

Summer 2020 AAG Council Meeting

June 23
(via Zoom)

Minutes

Present

Executive Committee:

David Kaplan, *President*; Amy Lobben, *Vice President*; Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach, *Past President*; Deborah Thomas, *Treasurer, GPRM*; Karen Johnson-Webb, *Secretary, East Lakes*; Gary Langham, *Executive Director (non-voting)*;

National Councilors: Dowler, Lorraine; Eaves, LaToya; Jepson, Wendy; Li, Wei;

Regional Councilors: Buenemann, Michaela *Southwest and Regional Division Councilor Chair*; Choi, Woonsup, *West Lakes*; Kelly, Rebecca, *Middle Atlantic*; Kujawa, Richard, *New England St. Lawrence Valley*; Kupfer, John, *Southeast*; Naylor, Lindsay, *Middle States*; Youngs, Yolonda, *Pacific Coast*;

Student Councilor: Stinard-Kiel, Sarah.

Regrets: Collins, Jennifer *National Councilor Chair*; Winders, Jamie, *National Councilor*

Staff: Candida Mannozi, AAG Director of Operations (non-voting)

Guest: Emily T. Yeh, *Vice President-elect (non-voting)*

11:03 AM

Langham opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

He provided a summary of the activities under the COVID Rapid Response initiative. He underlined the need to balance service to our members and financial responsibility for the Association's future.

Kaplan provided an overview of the Blue Ribbon Panel's process and review of the proposals developed by the Subcommittees.

Thomas stated that the Finance Committee recommended that the AAG seek matching funds for the proposals that the Council approves. Naylor also mentioned considerations for any future review/implementation by members, besides staff.

General consensus to review the AAG FYE 2021 Budget.

Thomas summarized the June 9 Finance Committee meeting and discussion. She reported that the FC recommends that website and membership database investments continue, while the building renovation be postponed. In general, she stated that the Finance Committee recommends to the Council to be more conservative on the amount of funding approved for COVID response, in order to safeguard the AAG's financial stability and future.

FC recommends 1) that any AAG funds for COVID proposals be matched by external funding and 2) that AAG should keep \$4-5M in unrestricted reserves to tide the org through the current circumstances. FC also recommends that Council should recommend a discussion around Gary hiring a DEI officer at the AAG, in response to current events and nation/worldwide racial issues.

Li thanked the Finance Committee for their thorough work on considering the AAG's financial well-being in these challenging times.

Thomas expressed a preference to discuss the DEI hire/initiative before discussing the proposals. Some agreement.

Johnson-Webb stated that the issue of a diversity hire has been kicked down the road in the past. She suggested that a plan be developed for this hire, regardless of whether it can occur in the present or not. Li and Naylor agreed, stating that one can't discuss COVID without discussing equity, inclusion and mental health issues. Dowler agreed and stated that the mental health proposals have also been postponed in the recent past and wants to see those revisited at this meeting. Luzzadder-Beach agreed and pointed to the fact that equity and inclusion issues were included in several of the proposals.

Kaplan stated that even if all 12 recommended proposals were approved, the total cost would not come close to the \$3M ceiling.

Langham stated that he is ready to launch a diversity initiative today. He suggested approaching this in the same manner the AAG tackled the Anti-Harassment initiative, with a similar method, rather than determining it in today's meeting. He suggested earmarking funding for this initiative, as part of the decisions made today.

Langham outlined the various financial projections he and the Director of Finance Teri Martin laid out for worst-case scenarios in drops in membership and drops in AM attendance. He pointed out that he is working with the 19th worst-case scenario of the 20 different scenarios he and staff ran, i.e., \$805,000 loss. Johnson-Webb asked about the projected cut in employee benefits. Langham stated those cuts were a projection for any future/new hires, not for current employees. He also stated that the AAG was successful in obtaining PPP funding to cover the next 2.5 months of staff salaries.

He stated that if the insurer does not pay out the coverage to help recover the \$1.2M in losses from canceling the meeting the FYE 2020 will be \$930,000. Langham is considering joining forces with a trade group to defray costs for a potential lawsuit against the insurer to obtain the payout.

Kaplan asked about the models and whether they include membership numbers too, as they are tied closely to AM registrations. Langham confirmed that the revised FYE21 budget does include both membership and Annual Meeting registrations, but that the Table 2 in the FYE21 Budget Narrative (see Appendix 1, pp. 8-11) only considered revenue and expenses from the

Annual Meeting (i.e., the 20 scenarios looked only at the Annual Meeting). A separate analysis calculated revenue loss from a 50% reduction in membership.

Li asked how many refunds or transfers did we have from the Denver meeting. Langham stated that there were 1200 registrations transferred to the Seattle meeting. Langham has hired a foundation consultant and the AAG is exploring ways to increase revenues. E.g., increase corporate investments

Langham showed the Council the performance of all invested accounts, which have regained some of the losses they incurred in March. He also shared an outline of Current and Future Expenses, in order to help frame the discussion on the COVID proposals. Thomas and Eaves also underlined that this is why the Finance Committee recommended maintaining \$4-5M in reserves to tide the AAG over the next 3-4 years of recession/recovery.

Thomas also stated that HVAC expenses would be crucial to ensure staff safety in a re-entry to the AAG office and investing in that may be more expensive than projected with a current hold on the building renovation.

The discussion centered on whether to spend anything from the recommended cushion of \$4M, or whether/how much to pull from the \$3M earmarked from the building renovation. Kaplan asked Langham to provide a ballpark for how much it would cost to fund some of the proposals. Jepson suggested that the proposals might be looked in a staggered timeframe, for the long term, and that an initial set of approved proposals may be added-to with later approval for additional proposals down the road.

Thomas pointed out that the FC recommended perhaps using savings from the AMS and building renovation toward COVID response, thus not encroaching on the recommended \$4.3M cushion in unrestricted. Luzzadder-Beach stated that the COVID budgets can be revised or looked at closely, as several may dovetail with the already approved improvements to AMS and website, etc. She cautioned the Council on spending too much from the hard-saved reserves.

Thomas suggested looking at the proposals now with the budget in mind, as well as through DEI, mental health lenses and a matching funds perspective. Li agreed. Naylor stated that she is looking at the proposals with a long-term perspective, as a way to invest in better services for the membership over the long term. Johnson-Webb suggested looking at the proposals in terms of whether they are rapid response or longer-term. Kaplan recalled the discussion at the Spring Council meeting, when the focus was on rapid response.

10 min break

Langham reconvened the meeting at 12:26 and invited each Council liaison to provide a brief synopsis of the top-ranked proposals from their Committee. Thomas suggested also asking them to look at them from the DEI, mental health and matching funds perspectives.

Kupfer – **Regional Internship proposal**: idea was that COVID is impacting ability of cities and states to fulfill their missions and geog. students could be paired with these needs, expose them

to opportunities outside academia, opportunities for minority students, and increase membership from outside acad. Scalable funding.

Li: need to increase goal of total numbers of students served, seems low.

Yeh: agreed. Not clear how Regions would match make with mentors/internship placements.

Johnson-Webb: recalled experience with Dr. Darden that demonstrated that it was incredibly difficult to recruit American-born minorities into such opportunities. Many Regions will be challenged to try to find eligible students. Because most student attendees of regional meetings are not AAG members, she would extend that criterion to this internship program too. This could serve as a recruiting mechanism for new AAG memberships. Langham suggested requiring membership for beneficiaries of COVID support, as it would be free to them.

Langham: revise this proposal based on proportionality, goal #s, and assigned budget.

Thomas asked about process: Council recommends funding and then the Committees work out implementation details with staff. Langham replied that staff will have to go through the approved proposals with a view to implementation. He also stated that the COVID Committee members have not been asked to continue serving.

Thomas recommended that someone from the Committees, or the Council, continue to be involved in the implementation/rollout phases.

Kujawa suggested that the implementation at various departmental levels could be complicated, as some departments could roll such a program out easily within their systems, whereas others might not be able to.

Johnson-Webb suggested asking the committees to reconvene to help develop the implementation aspects of any approved proposals. Kaplan agreed with the suggestion, if the committee members are willing to continue serving. Kaplan also stated that the Regions would in this case be given some freedom and leeway in how to implement these internships.

Jepson recommended Council to **green/red** light the 12 proposals, then recommend some for additional detailed elaboration from Committees prior to being approved for funding and implementation.

Membership SG/AG Fee support: Luzzadder-Beach stated that this proposal is intended for immediate relief and its budget is scalable. Opt-In for declaring oneself “in need” and be eligible for support.

Yeh suggested combining this with proposal #11 for **Temporarily extending Student Memberships**. Kaplan agreed. He and Langham also pointed out that funds spent on this combined proposal would count towards the AAG’s projected \$800K budget shortfall.

Dowler stated she liked this proposal. She pointed out it could serve as a good gateway program into AAG.

Naylor suggested perhaps combining these two proposals. General consensus.

She advocated for the membership extension component of the proposal, and to perhaps extend the #s to include candidates in proposal #2. She agreed with Langham to have staff review these proposals.

Virtual Research Experiences: Naylor stated this had an 18-month timeline to assist current students engage with mentors, and ABD students with postdoctoral opportunities. There is a possibility for a match from institutions or faculty. Johnson-Webb wondered how DEI might be included in this proposal (i.e., how to support IPOC grads?).

Naylor stated that if this proposal went back to committee, she would advocate it be offered 100% to underrepresented groups. Li suggested addressing institutional diversity in the Call, as well (i.e., risk that R1s will apply in larger numbers than other programs). Luzzadder-Beach suggested folding proposal #5 Methods Training into this one, too. Yeh moved that this proposal not be green-lighted.

Thomas mentioned an internship program in UNC system that could serve as helpful model for the AAG's rollout.

Methods Training – Naylor summarized this as a proposal to help students to network within the AAG membership, specifically with SGs. She stated that implementation would require staff time and time from the SG boards, as well as possibly the Committee that designed it. Choi pointed out that the training might not apply to all subsets of the discipline (i.e., soc. science human studies, or phys. geog. Might be more disadvantaged here?). Yeh suggested not combining it with #19 per the Blue Ribbon Panel's suggestion.

Li suggested combining this proposal with **Virtual Research Experiences** and **Supporting Remote Virtual Field Trips and Fieldwork** proposals.

Youngs suggested also ensuring faculty involvement for all participating students, to tie this back into their home campus curricula and credit-earning frameworks.

Supporting/Empowering Vulnerable Members: Luzzadder-Beach stated it's a scalable proposal, available to students, and includes matching funds from the AAG to member donations. Donations are to be used for hardware or research costs. She underscored that this is a member-initiated proposal that launches with member donations. AAG already has launched a COVID relief fund. Li suggested agreeing with the Blue Ribbon Panel's proposal to combine with #8 **Bridging the Digital Divide**. She also asked Langham and Kaplan to explain the Blue Ribbon Panel's question re. cost. She emphasized that the budget cost is lower than currently listed. Yeh agreed with the suggestion of combining this with Bridging Digital Divide proposal. Jepson pointed to the Virtual Computer Lab and Tech Support (not shortlisted by Blue Ribbon Panel), and the **Virtual Research Experiences** proposals, that also address similar aspects of this overall need. Yeh gave an overview of the Bridging Digital Divide proposal. Johnson-Webb stated that it behooves the AAG to look at the Blue Ribbon Panel's comments that seem to disparage or downplay the support for diverse, vulnerable and underserved populations. Thomas summarized the urgent and strong need being expressed by the committee members who developed the Digital Divide proposal.

Stinard-Kiel pleaded the urgency that students need financial support immediately, not just in the medium-long term.

Eaves stated being a bit concerned about the white-savior perspectives some of these proposals seem to include. She cautioned the AAG from implementing these combined proposals as a once-off, swooping-in- never-to-return approach. She suggested making sure the implementation is community-engaged.

Yeh indicated that the suggested partnerships for AAG in the Digital Divide proposal help address that concern.

Li thanked Renee Pualani Louis and Chantelle Richmond, co-chairs of the AAG Indigenous Peoples Specialty Group, as well as Deondre Smiles (incoming Chair of this SG) and also suggested combining this one with proposal #4 Supporting/Empowering Vulnerable Members. Dowler suggested issuing immediate relief to the indigenous population and the developing a longer-term effort of decolonization. She also cautioned combining proposals, if it risks going against their original intent.

Naylor also stated that the survey of AAG student members held at the outset of the COVID-19 response initiative clearly indicated that they are precarious and need material support immediately.

Jepson suggested approaching software companies for licenses or in-kind donations.

I am a Geographer 3: Professional Development Resources. Naylor stated this is part of the mental health support rollout for AAG. No match is envisaged in this budget. She stated this proposal follows the example of the Harassment-Free task force and its rollout. It provides a platform with links to professional development resources for members.

Dowler stated that historically it has been profoundly difficult to bring harassment and mental health issues to the AAG, esp. prior to Langham's tenure. The Mental Health task force work was not appropriately considered by the Council when it first delivered its findings to the AAG. She thanked the Executive Committee of that time for their persistence in not letting that initiative get dropped. She stated that the Harassment-Free Task Force's work almost got sidelined too, at the outset. She mentioned all this to state that there is a history of sidelining harassment and mental health issues at the AAG. She praised COVID Committee member (and Harassment Task Force member) Dydia DeLyser for her time and effort on these proposals. Dowler pleaded with Langham to reach out to the Mental Health task force chairs Linda Peake and Beverly Mullings to continue the discussion on these issues.

Langham stated that implementation was the question raised by the Blue Ribbon Panel, not so much the substance of the proposal. He stated the Panel was not sure whether some of the mental health activities and services being proposed would be deliverable by the AAG.

Dowler stated that the mental health program could easily be absorbed into a job training program, and that the AAG has professional consultants (i.e., social worker, victim advocate, etc.) on retainer to help advise on implementation.

Regional Stabilization and AM Relief: Kupfer summarized the 3 activities. Help to transition 2020 meetings to virtual platform; Assistance with hotel contract cancellations; Support for meeting costs.

Kujawa stated that having a successful smooth virtual meeting will be critical, as losing an in-person meeting will cause a dip in membership for the regions and their participation.

Regional Meetings as Platforms to Discuss COVID 19: Kupfer stated this proposal was intentionally not combined with the Stabilization proposal. Ideas for reinvigorating meetings for 2021.

Naylor stated that the Council already approved a fund for support to regions, so is this not redundant? Kupfer stated this is specific to COVID-related topics, so the question is only somewhat true.

Communicating and Marketing Geography: Thomas summarized this as creating a clearinghouse of materials on geography and its relevance to COVID 19. How to keep departments, the discipline, and the AAG healthy. This also includes developing a comprehensive communications and PR plan to promote geography (longer-term). Sliding budget from low (clearinghouse and promo materials), medium (updates and expert PR firm), to high (PR marketing campaign). As for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion considerations: the committee recommends that the AAG not create materials that reinforce the structural inequities in our discipline and history.

Supporting Research in the Face of COVID-19: Thomas summarized this proposal as consisting of a Professional matching service for students and mentors (low budget); Mentor-mentee training and networks (medium budget); seed grants (aka NSF RAPID) to bring geographers together (high budget).

Li praised the proposal and stated that implementation details (esp. for an AAG version of RAPID) may be challenging. Thomas stated these could be \$3-5K grants for initial workshops or grants.

Langham then asked the Council to consider what to support for the immediate term, and what can be put off for a few months before being funded.

Johnson-Webb proposed partially funding Regional Stabilization and AM relief for immediate 2020 meetings, and partially for the 2021 cycle.

Thomas moved to commit \$60,000 to hire a consulting firm with expertise in diversity, equity and inclusion, and one to lead the AAG through the planning process for crafting a DEI plan and potentially hiring a DEI Officer at the AAG. Luzzader-Beach seconded the motion. The motion passed with 15 votes in favor and 1 abstention.

Jepson asked whether the Executive Committee could now rank the proposals in terms of immediate and longer-term implementation timeframes, as well as more precise budgets, before moving forward.

Thomas stated that the Finance Committee recommends to Council to approve the revised FYE21 Budget presented by Langham at the outset of the meeting. Li seconded the motion. It passed with 13 votes in favor and 1 abstention.

Jepson moved to approve up to \$900,000 for 2020 implementation of COVID proposals, and to authorize the AAG COVID Steering Committee to refine the proposals and budgets, with a special focus on diversity, mental health issues, and their potential for phasing. Eaves seconded the motion. It passed with 13 votes in favor, and 2 abstentions.

Langham thanked everyone for their hard work on the Council, esp. during this extraordinary effort in the response to COVID-19.

Li thanked all the Councilors rotating off the Council at the end of June, many joined her in the thanks and well-wishes.

Kupfer moved to adjourn the meeting, Johnson-Webb seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:25 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen D. Johnson-Webb
Candida Mannozi