

# APS ALLIANCE STRATEGY COMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Summary, *Carol Windels*

Development of alliances with other organizations is essential for APS to attain many goals outlined in the current Strategic Plan. Alliances represent a range of involvement from *ad hoc* (e.g., a joint symposium) to managerial partnerships or a separate legal entity. Depending on the goal(s) of an alliance, benefits can include information, new products and services, enhanced reputation and status, revenue, or even survival. An alliance involves sharing of information resources, staff, management, technology, expenses, access to members, media attention, and management of a project, so it is vital for APS to strategically select appropriate projects and organizations for such ventures. The Society has had experience with other scientific organizations with some long-term and short-term activities. Various groups within APS have developed activities with other societies. APS also has a business partnership with the American Association of Cereal Chemists and has several clients (American Society of Brewing Chemists, Master Brewers Association of America, International Society of Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions). While these experiences form a sound historical basis, APS must be focused in defining its goals, strengths, interests and vision of the future. It should ally only with organizations that have common goals and interests that allow APS to provide benefit to members, gain expertise, or open access to new markets. This report identifies six general areas for developing alliances (information resources, government relations, education and outreach, international activities, market access, and business functions). It provides examples of potential activities and organizations with which APS might develop alliances. It also defines a process for identifying, reviewing, and assessing alliances. Recommendations for implementing development of alliances conclude this report.

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Throughout the current APS Strategic Plan there are several references to developing alliances and affiliations with scientific societies, industries, and other allied professions. The importance of alliances emerged when APS participated in the Kellogg-sponsored "Conversations-on-Change" series, organized by the Council on Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST, an organization of 41 professional societies). Discussions revealed many common "survival issues" faced by APS and other societies as they look to the future: membership retention, differences between members and customers, brand recognition, strategic priorities, governance/leadership, and volunteerism. Many factors are driving these trends, including technology (electronic delivery of information and communication, customization of products), globalization, and generational issues (preferences for programs and services, volunteerism, loyalty, work force). Major changes are sweeping all professional societies and "doing more of the same" or "doing it better" no longer are sufficient to remain vital and relevant. One of the most difficult aspects of this change process for APS has been to restructure how Council does business. Now its primary responsibility is to think strategically about the future - anticipate future trends and issues and then develop objectives, strategies, and action plans essential to APS. Thus, an integral aspect of attaining the goals outlined in the APS Strategic Plan will be forged in developing alliances and partnerships.

Fortunately, APS has an enviable and recognized record of being on the forefront of electronic technology and publications and for providing high quality products and services to members and customers. Many professional societies look to APS for leadership and seek guidance by its example. This favorable status is attributable to the dedication and talents of member volunteers and professional staff as well as strategic planning (and resulting financial resources). This reputation poses APS as an attractive organization for forming alliances, however, APS also must be strategic in the selection of alliances it forms to accomplish priority goals and activities. Of primary concern, alliances should provide benefit to APS members.

What is a strategic alliance and how will they benefit APS? A strategic alliance involves the sharing of information resources, staff, management, technology, expenses, access to members, media attention, and management of a project for mutual benefit (O'Brien, 1997). They can represent a range of involvement from informal, to active (e.g., a joint meeting) to managerial partnerships or even a separate legal entity such as a joint venture. Depending on the goals of the alliance, benefits can include information, new products and services, enhanced reputation and status, revenue, or even survival.

APS has experience with several long-term and short-term activities with other scientific organizations. For example, it has maintained "liaison" cooperation with approximately a dozen other organizations that are related to plant pathology and where there is overlap in scientific interest. Examples of these affiliates include the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Biological Sciences, American Type Culture Collection, International Society for Plant Pathology, Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry, and Society of Nematologists. APS is involved in the Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Funding Mission (CoFARM), which focuses mostly on domestic issues and the USDA by preparing position papers for Congress. Examples of recent, short-term activities with sister societies and organizations include joint annual meetings of APS with the Entomological Society of America in 1998, Canadian Phytopathological Society in 1999, and with the Society of Nematologists and Mycological Society of America in 2001.

Various groups within APS have developed activities with other societies. In 2001, APS hosted an international conference on the risks of exotic pests on trade, an on-line event initiated by the APS Forest Pathology Committee. This conference was endorsed by nine scientific societies and received financial support from the USDA, USDA Forest Service, APS Office of Public Affairs and Education, Plant Protection Service, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Sociedad Espanola de Fitopatologia, and Sociedade Portuguesa de Fitopatologia. In 1999, APS began publishing the online, multidisciplinary journal *Plant Health Progress*, which has several partners including the American Society of Agronomy, Campbell Scientific, CAST, College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at University of California – Davis, Cornell University, Crop Science Society of America, Pioneer Hi-bred International Inc, Syngenta, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service. In 2001, representatives of the Office of International Programs (OIP) attended meetings of a Peruvian society of plant pathologists and the APS Caribbean Division in Cuba as a special effort to contact scientists in these countries. The development of alliances with international societies and organizations is an especially valuable entrance for APS into the global community.

Historically, APS has experience with business partnerships and clients. APS and the American Association of Cereal Chemists (AACC) have been partners since 1967 (collectively named Scientific Societies). The relationship proved successful because each society found it efficient to share costs of an operation that provided very similar services (business, meetings, publishing). APS and AACC have primarily restricted the partnership to staff, office, and equipment and seldom operated on other levels such as planning, content, science, or government relations. APS also has shared the AACC's European Office, primarily for APS Press operations (APS is re-evaluating the APS international strategy and other potential uses for the Office). Currently, officers of both societies are discussing common concerns regarding international, electronic, and alliance/partnership issues.

The American Society of Brewing Chemists (ASBC, 950 members) has been a "client" of Scientific Societies (APS and AACC) for over 30 years. Services include membership records, accounting, annual meeting, publishing, methods development and check services. ASBC owns no part of the headquarters building and pays their direct expenses plus overhead and a fee for services provided by Scientific Societies. In 2000, staff also managed the planning and execution of the World Brewing Congress. The event was so successful that the Master Brewers Association of America (MBAA) recently negotiated with Scientific Societies to manage their meetings, exhibits, publishing, and other services. Another client of APS is the International Society of Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions (IS-MPMI).

At the 2000 annual meeting, APS President Steve Slack appointed an *ad hoc* Alliances Strategy Committee (Jacqueline Fletcher, James MacDonald, Gregory Shaner, Neal Van Alfen, Rick Bennett, Steve Nelson, Amy Hope, Miles Wimer, and Carol Windels, Chair). Their charge was to identify strategies for forming alliances including defining types of alliances and activities, identifying specific or general types of organizations and societies as candidates for alliances, and developing a general policy/approach (or specifics) for forming alliances. Underlying the development of these strategies is the basic premise that the alliances APS forms and the activities engaged in should not be a burden, financially or scientifically, on APS headquarters or members. Alliances should always be beneficial to both partners. Consequently, APS must be focused in defining its goals, strengths, interests, and vision. It should ally only with organizations that have common goals and interests that might allow APS to gain expertise or access to new markets. APS should develop a process for identifying, reviewing, and assessing alliances.

The remainder of this document provides a framework for APS to evaluate, select and establish successful strategic alliances. It covers A.) examples of types of alliances and activities that could be developed, B.) evaluation questions to assist in selecting an alliance, and C.) a policy/approach for developing a successful alliance. This report concludes with recommendations on how APS can implement development of alliances.

### **A. Types of Alliances and Activities**

Six general areas are being proposed for developing alliances: 1.) Information Resources, 2.) Government Relations, 3) Education and Outreach, 4) International Activities, 5) Market Access, and 6) Business Functions. Our committee has identified examples of potential activities, along with societies, organizations, and agencies with whom APS might develop alliances. An introduction to each of these general areas, along with possible activities and potential alliances have been identified (but not prioritized) as follows:

**1. Information Resources.** APS is a premiere resource for information and knowledge on plant health for the agriculture and scientific community. It publishes in-house and incorporates new technologies to remain a leader in the publication and dissemination of scientific information. APS also has a well-established reputation for quality meeting planning and execution, budgeting and financial practices, and delivery of member services (responsive and personal). Joint meetings

with other societies, both on-site and online, have been successful. The development of internet conferences is proving to be an effective, economic, and timely vehicle for bringing together scientists and other interested personnel from a wide range of disciplines and agencies at a local, national, and international level to discuss topics of mutual interest. Information resources, and the services that accompany activities in this area, are among APS's strongest assets and could be greatly expanded in new and exciting ways.

Examples of activities:

- Joint meetings (Ex: integrate multidisciplinary, information sessions)
- Co-host symposia, workshops, short courses  
(scientific and professional development offered online and/or on-site)
- Joint resource ventures: journals (e.g. *Plant Health Progress*), books, products
- Shared newsletter articles regarding common issues
- Joint membership of APS with other societies
- Packaging of journal subscriptions to libraries
- Online publication databases (Ex: online cross-references to mycological journal articles)
- Certified Crop Advisor Program
- Sell/market APS books and products at meetings of crop consultant societies

Examples of potential alliances: American Association of Cereal Chemists, American Society for Horticulture Science, American Society for Virology (and other plant virology organizations), American Society of Agronomy, American Society of Plant Biologists (former American Society of Plant Physiologists), American Society of Microbiology, Crop Science Society of America, Entomological Society of America, Mycological Society of America, National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants (and other crop consultant/advisor organizations, state crop consultant organizations), Society of Cooperative Extension Specialists, Society of Environmental Toxicology, Society of Nematologists

**2. Government Relations.** There are several reasons for a professional society to have Washington connections or a "Washington presence" regarding regulatory issues, national research funding, and national agriculture policy. APS alone may have little influence on these issues, but with appropriate alliances (agricultural, environmental, policy, regulatory organizations), APS can have impact. APS should work with established appropriate alliances, depending upon the issue. For example, all agricultural societies have a stake in how Washington distributes research money to human health, basic sciences, and agriculture in national research funding. There is a huge disparity between funding for the NRI compared to NIH and NSF, but even within NRI and other federal or regional programs, there are issues about the relative support for basic versus applied science as well as other areas (e.g., interdisciplinary research on agro-ecological systems). There are a number of regulatory issues related to genetically modified organisms, sustainability of forests and wild ecosystems, and the introduction of exotic pests that have international implications. For agricultural policy, the agricultural production societies could ally with agricultural economists to raise awareness about the biological implications of decisions made mostly on short-term economic considerations. For instance, past farm bills have influenced the decline of crop diversity in America's Corn Belt and Great Plains, which has had dramatic effects on disease, weed, and insect problems. Also, the recent events of September 11 have alerted the nation and world to the threat of bioterrorism, including vulnerability of food production and supplies. Recent world events also emphasize the need for the US to maintain strong research in support of agriculture to remain self-sufficient in production and processing of food and fiber.

Examples of activities:

- Inform legislators/regulators, e.g., position papers, informational brochures
- Respond to requests for input and opinions (e.g., Federal Register, etc.)
- Share "Washington presence"
- Hire full-time legislative liaison
- Alert plant pathologists and appropriate audiences to issues of common concern (e.g., ATCC)
- Advocate for funding of agricultural (plant, microbe, environment), cooperative, interdisciplinary research
- Advocate international research, education, and extension
- Provide input on national policy (agricultural and regulatory issues)
- Use APSnet for discussion of specific issues and to identify members who want to become involved or provide contacts with appropriate organizations, individuals, etc.

Examples of potential alliances: American Institute of Biological Sciences, CAST, CoFARM, Council of Scientific Society Presidents, relevant societies listed under Information Resources, above

**3. Education and Outreach** (K-12, college, teachers, general public). The public's general knowledge of the US and world food and fiber production system is dismal. Instruction about production of food and natural fiber, impediments to production, how agricultural commodities are processed and distributed, and the economics of this entire process should be part of the curriculum in our primary and secondary schools and colleges. In this broad view, plant pathology plays a small, but important, part. One suggested approach would be to incorporate plant pathology in the Social Science curriculum where topics covered include government (national, state, local), the legal system, transportation, health care, and the environment. A major omission in this curriculum is no mention of agriculture, food or food security – fundamental components in a secure and prosperous society. The Agronomy Society of America has identified education as an important goal, but to be successful this effort will require alliances among several societies (perhaps taking the social science approach?).

The APS Youth Committee of APS has done excellent work for several years to inform K-12 teachers of the opportunities for, and advantages of, incorporating plant pathology into their curricula. The recently developed APS Education Center also is a step to provide lesson plans and laboratory exercises for educators. These are excellent efforts that should continue, but a broader goal of educating children and teachers about food and fiber production will require a consortium of agricultural societies.

The general public also needs to be better informed about food and fiber production and science, in general. Alliances for a public education program probably would be similar to alliances for the program described above, but the activities and products would differ. Fortunately, APS already has activities and products in this area but distribution could be strengthened by alliances with other societies.

Examples of activities:

- Incorporate/integrate agriculture and biological sciences into curriculum K-12/college
- Develop books, laboratory exercises
- Exhibits and booths at meetings of teachers associations
- News releases on issues related to agriculture/science
- Joint position statements to press, media
- Educational sessions for public, i.e., Master Gardeners
- Books, videos, and other educational materials for general public

Examples of Potential Alliances: Agronomy Society of America, American Association for Agricultural Education, American Institute of Biological Sciences, American Society for Horticultural Science, Botanical Society of America, Coalition for Education in the Life Sciences, Entomological Society of America, National Association of College and Teachers of Agriculture, Weed Science Society of America

**4. International Activities.** Many of the activities described under the various areas of alliances (#1-3 and 5-6) could be expanded to include international efforts. It is identified here as a separate area to emphasize its importance to APS. About one-third of APS members reside outside of the United States and represent many activities, e.g., research, extension, teaching, consulting, publishing, diagnostics, and biotechnology. International membership has grown mostly through the member service enhancements made possible by new technology, so the trend for greater international membership is likely to continue. Our Society is in the position of needing to decide what its international posture, presence, or involvement will be. There are two areas to consider 1) the increased role of international members within APS (governance, editorial boards, international divisions, etc.) and 2) the development of alliances to achieve specific goals. This document addresses the latter.

To date, APS has been careful not to compete with activities of plant pathology societies in other countries. For example, the European Office has kept a low profile by only selling books for APS Press. The European Office could be more active in recruitment of new members, planning joint meetings, symposia, etc. Science is becoming more global, and with information more accessible through the Internet, APS will be increasingly expected to engage in activities with related organizations and sister societies around the world.

There are opportunities for APS to work with a variety of established international organizations. An example is the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (established by the World Bank), a regional commission with an Executive Secretariat at FAO in Rome which addresses agricultural issues of regional importance. It is not a funding or implementing body, but serves as a forum to discuss and address agricultural problems of regional importance such as major diseases of African crops. APS could develop an alliance with the Global Forum to reach out to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centers in Africa, Asia, etc. and key national agricultural research systems in developing

countries. APS has maintained close relationships with certain CGIAR Centers involved in plant health such as CIMMYT, CIAT, IRRI and others. Each year, the OIP booth features specific research programs at selected CGIAR Centers and encourages APS members to visit with Center representatives at the annual APS meeting. Many current and former Center employees are APS members and several international cooperative efforts have emerged from informal discussions at APS annual meetings. These personal relationships are important to members and APS should continue to encourage and support these efforts. In addition, the Global Forum may provide a more structured mechanism to reach out to other CGIAR Centers, national/regional systems, and donor organizations such as USAID and the World Bank.

Examples of activities:

- Joint membership of APS with other international societies
- Co-sponsor symposia, workshops, meetings (on-line, on-site)
- Develop funding for scientists in developing countries to access APS journals and meetings Expand European office
- Joint meetings with international societies
- Cooperative research projects in developing countries
- Monitor international regulatory issues
- Participate in meetings with International Centers and donor organizations held annually in Washington at the World Bank

Examples of potential alliances: Canadian Phytopathological Society, CGIAR (Head is Francisco Reifschneider, Ph.D in plant pathology, Univ. Wisc.; CGIAR is sponsored by The World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, and United Nations Development Program, USAID, and other national development assistance agencies), European Foundation for Plant Pathology, International Association for the Plant Protection Sciences, International Commission on Microbial Ecology, International Society for Plant Pathology, International Society for Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology, International Society of Arboriculture, International Union for Microbiological Societies, The Association for International Agriculture and Rural Development

**5. Market Access** (for APS books and products). Over half of APS revenue is derived from sales of journal subscriptions, books, and other products. Approximately 70% of book sales are to non-member customers. Reaching these non-member markets can be very costly. Most of the books and products are not competitive with those of other societies. Greater cooperation between societies could help promote the awareness of materials available across societies and mutually help each society reach members and potential customers much more economically. Exhibit booths could be traded between societies to make the display and sale of products more efficient. Advertisements could be bartered between society publications and book flyers included in mailings of other materials. Societies could cooperatively create promotions to reach beyond scientific societies to broader markets. They also could create value-added products by jointly organizing, producing, and selling publications.

Examples of Activities:

- Booths at meetings of other societies, organizations
- Advertisements
- links between society home pages
- cooperative or joint publications

Examples of potential alliances: See lists # 1-4 above.

**6. Business Functions.** APS along with financial partner AACC (Scientific Societies), could sell services to other nonprofit scientific societies. APS and AACC provide all services to IS-MPMI and ASBC, but it is also possible to sell specific services. By using the Headquarters staff and facilities for a greater volume of work, greater efficiencies for each of the organizations can be created.

**a.) Clients.** Where APS and AACC have expertise and the ability to effectively handle more work, it could sell certain services to other organizations.

Examples of activities:

- Publications (journals, books, newsletters)
- Accounting
- Meetings planning and coordination
- Member records
- Process development (e.g., strategic planning)

Online journal databases  
Clearing house for bringing together industry internships and students  
Clearing house for bringing together industry and cooperators in universities for research trials

Examples of potential candidates: agribusiness companies, land grant universities, Mycological Society of America, Society of Nematologists

**b.) Outsourcing.** APS and AACC could buy services from other organizations that are more efficient in certain areas or where expertise outside our competency is required.

Examples of activities:

Online training programs  
Online review and tracking systems  
Government relations

Examples of potential candidates: Societies and organizations that have expertise in functions that can assist, complement, or offer new options for APS interests and activities

## **B. Evaluation Questions**

A number of key questions should be answered by APS as it evaluates its position in selecting and developing successful alliances (S. Nelson; Phillip, 2001; O'Brien, 1997).

- What are the goals and desired outcome of the alliance?
- Is the alliance and the proposed outcomes strategic to APS achieving its vision?
- Is it clear that an alliance is a better approach for both organizations than attempting the activity alone?
- Is the alliance beneficial to both organizations?
- Are the deliverables clearly defined (financial, knowledge, value)?
- Are the responsibilities for each organization clear?
- Is it likely that the organizations will be able to work together (cultures compatible, e.g. in management style, values)?
- What are the financial requirements (is there a business plan?)?
- Can each organization(s) finance, staff, and manage their responsibilities? Note: it is not uncommon for alliance members to contribute at different levels.
- Is the risk out-weighed by the potential benefits (can we afford to fail)?
- How can issues be dealt with if the alliance creates competing factions?
- What is the timeline or schedule for accomplishing the activities? What are the specific benchmarks for measuring progress?
- What method(s) will be used for negotiating compromises and decisions?
- What are the mechanisms for terminating the agreement if the alliance isn't working?

## **C. Policy/Approach for Developing Alliances**

The best ideas for alliances usually are sparked by member needs and efforts to solve practical problems. Scientific societies on most levels are not competitive and each has specific areas of knowledge and expertise. The first step in the

process is to recognize that combining two or more of these areas of knowledge to solve a problem creates new knowledge or a new product. A key to this recognition is that committees and society leaders need to look beyond their own society and resources to consider alliances as possible solutions. APS could survey the needs and goals of other national societies. It could survey international societies, e.g., the International Society of Plant Pathology to generate information beyond surveying the needs and interests of APS members from other countries. Working with other entities outside the society is not a natural inclination and requires a different kind of communication. There must be a dialogue with the other entity to determine their interest. Different cultures and decision processes may require skilled dialogue to organize potential solutions.

Identifying a current member or customer need is step one in the process. Step two is consideration of what value APS can bring to help with the problem. Research is needed to determine if APS has the necessary resources to help with the problem and or if other societies or entities might be able to contribute. Are the other entities interested and able to contribute to the activity? Does the activity or product fit with APS' focus? Is it likely that APS and the other entity can work together to achieve the desired result? If the answer to all of these questions is yes, then the potential alliance needs to be documented and proposed to the appropriate governing bodies for approval. Depending on the scope of the project, documentation for an alliance could be based on a simple letter or for a very complex project, it may require a formal description and business plan.

O'Brien (1997) offers ten steps for successful collaborations that will be helpful to APS. They are outlined as follows:

- Identify member needs that will be served by the alliance.
- Select potential partners that can satisfy those needs.
- Initiate and establish a dialogue with potential partners to discuss goals, objectives, desired outcomes, appropriate roles and responsibilities, costs, pricing, potential problems, and risks of failure.
- Draft a preliminary plan that includes roles, responsibilities, tasks and schedules, and one primary contact person. This should be done for each participating group.
- Identify realistic guidelines for measuring success (include technical, financial, and other appropriate identifiers). Set monthly performance goals, schedule regular meetings (with designated personnel, including governing board when appropriate).
- If advisable, have the plan reviewed by legal counsel, Society officers, Executive Director or CEO of each participating organization, and chief financial officers.
- Conduct a pilot project, before committing to a major, untried undertaking.
- Promote and establish ongoing communication about the alliance so members and key constituents of all organizations involved understand what is going on and how they can participate.
- Carry out the collaboration with intensity and vigor, keep focused, maintain the commitment, and communicate frequently.
- Broadcast achievements to members, management, and internal partners. Credit everyone responsible for mutual successes. Celebrate accomplishments and acknowledge them in the media.

### **Citations**

Fillip, C. 2001. Keys to coalition building. Communication News, American Society of Association Executives. November issue (e-mail article).

O'Brien, J. 1997. Guidelines for strategic alliances. Association Educator, American Society of Association Executives. July issue, pages 1,2, and 4.

## **Recommendations for Implementation**

1. Form a standing committee (with one member representing the APS Executive Committee) to solicit and evaluate proposals for alliances that will help APS realize its' strategic goals.
2. Include the Alliance Strategy Committee Report in APS policy:
  - a) place report on APS web site
  - b) refine report for inclusion in Manual of Operations (sections on Evaluation Questions and Policy/Approach for Developing Alliances) and refer to complete report on web site
  - c) provide copies of this report to new members of Council and Committee Chairs on an annual basis
3. Submit copies of the Alliance Strategy Committee Report to all APS Offices, Boards, and Committee Chairs for their information and to generate ideas for alliances.
4. Publish an abridged version of the Alliance Strategy Committee Report in *Phytopathology News*.