By Sandy Hirsh

PRESIDENT’S PAGE

Our committees and task forces have been very busy working on important ASIS&T business and initiatives. I am devoting this issue’s column to one of these initiatives – our strategic planning process. The goals of the process are to

- provide strategic direction for the Association, thus setting the Association up for long-term success
- review ASIS&T’s mission, vision and goals and translate these into clear actions that can be reported on
- allow the Association to better align resources with strategic goals
- ensure that the Association is meeting membership needs and being more transparent.

We kicked off our strategic planning process at the 2014 Annual Meeting in Seattle with a series of focus group sessions and opportunities for attendees to give their input on four key questions. I wanted to share some of the preliminary findings with you and also provide an update about next steps in the strategic planning process.

Focus Groups: Key Themes from the 2014 Annual Meeting

Six focus group sessions were held at the 2014 Annual Meeting in Seattle with two groups of practitioners (members 0-5 years and members 6+ years), two groups of academics/faculty (members 0-5 years and members 6+ years), one group

EDITOR’S SUMMARY

From focus groups and other member input opportunities at the 2014 Annual Meeting in Seattle, several themes emerged for organizational goals and priorities. Seeing ASIS&T as a professional home, members appreciate opportunities for recognition and development and look for stronger links between theory and practice. Commenters approve of the association’s international scope, and many note the value of expanding strategic alliances with other information-oriented organizations, the desire to network outside the Annual Meeting and build regional chapters and the need to improve internal communications. The Strategic Planning Task Force will continue collecting and analyzing data and, drawing on feedback, draft and finalize a strategic plan for the Association’s long-term success.

KEYWORDS
Association for Information Science and Technology
strategic planning
goals
feedback
focus groups
of students (including master and doctoral students) and one group of ASIS&T leaders. Volunteer facilitators and note-takers ran the focus group sessions, in which more than 60 people participated. Some key themes emerged from the focus group sessions.

- One of the overarching themes is the feeling that ASIS&T is “home.” Members believe that ASIS&T provides them with personal connections through, for instance, chapters, SIGs and annual meetings, and with a scholarly or professional community that is unique. As one participant stated: “This conference is like a family reunion. There is a feeling of home.”

- Other reasons that members continue their involvement with ASIS&T are for getting recognition and building their reputation, pursuing leadership opportunities in the Association and continuing their professional development.

- Most participants want ASIS&T to foster a closer connection among theory, research and practice; this need is an opportunity for the Association.

- There are differing opinions about where ASIS&T should focus its efforts for growing the Association. While several participants think that ASIS&T should do more to connect with practitioners (such as ensuring that the Annual Meeting offer more than just scholarly research), other believe that ASIS&T should instead focus on increasing the number of international academics and researchers.

- Participants are positive about the Association’s name change as a good first step toward making the association relevant outside of North America, but they think that much work is still needed to grow the Association’s international reputation.

- Participants have many ideas about ways they think the Annual Meeting should evolve. These ideas include more variety in session types beyond the papers/panels format, opportunities to consider and generate solutions to real-world problems (as well as to share and address practical problems), additional support for career development and networking and more financial support to attend the Annual Meeting.

- Participants look for more ways to be engaged in ASIS&T outside of, or between, conferences – so that ASIS&T is “more than just a conference.” Some ideas suggested include offering more web-based and regional programming and educational opportunities and cultivation of interpersonal connections around topics of interest.

- Participants believe that the Association could improve its information management practices and internal communication with membership. For example, better communication with the broader membership about the activities, priorities and organizational structure of SIGs, chapters and conferences is desired.

- Participants suggest many ideas for strategic alliances that the Association might pursue to address the perceived need to bring in more practitioners and boost the diversity of scholarly viewpoints at the Annual Meeting. Some suggestions include liaising with organizations whose membership rosters overlap with ASIS&T such as ALA/ACRL/LITA, SLA and the Research Data Alliance and building bridges between ASIS&T researchers and professionals/policymakers who are currently unaware of ASIS&T.

**Poster Questions: Key Themes from the 2014 Annual Meeting**

Attendees at the 2014 Annual Meeting had the opportunity to share their responses to four questions that were posted on posters. Approximately 70 responses were collected. These questions, and a summary of responses, are listed below.

- **What does ASIS&T membership mean to you?** Similar to the focus group findings, the theme that ASIS&T is “home” emerged as an important reason that people continue their membership in the Association. As one person put it: ASIS&T is “a place for great connections on
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a professional as well as a personal level.” People also value the ability to “learn about new developments years before they appear at other conferences.”

- **What distinguishes ASIS&T from your other professional affiliations?** One of the key themes in response to this question is how ASIS&T blends theory and current practice and how it bridges disciplines: this “broadening scope is essential for innovation; ASIS&T encourages this!” People again talked about how ASIS&T “is like a professional family.” Especially important is how “everyone here is open to networking, unlike many other professional organizations where cliques reject other people.”

- **How can ASIS&T help you achieve your goals?** The answers to this question are more varied. Ways that people think that ASIS&T can help them achieve their goals include providing opportunities to discuss where the field is going, helping members find jobs, offering mentorship and networking opportunities, and providing “research mentorship for practitioners that don’t have a strong LIS research culture at their current place of work.” They also offered several ideas for different types of programs.

- **What ASIS&T benefits would help you most and enhance your membership?** These are among the responses:
  - More opportunities for student members such as more awards, leadership positions, stronger student organizations and more support resources for student chapter
  - Mentoring for students, emerging scholars, new professionals and others
  - Strengthening regional chapters
  - Financial support for presenters coming from abroad
  - Job advice
  - “Translational workshop for practitioners”

**Next Steps**

These preliminary findings are a starting point for the Association’s continuing discussion of the value that ASIS&T already provides to its members and where its membership would like to see the association direct its attention in the future. The Strategic Planning Task Force, chaired by Michael Leach, will be very busy over the next several months. Next steps include more data collection and analysis, drafting strategic priorities and plans, and soliciting feedback on the draft plan from the ASIS&T membership. The approximate timeline is as follows:

- **Data Collection and Analysis – through April 2015:** This phase involves collecting and analyzing membership data and trends; reviewing existing reports such as Membership Committee reports; and holding more focus group sessions, both virtual and onsite sessions with students, lapsed members, practitioners and members from outside North America.

- **Draft Strategic Plan and Feedback – through September 25:** A draft strategic plan will be developed and feedback from ASIS&T members will be solicited.

- **Final Strategic Plan – November 2015:** The revised strategic plan will be rolled out at the 2015 Annual Meeting. I encourage your participation in this important strategic planning process. If you are interested in participating in one of the focus group sessions or would like to provide input into the process, please contact our ASIS&T New Leader Maric Kramer (member of the Strategic Planning Task Force) at mkramer<at>wheelock.edu.

As shared in this column, initial findings gathered through the strategic planning process so far have identified areas for ASIS&T to improve but also highlighted some of the important strengths of the Association – especially the sense of community that the Association provides. As one focus group participant stated: “I love ASIS&T! There are a few things I’d like to see change, but this is the most valuable professional organization for me.” I am optimistic about the future of our Association and am looking forward to working with you over the coming months in the development of the strategic plan.”