

# National Association of Geoscience Teachers

## Annual Report: Executive Director

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In past years, I have organized my annual report by the broad goals I had set for the organization. This year, I looked at those goals and realized that they had not changed significantly, and they reflected the areas of responsibility as laid out in my contract as Executive Director. As a result, I'm trying a different format for my annual report this year, organized by my primary responsibilities:

- Promotion of the association's mission and coordination of its major programs and functions for essential annual operations,
- Management of an annual budget to ensure the long-term financial health of the organization,
- Support for activities of the Executive Committee and Council and where appropriate other bodies of the organization,
- Communication and coordination across the activities of the Sections, Divisions, Committees, Council and Executive Committee.

My hope is that this format will help the Executive Committee and others see how the work I am doing aligns with the mission of the organization and the expectations for the position. I end the report with some closing thoughts.

### Promotion of NAGT's mission and coordination of major programs

In this past year, promoting our mission took on a new meaning in late January when the presidential administration issued executive orders that called DEI efforts illegal and launched a cascade of events that led to termination of federal grants (some held by our members), elimination or renaming of diversity, and equity offices at colleges and universities, removal of web-based resources, and more. I am proud that NAGT has not considered changing its mission, *to support a diverse, inclusive, and thriving community of educators and education researchers to improve teaching and learning about the Earth*. I collaborated with our president, Rory McFadden, to communicate that message quickly and widely, to our members and beyond, and our message was heard. Our mission is strong and valuable. It always has been, and it feels especially so now. Since then, I have emphasized in every venue I've been in that we are not backing down from our mission.

Regardless of the administration's priorities, promotion of NAGT's mission has inward- and outward-facing components. Within NAGT's leadership community, I promote our mission to help guide our discussions and decision-making about our major programs, from cutting expenses to launching new efforts. Beyond our organization, I promote our mission to gain visibility and reach within and beyond the discipline and to forge partnerships with organizations whose missions are similar. My goal is for a consistent and clear message to our members and non-members alike. This is my standard approach, and I highlight a few specific programs:

- **Promoting our mission through our major programs**

- Professional development programming: We made several modifications to our professional development programming in the past year to better serve our mission. In particular, in revising the Earth Educators' Rendezvous programming, we made decisions to keep components of the program that were focused on community and interactive learning from each other.
- Traveling Workshops program: We expanded the scope of the Traveling Workshops program to include a new theme of transforming introductory science courses. I took over the management of this program and have been promoting it heavily through a range of channels.
- Awards: In the fall of 2024, we held our first virtual awards ceremony and learned a lot from it. This year will mark our second virtual awards ceremony, which will now happen on the same day every year to make it easier for people to plan to attend. One of our goals in moving online is to be more inclusive, and allow people to invite guests and whoever they wish to attend.
- **Gaining visibility and reach**
  - Transforming Undergraduate STEM Education: I served on this National Academies committee to develop a consensus report on equitable and effective education in undergraduate STEM. That report is now published, and includes examples from NAGT and the geoscience education community. In addition, I've been leading dissemination efforts focused on getting the recommendations from this report into the hands of geoscience educators, geoscience department heads and chairs, and others in our community.
  - Starting in June 2025, I began my term as a member of the Board on Science Education at the National Academies. As the sole geoscience educator (and professional society executive director), I bring my perspective from the organization with me to this important work.
  - Connecting with other societies: Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to join leaders from other STEM education professional societies in discussion about challenges and opportunities. This group has been informal, led by AAAS, and provides an opportunity to network with other leaders.
- **Forging partnerships**
  - With GSA publications: Over the past year, we have been collaborating with GSA Today on a series of essays entitled "Places that Reveal the Geologic Mind;" the last of 12 essays was published in the September 2025 issue of GSA Today. I served as the editor on this series, authored by Basil Tikoff and Tim Shipley. The series will be collected into a book with additional essays added. Planning for that publication has led to an MOU between GSA Publications and NAGT that covers how the two organizations will share the work and the profits from a book.
  - With AGI/AGU Heads and Chairs: NAGT has had a longtime association with the AGI/AGU Heads and Chairs program, but we have recently been involved more actively through choosing topics for and leading webinars. The first of these happened May 2, 2025, and have been followed this fall by webinars on Sept. 12 and Oct. 10. During these webinars, we are presenting NAGT-sponsored resources, the evidence base for them, and encouraging their use.

## Management of an annual budget to ensure NAGT's long-term financial health

The past several years have been financially challenging for NAGT, along with many other professional societies. Most societies (including NAGT) have seen declines in membership—and membership dues provide a significant source of income for our operations. In the past year, other potential sources of funding such as federal grants have been drastically reduced. Additional opportunities to generate income, including textbook publication and hosting conferences, have become less reliable and less predictable for us and others. All of these circumstances have put a strain on NAGT's budget. In the face of those challenges, we have made several changes. In the last year, I led our efforts to:

- **Develop a more robust annual budgeting process:** Over the past year, we added a Finance Committee to our organizational structure. The Finance Committee is a sub-committee of the Executive Committee, and includes the Executive Director and Business Manager as staff. The Finance Committee prepared the FY2026 budget for presentation to the Executive Committee, preparing a draft budget with a set of three questions for ExCom to address to finalize the budget. This process resulted in a much more streamlined and productive annual meeting for ExCom, as much of the budget speculation had already been discussed in depth by the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee also developed a Reserve Policy to better define our use of reserve funds and help guide our budgeting and long-term planning processes.
- **Minimize risk and right-size programming:** With a two-year lead time for our 2026 Earth Educators' Rendezvous, we made significant changes to the budget and management of this meeting to adjust to the expected attendance and shift more of the planning work to the volunteer committee. This involved working with SERC leaders to develop a new statement of work for the meeting and developing robust materials for volunteer leaders that include a timeline and planning checklist and a description of roles and responsibilities for each committee member.
- **Fundraise:** I devoted substantial effort to fundraising activities:
  - In the fall, I spent time analyzing data from our donations over the previous three fiscal years. This allowed me to see patterns in donations that suggest ways we could improve our fundraising strategies. In addition, I compiled and updated lists of previous participants in the Early Career and Preparing for an Academic Career workshops, along with previous NAGT-USGS interns.
  - A major challenge for our fundraising came when the NSF grant that would have supported the Early Career Workshop for Geoscience Faculty was terminated about two months prior to the workshop. NAGT committed to offering the workshop as it had been advertised, and covering the costs that would have been covered by the grant. This led me to launch a major fundraising campaign, soliciting previous participants in the Early Career Workshop (back to 2005) and previous leaders. This campaign was very successful, and we raised more than enough money to cover the lost grant funds and have some remaining for 2026.
  - We responded to other events with successful fundraising requests, including donating to funds in memory of others, and focusing on a different fund in each month's newsletter.

- I renewed and updated our status with Candid, and we now have a platinum seal. We have also registered to receive donations in the state of South Carolina in anticipation of fundraising in person at the EER.
- We hired a legal consultant to provide advice on where we should be registered for fundraising; that will guide some of our work in the upcoming fiscal year.
- With the development committee, I developed information about sponsorship for all of our professional development programs, and have been actively recruiting sponsors for these events.
- I led the submission of several proposals to support NAGT programming. The programs that would have supported these projects have been archived and the proposals withdrawn or declined, although we are still awaiting a decision on the Early Career Workshop proposal.
- Over the past three months, I have been exploring options for streamlining our fundraising and donations process in a way that can allow us to increase our fundraising capacity.

### Support for activities of ExCom, Council, and other NAGT bodies

This support is ongoing and involves a wide range of activities. Most broadly, I meet regularly with the staff to implement the activities of the organization, and meet with the presidential line to establish the agendas for all Executive Committee and Council meetings. Other activities vary substantially as they come up. For example:

- In response to a suggestions from the current secretary/treasurer, establishing a committee and leading a discussion to separate the duties of the secretary/treasurer into two positions on the Executive Committee;
- In response to a number of requests for support from geoscience departments, working with the Advocacy Committee to develop a new position statement on the value of undergraduate geoscience courses and programs;
- Working with awards committees to establish clearer criteria and guidelines for selection of nominees;
- In response to the K-12 committee and Outstanding Earth Science Teacher Award committee request, pursuing the option of offering Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for K-12 teachers through our professional development;
- Supporting the PNW section leader in determining the logistics of co-hosting a meeting with one of our sponsored projects;
- Defining the nature of a “fireside chat” vs. a webinar in order to provide guidance to committees, sections, and divisions;
- Over the past year, the editors of both of our major publications (Journal of Geoscience Education and In the Trenches) stepped down. We established search committees and appointed interim editors, both of whom went on to apply for the contract positions and are now continuing in those roles.

## Communication and coordination across the activities of the sections, divisions, committees, Executive Committee, and Council

Within NAGT and organizations like it, new people are always coming into leadership roles, responsibilities are distributed, and significant portions of work are accomplished by volunteers in coordination with the staff. In such a system, it can be difficult to maintain continuity and institutional knowledge through leadership and staff transitions. In the past year, I worked with staff and leaders to take significant strides in alleviating these challenges by:

- **Returning the Council to its constitutional role:** The constitution defines the Council as the Executive Committee, the section presidents, the division presidents, and liaisons to external organizations. Over the past decade, in an attempt to keep more people aware of the workings of the association, the Council had expanded to include committee chairs. This, however, was never officially adopted and made the Council meetings difficult to schedule and less aligned with the original intent of the Council. We returned the Council to its constitutional definition at the beginning of FY2025, and this led to more clarity in meetings and the overall process. At the same time, in order to serve the purpose of keeping more leaders engaged, we set up new communities of committee chairs and awards committee chairs, as they have different processes and needs than section and division leaders.
- **Developing resources to support leaders across the organization:** At the fall 2024 business meeting, we spent time in groups discussing the process of onboarding new officers, section and division leaders, and committee chairs. We received a lot of feedback at that time about the challenges groups faced with maintaining some amount of institutional knowledge. As a result, we invested substantial time and effort in
  - Assembling a [Leader Resources Hub](#) on the website that pulls together links to all of the key resources that leaders should have access to and know how to use.
  - Offering a series of [onboarding meetings](#) for different groups with the organization. Those onboarding meetings will happen annually, and the leader resources hub will be updated and improved as needed.
  - Establishing an [NAGT Google Workspace](#) to share documents so that they do not get lost as committee chairs and leaders move on from their responsibilities.
- **Develop calendars and timelines for annual processes:** A major addition to the resources for leaders and Executive Office staff is a set of calendars and timelines that lay out when things should be happening and who is responsible. These include:
  - [Meetings calendar](#) for the Executive Committee and Council, and other meetings that occur on an annual basis;
  - An [elections process timeline](#) for both the national officer elections and section and division officers;
  - An [awards process timeline](#) for association awards and committees.
  - A professional development planning calendar for all leaders to use that facilitates more sharing across different programs.

The overall feedback on this work from both the leaders and the staff has been positive, and we continue to find new resources to add and calendars to develop to help with communication and coordination across all of these entities.

## **Closing thoughts**

Over the past year, NAGT has encountered major storms over which it has little control. These storms have highlighted some of the challenges we face, and I have worked to both better understand those challenges and address them through reasonable, actionable changes. We have made significant improvements in our supports for sections, divisions, and committees, and I look forward to seeing the fruit of those efforts this year. I have recognized our strengths and weaknesses in fundraising, and hope to shift more of our weaknesses to strengths in the coming year. Similarly, I see opportunities to promote our strengths in our evidence-based professional development programming and other resources that would support greater reach and visibility and a growth in membership. I look forward to continuing this work.