

# **STRATEGIC FOCUS FOR 2003 THROUGH 2005**

By Bill Goodwin

November 27, 2002

Revised: January 16, 2003

2004 will be a major election year in Washington, as we vote on the next governor, other public offices and legislative issues. 2004 will be a time for the Washington State Chapter members to provide credible support to the governing officials and the public in evaluating issues relating to public works. As such 2004 will be a golden opportunity for raising the public's awareness and understanding of this chapter's role and the excellent character and expertise of its members.

My proposed strategic focus is based on a review and analysis of the chapter's strategic plan (which is provided on the following pages), discussions with chapter members and a general awareness of the public infrastructure challenges of our times. Following are my proposed key focus topics:

- Enhancing our credibility as public works experts and being the preferred technical resource for the governor and state legislature regarding public works issues. This will continue to build on Dick's branding efforts for the chapter.
- The attraction of younger public works employees from the public and private sectors to join and participate in APWA.
- Providing relevant education to enhance the technical skills and character of public works employees.

I envision my next three years of official chapter activity as consisting of the following:

- 2003: Plan, prepare and coordinate to build support for specific priority strategic objectives. My efforts will supplement those of Bob Moorhead as he pursues his program objectives in 2003.
- 2004: Implementing action plans for the objectives.
- 2005: Follow-up work and transition activities. Mentor another officer to support and pursue the strategic objectives.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTER'S STRATEGIC PLAN**

The following text provides a summary and analysis of the strategic plan elements that relate to my proposed focus topics. This is essentially a statement of opportunity.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Chapter's mission statement includes the promotion of "professional excellence". Recent election results and voter feedback indicate mistrust in government officials and indirectly in public works organizations. There are repeated calls for more performance accountability and more cost effective use of taxpayer dollars.

### **INTERNAL ASSESSMENT - STRENGTHS**

In assessing our chapter strengths we stated that the chapter is respected, has name recognition and possesses good leadership. We need to build on the respect and extend that attribute into the public works agencies, consultants, and vendor members of the chapter. This is essential to enhancing public perception of public servants and government. We should build on the inherent expertise of our members and find ways to transfer that knowledge to younger members and share the expertise with the governor, the legislature and other decision makers. We should exploit our propensity for taking risks and being innovative to succeed in these endeavors.

### **INTERNAL ASSESSMENT - WEAKNESSES**

In assessing our chapter weaknesses we stated that the chapter lacks presence with the legislature and that the legislature does not recognize the chapter as an organization of experts. We need to define and pursue more opportunities to engage with members of the legislature to educate them on public works issues and in doing so build trust and credibility. Such activity would offer mentoring opportunities to assure the development of future chapter leaders and continuity of our connections and involvement with governmental decision makers. Being a more publicly engaged chapter may make us more attractive to potential young members.

### **EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT - ISSUES AFFECTING OUR PROFESSION**

We identified several current key issues that may affect our chapter for the next five years:

- Public distrust
- Public apathy
- Growing sense that education and travel for government employees is a waste / boondoggle

## **EXTERNAL ASSESSEMENT – OPPORTUNITIES FOR APWA**

We identified several opportunities for APWA including the following:

- Lead the parade
- Legislative access
- Sharing successes with internals, other organizations, and the public
- Promote the profession
- Make it COOL to belong
- Attracting new people into the profession
- National Public Works Week—making it bigger

Because of the public works label we have the opportunity to lead and influence the public debate on public works issues. We need to exploit and improve the access we have to the legislature. We have an excellent opportunity to communicate the successes of our members in providing public service and completing public works projects. As we improve our access and involvement with the legislature, we could also be promoting the public works profession by highlighting our expertise and effectiveness in addressing public works issues. We can portray ourselves and the organization as competent problem solvers making valuable contributions to the welfare of society. Effective public relations and marketing of this message will help attract new people into the profession. National Public Works Week would be one of several public activities to make our pitch.

## **EXTERNAL ASSESSEMENT – THREATS AND CHALLENGES TO APWA**

Among the threats to APWA, there are several that relate to our relationship with the public:

- Need to prove to the public the value of our services
- Making politicians look good
- Voter expectations
- Public image—“leaning on shovels”
- Increasing our credibility to influence our future
- Declining government revenues

To the average taxpayer, “value” means “getting our money’s worth”, i.e. a good return on investment. Taxpayers have expressed a desire for increased accountability to assure and prove they are getting value. We in APWA can respond to this challenge with enhanced project design, management and construction operations training that are more readily available to a broader section of our membership. We can also better educate the public regarding what’s really happening on a project site, e.g. the apparently idle worker standing next to a hole in the ground is really a lifeguard.

For the politicians to succeed in convincing the public of the effectiveness and value of public works, we need to support them with excellent information, excellent performance and expert

speakers. We can help the politicians look good and in doing so succeed in regaining the public trust and support to fund the necessary infrastructure improvements.

## **COMMON VISION THEMES**

The common themes that define our vision of success in 2007 included the following:

- APWA is a trusted, credible public works resource
- Political activism
- Promote the image and value of public works
  - ◆ Raise the level of public works and our deliverables in our communities
  - ◆ Educate the public about what we do and how valuable it is
  - ◆ “We do the public’s work”
  - ◆ Raise visibility
  - ◆ Define what we mean by “Public Works”

## **DRIVING FORCES**

There are several driving forces that already exist to propel APWA toward the vision. Our organization is composed of highly motivated professionals. We have good leaders. We’re interested in our communities. We are committed to the success of our chapter and each member. In response to the public demand for better public works performance and the degrading infrastructure, we’re motivated for APWA to succeed. We desire change; we’re not satisfied with the status quos.

## **RESTRAINTS**

There are several obstacles that we have to clear in achieving the vision. People aren’t sure this organization will make a difference; they need to see value. We have traditionally assumed that people will come to us, rather than us going to them. We communicate poorly within and beyond our membership. We lack outreach skills and capability, e.g. public relations and marketing.

## **GOALS**

Goal 1 states that we will clarify and define APWA’s organizational identity and value. One objective of the goal requires us to communicate the APWA identity and value.

Goal 3 requires that we achieve increased awareness, perceived value, and appreciation for Public Works projects, people, and the profession, i.e. that we position ourselves as the premier Public Works organization.

## **VISION**

Our vision statement begins by proclaiming that the American Public Works Association is the most credible organization for public works professionals in Washington State, trusted and valued for its advancement of the field of public works.

One element of our 2007 vision requires that we promote the image and practice of public works in our communities through our public education and advocacy programs. Our relationships in government, business, and our communities generate support and respect. Our student chapters at UW and WSU are increasingly successful in attracting bright collegians to the profession and to APWA membership. We recognize achievement and celebrate success in our profession.

We have a clearly expressed intent to equip our members to meet the standards for professional competence and earn continuing education credits to advance their skill and status in their profession.

## **CONCLUSION**

All of the expressed elements of the strategic plan are woven together by the common threads of enhanced credibility and service to the public, attraction and retention of members, and providing relevant education to our membership. These are the areas in which I propose to focus my efforts in leading the chapter. After refining my focus topics through review and discussion with other officers and board members, I will develop implementation ideas and a program of activities to engage the chapter committees and members.

# IMPLEMENTATION

**2003 – The year of planning, preparation and building support for action in 2004.**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Coordinate with Dick Andrews (2002 Past President) and Bob Moorhead (2003 President) to avoid duplication of efforts in 2003 and assure mutual support.
2. Encourage and solicit input in an ongoing manner from all officers and board members.
3. Challenge and engage all chapter committees to support the objectives. Communicate with each committee chair to discuss the strategy and begin planning each committee's role for 2004.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Author pieces for the newsletter to communicate, build support and promote the strategic focus in 2004.
2. Provide credible technical support to governing officials and the public in evaluating issues relating to public works.
  - a. Continue to build on Dick Andrew's branding efforts for the chapter.
  - b. Challenge the standing committees to consider how they may do this.
  - c. Re-establish or reinforce our presence with the legislature. Team with other organizations on issues of mutual interest to share and communicate our expertise to the lawmakers.
  - d. Identify the untapped venues and opportunities (all forms of in-person and written communication) for more engagement with the politicians/lawmakers to educate them on public works issues. We may want to assign this task to the legislative committee.
  - e. For the politicians to succeed in convincing the public of the effectiveness and value of public works, we need to support them with excellent information, excellent performance and expert speakers.
    - 1) Ask for volunteers and establish a pool of technical experts to speak on short-notice or with advance notice on issues of importance to lawmakers.
    - 2) Likewise engage the various technical committees in an on-call capacity to provide written technical information on issues of interest to lawmakers.

3. Raise public awareness of the chapter's role and the excellent character and expertise of its members.

- a. Provide feature article(s) in various publications
- b. Better communicate and promote support for National Public Works Week
  - 1) Establish a committee for the week (if not already assigned to an existing committee).
  - 2) Check with national for resources and support.
  - 3) Communicate project successes/awards to a broad public audience – use a variety of news media, e.g. radio, TV, print. Ask the chapter marketing/public affairs/promotion committee to undertake this. What can MRSC do within the scope of our contract to help?
- c. Promote “professional excellence” to restore trust. Provide a forum and help communicate responsible value oriented performance of the public works profession.
- d. Extend the perceived public “respect” of the organization into the public works agencies, consultants and vendor members of the chapter.
- e. Build on WSDOT's gray book approach to reporting its performance to the public. How can we replicate this approach at the county and city levels in an efficient cost-effective valuable manner. Do they want to do this? Would WSDOT allow agencies to use its templates? Send reports to the media on a regular basis to highlight success. Do benchmarks already exist for various size and types of public agencies?
- f. Raise the chapter banner in various untapped venues:
  - 1) Engage a PR firm
  - 2) Public events, e.g. fairs, chamber events,
  - 3) National public radio – local stations
  - 4) Public Television – land an interview or series of programs to highlight the upside of the public works activities. Use it as a forum to educate the public. Engineers and planners stand at the interface between technology and solving public facility challenges.
  - 5) Challenge each member to raise the banner in the respective communities
    - Team with high schools to promote relevant activities, e.g. Mathcounts.

- Team with Boy Scouts / Girl Scouts to promote voluntary participation in public works projects.
- Promote student chapters at colleges and universities.

6) Engage in a public benefit activity at each conference, in lieu or of in addition to the social events:

- Habitat for Humanity.
- Litter patrol.
- Adopt a school playground project.
- Park maintenance project.

4. Attract younger public works employees from the public and private sectors to join and participate in APWA.

- a. Find more ways to share expertise of our seasoned members with younger members.
- b. Engage younger members to accompany senior members to meet with lawmakers.

5. Provide relevant education to enhance the technical skills and character of public works employees.

- a. Provide relevant enhanced contemporary project design, management and construction operations training in formats and venues that are more readily available to a broader section of our membership. Communicate national level resources.
- b. Provide character training, not just ethical training, to promote the development of desirable traits in our members.
  - 1) Augment the PWATC with this aspect.
  - 2) Provide separate training that is open not only to public employees but also to employees of consultants and vendors.
- c. Better educate the public regarding what's really happening on a project site, e.g. the apparently idle worker standing next to a hole in the ground is really a lifeguard.