
Ethical Society of St. Louis Strategic Plan

2019

Survey

Board Charge to SPTF

- *“Share the Ethical Society Mission, Foundational Principles, and Vision Statement with the members.” (Sections 5.1 – 5.3 of the Policy Manual)*
- *“Request member feedback about where the Ethical Society should be headed in the future.” (Strategic Planning Task Force Charge and Timeline)*
- *“The content of the survey questions should be both open-ended and also targeted to address the Ethical Society Vision and Mission statements.” (from summary of Board meeting, 8/14/18, and included in email from Board Chair to SPTF)*

SPTF Response

- Developed an open-ended, single-question survey, incorporating the Ethical Society’s Fundamental Principles, which solicits priorities for where the Society should be headed in the next 5 years. The survey was brief, to encourage wide participation, and open-ended, to ensure that members’ priorities (not SPTF assumptions) are the basis for the Strategic Plan. (see [Appendix A](#), page 5, for the survey).

Procedures for Soliciting Member Participation

Board Charge to SPTF

- *“Using diverse approaches, reach out to as many members as possible. Engage the membership such that all members feel their ideas have been solicited.” (Strategic Planning Task Force Charge and Timeline)*

SPTF Response

- The survey was posted online, and was also available in paper form in the office, from September 3 to October 3, 2018. The campaign to encourage member participation in the survey included: email notification, a printed insert in the Platform program, reminders from Leaders at Platforms and at the Sunday morning Forum, flyers handed out after Platform, weekly e-newsletters, reminders from chairs of most groups and committees to their members, discussion with parents at the SEEK registration meeting, and personal appeals to member friends and acquaintances.

Survey Responses

- 140 members participated and offered 402 responses to the survey. This response rate is more than double the number received in recent surveys of priorities for the Ethical Society’s future, and nearly 30% more than for the 2017 Leader survey.
- Responses submitted after the deadline were not included.

Methods Used to Analyze Survey Responses

- The aim of the analysis of member responses is to determine major categories (*Emphasis Areas*) and subcategories (*Goals*) that best integrate the responses. This analysis followed methods used in qualitative research to minimize bias in data analysis (see [Appendix B](#), page 6). This resulted in the final version of *Emphasis Areas and Goals* (see below).
- SPTF members then used the final version of the *Emphasis Areas and Goals* to code members' responses; again, following methods used in qualitative research to minimize bias (see [Appendix C](#), page 7, for methods).

Emphasis Areas and Goals

Board Charge to SPTF

- *“Organize the membership’s ideas and suggestions into areas of emphasis. Suggest overarching goals for each area of emphasis.” (Strategic Planning Task Force Charge and Timeline)*

SPTF Response

- *Emphasis Areas and Goals* were derived from the methods described above, and the terms and phrases describing the *Emphasis Areas* and *Goals* were drawn from member survey responses.
- Below, *Emphasis Areas* are in **bold**; *Goals* are subcategories of *Emphasis Areas*; the number of member responses corresponding to each *Emphasis Area* is in parenthesis.

I. Member Experience (159)

- A. Offer programs to support and strengthen bonds among members, including shared activities that help guide members to step outside their social comfort zones
- B. Provide more adult education
- C. Support and enhance SEEK
- D. Strengthen efforts to integrate new members
- E. Promote an inclusive and respectful community

II. Outreach (152)

- A. Increase awareness of the Ethical Society in the community, including our activities and the principles of Ethical Humanism
- B. Engage in political, environmental and social justice activism
- C. Collaborate with community nonprofits and congregations
- D. Invite prominent/provocative outside speakers for Platforms, talks and debates

III. Diversity (64)

- A. Increase diversity, broadly defined (e.g., ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, gender, sexual identity, stage of life)
- B. Make modifications to the building that welcome diverse groups

IV. Sustainability and Growth (51)

- A. Increase membership
- B. Practice responsible fiscal management
- C. Stay current with building maintenance and consider enhancements

- **Member Experience** and **Outreach** are clearly the most important priorities, receiving a very significant number of ratings. **Diversity** and **Sustainability and Growth** are also important but received less robust support.
- The four *Emphasis Areas* are distinct foci that received a substantial number of members' survey responses. Although distinct, there was also some overlap, as some responses fit more than one *Emphasis Area* (i.e., the response, "Increase growth and diversity" fits in both the **Sustainability and Growth** and **Diversity** *Emphasis Areas*). The number of overlapping responses between *Emphasis Areas* is included in the table below.

	Member Experience	Outreach	Diversity	Sustainability and Growth
Member Experience	159			
Outreach	17	152		
Diversity	1	7	64	
Sustainability & Growth	2	4	6	51

Table 1. Number of suggestions in each *Emphasis Area* combination.

Recommendations of Strategic Planning Task Force

Board Charge

- *SPTF can include issues that it considers important that may not have been highlighted in member feedback (from summary of Board meeting, 8/14/18, and included in email from Board Chair to SPTF)*

SPTF Response

- Although rarely mentioned in members survey responses, the Ministry Team leadership is essential to the success of the Strategic Plan. Leaders' Platforms and personal engagement with members in a range of activities, both formal and informal, are among the most important factors in **Member Experience**. They also are models, in words and deeds, for **Outreach** to the community and a commitment to social action. As the face and voice of the Society, Leadership **Diversity** is a visible exemplar of what the Society values and promotes. And able leadership also ensures **Sustainability** and enhances the promise of **Growth**.
- A frequently mentioned priority was to increase community outreach and social action commitments. Some also mentioned that they did not know all the activities the Society was engaged in or supported. Kate has given Platforms reviewing Society outreach efforts, and the number and scope surprises many members. It might be helpful for there to be a central "bulletin board", perhaps on the website, that lists these and who to contact for more information.
- Members offered a wide variety of potential goals for the Society. However, not detailed are the means for addressing these goals. The Ministry Team and Board would profit from engaging members on an ongoing basis to help identify and develop innovative programs to address these goals.

Conclusion

The survey results reveal areas of emphasis traditionally cultivated by the Ethical Society--- **Outreach** and **Diversity**, as well as areas essential for the welfare and wellbeing of the Society--- **Member Experience**, and **Sustainability and Growth**. The survey responses are both a message of support, and a call to action to do more, and to do it better.

Respectfully submitted,

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Rachel Jones
Kate Lovelady
Mary Murphy-Overmann
George Salamon
Brian Vandenberg, Chair

Appendix A – Survey

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Ethical Society Member Survey – Strategic Plan

Foundational Principles of the Ethical Society of St. Louis

- We recognize the importance and worth of every human being and value the unique qualities present within each individual.
- We seek to promote personal moral development and social responsibility.
- We foster a caring and supportive community, recognizing that our relationships bind us together.
- We are dedicated to the principle that respect, compassion, and integrity are the building blocks of personal and global harmony.
- We are committed to life-long learning and self-improvement, seeking truth and meaning in all that we do.

What should the top three priorities be for the Ethical Society in the next five years? (Please be as specific as possible)

Priority 1:

Priority 2:

Priority 3:

Age (optional): _____

Take the survey online <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2N8HV72> or return a completed paper copy to the office.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts. It will help us significantly in planning for the future of the Ethical Society.

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Appendix B – Methods Used to Identify ‘Emphasis Areas and Goals’

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The following guidelines were used by the Strategic Planning Task Force (SPTF) to analyze and integrate Society members’ survey responses.

The survey conducted by the SPTF is a form of qualitative research (as it does not involve quantitative responses from respondents) that has its own methods and procedures for organizing and synthesizing data. Although this is not a formal research project, the SPTF followed basic methodological strategies of qualitative research to help minimize SPTF bias. The following steps were taken to identify *Emphasis Areas* and *Goals*:

Step 1

- The approach for organizing and synthesizing the responses must be an inductive, not a deductive one. This means that responses are not approached with preconceived categories that are then applied to the responses. Rather, the categories must emerge from close reading and pondering of individual responses. It is important to get “down into the dirt,” spend time with each and all of the responses, and let this information help inform of how responses might fit together. Evaluators must be open to surprises. The aim is to work from the ground (individual responses) up (categories).
- Task Force members did this separately, without consulting anyone else on the SPTF, to minimize the effects of bias, ‘group think’ and social influence on the formation of their categories. No more than 7 categories were generated by each SPTF member, to ensure parsimony and an integrative synthesis. SPTF members also identified subcategories of responses within the categories. SPTF members used their categories to individually code all the member responses to the survey.

Step 2

- SPTF members electronically sent their category and subcategory results to the other members.
- SPTF members, using the results received from the other members, created a new, “integrated” category and subcategory organization.
- This “integrated” organization was then electronically sent to the other SPTF members, and was the basis for the next step.

Step 3

- SPTF members met to discuss the “integrated” organizations of categories and subcategories. Deliberations were guided by a close and careful review of the survey responses, and the final organization was determined to be the best integrative fit of the responses. Society members’ survey responses were the source of the names for the categories and subcategories.
- To meet the terminology requested in the Board Charge, categories were renamed *Emphasis Areas* and subcategories renamed *Goals*.

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Appendix C – Emphasis Areas and Goals Coding Procedures

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Emphasis Area Coding

Step 1

Task Force members individually, and independently, coded each survey response into appropriate *Emphasis Areas*.

These guidelines were used to code responses:

- Overlapping, or multiple *Emphasis Area* codes for a single response item should be robust. That is, if an item clearly fits into one *Area*, but the fit in another *Area* is a “maybe,” then do not code the “maybe.” Both *Areas* should have the same, robust level of confidence (i.e., “Increase growth and diversity”).
- If a response item appears to not fit, exactly, into any *Area*, pick the *Area* with the strongest fit; do not give it multiple codes.
- Only use ‘No Rating’ for those items that clearly cannot be coded into any *Emphasis Area*. An item where there is ambiguity about which *Area* it fits is not treated the same as an item that clearly doesn’t fit any *Area*.

Step 2

- SPTF members then electronically shared their codings and a master list consisting of all *Emphasis Area* ratings by the SPTF members for each response item was compiled. Only those *Emphasis Areas* that received a majority agreement among the raters were listed as a “hit” in the final coding. There was a majority agreement on at least one *Emphasis Area* for 97% of the response items.
- The SPTF then met to discuss those response items where there was no majority agreement, and an *Emphasis Area* placement was determined once a majority agreement was reached. A majority agreement was reached on all items, including nine items that a majority agreed could not fit into any of the *Emphasis Areas*.

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