

**North American Geosynthetics Society
Strategic Planning Retreat
SUMMARY
May 25- 26, 2004**

The NAGS Board recently met to develop a new, clear direction for the Society. The 2003- 2004 Board Members held a two- day Strategic Planning Retreat in May, led by Shirley Readdean, a professional facilitator. With the help of NAGS President, L. David Suits, Ms. Readdean led the Board Members through thought- provoking activities and detailed discussions, that enabled the group to set specific, reachable long- and short- term goals for NAGS. The Retreat was a huge success! The following is a summary of results and the plans of action set to achieve the goals for the betterment of NAGS.

After enjoying a casual, Continental breakfast in the meeting room, the group was introduced to Facilitator, Shirley Readdean. Shirley provided a brief overview of the Retreat, and jumped right into action! The first activity was called “Desert Storm”, in which the group was given a fictional Survival challenge, and asked to prioritize the 15 “survival” items they would choose to keep, as individuals, to sustain life until rescue arrived. Then, the group was divided into 2 sub- groups, and without telling their teammates their personal answers, had to decide the priority items as a TEAM, and record them on the same sheet. When each group had finished their entries, Shirley read out the “expert” answers, calculations were made, and each group could appreciate the positive affect that taking into account all of the differing and similar answers into successful decision making could be. A real “eye- opener”, which truly broke the ice!

After a short break, the sub- groups were asked to remain in tact, and they were introduced to a second activity called “NAGS Personality”. Each member was asked to think of a fictional character that they most personally relate to. Each sub- group then decided on one that had the most characteristics that represented their group, and then presented these to the whole group when it reassembled. Group One chose “James Bond”, and Group Two chose “Spock”! The resulting discussion made way for a stream of personal and professional insight into the characteristics valued most, and the effect they have on decision- making.

The next activity asked the question “Where are we?” and resulted in a short discussion, specific to NAGS. The purpose of this brief period of reflection was to set the base for what was to be worked on, in more detail, later that day. Each member had been provided with a copy of the NAGS Mission and Vision statement, and it was decided that detailed examination and revising of the two statements would be the focus. The group was then left to ponder this, over a hearty, delicious lunch get-together at “Smokey Bones” BBQ house, near to the Retreat location. Everyone enjoyed this time to “refuel” and review the events of the morning!

When the group reassembled, after a satisfying lunch break, they jumped right in to the topic of the Mission/Vision statements. Each line was dissected, and reworded or rearranged to make a clearer, more concise, statement. Once the group was satisfied with the new revisions, the change was recorded in the notes, to be added to the website and future NAGS mailings/information packages. This was the first step in redefining the purpose of the Society, and paved the way for the focused, specific goal setting session that would soon follow.

For the next hour of the Retreat, before getting into the specific goal setting, the group was lead through 2 more thought-provoking activities, entitled “Think About It” and “Dream Journey”. For the “Dream Journey”, the group was broken back down into two subgroups. Each was asked to envision that “money was no object”, and write down what they would like to have for NAGS, or have NAGS involved in. This removed the feeling of “restriction” from actual budget, and to encourage ideal situations to be voiced. Examples of the “dream” aspirations included establishing a formal promotion program to encourage geosynthetic related seminars, conferences, etc., and establishing a paid Executive Director position, to specialize in PR, especially conference exposure. Now, with the creative juices swiftly flowing, the groups divided back into two, and brainstormed. The remaining 2- ½hours of the afternoon Retreat session saw both groups sharing their “ideals”, creating the foundation for forming new, concrete goals for the growth of the Society.

The following is the list of items that was created and agreed upon, and represents “Where We Want to Go”:

“Where We Want to Go”

- 1. Develop conference programs**
- 2. Establish an Executive Director position. This position would focus on advancing the NAGS Conference experience, and growing the membership.**
- 3. Demonstration Site: (Education)**
 - a. Contractor/QA education hands-on**
 - b. Develop a video series**
 - c. Live web cast (e.g. Time-lapsed)**
 - d. Paid student participation**
- 4. Establish and maintain a continually updated Geosynthetics curriculum. (Education)**
- 5. Create and maintain NAGS “hotline”**
- 6. Awards Programs**
 - a. Student scholarships & fellowships**
 - b. Research awards e.g. Award of Excellence**
 - c. Innovation award**
 - d. Student Competitions (paper + building, etc.)**
- 7. Implementation of CAPITAL campaign (fundraising)**
- 8. PR program/person (on staff)**
- 9. Student Membership recruitment program**
- 10. Establish formal promotion program to encourage geosynthetic related seminars, conferences, etc.**
- 11. Develop a list of presenters to present non-commercial technical presentations using already existing programs (unbiased)**

- 12. Collaboration with other organizers beyond formal conferences**
 - a. Develop a voice in the development of codes and specifications**
 - b. Strong NAGS visual promotion tools (booths, T-shirts, etc.)**

- 13. Travelling Road Show for:**
 - a. Consultants/Contractors**
 - b. Educational institutions**
 - c. Provide kits for educators**
 - d. Short course/workshop format**

- 14. Develop distinguished Lecture Series.**

The first Retreat day adjourned at 5:00 p.m., and the group met for another succulent feast! This time, it was dinner at “Butcher Block” in Albany, NY. In between the laughter and great conversation, L. David Suits made a presentation on behalf of NAGS to Retreat Facilitator, Shirley Readdean, with an honorarium of \$250.00 for her leadership and a job well done. It was a pleasure to have Shirley’s company at the NAGS dinner, and she provided a positive and enthusiastic energy from beginning to end. During this casual presentation, Shirley was also given her very own NAGS lapel pin; a small token of appreciation, for which she was most grateful (she proudly wore it to breakfast, the following morning!)

On Wednesday morning, the Board met again for a light breakfast in the meeting room, then assembled for the scheduled Board Meeting between 8:45 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. The Agenda was kept brief, but did include updates on NAGS business, old and new, and resulted in a list of action items for the Board and Managing Director to start working on.

After the meeting was adjourned, the group welcomed Shirley back for the final morning session of the Strategic Planning Retreat. The day began with “Tuesday Feedback” and “Goals Revisited”. Discussions on both of these topics brought the group to its final assignment: Developing a time line to fulfill the new goals, and role assignments.

The result of the final activity was the creation of a list of specific goals, organized into those that are “doable now”, “doable within 1 yr”, and “doable within 2- 3 yrs”. On the following page is a list of the established goals within each category.

STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT
NEW GOALS FOR NAGS

“DOABLE NOW”

- ✓ **Conference late 2005**
- ✓ **Awards of Excellence**
- ✓ **Student Paper Competition**
- ✓ **Student Membership Recruitment**
- ✓ **Develop job description for Executive Director position**
- ✓ **NAGS recruitment**
- ✓ **Organize demo sites**
- ✓ **Capital campaign program**

“DOABLE WITHIN 1 YR”

- ✓ **Items 11 & 12 on list (re: collaboration)**
- ✓ **Develop PR strategy**
- ✓ **#13 (c) on list (kits, compendium)**

“DOABLE WITHIN 2-3 YRS”

- ✓ **Implementation of Executive Director position**
- ✓ **Creation of NAGS Hotline (w/help of Executive Director)**

Retreat wrapped up at approximately 11:30 a.m., on Wednesday morning, and the group took away a fresh new scope of vision for NAGS, with concrete goals to start working towards. Much gratitude was extended to Shirley Readdean and L. David Suits, for the creative tailoring of their Retreat format to suit the needs of NAGS. The event was a positive experience for all involved, and proved to be a valuable tool in planning for the future of NAGS. Good things are in store!!!

For more information on the North American Geosynthetics Society (NAGS) please visit our website at www.nagsigs.org, or contact us at our new address!

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