# Society of Women Engineers
# Public Affairs
# Policy and Procedures

## 1. Policy

### 1.1. Preface

It is important that engineers have input on the public debates that affect this country. Women engineers are incredible assets to national and local government officials, and we should maximize the impact of our input. Members of Congress, state legislators and representatives of executive branch departments and agencies are increasingly seeking out the technical opinions of engineers on a wide variety of issues. Engineers are viewed as leaders in their communities and are a valuable asset to any and all government leaders. The collective membership of SWE can and should have an influence on public affairs to further our mission.

### 1.2. Purpose

This policy addresses how the Society will interact with the mass media, the general public, government bodies and other interested audiences. It is designed to facilitate SWE involvement in public affairs by clearly identifying the appropriate procedures.

### 1.3. Policy

It is Society policy to encourage all units of SWE to participate in its United States-based government relations activities. SWE units include the Board of Directors (BOD), Council of Representatives (COR), national committees and task forces, region operations, and section operations. All SWE government relations activities should be coordinated through the Government Relations and Public Policy (GRPP) Committee of SWE.

It is Society policy to cooperate fully with government bodies and, in specific instances, present SWE's unsolicited views to legislators on pending or existing legislation provided that such activity does not become a substantial part of the Society's overall activities. It is Society policy to encourage the presentation of technical analyses, studies, or research for educational purposes to the media, the public, and government bodies. These presentations may include advice or conclusions when appropriate. This policy applies to all communications, including written, oral, and electronic.

It is Society policy that SWE does not engage in lobbying or other interaction on issues with governments outside the United States. This policy shall not preclude the development of position statements on global issues being addressed by multinational or international organizations.

SWE is incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia. It is Society policy that it shall be registered under applicable federal and state lobbying laws. It is Society policy that a system for identifying and recording lobbying activities and expenses be implemented and maintained

for or by the SWE Executive Director, so as to ensure that such activities do not jeopardize the Society's tax status.

### 1.4. Absolute Prohibition

In accordance with current U.S. federal tax law, it is forbidden that the Society, its BOD, COR, national committees and task forces, region operations, and section operations or any other unit directly or indirectly participate or intervene in any political campaign on behalf of a political candidate for public office. Any partisan political activity by any member must be done as a private individual and must not involve SWE directly or indirectly.

## 2. Procedures

Members of the Society are encouraged to participate as individuals in public affairs activities and this policy is not intended to limit this participation. But members as individuals must distinguish their personal views on public issues from those that have received the full and explicit support of the Society.

### 2.1. Authority to Express Views

If expressly authorized, a member may represent the Society, presenting or explaining approved SWE statements or positions. Without this authorization, any statement by a member must be identified as providing a personal viewpoint. Authorization is given by the President or the Executive Director.

All proposed statements or general position papers should be plainly marked "DRAFT – NOT FOR PUBLICATION," until the final version is approved.

As used in this Policy, the term "public issues" includes, but is not limited to, pending or existing legislation. All statements made on behalf of the Society must be consistent with the terms and limitations of this Policy. Any written statement presented to government bodies, public press, or other organizations must be on SWE letterhead.

The President, director responsible for public affairs, the Executive Director, and the Speaker of the COR should be kept apprised on a timely basis of all statements made on behalf of the Society. A copy of all written statements and a transcript of oral statements must be sent to the Executive Director who will ensure that proper procedures have been followed, and will maintain a permanent file of all SWE statements.

### 2.2. Categories of Public Statements on Issues

Under the authority described above, SWE has established two categories of public statements:

- A General Position Paper that provides an objective and balanced study of an issue of broad interest, and which states the position of SWE on that issue.
- A Public Policy Statement that is consistent with and communicates a SWE general position statement on a particular issue. .

### 2.2.1. A SWE General Position Paper

A position paper is intended to provide a balanced and objective review of an issue of broad interest. The position taken carries the full weight of the Society's influence. Any unit within SWE can identify issues of interest to SWE membership and recommend positions on those issues. The GRPP, with input from the BOD, COR and other Society groups and members, will select the issues of interest for SWE general position statements, to maximize the impact of SWE public affairs activities. The GRPP will compose each position paper, gathering input from diverse entities within and outside of SWE as appropriate, and present the position papers to the COR for review, discussion and approval. The position paper will then be submitted to the BOD for approval.

**Authorization & Approval**

- Must be approved by the GRPP.
- Must be approved by the COR.
- Must be presented as a motion to the BOD.
- Requires a two-thirds vote of the BOD for approval.
- The approved copy must be posted on the Public Affairs section of the SWE website within two weeks of approval. The final version must be maintained by the GRPP.

### 2.2.2. A SWE Public Policy Statement

A SWE Public Policy Statement communicates a SWE BOD-approved general position statement on a particular issue, and must be consistent with said position statement. SWE Public Policy Statements include statements presented to the media on issues of interest to SWE, correspondence to legislators, and endorsement of positions by other organizations.

**Authorization & Approval**

- Must be approved by the President or the Executive Director.
- Written statements made on behalf of SWE must be submitted to the Executive Director and posted on the Public Policy section of the SWE website within two weeks of submission.

## 2.3. Legal Constraints on Activities

### 2.3.1. Background

The Public Affairs Policy is intended to facilitate the Society's ability to address public issues to the extent permitted by its corporate purposes and powers, its tax-exempt status and laws regulating lobbying.

### 2.3.2. Limitations as a Tax-Exempt Organization

The Internal Revenue Service has ruled that the Society is exempt from federal income taxation and that contributions to the Society are deductible for federal income, gift, and estate tax purposes, because the Society is an "educational" organization. The status of the Society for federal income tax purposes has considerable bearing upon the determination of its status for purposes of numerous other state and local income, franchise, and excise taxes.

Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 provides that an organization which is exempt as an educational organization "will not, as a substantial part of its activities, attempt to

influence legislation … or participate to any extent in a political campaign for or against any candidate for public office."

### 2.3.3. Reporting Government Contacts

It is important the Society maintain careful records of funds expended that could be construed to be in support of lobbying activity. Accurate records will allow SWE to comply with the lobbying law as well as to maintain its tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code. All contacts by SWE members, officers and staff with federal, state, and local government officials for the purpose of affecting pending or existing legislation are to be reported to the Executive Director. A report need only be made when representing or speaking on behalf of SWE and when SWE is paying part or all of the costs involved. Personal contacts, representation or opinions of Society members, officers or staff when offered to federal officials need not be reported as long as they are identified as personal opinions, and as long as no SWE funds are involved.