



Strategic Plan – 2009-2012

The ACRA VISION:

To be the unifying voice for Aspen businesses and nonprofit organizations, promoting the success of our membership for the benefit of our entire community.

The ACRA MISSION:

To serve the Aspen business and nonprofit communities by:

- Attracting visitors to the resort
- Offering valuable services to member organizations
- Facilitating synergy among members and government and local civic organizations
- Providing advocacy on relevant community issues

ACRA GUIDELINES:

- Tell our story powerfully, both as a community and as an organization.
- Continually listen to our membership and community.
- Set realistic operational and financial goals.
- Actively participate in planning for the future of our community.

Introduction

This Strategic Plan serves as the roadmap for the Aspen Chamber Resort Association. It provides a framework and philosophy for Board governance and staff management of our organization.

The following board and committee members participated in the March 24th, 2009 Chamber summit and planning session held at the Limelight Lodge in Aspen, Colorado: Stan Clauson, ACRA board chair; Warren Klug, ACRA vice chair; David Perry, ACRA board secretary; Casandra Foister, asst. secretary; Helen Klanderud, asst. treasurer; Patsy Malone, Paddy Allen, Carol Hood, Kristin Drake, Tahnee Perry, Eileen Tucker, Donnie Lee, Susan Hamley, Cari Kuhlman, John Rigney, Cristal Logan, Corey Enloe, Kathryn Consoli, Kurt Adam, Martha Rose, Jeanne Mackowski, Jenna Weatherred and Mick Ireland. Chamber staff included Debbie Braun, president and CEO, and Ann Dockter, Julia Theisen, Jennifer Carney, Erik Klanderud, Heather Compton, Dorothy Frommer, and Michelle Miller.

To prepare, the ACRA hired a facilitator, Tim Ditzler, who met with staff and the table coordinators to review the governing documents and new goals. After the board planning session, the updated strategic plan was sent to the table coordinators and staff for thorough review and addition of new goals and strategies.

Duration of the Plan: 3 Year rolling plan

It was agreed that the plan would cover a period of three years and would not only update the last plan, but incorporate new elements as well.

Plan Sustainability

The plan should be the primary guide for current and future officers, board members, committees, and staff. Annually, it should be reviewed for progress and then updated as needed. At a minimum, it should be reviewed in detail at a board planning retreat every year.

Planning Terms

The **mission statement** should identify the organization, who it serves, and what it offers. A **vision statement** reflects how the organization envisions itself as it moves forward into the future. A **goal** is synonymous with an objective and is broad in scope. The stated goals should drive most efforts, including budgeting, staffing, and committee assignments. Organizations generally set three to seven goals. Within each of the goals are **strategies**. Strategies are suggested approaches for leadership, committees, staff, and contractors to achieve the mission, vision, and goals.

Goals and Strategies

The following pages summarize the primary goals and accompanying strategies to guide the board and staff over the next three years.

Organization

In developing this document, we have taken each of the four points under the Mission Statement and assigned goals, objectives, and strategies to each point. Finally, we have identified a series of key Action Steps to guide our operations in the years to come.

MISSION AREA 1: ATTRACTING VISITORS TO THE RESORT

The annual destination marketing focus and three-year priority initiatives for the ACRA have been determined as shown below. Responsibility for initiatives will be assigned by the ACRA President and the board.

Goal 1: ACRA will be known as the main source of community information for local residents and visitors.

Objective: To promptly disseminate information that is accessible, welcoming, relevant, and of exemplary quality.

Strategies:

- Provide guests with attractive, intuitive collateral materials that will offer information about Aspen during spring, summer, and fall. Although historically ACRA has not had any winter focus, look at incorporating winter marketing if budget increases.
- Post electronic versions of printed publications on the Chamber web site.
- Continue to develop a dynamic, easily navigable, comprehensive web site.
- Utilize website/database to target niche markets.
- Increase reciprocal links with community partners to ACRA website.
- Use website to highlight Aspen promotions and last minute deals on lodging, events and show tickets.
- Create "hot sheets" for last minute lodging and events that are distributed via web and visitor centers.
- Create electronic flyers with information on targeted kids/family, music/arts/cultural events, adventure, spa /relaxation promotions.
- Improve functionality of a comprehensive on-line community calendar of events; increase the number of users inputting data.
- Improve the quality of existing materials distributed by visitor centers; establish packets of subject-related materials.
- Respond to email requests for information promptly.
- Distribute information to Colorado Welcome Centers, AAA offices, and other drive market outreach providers, with a minimum of two follow-ups each year.

Objective: Further increase the visibility of the ACRA through a stronger visitor information center presence and an ongoing active community outreach program.

Strategies:

- Create a 24-hour guest service center for booking and information.
- Encourage and participate in community efforts to improve way-finding signage and consistency; add new signs including Aspen welcome sign as you enter town and update older ones.
- Undertake required visitor research and destination planning.
- Develop a Chamber ambassador program to provide visitor information at major events, airport information desks, and other appropriate venues.
- Provide an incentive for visitors to go to the Visitor Centers.
- Provide training for front line resort staff, restaurants, and hotels.

Goal 2: Build a larger and stronger financial base for Destination Marketing.

Objective: Increase the Destination Marketing fund by at least 15%.

Strategies:

- Create additional funding mechanisms for short and long term actions.
- Focus on campaign for increased room tax.
- Maintain relevant data on competitors' budgets and lodging/sales tax.
- Work with City of Aspen for cooperation on additional funding mechanisms.

Goal 3: Increase economic impact through new visitor retail and lodging expenditures.

Objective: Increase sales tax revenue through a marketing and public relations campaign that tells the Aspen story.

Strategies:

- Promote activities, special packages, and events through website and search engine optimization.
- Create specific promotions for restaurant and retail sectors.
- Develop a tighter system for the capture of all relevant information on past guests and potential visitors in the database.
- Cultivate the database development and management of our web site.
- Work with community partners to leverage our marketing campaign.
- Develop a public relations campaign to send target messages that drive business to Aspen.

Objective: To attract and coordinate special events for the community and visitor benefit.

Strategies:

- Act as a source of information for event producers wishing to partner with local businesses.
- Evaluate ACRA's menu of special events to assess on an ongoing basis cost-effectiveness and relevance to organizational goals.
- Produce the annual Wintersköl, Fourth of July celebrations, and Arts Festival
- Act as event manager for the annual FOOD & WINE Magazine Classic.
- Work with City of Aspen to create downtown mini-events that will add vibrancy to the community, i.e., street performers, musicians.
- Work with community to ensure a better coordinated calendar of events.

Goal 4: Leverage existing relationships with community and statewide marketing entities for greatest impact.

Objective: Continue to improve communications between the ACRA staff, chamber members, and the tourism industry, including the Colorado Tourism Office, Colorado Association of Destination Marketing Organizations, and Travel Industry Association. Include Aspen Skiing Company, Town of Snowmass Village, and arts & cultural organizations.

Strategies:

- Assess the Colorado Tourism Office marketing plan and timetable to determine opportunities for participation in co-op advertising and publicity.
- Disseminate tourism information and research through our website.
- Determine feasibility of an on-line application for the cooperative advertising program.
- Work with TOSV, ASC, and cultural organizations to create synergy on marketing efforts.
- Work with community marketing groups to tie in to scheduled events.

Goal 5: Increase revenue and participation by ACRA members in the Aspen Groups program.

Objective: Increase group bookings to Aspen through targeted sales and marketing campaign geared at corporate, association, wedding, and tour group travel.

Strategies:

- Increase presence and sponsorship of meeting industry events and trade shows.
- Email campaign aimed at corporate, association, and tour group travel.
- Increased travel budget for personal sales calls.
- Maximize Aspen Groups presence in targeted publications.
- Develop partnerships with media and publication companies who provide planner tools and resources.
- Promote wedding planner portion of ACRA website in bridal directories and websites.

Objective: Expand Aspen Groups to additional areas of participation and build revenue base to assure funding is self-sustaining.

Strategies:

- Document the success of the program to potential new members.
- Open up membership to non-lodge entities.
- Create income through ad sales by producing an Aspen Meeting Planner's guide.
- Work in cooperation with City of Aspen and ACRA Special Events departments to capture revenue in leisure market.
- Generate revenue via ad sales on Wedding Planner portion of ACRA website.
- Sell sponsorship of meeting planner events and FAM trips to ACRA members.

MISSION AREA 2: PROVIDING VALUABLE SERVICES TO MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Membership development is an important element within this section of the plan. To be successful, we must have a strong organization. We will support and expand our membership by providing value-added benefits and services that are responsive to our existing members and are attractive to prospective members.

Goal 1: Be regarded as a valuable partner for local businesses in maintaining a qualified work force.

Objective: To assist local businesses in sustaining a productive workforce.

Strategies:

- Develop and distribute high-quality relocation information.
- Produce spring and fall job fairs based on business needs.
- Provide employee benefits to employers to augment their employment packages.
- Continue to provide guest service resources to business owners, managers, and employees.

Objective: To augment employers' benefit packages with special offers and discounted amenities for employees.

Strategies:

- Develop and continue contractual relationships with businesses and government that provide valued goods and services to the local workforce on a discounted basis.
- Support the Roaring Fork Valley Community Health Plan maintaining accessible quality care in the area. Continue to establish special discounts for employees of Chamber businesses.
- Work with member services committee on a needs assessment and current conditions of benefit packages to determine areas of focus.
- Make advertising opportunities available for members to reach out to the community through chamber avenues.
- Promote member to member-keep it local campaign – Support local economic recovery by promoting the shop, dine, play local campaign.

Goal 2: To be the leading source of local information on operating a successful local business.

Objective: To offer useful information and seminars on business management for local owners and their employees.

Strategies:

- Survey the members to establish their information needs on a quarterly basis.

- Partner with other agencies, members, or suppliers when applicable to hire speakers and host workshops.
- Schedule business seminars throughout the year relevant to membership needs.
- Conduct post-seminar evaluations to determine their effectiveness.
- Coordinate and disseminate demographic information in a cohesive, user-friendly way for new residents and employees.

Objective: To communicate regularly with the membership on subjects important to their businesses and the value of the ACRA.

Strategies:

- Produce an e-newsletter with important business news and education, and distribute quarterly.
- Update and refine the member services section on the web site, making it more user-friendly and convenient for members to log-in.
- Produce a local TV show to relay pertinent Chamber and community information.
- Produce an annual report to the membership at the close of the fiscal and service year, highlighting the past years' accomplishments.
- Develop new member orientation sessions to familiarize members with applicable business opportunities.
- Communicate ACRA's monthly meeting agenda, actions, and marketing efforts to the membership.
- Ensure that ACRA Board election opportunities are well-publicized to each of the membership categories and cultivate new talent.

Goal 3: Promote our members by acting as a referral agent, by producing communication materials, and providing networking opportunities.

Objective: To provide opportunities for local business representatives to socialize, build relationships, and learn about community affairs.

Strategies:

- Produce major member luncheons in partnership with Wintersköl, the Food and Wine Classic, the City of Aspen, and the Aspen Skiing Company.
- Produce networking events for business owners and employees each year to meet and trade industry leads.
- Coordinate election forums to showcase candidates and issues important to local businesses.
- Re-establish formal networking opportunities for ACRA Members (Six Degrees, an ACRA Leads Group).
- Reach out to younger professionals, business owners, and employees to engage them in ACRA's mission.

- Promote member – to – member benefits/discounts (online, advertising, paycheck inserts available to members, create a card with member benefits to give to members, employees, etc.
- Define member benefits individually and simply.

Objective: Increase retention of members and expand positive membership relations, contacts, and value-added services.

Strategies:

- Continue to produce annual business directory (on-line and print) with advertising, email, and web addresses to facilitate business-to-business communications.
- Implement consistent member-feedback system to constantly monitor needs, results, and interests of members, including: regular surveys, utilization of Chamber Ambassadors, committees, and Board of Directors.
- Work with the Member Service Committee to evaluate and identify specific benefit programs and services currently offered as well as identify specific benefit programs that have potential to meet members' needs.
- Re-engage membership relations for consistent personal contact with Chamber members.
- Increase awareness and use of member referral system and communicate consistently to members.
- Work in conjunction with other local associations to best represent the interests of members.

Goal 4: To continue to coordinate and execute a community-wide guest service training program to improve the visitor experience.

Objective: Create consensus on community need and continue to evolve a need-based program.

Strategies:

- Build community alignment on a campaign for Aspen to be known for providing excellence in guest services.
- Facilitate a community leaders' discussion group on need assessment creating buy-in on phase two of the program.
- Continue to review baseline measurements to identify the current conditions of guest service and how much improvement the program has made each year.
- Assess and update research regarding guest service and select programs which fits community desires.
- Track results and evaluations and integrate them into selected programs.
- Continually identify new areas and methods for guest service program so that it is agile and adapting to current business environment.

MISSION AREA 3: FACILITATING COMMUNITY SYNERGY BETWEEN MEMBERS, GOVERNMENT, AND LOCAL NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

One of the recurring themes of this plan is “partnering.” The ACRA, by taking the lead role, will accomplish many of the action items outlined. Others will be accomplished with the Chamber facilitating their accomplishment and, in some instances, the ACRA will take a support role.

Goal 1: Facilitate and/or participate in key community issues with government, businesses, and local civic and non-profit organizations.

Objective: Support infrastructure and Entrance-to-Aspen improvements to facilitate transportation access to the community.

Strategies:

- Monitor work with CDOT and other official groups to update and revitalize the Entrance-to-Aspen Record of Decision. The Record of Decision was reaffirmed by CDOT in 2008.
- Promote a business forum to support efforts at implementation of transportation improvements.

Objective: The ACRA will be active in giving our membership a cohesive voice on relevant business issues by providing the membership with information and collecting their feedback.

Strategies:

- Plan presentations by other local groups at monthly board meetings and disseminate this information to the membership following the meetings.
- Ask staff and volunteer leaders to serve on appropriate committees or boards where they can be most helpful.
- Contribute support and in-kind services to other groups advocating positions on public issues where it is feasible and relevant to the Chamber purpose.
- Collaborate with other community organizations to present forums on vital local issues.
- Evaluate issues for referral to the public affairs committee.

Goal 2: Establish a round-table of community participants to develop an economic plan responsive to current economic conditions.

Objective: To ensure the key findings of the report are reviewed and updated.

Strategies:

- Develop and publish indicators of progress.
- Adopt decision-making tools and methods.
- Organize a business network to share information.
- Work with the ACRA Public Affairs Committee to review findings annually.

Objective: Support business initiatives to implement a Local Marketing District

Strategies:

- Provide a forum for business/non-profit leaders to disseminate information and debate the merits of a local marketing district.
- Review with Board to endorse the consensus approach.

Goal 3: Spearhead a brand identity exercise on behalf of residents (including all demographic groups: youth, retirees, etc.), second homeowner's, businesses (for profit and not-for-profit), and tourists to properly position ourselves.

Objective: Recognize the value of diversity to capture new market share, evaluate the balance between community and resort, and identify our community's limitations/challenges.

Strategies:

- Survey visitors and include questions regarding challenges/obstacles considered when booking visit to Aspen/Snowmass.
- Identify strategies to appropriately enhance diversity in our marketing and branding activities.
- Participate in an on-going dialogue regarding balance between user groups, including tourists, second homeowners, retirees, youth, and local residents.

MISSION AREA 4: PROVIDE ADVOCACY OF RELEVANT COMMUNITY ISSUES

In order to represent the interest of members and the overall business community, we need to enhance and sustain a positive business climate and maintain advocacy at all levels of government. This section of the plan addresses future efforts to provide leadership on emerging issues of importance to the business community.

Goal 1: The ACRA will be the recognized representative and advocate of Aspen local businesses.

Objective: To be responsive within the political arena to member needs and determine relevant community issues.

Strategies:

- Continue to develop a clear process for public affairs that identifies which issues are important to the membership and how issues are prioritized, how strategies are developed, and what resources are necessary to make informed decisions.
- Develop a plan to ensure that the process is transparent for the ACRA Board to understand and take action.
- Develop task forces and a solid committee structure to address issues the Board targets as critical to local business, with membership input factored into the decision process.
- On identified issues, conduct research and information gathering to form positions.
- Survey the members on their opinions identified through the public affairs process.
- Recommend an amendment to the ACRA public affairs policy to provide for quarterly member surveys.
- Facilitate an understanding of those identified issues by staging forums, workshops, and other communication vehicles, possibly in conjunction with other community agencies.
- Attend appropriate work sessions, conferences, or meetings on targeted issues.
- Be pro active, not reactive by meeting with City Council on a more regular basis to provide information on issues of importance to the ACRA and its membership.
- Develop a mechanism to communicate with members on a regular basis as to issues, advocacy, and results.
- Develop and maintain strong relationships with local, state, and federal government officials on behalf of the business community regarding issues of importance.
- Obtain information on key issues in a timely fashion. Set up a system so we keep an eye on what issues are on the horizon. Determine status and review issues.

Objective: To communicate the local community's concerns to groups at the state level engaged in ongoing education, networking, and in the formulation of a legislative agenda.

Strategies:

- Maintain membership in organizations representative of local business: the Colorado Chamber of Commerce Executives, the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, the Colorado Hotel and Lodging Association, the Colorado Society of Association Executives, Meeting Planners International, and similar organizations as may be appropriate.
- Offer invitations to appropriate leaders including business experts of such organizations to address ACRA board meetings.
- Attend meetings and conferences of such representative groups.
- Utilize Directors comments more effectively during Board of Directors meetings encouraging reports from their respective constituencies to identify issues of importance to ACRA and its membership.
- Contribute to periodicals or conference programs as appropriate.

ACTION STEPS TO DELIVER STRATEGIC PLAN: MAKING IT HAPPEN

To be a financially viable and accountable organization, we must successfully allocate our resources within the framework of our strategic plan. Below is how we plan to make it happen:

Objective: To retain 90 percent of the membership each year and recruit an additional 150 members over the three year period of this plan.

Action Steps:

- Produce a membership renewal packet with compelling information about membership value, benefits, and cost savings.
- Work with the City Finance department to capture data on and solicit new businesses throughout the Roaring Fork Valley.
- Call all non-renewing members and conduct exit interviews; encourage them to rejoin.
- Recognize new members through the e-news, announcements at member functions, etc.
- Clean up billing and renewal cycles to preclude non-renewing members being carried on the member roles for too long.
- Enter key data into the now-remodeled database for additional effectiveness in member communication: when they joined, what functions they attend, frequency, and points of contact, etc. Develop reports for the Board and Member Services Committee.
- Evaluate the member dues structure against services delivered.
- Introduce an electronic, database-driven billing process for member dues.

Objective: To pursue additional sources of non-dues revenue.

Action Steps:

- Compose a list of possible non-dues revenue-producing programs.
- Examine of the current investment policy.
- Assign Member Services Committees to work on and make recommendations to the Board regarding the evaluation of new funding sources.

Objective: To adhere to the fiduciary responsibilities inherent in the organization's administration.

Action Steps:

- Hire an accounting firm to conduct a financial review of the organization on an annual basis.
- Work with the Aspen Skiing Company and an independent auditor to audit the discounted ski pass program each year.
- Maintain appropriate insurance coverage and bonding for the Board and the staff.
- Work closely with the bookkeeper and the treasurer on budgeting, financial reports, and projections.

Objective: To elect qualified, enthusiastic, committed Board members during regular elections.

Action Steps:

- Encourage current Board and committee members to identify and encourage potential volunteer leaders within the business community.
- Select a Nominating Committee each year that is appropriately representative, knowledgeable, and respectful of the Chamber's nominating and election process.
- Encourage the Nominating Committee to consider future, as well as current, slates of officers.
- Update job descriptions of the Board chair, officers, and members for those considering service.
- Supply a board manual to each Board member, including the legal, financial, structural, and ideological basics of the organization.
- Conduct new-member orientations with appropriate officers for new Board members.
- Schedule a planning retreat and social functions for Board members to better get to know each other and their function within the Chamber.

Objective: To strategically field committees and task forces that will address pertinent issues in a substantive and timely fashion.

Action Steps:

- Schedule a meeting between the ACRA President and the Board chair to determine the list and composition of appropriate committees for the year.
- Include on committees Board members and interested, qualified members of the community at large.
- Work with the Board to enhance its awareness of the committee structure, Board and committee responsibilities, and the need to work within that prevailing structure.

Objective: To ensure that all official documents are up to date, accessible, and follow the letter of the law.

Action Steps:

- Update the bylaws and submit for legal review.
- Formulate a policy manual; research and assemble pertinent contents.
- Organize and archive articles of incorporation, minutes, bylaws, lists of past officers and directors, and any appropriate historical information.

Objective: To ensure that the ACRA physical plant and its technological support are sufficient to fulfill responsibilities.

Action Steps:

- Continue to improve the computer system in the office and the visitor centers by determining necessary hardware and software upgrades.
- Plan and execute a re-constitution of the visitor center space at Rio Grande to provide for greater visitor benefit. (ZG master plan, Youth Center Building mitigation)
- Work with Stay Aspen/Snowmass on any systems that could be shared for greater efficiency.
- Budget for capital improvements and ongoing maintenance as is necessary to maintain a clean, productive, and attractive workplace.

Objective: To ensure that the ACRA website is the preeminent website offering information to potential visitors about community events and member services that tracks usage and builds web traffic for marketing.

Action Steps:

- Budget financial resources to maintain our market leadership.
- Continue to enhance usability of website so the website is the central location for all community events and promotions.
- Ensure sufficient staff education on leading electronic technologies.

Objective: To train, motivate, and reward qualified staff.

Action Steps:

- Reassess performance evaluation forms and conduct evaluations at least annually.
- Reassess a financial incentive plan for the staff.
- Improve the structure of the 401(k) pension plan.
- Reformulate and update all job descriptions for greater clarity.
- Overhaul and update the employee manual; subject to legal review before providing to the staff.
- Budget for and observe opportunities for continuing education for the staff: in corporate sponsorships, not-for-profit management, writing and editing, member recruitment, etc.
- Assess all initiatives in the revised strategic plan within the context of necessary staff resources.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

CO-OP ADVERTISING: is where the ad costs are divided between two or more companies.

DIRECT MAIL: printed matter sent directly through the mail to prospective customers or businesses from our database, or sent through shared mailing

DIVERSITY: attracting potential visitors from all economic strata, in all age groups, and interest areas, both within the U.S. and abroad.

UNIQUE VISITORS: web visits that are counted only once no matter how many pages they view on our website.

WEB / SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION: is the act of increasing the ranking of a site and hence its visibility within search results for a given word, such as "Aspen" or "Colorado Summer Vacation."