

# The AIPG: Upholding professionalism in geology for over 50 years

Geological scientists are employed across the world in sectors including industry, government and academia but the American Institute of Professional Geologists (AIPG) president **Adam Heft** believes that there might soon be a shortage of new recruits. In this interview, Adam tells *Research Features* how the AIPG supports and encourages geology students who want to pursue a career in the profession and how it works to uphold the standard of current professionals as they make sense of earth processes in the interest of public safety.

**T**he American Institute of Professional Geologists (AIPG) is the largest association dedicated to promoting the profession of geology in the world, and is the only international organisation that provides certification for the competence and ethical conduct of geological scientists in all branches of the science. From professional certification to lobbying government and from acting as ombudsman or educator, the AIPG is at the heart of the geological community.

*Research Features* found out what AIPG has achieved since its founding in 1963, what it means to be a member now and the projects that they are working on for the future.

**What does your role entail as the President of the American Institute of Professional Geologists (AIPG)?**

As the AIPG President, I serve as the voice of the AIPG. I establish committees as needed to address various issues that may come up during my tenure. In addition, I run each of our business meetings, including the one that is held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting. I provide leadership for the organisation and identify opportunities that would better enable the AIPG to serve its members.

**You first joined the AIPG as a member in 1998 and started as President-Elect back in January 2016. Which achievements have you been most proud of since your affiliation with the AIPG first began?**

First, the organisation's focus on getting students involved. When I first joined the AIPG, there were no student members, and students did not know about the AIPG. We have done a great job getting them involved and helping them to become professionals after graduation. Second, is the creation of our newest member category (as yet to have an official name given to it), which is intended to help our members achieve licensure in various states and to serve as a repository for their credentials to assist with this process. This is something that several of our members saw the need for, particularly as some states have pushed for the deregulation of professional geologists and the elimination of licensure programmes.

**Why was the AIPG first established back in 1963, and what has changed in the 54 years since its inception?**

The AIPG was established because there was no agency at the time that focused on the ethical, professional and competent practice of geology. Geoscientists often work at the

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intersection between earth processes and the health and safety of the public. Because we are in a position of protecting the public, it is critical that practising geologists strive to meet the highest ethical and professional standards. This was, and continues to be, the primary focus of the AIPG. The biggest change has been the increased focus on students and young professionals. They are the future of the profession.

*Do you think geological research receives as much attention and funding as it deserves?*

Most people, including our governmental leaders, have no real concept of what it is that geologists do, why it is important or how it affects their daily lives. It seems only when disaster strikes that there is any thought given to why this could be

important. Even then, it is usually local to the disaster area and is forgotten soon after. A focus on proactive approaches to geological challenges and the funding necessary to identify, understand and address potential geological issues is a critical need for our future.

*The AIPG encourages membership from both fellow geologists and students. Why is having a younger membership made up of students so important?*

Young geologists and students represent the future of the profession. There are a great number of older geologists that are very close to retirement (or already have retired), and there simply are not enough young geologists to take their places. Also, getting the young geologists actively involved in the AIPG is a good way for them

to get to know experienced professionals and be mentored by them.

*The AIPG runs annual national conferences, with next year's conference taking place in Colorado. Could you tell us some more about this, and the influence these events have?*

The 2018 Annual Meeting will be in Colorado Springs, Colorado on 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> September; the theme will be 'Purple Mountain Majesties'. There will be field trips, technical sessions and potentially a short course on being an expert witness as part of the meeting activities in addition to the business meetings for the organisation. We recognise the important contributions made to the profession by various individuals by giving a variety of awards. The annual meetings are a good way to fulfil requirements for continuing education for those that need to meet those requirements. It is also a good opportunity for networking; many members attend every year so that they can get together with the friends and colleagues they have met at past meetings. Additionally, annual meetings represent an opportunity to learn about cutting-edge approaches to applied geology in a wide variety of geological specialities.

*AIPG is organised into 36 regional sections across both the United States and abroad. What is the significance of expanding the organisation overseas, especially in terms of spreading research and endorsing collaboration?*

All the AIPG sections are organised within the United States. However, we have many members overseas. There are advantages to both the AIPG and to the individual members overseas in expanding our membership. The first is that there is strength in numbers; the more voices we have, the better our chances of being able to make that voice heard by the public and the government about what it is we do and why it is important. In addition, many of the challenges we face in the United States are also faced by countries around the world. Having membership in other locations gives us a window into the approaches other countries/consultants are using to address these challenges. Having more members also increases the pool of geological knowledge available to our members, and helps individuals solve problems or contribute to research. I was personally able to work with a colleague from another part of the country on a project that had a component that was outside my speciality.



This collaboration is also important to the members overseas, as being a member of the AIPG lends recognition of their credentials by a professional organisation. Members of the AIPG can apply to be recognised as a competent person for some types of geological work in other countries and members of our partner organisations can apply to be recognised as Certified Professional Geologists with the AIPG.

*How do you see the landscape of geology changing over the next ten years and how will the AIPG play a part in that?*

As I previously indicated, it seems likely that the need for professional credentials will be more important than ever, particularly if states go down the path of eliminating their professional licensing programmes. This may be an opportunity for the AIPG to provide a

comparable credential that can be upheld to the public; these AIPG members holding our new member category credential can protect the public by practising in a manner that is done with competence, integrity and ethics. It is also important to note that job growth in the geosciences is projected to be in the neighbourhood of 10% per year, which has the potential to outpace the ability of our colleges and universities to train geoscientists. Those projections from the US Bureau of Labour Statistics indicate good opportunities for geoscientists in the next decade or so.

• For those interested in joining the AIPG or want to find out more, please visit the website at <http://www.aipg.org>.

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