



## **International Federation of Environmental Health IFEH**

**Approved by IFEH Council 26 September 2011**

### **Strategic Planning Initiative**

#### **Executive Summary:**

**At the October 2005, International Federation of Environmental Health Council meeting in Vancouver, Canada, a discussion paper ‘A Strategy For IFEH’ was presented for the consideration of the Council. That document had four key recommendations for action by the Federation.**

**At the 2006 World Congress in Dublin, Ireland, the Federation Council undertook a one day facilitated workshop to address the issue of a strategic plan for the organization. From that session came a document, ‘Thinking about the Future’ which identified the future vision of the Federation. The issues and concerns identified needed to be revisited and consolidated for the development of an environmental scan.**

**In 2007, at the Federation Council meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, a Steering Committee of representatives from five (5) countries was established to produce the finalized strategic plan for the organization. The deliberations of the Steering Committee were presented at the 2008 World Congress in Brisbane, Australia. The Steering Committee synthesised the works previously undertaken and produced a SWOT Analysis – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Weighting factors were developed to help rank and prioritized the issues identified. To further enhance the selection process for the development of the strategic plan, the priority issues identified were assessed and rated by perspective, either organizational or regional. In several instances, and as one would expect, the priority issues transcended both organizational and regional perspectives.**

**The top five (5) priorities were presented to the Federation Council meeting in Singapore in July, 2008. Not surprisingly, the highest ranked priority was that of not having an organizational strategic plan in place. Closely ranked in second spot was the budget of the Federation. Finances and strategic planning seem to be unequivocally linked to organizational direction and success for many not-for-profit organizations including the International Federation of Environmental Health. Finances and planning are interwoven within most organizational models and are the primary cornerstones for successful governance.**

**Rounding out the remaining three (3) priorities were the lack of a communications plan, the lack of Regional meetings and the lack of an official office headquarters.**

## **Background:**

The International Federation of Environmental Health was officially established in 1986. It is a federation of organizations of environmental health professionals globally. The IFEH is a legal entity, that is to say, a company, registered in the United Kingdom as both a company and a charity.

IFEH membership includes member organizations, associate member organizations, academic associate organizations and individual members. Organizational membership has increased significantly in the IFEH over the past years. The organizational motto is “caring for the environment in the interest of world health.” The Federation strives to be the focal point for national organizations of environmental health practitioners to exchange information and ideas, hold World Congresses and to promote the study of environmental health issues and to lobby governments and international organizations.

The core activities of the Federation are the publication of a journal; developing and disseminating policy papers; hosting a World Congress every two years; collaborating with the work of the United Nations and others; networking for the sharing and exchange of information; facilitating exchanges for environmental health professionals and developing a website to be utilized as a resource for members

It is recognized that the primary audience for this document are the member organizations of the International Federation of Environmental Health as well as members of the Faculty Forum. It is hoped that the publication of this document will help increase membership numbers and better position the organization to be sustainable into the future.

Strategic planning clearly is not a one-off exercise once the document is created. The finalized document should be considered a ‘living plan’ and **must** be revisited at least annually to ensure relevance and contextual correctness. Review of the strategic plan should provide a yardstick for measuring performance and marking organizational progress.

## **Discussion:**

Although the lack of a strategic plan was the number one identified priority, significant time will not be spent on discussing the development of the plan. Strategic planning is best described a process, which is a means to an end. Simply put, a strategic plan is an action plan that is implemented in a strategic or timely manner. The strategy is based on what is known in order to achieve the objectives set forth within the planning framework. A strategic direction framework and supporting principles should form part of the strategic plan. Those principles include customer focus, leadership, teamwork, analytical approach and continuous improvement. Key dimension of quality such as effective, appropriate, timely and cost effective should be included.

**A bottom-up approach to the strategic planning process was utilized by the Federation Board of Directors during the deliberations in Dublin, Ireland and then through the creation of the Steering Committee. Input was obtained from numerous organizational stakeholders and constituents present.**

**Participants articulated and identified their concerns, priorities, and thoughts for a future state vision for the International Federation of Environmental Health which now needs to be translated into a strategic action framework in order to achieve the goals of strategic planning. This document is the summation of the various strategic planning activities that have been undertaken to date. The input and energy of the participants is recognized and greatly appreciated. This document underscores the collaborative approach within the Federation and its member organizations.**

**Before proceeding to the implementation phase, the Federation Council must reach consensus on the framework of the strategic plan. Ultimately, the Board of Directors should have ‘ownership’ of the strategic plan, with the primary accountability resting with the President. The success of the implementation of any strategic plan rests with all member organizations.**

**Worthy of note is that a significant organizational change has already occurred during the strategic planning process. That change is one of increasing the Board of Directors from the present four (4) – President, President-Elect, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer to include the Regional Presidents (Chairs) should have a positive impact on the ‘going forward’ process. This recent organizational change should help drive the organization forward by better distributing the workload and responsibilities, a requirement previously articulated by members. Previously, the governance model was too flat and the addition of the Regional presidents (Chairs) is a positive move and should help in the implementation phase of the action plan.**

**Underpinning the strategic plan should be a communications plan and undoubtedly a marketing plan. Although not identified as a priority, the marketing plan will help grow the organization and therefore help increase revenue streams. It is recognized that the existing website is the primary vehicle for contact with the membership and represents the ‘face’ of the organization. For many, the website is their single point of contact with the organization. Continuous improvements, updates and changes to the website are the main reason for the success of the site. The website is a key organizational strength.**

**It is recognized that the International Federation of Environmental Health is not sustainable on membership dues alone, additional revenue streams must be created. The small operating budget of the Federation is an impediment for Congress Organizing Committees seeking government funding and sponsorships. A global organization must have significant funding if it is to be a player on the world stage. At present, the Federation has no ‘paid’ staff and all the work is undertaken by a cadre of volunteers. The Federation Council needs to be aware of setting the bar too high and not attaining the desired organizational outcomes presented throughout the document.**

## **Strategic Actions/Directions:**

The following Strategic Actions/Directions are presented for the consideration of the Federation Council. If approved, these strategic actions/directions will form the backbone of the strategic planning document. These activities should be undertaken and implemented in the next three (3) to five (5) years. It is imperative that the organization build on its existing strengths while mitigating any possible weaknesses.

It is essential that the International Federation of Environmental Health continue to ensure its relevance within the professions it serves, while striving to increase its human resource capacity at all levels within the organizational framework. Do we have the right governance model, at the right time and are we capable of effecting meaningful results and actions from within our decision making processes? The Board of Directors must continue to engage the full spectrum of membership to ensure organizational viability, relevance and sustainability.

It is suggested that the Board of Directors determine the person(s) accountable for each strategic action as well as the corresponding timeline and convey that information back to the Federation Council at the earliest possible convenience. Any new or emerging priority should first be considered with respect to the current strategic plan before being accepted and/or integrated into the planning process.

Once approved, these strategic actions/directions, plus the offsetting accountabilities should be published on the website. This clearly is the easiest way to provide an on-going strategic planning update to the membership. Further organizational updates should be provided routinely at predetermined intervals.

A performance management system should be established to monitor performance, feedback and reporting while allocating and prioritizing resource integration into the strategic action pathways.

The key strategic actions/directions are listed below for consideration:

### **1. Budget/Finances:**

establish a Finance Committee which includes the Honorary Treasurer and President to exam the possibility of creating additional revenue streams while examining the current funding model and membership fee structures;

increase the human resource capacity of the Federation in all aspects of the organization, thus increasing annual revenues and allowing for new organizational growth and energy. Target key areas for growth annually.

the bidding process for World Congresses should be revisited with an aim to developing a revenue sharing scheme between host countries and the IFEH which should be beneficial to all parties, while increasing the revenues of the Federation;

**discontinue the present ‘mail’ circulation of the Environmental & Health International journal, except for during World Congresses and rebrand the magazine in an electronic publishing format;**

**acquire key sponsors and advertisers for the electronic Environmental & Health International journal;**

**consider the possibility of a ‘patron’ for the Federation, a name that members and the public can relate and associate with environmental health;**

**explore the possibility of creating new government partnerships for the creation of research projects and contracts;**

**examine the revenue raising processes of member organization to ascertain best practices and revenue generating ideas and concepts; and,**

**obtain agreement on roles and responsibilities of the committee members.**

## **2. Communications Plan:**

**a Communications Committee which includes the Webmaster, the Editor of the Journal and the Public Relations Officer should be developed and to move forward the communications strategic actions. Strengthen and enhance communications with all segments of membership within the International Federation of Environmental Health;**

**a Membership Committee should be established to develop material to help increase organizational membership in all categories;**

**‘virtual’ or teleconference meetings of the Communications Committee should be held ‘routinely’ on a predetermined frequency;**

**continue to work with the webmaster to enhance the website as the primary tool for communications with the various member groups and a minimum of one new item should be added to the website monthly;**

**organizational culture in the Federation is one of transparency and should continue to be a key element of the Communications Plan;**

**consider the use of workshops or focus groups during World Congresses to ensure the ‘organizational pulse’ is focused on the correct deliverables...feedback is critical to organizational success;**

**all communication materials must continue to address the organizational diversity, skills, distinct regional variations and geographical diversity of the members organizations involved;**

**continue the recently established electronic newsletter under the primary function and lead accountability of the Public Relations Officer**

**the electronic newsletter should be published four (4) times a year and should be placed on a members listserv for distribution;**

**better articulate the Policy Statements of the organization to the ‘broader’ environmental health community ;**

**consider the development of an Advocacy Committee;**

**work more closely with the Faculty Forum and its members, through ensuring direct input to the Board of Directors;**

**create, develop, build and sustain strong connectivity and working relationships with environmental health students, environmental health schools and student associations;**

**identify organizational champions in each region with a view to developing new member organizations within each region of the Federation;**

**undertake a membership survey using an online tool such as survey monkey to enhance membership engagement...we need to understand what our members value in the Federation and how best to add to and enhance that value;**

**continue with the development of a membership brochure/document that clearly outlines the ‘value’ of membership in the IFEH;**

**although English is the official ‘working language’ of the Federation, there exists a need to continue the development of materials in other key languages;**

**it has been recognized that eight (8) main languages represent a significant portion of the membership and that all IFEH materials should be developed in as many languages as possible;**

**all IFEH members of the Board of Directors should use an IFEH domain name e-mail address for routine correspondence; and,**

**obtain agreement on roles and responsibilities of the committee members.**

### **3. Regional Meetings:**

**regions are encouraged to hold ‘virtual meetings’ at least twice a year, and report and provide updates on these meetings for publication on the Federation website;**

**ensure the regions are working in a collaborative manner with the Board of Directors to ensure better accountability;**

**the Membership Committee should work directly with the regions, et al to identify new area of organizational growth and opportunity;**

**it is important to understand the regional differences, scope and interests prior to the development of any new projects to initiatives; and,**

**inter-regional meetings should be held routine to aid in the transfer and dissemination of information and knowledge and to help build stronger bonds within the organization and to assist regions with moving forward.**

#### **4. Office/Headquarters:**

**the Finance Committee undertake the development of a business case/plan for acquiring office space and for the hiring of one part-time contractual employee; and,**

**the Federation Council consider the hiring of an Executive Director as that part time employee.**

#### **Conclusions:**

**The International Federation of Environmental Health can no longer be considered a ‘young organization, it has matured significantly since its inception. Many of the strategic actions/directions identified in the planning process have been previously identified in some form or another. The organization now must move to the implementation phase if it is to sustain itself and further develop over the next five (5) years. The International Federation of Environmental Health is reaching a ‘watershed’ point in its brief history and now must ‘walk the walk’ as it moves forward onto the global stage.**

**The Board of Directors must be the stewards of the strategic plan and commit to undertaking the necessary strategic actions/directions identified within this framework document and provide on-going feedback and reporting to the membership through a template document that charts the progress/status of each strategic action/direction identified.**

**The Board of Directors needs the organizational support of the member organizations of the International Federation of Environmental Health if it is to achieve its goals and objectives. A progress report should be provided at each Council meeting.**