

Advancing our Role in the Geospatial Revolution*

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Not everyone views their relationship with a professional society in the same light. Several organizations are addressing declining memberships. Fewer of us are doing a larger share of professional society-related tasks and many of us are expressing less professional satisfaction with our respective volunteer contributions while our day jobs become more challenging and uncertain.

With respect to the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS), a common refrain heard by many of us in National leadership positions is that ASPRS is no longer “relevant” to developing one’s professionalism or advancing one’s career. What does that mean? Seldom do we hear a convincing argument that substantiates this claim of irrelevance. Let’s first ask the question, “What is a professional society?” We need to examine the nature of ASPRS and the relevance that our society brings to our professional growth and personal satisfaction.

A professional society is an organization that advances the principles and body of knowledge of a discipline or field of study, addresses interests of individuals engaged in this discipline, and serves the public interest by conveying that body of knowledge in ways that sustain our communities. We can extend those general attributes to understand the purpose of ASPRS and why we should be engaged members of this particular society.

ASPRS exists to advance the principles and ethical behavior of our geospatial profession, to address the interests of individuals and organizations engaged in geospatial science and technology, and to serve the public interest in matters of imaging and geospatial information for advancing knowledge, decision

support, and management of Earth's resources. Our contributions and constructive engagement in our society should be based on our desire to learn and share what we learn with a broad spectrum of geospatial professionals that we cannot accomplish solely through our employment, by the latest accession from a web site, or from colleagues and friends.

Given we understand the nature of ASPRS as a professional society, let's address the question, "How is ASPRS relevant to me and to advancing my career?" To be relevant to our members and our profession, ASPRS must ensure connectivity to matters at hand, strive for practicality and applicability of geospatial science and technology, and strengthen proficiencies that satisfy needs of our clientele and enhances professional satisfaction. Relevance can also be judged by the degree to which ASPRS provides opportunities to learn, mentor, and network with our fellow professionals and students. This connectivity to matters at hand gives us individually and collectively the ability to share our knowledge and understanding with others who have the interest and power to make a difference. Relevancy of ASPRS can also be demonstrated by our ability to provide practical solutions that can be readily applied to a range of problems from routine to complex and to generate an awareness and understanding of geospatial data and information for addressing urgent environmental and societal issues. The degree to which we are successful in this endeavor will dictate the growth and sustainability of our organization.

The strategic plan of a professional geospatial organization is the primary mechanism by which this relevancy is sustained. As a scientific and educational organization, ASPRS' strategic plan captures the essential elements that define who we are. Without elucidating the specific objectives of our plan here, we develop scientific and technical programs to advance our geospatial profession in many ways. We also develop and deliver education and training programs for the imaging and geospatial information community, primarily through our publications, conference programs, certification, and on-line technical

webinars and seminars. Our plan also specifies that we exercise fiduciary responsibilities to ensure the continued financial stability and organizational resiliency of ASPRS. Strategic planning is a vital tool for any organization, but it only provides a structural framework for what needs to be done, which are those actionable items that put into practice the basic tenets of an organization.

In order to create and assign actionable tasks to elements of our strategic plan and to address issues of societal relevance, the ASPRS Branding Task Force was created in 2011. The outcomes of this task force were conveyed by President Roberta Lenczowski in her Presidential Address to ASPRS members during 2012. The key insights derived from the Branding Task Force survey that was administered to a wide spectrum of elected leaders, members, and Headquarters staff, included the following:

- **Make our Conferences more productive**

Persistent questions continue to focus on cost and technical content of our conferences, and increasing pressure is being applied by many organizations to limit travel to technical meetings. We need to be more creative at delivering technical content that balances both in-person and virtual, on-line approaches.

- **Examine options for organizational restructuring**

Survey feedback indicated that we need to consider more locally-based technical programs that help limit the need for expensive travel while capitalizing on geospatial expertise and business opportunities within regions, affinity groups within regions, or sets of neighboring regions.

- **Advance Technical Division and Standing Committee efforts locally**

There is a disconnect between technical programs developed and delivered at the national level and those at the regional or local level. Opportunities exist for local leaders to learn from and coordinate technical programs based on annual workplans of our Technical Divisions and

selected Standing Committees. We post these workplans on ASPRS' intranet site in matrix format for reference and periodic updates.

- **Address name and tag line recognition**

Concern continues to be expressed about our name, uncertainty relevant to the definition and practice of "photogrammetry," and apparent lack of visibility of GIS as a programmatic element of ASPRS. We have elected not to change our name but rather to de-emphasize our acronym (ASPRS) while emphasizing our tag line in correspondence and marketing opportunities: "asprs: The Imaging and Geospatial Information Society".

- **Fortify the value proposition for membership**

The value proposition is an explicit statement expressing the rationale for joining and becoming engaged in professional society affairs. Society leaders and staff continue to express this value proposition in many ways that resonates with most members but not all.

The 2011 ASPRS Branding Task Force transferred selected tasks to the ASPRS Restructuring Task Force (RTF), which I chaired during 2012. The purpose of the RTF is to examine our current national and regional organizational structure and to generate specific recommendations and action items for consideration by the ASPRS Board of Directors that sustainably advance the mission of ASPRS for the benefit of all members and the imaging and geospatial information community at large.

The vision of the RTF is focused on strengthening the relevancy of ASPRS, improving governance, and providing more learning, networking, and mentoring opportunities. Specific restructuring issues addressed by the RTF include: (1) the philosophical basis, vision, and value proposition of ASPRS that can be articulated to the geospatial community; (2) improvement of national and region officer/director training and governance; (3) modification of our organizational structure that encourages locally-based

technical programming with incentives, virtual thematic affiliations of members within and between regions; (4) re-organization of our conferences and technical meetings that recognizes more diverse imaging and geospatial needs of our membership and audience locally and nationally; (5) enhancement of publication policies relevant to our *PE&RS* journal; and (6) improvement of learning, networking, and mentoring opportunities for student, associate, and young professional members.

A set of recommendations was presented to the ASPRS Board of Directors (BOD) requesting feedback and level of agreement for each of the recommendations. Based on that feedback, our Society will move forward with several action items identified as being of high priority by the Board and governed by: assessing and refining our vision to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing geospatial world; improving web-based orientation materials to strengthen society governance at national and regional levels of the organization; adapting and reformulating technical conferences to convey relevant information to a wide spectrum of geospatial professionals and students; improving the impact factor and other journal performance metrics of *PE&RS*; and enhancing engagement retention and representation of students and their transition to professional membership status.

With this feedback and guidance from the Board of Directors, we now have a strong road map to move our society forward by addressing in earnest the concerns and recommendations from our members. Let me conclude with a humorous anecdote from my mentor, Professor Bob Colwell. A pastor queried members of his congregation on what they thought was the greater sin, ignorance or apathy. The response from one parishioner left the pastor speechless: "I don't know, and I don't care..." I am confident that our community of practice has the intelligence and compassion to advance our discipline in many tangible and intangible ways. I look forward to working with all of my fellow geospatial

professionals to meet this challenge of indifference so as to ensure we grow and sustain our respective professional societies for many years to come.

* This article is adapted from "*Relevancy of ASPRS in a Geospatial World*" first published on-line in the ASPRS 2013 Yearbook (http://www.asprs.org/a/publications/pers/2013_Yearbook.pdf)