

# Why science? Why AAAS?

Among the various ways of thinking and knowing about the universe and ourselves, science is special. Asking questions that can be answered empirically and engaging in open communication so that others can collectively review and verify possible answers lead to the most reliable knowledge—a knowledge that is powerfully applicable in daily life. Science is, as physician and essayist Lewis Thomas wrote, the “shrewdest maneuver” for discovering the world. This grand and clever enterprise, while surely not removing all worldly woes, brings beauty, wonderfully fulfilling intellectual pleasure, and cultural enrichment. It can lead to improved human interaction, more constructive commerce, and a better quality of life. Science helps bring what I think is a deep human need—a sense of progress.

That progress is not assured. To thrive, science needs the support of the society it serves, and that support must be cultivated. In 1848, a forward-looking group of scientists and advocates formed the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to promote cooperation across various scientific and technical fields and create an encouraging environment for the practice of science. They saw in America a widespread appreciation of science, as reflected in the country’s founding political documents and in the habits of mind of even their nonscientific fellow citizens. From this general appreciation, they fostered robust support for a scientific research and educational enterprise that has remained strong for a century and a half. AAAS became the principal voice for science and grew in many ways, including a realization that efforts to strengthen science must extend worldwide.

Today, however, in many places the appreciation, respect, and support for science need attention and renewal. Even as the practice of science becomes ever more advanced, the observations more precise, and the applications more prevalent, there are signs of public misapprehension, distrust, and eroding support. Who better to address this looming problem than AAAS? AAAS should

remain the force for science.

For the past 14 years, AAAS has been led by Dr. Alan Leshner, whose wisdom, skill, and industry have left it in a strong and influential position. The association now has about 110,000 individual members and 252 affiliated organizations across the globe, thousands of honored fellows and alumni of its various programs, and a variety of publications of the highest quality and reputation (including the one you are reading now). This is a strong foundation from which to move ahead, and this week, I am honored and excited to join AAAS as its Chief Executive Officer and Executive Publisher of *Science*. As a former professor of physics and public policy, and a former member of the U.S. Congress for the past 16 years, I deeply appreciate the importance of advancing science for the benefit of society and am sensitive to the many challenges ahead in accomplishing this. AAAS must continue to enhance science and engineering for the well-being of all people. The organization must defend openness and integrity in the practice of science. Communication and education

among scientists, engineers, and the public must improve. AAAS must be even more inclusive of all who can contribute to the scientific enterprise. And AAAS must be persistent in promoting the responsible use of science in society and in public and international affairs.

To do these things, and following the changes begun under Dr. Leshner, AAAS will seek to further strengthen its membership, in both numbers and engagement. The organization will build its publications and communications ability to meet the modern needs of the scientific community and the general public. AAAS will enhance its programs in public affairs, education, law, and international relations, and continue to explore constructive relationships between science and religion, art, history, and other disciplines. I am committed to raising the necessary resources to do these things. Especially, AAAS intends to remain the world’s most effective advocate for science.

— **Rush D. Holt**



*Rush D. Holt is Chief Executive Officer of AAAS and Executive Publisher of Science.*



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# Science

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