

Alliance for Community Media

*3-Year Strategic Plan
2018-2021*

Mission: The Alliance for Community Media is a national membership organization that advocates, promotes and preserves the right to media training, production, distribution, civic engagement and education in support of diverse community voices, through Public, Educational and Government Access channels and other forms of media.

Vision: All communities have the resources, ability and right to express themselves, create community dialogue and engage in civic life through local media.

5 GOALS

I. MEMBERSHIP

Background & Vision:

As a membership organization, we are dependent upon the number and relative financial and organizational health of members. We should anticipate and respond to the needs of current members – and seek out and cultivate new members to sustain our mission.

The conditions that our members and all community and civic media organizations will encounter will change in the next five years - and this must inform our work.

Regulatory actions, political environments, technological changes and shifting audience expectations all may have a dramatic impact on the work of Public, Educational and Government access organizations and channels. It is hard to predict the precise changes we will see in next few years. Because of that, and because the pace and nature of dynamic is changing itself, we should prepare our members for our membership organization to thrive.

This means continuing and strengthening education and technical support for the field, and ensuring the quality of education associated with our brand. And it means finding ways to support innovation at the national, regional and local level.

As of early 2017, our membership has grown – as has the amount of support we derive from membership. This has increased our financial health, while allowing for 2.5FTE staff for the organization in the last two years. Those FTE are distributed across Public Policy, Education, Fund Development, Administration, Communications and Governance.

Gross membership revenues have increased by 70% in a four-year period, primarily because of the membership changes that occurred in 2013. The increase this last year increase was 2.2%. To date in 2017, membership revenues are up \$11,000 from the previous year (or 11% through May 2017) and we have grown the organizational membership by about 40 organizations.

But even with this recent success, we are nowhere near saturating the market of PEG channels and organizations nationally.

Of the 381 combined supporters, individual and organizational members we currently have, the majority are concentrated in regions where concentrations of PEG channels have been historically based: New England (199, 106 in MA), California (36) and the Midwest (67).

Another measure of service is to look at the top 50 media markets in which we have active memberships. This represents populations served primarily, and while not all markets have all types of PEG, they most certainly have one or two. From this measure, we have members in less than half of these markets. Further, estimates of current PEG channels across the United States are in the range of 1500-2500 channels.

How our organization can strongly appeal to different organizational types – which often don't see themselves with one identity - is a key consideration as we look at possible growth. But there is ample room to grow.

We should seek methods to increase concentration of membership by state and extend into all states. We should also insure that our membership marketing materials are clear and consistently communicate the benefits members receive when they join.

Action:

- 1: Continue member promotions and outreach to non-member organizations. Enhance member benefits to increase appeal of membership.
- 2: Conduct member needs assessment on every other year basis starting 2018.
- 3: Examine dues sharing mechanism to support regional activity by November 2018 to inform budgeting.
- 4: Coordinate new regional structures with area volunteers. Implement any possible regional support mechanisms.

Strategic Outcomes:

- 1: Membership growth of 5% per year per category.
- 2: Member growth and regions structures in unrepresented geographic areas by 2021.
- 3: All regions have governance, management ability and activities by 2021.
- 4: Financially strengthened and active regions by 2021.
- 5: Measure level of member satisfaction and maintain or improve satisfaction levels as gauged by bi-annual surveys.

II. FINANCES

Background & Vision:

We should be continuing the trend of maintaining surpluses for the organization with the idea that revenue streams may fluctuate. Nevertheless, our next investments for the organization must be on service and market growth. The logical places for growth are in education development and coordination, and public policy advocacy and organizing. We should also consider greater contact with our members and marketing to potential members to grow our base. We need to determine how we grow our membership and who we outreach to in the future.

We may also be looking at more legal and policy battles at the federal and state level. This may mean building financial resources, and/or building funding partnerships to finance legal work.

As cable subscription rates and revenues decline – either at slow or rapid rates – or as pressure is exerted on government revenues, there will be increased pressure on our member organizations to pay their bills, and in some cases, keep their doors open - and this in turn will have an impact on the types of services they need and their relative ability to pay for membership, travel, education and advocacy costs.

This means we must continue to diversify our offerings for members, continue to grow the base of members who rely upon our services, and find ways to increase the financial health of our members.

It also means we should be in tune with our members' needs and concerns over what they do and how they pay for it. We should continue to seek public policy remedies where possible for these funding issues, but if none can fix this long-term trend, we must also promote other revenue solutions for our member's mission survival.

It may also mean looking at other ways to build value for member and non-member organizations such as direct consulting services and consider collaborations with other organizations as conditions change.

Another concern is the relative availability of sponsorship and exhibitor dollars for both national and regional conferences.

ACM's three main sources of revenue are membership, earned income, donations.

Action:

1: Grow membership by 5% per year; Grow earned income for the organization by \$30,000 per year.

2: Research and implement investment policy in 2018. Continue policy of surplus budgeting to grow reserves.

3: Implement sponsorship and earned income activities.

Strategic Outcomes:

1: Achieve and maintain three months reserves in operating revenue.

2: Generate sustainable revenue through donated and earned income to increase staffing in public policy or education by 2019.

3: Generate investment income for the organization with its assets after 2019.

III. PUBLIC POLICY

Background & Vision:

The current Congress and Administration are devoted to free market principles that undercut core principles within the Cable Act and which support our industry. While we educate them on the benefits of PEG and the virtues of local control of public rights of way or the values of localism and civic engagement, we find that decision makers who are sympathetic are in the minority. We should not expect positive regulatory actions in this environment and have to focus our federal action on preventing preemption of local authority and destruction of our industry.

Enabling communities to have the ability to produce and sustain locally responsive and civic content will continue to lie at the heart of the political discussion for the foreseeable future. This includes the ability of communities to decide how programs should be produced and distributed to ensure appropriate impact.

A continuing concern will be the sustainability of current revenue streams under the current policy regime. As cable subscriptions fall, communities have no ability to sustain local programming with fees in a broadband delivery system. The current Administration and Congress have little appetite for supporting local communities with this issue, and in fact may be looking to pre-empt local authority before it may yet exist for a solution. We will have to find ways to forestall or prevent preemption so states and localities can devise these funding mechanisms.

The principle of equal treatment for PEG channels and the need for fairness has both a wide public appeal and resonates with policy makers. Whether there are legal structures to support that principle is an entirely different question.

In the past year, we have seen actions at the state level to support PEG channels, and we may find that preventing federal action and promoting state organizing and actions will be more productive in the near term for our industry.

Action:

- 1: Increase grassroots advocacy with Congress and FCC.
- 2: Assess state opportunities and coordinate activity with state volunteers and organizations.
- 3: Continue partnership work with allies, particularly local governments and municipal organizations.
- 4: Prepare templates for members to use for advocacy work in 2018.

- 5: Conduct new Congressional outreach and continue Hill activity with 2019 Congress.
- 6: Prepare and publish policy papers for Presidential campaigns in 2020.

Strategic Outcome:

- 1: Ensure equal treatment of channels and continuing availability and sustainability of channels in local communities. Increase network activity as measured by number of active member organizations doing advocacy.
- 2: Build allies in Congressional delegations that actively promote community media.
- 3: Underline role that localism can play in health of communities and local democracy.

IV. COMMUNICATION

Background & Vision: Clear, efficient and consistent communications are essential for any enterprise, and this is true for our association for a host of reasons. Because we are in a field with a complex and sometimes confusing history, there is a general need to clarify and build our identity.

Further, if we have goals to build our membership we may need to extend or expand our communications to non-members. Additionally, as we have a disparate membership with different needs, we will have to consider methods to serve them better and ways to gauge their needs.

Messaging and communications for policy makers, funders and sponsors and the public need to be consistent in content and tone. This is complicated by the voluntary and fragmented nature of our affiliate and regional structures. It is vital that messaging by local organizations and the national organization parallel each other and don't work against one another.

Action:

- 1: Examine purpose, assess needs and direct staff action for Community Media Database and ACM website by March 2018.
- 2: Clarify roles of volunteers, staff and interns for message and communications work in 2018.
- 3: Create materials for advocacy and templates for member use to support membership goals in 2018. Update on yearly basis as needed.
- 4: Increase membership outreach and materials to non-members to support membership goals.
- 5: Improve marketing and outreach to increase conference attendance and awards participation to support financial goals.
- 6: Build webinar attendance by 10% per year through outreach and topic selection.
- 7: Determine baselines for communications activities in 2018 and report to Board on yearly progress for key indicators.

Strategic Outcomes:

- 1: Increased membership of 5% per year and increased participation of members in volunteer and ACM activity (i.e., use of materials, templates, and programs).
- 2: Use of materials at the local and state level.
- 3: Outreach to 25 non-member organizations per year.

V. GOVERNANCE

Background & Vision:

Ensuring diverse and engaged leadership in the organization will help ensure stability. Making sure that Boards and Committees have enough fully trained members and have clear objectives and adequate support will increase the efficacy of governance for the organization.

Key concerns to address are the relative availability of volunteers to assist the national and regional boards, the relative financial and organizational health of regions, and ensuring leadership training helps newer volunteers take responsibility and grow in their leadership.

We may find financial conditions with organizations and regions where thrice yearly travel is not realistic or affordable. This could mean either funding more travel support for the Board or reducing the number of in-person meetings.

Action:

- 1: Survey membership and assess Board needs to ensure that future boards reflect membership concerns broadly.
- 2: Ensure board and volunteer roles are clearly defined and understood through orientation, documentation and training.
- 3: Clearly articulate board qualifications in recruitment and election process.
- 3: Continue outreach through Nominations Committee and conduct webinar on Board service.
- 4: Evaluate travel policy and number of in-person meetings to achieve ends.
- 5: Work with Regional Boards to support healthy practices and develop regional leadership.

Strategic Outcomes:

- 1: Board is diverse, informed, self-sustaining and reflects governance needs of members.

2: Existing regional organizations are strengthened by 2021.

3: Regional organizations cover members in every U-S state by 2021.