

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERING SOCIETIES

In the late 1970s, Ken Roe, past-president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, began promoting the idea that the societies representing various elements of the engineering profession in the United States needed to improve their working relationships. The Engineers Joint Council provided for some interaction between the societies, but its structure did not facilitate organized collaboration. Others caught Mr. Roe's vision and together they proposed the formation of an umbrella organization for engineering with the express purpose of facilitating meaningful collaboration. Over a two-year period spanning 1978 and 1979, the proposal was developed and the American Association of Engineering Societies, or AAES, was born.

The original mission of AAES was to be the voice of the engineering profession in the United States. The vision was for AAES to become the organization to which policy makers would turn for answers when addressing issues with engineering implications. Heretofore, engineering was heard as several independent voices reflecting the various disciplines and interests. With AAES, those voices could be united into one, yielding a more focused response for the good of the public as well as the profession.

AAES convened for the first time in January 1980 in Washington D.C. To commemorate its formation, a black-tie dinner was held in the Pension Building on the night before the organization was to meet for the first time. Over 20 societies were officially represented, and the enthusiasm for the new organization and its potential was very high. The next day the first formal AAES meeting was held. Ken Roe was elected as the first AAES President and Chair, and the new organization was off and running. His election as President (the top staff position) was to be temporary until another was found to fill the position.

In the beginning, the organization was governed by the Board of Governors which was comprised of two representatives from each member organization: nominally the chief elected officer and the chief staff officer. AAES was directed by an Executive Committee which was made up of the elected officers including the Chair, Chair Elect, Past Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and one at-large society representative. Day-to-day management was provided by the President who managed the organization's staff. Funding for the organization was provided through member dues with the assessments being proportional to the size of each society's membership. Voting by the Board of Governors was generally held to one vote per member; however, proportional voting was allowed if requested by a member.

The work of AAES was conducted via several councils which were formed by representatives from the various member societies. Originally, four councils were formed addressing member affairs, public affairs, international affairs, and engineering education. Over time new councils were added or existing councils modified to address engineering public policy, public awareness of engineering, and codes and standards. The councils would address issues related to their area of interest and issue their findings through AAES governance. Funding of the council activities was provided by a portion of the AAES membership dues, and a member could earmark a portion of their dues for certain councils to match their interests.

At the time it was organized, AAES incorporated the Engineering Manpower Commission which had previously been part of the Engineers Joint Council. AAES renamed it

the Engineering Workforce Commission (EWC) and it remains part of AAES today. EWC performs ongoing research on the engineering workforce in the United States and provides demographic information each year. EWC information is used by many including federal and state government, higher education, industry and others.

The first AAES offices were located in New York City. Dr. Robert Frosch, who previously served as administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration under President Jimmy Carter, was hired as the first President. Within two years the offices were moved to Washington D.C. to be more accessible to the policy makers. In 2008 the AAES offices were relocated to Elkridge, Maryland, a suburb of Baltimore, to remain in close proximity to Washington D.C.

The AAES mission and vision of today are essentially the same as originally conceived, and the current organizational structure is very similar to the original. However, in 2006 the organization wrote new bylaws, and AAES went through a rebirth. What was once the Board of Governors is now the Board of Directors with only one voting representative from each member society. The organization continues to be directed by an Executive Committee which is made up of the elected officers including the Chair, Chair Elect, Past Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and three at-large members. Day-to-day activities are handled by the Executive Director who is responsible for all AAES staff. Membership dues are the same for each member organization regardless of size, and there is only one vote per member. Four standing committees are also used to address the business of the organization including awards, nominations, finance and audit. AAES is currently made up of thirteen member societies.

The councils have been replaced with working groups. Working groups are formed by three or more member societies to address issues of common interest. Working groups do not require representation by all member societies, just those with an interest in the issue being addressed; however, each working group is chartered by and reports its activities to the AAES Board of Directors. Each working group funds its own activities. Currently there are five working groups addressing international issues, sustainability, emerging issues, K-12 education, and diversity.

Another important recurring AAES activity is the selection and presentation of several awards recognizing individuals for outstanding contributions to the engineering profession and society. Seven awards are funded by AAES and conferred through nominations by AAES member societies. The awards are presented at an evening banquet which is held in Washington D.C. each spring in conjunction with the National Academy of Engineering Convocation. AAES also co-hosts the convocation and assists NAE with its planning.

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