

Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling

Strategic Plan: 2020-2023

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Letter from the President

College admissions is changing rapidly—more so in the last four years than in the 49 years the Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC) has existed. As president, I felt it was important to more strategically and intentionally guide our organization through the next three years in this ever-changing landscape.

Thanks to the generosity of our colleague at the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN), we were able to hire Public Sector Consultants—a well-known, Lansing-based consulting firm—to guide us through a comprehensive strategic planning process.

Together, 16 volunteers from MACAC and MCAN developed a survey of counselors and college admission professionals throughout the state and guided our efforts during a daylong workshop. I would like to recognize the following individuals for their time and valuable input:

Amanda Blanchette, University of Michigan
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The results of these efforts are exciting, and they will undoubtedly help MACAC grow stronger in the next three years and beyond. As we position MACAC to be the go-to resource in postsecondary planning, not only will we be able to focus on new ways to engage and increase membership, but also create strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations.

It has truly been an honor to serve you as president, and I am excited to share this strategic plan with you, which I believe provides us with a roadmap to advocate, collaborate, and educate!

Sincerely,



Holly M. Markiecki-Bennetts
President, Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling

Executive Summary

The Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC) is a professional association for individuals in the state of Michigan who assist students in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education opportunities. Founded in 1970 as an affiliate of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), MACAC supports its members with professional development, networking and mentorship services, as well as advocacy efforts. As we prepare to celebrate 50 years of serving admissions counselors across Michigan, it was important to take stock of our current position and develop a plan to elevate both our reputation and impact statewide. By 2023, we aspire to be the statewide leader and recognized expert in postsecondary admissions.

To achieve this goal, we engaged in a strategic planning process that involved an organizational assessment and a collaborative planning process to determine how to focus our efforts in the next three years. To better understand the current perception of MACAC, a comprehensive survey on our organization and programs was shared with current members, former members, and eligible professionals who have never joined. Beyond this effort, other NACAC-affiliate strategic plans were studied to determine how our peer organizations have invested their resources. The findings from the survey and research were shared with a group of members who volunteered to participate in a collaborative strategic planning workshop.

The workshop provided a facilitated process for members to collaborate with one another and reach consensus around the top strategic goals and objectives for MACAC to accomplish over the three-year period. These goals and objectives are articulated below.

- **Goal One: Grow Membership through Improved Attraction and Retention**
 - Objective One: Identify and Target Potential Members
 - Objective Two: Strengthen MACAC's Professional Support and Benefit Offerings
 - Objective Three: Expand and Promote Organizational Value and Reputation

- **Goal Two: Enhance Branding and Communication**
 - Objective Four: Refresh MACAC Vision and Mission Statements
 - Objective Five: Use Technology to Expand Reach
 - Objective Six: Increase Strategic Partnerships

- **Goal Three: Increase Student Access and Success**
 - Objective Seven: Enhance Programs for Student Access and Success
 - Objective Eight: Increase Impact on Educational Policy
- **Goal Four: Improve Financial Stability**
 - Objective Nine: Develop Intentional Fiscal Strategies to Increase Revenue

Through 2023, MACAC leadership will engage our members, nonmembers, students and families, strategic partners, as well as policymakers to provide the collaboration and insight needed to achieve the goals outlined in this plan. This investment will allow us to support our members and sustain our efforts to serve Michigan students and families for another 50 years.

Background

The Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling represents secondary school counselors, college admission and financial aid officers, enrollment managers, independent counselors, and organizations engaged in guiding students through the transition from secondary to postsecondary education opportunities. As an affiliate of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, we help our members reach professional goals and improve services to students by offering networking, professional development, mentorship, and advocacy opportunities, as well as access to additional supports. Additionally, we are focused on promoting and growing a college-going culture across the state.

As the college admissions process evolves, college admissions counselors must adapt accordingly to ensure we provide relevant, timely advice to the students we serve. Similarly, it is important that we periodically take stock of our work and services to set actionable goals for supporting members well into the future.

In service of those realities, we engaged in a strategic planning process—facilitated by Public Sector Consultants (PSC)—to craft a three-year plan for growing our membership and reputation as well as increasing our impact on issues important to the profession and related to student access. By 2023, MACAC hopes to be the statewide expert and resource for anything related to postsecondary education opportunities.

The following strategic plan outlines our strategic goals and objectives to accomplish before the end of 2023 and summarizes the process used to develop that vision.

Strategic Planning Process

MACAC contracted with PSC to facilitate a robust strategic planning process informed by board and staff engagement, research of existing materials from MACAC and similar organizations nationally, and broad stakeholder engagement. The following provides an overview of the process.

Research Scan and Survey

PSC reviewed strategic plans from other NACAC affiliates, including those located in Illinois, Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. These specific peer organizations

were identified and selected through conversations with MACAC executive staff to understand what issues similar organizations are addressing and to identify any novel solutions being implemented. This review revealed considerable similarities among the plans: Many were primarily written to cover a three-year span—mostly from 2018 to 2021—and revealed significant alignment among areas of focus, including communication and branding, membership, professional development, and financial responsibility.

These shared focus areas were then used to develop survey questions for current and potential MACAC members to determine how we are performing across common areas of concern. The survey was developed with input from the MACAC president and a project engagement team that comprised seven volunteer members across various geographic and professional viewpoints.

This process resulted in an online survey of current members, former members, and eligible professionals who had never joined MACAC to gauge their perceptions of our performance in the areas of membership, communication, advocacy, events, and professional development. Additionally, the survey asked respondents to prioritize professional and student groups in need of additional investment and, lastly, if our vision and mission statements aligned with respondents' understanding of the organization. In total, more than 250 people responded to the survey over the course of two weeks.

Research and survey findings were shared with the strategic planning workshop group. This helped ground the group in a common understanding of how other stakeholders view MACAC and how these stakeholders would like to see the organization prioritize resources moving forward.

Workshop

In order to develop a strategic plan rooted in our values with support from all members, PSC convened a volunteer group of MACAC members for a strategic planning workshop. During the workshop, the group reviewed findings from the research scan and stakeholder survey, examined our current vision and mission statements, and engaged in a consensus-building process to develop a core set of strategic organizational goals. The results of that effort are presented in the strategic goals section below.

Vision and Mission Statements

A vision statement is an expression of the world an organization hopes to create, while a mission statement serves as the roadmap for achieving that goal over time. As we engaged in this strategic planning process and committed to a scope of work for the next three years, it was important to revisit our vision and mission statements to ensure alignment with the new strategic goals and an accurate reflection of our current organizational culture and broader profession.

PSC asked the workshop participants to review MACAC's vision and mission statements to consider what elements were relevant and where there were opportunities for change. Participants first worked individually and then in small groups before sharing their views with the full group.

For the vision statement, participants noted tone and language issues. Broadly, they suggested elevating the tone to be more visionary and inspirational, as the current version more closely matched the tone of the mission statement. Additionally, participants highlighted potential language changes to add more specificity, be more inclusive, and reflect current terminology used in the profession.

Participants felt that the mission statement was too closely aligned with NACAC's. This raised concerns that NACAC members in Michigan would not see additional value in joining MACAC. Moreover, participants noted that the mission statement focused too heavily on student outcomes, rather than supports for members. Though student outcomes are certainly a priority, it should be clear that those goals are achieved through direct professional support to members. Lastly, there were language changes suggested to more clearly define what "postsecondary opportunities" means and to make the statement more action oriented.

Ultimately, participants determined that both statements would benefit from a refresh; however, the scope of the workshop did not include rewriting these items. To address this, we will convene a workgroup of diverse members to draft updated vision and mission statements. PSC captured specific participants' feedback and shared this information with the executive board to support this refresh.

Strategic Goals

Goal One: Grow Membership through Improved Attraction and Retention

As a statewide professional association, our success relies on engaging many members across all regions in Michigan. Membership dues fund our organization and allow us to provide the professional development, advocacy, and organizational services that are core to our mission.

By 2023, we hope to have a large, diverse, and engaged member base with representation in all parts of the state. This will be partially accomplished through the development of new outreach or ambassador programs designed to target disconnected and underrepresented individuals. The overall approach would be informed through the deployment of a needs assessment for both members and nonmembers to better understand what support and benefits they would look for in joining MACAC.

These outreach efforts will be supported through a renewed emphasis on promoting MACAC as the go-to expert in Michigan for all issues relating to admissions for postsecondary education opportunities. We will accomplish this by providing members with current and relevant best practices in the profession and recruiting top speakers from around the country to participate at the MACAC Annual Conference.

Concurrent with growing membership, we will also devote resources to retaining current members. While a growth mindset is useful for maintaining organizational health, we value the experience and insight of our existing members and want to encourage their continued engagement. We will achieve this by improving and expanding member benefits and supports, which will be informed by the results of the needs assessment.

Objective One: Identify and Target Potential Members

Short Term

- Create and deploy a needs assessment for members and nonmembers to understand their motivations and challenges within the profession to determine how we could best serve them

Long Term

- Develop programs to reach underrepresented demographics

- Create an ambassador program, or other outreach programs, to promote our organization and increase membership, particularly in rural communities

Objective Two: Strengthen MACAC's Professional Support and Benefit Offerings

Short Term

- Develop and promote a MACAC listserv
- Develop materials to more clearly articulate member benefits to potential and current members
- Improve peer support opportunities between members

Long Term

- Create and launch programs to mentor members for MACAC leadership positions and demonstrate pathways from membership to leadership
- Investigate the potential offering of liability insurance to counselors
- Refresh the MACAC Annual Conference with an emphasis on new content and speakers
- Develop professional development opportunities targeted towards senior- and expert-level members

Objective Three: Expand and Promote Organizational Value and Reputation

Short Term

- Promote and emphasize the NACAC code of ethics and MACAC's adherence to that code

Long Term

- Develop a strategy for promoting MACAC's expertise and impact across many channels
 - Host new resources on the website
 - Develop professional relationships with news outlets to serve as expert sources
- Position MACAC as the go-to expert in Michigan for postsecondary opportunity admissions

Goal Two: Enhance Branding and Communication

As we position MACAC as a statewide leader in postsecondary opportunity admissions, it is important to update our brand, communication plans, and strategic partnerships. This begins with a refresh of the vision and mission statements to reflect new programs and

areas of focus as well as changes in culture and terminology. We will then share these new versions with current and potential members through new communication techniques and channels that enable better outreach to members across the state. Additionally, this enhanced online presence and communication tactic will allow more members to fully engage in MACAC and its professional development offerings. Lastly, we will seek out like-minded organizations to form strategic partnerships that advance MACAC's interests professionally, programmatically, or in the advocacy space.

Objective Four: Refresh MACAC Vision and Mission Statements

Short Term

- Establish a workgroup to revise MACAC's vision and mission statements

Long Term

- Update the website and other branded materials to reflect the new statements and support strategic goals

Objective Five: Use Technology to Expand Reach

Short Term

- Explore new communication technology, techniques, and channels for reaching MACAC stakeholders
- Refresh and expand online presence

Long Term

- Create a new communications plan incorporating lessons learned
- Develop opportunities for online professional development

Objective Six: Increase Strategic Partnerships

Short Term

- Identify and develop strategic partnerships with peer organizations

Long Term

- Develop strategic initiatives in collaboration with partners

Goal Three: Increase Student Access and Success

MACAC members joined the profession because they care about students and want each of them to have access to the postsecondary education opportunities that serve them best. As an organization, MACAC shares and supports this goal, primarily through direct professional development for members. However, as statewide experts, we have a responsibility to share our resources and raise our voices when policy issues arise around postsecondary admissions and the counseling profession. That is because MACAC is a place for collective action, where admissions counselors can leverage their passion and expertise to impact student access and success statewide, beyond the important one-on-one support they deliver daily.

This collaboration is critical for changing Michigan's culture regarding the importance of postsecondary education opportunities and the pathways to access those programs. Changing the culture will require direct outreach to students and families. In service of this, MACAC will develop programs, including possible scholarship opportunities, to foster a college-going mindset with at-risk students and students who lack access to counselors, including those in elementary or middle school. Programming for students is slightly outside of MACAC's traditional scope of work, which is focused on services for members, but shifting younger students' mindsets regarding postsecondary education opportunities can be a professional benefit for the counselors who will work with these individuals at the high-school level.

As a trade organization representing many state and municipal employees, MACAC cannot ignore the impact that state and local government policies and priorities have on the professional lives of our members and on student access and success statewide. We play a significant role in aggregating and sharing the voices of our members to impact policy. By 2023, we will develop strategies to strengthen and focus our advocacy efforts to impact important issues, including improving the student-to-counselor ratio and leveraging state funding for our organization.

Objective Seven: Enhance Programs for Student Access and Success

Short Term

- Explore opportunities to grow existing programming for students

Long Term

- Develop strategies to fundraise more scholarship dollars, identify stakeholders most in need of scholarship funding, and establish scholarship programs to distribute the funds
- Create programs to conduct early educational outreach to younger students

Objective Eight: Increase Impact on Educational Policy

Short Term

- Advocate for more counselor positions to improve the existing student-to-counselor ratio

Long Term

- Push for the development of articulation agreements
- Advocate for increased state investment in MACAC

Goal Four: Improve Financial Stability

As an organization, we are committed to diversifying and growing our funding streams. Historically, membership dues have served as our primary funding source and will continue to do so; however, diversifying this stream yields benefits to both MACAC and our members. From an organizational standpoint, a robust and diverse funding stream provides stability if membership rates ever fluctuate. Moreover, as we focus on achieving new strategic goals, additional funding will allow MACAC to pursue those objectives without decreasing support for existing programs or increasing fees. Through this diversification process, we will have an opportunity to be more creative with restructuring membership fees—providing financial relief to those who struggle to pay—and with developing opportunities to attract independent professionals who previously could not afford to join.

To achieve this goal by 2023, we will develop a workgroup of members to research opportunities and best practices regarding nonprofit fundraising and funding diversification.

Objective Nine: Develop Intentional Fiscal Strategies to Increase Revenue

Short Term

- Restructure membership fees

Long Term

- Create membership incentive programs
- Increase the number of revenue streams and amounts raised

Next Steps

As we establish MACAC as the statewide expert and resource center for postsecondary education opportunity pathways, it is critical that members and leaders embrace a growth and change mindset. The strategic goals and objectives outlined in this plan provide the roadmap for us to achieve our goals of increasing support and professional development opportunities for our members, growing our advocacy role, and ultimately driving greater student access and success statewide. However, success will require engagement and buy-in from everyone. Over this three-year period, MACAC leadership will engage members, nonmembers, students and families, strategic partners, as well as policymakers to provide the collaboration and insight needed to achieve the goals outlined above.

By 2023, MACAC will be the unquestioned statewide leader in the pathway to postsecondary education opportunities and will be supported by a large and diverse membership base that reaches every part of the state. Our renewed branding and communication will clearly articulate organizational goals and values, bringing those messages directly to stakeholders through the adoption of new communication technology and channels. As part of this messaging effort, there will be a focus on engaging at-risk students around the state to normalize and encourage the pursuit of postsecondary education opportunities. Across Michigan, MACAC will be a leading advocate for policy issues impacting our members, both independently and through collaboration with peer organizations. Finally, all of these efforts will be supported by a robust and diverse funding stream, facilitating the pursuit of new initiatives and enabling more creative engagement with new and existing members.

Appendix A: Current Vision and Mission Statements

Vision

The Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC) believes in the benefits of a post-secondary education. As an organization, we adhere to a strong, nationally accepted Code of Ethics, namely the *Statement of Principles of Good Practice: NACAC's Code of Ethics and Professional Practices* as we work to:

- Create broader college awareness and access for students
- Encourage a college-going culture in schools
- Develop and provide professional development opportunities that will serve the school and admissions professionals working with students in the school-to-post-secondary transition.

Mission

The mission of the association mirrors that of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), which is to support and advance the work of college admission counseling professionals as outlined in the *Statement of Principles of Good Practice: NACAC's Code of Ethics and Professional Practices*. MACAC members are all committed to helping students realize their full educational potential with particular emphasis on:

- The transition from secondary school to higher educational or post-secondary opportunities
- Issues involving access and equity for all students
- MACAC is committed to maintaining high standards that foster ethical and social responsibility among those involved in the transition process



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