

Strategic Planning Session

Canadian Turfgrass Research Foundation

On Thursday, January 6th, the Board of the Canadian Turfgrass Research Foundation (CTRF) participated in a one day strategic planning session. The session was attended by the following individuals and facilitated by Carolyn Kearns of The Randolph Group.

Participants

Board Members

George R. McLeod, Chair
Debbie Amirault
Rick Brown
Don Campbell
Greg Holden
Ken Mackenzie (representing Daryl Asher)
John Mills
Peter Sorokovsky (representing Jerry Rousseau)
R. Marie Thorne
Kerry Watkins

Regrets:

Corrie Almack
Teri Yamada

Others

Ken Cousineau, *Executive Secretary, CTRF*
Dave Kuypers, *President, Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation (OTRF)*

These notes summarize the presentations and key discussion points.

INTRODUCTION

Chair George McLeod began by thanking Ken and his staff from the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA) for their support to the CTRF during the past nine months. He also thanked the Board members and their designates for making time to attend the strategy session.

George explained the situation with Golf Canada in terms of its role supporting the CTRF. There is a commitment to provide \$25,000 for 2011 but a decision not to have Board representation. On a personal level, George is very committed to both the CTRF and supporting turfgrass research. However, given the other priorities facing Golf Canada at this time and the change in focus given its recent strategy and reorganization, the support for the CTRF is being reduced. He thanked the group for their support to him during his time as Chair and their professional relationships with him.

Carolyn Kearns asked individuals to introduce themselves, their positions and experience with the CTRF Board.

Objectives

The session was designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To review the current situation and identify key challenges
2. To discuss organizational options
3. To agree on a preferred model for the functions provided by CTRF
4. To enjoy ourselves and build relationships

Deliverables

1. Agreement on the current environment and key issues to be addressed
2. A framework for moving forward
3. Additional work required

Hopefully by the end of the session, Board members will have agreed on a high level direction for the CTRF moving forward and be in a position to continue to discuss the specific actions to be undertaken during the next few months.

Guidelines for Participation

As a first step, the group agreed to respect the following principles:

- Be honest, i.e., say what you really think because there is no right answer
- Respect each other's views and opinions regardless of your background or experience
- Encourage everyone to participate because the success of the session depends on maximum input from all participants
- Work to achieve consensus to the extent that we can reach general agreement on key points
- Put all the "dead moose" on the table and don't keep anything from the group

Expectations for the Session

Before continuing, individuals were asked to provide their expectations in terms of what the session needed to achieve to be successful from their perspective. The discussion included some of the comments provided by Board members during the telephone discussions conducted by the facilitator in advance of the session. They are shown following and are not in any priority.

Expectations

To be successful, this strategic planning session must...

- Agree on how to move forward to proactively advance turf research
- Decide on the dollars required and sources of funds
- Determine an equitable and fair way to fund research
- Discuss the type of research to be funded – pure and applied
- Open lines of communication between national and provincial interests
- Buy in from the Board on the outcomes
- A position on which to build a platform for the future

CTRF: AN OVERVIEW

Ken Cousineau, the Executive Secretary of the CTRF presented information on its history, mandate and financial activities.

Historical Perspective

The CTRF originated in 1981 and involved the Royal Canadian Golf Association (RCGA) and some provincial organizations. In 1992, it was incorporated and became a comprehensive organization representing turfgrass research interests across Canada. It was granted charitable status at the time of its incorporation.

The mandate of the CTRF is to raise monies to support research to address questions and issues facing the Canadian turfgrass industry. It was anticipated that the work of the CTRF would result in reduced maintenance requests and enhance the environment.

The bylaws provide for a 12 person Board of Directors comprised of two representatives from the RCGA (now Golf Canada), two from the CGSA, one industry representative and one representative from each of the seven regional associations. The Board Chair is elected by the Board and is to be either from Golf Canada or the CGSA. Historically the Chair has alternated between these two organizations and has sat for a one year term.

In addition, the bylaws provide for a four person Executive Committee comprised of the Chair, one representative from Golf Canada or the CGSA, and two others. There is also a Research Steering Committee established to be an arms length group to provide independent evaluation of research proposals. It is chaired by the Executive Secretary of the CTRF and has one Board member as well as others knowledgeable about turfgrass research.

Audited reports indicate that from 1993 to 2010, approximately \$1,850,000 was contributed to turfgrass research through the CTRF. An additional \$800,000 was provided through matching government and industry grants. Approximately \$510,000 of this total \$2.6 million was committed during the past five years.

Current Status

At present, the operation of the CTRF is somewhat in hiatus. There is no Executive Committee and the Research Steering Committee is inactive. No requests for research proposals have been sent out for the past 18 months. There is no dedicated staff and administrative and support services have been provided free of charge by the CGSA for the past nine months.

Golf Canada has indicated that it no longer wishes to have representation on the CTRF Board of Directors and has reduced its financial contribution for 2011. At present, the CTRF has a bank balance of \$525,896 and contribution notices of \$67,000 for 2010. Research commitments for each of 2011 and 2012 total \$40,000 and involve two projects (one for \$25,000 involving the University of Guelph and the other for \$15,000 with the Nova Scotia Agricultural College).

The discussion of the historical perspective and current status of the CTRF further emphasized the importance of having the strategy session to allow the Board to determine how best to move forward.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

Strategic visioning begins with an environmental scan, which includes an identification of strengths

and weaknesses, and of opportunities and threats. Once this work is completed, it can be used to develop the key strategic issues to be addressed.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths and weaknesses are those factors within the direct control of the CTRF. The strengths reflect positive conditions and initiatives, and weaknesses are those areas where the CTRF could be doing a better job. The group discussion led to the identification of a number of strengths and weaknesses. They are listed following and do not reflect any priority or consensus. These comments build on the information obtained from the telephone discussions with Board members in advance of the session.

Strengths

What we value about the CTRF...

- The CTRF as an organization provides a national presence and exposure for turfgrass research
- The CTRF allows for a focus on Canadian issues and research needs
- The CTRF has funded some excellent research with a good balance of conventional and non-conventional research
- The Research Steering Committee has provided independent professional advice on the merits of research proposals that are submitted for funding
- Board and researchers are committed and passionate about turf grass research
- The CTRF has a good reputation with funding agencies (federal and provincial governments in particular)
- The charitable status of the CTRF is attractive for private sector fundraising
- Communication has improved now that the CGSA is providing administrative support
- The CTRF is financially healthy

Weaknesses

Our concerns and problems with the CTRF...

- Poor communications including information available on status of research projects, material available on the web site, etc.
- Funding available is insufficient for a national research organization (approximately \$68,000)
- Underdeveloped fundraising initiatives by CTRF (not actively soliciting donations from private sector and other organizations that might have an interest in turf grass research)
- Current focus on the CTRF is on golf but turfgrass has a broader application (e.g. landscape, sod, parks and recreation, etc.)
- Reduced support by Golf Canada – no longer wish to sit on the Board and reduced financial contribution
- Financial formula for funding by regional associations not working as fairly as it could/should
- Underdeveloped Board governance and operations (e.g. only have one face-to-face meeting a year and it is scheduled between another organization's meeting; members are all volunteers with other priorities)
- Lack of dedicated CTRF staff to support the Board and work of the organization (currently the CGSA provides 3-4 days of free support)

Opportunities and Threats

Opportunities and threats are different than strengths and weaknesses. They reflect trends and external factors that are beyond the control of the CTRF. However, opportunities and threats could have a positive or negative impact on the organization and must be considered as part of a strategic planning discussion. The group identified a number of opportunities and threats. They are listed following and again, do not necessarily reflect consensus and are not in any priority.

Opportunities

What are the trends suggesting as future opportunities for the CTRF?

- There continues to be an interest in having national and international research undertaken on turfgrass and the CTRF is well positioned to participate in these discussions
- There is growing attention and focus on the environment, sustainability and other areas that support turfgrass research
- Changing government legislation with respect to water, pesticides, etc. supports the need for provide grant monies to research impact of new policies
- National focus on improved human health supports broader mandate for CTRF in areas related to turfgrass as it applies to parks and recreation and members of the public

Threats

What are the trends suggesting in terms of potential negative impacts for the CTRF?

- Geography and climate across the country makes it challenging to have agreement on national turfgrass research projects
- Appears to be a lack of turfgrass researchers in Canada, which is perpetuated by a lack of research dollars available
- Decline in golf club memberships and increase in pay as you play golfers has a negative impact on the ability of Golf Canada to fund the CTRF and turfgrass at previous levels
- Difficult to convince the end user on the value of contributing to turfgrass research
- Government legislation (e.g. water conservation, pesticides, etc.) giving a negative image that is reducing the interest in funding turfgrass research
- Trend towards reduced focus and funding for turfgrass research nationally and internationally

Key Strategic Issues

An environmental scan also includes the identification of key strategic issues. The CTRF deals with a number of issues ranging from operational concerns through to high level concerns involving advocating for change. Strategic issues are defined as those areas of greatest importance to the future success of the CTRF and ones where it has a high capacity to influence the changes required.

The discussion was based on the overall issue of questioning what the golf industry will look like in three to five years. The key issues identified and discussed are listed following and are not in any priority.

- What should be the CTRF mandate and focus ?
 - As now stated which includes all applications for turf grass or as practiced, which is felt to be exclusively golf related
 - Should the target communications be to industries and organizations or the end user (i.e. the golfer)?
- How can we increase the CTRF capacity to raise research funds?
- What is the value proposition of the CTRF and why should it be supported?
- What is the appropriate balance of applied and pure research?
 - Realizing that pure research takes longer to show demonstrable benefits
- What is the future role of Golf Canada with respect to supporting the CTRF?
- How should the CTRF provide support for administration, research, marketing, communication and Board governance

DESIRED OUTCOMES

The discussion of the current situation was followed by suggestions of what success will look like if the CTRF achieves the positive results expected by members of the Board of Directors. These desired outcomes are high level, qualitative statements describing a future end state. They are listed following and are not in any priority.

- Strongest turfgrass research organization in the country
- CTRF sought out to help solve turf grass issues
- Well funded and supported
- Research dollars of partners are leveraged by the CTRF
- Research projects integrated with and supported by regional associations
- Research that provides scientific information and facts to address the views of special interest groups
- Research that has a healthy balance between pure and applied research
- Clear and transparent accountability of the CTRF roles, responsibilities and activities
- Excellent communication of CTRF activities

During the discussion of desired outcomes, the group emphasized that the CTRF must be supported by all regional associations. It cannot exist simply as just another turfgrass research organization. In particular, there is a need to have a strong partnership with the OTRF. Specifically, the OTRF needs to see that the CTRF is able to enhance and advance the national turfgrass research agenda and provide a vehicle for national awareness and fundraising for research projects. This perspective also requires that the regional associations embrace a new way of thinking about the research undertaken by the CTRF. They must play an active role in identifying the turfgrass issues to be addressed. As well, financial contributions need to be determined based on the overall value of the research being funded rather than the more traditional and parochial approach of evaluating the dollars contributed relative to the research dollars spent in the region.

OPERATIONALIZING THE DESIRED OUTCOMES

The group reviewed future organizational models that would address the current situation and key strategic issues, while at the same time supporting the desired outcomes. It was agreed that the future organizational model should reflect the following important objectives:

- | | |
|---|--|
| Strategic Alignment/Effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports achievement desired outcomes and improves relevance/effectiveness of activities |
| Accountability – Clarity of Role and Mandate | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarifies who is responsible for what and ensures accountability |
| Efficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maximizes impact of resources invested |
| Stakeholder/Partner Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enables effective interaction and collaboration with internal and external partners and stakeholders |
| Flexibility and Innovation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports ability to adapt to change, address emerging |

demands and be innovative

Service Excellence

- Enables excellent services to clients

Risk Management

- Enables risk to be managed

Resources

- Recognizes budget and staff capabilities and constraints

A number of organizational options were considered including the following:

A. Continuing with the current CTRF organization but modifying it to strengthen its ability to deliver on its mandate.

B. Disbanding the CTRF and having all turfgrass research undertaken by the regional associations. The associations could continue to meet, share information and if appropriate work together on research projects of common interest.

C. Transferring the mandate and responsibilities of the CTRF to one of the regional associations. In addition to continuing to have a regional role, one of the associations could be given the additional role of carrying out the CTRF mandate and responsibilities.

D. Creating a new organization to assume responsibility for turfgrass research at a national level. This organizational option is based on the assumption that the current CTRF is not sustainable in its current form and that a new organization with a new mandate and Board is required.

The discussion of these organizational options concluded that the preferred model is Option A, a modification to the current CTRF organization. It was felt that the mandate continues to be relevant and that there is value in revisiting how the CTRF is structured so that it can effectively undertake its role and deliver its responsibilities.

MOVING FORWARD: A REFRESHED CTRF

Members of the Board discussed how best to operationalize the work of the CTRF to achieve the desired results identified. The discussion was organized into four main areas – governance, mandate, funding and staffing. The questions used to guide the discussion are shown following:

- Governance**
 - How will the organization be structured?
 - To whom will it be accountable?
 - How will membership be determined?
- Mandate**
 - What will be the overall purpose of the organization?
 - What key areas of activity will it undertake?
 - Who will it interact with (partners) to carry out its responsibilities?
- Funding**
 - What type of budget is reasonable to carry out the mandate of the organization?
 - What are the likely sources of funding?
 - How should fundraising be undertaken?

- Should the organization have dedicated staff?
- If so, what are the ideal skill sets required?
- How should staff be compensated?

Staffing

Overall, it was agreed that the CTRF needs to demonstrate leadership at the Board level with support from staff, to execute its mandate successfully.

A summary of the discussion and key decisions follows.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Governance | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Align the CTRF Board to represent the interests of the turfgrass community 2. In the interim that the current composition of the Board of Directors continue with the exception that Golf Canada representation be reduced from two positions to one position on the Board 3. That the constitution and by-laws of the Foundation be amended to increase the size of the Board of Directors to 14 including one representative from each of the provincially based turf research organizations across Canada (WCTA, Alberta TRF, STA, MGSA, OTRF, QTRF, Atlantic TRF), one Golf Canada representative, two CGSA representatives and one industry representative selected by the Board of Directors. The appointment of the other three representatives is to be left to the discretion of the Board of Directors 4. Organizations represented on the Board should contribute financially to the CTRF 5. Board members to report back to their respective organizations on the work of the CTRF |
| Mandate | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue with the same mandate focused on funding turf grass research including golf courses and other applications 2. Strengthen relationships with all regional associations 3. Strengthen affiliations with national and international bodies undertaking turfgrass research 4. Broaden turfgrass research projects beyond those focused on golf 5. Recognize that fundraising is a key activity required to deliver the CTRF mandate successfully 6. Improve communications of CTRF activities and results through publications, newsletter, up-to-date web page, etc. |
| Funding | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a national fundraising strategy with an objective to increase fundraising 2. Pursue new alternative revenue sources 3. Develop a framework to allow the CTRF to achieve the level of research support required to drive turfgrass research in Canada |
| Staffing | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue in the short term with administrative support provided by the CGSA to provide administrative and management support including invoicing, accounting and book keeping, project management of the two research projects, press releases, etc. (up to a maximum of 5 days a week) 2. Develop a plan to provide dedicated administrative support to enable the CTRF to deliver its mandate successfully |

It was agreed that these actions are ambitious but necessary if the CTRF is to move forward in the manner envisaged by the Board.

SUMMARY COMMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

Before adjourning, individuals provided feedback about the session in terms of what worked well and areas for improvement. Comments are provided following and are not listed in any priority.

Evaluation

What I liked...

- Confirmation of the commitment to the mandate of the CTRF, its value and wanting it to grow
- Good opportunity for Board members to talk about strategic issues important to the future of the CTRF
- Improved understanding of the realities facing the CTRF
- Recognition of the importance of the regional associations to work together and with the CTRF
- Useful to have an external facilitator to keep the discussion focused and to move through the meeting agenda
- Discussion was candid and honest

What could be improved next time...

- Consider creating a “parking lot” for issues that require further discussion
- Reinforce the need for Board members to recognize their role in terms of supporting the CTRF as an independent organization

It also was suggested that the Board needs to meet more frequently.

The next steps in the process are as follows: