

## THANK YOU LETTERS RECEIVED FROM 2022 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

My experience at AGPA Connect 2022 was truly unforgettable. I am so grateful to Barbara Dazzo and *The Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health* for making my attendance possible. I was excited to dive head first into AGPA connect and attend as many events as possible.

I started and ended the week inside of "The COG" (continuous online group), where I was exposed to 24 hour chat-room based group for the very first time. Additionally, the COG helped me learn about large group dynamics. The "COG" quickly had my wheels turning, wondering how I could incorporate my learning into college counseling centers and community mental health centers.

Next, the scholarship I received allowed me to attend Dr. Hardy's special institute: *Group Therapy in a Time of Racial Reckoning and Unrest*. Much like group therapy, the topic of Dr. Hardy's presentation was challenging and important. Working in the non-profit sector, I am often serving and working alongside of people of color. Dr. Hardy invited me to think more critically of myself as a racial being and group leader, as well as to reflect on the potential experiences of my colleagues and my patients. Also, I have noticed an increased sense of confidence to talk about race in my groups and with my supervisees since attending this special institute.

Additionally, I attended the two- day institute. The two-day institute changed me as both a leader of group therapy and as a human. During my time in the process group experience, I was able to observe a skillful group leader at work, in order to gain tools that I can use in my own practice. Also, I gained a lot of empathy for the participants in the process groups I lead in my professional life. Until this experience, I was quite blind to the challenges that group members face (and I didn't even know it!). Since this experience, I have been tirelessly researching modern-analytic group training programs. The two-day institute is a truly life changing experience, leading to rich cognitive and emotional learning about myself and groups in general, that I would not have been able to experience without the help of scholarship funding.

Also, I attended three days of the AGPA conference. I was able to attend the special plenary presentations, which invigorated me and reminded me about why I have chosen to pursue group therapy. I attended two full-day workshops (Thursday and Friday) and two half-day workshops (Saturday). In my experience, conferences have been distant and non-engaging, but this was not the case with the AGPA conference. I ended every day exhausted from high levels of mental and emotional engagement and excited to take my new learning into my daily work. I learned about bringing vitality into groups, confronting scapegoating, utilizing countertransference, and applying meditation. It was an honor to learn from such notable and skilled group leaders, and I have been excited to bring pieces of them into my career.

Aside from the discreet institutes and workshops I attended, AGPA connect allowed me to make lasting connections and become inspired to further my career in group therapy. I met folks I can look to for mentorship, and I found an organization that feels like a professional home for myself. After attending AGPA Connect 2022, I am confident that I will continue to learn and grow as a group leader, as well as feel motivated to spread the word about the importance of group therapy.

Again, thank you to all of the folks who made attending AGPA connect possible for me and others. Because of you, the world has gained more group therapists and more patients will be served through this unique and important modality.

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Thank you for your scholarship support for my attending AGPA Connect 2022. I am three-quarters retired in agency counseling work with families who have children at risk of placement out of the home. I am not currently leading any groups, except occasionally for the Affiliate Societies Assembly.

I attended the full five day program and chose events indicated for the Leadership Track. I will share the impact and benefit of the Institutes and Workshops that I attended, including how they will enhance my leadership of the Affiliate Society of which I am president, the Carolinas Group Psychotherapy Society.

The Special Institute on Monday, 2/28 will help me be mindfully address systemic racism issues in my Affiliate Society, as well as for the clients I see. The presentation was so rich with understanding and guidance that I am viewing it again and taking notes.

The Institute I attended was XV-1: Rupture and Repair In Relational Group Psychotherapy. This will help me deal constructively with conflict as president of my Affiliate Society and in my work with the families I see. I learned to slow the rush to fix conflict and explore the feelings behind and below the presenting issues. This allows the humanity of people to come out for bonding and connection that can allow creative and compassionate energies to surface and show options.

The Mitchell Hochberg Memorial Public Education Event, a presentation of research on a way of treating historical, inter-generational and present trauma in Native American communities broadened my understanding and appreciation of the trauma, resilience and pain the speakers shared. It helped me understand how the cultural context of clients affords rich possibilities for treatment and support that are not mentioned in and go far beyond the power of the theories and modalities I have been taught. To reconnect a person to their world is the goal of treatment; how can this be accomplished without knowing and consulting their world?

Dan Siegel's plenary presentation, "IntraConnected: Integrating Identity and Broadening Belonging as Mwe," expressed my intuition about ontology or being: our bodies are only the locus of our connections, our being, our identity, is in our connections, in our relationships – with the earth, the rocks, plants, animals, and the people in our lives. And this being-ness, these connections, extend back through time in inter-generational relationships and histories.

My Thursday workshop was 4a – Leadership Development: Utilizing Group Therapy Skills in Corporate Culture, with Rick Tivers leading the workshop. I learned and refined skills for leading my Affiliate Society as its president. I learned that removing de-motivators, plus noticing and affirming volunteers' efforts, works better than "motivating" people, which is usually perceived as manipulating people.

Friday's Plenary with Gary Burlingame was encouraging and uplifting. I appreciated the data supporting the efficacy of group treatment. It will be useful as my Affiliate Society advocates for better reimbursement.

I attended workshop 27 – Diversifying Group Leadership, led by Karin(e) Bustamante and Francis Kaklauskas. I learned to use and recognize "Ouch!" as a flag that a microaggression has occurred, and ways to address it and validate the experience of the injured person(s). I learned that if I let fear and trepidation close down my engagement, I miss the opportunity to grow in capacity to tolerate this affect and miss the gifts that diversity offers.

I next attended workshop 37-5: Integrative Community Therapy: a Web of Solidarity and Care, with Sylvia London, Alice Thompson, Kenneth Thompson and Irma Rodriguez. I liked the way this broadened the reach of group therapy to a community. It provides a community a way to develop its own voice as the people explore and share their experience and wisdom around an issue the community faces. I liked how it taps and reinforces the culture of a community rather than ignoring or displacing the culture with white presuppositions and values.

I ended Friday with 40-5: The Terrible, Awful, Horrible, No Good Group, led by Jacqueline Silverman. This was an opportunity to recognize how I function in an anxious, annoyed group. I learned I step up to lead and step back when others step up to lead. This will help me lead with confidence and recognize leadership potential as I lead my Affiliate Society as its current president.

On Saturday I participated all day in 44a: Decentering Whiteness: Use of Mindful Facilitation Skills in Groups, led by Donna Harris. This workshop provided lots of practical skills for Facilitating diverse groups. I learned to avoid minimizing differences in a rush to find commonalities in group process, paying to aspects of identity people share. Using basic listening and reflection skills with mindfulness can open the value in differences and validate the uniqueness of each individual. Skillful inquiry helps a person feel heard and invited to reconnect with an experience, helping them explore and broaden their awareness and understanding of the experience and its impact. When their unique experience is explored, the group is enriched and the potential for deep connection increases. As we practiced these skills in role plays, I learned to confront racism authentically, as a harm to relationships that matter to me, instead of from some place of socio/political correctness or judgment.

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Today I am finishing up my conference experience, and I am coming away humbled and blown away by the talent and expertise I have been exposed to this week. The two day institute with Dr. Nickow helped me uncover some of my deepest psychological wounds and begin the process of healing from them. I had no idea this would be the result, and feel deeply humbled that I was offered a scholarship that led to this opportunity. As I sat with my individual clients this week, I found myself with more capacity for their pain and more empathy. I also felt more patient with their processes. I did not feel a need to rush or fix. This is a growth edge I was already actively working on as a clinician, and I did not realize that my impatience with my own pain was part of the reason for this. I am currently running two therapy groups, and while I have not yet led these groups since my experience with the conference, I know that similar impacts will be felt as I do this work. I also gained much from participating in Dr. Anna Graybeal's session about climate change. I feel more energy to hold other's anxiety around this topic. I also feel more capable of supporting any clients in recognizing a way forward with their emotions related to this topic. In addition, Ashley Powell's presentation on vicarious trauma and how to address it in clinical settings was very enlightening and left me with concrete concepts and tools.

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After the intensely useful clinical training and self-healing that happened this week, I plan to attend the conference next year, and feel extremely grateful that I was awarded this scholarship. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

It is with excitement and gratefulness that I share with you my experiences attending my second AGPA conference. When I transitioned to the role as Group Coordinator at Kansas State University Counseling Services it was suggested that I attend the annual AGPA conference from a colleague. As it turns out, this connection would be instrumental in advancing my career and competence in group therapy. Becoming connected with this community has already been such a wonderful experience as everyone has been so welcoming to new members. In addition, attending AGPA Connect has further enhanced this experience through the sharing of information, experiential learning, and connection to peers who deeply value group work.

During the conference, many of the presenters were gracious in sharing their presentation and resource guides. I have been able to take those resources, collaborate with colleagues, and deepen our agency's understanding of group functioning, development, and here-and-now group process. Having the experience of participating experientially in workshops has helped me better understand group dynamics and deepen my understanding of myself and interpersonal dynamics, which has contributed to growth as a group leader.

At the conference I attended various sessions such as; Using our Emotions as Leaders to Understand and Guide our group and Managing Client Suicide Risk. These workshops were the core of the information I was hoping to get from AGPA. The Using our Emotions workshop gave me interventions and a deeper understanding of how attachment injuries impact how our emotions show up in group. The Managing Client Suicide Risk gave me skills regarding how to explore suicidal ideation in group and resources to further support group members in between sessions.

The information provided in the Advocacy for Your College Counseling Program Workshop that I attended last year at AGPA has helped me identify possible solutions to various barriers our center faces when it comes to expanding our

group program. As a result of that workshop, I feel more prepared to implement a plan addressing some of the common barriers and feel confident in connecting with others on campus that may assist in these efforts.

Lastly, my experience at the AGPA Connect conference had a tremendous impact on my ability to be a Group Leader. It is because of my experiences with AGPA that I will be able to enhance my skills to create safe and therapeutic environments in the group room. I now feel more prepared to manage nuanced dialogs regarding various identity markers and I have a bigger tool kit when it comes to here-and-now process interventions. This learning and growth could not have happened if it wasn't for the scholarship I received from AGPA. Due to COVID-19, departments across our college campus are required to navigate more financial strains, attempting to do more with less. Counseling Services was not immune to this problem, earning this scholarship greatly helped offset the financial constraints presented by COVID. In addition, it helped further the values of continued education and growth as a group therapist.

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Thank you to the generous donors who made it possible for me to attend AGPA 2022 Connect. I felt honored to receive the full tuition scholarship for the second year in a row. Having this opportunity be fully paid for helped me as a working mother of two be at ease while attending. From the first year of attendance to this year, I have seen my group practice and leadership grow tremendously with echoes from lessons learned and knowledge received in the past. This year however, has made me examine my practice further as a white, female, who has much privilege throughout my life.

Attending the Special Institute with Dr. Kenneth Hardy was inspiring and raw as I listened and evaluated my own role in sustaining or breaking down racist frameworks in group psychotherapy and individual practices. Since his presentation I have spent time looking deeply at our systems and how they are either perpetuating harm toward our BIPOC family, friends, colleagues, clients, groups members, fellow citizens or helping to lift up voices to a place of equity and understanding. The call to actions Dr. Hardy put in front of us, I take on with great reverence and know that this is a lifetime of work which is needed. His messaging and themes helped to frame my experience at APGA Connect.

Returning to the full three-day conference after the Special Institute allowed me to explore Restorative Justice with a paneled experience gaining better understanding of how I can bring practice elements into my current groups. Along with looking and exploring my own history with aggression and power through experiences during the panel of Woman and Aggression: History, Healing, and Power. Additionally, had time to spend with Rick Tivers which helped to align and frame Leadership in the Corporate World – aligning the work I do and the systems I am in most frequently. It was a wonderful experiences to be present for and absorb so much from those around me, despite being in a virtual setting.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I am happy to be a member of AGPA and I hope that I am able to attend next year in person. As I said previously, AGPA Connect is a ***must*** attend conference for anyone working in with/in groups. I feel energized and renewed to go forward with the hard work we do each and every day.

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Thank you very much for granting me the Donald T. Brown GLBT Memorial Scholarship to attend this year's AGPA Connect conference. With the scholarship, I attended the Two-Day Institute for BIPOC therapists and a couple workshops, including Decentering Whiteness: Use of Mindfulness Facilitation Skills. I enjoyed learning from a range of experts and was immensely moved by the emotion, vulnerability, and attentiveness I witnessed from others. I was somewhat prepared to have emotional reactions within the group process, but also did not expect that there could be so much done within two days of knowing one another. I am excited to bring some of the Target/Agent skills model into racial healing workshops I co-lead, and normalize reactions and skills that may not always feel the most 'empowering' but are necessary for survival among BIPOC individuals.

I was moved by the openness and guardedness therapists in the workshops and institutes were able to express, and it helped me open myself to the interpersonal group process further. It also helped me think more intentionally about the role as a facilitator and member, and what it is needed to create an environment for genuineness, authenticity, boundary-setting, and flexibility. This experience has deeply informed my participation in groups and will prepare me to lead some in the coming year. Once again, I am very thankful to donors who make this possible, and I am very excited to be able to facilitate the group process such that others may also access the transformative power of group therapy.

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This year, I was lucky enough to attend my first AGPA meeting with the aid of a scholarship. I have been a full time student of psychoanalysis since 2020. And I have been thinking about developing skills in Group Therapy since 2019. I am really glad I was able to finally take the initiative to join AGPA this year, and to have my attendance facilitated by this much needed scholarship opportunity.

Attending AGPA Connect 2022 furthered my knowledge around group therapy work. I had already met wonderful instructors prior to the conference during the Core Principles Part 1 course. It is this wonderful course that prompted me to attend the Connect 2022. I was not disappointed. Over the few days I attended, I made many contacts, I interacted with new colleagues and potential mentors, I briefly attended a SIG which I am joining to further my connections, and I was able to consult with truly knowledgeable folks in the organization around a community project I am developing.

Since attending Connect 2022, I have had contact from many in the organization as I look to become certified in Group Therapy. It makes me feel supported to have this outreach. I recently applied for a small grant in order to begin the community group work I envision. This is directly related to the momentum I gathered from the Core Principles Courses and from AGPA Connect. I received much technical assistance on project implementation and additional follow up emails from AGPA. Whether or not I receive the grant, I have been able to lay out my framework for moving forward with other funding sources thanks to the discussions I began at the conference.

I am very much looking forward to continuing my relationship with AGPA. As a new member, I have signed up for continuing online coursework to further my knowledge, am exploring the possibilities for group supervision as I plan my training trajectory, and am most eager to become an integral and contributing AGPA participant.

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As I understand that this is to be shared with the benefactors of the AGPA scholarship, I would first like to say thank you for funding my experience at AGPA. I am only making \$12 an hour at my doctoral internship and it was immensely helpful. I was able to learn many new things about running group therapy, I was challenged professionally and personally, and I was able to make a friend/colleague that I have since kept in touch with.

Firstly, in the keynote, I was introduced to Bion's conceptualizations of group therapy. I had been a fan of his notion of working individually "without memory or desire" but I had not been exposed to his writings specifically on running groups. Secondly, I was challenged in my professional life by experiencing a new type of group that irked me and other group members. I am being trained in and am running a Yalom-style process group. Our leader used quite a different technique that myself and others in the institute found to be frustrating. This engaged parts of myself that had not emerged in my countertransference dynamics in individual therapy/supervision for years. This was because it inherently took a group experience to bring up that specific family dynamic. In the end, I became grateful for being challenged to embrace a new type of group. Now I have started utilizing some of the techniques I was introduced to in the institute, and have found it refreshing to the group. Lastly, I wanted to share that I was able to make a friend/colleague in this group. We had kindred spirits and connected afterwards, even virtually!

I hope this has been informative and motivating for those whose giving hearts can often grow weary by not directly observing the fruits of their generosity.

Thank you,

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I am a psychiatrist trained in Israel and currently completing a clinical fellowship in "Women's Mental Health" at Mount Sinai Hospital through the University of Toronto. Through the foundation, I received a scholarship to participate in the AGPA Connect 2022.

This conference was of great interest to me after I was invited to observe Possess groups at Mount Sinai outpatient clinic as part of my fellowship. I was very interested in learning more about group therapy; however, as an international student, financial considerations were barriers to my enrollment in this conference. Thanks to the foundation's generosity, I was able to attend and would like to extend my deepest gratitude for the scholarship that enabled this learning experience.

AGPA Connect 2022 provided a unique opportunity to understand the complexities and intricacies of the groups through the 2-day Process Group Experience special institute, which contributed to my more profound understanding of the patient's experience in groups and how powerful this kind of therapy can be. I also learned a lot from the Special anti-racism institute, which will affect my treatment approach and connection with patients from racialized communities.

My main focus during the fellowship is trauma therapy and perinatal psychiatry. The group therapy training received through AGPA Connect 2022 significantly contributes to my work with my patients individually and in a group setting. I especially enjoyed the Centered Group Therapy for Survivors of Trauma workshop and Compassion Focused Therapy workshop and have started incorporating more of the tools learned during the workshops into my practice. I am using my additional knowledge of group therapy to create a new group content for women struggling in the perinatal period with emotional dysregulation and have a history of trauma as my final fellowship project.

In addition to my personal gain from this learning opportunity, the therapy skills I received at AGPA Connect 2022, together with observing groups under the weekly supervision of Professor Molyn Leszcz at Mount Sinai Hospital, will enable me to extend my group therapy knowledge among psychiatry trainees back in Israel upon my return. Thank you for this amazing learning opportunity

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My experience at AGPA Connect 2022 was nothing short of incredible, and I am extremely grateful that I was awarded a scholarship to attend this conference. This conference provided me with opportunities to process my own personal reactions and growth while also learning and observing great group work. This experience was very essential to my personal and professional development, and I left the conference feeling affirmed, motivated, and better prepared to help others. I also appreciated the attention that was paid to multicultural competency and recognizing privilege throughout the conference and felt both the didactic and experiential components were helpful in understanding how to better attend to the groups I lead. I am looking forward to using this knowledge with the clients I am currently working with and with the groups that I will be working with in the future.

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As recipient of the Chuck Dachis Scholarship to AGPA Connect 2022, I came to the event with hopes to learn, grow, and connect with others doing similar work. While all of those expectations were met, I was not prepared for how transformational and moving my time at the conference would be for my personal and professional development. As

AGPA Connect centers experiential and process learning, I walked away from this experience having new theoretical understanding, but more importantly new self understanding and belief in the well-being inherent in safe vulnerability.

I was so moved by Dr. Hardy's relational style and his deft ability to experience and show black power, rage, and grief all while fielding differing levels of white fragility and shame. I was honored and touched to experience his expertise and felt so grateful for the lift he and other black therapists are doing to give guidance and clarity on the next steps for healing traumas, abuses, and biases inherent in interracial therapy in America. I will move forward differently because of his path of racial sensitivity and responsibility. I know my next steps there, and I know that it is a gift to be guided toward them. As a white therapist, I have returned to my practice with a new call to be the one who brings race into the room as the "powerful organizing principle" it is in our society.

The Two Day Institute created a buy-in for group work in me that I didn't know needed strengthened, but has been life and practice changing. I am a current member in a long term process group and was finding myself doubtful of the expressions of group members when someone became vulnerable. It all seemed too good to be true. As I watched and experienced my group mold together in the Institute, we began to express the same safe and caring and complicated things that I had seen in my group. It was healing in a pressure cooker, and I really, deeply got it.

I left AGPA Connect 2022 with a new understanding of myself and the healing power of group and am already looking forward to the community and learning of AGPA for my future practice. I hope to begin process groups and psychoeducation/process groups dedicated to the sexual healing of those from conservative religious traditions. The moment I am at in my story meant that I would not have been able to attend AGPA Connect without financial support, and I am grateful in a way that is motivating. I am honored to have been chosen for this scholarship and so grateful to be a new member of AGPA due to my experience at the conference.

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Thank you so much for the generous scholarship that allowed me to attend my fifth AGPA conference. I attended the Women's SIG and reflected on how I "grew" up at AGPA because this year I had "Ph.D." after my name. I admit the "Dr." part still feels a little awkward but being at AGPA Connect certainly does not! The opportunity to learn from dedicated leaders in the field of group therapy has been a major contributing factor to my growth as a clinician. I still feel the same energy and warmth from fellow members and look forward to continuing to grow as a group therapist.

This year I attended the Process Group Experience with Mixed Levels of Experience, led by Matthew Tomatz, Ph.D., CGP. Dr. Tomatz deftly led our group which included, for the first time, a lot of projections towards me from the group. He helped me and the group process that experience and we grew closer as a result. I found I relied on previous institutes where projections were talked about, to feel secure in the capacity of group to hold negative feelings. A workshop entitled, "Microaggressions Under the Microscope: Identifying, Unmasking, and Exploring Implicit Bias in Group Psychotherapy" stood out and deserves special mention. It was painfully eye-opening as I saw so clearly how as group leaders, what I/we focus on and neglect to focus on deeply impacts the level of participation and honesty in group. Drs. Brooks, Hahn, and Weltz modeled how group can hold emotional triggers that need to be verbalized. I look forward to watching Dr. Hardy's special institute presentation as I kept hearing quotes from his talk in almost all the virtual spaces I attended.

Finally, I want to thank the staff and Board of AGPA. I noticed how DEI issues were more readily brought into all the spaces in which I was a participant. I can see the growth and know of the hard work that has gone on both behind and not-behind the scenes. I am deeply grateful for this. Thank you for all the work that not only goes into the logistics for holding this conference, but for actively supporting human dignity and rights.

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Thank you for another great year of AGPA Connect! Even though I have only attended the conference virtually, I can already feel how close this community is and understand why people continue to attend it every year.

As a second-time scholarship recipient, this year has been a different experience for me. While I was still dipping my toes into the introductory session and workshops last year, I chose to attend more specific workshops this year. The most unforgettable part of the conference was undoubtedly the special institute with Dr. Kenneth Hardy. While I have attended past workshops and learned about racial sensitivity and social justice in class, his lecture connected a lot of dots for me. It not only allowed me to put words and concise definitions to how I feel during racial discussions, but he also demonstrated what it means to be patient and loving as an educator on this topic. He has brought so much hope to me in the work that I am passionate about doing. On top of that, I was really surprised and appreciative of the diversity in presenters and workshop topics. I attended a few workshops led by clinicians who are from a different country and/or have done training groups in a different country. I believe this experience has expanded my perspective as a student, and allowed me to dream of bigger possibilities to serve others in the mental health field. Thank you for this opportunity to attend the conference. I will take these tools and lessons from AGPA Connect, and apply them to my training and future practice.

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I'm writing to thank contributors to the AGPA scholarship fund and leadership of the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health. I was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship to attend AGPA Connect 2022 and I am incredibly grateful. This was my third year attending AGPA Connect, and as an early career professional passionate about group work every year I've found the conference to be incredibly useful and generative in my own practice. There's no other professional organization I know of that so effectively combines didactic training, professional development, community building, and (most importantly, to my mind) experiential work. In the last few years I've been able to run in groups in a wide variety of settings (a special education high school, an intensive outpatient and partial hospitalization program, and now an outpatient / hospital setting), and I have no doubt that my experiences at AGPA have deepened my capacity to be present and attentive to group process.

Importantly, this year's conference also provided various contexts to deepen my thinking around issues of race, gender, sexuality, and how intersecting identities show up in the room with clients. Personally, I deeply believe in the importance of doing anti-racist and liberatory political work at both a structural / material and an emotional / interpersonal level, and I think that AGPA as an organization has been increasingly showing up for this task in recent years.

Once, again, thank you so much for this opportunity. It was invaluable. I have no doubt that I'll continue to make AGPA into a professional home for years to come.

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