



Promoting the Value of Trees

**CLEANER AIR | GREENER STREETS | HEALTHIER
NEIGHBORHOODS**

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN | 2007 - 2010

prepared in partnership with the Institute for Conservation Leadership | September 2007

INTRODUCTION

Since its founding in 1993, the Alliance for Community Trees (ACT) has grown from an organization designed to support and connect the leaders of local tree organizations into a vibrant network of over 140 nonprofits and agencies promoting the environmental, economic, and social benefits of trees. In January 2007, the Board of Directors of ACT launched a strategic planning process to assess the organization's environment and design strategies to capitalize on emerging opportunities and build on ACT's strengths. ACT contracted with the Institute for Conservation Leadership* to facilitate the Board and staff through an interactive process with significant stakeholder input.

This document is the culmination of this strategic planning process. The first part of the document entitled *Environmental Scan* is a synthesis of the internal and external dynamics that the organization faces in the future. It includes a synthesis of ACT's strengths and assets, the forces and trends shaping the future, and the challenges and critical issues that the organization faces. This information and insight was gathered through a survey of ACT members as well as interviews with multiple stakeholders including board and staff of local tree groups, funding partners, and urban forestry researchers.

In the second section, entitled *Desired Impact and Goals*, ACT articulates its desired impact as the concrete difference that the organization wants to see in the world, or in other words, the organization's bottom line or return on investment. In addition to its desired impact, ACT acknowledges that there are conditions that must be achieved before this desired impact can be realized. ACT expresses these conditions as goals.

In the third section, *Strategic Focus*, ACT identifies how it intends to position itself within the opportunities and challenges in its contextual environment and contribute to achieving the desired impact and goals. For each strategy, ACT articulates both milestones and tactics. ACT designed the strategies and tactics to build on its strengths and resources and fulfill its niche as a key contributor to the desired impact and goals. As the plan is implemented, the Board of Directors will use the milestones to track progress and results.

In the fourth section, *Capacity Development*, ACT identifies six priorities for building organizational capacity to maximize its ability to deliver on the three programmatic strategies, including developing deeper leadership capacity and more sustainable fundraising.

A diagram that links the desired impact, goals, strategies and tactics, as well as the priorities for capacity development can be found on page 7. An action timeline for each of the three strategies as well as the priorities for capacity development starts on page 18.

This strategic plan sets the stage for an empowered national movement. With multiple partners, hundreds of member organizations and their thousands of volunteers, ACT will lead the nation in ensuring that every community receives the benefits of trees – cleaner air, greener streets, and healthier neighborhoods.

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ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The Alliance for Community Trees began the strategic planning process with a scan of its internal and external environment. We surveyed ACT's membership and interviewed 12 internal and external stakeholders. Interviewees include both long-time and new members of ACT as well as such partners as the US Forest Service, the State Foresters, National Arbor Day Foundation, and American Forests. Interviewees also include board members from local tree groups, corporate sponsors, and urban forestry researchers. In March of 2007, the Board of Directors reviewed the information and insight and added their own insight.

The information and insight gathered in this scan phase is synthesized below in three sections: 1) the strengths and assets of ACT; 2) forces and trends shaping the future; and 3) challenges and critical issues.

The Strengths and Assets of ACT

Since its founding in 1993, the Alliance for Community Trees has grown beyond a support organization for leaders of community-based urban forestry groups. As of September 2007, the membership includes over 140 nonprofit organizations and government agencies representing communities in 41 states and Canada. ACT offers its members training and technical assistance, networking opportunities, and other support. In recent years, ACT has mobilized its members to defend federal programs and deliver national initiatives to restore the urban tree canopy.

Members and other stakeholders identified four key strengths and assets that serve as the foundation for ACT's future growth and development:

1. **Direct and interactive relationships with nonprofit tree conservation organizations and government agencies.** ACT has a well-developed system for building and maintaining member relations including a resource-filled website, a biweekly electronic newsletter, training programs, and an annual meeting.
2. **A network that can be tapped to mobilize tens of thousands of people that care about trees.** The majority of ACT's 140+ members are community-based organizations with a membership base that values trees and understands their impact on communities. ACT calculates that its membership has planted and cared for 7.8 million trees with help from 450,000 volunteers. ACT estimates that its network of members engages over 50,000 volunteers a year.
3. **Credible relationships with national partners that influence urban forestry.** ACT's most significant partner is The Home Depot Foundation. In 2005, The Home Depot Foundation gave the first of three \$500,000 grants for the *National NeighborWoods Program*. ACT's other national partners include the National Arbor Day Foundation and the US Forest Service, which has provided \$275,000 to support creation and replication of the *Community Tree Leadership Forum*. In recent years, ACT has also developed credibility with national policymakers by coordinating a unified

federal advocacy message that has been supported by 14 national and more than 100 state and local organizations.

4. **The infrastructure and experience to deliver national programs.** In addition to delivering training and technical assistance, ACT successfully launched and implemented two new national programs in the last two years - *NeighborWoods* in partnership with the Home Depot Foundation and the *Community Tree Leadership Forum* in partnership with the National Arbor Day Foundation.

Forces and Trends Shaping the Future

Participants in the scan phase identified several driving forces and trends that have the potential to influence ACT as a nonprofit, to impact the urban tree canopy, or to reshape communities and their contextual environment. Some of the more significant forces and trends are highlighted below:

- **Climate change and global warming are the topics of the day.** Everybody from celebrities to Michael Dell and dozen of mayors are planting trees to reduce their carbon footprint. Major corporations are creating sustainable agendas and a “green wave” is moving through the marketing and product development departments of a significant number of businesses.
- **Communities are experiencing increased stress from urban sprawl and development,** the costs of storm water management and other infrastructure maintenance, the public health costs of obesity and asthma, and fewer federal dollars available for domestic spending. In the midst of these stresses, there is growing interest in green and livable communities that are safe, healthy, and walkable.
- **Innovation and vitality in the policy arena is coming from the local or state level.** States like California are increasing funding for urban forestry and are supporting innovations like *GreenPrint*. Cities are increasing urban forestry budgets and setting ambitious goals for citywide re-greening. Mayors and other city leaders are committing visible leadership to trees and other environmental issues.
- **With the heightened citizen demand for climate action and political shifts in Congress there are opportunities at the federal level to secure support for trees,** despite the lack of support by the current Administration. There are opportunities on the federal level to defend current programs, create new sources of support in EPA, DOE, HUD and other agencies, and fund the nationwide replication of successful state and local models. Competition for federal discretionary dollars will remain tight. Therefore, redirecting existing investments or establishing toe-holds existing programs may be more viable than creating new initiatives.
- **Nonprofits are expected to emphasize results, metrics, and accountability.** With more nonprofits competing for philanthropic dollars and the public’s attention, donors are funding the organizations that deliver tangible results.

Challenges and Critical Issues

As it looks to the future, ACT faces several challenges and critical issues.

- The public has never been more focused on environmental issues. **How does ACT best use its strengths and assets to push trees as an empowering solution to multiple environmental, community, and health problems?**
- The organization has only three staff and its board of directors is heavily composed of directors of small nonprofits. **How does ACT develop the leadership and capacity needed for future growth and development?**
- ACT is financially dependent on member dues and grants from a small number of foundations. **How can the organization develop a financial base with long-term sustainability?**

DESIRED IMPACT AND GOALS

When it was founded in 1993, the purpose of the Alliance for Community Trees was to provide support and networking opportunities to the leaders of the nonprofits that mobilized community volunteers to plant and care for trees. In the fifteen ensuing years, the membership base has grown to over 140 nonprofits, government agencies and others who have come to understand the essential role that trees play in the health and livability of cities and towns. In addition to ACT's own growth and development, the public's enhanced focus on climate change and livable communities has opened an unprecedented window of opportunity to promote the essential value of trees. The Alliance for Community Trees and its member organizations must prepare to lead the nation in ensuring that every community receives the environmental, social, health and economic benefits of trees.

Desired Impact

Desired Impact is the endpoint or return on investment for a nonprofit's work. In the coming three years, ACT is mobilizing its members around a dynamic agenda that captures the public's attention and spearheads more communities to strategically utilize trees for cleaner air, greener streets, and healthier neighborhoods.

**Trees are Essential . Cleaner Air. Greener Streets . Healthier
Neighborhoods**

Goals

ACT believes that successful achievement of the desired impact is dependant on creating four conditions. These four conditions are expressed below as goals that shape ACT's strategies and actions:

1. **A larger and more diverse constituency** that advocates for the value of trees to communities.
2. **Better public policy** that protects, enhances, and sustains trees for the benefit of people and communities.
3. **Greater public and private investment in trees**, including both funding and voluntary action.
4. **Greater knowledge of the multiple benefits of trees** and the science-based practices for planting, care, and long-term maintenance.

Measuring Progress

Successfully achieving the desired impact and four goals requires the contributions of many players. To track its contributions, ACT collects and aggregates data from its membership to track the following metrics:

- # of communities or neighborhoods served



- # of trees planted, maintained, or conserved
- Quantifiable benefits of trees to communities
- # and diversity of active member organizations
- # and diversity of staff and volunteers of ACT members
- # of people engaged or educated
- Dollars invested by partners in trees and their benefits
- # volunteer hours invested
- Changes in public policy at the local and federal level
- The use of new science-based practices for planting, care, and long-term maintenance of trees by ACT members

STRATEGIC FOCUS

Successfully achieving the desired impact and the related four goals requires action on the part of many players: citizens, local and state government, national funders, urban forest researchers, landowners, the US Forest Service and other federal agencies, as well as many others.

Recognizing its own strengths and niche in the field of community forestry, ACT focuses on three strategies:

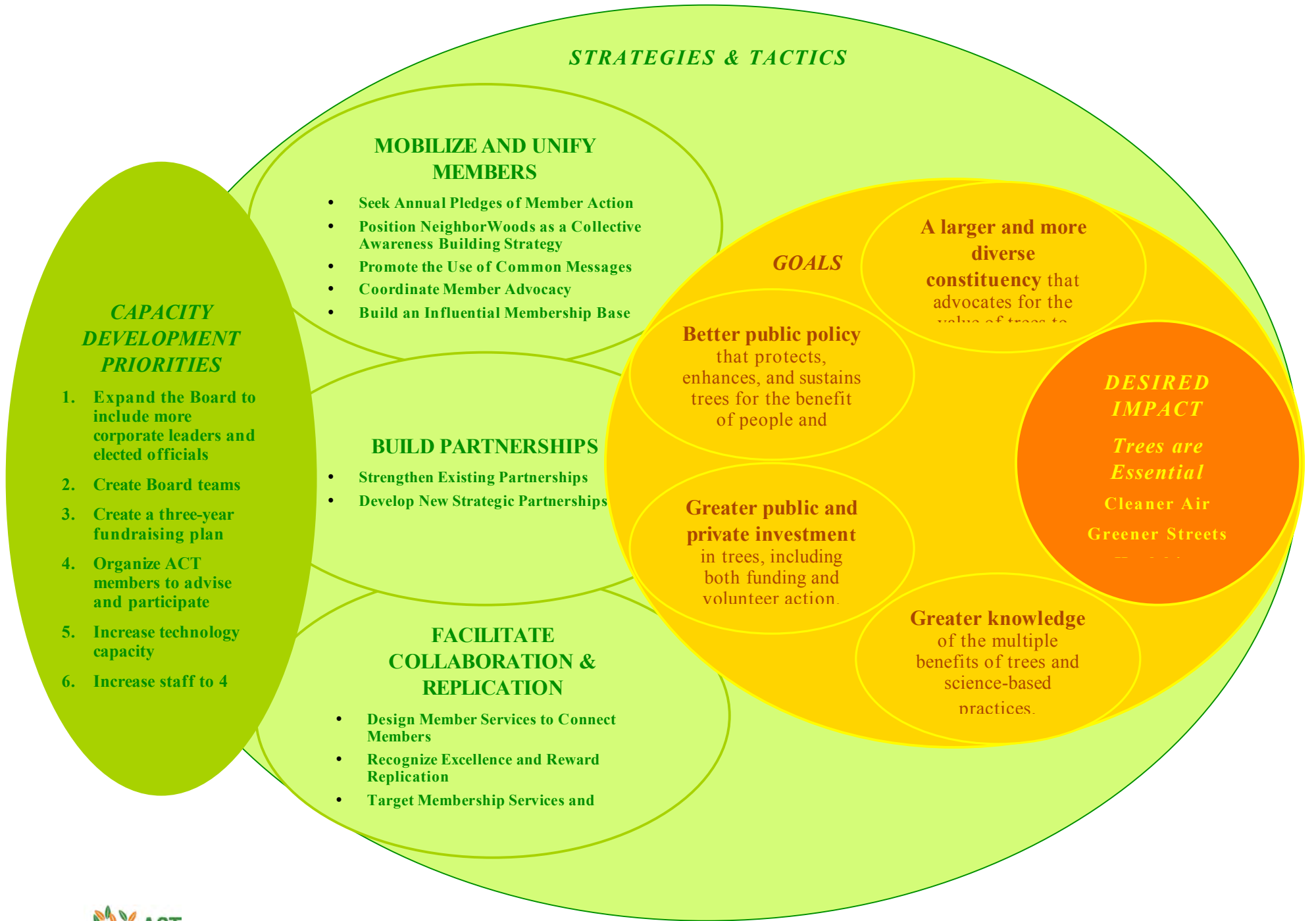
Strategy 1: **Mobilize ACT members as a unified movement** that collectively advances the health and livability of communities through the strategic use of trees.

Strategy 2: **Build partnerships to leverage greater investment and action** from both the public and private sector.

Strategy 3: **Facilitate member-to-member collaboration** for peer support, the sharing of ideas and proven practices, as well as the replication of demonstrated models.

In the past, ACT has dedicated significant resources to supporting members with both financial and technical assistance. This strategic plan shifts the organization's attention and resources to mobilizing members in joint action that creates a stronger, more unified voice as well as facilitating greater collaboration and peer-to-peer support between members.

In the pages that follow, each strategy is described in greater detail with concrete milestones that ACT uses to mark progress towards fulfilling the strategies and the key actions or tactics that ACT uses to advance the strategy. Figure 1 on the next page visually presents the desired impact, goals, strategies, tactics, and priorities for developing ACT's capacity.



Strategy 1: MOBILIZE AND UNIFY MEMBERS

Mobilize ACT members as a unified movement that collectively advances the health and livability of communities through the strategic use of trees.

STRATEGY 1 MILESTONES: MOBILIZE AND UNIFY MEMBERS

- By 2010, 100% of ACT's members participate in at least one of the actions promoted by ACT in the annual pledge of action.
- 500 NeighborWoods Month events in 150+ cities by October 2010
- 50 ACT member groups establish ongoing, branded NeighborWoods programs in their state or locality, clearly affiliated with ACT's national NeighborWoods initiative.
- 100 ACT members use ACT message templates and communications tools to amplify the core message that trees are essential to community health and livability.
- 100 ACT members contact or meet with their federal elected officials to advocate for the ACT national legislative agenda.
- 800 urban forest activists/influencers participate in an ACT-sponsored training or meeting between now and 2010.
- 100% of ACT members annually report their organization's accomplishment data to ACT to contribute to the case for our collective cause.

Since its founding in 1993, ACT has grown into a vibrant network of over 140 nonprofits and government agencies that can be tapped to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people and organizations that value trees and understand their benefits to communities. ACT calculates that its membership has planted and cared for 7.8 million trees with help from 450,000 volunteers. In the coming years, ACT calls on its members to take action with a unified national voice. Examples of participation include taking action to support ACT's policy agenda, hosting a NeighborWoods Month publicity event, or utilizing national messaging tools to create consistent, effective communication about the community value of trees.

TACTICS

Building on the strengths of its member services as well as the opportunities presented through the NeighborWoods partnership with The Home Depot Foundation, ACT mobilizes its members through five tactics: 1) an annual agenda and membership pledge of action; 2) the development of shared messages and a communications toolbox; 3) the positioning of NeighborWoods as a collective awareness-building activity; 4) the mobilization of members to advocate for federal policy that supports the benefits of trees; and 5) building a membership base with the will and capacity to be a part of a unified agenda; Each of these tactics is described in greater detail below.



Seek Annual Pledges of Action from Members

- Each year, the Board of Directors of ACT recommends specific actions for members to take to advance ACT's collective agenda. These actions are the foundation of an annual pledge of action that is rolled out to the membership at the annual meeting. Members are invited to commit to specific actions to advance the shared agenda. The annual pledge of action also defines what ACT provides to members in support of their action.

Position NeighborWoods as a Collective Awareness Building Strategy

- Position NeighborWoods as a turnkey program usable in any community by tree groups as well as other community organizations. Each year, ACT evaluates the success of the program and the value of the tools it provides, identifies gaps, and develops new tools as needed.
- Use grants to qualifying members to inspire visible local leadership, greater community involvement, target underserved neighborhoods, and involve Home Depot associates.
- Market NeighborWoods to members through the annual member action pledge.
- Use the annual meeting and three monthly webcasts to help members increase their understanding of how to use NeighborWoods to locally promote the community benefits of trees.
- Expand NeighborWoods Month with additional marketing tools, a communications partner, and more financial sponsors. Use as a vehicle to amplify the core message that trees are essential to community health and livability.
- Develop and promote an online fundraising vehicle for individuals and businesses to give to ACT in support of urban tree planting; proceeds roll into NeighborWoods to benefit member groups nationwide.

Promote the Use of Common Messages

- Engage a communications consultant to refine ACT's core message: trees are essential for clean air, greener streets, and healthier neighborhoods. The consultant is responsible for refining the message, segmenting messages for key audiences, and developing a plan for rollout and implementation by local members.
- Develop a communications toolkit for use by members focused on the value of trees to the health and livability of communities. Tools can be sorted both by issue and by audience.

Coordinate Member Advocacy for Federal Public Policy Initiatives

- Use the biweekly newsletter to inform the membership about changes in federal policy and encourage member advocacy for federal policy initiatives such as funding for the research program in the Forest Service and opportunities to connect trees to other issues such as energy, transportation, affordable housing, land development, and community development.

- Coordinate the participation of ACT members as citizen lobbyists in federal advocacy initiatives.

Build an Influential Membership Base

- Target specific organizations for membership recruitment. Organizations may be targeted by issue, geography, influence, or other characteristics that diversify ACT's membership. Targets must have the capacity, influence, and willingness to be part of ACT's agenda.
- Create subgroups of ACT membership for "influencers" including foundations, business, or elected officials. In addition to the electronic newsletter, these member groups are invited to two specially-designed webcasts a year. Dues from this class of members provide operational support to ACT.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

The following opportunities and barriers frame the design of these tactics:

- ACT's members has grown to 140+ including nonprofits and government agencies in 41 states and Canada. ACT members have the capacity to mobilize over 50,000 volunteers a year.
- NeighborWoods is ACT's primary strategy for inspiring greater public and private investment and building a larger more diverse constituency for trees. With the support of The Home Depot Foundation, NeighborWoods has grown into a successful branded initiative involving many ACT members. In October 2005, 16 ACT member groups joined together to launch the first National NeighborWoods Month with 28 tree-planting, maintenance, and training events that engaged 2,935 volunteers and planted 1,763 trees. In October 2006, 50 ACT members organized 150 events with 10,281 volunteers and 19,843 trees planted.
- The public policy that protects, enhances, and sustains trees for the benefit of people is enacted on both the local and federal level. In recent years, ACT has successfully advocated for urban forest research and urban forest programs with the USDA Forest Services budget and encouraged the US Conference of Mayors to adopt a resolution in support of the Forest Service's budget for urban forestry.
- Some local tree groups have greater capacity to advance this agenda than others. Members must be able to contribute on a level that aligns with their own organization's capacity and interests.
- The members use a variety of messages and tools to promote the value of trees; however, there is no common message across organizations.

Strategy 2: BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Build partnerships to leverage greater investment and action from both the public and private sector.

STRATEGY 3 MILESTONES: BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

- The Home Depot Foundation: 100% of ACT members that receive THDF funds engage The Home Depot store volunteers on at least one local project. Between now and 2010, ACT affiliates engage 3,000 Team Depot volunteers and suppliers in hands-on projects.
- National Arbor Day Foundation: 100% of ACT members celebrate Arbor Day and encourage their local government to pursue Tree City USA designation. 400 people are trained by *Community Tree Leadership Forum* between now and 2010.
- US Forest Service: By 2010, The Urban and Community Forestry Program provides \$50 million in technical and financial assistance to communities via state agencies, benefiting all ACT members. By 2010, research centers at Davis CA and Syracuse NY experience 20% budget growth. In 2007, 2008, 2009, the Forest Service invests in ACT with a cost share grant of \$50K-\$200K annually.
- By 2010, ACT has at least 3 new strategic partnerships that increase both the knowledge of the value of trees and investment in trees in addition to providing operational and programmatic support to ACT.

TACTICS

In recent years, ACT has developed strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with three of the major players in urban forestry: The Home Depot Foundation, National Arbor Day Foundation, and the US Forest Service. As it advances an agenda that promotes the community benefits of trees, ACT must strengthen these three partnerships and expand its reach by seeking out opportunities to develop new strategic alliances with partners with a more diverse constituency, the willingness to invest in trees, and/or the ability to advance the understanding of the ways trees benefit communities.

Strengthen Existing Partnerships

- Continue to strengthen the partnership with The Home Depot Foundation through the NeighborWoods programs. Continue to prioritize the engagement of The Home Depot store volunteers with ACT members (see Strategy 1 for more information).
- Continue to sponsor joint programs, like the Community Tree Leadership Forum, with the National Arbor Day Foundation. Encourage ACT members to celebrate Arbor Day and encourage their local government to pursue Tree City USA designation.
- Continue to mobilize ACT members to advocate for ongoing support for the US Forest Services' research program as well as the Urban and Community Forestry Program.



Develop New Strategic Partnerships

- Identify innovations within the ACT membership that can be replicated by other members and package them for sponsorship support by partners.
- Package ACT programs, such as NeighborWoods and others, into compelling opportunities for funders. Examples: regional Community Tree Leadership Forums, monthly webcasts, NeighborWoods Month, specific types of NeighborWoods events, and an annual award to recognize member achievement. Prospects for partnership include suppliers to The Home Depot, corporations with an interest in tree planting to offset climate change, foundations with interests in the environment and community development, and others to be identified.
- Seek out opportunities to partner with organizations with the potential to engage a more diverse constituency, invest in trees, and/or demonstrate the benefits of trees. Potential partners include:
 - National service organizations to increase volunteer participation in NeighborWoods grassroots action projects. Prospects: Hands On Network, Corporation for National and Community Service, Girl Scouts USA, Boy Scouts of America, Youth Service America.
 - National affordable housing organizations to increase strategic use of trees for energy savings and creation of safe social spaces. Prospects: NeighborWorks America, Habitat for Humanity, National Community Development Association, Green Affordable Housing Coalition.
 - National youth organizations to increase strategic use of trees in schoolyards and play spaces to promote cognitive and physical health of children. Prospects: KaBoom, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, National Environmental Education Foundation.
 - National land development or real estate organizations to increase industry understanding of the financial, social, and environmental benefits of trees and the best practices for incorporating trees into development. Prospects: SmartGrowth Network, Center for New Urbanism, Urban Land Institute, American Planning Association, or development industry business networks.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

The following opportunities and barriers frame the design of these tactics:

- With increasing media and public attention on global warming and the impacts of sprawl, there is growing interest on the part of many in the private sector to increase tree canopy. The opportunity to develop partnerships with the business sector has never been greater. This growing interest is coupled with skepticism of carbon neutral providers in a fast growing and still unregulated marketplace.
- ACT has strong partnerships with the major players in the field of urban forestry: The Home Depot Foundation, National Arbor Day Foundation, and the US Forest Service. There is

opportunity to expand the constituency for trees by developing partnerships with The Home Depot's vendors as well as other organizations allied with these three partners.

- To effectively promote the benefits of trees, ACT needs to broaden its constituency beyond those organizations who are already committed to urban forestry to those that are less directly connected to trees and more connected to the community benefits of trees. Since trees have multiple benefits, this universe of potential partners is large and diverse.
- Within the ACT membership there are relationships to leverage and innovations that can be replicated with additional resources provided by a partner.

Strategy 3: FACILITATE COLLABORATION AND REPLICATION

Facilitate member-to-member collaboration for peer support, the sharing of ideas and proven practices, as well as the replication of demonstrated models.

STRATEGY 3 MILESTONES: FACILITATE COLLABORATION AND REPLICATION

- 75% of ACT members participate in at least one annual learning opportunity such as the annual member rally, Community Tree Leadership Forum, or a monthly webcast.
- 50 ACT members contribute to or actively coordinate city-wide or region-wide GreenPrint / tree canopy initiatives involving many agencies and owners. ACT members work with local public officials to set ambitious yet achievable goals – such as number of trees planted or increases in tree canopy - and use an implementation plan based on the best available urban forestry research.
- 50% of ACT members have an ongoing relationship with at least one other ACT member that includes sharing information and ideas, replicating each other's programs, and/or the development of a joint project.
- 100% of ACT members track and report similar data so that ACT can measure progress made on the four goals.

TACTICS

ACT facilitates greater member-to-member collaboration through three primary tactics: 1) a set of member services designed to connect members to one another; 2) support and incentives for replication of proven practices and demonstrated models; and 2) targeted membership recruitment and services.

Design Member Services to Connect Members

In recent years with the support of key partners such as The Home Depot Foundation, National Arbor Day Foundation, and the US Forest Service, ACT has developed a comprehensive set of member services that can be easily scaled to serve a large membership without adding significant staff time as the membership grows. ACT aims to develop relationships between its members by providing two opportunities a year to connect face-to-face as well as through online communication and connection in the form of web casts and the bimonthly electronic newsletter. In the coming years, the organization will continue to offer member services that emphasize electronic delivery and Web 2.0 collaboration technologies.

Annual Member Rally – Held once a year, often in conjunction with other urban forestry events, the annual gathering is the opportunity for ACT to mobilize its members and for members to connect with one another and learn about trends in the field of urban forestry.



Community Tree Leadership Forum – This package of skill building workshops is offered at least once a year, in a different region each time. ACT will look for opportunities to share the costs of the event with state agency partners and others in the host region.

Webcasts – Initiated in the summer of 2007, the monthly webcasts are a cost-efficient method for the staff to provide useful information to up to 100 participants. The staff recruits a mix of members and other experts to provide the content. The webcasts tap expertise within the ACT membership so that members are helping each other and making active contributions to the network. One quarter of the webcasts focus on a topic related to NeighborWoods.

Newsletter – Each biweekly newsletter contains links to fresh content on the ACT website and information in the following areas: advancements in urban forestry research, public policy updates, information on events hosted by key partners, information on funding opportunities, and case studies of ACT members.

Website – ACT’s website is a dynamic repository of useful information. In 2008, ACT will augment the website with social networking features to create the capacity for users to upload documents and participate in an online community. ACT may extend channels for its content by providing members with a widget, RSS feed for their website, or other promotional tools that build interconnectivity in the ACT electronic network.

Marketing Member Status – ACT members receive affiliate logos to encourage branding and cross-marketing. Logos are “Alliance for Community Trees Member” and “NeighborWoods Month Partner” and other variants as needed.

In 2008, ACT will explore other incentives and tools to encourage collaboration, peer-to-peer learning, and exchange between members. This might include simple steps like offering travel assistance for professional exchanges or creating ice-breakers geared to encouraging idea trading at ACT events. Another idea is supporting some ACT members as regional hubs that provide ACT-branded support and training workshops to smaller community groups in their region. For example, Sacramento Tree Foundation, Friends of Trees, Trees Atlanta, and others are already informally advising start-up and suburban spin-off groups in their regions.

Recognize Excellence and Reward Replication

Much of the innovation in the realm of community tree planting and urban forestry happens on the local level, often spearheaded by the leadership and creativity of ACT members. As an example, local communities are adopting a variety of innovative public policy initiatives to increase local tree canopy and capture the strategic benefit of trees. These initiatives involve multiple agencies and landowners, set ambitious yet realistic goals, and ground the implementation plan in the best available urban forestry research. Examples include Sacramento’s GreenPrint that is now being promoted to other communities and similar initiatives in Los Angeles, Baltimore, New York City, Indianapolis, and Denver.

ACT builds on this local innovation by:

- Identifying and documenting demonstrated models and proven practices through ACT’s case studies and other publications, conferences, webcasts, and more.



- Rewarding the replication of proven practices and demonstrated models through incentives such as grants and national sponsors to seed replication.
- Recognizing the leadership of ACT members and individuals through media promotion and a national award program sponsored by a prestigious sponsor.

Target Membership Services and Recruitment

With the increased focus on member-to-member collaboration as well as the focus on mobilizing members around a shared agenda, ACT targets staff time and financial resources to those member groups who have the will, influence, and capacity to engage in the shared agenda. Groups with minimal capacity are invited to join ACT and receive the basic membership benefits including the biweekly electronic newsletter, four member mailings, and invitations to the annual meeting and webcasts.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

The following opportunities and barriers frame the design of these tactics:

- In the next three years, the most fruitful public policy changes will happen on the local level as cities and towns demand more from developers and property owners and define ways to create space for trees, remove and reduce impervious surfaces, and integrate trees across the landscape. ACT can play a role in spreading these local innovations to other communities through its membership.
- ACT has already secured US Forest Service funding for Community Tree Leadership Forums in 2008-2009.
- Shifting the expectation of one-on-one technical assistance and grants that support the growth of ACT members will require deliberate action on the part of ACT. Board members can play a role by asking members what they can do for ACT and for other ACT members.
- Technology solutions engage ACT to serve more members without significant additional cost.
- ACT does not have sufficient resources to both build the capacity of under-resourced organizations and also mobilize these members and others into a collective voice. Since the priority is mobilizing the collective voice of members, ACT must limit time-consuming one-on-one support.
- Most ACT members have access to capacity building services from their state nonprofit association and national organizations such as the Institute for Conservation Leadership. ACT can refer members in need of general nonprofit capacity development to these sources.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

This strategic plan is designed to efficiently capitalize on ACT's strengths and resources with synergy between strategies and activities, yet ACT must also increase its own capacity if it is going to successfully implement the three strategies and make progress on the goals and desired impact. ACT has only three staff and the majority of the board members do not have sufficient time and energy as they are focused on growing their own local nonprofits. Furthermore, the organization is financially dependent on membership dues and a small number of grants and in need of a more sustainable model for generating resources. With greater attention to structure and relationship-building, ACT can attract new leadership and better leverage the talent and passion of the leaders of its member organizations.

PRIORITIES

The Board of Directors has identified six priorities for building ACT's organizational capacity:

1. **Expand the Board of Directors to include people with time and energy for leadership as well as national connections.** Examples include corporate leaders, elected officials, and representatives from ACT's partners or potential partners. The goal is to add three new board members with national connections a year between 2008 and 2010.
2. **Create teams to improve the Board's ability to focus on significant areas of work.** Each team is charged with creating and implementing a work plan. The Board reassesses the focus of the teams annually in December. By the end of 2007, the Board will launch the following three teams:
 - a. *Board Development* with responsibility for identifying and recruiting new board members (see capacity priority 1).
 - b. *Fundraising and Partnerships* with responsibility for developing and implementing a fundraising plan (see capacity priority 3) including developing strategic partnerships (see strategy 2). The Board is inviting ACT members and others with funder and other partner relationships to join this team.
 - c. *Strategic Leadership* with responsibility for implementing the three strategies in this plan. The *Strategic Leadership* team in partnership with the ACT staff coordinates the work of teams of ACT members. This board team is also responsible for creating and using a scorecard to track the milestones identified for each of the three strategies.
3. **Revise the current fundraising plan into a three-year fundraising plan** that builds on the three strategies outlined in this plan and generates \$425,000 a year for baseline operations and \$300,000 a year for member initiatives from increased membership dues as well as foundation and corporations. This plan will be completed no later than June 2008 with leadership from the executive director, development director, and the Board's fundraising team.

4. **Organize ACT members to advise and participate in the three strategies** outlined in this strategic plan. The Board of Directors is creating three teams and inviting ACT members to join these committees at the annual meeting in November 2007. The communications team advises the staff on the creation of messages about the benefits of trees and the communications toolkit. The member collaboration team works with the staff to design member activities that encourage collaboration and replication. The member mobilization team works with the Strategic Leadership team to engage members in the annual pledge of action. The Board will assess the focus of the member teams on an annual basis and redefine teams as needed in time to recruit new members at the annual meeting.
5. **Increase ACT's technology capacity.** ACT relies on its website and other technology tools to efficiently deliver member services and promote member-to-member collaboration. In late 2007, ACT will contract with a technology contractor with the charge of maintaining ACT's current technology tools as well as identifying and implementing low-cost upgrades. ACT staff will seek funding for higher cost upgrades with a goal of implementing the new upgrades by June 2008.
6. **Increase the staff to four** including an executive director, development director, program director, and program associate. The staff was increased to three in 2007. The Board will continue to assess the needs for additional capacity and add a fourth position as funds are available.