

The Journey Continues: AIBS Moves Forward

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BioScience®

A Forum for Integrating the Life Sciences
American Institute of Biological Sciences

The Journey Continues: AIBS Moves Forward

AIBS is at a defining moment. Although the organization's constitution, drafted in 1947, still declares that "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," 65 years later, the organizational and governance structure of AIBS is different. Those differences will enable AIBS to better adapt to the changing landscape for modern professional societies and to reinforce the vision of AIBS as a "forum for integrating the life sciences," a goal that is evinced by the new tagline above and on the cover of *BioScience*.

The single biggest adjustment is the realization that the primary constituency of AIBS is its member societies and organizations (MSOs). This conclusion was reached after three careful years of survey-data collection and analysis by our Long-Range Planning Committee, ably chaired by past president Joseph Travis (articles describing this work will be published in coming months). Our thoughts about reinventing AIBS follow directly from what we heard the MSOs tell us. Moreover, we have concluded that our society of societies will have enduring success if it can help its MSOs ensure that the public, legislators, funders, and the community of biologists have access to and use accurate information in making decisions about matters affected by biology. The institute will, of course, maintain an open line of communication with individual members and will continue to serve them through *BioScience* and other venues.

Past editorials by AIBS presidents suggest that they have been struggling with the same difficulties and ambitions for the organization for decades. With the survey data, we are able to listen more closely to our MSOs and the community than we have before. This has given us a better sense of what the community needs and where we can help. And help we must, because we need to restore the public's respect for science and research. We increasingly encounter skepticism about the value of our country's research portfolio. Questions are being asked about how it contributes to economic development and employment, even as other countries expand their scientific investments.

The new societal litmus test seems to be that if investments do not immediately yield jobs, they are of limited value. This view ignores our long history of successful support for basic science and scientific education, investments that produced not only targeted successes such as polio vaccines but also unexpected discoveries such as the blood thinner warfarin. Our research enterprise is not well understood. By focusing on our MSOs' common interests, principles, and values while increasing the breadth and depth of our community, we also plan to improve how biological science is used to inform decisionmaking and to halt the further erosion of federal support.

I look forward to working with you in the year ahead to implement the next stage of our strategic-planning process. Strategic action has begun and continues. The changes envisioned for AIBS are critical to enabling the institute to meet its goal of having biology support decisionmaking while shoring up the social compact supporting long-term investments in research.

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