

Presentation of the Distinguished Public Service Award of the Mineralogical Society of America for 2024 to Sharon Tahirkheli

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President, ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues,

I am privileged and honored to introduce the recipient of the 2024 MSA Distinguished Public Service Medal, Sharon Tahirkheli. This Medal is awarded by the MSA Council to individuals or organizations who have made important contributions to furthering the vitality of the geological sciences, especially but not necessarily in the fields of mineralogy, geochemistry, petrology, and crystallography. It takes no imagination to envision Sharon's positive impact across these disciplines, and beyond.

I've had the pleasure of knowing Sharon and working alongside her in various capacities throughout much of my career. Her journey in the realm of service to the geosciences spans more than four decades at the American Geosciences Institute (AGI), where she began as an editor/indexer and entered data into an information system that has been a companion of nearly every geoscience researcher.

Sharon's contributions have left an indelible mark on the geoscience knowledgebase, and her innovative leadership has had far-reaching impacts on the very foundation of geoscience information. It is no wonder that she was honored with the Mary B. Ansari Distinguished Service Award from the Geoscience Information Society, in recognition of her significant contributions to the geoscience information profession. Sharon also served as president of the Geoscience Information Society, further exemplifying her dedication and leadership in the field. No doubt the Society realized the benefits of her forward-thinking vision and wise counsel.

Until March of this year, Sharon Tahirkheli held the role of Director of Scholarly Information at AGI, a role that is instrumental in overseeing the development of GeoRef, a monumental international bibliographic geoscience database with 4.3 million references from 140 countries and 60 languages. This database is the cornerstone of geoscience information, encompassing a wide array of resources, including conference papers, journal articles, books, maps, and much more. Sharon's consistent leadership has not only ensured the growth and sustainability of GeoRef but has also fostered crucial relationships with major publishers and database providers, thereby advancing the accessibility of geoscience information in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

Sharon's dedication goes far beyond GeoRef. She has been at the helm of developing numerous niche databases that cater to the diverse needs of the geoscience community. These include the Geologic Guidebooks of North America, Geological Surveys Database, Scientific Ocean Drilling Bibliographic Database, and the Midwest Geological Sequestration Consortium Research Database. In a testament to her forward-thinking approach, Sharon has even integrated searchable terms for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals within the GeoRef database, underscoring her unwavering commitment to the excellence and discoverability of geoscience information.

As Director of Scholarly Information, Sharon also led the production of other critical AGI information products, such as the Glossary of Geology and the Cold Regions Bibliography Project. She was a driving force behind the establishment of GeoScienceWorld (GSW), a groundbreaking aggregation of linked and interoperable Earth science journals. Her tireless efforts saw her serve on the GSW Steering Committee, on the Board of Directors, and as the organization's treasurer. Sharon's contributions also extended internationally as a member of the Management Council of the Digital Library for Earth System Education, where she led cataloging efforts to provide metadata for the DLESE Community Collection. Sharon's involvement in initiatives such as the Multilingual Thesaurus of Geosciences and work related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals within the GeoRef database demonstrate her global perspective and willingness to engage with international issues.

In March 2019, AGI faced a financial crisis, and it was no surprise that Sharon was chosen to serve as the interim executive director during these turbulent times. Over the next two years, she provided exceptional leadership, managing AGI's diverse programs, overseeing a substantial budget of \$5 million, and a staff of 45. Sharon's remarkable abilities and unwavering dedication were pivotal in steering the Institute back to financial stability, restoring trust within the geoscience community and enabling a successful search for a new executive director. To quote then President David Wunsch, "In my opinion, [Sharon] was the perfect choice for interim [executive] director because of her calm and pleasant demeanor, combined with business acumen, and a strong belief in the mission of AGI. Moreover, Sharon is well known and trusted within the geoscience community, so she served as an excellent ambassador for AGI during this tumultuous time."

Sharon's guidance has not only extended to her official roles, but she has been an invaluable mentor to me personally as I transitioned into my current role as the executive director of AGI. She continues service as an emeritus Director of Scholarly Information, and I continue to appreciate her wisdom, her even keel, her insights, and her sense of humor, which brings with it a laugh that often says unspoken "I've been down this road before."

In closing, Sharon Tahirkheli is most deserving of the MSA Distinguished Public Service Medal. Her extraordinary service to the national and international geoscience community may not be immediately apparent to all, but it is felt by each and every member of our profession. Sharon embodies the very essence of this esteemed recognition through her unwavering commitment to advancing the discovery, access, and distribution of geoscience information. Her dedication has been a cornerstone of the geosciences, and she has truly epitomized the essence of public service to both our profession and society.

Please join me in applauding Sharon Tahirkheli.

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