Building a Collaborative Community for the BSA

In the last few BSA member surveys, we have learned that networking with peers is the number one driver for joining the Society and also for renewing membership. Our members consistently have requested increased ways to connect with the community and more ways to involve our international members, outside of the community.

For example, here are just a few quotes from what members had to say in the 2016 survey about involvement.

"I'm looking for ways to be involved and to learn through connecting with other professionals. So far I haven't seen too many opportunities for undergraduates or recent graduates to be involved in the BSA in my area (Kentucky)."

"I teach at a small liberal arts college, so the research emphasis is not as strong and I can't attend meetings (very little to no support for travel) unless presenting. I think it's important to be a member, but I don't feel I get as much out of it as I did when I was a grad student."

"Great organization. Would like it to encourage more international contacts and collaborations."

"With the current economy, membership fees for societies are getting higher and higher and are becoming harder to justify for me when I can't attend meetings (also due to location and cost) and I feel like my membership fees go to simply keeping the journals afloat. There seems to be a lot of emphasis on K-12 and Community College educators, but those of us at small 4 year colleges get lumped in with the R1 universities...and we have a very different set of challenges from the R1 faculty. Helping to establish collaborations or networking will be a great help."

For years we have been discussing how best to foster collaborations and networking, to fulfill this need outside of our annual meeting. Most recently, we have been investigating online platforms and ListServs to use for member connection, collaboration, document-sharing, discussions. We

also throw around ideas of holding regional meetings or student/PostDoc meetings.

Plantae Proposal:
We have received an invitation to collaborate with ASPB in their Plantae.org online community platform. (online community for all plant scientsts) The benefit of this platform would be:

- One united and combined community for plant and allied scientists; cross-connection instead of competition
- Potential efficiencies in shared cost to support the community platform
- Greater visibility of the BSA brand
- Ability to collaborate with ASPB on content creation and educational value for the community
- Potential pipeline for membership growth (jury is still out on this)
- BSA would have seats at the table on the Plantae Steering Committee

Potential cost TBD, but it is not cheap - probably in the range of $15,000-$30,000 per year for a non-exclusive partnership. They also request we provide .5 FTE (minimum) as a staff resource to be part of the Plantae team.
ASPB claims that the community is about to catch fire and is getting very active. We are still not convinced.

Higher Logic Proposal:
A collaboration platform just for BSA members. It would connect to our membership database. Higher Logic implements these platforms for many associations and scientific societies as they are the current leader in the association space for online networking platforms. This is an enhanced ListServ format and they have an intriguing mentor matching option as part of the platform.

Slick and very clean; easy to use system. Online groups would be established based on our needs and members that belong to them could receive daily or weekly digests on discussion and share documents this way. One very attractive feature is that members can email the online group you want to target or connect with straight from your inbox instead of visiting an

online platform to do so.

Quite expensive – at least in the first proposal. $7500 set up fee. $2200 monthly costs to maintain. They say they are willing to work with us to get the price down if we are interested. BSA staffer would need to spend at least .25 FTE developing and promoting the community to keep things going.

Other Options:
Build our own platform linked to CiviCRM.
Set up forums or low-key listservs with Rob's assistance.
Set up many Facebook or Linked In groups.
Hold more meetings, regional or student related.
Set up a webinar/seminar series just for our membership.

Recommendation:
Let's investigate. We need your input! Plantae was not as attractive of an option in the past, but it has grown considerably and continues to add new features. However driving users to a free platform where they do not need a membership to participate provides the conundrum of competing with ourselves.

We need to survey our members.