

Toward the Future of Folklore Scholarship and Practice, 2014-2018: An Outline of the American Folklore Society's Long-Range Plan

September 2014

The American Folklore Society's first modern-day long-range planning effort took place in the late 1990s, and led, among other outcomes, to the Board's creation of a full-time executive director position for the Society. Then, throughout 2006, the Executive Board worked with the Society staff and committees to carry out a second long-range planning process, which led to the document titled "Toward the Future of Folklore Scholarship and Practice."

This 2006 process articulated five goals and developed a set of highest-priority actions associated with each theme. In 2009 and 2010 the Executive Board revisited that plan, evaluated our progress toward its goals, and determined a) to devote 2011-2013 to completion of all possible work on the goals outlined in the existing plan, and b) to undertake a new planning process in 2013-14 to revisit and revise our existing plan for implementation in 2014-2018.

Overarching these goals was the idea that the Society needs to focus on centering the field. The materials of folklore tend to be characterized by their diversity; and the study of folklore is similarly characterized by the centrifugal pull of this variety of materials, by the many approaches and methods of the field, and by the wide range of institutions, academic and public, in which folklorists do their work. There is nothing wrong with this tendency, but the Society can and should provide a complementary, centripetal pull.

In the larger world, we have been focusing our attention on the ways AFS can most effectively position the field as a core humanities and social science field, and can articulate the unique insights folklorists bring to the understanding and interpretation of significant issues of art, culture, education, the humanities, public policy, and society.

Inside the field, we have been focusing our attention on the ways AFS, as folklore's leadership organization, can most effectively assist individual folklorists, and the many institutions of our field, to reach their goals and to work together for the advancement of the field as a whole.

In 2013 and 2014, we have taken up work to revisit and revise our existing plan by making sure that our goals are still appropriate, and revising our initial list of activities under each goal to reflect what we have accomplished, as well as the Board's new priorities.

The five goals the Board set in 2006 included three that were focused more on the larger world:

- Engage in an active campaign to improve the standing of folklore in the academy
- Promote the purposes, work, value, and contributions of the field more actively and effectively
- Engage more fully in relevant public policy worlds

and two that were focused more within the field:

- Take better care of our own
- Improve and increase communications in the field

In Board discussions held in April 2013 and 2014 we decided that these five goals remained appropriate as guideposts for Society efforts, and that we would add a sixth goal (“Secure and sustain AFS’s organizational strength and capability”), primarily focused within the field, to the plan. What follows is a listing of these six goals, each followed by activities that emerged from our April 2013 and 2014 discussions as most important to the Board.

1. Engage in an active campaign to improve the standing of folklore in the academy.

- A. Carry out a “benchmarking” project to design and communicate objective criteria for the review and evaluation of university-based folklore programs.
- B. Create, in partnership with academic folklore centers, departments, and programs, a database they and we can use to track the career trajectories of their students.
- C. Modify AFS’s statement on promotion and tenure criteria (last modified in the 1980s to account for public folklore products) to include new-media and online productions.
- D. Work with the American Council of Learned Societies, and AFS sister societies within ACLS, to create and promote a more appropriate system of journal rankings and metrics for the humanities fields.

2. Promote the purposes, work, value, and contributions of the field more actively and effectively.

- A. Plan ways to implement the recommendations of the AFS Media and Public Relations Committee.

3. Engage more fully in relevant public policy worlds.

- A. Create a plan for funding and sponsoring “think tank” gatherings, focused on intersections of our field with relevant public policy arenas, that will produce practical recommendations for folklorists’ engagement in those arenas.

4. Take better care of our own.

- A. Re-convene a working group of folklore graduate students to help us design ways to meet the most important unmet professional needs of students, working in concert with academic programs and other institutions in the field.

B. Re-convene a working group of senior folklorists to help us design ways to retain the participation of retired folklorists as guides, advisors, counselors, and mentors to younger folklorists.

C. Act on the forthcoming recommendations of the Cultural Diversity Committee for increasing diversity of participation in and engagement with the Society's annual meeting.

D. Plan ways to implement the recommendations of the AFS Committee on International Issues.

E. Convene material culture scholars to identify ways of re-integrating them within the field.

F. Convene mid-career scholars (post-tenure but pre-full professor) to identify ways in which AFS can serve their highest-priority professional needs.

5. Improve and increase communications in the field.

A. Commission a series of curatorial essays of the AFS annual meeting, both before and after the meeting, for publication on the AFS web site.

B. Commission a series of profile articles on folklore departments, centers, and programs (academic and public) for publication on the AFS web site.

C. Develop our partnership with the Indiana University Bloomington Libraries, and pursue new partnerships, to strengthen the publications profile of our field and to provide open access to a wider variety of information resources in our field.

6. Secure and sustain AFS's organizational strength and capability.

A. Build the AFS Endowment Fund toward a goal of at least \$2,500,000 in present gifts and future pledges by 2018. [Note: The current total of present gifts and future pledges to the Endowment Fund is approximately \$1,800,000. Of this amount, approximately 10% has actually been donated and the remaining 90% is pledged to the Society from members' estates.]

B. Develop a transition plan for the executive director's succession.