

**Fiscal Year 2014 Executive Director's Report**  
**May 3, 2014**  
**By Andy Vaughn**

I have been ASOR's Executive Director for about seven and half years, and I have started to reflect on my time as an ASOR employee as well as to consider we might go in the next few years. My annual reports for the past two years have use the word "plateau," and I think that we are starting to move beyond that stage. Yet, we have not yet made that jump, and work remains over the next two to three years to help us move to what I would call the next level. The following report reflects on the stabilizing work that has been done to date, and then I provide my thoughts on how we might move forward (especially in terms of accomplishing the goals laid out in our strategic plan). As I have done for the last couple year, I also comment briefly on our program areas and provide my perspective for the board's consideration.

### **Basic Financial Health and Fiscal Summary**

I am pleased to again report that the fiscal state of ASOR is strong—we were in the black for FY2013, and we anticipate operating in the black for FY2014. I am now into my seventh year as Executive Director, and our financial situation has stabilized and become strong. The Foundational Campaign has had a positive impact on ASOR, especially in terms of our endowment accounts for operations and scholarships. I will discuss (below) several areas where we need to improve or expand in order to accomplish our goals, but the importance of our fiscal stability should not be overlooked or underestimated. We could not consider moving beyond what I call a plateau if we were not fiscally sound. Many officers, trustees, and volunteers deserve thanks for this situation. Thanks to their good and hard work, we are poised to move forward.

A summary of some of the gains that can be quantified for ASOR over the last 7+ years (many of which are the direct result of the Foundational Campaign) is found below:

- Membership has grown from 1,050 to a peak of 1,580 and is currently around 1,500. We anticipate a growth in membership with the revamping of the benefits for associate members (see below under membership).
- Endowment for operations have grown from \$329,000 to \$625,000 (as of March 31)
- All endowments (operations and fellowships) have grown from \$800,000 to \$1,354,000. This total will be at least \$150,000 higher when the new Strange/ Midkiff and Meyers Endowment Funds are added to the permanently restricted accounts (they are in the temporary restricted account right now).
- Annual membership and subscription revenues have grown from \$282,000 to approximately \$400,000.
- ASOR's unrestricted net assets for operations has gone from -\$180,000 to \$215,000 (as of June 30, 2013).

- Cash balances in our general fund and temporarily restricted accounts have gone from just enough to cover immediate obligations (7+ years ago) to more than \$700,000 (as of March 31)—these funds must be used for future obligations, but we now have the funds in the bank to pay for future obligations unlike some times in the past.
- Annual meeting attendance has grown from 500 to 932 (2013).
- Outreach has been revitalized with the established of the Friends of ASOR initiative. We currently have about 8,000 Friends (or subscribers to ANE Today). See below under outreach.
- Fundraising has increased in terms of dollar amount and participation: raised about \$400,000 in gifts and pledges so far this fiscal year and 395 donors to date (compared to 118 four years ago). See below under campaign summary.
- We have launched two new e-newsletters in the past 12-16 months: News@ASOR and ANE Today (see below under membership and outreach).
- Two endowed scholarship funds have been established in the past 12+ months. With the imminent establishment of three new funds in the next couple years, (see the President’s report), we will have seven endowed scholarship and grant accounts (Dever, Harris, MacAllister, Meyers, Meyers/Wright, Platt, and Strange/Midkiff)
- Foundational Campaign success
  - Our goal was \$1.3 million
    - Total raised was more than \$1.6 million not including more than an additional \$200,000 in in-kind donations
    - We established new endowments for scholarships (see above)
    - We transformed our online presence and our outreach program
  - Secondary goal was to increase donor participation to more than 400 discrete donors
    - We had 352 separate donors in FY13
    - To date in FY14, we have already had 395 separate donors
    - We have now broadened our base of donors and increased the number of major donors
    - We have met our goal of building a true “pyramid” of donors
  - Work left to complete: We did not meet our goals for endowment for operations, but we exceeded other areas. Endowment for operations (the goal of the Torch Campaign) is still something left for us to achieve
  - Something to celebrate: We have had our first campaign that exceeded our dollar goals
  - Poised to move into the future: the reason the campaign was called a “Foundational” campaign is that it was designed to build a foundation for the future. We have done that!
  - Many people to thank: This campaign was a true team effort. Everyone on the board stood up on two occasions to signal their support of the campaign, and everyone followed with their commitments. We should all be proud. As an ASOR staff person, I am certainly thankful to all of you.

## Office staffing

FY2014 was a year in which we experienced some transition and change in the ASOR office. We hired the following full-time employees during this fiscal year: Kaitlynn Anderson (Media Specialist); LeeAnn Barnes Gordon (Manager of Programs and Events); and Inda Omerefendic (Publications and Fulfillment Manager—she also served 6 months as the Interim Manager). Cynthia Rufo-McCormick has taken on new responsibilities with strategic planning and website management. Aviva Cormier remains a graduate student employee, but she also has assumed more hours and more responsibility as Membership Specialist. Selma Omerefendic has assumed the position of Assistant Director to provide greater strategic and budgetary planning as well as assuming the role of office manager. Last, but not least, we formed a Personnel Committee that advises me as Executive Director on staffing issues and provides direct oversight of many personnel matters.

During FY14, I have been working with the Personnel Committee to develop an employee handbook and guidelines for operations. We used to rely on Boston University to provide these items, and we have not developed our own policies after we moved away from all of our employees being BU employees (Selma is the last employee who is a BU employee and not an ASOR employee). We have made some good progress in FY14, and it will be important to continue this progress in FY15 and complete these policies or guidelines. We have also made progress over the past three years with increasing benefits that ASOR provides to its employees. If the budget that has been recommended by the Finance Committee is approved by the ASOR Board, ASOR will (in FY15) offer a total of \$6,000 in benefit dollars to all its employees. ASOR benefits do not yet include a complete health insurance package or retirement benefits, but we are making progress each year at providing the funds so employees can purchase essential benefits. It is my hope that we can continue this progress in FY16 and beyond.

I feel that we now have the best staff team in place since I have been Executive Director, and we are sharing responsibilities for program areas more than ever before. As a staff, we have been reading two management books together (*Forces For Good* by Crutchfield and Grant; and *Seven Measures of Success* by ASAE and The Center for Association Leadership). Both books emphasize the need for a team approach, delegation of duties, and shared leadership. To this end, one of my goals for FY14 and FY15 is to work on delegating responsibilities and to increase shared leadership among the staff as a whole. We have an excellent team in place, and I think that we are poised to work with the committees to accomplish our goal like never before.

## Membership and Outreach

The strategic plan emphasizes the importance of expanding the following:

- Traditional memberships (professional, student, and retired)
- “Lay” membership program(s)
- Different types of media engagement
- Lecture and/or seminar program(s)
- Travel/tour program(s)
- Public Outreach

As we enter the final two years of our current strategic plan, I think that we are nearing the saturation point of what we might call growth of traditional, professional members. We have reached about 1,500 to 1,600 members. These numbers can continue to grow at about 2-3% per year, but I do not see room for dramatic growth in professional members like we experienced up until 2012–13. The Strategic Plan anticipated this saturation, and that was one of the reasons that outreach and an expansion of lay membership were emphasized.

ASOR made a lot of progress with outreach and the involvement of non-specialist members in the past 12 months. The contributions of Trustees Stevan Dana, W. Mark Lanier, and Norma Kershaw cannot be overstated in this regard. Norma Kershaw has provided annual contributions to support the News@ASOR e-newsletter so that we can stay in touch with our members, and this has fostered a greater level of involvement. Stevan Dana and Mark Lanier have funded the outreach e-newsletter, *The Ancient Near East Today*. Most recently, the Friends of ASOR program (funded by a major gift from Stevan Dana), has added new programs such as the FOA Podcasts and the FOA Resource Webpage. The *ANE Today* and the FOA Podcasts are now our monthly outreach mechanisms, and they have provided us with the content to recruit more Friends of ASOR (to date we are up to 8,000 Friends). We have also launched ASORtv—a YouTube channel—and built on the successes of the ASOR Blog. We have more than 8,500 “likes” on our ASOR Facebook page, and we have consistent content posted on all of these and on our Twitter feed.

While these initiatives and this number of Friends (8,000) represent a solid start, we have not met our goals. We had a goal of making the FOA program self-sustaining; it is not. To date the FOA program has resulted in about a couple dozen new members and about \$4,000 to \$5,000 in extra donations. Our attempt to start a webinar program did not result in a sustainable program, and we do not have a backlist of products for our Friends to consider purchasing (and thus make the program self-sustaining). We have enough funding remaining in our temporary restricted account (when combined with anticipated support from the Lanier Library) to keep the program going and expanding through FY15. However, we will need to generate significant revenue (either in gifts or by other revenue) by June 30, 2015 if the program can be continued. Almost everyone agrees that these programs accomplish many of the goals set forth in the strategic plan and listed above—the key is to find a way to fund them after the initial lead gifts have been used.

There are three programs on the horizon that might generate the funds needed:

1. A revitalized Associate Membership category to supplement our Contributing Membership Program. Prior to April 2014, ASOR did not have a good option for Friends to join ASOR at a moderate price. The benefits of our Associate Membership really only attracted long-standing friends and people who a) joined to attend the annual meeting (it was free with the non-member registration) or b) joined in hopes of getting a scholarship. Our retention among Associate Members was low.

The Membership and Outreach Committee has looked at the benefits, and we have decided to make *NEA* a benefit of the Associate Membership. We have also lowered the price through at least December 31, 2014 with a \$15 “coupon.” The net price will thus be \$45 through the end of 2014. In addition to *NEA*, associate

members will receive a reduction in the annual meeting registration, discounts on ASOR books, and they will receive *News@ASOR* each month. As we post more and more content on the Friends of ASOR Resource page, Associate Members (along with other paying members) will receive access to some materials or resources that non-paying Friends do not receive. The key is to build member benefits to make it attractive for some percentage of our 8,000 Friends to become Associate Members.

2. We will continue to grow our Contributing Membership program. This program consists of a \$125 contribution to ASOR (\$100 is tax-deductible). A certain percentage of our Friends (a pretty small number to date) have become Contributing members, and we hope to see these numbers grow even more with the Associate Membership as an intermediate step.
3. Outreach seminars and tours: During FY12 and FY13 ASOR held three seminars in cooperation with BAS, and these seminars generated significant revenue—both in terms of the events themselves and in terms of new memberships. We have had about a 20% retention rate of contributing membership from the first year (everyone received a membership for “free” with the registration fee). The Membership and Outreach Committee is developing a proposal to expand this program to the annual meeting and to create something of a “second tract” that would run after the academic program ends (starting Saturday night). This plan is being developed and will be discussed further at the CCC retreat in May. We also hope to develop plans for tours and other seminars.

The seminar plan under development will also benefit from support from donors. We already have \$15,000 of pledges in place to ensure that the outreach seminar that would piggy-back on the annual meeting will not be a risk to ASOR. Based on what we experienced with the other outreach events, this one event has the possibility of funding half of the annual cost the Friends of ASOR program for a year if we have only 1/3 of the registrations that BAS experiences with their BibleFest. In addition, we anticipate that outreach seminars will attract new Associate Members who may (one day) move up to Contributing Members (in the past we tried to start seminar attendees as Contributing Members, and our retention rates were not as strong as we had hoped).

Finally, we hope to leverage our Friends program to recruit participants in a tour program such as found in our strategic plan. We will undoubtedly need to partner with a tour company because ASOR does not have the capacity to handle these tours with its current staffing. These initiatives will also generate new lay members and be a way to make the Friends of ASOR program self-sustaining. While tours are a key part of the strategic plan, we will likely need to wait until the end of FY15 or some time in FY16 to start this initiative.

In summary, the FOA program has resulted in more than 8,000 people having some sort of affiliation with ASOR. We are in the process of developing other resources so that more and more people will want to affiliate with ASOR as our Friends. We need to continue to find ways to have the program grow, and our goal (seriously) by June 30, 2015 is to have 50,000 Friends. All of the board members will have the opportunity to distribute Friends of ASOR cards (business-sized cards), and we are exploring other grass-roots ways to let people know about the program.

There are two simple keys to making the Friends of ASOR program sustainable apart from generous gifts: 1) recruit more Friends of ASOR; and 2) find ways for these Friends to becoming paying members or to purchase products or services from ASOR. We need your help and partnership in both of these tasks. The possibilities are really exciting. Once again, we are poised to accomplish the goals set forth in the strategic plan in a big way, but we still have a lot of work ahead of us.

## **Publications**

The Strategic Plan emphasizes the need for ASOR to accomplish the following with regards to publications:

- For ASOR to serve as an independent publisher as opposed to outsourcing this work to partners such as Maney Press, Brill, or Oxford University Press. These partners are excellent, and quite a few other learned societies work with them. Yet, the Strategic Plan calls for ASOR to handle its own publications of books and journals.
- For ASOR to expand the readership and subscriber base of our journals and books.
- For ASOR (or COP) to update its Guidelines and Procedures Manual for Publications.
- For ASOR to explore new products and venues for publications (especially digital products).

It is my opinion that ASOR has accomplished many of these goals with regards to journals, but we have not made much or any progress with regards to books. Last year my Executive Director's report detailed the many advances that had been made with the journals, and they also have been described in several reports by COP Chair Chuck Jones. I will simply summarize the work on journals with the following... They are all up-to-date. BASOR and NEA are now published in complete color. BASOR has 25% more pages annually, and NEA will have a 96-page issue at least once annually (compared to 64 pages for other issues). JCS continues to publish first-rate scholarship in black and white. We have also seen a successful transition to a new editor for NEA, and BASOR is poised for a successful transition with the appointment of Eric Cline and Chris Rollston as the new editors to succeed Jim Weinstein. All three journals are published in print and online through the JSTOR CSP program. The excellent work of the editors should not be underestimated, and the journals continue to be a cornerstone of ASOR and one of our key member benefits.

In terms of the other goals outlined in the strategic plan, there is much work left to be completed. Our subscription base has stabilized, but it has not grown. Inda Omerefendic (ASOR's new Publications and Fulfillment Manager) has some creative ideas about how we might grow subscriptions, and it will be important to put those plans into place. We need to grow our journal subscription base by about 5% per year in order to have the funding required to accomplish the goals set forth in the strategic plan. We have invested significant dollars in upgrading both BASOR and NEA, and we now need to see revenues grow so that we can have the funding to support the expansion of our book program.

Our book editors (Kevin McGeough and Joe Greene) have worked hard to maintain our Archaeological Report Series and the ASOR Annual. ASOR used to publish more books, especially books that were more popular and had a longer sales life. With the reorganization that took place about 8 years ago, those other books series have been on hold. The Strategic Plans calls for ASOR to expand our book program, and we have not been able to meet that goal. Much of the problem is that we do not what might be called a Director of Publications or a Publisher. Inda has some very good ideas of how to increase the sale of books in the near term, and I (as Executive Director) plan to increase the time that I spend promoting our book program in FY15 (hopefully to about 10% of my time). These efforts will help, but I do not think that we will meet our long-term goals until we can allocate more professional staff time for editorial acquisitions and for sales of textbooks, supplementary textbooks, and more popular academic books. By popular I do not mean sales in the 10,000's, but sales of 1,000 to 2,000. Absent of large donations to support such a program, it is my opinion that we need to increase journal net revenue (see the 5% goal above) to be able to pay for an expansion of the book program. If we could accomplish a 5% increase in journal subscription each year together with a 3-5% increase in subscription rates each year, we would likely have the funds needed to meet the goals set forth in the strategic plan in about four or five years. As ASOR considers financial needs for another comprehensive campaign in a few years, I would also suggest that funds to support an expanded book program would be a worthy area for consideration.

The last area of the strategic plan regarding publications that has not yet been accomplished relates to updating the Publications Guidelines and Procedures. It is my understanding that COP Chair Chuck Jones has identified this task as one of his goals for the coming year. I plan to work with him to provide whatever assistance I might (and the office might) so that we can meet this goal before the timeframe for this Strategic Plan ends.

## **Annual Meeting**

A key goal in the Strategic Plan is for ASOR to convene a vibrant annual meeting that is inclusive and broad in scope. The ASOR Board also has affirmed that ASOR should plan and manage its own annual meeting and not outsource this task to another group. As I look back over the past 7+ years, I think that we have accomplished many of the goals set forth in the Strategic Plan in this area. The academic program continues to expand, and we find that more and more scholars find it necessary and helpful to attend our Annual Meeting. Because of this growth in the academic program, I made the decision last year to redefine the primary staff position for the Annual Meeting so that the ASOR office could provide greater professional support for the academic program. It would be nice if ASOR could afford to have a full-time staff member allocated to the Annual Meeting program and another staff person who could serve as a meeting planner. In comparing ASOR with other learned societies, I found that almost all societies who could afford only one full-time staff person chose to have that person focus on the academic program and not meeting planning. To this end, we hired LeeAnn Barnes Gordon last year as the Manager of Programs and Events. She has been doing an outstanding job with both aspects of the job. I have also assumed a greater level of responsibility for contracts and some of the other

event details. Other aspects of event planning are now shared between LeeAnn and other staff members. The net result is that we have a substantially greater allocation of staff time (and professional training) to support the Program Committee and the academic program. The goal is to make the job of the Program Committee more manageable as the Annual Meeting continues to grow. LeeAnn will also work more and more with the Program Committee on expanding the intellectual and academic content of the Annual Meeting so that we can continue to meet the goals set forth in the Strategic Plan.

Finally, we plan to have an Annual Meeting retreat following the CCC retreat in May, and there will be an opportunity to hear more from the new program committee chairs about what their needs will be in FY15 in terms of staff support and office support. Danielle Fatkin and Geoff Emberling and the whole Program Committee are doing an outstanding job, and the Annual Meeting keeps getting better and better. The Annual Meeting has been one of ASOR's strengths. We plan to continue to build on this strength and to see the program become even stronger. We also want to make sure that the ASOR office adequately supports the Program Committee and its chairs so that this is a manageable job even as the meeting continues to become bigger and stronger.

### **Archaeology Policy and Support**

Sten LaBianca has provided a detailed report (see the board reports) that outlines the work of the Archaeology and Policy Committee in reviewing projects and encouraging best practices. He also included several appendices that list current and past projects, and he made a request for board members to give feedback about including past projects in ASOR's snapshot webpage and in other lists. I encourage board members to provide Sten and the Committee with that feedback.

The snapshot pages that the Committee has initiated go a long way towards meeting the goals laid in the strategic plan for ASOR to provide a web portal. Sten and Steven Savage deserve a lot of credit (and thanks) for moving this project forward. We now have the basic pieces in place, and we need to find financial resources to make the information even more useful. It will be a priority in FY15 to support this initiative and to integrate it into the Friends of ASOR Resources Pages that are developing. There always seem to be complications when integrating customized webpage into another website, and these complications or challenges will need to be overcome. ASOR would benefit from (but cannot afford at the present) a programmer to assist with such integration projects, and such a staff person (even if part-time) is a long-term desideratum.

Field scholarships and excavation grants are another key goal highlighted in the strategic plan. ASOR has made excellent progress over the past three to four years with providing funds for dig scholarships (that is, funds for students and volunteers). This has been one of the most successful aspects of the Foundational Campaign (see above for a list of endowed scholarship funds initiated in the last two years). ASOR is now in a position to provide more than 50 scholarships and grants per year, and I think that it is realistic for us to aim for a level of 60 or more per year.



While we have met and exceed our goals for dig scholarships, we have not met our goals for excavation grants (such as the Harris Grants). These funds support excavation projects and are often used as seed money for projects to get started. The Harris Fund is doing well because of a positive climate in the equities markets, but ASOR has not been successful in raising additional endowment funds for excavation grants. It has been my experience that donors prefer to give funds to student scholarships and not to excavations themselves. I think that we need to continue to encourage donors to consider such funding, but in the end we have to respect the wishes of the donors and their preferences.

Another item highlighted in the Strategic Plan is a tour of archaeological sites by colleagues. Again, this is an area where we have made some progress, but we have not met our goals. For the last two years I have visited many sites in Jordan, Cyprus, and Israel. Board Chair B. W. Ruffner accompanied me this past summer. These visits have served an ambassadorial function rather than providing peer review or professional advice. I think that these types of visits have been very helpful for me as Executive Director to learn first-hand about our work in the field, and the conversations have led to wider partnerships in a variety of areas. Yet, these visits have accomplished only part of what is highlighted in the Strategic Plan. I think that we need to consider how we want to best accomplish our goals in this regard. This topic is one that I encourage trustees to provide feedback to either me or to President Susan Ackerman—that is, should we continue visits like this or strive for something else or do both these visits and something else?

Finally, I want raise a topic that is more of a personal issue / topic rather than something mentioned specifically in the Strategic Plan. The topic is the inclusion (or exclusion) of non-North American projects as ASOR-affiliated projects. In my travels throughout the Middle East, I have been impressed by how many non-North Americans want to be involved in ASOR and are looking for ways to increase their involvement. In my travels, I have found that the success of the Annual Meeting, the success of our journals, and the success of our scholarship programs, and (indeed) the general success of ASOR, have raised our profile as a learned society. More and more professionals in Europe, Australia, and the Middle East and other parts of the world are interested in being involved in ASOR. It is my opinion that one impediment to such increased involvement (which I think does help ASOR accomplish many of the goals set forth in the Strategic Plan) is a rule that prohibits non-North Americans from having excavations projects affiliated with ASOR. This is an issue that is being studied by the CARP Committee, and that is the right place for the conversation to begin and take place for now. I do not want to circumvent that committee process, but I also felt compelled to comment on this issue in my annual report because it has been raised to me numerous times in my travels and in my meetings.

## Conclusion

In a podcast posted on the ASOR Blog just last week, Gary Rendsburg referred to the current academic climate as the “Best of Times and the Worst of Times.” If you have not listened to his comments, I encourage you to do so. I think that ASOR is in the “best of times.” Yet as Gary points out, the humanities in general are experiencing an “enrollment shift” and funding pressures that accompany that shift. We have finished a successful Foundation Campaign, and we are poised to move forward to impact our fields like never before. At the same time, many departments are under attack for funding, and interdisciplinary fields (such as archaeology) are often under financial pressure as departmental budgets are examined. The political situation in the Middle East is also turbulent, and there are many challenges to cultural heritage resources throughout the region. ASOR is posed to be an advocate like never before, and our fields and the world need our leadership and advocacy. I look forward to working with you to advance our goals and our mission in Fiscal Year 2015 and beyond—our 115<sup>th</sup> year. I am enjoying my job like never before, and I look forward to continuing to work with you.