

Proposed U.S. Aquaculture Society Strategic Plan 2020-2025

USAS Mission:

To provide a national forum for the exchange of timely information among U.S. aquaculture researchers, students and industry members.

USAS Vision Statement

To serve a leadership role in the sustainable growth of the U.S. aquaculture industry.

Introduction

The United States Aquaculture Society (USAS) was created in 1990 as a Chapter of the World Aquaculture Society (WAS). The USAS operates under articles of incorporation and is managed by an Executive Board. Staff support is also provided by the World Aquaculture Society's Home Office currently located near Baton Rouge, LA. Membership in USAS fluctuates yearly but has ranged from 851 members in 2015 to 1252 members in 2019. USAS membership was 36 – 45% of WAS membership during these years.

This USAS Strategic Plan was developed to reflect the incoming WAS Strategic Plan (our parent organization), on input from the current Executive Board of USAS, Past Presidents and other USAS members, as well as a review of the last USAS strategic plan. The 2020-2025 USAS Strategic Plan provides a vision, mission, values and strategic goals that will enable us to efficiently and effectively serve the needs of the U.S. aquaculture industry. The success of this plan can be evaluated through identified performance measures. The goals will be realized only with the support from members of USAS and WAS.

The USAS has taken a more active role in the last few years by offering members value-added workshops to attend prior to the annual Aquaculture America conferences and by having a wider social media presence that offers webinars through our internet site <https://usaquaculture.org>. In line with this active role, we conducted a survey (April 2018) to pole member preferences so that we can continue to improve member services in the future; this should be done periodically. The USAS Board has also created a Procedures and Policies manual (started about 2014) which is continually updated to help incoming Officers and Board members understand what is expected of them.

Organization

As WAS is preparing for potential transitions or retirement of their Home Office management, USAS should be prepared to help these transitions in any way for existing and future staff. Since 2014, USAS has devoted time and energy into creating a Procedures and Policy (PnP) manual to help guide future Board members to make them

more productive and effective at conducting USAS business. The USAS should effectively maintain and utilize membership data to develop further opportunities to improve our understanding of membership trends and needs by periodically surveying membership to keep up with current interests.

High Level Strategic Goal

Keep current with WAS operation and management.

Mid-Level Strategy 1

Improve data collection, management, and analysis.

Actions

- Through WAS, collect and analyze membership data using automated tools.^{12,15}
- Through WAS, implement methods to capture attendance trends at conferences, and at activities during the conferences and workshops.^{12,14,15}
- Through WAS, create database for registered conference and workshop attendees and exhibitors.^{12,15}

Mid-Level Strategy 2

Improve transparency, processes and efficiency of USAS Board Committees.

Actions

- Continually develop the USAS PnP for new Officers and Board members.^{1,5}
- Continually evaluate existing committee structure and responsibilities.^{1,5}

Finances

Strategic planning is ultimately about resource allocation. Thus, in order to both undertake new initiatives and secure long term USAS viability, a clear and concise business model that is transparent and has Board accountability is necessary. Although USAS continues to maintain a stable financial position with continued long-term positive profit from Aquaculture America meetings, there are concerns with the current business model specifically regarding the need to diversify revenue streams. Actions proposed address these concerns by evaluating cost-saving measures, exploring novel funding streams and re-evaluation of historical profit-sharing agreements.

High Level Strategic Goal

Establish a transparent financial model that secures long term viability of USAS.

Mid-Level Strategy 1

Improve financial management.

Actions

- Revise current finances, regular costs and outsourcing/insourcing possibilities to guarantee a sustainable business model.³
- Document PnPs that clearly define financial operations.^{3,5}
- Evaluate tools to improve financial management.³

Membership

Affiliation should provide multiple benefits, as most people will only belong to a limited number of Societies. Recruiting younger members and encouraging committee work

with the hopes of turning them into leaders should be a priority. USAS has added workshops prior to Aquaculture America meetings and several online webinars annually in efforts to benefit members. Membership has gradually increased for a decade, but there are more potential groups that haven't committed. The USAS brand must become a tool to recruit in a tiered membership structure and offer timely information, contributing to supporting aquaculture as a sustainable producer of high-quality products. It is necessary that the Board defines a measurable goal for USAS in terms of the number of members targeted over time. USAS proposes a series of actions to achieve the strategic goals that will result in increased membership numbers and strengthen the organization as a representative of stakeholders involved in aquaculture.

High Level Strategic Goal

Maximize membership benefits and engagement.

Actions

- Review membership categories and benefits to allow for increased flexibility of membership options benefits.¹²
- Continue member preferences survey.¹²
- Increase membership awareness of value proposition.^{12,14}
- Promote mechanisms to keep members aware and engaged in USAS activities.¹²
- Maintain member database (based on metrics established by WAS).^{12,14,15}
- Explore new ways to engage and increase value for industry members.^{11, 12}
- Conduct an evaluation of student attrition/retention in USAS.^{10, 12}
- Improve student engagement in USAS.^{10,12}
- Encourage committee work among members to recruit future Officer and Board members.¹

Conferences and Workshops

USAS conferences are well attended, well managed and provide a reliable income for the Society. However, some argue that our conferences are losing relevance due to a perceived decrease in the quality of science presented, lack of meeting focus and not being relevant to all sectors of aquaculture. The USAS is at conceivable risk from competition from other aquaculture conferences. Opportunities include using new paradigms in conference structure and technology, supporting more region-specific or theme-based meetings, evaluating the scientific rigor of presentations and having USAS more involved in setting standards for meetings.

High Level Strategic Goal

Keep USAS conferences the first choice for aquaculture in the U.S.

Mid-Level Strategy

Improve the experience attendees have at conferences and workshops.

Actions

- Assign new responsibilities and new structure to the existing conference steering committee.^{5,6}
- Continue to conduct surveys to assess what conference attendees need from the conferences.^{5,6}

- Evaluate alternative conference structures used by other industries and apply what works to aquaculture.⁶
- Conduct an evaluation of the science presented at conferences.¹³
- Engage with industry partners for sponsored highly-focused events.^{6, 11}
- Explore underwriting options to assist the WAS in conference operations.

Communication

Communication among USAS membership has improved since 2014 with the adoption of our USAS-owned website and a dedicated management team on the Board. An ineffective USAS messaging mechanism limits our ability to effectively engage members. We have had several USAS Board members in the past who helped greatly in this area, but without permanent or specialized staff, this contributes to the absence of an assertive communication plan; our sometimes-lacking social media presence is an example. The USAS proposes a series of actions to achieve the strategic goals that will result in improved communication to USAS members and to the general public and ultimately strengthen the role of the organization in becoming a representative voice for academic, industrial and political organizations involved in aquaculture. Social media and communications can be used to increase current member satisfaction and collegiality, in addition to attracting new members.

High Level Strategic Goal

Effectively communicate to the membership and the general public.

Mid-Level Strategy 1

Improve management of membership, website updates and contact with members.

Actions

- Create permanent committee to address society communication strategy.^{5,14}
- Partition IT, conference and website management and maintenance.¹⁴
- Hire or subcontract expertise to assist on communications (newsletters, social media, and website upgrade supervised by a communications committee).^{1,14,15}
- Implement new automated tools to manage membership communications, website content, newsletters, and membership data.^{1,14,15}
- Improve engagement with young students through more constant and useful communication using automated CRM platforms (jobs, projects and scholarships, useful manuals and opinion papers, help create environment, so students feel engaged)^{10,14}

Mid-Level Strategy 2

Improve perception and communication about aquaculture to the public.

Actions

- Identify topics to highlight and promote aquaculture.^{1,14,15}
- Develop content (economic, social, environmental, infographics, etc.) that can be distributed via email, websites and social media.^{1,9,14}
- Coordinate with WAS and other chapters on social media posts to share content.

Publications

WAS has been focused on three types of publications: The World Aquaculture Society magazine, the Journal of the World Aquaculture Society (JWAS) and books. JWAS has

gone through a reinvigoration process and it is becoming one of the top priority journals for aquaculture scientists. USAS should foster interest in these publications in every way possible. Publishing high-quality science is critical, however communicating about it effectively is equally important. The magazine is an important vehicle of information transfer to USAS members. Printed books continue to be a primary source of scientific information, but their role should be targeted towards the appropriate audience. WAS publications are a critical source of scientific information and can be used as a communication tool to improve aquaculture and its link with the aquaculture community. Consider a new type of publication to be webinars produced by USAS.

High Level Strategic Goal

Promote WAS publications as the source for aquaculture information.

Mid-Level Strategy

Help WAS improve value of publications.

Actions

- Further improve the quality, member satisfaction, and dissemination of the JWAS.⁹
- Promote development of new online publication types (white papers, manuals, best-practices, activity books for children, etc.) with WAS brand.⁹
- Promote development of materials (infographics and webinars) that can be used by local authorities to communicate about aquaculture.⁹
- Develop better electronic outreach to members and new members.^{9,12,14}
- Promote WAS's digital presence for special publications and the magazine to all sectors of the industry.⁹

Outreach

The USAS has been hesitant in establishing a role in policy development. Since WAS is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt, nonprofit organization, the Articles of Incorporation (Article III, Limitations, Section 1) would be violated if any actions to influence legislation are allowed to occur; hence, no lobbying or advocacy is permitted. Therefore, there are little to no relationships established with our policy makers. However, in October 2019 the USAS convened an initiative on public education and held a forum entitled "U.S. Aquaculture: Our Sustainable Food Solution" in Washington, D.C. which was targeted at educating the policy makers on the breadth of aquaculture. These forums should be continued on a regular basis so more of our policy makers understand aquaculture. Also, as mentioned above, USAS has added workshops prior to Aquaculture America meetings and several online webinars annually in efforts to provide more effective outreach to members.

High Level Strategic Goal

Position USAS as a highly regarded information source.

Mid-Level Strategy

Improve and/or develop new relationships with other aquaculture organizations.

Actions

- Continue educational outreach to policy makers on relevant topics. ^{1,9}

-Develop working partnerships with other national aquaculture organizations^{1,12} (i.e., National Aquaculture Association, Catfish Farmers of America, US Trout Farmers Association, East Coast Shellfish Growers Association, Pacific Shellfish Growers Association, National Shellfish Association and the American Fisheries Society - Fish Culture Section State, Regional and National Aquaculture Associations).

USAS Committees, Ad Hoc Committees and Staff Responsible for Implementing Actions

¹Executive Committee

²Election

³Finance and Long-Range Planning

⁴Affiliations

⁵Rules and Regulations

⁶Conference Steering

⁷Honors and Awards

⁸Past Presidents

⁹Publications

¹⁰Student Activities

¹¹Industry Relations

¹²Promotions and Membership

USAS Ad Hoc Committees

¹³Communications

¹⁴Strategic Planning

Staff

¹⁵Executive Director