

# Connecting the Dots

## Ensuring a Bright Future for ASSE



Kathy A. Seabrook

By now, you've most likely read or heard about our efforts to revise the Society's governance structure. As a Society, we have been transparently discerning a better governance model for ASSE since 2010. To keep you informed, we have published articles in *PS* since April; we've hosted webinars; we've discussed the model at many chapter and regional operating committee meetings; and it was discussed during Safety 2013 at the regional caucus and council meetings. In addition, we created a dedicated website at [www.asse.org/restructure](http://www.asse.org/restructure).

These ongoing communications are designed to explain why this governance change is important to ASSE's future. Our ultimate goal is to create an organization that can readily identify and seize opportunities to serve Society members and deliver value while advancing the SH&E profession in the eyes of employers, the business community, policy makers, ASSE members and other stakeholders. ASSE's Board of Directors (BOD) has approved the proposed model and the associated bylaws changes. The final step will be a vote by the House of Delegates, which represents our regions, chapters, councils and practice specialties.

### So Why Change?

Let's face it, change can be hard in any organization. So, what prompted the BOD to examine ASSE's governance? First, our model had not been reviewed in nearly 20 years. It was time. The world has changed dramatically since 1993, thanks to technology, globalization and changing economies. ASSE has also changed greatly in response to changing trends in volunteerism, the growth of chapters and practice specialties, and the advent of common interest groups (CIGs), which did not exist 20 years ago. You, our members, are telling us that you want choice in how you engage with ASSE in order to meet your needs geographically, by subject matter and affiliation. ASSE is mindful of this trend and continuously seeks to better meet members' changing needs in all three areas.

Through this process, we also came to better understand the workload and expectations experienced by regional and council vice presidents in fulfilling their dual operational and strategic roles. As any board member can attest, ensuring productive operations in regions, chapters, practice specialties, CIGs, professional development, professional affairs, and practices and standards is a full-time volunteer job. Add to this the need to identify strategic opportunities for the Society, and it is clear that our volunteer leaders often face unrealistic expectations.

This understanding led to development of a new model that "decouples" BOD operational roles from strategic roles. The BOD will focus on strategic planning, legal and policy, financial management and overall

organizational evaluation. The public director would help the BOD calibrate its perspective on ASSE's strategic direction. Decoupling also addresses the fact that fewer members are volunteering due to competing priorities of family, work and ASSE. The Society is already finding that fewer volunteers are able to engage due to time constraints and/or lack of employer support. This reflects a trend seen across volunteer associations of all kinds.

### Will Member Needs Be Met?

One member recently raised a concern that member needs will not be met under the proposed model. Meeting member needs was a driving force behind the BOD's decision to assess ASSE's governance. Through our dialogue with members and past and current leaders, and our work with recognized association management experts, it became clear that all members will benefit if regional and council vice presidents are able to focus on their operational roles. Chapters, sections, practice specialties and CIGs will have greater access to these leaders' expertise and guidance, and our volunteer leaders will be able to dedicate their time to addressing operational challenges and collaborating to develop innovative solutions.

Some members believe the proposed model leaves them with no voice on the board. Let's take a look at that concern. Under the proposed model, ASSE's councils will have decision-making authority over operational issues at their level. Unless those issues are strategic, or have significant financial or reputational implications, BOD approval will not be needed. This will enable our operational leaders to make decisions, implement timely resolutions, and move quickly on ideas from all groups. This increases the member influence in ASSE. In addition, all councils can raise strategic issues through the senior vice president who is their voice on the BOD.

### Connecting the Dots

So, let's connect the dots. A governance model that is relevant and reflective of ASSE's current and future needs will enable the Society to be strong, viable and sustainable. We are then positioned to advocate the value of workplace safety and health with our employers and other stakeholders, and to provide all members with networking and professional development opportunities, resources and tools to help us do our jobs. At the end of the day, each of us is working to provide safe, healthy workplaces wherever we are in the world. Happy holidays!

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Meeting member needs was a driving force behind the Board of Directors' decision to assess ASSE's governance.

**"There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, achievable vision for the future, widely shared."**

*Burt Nanus*

### Connect With Kathy



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