

Access to ACCIS:

A sense of community baseline
analysis for a growing and
evolving membership association

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Executive Summary

Organizational Context. The Association of College Counselors in Independent Schools (ACCIS) is an international membership organization providing support, shared knowledge, and professional development programming for college counselors based in independent (non-public) schools. At the time of publication, ACCIS counted nearly 600 schools as members, represented by over 2000 counselors and office assistants working to support the students under their care. For the purposes of this paper and study, those 2000 individuals representing school memberships will be known as “Representative Members” or “RMs.” RMs are the main unit of analysis, as they are ultimately who contribute and receive benefits from the community interaction, not the titular member schools.

Area of Inquiry. ACCIS has faced a number of changes and challenges over the past year. The community composition has changed significantly, with 25% of RMs joining ACCIS since June 2019. During this same time, there was a sudden and prolonged shift from in-person to virtual programming (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and a racial reckoning in the U.S. that prompted increased discussion on diversity, equity and inclusion amongst RMs and ACCIS leadership. ACCIS leadership sought a baseline analysis of RM needs and experiences to better understand and support its evolving constituency. The study utilizes the sense of community (SOC) framework, as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986), to explore inquiries posed by ACCIS leadership through a sequential, mixed-methods approach:

Stage 1 - Quantitative and demographic data collected using the most updated version of the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2), which has been referred to as the most frequently used quantitative measure of sense of community in the social sciences. This web-based survey was completed by 325 RMs (roughly 17% of total membership).

Stage 2 - Qualitative semi-structured interviews with 10 randomly-selected “new” RMs who joined ACCIS after June 2019. The intent of these interviews was to better understand new RM perspectives, experiences, and trajectories within the ACCIS community.

Project Questions, Findings and Recommendations. The following summary highlights findings and associated recommendations for the three key project questions. Stage 1 of data collection focused on answering Project Questions #1 and #2, while Stage 2 of data collection addressed Project Question #3.

Project Question #1: To what extent is a sense of community (SOC), as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986), observable among ACCIS's representative members (RMs) who take the SCI-2?

- **Key findings:** A potential gap is observed between the percentage of RMs believing SOC is important/very important versus the percentage of RMs experiencing higher levels of SOC.
- **Recommendation:** If ACCIS's SOC is evaluated in future, compare results to this baseline data.

Project Question #2: Are there observable differences with RM SOC when characteristics such as member longevity, program engagement, community leadership, number of college counselors at school, race and gender are considered?

- **Key findings:** The data revealed lower SOC among newer RMs, as well as those in single-person offices, and those who identified as Black/African Americans or Middle Eastern/North African. Higher SOC was found among RMs who participated in Summer

Institute, DE&I Colloquium, Affinity Groups and those who have held ACCIS leadership roles.

- Recommendation: To ensure an equitable introduction to ACCIS, it is important for ACCIS leadership to map out an “ideal” new RM trajectory. This involves evaluating initial messaging that enhances new RM baseline knowledge of the organization and available programming, reviewing the goals and modalities of new RM orientations (e.g., virtual and in-person), and identifying other supports that can ensure equitable access to programming and community leadership.

Project Question #3: In interviews with RMs who joined ACCIS between June 2019-December 2021, what SOC insights are provided that can help ACCIS better understand and support its evolving membership?

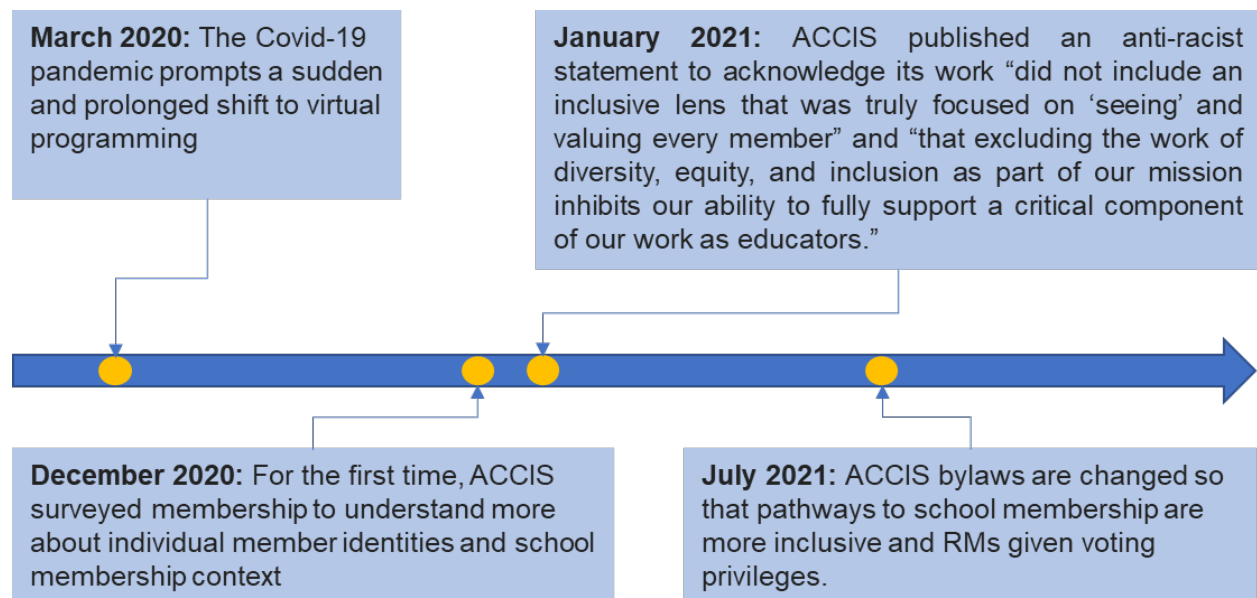
- Key findings: New RMs cited challenges with virtual introduction and how certain aspects of ACCIS remain unclear (e.g., how is ACCIS different from other similar organizations). Those working in smaller offices and metropolitan-area RMs seem to want and have access to different levels of support. New RMs, especially those who don’t have large networks, seem to have a desire to know and deepen connection with other RMs.
- Recommendation: ACCIS leadership should re-evaluate the outcomes and goals of virtual and in-person orientations (in line with new RM trajectory analysis noted earlier). There also seems to be merit in expanding affinity group programming (e.g., for those in smaller offices, new directors) and organizing regional or locally focused meet-ups. Opportunity to improve the RM experience also exists at the margin: ACCIS can facilitate group meet-ups at affiliated conferences and make it a point to highlight/humanize RMs via spotlights in its newsletters, social media and website.

Introduction

Partner Organization. Established in 2007, the Association of College Counselors in Independent Schools (ACCIS) is an international membership organization providing support, shared knowledge, and professional development programming for college counselors based in independent (non-public) schools. At the time of publication, ACCIS counts nearly 600 schools as members, represented by over 2000 counselors and office assistants working to support the students under their care. For the purposes of this paper and study, those 2000 individuals representing school memberships will be known as “Representative Members” or “RMs.” RMs are the main unit of analysis, as they are ultimately who contribute and receive benefits from the community interaction, not the titular member schools.

While ACCIS’s school membership growth has been modest in recent years (3% annually), 25% of RMs joined after June 2019, a significant change in community composition. During this same time, fundamental questions have been raised about how ACCIS can be more inclusive and welcoming. These questions were raised amidst a series of significant events, as presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Key drivers of recent change at ACCIS



Given the changes occurring internally and across the broader landscape, ACCIS leaders sought to better understand and support its evolving membership. At the time of my initial engagement, however, there was limited data about RM satisfaction and experience, especially relating to those who joined ACCIS in recent years. Therefore, baseline data needed to be collected. The sense of community (SOC) theory (McMillan and Chavis, 1986) enables researchers to evaluate the extent to which community members believe their needs are being met and feel (i) membership, (ii) influence, and (iii) emotionally connected to others within the community. ACCIS leaders felt these dimensions of a SOC could provide them with valuable insights as they navigate changes in organizational context and improve support for their evolving membership.

Organizational Context

Mission. ACCIS was established in 2007 to offer independent school college counselors a professional membership association focused on the needs and challenges of their work with students and families within independent school communities. The intent of ACCIS was to supplement the efforts of existing organizations, such as the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), and to provide additional and more focused opportunities to a specific constituent group.

History. In 2008, ACCIS hosted its first Summer Institute with 75 attendees. Since then, this annual multi-day gathering has become its flagship professional development offering. In addition to the Summer Institute, ACCIS hosts workshops for new counselors, new directors, and office assistants as well as colloquia to support letter of recommendation writing and diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I). In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic prompted ACCIS to make a sudden and prolonged shift from in-person to virtual programming. The Summer Institute was a virtual convening in 2020 and 2021, and all other ACCIS programming was delivered virtually through the summer of 2022.

Constituents. ACCIS membership is granted at the institutional level rather than to individuals. According to organizational bylaws, schools are eligible for ACCIS membership if they (i) are NACAC members, (ii) hold non-profit status, (iii) maintain membership in an independent school organization approved by the ACCIS Board of Trustees, (iv) demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and (v) are in compliance with state and federal law non-discrimination policies. ACCIS today counts over 600 schools as members. These member schools are represented by over 2000 college counselors and office assistants, who are referred to as “Representative Members” or “RMs” throughout this paper. ACCIS’s capacity to respond to RM needs and concerns is a critical barometer of ACCIS’s success as a professional community.

Employees. During its first decade, ACCIS had only two part-time employees. All other planning and operations were carried out by volunteers who simultaneously held full-time positions at ACCIS member schools. By January 2016, ACCIS had grown to 478 school members — ten times its original founding school membership count. That same year, ACCIS’s Board of Trustees approved the appointment of a full-time executive director to help advance its strategic plan and to continue to grow the organization. Five years later, in 2021, ACCIS hired a second full-time employee to support operations and member services. However, like many membership organizations, ACCIS continues to be led by its volunteers. All nine of its current program/operations chairs work full-time as college counselors at ACCIS schools, as do most current board members. ACCIS programming is the result of an expansive network of volunteers who are dedicated to ACCIS’s mission and community.

Strategic Plan. In early 2022, ACCIS leadership devised its near-term strategic roadmap, the ACCIS Forward 2022: Final Vision, Goals, and Initiatives (“ACCIS 2022 Vision Statement”). The roadmap outlined three key goals: (i) Goal 1 - optimizing ACCIS’s value to members (involving a strong focus on improved DE&I across operations and membership engagement); (ii) Goal 2 - making a difference in college admissions (refocusing on the evolving needs of students and their counselors, assume a greater leadership role in national college admissions dialogue/initiatives); and (iii) Goal 3 - ensuring a sustainable future (concentrate on maximizing membership retention by meeting member needs, developing a [unique] brand identity and value proposition, and match growth targets with financial projections).

In recent years, ACCIS operations have prioritized membership retention over growth. In 2020, ACCIS retained 97% of its school members, which was better than expected, especially amidst a pandemic. Among the roughly 15 schools in 2020 that did not renew their membership, most were a consequence of personnel changes or financial constraints. Member growth has been modest in recent years. According to ACCIS leadership, new member schools often join ACCIS because they learned about the organization through word-of-mouth or because they hired a counselor who worked at another ACCIS school who told them about ACCIS. In July 2021, ACCIS modified eligibility requirements so ACCIS membership is more inclusive of schools around the world. Leadership hopes to continue to grow ACCIS membership, which is critical for the organization's long-term sustainability.

Impacts of the project. The capstone findings and analysis will provide (i) a baseline understanding of RM SOC, (ii) qualitative and quantitative data that can inform the extent to which new RMs' needs are being met and (iii) data for ACCIS leaders that can inform future discussions about programs, resources and services. These outputs correspond with key action items under Goals 1 (strengthening, innovating, and promoting programs, resources, and services that increase access and member engagement) and 3 (increasing member satisfaction to increase retention and developing, articulating, and promoting a sustainable brand identity) of the ACCIS 2022 Vision Statement. ACCIS leaders have stated how they want to better understand and support its evolving membership. However, until now, ACCIS has had limited data about RM needs and experiences — particularly among those who recently joined the ACCIS community, a time when all the programming has happened virtually. This capstone project will provide ACCIS leadership with valuable insights about ACCIS's newest RMs, now representing 25% of the total RMs.

Area of Inquiry

ACCIS leaders seek to better understand the needs of their evolving membership. In my initial conversation with ACCIS's executive director, Emmi Harward, she spoke about the opportunities and challenges that come with organizational growth. In 2007, ACCIS had 42 founding member schools. Back then, most RMs who participated in ACCIS programming knew each other. Fifteen years later, there are over 600 member schools. ACCIS's membership is considerably larger and more diverse, and so too is its programming. Most notably, over the past two years, all ACCIS programming has been delivered virtually. Consequently, RMs have had different experiences, based on their time of tenure, as well as a variety of other factors.

As ACCIS leadership charts a path forward, understanding and responding to the RM needs and perspectives will be critical. Currently, there are over 2000 RMs, 25% who have only had the opportunity to know ACCIS and other RMs through virtual programming. In reflecting about ACCIS's growth, Ms. Harward, who was a long-time ACCIS RM and board member before becoming its executive director, shared: "When you are small, a simple majority can agree and everything's fine, but with a larger plurality, some people can feel totally differently." Ms. Harward went on to predict how "it'll be harder [in the coming years] for ACCIS to nail down what we think collectively" and that "we need to be mindful of potential blind spots."

When I began this capstone, there were limited data about new RM needs and experiences. RMs play such a critical role for ACCIS - they drive dialogue, deliver and attend programming, and ensure organizational relevance. I felt data from new RMs was crucial to assess ACCIS's current status, better understand RM perspectives, and identify insights that could promote the organization's long-term sustainability. ACCIS leaders have affirmed the sense of community (SOC) framework is aligned with their 2022 Vision Statement and can provide them with a barometer they can refer to as they further navigate organizational change and support RMs in the years to come.

This baseline SOC assessment and qualitative RM interviews were done against a backdrop of two broader, contextual shifts that occurred since June 2019:

- **The Covid-19 pandemic** prompted ACCIS to make a sudden and prolonged shift from in-person to virtual programming. All ACCIS programming has been delivered virtually for more than two years.
- **An amplification of national dialogue on race and equity** which prompted ACCIS to survey its membership for the first time to understand more about individual member demographics and intersectional identities in December 2020. Soon after that survey was disseminated, ACCIS published an anti-racist statement that acknowledged although it was founded to provide a supportive network, its establishment and work "did not include an inclusive lens that was truly focused on 'seeing' and valuing every member." Since then, fundamental questions continue to be raised about *how* ACCIS can be more inclusive and welcoming to members.

The ACCIS 2022 Vision Statement articulates key actions for Goals 1 and 3, which have helped guide the capstone area of inquiry, as noted in Table 1.

Table 1 - Excerpts from ACCIS' 2022 Vision Statement

<p>Goal 1 - Optimizing ACCIS's Value to Members <i>In 2022, ACCIS will have established itself as an exemplary professional membership organization that advances diversity, equity, and inclusion.</i></p>	<p>Goal 3 - Ensuring a Sustainable Future <i>In 2022, ACCIS will have a broad range of resources to serve and anticipate the dynamic nature and ever-changing needs of its members.</i></p>
<p>In order to achieve this goal we will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Model inclusion through a renewed commitment to diversity and access at all levels of the association. B. Build ACCIS's reputation as an authority, industry expert, and model for quality counseling for all students C. Support and empower the professional development of college counselors in every member school. D. Strengthen, innovate, and promote programs, resources, and services that increase access and member engagement. E. Improve, expand, and diversify member communications. F. Educate non-member constituents (boards/heads) on ACCIS as a valuable school resource 	<p>In order to achieve this goal, we will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Maximize outreach to ACCIS-eligible schools. B. Increase member satisfaction to increase retention. C. Diversify revenue streams to achieve financial sustainability. D. Expand human resources to advance organizational sustainability. E. Develop and implement a long-range growth plan. F. Develop, articulate, and promote a sustainable brand identity

Literature Review

This review aims to analyze the existing literature on sense of community, professional membership associations, and communities of practice. I highlight relevant concepts relating to my project questions and identify key takeaways for consideration and further analysis.

Sense of community

As part of early efforts to define a SOC, Sarason (1974) conceptualized it as the antithesis of individualism, and that people certainly know when they have it and when they do not. SOC has been shown to correlate with numerous activities and outcomes, such as community development, community participation, and social capital acquisition (Chavis & Wandersan, 1990; Christens & Lin, 2014; Putnam, 2000).

According to Park and Lee (2019), communities can be found within (1) physical spaces, such as towns, cities, and schools; and (2) non-physical spaces, such as social networks and political parties. Consequently, SOC has been studied in a variety of contexts, ranging from neighborhoods to international groups with shared interests, such as the science fiction fandom community and Portugal's faith-based scouting movement (Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Obst et al., 2002; Cunha et al., 2019). According to Cunha et al. (2019), an association is a context where many processes, dimensions, and elements relating to the more traditional SOC framework may be observed, as associations often have specific and structured guidelines, procedures, and rituals. They suggest an association to be an ideal context to evaluate SOC.

Notable exploration of SOC in virtual spaces can be credited to Blanchard and Marcus (2004), who focused on the unique dimensions of a sense of virtual community (SOVC). The researchers observed many similarities between SOC and SOVC, including feelings of membership, integration of needs, and shared emotional connections. However, with SOVC, they suggested there is a diminished expectation and realized feelings of influence. While ACCIS delivered its programs virtually between June 2020 through May 2022, it has historically offered most in-person. Health regulations allowed ACCIS to resume offering its flagship programs in-person in July 2022. As such, evaluating ACCIS through an SOC rather than a SOVC framework is the more appropriate choice.

McMillan and Chavis (1986), among other social scientists, worked to identify SOC's key attributes and establish methods of measurement to guide the application of the theory. In their seminal work on SOC, McMillan and Chavis defined it by borrowing from McMillan (1976): "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together." (p. 9) McMillan and Chavis further theorized a SOC can be defined by four key factors laid out in Figure 2:

1. Membership: The concept includes emotional safety, sense of belonging, identification with the community, and personal investment in the

Figure 2 - Sense of Community Framework (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)



community leading to stronger bonds. These attributes go together in a mutually self-reinforcing way.

2. Influence: Influence is a bi-directional concept, a reciprocal relationship between individuals and community and their impact on one another. An individual must feel they have some control and influence over the community. On the other hand, for a group to be cohesive it must also influence its individual members.

3. Reinforcement of needs: Members must perceive association to the community as rewarding for the individual (e.g., status gained, possibility to share in the success of community, and perceived competence of other individuals in the community who might help the member).

4. Shared emotional connection: The more people interact, the more likely they are to form close relationships. The more positive this interaction, the stronger the bond developed.

Borrowing from this SOC framework, the Sense of Community Index-1 (SCI-1) was created in 1990. However, reliability of this initial 12-item scale was considered to be inconsistent and sometimes low. Reliability concerns seem to be attributed to the fact that the SCI-1 had a true-false response set and because there were only three items in each subscale. In 2008, Chavis et al. presented an updated 24-item Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2). Unlike the first iteration, the SCI-2 covers all the aspects of a SOC described in McMillan and Chavis's original theory. The SCI-2 has been used in numerous studies covering different cultures as well as many community contexts. It has been referred to as the most frequently used quantitative measure of sense of community in the social sciences, and its reliability has shown to be quite high (coefficient alpha = .94). In considering SCI-2 context variability, Blanchard (2004) has suggested certain questions in the SCI-2 may not be relevant in non-physical contexts. Similarly, when Abfalter et al. (2012) tested the SCI-2 in an online community for elderly Germans, they suggested nine items from the SCI-2 be eliminated because they were not a good fit. That said, there is general consensus that the SCI-2 remains a highly effective tool to measure SOC.

Membership associations

The term "membership associations" often refers to "formally organized groups of members who are not financially remunerated for their participation" (Knoke, 1986, cited in Tschirhart & Gazley, 2014, p. 1). They exist in every industry and across interest groups. A subset of a membership association is one that is professional in nature. These generally help members advance their professional and industry knowledge through conferences, workshops, and publications (Ki, 2018). Professional associations can be a valuable resource for members to engage in networking opportunities (Bauman, 2008).

While this inquiry is focused on ACCIS, the largest membership association of college counselors in the world is the National Association of College Counselors (NACAC). Within its 25,000-person membership, roughly 7,500 (30%) are school-based secondary college counselors (NACAC, 2022). There are roughly two dozen regional NACAC affiliates, 22 in the U.S. and one which primarily supports college counseling professionals residing outside the U.S. To be clear, there are many college counseling associations inside and outside the U.S. not affiliated with NACAC. Most are informal and local.

While there are tens of thousands of college counselors around the world, there has been limited academic literature about college counseling associations. The closest approximation was a study by Bauman (2008) that attempted to gain an understanding of school counselors' decision-making in joining professional counseling associations. Upon surveying 450 school counselors in

a Southwestern U.S. state, Bauman suggested the key differences between members and nonmembers of counseling associations included (i) whether their graduate programs emphasized professional memberships, (ii) the membership status of colleagues, (iii) a belief that professional organizations advance the field, and (iv) a belief that being a professional means joining professional associations. This line of inquiry was extended by Burns (2015) who suggested state counseling association membership is complex and not solely explained by (i) incentives, (ii) information systems (iii) status, (iv) social interaction opportunities, and (v) effective management of the association. It should be noted that Bauman and Burns' studies were not centered on college counseling associations, but rather more general school counseling associations. Also, both studies were considered exploratory in nature as they both solicited insights from counseling professionals in a single state.

In considering membership associations more broadly, membership can be granted at the individual and/or institutional level. ACCIS does the latter. In analyzing why university administrators choose to join certain institutional membership associations (IMA), Orphan and Miller (2019) highlighted factors underpinning consensual validation and rewards for institutional investment, which in turn, enhance a sense of belonging and identification: a feeling, belief, and expectation that one's institution fits in the group and shares similar values. Similar psychological and social factors influencing membership participation were also identified in a study examining a professional association for people of African descent, in which Chioneso and Brookins (2013) advanced the notion that membership associations are relational communities in which participation is influenced by the degree to which members perceive they will obtain benefits in a setting that functions well at achieving its mission and goals.

In a study featuring an international accounting association, Markova et al. (2013) argued members of the association were more likely to be satisfied with their membership when benefits exceed expectations. In effect, having positive attitudes about an association may motivate one to renew. Khaliq and Walston (2012) found personal characteristics (e.g., gender or holding an advanced degree) are significant predictors when looking at factors that influence a members' decision to join or renew a membership in a healthcare professional association. Ki (2018) has suggested other characteristics – such as level of involvement in association, degree of volunteering, and tenure status – should be considered when investigating the factors that affect individuals' intentions to renew membership and recommend membership to nonmembers.

While many membership associations want to grow and diversify, Solebello et al. (2016) have suggested the varied and competing desires of a diverse membership can stretch associations thin. Their analysis highlights a paradox in which attempts to increase the association's inclusiveness are met with countervailing desires to maintain the membership association's exclusiveness. This tension is only exacerbated by the implications community size and inclusiveness may have on overall community effectiveness. Multiple studies have highlighted how network structure (e.g., size, committee organization etc.) establish boundaries that provide members with the emotional safety for needs and feelings to be exposed and for intimacy to develop (Ehrlich & Graven, 1971; Wood, 1971). While it's been estimated there are more than 63,000 professional membership associations in the United States alone, there is surprisingly very limited academic literature about the paradox of membership associations which are inherently exclusive that are striving to be more inclusive in their membership recruitment and member engagement practices.

Communities of practice

A key consideration of professional membership association growth and member retention is the trajectory of members. This trajectory concept is explored by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their work on communities of practice (COP). They define a COP as a group of people who share a

concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. When a participant joins a COP, they typically begin with limited responsibilities. Lave and Wenger coined the term “legitimate peripheral participation” to describe this phenomenon of limited responsibility, as a way to conceptualize the dynamics between newcomers and old-timers with respect to general activities, transfer of knowledge, and community practices. Naturally, those with more experience within a COP may be expected to contribute or participate more. Consequently, a newcomer’s learning trajectory is then governed by how knowledge, responsibilities and tasks shift over time. Greeno and Gresalfi (2008) suggest access to legitimate opportunities to learn and participate bears a direct impact on newcomers’ identity and relative positioning within a COP. If a COP understands and appreciates how newcomer contributions can support the larger group, it can positively impact participant learning trajectory. This evolution is critical to member expectations and satisfaction, as previously outlined in professional membership association literature.

Langenhove and Harre (1994) suggest interpersonal positioning can help us understand how humans are “located” in relation to one another (e.g., how a newcomer’s position within ACCIS may differ from an old-timer holding a leadership role). Anderson (2009) has suggested that positioning is infinitely broader and more complex than a single action or a single attribute. However, factors that influence positioning include group objectives, activity goals, affordances of learners, group practices and the ongoing evaluation of these practices. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest peripheral participation can eventually hamper confidence, capabilities, and know-how to be successful within a COP. According to Greeno and Gresalfi (2008), one’s learning trajectory can only progress when practices are intentionally inclusive and collaborative. To that point, Greeno and Gresalfi (2008) indicate when a community is not inclusive and learners feel marginalized, the participant’s learning trajectory can be hampered.

Key Takeaways

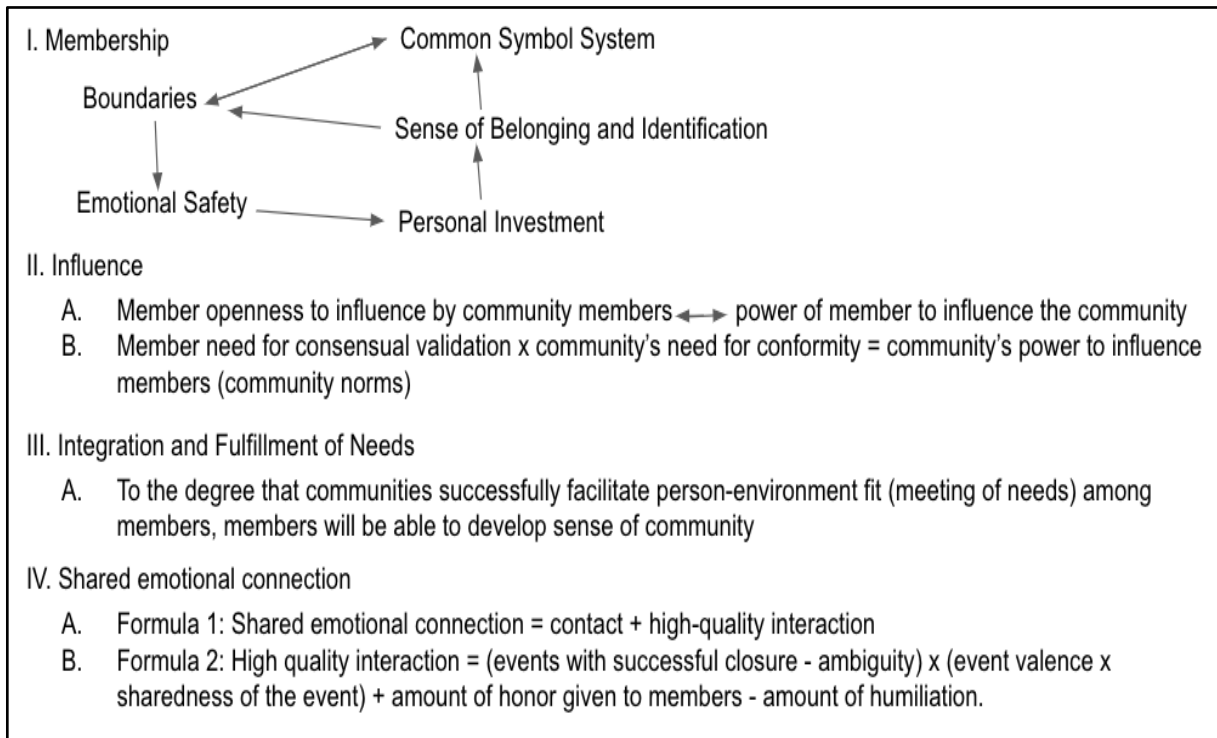
- If ACCIS has a strong SOC, we may consider it to be a well-functioning community that supports its members.
- SCI-2 has been shown to be a reliable SOC measurement tool.
- Participation in professional membership associations is influenced by the degree to which members perceive they will obtain benefits.
- Individual characteristics (e.g., gender, involvement in association) may also influence member satisfaction.
- While many membership associations want to grow and diversify, the varied and competing desires of a diverse membership can stretch associations thin.
- Access to legitimate opportunities to learn and participate bears a direct impact on newcomers’ identity and relative positioning within a community.

Conceptual Framework

Sense of community

McMillan and Chavis (1986) theorized SOC is defined by four key factors - (i) *membership* (feeling of belonging or sharing a sense of personal relatedness), (ii) *influence* (bidirectional concept in which individuals are especially attracted to a group when they have influence over what that group does), (iii) *fulfillment of needs* (the feeling members' needs will be met and resources received through membership in the group), and (iv) *shared emotional connection* (commitment and belief that members have (and will) share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences). Figure 3 shows the factors of sense of community and their hypothesized relationships, as proposed by McMillan and Chavis.

Figure 3: The Four Factors of SOC - Underlying Elements of Hypothesized Relationships



There are five elements embedded within the first factor, membership, which include (i) boundaries, (ii) emotional safety, (iii) sense of belonging and identification, (iv) personal investment, and (v) a common symbol system. The interplay of these elements is important. For example, boundaries provide emotional safety for members. Without emotional safety, there is a diminished likelihood an individual will make a personal investment in the community. Without that personal investment in the community, we would not expect an individual to feel an elevated sense of belonging or identify with the community. When one has a sense of belonging or identifies with the community, a common symbol system may be used. These symbols, in turn, can create boundaries referenced at the beginning of this interplay description.

In considering the second factor, influence, there are two main elements which include (i) a member's openness to influence from community members and (ii) power of member to influence

the community. There is a bi-directional relationship between the two elements. As a member achieves more power to influence the community, they generally are more open to influence from other community members. And yet, achieving more power is not possible unless that same individual is open to influence from the community.

The third factor, integration and fulfillment of needs, is the degree to which communities facilitate person-environment fit and meet the needs of members. The better the fit and greater extent to which needs are met, the more elevated sense of community that is perceived.

The fourth factor, shared emotional connection, is suggested to be the result of contact and high-quality interaction among individuals. High-quality interaction is understood to be a series of meaningful events in the past that were participated in by members of the group. It is important prior events had positive outcomes.

In deconstructing the underlying elements of the four key factors of sense of community, I believe elevated levels of reported sense of belonging, personal investment, influence and shared emotional connection will be the most relevant in ascertaining whether ACCIS, as a professional member association, is serving its membership.

Project Questions

ACCIS leaders want to better understand RM needs and identify specific ways they can support ACCIS's growing and evolving membership. A baseline analysis of sense of community (SOC) was identified as the best path forward. Project questions are presented below:

Project Question #1: To what extent is a sense of community (SOC), as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986), observable among ACCIS's representative members (RMs) who take the SCI-2?

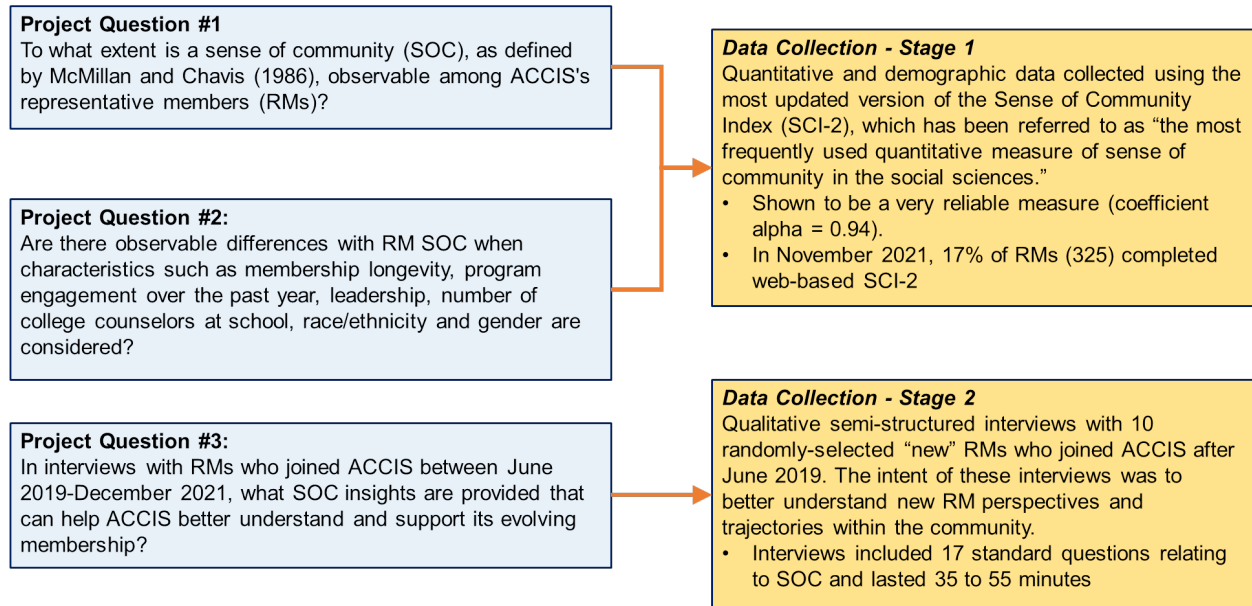
Project Question #2: Are there observable differences with RM SOC when characteristics such as member longevity, program engagement, community leadership, number of college counselors at school, race and gender are considered?

Project Question #3: In interviews with RMs who joined ACCIS between June 2019-December 2021, what SOC insights are provided that can help ACCIS better understand and support its evolving membership?

Project Design

This study uses a sequential, mixed-methods approach to explore inquiries posed by ACCIS leadership in relation to specific SOC factors. The data collection maps back to the four key factors of SOC and the related lines of inquiry as outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 4: Relationship Between Project Questions and Staged Data Collection



A. Staged Data Collection

Stage 1 - Web-based survey

All ACCIS RMs received a link to a web-based survey via email, as well as two reminders to complete the survey over a four-week period. No incentives were provided for participants. The web-based survey included all 24 questions from the most updated version of the Sense of Community Index II (SCI-2), considered to be the most frequently used quantitative measure of sense of community in the social sciences. The SCI-2 has been shown to be a very reliable measure (coefficient alpha = .94). The subscales also have been proven to be reliable, with coefficient alpha scores of .79 to .86. The 24 questions included in the SCI-2 are viewable in Appendix A.

The SCI-2 does not provide standard questions to provide researchers with personal characteristics of each respondent. As such, questions about personal characteristics needed to be added (listed in Appendix B) and were asked of a respondent after they completed the SCI-2. A review of these additional questions and rationale are presented as follows:

- *Demographics and professional context.* Multiple studies of professional associations have examined the impact of individual characteristics in evaluating member satisfaction (Hager, 2014; Knoke, 1986). In the SCI-2 administered to ACCIS RMs, respondents were not asked for personal identifying information (e.g., their name or school affiliation), however, they were asked to self-report their gender and ethnicity, as well as an approximation of years working as a college counselor in an independent school and for how long they had been an ACCIS RM.
- *Familiarity with broader membership.* In a SOC study focused on a single neighborhood, Glynn (1981) discovered one of the strongest predictors of SOC was the number of

neighbors one could identify by first name. As a loose approximation for this question, ACCIS members were asked how many ACCIS members (outside of those working at your school) they would feel comfortable reaching out to directly if they had a question.

- *Leadership experience.* In Ki's (2018) exploratory study of the determinants of membership retention and expansion within a health care professional association, she suggested researchers conducting a similar inquiry consider asking members about their general involvement and volunteering history for the association. These recommendations prompted me to ask RMs about their level of engagement in ACCIS programming over the past 12 months and if they served in an ACCIS leadership role.

Stage 2 - Semi-structured one-on-one interviews

There are no qualitative response questions in the SCI-2. I believed semi-structured interviews would provide important supplemental insights, and opportunities to better understand nuances around new RM experience and perspective. Following my SCI-2 analysis, a randomly selected sample of individuals who joined ACCIS between June 2019 and December 2021 were invited to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. There were roughly 120 RMs who met the eligibility criteria. While 70 RMs were contacted, 14 RMs (20%) responded to my interview request. In the end, 10 interviews were able to be scheduled. These interviews each took 35 to 55 minutes. All interviews took place virtually, using the Zoom platform. Seventeen questions were prepared for the semi-structured interviews (the questions are listed and available in Appendix C).

B. Data Analysis

SCI-2 Web-based Survey - Sample analysis

While 496 of the 1956 ACCIS members began the SCI-2 survey, 325 completed all of the questions. Incomplete surveys were discarded.

Key characteristics of SCI-2 respondents are as follows and summarized in Figure 4.

- **Most respondents had a longer membership tenure and tenure in the profession.** The majority of respondents (52%) had been RMs for 10+ years, indicating a sample with a long tenure within the ACCIS community. Approximately 65% of respondents indicated they also had experience working in the admission office of a college or university.
- **Formation of four cohorts based on RM tenure.** A key line of inquiry is how SOC compares between RMs who joined ACCIS right before or during Covid-19 pandemic with those who have been RMs for much longer than that. Overall, 84% of respondents were ACCIS members before the pandemic, indicating they have had increased opportunities to interact within the community. To support my analysis of ACCIS tenure mediating SOC, respondents were grouped into four cohorts, by the number of years they have been RMs.
 - Cohort 1 (0-2 years): 13%,
 - Cohort 2 (3-5 years): 25%
 - Cohort 3 (6-9 years): 30%
 - Cohort 4 (10+ years): 32%
- **Half of respondents did not participate in any ACCIS programming over the past 12 months.** It is believed the respondents' level of engagement with virtual programming was consistent with the broader membership.
- **Approximately 17% of respondents have been an ACCIS board member, committee chair, or committee member (most were in Cohort 4).** Based on this finding, I expected higher levels of SOC within Cohort 4, as leaders within a community should have a higher SOC than those who are marginally involved in it.

- **Cohort 1 is the most racially and ethnically diverse.** While the majority of respondents in Cohort 1 self-identified as White (54%), a significant percentage of Cohort 1 self-identified as Asian (21%) and Black/African American (26%). This is in marked contrast to Cohort 4, of which 88% identified as White, 3% Asian, and 3% Black/African American.
- **Many respondents work within larger college counseling teams.** The number of college counselors per school was consistent across cohorts. While I did not focus my inquiry on fully exploring SOC differences between RMs working within single-counselor offices and larger teams, it appears an elevated SOC within ACCIS may correlate with having at least one counseling colleague within one's school.

Figure 5: Quantitative Survey - Characteristics of Respondents

<p>Survey completion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 325 (of 1900) completed survey ● 17% sample <p>Job type</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 308 college counselors (95%) ● 16 office assistants (5%) <p>How many years in college counseling office in independent school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 0-2: 32 (10%) ● 3-5: 50 (15%) ● 6-9: 73 (23%) ● 10+: 170 (52%) <p>How many years as ACCIS member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 0-2: 43 (13%) ● 3-5: 80 (25%) ● 6-9: 95 (29%) ● 10+: 102 (31%) ● Unsure: 5 (1%) <p>School location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● California: 45 (14%) ● Pennsylvania: 23 (7%) ● Texas: 23 (7%) ● Massachusetts: 22 (7%) ● North Carolina: 18 (6%) ● Georgia: 15 (5%) 	<p>How many college counselors at school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1: 34 (10%) ● 2-3: 170 (52%) ● 4-6: 110 (34%) ● 7+: 11 (3%) <p>Program participation in past 12 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Affinity Groups: 73 (22%) ● DE&I Colloquium: 61 (19%) ● New Counselor Workshop: 32 (10%) ● New Director Workshop: 22 (7%) ● Office Assistant Workshop: 14 (4%) ● Rec Writers Workshop: 32 (10%) ● Summer Institute: 94 (29%) ● None of the above: 131 (40%) <p>Member of local/regional counseling group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes: 290 (90%) ● No: 35 (10%) <p>Worked at university prior to current job</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes: 213 (65%) ● No: 112 (35%) <p>Is or has been an ACCIS board member, committee chair, or committee member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes: 53 (16%) ● No: 272 (84%) 	<p>How many ACCIS members (outside your school) would you feel comfortable reaching out to if you had a question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 0: 10 (3%) ● 1-3: 59 (18%) ● 4-6: 80 (25%) ● 7+: 176 (54%) <p>Hispanic, Latinx/o/a, or Spanish origin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes: 24 (7%) ● No: 301 (93%) <p>Gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cis Gender Man: 91 (28%) ● Cis Gender Woman: 229 (71%) ● Gender Non-Binary: 1 ● Gender Not Listed: 4 (1%) <p>Race</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Asian: 19 (6%) ● Black/African American: 35 (11%) ● Middle Eastern/North African: 4 (1%) ● Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander: 1 ● White: 258 (79%) ● My Race is Not Listed: 1 ● Unknown: 8 (3%)
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Semi-structured interviews - Sample analysis

As shown in Figure 5, Cohort 1 RMs who participated in semi-structured interviews offered a sample relatively consistent with the demographics of RMs who completed the SCI-2. Regrettably, the 10 interviews lacked the perspective of a RM working in a single-person office (10% of SCI-2 respondents reported they worked in a single-counselor office). Only one of the 10 interview subjects identified as a Cis Gender Man, whereas 28% of SCI-2 respondents identified this as their gender. Lastly, only one interview subject indicated they had not participated in any ACCIS programming over the past year. That level of engagement was much greater than SCI-2 respondents, of which 40% indicated they had not participated in any ACCIS programming during that same period.

Figure 6: Qualitative Survey - Characteristics of 10 Interviewees

<p># of years in college counseling office in independent school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 1 year: 4 • 2nd year: 2 • 3rd year: 3 • 4th year: 1 <p># of years as ACCIS member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 1 year: 4 • 2nd year: 3 • 3rd year: 3 <p>School location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Atlantic: 2 • New England: 2 • Southeast: 2 • West Coast: 4 	<p># of college counselors at school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1: 0 • 2-3: 5 • 4-6: 5 <p>Program participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affinity Groups: 2 • DE&I Colloquium: 3 • New Counselor Workshop: 6 • Summer Institute: 2 • None of the above: 1 <p>Member of another counseling group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes: 10 • No: 0 <p>Worked as univ admission officer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes: 8 • No: 2 	<p>Gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cis Gender Man: 1 • Cis Gender Woman: 9 <p>Race</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian: 1 • Black/African American: 2 • Middle Eastern/North African: 1 • White: 6 <p>Hispanic, Latinx/o/a, Spanish origin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes: 1 • No: 9 <p>Under-represented in sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single counselor office • Cis Gender men • Midwest
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Findings

Findings for Project Question #1 and #2 are based on the SCI-2 measurement, and should be reviewed with the following notes in mind:

- **Calculation of total index results.** The SCI-2 total index was calculated by adding all of the 24 questions in the SCI-2 survey to find the overall total. The lowest value within this index is 0. To get that score, all questions would be answered with the lowest response of “not at all.” The highest value for this index would be 72, meaning that all 24 questions would be answered with the highest response of “completely.”
- **Calculation of subscale results.** The four subscales (Reinforcement of Needs, Membership, Influence, and Shared Emotional Connection) each consist of six questions that are added together with a total that represents the strength of each category. Each subscale has a minimum total value of “0” (all answers marked “not at all”) and a maximum total value of “18” (all answers marked “completely”). Responses were recorded and added to find the value of each subscale. However, this data is not being reported in the paper as there is disagreement in SOC literature about the stand-alone validity.

Project Question #1: To what extent is a sense of community (SOC) observable among ACCIS's representative members (RMs) who take the SCI-2?

Finding #1: In comparing Figures #7 and #8, we observe a potential gap between % of RMs believing SOC to be important vs. the % of RMs experiencing SOC. In the initial mediating question, a majority (65%) of RMs self-report feeling a SOC with other RMs is “very important” or “important.” However, 43% of respondents reported SCI-2 Index Scores of 40+ (mean score: 38; lowest score: 8; highest score: 72). There isn’t consensus within SOC literature about how we should interpret this potential gap.

Figure #7: Initial Mediating Question in SCI-2

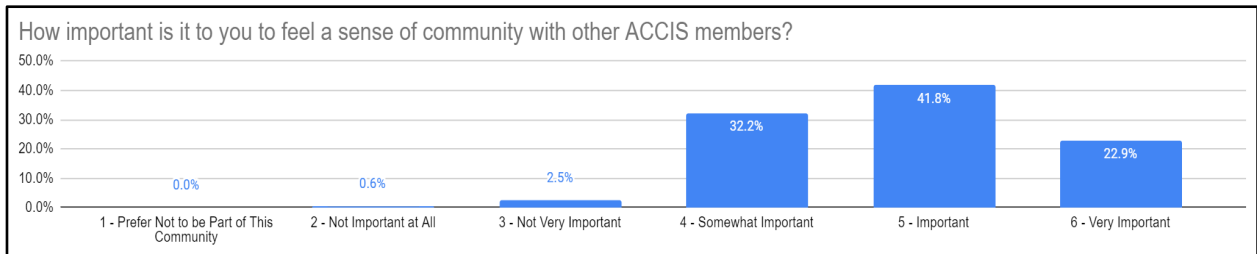
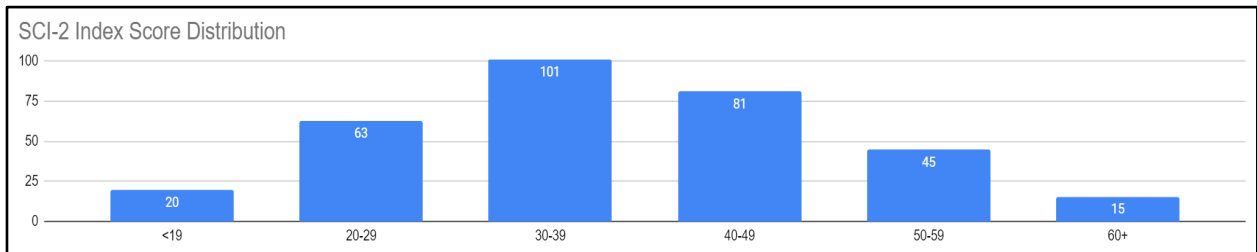


Figure #8: SCI-2 Index Score Distribution

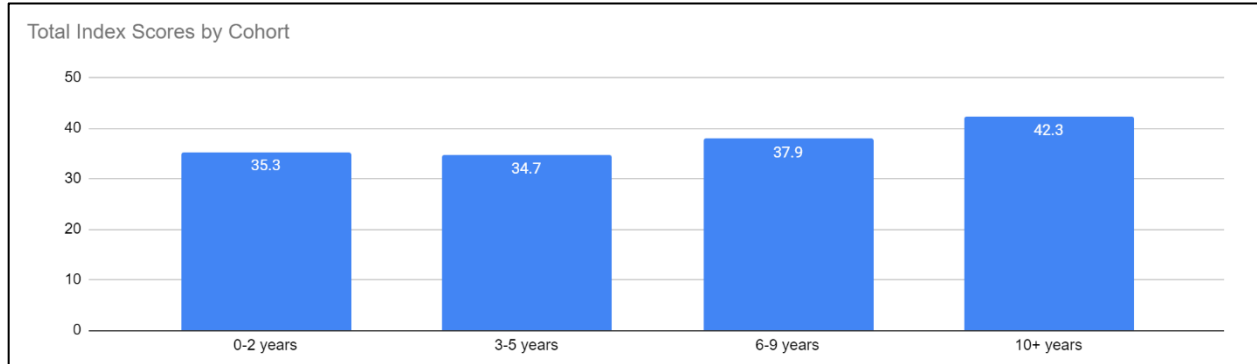


Project Question #2: Are there observable differences with RM SOC when characteristics such as member longevity, program engagement, community leadership, number of college counselors at school, race and gender are considered?

Finding #2: Analyzing SCI-2 Index Scores by targeted characteristics of respondents, I identified SOC subgroup variability based on member longevity, size of department, program engagement, leadership, race, and gender.

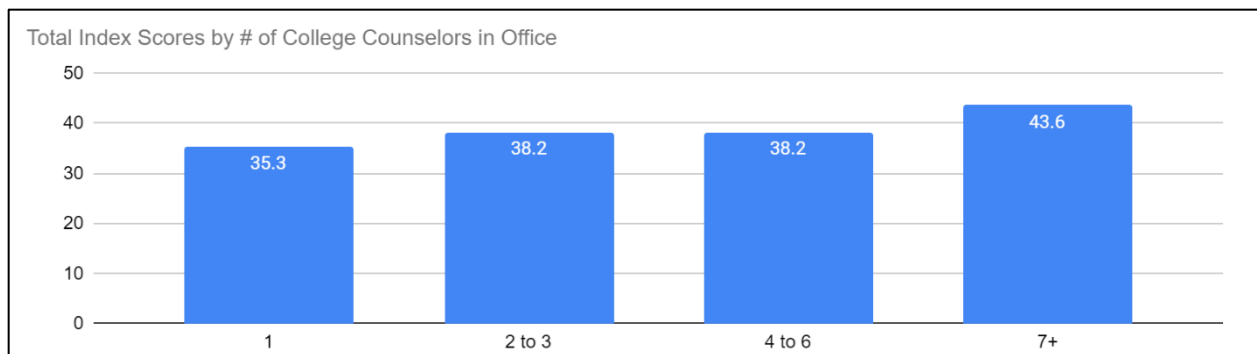
By Member Longevity (# of Years as ACCIS RM). As seen in Figure #9, SOC was relatively the same among RMs who joined ACCIS 0-2 and 3-5 years ago. SOC was slightly elevated among those who joined 6-9 years ago, and highest among those who joined ACCIS 10+ years ago. In summary, there may be a correlation between SOC and member longevity, and there appears to be value in exploring why that may be the case.

Figure #9 - By Member Longevity - Total SCI-2 Index Scores



By Size of Department. As seen in Figure #10, SOC was slightly lower among those in a single-counselor office, while SOC was highest among those in 7+ counselor offices. These findings are slightly counter-intuitive, as we might presume those in larger departments rely less on ACCIS, as they already have many college counselors within their school. However, SOC seems to be a more complex concept that is mediated by other factors.

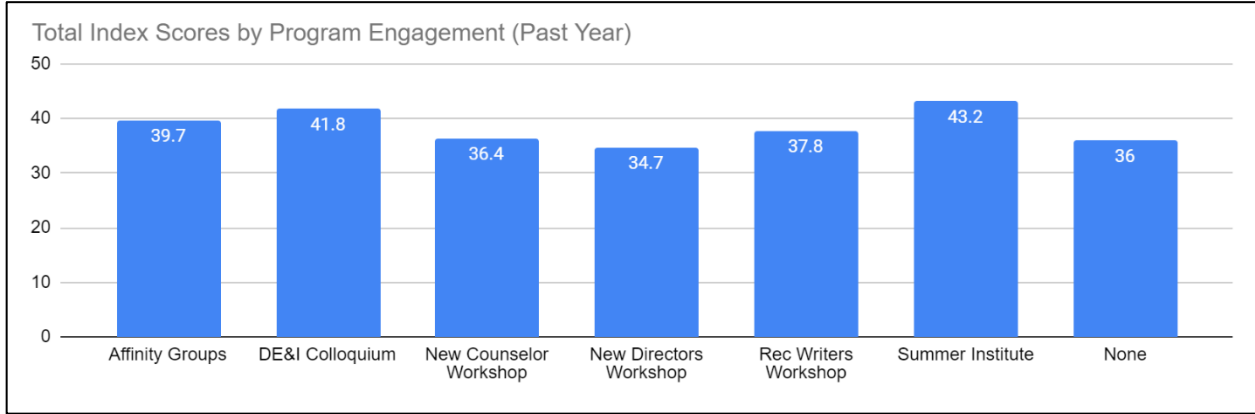
Figure #10 - By Size of Department - Total SCI-2 Index Scores



By ACCIS Program Engagement (Past Year): As seen in Figure #11, SOC was highest among those who participated in the Summer Institute. Interestingly, it was lowest among those who participated in the New Directors Workshop, lower even than those RMs who didn't participate in

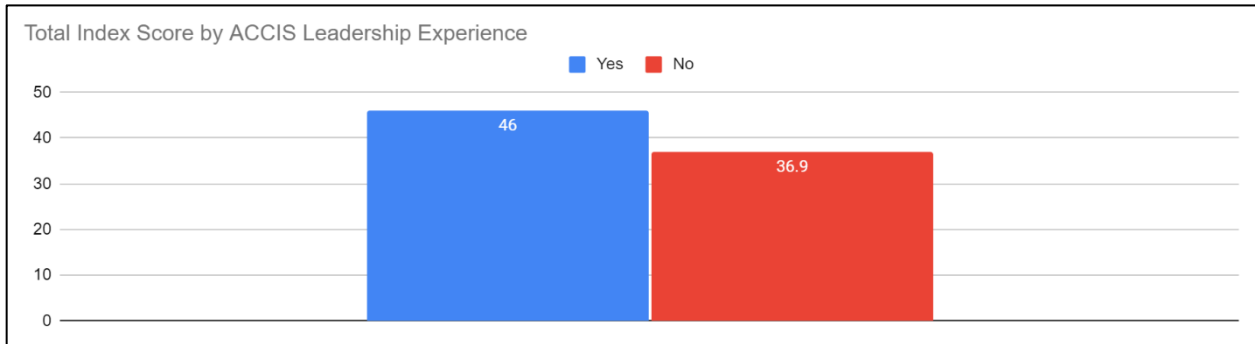
any ACCIS programming in the past year. While it's not immediately unclear why new directors have a lower SOC, this finding implies new directors is an RM subgroup that may benefit from further exploration.

Figure #11 - By Program Engagement - Total SCI-2 Index Scores



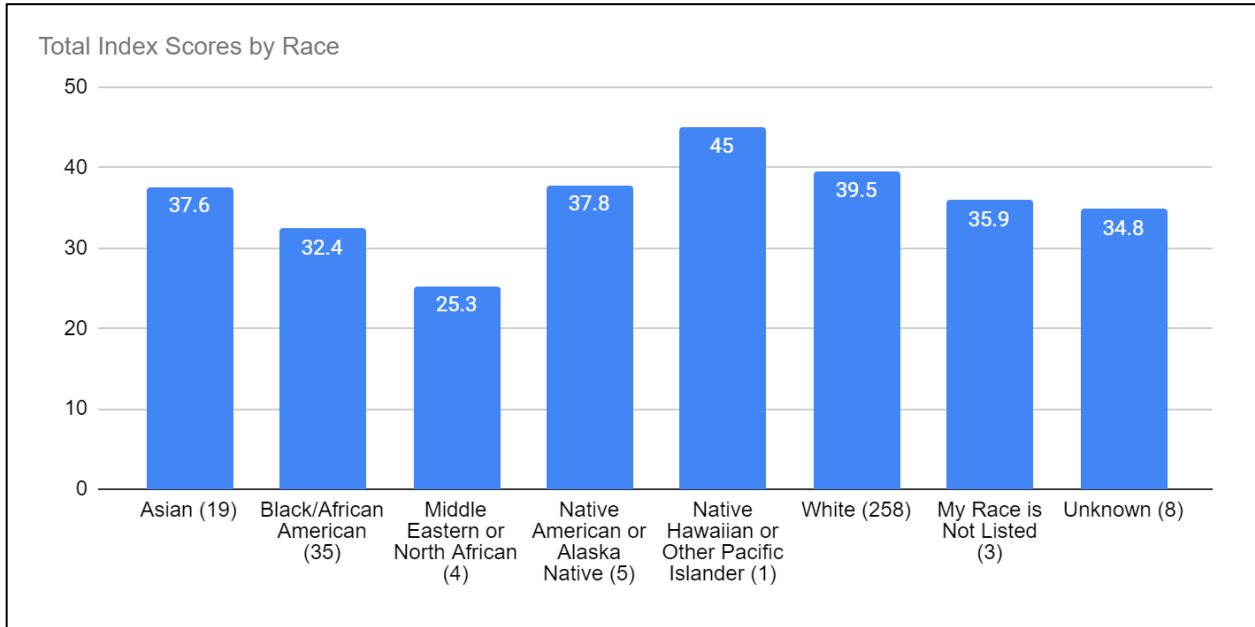
By ACCIS Leadership Experience (Board/Committee Member): As seen in Figure #12, SOC was considerably higher among RMs with ACCIS leadership experience. There seems to be a strong correlation between community leadership and SOC. However, what’s not clear is if RMs want to be leaders because they have an elevated SOC or if SOC is elevated after one becomes a leader. Nonetheless, it does appear important to ensure all RMs are encouraged to be involved and/or be leaders within the community.

Figure #12 - By ACCIS Leadership - Total SCI-2 Index Scores



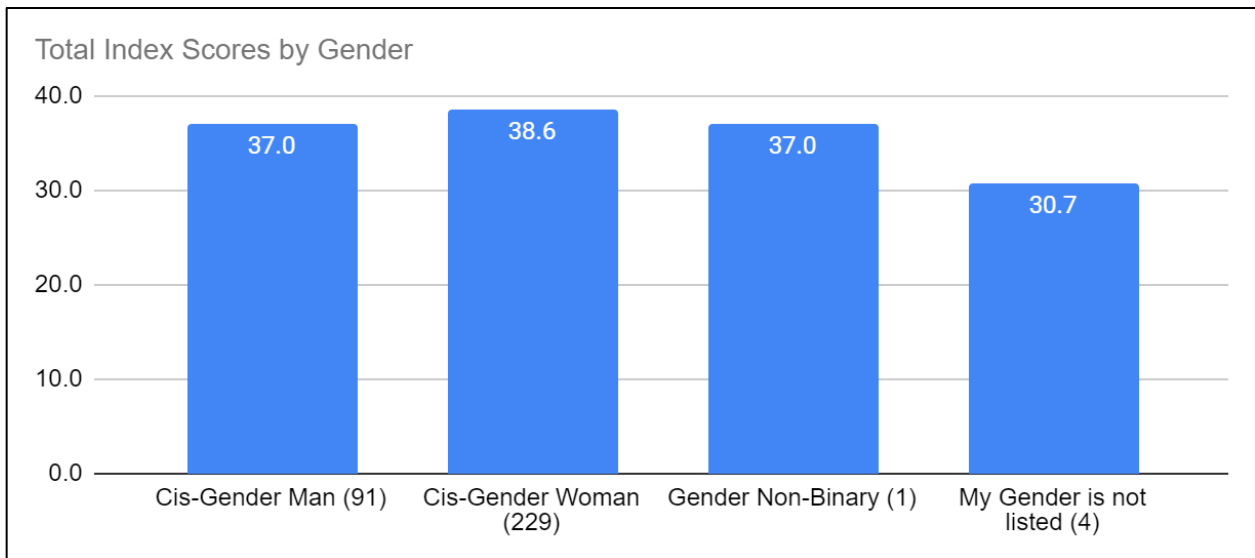
By Race: As seen in Figure #13, SOC was highest among those who self-identified as White, and lowest among Black/African American and Middle Eastern or North African RMs. (It should be noted the latter category was represented by four respondents.). Overall, non-White RMs seem to have a lower SOC than White RMs, who represent the dominant racial identity within ACCIS.

Figure #13 - By Race - Total SCI-2 Index Scores



By Gender: As seen in Figure #14, SOC was highest among those who identify as Cis-Gender Women. SOC was considerably lower among those who don't identify as either Cis-Gender Man or Cis-Gender Woman. (It should be noted that five respondents did not identify as Cis-Gender Man or Woman.) Similar to the racial analysis, the dominant gender identity within ACCIS seems to correlate with a higher SOC.

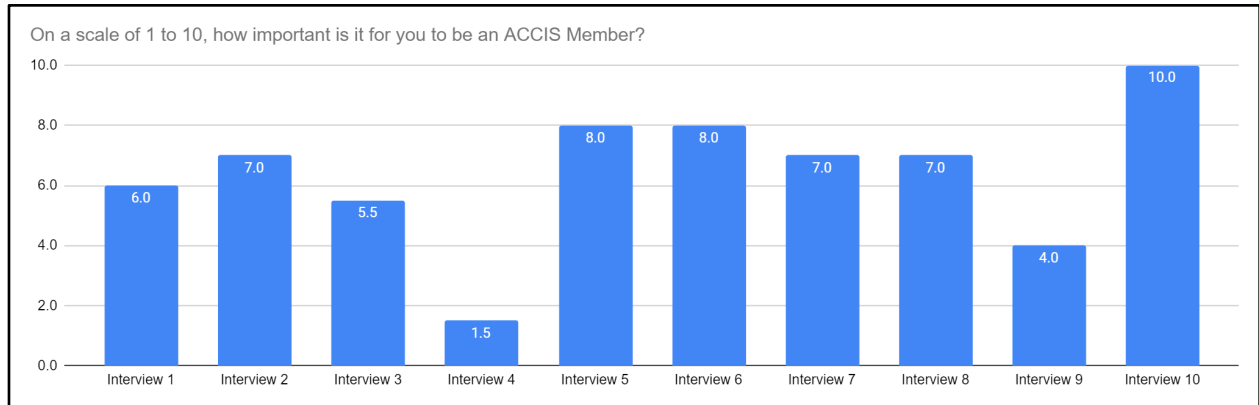
Figure #14 - By Gender - Total SCI-2 Index Scores



Project Question #3: In interviews with RMs who joined ACCIS between June 2019-December 2021, what SOC insights are provided that can help ACCIS better understand and support its evolving membership?

Finding #3: Qualitative interviews with 10 new RMs highlighted a significant diversity of opinion, perhaps best exemplified when asked on a scale of 1-10 how important it was for them to be an ACCIS member (Figure 15). Responses ranged from a 1.5 to a perfect 10.

Figure #15 - How Important is it for you to be an ACCIS member? (Interview Question)



Interview transcripts were initially reviewed against the four key elements of sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986): needs, membership, influence and shared emotional connection (Figure 16). This analysis led to 11 themes. Transcripts were subsequently analyzed a second time to determine whether positive feedback or challenges were being identified (Figure 17) across the 11 themes. Quotes included in Figure 17 contextualize some of the more prescient points regarding new RM experiences and perspectives that connect to the four elements of sense of community.

Figure #16 – Themes of sense of community identified through 1-on-1 interviews

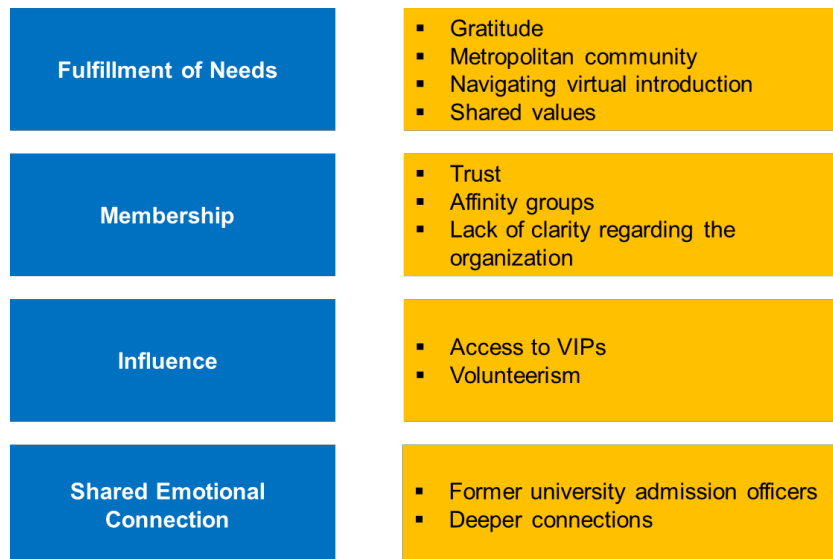


Figure #17 – Categorization of SOC dimensions (positive and negative) and diverse perspectives that contextualize SOC dimensions

	(+) Positive Feedback	(-) Challenges Identified	Sample Quotes
Fulfillment of Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sense of shared values ▪ Gratitude for support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges with virtual introduction to community ▪ Greater reliance on colleagues within same metropolitan area 	<p><i>"I think sometimes this work can be quite lonely, because college counseling offices are so separate from traditionally how the school works...when offices are so small (like this office [with] just the two of us) it is nice to expand [conversations] to more than just your one other partner in the office."</i> – Participant #6</p>
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity groups allow for deep meaningful conversation ▪ Trust in fellow members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Certain aspects of ACCIS remain unclear ▪ Some distrust with organization and leaders 	<p><i>"I assume they probably have a conference a lot of people go to each year normally. I guess. I haven't looked it up. It would probably be easy to find."</i> – Participant #1</p> <p><i>"There[ve] been a few times, where it has felt like ACCIS [was] quick to respond to the social crisis of the day, if you will...sometimes, to the point where it felt insincere or performative. Even in an effort to not be performative, it still came off as performative."</i> – Participant #7</p>
Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ACCIS provides access to individuals in the profession that RMs admire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unclear what is required to volunteer, some feel unprepared to do so 	<p><i>"As a woman of color, I am drawn to women of color. [Name of ACCIS leader] is amazing. I don't think I would feel comfortable enough to walk up to her at NACAC or in a social setting if I hadn't gone to ACCIS's first year college counselor workshop. Now I can say, "Oh, I was there and I heard you talk and it was really powerful to me." I think ACCIS puts me in the room, or at the table with people who I really admire and want to learn more from."</i> – Participant #4</p>
Shared Emotional Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Former university admission officers join community [already] knowing many 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Desire to deepen connection with others 	<p><i>"We would be with our cohort every day of the new counselor workshop. I appreciated that, because there [wa]s ... [a coordinating] person, [and] I feel like a lot of valuable conversations happen in those small groups. It would be nice... to continue to catch up with folks... from that initial cohort."</i> – Participant #2</p>

Recommendations

Given the findings uncovered through RM surveys and interviews, I propose the following recommendations for ACCIS leadership's consideration and implementation. Overall, the suggested actions include reviewing content dissemination and engagement opportunities for new RMs across both virtual and in-person formats to optimize the ACCIS onboarding experience for all.

Project Question #1: To what extent is a sense of community (SOC), as defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986), observable among ACCIS's representative members (RMs) who take the SCI-2?

Key findings: A potential gap can be observed between the percentage of RMs believing SOC is important versus the percentage of RMs experiencing SOC.

Recommendation: If SOC is evaluated in future, compare results to this baseline data.

- While we can observe a potential gap we must acknowledge this is the first time the SCI-2 has been administered to ACCIS RMs. Simply put, it's not clear if that gap is normal.
- ACCIS leaders need to decide if they would like to continue to monitor SOC in the future, to evaluate effectiveness of implementation of interventions identified in this paper. If SOC will be monitored in the future, it must be decided if the SCI-2 will be administered again, and if so, when that should happen. If the SCI-2 will be administered and the data subsequently analyzed, it must be determined who has the technical capacity to do this.

Project Question #2: Are there observable differences with RM SOC when characteristics such as member longevity, program engagement, community leadership, number of college counselors at school, race and gender are considered?

Key findings: The data revealed lower SOC among newer RMs, as well as those in single-person offices, and those who identified as Black/African Americans or Middle Eastern/North African. Higher SOC was found among RMs who participated in Summer Institute, DE&I Colloquium, Affinity Groups and/or among those who have held ACCIS leadership roles.

Recommendation: To support a more equitable introduction to ACCIS, it is important for ACCIS leadership to map out an "ideal" new RM trajectory.

- Goal #1 in the ACCIS 2022 Vision Statement involves improving the value of ACCIS for its members. As such, it is critical for ACCIS leadership to ensure new RMs get started on the right path and are aware of the many different ways they can engage and leverage ACCIS for their schools and students.
- I suggest ACCIS leaders start by evaluating initial messaging that can enhance new RM baseline knowledge of the organization and available programming, review the goals and modality of new RM orientations (e.g., virtual and in-person), and identify other supports that can support new RMs. This will collectively help ensure equitable access to programming and community leadership, ultimately improving the new RM onboarding experience.
- Consider targeted dialogue (e.g., focus groups) with medium- and longer-tenured RMs to clarify the potential for deeper RM engagement within ACCIS and identify how ACCIS can improve its value to a variety of RMs.

Project Question #3: In interviews with RMs who joined ACCIS between June 2019-December 2021, what SOC insights are provided that can help ACCIS better understand and support its evolving membership?

Key findings: New RMs cited challenges with virtual introduction and how certain aspects of ACCIS remain unclear (e.g., how is ACCIS different from other similar organizations). Those working in smaller offices, new directors, and metropolitan-area RMs seem to want and have access to different levels of support. New RMs, especially those who don't have large networks, have the desire to know and deepen connection with other RMs.

Recommendations: ACCIS leadership should ensure its practices are intentionally inclusive and supportive of new RMs.

- ACCIS leadership should re-evaluate the outcomes and goals of virtual, and in-person orientations (in line with new RM trajectory analysis noted earlier).
- There also seems to be merit in expanding affinity group programming (e.g., for those in smaller offices, new directors) and organizing regional or locally-focused meet-ups.
- Opportunity to improve the RM experience also exists at the margin: ACCIS can facilitate group meet-ups at affiliated conferences and make it a point to highlight/humanize RMs via spotlights in its newsletters, social media and website.

Conclusions

ACCIS has faced a number of changes and challenges over the past few years. The community composition has changed significantly, with 25% of RMs joining ACCIS since June 2019. During this same time, there was a sudden and prolonged shift from in-person to virtual programming (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and a racial reckoning in the U.S. that prompted increased discussion on diversity, equity and inclusion amongst RMs and ACCIS leadership. Consequently, ACCIS leadership sought a baseline analysis of RM needs and experiences to better understand and support its evolving constituency.

The SOC baseline assessment provided a number of critical insights illustrating why ACCIS should consider enhancing programming to welcome and support an increasingly diverse constituency. Next steps for ACCIS leadership, including further investigation, may include: (i) mapping out the ideal trajectory for new RMs to ensure all new RMs have equitable access to basic information about ACCIS; (ii) reassessment of orientations (both virtual and in person) to ensure consistency in information-sharing and to optimize RM engagement; and (iii) expansion and promotion of affinity group programming (i.e. for single office counselors, new directors, those inside and outside of metropolitan areas).

Given the lack of complete demographic data about the RM population, it is challenging to assess the degree to which the sample represents the broader population and there is likely to be a degree of volunteer bias that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The goal of this project was to provide baseline RM SOC data and identify trends and areas of further inquiry for ACCIS leadership. These findings are not generalizable across membership associations, as a sense of community is context-dependent. In this case, the SOC was particularly time-sensitive as it was considering SOC during a pandemic that limited in-person interactions.

This capstone does provide a good case study in which the SCI-2 and semi-structured interviews can enhance an association's baseline understanding of its constituency's needs and experiences, and most certainly can be considered as continuing the line of academic inquiry of SOC.

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Appendix A - Sense of Community Index 2

Validating question: How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members? **(Answers: Prefer Not to be Part of This Community, Not Important at All, Not Very Important, Somewhat Important, Important, Very Important)**

Index Questions (Answers: Not at all, Somewhat, Mostly, Completely)

1. I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.
2. Community members and I value the same things.
3. This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.
4. Being a member of this community makes me feel good.
5. When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community.
6. People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.
7. I can trust people in this community.
8. I can recognize most of the members of this community.
9. Most community members know me.
10. This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.
11. I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.
12. Being a member of this community is a part of my identity.
13. Fitting into this community is important to me.
14. This community can influence other communities.
15. I care about what other community members think of me.
16. I have influence over what this community is like.
17. If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.
18. This community has good leaders.
19. It is very important to me to be a part of this community.
20. I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them.
21. I expect to be a part of this community for a long time.
22. Members of this community have shared important events together - holidays, celebrations, disasters.
23. I feel hopeful about the future of this community.
24. Members of this community care about each other.

Appendix B

Questions about personal characteristics added to SCI-2

For approximately how many years have you been a college counselor at an independent school?

1. 0-2 years
2. 3-5 years
3. 5-7 years
4. 8-10 years
5. 10+ years

For approximately how many years have you been a member of ACCIS?

1. 0-3 years
2. 3+ years
3. Unsure

Did you participate in any of the following ACCIS programs over the past 12 months?

1. ACCIS Colloquium
2. New Directors Workshops
3. New Counselors Workshop
4. Summer Institute
5. Affinity Spaces

How many ACCIS members do you know on a first-name basis?

1. 0
2. 1-3
3. 4-6
4. 7+

Are you currently or have you ever been an ACCIS board member or committee member?

1. Yes
2. No

Which of the following best describes you?

1. Asian or Pacific Islander
2. Black or African American
3. Hispanic or Latino
4. Native American or Alaska Native
5. White or Caucasian
6. Multiracial or Biracial
7. A race/ethnicity not listed here

Appendix C

Interview questions for semi-structured one-on-one interviews

1. Can you briefly tell me a little bit about your professional background? How many years have you been a college counselor for?
2. How many college counselors are there at your school?
3. When did you first join ACCIS?
4. What motivated you to join ACCIS?
5. Tell me about initial experiences and interactions you had when you first joined ACCIS.
6. In addition to ACCIS, are you a member of any other local, regional, or national college counseling organizations?

Reinforcement of needs

7. What do you understand to be the purpose of ACCIS?
8. What are things about ACCIS that satisfy/delight you?
9. What are things about ACCIS that disappoint/frustrate you?
10. Which ACCIS programs (if any) have you participated in?
 - a. If YES: Were you satisfied with these programs?
 - i. Did the programs you participated in offer opportunities to interact with other members? How so?
 - b. If NO: If you didn't participate in any programs, can you share why not?
11. Do you know any other ACCIS members not at your school?
 - a. If YES: How did you get to know them?
 - i. How do you interact with them?
 - ii. Have you ever asked these individuals for help when you had a question?
 - b. If NO, what would you do or who would you turn to if you had a college-counseling question?

Membership:

12. Overall, is getting to know other ACCIS members of any value to you? Why or why not?
 - a. If YES, what opportunities are available for members to get to know each other?
 - b. If NO, would you like to share why not?
13. Have you ever volunteered or dedicated time and effort to support specific ACCIS initiatives or specific members?
 - a. If YES, what have you done? What was that experience like?
 - b. If NO, would you like to share why not?

Influence:

14. In your view, what challenges or problems does ACCIS as a community currently face?
 - a. To what extent do you think you or other members can solve these problems or shape solutions?
15. Have you ever thought about volunteering to be a committee member, chair, or board member?
 - a. If YES, what are your reasons for wanting to do so?
 - b. If NO, would you like to share why not?

Shared Emotional Connection:

16. Generally speaking, how important is it for you to be part of this community?
17. For how much longer do you anticipate you will be an ACCIS member?