

## **Welcome to The Board Room: The President Trio- Leading the Board of Directors**

*Alisha Saavedra, MA, CCLS, Immediate Past President*

**“There are three essentials to leadership: humility, clarity, and courage.”**

As I prepare to complete my term as the Immediate Past President of the ACLP Board of Directors, this quote from Fuchan Yuan, a Chan Buddhist master, could not ring truer for me.

When I joined the board in 2022, I did not fully realize what my volunteer responsibilities would be or what impact I would have on the Association or profession, other than bringing my knowledge and experience as an academician, and diverse perspective as someone who is neurodivergent and a person of color. I also had no previous ACLP Board experience and the relationship between governing an association and directly affecting change in the child life community was not quite clear, yet. Like many of us who join the profession, I answered the call to “make a difference” and serve in this leadership capacity with the intention to further advance the profession and mission of the Association.

These past three years on the ACLP Board have been transformative and fulfilling in so many unexpected ways, beginning with the president trio. Among the board members, the president, president-elect, and immediate past president form a unique trio that works together in a balanced and intentional way to carry out decisions and respond to Association needs. Witnessing the trio’s collective knowledge and experience, in coordination with executive support from the CEO, it became quite clear that there is not just one person who leads or has sole decision-making power. For nonprofit leadership to be hugely successful, it is important for the president trio and executive leadership to recognize how they are mutually valuable, and each person plays a pivotal role in steering the course of the Association.

From the outside, it may appear that these leadership roles put forth minimum effort or are somewhat disconnected from members, but I now know how different the reality is. In years past, prior to my role on the board, I do not think I could have fully understood the magnitude of these positions or their fiduciary duties. It is my pleasure to share with you some insight to the roles of these three key figures within the president trio, how they work collaboratively, and the impact they have on leading the Association.

### **The President**

The president of the ACLP Board is the highest leader and represents the board in interactions with members and the public, which includes responding to the president email address daily, hearing concerns from members, meeting with potential partners, reviewing committee reports, and so forth. The time and effort dedicated to the presidency is significant, along with balancing employment and personal life. In addition to being “the face” of ACLP and on call most of the time, they are responsible for setting the direction of the board, ensuring that meetings are ran efficiently, and that decisions and goals, short- and long-term, are made in alignment with the strategic plan.

As the primary person to preside over all meetings, the president is accountable for drafting agendas for their weekly 1:1 meeting with the CEO, the weekly meeting with the trio, all monthly meetings with the Executive Committee, and the quarterly meeting with the full board. The CEO also reports to the board of directors and, specifically, to the board president. As president, it is their responsibility to ensure alignment between the board's directives and the CEO's operational decisions. The CEO is responsible for implementing board decisions and managing the Association's day-to-day operations, while the president focuses on governance and strategic oversight. Overall, the president plays a crucial role in overseeing strategic decision-making processes, managing crises, and often having the final say on critical issues.

### **The President-Elect**

The president-elect is the designated successor to the current president. This role is essential for ensuring continuity in leadership and preparing for a smooth transition, so that the board's work continues without interruption. As they prepare for leadership, the president-elect spends their term learning from the current president and immediate past president to further understand the Association's scope, policies, processes, and details of the president role. They support the president in their duties by keeping record of the weekly trio meetings, being board liaison to assigned committees, attending Executive Committee meetings, taking on specific projects or initiatives to gain experience, and bringing fresh perspectives and ideas to the table during strategic discussions.

Additional firsthand preparation for leadership transition occurs when the president-elect attends a two-day, in-person, CEO Symposium with the current president and CEO. This is an opportunity for them to review strategies and primary tools of the leadership team, define the coming year's priorities, and determine how to work well together.

### **The Immediate Past President**

After serving as president, this individual remains on the board for one year to continue sharing insights and offer mentorship to the current president and president-elect. They also attend weekly trio meetings, are a board liaison to their assigned committees, are present at Executive Committee meetings, and assist with specific projects or initiatives, bringing a historical perspective and guidance.

The immediate past president is a valuable resource within the trio and for the board, providing historical context for prior decisions, helping the board understand past actions and to build on previous successes or outcomes. Overall, the immediate past president ensures continuity in leadership and acts as a guide on complex issues and supporting the board's strategic initiatives.

## **Collaboration and Impact**

Collaboration within the president trio is essential for the board's success. This trio works together to ensure that leadership transitions are smooth, strategic goals are met, and the Association remains on a steady course, maintaining momentum and focus. Together, leveraging their combined expertise and participating in high-level discussions, they navigate challenges, celebrate successes, and lay the groundwork for the Association's future. As part of the trio's legacy, each member of the trio benefits from mutual support and the mentorship of both the president and immediate past president, fostering strong leadership skills for effective decision making and aligning efforts and resources to support the Association's strategic plan.

## **My Final Farewell**

Throughout my time on the board, I have had the privilege of collaborating with an incredible team of leaders who are committed to making a difference and give of one's expertise, passion, talent, and experience to further ACLP's mission. Serving in the different president roles within the trio has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career which brought about numerous growth opportunities. I have had to remain curious and seek clarity, be humble and ask for guidance, and have courage to make decisions, even when they were difficult or unpopular.

As I move forward with what the future has in store for me, I carry all the invaluable lessons, unforgettable memories, and enduring bonds forged in this journey. I extend my best wishes to the upcoming board and hope for the continued success of ACLP. May the legacy of purpose-driven leadership and unwavering dedication continue to guide your path ahead, illuminating the way for the child life profession.

With profound respect and enduring gratitude,  
*Alisha Saavedra, MA, CCLS, Immediate Past President*