

CEO SUCCESSION SERIES • ARTICLE 1

Opportunities for AMCs

CEO transitions mark the perfect moment to build relationships and foster trust in the AMC management model.

Every CEO transition—and even the succession planning that may precede it—is an opportunity for associations to assess and reset. For AMCs, association transitions are also opportune moments, with the chance to offer support, relieve pressures boards may feel, and instill trust in AMC management beginning before an RFP is issued.

Recently four interviews conducted by Vetted Solutions explored roles and opportunities for AMCs during stand-alone association CEO transitions. Participants were

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

- Carrie Hartin, President, MCI USA Association Solutions
- Thayer Long, Executive Vice President, Industrial and Manufacturing, Kellen
- Fred Stringfellow, Executive Vice President, Etherio Association Management
- Chris Strong, Nonprofit Management Specialist and Interim Executive Director

Their insights emphasize opportunities to clarify and build trust in the management model, and the interviews will help to inform deeper research and an AMC Institute report planned for early 2027.

Supporting Transitions

When transition is imminent or in progress, playing an advisory or interim-services role delivers value and lays groundwork for the possibility of future business for an AMC. “When working with a board in transition, we try to get the board to slow down,” explains Hartin. “Transition is an opportunity. It is a good time to ask: Where are we going? What skills and capacities do we need?”

Strong agrees. In his interim roles, including one in which he helped an association transition to AMC management, he encourages the board to ask questions and use the answers to develop objectives for the CEO transition. For example: “Where have we come during the CEO’s tenure? What do we need to achieve our future objectives?”

Stringfellow adds this: When invited to discuss transition with a board, conducting a RACI (responsibility assignment matrix exercise) is a great starting point for a relationship. It helps clarify board, staff, and CEO responsibilities and can also identify gaps that need a staffing solution, for example, that frees the board for more strategic focus. Transition is a good time to reset.”

Another way in which an AMC can support a CEO transition is by clarifying the management model and the forms collaboration can take in terms that resonate with boards. For example, Long notes, *fractional staffing* is a relatable term for a board that may not know what an AMC does and the various forms a relationship can take. Additionally, he says, “Boards like to hear that the AMC presents successors when new staff are needed. “The process is less disruptive, and continuity of service and attention to strategic objectives is enhanced.”

Observing optimal conditions

The chance to apply an association’s financial resources more effectively is a strong motivator for board attention. At the association Strong helped move to AMC management, for instance, it became clear that for the money the organization was spending, it could gain greater access to broad, first-class association management expertise, as well as specialized operational capacities in areas such as IT, finance, and human resources. “If you have one or two people, that’s what you have in skillsets, whereas in an AMC, you might get access to six or seven people with a wider range of skillsets for the same money.”

Among other key conditions:

- A board might recognize that the association is falling behind on AI, for example, and an AMC is better positioned to keep pace because its investments are scaled beyond a single association.
- A business model may need rethinking or realignment. Hartin, for example, notes that associations with revenue dependency too tipped to a single business line sometimes look to AMCs to help them develop sustainable new strategies and offerings.
- A board might see that its association has become overly dependent on the institutional knowledge vested in the CEO and staff. Hartin says, “They realize they need to be more resilient,” and an organizational structure that can access and apply more resources as needed, sustain consistency of service delivery and related documentation, and engineer succession are huge benefits.
- Volunteers want to apply their limited time to impactful work. Consequently, as Long explains, a compelling message is that “we are going to unburden you of staffing and operational issues.” Adds Stringfellow, “Volunteers don’t volunteer to get involved with managing those issues.”

Exploring primary opportunities

Interviewees agreed that this is an opportune time for AMCs. They cited these primary opportunities:

- Look for chances to relieve the pressure many associations feel to sustain investments, for instance, in cybersecurity.
- Emphasize the ability to access expertise and experience to a greater degree than many stand-alones.
- Promote seamless staffing solutions and succession support—the message resonates with boards that do not relish needing to conduct a new executive search every several years.
- Offer advisory or interim capacities during organizational transitions to provide value and create a test of the model that could lead to deeper engagement.
- Support startups. “A segment might be breaking away from a larger group or emerging from a fast-moving industry,” says Hartin, “and AMCs can provide assistance with the startup and management.” Adds Long, “For the AMC industry, the growth opportunity is in growing the pie. The next evolution is identifying opportunities to create associations. AMCs have all the infrastructure in place, are good incubators, and can scale.”

ABOUT THE SERIES

Vetted Solutions and the AMC Institute are collaborating on a research series that explores three entry points where standalone associations are most likely to consider an AMC: CEO succession, integrated (hybrid) management, and consultative services. Interviews and case studies on CEO succession will inform a full AMC Institute report planned for early 2027.