Mission of the KGA
The KGA’s mission is to promote and support geographic literacy and education throughout Kansas.

Our Vision is that the KGA will...
Our vision for the Kansas Geographic Alliance as an organization is that the group will be the recognized, valued, and respected as a go to source for expertise on geography and the teaching of geography for the citizens of Kansas.

Our Vision is that Geography will...
We envision a geographically literate Kansas society that uses their spatial and human-environment knowledge to support and maintain a healthy environment as a base for strong communities and a vibrant economy, to help the population to make informed decisions as citizens of Kansas, the United States, and the planet.

Those Behind the KGA
The partnership between K-12 teachers and higher education has been the heart and soul of the KGA. The organization recognizes and values the knowledge base and expertise found throughout the educational community, and sees values in the synergisms generated by reaching out to other organizations and communities. As the KGA actively seeks ways to leverage human and economic resources, the organization will remain true to the holistic roots of geography, and respectful of the organization’s heritage, visions, and mission.
The KGA is strongly committed to the concepts and resilient tradition of geographic content that includes: the study of places and regions, maps and spatial analysis, an understanding of the natural environment, and the role of humans in reacting to and modifying their environment. We live on a rapidly changing planet and the KGA supports the inclusion and development of new ideas and technologies, such as GIScience.

Goals of the KGA

In order to accomplish our visions and mission, the KGA has established five interrelated goals (G1 – G5). These overarching ideas include:

1. **Advocacy for Geography (G1)** – being an advocate for geographic literacy and geographic education at the local, state, and national levels.

2. **Supporting Kansas Educators (G2)** – supporting the professional growth of Kansas educators, especially with regard to strengthening their abilities to teach geographic content.

3. **Being A Strong Organization (G3)** – being an efficient and financially stable organization with effective outreach that responds to member suggestions and is flexible and responsive as conditions change. The KGA will maintain and grow a network of K-12 teachers, higher education professionals, and geographers who are interested in enhancing the geographic literacy of Kansans.

4. **Recognized as the Kansas Resource for Geography Education (G4)** – develop and/or obtain, store, and disseminate quality educational materials that help enable geographic literacy. The KGA wants to be a trusted and reliable source available to Kansas citizens for geographic information at the local, regional, national and planetary levels.

5. **Being a Constructive Partner (G5)** – an organization working with other professional organizations or interested groups to help improve the quality of geographic education and overall geographic literacy both within Kansas and across the nation.

Diagram illustrating that societies create economies and that a society exists within a geographic environment.

Like many successful volunteer organizations, the members of the Kansas Geographic Alliance share a number of values that help define and reinforce the success of the organization. These values include, but are not limited to:

- Being an enthusiastic and proactive statewide organization.
- Appreciating and respecting the time and talent that many volunteers have brought to the KGA to support our vision and mission for advancing geographic literacy in Kansas.
- Celebrating a strong partnership between K-12 teachers and higher education, this connection has been the heart and soul of the KGA.
- Valuing other people’s time and talent.
- Recognizing and greatly valuing the knowledge base and expertise found throughout the K-12 teaching community.
- Recognizing the importance of teachers teaching teachers.
- Recognizing effective teaching of geographic concepts at all levels throughout the curriculum.
- Recognizing the synergisms generated by reaching out to other educational organizations and communities.
- Appreciating that a synthesis of ideas from the social studies, natural sciences, and artistic perspectives provides a ‘value added’ that neither of these approaches can contribute by itself.
- Knowing that many people are excited to travel and learn about new places; the KGA respects this foundational knowledge about the planet and places and recognizes that these building blocks provide the foundation for other types of geographic learning, knowledge, and critical thinking.
- Recognizing that integration and synthesis, hallmarks of geographic thinking, involve establishing connections among different facts, ideas, places, and/or clusters of ideas, (e.g., fertile soils, an adequate water supply, and vibrant communities provide the basis for a healthy agricultural community).
- Recognizing that citizens who are geographically literate can apply their knowledge and ways of thinking to new and changing situations.
- Recognizes our rapidly changing planet and the need to move toward sustainability.

The KGA is strongly committed to the concepts and resilient tradition of geographic content that includes: the study of places and regions, maps and spatial analysis, an understanding of the natural environment, and the role of humans in reacting to and modifying their environment. We live on a rapidly changing planet and the KGA supports the inclusion and development of new ideas and technologies, such as GIScience.
KGA History


The KGA’s first decade was marked by an exceptional “alignment of the stars” producing a period of youthful vigor and rapid growth. If using an analogy of a rocket going to the stars, one would term it the “lift off stage.” The National Geographic Society invested heavily in the Alliance concept, providing many educational experiences in Washington D.C. for a cadre of Kansas teachers who returned as Teacher Consultants.


If lift-off and a can do attitude marked the first phase of the KGA, the second phase might be seen as a stationary orbit phase. It was during this phase that the KGA changed from a top-down organizational structure to one equally owned by the TC’s and the Coordinators. Governance structures were codified, a new Public Engagement Coordinator was established, committees were identified, and regular board meetings occurred. At the same time, leadership was transitory, TC’s were retiring, and general membership was decreasing.

“Reflection and Planning the Next Mission” Phase: 2009-2012

The Capacity Building strategic planning initiative will either be the fuel needed to ignite the next take off stage of the KGA’s journey to success or just another initiative of the early 21st century. The KGA has been committed to this initiative; mission and vision statements were developed, assets and liabilities identified and committee tasks assigned. 2012 will probably bring this step in the process of capacity building to a close, but success will be dependent upon overcoming the changing headwinds that brought the Alliance to the orbital stage of its existence.

Membership

A membership committee was formed in 2010 to help the KGA executive committee work on revitalizing and expanding our membership base. Membership growth is an important strategy for the Alliance. The membership committee formed a plan to seek new members through four strategic approaches:

1 - Increase the number of in-service events, which the KGA calls: GeoPower workshops.

2 - Increased contact with the state universities and their pre-service teachers and to increase pre-service activity. Current activities involve Kansas State University, Fort Hays State University, Pittsburg State University, and Washburn University.

3 - Further our relationships with state social studies organizations and their annual conferences, such as the Kansas Council of Social Studies, the Kansas Historical Society, and the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education.

4 - Maintenance of an enhanced and updated KGA webpage, which contains links to NGS, to State Conferences, and easy access to becoming a member.
Organizational Design

Alliance Organization

The governing body of the alliance consists of a primary coordinator, a co-coordinator, a publication director, an executive committee of nine teachers consultants, special committees as needed to carry out the working of the Alliance, and as desired by a majority vote of the executive committee, a coordinator emeritus.

Regarding the dual Coordinator concept, one coordinator will serve eastern Kansas and the other will serve western Kansas. Traditionally, the eastern branch has been housed at Kansas State University and the western branch at Fort Hays State University.

Current Situation of the KGA

The Kansas Geographic Alliance is fortunate to have respected senior leadership as it moves forward. Drs. John Harrington, Jr. and Paul Phillips are Co-Coordinators and each oversees a KGA office housed at their respective universities. An Executive Committee provides guidance for KGA activities and assists with many of the important volunteer activities that keep the Alliance moving forward. In midst of current strategic planning efforts, the KGA:

- continues to maintain its bridges with outside organizations, including the Kansas Council for the Social Studies, the Kansas Council for Environmental Education, Kansas State Research and Extension Office and 4-H initiative, and the Kansas Department of Education;
- seeks to build more relationships and initiatives are being taken to strengthen bonds with state and private universities within the state, especially to offer more geography professional development opportunities for in-service teachers and pre-service teachers;
- has a sustained presence at the annual Topeka Water Festival and at the Kansas State Fair, as well as maintained the annual fall conference tradition;
- is recording an increase in the recent number of Geo-Powers being offered as professional development;
- is noting an increase in membership can be seen over the last few years; and
- is working to upgrade its website for enhanced information sharing.
Opportunities

The Kansas Geographic Alliance is in a position to use ‘teachable moments’ and other evolving opportunities to advance geographic education in Kansas. The KGA has worked since its beginning to make connections with other groups. The KGA now has new opportunities to again make connections with a variety of stakeholders. We have identified the following opportunities:

- to assist in the process of re-writing the Kansas social studies and science standards;
- to enable teachers to take advantage of state-wide ESRI site license through assisting with implementation and providing professional development on GIS in the classroom;
- the creation of a student atlas of Kansas, most likely a GIS-based atlas;
- more opportunities to share geography education materials during in-service days, conferences, and consortiums for in-service and pre-service teachers;
- a partnership with the Kansas State Historical Society to continue to provide dual-encoded lessons that provide both history and geography content;
- provide geocaching programs in partnership with the Parks and Recreation of Topeka;
- more availability to work with state 4-H clubs to support projects in community GIS and spatial-related projects; and
- the connections with 4-H has provided opportunity to have a presence at the Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson, KS.

Public Engagement

The Kansas Geographic Alliance public engagement initiative to spread the word on the importance of geography in our schools began in 2006. The following outreach programs to communities, coalition partners, educators and state legislators have been implemented:

- an annual booth at the Kansas State Fair offers additional outreach with Kansas 4-H;
- informative teacher sessions have been added to the Kansas Geography Bee program;
- direct contact with pre-service and in-service educators at the Kansas Council for the Social Studies conference, KGA Fall Conference, Summer Institutes, KGA Workshops, district in-service meetings and teacher enrichment programs at state universities;
- an annual presence at the National Council for Geographic Education conference;
- “Kansas Family Geography Night” kits for teachers (adapted from the Michigan Geographic Alliance) have been distributed to teachers and led for groups upon request;
- connections with local home school networks to enhance their geography content; and
- state legislators have been contacted with mailings and personal meetings.