

Request for Proposals

Strategic planning consultant

Release Date: Jul 13, 2026

Closing Date: Aug 14, 2026

Tentative start date: August, 2026



Introduction

The Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) is a registered not-for-profit cooperative. Started in 2000 by the region's organic farmers and processors, ACORN has effectively become the "Voice of Organics for Atlantic Canada," serving as a network for those who are engaged with regional food systems, from seed to farmer to consumer.

ACORN works to grow and strengthen the organic and ecological agriculture sector across Atlantic Canada. ACORN convenes established and aspiring farmers, provincial organizations, researchers, processors, and advocates to support collaboration, knowledge sharing, and sector development. ACORN plays a unique role as the only pan-Atlantic organic network. ACORN works closely with provincial organizations and stakeholders to facilitate cross-provincial coordination, sector-wide engagement and program delivery.

ACORN is seeking a strategic planning consultant to support the development of a 3–5 year strategic roadmap for ACORN, to guide the organization's role in strengthening the organic agriculture sector across Atlantic Canada. This initiative will focus on defining ACORN's role and strategic priorities and does not aim to prescribe sector-wide production or market outcomes.

Vision

ACORN aims to enhance the viability and growth of the Atlantic Canadian organic sector through a unified regional network.

Mission

ACORN is a non-profit organization that promotes organic sector by:

- Facilitating information exchange between and amongst organizations and individuals;
- Coordinating non-formal education for producers through to consumers;
- Networking with all interested parties both regionally and nationally.

Background

As a small organization serving four Atlantic provinces, ACORN operates with limited staff capacity and an engaged volunteer board. Board members have played an active role in supporting both governance and organizational operations, allowing ACORN to sustain programming while navigating changing member needs. As the organization approaches its next chapter, there is a clear need to strengthen organizational capacity and establish a clear strategic direction. The ACORN team is seeking a roadmap to further increase financial stability and capacity while effectively supporting and serving the organic sector. This strategic planning process will help ACORN clarify its role, priorities, and capacity in a way that is realistic, focused, and aligned with sector needs.

Project Purpose

ACORN is undertaking a strategic planning initiative to:

- Clarify ACORN's role and strategic priorities over the next 3–5 years.
- Assess ACORN's organizational capacity and identify priority areas for growth, focus, or reduction.
- Recommend a realistic organizational and financial sustainability approach, including revenue diversification priorities aligned with ACORN's mission and capacity.
- Identify strategic partnership opportunities that strengthen ACORN's impact.
- Develop a practical implementation roadmap with measurable impact indicators
- Establish practical and measurable indicators of success to accompany roadmap activities

The final result will be an evidence-based strategic roadmap to guide ACORN's future activities, and strengthen its next 20-year chapter.

Nature and Scope of Work

The consultant will support a collaborative process, working closely with ACORN staff and board throughout to design and deliver the strategic planning process. Responsibilities will include:

Process Design

- Design strategic planning methodology
- Refine engagement approach
- Develop consultation framework
- Support survey design and data collection approach

Facilitation & Engagement

- Facilitate board visioning session(s)
- Host key informant long-form interviews (approx. 15-20 conversations)
- Facilitate in-person stakeholder consultation (1-2)
- Engage value-chain stakeholders (farmers, processors, distributors, retailers) to inform ACORN's strategic direction
- Support synthesis discussions

Research & Analysis

- Review ACORN's current funding structure and identify opportunities for diversification and long-term sustainability
- Review sector landscape and background materials
- Analyze consultation and survey findings
- Identify themes, opportunities, and constraints
- Develop strategic options

Project Roles

This project will follow a collaborative delivery model, with ACORN leading coordination and engagement, and the consultant providing facilitation, analysis, and strategic guidance.

ACORN will:

- Lead communications and promotion of the planning process
- Support with connections to stakeholders
- Support consultant with logistics and coordination across provinces
- Help administer sector survey
- Support background research
- Provide sector context
- Engage members and key informants; input on key deliverables
- Manage project timeline
- Collaborate on direction and decision-making
- Support with convening several in-person meetings

Consultant will:

- Guide planning methodology
- Facilitate strategic discussions
- Analyze engagement findings
- Draft strategic framework in collaboration with ACORN staff and board
- Support final plan development

Deliverables

- Strategic planning process design
- Facilitation of feedback/visioning session(s)
- Draft 3–5 year strategic roadmap / High-level implementation roadmap (Years 1–3)
- Define priorities and strategic directions
- Implementation plan aligned with ACORN's capacity and role
- Simple impact monitoring framework (5–8 measures)
- Engagement summary report (consultations + survey findings)
- Present the strategic plan to the ACORN board for feedback and discussion
- Provide final written report

*This is not intended to be a detailed financial model, but rather a practical framework to support more stable and diversified revenue over time.

Timeline *Proposed timeline, details to be discussed.

August - September 2026

- Consultant engagement
- Planning design

September – December 2026

- Regional consultations
- Stakeholder & board engagement

December 2026 – February 2027

- Sector roundtable discussions
- Analysis and synthesis

February – March 2027

- Draft and finalize strategic plan
- Visioning session
- Solicit feedback and facilitate final consultations on Draft final strategic plan at ACORN's annual conference

Final deliverable due: March 31, 2027

Desired Qualifications

ACORN is seeking a consultant with:

- Experience working in collaborative or participatory planning processes
- Experience facilitating strategic planning processes
- Experience supporting nonprofit financial sustainability or revenue diversification (asset)
- Experience with nonprofit or sector-based organizations
- Knowledge of agriculture, food systems, or organic sector (asset)
- Experience with stakeholder engagement
- Strong facilitation skills
- Experience working across regions or networks
- Ability to synthesize qualitative and quantitative input
- Strong report writing skills

Proposal Requirements

Proposals should include:

1. Consultant overview
2. Relevant experience
3. Proposed approach / methodology
4. Timeline
5. Budget breakdown
6. Description of how the consultant will work collaboratively with ACORN staff and board throughout the process (optional but encouraged)
7. Examples of similar work (optional but encouraged)
8. References (2–3)

Maximum length: 7 pages

Budget

Total project budget: \$14,000- \$15,000 (excluding approved travel expenses and applicable taxes). Proposals should include a detailed budget demonstrating a focused, practical planning approach.

Proposals should include:

- Consultant fees
- Estimated hours
- Travel (if applicable)
- Facilitation costs
- Applicable taxes
- Any additional expenses

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- Relevant experience
- Understanding of project goals
- Quality and practicality of the proposed engagement methodology
- Facilitation approach
- Budget/value
- Timeline feasibility
- Demonstrated ability to work within a collaborative planning process

Submission Details + Points of Contact

Full proposals should be in PDF format and include:

- Cover Letter + Resume
- Proposed project budget including time management outline with hourly rate
- Three professional references
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Proposals must be received by **August 14 by 5 pm Atlantic time**. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that their proposal is received in its entirety by the specified date and time. Proposals should be submitted in digital format to acornoffice@acornorganic.org

Subject line:

ACORN Strategic Planning RFP Submission

Questions may be directed to:

acornoffice@acornorganic.org

Interviews will take place the week of August 17. We will contact all shortlisted candidates by that time. If you have not heard from us by the end of that week, please accept our sincere thanks for your time & interest.