



Cover image credit: AAVSO observer Carl Weber — NGC 7000 featuring the Cygnus Wall.



STRATEGIC PLAN  
HIGHLIGHTS | 2021

*Carl W. Weber*  
PHOTOGRAPHY



## OUR MISSION:

“TO ENABLE ANYONE,  
ANYWHERE TO  
PARTICIPATE IN  
SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY  
THROUGH VARIABLE  
STAR ASTRONOMY”

Image credit: AAVSO observer Carl Weber — Cederblad 214 and NGC 7822.

## WHO WE ARE:

The AAVSO is a welcoming and dynamic international citizen science community, recognized worldwide for significant contributions in astronomy research, as well as for its active community of observers. Since 1911, we have advanced astronomy by providing citizen scientists the opportunity to contribute to research on a global scale.

As we enter our 110th year of operation, we are implementing a strategic plan that sets the stage for AAVSO’s future and impact. Over the past two years, we listened to our members, studied the astronomy community’s needs, identified the ways our data supports research, and developed new ways to assist members with observing technology. We focused on three objectives: membership satisfaction, organizational impact, and long-term financial stability.



KEEPING IN MIND  
AAVSO'S FUTURE  
AND IMPACT,  
  
OUR 5  
GOALS ARE:

1. Advancing Science
2. Building a Diverse Community
3. Enhancing Technical Infrastructure
4. Increasing Our Operation's Effectiveness
5. Financial Stability

## GOAL 1 | ADVANCING SCIENCE

The AAVSO will be leading a citizen astronomy movement by encouraging its international community to collaborate with professional astronomers, enabling novel science.

Our observers contribute to long- and short-term scientific projects. The AAVSO is committed to supporting their work by providing the resources and opportunities needed to maximize their impact. The AAVSO supports them by:

- fostering key partnerships with high-profile international groups
- promoting the *Journal of the AAVSO* (JAAVSO) as a recognized publication of variable star research
- encouraging professional-amateur collaborations and mentorships
- maintaining and enhancing relevant tools for data submission, retrieval, and analysis
- leveraging our observers' expertise to educate other citizen scientists
- educating our members and observers
- creating introductory learning materials to encourage and support aspiring observers
- providing access to reliable data found in the AAVSO databases
- creating engagement opportunities for individuals with limited resources
- maintaining a help desk managed by our professional staff

### OBSERVER SPOTLIGHT



**Richard R. Sabo, MD,  
FACS**

“The AAVSO has given me the tools and motivation to transform a minor hobby into a mentally challenging and extremely gratifying avocation. The instructional courses, the tools on the website and the mentoring attitude of so many members, including professionals, are incredible resources available that have benefited me.”



Attendees of AAVSO's 108th Annual Meeting, Hotel Encanto, Las Cruces, New Mexico

# aa v s o cultivating the future

american association of variable star observers



AAVSO Director Stella Kafka with Annual Meeting attendees



Attendees of AAVSO's 107th Annual Meeting, Lowell Observatory, Flagstaff, Arizona

Background image credit: Keanu, 2018

## GOAL 2 | BUILDING A DIVERSE COMMUNITY SUPPORTIVE OF THE AAVSO'S MISSION AND VALUES

The AAVSO's superpower is its active, enthusiastic, and diverse international community of stakeholders. We commit to:

- empower individuals to grow and learn in variable star astronomy through AAVSO meetings, webinars, and new observing section activities
- ensure that our virtual and in-person events provide welcoming opportunities for exchanging ideas and information to maximize engagement
- connect professional and amateur astronomers
- promote inclusionary practices to guarantee the fulfillment of our mission to fully involve anyone, anywhere in scientific research.
- communicate the value of our observers' data to professional astronomers

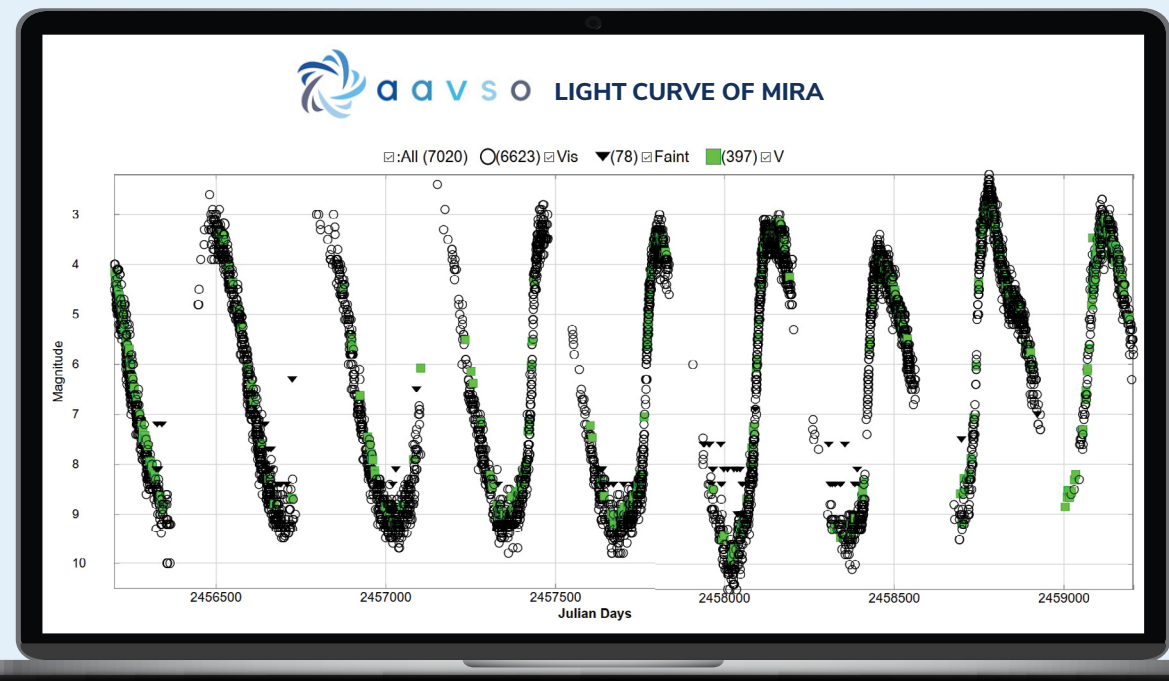
### BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



#### Kristine Larsen

AAVSO Board Secretary  
Past President of AAVSO  
Co-chair of the Solar Observing Section

Kris is a vocal advocate of inclusion and diversity in science, working towards providing equal opportunities to all, in research and education. Kris received the AAVSO Director's Award in 2019 for her tireless work and dedication to the AAVSO community.





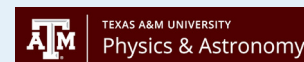
## GOAL 3 | MAINTAINING & ENHANCING OUR TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The AAVSO website is the hub of our international community. It is the platform that supports our programs and initiatives and celebrates our accomplishments. To that extent, we are building a content-development strategy for our website that will provide:

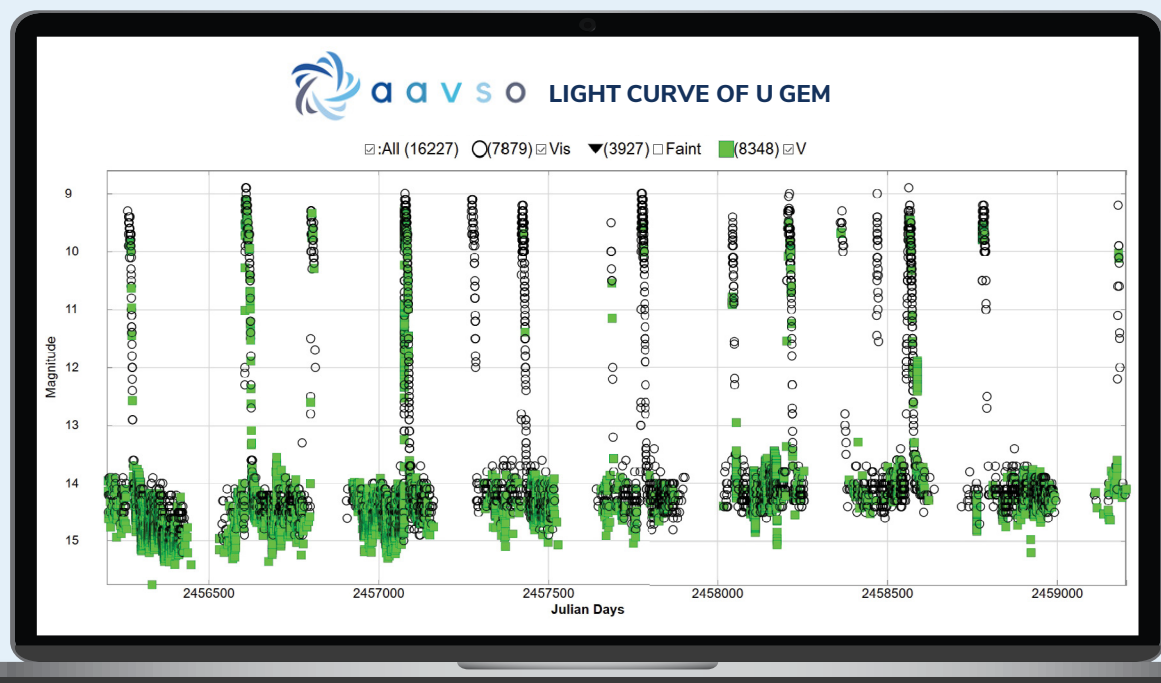
- a solid and secure technical infrastructure
- curated databases
- best practices in software and content management
- enhanced cybersecurity
- updated software tools to facilitate observation submissions, data download and analysis



**Prof. Kevin Krisciunas**  
Texas A&M  
Department of Astronomy



“Of all the sciences, astronomy is the easiest for amateurs to make a contribution to real research. I might notice that a dwarf nova is at outburst. I call it in to the AAVSO. They tell a professional astronomer, and in short order, an orbiting telescope is gathering data on this object. How great is that?”



UPDATED AAVSO WEBSITE  
LAUNCHED DECEMBER 21, 2020

[WWW.AAVSO.ORG](http://WWW.AAVSO.ORG)



**Dr. France Córdoba**  
National Science Foundation

Opening talk at the White House Forum  
on Citizen Science and Crowdsourcing;  
September 30, 2015

“I owe a personal debt to a group of backyard amateur astronomers who collectively form the American Association of Variable Star Observers.

While a Ph.D. student, I enlisted this group in following the brightenings and dimmings of a class of close binary systems...late one night an amateur astronomer from Prescott, Arizona, called me at home to let me know of a visible outburst from one of these binary stars.

I immediately convinced my thesis advisor to convince the Goddard Space Flight Center to... point the space observatory towards that one star.

The result was outstanding: the first detection of not only X-rays, but rapid X-ray pulsations. And I finally had a thesis result that confirmed that the accreting star in these binaries had to be a collapsed degenerate star in its death throes.”



## GOAL 4 | INCREASING OUR OPERATION'S EFFECTIVENESS

The AAVSO accomplishes its mission through the combined efforts of its staff, volunteers, observers, and members — 2,000 people sharing a common passion and joy of observing variable stars and contributing to scientific research. Over two hundred active volunteers augment the six-person staff.

During the strategic planning process, we identified ways to improve how we organize and guide our work efforts.

We established new operating committees to improve our effectiveness that include staff, board members, and volunteers from our community:

**Programs Committee** — Develop metrics to assess ongoing AAVSO programs for member interest, costs/benefits, scalability, and vet new program ideas.

**IT Committee** — The committee develops and guides the AAVSO's IT strategy and implementation plan to support our website and our data management and analysis tools.

**Marketing Committee** — This committee will develop programs and marketing materials to increase the visibility and presence of the AAVSO worldwide.

**Membership Committee** — This committee's primary responsibility is to work alongside the Board Diversity Committee to provide the strategies to recruit a wide range of individuals into our membership. This committee's secondary responsibility is to monitor member satisfaction.

**Observing Section Leadership Team** — Observing section leaders meet monthly with staff to share ideas and to create a consistent way to communicate with section members.

We expect these new committees to improve our entire organization's effectiveness, helping us achieve all three of our fundamental objectives — high membership satisfaction, increased impact, and long-term financial stability.

### OUR VOLUNTEERS

- Board/committees
- JAAVSO Editor
- Special projects
- VSX team
- Observing sections
- Charts and Sequences
- Data validation
- Mentor program
- CHOICE course instructors
- Software development and support
- AAVSOnet — BSM
- Archival digitization and special archival projects
- Translators
- Ambassadors

# GOAL 5 | FOCUSING ON FINANCIAL STABILITY

## AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHTS



### Molly Wakeling

AAVSO Ambassador Leader  
<http://www.astronomolly.com/>  
 Astrophotography website

"I got my first telescope in 2015, and after seeing how incredible Saturn was in it, quickly figured out how to do astrophotography so that I could share its beauty with others! From there, I dove pretty deep into astrophotography, which has been an ever-evolving adventure of new equipment, software, and techniques. I share those images, and do as much public outreach as I can!"



### Chris Colvin

AAVSO Ambassador Leader  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSERB9-YU41uZbliwJfkJcw>  
 "Spacebytes" podcast series

"By night, I am a passionate amateur astronomer and citizen scientist. I am extremely passionate about the work AAVSO does and believe that as a young(ish) member, I can play a role in securing the future of AAVSO and variable star astronomy for amateurs around the world."



Image credit: AAVSO observer Carl Weber - Westerhout 5 (a.k.a. The Soul Nebula)

The AAVSO's long-term financial stability depends on balancing income and expense while not overdrawing from our endowment.

During the strategic planning process, we scrutinized all of our expenses. This included a detailed analysis of the work done by our staff, contractors, and volunteers.

Next, we analyzed our income, which comes from four major areas:

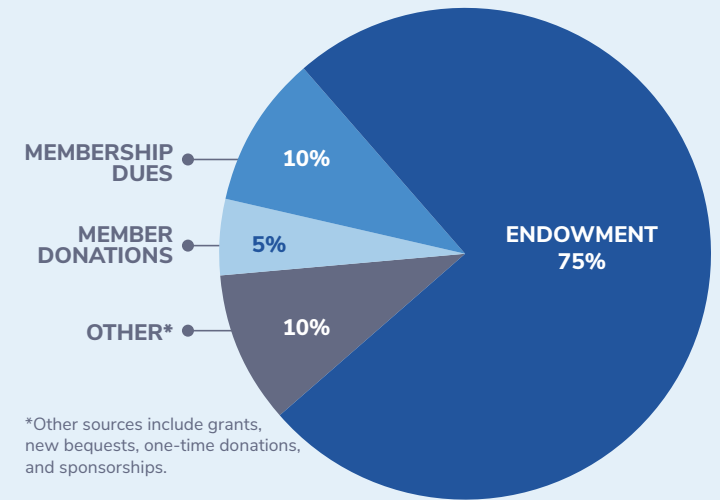
1. Endowment
2. Membership Dues
3. Member Donations
4. Other Sources

We are putting the following plan in place to balance our finances, increase member support and enable the AAVSO to grow and thrive.

- Reducing this year's annual endowment withdrawal to below five percent.
- Increasing non-endowment income by working with professionals to develop a comprehensive fundraising campaign. Focus areas include:
  - identify grant opportunities supporting our mission
  - identifying and contacting foundations that support science research
  - developing marketing materials to increase our visibility
- Increasing volunteer involvement.
- Initiating a \$200,000 Strategic Plan Fundraising Campaign in 2020.

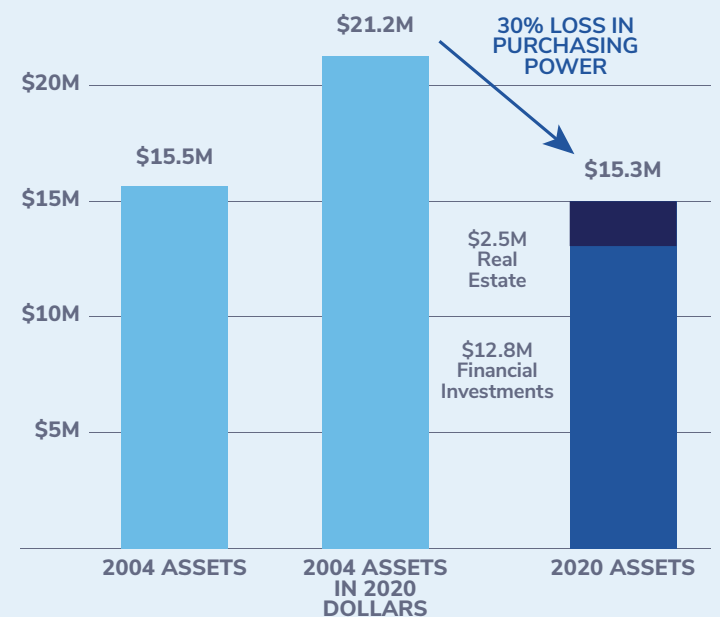
## AAVSO'S INCOME SOURCES

(Reviewed 2020)



## AAVSO'S ASSETS, 2004-20

(Excluding Cash Reserves)





## TOWARDS A PROMISING FUTURE:

As we celebrate 110 years since the AAVSO's founding, we have begun executing the strategic plan to build a dynamic and responsive organization. We are creating avenues to connect with "anyone, anywhere."

We are fostering key partnerships and engaging more individuals in the excitement of scientific discovery.

We know you will be inspired to embrace and support our work to successfully achieve these goals, because you are the AAVSO!



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[WWW.AAVSO.ORG](http://WWW.AAVSO.ORG)

