



The Role of a National Chemical Society in the 21st Century



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I am honored to provide the Opening Article for the Chemical Society of Japan's prestigious journal *Chemistry and Chemical Industry*. As the former Chairman of the Board of the American Chemical Society, I have for many years seriously considered the role of a national chemical society, relying on in-depth discussions with colleagues and the many stakeholders we serve, including but not limited to our 150,000 members. These deliberations have made it very clear that in today's world, there is but a single constant upon which we can rely. Ironically, that constant is change — a rapidly changing environment to which we must adapt and modernize our operations. The frequency of change is getting shorter while the amplitude is increasing, a formula for greater risk and uncertainty. In this environment, the role of a national chemical society must also undergo rapid change or become marginalized or worse, irrelevant. Although this may seem to be a slowly evolving crisis, make no mistake, it is a crisis. Fortunately, like all crises, opportunity abounds amid the threatening landscape.

Take, for example, globalization, a driving force that continues to exert its effects with ever increasing impact. To be sure, a national chemistry society will focus on the needs of its own members according to its long standing commitment to them. However, our members' needs now include the increasing importance of operating on the global stage. Member benefits must expand to meet these changing requirements and the most successful organizations will provide its members with the tools to succeed in the 21st century model of globalization. In addition, a national chemical society must also balance the traditional benefits offered to its members with the opportunities for the Society itself to expand its own global reach and impact. This can be accomplished through meaningful alliances with other national societies, creating an international chapters network, and providing a welcome home for members outside of the home country.

Indeed, there are many opportunities for national chemical societies to collaborate across national boundaries and cultures. We all face common challenges which exist in the "pre-competitive space", areas of mutual interest in which collaboration rather than competition is a preferred approach to solutions. Examples of these are maintaining or increasing active membership, fostering enhanced educa-

tion in the sciences and mathematics, increasing the knowledge and appreciation of chemistry in the general public, and advocating important science-based policies in government. [An example of competitive space is the publication of scientific journals and periodicals.] So, an enthusiastic spirit of collaboration among the national chemical societies seeking solutions to these common areas of interest should be a highlight of international cooperation in this new century.

In the world of constant change, our member benefits must also emphasize the varying needs that individuals experience at the different stages of a career in chemistry. In the early stages, presentation and interview skills are important as is moving from the individual chemistry practiced in college and graduate school to working in teams, whether in industry or academia. In later years, it's important to offer up-to-date training in leadership skills and working across scientific disciplines. The great challenges that the planet faces such as alternate energy, new life saving medicines, the food and water issues — all require chemistry as the central science, but success can only come as part of a global multi-disciplinary effort over the next several decades. Our societies will be the organizers of these grand activities, the scientific communicators through our publications, and the conveners of scientists through our conferences. In this digital age, we need to work differently and take advantage of the efficiencies and opportunities that global connectivity affords. The new age offers greater global reach and impact while the speed and exchange of scientific breakthroughs is spread rapidly *via* broadband communication technology.

Finally, a very important role of a national chemical society is to interact closely with government agencies to ensure that high quality science is employed in all policy decisions. A key part of this responsibility is to ensure that the general public understands the issues and the ability of chemistry and allied sciences to define the problems and provide the technical path to solutions. I personally look forward to the age of collaboration among the national chemistry societies as we work together to chart the course of our future in this ever-changing world.

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