

# ASSE Governance Update

## Proactive Change for the Future

Trish Ennis, CSP, ARM, ASSE's 2013-14 President-Elect, has been a volunteer leader at the chapter, region, council and Society levels. Through these experiences, she has developed an almost panoramic view of how ASSE functions, what it does well and where it can improve. When asked about the current governance restructure proposal, she says she understands that change can be disconcerting for some, especially if they perceive that nothing is broken. But Ennis believes that the best time to change is outside of a conflict or a crisis. "We don't want to wait until it is broken to fix it," she says. "We want to be visionary, we want to see where the trends are going and be proactive as we see them developing."

### Adding a New Perspective

Some members have questioned the need to add a public director to the Society's Board of Directors (BOD). Ennis believes this individual will bring new ideas and broaden the BOD's outlook. She uses her own work experience to explain. "When I worked for the Denver Zoo, I often heard, 'Oh, you're not an animal person.' My response was always, 'And that's exactly why you need me.'" It's the essence of what safety professionals do, Ennis observes. "For our employers or clients, we have to look at new or different ways to do things, ways that they may not have considered because safety isn't their area of expertise or knowledge. It's the same with the board. We are looking for an outside perspective and new ideas."

### Spreading the Volunteer Workload

Ennis also says the proposed changes reflect current business realities, particularly for member-driven volunteer organizations like ASSE. "We recognize that as ASSE continues to expand its footprint and grow globally, which is a strategic objective, it takes much more time to serve on the Society's board than it once did, and that time commitment will only continue to grow." That, she says, is something few employers will support. "Employers are giving employees less and less time to fulfill volunteer commitments." Simply put, fewer volunteers are available to fill key leadership roles.

The current BOD structure adds to the difficult juggling act. Serving on a working board, each BOD member wears several hats. "For example, one of us oversees professional development, another oversees professional affairs or practices and standards. Each region vice president oversees the operations of chapters in his/her region. As President-Elect, I chair the Public Relations Committee," Ennis notes. "These are all huge jobs in and of themselves." Essentially, the proposed model distributes these responsibilities in a way that "takes away this second job" and frees BOD members to focus on strategic thinking and planning, and resource alignment.

### Empowering Decision Making

Ennis also counters the notion that removing region vice presidents from the BOD will reduce the voice of regions, and thereby members, in Society operations. In fact, she explains, the opposite is true.

"ASSE's board takes a broad look at the Society as a whole. We are not an organization that has initiatives in one region but not in another." In other words, the issues that affect one region may not affect all regions, so they aren't typically a topic of deliberations at BOD meetings. Instead, she says, those conversations occur during the council meetings held before the BOD meeting.

Despite this reality, the current governance model requires BOD approval on many of these kinds of issues. This well-known bottleneck would be eliminated under the proposed model, which aims to expand the number of decisions made at the region level. "We want to keep issues that affect the regions at that level, where they can be best addressed," Ennis says. "We want to give the regions the business model to address their own needs. We want to empower the regions to make the decisions that they should be making themselves."

To illustrate her point, Ennis offers this scenario. "Suppose a region decides it needs to add some new chapters or dissolve another. Those issues primarily affect only that region. It is envisioned that under the proposed governance model, these issues

will be voted on by the regional operating committee and Council on Region Affairs. No need to wait for BOD approval." She anticipates a similar scenario at the council level. "Suppose a region recognizes that its vice president is spread too thin and has to cover too many chapters. The Council on Region Affairs could decide to add a region and rebalance the workload among additional volunteers."

### Elevating the Profession & Advocating for Its Practitioners

Ennis emphasizes this last point, believing that the proposed changes will create more paths for conversation, while alleviating many of the time constraints that today's potential volunteer leaders face. "The proposed changes will reduce the workload on individual volunteers and open the door for more volunteers. Ultimately, this will strengthen the members' voice across the Society." In the end, it will also create a stronger organization whose leaders are focused on elevating ASSE members and the SH&E profession.

The Society continues to gather member input and solicit feedback and questions on the proposed governance model. Be sure to visit [www.asse.org/restructure](http://www.asse.org/restructure) for the latest updates and resources, including FAQs, webinar recordings and PS articles.

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*Patricia M. Ennis*  
ASSE President-Elect