



CIRPA/ACPRI

Canadian Institutional
Research and
Planning Association

Association canadienne
de planification et de
recherche institutionnelles

Describe the purpose of the organization.

The mission of the Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Association (CIRPA) is to promote effective planning and institutional research in support of informed decision-making in Canadian post-secondary education. To this end, the Association encourages cooperation on institutional research/planning practices and projects, information sharing, and professional development.

Describe the constituents and size of the organization – include geographical region, institutions represented, intended audience, home site (if there is one), mailing address, and contact information.

CIRPA members comprise almost 250 professionals from across Canada with about 55% from the university sector, 30% from colleges and 15% from government or private business. Geographically, the association has a representative membership based on population and numbers of institutions.

CIRPA is comprised solely of volunteers. The best way to contact the organization is through the web site at www.cirpa-acpri.ca, choose your language of choice and select the 'Executive' or 'Bureau de direction'.

A short history of the organization – when did it start, who were the initial members, significant milestones etc.

Canadian practice of institutional research grew from the recognized value of the activity, primarily in the United States of America, where institutions needed to have a better understanding of their operations. One of the major differences between Canadian offices and US offices is that education falls under provincial legislation in Canada and therefore reporting requirements differ across the nation. The scope of national reporting by institution varies and often this responsibility is decentralized to various operational units (e.g. registrar's offices for student information). However, institutional research offices retain a central repository of information and in essence develop and house the institutional memory.

Larger Canadian universities were the first to develop an institutional research function. As these institutions leveraged the value of the new offices, other universities and colleges also developed similar units. Professionals in these offices typically attended the AIR forum as their primary source of professional development and networking although there were some informal regional associations in existence in various parts of Canada. However, at a Western Canadian regional conference in 1989, delegates from across Canada discussed the possibility of forming a national organization. Meetings followed where it was determined that there was indeed a critical mass of institutional researchers in Canada. It was resolved that an annual conference should be organized, about 6 months after the annual AIR Forum.

The first Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Conference took place in Ottawa (Canada's capital city) in November 1991. Joseph Lloyd-Jones (University of Ottawa) was the conference chair and was supported a program committee consisting of other long time institutional researchers: Lise Tremblay (Concordia University), John Cousineau (BC Research Council), Thelma Lussier (University of Manitoba) and Brian Christie (Dalhousie University). The first conference was a great success attracting 141 delegates. A journal of conference

proceedings was published that exceeded 400 pages (ISBN 0-9696088-0-2). Moreover, delegates overwhelmingly voted in favour of repeating the process and holding a conference approximately 16 months later, this time on Canada's west coast in the city of Vancouver.

Barrie Dubray (University of Saskatchewan) chaired the 2nd conference committee and another stellar program was presented in March 1993. Keynote speakers included Dr. Brian Segal, publisher of *Maclean's Magazine* and senior vice-president of Maclean Hunter Canadian Publishing Co., Dr. François Tavenas, Vice-Principal (Planning) at McGill University, and Gary Mullins, Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology in British Columbia. Ann Dowsett-Johnston, education editor of *Maclean's*, addressed the delegates and defended the recently introduced *Maclean's* University Rankings to an often less than hospitable crowd. As electronic publication capability improved, and in an attempt to promote an environmentally sustainable medium (years before our time), the newly developing organization supported and promoted electronic communications as the preferred mode of communication. Proceedings for the 2nd conference were published online starting in 1993 (www.cirpa-acpri.ca, click on language of choice and then 'Conferences'). All subsequent conferences proceedings are available online.

Delegates attending the Vancouver conference overwhelmingly voted in favour of proceeding with forming a national organization. A committee was formed to pursue the formalization of the organization. Brian Christie (Dalhousie), Lise Tremblay (Concordia) and Jeffrey Holmes (SSHRC) drafted a constitution and laid out a process for incorporation. In August 1994 at the 3rd national conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, delegates accepted the proposal to form a national committee and the first executive was elected. Members of the first executive of the organization were:

- President, Barrie Dubray, University of Saskatchewan
- Vice-President, Jean-Pierre Adam, University of Quebec
- Treasurer, Thelma Lussier, University of Manitoba
- 1995 Conference Program Chair, Garry Milton, Concordia University
- Members At Large:
 - Paul Chancey, Memorial University
 - Jeff Donnelly, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
 - Doug Lynd, Statistics Canada
 - Alison McNeill-Hordern, Brandon University
 - Walter Wattamaniuk, Simon Fraser University

The new executive set out to formalize the association and advance the study of institutional research in Canada, recognizing the wide geographic dispersion and population of the potential membership across the country. As a result, the mandate of the organization needed to be reasonably broad and therefore incorporated "planning" into its constitution and name. Hence the organization was incorporated as the Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Association (CIRPA) and in French as l'association canadienne de planification et de recherche institutionnelles (ACPRI). A single web site domain name was chosen, i.e., www.cirpa-acpri.ca recognizing both official languages in Canada.

The new association's executive soon realized that federal legislation required an annual general meeting and although this could be conducted electronically, it made eminent sense to coordinate the annual general meeting in conjunction with the annual conference. In order to respect the meeting and work cycles of IR professionals, October was chosen as the optimal time for the annual meeting and conference.

Description of programs and services provided, including conferences and their timing.

CIRPA has moved to conduct as much business electronically as possible. Conference proceedings are published electronically (in the language in which they are received) while elections and other correspondence are conducted electronically through the web site www.cirpa-

acpri.ca . A quarterly newsletter is published in both official languages (accessible through the website) and it is announced through the use of the CIRPA listserv.

CIRPA conferences are typically held in the month of October at cities across Canada. The conferences typically alternate between Western, Central and Eastern Canada. Moreover, CIRPA has held 2 joint conferences with regional AIR affiliate groups.

The annual conference is the premier event for the association where member presentations are the mainstay of networking and display of professional work. Internationally renowned keynote speakers address an exuberant crowd of delegates from across Canada. CIRPA has developed a strong slate of pre-conference workshops that have developed to meet the needs of the membership. Workshops have included: Introduction to MS Access, Excel, SPSS, data mining techniques, dashboards, reporting and analysis of results from the National Survey of Student Engagement, strategic enrolment management and policy development. CIRPA has an established Data Advisory Committee that collaborates with national data collection agencies (primarily Statistics Canada) and maintains an active voice with government through the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) as well as media such as the Maclean's Magazine (University Rankings) and the Globe & Mail (Canadian University Report). CIRPA promotes strong alliances with the Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) as well as other organization such as the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) and the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS). CIRPA continues to respond to the needs of its members by incorporating post-conference workshops or special interest group meetings where delegates have the opportunity to discuss details of current research with leading experts in the field. CIRPA has also sent several delegates to the annual AIR Data Policy Institute. CIRPA is grateful to AIR for providing web services to its affiliated groups; for example, AIR hosts the CIRPA web site as well as many of the other customized electronic services that CIRPA offers to its members.

Future and strategic plans for the organization. What are the major issues faced by higher education in the region. What are the major issues for the organization?

CIRPA has advanced and matured a great deal over the past twenty years. The organization developed from an idea into a vibrant community that is continually changing and evolving to meet the needs of its members. One of CIRPA's objectives was to build a critical mass of research professionals across the country; this has been aptly demonstrated by growth of the membership to almost 250, which is solid evidence of the value of the association. CIRPA will continue to adapt to meet new demands of the membership while holding true to its mission.

As CIRPA approaches its 20th conference in 2011, the association is renewing its strategic plan to further respond to member needs and the changing environment in which it operates. Survey analysis has grown in importance and abundance across the country as institutions attempt to gain strategic advantage to ever decreasing public funding and challenging enrolment trends. CIRPA plays a keen role in survey work by keeping the national perspective in sight. Benchmarking or performance reporting is a growing demand on institutional research as institutions demonstrate accountability and efficient use of public funds to all of their stakeholders. And, true to its name, CIRPA plays a key role in the proliferation of planning initiatives across the country. Institutional research is a key pillar in institutional planning as a voice of unbiased logic and reason to the planning process. CIRPA is leveraging opportunities with organizations such as the Society of College and University and Planning (SCUP) who also see a need for their services in Canada, yet lack ability to *'crack the cold and variable Canadian climate'*. At the same time CIRPA faces competitive pressure from *'like'* organizations and shrinking institutional budgets which could diminish professional development expenditures (conference attendance and membership). Therefore, as an organization, CIRPA continues to strive to demonstrate that it delivers the best value for its members; a responsive dynamic organization that is the pillar of institutional research in Canada.