

# The Development of the African American Cultural Center at NCSU

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## Introduction

An external review of the North Carolina State University's African American Cultural Center (AACC) was completed in November 2000. This was followed by an internal review that was initiated in December 2001 and completed in March 2002. The culmination of each review was the production of a report that identified key issues, stated conclusions about the current status of the AACC's functioning and articulated recommendations for future development. Careful examination and comparison of the two review reports revealed striking similarity in the issues that were identified, the conclusions that were reached and the recommendations that were offered.

In general, the internal and external reviews revealed that the AACC possesses a number of strengths and has achieved noteworthy successes despite challenges posed by a history of under-funding and inadequate resources. As an academic unit that exists under the umbrella of the Provost's Office, the AACC has the potential to become a very powerful force that facilitates the intellectual, cultural and social growth of the entire university community. In order to realize this vast potential, the AACC must become more actively engaged in the academic life of the university. It must provide programs, resources and services that make a meaningful impact on the academic success of African American and other students and faculty while also contributing to the broader community. The reviews agreed that focused attention must be given to issues of governance, long-range planning, internal accountability systems, strategic partnerships and resource development.

On the basis of data derived from the internal and external reviews, the present document provides a summary of the conclusions that were reached in six key areas:

1. Leadership
2. Governance and Management
3. Programming
4. Financial Resources
5. Human Resources
6. Campus and Community Relationships

This report also provides a list of intended actions that address these critical issues.

## Conclusions and Intended Actions

### 1. Leadership

Conclusions: In order to meet its goals, the AACC needs a visionary leader who is able to translate the unit's mission and goals into purposeful and effective action. The reviews found an absence of objective performance standards and clearly defined outcome measures that would be used in assessing the director's effectiveness. Subjective performance indicators suggest that the director has done a great deal to advance the mission of the AACC. As the unit's only director since 1991, she has worked diligently to help the AACC meet its goals. While it is clear that the current director has been a valuable asset to the AACC, she exhibits limitations in some critical administrative and management skills and needs the opportunity to strengthen the skills that will enable her to be a more effective leader.

Action: The development of performance standards and accountability expectations for the AACC director is under way. Progress toward explicit performance goals and objectives is monitored on an on-going basis. There will be periodic assessment of work products and other performance outcomes. Close supervision, administrative coaching and opportunities for professional development will be provided.

### 2. Governance and Management

Conclusions: The reviews found that the AACC's governing body, the Council of Directors (COD), was created to advise the development of policies and programs, monitor AACC operations, assist with securing resources and evaluate the unit's effectiveness. The COD has not functioned in several years, leaving the AACC to operate without adequate oversight. The reviews also cite ineffective administrative and management practices, particularly those associated with internal accountability. The AACC is in need of proper supervision, direction and guidance.

Actions: The process of appointing a new Council of Directors has already begun. This group will be installed during the Fall 2002 semester. This advisory body will be given the responsibility of recommending policies and programs, monitoring AACC operations, assisting with resource development and evaluating the unit's effectiveness. The development of clear and enforceable policies and standard operating procedures for all AACC operations, functions, activities and events is under way.

### 3. Programming

Conclusions: The AACC has presented important and relevant programming during its 11-year life span. However, innovation and long term strategic planning have been limited. There is a lack of systematic program evaluation, an issue that is of particular concern with long standing programs that require significant resources. While new programmatic activities have been added over the years, the AACC's development of holistic, comprehensive, co-curricular programs has been limited.

The reviews also concluded that the AACC has met limited success in its efforts to engage the entire University and the broader community in its programs, activities and events. Inadequate marketing strategies and ineffective promotional activities lead to low turn out and poor participation. Subsequently, many excellent AACC activities and events go unnoticed by both campus constituents and the broader community.

Actions: The AACC is in the process of re-designing its programmatic offerings so that they can be "re-packaged" into cohesive units that can be effectively marketed, promoted and evaluated. New strategic planning efforts are focusing on the creation of innovative programs that include a wide array of activities and events designed to engage the entire University community while furthering the AACC's mission. The effectiveness of all programming efforts will be systematically assessed and evaluation information will inform program improvement initiatives. Ineffective programs will be eliminated. The AACC will undertake academically oriented activities such as sponsoring intra- and inter-university research conferences featuring the work of faculty and students (both graduate and undergraduate) or producing a literary or scholarly publication that features campus and community contributors.

### 4. Financial Resources

Conclusions: The AACC was under-funded from its inception and has struggled with inadequate financial resources since it opened. The reviews revealed inconsistent financial accountability standards and an absence of strategic financial planning, problems that can contribute to ineffective fiscal decision-making. The AACC needs to expand its base of financial support.

Actions: Budget planning for the 2002-03 fiscal year seeks to re-allocate current funding. Ineffective programs and management practices will be eliminated or

significantly modified. Increased support will be applied to maintaining and improving only the most effective programs and practices. Fiscal accountability standards are under revision. Financial goals and objectives are being specified and a strategic approach for pursuing external funds is being developed.

## 5. Human Resources

Conclusions: The AACC needs sufficient staff to enable proper operation of the unit. This staff must be properly directed and supervised. The reviews found a lack of clearly stated performance expectations, detailed work plans and consistently enforced accountability standards, particularly for part time, temporary and student employees. Because of these deficits, AACC staff frequently failed to complete job tasks effectively and in a timely manner. The integrity of the AACC is further compromised by the employment of individuals who don't have the qualifications, skills and experience base necessary to meet the demands of the unit's work. The AACC's human resource must be carefully cultivated and given proper guidance. Staff members should be held accountable for job-related tasks and responsibilities.

Actions: Future AACC staffing decisions will address the identified needs of the unit such that positions are filled with individuals who have the qualifications, skills and experience base needed to effectively accomplish the specified work. The AACC is developing guidelines and standards that govern the use and function of part time, temporary and student employees. Clearly stated job expectations will form the basis for necessary employee performance evaluations.

## 6. Campus and Community Relations

Conclusions: The AACC cannot flourish without the active engagement and involvement of others. While the AACC has formed productive partnerships with numerous entities both on and off campus, there is a need for more. There also appears to be a need for the AACC to improve the quality of its relationships, some of which have been frustrated by problems that are associated with inadequate long-range planning. Both reviews concluded that the AACC must develop outreach initiatives that are designed to establish partnerships that may yield valuable resources and higher levels of participation by campus and community constituents.

Actions: The AACC is pursuing additional strategic linkages, both on and off campus. These partnerships will be cemented by written agreements that outline what the parties are seeking to accomplish through the collaboration, what each party contributes and how each party will benefit. These agreements will provide reference points for determining the success of the partnerships. Such linkages will be developed with each of NCSU's 10 colleges and other critical University units such as Africana Studies, Career Planning and Placement, First Year College, Honors Program, International Affairs and Multicultural Student Affairs. The AACC will also seek to strengthen relationships with faculty and students from African countries. Strategies are being developed to involve current and former NCSU athletes in AACC outreach efforts.

### Closing Thoughts

It is imperative that the AACC retain its identity as an African American Cultural Center. A fully functioning African American Cultural Center is indispensable to NCSU's current mission with its stated goals of "building a diverse and inclusive campus community, fostering demographic and intellectual diversity, fostering internal and external partnerships and adopting an operational model that embraces efficiency and accountability". To these ends, a concerted effort is being made to strengthen the AACC to the benefit of the University and the broader community.