

## Strategic Plan – Association for Chemoreception Sciences

January, 2021 - December, 2025

### 1. Executive Summary

The Association for Chemoreception Sciences (AChemS) is a leading scientific society dedicated to understanding the chemical senses. To better prepare AChemS to serve the chemical senses research, education and clinical communities, and the public at large, the AChemS Executive Committee established an *ad hoc* Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) and charged it with (i) reviewing the AChemS mission statement and, if deemed warranted, making recommendations for modifications of the Mission Statement; and (ii) developing a 5-year Strategic Plan for AChemS. This document represents the Strategic Plan developed by the SPC and submitted to the Executive Committee for its consideration, revision and approval. This document also describes recommended minor changes to the AChemS Mission Statement. As part of its process in developing this Strategic Plan, the SPC undertook a SWOL analysis to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and limitations in the context of both AChemS as an organization and the major activity of AChemS, its Annual Meeting. The SPC concluded that the major strategic goals for AChemS over the coming five years should be to:

- A) Fulfill the AChemS Mission.
- B) Increase the membership of AChemS through improved retention of current members and better recruitment of new members.
- C) Improve recognition and support of diversity in the society and in the field.
- D) Improve the scientific content of the annual meeting.
- E) Increase the relevance of AChemS to chemosensory scientists, educators and clinicians.
- F) Adjust AChemS activities to reflect the reality of stagnant research funding, environmental impact of meeting travel, and other factors.

Appendix 1 includes recommendations to the Executive Committee for specific actions that will assist AChemS in achieving these goals.

### 2. Introduction

In April, 2019, the AChemS Executive Committee established an *ad hoc* Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) with an initial term of five (5) years. This term may be renewed per AChemS bylaws. The charge of the committee is to conduct strategic planning for the society and to make recommendations, plans or proposals to the Executive Committee. The Strategic Planning Committee is advisory to the Executive Committee, which is in turn responsible for approving and executing any recommendations, plans or proposals submitted by the Strategic Planning Committee.

In its initial year, the SPC was composed of the following AChemS members (in alphabetical order): John Boughter, Ph.D. (University of Tennessee, Memphis), Jessica Brann, Ph.D. (Firmenich), Rachel Herz, Ph.D. (Brown University), Steven Munger, Ph.D. (University of Florida), Christopher Simons, Ph.D. (Ohio State University), Dana Small, Ph.D. (Yale University), Donald Wilson, Ph.D. (New York University). Dr. Munger chaired the SPC.

From September, 2019 until February, 2020, the SPC performed the following tasks, per its charge:

(i) Reviewing the AChemS mission statement and, if deemed warranted, making recommendations for modifications of the mission statement.

(ii) Developing a 5-year strategic plan for AChemS.

This document serves both to report the recommended changes to the AChemS mission statement in the Bylaws (these minor changes are consistent with those recently made on the AChemS webpage) and to present a 5-year strategic plan for the society. All SPC members contributed to the writing of this report and approved it unanimously.

### **3. History and Background**

Aided by a planning grant from the National Science Foundation, Dr. Maxwell M. Mozell (SUNY Health Sciences Center, Syracuse) and a group of ten colleagues in the chemical senses met in 1978 to initiate the formation of the Association and plan its first meeting. The first Annual Meeting of the Association for Chemoreception Sciences was held in Sarasota, Florida, in April, 1979. AChemS has grown to become the preeminent professional society for olfaction and taste research in the United States. The Annual Meeting has evolved into the world's major forum for presenting advances in chemical senses research.

The design of the Annual Meeting was initially modeled after the successful meetings of the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO). It retains much of its original character and composition. The AChemS Annual Meeting includes scientific sessions (e.g., platform symposia, robust poster sessions and plenary lectures) along with networking and social activities. AChemS emphasizes a broad, multidisciplinary view of the chemical senses in its membership and in activities at the Annual Meeting. Active and meaningful participation by trainees is a hallmark of the Annual Meeting and the Association.

AChemS activities also include public education through outreach events, the <http://achems.org> website and social media. AChemS provides expertise and advice to federal agencies and other entities on issues impacting, or being impacted by, the chemical senses and/or chemosensory research. The Association helps to disseminate chemical senses research through its co-sponsorship (with several other scientific societies) of the journal *Chemical Senses*, which is published by Oxford University Press.

### **4. Management and Staff**

AChemS is governed by an Executive Committee, the members of which are elected by the membership of the Association. The Executive Committee conducts the Association's affairs as outlined in the Bylaws, and their responsibilities and activities are not detailed further here. Currently, the Executive Committee is assisted in the management of the Association by a professional management firm, SPLtrak, which has served in this capacity since 2017.

### **5. Mission**

ACChemS, the Association for Chemoreception Sciences, is a scientific research organization dedicated to understanding the “chemical senses” of smell, taste, trigeminal irritation and internal chemoreception from the fundamentals of neurobiology to complex behavior.

The Association for Chemoreception Sciences (ACChemS) seeks:

(a) to advance the understanding of chemosensory mechanisms by bringing to one forum the variety of different scientific disciplines currently being used to approach the chemical senses;

(b) to encourage fundamental, clinical, and applied research in the chemical senses;

(c) to act as an identifiable organ representing the interests of the chemosensory research community; and

(d) to act as an identifiable directory for those requiring particular types of chemosensory expertise.

(e) to promote general appreciation of the need and impact of chemosensory research, and to foster public information and education about the chemical senses at practical, applied and clinical levels.

## **6. SWOL Analysis**

### **(a) The Society**

#### **• Strengths**

- ACChemS is the face of chemical senses research in the U.S.
- The society has a large number of members who are committed to the success of ACChemS and its activities.
- ACChemS continues its historically strong support of trainees and junior investigators.
- ACChemS is in excellent financial shape.
- The society journal *Chemical Senses* is a critical, respected outlet for many in the field.

#### **• Weaknesses**

- ACChemS is not well known to the public or to scientists outside the chemosensory field, and many major areas of chemical senses research have little representation in the society.
- Membership is stagnant and below recent historic levels.
  - Chemosensory scientists that did not “grow up” in ACChemS often do not choose to join the society.
  - A large number of senior, highly-involved ACChemS members have recently retired or will do so this decade, leaving a leadership gap.
- Outreach and awareness campaigns have had little impact and major goals of these campaigns are poorly defined.
- ACChemS activities outside the Annual Meeting are few in number and small in scope.

- The society's track record of promoting diversity in leadership and in awards is mixed.
  - AChemS has not been proactive about addressing environmental/carbon footprint issues related to its activities.
  - Industry participation and sponsorship is modest and inconsistent.
- **Opportunities**
    - Increase the value of membership by strengthening the Annual Meeting and adding additional member benefits (e.g., online resources)
    - Increase outreach and education activities towards industry, government and the general public.
    - Reestablish AChemS as the premier scientific society for all subfields of chemosensory science.
    - Enhance relationships with societies that have overlapping but distinct interests (SSIB, ARVO, ARO).
- **Limitations**
    - Chemosensory science is a small field, and other general societies in small fields are facing similar challenges.
    - Members perform society activities on a volunteer basis and in addition to their regular duties as employees of universities, industry, etc. and their participation in other scientific societies.
    - Volunteer leadership turns over regularly, negatively impacting long-term initiatives.
    - Tight research funding hampers participation.
- (b) **The Annual Meeting**
- **Strengths**
    - The Annual Meeting represents a diversity of perspectives and approaches.
    - The meeting is enjoyable, focused, and full of strong science, without being overwhelming.
    - Many attendees strongly value the Florida location and the current hotel (though see Weaknesses).
    - The conference is significantly less expensive to attend than similar conferences, especially for trainees.
  - **Weaknesses**
    - Several major constituencies have the perception that their own research area is being sidelined at the Annual Meeting, and researchers in many major areas of chemosensory science do not attend regularly.
    - Members differ on their opinion of the current Annual Meeting location, and on whether the Annual Meeting should return to the same location each year.
    - The standard program structure does not facilitate "deep-dives" into subfields. The pre-meeting symposium (which was initiated to address this) prolongs the meeting and may cannibalize the last day of the regular meeting.
    - The typically low number of symposium submissions from a subset of members contributes to perceived program repetition from year to year.
    - Some newer research areas represented (nutrition, ingestive biology) overlap

with other societies.

- **Opportunities**

- AChemS could create more program activities targeted specifically to attendees at different career stages.
- Satellites/focused pre-meeting sessions such as workshops could offer opportunities to attract scientists from outside AChemS.
- Focused topics could be addressed at mini-conferences under the AChemS umbrella (but distinct from the Annual Meeting).

- **Limitations**

- Satellites/focused pre-meeting sessions may lose novelty over time.
- Conference competition is high and unlikely to diminish.
- Tight research funding hampers participation even with competitive registrations costs.
- The Annual Meeting is an important revenue stream and activity for the society.
- Adding more activities to the meeting reduces time for other types of interactions between members (e.g., between collaborators).
- NIH silos can impair the meeting's ability to pursue interdisciplinary science.

## **7. Major Strategic Goals**

- A. Fulfill the AChemS Mission.
- B. Increase the membership of AChemS through improved retention of current members and better recruitment of new members.
- C. Improve recognition and support of diversity in the society and in the field.
- D. Improve the scientific content of the annual meeting.
- E. Increase the relevance of AChemS to chemosensory scientists, educators and clinicians.
- F. Adjust AChemS activities to reflect the reality of stagnant research funding, environmental impact of meeting travel, and other factors.

## **8. Evaluation**

The Strategic Planning Committee should review the Strategic Plan and evaluate its implementation yearly and provide a report to the Executive Committee. The Strategic Planning Committee should develop a new strategic plan every five years for consideration by the Executive Committee. Thus, the next AChemS strategic plan would be scheduled for Spring, 2025.