

## Building on Our Strengths

The AAG annual meeting is the capstone for the AAG's year. Like the rest of the past year, the annual meeting in Boston was outstanding in nearly every respect. More than 7,000 attendees participated in a diverse range of sessions, meetings, and social activities. Spirits were high, the skies were clear, and many people told me how happy they were to be participating in the festivities.

Numerous other developments added to the positive vibes evident in Boston. The first issues of the *Annals* and *Professional Geographer* published by Routledge appeared along with the first books resulting from the Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE) project. Others were excited about the AAG's new Developing Regions Membership Program, which enables geographers in 150 eligible nations to become AAG members and to receive our journals and newsletters online for annual fees of only \$20.

Membership is near the 10,500 level, up roughly 4,000 from the start of the decade. The AAG's total assets have increased to nearly \$8 million over the past five years. In what I consider to be the AAG Council's most significant action during its meeting in Boston, the Council voted to place \$5,000,000 of these new assets in an endowment to support long-term development of the AAG. Through this action, the AAG's endowment funds increase by an order of magnitude. This should provide stable funding to support the association for many years into the future.

While we have much to be happy about regarding the AAG and geography as a whole, we cannot be complacent and simply expect our success to continue. One area that Council has given attention to over recent years is the operation and governance of the AAG. On the whole, councillors have been pleased with the ways that the association has functioned, and no major changes have been suggested regarding the AAG's governing structure or modes of operation. But while no major changes are contemplated,

Council has asked the AAG Constitution and Bylaws Committee to address two general topics where some changes might enhance the participation of members in the governance of the association.

One general topic is the feasibility and appropriateness of the use of e-mail, web-based services, and other electronic means of conducting elections and for voting on other matters. The AAG Constitution and Bylaws currently call for all elections and votes to take place through mail-in ballots or through votes by members attending the annual business meeting. Other scholarly societies and professional associations have found that the percentage of members voting in elections increased significantly when online voting was used. Furthermore, after investments are made in the necessary software to conduct e-voting, cost savings can be considerable when votes are cast electronically rather than with printed paper and postage stamps.

While many members have been positive about a possible shift to e-voting, some legitimate issues need to be addressed. One is the maintenance of a "one member-one vote" principle. Another is the need to provide voting through other media for those members who do not have online access. The Constitution and Bylaws Committee is identifying the issues that Council should consider as well as parts of the AAG governing documents that would need to be amended if the association wants to implement electronic voting.

The second general topic that the Council asked the Constitution and Bylaws Committee to address relates to ambiguity and confusion regarding the use of petitions and resolutions. Council has affirmed that any AAG member may contact the Council at any time to make suggestions or to request consideration of any issues related to the objectives of the AAG. When a group of members wants

to address an issue or request some kind of action through a formal petition, Council has suggested that 50 be the minimum number of members who would affirm their support for the petition. Council would respond to the petition in a timely manner, and it would retain the right to forward the petition to a vote of the membership as a whole if it deemed that the best course of action. If the petition sought to have a resolution passed at an annual business meeting, either Council or a petition presented by 50 members could put the resolution to a vote of the membership as a whole.

By clarifying the process through which petitions and resolutions are handled, the Council hopes to make it easier for all members

to understand how they may bring issues they deem important to the AAG's elected leaders and to the membership as a whole. Any changes to the Constitution and Bylaws required to implement changes like those proposed by Council will be fully vetted with the membership. These proposed changes will not dramatically alter the way the AAG functions, but they should help to make an already-strong organization even stronger.

This column is the last one I will write as the AAG President, and it likely will be one of my last official actions in that role. It was a great honor to be elected to serve as the President, and I have had a delightful year working with Douglas Richardson and other AAG staff members, with other councillors and regional division leaders, and with many AAG members. In the coming years, I look forward to working with incoming President John Agnew and his successors to continue to strengthen the AAG and geography. ■



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