



Rising to Excellence

OUR THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2019-2022



Strong Today, Stronger Tomorrow!

Washington's 281 cities and towns are the lifeblood of our great state, and the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) has long been proud to count all of them as members.

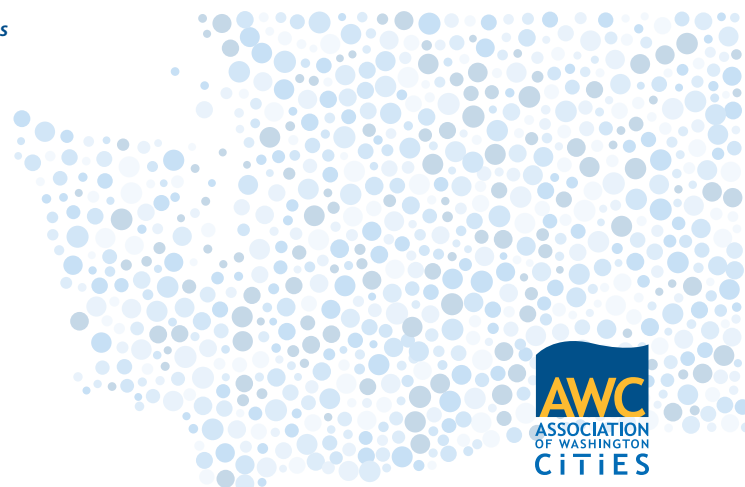
For more than 85 years, AWC has been a highly-effective advocate and resource for municipal government. Today, AWC is respected among state decision-makers, widely recognized for the quality of our conferences and trainings, and known for our dedication to serving elected officials and city staff across Washington's diverse spectrum of cities and towns. AWC stands out among our peers nationwide for innovative programs, a robust array of member programs, and our long-standing ability to retain 100% membership.

To enhance and strengthen our current leadership position, as well as expand the depth, breadth, and pace of the work AWC does on behalf of cities, **we have committed to do even more.**

Our state has entered an era defined by ever-accelerating change. Each of our cities is being impacted by a unique combination of economic, demographic, social, environmental, and political factors. It is also increasingly evident that for our municipalities to successfully address challenges and threats and effectively build on emerging opportunities, those entrusted with leading them must be capable, ethical, agile, resourceful, compassionate, and visionary.

We believe that bold action is required to prepare our cities for a future that will be transformed in ways we cannot yet foresee. Our association will be instrumental in helping to ensure that all of Washington's city elected officials and public servants are able to rise to their highest levels of excellence, so that every city in our state will thrive.

Throughout this plan the word cities refers to cities and towns.



**THE STRATEGIC PLAN
WAS APPROVED
BY AWC'S BOARD
OF DIRECTORS ON
FEBRUARY 12, 2019.**



ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS:

Our plan focuses and empowers AWC to do an even better job of fulfilling our mission and addressing the challenges facing the cities we serve. We are committed to charting a course that builds on our experience and success, guides our growth, and takes the impact and value we deliver to even greater levels.

This plan is the product of a collaborative process that was led by a strategic planning group comprised of AWC's Board of Directors, board representatives from the AWC Employee Benefit Trust and AWC Risk Management Service Agency (RMSA), and AWC staff leadership. The planning process was structured and facilitated by 2B Communications, a consulting firm with extensive experience working with associations and nonprofits throughout the nation.

KEY PLANNING STEPS INCLUDED:

Qualitative research: A spectrum of opinion and perspectives to inform the plan was gathered through a series of one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders. In-person interviews took place during June 2018, at the AWC offices in Olympia and at the AWC Annual Conference in Yakima. Additional interviews were conducted by phone. Stakeholder opinions represented include:

- AWC/Trust/RMSA board members
- AWC staff and leadership
- AWC members representing large and small cities throughout the state
- Partners and sponsors
- State agencies
- Legislators

Quantitative research: Two online surveys were fielded in July and August 2018 that expanded on the insights of the qualitative research and gathered actionable data from AWC members and AWC staff.

Operational review: A snapshot of AWC operations was compiled, which included a summary of AWC membership makeup, governance and organizational structure for both AWC and the AWC Member Pooling Programs, financial data and budget trends, event attendance, and communications trends and metrics.

Facilitated planning session: The strategic planning group convened in September 2018 in Walla Walla for a facilitated planning retreat. The research findings were presented and vetted, robust discussions were held around key issues and opportunities that surfaced in the discovery process, and the group developed consensus on six goal areas and preliminary strategies to be included in the plan.



KEY PLANNING STEPS INCLUDED *continued*

Plan framework development: Building on the work of the retreat, AWC staff and the 2B consulting team collaborated closely to further refine and give substance to the goals and strategies.

Board and AWC member feedback: The resulting plan framework was presented in a webinar to the strategic planning group in October 2018, during which additional input was obtained that informed further refinement. In December, AWC's full membership was invited to review the framework and provide input.

Plan development: The complete and final plan was prepared in January 2019 and reflects the input received from AWC's Board, strategic planning group, and membership.

MISSION

AWC's mission is to serve our members through advocacy, education, and services.

VISION

AWC is a highly-respected voice for cities and towns before the Legislature, Congress, government agencies, and others. We are the leader in providing valuable services and continuing education for our membership. We are the catalyst for promoting communication between cities and towns and for developing a broad public understanding of the important roles of cities and towns across the state.

A Plan to support AWC's mission, vision and values

During the strategic planning process, we reaffirmed that our current mission and vision will continue to guide our activities. The plan also fully aligns with AWC's established core beliefs in:

Leadership: Assisting all cities and towns to develop competent and principled elected officials and community leaders.

Excellence: Delivering excellent programs, products, and services to all members.

Advocacy: Advocating on behalf of member cities and towns.

Diversity: Appreciating and recognizing, in all aspects, the diversity of our membership.

Education: Educating members, community leaders, and the public at large is the key to sustainable and livable communities.

Responsiveness: Responding to member needs, critical issues, and unforeseen events in a timely, effective manner.

Service : Above all, we believe in providing quality service to our members.

TOP
THREE ISSUES
FACING CITIES
TODAY

1. Economic and community development/jobs
2. Fiscal sustainability
3. Infrastructure/ public works

Source: Association of Washington Cities 2018 Member Survey



AWC today

To be successful, our new plan needed to be based on an accurate and current understanding of how effectively we are operating as an enterprise, the areas where we are succeeding, and the challenges and opportunities that must be addressed to make certain we continue to meet the evolving needs of the cities we serve. Findings from the discovery phase provided a multidimensional look at AWC and served as context for the planning sessions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE RESEARCH:

AWC is widely seen as the statewide champion for local government:

Members and stakeholders alike recognize AWC's strong, established presence in Olympia. AWC is viewed as operating with integrity, having effective lobbyists, and earning the respect of legislators. Members cited AWC as the primary advocate for city issues, and they support taking an even more proactive stance in the advocacy arena.

AWC membership remains at optimal levels: AWC's ability to maintain 100% membership of all 281 of Washington's cities is viewed by many as its most compelling asset. There is recognition that keeping this level of membership, which is rarely achieved by peers across the country, requires flexibility and constant vigilance.

Associate Membership has grown: Associate Members, who are supportive of AWC's mission and are drawn from public agencies, nonprofits, and the business community, have increased by 49% over the past five years.

AWC's financial health is strong and sustainable: AWC has established diversified revenue streams, operates in the black, and maintains reserves that reflect sector best practices.

Among members, AWC is a trusted source: AWC provides information on current and proposed legislation and policies that may impact cities. They provide updates on state agency rules and rulemaking and offer training to better understand state laws and requirements. In particular, AWC is viewed as the top training resource for newly elected officials.

AWC is known and valued for its conferences, events, and trainings:

Attendance at the Annual Conference, City Action Days, Labor Relations Institute, Healthy Worksite Summit, and Member Expo has continued to grow over the past five years. In the member survey, the Elected Officials Essentials training was the most highly rated offering, with nearly 90% of participants describing it as valuable or extremely valuable.



**AWC
ACTION
PRIORITIES**

According to our members, AWC's top three action priorities are to:

- 1. Collect and share data on city issues and trends**
- 2. Develop recommendations for addressing specific issues of interest to cities**
- 3. Proactively develop and support legislation on issues impacting cities**

Source: Association of Washington Cities 2018 Member Survey

AWC Today *continued*

The Member Pooling Programs provide high value and are widely used by members. The Employee Benefit Trust serves 80% of member cities and more than 50 additional local government employers. One-third to nearly one-half of member cities participate in either the Drug & Alcohol Consortium, Workers' Comp Retro Program, or RMSA. All programs have enjoyed stable membership and sustainable growth over the past five years, and surveyed members overwhelmingly rated them as valuable or extremely valuable.

AWC staff are regarded as knowledgeable, experienced, and responsive by members. Like cities, AWC is experiencing turnover arising from the retiring Baby Boomers. A new generation has arrived, with changing expectations of the workplace and service delivery.

The AWC leadership experience is perceived positively by those who are active in governance. A potential challenge is to examine current pathways for elected officials to serve as part of the AWC leadership and ensure that a robust pipeline is in place to attract new talent.

AWC members and staff are in alignment on the top action priorities to address in the next three years. These include:

- Collect and share data on city issues and trends
- Develop recommendations to address specific issues of interest to cities
- Proactively develop and support legislation on issues impacting cities

Cities are keenly aware that differences in their size, demographics, geographic location, municipal structure, and other factors shape the value that AWC brings to each, which can sometimes create tensions.

AWC's 281 cities are a diverse population. There is recognition that to be relevant to all members, AWC programs and services must be able to address both shared and differing needs.

Overall, members feel very positive about AWC. In the recent member survey, 92% of respondents rated AWC as a good value for the money. On a separate measure of engagement, more than half of the responding members could be considered highly engaged "brand advocates" who actively promote AWC to others.



How We Will Get There

Six high level goals were established, along with strategies that provide a roadmap for guiding and prioritizing our work in the coming years.



GOALS and KEY STRATEGIES



GOAL #1: LEAD | Boldly and proactively drive policy on behalf of Washington's cities and towns.

Key Strategies

- a) Enhance our ability to adapt and anticipate issues by reviewing and refining our advocacy processes.
- b) Proactively work with legislators to propose legislation that addresses issues impacting cities and towns.
- c) Increase awareness, respect, and support for city and town issues by developing an education program for legislators and their key staff.
- d) Increase support by acknowledging legislators who support AWC priorities and by holding legislators accountable when they take actions that undermine city and town needs.
- e) Optimize member involvement in advocacy by strengthening year-round programming and communications.
- f) Evaluate the potential effectiveness of litigation as a component of our advocacy strategy.



GOAL #2: PROMOTE | Raise visibility for cities and towns and the pivotal role of local government.

Key Strategies

- a) Capitalize on AWC's reach and reputation to shape the public narrative regarding cities and towns through increased media, partnerships with civic groups, and targeted outreach.
- b) Expand our capacity to identify and disseminate compelling city and town stories and best practices.
- c) Maintain a strong lineup of member spokespeople who are prepared to share cities' and towns' perspectives and speak on priority issues.



GOAL #3: EDUCATE | Inspire excellent and effective city and town leadership.

Key Strategies

- a) Increase member awareness of AWC's robust educational offerings.
- b) Continue to evolve and deliver relevant, best-in-class conferences, and online educational offerings for members.
- c) Expand educational programs for newly elected officials with particular emphasis on strong mayors.
- d) Promote and enhance the value of AWC's Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) program and increase participation.
- e) Develop additional venues and vehicles for cities and towns to share and learn about best practices.



GOAL #4: EMPOWER | Champion innovative, high-quality solutions and resources to help cities and towns thrive.

Key Strategies

- a) Expand capacity to collect and share data on city and town issues and trends.
- b) Continue to provide high-quality solutions through the Member Pooling Programs and Member Services departments.
- c) Identify and/or create new resources to address the evolving needs of cities and towns.



GOAL #5: ENGAGE | Model inclusiveness and provide meaningful engagement opportunities to all members.

Key Strategies

- a) Evaluate structure and practices to increase participation and build a strong leadership pipeline.
- b) Formalize an AWC "ambassador" program to personally introduce and connect new members to AWC.
- c) Review and enhance the member onboarding process.
- d) Explore developing a mentor-matching program for elected officials.



GOAL #6: DELIVER | Maximize our organizational effectiveness.

Key Strategies

- a) Review programs and initiatives to ensure equitable access by members.
- b) Ensure the ongoing financial health of the association.
- c) Position AWC's board members to serve as advocates for AWC programs and offerings.
- d) Enhance relationships with other organizations like MRSC in order to reduce duplication of effort and to enhance the value of services to cities and towns.
- e) Advance AWC's systems and technology to support operational needs and deliver an excellent member experience.
- f) Maintain a culture of member-centricity, transparency, strategic focus, and organizational agility.
- g) Foster a collaborative, equitable work environment and continue to invest in attracting and retaining highly qualified staff.



From planning to action

This strategic plan is designed to be a management tool for the AWC Board and staff.

Our intention is for this plan to spark interest and engagement among AWC members statewide. AWC's Board of Directors and staff share responsibility for leading the plan's implementation. Each year, we will review and measure progress, and make any strategic adjustments that may be needed to ensure that AWC is delivering on our commitment to bold thinking, action, and outcomes. In doing so, we will continue to proactively and wholeheartedly serve city elected officials and staff throughout Washington.

Thank you to AWC's Board of Directors, board representatives from the AWC Employee Benefit Trust and AWC Risk Management Service Agency (RMSA), members, and AWC staff for your visionary leadership and active engagement throughout the strategic planning process.

