

Executive Summary of the Strategic Planning Evaluation of Creating a New Professional Association

Association→→ Members	Member →→ Benefits	Association→→ Functions	Design →→ Principles	Association Form
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(CRLA/NADE) Working Group Members

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Section One Executive Summary

Creating a new professional association to more effectively serve both current and potential new members has been the focus of the CRLA/NADE Working Group. The group considered not only the issue of effectiveness, but also the merits of expanding the mission and vision of a new professional association. Building upon the past success of CRLA and NADE, the Working Group identified many areas that such a new association could better serve its members and also have a greater influence in society. The major findings from this strategic review include the following:

1. Significant and systemic change is required. The external threats to the existing organizations for not engaging in dramatic change and renewal far outweigh the advantages of no change. The organizations have worked incredibly hard with a strong volunteer leadership structure to implement their strategic plans. Progress has been positive but slow and incremental due to limited resources and the volunteer leadership base available through the organizations. The organizations have been working at maximum capacity for a long time. The unmet needs of their association members require a dramatically different structure. An analogy illustrates the current state of the professional associations. A well-known parable cautions against placing “*new wine in old wineskins*.” When it was common practice to place wine in a leather pouch that was stitched together, fresh leather was always used since it would stretch when the new wine expanded during its fermentation process. Use of a previous old wineskin container that had already been stretched out would rupture if new wine was placed within it. This analogy describes why a new association “*container*” is necessary to achieve an expanded set of services for members and increased influence within both higher education and the wider society.
2. A strategic review of creating a new professional association identifies a long list of potential strengths for such a new structure. This review also identifies potential external threats and weaknesses. The Working Group identified potential solutions for dealing with each. One of the biggest challenges is the process of creating the new association. A

basic law of physics is “*where there is movement, there is always friction.*” The final section in this report identifies a suggested calendar of events to engage more people in the conversation to encourage buy-in and support for change.

3. The Working Group identifies that in addition to the current profile of association members, there are other groups within postsecondary education that could find affiliation with a new organization desirable. A new association with an expanded mission, vision, and more inclusive language could encourage active membership by these groups. More than 60,000 professionals work in the field served by CRLA and NADE. However, less than 10% are members of these associations. A new association would be more attractive to these nonmembers if they could access more services through venues in addition to conferences.
4. The reason for change is not rearranging organizational patterns. It is about increasing the quality and quantity of professional development venues for individual members. CRLA and NADE host excellent chapter and national conferences. However, a careful review of other postsecondary professional associations finds that they offer many more services for their members through rich web sites, multiple publications, on-line conferences, webinars, and research that identifies best practices for their members.
5. A new professional association serves as a catalyst for new language, expanded mission, and reinvented vision for serving a wider community. While the reason for change is about professional development and service to its members, the organizational language and structure have an impact upon the association’s capacity to serve its members. Some examples of these potential changes for conversation among a larger group inside of CRLA and NADE include:
 - a. More inclusive association purpose statement such as: “*The purpose of this organization is to advance the scholarship and practice of professionals dedicated to postsecondary student success through academic support and instruction*”.
 - b. Provide groups of varying sizes within the larger association for members to find a comfortable place for learning, fellowship, and support. These affinity groups could be organized on the basis of job duties, topics, institutional affiliation, or other criteria.

- c. The association would be organized through major operating divisions based on major job responsibility categories (e.g., teaching reading courses, learning assistance center activities, tutoring and peer learning programs). These operating divisions would have delegated autonomy to meet the needs of members within the larger professional association.
 - d. “*Knowledge Communities*” are a key element for meeting the information needs of members. More than a SIG or SPIN group, these communities both generate scholarship and provide information for members on-demand. They are a major recruitment feature for new members.
 - e. Expanded national executive policy board. With the increased size and complexity of the new association, a corresponding increase of the elected leadership group is essential for leadership and stewardship. The report presents several possible patterns. However, establishing first the needs of the individual members and the essential functions of the new association should precede focus on this element. The Working Group followed the old saying “*form follows function*” with this issue.
 - f. Increase in the use of professional staff. All other professional associations studied by the Working Group had one or more full-time staff members to complete essential day-to-day duties to serve the membership and support the association leadership group. The national dues for CRLA and NADE are dramatically lower than any of the other national associations studied. In addition, most of them have many more revenue sources than just the national conference to meet budget needs.
6. A wider conversation needs to occur concerning the ideas and possibilities presented in this report. The final section of this report identifies a possible scenario for this wider discussion. The inclusion of more voices and ideas will generate an even better vision for a new future.

The pace and scope of change needs to dramatically accelerate. Rather than incremental change, dramatic reinvention and transformation is needed. A new term used to describe this change is “*leapfrogging*” (Harbison & Pekar, 1998; Nonaka & Nichiguchi, 2001). Instead of “*fixing*” an old process, it is “*leapfrogged*” and a new process is introduced.

The often-cited classic example is how emerging countries are designating cell phones as the primary communication channel and skipping the wiring of the countryside with traditional telephone wires. The cost of the new technology and ease of implementation is much less than the older technology. With this report, the Working Group strongly supports the creation of a new professional association rather than attempting to retool the older ones. The synergy of a larger organization with more assets and a fresh start presents many opportunities.

This Working Group completed the first draft of this report during its meeting in Austin, TX in June 2007. The conclusion was that a new professional association would be beneficial, but the change process would be difficult and significant. Our group recognizes that the easiest course is to continue to make incremental changes within the current structures. Perhaps the umbrella group for the existing associations, American Council for Developmental Education Associations (ACDEA), could provide more coordination and collaboration for the field to better meet the needs of the members. Those are two possible paths to the future. However, this Working Group recommends a third path: creating a new professional association with a more inclusive language, mission, and vision for the future for all the reasons stated in this report.

A reoccurring question examined by the Working Group has been “*why change?*” This long report has carefully explored the pros and cons of creating a new association and provided numerous suggestions for its services and organization structures. A better question than “*why change?*” is “*what kind of change is demanded by postsecondary education and needed by these professionals?*” Perhaps others can provide a paradigm for us when considering the future. When writing a dialogue among several of his characters in a play discussing the future, Shakespeare penned the expression “*The Undiscovered Country*” to describe this place. While everyone will visit the future, no one can come back and tell others exactly what it will be like. However, all of us will walk into The Undiscovered Country.

We have the choice regarding how we walk into the future. Change can be proactively managed or simply reacted to. The best of past traditions can be brought into the future and

merged with new structures and traditions or all can be left to chance. The most important element that moves forward into the new association are members of the current organizations. They form the core of the new future and bring forward the history and traditions of the previous organizations. Let us encourage new members to join these veterans as we walk together into The Undiscovered Country as colleagues and friends. Let's build a new future together.

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