

A Brief History of SAGIC

Background

Since at least 1990, Wisconsin state agency staff members have been communicating and collaborating on the topics of geospatial data and technologies. This cooperation evolved over the years, eventually leading to the formation of the [State Agency Geospatial Information Committee](#) (SAGIC) that exists today. The purpose of this document is to provide a brief history of SAGIC and describe the work being done by SAGIC today.

Pre-SAGIC

Many technological advancements occurred in the 1990's, including the expanded use of desktop computing, increased access to and speed of the internet, and a broader commercialization of geospatial technologies. The Wisconsin legislature had established a [Land Information Program](#) to help local governments modernize land records. Against that backdrop, staff from several state agencies met regularly to discuss a variety of topics. Major themes that pervaded those discussions, and continue to be of interest to SAGIC today, included:

- geospatial data development, availability, and access,
- awareness of geospatial project initiatives taking place at various agencies (and how other agencies might leverage them),
- potential opportunities for consolidating geospatial technology infrastructure across state agencies to gain efficiency and eliminate unwanted redundancies, and
- how geospatial practitioners could and should orient themselves both within state government and the broader local, state, and national geospatial communities.

This last theme has often been a topic of thought and discussion amongst practitioners, particularly within the context of state government. Participants recognized the inherent value in interagency awareness of and collaboration on current and potential geospatial activities, as well as elevating that awareness to agency executives and officeholders. However, identifying approaches for promoting geospatial issues with agency administration has proven difficult as participants of the group were loosely affiliated, were mostly collaborating voluntarily, and did not generally have high-level decision making or budgeting authority within their agencies.

By the early 2000's, the group coalesced into a SAGIC precursor known as Wisconsin Enterprise GIS, or WEGIS. The Department of Administration - Division of Enterprise Technology (DET) was an important connection for WEGIS. It was (and is) the primary group that provides enterprise technology services to Wisconsin state agencies. The first State of Wisconsin Geographic Information Officer (GIO) position was [established](#) within DET in 2005. The first GIO worked to help formalize WEGIS and collaborated with the group to develop strategies, plans, and programs aimed at centralizing geospatial data and services to benefit all agencies. As one participant put it, "cost-sharing and funding at scale." However competing interests, turnover, and uneven prioritization of the effort across state government caused that effort to eventually stall.

Establishment of SAGIC (2007)

After the dissolving of WEGIS, a refreshed, staff-driven effort established SAGIC in 2007. The establishment of SAGIC as a committee that acknowledged the grass-roots volunteer nature of the group. Participants recognized the value of interagency collaboration and awareness, but also realized the limits of their collective influence

and authority. A charter was drafted and maintained, meetings were governed using Robert's Rules of Order, officers were elected, and working groups were formed to pursue various topics of interest. The group focused on interagency communication, skills-building, industry trends, and some outreach efforts. Members worked together to participate in and respond to important geospatial events and topics, such as coordination and response to floods in 2008, statewide orthoimagery projects (first in 2010), mapping broadband access, and mapping Wisconsin landcover. SAGIC members participated in developing data that supported those efforts, and many others, and collaborated to develop methods for distributing data and maximizing its usage and value.

Events and Accomplishments

SAGIC also gave agency geospatial practitioners a forum to collectively discover and discuss issues, and then return to their member agencies to inform and educate their coworkers and leadership. This was at times quite influential. Members found legislators would listen to input from agencies regarding bills and language, especially if there was consensus amongst multiple agencies. One significant example of this was a collective response by SAGIC members and their agencies to 2013 Wisconsin Act 358, which sought to require anyone creating or editing GIS parcel data in the State of Wisconsin to be a licensed surveyor. State agencies coordinated deeply to create a response that helped modify the resulting statutory language to eliminate this requirement.

There have been several SAGIC events that have also helped raise awareness amongst state government, and the public. "[Maps Matter](#)" was a daylong series of presentations at the Wisconsin Capitol that showcased GIS use at state agencies and explained why it was essential. The event was first held in [2009](#), and again in [2013](#). A similar event, "[Maps at the Capitol](#)," was held in 2019. These presentations were captured by WisconsinEye and are available to view in the WisconsinEye archive.

SAGIC Today

SAGIC members have continued to wrestle with the idea of more formal recognition from and connection to authority within state government. For a time in the mid-2010's, SAGIC attempted to associate itself with the Governor's Management Cabinet. However, the concept of reporting SAGIC business to the Management Cabinet itself never solidified, and the connection did not prove long lasting.

This history has brought SAGIC to where it stands today; a business-driven group that works for the standardization, development, documentation, accessibility, and governance of state agency spatial data. The committee consists of high-level geospatial staff from Wisconsin state agencies. It fosters collaboration between state agencies and other organizations to recognize the value of geospatial data and tools and broaden their use. As one SAGIC founder put it, "No one is going to rescue GIS. We need to work together and advocate for ourselves."

Past SAGIC Chairs (Incomplete)

2007, 2013-16: Lisa Morrison, DATCP/WDNR

2008-12: N/A (no chair assigned)

2017: Laurence Cutforth, DATCP/WDNR

2018-20: Colter Sikora, PSC

2021: Felipe Avila, WHS

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Please submit comments, updates, and corrections to SAGIC Communications Working Group

Past Co-Chair (Incomplete)

2007-14: N/A (position added in 2015 elections)

2015: Tony Van Der Wielen, LTSB

2016: Chris Diller, DMA

2017-19: Colleen Hermans, WEM

2020: Felipe Avila, WHS

2021: Shelley Witte, DPI

Past Secretaries (Incomplete)

2007-14: N/A (position added in January 2015)

2015-16: Melanie McCalmont, DPI

2016-17: Colter Sikora, PSC

2018-19: Felipe Avila, WHS

2020: Shelley Witte, DPI

2021: Greg Grube, WEC

Past Wisconsin Geographic Information Officers

2005-07: David Mockert

2007-14: Curtis Pulford

2015-present: Jim Giglierano