



The Executive Director's First Year

2026
Convention Report

The Executive Director's First Year 2026 Convention Report

End of 1st Quarter Fiscal Year 2026 –2027

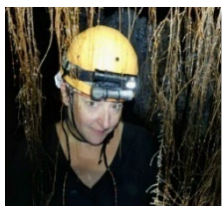
A Year for the Ages

The National Speleological Society (NSS) hired its first Executive Director in August 2025. It is with great pride that I present the inaugural, first-year Convention report as Executive Director, as I am approaching my one-year anniversary in this position in August. Over the past year, our volunteers and staff have built upon the NSS's strong legacy while adapting to the new organizational structure. I continue to be grateful for and inspired by the dedication of our volunteers, from the Board of Governors and Division Heads to the NSS Preserve Managers, trainers, educators, conservationists, scientists, and explorers.

This report focuses on progress the Society has made to meet goals outlined in the [2023–2028 Strategic Plan](#) over this past year. Included are detailed summaries of work I did that aligns to Society goals, as well as work done to fulfill my personal vision after accepting the position. [A year ago](#), I prioritized wanting to strengthen volunteer engagement and recruitment opportunities, build partnerships with agencies and institutions, enhance communication with and among members, acknowledge the contributions and legacy of our donors, and expand the visibility and utility of the NSS Headquarters in Huntsville, Alabama. In the process of meeting these goals, we also strengthened our financial foundation, operational processes, and organizational workflow, as summarized in this report.

With the NSS celebrating its 85th anniversary, this report also reinforces that the NSS is thriving. The NSS is financially healthy and able to invest in important programs that align with our mission. Our membership numbers are increasing, albeit at a slow pace. We are actively working to encourage new members by building a more welcoming culture. We are also making strides at improving our volunteer programs and how we engage with and educate the public about the NSS, cave conservation, science, and exploration. We are finding ways to expand funding opportunities to do our work and help members reach new exploration depths, make new discoveries, and protect and manage more cave and karst resources. With partners, the NSS is able to expand its reach to advocate for cave access and conservation. Collectively, these efforts are increasing the visibility of the NSS locally, within the Huntsville nonprofit education, conservation, recreation, and STEM communities, which will improve the overall visibility of the NSS regionally and nationally.

Thank you—our current members, volunteers, and donors—for making all of the work of the Society possible. These accomplishments and improvements are a direct result of your dedication to the NSS. We cannot expand our work in the future without you. Whether through your continued support, volunteering, or advocating for our mission, your involvement is the reason for everything the NSS is and can become. Together, we will continue to be brave and bold as we seek new opportunities to strengthen and build a better NSS for future generations.



Respectfully submitted,
Annette S. Engel
Executive Director

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Financial Health (1st Quarter)

Annual Budget

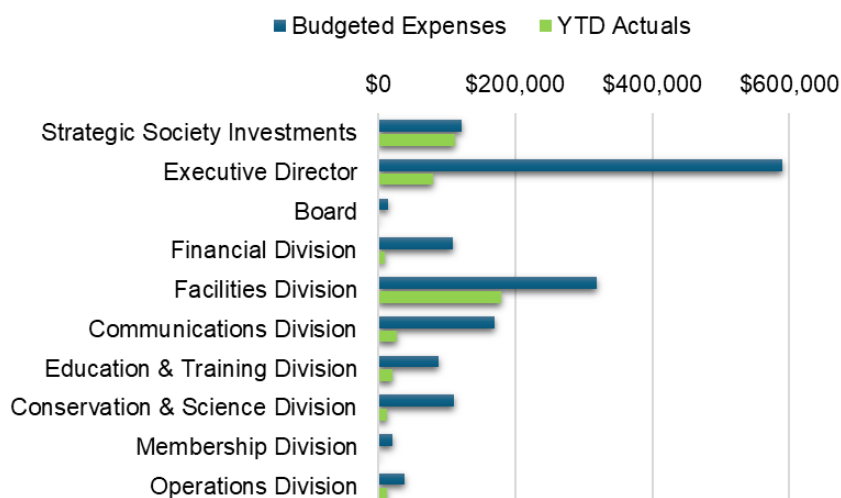
The NSS Board of Governors approved the [2026–2027 Budget](#) on March 14, 2026, at their Spring meeting, which is available at the link. The Budget is divided into separate spreadsheets that account for the expenses and income for each Division, the Board, and the Executive Director, and included a spreadsheet for Strategic Society Investments.

Projected expenses and income streams amounted to a balanced annual budget of \$1,564,433 for 2026–2027.

Year-to-Date Expenses

Spending is on target for the year based on the tracked year-to-date (YTD) actuals for each of the Divisions. About 22% of the budget has been spent during the first quarter.

Large expenses during the first quarter included the demolition of the building on Cave Avenue, which cost \$53,754 of the \$60,000 allocated by the Board, and the distribution of \$111,210 budgeted for the NCRC gear caches from Strategic Society funds.



The 2026–2027 fiscal year spending to date (as of mid-June 2026) compared to budgeted expenses for the year, divided by Division or another group.

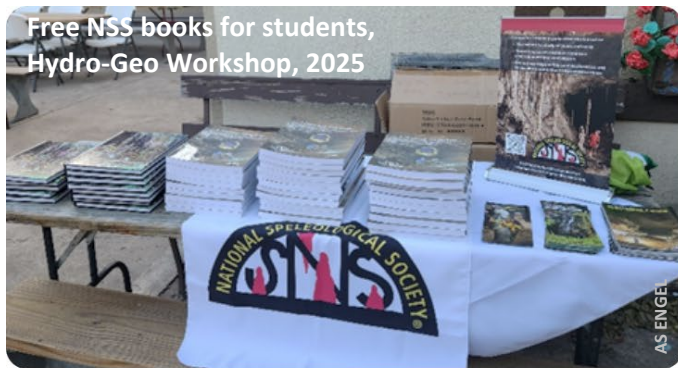
One of the most significant and successful operational changes that the NSS made this past year was to centralize its finance management for all of the Divisions and Society using Ramp, a software platform that manages, controls, and automates spending, consolidates invoicing and approvals, credit card use, and compliance and policy standards. Now, the NSS staff manage the approval process, issue payments, and also track expenses, vendors, and users all in one system, plus Ramp integrates with other accounting platforms. Division Heads can approve and monitor spending within their divisions. Bills are paid in a timely fashion. If personal funds are used to cover an expense, then reimbursements can be completed quickly. Grant funds are also distributed and tracked through the platform.

Year-to-Date Income

Beyond membership dues, the NSS has multiple other income streams, such as from Bookstore sales, advertisements run in the *NSS News*, and events like Convention, as well as from interest earned from investments.

The two most important income sources for the Society are projected in the fiscal year's budget and are directly influenced by the membership:

- Membership dues in the first quarter totaled \$58,474 and represent 25% of the projected dues for the year, which means that the budgeted versus actual membership dues income for the year is on track.
- Donations for the first quarter totaled \$12,362, which is about \$1,400 higher than for the first quarter last year, and significantly higher than the same quarter in 2024–2025 (at \$4,367). This income represents 13% of the projected amount for donations for the year, which is expected because the donations during the other quarters of the year tend to be higher than in the first quarter.



Free NSS books for students,
Hydro-Geo Workshop, 2025

AS ENGEL



Free NSS books for Alabama
Cave Survey members, 2026

AS ENGEL



"Tales From Dark Places" event,
The Explorers Club, 2026

AS ENGEL



NSS Bookstore,
SERA Cave Carnival, 2026

AS ENGEL



Demolition of the old NSS
Headquarters on Cave Ave., 2026

AS ENGEL



Demo of building
complete, 2026

DW HUGHES

2023 – 2028 Strategic Plan

The National Speleological Society's [2023 – 2028 Strategic Plan](#) outlines a vision for the Society to be the home for cavers of all backgrounds and the voice for the understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of caves and karst.

The work of the Society centers on fostering Fellowship, advancing Education, investing in Access and Conservation opportunities, and promoting Scientific Study and Exploration.

- Increase membership
- Improve member retention
- Promote a welcoming environment for all cave enthusiasts
- Promote responsible and safe caving through education and training
- Educate the public and landowners about effective cave and karst protection practices
- Increase visibility and transparent communication
- Engage partners to advocate for responsible cave access, protection, acquisition, and management
- Cultivate legacy giving and grow donor opportunities
- Expand funding for research and exploration
- Optimize volunteerism

Meeting Strategic Goals

The work done by each volunteer on the Board of Governors and within Divisions, and by the Executive Director and other employees of the NSS, is guided by the [2023–2028 Strategic Plan](#). The goals center around Fellowship, Education, Communication, Access, Conservation, Science, and Exploration. For the 2025–2026 year, and the first quarter of the 2026–2027 year, the following highlights some important progress made at meeting key strategic goals:



Increase and Improve Annual Membership Retention

The number of NSS members is at its highest over the past eight years, with about 8,440 members in all membership categories. The long-term goal for the Society has been to maintain renewal rates of 75% or greater, and that goal has been met for the past five years. For 2025–2026, the overall renewal rate was 76%. So far for 2026–2027, the renewal rate is 78%. This is a positive trend that encourages the use of a robust renewal notification system. Growing membership by 5% annually has been a long-term goal for the Society. However, this has not been met. Between May 2025 and May 2026, growth was about 1% overall, although the number of Life members (Life and Conservation Life) grew by 2%. Therefore, despite retention goals being met, the rate of adding new members is barely keeping up with the nonrenewal and loss rate, as loss also includes our dear friends and legends who pass away. Ongoing efforts to improve member services and opportunities that are exclusive to NSS members are needed to encourage renewals and attract new members.



Create a Welcoming Environment for Cave Enthusiasts and Promote an Inclusive Culture

Formalization and standardization of procedures for the [Code of Conduct Team](#) took place this year. A Code of Conduct Team manual was developed that outlines the case submission process (received via conduct.caves.org), case review, team composition and requirements. Guidance documents were generated for individuals, as complainants or respondents to submissions, and for grottos handling their own conduct procedures. Two members of the Investigative team review each case, with the NSS General Counsel, and present a report to the rest of the team that may include recommendations for the Executive Director and/or the Board to consider, such as sanctions like removal of being a member in good standing or loss of membership. With the new process in place, the response time goal, from submission to review and recommendation, should be 10 weeks or less.



Optimize a Volunteer Program to Address Burnout

A staff vacancy in the NSS office in December 2025 provided an opportunity to create a new full-time position, a Membership Community Manager, and expand the previous position's job responsibilities to include much-needed volunteer coordination. The position was advertised broadly and 59 applications were screened. Russell Quinn was selected and started on May 4, 2026. Some of the first tasks to improve volunteer experiences and support volunteers within the NSS will be to create a database of volunteer roles and responsibilities and implement a volunteer recognition program.



Engage, Serve, and Educate the Public

Several years ago, the Board decided that an event planner was needed to help plan Conventions, but it would be a part-time position. In October 2025, the Executive Director presented the Board with an opportunity to create a full-time staff position by combining event planning with outreach work in Huntsville. A portion of the salary would come from Convention budgets and the rest of the salary would be new funding as a strategic investment. The Event and Engagement Manager position was advertised, and after screening 51 applications, Nadya Poon was hired and started on May 4, 2026.

As part of the NSS's broad educational programming, the NSS offers a range of [digital and print brochures](#). One of the most popular is the [A Guide to Responsible Caving](#). This booklet is sent to every new member and is provided for free to grottos, parks, show caves, nonprofit organizations, and individuals. The last update to the booklet was in 2016, as the 5th edition. When the last copy at the NSS Headquarters was mailed out in May 2026, the Executive Director worked with Division Heads to update the text and layout, in time for the 6th edition to be at Convention and fulfill requests.

Publish an Annual Report to Increase Transparency

This had been a goal for other NSS leaders in the past but was never achieved. For the 2025–2026 year, the Executive Director produced the [first annual report](#) of the Society, which is available online and has been reported to the membership through the monthly newsletter.



Expand Funding Opportunities for Exploration & Science and Acquisition & Conservation

Money for grants that are awarded by the NSS for exploration and science, as well as cave acquisition and conservation projects, primarily comes from endowments held by the National Speleological Foundation (NSF). Established over 60 years ago, the NSF now manages 19 funds for the NSS, which total over \$2,100,000. The NSS can draw up to 5.5% from most of the funds annually, which will amount to about \$97,000 for the 2026–2027 fiscal year. The NSF also manages the NSS Permanent Endowment Fund that returns 4% of a three-year-average back to the NSS annually.

The newest endowment fund started this year, the Dr. Albert and Ethel Odgen Geosciences Research Fellowship. Each year, this fellowship will support the scientific research career of an undergraduate or graduate student who is studying cave- or karst-related geoscience or another earth science field. The NSS is grateful to the Ogdens for their generous donations that will promote the growth of earth science researchers in the United States.



This year, of all the distributed NSF endowment funding, the NSS anticipates being able to award over \$72,000 in grants and awards. About \$34,000 alone will be used for exploration and science grants from the Sara Corrie Memorial Fund for U.S. Exploration, the International Exploration Fund, and the Stone Research Fund. The endowment distributions also include over \$10,800 in NCRC scholarships from the NSF-held Rescue Training Fund, and about \$12,000 for cave acquisitions and \$11,000 to support the NSS Nature Preserves. To be able to provide more funding opportunities in the future, the size of each fund needs to grow. For instance, the principal for the Sara Corrie Memorial Fund is currently at about \$230,000. If the principal was \$1,000,000, then the NSS could award \$55,000 as U.S. exploration grants. Fundraising campaigns to boost fund sizes will allow for more and larger grants and provide new exploration and science prospects for future generations. A larger Cave Acquisitions Fund will also allow the NSS to purchase more properties to conserve cave and karst resources.

Partnerships and Advocate for Cave Access and Conservation

The NSS maintains many different types of partnerships with like-minded organizations and government agencies that have a shared mission, such as concern about cave conservation and protection, advancement of cave science and exploration, and, most importantly, cave access. At current count, the NSS has at least 18 partners. As part of the restructuring of NSS operations, the Executive Director moved partnerships to her oversight for more direct management, coordination, and signing authority. Some have formal agreements and others are looser, informal associations.

This past year, efforts between the NSS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Forest Service resulted in renewing their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Forest Service has cave and karst resources in 100 forests and grasslands, and over 2,700 significant caves. But, the Forest Service does not have the capacity to understand or effectively manage these resources. This is where cavers, organized in grottos or cave surveys, or as individuals, are able to work through the NSS with the Forest Service for discovery, exploration and mapping, and management projects. So far, the NSS has cavers working in over five National Forests, with one more National Forest being added this year.



Vacant positions with professional societies that had been lost over the years also started to be filled, such as with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The NSS started participating in AAAS meetings in 1951. There is a rich history between the two organizations and for cave and karst scientists in the U.S. that needs to be better acknowledged and formalized. Partnerships with other organizations, like the Geological Society of America, are important to improve the visibility of the NSS and grow our membership. Efforts are underway to renew MOUs and improve partner activities with other groups in the coming year.

Support Training Programs

Responsible caving starts with education. The NSS trains across a broad spectrum of practices, including cave rescue, vertical caving techniques, and conservation and restoration methods.



The National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC) is a volunteer group that shares essential knowledge, skills, and resources for effective cave rescue needs. The NCRC started in 1975 and became a Commission of the NSS in 1979. During 2025–2026, NCRC completely overhauled its curriculum, which was piloted in January 2026 in Texas and overlapped with a special edition of the *NSS News* [volume 84, no. 1] dedicated to all things NCRC and cave rescue. The NCRC also held their 500th training session at the start of 2026. At the Spring 2026 NSS Board of Governors’ meeting, in addition to approving over \$10,800 from endowment funds to support NCRC scholarships, the Board also approved over \$110,000 of new strategic funds to purchase and upgrade over 20 national and regional NCRC gear caches around the country. This significant and historic investment will improve access to equipment for cave rescue teams around the U.S. and new curriculum delivery.

The Vertical Training Commission (VTC) is also a group of volunteers who created a curriculum to help cavers learn safe vertical training methods using a “train the trainers” model. The NSS adopted the VTC as a Commission in 2021. Over 20 VTC courses were offered this past year, and student course costs are kept as low as possible. Most of the fees go toward insurance. However, not all the expenses to operate VTC are recoverable from course fees, and the NSS Board approved \$60,000 in the 2026–2027 fiscal budget to pay for VTC insurance, as well as a nominal amount (\$1,500) for gear.



The NSS also supports volunteers working on cave conservation and restoration like the Cave Formation Repair Project led by Mike Mansur, who also serves on the NSS Board of Governors. Volunteers are trained in workshops around the U.S., as described in a recent [webinar](#), including at the annual NSS Convention. Groups can apply for NSS Conservation grants to fund their repair work.

Increase NSS Visibility

The NSS’s Headquarters is located in Huntsville, Alabama, affectionately referred to as “Rocket City.” Huntsville boasts having one of the highest concentrations of scientists and engineers in the U.S. due to NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, Cummings Research Park (the 2nd largest research park in the U.S. and 4th largest in the world), Redstone Arsenal, and recently being selected for U.S. Space Command. Huntsville also has the U.S. Space and Rocket Center and is home to Space Camp, as well as HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology and many other high-tech industries like Boeing and Lockheed Martin. The NSS is one of over 2,500 nonprofit charitable organizations in Huntsville that span STEM education to the arts, recreation, healthcare, and civic engagement. The NSS has done little in the past to engage with these groups and communities. This past year, the Executive Director enrolled the NSS in the Alabama Association of Nonprofits and is working to update the NSS’s information with the Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville and other partner programs to improve NSS’s visibility.



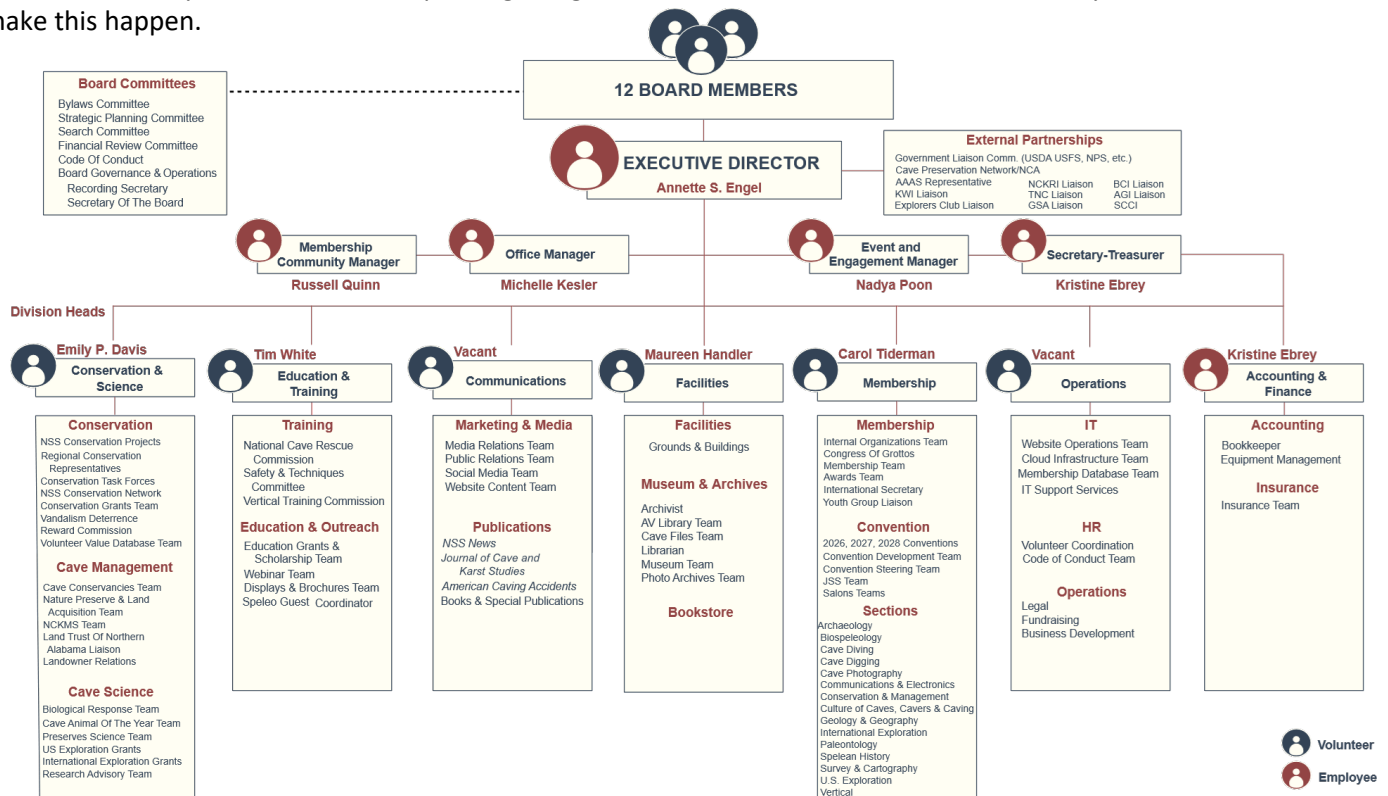
Several other approaches have been taken to increase NSS’s visibility from hundreds to thousands of people and to expand the use of the NSS Headquarters. Some activities this year included:

- Attending more caver events like Old Timer’s Reunion, the National Cave and Karst Management Symposium, and Hydro-Geo Workshop to provide more engagement opportunities.
- Participating for the first time in STEAMfest, the [Alabama Science Festival](#), which included hosting an evening program for local youth at the Headquarters with CaveSim, the NASA Planetarium, and other local organizations; several hundred people attended the NSS event and >4,000 attended STEAMfest.
- Participating in Huntsville’s 1st Outdoor Recreation Fair organized by the Land Trust of North Alabama (LTNA), and hosting LTNA members during events at the Shelta Cave Nature Preserve.
- Working with WLRH 89.3 FM – Huntsville Public Radio – to tell cave, caver, and caving stories.
- Developing school group content to boost awareness about caves, cave animals, and conservation.
- Pursuing an opportunity to transform spaces at the Headquarters into a public-facing cave and natural history museum, as unanimously approved by the NSS Board on March 14, 2026.
- Partnering with the Scouting America and Boys & Girls Clubs of North Alabama to use the Headquarters.

NSS Organizational Structure, June 2026

The NSS is a nonprofit membership organization that is governed and directed by the Board of Governors. In July 2024, the NSS reorganized its structure to stand up seven divisions, each led by a Division Head, to oversee the work of the NSS done within Departments. The Executive Director runs the organization day-to-day and reports to the BOG. The Division Heads report to the Executive Director, as do the NSS employees.

As the year progressed, the Executive Director saw other opportunities to streamline workflows within and among the Divisions and was able to expand the scale to include groups that had been left off the chart, such as Sections. Their role in the Society is critical to accomplishing our goals and countless volunteers work in many different Sections to make this happen.



The Executive Director's Year in Review

The following summarizes the “ground-level” work of the Executive Director since August 2025, roughly 11 months into her first year and framed in the context of the 2023–2028 Strategic Plan for the Society. During her first year, she prioritized to:

- Improve NSS operational processes, best practices, organizational workflow, and compliance
- Reinforce the NSS’s strong and healthy financial foundation
- Strengthen volunteer engagement and recruitment opportunities
- Build partnership with agencies and institutions
- Enhance communication with and among members
- Acknowledge the contributions and legacy of donors
- Expand the visibility of the NSS and of the visibility and utility of the NSS Headquarters

Reaching these goals, along with meeting operational goals established prior to being hired as the Executive Director, was only possible with the hundreds of volunteers who serve the NSS in countless ways, including being on the Board of Governors, volunteering as Division and Department Heads, chairs of commissions, committees, task forces, sections, preserve teams, among others groups in the NSS. ***Thank you for everything you do for the NSS every day!***

Strategic Goal(s)	Contribution	Collaborators	Purpose(s)
Fellowship, Communication	Served as a central point of contact for the Society by fielding member, donor, partner, and media emails and calls; year-to-date, received a work-related email every 6 minutes during an average 40-hour work week	NSS Office Staff, Division Heads	• Communication • Compliance
Fellowship, Communication	Produced the NSS's 1 st annual report for 2025 – 2026 fiscal year; ongoing work to make a flashy, shorter version and build 2026 – 2027 annual report	Board, Division Heads	• Communication • Member, Volunteer, & Donor Recognition • Society Legacy
Fellowship, Communication	Updated all correspondence from NSS office, including new member letters, anniversary letters, and donation letters to improve readability and IRS compliance information	NSS Office Staff	• Communication • Fundraising • Donor & Member Recognition
Fellowship	Implemented standardized Employment Agreements for all new hires, regardless of full, part-time, or temp position, and developed job descriptions for all NSS employees	NSS General Counsel, NSS Office Staff	• Compliance • Improve Operations & Professionalism • Enhance Employee Retention
Fellowship, Communication	Organized and digitized hardcopy files at the NSS Headquarters (publication agreements, vendor agreements, wills and trusts, rental contracts, building and property documents, SOPs, and archival items); facilitated the purge of excess and unneeded documents and records per NSS's Document Retention Policy for IRS and legal purposes	NSS Office Staff	• Compliance • Fundraising • Society Legacy & Archives
Fellowship	Significantly revised and modernized NSS Employee Handbook for compliance with Alabama and federal law; developed new HR practices (comprehensive benefits and insurance packages) and policies consistent with professional workplace expectations, and created onboarding processes to improve operations; standardized hourly reporting (required for grant eligibility); ongoing work to update performance reviews	NSS General Counsel, Insurance Team, NSS Office Staff	• Compliance • Improve Operations & Professionalism • Enhance Employee Retention
Fellowship	Managed two new job searches, including assembly of two search committees, development of application review rubrics to reduce bias, advertisements using Indeed (free) and social media; Zoom-interviewed 10 people, 4 people in-person, and communicated with every applicant (~110)	NSS Office Staff, Division Heads	• Improve Operations and Professionalism • Compliance • Volunteer Coordination • Event Management
Fellowship, Education, Conservation, Science	Wrote and organized job descriptions for key volunteer positions within the Society; helped Division Heads with descriptions and ads for Cave Science Department Head (filled by Pat Kambesis March 2026) and Education Department Head (filled by Diana King February 2026); Marketing Manager position currently in the pre-selection interview stage; posted advertisements for open positions on NSS website and social media; sent emails to targeted members to solicit interest and respond to questions; work ongoing at the national-level to fill vacant Communications and Operations Division Head positions, as well as Chair of the Research Advisory Committee, Code of Conduct Team, among others	Division heads, NSS Office Staff	• Communication • Compliance • Improve Operations at the Division-level • Volunteer Coordination

Strategic Goal(s)	Contribution	Collaborators	Purpose(s)
Fellowship	Developed Background Check Policy (NSS did not have one in compliance with federal and state laws); policy outlines how written consent is obtained, who reviews reports, guidance how to use reports, and information about positions that need background checks and their frequency, among other considerations when reviewing reports; work ongoing to implement and review need for different volunteer teams (JSS, Convention, financial review, etc.)	NSS General Counsel, Insurance Team	• Improve Operations and Professionalism • Compliance • Safety
Fellowship, Communication, Education	Managed staff (previously supervised by volunteers) and job searches; hired full-time Secretary-Treasurer (October 2025), accepted resignation of the Membership Manager (December 2025), terminated Facilities Manager (January 2026), hired full-time Office Manager (& Bookkeeper) and part-time Membership Associate (February 2026), hired Membership Community Manager and Event & Engagement Manager (May 2026); overall result was the NSS went from 2 employees to 5.5 employees in one year	NSS Office Staff, Division Heads	• Compliance • Improve Operations and Professionalism • Volunteer Coordination • Event Management
Fellowship	Drafted Conflict of Interest Policy for Board approval; Board Act 03-455 is limited to the Board self-reporting conflicts related to financial interests but there is no policy that covers non-financial conflicts and conflicts of interest for employees and non-board leaders with board-designated responsibilities (Division Heads, Department Heads, etc.); work ongoing to implement for staff and volunteer teams	NSS General Counsel, Insurance Team, Board	• Compliance • Protect Nonprofit Tax-exempt Status • Improve Operations & Professionalism • Communication
Fellowship	Assisted with formalizing practices and policy documents for the Code of Conduct Team, including team manual describing submission process, case review, team composition and requirements, and guidance documents for complainants, respondents, and grottos; materials posted online and described in 2025–2026 annual report; met with the committee and General Counsel regularly to go over cases, challenges, and best practices	Chair of Board, Code of Conduct Team, NSS General Counsel	• Membership Safety & Inclusivity • Compliance • Communication
Fellowship, Communication, Education, Access	Restructured Organization Chart and moved Government Liaison Committee to ED oversight (from Communications) to improve efficiency and have direct line to NSS leadership, partner & volunteer work, actions and outcomes; the NSS has 18 active partnerships; significant activities included working on MOUs with USFS/USDA, BLM, and other federal agencies; new MOU with USFS/USDA completed and signed	Gov't Liaison Committee, Division Heads, Board, General Counsel; External Partners	• Improve Visibility & Advocacy • Improve Cave Access & Conservation • Facilitate Education, Science, Exploration • Compliance
Fellowship, Education, Access, Science	Identified NSS liaisons to NCKRI, AAAS, AGI, and GSA, to improve NSS's network among scientific groups; ongoing work to seat liaisons between NSS and KWI, BCI, and other groups (these positions were vacant for years)	External Partners	• Improve Visibility • Communication • Facilitate Education, Science, Exploration, and Conservation Advocacy
Fellowship, Communication	Standardized operational plans and goals for each division; initiated review of plans with Strategic Planning Committee and reporting expectations; worked with Division Heads to develop plans to accompany budget requests; significant effort in the 2026–2027 FY budget to be transparent and show cost breakdown for increased accountability and transparency	Division Heads, Board, Strategic Planning Committee	• Improve Operations • Compliance • Strategic Planning • Communication • Transparent Spending

Strategic Goal(s)	Contribution	Collaborators	Purpose(s)
Fellowship, Communication	Helped to refine planned giving website pages, letter language, and <i>NSS News</i> advertisement; ongoing work	Fundraising Committee	• Fundraising • Communication
Fellowship, Communication	Created and sent handwritten thank you cards to donors who gave > \$200 during past fiscal and current year, either to the NSS or NSF Permanent Endowment Fund; included an NSS Bookstore discount coupon as a token of appreciation	NSS Office Staff	• Donor Recognition • Fundraising
Fellowship, Communication	Thoroughly reviewed and updated Stephenson Group records, which had been lost for years; created <i>NSS News</i> ad, edited webpage, and wrote about group in 2025–2026 Annual Report to encourage new membership; thus far, recognized over a dozen people whose contributions had been lost from Team 404, donations made directly to NSF, or from unaccounted wills; 8 new members added to date	Fundraising Committee	• Donor Recognition • Society Legacy • Fundraising
Fellowship	Coordinated a new funding opportunity with the National Speleological Foundation (NSF), for the NSF to transfer a percentage of their earned interest annually to NSS's NSF-held funds that award grants, to start 2027–2028	External Partner	• Fundraising • Society Legacy
Fellowship, Science	Assisted in creating a new NSF fund for geoscience student scholarships, with donations from Dr. Albert Ogden for the Dr. Albert and Ethel Odgen Geosciences Research Fellowship; ongoing communication for future donations	Conservation & Science Division	• Fundraising • Improve Science & Student Support • Society Legacy
Fellowship, Conservation, Science	Evaluated an opportunity for a new Society award and grant program in collaboration with The Explorers Club and the National Speleological Foundation; would require \$10K contribution annually from the NSS and needs BOG support; ongoing consideration and planning	External Partner, Board	• Fundraising • Improve Visibility • Support Conservation & Science • Society Legacy
Fellowship, Education, Communication	Designed NSS-logoed PR & outreach materials (e.g., table coverings, banners, flyers, ads, etc.) for events held in the U.S. and at the Headquarters	NSS Office Staff	• Improve Visibility • Communication • Public Education • Event Management
Fellowship, Communication, Education	Sponsored NCKMS and Western Cave Conservancy in 2025, Ely, Nevada; attended as an NSS representative for 1 st time at NCKMS (with booth to sign up new members and enter renewals, welcome/intro speech, donor recognition); distributed NSS outreach & educational materials to attendees and grottos	External Partners, Division Heads & Teams	• Improve Visibility • Member/Volunteer Recognition & Recruitment • Support Management Efforts & Conservation, Access
Fellowship, Communication, Education, Science	Sponsored Hydro-Geo Days field trip and Geological Society of America sessions in 2025, San Antonio, Texas (included attending both events and gave away 300 NSS books to students); attended GSA Karst Division business meeting to improve liaison opportunities and communication; distributed NSS outreach & educational materials	External Partners	• Improve Visibility • Member/Volunteer Recognition & Recruitment • Support Science Efforts & Education
Fellowship, Communication, Education, Science	Sponsored “Tales from Dark Places” annual event with The Explorers Club and National Speleological Foundation in New York City; attended and gave welcoming address and presentation, met donors and members; distributed NSS outreach & educational materials	External Partners	• Improve Visibility • Support Science & Exploration Efforts • Fundraising • Member/Volunteer/ & Donor Recognition

Strategic Goal(s)	Contribution	Collaborators	Purpose(s)
Access, Conservation	Assisted another organization to obtain a grant to develop resources on federal land; future work will involve recruiting NSS volunteers by the end of 2026 (the organization and other information cannot be shared openly yet)	External Partner	- Facilitate Education, Science, Exploration, and Conservation - Volunteer Coordination
Fellowship	Identified and resolved YM issues affecting member counts (e.g., inconsistent notation for deceased members, uncounted membership categories, missing grotto records, unfulfilled renewal notifications); developed record and reporting SOPs	Membership Division, NSS Office Staff	- Improve Member Services & Recruitment - Member Retention - Society Archives, Records
Fellowship	Explored new NSS's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools, to switch from YourMembership (YM) to another platform that could provide more operational resources for the NSS; research for a new CRM is underway to best fit the NSS's and members' needs (e.g., modern tools to sign up across age ranges, more online tools and ease of operations, diverse payment options, etc.)	Operations Division, IT Team, Members Division, NSS Office Staff	- Improve Member Services & Recruitment - Member Retention - Society Archives, Records - eCommerce options
Communication	Assembled, reviewed, and culled software/IT resources to improve efficiency, need, and costs; moved expenses for most resources from throughout the budget to the Operations Division for better tracking and management	Division Heads, NSS Office Staff	- Improve Compliance, Efficiency - Reduce Costs & Waste - Improve Workflow
Fellowship	Researched reporting & costs for the anniversary pin project; transferred to Membership Division's budget (previously was under Facilities and historically overspent Bookstore's budget for costs of goods and shipping)	Division Heads, NSS Office Staff	- Member Recognition - Society Legacy - Improve Efficiency - Reduce Costs & Waste
Fellowship	Facilitated grotto designations, communications, and recognition; signed two new grotto charters; worked to improve the lengthy grotto approval process and resolve conflicts; continued efforts for collegiate grottos to have programmed time at Convention (there are at least 15 student grottos of the NSS, which hosts a significant portion of the NSS's Introductory Members, aged 26 or younger)	Membership Division Teams and Volunteers, NSS Office Staff	- Communication - Reduce & Minimize Volunteer Burnout - Member Recognition - Society Legacy
Fellowship, Communication	Worked with grotto-level and regional leadership, as well as NSS Division Heads and Code of Conduct Team, and federal agencies, to resolve conflicts, cave access issues, and policy problems for 8 different grottos/regions in the U.S.; ongoing work tied to agency efforts and code of conduct issues	Membership Division Teams and Volunteers, NSS Office Staff	- Membership Inclusivity and Safety - Improve Cave Access - Communication
Fellowship	Developed list of volunteers and staff to recognize at 2026 Convention with Society Certificates of Appreciation	Division Heads	Member/Volunteer Recognition
Fellowship, Communication, Education	Recovered original 5 th edition file (from 2016) for Guide to Responsible Caving booklet file and revised/updated content before printing new, 6 th edition; started 7 th edition revisions with new photographs and content	Membership Division Teams and Volunteers, NSS Office Staff	- Communication - Education about Responsible Caving Practices
Access, Conservation, Communication	Worked with Division to secure funding from Board for new litigation expenses involving Mill Creek Sink Nature Preserve in Florida; NSS funding for legal action directly led to a "win;" assisted with appeal to members to replenish fund via Givelively ; over 70 donors raised \$6,700+, which was about 84% of what was spent on legal fees and consultation	Conservation & Science Division Teams, Board	- Cave Access & Conservation - Communication - Strengthen Advocacy & Partnerships
Fellowship, Communication	Professional development included 6-month Space To Focus program, VolunteerPro 2-week program "Teamwork Makes the Dream Work" and >15 misc. nonprofit, leadership, HR, management, reporting and grant-writing webinars/courses	External Partners	- Communication, Education - Improve Operations

Strategic Goal(s)	Contribution	Collaborators	Purpose(s)
Access, Conservation, Education, Science, Communication	Reviewed NSS Project guidelines to encourage more Projects; ongoing work to assess requirements and guidance for future Project teams, including membership opportunities, and to identify a new RAC Chair for reviews	Conservation & Science Division Teams	• Membership Opportunities • Volunteer Coordination • Education & Science
Access, Conservation	Reviewed preserve management plans for consistent language that meets insurance policy needs (fires, hunting, fishing, camping limits); new agreements for Thunderhole and Perkins preserves signed after Board approval; ongoing reviews work for other preserve management plans	Insurance Team, Conservation & Science Division Teams	• Cave Access & Conservation • Safety & Compliance • Reduce Volunteer Burnout
Fellowship, Access, Conservation	Reviewed new cave and property acquisition possibilities and priorities in consultation with Division Teams; met separately with several landowners and donors interested in potential NSS management of their properties; ongoing meetings with Acquisitions Team to review leads to expand preserve portfolio and potential landowner partners	Conservation & Science Division Teams	• Cave Access & Conservation • Improve Membership Opportunities
Education	Worked with teams to develop plans and strategy for the Headquarters Training Facility, including architectural drawings; a presentation was made to Board March 14, 2026; this represents a significant strategic (and operational) shift from a “vertical tower” concept to a fully modern training center for the VTC and NCRC, and others	Education & Training, Facilities Division Heads, NSS Office Staff, Board	• Education • Safety Communication • Membership Opportunities • Improve Visibility & Utility of Headquarters
Education	Supported an outreach event – <i>From the Center of the Earth to the Stars</i> – at the NSS Headquarters with Alabama STEAMfest and for NSS’s 1 st attendance at STEAMfest; engagement received high praise and strong support from volunteers, with request to increase frequency of events and more advertising; several hundred in attendance	Division Heads, Teams and Volunteers, NSS Office Staff	• Education & Outreach • Event Management • Membership Opportunities • Improve Visibility & Utility of Headquarters
Communication, Education	Channeled press/media requests to Division Heads for NSS involvement, including for local radio station shows featuring caves, cavers, and caving stories and NSS work	Division Heads, Teams, NSS Office Staff	• Education & Outreach • Improve Visibility & Utility of Headquarters
Communication	Updated website pages (when time permitted), posted job advertisements, updated inconsistent text throughout	Division Heads, IT Team	• Improve Visibility • Communication
Communication, Education, Fellowship	Developed and signed new contract for the NSS to sell Vertical Training Commission books, outlining VTC vs NSS responsibilities for production, selling and order fulfillment, repayment, and uniform pricing practices	Education & Training, Communications, & Finance Divisions	• Education & Training • Safety Communication • Membership Opportunities
Communication, Education, Fellowship	Signed an agreement for a new NSS book series, <u>Beyond 3-C: Historic Documents from the 1954 Collins Crystal Cave Expedition</u> , by Dave Hughes and Thomas A. Brucker; volumes 1 and 2 are available through the NSS Bookstore; these are the first NSS publications in several years	Communications Division, Special Publications Team	• Education • Communication • Society Legacy
Fellowship, Communication, Education	Negotiated with <i>Gone Caving!</i> game developer/designer to transfer rights to NSS (this has been in the works for almost 2 years); ongoing work to transfer licensing and agreement with Special Publications Team	Communications Division, Special Publications Team	• Education & Fellowship • Communication • Membership Opportunities
Communication, Fellowship	Resolved mysteries regarding book royalties by reviewing book author agreements; some payments hadn’t been made in 5+ years and authors were back-paid lost funds after reviewing sales	NSS Office Staff, Communications Division, Special Publications	• Communication • Improve Operational Workflow • Reduce Future Costs

Strategic Goal(s)	Contribution	Collaborators	Purpose(s)
Communication, Education, Fellowship	Coordinated with Special Publications team to push the <u>On Rope</u> latest edition, due to print in 2026, and to seek other opportunities, which resulted in a new <u>On Station 3rd Edition</u> by George Dasher and team (due March 2027), a significant revision that will appeal to members and others interested in survey, and another new book due early 2027, <u>Caves of the Central Cumberland Plateau</u> , by Larry Matthews	Communications Division, Special Publications	• Education & Training • Communication • Society Legacy
Communication, Science, Education	Implemented new publishing contract for <i>Journal of Cave and Karst Studies</i> that includes AI and plagiarism screening and will improve volunteer workflow and publication quality	Communications Division Team, NSS General Counsel	• Improve Visibility • Reduce Costs & Volunteer Burnout • Improve Quality
Fellowship, Communication	Resolved <i>NSS News</i> mailing problems that resulted in reprint/shipping of February and March 2026 issues to about 2,100 members; problem was caused by outdated and incomplete report of membership shipping addresses	NSS Office Staff	• Improve Membership Services • Improve Operations
Fellowship, Communication	Completed 7 Executive Director articles for the <i>NSS News</i> ; drafts of at least 4 more are being prepared and ongoing	Communications Division Team	• Communication • Fundraising
Science, Fellowship	Made the decision to apply 50% of proceeds from the sale of NSS Conservation Bat Bookstore items to the Bat Research & Conservation Fund; the original trademark transfer to the NSS included this stipulation but the amount was never decided and no money was ever transferred; this will significantly increase the grants that can be awarded from the fund in future years	Conservation & Science and Accounting & Finances Divisions	• Improve Funding Opportunities • Transparent Fundraising to Members • Improve Operations
Fellowship, Communication, Access, Conservation	Reviewed insurance policy and revised procedures/practices at the Headquarters and for NSS Nature Preserves, which resulted in changes to the Vertical Section of the NSS by dissolving their 501(c)3 to stay within the NSS insurance policy, and new permits for outdoor-only Headquarters camping and daily surface-use on Stephenson NSS Nature Preserve, which put in place an approval step for the NSS Office staff and also required zoning variance request from City of Huntsville, which was handled by the Secretary-Treasurer and approved June 2026 for 3 years (limited to 20 people per night, restricted from fence line)	Insurance Team, Accounting & Finances and Conservation & Science Divisions, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Reduce Risk • Provide Access to NSS Nature Preserves • Improve Member Services and Opportunities • Safety and Compliance • Communication
Fellowship, Communication	Worked with Secretary-Treasurer to develop 2026 – 2027 budget, monitor spending (actuals) and budgets for each of the divisions; approve and review expenses and invoices	Accounting & Finances Division	• Improve Operations • Reduce Risk • Reduce Costs
Fellowship, Communication	Traveled throughout the year for NSS-related work, overall representing ~45% of work time (meaning the Executive Director traveled for the NSS almost half of the working days in the year so far); spent 63% of year-to-date travel at the Headquarters in Huntsville, which provided unprecedented insight into facilities use, upkeep, office work and operations, and improved opportunities to work with staff, onboard new staff, meet members and visitors, and meet with and learn about other local nonprofits	Facilities Division, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Improve Visibility and Understand the NSS's Place in Huntsville Nonprofit Space • Member Services and Opportunities • Communication
Fellowship	Assessed past Bookstore event attendance costs (had been in excess of income due to overtime and travel costs); developed scheduling and travel policy to streamline costs and minimize overtime because the Bookstore's presence is important at events for membership and communication	Facilities Division, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Minimize Costs • Improve Visibility • Member Services

Strategic Goal(s)	Contribution	Collaborators	Purpose(s)
Fellowship, Communication	Reviewed profit-loss statements for the NSS Bookstore, including publication history and author agreements, and clothing and other inventory ordering and costs, sales & stock; identified >\$300,000 of liabilities for books alone (as overstock, under-sold items) that initiated inventory reduction; distributed items for free to NSS members and libraries; sought feedback for merchandise to boost sales	Facilities Division, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Reduce Risk • Improve Member Services and Opportunities
Fellowship, Access, Conservation	Identified and resolved maintenance and space use issues with the Headquarters, which improved cleanliness, safety, and overall facilities functions and appearance, including supporting and enabling repairs and attention to on toilets/plumbing, lighting, gate access and security system, pest control, pavement and signage, and helping to coordinate the removal of clutter & unnecessary documents and supplies to improve space use, removal of dead/unused electronics and items, reduction of treefall risk by trimming & upkeep, supply costs reduction, hiring janitors, etc.	Facilities Division, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Reduce Risk and Costs • Improve Member Services and Staff Morale • Enhance NSS Assets and Asset Use • Improve Visibility
Fellowship	Researched Capex budget options, costs, history of repairs and improvements, lifespans and estimated future expenses; Capex plan approved by the Board in October 2025 and initiated by April 2026; signed new bank contract with Secretary-Treasurer	Accounting & Finances and Facilities Divisions	• Improve Operations • Reduce Risk & Costs • Enhance NSS Assets
Fellowship, Access	Pushed for the demolition of Cave Avenue (old Headquarters) building; this work had been approved by previous Boards, as it would remove maintenance costs and provide for future lot consolidation to reduce taxes; budgeted in 2026–2027 budget and completed May 2026	Facilities Division, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Reduce Risk & Costs • Improve Visibility • Enhance NSS Assets
Fellowship, Access	Supported improvement plan for “Back 5” rooms to be completed, targeting space for the Archives Team; supported library consolidation plans and strategies to reduce and organize donated inventory with Library Team	Facilities Division, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Enhance NSS Assets • Member Services • Society Legacy
Fellowship	Identified rental contract inconsistencies, rewrote rental contract, sought legal and insurance reviews, and implemented new SOP before discovering embezzled cash dating to late 2023 through early 2026 (investigation ongoing by the Huntsville Police Department, Criminal Investigations Unit)	Facilities Division, NSS General Counsel, Insurance Team, NSS Office Staff	• Improve Operations • Reduce Risk, Legal Compliance, Asset Management • NSS Visibility
Fellowship, Education, Science, Communication	Research finances for the indoor and outdoor rental program and ceased unprofitable operations at the Headquarters after February 2026; future rental and space use reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with priority consideration for nonprofits with mission overlap (e.g., Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, schools, training groups)	Facilities Division, NSS Office Staff, Board	• Improve Operations • Reduce Expenses • Society Legacy • Enhance Asset Use, Mission Alignment • Improve Visibility
Fellowship, Education, Science, Communication	Proposed a new use for the Headquarters, a public-facing Cave and Natural History Museum, that would be mission-aligned, appeal to members, and improve public visibility and engagement; this represents a significant operational shift in how the NSS uses its property and builds a future legacy for the Society and community; Board approved the project, including partnership with a new nonprofit, NSS Cave Museum Foundation, leasing spaces, and promissory note for seed funding, on March 14, 2026; exceptionally strong community support from nonprofits & STEM groups	NSS Office Staff, Facilities Division and Other Divisions, External Partners, Board	• Improve Operations • Mission Alignment • Society Legacy • Enhance Asset Use • Improve Visibility