

Confidential memo from the Executive Director to the ASOR Board about ASOR CHI  
(and a few comments about ASOR revenues in the future)

Dear colleagues,

Susan Ackerman asked me to provide a memo to the Board with an update on ASOR CHI and some of the events that took place this summer. While the material here is not really confidential, it is sensitive. I thus ask that you not distribute it widely. The memo provides responses to some questions raised by President Susan Ackerman before the Executive Committee meeting in October: more specifically, why the CHI renewal, which we had anticipated would happen during Summer 2015, did not in fact happen until late September, and why the project was renewed for only one year, rather than the two-year extension that we discussed with the Board last April. I presented these responses orally at the EC meeting, and I wanted to share the responses with the board.

I then include some comments about revenue streams that will be important as we consider the new strategic plan.

Best,  
Andy

*Why was the CHI project renewed for one year and not two years as previously anticipated?*

We do not have an official response or a response in writing from the DOS. However, it seems that there were funds available last fiscal year (the federal fiscal year) that could pay for another year. It does not seem that it was possible to combine current year funds with funds that can be spent beyond one year. Thus, there seems to have been a preference to renew for one year. We hope that we can apply for a renewal next spring, and we now know to ask for a one-year renewal as opposed to a multi-year renewal. We have not been promised anything beyond this current federal fiscal year.

*Why did the renewal process take so long?*

Again, we do not have an official answer nor anything in writing. It seems that renewals of more than \$1 million (which a two-year approval would have been) take approval at the assistant secretary level and higher. We suppose that those people were busy negotiating the Iran deal, and our cooperative agreement was not viewed as pressing. In addition, there was a preference to hold off on the renewal until the end of the fiscal year (September 30).

*Why was the ultimate renewal for \$900,000 and not \$750,000?*

Once we finally were ready to sign the second-year extension, Andy was asked to go to Washington on short notice (six days) to report on the first year, so the DOS could perform an evaluation on the project. It was possible that the evaluation could have been negative and funding would not have been approved. Fortunately, the DOS was very pleased with the CHI team, and funding was approved. About two weeks later, Michael Danti and Andy Vaughn were asked to return to do more presentations. These were also received well. During that trip, Michael and Andy showed some staff in Near Eastern Affairs a web application (see

[www.heritagemonitor.org](http://www.heritagemonitor.org)), and the DOS liked the app and wanted to fund it with an additional \$150,000. This is one-time funding, and it is not anticipated that Year 3 funding (if it were to be approved) would include that increase.

*What was the event sponsored by the DOS at the Met on September 29?*

The DOS sponsored a cultural heritage event at the Met at the end of the September, and the event featured public/private partnerships. ASOR CHI Academic Director Michael Danti gave the first presentation. His talk featured the work of the CHI team. Andy Vaughn and Jesse Casana attended the event as guests in the audience. Michael did a fantastic job, and everyone was pleased with what ASOR was/is doing. This was the second year that ASOR was featured at this event.

*Why was the cultural heritage event planned by ASOR for October 6 cancelled/postponed?*

Some of you may have noticed that ASOR originally planned to hold a cultural heritage event at the Elliot School at GWU on October 6, 2015. We decided to postpone this event for several reasons: 1) the DOS preferred to focus their efforts on the event at the Met rather than this event a week later in Washington; 2) there have been about 8 to 10 similar events in NYC and Washington over the past 5 weeks (including a three-day event at the Smithsonian from October 7-9); ASOR and AIA have been awarded a NEH Chairman's grant for a conference in December 2015. We thus decided to focus our efforts on the symposium at our annual meeting and on the event in December (see below).

*What is the NEH Chairman's grant?*

The Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) and American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) have jointly received a NEH Chairman's Grant to support a two-day summit in Washington, DC on December 10–11, 2015. During the summit, representatives from organizations engaged in collecting data on the cultural heritage of Syria will agree upon ways to cooperate and reduce duplication of effort. NEH Chairman William "Bro" Adams will be one of the moderators for the public event to be held on Friday, December 11, at the National Geographic Society.

Relatedly, ASOR and the German teams (DAI and the Museum for Islamic Art) have signed an MOU to share datasets and to cooperate. ASOR plans to sign a similar MOU with CRANE and the English/French team. We will thus have several formal agreements to share and cooperate before the NEH event in December.

*Do we anticipate other funding? Do we anticipate funding beyond Year 2?*

ASOR received \$57,000 from the Kaplan Fund last year. Unfortunately Kaplan has just informed us that they are postponing all future grants until mid-2016 after they undergo a review. This decision does not appear to have any to do with our performance; rather, their board wants to reassess their programs before making future cultural heritage grants.

We have received positive word about funding through a collaborative agreement with the Getty Conservation Institute. I need to stress that this is a collaborative agreement and not a grant (GCI has asked that we make sure not to refer to it as a grant as they do not award grants). The collaborative agreement will total \$183,500. \$70,000 of the funding will go directly to the software developer for Arches for upgrades and enhancements that will benefit ASOR and other cultural heritage users of Arches. ASOR will serve as a collaborator for the remaining \$113,500.

\$58,500 will be used for a sub-award to University of Central Florida to support Dr. Scott Branting's work on Arches for ASOR CHI. \$30,000 will be used for ASOR CHI salaries, and \$25,000 will be used for Collaboration Grants for participants in the NEH-funded summit in Washington.

We are hopeful that ASOR CHI can continue its work beyond September 2016 through funding from the federal government and other groups. Nothing is guaranteed of course, and Year 3 funding is uncertain from the DOS.

*Comments on some ASOR revenue streams that may be important for the Strategic Plan*

I certainly echo the assessment provide by Susan Ackerman in her report—"ASOR is thriving." You will notice from the finance reports that ASOR finished FY15 with a \$51,000 increase in unrestricted net assets available for operations (\$42,000 when you subtract expenditures for property and equipment). This brings our total of unrestricted net for operations to \$252,000. Another way to think of this total is that it's our cash surplus or "rainy-day fund." This number is even more impressive when we realized that the figure was a negative (-\$300,000) just ten years ago. Moreover, all of different endowment accounts now total \$1.5 million. While we are certainly not overly rich, we should be proud about how well we have done. The Foundational Campaign had a goal of establishing a foundation upon which we could build, and it certainly accomplished that goal.

At the same time, I want to remind us all of what we will need to accomplish the goals presented in the strategic plan—we need more revenues from sources that are not dependent on grants or fundraising. Please do not get me wrong—I am confident that we can continue to raise much of the funds needed for the strategic plan, and I know that Ed Wright and the Development Committee have been chomping at the bit to get the plan in place. We also can continue to have success with grants and cooperative agreements through our Cultural Heritage Initiatives. The following is not intended to diminish what we have accomplished nor to doubt what we can raise in future; rather, I want to encourage us to also redouble our efforts to continue growing our traditional revenue streams.

Membership, subscriptions, annual meeting registrations, and book sales are the "bread and butter" of our revenues. We have doubled our revenues from these sources from where we were ten years ago; however, we have not succeeded in growing them more than a few percentage points per year in the past three years. I do not want to imply that we have done a bad job—quite the contrary. JSTOR has not met our expectations for journals, and Swets (another subscription agency) declared bankruptcy. At a recent meeting of learned societies, an executive director of a peer society shared that their revenue from memberships and subscriptions had dropped more than 30% in the past three years. Other peer societies (certainly not all) have experienced deficits in their unrestricted net assets for operations. In fact, I would say that ASOR has been quite successful in being able to grow slightly over the past three years considering a challenging climate.

At the same time, we have not met our goals. Five years ago we set an ambitious goal of reaching 2,000 members in 2016. We also set a goal of growing institutional subscriptions to

*BASOR* and *NEA* by at least 25%. The attainment of both of these goals would give us more than \$100,000 of additional revenue every year. I also want to stress that I am convinced that both goals are very much in reach, and there are concrete ways that trustees can help us meet these goals.

As part of a subscription growth plan, Inda Omerefendic has compiled a list of all institutions that do not subscribe to *BASOR* but have had a professor attend our annual in the past five years. We are already in the process of reaching out to librarians at these schools, as well as the professors who have attended the annual meeting. The editors of *BASOR* have been partners in this process by writing a letter to their colleagues to encourage them to have their schools subscribe to *BASOR*.

I mention this one initiative because it represents a concrete way that you as trustees could help ASOR grow our subscriptions. We need volunteers (and our trustees would be ideal) to contact these professional members and encourage them to have their institutions subscribe to *BASOR*. Because an institutional subscription to *BASOR* is \$280, an increase of 100 subscriptions would mean \$28,000 per year. That goal is certainly within reach as we are way behind some of our peer societies (AIA, SBL, SCS) in institutional subscriptions.

Similarly, we need to grow our membership numbers. Again, we have reached a plateau in terms of membership over the past three years. Randy Younker has some very creative ideas about increasing ASOR membership in Europe and the Middle East. We also need to attract some of our 12,000 Friends of ASOR to become contributing members. Inda and Aviva Cormier have come up with some excellent (and creative) ideas for increasing membership. I hope that some trustees will volunteer to work with the staff and members of the membership and outreach committee to see our membership numbers grow by 10% per year for the next few years.

In short, we do not need dramatic growth to provide the revenues needed to bring about the goals outlined in the strategic plan, but we do need some growth. I think that they are all within reach, and the staff would be grateful for your partnership and help in carrying out these initiatives.

*Summary:*

The state of ASOR is indeed strong, and the Board has been leading the way. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as ASOR's executive director for the past nine years. So much has happened during that time, and the good things are a result of many leaders who have worked for the good of ASOR without worrying about personal credit. I look forward to continuing to work with you all to advance ASOR in 2016—our 116th year!