



NACRO

NETWORK OF ACADEMIC
CORPORATE RELATIONS OFFICERS

2026-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN





“NACRO’S GREATEST ASSET IS ITS PEOPLE — PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE BUILDING THE FIELD OF CORPORATE RELATIONS FROM THE GROUND UP, ONE INSTITUTION AT A TIME. THIS PLAN IS ABOUT GIVING THOSE PEOPLE A STRONGER PLATFORM, A MORE CONNECTED COMMUNITY, AND AN ORGANIZATION THAT CAN GROW WITH THEM.”

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INTRODUCTION



As NACRO approaches its 20th anniversary, the organization continues to serve as the leading professional association for higher education corporate relations professionals. NACRO members operate at the intersection of industry engagement, institutional strategy, research advancement, workforce development, and philanthropy — helping colleges and universities build meaningful partnerships that create lasting impact for students, faculty, institutions, and society.

As higher education and external engagement continue to evolve, NACRO must remain agile and responsive. Institutions are facing increased financial pressures, shifting workforce expectations, rapid technological change, heightened accountability demands, and growing competition for corporate and philanthropic investment. At the same time, opportunities for strategic partnership and institutional impact have never been greater.

This Strategic Plan outlines NACRO's priorities for 2026–2029 and reflects the organization's commitment to strengthening the profession, supporting its members, and positioning NACRO as a leader and convener within higher education advancement and engagement. The plan is designed to be aspirational and actionable — providing a clear framework for organizational decision-making while allowing the flexibility necessary to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Led by the NACRO Board of Directors' Member at Large, an ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee developed this plan through a collaborative process informed by member feedback, leadership discussions, organizational assessment, and consideration of broader trends affecting higher education and corporate engagement. The resulting framework centers on four interconnected focus areas:

- GROW AND ENGAGE THE NACRO COMMUNITY
- ELEVATE NACRO'S VOICE AND IMPACT
- STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY
- STRENGTHEN DATA, INSIGHT, AND DECISION-MAKING

Together, these priorities are intended to guide NACRO's work over the next three years while reinforcing the organization's core mission: advancing the corporate relations profession through community, learning, leadership, and collaboration.



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HUNTSMAN

WHERE THE AGED BUSH GROWS
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

NACRO

Heather

Heather Johnson
Utah State University

WESTERN REGION

NACRO

Carmella

Carmella Johns-Andruk
Utah State University

WESTERN REGION

FOCUS AREAS

NACRO's 2026–2029 plan is organized around four interconnected Focus Areas. They form a reinforcing system: stronger **infrastructure** and smarter **data** enable **community growth**, and a growing community amplifies **NACRO's voice**. Progress in any one area accelerates the others.

GROW AND ENGAGE THE NACRO COMMUNITY

NACRO will deepen connections with current members, strengthen post-conference retention, and open the door to new audiences across higher education to build a broader, more engaged professional network.

ELEVATE NACRO'S VOICE AND IMPACT

NACRO will build on its strong portfolio of research, publications, and expertise to deepen its credibility as the “thought leader” in the field, extending its reach beyond current members so more professionals and institutions can benefit from NACRO's knowledge and leadership.

STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

NACRO will reinforce the governance structures, financial foundations, and operational documentation needed to ensure that the organization grows stronger with each leadership transition.

STRENGTHEN DATA, INSIGHT, AND DECISION-MAKING

NACRO will maximize the full potential of its membership platform by developing the training, workflows, and decision-making protocols that turn member data into a strategic asset across every area of the organization.

This Strategic Plan will be in effect 2026 through 2029 and may be extended for a period of up to two years by the Board of Directors.

GROW AND ENGAGE THE NACRO COMMUNITY

As NACRO continues to grow, the organization has an important opportunity to enhance member retention and strengthen sustained engagement while expanding its reach to new audiences across higher education. Significant growth opportunities remain untapped across the full spectrum of higher education institutions — from Carnegie classified research universities to regional institutions, community colleges, and other adjacent audiences. This Focus Area addresses both membership retention and the expansion opportunity: keeping the members NACRO has, deepening their connection to the organization throughout the year, and growing the community to better reflect the full diversity of the academic corporate relations profession.





GOALS

KEY ACTIONS

I. Maintain year-round member engagement beyond the annual conference

1. Develop a marketing and promotional schedule for regional meetups, webinars, and peer networking events
2. Formalize peer networking groups (by sector, career stage, or institution type) with a regular meeting cadence
3. Create and implement a new engagement plan for mid-career members, to enhance retention
4. Refine the mentorship program to effectively serve new and early career members

II. Develop outreach initiatives to expand the corporate relations professional community

1. Create segmented outreach plan for RI, R2, and other research universities
2. Assess the potential for community college membership expansion and implement if warranted
3. Ensure relevant programming is available for any new or expanded audiences

III. Utilize data-informed outreach to grow and retain membership

1. Develop a strategic framework for prospecting outreach utilizing AI and emerging technologies
2. Leverage expanded capabilities for strategic follow-up with lapsed and former members
3. Utilize segmented outreach lists (by career stage, institution type, geography, lapsed status) for targeted communications
4. Utilize Novi's churn predictor and net promoter score features to analyze data on current members in order to drive member retention

ELEVATE NACRO'S VOICE AND IMPACT

NACRO has built a foundation of research, data, and professional expertise, and is well positioned to become the definitive voice of the corporate relations profession. This Focus Area elevates NACRO as the first call for credible guidance among practitioners, university leaders, and industry partners. Success is reflected in NACRO's work being widely cited, its resources serving as standard onboarding tools, and its leaders shaping dialogue at major national convenings.





GOALS

KEY ACTIONS

I. Elevate NACRO's standing as the primary source of credible thought leadership in academic corporate relations

1. Set 3 year plan for addition or repurposing of content in NACRO's thought leadership portfolio (white papers, surveys, benchmarking reports) with clear positioning and use cases
2. Create a standardized release and promotion plan for each major research instrument
3. Leverage membership platform, AI and current platforms to enhance NACRO's ability to develop and push out thought leadership material

II. Increase NACRO's visibility and credibility beyond its current membership

1. Develop an external-facing NACRO positioning statement and message framework
2. Package selected NACRO resources for non-member consumption
3. Secure regular NACRO presence at national higher education conferences and in trade publications

III. Align NACRO's brand, messaging, and storytelling to reinforce its leadership role

1. Clarify NACRO's core narrative: who we serve, what problem we solve, why we matter
2. Audit NACRO's current communications for alignment with desired identity
3. Create simple brand and messaging guidelines for committees, presenters, and leaders

STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

NACRO runs entirely on volunteer efforts, a model that has built something remarkable, but which carries risks for continuity, capacity, and financial resilience. This Focus Area lays the foundation for everything else: clarifying governance and roles, diversifying revenue beyond membership dues and conference, building the standard operating procedures needed to survive leadership transitions, and ensuring NACRO has the financial health to invest in its own future.



UT DALLAS ORANGE AND GREEN
FOUNDERS' VISIONARY DREAM
TO INFLAME THE SCHOLAR'S HEART
LIGHTING PATHWAYS THROUGH THE DARK
REACHING OUT FROM EARTH TO SPACE
SERVING ALL THE HUMAN RACE
JOINED AS ONE IN LOVE

GOALS

KEY ACTIONS

I. Elevate NACRO infrastructure to foster organizational professionalism and maturation

1. Reinstitute larger Finance Committee and formalize new structure that supports NACRO's fiscal processes and decisions
2. Conduct an audit of NACRO's operating structures. Utilize findings to create an official organizational chart with clearly defined responsibilities and expectations attributed to each role
3. Align NACRO's structures to facilitate a broadening of academic membership, inclusive of all research institutions, community colleges, etc.
4. Align the outcomes identified in Actions 2 and 3 with the operational capabilities and support required for effective execution (e.g., association management, marketing, and data utilization)

II. Ensure long-term financial health

1. Evaluate existing revenue streams and determine key areas to advance diversification of revenue streams
2. Utilize findings from Goal 1 to identify possible business efficiencies. Specifically, build strategy around the internal movement of funds to maximize organizational financial health (e.g. leveraging lines of credit)
3. Utilize findings from Goal 1 to improve budget forecasting and process, especially in light of new rolling membership year
4. Implement existing policy regarding medium and long-term investment strategy

III. Generate support mechanisms for broader leadership and organizational sustainability

1. Design and reaffirm committee processes and playbooks to capture institutional knowledge and reduce reliance on individual memory
2. Create Executive Committee playbook, including officer roles and responsibilities, perennial operational objectives, and crisis management resources
3. Review and design on-boarding and off-boarding process for new and elevating board members presenters, and leaders



STRENGTHEN NACRO'S DATA, INSIGHT, AND DECISION-MAKING

NACRO recently completed a significant transition to Novi as an enhanced platform with broader capabilities for data management. A new system alone does not create value; the value comes from understanding what it can do, building the internal knowledge to use it well, and developing a deliberate strategy for how NACRO's data informs decisions across every Focus Area. This Focus Area ensures that investment in an improved data strategy translates into organizational intelligence — so that membership outreach, retention, engagement, and financial planning are driven by accurate, timely, and actionable data.



GOALS

KEY ACTIONS

I.

Build organizational proficiency with new membership platform

1. Conduct a full audit of new membership platform's capabilities against NACRO's current and future needs
2. Develop a membership platform onboarding and training plan for committee chairs, Executive Committee, and key volunteers
3. Create documentation of data workflows and processes to enable knowledge transfers with leadership transitions
4. Establish a single point of accountability for membership platform administration and data integrity

II.

Develop a data strategy that informs decision-making across all Focus Areas

1. Define what data NACRO needs to collect, how it should be structured, and who is responsible for its maintenance
2. Establish a standard set of membership metrics (engagement score, churn rate, net promoter score, demographic breakdown) and report to leadership on a regular cadence
3. Develop data collection and reporting protocols that connect to each of the other three Focus Areas — membership growth, thought leadership, and financial health

III.

Align Novi's configuration and capabilities with the operational and strategic needs of NACRO committees

1. Create a toolkit of data-informed outreach resources to support targeted engagement strategies
2. Develop standardized reporting and dashboard tools that provide committees with timely, relevant data to support planning, decision-making, and performance measurement
3. Implement a consistent framework for data governance, ownership, and accountability across committees

IV.

Establish a culture of data-informed governance

1. Incorporate data reporting as a standing agenda item at Board and Executive Committee meetings
2. Develop a simple annual data review process to evaluate NACRO's progress against its strategic plan metrics
3. Create a feedback loop between membership data and NACRO's communications, programming, and membership strategies so the plan stays responsive to what the data shows

PROCESS + ACCOUNTABILITY

DEVELOPMENT

- The Strategic Planning Committee gathered input across all NACRO committees at the 2026 Midwinter Leadership Meeting
- Three focused workgroups were assembled and completed structured workbooks identifying Goals and Actions
- Past Presidents were interviewed to gather their perspectives as long-tenured leaders
- The full Strategic Planning Committee synthesized workgroup outputs, identified cross-cutting priorities, and resolved overlaps
- General membership was surveyed via email for their input in June 2026
- The plan was presented to the Board of Directors in June 2026 and will be presented at the July 2026 Annual Conference in Salt Lake City for formal membership adoption.

IMPLEMENTATION

The success of this Strategic Plan will depend on clear accountability, regular progress assessment, and sustained leadership commitment. NACRO's incoming leadership will establish an implementation and reporting framework to guide execution of the Plan, monitor progress toward key objectives, and communicate outcomes to the membership. Additional details regarding this framework will be developed and shared following adoption of the Plan.



“OPPORTUNITIES FOR
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP
AND INSTITUTIONAL
IMPACT HAVE NEVER
BEEN GREATER.”





THANK YOU TO NACRO'S STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS!

CHAIR:

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VICE CHAIR:

Emily Kelton

NACRO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Joon Cho, Joseph Huang, Tammy Eickhoff, Jason King

MEMBERS:

Adam Bear, Lilly Bjorkman, Adam Causgrove, Michelle Dingwall, Tim Hausman, Heather Hirsch, Heather Kimmett, Marla Morris, David Ortendahl

SPECIAL THANKS:

Yolanda Norman, Josh Barbour (Aslan Group), Shelley Dominguez, Midwinter Leadership Meeting participants, NACRO Board of Directors and committee members

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