

COMMENT

# Supporting ACS's volunteers

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Every year, thousands of dedicated and talented volunteers channel their passion for chemistry, education, advocacy, diversity, and other issues into tangible deliverables that make an impact on the American Chemical Society, the chemistry profession, and society as a whole.

ACS volunteers dedicate their time and talents to realizing the ACS vision of “improving people’s lives through the transforming power of chemistry.” Some of these volunteers have been contributing their efforts to local and national projects for ACS for decades.

ACS’s committee system, which is made up of more than 40 council and/or board-related committees, provides a framework for volunteer engagement at the national level. Many volunteers report that they have benefited from opportunities to get involved through local section, committee, division, and governance activities. Because ACS is a membership society, strong engagement of members at multiple levels is a key factor in the success of the organization.

The mission of the ACS Committee on Committees (ConC) is to ensure that ACS committees are optimally organized, resourced, and engaged. ConC has defined four strategic goals to reach our vision of an effective and dynamic committee system:

- ▶ Develop strategies to best match the needs and demands of committees with member expertise and perspectives. ConC is working with each committee to identify the skills, experience, and expertise the committee needs and is establishing ways to identify volunteers to fill those needs.
- ▶ Increase the number of qualified and committed volunteers from diverse communities by developing ways to expand the reach of committee preference forms to include a more diverse pool of potential volunteers.
- ▶ Partner with ACS committees to en-

hance their communications, networking, and collaborations. Activities include sponsoring interactive sessions for committee chairs, sharing committee goals and activities among ACS committees, and organizing “speed networking for committees” events.

- ▶ Identify, assess, and recommend enhancements to improve the effectiveness and



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sustainability of the committee system.

Given ConC’s vision of effective and dynamic committees, our committee system should provide a meaningful volunteer experience; facilitate excellent collaboration, communication, and coordination among committees; drive impactful decision-making; provide transparency; connect individual members to national governance; and, above all, achieve the purpose of ACS as defined in our congressional charter. Although we have a strong system now, we also have to consider what the future may bring and how the committee system can best support the changing demographics of our membership.

ACS has enjoyed decades of success with volunteers who are willing and able to attend the two national meetings each year and work to achieve committee goals between meetings. However, we miss the contributions of members who are not able to commit to attending those meetings and yet would like to engage at the national level. Today’s technologies provide opportunities for changing the way volunteers contribute, and we need to take full advantage of those technologies to find ways to involve more members and minimize some of the present requirements, such as travel.

Volunteerism is evolving with each

generation, and ACS has volunteers across multiple generations (traditional, baby boomer, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z). Our committee system needs to embrace each generation’s values, needs, and styles.

These differences include a likelihood to volunteer on an ongoing basis versus a tendency to volunteer for discrete projects; a willingness to travel for their

efforts versus a preference for working from home; and a reliance on face-to-face interaction versus a comfort with telecommunication.

ConC needs to ensure that we have a committee system that encourages the participation of all members and all generations. We have to ask ourselves if our paradigm of assigning 750-plus members to committees that meet twice a year in person (typically at national meetings) is the best way to achieve our purpose and provide meaningful volunteer experiences for all our members.

We have to consider if our current system encourages or constrains volunteers and what options exist for engaging more members in reaching our goals of providing information solutions, empowering members and member communities, supporting excellence in education, and communicating chemistry’s value.

ConC wants to hear the thoughts of ACS members as we seek input on ways to sustain and enhance the effectiveness, collaborations, and communications of the committee system and improve the volunteer experience for all its participants. Please send your comments, ideas, and thoughts to [secretary@acs.org](mailto:secretary@acs.org).

Views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of C&EN or ACS.