



Special Data Request: Review of the Technicians Needs Analysis Survey

ACS Department of Member Research & Technology
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Background

The American Chemical Society (ACS) launched a Technicians Needs Analysis in the fall of 2008 to help determine how the ACS supports technicians and other applied chemists throughout the country.

Definitions and Limitations

This survey was initially sent to ACS member technicians. Respondents were invited to share the survey with other technicians as well. In total, 622 participated in the survey. The response rate could not be calculated because it is not known how many technicians were invited. Similarly, the findings cannot be generalized to a wider population; they are descriptive of those who agreed to participate. Large numbers of respondents did not answer certain questions. Some (but not all) of this was due to “skip” logic in the survey. Thus responses to some questions were quite small.

Findings

A majority of survey respondents were technicians (74%). A smaller percentage (17%) supervised the work of technicians. Roughly nine percent of survey respondents worked with technicians. Roughly half of the respondents have either a high school diploma, some undergraduate education, or an associate’s degree.

Respondents were most likely to network with other technicians within their company and with supervisors and managers within their company, rather than networking with technicians or other professionals outside of their company.

A little less than one-half of those responding (47%) belong to a professional association. Most of those were members of the American Chemical Society. Very few respondents were members of any one of the 13 other professional associations listed. A large percentage of respondents limit their participation to attending meetings. Very few respondents play a role as a committee member or organizer, among others.

When asked to indicate the biggest challenge facing their participation in other associations, responses were mixed (and respondents could select more than one). The three most prominent reasons were lack of time (30%), difficulty of traveling to meetings (25%), and expensive membership fees (20%).

When asked which benefits they valued, respondents seemed to agree that networking was the most important benefit, followed by continuing education. Benefits such as presenting/attending presentations, leadership opportunities, volunteer opportunities, career advice, professional certification, and access to publications all received high marks. No member benefit received particularly low marks.

Respondents generally make more use of newsletters than they do of peer-reviewed journals. They rarely attend social events or take advantage of other member benefits. Very few respondents have participated in award programs, most of whom cite time constraints.

A number of respondents claim that their employers do, in fact, help cover the costs associated with member fees, allow time to participate in events, activities, and meetings. Relatively high percentages of respondents state that their employer provides in-house and off-site training, and tuition reimbursement.

Discussion

Only about one-half of respondents were members of a professional association, and most of those were members of the ACS. This should not be too surprising because the survey was sent first to ACS members. This survey reflects a mere fraction of technicians in the workforce. The latest data from the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests that there are nearly 65,000 chemical technicians alone, i.e., not including process technicians, engineering technicians, etc.

It is ironic that “networking” and “continuing education” were the most highly valued benefits to belonging to an association, yet very few respondents actually participated in ACS networking and/or continuing education opportunities. Fairly robust percentages of technicians do not participate in many aspects of organizations at all. Part of this phenomenon might be explained by the low number of responses, part of it might be explained by a potential mismatch between technician needs and ACS offerings. Regardless, this finding may not necessarily be reason for alarm. In fact, most associations are composed of large numbers of “dues payers,” individuals who simply pay annual dues and do little else.

There does not appear to be a strong consensus as to the reasons why technicians are *not* members of professional organizations. They offer a range of explanations. Similarly, respondents expressed a range of conditions that might encourage their participation in a professional organization.