

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Coming Full Circle: NAEP Providing Value to Environmental Professionals

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Over the past year and a half as NAEP president, I have been privileged to witness some great accomplishments in NAEP. I am extremely thankful to the preceding presidents, who made the Association a working machine of innovation, imagination, and growing influence. The board members have facilitated the cooperation to make things happen. I am fully aware now that the progress of the Association depends entirely on the volunteers and their vision. Whereas a president has the title, the board of directors determines whether things get done.

NAEP has had its trials, to be sure, but we have entered a time of better service to the membership in general and to the professions as a whole. Here are three examples where the value to members is palpable and measurable. Each example individually provides value to professionals through networking, education, and up-to-date knowledge.

Annual Conference

This past year, we had the best-attended conference in recent NAEP history. The beautiful backdrop of Portland, Oregon, was a magnet that attracted environmental professionals to become part of something significant. The cooperation of the planners—national and local—ensured the success of the conference. In this instance, the imagination of the Northwest Chapter volunteers and the vision of our conference planner, Donna Carter, who has been with us since 1999, made the conference a complete success. From the local keynotes to the national presenters, the conference was filled with useful general observations, thoughtful considerations about the state

of the professions, and insight into how the professions need to keep moving into the future.

Our fantastic volunteer planners take complete ownership of their assigned tracks and work hard to find common threads among individually submitted abstracts to present a professional level of useful knowledge for the attendees.

Although the conference planning process results in some presentations and abstracts not being selected, I really wish that we had room to accept more. We are very fortunate that our members and others feel that presenting the results of their work at our conference is a worthy goal. It also tells me that the value inherent in the presentations in particular and the conference in general is that we attract top-echelon professionals. Our presenters are the best. What remains in the program is cutting edge, professionally fulfilling, and valuable to all in attendance.

It pleases me to be able to say that, without question, the NAEP Annual Conference is the best venue for practitioners in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to assemble to obtain the best and latest findings in their area of interest. Our conference has become the primary NEPA venue nationally. Thanks for this professional venue comes in great part from the continued substantial relationship we have with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the caliber of our planning volunteers responsible for assembling the panel discussions, legal updates, and individual presentations.

As part of the CEQ relationship, an idea presented by three of our members was chosen as a pilot project by the CEQ to determine Best Practice Principles for Environmental Assessments. David Keys, Robin Senner, and Larry Canter developed the idea and were assisted by Ron Deverman, Rita Holder, and me. The development and

presentation of the idea at the conference were inspiring to me. The innovation reflected in the concept and the effort to provide a forum for practitioners to participate and contribute in the presentation of results demonstrated a dedication to the Association and a professional commitment by all involved. The presentation of the project results at the conference provided a means for participation and comment on the project to all in attendance.

The Energy Boot camp from the conference was an innovative look at an important subject for environmental professionals: the sustainable energy market. Once again, the planners responsible were the innovators who developed the concept and brought it to fruition. This presentation of the development and expansion of this topic provided a means for attendees to learn about sustainable energy and the challenges inherent in the development of this new frontier.

The introduction of a brand new topic to the conference—*visual resource impact assessments*—and the separate conference tracks provided a full-spectrum immersion into this still developing field of study and implementation. For those who had never been exposed to the subject, the day-long seminar before the conference—a 101 course in Visual Impact Assessments—brought attendees up to the level of comprehension that enabled us to follow the more complex concepts presented within the conference tracks.

These extremely informative presentations were just a small slice of the professional expertise that is presented consistently at our conferences. I cannot place a dollar figure on this exposure available to an attendee, but I can say that the price of NAEP membership is repaid easily within any individual conference.

The overall conference experience—meeting new people, seeing old friends, being able

to wander the exhibition hall on breaks—all have inestimable value for me personally. By being able to talk to people about what I just saw, I have gained more insight into how the knowledge presented applies to my professional career. That comfortable, living-room feel is the result of a lot of planning.

Donna Carter's guidance is generally hands off for the location. She provides excellent insight when requested and allows the local planners to give the conference their own local flavor. Her guidance provides the planners with an understanding of what can be done and then allows the local creativity to form an unforgettable experience.

The venue logistics sometimes can be tedious, but somehow Donna makes it all look easy. I have seen her turn a conference from a potential loss to a substantial profit simply through behind-the-scenes adjustments to hotel-related costs and looking out for the best interests of NAEP and the local chapter. At each conference I have attended, I have heard great feedback about her help and knowledge and how the local planners were able to depend on her for anything.

For the past few years, Donna has brought an entourage of volunteers who work hard to ensure that the conference daily operations come off brilliantly. For example, volunteers Chip, Mary, and Abe became part of the conference success as they handled issues, wrangled the local volunteers, and facilitated a smooth conference for all.

Donna has been a rock for NAEP for years. She brings a professional attitude to each conference and delivers the best experience for the attendees. Although she is a paid professional planner, she is enthusiastic about NAEP, believes in who we are, and ensures that we all have a positive experience. We are very fortunate to have someone of her caliber working with us.

For all the hard work that the members of the local chapter (the Northwest Association of Environmental Professionals—Washington and Oregon) put into the conference, they reaped a tremendous windfall that can help them grow and spread the

word about NAEP to the Oregon and Washington State environmental professionals.

Hosting a conference offers many ways in which local professionals can obtain more value for their membership. First, planning a conference can become a learning experience that a chapter can use to further their goals of increased membership and networking. The planning skills and the techniques that Donna uses can be transferred to any venue.

For the chapters that wonder whether they could plan something as complex as a conference, I can say that, though the experience appears daunting, it will be the most worthwhile volunteer work you will ever do. For the local volunteers, conference planning provides a venue for using personal and professional networks to assemble subject-matter experts and professionals. After returning to Portland for the second time, I can see that the experience of the local chapter members in planning previous conferences improved the conference planning capabilities for the 2012 Conference.

Each conference provides the local chapter with a way to show off the reasons they choose to live in the area and provides reward and recognition for a job well done. The potential result is the expansion of membership in the chapter service area and a means to increase chapter visibility and local importance.

Finally, the utility of the conference proceedings is often overlooked. I have stated that the conference provides a venue for the attendees to see great professionals present their work, but an attendee cannot see everything of interest among the multiple simultaneous tracks. If you have a professional career that spans many aspects of the professions, you know that many of our tracks overlap. NAEP has been very good at providing each attendee with a means to experience each subject presented. The papers that we have accepted over the last few years have provided me personally with an amazing full reference library of knowledge. Having the presentations and papers from our top-notch professionals available at my digital fingertips through a thumb drive of the conference

proceedings has been extremely useful for me professionally. Although not a peer-reviewed publication, the papers published are high quality. The conference proceedings are a resource for those professionals who understand the quality of our presenters and the depth of knowledge each brings to an individual presentation.

I am looking forward to the upcoming conference in Los Angeles. The newly completed LA Live venue promises an oasis of walking and low stress in a city known for its traffic. The plans are coalescing, and we are expecting great things at the conference.

Webinars

Conferences are only one of the venues through which NAEP provides real tangible professional merit to our members. Last year, in an effort to provide timely policy updates to the professional community, we implemented the webinar series, with the first held in March 2011. So far, NAEP has completed 12 informative, interesting, well-done webinars. Additionally, we have worked with our education partner American Public University (APU) to produce practical, professional webinars on how to find a job in the professions and how to enhance one's professional network. APU put together a series aimed at new and veteran environmental professionals. The topics—*Prepare to Stand Out*; *The Perfect Resume*, and *Leveraging LinkedIn to Land Your Next Job*—were stimulating and informative. The speakers were excellent, and the webinars had something for all to ponder and incorporate into our professional lives. Carolyn Henn, our spark plug in the Middle Atlantic Region, was a well-spoken, knowledgeable representative of NAEP throughout the series. The individual recorded webinars are still available through APU.

Our Education Committee, led by Marie Campbell, is working on the next series of webinars. Both the NAEP and the APU webinar series suit the Committee's vision to expand the knowledge base of our members and advance their education in the profession. This vision is an inherent part of the NAEP mission statement; that is, to be the primary source of unbiased information on environmental practices. We have

reached hundreds of professionals directly through our series. Based on the postwebinar survey results, we are fairly sure that for each registered attendee we average six more professionals who enjoy the educational benefit of the series. With over 15 total webinars completed, I believe we can claim thousands served.

The NAEP webinar series has covered varied topics. Attendees have offered many suggestions that we intend to incorporate in the upcoming year. The original intent of making education more easily accessible to our members is not only working but has become an additional service for the members and the community at large.

If you are attending at the nonmember rate, join NAEP. The money you save in attending these informative, important webinars will more than pay for your membership within the year and you can provide additional value for your company and your clients by offering this venue for them all to learn about the current issues facing environmental professionals. The networking opportunities are tremendous, and improving client relations is a bonus that has developed with the evolution of the series.

Publications

The NAEP publications have finally fulfilled the concept of coming *full circle*. In the November–December 2010 issue of the *E-News*, we published a paper on hydraulic fracturing and the efforts by the US Environmental Protection Agency to address concerns related to the practice. At the conference in 2011, I moderated the brownfields track, which included two presentations on hydraulic fracturing related to the redevelopment of brownfield sites.

In September 2011, our two-part webinar on hydraulic fracturing (or fracking) provided our attendees with a complete picture of the legal and policy sides of the practice and offered insight into the environmental impacts that can be expected as development of the Marcellus Shale and the Utica Shale begins to affect the forested areas of Pennsylvania and New York.

Whereas the initial thoughts were that hydraulic fracturing is a regional issue, this informative discussion of policy and the natural resource impacts provided the community with an understanding that the spread of hydraulic fracturing could affect more than the northeast and, indeed, impact nearly every part of the United States. Areas not currently experiencing this form of oil and natural gas exploration can expect to face similar decisions involving science, politics, and policy. This demonstrates concrete examples of the professional value of NAEP membership.

Attendees of the webinar on hydraulic fracturing included US and Canadian government employees, which reflected that, despite our national focus, hydraulic fracturing is truly an issue of international importance. Our webinar planners should be very proud that, in covering this single subject, NAEP has provided awareness that is applicable in many nations on several continents.

Additionally, our current news publication—the *National Desk*—has provided timely feedback on this subject several times. The *National Desk* news summary supplies our members with a breadth of environmental knowledge. Ron Lamb has worked hard to make the *National Desk* yet another addition to the arsenal of publications that keep our members at the top of their game, well informed, and up-to-date. With a publication schedule of every two weeks, he has been busy reviewing news sources to ensure a very strong publication. While it is free for our members and affiliates, we still need sponsors to help offset the cost to NAEP in order to continue this important and vital news source.

By using contacts gained through the webinar, the editors of this journal have been able to assemble this issue dedicated to hydraulic fracturing, an important subject that has come full circle for our members. With this journal issue, all of the publication and educational efforts of NAEP have dealt with hydraulic fracturing. We have obtained findings from a variety of sources. NAEP has provided our members with a full spectrum of findings through which to

make their own decisions on a controversial environmental subject.

Members who have participated in all aspects of this important topic now have a wide information base regarding its study. Through their understanding, I expect that some of the misinformation that surrounds this subject will be corrected in the public arena.

NAEP provides value in so many ways much beyond the cost of membership. Although each professional needs to determine for himself or herself whether the cost of NAEP membership is worthwhile, we all should recognize the direct applicability of our suite of services for practicing professionals, recently graduated professionals, professionals looking for reemployment, those looking to improve their professional career, and those who still enjoy learning new things.

I believe that the Association is fulfilling our responsibility to the membership and our affiliated members. I believe that the knowledge we provide enables our members to advance professionally. I expect there will be more full-circle topics in the coming years, but what I am most pleased about is that NAEP has reached the point where we are tackling the topics that affect us all.

One of the messages I have been returning to as I have served as president of this Association is that its worth to a member is a direct result of the effort that the individual member puts into it. Attending conferences is an expense, but the professional merit far exceeds the cost. Our webinars are inexpensive, so their professional value is primarily in participation. Our publications are useful reference materials but are of more utility to the members who contribute and who use the publications to advance their knowledge.

I recommend that you volunteer to work with NAEP if you are inclined to expand your level of professional responsibilities. I can promise that the work will be worthwhile, and your personal reward for the the work will far exceed the price of membership.