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## Now Is Time to Update PRSA Bylaws

Updating PRSA's [bylaws](#) in keeping with modern governance theories and current best practices in association management is one of the most important organizational initiatives that PRSA National is undertaking in 2009.

PRSA's bylaws were drafted by the Society's founders, under the authority of its Charter, to govern areas such as membership, dues, the election of directors and officers, accreditation, and the establishment and operation of Chapters, Districts, and Sections, among other things. Amending PRSA's bylaws requires a two-thirds vote of the delegates present and voting at the annual meeting of the Assembly.

There needs to be appropriate cause to amend the bylaws — and broad support for the changes being proposed — which may be reasons why PRSA's bylaws have not been thoroughly revised since they were first ratified more than 60 years ago. They have been amended slightly from time to time, however, in response to evolving Society needs.

Today, PRSA is at a point in its history when broad and meaningful bylaws changes will help the Society continue to grow, prosper, and serve as a leading voice in the public relations industry. If we're to build a framework for PRSA to move confidently into the 21st century, we cannot do it on an early 20th century foundation.

For this reason, PRSA established a [Bylaws Task Force](#) in 2007, to determine exactly what changes were needed and for what purpose, and how to accomplish those changes in a way that was data-driven, logical, informed, transparent and likely to produce the desired outcomes.

The task force researched current trends in association governance and engaged [Tecker Consultants](#), experts in association governance, to further understand best practices. A number of governance shifts with direct relevance to PRSA were identified, among them:

- Bylaws can accommodate change as an organization and profession mature.
- Associations that represent mature professions are inclusive, engaging the broadest possible community.
- Barriers to full participation, including holding the organization's credentials, are usually abandoned.
- Boards are defining and delegating, rather than reacting and ratifying.
- Popular votes are supplanting the use of stakeholder groups to “represent” members.

The task force next engaged the Board and Chapter, District, and Section leaders, as well as members and Assembly Delegates, in exercises to articulate their vision of the “ideal” PRSA. Attributes for an “ideal” Society that emerged from these exercises were diverse and far-reaching, and included qualities such as “inclusive,” “open,” “member-driven,” “more democratic,” “strategic,” and “trendsetting.”

While PRSA's successes already show progress against many of these ideals, the task force felt that governance changes in three main areas of the bylaws—membership, governance, and leadership—could further strengthen the Society for the future. Subject to input from our members, we plan to incorporate changes in these areas into a new bylaws document to be voted on by the Assembly at PRSA's [International Conference](#) in San Diego in November 2009.

To help our members understand why the changes are necessary, the specific changes being contemplated and the expected outcomes that the changes will produce, we've established a variety of resources. For starters, a [leadership briefing](#) has been prepared and posted online. A Governance e-Group also will be available the week of Feb. 23, in the [MemberNet](#) section of the [PRSA Web site](#), where a list of frequently asked questions and various background materials and presentations also can be accessed. In addition, a series of calls between the PRSA Board of Directors and Chapter, District, and Section leaders and Assembly Delegates will be scheduled.

Finally, member questions may be sent at any time to [governance@prsa.org](mailto:governance@prsa.org).

Meaningful change is never easy. Still, revisions to the current set of PRSA bylaws will result in a more modern, flexible and efficient system of governance for PRSA, and we are eager to engage the PRSA community in developing a shared vision for moving forward.

*William Murray is president and COO of PRSA*

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