



Why Volunteer?

General Membership Program Director **Jennifer Ragan-Fore** says volunteering offers many benefits beyond a desire to do good.

I recently returned from the annual meeting of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), where this year's two central themes were "connecting" and "volunteerism." This is an appropriate combination, as so much of what association professionals do involves supporting members in making meaningful connections, particularly through volunteer service. As I paged through ASAE's volunteer research study, *Decision to Volunteer*, I reflected on ISTE's volunteer program, my own volunteer service, and the value that volunteering provides, both individually and organizationally.

The foundation of any professional association is its volunteer base. After all, the genesis of most associations begins with a group of passionate volunteers committed to a particular idea or cause. Volunteer boards guide its strategic direction and mission; as the organization grows, staff is added, and the day-to-day execution of the mission is placed into the hands of full-time employees. Committees, ad hoc volunteers, presenters, authors, and mentors extend the mission and work alongside staff.

One of the interesting findings from ASAE's study is that few people volunteer purely for altruistic purposes (which is not to say that altruism isn't one factor). Volunteers seek many things—building professional skills; establishing connections with peers; the opportunity to engage in rewarding, creative, career-expanding work; or the chance to contribute something important to one's own field.

Not everyone will want or need the same things from a volunteer program, and we've considered these factors as we've designed ISTE's program. We've tried to strike a balance by creating opportunities for periodic, less-structured volunteerism through projects such as ISTE's social networks, NECC, or the NETS Refresh Project, as well as by offering opportunities for more formal, multiyear officer roles through special interest groups or board committees.

I recently started a term on one of ASAE's professional interest section councils, a program similar to ISTE's SIGs. I found myself experiencing firsthand what it feels like to be a new SIG officer—Would our work be interesting and meaningful? Would I fit in? Would my contributions be val-

ued? Would my organization be supportive of the time it takes to actively participate? These are core questions for any volunteer, and I'm finding it useful to understand this perspective as we expand our support of ISTE's volunteer program.

You may have noticed ISTE's "Call to Volunteer" bulletins over the past several months. These bulletins began with the simple acknowledgement that volunteer service is directly tied to a member's overall satisfaction—typically, the more a member volunteers, the more deeply satisfied he or she is with the association. This underscores another finding from ASAE's survey: Volunteer opportunities usually represent one of the most valued benefits of a professional membership.

As you consider how (or whether) to volunteer for ISTE, think about what would make it most meaningful for you, and how easily the opportunity will fit into your home/work life. Let us know how we can improve our offerings and support you in your career by completing the survey at www.iste.org/volunteer. We look forward to hearing from you!

If you're interested in learning more about ISTE's volunteer program, visit www.iste.org/volunteer or send e-mail to volunteer@iste.org. ■



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