



Strategic Plan 2021-2024

Draft version v3

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Vision, Mission, and Values	3
3. SWOT	4
4. General Membership Survey	8
5. Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Actions	12

1. Introduction

Strategic planning is a process which reflects on the past, present, and future of the Society, and the broad range of determining factors that surround it as well as its internal and financial context. This 2021-2024 strategic plan seeks to update the previous 2017-2020 strategic plan, presenting an updated tool for the Society's management and decision-making, to assist in addressing the present and future challenges and opportunities it faces. It is not meant to be a static tool, but rather an active and dynamic tool to guide decision-making in line with the objectives of the Society.

As before, the Strategic Plan:

- a) Affirms our commitment to all our members
- b) Identifies and defines our priority areas for action, together with our main strategies and operational plans
- c) Identifies indicators and specific actions to adequately monitor performance, guide management decisions and design evaluation processes
- d) Has a specific timeframe (here 2021-2024)
- e) Has been developed and agreed upon through a participatory process.

The development of this strategic plan was lead by a Strategic Plan Committee formed of: co-Chairs Michelle Turner (Spain) and Beate Ritz (U.S.), with members Nelson Gouveia (Brazil), Ho Kim (South Korea), and Mildred Maisonet (U.S.). The main activities undertaken in preparing the strategic plan included conducting a SWOT evaluation, a general membership survey, two strategic planning meetings consisting of ISEE leadership and associated journal editors, and an evaluation of the actions and achievements undertaken as part of the previous 2017-2020 plan. The first draft of the plan was circulated to the Executive Council and Chapter and Committee Chairs in January 2021. A revised version was subsequently posted on the ISEE website February 2021 for review and comment by the entire membership. A final version of the strategic plan is expected to be approved and adopted by the Executive Council in March-April 2021 and implemented in partnership with all Chapters and Committees.

2. Vision, Mission, and Values

The Vision of ISEE is that:

We are a scientific association in environmental epidemiology that impacts research, training, and policy worldwide.

Our Mission is:

To foster epidemiological studies on the effects of environmental exposures in people, stimulate communication between health professionals, promote methodological advances, and strengthen environmental health policy.

ISEE Values and Member Responsibilities include:

Integrity, Diversity, Member Service, Communication, Respect and Trust, Career Development, Excellence, and Sustainability.

3. SWOT

To formulate the previous 2017-2020 strategic plan, a SWOT exercise was conducted to identify the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the Society by surveying Council members, Chairs of Committees and Chapters, and other volunteers. A similar SWOT exercise was conducted in April-May of 2020 to understand how these features may or may not have changed. Suggestions for questions for a General Membership Survey (below) were also solicited as part of the SWOT exercise. A total of 24 responses (out of 35 invited) were received from ISEE Councillors, Committee and Chapter Chairs and Co-Chairs in response to a web-based questionnaire. A summary of the 2020 responses is provided below, presenting the mean level of agreement reported for each statement. Additionally, free text responses, when respondents were asked to note any further strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the Society beyond those already listed are also provided below.

Strengths

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
Its active Students and New Researchers Network (SNRN)	4,7 (0,7)
Its annual conference	4,7 (0,7)
Its recognition as the premier society in environmental epidemiology worldwide	4,6 (0,9)
Its membership, consisting of a good blend of senior and junior researchers	4,5 (0,7)
A core group of engaged and committed members	4,4 (1,0)
The development of active regional chapters	4,4 (0,7)
Its international representation	4,3 (0,9)
Its council and committee members	4,3 (0,9)
Its coverage of most of the important areas in environmental epidemiology	4,0 (1,1)
Its advocacy - Policy and Ethics committees are active and strong	3,9 (0,8)

Its relative unique emphasis on ethics and philosophy among similar research societies	3,8 (0,9)
Its award program	3,8 (0,9)

Other Strengths noted in free text responses included:

- “Funding of regional chapter activities”
- “Funding of capacity building and short course in Low and Middle Income Countries”
- “The high relevance of environmental epidemiology for the major global health issues including the emerging ones”
- “Annual conference is definitely a strength, but we need to be climate conscience, look to greener alternatives and take better advantage of digital solutions”

Weaknesses

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
The fact that most members are not actively engaged in society	3,9 (0,9)
The limited activities outside of annual conference (limited value for members)	3,8 (1,0)
Its limited financial resources	3,8 (1,2)
Its absence in large geographic areas of the world (most members are from North American and Europe)	3,5 (0,9)
The limited engagement with external stakeholders	3,5 (0,9)
The lack of extensive action in important areas (education, policy)	3,4 (0,8)
The lack of established partners in the wider public health area	3,3 (0,9)
Its website, which is text heavy and outdated	3,3 (1,3)
The lack of membership benefits beyond the annual conference and journal	3,3 (1,2)
The lack of dissemination activities	3,1 (0,9)
The lack of modern communication activity including social media usage	3,1 (1,2)
Its lack of a board of directors insurance and/or occasional legal counsel is a concern, especially with issuing policy statements	3,1 (0,9)
The lack of communication with members in between the annual conferences	3,0 (1,0)
Its small number of (approx. 700-900) members	2,8 (1,2)
The lack of clarity in projecting the Society’s image; whether the essential characteristic of the Society is “international” or “environmental”	2,8 (1,0)

Its inefficiency in annual conference site selection and conference organization	2,6 (1,0)
Its membership system	2,6 (0,8)

Other Weaknesses noted in free text responses included:

- “The main journal is not really environmental”
- “Western countries issues dominate activities of most committees”
- “A mechanism to encourage continuous membership would be highly beneficial, not easy”
- “This isn't an additional weakness but rather a comment on the first few questions. I think there is a tradeoff between size and level of engagement. A bigger society is not necessarily better in terms of experience for the members. The active engagement of the members is what makes the difference and this may be diluted if too much focus goes on growing the society.”

Opportunities

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
Climate change and environment being recognized as major worldwide problems	4,7 (0,5)
Environmental health/epidemiological transition in developing countries	4,6 (0,6)
The expansion of SNRN opportunities and outreach on campuses	4,3 (0,6)
Its large potential member base (past and present)	4,2 (0,6)
Emerging technologies (e.g. citizen science, etc.) and big data	4,1 (0,8)
Possibilities for dissemination of environmental health in mass media including internet and social media	4,1 (0,8)
Increasing and encouraging donations for scientific activities	3,9 (0,9)
the Exposome	3,5 (1,1)

Other Opportunities noted in free text responses included:

- “Building cross country networks for doing multi-center research”
- “Although I strongly agree about donations, this would need to be cautiously conducted to ensure that donors represent the society's ideals”
- “Working with stakeholders in the policy arena, encouraging environmental health impact assessment, tapping into the large pool of environmental epidemiologists that are not members, knowledge translation”
- “Potential for increasing membership in Africa (judging by response of over 500 applications from 15 African countries) to ISEE sponsored short course in Nigeria in 2019”
- “Opportunities to stand up for epidemiologists under attack by current governments”

- “Again, the question is what is the ideal size and composition. I have doubts that bigger is necessarily better in terms of networking opportunities for young researchers, maintaining a high level of activities.”

Threats

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
The general reduction of research funds in many parts of the world	4,1 (0,7)
Political priority/support for environmental health not being translated to research funds	3,8 (1,1)
The competition for membership with other societies	3,5 (1,1)
The fact that the role of scientific associations may become less clear/important	3,3 (1,0)
The movement towards interdisciplinary environmental health research	2,1 (0,8)

Other Threats noted in free text responses included:

- “COVID-19 pandemic, loss of membership, geographical dispersion, lack of sharing resources and knowledge within the society but also with outsiders”
- “Lack of adequate diversity and inclusion in the ISEE Council composition. For instance, lack of councillor position for Africa”
- “Epidemiologic science is under attack, and environmental epidemiologic science is most strongly feeling this attack”
- “Its financial viability is a constant threat as many functions rely on volunteers only”
- “Climate change and the ethics of holding an international conference every year”
- “If the annual conference is online, what does this mean in terms of value of membership?”

Other Comments noted in free text responses included:

- “With projected population growth in Africa, high contribution of environmental risk factors to burden of disease and increasing members of ISEE in the region, there is need to have a councillor slot for Africa in ISEE Council”
- “If some of the pre-conference workshop videos are available online, it would be great”

SWOT Conclusions

Overall, many of the top strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the Society remained consistent over time. However, the level of agreement with some strengths, including its international representation and coverage of most of the important areas in environmental epidemiology, were rated somewhat lower here in the ranking of strengths. Some weaknesses, including its website, which is text heavy and outdated and the lack of modern communication activity including social media usage, were also ranked lower here, likely reflecting the major improvements made over the recent years.

Key aspects to consider in future work, in addition to maintain key strengths, should include further support of:

- Broadening of topics covered in ISEE events and work
- Strong regional chapters and broad international membership
- Strengthening of work on civic engagement/advocacy, policy and ethics
- Enhancing opportunities for membership engagement in the Society throughout the year
- Strengthening of financial resources for the Society and research in environmental epidemiology in general

4. General Membership Survey

A survey of all ISEE members (current members, and recent former members of < 2 years) was also conducted to obtain input from the ISEE membership into the current strategic plan. The survey was conducted in October-November of 2020 and captured basic information, 2020 conference participation, and opinions on ISEE membership and member benefits. A total of 474 respondents completed the online survey with a survey completion rate of 87%. A summary of responses is provided below.

Overall the main characteristics of respondents were as follows:

- 79% current members
- 56% female
- 42% North America, 21% Europe, 13% Africa, 12% Asia and Western Pacific, 8% Latin America and the Caribbean, 3% Eastern Mediterranean
- 82% academic or research institution, 11% government

2020 Conference Participation

- 64% of respondents reported attending the 2020 online conference
- Among those reporting not attending the primary reason reported was:

	% (n = 167)
I was not available during the conference time period	44
I was unable to access funding to pay the registration fee	20
I was not interested in joining an online conference	13
I thought the registration fee was too high	11
Other	12

ISEE Membership and Member Benefits

- 84% were satisfied or extremely satisfied with being an ISEE member overall
- 80% plan to renew their ISEE membership in the future
- Among those reporting being unsure or not planning to renew their ISEE membership in the future, the main reasons reported were:

	% (n = 88)
Too expensive	47
I normally do not actively participate in the society	18
I do not know how to actively participate in the society	18
I do not plan on attending the annual meeting in the future	10
The society does not match my interests or needs	7
I prefer to be a member of another scientific society	5
Don't know	5
The renewal process is too complicated	3
Other	16

Free text responses on what ISEE can do to encourage you to renew your membership included:

- Reduce membership fees or free membership
- Include conference in membership
- More regional networking/collaboration/communication (ie. lunch program, mentorship, informal networking)
- More benefits in general, more communications (ie. regular featured articles)
- Expand work on broader range of topics

Value of the following membership benefits:

Related to the society overall:

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
Networking opportunities	4,1 (1,0)
Eligibility for annual conference travel awards and/or registration discounts	3,6 (1,4)
Eligibility to fully participate in ISEE regional chapters	3,5 (1,2)
Eligibility to fully participate in ISEE committees	3,4 (1,1)

Eligibility for career awards	3,1 (1,3)
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Related to communications:

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
Linkages with Environmental Health Perspectives (EHP) (including publication of annual conference abstracts in the journal)	3,9 (1,2)
ISEE newsletter	3,8 (1,0)
ISEE website	3,7 (1,0)
Publishing discounts in Environmental Epidemiology	3,5 (1,3)
Opportunity to contribute solicited commentaries to Epidemiology with no publication charges	3,2 (1,4)
Access to the journal Epidemiology (note that currently for full members, \$45 of the \$230 membership fee is paid to the journal Epidemiology annually to support such access)	3,1 (1,4)
ISEE twitter	2,9 (1,4)
20% discount on books published by Wolters Kluwer when ordering online	2,7 (1,4)

Related to training:

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
Access to online webinars and training resources (e.g. YouTube channel)	3,9 (1,2)
Access to in person training events	3,6 (1,2)
Mentoring activities	3,3 (1,3)

What ISEE should do more of in the future:

Related to the society overall:

	Mean (SD) score
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	(out of 5)
Increase the diversity of environmental epidemiology topics throughout its work	4,3 (0,8)
Greening of the annual conference, i.e. to improve its sustainability and reduce its adverse environmental impact [and free text suggestion*]	4,2 (0,9)
Collaborate more with other related scientific societies	4,1 (0,9)
Offer multi-year memberships	4,0 (0,9)
Further develop regional chapters	4,0 (0,9)
Offer more online conference participation options with more fully or partially online conferences	4,0 (1,0)
Offer more regional conferences	4,0 (1,0)
Increase the size of the society membership	3,7 (0,9)
Offer institutional memberships	3,6 (1,0)
Offer memberships without access to the journal Epidemiology (note that currently for full members, \$45 of the \$230 membership fee is paid to the journal Epidemiology annually to support such access)	3,6 (1,2)

*specific suggestions have been circulated to the Annual Conference Committee

Related to communications:

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
Offer regular newsletters and/or infographics aimed at the general public to communicate about environmental health topics	4,1 (0,9)
Offer more publishing discounts or fee waivers	4,0 (1,0)
Connecting members more through social media and related communications tools	3,9 (1,0)
Offer access to other relevant journals	3,7 (1,1)

Related to training:

	Mean (SD) score (out of 5)
Offer more online training courses or webinars on environmental epidemiology topics exclusively to members [and free text suggestion*]	4,2 (0,9)

Offer more mentorship opportunities	4,0 (0,9)
Offer more in person training courses on environmental epidemiology topics exclusively to members [and free text suggestion*]	3,9 (1,0)

*specific suggestions have been circulated to CAPE Committee

Finally, when asked if, following publication of research findings on health risks from an environmental exposure, have you ever experienced negative career impacts?

- 88% (of 403 respondents) responded no while yes or maybe was reported by 12%

General Membership Survey Conclusions

Overall, there was a very high degree of satisfaction reported by respondents in terms of being an ISEE member. Though 2020 online conference participation was also high, further consideration should also be given to:

- Promote online conference registration and benefits, as conference content is recorded and available for several months following conference dates
- Additional support for conference registration fees and lowering of registration costs

Although most respondents reported planning to renew their ISEE membership in the future, consideration should also be given to:

- Further lowering of membership fees
- Enhancing opportunities for membership engagement in the Society throughout the year, including formal and informal networking and mentorship
- Promotion and strengthening of member benefits, including those related to journal publishing and assistance with publishing fees
- Online webinars and training resources
- Broadening of topics covered in ISEE events and work
- Greening of the annual conference (including more online participation options)
- Collaboration with other scientific societies
- Strengthening of regional chapters and activities such as conferences
- Communications with the general public on environmental health topics

5. Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Actions

The SWOT evaluation, general membership survey, and discussions at two strategic planning meetings consisting of ISEE leadership and associated journal editors have led to the development of several key strategic priorities, objectives, and actions for 2021-2024 arranged as previously into the following five main areas: Membership, Finances, Communications, Capacity Building and Education, Ethics and Policy, Sustainability and Anti-Racism. Specific objectives and priority actions are defined below.

Membership Priorities

1. Further increase Society membership and widening of geographic base of membership overall, particularly in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Eastern Mediterranean
2. Increase diversity of researchers among membership to include broader range of research interests
3. Strengthen membership benefits and opportunities for membership engagement in the Society throughout the year, including in current pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios

Specific actions include:

- Further lowering of membership fees (although the membership fees for researchers in LMICs was reduced by 50% in 2020, reduction of standard membership fees should also be considered) in line with other similar societies
- Further strengthen and support regional chapters, particularly Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Eastern Mediterranean, and host more regional conferences/events
- Conduct mapping of environmental epidemiologists and relevant clinical researchers worldwide and conduct interviews with those who are not already ISEE members to inform the development of programs and membership benefits
- Cross-promotion and networking with other relevant societies and experts
- Implementation of new ISEE Fellow status as a new member benefit
- Offer a broader range of awards including through regional chapters
- Offer more formal and informal online networking and mentorship opportunities
- Offer more discounts and waivers for conference and event registration for researchers in LMICs
- Promote member benefits more actively including with new electronic promotional materials with new messaging, for example through graphics, infographics, videos etc. A new promotional campaign developed closely with the SNRN could be considered.
- Engage members, including provisional members who have registered as conference non-members, to join committees and Society activities, including more regular open calls for committee volunteers and transparent procedures in leadership and recruitment
- Implement a more modern and flexible membership database platform, also in parallel with a new ISEE website and online training platform

Financial Priorities

1. Further strengthening of Society finances, establishing a reserve fund, and more diverse income sources

Specific actions include:

- In parallel to further lowering of membership fees (above), strengthening of revenue sources from online and in-person conferences, training and continuing education sessions, and events from non-members
- Establish a financial investment policy and reserve fund
- Consider further fundraising activities and conference sponsorships (in line with the Values and Ethics of ISEE), including new sponsorship opportunities for student registration/travel awards as well as educational grants for regional workshops in LMICs

Communications Priorities

1. Update and further refine and develop ISEE website and communications tools that reach members and allow interaction between members using modern approaches
2. Update journal partnership agreements and establish criteria for partnership with journals
3. Develop communications with the general public on environmental health topics

Specific actions include:

- Develop a new ISEE website including more innovative content such as graphics, infographics, videos, and updated content describing member benefits as well as new content aimed at the general public
- In collaboration with other relevant committees/chapters in the promotion of online training and continuing education sessions, and events, including the long-term hosting of past conference and webinar sessions for future use
- Renegotiate contracts with official journals (ie. Epidemiology) the Society currently pays to support member access, to a no-cost or revenue generating model
- Offer more access and publishing discounts in relevant journals
- Promotion of regular featured published papers by members

Capacity Building and Education Priorities

1. Develop new workshops and training schools and materials on special topics using modern and online approaches
2. Develop new formal and informal networking and mentorship opportunities using modern and online approaches

Specific actions include:

- In collaboration with SNRN and other relevant committees/chapters (as well as other scientific societies) in the development of online training and continuing education sessions, and events, including the long-term hosting of past conference and webinar sessions for future use

- Develop mentoring structure and offer more mentorship opportunities including in terms of publishing papers
- Develop informal approaches to networking with membership throughout the year

Ethics and Policy Priorities

1. Further strengthen work and education on civic engagement/advocacy, policy and ethics on a broad range of topics in environmental epidemiology

Specific actions include:

- Promote ethics guidelines for environmental epidemiologists
- Support of members who have experienced negative effects from publication of their work
- In collaboration with other relevant committees/chapters develop online webinars and training materials on ethics, policy, and racism in environmental health
- Promote ethical management of the society
- Prepare policy statements on priority issues in environmental health, including in collaboration with other scientific societies or professional groups, and strengthen collaborations with policy makers and international health agencies
- Promote participation of ISEE members in preparation and formulation of policy statements and national and international policy making processes
- Re-define civic engagement/advocacy within ISEE, as well as establish priorities for action/advocacy including for continued and increased research funding in environmental epidemiology
- Draft and administer an online survey regarding ethical and philosophical stressors faced by ISEE members

Sustainability Priorities

1. Define current status and steps ISEE will take towards reducing emissions
2. Provide specific greening advice to conference organisers
3. Track progress towards more sustainable conferences

Specific actions include:

- Measure the carbon footprint of previous and ongoing ISEE conferences
- Identify actions to reduce the carbon footprint, and set short-term objectives on mitigation action that can be rapidly and efficiently implemented, and a longer-term working strategy for those that are more complex to develop
- Consider setting a goal that would lead to carbon-neutral conferences by 2030
- Consider holding more virtual conferences and less in-person conferences

- Develop a low-carbon guide for the conference organizers to follow as they organize the conference
- Consider developing performance indicators for the hosts of each conference, and hold them to specific reduction of the conference's carbon footprint
- Develop a Sustainability Committee with the responsibility to measure the carbon footprint of the next conferences and report annually to the Executive Council

Anti-Racism Priorities

1. Strengthen and promote the Society's efforts towards equity
2. Further strengthen the anti-racism task force

Specific actions include:

- Develop a plan to make the Society's activities as equitable as possible
- Suggest how members can incorporate anti-racism into research and training
- Create a forum for Society members to share ways we can address equity
- Develop and disseminate statements regarding equity and health
- Organize discussions and sessions on equity at the Society's meetings
- Monitor the Society's progress towards achieving equity