

Anne Egger

Executive Director of the National Association of Geoscience Teachers



What is your current occupation?

I have two current positions. I am a professor at Central Washington University with a joint appointment in Geological Sciences and Science and Mathematics Education. In addition, I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Geoscience Teachers, a non-profit organization whose mission is to support a diverse, inclusive, and thriving community of educators and education researchers to improve teaching and learning about the Earth. As Executive Director, my role is to coordinate and implement the programs of the organization while maintaining its financial health. The ED is appointed by the Executive Committee, and the members of the Executive Committee are elected by the membership, so I implement what the membership thinks the organization should be doing.

What is your educational background?

I have a BA, an MS, and a PhD in geology, all separated by a few years of work. After finishing my undergraduate degree, I worked as a river guide, mostly on the San Juan River in southeastern Utah, for three years. After completing my MS degree, I taught at a community college in northwestern New Mexico for two years, then worked as academic staff at Stanford University. I finished my PhD while I was working at Stanford. I have learned everything I know about non-profits, however, from serving first in the presidential line (an elected position) and then as Executive Director of NAGT.

A key message for students is that the geoscience workforce is dynamic, and boundaries between sectors and occupations are fluid. How has this been true in your career?

My career path has wandered a bit, mostly through my own desires rather than driven by the dynamics of the workforce. Many professors (and, to be honest, my parents) told me to go straight to grad school, or told me I was making a mistake taking a job at a community college, but the choices I made were good choices for me: I learned a lot from both of those experiences that continues to shape my approach to work and to people. Working in the service industry exposed me to a wide variety of people, and as a guide I came to know the basic needs that drove them. Working at a community college with 30% Navajo students taught me that culture and background has a strong influence on who you are and how you interact, and I learned to adapt. I've been open to learning from every experience I have, and integrating that learning into my profession.

Where do you see your sector moving in future years? How would you advise students to prepare to be competitive job applicants and successful employees?

Non-profits have not fared well during COVID, and can be challenging places to work even when there is no pandemic. Many rely on donations and/or membership dues to cover their operational expenses, and both have been down. Successful non-profits provide true value to their members, and/or have a passionate following, so that they can remain financially stable. Many people go into the non-profit world because they are passionate about a cause and do not want to think about making money, but making money and ensuring the financial solvency of the organization is always on the mind of the leadership and staff of any non-profit organization. And making money for the organization can be tricky. If you have a good feel for making strong and meaningful connections with people and helping them see why they should support your work, you can become a fundraiser and the non-profit world can be a great place. Just the passion for the work, however, can lead to burnout, which is what happens to a lot of people. It's important to be able to look at everything you want the organization to do and then prioritize and pare it down to what the organization can do sustainably.

What is the role of networking in your sector? Do you have advice for a student who is just beginning to build their network? What is the best way for students to get their foot in the door?

Networking is important once you are in the sector: non-profits often collaborate, seek out corporate sponsors, etc. Getting a foot in the door at a non-profit usually involves becoming a volunteer first, or participating in the programming offered, or taking on an elected leadership role. It's a good way to learn about the organization, the constraints on the budget, the involvement of the board, and how you can contribute.

What does a “typical” day of work look like for you?

My work at NAGT is about 30% of my time. Some days, I don't do any work for NAGT at all, some days are all NAGT. As with academia, there is also a seasonality to the work that is driven by the timing of our annual meetings and other big events. In a typical week, I have a standing 1-hour meeting with the business manager of the organization and a 1-hour meeting with all of the staff. In addition, I might have a committee meeting to attend. A lot of the job is responding to email requests, which might be to approve payments or to answer more substantial inquiries. Then a few hours might be working on implementing something: writing new web content, or setting up plans for future work. This past year, we have been working on a strategic plan, which has mostly involved getting input from the membership and leadership and establishing new goals and actions to implement those goals.

What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job at NAGT is helping people become better educators and researchers and giving them the support they need when they need it. Teaching can be a lonely profession, especially for university faculty who had little to no preparation in it before they ended up in front of students. I love that we provide programs that help people, every day. And in a small non-profit like NAGT, even as Executive Director, I am involved in our programming and work with people directly.

Do you have any other comments or advice for students looking to enter your sector of the geoscience workforce?

There are not a lot of non-profits out there focused solely on geoscience. There is, however, a lot of room to bring geoscience in to other organizations. Look around at the organizations you love and support: what do they do well? Why do you continue to support them? Try to emulate that in your own work.

Connect:

I am happy for anyone to reach out with questions.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/anne-egger-92786a211/>