

## **Aibs Releases New Strategic Plan**

Authors: Stafford, Susan G., Collins, James P., and Travis, Joseph

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# AIBS Releases New Strategic Plan

**T**hree AIBS presidents, with the unanimous support of the AIBS Board of Directors, launched a new strategic vision for the organization in July of 2012. The new plan hews to the founding principles of the organization while reimagining the Institute's role in framing the future of the biological sciences. In partnership with the community, AIBS will listen; anticipate; advise; collaborate; and, when needed, lead efforts in the life sciences to address scientific and societal challenges, particularly those emerging from the rapid social, cultural, economic, and technological changes of the twenty-first century. AIBS will inform decisions related to these challenges and will catalyze action that will strengthen the field and profession of the biological sciences.

Beginning in 2010, AIBS initiated a long-range planning process to reassess its national role, to strategically evaluate how it can best serve biology and biology's organizations, and to position itself to help the biological science community thrive. AIBS's leadership recognized three critical points: The practice of biology is changing rapidly; the models for the associations supporting that practice do not fit well with the economic, technical, and social milieu in which they have been operating; and the twenty-first century community of biological scientists faces an array of challenges that will be met only through strong, concerted effort. From this long-range planning process emerged a decision to refocus the mission of AIBS and to alter its governance structure to help the organization fulfill that mission through a new strategic plan, which is included as a booklet in this issue of *BioScience*, as well as online at [www.aibs.org/about-aibs/strategic\\_plan.html](http://www.aibs.org/about-aibs/strategic_plan.html). It describes a results-oriented AIBS that supports the biological sciences and its community of professionals and organizations

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AIBS launches this new vision of the organization with the endorsement of recent past presidents:

2009 May R. Berenbaum	1998 Gary W. Barrett
2008 Rita R. Colwell	1997 Frances C. James
2007 Douglas J. Futuyma	1996 John E. Burris
2006 Kent E. Holsinger	1995 W. Hardy Eshbaugh
2005 Marvalee H. Wake	1994 Harold A. Mooney
2004 Joel Cracraft	1993 Diana W. Freckman (Wall)
2003 Gary S. Hartshorn	1992 Thomas Lovejoy
2002 Gene E. Likens	1991 Paul G. Risser
2001 Judith S. Weis	1990 Paul R. Ehrlich
2000 Alan P. Covich	1984 Peter H. Raven
1999 Gregory J. Anderson	

through two clearly defined roles: (1) as a trusted broker, providing peer-reviewed or vetted information to inform decisionmaking, and (2) as a leader, building capacity and catalyzing action in the community to address challenges through collective action.

At one level, this new vision is not dramatically different from the one articulated at the founding of the Institute in 1947. The original constitution described the mission thus:

The purposes of the Institute shall be the advancement of the biological sciences and their applications to human welfare and to foster and encourage research and education in the biological sciences, including the medical, environmental, and agricultural sciences. To serve these purposes, the Institute will assist societies, other organizations, and biologists in such matters of common concern as can be dealt with more effectively by united action; hold and sponsor scientific meetings; cooperate with local, national, and international organizations concerned with the biological sciences; provide a voice for biologists in the public forum; promote unity and effectiveness of effort among all those who are devoting themselves to the biological sciences and their applications; and foster the relations of the biological sciences to other sciences, to the arts and industries, and to the public good.

The long-range planning process did not change that guiding vision. The challenge is to move from these

broad principles to specific, effective actions that will enable AIBS to fulfill that vision in a period of rapidly evolving cultural, financial, technological, and scientific change.

Those with long memories will recall other attempted reinventions by AIBS. Those efforts were often focused on a need to gather together the fragmented community of biologists, to develop avenues for concerted action, and to develop a vehicle to give the life sciences a unified voice comparable to what biologists felt had been developed by the various communities of physical scientists, especially physicists. Although those efforts engendered great enthusiasm (one of them actually produced AIBS's Public Policy Office), none produced a quantum leap forward for either AIBS or the community.

What is different this time? First, we are building on knowledge from the past: We put a great deal of effort into understanding the forces that defined our success in the past, and we built on that knowledge in charting our new course. Second, we listened and learned: We began a large-scale project to investigate who constitutes the biological science community; what challenges that community sees facing the discipline, its members, and itself as a community; and what help it needs and wants from its professional organizations, including AIBS. AIBS has

never done anything like this. Finally, AIBS is acting on what we have learned. We see broad agreement in the community on a number of issues, from what the community feels is important to what it sees as challenges and what it needs from its organizations. Most importantly, we see what the community wants from AIBS, and we want to provide it.

In getting to this point, we have already begun to make some changes. In 2010, we realigned financial and staff resources toward implementing new activities that emerged from our analysis. In 2011, AIBS changed its governance structure (for additional information about AIBS's governance changes, visit [www.aibs.org/about-aibs/aibs\\_enacts\\_governance\\_changes\\_to\\_advance\\_strategic\\_plan.html](http://www.aibs.org/about-aibs/aibs_enacts_governance_changes_to_advance_strategic_plan.html)) and its bylaws to do three things: to empower the organization to expand the range of expertise and representation on the board; to enhance the stability of leadership on the board by changing how officers are elected and by lengthening the terms that they serve; and, finally, to improve the types and makeup of its standing committees. In 2012, we are building an *outcomes framework* of targets and milestones that will enable us to measure the results of our activities and communicate the impact of our efforts.

Our vision is an AIBS that draws from its original mission and its timeless values but that embraces a broader representation of the discipline and fulfills its role more effectively, sustainably, and collaboratively. Although this strategic plan is being launched in 2012, this effort represents the end of only one phase of AIBS's long-range planning. We are in a period of rapid, profound change in science and scientific practice, and the plan will enable AIBS itself to keep changing and, by doing so, to help shape the future.

SUSAN G. STAFFORD, JAMES P. COLLINS, AND JOSEPH TRAVIS

*Susan G. Stafford, James P. Collins, and Joseph Travis are the present and past AIBS presidents for 2012, 2011, and 2010, respectively.*

### Frequently Asked Questions

AIBS offered previews of this plan to a number of individuals, including many of its past presidents. The ensuing discussions were centered on several questions about the plan's structure and its implications for the traditional activities of the Institute.

#### **The plan is broad rather than detailed about AIBS's anticipated activities. Why is that?**

AIBS set out on the long-range strategic-planning process understanding that changing times require continual self-assessment and, often, changing activities. This phase of the planning process was focused on assessing what the discipline and community need in a modern era and making the commitment that we were going to serve those needs. The next phase of our planning is to establish an outcomes framework that will allow us to set short-term goals (3–5 years) for the impact we intend to have through our efforts and for how we will measure that impact. We anticipate a period of new initiatives as we learn what we can do best in an era of rapid change to build a portfolio of consistently successful activities.

#### **AIBS stopped holding meetings of its member societies. Will an annual meeting be reinstated or just meetings when specific issues arise?**

In 1999, AIBS moved from having its annual meeting in conjunction with the annual scientific meeting of some of our member societies and established a stand-alone scientific meeting. After a 10-year run, it became apparent that an annual stand-alone scientific meeting, held in conjunction with the AIBS business and Council meetings, was not sustainable. AIBS has continued to hold annual business and Council meetings.

We have begun to reimagine the annual Council meeting to be more attractive to the Council representatives from our member societies and organizations and to help us fulfill our renewed sense of mission. In December 2011, for example, we used the Council meeting to host a daylong discussion, entitled "What is the place of the scientific

society in the twenty-first century?" We invited historians and business consultants to speak to the attendees about the historical role of scientific societies, about how modern trends are affecting professional associations outside of our immediate community, and about establishing earned income programs to supplement declining publications revenue. We plan to have a program that explores a topic or theme that would interest the leadership of biology organizations at every Council meeting.

#### **How will AIBS collaborate with its member organizations in this plan?**

AIBS can often do what individual member organizations cannot: collect data on the structure and practice of biology in its broadest sense to help its member organizations plot their own courses, enable the transfer of best practices among organizations, and catalyze collaborations among parts of the community.

Here are some recently initiated examples of what this work looks like:

**Systematics.** AIBS was contacted by some of its member societies concerned about the need for organization and advocacy for biodiversity and systematics. To respond, AIBS organized an ad hoc committee to examine the issue, invited the participation of its member organizations, and is now developing a strategy with those organizations to advance efforts that will address the concerns.

**AIBS Survey of Biology Organizations.** In 2010, AIBS conducted a survey of biology organizations to learn more about the challenges they see facing the field. The survey results led to additional surveys, a theme for discussion at AIBS Council meetings, and a new event to promote a cross-generational dialogue about the issues, observations from which are published on the AIBS Web site ([www.aibs.org/about-aibs/cross\\_generational\\_conversation.html](http://www.aibs.org/about-aibs/cross_generational_conversation.html)).

#### **What does this new plan mean for AIBS public policy efforts?**

AIBS public policy programs are still going strong and have grown

considerably in impact and depth since the office was formed in 2000. Through financial contributions that ensure that AIBS has the staff resources needed to advocate for our field, to administer programs such as Congressional Visits Day, to publish and distribute biweekly Public Policy Reports, and to maintain alerts about actions that need attention (now via the Legislative Action Center), AIBS provides a strong voice for the interests of biology in Washington, DC, and connects the community of biologists across the United States to the skills and opportunities that enable life scientists to advocate for themselves. No other policy organization ensures that the voice of biology is heard on far-reaching issues such as funding for basic research; supporting scientific collections; and research, education, and workforce policy while providing the knowledge that will prepare policymakers to embrace twenty-first century biology in our nation's policymaking.

**Will AIBS sponsor particular initiatives for teaching biology in high schools and colleges? Does AIBS work to integrate teaching and research?**

AIBS is actively involved in several initiatives that promote more effective and productive biology education experiences for both future professionals and the public at large. The AIBS Education Committee is conducting research to determine how AIBS can best provide leadership support for departmental chairs and future leaders in order to implement departmental goals based on the recent Vision and Change report (<http://visionandchange.org>) and similar calls for transformation. AIBS is working with the Partnership for Undergraduate Life Science Education (PULSE) initiative, a collaborative project supported by the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health's National Institute of General Medical Sciences, and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. PULSE is working to achieve the goal of catalyzing systemic change in undergraduate life-science education. AIBS is a part of the Introductory Biology Project Research Coordination

Network—Undergraduate Biology Education (with principal investigator Gordon Uno), which has held numerous events that brought together individuals from different areas of expertise, all focused on improving the introductory biology experience for students. The National Evolutionary Synthesis Center's annual Evolution Symposium and Workshop brings science to biology educators attending the National Association of Biology Teachers' professional development conference. AIBS actively promotes and supports two Web sites: Understanding Evolution (<http://evolution.berkeley.edu>) and Understanding Science (<http://undsci.berkeley.edu>), which provide valuable resources and information to the community. AIBS also continues to publish *ActionBioscience.org*, a free online resource that invites the public to access vetted information about how the biological sciences inform societal decision-making. Finally, the AIBS Public Policy Office continues as a liaison with the National Center for Science Education and other organizations to enlist the community's support for the teaching of evolution and climate change.

**Will *BioScience* make a bigger effort to report new discoveries in biology that are of general interest and more news about innovative ways to teach biology at various levels?**

The future roles that *BioScience* will fill are actively being discussed. AIBS is experiencing a challenge common to societies that publish scientific journals: steep drops in membership (equivalent to individual journal subscriptions) and increasing numbers of readers who obtain journals through their institutional libraries. There are other forces at work in scientific publishing affecting the finances of scientific societies, including the need to provide access to journals via individual mobile devices; to remain desirable while academic libraries continue to cut their budgets for periodical subscriptions; and to cover costs despite the movement to open-access, all-electronic outlets for scientific information. The scholarly journal in its current form is no longer a benefit that

motivates membership in a scholarly society (<https://aibs.site-ym.com/page/Index/>). AIBS has engaged a consultant to help it revision *BioScience* and to align its content and distribution with this new strategic plan and a revenue model that will sustain its activity. You will hear more about *BioScience* in the future.

**Is AIBS still performing independent peer-review and related research evaluation services?**

The AIBS Scientific Peer Advisory and Review Services department, commonly referred to as SPARS, is the foundation of AIBS's peer-review efforts. Having performed peer-review and related research evaluation services since 1963, AIBS SPARS is one of the longest-serving independent scientific review service providers in the nation, one with a very strong reputation for the quality and timeliness of its work. SPARS is bigger and more widely known than ever. AIBS continues to serve the peer-review needs of the Department of Defense and provides administrative support for the BP-sponsored Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative, while serving many other foundations and state and government agencies. In 2011, AIBS SPARS reviewed thousands of research proposals, advising government agencies and foundations on funding decisions in excess of \$1 billion in potential research. The proposal reviews included those related to consortia development, biological training and education programs (e.g., curriculum development), innovation awards, technology development awards, and clinical trial awards. AIBS SPARS has facilitated reviews of various sizes (from one to several hundred proposals) and delivers accurate, insightful, edited reports to help clients make sound funding decisions. The scope of the programs that SPARS reviews ranges from those addressing advances in basic biology to those addressing clinical medicine, technology, wildlife, and environmental concerns.

Read more about AIBS activities in the 2011 Annual Report ([www.aibs.org/about-aibs/resources/AIBS\\_2011\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.aibs.org/about-aibs/resources/AIBS_2011_Annual_Report.pdf)). The AIBS Strategic Plan is attached to this issue at p. 869.