State Affiliate News

State Affiliate Management Options

Different Management Models Work for Different ASCO State/Regional Affiliates

ASCO strives to involve practicing oncologists in the organization's advocacy initiatives at every level, and in 1993, developed the State/Regional Affiliate Program. This program helps oncologists respond to the practice issues arising from the constantly changing landscape of cancer care.

Today, ASCO collaborates with 47 affiliates that serve 49 states. Each affiliate has a voting representative on the ASCO Clinical Practice Committee, which gives affiliates a role in the development of public policy positions at the national level.

Management Models

State affiliates use a variety of management models. The model chosen depends on a host of factors, including its size, its budget, the kind of expertise it requires, the types of tasks it has, the amount of time that members have to volunteer, and whether it needs a physical location and an executive director. The affiliates' expectations help to define the model that will work. Models vary in complexity from one or two people on the physician's office staff to association management companies to state medical societies to individual executive directors with or without support staff. Each has its own strengths and challenges.

Part-Time Staff Support

The Society of Rhode Island Clinical Oncologists (RICO), which has a membership of approximately 25, is small enough to use a board of directors' structure to run the organization, according to RICO Board President Joseph DiBenedetto, MD. "We are in a unique position with such a small membership," he says, "So we've opted to run it ourselves."

Dr DiBenedetto says the board *did* consider use of a management company but felt that the fees were too high. The Board of Directors determines the direction for the Society and its activities related to programming, dues, member recruitment and retention, and finances. "We then decide matters by a quorum of the membership," says Dr DiBenedetto, noting that the membership is a mix of

hospital-based and community physicians that bring both business sense and academic thinking to the Society. The group receives administrative support from his office staff.

Association Management Companies

Other societies go the way of hiring association management companies (AMCs) that offer administrative and financial management, fundraising, leadership support, legislative advocacy, meeting planning, member communications, member recruitment and retention, membership dues collection, payor advocacy, program development, public relations, and Web site development.

Pat Troy, CAE

Pat Troy, CAE, manages the Maryland/DC Society of Clinical Oncology plus 10 other organizations through her management firm Next Wave Group LLC. Naturally enough, she asserts that management companies can do the best job for associations. "Obviously, I am biased," she says. "I think we are doing a good job for the group, and they are a stronger organization now than before we came on board. They have a

healthy treasury, a newsletter, an annual hot topics forum, a practice managers' meeting, and are now collaborating with ASCO to put on an awards dinner." In general, AMCs offer a better perspective on everyday challenges or the occasional crisis, according to Troy. "Because we work with a lot of different groups, we are better able to see the big picture, less likely to get caught up in organizational politics, and more likely to subscribe to a 'best practices' mindset."

The downside to being one society among many other clients is that management companies cannot give 100% of their energy every day to any one client. "Therefore, planning and timing, keeping to deadlines, and clear expectations are essential," Troy says. "AMCs must have systems in place to operate efficiently, which means that, while there can be customization, we must use the same tools and processes across all of our client organizations."

Peter Graze, MD, FACP, president of the 200-member Maryland/DC Society of Clinical Oncology, whose board selected Troy, says she was a special find. "Pat is very talented and charismatic; she's enthusiastic and dynamic. She is local,

Peter Graze, MD,
FACP

which meant a lot to me. I'm old fashioned enough to want to meet with people face to face." Accessibility was another high priority for Graze, and he also needed someone with initiative. Although administrative expertise was a given, financial management and fundraising were important to him, as was having someone who was familiar with nonprofits and medical issues.

Executive Director

Mary Jo Wichers, owner of MJ Executive Management Inc, is executive director of and manages three ASCO State

Mary Jo Wichers

Affiliates: Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Utah. The challenge is keeping up with it all. "I work lots of evenings and weekends," she says. The payoff is job satisfaction. "I have a passion for what I'm doing," she says. But she is also cross-training her staff of three and hiring a fourth staffer. Clients can hire her to handle all society functions or choose services *a la carte*.

Marci Cali, executive director of the Oncology State Society Network, manages and serves as executive director of 14 state oncology societies. Oncology State Society Network is part of the Association of Community Cancer Centers and offers the full range of association services. "A major benefit to the client is having a national presence," Cali says. She and her team manage mostly smaller state societies, and though there are some similarities among them, she says they are diverse. In addition, no matter how good the management company, Cali says it is vital to have leadership within the state, and persistent and dedicated people on the ground.

State Medical Society Management

Sally Blackstad, specialty society coordinator at the New Mexico Medical Society, serves as the administrator of nine

associations. She seems spread a bit thin, although the saving grace, as she tells it, is the fact that some of the societies contract for few services. The medical society provides a full range of services to associations, but none so far contract for all services. Blackstad does mailings and follow-up for one, a database for others, plans and staffs meetings for several others, and so on, in addition to her work for the New Mexico Medical Society.

Asking the Right Questions

ASCO provides free support services while various members and management companies keep things running on the back end. Affiliate members who are trying to decide which way to structure their societies must begin by asking themselves many questions (see inset), by tapping into colleagues' expertise, and by interviewing management companies to determine which model is the best fit. Those who do their homework will find that there are management resources out there to make every affiliate a success story.

Issues to Consider When Choosing a Management Model

- What are our expectations in terms of management? What tasks need to be done and how often?
- What are our goals?
- What is our budget for management?
- Do we need an office? Can a virtual society management company work?
- What kind of expertise do we need most?
- Is the use of technology important?
- Do we want an administrator or executive director?
- How much time will it take the executive director to get a good understanding of the organization?
- What is the company's track record of success?
- Request references.

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