


Positioning ASA AND THE STAFFING INDUSTRY for the Future

The association's top priority is serving members and representing the industry, no matter the circumstances—economic, political, or otherwise. That's why **ASA leadership and new taskforces have been working hard to lay the groundwork to ensure continued success.** The result is an expansive strategic plan. **Here's a brief look at how all will benefit.**

By Steven P. Berchem, CSP



A photograph of a paved road stretching into the distance, with the years 2018 through 2025 painted in white on the asphalt. The road curves to the right and leads into a lush green field under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. A large, stylized yellow graphic is positioned at the bottom of the page.

Two years ago, ASA staff began working with the association's board of directors to deepen member engagement and get ahead of the next possible economic recession and its potential impact on the industry and the association.

The entire membership was surveyed to determine how to better align the association with members' business interests. The responses were noteworthy: More than 1,300 replied, including 499 staffing company owners, chief executives, other c-suite executives, and divisional or regional leaders. The survey results revealed 25 key up-at-night issues. Five taskforces composed of board members, corporate partners, industry leaders, and ASA senior staff were convened to analyze, evaluate, and discuss the survey outcomes. Each taskforce was charged with specific fact-finding and strategic-thinking objectives, resulting in the ideation and consideration of 42 major activities and 18 potential initiatives. In the end, the taskforces developed—and the board approved—a strategic roadmap for 2016 through 2018 that focuses on one goal. >>>

The main goal of the association—and the goal upon which the strategic plan is built—is to position the industry as **an essential driver of workforce innovation, economic growth, and public policy solutions.**

Focusing on One Core Goal

There's something to be said for keeping it simple: the main goal of the strategic plan is to position the industry as an essential driver of workforce innovation, economic growth, and public policy solutions.

The board and taskforce members agreed that the association should focus on offering constructive solutions to workforce issues that expand and enhance the industry's public policy and advocacy role at the national and international levels. It's important for the association to engage thought leaders from diverse communities and disciplines to develop innovative workforce solutions to meet the needs of ASA members, workers, and businesses.

ASA will promote the industry and the value of staffing company services to clients, workers, and the public. The association and its members will work together to create a solution-focused public identity for the industry that better reflects the association's expanded mission and the broadening scope of members' services.

To reinforce the foundation of these ambitions, ASA will help enhance operational excellence within the industry—to deliver higher quality services and improve efficiencies. That means more and better education, elevated content, and greater professionalism.

Accomplishing these objectives, will require the association to develop more and better market intelligence, research, and data, and improve industry understanding of technology trends to foster innovation and adoption.

The association's new strategic plan aligns with the ASA mission: To serve as the voice of the staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions industry. ASA advances the interests of the industry through advocacy, research, education, and the promotion of high standards of legal,

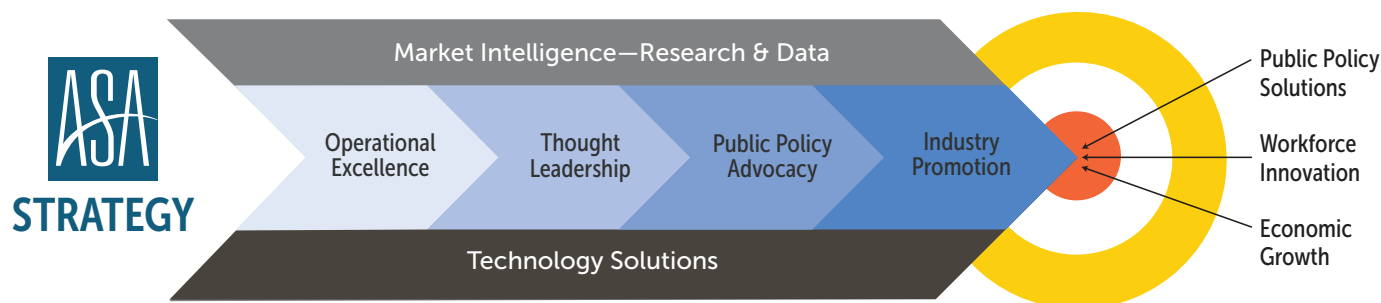
ethical, and professional practices. In positioning the industry as an essential driver of workforce innovation, economic growth, and public policy solutions, the strategic plan shifts the association's perspective from one of self-preservation to one of expansive altruism. ASA leadership moved from bracing for a defensive posture to huddling over an offensive playbook.

Dovetailing the Objectives

As illustrated in the ASA Strategy diagram below, the plan's objectives dovetail in alignment toward the goal. Operational excellence comes first. The industry must deliver top quality service to be credible in driving solutions. Top quality elevates industry credibility in offering thought leadership and advocating public policy. And quality service allows for industry promotion. All of these objectives require market intelligence and technology solutions to succeed in achieving the strategic plan's goal.

Operational Excellence. The plan calls for developing strategic and high level educational programs offering innovative workforce solutions to assist members in exceling operationally and professionally. An operational excellence taskforce is identifying key challenges, knowledge gaps, opportunities, solutions, and target audiences. An educational academy has been envisioned to create new knowledge-sharing opportunities and platforms for industry professionals from the c-suite to branch managers. The taskforce will explore possible new certification programs in sales, operational excellence, account management, and leadership development.

ASA is organizing all publications and webinar recordings on its website into four topical pillars: Hiring Internal Talent and Leading People, Business Management and Administration; Revenue



Retention and Growth; and Compliance and Risk Management. This will facilitate new ways to make the content easier to search and use.

ASA continues to develop new content, too. For example, indemnification remains a top legal issue, so the association's legal team led the creation of the ASA Indemnity Tool Kit (*americanstaffing.net/indemnity*) containing information and resources on why certain client demands are inappropriate when it comes to contracts and other agreements. Also launched this year: the Safety Standard of Excellence program, an initiative of ASA and the National Safety Council designed to help prevent and reduce the rate of temporary worker injuries, illnesses, and fatalities through the adoption of best practices and the encouragement of continuous safety improvement (*americanstaffing.net/safety*).

Thought Leadership. The strategic plan emphasizes that ASA support and promote thought leadership, research, and innovation to identify current and future workforce and labor market challenges and develop effective total talent supply chain management and overall workforce solutions. A thought leadership taskforce is identifying key challenges, knowledge gaps, opportunities, solutions, and target audiences. It will assess needs and resources, for example data relating to job seeker demographics, trends, and worker preference; trends in client service needs, by sector; and global socioeconomic trends.

ASA recently has participated in several Future of Work conferences held by the U.S. Department of Labor to ensure that the staffing industry's point of view is conveyed to thought leaders. ASA also, by invitation, recently presented the methodology behind the ASA Staffing Index at a federal statistical policy conference.

Meanwhile, the association has been working on a lexicon of industry terms to help define the staffing industry as well as reflect how the industry wants to be understood. Other industry thought leadership initiatives include creating a Women in Leadership taskforce and convening both a Chief Information Officer Roundtable and a Managed Services Forum.

ASA is also enhancing relationships with influential thought leadership communities outside of the industry, such as Jobs for America's Graduates and the National Urban League. For example, ASA president and chief executive officer Richard Wahlquist was recently elected to the JAG board of directors, a large cadre of state governors and multinational corporate executives (*americanstaffing.net/JAG*).

Public Policy Advocacy. In addition to promoting thought leadership, ASA is expanding public policy advocacy. This entails pinpointing current and emerging policy, legal, legislative, and regulatory issues for the industry to deliver ongoing guidance that creates opportunities to offer workforce solutions, and identifying opportunities for the industry to serve as the primary source for workforce solutions and related resources for employers and workers as well as state and federal regulators and legislators.

Again this year, ASA has made a big difference on several major public affairs issues.

On the new overtime rules, ASA published timely guidance explaining the legal and operational implications and arranged for a top U.S. Department of Labor expert and a leading employment lawyer to conduct educational sessions at Staffing World® 2016 in October. After the convention, a former head of the DOL wage and hour division conducted a webinar in early November to help staffing firms prepare for the Dec. 1 effective date.

ASA has continued its temporary worker safety initiatives including efforts to educate regulators on the unique compliance challenges staffing firms face. In October, ASA and the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration renewed their alliance that began in 2014 to promote the health and safety of temporary workers. ASA also continues its important work in the areas of joint employment and the Affordable Care Act at the federal level.

At the state and local level—ASA has been actively engaged in dozens of proposals in more than a dozen jurisdictions covering a wide range of issues affecting how staffing firms operate. Some of the major ones include

- “Right to know” (also called “wage theft”) provisions that mandate what and when staffing firms have to tell temporary workers about their wages and other terms and conditions of employment
- Predictive scheduling proposals that require staffing firms to provide advance notice of temporary assignments
- Paid leave mandates for employee illnesses or to care for family members
- Assignment limits that prohibit use of temporary employees beyond specified periods
- Workers’ compensation—one proposal, in Rhode Island, would have stripped away client protection from employee negligence suits for workplace injuries if the client acted “recklessly”
- Sales and other taxes—ASA is working to repeal or reduce the sales tax on temporary services in



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In line with the strategic plan, **ASA has expanded its research offerings for members.** The new **Staffing Operations Benchmarking Survey** and **Staffing Compensation & Benefits Survey** both aim to help staffing companies **improve their operations.**

Ohio and ASA joined with Oregon businesses in successfully defeating a new gross receipts tax in that state

Industry Promotion. With an emphasis on both job seekers and staffing clients, ASA is positioning and promoting the staffing industry as leading providers of talent and innovative workforce solutions, as among the best places to work and find work with job opportunities at all stages of worker careers, and as experts on labor market issues and trends. The No. 1 up-at-night issue facing ASA members is filling the talent pipeline—for both external assignments and internal corporate positions. ASA is helping with both.

This year ASA has been testing messages to determine those most effective in getting workers to consider employment through a staffing company. What would it take to get them to fill out an application? And what messages would be most effective in getting their friends, families, and closest advisers to consider staffing employment?

ASA also is providing tools to help staffing companies fill their internal talent pipelines. The association's Staffing as a Career website (*staffing-as-a-career.net*) showcases a video that speaks to new or up-and-coming college graduates with messages about working *inside* the staffing industry. Member staffing companies can also list internships and management training programs on that website, so that interested candidates can reach them directly.

Another initiative is aimed directly at a specific talent shortage within staffing companies: the RightSkill Recruiter Program, which was developed in collaboration between ASA and its corporate partner CareerBuilder.

The RightSkill Recruiter Program delivers a new pool of qualified, career-minded, entry-level staffing recruiters. This innovative collaboration promotes staffing as a profession—changing the way firms find, hire, and train their internal talent. RightSkill creates a new supply of job-ready talent (*americanstaffing.net/rightskill*).

Market Intelligence. The board created a market intelligence taskforce to foster innovation and research. To learn what research already exists, the taskforce's first initiative was to conduct a scan of the economic literature to determine current knowledge gaps in the staffing industry and what to fill, to curate data for exceptional insight, and to create a clearinghouse of quality data on the total talent supply chain.

ASA contracted a well-regarded econometric consulting firm, which concluded that while

there's a lot of research published about the industry, there's a dearth of good data. The consultants made recommendations for how ASA might work with government and academia to improve the quality of data used by the industry and by policy makers.

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Technology Solutions. Finally, in the up-at-night issues survey, large majorities of executives and managers alike expressed interest in learning more about technology to drive sales, to create new solutions with clients and tech firms, and to participate in peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. Technology solutions cross several strategic objectives, particularly market intelligence, thought leadership, and operational excellence.

The taskforces will be working with ASA staff to inform the industry of automation and tech trends, to develop thought leadership forums and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing to engage and embrace change, and to link technology and automation to the total talent supply chain.

Planning Next Steps

The association has executed much of the strategic plan this year, but there is much more to do next year and beyond.

Under the leadership of Susie Dietrich, the new board chairman who has been deeply involved with the strategic plan since its inception, the association will continue to work toward positioning the industry as an essential driver of workforce innovation, economic growth, and public policy solutions. ■

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