



NACRO Unveils 2026-2029 Strategic Plan

We're delighted to announce the publication of NACRO's [2026-2029 Strategic Plan](#) (unveiled and approved by the NACRO Membership at NACRO's 2026 Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, July 14-16).

Our new 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 provides 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, **Thomas Manshack** ([Texas Native Health](#)) with **Emily Kelton** ([Colorado School of Mines](#)), 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

[Read more.](#)

Profiles of NACRO's 2026 Awardees

Each year, NACRO recognizes members whose leadership, service and dedication have made a lasting impact on our organization and the academic corporate relations profession. At the 2026 Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, our community honored an outstanding group of individuals whose contributions span decades of volunteer leadership, emerging excellence, strategic vision and unwavering commitment to advancing our community. Congratulations to all of this year's well-deserved award recipients!

Lifetime Service Award

Lorena McLaren – Lorena has had a deep commitment to the NACRO organization. She has served as the conference planning chair, a member of the professional development subcommittee, benchmarking committee, site selection committee and chaired the advanced career committee. She's developed programming content, led initiatives and contributed to the overall success of the organization. Currently the managing senior director of Corporate and Foundation Relations at Emory University, Lorena has been in the university corporate relations industry for nearly 30 years.



Lifetime Service Award

Megan Puzey – As a NACRO fixture for many years, Megan has served as a member of the conference programming committee, professional education committee, 20th anniversary committee, chair of conference programming, vice president, president and past president. She continues to take on a variety of leadership roles in NACRO including mentorship. Now the Executive Director of the Office of Corporate Relations at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Megan has worked in corporate relations at Illinois for nearly 18 years. She remains strongly engaged with NACRO, continuing to serve on various subcommittees and initiatives.

Volunteer of the Year

Carmella Johns-Andruk – Carmella serves as a Senior Manager for Corporate and Alumni Relations for the Jon M. Huntsman Business School at Utah State University, where she's developed partnerships over the last seven years. As a NACRO member and volunteer, Carmella has made a meaningful impact on the organization through her commitment as the conference experience chair. As chair, she curated content, built panels and secured speakers.



Rising Star

Lilly Bjorkman – Since July 2023, Lilly has served as Associate Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations at Mississippi State. Joining NACRO in 2025, she quickly made an impact, serving on the early career subcommittee. Her leadership doesn't end with her subcommittee involvement, as she also emceed for the 2026 Virtual Bootcamp and contributes to the 20th anniversary planning committee and the 2026 Strategic Planning Committee. She's demonstrated exceptional initiative and professionalism.

President's Award

Emily Kelton, Assistant Vice President, Corporate and Foundation Relations for the [Colorado School of Mines Alumni & Foundation](#), and **Thomas Manshack**, Director of Development with [Texas Native Health](#), received the President's Award, recognizing and honoring members who have provided exceptional service to the NACRO community. Kelton and Manshack were specifically recognized for having led the development of (and securing membership approval for) NACRO's new 2026-2029 Strategic Plan.



Written by Desiree Clayton, Member of NACRO'S Communications Committee and Assistant Director of Marketing and Communications, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation – Administration with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

A Quick Text With...Elon University's Emily Witthohn!

For our next "Quick Text With . . .," we're delighted to feature **Emily Witthohn**, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations with [Elon University](#)!

NACRO: "Hi Emily, great seeing you in Salt Lake City! What's a new CR project or related good news at Elon University?"

Emily: "Big news: we've welcomed the inaugural dean of our new [School of Engineering and Computing](#) — and we're building a strategic corporate relations framework right alongside it. It's a rare chance to design industry partnerships into a school from day one instead of retrofitting them later."

NACRO: "Congratulations Emily — great news — please keep us up to date on your work!"



NACRO Member Profile: Mindy Miller Hill, Trinity University

This month we're delighted to feature **Mindy Miller Hill**, Director of Corporate Relations with [Trinity University](#) in San Antonio, TX.

In her member profile video, Mindy shares how NACRO is defined by collaboration and being in the same room with peers who are excelling in their roles.

[View Mindy's video.](#)



NACRO Blog: University of Wisconsin's Doug Barton

In the NACRO Blog this month, **Doug Barton**, Director of the [University of Wisconsin E-Business Consortium](#) (UWEBEC) with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, shares his perspectives and takeaways following his participation at NACRO's 2026 Annual Conference in Salt Lake City.

"I left more convinced than ever: engagement is how we meet the future ready instead of rattled," writes Doug. "And the people doing this work are responsible for compounding the results through their sharing and generosity." [Read more.](#)



NACRO White Paper: *Corporate Relations Reimagined*

For NACRO's white paper — "**CORPORATE RELATIONS REIMAGINED: How Academic Institutions Can Build Sustainable Industry Partnerships**" — we're highlighting each month one of our "seven essential elements" for successful corporate engagement.

#6 — Integrated Approach to Corporate Sponsored Research: In addition to being in step with Career Services, it is critically important that the CR Office also have alignment with the University Research Office. Whether the CR Office resides with Research, Advancement, or another department, the two working together is significant to success with industry. [Read more.](#)



NACRO: Job Postings

[Baptist Health Innovations South Florida - Senior Innovation Licensing Specialist](#)

[Johns Hopkins University - Associate Director, Corporate Engagement for Education \(Corporate & Global Affairs\)](#)

Job posting forms are due to [Jessica Hutchins](#) no later than the 1st of the month to be included in that month's *NACRO News*. The newsletter goes out the second Tuesday of every month.



JOB POSTING FORM

NACRO: Corporate Relations Roundup



[Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences](#) has named **Elizabeth Kozor**, MBA, as its first-ever director of corporate, foundation and grants relations. In this newly created role, Kozor will lead the university's efforts to expand corporate and foundation partnerships, strengthen philanthropic engagement and secure grant support for institutional priorities. She joins DMU after more than a decade at Drake University, where she led grant development and advancement communications. [Read more.](#)

Cate Schlobohm has been named Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations Operations at the [West Virginia University Foundation](#). Schlobohm joins the Foundation after more than 15 years at [West Virginia University](#), most recently serving in a leadership role with the WVU Purpose Center. In her new position, she will support the Foundation's corporate and foundation relations efforts, helping advance the university's mission through strategic partnerships, philanthropy, and institutional engagement. [Read more.](#)



[Cornell University](#) has appointed **Laura Batten** as its new Executive Director of Corporate Relations, a newly established leadership role focused on advancing academic-industry collaboration across the university. Batten assumes the position after nearly a decade leading corporate and foundation relations at the [Cornell Bowers College of Computing and Information Science](#), where she helped secure more than \$65 million in corporate and foundation support. In her new role, she will strengthen partnerships that connect companies with Cornell's research, technology, talent, and innovation ecosystem while expanding opportunities for faculty engagement and collaborative research. [Read more.](#)

The [University of Minnesota](#) has named **Cynthia Carnes** as its new Vice President for Research and Innovation. Carnes brings 30 years of research leadership experience to the role and will lead the university's \$1.4 billion research enterprise. As vice president for research and innovation, Carnes will lead efforts to sustain and strengthen the University's research enterprise, enhance operations and interdisciplinary collaboration and expand



partnerships across industry, government and communities statewide. [Read more.](#)

More Corporate Relations Roundup News

[Marquette advances holistic corporate engagement strategy with new partnership](#)

[\\$47M NSF pilot to arm Ph.D. students with private industry experience](#)

[Ohio State president is building new pathways for business partnerships](#)

[Bryant, Fidelity partnership is a pipeline to success](#)

[JetZero to open engineering office on Wichita State's Innovation Campus](#)

[How to reimagine research partnerships at the speed of industry](#)

[CU Boulder's \\$60-Million Pivot: Federal money built this research powerhouse. Can private industry sustain it? \(Paywall\)](#)

NACRO: New & Returning Members

We would like to extend a big welcome to our newest members and welcome back those that stepped away for a bit but have recently returned to NACRO!

Lauren Berutich, Fort Lewis College Foundation

Ashley Eddie, Cleveland Clinic

Emily Hatch, University of North Florida

Mark Ironside, Lehigh University

Stephanie Mabry, Baylor University

Emily Perry, Cleveland Clinic

Kristin Singhasemanon, University of California-Davis

BECOME A NACRO MEMBER!

NACRO: LinkedIn Group

NACRO has launched one of our most frequently requested member resources – a member-only discussion forum, hosted as a private, unlisted LinkedIn group.

NACRO members can request to join the group by clicking on the link below.

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Network of Academic Corporate Relations Officers | P.O. Box 2905 | LaGrange, GA 30241 US

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