

## Strategic Planning Summary Report

### Association of Environmental and Resource Economists (AERE)

September 2025

---

#### Executive Summary

The Association of Environmental and Resource Economists (AERE) began a strategic planning process in January 2025. With the support of AERE's Membership Committee, we conducted a member survey in January. In February, AERE leadership convened a 15-member Strategic Planning Committee representing a breadth of perspectives and seniority, and the committee conducted eight virtual listening sessions with AERE members in April. In May, the strategic planning committee met in person to evaluate AERE's current programs and structure and identify clear priorities for the future, with a planning horizon focused on 2025-2030.

At the May meeting, the committee critically assessed AERE's current standing and identified some strategic priorities for AERE's future. The group considered what would help AERE best support the next generation of environmental and resource economists in their work. Recurring themes included the provision of an intellectual home, supporting scholarly excellence, and promoting mentorship, professional development, and inclusivity across different parts of the discipline, types of institutions, and career phases. These themes reflect AERE's unique strengths as a scholarly organization that bridges rigorous research, applied policy relevance, and a community for intellectual and social connection.

A central goal of the strategic planning process was to position AERE for continued leadership in a fast-changing academic and policy environment. Participants emphasized the Association's responsibility to remain intellectually rigorous, inclusive, and responsive to technological and structural changes in the field. In particular, the group highlighted:

- A need for **clarity of purpose**, calling for updating the mission statement to reflect AERE's scholarly and member-centered identity
- A commitment to **mentorship and community**, with calls to deepen and diversify AERE's support for early-career scholars, mid-career faculty, and those outside R1 institutions
- An intention to **refresh our events** (summer conference, regional meetings and workshops, OSWEET, virtual workshop) to ensure that they serve our growing

membership in their research, teaching and policy engagement at all levels and all types of institutions

- A desire for **greater global presence**, and an intention to deepen connection with scholars and counterpart organizations in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa
- The importance of **navigating technological shifts**—particularly AI and digital publishing as they affect AERE’s journals—to support members and the profession
- Aspirations to **amplify AERE’s role and visibility** in promoting research, teaching, and engagement via policy-relevant scholarship, including by enhancing our online presence

This report integrates these visioning themes with a review of strategic opportunities and challenges, supported by insights distilled from our in-person meeting, the member survey, and the listening sessions with AERE members. It includes an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) and concludes with prioritized goals for short, medium, and long-term planning horizons. By outlining specific recommendations, this document is intended to serve as a guiding, flexible framework for AERE’s leadership in ensuring the Association’s continued prominence and value to its members and the broader society.

---

## 1. Introduction: The Need for Strategic Planning

Established in 1979, AERE has long served as a critical professional organization for scholars and practitioners in the field of environmental and resource economics. Its foundational mission has been to facilitate the exchange of ideas, stimulate rigorous research and promote advanced graduate training within the field. For almost five decades, AERE has cultivated a vibrant community. As we approach our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, AERE has over 1,200 members from more than 30 nations, representing diverse sectors such as academia, government and private industry. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, AERE’s commitment extends beyond academic discourse to fostering an equitable and inclusive environment across all of its professional activities.

In an era characterized by rapid environmental change, evolving policy landscapes and dynamic shifts in academic publishing and professional engagement, the need for strategic planning is strong. The recent two-day strategic planning retreat was convened to address these contemporary challenges and opportunities. The meeting’s agenda was designed to elicit candid discussion on various aspects of AERE’s operations, from its core mission and events to its flagship journals and mentoring initiatives.

---

## 2. SWOT Analysis: AERE in Context

### Strengths

- **Established Scholarly Reputation:** AERE's journals (*JAERE* and *REEP*) are respected and recognized for high-quality, policy-relevant research, and our annual conference draws high-quality paper submissions and a growing attendance.
- **Strong Community Culture:** AERE is known for its collegial, supportive environment, particularly for junior scholars and scholars from diverse backgrounds and institutions.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** The organization operates efficiently with a lean structure and highly committed Board and committee volunteers.
- **Central Role in the Field:** AERE is widely regarded as the primary scholarly association for environmental and resource economists, particularly in the U.S.

### Weaknesses

- **Limited Opportunities for Engagement on Teaching:** AERE does not offer avenues for members interested in improving their teaching to engage with and learn from each other.
- **Digital Presence Gaps:** Our digital presence (website, RESECON listserv, conference app, social media efforts) could be better integrated to support our community.
- **Reliance on a Few Programs:** While successful, AERE's programs could be better connected and diversified to meet the full lifecycle needs of members (e.g., mid-career).
- **Unclear or Outdated Mission Statement:** The current mission-relevant text in the bylaws does not fully reflect the scope of AERE's work or its commitment to mentoring and inclusion.
- **Limited Engagement with International Scholars:** AERE events and journals have less of an international orientation than other institutions/journals in the field.

### Opportunities

- **AI and Open Science:** Tools like large language models, AI-assisted peer review, and open data repositories are reshaping scholarly communications. AERE can lead or convene conversations about their role in the field.
- **Demand for Mentoring and Career Support:** There is a strong need for mentorship at all career stages—including among mid-career scholars and among junior scholars, of whom our mentoring programs serve only a small fraction.
- **Global Growth and Collaboration:** Associations in Europe, Asia, and Latin America are expanding their memberships and impact, and international submissions to our sister journals are growing rapidly. AERE has the opportunity to partner, co-host events, or build cross-institution mentoring structures.
- **Growing Profile in the Discipline of Economics:** Younger scholars are increasingly interested in environmental issues such as climate change, providing an opportunity to raise the profile of our field within our profession.

## Threats

- **Evolving Publishing Ecosystem:** Open access mandates, interdisciplinary journals, and the use and potential use of AI by authors and referees are rapidly changing the publishing landscape. International submissions to competing field journals have outpaced submission growth at JAERE. AERE’s journals must stay competitive, relevant and credible in this environment.
- **Member Expectations Outpacing Capacity:** As member needs grow (especially for digital tools, mentoring initiatives, and global inclusion), AERE risks lagging behind better-resourced or more agile associations.
- **Technological Disruption:** As peer associations adopt apps, AI-assisted services, and global platforms, AERE must keep pace to retain and grow its community.
- **Political Polarization:** Environmental policy is the subject of a large share of research published in AERE’s journals and presented at our events; political polarization requires that AERE strengthen resilience to any resulting threats to funding, attendance and reputation, and support members as they navigate this challenge.

---

## 3. SWOT Summary

In summary, AERE stands at a pivotal juncture. It boasts significant strengths—a respected legacy, strong publications, growing membership (especially among junior scholars) and a

vibrant community—and has proactively pursued emerging opportunities, from journals and virtual outreach to global partnerships. AERE’s events are a cornerstone of its value proposition, providing crucial platforms for research dissemination, networking and community building. These internal assets position AERE well to capitalize on opportunities for growth and impact, including the surge of interest in climate economics and policy, the globalization of our profession, and the ability to connect quickly with a broader-than-ever community online (e.g., via social media).

However, our review also highlights serious challenges. Evolving publishing norms and intensifying pressure for visibility and relevance demand agility and strategic focus. AERE’s journals, while well-regarded, face growing competition from both general and interdisciplinary outlets, as well as challenges associated with AI. Likewise, the increasing demand for digital tools, mentorship pathways, and global connectivity places new expectations on association infrastructure. Polarized views on environmental policy in the U.S. raise potential threats to fundraising, reputation and impact for both AERE and our members.

By leveraging its core strengths—journal quality, inclusive programs, and a culture of intellectual generosity—AERE can mitigate external threats and remain a leader in its field. The SWOT analysis underscores that AERE’s future success will depend not only on what it offers, but on how nimbly and inclusively it adapts to a rapidly changing academic and policy environment.

---

## **4. Strategic Themes**

### **A. Reaffirm and Clarify AERE’s Mission**

AERE’s mission should reflect:

- Scholarly excellence
- A full-lifecycle commitment to support of members in academia, government, and the private and non-profit sectors
- Global relevance
- A proactive stance on inclusion, mentoring, and community-building
- Expertise independent of politics

### **B. Create a Teaching Work Group**

Launch a Teaching Work Group to:

- Design conference sessions and/or virtual panels focused on pedagogy
- Support peer mentoring around teaching
- Create a pathway to support creation of teaching resources (e.g., through videos)
- Coordinate with the AERE Scholars program and DEI efforts
- Identify additional ways AERE can support members in teaching-intensive careers

### **C. Expand and Evaluate Mentorship Structures**

Strengthen and diversify mentoring opportunities by:

- Supporting mid-career professionals
- Serving a larger number of junior scholars
- Launching interest-based or regional mentoring groups
- Defining and tracking engagement and success of mentoring programs
- Offering digital mentorship matching and check-ins

### **D. Refresh AERE Events**

Make our events more useful to members by:

- Diversifying session formats (spark/lightning sessions, teaching, policy panels, professional development)
- Expanding informal time (breaks, social opportunities) to support networking
- Creating “best lightning presentation” and/or “best poster” awards
- Facilitating mixing among senior and junior scholars
- Increasing support for AERE@ sessions and other activities at regional meetings
- Actively engaging scholars with diverse perspectives on environmental and resource issues

### **E. Modernize AERE’s Technology Infrastructure**

Implement updates to website, RESECON listserv, conference app and/or other infrastructure to:

- Create a more engaging and useful web presence
- Encourage member communities and forums

- Promote resource sharing (e.g., papers, syllabi, datasets, job market tips)
- Track engagement with our online presence to support analysis of what is working well and what is working poorly

## **F. Enhance Global Engagement**

Advance international participation by:

- Recruiting globally for editorial boards and committees
- Promoting AERE journals in international settings (e.g., national & university “tenure lists”, JAERE and REEP event sponsorships)
- Offering virtual programming to global audiences
- Strengthening partnerships with EAERE, AFAERE, AAERE, and LAERE through the World Council and bilaterally

## **G. Strengthen AERE’s Journals**

Prepare for future publishing challenges by:

- Partnering with the University of Chicago Press to develop goals and objectives for growth, impact, and navigating pressures from AI and open access
- Broadening inclusion among the editorial teams
- Developing consistent guidance on ethics and openness in AI use by authors, referees and editors for both JAERE and REEP
- Improving journals’ online presence on social media, podcasts, Econimate, etc.

## **H. Broaden Fundraising Efforts**

Diversify AERE’s revenue sources by:

- Establishing infrastructure for bequests and promoting AERE as a worthy target for such donations
- Developing a plan for modest increases in annual membership fees
- Working toward endowing specific AERE initiatives that enjoy strong support from members (e.g., Oates Dissertation Award, Scholars Program, grad student and junior faculty travel grants for the Summer Conference)
- Increasing the level and resilience of Summer Conference funding by identifying additional sponsors

**I. Increase Visibility of AERE and Environmental Economics**

- Investigate interest in and capacity for an AERE working paper series
- Facilitate direct engagement between AERE members and journalists
- Develop and implement a comprehensive social media strategy to disseminate research and amplify AERE activities
- Partner with policy organizations across the political spectrum to co-sponsor events

**Prioritized Goals by Time Horizon**

Goals	Related Theme(s)
<b>Short-Term (2025–2026)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise AERE’s mission statement, with support from the strategic planning committee and AERE Board. If this requires changes to AERE’s bylaws (Article 1), conduct a vote of the membership to adopt the new mission statement.</li> </ul>	<b>A</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt clear language on institutional neutrality for the AERE policy handbook.</li> </ul>	<b>A</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form the Teaching Work Group and launch at least one pilot initiative in 2026.</li> </ul>	<b>B</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiment with one virtual mentoring offering to support mid-career scholars (peer-to-peer matchmaking, small group mentoring).</li> </ul>	<b>C</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene organizers of AERE@ sessions for regional conferences and AERE leadership to discuss opportunities for coordination and additional support.</li> </ul>	<b>D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider soliciting proposals for a pre-conference methods workshop for the 2028 summer conference.</li> </ul>	<b>D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene an ad-hoc committee to evaluate the website and propose improvements.</li> </ul>	<b>D, I</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamline social media presence by combining AERE/JAERE/REEP accounts, add LinkedIn to our platforms, and recruit members for live social media coverage of AERE@ sessions at regional meetings and ASSA.</li> </ul>	<b>E, I</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate a meeting (virtual or in-person) with UCP, JAERE and REEP editors, and AERE leadership to refresh partnership, establish goals and strategies for growth, discuss AI and social media, and consider expanding our global reach.</li> </ul>	<b>G</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to potential podcast partners for regular features on JAERE and REEP articles (Resources Radio, ClimateNow, ...).</li> </ul>	<b>E, G</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish infrastructure for soliciting and accepting bequests to AERE.</li> </ul>	<b>H</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a plan for increasing annual membership fees.</li> </ul>	<b>H</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a plan for the strategic investment of cash reserves.</li> </ul>	<b>H</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up 2027 summer conference prospectus by March 2026 and recruit new sponsors (Stata, ArcGIS, Python, sister journals, university research centers focused on climate/environment, consulting &amp; tech firms, state/local governments in conference locations, sponsors of organizations like APPAM, SBCA, ASSA, AGU, World Bank).</li> </ul>	<b>H</b>
<b>Mid-Term (2027–2028)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce travel commitment for Scholars Program participants in 2027 from two summer conferences to one, and double participation in this program.</li> </ul>	<b>C</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin developing additional, lighter-touch mentoring programs (adopt-a-paper, peer mentoring groups, create opportunities through OSWEET, once per semester “mentoring minutes” on Zoom, virtual one-on-one matchups).</li> </ul>	<b>C</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot at least two new Summer Conference initiatives in 2027, and then evaluate and reconsider them for 2028 (e.g., a pedagogy event or session, a dedicated set of parallel “spark sessions” sponsored by JAERE followed by a mixer with facilitated interactions, longer breaks in the program, more social opportunities, professional development panel on communicating for policy or opportunities in government service, an AERE Fellows or policy panel sponsored by REEP, pre-conference methods workshop if supported). Assign an additional AERE Board member to the conference organizing committee to help with these.</li> </ul>	<b>D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revitalize the poster session at the 2027 Summer Conference.</li> </ul>	<b>D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite editors of science journals and major media (<i>Nature</i>, <i>Science</i>, <i>PNAS</i>, <i>NY Times Science Times</i>) to the 2027 Summer Conference.</li> </ul>	<b>D, I</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace AERE luncheon at the ASSA meetings in 2027 with a business meeting at the Summer Conference, and a virtual board meeting in mid-January.</li> </ul>	<b>D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify one or more workshops or training events for AERE, JAERE or REEP to co-sponsor (Berkeley Summer School, Camp Resources, Big Sky, Heartland, California Occasional, NBER ee, Environment for Development, etc.).</li> </ul>	<b>D, I</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus 2027 and 2028 virtual workshops on topics with appeal across the political spectrum and both within and outside the U.S. (critical minerals, energy markets, permitting reform, etc.).</li> </ul>	<b>D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reach out to conservative organizations with strong environmental economics expertise to discuss possible partnerships (PERC, Mercatus, Niskanen, GWU Regulatory Studies).</li> </ul>	<b>D</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cross-promote AERE’s 2027 Summer Conference and LAERE’s 2027 Conference (in Mexico City).</li> </ul>	<b>F</b>

• Begin planning an AERE presence at the 2030 World Congress.	<b>F</b>
• Implement formal AI-related publishing policies at JAERE and REEP.	<b>G</b>
• Investigate interest in and capacity for an AERE working paper series.	<b>I</b>
• Plan a virtual event, possibly with a fundraising component, to celebrate AERE’s 50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2029.	<b>I, H</b>
<b>Long-Term (2029–2030)</b>	
• Scale and sustain new teaching and mentoring activities	<b>B, C</b>
• Evaluate Scholars Program to assess effects on career outcomes and satisfaction, AERE engagement, and other impacts	<b>C</b>
• Host an AERE event (and/or a co-sponsored journal event) at the 2030 World Congress	<b>F</b>
• Evaluate AERE journals’ progress on growth, globalization and other goals in partnership with UCP.	<b>G</b>
• Launch a campaign to endow the Oates Dissertation Fund, with potential matching from a portion of AERE’s cash reserves. Can be used as a model for additional endowments if it works well.	<b>H</b>
• Revisit and adjust revenue strategies (membership fees, bequests, sponsorships, investments) for future growth, and consider hiring a part-time development consultant for any areas of need	<b>H</b>
• Consider developing an externally co-sponsored program to embed environmental economists within agencies that need better support for economic analysis.	<b>I</b>

Successful implementation of this strategic roadmap will require sustained commitment from AERE’s leadership, active engagement among its members, and a willingness to embrace innovation. Pursuing these recommendations and building on them as future AERE leadership sees fit will help AERE to preserve its legacy as a leading intellectual home for environmental and resource economists and also significantly expand its relevance, impact and inclusivity to support its members and our profession.