

Structural Engineers Association of Washington

Strategic Plan 2012-2015



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Recommended by the SEAW State Board of Trustees on February 3, 2012
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Mission: The Structural Engineers Association of Washington is a not-for-profit professional organization dedicated to the advancement of excellence in structural engineering through building code advocacy, continuing education, research, emergency preparedness, exchange of ideas, and mentoring, to ensure the highest standards of practice are upheld and to guard public safety.

Membership in SEAW is essential to the professional development and success of structural engineers practicing in Washington.

SEAW Values:

- Education
- Professionalism
- Public Welfare
- Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

*“If you are working on something you really care about,
you don’t have to be pushed. The vision pulls you.”
~Steve Jobs*

Background and Strategic Planning Process:

The Structural Engineers Association of Washington (SEAW) is a 501(c)(6) professional society with a membership of 860 engineers practicing across Washington State. SEAW is the umbrella organization for four regional Chapters (Seattle, Spokane, Southwest, South Central), each of which has its own Board of Directors.

SEAW has been in existence since 1950, and this was its first formal strategic planning process in many years; it brought together leaders from the State Board and every Chapter.

SEAW contracted with Donna Cameron, CAE, President of Melby, Cameron & Anderson, an Association Management and Consulting firm in the Seattle area. Donna prepared two surveys: one to assess the concerns and attitudes of State Board and Chapter leaders, and a second comprehensive survey of satisfaction and priorities sent to all SEAW members. The latter survey received a 27.6% response rate (245 completions). Results of both surveys were sent to the planning group (State Board, Chapter Board members, selected at-large leaders). Based on the survey results, Donna prepared a series of “pre-planning” messages providing background for retreat participants and setting the stage for the day of planning. Donna also used the results of the two surveys to craft a draft Vision Statement and Vision Story for SEAW, using the ideas and words of the members and leaders. The intent was that, given only about six hours together, the group could finalize and approve the Visions and focus on identifying goals and action steps toward achieving them.

Once the planning group identified five broad planning hubs, it brainstormed goals and then broke into small groups to begin refining them and determining strategies for achieving them. Groups were asked to be very specific in terms of what success looks like: quantitatively, qualitatively, accountability, cost, timeline. Each group shared its work with the full body and further refined it during discussion.

Donna Cameron compiled the report and worked with a small taskforce to finalize it for distribution to the full planning group and ultimately to the SEAW Board for approval, following which it will be communicated extensively to the full membership.

Strategic Analysis/Observations:

Recognizing that SEAW’s resources (time, money, staff, volunteers) are not unlimited, consultant suggests that in the near term (2012 into 2013) SEAW focus its time and energy in the following critical areas:

- Establish clear processes by which committees are activated and empowered to most effectively conduct the mission- and vision-critical work of the Association. This includes succession planning and nurturing younger members to be leaders of the future.
- Actively address membership needs for continuing education and professional development – at a variety of levels and through diverse delivery methods (with face-to-face primary for the immediate future).

- Focus on delivering and communicating value to existing members while targeting new members through strategic and deliberate efforts.
- Focus on expanding communication efforts—via newsletter and other electronic outreach, enhancement of website, and an ongoing “listening campaign” with members, where SEAW not only communicates its activities to members, but continually seeks opportunities to hear from members about their interests and concerns.
- Solidify and clarify a governance structure that will best serve members and allow you to most effectively move toward your strategic vision for 2022 (remembering always that form follows function). This includes State and Chapter Board structure, operations, and interactions—which should be set in policies/procedures for ongoing consistency and clarity.

This is not to say that you should not address other activities and initiatives that emerged from the planning retreat if capacity exists, but that these five “hub” areas are most critical to SEAW’s present and future success.

While the vision story that was crafted is of what SEAW aspires to look like in 2022, this strategic plan is intended as a three-year plan which will make great strides in moving SEAW toward its vision for 2022. It is recommended that SEAW leaders come together annually to review and update the plan, celebrate accomplishments, set some new goals, and identify new strategies for achieving them. Another in-depth planning retreat should take place in 2014 or 2015—at which time you can update or revise your vision for 2022, perhaps extending it to 2024 or 2025. Mission, vision, and values tend to be fairly timeless—so you should not see the need to revise them for some time. You will, of course, want to revisit them and keep them at the forefront of *everything* you do.

Remember that your planning challenge is as much knowing what to say “no” to as what to say “yes” to. SEAW must be careful not to spread its resources too thin or cloud its purpose. Each year, you should be looking at the *critical few* things you want to focus on for the coming year, mindful of what you want to earmark for subsequent years.

It’s worth taking the time occasionally to review the following reasons why plans typically fail and see if you have inadvertently fallen into any of these traps. If so, take steps to remedy.

Why does planning fail?

- We made it too big and too complicated
- We assume the plan is the product
- We fail to apply specific and measurable performance measures
- We fail to make the plan central to everything we do (we put it on the shelf)
- We fail to assign and empower a monitor
- We fail to maintain the momentum and enthusiasm
- We communicate insufficiently
- We fail to acknowledge and celebrate our successes

SEAW MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

SEAW's Mission Statement:

(The mission statement has been in existence for some time and leaders felt it is still an accurate and compelling reflection of SEAW's mission. One individual had concerns about the use of the word "highest" and the ability of SEAW to truly "guard" public safety. Such language tweaks would not materially change the mission, and you may want to address them at a future Board meeting.)

The Structural Engineers Association of Washington is a not-for-profit professional organization dedicated to the advancement of excellence in structural engineering through building code advocacy, continuing education, research, emergency preparedness, exchange of ideas, and mentoring, to ensure the highest standards of practice are upheld and to guard public safety.

SEAW Values

(A numbers of words to describe SEAW's values were used with some frequency by members in both the Leaders Survey and the Members Survey. Planning participants were asked to "vote" on the words that resonated most deeply with them and four values emerged well ahead of all others.)

- Education
- Professionalism
- Public Welfare
- Leadership

"If you think of vision and mission as an organization's heart and head, the values it holds are its soul."

~Buzzotta Beatty

SEAW Vision Statement

(This is a brief, compelling, statement of what SEAW aspires to be; it can be used on the website, business cards, collateral material, and other places where you want to convey your intent for the organization.)

Membership in SEAW is essential to the professional development and success of structural engineers practicing in Washington.

SEAW Vision Story

(This is a compelling, multi-paragraph description of SEAW's preferred future, something that would make an engineer say upon reading it, "I'd really like to belong to that Association." It is a more detailed—but still vivid—description of what that future looks like.)

SEAW Vision Story 2022

Membership in SEAW is viewed as essential to the professional development and success of a structural engineer. Our members value an array of benefits, including education and training opportunities offered to them at every level of their careers and delivered in-person and via technological options. There are myriad ways to become involved through technical and professional committees, taskforces and shared interest groups, as well as social and educational events that build engagement and community and provide opportunities for networking and peer exchange of ideas. SEAW offers a robust website providing important knowledge/resources and interactive opportunities. Leadership and mentoring opportunities are abundant.

SEAW's fiscal position is stable and strong. The association is seen as a leader both on the national and state level. Its professional staff is competent, efficient, responsive, and committed to its mission. There is a clear definition and delineation of roles and responsibilities between and among the State Association and its Chapters, and within their respective committees. The Association and its Chapters are active in legislative and regulatory advocacy, and seen as leaders in code development and emergency preparedness. State and Chapter committees are active and clearly focused on achieving the mission and goals of the Association.

Leadership positions in SEAW and its Chapters are highly regarded and sought after, and the Association has a clear pathway for leadership training, development and succession. Leaders serve with the primary intent of advancing the Association, serving members, and contributing to the profession. Relationships formed through SEAW are lasting and valuable, both professionally and personally.

Society recognizes the contribution structural engineers make to public safety. Structural engineers are respected and highly regarded within the built environment and the general public. The S.E. designation is widespread and sought by engineers as a valuable indicator of professionalism and competence.

IDENTIFICATION OF STRATEGIC GOALS

Insights

Participants described insights they perceived from the results of the Members Survey, conducted in late October 2011:

- Continuing education is a top priority
- Among many members it is not clear what the value of membership in SEAW is
- Mentoring is seen as a valuable way of helping younger members launch their careers and become involved in the Association
- Code development and simplification are a high priority
- Some members would like to see SEAW occasionally focus on structures other than building (e.g., bridges)
- Some members find it challenging to participate in SEAW or Chapter activities due to location, timing, or other conflicts
- There is room for improvement in communications and website
- Succession planning and transition of leadership is a significant concern
- Some members expressed concerns about lack of professional courtesy/respect among competitors
- For some members employment assistance would be a welcome benefit
- Many members recognize the need for more visibility for structural engineering—within the design and construction community, with regulators/policy-makers, media, and the general public
- The economy is the big worry on most members' minds
- Many would like to see greater promotion of the S.E. designation

Five Major Goal Areas

Using the mission and vision, as well as the insights and assumptions that had been discussed, the planning group identified five major goal areas that need to be addressed if SEAW is to achieve its vision:

- Continuing Education/Professional Development
- Membership Growth and Engagement
- Advocacy and Public Outreach
- Leadership Succession and Committee Effectiveness
- Optimize Organizational Effectiveness and Structure

The group brainstormed goal statements and key strategies for each of these five important areas. They were clustered and combined to create a goal statement and identify potential strategies toward those goals. Participants broke into five small groups, each tasked with refining the goal statement and identifying strategies, tactics, and steps to achieving them. The groups were asked to be as specific as they possibly could—applying metrics to the goals and the strategies (qualitative, quantitative, accountability, cost, timeline...). In the limited time available, it was understood that some unanswered questions would remain, as well as some metrics that would be determined later. The following pages describe the goals/plans developed by each of the five groups. A workplan tracking table has also been crafted to monitor and track progress.

Continuing Education/Professional Development

Goal: SEAW offers ongoing education and professional development opportunities to members at every stage of their careers through a variety of methods.

Strategy #1: Survey membership for ideas and input about educational topics, delivery methods, timing, and potential speakers

Action steps:

- Activate Education Committee
- Recommend that Education Committee to prepare survey (with consultation/assistance, if needed)
- Use results of survey and new commitment to education to approach larger companies with request that they share designs, techniques, possible presenters
- Approach SEAW refresher course instructors to provide education
- Approach material representatives/suppliers for designs/techniques, possibly speakers and/or educational sponsorship funding
- Explore possibility of partnering with another state association(s) to offer webinars or other on-line training

Strategy #2: Reinstate mini-seminars at SEAW meetings

Action steps:

- Develop one topic for each meeting (Seattle Chapter, in consultation with other chapters)
- Design/determine delivery method for other chapters (each Chapter)
- Offer/issue PDH credits
- Communicate that the intent is to prepare young engineers for the exam and provide review for more experienced engineers

Strategy #3: Offer half-day or full-day in-person seminars twice per year in both Seattle and Spokane

Action steps:

- Issue PDH Credits
- Put together a calendar of meetings and topics to post on website and promote statewide
- Use website and other means to promote the events and their educational/networking value
- Possibly seek sponsorships for these educational events

Membership Growth and Engagement

Goal: SEAW's membership grows by 3% (net) each year, resulting in 1250 members in 2022. Members are active and engaged and recognize the value of their membership.

Strategy #1: Measure current participation in SEAW activities using information from SEAW database; put together a report addressing the following:

Action steps:

- Activate Membership Committee
- How many committees do we have and how many participants, and where do they come from (i.e., what chapter)?
- What is each chapter's level of lunch/dinner meeting participation?
- What is the typical Conference attendance and where are attendees coming from?
- What is the participation in SEAW by representatives of higher education? Is there an opportunity for growth here?

Strategy #2: Identify potential new members, including students, EITs, PEs, and non-member SEs

Action steps:

- If retention data is available, examine it to see what the average year-to-year retention percentage is; if data is not available; begin collecting it and benchmarking it from year to year
- Using retention data, calculate how many new members must be recruited each year to meet the 3% net goal
- Charge a Membership Committee with overseeing the success of this goal
- Use leadership of firms to recruit their non-member employees
- Access public records for list of licensed SEs and their contact information
- Contact non-member licensed SEs for membership
- Target engineering firms that are not well-represented in SEAW
- Utilize website to communicate value and provide resources members will seek

Strategy #3: Improve communication to members regarding SEAW and Chapter events

Action steps:

- Post calendar of events and activities on the website
- Send e-mails announcing events to members
- Make the roster of members easily available and downloadable in the members-only section of the website
- Send timely "e-news" as supplement to periodic newsletters

Strategy #4: Improve communication from Committees to membership

Action steps:

- Post committee meeting reports/summaries/minutes on the website
- Establish blogs to encourage interactive dialogue
- Incorporate techniques of social media

- Utilize input from YMF to assure website and communication strategies are meeting the needs of younger members

Strategy #5: Make meetings and conferences more relevant and attractive to a greater number of members

Action steps:

- Using data from member survey and survey proposed under C.E. goal, assure timing of events best meets members' needs
- Using data from member survey and survey proposed under C.E. goal, assure topics, speakers, and delivery methods are both relevant and interesting
- Promote networking and social interaction at all meetings

Advocacy and Public Outreach

Goal: Through the efforts of SEAW, the structural engineering profession is visible, respected, and highly valued within the design and construction industry and the general public.

Strategy #1: Partner with other organizations in the building and construction industry to create opportunities for collaboration and increased visibility

Action steps:

- Public Information Committee (PIC) to identify target organizations (i.e., AIA, ASCE, PSEC, WABO, CREW (Cascadia Region Earthquake Workgroup)...refer to member survey to see which organizations respondents hold dual memberships in)
- Contact target organizations to explore collaborative relationship (such as liaisons, joint meetings, project collaboration...). Board oversees this effort.

Strategy #2: Create and post documents that will increase SEAW visibility and credibility among members, potential members, and interested outsiders

Action steps:

- Write white papers on topics of interest and relevance and post on website (PIC in collaboration with other committees)
- Develop policy statements for posting on website and disseminating elsewhere as appropriate (Board in collaboration with PIC)

Strategy #3: Increase visibility to students

Action steps:

- Coordinate “mentor nights” which might be connected to a dinner meeting presentation; recruit members to participate as mentors (PSEC representative)
- Promote the scholarship program (Scholarship Committee)
- Support ACE mentor program – SEAW Board (*this might include promotion of ACE mentoring at meetings or through newsletter; encouraging attendance; possibly having the Foundation sponsor an ACE scholarship...*)
- Develop and offer presentations to students through their schools and universities
- Coordinate YMF outreach lunches (YMF)

Strategy #4: Increase visibility of structural engineering profession to general public

Action steps:

- Develop a page on the website that describes what a structural engineer is and the importance to public safety (PIC)
- Develop and offer presentations on value and importance of structural engineering (PIC and Foundation)
- Issue policy statements that have relevance and interest to the media and general public (Board in collaboration with PIC)
- Partner with groups such as CREW for public education (Board)
- Give earthquake reconnaissance briefings and post report on website (Disaster Preparedness Committee)

Leadership Succession and Committee Effectiveness

Goal: All active committees have clear goals and defined outcomes related to the Association's mission and are accountable for achieving those goals. Committees are a means of involvement and can be a path to SEAW leadership

Strategy #1: A task group of the State Board will review committee goals and procedures to assure that they match the long-term goals, to determine if individual committees need to be activated, to assure committee charge is clear, and identify if there are any barriers to participation that can be removed.

Action steps:

- Board decides who will conduct the review and whether to utilize chapters for the task
- Board develops multiple leadership models – *flexible enough to allow long-serving committee chairs who have gained national stature to continue in their roles, and also to encourage younger leaders who may not want to make a long-term commitment.*
- Activate a Website and/or Communications Committee or Taskforce

Strategy #2: Improve Committee Outreach to activate more members working on committees and to assure committees are able to accomplish their tasks

Action Steps:

- Post committee meeting times and locations on the website
- Post on website committee descriptions, charges, and calls for participation
- Make committee outreach through YMF; committee chair or designee(s) attend YMF happy hours
- Make outreach to unemployed and under-employed
- Facilitate committee meetings through web-based technologies (e.g., Go to Meeting, WebEx)
- Move the August Committee Dinner meeting to a month later in the year where attendance is likely to be better

Strategy #3: Develop a plan to engage firms in encouraging participation in SEAW committees among their employees

Action Steps:

- Use survey results and testimonials to prepare an attractive document illustrating the value members derive from participation
- Create a small taskforce of “illustrious” members to sign the letter to firms, and possibly make phone calls to some of the larger target companies

Strategy #4: Align code committees with national groups to encourage SEAW voice at the national level

Action Steps (refer to):

- Seismology
- Wind
- Existing Building
- General

Optimize Organizational Effectiveness and Structure

Goal: Achieve the best structure of the State Association, Chapters and Committees to accomplish SEAW's mission and vision, and serve members most effectively

Strategy #1: Review the effectiveness and efficiency of the State Board with respect to finance, administration, and committee oversight, as well as with regard to Chapter representation on the State Board

Action steps:

- Form a taskforce to address this issue (Jill Shuttleworth, Howard Burton, John Tawresey, Luke Heath, Dave Peden, Ted Smith)
- Talk to members about perceptions and concerns
- Formulate a position and recommendation to be presented to the State Board by Jan. 27

Strategy #2: Review SEAW finances to identify possible inefficiencies, redundancies, and areas where improvements can be made (assigned to Treasurer Ted Smith)

Action steps:

- Review and analyze financial aspects of State/Chapter interactions
- Present recommendations to taskforce by January 20 and then to Board at January 27 meeting

Strategy #3: Review Committee operations, assignments, and composition to determine optimum structure and organization to get the work done

Action steps:

- Taskforce will ask for feedback from committee chairs and key leaders
- Present analysis and recommendations to Board

Strategy #4: Recommend that every Chapter Board evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the SEAW goals set forth in the Strategic Plan, and ask each Chapter to set chapter goals that will advance the State goals.

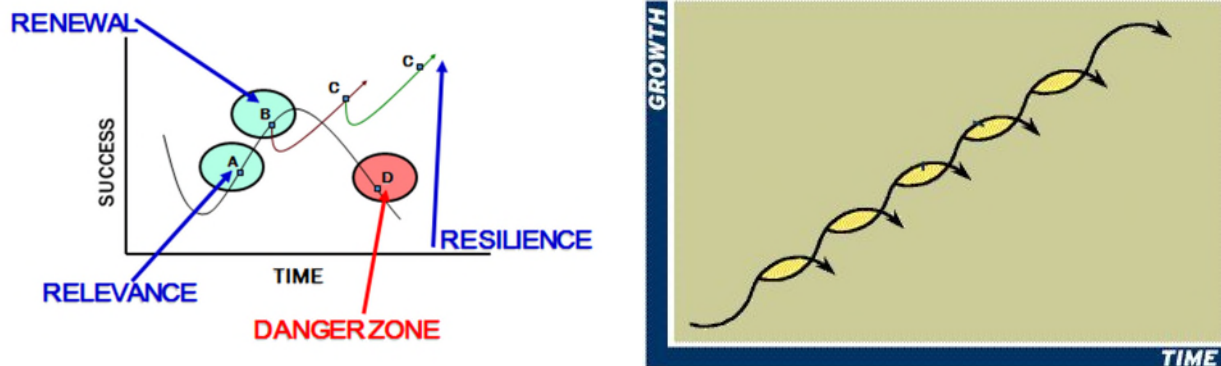
Action steps:

- State President Luke Heath to write a letter to each chapter requesting chapter boards to evaluate their effectiveness and set some goals in support of the SEAW plan.
- State Board will facilitate implementation of chapter goals by providing connection to committees, calendar of events with times and locations, and providing resources such as technical expertise as required to implement goals.

APPENDICES

Per SEAW request, these appendices provide some of the background material that informed the planning effort, as well as some of the insights that emerged during the process. The planning report stands alone without these, but they may be of interest for reference as you move forward.

Sigmoid Curve



The secret to constant growth is to start a new S-curve before the current one starts its decline. The right place to start the second curve is at point B when there are the time, energy and resources to get the new curve through its initial stages before the first curve plateaus and declines.

Why Engage in Strategic Planning:

- It builds community
- It builds continuity
- It encourages assessment
- It helps us to make the best use of available resources
- It provides us with a clear tool for budget and management
- It helps us recognize and make decisions in advance
- It helps us see where we may be stuck
- It gives us an opportunity to celebrate our accomplishments

Desired Outcomes for the Day

- ⇒ Agree on a vision statement and vision story for SEAW
- ⇒ Identify a limited number of clear goals for SEAW—goals that are mission critical and will facilitate making the SEAW vision story a reality.
- ⇒ Define in very specific terms* the strategies, steps and tactics to achieving those goals.

**This is where most strategic planning falls short*

Why are the mission, vision, and values so important to the planning process?

- #1: Everything the association does must extend from the mission & vision
- Mission, Vision and Values must be clear to the members
- All committees and taskforces must understand how their work supports the mission and vision
- The president and board members are elected to support the mission and vision, not to create new ones
- Mission and vision don't change, unless there is a compelling reason to do so

Assumptions

Planning assumptions:

- In the current environment, members are far more interested in how we can help them today than in what our vision is for them or the association 10 years from now. (This doesn't mean we shouldn't set a vision for 10 years from now, it just means the steps we take to get there must be serving our members today—otherwise we're off base on our vision)
- Community is the arena that truly differentiates associations
- The answer to the question, "What do our members need?" is not a product or service, but a solution or an opportunity.
- We should be continually asking the question, "What is the member experience we're creating/offering?" (Goal: to remove any buying decision from the member experience, "*of course I'll renew my membership...I'm a part of this community*")

Assumptions about Professional Trends and the Practice Environment

- Code complexity may make it harder to do our jobs
- The environment will continue to be litigious
- The economy is going to be a challenge for at least a few more years
- Technology will be increasingly important—to the Association and to the profession
- Social networking will continue to grow
- A national disaster would activate us

Questions to Be Mindful of:

As SEAW moves forward on the priorities it has identified that will advance the organization toward its vision for 2022, and as it continues to establish goals and strategies to serve its members, it should be mindful of the following questions:

- Does what we're proposing to do relate to our mission, vision, and limited number of key goals? If not, why are we talking about it?
- Is this something we can do and we can make a difference on?
- Is what we're doing necessary and valuable?
- Is this the best use of our time and resources right now?
- Does it serve our members?
- Will some aspect of our mission fail if we don't take this action?
- Is there a partner (or partners) we can work with to address this issue?
- What's the cost in terms of money, time, staff, and volunteer resources?

Levels of Commitment Scale

-1 Today I will smile and nod, but later I will sabotage behind the scenes.

0 I don't really care.

+1 An acceptable idea/plan. It will be interesting to watch the rest of you work on it.

+2 An excellent idea. I will help out whenever/wherever I can.

+3 A critical idea. I will devote significant time and energy to seeing this through.

At the close, participants anonymously ranked their own commitment to SEAW's ongoing planning effort using the above scale (and some improvisation of their own). Responses ranged from five 1.5's to three 3's, with an overall average commitment level of 2.0125 (*I would have rounded it to 2, but y'all seem to like decimal numbers...*)