

IPPS International Strategic Plan 2014-2017

Introduction

Since 1951 IPPS has grown into an internationally respected organisation 'sharing plant production knowledge globally'. The current membership is 1600, in eight regions: Australian; Eastern Region, North America; European; Japan; New Zealand; Southern Africa; Southern Region United States; Western Region United States

Financial downturn, market changes and changing trends have in the past five years seen declining membership numbers in some regions, leading to financial difficulty and the need to make very difficult choices. Like any organisation IPPS requires strong leadership and direction to meet existing and future challenges – to create a sound financial base and a strategy in which the eight regions work together as an international organisation.

In September 2013 the IPPS International Board formed a Strategic Advisory Committee to consider how IPPS serves its members and to deliver a Strategic Plan over the next four years. The committee members are: Michael Norris, chair (European Region); Hans Jurgen Sittig (Southern Africa Region) Philip Smith (New Zealand Region). Eastern Region's Alan Jones (covering finance) and International Board chair David Cliffe are also providing input.

The committee has canvassed views from each region by distributing a feedback request to International Directors, Regional Presidents and Secretaries. Each was asked to give their opinion on:

1. The role of the IPPS International and the role of the IPPS International Board
2. Communications (including website and digital media)
3. The *Combined International Proceedings*
4. Marketing and promotion
5. Young membership promotion
6. Education
7. Student Exchange Programme
8. International sponsorship
9. Finance
10. Anything else (AOB)

This stimulated some very positive and constructive feedback and we are very fortunate to have such committed members who provided some very worthwhile and well thought-out ideas. It is clear from the feedback that we do face many challenges but with such dedicated people involved in the organisation, we have no doubt that IPPS can, with a number of strategic changes, meet and overcome them.

1. The role of the IPPS International and the role of the IPPS International Board

Some feel the International Board is distanced from the membership, which is less a reflection on board activity than on how its work is communicated to members. The consensus is the International Board is vital but it must work for the members, reacting to changing needs and able to make decisions quickly. The board must provide governance and strategy then allow the regions to execute the strategy as locally appropriate.

The role of the international directors here is crucial, and cannot be underestimated, and those individuals must be carefully chosen by each region to deliver a return on investment back to the region and its members. The international directors will have a crucial role in delivering the strategic plan.

Each region must select its director on the contribution they will give and not as an automatic choice based on historic protocol or current regional constitution. A successful international director will assist in providing leadership, driving communication both internationally and regionally. The roles and duties of international directors should therefore be reviewed and updated by July 2014 enabling them to be presented to existing and new directors to provide clarity to those taking the role on.

The board's previous decision to elect an International Chair for a three year period of office has already proved a wise one and careful consideration must be given to the question of succession in this position. The International Chair must also be given power to ensure directors are delivering for their regions – including removal and replacement of an individual if they should prove not to be fulfilling their obligations.

The board should also consider and use the wide array of talents that exist within the society. For example if we have a member who is a specialist in social media, the board should consider co-opting them to undertake the work we need to do in that area – they would not be a director but would be accountable to the board. Individual directors or a small sub-committee could provide governance but not execution.

How the board operates

To make the best use of the time available to it, the board's activity should focus on strategic matters and governance, rather than reviewing matters such as past performance of regions, which it cannot influence. Direct reports to the board can be covered by conference calls prior to the annual board meeting, so that sufficient time is given to planning and strategy. This must include financial planning, linking to the board's plan for investment.

The IPPS International Board member's primary function when attending international meetings, is to execute board duties and undertake IPPS business activity. If board business is not concluded within the timescale allowed, the board should reconvene, taking time out from conference or tour to ensure decisions are made, and an execution plan is in place. The chair should have the power to call these extra meetings as required.

Some of those responding to the survey questioned the length of the International Tour and the value of it for the membership. This is largely a matter of communication by the Board to the membership but does need discussion, as there should be a review of tour length and affordability. Currency fluctuations can also make it difficult for some regions to achieve full representation when board business is conducted through a lengthy tour.

One very positive step would be to promote the International Tour more widely to members in the host region. It is often regarded as very elite and expensive. More local members should be encouraged to join in at the various nursery and other visits on the tour.

Membership administration

We must take a long hard look at whether IPPS membership should primarily be administered at regional or international level. At present there is a lot of duplication and the systems have developed in a very haphazard and piecemeal way to solve individual issues as they have arisen.

There is a variance between regions. Those which do have a more professional administration are, in effect, paying twice for the same thing. The International Board should decide what needs doing at international level and what is best left to the regions. Perhaps, we should consider a minimal level of administration at international level, with appropriate minimal fees from the regions, then any region requiring something more sophisticated could opt to pay more? Alternatively, all the administration might be done at international level to the point where regions no longer need their own paid administrator. Greater consistency would lead to more efficient use of members' dues.

The International Board needs to ensure that the decisions it makes and the systems it devises are as simple and cheap to operate as possible in the regions – this has not necessarily always been so in the past, when some board decisions have led to increased complication and workloads for regional administrators for little perceived benefit to the members.

2. Communication

This is the subject that generated by far the most comment and is clearly the greatest challenge the society faces. Perhaps the biggest challenge is to find the right compromise between paper communications, which tend to be preferred by our long serving members, and digital methods favoured by newer members. Crucially, all members ranked the *Combined International Proceedings* as a key membership benefit and IPPS must continue to satisfy those who wish to have easy access to its contents wherever they are and whenever they need it (see item 3 below). IPPS must also embrace the use of social media to share its message but this must be on a combined international basis to avoid the confusion created when individual regions adopt different logos and designs.

Website

In their comments, many felt the IPPS website should be a priority for the Board and that it should be capable of coping with future as well as current need. Our new International Secretary shares a passion for web design and social media, which will be crucial as the board looks to the future. It is clear from comments received through the survey that the International Website must be the central point for all information, with each region carrying regionally unique material and acting as a portal to the main site. This is an area that will require significant investment but will return a huge membership benefit into the future. A decision on moving this forward must be made at the next Board Meeting and communicated to regions and members.

Newsletters

In the past, regions produced their own newsletters in different formats, some are now digital and some are printed. Ordinary members feel they receive too little information from international, and too little about what is happening in other regions. From the comments in the survey it would appear that a monthly 'electronic newsletter' generated via the international office, and including

regional information on a rotational basis so that each region would be featured twice a year, would be well received. A bumper edition could be produced for the International Conference with assistance from the International Office and Editor. Technically this could be done very simply via Mail Chimp (or similar), including video presentations from conference and links to papers. This could be a very powerful tool for all members and, importantly, help everyone to feel part of an international group of professional people.

Other digital media

Each region promotes social media in its own way, but if this was centralised an IPPS International Facebook page for example, where each region was given a user status, would be a great asset to spread our message and connect with young people. This report has already commented on the need to use the talents at its disposal among the membership: a Southern Region United States member, Brienne Oliver, is passionate on this subject and the Board should consider asking her to lead this project, with help from like-minded individuals nominated by the other regions. Such a scheme would show our members that we wish to embrace innovation, be open to new ideas and use the vast skill base that exists in the society.

With this in mind IPPS must publish two new email addresses instantly, promote them to members and make use of the comments and suggestions they generate:

ideas@ipps.org

feedback@ipps.org

Digital media provides an opportunity to encourage more individual members to make more short contributions for newsletters, web forum, Facebook pages etc to share their own experiences. However, some editorial control will be required at regional or international level as appropriate, for anything that is to do with promoting IPPS or which may affect the image of the society

3. International Proceedings

While members are in strong agreement about the value of the *Proceedings*, they are divided about how it is delivered. Most long standing members who gave feedback said it was the most important reason for membership and they value and enjoy the format as currently edited. The information is also of significant interest to younger members but they feel that the way it is presented is completely outdated. Publishing on the Pubhort website has gone some of the way to achieve digital communication; however, it is unclear to many members how to obtain it. The feeling of the committee is that our Proceedings should be accessed through the IPPS International website and this should be accommodated when the website is reformed. Communication on this subject has been disjointed and many members believe the 'black book' is to be discontinued. Even the younger members do not know that *Proceedings* papers are available to download.

This needs a tough 'back to basics' discussion. Recent moves by the International Board towards enabling all members to have open access to the information presented at all regional conferences will be welcomed by many members.

A key issue to recognise is that all regions are finding it increasingly difficult to get conference speakers to provide written versions of their presentations. It asks an awful lot of regional editors to create meaningful *Proceedings* papers from PowerPoint slides of variable depth of detail. This problem really does need addressing now. There is a time issue for those presenting papers but it's a

'one vs. many': each speaker just needs to do their own; some regional editors are only getting about 50% of presentations in written form.

The board needs to think about whether members want the *Proceedings* to continue in present form, as a detailed written set of presentations (irrespective of whether printed or published electronically) or whether this is no longer achievable; and if no longer achievable then what to replace it with. Simply posting PowerPoint slides on the website is not going to help, as they rarely contain enough information to enable anyone not present at a conference to piece together the content of a talk. Regional editors have commented they are most likely to get written papers from academics than from IPPS members.

Can IPPS afford full video or audio recordings? The European Region recorded all the presentations at its 2013 conference in a pilot scheme and they will be available for publication. Internationally could we pursue this, either in terms of full recordings of regional conferences, or highlights?

4. Marketing and Promotion

The feedback received for the survey suggests that IPPS marketing is nonexistent at international level and disjointed and variable in the regions. IPPS marketing needs to be led by the international office and to be web based, and we need a firm understanding about who we want to promote the society to. This is very important and needs to be reviewed, and an action plan put in place. It is very easy to put a lot of effort into complicated marketing ideas while overlooking the fact that if you provide the things people join up for (good communications, meetings and events) then you will be more likely to retain existing members and attract new ones.

It is also imperative that all regions are clear about who IPPS is best able to serve as members and therefore who the organisation should concentrate on recruiting. The International Board should draft a letter to the regions stating this clearly. This must also be made clear in an updated mission statement which the committee has drafted for discussion.

One simple idea arising from the survey is to send new and renewing members a welcome pack with information about IPPS international and regional activity for the coming year.

5. Young Membership Promotion and 6. Education

We have grouped these two subjects together as we feel they are very closely aligned and the view of members is that this is an area where the board should invest energy and time.

Attracting young members should be a key focus and adequate resources need to be allocated to explore possible avenues this should take. There has been much focus on students and universities, but we must not forget younger nursery workers/apprentices who are equally important to the society and should not be excluded from any venture considered. Experience suggests a young horticulture worker linked to a mentor is highly likely to remain in the society as they earn their place.

It is our suggestion that all students connected to full-time education be offered free digital membership, along with anyone employed in horticulture (including production, conservation, research etc) below the age of 21. This will be covered more in the strategic plan to explain how this may take shape ensuring the society is protected financially.

It is pointless giving free membership unless we have a mechanism in place to service these young members. One suggestion from the feedback exercise was: "would it be possible to make colleges

‘corporate members’, perhaps linked to a willing nearby member nursery, rather than put huge efforts into recruiting?”

7. Student Exchange Programme

Members report that student exchange is important to them on many levels: personally, for their business, to enhance further education and for members to be connected internationally. It comes in the top three to tackle in the strategic plan but must be thought through thoroughly to insure IPPS gets a return for its funding and that students who benefit stay within the society. Its appeal would be widened if the title was changed to Youth Exchange Programme, dropping the reference to student, as many entrants to the industry are not students in formal college education programmes.

The programme could usefully be expanded to embrace work exchange programmes more generally.

8. International Sponsorship

This is a thorny issue, as some members feel it could cause conflict regionally and give rise to some other possible pitfalls. That said, if the society is to achieve its aims it must look for international sponsorship to help fund its future activity. It is vital that we do not underestimate the value of the IPPS membership to companies looking to promote products or to be linked with healthy and environmentally sound image of the industry: there are very few societies that provide a mechanism for such promotion on a global scale. The Southern Region United States and European Region have successfully used sponsorship to reduce attendance fees at their conferences and to provide a surplus to return into their regional funds. International sponsorship will need full support from the regions to attract global sponsors.

9. Finance

Although the international budget is in surplus, we must not be complacent as to what this hides. Cash flow is the lifeblood in any organisation and the cash flow challenge that a declining membership brings cannot be underestimated. The income derived from investment of surplus funds remains invaluable here.

Many members feel that dues are high enough and in the current economic climate it would be catastrophic to increase dues. The International Board has made significant steps to reduce costs, most notably with the move to publishing the *Proceeding* via ISHS. More needs to be done. At the current rate of decline in membership, the surplus will be eradicated in three years and the international annual budget will return to deficit.

First and foremost the International Board must operate consistently in surplus. In the 2013 budget, IPPS made a 23% surplus. However, nearly 60% of IPPS International expenditure is in operating costs while only 1.2% is invested in marketing and promotions. This is commercial suicide and must be addressed. Allocation of funds in relation to cash flow and with consideration of return in investment needs to be reviewed annually in one specific conference call. The International Board is very prudent with expenditure but must urgently review how it allocates funds and calculates return on investment.

IPPS must also consider how it uses its greatest asset – information. Many members feel the information resource represented by IPPS is undervalued and not capitalised on enough outside the membership. It has been suggested that ascertaining the rights of individuals to ownership of information published by IPPS may present issues. If IPPS has edited and refined papers, are they our intellectual property?

A very important point was raised by James Johnson, former International President, on the impact of currency fluctuations.: “A factor that has coloured individual regions’ perspectives has been

economics. Over the years there have been fairly dramatic changes in the relative strengths of international currencies. It seems that each year there are some regions that find the cost of international meetings to be acceptable and others who consider them overly expensive. The same region may or may not be in the same circumstances each year. As this applies to the Eastern Region of North America, and indeed all regions of North America, we presently have a relatively weak dollar compared to what we have been used to.”

10. Anything else (AOB)

International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS) - Horticultural Congress, Brisbane, Australia.

Following a suggestion by Dick Zimmerman from the Eastern Region, IPPS will have representation at the International Congress being held in Brisbane, Australia in August 2014.

More than 4,000 abstracts were submitted before the deadline and attendance is estimated to exceed 3,000.

IPPS Directors David Cliffe and Bob Geneve are expected to attend.

Summary

The summary above is a true reflection on the feedback from the membership. From this the committee set out to achieve the following;

- Update IPPS Mission Statement
- Complete a SWOT analysis for IPPS International (see below)
- Set out Strategic Plans from SWOT analysis