

## **ASEE Strategic Doing Governance Committee Report, May 2017**

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These recommendations come from the ASEE Strategic Doing Governance Committee. The Committee has spent 2016-17 reviewing minutes of ASEE committee and board meetings, engaging members in a broad survey, carefully studying the very large volume of comments from the survey, as well as collecting feedback from the Committee's members. The Committee includes broad representation from ASEE members and staff, as well as a number of members with long ASEE Board service and an understanding of society-wide recent history and perspective.

The goal of these recommendations is to provide feedback to the ASEE Board of Directors about issues related to society governance which further merit in-depth study and review. The survey, which was completed by ASEE members in Fall 2016, provided important insights that guide the recommendations below. Some of the recommendations also draw on the knowledge and experience of the members of the Committee.

We first note that many survey respondents felt things were fine as is or that they were not interested in being further engaged with ASEE beyond what they already do. However, for those who wished to see changes, the following themes emerged from the survey:

- Improved communication and transparency was the pervasive theme in response to every question from the survey. It was clear that this includes 1) robust communication, both up and down, between headquarters, the board, other organizational units, and the membership; 2) a clear mechanism for individual members to provide feedback on issues of interest; and 3) efforts by ASEE to solicit input from members on pertinent issues (versus a focus on simply sending out information to members). Transparency and responsiveness with regard to Board actions and decisions was considered an important component of effective communication.
- There is a lack of understanding of ASEE's current organizational structure, especially given its size and complexity. This also leads to the perception that decisions are made by a small group of individuals who are on the "inside." This contributed to the sense that ASEE operates as a top-down organization.
- There is also a desire on the part of many members to be more engaged and to have a clear path to leadership positions beyond the division level. In many cases, interested members do not know how to seek either type of opportunity.

- The cost of participation, especially of the Annual Conference, makes full and regular participation difficult for some members.

### **Recommendation #1: Strategic Issues, Processes and Decision-Making**

The Committee recommends that the ASEE Board restructure its meetings to focus on strategic (versus tactical) issues. With a new strategic plan under development, the Board will soon have a road map to guide such discussions. Reporting from committees and other groups could be handled electronically, reserving in-person meetings for issues requiring discussion, brainstorming and action. The Committee also suggests that the Board undertake a study to examine its processes and procedures to ensure increased communication, efficiency and transparency.

### **Recommendation #2: Revise the Committee Structure to Better Reflect the Goals of the Society**

Committees should play a more significant role in our organization. They allow organizations to apply focused attention and expertise to tasks and issues ranging from the routine to the complex. They provide members with opportunities to serve the organization and acquire new skills, knowledge, and professional relationships. A well-functioning committee structure facilitates timely and effective decision-making. By delegating work to committees, the organization and especially its Board, Officers and Executive Director, will be able to focus their attention and energy on strategic matters.

ASEE should conduct a comprehensive review of its committee structure to ensure that it reflects and aligns with the goals of the organization. It should reorganize and/or expand the number of committees in order to address new or emerging tasks and issues. Comprehensive reviews of the committee structure should be conducted as necessary, but at least every ten years.

As provided by the ASEE Constitution and Bylaws, the Board should review and reconfirm the terms of reference of each committee annually. Members of committees should be appointed to renewable terms of not more than three years. Committee members' terms should be staggered in order to ensure continuity, cohesion, knowledge transfer, and preservation of institutional memory. Committee membership should reflect the diversity and expertise of the membership at large, with specific attention to underrepresented groups and constituencies. ASEE currently has twelve standing committees and several special committees. Given the size and complexity of the organization and engineering education in general, this perhaps is too few.

### **Recommendation #3: Improve Communication and Transparency Society-wide**

The Committee believes that communicating the work of the Board to society members is an area that needs to be improved and that this will help the Board's work become more transparent to the membership. Based on the results of the recent survey conducted by the Committee, only 18.2% of the respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they understood the work being done by the ASEE Board of Directors on behalf of the organization. With regard to whether the views of ASEE Division Leadership are being effectively communicated upward to the ASEE Board of Directors, only 27.6% of the respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that this was happening. In addition, in response to the question of whether individual member views were being effectively communicated to the ASEE Board of Directors, only 19% Agreed or Strongly Agreed.

The Committee recommends that the Board make its portion of the website more visible and transparent to the membership, with timely postings of upcoming meeting agendas and minutes of the Board meetings. The Board may also wish to engage in regular communication to the general membership through a medium such as *Prism*, *First Bell*, the website, or other means. To ensure responsiveness, the Board should also ensure that actions taken in response to member concerns are communicated back to the relevant members and/or groups.

#### *Suggestions:*

For upward communication, the Board might consider one or more of the following:

- Regular member surveys
- Open meetings
- Listening sessions on selected topics
- e-newsletters/updates
- Blogs
- Webinars
- Having Board representatives available
  - At a central table during the Division Mixer and/or
  - At a "booth" during the Focus on Exhibit sessions
- Regular announcements on:
  - "How to become involved"
  - ASEE's organization and governance structure
  - "How to communicate your ideas"

The Strategic Doing Connecting Us Team has also offered a number of recommendations related to communication to and from the divisions. We recommend that the Board also consider those recommendations.

### **Recommendation #4: Consider Revising Existing Board Structure**

Some non-profit boards have reorganized in recent years to improve their capacity to effectively govern their organization and maintain oversight, although the results are inconclusive as to whether this works. There are Committee members who feel that acting on the above recommendations will be sufficient to give the Board the capacity to carry out its responsibilities. However, if those do not work, and the Board feels that it is unable to maintain a strategic focus and effectively execute its responsibilities, then the Board should be prepared to modify its structure more extensively.

*Suggestions:*

Options for change vary from minor to major, and could include the following:

1. Embed a “workshop” within the regular board meeting where the Board members, or breakout groups of board members, engage in working sessions on specific issues, including issues of strategic direction and importance. (If breakout groups are used, the results of their work, including recommendations, should be reported out to the full board for deliberation.)
2. Embrace a more traditional board committee structure that would, at minimum, include standing committees for Governance, Finance, Organizational Audit, and Long Range Planning. These committees would be internal to the Board, as opposed to the Advisory Committee structure that is used at present within ASEE (although some Advisory Committees currently function as Board committees). Regular members can be included in Board committees, by invitation.
3. Shift to a Policy Governance® Board Model, a recognized and trademarked model that aims specifically to create board structures with a strong strategic focus. Board members are given specific responsibilities for acting on the major goals of the organization, and interact directly with the head of the organization (Executive Director in our case) to ensure that forward progress is being made in strategically targeted areas (see <http://www.policygovernance.com/model.htm>). While our team felt that of the non-traditional governance models currently in existence, the Policy Governance Board model might be most closely aligned to our organization and its needs, other models can be found in the memo, “Some New Nonprofit Board Models,” offered by Authenticity Consulting LLC (see <http://managementhelp.org/misc/New-Nonprofit-Board-Models.pdf>)

*Additional suggestions:*

- Given recent changes in Board structure, which have given expanded responsibilities to the Executive Committee, there should be robust communication between the Executive Committee and Board. This should include timely distribution of Executive Committee minutes so that all Board members are fully informed about, and able to participate in strategic decision making.

- The Board should also consider adding two at-large Board members to strengthen member communication to the Board, and to enhance the transparency of Board deliberations and actions. This may need to be balanced against the standing recommendation to limit the overall size of the Board, but should nevertheless be incorporated into any general restructuring of the Board.