



**State Onsite Regulators
Association**

STRATEGIC PLAN

2017 --- 2022

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Executive Summary

This strategic plan is the State Onsite Regulator Association's (SORA) official strategy and action plan for use by its leaders to ensure that SORA remains effective, responsive, and continuously relevant to its stakeholders and their interests. The primary purposes of this plan are to:

- Supplement the SORA bylaws by explicitly defining SORA's strategic direction and aspirations; and
- Provide the overarching accountability framework by which SORA will prioritize and conduct its activities to achieve the long-term vision, mission, and goals in a manner consistent with its governing values defined herein.

The nature of the plan is strategic, rather than tactical, setting general direction rather than specifying tasks. The plan includes implementation and accountability tools for use by the Board of Directors, committee leaders, and stakeholders to document and continually track SORA's progress toward successfully implementing this strategic plan. These tools are intended to be continually updated. As SORA develops and evolves, so will this strategic plan.

A brief organizational description of SORA is included to illustrate the historical path and foundations of the organization.

This, in concert with the assessment of SORA's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, formed the basis for SORA's mission, vision, values and strategic goals.

This diagram depicts the integrated relationship between SORA and its stakeholders. SORA is dynamic partnership that draws its strength from direct engagement with each partner, and the two-way communication and support that SORA provides and receives from its partners.



Board Authorization of Strategic Plan

This strategic plan was developed at the direction of the 2017 SORA Board (see table below). The Strategic Planning Committee presented this strategic plan to the Board of Directors on September 5, 2017. The SORA Board of Directors approved this Strategic Plan with changes set out at the October 3, 2017 meeting. This strategic plan continues until the plan is revised or rescinded by the Board.

SORA Board of Directors 2016-17		
Representative Area	Representative Member	3 yr. Term Expiration
Region 1	Amanda Clark (CT)	2019
Region 2	Vacant	2017
Region 3	Vacant	2018
Region 4	Steven Berkowitz (NC)	2019
Region 5	Mike Mettler (IN)	2017
Region 6	Matt Pace (OK)	2018
Region 7	Ann D'Alfonso (KS)	2019
Region 8	Chuck Cousino (CO)	2018
Region 9	Chris Edwards (KY)	2018
Region 10	Jeremy Simmons (WA)	2019
Canada	Derek Smith (Manitoba)	2017
Tribal	Vacant	2019
At Large	Mary Clark (VT)	2017
<i>Officers:</i>		Expiration
President	Chuck Cousino	2017
President Elect	Ann D'Alfonso	2017
Treasurer	Amanda Clark	2018
Secretary	Jeremy Simmons	2018

Organizational Description

Organizationally, SORA traces its roots to the first Earth Day (1970) and the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1972 when the Clean Water Act focused on protecting public health by maintaining a safe and healthy environment. In 1972 when the Clean Water Act was signed into law, work began to protect and improve the water quality in the lakes, stream and oceans. Among the many initiatives created by the Clean Water Act was the National Small Flows Clearinghouse (NSFC). In 1977, a provision in the Clean Water Act required EPA to fund a national clearinghouse devoted to providing technical assistance, information distribution and training to small municipal and decentralized wastewater systems. Its purpose was to improve small community capacity to address wastewater treatment issues. The clearinghouse resided at West Virginia University and was continuously funded as the NSFC by EPA to 2005.

By 1996, EPA recognized that considerable progress on centralized wastewater treatment systems had been made, but also acknowledged the high cost of municipal treatment plant construction. EPA turned its attention to decentralized wastewater treatment and management as a viable cost effective technology alternative. In a 1996 general Report to Congress, the House Appropriations Committee highlighted the importance of decentralized wastewater treatment to the country and that it should be promoted where appropriate. This led to the 1997 Clean Water Action Plan and subsequently EPA's 1999 *State Voluntary Guidelines for Onsite and Decentralized Wastewater Treatment and Management*.

In 1999, the first National Onsite Wastewater State Regulators Conference was hosted by the NSFC and held in St. Louis. Mike Cook, then Director of the EPA Office of Wastewater Management, addressed regulators from 41 states. He stated that the St. Louis conference forum had brought together the best people qualified to work on the issues relevant to decentralized systems. He called for a stimulating exchange of information that might evolve into technologies that would support the decentralized industry. He concluded that it was EPA's vision that in the future, 25 percent of U.S. homes would be served by properly installed, well-maintained decentralized systems. These systems would be managed by a national plan that assured they would not contribute to water quality problems.

From this first meeting, many significant events emerged. The state regulators recognized the need to continue an annual national conference. Regulators now had a voice that was being recognized by EPA and other associations such as the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA), the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and the NSF International (NSF). The regulators saw value in the exchange of ideas and the opportunity to compare problem-solving strategies that the conference provided. They recognized the need for an administrative body to maintain a state regulators information exchange network and to provide opportunity for the states to interact. They saw the value of incorporating the private sector into their forums, allowing them to

interact professionally and informally with those providing decentralized services.

NSFC continued to receive EPA funding for their administrative support of SORA until 2015 when the funding ceased. At that time, SORA needed to decide whether it could survive on its own, or would cease to exist. It was decided to create a non-profit association that was funded by membership fees and COI fees. A new fee policy has been developed, and January 2018 will begin the first membership fee collection period.

These elements were addressed gradually by succeeding annual conferences. By the 3rd Conference (2001) in Arlington, Virginia, the Captains of Industry (COI's) were officially recognized. These COI companies were comprised of manufacturers of various collection, treatment and dispersal technologies that support the decentralized industry nationwide. Arrangements had also been made to include regional EPA onsite coordinators at the annual conferences. By 2007, at the 9th annual conference in Reno, the name SORA and Captains of Industry were in common usage.

The two now-recognized groups had collaborated even before the first conference and had produced white papers, which were used by EPA in the 1999 voluntary management guidelines. In 2008, a steering committee was created to develop SORA's official bylaws, which were ratified by the membership at the 2009 Atlanta annual conference. Current bylaws are available on the SORA website at www.soraus.org. As of 2016, SORA has hosted 19 annual conferences held in 13 different states. Five of these were partnered with NEHA and two with NOWRA.

SORA has a Board of Directors (Board) that participates in monthly teleconferences, maintains three standing committees (Strategic Planning, Membership and Conference/Business Meeting Planning) and four ad hoc (Data, Sustainability, Retirees and COI) committees with regular teleconferences. SORA also maintains a private listserv for regulators and COIs with over 200 contributors, and participates as an original founding member of EPA's 2005 Partnership for Decentralized Wastewater Technology Memorandum of Understanding (MOU Partners). The MOU Partners now comprised of 18 membership organizations.

SORA's members include government regulators of decentralized and onsite wastewater systems from all 50 states, U.S. Territories, Native American Tribes, and Canadian Provinces. Affiliate membership is open to organizations and federal agencies having a vested interest in SORA's mission. Through the Captains of Industry (COI), membership is also available to private companies who offer products and services for decentralized and onsite wastewater treatment. In 2018, membership is being expanded to include regulators in local, county and regional districts.

SORA serves as dialogue facilitator between regulators and among regulators, training and testing facilities, and with product developers, manufacturers, distributors and service providers. The goal is

to convert quality research, existing information, and technology into state and local regulatory programs using solutions that protect public health and the environment. By basing regulations in science and shared experiences, the decentralized wastewater industry will be considered a viable and sustainable option for long-term wastewater infrastructure solutions.

Major products and services

- **Conference/Business Meeting** – Each year SORA conducts its State Onsite Regulators Association conference/business meeting, bringing together environmental health professionals focused on onsite wastewater with industry professionals (manufacturers) to share ideas, share information on new technologies, and to benefit from educational sessions on topics of interest. SORA conducts its annual business meeting where new officers are elected, bylaws are updated, and committees report on progress during the past year and direction for the coming year. Previous SORA events have been stand-alone events as well as partnered events with other organizations like the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), the National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA), the National Association of Waste Transporters (NAWT), as well as regional and state associations/organizations.
- **Listservs** – In the early stages of SORA's formation, state regulators saw a need for onsite regulators in all the states to access a method of communication among themselves. This need was met with the creation of the first SORA listserv. The success of that first listserv has transitioned into two main listservs maintained by SORA for the benefit of the organization. These listservs and their intent/benefit are as follows:
 - ***SORA*** – (Created in 2005, revised in 2017) Listserv members are onsite regulators from member states, tribes, and Canadian provinces. This listserv is a restricted access listserv developed to allow open communication between regulators. Regulators frequently use this listserv to determine how various regulatory issues are handled in the other states, aiding them to rectify issues they are facing and/or update their statutes or regulations.
 - ***SORA Board (formally Steering)*** – (Created in 2008, revised in 2017) Listserv members are members of the SORA Board. This listserv allows facilitation of the monthly SORA Board meetings as well as communication among Board members between scheduled calls when issues arise that need immediate attention.
 - ***COI*** – (Created in 2011, updated in 2017) Listserv members are members of the Captains of Industry. These are onsite wastewater manufacturers who see the value of working with state regulators to advance the field of onsite and decentralized wastewater treatment and disposal. Members are voted in by the SORA Board of Directors. This

listserv enables manufacturers to easily communicate among themselves regarding current issues and topics.

- **Website** – The SORA website was originally managed by NSFC. In 2017 SORA developed a new website which contains many new features. Visitors of the new website (www.soraus.org) will find information about SORA the organization as well as membership information and forms, event information, and event sponsors.

Major Accomplishments

- **Publications / White Papers:**
 - *Decentralized Onsite Wastewater Technologies – Sustainable Green Infrastructure Protects Source Water Quality and Public Health*
 - *Decentralized/Onsite Wastewater Projects and Programs – Opportunities for Funding*
 - *Onsite Wastewater Nutrient Regulation Survey Report*
- **19 consecutive SORA Conferences/Business Meetings**
- **Charter member of the US EPA Decentralized MOU**
- **Key collaborator on the US EPA State Voluntary Guidelines for Onsite and Decentralized Wastewater Treatment and Management**

Vision Statement

SORA is the leader and primary resource for regulators and onsite professionals in North America.

Mission Statement

SORA's purpose is to protect public health and the environment by leading the onsite wastewater regulatory industry. SORA will accomplish this by:

- Facilitation of an ongoing national dialogue between onsite regulators and among regulators and the onsite industry
- Working with state and local regulators to incorporate use of proven technologies into their current regulations
- Integration of science-based research and information into regulatory programs, i.e., regulation development, policies and/or practices

Values Statements

Leadership Active promotion of the onsite industry and engagement with all stakeholders

Collaboration Work collaboratively to implement best practices and build connections between regulators and other stakeholders in the onsite industry

Communication Strong internal and external communication with all stakeholders

Sustainability Environmental and public health protection and economic sustainability for current and future generations

Economic Viability Financial stability and utilization of effective and efficient business practices

Knowledge Supporting sound science and research and encourage incorporation of this knowledge into decision making and regulatory frameworks.

Customer Service Provide excellent customer service to SORA members and stakeholders

Professionalism Presentation of credentials, training and abilities with integrity and pride

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities Threats (SWOT) Analysis of SORA

Strengths:

- Broad representation across the country
- Strong expertise in onsite industry
- Partnerships with international, national and state organizations
- Annual Conference/Business Meeting
- Listservs/communication
- Established inter-relationships amongst and between onsite regulators and COI
- Productive workgroups
- An active dialogue with ability to come to consensus
- Strong volunteer support

Weaknesses:

- Small pool of active volunteers
- Lack of representation from member states
- Lack of regulator and COI membership participation
- Lack of advocacy from membership to promote SORA
- A lack of recognition as state onsite leaders
- Sustainability due to limited funding resources
- Vulnerability as a new association
- Limited expertise in association management

Opportunities:

- Actively promote communications with decision and policy makers
- Encourage and identify new funding opportunities
- Promote effective onsite wastewater management approaches which can include Responsible Management Entities (RME) or other applicable management mechanisms
- Foster partnerships within the water resource, watershed and onsite wastewater communities
- Expand our international partnerships
- Develop a greater voice in the national planning process

- Provider of technical assistance to the onsite wastewater and watershed communities
- Maintain and increase participation using the listserv as a resource to gather and share information
- Create online profile utilizing available social media
- Expand data sharing for water resource, watershed and onsite wastewater communities

Threats:

- Lack of funding for the organization
- Lack of funding within onsite wastewater industry
- Lack of sustainability due to low membership involvement
- Lack of understanding of the roles and limitations of a regulatory structure
- Lack of an understanding of the role of onsite wastewater within the national wastewater infrastructure industry
- Lack of understanding of onsite wastewater by external decision and policy makers
- Lack of scope of decentralized management at the national scale
- Lack of appropriate funding and regulatory staffing at the federal, state and local level
- Deregulation of onsite
- Outdated regulations and complicated regulatory-change processes make it difficult to keep up with new technologies

Trends

We identified the following trends and how they might affect our organization:

Political trends:

- Limited government involvement and resources which identify onsite wastewater as a viable and sustainable treatment option
- Limited awareness of the importance of decentralized options in the U.S. legislature
- Presidential focus on green infrastructure and infrastructure funding may be beneficial for decentralized options
- Federal focus on centralized systems may be changing with the expansions in the CWSRF allowing for stormwater and decentralized project qualifications

Economic trends:

- Decreased federal support for decentralized wastewater treatment when considered 25% of national infrastructure
- State level budget cuts to permitting programs
- Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) are difficult to access for smaller projects and lack state and local advocacy
- Funding focus on stormwater in many states
- Increased development utilizing onsite systems

Societal trends:

- Onsite wastewater is often forgotten until a problem occurs
- People served by onsite maintain an “out of sight, out of mind” mentality
- An increase in urban sprawl increases a need to regulate more onsite/decentralized wastewater systems

- Public apathy
- Mentality that “big pipe” is the only solution
- Lack of infrastructure for communities that are changing from seasonal to year-round
- Lack of education of the general public
- Greater appreciation for treated effluent beyond wastewater dispersal for onsite systems
- Green development is on the rise
- Property values are dependent on onsite infrastructure

Management trends:

- Development of comprehensive watershed management plans that includes onsite
- Utilizing onsite strategies for nutrient reduction
- Exploring use of RMEs to establish successful and sustainable management models
- Exploring ways to track and locate onsite systems via GIS or national database

Technological trends:

- Lack of funding for research
- Regionalization of technological standards (Data Sharing)
- Technology use is increasing nationwide
- Water reuse technologies increasing due to public demand and drought
- Industry is reacting to regulatory changes (which are driven by social trends)

Goals, Strategies and Objectives

The following tables outline four major goals of SORA, along with specific strategies, objectives and timeframes. These tables will drive activities within SORA for the next four years and will be utilized and updated continuously.

Goal #1	Establish SORA as a primary resource for onsite regulation and policy development within the onsite industry
#	Strategies and Objectives (specific-What, who, when)
A	SORA Board of Directors create and maintain a standing policy committee 2018-2019
1	Once SORA membership has been established, the board shall create the standing Policy Committee (2018)
2	Current board member to chair the committee which shall be comprised of multiple full members and COIs (2018)
3	Review and update policy manual (2019)
B	SORA Policy Committee continuously monitors national policy needs 2018-2019
1	Identify policy decisions, trends and information that impact the onsite industry and report findings to SORA Board
2	Identify partnership opportunities
3	Create and disseminate policy recommendations
C	SORA committees compile, review, author and disseminate technical information 2020-2025
1	White papers
2	Surveys (might be used early on to identify topics)
3	

Goal #2	Further Development of our robust communications and support network
#	Strategies and Objectives (specific-What, who, when)
A	SORA Board of Directors to establish and maintain a standing Communications Committee 2017-2019
1	Website development and roll out 2017
2	Develop and distribute a Quarterly Newsletter 2019 (continue email updates)
2a	Define newsletter (2018) and website content (2017) - gather feedback- Board Decision 2017-2018
3	Maintain and enhance List-Serve and Archive 2017-2018
3a	New list-serve up and running 2017
3b	Archive feature to be explained to users-tutorial 2018
4	Improve communications with COI (ie. website, newsletter) 2017-2018
4a	Appoint a board member be an outreach person to COI (quarterly minimum) 2018
B	Actively engage current members in SORA; committee involvement 2018
1	Regional board members reach out to state members 2018
2	Regional Meetings 2018
3	Increase SORA member participation in developing meaningful partnerships with stakeholder organizations (include counties and municipalities)- Engage board members to reach out 2018

Goal #3	Create and implement a proactive and responsive sustainability plan
#	Strategies and Objectives (specific-What, who, when)
A	Update policy manual 2017 - 2018
1	Ongoing 2017
2	Add a policy on recognizing outstanding members 2018
3	Update dues policy and treasurer's policy 2017
B	Develop a business plan 2017-2020
1	Identify revenue and expenditures 2017
2	Draft a formal business plan 2018-2020
C	Identify and pursue additional revenue sources (i.e. membership fees, educational seminars etc.) 2017-2020
1	Define COI benefits and annual dues 2017
2	COI sponsorship of events- meet and greet 2017
3	Compile and maintain list of revenue sources 2018
4	Educational seminars-webinars – Identify ways to attract presenters 2020
D	Pursue grant funding /Communicate and coordinate with funding sources to support SORA (creative solutions) 2018-2019
1	Research/Write a grant proposal 2018-2019
E	Develop and maintain an inventory of members 2017
1	Maintain up to date spreadsheet 2017
2	Identify regional members who are leaders 2017

Goal #4	Strengthen our relationships with national and state organizations
#	Strategies and Objectives (specific; what, who, when)
A	Providing onsite expertise to EPA MOU partners and other stakeholders 2017
1	SORA will continue to be a part of EPA MOU 2017
2	SORA participate in EPA MOU partners call and comply with requirements of the MOU agreement. 2017
3	Encourage regular EPA regional and individual state meetings with local stakeholder groups 2017
B	Recognize state-wide and SORA leadership in onsite industry 2017
1	Award at NOWRA/SORA 2017
C	Identify all current partnerships and potential partnerships 2017-2020
1	EPA, EPA-MOU Partners, NEHA, NAWT and NOWRA 2017-2018
2	Identify one member to communicate with each partner 2017-2020
D	Improve communications with inter-state agencies 2017-2018
1	List-serve- encourage multiple state agencies 2017-2018
E	Expand network opportunities (ie. Universities, reuse, green industry, stormwater, water quality, aquifer protection) 2020
1	Identify what Universities have decentralized programs 2020
2	Identify reuse organizations to promote reuse in onsite industry 2020
F	Continue Annual Conference Partnership 2017-2025
1	Eventual SORA day (2019)
2	Conference planning committee (2017)
3	Offer free conference to each member state (2025 or sooner)

Communicating the Plan

This plan will be widely communicated including through use of the following approaches:

1. Upon approval by the SORA Board of Directors, a PDF of the complete plan will be distributed on the SORA Board listserv, Regulators listserv, and COI listserv.
2. A PDF of the approved plan will be posted on the SORA website.
3. The Mission, Vision, and Values statements will be excerpted and placed prominently on the SORA web page.
4. SORA will provide a page link to SORA Partner organizations to link to the SORA Mission, Vision, and Values.
5. The Mission, Vision, and Values statements will be used in promotional publications.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Plan

Implementation of this plan is a function of the commitment of the members through various committees to meet the objective contained in this Strategic Plan. The strategic plan is a road map to our activities and the goals, strategies and objectives with target dates will inform the organization's focus.

Key Questions While Monitoring Implementation of the Plan

1. What will the process of communication be between Board and committees indicating work process, flow, accomplishments, modification, and future direction?
2. Are the activities conducted under this strategic plan consistent with the strategic vision, mission, and values articulated in the plan?
3. Are we achieving our strategic objectives?

Reporting Status of Implementation

Committees will report on progress bi-monthly to the Board.

Procedure for Changing the Plan

The Strategic Planning Committee will update this plan with recommendation from the Board.