



FINAL

Accola Programs & Opportunities Committee
Monday, November 10, 2025; 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Hybrid

Attendees: Comfort Dondo; Anita Duckor, CSJ-C; Karen Gervais; Steve Kenney; Colleen O'Malley, CSJ; Adele O'Sullivan, CSJ; Sandy Vargas; Anne Weyandt

Special Guest: Atum Azzahir, Director of the Cultural Wellness Center

Staff: Andrée Aronson; Haven Green; Matt Halley

The Accola Programs and Opportunities Committee convened in-person and online at 2:30 p.m. Notes for the November meeting were taken by Andrée Aronson and will be reformatted by Lacy Sietsema.

DEI Statement: Anne read the DEI Statement.

Spiritual Centering: Anne led the committee in spiritual centering.

Minutes: The October minutes were presented for approval. Hearing no changes or corrections, Sandy moved and Anita seconded to approve the September minutes. All present members voted to approve.

2025-2026 Committee Work Plan

The committee reviewed the proposed committee work plan for 2025-2026. It was suggested that the entire Board of Directors will be apprised of this plan. An additional suggestion was made to complete the committee self-assessment by the end of June. Hearing no further feedback, Sandy moved to approve the work plan with the new addition and Karen seconded. All present members voted to approve the work plan.

The committee discussed the 2nd goal of the work plan, which focuses on diversity. Atum Azzahir, is a special guest at this meeting. Atum's background is as a source of wisdom in the community. Atum has worked nationally and works in culture and relationships. Atum highlights the question of self-study (the importance of doing work internally before doing work externally). Comfort added that Atum is from Kenya and her journey started as a survivor of a shooting/domestic violence. Comfort talked about her work helping to transform rage into resilience.

This committee has a deep understanding of the need for self-study. Committee members were directed to listen to what Atum does and brings. This will lead to further discussion about an opportunity to sign up for an extended engagement of Atum's work with the committee. This work will be brought to the Board.

Discussion with Atum Azzahir, Director of the Cultural Wellness Center

Atum talked about the Cultural Wellness Center (CWC), a community-initiated multidimensional organization focused on promoting health, healing, and Cultural Wellness within diverse communities, especially among people of African descent. Founded in 1996, the CWC empowers and engages communities, by assisting them in

reversing the problems created by individualism, loss of culture, and loss of community.

The theme of the importance of the rise of individualism, loss of culture, and loss of community was key to the conversation. Atum shared her growing up years - and her relationship with her mother who could not read or write but had a symbol that represented her. She talked about the "mystery of why hate was so widespread" and how that continues today - and then talked about rebuilding connections by studying and lifting up culture. It is important to look at neighbors with equality, value, and voice in decision making. She raised the question that "we are all on equal ground AND who is missing from the conversation." Atum asked how do we (Accola) create a sense of belonging? We create partnerships with equity at the center, combining balance, fairness, and respect. She also asked the question "What has whiteness done to you (not for you)" - and acknowledged racism as the core of disconnection.

Discussion Follow-Up: Anne will email the committee follow-up questions for further discussion. Anne and Matt will meet with Atum to explore next steps. Anne suggested extending the December meeting time from 2:30-4:30 p.m. Lacy will update the calendar invite.

Adjournment: The committee adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lacy Sietsema, Accola