



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR AUTISM RESEARCH STRATEGIC PLAN

Updated 12/30/2015

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Introduction

In the spring of 2015, the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) Board of Directors embarked on a process of refreshing and expanding INSAR's strategic plan, which had not been updated since 2010. Throughout the process of updating the plan, the Board's goal was to engage INSAR members in the process to create a plan that reflected the perspectives and priorities of the INSAR membership.

Since its inception, INSAR has focused primarily on two major activities: the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR; INSAR's annual meeting) and the society's flagship journal, *Autism Research*. While the bulk of INSAR's financial and intellectual investments remain focused on these two signature efforts, the updated strategic plan puts greater emphasis on year-round activities designed to increase diversity among INSAR's membership, promote global engagement, and nurture the early-stage careers of autism researchers. This emphasis is not an entirely new direction; it is an expansion of priorities and activities commenced earlier, as reflected in the 2010-2014 strategic plan and initiatives. Examples of year-round activities undertaken in 2015 that reflect the culmination of early initiatives include the first Regional IMFAR in Shanghai, China, and the virtual Summer Institute, an online webinar series offered by experts in the field of autism that could be readily accessed worldwide. In 2016, INSAR will have its own app that provides year-round information and communication about activities and events. This exciting transition to a year-round organization is allowing INSAR to have a greater impact across the globe. As we sought to update our strategic plan, the goals, objectives and tactics that were established increasingly reflected INSAR's broader reach beyond the annual meeting and journal.

Strategic Planning Process and Membership Survey

The 2015 strategic planning process was designed to solicit the broadest possible input from the INSAR membership regarding INSAR's current level of success in addressing these initiatives and priorities for the future. In preparation for the strategic plan update, the INSAR Board met with chairs and members of INSAR committees to gain their perspectives and feedback.

The INSAR Board also solicited feedback from all INSAR members through an online survey. Overall, 431 members of INSAR participated in the survey. Respondents were diverse, with the majority comprised of full members who had been part of INSAR for 3-9 years, regularly attended IMFAR, and had been involved in autism research for greater than 10 years. On average, respondents were greater than 35 years of age, female (70%), from the US (68%), and active scientists in the field (65%). The areas of research conducted by respondents were also varied and included those involved in basic/preclinical research (24%), clinical trials (30%), descriptive/experimental research (60%), and epidemiological research (12%).

When asked how effective INSAR has been in accomplishing its strategic initiatives, the majority of respondents indicated that they believed INSAR had been effective or very effective in enhancing the quality of research presented at IMFAR and in its journal, *Autism Research* (80% and 74%, respectively). The modal response in terms of how effective the respondents believed INSAR had been in expanding the scope of research to cultivate both basic and service research, encompassing global perspectives, and nurturing the next generation of scientists was “effective.” Similarly, respondents most often reported that they felt that INSAR had been “effective” in growing its membership and building its identity.

Looking to the future, the majority of respondents to the INSAR strategic planning survey ranked the following initiatives as among prospective top priorities:

- Improved public understanding of ASD research
- Training/nurturing the next generation
- Enhancing quality of research presented at IMFAR
- Expanding the scope of research to include basic to dissemination science
- Enhancing the quality of research published in *Autism Research*
- Increasing the impact of autism science on policy and practice

When asked about their overall satisfaction with INSAR, 83% of respondents indicated that they are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with INSAR. The detailed results of this survey are summarized in Appendix 1.

The strategic planning workgroup was comprised of the INSAR Board, two staff members from Association Resources, Inc., a parent of a child with autism, a person on the autism spectrum, and a representative of the student and trainee committee. Members of the workgroup are listed in Appendix 2. The plan was partially developed during an in-person meeting held in the fall of 2015. During the meeting, the feedback received from the INSAR membership and committees was synthesized to shape the updated plan.

The updated strategic plan is built upon a solid foundation created through the passionate volunteer efforts of many past board members, committees, advocacy organizations, individuals on the spectrum and their family members, as well as many others who believe that high-quality autism research is a crucial cornerstone of progress toward improving the lives of persons with autism and their families.

INSAR’s Mission Statement

One of the most significant changes made when updating INSAR’s strategic plan was the revision of INSAR’s mission statement. Understanding that the mission statement reflects the aims and values of INSAR, the decision to change the statement was not made lightly. Since its inception, INSAR’s mission statement has been “to present and promote an integrated approach and understanding of research on autism spectrum disorder.” The strategic planning workgroup felt that this statement accurately captured

the activities and values of INSAR during its first decade of existence but that the growth and impact of INSAR over the past few years justified an expanded description of INSAR’s mission.

INSAR Mission Statement

To promote the highest quality autism research in order to improve the lives of individuals affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder

The new mission statement represents INSAR’s strong commitment to use rigorous science to improve the lives of those affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and implies, we think correctly, that the maturing field of autism research is poised to have an increasing impact on policy and practice. This transition from gathering knowledge to applying knowledge is also reflected in new strategic initiatives that were added as part of the strategic plan update.

INSAR’s Core Values

In conducting all of its activities, INSAR is committed to the following values:

- High quality autism research
- Collaboration among scientists across disciplines
- Supportive environments for early career autism researchers
- Ethnic, racial, and geographic diversity of autism researchers and knowledge
- Partnerships with external partners, including other scientific societies, advocacy groups, government agencies, educational institutions, foundations, and industry
- Perspectives and priorities of those affected by autism spectrum disorder

Strategic Initiatives

The updated strategic plan includes and expands upon the five strategic initiatives that comprised the previous strategic plan. Two new strategic initiatives were added. The first new initiative focuses on our goal of disseminating autism research to have broader impact in shaping research priorities, policy, practice, and public understanding. The second new initiative reflects a desire to enhance communication between autism researchers and those affected by ASD. This document outlines the goals and objectives associated with each of these initiatives.

The following are INSAR's Strategic Initiatives:

1. **Setting the Bar** - Increase the quality of research promoted through its annual meeting, journal, and other activities
2. **Interdisciplinary and Translational** - Cultivate interdisciplinary and translational research, public-private partnerships, and relationships with industry
3. **Diverse and Global** - Increasingly represent and serve a diverse and global community
4. **Next Generation** - Foster opportunities for leadership and career development for the next generation of ASD researchers
5. **Building Identity** - Promote INSAR as the premier society for autism researchers
6. **Research to Practice** - Disseminate science-based knowledge to inform research priorities, public policy, professional practice, and public understanding
7. **Partnerships** - Foster communication between autism researchers and individuals affected by autism spectrum disorder

Initiative #1: Increase the quality of research promoted through the annual meeting, journal, and other activities

Desired outcomes:

- Enhanced quality of research presented at IMFAR, including research highlighted at its press conference and other media activities
- Enhanced quality of research published in INSAR's flagship journal, *Autism Research*
- Improved understanding by autism researchers regarding the scientific standards for conducting well-designed autism studies, including clinical trials

Action plan:

- Establish a Scientific Standards Committee
- Define the membership and charter of the Scientific Standards Committee
- Develop scientific standards and detailed guidelines for IMFAR abstracts
- Publish scientific standards for journal submissions in *Autism Research*
- Communicate information about scientific standards for IMFAR submissions to INSAR membership via message from the President and chair of the Scientific Standards Committee
- Annual review of the process to select Press Conference abstracts
- Enhance continuity of oversight of IMFAR by creating a rotation process for the Scientific Program Committee with overlap of leadership across years
- Encourage IMFAR Program Chairs to continue IMFAR keynote panel
- Increase synergy between journal and IMFAR and INSAR, including requiring journal editorial board to maintain INSAR membership

Initiative #2: Cultivate interdisciplinary and translational research, public-private partnerships, and relationships with industry

Desired outcomes:

- Increased participation by representatives from industry at IMFAR
- Increased collaborations between autism researchers and industry sponsors involved in discovery and development of autism diagnostics and treatments
- Acceleration of progress in developing effective diagnostics and treatments for ASD

Action plan:

- Invite thought leaders from industry to give keynotes at IMFAR 2016
- Solicit sponsorships from industry leaders involved in autism research
- Add an IMFAR Panel on industry involvement in autism research that includes international representation

Initiative #3: Increasingly represent and serve a diverse and global community

Desired outcomes:

- More opportunities for keynote presentations by speakers outside North America
- More diverse representation on INSAR Board of Directors and *Autism Research* Editorial Board
- Expanded dissemination of and increased access to INSAR related educational/scientific materials and activities
- Improved access to autism diagnostic tools in low resource communities
- Continue to support regional IMFAR meetings outside of North America and Europe

Action plan:

- Invite at least one keynote speaker from outside North America to future IMFAR meetings
- Enhance the balance of gender, geography, and ethnicity/race among INSAR Board members and keynote speakers
- Share IMFAR educational seminars via online videos
- Increase accessibility of IMFAR recorded presentations through translation and web access
- Partner with Autism Speaks' initiative to develop diagnostic tools for low income settings
- Develop plan for hosting/partnering with a host for open access autism research tools
- Increase cultural diversity on *Autism Research* Editorial Board

- Review highly rated IMFAR presentations from countries outside of North America and Europe and invite submissions to *Autism Research*
- Evaluate key factors contributing to success of Regional IMFARs following the Shanghai meeting to enhance future regional meetings
- Identify future partners for regional meetings and other global initiatives

Initiative #4: Foster opportunities for leadership and career development for the next generation of ASD researchers

Desired outcomes:

- Increase awareness of activities and goals of the students and trainees involved in INSAR
- Expand membership of student members in INSAR
- Enlarge the number of young people entering the field of autism research
- Increase access to scientific knowledge by students across the globe
- Provide opportunities for students and trainees attending IMFAR to socialize, network, and gain mentorship and guidance from senior researchers
- Enhance communication and networking among students and trainees via social media
- Increase student involvement in a variety of IMFAR activities and committees
- Create new opportunities for nurturing early career autism researchers at the postdoctoral and junior faculty stages
- Improve access to knowledge about strategies for developing a successful career as an autism researcher
- Provide an opportunity for learning about budgeting and financial planning for student members of INSAR

Action plan:

- Create Student & Trainee page on the INSAR website to increase awareness of the committee and share information
- Publish Student & Trainee Newsletter twice each year
- Continue virtual Summer Institute and establish plan for hosting and promoting exclusively by INSAR
- Continue IMFAR student-related activities: Student Social, Pre-Conference Workshop, Meet the Experts, SIGs, Booth
- Leverage social media to enhance awareness and communication among students
- Appoint an INSAR Student & Trainee Committee representative to every committee

- Submit a proposal for a new committee for early career scientists (advanced post-doc, junior faculty)
- Create career development webinar
- Increased financial accountability by Student and Trainee Committee by requiring annual budget request
- Solicit a proposal to initiate a new Early Stage Faculty Committee that will serve as a landing spot for active INSAR students and trainees

Initiative #5: Promote INSAR as the premier society for autism researchers

Desired outcomes:

- Enhanced public knowledge about INSAR and autism science
- Enhanced engagement of INSAR membership year round via activities and communications provided via the website, email, and mobile devices
- Regular use of social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to promote INSAR's flagship journal, *Autism Research*
- Regular communication about the activities and accomplishments of INSAR via President Messages and an INSAR Annual Report
- Fresh content on INSAR website, leading to increased member and public engagement
- Increased visibility of INSAR senior scientists as credible voices in the media
- Increased participation in INSAR and IMFAR by thought leaders in the field of autism research
- Enhanced learning opportunities for senior scientists

Action plan:

- Create a Communications Committee
- Develop a year-round communications plan
- Create a mobile app to support IMFAR meeting and year-round communication with INSAR membership
- Utilize social media for journal publication promotion
- Publish an annual report
- Website update, including enhanced web content
- Increase visibility of INSAR brand on virtual Summer Institute
- Develop list of INSAR member scientists to serve as speakers to work with media
- Coordinate media training for INSAR Board/Expert speakers
- Create new INSAR logo
- Personal invitations to scientific leaders to join INSAR

- Create INSAR Fellow Program to recognize scientists who have made major contributions to the field of autism research
- Publish President Messages throughout year (via emails to members and on website)
- Develop a Pre-Conference providing advanced training for scientists
- Review and renew *Autism Research Journal* Contract with Wiley

Initiative #6: Disseminate science-based knowledge to inform research priorities, public policy, professional practice, and public understanding

Desired outcomes:

- Broader dissemination and impact of autism science
- Regularly funded opportunities for INSAR scientists to synthesize existing scientific literature to form and publish policy statements and/or practice guidelines
- Archiving of knowledge gained through activities of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) sponsored by INSAR so that knowledge can be more broadly accessed
- Leveraging of external partnerships in order to have greater impact of autism research in shaping research priorities, policy, and practice
- Increased access by the public to cutting-edge autism research presented at IMFAR

Action plan:

- Establish new initiative on scientific dissemination and impact
- Establish policy and procedures for creating annual INSAR Policy and/or Practice Brief
- Establish and hold first annual thought leader meeting to create INSAR Policy/Practice Brief
- Publish INSAR Policy/Practice Brief
- Require SIGs to provide report on activities for website/ publication
- Package lay abstracts and disseminate via social media
- Develop partnerships with other agencies, scientific organizations, institutions, and foundations

Initiative #7: Foster communication between autism researchers and individuals affected by ASD

Desired outcomes:

- Priorities and perspectives of those affected by ASD are reflected in the values, goals, and initiatives of INSAR

- More diverse representation in INSAR activities across the range of individuals affected by ASD, including those on the spectrum, relatives, educators, and clinicians
- Increased numbers of individuals directly affected by ASD involved in INSAR and its annual meeting
- Regular communication and enhanced partnerships between those affected by ASD and autism researchers

Action plan:

- Establish a new initiative to foster communication between autism researchers and individuals affected by ASD
- Change composition of Community Advisory Committee to encompass a broader range of community stakeholders (parents, grandparents, educators, and clinicians)
- Communicate with Community Advisory Committee to encourage expanding charge of committee beyond stakeholder lunch and awards
- Establish regular opportunities for individuals on the spectrum who are on the Community Advisory Committee to have input and provide feedback to INSAR Board
- Involve stakeholders, including parent and person on the autism spectrum, in creation of updated INSAR strategic plan
- Increase attendance and membership by nonscientist stakeholders, including persons on autism spectrum, relatives, educators, and clinicians, via partnership with Autism Science Foundation

Appendix 1

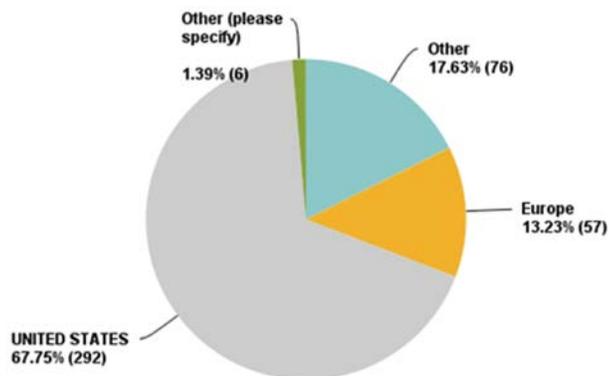
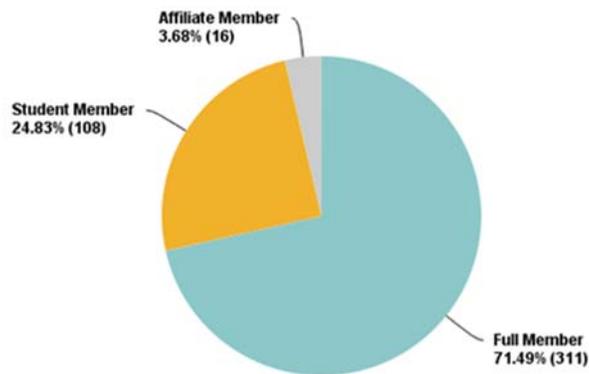
INSAR Membership Strategic Planning Survey

Description of participants in the survey

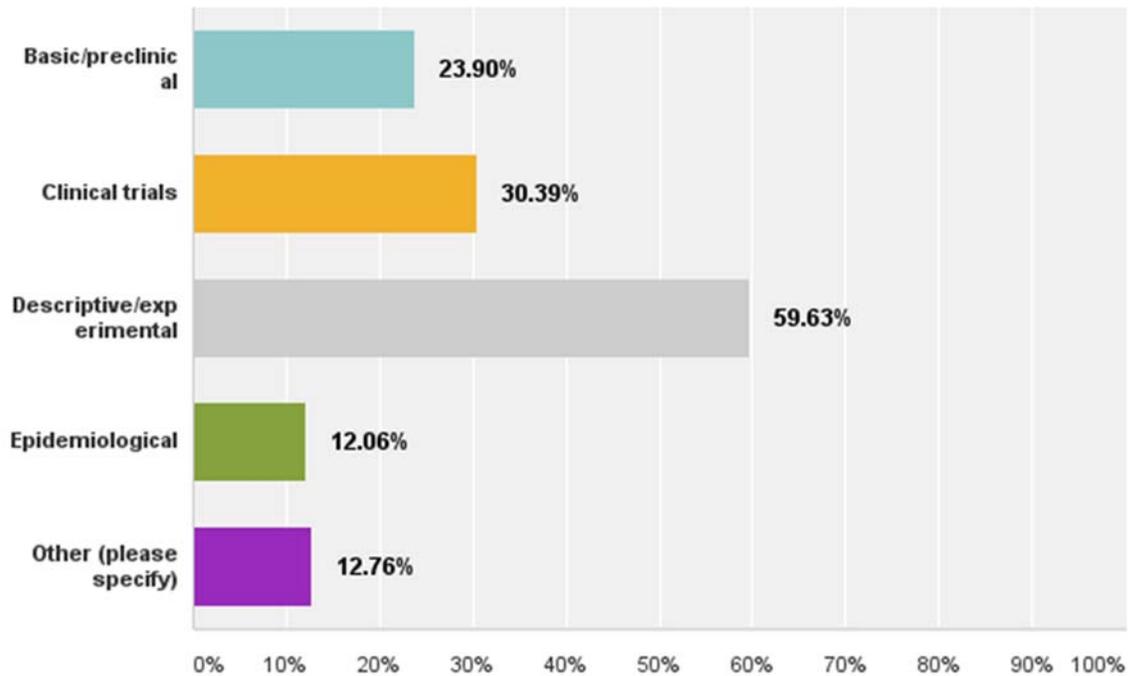
N = 431 INSAR members

Respondents were primarily:

- Full members
- Members for 3-9 years
- Attended 3-8 meetings
- Involved in autism research > 10 years
- Age > 35 years
- Majority female (70%)
- Majority from US (68%)
- Majority scientists (65%)



What types of research did respondents to the survey conduct?



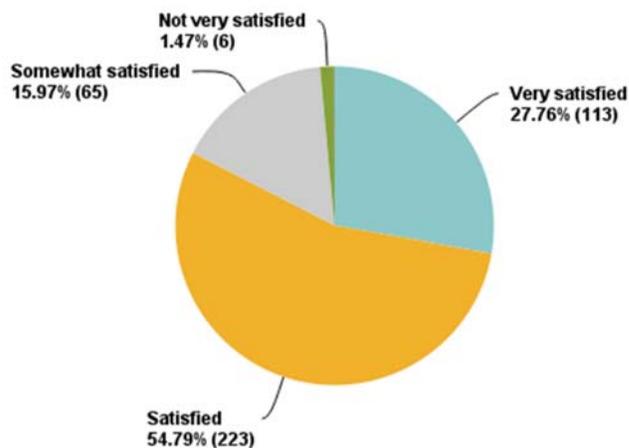
How effective has INSAR been in accomplishing its strategic initiatives?

	Not effective	Barely effective	Effective	Very effective	Unsure	Total	Weighted Average
Enhance research quality at meeting	0.95% 4	9.74% 41	43.94% 185	36.34% 153	9.03% 38	421	3.27
Enhance research quality in journal	0.95% 4	5.23% 22	38.24% 161	35.39% 149	20.19% 85	421	3.35
Expand the scope of research from basic science to service delivery	3.33% 14	14.73% 62	46.56% 196	20.19% 85	15.20% 64	421	2.99
Expand scope to encompass global perspectives	1.90% 8	16.15% 68	43.23% 182	23.99% 101	14.73% 62	421	3.05
Next generation leadership and training opportunities	2.61% 11	16.39% 69	42.76% 180	21.85% 92	16.39% 69	421	3.00
Grow membership	1.19% 5	2.38% 10	40.38% 170	23.28% 98	32.78% 138	421	3.28
Build INSAR's Identify	1.66% 7	11.88% 50	47.03% 198	16.15% 68	23.28% 98	421	3.01

Looking to the future, what do respondents to the INSAR Survey view as the highest priority initiatives?

Ranking	Initiative	Percentage of members who ranked as high-highest priority	Average ranking (1 = not a priority to 5 = highest priority)
1	Improve public understanding of ASD research	84%	4.28
2	Next generation/training	83%	4.19
3	Research quality at meeting	77%	4.02
4	Expand scope of science basic to dissemination	74%	4.07
5	Research quality of journal	71%	3.92
6	Increase impact on policy and practice	70%	3.95
7	Website/social media for communication/dissemination	58%	3.64
8	Expand scope to encompass global perspectives	57%	3.70
9	Increase diversity in membership	56%	3.66
10	Educational activities such as summer institute	55%	3.64
11	Inclusion of persons with ASD	51%	3.56
12	Increase presence of basic scientists at meeting	47%	3.43
13	Build INSAR identity	37%	3.29
14	Grow membership	28%	3.13

Overall satisfaction with INSAR



Appendix 2

2015 INSAR Strategic Planning Workgroup

Geraldine Dawson, PhD, President

Francesca Happe, PhD, Past-President

Craig Newschaffer, PhD, Vice-President

Raphael Bernier, PhD, Treasurer

Katarzyna Charwarska, PhD, Secretary

James McPartland, PhD, Past-Treasurer

David Amaral, PhD, Editor, *Autism Research*

Alison Singer, Parent

John Elder Robison, Self-Advocate

Vanessa Hus Bal, PhD, Student Representative

Jennifer Gentry, INSAR Administrative Director, Association Resources

Martin Rotblatt, CAE, IOM, Association Resources

Appendix 3 2015 INSAR Organizational Chart

