



Science  
Societies

# Strategically Planning Our Future, Together

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*Richard Harris, veteran National Public Radio (NPR) science correspondent, gave the opening keynote at the 2022 Annual Meeting in Baltimore.*

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I was reflecting on all of the excitement and enthusiasm present at November's ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting in Baltimore. It was awesome to hear all the good things and what you as our members enjoyed. Yet, I also treasured hearing your criticisms and concerns because this means members are invested in their Society and in improving it, and furthermore, that they trust me to help it improve in the future. While the success of the meeting program and content is due to you, our members and volunteers, the financial and organizational success of these meetings are primarily due to our amazing staff. Our staff continually improve these meetings; they also keep elected leadership on track (for instance letting me know that I had until 22 November to write this article if I wanted to make it in the January issue, LOL).

Accustomed as I am to communication on topical items through Twitter, it is exciting to have more than 280 characters, but it also is unnerving to have a two months'-long delay in reaching you and in receiving your feedback. This is the nature of popular print media. We cannot disregard these communication forums as print reaches different sets of our membership and stakeholders compared with other sources.

Communicating important and topical issues can be difficult within our discipline and especially to those outside of our discipline. Regarding communication, our meeting plenary speaker, Richard Harris, said, "Always underestimate what your audience knows rather than overestimate it. Above all, know your audience." Improving communication is critical. In fact, the theme selected for our Baltimore meeting by Carrie Laboski (as then SSSA president-elect), Joann Whalen (then ASA president-elect), and myself revolved around communication. Effective communication must be a cornerstone of all that we do.

I am excited to serve as your CSSA president. No matter your institution or division, I want to thank you for placing your trust in me to care for our Society. In these monthly messages, I hope to do four major things:

1. Communicate the activities and the value-added outcomes that CSSA provides our members and global society.
2. Provide a peek behind the curtain about why things are the way they are within our scientific societies, our disciplines, academia, and beyond.
3. Showcase and promote you as members and your work.
4. Finally, I hope to challenge your thinking and possibly antagonize you into viewing the world in a different way than you did before.

I believe opportunities for critical thinking and challenging norms can benefit our careers, our research, and our teaching outcomes. We need to create and critically evaluate new ideas to improve and rise above the many new challenges we and our disciplines face.

## **Strategically Planning Our Future**

Among the first things that positively kicked off my meeting experience this year was the presentation by Jim Cudahy, our new ACSESS CEO who will help lead us in addressing CSSA's upcoming challenges. If you have not met him, I hope you will soon! ACSESS stands for the Alliance of Crops, Soils, and Environmental Sciences Societies and is the management entity that integrates ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. In his (very) new role, Jim has been asking staff, "Where do you want to be in five years?" Many have said they had not really thought about it.

Have you thought about where you want to be and want your career to be in five years? You can't have a plan for how to get there if you don't know where you hope to go; our scientific Society can help with this. Such visioning is critical for us as individuals but also for our discipline and for our scientific Society. We are now preparing to build a new strategic plan in 2023. With your input, this activity will guide our future as CSSA and position us as leaders among scientific societies globally. I know talk of strategic plans will make many members' eyes glaze over, but these plans are critical to help elected and staff leadership direct and invest in what you think is most important. I have participated in multiple organizations' strategic planning and kind of geek out about the world of possibilities they create. I especially geek out about being able to point to them when we prioritize the actions we take. Strategic plans are not science, but they facilitate science. That is why your input is critically needed in this process.

In our existing strategic plan, built by members, there are a few main cross-cutting themes that we are investing in to improve: membership, diversity-equity-inclusion, and publications. As president over the next year, with your help, we can make a positive difference in these areas that you previously identified as important. But change takes time, which is why the strategic planning process is so critical. It is also critical that we continue to have a strong collaborative leadership team with continuity. Your Division Board representatives, staff, and the executive leadership team (consisting of Marilyn Warburton, past president; Vara Prasad, previous past president; and Kim Garland Campbell, president-elect as of 1 Jan. 2023) all continue to work together to implement activities to address our strategic goals.

## **We Need Your Engagement in These Areas in 2023**

Beyond the main strategic themes, which I will talk about individually in upcoming messages, there are a few exciting and important initiatives planned for 2023 for which we need your engagement now.

- First, to establish a clearer pathway to Society leadership—to communicate how members can get involved and how such engagement can benefit your career and your portfolio of skills.
  - Second, to find mutually beneficial ways CSSA can link universities, government, industry, and members towards enhancing, and possibly peer-reviewing, course curriculum and continuing education.
  - Third, to launch Decode 6 (<https://decode6.org/>), a trusted, peer-reviewed platform to communicate with farmers and policymakers about carbon and ecosystem services in agriculture. Decode 6 is supported by ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. I see it as a huge opportunity for us to be global leaders in the field and elevate our members.
  - Finally, to bring more recognition and prestige to CSSA's repertoire of awards.
- Awards elevate and recognize the contributions of our members.



*Awards elevate and recognize the contributions of our members. Here 2022 CSSA President Marilyn Warburton (right) presents Elizabeth Guertal with the CSSA 2022 Presidential Award.*

It is such an exciting time for CSSA, and I look forward to sharing this journey with you. Thank you for your membership. Thank you for your investment of time, money, and energy. And thank you for the trust that you have offered to me and to your CSSA Board of Directors. I'm excited about current and upcoming activities, and as always, if you have any questions, comments, concerns, suggestions, quandaries, or ideas—especially ideas—to share, please let me know!

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