Association County Commissioners of Georgia
Strategic Plan

Building Upon a Solid Foundation
Visioning Toward a Centennial Anniversary

April 27, 2009
Association County Commissioners of Georgia
Strategic Plan, 2009 - 2014

Building Upon a Solid Foundation
Visioning Toward a Centennial Anniversary

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The Association County Commissioners of Georgia Strategic Plan was prepared for the Board of Managers and associates to serve as a guiding document for the next five years. It was developed under the guidance of the Board of Managers Strategic Planning Committee with input from the rest of the Board of Managers and ACCG management staff.

Special thanks are extended to Dr. Rob Williams with the Fanning Institute at the University of Georgia who facilitated the strategic planning process.
# ACCG BOARD OF MANAGERS

## Officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>County/Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Jan Tankersley</td>
<td>Bulloch County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Vice President</td>
<td>Lamar Paris</td>
<td>Union County Sole Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Vice President</td>
<td>G. Melvin Davis</td>
<td>Oconee County Chairman</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd Vice President</td>
<td>Clinton Perry</td>
<td>Taylor County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immediate Past President</td>
<td>Tom McMichael</td>
<td>Houston County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACCG Executive Director</td>
<td>Jerry Griffin</td>
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## District Representatives

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<tr>
<th>District</th>
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<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Terrell Hudson</td>
<td>Dooly County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>D.M. Mullis</td>
<td>Laurens County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Charles Lingle</td>
<td>Dougherty County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Judy Evans</td>
<td>Lowndes County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>John McIver</td>
<td>Liberty County Chairman</td>
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<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Eddie Freeman</td>
<td>Spalding County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Kevin Little</td>
<td>Walton County Commissioner</td>
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<td>8th</td>
<td>Terrell Hudson</td>
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<td>11th</td>
<td>Judy Evans</td>
<td>Lowndes County Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>John McIver</td>
<td>Liberty County Chairman</td>
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## Consolidated Government Representative

- **Heidi Davison**
  Athens-Clarke County Mayor

## At-Large Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>County/Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Gault</td>
<td>Jones County Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Hart</td>
<td>Bibb County Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Nelson</td>
<td>Ware County Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel S. Olens</td>
<td>Cobb County Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Stone</td>
<td>Chatham County Commissioner</td>
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## Section Presidents

- **Managers’/Administrators’ Section**: Darrell Hampton, Jackson County Manager
- **Attorneys’ Section**: Karen Thomas, Gwinnett County Attorney
- **Clerks’ Section**: Kathy Arp, Floyd County Clerk
- **ACCG-IRMA Representative**: Charles Newton, McDuffie County Chairman
- **ACCG-GSWCF Representative**: Walter L. Sanders, Greene County Commissioner
- **Pension Board Representative**: H. Jay Walker, Houston County Commissioner

## Ex-Officio

- **Richard English**: Troup County Commissioner
- **James Ham**: Monroe County Commissioner

## Active Past Presidents

- **Clarence Brown**: Bartow County Sole Commissioner
- **James Ham**: Monroe County Commissioner
- **Benjamin Hayward**: Mitchell County Chairman
- **O. D. Netter**: Ben Hill County Commissioner
- **Benjamin Hayward**: Mitchell County Chairman
- **O. D. Netter**: Ben Hill County Commissioner

## NACo Board Members/Officers:

- **Richard English**: Troup County Commissioner
- **James Ham**: Monroe County Commissioner
It is the mission of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia to enhance the role, stature and responsiveness of county government in Georgia. Since counties are the level of government closest to the people and serve all the people of the state, ACCG will promote the ability of Georgia counties to provide public services responsibly, efficiently, and cost effectively through cooperative legislative action, education of public officials, provision of quality member services and technical assistance, and increasing public awareness of critical local government issues.
It is my pleasure to present to you the new five year strategic plan for the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG). This plan will guide the Board of Managers and ACCG staff through the year 2014, when we will celebrate the Association's Centennial Anniversary.

I want to thank Rob Williams, from the Fanning Institute at the University of Georgia, for his leadership and direction in helping to develop this plan as well as my fellow Strategic Planning Committee members and ACCG staff leadership for their interest and dedication in developing this blueprint for our future.

The implementation of this strategic plan will provide direct benefits to our members by improving member services, expanding our communications and helping ACCG become an even stronger and more effective Association than it is today.

I look forward to working with all of you to achieve the strategies that are outlined on the following pages and positioning ACCG for another 100 years of greatness.

Jan B. Tankersley

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When it comes to strategic planning, those involved often celebrate when the final plan is written. While developing a plan is a monumental task, the real work begins with implementation. We are proud that this strategic plan is a working document, and even as we were developing it we were already moving forward with some of the great ideas that were identified.

The devil is in the details is what I always like to say, and I commend our Board of Managers for setting an ambitious yet realistic plan for our next five years. This strategic plan addresses many critical service areas that we provide to you as members and should help you to get even more out of our relationship with ACCG. Our dedicated and professional ACCG staff is committed to the implementation of this strategic plan and we look forward to working with the Board of Managers and the entire ACCG membership to accomplish all of the strategies in the next five years.

Jerry R. Griffin

ACCG Board of Managers Strategic Planning Committee
Jan Tankersley, President
Lamar Paris, 1st Vice President
Melvin Davis, 2nd Vice President
Mike Berg
Clarence Brown
Heidi Davison
Benjamin Hayward
Tom McMichael
O.D. Netter
Sam Olens
The strategic planning process for the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) began under the presidency of Tom McMichael. It has had input from the Executive Committee and other Board members representing key constituencies and regions of the state. ACCG staff leadership was involved in the development of the plan and additional staff reviewed the final drafts of the plan and provided additional implementation strategies. The Association hired Dr. Rob Williams from the J.W. Fanning Institute at the University of Georgia to serve as the consultant for this planning process.

The ACCG Strategic Planning Committee initially met in Houston County on March 6 - 7, 2008. Prior to this retreat, Dr. Williams conducted individual telephone interviews with all session participants. He used the findings of these conversations to outline perceptions and opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of ACCG. During the retreat, the Committee closely scrutinized all aspects of the Association.

The group developed guiding principles for the planning process (see box on this page) and selected a five year planning horizon with annual review by the Board to allow for adjustments as needed. In addition, the group wanted maximum involvement by members and staff in order to ensure a firm commitment to the plan's implementation and the development of appropriate resources and staffing. A second planning retreat was conducted by the Committee on August 18 - 19, 2008 in Bibb County. At that session, the Committee reaffirmed the proposed planning schedule (see page 4) and the guiding principles as well as outlined strategic issues and goals. The Committee specifically decided to have the strategic plan focus on services to and representation of the Association membership. The issues that the ACCG Strategic Plan will focus on include:

- **Increasing Participation and Involvement in Member Services**
- **Improving Communications and External Relations**
- **Building Upon a Solid Foundation**

### Strategic Planning Guiding Principles

1. The plan should recognize and celebrate the current strengths of the Association.
2. The plan must be practical and workable.
3. The plan must be measurable, with some way to assess progress in meeting goals.
4. The plan must serve the membership and enhance the public perception of county government.
5. The plan must make efficient use of the time of the Board of Managers, County Commissioners and ACCG staff, both in planning and implementation.
6. The plan must be developed with input and support from county elected and appointed officials and ACCG staff in order to create ownership of and commitment to it.
7. The plan should use membership participation data wherever possible as a basis for the future direction of the Association.
8. The plan should primarily focus on the next 5 years.
9. The plan should focus on strategic, not operational, issues, especially those long-term issues for which there are currently no clear-cut answers or solutions.
10. The plan must recognize that unanticipated events may alter even the best developed plan and should be addressed by the Board of Managers.
11. The plan should recognize the expanded role ACCG plays in state policy and local governance.
It is intended that future plans will concentrate more comprehensively on other “constituencies” including federal and state government agencies, legislators and legislative staff, other associations, ACCG Associate Members, non-profit organizations, firms and corporations and the general public.

The entire Board reviewed and approved the first complete draft of the strategic plan at the Fall Board retreat in Glynn County, September 12 - 14, 2008. Additional surveys were conducted during the 2008 ACCG district meetings in November and with newly elected officials in December. The results of these surveys were discussed at the Winter Board meeting, December 10 - 11, 2008, and the plan was revised. The plan will be submitted to the ACCG Board of Managers for final review and approval at the February 9, 2009 Board meeting. The strategic plan was submitted to the full membership and approval during the business session of the annual meeting in Chatham County on April 27, 2009.

Strategic Planning Timeline

- **Strategic Planning Retreat**
  March 6 - 7, 2008 - Houston County

- **Strategic Planning Group Meeting**
  August 18 - 19, 2008 - Bibb County

- **Fall Board Meeting**
  September 12 – 14, 2008 - Glynn County

- **2008 District Meetings**
  November 2008
  (Strategic plan presented.)

- **Winter Board Meeting**
  December 10 – 11, 2008 - Greene County

- **Legislative Conference Board Meeting**
  February 9, 2009 - Fulton County

- **2009 ACCG Annual Meeting**
  April 27, 2009 - Chatham County
  (Formal approval of the strategic plan.)
RESOLUTION

Approval of 2009 – 2014 ACCG Strategic Plan

WHEREAS, the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) was created in 1914 as an organization with 19 charter counties and has grown to a statewide organization representing all 159 counties in the State of Georgia; and

WHEREAS, ACCG has a rich history of providing diverse membership services which include consensus building, legislative action, meetings and professional training, technical assistance, insurance and retirement programs, financial services and communications and education; and

WHEREAS, the ACCG Board of Managers committed to develop a five-year strategic plan for the association and named a Strategic Planning Committee to guide the process with their oversight and input that focused on providing services to and representation of the membership; and

WHEREAS, the Strategic Planning Committee worked with the Fanning Institute between March and December 2008 to develop a plan focused on increasing participation and involvement in member services, improving communications and external relations and building a solid foundation for the association;

WHEREAS, the Board of Managers as well as other members and ACCG staff provided input throughout the Fall 2009, resulting in clearly defined tasks with an implementation schedule; and

WHEREAS, the ACCG Board of Managers endorsed the Strategic Plan in February 2009 to take to the full membership at the Annual Meeting in April 2009; and

WHEREAS, this strategic plan provides a clear vision that the Board of Managers, ACCG staff and the entire membership can support to build a solid foundation for the future of ACCG based on its rich history;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, whose members represent all the people of the State of Georgia, approves the 2009 – 2014 ACCG Strategic Plan and commits to work towards its full implementation. This the 27th day of April, 2009.
The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) was formed in 1914 with 19 charter county members and a very limited mission – to help Georgia qualify for a share of the first ever federal road funds. Today, ACCG membership includes all 159 counties within the state and serves as a consensus building, training and legislative organization representing the interests of local government.

From this early beginning, ACCG established itself as a leader in working on statewide issues. In 1914, there was no highway road system and most roads had been built for horse and buggy travel. County government had neither the money nor the authority to construct an integrated system of highways suitable for motor travel.

Congress enacted the first federal aid road bill, the Bankhead Act, to take effect in 1916. However, before any state could be eligible to receive funds, it had to establish a Highway Department and Highway Board to plan and distribute funds. Several far-sighted county commissioners started recruiting their counterparts from around the state and formed ACCG to provide a unified voice.

At this time, the entire state budget was only $6.5 million. The state only provided $30,000 per year through a portion of the license tag fee to fund the newly created Highway Department. The Department had to find matching funds in order to be eligible for the federal funds.

ACCG organized counties in a massive highway bond drive. County governments, not the state, used their own taxing power to provide $26 million worth of bonds to match the first federal highway dollars. The Association successfully promoted legislation that required the Georgia Highway Department to repay counties for those bonds at a rate of 10 percent per year. The final reimbursement was made in 1945.

While transportation has always been an important focus for ACCG, it is important to recognize that county government also had a very narrow field of operations from the start of the Association through the 1950s. These responsibilities included roads, the courts, law enforcement, elections, land records and vital statistics. Only a few of the more densely developed counties like Fulton, DeKalb, Bibb, Chatham, Dougherty and Richmond had taken on some additional services such as fire protection and police. These services were funded primarily by property taxes and little else.
In 1948, ACCG teamed with the Georgia Municipal Association to sponsor training for tax assessors. Training was not mandatory, nor were periodic updates on property valuations. ACCG stood squarely in the tax equalization struggle and recognized that tax inequities were discouraging new industrial and commercial investments in Georgia. Through ACCG, county commissioners established mandatory training for assessors, received statutory permission to hire professional appraisers, completed reappraisals in every jurisdiction and secured state aid to accomplish this task.

The Association also became involved in environmental issues in the 1950s with a bold educational campaign aimed at protecting lakes and waterways from pollution. At this time, few people were aware, much less concerned, about how pollution threatened their water supplies, their communities’ growth potential and their health.

This campaign featured a duck called the “Georgia Quacker”, which served as the official clean water mascot. ACCG urged the state to adopt uniform standards for water quality throughout Georgia. This action paved the way for federal funding, and Georgia became the second state in the nation to submit standards and specifications for all streams and waterways.

The phrase “unfunded mandates” didn’t exist in the 1960s and 1970s, but state and federal government started placing spending demands on local government during these decades. Local government officials realized that they needed another source of funding in order to provide these services. First, the Association pursued legislation to provide an add-on to the state sales tax. Then, the Association teamed with the Georgia Municipal Association to establish a statewide levy of 1% that would be remitted to all local governments based on population. After several years of debate, what ultimately passed was the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) in 1975 and took effect in 1976.

The most dramatic changes in county government, and in ACCG activities, came about because of drastic population shifts. In the first half of the 20th century, loss of farm employment drove people to urban, industrialized centers in search of work. Well into the 1950s, rural counties were losing population to urban centers at a great rate. In that decade alone, 97 of 150 counties lost population.

Conditions started to change in the 1960s with cities losing population to the suburbs and suburban counties. People could afford to commute, and many professionals chose less urban locations to live. These new suburbanites appreciated the rural settings, but demanded urban services from their local government, usually the county. Counties, therefore, were forced into providing many services formerly considered “municipal” including utilities, parks and recreation programs, police and fire protection.
With Fulton County and the City of Atlanta having demonstrated the workability of service mergers in the 1950s with fire and police protection, ACCG urged county leaders to seek out service merge opportunities because of the increased efficiency and cost savings. Areas where service mergers were established included planning commissions, building inspections, emergency communications, jails, and water and sewer systems.

It was during this time that the Association became an advocate for home rule, which continues still today. Protecting home rule means that decision-making on local issues resides at the local level.

In the 1960s and 1970s, ACCG had enough progressive minded leaders to push several less than popular issues. Professionalism on the county staff was the goal. Where size warranted it, the Association endorsed the hiring of county administrators or managers. This action was not welcomed by all county commissioners because it meant steeper salary and training costs. It also meant better quality administration and efficiency.

ACCG and the University of Georgia, with support from GMA and other organizations, sponsored training for tax assessors, county clerks, sheriffs and others. The ACCG training program for county commissioners also was significantly expanded. The Association supported mandatory training for public safety personnel and encouraged additional pay to recognize them for their training.

ACCG also recognized that emergency medical service was essential and urged counties to take on this responsibility and to improve its effectiveness. Before this time, emergency services was actually provided by mortuaries and untrained personnel. ACCG supported mandatory training for ambulance attendants as well as the provision of on-board equipment needed to save lives.

In more recent years, ACCG has turned its focus to programs such as the Local Assistance Road Program (LARP). The Association supported the creation of the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority and the availability of low interest loans for water and sewer projects to help deal with water quality mandates. In addition, ACCG has established several initiatives to reduce the costs of county administration through programs such as insurance and retirement programs and the lease purchase program.

The Association has a clear and proven history of working to give counties a stronger, more unified voice in statewide issues, to protect home rule, to improve county government operations through adequate staff training, and to secure revenue to meet counties’ obligations to their citizens and to the state.

This strategic plan was written to build upon the solid base that ACCG has established and to guide the Association to an even stronger future as it approaches its centennial celebration in 2014.
Associations throughout the country share common characteristics that have been identified as “best practices” through BoardSource, the American Society of Association Executives, the Georgia Center for Nonprofits, and other association consulting work done by Dr. Rob Williams and the Fanning Institute. Based upon a survey of the Association’s membership and a “best practices” comparison of ACCG to other similar associations (both state and national), Dr. Williams identified the following key strengths of ACCG as well as other areas of focus to consider during planning:

• **Public Policy**
  Both as a key service to local government and as a source of information for state elected officials and government agencies, ACCG public policy efforts reflect many of the “best practices” of other associations. Research and data collection from members provides one of the most complete sources of information on county government and county services in the state.

• **Education and Training**
  As one of the earliest advocates of professional education and training for elected officials and staff of local governments, ACCG is recognized nationally for its programs. The Association is fortunate to have developed longstanding, contractual relationships with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government and others that have the expertise and reputation to develop and deliver high quality training programs that the Association could not do on its own. Because this area provides a significant portion of member services and public recognition of ACCG, it is also an area that requires continuous improvement to remain a “best practice.” This effort has proven to be a model example for the use of partnerships to strengthen the organization.

• **Member Services**
  The Association is viewed positively by most of the membership in terms of the type and quality of member services it provides. In addition to the public policy and educational areas mentioned above, ACCG has developed and marketed services such as insurance, retirement / pension plans, purchase of equipment and services, and others that rely upon group purchasing power and have reduced the cost of local government. Members indicate that the Association could do more in providing technical assistance to county government, especially in critical emerging areas such as growth management, conservation and regional services. There also were common concerns about the participation in the Association’s annual and district meetings.

• **County Relationships**
  ACCG must have a strong relationship with all county commissioners, the other constitutional officers and the staff of every county. ACCG must continue to seek opportunities to engage all members and to use the network of elected and appointed officials and county staff as a resource for identification of critical issues and information on local government operations.

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**An empowered organization is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire, and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organizational success.**

- *Stephen Covey,*
  *Author of Principle-centered Leadership*
• Political Acumen
ACCG has an outstanding reputation for its technical expertise, understanding of and respect for the political process and willingness to help build consensus for challenging or emerging issues with both elected and appointed leaders at the state and federal level. For this reason, the Association is often sought out as a trusted resource during the legislative process and in the development of new initiatives. Political acumen is essential to meet the needs of local government, and the Association should continue to build these relationships through its staff and the Board of Managers.

• Public Information
Through its membership and other relationships, ACCG has a strong network throughout the state. The Association has many strong and recognized communications tools already in use that are also recognized as a “best practice” for association communications, including the Web site, magazine, and e-newsletter. However, communications today is an ever-changing dynamic, and ACCG should seek to improve communications by incorporating new technology and following trends in how and where people receive information. In addition, local governments also need assistance in increasing civic involvement and improving public awareness of their role.

• Governance
Unlike many professional associations, participation in ACCG changes based upon the outcome of local elections. Because of this, efforts to ensure an orderly progression of key leaders are often thwarted by a Board member or upcoming officer who loses an election. ACCG tends to reflect a healthy balance between staff and volunteer leadership in terms of managing and leading the Association. The Board generally remains at the policy and planning level and staff tends to seek Board and membership input on key operation and implementation steps. The Association should develop a defined role for the Board of Managers particularly with respect to its interface with the Executive Director. In addition, the Board should invest more time in long-range planning, Board self-assessment, and Board development.

• Sound Diversified Financial Base
Associations do not exist to make money, but the best associations have proven and diversified financial resources. ACCG reflects “best practices” in that the Association has combined services to members with revenue generation and diversified its income so as not to depend upon dues or meeting revenues alone. It also has a history of successful management of cash flow, operating expenses, and Board financial oversight.

• Staff
The staff of ACCG received high evaluations from members in the surveys conducted. In particular, members pointed positively to the responsiveness, subject matter expertise and understanding of local government operations. In terms of “best practices”, ACCG maintains an appropriate balance between the number of staff, size of the membership and services provided. Of concern to members is the need for increased staff development in three areas: continuing professional education, lack of diversity at the highest staff levels, and danger for operations to become fragmented or specialized, resulting in organizational “silos.”
ISSUE 1: INCREASING PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN MEMBER SERVICES
Member participation and involvement is vital to the success of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG). The Association is committed to representing the interests of all counties, whether they are urban, suburban or rural, involving all of the member services. Likewise, members benefit from interaction among their peers where they can exchange ideas and develop solutions to critical issues facing their county.

The Association must continue to look for ways to increase participation and engage the membership in meetings, training and policy development. Based upon an analysis of the membership survey, nearly 20 percent of counties in Georgia have below average participation in Association activities. These counties are not taking full advantage of the benefits that active participation provides. The Association needs the involvement of all counties to shape policy, improve technical assistance and develop the most informed perspective possible on issues of importance to local government.

ACCG is uniquely positioned to provide outstanding technical assistance on a wide range of topics through its policy staff and government field representatives and should continue to identify new service areas where the Association can assist members in improving their efficiency and effectiveness. The Association should also incorporate the use of new distance learning technology into its member services and outreach efforts.

Lastly, ACCG has long served as a leader in bringing together organizations, government leaders and others with diverse backgrounds and perspectives on issues such as water, transportation and land conservation. This is accomplished by organizing “summits” of stakeholders, developing educational materials and involving its members in emerging statewide trends. Based on past successes and the increasing need for this role on future issues, the Association must develop policies and procedures to better identify these issues in a timely manner and decide which of those issues fits best within the mission and resources of ACCG.
Goal 1: Increase member participation in Association activities such as the annual meeting, district meetings, and policy committee meetings by identifying needs, providing timely and informative programs, and engaging newly elected and appointed officials.

**Strategy 1:** Begin a more frequent and broad-based survey of elected members and key appointed staff to assess and track information such as: (a) socio-demographics, including employment of county commissioners; (b) why the individual ran for elected office (if applicable); (c) expectations of ACCG; (d) current level of ACCG participation; (e) barriers to ACCG participation; (f) most useful ACCG meetings and activities; (g) current critical issues of the county; and (h) emerging or unmet needs of members.

**Target Date: September 2009**

**Strategy 2:** Hire a consultant to conduct random telephone interviews with county commissioners who have served at least one term and are not active in ACCG, especially those in large counties, to assess barriers to participation and unmet needs.

**Target Date: September 2009**

**Strategy 3:** Develop recommendations for an annual dues structure that rewards member participation and establishes higher fees for counties that are not actively involved for consideration by the Board of Managers.

**Target Date: September 2011**

**Strategy 4:** Provide several follow-up communications from ACCG in the months following new commissioner training to promote involvement in ACCG. Utilize the internet, including blogs and survey tools, to conduct informational exit surveys.

**Target Date: Jan - March 2009**

**Strategy 5:** Facilitate a mentoring program for new county commissioners and key county staff. Develop guidelines and/or training on the role of a mentor and define tasks and expectations.

**Target Date: January 2011**

**Strategy 6:** Hire an external meeting consultant to review the content, structure and flow of the annual meeting and make recommendations on improvements for Board consideration.

**Target Date: January 2010**

**Strategy 7:** Restructure the district meetings to encourage increased participation by providing updates on critical issues or recognizing innovative programs within the district. In addition, increase the role of district representatives in these meetings to further establish these individuals as a resource for members and a link to the Association’s governance.

**Target Date: November 2010**
INCREASING PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN MEMBER SERVICES

Goal 2: Increase member involvement in key member services such as legislative policy development and engagement during the legislative session, financial services, and continuing education and training.

Strategy 1: Identify one elected or appointed individual in each county as the “legislative liaison” for that county who is active in the ACCG policy process. Target Date: February 2009

Strategy 2: Charge district representatives and ACCG governmental field representatives to use data from the “participation maps” showing levels of county participation in ACCG activities to target visits and phone calls to counties with low participation. Target Date: September 2009

Strategy 3: Work with the legislators to evaluate the opportunity to pursue legislation to increase the amount paid to county commissioners for maintaining certification or obtaining advanced certification. Target Date: January 2011

Strategy 4: Recognize the two tracks for continuing education within the Association: 1) the county commissioner training program and 2) training and/or increased awareness that results from participating in Association activities such as district meetings and the annual meeting. Target Date: June 2010

Strategy 5: Revitalize the county commissioner training program by updating the curriculum and developing a new name and logo. Target Date: January 2010

Goal 3: Use emerging technology to communicate more effectively with members

Strategy 1: Increase the number of “distance education” training programs and activities of ACCG, including teleconferences or web-based meetings on legislative issues, specific advanced training, and other topics. Develop relationships with community colleges, technical schools, utility companies and hospitals that have teleconferencing facilities. Target Date: January 2011

Strategy 2: Increase the number of hours for certification or for maintaining certification and increase opportunities to earn credit hours at annual meeting programs. Institute a magnetic “registration” card tracking system for participation in annual meeting events and activities. Target Date: April 2011
INCREASING PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN MEMBER SERVICES

Goal 4: Provide new services to improve county government

**Strategy 1:** Strengthen the role of the ACCG government relations manager that will work with individual or regional clusters of counties. Develop a job description and explain the role of these representatives to members.  
*Target Date: March 2009*

**Strategy 2:** Identify, document and distribute innovative ways to “stretch the dollar” in local government, including energy conservation, multi-county shared equipment and others. Use governmental relations representatives and member input to identify and recognize innovation.  
*Target Date: April 2009*

**Strategy 3:** Establish models for the efficiencies of government consolidation and a handbook on the process for successful consolidation of city and county government.  
*Target Date: January 2011*

**Strategy 4:** Evaluate the current services ACCG provides compared to similar membership associations and report findings to the Board.  
*Target Date: September 2010*

Goal 5: Provide leadership for members and the state on emerging issues.

**Strategy 1:** Develop a set of procedures for Board approval for (a) identifying emerging issues through member input; (b) developing strategies for ACCG to most effectively support further exploration and recommendations on those issues; and (c) developing partnerships with other key stakeholders to address those issues.  
*Target Date: September 2009*
ISSUE 2: IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS
One of the greatest strengths of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) is its advocacy role with legislative issues (state and federal) affecting county government. However, ACCG should work to increase its communications efforts beyond interaction with policymakers.

Consistent and proactive communications that focuses on the positive role of the Association, as well as the role of local government and the services it provides, can greatly increase public awareness. Developing an overall communications plan will help the Association to engage both internal and external stakeholders by blending the use of established communications tools such as Georgia County Government magazine, the Web site (www.accg.org), the County Line e-newsletter and other publications with new outreach efforts such as media relations and the development of communications campaigns designed to address specific programs and issues. Over the next five years, the Association should strive to provide communications support and resources to its membership in much the same way as technical assistance is provided through other services.

The Association and its members also benefit from the relationships that ACCG has established with federal and state government, non-profit organizations, other trade associations and the business community. In particular, ACCG has worked very diligently to establish a broad-based intergovernmental network. The Association should establish a systematic approach for managing these relationships to maximize the benefits to the members.

Examples of some successful models already established between the Association and other organizations include the joint liaison position with Cooperative Extension and the statewide county internship program established with the Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education (ARCHE). In addition, the digitization project for county government records with the Georgia Historic Records Advisory Board (GHRAB) resulted in new financial partnerships with Microsoft and The Generations Network. ACCG also has established private sector relationships with the Coca-Cola Company, Verizon Wireless, Enterprise, Dell, Yancey Brothers, the Georgia Power Company, Starbucks and over 160 associate members representing a large number of professional disciplines. ACCG staff should continue to identify and cultivate relationships such as these that further the mission of the Association and benefit its members.

As the current Regional Development Centers (RDCs) transform into newly aligned Regional Commissions, it also is very important for ACCG to identify new opportunities to work with regional “partners”. The Association’s renewed focus on government field representatives also will facilitate more interaction between local governments and other partners. Developing innovative service delivery plans and programs, can ultimately lead to cost benefits which are not currently being realized.

Lastly, the Association should place additional focus on increasing the civic awareness of Georgia’s citizens. Focus on youth should be achieved by expanding the Georgia Civic Awareness Program (GCAPS) and empowering the ACCG Foundation to identify and develop other ways to encourage civic participation.
Goal 1: Establish ACCG as a primary source of information on local government issues for Association members, county public information officers, the media, and the public and develop proactive communications programs to increase awareness of the role of and services provided by local government.

Strategy 1: Initiate a process to develop a communications plan. The Association communications plan should include, but is not limited to, media relations, in-house publications and the web site. The plan also should address outreach campaigns, special events, and public relations coordination with county governments including the development or enhancement of web sites.  

Target Date: June 2009

Strategy 2: Hire a fulltime communication specialist.  

Target Date: January 2009

Strategy 3: Continue to improve the ACCG Web Portal.  

Target Date: Underway

Strategy 4: Develop supporting materials and templates for county government public events, media outreach and county government newsletters.  

Target Date: Ongoing

Strategy 5: Increase recognition of volunteer leadership and Board membership through ACCG communications such as press releases to local media and more information about board members on the web site and in Georgia County Government magazine.  

Target Date: July 2009

Strategy 6: Develop and coordinate an annual campaign to promote “County Government Week” in association with the efforts of the National Association of County Organizations, including supporting outreach materials for state and local use.  

Target Date: May 2010

Strategy 7: Develop special programs — such as “Youth Academies” or “Shadow Local Leaders” — in partnership with the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) and others to involve youth and increase their awareness of the role and accomplishments of local government.  

Target Date: January 2011

Strategy 8: Create annual campaigns to highlight the role and accomplishments of county government that can be incorporated through ACCG and local government communications, including but not limited to media relations, magazines, newsletters, local cable access programming, and web sites.  

Target Date: January 2010; January 2011; and January 2012
### Improving Communications and External Relations

**Strategy 9:** Establish an Association Centennial Celebration Committee and develop a communications plan to recognize the accomplishments of the Association and local government in 2014.  
**Target Date:** January 2012

**Strategy 10:** Increase the number of awards and recognition for individual members and county governments for innovation and service and participation in ACCG activities.  
**Target Date:** April 2010

**Strategy 11:** Publish a biennial report, similar to the annual legislative review, highlighting the accomplishments of ACCG.  
**Target Date:** January 2010

### Goal 2: Improve external relationships and forge effective partnerships for policy development and programming with state and national organizations.

**Strategy 1:** Facilitate a joint meeting for volunteer and staff leadership of ACCG and the Georgia Municipal Association to identify ways to improve communications and collaboration between the two associations.  
**Target Date:** September 2009

**Strategy 2:** Explore ways to strengthen relationships with Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA), the Georgia Sheriffs’ Association (GSA), the County Officers’ Association of Georgia (COAG) the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and other key groups with a local government or development role.  
**Target Date:** September 2009

**Strategy 3:** Identify key resource groups in the state, such as Cooperative Extension, state colleges and universities, technical schools, state agencies and others, and explore possibilities of joint staffing. Develop strategies, such as the Cooperative Extension fellowship program that will maximize these relationships.  
**Target Date:** September 2010
**Goal 3:** Improve the role of serving as a communications bridge with federal, state and regional governments and organizations.

**Strategy 1:** Establish and maintain key staff contacts in each congressional office in Washington, DC and the district and schedule periodic visits with them by key ACCG staff including the governmental field staff. Establish a system to track information on these meetings through the central information section of the ACCG office.  
*Target Date: Underway*

**Strategy 2:** Develop a comprehensive list of the federal agencies that ACCG works with on behalf of its members and identify agencies that need to be added if necessary to benefit the membership.  
*Target Date: December 2009*

**Strategy 3:** Encourage the Board of Managers to interact with the congressional offices and federal agencies by providing opportunities through meeting participation and other outreach. The Board of Managers should provide feedback from this interaction to the ACCG staff to assist in furthering relationships with these contacts.  
*Target Date: June 2010*

**Strategy 4:** Encourage Regional Commissions to coordinate the availability of federal grant and loan programs and use ACCG communications resources, meetings and training programs to promote them.  
*Target Date: September 2009*

**Strategy 5:** Host opportunities for federal agency staff to familiarize them with the ACCG network and to help them better understand the needs of members.  
*Target Date: June 2010*

**Goal 4:** Identify new opportunities for ACCG and the Regional Commissions.

**Strategy 1:** Convene a meeting with the GARDC Council (or appropriate governing body) to consider “new opportunities” for interaction between ACCG and the newly established Regional Commissions.  
*Target Date: June 2012*

**Strategy 2:** Review the newly formed Regional Commissions in order to determine how they can assist local government, especially in achieving cost efficiencies in service delivery. Encourage the Regional Commissions to develop regional forecasting and to facilitate interaction to address regional solutions.  
*Target Date: June 2009*
Goal 5: Further develop the ACCG Foundation to expand civic engagement for students at the high school and college level.

**Strategy 1:** Expand the Georgia Civic Awareness Program (GCAPS) beyond its initial pilot counties to assist other counties in developing similar programs. Further develop the relationship with Cooperative Extension and identify other potential partners to support GCAPS with financial and in kind services.

**Target Date: July 2010**

**Strategy 2:** Appoint an ACCG Foundation Board of Directors from the public and private sector. This Board will play a key role in developing the structure and guidelines of the civic engagement programs and in assisting with fundraising and promotion of the programs.

**Target Date: September 2010**

**Strategy 3:** Facilitate GCAPS student participation in the Georgia Youth Summit organized every other year by Cooperative Extension's 4-H program and the Georgia Rural Development Council. This program brings youth together to discuss community challenges and assets and to develop an action plan to address a local issue.

**Target Date: December 2009**
ISSUE 3:
BUILDING UPON A SOLID FOUNDATION
The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) is fortunate to have highly competent and professional staff and committed and experienced volunteer leadership through the involvement of elected and appointed officials. As the Association has grown and prospered, however, the professional and volunteer leadership roles have become increasingly complex.

In order to continue to function as a strong and vibrant Association representing the interests and needs of all members, ACCG should evaluate its organizational structure and the functions of the Association and its Board of Managers. The Association may choose to modify its bylaws to allow for better integration throughout the Association. For example, the Board of Managers may consider broadening the responsibilities of district representatives to further engage the membership.

ACCG also is extremely fortunate to have a history of financial stability because of its broad base of revenue and its relatively low operating expenses. Currently, less than 8 percent of the Association’s operating costs are paid through regular member dues. Other operational funding comes from insurance and GEBCorp program reimbursements (45%), sponsorship fees (31%), meetings and training (11%) and leasing programs (5%). Even with this strong financial base, the Association must continue to diversify its funding mechanisms and seek new partnerships in order to continue to improve services for its members.

One of the Association’s most valuable assets is its highly competent and experienced staff. The current staff is composed of professionals who have previously worked at the federal, state and local government levels. Some also have worked at the national/regional level or at the state/regional level and others have private sector experience. The management positions are filled with individuals who combined have more than 150 years of professional public policy experience. ACCG must continue to recognize and provide opportunities for its staff in order to retain their expertise.

*Organization doesn’t really accomplish anything. Plans don't accomplish anything, either. Theories of management don’t much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds.*

- Colin Powell, retired four-star general and 65th U.S. Secretary of State (2001 - 2005)
**Goal 1:** Identify improvements to the Association’s structure, governance and organizational development to ensure its continued success.

| Strategy 1: Strengthen the bond between ACCG, the ACCG insurance programs and GEBCorp to create a greater understanding of the Association’s services both internally and for members. Consider unified branding and joint communications to promote all Association services. | Target Date: December 2009 |
| Strategy 2: Conduct an “organizational audit” to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the current structure and staffing of ACCG based upon “best practices” of associations. The audit also should identify areas for training and development for staff as well as ways to improve internal communications and coordination of staff efforts. The audit should provide recommendations for Board consideration. | Target Date: July 2010 |
| Strategy 3: Conduct a Board self-assessment to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the current structure and operations of the Board of Managers based upon “best practices” of associations. The self-assessment should identify minimum qualifications and key competences for Board membership as well as areas for Board training and development. | Target Date: September 2009 |
| Strategy 4: Clarify the role of the Executive Committee and communicate these responsibilities to Board members. | Target Date: September 2009 |
| Strategy 5: Revise and expand the role of the district representative to improve “vertical integration” between the Board and members. The role of district representative should include mentoring and encouraging participation in ACCG. | Target Date: September 2009 |

**Goal 2:** Enhance management practices for financial resources and external partnerships; especially with the business community, to provide new services and increased technical assistance and to reduce costs for the Association and its membership.

<p>| Strategy 1: Charge the Board Executive Committee and appropriate staff to conduct a “strategic review” of the current finances of the Association and prepare a report for the Board. In particular, the strategic review should compare current and future income and expenses to the strategic plan and identify areas which will have a significant financial impact. | Target Date: September 2009 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 2:</td>
<td>Develop a Board approved set of guiding principles for establishing relationships or contractual agreements with external partners.</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy 3:</td>
<td>Institute an annual review by the Board and a semi-annual joint review by staff of existing contracts and grants. Ensure that all contractual obligations are met or exceeded.</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
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<td>Strategy 4:</td>
<td>Present a periodic review of existing and potential commercial partnerships to the Board of Managers, including a basic business plan and other considerations, to ensure the most beneficial agreements.</td>
<td>September 2009</td>
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<td>Strategy 5:</td>
<td>Conduct an analysis of the purchasing and service delivery needs of members to identify the potential for new commercial partnerships, multi-state opportunities, and additional member services. Focus on core policy areas and use membership survey results and recommendations of staff (especially government field representatives) to identify areas in which new relationships are needed. Consider legal and financial issues for all new identified needs.</td>
<td>December 2009</td>
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<td>Strategy 6:</td>
<td>Develop an “entrepreneurial” income plan to strengthen the Association’s revenue base. Consider sponsorships for programs such as continuing education and other member services.</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
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<td>Strategy 7:</td>
<td>Review the dues structure of ACCG with specific attention paid to associate member dues. Revamp associate member information to explain the benefits of membership and how these dues are used.</td>
<td>April 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 8:</td>
<td>Evaluate the opportunity for generating funds for the Association and its membership for special projects.</td>
<td>January 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goal 3:** Enhance management practices to encourage staff retention.

**Strategy 1:** Formalize the existing bonus program for ACCG staff to encourage lateral and upward mobility. | July 2010
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