



Solano County Fair Association

Executive Summary of Pre-Planning Interviews of Fair Board Members, Staff, County Supervisors, and Stakeholders

Part of the strategic planning process is to gather data and input to be reviewed and integrated into the planning. One tool utilized in the Solano County Fair planning process is that board members of the Solano County Fair Association, Solano County Supervisors, as well as key stakeholders and fair staff were individually interviewed by planning facilitator Rebecca Desmond from California Fair Services Authority (CFSA).

Key questions each interviewee was asked included:

1. Why is the Solano County Fairgrounds important to you and the residents of Solano County?
2. Why is the Solano County Fair Association important to you and the residents of Solano County?
3. How does the Solano County Fairgrounds contribute to the well-being of the Solano County and what needs to be preserved for the future?
4. How could Solano County Fairgrounds contribute more to a Solano County need that is currently not being met? What could be done better for the future?
5. What ideas should be considered to help the Solano County Fair Association be financially self-sufficient – not dependent upon state or county funding for fairs?
6. What is your vision for the Solano County Fairgrounds? What do you envision the fairgrounds will be in the future?
7. What is your vision for the Solano County Fair Association?

The interviews were helpful and enlightening in appropriately kicking off the planning process and engaging all parties in thinking strategically about the Solano County Fair's

future. A unique challenge to this particular strategic planning process is the overlaying issue of what the future of the fair, fairgrounds, and fair board will be, both short term and long term. Thus the answers provided during the interviews included opinions on association and fair operations, fair board structure, and suggestions for the county's development project known as "Solano 360." A summarized list of comments is attached.

Findings – Executive Summary

There is a lot to glean from the comments offered. Consistent themes in the comments are as follows:

- The Solano County Fair and fairgrounds are valued.
- The Solano County Fair and Ag Day play a positive and necessary role in agriculture education for the people of Solano County.
- The Solano County Fair is a gathering place where people from all cultures economic backgrounds come together to celebrate Solano County.
- Due to Solano County's rich diversity, having both the Solano County Fair and the Dixon May Fair in the county is a benefit to all Solano County residents.
- The Solano County Fair provides a venue for young people to showcase their talents in agriculture, fine arts, STEM, music, and the performing arts.
- The Solano County Fairgrounds is a critical asset in the local, regional and state emergency response network.
- The Solano County Fair Association needs to understand their financial standing and stop operating at the same level they did when revenues and reserves were much higher.
- The Solano County Board of Supervisors and the Solano County Fair Association board and executive staff need to build a respectful partnership, putting the people of Solano County first in decision making related to the fairgrounds and fair association operations.
- A two-day fair is not long enough.
- It is time to re-invent the Solano County Fair and fairgrounds from the ground up including facility improvements, structure of the Fair Association board and staff, and a new positive working relationship with the county.

Support for the strategic planning process is strong as is the hope and vision of the phoenix rising from the fire in the form of a new operational plan that includes facility improvements, realistic spending, revenue generation, and a new county-fair association partnership. Some of the more common themes included:

- The fair needs to reach out to its immediate community in Vallejo and invite the community in for education, culture, arts, and events.
- The fair association needs to determine its structure and the county supervisors need to then appoint board members who are going to help the association do its job, maintain its mission and accomplish its vision.

- ✍ The county staff and board of supervisors need to see the fairgrounds, fair association and fair event as the asset it is and assist in the re-invention.
- ✍ Going forward, nothing can be done in a vacuum. Open dialogue and transparency/understanding of finances are key to the success of the accomplishing the goals that will be set forth in this strategic plan.
- ✍ The Solano County Fair is one of the few events that brings together all of the cultures and demographics of the county in one place to celebrate, learn, and honor all that is Solano County.

There is overwhelming agreement that the time for focused, meaningful strategic planning is now. This is the time to move forward for the good of the residents of Solano County. This being said, we can always learn from the past. In 1946 the county board of supervisors had a vision that perhaps can be the guide in this current planning process:

Resolution for Institution of Solano County Fair (1946):

“A county fair be held in Solano County “for the purpose of advertising, exploiting and making known to the world at large the resources of said County, to induce immigration into said County and the attraction of capital investments therein, to increase trade and commerce therein, and provide a means of exhibiting and advertising agricultural, livestock, horticultural, viticultural, mineral, industrial, commercial, climatic, educational, recreational, artistic, musical, cultural and other resources and advantages of said Solano County, and to conduct shows, races and athletic contests.”



Solano County Fair Association

2018-2019 Strategic Planning Workshop Report

The Solano County Fair Association board of directors, staff, and stakeholders met in a workshop to develop a 2018-2019 Strategic Plan on the evening of July 27, 2018, and all day on July 28, 2018, at the Vacaville Chamber of Commerce building. CFSA Deputy Executive Director Rebecca Desmond facilitated the planning session.

Association board members in attendance on Friday evening included treasurer Carole Paterson, and directors Norma Placido, Kari Birdseye, and Kathy Marianno. Fair staff included General Manager Stephen Hales, Deputy General Manager/CFO Mike Passey, Business Development Manager Mike Ioakimedes, operations staff Lewis McGaffie, fair livestock superintendent Kelly Fletcher, fair fine arts supervisor Mike Loeb. Stakeholders in attendance included Valerie Williams from the U.C. Cooperative Extension Services.

On Saturday, District 1 County Supervisor Erin Hannigan and association marketing contractor Debbie Egidio joined the workshop.

In the weeks prior to the workshop, Ms. Desmond interviewed more than 25 association board and staff members along with four of the five Solano County Supervisors and other various stakeholders. The interview participants were asked the following questions and they also offered open comments:

1. Why is the Solano County Fairgrounds important to you and the residents of Solano County?
2. Why is the Solano County Fair Association important to you and the residents of Solano County?
3. How does the Solano County Fairgrounds contribute to the well-being of the Solano County and what needs to be preserved for the future?
4. How could Solano County Fairgrounds contribute more to a Solano County need that is currently not being met? What could be done better for the future?
5. What ideas should be considered to help the Solano County Fair Association be financially self-sufficient – not dependent upon state or county funding for fairs?

6. What is your vision for the Solano County Fairgrounds? What do you envision the fairgrounds will be in the future?
7. What is your vision for the Solano County Fair Association?

A copy of the interview executive summary is attached to this report.

The meeting opened Ms. Desmond reviewing the purpose of strategic planning:

- ❖ You cannot *predict* the future. You can *create* your future.
- ❖ Set specific goals and objectives, making decisions and acting upon the direction set.
- ❖ A series of well thought out, researched and systematic decisions for the future make up strategic planning.
- ❖ Understanding the past with an eye to the future.
- ❖ Knowing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the fair association.
- ❖ Clearly understanding and embracing the purpose and direction of the fair association.
- ❖ Creating an action plan to meet the goals.
- ❖ Being accountable to the community and the county.

Ms. Desmond asked each participant to tell the group how many years that had been connected with the Solano County Fair, Association, fairgrounds, etc. There was more than 400 years of experience and connection in the room.

Ms. Desmond next reviewed the standard strategic planning ground rules:

- ❖ Confidentiality
- ❖ Contribute
- ❖ Listen for Understanding
- ❖ Focus
- ❖ Team work
- ❖ Action for Success

She also reviewed what was deemed “local rules” that pertained to this particular planning session:

- ❖ We are not here to come up with ideas for the County’s development of the Solano 360 property.
- ❖ The SCF Association and Solano County are co-stewards of the fairgrounds (new footprint). This process will seek to clarify and help define SCF Association’s role. The roles of each entity will be defined through this process and this group will work only on the Association’s role.
- ❖ The Solano County Fair is not the Dixon May Fair. Why not?
 - While being in the same county and sharing the same boundaries, each fair is unique, as are all California fairs.
 - The Dixon May Fair is located in a rural community. The Solano County Fair is located in an urban community.

- The Dixon May Fair is a state district agricultural association.
- California fairs do not compete with one another, they support each other as these two fairs do.
- ❖ While we always need to learn from the past, we will not be dwelling on past decisions or practices.

The group agreed on some clarifying definitions in an effort to avoid confusion or misinterpretation of information and ideas. Those definitions are as follows:

- ❖ Fair – The annual Solano County Fair event.
- ❖ Fairgrounds – The Solano County Fairgrounds operated by the Solano County Fair Association on a year-round basis.
- ❖ Association – The Solano County Fair Association, a private nonprofit corporation that contracts with Solano County to operate the fairgrounds on a year-round basis.
- ❖ County – Using a capital “C” refers to the Solano County government.

At the strategic planning workshop the group listed their expectations for the workshop. Expectations for were viewed as “hopes” or “hurdles” to the planning process and included the following:

Hopes

- ❖ We come out with a thought-out one-year set of goals and have an action plan that pushes those goals through the year. Understanding that a normal strategic plan would look at three-to-five-year goals, without the certainty of the extension of the Associations management contract with the County, planning beyond one year is prohibitive..
- ❖ We review the mission and vision statements for relevancy and currency.
- ❖ We have defined roles and responsibilities for the Association and County better defined with trust and transparency.
- ❖ We improve the fair over this year’s event and get more participation (attendance, exhibitors, etc.)
- ❖ The plan includes how to better communicate our mission, core values, this new plan to the County and the public.
- ❖ To have a unified message to the public about our future.
- ❖ Always to have diversity as a board.
- ❖ We have teamwork and support for everyone.
- ❖ We leave here with a brighter outlook for the fair and association that can be shared.
- ❖ We understand we can’t do it all at once and we agree on a path forward.
- ❖ We have a plan that will be supported by the County and ensure the future of the fair and the Association.
- ❖ We are able to answer the questions “Why do we exist?” and “What do we do better than anybody else?”

Hurdles

- ❖ Not enough time to fully flush out the ideas and action plans.
- ❖ Not all Association board members are present.
- ❖ No County supervisors are participating (Supervisor Erin Hannigan attended the session on Saturday morning).
- ❖ Lack of a fully appointed board (only six of 15 supervisor-appointed board seats are filled).
- ❖ We may not have all of the information at hand today to make certain decisions.
- ❖ Afraid there may be a lack of frankness. We need to speak the reality.
- ❖ Longevity of the planning participants' involvement with the fair. While institutional knowledge is valuable, don't want to get stuck in "We always done it that way."

It is important for any entity conducting planning for the future to look at the present conditions of the fair organization, including the financial condition. Ms. Desmond presented the following chart reflecting the 2017 Solano County Fair Association State of Operations report filed with the California Department of Food & Agriculture's Branch of Fairs & Expositions based up the fair's year-end financial reports for 2017:

2017	Revenue	Expense	Contribution to Net
Fair	490,647	850,189	(359,542)
Interim	927,802	31,507	896,295
Satellite Wagering	411,514	352,134	59,380
Other	1,196,933	665,722	531,211
Totals	3,027,895	2,924,030	1,127,334
Administration Overhead			(572,815)
Maintenance Overhead			(451,531)
Net Proceeds			102,988

The next step in the workshop was to review the current mission and vision statements and core values for the Solano County Fair Association.

Mission Statement: *The mission of the Solano County Fair Association is "to ensure a positive experience for the public by providing a year-round multi-purpose venue that showcases and celebrates the wide variety of resources and activities available to our diverse community."*

Vision Statement: *The vision of the Solano County Fair Association is "to be a thriving destination point by presenting a first-class multi-use entertainment and*

recreation facility that supports the county fair and our mission, and provides a sustained economic benefit to the county in partnership with our corporate neighbors and others.”

Values: *We operate with honest, integrity and fairness. We operate with respect and teamwork.*

After some discussion, the group decided that for the sake of time, a subcommittee of staff and board would review the mission and vision statements and bring recommendations back to the board at the August 15 board meeting. This task became an objective in the strategic plan.

In order to move into the future, it is important to look at the current and past conditions to set priorities and a path forward. To do this, the group conducted a SWOT analysis, looking at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Solano County Fair Association. Strengths and weakness are internal matters that the Association has control over while opportunities and threats are more external. Then each planning participant voted on their six top priority areas (numbers in parentheses following item indicates how many votes that item received). When voting on priorities, the focus is put on weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths

- Location
- 70 years of history, longevity
- 7 cities in the county
- Diversified client base
- Stick-to-it staff
- Tenaciousness – Regarding the board members still here
- Experiences
- Participation by board members
- Fun
- Resourcefulness
- Open to change
- Amazing opinions
- Diverse community
- Willingness to voice thoughts
- Lease revenue
- Stakeholder strength and support
- Satellite wagering facility
- Tangible assets (i.e. liquor license)
- Optimistic
- Sponsorship support
- Facilities for emergency response and staff skilled in response due to event management skills
- Fairgrounds with green space
- Returning events (i.e. dog show) and client retention

- Nonprofit experience of board and staff
- Potential for strong volunteer base
- Redevelopment of some of our space
- Annual fair
- Ag Day
- Community participation
- Flexibility in space (campus), diversity in types of events that can be held at the fairgrounds
- Use of social media, communications, advertising, marketing
- Electronic sign board
- History

Weaknesses

- Lack of fully appointed board
- Location
- Low attendance at the fair
- Perception the fair is closing
- Outdated facilities
- Low financial reserves (5)
- Internal perception of host city and security plan is 10 years old addressing dated security issues
- Lack of volunteer management program
- Staff structure – policies, procedures, lack of business structure (1)
- Bare bones staff level
- Relationship with the County (7)
- Lack of relevancy to our market – fair programming
- Community outreach – telling our story, promoting programming (5)
- Need more performers on the Cultural Stage (1)
- Lack of established financial reserve goal/policy – what can reserves be used for (1)
- We focus on the fair and not as much on the fairgrounds
- No flexible employee model – staffing within budget
- Need more Association-sponsored events
- Lack of capital improvement plan in the budget (1)
- More shuttle transportation is needed for seniors
- Need long range financial/business plan (7)
- Dependency on lease revenue (1)
- Aging workforce
- Employee retention due to uncertainty of Association future
- We don't act like a nonprofit or take advantage of nonprofit opportunities (1)
- Need to explore grants (1)
- Uncertainty about the future – can't enter into long term contracts (2)
- Need to update management plan in the County contract (2)
- Operating with short-term view point – looking at the end instead of the future

- Poor curb appeal – fairgrounds needs to look fresher, need to tear down unused facilities that bring down the appearance of the fairgrounds (2)

Opportunities

- Better relationship with the County (5)
- Better relationships with cities and community partners (1)
- Location
- Solano 360 (1)
- Cannabis
- Development of volunteer base in support of the fair and the Association
- Space at the fairgrounds
- To be the fair of the future (1)
- Partner with other nonprofits
- Tapping into large diverse population (1)
- Community outreach, develop awareness – speakers bureau, board members speaking at community groups and service clubs, uniform message points
- RV Park
- Fair weather site
- Maintain focus on the best interest of the fairgrounds (1)
- Association-promoted events (1)
- Increase lease revenues
- Utilize board members diversity and expertise (1)
- Six Flags – marketing partnership, events (3)
- Play a role in disaster relief/response (3)
- Do something no one has ever done before
- Rebuild the fair event from ground zero (2)
- Partner with the education community – schools, community college, college students help on marketing plan
- Neighborhood associations
- Commercial/demonstration kitchens (1)
- Bridge the gap between urban and commercial agriculture
- Partner with County “parks and rec” to offer classes (2)
- Provide a venue for different types of entertainment
- Sharing with neighboring fairs
- Look outside the fair industry for staff succession planning

Threats

- Comparisons to what we have been in the past (1)
- Solano 360 – what will it look like, not being in control of our destiny, plan is dated (4)
- Lack of young industry pool of potential staff members
- External perceptions (2)
- Changing marketplace (1)
- Digital society
- Lack of resources

- Obsolescence
- Location – perception of “Vallejo”
- Market competition for the discretionary dollar (3)
- Economy
- County contract not being renewed, possible Association dissolution
- Entire fair industry is in transition
- County
- Declining horse racing industry
- Aging core customer base (1)
- Declining participation in 4-H and FFA
- Getting volunteers
- Geographically disjointed county
- Competition for sponsorship dollars
- Cost of doing business is going up – minimum wage, OPEB/PERS liabilities
- Solano County is a bedroom community for Bay Area
- Perception we are the Vallejo Fair, instead of the county fair
- Inaccurate comparisons to the Dixon May Fair

The group used the SWOT analysis to create measurable goals for the next 12 months:

Goal A: Building a better relationship with the County (staff and electeds)

Goal B: Establishing and defining our identity

Goal C: Develop community outreach plan

Goal D: Develop a business/management plan

The group next created objectives and action plans for each of the goals to assist the Association in accomplishing these short term goals and to communicate the direction of the strategic plan to the rest of the Association staff and board, the County staff and elected, to the Association’s stakeholders, and to the community at large.

Goal A: Building a better relationship with the County (staff and electeds)

Objective 1: Present the strategic plan, draft revised bylaws to the Association/County Subcommittee at the August 29, 2018 meeting

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Draft bylaws	Carole Paterson, Mike Ioakimedes, Kari Birdseye, Stephen Hales	8/15/18 Association board meeting	8/15/18 Association board meeting
Write Strategic Plan Report	Rebecca Desmond	8/3/18	8/15/18 Association board meeting
Create presentation to Association/County subcommittee	Carole Paterson, Mike Ioakimedes, Stephen Hales	8/21/18	8/15/18 Association board meeting

Objective 2: Define roles and responsibilities of Association and County

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Develop draft management plan/County agreement	Stephen Hales, Mike Ioakimedes, Mike Passey, county counsel, Dennis Yen	9/19/18	8/15/18 Association board meeting

Objective 3: Develop communications/relationship building plan **with** the County

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Create quarterly "State of the Fairgrounds" report	Kari Birdseye, Stephen Hales, Debbie Egidio	First report by 10/30/18	All Association board meetings
Communicate with Association/County Subcommittee about the communication plan and establishing an annual gathering	Carole Paterson, Norma Placido, Lee Williams	8/29/18 Association/County subcommittee meeting	Report outcome to Association board at 9/19 meeting

Goal B: Establishing and defining our identity

Objective 1: Revise/update/reaffirm SCFA mission and vision statements

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Revise/update/reaffirm SCFA mission and vision statements	Mike Ioakimedes, Kari Birdseye, Mike Passey	Circulate first draft by 8/3/18, final by 8/15/18	8/15/18 Association board meeting

Objective 2: Conduct public/patron survey

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Write and circulate survey	Debbie Egidio	9/19/18 Association board meeting	8/15/18 Association board meeting

Goal C: Develop community outreach plan

Objective 1: Develop message points/power point/public speaking plan

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Develop message points/power point/public speaking program	Mike Ioakimedes, Carole Paterson, Kurt Brown	11/1/18	9/19/18 Association board meeting
Implement the plan	Association staff and board	November 2018	n/a

Objective 2: Develop community outreach plan

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Develop community outreach plan	Carole Paterson, Valerie Williams, Lewis McGaffie, Norma Placido	Ongoing	November 2018 Association board meeting

Goal D: Develop a business/management plan

Objective 1: Draft financial plan (history, current status, 2019, and three-year outlook)

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Draft financial plan	Kelly Fletcher, Mike Passey, Mike Ioakimedes, Dennis Yen, Kathy Marianno	8/15/18 for 8/29/18 subcommittee meeting	n/a

Objective 2: Review organizational structure

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Draft new organizational structure	Stephen Hales, Mike Ioakimedes, county counsel, Carole Paterson, Kari Birdseye	8/15/18 for 8/29/18 subcommittee meeting	n/a

Objective 3: Draft narrative of business plan

Action Step	By whom	By When	Status Update
Draft narrative of business plan	Stephen Hales, Mike Ioakimedes, Carole Paterson,	8/15/18 for 8/29/18 subcommittee meeting	n/a

Ms. Desmond concluded the workshop by conducting an evaluation of the strategic planning session:

Evaluation of Strategic Planning Session

What went well?	What could have been better?
Good contribution by participants	Wish more participation from County and other stakeholders
Facilitator's industry knowledge very helpful	Bigger space needed to see all of the big sheets
Pace was good	
Food was great!	
Action plans were identified	
Appreciate people stepping up in the action plans	
Attendance was awesome	
The facility was free	
The "Wall" ice breaker	
Staff preparation was very helpful	

Final Thoughts

Ms. Desmond concluded the workshop by congratulating the group for their hard work and production of a final product and offered the following quotes:

"When we commit to a vision or direction to do something that has never been done before, there is no way to know how to get there. We simply have to build the bridge as we walk on it."

Quin 2004

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

Henry Ford