

Published on *American Geosciences Institute* (<https://www.americangeosciences.org>)  
Home > Congressional Fellow Translates Geoscience Into Language Policymakers Can Understand

---

## Congressional Fellow Translates Geoscience Into Language Policymakers Can Understand



Ryan Edwards had completed degrees in geology and civil and environmental engineering, including a Ph.D. from Princeton University. But he still had a few things to learn when he embarked on his recently completed term as AGI's 2018-2019 William L. Fisher Congressional Geoscience Fellow, he says.

"What I got out of this fellowship is almost 100 percent communication," says Edwards, who served in the office of Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island. "It forced me to think about how to translate science into the ways we need to communicate ? quickly and effectively ? to policy and stakeholder groups."

Among other duties, Edwards monitored developments in science news, met with constituents and stakeholders, conveyed relevant information to the senator, helped draft science-related legislation, and wrote for the weekly speeches on climate that Sen. Whitehouse has traditionally delivered on Capitol Hill. Much of this work built on Edwards's research on hydraulic fracturing and geological storage of carbon dioxide.

Each year, the Fisher Fellowship allows a geoscientist the unique opportunity to spend a year in Washington, D.C., working as a staff member in the office of a member of Congress or with a congressional committee.

"Like it or not, decisions on funding for geosciences, regulations affecting geoscience-related industries, and environmental policies that rely on geoscience must all be made by legislatures and government agencies," says Edwards. "It is very important that geoscientists are involved in helping policymakers understand the science and make good decisions."

Edwards, who has always been fascinated by the world of policy, says that the fellowship opened his eyes to "how important individual people are in policymaking." Even a perfect policy will not get anywhere by itself, he adds. "It needs individuals to identify political opportunities to enact it, to champion the legislation, and to connect and build support with stakeholders."

Prior to moving to the United States from Australia, Edwards earned a bachelor's degree in geology at the University of Adelaide and worked as a water engineer in the mining and natural resource management industries. Edwards was also a fellow with the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, where he worked on energy and climate policy issues, investigating ways to accelerate deployment of carbon capture and storage.

"Ryan understands that real-world scientific problems can't be solved by science alone and are just as dependent on communication and decision-making," said AGI Executive Director Allyson Anderson Book. "His work in carbon capture and storage is timely and relevant."

Every year, AGI's Fisher Fellow joins more than two dozen other scientists and engineers for an intensive orientation program on the legislative and executive branches, organized by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which also

provides educational and collegial programs throughout the year.

Edwards recommends the experience. “I would tell prospective fellows,” he says, “that the fellowship will broaden your horizons, that you will learn first-hand how science and scientists can contribute in policymaking, and that you will see the breadth of opportunities to make an impact beyond academia.”

Learn more about AGI’s Fisher Fellowship.

## Tags:

- geotimes, congressional geoscience fellow, fellowship
-