



FINAL REPORT

CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SENIOR CENTER PERSONNEL



STRATEGIC PLAN

Consultants

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CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SENIOR CENTER PERSONNEL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel (CASCP) asked National Executive Service Corps (NESC) to assist in the development of a strategic plan. Faced with declining membership and an upcoming election, the current board sought a clear path for the future.

The objective was to develop a strategic plan that could be embraced and implemented readily by a new or returning Board. CASCP was seeking specific, actionable goals and objectives to ensure optimal future success.

As an all-volunteer organization comprised solely of the Board members (all of whom have a leadership role in one of the state's senior centers), CASCP has always struggled with having the time and resources to move its agenda forward. With this in mind, NESC has created a draft strategic plan that focuses on the priorities identified by the board while also providing the basic building blocks of suggested next steps – all with projected due dates approved by the CASCP board at their retreat. With Connecticut's aging population, growing numbers of seniors and stretched municipal budgets, the services provided by CASCP are increasingly critical throughout the state.

Members and former members of CASCP were interviewed as a part of the planning process and their feedback was clear. CASCP is an essential organization, but one in need of renewal. With over 160 senior centers throughout Connecticut, CASCP's training, advocacy and networking opportunities are viewed as valuable and having the potential not only to favorably impact the lives of many seniors in the state but also the professionalism of the many senior center personnel themselves.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report documents information generated during the data gathering, the board and CASCP member interviews, and the board retreat. It includes the assessment of CASCP's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the priorities, and the constraints and implications of both. The supplemental materials in the Appendix section may be helpful to the board members as they review progress and update the plan in the future.

The final plan is the result of the board's consideration of the internal and external environments affecting CASCP's efforts to achieve its mission. The Tasks represent a summary of initial key action items developed by the board to begin the implementation.

Suggested Priority Next Steps

Many plans fall short because the individuals who develop them fail to use the plan in a meaningful way. They fail to refocus the work they do in the context of the new direction. For this reason, plans get put on the shelf and boards continue to operate in the same ways as before, doing the same work in the same way. To reinforce your intention to succeed, there are several steps to consider as you begin to implement:

1. Proceed with formally adopting the Plan at a board meeting and record the votes in the official minutes of the board.
2. Prioritize sequence and integrate all committee work plans, and specify the resource requirements to confirm that you have the people and dollars needed.
3. Communicate your new direction and initiatives:
 - a. Share a summary of the plan with your membership.
 - b. Communicate your new direction to key constituents from whom you want support or with whom you want to collaborate.

Other Suggestions to Consider as You Proceed

1. Keep in mind the next year is to be a time of stabilizing the organization and beginning to rebuild CASCP. Make a concerted effort to focus on the basics, prioritize the most important work and maintain those priorities. By taking on fewer and the most important initiatives, the probability of progress will increase. Your plan should be your guide now and in the future, and should be on the agenda at all board meetings.

2. Once you identify and approve the essential governance elements and changes to your operating practices, follow the new practices. Other suggestions include:
 - a. Hold regular meetings scheduled well in advance at a time when everyone can participate.
 - b. Set an agenda prior to the meeting and follow it.
 - c. Consider a telephone meeting if in-person is not practical.
3. All good boards work through committees. As an all-volunteer organization, accomplishing work via committees is a matter of survival. Consider the following to enhance progress:
 - a. Approve an effective committee chair; populate your key committees with organization members and formally delegate work to the committees. A committee of three good members can accomplish a great deal.
 - b. A committee structure is already in place. Evaluate the structure, eliminate those that are not needed and focus on the most critical ones for now.
 - c. Consider using ad hoc committees with specific objectives to work on specific issues or initiatives. Request the committees to report their progress to the board. This approach is an excellent way to: engage board and members, groom future board members and accomplish your work without doing it all yourselves.
4. Implement a budgeting process in the upcoming fiscal year to reflect the priorities. If you haven't already done so, establish both revenue and expense budgets for the whole organization and present the final budget to the board for approval. Results should be reviewed throughout the year.

Institute Accountability and Track Progress

1. Tracking progress and holding one another accountable for the plan activities is essential to success. Not doing so is the first step toward falling off the path to success. Begin by monitoring progress against objectives on a consistent and realistic basis. At board meetings, measure whether or not results have been achieved. Appendix 4 includes suggestions for monitoring progress and assessing results. If mid-course correction is needed, make the changes.

2. The following are other suggestions to consider in the future to strengthen your governance and your organization:
 - a. There are many resources to help with board development and training, such as *Board Source* that offers many publications to help boards help themselves.
 - b. You may wish to create a new formal approach to board recruiting. First determine the number, skills and geography required for the board. Then develop a plan to recruit and fill the needs. It is a best practice for boards to use an organized approach to assessing their own performance in order to improve governance and fiduciary responsibilities. Once you have your new governance and organizational practices in place, it would be useful to assess the board's performance.
 - c. Begin discussing board leadership succession planning. We observed that some of you felt obliged to continue your roles because no successor had been identified. Make this a priority step in order to be ready next year to make changes if current leaders want to step down.

Marketing/Membership and Programs

Membership decline is one of the top issues to address. During this next year it will be important to reconnect with members to stop the decline and begin to rebuild CASCP. It will be important to implement a basic communication strategy. Start by holding a membership meeting to inform members of your direction and plans for the future, and provide each member with the updated membership directory.

The Second and Third Plan Years

There are a number of initiatives to be carried out in the future. You may want to create a separate document or add a section to the end of the plan entitled "Initiatives for Years Two and Three." We included this section and added several initiatives you discussed, but which you did not have sufficient resources to address now. There were also ideas generated during the retreat which could be considered in the future (see Appendix 2). Several initiatives for Year Two or Year Three are:

1. Review and assess all programs for their effectiveness and decide whether to continue, change or delete them. Use this program evaluation process to create a basic program/meeting plan and then implement it.

2. Review fee structure to determine competitiveness. The interviews suggested alternative approaches (see Appendix 1).
3. Reevaluate the focus of CASCP and consider expanding the mission.
4. Consider changing the operating model from all volunteer to paid staff or hybrid, using a fiscal sponsor.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The members of the board are to be applauded for their work to set a new direction and develop their plan for the next 18 months. The issues the committee cited are critical ones and need to be addressed in order to achieve the goals.

CASCP and its members not only have opportunities with the growth of the aging population, but they also face challenges. The operating environment presents resource constraints with limited time and dollars. The board and membership need to accept this reality until they have revitalized CASCP membership roles and enhanced their revenue significantly.

The board's engagement, oversight and accountability are vital to future success.

With the all-volunteer organization moving toward a committee-operating model, the board is the place where final decisions are made for the benefit of the whole organization. The board is the organizational glue and they are the chief communicators. An important aspect of the board's role will be to ensure that the committees are working toward the same plan goals and not in a vacuum.

* * *

It has been a pleasure to work with the board on this important initiative. It is our hope that our work together will help to accelerate your success. With a solid plan in place and continued board diligence, the Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel will be positioned to achieve its goals.

Wishing you great success,

The NESCC Consultants:

Nancy Brennan
Cal Heminway
Elaine McDonald
Kathi Meding

**CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF
SENIOR CENTER PERSONNEL
STRATEGIC PLAN
June 2015 – January 2017**

INTRODUCTION

Connecticut Association of Senior Center Personnel was formed in 1984 and it is the only association dedicated to senior center professionals in the state. Its members come from across Connecticut. It is an affiliate of the National Council on Aging/National Institutes of Senior Centers.

Since its inception, CASCP has addressed the concerns of the state's senior centers by offering training, programming and a focus on standards. CASCP has also been a bridge to the state and national government agencies related to aging.

Currently there are about 160 senior centers operating autonomously in Connecticut, staffed with a combination of paid staff and volunteers, with heavy reliance on volunteers. Unlike its members' centers, CASCP is an all-volunteer organization. It relies on a volunteer board and members to deliver the organization's mission. The membership of CASCP is supportive and believes the organization has a unique mission.

Recently the organization noted a decline in membership and cited increased limitations on their time. The board believed they needed to address these issues before they experience a significant decline in CASCP.

Therefore the board agreed to engage a consulting group to help them evaluate their issues and develop a plan to guide the organization over the next two years. As part of the planning process the board wanted to:

- Gain a better understanding of board and members' views of the operating environment, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in order to determine critical issues and priorities.
- Confirm the direction of CASCP and reach consensus among board members.

- Develop: a practical plan, a usable implementation approach and an effective monitoring process in order to institutionalize the new direction and goals.

PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

The planning process included internal and external interviews. The consultants developed and used separate interview surveys customized to the board and the members. In addition, the consultants reviewed other data such as bylaws, available financial documents, membership data, published and website materials. All the information was summarized and the findings were presented to the board at a retreat. During the retreat the board reached conclusions and developed a new direction, goals and a short-term action plan to implement this new direction.

DATA GATHERING AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

At the beginning of the assignment, both the board and a representative group of CASCP members and former members were invited to share their honest opinions and recommendations relating to the mission, the programs, the opportunities and the challenges for CASCP. What we heard not only affirmed the importance and relevance of the organization, but also raised concerns.

Member Themes

The members offered candid feedback. They provided a picture of their senior center operating environment and issues. They described a challenging and resource-constrained situation. The centers believe they suffer a less than favorable image from people who don't use their services. The support structure is fractured and there are many competing state and federal agencies involved. Having said all this, the senior population is exploding and center utilization is stretched to capacity and beyond.

The members supported CASCP and its purpose. Overall CASCP was viewed as an essential organization, but one in need of revitalization. There were a number of suggested improvements in categories noted below:

- Communications, planning and meeting notification.
- Training (it needed to be refreshed).
- Board composition (it needed to be more diverse geographically and by type of senior center).

Members see the importance of CASCP and want it to improve and become vital again. They recognize and value the benefits of CASCP in networking, information exchange, training and education. The members felt CASCP was well positioned to play a role in this exchange as well as facilitate collaboration between and among the senior centers. Members thought CASCP could potentially offer a venue to consider some of the vexing issues they are facing such as: transportation, image building and attracting new customers (boomers). In addition, the members said they were willing to share their expertise with other centers. It is interesting to note that a number of those interviewed indicated that they would be willing to pay higher dues (up to \$100 per year) as long as CASCP offered value for money.

Those interviewed observed CASCP is more regionally focused and needs to become statewide if it is to grow. Fortunately, members are not fully aware of CASCP's challenges and continue to feel goodwill toward CASCP. Without change, this goodwill could erode.

Board Themes

The board members were candid and offered well-thought-out responses. While expressed differently, board members understood the need to develop a common view and a plan to make CASCP a more dynamic and engaging organization.

The board members are dedicated professionals. They are fully aware of the issues facing their field, as well as CASCP's issues. They are particularly concerned about: membership decline, inadequate communication, inadequate succession planning, operational weaknesses due to time and dollar limitations and the overall impact of these issues on CASCP.

Additionally, the board felt the mission needed clarification. The value of CASCP should be communicated to members and activities should be focused on those most valued by members – education and networking.

STRATEGIC ISSUES, PRIORITIES AND NEW DIRECTION

During the retreat the board engaged in exercises to agree on the critical issues and priorities.

Strategic Challenges

The board concluded that a critical challenge as an all-volunteer organization is finding the time and resources to implement the needed changes. It became clear that with the declining membership it would be necessary to stabilize the membership roles while addressing the most basic but important operational issues. To accomplish both, it would be necessary to focus on only a few important initiatives over the next 12 to 18 months. Therefore the board decided to develop a short-term tactical plan.

PRIORITIES, RATIONALE AND PLAN GOALS

It is the aim of this plan to refocus and revitalize CASCP in order to grow again and remain viable. To accomplish this endeavor, CASCP will direct its talent, time and other resources to three priorities over the next 12 to 18 months. To manage CASCP's resource and time constraints, the strategy is to implement key initiatives on a phased-in basis starting with the most important ones. The following are the key agreed-upon priorities and the rationale for selecting them:

Priority One

To stabilize the CASCP organization.

The planning process highlighted not only the weaknesses of the all-volunteer organization, but also how this operating model could impede progress. At the same time, making an investment in staff is impossible at this time. Therefore accomplishing a few important initiatives such as effective governance, basic financial management, and effective membership solicitation and administration would help to put in place a solid operational and governance foundation.

Priority Two

To rebuild CASCP by retaining membership goodwill and stopping the decline.

It was decided that once the basics were in place, CASCP would begin rebuilding its membership roles by consistently delivering the basic offerings at the current dues

levels. This effort would help CASCP to reconnect with current and former members and to stop membership decline.

Priority Three

To strategize to expand CASCP.

Once the organization has been refocused and revitalized it would be time to consider opportunities to expand the mission of CASCP. As part of this initiative it would be appropriate to consider changing the operating model from all volunteer to paid staff or a hybrid model such as engaging a paid fiscal sponsor.

Critical Success Factors

Implementing effective governance and remaining disciplined and focused are critical to the success of these new initiatives:

- Governance may need to be enhanced by increasing focus on the traditional board role. The board may need to rethink how it executes its board role vs. its volunteer operating role in order to address some of these issues and opportunities.
- Decision making needs to be selective and, where possible, the board could consider delegating to committees in order to achieve goals. Discipline, focus and delegation to committees are important due to limited time and resources. The CASCP board members are not without great ideas, but they lack the resources (people, time and money) to implement. It will be necessary to take on only the most important initiatives and do them well. Begin with a few initiatives to lay the foundation and build upon them over several years.

Plan Goals

A set of overarching longer-term plan goals were identified based upon the current mission and priorities. However the organization is not well positioned at this time to focus on all of these goals until the board repositions the operation. Therefore the focus will be on the first goal for the next 12 to 18 months. When the organization begins to consider expansion, it will review and update these goals:

- Goal I. Strengthen the organization, governance and operation of CASCP.
- Goal II. Raise CASCP's profile within the community and improve communications to build support and diversify the funding base to promote greater financial stability.
- Goal III. Support improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of service center delivery in senior centers across Connecticut, and strengthen the relationships with partners in the aging network to help shape service priorities for older adults.

The board developed objectives with action steps, assignments and due dates. Work is already in progress and other initiatives will be undertaken over the next year. In the following plan, the Action Steps are summarized. For more detail please see the Action Plan document, pages 13-18.

CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SENIOR CENTER PERSONNEL

PLAN FOR July 2015 – June 2016

THE MISSION

To improve the quality of life of older adults by supporting a network of senior center professionals and their service delivery throughout Connecticut

GOAL I. STRENGTHEN THE ORGANIZATION, GOVERNANCE AND OPERATION OF CASCP

Objective A

Review/upgrade CASCP organizational structure to ensure all state and federal filings are current.

Action Steps

Task # 1. Clarify IRS status

- a. Meet with CPA to determine status and options
- b. Present option to board for approval if needed

Assigned to: L. Rapp/ MJ Riley

Due by: End of June 2015

Objective B

Institute essential governance practices and follow them.

Action Steps

Task # 1. Develop new governance structure and operating model, and update bylaws accordingly.

- a. Form committee to complete assessment and recommend structural changes such as: board terms, committees and roles/responsibilities.
- b. Obtain legal review.
- c. Complete review and report recommendations to board for discussion and approval.

Assigned to: P. White and full board

Due by: End of October 2015

Task # 2. Create schedule and procedures for best practice board meetings.

- a. Set and publish board meeting schedule for remainder of current and 2015-16 years.
- b. Establish and follow regular meeting procedures using published agenda, voting procedures and published minutes.

Assigned to: MJ Riley and future chair and board secretary

Due by: March 2015 meeting and ongoing

Objective C

Establish fundamental operating practices suitable for size and scope of CASCP.

Action Steps

Task # 1. Establish formal financial report statements and prepare on a regular basis.

- a. Work with CPA to determine the appropriate financial reporting structure for CASCP and implement.

Due by: June 2015

- b. Work with CPA to determine an appropriate set of financial policies and put in place (signing authorities, check deposit procedures, etc.).

Due by: September 2015 and Implement by October 2015

- c. Develop any other financial reporting recommendations and present to the board for approval and implementation.

All assigned to: L. Rapp and MJ Riley

Due by: December 2015 and Implement January 2016

Task # 2. Reconnect with members to stop membership decline.

- a. Update membership list to ensure it is current.

Assigned to: D. Ridgeway

Due by: July 2015

- b. Create an annual meeting ad hoc committee to organize the meeting and the program for 2016 year. Set the meeting date.

Assigned to: Board

Due by: TBD

- c. Prepare an engaging annual meeting program and invite all current and past members to meeting. Institute an organized and aggressive “campaign” to encourage attendance.

Assigned to: Ad hoc and membership committees

Due by: TBD and schedule by end of 2015 calendar year

- d. Provide overview of survey results to attendees at annual meeting. Include information about top three concerns, new direction and next steps for CASCP. Capitalize on this meeting to begin revitalizing CASCP.

Assigned to: Board with ad hoc committee support

Due by: TBD based upon meeting date

- e. Present summary of plan and operating budget to membership.

Assigned to: Board chair and treasurer

Due by: TBD based upon meeting date

Objective D

Put in place an appropriate Governance structure for a statewide, all-volunteer organization.

Action Steps

Task # 1. Develop a board member job description and submit to board for discussion and approval.

Assigned to: Board

Due by: December 2015

Task # 2. Roll out the new committee structure agreed by the board.

- a. Identify and confirm the committee chairs.

Assigned to: Board

Due by: January 2016

- b. Recruit committee members from among board and CASCP membership.

Assigned to: Board

Due by: February 2016

- c. Hold opening meeting of new committees and agree on committee goals.
Review with board.

Assigned to: Committee chair

Due by: March 2016

Objective E

Establish basic plan and procedures to reconnect with members.

Action Steps

Task # 1. Develop basic program plan and schedule.

Assigned to: C. Wilson

Due by: October 2015

Task # 2. Develop membership solicitation plan and procedure, and follow up on all current and prior members using writing solicitation and telephone follow up.

Assigned to: D. Ridgeway and N. Cohen

Due by: January/February 2016. Actual dates may tie into a scheduled member meeting

Task # 3. Develop formal membership communication plan to strengthen connections between CASCP and members, including management of:

- a. Preparation and maintenance of calendar of events
- b. Regularly refreshed website
- c. Periodic e-letter or newsletter

Assigned to: D. Ridgeway, N. Cohen, new membership/marketing committee and should liaise with program committee

Due by: Develop calendar to include in membership solicitation material, if not sooner

Website should be updated prior to membership solicitation

Basic newsletter or e-letter should be done no later than late winter 2016

Other Tasks to Consider During Second Half of 2015-16 Year

To Address Goal I

Governance

- Decide succession for board leadership role.
- Develop and implement board recruiting for smooth succession including assessment of board composition and future board leadership and membership requirements. This will be needed to ensure appropriate board leadership succession.
- Actively solicit potential committee members from CASCP membership.

To Address Goal II

Membership Development for 2016-17 Year

- Evaluate options to increase membership revenue and implement changes for 2016-17 year.
- Create robust membership marketing and development approach, and targets to focus on greater regional diversity and growth. One suggestion is to adopt a regional outreach by selecting committee members from target regions.

Tasks to Consider for Second Plan Year 2016-17

To Address Goal III

Programming

- Devise means for CASCP to facilitate active resource, information sharing and mentoring among members, including utilizing social media options.
- Consider ways to showcase and even foster collaboration between and among centers.

Advocacy

- Highlight successes in gaining support from state and municipalities as a way of advancing advocacy for senior centers.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1

Strategies and Actions Suggested by Members During Interviews

Things to do now

- Publish up-to-date membership list and maintain.
- Develop one-page sheet listing benefits of CASCP membership.
- Determine and announce program offerings for this year. Suggest annual meeting and fall workshop.
- Publish list of resources available to CASCP members.
- Promote MA Conference discount for CASCP members, which more than pays for the cost of dues.
- Promote the Yahoo group.

Topics for annual meeting or fall workshop

- Hold regional workshops or networking sessions.
- Do workshop or regional session:
 - Marketing to boomers.
 - How to develop and maintain good center volunteers.
 - How to develop community and local government support.
 - Ways to address key issues such as transportation, transition housing.
 - How do centers seek and obtain private funds?

Things to consider in Phase II or Phase III

- Consider alternative member cost centers:
 - Establish per-center membership cost (investigate pros/cons).
 - Membership based upon center budget.
- Foster collaboration among centers near one another when they have common issues or common opportunities.
- Address CASCP's role in advocacy.
- Offer legislative updates.

Appendix 2

Future Strategies and Actions Identified by the Board at the Retreat

- CASCP would support centers in the accreditation process.
- Regarding meeting venues – members are confusing CAME with CASCP. Since your meetings have been held at central locations, this confusion needs to be corrected.
- There is potential to pursue a collaboration with your Massachusetts sister organization:
 - The MA Conference and Certification Program, for example.
 - Showcase the MA Conference discount on your website; mention it at your annual meeting.
- It would be helpful to seek pro bono relationships with legal and accounting organizations or consider including a representative from these groups as a non-board advisor.
- Need to develop board job description; evaluate length of board and officer terms and amend by-laws if changes are decided.
- Committee structure should be evaluated; consider limiting standing committees to only the most important. Use task force or ad hoc committee for special projects.
- Evaluate the membership dues model. This could be done in Phase II.

Appendix 3

Sample Agenda for Regular Board Meeting

Call to Order

Welcome Remarks

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting (if using Consent Agenda, include Minutes on Consent Agenda)

Treasurer's Report

Committee Reports (review only if there are issues to discuss or decisions to make; otherwise, have a brief written report submitted by committee chair prior to meeting and send out in advance of meeting with agenda)

Unfinished Business (business brought over from previous meeting)

New Business

Adjournment

Appendix 4

Recommended Process for Monitoring Progress and Assessing Results

NESC suggests that the CASCP board adopt a plan review process. The following is a tested approach.

Plan Review Process

Once the goals and objectives for the current year of a strategic plan have been established and approved by the Board of Directors, the board may work with the committees to delegate appropriate sections of the plan. The committees will then have the responsibility to implement those plans and report progress to the full board on a periodic basis. Ideally, this activity should be completed in a formal manner at midyear and at the end of the fiscal year.

Generally, not all goals are achieved during one year unless it is a short-term plan. The building blocks to complete a goal are the annual objectives. The status of each objective at midyear and at year's end will be achieved, partially achieved, or not achieved.

Achieved: all aspects of the stated outcome have been completed.

Partially Achieved: work has started toward the outcome or a fraction of the outcome is finished, but the target has not been reached. At midyear the board should be interested in the percentage of completion against the calendar to predict potential completion by year's end in order to give participants direction on the expected focus for their work.

Not Achieved: no work has been started on this objective. At midyear the board must recognize that there are projects that are calendar-specific which could not yet have been achieved. Focus, therefore, should be on those items for which no effort has been made and no planning has occurred. Again, board direction to staff, volunteers and specific board members on where to put their efforts is vital.

At year's end the board may choose to use *Substantially Achieved* on a limited basis to acknowledge that unforeseen or extenuating circumstances have interfered, or that the gap between end-result and target is very small. This option allows the board to give

credit for work that has been done well, while still maintaining the original target as the preferred outcome. The difference can then be added to the new annual objective and responsible parties will continue to work toward achievement.

The board should carry out the midyear and discuss at the next board meeting. The year-end review may be more formal and include a written summary of progress by including a brief statement on the status of each objective. To have a productive discussion it is useful to send this written summary to board members in advance of the year-end meeting. The board agendas for those sessions should allow ample time for the board to discuss the materials. The minutes should reflect areas of praise, concern, need for further discussion and alternate planning decisions.

The board should develop and adhere to a process by which objectives should be dropped or revised midyear. However, there should be adjustment only if there is overwhelming evidence of the need for change or that the objective was originally unclear or unrealistic. Board minutes should reflect the decision and the year-end expectations should be revised accordingly.

The year-end report is the first step in determining the objectives for the next year of the plan. The board should agree on which areas need to continue as planned, which need to be revamped due to either success or problems, which new areas need to be addressed.