

American Indian Center STRATEGIC PLAN 2002-2007

**Approved and Adopted by the
American Indian Center
Board of Directors
September 10, 2002
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Table of Contents

- I. Mission and Vision Statements
- II. Introduction
- III. Strategic Plan
 - 1. To Ensure Adequate Resources to Satisfy Community Needs
 - 2. To Foster Community Involvement and Association with the Center
 - 3. To Raise Awareness of the Center and the Cultural Presence it Celebrates
 - 4. To Provide More and Better Programs, Services, and Events
 - 5. To Make Full Use of the Center's Facilities
- IV. Annual Plan
- V. Appendices
 - A. Board of Directors and Staff
 - B. 2002-2003 Annual Implementation Plan
 - C. The Strategic Planning Process

I. American Indian Center Mission and Vision Statements

Mission:

“To promote the fellowship among Indian people of all Tribes living in metropolitan Chicago, and to create bonds of understanding and communication between Indians and non-Indians in this city. To advance the general welfare of American Indians into the metropolitan community life; to foster the economic and educational advancement of Indian people, to sustain cultural, artistic and avocational pursuits; and to perpetuate Indian cultural values.”

Vision:

We envision the Center as the authentic primary resource for urban American Indian culture and a welcoming home for all American Indians.

II. Introduction to the organization and Strategic Planning

The American Indian Center was founded in 1953 in response to the growing needs of a rapidly-expanding local American Indian population. The selective termination of tribal status and the Indian Relocation program of the 1950s brought thousands of American Indians from all over the country to the culture shock of urban life in metropolitan Chicago. While originally founded to provide basic necessities and a social meeting place for these American Indians, the Center has adapted and evolved along with our community over the years, and now has broadened its focus to include long-term support and retainment of cultural traditions, as well as the education of broader society about the continued presence and diversity of Native America in Chicago.

The AIC is now entering its 50th year on a high note. Having overcome a recent stretch of hard times, including reliance on an entirely volunteer staff, the Center is now operating on a triumphant upswing, with a small but dependable full-time staff and ever-increasing programs and services for our community. We recognized that this new momentum provides both a cause and an opportunity to reflect upon where the organization has been, reassess where it is, and reaffirm or redirect where it is headed. The result was an internal strategic planning process fueled by ideas and assessments from the Board of Directors, AIC staff and members of American Indian community. The plan has helped the American Indian Center emphasize its strengths to ensure prolonged growth, prioritize the allocation of new revenues, and channel our new-found progress to best achieve the Center’s guiding mission and vision.

III. The Strategic Plan: Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The American Indian Center has chosen to focus on five aspects of our functions an urban cultural community center. We appreciate that the mere existence of the Center and its services provides a cultural anchor and touchstone for our American Indian community. However, over the next five years we believe we can channel our resources and improve the quality of the Center through progress towards the realization of the following goals:

- 1. To Ensure Adequate Resources to Respond to Community Needs**
- 2. To Foster Community Involvement and Association with the Center**
- 3. To Provide More and Better Programs, Services, and Events**
- 4. To Raise Awareness of the Center and the Cultural Presence it Celebrates**
- 5. To Make Full Use of the Center's Facilities**

These goals have a common link to our vision: the community. Our priority for the next five years is to provide the services, programs, and events that satisfy the community's needs and to keep the community engaged in this process. The following strategic plan includes both short and long term strategies to get closer to this standard of success. It is a living plan: one that we will use daily and revisit annually to monitor both our progress in these initiatives as well as the evolving changes in the priorities and goals of the organization and our community. Ideally, in five years we will need a new strategic plan, with all of the objectives and strategies delineated herein completed and obsolete. The realization of each of these objectives will represent a step closer to our goals and the broader mission of community service, cultural and educational exchange, and support for Chicago's American Indian population.

1. To Ensure Adequate Resources to Respond to Community Needs

As basic and necessary steps to strengthen the organization, the American Indian Center plans to improve our financial infrastructures and to expand our operating budget. Some progress was achieved in this regard when the Center acquired a full-time grant-writing staff just last year—an addition that has initiated an inflow of much-needed funds to support our most vital programs. While these grants and fund-raising efforts have increased the capacity of the Center to provide our community services, we also plan to gradually increase our self-sustaining revenues, to further institutionalize our financial and operational independence and to guarantee a permanent place in the community.

Objectives and Strategies:

- 1.1 Formalize an annual budget creation and review process
 - a. Compile a comprehensive budget presentation for the 2001-2002 Annual Report and follow the model each fiscal year.
 - b. Formalize an annual schedule for budget creation and review at monthly Board of Directors meetings.
 - c. Set and monitor revenue goals at the abovementioned budget Board meetings.
- 1.2 Organize and expand the grant application system
 - a. Maintain an intern position to assist in the grant-writing process until a larger full-time development staff can be assembled.
 - b. Increase fund-raising roles of the Board of Directors to include participation in researching potential funders and eventually responsibility for the initial inquiry steps of the grant application process.
 - c. Acquire or generate a software system to keep track of annual grant proposals and deadlines.
 - d. Initiate a major gift campaign.

1.3 Increase revenues

- a. Pursue a Capital Campaign and an annual-giving campaign.
- b. Solicit endowments and bequests.
- c. Seek “economic development” grants that support initiatives to increase self-sustaining revenue.
- d. Target the stocking of the Gift Store to coincide with special events held at the Center.
- e. Increase the quantity and variety of products available at the Gift Store, eventually developing it into a full-fledged retail center with full-time staff, expanded stock variety, and an independent formal advertising plan.
- f. Increase the profitability of popular monthly AIC events such as Bingo and Flea Markets.
- g. Involve the youth groups and community members in fundraising activities such as car washes, flea market sales, etc.
- h. Increase organization membership, special event programming, and building facility rentals as described in subsequent sections.

2. To Foster Community Involvement and Association with the Center

The American Indian Center regularly serves a large, diverse community. Our special events often attract new first-time visitors, both Indians and others. The Center would like to enroll all new and returning participants as AIC members, to get them involved in our various other programs and activities, and to bolster overall event attendance. Increased community involvement will lead to increased community input and initiative for new projects and planning decisions, a dynamic that is very important as the Center strives to be an entity that is both of and for the community. We aim for the community to both take part and take pride in the Center.

Objectives and Strategies:

2.1 Increase total membership

- a. Institute a sign-in sheet at all programs and special events to monitor attendance, tribal affiliations, and compile a broader mailing list for membership materials.
- b. Solicit Tribal Offices to subsidize AIC membership fees for their tribal members, or to purchase a single tribal membership that has AIC benefits for all tribal members.
- c. Place a membership table at the entrance of all special events to target those attendees seeking reduced admission prices.
- d. Create further incentives for membership, beyond admission price reductions, using distinct strategies to attract new Indian memberships and new non-Indian memberships, if necessary.

2.2 Increase attendance at Center functions

- a. Institute a broad marketing and advertising plan, as described in the following section.
- b. Solicit community members directly to attend special events.
- c. Provide transportation to the Center for special events, particularly for evening activities, such as a shuttle to the L train station or van service for elders and those without cars.

2.3 Increase community participation

- a. Solicit community members directly to volunteer at events and on planning committees.
- b. Maintain a “wishlist” of desired volunteer services in a visible location at the Center and in promotional materials.
- c. Organize activities that will incite community members to come and help, e.g. site clean-up day with free lunch provided.
- d. Formalize and maintain transparent and reliable avenues for community input.
- e. Foster reciprocal participation at events held by other community organizations; participate in their functions just as the Center hopes they will participate at ours.

3. To Raise Awareness of the Center and the Cultural Presence it Celebrates

The American Indian Center is unique and valuable in both its services and its mere existence as “the only real piece of Indian country in Chicagoland.” We want to ensure that all American Indians in Chicagoland and nation-wide know that Center is here, providing programs and activities on their behalf. We have a healthy word-of-mouth network that keeps our programs well-attended, but would like to expand our outreach and see more and more new faces. Part of the educational mission of the Center is to inform greater Chicago society of the existence and practices of contemporary American Indians among them. The Center hopes our new-found visibility, evidenced in part by the honor of being invited by the Smithsonian Museum in DC to collaborate on an exhibit in their new Indian museum, will help to make the Center a household name in the Chicago American Indian community and at least recognized by the majority of residents of Chicago. The marketing plan that will be developed to achieve this goal will be a long-term strategy that evolves with the steady increase of the financial capacity of the organization.

Objectives and Strategies:

3.1 Establish a marketing/advertising plan

- a. Divide marketing/advertising strategies into sequential phases to correspond with the evolution of the organization’s financial capacity.
- b. Maintain a category for marketing/advertising expenses in the annual budget.
- c. Monitor the progress and phase evolution of the marketing/advertising plan at the biannual budget review Board of Directors meetings.

3.2 Expand and enhance marketing/advertising strategies

- a. Create strategies that go beyond word-of-mouth information dissemination and target a very broad public audience.
- b. Compile a list of organizations willing to post our flyers and announcements, and provide these organizations with new materials on a regular basis.
- c. Advertise powwows and other events well in advance.
- d. Improve the on-site signs/advertising of the Gift Shop and special events.
- e. Include mass mailings, ad placement in city-wide periodical publications, radio and/or television advertising when financial capacity allows.
- f. Publicize corporate and foundation partnerships.

3.3 Update all promotional materials

- a. Create a new brochure.
- b. Compile an Annual Report and institutionalize its yearly production.
- c. Standardize a professional but friendly format for the quarterly monthly newsletter, including solicitations for volunteer services, donations, community contributions, biographies of elders or noted community members, etc.

3.4 Extend the target audience of our advertising focus

- a. Reach out to the American Indian community in south side of the city and suburbs.
- b. Initiate a campaign for the re-association/affiliation of former members who still reside in the area.
- c. Collaborate with other cultural or educational organizations in the city to access their interest and member lists.
- d. Solicit reciprocal advertising arrangements with Tribal reservations for powwows, special events, and general operations.

4. To Provide More and Better Programs, Services, and Events

The current programming at the American Indian Center falls into four categories: Social Services, Educational Programs, Technology, and Cultural Activities. The social service department provides food, clothing, and furniture for low-income families. Our educational programs reach both the local community—in our after-school tutor/mentoring program—and the greater Chicago population in School Tours led by our Cultural Coordinator. Our technology initiative has placed the American Indian Center in the 21st century by acquiring computers and internet access for the staff and for the community via our Community Computer Lab facility. The Center also hosts a full year-long schedule of powwows and other cultural events. In our constant effort to serve more members of the community and serve them better, we plan to increase the capacity of the organization to run these programs, improve the quality and efficiency of these existing programs, and initiate various new programs to fulfill other community needs and attract new crowds to the center.

Objectives and Strategies:

4.1 Increase organizational capacity and structure

- a. Define expansion priorities, i.e. sequential uses of additional funds as they become available, particularly regarding the acquisition of more full-time staff members. Include the opinions of the current staff members in this decision-making process.
- b. Enlarge the staff as funds become available, according to the priority plan above.
- c. Continue to apply for grants to fund salaries and general operating costs.
- d. Hold regular weekly or bi-weekly staff meetings.
- e. Expand the avenues for communication between the staff and Board of Directors.
- f. Compile an Operational Procedures manual to formally document the official protocols for all organizational processes (e.g. donations, grievances), and the job descriptions of all staff and Board of Director positions.

4.2 Improve the existing programs and services

- a. Create a plan assessing the current functional level and staff capacity of each program, and define successive tiers of capacity to be targeted over a certain time period. Review this plan annually.
- b. Continue to seek funding and donations for materials, general operation costs, and program-specific expenses.

4.3 Add new and diverse programs, services, and events

- a. Target interest groups and age groups currently underrepresented in Center attendance records.
- b. Maintain a balance of programs geared internally to the American Indian community and externally to the general public.
- c. Avoid the addition of programs that exist elsewhere in the community to avoid competition.
- d. Hold more popular one-time special events, such as a 50th anniversary photo collection, famous guest speakers, live musical or artistic performances, etc.
- e. Establish a regular series of monthly activities, such as a Spring Expo, sock hop, disco night, etc.
- f. Institute an event/Powwow Babysitter once there is an outfitted child-compatible room in the facility.
- g. Increase arts programming for general membership, e.g. beading, carving, and/or leather work, poetry or book club meetings, darkroom/photography facilities, etc.
- h. Investigate and implement new child and youth programming, such as the creation of an on-site Teen Activity Room and/or a collaborative Day Care program.

5. To Make Full Use of the Center's Facilities

The American Indian Center acquired its current facility in 1966: a very spacious four-story building in the heart of the Uptown Chicago American Indian community. The building is a strong asset to the organization, with virtually unlimited space for organizational expansion, but has required significant remodeling and repairs given its age and previous lack of maintenance. We plan to continue progress in the ongoing endeavor to expand the functional spaces, uses, and appearance of the building.

Objectives and Strategies:

5.1 Realize complete handicap accessibility

- a. Install a handicap stair lift at the Center's main entrance.
- b. Continue to seek and acquire funds for accessibility building projects.

5.2 Increase the functional spaces

- a. Clean out unused spaces and storage rooms.
- b. Create and/or renovate existing arts spaces in the building.
- c. Replace and increase plumbing and electrical fixtures to increase capacity.
- d. Renovate the third and fourth floors of the building for use, perhaps in a one-time overhaul.
- e. Rent vacant rooms to groups or agencies in the community.

5.3 Improve security measures in and around the building

- a. Improve external lighting.
- b. Hire or appoint security staff during evening activities.
- c. Install locks on more doors and a security system (alarm or motion detector) for overnight vigilance.

5.4 Increase parking availability

- a. Collaborate with neighboring organizations for lot-sharing arrangements.
- b. Research the possibility of on-site parking spaces.

IV. 2002-2003 Annual Implementation Plan

This strategic plan defines the goals and objectives of the American Indian Center for the next five years. Using this framework, the AIC Board of Directors compiled a more detailed "plan of action" to define the specific steps the organization will take towards the realization of these goals in the first year of implementation. It was a difficult process, with the desire to achieve all the growth and improvements right away checked by the Center's current staff and budget limitations. However, it was also an inspiring process, demonstrating that the Center truly can approach its ambitious vision of being the most authentic and welcoming urban Indian Center through constant and steady progress on manageable tasks.

At the end of fiscal year 2002-2003, the Board will assess the new status of the organization in relation to our five primary strategic goals, and create an implementation plan for the next year's strategies, building on the improvements to make further progress. In this way, the American Indian Center will steadily march towards the realization of its goals and towards a better served American Indian community.

APPENDIX A:

American Indian Center 2002-2003

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers:

Chair

Ronald Kely, *Chippewa/Potawatomi*
Ironworker Supervisor

Vice-Chair

Pam Auxier, *Cherokee*
Registered Nurse

Secretary

Christine Redcloud, *Ojibwe*
NAES College Registrar

Treasurer

Norma Robertson, *Lakota*
St. Augustine Social Worker

Sgt. At Arms

Mavis Neconish, *Menominee*
Field Museum

Board Members:

Hugh Bannon
Retired Businessman

Vanessa Fuller, *Ojibwe*
Volunteer Coordinator – IL Masonic Hospital

Nora Lloyd, *Ojibwe*
Lloyd Graphic Design

Michael Pamonicutt, *Menominee*
Auto Mechanic

Valerie Wilson, *Nipmuc*
Chicago Tribune Advertising Dept.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chair

Scott Sypolt, *Cherokee*
Assistant Attorney General

Sara McNear
Attorney, Richard Connor Riley

Warren Perlstein
Photographer

Patricia Xerikos, *Ojibwe*
AT&T

Christopher Drew
Executive Director, Uptown Multicultural Arts
Center

STAFF

Executive/Technical Director
Executive Secretary/Bookkeeper
Developer
Cultural Coordinator
Social Services
Receptionist
Maintenance Engineer

Joseph Podlasek, *Ojibwe*
Mary Anne Armstrong, *Ojibwe*
Dave Spencer, *Choktaw/Navajo*
Ansel Deon, *Lakota/Navajo*
Maxine Spataro, *Oneida*
Lorraine Corona, *Chippewa*
James Crowley, *Seneca*

APPENDIX B:

AIC Annual Implementation Plan 2002-2003

Strategic Plan Ref.	Strategy to be completed	Responsible Party/ies
1. To Ensure Adequate Resources to Satisfy Community Needs		
1.1 a	Create regular budget presentation format	Staff
1.1 b	Designate as Budget meetings two monthly Board meetings: June for yearly budget creation, December for mid-year review	Board
1.2 a	Draft a flyer or letter informing schools/students of internship position	Staff
1.2 c	Acquire software to organize grant proposals and deadlines	Staff
1.2 d	Fundraising campaign for our 50 th anniversary year, using list of previous donors	Board, Staff
1.3 a	Begin investigating Capital Campaign process, using examples of other Indian organizations	Board, Staff
1.3 b	Choose a venue to solicit endowments/bequests, perhaps on the webpage or Newsletter	Board, Staff
1.3 d	Target stocking the Gift Store to coincide with special events	Staff
1.3 f	Seek donations for Bingo prizes rather than purchasing them, Combine or collaborate with other community organizations to increase the scale of Bingo attendance and prizes, bake sale at Flea Market?	Board, Staff
1.3 g	Involve the youth group in fundraising activities like car washes, etc.	Board, Staff
2 To Foster Community Involvement and Association with the Center		
2.1 a	Sign-in sheet at all events to compile mailing list and monitor attendance	Board, Staff
2.1 c	Membership table at all events	Board, Staff
2.1 d	Explore creation of further incentives for membership	Board
2.2 b	Solicit community members directly to attend special events	Board, Staff
2.3 b	Create "wishlist" of desired volunteer services and post on front bulletin board	Staff
2.3 c	Organize activities that will incite community participation, e.g. site clean-up with free lunch	Board
2.3 d	Create and formalize transparent avenues for community input, e.g. suggestion box	Board, Staff
3 To Raise Awareness of the Center and the Cultural Presence it Celebrates		
3.1 a	Create a phased marketing/advertising plan to advance with income	Board, Staff
3.1 b	Maintain a category for marketing/advertising in annual budget	Staff
3.2 a	Go beyond word-of-mouth advertising	Board, Staff
3.2 b	Compile list of organizations willing to post our flyers and provide with flyers regularly	Staff
3.2 c	Advertise powwows in advance, perhaps in Indian and other publications	Staff
3.2 f	Begin a policy of publicizing corporate and foundation partnerships with donor parties and/or prominent lobby plaques	Staff
3.2 g	Use mailing list for 50 th fundraising push, letters of appeal for each program category	Staff
3.3 a	Update Brochure	Staff
3.3 b	Create Annual Report	Staff
3.3 c	Maintain quarterly Newsletter	Staff
3.4 c	Collaborate with other cultural or educational organizations to access their members/ mailing lists	Staff

4 To Provide More and Better Programs, Services, and Events		
4.1 a	Create a staff expansion priority plan, perhaps in a retreat setting	Board, Staff
4.1 c	Continue to apply for salary and general operating costs grants	Board, Staff
4.1 d	Hold regular staff meetings	Staff
4.2 a	Create program assessment plan to define phases of program development; include the goals of increasing the educational programming staff, particularly for School Tours, expanding the computer class offerings, and increasing the frequency of on-site powwows, pending the availability of drums/dancers and attendance, and all other such suggestions	Staff
4.2 b	Continue to seek funding and donations	Board, Staff
4.3 b	Maintain the balance between Indian and non-Indian programming	Board, Staff
4.3 c	Be aware to not create programmatic competition within community (including Gift Store development)	Board, Staff
4.3 d	More one-time special events (for 50 th)	Staff
4.3 e	Monthly regular evening events like Bingo, e.g. dances, movie nights, etc.	Board
4.3 h	Investigate potentials for new youth programming such as day care collaboration and teen activities	Staff
5 To Make Full Use of the Center's Facilities		
5.1 a	Handicap Lift installation	Staff
5.1 b	Continue to apply for grants	Board, Staff
5.2 a	Clean out unused spaces as well as common areas like stage, etc. for functional and appearance reasons, convert rooms into other needed uses	Staff
5.2 e	Rent rooms to groups and agencies as they become available	Staff
5.3 a	Safety: external lighting	Staff
5.3 b	Safety: safeguards during events and powwows	Staff
5.3 c	Safety: locks on doors and alarm for overnight	Staff
5.4 a	Collaborate with neighboring organizations for parking lot sharing arrangements	Staff

APPENDIX C:**The AIC Strategic Planning Process**

The process of compiling a strategic plan was designed to unify the organization and define a direction for the organization by incorporating the assessments, ideas, and visions of as many involved parties as possible. In formal one-on-one interviews with each Board member and Staff person, informal interviews with members of the community and other local nonprofit organizations, and several meetings along the way, the American Indian Center was able to arrive at the mission, vision, goals, objectives, and strategies in the 2002-2007 Strategic Plan. Towards the end of this five year period, the AIC Board of Directors and Staff should follow a similar process to create a new plan for years to come, thus ensuring continued progress and success. The process steps used in July-August of 2002 are outlined below.

1. Getting Ready

The AIC had to decide whether it was ready and able to devote the time and energy to embark on a strategic planning process. Upon coming to an affirmative decision, the Board and Staff defined role responsibilities for the process and who would fill them, set a schedule for meetings and deadlines of successive steps in the process, and held meetings to inform the Staff and community of the decision to create this plan and how they would be expected or able to participate.

2. Articulating Mission and Vision Statements

The AIC chose not to alter its mission statement. The vision statement was chosen by the Board and was a product of much of the thought process and discussion raised by the whole strategic planning process. In future strategic plans, the assessment and revision of these statements should occur early in the process, to help define the desired direction of the organization to be elaborated in the rest of the plan.

3. Assessing the Situation and Environment

The Staff member compiling the plan conducted interviews with each Board of Director member, each Staff member, and several members of the community to collect assessments of the organization's strengths and weaknesses, perceptions of the organization's role in the target community, and goals for the organization's future directions.

4. Developing Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Information and assessments collected in these interviews were categorized into the five major themes or goals of the 2002-2007 Strategic Plan. A brainstorming session was held to create more specific objectives within these goals and strategies for how to accomplish them.

5. Completing the Written Plan

The goals, objectives, and strategies that resulted from the interviews and brainstorming sessions were organized and compiled into a single document with brief narrative introductions.

6. Developing an Annual Implementation Plan

In a second brainstorming meeting, the Board of Directors selected those strategies from the 2002-2007 Strategic Plan to which the AIC should devote its attention in the first year, i.e. 2002. By prioritizing the strategies and compiling an immediate "to-do list," the broader goals of the plan were broken down into realistic, attainable tasks.

7. Implementing the Plan

The goals of the organization defined in the plan were publicized to the Staff and community to ensure unified efforts toward their realization. The Annual Implementation Plan will be monitored in monthly Board meetings and recreated at the beginning of each new fiscal year until 2007.