



AMCTO
THE MUNICIPAL EXPERTS

Zone Spring Meeting

2027-2030 Strategic Plan & Rebranding
Discovery Phase



Presentation Agenda

2027-2030 Strategic Plan & Rebranding Discovery Phase

- SWOT Analysis
- Expansion or continuous improvement?
- Advocacy – time to level up?
- Brand refresh – how far to go?
 - What we heard
- Your thoughts
- Next steps

Strengths

- **Highly trusted education and accreditation programs:** AMCTO is widely recognized as the provincial leader in Ontario-specific municipal governance education, elections training, and professional accreditation. Accreditation “puts confidence in the sector” and appears in job postings.
- **AMCTO stands out in its advocacy efforts:** AMCTO’s policy and advocacy work – particularly on strong mayor powers and OMERS changes as well as its ongoing longstanding efforts regarding elections legislation and MFIPPA – are highly valued by most. AMCTO is viewed as a legitimate, practitioner-driven voice, speaking where members as objective professionals cannot.
- **Strong sense of community and networking value:** Opportunities for peer connection, mentorship, and networking continue to be core to AMCTO’s value proposition, particularly in a climate of incivility and constant legislative change.
- **Strategic focus around governance expertise:** There is consensus that AMCTO’s “sweet spot” is governance, legislative interpretation, elections administration, and professional standards.
- **A stabilizing force in a destabilizing time:** AMCTO is widely viewed as a trusted convenor for the sector, bringing municipal professionals together and providing practical guidance and a shared forum for navigating emerging sector challenges.
- **Enhanced visibility and presence:** AMCTO has expanded its communication and outreach efforts, building a stronger sector presence and clearly demonstrating how it is working on behalf of members.
- **Membership has seen moderate growth:** During the time the previous strategic plan was developed, AMCTO was seeing a slow decline in membership. Today, AMCTO is recognized for having grown its membership, programs, and conference attendance.
- **Experienced leadership and capable staff team:** AMCTO as an organization has matured significantly, supported by strong executive leadership, a cohesive management team, and high-performing staff.

Weaknesses

- **Continued lack of alignment on who AMCTO should be serving:** Views are divided on whether AMCTO should broaden its mandate to represent all municipal staff or remain focused on clerks, treasurers, and managers. In particular, there continue to be concerns about the treasurer contingent and whether they are finding value in the organization.
- **Unclear growth path:** Ongoing questions about AMCTO's core audience and scope have amplified uncertainty around if and how the organization should grow. Some cautioned against becoming "everything to everyone," while others noted that AMCTO's governance and legislative expertise, programming, and professional standards are valuable to municipal professionals across subject matters and service areas.
- **Mixed views on the brand:** There is broad agreement that a brand refresh is needed, though views differ on how well the current brand aligns with AMCTO's purpose. Some noted that the brand – particularly the name may be unintentionally limiting broader participation and membership growth.
- **Continued perception as the "Clerks' Association":** AMCTO continues to be widely perceived (internally and externally) as clerk-centric. Treasurers, CAOs, managers, and emerging professional roles do not always see how they fit into and can benefit from AMCTO involvement.
- **Education program overlap and internal competition:** There is sometimes duplication across forums, workshops, and corporate training, which creates confusion for members and internally.
- **Aligning internal capacity to growth:** There are concerns about the risk of trying "to do it all for all", including the constraints of current staff to continue delivering the quality AMCTO is known for while also expanding into new areas and programs.
- **Internal career progression:** There is a need for AMCTO to model its commitment to professional development by supporting internal growth and advancement opportunities for AMCTO staff.

Opportunities

- **Align on organizational direction:** As noted, there are a variety of perspectives on AMCTO's strategic direction and opportunities for growth or expansion. Achieving clarity on the desired future direction is critical to setting priorities and informing a potential brand refresh.
- **Brand refresh:** There is consensus that the AMCTO brand would benefit from an update; however, views differ on the scope of the refresh and which elements should be retained, revised, or changed.
- **Strategic partnerships vs. duplication:** There is continued support for pursuing partnerships with other professional associations to complement AMCTO's offerings, rather than duplicating services or competing directly.
- **Topical and responsive offerings:** There is interest in more agile and focused programming in response to emerging issues and trends, building from AMCTO's successful strong mayors webinars and other recent initiatives.
- **Continue expanding and refining advocacy role:** AMCTO's advocacy efforts and policy updates are valued, with opportunities to be more proactive, visible, and influential as the go-to voice of municipal professionals. There is also interest in better understanding and measuring the impact of AMCTO's advocacy work.
- **Diversify board opportunities:** There is interest in broader geographic and ethnic representation on AMCTO's board to better reflect diversity across the municipal sector.
- **Continuous improvement in programming and speakers:** There is an opportunity to build on AMCTO's strong programming by periodically reviewing and updating the range of speakers and topics, reinforcing member value and return on investment.
- **Internal streamlining to increase response efficiency:** AMCTO moves quickly to respond to evolving sector needs and policy changes but as the organization evolves there is an opportunity to improve internal and governance processes to ensure the organization can move quickly and cohesively

Threats

- **Government's view of AMCTO:** AMCTO has limited political visibility, partly due to a focus on niche or occasionally government-misaligned issues (e.g., strong mayors). While it has strong relationships with Ministry staff, the advocacy space is crowded. AMCTO is generally well regarded for its expertise, but its specialized focus limits broader influence.
- **Municipal budget pressures:** Municipalities are facing increasing budget pressures and resources for professional development activities for municipal employees are competing against other priorities.
- **Association market is crowded:** The municipal association landscape is highly populated, and in some cases, there are overlapping service offerings and shared target audiences across organizations.
- **Municipal staff are under pressure:** Ongoing recruitment and retention challenges persist, intensified by the strong mayor environment and the continuing "grey tsunami." These pressures are further compounded by rising levels of harassment and incivility toward municipal professionals, increasing the burden and strain of their roles and in some cases, driving them out of the sector.
- **Rapidly changing policy and legislative context:** The provincial policy environment is evolving rapidly, with short consultation windows that require clerks and CAOs to implement changes quickly, often without clear operational guidance. This "policy churn" has increased the need for AMCTO to serve as a strong, timely voice for municipal staff.
- **Sector variations continue to pose a challenge:** Municipal administrations are, by their very nature, not standardized and roles and responsibilities can vary based on the size and capacity of the organization (e.g., more 'generalists' or combined positions such as CAO/Clerk). These variations impact how people perceive AMCTO's relevance to their specific roles.
- **Impact of AI:** The growing ubiquity of AI will require AMCTO to evaluate how its education programs remain relevant and credible in an evolving learning environment.

Expansion or Continuous Improvement?

What We Heard:

- **There is general agreement that AMCTO should build from its existing strengths** – enhancing the services it currently delivers well, driving greater value for core member groups, and avoiding unnecessary duplication – while remaining open to intentional, selective growth opportunities.
 - **47%** of member survey participants indicated that AMCTO should take a balanced approach – strengthening core services while pursuing selective growth. Of the remainder, **29%** support improving current services, while **13%** are interested in new areas of growth.
- **Concern was expressed about the risks to quality if AMCTO tries to do too many things or serve too many people.** There was also concern that growth and expansion or openness to other subsets of municipal professionals may shift focus from and potentially alienate core long-standing members, including clerks.
- Others acknowledged that there continues to be **uncertainty about the role of treasurers in the organization**, and there **should be clarity on whether or not this should still be a priority group**, given declining membership and perceptions of limited value for treasurers.
- However, it was also observed that **AMCTO can both improve and grow by focusing on its role in providing resources and supports in matters of governance and the legislative context** – these topics have relevance to staff in every field and are areas in which AMCTO has a strong and reliable market foundation and credibility.

Advocacy – Time to Level Up?

What We Heard:

- **Advocacy is viewed as a foundational element of AMCTO's value proposition, along with education and networking/community-building among members.** Notably, only 5% of non-members associate AMCTO with advocacy.
- **Strong praise for the policy team and the overall growth in the visibility of AMCTO's presence** – at conferences like AMO and ROMA, in the media, etc. – though some questioned to what degree the government is listening or acting upon AMCTO's advocacy.
 - There is interest in understanding how the organization tracks or assesses the outcomes of its advocacy efforts.
- **Some differing views on how assertive AMCTO could or should be** in its advocacy:
 - Some would like AMCTO to take a stronger stance on some issues, particularly where other associations have taken a contrary position or no position at all.
 - A couple expressed concerns about becoming a “lobbying group.”
- There is **recognition that growing AMCTO's member base could result in an increased advocacy scope** when it comes to topics of interest.
- **Wide consensus that an enhanced advocacy function would need to be resourced appropriately** – “more for the same” is not feasible.

Brand Refresh – How Far?

What We Heard:

- **Overall buy-in for reconsidering the brand, but there are divided perspectives on the scope of the brand refresh** and whether all elements should be on the table.
- The **most common perception of the brand is that the organization is geared primarily to clerks**. Some consider this a significant limiting feature of the brand in the marketplace.
- **Views are split on reevaluating the name** of the organization:
 - There is wide acknowledgement that the name is inherently complicated and may be limiting or exclusionary by specifying member groups.
 - However, the name is consistent with comparable associations – MFOA, OMAA, OMHRA, etc.
 - Some indicated that the name no longer appropriately represents the organization's core purpose, noting it serves more municipal professionals than those listed in the name: clerks, treasurers, and managers.
 - The main concern to changing the name relate to the risk of distance from strong brand recognition and legacy AMCTO has in the sector
- **Wide agreement that the logo should be reimagined as it is outdated and unclear** in terms of what it is meant to represent.

Brand Refresh – How Far?

“[The name] is a mouthful.”

“If we’re naming some titles, are we missing any? If we’re all municipal professionals, does the name capture us all and avoid exclusion?”

“The brand is very traditional. Very old school feel.”

“We should rebrand but we need to caretake along the way. We don’t want to lose members.”

“The name is well recognized – don’t change that. But the logo doesn’t need to stay.”

Brand Assessment

Key Takeaways

- AMCTO's brand within the sector is recognized, reputable and reliable.
- **61%** of member survey respondents indicated that the current brand reflects the organization very or somewhat well; this is compared to **41%** of non-members.
- There is broad support for the brand refresh to AMCTO's visual identity (including the logo), but support for changing or updating the name is divided.
 - Members and non-members indicated that there is a strong perception that AMCTO primarily represents clerks and treasurers.
 - Some participants identified that a broader name would signal inclusivity across municipal professionals.
- Ultimately, the scope of the refresh should align with the strategic direction of the organization regarding the "growth question".



What We Heard | Name

- Overall, mixed views among members and non-members.
 - **45%** of member survey participants indicated that the name should be “kept as is.” However, in a subsequent question, **44%** stated the name should be considered as part of a brand refresh.
- Questions raised about whether the AMCTO name accurately reflects the organization today – some concerns that its highly descriptive nature may constrain broader positioning in the marketplace.
 - This is notable among non-members survey participants, who noted that the name makes it seem like the organization is only focused on the roles specified.
- Name is widely recognized within the sector and to some external audiences (e.g., provincial government).
- Name carries strong legitimacy and credibility in the sector – a name change could dilute this brand equity.

What We Heard | Tagline

- Overall, mixed views.
- Tagline remains an accurate reflection of AMCTO's expertise and professional standing in the sector.
 - Yet, also gives the perception that AMCTO can be “all things to all people.”
- Tagline may be perceived as exclusionary – AMCTO is not the only home for municipal expertise.
- The tagline was not referenced in any survey feedback.

What We Heard | Visual Identity/Logo

- General consensus that a refresh is needed.
- Logo is unclear – lack of understanding as to what the visual represents or means.
- Logo is outdated and not welcoming or inclusive.
- General sense that changes to the logo would not impact overall brand recognition.
- The top words used identified in the survey to describe AMCTO's current visual brand include:
 - Professional
 - Outdated
 - Plain
 - Recognizable
 - Boring
 - Trustworthy
 - Traditional

What Are Your Thoughts?

Do you agree with the feedback? Disagree?

Expansion or continuous improvement?

Advocacy – time to level up?

Brand refresh – how far to go?



Next Steps

- March – May 2026
 - Strategic Plan Working Group (4 Board and 4 Staff) work to:
 - Revise current vision, mission, pillars and guiding principles (minor edits anticipated)
 - Establish new goals and strategic actions, with timelines and performance measures.
- June 2026
 - Presentation of draft Strategic Plan to the Board of Directors
 - Recommendations on direction for rebranding
- September/October
 - Launch of 2027-2030 Strategic Plan to membership