



ENTOMOLOGICAL  
SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
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To: ESA Membership  
From: ESA Governing Board  
Date: February 16, 2023  
Re: Branch Empowerment: A report from the Governing Board to Branch Leadership and the Society's members

As you likely recall, following several years of overall declining finances for the ESA Branches, in early 2022 the Governing Board released a [report](#) to the membership entitled “**10 Ideas for the ESA Branches**”. This report was the result of a year and a half long project to review the ESA Branch structure (which had not changed much since the Society's earliest days). This became known colloquially as the BEP. The idea we explored was that of Branch empowerment – seeking cost-efficient ways to maximize the regional delivery of products and services to ESA members.

Ten ideas were presented as discussion-starters, not necessarily as solutions in and of themselves. As part of the report, an online membership survey was developed to gauge member opinions on the Branches. The survey was only modestly completed by members, but many good ideas were shared, and every response was presented to and read by the full Board.

This information was supplemented with town halls hosted at each of the 2022 Branch meetings which were designed to provide a forum for members to speak directly with leadership (2022 President, Jessica Ware, and ESA's Executive Director, Chirs Stelzig), to hear directly from members what they liked about their Branches, and what they would seek to change.

After a year of listening and learning, the Board wanted to follow up with the Branch leaders and members to discuss the outcomes of the BEP. The entire intent of the BEP was to re-examine the status quo and make changes where it made sense. We think that this has been successful, though perhaps not in the same way that we first envisioned the change would be made.

In the spirit of modeling the end of the BEP project with the way it was started, we now present this report: “10 Ideas FROM the ESA Branches”.

## #1: Branch finances are improving.

The January 2022 report included a table (duplicated herein) which showed that when taken as

ESA Branch Net Profit/Loss (Without Program Enhancement Funding)								
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Eastern	(5,366)	(1,490)	5,938	(11,875)	(26,877)	(21,024)	9,419	(51,275)
Southeastern	(3,813)	13,584	(25,587)	(27,454)	(3,077)	(2,206)	77	(48,476)
North Central	(2,593)	2,121	(42,247)	(12,816)	(15,913)	(9,778)	3,724	(77,502)
Southwestern	(4,841)	4,449	280	(6,873)	(8,890)	5,452	5,355	(5,068)
Pacific	7,624	4,227	(1,341)	(9,612)	(24,258)	(5,688)	22,160	(6,888)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(8,989)</b>	<b>22,891</b>	<b>(62,957)</b>	<b>(68,630)</b>	<b>(79,015)</b>	<b>(33,244)</b>	<b>40,735</b>	<b>(189,209)</b>

a whole, from 2014-2020 the Branches lost \$189,209 (without including Program Enhancement Funds (PEFs)). On this point there was considerable input from the Branch leaders<sup>1</sup>. Several Branch leaders felt that the talking point of Branches losing money was unfair given that PEF funds have been a regular part of balancing Branch meeting budgets for decades: Removing the funding showed the Branches in an unfair, unfavorable light.

We acknowledge the point that it would be useful to see the data with PEFs included.

The table below does just that. This shows a much stronger financial picture for all Branches, though there are still some clear warning signs.

Net Income/(loss)	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total	7-Year Avg
--Eastern	(1,752)	1,864	9,536	(8,707)	(23,356)	(17,156)	13,873	(25,698)	(3,671)
--Southeast	773	17,889	(21,056)	(22,207)	1,738	2,790	4,830	(15,243)	(2,178)
--North Central	2,331	7,418	(37,123)	(8,650)	(11,610)	(4,564)	8,374	(43,824)	(6,261)
--Southwest	(2,598)	6,438	2,743	(4,832)	(6,199)	9,294	7,519	12,365	1,766
--Pacific	12,257	9,282	2,943	(4,234)	(19,588)	(3,609)	26,138	23,189	3,313
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,011</b>	<b>42,891</b>	<b>(42,957)</b>	<b>(48,630)</b>	<b>(59,015)</b>	<b>(13,245)</b>	<b>60,734</b>	<b>(49,211)</b>	<b>(7,030)</b>

Prior to the launch of the BEP, most Branch finances were managed by the Branch leadership. Since then, however, ESA headquarters has played a larger role in the development and execution of budgets for the Branch meetings. This has had a positive effect on Branch finances wherein four of the five domestic Branches saw net-positive returns on their meetings in 2022, whether PEF funding is included in the totals or not.

A notable omission to the table above is the International Branch (IB). The IB meeting is virtual and free to attend (though there is a submission fee for presentations to offset costs). With revenue only coming from sponsors and PEFs, the IB budget is thus considerably smaller than

<sup>1</sup> PEFs are funds from the ESA Central budget that offset Branch meeting programming. They vary based in part on meeting attendance and can range from approximately \$1,900 - \$4,800 (based on 2022 totals).

the domestic Branch budgets. However, the IB has been consistently in the black and the budget is slowly growing.

## **#2: The first annual ESA Branch leadership council meeting.**

Though each Branch is different, there are similarities in the kinds of issues that Branch leaders encounter on an annual basis. Over the years at ESA, there has been little infrastructure in place for Branch leaders to meet, learn from, and talk with each other. In the early days of the [ESA Networks](#), a network was formed to serve as a conversation hub for Branch leaders, but over time it fell into disuse.

Since approximately 2014, leaders of the four ESA Sections have been meeting together at the Annual Meeting to talk about their challenges and triumphs. Section leaders, of course, already have a fairly regular line of communication since the Section leaders also form the leadership of the Annual Meeting Program Committee. Branch leaders have never had an opportunity for that kind of collaboration.

Until now.

In Vancouver in 2022 on Sunday, November 13, the Society convened the first-ever ESA Branch Leadership Council Meeting. Each Branch provided a short presentation on their leadership structure, finances, Branch meeting highlights, and areas where they were struggling with a problem. There was plenty of opportunity for interaction between Branch leaders. As the session concluded, there was a strong consensus that the session should continue yearly.

We encourage Branch leaders to plan for this as part of their Annual Meeting experience.

## **#3: Branches can be more than branch meetings.**

One of the ideas suggested in the original report was that of “having more than one meeting a year”. This past year the Eastern Branch did just that. On September 11, 2022, a small planning committee organized a trip for Branch members (43 in total) to a 4-H camp in Front Royal, VA, reminiscent of similar gatherings of naturalists in the 1920s. Attendees collected insects, attended workshops, and engaged in informal networking opportunities like hiking and a fire ring. Along the same lines, they organized tours of local entomologically interesting institutions, the first of which was held at the USNM in June 2022, and the second of which is scheduled for March 2023.

This was a first effort to think beyond traditional meeting structures and arguably was successful right out of the gate.

The Southeastern Branch co-located their meeting with the Caribbean Division of the American Phytopathological Society in San Juan, PR, in March 2022. This was not the first time that ESA Branches have partnered on meeting hosting, but it provided a real-world, pandemic-era example of the financial success that can happen with arrangements of this type. In 2022, the SEB registration was up by 39%, and profitability was up over the last Branch meeting (2019) by about \$31,000 – the largest jump by far of all the ESA Branches last year.

The Governing Board encourages Branch leaders to continue experimenting with the model, whether that be changing the length, duration, rotation, partners, or other factors of their meetings.

#### **#4: New elements for the Branch meetings.**

The Pacific Branch debuted several innovations that proved to be popular with the membership. The Entomology Games included a non-student attendee option so that meeting attendees could form ad hoc teams and compete in pub-style trivia.

Additionally, Downen Jocson, Cesar Reyes-Corral, and Aldo Hanel, organized an Entomolympics for the 2022 Pacific Branch meeting in Santa Rosa, CA. It included a series of games including who could punch out the most point mounts and who can assemble bug dorms fastest. Attendees were able to compete as teams or as individuals. This seemed to be very popular with the Branch meeting attendees.

Another new element debuted in 2022 when the North Central Branch hosted a successful and inaugural pre-conference workshop – a first of its kind for the Branch. The event was very popular and in 2023 the Branch is planning to host two workshops at the start of the Joint NCB/SWB meeting in Oklahoma City.

These are not the first innovations at Branch meetings and they won't be the last. But they serve as a useful reminder that innovations like these keep the Branch meetings fresh and vibrant and–hopefully–will build member engagement and registrations in the years to come.

#### **#5: Awareness of an ability to change.**

The innovations previously mentioned, in and of themselves, are all great. But the real lesson learned is that change is possible. For many years, branch functions and activities have changed relatively little. Nevertheless, a variety of novel changes have been introduced, portending opportunities for creative and relevant changes in branch activity. We support that and encourage more experimentation in the years to come in an effort to take advantage of an organizational structure based on region.

## **#6: More Branches moving finances to headquarters.**

Wait, you say.... That's not a Branch meeting innovation! True. But it's an innovation nonetheless.

Think about why you first joined ESA – it is likely not because you were interested in the business aspect of running the society: Most members joined due to their love and appreciation of insects and the science of entomology. Too often members get bogged down in the “business” of running ESA. Fortunately, ESA employs a professional staff who can support this necessary part of Branch operations. This past year, the Southeastern Branch moved oversight and management of their finances to ESA HQ. ESA's Meetings team helps to both develop and oversee budgets for each year and source locations for future meetings that are within budget parameters. Safeguards are built into the system to have several people review expense requests prior to ESA HQ cutting a check. HQ regularly reports back to the Branch leadership on the status of the finances.

As you and other leaders of your Branch continue to innovate, you may find a need to offload some of the business aspects of running your Branch. We encourage you to contact Headquarters to learn more about internal options for support.

## **#7: Branch meetings are not for everyone. And that's okay.**

During the 2022 Branch meeting town halls, participants were asked for a show of hands to indicate to what Section they belong to. The strong majority were in P-IE or MUVE. There were a few SysEB members in the rooms, but PBT was by far the most under-represented Section at the 2022 ESA Branch meetings (based on this, admittedly, highly limited and flawed survey). It should also be noted that PBT is by far the smallest of the ESA Sections, so perhaps it stands to reason that their members would be least likely to be found at Branch (or any) meetings. But no matter the reason, Branch meetings seem to serve MUVE and P-IE members more than SysEB and PBT members. This might mean that there are opportunities for Branches to better serve the needs of PBT and SysEB members – and thus, boost their meeting attendance (or develop new regional ways to support PBT and SysEB members).

## **#8: Solutions are not one-size-fits-all.**

The current ESA Branches are as diverse as our science and the U.S. – where a preponderance of our members live. There are differences in size, tradition, culture, and history. Just as the needs and challenges that face the Branches are not the same for each, neither are the solutions to those needs. This is to say nothing of the very divergent needs of ESA's (by far)

largest geographic Branch – the IB. The IB was largely left out of the BEP since the primary focus was on the in-person Branch meetings. But as we conclude this aspect of the Branch review, some consideration should be given to the successes enjoyed by the IB through their entirely virtual meetings. These ensure that the Branch (and thus, the Society) is meeting the needs of all our members, no matter where they are based.

The Board recognizes that the current experimentation mode that the Branches are in is good for the Society. We are in favor of backing off large-scale changes at this point and instead seeing what emerges more organically from these experiments. In other words ...

### **#9: Sometimes the answer is no.**

One of the highest duties of a Board member is to protect and care for the organization. To a person, we all take that job seriously. We want the best for ESA and the discipline. Sometimes that can include taking the organization in new directions and sometimes it can mean reinforcing traditional and existing structures.

When we launched the BEP, the Branches (as a whole) were not trending well financially. And then came the pandemic. Given what we knew at the time, it was clear that something had to change. But there was no clear consensus on what that change might be. So, we opened a conversation with the Branches on what we could do to better serve the needs of members.

The outcome of the BEP was never pre-determined. The Board only committed to a full exploration and conversation. What we found among the membership runs the gamut, from passionate defenders of Branches (and Branch meetings) to complete apathy about the same.

So where does that leave us?

What is clear at this point is that Branches provide value to participating ESA members and that the current regional model serves the needs of these members well. Therefore, Branch members feel it is unnecessary to make any drastic changes to the current structure. Branches are currently able to test and adopt new programs based on the interests and priorities of their regional members. The Board supports this incremental approach taken to Branch evolution and hopes that Branch leaders continue to share innovative ideas with one another. We encourage future Branch leaders and Governing Boards to revisit ESA's traditional structures—regional and otherwise—periodically to ensure our society continues to provide the best value to our members.

### **#10: Your idea to improve how ESA serves members regionally is ...**

Just as we ended the last report with a call for your ideas, we'll do the same here. ESA is a volunteer-led Society. We build, change, grow, and evolve due to the work and ideas from the

membership. Both now and in the future, we challenge you all to look at how being organized based on geographic proximity can lead to innovations in meeting structure as well as promoting science advocacy, teaching, career-related training, and more.

Branches have active volunteer networks, social opportunities, awards programs, and—yes—meetings. Some of these are steeped in history and some are newer.

As you attend regional meetings (whether sponsored by ESA or not), if you see something you like, bring the idea to your Branch (or national) leadership and encourage innovation.

Thank you for working with us on this project to improve our ability to serve members of the Society regionally.

Sincerely,

The members of the 2023 Governing Board

*Marianne Alleyne – President*

*Jennifer Henke – Vice-President*

*Lina Bernaola – Vice President Elect*

*Jessica Ware – Past President*

*Faith Oi – Treasurer*

*Don Weber – Eastern Branch Representative*

*John Ruberson – North Central Branch Representative*

*Jesus Esquivel – Southwestern Branch Representative*

*Karla Adesso – Southeastern Branch Representative*

*Julien Saguez – International Branch Representative*

*Mark Wright – Pacific Branch Representative*

*Erika Machtinger – Medical, Urban, and Veterinary Entomology Section Representative*

*Richard Mankin – Physiology, Biochemistry, and Toxicology Section Representative*

*Melissa Siebert – Plant Insect Ecosystems Section Representative*

*Andrew Short – Systematics, Evolution, and Biodiversity Section Representative*

*Scott O’Neal – Early Career Professional Representative*

*Jamal Hunter – Student Representative*

*Chris Stelzig – Executive Director*