



Strategic Direction Statements

**Approved by
IRA Board of Directors
October 16, 2009**

SD1-Professional Development

Strategic plan connection

Professional development is IRA's North Star. The way IRA intends to achieve its mission of promoting literacy worldwide is by giving educators across North American and National Affiliates around the globe access to high quality, research-based professional development.

Guiding principles

Professional development offerings should cover all phases in the career cycle.

- Professional development offerings for literacy leaders/experts, the traditional focus of IRA, should be continued.
- New professional development offerings should be developed for other phases in the career cycle, with particular emphasis on teachers new to the field and experienced teachers.
- Offerings should match the content needs and interests of each phase, as well as preferences for delivery methods. Online delivery as well as other methods should be explored.
- Offerings might be developed for other audiences, those with a need for information about literacy instruction but who have not previously been addressed by IRA.

All professional development offerings should be research-based, grounded in theory and demonstrations of effectiveness.

Preference should be given to offerings that:

- Focus on the teacher as decision maker rather than on the implementation of a set program or method
- Offer opportunities for learning over time, as opposed to involvement in a single event.

The process of developing new offerings should be informed:

- By the guidance of those with expertise in the field of reading and literacy, including the IRA Board, committees, and staff.
- By research on effective classroom practices
- By market research.

New strategic partnerships should be established between IRA, which has strengths as a content provider, and organizations with strengths in delivering content to a wide audience. Synergies should be sought by strengthening connections among existing professional development offerings, for example, the annual convention, regional and state conferences, publications.

SD2-Partnerships

Strategic plan connection

Partnerships with other organizations should be aligned with IRA's strategic priorities.

Guiding principles

- Partnerships with other organizations should be entered into based upon an alignment between organizational priorities, member engagement, and contribution to IRA's goal to promote literacy worldwide.
- Partnerships should be explored with professional, government, and service organizations that have literacy as a core focus and could offer IRA interesting partnership opportunities.
- Partnerships should be chosen strategically, for example, to diversify representation of perspectives and to leverage communication with a wider audience worldwide and should include other national and international organizations that advocate for literacy development.
- Partnerships should be formed **only when there are** clear expectations and outcomes stated at the outset.
 - Partnerships may be variable, such as group-to-group and group-to-individual partnerships depending on goals and expected outcomes.
 - Partnerships could occur with different levels of intensity and commitment, resulting in a tiered arrangement.
- Partnerships with other organizations should have specific mechanisms in place that facilitate
 - Communication with IRA's membership and the IRA board
 - Sustainability and periodic checks on feasibility as judged by goals and expectations
 - Mutually beneficial contributions to both organizations
 - Cost effectiveness (initial investments should be replaced with self-sustaining budgets)

SD3-Research

Strategic plan connection

A strategic priority is to maintain IRA's position as a preeminent literacy research authority. The way that IRA intends to achieve its mission of promoting literacy worldwide is to leverage research to shape professional development content and priorities.

Guiding principles

- Research activities should be guided by a vision of research contributions that articulates its goal for translating cutting edge research
- Research activities should result in outputs that support IRA's professional development
 - Research is translated and packaged into multiple forms of PD materials
 - Research is disseminated through multiple PD channels (e.g. new research publications, workshop content, online professional development)
- Existing core activities of IRA, such as standards, position statements, and timely reports should be grounded in translating cutting edge research and theory that represent multiple perspectives
- Preference for generating outputs is on translation of research into effective practice
- IRA's conduct of original research should be evaluated to determine its
 - Contribution and impact
 - Alignment with IRA's strategic goals
 - Cost effectiveness
 - Plan for cost control with the goal to de-prioritize internally funded research and partner with organizations who have funded research
- IRA should take on a more active role in synthesizing and disseminating research and more aggressive stances on how research should inform the literacy education curriculum and instruction
- IRA should align endowment-funded and government-funded research with strategic priorities
- IRA should maintain its publication of high quality research and professional journals both offline and online such as Reading Research Quarterly (RRQ), Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy (JAAL), and The Reading Teacher (RT).
- The process of generating new research-based journals and materials for PD should be informed by
 - Market research
 - The guidance of literacy educators and researchers, including the IRA Board and committees
 - Classroom or school-based research

SD4-Advocacy

Strategic plan connection

Advocacy refers to IRA's work with organizations and individuals to bring about change worldwide, consistent with its policy and strategic plan. Advocacy is what reforms current policy and redirects existing resources toward improvements in literacy research and literacy development in schools and communities and in fostering lifelong literacy habits.

Guiding principles

- Advocacy efforts need to be far reaching, ranging from the local level, to the state or provincial level, to the national level, and finally, to the international level.
- In the U.S. and Canada, the leading edge of advocacy efforts should be at the state and provincial level, even as federal advocacy efforts are continued.
- Advocacy efforts should focus on IRA's mission of improving literacy worldwide through the professional development of teachers.
- Advocacy efforts should be seen as collaborative ventures within IRA, so that these efforts can be strengthened and enhanced. Examples of available resources that might be tapped include development, marketing, publications, research, and technology. This would include collaboration with other national and international organizations that advocate for literacy development.
- Advocacy should be a consistent and well publicized facet of IRA. Strategies need to be developed for rallying more advocates and organizing new and current advocates around common goals.

SD5-Councils and Affiliates

Strategic plan connection

Councils and affiliates are at the very heart of IRA as an organization. They are the connective strands that allow IRA to weave a broad and deep network of literacy leaders and educators across North America and around the world. IRA must seek to clarify and strengthen its relationships with councils and affiliates, including pursuing organizational changes that may be necessary to this effort.

Guiding principles

- Every effort should be made to treat councils and affiliates as IRA's most important and valuable customers – which in fact they are. All aspects of interacting with IRA should be made as smooth, simple, easy, and quick as possible for these valuable customers.
- Multiple channels for ongoing, interactive communication should be established between headquarters and IRA's councils and affiliates, as well as among councils and affiliates. Advantage should be taken of the technologies now available to create economical yet robust means of interaction, especially for the purposes of inviting ideas and feedback. Efforts should be made to create an online network that serves as a virtual meeting place where councils and affiliates can share information, goals, plans, resources, and new developments, as well as request assistance.
- Systems should be established to allow successful councils to share the secrets of their success with others. Councils should be the epicenter for the development of new projects and quality resources. Councils should also be the vehicle for reaching out to potential new members and maintaining relationships with current members.
- New ways of supporting councils and affiliates should be explored. New services should be developed and piloted with certain groups to see how well they work. If piloting proves successful, these services could then be offered more widely.
- Ways of developing new forms of Councils should be investigated, in an aggressive effort to recruit and retain younger members. For example, the concept of a virtual (rather than geographically based) council might be explored, with members convening in an online community.
- Both increasing the membership in general and increasing the diversity of IRA's membership are central policy goals. Efforts should be made to expand members to a wider circle of educators throughout the world. Councils should be supported in recruiting new members of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- A related policy goal is increasing the diversity of IRA's leadership. In this regard, a path to leadership should be established, and Councils should be assisted in guiding members of diverse backgrounds along this path.

SD6-Technology

Strategic plan connection

Strategic planning revealed that IRA is not yet making extensive and effective use of online technologies to achieve its mission and enhance its operations. Development of a comprehensive technology strategy is one of the strategic priorities currently underway, to be completed by the new executive director.

Guiding principles

- IRA should recognize the new literacies evolving under the influence of the Internet and information and communication technologies. This recognition should extend to all aspects of its operations, including position statements and professional development offerings.
- All due haste should be employed to bring IRA up to date in implementing online technology throughout the organization, with a significant investment in online technological capability (functional and human).
- Online technologies should be used for interactive purposes, to open communication channels among IRA members and other groups. They should be used to promote discussion on various literacy issues, and they should offer members the opportunity to initiate topics of discussion.
- Multiple means should be explored of making IRA's professional development content available through online technologies, especially in ways that will attract and support those just entering teaching.
- Online technologies should be used to promote community building within IRA and between IRA and external groups supportive of its mission. These community building initiatives should extend to countries all around the world. As an example, efforts should be made to allow online submission of application for awards and grants.

Explicit Connections for Supporting International Community Members (i.e., Affiliates)

Connection to Strategic Planning

The six SD statements have implications for the focus of the International Division and their support of IRA's national affiliates. The implications include attention to the committee structure, partnerships for research and development initiatives, and support from headquarters.

Guiding Principles

- Design organizational structures to facilitate the goals described in the six strategic direction statements.
- Build on existing relationships and develop new relationships with literacy leaders across the globe to support expansion efforts as described in SD-5, Councils and Affiliates.
- Actively seek new partnerships and build on current partnerships that support initiatives that align with our strategic goals.