



Science
Societies

Building from within: Introducing SSSA's 'Grassroots RFP'

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SSSA is launching a 'Grassroots Request for Proposals (RFP)' for member-driven Working Groups, Commissions, and Consortiums. SSSA President Aaron Daigh describes it this way: "[Think of it as the Society investing its](#)

institutional resources and capacity into your vision while helping you build the external partnerships and funding pathways to sustain it over time." Learn more about it.

Last month's column covered our Congressional Visits Day and the conversations we had with legislators about the value of agricultural research. Those conversations were encouraging, but they also sharpened a question that has been on my mind all year. What can we do right now, from within our own Society, to move our discipline forward?

The SSSA 'Grassroots RFP' for Working Groups, Commissions, and Consortiums

Back in January, my New Year's resolutions included a commitment to "*create avenues for a surge in grassroots efforts and programs within SSSA to leverage the creativity and innovation of our members,*" which we have been working on over the last few months.

I am proud to announce SSSA is launching our '***Grassroots Request for Proposals (RFP)*** for member-driven Working Groups, Commissions, and Consortiums.

Here is the core idea: Any SSSA member can submit a proposal to establish a Working Group, Commission, or Consortium within the Society. Selected proposals will receive tangible Society support in the form of staff coordination and administrative assistance;

communications and promotional support; access to SSSA programs, meeting platforms, and digital infrastructure; and direct assistance in developing external funding proposals to the [Agronomic Science Foundation](#), federal agencies, and private sector sponsors.

An important distinction is worth drawing here. This is not a traditional grant where money flows directly to the applicant. Instead, it is access to the Society itself. Selected Working Groups will be able to leverage our contacts, networks, programs, outlets, and media to grow their ideas into lasting initiatives. [Think of it as the Society investing its institutional resources and capacity into your vision while helping you build the external partnerships and funding pathways to sustain it over time.](#)

Proposals will be evaluated and prioritized across two focus areas.

["Think of it as the Society investing its institutional resources and capacity into your vision while helping you build the external partnerships and funding pathways to sustain it over time."](#)

1. [Forward-thinking collaborative efforts that create sustainable, long-lived programs to advance fundamental or applied soil science and outline future opportunities and actions for our discipline, whether through collaborative research networks, soil](#)

science roadmaps, emerging science initiatives, or cross-disciplinary collaborations.

2. Think tanks aimed at enhancing the Society's capacity by strengthening our economic engine, membership pathways, and programmatic reach into the future, whether through new professional training or certification programs, strategic partnerships, revenue-generating initiatives, or new member engagement models.



The RFP is being released in May 2026. Proposals are due by mid-July 2026. The SSSA Board of Directors will review and rank all submissions in August 2026 with selected Working Groups, Commissions, and Consortia announced and initiated in September 2026. Proposals that include letters of support from division chairs will be prioritized as they signal alignment with the broader needs of our scientific community.

The proposal format is designed to be accessible and straightforward. The core of each submission is a concept description of 300 to 500 words, along with a brief statement of the need or opportunity being addressed, proposed activities, and expected outcomes across a three-year horizon. Proposals also ask you to identify any external partnerships or funding opportunities that could help sustain the Working Group in conjunction with SSSA support. This two-way approach reflects the

program's design. SSSA provides the institutional foundation, and you bring the vision and the networks to grow it.

What could this look like?

If you are wondering what kinds of Working Groups or Commissions fit the spirit of this RFP, here are some examples to get your thinking started.

Some of the most consequential advancements in soil science have emerged from working groups within international organizations. The World Reference Base for Soil Resources (WRB), now the international standard for soil classification, originated as a working group within the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS). The International Soil Modeling Consortium (ISMC), which coordinates soil modeling research across continents, also grew from an IUSS working group. Both began as member-driven ideas that gained institutional support and evolved into programs that shaped the discipline for decades.

That is the kind of ambition this RFP is designed to support.

What might our members propose? Many people have described diversity as a long-term vision for growth (Daigh, 2019). That framing applies here too. Working Groups or Consortia focused on artificial intelligence applications in soil science would open new ground for the discipline. Commissions dedicated to deeper engagement strategies for research funding and political advocacy could strengthen our collective voice. Proposals that bridge soil science directly with human health and public health would address an intersection that is gaining urgency worldwide. Advisory boards that position SSSA members as direct consultants to major agencies around the world would extend our reach in ways no single committee can. These are just starting points. The best ideas will come from you, from the conversations already happening

in your labs, your division meetings, and your professional networks.

Early career members, graduate students, and members from our underrepresented divisions should especially feel welcome here. The strength of a grassroots program is not measured by seniority. It is measured by the quality of the idea and the energy behind it.



Photo courtesy of Unsplash/Clare Tallamy

How to submit

The full [RFP document](#) and a [submission template](#) will be available through SSSA's website and announced via our *News Flash* emails and Membership Hub Circles. The template walks you through each section of the proposal, including your concept description, proposed activities, expected outcomes across Years 1 through 3, the SSSA resources you are requesting (presented as a simple checklist), and any external

partnerships or funding opportunities you have identified. The entire process is designed to be straightforward and manageable.

In the meantime, start talking. Share this column with a colleague. Bring it up at your next lab meeting or division gathering. Reach out to your division chair. Post a thread in the Member Hub Circles. The best proposals will likely come from conversations that started well before the submission window opened. And if you are wondering why we built the program this way, read on.

Trusting the process

The philosophy behind this RFP has been taking shape for longer than this presidential term. Over the years, a few ideas have surfaced in my *CSA News* columns that keep proving relevant, and they are all woven into what we are launching here.

One is the relationship between metrics and values. In [a 2018 column](#) (Daigh, 2018), I encouraged readers to identify personal “touchpoints”... concise reminders of the values that guide your decisions even when circumstances get complicated. The core argument was that metrics are best used as indirect indexes to track progress towards a goal and should not become the goal itself. Care less about the metric. Care more about whether your actions reflect your values. When we do that, something interesting happens. The focus shifts from outcomes to process, and the process itself starts producing results we did not plan for.

That kind of emergence requires space. Over a decade ago in [my 2015 column](#) on time management (Daigh, 2015), I made the case, through Covey’s Grid, that our most impactful work happens in the “Important and Not Urgent” category. That is where big ideas live. The thinking that shapes a career, a discipline, or a generation of scientists does not come from checking off today’s to-do list. It comes from reserving room for

creative thought and long-range vision.

The Grassroots Working Groups program is built on both of these principles. It is not designed to produce a set of metrics for us to report on at the end of the year. It is designed to initiate a process. A process for emergent advancements, for creativity that we cannot fully predict, and for community-driven growth that gains momentum over time. The proposals we select will not be measured by how quickly they deliver a product. They will be valued by how deeply they invest in a trajectory that our members identify with and build upon for years to come.

My [2020 column on mentoring](#) (Daigh, 2020) captured a similar spirit. Good mentees do not just listen and follow instructions. They listen, think, remold the advice, and then apply it in the way that best serves themselves and their goals. The same principle applies here. SSSA is providing a structure and a runway, but the creative direction belongs to you. [The best outcomes will come from members who take the resources we are offering and shape them into something none of us have imagined yet.](#)

Who do we give our time to?

["The best outcomes will come from members who take the resources we are offering and shape them into something none of us have imagined yet."](#)

A question from [my January column](#) resurfaces in the spirit of this Grassroots RFP. Who do we give our time to? The RFP is one answer from the Society's side. We are giving our time, our staff resources, and our institutional energy back to you. In a moment when so much in the external landscape feels beyond our control, this is something we can choose. We can choose to invest in each other.

Scientific societies exist because scientists decided, generation after generation, that their work was better done together than alone. That conviction does not expire during difficult funding cycles. If anything, it matters more. The ideas that will shape the next generation of soil science are not waiting in a federal appropriations bill. They are waiting in our community.

Let's find them.

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