

# ASEH Strategic Plan, 2018

## *Preamble*

This is the third ASEH strategic planning document, following those of 2006 and 2012. Like its predecessors, this document reflects the conviction that it is timely and appropriate for the organization to ponder and articulate its mission, vision, and strategic goals. Such exercises are good practice and should assist the Society to thrive and succeed in a changing environment. In formulating this plan we seek to respond to broader circumstances – the maturation of the field of environmental history; shifting, and to some extent unpropitious, fiscal outlooks for non-profit organizations; an apparently narrowing horizon of opportunities for grant and foundation support – and the impending retirement, late in 2018, of ASEH’s long-serving and highly effective Executive Director. This Strategic Plan is intended to serve as a guide for the Society going forward. Ideally we see it contributing to the strategic management of society affairs through this time of transition and adaptation. We would hope that this document encourages discussion, on an annual basis, among the Executive Director, the President, President-Elect and immediate Past-President of ASEH, to evaluate progress and to prioritize the aspirations to be addressed in the coming year.

This Strategic Planning exercise was led by ASEH President Graeme Wynn, who drafted an initial version for presentation to the Society’s Executive Committee in March 2018. This draft was refined by a committee comprised of Emily Greenwald, Lynne Heasley, Mark Madison, Zachary Nowak and Lisa Mighetto (ex officio). Lisa Mighetto provided a great deal of information on the operations of the Society since 2012. The plan and the committee considered the immediate past and potential future status of the Society’s human and financial resources, its specific goals and broader aspirations, and its capacity to respond to challenges and opportunities considered likely to emerge between 2018 and 2023. After discussion of the draft Plan by the ASEH Executive Committee, which conferred its imprimatur in March 2018, ASEH members were invited to contribute to the strategic planning exercise through a call for input in the Spring 2018 Newsletter. Suggestions were considered by the

Strategic Planning Committee in revising the document. A penultimate draft of the committee's report was shared with three past-Presidents (Gregg Mitman, Kathy Brosnan, and Bill Cronon) and President-Elect Ed Russell III; their responses and suggestions were further considered for incorporation into the final document.

Following a brief history of the ASEH, this Strategic Plan offers a VISION STATEMENT for the Society, intended to articulate purposes and aspirations crucial to the future of the organization and inspire a commitment to its future. We formulate a new MISSION STATEMENT to clarify the purposes of ASEH and to provide an essential touchstone for the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan itself turns on three STRATEGIC GOALS FOR ASEH: to INCREASE OUTREACH; TO IMPROVE RELEVANCE TO MEMBERS; and TO ENSURE THE CONTINUING VIABILITY OF THE SOCIETY. Subsidiary objectives flow from each of these goals. These objectives, styled as ASPIRATIONS, have been shaped by a careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Society (internal) and an assessment of the opportunities and threats (external) that lie ahead.

## *History & Context*

As it enters its fifth decade ASEH (founded in 1977) can look back on forty years of growth and achievement in the promotion of environmental history in the United States and, increasingly, on a world stage. A pioneer in the field at its inception, ASEH joined forces in 1996 with the Forest History Society to co-publish *Environmental History*, the leading journal in the field (published since 2010 by Oxford University Press). ASEH encouraged the launch of the European Society for Environmental History (ESEH, 1999) and maintains an affiliation with that organization and with the Sociedad Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Historia Ambiental (SOLCHA, 2004). It has valuable links with the Rachel Carson Centre (RCC) and with the Australian and New Zealand Environmental History Network (ANZEHN), and it has supported the development and expansion of the International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations (ICEHO) which will hold its 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress in 2019. ASEH has been a member of the National Coalition for

History since 1999 and a member of the American Council of Learned Societies since 2004.

### **Membership:**

Membership in ASEH is dominated by North Americans (roughly 80% US and 9-10% Canadians), but includes people from many other countries; among the latter are several who are also members of ESEH and SOLCHA. After a period of steady growth from the 1990s, membership in ASEH began to plateau at approximately 1,000 members in the mid 2000s and has remained relatively constant since. Similar trends in membership have been recorded by many societies and reflect at least in part (i) the effects of the financial crisis of 2008 and (ii) the decoupling of membership and journal access with the rise in digital subscriptions and ready availability to those with digital access to good libraries. Because ASEH does not have a membership database system, it has limited data on the composition of the membership (professor vs. graduate student, departmental affiliation, etc.) either currently or as it has changed over time.

### **Conferences:**

Since 2000, ASEH conferences have been held on an annual rather than biannual schedule, and the size, vitality, and value of these meetings has increased markedly. In 2004 and 2010, ASEH and the National Council on Public History joined forces in hosting large conferences in Victoria BC and Portland, Oregon. ASEH has also partnered with the Society for Conservation Biology and the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment to organize panels at conferences.

2000 Tacoma – 323 attendees

2001 Durham (with FHS) – 470 attendees; includes both organizations

2002 Denver – 343 attendees

2003 Providence – 430 attendees

2004 Victoria, BC (with NCPH) - 710 attendees; includes both organizations

2005 Houston – approximately 350 attendees

2006 St. Paul (with FHS) – 520 attendees; includes both organizations

2007 Baton Rouge – approximately 400 attendees

2008 Boise – approximately 450 attendees

2009 Tallahassee – 530 attendees

2010 Portland, OR – (with NCPH) – +/- 1,000 attendees from both organizations

2011 Phoenix – 581 attendees

2012 Madison – 617 attendees

2013 Toronto – 607 attendees

2014 San Francisco – 716 attendees

2015 Washington, DC – 682 attendees

2016 Seattle – 712 attendees  
2017 Chicago – 632 attendees  
2018 Riverside, California – 612 attendees

The growing vitality of the field and the Society is also reflected in the number of exhibitors (mainly publishers) at annual conferences:

2000 – 3 exhibit tables  
2007 – 25 exhibit tables  
2018 – 53 exhibit tables

### **Committees:**

ASEH has a suite of standing committees, and a number of smaller committees to adjudicate the Society's prizes and fellowships. Membership in these committees is refreshed regularly. Prize committees generally consist of three persons, each now invited to serve for a three-year term by the President. Thus colleagues normally rise through the prize committee to serve as its chair in year three of their service. The Executive Director provides prize committees with their mandates and works to keep their activities on schedule. Each of the Society's several Standing Committees (and the Advisory Board on Professional Development and Public Engagement) is led by one of its members who directs the work of the committee in consultation with the President and Executive Director. A small ad hoc committee on political engagement was established as part of the Advisory Board on Professional Development and Public Engagement in 2017.

### **Partnerships:**

The ASEH has also developed partnerships for several specific purposes. It partnered with the History of Science Society to fund student travel grants through the National Science Foundation from 2012-2018. In 2009 it signed an agreement with the National Park Service (NPS) to fund students, workshops, and two large, multi-year history projects, one based in Hawaii and the other in Death Valley, California; this also offered opportunities to interact with NPS staff and contribute ideas about environmental history and the national parks. In 2008 ASEH reached an agreement with the USDA Forest Service to fund workshops and projects. Similar agreements with the US Fish and Wildlife Service provided support for students at conferences.

### **Journal:**

*Environmental History* is a quarterly, interdisciplinary journal. It publishes articles by an international suite of authors addressing human interactions with the natural world over time. *Environmental History* includes up to 920 pages per year, and is

widely ranked among the world's leading journals by scholars, scientists, and practitioners interested in this field. In 2016, the journal received submissions from scholars in 20 countries. That year there were approximately 5000 subscriptions to the journal. Paralleling general trends, traditional institutional and personal (membership) subscriptions have declined steadily since 2010. On the other hand, digital access through consortia is now available in 78 countries (and at multiple sites in most of them) and over 1300 institutions have acquired access to the digital archive of *Environmental History* and its predecessor titles. Abstract and full text downloads both exceed 4000 per month on average. In 2016, 20 articles were downloaded more than 250 times. Since 2008, the Journal's Five-year Impact Factor has fluctuated from a high of 1.085 to a low of 0.553.

### **Finances:**

ASEH is in good financial health. Financial reserves have increased 3.4 fold since 2000, and now stand in excess of \$580000. In round numbers ASEH's financial reserves increased by \$113000 between 2000 and 2006; \$115,000 between 2006 and 2011, and \$190000 in the following quinquennium. These amount to (approximate) increases of 64%, 40% and 47% in each of these periods. This is commendable, but the investment portfolio as it stands is not diversified, and very cash-heavy. Moreover, the Society has no endowments. Most sources of revenue are flat and costs are increasing. All major funding streams, beyond that from the OUP agreement for publication of *Environmental History*, are contingent. We are critically dependent on NSF travel grants to support student travel to the annual conference. Donations are "abysmally low" and are unlikely to increase dramatically given the economic climate and the failure, heretofore, of appeals to conscience. We need to prepare for, and respond to, a shrinking academic job market coupled with the likelihood of several lean years of government and other funding for environmental groups.

### **Past, present, future:**

ASEH has achieved a great deal, reaching, it might be said, intellectual and professional maturity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the authors of the 2012 Strategic Plan concluded: we are stronger in terms of visibility and administration than we were five years ago. However, ASEH will welcome a new Executive Director with the retirement of Lisa Mighetto in Fall 2018. The organization will lose an enormous reservoir of experience, a fund of knowledge, and a set of valuable skills that it will – inevitably – take time for the new Executive Director to develop. Hiring a new director is a costly, but inevitable, step and one that should be viewed as an investment in helping our organization reach a new level of development and maturity.

## *Vision*

*Environmental Historians seek to understand the complex entanglements of humans and the rest of nature over time. By fostering such inquiry, the American Society for Environmental History, aims to broaden debate about the desirability, possibilities, and prospects of enhancing sustainability and reducing environmental and social injustice.*

## *Mission Statement*

*The American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) advances understanding of human interactions with the natural world by promoting historical research and teaching, and fostering dialogue about human use of the earth among humanists, social and environmental scientists, and the public. Its efforts benefit humankind by illuminating the past and providing perspective on current environmental issues.*

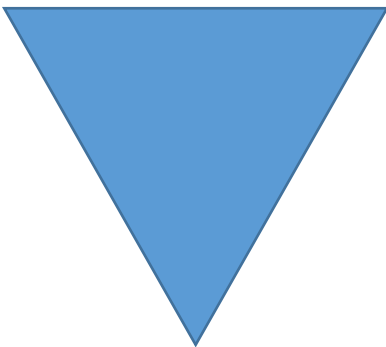
*ASEH promotes these interests globally through its peer-reviewed journal **Environmental History**, annual conferences, scholarly awards and fellowships, online discussions, conversations with other professional societies, and public outreach.*

## *Strategic Goals*

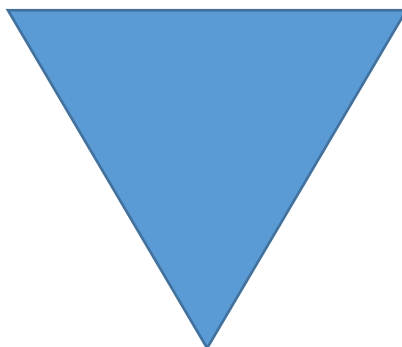
The overarching goal for ASEH in the five or six years ahead, is to maintain and expand its global leadership in environmental history, while enhancing diversity, inclusiveness, and equity among its members, and ensuring a robust future for the Society.

Action on three allied fronts will be necessary to achieve this overarching goal. We frame these as the directions in which the Society will need to move to extend, and improve, its REACH, RELEVANCE, and RESOURCES. Under each of these rubrics we identify a series of realizable goals (aspirations), framed in response to challenges and circumstances deemed likely to affect ASEH in the next several years. They seek to identify what the Society wants and needs to achieve in this time frame.

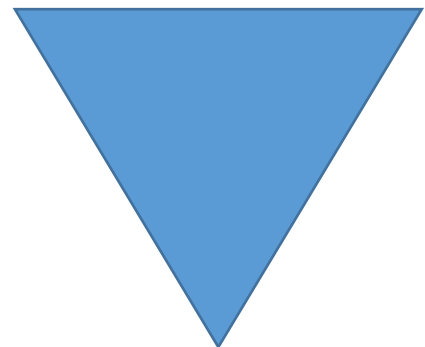
*REACH*



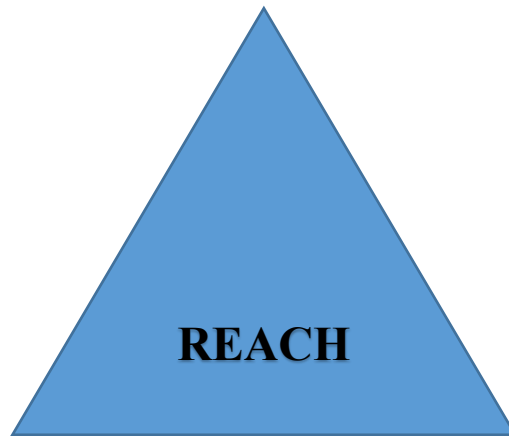
*RELEVANCE*



*RESOURCES*



*DIRECTIONS FOR ACTION AND STRATEGIC ASPIRATIONS*



*EXTENDING CONNECTIONS & IMPROVING VISIBILITY*

Collegiality has been one of ASEH's fundamental assets, historically. As we work to enhance the organization's outreach through the latest technologies, we need to foster and maintain open, inclusive face-to-face personal connections among our members by actively encouraging and supporting one another at annual meetings and through such events as regional meetings

ASEH has exercised national and global leadership in the promotion of environmental history. Significant networks, structures, and conduits for the advancement of the field have been developed in the last few decades. These range from organizations such as ICEHO and RCC, kindred societies (ESEH and SOLCHA), less formal networks (ANZEHN; WEHN), lively and important journals (*Environmental History*, *Environment & History*, *Global Environment*), and several healthy book series. These are developments to be celebrated. But as the field expands it becomes correspondingly more difficult for particular groups or organizations to identify their place within it and to ensure their continuing visibility. Further, the recent rapid rise of enthusiasm for “Environmental Humanities” presents both opportunities and challenges for ASEH. To retain a significant presence on the expanding global stage, ASEH will need to cultivate strategic links and improve its visibility.

Rapidly evolving communication technologies offer opportunities and pose challenges. By all prognoses digital media will play an ever-larger role in securing attention and recognition. Staying current (in both form and content) in the digital world costs time and money. Moreover, digital hares constantly overtake digital



tortoises, and it is not clear, in this new media world, that the old adage, “slow and steady wins the race,” still holds.

The Society journal *Environmental History* is a fundamental building block of the Society’s visibility and academic reputation. Although ASEH and FHS jointly appoint the journal editor(s), neither they nor their editor(s) has complete control over the journal and its digital presence due to the valuable arrangement with the publisher Oxford University Press. This arrangement has reduced editorial busy-work and greatly enhanced access to the journal. The agreement between OUP and ASEH is secure through January 2022 and is an important source of income for ASEH. OUP is in the process of introducing a new platform for management of its journals and this is likely to offer impressive new capabilities and possibilities. Some years ago, the journal set up its own webpage, and FHS and ASEH contribute equally to a small stipend for the webpage manager. Generally, it is a challenge to coordinate material on the OUP webpage for the journal and the separate *Environmental History* page. As the journal moves forward with a new editorial team assuming office in 2019, attention should be paid to resolving this challenge of co-ordination and capitalizing on opportunities to increase the digital reach of the journal and the Society.

ASEH has an information-packed website and a Facebook and Twitter presence. Perceptions of the website differ. Some value its content highly; some find the layout less visually striking than they would wish; others are essentially indifferent to such concerns. Yet others advocate for the capacity to upload user-generated content, and podcasts, to the web page and advocate for an Environmental History blog. Almost all recognize the pressing need for a radical overhaul of the website to improve its utility and appearance on small-screen devices.

The possibilities are many and other organizations have forged ahead with some of them. NiCHE (Network in Canadian History and Environment/ *Nouvelle* initiative Canadienne en histoire de l'environnement) and the Graduate Association for Food Studies (GAFS) are two exemplars of fruitful possibilities. After years of publishing short-form writing, podcasts, and videos, and maintaining an attractive and up-to-date web presence, NiCHE is now publishing 5000-word plus, peer-reviewed research papers on the intersections of environment and history in Canada: **PiCHE** or *Papers in Canadian History and Environment*. GAFS is the official graduate student caucus of the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS). It is an interdisciplinary academic community founded to connect graduate students interested in food and to promote their work. The Association publishes the digital *Graduate Journal of Food Studies* and hosts the Future of Food Studies conference for graduate students to present, discuss, and network. Both websites are

worthy of close consideration and a degree of emulation (<http://niche-canada.org/> and <https://gradfoodstudies.org/about/> )

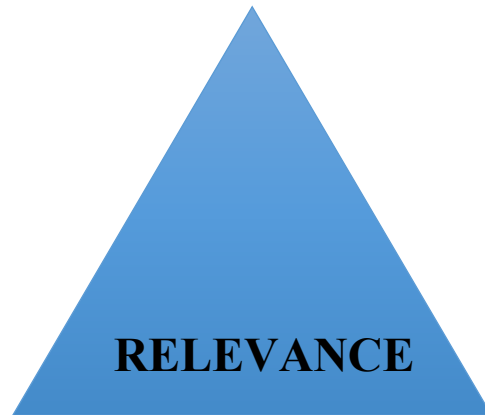
All such initiatives require time and particular expertise, however, and any changes and (re)developments should be undertaken thoughtfully, on the basis of evidence. Careful review of website usage data from Google Analytics should be used, for example, in planning changes to the website. Facebook and Twitter (and other platforms) require active curation to achieve the results for which organizations generally create them. Followers and re-tweeters have to be recruited. Tasks other than these have necessarily taken precedence for the Executive Director and – despite her best efforts – there is work to be done on this front. The need for ongoing maintenance is high; staff or dedicated volunteers are required to maintain a strong digital presence. The importance of addressing this issue is signaled in the next section: “Relevance”.

The possibilities of formalizing strategic links with other environmental history (and cognate) organizations should also be explored. Are there innovations that might produce mutual benefits? Joint membership arrangements may not be practical or profitable between countries. But something as simple as the establishment of hotlinks to all other EH organizations on the websites of each such organization might draw interest and engagement. Might more use be made of the ICEHO Newsletter to instantiate the work of ASEH among EH organizations? Might ASEH take the lead in bringing like organizations together to establish a portal or clearing house for information on environmental history (grants and fellowships available, positions open, conferences etc.) around the globe?

### **Aspirations:**

- i) An improved social media presence**
- ii) A revamped website for ASEH with improvements based on evidence of usage patterns etc. and attentive to requirements for use on small-screen devices**
- iii) Development of an active, web presence for, and by, the Graduate Student Caucus**
- iv) Appointment of a “Digital Communications Committee” (earlier established, no longer active) initially to advise and then (perhaps with expanded membership) to assist Executive Director in the above tasks**

- v) **Consolidation and enhancement of web and social media presence of *Environmental History*, taking full advantage of capacities of new OUP platform**
- vi) **Development of fuller, more formal and productive links with other environmental history organizations**
- vii) **Creation of an integrated and reasonably seamless web- and social media-presence for ASEH and *Environmental History*.**



*ENHANCING THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP*

For almost a decade after 1987, an advertisement for American Express conveyed the message that “Membership has its privileges.” This is a crucially important observation, that ASEH and other professional and nonprofit organizations should heed. Across the global north it seems, most such organizations are finding their membership numbers static or in decline, and many struggle to increase participation in their conferences and events. As reported on the web, Belinda Moore, the CEO of the Australasian Society of Association Executives has concluded that “a number of powerful generational, cultural and economic forces are colliding to create a perfect storm that will make the next 5-20 years some of the toughest ever faced by associations. ...[Those] who don’t adapt face a slow decline into obscurity.” The

crux of the matter, as expressed by Jeremy Miller on his “Stickybranding” blog, is that members of the baby boomer generation habitually joined **associations**, whereas today’s young professionals (members of so-called Generation Y or Millennials) join **communities** built in digital space, through social media. Rather than paying to join an association or group, the rising generation uses these platforms to participate freely in groups of their peers.

Even so, people will join organizations and pay dues if they see benefit in doing so, AND enjoy the experience of being part of the organization. We need to ensure that membership means more than paying dues, getting a reduced registration fee for the conference, and a copy of *Environmental History* (which many of those we want to join us can access by other means these days). We need to look beyond this traditional model, to find ways of reaching non-members (see preceding section) and then convincing them that membership in ASEH has privileges that go beyond the material and are unlike what they can get on social media. Membership in ASEH needs to be the inner circle of a wider community, and an inner circle that people will happily pay to join. It is instructional to consider the model developed by Dropbox and Evernote here. These software providers offer limited versions of their products free of charge; once they realize the value of these services, many people willingly pay for additional capacity and features. They become aware of the product, come to value what they see, and sign up for premium service.,

Many long-time members of ASEH have remarked over the years that the Society is their favorite professional organization, that the ASEH annual meeting is the most enjoyable of all such academic gatherings, and that environmental history is “the place to be.” This is encouraging, and terrific, and what we want – and need – to hear. But it is not enough. To be a truly welcoming and collegial organization, we need to hear the same enthusiasm from a broader network of people of all ethnicities, nationalities, genders, and sexual orientations. This aspiration is a top priority of ASEH. The Women’s Environmental History Network (WEHN) brought the equity issue to the attention of the ASEH Executive Committee in its March 2017 Report. These are large and complicated matters, and they are outlined at length in the WEHN Report and the response to it brought before the ASEH Executive Committee in March 2018. Both documents, the Report and the Response are posted on the ASEH website. It is clear that more needs to be done, that there is an urgent and undeniable need to promote and nurture diversity, inclusiveness, and equity within ASEH. *Continuing* to address these issues (for we should not forget the efforts of the Diversity Committee [now the Committee on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity] on this point, nor ignore the endeavors of the many who have worked to foster these values within ASEH) will enhance the pleasure and value of membership in the

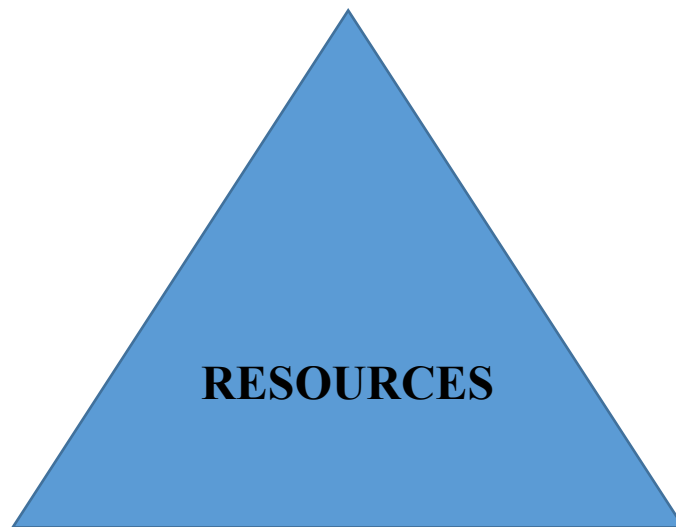
Society. Some specific steps toward some of these goals are indicated in the Response to the WEHN Report

Much has been done in the last several years to expand the tangible benefits, or privileges, of membership in ASEH, especially for junior scholars, but this remains a pressing priority. It is time to broaden the purview of the Society's Nominating Committee, a process already initiated in 2018/19, by more actively encouraging nominations for various elected offices. The need to grow fellowship and internship programs, to increase the number of awards offered by ASEH, to provide more travel support for students, to assist in the establishment of postdoc positions, and to help prepare graduate students for careers beyond academia, were all identified in the 2012 Strategic Plan. Some progress has been made. The Advisory Board for Professional Development and Public Engagement was established in the wake of that earlier plan. The Graduate Student Caucus has grown and been led energetically; it has been supported through a reception at the annual conference and now holds a more meaningful place at the Executive Committee table. But again there is much scope for more. It is vitally important that young scholars and new-comers to our Society and conference are made to feel appreciated and welcome. However desirable, most tangible benefits can only be realized with tangible resources (often in significant amount). Here the importance of the third strategic goal (Resources) is clear, but such initiatives as the Mentoring Program (taken in hand by the President and re-envisaged and expanded in 2018) and the Advisory Board for Professional Development and Public Engagement should be well fitted to take the early lead in moving forward several of the aspirations listed below.

As ASEH transitions to a new Executive Director it is a good time to review and re-evaluate the tools and systems used by the Executive Director in fulfilling her/his tasks and serving the membership. Much has been achieved in the last several years by introducing online membership and subscription renewal service (via EventRebels) and the use of web-based software to assist the work of the Program Committee and program planning for example. But managing the annual conference and preparing the program still consumes an enormous amount of time and effort. As the organization has increased in size, the administration of its affairs has necessarily grown more complex. Through long acquaintance with the Society and its members, the current Executive Director has an impressive store of experience and contacts upon which to draw for advice or assistance. This will not be the case going forward and ASEH should move to improve its infrastructure and means of communicating with and responding to members where possible.

## **Aspirations:**

- i) Promote diversity, inclusion, and equity as fundamental values of ASEH**
- ii) Acquire data for evidence-based engagement with perceived issues relating to equity, diversity, and inclusion.**
- iii) Implement strategies and steps to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusiveness, from stressing the importance of engaging, so far as possible, colleagues of all ages and identities in formal activities and casual conversations at annual conferences to actively reaching out to relevant groups, organizations and populations and enhancing support services (such as assisting with conference childcare)**
- iv) Increase activity and effectiveness of the Advisory Board on Professional Development and Public Engagement by improving communication with the Graduate Student caucus to refine and define goals for the Board and by providing it with the tools and resources needed to implement new strategies.**
- v) Develop more transparent opportunities for professional service in ASEH.**
- vi) Expand programs that support junior scholars and other disadvantaged groups, such as the mentoring program, writing workshops etc.**
- vii) Increase support for travel grants, etc. especially for identified groups**
- viii) Support (from ASEH funds) the activities and encourage the growth of regional clusters or nodes for the promotion of environmental history, the building of a broader constituency, and the introduction/ inclusion/ integration of “non-traditional” participants in ASEH activities.**
- ix) Evaluate tasks required of, and tools available to, Executive Director with a view to implementing changes as necessary to facilitate work of new incumbent in that position and respond to changing external circumstances**
- x) Explore the feasibility and utility of acquiring/ implementing a Data Management System to facilitate record keeping and access to ASEH data – to reveal strengths and weaknesses in membership, and to improve communication with the membership and potential members (e.g. those who have submitted conference proposals unsuccessfully in the past). If desirable proceed.**



### *ENSURING THE CONTINUING VIABILITY OF ASEH*

Success in realizing the aspirations for Reach and Relevance itemized above will go a long way toward ensuring a vigorous future for ASEH, but unless they are matched by success in building a stronger financial base, all that is now solid might turn into air.

The Society would be wise to anticipate a downturn in its financial picture with the changeover in Executive Directors, simply because transitions have their costs and also because some existing partnerships are expiring and the new incumbent will need time to identify and establish new arrangements.

Moreover, ASEH needs to replace the partnership agreements with government agencies that it has enjoyed during the last 10 years. The Society has received significant amounts of funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and USDA Forest Service for various projects. But this funding source is disappearing; recently some US government agencies have been instructed not to form partnerships or to enter agreements.

New expenditures will also be necessary to enhance the benefits of membership in, and extend the visibility of, ASEH as outlined above.

Similarly, it must be recognized that it is increasingly difficult for conferences (once a source of significant revenue for ASEH) to do more than break even. Some will, inadvertently, fall short of even this mark. Costs are rising, local-area university support is more difficult to secure and usually comes in diminished amounts, and Local Organizing Committees have mixed success in eliciting donations in support of meetings.

The time is right – indeed it is necessary – to take a hard look at ASEH’s financial picture and for the core leadership to consider possible adjustments. ASEH’s investments are very undiversified; a significant market correction could massively reduce capital and operating funds. Redistribution of funds to diversify holdings should be considered on an urgent basis.

For some years, the Society has appointed a fund-raising committee, chaired since 2015 by the President-Elect. This committee has explored various avenues to increase Society revenues, including the following: development of a glossy pamphlet to provide information about what we do to potential donors; encouraging monthly donations (however small) through Paypal subscription; fostering Planned Giving; adding “donation check-boxes” to membership and registration forms; enrolling former ASEH Presidents to make substantial annual donations; and “passing the hat” for spontaneous donations at the Annual Meeting. Revealingly, the first pass at the last of these initiatives ranked second only to the former-presidents’ donation scheme as the most lucrative. It returned \$800.00. This is to say, sadly, that fund raising efforts to date have been exceedingly disappointing. If the past is any guide, increasingly aggressive efforts to secure donations from members would probably produce mediocre returns on the energy and time invested. They could also annoy members who already pay dues and donate time to the ASEH, and thus prove counterproductive. The fund-raising committee should engage the Executive Committee in a discussion about the wisdom and form (if any) of future fundraising efforts.

There has been some reluctance to raise membership dues and conference registration fees, for fear that doing so might alienate members or turn away participants. This is understandable. But we need to establish whether it is realistic. Membership is \$40.00 per annum for students, and then on a graduated scale according to income from \$55.00 and \$110.00 per annum. Conference registration fees are \$160.00 for members in advance and \$180 on site. This compares with OAH at \$160 in advance and \$200 on site; AHA \$170 and \$201; Canadian Historical Association C\$239 and C\$265; and the Association of American Geographers and the American Psychological Association, both in the \$290/\$345/ \$385 range. Many colleagues are in a position to pay membership dues and registration fees from



research funds or, failing this, to treat them as business expenses for tax purposes. This reduces the personal “blow” of any increase. Further, success in ensuring that membership has its benefits should make it easier for people to accept a modest increase in fees/dues. Costs and benefits are conjoined, and it may be time to drive home this understanding.

ASEH’s executive committee has identified the following fundraising priorities: Operations; Awards and Prizes; Student and New Professional Support; Digital Improvements -- which might be interpreted as better communication with members. All of these are important and they need to be borne in mind in shaping and targeting efforts to raise funds. So for example, foundations are generally reluctant to fund general operations (though member contributions might well help in this area); awards and prizes offer “naming opportunities” and the “legacy value” of such investments could be an incentive for potential donors.

Many professional fund-raisers indicate that building endowments through donations is considerably more difficult today than once it was, and that efforts to raise funds may be more successful if targeted at specific time-limited objectives. (e.g. a commitment of \$2000 per annum for a named scholarship to be awarded in each of ten successive years; or a \$20000 gift to provide four \$500 travel bursaries for five years). Others differ, and continue to advocate for the creation of endowments. This is another question on which the fund-raising committee should engage the Executive Committee in a discussion about how best to proceed.

In considering the resource needs of ASEH and goals for the future in basic dollar terms a basic goal can be framed – as below – in broad (regardless of fundraising priorities) and specific (annual goal) terms, but the value of identifying corollary aspirations is also clear. The point of these aspirations is to realize the Society’s desire for greater reach and relevance, not to add to ASEH’s financial reserves. According to standard guides for non-profit organizations, the appropriate amount considered advisable for Financial Operating Reserves varies (depending on the nature of income streams and commitments) from about a quarter to double (0.25 to 2.0) of annual obligations. It is also recommended that organizations develop a formal operating reserve policy “to describe and document the purpose, goals, and mechanics for maintaining and using operating reserve funds.” (see for example material provided by National Council of Non-Profits, at: <https://www.propelnonprofits.org/resources/nonprofit-operating-reserves-policy-examples/> )

## **Aspirations:**

- i) Redistribution and diversification the ASEH financial portfolio, with a view to improving returns and guarding against detrimental effects of significant market adjustments**
- ii) ASEH annual income (including returns on investments) increases by a minimum of \$35000 year on year for the period 2018-2025**
- iii) Membership donations to ASEH increase year on year**
- iv) Fundraising and Development Committee engages with Executive Committee to identify and pursue productive fund-raising strategy/strategies**
- v) Executive Director develops a list (as broad as possible) of relevant foundations (and deadlines) for grant applications, and opportunities pursued**
- vi) Establish formal operating reserve policy (specifying amount of reserve at say 0.80 or 1.00 of annual obligations) with Executive Committee approval**
- vii) Commit “surplus” funds to furthering Reach and Relevance of ASEH as per priorities above, and move on this front.**

## *Summation*

Four decades of conscientious leadership, dedicated stewardship, enthusiastic membership, and thousands of invaluable hours of volunteer commitment have brought ASEH to an admirable position of strength in the field of environmental history and among comparable non-profit academic associations of similar size. Yet we know that particular thoughtfulness and specific strategies are required to maintain vitality in maturity, especially as changing times necessitate adaptation and flexibility. ASEH is in good shape to move forward. Continuing success will, however, depend upon the reformation of old-established habits, a commitment to more proactive outreach, and dedication to enhancing the benefits of membership in the Society. The Society is fortunate in having the fiscal reserves to begin this process of moving strongly toward its half-century mark immediately, but its long term health and vigor will depend on the success of necessary efforts to increase annual revenues.