



ACS STRATEGIC PLAN 2020

PROCESS

The ACS Strategic plan was developed with broad-based direction from stakeholders coupled with a proactive eye to the industry's future. This multi-phased strategic planning process included:

- Board of Directors Self-Assessment and Analysis
- Member Satisfaction Survey
- Post-Conference Survey
- State of the Artisan and Specialty Cheese Industry Survey
- Denver Management Team Strategic Visioning/Planning
- Board of Directors Strategic Visioning/Planning
- Board Approved initiatives, goals, strategies, tactics, and timeline

By incorporating so many points of information and so many in-depth steps, the plan responds to member needs by specifically addressing areas of concern through targeted efforts to advance the industry. The plan identifies three Key Initiatives tied to the three Core Values of ACS: Engagement, Education, and Sustainability.

IMPLEMENTATION

The tactics that will be employed to advance strategies and reach goals are tied to end dates in the Plan. Much of the groundwork needed to achieve the three Key Initiatives will need to take place in the 2017 calendar year. The ACS Board of Directors will review progress quarterly, and at the start of each year, updated timelines and targets will be established to ensure tracking to overall Plan goals. The Plan is intended to guide ACS through 2020, and is thus nimble enough to adjust to changing market needs and trends.

BUDGET

Funds needed to successfully complete the Plan will be itemized at the beginning of each year as part of the annual budget planning process, and will be approved by the Board of Directors annually at its January Board meeting. It is understood that with the approval of the Plan the Board of Directors supports the future expenditures needed to reach milestones and goals, and that the budget for such efforts must nonetheless comply with all ACS financial policies and budgeting guidelines.

Key Initiative 1: INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to serve ACS members and engage the broadest possible stakeholder base, ACS will continue to strive for transparency in its operations, parity in its structure, fairness in its service to members, and nimbleness in its ability to modify policies, programs, and procedures to best address changing member needs and demographics.

This Initiative addresses the ACS Core Value of: SUSTAINABILITY

Commit to a holistic approach to sustainability ensuring long term physical and financial viability so members can survive and thrive.

GOAL 1: Clarify Infrastructure to Enhance Efficiency and Capacity

STRATEGY: Review, Clarify, and Develop Policies

Since ACS moved to self-management in 2010, many policies have been established that did not previously exist. ACS adheres to a policy governance structure, thus our objectives are to:

- Identify policy gaps
- Create policies to ensure the future growth, smooth functioning, and continued relevance of the association
- Establish parameters for policy review

GOAL 2: Maximize Data Management to Support Data-Driven Decision Making

STRATEGY: Build Targeted Expertise and Fully Utilize Capacity

With projects housed in multiple databases, ACS will better track, mine, and utilize key data and indicators. Our objectives are to:

- Utilize technology to suit our needs, not vice versa
- Identify efficiencies and select appropriate technology tools
- Mine data for actionable information
- Repurpose data that can serve many roles
- Better serve members through accurate, accessible data

GOAL 3: Ensure Financial Health and Stability of Organization

STRATEGY: Update/Develop Financial Policies that Reflect ACS Growth

In the past seven years, ACS has carefully built up reserves to allow for new initiatives, programs, and to sustain the organization through challenging economic times. Our objectives are to:

- Develop a new Investment Policy focused on minimizing risk, long-term investment, and engaging a third-party Financial Advisor/Investment Manager for continuity during leadership changes and to ensure checks and balances
- Review, update, implement financial policies to ensure relevance

GOAL 4: Better Serve and Grow Membership with New Membership Structure

STRATEGY: Develop New Membership Model

The ACS membership structure is outdated and does not allow ACS to fully engage and represent the many industry professionals who wish to be an active part of the association. Long term sustainability of the industry, and the organization that represents it, must consider those who founded ACS back in 1983, Producers, at its core. Growing ACS ranks with Producer members as the hub of our industry wheel will expand out to better serve all ACS members. Our objectives are to develop a model that:

- Captures “shadow members”
- Focuses on Producers as core members
- Is revenue neutral in year one with plan for dues revenue growth
- Implement for 2019 dues cycle
- Determine what success will look like

Key Initiative 2: CONTENT DEVELOPMENT AND ACCESS

Since its founding in 1983, ACS has focused on education, information sharing, and developing and providing access to accurate, relevant resources for members. This is at the heart of ACS’s mission.

This Initiative addresses the ACS Core Value: EDUCATION

Create and provide access to resources, programs, and education for our evolving industry.

GOAL 1: Be “The” Go-To Resource for Current Industry Research and Data

STRATEGY: Develop a Content Management Plan

As a cornerstone of our organization, content plays a critical role in assisting our members and broader industry to remain relevant and sustainable. In order to build our content and become the “go to” resource for industry information, we must fine-tune our research and data collection efforts to identify current needs as well as information gaps. Our objectives are to:

- Increase the knowledge base of our members and industry
- Assess and manage our current content resources and identify information gaps
- Gather content through research and data collection

GOAL 2: Enhance Education and Content Accessibility

STRATEGY: Strengthen and Grow Educational Offerings

Education is central to the ACS mission. We aim to empower our members and the larger cheese community by providing educational resources that are focused on the highest standards of cheesemaking and food safety. Our objectives are to:

- Ensure our products and services align with our mission and core values
- Identify additional programs to help bolster our education program by providing year-round education for our members
- Ensure content is up-to-date and easily accessible to our members
- Expand our certification program to include additional exams
- Integrate our technologies to help organize content and resources
- Focus on food safety and expand our Best Practices
- Develop a content management strategy

GOAL 3: Link Educational Offerings to the Body of Knowledge

STRATEGY: Develop a Seamless Information Architecture to Umbrella All Educational Offerings Tied to the Body of Knowledge

We have identified a body of knowledge that defines industry standards and is set to be the framework of our industry knowledge which in turn guides our content development efforts. Our objectives are to:

- Develop and update industry definitions and terms for consistent use throughout our programs and content
- Link education programs and content to the ACS Body of Knowledge (BOK) where possible
- Enhance member knowledge and understanding of the Body of Knowledge

Key Initiative 3: MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Achieve the ACS Vision Statement to be the leader in supporting and promoting American cheeses through clear brand identity, messaging, and communications.

Focus efforts on three key audiences:

- Internal (Denver Management Team, Board, Committees)
- Industry (Existing Members and Prospective Members)
- External (Consumers, Regulatory, Media)

This Initiative addresses the ACS Core Value of: ENGAGEMENT

Support, promote, connect, and represent cheesemakers to the broader community and industry.

GOAL 1: Streamline Internal Communications

STRATEGY: Make information/resources easy for internal constituents to access.

Implement technologies that expedite, clarify, and make current information and resources easily accessible to relevant parties. Our objectives are to:

- Minimize the number of steps needed to access information
- Develop protocols for information-sharing among Board, committees, and Management Team
- Ensure that information/resources are shared securely
- Formalize a process for fostering innovation

GOAL 2: Enhance and Ensure Clarity of Industry-Facing Communications

STRATEGY: Utilize new and existing communications tools to provide clear information and content to ACS members.

Review, clarify, and enhance delivery methods to ensure that members can easily find information they need, when they need it, and that they have a clear understanding of who ACS is and why ACS matters. Our objectives are to:

- Improve and develop digital resources
- Utilize ACS Annual Conference as our primary annual communications tool
- Clarify and clearly convey membership benefits

GOAL 3: Strengthen the Value Proposition for Core Members (Producers)

STRATEGY: Improve the value of membership for Producer members.

ACS exists to serve cheese industry members. Its core membership group, Producers, is a priority in this work. To best serve Producer members, ACS will assess and improve the value that these members receive, in order to ensure their continued investment in the association. Our objectives are to:

- Determine the current value proposition for Producer members
- Grow benefits and strengthen messaging around those benefits, to ensure Producers feel their investment is worthwhile
- Grow the core base of Producer members

GOAL 4: Enhance and Maximize External Communications

STRATEGY: Prioritize and enhance communications targeting external audiences.

ACS's core value of supporting, promoting, and representing cheesemakers to the broader community and industry can only be fulfilled if the association reaches external audiences – including regulators, consumers, and media. As such, ACS must prioritize and enhance communications that reach these audiences. Our objectives are to:

- Increase awareness of ACS members' stories and products among a consumer/public audience
- Grow PR efforts to ensure that American cheese and Producers are top-of-mind for media
- Continue to engage in regulatory advocacy on behalf of ACS members

GOAL 5: Ensure that ACS is prepared for a crisis/emergency

STRATEGY: Develop proactive plans/best practices to ensure crisis preparedness.

The Annual ACS Conference reaches 1,200+ individuals with 1,800+ different products. Members' products are also represented by ACS at consumer-facing events year-round. In order to fulfill its mission to be the leader in promoting and supporting American cheeses, ACS must ensure that the health and safety of guests consuming members' products is a top priority. Our objectives are to:

- Ensure that ACS is prepared for worst-case food safety scenarios at its industry and consumer events with best practices guides and crisis plans
- Prioritize the health and safety of others in all event plans and procedures