

Regional Divisions Taskforce Report and Proposed Actions

PACIFIC COAST | GREAT PLAINS/ROCKY MOUNTAINS | WEST LAKES | EAST LAKES | MIDDLE STATES
NEW ENGLAND/ST. LAWRENCE VALLEY | SOUTHWEST | SOUTHEAST | MIDDLE ATLANTIC



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Introduction

The Regional Divisions Taskforce was established by AAG Council in November 2018 in order to explore ways to increase the health of the AAG Regional Divisions and to improve the vitality of the AAG Regional Division Meetings for the benefit of AAG Members. The taskforce is composed of representatives of each Regional Division. The taskforce has had one in-person in Washington, DC during the Spring 2019 AAG Annual Meeting. The taskforce has also had two Zoom meetings, one in September 2019 and one in February 2020.

Purpose, Value, and Challenges of Regional Divisions

The AAG Regional Divisions—mostly within the United States but also including some Canadian provinces—developed as an intrinsic part of the overall AAG organization. The Pacific Coast Division was

formed in 1938 and the other Regional Divisions were established in the 1940s and 1950s. Preston James and Geoffrey Martin credit the Regions with much of the AAG’s growth during the 1960s.

Each Regional Division is unique. Each has distinct governance structures and membership that encompasses both AAG members and nonmembers. Several Regions run their own journals; while others have comprehensive websites and newsletters. Every Region hosts a substantial one- or two-day meeting in the Fall with field trips, keynotes, sessions, posters, and awards. The following table, based on feedback from Regional Division officers, articulates these differences:

Region	Membership	Election Process	Eligibility	Extra Dues	Web site	News letter	Journal
MAD	452	as needed	AAG member	no	yes	no	N/A
Middle States	874	annual for VP, Sec Councilor in Fall	AAG member	no	yes	Twice a year	<i>Middle States Geographer</i> , annual online
NESTVAL	577	biennial for VP, Sec, Treasurer	academic, dues paying, must reside in region	\$35/ \$15	yes	no	<i>Northeastern Geographer</i> , annual both
East Lakes	405	3 year terms	AAG members must reside in region	no	no	no	N/A
West Lakes	647	annual for chair	AAG members must reside in region	no	no	no	N/A
GP/RM	446	at business meeting; changing in 2019	Must reside in region	no	not any more	no	N/A
SWAAG	522	by ballot	AAG members must reside in region	no	yes	yes	<i>Southwestern Geographer</i> annual online
SEDAAG	1,158	staggered 2 year terms in Fall	Dues paying	\$50, \$25	yes	no	<i>Southeastern Geographer</i> 4 times a year
APCG	1,201	VP and Pres for one year, Secretary and Treasurer for 2 years, regional councilor 3 years	Dues paying	\$25 reg, \$15 student	yes	twice a year	<i>Yearbook of the Assoc of Pacific Coast Geographers</i> , annual, print/online

Based on the results of a survey of the AAG membership of the US and Canada, which we present later in this report, Regional Divisions are highly prized by a segment of the AAG membership. Participation in Regional Divisions is often institutionally diverse and may be the only interaction that some AAG members have with the AAG. For those Regions that have them, journals are a great way of presenting information and research unique to the region. Advantages of Regional Division Meetings include a

more intimate venue than the national meeting, more opportunities to highlight geography to the local community, the ability to show off geography to administrators, better interaction opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, great opportunities for local field trips, much lower costs, institutional and attendee diversity, and much less distance for attendees to travel to get to the meetings. The Regional Divisions Taskforce has found that with fewer outside distractions, most sessions at Regional Division Meetings are quite well attended with ample questions and an opportunity for presenters to get their ideas across. And in this day of concern about carbon impacts of attending far-away conferences, Regional Division Meetings provide an option much closer to home.

Despite the benefits of Regional Divisions, there are several challenges that have been articulated to the Regional Divisions Taskforce. Membership numbers vary by a factor of three to one. The geographical area of these Regions ranges from MAD which contains Maryland, DC, and northern Virginia to several Regions that span over 1,000 miles. Some Regions are relatively prosperous whereas others have few resources. Some have communications outlets such as journals and active websites/newsletters, whereas some have little communication outside of the meetings. Some Regions have strongly articulated governance structures with active committees and plenty of leadership opportunities, whereas others struggle to find willing participants. Regions do not have professional staff and so governance and conference planning falls on the shoulders of volunteers. Moreover, Regional leaders often feel that recognition – from their universities or other employers – is not at all commensurate with the demands of this vital service.

Within the Regional Division meetings, there are also challenges that affect every Region but some more than others. These often come in the form of varied attendance and engagement by members. Some schools are highly involved in Regional activities whereas some significant programs are virtually absent. Most Regional leaders bemoan the lack of attendance from the larger, research-oriented programs within their Regions. A lack of attendance renders the Regional Meeting less valuable, as it cuts down on networking opportunities, something that was identified as one of the primary benefits of the AAG Regional Divisions in the AAG membership survey (see below). For faculty, many do not feel as if they have enough of their peers in attendance to justify travel costs to a Regional Meeting as opposed to other smaller conferences. For graduate students looking to make contacts with scholars in their area of interest, or for undergraduate looking for information about different programs, such absences can be frustrating. Smaller attendance can also lead to more and more geographers deciding to abandon the Regional Meeting altogether and focus solely on the national meeting and on other opportunities outside of AAG and the geographic discipline.

Proposals

The taskforce was most interested in what the AAG could do to improve the position of the Regional Divisions. Based on our own discussions, reaching out to Regional stakeholders, and the results of three surveys sent to different populations of people, we developed a few categories and arrived at the following sets of improvements. **Items in italics require Council action.**

Improvement 1: Governance and Leadership

- The AAG President can provide more recognition of Regional leaders in the form of a letter to include in tenure and promotion files recognizing importance of service to the discipline.

In discussions with Regional personnel and the Regional Divisions Taskforce, the lack of recognition came up time and again. This was particularly true for those who wanted their service to the Region to be valued for credit. This is an easy to accomplish goal and would only require a little bit of staff time.

- Create a president's cabinet made up of Regional Presidents. This elevates the regular AAG meeting to something that primarily features the head of the Region, allowing them a greater voice in how the national AAG responds to the needs of the Regions. This has already been implemented, beginning with the Denver meeting.
- *Provide some financial support to Regional leaders by offering free AAG Annual Meeting registration to Regional Presidents.* Discussion with Regional leadership and task force members indicated a need for Regional Division leaders to attend the national AAG meeting for the purposes of communication and full integration of the Regional Divisions into the AAG structure. Yet, unlike Regional councilors, Regional Presidents/Chairs are not reimbursed for this essential travel. One small way to rectify this is through the reimbursement of registration fees. This would still be a fraction of what is provided to Regional Councilors but would constitute a good first step. (Regional Councilors are elected for 3-year terms and receive travel assistance funding from AAG to attend the annual AAG meeting each spring and a fall meeting.)
- Greater communication between AAG central and all Regions regarding when things need to be done by creating a yearly timeline. In discussions with members of the Regional Divisions Taskforce and on the various surveys that were sent out, a lack of communication between the central AAG office, national leaders, and Regional Division leaders became apparent. The Regional Councilors do a great job of reporting on Regional activities, but the Taskforce feels that there needs to be more direct coordination with the central office.
- AAG can coordinate the development of resources on best practices for planning a Regional Meeting for Regional Divisions to use. In discussions with Regional Taskforce members and from some of the open ended responses in the surveys, the lack of coordination between Regions came up. Many Regional meeting organizers have little guidance or experience in the way of organizing a conference and so providing a clearinghouse for best practices would help assist in organizing meetings. The best practices would not mandate any specific actions, but could provide a number of options and assistance.
- AAG can call upon the World Geography Bowl Executive Committee to develop best practices for Regional Geography Bowls. The same logic as for Regional meetings best practices also applies to this case.

Improvement 2: Financial positions of Regions

- *Increase Regional subsidy by creating a fund for Regions to apply for up to \$2,500 annually.* Our discussions with the Regional taskforce and with leaders of the various Regions have often boiled down to financial need. Three Regions assess separate dues and are fairly well off financially whereas other Regions show financial need. As part of the survey of AAG members, the taskforce asked what the AAG could do to help Regions. Of those who offered a response, 26% said more funding and a further 14% said more AAG support. That said, it may not be prudent to simply increase the Regional subsidy across the board. One idea would be to develop a pool of funds that Regional Divisions could apply for to bolster

internal activities such as building a new website, further communication, develop a new award, improve publicity, and other ideas that come to mind. This pool could be fixed or could depend on how many Regions apply per year. It would allow Regional Divisions to act on some of their ideas.

- Better communicate services the AAG provides to Regions. Appendix 1 shows the services that the AAG currently provides and how many Regions use them. Getting more communication to the Regions about these services can be an ongoing project and perhaps can be part of revitalizing the Regional Division Chairs Knowledge Community (see Improvement 3).
- Consider adding/identifying an AAG staff-member who explicitly serves the Regions, coordinates timelines and communication, and communicates services the AAG provides to Regions. Many of the non-financial items mentioned in this proposal would be enhanced by the identification of an AAG staffer whose responsibility was to liaison with the Regional Presidents, Regional Councilor, and Regional governance.

Improvement 3: Increase communications and publicity for the Regions and Regional meetings

- Have publicity available at the AAG Annual Meeting. This is an effort the taskforce has already begun by making the Regions part of the AAG booth space with including posters, flyers, journal samples, etc. In the Taskforce's survey, 76% of respondents attended the AAG Annual Meeting either every year or every other year. Only 40% of this group also attended Regional Meetings regularly, about as many who attended rarely or never. One of the reasons people cite for not going to Regional Meetings is lack of communication. The Taskforce hopes that this publicity provides a strong message that the Regional Divisions are a vital part of the AAG organization and community of members.
- Add additional Regional Meeting info into AAG publicity efforts through the year such as newsletter, website, and social media. This will serve the same purpose as the above.
- Revitalize the Regional Division Chairs Knowledge Community.

Improvement 4: Increase attractiveness of the Regional meetings for students, faculty, and the public

- *Create an undergraduate award analogous to the \$1000 graduate award for best paper of the meeting.* Members mentioned in person and in the surveys how they value the student focus of the Regional Division Meetings. One of the most striking things about the Regional Meetings is the attendance of undergraduate students, often led by a dedicated faculty member. Given the success of the graduate award for best paper, we believe that it would be a good idea to have an undergraduate award as well. Encouraging Regional membership among younger people early in their career could have the added benefit of continued membership after graduation in the Regional Divisions or in the national AAG, thus having the long-term effect of expanding the geography community to a broader audience.
- *Development of a \$10,000 fund out of which Regional Divisions can apply for Meeting enhancement monies.* Regional conference organizers have to tap into limited funds just to put on a basic meeting. The Taskforce believes that the provision of extra money to try out some new things, perhaps trying a new venue, bringing in a renowned speaker, provide a common experience, or other options. This money would require an application from meeting organizers. Money for a well-known speaker could also be used to open this

keynote up to the general public and for advertising the keynote to the general public. This would increase the awareness of geography in local areas and among non-geographers. Local press could be invited.

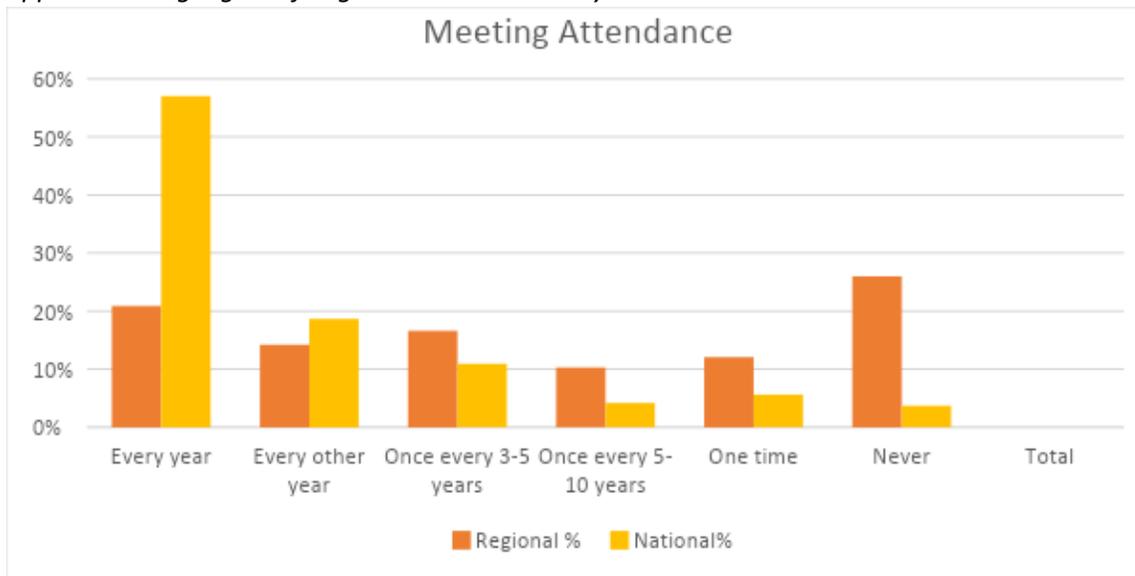
- Increase AAG presence at each Regional Meeting. Traditionally the AAG President or other executive attends each Regional Meeting. This provides some connectivity but not as much as having a dedicated staffer at a table at each Regional meeting. This person can advertise the AAG, offer workshops, offer jobs and careers materials, etc. This has already been tried at several of the 2019 Regional Meetings and the Taskforce feels it could be a good practice going forward. The person could coordinate with the Regional President and Regional Councilor to facilitate their attendance and highlight their activities at the regional meeting.

Appendix I: Use of Services Provided by the AAG

AAG Service	No. using them	
Meeting insurance coverage	17	may be used by all regions, but 4 “nos”
Bookkeeping of region’s finances	13	used by about 7 regions
Use of AAG Eventbrite license	7	used by 3, maybe 4 regions
Use of AAG PayPal license	4	used by 2 regions
AAG election system for Councilor	15	not used by at least 2 regions
Use of AAG ZOOM accounts	4	used only by 3 regions
Childcare subsidy at regional meetings	9	used by 3 maybe 4 regions
Current list of AAG members in region	19	1 person from 2 regions
Current \$1,500 annual subsidy	17	most seem aware
\$500-\$1,000 for participants in geography bowl	21	Everyone
\$1,000 for best student paper at regional meeting	19	1 person from 2 regions
Website hosting by the AAG	13	one yes from every region

*Based on a survey sent to 21 leaders of the nine regions

Appendix II: Highlights of Regional Divisions Survey sent to All AAG Members in the U.S. and Canada



How frequently do you attend your Regional meeting? By employment status

	Every year	Every other year	Every 3-5 years	Every 5-10 years	One time	Never
Adjunct Faculty	13%	0%	38%	25%	13%	13%
Graduate Student or Post Doc	21%	15%	9%	1%	13%	42%
Non-Tenure Track Faculty	21%	15%	18%	8%	8%	31%
Post-Tenure Faculty	25%	15%	17%	18%	9%	16%
Pre-Tenure Faculty	20%	21%	22%	1%	13%	23%
Professional	3%	6%	11%	10%	17%	52%
Retired	21%	12%	30%	14%	11%	12%
Undergraduate Student	22%	0%	0%	0%	67%	11%
Students	21%	13%	8%	1%	17%	40%

How frequently do you attend your Regional meeting? By Regional affiliation

To which AAG Regional Division do you currently belong?	Every year	Every other year	Every 3-5 years	Every 5-10 years	One time	Never
APCG (Pacific Coast)	21%	17%	21%	9%	7%	26%
ELDAAG (East Lakes)	22%	24%	11%	13%	20%	11%
GPRM (Great Plains/Rocky Mountain)	16%	10%	24%	13%	13%	24%
MAD (Mid-Atlantic Division)	10%	13%	10%	17%	15%	35%
MSAAG (Middle States)	14%	7%	20%	20%	14%	25%
NESTVAL (New England St. Lawrence Valley)	22%	16%	5%	11%	14%	32%
SEDAAG (Southeast Division)	34%	16%	18%	8%	6%	18%
SWAAG (Southwest)	27%	16%	19%	9%	13%	17%
WLDAAG (West Lakes)	21%	18%	22%	7%	16%	16%
Sum	22%	15%	18%	11%	12%	22%

How frequently do you attend the National Meeting? By employment status

	Every year	Every other year	Every 3-5 years	Every 5-10 years	One time	Never
Adjunct Faculty	38%	25%	13%	25%	0%	0%
Graduate Student or Post Doc	56%	13%	6%	0%	18%	8%
Non-Tenure Track Faculty	49%	21%	18%	3%	5%	5%
Post-Tenure Faculty	61%	23%	10%	4%	0%	1%
Pre-Tenure Faculty	85%	11%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Professional	37%	21%	13%	10%	11%	10%
Retired	35%	21%	28%	12%	2%	2%
Undergraduate Student	33%	0%	0%	0%	44%	22%
Students	54%	12%	6%	0%	20%	9%

Frequency of Regional Meeting Attendance as Percent of National Attendance

How frequently attend national AAG annual meeting?	How frequently do you attend your Regional meeting? (as a % of national attendance)					
	Every year	Every other year	Every 3-5 years	Every 5-10 years	One time	Never
Every year	25%	16%	16%	7%	11%	25%
Every other year	19%	16%	16%	18%	11%	20%
Once every 3-5 years	16%	9%	34%	18%	7%	16%
Once every 5-10 years	8%	12%	19%	23%	12%	27%
One time	3%	6%	3%	0%	46%	43%
Never	13%	4%	0%	0%	4%	78%
Sum	21%	14%	17%	10%	12%	26%

Value of Regional Division offerings by Frequency of Attendance

What do you value most about Regional Divisions by How frequently do you attend your Regional meeting?	Journals	Regional Meetings	Grants & Awards	Leadership	Geography Bowl
Every year	46%	98%	39%	27%	27%
Every other year	31%	93%	32%	14%	17%
Once every 3-5 years	22%	89%	23%	13%	10%
Once every 5-10 years	25%	65%	25%	6%	11%
One time	16%	58%	30%	4%	9%
Never	19%	26%	21%	4%	4%
Blank	13%	35%	22%	4%	17%
Total	27%	67%	28%	12%	13%

Reasons for attending Regional Meetings by Frequency of Attendance

Why do you go to your Regional Meeting? by How frequently do you attend your Regional meeting?	Present Research	Networking	Mentoring	Geography Bowl	Learning from Presentations	Learning about AAG
Every year	79%	92%	59%	12%	67%	11%
Every other year	77%	92%	42%	8%	54%	10%
Once every 3-5 years	70%	80%	50%	6%	30%	7%
Once every 5-10 years	45%	45%	46%	2%	40%	6%
One time	47%	55%	18%	4%	28%	7%
Never	10%	14%	2%	0%	12%	3%
Total	50%	58%	33%	5%	36%	7%

Why do you choose not to attend your regional meeting? By Region

Regional Division	No Interest	Not relevant audience	Timing of meeting	Distance/ accessibility	Cost/funding availability	Prioritizing other meetings	No Communication	Too small
APCG (Pacific Coast)	2%	8%	37%	35%	51%	38%	5%	0%
ELDAAG (East Lakes)	6%	13%	25%	42%	38%	48%	2%	2%
GPRM (Great Plains/Rocky Mountain)	1%	16%	30%	52%	51%	48%	0%	1%
MAD (Mid-Atlantic Division)	10%	18%	28%	16%	18%	46%	6%	0%
MSAAG (Middle States)	9%	27%	42%	33%	36%	58%	9%	0%
NESTVAL (New England St. Lawrence Valley)	5%	11%	34%	13%	21%	58%	3%	0%
SEDAAG (Southeast Division)	3%	4%	31%	43%	51%	39%	2%	0%
SWAAG (Southwest)	8%	8%	29%	44%	39%	47%	3%	2%
WLDAAG (West Lakes)	3%	13%	33%	39%	39%	49%	3%	0%
Sum	6%	12%	31%	36%	40%	45%	4%	0%

How do you find out about Regional Meetings? By Region

	AAG Website	AAG Knowledge Community Emails	Regional Division email listservs	Regional Division Social Media	Regional Division Website	Word of Mouth	AAG Social Media
APCG (Pacific Coast)	19%	6%	37%	1%	30%	2%	0%
ELDAAG (East Lakes)	33%	8%	25%	2%	17%	13%	2%
GPRM (Great Plains/Rocky Mountain)	48%	8%	23%	0%	10%	10%	1%
MAD (Mid-Atlantic Division)	20%	20%	42%	0%	8%	6%	0%
MSAAG (Middle States)	27%	9%	18%	2%	36%	9%	0%
NESTVAL (New England St. Lawrence Valley)	21%	8%	39%	0%	11%	16%	0%
SEDAAG (Southeast Division)	12%	13%	17%	9%	38%	7%	1%
SWAAG (Southwest)	14%	11%	33%	0%	36%	5%	2%
WLDAAG (West Lakes)	37%	13%	20%	0%	12%	13%	4%
Total	25%	11%	27%	2%	24%	8%	1%

Value of Regions and Meetings

Regional Division	Value Most About Regions					Why Go to Regional Meetings					
	Journals	Meetings	Grants & Awards	Leadership	Geog Bowl	Present Research	Net-working	Mentor-ing	Geog Bowl	Learning from Presentations	Learning about AAG
APCG (journal)	31%	67%	36%	18%	10%	54%	64%	35%	4%	44%	4%
ELDAAG (no journal)	19%	73%	38%	4%	17%	56%	69%	33%	4%	35%	10%
GPRM (no journal)	10%	70%	26%	8%	12%	56%	58%	38%	5%	40%	7%
MAD (no journal)	14%	54%	16%	14%	18%	26%	52%	14%	4%	32%	6%
MSAAG (journal)	36%	71%	20%	16%	22%	42%	44%	38%	4%	27%	4%
NESTVAL (journal)	29%	58%	16%	13%	18%	37%	55%	37%	13%	21%	5%
SEDAAG (journal)	54%	79%	34%	16%	16%	64%	70%	35%	9%	47%	7%
SWAAG (journal)	27%	76%	29%	14%	17%	64%	67%	39%	3%	33%	11%
WLDAAG (no journal)	4%	79%	27%	8%	4%	51%	64%	47%	3%	43%	9%
Total	27%	71%	28%	13%	14%	53%	62%	36%	6%	38%	7%

What would enhance the value of the Regions to members?

	Count	% of responses
More Institutions Involved	49	18%
Better Communication	32	11%
Student focus	27	10%
Networking Opportunities	21	8%
Professional development	15	5%
Change division boundaries/ Joint Meetings	14	5%
Specialty group collaboration	12	4%
Timing	10	4%
Improve quality	10	4%
More alt-ac programming	9	3%
Regional journal	9	3%
Lower fee	8	3%
AAG support	8	3%
Alternate with National	7	3%
Organization	4	1%
Governance	4	1%
Restrict annual meeting	3	1%
Job assistance	3	1%
Distance	3	1%
AAG presence	3	1%
More local meetings	2	1%
Field trips	2	1%
Employment opportunities	2	1%
Disband	2	1%
Community	2	1%
Attitude	2	1%
Total Responses	279	

What can AAG do to enhance the value of Regions to members?

	Count	% of responses
More Funding	62	26%
More Publicity and Outreach	36	15%
Greater AAG support	33	14%
Greater AAG presence	12	5%
Change regional boundaries	10	4%
Promote consistency across regions	9	4%
Journal	8	3%
More Institutions Participate	7	3%
Restrict participation in annual meeting	7	3%
Discount costs for attendance	6	2%
Alternate with National	5	2%
Specialty group collaboration	5	2%
Governance	4	2%
professional development	4	2%
Supply experts/speakers	4	2%
More local events	3	1%
Timing	3	1%
coordination with regional leaders	2	1%
Disband	2	1%
Networking	2	1%
virtual presentations	2	1%
Total Responses	241	