



LETTER FROM THE PAST PRESIDENT

I want to start by saying thank you to each and every NACIS member, conference attendee, and volunteer—past and present—for being part of the NACIS community and fostering its growth. In our organization’s 41 years, we’ve experienced *a lot* of changes, both in the field and in the world around us. What has always been constant is the NACIS community, and our ability to keep evolving our Society to remain relevant as the field of cartography changes. The caliber of our conferences, our organizational initiatives, and our passionate volunteers make us one of the most unique societies out there, and one that we should all feel proud to be a part of.

The past two conference years, Virtual NACIS 2020 and Hybrid NACIS 2021, are testament to our Society’s ability to forge new ground even in the toughest of times. As program planner for our first fully virtual conference in 2020, I feel so proud of what we were able to accomplish together, and of the bright spot the conference was able to offer to many of us during a difficult and unprecedented time. Virtual NACIS 2020 required a completely new conference model, one that we adapted to quickly and which gave our Society the amazing opportunity to bring people in our industry together from around the world.

Kicking off NACIS 2020 was our keynote speaker, the passionate and insightful [Marusia Musacchio](#), who set the stage for what we all hoped our virtual conference would be: engaging, fun, and memorable. Our session moderators brought Virtual NACIS to life with live speaker engagement, made possible by the incredible team at [e3 Webcasting](#) and our Slack channels. We got to virtually meet our Corlis Benifideo Awardees, [Tonika Lewis Johnson](#) and [Paola Aguirre Serrano](#) and learn more about their imaginative cartography. The sessions on [Mapping for Change](#) and [Mapping for Society](#) were inspirational and show the power of stronger collaboration between program planners and our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, which took the lead in recruiting a diverse set of speakers. NACIS 2020 also brought a lot of new ways for our content and organization to be made more accessible. We had our first ever virtual Map Gallery which opened up cartographers’ entries to a much wider audience, and we also introduced a revamped version of our Student Dynamic Mapping Competition, with attendees now voting to select the winning entries. On the social side, Slack took on a life of its own and continues to be a way for our members to engage with each other between conferences. The virtual social events in Remo were so memorable, and took the conference experience to the next level. And within days, all talks were posted to our [YouTube Channel](#).

In short, all of the positivity that was familiar to those of us who had attended in-person NACIS was radiating around the world through our computer screens. I can't say thank you enough to **the Board and volunteers** that I had the fortune of working with during my program planning year. We will forever be bonded by the experience of pulling off the NACIS 40th Annual Meeting in the middle of a global pandemic.

2021 has been another, totally different version of a pandemic year. This year, some people could travel, while others could not. As an organization we had to figure out yet another conference model that built off of the success of the 2020 virtual experience and the previous 39 years of in-person experiences, while keeping our organization financially healthy and responsible. Huge congratulations are due to Pat Kennelly and Travis White for a successful Hybrid NACIS 2021. Planning a conference that had the energy it did both in Oklahoma City and online was no small effort.

Even while the Hybrid conference was in the works, this all-volunteer organization tirelessly pushed forward on other NACIS initiatives. Our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee worked closely with Pat and Travis on speaker recruitment for the 2021 program. The committee also gathered feedback from the NACIS community via surveys, and is actively working on ways to bring more awareness about DE&I to our organization across different initiatives. Our Communications and Outreach committee continues to increase our presence on social media, maintain nacis.org, and send out the wonderful NACIS Newsletter. In addition, the committee worked with several volunteers to expand our outreach mailing list, adding nearly 200 new contacts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and other Minority-Serving Institutions. The Awards Committee continues to manage everything from conference swag to map galleries to travel grants, while also working on ways to fund more people from underrepresented groups to attend our conference. The NACIS Store has been a big hit and is becoming *the place* to find the latest mappy gear. All proceeds from the store go to student and member travel grants and conference accessibility. Finally, the Membership and Analytics Committee worked to analyze conference survey results from the past few years. As a result, the committee redesigned this year's conference survey, focusing on the right kind of feedback so we can continue to make improvements and measure their impact over time.

This coming year, under Pat's leadership, all of these efforts (and more!) will continue to grow. In addition, our Finance Committee will evaluate the 2021 hybrid model to determine what version is most sustainable for Minneapolis 2022 and beyond, giving special attention to the impacts on long-term financial viability if in-person conference attendance declines.

My first NACIS was St. Louis, in 2007. Over the years, as an attendee and a volunteer, I have made best friends, found mentors, and maintained meaningful relationships. The NACIS community has been instrumental in making me feel more confident in myself as a professional in our industry. The fact that I, like many, reference life events on a NACIS conference timeline is a testament to how meaningful this organization is and the sense of community it has brought.

As Past President, I feel a tremendous amount of gratitude and appreciation for the work NACIS does as an all-volunteer organization. I've had the opportunity to work alongside the most passionate group of volunteers, who care so deeply about this Society and the people who are a part of it. To all the Board members I've had the honor of working with,

thank you for lifting me with courage and joining me in making a true impact on this Society. An extra special thanks to our Director of Continuity, Ginny Mason, our Director of Operations, Nick Martinelli, and our Super Woman Business Manager, Susan Peschel. Thank you for your constant mentorship and friendship and keeping this all going from the background. I've grown so much because of you and can't thank you enough for everything you do for NACIS.

In closing, NACIS is a community first and a Society second. Let's continue to ask tough questions and be the change that we want to see. Let's continue to cultivate a safe space where all feel welcome and that is more representative of our industry. Let's continue to keep the field of cartography relevant. Most importantly, let's all do it together and through community, continue building the Society that we feel proud being a part of.

Mamata Akella

NACIS Past President

