

Norbert Wilson



Norbert is a Professor of Food, Economics, and Community at Duke University in the Divinity School with a secondary appointment in the Sanford School of Policy. He earned a Ph.D. (University of California, Davis 1999), MSc (University of London, Wye College 1994), and BSA (University of Georgia 1993). He was a Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University (2017-2020) and Auburn University (1999-2016). Norbert worked at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris, France (2001-2002 and 2004-2006). Norbert was a member of the AAEA Board (2017-2020) and chaired the Committee on the Status of Blacks in Agricultural Economics (COSBAE) (2014-2015). As the Mentoring Committee chair (2016-2017), Norbert helped organize two mentoring workshops (2017 and 2019). Norbert has published in the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, *World Development*, *Journal of Public Health*, *Food Policy*, *Agricultural Economics*, among others.

1. What is the biggest concern/problem facing AAEA?

Our biggest challenge is to live out our [mission](#): *“to enhance the skills, knowledge, and professional contributions of economists who help society solve...problems.”* However, the pandemic has challenged the AAEA’s mission and will continue to affect our ability to engage in activities to enhance our members’ work. The membership of the AAEA does not reflect our societies’ diversity, limiting our ability to address problems because the diversity of knowledge and experience is key to problem-solving. The field of economics and the professional landscape are ever-changing. Keeping up and anticipating these changes will enhance the AAEA’s capacity to support our member’s ability to solve societal problems.

2. What actions would you initiate to improve the situation described in your response to the previous question?

Many, but not all, of us have benefited from successful professional development programs that have arisen sporadically, but these efforts have depended on isolated individuals’ innovations. We do not have a coordinated program to motivate, manage, or evaluate professional development across the AAEA. We do not have a shared vision of what professional development is beneficial over a career, especially outside the academy. For example, we have projects and funds to support the collaborations between junior and senior faculty and faculty in different regions of the world. I have led mentorship workshops but at no point have we thought through how these pieces fit together. We see efforts to address important issues such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) or changing responsibilities along the career path that affect the entire membership. While relevant for all, we do not have collaboration in these efforts across the association. The AAEA can better coordinate efforts to provide training or support, but that requires planning.

I propose a task force that will set in motion a strategic planning and evaluation process for professional development programming for AAEA members. The task force will reflect the diverse career trajectories in the academy, government, and industry of our membership at various stages, from student to retiree. In collaboration with the Trust and the Board, the task force will coordinate with sections and existing committees to initiate a deliberate and holistic approach to career development. In time, the task force’s work could become a responsibility of a standalone committee or a collaborative effort of the Board and Trust.

3. At the end of your three-year term, what changes/new initiatives would you have helped create?

The task force’s immediate goal is to develop a strategic plan for concerted professional development over members’ careers. Under the leadership of the Board and Trust, the strategic plan will help committees and sections better coordinate programming to identify synergies and funding to support programming from within and beyond the AAEA. With intention, this effort will strengthen our needed work at DEI. By coordinating to support our mission, the AAEA will become an even more attractive professional organization. In the long run, the management of professional development will help us strengthen all members’ work. The AAEA will further our collective efforts to solve societal challenges through this coordination.