

One Society, 5,000 Members, Equal Responsibility

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In a previous article for the Leadership Institute, **Steve Nelson** outlined the importance of the agenda, the need for timely and appropriate

background information being provided to the participants, and that meeting participants are “expected to come prepared to start the dialogue in order to reach a decision or conclusion.” While there are positions in the APS organizational structure with specified responsibilities at and for meetings, unlike the meetings we generally go to for our “day jobs,” there is no hierarchy of authority at APS meetings. From council to committees, when APS members walk into the meeting rooms, everybody is there as a volunteer. As every APS member at the table is a volunteer, we each have an equal voice, and with that equal voice comes equal responsibility.

As APS Council has moved to a smaller group and more of the work of the society is done in boards and offices, it becomes important that each person find their voice at the table and expand the definition of coming prepared beyond the provided background information on a specific topic or task. Many of the committees I have served on in my career have been developed by trying to

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represent different constituencies. This may work in the U.S. House of Representatives (or not!), but many times such constituency-based committees result in discussions being directed toward what is perceived as best for “your” constituency regardless of the impact on the whole organization. APS has greatly benefited from leaders that have thought more about the whole organization than just a segment of the membership. In order to think broadly about the needs of the organization, the benefits of potential activities under review, or an activity you are considering proposing, it is important that volunteers in any role in the society take time to learn about APS.

As a volunteer, in addition to mastering background information for the items on the agenda, one should also consider learning 1) What are the goals of APS?, 2) How do members, including you as a volunteer, interact with staff to work toward achieving

those goals?, 3) How are the goals and activities determined and financed?, 4) How can one facilitate engaging others members to achieve these goals and activities?, and 5) What are my expectations from how I will benefit from this volunteer experience?

It is rare that meetings take place in a room with a round table, as King Arthur’s Knights congregated around, to show that each who sits at the table has equal status. However, by the nature of APS being a volunteer, member-driven scientific society, each member is equal in status. Having a broad understanding of APS and considering how agenda items may impact the collective vision of the future of plant pathology and APS makes you a better member. Thus, making your voice at the table, round or otherwise, a creative resource for the benefit of members and the greater good of the society. ■