



The  
Community  
Alliance of  
Chicagoland  
REALTORS®

*“An alliance that champions professionalism  
and positive change for the real estate  
community in the Chicagoland region.”*

## **Challenge**

Creation of a regional framework for meaningful cooperative activities among contiguous Associations while keeping each Association separate and autonomous is the challenge.

## **Concept**

The Community Alliance of Chicagoland REALTORS® (CACR) is a collaborative venture of four area REALTORS® Associations creating an environment of sharing to better serve the needs of the entire real estate community. The four Associations are: Chicago Association of REALTORS® (CAR), Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS® (MORE), Northshore-Barrington Association of REALTORS® (NSBAR), and REALTORS® Association of Northwest Chicagoland (RANWC). Through combined efforts CACR will provide programs, products and services of higher quality, reaching more members and increasing professionalism. The combined voice will strengthen influence of legislative or regulatory issues and also promote more effectively the image and value of the Realtor®.

## **Philosophy**

The overall philosophy in all discussions, decisions and actions creating the venture is “What is the greater good for all REALTORS® working in the Chicagoland area?” This philosophy and any meaningful effort are only possible through mutual benefit, respect and teamwork.

## **Member Benefits**

The cooperative spirit between Associations leads to faster resolution of issues or concerns from members working across different Association jurisdictions. Large market area firms especially appreciate the coordination. A combined voice on public policy matters – legislative and regulatory - in a highly political city assures Realtor® influence. The coordinated approach to all area media promotes and protects the Realtor® image and strong voice. A broader range of services is available at higher quality to all members. The sharing of staff talents reduces the cost of administrative duplications passing savings on to members.

## **Structure**

After full study of all possibilities the structure selected was an umbrella cooperative organization. Thus CACR is a formal collaborative venture of Associations that serve the greater Chicagoland real estate market.

To be clear, the regional alliance is not about formal structures or governance systems. Rather, it is about information sharing and the creation of an environment for a “community of trusted real estate advisors” which can truly service the needs of the greater real estate community within the Chicagoland area. It is just as much an attitude as an organization.

The choice of the cooperative design as opposed to other options was based upon three key long-term values:

- It enhances services and/or makes them more consistent throughout the region, so it is easier for members to conduct business across jurisdictional borders;
- It provides for external efforts of the Associations and it’s members, to become more effective and influential in the communities they serve;
- It streamlines internal processes and creates efficiencies, which may result in future contained and/or reduced costs.

Participation in any proposed joint project is voluntary by the individual Associations. Any combination of individual Associations can occur for any project. The decision process on participation is up to the individual Association.

Continuous and open discussion on possible shared ventures flows among the Association Executives. In fact, the mutual respect of the AEs for each other is vital for CACR to function. The same cooperative attitude is also necessary for the Leadership of the Associations to assure ongoing success.

## **Purpose**

CACR is an alliance that:

- Addresses those issues and activities which impact the greater Chicagoland region, and which cannot be resolved by the individual, participating associations on their own;
- Has collective clout in the Chicagoland community (as the voice for 32,000+ members) on real estate policy issues;

- Is not a brick and mortar institution, rather it is organized only to the extent that allows CACR to function efficiently and effectively;
- Does not compete with, replace, or supplant the associations which participate in it, however, it may afford them the opportunity to consolidate internal systems (i.e. accounting, database and/or professional standards administration) so that members are served seamlessly with enhanced services and/or reduced costs;
- Has its' own regional brand, which is affiliated with the participating associations;
- Has a website separate from the associations;
- Connects members to each other through social networking/media;
- Connects members to content rich websites related to their businesses;
- Stimulates conversations among practitioners about the challenges, opportunities and trends facing the real estate industry in the Chicagoland region;
- Provides not just regional statistics and data, but analysis of such, which can be utilized by the members to market more effectively to their clients and customers;
- Takes a multi-tiered approach to the delivery of skill-building and relevant education;
- Creates an environmental scanning system that allows the alliance to be proactive on industry and community issues, which impact the region and the needs of membership;
- Develops a rapid response system to critical, regional issues;
- Is fluid, nimble, efficient, effective, and utilizes wisely the resources invested in it by the alliance associations;
- Is a champion of change for all things real estate-related in the region.

### **Original Strategic Goals**

During the original meetings discussing the cooperative concept several overall strategic ideas were advanced. They were:

Create regional efficiencies and increased productivity within internal systems:

- Accounting/Finance services
- Member Database services
- Member data collection and survey
- Human Resource administration
- Internal Communications

- Information Technology infra-structures
- Combined facilities
- Capital equipment and office supply purchases

Identify products and services desired by Realtors® in the region which are better met through shared resources:

- Professional Standards training and administration
- Forms
- Education
- Member Benefits
- Retail

Increase the positive influence of the Realtor® organization within the Chicagoland region:

- Media relations
- Statistics and industry trends (as they apply to the region)
- Website – for members, regional issue specific
- Fair Housing
- Advocacy
- Leadership training
- Economic development
- Community alliances

### **Game Changer Project**

CACR was accepted into the NAR Game Changer Program as an example of collaboration among contiguous Associations while keeping local Associations in place. During CACR meetings a review of all possible actions was conducted and several projects were chosen to aggressively implement. All of them are supported through the Game Changers Project.

They are:

- A broadcast system between associations to enhance communication and provide connectivity
- A Social Media event that will allow members to not only understand “how” it works but also assist them in creating a strategy or business plan for “why” it works. Build a Chicagoland social media community
- Joint media messaging
- Programming that allows the Associations and their staffs to work more efficiently and effectively

- Coordinate and combine advocacy efforts
- Provide funding for a Commercial Summit that will attract and establish CACR as a resource for commercial members
- Work in Professional Standards area. Set up regional panels, consistent training and administration, etc.
- A statistical study of the area. This study could give insight into trends in the area.
- A mobile application for statistics

### **Initiatives Success**

Here are details of initiatives selected.

#### ***Broadcast system:***

Illinois Association of Realtors (IAR) installed a broadcast system, with equipment to receive broadcasts in various Associations around the state. Subsequently, MORE investigated and implemented an enhancement to that system which allows them to not only receive, but also to broadcast. Other Associations are linking in turn.

Applications of the broadcast system for the region include: Push educational instruction, Leadership meetings, topical issues (fair housing, professional standards, membership meetings, political issues), internal video recording, broadcasting to remote locations, record and upload to website. Cost savings occur by having one instructor, one location, and alternative educational platforms as well as one “meeting” for topics.

Technology issues: Bandwidth, portability, individual member / firm capability. Must identify key franchise offices and what technology they possess then determine what we need to do to connect with them. Interface with a Go To Meeting (Go to Web) format. Study Cloud applications that may reduce the costs.

Instructor matters: Intellectual property issue as well as remuneration issues, pay per head (or range), instructional development program, feedback loop, broaden the pool of great instructors, and set up standards for all instructors.

Forward Steps: Tech staff gathers to discuss issues, determine broker bandwidth issues for firms, and identify specific types of uses and schedule,

use with either Social Media program and/or Commercial Summit to promote.

***Social media event:***

The Social Media Event is planned for Summer 2010.

Forward steps: Build event around one keynote speaker. Have 2 – 3 breakout sessions with subject experts. Video key sessions for broadcast. Explore possible Exhibit area. YPN group to plan. Look the Houston program for ideas. Airport location. Attendance goal is 500. Key staff to coordinate and investigate breakouts and RE Bar inclusion.

***Joint media messaging:***

Collaborative media opportunities have taken place since 2009. MORE and CAR did joint program with WBBM radio station. In addition, CACR achieved recognition within the Chicagoland area as a new regional real estate entity, in the Chicago Agent Magazine.

Forward Steps: Develop more topics that can have regional newspaper impact. Improve coordination among the four associations. Ensure both CACR and each individual association get appropriate credit. Meet quarterly to plan at least 1 – 2 media outreach pieces. Keep meetings as virtual as possible.

Long-term strategies: Have strong play off of NAR monthly report/statistics. Improve coordination with MRED (Regional MLS) for coordination of statistics to the media. Use IAR survey and NAR oversampling survey to develop a release. Bid out for possible PR assistance. Develop CACR website pages on each association's site.

***Association staff to work more efficiently and effectively:***

Two Regional Leadership Retreats have been held. Key staff from the four associations meets periodically to set goals, coordinate the logistics, program and budget of the events. Events are promoted appropriately through each individual organization, as well as CACR. Video (as appropriate) of portions of the events are available and placed on the CACR website.

Approach: Utilize online and phone meetings rather than face-to-face. Goal is one joint project per quarter. Internal efficiencies include membership programs and statistics generation.

Key staff areas: Communications, Government Affairs, Technology and Education. More coordination is organized through virtual meetings and quarterly targets for coordination and administration.

***Joint advocacy efforts:***

Organization and coordination among the four Government Affairs Directors was targeted. Specific issues coordination is the target.

Initial issues were: Foreclosure education for elected officials, neighborhood stabilization programs, economic development, FHA lending policies, and monitoring Cook County political activities.

Forward Steps: Get IAR CEO to increase coordination and distribution of information through GADs. (All GADs are IAR employees). Use the Broadcast System to enhance political awareness and actions.

***Commercial Summit:***

The Commercial Summit is planned for 2010. It is timed to coincide with the implementation of the CIE system.

Forward Steps: Have each association send an individual to the Commercial Forum meeting. Networking should be built in. Have as a breakfast / lunch at downtown location. Topic should be Financing with speaker from Washington, DC or New York.

***Regional Professional Standards:***

Two Associations began shared professional standards administration services. One Association now utilizes a professional standards online tool, which was developed by another Association. A regional roster of Professional Standards members was developed for use in inter-board hearings. Regional training of volunteers is organized and planned.

Professional standards administration: Process underway to coordinate a true regional system. (MORe and NSBAR doing now, RANWC and CAR to follow). An in house person will answer phones, organize, etc. Legal costs are escalating and must be contained. Conference call with four AEs and the Director of the statewide Texas Professional Standards Administration Program of the Texas Association of Realtors was held and ideas for implementation gathered.

***Area statistical study:***

The Associations collected and disseminated regional market statistics. An economist was hired to create analytical reports. CACR purchased a regional overrun on NAR's Chicagoland PMSA survey. A regional Economic Forecast event was also held and was webcast to all four Associations.

The new, highly effective IAR research report has now accomplished the goals of CACR in this area. Therefore, this is not a priority going forward.

***Mobile application for statistics:***

Applications are under development now individually at the four Associations. Later comparisons and coordination will be accomplished.

**Other CACR Projects**

***CACR Website:***

The creation of a CACR website to integrate with cooperating Association's websites was accomplished. A logo was created and standards for posting to the site were set. Social media is being used to accomplish buy-in.

***Joint Events:***

In addition to the events mentioned already, a Fair Housing Training program was conducted. Others are being discussed.

**Project Funding**

Game Changers funded the CACR Project for \$100,000. Most of the funds were set for the broadcast system hardware and the educational events. When all are completed the project will be on or below budget.

**Key Success Factors**

The major factor was a total drive for cooperation in every way possible. For the AEs it meant putting egos aside and believing in the greater good. There was also a team spirit among the volunteer leadership of the four Associations to make the alliance work. By far these attitudes were the critical factors for success but there were others that were important.

The coordination of all possible programs, products and services was vital to large brokers whose market footprint crossed over multiple Associations. The assumption was for CACR to yield increased efficiency, lower costs, less conflict on policies, and a reduction of time for volunteer commitments.

All four Associations had been the result of several mergers in the past. So territory and name identity was not a significant issue. Even though the cultures of the Associations were different there were enough similarities (MLS, Professional Standards process, business forms) to build upon. The prior merger of the MLSs into a regional service took away a possible conflict and provided an opportunity to work closely together on everything else. And there was a futuristic realization that the MLS revenue stream would go away in several years anyway.

All Associations were concerned about continually proving value to the members, especially in the challenging market. Market conditions raised questions of dues paid and services received. So the ability to increase services and concentrate on the highest benefit to all the members made the decisions clearer.

### **Significant Obstacles**

There was some resistance from a few Directors that saw a loss of importance of their individual Association. The rise of a crisis – a regional lockbox issue – that required cooperation to resolve changed this early obstacle and became an example of cooperation for other efforts.

For the AEs the possibility of broad sharing could reveal weaknesses in their own management or the program mix for the member from the Association. In actuality the strength of one AE matched the weakness of another so they all were better as executives. The willingness to be open and view each other as partners resolved this obstacle.

### **Surprises**

There was much more cooperation among both leadership and staff specialists than expected. CACR accomplished more than expected in less time that anticipated. Identity of an individual Association was not an issue, especially among brokers. Perhaps this was due to firm consolidation underway among brokerages.

One assumption, that market and business practices differences would create problems, did not develop. The scope of the programs at this new level overcame those fears. A study of membership statistics in the planning stages of many projects helped to focus the program or service also.

### **Suggested Process for Other Associations**

Since trust of AEs is vital, the first step was a meeting of just the AEs to openly and honestly discuss the concept. When that was successful then a meeting of just the Presidents and AEs was held. Again, open discussions on possibilities were the agenda. Options were advanced to keep flexibility.

With a delicate consensus a “test case” was advanced: a joint Leadership Retreat. This event was successful on several levels: a stronger program outright and also a camaraderie building time.

With this initial success each Association advanced \$10,000 to fund investigation into other events and activities in the coordinated field. Also each AE planned for necessary staff time to the coordinated projects – both planning and execution. As more projects are accomplished the staff communications among the Associations are as normal as within one Association.

Next involve the market leading brokers. They understand the evolving history of the Associations and the need to coordinate multiple offices, activities, and cultures. Their concern about overlapping Association jurisdictions impact makes this a winner from their view. Support from them in the background is also very helpful.

The State Association support, especially in the political arena, was absolutely needed. Engage the State Association as an ally and make sure the project is not seen as leverage against the State in any way. CACR has forged a new, stronger relationship with IAR.

### **Replication at Other Associations**

We are convinced that this approach can be successful no matter the size of Associations. Even though our four Associations are contiguous this coordinated approach can be accomplished with non-contiguous Associations. As related above, it is attitude and trust, not geography and structures that determine success.

### **Conclusion**

The CACR is a solid success in extending the services, influence and power of the participating Associations without giving up local autonomy. This delivers the best of both worlds. The members have benefited through the leverage of size while having the special nuances of a separate local community Association. Member firms with larger markets have enjoyed fewer impediments based on jurisdictions. And the continuing co-operative spirit among the staff and leadership will create an even more cohesive and powerful CACR in the future.

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