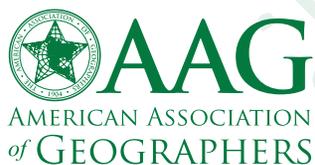


American Association of Geographers

# LONG-RANGE PLAN

2015 - 2025



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# AAG LONG-RANGE PLAN

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# INTRODUCTION

Changes are underway in science, scholarship, and education that are likely to have tremendous effects on geography as a discipline and profession over the next decade, offering both opportunities and challenges:

- New research frontiers and opportunities have emerged over the past decade in the geographical, geospatial, and environmental fields;
- Higher education and the entire educational landscape are changing in response to a wide range of economic, political and demographic factors;
- Technology is changing the way we conduct our research, communicate, collaborate, publish, learn, and teach;
- Globalization has made the AAG much more international in its membership, meeting participation, and outlook;
- Career opportunities for individuals with geographical training are increasing, but also changing, with opportunities emerging in new areas; and
- Efforts to build a more inclusive community by gender, race, sexuality, ability, ethnicity and national origin are gradually creating a more welcoming and equitable professional environment for all geographers.

Given these issues, the Executive Committee of the AAG created a Long Range Strategic Planning Committee to develop a plan to guide the Association over the next 10 years. Using the strategic plan approved in 2002 as a starting point, the committee was asked to consider the progress the Association has made relative to this earlier plan and to focus on changes in the environment in which the AAG is likely to operate in the near future. The objectives stated in the Constitution of the AAG and affirmed in the 2002 Long Range Plan remain a foundation upon which to build our future: “to further professional investigations in geography and to encourage the application of geographic findings in education, government, and business.”

The 2002 plan provided detailed recommendations for achieving five goals for the AAG: 1) Advance geographic research and practices; 2) Strengthen education and training at all levels; 3) Provide service and support to members; 4) Promote geography within society at large; and 5) Maintain organizational viability. The last recommendation focusing on finances and membership was vital to the plan.

The AAG can be proud of the progress and accomplishments relative to these goals. Much of this success is due to both stable and highly effective

leadership and an active and engaged membership. The AAG has developed and supported a comprehensive and forward-looking research agenda through dozens of initiatives, many funded through major grants. These initiatives have been developed in collaboration with public agencies and scholarly associations of related disciplines, and have built upon technological and methodological innovations within and beyond the discipline.

The AAG has responded to the need for stronger geographic education at all levels through innovative curriculum projects, professional development workshops, and participation in the development of educational policy. AAG members enjoy improved membership support and service through expanded journals and publications, quality national and regional meetings, and an effective transition to online delivery of materials and service. Through the work of the Association to engage with professionals and the public beyond academia and the discipline, the visibility of the discipline of geography has never been higher. These improvements supported and were possible because of membership growth and financial strengthening.

Recognizing these accomplishments, this plan suggests where the Association should focus its energy and attention in the coming decade. This plan outlines 20 key long-term goals in five areas: A) Advance geographic research and professional practice; B) Strengthen education, training and professional development at all levels; C) Focus on service and support to members; D) Promote outreach and engagement; and E) Sustain growth in financial and organizational strength and sustainability.

Suggestions are provided throughout this plan of activities and ideas that might help our Association reach these goals, but the Council, officers, executive director and staff of the AAG must decide on specific strategies, as noted below in the section on implementation and assessment.

The recommendations are grouped by area, rather than overall priority: we believe that all are important to the AAG’s future! But, within each area, we have tried to place the recommendations in priority order. This order means that, in terms of immediate efforts, we stress the importance of recommendations:

- 1) Foster global engagement to build an international community of geographers.
- 6) Promote inclusion, equity, and social justice across the entire discipline.
- 10) Make digital and social media a key means of direct interaction among members via innovative practices.
- 15) Engage public debates on contemporary issues and policy initiatives both nationally and internationally.
- 17) Sustain the financial health and resources of the AAG.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## AREA A. Advance geographic research and professional practice

In the U.S. the support for and conduct of scientific research are decentralized. Decentralized support is a strength, in that it promotes different streams of research innovation, but it also complicates linkages to national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations for purposes of advocacy and communicating research agendas. The AAG is well-placed to provide advocacy for and communication of geographic research and its support. Advocacy includes pressing for research funding, as well as arguing for openness and availability of data and research that further geographic research.

The decentralized conduct of research fosters innovation, but presents challenges to generating over-arching, collaborative research agendas. A key role of the AAG is to create opportunities for researchers to develop such research agendas.

The AAG is also well-placed to undertake research into the state of the discipline and its practitioners, research that promotes liaisons with international organizations, and sponsored activity that helps disseminate geographic research through many channels. Toward this end, we recommend the AAG:

### **RECOMMENDATION 1. Foster global engagement to build an international community of geographers.**

The AAG is already an international organization in terms of membership, participation in the annual meeting, and research published in its journals. The Association should act to recognize this status explicitly across all of its activities discussed in this plan including research, education, meetings, publications, and outreach. The AAG should help create an inclusive international community of geographers by enhancing opportunities for international dialog and collaboration in research and fieldwork; publications; educational projects; and outreach. A number of mechanisms should be explored to foster such engagement, such as:

- a) Work towards further integration of geographers from all countries into the Association's organizational and governance structures.
- b) Promote collaborations with geographers and geography associations globally to bring new insights to planetary issues, influencing international debates and policy initiatives.
- c) Encourage collaborative, international and multi-lingual geographical scholarship and pedagogy.
- d) Support international workshops that centrally involve researchers from beyond the Euro-North American realm.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2. Develop forward-looking research agendas, initiatives, and campaigns.**

The AAG should seek opportunities for innovative research initiatives by serving as a forum for bringing researchers together; building partnerships between public, private, and academic sectors to pursue significant research opportunities; and acting as a broker for research projects. The Association has considerable research capacity that should be sustained and expanded, especially as it fosters greater coordination and integration among researchers in the academic, private, and public sectors. The AAG should encourage and facilitate work that combines theoretically informed approaches with practical applications, including research that addresses major policy-related issues.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3. Foster interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research.**

Geographic and spatial perspectives and approaches complement the interests of many other disciplines. Some research involves *interdisciplinary* sharing of ideas, methods and perspectives with scholars from other disciplines; other research leads to *transdisciplinary* projects as in climate science, the geohumanities, sustainability science, and geographies of the anthropocene. The AAG should continue to engage in activities to spur the integration of geography and geographers into broader-ranging research and application domains. The AAG's journals should publish articles on projects that span disciplines, paradigms, and approaches.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4. Support dialog across the full breadth of the discipline.**

The diversity of subject matter and approaches of contemporary geography is a source of great strength, but also has the potential to fragment the discipline's sense of community and shared values. The AAG should continue to promote the common experiences of all geographers through its annual meetings and workshops. The AAG should seek opportunities for cross cutting dialog through its publications and through special sessions at annual meetings. The AAG should also assist in the development of cross cutting thematic proposals that engage a diverse set of specialties and members.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5. Recognize and reward geographic scholarship within and beyond the discipline as well as within and beyond the U.S.**

It is important to recognize the scholarly contributions of members within the discipline, and also promote geographic scholarship to external constituencies in the U.S. and internationally.

## AREA B. Strengthen education, training and professional development at all levels

Advancing geographic research and education in the twenty-first century requires participation by all who wish to contribute, regardless of their background, career path, or career stage. To maximize the contributions of all, the AAG should:

### RECOMMENDATION 6. Promote inclusion, equity, and social justice across the entire discipline.

The AAG is committed to addressing issues of equity and social justice, including racism and xenophobia, sexism, ableism, homophobia, ageism, and all forms of human oppression. This commitment recognizes both the long-standing concern of the discipline to address questions of human oppression and promote human rights in research and teaching, and the need to focus on the demographics of the discipline, where both students and faculty come from increasingly diverse backgrounds and face barriers to full inclusion.

The under-representation of members of minority groups in the discipline is both serious and sustained. The AAG needs to develop methods to increase representation, as well as identify barriers that have hindered such efforts, through efforts such as:

- a) Maintaining or developing new efforts building upon the work of the Enhancing Diversity Committee, such as the ALIGNED Project; Diversity Ambassadors, and the Catalyzing Research on Geographies of Broadening Participation project. These are all projects designed to mobilize interest and funding for sustainable programs aimed at promoting inclusion within the discipline; implementing curricula that enhance knowledge and pedagogy focused on equity, social justice, inclusion, and representation issues; and supporting research into these issues;
- b) Sponsoring conferences and activities such as the “Race, Place, and Ethnicity Conference,” that promote inclusion, attract students and faculty, and build and strengthen linkages with minority-serving institutions.
- c) Addressing the issues of equity, inclusion, and representation in all AAG activities, including committee assignments, staffing, council membership, awards, publications, electronic media, meeting locations, and meeting activities.
- d) Taking an active role in collecting data and monitoring equity, inclusion and representation on a regular basis at a range of scales using a variety of metrics.

### RECOMMENDATION 7. Expand professional development opportunities.

Professional development is best viewed as a life-long, career-spanning process, not just an issue of earning a particular degree, certificate, or credential. Although many types of professional development are available formally and informally, the AAG can advance these efforts by supporting existing and new opportunities that are responsive to the diverse and evolving contexts in which geographers work. Timely help and training at meetings, in workshops, and in other settings can help strengthen the geography community both nationally and internationally. Particularly important are efforts that:

- a) Strengthen further professional development opportunities for early career geographers moving into careers in academia, business, government, education and the non-profit sector so that they can succeed and thrive in their careers. This process may involve activities like the Geography Faculty Development Alliance, and the work of specialty groups and regional divisions in organizing workshops and creating resources for developing grant proposals; writing and publishing; preparing for tenure review; and other topics. Additional opportunities are available at the national level through sessions on jobs and careers organized for the annual meetings.
- b) Develop support for mid- and late-career geographers to sustain their contributions to the discipline. Such initiatives might include workshops to enhance technological skills, supporting mentorship programs that link mid- and late-career scholars to younger scholars, or providing resources for new directions in teaching.
- c) Improve leadership training for geographers so they are able to respond effectively to the many opportunities and challenges facing the discipline in coming years. Geography needs good leaders. Hoping that colleagues will develop leadership skills on their own once they move into leadership positions is not realistic. An alternative is to provide guidance and training earlier and in other ways. The AAG’s Healthy Department initiative is an example of a key means of providing this training and mentoring.
- d) Build support for contingent faculty and other members of the geographical workforce who may not have permanent or continuing employment. Career paths are changing in the current economy and it is important to support geographers who may be following non-traditional paths in the workforce whether because of choice or circumstances. The AAG should also monitor the increasing casualization of the geographical workforce to understand the impact upon both its individual members and the discipline as a whole.

**RECOMMENDATION 8. Strengthen and expand geography’s role in higher education.**

It is important for geography to continue to attract and train students capable of tackling the critical geographical and environmental issues of our times. The AAG has a role to play in these efforts by fostering innovations that will sustain strong programs and increase student numbers. Such efforts are especially important given the many changes underway in higher education at the national and international levels. Therefore the AAG should:

- a) Strengthen existing programs and create new ones in geography and related spatial and geographical sciences at all levels of higher education in all institutional settings. This process includes building effective collaborations in interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and area studies programs in which geography can contribute strongly.
- b) Promote the improvement of healthy and innovative programs by sponsoring workshops and other activities focusing on topics such as curriculum development, pedagogy, student assessment, program evaluation, strategic planning, or student recruitment and retention that will help geographers improve their programs.
- c) Support and initiate research on issues related to geography’s role in higher education, the employability of geography graduates, workforce dynamics, and other issues such as those that have been investigated most recently by the Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE) in geography project.

**RECOMMENDATION 9. Lead programs and develop collaborations with other organizations to strengthen geography education and pedagogy at the primary and secondary levels, as well as in education outside of formal instructional settings.**

Education is the foundation of the discipline. Education helps students and the general public to understand the geographical and spatial dimensions of world events and contemporary issues which helps to attract students to the discipline. To enlarge and improve the role of geography education, the AAG should aim to:

- a) Develop advocacy strategies to expand public and federal funding support for geography education, particularly in relation to federal initiatives.
- b) Assist and partner with other relevant organizations in focused activities, especially those that address the connections between primary, secondary and higher education.

- c) Support development of high-quality educational materials, and professional development programs for pre-service and in-service teachers as well as for informal education.
- d) Promote research in geographic and spatial learning, educational practice, educational policy, and other topics that will help expand understanding of key issues related to geographic education.

**AREA C. Focus on service and support to members**

In the past decade, the Association has been highly successful both in expanding its membership base and in delivering an increasingly diverse range of services that are of value to members. Since the previous strategic plan, the AAG has successfully transitioned to online delivery of many services, updated its publications and annual meeting to serve a larger and more diverse membership, and leveraged digital media to offer new types of services. Looking ahead, the organization should be responsive to broader social, economic, and technological changes that impact core membership services, such as the growth of open access publishing and the growing use of digital and social media. The increasing geographical, occupational, and socioeconomic diversity of the AAG’s membership calls for shifts in the types of services offered and expansion of alternative service delivery models.

**RECOMMENDATION 10. Make digital and social media a key means of direct interaction among members via innovative practices.**

The AAG should increasingly see itself as the discipline’s key avatar in cyberspace. This means seeing cyberspace as a critical area for promoting communication, collaboration, and outreach as well as for building a sense of community and inclusion. The Association should also use its computing resources, distribution lists and social media outlets to facilitate the rapid dissemination of information, but also to strategize about building its digital presence in cyberspace. When people search for information about geography in the web, the AAG should appear as a major source of information. At the same time, the AAG should encourage research upon and be aware of the ways in which society is changing, especially in terms of spatial relations, as a result of the growth of cyberspace.

**RECOMMENDATION 11. Enhance and expand high quality publications in all formats.**

The AAG should continue to disseminate the results of the highest-quality geographic research through its journals. It should expand efforts to increase the impact, visibility, and relevance of its publications through the use of diverse formats including digital media, special issues, and online discussion forums. As innovations such as open access and new revenue models transform the academic publishing industry, the economic viability and scholarly impact of the AAG's flagship publications may be at risk. It is essential that the AAG successfully navigate these powerful trends.

**RECOMMENDATION 12. Provide appropriate services and support for an increasingly international and socio-economically-diverse membership**

The organization should continue to develop and offer tailored membership programs and services, especially for geographers from developing regions, through mechanisms such as online knowledge communities and various community-building efforts, digital media, and conference travel awards. Keynote lectures, high-profile panels, and other noteworthy events at the annual meeting should be disseminated online. The current progressive dues and fees structure should be maintained, and dues and fees levels should be re-evaluated on a regular basis with respect to affordability for students, those in part-time employment, and those from low-income countries.

**RECOMMENDATION 13. Conduct strong and inclusive annual meetings and other forums for dissemination and exchange among and beyond the membership.**

The AAG's annual meetings are popular and important settings for sharing research results, developing collaborations, and networking. The AAG should continue to conduct meetings that are open and inclusive for the benefit of all of its members as well as geographers and non-geographers from around the world. To this end, it is important for the AAG to take steps to support the participation of members who are sometimes marginalized by existing disciplinary structures, such as part-time academic and professional employees, self-employed geographers, and geographers having parental, personal, and family responsibilities outside of their professional work.

The AAG might also use the annual meetings to interact more with public audiences. For example, opening and inviting the public to a few of the major meetings events, or organizing events at the meetings especially for the public or for school audiences, as for example at the 2015 Geological Society of America, or offering admission for students in AP programs.

The AAG should also conduct or facilitate smaller, more focused conferences, workshops, and other kinds of meetings that promote the exchange of information and ideas, professional development of members, and other goals of the association. Methods of remote participation via digital technologies should be explored as a means of including more individuals and geographical communities in research and education.

**RECOMMENDATION 14. Provide services to assist in the hiring and placement of geographers.**

The AAG has played a valuable role in helping to highlight the employment potential for careers in geography as well as careers built on sound geographic education and training. The AAG should contribute to facilitating the employment of geographers through digital media and through in-person social networking. It is important to the discipline that newly trained geographers of all backgrounds find and succeed in useful employment. Given the increasing importance of employment opportunities in non-academic settings, efforts should be made to expand such opportunities and to enhance connections among geographers working in diverse fields. Efforts are especially needed to support and engage the expanding group of geographers facing barriers to full participation in the association, whether economic, social, racial, spatial or personal. The AAG should regularly reassess how best to take advantage of new technologies to provide these services most efficiently and economically.

**AREA D. Promote outreach and engagement**

Geographic scholarship is increasingly influential beyond academia and the work of the Association and its members is contributing substantially to this progress. The public and media are recognizing what geographers have long understood, that there is a geographic dimension to most contemporary issues that must be incorporated into public policy. Maps, geographic data and geographic images are now common methods to present information to the public through media, government agencies and non-profit organizations. The number of geographers working in professional positions outside the academic environment has multiplied and the AAG has established a strong record of successful collaborations with organizations both in and out of the community of geographers.

Given geography's scholarly insights and particular expertise in spatial thinking and analysis, and spatially aware scholarship, the Association should help guide the appropriate use of geographic insights, technologies, and methods for improved scholarship and the common good. In light of these developments, the Association should work to:

**RECOMMENDATION 15. Engage with public debates in civil society on contemporary issues and policy initiatives both nationally and internationally.**

Writing and speaking for general audiences is different than from academic audiences. In order to maximize the contributions of geographers and the Association to public debates the AAG should develop workshops both to encourage and to train members on how to engage effectively in scientific and policy debates through writing essays for the broad public audience, writing op-eds for local and national newspapers, and participating in interviews with the media. These workshops can be part of the annual meeting, regional meetings or stand-alone workshops if interest warrants. The Association should also continue its efforts to engage with media organizations, media professionals, and journalists to further opportunities for geographers to contribute to public discussions on issues such as climate change, the use and misuse of digital maps and spatial data, economic and social policy, globalization and other key topics.

Public engagement should also extend to collaborative engagement in civil society. The Association should identify and cultivate geographers committed to such engagement, publicizing such collaborations as an important aspect of geographical scholarship. It should further expand its capability to respond to inquiries about the discipline and areas of expertise therein and to develop an information clearinghouse, where civil society groups can be connected with members with the relevant skills and interests.

**RECOMMENDATION 16. Collaborate on issues of mutual interest with governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and related national and international scholarly organizations.**

The ability of geographers and the Association to engage in public debates also depends on its interactions with both non-academic professionals and organizations within and outside the discipline and with scholars and organizations beyond the United States. The Association should identify key geographers working in non-academic environments to take the lead on key initiatives. It should also continue its membership and successful participation in interdisciplinary scholarly organizations and it should seek out leadership positions when appropriate.

**AREA E. Sustain growth in financial and organizational strength and sustainability**

The AAG has experienced a decade of significant growth and advancement in membership, resources, and international engagement. Members should continue to receive the services they need from the Association. Financial practices and internal management systems that have served the AAG well should be maintained. Income from grants and contracts has grown facilitating the expansion of AAG programs and activities. But the AAG must continue to assess and evolve in order to maintain and improve its capacity for effective operation.

**RECOMMENDATION 17. Sustain the financial health and resources of the AAG.**

Finance and membership are the foundation of the organization. A major accomplishment of the AAG under the directorship of Douglas Richardson has been to build this foundation so that it will support the next generation of innovation under this new Long Range Plan. It is essential that the AAG and its governing Council always keep this recommendation in the foreground by maintaining strong revenue streams from membership dues, the annual meeting, publications, grants, and contracts. It is essential that the Association ensure that membership dues and annual meeting fees are both fair and reasonable and generate sufficient resources to cover costs and maintain quality of services to members.

Grants and endowment income supplement regular sources of income. The Association should continue to aggressively seek grants and contracts. The revenue of grants and contracts should cover both their direct and indirect costs to the Association.

The AAG endowment has grown significantly since the last strategic plan. The Association should continue efforts to expand the endowment and ensure that income from the endowment advances the goals and objectives of the Association.

**RECOMMENDATION 18. Attract and involve more people in AAG activities.**

Membership in many associations has been declining as professionals find other ways to network, communicate, and share ideas. The AAG has been successful in growing its membership in the face of these trends; however, member demographics and more diverse professional options available to geographers will combine to create challenges to continued membership growth. To remain a vital nexus of professional, intellectual, and scientific innovation, the AAG must continue its efforts to:

- a) Expand membership through regular campaigns highlighting the benefits of participation in AAG activities, focusing especially on people early in their careers.

- b) Promote the benefits of membership to potential members internationally and outside academia and consider dues structures that are attractive to these groups.
- c) Communicate frequently with members to identify ways of enhancing services, activities and programs.

**RECOMMENDATION 19. Modify the organizational structure and operations of the AAG as necessary to meet future needs.**

The organization structure of the Association should always be flexible, lean and resilient, so as to be able to respond quickly and effectively to changing project and organizational needs, both internally and externally. To meet challenges of the future, the Association should:

- a) Assess and modify as necessary the organizational effectiveness of the AAG and its Council, committees, regional divisions, and specialty groups.
- b) Assess and modify as necessary the relationship between the AAG and organizations with which it shares common interests and objectives.
- c) Invest in professional development for AAG staff to enhance and extend the association's capabilities.

**RECOMMENDATION 20. Incorporate green and environmentally sustainable practices into AAG operations and activities to promote the stewardship and sustainability of Earth's ecosystems and environment.**

One of the important themes of geography is the relationship between humans and the environment. Geographers have been leaders in conducting important research on major environmental issues at all geographic scales. Consistent with that theme the Association has a responsibility to conduct its business in ways that demonstrate its commitment to environmental responsibility and stewardship. The Association should continue to conduct its operations at the central office in ways that are energy efficient, maximize recycling, and minimize waste. Annual and regional meetings should also be operated according to similar principles where possible especially in regard to recycling and reuse of meeting materials.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

The AAG is served well by an elected Council, a dedicated and organized staff, and by excellent attendance at its annual meeting. These could be the loci for implementing, assessing and updating this plan on a regular cycle. Indeed, the next step is to develop implementation strategies and goals that can be assessed regularly.

A portion of at least one of the two bi-annual Council meetings should be devoted to assessment of progress toward one or more of the recommendations of this Plan. This exercise need not differ greatly from long-time Council practice of beginning its meetings with a broad-ranging discussion of current issues. Indeed, the Long Range Plan could be the subject of one of these discussions each year, either in the spring or fall. Such discussion would enable the executive director and staff to summarize progress toward the goals each year and to involve the Council in discussion about further plans.

The business meeting of the Association, held at the annual meeting, should include a brief statement from the executive director or president regarding progress toward one or two aspects of the Plan. The executive director should provide a summary of implementation steps and progress in a mid-stream report to the membership, five years after the adoption of the Plan. In these ways this plan can serve as a foundation for growth and innovation, just as the 2002 plan served as a catalyst for progress and change within the AAG.

### Long-range Planning Committee

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*Approved by AAG Council, November 7, 2015. San Antonio, Texas.*

## NOTES