

ASOR Strategic Planning Task Force Working Document:
Prepared for the ASOR Board of Trustees and Executive Committee
(based on the discussions of the Strategic Planning Task Force,
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I. Review of the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan

The Strategic Planning Task Force reviewed the feedback that had been collected (from the Board of Trustees, from the Chairs Coordinating Council, from certain chairs of ASOR standing committees and certain members of the 2011-2015 Strategic Planning Task Force), regarding the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan: successes, failures, and matters of ongoing concern. The Strategic Planning Task Force agreed that the feedback was rather muted, which was interpreted as a good sign. In other words: if there were a lot of problems or dissatisfaction, the Strategic Planning Task Force felt sure we would have heard about it! The Strategic Planning Task Force thus concluded that ASOR members are satisfied (even pleased) with what we have accomplished based on the 2011-2105 Strategic Plan and the foundation for the new era is set.

II. Mission Statement: Review and Proposed Revisions
(additions in **bold**, deletions in ~~strike through~~; internal comments in ALL CAPS)

ASOR's mission is to initiate, encourage and support research into, and public understanding of, the cultures and history of ~~the Near East~~ DO WE NEED A GEOGRAPHIC DESIGNATION THAT BETTER DESCRIBES THE RANGE OF OUR MEMBERS' WORK? [SEE FURTHER BELOW] from the earliest times:

- By fostering original research, archaeological ~~excavations~~ FIELDWORK, and explorations.

- By encouraging scholarship in the basic languages, cultural histories and traditions of ~~the Near Eastern~~ [???] world.
- By maintaining an active program of timely dissemination of research results and conclusions.
- By maintaining the highest ethical standards of scholarship and public discourse.
- By promoting and advocating the highest academic standards in teaching about the Near East and in interdisciplinary research.
- By offering educational opportunities in ~~Near Eastern~~ [???] history and archaeology to undergraduates and graduates in ~~North American~~ [???] colleges and universities, and through outreach to the general public. DELETE “NORTH AMERICAN” AS NOT FITTING IN WITH SOME OF OUR CURRENT EFFORTS (THROUGH CAP, THROUGH MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH) AT INTERNATIONALIZATION (AS WELL AS NOT FITTING IN WITH OUR MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHIC, WHICH IS ABOUT 20-25% NON-NORTH AMERICAN)? OR, ARE WE, AFTER ALL AND FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, THE *AMERICAN* SCHOOLS OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH?
- **By developing robust programs of public outreach for students in K-12 educational venues and for the general public.**
- **By supporting and participating in efforts to safeguard and preserve the cultural heritage of the ~~Near East~~ [???] and in efforts to raise awareness about cultural heritage degradation.**

COMMENTS:

(1) Do we need to add something in the mission statement, or elsewhere, about ASOR’s relationship to the Overseas Research Centers? This is something that makes ASOR unique in comparison to other learned societies that study the ancient world – cf., e.g., AIA and its non-relationship with the American School in Athens and the American Academy in Rome. See further IX (2) below.

(2) How to describe ASOR’s geographical reach, given that we have members who work well beyond the traditional “boundaries” of the Near East (east as far as Central Asia; south as far as the Sudan; north into the region of the Black Sea and the Caucasus; and in Phoenician and Punic colonies as far west as Sicily, Carthage, and Spain)?

Some possible alternatives [for the beginning of the mission statement]: “ASOR’s mission is to initiate, encourage and support research into, and public understanding of, the global history of the Levant (Eastern Mediterranean?) and the interactions of this region with Anatolia, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, and the rest of Western Asia.”

Some possible alternatives [for the beginning of the mission statement and elsewhere]:

- “the Levant (Eastern Mediterranean?) and the associated regions of Anatolia, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, and the rest of Western Asia”
- “ancient Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East”
- “eastern Mediterranean basin and West Asia”
- “the wider Mediterranean” (i.e., west beyond the Eastern Mediterranean, and east beyond the shoreline of Syria/Lebanon/Israel/Palestinian Territories)
- “from the Western Mediterranean to India, and from southern Russia to Ethiopia and the Indian Ocean” (this is Albright’s old formulation)

N.B. From here on out, this document will use the terms Near East and Near Eastern, while acknowledging that the geographical range of ASOR's members' interests significantly transcends these rubrics and thus the rubrics may need to be replaced.

III. ASOR's Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting has excelled in the charge outlined in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan: to serve as a vibrant venue devoted to the dissemination of knowledge about any/all aspects of the cultures and history of the Near East. Moving forward, the Strategic Planning Task Force identified two key questions for the Annual Meeting: (1) growth, and (2) meeting time and location. In addition, the Strategic Planning Task Force identified some less global questions that it will recommend to the Program Committee for its attention.

(1) Growth

- The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that ASOR's priority be growing the meeting in terms of attendance (in order to make the meeting more financially self-sustaining) without growing the number of sessions.
- More specifically, the Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that the current size of the academic program at the Annual Meeting remain as is (4 times slots for sessions per day; 8 sessions per time slot; for a total of 96 sessions over the course of the three-day meeting). Overall, our goals should be (a) to preserve the intimacy of the meeting; (b) to make it feasible for attendees to attend most (or all) of the sessions they want, without wrestling with scheduling conflicts; (c) to insure the highest possible quality of the papers presented (this last point was in particular identified as being a priority).

Nevertheless, the Strategic Planning Task Force recognizes that if the opportunity to give a paper at the Annual Meeting becomes more competitive, it will be necessary to increase the number of travel fellowships available, so that colleagues (especially junior scholars) who are not giving a paper would still have funding available to attend the meeting.

(2) Meeting Time and Location

- Given the reunification of the AAR and SBL, and given what this means in terms of ASOR's inability to access hotel space reasonably proximate to the AAR/SBL meeting, the Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that an *ad hoc* committee be formed to evaluate whether meeting at the same time and in the same location as AAR/SBL remains a viable model for ASOR.
- This committee should also consider whether ASOR – if it chooses not to continue meeting at the same time and in the same location as the AAR/SBL – wishes to meet in conjunction with some other professional organization: AIA? SAA? MESA?
- Finally, this committee should consider whether ASOR would like to cultivate closer relationships with organizations such as ARCE or ARIT and see if these organizations might be made more a part of ASOR's Annual Meeting.

IV. Publications

Like the Annual Meeting, Publications have in many ways excelled in the charge outlined in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan: producing scholarly publications on any/all aspects of the cultures and history of the Near East, reflecting the highest academic standards and employing the latest information technologies. In particular, our journal publications program has excelled. Moving forward, the Strategic Planning Task Force identified three key questions regarding Publications: (1) ASOR's monograph publications program; (2) open access; and (3) some matters regarding publications oversight, especially of our outreach publications. The Strategic Planning Task Force also identified as a priority securing permanent funding for an outreach specialist in the ASOR Office, to help in the work of outreach publications and also to oversee our other social media initiatives (Facebook, the ASOR Blog, Twitter, etc.).

(1) Monographs

- The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that ASOR reaffirm its historic commitment to monograph publishing. This is an important service we provide to our members and also to our discipline. The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends, moreover, that ASOR not only continue its current program of publishing three monograph series – the Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research (AASOR); the Archaeological Reports Series (ARS); and the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* Supplement Series – but that ASOR look to restore the ASOR Books series.
- In making this recommendation, the Strategic Planning Task Force acknowledges that monograph publication is an expensive business. But the Strategic Planning Task Force recommends ASOR affirm that this investment in knowledge production and knowledge dissemination is an investment to which the organization has a deep and fundamental commitment. The Strategic Planning Task Force further recommends that ASOR work to foster recognition of the value and worth of this investment (of both our fiscal resources and our resources in terms of time) among the public and also within our membership.

(2) Open Access

- Like monograph publication, open access requires a commitment of fiscal resources – or, more specifically, a commitment to forego income we might otherwise derive from the sale of ASOR publications. But again, ASOR's deep and fundamental commitment to knowledge production and knowledge dissemination should dictate that as appropriate, and as economically feasible, ASOR should strive to expand its open access offerings.

(3) Oversight

- The Strategic Planning Task Force agreed that oversight of ASOR's scholarly publications (our three journals and the monograph series) should be assigned (as currently) to the Committee on Publications. The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that oversight of our outreach publications (*News@ASOR*; *The ANE Today*) be assigned to the Membership and Outreach Committee.
- What exactly “oversight” of our outreach publications means, however, needs to be defined: e.g., should the editor of *The ANE Today* be reviewed every three years, just as the editors of our scholarly journals and monograph series are

reviewed every three years? Likewise, should there be a limit to the term of service for the editor of *The ANE Today*, as there are (ideally) limits of two, three-year terms for the editors of our scholarly journals and monograph series? Also, what should be the role of Membership and Outreach concerning the ASOR Blog: should Membership and Outreach be asked to help determine/review editorial policy for the Blog, and/or how should Membership and Outreach be engaged when editorial decisions regarding Blog posts come up?

- More generally, Membership and Outreach needs to define more carefully its charge, with an eye toward reasonable balance: as our outreach efforts have expanded, have we come to ask too much of Membership and Outreach?

V. Fellowships and Archaeological Support

Again, ASOR has in many ways excelled in the charge outlined in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan: to fund student fieldwork and travel fellowships. However, the Strategic Planning Task Force agreed that ASOR has not fulfilled its goal, outlined in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, to fund excavation and fieldwork research grants. In addition to (1) recommitting itself to this goal of developing grant funding for archaeological fieldwork and fieldwork-related projects (e.g., publication), the Strategic Planning Task Force urges that attention be given to (2) the development of in-house resources (e.g., a website resource page) to support archaeologists and their projects that are in the field and (3) the development of fellowships that support ASOR members' work in areas beyond fieldwork-related grants.

(1) Fieldwork and Fieldwork-Related Research Grants

- The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that ASOR seek to develop targeted funding that supports the cost of key yet discrete activities that would augment the work of our members' fieldwork: e.g., funds that would support the purchase of a crucial piece of equipment, or the fees for certain laboratory tests, or the cost of hiring a certain technological specialist.

(2) The Development of In-House Resources in Support of Archaeological Fieldwork

- The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that ASOR develop a website research page that helps facilitate the work of fieldwork projects by
 - (a) providing a place for directors to list fieldwork projects that are looking for volunteers, so as to help projects in the field find the staff that they need;
 - (b) providing directors with our "best advice" on how to meet the challenge of archiving, and more specifically digital archiving and data recording (most likely, this would be advice that CAP took responsibility for periodically updating, but possibly, this would be advice that should periodically be updated by an archaeological policy expert [on staff? consultant?]);
 - (c) providing a "directory page" that directs its audience to the location of the archives of ASOR's CAP-affiliated projects

- The Strategic Planning Task Force further asks whether ASOR could develop in-house resources to help our members in grantsmanship, e.g., the writing of a successful NSF grant?

(3) Fellowships beyond Fieldwork-Related Grants

- The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that ASOR strive to develop fellowships and grants that support the work of its members in areas beyond fieldwork-related grants, such as (a) “travel to collections” grants (fellowships to conduct work in museum collections; fellowships to work in the ASOR archives); (b) fellowships to support publications (e.g., by subsidizing subventions); (c) fellowships supporting residencies at the Overseas Research Centers; (d) as in III (1) above, fellowships to support travel to the Annual Meeting.
- The Strategic Planning Task Force further recommends that, in developing this sort of fellowship funding, ASOR should put special emphasis on raising funds to support the professional development of non-tenured and independent scholars, and of similar scholars who otherwise lack access to funding support from their employers. See further VII. below.

VI. Other Forms of Membership Support

The 2011-2015 Strategic Plan called for a committee structure that included a Membership Committee, plus several different outreach committees (education outreach, lectures and tours, media relations, and regional affiliations). In the implementation phase, this proposed structure was significantly altered, so that the various outreach initiatives that were to be overseen by separate committees were subsumed within a single “Membership and Outreach” committee. This reconceptualization has generally been very successful (most important, it has kept the CCC a manageable size, because five separate standing committees were subsumed into one). However, the Strategic Planning Task Force did recognize some pending issues (1), and other issues (2) have been raised as a matter of concern within the committee itself.

(1) Issues Concerning Membership and Outreach Identified by the Strategic Planning Task Force

- When the CCC was formed as mandated in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, each committee in that body developed a plan that defined itself and outlined its own sense of its charge and its responsibilities. Because Membership and Outreach came “late to the game,” so to speak, it still needs to do this. See also V (3) above.
- Although the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan called for “expanding ASOR’s lecture program,” this is not something that has been done, and the Strategic Planning Task Force raised the question of whether this should in fact be a priority. More specifically, it was noted that many ASOR members already lecture through the AIA and that “it might be a fool’s venture” for ASOR to try to replicate what the AIA is already doing.

(2) Issues Concerning Membership and Outreach Identified within the Committee

- The Membership and Outreach Committee has identified as a priority that ASOR members should have equal access to the benefits of membership bestowed by the organization, meaning especially that international members

should have the same access to benefits as North American members (see further II. above). In particular, Membership and Outreach urges that ASOR's international members be eligible to apply for CAP affiliation for fieldwork projects, just as North American members can. The Strategic Planning Task Force urges that Membership and Outreach and CAP work together to try to resolve this issue.

- The Membership and Outreach Committee is also wrestling with the issue of institutional memberships, as the old “carrot” (free subscriptions to journals) is not as lucrative as it was in the days before JSTOR. Why, then, would institutions seek institutional membership, and should there perhaps be categories of institutional memberships: doctoral institutions versus non-doctoral institutions, North American institutions versus non-North American institutions?

- The Membership and Outreach Committee, as well as the Strategic Planning Task Force, agree that ASOR values diversity and strives to be inclusive and promote diversity in its fieldwork projects, in its fellowship awards, in its appointments to committees and other governance bodies; in its appointments of session chairs, etc.

- Indeed, demographic diversity throughout the organization is essential for ASOR's growth and well-being in the 21st century, as the United States and Canada – still the home of the majority of ASOR members – are both becoming increasingly diverse. ASOR should thus strive to increase the presence of underrepresented communities within ASOR over the next 3-5 years.

VII. Fostering the Field and (Simultaneously) the Next Generation

(1) Fostering the Field: Advocacy

- ASOR will seek to promote the study of the Near East through a commitment to engage the national humanities community. E.g., ASOR commits to regularly attending the annual meeting of the National Humanities Alliance, both in order to advocate on behalf of the field of Near Eastern studies and to assert more generally the value of the humanities.

- ASOR will likewise seek to engage more in public advocacy in the federal arena, e.g., by speaking out against proposals to decrease NSF funding available to the social sciences (and so to archaeology) and against proposals to decrease NEH funding available for research, with the goal of sustaining these important funding sources both for the next generation and for our own.

(2) Fostering the Field and (Simultaneously) the Next Generation

- As articulated in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, ASOR also seeks to support the development and advancement of Near Eastern programs in university and college departments, by – among other things – supporting these departments' junior faculty.

- At the same time, ASOR recognizes that traditional career paths in higher education are no longer as likely a career option for scholars in our field, and, with that in mind, ASOR seeks opportunities to support scholars who may not pursue, or who are no longer pursuing, a traditional career track, by supporting

professional development of non-tenure-track and independent scholars and by supporting graduate students in their exploration of career opportunities beyond traditional careers in higher education.

- The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that the Annual Meeting incorporate programming on non-traditional career tracks: e.g., in the NSA or elsewhere in the federal government; in IT; in the fields of publishing and journalism.

- Likewise, the Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that the Junior Scholars discussion at the Annual Meeting – one place where conversations about non-traditional career tracks is likely to take place – be better publicized: (a) by being listed as an event in the text of the “Academic Program,” rather than only in the schedule of “Business Meetings, Receptions, and Events,” in the Annual Meeting program book; (b) by being included in a “Highlights of the Meeting” page at the front of the Annual Meeting program book.

- The Strategic Planning Task Force also recommends that the AIA/ASOR job posting site have a place dedicated to the posting of non-academic careers and that this site also include links to other sources for non-academic jobs (e.g., a link to www.usajobs to facilitate the searching of federal jobs available in archaeology).

- Finally, the Strategic Planning Task Force notes the integral relationship between ASOR’s engaging scholars following all possible career tracks and ASOR’s responsibility to promote the relevance of the field of Near Eastern studies, as one indication of our relevance is precisely the fact that there is so much important work we can do both inside and outside the academy.

(3) Fostering the Next Generation

- As noted in II. above, the Strategic Planning Task Force proposes that the fostering of the next generation means not just fostering graduate students and recently minted Ph.D.’s, but also fostering younger generations still (“By developing robust programs of public outreach for students in K-12 educational venues and for the general public”).

- Likewise, as noted in VI. above, the Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that fostering of the next generation means paying special attention to issues of diversity. Could we direct some outreach efforts toward students enrolled at historically black colleges and universities, for example?

VIII. Cultural Heritage

- As noted above, the Strategic Planning Task Force recommends adding language to the ASOR Mission Statement that commits ASOR to initiate, encourage and support research into, and public understanding of, the cultures and history of the Near East, by, among other things, “supporting and participating in efforts to safeguard and preserve the cultural heritage of the Near East and in efforts to raise awareness about cultural heritage degradation.” In making this recommendation, the Strategic Planning Task Force urges that ASOR recognize that the safeguarding and preservation of the Near East’s cultural

heritage is a core and growing area of interest to ASOR members and a responsibility that we should thus strive to assume, as long as it is feasible for us to do so and be fiscally responsible.

- Currently, our major organizational endeavor in this respect is ASOR's Syrian Heritage Initiative, undertaken as part of a cooperative agreement with the United States Department of State. ASOR realizes, however, that the Department of State funding will someday end.

- The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that ASOR not pursue large-scale efforts in cultural heritage safeguarding and preservation in the absence of external funding. That is, the Strategic Planning Task Force recommends that while ASOR is fortunate to be able to currently participate in the work of protecting and preserving the Near East's cultural heritage in major and significant ways, our core programs – e.g., Annual Meeting, publications, fellowships – must take funding priority.

IX. Other Matters of Strategic Concern

(1) ASOR needs a better web page, and a web page that is continually modified and updated to reflect best website practices.

(2) ASOR needs to better define its relationship with the Overseas Centers.

- As noted in II. above, ASOR's relationship to the Overseas Research Centers is something that makes ASOR unique in comparison to other learned societies that study the ancient world. The Strategic Planning Task Force recommends, moreover, that ASOR endorse enthusiastically the continuing of its valued relationships with the Overseas Research Centers, especially exploring how to make those relationships more effective and functional to the mutual benefit of both ASOR and the Overseas Research Centers. E.g., should ASOR commit to trying to secure permanently the now-lapsed funding that supported the Centers' Directors' Exchange?