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Find application information at [www.geosociety.org/csf](http://www.geosociety.org/csf) or contact Ginger Williams, +1-303-357-1040, [gwilliams@geosociety.org](mailto:gwilliams@geosociety.org). **Deadline for application:** 1 February 2009; selection of the next GSA-USGS Congressional Science Fellow will be made soon thereafter.

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## 2007–2008 Congressional Science Fellow Final Report

*Maria Honeycutt*

While the 2008 elections created tremendous anticipation on Capitol Hill this fall, my excitement was tempered by the realization that my tenure as the 2007–2008 Geological Society of America–U.S. Geological Survey Congressional Science Fellow was rapidly coming to an end. I am deeply indebted to GSA and the USGS for giving me the opportunity to work with a phenomenal host office (Senator Bill Nelson of Florida) and experience first-hand the application of science in our legislative process. This has truly been a life- and career-changing experience.

So, what's next? This deceptively easy question (which usually strikes fear in the hearts of outgoing Congressional Science Fellows) typically lacks an easy answer. After spending a year gaining insights into the formulation and implementation of science policy, what's the next logical step? What does one do with this type of experience?

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), which manages the Science and Technology Policy Fellowship Program, tracks the professional whereabouts of program alumni. The AAAS estimates that in the year following the fellowship, roughly 40%–50% of Fellows continue in science policy. Of the remainder, half tend to return to their pre-fellowship professional sector and the others pursue completely new opportunities.

Although I had the option of returning to my pre-fellowship position as a consultant, I ultimately decided that I could not go back. My perspective on the environmental challenges our nation faces, as well as the role geoscientists can and must play in the policy dialogue, had changed too much for me to be content with resuming my former career.

Once I'd decided to remain in science policy, the question became, what do I do now?

During my year on the Hill, I made a habit of asking former Fellows and other colleagues about their career paths. I was amazed at the diversity of post-fellowship jobs that constitute the “next step” in a science-policy career. Common choices include staying on the Hill, working in government affairs for a non-profit or advocacy organization, becoming a registered lobbyist for particular interest groups or companies, or joining a think-tank that conducts independent policy analysis. Most of these positions are focused on the federal government, but there is also a vast array of jobs dealing with state, regional, and local issues.



As I conversed with colleagues involved in science policy for more than 10 years, I learned that mid-career moves were equally diverse and tended not to follow any sort of predictable pattern. People commonly cycled multiple times through positions on the Hill, in government, and with non-profit organizations. All found their work to be rewarding and valued the different perspectives gained in each job. This was good news, but I was still struggling to determine what next step would be best for me.

As the end of the fellowship approached, I tried to organize the dozens of career narratives swimming around in my head and define a typical career path within geoscience policy. In the aca-

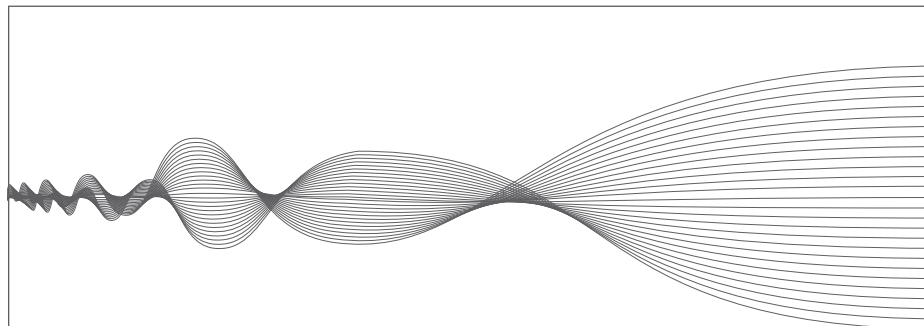
demographic and consulting worlds, the rungs of the career ladder and measures of productivity are relatively well defined. I figured that if I could identify discrete milestones in a science-policy career progression, I could better evaluate the opportunities before me and chart a course forward.

Unfortunately, the wealth of data and advice I received (and my analysis of it) failed to answer some critical questions. None addressed the question of what constitutes a lateral career move in science policy versus advancement (or regression). Few provided tangible metrics that I could use to gauge my effectiveness and thus my value in the field. How could I match my skill level with a potential position? How could I or my employer objectively judge my efforts?

After spending months trying to define the typical geoscience policy career path (as if there were only one), I concluded that I was looking for something that simply doesn't exist. While those involved in science policy must have some common skills and certain basic knowledge about government operations, where you go from there is really up to you. One's effectiveness is largely measured over years or over a career, not in annual personnel review cycles. Although failing to come up with a "typical" career track and concrete metrics was a little frustrating for me in the near term, I'm convinced that this outcome is actually a very good thing.

The best analogy I've come up with is that science-policy careers are like braided streams. Multiple parallel (but sometimes intersecting) tracks comprise a larger system aimed at bridging the gap between scientific research and public policy. No one track is necessarily superior to another, and it's relatively easy to shift course as your interests or the needs of decision makers change. The variety of potential professional experiences and the great flexibility with which members can acquire essential knowledge and skills both enhance the viability (and desirability) of science policy as a career field.

So after all this research, what's next? Much to my husband's relief, I eventually found an answer. I accepted a position working jointly with the National



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Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal Services Center and Climate Program Office. With projects focusing on coastal hazards, climate change, and adaptation planning, I'll remain intimately involved in many geoscience policy issues. While I can envision staying in this type of role for the duration of my career, I'll certainly remain open to other opportunities in the years to come. After all, there is no single, ideal career path in geoscience policy, and that's a wonderful thing.

*This manuscript is submitted for publication by Maria Honeycutt, 2007–2008 GSA–U.S. Geological Survey Congressional Science Fellow, with the understanding that the U.S. government is authorized to reproduce and distribute reprints for governmental use. The one-year fellowship is supported by GSA and by the U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, under Assistance Award No. 07HQGR0140. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the author and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. government. Honeycutt can be reached at [mghoneycutt@gmail.com](mailto:mghoneycutt@gmail.com).*