



ASA, CSSA, SSSA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative Recommendation Report

2021

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Introduction

At the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), our core values guide our efforts and long-standing commitment to proactively build a culture where every person can develop and apply their limitless potential in the fields of agronomy, crop, soil, and environmental sciences. We are also committed to increasing diversity across all disciplines of our sciences, beyond just demographics, by ensuring our community welcomes all members. Additionally, through collaboration and relationship-building, we seek out participation from those in underrepresented groups in order to build and develop a world in which studying, working, utilizing, contributing and promoting science are open to all.

The Societies developed a short-term, five phase action plan to raise awareness, conduct discovery, and develop long-term actions to support diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our science community.

Phase 1: Discovery and resource allocation efforts will be focused on compiling ASA, CSSA, and SSSA policies and procedures and raising seed funding for actions through the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF) and broader engagements.

Phase 2: Establish a DEI-focused leadership body and define roles and responsibilities. This phase will be critical in establishing leadership for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA initiatives and ensuring accountability measures are in place.

Phase 3: Extending beyond policies and procedures to understand the status of DEI across membership and staff activities. This will include multiple avenues (surveys, focus groups, and social media) to connect with members and certified professionals on needs and pathways forwards.

Phase 4: Transparency and communications are essential in raising awareness and accountability for actions and DEI outcomes. This phase will include the website and other communication builds to ease access to DEI information across ASA, CSSA, and SSSA.

Phase 5: Reporting and presentation for action will occur in this phase. Throughout the phases, the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Boards will be educated and presented recommendations coming from the DEI-focused leaders at the end of this phase. The education and recommendations will be guided by member input.

Over the past year, our Societies have worked to assess the current state of diversity, equity, and inclusion within our scientific communities. In addition, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA have collaborated with members and external scientific professional societies to help guide, educate, and provide actionable goals for our DEI Initiative moving forward. In this report, we will briefly discuss i) the accomplishments of the ASA, CSSA, SSSA DEI Initiative thus far, ii) the current challenges and successes of the Societies in regards to the scope of DEI, and most importantly iii) provide focus areas and recommendations for moving forward with DEI efforts based on member feedback.

Accomplishments

Within the past year, concrete actions have been taken to promote and integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the Societies, including funding, communications, member services, partnerships, and leadership/governance. Major accomplishments include:

- i) Funding operational budgets for DEI research and development,
- ii) Establishment of the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF)-IDEAS Fund to support DEI initiatives by ASF, the Societies, ACSESS, and allied partners,
- iii) Release of a Society-wide DEI survey and survey report to aid in the future direction of Society efforts

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA DEI Initiative Launch Overview of Accomplishments

Establishments
The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Boards of Directors approved the integration of the DEI Initiative into their strategic plans as the number one priority as a cross-society objective. August, 2020
Approved and published an updated and more comprehensive DEI Statement focusing on the vision and commitment to a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion for all.
Initial resource allocation - staff support, fund reallocation, and fundraising ASF-IDEAS Fund established - \$250,000 seed funding.
Diversity Committee reorganization to lead the DEI Initiative. Establishment of the SSSA, ASA, and CSSA DEI Board Members-at-Large.
Assess current state of diversity, equity and inclusion within the Societies
ASA, CSSA, and SSSA member-wide DEI survey was conducted in Spring 2021. Meetings conducted with groups and individuals to gain a greater understanding of considerations for DEI activities.
Analysis of statistics on the extent of diversity within the Societies.
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Survey Report was finalized and presented to all Board of Directors in July 2021 and made public to all members via the Societies' DEI websites.

Communication
Created Communications Plan to guide dissemination of DEI information to members and leadership.
Developed and updated www.agronomy.org/diversity , www.crops.org/diversity , www.soils.org/diversity web pages and updated as new information and phases of the initiative were completed.
Provide <i>CSA news</i> with DEI Initiative plan overview, survey results articles.
Partnerships
2021 Bridge Scholars Program with SACNAS and the Societies bringing Native American and Hispanic/Chicanos scientists to our Annual Meeting and promoting the Societies at the SACNAS meeting. Collaborations with MANRRS within the Bayer Diversity Scholars program (2020) and Encompass Fellows/Scholars program (2021).
DEI Initiative Recommendation
Developed a comprehensive report for members and leadership with recommendations to advance the DEI initiative to the next phase.

Current DEI State of the Societies

Demographics

As Science Societies, we have demographic data on approximately 43% of our 9,000 members (2020 data). Combined, the three Societies, 84% are white, 72% are male and roughly 66% are at universities. These statistics do not mirror the diversity across our global populations – nor the strength it provides.

DEI Within the Societies

Several catalysts in 2020 pushed organizations further to recognize and respond to the inequities within scientific societies (and the greater society). However, providing opportunities, education, networking, and a welcoming community has always been a priority for the Societies.

Therefore, all three Societies committed to a greater focus on addressing efforts that ensure the Societies are diverse, equitable and inclusive. This led to the launch of the cross-Society DEI Initiative, the top priority in the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Strategic Plans. Currently, **73% of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA members, and across all gender**

types, believe the DEI Initiative should be a top priority for leadership and staff, per the 2021 DEI Survey.

Through a year-long process, the Societies have sought to assess their organizational cultures and explore how to better align our DEI efforts with organizational goals. Leadership and staff, in partnership with a member-affiliated DEI Project consultant, sought to understand where other scientific organizations and our own members were in their journeys, struggles, and prospective goals. According to these various groups and organizations within and external to the Societies, people agreed that when approaching a DEI Initiative one should:

- Be open to conversations from all points of view,
- Acknowledge that there is discrimination/bias and it needs to be addressed to bring positive change,
- Provide support for those in under-represented groups as needed,
- Be aware of reverse discrimination and/or the perception of it, and
- Meet people where they are in their DEI journey.

Just like across all professional societies, there are proponents and detractors for the DEI initiative within the Societies along with a group that believe there are no DEI-related concerns within the Societies. This should not be seen as negative or positive but rather as another perspective to learn from, which leads into one of the most requested training topics for the Societies to take action on - addressing and educating all members on learning how to process and respect other perspectives.

Based on survey data, member conversations, and training, a series of recommendations has been developed to shape the expanded diversity, equity and inclusion within the Societies. ***As we move forward to provide an inclusive organization, it is crucial to take action on these areas where the Societies need to focus our efforts based on member feedback.***

These recommendations are listed in priority order, with the first four (anti-harassment policy development, education/training, mentoring, and support) viewed as most important by members. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Committee (ACS 528) will be responsible for further definition and development of each recommendation.

ACS 528: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee is a Special Committee and has been restructured to focus on advancing the goals and programmatic activities related to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Due to the strategic nature of the committee, members will simultaneously bring their unique voices while considering and making decisions that reflect the objectives of the DEI Initiative. Further details of the committee can be found on each Society's committee webpage.

Functions include:

- The committee is a collaborative group dedicated to enhancing equity within our sciences, inclusion throughout our Societies, and in turn increasing diversity in people and perspectives. The committee works to address the overall Societies' DEI initiatives as informed by members, the Board of Directors, the elected leadership and staff.
- Serve as an advisory committee to promote the status of those in under-represented groups in the Societies.
- To submit periodic reports, as requested, to the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Boards of Directors and through the annual report.
- Serve as the nominations committee to select the candidates for the DEI member at large Board positions for the Society elections.

Recommendations

Professional Conduct and Anti-Harassment Policies Development

In the DEI member survey, 17 percent of participants noted that they have personally experienced discrimination in the Societies, which may be in many forms. While many noted that this discrimination happened in the distant past, any discrimination is too much.

Furthermore, there is greater awareness among professional organizations that they are responsible for ensuring there is a framework for model honors and awards policies, meetings, members, general conduct, and addressing conduct concerns of members, particularly around harassment. This includes when members are found guilty of offenses within their work and/or other professional society settings. Finally, the Societies must recognize their ability to educate members on acceptable behaviors - both within our activities/programs and as members of the greater society.

We recommend the development of an Ethics Committee and timeline to:

- establish a Society-wide OMBUDs program ensuring that reporters of harassment are safe and have emotional support (for launch prior to the 2022 Annual Meeting),
- review and update conduct policies (by mid-year 2023)
- develop investigation and resolution policy guidelines (by year-end 2023)

Education/Training

Members are interested in education and training opportunities to increase their DEI competency and provide them with the right tools to address DEI issues within and outside of their organizations. The top three highest priority areas for education/training are:

- developing inclusive workplace practices (with many components),
- understanding power dynamics, and
- facilitating conversations.

In addition to these areas, it will be important to address other vital areas of interest to our members, such as recruiting diverse candidates, implicit bias, and understanding other perspectives. Education and training efforts must realize that there is overlap with concepts and find ways to address that.

We recommend the establishment of a working group to develop an education and professional development plan (utilizing the results of the DEI survey) and timeline. This working group may sunset (or transition to an implementation group) once the plan is completed, which should be developed within 12 months of the approval of this report.

Mentoring

Mentoring is one of the most fundamental assets the Societies can offer members and is crucial for establishing an environment of inclusivity. We highly recommend the assessment, funding, and development of a robust mentoring program that connects members with mentors - regardless of career stage - within and across-Societies. This involves:

- A comprehensive mentoring system (software)
- Communications
- Management
- Promotions
- Evaluation and improvements

There is strong support among members for more *action* in developing a stronger mentoring program and research shows that a strong mentoring program can help retain diverse talent. Secondary opportunities that support this may also include:

- Mentoring for first-time annual meeting attendees,
- Mentoring for recent graduates, where we tend to lose a percentage of members, and
- Developing career information (in a variety of media including video) that features diverse representation of people in the scientists across a spectrum of careers

We recommend the establishment of a working group to review and provide input into a mentoring system. This working group may be sunset once the Mentoring Program is completed. We recommend the review and development of this mentoring program within two years of the approval of this report.

Support and Collaborations

Within the DEI Survey, only 36% agree or strongly agree that the Societies provide programs and resources to foster the success of under-represented groups in our membership. And 55% believe a top priority is to “engage and support under-represented individuals through programs and activities and develop long-term relationships with minority-serving institutions/organizations and diversity advocacy groups.” As such:

- Develop programs to assist those in under represented groups to ensure the Societies provide equity in their opportunities ensure equity for the greatest number of members in under-represented groups,
- Consider travel and financial support,
- Build on the relationships in place with diversity advocacy groups and determine actions to build more deeply rooted long-term relationships with minority-serving institutions.
- Define what a “support” program looks like, where an example may be the most recent 2021 Bridge Scholars. This also includes addressing challenges such as introducing spaces for non-traditional agricultural, crop and soil science research in our Societies.

We recommend analyzing current programs, formulating a path for developing programs, and collaborating when possible with outside groups/organizations/universities for joint activities before the 2023 ASA, CSSA, SSSA Annual Meeting. Additionally, we recommend liaising with the Agronomic Science Foundation and other funders for financial support.

Leadership, Governance, and Policies

The membership spoke clearly in the DEI Survey that there is a lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the leadership of the Societies. Diversity of thought is imperative as the Societies evolve and adapt to the ongoing change in our world. To ensure equity, it is critical that the policies and procedures, across all activities, be reviewed for unintentional bias, disadvantages, and inequities that may prevent those who are interested in fully participating and engaging with the Societies.

Reviews should include and are not limited to:

- Policies of the Societies
- Nominations/election procedures/candidate selection
- Committee/reviewer appointment process/structures
- Awards application language and requirements/selection criteria and processes
- Peer-review criteria
- Governance documents

We recommend a working group be established to oversee a full review of the Societies policies and processes, within a three-year timeframe from the approval of this recommendation.

Secondly, we recommend a working group be established to develop and execute a plan for continuous assessments and monitoring to ensure equity of representation within the various leadership of each Society and leadership areas including divisions, communities, committees/task forces/working groups, editorial boards, certification boards, and boards of directors. Ideally, the plan developed by the work group will be completed within a two-year timeframe.

Finally, a working group should be established to develop and implement training for all Society leaders that focuses on DEI-specific policies, procedures (including reporting), actions, activities, and how they can positively affect change to ensure a culture of inclusivity. This training should be implemented by the end of 2022.

Communication

The Societies have established a DEI Communications Plan that reviews the current platforms, audiences, and opportunities to communicate our DEI initiative and activities. The plan also provides recommendations to ensure the Societies are prepared to effectively communicate across our audiences, gather feedback, and facilitate discussions on an ongoing basis.

Currently, the Societies have numerous communications tools and this plan seeks to effectively maximize communications efforts to members, non-members, certificants, and stakeholders on our DEI Initiatives.

Staff, across all departments that contribute to the communications activities of the Societies, will work to implement the Communications Plan and ensure information is efficiently distributed to members across a variety of platforms, while members will have a crucial role in communicating to staff the diverse research and activities occurring across our Societies. We recommend that staff develop a plan for implementing the activities outlined in the Communication Plan within two years.

Activities may include:

- Creating a space for DEI information, on an ongoing basis, in our publications and journals, including publishing the DEI Survey report in all three Society flagship journals
- Inclusify the Websites - ensure diversity is portrayed within the range of content areas
- Review all Society communications vehicles for diverse representation
- Consider opportunities to engage members in conversations and discussions such as town halls, debate night, book club, videos, strengthening Specialty Groups; creating “Months” of Celebration (Black History Month, Women in Science, Pride Month, Veterans Celebrations, etc)
- Develop mechanisms for member feedback
- Assess the need for a funded review of communications and websites to ensure representation and accurate portrayal of diversity in our sciences and Societies

Ideally, the plan will be developed within the first year of the recommendations approval and all components of the plan implemented by the end of the third year.

Measuring Success

Establishing and communicating specific and measurable goals will help guide the Societies forward, assess their direction and improvement, and help members and donors know where the Societies are in their DEI journey as well in terms of the efforts being made.

Metrics for tracking consideration should include:

- demographics (including changes to demographic information collected),
- number and impact of programs and activities,
- evaluation by participants in programs and activities, and a
- change in perception of diversity, equity and inclusion of the Societies and their programs.

We recommend that the DEI Committee, with staff, develop specific metrics for measurement and inclusion of these metrics in communications to members on an annual basis, starting with simple and attainable metrics in the first year and expanding over time.

Alliance of Crop, Soil and Environmental Science Societies (ACSESS)

DEI runs throughout everything the Societies do including our staff. Therefore, it is imperative that DEI efforts be taken at a staff level as well. Actions include but are not limited to:

- establishing a designated DEI staff lead to coordinate with the DEI Committee, Leadership, and staff (by quarter 1 of 2022), and
- developing a review process of policies and procedures in hiring, retaining, and training staff to ensure DEI at the staff level (by year-end 2023)

This recommendation will be performed by ACSESS staff, where they will report accomplishments to the DEI Committee.

Timeline and Priority Chart

Leadership and staff of our Societies values all member input and understands that recommendations are equal in importance. Nonetheless, approaching all recommendations at once is unrealistic and therefore we have provided a recommendation for prioritization of actions to help establish a foundation. We recommend that the first three priority areas approached by the DEI committee should be: anti-harassment policies development, education/training, and mentoring. The DEI Committee, in its new structure, will be launched in January, 2022. The committee has reviewed the recommendations and timelines (see page 13) for the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Boards of Directors to review and approve.

Recommendation Implementation Timeline

	Year 1 - 2022				Year 2 - 2023				Year 3 -2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
DEI Initiative Actions												
Establishment of new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion ACS Committee and review/approval of recommendations report												
Presentation of Recommendation Report to ACS Board of Directors												
Top 3 Priorities												
Anti-Harassment Policies Development												
Education/Training												
Mentoring												
Other Recommendations												
Support and Collaboration												
Leadership, Governance, and Policies												
Measuring Success												
Alliance of Crop, Soil, and Environmental Science Societies (ACSESS)												
Communication												
Establish and implement plan for recurring updates on DEI efforts												