



President's Column

Alan E. Willner

“We Have a High-Class Problem. Please Help!”

“The only real security that a person can have in this world is a reserve of knowledge, experience, and ability. Without these qualities, money is practically useless.” Henry Ford, Industrialist.

Which is worse: not having money, or having money but not spending it? Neither is good. LEOS and central IEEE are in a strange position. We have the potential to spend money, but there must be worthwhile ideas in which to invest.

Of course, LEOS has the responsibility to build financial reserves so that we can survive in poor economic times. However, when the reserves grow extremely large, we are abrogating our fiduciary responsibility to spend the money for the benefit of our stakeholders. We are a not-for-profit enterprise that exists for the sole purpose of providing value to our community.

FINANCIAL FACTS

“If one has money, it is irrational to hoard it.” Jean-Baptiste Say, Economist.

How did LEOS find itself in this great situation. Due to careful management and growth of our industry, we are in strong economic shape. Moreover, there are presently three important financial facts that greatly impact us:

1. The IEEE permits us to annually spend up to 3% of our reserves on new society initiatives. Given that we have roughly \$9M in reserves, this means we have roughly \$275k on “new” activities that are deemed worthwhile by us and by the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB). LEOS needs a constant flow of high-impact ideas in order to effectively spend this yearly 3% fund. Note that the IEEE places some restrictions on how we spend this money, such as restricting any endowment of awards.
2. The parent IEEE entertains large proposals for new activities that could bring benefit to multiple societies or that are aligned with the IEEE strategic goals. At present, the IEEE is in a situation in which there is more money than good ideas. Proposers do not need to think “small,” and bold could be good. The IEEE link explaining the policy on proposals can be downloaded at <http://www.ieee.org/web/aboutus/whatis/policies/p5-3.html>.
3. There is a new IEEE TAB policy that enables any end-of-year financial surplus to be credited 50% to reserves and 50% to next year’s budget. This surplus is determined fairly late in the budget planning process, such that any extra money has a shorter fuse in terms of finding good ideas to fund.

I want to make one thing perfectly clear. The money is there to do wonderful things for our community. If no compelling ideas that are consistent with our strategic goals are put forward, however, the LEOS Board of Governors (BoG) will probably not authorize money haphazardly.

HAVE VISION AND PASSION

“Both people and organizations need to establish a strategic framework for significant success. Identifying your vision, mission statement, values, strategies, goals and action plans will fuel your future accomplishments.” Susan M. Heathfield, Strategist.

LEOS now has a “high-class” problem – we must intelligently invest/spend our money on the most worthwhile ideas. Scott Hinton, LEOS Past President, and all our V.P.s have been engaged in a strategic planning process for the past several months, with the goal of completing the project by the LEOS Annual Meeting in October. The progress so far has been excellent and

illuminating, and the hope is that strategic goals will naturally lead to tactical motions by the various V.P.s for the BoG to consider. (Scott, Thanks!)

One of the key features that is being implemented by BoG at the insightful suggestion of Steve Newton and Fil Bartoli, our V.P. Finance and Treasurer, respectively, is to have some formal-but-easy process to enable financial proposals to be voted upon in a coherent fashion that follows a strategy. Our classical "Newtonian" process will ask that successful proposals should include the following elements:

- Brief overview of proposed action
- Statement of the LEOS strategic priorities that are being promoted
- Specification of the financial impact and implementation schedule
- Proposed tracking plan for evaluating success
- Name of initiative champion

To repeat, an initiative champion must be included. Without someone with vision and passion for a project, it will be doomed to failure. Moreover, this process is certainly NOT meant to be onerous and discourage proposals, rather to enable BoG to function efficiently and process MORE proposals.

PLEASE HELP

"Help [us to] help you." Paraphrased from Jerry Maguire, in 1996 movie Jerry Maguire.

Although the process of accepting proposals is on-going, the present time is particularly ripe in which we can invest in new programs. As in all organizations, this scenario may change in the future, and all LEOS members should view this as a great opportunity that we shouldn't miss. Some suggestions include:

- a) Proposals do not need to be perfect or all-encompassing. If more information is needed, the Finance Committee can request more detail.
- b) Vision and passion doesn't mean that the champion is required to do everything. LEOS staff, volunteers, and other resources will be brought to bear on the project.
- c) Even though the Strategic Plan is not complete, please submit ideas and we can work together to identify the appropriate over-arching goals.
- d) If your proposal is not funded but "shelved," this is not a fatal set-back. We need "fundable" ideas should money become available at any future point.

Please consider this opportunity and submit your ideas to LEOS-IDEAS@ieee.org. We will route the suggestion to the appropriate V.P. and help realize the most worthwhile ideas. This is your society, your money, and your future. Please help LEOS in wisely achieving our goals!

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