

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

Carol Bowers, Interim Executive Director, American Association of Engineering Societies (AAES)

Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA

Carol Bowers

About AAES, American Association of Engineering Societies

The society is actually a federation of engineering societies. And the member societies represent all different types of engineering; ranging from the ones that you would think of: the civil, the mechanical, the electricals, chemicals – down to groups like a very small society called Human Factors and Ergonomics. So we have a very broad range of member societies, and they cover – as you can imagine – all types of technologies, and various issues. There are a number of types of engineers that get involved in infrastructure issues and so that's definitely something that's on the radar screen of AAES as an organization. We've been working on a value statement, which we haven't finalized yet, but I'll just let you know that in that value statement it talks about how AAES is working through our members to collaborate on critical areas of engineering education, public policy, licensure, and infrastructure is mentioned as one of those critical areas, as you can imagine. What we try to do is provide a common voice, a unifying voice, for engineering as a whole. And that's really what AAES is all about; finding those common areas in engineering.

Engineers Have Untapped Power

AAES represents something between 750,000 and 1,000,000 engineers. If we can go speak to folks on Capitol Hill and let them know that we're representing that number of engineers we're bound to get a little more attention. But we've also encouraged our members to go individually to their state and local politicians. To go out to schools to talk to kids, because it really is a matter of getting word out at all levels. And one of the things we've found is we have a K-12 outreach program, and the earlier you can talk to the kids and explain to them what engineering is about and how it helps the world, the kids are really interested these days in doing things that can – that have a big impact; and doing things that are good for the world. So, as long as we can assist our members with some tools to get out there, they are willing and love to go out and talk about their profession. Sometimes they're just not sure exactly how to start. And that's one of the things we attempt to provide them with from the professional societies, the tools to talk to the kids. The kids then talk to their parents, the parents then talk to their local and state and national politicians, and it spreads that way. That's

really a good way to get the word out. And we also we try to facilitate individual member societies – specific disciplines of engineering – by supporting them through the larger organization. There may be issues that come up that – especially with some of our smaller members – that they are again feeling like that lone voice in the wilderness, and when they bring an issue through AAES it gives them that additional support of a million engineers.

Engineers Need to Communicate

How many TV shows are there about engineers? You see lots of doctor and lawyer TV shows, and a few about forensics, but you don't see a lot about engineering. You see stuff about athletes, professional athletes. They're out there, but the word is just not out about how exciting engineering can be and what great things engineers are doing. And again, with people that get into engineering – or used to get into engineering – it was because they were so interested in the technical piece. And maybe weren't so interested in communicating it; they just wanted to get out there and do it. But I think more and more engineers are recognizing that in order to get the respect that they deserve, and the recognition they deserve, they really have to learn to communicate in addition to having those technical skills.

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