

National

Affiliate Nationally by Joining ASPA

This is the first of what will be a series of short columns in DAPA's newsletter featuring news and other items of interest from the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). This time out, I'll just provide an overview, especially for those of you who are DAPA-only members, and a word about what's going on in ASPA at the moment, which I hope will interest ASPA members as well as DAPA-only members.



ASPA, founded in 1939, is the only U.S. professional association concerned with all sectors and subsectors of public-service organizations—all levels of government in our federal system, domestic nonprofit organizations, international NGOs, and international as well as intergovernmental and inter-sector linkages and comparisons—and all aspects of public policy and public service. It also stands out for its inclusion of academic and practitioner members on an equal footing, rather than treating one of those categories as full and the other as associate or affiliate members. This comprehensiveness is in concept a signal strength of the organization, particularly in an increasingly complex global social, economic, and institutional environment, but it is also a very significant marketing and membership challenge in the face of competition from more narrowly focused groups (such as APA, APPAM, ARVONA, GFOA, ICMA, and the like).

From a Delaware perspective, affiliation with the national organization is valuable, too, in part because it provides us a ready-made network to all of the people and ideas and experience that a longstanding national organization can offer. While my fellow DAPA officers do not all agree with me, this is one reason why I urge every DAPA member who takes the profession and her/his own professional development seriously to give equally serious consideration to joining ASPA if you are not already a member. The cost is greater than a DAPA-only membership, but it is still much less expensive than many narrower organizations such as those noted above. What's more, student and new-professional memberships are quite inexpensive (visit www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/Membership.cfm for more information or to join). And even the least expensive category of membership brings access to networking and other professional-development resources, the monthly *PA Times* and bimonthly *Public Administration Review*, and communicates to others your seriousness of purpose.

Now comes the disclosure. I'm not solely urging this for your own good (although I am confident that self-interest alone should be reason enough for a serious professional to join), but for the good of the organization, too. For a number of reasons, ASPA's membership has declined over the past two decades from about 20,000 members to about 8,500 members today. If this trend is not reversed, we are at risk of losing ASPA's general- and special-interest publications; the national, regional, and local events and conferences it sponsors; and the organization itself—the only national organization that, by design, brings together all of the diverse people and organizations concerned with public service and governance in the U.S.

—by Jonathan Justice