

Associational Design for the Future

Introduction:

The Baptist Association has been undergoing both incremental as well as radical change for at least fifty years. However, the association of the past and present is not and cannot be the association of the future. The Association of the future has been emerging over the last five to six years. Here are the basic elements of what the association of the future looks like and describe how it functions.

Basic Premise:

There are two key concepts that drive the association of the future.

1. The association is not a church. Only the church is a church and thus as ordained by God has the responsibility to fulfill and carry out the functions of the church. All other organizations are Para church and therefore by their very nature exist for some other role and function.
2. The role and function of the association is to assist, support and resource the unique, God-given vision of the churches to carry out the Great Commission. Thus, the role of the association is to “assist,” not “do.” Churches do, associations assist and resource.

The Association of the Future:

The organizations of the future need to be fast, flexible, focused and friendly. What does this mean?

1. Fast: the association of the future must be in a position to respond to the needs of churches quickly. What is the process, and how long does it take to authorize the expenditure of \$500 related to a need of one of its churches? The association of the future will be in a position to respond almost immediately upon receiving requests from their churches.
2. Flexible: flexibility is closely connected to “fast.” Associations of the future need a streamlined organization that allows flexibility and speed of delivery to respond to new and emerging opportunities. A team-based organizational structure can provide this kind of a system.
3. Focused: the focused association is one that knows who it is, what its mission is, and knows the future picture of what they want the association to look like. This involves establishing appropriate core values, mission and vision. The association of the future is built and organized around priorities, not programs. These priorities often include church health, church planting, leadership development, and others. These associations know what they can do and deliver and what they cannot do and cannot deliver. They do not try to be best at everything but determine what they can do best and focus on it.
4. Friendly: do the churches find the association ready and able to provide assistance and resourcing at the point of need in a timely fashion? Is the association the first choice of its churches, or do they look elsewhere for help? The association of the future will be relevant by knowing the needs of its churches and providing resource help in a relevant, timely, and friendly manner.

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The association of the future is interested in measuring real results that focus only on significant areas of associational work. These focus on four key indicators of Kingdom impact.

- Are the churches reaching people (penetrating lostness)? Measured by baptisms
- Are the churches keeping people? Measured by church attendance. If the church is losing people it may indicate a leadership issue.
- Are the churches discipling people? Measured by stewardship. If the people are growing spiritually they will also be giving.
- Are the churches involved in Kingdom impact? Measured by partnerships you have outside the congregation. This includes mission endeavors, partnering with other congregations for church planting, and possibly global partnerships.

The association of the future is going to resource its churches in ways that will enable them to be more effective in reaching the lost, develop disciples and leaders, and involve them in kingdom partnerships. When the association focuses on these areas, they become relevant to their churches and will have the potential to experience exponential growth.

Article, above, adapted from a position paper by the Associational Initiatives Team,
North American Mission Board in 2005

Prairie Partners Baptist Association Design for the Future

What is Prairie Partner's Design for the Future? We have been attempting to use this organization style since 2005 (fast, flexible, focused and friendly). However, duties and meetings out of the area have sometimes prevented us to be present when churches have asked/needed.

The changes we are making will help us be more focused. Pastors have shown the desire to have association leaders who are "encouragers." This may not fit the personality profile of a Church Starter. Also, we will help a future NAMB/DBC "Church Starter Strategist" by freeing them up to focus on church starting.

Church Health, Church Evangelism, Missions Education, Worship, Prayer and Fellowship can all be a part of our associational focus if we want. These areas of ministry must be led by committed volunteers, as there will no longer be a full time, paid, missionary. We will need to discover and focus on church needs to help grow healthy, kingdom-minded churches.

Let's look at this opportunity to design our future with a positive attitude and renewed appreciation for God's gift of Prairie Partners Baptist Association.

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Prairie Partners Baptist Association

