



Geography in the Americas: Resources for Supporting International Collaboration

March 22, 2009

A special panel at the 2009 AAG Annual Meeting discussed how to procure resources that enable geographers across the Americas to garner the support needed to pursue international collaboration. Panelists shared information and experiences on how to develop successful research projects, how to take full advantage of the unique nature of international collaboration, and how to best pursue opportunities for support. Panelists distributed print information about a large number of programs related to their institutions, many of them providing grants, networking functions, or other kinds of facilitation for international research collaboration among geographers of the Americas. Questions from the audience launched discussion around identification of some of the most critical emerging themes for which resources were increasingly focused, many themes of which relate strongly to the work of geographers. Queries about the how the current economic downturn might affect resource-seekers met with mixed responses, generally that for now, particularly with governmental sources, opportunities were ample, but especially foundations expect to see lower awards being made for a couple of years. Additional discussion centered on advice for successfully submitting competitive proposals for grants, fellowships, or travel funds.

Panelists included **Santiago Borrero**, Secretary General of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH), an organization of the Organization of American States (OAS) with headquarters in Mexico City, Mexico. Borrero shared his 28 years of experience in information and development, especially in the production and application of geographic information for developing nations. He noted that over the next ten years, PAIGH will especially seek to support innovative programs that draw upon interdisciplinary and transnational research. One area of emphasis from their strategic plan that links across all four commissions in PAIGH, namely cartography, geography, geophysics, and history, is natural disasters and hazards research and education. Borrero explained the organization's strong network and reputation within Latin America, particularly with government institutions in addition to universities and the private sector, represents an important resource for geographers seeking to establish or strengthen contact with colleagues in the region.

Ned Strong, Executive Director of LASPAU: Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas, a non-profit organization affiliated with Harvard University that administers Fulbright Programs in the Americas, among other opportunities, described a suite of programs and opportunities offered currently. He also stressed the importance of establishing good relationships between institutions when collaborations begin, not only for increasing the competitive level of proposals, but also for improving changes for a successful experience. For example, a letter of support from a collaborating university in the U.S. significantly boosts funding prospects for a project proposed by a foreign researcher, he said. His remarks also underscored a recent trend whereby foundations in particular are turning toward supporting more entrepreneurial, creative programs, focused on meeting the most urgent needs.

Nicole Stahlmann, Director of Fellowship Programs of the American Council of Learned Societies, spoke about opportunities for seeking support for both individual and collaborative research. Stahlmann described a significant new program designed to support up to 200 fellowships for researchers working on international or interdisciplinary topics. She also remarked that the most successful proposals are

those with clear strategies and well organized plans. In a context where funding for research in human or physical geography sometimes overshadows awareness of such opportunities, Stahlmann also noted how the ACLS was able to fill in an important niche to support geographers working in the humanities.

Ibrahim M. Shaqir, Director of the Office of International Research Programs within the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) of the US Department of Agriculture, shared his expertise in collaborative research using information management and international cooperation in agricultural sciences. In particular, he described programs and in-house research at ARS designed to enhance the productivity, effectiveness, and impact of USDA services through mutually beneficial international activities. He noted current opportunities in the Andean region, as well as Brazil, where agricultural research is strong. Shaqir encouraged geographers to engage with domestic staff working internationally as one way to enhance research collaboration, generate new research contacts, or link up activities with broader projects and results.

Mark Caicedo described the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) Fellowship Program, which he oversees. The IAF Fellowship Program supports graduate study on grassroots development topics in Latin America and the Caribbean. Caicedo mentioned that one principal objective of the program is to provide the means for Latin American scholars to study in U.S. institutions. His remarks lead to a brief discussion of insightful comments regarding creative ways to support collaborations across borders, piecing together, for instance, funds from different sources that have differing eligibility criteria, as well as finding other support that motivates participation on the part of colleagues from across the hemisphere.

Jessica Robin, Program Officer of the Americas Program in the Office of International Science and Engineering at the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), spoke about the NSF's role in supporting transnational collaborative research projects. She noted that many domestic projects funded by the NSF are eligible for additional funding to increase their scope beyond the U.S., referring to IGERT and REU options. Robin also mentioned that certain programs provide up to \$20,000 to allow researchers to travel to another country as part of a funded research project. She also described the International Research Fellowship Program (IRFP) that supports early career scientists to gain international experience as well as the Pan-American Studies Institute (PASI) Program that supports 50% US scholars and 50% Latin American scholars to engage in short scientific institutes. She reported that the Partnerships for International Research and Education (PIRE) program no longer has budgetary limitations.

The panel identified some of the major topics, or thematic emphases that they recognize as experiencing growing importance to resource providers working in the Americas, including: immigration, economic impact, health, climate change, natural disasters, cyberinfrastructure, water, energy, innovation, food security, indigenous peoples, commodities, energy, invasive species, and others. The audience remarked how geographers across the Americas are contributing to such themes and may be well poised to continue pursuing such opportunities in a collaborative fashion.

Advice was shared by all panelists regarding what elements engender not only success with proposals being approved, but also success with respect to the results of international research collaborations. Among those identified were projects that: represent true intellectual collaboration with foreign counterparts; engage with colleagues in developing regions such as Latin America; combine research, education and capacity building activities; are interdisciplinary in nature; clearly identify outcomes or end results; are transformative; are innovative; create excellence; demonstrate potential for long-term impact; or might be sustainable or transferrable.

The panel, sponsored by the AAG, co-organized by **Patricia Solís**, AAG Director of Outreach and Strategic Initiatives and **Matthew Hamilton**, AAG Developing Regions Membership Coordinator, and endorsed by the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers (CLAG) and the AAG Latin America Specialty Group, continued a series of featured sessions on Geography in the Americas, focused on topics related to international collaboration among geographers of the hemisphere. They began with the first Spanish-language session in Chicago 2006 on the State of Geography in the Americas; San Francisco 2007 on the Potential for International Collaboration in the Americas; and in Boston 2008 on Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration in the Americas.



(L to R) Geography in the Americas Panelists: Shaqir, Strong, Robin, Borrero, Stahlmann, Solís (AAG), Caicado, with Doug Richardson (AAG Executive Director).

Additional Information:

- AAG, Association of American Geographers www.aag.org
Latin America: <http://www.aag.org/Developing/Latin-America/index.htm>
AAG Grants and Awards: <http://www.aag.org/Grantsawards/index.cfm>
Proposal Writing Resources: http://www.aag.org/Grantsawards/grant_writing.cfm
Writing Competitive Research Proposals, *Aspiring Academics*: www.aag.org/EDGE/edge_materials.cfm
Como Preparar Propuestas: <http://geografwiki.wdfiles.com/local--files/funds/propuestas.pdf>
AAG Developing Regions Membership Program: <http://www.aag.org/Developing/index.htm>
Geography in the Americas 2009: <http://www.aag.org/Developing/Latin-America/americas2009.htm>
Estado de la Geografía, 2006: <http://geografwiki.wdfiles.com/local--files/documents/El%20Estado%20Actual%20de%20la%20Geografia.pdf>
US Latin American Collaboration, 2006: <http://geografwiki.wdfiles.com/local--files/documents/US%20and%20Latin%20American%20Collaboration.pdf>
Oportunidades de Colaboración, 2007: <http://geografwiki.wdfiles.com/local--files/documents/Oportunidades%20de%20Colaboracion%20Internacional.pdf>
Interdisciplinary Collaboration, 2008: http://communicate.aag.org/eseries/aag_org/program/SessionDetail.cfm?SessionID=6275
The AAMIGA Project: <http://geografwiki.wikidot.com/aamiga>
LASG: <http://sites.maxwell.syr.edu/clag/lasg.htm>
CLAG: <http://sites.maxwell.syr.edu/clag/clag.htm>
- ACLS, American Council of Learned Societies
Main page: <http://www.acls.org/>
Fellowships and Grants: <http://www.acls.org/grants/default.aspx?id=354>
Competitions and Deadlines: <http://www.acls.org/grants/Single.aspx?id=352>
Awardees: <http://www.acls.org/research/Default.aspx?id=1504>
- IAF, Inter-American Foundation
Main page: http://www.iaf.gov/index/index_en.asp
Dissertation Fellowship Program http://www.iaf.gov/fellowships/about_program_en.asp
Other grants: http://www.iaf.gov/grants/apply_grant_en.asp
Publications: http://www.iaf.gov/publications/publications_en.asp?menuId=51
- LASPAU: Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas (Harvard University)
Main page: <http://www.laspau.harvard.edu/>
Grant opportunities: <http://www.laspau.harvard.edu/grant-laspau.htm>
Other fellowships listing: <http://www.laspau.harvard.edu/fellow.htm>
Opportunities for international students: <http://www.laspau.harvard.edu/grant-resources.htm>
- NSF Office of International Science and Engineering
Main page: <http://www.nsf.gov/div/index.jsp?div=OISE>
Americas Program: <http://www.nsf.gov/od/oiase/americas.jsp>
DGSE: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=12831&org=OISE&from=home
IRFP: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5179&org=OISE&from=home
PASI: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5327&org=OISE&from=home
PIRE: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=12819&org=OISE&from=home
- PAIGH (IPGH), Pan American Institute of Geography and History
Main page: <http://www.ipgh.org/spanish/default.htm>
Strategic Plan 2010-2020: www.ipgh.org/Consejo-Directivo/41-RCD/Files_41-RCD/Inf-Sec-Gral-2008.pdf
Convocatoria 2009: http://www.ipgh.org/Cooperacion-Tecnica/Files_CT/Conv_Proj_2010.doc
Capacitación y Becas: <http://www.ipgh.org/spanish/quienes-somos/#capacitacion>
Others : <http://www.ipgh.org/spanish/convocatorias/>
- USDA Office of International Research Programs, Agricultural Research Service
Main page: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/docs.htm?docid=1428>
Latin America: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=7088>
Research Initiatives: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=1414>