“IT’S NOT ABOUT PERFECTION; IT’S ABOUT THE JOY OF STRIVING.”

- THOMAS KELLER
Our History

The American Culinary Federation, Inc. (ACF), a professional organization for chefs and cooks, was founded in **1929** in New York City by three chefs’ organizations: the Société Culinaire Philanthropique, the Vatel Club and the Chefs de Cuisine Association of America. Since our inception, little has changed in our principal goals. We are an organization based on promoting the professional image of American chefs worldwide through education of culinarians at all levels. In **1976**, ACF forever changed the culinary industry by elevating the position of the executive chef from service status to the professional category in the U.S. Department of Labor’s Dictionary of Official Titles. Since this change, the culinary industry and our organization have grown tremendously.
Our Present

ACF is now the largest professional chefs’ organization in North America. We are made up of more than 15,000 members that belong to more than 150 chapters in four regions across the U.S. Today, ACF is the leader in offering educational resources, training, apprenticeship, competitions and programmatic accreditation designed to enhance professional growth for all current and future chefs and pastry chefs. In addition, ACF operates the most comprehensive culinary certification program in the world. ACF is home to ACF Culinary Team USA, the official representative for the United States in major international competitions.

Our Future

This Strategic Plan reflects the priorities of the ACF for the next five years, emphasizing the quality and variety of services and resources we provide for our members. It is designed to be the roadmap for the staff and current and future boards to assure relevance, growth, and success for our members.
This Strategic Planning initiative was begun in early 2017, building on the work of the 2016-2018 Transition Plan. In the spring, the senior staff developed an updated Situation, identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. At the direction of the Board, the staff continued the process. A membership survey was conducted in preparation for the Strategic Planning process.

In the autumn, Nancy Dering Mock was selected as the Strategic Planning consultant and the process was planned for the fourth quarter of 2017. In addition to an Environmental Scan and Market Analysis, a review of Emerging Trends in Professional Association Strategy and Management was developed. A survey was completed by both board and staff, with the results presented to the staff in December for use in generating strategy and priorities. After many hours of deliberations by staff, the Plan document was finalized for adoption by the Board.

The Strategic Plan, on adoption, will be effectively communicated and marketed to all stakeholders for implementation. In addition, progress on the priorities will be monitored and regularly reported to the board, staff and membership.
Mission & Values

Through this Strategic Planning process, the existing Mission and Values of the ACF were updated to convey the purpose of the organization and its guiding principles.

Our revised mission statement reflects this work and is as follows:

Mission: We are the standard of excellence for the culinary industry, advancing and promoting professionalism, leadership and collaboration.

While our mission statement has changed to reflect our evolving role in the culinary community, our values continue to stand as the foundation of the work that we do.

Here are our guiding principles:

Professionalism
Within our association and our workplaces, we promote the highest standards of professionalism, through certification, integrity, respect for diversity and transparency.

Leadership
Within our association and our workplaces, we shape and adapt to changes in our industry, reward creativity and continuous improvement, and promote leadership development and lifelong learning.

Collaboration
Within our association and our workplaces, we respect our colleagues: building productive relationships, networking, serving customers, empowering employees and collaborating productively with constituents and partners.

Excellence
Within our association and our workplaces, we uphold the highest standards of quality in all products and services, setting high goals and taking pride in hard work, persistence, and success.
CHANGES IN FOOD INDUSTRY LANDSCAPE AND IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

As an important part of this process, the planning team identified changes to which the ACF needs to be responsive in order to be relevant to our membership:

- Competition and Compensation in Culinary Industry
- Availability of Trained Personnel
- Issues of Diversity and Inclusion
- Public Awareness of Professionalism in Culinary Profession
- Changing Demographics of Young and Student Culinarians
- Impact of Technology on Learning and Communicating

The planning process addressed the following key questions:

1. What is the appropriate leadership response to these trends and challenges?
2. How best can ACF leaders assure relevance, vitality and influence in this environment?
3. By what means will ACF leaders guide the association and steer it to effectiveness in the coming decades?
ACF’S RESPONSES

There was unanimity among the planning team that ACF needs to build on its rich heritage of excellence in the culinary arts and respond to these challenges, preserving what is valuable to the members and adapting to the changing industry and the changing needs of our members. Through very thoughtful dialogue, the planning team identified what should be preserved, what should be discontinued and what should be initiated. The six overarching priorities were developed.
These goals are the strategic framework for the ACF moving forward. Each goal will be supported with key objectives and action plans, detailing the accountability and target date(s) for each key action.

I. To enhance the awareness of the public and the profession of ACF and our value to the profession, our employers and the public

The vision and value of ACF needs to be clearly formulated and strategically communicated to select audiences. This priority calls for focus on a Strategic Marketing Audit and Plan and a review of all current communications with the objective of simplifying communications and increasing impact.

II. To provide high quality professional education programs and services that add value for our members, prospective members and the profession

Certification, continuing professional education, apprenticeships and the camaraderie they create are the lifeblood of ACF. This priority calls for leveraging ACF’s Certification efforts, reinventing events and conferences and expanding apprenticeships.

III. To grow and engage our membership, continually assuring relevance in programs, presence and services

Changing demographics and changing member needs require continuous adaptation of membership recruitment and retention efforts. This priority calls for ongoing assessment of member services, redesign of the recruitment process and strengthening of the ACF Chapters.
IV. To modernize our technological resources, emphasizing convenience for members and efficiency for the association

Modernization of technology is not a luxury, but an absolute necessity for ACF to remain relevant and efficient. This priority calls for accelerating the LMS system development and implementation and conducting a Technology Audit to assure ease of use for registration, membership enrollment and renewal and access to information.

V. To streamline the Governance and Structure of the association, assuring performance, continuity and transparency

The structure of the association should support alignment around priorities, decision-making, and association performance. This priority calls for focusing staff efforts on agreed-upon priorities, streamlining the association structure and designing a Future Leaders program to develop the future leaders of ACF.

VI. To assure the ongoing financial viability of the association

Ongoing attention to the financial viability of various programs and activities is imperative. This priority calls for rationalizing current programs, identifying additional ways to generate revenue and emphasizing controlling costs.