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ACC 2009 Board of
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Moving Forward by Looking Backward

The teams that form today in pursuit of airport development projects look much different than the teams of the 1970s, when ACC first emerged as an organization.

In the '70s, the majority of consulting firms were hired by airports as individual entities. Many of the firms were multi-disciplined and viewed as capable of "doing it all."

By the late '80s and early '90s, however, more airports began to hire "teams" of consultants. The reasons for this evolution were varied: to satisfy DBE and other minority requirements; to meet local participation requirements; and to ensure there were adequate specialty skills (environmental, security, IT, etc.) on the team.

Today's increasingly complex projects are more and more frequently requiring "airport development teams" that are comprised of planning and design firms, specialty system consultants, retail consultants, contractors, financial planning firms, law firms and in some cases even equity firms.

Also, during the past 20 years, project locations have diversified to a remarkable extent, a trend that has significantly impacted consulting firms' operations and structure. Think back to the 1970s when many more consulting firms were regionally based. Few were serving airport clients coast to coast, and even fewer worked globally. Now consider today. Small, medium and large consulting firms routinely lead airport development projects across the United States and around the world. The global players include obvious names like Parsons, AECOM and Bechtel,

but also firms such as R.W. Armstrong, Landrum & Brown and the Montgomery Group.

Throughout its history, ACC has effectively responded to change. Instead of being comprised of only multidiscipline firms, specialty and small firms were welcomed into the organization. Then during the early 1990s the Associate category of membership was created to enable equipment service providers to join to enable their valuable products-related knowledge to be shared with the consultant community. Some law firms and firms specializing in finance have also more recently joined.

The evolution of our industry was a major topic of discussion at the ACC Strategic Planning Retreat in January 2009 (which I wrote about in my last article). Participants clearly understood that we, as an association, recognize that for ACC to remain the expert voice of airport development, we may need to further diversify our membership. We also need to do more to help our members understand how to do business globally.

With this apparent evolution, what will ACC need to look like in the future? How can our organization continue to serve as the expert voice on airport development?

The core of the organization will likely continue to be consulting firms. However, an increasing number of firms that offer specialty products and services, as well as contractors, law firms, equity firms and airport operators with consulting arms, will also likely join. While this new organization will surely have those most familiar with airports at its core, will it still be called ACC or will the name need to better reflect the airport development role that our membership plays?

The needs of our members and of the global aviation marketplace will ultimately dictate the future direction of ACC. Our past track record has proved we are up to that challenge as long as we all share our perspectives and insights! *(Feedback is encouraged. Contact Evan at Futterconsult@aol.com).*

