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Vertical Association Resources

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The USA has more than 150,000 associations. Nearly 3,000 national associations reside in the Washington DC area. The majority of associations in the US are state and local in scope. Where do association professionals turn for help?

Many executives join the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) or their state affiliates. ASAE is the “mothership” for associations.

Its members make up a broad array of executives in diverse industries and professions. It serves a wide horizontal market, defined as offering features across different kinds of associations and a more general audience.

Narrowly Focused Association Resources

Vertical markets define the more narrowly focused organizations serving association executives with similar interests. Let’s call them councils for this article.

The groups include the Council of State Retail Associations (CSRA), National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations (NASPA), the Trucking Association Executives Council (TAEC) and the American Association of Medical Society Executives (AAMSE).



The councils are designed to serve the challenges and needs of executives managing like associations in the same business sector.

Councils are platforms for instilling excellence within the sector by providing expressly designed resources and education. Councils understand the benefit of every member performing effectively, leaving no weak links in the sector.

President Kennedy’s quote on “the rising tide lifts all the boats” would apply to councils working to ensure that every affiliated entity functions at its best.

Susan D’Antoni, immediate past president of AAMSE, explains the organization is committed to supporting medical society professionals “It is the only association of medical associations recognizing the unique needs and addressing the challenges specifically for medical society staffs.”

Advice for New Council Members

At a recent council meeting of state executives they opened by sharing advice for the group's newest members:

- ✓ There are no dumb questions among peers.
- ✓ Rely on your colleagues to share best practices and common challenges.
- ✓ The education portions of the meeting are not the only places you'll learn.
- ✓ Get to know everybody and keep their emails close at hand.
- ✓ Maintain a work-life balance no matter how hard the job will be.
- ✓ Don't become frustrated or resign without first seeking help.
- ✓ We encourage you to "beg, borrow and steal," or use the C.A.S.E. method – "Copy and Steal Everything."

Precision Solutions

Because the council members have familiarity and comparable challenges, their meetings are an environment in which to pose questions and share solutions. Sharing is the backbone of the councils.

For instance a policy manual for a medical society might benefit others in the sector. A strategic plan crafted by one association may serve as a template for others. Exchanging best practices in an environment with peers makes sense.

Most councils offer comparable benefits:

- Toolkits and proven best-practices.
- Shared services such as website development, database management and bookkeeping.
- Conferences and forums.
- Support from the council leadership.
- A "warehouse" of documents to avoid "re-inventing the wheel."
- The services of strategic planning and board development by seasoned colleagues.
- Scholarships and travel grants.
- National association support.

Delivering Value

Both the associations serving diverse organizations and the targeted councils provide solutions for executives seeking to excel.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides association governance tools and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.