

ACLS PRIORITIES 2021-22

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE MEMBER SOCIETIES

This memo describes the funded activities designated to support ACLS member societies that ACLS has prioritized for the academic year 2021-22 – in addition to long-standing services such as the CEO meetings and the listserv. They were chosen from a list of over twenty recommendations created by six working groups that were established at the recommendation of the Future of the Societies group in 2020. The Futures group reviewed the long list and moderated discussion of its contents with attendees of the ACLS Annual Meeting in April 2021.

ACLS is committed to improving its services to our member societies by remaining responsive to societies' needs and priorities, and by making our work more visible and accountable. We will add more detail to the list over the course of the coming year, notably regarding the \$3 million three-year Mellon-funded Intention Foundry, which seeks to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in the academy in partnership with member societies' leadership and scholars of color. We will report on our progress on these priorities at the CEO meetings in spring and fall 2022. Consultation with the Executive Committee of the CEO and with the CEO as a whole will allow us to assess our progress and update priorities for 2022-23. We would like to make this process (modified as appropriate) a regular part of our planned work each year.

1. Help societies clarify mission and priorities

- Engage Wellspring Consulting in August 2021
- Organize 2 day CEO retreat in spring 2022
- Integrate work on mission and priorities into CEO meetings and Annual Meeting

The Hacking a New Society working group stressed the pressure society directors and boards feel to do everything for everyone – an impossible task given staff and funding limits. Societies must identify their missions and priorities more clearly to potential members (especially emerging scholars and independent scholars) as well as to faculty, presidents, provosts, and deans. This will help make the work of societies more visible, underline the value of institutional support for membership in scholarly associations, and explain what a learned society can offer to colleges and universities.

In summer 2021, ACLS hired Wellspring Consulting to advise on how which societies can better articulate their mission, ideal membership, key relationships, and core priorities. Wellspring ran a well-attended two-day workshop in August 2021. The aim was to identify ways to strengthen membership structures and financial positions. Wellspring provided useful tools such as checklists, frameworks, and approaches and facilitate interactive work among participants. This work will continue at the fall 2021 meeting of the CEO, the Annual Meeting, and the CEO spring 2022 meeting immediately after the Annual Meeting.

The workshops were filmed. The six hours of film are being reduced to a short 12-15 minute video to share with the entire CEO. Sandra is compiling the responses to our question about what further actions ACLS can take.

In spring 2022, ACLS will host an in-person 2-3 day retreat for the CEO. The work begun in August with Wellspring will serve as a touchpoint for an intensive examination of the value proposition of learned societies in the aftermath of the pandemic.

2. Accelerate change through the Mellon Intention Foundry and the Luce Design Workshop

- Held the first meetings for the Intention Foundry
- Pilot projects in IF to come this year
- Integrate the member societies into the plan to disseminate results from the Design Workshop for a New Academy

The groups on Graduate Education and Undergraduate Education identified the urgent need for societies to host and moderate discussion of the mission and goals of humanistic fields as well as tough questions (how to increase undergraduate enrollment, whether and how to limit PhD intake) *at the level of the department*. Many societies are already doing this work, but the working group underlined the gap between the conversations that take place once or twice a year at Annual Meetings or in society committees on the one hand, and everyday life in the department on the other.

The Mellon Intention Foundry has focused on the diverse and often difficult conversations about racial prejudice, decolonization, and practices of gatekeeping in curricula and mentoring today. We are working now to identify 1-2 pilot projects for implementation in 2021-22.

The Design Workshop is working with teams from six schools and a dozen individuals with a history of working for change in academia. In both projects, we see lines of convergence with the thinking of the working groups and with societies' current activities at the department level. This fall and at the spring 2022 retreat, we will share the results to date and seek to agree on the best ways for societies to communicate the work to society leadership and departmental chairs and for ACLS to build on these lines of convergence.

3. Support unaffiliated/independent scholars

- Work on offering access to scholarly resources to scholars

The working group on Professional Development conveyed the urgent need for ACLS and members to undertake concrete, visible action on behalf of scholars who are unaffiliated with an institution or working as independent scholars. The group underlined the special needs of scholars seeking stable academic employment. They identified two priorities: A) better access to scholarly resources, both primary and secondary; B) better access to health insurance. We

will focus this year on secondary sources offered through third party digital services. For 2022-23: Sandra Bradley will continue to investigate the possibility of a society consortium providing health insurance to contingent faculty members of individual societies.

In summer 2021, Sandra surveyed 12 CEO members regarding the questions below. We will discuss these results and propose actions at the Fall Meeting in late October.

- which member societies already provide access to JSTOR, EBSCO, Project Muse, and other digital resources
- which societies have surveyed their own members about desired/needed scholarly resources and the sum of the results
- if there is need for assistance in conducting such a survey

With this information in hand, we will explore how ACLS, perhaps working with societies as a collective “bargaining unit,” could improve scholars’ access to secondary sources. We want to use the momentum created by the pandemic to open up access for scholars; we see this as a time-sensitive project.

4. Improve doctoral education

- Create and disseminate guidelines for doctoral curricula for the first year

The group on Graduate Education strongly recommended the creation, in consultation with member societies, of “Before Day One” and “Road Map” orientation materials for doctoral programs. Disseminated by ACLS and by the societies to graduate departments, these guidelines will affirm values of intellectual growth, effective mentorship, career diversity, collaborative work, and familiarity with standard operations of institutions of higher education. This effort dovetails with priorities expressed by participants in the Mellon Intention Foundry and the Luce Design Workshop. We aim to complete a draft by December 2021. Further discussion is needed at the 2022 CEO retreat to determine proper processes of consultation and dissemination in collaboration with individual societies.

5. Data collection and analysis

- Consult and decide in calendar year 2021 on at least one data project

ACLS hears many calls for collecting data – a complex project that may be variously configured around faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, departments, or fields/disciplines/areas. We commit to determining by end of calendar year 2021 which project or projects we are able to take on, understanding that we may need to hire specialized support. We will ask: which project(s) show promise of having the most impact? Which will be most and least difficult and sustainable? This was a priority identified by the groups on Graduate Education, Undergraduate Education, and Advocacy.

This requires discussion with the CEO so that ACLS can realistically set priorities with input from EDs. Examples of requested analyses:

- Demographic analysis of selected fields
- Post-PhD employment trends
- Department and program closures in the humanities and social sciences
- “Success stories”: innovations or experiments that strengthen a particular program or department in measurable ways, such as pedagogical innovation leading to increased undergraduate enrollments leading to institutional recognition. ACLS can coordinate with member societies to gather and distribute information on society efforts to support pedagogical innovation. The resulting repository would include toolkits, training, and resources for curriculum development
- Humanities and social science undergraduate enrollments gathered from initiatives funded by AAAS (Humanities Indicators), Mellon, Teagle, Kresge, Spencer, Luce, NEH and others to create a resource page for member societies
- A clearinghouse of data and best practices would allow societies to access information already available so they can build out projects from work already undertaken
- Compendium of initiatives on career diversity

6. Help societies improve and update governance practices, with attention to DEI

- Integrate diversity and inclusion as a regular session in the Leadership seminar, starting with a session in 2021 run by Jovonne Bickerstaff
- Offer one training session this year for boards and/or committees (hiring Hyphens & Spaces) on how to diversify committee membership, especially among emerging scholars and scholars of color
- Offer one training session this year on for specialized roles such as treasurer

Recommended by the Governance group, ACLS will incorporate into its annual Leadership Seminar discussion of best practices for ensuring equitable representation on society committees and boards. ACLS will set up additional regular sessions to better prepare scholars to serve on society boards.

7. Expand membership and paths to membership in ACLS

- Increase the diversity of fields represented in ACLS by devising new modes of engagement

As part of ACLS’s own progressive evolution, we are intent upon diversifying the fields represented in the CEO, and we made good progress last year, admitting three new societies. At the same time, we have become aware that some new and/or small societies lack the staff and resources to put together applications for membership. A few other societies, in our view, need deeper experience of ACLS so that the benefits of membership are clearer to them. We want to explore with the CEO alternative options for engagement with ACLS and with the CEO – possibly through a “guest” or “observer” membership, or by adopting approaches already used in the societies for affiliate members.

Possible steps for 2022-23 and beyond

According to the groups Hacking a new society and Governance, ACLS can help member societies improve financial transparency by cataloguing how societies communicate financial matters to their broader membership. ACLS might share and showcase the different methods societies use to communicate financial information to members. To accomplish this, ACLS may:

- Seek data on most effective ways to help members understand the distribution of societies' income and expenses and the correlation between dues, conference costs, etc., for example, through the equivalent of a non-profit annual report
- Set up a platform for more efficient exchange of information than the listserv
- Offer workshops for society directors on how to educate board members on their fiscal responsibilities to the organization and on best practices in budgeting and communication of financial decisions and results.