



## 2025/2026 AAG Handbook for Group Chairs

### A. ABOUT AAG GROUPS

Groups are formed by members of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) who wish to organize because of a common interest associated to the discipline of geography and doing so under the AAG infrastructure enables them to coordinate professional activities designed to advance the collective state of knowledge in their shared interest.

AAG Groups refer to:

- **Specialty Groups** – They typically form around a particular sub-disciplinary topical area.
- **Affinity Groups** – They typically form around a particular status, such as being a student or being a retiree.

AAG Council voted in April 1996 to expand groups to include Affinity Groups. AAG Council unanimously confirmed in November 2005 that the procedure for establishing and maintaining Affinity Groups is identical to that for establishing and maintaining Specialty Groups.

Per the AAG Standing Rules on Specialty and Affinity Groups:

- Specialty and Affinity Groups must comply with particular financial and legal procedures as required for the association's auditing needs. The most current information on these procedures can be found in the latest AAG Specialty and Affinity Group Handbook [this handbook], which is provided to Chairs and posted online. This handbook will be maintained on the AAG website by the AAG office and thus is provided to Chairs and officers for their reference, who bear responsibility for its implementation.
- The AAG Council establishes policy and implements procedures for the formation, functioning, and decommissioning of AAG Groups, as documented in the history of resolutions of the council. This is also outlined in the AAG Specialty and Affinity Group Handbook [this handbook].

### B. LEGAL STANDING OF AAG GROUPS

AAG Groups are voluntary, unincorporated administrative units or divisions of AAG. They do not have a separate legal organizational standing, meaning that they are not independent legal entities separate from the American Association of Geographers. Instead, AAG Groups are subject to the authority of the AAG Council, with that Council having delegated authority for the routine management, operations, and activities of the AAG Group to its respective group leadership via their respective group bylaws and as consistent with the AAG governing documents and applicable law.

AAG Groups must request prior approval from Council for the use of the AAG seal by Groups (per resolution at the April 1978 meeting).

AAG Groups are not entities eligible to receive grants or funds, or sign contracts directly as a separate organization. AAG is open, however, to consider supporting Groups in accessing grants, funds, or sign contracts if there is capacity to do so and when it aligns with the mission of the Group and with the mission of the AAG. If you Group is considering an opportunity like this, reach out to AAG at [communities@aag.org](mailto:communities@aag.org).

## **C. RESPONSIBILITIES OF GROUP CHAIRS AND THEIR BOARD**

### **1. Minimum required responsibilities**

AAG Group leaders are subject to the AAG Professional Code of Conduct. They oversee their Group's budget, facilitate elections, and communicate with AAG (board updates, reimbursements, payments, etc.) and with their Group members (opportunities, events, policy, etc.). Group Chairs have the following minimum required responsibilities to ensure AAG Council to consider their Group's status to remain active:

- Organize or sponsor at least one (1) session at the Annual Meeting.
- Organize at least one (1) Business Meeting open to all group members. Most Groups opt to have that meeting in-person, at the Annual Meeting.
- Attract at least one hundred (100) members.
- Submit an Annual Report (see section on Annual Reporting)

If a Group cannot fulfill one or more of the required responsibilities above for three (3) consecutive years, the Group Chair may be approached by the AAG National Councilor Chair (see section D.4) to determine status of the group and identify a future course of action such as merging with another group, or may be declared inactive after careful consideration by the AAG Council.

### **2. Other common responsibilities Group Chairs manage with their Board:**

- Organize or sponsor sessions at the Regional Division Meetings.
- Organize discussions and invite speakers outside of AAG Meetings (virtually or in-person at Special Meetings).
- Facilitate Awards to honor and support their members for advancing the collective state of knowledge.
- Facilitate career and mentoring support (organize career-focused discussions, facilitate members to find mentors, etc.).
- Manage a Website.
- Manage a Newsletter.

### **3. Membership Requirement of Group Board Members**

All members on a Group Board should have an active membership throughout their term with both the AAG and with the AAG Group they serve. The position of a Group Board member who is no longer in good standing will be listed as "Vacant" across AAG platforms (website,

knowledge community, AAG database). It might be helpful to remind Board Members of this requirement during Board Meetings.

## **D. OPERATIONAL SUPPORT TO ALL GROUPS**

### **1. AAG staff support for onboarding and facilitating connections across AAG Communities**

- Any Group-related questions can be emailed at [communities@aag.org](mailto:communities@aag.org). Throughout this handbook, if there is a mention to “email AAG”, then the email should be addressed to [communities@aag.org](mailto:communities@aag.org), unless specified otherwise.
- AAG staff provide onboarding to Group Chairs to share important resources, opportunities, and deadlines with them.
- AAG staff can facilitate connections with other AAG Communities that are relevant to the Groups.

### **2. Knowledge Communities for Groups**

This is provided by AAG to support Group members to exchange information with each other and for Group Leadership to share information with their members. The Knowledge Community for your Group can be accessed at <https://community.aag.org>.

### **3. Database of Group Members**

Group Chairs have a level of administrative access to their Knowledge Community that enables them to extract a list of their group members.

Below are steps to export a list of your group members and their membership tier. We can't provide historical data, but some groups do collect their membership data and have an archive of it in their SharePoint site folder.

1. Log in at <https://www.aag.org>
2. You will be directed to your AAG Dashboard. At the top of your dashboard, you will see a section labeled “My Communities” and you should see a tile for your Group there. Click on your Group’s tile.
3. You will be directed to your Group’s “Community Home” tab. There are 3 other tabs you can navigate to, including the “Members” tab. Click on the “Members” tab.
4. Scroll down a bit, until you start seeing a list of your members. Just above the list of members, look for a gray “Export” button. A pop-up will show up to let you choose between two file formats (Excel or CSV), and then select the “Download” button.
5. Once you open the file, just a note that you can find each member’s type of membership under the column labeled “SecurityGroups”. Below is what each category means:
  - a. Member and Retired - they paid your group’s Regular Member dues rate
  - b. Student - they paid your group’s Student Member dues rate
  - c. Developing Region and Staff - they did not have to pay dues to be added to your group.
  - d. Non Member - You should not have any of those in your list. If you do, ignore those rows because they are a glitch in our database, and please email us with

the name and email of any that are listed as “Non Member” as their SecurityGroup, and we will fix those glitches.

#### **4. Liaison with AAG Council through the National Councilor Chair**

The AAG Council is a volunteer governing body that acts as a board of directors for the Association, and consists of:

- The Executive Committee (6 members) - the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, the most recent past president, and - serving in a non-voting ex officio capacity, the executive director
- National Councilors (8 members) - Six nationally elected at-large members, one international member, and one student member.
- Regional Division Councilors (9 members) - Nine members elected from each Regional Division.

Among the National Councilors, one of them acts as National Councilor Chair. The National Councilor Chair acts as a liaison with Group Chairs, which means Group Chairs can reach out to the National Councilor Chair for questions about AAG Governance and the National Councilor Chair shares updates about Council decisions with Group Chairs.

AAG National Councilor Chair: **Mark Barnes**, [mark.barnes@morgan.edu](mailto:mark.barnes@morgan.edu)

#### **5. File Management and Archives for Groups**

This support is provided by AAG to enable Group Chairs to access key documents and leave or archive documents for future Group leadership. Each Group receives up to 2 logins to access the Group Chairs SharePoint Site, where they can access key documents and forms.

<https://aagorg.sharepoint.com/sites/SpecialtyGroupChairs>

#### **6. Finance Operational Support For Groups**

AAG maintains the financial records of each Group and publishes periodic fund balance reports in the “Finance” folder of each respective Group on the AAG Group Chair’s SharePoint site. The periodic fund balance report is a cumulative fund balance that includes the details of the activities of the calendar year.

Depending on the AAG Annual Meeting and Awards session quarterly reports are adjusted for different months of the year each. Fund balance reports scheduled for 2025:

- |                |                                                |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------|
| • January 2025 | Fund Balance report published in February 2025 |
| • Jan-May 2025 | Fund Balance report published in June 2025     |
| • Jan-Sep 2025 | Fund Balance report scheduled for October 2025 |
| • Jan-Dec 2025 | Fund Balance report scheduled for January 2026 |

#### **7. Group Support at the Annual Meeting**

**Group Chairs Social** – AAG facilitates a social for Group Chairs at each Annual Meeting. The AAG National Councilor Chair (see section D.4) presides over this event. All Group Chairs will be asked to RSVP through a form that will be posted on the SharePoint Site (typically in February).

**Group Business Meeting** - Groups can host a Group Business Meeting at the Annual Meeting (in-person or virtual). The Group Chair is responsible for requesting a Business Meeting using the form on the SharePoint Site (typically available from September until December).

**Group Track of Sessions (a.k.a. Sponsored Sessions)** – Any Annual Meeting attendee has the ability to organize sessions and can request up to three (3) Groups to “sponsor” their session. The way attendees request a Group to “sponsor” their session is by emailing the Group Chair to ask if they think the session contributes to the mission of their Group. If you or your Board agrees to sponsor a session, the attendee will be able to add your Group as a sponsor to their session. That session will then be included in the Annual Meeting program under your group’s “track of sessions”. This enables attendees to filter sessions sponsored by your group. All sessions you sponsor should be included as part of your annual report of activities.

**Group Events** – AAG enables Groups to hold a meeting, reception, or special event in conjunction with the Annual Meeting. There is limited space for Group events, and requests are approved on a first-come-first-serve basis. The Group Chair is responsible for making the request using the form on the SharePoint Site (typically available from September until late October).

## **8. Group Meeting Management Support (Registration and Program Schedule)**

AAG can support a very limited number of Groups with managing registrations and program scheduling for a special meeting (outside of the Annual Meeting or Regional Division Meetings) on our platform (OpenWater). If a Group is interested in this support, please contact [meeting@aag.org](mailto:meeting@aag.org) so we can discuss the feasibility of using AAG’s platform to support your special meeting.

## **E. FUNDING SUPPORT AND REVENUE MECHANISMS FOR GROUPS**

### **1. AAG Group Keynote Speaker Fund**

AAG Council allocated funds that aim to support Groups in organizing keynote sessions that feature prominent speakers across our disciplinary spectrum to bring their unique insights to our Annual Meeting. The fund is meant to cover the following for a speaker identified by an AAG Group:

- **\$250 honorarium.** If an AAG Group would like to offer a higher honorarium to a speaker, they are allowed to decide to complement it with available funds in their Group Budget or collaborate with other Groups (see acceptable scenarios below). If the speaker can accept the honorarium, the honorarium will be processed if and once the speaking engagement was rendered. In other words, the honorarium will be processed *after* the Annual Meeting *if* they spoke at the keynote session.
- **Registration for the Annual Meeting (In-person or virtual)** - If the speaker is already registered by the time of this request, they will be able to get a refund.

This AAG Fund can cover about 40 speakers. Each AAG Group may submit a request for up to one (1) speaker but are allowed to combine efforts and funds with other AAG Groups. Funds are distributed on a first-come-first-serve basis, until funds are exhausted.

The Group Chair is responsible (but may delegate to another member of the Group Board) for (1) coordinating the submission of a request to this Fund using the form on the SharePoint Site (typically available from September until early January), and (2) for making sure a keynote session is submitted to the Annual Meeting and that the speaker is added to that session. Ideally, this should be done before the Annual Meeting program release (early January), so that AAG Group Keynote Sessions can become a part of Annual Meeting communications.

Combining funds and efforts – acceptable scenarios:

- A Group would like to use some of the available funds in their Group Budget so they can offer the speaker a higher honorarium – *For example: The Group would like to offer a \$600 honorarium to the speaker. In that case, they submit a request to the AAG Group Keynote Speaker Fund, and in the form they indicate they will use \$350 from their Group Funds to supplement the \$250 honorarium.*
- A Group would like to combine funds with other Groups so they can offer the speaker a higher honorarium – *For example: Two (2) Groups would like to invite the same speaker and want to offer them a \$500 honorarium. In that case, one of the two Groups submits a request to the AAG Group Keynote Speaker Fund, and in the form, they indicate they are collaborating with another Group to double the honorarium. The collaborating Group will not be permitted to submit a request to the AAG Group Keynote Speaker Fund.*
- A Group would like to coordinate with other AAG Groups to organize a keynote session with more than one speaker – *For example: Three (3) Groups would like to coordinate their keynote session and want to offer a \$250 honorarium to 3 speakers. In that case, each Group submits a request to the AAG Group Keynote Speaker Fund for one of the speakers. The collaborating Groups make sure the speakers are added to the same keynote session.*

## 2. Group Member Dues

**Tiered Structure** - All groups have the same tiered dues structure, consisting of three (3) tiers:

- Regular Group Dues – AAG Members with a Regular Membership (all membership categories except student and developing region memberships) can join any AAG Group at the respective rate set by a group for regular members.
- Student Group Dues – AAG Members with a Student Membership can join any AAG Group at the respective rate set by a group for students.
- Developing Region Group Dues (FREE) – Group dues are waived for AAG Members with a Developing Region Membership.

**Changing the tiered structure** - There is currently no option to offer more tiers, but AAG is open to hear from Groups about what your group is hoping to solve or achieve with a different tiered structure. As we continue to hear more from Groups on this, we might think about new ways that can best serve Groups.

**Changing your Group Member dues** - Below are some general guidelines in case a Group is considering changing their group dues:



1. The Group (Co-)Chair reads through the most updated bylaws to determine whether changing group dues will require an amendment to the group's bylaws, a decision by the group's board, or a vote by group members.
2. The Group (Co-)Chair coordinates the process required according to the bylaws to make a decision about dues changes.
3. Once a decision about dues is final and to make sure AAG staff can make the needed and proper updates across our platforms about this decision:
  - Upload a PDF to your “Governance” folder on SharePoint that captures the following elements:
    - The reason behind proposing changes to the group dues.
    - The process required by the group bylaws to make a decision about group dues changes.
    - The process taken to make a decision about group dues changes and a record of the voting/decision results around the proposed changes.
    - The final decision that resulted from that process.
    - The date on which the change is effective (avoid holidays or weekend days because AAG staff will not be able to make the change effective on those dates).
    - Rename the document as “Dues Change Decision [YEAR] – [GROUP ACRONYM]”
  - Email communities@aag.org at least 2 weeks ahead of the effective date about the change.
- Once AAG staff were notified and the proper documentation is available in SharePoint, AAG staff will ensure the update is made on the effective date across our platforms (website, knowledge communities, and more).

### **3. Donations**

Each Group has a page on the AAG website, which has a “donate” button that direct anyone to donate directly to the respective group. When a donation is made directly to a Group, it will be reflected in the group’s fund balance report. The donation is restricted to that group’s programs and operating activities.

This direct “donate” link can be used by an AAG Group Board to organize fundraising efforts. If it is helpful to have a QR code rather than a link, email us to request the QR code.

### **4. Endowed Funds**

If your Group has an opportunity to receive an endowment or is considering fundraising efforts to start an endowment, email us. AAG staff can answer questions you may have and has templates for establishing endowments (e.g., Endowment Fund Establishment Resolution document, Endowment Agreement)

### **5. Other Revenue Sources (e.g., Grants and Contracts)**

Chairs seeking to receive funding from or sign contracts with external agencies in the name of their AAG Group must email us. Since AAG Groups do not have a separate legal organizational standing, they are not entities eligible to receive grants or funds directly as a separate

organization. Yet, AAG staff is open to consider supporting a funding proposal or contract if there is capacity to do so and when it aligns with the mission of the AAG Group and the mission of the AAG.

## **F. AAG GROUP MOST COMMON EXPENSES**

### **1. Award Payments**

Most Groups administer awards to honor or support their group members in advancing the collective state of knowledge in their shared interest. Awardees have a responsibility to acknowledge the AAG Group for any direct work that was supported by those funds.

Typically, Groups honor their awardees in-person at their Group Business Meeting at the Annual Meeting. Group awardees are also invited and celebrated as a part of the AAG Awards Ceremony at the Annual Meeting if the Group Chair communicates awardees with AAG staff.

To request payments be made to awardees, the Group Chair is responsible (but may delegate to another member of the Group Board) for submitting an Award Payment Request using the form on the SharePoint Site. The form is typically available between early January and two weeks after the Annual Meeting, below are some deadlines to consider:

- Early January – Form is made available and communicated to Groups
- One month before the Annual Meeting – Pre-Annual Meeting payment processing deadline. If Groups submit the form before this deadline, they have a guarantee that awardees will receive their award before the Annual Meeting. This might be particularly important in the case of travel support awards or for awardees that might rely on the award to cover their costs of attending the meeting.
- Two weeks after the Annual Meeting – Form is closed. Groups are no longer able to request payments to be made to awardees.

Specific deadlines will be communicated with Group Chairs in early January. The AAG Finance team processes all the requested award payments no later than 60 days after the AAG Annual meeting each year.

### **2. Honorarium Payments**

Groups often decide to use some of their Group Budget to invite panelists or speakers to the Annual Meeting and offer them an honorarium. To request an honorarium to be paid to someone, the Group Chair is responsible (but may delegate to another member of the Group Board) for submitting an Honorarium Payment Request using the form on the SharePoint Site. If the person can accept the honorarium, the honorarium will be processed if and once the speaking engagement was rendered. For example, in the case of an honorarium for a person who was invited to speak on a panel at the Annual Meeting, the honorarium will be processed *after* the Annual Meeting *if* they participated at the session.

What is an Honorarium? - Honoraria are a one-time payment, most commonly serving as a gift for services rendered in a professional or voluntary capacity. They do not serve as compensation for services rendered nor as a reflection of the value of work produced. Honoraria are a thank-you payment of nominal value for voluntary services by an individual



whose primary income is not generated from this service. They may include consideration for expenses such as travel, meals, etc. They are not typically considered taxable income. The payment is not an honorarium if payment is negotiated and agreed upon, it is then a contractual agreement. The Internal Revenue Service requires all payments of \$600 or greater to be reported as income to the individual, so it is not uncommon to cap an honorarium at \$500 for that reason. Some U.S. States have other requirements.

### **3. Group Board Expense Reimbursements**

The AAG facilitates reimbursements for expenses incurred by Group Board Members that are directly related to conducting a group business within the available fund balance. The Group Chair or Treasurer is responsible for reviewing and approving expenses. De minimis expenses are processed on a reimbursement basis using the expense reimbursement form located on the SharePoint site with the appropriate invoice/bill within 30 days of incurring such expenses. The alternative option is “vendor direct billing” for larger expenses by contacting the Controller ahead of time to coordinate by emailing the full details of expenses to [accounting@aag.org](mailto:accounting@aag.org). Once submitted payment requests with appropriate receipts and bills are processed within 30 days.

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

### **G. GROUP BOARD ELECTIONS**

Most AAG Groups complete their elections in the Spring. If your group does not hold elections in the Spring, we encourage your group to adjust your elections to that timing, so that AAG can better support a collective onboarding process for all Group Chairs. You can find more detailed recommendations and templates (ballot, nominations, emails, etc.) for your Group Board elections on the SharePoint Site.

The Group Chair is responsible for running the elections and for communicating election results, document election results to the SharePoint Site, and notify AAG staff of board updates so they can update your Groups Board information across AAG platforms (website, knowledge communities, and more).

## H. ANNUAL REPORTING

Each Group is expected to report annually to the AAG Council. Reports can be sent anytime between the day after the Annual Meeting and July 1. The report 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

## I. INACTIVE GROUPS

If a Group is not able to fulfill their minimum required responsibilities (see section C.1 on Minimum required responsibilities), the Group Chair may be approached by the AAG National Councilor Chair (see section D.4) to determine status of the group and identify a future course of action such as merging with another group, or may be declared inactive after careful consideration by the AAG Council.

Per a Council resolution at the April 2005 meeting, Group funds will revert back to AAG, in the event that a Group is declared inactive by the AAG Council. In the event that a Group is declared inactive by the AAG Council, the AAG Secretary will notify the current or last known chair of the Council's action.

## J. FORMING AN AAG GROUP

AAG Council has sole authority to approve or deny requests to form new AAG Groups. If AAG members wish to form a group, they should email [communities@aag.org](mailto:communities@aag.org) with one (1) PDF document containing:

- **Organizing Committee Contacts** – Name, email, and affiliation of each organizing committee member. Organizing committee members must have an active membership with AAG throughout the formation request process. Typically the organizing committee becomes the first board of the group, so it is best for the organizing committee to have at least 3 members, who can become Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary/Treasurer in the event Council approves the formation of the proposed group.

- **Signatures of 50 or more AAG members** who support the creation of the new group and its mission. Signatories must have an active membership with AAG throughout the formation request process.
- **Group Bylaws** – Group Bylaws cannot contradict AAG Bylaws and Standing Rules. If a template would be useful, email us to receive the latest one.
- **Statement of potential overlap with existing AAG Groups** – The statement must explain why this group's specialty or affinity is new or distinct from already existing groups and/or why this group's proposed purpose or activities cannot be advanced through participation in any existing groups.
- **Statement of Support from existing AAG Groups (if applicable)** - If existing groups might perceive this group as overlapping with theirs, the organizing committee should communicate the details of their proposed group with the board members of these existing groups and request a statement of support from each group board chair.
- **List of Activities** the group will undertake if the formation of the group is approved by AAG Council. This can include sponsoring sessions at the Annual Meeting or at Regional Division meetings, pursuing publications (newsletter, special journal issue, etc.), hosting lectures, issuing awards/grants, among many other possible activities.

Once received, this PDF document will be shared with AAG Council ahead of the next appropriate Council Meeting. During that meeting, Council is made aware of the request and has an opportunity to ask questions about the request. It is only at the Council Meeting thereafter that Council decides by vote on the request. Once a decision is reached by Council, the organizing committee will be notified by AAG staff. Below are a few aspects AAG Council considers when reviewing new group proposals:

- Being receptive to all topics and subjects related 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.

If the new group is approved, the organizing committee is expected to hold an organizational meeting at the next Annual Meeting of the AAG during which members can elect officers.