

ASOR Executive Director's Report
April 20, 2013

General overview: The general state of ASOR is strong, and we are posed to grow in the areas outlined by the strategic plan over the next three to five years. Over the last seven years we have gone from a significant deficit in terms of unrestricted assets available for operations to a small “reserve” of cash (\$196,000) available for operations. We have built a certain level of trust among our members and donors, and that trust will be important as we seek to expand in the areas outlined in the strategic plan.

The following is a brief summary of some of our program areas, and I will expand on each section of this summary in the paragraphs below. These areas have also effected the proposed budget for FY14. Our professional **membership** has reached a plateau, and we now need to focus our efforts on expanding our membership with “enthusiast members” (i.e., the wider public who are not professionals in archaeology, religion, history, etc.). Our **publications** continue to be strong and published in a timely manner. Journal subscriptions reached a trough about 18 months ago, and they are now increasing slowly. We need a focused effort to increase our subscriptions so that our subscription numbers are comparable with peer journals. We have not placed an emphasis on book publications in the last seven years, and we now ready to start expanding in that area. The **annual meeting** has been growing steadily for six years, but we seem to have reached a plateau with professional participation. Future growth (which is necessary to make the meeting close to break-even) will be more difficult, and we will need to find ways to increase involvement by people who are not presenting papers. **Outreach** has been limited over the past five to six years, and we need to work on ways to carry out the goals specified in the strategic plan. The Friends of ASOR program and our social media initiatives will be an important part of this effort. **Archaeological support** has grown through our scholarship program, and we have made improvements in the dig affiliation process. We need to work on endowing scholarships and expanding our affiliated digs. We also need to work on raising funds for excavation grants that are currently supported through the Harris Endowment. The **financial** support of all of these initiatives is made possible through good management of membership and subscription revenues, annual meeting revenues, investments, and our **development** efforts. We have made strides in broadening our donor base and not relying on a few, major donors. We are at a point where we can work on increasing non-gift revenue and asking donors to support special initiatives and scholarships.

Membership: Many of the details are contained in Jennie Ebeling's report, and I will not repeat them here. We reached a high of 1,590 members at December 31, 2012, and that number decreased slightly to 1,523 at March 31, 2013 (but still higher than March 2012). These record numbers follow intense efforts by the ASOR staff. We hired an additional staff person in the membership and publications area. That staff person (Jen Fitzgerald) has spent much time working on ASOR social media efforts and the new Friends of ASOR program. Cynthia Rufo has also worked as webmaster at least half-time in FY13, and much of her time has been spent supporting outreach and membership initiatives on the website and with the Friends of ASOR program. We also continued to use direct mail to recruit new

members. We have used mailing lists from two other learned societies (about 7,000 names total), and those lists yielded around a 2-3% positive response rate. Those positive responses paid for themselves in the first year in terms of new revenues (professional memberships are \$130 per year, and contributing memberships are \$125 per year). We will look for other lists to contact with direct mail, but right now we have exhausted the best lists of peer societies.

In a related effort, we conducted a very large direct mailing test to promote the contributing membership program. We sent individual letters to 9,500 people with two brochures (history of ASOR and the contributing membership) with a return envelope. The cost of this trial was about \$6,500. We needed 47 positive responses to have this trial pay for itself, but we only received seven positive replies. We thus had a loss of a little more than \$5,000 (not including staff time) on this effort. These efforts (even if not all successful) illustrate how we are being creative and trying new things to expand our membership. Some of the efforts have worked, and others have not. We have learned from these initiatives, and we plan new efforts next year. We have learned that it is not possible to bring enthusiast members in at the contributing membership level (\$125) through direct mail, and we need another way to get people involved in ASOR at a lower level of financial commitment. This is where the Friends of ASOR (FOA) program comes into play.

The FOA program will allow people to become affiliated with ASOR for free. Anyone can become a "friend." Another way of understanding the friends of ASOR program is that it will be ASOR's house list of names and email addresses of individuals who have said that they are interested in our organization and what we do. Once this list grows large enough, we can use it to recruit paying members, participants in a lay track at the annual meeting, customers to buy ASOR videos and webinars, etc. The FOA program will also be a way that we can allow our 5,100 friends on Facebook and the 12,000 unique individuals who check out the ASOR Blog each month to be associated with ASOR in a direct way.

The FOA program will support our social media efforts and our e-newsletters. As Jennie mentioned in her membership report, we have a new member e-newsletter called News@ASOR. We hope that this newsletter (which has been funded initially by the Kershaw Family Trust) will focus on membership and professional news (e.g., Jennie's article on why she and others attend the annual meeting). We also hope to have articles that would be similar to what you might find in the Chronicle of Higher Education but focused more on ASOR (e.g., an article asking the question if there are too many people in Ph.D. programs in archaeology or if students are taking on too much debt). The other e-newsletter is titled *The Ancient Near East Today—the e-Newsletter of the Friends of ASOR*. The *ANE Today* is geared towards a public audience, and it is a free product that will be used to encourage people to become Friends of ASOR. We have hired Alex Joffe as the editor of the e-newsletter, and an anonymous trustee is paying for the start-up costs. Our goal is to have 50,000 people receiving the e-newsletter within 12 months.

As executive director, I am very excited about our new membership initiatives. We are trying creative things that are being mentioned in ACLS circles as breaking new ground. While we experienced about 8% growth in membership for 5 of the last 6 years, we will need to try new efforts if ASOR is to grow more. We have reached a plateau (this is a recurring theme in my report) with regards to professional members, and many of them only join to attend the annual meeting. We are experiencing a challenging year in that regard because Baltimore does not seem to be as attractive of a venue as San Francisco and

Chicago. Past experience has shown that San Diego (2014) will also not be a large draw. It is thus important that we explore these new ways of increasing membership. The new membership in turn will help support the annual meeting.

Publications: ASOR continue to produce journals of the highest quality on time for four years in a row. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Our subscribers now rely on ASOR to publish journals when we say we will publish them. The editors (Michalowski, Schneider, and Weinstein) are doing excellent work, and the journals not only contain articles of the highest caliber, but they look great as well. The next issue of JCS promises to be one of the best ever. NEA continues to be published on time, and for the last year plus the articles have been broader and shorter. We had previously heard criticisms about articles in NEA being too long, and more recently they have been shorter and have covered a broad range of topics and regions. BASOR continues to look better and better with the move to color. As discussed earlier, BASOR will undergo a redesign and will be printed twice a year starting in 2014. We will also increase the annual page count by 25% in 2014. Editor Jim Weinstein deserves much credit and thanks for this transition. Jim reports that article submissions have risen dramatically with the shift to color and the new page count, so we hope that demand for the journal by libraries will also increase.

In terms of subscriptions to our journals, we are stable. We have not seen the increase in subscription rates from the move to JSTOR that we were promised by the company. In their proposal, JSTOR forecasted that we would see about 80 new subscribers in 2013, and we have only had about 20 new subscribers. Their forecast for next year has been revised downwards to 12 new subscribers. Our membership and the libraries are pleased with the JSTOR service, but it has not resulted in the dramatic increases that we expected. We thus have shifted our subscription efforts to promote the journals ourselves rather than rely solely on JSTOR. The good news is that our declining institutional subscriptions reach a trough about 18 months ago, and we have been growing very slightly since then. We are partnering with JSTOR to offer free online access to our journals throughout the remainder of 2013 if libraries will sign up for a new subscription for 2014. They can cancel 2014 without having to pay anything if they are not satisfied or change their minds. This offer is only for new institutional subscriptions, and we are working on developing ways that our membership can help promote this offer. In summary, we are exploring ways of aggressively marketing our journals on our own (by using the JSTOR product), and we want to develop other initiatives that will increase this revenue stream. Any increases in revenues will pay for improvements such as the increased page count of BASOR and the move to color. They will also support other programs.

ASOR books (archaeological reports and the annual) have not been a focus for the last seven years. We have only published two to four volumes per year, and the reason was that we needed to devote staff time to other areas that were more self-sustaining. We are now in a position to expand our book publication program. The archaeological report series is on track to publish at least 3 volumes per year. The annual series (AASOR) has the most standing orders, and we need to increase the number of volumes published each year. The AASOR deserves some extra attention in 2013 and 2014 to make sure that we catch up and publish more volumes. We should also consider reviving the ASOR Books series and/or the dissertation series. Staff support of the books will not be as high or a priority as

journals and membership, but we should explore ways that we can increase our exposure through books (consistent with the strategic plan).

I should also note that the search for a new editor of BASOR will be an important task for FY14. This search will be led by Chuck Jones as chair of COP. We are all grateful to the decades of service by Jim Weinstein, and the entire board should work to make sure that Chuck and his committee have a broad pool of applicants to consider.

As a final note, I want to mention a new role that Cynthia Rufo is playing in the office and how this new role will help us address all membership and publications goals. Starting January 1st, Cynthia has been serving as the coordinator for information and planning. It should be stressed that this is a coordinator role and not a director role. She and I have worked on developing a list of all of the goals outlined in the strategic plan for each program area (e.g., publications, membership, or annual meeting). Cynthia has then worked with the director for each area to track what tasks are being done by the director and by the other staff. We have found that some areas (such as books) that were not receiving as much attention as other areas. With the example of books, we have decided to postpone efforts and to focus right now on journal subscriptions, but we are keeping better track of what parts of the strategic plan we are moving forward and what parts are on hold.

Annual Meeting: The annual meeting in Chicago was our biggest and best yet. We had 921 registrants, and about 440 paper and poster presenters. The Chicago venue drew many participants, and this will be hard to repeat in Baltimore (2013) and San Diego (2014). We continue draw more revenue for the annual meeting, but we are far from breaking even. After staff time and other expenses were factored into the program, ASOR spent \$87,500 in FY12 on the annual meeting in excess of direct revenues (see page 18 of the FY12 audit). Our short-term goal (3-4 years) is to have this figure decrease to where we are spending about \$25,000 per year on the annual meeting from unrestricted funds. We are looking at several things in FY14 to help achieve the financial part of the goal for the annual meeting. We will explore ways to reallocate staff time, and we will benefit from some advantageous hotel contract terms in FY14, 15, and 16. We have increased efforts for attracting new exhibitors and sponsors, and we will have other ASOR staff work on exhibitors and advertisers from June through September. One of the most important things to explore for 2014 and beyond is a way to attract non-specialists to the annual meeting. We hope to explore a lay-track for the annual meeting, and that track may extend into Sunday.

We are also looking at ways in which the annual meeting can more effectively address the goals outlined in the strategic plan. Just as we did with membership and publications, Cynthia Rufo and I worked with Kelley Herlihy to develop a list of goals for the annual meeting and other meetings and events. We discovered that we had good to excellent coverage of the logistics surrounding the annual meeting, but several larger goals and the outreach initiatives were not being adequately addressed. We are in the process of coming up with plans to address these larger goals. The focus through July will be supporting the annual meeting and further professionalizing the program book (this has been led by Elise and Andrew), but we will start addressing the larger goals in August and beyond.

There will be two important transitions with the annual meeting in FY14 that will require attention. Elise Friedland and Andrew Smith will be finishing their terms as co-chairs of the program committee, and a search for new chairs will be very important. That

will be led by Sharon Herbert and the chairs nominating committee. We also will have a search for a new coordinator or manager of the annual meeting program in the ASOR office. We are redefining the Director of Meetings and Events as either a Manager or Coordinator position. This redefinition will require more sharing of responsibilities throughout the office, and the executive director will continue to take the lead in the strategic planning of the annual meeting (in consultation with the chairs of the program committee and the CCC). The executive director also will continue to take the lead in contract negotiations for annual meetings that have not been signed (2017 is the next contract to sign).

Outreach: Much of the outreach initiatives have already been described above with the Friends of ASOR program and the social media initiatives, so I will not repeat them in this paragraph. It will be important that the various committee discuss how best coordinate our outreach efforts, and the CCC retreat in Detroit at the end of April will be an important step in the process for this coordination. In addition to the programs mentioned above, the strategic plan mentions a travel program, educations seminars, and lectures as ways that ASOR might broaden its outreach. All of these could fit well into the Friends of ASOR initiative, and they should all be explored in FY14 or FY15.

Archaeological Support: Sten LaBianca's report outlines the activities of CAP. He should be congratulated for regularizing the application process for affiliated digs. He is also moving forward the snap shot pages for affiliated project, and he has received a grant to support a wiki-type page to promote key research topics for the field. CAP has also formed four or five working committees, and these committees may be bring action items before the board in November 2013 or April 2014.

Scholarships and grants for excavations continue to be an area of strength. We will not reach our goal of awarding 85 scholarships or grants this year, but we should hit 60 total awards (again a record). There were 12 total Harris grants awarded, and it is anticipated that we will award between 45 and 50 dig scholarships this summer. Fundraising for scholarships continues to be a priority for the executive director, and we especially want to work on endowed scholarships as part of the Foundational Campaign.

Finance and Development: The financial details are contained in the treasurer's report, so I will not repeat them here. I would like to highlight that we have reach \$500,000 in our general fund bank account for the first time, and our endowment for operations has also grown over the \$500,000 mark.

Development. ASOR continues to expand its donor base and do well in terms of development. Last fiscal year (ended June 30, 2012) we had 282 different donors for the year. We set an ambitious goal of 350 donors for this fiscal year, and we are on target to reach that goal. As of April 17, we have 286 different donors for FY 2013. If everyone who made a gift in FY11 or FY12 but has not yet contributed this year makes a gift, we should exceed our goal in terms of participation. The results so far this fiscal year for dollars raised have also been outstanding. Last fiscal year (FY12) we raised \$196,000 total; so far in FY13 we have raised \$320,500 in gifts and pledges. In terms of progress with the Foundational Campaign, we have reached \$834,000 in pledges and gifts to date for the \$1.3 million campaign (FY12, FY13, and FY14). We are still \$466,000 away from our goal, but it is within reach. We also have a little more than a year remaining in the campaign. Since the

\$834K figure includes many pledges for next fiscal year, the last \$466K will be a challenge that will require the help of all of our trustees. We can celebrate that we have been so successful to date, and we should also celebrate that we are endowing our scholarship programs and continuing to expand our online and outreach initiatives.

I look forward to seeing you all in Indianapolis in a few days and to working with you to advance ASOR in the remainder of 2013—our 113th year!