



# Strategic Plan

**2024-2027**

The Recycling Association of Minnesota provides leadership, advocacy, and education to encourage the responsible use of resources through recycling and supporting modes of waste reduction.

## STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

Through a participatory process that included thoughtful reflection, generative dialogue and community input, the strategic direction for Recycling Association of Minnesota consists of three impact areas with corresponding goals to guide activities over the next years.

### Convener

**Build knowledge and networks relevant to recycling and waste reduction across industries, sectors and Minnesota.**

- *Goal: Coordinate an annual conference that is informative, engaging and profitable.*
- *Goal: Develop ongoing educational opportunities for members and the public.*
- *Goal: Leverage RAM's position in the industry to facilitate connections that advance recycling and modes of waste reduction.*

### Membership

**Create an informed and engaged membership through professional and leadership development opportunities.**

- *Goal: Clarify and communicate the value of membership at RAM for existing and new members.*
- *Goal: Establish a tiered membership model to increase the diversity of members.*
- *Goal: Increase revenue from membership through new and increased members.*

### Catalyst

**Position RAM as a leader in recycling through advocacy and public policy in Minnesota.**

- *Goal: Prepare advocacy strategies for adequate resources and access to recycling services throughout the state.*
- *Goal: Ensure RAM is consulted to inform and educate policymakers on topics relating to recycling.*
- *Goal: RAM's policy development provides credible data and information on recycling.*

# STRATEGIC PLAN

June 2024

## Overview

Strategic planning is a structured process used by nonprofit organizations to define their direction and make decisions on allocating resources to pursue their strategy. It helps organizations establish priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure that employees and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. The process also:

- **Clarifies Mission and Vision:** A strategic plan reaffirms the organization's mission and vision, providing clarity and direction for all stakeholders.
- **Improves Resource Allocation:** It helps in prioritizing the use of limited resources (financial, human, and material) effectively.
- **Enhances Organizational Performance:** By setting clear goals and objectives, organizations can measure and track their performance more effectively.
- **Strengthens Board and Staff Engagement:** The planning process engages board members and staff, fostering a sense of ownership and alignment with the organization's goals.
- **Increases Accountability:** A strategic plan provides a framework for accountability and transparency within the organization and to external stakeholders.
- **Prepares for Change:** It helps organizations anticipate and adapt to changes in the external environment, reducing risks and identifying opportunities.

To support the success of a strategic plan, the development of annual action plans that include key activities, metrics and timelines track progress and prompt any necessary adjustments. The board of directors monitors the plan and guide staff to adapt strategies to internal and external conditions to achieve its goals.

## Strategic Planning Process

Recycling Association of Minnesota (RAM) engaged Propel Nonprofits to facilitate a strategic planning process that resulted in goals and strategies in three impact areas. The plan looks out three years and serves as a road map for the staff and board to secure and allocate adequate resources to carry out the mission.

The strategic plan consists of insights, knowledge and perspectives from staff, board members and stakeholders of RAM. The process started with RAM staff and board members contributing their insights into the environmental analysis using three tools:

- **Situational Analysis:** identification of organizational and programmatic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- **Trend Analysis:** identification of emerging and existing trends taking place in the community and their trajectory in the coming years.
- **Infrastructure Analysis:** identification of needs in seven categories of capacity to support the operations and programs of an organization.

The environmental scan assessed the current state of RAM's internal and external conditions. It informed the stakeholder engagement process to gather further input from board members,

organizational partners, industry leaders and experts, members and donors, and policy advocates. Finally, a financial assessment provided deeper understanding of income and expenses for programs and administration of RAM.

The information and conversations accumulated from the information gathered influenced the strategy session, focused on delivering RAM's mission that maximized its strengths and opportunities while considering its weaknesses and threats along with the incorporation community and financial insights. During this session, staff and board members participated in generative conversations, reflected on lessons learned and suggested potential organization goals to advance RAM's mission of providing leadership, advocacy, and education to encourage the responsible use of resources through recycling and supporting modes of waste reduction.

## Summary: Information Gathering

### Situational Analysis

The situational analysis consists of four different points of view. *Strengths* are program and organizational attributes that helps advance goals. *Weaknesses* are program and organizational attributes that hinder progress toward goals. These two points of view look internally at the organization. *Opportunities* are external conditions that help an organization achieve its goals. *Threats*, on the other hand, are external conditions that can damage an organization's performance. These latter two are points of view looking outside of the organization.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Conference brings people together</li> <li>•ED strengths are aligned to tasks and has big picture of RAM's impact</li> <li>•Industry knowledge and passion throughout the board</li> <li>•Cash reserves and earned income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sustained funding</li> <li>•Lack of understanding and visibility</li> <li>•RAM's position in industry</li> <li>•Mission alignment with ran barrel/compost bin</li> <li>•Too much focus on mundane tasks</li> <li>•Member engagement</li> <li>•Diversity</li> <li>•Board structure and makeup</li> <li>•Staffing size and structure complicates transitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Small communities and Greater MN</li> <li>•Outreach to businesses</li> <li>•Be the resource and voice for recycling</li> <li>•Policy advocacy: engage member on multiple perspectives</li> <li>•Partnerships for funding, programming and expansion</li> <li>•Leverage membership for impact</li> <li>•Social justice and DEI</li> <li>•Recycling is popular among corporations</li> <li>•MN has more talent in recycling</li> <li>•Develop recycling expertise among staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Small staffing size to expand programs</li> <li>•Membership engagement and services require more capacity</li> <li>•We are insular</li> <li>•Fundable programs; lack of philanthropic interest</li> <li>•Misinformation on recycling</li> <li>•Need a healthy financial model</li> <li>•Undefined value proposition</li> <li>•Innovation requires new technology</li> </ul>

## Infrastructure Analysis

Having a solid infrastructure is what helps nonprofits achieve their missions. There are seven main areas of infrastructure, or internal capacity, to support the operations and programs: staff leadership; board and governance; financing and fundraising; marketing and communications; program and administrative staffing; programs and services; and administrative/organizational systems.

As a growing organization, there will continue to be needs for infrastructure development. This assessment can guide prioritizing strategic infrastructure growth as part of strategic planning. Below is a summary of input for the infrastructure analysis:

- **Staff Leadership**
  - Realistic expectations for staff
  - Assess staffing needs and growth
  - Director's strengths and tasks are aligned
  - Increase industry knowledge
- **Board and Governance**
  - Meeting management
  - Committee accountability & mgmt
  - Distinguish between staff and board
  - Diversity
  - Bylaws limit diversity
  - Hard for board members to leave their organizations at the door
- **Finance and Fundraising**
  - Audit of rain barrel and compost bin
  - Increase diversity of revenue
  - Seek government contracts
  - Plan for unrestricted income
- **Marketing & Communications**
  - Determine messaging, strategies and outreach plan
- **Programs and Admin Staffing**
  - Clarify conference contractors' roles
  - Skills to leverage technology for effective operations
  - Conference planning no longer fun
- **Program and Service Delivery**
  - Year-round programming
  - Balance member and non-member services
  - Launch policy advocacy work
  - Greater MN expansion
  - Partnerships, build new and strengthen existing ones (SWANA)
- **Administrative/Org Systems**
  - Accounting systems don't communicate
  - Succession planning
  - Integrate of databases and software programs

## Community Trends Analysis

Using a trend analysis, organizations can assess growing, declining, or steady needs in the community for their programs and services. These can be existing or emerging trends but could have significant impact on the organization's impact in the coming years. For RAM, significant trends include the growing misunderstanding of recycling as it evolves; increasing interest in other environmental topics such as water and climate; the labor force is declining; policies at the municipal, county and state levels in progress and upcoming; the ending of old markets and entry of new markets (e.g. plastic film); and technology, particularly artificial intelligence, will continue to impact RAM internally and externally.

## Stakeholder Input Summary

Stakeholder engagement gathers input, perspectives and support for an organization's strategic planning process. It is an opportunity to gather feedback on recent and current impact, as well as future direction. This is also a relationship-building process to deeply engage stakeholders with the mission, vision and the leadership of Recycling Association of Minnesota.

This list summarizes feedback gathered from a survey that was sent to key individuals including program participants, funder/donors, organizational partners, community members, staff and board members, and policy makers/elected officials. During the period of January 14 to February 5, 2024, 16 individuals shared their perspectives of RAM:

- *Mission:* Education and awareness; Advocacy; Convening and Leadership
- *Impact:* Conference; Community Resource; Convening
- *Strengths:* Conference; Convening; Communication with members; Education
- *Improvements:* Communications and Marketing; Advocacy; Partnerships; Education
- *Community Trends:* Lack of public investment; Cost of facilities increasing; Climate and Environmental Justice; Policy impact; Economic factors; New technology; DEI
- *Priorities:* Programming; Convening and Partnerships; Advocacy; Communication
- *Additional:* Focus; Organizational Identity Crisis; Voice; Keep up the good work

The convergence of this information gathering and knowledge sharing process led to strategy session focused developing goals and outcomes for RAM. Upon the completion of the session, Propel consultants organized the input into four impact areas, each with three goals and corresponding strategies.

## Governance of Strategy

Recycling Association of Minnesota is governed by a volunteer board of directors. The board is comprised of RAM's member base and brings with them deep knowledge and industry representation to inform the organization's programs and operations. They play an important role in shaping the organizational impact through assessing outcomes and financial performance.

With their primary function to govern, they focus on overall organizational sustainability and fiscal responsibility. However, there may be opportunities for more involvement through board committees and volunteering with the staff. These will vary based on the cadence of RAM's programs and services along with the capacity and knowledge of staff.

As champions of RAM's mission and goals, the board of directors will have to ultimately approve significant changes to the strategic direction of the organization in response to changing conditions, including the goals and strategies in this plan.

## Strategic Plan

<p><b>Impact Area: Convener</b></p> <p><b>Build knowledge and networks relevant to recycling and waste reduction across industries, sectors and Minnesota.</b></p>
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*Goal: Coordinate an annual conference that is informative, engaging and profitable.*

- Ensure a diverse representation of presenters, volunteers and attendance through relationships and partnerships.
- Develop a comprehensive conference budget to maximize profits to partners.
- Increase attendance through marketing, partnerships and accessibility.

*Goal: Develop ongoing educational opportunities for members and the public.*

- Develop a responsive series of learning opportunities for a diverse audience.
- Elevate the expertise of local, regional and national experts.
- Increase the reach and impact through technology and virtual tools.

*Goal: Leverage RAM's position in the industry to facilitate connections that advance recycling and modes of waste reduction.*

- Enhance social media presence to attract and inform a diverse range of stakeholders.
- Expand partnerships to reach new and diverse audiences to advance recycling knowledge and activities.

<p><b>Impact Area: Membership</b></p> <p><b>Create an informed and engaged membership through professional and leadership development opportunities.</b></p>
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*Goal: Clarify and communicate the value of membership at RAM for existing and new members.*

- Support the Membership Advisory Committee to inform, guide and champion strategies to meet goals.
- Solidify RAM's value to members for consistent communications and outreach strategies.

*Goal: Establish a tiered membership model to increase the diversity of members.*

- Increase membership through varying levels of membership and benefits.
- Increase the diversity of members through flexible rates and participation.
- Ensure opportunities to elevate members and their services to RAM's network.

*Goal: Increase revenue from membership through new and increased members.*

- Establish a membership recruitment plan and process to ensure consistent new members join RAM's community.
- Employ effective and enjoyable membership engagement strategies to sustain base.

<b>Impact Area: Catalyst</b> <b>Position RAM as a leader in recycling through advocacy and public policy in Minnesota.</b>
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<p><i>Goal: Prepare advocacy strategies for adequate resources and access to recycling services throughout the state.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt an internal decision-making process for RAM's position on public policies.</li> <li>• Ensure access to recycling resources and services for communities, governments and businesses.</li> <li>• Develop expertise to advocate for the advancement of recycling as part of environmental responsibility initiatives.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Goal: Ensure RAM is consulted to inform and educate policymakers on topics relating to recycling.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish reputable relationships with policy-makers at different levels of government as the source for recycling and waste reduction.</li> <li>• Map out advocacy leaders among RAM's membership to identify opportunities to lead and to partner.</li> <li>• Ensure RAM is represented at key decision-making spaces related to recycling resources and education.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Goal: RAM's policy development provides credible data and information on recycling.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the understanding of recycling through public messaging.</li> <li>• Provide research and data on recycling that informs decisions and actions.</li> <li>• Deliver consistent communications to solidify RAM as the voice of recycling in Minnesota.</li> </ul>
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## Conclusion

Recycling Association of Minnesota has built a sizable membership base of experts and leaders and supported organizations committed to the systemic and societal responsibility to sustain resources. Its diverse network of people and organization positions RAM to educate, advocate and develop leadership to ensure recycling is understood and accessible by all.

Completion of a strategic plan will guide RAM to have impact by prioritizing its activities, leveraging the organization's current impact and allocating resources to advance the mission and goals. Subsequently, annual action planning will support the implementation of this plan, assess progress toward goals and inform the securement of resources.