



STRATEGIC PLAN

Originally adopted April 27, 2015; Revised March 25, 2018

BACKGROUND

The American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA) convened a task force in early 2018 to assess the organization's progress in achieving its strategic plan adopted in April 2015. The task force considered which aspects of the plan have been completed, which are no longer relevant because of changed circumstances, and which should be the focus of the organization's efforts in the final two years of the strategic plan.

Since the strategic plan was first developed in 2015, events and activities both external and internal to the organization have influenced our assessment of the strategic plan. In 2017, Donald Trump took office as President and the changing political environment is challenging for ACRA's positions. Our organization's own progress on reclaiming our financial stability, developing continuing education programs, and engaging more members has shown that many aspects of our strategic plan are already bearing fruit. ACRA continues to increase its legitimacy and leadership as the only national trade association for CRM firms and to achieve better outcomes for its members and the CRM industry.

ACRA's president, Kim Redman, formed a task force comprised of president-elect Nathan Boyless, past-president and past-VP of Government Relations Ian Burrow, past-president Duane Peter, past-president Mike Polk, and executive director Marion Werkheiser to review the strategic plan. This document summarizes their recommendations for a refreshed strategic plan.

VISION

Our vision should describe how we want the world to be different in 20 years as a result of our efforts. Our vision remains:

A robust and thriving cultural resources management industry delivering responsible solutions that balance development and preservation and enjoying strong support from clients, government, and the public.

MISSION

Our mission articulates those aspects of our vision we are uniquely suited to accomplish, specifically those that are measurable and accomplishable in a 5-10 year time frame. Our mission remains:

ACRA improves the quality and effectiveness of cultural resource management firms, advocates for conditions that allow the cultural resource management industry to thrive, and supports responsible cultural resource management solutions.

VALUES

The Board agreed that ACRA's Code of Ethics is an accurate statement of the organization's values.

OUTCOMES

The Board prioritized outcomes for ACRA to achieve over the next five years. The Board should hold itself and its executive team accountable for achieving these outcomes, and the executive team should adjust strategy and work plans as needed to ensure these outcomes are met.

Outcome 1: Enhanced Appreciation of the Public Value of the Cultural Resource Management Industry by Clients, Regulators, and the Public.

Outcome 2: Improved Cultural Resource Management Practice that Delivers Responsible Solutions that Balance Development and Preservation.

Outcome 3: Improved Business Efficacy of ACRA Member Firms.

Each outcome is discussed in detail below.

Outcome 1: Enhanced Appreciation of the Public Value of the Cultural Resource Management Industry Among Clients, Regulators, and the Public.

The task force believes that this outcome should be our top priority in the next two years. With the political environment presenting more risk, and with the need to enhance ACRA's own reputation, the following activities are important to advance:

- Collect stories about responsible cultural resource management solutions and effective Section 106 consultations / processes.
- Communicate these stories to legislators and regulators through a robust Capitol Hill advocacy campaign and through ACRA publications.
- Communicate these stories to the public through traditional and social media campaigns and through the campaigns of partner organizations like the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, NCSHPO, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
- Communicate these stories to clients through ACRA publications, such as the revived newsletter, and celebrate clients who act as good stewards and support responsible solutions.
- Consider giving awards to clients at their trade association meetings, rather than just ours, so we can recognize them among their peers.
- Work with partners the Society for Historical Archaeology, American Anthropological Association, and the Society for American Archaeology to advance coordinated government relations advocacy through the Coalition for American Heritage.

Outputs:

- More informed public who advocates for laws and regulations that support responsible cultural resource management
- More informed legislators and regulators who support laws and regulations that promote responsible cultural resource management and a thriving cultural resource management industry
- More informed clients who support laws and regulations that promote responsible cultural resource management and who will be responsible stewards of cultural resources

Outcome 2: Improved Cultural Resource Management Practice that Delivers Responsible Solutions that Balance Development and Preservation.

The task force recommends that ACRA form a committee to study the feasibility of developing and implementing a process where ACRA firms receive credentials as responsible CRM companies after meeting certain criteria. A credentialing program presents both opportunities and challenges, and ACRA has weighed creating one in the past and deferred. We believe that ACRA should fully investigate the feasibility of such a program, which could be a significant member benefit and help increase ACRA's membership base and reputation over time. The feasibility committee should report back to the board by the Spring 2019 meeting so that ACRA can decide whether to pursue credentialing as part of its next five-year strategic plan.

Activities:

- Form a committee to study the feasibility of a credentialing program
- Collect best practices from industry practitioners and inform ACRA members through ACRA publications, such as the newsletter
- Promote a pro-active agenda to Congress and agencies that advances common sense solutions to making the regulatory process more efficient and effective, such as an emphasis on early planning by developers in concert with CRM consultants
- ~~Provide expertise to regulators by participating in programmatic agreement and nationwide permit negotiations~~
- ~~Provide training to regulators through partnerships with groups such as NCSHPO and ACHP~~
- Advocate for federal funding of cultural resource management
- ~~Invest in products, programs, and processes that allow cultural resource management to be conducted more effectively and efficiently, such as synthetic data studies~~

Outputs

- Higher quality solutions provided by ACRA firms because of greater awareness of best practices and model solutions
- ~~Better trained and informed regulators who appreciate and expect quality solutions from the industry~~
- Better resourced regulators who can provide higher quality and more efficient oversight

- ~~Innovations within the industry that lead to more effective, integrated, and efficient solutions~~

Outcome 3: Improved Business Efficacy of ACRA Firms.

ACRA has made great strides in developing a successful online continuing education program. That work should continue to be supported and expanded. In addition to studying the feasibility of credentialing (discussed above), ACRA should focus on communicating best practices and innovations within the industry through its publications, website, and social media streams.

Activities:

- Develop an assessment tool for firms to identify areas of excellence and areas that need improvement directly related to their business practices (this activity will happen if the credentialing committee decides to move forward)
- Develop curricula and training programs to help firms address areas that need improvement, including online learning and conference programming
- Inform ACRA firms about regulatory developments that could affect their businesses

Outputs:

- ACRA membership is perceived as an indicator of firm quality
- Firms are more successful and sustainable
- Low bids are reduced because firms understand what it takes to run a successful business

ADDITIONAL AREAS OF FOCUS

The task force discussed in particular the need to conduct more outreach to our client industries, which could take the form of presenting awards at their trade association conferences, including clients on certain publications, and attending client trade association conferences as exhibitors and presenters.

We also discussed the need for enhanced internal communications to members, especially about the nuts and bolts of ACRA's government relations program and our direct and grassroots lobbying efforts in Congress and the agencies. We also discussed the need for improved internal communications among members themselves.

REQUIRED RESOURCES

To achieve these important outcomes, ACRA requires increases in membership, volunteer and staff capacity, and financial resources.

Members

Membership has hovered at 160-180 firms since ACRA's founding, out of a current community of 1,300 firms in the United States. The Board considered opening membership to individuals, but has decided instead to focus on expanding and providing greater value to a membership base of firms. The Board did express a desire to recruit university-based programs and public agencies as members.

Membership must be increased to achieve the plan's goals and maintain and deepen legitimacy as the industry trade association. By 2020 ACRA should have 360 member firms representing at least \$500M in annual industry revenue, or half of the projected industry total.

Human Resources

ACRA has leveraged management support from Cultural Heritage Partners to increase its financial stability and improve internal processes so that a full time executive director can be hired by June 2018 to support the organization, as was contemplated in the 2015 strategic plan.

ACRA's president has convened a committee to develop a job description and manage the hiring process for the executive director. CHP is committed to assisting with an effective transition of management responsibilities, and CHP wishes to continue on as ACRA's government relations consultant after the executive director is in place.

Financial

ACRA has resolved its financial deficit and is now operating at break-even budgets. ACRA's goal should be to develop a cash reserve through small surpluses in multiple years to ensure the organization's ability to weather a future downturn. In addition, ACRA should focus on increasing sponsorships and memberships to deliver funds needed to attract a promising executive director.

NEXT STEPS

Each committee should revise its workplan for the next 12 months based on this strategic plan.

CONCLUSION

ACRA has a proud history of providing leadership for the CRM industry over the past two decades. It faces existential questions about how to remain relevant as the industry evolves, and this plan provides clear pathways to achieve the proposed outcomes.