

EXPANDING THE STAFFING AND MEMBER-SERVICES CAPACITY  
OF THE PUBLIC POLICY OFFICE OF THE  
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES  
A FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

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Prepared for:

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## INTRODUCTION

The American Institute of Biological Sciences has had some presence in the public policy arena over the 53 years since its founding, but during much of that time, it has not had a professional governmental affairs staff. There have been years during which AIBS has had no involvement in public policy. This lack of substantial involvement in public affairs resulted, in part, from priority-setting by the Board of Directors, which chose to use limited funding to support congressional fellowships. In September 1999, in response to the direction of the Board of Directors to increase the organization's presence in legislative and regulatory affairs, AIBS created a part-time, professional staff position.

AIBS' role in public policy matters is still limited, not only by the limited capacity of a part-time position, but also by the fact that the member societies and organizations (MSOs) have not authorized AIBS to speak on their behalf. There is neither a mandate nor a mechanism for AIBS to represent its MSOs.

In November 1999, AIBS held its first-ever summit for the MSO presidents, to identify collective action plans for AIBS' future efforts, including the public policy function. The summit participants, which included society presidents and other society representatives, developed a range of concepts for an expanded public policy function, which found substantial support.

Perhaps the most significant result of these discussions was the fundamental agreement that the member societies and organizations can and should work together to take collective action in certain instances and should, when appropriate, speak as one through the AIBS.

The society presidents directed AIBS to prepare this feasibility study to examine options for an expansion of AIBS' public policy function.

## THE ROLE OF A PUBLIC POLICY OFFICE OF A SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATION

Public policy offices in scientific organizations serve to address legislative, regulatory, and other policy matters in three basic areas: those that affect the conduct of the scientific endeavors of their members; research funding; and other topics in which their members have an interest.

Matters that affect the conduct of the scientific endeavors of biologists can be characterized include:

- research integrity
- permitting
- requirements for public disclosure of data
- restrictions imposed by virtue of the Animal Welfare Act
- education policies that affect the teaching of biology

- appointments to key federal agencies

Research funding is an ongoing concern that requires attention throughout an annual cycle. Agency budgets of interest to biologists include the National Science Foundation, Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Commerce, State, and Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency. There are also individual bills that may include provisions for biological research, as well as legislation to increase research funding overall (the Federal Research Investment Act, also known as the “Doubling Bill”).

These first two categories - policy that affects the conduct of scientific research and research funding - can be characterized as “fundamental issues.”

Scientific organizations may also address other topics of interest to their members. These efforts may take two forms. The first is the effort to enhance the use of science in the decision-making process, by assuring that decision-makers have access to and understand the scientific information relevant to public policy issues. Some scientific organizations have been engaged in this process for decades. In the second form, scientific organizations may take a stand on particular legislation and may even work to assure passage or defeat. Legislation that may be included in this second category includes the various efforts to reauthorize and modify the Endangered Species Act, attempts to place limits on access to family planning, or ratification of international treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

## PUBLIC POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF COALITIONS

As difficult as it is to represent the views of individual members, it is an order of magnitude more difficult to represent the views of coalitions of scientific organizations. It is a time-consuming process requiring excellent communication channels to present the information to the individual societies, engage in reasoned discussion, and reach consensus.\*

For this reason, most scientific societies do not often take stands on policy matters that do not affect the ability of their members to conduct research. The participants in the Presidents' Summit suggested that a public issues council be developed to address this type of issue. If the MSOs reached consensus through the public issues council, the AIBS Public Policy Office would act in accordance with the recommendations of the public issues council (a more detailed explanation of this process is provided below, in the discussion on the functions of an expanded public policy office).

However, with regard to the “fundamental issues” - policies that affect scientific research or research funding - it is rarely difficult to develop a position that serves the interest of all members of the coalition. It is also critical to speak out. On topics of more general interest, there will be many organizations engaged in the effort. On matters involving science, the only participants will be scientists. Generally, scientific coalitions have a professional policy staff, advised by a policy committee and by some or all of the officers and directors of the society.

Member societies rely upon these professionals and representatives who are well-versed in the issues to develop an appropriate position on the issue.

For the purpose of this feasibility assessment, it is assumed that the MSOs are satisfied that AIBS staff, with the advice of the Public Policy Review Committee and society officers, is capable of acting on their behalf on these issues.

Concerted action is important, because an organization representing 150,000 individuals garners more attention than an organization with 5,000 members. That is not to say that individual societies shouldn't voice their views - they should. Just as the 70 member societies of AIBS can increase their effectiveness by speaking as one, so AIBS joins with many other organizations on issues of mutual interest. For example, AIBS works with approximately 80 organizations that comprise the Coalition for National Science Funding.

\*Consensus does not require unanimous agreement. Instead, it requires only that no organization is so opposed to the proposal as to block it.

## WHAT AN EXPANDED AIBS PUBLIC POLICY OFFICE WOULD DO

### 1. Better coverage of fundamental issues

The time limitations of a part-time position prevent us from making the concerted effort that certain issues require. Our ability to contribute to the coalitions of scientific societies has been limited. Our public policy representative has not had enough time to develop the relationships with key agency officials and Congressional staffers that are essential to an effective public policy office. We have been unable to address some of these issues at all. In particular, we have been unable to devote attention to education issues.

The Presidents' Summit several key areas for joint action. One of these - making the case for biological science - would require effort on the part of both the policy and communications offices. Desired outcomes included a higher level of biological awareness and literacy in the voting public and on the part of government officials. Nothing could be more fundamental to assuring success in the funding and research policy arenas. This kind of effort requires sustained and constant attention.

Furthermore, there is often a need to address issues that arise at the international level (such as the regulation of genetically-modified organisms) or at the state level. AIBS cannot address these issues without an expanded public policy office.

Finally, it must be noted that the interests of the AIBS MSOs are diverse. The range of policy issues that must be covered, if only to alert them to issues of interest to them, let alone address those issues or assist them in doing so, is substantial. A partial list includes wetlands protection and restoration, regulation of genetically modified organisms, international conservation policy,

deep sea exploration, fisheries, pesticides, invasive species, agricultural policy, and a wide range of general conservation issues. Working with the MSOs on these issues, either to facilitate their efforts or to advocate the consensus position of the MSOs, should they authorize AIBS to do so, cannot be achieved without expanding the public policy office.

## 2. Better communication with MSOs and individual biologists/development of “grass-roots” effort

At current staffing levels, AIBS communicates with MSOs through the AIBS News column in BioScience and with biweekly e-mail policy updates. Special policy alerts may also be issued in certain circumstances, but we do not want to inundate the recipients with e-mail. We are currently using an individual e-mail list that includes society officers and Council Representatives, but are developing an e-mail listserv through Capitol Advantage that will allow us to reach all members of the MSOs, as follows:

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### *Capitol Advantage List Manager*

*AIBS contracts with Capitol Advantage ([www.capitoladvantage.com](http://www.capitoladvantage.com)) for website services for the AIBS public policy section of [www.aibs.org](http://www.aibs.org). This service, for which AIBS pays \$2,500/yr, is known as the Legislative Information Center and offers a plethora of information about legislation and policy issues, all updated daily. The AIBS public policy representative selects the information that is likely to be of interest to the members of the MSOs.*

*Recently, Capitol Advantage began to offer an additional service known as List Manager, which is essentially a one-way e-mail listserv. AIBS plans to use this List Manager service in lieu of the informal e-mail system it has been using to reach MSO officers, Council Representatives and others. The List Manager will allow us to reach all the MSO members who wish to receive policy alerts and other AIBS news and information. It will also allow AIBS to direct messages to particular societies, so that the participants are not burdened with messages that are of no interest.*

*AIBS could make this service available to MSOs who wish to use it to contact their own members by email. MSOs would provide the names and e-mail addresses of their members and would be able to send messages to those members through AIBS.*

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The purpose of reaching individual biologists is to provide those who are interested in specific issues, or policy generally, with the means to participate more effectively. The AIBS MSOs may decide to refrain from engaging in general policy matters, or abstain from certain issues on which consensus is not reached. On those matters, individuals who are interested will have a ready source of information and the tools needed to voice their opinions easily and effectively. This is not intended to function as an actual grass-roots action network, in which the organization urges

individuals to support a stand taken by the organization. However, if there is an issue upon which the MSOs have authorized AIBS to take a stand, the tools to activate a grass-roots effort would be in place.

### 3. Development of a mechanism to address general policy issues and affect policy by communicating scientific information to decision-makers

Based on the results of the Presidents' Summit, we anticipate that the MSOs will move forward to engage in joint action on some issues beyond the fundamental issues. There was substantial interest in the development of a public issues council that would serve as the coordinating body on public policy issues to be addressed by AIBS.\* The public issues council would examine candidate issues through a roundtable process or by designating an ad hoc committee to study the issue in depth. After developing a position, the public issues council would seek to reach consensus among the AIBS MSOs. Assuming consensus, the public issues council would then recommend a form or forms of action to the public policy office. It was contemplated that the public policy office would work closely with this issues council by suggesting topics for consideration, providing information and guidance as to the policy parameters of an issue.

The discussion at the Presidents' Summit supposed that the public issues council would provide information to decision-makers through the public affairs office (the exact proposal was denoted, "Integrating Science Resources for Emerging Issues in Public Policy"). The proposal also suggested that the public policy office would engage in advocacy based on input from the public issues council.

Helping to develop the public issues council, assisting it on specific issues, and implementing its recommendations will require additional staffing in the public policy office. It will also require additional staffing in the communications office, both to facilitate communication among MSOs and to be sure that the products developed to implement the recommendations of the public issues council are distributed effectively.

### 4. Assist individual societies in developing public policy functions

Even with an expanded public policy office, there will always be a limit to the number of issues that AIBS will be able to address. With 70 member societies and organizations with a wide array of interests, it is probable that some issues will be too narrow for AIBS to address. Also, there may be issues upon which the public issues council is unable to develop consensus. Individual societies may wish to address some of these issues, but most do not have the capacity to do so. The participants in the Presidents' Summit suggested that the public policy office assist MSOs in developing the capacity to participate in the public policy arena. Specific ideas included short training sessions in the context of AIBS meetings, longer stand-alone training sessions, and continuing logistical support.

## COSTS AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Based on the salary range offered to public policy professionals at a range of scientific organizations, we can expect to pay a salary of \$45,000 to \$50,000 for an individual with training in both science and policy and several years' experience. Highly-experienced public policy professionals in scientific organizations command salaries in excess of \$65,000 per year. A junior staffer would expect to earn about \$36,000. Benefits and indirect costs such as worker's compensation insurance are assumed to be an additional 1/3 of salary.

### Optimal staffing level

With either two full-time employees at the intermediate level or one at the intermediate level and one at the junior level, the AIBS public policy office should be able to cover the four areas discussed above. We would also need to have a program assistant--a junior position, perhaps even a rotating intern position--whose time would be divided between the public policy office and the communications office. Although the current AIBS Communications Assistant could handle some of this work, a program assistant with specific experience or education in public policy work is preferred .

The estimated annual cost of this staffing level ranges from

\$114,000 for 1 intermediate level and one junior level professional staff, incl. benefits  
plus \$8,000 for a program assistant (as intern with minimal benefits, see below)  
= \$122,000/yr  
to  
\$133,000 for 2 intermediate level professional staff, incl. benefits  
plus \$8,000 for a program assistant (as intern with minimal benefits, see below)  
= \$141,000/yr

### Minimum effective staffing level

At the least, AIBS would need one full-time staffer at the intermediate level and one additional program assistant with some experience in a public policy office or training program.

The estimated annual costs of this staffing level are:

\$66,000 for 1 intermediate level professional staff, incl. benefits  
plus \$8,000 for a program assistant (as intern, see below)  
= \$74,000/yr

This minimal effective staffing level should suffice for the next year to 18 months, but once the public issues council has been developed and begins its work, it will be necessary to increase staffing to the optimal level.

### Interns

It is contemplated that AIBS could offer at least one policy internship each year. We are particularly interested in students with very strong academic backgrounds in the biological sciences who have a strong interest in public policy. Graduate students would be preferred, as would students who are willing to commit to working a full-year (part-time during the school term). The three-month internships typically required of students rarely offer the student an

opportunity to do anything meaningful and generally require more work on the part of the supervisor than is worthwhile.

Most interns are paid a stipend, even for summer internships. A stipend for a summer intern is usually about \$1,000 for 10 weeks work. A year-long internship should pay at least \$100 per week for weeks that the student works 15 hours per week (during the school term) and \$200 a week for 10 weeks of full-time work during the summer. Therefore, the estimated cost of an intern is \$6,000, plus statutory benefits.

## POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCES

### Member societies and organizations

Based on discussions at the Presidents' Summit, it appears that many societies, or at least those without public policy offices of their own, are willing to contribute increased dues funds to the cost of expanding the AIBS public policy office. It would be necessary to canvas these organizations to determine the extent of their ability and willingness to pay the additional costs.

For illustration purposes, consider that across all 70 MSOs, the additional cost (above the current AIBS budget allocation for public policy office staff, which is \$20,000 per year) at the optimal staffing level (\$141,000/yr) would average \$1,729/yr per society. The cost for the next staffing level down (\$122,000/yr) would average \$1,457/yr per society. The cost for the minimal effective funding level (\$74,000/yr) would average \$771/yr per society.

### Foundations

Foundation funding would be sought for the internship. AIBS has already initiated an effort to obtain foundation funding for the AIBS Congressional Fellowship and will look for funding for an internship program at the same time.

Foundation funding is generally not available for general operations. However, at least one component of the expanded public policy office would make an excellent grant proposal - the campaign to "make the case for biological sciences." In fact, it might be possible to find funding for a staffer specifically for this project for a period of several years.

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