American Institute of Biological Sciences
2016 Public Policy Office Annual Report
Director’s Message

Thank you for your interest in the public policy programs of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS). This report summarizes the recent initiatives, services, and accomplishments of the AIBS Public Policy Office.

2016 was a year of new opportunities and new challenges.

We are excited to be offering a new series of training opportunities for scientists. The initial science communications boot camp, held in December 2016, was well received by participants—many of whom plan to tell their colleagues about the program. A second boot camp will be offered in February 2017. A workshop on enabling interdisciplinary science is also planned for the new year. We anticipate additional courses being developed in 2017.

To say that the national elections last year were unique is definitely an understatement. We witnessed new campaign strategies, groundswells of populism – on both sides of the political spectrum – and a return to single party rule; at least for the next two years. As with any change in presidential administration, there will likely be opportunities and challenges for science. What has not changed, however, is the need for the biological sciences community to become effective and engaged advocates for our science. If we do not tell our story and help decision-makers understand the societal benefits of biological research, who will? AIBS has already reached out to the White House transition team to establish relationships with the new administration.

Thank you for your support of AIBS and our efforts to promote a national science policy that serves the interests of the biological sciences community.

Robert Gropp, Ph.D.
Interim Co-Executive Director
Key Accomplishments in 2016

√ Created a new two-day communications training program for scientists to develop their skills to successfully communicate their research with decision-makers and reporters.

√ Collaborated with 55 leading science organizations to ask the U.S. presidential candidates a set of twenty questions regarding major issues in science, engineering, health, and the environment.

√ Organized a letter from 63 scientific organizations to President-elect Trump about the role science should play in his administration.

√ Influenced legislation that sets policy directions for basic research and science education programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF).

√ Orchestrated a successful campaign that resulted in the National Science Foundation reversing a decision to suspend a program.

√ Organized advocacy events that enable researchers, educators, and students to learn how to be effective advocates for science. Facilitated more than 90 meetings with federal and state lawmakers.

√ Wrote a report documenting the payoffs of federal investments in basic biological research, which was distributed to all congressional offices.

√ Reaffirmed the scientific consensus on climate change in a joint letter to Congress from 31 scientific organizations.

√ Presented two webinars as part of the Leadership in Biology series on careers in science policy and careers in conservation and environmental biology.

√ Produced a new video resource to train researchers to engage their elected representatives.

Science Policy

The AIBS Public Policy Office made significant contributions to research and science education policy in 2016. Our efforts were focused on sustaining federal investments in biological research and education, promoting the responsible use of science in the policymaking process, influencing legislation that would impact National Science Foundation (NSF) programs and operations, and furthering the policy interests of natural science collections.

Research Funding

AIBS continued its efforts to positively influence federal science funding trends. A new report prepared by AIBS staff highlighted some of the innovations and technical advancements resulting from federally funded biology research. The report, “Biological Innovation: Benefits of Federal Investments in Biology,” is available online.

Testimony was submitted to congressional appropriators regarding funding for NSF, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Forest Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, research funding was the focus of advocacy events organized by AIBS.

America COMPETES Reauthorization

At the end of 2016, Congress completed a multiyear process to partially reauthorize the America COMPETES Act, a law that sets future directives for the NSF and other federal science agencies that support basic research. Language suggested by AIBS regarding crowdsourcing and citizen science was accepted into the final version of the law, S. 3084. Another notable achievement for representatives of the scientific community was the removal of several objectionable provisions contained in earlier drafts, including directorate level funding allocations for NSF’s research programs and requirements for the agency to only fund grants that are in “the national interest.”
**Presidential Campaign**

AIBS was among a core group of organizers for Science Debate 2016. The effort developed and posed 20 questions to the U.S. presidential candidates regarding their views and plans for research funding, science education, biodiversity conservation, climate change, and other topics. The candidates’ responses were widely covered by the media.

In December, AIBS led a letter to President-elect Trump regarding science in his administration. Sixty-three organizations signed the letter, which called for the Trump administration to take swift action to make scientific research a budget priority, to appointment a presidential science advisor with strong scientific credentials, and to use peer-reviewed scientific information to inform decision-making.

**Natural Science Collections**

In the spring of 2016, NSF announced that the Collections in Support of Biological Research program had been placed on hiatus. The program supports the preservation of and improved access to biocollections. AIBS, the Natural Science Collections Alliance, and the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections responded with a letter to NSF and solicited letters from other scientific organizations and researchers. In response, NSF reinstated the program, but on a biennial funding schedule.

The Biodiversity Collections Network (BCoN), which is co-lead by AIBS, now has more than 35 organizations supporting the effort, which aims to build a biocollections community that is able to fully implement and achieve the goals of the Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance. The project is supported by a five-year grant from NSF and is in partnership with the Natural Science Collections Alliance and the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections.

In 2016, BCoN released a report summarizing a workshop held at The Field Museum in Chicago. The report offers recommendations regarding communications and outreach on scientific collections.
Other Highlights

The USGS Coalition, which AIBS co-chairs, awarded Representatives David Joyce (R-OH) and Chellie Pingree (D-ME) the 2016 USGS Coalition Leadership Award for their strong support for the scientific programs and personnel of the U.S. Geological Survey.

Representative Joyce (center left) with USGS leadership.

The Association of Ecosystem Research Centers has worked with AIBS for many years to plan a Capitol Hill briefing in conjunction with their annual meeting. This year’s event highlighted the role of radioecological research in national security.

Outreach and Training

Meetings with Lawmakers

AIBS offers opportunities for scientists to meet with their federal and state elected officials in Washington, DC, or in their home state.

AIBS and the Ecological Society of America once again organized the Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition Congressional Visits Day. Thirty biologists from across the nation participated in the event, which included a one-day training program on science advocacy and the federal budget, and 60 meetings with House and Senate offices about funding for biological research programs.
Dozens of biological researchers and educators participated in the 8th annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event. This national initiative encourages scientists across the nation to showcase for federal and state lawmakers the people, facilities, and equipment required to conduct scientific research. AIBS policy staff helped participants schedule and prepare for their meetings.

Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits Sponsors
Policy and Media Training for Scientists

The Public Policy Office offered a new training program in 2016: a two-day science communications boot camp. Thirty students and researchers participated to improve their communication skills. Participants learned tools and tips to successfully communicate their research with decision-makers and reporters.

AIBS also produced a short video to train researchers on how to interact with policymakers.
Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award

AIBS recognized graduate student Julia Omotade with the Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award. Omotade is a Ph.D. candidate in Biochemistry, Cellular and Developmental Biology at Emory University. The 2016 award winner received an expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, to participate in meetings with her congressional delegation, training and information on the federal budget and appropriations process, and a one-year AIBS membership.

Internships

In 2016, policy staff mentored two interns: a recent graduate of George Mason University and a recent graduate with a Ph.D. from Penn State University. These opportunities provide students with an introduction to the processes through which Congress, the White House, federal agencies, and the scientific community work to develop the nation’s science policy. Past interns have returned to graduate school, secured other policy fellowships, or are employed at the interface of science and policy.

Help Support Student Opportunities

AIBS would like to provide more education and training opportunities to biology students. We particularly want to expand our highly successful Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award program. To do this, we need the support of our members and friends. Please consider donating to AIBS to help us ensure more biology graduate students have an opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills they need to develop careers that allow them to successfully work at the nexus of science and public policy.

Please make a tax-deductible donation today by visiting https://memberplanet.com/campaign/aibs/eppladonation.
AIBS Legislative Action Center

Grassroots activists use the AIBS Legislative Action Center to advocate for science policy. In 2016, researchers wrote to their members of Congress about the funding for the biological sciences. The website also offers summaries of legislation of interest to the biological sciences community and other resources for researchers to engage in the development of the nation’s science policy.

The Legislative Action Center is made possible by financial contributions from Society for the Study of Evolution, the Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography, and the Botanical Society of America.

Publications and Information Dissemination


Leadership in Biology Webinars

The Public Policy Office organized two webinars for AIBS members in 2016. One webinar focused on science policy careers and the other event featured a panel discussion on careers in conservation and environmental biology. Hundreds of people participated in the programs. More webinars are planned for 2017; learn more at https://www.aibs.org/events/latest_events.html.

A group of Navajo young adults participated remotely in the conservation careers webinar. Photo credit: Andrea Stanley.
Photo Contest

The AIBS sponsored Faces of Biology Photo Contest continues to draw robust participation from members of the biological sciences community. The contest encourages researchers, educators, and students to showcase the varied forms that biological research can take. The photos are used to help the public and policymakers better understand the value of biological research and education. The winners of the 2016 contest included photos of a researcher studying an endangered sturgeon, the preparation of a microbial experiment, and paleontological research. The first place winner will be featured on the cover of an upcoming issue of BioScience and received $250.

Photo contest first place winner Christopher Guy.
Get Involved

If you have a minute…

• Join the AIBS Legislative Action Center (policy.aibs.org)
• Subscribe to the Public Policy Report (www.aibs.org/public-policy-reports)
• Follow us on Twitter (@AIBS_policy)

If you have 15 minutes…

• Read an AIBS position statement (www.aibs.org/position-statements)
• Delve into science policy by reading a Washington Watch column from BioScience (www.aibs.org/washington-watch)
• Learn about federal investments in science and the budget process (www.aibs.org/public-policy/science_funding.html)

If you have a day…

• Participate in the BESC Congressional Visits Day in Washington, DC (www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_visits_day.html)
• Participate in the Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event (www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html)
• Coordinate a media and policy training workshop (www.aibs.org/public-policy/policy_training.html)

Student Opportunities

• Apply for the Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award (www.aibs.org/public-policy/student_opportunities.html)
• Intern at the AIBS Public Policy Office (www.aibs.org/public-policy/student_opportunities.html)
Contributing Societies

**Partner**

Natural Science Collections Alliance

**Collaborator**

Society for the Study of Evolution

**Participant**

American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
Association of Ecosystem Research Centers
Botanical Society of America
Organization of Biological Field Stations
Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology
Society of Systematic Biologists
Society of Wetland Scientists

**Supporter**

American Arachnological Society
Mycological Society of America
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry—North America

*The Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography contributes targeted funding to help sponsor the Legislative Action Center.*

*The American Society of Mammologists contributes targeted funding to support student training initiatives.*

**How to Contribute**

Financial support from individuals and organizations makes it possible for AIBS to serve the biological sciences community and to help advance a common agenda. Consider making a contribution to AIBS. Please visit [http://access.aibs.org/donate.html](http://access.aibs.org/donate.html) to make a secure online donation.
AIBS Public Policy Committee

Chair
Keith Crandall, Society of Systematic Biologists

Committee Members
Carol Baldwin, American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
Marian Chau, Botanical Society of America
Paul Foster, Organization of Biological Field Stations
Morgan Gostel, Botanical Society of America
Kent E. Holsinger, Society for the Study of Evolution
Molly Jacobs, Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology
Gene Rhodes, Association of Ecosystem Research Centers
Al Savitzky, American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
Dennis F. Whigham, Society of Wetland Scientists

AIBS Public Policy Office Staff
Robert Gropp, Director
Julie Palakovich Carr, Public Policy Manager

Photo credits (unless otherwise noted): Julie Palakovich Carr
About AIBS

The American Institute of Biological Sciences is a national scientific organization that promotes the use of science to inform decision-making that advances biology for the benefit of science and society.

AIBS initiatives are unified by a commitment to promoting informed decision-making. Our areas of focus include:

• **Scientific Communications:** AIBS publishes the scientific journal, *BioScience*. We also conduct communication training programs for scientists, produce monthly podcasts about timely research, and host a Leadership in Biology webinar and meeting series that raises awareness of current topics influencing scientific research and education.

• **Scientific Peer Review and Program Management Services:** The AIBS SPARS program convenes expert panels to review proposed and on-going research. Our clients use these reviews to inform their funding and management decisions. We are also working to identify and promote best practices in peer review through original research we conduct.

• **Science Policy Initiatives:** AIBS provides policymakers with high-quality, vetted information about the latest scientific findings, and about the needs of the biological research and education communities. We do this through congressional briefings, expert testimony, white papers, and coalition and grassroots advocacy initiatives.

Our work and interests span the breadth of the life sciences. We address issues related to fundamental research as well as biomedical and environmental sciences. Collaborators in these efforts include our business partners, clients, and individual and organizational members. A growing number of individual donors also help to advance our goals.

You can learn more about AIBS, how to become a member, or how to make a tax-deductible donation via our [website](http://www.aibs.org).

American Institute of Biological Sciences
[www.aibs.org](http://www.aibs.org)

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We’ve moved!