

# AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

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## New Directions for AAAS

Last year the AAAS Board of Directors appointed a Committee on New Directions, chaired by Leonard Rieser. The Committee was asked to look ahead to 1980 and beyond, to anticipate the climate for science and technology in the United States and suggest new and meaningful roles and missions for AAAS.

The Committee has been holding spirited meetings, and in October its chairman made a progress report to the Board. The Committee has avoided both the trap of reinventing the objectives of the Association and the itch to spend its time reevaluating ongoing programs. What concerned it was the future and how AAAS could make the best of it.

A number of ideas have come to light which have the flavor of innovation and hint at a more rapid pulsebeat in the performance of AAAS. Each responds to the question of how AAAS can anticipate the needs of science and society and contribute to making a difference in how things turn out. Two broad priorities stand out thus far in the Committee's thinking. One concerns the role of AAAS in relation to public choices that have strong scientific or technological components or that carry strong implications for the future direction of science and technology. The other focuses on steps that AAAS could take to see that science and technology are presented accurately to the public, including informed commentary on borderline science.

Two of the Committee's proposals concern the style of AAAS behavior. One emphasizes the leverage that the Association has as a convenor of sectors and groups which now go their separate ways but which have strong voices in decisions that affect science policy. An example of the use of this role was the colloquium held by AAAS in Washington last summer on the federal R & D budget, in which representatives of Congress, the White House, industry, and academia took an active part. The second proposal of the Committee urges the Association to move increasingly toward collaborative relationships with other professional associations, following the precedent of the National Conference of Lawyers and Scientists, a joint venture of AAAS and the American Bar Association. The possibilities here are for similar joint relationships with groups representing such professions as journalism and industrial management.

Going beyond the area of style into that of substance, the Committee is suggesting two major departures. One would take AAAS closer to policy controversy, through selective publication of panel reports on disputed questions involving science or technology with public policy, with the aim not of throwing weight on one side or the other but of injecting clarification from a respected quarter. The second significant proposal would involve strengthening and extending AAAS efforts in public communication, including *Science* and the annual meetings, but with the addition of concern for improving science programming in commercial television and motion pictures. In the age of electronics, AAAS can no longer fail to take into account the influence, for better or worse, of commercial television and films in shaping social attitudes toward science and technology.

These ideas are timely and stimulating. They seem compatible with our character and objectives, and they suggest the development of momentum in the affairs of the AAAS. Putting them in the context of initiatives that AAAS is already taking—active concern for problems of scientific freedom and responsibility; new departures in the field of science and public policy; regional forums on the impacts of science on society; programs to improve the status of women, minorities, and the handicapped in science; congressional fellowships; outreach to international science; and the strengthening of *Science* as a preeminent journal—it all points to a lively design for the future.—WILLIAM D. CAREY