

Social Science Working Group
Society for Conservation Biology

Strategic Plan, 2025-2030

Introduction

The Social Science Working Group (SSWG) of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) is a global professional community interested in the social dimensions of biodiversity conservation. Since its inception 20 years ago, the SSWG has grown rapidly and has been successful in defining the conservation social science field, establishing an interdisciplinary and global epistemic conservation social science field community, legitimising and mainstreaming the social sciences within SCB, elevating standards for conservation social science field research and practice, and applying conservation social science field insights to conservation practice and policy. We have grown our membership, with members from close to 60 countries, offering a home to a diverse array of conservation scientists and practitioners.

Every 5 years the SSWG develops and adopts a new strategy. With this new 2025-2030 strategy, the SSWG Board of Directors want to look ahead to what we have yet to achieve, and where we want to position ourselves in the next decade. This strategy comes at a pivotal time, where the conservation community strives towards reaching key milestones in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and CBD 2030 targets, fulfilment of which requires the conservation social sciences to take a central role and to be employed to achieve effective and equitable conservation outcomes.

The vision, goals, and objectives outlined in this strategic plan are designed to focus, sustain, and enhance the impacts of conservation social scientists on conservation science and practice worldwide. Having already established an organisational home for conservation social scientists, this strategic plan focuses on securing our position as a key voice in scientific debates on conservation policy; further diversifying our vibrant and respected global community of conservation social scientists; and catalysing the development of the next generation of leaders in conservation social science. At the same time, the plan highlights the need for organisational development of the SSWG to develop and sustain these targeted programmatic activities.

By achieving the goals and objectives articulated in this plan, the SSWG will substantially further its mission – to strengthen conservation social science and the application of social science to conservation practice. In this way, we will contribute to advancing the science and practice of conserving the Earth's biological diversity, the mission shared by all members of the Society for Conservation Biology.

Mission & Vision

Mission:

The mission of the SSWG is to elevate and integrate conservation social science within the SCB and in conservation research, policy and practice globally.

Vision:

The SSWG seeks to:

- Become a key voice in scientific debates on conservation policy;
- Establish a vibrant, diverse, and respected global community of conservation social scientists; and
- Catalyse development of the next generation of leaders in conservation social science (CSS).

Goals:

We seek to realise this vision through continuous progress toward five goals:

- (1) **Science.** To elevate standards of practice among conservationists who use the conservation social sciences to advance the science and practice of conserving Earth's biological diversity and people's relationships with it.
- (2) **Leadership.** To elevate conservation social science professionals into SCB's Administrative Board and the conservation science, practice, and governance communities more broadly
- (3) **Representation.** Supporting diversity, inclusion and decolonisation within SSWG activities and across the CSS.
- (4) **Growth.** Continue to grow the conservation social sciences within the SCB and beyond.
- (5) **Sustainable capacity.** To strengthen the organisational capacity and funding of SSWG to achieve its goals, in line with the new SCB structure.

Goal 1: Science. To elevate standards of practice among conservationists who use the conservation social sciences to advance the science and practice of conserving Earth's biological diversity and peoples relationships with it.

Over the next five years, SSWG intends to more directly set standards for the conservation social sciences, and showcase examples of those standards of research, practice, and conservation impact. We also acknowledge that SSWG could better identify and promote conservation narratives and success stories based on and led by CSS. In our role as a professional society, SSWG should highlight exemplary work through its early career award. However, it is also important that SSWG promote its most esteemed members through SCB's reward structure, including through conference awards, the Smith Fellows program, and overarching societal awards.

Objective 1.1: Showcase examples of research standards and conservation impact.

- Activity 1.1.1: Share success stories – showcasing how social science enhanced outcomes for communities and biodiversity, through our blog, 'The Social', our website, and other social media platforms.
- Activity 1.1.2: Provide acknowledgement and/or awards for professionals modelling exemplary standards of practice.
- Activity 1.2.3: Create or share guidelines for the application of conservation social sciences, including culturally responsive standards and ethics.

Objective 1.2: Establish a knowledge hub and position ourselves as the 'go to' working group for information on the CSS.

Activity 1.2.1: Develop online and in-person training in multiple languages and formats on the following:

- Specific soft or technical skills e.g. guidance on software, facilitation, literature review, impact evaluation, or field methods.
- Production of simple, brief, easy to follow introductions to different social science theories to encourage greater awareness and communication between ecologists and social scientists, and within the different social science disciplines.

Activity 1.2.2: Update and maintain our online directory of available training resources.

- Review and update our current database of online resources.
- Determine whether our website is currently fit for this purpose to host relevant CSS resources.
- Source volunteer(s) responsible for maintaining, updating and organising the resource page/website.

Goal 2: Leadership. To elevate conservation social science professionals into leadership positions within SCB and beyond.

We envision a SCB with the consistent representation of SSWG “alumni” and conservation social science professionals among its restructured governance and operations.

Objective 2.1: Facilitate and promote internal and external leadership opportunities, proactively increasing a diversity of perspectives and representation.

- Activity 2.1.1: Encourage volunteers and board members to seek positions within SCB’s Administrative Board.
- Activity 2.1.2: Commit to better support and management of SSWG volunteer strengths and introduce them into leadership roles within SCB Working Groups through “visitor access to SSWG board meetings”.
- Activity 2.1.3: Create a volunteer model that supports volunteers, allows them to contribute to SSWG, sustain their engagement, and pursue their interests.

Objective 2.2: Establish a network hub for conservation social science professionals.

- Activity 2.2.1: Continue with and scale-up the number of mentors and mentees in the SSWG mentor program.
- Activity 2.2.2: Become an active convener between organisations interested in drawing on the social sciences and conservation social scientists and practitioners.
- Activity 2.2.3: Share relevant training opportunities, professional societies, and job opportunities via social media and a monthly roundup.
- Activity 2.2.4: Develop a regular programme of networking opportunities, in-person and online, to maintain our vibrant community and encourage our membership to engage, grow, and interact.

Goal 3: Representation. Supporting diversity, inclusion and equity within SSWG activities and across the CSS.

The SCB restructure and transition of SSWG into a Global Program provides new opportunities to leverage and raise funds that will better serve a broader, more diverse group of conservationists around the globe and assert SSWG's professional society role (See Goal 5 on leveraging funds).

We envision the development of scholarship, internship, and small-grants programs to support under-funded conservationists in under-resourced geographies to support diversity, inclusion and equity of conservation and champion the conservation social sciences within and outside of SCB. We also envision subsidising volunteer efforts – particularly to help those from professional cultures where voluntary, unpaid service is less common and a more significant burden.

Objective 3.1: Supporting diversity, inclusion and equity within SSWG activities and across the CSS.

- Activity 3.1.1: Develop a funding structure and offer subsidised volunteer efforts for SSWG volunteers from lower-income countries or other underrepresented communities for 6 months with SSWG.
- Activity 3.1.2: Emphasise mission and goals beyond North America, Europe and Australia by producing content in multiple languages as available to SSWG.
- Activity 3.1.3: Offer expense-free learning opportunities, particularly in lower-income countries and other underrepresented communities, via webinars and workshops to: students, academics and researchers, but also grassroots practitioners in the field who are not attached to universities or larger institutions.
- Activity 3.1.4: Actively build closer relationships with subsections of SCB to help enable greater participation in SSWG activities by those from underrepresented backgrounds (e.g. LACA, Asia, Africa chapters), through for example, joint training, webinars, and dissemination of funding opportunities.

Goal 4: Growth. Continue to grow the conservation social sciences within the SCB and beyond.

Objective: 4.1: To increase the visibility of SSWG and the conservation social sciences within the SCB and beyond.

- Activity 4.1.1: Increase the visibility and engagement of the SSWG membership with SCB by putting forward SocSci profiles, doing interviews on the SCB website, writing blogs for SCB and promoting the SSWG blog.
- Activity 4.1.2: Build collaborations with Universities globally and support the integration of social science into curricula.
- Activity 4.1.3: Ensure growing presence of SSWG and the CSS at major SCB conferences, including ICCB, and regional chapter events.
- Activity 4.1.4: Establish a programme of SSWG run conferences and events, including a bi-annual conservation social science conference.
- Activity 4.1.5: Promote the conservation social sciences in academia: Publish a special issue on conservation social sciences.
- Activity 4.1.6: Consider supporting the creation of a CSS journal under SCB, and/or actively encourage SCB journals to prioritise interdisciplinary work.

Goal 5: Sustainable capacity. To strengthen the organisational capacity and funding of SSWG to achieve its goals, in line with the new SCB structure.

As we want to scale up our efforts and activities in the coming years, SSWG may want to consider how we can generate income to support these activities aside from depending on SCB membership and journal income.

Objective 5.1: Ensure financial sustainability through fundraising activities to support SSWG operations and activities.

- Activity 5.1.1: Determine our financial needs over the next 5 years.
- Activity 5.1.2: Plan a programme of paying social events, training, webinars, and conferences for developed countries to enable us to scale-up our activities.
- Activity 5.1.3: Explore the option of registering SSWG as a non-profit, opening up opportunities for other competitive grants.