

GEA SPACE Letter to AAMC Leadership Regarding the Affinity Group Evolution

November 11, 2025

Dear AAMC Leadership,

On behalf of the more than 550 members of **S.P.A.C.E. (Staff Professionals Across the Continuum of Education)**, we write to express our deep appreciation for AAMC's continued commitment to advancing academic medicine—and to share our reflections and recommendations regarding the planned reorganization of the affinity group structure.

We recognize the financial and operational realities that have prompted this effort and understand the desire to streamline structures and enhance efficiency. However, as AAMC explores new engagement models, we urge you to ensure that **staff professionals—who form the connective tissue of medical education—retain a clear, visible, and cohesive national presence within the AAMC community.**

"S.P.A.C.E. allowed me a sense of belonging as a staff member non-physician/clinician in medical education." – S.P.A.C.E. member

Why S.P.A.C.E. Matters

Since its inception in 2023, S.P.A.C.E. rapidly created a vital network that connects and empowers staff across **UME, GME, and CPD**—those whose daily work operationalizes the academic missions of teaching, assessment, learner support, and innovation. Currently part of GEA, S.P.A.C.E. is the only national AAMC community intentionally designed for **non-physician professionals** whose roles often span the full educational continuum.

Our members describe S.P.A.C.E. as a **home**—a place where staff are recognized as collaborators, subject matter experts, and leaders, not simply support personnel. The community has fostered professional development, mentorship, collaboration, and scholarship that directly align with AAMC's mission to advance medical education and healthcare. Among its accomplishments:

- Conducted the first-ever national survey of medical education staff professionals.

- Presented at Learn Serve Lead 2025: *Staff Professionals as Key Collaborators for Educational Success* to a standing-room-only crowd, as more chairs had to be brought in.
- Offered professional development that includes the national Staff Track, a free, half-day, virtual conference for staff. In 2024, over 700 registered with sustained attendance of 400+.
- Enhanced staff-relevant programming at regional education conferences.
- Piloted staff awards for scholarship.
- Shared resources to support staff who want to submit conference proposals.

While we are gratified to see “staff” named in several new affinity group descriptions, we believe that to dissolve or disperse this network across multiple affinity groups would not only diminish its effectiveness but also risk reversing progress toward inclusivity and cross-functional collaboration in academic medicine.

“S.P.A.C.E. recognizes the hard work of non-physician staff in contributing to the medical education journeys of our students.

It is the ONLY AAMC forum in which we are validated for the work that we do in contributing to student growth and development.” – S.P.A.C.E. member

Key Concerns and Questions

1. **Loss of the Continuum:** The proposed structure risks fragmenting collaboration across UME, GME, and CPD—re-siloing staff whose work naturally spans these boundaries.
2. **Loss of Professional Identity:** Without S.P.A.C.E., staff professionals lose their collective visibility and voice at the national level, as well as opportunities for shared development and leadership.
3. **Confusion:** It will be unclear for many staff as to which affinity group is a best fit. Staff won’t have time and resources to engage with multiple affinity groups. ***(Our national survey data supports that staff span multiple functional areas that the new affinity groups represent)***

4. **Equity in Governance:** Staff leaders have historically had limited or no inclusion in AAMC governance. This reorganization presents a critical opportunity to model true partnership between staff and faculty voices.
5. **Sustainability and Efficiency:** S.P.A.C.E. can operate with minimal cost and administrative burden while delivering measurable impact through community engagement, mentorship, and scholarship dissemination.
6. **Pipeline and Belonging:** Like the regional GEAs/GSAs, S.P.A.C.E. provides an ecosystem and accessible “on-ramp” for staff to engage in national service, scholarship, and leadership—ensuring the pipeline for future AAMC contributors remains robust and diverse.
7. **Planning and Decision-Making:** We believe that engagement is more than taking feedback from a form, and respectfully request that, at the very least, affinity group leaders be “at the table” when the AAMC considers decisions about governance, future convenings, and how a new structure will operate. This process would benefit from the inclusion of members with change management expertise.

A Constructive Path Forward

Rather than dispersing S.P.A.C.E., we urge AAMC to **preserve its function as a national convener for staff professionals**, aligned with and connected to other affinity groups through intentional collaboration.

We respectfully propose that AAMC consider:

- **Recognizing S.P.A.C.E.** as a *cross-affinity network* or *community of practice* under the new model.
- **Leveraging S.P.A.C.E.** to support cross-institutional innovation, mentorship, and professional development for staff, as aligned with AAMC’s educational mission. We can’t foresee each affinity group with staff devoting time and people to do this individually, nor does it make sense. A “think and plan globally and act locally” approach would be more effective and efficient.
- **Staff serve as co-leaders with faculty** which intentionally creates opportunities to foster leadership among staff.
- **Exploring partnerships** between S.P.A.C.E. and relevant affinity groups in the new structure to enhance interdisciplinary initiatives without loss of identity or cohesion.

“As a S.P.A.C.E. member, I’ve seen firsthand how this community fosters collaboration...

S.P.A.C.E. provides the infrastructure for staff-led scholarship, mentorship, and innovation that directly supports AAMC’s mission to advance medical education.” – S.P.A.C.E. member

AAMC’s leadership in fostering collaboration and equity across disciplines has always set the standard for academic medicine. Preserving S.P.A.C.E. as a national staff network will demonstrate a continued commitment to valuing all who make medical education possible. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to future discussions with Jennifer Schlener, Dr. Alison Whelan, Amy Mathis and other colleagues about how the GEA and S.P.A.C.E. can continue to advance AAMC’s mission within the evolving structure.

With gratitude and respect,

Tyrese Hinkins Jones, EdS Med, Chair

Deb Birnbaum, MBA, Chair-Elect

Jon Goforth, MBA, National Secretary

Jenn Handrop, EdD, National Membership Chair

Barbara Hildebrand, National Marketing/Communications Co-Chair

Marisol Britt, National Marketing/Communications Co-Chair

Sarita Martinez-Moran, NEGEA Representative

Richard O’Neal, MS, SGEA Representative

Brian Herman, MPA, WGEA Representative

Holly Proffitt, PhD, CGEA Representative

Yasmain Rice-Greene, Staff Track Planning Chair

Elissa Hall, EdD, MA, GEA Chair

On behalf of the members of S.P.A.C.E.

(Staff Professionals Across the Continuum of Education)

AAMC Leadership Response to SPACE Letter

December 12, 2025

Dear S.P.A.C.E. Leadership:

Thank you for taking the time to write and share this robust background, benefits, and achievements of this S.P.A.C.E. community, along with your questions, concerns, and recommendations. Your letter was very informative, and I have benefitted from the opportunity to better understand your work and contributions – thank you!

I appreciate your – and the broader GEA community’s – commitment to navigate this change together. As I’ve stated previously, the feedback we continue to receive remains incredibly valuable as the team works to build the operational approach to this evolved affinity group structure. And while I don’t have answers to each of your questions and concerns, please know that they have been conveyed to the team advancing this work.

While I am mindful this feels like a tectonic shift to many members of our community, the AAMC remains firmly committed to medical education across the continuum. The fear of loss of community and professional identity is palpable, especially during this time of such change across academic medicine and beyond. I very much hope you and your colleagues will embrace the spirit behind this evolution to be even more inclusive, to provide engagement opportunities for even more individuals supporting our collective mission of medical education across the continuum.

Currently, non-physician professionals engage across many of the AAMC’s current affinity groups, well beyond our education-focused groups. And I am confident that such engagement will continue across our eleven new groups. As you know, the challenges facing our academic medicine community are great, and we all will benefit from more varied voices, perspectives, and experiences in the conversations the AAMC facilitates.

We are all committed to effectively launching these new groups in July 2026, and I thank you for your patience and, in advance, your willingness to meaningfully engage in conversations as we bring constituents together to begin building these new group governance structures, processes, and communities. We have not reached that point yet, but we will in early-2026.

Again, thank you for taking the time to write and better educate me about the contributions and benefits of the S.P.A.C.E. constituency.

All best,
David