



Professional Association Membership is More Valuable than Ever

By Glenn R. Bell, P.E., S.E., C.Eng, FStructE, F.SEI, F.ASCE

Even before the tumultuous events of 2020, things were changing rapidly in our profession. The technological revolution, globalization, major societal challenges requiring structural engineering leadership, and the advancement of a new generation of engineers eager to make a difference in the world have been shifting the landscape for some time. The events of the last six months, however – COVID and our Social Awakening – have imposed on us dramatic change that we never imagined. No doubt that, when the day comes that we can once again congregate and travel more, some things will revert toward what we once thought was normal, but some things will be permanently changed. I believe these changes will make memberships in professional associations more valuable than ever.

Rapidly-Changing Technology and Practice

We expect continued transformational development in technology in areas like performance-based design, minimization of embodied carbon in constructed works, and resilience. We also expect professional and business practices to respond to the demand for creativity, value, societal needs, and human-centric design. Gone will be the days when crunching numbers that satisfy code equations are a differentiator in a competitive, dynamic environment. Those who embrace change and keep up will flourish; those who do not will struggle for relevance.

Our professional societies are primary resources for keeping abreast of change and gaining access to resources such as conferences, webinars, live chats, collaboration sites, journals and other publications, codes and standards, and continuing education. As we continue to pivot toward digital delivery, you can access the latest content in an environment customized to your needs.

Connecting with Thought-Leaders

Professional committee work, publication, and lecturing are great ways to work with the thought leaders in our profession – building one's expertise and reputation. Want to become a true and recognized expert in wind loads, reliability-based design, or tsunami effects? Join an ASCE-7 subcommittee and learn from the best.

Digital delivery also increases your direct access to thought leaders. As SEI President, I receive a constant flow of inquiries from members looking for advice, mentoring, or to find information. Other industry leaders and I work hard to answer every communication.

And, when I was CEO of Simpson Gumpertz & Heger, I was part of a network of company executives who helped each other in issues of company leadership. We built this network through our professional society connections. You can build networks like this too.

Broadening our Horizons

We recognize our need to overcome silos of specialization by collaborating with like-minded organizations in our profession and with other related organizations in and outside our industry. Increasingly, SEI has engaged with CASE and NCSEA, and in 2019 adopted our

joint Vision for the Future of Structural Engineering. Together we are working on several initiatives to advance the profession such as leadership training, advancing structural engineering licensure, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. SEI has a collaborative relationship with IStructE, with whom we have joint efforts in advancing performance-based design and embodied carbon reduction. SEI is also engaging with the other ASCE Institutes in the development of joint standards, and the Institutes will hold their first Virtual Technical Conference in September.

This increasing collaboration amongst organizations means that membership in one can be the gateway to the broader knowledge and network of others, and provide the broader vision that is the antidote for overspecialization.

The Power of a Larger Voice

I am inspired by the younger generations' desire to drive change, not only in our profession but in societal issues that impact our profession. We seek to influence the public's knowledge and view of our profession. We want to redefine the domain of structural engineering so that we can continue to attract and retain the best and brightest toward a resilient future for our profession. In recent months, our awakening to issues of systemic racism, inequity, and need for diversity has reached new levels of commitment for action. The voice of our professional societies is the collective voice of our members, and we can use the power of that collective voice to achieve our goals.

Cultivating your Professional Community

We all need professional communities, and these communities will be increasingly essential to each of us in the future. Digital technology continues to shrink the world, reducing the need for physical proximity, giving us access to the latest and best resources, and allowing us to broaden our horizons. For many of us, those professional communities are through our places of employment, but nurturing your connections through your professional associations can be so much more powerful and durable.

My primary professional community is ASCE/SEI. Through its vast communication channels, the use of which I can tailor to my own needs, I have gained global access to people, other organizations, knowledge, and a platform for sharing ideas that, even after 45 years, is proving of increasing value and importance. How can you better cultivate your professional community towards a more impactful and resilient career?•

Connect: SEI Virtual Events <https://bit.ly/3k9GkYK>
ASCE Collaborate <https://bit.ly/3gIJssk>



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