



Columbia
Association

STRATEGIC PLAN

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FY25
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Executive Summary

A Framework for the Future

The FY25 Columbia Association (CA) Strategic Plan presents a clear and forward-thinking framework designed to guide the organization's work over the next five years. Developed through a robust and inclusive process, the plan reflects extensive input from past strategic planning efforts, community engagement, a board retreat, leadership team discussions, and individual interviews with CA Board members. It balances continuity with innovation – ensuring CA honors its foundational values while evolving to meet the needs of a changing community.

Mission and Vision as the Foundation

At the heart of the Strategic Plan are CA's Mission and Vision, which clarify the organization's purpose and long-term aspirations.

- The **Mission** affirms CA's role: *Engage our diverse community, cultivate a unique sense of place and enhance quality of life.*
- The **Vision** paints a picture of the Columbia we aim to help create: *A Columbia that is intentionally diverse, committed to wellness, sustainable, beautiful, connected and resilient.*

These statements serve as the foundation from which all strategic decisions, actions, and priorities flow.

Organizing the Work: Focus and Emphasis Areas

To translate vision into action, the plan introduces two key structural elements that create an integrated framework to align daily activities with broader organizational goals:

- **Strategic Focus Areas** define the primary categories of CA's work: *Community Connection, Wellness, Environmental Sustainability, and Resource Resilience.* These focus areas reflect the themes that set CA's long-term direction.
- **Strategic Emphasis Areas** serve as guiding lenses to be applied across all areas of work. These include *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB); Modernization; Awareness of Value/Identity; Risk Management; and Affordability/Accessibility.*

From Planning to Implementation

The Strategic Plan is designed as a living framework, built to evolve alongside the organization and the community. It supports an annual process of goal-setting and performance evaluation, enabling CA to remain responsive to emerging needs while staying grounded in long-term priorities.

Building a Stronger, More Connected Columbia

Ultimately, the FY25 Strategic Plan is more than a roadmap – it is a commitment. It reflects CA's ongoing promise to be a trusted steward of community resources, a convener of collaboration, and a catalyst for positive change. Through this plan, CA strengthens its ability to deliver meaningful, measurable impact in the lives of Columbia's residents and ensures that the community's values continue to guide its future.

Introduction

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is a process that helps organizations define their direction, set goals, and identify areas for improvement. It's a forward-looking process that involves analyzing trends and issues to align an organization's priorities. The goal is to create a plan that will help the organization achieve its vision and succeed.

Benefits of Strategic Planning

Strategic Planning Helps Organizations:

- **Prioritize** critical issues and allocate resources effectively
- **Align** goals and employees on the organization's direction
- **Adapt** to changing circumstances
- **Differentiate** from competitors
- **Create direction and structure** for making day-to-day decisions
- **Take action** before problems become crises

Formation of Framework

Development Process:

The framework for this plan was developed after analyzing and evaluating information from various previous strategic planning efforts, considering the community feedback received throughout, integrating insights from various sources of input, and incorporating more recently acquired knowledge to create something new. It draws from consensus built during the CA Board Retreat to guide our areas of focus and strategic emphasis. It also considers input from subsequent interviews with FY2025 Board members and discussions with the senior leadership team.

Description of Framework

2025 Strategic Plan: Mission, Vision, Strategic Focus Areas, their Components, and Areas of Emphasis Throughout

Our Mission and Vision form the foundation of the framework. The Mission Statement defines the organization’s purpose and explains why it exists. It answers stakeholders’ questions about who we serve, what we do and why we do it. The Mission Statement lets people know who we are and what we value. Our Vision Statement describes what our organization would like to see in the future as a result of our efforts. It tells people what we want to become.

From that Mission and Vision, we develop strategies on how to achieve our vision. In the framework of this plan, our work is organized around strategic focus areas and their components. We have also designated areas of emphasis to be considered throughout all of our work. These areas of emphasis help in achieving the themes associated with our strategic focus areas.

After the plan is approved, we can then proceed to implementation by setting annual goals and work plans with short-term objectives to get us to our long-term vision. These annual goals will include measurement and metrics not only to assist in gauging our degree of success, but also to increase our learning so that we can become more effective and have greater positive impact in the community.

Roles played by Mission and Vision

Per Principles of Management, Chapter 4.3 by University of Minnesota:



Mission

Engage our diverse community, cultivate a unique sense of place and enhance quality of life.

Vision

A Columbia that is intentionally diverse, committed to wellness, sustainable, beautiful, connected and resilient.

From this Mission and Vision, we have designated 4 Strategic Focus Areas. The work which we aspire to do can be summarized (categorized) within the components of the 4 Strategic Focus Areas. The aim of this work can be reflected in the themes:

- Community Connection
- Wellness
- Environmental Sustainability
- Resource Resilience

These strategic focus areas and their components help us to organize our work. By mapping out the components of these focus areas, we take stock of the work that needs to be done and get a general idea of what it entails. The strategic focus area titles also provide themes that set the direction for our organization in the long term. They address the destination we are trying to reach from our Vision. As we look forward to the next 5 years, themes of Connection, Wellness, Sustainability and Resilience are the aim.

To sharpen our aim, we have selected five areas of emphasis to be addressed throughout our work. These areas of emphasis are the lenses through which we approach the work we do. They are key strategies for carrying out the themes of our vision.

- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB)
- Modernization
- Awareness of Value/Identity
- Risk Management
- Affordability/Accessibility

Along with the Mission and Vision, Strategic Focus Areas, and Emphasis Areas, organizational goals and objectives are the final elements used to complete the framework of this Strategic Plan. This framework (shown on the following page) will help to guide the organization, while fostering collaboration and accountability toward shared objectives.

Clear goals facilitate better communication with stakeholders about CA's organizational strategy and priorities, which fosters transparency. Using the Mission, Vision, Strategic Focus Areas and emphasis areas as guiding principles, leadership can develop organizational goals and staff workplans that reflect the themes of the Strategic Plan and serve to further CA's commitment to the community.

Additionally, by establishing strategic goals and measurable objectives within this defined plan framework, leadership creates a roadmap for success while enhancing effectiveness across all levels of the organization.

Strategic Plan Framework



The pages that follow provide further description of the Strategic Focus Areas, the component themes these areas represent, and the emphasis areas we will address in carrying them out.

Focus Areas & Focus Area Components:

Focus Area: Community Connection

Involved, belonging, valuable community resource, partnership, experiential place to be, community needs (whole life-every stage), Connected, Cohesive

Community Connection involves coming together on shared work, activities, passions, desires and interests. It is how we interact and connect on a social level and can be defined as feelings of togetherness, unity and warmth. When a community is connected, positive dialogue is promoted, trust is created, and resilience among members increases. Members can help each other navigate challenges and difficult times. We can also come together to celebrate who we are, what we have been able to accomplish and to just have fun enjoying the unique and rich quality of life that is available in Columbia. Community connection can help people develop a sense of belonging and can improve mental and physical health.

Other Benefits of Community Connection:

- Equips organization and members with resources
- Increases learning experiences
- Empowers professionals and others with unique expertise to contribute their insights and experiences to decision-making processes
- Provides people with needed information and support
- Shares the burden of expenditures (helping us to use resources more efficiently)

CA strives to be better connected to its stakeholders and members of the community both professionally and personally for mutually beneficial and meaningful long-term partnerships, social wellness, inclusion and belonging.

Focus Area Components:

Identify and Establish Relationships:

Constantly evaluate community partnerships - including but not limited to relationships with our Villages, government entities, for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations - and adjust CA's approach to optimize the organization's effectiveness and reach in the greater community. Also, consider new relationships that may be beneficial to the community and efforts of the organization, take stock of missing or weaker relationships that need to be strengthened, and make efforts to establish or stabilize those that align with CA's mission and vision to develop opportunities for intentional collaboration.

Facilitate Ongoing Communication:

Communicate with stakeholders and community partners regularly to strengthen relationships, build trust, share ideas, provide feedback and work together more effectively, gain understanding, reduce confusion, keep up to date to allow for timely identification and resolution of issues before small problems escalate, Inform and be Informed to stay agile and adapt to changes quickly.

Create Spaces, Places and Occasions to Connect:

Host events in Downtown Columbia and throughout the Columbia Villages that emphasize CA's commitment to serving and representing our diverse community, foster a sense of belonging, encourage both interpersonal connection and individual empowerment.

Community Engagement:

Encourage participation throughout CA at all levels and in various areas, including environmental stewardship, wellness and wellbeing, arts and culture, governance, volunteering, etc., and seek out feedback on not just customer satisfaction but community wants and needs.

Focus Area: Environmental Sustainability

Resource conscious, green, environmental resource provider; environment sustainability; resiliency in the ecosystem; sustainable, safe, accessible, and appropriately developed public open space; resilient; compatibility between natural and built environments

The Columbia community was founded on and continues to prioritize environmental stewardship, resource conservation, and the preservation of green space. The Environmental Sustainability Focus Area advances CA's leadership in protecting local ecosystems, climate change mitigation, watershed management, and promoting the efficient use of natural resources. Preserving and enhancing the quality of our environment provides important long-term benefits for our community. Clean air and water, vibrant natural ecosystems, and a stable climate are fundamental to human health and well-being. The overall goal of this focus area is to provide exceptional environmental stewardship within CA's operations and to engage the broader Columbia community in this mission.

Focus Area Components:

Natural Environment:

This includes enhancement and preservation of native trees and other vegetation, watershed management (streams, ponds, and lakes), wildlife management, and invasive species control.

Built Environment:

Advancing high performance and sustainable facilities, and clean energy infrastructure.

Operations:

This includes integrating environmental sustainability principles in open space maintenance, equipment and vehicle fleet maintenance, energy supply, and general operating practices as well as community engagement programs.

Focus Area: Wellness

Quality programs, whole life, health, and wellness, comprehensive, holistic, multi-dimensional, community wellness (physical, intellectual, emotional, social) community sustainability

Wellness, as defined by the Global Wellness Institute, goes beyond the absence of illness, it is the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health for the individual and for the community. This pursuit encompasses various dimensions, including physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and environmental wellness, each contributing to an individual's overall well-being and the well-being of the community.

This holistic approach to wellness is carried throughout the strategic plan. While we address Environmental wellness in the “Environmental Sustainability” Focus Area and deal with many of the social aspects of wellness in the “Community Connection” Focus Area, the “Wellness” Focus Area components delve into the internal dimension, speaking to the physical, emotional and intellectual aspects of wellness.

This focus aims to develop diverse programming and services encompassing the dimensions of wellness across the entire lifespan, including recreation, fitness, mind/body, arts, and culture, and encourage social and emotional wellness, mental health, knowledge, and a sense of community.

Focus Area Components:

Physical

Focus on maintaining a healthy body through regular exercise, proper nutrition, sleep, and preventive healthcare.

Emotional

Support individuals’ ability to understand, manage, and express emotions constructively, as well as develop resilience in the face of challenges.

Intellectual

Encourage learning and mental stimulation. Foster curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking while embracing personal growth and continuous development.

Focus Area: Resource Resilience

Thriving in the face of change, financial resource sustainability, long-term financial planning, stability, empowered staff, best-in-class employer, compelling value proposition for retention and potential candidates, including DEIB.

Resource resilience reflects an organization's ability to adapt to change, recover from disruptions, and thrive in new circumstances – demonstrating the expertise and discipline needed to prepare for and respond to challenges, both expected and unexpected. Resource resilience for CA means that CA will commit to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our finances, physical assets, and people resources so that the CA programs, services, and facilities our community enjoys and relies upon can be operated and maintained in a responsible manner.

Organizations that are resource-resilient:

- Anticipate threats
- Adapt continuously
- Protect assets
- Mitigate crises
- Capitalize on opportunities

The Resource Resilience focus area reflects CA's role as a nonprofit, community services organization stewarding financial, physical and people resources on behalf of the Columbia community. Being Resource-Resilient enables CA to effectively serve our community and meet the needs of our team members over the long term. Our success with all other efforts is contingent upon our ability to be resilient with the resources with which we have been entrusted in fulfillment of our fiduciary responsibility.

Focus Area Components:

Financial Resources

Steward CA's annual charge funds, revenues from programs and services, and operating and capital expenditures to maximize CA's value to the community.

Physical Resources

Provide financial management and planning to accommodate short- and long-term investment in buildings and equipment, land and natural resources, and open space assets.

People Resources

Foster an environment that values CA's people resources, employees/team members, volunteers, community partner relationships. Provide education and training, or information, to enhance the impact they provide the organization.

Strategic Emphasis Areas:

Strategic Emphasis: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB)

Diverse participants in leadership roles, initiatives, and programming.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are the essence of who we are at CA. Our foundational mission is to foster a community and workforce where every individual, regardless of their background or affiliation, feels a profound sense of belonging and enjoys an enriched quality of life.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) has been designated as the first area of Strategic Emphasis to highlight the importance of promoting the fair treatment and participation of groups that have been underrepresented historically or have been subjected to discrimination based on their identity and/or disability.

Diversity

Our consideration of Diversity encompasses Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Identity and Ability. Our goal is to ensure inclusivity in all aspects, including leadership roles, employment, programming, and every other area of our work.

Equity

Equity is the fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities, and access to ensure that everyone has what they need to succeed. Equity is different from equality, which is when everything is distributed evenly among people. Equity recognizes that people have different starting points in life and aims to provide resources and opportunities to help everyone achieve their full potential.

Inclusion

When we talk about Inclusion, we mean creating a space where everyone, no matter their background or identity, feels welcomed, valued, and empowered to participate fully. This involves allowing individuals to be their true selves without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

Belonging

Belonging refers to the feeling of being accepted, valued and blended into the fabric of a group or community. Inclusion involves having access and being present, but belonging goes beyond by ensuring individuals feel seen, heard and appreciated for who they are.

This emphasis will involve recognizing and appreciating our differences, promoting diversity and inclusion in our actions and decision making, addressing unconscious bias, ensuring that policies, practices and physical environment are accessible to people with disabilities, and open communication to create a space where everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinions and concerns without fear of judgement as well as clear channels for raising concerns related to inclusion.

Strategic Emphasis: Modernization

Change champion, utilizing innovative technology to engage community and employees, disrupting status quo, overcoming legacy attachments, facilitator and partner, modern, innovative, user-friendly tools for employees and community, utilize technology to encourage access.

Modernization is a comprehensive strategic emphasis aimed at transforming various facets of the organization to enhance efficiency, agility, and impact. It involves updating infrastructure, processes, facilities, products, and services to improve overall productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of the work CA does. It also involves the use of data and data analytics. This holistic transformation encompasses all parts of the organization.

Infrastructure and processes

At its core, modernization involves updates to infrastructure, which are crucial for supporting robust, secure, dynamic, and intuitive advanced technologies and enabling seamless communication across the organization. Modernizing processes involves adopting new methodologies and tools that streamline operations, reduce redundancies, and improve overall productivity. This could include implementing automation and embracing agile practices.

Data and Data Analytics

Data plays a pivotal role in modernization efforts. By harnessing the power of data, CA aims to gain valuable insights into its operations, community and member engagement, and program effectiveness. This data-driven focus will enable informed decision-making, better resource allocation, and the ability to measure and demonstrate impact. Utilizing data analytics tools will help identify trends, optimize processes, and enhance program delivery.

Facilities

Facilities modernization focuses on creating a conducive work environment that fosters collaboration, productivity, and team member well-being. This might involve optimizing workspaces, incorporating smart technologies, and ensuring sustainability.

Products and Services

When it comes to products and services, modernization means continuously evolving to meet changing community needs and program experiences. This could involve developing new programs, enhancing existing ones, and adopting digital solutions to improve service delivery and engagement.

Overall, modernization is not just about adopting new technologies; it's about a holistic transformation that aligns with the organization's mission and prepares it for future challenges and opportunities. Viewing strategic initiatives through this lens ensures that every aspect of the organization is optimized for success in a rapidly changing landscape, ultimately enhancing its ability to make a positive impact in the community.

Strategic Emphasis: Awareness of Value/Identity

Relevant, Desirable, Very Visible, Valued Partner, Enriched Quality of Life, Amenity Value, Community Cohesion/Connections, Assess and increase people's awareness, understanding and value perception of CA.

Identity, Awareness, Visibility & Engagement

CA has long been a cornerstone of community life in Columbia, offering a broad array of programs, services, and experiences that enrich quality of life, foster community connections, and promote health and well-being. Despite these contributions, awareness and understanding of CA's full value remain uneven across the diverse populations we serve. The "Awareness of Value / Identity" strategic emphasis is a deliberate effort to bridge this gap, ensuring CA is recognized as an essential and desirable partner in enhancing quality of life in Columbia.

By advancing this work, CA seeks to reinforce its relevance in an ever-changing landscape while fostering a shared understanding of its mission, offerings, and impact. The intent is not merely to raise awareness but to deepen appreciation and engagement, positioning CA as both a vital resource and an irreplaceable part of Columbia's identity.

Value

To achieve this, CA should prioritize initiatives that clarify and amplify its value proposition, leveraging communication channels, partnerships, and experiential opportunities to demonstrate the tangible and intangible benefits of CA membership and services. This includes telling the stories of how CA positively impacts individuals, families, and neighborhoods while addressing misperceptions or gaps in understanding that may hinder stronger connections to the organization.

Successful implementation of this emphasis means that Columbia's residents and stakeholders will more clearly see the value CA brings to their lives, whether through the use of facilities and community amenities, innovative programs, community-building events, or advocacy for Columbia's vision and values. It will also ensure CA's identity is consistent, recognizable, and resonates with the aspirations and priorities of the community.

Strategic Emphasis: Risk Management

Security, safety, protection in case of loss, coverage and sustainability.

CA's leadership – Board and staff – are responsible for providing safe and effective programs and services to the Columbia community while maintaining trust, financial stability and operational continuity. Risk management is the systematic process of identifying, assessing, mitigating and monitoring threats or uncertainties that can affect CA's ability to achieve these goals. It includes analyzing the likelihood and impact of risks, developing strategies to minimize harm, and monitoring measures' effectiveness. We emphasize Risk Management because strong risk management practices have helped, and will continue to help, CA safeguard people (community members and staff), physical assets and financial viability. Risk management is a strategy that will make CA resilient in the face of unforeseen challenges, such as economic downturns, climate-related events and other emergencies. Integrating a risk management emphasis and best practices into each strategic focus area will help CA to successfully achieve its mission, vision, strategic focus and goals.

Some examples of how risk management is embedded throughout the organization in the strategic focus areas are:

- Cyber and data protection measures, with a focus on continuous team member training
- Team member training on proper and safe use of equipment, procedures, defensive driving, etc.
- Thoughtful transfer of risk through contracting processes and third-party insurance
- Internal and external audits
- Board participation in the general liability Risk Management Program
- Engagement of external subject matter experts in loss control, risk management, insurance, safety programming, etc.

Strategic Emphasis: Affordability/Accessibility

Reduced financial and physical barriers to participation, ease of access, consideration of other barriers to participation, Equity, Inclusion, Diversity in accessibility.

The Affordability and Accessibility Strategic Emphasis underscores the critical importance of eliminating both financial and physical barriers to ensure equitable access to CA programs, services, and amenities. This focus aims to create an inclusive environment where all individuals, regardless of their financial situation or physical limitations, can participate in and benefit from the offerings available. By prioritizing affordability and accessibility, we strive to break down obstacles that may prevent underserved or differently abled communities from engaging with these programs. The overarching goal of this emphasis is to promote Equity, aligning with our broader commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB). Through these efforts, we aim to create a more inclusive and welcoming space where every person has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the community's collective well-being.

Goals & Objectives

Establishing Annual Organizational Goals & Objectives

Setting clear and achievable goals is essential for guiding CA toward fulfilling its Mission and Vision. The framework established in this strategic plan provides the organization an annual opportunity to assess the needs of the community as they relate to the CA's Mission and Vision, Strategic Focus Areas, their Components, and CA's Areas of Emphasis. This structure will help to guide the organization while fostering collaboration and accountability toward shared objectives. The Strategic Focus Areas and their Components will serve as benchmarks against which CA can measure its short- and long-term progress.

Each CA Board will have the opportunity to use the framework in this Strategic Plan to establish goals that are relevant to the current climate, while remaining consistent with CA's vision. These goals should be "SMART" --Specific, Measurable, Ambitious but Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based. By establishing strategic goals and staff work plans with measurable objectives within this defined plan framework, CA's leadership creates a roadmap for success while enhancing operational effectiveness across all levels of operation. Lastly, establishing clearly defined goals and objectives provides the opportunities for CA's leadership to annually review progress toward these goals and consistency with the framework of this strategic plan.