

# Improving Your Success in AGU Honors

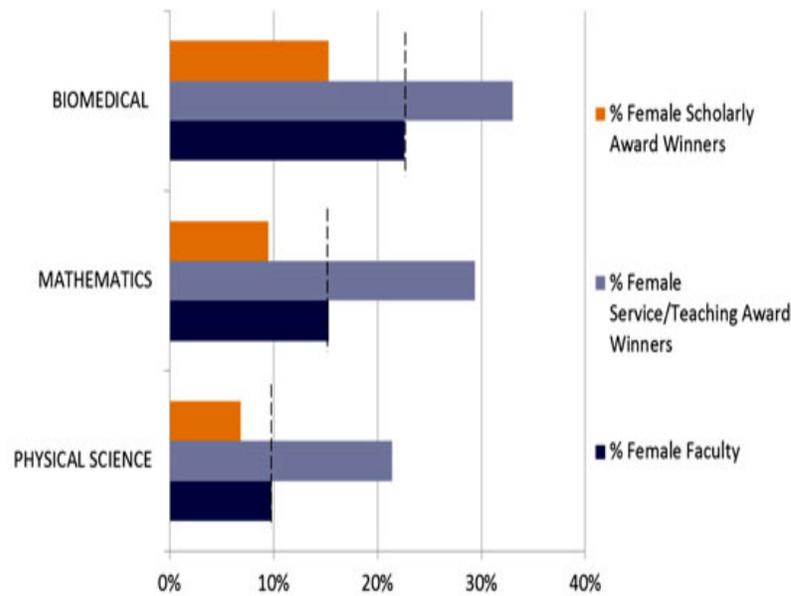
To reduce the barriers for engagement and success in this essential scientific enterprise, the American Geophysical Union is working to build a more transparent culture around the awards and nomination process.

By [Jessica Ball](#), [Eric Davidson](#), [Tracey Holloway](#), [Mary Anne Holmes](#), [Judith Ann McKenzie](#), [Sam Mukasa](#), [Beth Paredes](#), [Carle Pieters](#), [Murugesu Sivapalan](#), and [Jasper Vrugt](#) 6 hours ago

The American Geophysical Union (AGU) has been recognizing excellence in the geosciences for more than 70 years, with 23 Union-wide honors, annual recognition of new Fellows, and numerous section and focus group honors. Recognizing these achievements is important both to the advancement of our science and to the inspiration and motivation of the next generation of scientists.

To reduce the barriers for engagement and success in this essential scientific enterprise, AGU is working to build a more transparent culture around the awards and nomination process. One of the ways we did this was by hosting a workshop at the 2014 Fall Meeting entitled “Improving Your Success in AGU Honors: Tools, Tactics and Tips.” Although the workshop yielded numerous helpful insights, two important issues that require attention stood out.

## To Increase Demographic Diversity of Awardees, Increase Diversity Among Nominators and Nominees



(<https://eos.org>

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Fig. 1. The Association for Women in Science demonstrates that women receive fewer awards than their proportion in professional societies would predict. Women are overrepresented among service and teaching awards.

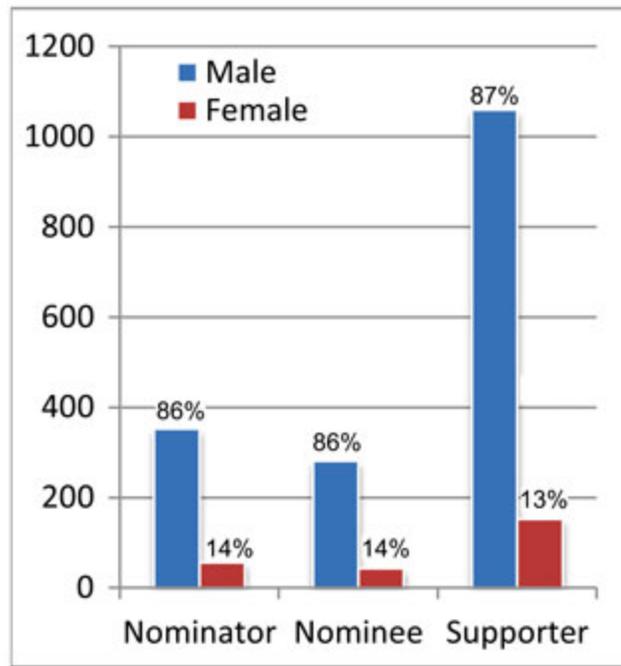
Most professional societies find that persons of color, women (including women of color), and members who are geographically distant from the center of power are inadvertently but regularly underrepresented among awardees (Figure 1). Ensuring fairness is not easy; however, AGU has extracted, processed, and presented demographic data on awardees and membership that allow us to see how we are doing and how we can improve the process going forward. Although these data focus on gender diversity, AGU recognizes the need to improve overall diversity in the honors program and is working on gathering additional data to determine the underrepresentation of other diverse groups.

The data unfortunately reveal that like most other professional societies, AGU honors and awards tend to go to majority members. At AGU, 22% of members are women; however, women receive only 17% of research awards (Figure 2). Analyzing the available data and referring to the body of literature on this topic permit us to identify where the disconnects occur and what can be done to eliminate the imbalance.

	<b>Women Fellows</b>	<b>Men Fellows</b>	<b>Percentage of Women Fellows</b>	<b>Percentage of U.S. Women Ph.D. Recipients</b>
2009	5	51	9	20
2010	8	53	13	19
2011	9	56	14	21
2012	5	60	8	23
2013	13	49	21	20
2014	13	49	21	20

(<https://eos.org/wp-content/uploads>

[/2015/03/15-0107\\_PAREDES\\_4953\\_Table-1\\_Web\\_NEW.jpg?f6cf31](https://eos.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/15-0107_PAREDES_4953_Table-1_Web_NEW.jpg?f6cf31)) Women are also underrepresented among AGU Fellows and have been for years (Table 1). Once nominated, however, their proportion in the nominee pool stays consistent as they progress through the review and approval steps, suggesting that the selection process is a fair one and that implicit biases shared by men and women are not overtly disadvantaging women at this stage. One reason that women are underawarded at AGU is that they comprise only 14% of the nominee pool (Figure 2). Research indicates that both men and women overlook women colleagues for professional awards, nominations for promotions, and leadership positions relative to their presence in the available pool. Therefore, one way to move toward equity is to simply notice our underrepresented colleagues and proactively organize the community to submit nominations of worthy candidates.



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Fig. 2. Total number of nominees, nominators, and letters of support in 2014, broken down by gender. The breakdown shows that women were underrepresented among nominees for awards; they were also underrepresented among nominators and those who wrote supporting letters. Women comprise 22% of the 2014 AGU membership.

Although the data show that the success rate of a nominee is not influenced by the gender of the nominator, only 14% of nominators for awards are women, and letters of support for nominations are less likely to be written by women. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which are higher service burdens and disenfranchisement, women are simply less likely to participate in the AGU honors and recognition process.

One positive note, however, is that in 2013, an exception to the underrepresentation trend occurred, and 22% of the individuals elected as Fellows were women—which reflects the 22%

of AGU's 2013 membership that was composed of women. That success was the result of a conscious effort on the part of those involved in the AGU Fellows awarding process.

## **To Increase the Success of a Nominee, Improve the Quality of the Nomination**

Although most nominees are truly deserving of an AGU honor or award, the nomination packets submitted do not always highlight the person's work in a way that makes the impact of his or her accomplishments clear. To help facilitate a more successful nomination process, AGU has compiled the following list of tips for nominators:

- Discuss why the candidate is well suited for the award goals and pay explicit attention to the selection criteria. Explain the importance of the science/accomplishments relevant to the award. Include the following relevant elements, with the emphasis of each dependent on the award:
  - Science (specific papers that “changed” the field)
  - Service (unique impact, AGU service)
  - Teaching/mentoring or outreach
- Identify clear science achievements. Link to specific papers in a bibliography or on the CV and discuss why they are important.
- Mention other accolades (i.e., National Academies fellowships). Do not just rely on bibliometrics such as the h-factor.
- Follow the nomination requirements (e.g., number of pages, format, CV, bibliography, etc.).
- Distinguish and highlight the role of the nominee (is the nominee a motivator/leader /implementer?).
- Mention relation to coworkers (students, postdoc, mentor, etc.). If the nominee has a large research group, highlight the intellectual contributions made by the individual to the work. Also mention the success of coworkers the nominee has influenced (students, postdocs, and adjunct faculty).
- Summarize the qualifications of the letter writers.

- Present the supporting evidence in the letters in a way that educates or informs the committee members (who may otherwise not be knowledgeable about the candidate).

## Other Resources

We must apply more attention and thought to who we nominate for awards and how we nominate them.

From the workshop discussions, AGU was able to compile a list of myths and facts (<http://honors.agu.org/myths-and-realities/>) with regard to the honors program and the nomination process that is now available. In addition, AGU's Fellows Program Review Task Force recently issued a report highlighting their recommendations (<https://eos.org/agu-news/task-force-recommends-ways-to-improve-agu-fellows-program-2>) for improving the Fellows program.

In short, the research shows that we must apply more attention and thought to who we nominate for awards and how we nominate them. The inspiration and recognition the AGU honors program provides are hugely important. We owe it to ourselves and to the next generation of Earth and space science pioneers to do better.

—Jessica Ball, Eric Davidson, Tracey Holloway, Mary Anne Holmes, Judith Ann McKenzie, Sam Mukasa, Beth Paredes, Carle Pieters, Murugesu Sivapalan, and Jasper Vrugt, panelists on AGU's 2014 Fall Meeting workshop "Improving Your Success in AGU Honors: Tools, Tactics and Tips" (<http://fallmeeting.agu.org/2014/events/improving-success-agu-honors-tips-tools-tactics-2/>); email: [eparedes@agu.org](mailto:eparedes@agu.org) (<mailto:eparedes@agu.org>)

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