A Call to Action

The Association stands at a crossroads, and we need to chart a clear direction for which way we are headed. The field’s future, as well as the Association’s, depends on our ability to dismantle barriers of inequity that hobble entry and career advancement for researchers and practitioners of color. We have acknowledged for years that our main revenue sources (membership, meetings, publication royalties) all face significant challenges. Our field’s sprawling intellectual terrain is a strength of the discipline, but the future of discipline-based knowledge production needs to be assessed, as does the structure of a scholarly and professional society whose mission is to advance the discipline. Higher education institutions—the centers of teaching, learning, research, and training for the next generations of anthropologists—face transformational forces over the next few years. Career pathways for anthropologists into business, government, and nongovernment settings need to be expanded and strengthened, and the Association can advance the discipline by helping make it less explicitly academic-centric. Our membership numbers have decreased in recent years, which calls out for assessment. As older members retire, we are challenged to demonstrate the value of AAA membership to students and early-career anthropologists.

The Association faces some important choices over the next several years concerning (1) our publishing program and how to simultaneously honor its core values of quality, breadth, accessibility, equity, and sustainability; (2) our meetings and conferences, and how to use them to greatest advantage in promoting knowledge circulation, professional development, and community formation among our members; (3) our membership value proposition and how to keep participation in AAA activities and events affordable while coordinating with emerging, less formalized institutional spaces for affiliation; and (4) development of resources to expand pathways into the profession for the next generation of anthropologists, support professional development across the span of careers in a diverse range of settings, and increase public awareness of the important contributions anthropologists make to building a just and sustainable world.

The Association has been guided by a Long Range Plan, which is incrementally modified each year, but has not been fully revisited in a decade. Through an intensive consultation process with a number of key stakeholders, we have taken stock of the strategic landscape, our assumptions about the pace of change in this landscape, and we have considered a renewed vision for the Association to take definitive, actionable steps regarding inclusion, equity, and diversity in our membership and advancing the field through a broad range of career pathways. We have forged a consensus about the strategic priority focus areas that will guide our work for the next five years.

Change is the rule, not the exception. The events of the last year and a half make it imperative that we develop the capacity to anticipate change, reimagine how to take advantage of change to continue serving our members, and help advance the field well past its historical roots to
make it a more welcoming organizational home for people who have felt alienated and marginalized in the past.

AAA’s Mission, Vision, and Values

AAA’s mission is to advance anthropology as a discipline of scientific and humanistic research, practice, and teaching that increases our fundamental understanding of humankind, and applies this understanding to addressing the world’s most pressing problems.

AAA’s vision is to enrich the discipline’s intellectual terrain, challenging ourselves to dismantle the barriers that have hobbled entry and career progression for scholars and practitioners, with special focus on anthropologists who have felt alienated from, harmed by, or marginalized by the Association in the past.

The core values that guide the AAA in realizing this vision are community, quality (intellectual as well as member services), equity, inclusion, accessibility, and sustainability.

Strategic Focus Areas (2021-2026)

Our strategic focus areas for the next five years include building trust and accountability within the Association, supporting equitable knowledge production and circulation, making the association a more welcoming home for people in practice settings, and enhancing public awareness of how anthropologists contribute to a more just and sustainable world. We must also ensure that we have the financial resources to enact these priorities.

1. Trust and Accountability

Goal: To build a culture of trust and accountability within the Association that recognizes past and ongoing harms, transforms barriers into opportunities for justice-oriented engagements, creates durable action, and re-evaluates access to all facets of the organization.

Proposed Objectives:

- In close collaboration with affected individuals and members, identify and transform AAA policies and practices that operate as barriers to participation among anthropologists across organizational/institutional affiliations, career stage, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class, religion, national identity, and gender.
- Identify specific ways in which the Association’s governance structure, including the size and composition of the Executive Board, the advisory committee structure, and the process for nominating and appointing Association leaders, can be modified to enhance a culture of trust and accountability within the AAA.
● **Strengthen alliances** with other scholarly / professional societies and constituent groups to foster sense of belonging and increase inclusion in AAA.
● Identify ways to increase engagement and membership of historically under-represented groups and practicing anthropologists.
● **Improve outreach to Minority-serving Institutions**, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal colleges, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, as well as community colleges and high schools, to increase awareness of the value of belonging to the AAA community.

2. Knowledge Production and Circulation

**Goal:** To promote the equitable production and global circulation of anthropological knowledge and its practical implications through meetings, conferences, technical reports, visual and performance forms and other activities that emphasize intellectual rigor, originality, inclusiveness, and accessibility of the field’s core knowledge base.

**Proposed objectives:**
- Encourage **knowledge circulation among researchers and practitioners** that highlights the conduct of anthropological work in a range of professional settings, through innovative meeting formats and occasions.
- Guided by its international advisory group, further develop the **Open Anthropology Research Repository (OARR) as a global resource** for equitable exchange of research and related materials in any language and many formats.
- Support the **inclusion of new voices** to submit, publish, review, and serve in editorial capacity in AAA journals.
- **Reorganize AnthroSource portfolio** to have a more unified, coordinated, inclusive, and accessible presentation of anthropological scholarship.

3. Welcoming Home for Anthropologists in Practice Settings

**Goal:** To make the Association an organizational home where anthropologists working (or aspiring to work) in business, government, and non-profit settings have a strong sense of belonging and clearly see opportunities for meaningful engagement.

**Proposed objectives:**
- Assist departments in **timely and accurate tracking of graduate placements** to produce (1) a clear picture of career pathways that are possible with anthropological training and (2) a network of individuals and organizations embedded in these practice settings.
- **Design annual meeting events and activities** to boost attendance of anthropologists working in practice settings.
● Create year-round programming and activities that fit into the work lives of anthropologists from all subfields of anthropology who are employed in practice settings.

● Design member benefits that increase the value of membership for practitioners.

● Provide additional ways for practitioners to affiliate themselves with the association that can later be converted to full members, could be practitioner-specific (see strategy above under inclusion).

● Strengthen AAA resources to support preparations for diverse career pathways.

● Create an institutional membership program for organizations in the business, government, and non-profit sectors with a history of employing anthropologists, with member benefits that offer a compelling value proposition.

● Create opportunities in meetings, publications, and online events to showcase the work that practitioners do in diverse professional settings and contexts of practice.

4. Outreach, Advocacy, and Education

Goal: To increase awareness on the part of prospective employers, media, public policy officials, and the general public of relevant anthropological scholarship and practice through outreach, advocacy and policy making, and public education initiatives.

Proposed objectives:

● Develop and strengthen new public-facing programs and activities to place anthropology more centrally in the public conversation about important social and scientific issues, and raise awareness of anthropology’s value and contributions to addressing these issues.

● Develop and strengthen communications workshops and programs (e.g., the OpEd Project, 3-Minute Thesis competition) that enhance members’ ability to more effectively interact with policy makers, the media, and the general public.

● Strengthen outreach to departments of anthropology to help them promote the field to prospective students and employers.

● Build pathways into the profession by exposing students and teachers in K-12 and International Baccalaureate programs to anthropologists’ treatment of key subjects, including developing grade-appropriate, decolonial, anti-racist, feminist curriculum