

# Association Executives: Provocative Proposals for Change

## January 2012

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**Executive Summary:** Appreciative Inquiry (AI) research was conducted to identify future positive and achievable opportunities for associations and association executives (PARTS III and IV). The research yielded numerous themes (PART IV), which serve as inspiration for provocative proposals for change, some of which are offered (PART V). Our personal interpretation of perspective we have gained through conducting the project itself is offered at the conclusion (PART VI). The report is intended to serve as a basis for associations and their executives to devise their own provocative proposals for positive future change.

### PART I: OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

In the spring of 2011 our consulting firm, Alcorn Associates Management Consulting (“AAMC” or “we”), began an Appreciative Inquiry based project (AI) called *“Association Executives: Provocative Proposals for Future Change.”* We frequently use AI techniques in our work with not-for-profit entities and became convinced that perhaps the technique should also be used within the not-for-profit community. Our favorite brief summary of the AI principles, by author Richard Seel, can be viewed at [http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/introduction\\_to\\_ai.htm](http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/introduction_to_ai.htm).

Originally conceived as a small-scale effort, the project quickly outgrew our expectations. Through social media, word of mouth, referrals and invitations our participant list grew to include over 200 association executives from all 50 United States, Canada and South Africa. We primarily focused on 501(c)(6) trade and professional associations, but also included a number of 501(c)(3), (c)(4) and (c)(5) organizations. You can see our list of participants at the end of the report (ATTACHMENT C). We are immensely grateful for their participation in this effort.

The ten questions we proposed were designed to examine a number of different over-arching trends moving through the consciousness of association executives today, including -- where the executives of tomorrow are coming from, membership trends, what the association business model looks like and, most importantly, the future role and configuration of associations. The executives who participated in the project were enthusiastic and willing to share their views on these issues, as well as surfacing plenty of others, from a positive perspective. An outline of the questionnaire used is attached (ATTACHMENT A).

Since the survey was dependent upon interviews and qualitative input, the results are presented as descriptive summary statements. Interviewees are not identified. Although all input was valuable and taken into consideration, those responses given by only a few (and in some cases only one individual) are not necessarily included in the summary statements as these are meant to create a general, albeit recognizable, story. A summary of responses to AI interview questions is set forth in PART III of this report. The summary responses were used to develop the Themes in Part IV of this report.

However, because of the immense value contained in the individual responses, we decided to expand this effort beyond the borders of this report. We have established the Association Forecast blog

([www.associationforecast.com](http://www.associationforecast.com)) and the Association Forecast LinkedIn group and intend to publish individual stories from those executives who participated in the effort upon receipt of permission from the interviewees to do so. Those who choose to use this resource will have the added benefit of hearing from the individual participants in their own voices and can choose to draw your own conclusions.

Based on the statements (Part III) and themes (Part IV) culled from the interviewees, various provocative proposals for future changes in the association management profession were devised. The provocative proposals are not intended to be adopted out of hand. Rather, they are suggested ideas and directions that any given association or association executive may wish to adopt, modify or reject. The provocative proposals are meant to provoke discussion and to inspire new thinking from the association audience. In a normal environment, there would be an opportunity to engage a number of voices in the development of the provocative proposals, but in this case we have a limited number of minds who are considering potential scenarios. Some of the provocative proposals might be considered wholly inappropriate to some, or dull and unrealistic to others. The provocative proposals are set forth in PART V and more fully explored in ATTACHMENT B of this report.

It is important to note that while the summary responses stick closely to the data at hand, the provocative proposals are ***an outgrowth of ideas sparked by the results***. In some cases, they represent large conceptual leaps into a potential future state. In other instances, their direct connection to the summary responses may seem unclear.

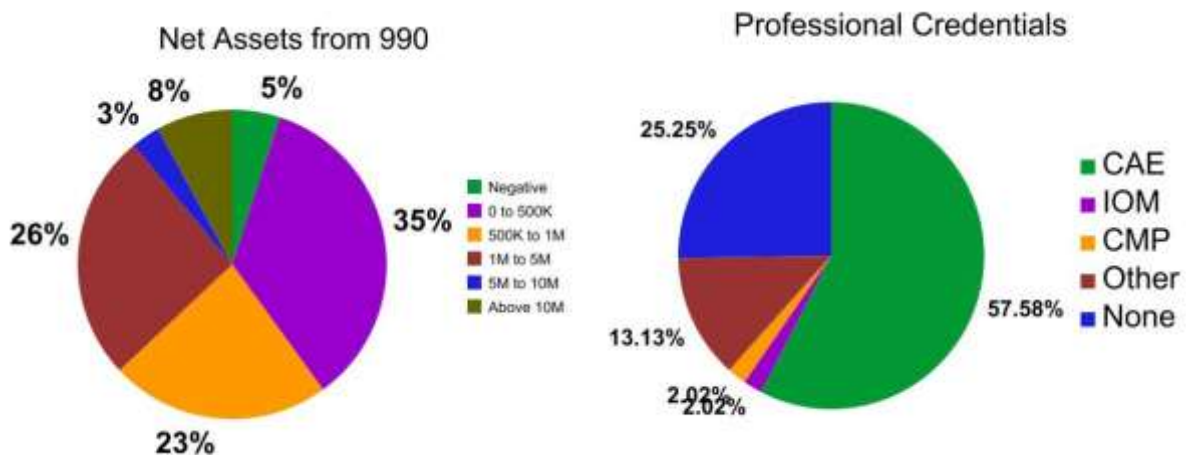
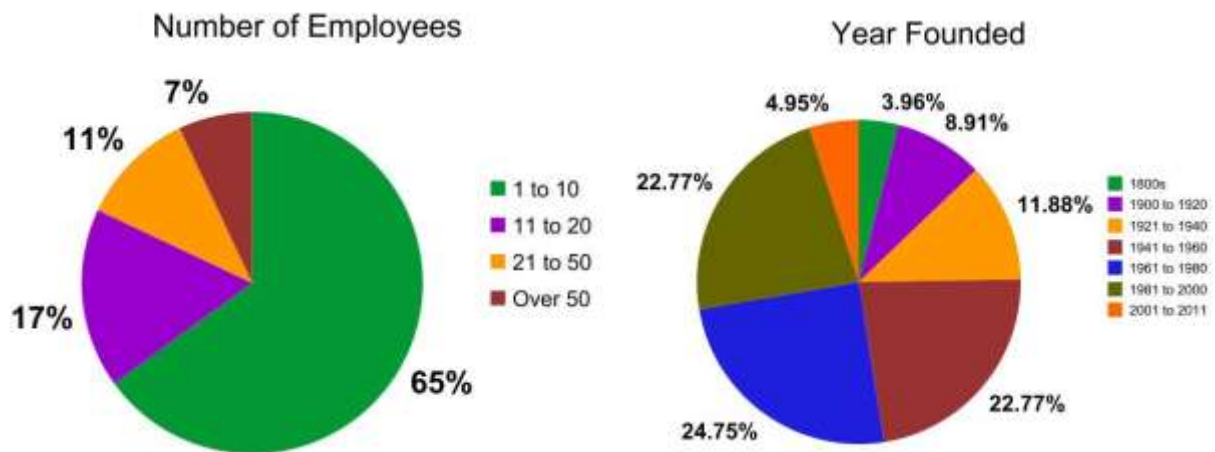
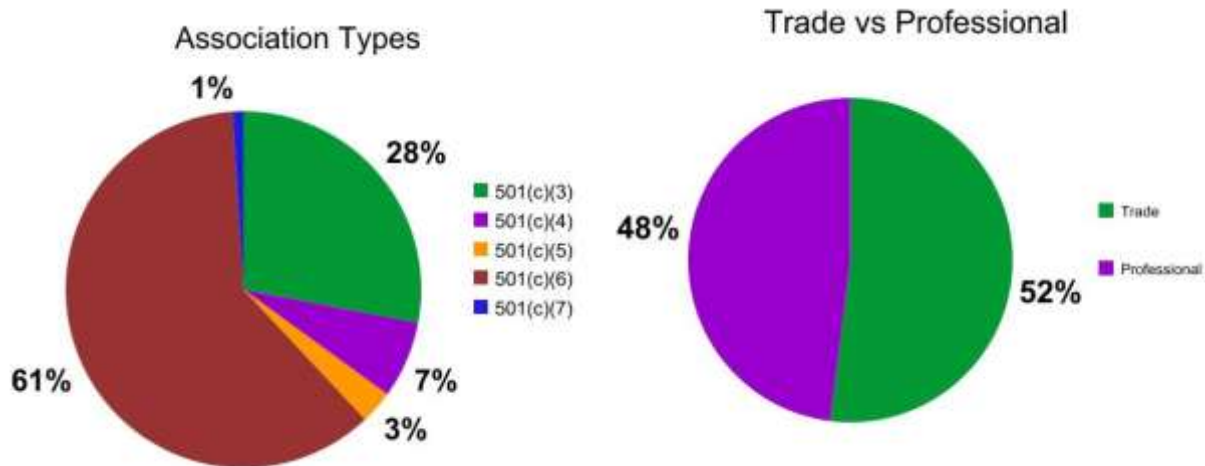
Finally in Part VI, AAMC provides herewith its personal interpretation of and implications for the data collected. This section of the report is reflective not only of the data, but of our personal ideals and beliefs. We do not assume that everyone will agree with us, but hope it will foster discussion and creative change on the part of colleagues who believe associations have a bright and vibrant future.

Comments and input concerning this paper are welcome. Shelly Alcorn, CAE can be contacted at [shelly@alcornassociates.com](mailto:shelly@alcornassociates.com).



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## PART II: BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERVIEWEE POOL



## **PART III: SUMMARY OF RESPONSES**

Upon conclusion of the interviews, the first steps we took in analyzing the data was to take a look at the answers to each question and note each separate concept as it appears in the transcriptions. As the same, or very similar, concepts resurfaced in other interviews, their appearance was noted. By using this process, the most often and the least often reported concepts were quantitatively evaluated. At that point, similarities, differences and contradictions revealed themselves most fully. Concepts mentioned most frequently were the ones that received the most attention and were the primary source used in the development of the summary responses. However, less frequently mentioned concepts were still valuable in terms of understanding the context associations operate in. Those concepts were included on a case-by-case basis and highlighted when they appear. The absence of percentages, except in certain notable instances, is purposeful. You will notice terms such as, “significant number,” “most,” “some,” and “a few” instead. The object is not to slice and dice the data by “30% of executives said x, y or z” but to create a recognizable narrative which serves as the basis for the development of the themes and provocative proposals.

### **1. What led you to become involved in association work and how did you become an executive director?**

Almost universally, the answer was the same as it has always been. ***Interviewees typically became aware of the position through informal means.*** Those interviewed either knew somebody who pitched the position to them, they responded to an advertisement or they were association members who decided to redirect their careers and join the staff. In fact, 40% of respondents used the words, “I fell into it.” Other popular phrases included, “it was a fluke,” and, “it was an accident.” Although a few interviewees reported the executive position was the first position they had held in an association, most respondents tripped into a functional position, (i.e., communications specialists got jobs handling association communications) and then worked their way up to the executive position. A number of executives reported pursuing and obtaining certifications such as the Certified Association Executive (CAE), Institute of Organizational Management (IOM) or Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) on their journey.

A full quarter of the interviewees had another career prior to shifting into association management. ***Prior careers most often mentioned included teaching, lobbying, and political consulting.*** A number of former attorneys were found in executive ranks as well. Other various careers were reported from fields such as business, finance and communications. In a very few cases, we even found some former elected officials who held public office.

For those interviewees who were members of the association prior to coming on staff, the transition was sometimes tumultuous. Although prior experience in the specific industry or profession was helpful in terms of understanding the member perspective, the skill set required to actually run the association almost always presented a steep learning curve. Once hired and becoming committed to association management, executives diverged into two different groups. One group believes experience in the industry or profession is critical to success in the executive position and have either stayed at their original association or moved to a closely related association in the same field. A second somewhat larger group came to see the executive position as one with a portable skill set and have moved on to lead associations that may or may not be related to their original industry or profession.

***Rarely mentioned were any pathways into the association management field from the secondary or post-secondary educational system.*** There were a few reported instances of current executives having accepted college internships in a 501(c)(3) setting which raised their awareness of the non-profit community, if not the association community itself. One executive mentioned having had a professor who encouraged them to look at the association world as a potential career and one other executive talked about actually attending a college program in association management which was subsequently cancelled due to low enrollment. The only exceptions to this general rule were those respondents who mentioned they had been political science majors and had heard about associations because of their frequent employ of lobbyists and political operatives.

**2. Where do you see the next generation of executives coming from? Will it continue to be a more organic process or do you see additional entry points opening up?**

Again, almost universally this was identified as a pressing issue for the association community to grapple with. For the most part, interviewees were unaware of any official efforts underway to directly address the issue. From their perspective, the association community has made some gains with the CAE designation administered by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). ***Where the CAE seemed to fall short in their eyes is in solving the underlying problem of awareness of the profession itself and the need to attract candidates who are capable of developing the appropriate skill set.*** Interviewees reported that associations have been aware of the empty “talent pipeline” for a number of years now, but despite various efforts to address the situation do not seem to be appreciably moving the needle.

***The most popular response reflected the belief that recruiting individuals into association management has been, and will continue to be, an organic process.*** Many interviewees do not believe associations do a good job of promoting themselves as a career choice. They reported that association visibility remains low. Some interviewees mentioned they wished they had heard about associations in college so they could have gotten involved in their careers sooner. Occasionally interviewees have attempted to increase awareness of the career by speaking at high schools, college job fairs and sometimes college classes. Interviewees reported many associations are still pulling a fair number of executive candidates from traditional avenues such as personal contacts, lobbyists and political operatives.

Interviewees surfaced a new trend that has manifested in the association community since the Great Recession began in 2008. After having moved away from pulling executives from within the membership ranks over the past several years, a number of associations have reversed course and are now doing so at an accelerated rate. In some cases, interviewees reported on cases they know of where association boards of directors fired their current executive without cause and gave that position to a board member or other influential volunteer who was out of work due to the recession. ***The ease and speed in which this trend has manifested over the course of 2010-2011 suggests the association profession has not attained unassailable legitimacy in the eyes of the public.*** For example, it seems unlikely that a board would fire their legal counsel and assume a volunteer could do the job just as well, but the executive position appears to not benefit from the same level of professional respect.

In addition to feeling they are still not considered by many to be in a “legitimate” profession, many interviewees declared they need a better and simpler way to describe the world of association management. This finding suggests association management professionals need to continue defining their role and reinforcing the idea that association management is a profession in its own right. ***It appears there are a growing number of executives who believe it is time for associations to develop an evidence based body of knowledge beyond the current literature and to create intentional career pathways to attract talent.***

Some interviewees reported seeing a slight uptick in job candidates coming into the association management profession by choice rather than by accident and, in some cases, attribute this trend to social media. They also reported a slight increase in the number of candidates who are coming in holding one of the various nonprofit certificates being offered at colleges and universities around the country. However, they also stressed their belief that these nonprofit certificate programs are typically focused on the 501(c)(3) perspective, not the 501(c)(6). ***Those candidates who have certificates in non-profit management have a head start, but are still inadequately prepared for the association sphere and require additional training to be effective.***

Regarding skill sets, interviewees often mentioned their belief that it is not easy to develop the skills needed to be an effective association executive. ***When reflecting on the most critical skills an association executive needed to possess, interviewees most often stressed diplomacy, volunteer engagement and stewardship.*** In addition, the executive of the future was described as an individual with a high degree of proficiency in three particular areas - technology, people skills and business acumen.

In the meantime, it appears associations will continue searching for executive candidates in the normal, haphazard way they always have. Interviewees mentioned an increased use of social media to find potential candidates. In some cases, those interviewees who are attempting to establish a succession track in their association are relying on pulling staff members into functional areas such as marketing, or communications, and then hoping the new employee begins to identify less with their individual expertise and embrace the association management career as a whole. ***Promotion to the executive position from within was mentioned as a good option, although some interviewees reported they either don't have anyone currently on staff who can do the job or (worse) if they can do the job, they don't want it.***

Some interviewees said they were actively seeking people who have a passion for the subject matter, while others saw recruiting from other professions as a good thing to bring more varied skill sets and experience into their staff culture. Still others were trying to get potential executive candidates more involved with their local state Societies of Association Executives (SAE's) or ASAE and were actively encouraging potential executive candidates to pursue the CAE, IOM or similar designation.

3. **Please describe the most rewarding, most exciting or best experience you have ever had as an association executive.**

This question had a wide variety of answers that were each unique to the individual but overall our interviewees reported they found being an association executive extremely rewarding. According to them, association management is a challenging but very satisfying line of work. ***Many interviewees reported finding a great deal of personal and professional fulfillment in their chosen career.***

Oddly, the most frequent answer to this question was no answer at all. One-fifth of interviewees were unable to identify any one event that they found particularly rewarding. Instead, they reported a deep sense of satisfaction that spanned their entire career. Of those who did have a particular event to point to, involvement in the legislative process, achieving legislative and regulatory victories and crafting good public policy were mentioned most often as highlights. The second most popular response involved helping members be successful and learn new skills, or helping advance a particular industry or profession.

In addition, interviewees frequently mentioned the relationships they have developed with both staff and volunteers as ranking high on the list of most rewarding aspects of the job. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned the phrase, "It's the people." Hearing thank you from or being recognized by staff, volunteers or colleagues were also high points. Many reported being involved with colleagues at the state and national level through the state SAE's, or ASAE was a career highlight.

***When interviewees described their best experiences, the answers were very different but they seemed to break down into lists that seemed to reflect on certain aspects of an executive's personality and general temperament.*** For example, there were a significant number of what might be called ***adrenaline junkies*** whose most rewarding experiences centered on winning legislative battles, pulling off difficult conferences or projects, starting an association from scratch or turning an association around from the brink of financial or other disaster. These interviewees seemed to enjoy wearing a lot of different hats and working on the edge.

There were also those interviewees who could be categorized as liking to ***bring order out of chaos***. Their best experiences centered on creating clear strategic priorities, presenting easily understood financials, being known for running a tight ship, staying focused and on target. These interviewees liked to focus on best experiences that highlighted making small but continual adjustments to keep the association moving forward, rebuilding reserves and exhibiting a high degree of financial skill.

There were some interviewees who seemed to be mainly ***relationship driven*** and reported their best experiences centered on connecting members, seeing their volunteer's passion for their fields, creating networking opportunities and seeing members face-to-face in their places of business or at conferences. These interviewees seemed to like making friends and didn't seem to be particularly concerned with blurring the lines between their personal and professional lives. They tended to mention spending a great deal of time working with younger members or students and attempting to involve these demographics in their respective associations and social networks.

Other interviewees seemed more driven by **future thinking** and their best experiences were described in terms of developing a strong vision for the organization, being change agents, instituting research efforts to scan future trends, seeing opportunities to be innovative or progressive, and keeping their associations ahead of the curve and relevant to the members. This group of interviewees usually reported a high level of interest in globalization.

It also appeared that some interviewees had a personality type that seemed most attracted to **helping people**. Their best experiences revolved around the times they were able to help people by instituting educational programs, offering assistance to members in times of crisis, serving as a sounding board, developing career pathways, starting foundations or other charitable efforts, as well as, raising money for different causes and participating in mentoring programs.

**4. Please describe the most important two or three things you have learned as an association professional.**

Of all questions answered, this one had the widest variety of answers. Every interviewee had a piece of advice to give and in most cases, that advice was based on individual experience that varied widely from executive to executive. There were a few answers that did appear a number of times but for the most part, this question remains the hardest to quantify in this report.

**Interviewees most often mentioned their belief that adapting to change is no longer part of the job, it IS the job.** They reinforced the idea that association executives need to be flexible and creative and to encourage a culture of innovation that respects experimentation and new ideas. Many interviewees urged their colleagues to think farther ahead than today, and to spend time connecting those dots for their members.

**However, interviewees also warned there is a careful balance to strike between changing too fast and defending the status quo too vigorously.** Either extreme was often mentioned as a quick way to the unemployment line. Patient yet persistent devotion to change was seen as the ideal. Most interviewees admit big changes are necessary, but so is a thoughtful, careful strategy to achieve those changes. They wanted to encourage their fellow executives to not get too far out in front of the members, lest they find themselves disconnected from the group.

The next most popular answer repeats an old adage - "it's not your association, it's the members." However, interviewees seemed to be putting a contemporary spin to the phrase by strongly reinforcing the idea that they see themselves as temporary stewards of a cause and want to put processes in place that are designed to outlive their service. Interviewees expressed their belief that association executives who forget these principles may find themselves in trouble. Interviewees acknowledged the importance of ownership. **However, in most cases they rejected the notion that the executive should take control of the association and drive the agenda.**

**Another frequently mentioned topic was advice regarding communication which usually boiled down to - listen more, talk less.** Interviewees urged their colleagues to be clear when explaining their own actions and to communicate early and often with their boards on issues of concern. Interviewees stressed the need for transparency and the need to ensure boards hear any bad news directly from the executive first, before they hear it from anyone else.



Some interviewees wanted to reinforce the importance of understanding volunteer leadership styles and how it is the executive's job to adjust to the volunteers, not the volunteer's job to adjust to the executive. **They believed dealing with different personalities is simply part of the job and developing those soft skills are crucial to success.** Understanding different member perspectives and political factions is also important. Interviewees suggested the most successful executives continually scan the environment and keep a close eye on the internal politics of the association.

At the end of the day, **developing and maintaining relationships** were often described by interviewees as the keys to a successful association career. Devotion to ethical behavior and having a high degree of personal integrity was seen as crucial. Interviewees stressed how executives should pay careful attention to maintaining their reputations, as well as being humble and keeping egos in check.

The last set of responses centered on how things get done. **A number of interviewees mentioned the necessity of having the skills to effectively multitask and wear a number of different hats.** They mentioned a level of concern surrounding their perception that too many association executives are forgetting or neglecting to harness the potential of the volunteer workforce. In their view, staff should not do everything, as tempting as that might be. Interviewees frequently mentioned the fact that associations couldn't do what they do *without* volunteers, yet volunteer energy and skill often remains untapped because of the staff-driven culture that has developed over the years. Interviewees suggested developing a strong strategic planning process and then effectively delegating sets the right foundation and tone for the organization. They also stressed the need for association executives to be collaborative, but to avoid micromanagement of staff or volunteers.

**5. Please describe a time when a particular group of volunteers was at their best in providing leadership?**

This question was designed to elicit stories about leadership by a volunteer group, whether that group happened to be the board, a chapter or region, committee or task force. We received many individual success stories that will serve as an important part of the work as it moves forward beyond this first report.

However, no matter what the issue or project, and regardless of which volunteer group was responsible for it, the most frequently mentioned common denominator was vision. Interviewees reported the most important criteria in creating the right conditions for excellent leadership to emerge was by focusing volunteers on something bigger than their own self-interest. **Vision was the one ingredient, (usually the only ingredient), that was able to trump internal politics and keep volunteers focused, committed, engaged and moving forward.**

Most often, stories about exceptional volunteer leadership came up in the context of fighting legislative or regulatory battles, overhauling governance structures or developing strategic vision. The key leadership attribute didn't have to do with exactly **what** they did, but **how** they did it. Those volunteers who were able to rise to the occasion almost always developed the social cohesion to stick together in spite of opposition or criticism. They engaged in a rigorous process of debate and made every effort to make decisions that were in the best interests of the

entire association, industry or profession at large. They also worked hard to be inclusive and solicit input, while still being decisive.

Interviewees highlighted a core requirement for cultivating exceptional volunteer leadership includes a strong partnership with the executive. They suggested an integral part of any association executive's job is to help create the conditions for success. This includes maintaining a focus on vision, process, removing roadblocks and clarifying roles. Once the questions are framed, volunteers typically move quickly to ascertain the answers.

**6. Please describe a time when your staff was at its best in providing leadership.**

On this question, we were surprised to see the lack of specifics that could be included in the concept capture. Of the concepts we were able to capture, this question had the least amount of variance. ***We rarely got stories or narratives that demonstrated instances of outstanding staff leadership.***

Most interviewees were effusive in their praise and, rather than mention a singular time their staff had demonstrated exceptional leadership, instead claimed their staff was at its best "every day." On the few occasions an interviewee did tell a story about staff leadership, most of those stories focused on a particular instance that occurred in conjunction with a conference or large event.

The second most popular response revolved less around specific examples of staff leadership, and more around the philosophy that staff leadership comes as a result of being empowered, not micromanaged and allowed to innovate. Interviewees offered a few examples of staff showing leadership in the face of downsizing during the most recent recession. Interviewees also discussed the fact that although some association staff members adjusted well to necessary layoffs, the increased workloads affected morale. Some interviewees placed an emphasis on reviewing staffing strategies in light of sustainability concerns. ***While interviewees mused that experienced association professionals will not necessarily recognize this condition as "new" since associations have historically had a reputation for overburdening staff, they did want to point out that overburdened staff, added to the empty talent pipeline, is creating a "perfect storm."*** Pushing current personnel to the breaking point coupled with a coming retirement wave, then adding in the challenges of attracting new recruits has the potential to negatively affect association staffing paradigms for years to come.

After this input, responses sharply fell off. ***There are not nearly as many examples of when staff showed leadership as compared to stories about volunteers showing leadership.*** One could argue this is actually an ideal state and that exceptional volunteer leadership is only possible with strong and capable staff support in the "background." If so, staff leadership may be "hidden" behind volunteer accomplishment.

However, based on the tone of the interviews, a more likely alternative is association staffing structures could be unconsciously stifling staff leadership. ***In spite of enthusiastic claims that exceptional staff leadership happens "on a daily basis," the noticeable absence of specific examples is concerning.*** It may be pointing to a staff culture that offers a great deal of highly valued ongoing support to the executive, but is becoming less and less likely to stick its neck out and take a calculated risk.

If, in the absence of viable alternatives, associations are going to continue to pull executive talent from within staff ranks, taking risks is a skill that needs conscious development. If staff members are unwilling or unable to develop their ability to take calculated risks, they will collectively hamper any association's efforts to create or sustain a culture of innovation going forward.

**7. Do you believe you are using your position as an association executive to positively impact society in general?**

The response to this question was overwhelmingly positive. 76% of interviewees gave an unequivocal 'yes' and many of them drew a direct line between the condition of their members and the condition of society overall. At first glance, our common association mythology would attribute stated societal concerns and service more likely to be found in professional associations than in trade associations. However, this finding highlights an important change in that it cuts across both professional and trade association lines.

As far as nonprofits making a positive impact on society, associations are often overlooked, as the public tends to focus on the 501(c)(3) charitable groups instead. However, according to this research 501(c)(6) associations do not need to feel like second class citizens. Interviewees strongly felt they make a demonstrable impact on society, particularly in regards to local, state and national economics, public health and education.

***The interviews suggested there may be a renewed interest in, and a growing recognition of, the role that associations play in society.*** A number of interviewees expressed their belief that they have a significant responsibility to help the public understand what their members do and why their members make life better for society. Other interviewees felt a strong sense of responsibility to impact the public directly and expressed a desire to look beyond their membership borders and work for the good of all, not necessarily just their members. Establishing certification programs, setting standards and encouraging or enforcing ethical behavior were mentioned most often as tangible outcomes of these efforts.

There was a small but vocal segment of the interviewees who expressed concerns that focusing on tangential issues that may or may not be in the direct interest of their membership base may be a waste of time at best, and could lead to a loss of perceived membership value at worst.

***Overall, interviewees were relatively certain their efforts to create good public policy were beneficial for society in general, not just their members.*** Interviewees also often stated if they didn't feel they were doing good works, they wouldn't still be in the profession.

**8. Please project yourself out 25 years into the future, what are associations doing to garner mindshare on the part of the public?**

Admittedly, this question was predicated on a scenario in which associations have achieved a measure of public awareness that would not only bolster the profession itself but clearly show society the important and beneficial role associations play. Some interviewees were unable to project 25 years out and felt the rate of change is making long-term visions more difficult to predict, establish or maintain. A few interviewees expressed they did not feel public awareness

was the job of any association and that any future role for the association should be limited to promoting their members as opposed to themselves.

However, in spite of a few objections to the premise, most interviewees expressed a significant level of enthusiasm for the envisioned future and were not shy about offering opinions on how to get there. Overall, the concepts centered on an intentional expansion into the public sphere and ambitious ideas on how to do so.

***The most popular response centered on the idea that associations need to stop being shy about publicizing their good works.*** According to these interviewees, associations must find new ways to talk about themselves and tell their stories. There was a strong desire on the part of some to collaborate in the new media landscape as a way to amplify their voice beyond their own borders.

The next most often repeated answer included the idea that associations have the internal capacity to take on a bigger role in society. This was expressed in terms of supporting or, in some cases, supplanting governmental entities as well as playing a more significant role in the post-secondary system. ***Some interviewees were effusive about their belief that associations have the ability (maybe even a responsibility) to fill perceived leadership vacuums in the public sphere.***

Another group of interviewees saw value in positioning associations as a new source of information for the general public. They believed associations have a responsibility to circumvent what the media wants to publicize about them, their professions and industries. ***They made the case that associations not only have the ability, but the responsibility, to provide credible, well researched, non-partisan information to the public.*** Associations may have new roles to play in ensuring the general public has access to fact-based information - not information that is spun from one perspective or another.

The association is seen by some interviewees as an entity that can bring forward excellent solutions on public issues, as well as, positively influence economic and social growth. Some interviewees strongly believed associations can and should act as important forums for debating and solving public policy issues in a non-partisan environment. ***Establishing coalitions of the “unlike” and expanding current definitions of stakeholders were mentioned as potential strategies.*** In addition, some interviewees expressed their belief that associations have the capacity to go beyond convening conversations to actually providing essential services directly to the public.

***Other interviewees mentioned the need for associations to re-claim or outright reject the title of “special interest.”*** This characterization was proffered as a major obstacle to achieving goals on behalf of a broader societal audience. Some interviewees expressed their belief that associations have gone too far in the “war to win at all costs” and have lost sight of their responsibility to compromise for the greater good, even if that compromise means members might have to change the way they do business. A smaller group of interviewees focused on the need for associations to provide evidence of stronger links between the public and the industries and professions they represent to help overcome the pejorative “special interest” label.

There were also a small number of interviewees who mentioned they believed associations need to develop their own brand. However, over half who mentioned branding efforts said, “The Power of A” effort from ASAE was not what they were talking about. What they meant was a shared brand that would position associations as the guardians of business, professions and industry both in the United States and internationally.

The last major concept that was articulated came from those interviewees who felt associations need to focus on their educational efforts. There is a growing desire on the part of some interviewees to expand and professionalize educational efforts. These suggestions centered on blending peer-to-peer knowledge transfer with modalities developed by professional educators in order to reach a higher degree of efficacy and respectability.

9. **Imagine membership is comprised of every member you ever wanted – you have reached 100% of your target market however you define that market. Is this a matter of creating opportunities or removing barriers?**

*Although most interviewees were excited by this question, the responses were really dependent on what could be called an emerging “membership philosophy.”* The number of interviewees who felt that 100% of any target membership market **was not** the goal of the association outnumbered those who did by 2 to 1. A smaller group of interviewees were unsure if 100% was the right goal or not.

The responses revealed an almost even split between those interviewees who are more insular, more selective and who report their membership categories as contracting versus those who are more expansive and opening their membership categories up to a wider audience. ***The interviewees who reported an “inward collapse” slightly outnumbered those who focused on “outward expansion.”*** Those choosing a more insular path are focused on providing member value, things “members really need” and attempting to avoid the complications and diffusion of focus that can sometimes result from having a larger, more diverse membership. Those choosing a more expansive path are typically not particularly focused on membership. Instead they are focused on “doing great things,” such as involving a wide range of stakeholders, making progress towards or achieving a specific mission on behalf of the industry or profession and expecting membership to organically emerge as a consequence of their success. ***Attributing this split to the natural differences that exist between trade and professional associations is not sufficient to understanding this trend. This finding cut across all association types, sizes and revenue bases.***

***Some interviewees mentioned their top priority was volunteer engagement with many saying they would rather see 100% of current members engaged than enrolled.*** As far as creating opportunities or removing barriers to increase participation, interviewees were relatively evenly split. Some said associations need to do both, and others said associations need to concentrate on one or the other. When discussing barriers, dues were mentioned most often and the time people have to devote to the association was a close runner-up. The most common opportunities mentioned centered on the need for associations to concentrate on changing demographics and intentionally pursuing the creation of more culturally diverse institutions.

Regardless of insular or expansive focus, or philosophy in terms of barriers or opportunities, one-fifth of interviewees were very concerned about the need to attract younger members. ***Time and again, interviewees mentioned the pressing need to build a bridge between younger members with new ideas and older members who are vigorously defending the status quo.*** Despite data in the association sphere that has suggested this is not a new conflict, and that often member engagement has more to do with career stage than with age, there are a growing number of executives who believe associations can't sit on the sidelines. ***In their opinion, it is risky in this environment to assume these historical membership patterns will play out in the same manner they always have.***

Social media was mentioned by a few as an important development and interviewees reported seeing direct and indirect impacts on membership. For example, interviewees discussed having seen groups of young professionals setting up Facebook groups on topics the association believed it was in the lead on. ***Often, these younger people had no idea an association was already out there working on these issues and, worst of all, didn't seem particularly impressed when they found out.*** Antiquated communications strategies and internal cultural temperament surfaced as the main barriers to engaging with younger audiences.

At the end of the day, interviewees rarely mentioned "membership" as an outdated or irrelevant concept. They focused more on how to adapt to, and improve, the structures that currently exist.

#### **10. If you could change one thing about how we do business, what would it be?**

This question elicited concrete ideas about what associations could change about their current business model. ***The key themes underlying these responses were streamlining, flexibility and scalability.***

Streamlining governance was the most popular answer, with diversifying revenue streams the second most common answer. Interviewees most often mentioned a need to make their decision-making processes faster and more efficient. Eliminating extraneous policies, bureaucratic processes and red tape are no longer considered "nice to haves," but imperatives. Streamlining communications and cutting through the white noise without unduly contributing to it was favored by a smaller proportion of respondents.

***However, there was no consensus that the current business model is in danger.*** There were quite a few interviewees who offered the oft-repeated maxim - "Nonprofit is a tax status, not a business strategy," and another relatively large contingent who believed better business practices and financial management were crucial to association success in the future. There were a small number of interviewees who questioned why associations pursue nonprofit status and wondered whether the new socially conscious corporation model may hold some potential for non-profits who are struggling with growth and innovation.

There were also several interviewees who believed nonprofit status is likely to disappear, or become compromised, in an economic climate that appears to be stagnating with lower projected tax revenues over a sustained period of time and the increased public scrutiny of campaign activities in a post-Citizens United world.

Another contingent sees a future where there are fewer associations due to mergers and acquisitions but felt that ultimately, this would be positive in terms of impact. Less competition and duplication of efforts between associations means more resources to compete with other threats.

***There were a number of interviewees who reported that corporate and non-traditional competition is increasing exponentially.*** They believed developing strategies to combat this phenomenon should be of the utmost importance. That is not to say there was consensus on how associations can best compete in this environment. Some interviewees felt that modifying association structures to function with a more “corporate” model would be appropriate. Others expressed concerns that in the fervor to directly compete, some associations are losing their way and may be risking their essence which might actually be one of their most important competitive advantages. A number of interviewees believed the key to competing effectively is to focus on developing the individual and organizational capacity to competently engage in change management processes and then engaging those processes as each individual issue and decision point presents itself.

***The last concept that arose in this question regarding improving the business model, centered on intentionally developing human capital.*** Interviewees repeated their long-standing desires to develop volunteer leadership skills, institute better training for board members and to create systems that make it easy for volunteers to engage and participate in association activities.

## **PART IV: THEMES**

The next step in analyzing the data involved reading the interviews and the summary statements, then extracting key elements. The concepts most frequently and energetically expressed were those most likely to be identified as a “Theme.” Here are the over-arching themes that arose:

- 1. The association profession continues to be marked by a process for recruiting and retaining staff, CEO and volunteer talent that can best be described as a random and haphazard series of circumstances.*
- 2. Association executives, as a group, are receptive to providing societal benefit through their professional activities, sometimes even more than their boards are. Executives consistently highlight service to others and the joy of being part of something larger than themselves. They take pleasure in individual and/ or organizational evolution and progress.*
- 3. Boards of Directors and other volunteer groups are at their best when focused on something other than their own self-interests. High performance boards are marked by their ability to tackle controversial issues and to stand together in the face of criticism. Once that level of cohesion is developed, bold, visionary level activities become the norm.*
- 4. There is a growing disconnect between those associations who choose to embrace societal benefit as part of their mission and those associations who choose to ‘represent their members’ interests’ exclusively. There is also a desire on the part of some associations to draw a clear distinction between associations who represent trades and professions as opposed to the more recreational, hobbyist or single issue groups.*

5. *The definition of membership is in flux, yet two divergent philosophies are emerging. One philosophy sees associations collapsing inward, becoming focused on a smaller audience and developing a more transactional relationship with individual members based on perceived value. The other sees associations expanding outward including establishing much broader membership categories and asking all members to become engaged in efforts to improve the industry, profession and society at large. These trends cannot be explained by using the “professional” versus “trade” association explanations of the past.*
6. *Visions of the future overwhelmingly include an intentional expansion into the public benefit sphere and more collaborative efforts between associations and other stakeholders.*
7. *The overarching theme in discussions regarding governance structure and improvements in the business model can be linked to a desire for simplification.*

## **PART V: PROVOCATIVE PROPOSALS**

Overall, the themes identified from the AI interviews are not necessarily surprising. After all, they came from ordinary association executives from all over the United States, and then some. Their value lies in their origins: These are themes that are real, that association executives have *personally experienced*, and/or have resulted in the *highest and best successes* for association executives.

These themes are not theoretical concepts from any book. Association executives already know the taste – the thrill – of these experiences. They have a pretty good idea of what caused them, and of how they might make great things happen in the future.

Here, of course, is the power of AI: To recreate the best and most powerful experiences and successes, and spend less time on things that are negative, things with which we have no particular skills or experience, and things that have led to mediocre results. This is not to say that we do not learn from our failures. Indeed, failure is an important experience of any successful individual or organization. Rather, this is to say that as we look forward to creating a more successful future, our ambitions and plans are best sourced from things that were successful, and things with which we have some experience.

For this reason, the AI technique relies on themes, such as the ones identified above, as its inspiration for “provocative proposals” for change. The term “provocative proposals” was purposefully chosen by Professor David Cooperrider of the Case Western University Weatherhead School of Management. His idea was to use themes to generate bold ideas for change. Because the provocative proposals are rooted in past successes and outstanding experiences, and because they are rooted in things that association executives have done and experienced, the chances for success are substantially enhanced.

The notion of “dreaming” of fantastic future success is nothing new. Inspired “dreams” are, more often than not, a key part of any great success. This is reflected in the work of one of the most popular authors of our day, Jim Collins. Collins is the author of, among other works, “Built to Last” and “Good to Great.” Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras also authored an article published in Harvard Business Review entitled, *Building Your Company’s Vision* (September-October 1996, Pages 65-77). These works focus on the value of “vision” in building and operating a successful enterprise.



The following are examples of “dreams” – or *provocative proposals* – super successful companies had for themselves in the past:

Microsoft: A computer on every desk.

Wal-Mart, 1990: Become a \$125 billion company by 2000.

Stanford University, 1940s: Become the Harvard of the West.

City Bank, 1915: Become the most powerful, the most serviceable, the most far-reaching world financial institution that has ever been.

Of course, each of these entities succeeded in achieving their vision in a big way. And it is presumed that even those companies that did not succeed in the scale of the entities listed above still succeeded to a much greater degree than they would have without articulating a compelling provocative proposal for its own future.

Incidentally, not all provocative proposals need to be of such a grand scale. In his article “*Turning Goals Into Results: The Power of Catalytic Mechanisms*” (Harvard Business Review, July-August 1999, and Harvard Business Review OnPoint, Winter 2010) Jim Collins highlights the use of catalytic mechanisms to achieve their big, hairy, audacious goals. **The secret of catalytic mechanisms is that they often work best when they put power (including the power to disrupt and change traditional or “status quo” practices) into the hands of involved participants.** Provocative proposals and a catalytic mechanism have similar characteristics, but they are not necessarily the same thing. Both are intended to disrupt the status quo and traditional practices. Both target meaningful change. However, provocative proposals are oftentimes more in the nature of a trial balloon, a “what if” proposition, or a challenging idea. Nor are provocative proposals and catalytic mechanisms mutually exclusive:

For example, *what if* all 3M scientists were urged to spend 15% of their time experimenting and inventing in the area of their choice? *What if* all customers of Granite Rock were allowed to pay only for the product that satisfies them, without having to return the product that does not satisfy them, or even calling to complain? (See Catalytic Mechanisms article, Page 46.) *What if* Nucor Corporation, the most successful US steel company for the last three decades, dropped wages to 25 to 33% below the industry average, but paid bonuses of 80 to 200% of base pay, based on exceeding team productivity goals? (See Catalytic Mechanisms article, Page 51.) *What if* W.L. Gore & Associates, a \$2 billion fabric company, allowed employees to simply bypass their supervisor and follow a different leader within the company? (See Catalytic Mechanisms article, Page 52.)

Our question now is, “What if...?” The easiest way to begin a provocative proposal is with the words “What if...”

The following are a few provocative proposals for association executives to consider. The list, of course, is not exhaustive, nor is any item necessarily good or bad, right or wrong. They are simply ideas for provocative proposals. What worked at 3M would not have worked at Nucor. And what worked at W.L. Gore & Associates would probably not work in most associations. Thus, what each reader should hope to find or create is that special intriguing or compelling provocative proposal that might just work -- or inspire other provocative proposals -- for the association management profession.

Each of these provocative proposals is discussed in more detail in ATTACHMENT B to this paper.

***What if...*** associations had access to a pipeline of staff talent composed of individuals who are well-trained, acquainted with the association world and had temperaments conducive to success in this profession?

***What if...*** apprenticeship programs existed for aspiring association executives?

***What if...*** association executives had access to an expansive evidence-based body of knowledge?

***What if...*** this evidence-based body of knowledge provided a professional level of certification (substantially exceeding that of the CAE)?

***What if...*** the CAE or other association credentials were legally bound to common standards of ethics and performance?

***What if...*** credentialed/licensed association executives had substantial skills and training on public policy leadership?

***What if...*** an extensive collection of narratives and true stories existed that demonstrate the uniquely satisfying aspects of this professional experience?

***What if...*** associations took a serious look at changing their for-profit subsidiaries to benefit corporations instead?

***What if...*** service to a trade or professional association was considered a civic responsibility in a democratic society like voting?

***What if...*** associations had access to board members who already had an understanding of what board service entails?

***What if...*** high quality, affordable “volunteer boot camps” existed as a resource for associations?

***What if...*** associations recast themselves as representatives of the public good as opposed to purely self-interested entities?

***What if...*** association boards contained a number of members of the public to ensure the public interest stays on the agenda?

***What if...*** associations had advisory committees of community leaders to assist in providing guidance to the group?

***What if...*** associations create a collaborative platform to publicize their achievements and their impact on the public good?

**What if... associations provided information and research directly to the public and became the arbiters of public truth?**

**What if... associations collaborate, develop a series of principles and those associations who adopt those principles are able to claim a brand banner to fly that the public can learn to identify?**

**What if... participation and involvement replaced the concept of membership?**

**What if...associations became an official part of the post-secondary, adult education system in the United States?**

**What if... we give up brick and mortar offices?**

What other provocative proposals come to your mind that might ignite passion and cultivate positive change and achievement for the association management profession?

## **PART VI: OUR (ALCORN ASSOCIATES) INTERPRETATION**

This section focuses on what AAMC believes is a forward-thinking interpretation of the data collected from the AI interviews. In this section we occasionally cross over into the realm of opinion, and sometimes even advocate for certain kinds of changes. ***This is a clear break from being impartial reporters on research results at the beginning of this paper. None of the interviewees have endorsed this section.*** It is not necessary for the reader to agree with our perspective. Rather, it is intended to enlighten and, yes, to consider our views of the future possibilities for associations, and the role of associations in society.

Following review of the interviews, summary statements and the themes that emerged from the material, we feel compelled to offer a new view of the future of associations. After several brainstorming sessions where we asked ourselves, “What if....” questions, a common thread was discovered in the, “what if” proposals that leant themselves to the creation of an underlying framework for action.

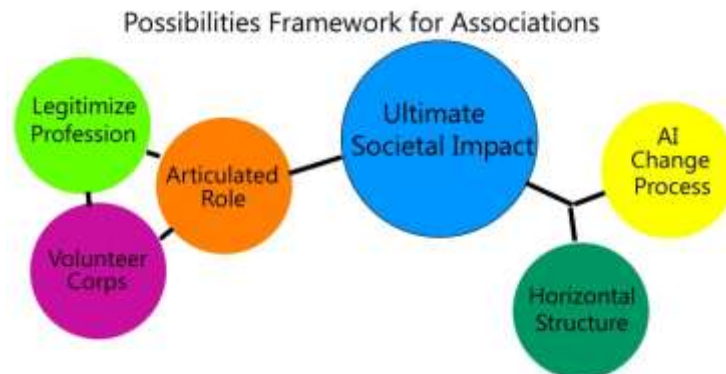
During the course of conducting this project, ***we became convinced that associations are losing their ability to differentiate themselves in the marketplace, not because of a lack of innovation and creative capacity, but through a wholesale adoption of language and management techniques more suited to the purely corporate goal of product production, and not experience creation.*** We believe recapturing our competitive position includes reframing the associations’ role in society. That reframing should lead to two important outcomes – our ability to make the case for our legitimacy as a profession and the engagement of a society wide effort to recruit and train a new generation of volunteers to serve their industries and professions.

In order to support a reframed role, the legitimacy of the profession and the imperative of society-wide engagement, we believe our organizations need to evolve in two key ways. This evolution entails the development of a more open, horizontal leadership/functional structure and the institutionalization of change process. We believe the regular use of Appreciative Inquiry and other methods designed to focus our attention on positive achievement will, over time, provide substantially improved outcomes in a more flexible and adaptable strategic environment.

The ultimate societal impact would be the recognition on the part of the public that associations occupy a critical niche in our democratic society, the promulgation of non-partisan forums for debate on public policy issues, collaborative platforms for associations to provide the public and members of the media with non-biased research and information, the ongoing production of positive news stories, public recognition of workforce development tracks and the potential for associations to become embedded in the new post-secondary educational landscape that is unfolding.

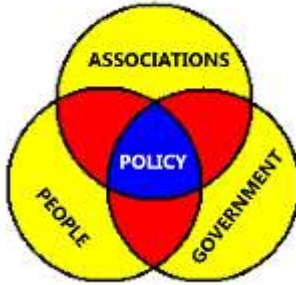
The adoption of this collaborative framework could result in the creation of a superstructure. Here is the definition of SUPERSTRUCTURE from Merriam-Webster – 1) a : an entity, concept, or complex based on a more fundamental one or b : social institutions (as the law or politics) that are in Marxist theory erected upon the economic base, or 2) a structure built as a vertical extension of something else: as a : all of a building above the basement b : the structural part of a ship above the main deck.

This superstructure would entail in-depth examination of a number of key pieces highlighted by this research including a re-articulation of our role in society, further legitimizing the profession with a body of knowledge that could create a recognized career path and the development of volunteer leaders. Secondly, it would require the systematic implementation of more horizontal systems and an ongoing commitment to using AI, and strengths-based change processes to ensure associations continue to function at their highest possible potential.



The following are detailed descriptions of these different components and the underlying philosophy behind them.

### Articulated Role for Associations:



We believe there is a hunger to develop a simpler, more easily understood message for how and why associations came to exist in the United States and why we believe they will persist over time in any democratic society. Almost any association is fundamentally a democratic institution which runs with the same engine you will find in similar democratic bodies.

What makes their existence so compelling, and why individuals of came to view them as essential during the initial years the United States was being formed, was the bridge they built between the public and government, allowing for collective action and providing platforms for collaboration between the citizenry and the government itself. **Associations were founded to protect three key rights – freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and, interestingly enough, freedom of the press.**

Not only is an association a key part in the political process and a bulwark to protect our First Amendment Rights, but associations have a responsibility to ensure their constituencies are civic minded, well-educated and prepared to earn a decent living. In this way, associations have a keen interest in the preservation of the middle class and in providing pathways into it.

Over time, we have diluted these crucial messages with “member services” and our various attempts to shill for our corporate sponsors. Associations may be struggling today because they have forgotten how to clearly explain their role in our larger society. Associations routinely come under fire in the media as “special interests” for the same reasons – **by turning “legislative advocacy” from a civic duty to a member benefit, they are compelled to “win at all costs” by providing returns on dues investments instead of advocating for good public policy that benefits both the association members and society at large.** This is an unsustainable situation that must be remedied. At some point the emphasis must shift from being seen as “special interests” to being seen instead as “problem solvers.”

Associations have struggled over the past few years with membership and with a perceived “gap” in the willingness of volunteers to devote time to their association’s mission. We believe one of the possible drivers behind the squeeze on not only dollars but time is the disappearance of the middle class in the United States. Time is money. Many of our members and volunteers are squeezed so tight, they are struggling with paying basic bills let alone dues. Many dual income households also struggle with continued expansion of hours worked, in addition to stagnating income. This situation has led to a “time crunch,” where volunteers may feel a desire to volunteer but can’t find the time. Between working more hours and having to make choices regarding where to invest family and leisure time many individuals are deciding that associations that are not providing real, tangible experiences are falling down on the priority scale. Those associations who continue to beat the drum of advancing their members’ interests, over and above the interests of any other constituency, are falling on ears that are exhausted by the pursuit of craven self-interest and are deeply desirous to hear about something more meaningful.

As income inequality continues to churn through our economic system, associations will continue to struggle with resources, and strength will be sapped while the corporate machine strengthens its position within the political system. This is unbalancing the way the system is supposed to work. In desperation, we are trying to look more like the winners in the vain hope that we can more effectively compete. We are turning to the language of economics with terms like “return on investment” and “customer service” and “streamlining governance” and “members are consumers” instead of boldly confronting one of the root causes of the problem – as the middle class goes, so goes the future and the role of the association and the citizenry the association represents. Using economic language only reinforces the idea of self-interest. Our language should be aspirational, not economic. Articulating our role will entail a return to our reasons for existence as well as a new vocabulary.

### **Legitimize the Profession:**

Association executives have long been frustrated with their inability to articulate exactly what they do for a living. As the role of the association, and the connection between the people and their government, becomes clearer and easier to explain, it should also become clearer that managing an association takes a specialized skill set. These aren't glorified clubs or simple organizations that are out to provide discounts on rental cars to its members. ***At the heart of it, associations are sophisticated ecological systems that maintain and preserve the political process, train our citizenry in democratic operations as well as participation in our workforce, provide for social cohesion among peer groups and disseminate facts, information and knowledge regarding industries and professions across the United States and in the global community.***

Up until now, there have been periodic, individual, ad-hoc efforts made to coordinate with educational institutions on the development of curriculum for nonprofit management. The majority of the programs that do exist tend to focus on the 501(c)(3) perspective more than the 501(c)(6). Access to the few institutions with curriculum more appropriate for a 501(c)(6) is limited by time, cost and geography. We believe the potential exists for associations to leverage their collective efforts and establish an evidence-based body of knowledge that can be used to develop formal links to the secondary and post-secondary world. We are aware of efforts underway at the Melos Institute ([www.melosinstitute.org](http://www.melosinstitute.org)) to create a cross-disciplinary team to develop such a curriculum. Perhaps a forward looking institution like Case Western University could be a good host for promoting such an effort and other platforms, like the University of the People, may be good options to house such curriculum so it is affordable and accessible to a global audience.

There is also potential in examining the concepts of establishing apprenticeship programs through independent third parties who would be in charge of administering the curriculum, field work and assessment processes. At the end of the program, executives could be issued a degree, or other suitable credential that would support entry into the association profession at top levels. Any credentialing program should be international in scope and be the basis for expansion and support of associations that function in the global community.

Of course, we are discussing the potentially controversial idea of establishing a credentialing procedure that is an addition or alternative to the CAE currently offered through the American Society of Association Executives. One of the authors holds their CAE and is aware of the benefit

of the designation as are many of the individuals we interviewed for this project. Although the CAE has served an important role in legitimizing the profession, we need to admit the body of knowledge it uses is based largely on legal and regulatory issues, the functional descriptions of typical tasks performed as association staff and then on a largely opinion-based philosophy that has not been fully scientifically assessed.

In addition, perhaps the time has come to consider being legally bound to common standards of ethics and service to the public instead of “voluntarily” agreeing to abide by standards currently promoted in the profession. ***Perhaps the ability to achieve and maintain the ability to hold the title of association executive and to practice association management should be subject to the same rigorous rules required of attorneys or medical practitioners. Those who stray outside of them could be subject to disciplinary action and removal from practice.***

Until we develop the framework to underpin the workforce we need in the coming years, with the specialized expertise needed to run our associations, we could potentially focus our efforts in the following areas:

- Contact those institutions that currently offer certificates for nonprofit management and present the case that their curriculum is insufficient to adequately prepare candidates for the needs of the entire 501(c) community. Those needs include curriculum related to historical context, public service and benefit.
- Develop tools to assess necessary skills and/or personality traits and provide those tools to secondary and post-secondary career counselors to identify candidates that may be suitable for an association career.
- Capture stories and narratives from current staff and executive talent to demonstrate the attractiveness of this career.
- Formalize a career path into the world of association knowledge by building upon resources that currently exist within ASAE and the Allied Societies.

### ***Volunteer Citizen Corps:***

As the association’s role in society becomes clearer and association executives achieve a high level of recognition for what they do for a living, we cannot neglect the symbiotic relationship between association staff and the volunteer leaders of the future. Highly functioning associations are those who reject the idea of “staff-driven” or “volunteer-driven” models and who recognize the value of the partnership model.

One of the oft-repeated refrains in the association community is the perception that board members, volunteer leaders and members are not well-prepared to serve in a leadership capacity within the association. This often leads to conflict and lost potential. We believe the future of the association management profession will require the intentional creation of a volunteer citizen corps, which includes practitioners in specific industries and professions, as well as persons who are impacted by those who employ the practitioners.

In the past, we have attempted to “deal with what volunteer talent we inherit,” by holding periodic annual board orientation programs, or developing pathways to member engagement on an ad-hoc basis. Some associations have boldly created Leadership Academies or other efforts to indoctrinate volunteers. In some cases, associations that have highly-educated,

professional members have fared better by inheriting a pool of relatively skilled leaders to choose from. Other associations have not fared so well with memberships composed of individuals who have skill sets that are not well suited for the association environment. Even in the best scenario, being a board member entails a learning curve for every individual who has never served on a board before.

We posit that the board member of the future is the high school or college student of today. ***We believe we have an opportunity to positively influence the future by expanding current civics curriculum to include the concept that associations were formed to fill a critical role in our democracy.*** History classes can and should include references to the fact that individuals vigorously pursued the establishment of associations during the founding of the country as a way to reinforce their rights to free assembly, free speech and a free press.

As such an important contributor to the social fabric, there is a natural link between people, their livelihoods and their government as a key feature of any democratic society. Associations remain recurrent features in them. It is possible we will see an accelerated manifestation of associations in the global community as the Arab Spring and other movements take hold across the world. Associations also act as agents of social good and the developers of public policy. In the same manner as voting is presented as a part of our civic duty, affiliation with, and support of, associations in service to industries, professions and personal interests should be as well.

Once the historical case is made and the importance of service is reinforced, we can begin to concentrate on the development of skill sets in collaboration, leadership and communication necessary for both gainful employment as well as association service. Perhaps virtual volunteer boot-camps can be established for future association supporters and leaders to learn about association structure, volunteer roles and how to maximize their member experiences on behalf of those groups they choose to affiliate with.

We have the opportunity to work with clubs and organizations that interact with secondary and post-secondary students to promote these messages. We also have the ability to work with organizations such as SkillsUSA to ensure competitive events in parliamentary procedure, etc., include full and complete descriptions of why and how rules work in not only our local, state and federal governments, but in our associations and societies as well.

With well-qualified, engaged volunteers, association executives and professional staff will suddenly find themselves with a large contingent of individuals who are capable and ready to assume their roles within the organization. Not only will those volunteers understand the important role they play, they will also see a direct link between their efforts and the benefit to their industry, profession and society at large. Association executives and staff will find they have the ability to avail themselves of a large, capable workforce that can expand paid staffing resources exponentially. This may help stem the negative reinforcing loop where staff ends up doing more and more because the volunteers are seen as “disruptive” and the volunteers do less and less because their efforts are devalued.



### **Horizontal Structure:**

Associations, like many other institutions, find themselves running hierarchical management systems in an increasingly horizontal world. The tension between the two points of view is becoming more pronounced in both the private and the not-for-profit sectors. Oddly enough, associations in particular have suffered from this tension for years although they may not have clearly articulated it. Association executives have often been heard to lament the troubles of, and the advantages to, working within a dual leadership system having both staff and volunteers involved in governance. The tension between vertical/horizontal systems is instantly recognizable by association executives and the resolution is usually couched in terms of needing clear policy and well understood roles.

At this time, we believe we need to go farther to adequately resolve this challenge and adjust to a fast changing world. The tension between hierarchical systems and horizontal structures can be resolved by adopting mindsets and processes that are more suited to a distributed environment. Associations are in the perfect position to utilize a more “glocal” (global-local) focus due to the fact that many of them already operate in affiliated structures with local, regional, state, national and international frameworks. Also, they have a great deal of communications savvy which is needed to support those connections that exist between global concerns and face-to-face interactions in very local areas.

However, we do not advocate the wholesale adoption of any of the various governance structures currently promulgated in the association community such as the “Carver” model of policy governance or any other model. What we do advocate is a systematic dismantling of hierarchical structure, a streamlining of policy and well-established processes for “delegation of vision and mission” and “selection of roles” to each individual stakeholder. ***(Maddie Grant and Jamie Notter have authored a ground-breaking book, “Humanize – How People Centric-Organizations Succeed in a Social World” which holds valuable insight for those associations who are interested in undertaking such an effort.)***

We are aware of efforts to suggest that boards of directors should be eliminated, or reduced to just a very few members. ***We believe this is more akin to a dictatorship than a democracy and that eliminating roles for volunteers removes the essential characteristic of association service which is the promulgation of citizen engagement and service.*** The desire to “eliminate the volunteers” is usually presented in the context of being able to make decisions faster, or get products to members faster. This may be true if associations were actually in the business of “producing products” as opposed to “creating experiences.” By continuing to look at ways to improve volunteer training, instead of eliminating the volunteers, we remain in a strong position to promote citizen involvement in the political process and in those educational processes that improve businesses, industries and professions in our employment universe.

While we watch the corporate sphere attempt to co-opt the term “member” (in the manner of Costco and countless others from grocery stores to oil change shops with “members” and “rewards” programs), maybe it is time we abandoned both the term and the concept. ***As part of the more horizontal structure, more opportunities exist for other constituencies to become involved, way beyond what we have traditionally thought of as “members.”***

It may be time to focus less on the development of prospect lists and “marketing collateral” and focus more on what personnel resources it will take (both paid staff and volunteer) to execute the vision and mission of the association. This focus could lead to an increase in involvement from practitioners and suppliers as well as members of the general public who choose to support the work. This is not limited to just supporting the work of the 501(c)(3) community. Who is to say a member of the public with a family member who suffers from heart disease would not be interested in supporting the work of the professional associations who support the nurses, cardiologists and vascular specialists who devote their professional lives to improving the health of heart patients?

***What if we abandoned the term “membership” in favor of “community of interest?”*** This implies an almost alarming lack of structure, but is fully in keeping with a more horizontal organization. What this implies is the need to develop enormously sophisticated database solutions and social listening systems in order to maintain and organize participation in a widely distributed environment. Software may become enormously complex, but the benefits are clear and compelling with constituents being able to access, manipulate and engage with exactly what they care about without wading through the obligatory pile of options they don’t want. ***What if we could create a centralized nervous system that could actively contribute to the ability of individuals to thrive in a purposefully unstructured environment?***

What this does in the long run is changes the dynamic of “what do we get in return for our dues?” into, “How can we better support the good work being done on behalf of our industry, profession or issue we care about?” By asking for dues and then attempting to provide value we create a population of passive consumers. By focusing on providing value first and then asking for support we actively engage individuals in our success. ***By flipping the construct from “dues to value” to “value to dues” we circumvent the “consumer” experience and gain access to the “co-creator” experience which is more sustainable over the long term.***

One other factor that may ultimately render the concept of membership obsolete is that lifelong employment in a particular career has become less and less prevalent. Studies have shown the typical individual changes careers an average of five times over a lifetime and that trend may be accelerating. By spending the bulk of our time and energy on “membership” we are continually chasing ghosts. These ghosts churn in and out of any given industry or profession at all different ages and stages of life. A number of interviewees expressed their frustration that they aren’t even sure who their members are any more due to fast-moving structural changes in the nature of jobs available in our economy, or that their members are entering and leaving professions at such a rapid rate they can’t get a handle on them before they are already gone. Many of our membership “marketing” strategies are not built to take this shift into account and are becoming more and more unsustainable. ***The continued pursuit of the “lifelong practitioner” membership based on a specific job description is becoming unrealistic as are the financial models built to predict the “lifetime monetary value of dues” to the association.*** It may be possible to create a lifelong membership for those who continue to care about a profession even after they leave it, but that is based on affinity with the issues pursued by the association, not the occupational position the person may hold.

According to our research, associations are busy choosing pathways that veer between more insular and member-focused to more external and issues-focused with any number of variations in between. Those associations that choose to stop focusing on members and start focusing on

issues critical to the industries and professions they represent are in a better position to adopt a more horizontal structure, and perhaps abandon the concept of “membership” in favor of serving a broader constituency that ultimately may have a greater interest in assuring the association works on behalf of the greater social good.

***Change Process:***

There is a general consensus that our ability to compete and survive over the long term depends in large measure on our ability to master change processes, adapt and be flexible. ***Dealing with change is no longer a part of the job, it IS the job.*** Innovation is not a nice-to-have component, it’s a must-have competency.

Along with the development of a more well-defined message regarding our role in society, the formalization of our profession, the development of our volunteer corps, the development of more horizontal structures with an accompanying review and overhaul of the concepts of membership - the next development phase is the institutionalization of change process as part of the vision and mission of any organization.

Those associations who operate in the past and refuse to abandon the status quo are limited in their prospects for future success. Options for growth and progress will become less and less available to their constituencies and the industries, professions and interests they represent.

By institutionalizing change process and rooting it in strengths-based philosophies, the expectation can be created that change is not only normal, but it is an expected outcome of volunteer and staff effort and energy. Training is essential and the establishment of “change and innovation” policies, procedures and goals should be a hallmark of a high-functioning association.

We believe those change processes are best housed in the systematic and intentional use of Appreciative Inquiry processes on a regular basis to examine issues and develop provocative proposals for change. Ongoing training on how to start, support and usher in changes through to completion should be offered to members, volunteer leaders, staff and stakeholders on a consistent basis. ***A strategic environment with change process embedded within it, instead of change process being seen as a tool to be used to execute strategy is radically different.***

Associations are often overlooked as innovation engines because they focus on innovating within a tightly insulated group of practitioners and the “word” doesn’t get out beyond their immediate scope of influence. ***However, associations have the capacity to become reinvented Renaissance salons such as the ones that led to the Enlightenment era in Western civilization.*** It is well documented that processes that encourage change, experimentation and innovation are often found at the intersections where groups and individuals meet and exchange disparate ideas. Often the combination of unlike disciplines leads to breakthroughs that would have been unlikely, if not impossible, without such interaction.

David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western University have produced a new paper in which they discuss Appreciative Inquiry as one of the pillars behind organizational innovation. Their new theory – Innovation Inspired Positive Organizational Development (IPOD) incorporates elements of other theoretical models including a blending of ideas that many of us

in the association world have been toying with but have not yet coalesced into a manageable model – positive organizational scholarship, positive psychology, design theory, as well as biomimicry and the rise of the sustainable model. The work is a bold step forward and a beacon for those of us who work with organizational development and change and know there has to be another way.

***Societal Impact:***

All of the aforementioned strategies combine to create a high degree of societal impact that has heretofore been relegated to the 501(c)(3) community in the mind of the general public and to the occasional association, such as the American Association of Retired People (AARP), that have managed to break through the white noise of the “chattersphere.” ***The mission of the association of the future is to reclaim their rightful place in this space by doing things that only associations can do.*** If associations aspire to attract supporters, practitioners, talented staff members and the resources to do their work they can’t depend on the hierarchical systems of yesteryear any more. If they wish to become a well understood part of the social fabric, they will need to intentionally expand into the social sphere. This is particularly important for smaller associations who are typically the most resource challenged of all.

Many association executives we interviewed stated they had a desire to collaborate in the new media landscape to amplify their voices. Associations, particularly smaller associations, struggle with how to engage in effective public relations efforts without burying themselves under unbearable costs. Perhaps a collaborative platform can be created for associations to allow them to do it. This platform would be above and beyond what ASAE has attempted to do with the Power of A campaign, which although admirable, does not meet the criteria of scalability which any truly useful collaborative platform must achieve.

When considering the opportunities we have to influence not only the political process but the delivery of essential government services, we cannot overlook the fact that we have served as the unsung heroes of the post-secondary educational system in the United States for years. The advent of new technologies and the coming revolution in the post-secondary system is providing us with unprecedented opportunities to professionalize our own educational efforts and become officially integrated into the educational system in the United States and on the international stage.

Associations also have the opportunity to act in the public interest by providing research, information and statistics that are truthful, credible and non-partisan directly to the public and not hidden behind member’s only walls. The information we have squirreled away in associations of all types, all across the United States can be repurposed and offered to the public in a way that contextualizes it for general consumption. This would make great strides in our ability to act as the arbiters of factually-rooted public information and reinforce our value as representatives of the people’s interests to both governmental and corporate entities who, in many cases, distort facts and figures to pursue an agenda that advances their interests over the interests of a more and more marginalized public.

Adding the responsibility of association service to the list of civic responsibilities we expect from our citizens, also adds an additional dimension to their service. The association’s ability to function simply as a mouthpiece, or lobbying group that advocates for their members interests

absent any concern for society at large may be diminished. At the same time, associations are in the enviable position of being in a position to establish coalitions of the “unlike” and act as important forums for debate. With change processes being part of the associations DNA, association members may be able to begin to expect different results and not always focus on the “win” and the defense of the status quo as the ideal outcome.

## **PART VII: AFTERWORD**

As initially stated, this report is intended to serve as a basis for associations and their executives to devise their own provocative proposals for positive future change. Perhaps we should have said we hope it would serve as an *impetus*, among many, for associations and their executives to devise their own provocative proposals, and move in the direction of positive change.

So what comes next? For us, it is to keep these conversations alive and keep working towards the day when some of these ideas can become a reality. For you, we don’t know. However, we truly believe that application of the ideas culled from our research could lead to positive change. In fact, we believe that the association management profession has not yet seen its brightest days. Although we believe we have some significant challenges, we don’t believe that associations are incapable of innovation or that they are dinosaurs, destined at best for irrelevance or worst - demise.

Here are some suggestions for you to consider as you ponder how this information can make a difference in your corner of our world.

1. If you believe this report has merit, please forward it to other association management professionals and business partners.
2. Highlight key concepts you found interesting and share with your peers, staff and volunteers. Discuss, write or blog about your thoughts.
3. Devise your own provocative proposals from the themes and summary statements and add your own voice to the discussion. Feel free to share with us and we will add your thoughts to the list of proposals.
4. Consider potential implications for your career, your staffing needs or your association’s operating environment.
5. Consider if you have any passion or resources to bring to bear on any of the provocative proposals.
6. Visit and follow – [www.associationforecast.com](http://www.associationforecast.com). We will be asking for permission to publish interview transcripts from our participants and you will be able to read their own words and draw your own conclusions.
7. Join the “Association Forecast” LinkedIn group where we hope to have discussions on topics readers found interesting.
8. Learn more about appreciative inquiry and consider applying these techniques to promote change within your association. It can be applicable in many different areas from membership to governance.
9. Be aware there are reasons to believe that the association profession is in a particularly dynamic moment, but they aren’t doomed.
10. Be confident that associations who are able to embrace their history while adapting to the future have the greatest chance to achieve greatness.

## ATTACHMENT A

### **Association Executives: Provocative Proposals for Future Change “Appreciative Inquiry Research Tool”**

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1. What led you to become involved in association work in general and what path did you take to become an Executive Director/CEO?
2. Where will the next generation of executives come from? Will it continue to be an organic process of becoming aware of this career by informal means or do you see additional entry points opening up?
3. Please describe the most rewarding, most exciting and/or best experience you have ever had as an association executive and what made it so compelling?
4. Please describe the most important 2 or 3 things you have learned as an association executive. If you were talking to a brand new executive, what would be most important for them to know?
5. Trade and professional associations tend to have certain bodies in common – boards of directors, committees, chapters/affiliates, staff, etc.
  - 5.a. Please describe a time when a specific volunteer group was at its best in providing leadership and explain what they did.
  - 5.b. Please describe a time when your staff was at its best in providing leadership, and explain what they did.
6. Do you believe you are using your position as an association executive to positively impact society in general? If yes, please explain.
7. Please project yourself out twenty five (25) years into the future, and assume associations have achieved a significant level of public awareness. The public is aware of the role associations play in society, constitutional democracy and public policy. Nonprofit executives are celebrated in Time Magazine like the Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberrgs of today. Please describe one or two hypothetical scenarios of the kinds of things that associations would be doing to achieve that level of mindshare on the part of the public.
8. Imagine your membership is comprised of every member you wanted to have join, they are excited about your association and engaged in leadership at every level. What sorts of positive opportunities need to be created (or what barriers need to be removed) in order to see that happen?
9. In the association world’s search for continuous improvement, do you have any suggestions on how we might do business differently? Or what would you do to heighten the overall health and vitality of associations?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share that the questions did not address?

## ATTACHMENT B

### **What if we had access to a pipeline of staff talent composed of well-trained individuals who were acquainted with the association world, and had temperaments conducive to success in this profession?**

Perhaps the time has come to stop depending on the organic nature of the recruiting and hiring process, to develop direct lines in from the secondary and post-secondary systems in the United States and to develop the types of skills and personality assessments that will help students and individuals self-identify as potential association career candidates. We can envision a future where secondary and post-secondary students are proactively encouraged to look at associations as a career choice. We believe it is possible to identify secondary students and direct them into association-driven educational programs through ASAE or state SAEs to enhance their employability.

### **What if apprenticeship programs existed for aspiring association executives?**

For a moment, let's consider the advantages of having an independent third party entity establish and monitor an apprenticeship program for aspiring executives. Those executive candidates could be placed within an existing association, would be mentored by the current executive, would have additional coursework and at the end of the apprenticeship would receive a certificate or credential that would demonstrate their readiness to assume the position of chief staff executive?

### **What if association executives had access to an expansive evidence-based body of knowledge?**

We can also envision a future where we mount a successful campaign to develop a post-secondary program for association management. Perhaps this can be accomplished by working with forward looking institutions such as Case Western University, University of Indiana, the Melos Institute or others. We may have opportunities to approach those institutions who currently offer non-profit certificate programs to present our case that additional training in the 501(c)(6) section of the discipline is needed for students to have a well-rounded and comprehensive view of the entire not-for-profit sphere.

### **What if this evidence-based body of knowledge provided a different level of certification (substantially exceeding that of the CAE)?**

What if we were able to get a Master's Degree in Association Management, or some other certification that was based on more comprehensive understanding of the association environment than currently provided? This type of degree or credential would be based on a more in-depth curriculum and entail significantly more rigorous preparation to achieve.

### **What if the CAE or other association credentials were legally bound to common standards of ethics and performance?**

Right now CAE's sign a voluntary statement stating they will comply with ASAE's Code of Ethics. What if this commitment to ethics and standards of practice were akin to the medical and legal profession and dereliction of duty or violations of public trust would be cause to remove a person's ability to practice in the association arena? Such rigorous standards or licensing requirements could also include the expectation that association executives should be committed to the public sphere and actions taken on behalf of a membership should be able to demonstrate a clear public benefit.

**What if credentialed/licensed association executives had substantial skills and training on public policy leadership?**

Much of the experience association executives have in public policy administration comes from experience working with various local, state and federal bodies. Some association executives even come from the legislative or lobbyist arenas. Perhaps it is time association executives had a deeper understanding of public policy issues from the public administration perspective, and not just the “lobby to win” perspective.

**What if an extensive collection of narratives and true stories existed that demonstrate the uniquely satisfying aspects of this professional experience?**

Overwhelmingly, association executives have great things to say about their professional careers and are able to clearly demonstrate a myriad of ways to have rewarding experiences. Not only can we attract people to this profession with these stories, but we might also create opportunities for current professionals to reconnect with their passion and to actively pursue the creation of even more positive experiences in the future.

**What if associations took a serious look at changing their for-profit subsidiaries to benefit corporations instead?**

The socially conscious corporate movement is continuing to gain steam in the United States, particularly in light of the economic disaster of 2008 and the ensuing aftermath. Associations, particularly those who are concerned with establishing rigorous professional standards and certification, may have opportunities to abandon the membership structure for a purely independent fee based model housed within the B-Corp structure. If not the association itself, then perhaps some of their subsidiaries would be interested in doing so and moving away from profit being the only measure of success. Associations may have an active role to play in the implementation of socially conscious corporate structures and the establishment of standards.

**What if service to a trade or professional association was considered a civic responsibility in a democratic society like voting?**

Imagine a world in which student body councils, civics courses and clubs that emphasize good citizenship at the secondary and post-secondary levels included instruction designed to raise awareness of the association community and the need for active participation in an association linked to an individual’s occupational or recreational pursuits as a civic duty in a democratic society?

**What if we inherited board members who already had an understanding of what board service entails?**

If we were able to encourage a direct link between the health of the association and the health of democracy in the minds of students, why couldn’t we then teach young people what volunteerism and board service is actually all about? Why couldn’t we prepare the next generation to be active participants in these organizations and to develop appropriate skill sets in visioning, collaboration and communication to make board service rewarding.



### **What if high quality, affordable “volunteer boot camps” existed as a resource for associations?**

Beyond training for incoming presidents, such as the programs ASAE conducts, why can't we develop online volunteer bootcamps for average citizens to learn about their responsibilities and how to best leverage their volunteer skills in the United States and in the international community?

### **What if associations recast themselves as representatives of the public good as opposed to purely self-interested entities?**

Associations are at a crossroads. We have seen where partisanship and obstruction weaken our political and judicial institutions and in many cases, associations must share the responsibility for our current environment. By claiming “lobbying” as a member benefit, we set up the expectation that “winning” delivers “value for dues” and “losing” does not. We have systematically set up a consumer based expectation which labels the outcome in any political process as either “good” or “bad” and we have de-incentivized ourselves to seeking compromise for the common good.

### **What if association boards contained a number of members of the public to ensure the public interest stays on the agenda?**

Association boards have the ability to create positions in their leadership structures for members of the public who have an interest in a particular industry or profession. Public representatives who are selected for their expertise and interest could jump start innovation and serve as a sounding board for those associations who wish to explore how to improve their relationship in the public sphere at large.

### **What if associations had advisory committees of community leaders to assist in providing guidance to the group?**

In the past, associations have been quite successful at building coalitions and have developed a great deal of knowledge and direct experience with them, particularly as they relate to legislative and regulatory matters. Similar to the previously mentioned public board member, associations could take that coalition building skill and institutionalize more broad based advisory groups that could work in concert on issues beyond the legislative and regulatory arena particularly in the areas of education and workforce development. By involving representatives from local government, educational and business interests, this more broad-based focus could provide valuable insight as well as guidance in developing collaborative efforts that could amplify the strengths of all participating groups.

### **What if associations create a collaborative platform to publicize their achievements and their impact on the public good?**

The technology exists today for us to take control of our own messaging. Instead of waiting for the media to come to us, we can go to them and develop a broadcasting system that focuses on the good associations do for industries and professions all over the globe.

### **What if associations provided information and research directly to the public and became the arbiters of public truth?**

In a similar vein, there is no doubt that the media landscape has been turned upside-down and the 24/7 news cycle has become entrenched in our communications world. What is often missing in the analysis

is the information that associations hold in their hands – legitimate research, facts and knowledge about sectors, industries and professions. Potential exists for associations to develop more sophisticated platforms to be used for the purposes of connecting directly with a public that is drowning in information, yet starved for facts.

**What if associations collaborate, develop a series of principles and those associations who adopt those principles are able to claim a brand banner to fly that the public can learn to identify?**

Alex Bogusky, formerly of Crispin, Porter and Bogusky, and his group at Fearless Cottage are busy at work creating a “Common” brand for socially conscious corporations and start-ups. By adopting the “Common” brand the collaborative effort between all of the players will add awareness and cachet. The hope is that consumers will begin to recognize and identify with the “Common” brand thereby giving smaller companies the opportunity to develop brands like bigger companies do. It’s a concept that can work for these types of corporations, why not our own?

**What if participation and involvement replaced the concept of membership?**

What if we were so laser focused on the mission that we stopped pursuing members and allowed all parties who were interested in our success to participate in the outcomes we have set for ourselves? This would entail the creation of a larger community of interest and would break down the walls between categories of members, the public and other stakeholders formerly held at arm’s length. In many ways, using engagement and participation as measures of success instead of numbers of members who pay dues is a more accurate assessment of the actual impact on the achievement of vision and objectives.

**What if associations became an official part of the post-secondary, adult education system in the United States?**

There is no doubt that for years associations have functioned as the unsung heroes in the adult education world. Often overlooked in official reports and statistics on adult education, perhaps the time has come for associations to make a more powerful case for their impact. Associations serve as the transmission conduits for information and knowledge specific to thousands of industries and professions. They also serve as important access points for those professionals who may or may not have had full access to the traditional post-secondary system. The traditional post-secondary system itself is undergoing an enormous transformation with the potential of online education becoming vastly more significantly disruptive than we ever thought possible. Associations have a definite role to play in education as well as provide pathways to recovering for a middle class in crisis.

**What if we gave up on bricks and mortar offices?**

Imagine a world where association staff members are trained to work in a distributed, virtual environment and our measurement and management practices evolved to handle such an environment. It would lead to a smaller footprint, lessen the need to maintain strict boundaries between our personal and professional worlds and would make us more mobile and able to adjust to circumstances as they change. We can hire the best of the best, no matter their geographic locations; we can save daily commuter costs and the loads on our public infrastructure. At the same time, we can be more mobile, expand into different geographic locations and more easily cross international and cultural barriers.

## ATTACHMENT C

This project would not have been possible without the participation of our interviewees listed below.

**Marc Abla, CAE**, Executive Director, Illinois Chiropractic Society, Inc.

**Bob Achermann, CFO**, Advocacy and Management Group, Inc.

**Jane H. Adams**, Executive Director, California Park & Recreation Society

**Maren Amdal**, Executive Director, CFA Society of Minnesota

**Jim Anderson, CAE**, President and CEO, California Society of Association Executives

**Trudy Aron, CAE**, Executive Director, American Institute of Architects - Kansas Chapter

**Maury Astley, CAE**, Executive Director, Nevada Society of Association Executives

**Larry Atwell**, Executive Director, Wyoming Society of Association Executives

**Gina Ayllon, CAE**, Executive Director, Professional Association for Childhood Education

**David Bakerian**, President & CEO, Delaware Bankers Association

**Barbara Baldwin, MPH, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, California Society of Anesthesiologists

**Tom Bannon**, Chief Executive Officer, California Apartment Association

**Jackie Barry, CAE**, Executive Director, Physical Therapy Association of Washington

**Beverly Barsook**, Executive Director, Museum Store Association, Inc.

**Margaret Bauer, CAE**, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Music Educators Association

**Jennifer Ray Beckman, CAE, MBA**, Executive Director, American College of Cardiology Florida Chapter

**Debra BenAvram, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition

**Bonnie Benitez**, Executive Director, Consumer Attorneys of San Diego

**Andrea Bennett, PMP**, Executive Director, California Educational Technology Professionals Association

**Chuck Bidek, CPCU**, Chief Executive Officer, Insurors of Tennessee

**Susan Bitter Smith**, Executive Director, Arizona-New Mexico Cable Communications Association

**Mark Bledsoe, CAE**, Executive Director, United Suburban Schools Association

**Sharron Bradley**, Executive Director, Western Home Furnishings Association

**Kevin Brennan, CBAP, PMP**, Executive Vice President, International Institute of Business Analysis

**Susan Brinkhaus, CAE**, Executive Director, Salon & Spa Professional Association, Inc.

**Beth Brooks, CAE**, President and CEO, Texas Society of Association Executives

**Sharon Bruce, CAE**, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of School Business Officials

**Kendall Buck, CAE**, Executive Vice President, Home Builders and Remodelers Assn of New Hampshire

**Joe Burak**, Executive Officer, Home Builders Association of Greater Little Rock

**William Burns, CAE**, Executive Director, Association for Play Therapy

**Nina Buthee, CAE**, Executive Director, CA Child Development Administrators Association

**Francine Butler, PhD, CAE, CMP**, Executive Vice President, AMC Institute

**Cindy Butts, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Maine Association of Realtors

**Roque Calvo, CAE**, Executive Director, The Electrochemical Society, Inc.

**Jim Carney, CAE**, Executive Director, NTEA - The Association for the Work Truck Industry

**Jon Chandler**, Executive Vice President, Oregon Home Builders Association

**Janice Charlesworth**, Executive Secretary, Alabama Education Retirees Association

**Sue Chasteen**, Executive Director, Tennessee Academy of Ophthalmology

**Terisa Chaw**, Executive Director, National Employment Lawyers Association

**Susan Cheshire, CAE**, Executive Director, Georgia School Nutrition Association

**Norma Claassen, CAE**, Executive Director, Alameda County Dental Society

**Rick Clayburgh**, President & CEO, North Dakota Bankers Association

**Hannes Combest, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, National Auctioneers Association

**Karen Conlon**, President & CEO, California Association of Community Managers, Inc.

**Tom Cooper**, Executive Director, International Anesthesia Research Society

**Joni Cover, JD**, Executive Vice President, Nebraska Pharmacists Association

**John Dane, CAE**, Executive Director, California State Firefighters Association

**Alan Davis**, Executive Director, National Association for Campus Activities

**April Davis, CAE**, Executive Director, International Society for Performance Improvement

**David Dellinger**, Executive Vice President, NAIFA-California

**Mary Detloff, CAE**, Executive Director, Minnesota Society of Professional Engineers

**Dawn Dole**, Executive Director, The Taos Institute

**Robyn Dombroski**, Executive Director, Alaska Rural Water Association

**Claire Donnenwirth, CAE**, Executive Vice President, Associated Plumbing & Mechanical Contractors

**Kasey Dread**, Executive Director, Nashville Academy of Medicine

**Ken Dunham**, Executive Director, Lumber Association of CA & NV

**Gabriel Eckert, CAE**, Executive Director, Building Owners and Managers of Atlanta

**Deborah Elam, CAE**, Executive Director, San Francisco Dental Society

**Pat Epple, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Pennsylvania Pharmacists Association

**Karyn Estrella, CAE**, Executive Director, New England Medical Equipment Dealers

**Nelson Fabian**, Executive Director/CEO, National Environmental Health Association

**Denise Fandel, CAE**, Executive Director, National Athletic Trainers Association Board of Certification Inc

**Katherine Finley, CFRE, Ph.D., CAE**, Executive Director, Organization of American Historians

**Jim Folkman**, Executive Vice President, Home Builders Association of Central New Mexico

**Donna French Dunn, CAE**, Executive Director and CEO, Association of YMCA Professionals

**Karen Fricke**, Executive Director, Apartment Association Greater Inland Empire

**Mark Gamble, Sr. VP/COO**, Hospital Association of Southern California

**Ricki Garrett**, Executive Director, Mississippi Nurses Association

**Mark Garvin**, President & CEO, Tree Care Industry Association

**Carolyn Gaughan, CAE**, Executive Director, Kansas Academy of Family Physicians

**Jan Gemar**, Executive Director, Iowa Land Title Association

**Sandra Giarde, CAE**, Executive Director, California Association for the Education of Young Children

**Fran Gilbert, CAE**, Executive Director, Tallahassee Society of Association Executives

**Mark Glasper**, Executive Director, Ohio Society of Association Executives

**Penny Gold**, Chief Executive Officer, Kentucky Society of Certified Public Accountants

**Mark Golden, CAE**, Executive Director and CEO, National Court Reporters Association

**Peggy Goldstein, CAE**, Retired

**Greg Golik**, Operations Manager, Murdoch, Walrath and Holmes

**Susan Gorin, CAE**, Executive Director, National Association of School Psychologists

**Carey Goryl, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, International Association of Forensic Nurses

**Paul Grace, MS, CAE**, President and CEO, National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy

**John Graham, CAE**, President and CEO, American Society of Association Executives

**Judy Gray**, President and CEO, Florida Society of Association Executives

**Jeffrey H. Greenwald, P.E., CAE**, Executive Director, Institute of Hazardous Materials Management

**Stanley R. (Rob) Gustafson, CAE, CSI, CEO**, Secretary, Woodwork Institute

**Paul Gutierrez**, Executive Director, New Mexico Association of Counties

**Carol Hardwick, IOM, CAE**, Executive Director and COO, Mississippi Economic Development Council

**Mary Harris, CAE**, Executive Vice President, National Association of the Remodeling Industry

**Jim Harrison**, President, Vermont Grocers Association

**Theresa Hatton, RCE, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Greenwich Association of Realtors

**Pamela Haylock, RN, PhD**, Chief Executive Officer, Association for Vascular Access

**Jodie Hickman**, Executive Director, South Dakota Cattlemen's Association

**Angelique Hill, CAE**, Executive Director, California Retired Teachers Association

**Cynthia Hnatiuk, EdD, RN, CAE**, Executive Director, American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing

**Rita Hood**, Executive Director, AGN International North America

**Jon Hultman, DPM**, Executive Director, California Podiatric Medical Association

**Sharon Hunt, CAE**, Executive Director, Southern Association of Orthodontists

**Ross Hutchings, CAE**, Senior Account Executive, Association Resource Center

**Tom Ingram**, Executive Director, Diving Equipment & Marketing Association

**Diane James, CAE**

**Nelson Janes, CAE**, Executive Vice President, Sacramento Association of REALTORS

**Larry Johnson**, President, Nebraska Trucking Association

**Neil Johnson**, Executive Director, Minnesota HomeCare Association

**Robert Johnson**, Executive Director, California Association of Private Postsecondary Schools

**John Kabateck**, Executive Director, National Federation of Independent Business

**Wendy Kavanagh, CAE**, President, Georgia Society of Association Executives

**Karen Kelly-Thomas, FAAN, RN, Ph.D., CAE**, CEO, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

**Jim Kendzel, MPH, CAE**, Executive Director/CEO, American Society of Plumbing Engineers

**Brit Kramer, CAE**, Executive Director, Washington Recreation and Park Association

**Gary LaBranche, CAE**, President & CEO, Association for Corporate Growth

**Eric Lanke**, Executive Director, National Fluid Power Association

**Mike Lee**, Chief Executive Officer, ATM Industry Association

**Leo Leger**, Executive Director, Storage Networking Industry Association

**Carol Leveroni, CAE, CMP**, Executive Director, California Peace Officers Association

**Jo Linder-Crow, Ph.D.**, Executive Director, California Psychological Association

**Denise Love**, Executive Director, National Association of Health Data Organizations

**Mark Male**, Executive Vice President, Independent Insurance Agents of Rhode Island

**Gray Marion, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Independent Insurance Agents of West Virginia, Inc.

**Rebecca Maron, CAE**, Executive Director, Society for Vascular Surgery

**Mike McArthur**, Executive Director, Association of Oregon Counties

**Elizabeth McClatchy, CAE**, President and CEO, Safety Center Incorporated

**Patricia McFarland MS, RN, FAAN, CEO**, Chief Executive Officer, Association of California Nurse Leaders

**Leslie McGill, CAE**, Executive Director, California Police Chiefs Association

**Pamela McKenna, CAE**, Executive Director, New England Society of Association Executives, Inc.

**Mike McLaran**, CEO, Salem Area Chamber of Commerce

**Kevin Mead, CAE**, President & Executive Director, IGAF Worldwide

**Larry Merrill, CAE**, Executive Director, Michigan Townships Association

**Sally Michael**, President, California Assisted Living Facilities Association

**Susan Milazzo**, Executive Director, California Mortgage Bankers Association

**Neil Milner, CAE**, President & CEO, Conference of State Bank Supervisors, Inc.

**Mike Mitchell, CAE**, President and CEO, Credit Management Association

**Rick Mockler**, Executive Director, California Head Start Association

**Lynn Mohrfeld, CAE, IOM**, President and CEO, California Hotel & Lodging Association

**Pat Monahan**, Executive Director, Wyoming Primary Care Association

**Jim Moody, MBA, CAE**, President, Construction Suppliers' Association

**Tom Morrison**, CEO, Metal Treating Institute

**Kathy Murphy**, Executive Director, Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children

**Leslie Murphy, CAE**, Executive Director, Indiana Society of Association Executives

**Bill Murray, CAE**, President and Chief Operating Officer, Public Relations Society of America

**Bennett Napier, CAE**, President and CEO, Partners in Association Management

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**Linda Navarro**, President and CEO, Oregon Bankers Association

**Sheila Navis, CAE**, Executive Director, Rural Iowa Independent Telephone Association

**Susan Negreen, CAE**, President and CEO, CA Hospice and Palliative Care Association

**Melissa Nelson, CAE**, Executive Director, Idaho Society of Certified Public Accountants

**Steve Nelson, CMP**, Executive Vice President, AACC International

**David Nielsen, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland

**Jamie Notter**, Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness, Management Solutions Plus

**Judy Oiler, CAE**, Executive Director, American Physical Therapy Association of New Jersey

**Peter O'Neil, CAE**, Executive Director, American Industrial Hygiene Association

**John Orr, CAE**, President and CEO, North State Building Industry Association

**Frank Patek**, Executive Director, BMW Car Club of America, Inc.

**Rob Paterkiewicz, IOM, CAE**, Executive Director, Selected Independent Funeral Homes

**Lynda Patterson, FASAE, CAE**, President and Owner, Association Management Partners

**Sheri Penner, CAE**, Executive Director, Oklahoma Society of Professional Engineers

**Dave Phillips, CAE, RCE**, Chief Executive Officer, Pennsylvania Association of Realtors

**Rodney Pierini**, President and CEO, CA/NV Automotive Wholesalers' Association

**Robert Pugh, MPH**, Executive Director, Mississippi Primary Health Care Association

**Lee Quinby**, Executive Director, Association of Colorado Independent Schools

**Kathy Ragsdale**, Chief Executive Officer, Central Oregon Association of REALTORS

**Allan Ramsaur**, Executive Director, Tennessee Bar Association

**Laura Redoutey, FACHE**, President, Nebraska Hospital Association

**Anne Rendle, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Northeast Association of Realtors, Inc.

**Christopher Rice**, Executive Director, California Disability Services Association

**Julie Rogers, CAE**, Executive Director, Washington Association of Building Officials

**Cheryl Ronk, CAE, CMP**, President, Michigan Society of Association Executives

**Diane Ruggiero, RCE, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Kansas City Regional Association of Realtors

**Phil Russo, CAE**, Executive Director, NAFA Fleet Management Association

**Nick Sabatine, RCE, CAE**, Chief Executive Officer, Greater Greenville Association of Realtors, Inc.

**John Sadwith**, Executive Director, Colorado Trial Lawyers Association

**James Sandefur, OD**, Executive Director, Optometry Association of Louisiana

**Donald Savoie**, Executive Director, AIGA San Francisco

**Renee Schleicher, CAE**, President and CEO, American Academy of Medical Administrators

**Betty Shanahan, CAE**, CEO and Executive Director, Society of Women Engineers

**Kim Shanahan**, Executive Officer, Santa Fe Area Home Builders Association

**Frank Sheppard, AAI, CAE**, President, Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of South Carolina

**Barb Sido, CAE**, Executive Director, American Institute of Architects Michigan Society

**Jim Skiera, CAE**, Executive Director, International Society of Arboriculture

**Mitchell Sklar, Esq., CAE**, Executive Director, New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police

**Catherine Smith, CAE**, President, Smith Moore and Associates, Inc.

**Gordon Smith**, Executive Vice President, Maine Medical Association

**Kristen Smith, CAE**, Executive Director, Word of Mouth Marketing Association

**Steve Snyder**, Vice President, Western Association of Chamber Executives

**Lori Spear, CAE**, Executive Vice President, Southern Association of Independent Schools

**Chris Stephenson**, Executive Director, Computer Science Teachers Association

**Maurine Dyer Stevens**, President & CEO, Society of Animal Welfare Administrators

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**Daryl Strouts, CAE**, President, Kansas Wheat Alliance

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**Stacy Tetschner, CAE**, Executive Vice President/CEO, National Speakers Association  
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**Judith Thompson, IOM**, Executive Director, South Carolina Nurses Association  
**Len Toenjes, CAE**, President, Associated General Contractors of Saint Louis  
**Pam Tolson, CAE**, Executive Director, Illinois Society of Association Executives  
**Julie Trost**, Executive Director, California Conference of Mason Contractor Associations  
**Joe Truncale, CAE**, President and CEO, National Association for Printing Leadership  
**Steve Turkiewicz, CAE**, President & CEO, Montana Bankers Association  
**Kent Van Amburg, CAE**, Executive Director, American Society of Baking  
**Chris Vranas, CAE**, Executive Director, American Association of Orthodontists  
**Sean Walters, CAE**, Executive Director/CEO, Investment Management Consultants Association  
**Eleanor Warmack, CPRP, CAE**, Executive Director, Florida Recreation and Park Association, Inc.  
**Gary Williams, CAE**, Executive Director, Florida Rural Water Association  
**Charles Wilt, CAE**, Executive Director, American Library Association  
**Jeanne Wolf, CAE**, Executive Director, Boston Security Analysts Society  
**Janlee Wong**, Executive Director, National Association of Social Workers - CA Chapter  
**Stuart Zanville**, Executive Director, Consumer Attorneys of Los Angeles