

Senate Structure

Who is on the Senate?

The Senate is made up of various roles most simply defined as voting and non-voting members.

Voting members include:

- Senators: 21 Senators each serving staggered three-year terms. Senators are elected to make strategic recommendations and decisions and vote on matters in the best interest of the Society.
- The Society bylaws also allow up to three Special Senators who may be nominated by the Speaker of the Senate and elected by the Senate to serve within a single fiscal year to provide specific subject matter expertise as needed.

Non-Voting Members include:

- Senate Leadership: Speaker of the Senate (2-year term), Deputy Speaker of the Senate (1-year term), and Secretary (1-year term)
- Board of Directors: All BOD members are contributing, non-voting members of the Senate and participate in the full Senate meetings. BOD members participate on the standing Annual Strategic Planning Sub-team each year with additional BOD members assigned as collaborators on the Senate sub-teams formed each year.

Senate Impact

How has the Senate influenced / impacted SWE in the past 5-10 years? And how has the Senate evolved over that same time period?

Whether it be developing, or monitoring, the Society's multi-year strategic plan, the Senate maintains a long-term strategic view of how the Society may best advance its mission and vision. Each year, the Senate makes recommendations based on the research, discussion, and discernment of various micro- and macro-trends and initiatives impacting the direction of the Society.

The BOD carefully considers the Senate's recommendations for the Society and determines what, how, when, and where actions may or may not be taken inspired by those recommendations. Those recommendations may impact the immediate following year's operational plan, other near-term SWE initiatives, or initiatives formed at a later date.

While specifics are often held in confidence, past strategic initiatives have focused on:

- Collegiate Engagement
- Committee Strategic Planning
- Diversity & Inclusion: Gender Inclusion
- Education & Learning
- Leadership Pipeline
- Changing Work & Workforce
- Racial Inclusivity for Society Equity
- Bylaws Streamlining
- SWE Leadership Experience
- Sustainability & Innovation

This is in addition to the development of SWE's strategic plan as posted at [About SWE - Society of Women Engineers](#) under SWE Strategic Goals. The current FY23-FY27 plan, developed by the FY22 Senate Annual Strategic Planning Sub-team, sets the strategic direction and focus on which the rest of the Society aligns. In this sense, the Senate guides a focus and impacts the work done throughout the leadership and membership in service of the Society to accelerate and support the manifestation of SWE's mission and vision.

Perhaps most notable to the broader membership that can be freely discussed, the Senate voted on numerous bylaws amendments, on the new SWE logo and branding campaigns in FY15, and on the dissolution of the U.S. geographical regions and establishment of the five standing committees – audit, bylaws, ethics, finance and nominating, to conduct the business of the Society. This change also prompted the shift from regionally-elected Senators to being elected by the entire membership. And most recently at the end of FY23, the Senate voted to move bylaws amendment authority to the BOD thereby sharpening the focus as the strategic planning body of the Society.

How long has the Senate operated?

[<Link to slides>](#)

Responsibilities

What is the time commitment?

The expected time commitment for Senate members and leaders aligns with the level of responsibility and may vary over the course of the fiscal year depending on sub-team activity scope and duration. With three-year terms, the role of Senator is one of the longest serving elected positions in SWE. This allows for a longer-term purview for the Society's strategic work. Each year, the Senators will join at least one strategic initiative sub-team with the option to also work on small tiger teams for shorter initiative projects.

A Senate member will spend approximately:

- ~4 hours at the start of the fiscal year on training and onboarding
- 1-2 hours per month attending full Senate meetings live and/or watching recordings. Additionally, up to three in-person or hybrid meetings are scheduled for 4-8 hours each in conjunction with other SWE events.
- 1-2 hours per month attending sub-team meetings (sub-team work typically occurs between Sept-April each year)
- 1 hour per week independently reviewing materials, performing tasks, and participating in online Teamwork forum discussions support of full Senate or sub-team work.

Sub-team leads will spend an incremental 1-2 additional hours per week on meeting planning and interactions with other SWE leaders.

The Senate Leadership will also have both additional weekly meetings and workload. This is significantly greater for the Speaker of the Senate who additionally serves as a member of the Board of Directors.

Alternative Table View:

Senate Member Time Commitment

Activity	Time Commitment	Frequency
Training / Onboarding	4 hours	Start of FY
Full Senate Meetings (attend live or watch recordings)	1 hour	Monthly
Sub-Team Meetings (work typically occurs between Sept-April each FY)	1-4 hours	Monthly
Independent material reviews, tasks, Teamwork forum discussions, etc.	1-2 hours	Weekly

Additional Time Commitment for the Speaker of the Senate,
the Deputy Speaker of the Senate, Senate Secretary, and Sub-Team Leads*

Activity	Time Commitment	Frequency
Meetings, Meeting Preparation, Communications	1-3 hours	Weekly
Interactions with other SWE Leaders	1 hour	Weekly

* *The Speaker of the Senate has significant additional responsibilities and time commitments as a member of the BOD.*

What does a typical Senate meeting look like?

Senate meetings are opportunities to learn, contribute, collaborate, deliberate, build consensus, around topics ranging from short-term projects to long-term visioning of the future of the Society. Agendas are set and communicated in advance by Senate leadership with input from sub-team leaders.

Often, we get progress reports from sub-teams leads so that input can be gathered from the wider Senate beyond just the sub-team members. Sometimes guests may join meetings to present research or survey findings. Meetings times vary to accommodate different timezones around the globe and while live participation is always preferred, recordings are always provided for those who are unable to attend live. Everyone is expected to watch the recordings and provide their input on the meeting topics in Teamwork.

Is employer support a requirement?

Most Senate meetings are held virtually using teleconferencing tools. Up to three meetings (usually the half- or full-day meetings) are held in-person where travel will be necessary and are usually announced well in advance. For these in-person meetings, hybrid options are also available to accommodate those who are unable to travel.

Asking your employer or university for financial support of SWE travel is a great option! Many companies and universities that value the professional development benefits SWE provides will be willing to offer financial support. However if your employer or university does not provide travel support, or you do not have an employer, financial reimbursement is available to Senators

as described in the [Volunteer Travel Policy](#). Senate Leadership will communicate requirements for requesting travel support ahead of each scheduled hybrid meeting.

Professional Development

What skills can I expect to develop on the Senate?

The Senate serves as the strategic planning body of the Society whose primary responsibility is to be scanning trends and market changes to inform and develop the strategic plan. As such, Senators will rely on and further develop and hone skills in qualitative analysis, strategic planning and research, strategic thinking, oral and/or written communications, mentoring, DEIB practice, and business practices.

Senators can continue building their skills within the SWE Leadership Competency Model (LCM).

What do Senators typically do within SWE after their 3-year term is over?

Senators can continue to serve in leadership or participate at any level of the Society. Past Senators go on to leadership and committee involvement at the section /affiliate / member-at-large levels, serve as Global Ambassadors, join and/or move into leadership within a Society Committee and/or Affinity Group, move into Senate Leadership or join the Board of Directors. They consistently participate in any plethora of short-term and long-term opportunities within the Society.

Can I take on additional responsibilities while also being on the Senate?

Given the time commitments Senators need for meetings, collaboration, and communication within the Senate during their term, taking on additional significant SWE responsibilities is not recommended. Furthermore, as having been voted into the Senate by the membership as a senior leader of the Society, Senate work takes priority over other SWE obligations.

Senators are encouraged to participate in other SWE activities but are strongly discouraged from being taking on additional SWE leadership roles.

Eligibility

How do I become part of the Senate?

Members of the Senate are nominated, vetted, slated, and elected by SWE membership through the annual election process managed by the SWE Nominating Committee. If you are interested in joining the Senate, you need to nominate yourself when the call for Society Leadership interest is announced in the fall. Visit the [SWE Nominating Committee website](#) for information about this process and up-to-date information on how to prepare your nomination application.

SWE's bylaws also allow for up to three Special Senators to be nominated by the Speaker of the Senate and elected by the Senate to serve for 1 fiscal year.

How much SWE experience do I need before I can apply for the Senate?

SWE bylaws require Senators and Senate Leadership to be voting members of SWE that

demonstrate competency in skills as determined by the Nominating Committee. The current list of skills can be found below or on the [SWE Nominating Committee website](#). The Nominating Committee often consults with Senate leaders prior to each call for interest to discover what special skills might be needed for an upcoming fiscal year based on planned Senate work.

Since these are skills-based criteria, there is no minimum amount of SWE membership longevity or leadership position tenure that is required to become a Senator. We seek out and cultivate diverse perspectives from every corner of SWE and beyond so you can consider your skillset developed both within and outside of SWE. If you are new to SWE, it would be beneficial to at least visit the [SWE Advanced Learning Center](#) and view the SWE-specific modules to learn more about the organization and leadership structure.

What skills are needed to join the Senate?

Per the Leadership Competency Model (LCM), the most important competencies for Senators include: Communication, Self-Management & Development, Business Acumen and Diversity & Inclusion.

In the role of Senator, volunteers gain insights into the Society's operations, member feedback, and have the opportunity to grow lasting connections with members from a variety of backgrounds and around the globe. Additionally, Senators have access to discounted registration for the Annual Conference and, if needed, financial assistance for travel to any scheduled hybrid meetings.

As an entity primarily focused on strategy, the Senate is tasked with providing forward-looking direction for the Society and is expected to defer operational and tactical activity to other bodies in SWE such as HQ staff, the Board of Directors and/or SWE Committees. As a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, Senators are expected to adhere to the Society's Code of Conduct, Code of Service, Policy Against Harassment and Disclose and avoid any conflicts of interest.