



POLICY DEPARTMENT

STRATEGY & PLAN

COMMIT YOUR



📷 [cover] AAC member Christian Pondella; [clockwise] AAC member Austin Schmitz; AAC member Ken Etzel; AAC member Andy Cochrane; AAC member Kylie Fly

TO

COMMUNITY

Vision // *Where we're headed*

5 million climbers empowered to protect climbing communities and ecosystems.

Mission // *How we'll get there*

The mission of the AAC Policy Department is to grow and convene the community of civically active climbers, empower them with information, and partner with them in advocacy.

Strategy // *Our COMPASS*

At the heart of AAC programming is a profound commitment to community—how we show up for each other at the crag and the gym, how we expand our collective knowledge, how we pool our resources and expertise to make change and move mountains. People—climbers—are our lifeblood and our work is member-centered and volunteer-powered.

Our climbing places are human places, too. As climbers, we are part of and accountable to a broader social ecosystem, a web of humanity connecting climbers, mountain enthusiasts, and the communities who call the places where we climb home. We believe that all people have a right to safe and equitable access to these places, whether a crag in a national forest or a gym in an urban neighborhood. Likewise, we believe that climbing-adjacent communities have an essential role to play in policymaking.

More than advocating generically for diversity, equity, and inclusion, however, we are committed to understanding and solving for why

climbing and related policy making have historically excluded some members of our social ecosystem. By identifying the root causes of inequities in and surrounding climbing and accounting for these in our programming, we put people and our broader community first. This is the first and most important component of our strategy.

We view climbers as both the drivers and beneficiaries of change. Amplifying the influence of AAC members and volunteers, as well as non-AAC climbers, is the second pillar of our strategy. We believe that change happens when everyday climbers unite around a shared cause, are educated on the issues and key data, and positioned to advocate for our interests. Our climber-centric strategy is reflected both in community organizing work and in a government affairs approach, which elevates climber experiences and stories.

Growing our membership in order to maximize our long-term political power at the state and federal levels is the third component of our strategy. We believe that a more inclusive, diverse and ultimately



📷 AAC member Savannah Cummins

larger AAC membership will most accurately reflect the policy needs of the climbing community and increase our influence in state houses and the U.S. Capitol.

Leading through partnership is a critical component of our strategy. As the oldest national climbing organization, we are the community's natural aggregator. Whenever possible we gather and mobilize people, peer organizations, existing research and scientific data, and other resources. When existing research is insufficient to support our advocacy work, we build upon our legacy of "study of the high mountains and climbing environments" to fund cutting edge applied research that arms climbers and our peer organizations with essential findings and insights.

Our in-house education, volunteer, and community-focused programs are a strategic advantage. Leaning into the knowledge, networks,

and resources of other AAC programs is how we strengthen and scale our policy work.

By balancing long-term national policy objectives with more immediate local and regional needs, we influence federal policy, without losing sight of the day-to-day needs of climbers. We strike this balance by centering our work around a long-term national policy goal or unifying theme—as determined periodically by AAC management, informed by the board policy committee—and aligning select local and regional efforts accordingly. In this way, we seek to integrate climbers' interests into the formulation of policy at all levels, while creating operational cohesion and efficiency, and avoiding too much focus on any single issue. At all times, our efforts align with our official policy positions, which are grounded in science.

Programs // *Our Tools*

Although we are not limited in the actions we will take to achieve our vision, our primary tools for influencing change center around growing a Climbers' Advocacy Network (CAN), equipping volunteers and other climbers with information, and engaging and representing climbers in advocacy. As needed, we also utilize litigation, coalition building, and other tactics.

Partnership with other AAC departments is a critical success factor for our programming. We work closely with the AAC Volunteer team to grow and support the Climbers' Advocacy Network, with the

education team to design and deliver volunteer training, with the library to gather and organize research, and with marketing and membership to engage and grow our community. This coordination within the AAC maximizes our potential to affect change and will amplify our influence.

As a part of our annual roadmapping process, we select from the following menu a mix of programming and initiatives to carry out the year's objectives.

Growing a Climbers' Advocacy Network (CAN)

- + **Climbers' Advocacy Network** coordinated by AAC Policy Director and steered by a committee of 5 exceptionally active volunteers
- + **Climbing Festival Outreach** to recruit new Network members and provide learning and networking for existing members
- + **Climbers' Advocacy Network Summit** to gather AAC volunteers and other climbers for learning, celebration, advocacy, and recruitment of new AAC and CAN members

Empowering Network with Information

- + **Research Grants** made in coordination with network Steering Committee and aligned with volunteer advocacy needs
- + **Advocate Learning Center** compiles, organizes, and distills resources for easy use by CAN members and other stakeholders
- + **Online Training and Speaker Series** to connect Network with research, skills education, policy influencers
- + **Summit Register** reimagined to document key moves and wins by Network and other stakeholders; can include interviews, in-depth profiles, guest features, etc.
- + **Send it to the Polls** a biennial get-out-the vote effort created by and for the climbing community and focused on voter registration, education, and engagement

Engaging and Representing Climbers in Advocacy

- + **Hill to Crag** to connect elected officials with climbing places and Network members in priority districts
- + **Action Alerts** to notify and call to action Network Members and others around pressing legislative and administrative developments
- + **Statehouse Advocacy Days** CAN engage with their local Representatives on emerging issues
- + **Climb the Hill** to activate CAN and convene the broader climbing community and partner organizations in D.C. for a national day of action



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