

2021 A Year of Action and Engagement:

A REPORT FROM RANDY FISER, CEO, AGU



I feel privileged and honored to have joined an organization that is a global leader in the world of Earth and space sciences and science policy. It is an amazing opportunity to step into a role in an organization whose values and goals align so completely with my own – to work to leave this world a better place. Most important from my point of view, AGU’s strategic plan clearly marks out a path forward: maintaining our reputation for scientific excellence, especially in the area of discovery science, while energetically moving more deeply into the *solutions space* to solve pressing societal challenges.

The past year has been one of action and expansion, in several important directions. I feel enormous gratitude for the accomplishments that our team – staff, volunteers, and leadership – achieved to make this past year so successful.


AGU’s strategic plan is an ambitious long-term vision. Part of the work of the past year was developing an implementation plan that can support those goals. But however big the vision for the future, we need to be very clear – within our own community and beyond – that AGU’s long-term thinking is firmly anchored in our critically important core work of scientific discovery. Discovery science is part of the same continuum with solutions science; you cannot get to solutions without discovery. AGU will continue to address, even more directly and urgently, the survival of our planet, through the individual and combined efforts of the entire organization. It’s a growth trajectory that does not leave anyone behind; it in fact creates more opportunities for everyone to have a voice in this organization and beyond, and to be part of the future of our planet and universe.



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is woven into the fabric of AGU

A critically important commitment, and one I am especially proud of, is the organization's serious and sustained focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. In August 2020, the AGU Board and staff announced eight action steps that AGU is taking to address systemic racism in the Earth and space sciences community. These steps will invite new voices and spark new conversations with people who have historically not been at the table. To do so, we will need to change the table.

DEI champions and leaders in the geosciences have long needed a means for networking and professional development. The AGU LANDInG Academy was designed to develop competencies in DEI leadership. This includes strategic planning, understanding best practices, and building evidence-based models for success. Our first cohort was launched in December 2021 and its members attended AGU Fall Meeting. I am eager to see how they apply their learnings to their institutions. We are now partnering with National Science Foundation (NSF) to extend the impact of what we are learning; NSF post-doctoral fellows in the Earth and space sciences will now participate in the initial training for this program.



Partner broadly to effectively address scientific and societal challenges

We are also enlarging the table as a *convenor*. As an example, during the pandemic, thanks to the connections brought by our GeoHealth section, AGU helped run a conference that included the World Health Organization and the World Meteorological Organization. We recently launched a joint effort with five other partner societies on community science, which leverages the impact of AGU programs – including the Thriving Earth Exchange. Our health as human beings depends on the health of the planet and engaging communities at all levels. The power of AGU to bring health and climate together into a conversation, and forge a shared agenda with communities, demonstrates our far-reaching strategic capability.

This year AGU attended COP26 for the first time, and our focus was on understanding how we can amplify the work of our community—the work of our individual scientists—to have an impact on climate change. We believe it is the political leadership that must make the crucial decisions, always guided by the evidence and the discoveries developed by scientists.

AGU can play an important role in ensuring accountability. Climate change continues to evolve, and climate impacts need to be continually monitored and assessed. The specific global targets and agreements committed to at COP26 will also require a sustained monitoring effort. The scientific community will need to develop and deploy reliable sensors for this purpose, and to closely monitor climate change, and governments will need to fund them and share the data. Just as important, governments must commit the financial resources to address the needs of other countries that may already be experiencing severe climate impacts.

“Science is Society” AGU Fall Meeting

I think many of us found it exciting, in ways we might not have expected, to be part of the hybrid Fall Meeting this past year. It was wonderful to see the in-person energy that we had missed in 2020. And at the same time, we saw the same dramatic inclusivity that was present in 2020, with people who were unable to participate in person joining from all over the world – many who were engaging with AGU for the first time.

The most exciting aspect of the meeting, for me, was to see the richness of perspectives that bubbled up, and the energy of the conversations, which were wide ranging, from new discoveries about our planet and our universe to the difficulty of addressing environmental justice. People like Dr. Robert Bullard, Dr. Kelly Mack, Dr. Jeffrey Sachs and Sekou Andrews talked about how to communicate science in a way that gets people excited about this work, helps them to understand it and to begin thinking about how to diversify the scientific community itself and address the “poverty trap” climate change has visited upon the poorest nations and people.

I was especially inspired to meet some of our early career scientists, people who seem to have “solutions-based” science in their DNA. They are more than ready to tackle the difficult issues of environmental justice and inclusion. And I’m grateful that we can continue to revisit all these conversations, through the virtual online content that we made available through February.

With all the important new directions for our work, there remains an essential core that we need to preserve: our scientific work – the source of the new discoveries and data technologies that make our policy work possible. You can’t get to the solutions the world needs without supporting the process of scientific discovery. In fact, the urgency of these policy challenges creates ongoing opportunities for significant research. Science is needed to inform policy, and policy can also inform science. We were pleased to have Special Envoy for Climate Secretary John Kerry join our Fall Meeting and share the importance of following the science and the necessity that all nations be involved in climate solutions.

No one should underestimate the difficulties entailed in bringing scientific perspectives and data into the world of policy making. But science *does* need to be represented in critical policy discussions. How do we, the scientific community, present our best information as clearly as possible?



“In order to tackle our climate crisis, we need to move quickly to specific policy frameworks and pathways, and for that we need AGU to play its essential role”

The above quote was the first of several appeals Dr. Sachs made to AGU and its’ leadership during his Plenary Lecture at Fall Meeting.

He called for the “contributions AGU can and has to uniquely contribute useable information” to policy makers to plan the transformation to a zero-carbon energy system and to sustainable land management. He also urged AGU — our leadership and our science community — to identify what resources we will need for systematic deep and vital Earth system monitoring and observation. This may be one of the *most* significant contributions AGU can make toward addressing our climate crisis.

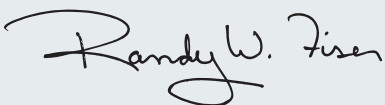
We have a lot to do this year

Ensuring the diversity of our geosciences community is critically important. We need everyone at the table; we need to hear and understand their voices. We need to explore partnerships with unique organizations that we may not have partnered with in the past. We have to be vigilant in conscientiously removing barriers that keep people from participating in this work. This new world we are now living in requires change, flexibility, and a strong partnership among AGU’s staff, volunteers and leaders.

But there are untapped resources as well. Of course, the science is critically important- the science is what brings us together. But there are many other ways to contribute, to be part of this work, besides doing science: through volunteering; through financial contributions; through bringing new people to the table.

We are only successful when our community engages with us, on many different levels, to help us achieve our goals. Based on the energy and sense of commitment that I’ve seen so far, I feel certain that the coming year will once again be a period of almost limitless energy, talent, and discoveries.

Thank you for being a part of the community that values and takes action on behalf of science.



Randy Fiser