

Enhancing the Value of Membership for ASABE Members Final Report for the ASABE Board of Trustees

Prepared by the Presidential Ad Hoc Committee: Sherry Hunt (Chair), Sreekala Bajwa, Gayle Baker, Alicia Modenbach, Scott Mueller, Bailley Richardson, Eric Smith with Tina Schultz and Mark Crossley providing administrative support from ASABE

July 20, 2018

In August, 2017, ASABE President Steve Searcy appointed a group of ASABE members to serve on the Ad Hoc Committee Enhancing the Value of Membership for ASABE Members. Upon reviewing the charge as well as membership data, the committee recognized that this project was much larger than what the committee could do on their own. At the recommendation of the committee, the ASABE Board of Trustees Meeting (BOT) approved retaining McKinley Advisors, a leading consulting firm focused exclusively on associations, whose practice is organized around developing and delivering practical, proven solutions that enable mission-driven organizations to maximize member value and their impact on society.

McKinley's goals were to help the Society better understand the current needs, views, and expectations of its core audiences related to their overall experience as well as the Society's products, services, and offerings. The ultimate goal of McKinley's research was to assess the perceptions, needs, and challenges of key stakeholders in order to inform ASABE's value proposition and the development of effective recruitment and retention strategies. The McKinley research was three-fold: 1) project immersion by reviewing membership data as well as the Society's products, services, and offerings, 2) conduct telephone interviews with Ad Hoc Committee members as well as current and former ASABE members, and 3) conduct an electronic survey of the ASABE members including current, prospective, and past members.

Telephone interviews with the seven ad hoc members provided McKinley Advisors with some initial findings on how best to develop the electronic survey and provided a guide on developing member and non-member telephone interviews. The electronic survey was delivered to 13,308 ASABE contacts, which included members, former members, and never members. The response rate to the electronic survey was 9.3%. Additionally, thirteen telephone interviews were conducted to explore in greater depth key themes and opportunities identified through the survey and previous stakeholder interviews.

The following summarizes key findings from the electronic survey and member/non-member telephone interviews:

- 78% of survey respondents were current ASABE members, 17% were former members, and 4% were prospective members.
- 70% of members are satisfied with ASABE while 19% indicated they are dissatisfied; when ASABE was compared to other scientific/engineering societies with regards to member satisfaction, the satisfaction was approximately the same. In addition, more tenured members (30+ year member) were most likely to be satisfied with their ASABE

membership, but membership satisfaction among more tenured members was not significantly higher when compared to the satisfaction of members with 6 to 15 years of membership. Satisfaction was nearly equally divided among the technical interest areas of Natural Resources and Environmental Systems; Information Technology, Sensors, and Control Systems; and Machine Systems, with these three groups identified as having the most satisfaction.

- 88% of members are likely or very likely to renew their membership; 64% of members pay their own dues while 29% indicated that their employer pays their dues. The most common reasons for member non-renewal was employer does not pay for membership (40%) and dues are too high for benefits received (39%). The least common responses for not renewing membership were career path change (13%) and retirement (7%).
- 73% of members felt the value they receive from ASABE membership is equal or greater than the cost
- 82% find ASABE to be a trusted source of information; more tenured members (30+ year members) (58%) look to ASABE first as their source of information while only 41% of members with five years of membership or less turn to ASABE as their first source of information.
- 78% feel ASABE fosters/builds community; 68% feel ASABE is great for networking; 65% feel ASABE represents the breadth of the profession.
- Respondents specialization dictated which global trends or issues are most important; for instance, 58% of the Natural Resources and Environmental Systems respondents indicated “competition for natural resources” as important, while “artificial intelligence and machine learning” was indicated most frequently by respondents representing Machine Systems (61%) and Information Technology, Sensors, and Controls Systems (83%).
- Overall, 84% indicated if given the opportunity, they would choose to work in their chosen field again; 80% feel they are equipped to address the challenges they face; and 78% are optimistic about the future of the profession.

McKinley Advisors provided respondents an opportunity for identifying what benefits they value most as well as an opportunity in identifying benefits they do not currently receive today and what they would like to see in the future. Members identified that access to a network of professionals, standards development, source of news related to the profession (i.e. staying up-to-date on latest trends and technology), career advancement, and attending meetings/conferences were important for them to join and stay a member of ASABE. Members identified access to the online technical library, standards development, ASABE committees; peer-reviewed research journals, and resource magazine were the most important or valued benefits of their ASABE membership. Twenty percent of those responding were unsure or could not think of a suggestion on benefits they currently don’t receive and/or wish to receive in the future. Twelve percent indicated they would like for ASABE to provide financial support, while 10% indicated they prefer stronger, more accessible journals and publications.

The electronic survey and telephone interviews were beneficial in identifying members’ perceptions as well as where ASABE can grow and develop products and services on what members value most about their membership. Based on the survey results, members identified ten benefits where their satisfaction outweighed their importance, so our committee feels these

benefits may be areas ASABE wishes to examine on whether they are “over-delivered” and whether staff time may be redeployed elsewhere or if an opportunity for ASABE to raise the perceived importance of these resources is needed. In addition, members identified nine benefits as being important but viewed their satisfaction lagging, indicating these as areas where some improvement is possible. The top three opportunities or the greatest priorities for improvement within ASABE member services are the technical library, standards, and committees according to survey feedback. Our committee concurs with this assessment by the McKinley Advisors. Addressing some of these priorities and opportunities are well on their way as enhancements are currently being made to the ASABE website and knowing there are focused efforts in recent months regarding ASABE journal publications.

McKinley Advisors highlighted key opportunities for ASABE moving forward: 1) communicating ASABE’s impact, 2) highlighting impact stories, 3) leveraging strengths and filling gaps to strengthen the membership pipeline, and 4) cementing ASABE’s position as a thought leader. Based on the discussion of our committee, some of these recommendations may be easily implemented without much effort needed while others will need a well thought out plan for execution. For instance, communicating short narratives of tangible impact by ASABE members through a variety of venues like videos on the website or through social media should be easily accomplished. However, it will take time to identify members, who can provide compelling stories to share as well as ASABE staffing, who can organize an effort in developing these snapshots of impact. Our impact can be further communicated through conference formatting (i.e. integrated presentations – pairing presentations that are academic and research in nature with those from industry professionals who have taken the research and put it into action). Providing more integrated program content at conferences will help leverage our strengths and provide personal outreach to our industry partners.

Other ways of leveraging our strengths as recommended by McKinley Advisors was through content-based communities. As was discussed by our committee, content-based communities are already available through ASABE’s technical committees and forums; however, McKinley Advisors suggested to further explore this content-based concept at a more local level (i.e. sections or districts). While this concept could complement the existing technical committee structure, it is our recommendation that careful consideration be given to it before fully implementing any changes as this will take significant input from leadership within the sections regarding their current structure. It should be noted that developing content-based structure for sections and/or regions may be a way of engaging more members at the local level, who otherwise are unable to attend the annual international meeting (AIM) or unable to actively participate in the technical committees.

Personal outreach was another big topic of discussion primarily as it focused around e-mentoring. While e-mentoring was identified as important by those surveyed, their satisfaction with it was lagging. This may be an area to determine if improvement is needed. It should be noted that the Young Professional Community (YPC) is currently focusing on retooling this program, so not much effort may be needed to address this program. In addition, some brief discussions of the committee surrounded the topic of continuing education which was identified by those surveyed as somewhat important but where satisfaction appears to be lagging. This is an area that has been a challenge for ASABE for some time, but it may be an area considered for

growth since it could engage all members. Executing a continuing education program that is readily available to all members should be directed for online application as not all members have the resources to attend AIM. However, it will take significant time and effort to execute an online continuing education program as content and instructors for the program need to be identified and resources (i.e. staffing) provided for producing webinars for online delivery.

Effective communication appears to be a key factor in implementing any recommendations moving forward. While some recommendations will be fairly easy to implement, others will take time, patience, teamwork, and diligence by ASABE. Given the charge of this committee, we believe McKinley Advisors provided substantial research and provided sound recommendations. In conclusion, the recommendations provided by McKinley Advisors should be reviewed by ASABE leadership and consideration given to whether each recommendation is truly in the best interest of the Society's members. Furthermore, the committee recommends that a well thought out plan be developed on how to best execute the recommendations that will best enhance our Society's membership.