

The Academy of Leisure Sciences Strategic Plan (2025 – 2030)

Introduction

The Board of Directors (BOD) for The Academy of Leisure Sciences (TALS) undertook a strategic planning process that began in February 2024 concluding with this plan being formalized and adopted in March 2025. This strategic plan, which follows the completion of the 2017 - 2023 strategic plan, has been developed through a comprehensive engagement process. Using an outside facilitator, the BOD undertook a day-long workshop in February 2024, followed by four focus groups targeting specific member groups affiliated with the organization (i.e., graduate students, junior faculty, teaching-focused faculty/educators, and senior faculty/researchers).

Revised mission and vision statements as well as strategic mission-related and sustainability-related priorities were produced through the workshop and focus group feedback. These initial draft statements and ideas for strategic priorities were then sent to current members of TALS for review, feedback, and prioritization. A broader non-member survey was sent to an affiliated listserve to capture perspectives of others not currently involved with TALS but who may have a professional interest in the organization. Throughout this process, the BOD of directors met six times - from March 2024 to March 2025 - to consider the data and operationalize the action steps to move this plan forward.

TALS Strategic Plan Working Group:

Brooke Burk, At large BOD
Lauren Duffy, President
Edwin Gomez, President Elect
Mary Parr, Historian
Augustus Hallmon, Membership Committee Chair
Corey Johnson, Invited Contributor
Deb Kerstetter, Fellows Representative
Toni Liechty, Treasurer
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Sasha Mader, Graduate Student Representative
W. Thomas Means, At large BOD
Rasul Mowatt, Immediate Past President
Andy Mowen, Past Fellows Representative
Matt Ostermeyer, Secretary
Sammie Powers, Future Scholars Committee Chair
Iryna Sharaievskaya, At large BOD
Julie Stafford Son, At large BOD
Lauren Stephens, At large BOD
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Daniel Theriault, Past Secretary
Stephanie West, Invited Contributor
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Final adoption date: May 14, 2025

Mission and Vision Statements (adopted May 7, 2024)

Vision

We aspire to be a leading organization that brings together scholars from diverse disciplines as a community that investigates and promotes the value and fundamental aspects of leisure.

Mission

TALS empowers and represents a community of educators and researchers who steward the value of leisure through advocacy, knowledge creation, and education.

Strategic Priorities

After the development and revision of our mission and vision statements, the BOD conducted an environmental scan to consider the internal and external factors that affect our ability to achieve our vision, mission, priorities, and/or goals. In doing so, we assessed areas of growth, challenge, and investment. Our priorities are categorized into two strategic priority areas: 1) mission-related, which are focused on furthering our mission and vision broadly as an organization; and 2) sustainability-related, which are priorities that further the effectiveness and functionality of the organization.

For the immediate future, only five strategic priorities have been developed into actionable goals and tasks. Once these priorities are completed, the BOD may revisit/revise the list below as needed. Those that are the focus for the next one to two years are in bold below. The intention is that, as a living document, the BOD will continue updating, revising, and engaging with the priorities listed below while also recognizing these priorities may shift and evolve with changing needs and resources.

Mission-related Priorities

- 1. Serve as an advocate for our discipline to our academic institutions and other stakeholders.**
- 2. Provide resources for graduate students to increase engagement and connection.**
- 3. Enhance engagement through conference-focused improvements or initiatives.**
4. Create Special Interest Groups (SIGs) that can function outside of the conference.
5. Foster racial diversity across the leisure field and profession.
6. Identify and advocate for continuous improvement and relevancy of teaching and learning.

Sustainability-related Priorities:

- 7. Improve membership management practices to better serve current and prospective members.**
- 8. Enhance communication to both members and the broader public.**
9. Identify and foster university programs that help drive membership to TALS.
- 10. Engage members to contribute to the success of the organization.**
- 11. Develop and nurture pathways to leadership in the organization.**
- 12. Improve processes behind membership management and the development of strategic partnerships.**
- 13. Explore functional areas of TALS that could benefit from staff support or being contracted out.**
- 14. Review and update the current committees, committee structure, and operations handbook to best meet the mission and vision of TALS.**

TALS Goal Tracking Tables

Strategic Priority #1: Serve as an advocate for our discipline to our academic institutions and other stakeholders.		
Description As an organization, we need to take a stance on key issues impacting the discipline in higher education and beyond. To do this, we must have a clear set of values that can be communicated internally and externally to stakeholders. When advocating for the discipline, our messaging must account for larger social and environmental issues, such as climate change, health inequities, and disparities, within the context of leisure, recreation, parks, youth development, tourism, recreational therapy, outdoor recreation, events, etc. In addition, we need to codify our values into communication materials, engage with legislation, and strengthen our partnerships with leisure journals, leisure departments, and other partners.		
Achievable Action Steps	Who's Involved?	Time-frame for work
Goal 1.A Define values and organizational stance. - Identify the critical issues we want to advocate for and commit to (e.g., arts should be preserved, NPS should be maintained, parks and recreation is an essential government service [green spaces save lives], climate change education, public health education through leisure/health disparities). - Review 2017 – 2023 strategic plan as well as past work defining values within TALS. - Review other aligned organization's strategic plans to review their values and stances on issues essential to leisure, parks, and recreation.	BOD	2025 (Present at December 2025 BOD meeting)
Goal 1.B Communicate organizational values and stance. - Create documents, talking points, and templates for members to share with local, state, and national legislators. - Stay current on national and state-level legislation to stay informed on legislative decisions. - Connect conference themes to organizational values/ stance.	BOD and Communications Committee	2025 - 2026 (Present at 2026 annual conference)
Goal 1.C Highlight and promote members and their research as they reflect the values of TALS. - Continue connecting with sister leisure, non-profit, and political (e.g., United Nations) organizations to identify co-presenting opportunities at each other's conferences. - Develop social media postings focused on high-level achievements of TALS members that can support increasing their visibility, and subsequently the visibility of the organization.	Communications Committee and Global Relevance Committee	2026 - 2027

Develop a process for identifying members and their research to promote across TALS online platforms.		
Goal 1.D Generate visibility for TALS and the leisure field. - Explore the viability/practicality of establishing a TALS Podcast, contacting established podcasters to see about collaboration (e.g., contact Sherry Bagley of AEE, and other partner organizations, as part of fact-finding effort on feasibility). - Review the various online outlets for engagement (e.g., blogs, YouTube channel) and resources required for short-term explorations. - Continue offering webinars in partnership with sister organizations.	Communications Committee and Global Relevance Committee	2025 - 2026
Goal 1.E Develop Partnerships with practitioner-based organizations (e.g., AARPA, NRPA). - Consider the development of a strategic partnership committee or a sustainable process for fostering these partnerships. - Identify practitioner-based organizations that share common goals to develop an agenda for collaborative initiatives which may relate to students/industry preparation, or research/larger issues or concerns. - Develop a reciprocal plan for engagement that furthers the mission of both organizations. - Utilize conference as means for connecting with local organizations	BOD, Global Relevance Committee, and Conference Committee	2026 - 2027
Goal 1.F Connect with leisure Journals, Editors or Publishers for collaborative promotion and support. - Develop specific engagement opportunities for Editors/ Publishers to effectively integrate interests at the annual conference. - Consider TALS -supported special issues that serve a broader scope of TALS members (e.g., teaching-focused journals).	BOD and Conference Committee	2025 - 2026 (By 2026 annual conference)
Goal 1.G Identify and support the needs of leisure departments and programs. - Conduct a needs assessment of leisure departments and programs. - Support academic leadership sessions at the conference that focus on departmental issues (e.g., enrollment, external grant demands, chair issues; NALR).	BOD and Conference Committee	2026 - 2027
Measurable milestones achieved as of DATE: - Provide a report highlighting the process for defining the values. - Provide a brief, yet effective visual that communicates the values.		

- Offer at least one panel or workshop at 2026 annual conference in collaboration with a leisure journal, editors, or publisher.
Additional notes on the strategic goal: - We need to build capacity to support issues aligned with values - Review NRPA, LSA, City Parks Alliance (see Year in Review: Outdoors for All - https://cityparksalliance.org/blog/2023-year-in-review/ and the Explore Act - https://cityparksalliance.org/blog/explore-act-passes-the-house-nonprofit-business-groups-urge-swift-action-by-senate/) and sister organizations (e.g., https://www.worldleisure.org/; https://canadianleisurestudies.ca/). - It would/will be a challenge to decide what is 'relevant' or 'important' enough to take a formal stand on as an organization, given how leisure connects to so many aspects of society and life. - We cannot provide resources until we take a stance on key issues impacting the profession and the discipline.

Strategic Priority # 2: Provide resources for graduate students to increase engagement and connection		
Description We will expand the impact of TALS on our graduate students in ways that will help them develop the knowledge and skills necessary for jobs in academia and practice. This will involve expanding our graduate student awards, mentorship opportunities, and conference and webinar sessions focused on issues related to graduate students' needs.		
Achievable Action Steps	Who's Involved?	Time-frame for completion
Goal 2.A Reform the graduate student committee. ● <i>Formalize the Committee:</i> Establish a formal structure for the graduate student committee, including clear roles and responsibilities for committee members. Identify specific roles for graduate student representatives to ensure diverse perspectives and needs are represented. ● <i>Facilitate communication:</i> Establish regular communication channels between the committee and graduate students, such as email lists, online forums, and/or in-person meetings.	BOD and Graduate Student Committee	Completed by August 2025

Goal 2.B Plan and implement programs and initiatives that benefit graduate students. • <i>Connect with Conference Meetings:</i> Coordinate with conference organizers to integrate graduate student committee activities into the conference program, such as hosting workshops or panel discussions. • <i>Revive Mentorship Program:</i> Reintroduce a mentorship program, such as a mentoring lunch, to connect graduate students with current faculty, experienced peers, and Fellows. • <i>Organize Webinars:</i> Host webinars on topics relevant to graduate students (e.g., career development, research skills, academic writing) • <i>Create a Grant Repository:</i> Develop a centralized repository of grants and scholarships specifically for graduate students. Share this information with undergraduate students.	Graduate Student Committee and Conference Committee	2025 - 2026 (Launch at least one program by 2026 annual conference)
Goal 2.C Graduate student awards. • <i>Expand Eligibility:</i> Update the award criteria to include Ph.D. students as "future colleagues" in addition to "future scholars." • <i>Increase Funding and Waive Fees:</i> Allocate additional funds to the award program and waive conference registration fees for recipients. • <i>Maintain/Increase Volunteer Roles:</i> Continue to involve award winners in conference volunteer activities, emphasizing opportunities for Ph.D. students to lead an element of the program (e.g., formalize graduate student travel funds to TALS; could connect with volunteer opportunities for this such as social media management).	Future Scholars Committee, Graduate Student Committee, and Finance and Fundraising Committee	2025 - 2027 (Have new awards/ funding launched by 2027 annual conference)
Goal 2.D Graduate Student Career Development. • <i>Job Search Preparation Workshops:</i> Organize workshops to prepare graduate students for various career paths, including	Graduate Student Committee and Conference Committee	2025 - 2027

faculty positions, non-academic jobs, research roles, and industry positions. • <i>Mentorship Program</i>: Establish a formal mentorship program to connect graduate students with experienced faculty, TALS Fellows, alumni, and industry professionals. • <i>Conference Panel</i>: Organize a conference panel to discuss various career paths (academic and non-academic jobs), service opportunities, publishing, and grant writing and obtaining funding.		(Rollout by the 2026 conference. Fully launched by the 2027 conference).
Measurable milestones achieved as of DATE: - Creation of a reformed graduate student committee - Expand the number and type of graduate student monetary? awards - Develop panel(s) in support of graduate student interests - Introduce webinars in 2026 specifically targeted for graduate students - Introduce a mentorship program		
Additional notes on the strategic goal: - Will need a strong academic/professional member(s) to help organize the graduate student committee and provide some continuity to the committee as grad students roll on and off. - Finance and Fundraising Committee needs to be restarted or will need a devoted member to move a campaign forward to fund these awards		

Strategic Priority #3: Enhance engagement through conference-focused improvements and initiatives		
Description: The annual TALS conference is a critical function of the TALS organization. It is a tool and platform for achieving many of the organizational goals, and also represents a significant place that the TALS BOD places its human resources. The health of the organization is directly linked to the success of the conference, and this strategic priority reflects the on-going and intentional improvements to the conference.		
Achievable Action Steps	Who's Involved?	Time-frame for completion
Goal 3.A Provide conference attendees with additional types of sessions and/or workshops to enhance their research, teaching, and professional preparation. • Provide a feedback survey at the conclusion of each conference to evaluate the satisfaction and value of the research and teaching sessions, as well as the social functions of the conference. • Conduct a needs assessment of members to examine the types of sessions, workshops, and/or topics they are interested in for the annual conference.	Conference Committee	2025 - ongoing (Collect data on an annual basis)
Goal 3.B Increase networking opportunities during and after the conference. • Explore creative strategies for increasing informal and formal networking opportunities at the conference, with a specific eye towards the different groups present (e.g., Fellows, graduate students, junior faculty, teaching faculty). • Create more opportunities to engage established scholars and TALS Fellows at the annual conference.	Conference Committee	2025 - 2026 (Implement creative strategies for 2026 conference)
Goal 3.C Review and improve the conference planning process and logistics. • Review and evaluate current practices for conference planning. • Develop a plan to create a sustainable process, timeline, and cadence for conference planning that serves the needs of members. • Evaluate potential conference support from meeting planners (e.g., Treeline).	BOD and Conference Committee	2025 - 2026

Measurable milestones achieved (with deadline): - Conduct feedback surveys. - Conduct needs assessments. - Implementation of creative strategies that emerge from the needs assessments and feedback surveys. - Written report with recommendations for conference planning processes.
Additional notes on the strategic goal:

<i>Strategic Priority #7:</i> Improve membership management practices to best serve current members and prospective members.		
Description: One of the most important functions that TALS provides is organizational and individual memberships that support the efforts of the organization (e.g., the Awards program, Fellows, Future Scholars). It is critical that we take a more proactive approach towards membership management, but also create mechanisms for consistency across leadership changes.		
Achievable Action Steps	Who's Involved?	Time-frame for completion
Goal 3.A Create a plan for membership management. • Identify membership benefits for individuals and organizations that are connected to our mission. • Identify long-term plan for membership pricing that is appropriate for organization sustainability. • Evaluate membership rates every 2 years and the value of institutional memberships (and the differentiation between tiers).	President, Membership Committee, and Treasurer	2025 - 2028 (Report to BOD on membership management at each December meeting)

• Develop a protocol for easily identifying TALS Fellows when they renew their membership. • Develop a protocol for reviewing and monitoring the status of membership to ensure accuracy (particularly as it connects to eligibility for voting, receiving the newsletter, purchasing a membership rate for the conference).		
Goal 3.B Create strategies for increasing memberships (institutional and/or individual). • Develop proactive communication and management practices that ease membership renewals for institutions and individuals. • Evaluate creative strategies to increase membership benefits that cross-section with other strategic priority areas (e.g., expanding Awards program). • Consider the possibility of membership-only content (that requires active login to TALS website).	President, Treasurer, Membership Committee, and Membership Management Association	2025 - 2026 (Report to the BOD by July 2026)
Goal 3.C Create an initiative to increase membership with departments at teaching institutions. • Conduct a survey to identify the needs of departments at teaching institutions and connect needs to TALS membership benefits. • Revive/reconstitute the Education Committee to focus on teaching-related priorities for members. • Build out teaching and learning resources (via the conference, website, or other virtual resources).	BOD, Membership Committee, and Education Committee	2027 - 2028
Goal 3.D Hire a membership management firm. • Revive/ reconstitute the Finance and Fundraising Committee. • Work with the Treasurer and Finance and Fundraising Committee to allocate funds (e.g., 20 - 30% of membership revenue) towards hiring a membership management firm. • Evaluate the performance of the membership management firm.	President, Treasurer, Membership Committee, Finance and Fundraising Committee, Membership Management Association	2025 - 2026 (Revive Finance and Fundraising Committee by July 2025; Provide a report reviewing membership management by July 2026)

Measurable milestones achieved (with deadline):

- Hire membership management association.
- Revive/ reconstitute the Finance and Fundraising Committee.
- Provide an annual report on membership management at each December BOD meeting.

Additional notes on the strategic goal:

- Challenges: Human Resources to work on this task; financial support.

Strategic Priority #8: Enhance communication to both members and the broader public.**Description:**

The relevancy of TALS is reflected in its ability to communicate the activities of the organization to members and the broad public. Improving how we communicate to each other and beyond is a vital sustainability-related priority that will improve the visibility and prestige of TALS.

Achievable Action Steps**Who's Involved?****Time-frame for completion****Goal 4.A: Review and update the current TALS website.**

- Conduct an evaluation of member digital accessibility and engagement needs.
- Review website options, including the current Squarespace site, to see if they meet the needs of the organization:
 - Develop a process
 - Develop a work form
 - Define a timeframe for the updates
 - Identify responsible individuals
- Incorporate dynamic pages on the website that show continuous activity (newsletter page, webinars page, updated committee memberships).
- Explore what funds are available to support the website (and establish an appropriate % of budget).

President, Communication Committee, and Newsletter Committee

2025 - 2026 (Initiate the survey by July 2025; provide a report with recommendations by December 2025; Implement recommendations by 2026 annual conference)

Goal 4.B: Develop a social media campaign. • Conduct a needs assessment to establish if campaign initiatives (assessment should define purpose and scope of campaigns). • Review potential social media platforms TALS should engage with. • Review potential audiences campaigns are targeting. • Create content on social media aligned with campaigns (e.g., repost videos/media from partners, engage in meaningful discussion/discourse). • Connect on social media with other schools and universities, Journals, Editors, etc.	Communications Committee and BOD	2026 - 2027 (Conduct needs assessment by July 2026; provide a social media campaign plan by the 2027 annual conference)
Goal 4.C: Create Listservs Communication and Announcements Plan. • Conduct a needs assessment to establish if TALS needs a new, independent listserv (and if so, develop a process for control/ management of content). • Develop a plan to connect the communication committee/ newsletter committee with other committee chairs to help move internal communication more efficiently.	BOD, Communications Committee, and Newsletter Committee	2025 - 2026
Goal 4.D: Consider strategies for improving conference promotion. • Establish a communication plan (when, where, and what information is released). Plan should include specificity in communicating to members and the broader public. • Develop a template for these communication plans.	Communications Committee and Conference Committee	2025 - 2026
Measurable milestones achieved as of DATE: - Provide a report of needs assessment on website needs. - Provide a report of needs assessment on social media campaign.		

Additional notes on the strategic goal:

- 4.B: World Leisure moved to LinkedIn- Should we consider the same?
- 4.C: Review history and address how to mitigate potential long-term viability. Determine whether a membership management association supports this.
- 4.D: Consider the purpose of this goal: Is it to improve general communication of conference info, or is it to drive engagement before the conference?
- 4.E: Possibly establishing a 2 year position as Podcast Host, then rolling Hosts (i.e., Podcast Host Elect)... Opportunity for Grad Students to support.
- One of the challenges here is differences in what we see as a purpose of communication, as well as what people see as appropriate channels. In many cases we just see social media channels as an end goal while it may be more of a tool in helping us to communicate the message.
- Resources or investment needed by TALS (financial or human).

Appendices

Appendix A: Workshop and Focus Group Results

Appendix B. Survey Results from Members

Appendix C. Survey Results from Non-members

Appendix D: Example of a website update form

Appendix D: Website update form example

[Home](#)

WEBSITE UPDATE REQUEST FORM

Website Update Request Form

Name *

First

Last

Email address *

Department/program *

Website to be updated *

Update notes *

Upload files (optional) FILE SIZE IS LIMITED TO 5 MB

Upload a file 

Submit