

SAN DIEGO ASTRONOMY ASSOCIATION

STRATEGIC PLAN
2026-2030



STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

The **San Diego Astronomy Association (SDAA) Strategic Plan 2026-2030** provides a roadmap for strengthening the organization through improved governance, stronger member engagement, expanded outreach, and upgraded facilities. The plan focuses on building the infrastructure and systems needed to support sustainable, member-driven growth.

SDAA Strategic 2026-2030

Five key goals guide the strategy:

- 1. Professionalize governance and finances** by hiring staff, clarifying roles, strengthening board operations, and creating a long-term financial strategy.
- 2. Improve digital presence and communication** by modernizing the website, expanding social media and live streaming, and creating centralized communication tools and a membership database.
- 3. Increase membership engagement and diversity** through better onboarding, mentorship opportunities, clearer volunteer pathways, and stronger feedback systems.
- 4. Expand outreach and education programs** by strengthening partnerships with schools and community organizations, using digital tools to reach broader audiences, and developing scholarships and impact measurement tools.
- 5. Upgrade observing facilities**, particularly the Tierra Del Sol site, while exploring remote telescope access and long-term facility improvements.

Progress will be measured using data-driven metrics such as member engagement, outreach participation, digital activity, and facility usage. The plan also leaves room for future initiatives like citizen science, research partnerships, and light-pollution advocacy once the organization's core systems are strengthened.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR GROWTH:

Goals and Implementation

Over the next five years, SDAA will focus on creating and building out the infrastructure and systems needed to strengthen and sustain member-driven initiatives that align with SDAA's goals.

The following slides provide overarching goals with accompanying recommendations and activities to serve as a roadmap. These goals have been informed by document review, desk research, and stakeholder and external interviews.

- **Goal 1:** Professionalization Towards Efficient Governance, Financial Sustainability, and Strategic Growth
- **Goal 2:** Enhance Digital Presence and Communication
- **Goal 3:** Strengthen Membership Engagement, Inclusion, and Retention
- **Goal 4:** Expand and Modernize Outreach and Education Programs
- **Goal 5:** Maintain, Upgrade, and Diversify Observing Facilities
- **Aspirations:** Long Term Goals and Future Decision Making

Finally, these activities start as granular and may be ambitious, especially those listed for year 1—we recognize that some will carry forward into future years. This is normal and to be expected. Activities become less granular as time goes on. Once professional staff has been hired, many of the subsequent tasks will be determined by that staff's and their new board's skills and priorities. This plan is intended to be a guide, not an edict. We are committed to the overarching goals, but also recognize potential adaption of activities over time.

MEASURING PROGRESS & IMPACT

Given the focus on better understanding SDAA's members, their experiences, and the impact of SDAA's programs, the Strategic Planning Committee, working with consultants Ideas in Philanthropy, has indicated measures of success for each goal. Metrics of success for each goal in this document outline targets to be determined when a baseline is established. These measures will take the form of SMART goals which are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timebound.

Why it's a good idea:

- Guide programming decisions, yielding greater success
- Galvanize membership by sharing the results of their hard work
- Communicate impact to partners and the public
- Inform the development of annual goals and provide accountability in annual evaluations for staff members

What data we plan to collect:

- Number of people reached and/or engaged in activities
- Demographic information of participants
- Whether participants are repeats or first timers
- Self-reported levels of interest and knowledge pre-and post-events
- Areas of interest in astronomy
- Interest/engagement in leadership roles at SDAA

General considerations:

- Measures should be tied to SDAA's mission and intended impact
- Data collection has a lag—it takes time to amass enough data to make informed decisions. Be patient and consistent in collecting data at regular intervals and/or events.

GOAL 1

Professionalization Towards
Efficient Governance,
Financial Sustainability,
and Strategic Growth



GOAL 1

Professionalization Towards Efficient Governance, Financial Sustainability, and Strategic Growth

Survey Insight: Members raised concerns about use of funds and long-term planning.

Interview Insight: Board members are past capacity and tightly focused on day-to-day operational decisions. SDAA should strive to create conditions that allow the board to serve as a high-level strategy and decision-making Board .

Recommendations:

Professionalization

- Consider paid staff to support operations, day-to-day and low-level responsive decision making, and to liaise between committees, board (Foundation and SDAA), as well as members.
- Create an organizational chart to clearly articulate roles, authority, and lines of communication.

Governance

- Establish new decision-making processes in preparation for, and when appropriate, with newly hired staff to clarify roles and responsibilities. Will include updates to the bylaws.
- Consider a board training with new staff support to equip everyone with the necessary capacity and positioning.
- Create a code of conduct that should be written down, taken seriously, and clearly defined.
- Consider granting budgetary authority under a certain amount to empower committee leadership and streamline simple decision making.
- Think of recruitment for the board as a longer-term strategy that is built into general membership recruitment efforts. Over time, develop a clearer sense of the skills present and missing on the board to make targeted recruitment of members with skills most useful to advance SDAA mission.
- Over time, create a plan to differentiate representation on the SDAA and Foundation Boards.

Financial Sustainability

- Develop a 5-year financial roadmap and endowment strategy.
- Form a finance and audit committee. Consider leveraging members with financial backgrounds to help lead the ongoing management of SDAA finances. This data will be more readily available in the proposed membership database.
- As SDAA stabilizes in the initial stages of implementation for the Strategic Plan, consider how diversifying revenue through grants, scholarships, and donor partnerships fits into SDAA's growth goals.

GOAL 1

Professionalization Towards Efficient Governance, Financial Sustainability, and Strategic Growth

YEAR 1

- Hire interim support to drive the expansion of digital infrastructure and communications (see scope provided to SPC in appendix).
- Develop job description, recruit, and hire professional support staff for SDAA. Create or refine organizational chart (see example of draft organizational chart in appendix).
- Form additional committees: finance and audit.

YEAR 2

- In partnership with the professional staff role, refine and update board and committee roles as well as decision-making processes for both SDAA and the Foundation.
- Establish a 5-year financial roadmap and endowment strategy aligned with SDAA goals.
- Hold board training(s) to build capacity as a newly oriented strategic board.

YEARS 3-5

- Continued partnership with professional staff to maintain and build SDAA programming and operations aligned with mission and goals.
- Evaluate need for additional staff to support current operations and/or growth.
- Consider how diversifying revenue through grants, scholarships, and donor partnerships fits into SDAA's growth goals.

Metrics of Success

- Reduced burden on governing board
- Reduced burden on volunteers and other engaged members
- Increased impact of programs and internal changes via data collection tools
- Leadership and members report increased level of knowledge of the organization
- Leadership and members report increased levels of trust and understanding of SDAA decision making

GOAL 2

Enhance Digital Presence
and Communication



GOAL 2

Enhance Digital Presence and Communication

Survey Insight: Members want stronger digital tools and communication.

Interview Insight: Communication is a consistent challenge. It can be difficult for members or leadership to know who is doing what or what processes already exist. Centralize and simplify communication to engage your audience and prioritize necessary information. Additionally, SDAA should update their website, leverage social media, and consider ways technology will help to reach and engage new audiences in their programming.

Recommendations:

Digital Infrastructure

- Update the SDAA website with modern features and mobile optimization.
- Explore providing live stream access or recordings of lectures and events.
- Consider which social media channels, such as Instagram, Discord, YouTube, Podcast, etc, can support SDAA's growth goals by increasing engagement with members and general community.

Communications

- Centralize communication of need to know information in one place (typically email) accessible to all and echo this information as it make sense with supplemental content for additional reach in places like social media, newsletters, Discord, YouTube, etc. This is true of communication between and within leadership, committees, and members.
- Consider a communications audit to understand and map where there are breakdowns in communication.
- Maintain feedback channels for members – including focus groups, surveys, and feedback forms. Be sure to be clear about how that information will be used in decision making.

GOAL 2

Enhance Digital Presence and Communication

YEAR 1

- Hire interim support to drive the expansion of digital infrastructure and communications (see scope provided to SPC in appendix for more information on action items for year 1).
- Conduct communications audit.
- Conduct digital infrastructure audit.
- Create protocols for digital infrastructure (roles, responsibilities, login credentials, etc.).
- Update website with initial roll out of communications goals and general strategic plan.
- Develop a code of conduct for member engagement and communication.
- Develop and launch **membership database** and **membership experience survey** (see Goal 3 for tool applications).

YEAR 2

- Refine and update website.
- Develop and launch **Communications Channel** (ex. Discord or Slack) community for members rooted with community code of conduct (to be developed per Goal 3 activities).
- Develop and launch **impact data framework and collection tools** for outreach programs (see Goal 4 for tool applications).

YEARS 3-5

- Continued refinement of communications and digital systems based on data and feedback.

Metrics of Success

- Increased engagement from members and larger community with digital content
- Increased clarity and uniform understanding of SDAA progress and decision making amongst members
- Increased communication and engagement between membership
- Increased knowledge of member skills and experience leading to strategic placement in leadership and targeted volunteer recruitment

***Bolded text** refers to specific tools to be built for the implementation of this strategic plan. The following slide provides additional context for what these tools are and their general application. Activities related to the implementation and maintenance of these tools live in their respective goals as indicated on this slide.*

A NOTE ON BUILDING TOOLS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

As a part of the Strategic Plan, the Ideas team has identified tools or key pieces of infrastructure that we recommend SDAA create or refine, as articulated in the activities for Goal 2. For the sake of clarity, we have created this “cheat sheet” on each of the tools with their intended purpose.



Membership Database

This is a central database that captures basic member information, contact details, professional skills and experience, organizational affiliations, personal interests, and club engagement. This will be used for targeted member engagement for program delivery, targeted board and leadership recruitment, membership connection and collaboration, and generally increasing transparency of the skills, interests, and experiences individual members bring to the club.



Membership Experience Survey

SDAA has already conducted a member survey – the data from which was used as a part of this work. We encourage SDAA to update and refine this survey as an annual or semi-annual member feedback and organizational culture survey. This would provide feedback to leadership about successes and challenges within the organization, inform decision making, and help track progress toward goals over time.



Communications Channel

This refers to a members-only instant messenger or communications tool like Slack or Discord, which has already been requested by members and leaders. These tools would be used to increase communication and collaboration across the membership base.



Impact Data Framework and Collection Tools

As SDAA seeks to better understand its member engagement and programming effectiveness, creating a formal framework will help maintain consensus and tie your programming and operations to the change your organization wishes to see. The framework will inform data collection tools, such surveys so that SDAA can better understand and communicate its impact. See more information in slides related to Goal 4: Expand and Outreach and Modernize Education Programs

GOAL 3

Strengthen Membership
Engagement, Inclusion,
and Retention



GOAL 3

Strengthen Membership Engagement, Inclusion, and Retention

Survey Insight: Members value community but want more engagement and inclusivity.

Interview Insight: Member Engagement is limited by variable interest, time, and astronomical expertise. There is an acknowledgement that SDAA needs to grow active membership with an eye towards engaging a younger, more diverse population. Furthermore, without a robust, formal onboarding process, new members may not see clear pathways for volunteerism.

Recommendations:

Member Engagement

- Clarify and unify onboarding by building a clear process and suite of materials that new members engage with.
- Ensure that the new member experience is streamlined and proactive so that no one is left wondering who to talk to or what to do next. Those who are tasked with engaging members should be reasonably responsive. This responsibility will likely be owned by the professional support staff.
- Consider a mechanism that would help connect folks with specific interests or general mentorship for people who want to share their knowledge in a more formal, structured way. This could be with new members, educational for students, or both.

Diversifying Membership

- Membership should be built with a focus on attracting younger people.
- Consider the timing, frequency, and settings of recurring and special events to accommodate the difference in available time and competing priorities for people at different life stages.

GOAL 3

Strengthen Membership Engagement, Inclusion, and Retention

Recommendations Continued:

Understanding Members

- Create a database for all members to understand who is engaged, and how. This would provide an easy bi-directional directory for leadership to understand the skill sets within membership while members can have a quick eye at the network they belong to.
- Develop framework of members you want to pursue with intended recruitment (for new members) and engagement (for existing members) processes. See accompanying member slides for more information.
- Maintain feedback channels for members - including focus groups, surveys, and feedback forms. Be sure to be clear about how that information will be used in decision making.

Shifting Culture

- Develop a code of conduct for members and hold people accountable to it. This is essential for creating a safe and welcoming space for people of all backgrounds.
- Threats or exposure of private, personal information should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

GOAL 3

Strengthen Membership Engagement, Inclusion, and Retention

YEAR 1

- Form additional committees: membership.
- Audit processes and available information to date for member engagement purposes.
- Clarify role and expectations for those leading the overall and day-to-day engagement of members.
- Develop/refine standardized onboarding and mentorship for new members.
- Identify key membership groups (see following slides for foundational framework) and develop strategies to catalyze and deepen engagement.
- Develop and launch membership database and membership experience survey.

YEAR 2

- Develop and launch **Communications Channel** (ex. Discord or Slack) community for members rooted with community code of conduct (in keeping with Goal 2 activities).
- Refine and update member database.
- Develop and launch impact data framework and collection tools for external programs.
- Carefully review member responses submitted through feedback tools, and use it to inform club decisions. Be sure to communicate what feedback was received and how it is being incorporated into plans going forward.

YEARS 3-5

- Continued refinement of recruitment and engagement processes based on data and feedback

Metrics of Success

- Increased total number of engaged members
- Increased total number of dues paying members
- Increased diversity within membership
- Increased interest and engagement in committees and leadership opportunities
- Increased knowledge of member skills and experience leading to strategic placement in leadership and targeted volunteer recruitment

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Thoughts on Member Engagement

- SDAA does not have a shortage of general membership. As they expand outreach and build a more visual presence in community, organic interest will continue to grow.
- SDAA currently has a much smaller pool of what would be considered “engaged” membership.
- Operational updates, like clearer onboarding and communications, will support more members to be engaged.
- Member database will support engaging members in a more intentional way.
- Increasing access (via technology or consideration for different schedules/locations) will increase opportunities to engage members.
- Creating a strong, engaged member pipeline will increase leadership recruitment.
- As SDAA professionalizes and improves communications, member engagement, and general governance, interest in leadership positions may increase.

Moving Forward with Intention

As SDAA begins to think more intentionally about membership recruitment, we encourage you to consider the following questions:

- Working off of the framework on the previous slide, do these groups make sense?
- Are there subgroups within these groups that would add nuance to recruitment and engagement strategies?
- Why do certain folks disengage or convert?

To effectively do this work we encourage SDAA to apply flexible but clear groupings to members, coupled with feedback surveys and the member database, to make data-informed decisions based on how, when, and why people convert or disengage.

This will take time given the development of the database and tools and the time lag for data. We encourage SDAA to take an initial pass on developing these groups and processes a level deeper to fully reflect their understanding of their membership experience.

GOAL 4

Expand and Modernize
Outreach and Education
Programs



GOAL 4

Expand and Modernize Outreach and Education Programs

Survey Insight: Outreach is highly valued and members would like to see it expand.

Interview Insight: Outreach and education is at the foundation of SDAA's purpose. Robust engagement is not only paramount to the growth of the organization programmatically, but can also serve as a member growth and engagement strategy.

Recommendations:

- Stabilize current outreach offerings by engaging a more diverse group of members to implement programming. Try to incorporate members with diverse interests: education/youth, hobbyists, astrophotography, and citizen science, and ensure that new members or non-members know that there are lots of different ways to engage.
- Prioritize building school-based education efforts to complement star parties and other community events. Keep an eye to make sure outreach efforts include underserved communities.
- Build partnerships with museums, colleges, libraries, and other community organizations for joint programming.
- Leverage digital technology to increase reach, consistency, and access of outreach efforts. This would include astrophotography, social media, livestreaming platforms, and up-to-the-minute guides on the night sky.
- Consider building a central hub for members to access past educational resources.
- There is a lack of metrics on the impact of outreach programs past the number of people served.
- Create a regular tool to collect relevant information to better understand who participates, why they participate, and the impact the events have.
- Create scholarship or small grants program for students pursuing astronomy.

GOAL 4

Expand and Modernize Outreach and Education Programs

YEAR 1

- Develop vision, mission, goals, metrics, and budget to grow outreach programs.
- Review all outreach program data available to begin tracking trends that could inform decision making (e.g. is there a particular site that is always well attended, is there a particular month that doesn't get good crowds, etc).

YEAR 2

- Continued implementation of expanded outreach programs.
- Develop and launch impact data framework and collection tools for outreach and education programs.
- Refine and update member database.
- Identify short list of potential partnership organizations and begin outreach.
- Form a scholarship committee.
- Develop plan to expand existing scholarships and create grant opportunities.

YEARS 3-5

- Continued implementation of expanded outreach programs.
- Continued refinement and administration of scholarship and grant programs.
- Analyze impact data on an annual basis, at least. Use this information to guide decision making about future outreach programming.
- Continued maintenance, development, and evaluation of new/ongoing programmatic relationships.

Metrics of Success

- Increased in-person attendance over time (annual and over longer periods)
- Existence and increase in virtual audience over time
- Evidence of continued impact (TBD) from participation in programming
- Increase in number of volunteers that design and run outreach programs
- Increase in school partnerships for outreach programs
- Increase in number of partnerships with other community organizations

GOAL 5

Maintain, Upgrade, and Diversify Observing Facilities



GOAL 5

Maintain, Upgrade, and Diversify Observing Facilities

Survey Insight: TDS is beloved but underutilized due to distance and infrastructure needs.

Interview Insight: TDS is an invaluable asset to the club and its membership.

Recommendations:

- There is a need to pursue continued oversight and updates of TDS infrastructure. (This is inclusive of the power grid, wi-fi, bathrooms).
- Consider real estate acquisition in the surrounding area to mitigate and/or control light pollution while adding facilities in proximity to TDS.
- Explore how potential partnerships with other clubs or relevant organizations can expand available facilities and/or space.
- Add remote access telescopes for members unable to travel to TDS.
- Consider remote access telescopes in a different hemisphere to diversify the night sky available to SDAA members.
- Create a long-term facilities master plan to clarify roles and oversight and, over time, potentially attract research and educational partners.
- Consider options to rent out facilities to researchers.

GOAL 5

Maintain, Upgrade, and Diversify Observing Facilities

YEAR 1

- Form additional committees: facilities.
- Continue and complete electrical upgrades to the TDS site.
- Create or update a facilities master plan to codify roles, oversight, and responsibilities around maintenance, upgrades, and potential expansions.

YEAR 2

- Evaluate and identify priorities for continued upgrades and maintenance for TDS.
- Explore opportunities to expand access to dark sky site through remote access telescopes, both at TDS and across hemispheres to access more of the night sky.

YEARS 3-5

- Continue upgrades and maintenance of TDS site (examples we heard included warming center, wi-fi capabilities, bathrooms, and electrical grid).
- Evaluate potential partnership opportunities to increase infrastructure and access.
- Evaluate user experiences for TDS site to identify qualitative/cultural upgrades to the experience for members

Metrics of Success

- Increased usage of TDS (# of people, time on premises, etc)
- Increased positive user feedback
- Increased access to night sky via remote technology

FUTURE GOALS

Advance Citizen Science,
Research and Policy
Leadership



ASPIRATIONS

Advance Citizen Science, Research and Policy Leadership

Survey Insight: Some members expressed interest in astrophotography, citizen science, and light pollution advocacy.

Interview Insight: There is a niche, passionate extension of SDAA membership interested in growing citizen science to contribute to the field of professional astronomy. This could potentially create significant press and clout for SDAA in the broader astronomy community.

Recommendations:

There is a group of SDAA members interested in pursuing activities related to citizen science, professional research, and policy leadership. Heavily investing in this space in the short-term risks mission creep and presents some misalignment with the larger ecosystem and where SDAA is currently as an organization. Goals related to updating capacity, professionalization, expanding outreach, and refining membership engagement should take priority in the immediate term of implementation for the strategic plan (Years 1-2). **That said, this does not preclude SDAA considering how they can support members who share these interests in the near term.**

Recommendations and issue areas to explore below should be considered as extensions of the identified strategic planning goals. "Aspirational" recommendations will require deeper discussion and planning.

Short Term

- Expand the astro-imagining special interest group (AISIG) and offer advanced workshops.
- Provide loaner astro cameras and data analysis training.
- Consider how AI can lighten the lift for members interested in citizen science.

Long Term

- Develop partnerships with AAVSO, universities, NASA, and research groups for collaborative projects.
- Advocate for light pollution mitigation policies in San Diego.
- Position SDAA as a regional resource in astronomy-related policy discussions.

THANK YOU!

Questions?
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