I spent five years in the mid-2000s reviewing air quality modeling studies for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the science of modeling continues to interest me. I'm excited to read our October issue of EM and look forward to additional A&WMA programming that will advance member knowledge on air dispersion modeling. Although I believe that small-scale sensors and other monitoring technology will be a “game changer” for our environmental field, air quality models are still a part of the technical backbone of our work, from State Implementation Plans to project-specific ambient impact analyses. Please enjoy this issue of EM and let us know if there are other modeling topics that are important for your organization’s success.

Over the past two months, I used this space to lay out ideas for Association work on mentoring and content delivery though modern media. This month, focuses on new learning platforms and their potential application for A&WMA and our members. My hope is that our Association can improve in these areas over the next several years and that improvement will lead to direct member benefits and a more robust A&WMA.

Both our environmental science field and our global economy continue to evolve, often in unpredictable ways. Change is continuous and ongoing learning and professional development has never been more important for individuals. In any profession, people must continue to learn and adapt to new ideas and ways of working. A&WMA has long been a source for member professional development. We will need to adapt too, if we want to be relevant in our marketplace.

In school, my kids use online learning programs to supplement their classroom work. Examples include IXL (https://www.ixl.com/) and Khan Academy (https://www.khanacademy.org/).

They lay out topical lessons in a number of areas and can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection. Similarly, websites like Coursera (https://www.coursera.org/) offer advanced learning courses with opportunities to earn certificates and credentials.

Travel budgets are shrinking for nearly everyone and it takes months for some of our state agency colleagues to get approval to travel out of the state. A&WMA already provides high-quality webinar content to meet member needs. I think we could expand our offerings to include on-demand learning on environmental science topics. We may not be able to compete with Silicon Valley startups but, with our core areas of expertise, we could provide real value to our members.

I’ll use air dispersion modeling as an example. Some of our members from the consulting world offer high-quality in-person training courses on modeling. Many of these same members support A&WMA by collaborating on webinar content that also enables other members to learn. We could supplement these efforts with online content on air dispersion modeling, available to A&WMA members. Any initial efforts would likely synthesize available Association content and not provide new lessons: past webinars, published articles from EM and JA&WMA, and conference and workshop proceedings. If organized by topic, a member could improve their knowledge in an organized way and the Association could either develop new programming to fill gaps or partner with other organizations that provide training in a specific area. Members could use A&WMA as a hub for learning and as a gateway to partner organizations.

Any efforts to build an online A&WMA learning platform will start small and build over time. I look forward to working with you to determine what will provide member value and how we can start the development process. em