

# Mining the Gems: Findings from the SGS Priorities Survey

## Report on Service Priorities



## Executive Summary

In 2018, the Survey Subcommittee of the SGS Development Committee disseminated a survey to current and previous members and associated stakeholders. The goal was to obtain a consensus on what respondents felt were the most important issues faced by older adults in the South, in order to establish a regional agenda for SGS with particular focus on research and service priorities. This summary details findings from the service priorities component of the survey. The full report is available upon request. It is important to note that the survey participants included only individuals who are or were associated with SGS. Their responses must be interpreted within the context of their background, experiences, and understanding of the needs of older adults in the South.

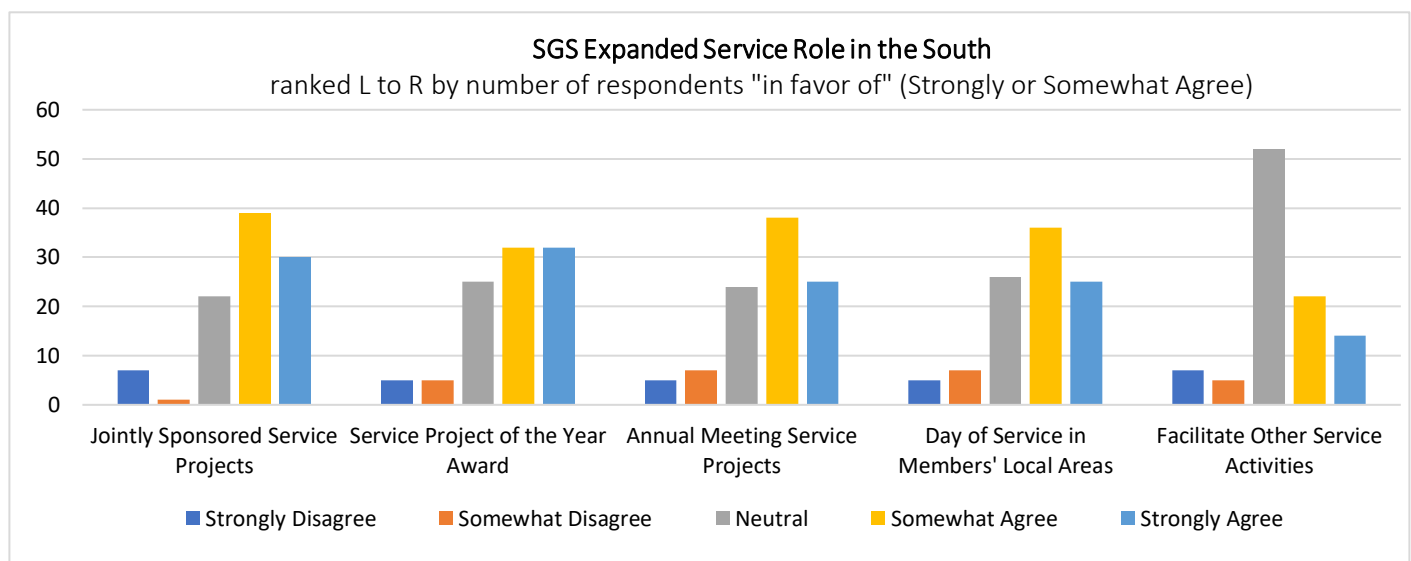
### Respondent Details

Surveys were emailed to approximately 850 individuals. A total of 108 individuals responded (13% response rate), but not all respondents answered all the questions. Most respondents were current SGS members (65.4%), with the majority self-identifying as academics/researchers (37.9%), retired individuals (20.3%), practitioners (16.6%), other (14.8%), or students (6.4%).

### Expanded SGS Service Role

Approximately 60% of the 99 individuals who responded to this question were in favor of ("Strongly Agree" or "Somewhat Agree") SGS expanding its service role in the following ways:

- **69%** - SGS should jointly sponsor service projects with local or state aging organizations
- **64%** - SGS should sponsor an annual "Service Project of the Year" award
- **63%** - SGS should have a service project at each annual meeting
- **61%** - SGS should have a day of service when individual members in regional locations get together to perform service activities in their local communities



## SGS Webinar Interest

Forty-three respondents (40%) indicated interest, while 63 respondents (58%) were not interested in SGS-produced webinars for CEU credits. Webinar topics of interest mentioned by respondents represented 25 different subject areas, with those mentioned three or more times noted below.

Subject Areas of Interest for SGS Webinars	Number of Responses
Health Care (e.g., chronic disease, reimbursement, barriers, disparities)	6
Alzheimer's / Dementia	4
Research Topics (e.g. best practices, methods, conceptual frameworks, grant writing)	4
Rural Aging	4
Housing	3
Policy & Advocacy Activities	3

## SGS Member Benefits

Eighty-five respondents (79%) were satisfied with current SGS membership benefits. Only 16 respondents (15%) expressed interest in additional benefits, some of which are noted in the Recommendations section of this report.

Sixty-four of 98 respondents (65.3%) indicated that their SGS membership was current. Respondents who were not current members or had not renewed their memberships were asked reason(s) for not doing so. The two most common reasons for lapsed membership were overall reduction of membership to professional organizations, and cost of membership. There were 20 "Other" responses, with 10 clarifying comments included. The only common theme (n=3) was lack of familiarity with SGS as an organization. All other responses varied.

Reasons for not Renewing SGS Membership	Number of Responses
My career path is changing from aging	1
SGS membership benefits were not meeting my needs	2
Membership cost	6
I am reducing my memberships to professional organizations	7
Other	20

## Reasons for SGS Membership

Ninety-two respondents shared their reasons for being SGS members. Of these, 28 responses were from non-members and were excluded from the tabulation. Themes emerging from the remaining 64 responses, included:

- 1) Friendly professional community, student mentoring, collegiality, and networking opportunities.
- 2) SGS's focus on regional issues of aging in the South.
- 3) Education via the annual conference and an applied gerontological focus bridging academics to practitioners.
- 4) A connection to SGS's mission and goals.

# Recommendations

On the basis of priorities identified from the survey and our considered deliberations, the Survey Subcommittee makes the following recommendations with regard to SGS service priorities. We recommend that SGS address these priorities through research funding, policy initiatives, advocacy, and education.

## 1. SGS Service Activities

While survey respondents were generally in favor of an expanded service role for SGS in the South, there are some complicating issues that may make a centrally-coordinated service initiative during the annual conference challenging or impractical. Below are options for consideration.

- A. If it is decided to pursue a service project during the annual SGS regional conference, the following considerations may increase the likelihood of success.
  - 1) Choosing an appropriate project in sufficient time for preparation before the conference.
  - 2) Obtaining member assurance of participation in sufficient numbers before committing to an SGS group service project.
  - 3) Keeping the project scope within the established meeting days in order to avoid adding to members' travel time and costs.
  - 4) Determining how to schedule a meaningful amount of time to a service project without taking time away from conference participation.
- B. As an alternative, SGS could designate an "SGS Service Week" during which members would be encouraged to participate in a day of service in their local communities.
  - 1) Member activities could be reported for inclusion in an "SGS Volunteer Service Report" to be published for the membership.
  - 2) These activities could be included in a press release and distributed to local media by members, to promote the work of SGS at the local and regional levels.
  - 3) Presentations about member service activities could be made at the annual conference in a forum that would facilitate comparison, idea sharing, and replication of initiatives.

## 2. SGS Webinars

Since webinars and CEUs are available from other resources, it might not make sense for SGS administration to focus time and effort on webinar production, given that only 43 respondents (39.8%) indicated interest, and the suggested subject areas were very diverse.

- A. Webinars and CEU accreditation decisions/recommendations should become the responsibility of the proposed SGS Education Committee.
- B. Prior to formation of an Education Committee, SGS members may facilitate webinar production as individual initiatives, in coordination with the SGS Executive Director, including pursuing any credentials needed for CEU credits.

**UPDATE:** While survey responses indicated marginal levels of interest in webinars, member-produced webinars hosted by SGS in fall 2019 proved to be successful based on number of attendees, new and renewed memberships, and revenue generated. This counters the initial Survey Subcommittee recommendation and supports a reevaluation of the data.

The subcommittee now concludes that, given SGS's improved software capabilities and provided that desirable topics and presenters are featured, webinars may be a successful way for SGS to educate, add members, enhance member benefits, and provide an additional revenue source. (The other two recommendations regarding webinars remain as originally stated in this document.)

### 3. SGS Member Benefits

While it appears that no major changes or additions to member benefits are currently needed, the following suggestions mentioned by multiple respondents should be considered:

- A. Setting up an attendee match program for the annual conference, connecting first-time and/or student attendees with existing SGS member(s) for networking and mentoring, including contact prior to the conference.
- B. Creating an online directory of relevant state organizations within the 14-state SGS region (e.g. state gerontological associations, State Units on Aging, Area Agencies on Aging, etc.).
- C. Creating an area on the SGS website for member forums.

### 4. Future Surveys

SGS should continue to monitor constituent attitudes regarding service priorities and member benefits at least every three years, as part of a recurring research and service priorities survey. More refined levels of respondent detail should be considered in the framing and interpretation of future survey questions, to facilitate a more actionable cross-tabulation of answers.

