



a m c e s

Association Management, Consulting & Evaluation Services

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*Helping associations exceed member expectations.*

## Taking AME

CSAE was one of several association pioneers in what is now being referred to as e-learning. The Association Management Education Program (AME) has been delivered on-line for four years now. Content and technological applications are formally reviewed twice annually. A complete site reconstruction will be completed by January to make it even more user-friendly, and will incorporate a chat line for participants who want to increase their learning experience through networking.

According to Wendy Sue Lyttle, CSP, CSAE's Professional Development Manager, continuous adult education is no longer viewed as an employee perk but as a necessity. "Associations now look to the AME program as a means of mentoring their management staff," says Lyttle. "It is becoming widely recognized that the AME program pays huge dividends to associations who encourage their staff to participate."

With more than a little enthusiasm, Lyttle points out that registration in the AME program increased 62% in 2001. As well, attrition rates are down to 15% from 59% the year before. Lyttle attributes much of this success to the fact that on-line distant learning is becoming more acceptable—people seem to be overcoming their initial fear of trying something new. Participants also appreciate the ability to schedule their own time to study and interact with other students—flexibility, it seems, is an important consideration for busy association employees.

Barbette Cejalvo, CAE, British Columbia Electrical Association, was among a group of 16 who were recently awarded their Certified Association Executive designation after completion of the AME program. "After seven years with my association I felt it was time to expand my knowledge on association management," says Cejalvo. "It can be difficult to return to school while working full time, especially if you have a family—the AME program is ideal because it allows you to work on your own time, as well as interact with other students."

"The AME program was actually one of the main reasons I joined CSAE," notes recent graduate Loretta Ryan, CAE, Ontario Professional Planners Institute. "I strongly believe in the importance of continuing education, as it exposes me to new ideas and concepts, both at work and in my personal life. I think that when you stop learning, you stop growing."

Those who have participated are an enthusiastic group of ambassadors for the AME program. They all indicate their intent to encourage others to participate in the program. And, they all say the knowledge and competencies gained as a result of their participation has increased their confidence and skill levels.

Jim Pealow, MBA, CMA, CAE, the lead AME instructor/facilitator, marvels at how student confidence and skill levels improve with each course they take. This is likely because participants are armed with new competencies and a clearer direction as to where they want to take their career.

Many of those who complete the five AME courses ultimately pursue and obtain their Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation—both Pealow and Lyttle have noticed a trend where participants move on to new career opportunities within their own association or with a new association within one or two years of completing the program.

But for Pealow, the benefit to associations who have staff members participate in the AME program is where the rewards lie. "Many student assignments end up on the agenda for their management team or Board of Directors," says Pealow. "This practical application of the learning process is the element I enjoy the most, as I believe it is making a real difference for associations in Canada, not just those staff members who participate."

If you haven't yet jumped on the AME bandwagon, perhaps these final words from recent graduate Denise Lauzière, CAE, Canadian Education Association, will motivate you. "Do it! It is intense. You need to be disciplined because you don't have an assigned time or place to go to study. The beauty of the AME program is that it can be accessed on-line even if you're traveling. It is an amazing professional development experience. Obtaining the CAE designation is the icing on the cake!"

*Sandi L. Humphrey; CAE.*