

THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VIEW

Donna L. Neff

Boys Town National Research Hospital
Omaha, Nebraska, 68124

From my point of view, the 13 technical committees (TCs) that comprise the ASA are *the* single most important part of the Society. To paraphrase a common quote, “if they ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.” Over the past 76 years, the ASA has grown into the premier scientific society for acoustics, and the vitality of our TCs will be the key factor in how our Society fares in the future. As President Bill Yost noted in the inaugural issue of this new magazine, the ASA is doing well. We have good reason to be proud of our meetings, journals, and many other activities. There is, however, plenty of room for new ideas, new approaches, new topics—for innovation and growth—without discarding tried and true approaches that have served us well. For a variety of reasons, many of us are active in other scientific societies in addition to the ASA. It is worth thinking about what we find at other places that is different than at ASA, and whether that signals the need for experimenting with new topics or formats at meetings or other new ventures. At the recent Minneapolis meeting of the Technical Council, I asked the Chairs of the TCs to list “cutting edge” topics in their field—and whether these were represented in their technical programs and in the ASA. In the press of our hectic schedules, this is not something most of us think about often, and it proved a difficult question to answer in many cases. How would you have responded? On a related note, how “healthy” do you think your technical committee is? Is your group of colleagues in the ASA expanding, holding steady, or shrinking? How often do you sample sessions at ASA meetings that are well outside your area—or interact with colleagues in other technical areas?

As you can tell by now, the central theme of this column is to campaign for more of our members to become actively involved in the activities of their technical committees, and to promote more “big picture” and innovative thinking about topics and formats for our meetings. In the upcoming meeting at Providence, the report of the Vision 2010 group will be ready, which continues a series of workshops held over the years that examine the ASA as a whole and suggest ideas for making good things even better. Nothing will happen, however, unless individuals—often at the evening open meetings of the TCs at ASA meetings—volunteer to organize a session, plan a



workshop, seek funding for an interesting new initiative related to their area, etc. For a number of years, funding requests submitted to Technical Council have been categorized as routine versus innovative. The routine requests, which take the lion’s share of the funds, are certainly very important. These are the requests to support core activities such as travel funds for invited speakers, webpage development, student paper awards and so forth. Truly innovative requests have been few and far between. Admittedly, deciding what is “innovative” is a bit subjective, but the debate does not come up as often as one would like. The classroom acoustics activities involving multiple ASA committees is a good example of activities falling in this category. To take a contentious issue in my area, Psychological and Physiological Acoustics, how might the long-standing desire for one ASA meeting per year be handled? Although we are not the only TC to think this might be a good idea, at a pragmatic level is it very difficult to implement. For starters, there is not even agreement across TCs on whether the fall or spring meeting would be the one targeted, and then there are such attractive fall venues like Hawaii and Cancun! It would be possible and convenient, however, for workshops in specialty areas to be held for several days at the time of the ASA meeting for P&P, taking full advantage of the hotel and other arrangements already in place in hosting the overall ASA meeting. The Vision 2010 group, President Yost, and I all agree that technical committees should be encouraged to think of the meeting format in both traditional and more flexible ways—whatever best serves the interests and needs of the members of that committee.

Our spring meeting in Providence looms close, and the Chairs and session organizers in your area have finalized the Hawaii program of joint special sessions with the Acoustical Society of Japan. Both meetings for 2006 promise to continue our tradition of excellence in science and national and international collegiality. In closing, my thanks to each of you who present talks and posters, organize sessions, publish in JASA, serve on committees, and work in so many other ways to keep ASA the great society that it is. I hope to see you at Providence—perhaps sampling a few papers well outside your usual technical area.