



The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada La Société Royale d'Astronomie du Canada

2011-2013 Strategic Plan:

Information, Discussion and Q&As

January 18, 2011

Introduction:

First, many thanks to every RASC Centre and member who provided so much thoughtful, productive and constructive feedback on the proposed plan. Your participation in the process is of great value to the success of the strategic plan, and ultimately to the future of the RASC.

The executive committee is discussing your input and will be meeting soon to revise the plan. The revised plan will be circulated well in advance of the upcoming 26 March 2011 national council meeting, so please stay tuned.

As you would expect, individual opinions on specific elements of the plan varied across the entire spectrum. What is gratifying is that our Centres understand and agree on the overall direction of the strategic plan. *This is a very rewarding outcome for the work done thus far and a positive indicator of the collective understanding and appreciation of how our Society works!*

Background:

There has been some criticism about the consultation process. Admittedly, it would be nice to be able to involve everyone in every decision at every level. But I'm sure all of you reading this will agree that full involvement from everyone from the very beginning would be an impossible process to manage successfully. I trust our members to agree that we have made a good start. I believe that through the consultation process in place that everyone will have adequate opportunity to contribute to the final strategic plan.

By electing an executive committee, the membership empowers these directors to represent them in organizational decision-making. For the most part the general membership does not approve the strategic plan unless by-law change is required. The input of the general membership is most instrumental in shaping the strategic planning process through member surveys and program evaluations which were undertaken recently and in the past and were part of the environmental scanning process.

While everyone may not agree with this, *the national executive team has tried very hard to communicate often and openly with our centres and members on this process. We have done the best we can with available time and human resources.*

1. What is the role of the Executive Committee in strategic planning?

Strategic planning is normally done by a small, involved, high-level group of people who have been charged by the membership to go through this exercise. These people—the duly elected executive committee—are responsible for the successful operation and management of the RASC, and for the success and/or failure of the strategic plan.

2. Why is the RASC conducting Strategic Planning?

The strategic plan will produce greater satisfaction and meaning among all of our

stakeholders, especially around a common vision and mission. It will build stronger working relationships with staff, Executive, Committees, National Council and our Centres. The plan establishes realistic goals and objectives consistent with the mission within a defined time frame. The plan communicates our strategic objectives to our key stakeholders: members, Centres, National Council and Committees.

3. How does each strategic objective align and support the realization of the mission and vision of the RASC?

Objective 1: Implement Centre Support Program

We need to build more understanding and stronger working relationships between Centres, National Council, the Executive and National Office operations, with the goal of continuing to improve the RASC member experience, value and services. We need to do a better job of helping everyone understand fully their respective roles and responsibilities that go hand-in-hand with the benefits and privileges of membership.

Objective 2: Implement Volunteer Support Program

Like many volunteer organizations, we have a volunteer deficit. We need to provide as much information, tips and tools, orientation manuals, volunteer recruitment and engagement strategies, etc., as we can, for present and prospective RASC volunteers. Volunteers are the lifeblood of the RASC and their volunteer experience should be a positive one.

Objective 3: Improve response time for customer service delivery.

Not everyone agrees that this is a strategic objective. But there has been almost unanimous agreement that it is a top priority item! Customer service delivery timelines are too long, resulting in reduced satisfaction and revenue. The objective is to improve the customer/ member experience by reducing delivery timelines. Better service means more customers, and increased satisfaction, loyalty, and revenue. We are making excellent progress on this already.

Objective 4: Increase revenues from present and new sources by 30 percent.

To continue to realize the RASC mission and vision, we need to continue to increase revenues through improved publications sales, donations, and membership growth. Not everyone agrees with the target, but if we don't set some sort of target, we'll never reach one.

Objective 5: Increase RASC membership to 5,000 members.

More members, and more diverse members will build a stronger Society. To realize the RASC mission and vision, we need to increase membership by acquiring new members, membership retention, and extend the membership base into new markets (youth, women, minorities). The push for increased membership will happen primarily at the national level. There is no expectation for Centres to assume the lion's share of this responsibility. Nationally we have already begun a membership retention campaign.

Objective 6: The Executive Director and MAP (Membership and Promotions) Committee will develop a marketing and communications plan.

Attracting new members and new sales markets will help the Society grow in every way. Enhancing the profile of the RASC in the marketplace is a necessary first step. We have a draft marketing and communications plan prepared now and have already begun acting on it. Many of you are aware of some of this activity and its results. Through the use of this plan, analysis of customer needs and review of competition will assist in setting membership acquisition and retention strategies; help to increase revenues in support of objectives 3 and 4; and determine new product/service offerings.

Objective 7: Make recommendations on necessary revisions to our By Laws.

Revising the by-laws is not fun, but it is important to the future success of the RASC. The existing bylaws are highly prescriptive, as many decisions related to operational processes must be voted on at Annual or Special Meetings of the Society (e.g. committee-reorganization, member entitlements, and fee structures). By-Law renewal will help streamline the Society's operational efficiencies. *It is important to note that additional new federal legislation, when enacted later this year, will require that we make certain changes to our governing documents in the coming 2-3 years. I refer here to the new Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act (CNCA).*

5. How does the budget assigned to each objective fit into the present and future financial plans of the RASC i.e. increase budget line, reallocation of funds, etc?

Most of the activities mentioned in the strategic plan will be delivered using existing internal resources with no additional cost. In a few cases there may be some photocopying costs, which will be minimal. There are other items that require some investigation and if the costs are significant they will go through the normal budget approval process. This applies to the items involving potential additional IT costs and/or software costs. The proposed Web and JRASC redesign/refresh will go through the normal budget approval process. In the case of JRASC, there are grant applications underway now.

The one item that stands out for many of you is the marketing budget of \$20,000.00. Please remember that we already spend \$13,000 per year on promoting the Society and its products. This amount will simply be allocated in a separate line item in the budget, instead of being folded into other items as has been previously done. This means we are looking at a potential increase in spending of \$7,000 per year to promote the Society to a broader demographic. *A fee increase is **not** our first—or only—option to cover the proposed increase.* We will be looking at all of our revenue streams as part of the decision making process.

Conclusion:

It helps to remember that a strategic plan is—first and foremost—a plan. It provides guidance, direction and a means to judge success. Council can either approve or reject the plan when it is presented at the March meeting. Nobody promised that it would be perfect! We have started the process because we must. The staff and executive are already implementing some parts of the plan and we are already seeing some of the results. If we do not meet every target does that mean the plan is a failure? I don't think so! It just means we have a little more work to do, and we're used to that.

The final strategic plan, when adopted by national council, will give the Society direction, guidance and milestones as the Society moves ahead, engaging challenges and making decisions that will have an impact over the long term. It will provide a foundation for all other planning that we do as an organization. It will help establish priorities, provide focus and clarity, and it will communicate to everyone what is most important to the RASC. A strategic plan is a valuable tool for any organization.

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