


THINKING & PLANNING STRATEGICALLY



*In August 2006, the Soil Science
Society of America came to
consensus on what will constitute
its success in the future.*

This is that direction...

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OVERVIEW



A strategic planning group consisting of Board members and senior staff of the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) met on August 9 and 10, 2006 to develop a long-range strategic direction. Bud Crouch, principal partner of Tecker Consultants LLC, led the group through the planning process.

This planning document defines SSSA's clear strategic direction. It is the planning group's consensus on what will constitute its future success. It answers the following two strategic questions:

1. Where is SSSA going? *Its future direction.*
2. Why is it going there? *Its reason for existence and core purpose.*

The document also aligns with and supports SSSA's overall strategic direction.

Planning Strategically:

The existence of this strategic direction and its successful implementation signals the Board's desire to lead SSSA via a more formal *planning strategically* leadership approach. Developing a strategic direction is not a one-time event, but an ongoing commitment and process to lead the Society in a strategic orientation. The strategic direction represents a compass that will be used to guide SSSA's future strategic decision-making and ongoing operational work.

Planning Horizons:

During this session, the strategic planning group reviewed the four planning horizons that are used by successful organizations today. These horizons significantly differ in strategic focus and the length of planning time. Organizations that successfully employ the four planning horizons understand the difference between what should never change, and what should be open to change. They are aware of the difference between what is genuinely sacred to the organization and what is not. This rare ability to manage continuity and change is facilitated by the development and use of the four planning horizons.

Strategic Focus:

Organizational strategic focus or intent is very important. One of the challenges that SSSA faces is the fact that there is more to be done for members and key stakeholders than it has resources to accomplish. The temptation to do every thing can often lead a not-for-profit organization to *try to be all things to all people*. The result of this approach is not doing anything particularly well. If everything is important — *nothing is important*. Planning strategically is the counter to the *all-things syndrome*. It is about identifying a limited number of *key strategic activities* that the Society must undertake to move successfully into the future. Implementing the new strategic direction will bring focus to SSSA's future activities.

Strategic Approach:

SSSA provides a wide portfolio of programs and services – its annual operational and business plans. The approach in defining the new strategic direction was not to identify what SSSA is doing today, but to determine *what is not being done today, and must be done in the future to be successful*. This strategic direction is not about business as usual – ***it is about change!***

This approach separates the strategic direction and five-year strategic plan from the annual operational plan. As the leadership team oversees the development of the annual operational plan, the strategic direction is a constant reminder of what must be changed to steer towards the envisioned future.

Updating the Five-Year Strategic Plan:

A strategic plan that covers the 3 to 5 year planning horizon can only stay current and relevant if the governing body insures that the plan is updated on an annual basis. A strategic plan is not laser-beamed onto a marble tablet that can never be changed. It is the leadership team's *working document*. Therefore, the governing body has both the right and the responsibility to: 1) change the 3 to 5 year strategic plan when it needs to be changed based on sound reasoning and assessment, and 2) update the plan on an annual basis.

Development of the Strategic Direction

The objective of the planning group was to recast a credible and relevant strategic direction that is distinguished both by its simplicity (*user-friendly document*) and its power to assist leadership in making tough decisions in order to sustain SSSA's success.

We wish to thank SSSA volunteers, leaders, and staff who offered their valuable time and hard work to participate in the successful development of this strategic direction. It is the responsibility of SSSA's entire leadership team to give the new direction meaning and life.

STRATEGIC ASSUMPTIONS



The following are SSSA's ten-year assumptions concerning the *key external trends, challenges, or issues* that will impact the soil science profession and the Society in the future. They may represent future opportunities or threats.

Financial Issues:

- There are increasing federal and state funding cuts to land grant universities and agencies that support research (e.g., loss of Hatch funds).

Government:

- Regulatory reaction to global changes effecting soils and the environment will continue.
- There is an increasing disconnect and lack of understanding between public policy makers and the food production profession and industry.

Changes in Soil Science:

- Traditional course offerings and programs at land-grant universities in the soil science profession are disappearing.
- The number of soil scientists (e.g., dismal student numbers) is substantially declining. However, students in soil science are finding great job opportunities at graduation.
- There likely are more research scientists with a non-soils background doing soil science research than trained soil scientists.

Environmental Issues and Changes:

- One of the most pressing external issues for wild land soils is climate change in all its manifestations (e.g., soil changes, soil and ecosystem C budgets, and effects on disturbances such as storms and wildfires).
- The significant rise in the cost of fuel will have a great impact on boosting research pertaining to the growing use of alternative fuels. The push for alternative fuels may also create big bio-fuel companies who strip all aboveground vegetation resulting in large negative environmental effects regarding soil sustainability.
- Agriculture/urban interface issues will continue to grow. (e.g., How does the world maintain its natural resources in the face of growing population pressure in high population density areas?). Urbanization and population growth will put additional pressure on agriculture and wild lands, which will probably isolate people more and more from soils and the environment.
- Public interest in the environment is increasing, which is being prompted by energy, global climate changes, and declining water quality and quantity.

- Continued efforts to minimize the impact of agriculture and other industries on the environment and to improve environmental quality may provide an opportunity to emphasize the role of soils in almost every aspect of environmental function.

Image & Recognition:

- There is a poor understanding of the importance of soils. The influence of agricultural interests is declining in the public arena.
- There is a growing interest in organic agriculture with a potential for increased consumer awareness of food production.
- Food safety and quality will become more important to consumers, which will create more opportunity to focus attention on the role soil plays in food production.

Society Changes:

- There is a continuing decline in volunteerism throughout the United States and the world.

Mega issues are overriding issues of strategic importance that cut across multiple outcome areas. They address key issues that SSSA must answer, illuminating choices it must make and the challenges that need to be overcome to better serve its members, fulfill its purpose, cause or mission and to successfully move into the future. The planning group developed the following mega issues.

Strategic Purpose, Focus and Leadership:

- What is SSSA's future role or niche? Why will it exist in the future? What is its mission? Who will it serve?
- Is SSSA a scientific only, or a professional only, or both? Should SSSA define and promote the profession?
- How can SSSA embrace land environmental soil issues?
- How does the Society establish the uniqueness of the soil's discipline?

Financial:

- How can the Society improve its financial security (i.e., diversify income streams, reduce its dependency on journal revenue subscriptions and maintain its funding base and better utilize its resources)?

Competition:

- What can SSSA do about the growing competition from for profit organizations and other scientific societies as the disciplines continue to splinter and more specialized scientific societies emerge?
- How do we respond to the growing number of non-soil scientists and

professional practitioners who are involved in soil science research and practical applications who have little training in soil science?

Changes in the Soil Profession and Science:

- How can SSSA interact with the soils programs that are disappearing at universities and appearing at non-land grant universities.

Advocacy:

- How can the Society prevent adverse legislative reaction based on non-scientific information and fear?
- What is the Society's role in addressing soil related environmental issues?
- How can the Society promote the funding of basic soil science research (public and private) without advocating a specific political agenda? *Lobby?*
- How can SSSA address the growing disconnect between public/policy makers and soil science and agriculture?
- How can the Society work to enhance soil science education in primary and secondary schools, thereby, providing a basis for careers in soil science and growth in the Society?

Membership Value, relevancy and Indispensability:

- What will SSSA need to do in the future to attract and increase membership (i.e., expand programs, services, etc. to practicing soil scientists, etc.)?
- How can the Society address the needs of its growing diverse membership (e.g. international, younger, older, ethnic, gender,)?
- How will SSSA provide a home for soil scientists that are being courted by other more specialized scientific societies?
- How can SSSA better communicate the value and importance of belonging to the Society (ROI)?
- How can the Society influence and sustain soil programs at both land grant and non-land grant Universities?
- How can the Society work more closely with the non-research (professional) practicing soil scientists and keep this segment engaged within the organization?

Image, Reputation and Brand

- What can the Society do to convey a better impression of openness to people interested in soils? (e.g., *We are perceived as somewhat intimidating and act like a private "club" that they may not be welcome to join.*)
- How can the Society increase its recognition and soil science to diverse audiences?

- What can SSSA do to increase public awareness of the contributions of soil science and its importance to society?

Identity of Excellence (SSSA's Branding)

An identity of excellence describes the framework for SSSA that will be required to sustain a position of relevance and earn a reputation for value and excellence for the future.

An organization with a true cause or constituent focus must start with the knowledge of what the constituent considers to be of value and then build a comfortable relationship with them to be seen as the provider of choice. Value can be defined as the constituent's definition of quality relative to quality programs and service delivery – the right product, at the right price, and in the right format and delivery.

Branding is composed of two essential elements that form a value equation – the *value proposition* and the *value discipline*.

Value Proposition (The promise that SSSA makes to its cause and key stakeholders.)

The programs and services that SSSA will offer and the nature of the delivery experience based on relevant dimensions of value that members' want.

+ Plus

Value Discipline (The implementation of that promise.)

SSSA will be branded for having an identity and image of *leading edge products and services* supported by operational effectiveness, membership intimacy and representational effectiveness.

This branding will need to be supported by operational excellence, effective advocacy for the profession, and the ability to create strong membership loyalty. To achieve this brand, the value equation for SSSA needs to include the following.

Value Proposition:

(What we will offer)

- Provide leading edge innovative forums for knowledge exchange, professional development and positive and enjoyable member experiences.
- Understand what members will need to be successful in the future that they don't even know they need yet.
- Develop the vision of what the soil science professional will look like in the future.
- Create new applications of existing programs.
- Deliver programs through a variety of formats (face-to-face and virtual).

- Build a reputation of providing these leading edge programs with excellence.
- Commitment – *We provide the best stuff.*

Value Discipline:

(What we must do)

- Develop a culture that supports inventiveness, innovation and risk taking in order to provide leading edge and innovative programs.
- Accept possible mistakes and move on.
- Develop scanning mechanisms to know where the soil science profession is going in the future.
- Create a program/service development and introduction process that supports new program and service introduction faster.
- Be willing to leapfrog current programs.
- Operate with financial stability and security.
- Provide quality member service.

To successfully achieve this identity of excellence, SSSA's strategic direction must support and be linked to this branding.

LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLANNING HORIZON



(10 TO 30 YEAR ENVISIONED FUTURE)

SSSA developed a 10 to 30 year planning horizon, which consists of a core ideology and 10 to 30 year envisioned future.

Core ideology clarifies what must be preserved in an environment of rapid and unpredictable change. Core ideology consists of the Society's core values and core purpose.

The *core purpose* describes SSSA's very reason for being or existing — why the Society will or should exist for a long, long time (10 to 30 years). What would be lost if it ceased to exist? What sense of purpose will motivate members to dedicate their creative energies to SSSA and its efforts over a long period of time?

Core Purpose

To advance soils as fundamental to life.

Core values are a small set of timeless, guiding principles that do not require external justification. They only have intrinsic value and importance to SSSA and its members. Core values are so fundamental that they seldom change — *if at all*. They define the behavior required in order for the organization to achieve its core purpose. Core values are so deep-seated and valid that SSSA would preserve the core values even if it were admonished for having these values.

Core Values

- *Pursuit of knowledge/truth*
- *Respect for all*
- *Openness to new ideas and concepts*
- *Adherence to scientific and ethical principles*
- *Environmental stewardship*

The *10 to 30 year envisioned future* consists of two parts: a single, ten-year plus, *big audacious goal (B.A.G.)* and a vivid description.

The B.A.G. is a huge challenge and its achievement will require SSSA to move outside of its comfort zone. The goal can be accomplished and has a clear finish line, but will require a heroic effort and luck. The goal will stimulate membership activity,

commitment, and participation beyond SSSA's present leadership. The B.A.G. is very clear and compelling to members and does not require explanation. It sets the direction for the succession of future three to five year strategic plans.



SSSA's B.A.G.

SOILS and soil science will be at the forefront of global consciousness to sustain life.

A *vivid description* shows what the world would be like if the Society were to achieve its B.A.G.

When SSSA completes its Big Audacious Goal access to SSSA and soil science will look like the following:

- Legislation will be developed that requires all practicing soil scientists to be licensed in each state.
- Soil science has become part of the curriculum in all levels of education (e.g. K-12, high school, college and university). Core soil science courses exist at universities, and there will be a wait list for soil science classes.
- Soils are recognized by ISI as an entity.
- The majority of all key stakeholders properly use the correct term "soils".
- The SSSA Journals will be recognized worldwide.
- Soil will be recognized globally as much of a critical resource to survival as air and water. Governments will recognize the need to maintain soil as a critical natural resource.
- SSSA's meetings will receive significant international media attention.
- Soil will have increased recognition in the global economy (e.g. soil will have a recognized dollar value by all governments, businesses and the public).
- Use of land decisions and planning will be made based on soil science. Land planners will attend soil science courses.

THREE TO FIVE-YEAR PLANNING HORIZON



The following is SSSA's three-to-five year strategic plan, which consists of key, short-term infrastructure actions that are required to better link the infrastructure to the new strategic plan, three-to-five year goal statements, strategies, and milestones for each goal, and a three-to-five year envisioned future.

Three to Five-Year Envisioned Future

An envisioned future is a simple and concise picture of an ideal, desired future for the organization out three to five years. The envisioning process is the leadership team-reaching consensus on what future success will look like. By engaging in an envisioning process, the Society is already beginning to create its own future. It sets direction and helps to focus SSSA's strategic planning efforts. The process of developing an envisioned future is as important as the direction itself. The envisioned future does not supplant the 3 to 5 year strategic plan, it comes before it. The envisioned future sets the tone and direction for the strategic planning process.

By 2011, SSSA will have:

- increased membership that is very diverse.
- significantly expanded its certification program.
- a new name (e.g. Soil Science Society, Inc.).
- developed a closer relationship with education (K-12, high school, Universities) to develop a soil science interest and curriculum.
- increased its continuing education programs.
- received significant financial endowments and gifts.
- achieved significant international growth.
- additional societies as part of its unified organization with ASA and CSSA.
- received awards, citations and increased recognition for its publications.
- increased its capability and activities to position itself as a powerful advocate for the advancement of soil science.
- increased input into research priorities.
- expanded recognition, positive branding and media attention.

LONG-RANGE GOALS



The following represents SSSA's long-range goals that encompass its three to five year direction. These goals are outcome-oriented statements that lead SSSA towards its envisioned future. These goals are not in any order of priority. All of the goals will need to be accomplished, if SSSA is to fully achieve its three to five year quest.

In 2011:

- Goal A.** *SSSA will be the indispensable resource for enhanced programs and services to its members.*
- Goal B.** *SSSA will be the resource for enhanced programs and services to practicing soil scientists and associated professionals.*
- Goal C.** *SSSA will be recognized as the most powerful advocate for soil science.*
- Goal D.** *SSSA will be financially secure and capable to carry out its strategic direction and vision.*
- Goal E.** *SSSA will partner in a coalition of scientific societies to advance sustainability.*
- Goal F.** *SSSA will be known for its innovative infrastructure that advances and sustains its success.*

LONG-RANGE GOALS & STRATEGIES

Strategies indicate how SSSA will organize, focus, and expend its resources and actions to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving these goals. The strategies must be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

Milestones are used to determine the overall progress toward a goal. They indicate how close SSSA is to achieving a goal as it executes the individual strategies for each goal. **The milestones measure goal achievement, not strategy achievement.**

Goal A: *SSSA will be the indispensable resource for enhanced programs and services to its members.*

Strategies:

- A1. (High) Improve graduate/early career recruitment and involvement, and develop more tailored programs and services.
- A2. (Medium) Improve SSSA's website as a relevant, valuable benefit to members (e.g. a world class website).
- A3. (Low) Increase value (ROI), benefits and marketing to better attract international members.

Milestones:

An increase in the number of:

- members, membership diversity and membership retention.
- new programs products and services.
- interactive hits on the members' only section of the web site.
- SSSA members participating and attending programs and services.

An increase in:

- the use of technology in delivering programs, services and opportunities for networking and sharing.
- membership satisfaction with the value of belonging to SSSA by all membership segments.
- non-dues revenue.
- information, knowledge and services offered on SSSA's website.

The existence of a/an:

- enhanced internal website section for members only.
- ongoing market research of membership.

- marketing program to better communicate the value and benefit of current SSSA's programs and service to members.

Goal B: *SSSA will be the resource for enhanced programs and services to practicing soil scientists and associated professionals.*

Strategies

- B1. (High) Increase value and benefits for practitioners (e.g. NSCSS, scoping, awards, K-12, workshops, CEU's).
- B2. (High) Develop a comprehensive outreach program (web-based where possible), including:
 - (High) Develop a database of educational programs/clearing house with reciprocal links to other societies.
 - (Medium) Develop a fact sheet clearing house.
 - (Low) Develop lesson plans (trade publications).
- B3. (Medium) Develop active training and educational programs, including:
 - Short courses (development, implementation, and sponsorship).
 - Linking educational programs to branch, state meetings.
 - Developing preparatory courses for soil science certification exams.

Milestones:

An increase in:

- membership and membership diversity.
- non-dues revenue.
- non-member revenue.
- outreach programs that are web based.
- SSSA's recognition by the soil science community.
- interactive hits on the website.
- the number of requests for information.
- attendance at SSSA meetings, forums and educational sessions.
- the existence of new program that positions SSSA as an increased resource.

Goal C: *SSSA will be recognized as the most powerful advocate for soil science.*

Strategies***Education***

- C1. (High) Organize a strategy session to develop plans for incorporating soil science into university curriculums (core courses).
- C2. (High) Contact NASULGC to establish a strategy session to address the decline in soil science positions in academia (university-wide).
- C3. (Medium) Develop and design K-12 curriculum resources.

Policy

- C4. (Medium) Contact (using the House Soils Caucus) government agencies to begin to address the decline in soil science positions.

Milestones:

An increase in:

- K-12th grade curriculum resources.
- the recognition of soil science and the critical importance of the resource by government and agencies worldwide.

An increase in the number of:

- soil science positions across academia worldwide.
- universities with soil science curriculums.
- academic institutions that recognize soil science as a stand alone science and career field.

Goal D: *SSSA will be financially secure and capable to carry out its strategic direction and vision.*

Strategies

- D1. (High) Develop broad based endowment funds in support of education, advocacy and outreach.
- D2. (Medium) Leverage the Smithsonian exhibit to support endowment efforts.
- D3. (Low) Increase non-dues income from SSSA's programs and services.
- D4. (Low) Increase grant, foundation and contract support for SSSA initiatives.

Milestones:

An increase in:

- overall net revenue.
- non-dues revenue and diversification of non-dues revenue.
- the reserve fund.
- non-member revenue.
- grants and foundation support.
- endowment funds.
- The existence of a formal dues plan.

Goal E: *SSSA will partner in a coalition of scientific societies to advance sustainability.*

Strategies

- E1. (High) Investigate and develop plans for holding “independent” joint meetings with other societies approximately every three years (e.g. special workshops).
- E2. (High) Investigate forming a coalition of National Resource Societies.
- E3. (Medium) Continue to pursue development of joint publications with other societies.
- E4. (Low) Continue to reshape SSSA’s infrastructure and facilities to be more inviting to a coalition of societies.

Milestones:

An increase in:

- joint activities with other societies.
- positive recognition for and awareness of the challenges to natural resources worldwide.
- positive outcomes for the sustainability of natural resources worldwide
- The existence of a *Coalition of Natural Resources*.

Goal F: *SSSA will be known for its innovative infrastructure that advances and sustains its success.*

Strategies

- F1. (High) Develop a leadership development and succession planning program that includes:
- identifying future leaders;
 - developing a new Board member orientation program;
 - creating a volunteer workshop for current volunteer; and
 - increased marketing on how to become a volunteer, etc.
- F2. (Medium) Establish a task force to reevaluate the divisional representation on the Board by being constituency based vs. at large and restructuring the nomination procedures.
- F3. (Medium) Continue development of the move towards a more strategic Board. Review the Board's oversight of the implementation of the strategic plan.
- F4. (Medium) In conjunction with ASA and CSSA, implement a management entity and insure it supports implementation of the strategic plan.

Milestones:

An increase in the Board's understanding of their oversight role in the implementation of the strategic plan.

The existence of a:

- leadership development and succession planning process and structure.
- revised new Board member orientation program.
- volunteer workshop.
- new management structure.