

“By 2031, STMA will be the recognized leader in strengthening the sports turf industry and enhancing members’ competence and acknowledgement of their professionalism.”

Executive Summary

Through the 2021 strategic planning process, the board of directors identified the most pressing issues facing STMA: next generation professionals, diversity & inclusion, and rejection of expertise. In addition, the discussions held at the planning meeting led to some specific recommendations and some general observations.

As stated during the meeting, the work of the sub-groups on the three drivers of change was very good. Most of the output was related to the baseline future (the next two to three years) for the organization: what we expect to happen. Additionally, most groups struggled with the long-term visioning. Moving forward, energy should be spent on looking at the topics with a wider and longer lens. Ten years from now could STMA be the go-to organization industry wide? Could field managers be viewed as experts by internal and external audiences? Can we increase the diversity within the industry?

While the chapter network provides a few challenges to achieving the organization’s vision, it also provides opportunity for growth for STFM. Instead of thinking about chapters as a one-off, chapter relationship building should be an integral part of the Board’s strategy moving forward, underpinning each of the three goals.

In addition, the Board must make a decision regarding the name of the organization and develop a communication plan around the decision. The consultants believe that the communications of this decision will take a significant amount of organizational energy, and this must be factored into the planning process.

And finally, the consultants recommend that a portion of all future board meetings should be devoted to the long-term planning for the organization – preparing for plausible alternatives to future disruptors that will impact the organization.

Recommended Strategic Goals: Market – Grow – Diversify

- Grow the respect for the Sports Field Manager, positioning them as the expert in producing safe and playable fields for the entire spectrum of players.
- Grow the organization by focusing on integrating the next generation into positions that will ultimately lead to the Sports Field Manager by using technology to bridge the gap between those upcoming generations and current sports field managers.
- Diversify the organization to attract underrepresented groups to better reflect the population of the United States.

The following report contains the Consultant Recommendations and then summarizes the work of the Board. The appendices complete the report with three sets of documents: 1) An overview of the process 2) The flip charts and notes from the meeting 3) The survey results.

Consultant Recommendations

After synthesizing the work completed by the three sub-groups, the Consultants recommend the following goals and structure for the strategic plan.

To achieve the STMA vision “to become the recognized leader in strengthening the sports turf industry and enhancing members’ competence and acknowledgement of their professionalism,” the Board should focus on the following goals:

Goal #1: Grow the respect for the Sports Field Manager, positioning them as the expert in producing safe and playable fields for the entire spectrum of players (beginning to expert).

- a. **Short term (one to two years). Tactics may include:**
(The following tactics are not listed in priority order– each item should be reviewed to ensure it is in the right priority and each should have its own action plan developed)
 - i. Create a Marketing Plan including creating and selling the narrative of the organization, positioning it for communication outside of the industry. This plan should use outside expertise and focus on positioning the member as the expert.
 - ii. Ensure the existing and any new industry education is comprehensive and helps to ensure the Sports Field Manager is ready and able to be positioned as the experts. The Education must include soft skills of leadership and the ability to self-market competencies (may require different and expanded career tracks or degree style programs).

- b. **Medium Term (three to five years). Tactics may include:**
 - i. Develop strategic partnerships with professional, and collegiate sports groups to communicate the expertise of the Sports Field Manager relative to the training they receive in safety standards
 - ii. Expand and position the CSFM as industry leading and ensure the CSFM covers more robust and diverse standards and builds the career path so that it leverages the program in your marketing plan.

- c. **Long Term (six plus years). Tactics may include:**
 - i. Create the opportunity for STMA to include an advocacy and lobbying segment within the organization.

Goal #2: Grow the organization by focusing on integrating the next generation into positions that will ultimately lead to the Sports Field Manager by using technology to bridge the gap between those upcoming generations and current sports field managers

a. Short term (one to two years). Tactics may include:

(The following tactics are not listed in priority order– each item should be reviewed to ensure it is in the right priority and each should have its own an action plan developed)

- i. Rebrand the Sports Field Manager (this may include a name change for the organization to better reflect the preferred future).
- ii. Survey prospective members of the next generation regarding what they want from a work experience.
- iii. Expose and educate SFMs on current social media platforms and how to use them most effectively.
- iv. Create an Ambassador Outreach Program where ambassadors participate in career days at local schools and present to leadership groups (athletic directors, school boards, coaches’ associations) the safety and expertise of SFM. Chapters should be incorporated into this type of program for maximum return.
- v. Ensure the Marketing Plan positions the SFM as a leader and technology expert and combats the public image of an SFM sitting on a lawnmower all day.

b. Medium Term (three to five years). Tactics may include:

- i. Create educational opportunities to improve member’s “soft skills.” (public-speaking, intervention, business management, etc.)

b. Long-term

- i. Develop a series of evolving strategies for member retention. Many of these strategies should be tied to the value of the CSFM.

Goal #3: Diversify the organization to attract underrepresented groups that better reflect the population of the United States.

1. For the short term (one to two years) tactics may include:

(The following tactics are not listed in priority order voted on by the Board at the meeting – each item should be reviewed to ensure it is in the right priority and each should have its own action plan developed)

- i. Hire a consultant who specializes in issues related to diversity, inclusion and equity in order to complete the next two tasks:
 - i. Create a comfortable environment for discussions about diversity and inclusion.
 - ii. Develop an issue position statement on the importance of diversity and inclusion within the sports field management profession.

It will be extremely difficult to accomplish these tasks without the expertise of someone to guide you in this area.

2. Mid-term (three to five years). Tactics may include:
 - i. Incorporate diversity and inclusions topics into the STMA education program (i.e. unconscious bias, developing work cultures, etc.)
 - ii. Include diversity and inclusion into certification programs
 - iii. Develop partnerships to advance diversity and inclusion in STMA (i.e. NFL Managers, NRPA, etc.)
 - iv. Conduct research with chapters to determine true diversity potential.
3. Long-term (six plus years). Tactics may include
 - i. Increase membership in STMA through targeted diversity and inclusive initiatives.
 - ii. Increase engagement with underrepresented groups.

In all places where it is appropriate, chapters should be included in the work. Regardless of the work, it is critical that STMA continue to communicate what they are doing with the chapters.

Recommended Board Work

1. Recommend the Board review the goals and tactics and sharpen their focus on these three goals, specifically addressing tactics for the short-term (each tactic should have an action plan).
2. Conduct a program review of existing programs offered by the organization. Current staff cannot absorb additional work.
3. Share this document with the Board who were not in attendance.
4. Share this document with appropriate audiences to your organization (past presidents, etc.?)
5. Try to secure non-dues revenue to support new initiatives and add staff as necessary.
6. Create an action plan for each tactic.
7. Create a budget that is based on the new goals and tactics.
8. Continue an annual review of the tactics – vision should not change, goals should not change necessarily but tactics should be reviewed on an annual basis.

Additional recommendations:

It is clear that the people make STMA the organization it is today. The challenge is selling this concept to non-members including creating talking points for current members to use in discussing the benefits of membership to the national organization.

APPENDIX: The process

STMA came out of the pandemic with a stable financial picture and energy from the Board to tackle the future of the sports-field industry.

Consultants Bob London, CAE and Hannes Combest, FASAE, CAE were hired to facilitate the discussion of how the Board should reach its vision within a ten-year framework. These two individuals have more than fifty years of experience in association management; in addition, they have received a certificate in Foresight Strategy from the University of Houston. They have developed a process whereby they use foresight to help organizations and its members plan and execute strategies to achieve their vision. They use a tool developed by ASAE called ForesightWorks that simplify the process through 50 Drivers of Change that Boards can use as conversation starters.

Prior to the planning session, London and Combest interviewed five Board members plus the CEO to identify the state of the industry and the state of STMA¹. After those interviews, the Consultants reduced the number of Drivers that they believed would impact STMA most significantly from 50 to 12. They distributed a description of the drivers in a survey and asked the Board to vote on their top three choices.² In addition, Board members were sent a copy of a STMA “Mad Lib” that they were to complete and bring with them to the meeting.

The meeting was held at the Westin in Savannah, GA on June 18, 2021. In attendance were:

Nick McKenna, CSFM	Clark Cox, CSFM
James Bergdoll, CSFM	Alpha Jones, CSFM
Sun Roesslein, CSFM	Jeremy Bohonko
Paula Sliefert	Brad Thedens, CSFM
Jimmy Simpson, CSFM	Kim Heck, CAE

London and Combest began with a discussion of what Foresight is and the process that they would be following throughout the day.³

Based on the Board’s survey results, three small groups would discuss the following Drivers of Change:

- 1) The Next Generation/Reworking Career Pathways
- 2) Diversity and Inclusion
- 3) Rejection of Expertise

The groups were given a worksheet to guide their discussion.⁴ The discussions were to address opportunities for the industry and for the association.

¹ A summary of the interviews are in Appendix A.

² The survey results are in Appendix B.

³ The slides for this presentation are attached in Appendix C.

⁴ A copy is found on Appendix D.

Once the small group discussions were complete, the group reported out a summary of their discussions with the full Board along with the ideas that they generated on how to address these issues within the association.⁵

Individuals then voted on the priorities to be addressed in the short-term (one to two years), mid-term (three to five years) or long-term (six+ years). London and Combest noted that none of the items would be eliminated and would be contained within the final report. They also noted that this would be the first of many conversations about the tactics and the priorities could be revised.

Future Board conversations

It will be incumbent on the Board to evaluate current programs to determine the following:

- 1) Will the current programs/processes advance progress on the future of STMA?
If yes....
- 2) How are they measured against these new ideas?

Decisions must be made on whether the existing and new programs are eliminated, continued or continued with revisions. If continued, what are the priorities: short-term, mid-term or long-term.

The annual business plan and budget should be built from these priorities of new and existing programs, evaluated on a regular basis (bi-annually or every three years), and adjusted according to what has been accomplished and what revisions have occurred.

“A lot of what happens in ten years will be the results of our efforts now.” Nick McKenna

⁵ A complete set of notes is attached in Appendix E.

Board Conversations about the Drivers of Change in Savannah

Next Generation Professionals

This small group seeks to engage the next generation by using technology to bridge the gap between the younger generations and current sports field managers (3). It will be important that we keep these pathways evolving to meet the needs of the employers, ensuring the members are relevant in the industry.

Short-term

In the short term, it is important to expose Sports Field Managers to today's social media platforms and it would be useful to have the younger generation accomplish this.

We assume a lot of information that we should have documented about what the younger generation wants and needs from a work experience (1)

We need to continue our work to rebrand the Sports Field Manager (1)

Create an Ambassador Team Sports Field Manager that could communicate who and what we are to various employer groups as well as recruit people into the profession.

Mid-term

It is important that we create different education (public speaking, intervention, business management, etc.- things that are not science-driven) All SFMs do not need to be public speakers but we should be able to share with someone what you need to learn from step 1 to step 3. We should address more specialties. (2)

We need to think about adding more headquarters staff

We need to consider adding in-house social media presence

Long-term

We need to create a series of evolving strategies for member retention

Challenges to be addressed

It will be important for SFM to create the opportunities, to make this effort local.

It is also important that we remember that the way the current Board came into the profession is not the same path that people will take today or in the future. We need to be more active.

Diversity & Inclusion

All in attendance agreed that this is a difficult topic to be honestly addressed. The facts remain that STMA has raised the profile of women in the industry; however, still only about 3% of STMA membership are women. It is unknown what the industry statistics are. Racial diversity is also very underrepresented. This is important to recognize as the population of the US is expected to be changing significantly over the next 20 years. In addition, it is important that the STMA Board address diversity & opportunities for leadership roles in our industry.

Short term

This is one of the most important things that the group believes should be addressed. We must create a comfortable environment for discussions about D&I, beginning at the Board level. (3)

Develop an issue position statement that is publicly communicated.

Mid-term

Incorporate Diversity & Inclusion into STMA's educational system.

Specifically include the importance of Diversity and Inclusion into certification programs

Develop partnerships to advance D&I in STMA.

Conduct research with chapters to determine the true potential for action.

Long-term

Increase membership in STMA through Diversity & Inclusion initiatives.

Increase engagement with underrepresented groups.

Rejection of Expertise

Board members expressed that it is critical that the organization continue its rebranding efforts in order to continue to ensure that members are relevant within the industry. As employers continue to seek more return on their investment in sports fields, STMA must ensure that their members are provided the respect they deserve for their part in managing their facilities.

Short term

Create a long-term, sustainable marketing plan (6)

Ensure we create our own narrative and market it outside of the industry.

Ensure STMA's education includes the following: (3)

Soft skills, leadership, self-marketing

Expanded offerings (Career Track/Degree style program)

Medium Term

Develop strategic partnerships (MLB, NFL, NCAA, NFHS, NATA, etc.) (1)

Focus on creating Safety Standards that can be used as guidelines and training for STMA members and their staff.

Restructure the CSFM Program to ensure it is more robust & diverse standards

Build career path and leverage program

Long Term

Advocacy & Lobbying

Add player association as a partnering group