

# VIEWPOINT

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO [GEOSCIENTIST@GEOLSOC.ORG.UK](mailto:GEOSCIENTIST@GEOLSOC.ORG.UK)  
FOR GUIDANCE ON SUBMITTING A COLUMN,  
SEE [GEOSCIENTIST.ONLINE](http://GEOSCIENTIST.ONLINE)

COLUMN

## Connection matters

Earth and space science have come under fire in the US, with global ramifications. Brandon Jones reflects on a challenging year, arguing that strong networks – national and international – are more essential now than ever

**G**rowing up in Springfield, Ohio, I was a good 700 miles from the ocean, but one day that distance dramatically shrank. I was around seven years old when I first watched the documentary series *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*. The vibrant corals and the other-worldly creatures from the deep sparked a wonder that connected to a curiosity, which ultimately led to a lifelong passion.

My journey from classroom to lab, from fieldwork to more than 20 years of service in US federal science, has been rooted in the dynamics of making connections – with mentors and colleagues. Connections like these built the powerhouse that is our global scientific enterprise, and it will be our connections that get us through the current challenges facing the Earth and space science community.

We can ensure resilience, stability and growth of

geoscience in three fundamental ways: holding onto our connections; digging deeper into existing connections; and branching out to establish new ones.

### An altered landscape

First, we must solidly link with our immediate community.

We are over a year into an altered landscape for global science. Through executive orders, withholding congressionally approved funding, and brazen, questionable personnel actions, the current US Administration has made its priorities regarding science abundantly clear.

Across federal agencies, the scientific workforce is being hollowed out by mass terminations, pressure-driven resignations, and early retirements, erasing generations of institutional knowledge and undermining future discovery and innovation. Research budgets across the

full breadth of the geosciences, from planetary science and heliophysics to climate science and geohealth, are under continued threat of profound cuts at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), United States Geological Survey (USGS), and National Science Foundation (NSF). At the same time, environmental protections are being systematically dismantled, and the communication of scientific evidence has become increasingly politicized – further weakening the ability of science to inform policy and protect the public.

As President of the American Geophysical Union (AGU), the world's largest association of Earth and space scientists, and a former Program Director at the NSF, I have seen this play out up close – and way too personal. In the fall of 2025, I

made the very difficult decision to leave NSF and federal service to find other areas within the research enterprise to support science and undergird important initiatives for aspiring STEM professionals.

On one hand, I found myself linked with thousands of federal colleagues either let go or pushed out of their positions, and on the other, able to directly assist and support through a large association like AGU. I have never been a fan of the phrase *bully pulpit* to describe the special platform a certain position affords a certain occupant. I like to think of my role as AGU President more as *inspo instigation* – how one can motivate positive action.

In the face of the recent enormous challenges, AGU relied on the connections our members have with one another around the world. We collected and carefully listened to impact stories, drafted statements, increased policy trainings,



© Getty

Geoscience Union (JpGU), we sport a rich tapestry of international linkages in the geosciences. But if attention is not paid to expansion and reinforcement, then connective threads may become frayed and strained.

Shirley Chilsom, the first Black woman to run for president in the United States, famously said: "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." With science under attack on so many fronts, colleagues around the world aren't just pulling up a chair; they are building their own tables.

Last summer, AGU joined with the American Meteorological Society (AMS) to create a new special collection on climate assessment research to continue the momentum of the now shuttered sixth National Climate Assessment.

In addition, we saw a whole new *ad hoc* organisation form. The US Academic Alliance for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) opened a portal for experts, authors and review editors for the IPCC Seventh Assessment. With critical climate reports and readouts being cancelled by the current US Administration, this move represented a bold resetting and reframing for how scientists can organise and mobilise.

### Branching out

The third and final component to science's connective power potential is how we boldly mature past traditional frames and operational structures. At AGU, we decided we needed to do more for the community on multiple fronts. As thousands of federal scientists were

impacted by potentially unlawful firings engineered by the self-proclaimed, and now defunct, Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), we engaged as co-plaintiffs with Democracy Forward ([democracyforward.org](http://democracyforward.org)) in multiple court cases to challenge these actions. It's been a rollercoaster of ups and downs as decisions have passed from circuits to appeals to, ultimately, the Supreme Court. This process is a long game, but we have made a decision to support our members and advance our mission over the long haul.

New alliances are increasingly being shaped not only by institutional partnerships, but by shared scientific needs. One of the most urgent is the preservation of data.

A stark example is NASA's Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC), which lost funding last year following the federal administration's decision to reduce support for Columbia University in New York, which hosts the center. SEDAC developed and maintained critical datasets and applications on land use, population, and climate impacts –resources that have been foundational to the socioeconomic components of IPCC assessments.

At the same time, actions by the current US administration to decommission or remove data pose far broader risks. These include terminating data collection for the Sea Ice Index, which tracks changes in polar sea ice, and removing online access to the US Global Change Research Program and National Climate Assessment reports.

Together, these steps threaten data continuity and global scientific understanding, with consequences that extend far beyond the United States.

AGU and other global partners kicked off The Data Resilience Project addressing the governance and technical architecture needed for a more resilient global data network. These efforts are also being complemented by a special journals' collection. We are connecting over a vital issue with new substantive partners, a good reminder about keeping our networks fresh.

### Threaded connections

Science is a never-ending cycle of ideas born and shared; theories developed and tested, research undertaken and expanded upon. And each step of the way, it is all threaded through connections. Connections made person to person, institution to institution, government to government. I urge all in our global community to be mindful of their immediate colleagues, to develop deeper, more complex ties within existing networks, and finally to cultivate new partnerships for strengthening the Earth and space sciences. **G**

#### DR BRANDON JONES

President, American Geophysical Union, USA  
[agu.org](http://agu.org)

### FURTHER READING

A full list of further reading is available at [geoscientist.online](http://geoscientist.online).

- [fromtheprow.agu.org](http://fromtheprow.agu.org)
- Weinberg, J. & Pflaumer, K. (2025) AGU and AMS join forces on special collection to maintain momentum of research supporting the U.S. National Climate assessment. AGU Press Release, 2 May; [news.agu.org/press-release](http://news.agu.org/press-release)

created assistance programmes, and broadened our career guidance offerings.

These are crisis fundamentals and cannot be carried out in a "one and done" fashion. Over a year after stunning policy shifts, we must still be in constant contact with our colleagues to assess their needs and challenges.

Being there in support of the people – whether it is member societies, research teams, alumni groups or any kind of cohort – is still paramount to keeping our science community strong.

### Dig deeper

Second, key relationship building does not stop at just being a dues-paying member. We can and should dig deeper into outer networks.

Our global scientific enterprise has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to organisations and associations. From AGU to the European Geosciences Union (EGU) and to the Japan