



2021 Annual SNA Patron Meeting

Highlights & Key Takeaways

Nearly 50 representatives of School Nutrition Association (SNA) Patron companies joined with the organization's Board of Directors on October 21, 2021, for the annual SNA Patron Meeting—the first in-person gathering hosted by SNA since declaration of the global coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. The event was held at the Alexandrian Hotel in Alexandria, Virginia.

Key Takeaways

» The early consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with ongoing challenges are sobering. Supply chain disruptions and labor challenges necessitate greater focus on day-to-day management, rather than longer-term sustainability and innovation, and many operators and vendors believe that this will be the case for at least another year. Still, most remain resolute in their commitment to the K-12 school nutrition segment.

» Current government support, particularly by USDA, is much appreciated, but insiders are wary about the likelihood of systemic changes, especially in regard to universally-free meals. In anticipation of ongoing supply and labor issues, operators and vendors are hopeful for another year of regulatory waivers, especially for universal meals and flexibility around sodium requirements and hope that such a decision is announced early in the bidding season for SY2022-23.

» Supply chain disruptions are prompting some school districts to begin to think differently about cycle menus, the number of entrée choices offered, just-in-time ordering patterns, managing storage and inventory, forecasting and data analysis. These may have a lasting impact on the K-12 segment. In addition, operators are prioritizing the versatility of ingredients more than ever, with an eye on speed-scratch and, when labor is available, greater use of full-scratch to compensate for shortages and substitutions of popular processed standbys.

» Operators and industry alike are very concerned about pending changes in sodium requirements. A much-debated issue before the pandemic, the supply side complications put Target 2 decisively out of reach for most school districts. In addition, manufacturers facing their own threats to a sustainable bottom line do not have the R&D budgets to explore product reformulations at this time nor in the immediate future.

» SNA's new Strategic Plan reflects a forward-driven vision that looks beyond pandemic-era challenges. It channels transformative energy to ensure the organization and the profession drive change, rather than merely react to it. But the organization remains nimble and responsive to current-day concerns across its core competencies of advocacy, education, resource development and best-practice sharing.

» The enthusiasm around this 2021 Patron Meeting signals the readiness by operators and vendors alike to continue to resume in-person networking, learning and business development. It bodes particularly well for attendance and engagement at SNA's slate of 2022 national meetings.

An in-depth summary of presentations and discussions follows.

Program Highlights

SNA Strategic Plan & Updates

The meeting was kicked off by SNA President Beth Wallace, MBA, SNS, who introduced CEO Patti Montague, FASAE, CAE and Industry Advisory Council Chair Nicole Nicoloff. After a fervent thank-you to Patrons by Montague (“You continue to sponsor and support SNA, even though your own businesses are suffering”), she and Wallace reported SNA’s strong financial position leading into the launch of a new Strategic Plan for 2021-24. The complete Strategic Plan can be found [here](#), and an August 2021 *School Nutrition* magazine article [details its development process](#). Wallace described the Plan’s four areas of focus:

- Voice of School Nutrition
- Career Development & Growth
- Stakeholder Community
- Thriving Organization

She also made note of the cross-cutting themes that were established:

- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Fiscal Responsibility, Financial Sustainability and the School Nutrition Foundation
- Meaningful Communications, Marketing and Outreach
- Relevant Digital Experiences

» Montague provided a brief **SNA report**, beginning with an overview of SNA’s 2022 slate of national conferences:

■ The upcoming School Nutrition Industry Conference (SNIC) will take a hybrid in-person/virtual event approach. Registration for the in-person event is off to a good start.

■ Planning is underway for the Legislative Action Conference (LAC). Although Congress might not permit in-person legislative visits by the early March meeting, Montague remained optimistic that the draw of the midterm elections, the possibility of a Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) bill and the return to an in-person event back at the popular J.W. Marriott hotel would yield record attendance. She also noted that plans are proceeding for a celebratory Together Again Gala during LAC to support the School Nutrition Foundation.

■ Patrons are welcome to attend the National Leadership Conference (NLC), which is exclusive to volunteer leaders in the national organization and the state affiliates. The event will be held in West Palm Beach, Florida, in late April.

■ Excitement is high for the Annual National Conference (ANC) in Orlando, with 750 booths sold to date and a closing event planned for Sea World.

■ The report from many state affiliates is that their in-person conference attendance has been low, largely because labor shortages at the district level are so profound that operations cannot afford to have team members away for those events.

Montague also reported that SNA is undergoing a DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access) assessment in an effort to ensure that the Association is truly an inclusive organization. She noted that the diversity on both the operator and industry sides of the K-12 school nutrition segment is not currently reflected in SNA’s state and national leadership.

» A separate **Advocacy Report** focused on three primary areas:

Congress:

A Continuing Resolution regarding the federal budget is currently in effect until December 3; it may be extended into early January. Initial drafts of the Build Back Better budget included more funding for school nutrition programs, but SNA expects that money to be cut from the final version of the bill.

There's been no forward movement on CNR, with most attention on the Build Back Better bill, but conversations continue with both House and Senate staff. The SNA CNR Taskforce produced a very detailed and strategic document regarding the Association's reauthorization priorities, which is being sent as a separate document. Among the top needs is a significant increase in meal reimbursement rates.

USDA/SNA's Supply Chain Response:

Montague shared that USDA has been "incredible" in supporting the Association and the school nutrition profession. She reported that initial email exchanges have evolved to almost weekly calls with key agency staff, including Secretary Vilsack. She described the creative and collaborative approach SNA and USDA were taking together in problem-solving: "We didn't get a meal pattern waiver—that is a political hot potato—but we got the announcement that fiscal action would not be taken if meals fail to comply with the regulations due to supply shortages."

Another impressive advocacy success was the September 29 announcement of \$1.5 billion to support school meal programs, as well as America's

agricultural producers. Montague also noted the value that industry support of the universal school meals model carries with policymakers when it comes time to try to find the money in the Federal budget for a permanent change.

» Montague used this opportunity to detail some of the actions the Association has taken to support members through the supply chain crisis. These include:

- Production of a series of animated videos explaining the supply chain to different audiences, including frontline staff, parents and other stakeholders and Spanish speakers.

- "Share Your Challenges" [web link](#) to collect firsthand stories about challenges in the wake of both supply chain disruptions and labor shortages. SNA will continue to share these compelling (and sobering) tales with USDA and members of Congress to support advocacy efforts. She encourages industry to share *their* struggles, as well, thanking former Industry Advisory Council Chair Sean Leer, GS Foods Group/GoldStar Foods, for his exceptional help over the last 20 months, and asking manufacturers to help bring more distributors into the loop with SNA.

The efforts of school nutrition professionals to get the job done is earning considerable media attention, including national coverage.

Sodium:

Requirements to further reduce sodium in school meals remain on the books, although Target 2 standards officially scheduled to have been implemented in SY2020-21 have been delayed following court action in Spring 2020. SNA continues to advocate for flexibility in this area

with the Biden Administration. The Association has created several [downloadable resources](#) that promote the sodium reductions already achieved and explain why USDA should ease the timeline for Target 2 reductions, eliminate unachievable Final Target mandates and empower schools that are able to voluntarily reduce sodium beyond Target 2. These resources include a fact sheet, Q&A, infographic and responses regarding future sodium regulations in SNA's 2021 Back to School Survey. At the time of the meeting, the Food & Drug Administration had just announced planned targets for sodium for voluntary action by manufacturers.

» The final SNA update, presented by SNA Chief of Staff Rhea Steele, CAE, [reviewed recent research and analysis](#) conducted by the organization. Reports can be found [here](#). Steele's brief overview of several reports included the following insights:

- In SY2020-21, meal participation was down 10.94% compared to SY2019-20
- While lunch counts plummeted, breakfast participation actually increased.
- It was surprising to learn how many districts continued to use the National School Lunch Program (56.8%), during this time rather than the Summer Food Service Program, failing to take advantage of the latter's higher reimbursement rate.
- The higher reimbursement rate meant that overall SY2020-21 funding was up, despite meals being down.
- In planning for SY2021-22 back in late Spring 2021, respondents to the annual Back to School Survey had numerous anxieties. Just shy of 97% were seriously concerned/concerned about continued pandemic supply chain disruptions; 90% were seriously

concerned/concerned about staff shortages; 85% feared financial losses. Other areas of stress included low meal participation, pandemic meal service modifications, meeting meal pattern requirements and barriers to serving distance learners. The only issue of little concern for SY2021-22 was unpaid meal charges.

Burbio Update on COVID Response in Schools

For more than a year, SNA has been partnering with Burbio, a leader in aggregating information from districts representing more than 35,000 schools, including the 200 largest school systems in the U.S. [SNA posts and distributes Burbio's weekly reports](#) on COVID-related school policies and activities, including openings/closings, mask policies, quarantine/testing requirements, staff vaccination policies, emergency relief spending and more.

In a videotaped presentation, Burbio CEO Dennis Roche offered an overview of trends seen thus far in SY2021-22:

- Every school district in the country is open to in-person learning.
- Individual school closures continue, but not at the "wild" rate of SY2020-21.
- Most closures occurred within 3 to 4 weeks after the start of the school year.
- Average closures are 7 days.
- Closures generally follow infection spread patterns, higher in the Sunbelt and Midwest. With COVID behaving seasonally, more disruptions are expected into the winter.

- In general, mask mandates and adherence to CDC recommendations are keeping students in school, with exceptions and/or bans being a factor behind school disruptions. Several mask bans have been overturned in the courts. Of the top 500 school districts, 80% require masks.
- Many districts are no longer requiring quarantining for asymptomatic students or staff.
- Test-to-Stay policies are on the rise and helping to move students out of quarantine more quickly.
- Staff vaccination requirements are going fairly smoothly.
- Overall there is greater consistency in keeping kids in school, and even if closure rates spike in late fall and winter, Burbio expects much less disruption than last year.

Proposed Initiative for K12 Data Exchange: A Supply Chain Toolkit from InTeam

Chip Goodman, CEO of InTEAM Associates, LLC, shared details of a school foodservice supply chain initiative that his company has been developing since the 2017 Nourish to Flourish think tank meeting. SNA's Executive Committee requested he provide an overview at the Patron meeting as the Board of Directors considers collaborative partnership opportunities. K12 Data Exchange: A Supply Chain Toolkit is intended to be an ongoing collaborative initiative of industry, school foodservice operators and tech companies.

The K-12 foodservice segment has been hit particularly hard by supply chain disruptions due to its unique needs that prohibit vendors from marketing products across foodservice segments. Successful management of the challenges will require several tactics, including *frequent communication* up and down the chain and *forecasting*.

An estimated 90% of school nutrition operators invest considerable time and effort in identifying product specifications to be in compliance with regulations and meet implicit guarantees regarding safety, allergens and other community expectations. Information is vital, but traditionally it's been hard to come by in an efficient way. Nearly all SNA Patron food suppliers are publishing product information data to the Global Data Synchronization Network (GDSN) for other foodservice segments, but K-12 operators are largely unaware of this resource and/or can't easily access or navigate the information it collects.

InTeam has developed a prototype software, K12 Data Exchange (K12 DEX), as a free website for school nutrition operators to search for products, generate forecasts and gain insights through data analysis. The database currently features more than 185,000 items from GDSN and other sources like USDA and distributors. Nutrient, meal credit and allergen information is updated in real-time. It features GTIN (Global Trade Item Number) codes that unlock standardized product attributes, such as ingredient lists, meal pattern credits, allergens, per-serving nutrients, product images, storage and handling requirements, prep instructions, servings per case and more.

The Google-like search interface allows operators to:

- View sponsored search results that highlight new products
- Create compliant menus that feature new items
- Generate forecasts to share with vendors
- Find replacement menu items or recipe ingredients in response to shortages
- View detailed analytics based on production record data
- Gain insights into their own operations

The program facilitates better communications through the bidirectional exchange of standardized data between operators and suppliers. It works with existing operator software using standard data transfer protocols (extensive documentation and third-party experts are available to assist schools and their software providers with setting up the data transfer). It has been piloted in 14 school districts with prototype software. A Technology Stakeholder Advisory Group (which includes software providers, food suppliers and school operators) has been providing oversight and support to the initiative.

Goodman noted that while branded products are universally available, there are other sources of data that will need to be manually integrated, such as for produce and USDA Foods items, which go beyond the GTINs. In addition, discussion continues about retrofitting data from schools to use existing systems and find a corresponding GTIN and align with GDSN standards.

He conceded that it will be a paradigm shift for most school districts. But as more operators participate, more in-depth analytics and insights can result, especially when site demographics are correlated with operational variables. For example, it can reveal the optimal number of entrée choices in a specific type of school and food delivery system. Going further, it could produce data helpful for public policy, measure economic impacts of USDA Foods, track promotions and “buy local” incentives, measure the efficacy of grants, supply the paper trail for additional reimbursements and more.

According to Goodman, all suppliers who publish into the K12 DEX would receive category marketing trends reports for free and subscribe to advanced market data reports for greater detail on their specific product portfolio. Optional monetization via sponsored searches would count clicks. Use of banner ads or keyword-sponsored searches are among other possibilities. Patron members were encouraged to:

- Publish data to the K12 DEX
- Work with inTEAM support to navigate the complexities of GDSN
- Promote K12 DEX to customers
- Sign up to start accessing market share reports
- Contact inTEAM to discuss value-added sponsorship opportunities

A brief Q&A moderated by SNA President-Elect Lori Adkins, SNS, confirmed that since the data comes from the operator level, a state bid (such as in Alabama) would not be a problem. In addition, the interface is available to software providers at zero cost; the business model is predicated on

advertising. Goodman also noted that while distributors are offering GSDN data today, they have a fair amount of private label products and the data is not K-12-specific.

Global Cold Chain Alliance: State of the Food Supply Chain

Adam Thocher, Senior Vice President Global Programs and Insights, Global Cold Chain Alliance, shared insights into current supply chain disruptions from the perspective of temperature-controlled global food distribution—which represents 90% of the food supply—from harvest to refrigerator/freezer.

Thocher urged perspective: trade levels are solid and production is expected to remain healthy, although the pace of production is slower due to labor shortages. However, unprecedented shocks of supply and demand patterns on a system that is not nimble has had a significant impact. By design, the systems are designed for normal operations, not for a once-in-a-lifetime period of disruption and recovery.

There is not one single point of disruption but a confluence of events around production and distribution, imports/exports, port congestion, trucking, changing purchasing habits and labor. He noted that the coronavirus is not under control in parts of the world, including some key areas where many items are produced. In addition, “Containers are not where they need to be, when they need to be there, and that’s adding a lot of cost. ... At one point there were 73 ships waiting off the port at Long Beach; if they were processed round-the-clock, it would take two weeks just to get through the backlog.” But, of course, you can’t just reroute a ship and air freight is 5 times the price, he noted.

In addition, Thocher explained, the longstanding truck driver shortage is exacerbating the situation. “Once freight is off the ship, it’s intended to move right away, but instead, ports are acting more as storage facilities.” He also identified changing purchasing habits as an area “we don’t talk about as much. Online transactions have created an expectation to get stuff within 1 to 2 days, which created unexpected pressure. No one knows how consumer behavior and consumption will adjust, but we know that the traditional, just-in-time inventory approach will need to adjust.”

With regard to labor scarcities, Thocher affirmed the tactics being employed across industries (raising wages, recruiting from non-traditional sources, providing incentives, changing when/where work requirements) and pointed to the need for longer-term strategies, such as investments in tech and automation, increased capacity to adjust for updated production and storage, workforce development and rebalancing the ecosystem, adjusting sources of supply.

Supply Chain Disruptions: Perspectives from the K-12 Front Lines

Chris Derico, SNS, SNA Vice President, moderated a panel discussion among four school nutrition directors who serve on the Association’s Board of Directors and represent school districts diverse in size, demographics and geographic location. Panelists were asked to describe their ongoing supply chain and labor challenges, as well as to share their thoughts on the Target 2 sodium requirement for school meals.

Perspectives were shared by:

- » Chris Burkhardt, SNS, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Ohio
- » Warren DeShields, Bridgeton Public Schools, New Jersey
- » Shannon Gleave, RDN, SNS, Glendale Elementary School District, Arizona
- » Lynnelle Johnson, RD, SNS, Williston Public School District, North Dakota

Burkhardt:

■ 393 schools, 35,000 students, CEP district, 87% disadvantaged pre-COVID

■ Schools continue to close every week for both COVID (sometimes there is an insufficient number of teachers available) and weather (several high-heat days in facilities without A/C), plus power outages. As a result, kids are picking and choosing when they want to come to school or stay home and participate virtually, because they can do either. This takes a toll on our ADP.

■ Overall, lunch participation is down 20% and breakfast is down 25%.

■ PBET is another factor hurting school meal participation.

■ Of 350 full-time positions, there are only about a dozen openings. But among 80 positions for part-time staff, there were 60 vacancies.

■ We were relatively unscathed by supply chain disruptions until two weeks ago, thanks to a lot of pre-buying and stocking of our warehouse; but all those inventories are now gone. I'm down to one week's supply in my warehouse; normally it would be a couple of months' worth. Our distributor is Sysco.

■ The biggest issue right now are the disposables (trays, plates, utensils). Also water—

with water fountains shut off in the schools, we've become the water supplier throughout the district.

■ I may be a pessimist, but I think things will get worse before they get better, and it will take another two years to ride this out.

■ We're going to use our warehouse as a warehouse, shrinking our menus. We're realizing we don't need to have 14 entrees at one school to have student acceptability.

■ Our orders are week-to-week, but we're also trying to build back up the reserves we keep on hand in storage.

■ Target 2 is the last thing on my mind. I'm trying to just get kids fed. We have two years before our next Administrative Review. Tell me how I can reliably get food from the manufacturer to the distributor to me, and *then* I'll worry about how to get technical assistance regarding Target 2.

DeShields:

■ 10 schools, CEP district, 93% free/reduced pre-COVID

■ With the return to in-person learning, we are delivering meals to classrooms.

■ Haven't seen that much participation fluctuation, except at a newly refurbished elementary school, which spiked to 95% and has maintained that level.

■ Labor vacancies are on the rise; we used to have 13 employees at our high school, but now only 8—"and they are on roller skates."

■ I talk to US Foods every day, several times a day. Last week, we had to change this week's entire menu. The most difficult items to get are chicken patties and nuggets.

■ No more 6-week menu cycles; we'll probably switch to 4- or 3-week models, depending on what we get in.

- I rely on my own chef background to maximize the versatility of various items.

- I have the support of the superintendent and was able to receive CARES funds.

- When I hear about different operators losing money, it makes me really scared. In New Jersey, there is a law that districts *can't* bail out the school foodservice operation. So we do every program we can, seven days a week, to ensure a good financial year.

- We serve a population that needs to eat school meals. With two registered dietitians on staff, we're thinking that if we have to meet Target 2 next year, we'll take the financial hit of missing that requirement instead. I'd rather feed kids than have a healthy trashcan.

Gleave:

- 17 schools, but enrollment is declining; we closed 2 schools during COVID and 2 more are scheduled to close; 96% free/reduced

- Pre-pandemic lunch participation was strong: 80-85%; breakfast, even free, hovered only at 35%. Counts for both meals increased at the beginning of the pandemic, but then fell off across SY2019-20 and SY2020-21. Back in school for in-person learning, lunch counts have still been low: 70%. Breakfast participation varies wildly—from 60% to 6%—from site to site.

- Closing schools meant we had a number of staff that could be absorbed into other schools, but we are seeing the effects of fatigue with upticks in resignations.

- We have good communication with our distributor, Shamrock Foods. We've been able to get menu items, but with many substitutions.

- I am on the verge of cancelling Thanksgiving meals, especially for outside guests/families.

- I'm excited for the day when we can get back to putting new items on the menu and get away from individual, prepackaged portions. We won't go to full scratch, as we don't have the staff, but I'm looking at speed scratch. I don't see it happening this year, though.

- Our superintendent does a good job of recognizing our front line staff, but seems to be in a bubble about food shortages and their impact in Arizona.

- If we're in the same supply situation next year, not having waivers for nutrition standards will be difficult. Before COVID, we were almost at Target 2, but that was by eliminating all condiments. There's no way I could manage this with all the substitutions we're dealing with right now. I'm already dealing with daily nurse calls regarding changes in carb counts, gluten and allergens.

Johnson:

- 15 sites, 4,200 students, considered a "large" district in the state. Free/reduced is at 25% and declining with the oil boom

- Pre-COVID, participation was 15-20% at breakfast; 65-70% at lunch. Our high school is all over the place, because it's an open campus. We were in-person all last year; still, participation has increased greatly *this* year, especially at breakfast.

- Had to raise wages back in 2013 and 2014 to compete with Walmart and McDonald's. Staff get paid ~\$20/hour. No position vacancies at the moment.

- Our food distributor, Cash-Wa, drives 140 miles one way to deliver to us three times a week. Fortunately, they haven't dropped us, although they did drop a 250-school co-op recently.

- I talk to my salesman almost daily.

Forecasting went out the window, as it just never matched what came on the truck. We're struggling to get corn dogs, cereal bowls, yogurt and juice boxes. We had diced chicken and ground beef in the warehouse and tried to do more scratch, but for other ingredients, like canned soup, I went to the local grocery store and wiped them out.

- I think a lot about whether we need a regional warehouse or to push us more to local sources. If I could get more cash in lieu of commodities, I could source more local food.

- Our administration seems largely unconcerned about the supply chain stresses, probably because I'm handling it.

- Our reserves are dropping because of increased labor costs, but this year should be good between reimbursements and participation. Still, what about the future if waivers are not extended into SY2022-23?

- How different states interpret the waivers is crazy. Fortunately, our state has been very easy to work with. But I don't want to talk about Target 2. I know some schools are close, but I'm not sure I even want to try.

Additional Audience Comments:

Sean Leer: With schools built in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies, they don't have the capacity for today's storage needs. Distributors have become de facto cold chain storage facilities for many customers. It was a broken system pre-COVID, but now we really have to look seriously at infrastructure.

Patti Montague:

» In response to Leer's comments, Montague proposed seeking funding for a USDA study to support the distribution infrastructure required to support school nutrition programs as part of SNA's upcoming Position Paper.

» One SFA was told by their administration that they'd have to take out a loan; that the district could not keep floating them.

Megan Garcia/Conagra: As a company, we're trying to keep our head above water and we told USDA that if nutrition standard waivers aren't renewed, we're going to be in trouble. We just don't have the resources to put into R&D and reformulation, specifically about Target 2.

Carole Erb/JTM Food Group: If USDA were to provide a repository of standardized bid documents, would that be helpful for you?

» **Burkhardt:** Yes, but each state still has their own 25 pages of legal boilerplate information that they require. So, it will still be a hodgepodge that we would have to run by our legal counsel.

» **Johnson:** State—and regional—interpretations are so different. Part of me says 'Yes, give me a national bid standard,' but then I remind myself to be careful what you wish for, because we certainly didn't like the national SmartSnacks rules.

SNA Strategic Plan: Thriving Organization/Digital Transformation

One objective in the Thriving Organization focus of SNA's 2021-24 Strategic Plan is to be a "digital-first organization with a strong, nimble technology infrastructure and efficient processes." Danielle Duran Baron, CAE, Staff Vice President of Marketing and Communications, described several of the initiatives currently underway at SNA Headquarters:

- New digital products and resources:
 - Greater use of video (such as the previously mentioned Supply Chain series)
 - *SN Plus*: An outgrowth of the pandemic-specific supplemental articles to *School Nutrition* magazine, these monthly articles offer a range of other timely and useful topics
 - *SN Side Dish*: An advertorial dedicated send that leverages the magazine brand
- Revamped newsletters using the Axios model and software
 - Shorter, bulleted format
 - Staggered rollout of updates of SNA's family of newsletters, one per month; *Industry Insider* is set for its update in November
 - Opportunities available for sponsored thought leadership case studies
- SchoolNutrition.org web redesign
 - Intended to go live in Spring 2022
 - Improved navigation
 - Greater emphasis on member profiles
 - Greater incorporation of video
 - Modern approach to digital articles
 - Future recipe library
 - Separate microsite for Annual National Conference

SNA Strategic Plan: Stakeholder Involvement

The Stakeholder Community area of focus in the SNA 2021-24 Strategic Plan includes an objective to "redefine and elevate the relationship and partnership with industry." Success toward this objective looks like:

- » Our industry members are active thought leaders and valued as innovation drivers among the membership.
- » We invite, include and value the contributions from industry and school nutrition members equally, encouraging mutual respect and collaboration.
- » Our industry relationships and partnerships go beyond fiscal contribution in the value they provide to members and SNA.

The 2021 Patron Meeting closed with table discussions facilitated by Rhea Steele, who asked attendees to consider two questions for brainstorming:

- » What engagement opportunities are there for thought leadership, innovation and value creation?
- » If you had to start from scratch to create a symbiotic relationship with your company and SNA, what would it look like?

A sampling of shared table reports with the entire group include the following reflections:

- The equipment industry is vastly under-represented; in fact, there was nothing for this segment in this meeting. SNA should consider organizing a separate equipment show every few years, following the NAFEM model or that of the Georgia SNA Equipment Academy event. It could also be incorporated into ANC as a pre-con or other day where the Exhibit Hall is set aside just for equipment vendors.

- The Industry Advisory Council Chair position should be rotated among different category segments to ensure this type of diversity.
- Conduct a deep-dive review of the Patron program, revising as necessary.
- Find ways to reinvent booth discussions into meaningful operator/vendor conversations about key industry issues.
- Shorten the number of asks on the Position Paper. There are so many issues facing this industry, but we should be prioritizing better.
- Improve symbiosis between operators and vendors in creating and implementing innovative solutions.
- Do more with Hispanic Heritage Month and other observances to feature up-and-coming leaders not only from the operations side, but also industry.
- Veteran industry members should attend Boot Camp to act as stewards and ambassadors of this segment, with a particular eye on getting more younger people involved.