

The Evolution of a National Voice

The Future of the National Society of Professional Surveyors

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The recent NSPS meeting in Phoenix was probably one of the most emotional since NSPS was incorporated in 1981. A motion was introduced at the Board of Governors' meeting to request the Board of Directors to initiate the process of separating from the umbrella organization, ACSM. This certainly got everyone's attention and the discussion started. It was emotional at times, rightfully so, bringing forth many comments and suggestions. The end result was a motion passed by the Governors (35 yes, 5 no, and 7 abstentions) requesting the Board of Directors to initiate the process of separation and establish a committee to study the financial and membership impacts of this action, if it were to go full term. The committee is to report its findings by September 15, 2010. This motion was passed by the NSPS Board of Directors by a vote of 11 yes and 5 no.

A previous agreement with ACSM spells out a two-year term of separation for any of the member organizations (MOs), which can be reversed at any point along the way. The motion that passed holds much wisdom and keeps all options open for NSPS, but it does start the clock for a two-year window during which NSPS will work to define its future and its relationship to ACSM.

Why is this process so important? The answer to that question may be found in the marketing report commissioned by ACSM and all of the MOs to help improve their respective and collective well-being. An ACSM committee made up of members from all the MOs worked very hard to read through the report and evaluate its findings. The report gathered information from various sources, including association leaders, current and past members, various government agency heads, related association executives, and publishing-oriented contacts. There were also online surveys conducted with over 4100 current and former MO members and state affiliate members. The findings, while not totally unexpected, were revealing. The primary challenges ACSM and its MOs face are:

- Lack of awareness;
- Lack of perceived value;
- Perception of ACSM and MOs as an outdated group which is behind the times;
- Negative stereotype of the term "surveyor";
- High levels of competition amongst the state affiliates, MOs, and other associations

The report recommended "the formation of a single industry-wide membership organization which would include all the MOs as well as the state and local pieces of NSPS." The Ad-Hoc committee reported these findings to the ACSM Congress where a motion was passed to charge a committee to study options for a possible structure of a unified member organization. Their report is due on September 1, 2010.

Given the decreasing membership, the current financial situation, and the findings of the commissioned report, NSPS and the other MOs have reached a critical juncture and there is no luxury of extra time to move in the right direction, whatever that direction may be. The work that will be done by both the NSPS and ACSM committees will be extremely valuable in the discussions about the future. The two-year time frame keeps the importance of this issue where it belongs... at the top of the list.

What is needed is everyone's input on the possible scenarios. If you have a doubt about whether there needs to be a national voice for the surveying profession, you need to think again. Just as state issues do, national issues touch all surveyors. Public, private, topographic, boundary, layout and other survey issues all have national tones. ALTA standards, Qualifications Based Selection, academic accreditations, real estate settlement survey issues, GPS height modernization, letters of map amendment (LOMA), to name just a few, are all issues addressed at the national, not at the state or local level.

These issues will not go away, and some organization will deal with them nationally for the surveying community. The question is which one? The American Society of Civil Engineers, the American Council of Engineering Companies, the American Society of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing, the Management Association of Private Photogrammetric Surveyors, or a true national voice of the Surveying Profession. This is the question we will attempt to answer over the next several months. There will be many opportunities for input, and when they present themselves, take the time to share your ideas and counsel. Together, we will arrive at the best option possible for the entire Surveying Profession.