

IACAC's New Logo Story

By: Erin M. Hoover, IACAC Executive Director

IACAC's logo has been the same for as long as I can remember.



Thanks to *unofficial* IACAC historian, Julie Nelson, its origin story is quite simple: “Make a logo that looks similar to NACAC’s.” Simple enough at the time but the world of marketing and branding has exploded with change since. In a recent survey of this year’s New Counselor Institute class, participants said our logo was “classic,” “professional,” and “good, but not memorable.” Others said it was “outdated,” “corporate,” and more than one person said “what logo?” These descriptors were a stark contrast to the brand identity our Executive Board and a group of distinguished Past Presidents envisioned for us on their survey. What is IACAC’s brand identity? Did we really have one previously? How do we define one that captures all that IACAC is? That’s where our new logo’s story begins.

When IACAC hired Mike Ford to serve as Digital Marketing Coordinator, the priority task was clear - define IACAC’s brand. Invigorated by this task, Mike immediately went to work researching who we are as an organization, how we are represented externally, as well as how we are representing the great state of Illinois. His initial survey targeted current Executive Board members and a group of recent Past Presidents hoping to gain a better understanding of who these individuals believe IACAC is. From that survey, Mike presented a summary to the Executive Board in November of 2024. Included in that summary was the following:

*According to the survey responses, the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling (IACAC) is dedicated to fostering professional growth within the realm of higher education. Our core values include **passion, collaboration, kindness,***

support, and resourcefulness. Our audience consists of school counselors, college admission representatives, enrollment managers, college counselors, educational consultants, community-based organizations, and more.

Vision for a new logo

Modern

Minimalistic

Abstract

Key Findings and Recommendations

IACAC clearly defines its organizational identity and target audience. However, establishing consistent branding, marketing, and messaging is essential for reinforcing that presence. It is advisable to develop a more prominent brand identity to strengthen the organization's capacity to communicate our mission and services effectively. Develop strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing brand visibility and expanding our market.

Branding Survey Executive Summary

From there, we started researching ideas surrounding Illinois themes, modern, minimalistic, and abstract ideas.

An initial Potential Brand Board V1 (below, labeled IACAC Concept) was presented to the Executive Board in November of 2024. Some Illinois themes we liked were violet, gold rush apple, slate, tartan, and fluorite gem.

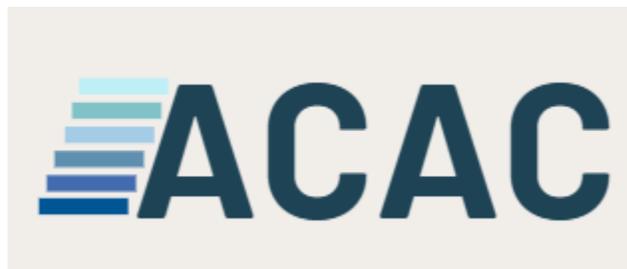


Additionally, we looked into utilizing the five core values summarized in the Branding Survey with the colors that represent them combined with the original (OG) IACAC blue to represent our foundation:

passion = red
collaboration = yellow
kindness = pink
support = brown
resourcefulness = orange

We didn't feel this color combination was right for us. From there we played with the OG blue and variations of that. Our first mock up was a logo that included the idea of stepping stones signifying the path towards graduation within the first I in IACAC. Over the years, our leadership has engaged in many conversations about mission creep. Who does IACAC serve, professionals or students or both? IACAC's current mission is to serve you, the professional, who is *servicing* students. Upon further discussions, we narrowed in on the idea of the stepping stones symbolizing **professional development, growth, post-secondary path, high school to college, advancement** within your employer and/or **leadership** within IACAC, **upwards/forward**; all things IACAC is.

That led us to this design:



In this design, we liked that there were steps representing the pillars of the Strategic Plan: Membership, Fiduciary Responsibility, Education Opportunities and Outreach, Brand, Governance.

But we felt the Illinois component was missing. We tried varied versions of the logo including the state of Illinois outline. In doing so, the mock logos were too similar to other Illinois organizations and state government entities.

So we went back to the list of Illinois features to look for other inspiration. What stood out then was the violet flower, fluorite gem, slate, and gold rush apple. The violet flower and fluorite gem incorporate purple, turquoise, and blue. We wondered what defined each of those items.

Fluorite is often associated with the following meanings:

Clarity and mental enhancement

Fluorite is said to help clear negative energy, improve focus, and aid in decision-making.

Emotional balance

Fluorite is thought to help stabilize emotions, release strong emotions in a healthy way, and calm nerves.

We decided those should be our primary logo colors with slate as an accent color and yellow/gold as a secondary “pop of” color.

The violet flower represents:

Modesty

Violets are small and unassuming, growing close to the ground with their heads bowed.

This modest appearance symbolizes ***humility and grace***.

Really, *humility and grace* are the words used to describe the violet flower??? We couldn't believe the perfect symbolism. Our then President, Annette Braden who represents Norris City-Omaha-Enfield High School in rural southern Illinois, would speak often about how important humility and grace are in the work we all do; how critical those words are in how we treat one another; and how those intentions can change the course of a conversation, a disagreement, or a misunderstanding. We felt we had finally found the color palette that was most “IACAC.”

Now came time for the glow-up. (Or so we thought.)

To honor IACAC history and our original foundation, we kept the original IACAC blue within the steps while bookending a new, darker, deeper, rich blue on the top and bottom of the I with a distinct longer length to be able to easily identify it from the other letters.

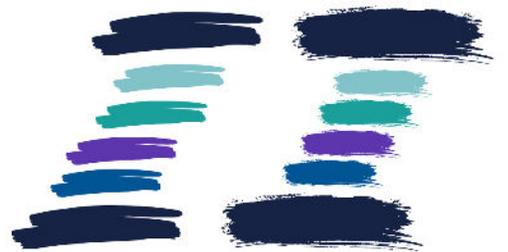
We incorporated the purples and turquoise into the stepping stones between the top and bottom blue. We loved it.



But, this logo did not garner the same love we felt for it from our audience. Instead it was met with “um, ok, it’s close, yeah, hmm, so we’re on the right track, but we aren’t there yet” from the Executive Board.

As consummate professionals, we took their feedback and tried additional versions (below). We said, “**professional development, growth, path to graduation, high school to college, advancement** within your employer and/or **leadership** within IACAC, **upwards/forwards** are not straight lines or perfect, everyone’s journey is a little wavier/messier.”

The new mockups were all a NOPE and some even got weird, real weird. You know that feeling when you’re working on a project for sooo long that you get a little loopy about it or when you look at the same word over and over again and convince yourself that it’s misspelled even when it isn’t? Yeah, we felt that.



At this point, we took a little brain break and when we got back to work we started with what we knew we had right. We knew we had the **story**, the **purpose**, the **feels**, and the overall **imaging** right but we needed to take a fresh look at all of those items combined with the feedback from members.

The steps from the original concept then morphed into layers. Layers are the depth of a journey. People have layers. Growth has layers. Professional development has layers. Our students have layers.

Layering our color palette on overlapping outlines of the state of Illinois immediately provided the real glow-up we were looking for. The colors illuminate the flow of the

river giving our state its unique and identifiable shape. The layer imagery created the waves of journey and growth we were hoping to capture.

In comparison to other affiliates' logos who also bear the ACAC acronym, we knew our "I" needed to be bold as Illinois is historically and currently one of the boldest among the affiliates.

We were closing in on getting it right. And it was exciting.

Ahead of the March board meeting, we rallied our energy, prepared our full research, and created a poll. The poll re-iterated where we had been, what we had changed, and where we could possibly go. The poll also stated, very bluntly, that those working on this design (Mike and I) were paid entities who had taken our expertise as far as we could. And noting that, if we didn't get this right, that would be ok and we could problem solve that going forward. All that mattered was getting this right for our past, for our present, and for our future.

After the Executive Board members had a chance to review all of the information, they were asked to cast their final vote between two images or neither. We were thrilled to reveal the winner at the end of the March board meeting. We had gotten it right. We hope you love the new logo's story as much as the new logo itself! This logo and [branding guide](#) will be applied to all things IACAC in the coming weeks.



As we work on that, we'd love to invite you to get your new IACAC merch [here!](#)