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## **Linking Geoscientists and Geoscience Information with Decision Makers at the U.S. Federal, State, and Local Levels**

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The United States is a federation of 50 states with multiple levels of decision making. The federal government is concentrated in Washington, DC, where the legislative branch (Congress), the administrative branch (the President, federal agencies), and the judicial branch (federal courts) make, implement, and interpret nationwide laws and regulations. Each state also has its own government and legal structure. At the local level, counties, cities, towns, and other districts are responsible for many matters including planning, emergency management, and infrastructure. Tribal, insular, and territorial areas add another layer of complexity.

Many decisions made by these governments have a significant geoscience component, including national energy policies, state investments in natural hazard mitigation, and local planning and zoning regulations. The American Geosciences Institute (AGI), which is a federation of 51 member societies that span the geosciences and represent about 250,000 members, has created two programs to raise awareness of, and appreciation for, the geosciences among policy and decision makers at all levels in the U.S.: the Geoscience Policy program and the Critical Issues program. Together these programs raise geoscientists' awareness of, and engagement with, policy making and facilitate interactions between geoscientists and decision makers. The Geoscience Policy program, established in 1992, focuses on the federal level, while the Critical Issues program, initiated in 2013, targets the larger and more dispersed audience of state and local decision makers.

At the federal level, AGI interacts regularly with key policy makers, issues a Monthly Review reporting on geoscience policy developments, creates factsheets about key policy issues, and collaborates with other geoscience organizations to run Geoscience Congressional Visits Day and to present unified messages on behalf of the national geoscience community. A recent publication, *Geoscience for America's Critical Needs* [1], identifies geoscience policy priorities in the lead-up to the 2016 Presidential election. AGI also supports a Congressional Geoscience Fellow who spends a year in a Congressional office.

Because it is difficult to track and react to the multitude of state and local issues on an individual basis, the Critical Issues program is designed to address common themes mainly by delivering information through its website ([www.americangeosciences.org/critical-issues](http://www.americangeosciences.org/critical-issues)). The program links decision makers to relevant sources of information and to geoscientists, particularly to State Geological Surveys. The Critical Issues webinar series, which addresses issues of immediate interest, is proving very popular and is attracting an international audience. Critical Issues forums bring geoscientists, policy makers, and stakeholders together to explore technical, economic, policy, and social aspects of key geoscience topics. In order to effectively reach decision makers who may not be familiar with AGI, the program is building collaborative links with organizations that key decision makers already view as trusted sources of information.

*References:*

[1] American Geosciences Institute (2015) *Geoscience for America's Critical Needs*: American Geosciences Institute, 13p.

