



Why AAPS Transitioned to AMC Management

The American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists “puts science on stages,” and its management change is 100 percent focused on its core mission.

Association board leaders who recognize CEO succession as a strategic opportunity make better-informed decisions about applying resources to advancing the mission. They may even re-think the association’s approach, exploring previously unconsidered management options. A case in point is the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists, which in summer 2026 transitioned into management by Etherio, an association management company.

For AAPS, an 11-staff-member organization with an operating budget of \$9 million, the decision to engage an AMC for management is strategic. As Chief Operating Officer Joy Davis, CAE, explains, the society’s top priorities in 2026 are growing the organization’s ability to help scientists to share cutting-edge research and ensuring financial stability by introducing efficiencies and reducing the administrative load on AAPS’ board and senior leadership.

Planning Comes First

In 2025, like other scientific organizations, AAPS was sideswiped by changes in support for the sciences—a reality that the AAPS board and senior staff factored into its strategic planning. “We knew we would have to cut expenses because scientists were having to cut their expenses,” Davis says. “We also know what we are good at, and that is putting science on stages, in publications, and online that helps pharmaceutical scientists come together and understand something they might not ever have seen otherwise.”

When the AAPS CEO announced her retirement, it created an opportunity to restructure the association’s resources in alignment with the strategic planning process recently completed by the board. The leadership prioritized hiring a chief science officer to lead its scientific portfolio—ensuring that science would be the most important goal at AAPS. By early 2026 Davis was searching for an AMC for administrative management.

Find the Right Fit

As Davis researched and vetted AMCs that were accredited by the AMC Institute, she took an approach intended to invite uninhibited proposals that would speak to AAPS's goals. "I told them we need to have control over our science and move as much administration as possible into the AMC to improve our financial position," she explains. "Then I asked, what's your pitch?"

Those AMCs whose proposals showed an appreciation for who AAPS is and that related their experience and capabilities to AAPS's mission and goals got a second look. A list of a dozen promising organizations was winnowed down by reviewing their proposals as well as the performance of other scientific organizations the AMCs represented. Davis ultimately asked the board to meet with three AMCs, explaining to them that each could do the job but with different approaches.

Leaders considering AMC management should look for the capabilities and approach that best align with the association's strategy, Davis says. AAPS's board selected Etherio, in part because the company has a life sciences division and deep meetings expertise to support the association's "science on stages" imperative.

In summer 2026, the current AAPS staff moved to Etherio employment as the science team. Davis anticipates numerous advantages, chief among them the following:

- **Stability:** Downtime is not an option, so Etherio's ability to seamlessly replace departing staff "really matters to us," says Davis. Further, while retaining control of the association, the AAPS board of directors can rely on Etherio for most employment matters because the senior science team is part of the AMC yet remains accountable to the board.
- **Financial flexibility:** An AMC can ratchet service up or down, depending on circumstances. This is critical to AAPS, as it and societies like it face volatility in federal funding for science.
- **Refined expertise:** AMCs have determined how to effectively and efficiently operate and sustain systems, for example, finance and IT, whereas small, standalone societies can struggle with evolving their systems.

Davis also has three pieces of advice for association leaders whose groups may be good candidates for AMC management:

ADVICE FROM JOY DAVIS, CAE

1. If you are feeling pressure, as all scientific societies are, do not wait until it is too late to explore whether alternative management options would improve performance.
2. If you explore AMCs, let them make the best pitch possible. Do not be overly protective of what has always been done.
3. Know your strategy. Too many discussions about the AMC alternative begin with costs. They need to begin with, “What do we need to be able to do to move forward?” Davis says. “AMCs are different from one another. Look for the one that best fits your strategy.”

For AAPS, the transition to management by an AMC is a future-focused move, emphasizes Davis, and one immeasurably aided by the board’s strategic foresight and the chair’s ability to ensure momentum through even tense moments. Looking ahead, Davis acknowledges the significance of challenges ahead, but she is energized by entering fiscal year 2027 planning and budgeting with the new management model in place. “As an example, one thing we are facing is that our model for funding meetings will likely have to change,” she explains. “Now we will address that challenge with more resources to help us through. This structure gives us more options and much greater flexibility.”

ABOUT THE SERIES

Vetted Solutions and the AMC Institute are collaborating on a research series that explores three entry points where standalone associations are most likely to consider an AMC: CEO succession, integrated (hybrid) management, and consultative services. Interviews and case studies on CEO succession will inform a full AMC Institute report planned for early 2027.