

Steering with committees: the gift of insider leaders in ATS programming

By CHELSEA BROOKE YARBOROUGH

ATS Leadership Development takes pride in designing programs that bring together leaders from across our membership to explore and engage in issues and challenges specific to leadership in theological education. But these programs are more than just meetings or conferences—they are intentional spaces for nourishment, growth, and possibility. The goal is to create space for real community, an environment where professionals who serve in similar capacities can connect with one another, share experiences, and explore innovative ideas that strengthen the entire community of theological schools.

While there are many roles and pieces that contribute to moving ATS programs from ideas to implementation, it's important to note the crucial role that steering committees play in driving leadership programming successes. These committees serve as essential partners, ensuring that Leadership Development programs stay responsive, representative, and relevant to the diverse needs of the ATS membership.

The role and impact of steering committees

Steering committees play a vital role in sustaining the Association's communities of practice. Currently, ATS Leadership Development has five active steering committees, including those for technology professionals (TTEG), financial officers (CFO), chief academic officers (CAOS), student-facing professions (SPAN), and advancement and communications professionals (DIAP). Their contributions help us support the overall ATS mission: to promote the improvement and enhance-



ment of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public by supporting school leaders.

Each committee is composed of members from across the Association who represent their different professional roles within theological schools. These dedicated individuals often begin their involvement after attending an ATS event that sparked their interest, inspiring them to give back and help shape future initiatives. Members are invited through nominations or selected intentionally by the Leadership Development team to ensure the committee reflects the wide diversity of institutions, ecclesial families, geographies, and experiences that comprise the Association's membership. Representation of the whole membership in this way strengthens the committees' ability to identify emerging needs for their particular communities, to craft relevant programs in response, and to build bridges across the entire ATS network.

Spotlight on the DIAP steering committee

The steering committee of the Association's Development and Institutional Advancement Program (DIAP) — representing professionals in development, institutional advancement, and communications—is cur-

rently preparing for the 2026 DIAP Conference, scheduled for February 10–12 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The theme, *Better Together: Resources and Relationships to Support All We Do*, emerged from conversations with the committee. They discussed how rapidly changing institutional landscapes call for new ways of collaborating, sharing ideas, and building networks of mutual support. In a time marked by organizational change and shifting policies, the committee recognized that success in advancement and communications depends not only on strategy, but also on relationships. The chosen theme reflects the belief that when leaders strengthen connections—both within one’s school and across the membership—they generate resilience and creativity that benefit everyone. Throughout the planning process, the DIAP Steering Committee has been committed to curating a program that offers both practical tools and relational renewal.

When asked why he joined the DIAP Steering Committee, chairperson Richard Thompson, director of advancement at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, responded, "I was asked to join the committee quite simply because they wanted a Canadian on board! And I'm okay with that." He added, "My seven years

on the committee have been a joy and privilege. I love the camaraderie of the committee and the DIAP community, and it has been such a blessing for me to help in some small way to ideate and facilitate our annual gatherings and to support and resource the important and vital work of my peers in our ATS schools."

Thompson’s comments reflect a larger truth about ATS leaders who give their time. They are invested in the resourcing and support of their peers. They use their precious and often scarce time to support building meaningful connections, trusting that they, too, will gain wisdom, tools, and friendships that strengthen their own work.

As the upcoming conference approaches, the DIAP Steering Committee and the Leadership Development team extend an open invitation to all advancement and communication professionals to take part. It will be a time for professional renewal, creative exchange, and, most importantly, a time to reconnect with colleagues who understand the challenges and joys of this work. We would love to see you there!

If you are interested in learning more about steering committees, feel free to reach out to me ([Chelsea Yarborough](#)) or to [Deborah Shadd](#), director of leadership development.



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