

2021 ASAE Virtual Annual Meeting
Remarks by
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Chair, ASAE
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Good morning and welcome to the 2021 ASAE Virtual Annual Meeting!

As you know, I began my year as Chair as COVID-19 cases were resurging. Many thought vaccines were years away. Our community was grappling with an economy in retreat... bans on live meetings and travel... restaurants, hotels and main street business were desperately clinging to survival, and a long overdue, nationwide reckoning on racial injustice.

For ASAE and the association community, it was certainly a low point, but we persevered.

We did what trade associations and professional societies do, we stepped up... and we spoke up... and that is what we have been doing ever since.

We said, “Let us rise up and come together. When times are tough; you can count on associations for ideas and education... ASAE for connection through virtual meetings... and for meaningful action and advocacy on behalf of our community.”

And so, from brilliant work done by the pharmaceutical industry to develop and manufacture vaccines, and successful testing at chain drug stores, to overcoming consumer-related supply chain disruptions, to advances in hygiene, to technology, and mental health, associations have risen to this once-in-a-lifetime challenge.

And I am proud of how ASAE, our professional society, rose in support of the association community. It was ASAE—with the help of thousands of you—that led the charge to extend Paycheck Protection Program loans to all 501c organizations... clarify the guidance on the lobbying cap... and extend the deadline so more associations had time to get through the application process.

Despite revenue challenges... the inability to hold meetings and trade shows... the abrupt shift to work-from-home... associations became a hub of connection, peer-to-peer learning, best practices, research, and simple (yet so important) camaraderie.

And ASAE stepped up as well. We experimented with virtual meetings... software demo days... and online chat... so that you could learn what works and what did not.

And right in the middle of this crazy year, ASAE completed and adopted its new Three-Year Strategic Plan.

Bottom line, the goal of the Strategic Plan is to engage a much broader and more diverse membership in our community.

It refocuses on Association CEOs and C-Suite executives, whose critical buy-in to ASAE opens opportunities for people throughout their organizations.

It also broadens access to members by making sure that ASAE's programs and services are omni-channel.

And third, it strengthens pathways for all association professionals to develop into leaders.

We would not have chosen to create a strategic plan in the middle of a pandemic. But we did under the excellent leadership of Patricia Blake. And that makes our plan even more relevant to the new future we face.

Finally, as a community we said, "Let's speak up."

Associations took a strong stand last year when the murder of George Floyd brought a new urgency to addressing racial injustice...

...when some states moved to restrict the voting rights of eligible constituents, or discriminate against those identifying as LGBTQ...

...and when politicians abandoned civil discourse during the election and a small, but vocal minority of Americans attempted an insurrection of the Capitol on January 6, we spoke out.

We built upon our strong history of including diverse members... treating all stakeholders equally... and welcoming those of all backgrounds. And we demonstrated how the association model of tolerance and respect is a way to get beyond partisan divisiveness and get things done.

I will soon be handing over the Chair of ASAE to someone who shares not only my first name, but also my deep commitment to this community.

I know Steve Anderson feels, as I do, that we have a rare and powerful opportunity. It is time to really tell our story: Associations represent the vast economic contributions of our members and have the power to impact society... and create a better life for every one of us. This story needs to be told—to policymakers, the media, and the American public.

We look forward to your committed and strategic leadership, Steve—you have been a wonderful partner.

I would also be remiss if I did not thank the rest of the Officers: Pat Blake, our Immediate Past Chair and Lakisha Woods, our Secretary-Treasurer—your sage counsel, and support is so appreciated... the dedicated Board of Directors... and the ASAE Staff.

I would also like to thank the Search Committee for doing a great job in selecting our new CEO—who we will introduce formally to you on Wednesday.

Finally, I am sure I speak for the entire community when I deliver heartfelt thanks to Susan Robertson who has capped a twenty-year career with ASAE by serving with distinction these past eighteen months as our first woman President & CEO.

Susan, you are leaving a legacy of accomplishment, compassion, and grace. You have demonstrated extraordinary leadership through the unfortunate passing of John Graham... the pandemic... the strategic plan... and the budget and organizational cutbacks of last year due to COVID.

You have been candid, honest, funny, empathetic, and decisive.

[roll video]

Susan, thank you from the entire community.

Friends and colleagues, thank you for the privilege of serving as your Chair.

And thank you for attending this Virtual Annual Meeting!