



2026/2027 AAG Handbook for Group Chairs

A. ABOUT AAG GROUPS

AAG Groups are communities within the American Association of Geographers (AAG) formed around shared professional, scholarly, topical, or identity-based interests.

AAG Groups refer to:

- **Specialty Groups** - organized around sub-disciplinary or topical areas of geography
- **Affinity Groups** - organized around shared identities, roles, or career stages (e.g., students, retirees)

Groups operate within the AAG structure and serve as spaces for networking, collaboration, leadership development, mentorship, scholarly exchange, and community-building. The AAG Council establishes policies governing the formation, operation, and sunseting of Groups. All Groups must comply with AAG governing documents, including:

- AAG Bylaws
- AAG Standing Rules
- AAG Financial and Operational Procedures
- AAG Professional Code of Conduct
- AAG Statement of Professional Ethics

This handbook serves as the primary operational guide for Group Leadership and is maintained by the AAG Office.

B. LEGAL STANDING OF AAG GROUPS

AAG Groups are voluntary, unincorporated units of the American Association of Geographers. They are not separate legal entities and operate under the authority of the AAG Council.

The Council, however, delegates responsibility for day-to-day management to each Group's elected leadership. Group Leadership is responsible for overseeing activities in accordance with:

- Group bylaws
- AAG governing documents
- Applicable laws and policies

AAG provides organizational infrastructure to support Group activities, communications, and financial administration. Responsibility for planning and communicating Group activities, as well

as ensuring the professional conduct of Group Leadership and its members, rests with Group Leadership.

Because Groups are not independent legal entities, certain activities require AAG approval. Specifically:

- Groups may not independently enter into contracts
- Groups may not directly receive grants or external funding
- Groups must comply with AAG policies governing use of the AAG name, seal, and logo

Questions on these matters should be directed to communities@aag.org.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GROUP LEADERSHIP

1. Minimum Responsibilities

To maintain active status, each Group must:

- Organize or sponsor at least one session at the AAG Annual Meeting
- Hold at least one business meeting open to all Group members
- Maintain a minimum membership of 100 members
- Submit an Annual Report to the AAG

Most Groups hold their business meeting in person at the Annual Meeting.

2. Common Responsibilities

Group Leadership typically:

- Facilitate elections and leadership transitions
- Maintain bylaws and governance records
- Manage Group finances and reimbursements
- Communicate with members
- Administer awards and grants
- Organize sessions and activities at the Annual Meeting
- Support mentoring and career development
- Maintain websites, newsletters, or other communication platforms
- Coordinate additional virtual or in-person programming

3. Membership Requirements

All members of Group Leadership must maintain active membership in:

- the AAG, and
- the Group they serve

Individuals not in good standing for more than 30 days may be listed as vacancies across AAG systems.

Add or Renew a Group Membership:

1. Go to www.aag.org

2. Click “Log in” in the upper-right corner and log in with your AAG credentials.
3. You’ll be taken to My AAG Dashboard.
4. In the My Communities section, click the red “Add a Group” link.
5. Review your current Groups, then click the grey “Continue” button in the lower right.
6. When the Specialty Groups list appears (it may take a minute), check any Group you wish to join, then click “Continue.”
7. Continue through the Affinity Groups and Communities of Practice screens until you reach your Shopping Cart, then proceed to Checkout.
8. Once payment is complete, you’ll see a confirmation message.
9. Allow up to 15 minutes for your dashboard to update. If the update doesn’t appear, try logging out and back in—or use a private browser window to clear any caching issues.

4. Elections and Leadership Transitions

Maintaining active Group Leadership is essential for sustaining an effective Group. Elections and transitions must follow Group bylaws.

The Group Chair is responsible for:

- Coordinating leadership elections and any changes (e.g., resignations)
- Uploading announcement or meeting minutes with new board composition, election outcomes, and or leadership changes, to the “Governance” folder on the SharePoint site
- Communicating leadership updates to AAG staff using the form on the SharePoint site
- Transitioning access to the SharePoint site and Microsoft inbox to new Group Chair
- Communicating leadership updates to Group members

Groups are encouraged to align elections with the spring transition cycle. Templates and guidance are available on the SharePoint site (e.g., running elections, ballot template).

5. Amending Bylaws

Groups must follow their bylaws when making amendments and document all changes.

Groups should:

- Follow established amendment procedures
- Upload required documentation to the SharePoint site
- Archive previous versions of bylaws
- Notify AAG staff at least two weeks prior to the effective date

Required documentation:

- PDF document of final amended bylaws
- PDF document showing proposed amendments (e.g., with track changes)
- PDF documenting the amendment process and outcomes:
 - the rationale for the change,
 - the decision-making process,
 - voting or approval outcomes, and
 - the effective date of new bylaws.

6. Missing Bylaws

If bylaws cannot be located:

- Prioritize drafting new bylaws using the template on the SharePoint Site
- Approve through Group Leadership
- Upload required documentation to the SharePoint site
- Share the bylaws with Group members
- Notify AAG staff

Required documentation:

- PDF document of final bylaws
- PDF document of the process and outcomes:
 - due diligence for locating original bylaws,
 - process for drafting bylaws,
 - voting or approval outcomes, and
 - the effective date of new bylaws.

D. AAG OPERATIONAL SUPPORT FOR GROUPS

1. Staff Support

The AAG Office supports Groups through onboarding, communications, and operational guidance. Unless otherwise noted, questions should be directed to communities@aag.org.

2. Liaison with AAG Council

The AAG National Councilor Chair serves as liaison between Group Leadership and the AAG Council by:

- Leading the Group Chairs Social at the Annual Meeting
- Sharing Council updates
- Conveying feedback, priorities, and suggestions from Groups to the Council

3. Group Pages on the AAG Website

Each Group has a webpage on the AAG website with information such as mission, dues, leadership, and contact details.

Access at <https://www.aag.org/groups>

4. Knowledge Communities

Each Group receives an AAG-hosted Knowledge Community for communication and engagement.

Access at <https://community.aag.org> (use your regular AAG login credentials)

Group Chairs are granted administrative access, including the ability to download membership lists. This access is limited to Chairs to ensure responsible data stewardship. Membership lists are intended to support core Group functions, such as understanding membership trends and maintaining communication with current and former members.

When a new Chair is elected, they will receive administrative access after AAG staff are notified of the updated board composition and election results (see section above on elections and leadership transitions). Administrative access for the outgoing Chair will then be removed.

Export Group Membership List

1. Sign in at <https://community.aag.org>
2. Under Specialty Groups, click My Specialty Groups
3. Click on your Group
4. Open the Members tab
5. Above the member list, click Export, choose Excel or CSV, and download the file
6. Membership type appears in the SecurityGroups column. What SecurityGroups mean:
 - a. Member and Retired – paid regular dues
 - b. Student – paid student dues
 - c. Developing Region and Staff – no-cost membership
 - d. Non Member – database error; ignore and report to communities@aag.org (include name and email)

5. SharePoint and Microsoft Inbox

Each Group is provided with the following AAG-managed platforms to support operations, continuity, recordkeeping, and communication:

- **SharePoint site** (the “AAG Group Chairs SharePoint site”) - for document storage, governance records, templates, fund balance reports, forms, and other resources. Access at <https://aagorg.sharepoint.com/sites/SpecialtyGroupChairs>
- **Group Microsoft inbox** - for groups to receive and respond to inquiries from the broader community. Access at <https://www.office.com>

Login Information for Both Platforms

- **Username:** Your Group’s email address (listed on your Group’s page on the AAG website (format: XXXXX@communities.aag.org))
- **Password:** Provided by prior Group Chair

Recommendations to Avoid Login Failure

- Log out of other Microsoft accounts before signing in
- Use a private/incognito browser window if needed
- Set up **at least two** multi-factor authentication (MFA) methods. If only one MFA method is added, you will not be able to reset your password independently and will need AAG assistance, which may delay your access at the time you need it
- Groups may grant access to one additional Board member (e.g., Treasurer) by adding their phone number as an alternate phone under your MFA sign-in options

Transitioning Access to a New Chair

Complete this process while on a call with the incoming Chair, so you can coordinate password changes and MFA setup in real time.

- Sign in at <https://www.office.com>

- Select “**View Account**” in the top right corner
- In the new window, select “**Security Info**”, then “**Update Info**”
- You will see the list of existing authentication methods (phone number, secondary email, authenticator app, etc.) and the password entry
- Select “**Change**” next to the password
- Enter and confirm a new password
- Copy the password and share it with the incoming Chair
- Remove any MFA methods that belong to you as the outgoing Chair
- Help set-up at least two MFA methods for the incoming Chair
- Log out of both the Microsoft account and the SharePoint site
- Confirm that the incoming Chair can successfully log in using the new password and MFA setup

6. Meeting Management Support (Non-Annual Meeting)

AAG may support a limited number of Group-organized meetings outside the Annual Meeting by providing registration and program management through its OpenWater platform.

Groups should contact meeting@aag.org to assess feasibility.

E. AAG ANNUAL MEETING SUPPORT

1. Business Meetings

Groups may organize business meetings (virtual or in person) during the Annual Meeting. Requests must be submitted by the Chair using the form on the SharePoint site, and by the posted deadline.

Group Track in the Annual Meeting Program (fully refined)

2. Group Track in the Annual Meeting Program

Groups may organize sessions that align with their mission and include them within their Group’s track in the Annual Meeting program.

Annual Meeting attendees may also include a session they are organizing within your Group’s track. Before doing so, however, they are expected to seek approval from the Group. Group Leadership should review these requests to ensure alignment with the Group’s mission and activities.

Groups are responsible for ensuring that all sessions included in their track reflect their mission. If a session is identified as misaligned, Group Leadership should contact the Primary Session Organizer and request that their Group be removed from being listed in their session.

All sessions included in a Group’s track must be reported in the Group’s Annual Report.

3. Group Events

Groups may request event space during the Annual Meeting for activities such as receptions, networking events, or other gatherings. AAG staff will coordinate with the Group to determine

any associated costs (e.g., catering). These estimated costs will be charged to the Group’s fund balance.

Space is limited and assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. Requests must be submitted by the Chair using the form on the SharePoint site, and by the posted deadline.

4. Group Chairs Social

AAG hosts a Group Chairs Social during the Annual Meeting. The National Councilor Chair leads the event. Group Chairs must RSVP using the form on the SharePoint site, and by the posted deadline.

5. Keynote Speaker Fund

AAG Council established a fund to support Groups in organizing keynote sessions featuring prominent speakers within their area of interest. The fund supports the following for a speaker identified by a Group:

- \$250 honorarium (these are processed after the speaking engagement)
- Annual Meeting registration (in-person or virtual)

This fund covers about 40 speakers. Each Group may submit one request, and funding is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted. Requests must be submitted by the Chair using the form on the SharePoint site, and by the posted deadline. The Chair is also responsible for ensuring the keynote session is submitted to the Annual Meeting program, that it is included in their Group’s Track, and that the speaker is added to the session.

Groups may:

- Supplement the AAG-funded honorarium with their own funds
- Partner with other Groups to jointly support a speaker
- Coordinate multi-Group keynote sessions featuring multiple speakers

F. GROUP FINANCIAL OPERATIONS

1. Revenue Sources

Group Dues

All Groups follow a three-tier dues structure:

- **Regular dues** – paid by AAG Regular Members (all member categories except student and developing region members)
- **Student dues** – paid by AAG Student Members
- Group dues are waived for AAG Developing Region Members.

Groups should set dues based on anticipated expenses (e.g., speakers, awards, or events) and anticipated revenue (e.g. dues per membership category) at a level that can meaningfully support activities. Dues should reflect a level of commitment rather than being set so low that members join only casually.

Groups considering changing dues should:

- Follow procedures in their bylaws
- Upload required documentation to the SharePoint site
- Notify AAG staff at least two weeks prior to the effective date

Required documentation:

- PDF document of amended bylaws (if dues are explicitly defined in the Group’s bylaws)
- PDF documenting the process and outcomes:
 - the rationale for the change,
 - the decision-making process,
 - voting or approval outcomes, and
 - the effective date of new dues (avoid weekends and holidays).

Donations and Fundraising

Groups may raise their funds through donation campaigns, sponsorships (e.g., from publishers or organizations), or contributions from members, including support for endowed awards.

- **Fundraising efforts** – Each Group has a “Donate” button on its page on the AAG website that may be used to support fundraising efforts. Donations are reflected in the Group’s fund balance reports and are restricted to the Group’s programs and activities. A QR code version of the donation link is available upon request from AAG.
- **Endowments** - Groups that have the opportunity to receive a significant donation or are considering a larger fundraising initiative to establish an endowment should contact AAG staff. AAG can provide guidance and relevant templates (e.g., endowment agreements and establishment documents) to support the process.
- **Other Revenue Sources (e.g., Grants, Sponsorships, Contracts)** - Because Groups are not separate legal entities, external funding and contracts must be coordinated with AAG staff.

2. Common Expenses

Awards and Honoraria

Groups may use available funds to administer awards, grants, scholarships, honoraria, or other forms of scholarly recognition. These recognitions are typically acknowledged during the Group business meeting.

To amplify these recognitions, AAG publishes recipients on its website and invites them to the AAG Awards Reception at the Annual Meeting. For that, however, AAG staff must be notified by the Chair or Treasurer using the form on the SharePoint site, and by the posted deadline, whether the recognition is monetary or non-monetary. The deadline to notify AAG staff is two weeks after the Annual Meeting, and monetary awards are processed within approximately 30 days.

- **Awards, Grants, and Scholarships** - These may be processed once recipients are selected. For travel-related awards, Groups should clearly communicate any conditions (e.g., attendance at the supported event, such as the Annual Meeting).

- **Honoraria** – These will be processed *after* the service was rendered, and if the person is able to accept an honorarium. Honoraria are often offered to prominent speakers, and they are nominal, one-time payments provided as a gesture of appreciation for voluntary professional contributions (e.g., speaking engagement). The payment is not an honorarium if payment is negotiated and agreed upon, it is then a contractual agreement.

The U.S. Internal Revenue Service requires all payments of \$2,000 or greater to be reported as income to the individual, so it is not uncommon to cap any awards or honoraria below that threshold.

Expense Reimbursements

The AAG facilitates reimbursement for expenses incurred by Group Leadership that are directly related to conducting Group business and are within the Group’s available fund balance. The Group Chair or Treasurer is responsible for reviewing and approving all expenses.

- **De minimis expenses are processed on a reimbursement basis.** Requests must be submitted by the Chair or Treasurer within 30 days of incurring the expense using the form available on the SharePoint site, along with all required supporting documentation (e.g., receipts, invoices, and/or bills). Reimbursement requests with complete and appropriate documentation will be processed within 30 days of receipt.
- **For larger expenses, Groups may use the “vendor direct billing” option.** To arrange this, the Chair or Treasurer must contact the Controller in advance by emailing full expense details to accounting@aag.org.

Several categories of expenses are typically not allowed for reimbursement. The list below is a list of unallowable expenses that is not exhaustive:

- Expenses not directly related to the AAG Group’s business
- Advertising and public relations
- Alcoholic beverages
- Donations
- Entertainment
- Fines and penalties
- Equipment, buildings, and land
- Housing and personal living expenses
- Insurance and indemnification
- Legal costs
- Lobbying
- Royalties or patents

3. Financial Management Support

AAG maintains Group financial records and provides periodic fund balance reports via the SharePoint site (in the “Finance” folder). These reports provide a cumulative fund balance that details the Group’s financial activity for the calendar year to date.

Fund balance reports scheduled for 2026-2027:

- Jan 2026 - April 2026 Report uploaded to SharePoint in May 2026
- Jan 2026 - Sept 2026 Report uploaded to SharePoint in October 2026
- Jan 2026 - Dec 2026 Report uploaded to SharePoint in January 2027
- Jan 2027 - March 2027 Report uploaded to SharePoint in April 2027

This reporting schedule is intentionally designed to align with the typical timing and volume of financial activity across AAG Groups. Fund balance reports are only provided according to this schedule, though timelines may be adjusted slightly as needed throughout the year.

G. ANNUAL REPORTING

Groups must submit an Annual Report to the AAG Council. Reports must be submitted by the Chair using the form on the SharePoint site, anytime between the day after the Annual Meeting and June 1. Reports should include:

- Group Name
- Mission Statement
- Dues Information
- Composition of Board including Recent Board Updates (elections)
- Date, Time, and Location of Business Meeting(s) in the past 12 months
- List of Annual Meeting activities
 - Organized or Sponsored Sessions
 - List of Awardees
 - Other events and activities
- List of non-Annual Meeting related activities
- Membership and Participation
- Financial Report
- Statement of self-assessment summarizing achievements and challenges
- Suggestions to Council

H. INACTIVE GROUPS

Groups that do not fulfill minimum responsibilities may be reviewed by the AAG Council.

Possible outcomes include:

- Reactivation planning
- Merging with another Group
- Inactive status

If a Group is declared inactive by Council, it will be formally sunset, and any remaining Group funds will revert to the AAG, in accordance with the Council resolution adopted in April 2005.

I. REQUESTING TO FORM A NEW AAG GROUP

The AAG Council has sole authority to approve or deny requests to form new Groups.

1. Submission Requirements

AAG members seeking to form a new Group must submit a single PDF document, including page numbers formatted as “Page X of Y”, to communities@aag.org. The document must include:

1. **Organizing Committee Contacts** - Provide the name, institutional affiliation, and email of each organizing committee member. Each must maintain an active AAG membership throughout the request process. These individuals may become candidates for the Group’s first leadership election, therefore, a minimum of three members is recommended so they can serve as Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary/Treasurer.
2. **Organizing Committee Chair** - Designate one member as Chair, who will:
 - a. Submit the proposal
 - b. Serve as the primary contact with AAG staff
 - c. Coordinate the Group’s implementation if approved
3. **Bylaws** - Include proposed bylaws that align with AAG Bylaws and Standing Rules. Request the AAG Community Bylaws Template from AAG staff.
4. **Proposed Activities** - Provide a list of activities the Group intends to undertake, such as:
 - a. Organizing sessions at AAG Annual or Regional meetings
 - b. Offering awards or grants
 - c. Hosting lectures, workshops, or events
 - d. Publishing newsletters or special journal issues
5. **Statement on Overlap** - Explain how the proposed Group is distinct from existing AAG Groups, or why its goals cannot be achieved within existing Groups.
6. **Statements of Support** - If the proposed Group may be perceived as overlapping with existing Groups and/or competing with its members:
 - a. Contact the boards of those Groups
 - b. Request formal statements of support from their Chairs

This step is essential to demonstrate complementarity rather than competition.
7. **Member Signatures** – Provide support from at least 50 AAG members. All signatories must have active membership during the process, which will be confirmed by AAG staff. Signatures must be collected using an AAG-provided online form. To set this up, email AAG at least two weeks in advance with:
 - a. Proposed Group name and acronym
 - b. Organizing Committee and Chair contact details
 - c. Public link to proposed bylaws
 - d. Target deadline for collecting signatures (if any)

2. Review Process

When reviewing requests to form new Groups, the Council aims to:

- Be receptive to all topics relevant to geography and the geography community
- Avoid the proliferation of new groups without sound justification
- Avoid duplicating the interests of existing groups to prevent competing for members and undermining the health of existing groups.

Because of these considerations, statements of support from potentially overlapping Groups are especially important. They demonstrate that the proposed Group complements - rather than competes with, existing communities.

The review and approval process requires staff review and at least three Council meetings.

- **Initial Staff Review** - AAG staff review the submitted PDF for completeness. Once complete, the proposal is added to the New Business section of the next Council meeting agenda.
- **First Council Meeting (Informational)** – The Council discusses the request but does not vote. If questions or concerns arise, AAG staff will relay feedback to the organizing committee, who may respond before the next meeting.
- **Second Council Meeting (Vote)** – The Council votes on the proposal. If Council voted in favor, AAG staff will schedule a guidance call to help prepare for the Group’s launch.
- **Third Council Meeting (Ratification)** – The minutes from the Second Council Meeting are ratified. Upon ratification, the Group becomes official.

3. Post-Approval Responsibilities

Once official, the new Group must:

- Hold a Business Meeting at the next AAG Annual Meeting to elect officers
- Participate in the AAG Group Chairs Social at the Annual Meeting (Chair only)
- Submit an Annual Report by the required deadline