Science Societies

CSSA strategic plan: Roadmap for the future

By Shawn Kaeppler

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Our strategic plan is a roadmap for the future of our Society and a critical tool to engage the headquarters staff in priority activities. The CSSA plan was officially approved at the August 2020 board call, completing a lengthy period of input, review, and discussion.



Shawn Kaeppler

The current strategic-planning process began more than 18 months ago with information gathering and planning coordinated by facilitator Seth Kahan. The goals of the activity were to develop and coordinate strategic plans across ASA, CSSA, SSSA, and ACSESS and to identify new directions and a potential Grand Challenge. The Societies continue to be faced with challenges including declining membership trends, changes in publications that affect the overall business model, and changes in the way that the current generation of scientists connect and interact. The strategic-planning process was critical to identifying a path to long-term stability and had the potential to identify a Grand Challenge that would increase the impact of our Societies to a new level—substantially beyond our membership.

In June 2019, in Cape Coral, FL, the Society boards came together for a joint meeting for the first time in nearly 20 years to discuss strategic plans. The meeting included board members and additional participants, providing a robust environment for discussion and planning. There is substantial disciplinary diversity across the three

Societies, and even among members within a Society, and the diverse perspectives and values were evident. Nevertheless, common themes were identified, including concern for the health of the planet and its inhabitants, the growing role of data in our science, and the passion members have for teaching and mentoring. There were Society-specific breakouts at the meeting that initiated the framework for continuing strategic planning, and it was also clear that multiple priorities were common across the three Societies.

Strategic planning within and among Societies has continued since that time. CSSA approved a set of Society-specific priorities in June of this year and finalized the complete plan, which also included cross-Society priorities, in August. CEO Nick Goeser has been tremendously helpful in coordinating and advancing the planning processes and working with staff to turn them into action items. Many hours of board and staff time have been spent on the planning process, including strategic planning as a primary component of the CSSA annual board retreat, which was held virtually in June this year.

Strategic Plan Summary

The strategic plan can be viewed online at **www.crops.org/about-society/governance**. A summary of the plan is as follows:

Vision: Improve the world through crop science.

Mission: Discover and apply plant science solutions to improve the human condition and protect the planet.

Summary of CSSA and Cross-Society Priorities

1. **Broaden diversity**, including increasing and ensuring opportunities for underrepresented minorities and expanding disciplinary diversity to increase our membership landscape.
2. **Advance scientific communication** by enhancing the quality of our publications, increasing the exposure and utilization of published articles, and ensuring that evolution of our model for scientific communication is rapid and effective.
3. **Increase external engagement and impact** by planned marketing and branding initiatives, strategic outreach and communication, and developing new partnerships.

The concept of the Grand Challenge was also highly prioritized within our planning process. The current Grand Challenge statement is: "Drive soil-plant-water-environment systems solutions for healthy people on a healthy planet in a rapidly changing climate." This is a broad statement, and the details of implementing a response to the challenge will be critical. Nevertheless, a cross-Society, and beyond, project that dramatically expands our scope, visibility, and impact was viewed as an exciting and important step in the future of our Societies.

The strategic plans have been summarized into action plans by the headquarters staff. These action plans will be reviewed regularly across the next two to three years to support staffing decisions and to ensure progress. The plans are very helpful to the staff to clarify allotment of time and articulate success in their jobs. The work of the entire headquarters staff to advance the strategic plans into action plans is much appreciated.

Call to Action

The strategic plans provide a vision of a path forward. The successful implementation of the plans depends on the Society membership (YOU!) to define and refine the details and to carry out the activities associated with each plan. It is my hope that

many members will experience the excitement that the board senses within this plan and will be enthusiastic in participation. As incoming president, Vara Prasad will soon be filling committee positions and advancing the next steps in the strategic plan. If you are interested in increasing your participation in CSSA and/or have questions about the strategic plan, please contact Vara (Send Message), me (Send Message), or Nick Goeser (Send Message).

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