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The Face of Surveying

The fable of *The Six Blind Men and the Elephant* tells of the 6 mutually exclusive opinions describing an elephant. So it has been with surveying. For thousands of years the profession has included any and all technologies available. Leading observers from different perspectives have come up with individual descriptions of Surveying. It makes any surveyor sympathize with the elephant.

To understand the situation in which we find the practice of surveying today. We need to ask Who, What Where, When and Why are we? ... are they? The struggle to answer doesn't come so much from its members understanding themselves. It comes from dealing with and answering the misconceptions of those not members of the profession.

Since 1941 the National Congress on Surveying and Mapping (later named ACSM) had sought to better coordinate the nation's surveying and mapping activities to "advance the sciences of surveying, mapping, geographic information and related fields, in furtherance of the public welfare and in the interests of those who use surveys, maps, spatial information and those who make them, and to establish a central source of reference for its member organizations and the public."

ACSM has suffered strains at times when parochial interests overshadow the purposes of the organization. In 2004, the structure of ACSM was changed from one in which individuals were members of ACSM (while participating within their chosen interest group) to one in which individuals are members of one of four member organizations—the American Association for Geodetic

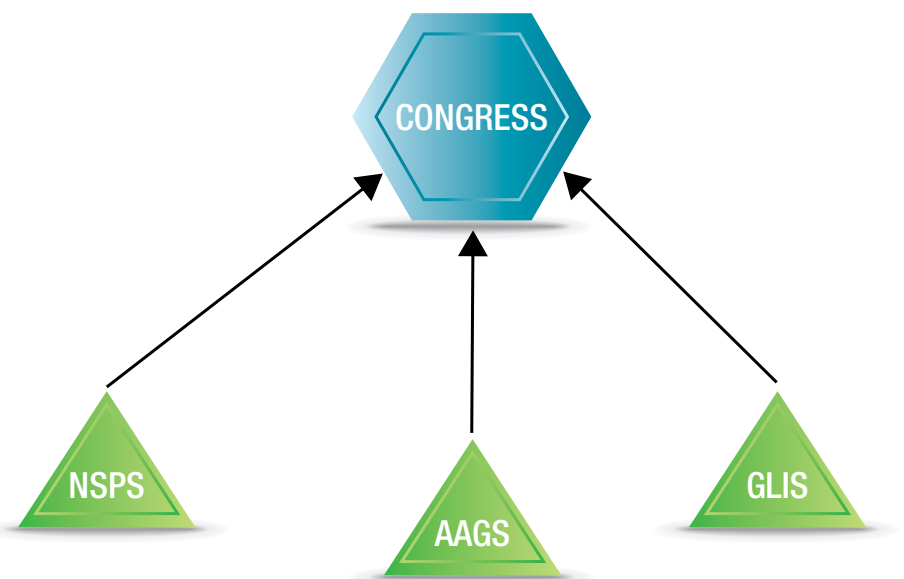


Figure 1 Member Organizations formed the “Congress” of the ACSM.

Surveying (AAGS), Cartography and Geographic Information Science (CaGIS), Geographic and Land Information Society (GLIS), and the National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS). As GIS technology has continually evolved, many practitioners have sought professional status separate from land surveying. One result was the withdrawal of CaGIS from ACSM. **See Figure 1** for the current Congress make-up.

Recently, the imbalanced governance of the ACSM by equally represented member organizations, coupled with two unprofitable conventions, has resulted in near fiscal disaster for ACSM. NSPS with over 95% of the ACSM membership has picked up much of the financial burden, but its membership has set in

motion the process of withdrawing from ACSM as well.

Representatives of NSPS, AAGS and GLIS have met in an effort to reorganize ACSM in a manner acceptable to all, but have not been successful in finding middle ground.

The dispute seems to have boiled down to this: AAGS and GLIS members, fearing that NSPS will leave with a nearly total majority of the membership, resent feeling like they are being dictated terms. NSPS members resent hearing less than 5% of the membership demanding major changes in governance and operational structure. Neither sees the other as playing fair. NSPS, the 800-pound gorilla in the room, has the resources

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and membership to survive going its own way, while ACSM without NSPS won't likely be viable. The future success of any group that has the best interests of all land surveyors must serve the interests of its members.

Surveying is mathematical, astronomical, legal, optical, historical, electronic, geological, computerized, chemical, manual, biological and above all, professional. No other field has such a university within itself. That is why those with a specialized mindset have failed to adequately serve and nurture it. NSPS includes primarily members who are licensed to practice surveying by state law. Those not licensed are skeptical that their interests will be fairly served.

The successful solution will not be a simple one. In whatever organization emerges, all interests must be accommodated in a way that doesn't unreasonably empower a few to dominate the whole, except to defend a recognized right principle.

The members of NSPS represent over 95% of ACSM and must form the immediate core of any result. The existing successful local penetration of the NSPS affiliate structure lends organizational strength and stability. While this group is composed of state licensed practitioners, a welcoming attitude must prevail to specialists who aren't licensed, including a strong persuasion for the states to be inclusive with membership as well as broadening licensing definitions. If that can be done the future is hopeful.

The current NSPS organization is much like early bicameral governmental experiments. There is a lower house (Board of Governors) that is most responsible for initiating legislation that must be passed on to an upper house (Board of Directors) for conclusive action. In order to accommodate the specialists, NSPS will have to add another body. **See Figure 2.**

I envision a few "special interest areas of practice" that would have, as members, individuals whose practice includes the specialties covered by each. Each special interest group will choose a delegate to a senate-like body ("Board of Specialties") to balance the BoG. **See Figure 3.**

I see two methods for passing on legislation to the BoD. 1) A motion would be for either the BoG or the BoS to pass an item without concurrence of the other to be treated as a motion in

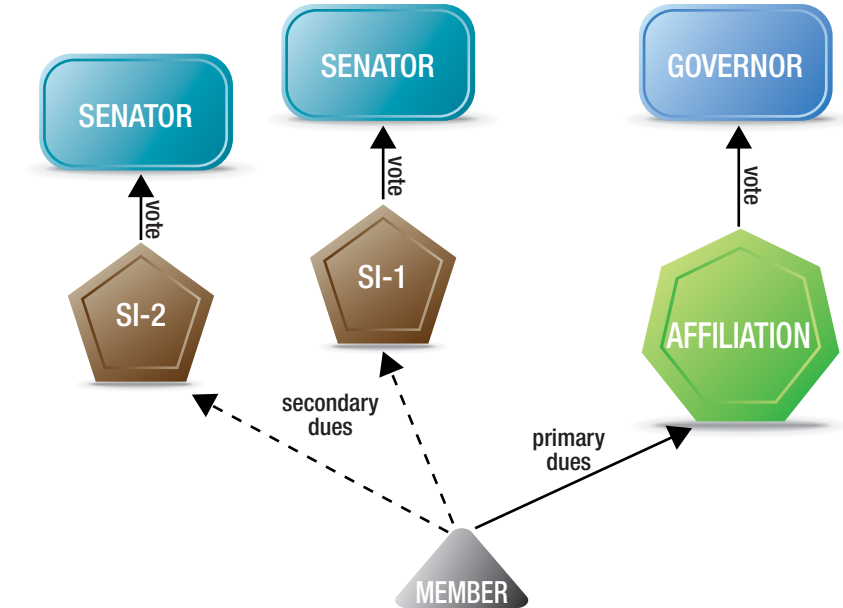


Figure 2 Members pay dues through their geographical affiliate and indicate special interest by dues paid to S.I. groups.

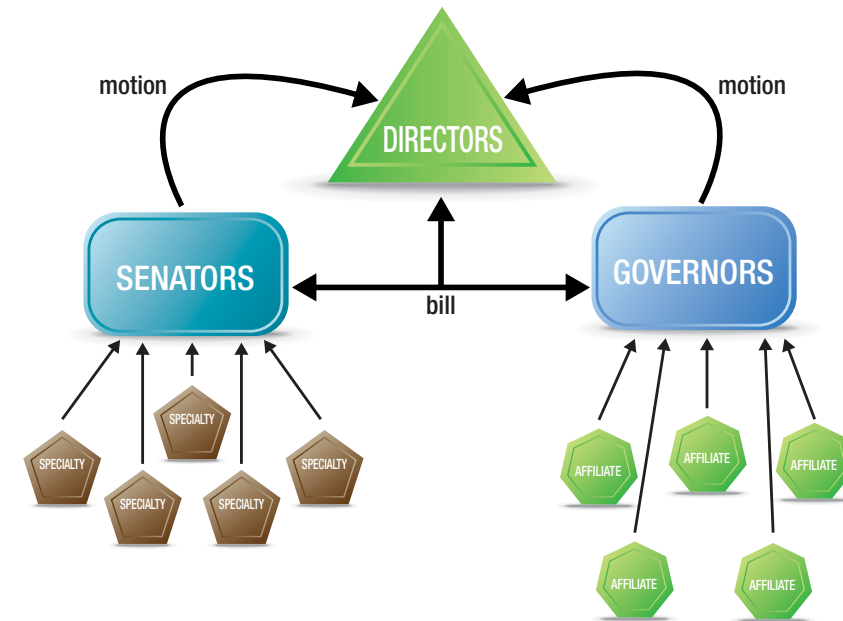


Figure 3 Either body may pass a motion on to the Board of Directors for consideration. Both houses may concur on a bill that the BoD may veto.

the BoD; much like actions passed by the BoG is now handled. 2) A bill would be when the BoG and the BoS concur by passing identical legislation on to the BoD who then must veto the action or it becomes effective. The situation will resemble somewhat the relationship between the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Executive Branch but with the BoD reserving a bit more leeway to act.

With such a balance, the interests of all may be fairly represented. I hope pressure

would be brought to bear on the states to broaden the definition of surveying and membership in NSPS ought to become a requirement to join a state organization to be an affiliate. If we accomplish those things we will have a good chance at a viable future and a chance to represent surveying going forward. *AS*

Author Note: The opinions expressed are entirely personal and are not represented to be those of any other than the writer.