

AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American Geographical Society Selected to Lead Global Dialogue Surrounding Harnessing the Ethical Use of Mobile Location Technology for Governance & Society

Description: The American Geographical Society announces the receipt of a new grant from the Henry Luce Foundation to advance global dialogue focused on the ethical use of mobile location technology for governance and society.

[New York City, NY] – [May 5, 2020] — The American Geographical Society (AGS) and its EthicalGEO Initiative has been awarded a grant by the Henry Luce Foundation to investigate the societal implications of geospatial technology and location tracking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. As public consciousness coalesces around location data collection and its implications amidst the pandemic, the grant awarded to AGS will focus on COVID-19 surveillance and its impact on democratic practices and civil liberties. The grant, which will be awarded immediately, will be completed within the next 90 days so that the results can be used quickly to impact how decision makers use technology to manage the pandemic.

“We at the AGS are excited to partner with the Henry Luce Foundation on this critical dialogue about how mobile location technologies can be ethically applied to COVID-19 biosurveillance, recognizing the need to protect civil rights and vulnerable individuals and communities. We are confident that this effort will help us all navigate the future responsibly as these technologies more ubiquitously shape citizens’ lived experience,” said Dr. Christopher Tucker, Chairman of AGS.

“The Luce Foundation is proud to support this important AGS project, immediately relevant as we tackle COVID-19 and essential to our democracy in the long term,” said Dr. Mariko Silver, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Henry Luce Foundation. “Mobile location technologies are pervasive in our society and we need expert-informed public discussion about how we want them to be used, under what circumstances, and under whose control. Geolocation data present particular privacy and civil liberties challenges, and it is essential that we create a shared understanding of how we as a society want them to be deployed in service of our safety, security, and civil liberties.”

In the first activity under the work of the grant, AGS will convene a series of Blue-Ribbon Panels to discuss the ways in which using location technology affects individuals, various groups, organizations, business, as well as local, state, and federal governments. Experts from around the country, and the world, will be convened to participate in sessions to ascertain how location technology can help fight the virus, determine the effect of such technology on society in a post COVID-19 world, and provide recommendations.

“Everything about the pandemic is geographical...how we track it, understand it, and figure out how to manage it,” said Dr. John Konarski, Chief Executive Officer of AGS. “And the consideration of privacy as we use geospatial location tools and apps to fight it raises issues that must be considered now in the short-term and later when these technologies continue to play a role in our everyday lives.”

Through its partnership with the Henry Luce Foundation, AGS will advance dialogue surrounding location data collection and its implications on the future of technology and governance, and invites the broader community to join the discourse. To follow project developments, visit www.ethicalgeo.org.

The American Geographical Society (AGS) is a 21st-century learning society dedicated to the advancement of geographic thinking, knowledge, and understanding across business, government, academe, social sectors, and most importantly with teachers and students. Established in 1851, AGS is the oldest professional geographical organization in the United States. It is recognized worldwide as a pioneer in geographical research and education for over 168 years. The mission of AGS is to advance and promote geography in business, government, science, and education. Our goal is to enhance the nation's geographic literacy to engender sound public policy, national security, and human well-being worldwide. AGS seeks to engage the American public, from its youngest to its oldest citizens, with new and amazing ways to understand and characterize our changing world. The Society maintains its headquarters in New York City.

The [Henry Luce Foundation](#) seeks to enrich public discourse by promoting innovative scholarship, cultivating new leaders, and fostering international understanding. The Foundation advances its mission through grantmaking and leadership programs in the fields of Asia, higher education, religion and theology, art, and public policy. Established in 1936 by Henry R. Luce, the co-founder and editor-in-chief of Time, Inc., the Foundation's earliest work honored his parents, missionary educators in China. The Foundation's programs today reflect the value Mr. Luce placed on learning, leadership, and long-term commitment in philanthropy.

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