

ASAE/GWSAE Leaders Sifting Through E-mails

70 Percent Are "Totally Positive"

By Dan Caterinicchia

Hundreds of association executives and business partners have sent e-mails expressing their opinions about the proposed consolidation of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) and the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives (GWSAE), and the leaders of those associations are seeking even more input before a vote later this year.

As of last week, John Graham IV, ASAE's president and chief executive

officer, and Susan Sarfati, CAE, president and CEO of GWSAE, have received 438 e-mails and said 70 percent expressed "totally positive" feedback.

The e-mail breakdown is:

- Totally Positive — 304 people (70 percent);
- Positive with Questions — 73 people (17 percent);
- Neutral-to-Negative with Questions — 46 people (10 percent);
- Negative/Opposed — 15 people (3 percent).

Of the 15 e-mails opposed to the consolidation, nine were from GWSAE association professional members, who can ultimately vote on the measure. Of

the more than 300 totally positive responses, about 75 came from potential GWSAE voters, according to GWSAE spokesman Al Rickard.

About 75 percent of responses have been from association professionals, with the remainder from business partners. In terms of geography, about 65 percent are from the Washington, D.C., area, Sarfati said.

An association executive in Albuquerque, N.M., wrote: "WOW! A brave new world for associations! Congratulations to all who participated in this monumental undertaking. You give new meaning to risk-taking and creative thinking. But

, most importantly, the leaders of the four pillar organizations have boldly 'walked the talk.' I'm on board!"

A Washington, D.C. area association CEO expressed similar sentiments.

"What a superb initiative. While working out all the issues will not be easy, I am confident, in the end, that the collective memberships, our profession and organizations we all serve will be greatly enriched by what you are working to achieve. Excellent!"

While more than 400 e-mails received is a substantial number considering the proposed consolidation was announced last month, the respondents represent a small fraction of ASAE and GWSAE members. However, Graham is not concerned.

"Given the fact that we're asking for responses and we're getting them, I think the response amounts are fairly significant," Graham told *USAE*. "I'm not concerned about the number of responses [because] the way they're spread out is consistent with the conversations we've been having."

Business partners are also endorsing the proposed consolidation, which involves ASAE and its Foundation, GWSAE and the Center for Association Leadership. ASAE would become the sole 501(c) 6 entity and the Center for Association Lead-

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HOTS

HOTS would like to hear from association professional members of the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives (GWSAE) to find out their thoughts on the proposed consolidation with the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). This consolidation hinges on GWSAE members' support in a vote later this year and HOTS wants to know how you're planning to vote. So send an e-mail or give a call. Of course, HOTS won't include your name in future stories if you prefer to remain anonymous.

ASAE/GWSAE

Continued from page 1

ership would continue as a 501(c) 3 organization. If approved by its members, GWSAE as a separate organization will cease to exist. ASAE's Foundation and its education department would become part of the newly re-constituted Center.

"EXCELLENT move! I was previously a member of BOTH GWSAE and ASAE and allowed my ASAE membership to lapse because I would rather focus my energy on the 'local' association right now. This move is enough to get me to renew my ASAE membership," according to one business partner in the D.C. area.

An Orlando, Fla.-based partner agreed. "May I congratulate both of you on your bold move, courage, mutual trust, and vision to advance the profession. I know this could not have been easy."

Not all of the e-mails were completely complimentary. About 25 percent expressed some reservations about the proposed consolidation, but only 3 percent completely opposed it, including these:

- "This move only tells me that more of my dues dollars are going to support the D.C. association executives," wrote one association CEO in Indianapolis.

- "I am concerned that the efforts of the rather regionally directed GWSAE will be swallowed up by the national ASAE," wrote a D.C. area association CEO.

Still, Sarfati told *USAE* she is delighted with the input received so far and that the immediate goal is to continue gathering input from the entire association community "so we can develop the best structure for this proposed consolidation to meet the needs of all members and stakeholders."

"It is far from a 'done deal,' so everyone should feel free to offer their input," she wrote in a Feb. 17 e-mail. "We are carefully considering all comments and feedback and we very much appreciate the time people have taken to offer it and look forward to continued feedback."

In addition to the more than 430 e-mails, Sarfati and Graham have received hundreds of other comments at the Town Hall meetings, through phone calls, and in other

e-mails that have come in unsolicited as part of other messages.

"We also continue to hold GWSAE Advisory Council meetings and other programs at The Center for Association Leadership Marriott Learning Complex, and many people at these events have also commented," Sarfati said. "We are very confident that we have effectively reached the entire association marketplace, including business partners, with our messages and that everyone is getting ample opportunity to respond and voice any questions or concerns."

"This process of gathering input has only just begun – we have scheduled four Town Hall meetings for GWSAE members with the first one on February 25 at the National Association of Home Builders in Washington, D.C., from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m."

All the Town Hall meetings are free of charge and open to GWSAE members and Circle Club organizations. The other three meetings will be held:

- March 3 at the Hyatt Regency Bethesda, Md., 5:30-7:00 p.m.
- March 4 at the Hilton Alexandria, Va., Old Town, 5-6:30 p.m.
- March 9 at the Sheraton Premiere, Tysons Corner, Va., 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Graham said many of the negative comments are coming from people outside the Beltway who want to make sure that ASAE will provide more services to them. "The answer to that is a resounding 'Yes.'"

An association CEO in California wrote, "Consolidation is the way to go. I only hope that non-Washington associations, particularly those in the western United States, will get some expanded education offerings."

A business partner in Raleigh, N.C., had one basic query.

"The question probably many of the members of each organization are asking is: What will be the net benefit for membership dues taking into consideration the economies of scale?"

Under the new structure, Graham would continue in his role as president and CEO of ASAE, and Sarfati would continue in her role as president and CEO of The Center in addition to becoming executive vice president of

ASAE.

Winning the hearts and minds of the GWSAE regular membership may prove to be the most difficult and important step. Those members will have the final say on whether 76-year-old organization is dissolved prior to consolidating with ASAE.

During last month's Town Hall meeting, Jeffrey Tenenbaum, general counsel for GWSAE, said that according to Washington, D.C., law, 10 percent of the GWSAE membership must attend and cast a vote for the results to be legal and binding. Two-thirds of voters must approve the consolidation plan for it to go forward.

At a minimum, 175 of the 1,750 association executive members of GWSAE will have to be present for the vote (for which no date has been scheduled.) Per the bylaws of the association, no proxy voting is permitted.

"We look forward to a positive resolution and we're not anticipating a negative vote as we're doing our best to address concerns," Graham said.

Sarfati said the first step is to propose the final consolidation structure to the boards of the four organizations in May.

"If they all approve it, it would then go to GWSAE members for a vote," she said. "If GWSAE members decide to vote against the proposed consolidation we will not force it on them. It is ultimately their decision. There are many details about the structure of the proposed consolidation still to be worked out, and that's why we are so interested in gaining input through our continuous communications and the Town Hall meetings. We will use this input to develop a structure that will preserve the culture and quality of programs that GWSAE members want."

If the proposal is voted down, "first we'd have to assess why, then we'd have to regroup and determine the next step by the nature of the 'No' vote," Graham said, adding that he does not expect to have to go through that process.

"Based on the feedback we've gotten, I think the vast majority [support] this [proposed consolidation]. I'm very much anticipating a positive vote on this," Graham said.

The method and date for the member vote has not been determined.