

ASEH Advocacy Guidelines

ASEH members are often involved in various policy issues, and the society has been asked to take positions on environmental issues and on issues related to the profession of history, such as academic freedom, continued funding for public access to archives, and closure of libraries. In March 2007, the ASEH Executive Committee adopted advocacy guidelines that establish a process for the ASEH to take policy positions on matters directly relevant to the profession of history. The process is detailed below.

When we as a society start advocating on matters outside our professional expertise, we risk losing professional credibility. But we have a role to take on matters within our profession such as academic freedom, continued funding for historical research, or continued funding for print archives. These are all matters informed by our common professional training, not by our own individual research topics or political involvements. Individual ASEH members, however, often have a great deal of expertise with particular environmental issues, and their historical work may be relevant to current environmental policy debates. So, for example, it might be reasonable for the Society of Herpetologists to take a position on amphibian declines, because all herpetologists share a common training that gives them expertise in amphibians. An individual ASEH member might have spent years studying the history of amphibian declines, and she too might be equally qualified professionally to take a position. But historians as a whole cannot claim such expertise, and if ASEH took a position as a professional society, the general public might rightly wonder what gives historians any credibility to advocate for one position or another.

As a society, we can and should encourage individual members to consider ways their historical research might be useful in informing policy. The expert's roster on the ASEH website allows members the opportunity to connect with journalists and policymakers about such matters. In addition, we can encourage members to consider joining societies that do take advocacy roles, and to join National Research Council committees, which are groups of experts convened to review the available scientific (and often historical) evidence relevant to a particular policy issue.

ASEH shall not intervene, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign for or against a candidate for public office. ASEH may not endorse candidates, contribute to campaigns, raise funds, distribute statements or become involved in any other activities that may be beneficial or detrimental to any candidate.

ADVOCACY PROCESS

1. A member or non-member who learns of an issue that seems relevant to the profession of environmental history will ask the president to have it considered. If the president believes that the issue falls within the broad guidelines for ASEH advocacy, the president will create an ad-

hoc committee of 3 to 4 people to review the issue and recommend a course of action.

Ad-hoc Committee make-up:

- a. All members must be ASEH members.
 - b. The member who suggested the issue would ideally serve.
 - c. The committee will ideally have at least one executive committee member.
2. The ad-hoc committee will research the specific issue and write a brief background statement (2 to 4 pages) with a suggested course of action and submit it to the president.
 3. The president will forward the committee's report and recommendation to the executive committee. If action is required, a motion will be put forth before the executive committee.

Discussion could be carried out electronically or in person at the annual meeting, although time limitations at the annual meeting might make in-person discussions difficult. Deadlines for certain issues would also make electronic discussions advisable under certain circumstances.

Electronic discussions need to be carefully managed to follow Robert's Rules, separating the motion from the discussion and the votes, so that no member votes before hearing all sides of the discussion. Because more executive committee business is being carried out electronically, we suggest that ASEH develop guidelines for electronic motions (suggested guidelines are posted as a separate document on the website).

The ordinary rules for quorum and voting will apply for in-person meetings (a quorum of 50% and a majority for voting purposes of 50%+1 of that quorum). For electronic decisions, we suggest a quorum of 50% of executive committee members eligible to vote.

4. After the executive committee decision, the president will coordinate with the ad-hoc committee to notify the membership and carry out the recommended action (for example, if it's a resolution, the president and/or committee chair would notify contacts at SEJ to help publicize our position).
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