

Editorial | Where We Go Depends On Where We Aim

By Barry Arnold, S.E., SECB



Unprecedented challenges face the structural engineering profession in the years to come. Threats from foreign competition, opposition to structural licensure, dwindling profits, decline in ethics, and increased risk and expectations are at our doorstep now. It has become obvious that trying to maintain the status quo will only result in a decline in the relevance of the profession. An idiom states that there are three types of people: Those that are in the loop, those that are out of the loop, and those that don't know there is a loop. As licensed professionals, it is imperative that we be 'in the loop', actively engaged in advocating for our profession, and working to forge a meaningful future for all present and future structural engineers.

There are three ways to approach the future: We can actively plan and contribute to make the future we want a reality, we can sit idle and wait and see what happens or, when the future arrives, we can see what happens and adjust. The first option requires that we plan and build the future we want, not unlike the planning, calculating, and construction that goes into building a structure. The second and third options require no planning, no effort, and no consideration for the profession or the public.

To position itself to meet and address the present and future concerns of the structural engineering profession, NCSEA has taken the initiative to create a four-phase strategic planning process.

Phase 1 – Determine Whom You Serve

Marcus Buckingham declared in his book, *The One Thing You Need To Know*, that the key to long term success is to know whom you serve. Knowing why your organization exists, who your clients are, and what they want, is crucial to your long-term success. After much thoughtful discussion, it was determined that NCSEA exists to represent and support the Structural Engineering Associations (SEAs) in their effort to improve the profession and protect the public.

Phase 2 – Collect Data

With clarity on whom NCSEA serves, NCSEA sent a 3-question survey to the leadership of the SEAs, asking them: First, what are the three most significant problems facing your member organization? Second, what are the three things you believe NCSEA is doing well? Third, what could NCSEA do to improve its support of your SEA?

Seventy-five percent of the SEAs participated, providing a total of 291 responses, which were reviewed by the 34 participants attending NCSEA's

2-day Strategic Planning Session. The input by the SEAs provided a valuable resource of relevant information considered significant by the SEAs.

Phase 3 – Develop a Mission and Vision Statement

Based on the SEAs' input, *NCSEA created new Mission and Vision Statements which better reflect the purpose and intent of the organization.*

NCSEA's new Mission Statement: NCSEA advances the practice of structural engineering by representing and strengthening its Member Organizations.

NCSEA's new Vision Statement: *The National Council of Structural Engineers Associations will be recognized as the leading advocate for the practice of structural engineering.*

Phase 4 – Form Focus Groups

Four focus groups were formed to undertake the following tasks and make recommendations to help NCSEA meet its mission and vision statements: (i) Evaluation of NCSEA's Organizational Structure, (ii) Examination of the current NCSEA-MO delegate model and evaluation of the ways it can be modified and improved, (iii) Exploration of new ways to improve MO communication between all components of the organization, including Board, Staff, Committees, and Member Organizations, and (iv) Assessment of NCSEA's financial sustainability, including evaluation of both opportunities for additional revenue streams and threats to current revenue streams.

NCSEA's Strategic Plan is an on-going process, based on feedback from the SEAs. And because great organizations do more than just collect feedback, NCSEA is putting the ideas, hopes, and dreams of the MOs into the strategic plan by addressing their concerns.

NCSEA needs to be strong and aimed in the right direction as it advocates for the profession. It also needs to be nimble so it can easily adjust to changes in our world and provide additional emphasis in areas needing critical attention. NCSEA exists for the SEAs, and the SEAs exist for their members. Their members, the structural engineers, exist to protect the public. We are all in this together. We all need to be in the loop and actively engaged in this important process.

NCSEA should aim high and set goals that will ultimately improve the structural engineering profession and benefit the public. NCSEA's aim must be true, so that the structural engineering profession will remain relevant and vibrant as it faces the challenges ahead. ■



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