Complementary, Not Competing: AECT, OLC, UPCEA and Quality Matters

What our members gain elsewhere, what we uniquely offer, and where we might work together

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This document looks outward from AECT. It assumes what most of us already believe — that AECT is the scholarly home of instructional design and technology — and asks three practical questions that follow from it: what our members can gain by also belonging to the Online Learning Consortium, UPCEA or Quality Matters; what we offer that those organizations cannot; and where the four of us might work together rather than separately.

The premise throughout is complementarity. These are not four organizations competing for the same membership dollar; they are four organizations doing different work for overlapping people. AECT builds the knowledge base, forms the scholars and sets the field's vocabulary. OLC turns that knowledge into credentials and quality instruments. UPCEA turns it into benchmarks, market intelligence and policy. Quality Matters turns it into a standard, a certification mark and the largest trained reviewer corps in the field. Read that way, the case for joining another organization and the case for partnering with it are the same case.

Question / Theme	Online Learning Consortium (OLC)	UPCEA	Quality Matters (QM)	All Three — and All Four Together
Question 1 — Using AECT as the base model, what do these other organizations offer that AECT does not? Why would AECT members benefit from joining OLC, UPCEA or Quality Matters? *Columns read as: what OLC adds for an AECT member | what UPCEA adds | what QM adds | what they add jointly, and how to think about a portfolio of memberships*				
1a. The headline complements	• A complete professional credentialing ladder. AECT develops people through mentorship, publication and service; OLC issues portable credentials an employer recognizes — the Instructional Design Professional (IDP) and Digital Education Leader (DEL) certifications, certificate programs and stackable digital badges. • A widely adopted quality instrument. The OLC Quality Scorecard suite — program-level, course review, Spanish-language and the new Learning Experience Quality Standards — is used in accreditation self-studies and program reviews. • Year-round applied training. Workshops of one to two weeks, four-week Mastery Series cohorts, self-paced modules and a microlearning library, running continuously rather than only at a convention. • Reach beyond higher education. Accelerate programming spans K-12, higher education and corporate learning and development.	• Institutional market intelligence. The annual Benchmarking Online Enterprises study, plus custom market research and program portfolio analysis, supplies the numbers a dean or provost asks for. AECT produces research about learning; UPCEA produces research about the business of learning. • Executive peer networks. The Council for Chief Online Learning Officers and the Council for Credential Innovation seat one senior leader per institution — a room AECT has no equivalent of. • Policy and advocacy. Government Affairs coverage and Policy Matters primers on accessibility, regular and substantive interaction, financial aid definitions and state authorization. AECT takes no policy positions. • A dense year-round calendar. Four national conferences a year, near-weekly webinars, Regional Salons and unrecorded Coffee Chats — all open to unlimited colleagues under one institutional membership.	• The field's most widely adopted course design instrument. The QM Rubric appears in accreditation self-studies, program reviews, state authorization documentation and program marketing. AECT publishes the research that makes such an instrument defensible; QM supplies the instrument. • An externally recognizable certification mark. A QM-Certified course or program is a public, verifiable claim carrying currency with provosts, accreditors and prospective students. Nothing AECT offers has comparable external legibility. • The cheapest serious entry point for a full-rate professional — a $195 individual subscription, against AECT's $225, including the annotated rubric, the Self-Review tool, the Course Review Management System and free membership in the QM Instructional Designers Association. For students and international members, AECT is cheaper still. • Four sectors, four rubrics — higher education, K-12, continuing and professional education, and publishers/vendors — so one framework travels with you across jobs and sectors. • Scale: more than 60,000 professionals trained and more than 1,500 institutions. The broadest installed base of the three.	• All three sell something AECT does not: an institutional subscription covering every employee. One invoice puts your whole instructional design team, your faculty developers and your online administrators inside the organization — a very different conversation with a dean than “reimburse my $225.” • All three are organized around practice and enterprise rather than scholarship, so they answer the questions that arrive on a Monday morning: how do we review this program, what do peer institutions charge, does this course meet standard. • With four organizations the portfolio logic finally gets clean: AECT for scholarship and identity; QM for the instrument and the credential; OLC for practitioner capability; UPCEA for enterprise strategy and market data. • The cheapest viable combination for an individual is AECT $225 + QM individual $195 = $420 a year, which buys a scholarly home, a journal library, a rubric, a credential pathway and two instructional design communities. • One caution worth passing on: OLC and QM overlap directly — Quality Scorecard versus QM Rubric. An institution should generally choose one, not both.
1b. Professional development and credentials	• Career Certifications, members only and renewable: Instructional Design Professional (IDP) and Digital Education Leader (DEL) — $580	• The Digital Learning Academy, launched August 2026, in three career-stage tiers: Essential Learning (self-paced labs); Professional Practice	• A credential ladder built on peer review rather than coursework — a genuinely different model. QM Peer Reviewer via the Peer Reviewer Course	• For an AECT member whose next step is a director, associate dean or chief online learning officer role, neither AECT's convention nor its

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	professional member, $530 institutional member. Portfolio-based rather than exam-based, so existing work counts. • Certificate programs: Instructional Designer; Advanced Instructional Designer; Online Teaching; Advanced Online Teaching (12 weeks); Leadership. The Instructional Designer Certificate is reported at $1,800–$2,180 depending on membership. • Certificate alumni may articulate into Baylor University graduate certificates — an association credential with an academic on-ramp. • Skills Pathways: three workshops in a theme earn a credential, with digital badges on every workshop. • IELOL — the best-known leadership institute in the field, running since 2008 across four phases over roughly 3.5 months with an onsite residency. $3,025–$3,950.	(instructor-led courses with UPCEA-backed badges); Enterprise Leadership. • The Enterprise Leadership Certificate carries two concentrations aimed squarely at senior roles: Chief Online Learning Officer (COLO) and Professional & Continuing Education (PCE). • UPlift mentorship pairs members as mentors, mentees or both, across institutions and career stages. • "Second Opinion" — a free 30-minute consultation with UPCEA's lead consultants, included in dues. • Planning note: Digital Learning Academy prices and durations are not published publicly.	($220 member / $385 non-member, about three weeks online, with APPQMR as prerequisite); Master Reviewer Certification ($330, members only); facilitator certifications; a Program Reviewer Course. • Applying the QM Rubric (APPQMR) — $220 member / $330 non-member; two weeks asynchronous or two half-days virtual. The most widely taken workshop in this field and the gateway to everything else. • Teaching Online Certificate — seven workshops at $1,089 member / $1,634 non-member with the 10% package discount, each one to two weeks, with a QM Digital Credential per workshop. • Free QM Coordinator training, two seats per subscription — a no-cost leadership credential with real institutional visibility. • Low-cost, high-cadence entry points: $55 QM Live! sessions, micro-learning with OneHE, and a free self-paced "Elements of Quality Matters" course open to anyone.	journals supply a credential a search committee will recognize. All three of these organizations do. • The three ladders target different rungs and are complementary rather than redundant: QM credentials the reviewer and the online teacher; OLC the instructional designer and emerging administrator; UPCEA the sitting or aspiring executive. • QM offers the cheapest and fastest route to a recognized credential — roughly $440 and five weeks from zero to certified peer reviewer. • None of this replaces what AECT gives a scholar. A doctoral student is usually better served publishing in ETR&D than buying a certificate; a mid-career practitioner without a doctorate may find the reverse. • A rule of thumb worth offering members: AECT for who you are in the field, the others for what you can prove on paper.
1c. Data, benchmarks and institutional tools	• The Quality Scorecard suite, free to organizational members: program-level scorecards, a course review scorecard, Spanish-language versions and the new Learning Experience Quality Standards. • The Course Review Assistant GPT, exclusive to institutional members — an AI tool built on the Scorecard. • Formal Quality Scorecard Reviews and OLC Consulting for institutions seeking external validation of a program. • Freely published playbooks and toolkits on accessibility, quality and AI, including the Faculty Development and GenAI Playbook with Every Learner Everywhere.	• Benchmarking Online Enterprises — third annual edition, August 2026 — on structures, strategies and financial models for online units. No equivalent has existed since the Sloan-C / Babson enrollment series ended. • Three Hallmarks of Excellence frameworks: Digital Learning Enterprises (2026), Credential Innovation, and Professional & Continuing Education — self-assessment instruments for units rather than individuals. • Member rates on custom market research, program portfolio review and competitive analysis, plus member-only benchmarking data, session recordings and slides. • Joint industry research — for example the 2026 UPCEA / Search Influence study finding that prospective students now consider three or fewer programs and increasingly rely on AI-generated search summaries.	• The CHLOE Project — an annual national survey of chief online learning officers, now in its tenth edition (2025), produced with Eduventures and Bay View Analytics, and free to download. The closest thing the field has to a census of online learning leadership. • Operational software, not just a document: the Course Review Management System, My Custom Reviews for custom rubric worksheets, and Self and Internal Review tools that let faculty evaluate their own courses before a formal review. • The QM Research Library, curated by QM's Department of Innovation & Research, which also produces the literature reviews keeping the Standards research-current. • The QM AI Review Assistant (beta) — three free course evaluations per month for Full subscribers. Note it is built and maintained by Noodle under Noodle's terms, not QM's. • Public directories of QM-Certified Courses and Programs — usable benchmarking data requiring no subscription.	• This is the clearest complement to AECT's portfolio and the most persuasive reason for an AECT member with administrative responsibility to hold a second membership. • A practical division of labor: cite AECT journals when you write; use QM's rubric or OLC's scorecard when you review a course; use UPCEA's or QM's benchmarks when you budget or make the case to a provost. • Note the overlap honestly: CHLOE and UPCEA's Benchmarking Online Enterprises survey similar populations. Reading both is useful; paying for both may not be. • AECT's scholarship tells you what works; the instruments tell you whether your courses meet a standard; the benchmarks tell you how your unit compares. All three sets are stronger used together — which is also the argument for partnership in Question 3.
1d. Who should join, and what it costs	• Individual membership $195 per year — recovered by one conference registration alone ($200 saving), and it unlocks eligibility for the IDP and DEL certifications. • Organizational membership $1,200–$5,500 by student FTE (community colleges 10% less), covering every full-time employee.	• Institutional membership only, $980–$6,600 by Carnegie Classification and enrollment — and it includes an unlimited roster. • Best fit: deans and directors of online and continuing education; enrollment and marketing staff; program planners; credential innovation leads; and instructional design teams through the eDesign Collaborative Network.	• Individual subscription $195 per year for one rubric — the best value in this comparison for a working instructional designer, and it includes free QM IDA membership. • Institutional: HE Basic $1,925; HE Full $2,545 (1–2 online programs) or $3,815 (3+); Consortium $1,925–$2,860 per organization;	• The most efficient path for most AECT members is to hold AECT individually and encourage their institution to hold QM, OLC or UPCEA organizationally. That costs the member $225 and the institution $1,200–$4,900, and covers the whole team. • If an institution will fund only one institutional subscription, the choice is functional: QM or OLC

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	• Best fit: instructional designers and course developers; faculty developers; quality assurance and assessment staff; anyone preparing for accreditation or program review. • Worth passing on: OLC's free "community membership" does not qualify for any discounts. A paid membership is required for member rates.	• Emeritus / Transitional individual membership is $65 — the least expensive way for a retired or between-roles AECT member to stay connected. • Note for advisors: UPCEA has no student membership and no student rate.	Publisher/Vendor $3,630. All cover every faculty and staff member. • The Basic-to-Full decision is the one that matters: Full licenses you to facilitate QM workshops in-house and to run your own official reviews at $100 — or $0 with a certified Course Review Manager — instead of about $1,300 per QM-managed review. • Best fit: instructional designers, faculty developers, QA coordinators, anyone preparing for accreditation or program review, and anyone wanting a portable credential quickly and cheaply. • Note for advisors: no student membership and no student rate. The $195 individual rate is the only route for a graduate student.	if the need is course and program quality; UPCEA if the need is enterprise strategy, market data and credential innovation. • Three of the four have no student membership. AECT remains the only home for graduate students in this field — a point worth making loudly. • AECT remains the only one of the four that belongs to the individual rather than the employer, which is exactly why it should be the membership a member never lets lapse. • Framed positively: this is not a competition for loyalty. It is a portfolio decision, and AECT is the anchor.
Question 2 — What does AECT offer that these other organizations do not? What would we say to encourage OLC, UPCEA and QM members to join AECT, and what is in it for them? *Columns read as: the case to make to an OLC member | to a UPCEA member | to a QM member | the shared case that works with all three audiences*				
2a. The headline offer	• Three owned journals plus three sponsored. AECT owns Educational Technology Research and Development and TechTrends with Springer, plus the Journal of Formative Design in Learning, and sponsors three open-access titles. An OLC member has one excellent journal; an AECT member has six venues and a route into book series. • A book and reference program: the Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology; Learning, Design, and Technology (Major Reference Work); the Encyclopedia of Terminology; the Educational Media and Technology Yearbook; SpringerBriefs. • The Center of Excellence for Publishing, which mentors members into becoming authors, book series editors and journal editors. There is no comparable route inside OLC. • The theoretical foundation that quality instruments rest on. Much of the research making a quality rubric defensible was published in ETR&D and TechTrends.	• A research base to publish in. UPCEA members produce excellent benchmarking and market data but have no active peer-reviewed journal of their own. AECT is where that underlying scholarship belongs and where it acquires citable authority. • Design and learning theory, not only enterprise strategy. UPCEA answers how to run an online unit; AECT answers how people learn and how instruction should be designed. • A venue built for practitioner scholarship. The AECT Online Conference is explicitly practitioner-facing — action research, dissertations in practice, applied best practice. • Access at an individual price. When an institution drops a UPCEA membership its staff lose everything; an AECT membership is personal and portable at $225.	• Three owned journals plus three sponsored, and a book program. QM owns no peer-reviewed journal at all. It curates research in its Research Library; AECT produces it. • A home for the research that validates the instrument. QM's Rubric Committees rely on literature reviews of work published in venues like ETR&D and TechTrends — the evidence base QM depends on is substantially AECT's output. A point to make generously rather than competitively. • Theory, not only standards. A rubric tells you what good looks like; AECT's scholarship explains why, and supplies the design and learning theory you need when a decision falls outside what any rubric covers. • Member governance. QM's direction is set by a board and three advisory councils; AECT's eleven divisions elect their own boards, and those divisions are represented on the AECT Board through a Division Representative. A QM volunteer contributes labor; an AECT member can stand for election and help steer the organization. • A professional identity not tied to a single instrument. QM membership makes you a certified reviewer of a particular rubric; AECT membership makes you a member of the field.	• AECT's central offer is the same to all three audiences: the field's intellectual infrastructure, and a professional identity that is personal rather than institutional. • AECT is the only one of the four you can belong to as a person rather than as an employee. Change jobs and your AECT membership follows you — which matters in a sector with this much churn. • AECT is where the field's vocabulary is set: the AECT Definition of the Field, the Code of Professional Ethics and the Instructional Design Standards for Distance Learning are cited across all three organizations' work. • More than a century of continuous scholarly record since 1923. None of the other three can offer that depth of field memory, and all three draw on it. • With four organizations in view, AECT holds essentially all of the field's scholarly publishing: three owned journals plus three sponsored open-access titles, against OLC's one and zero each at UPCEA and QM.
2b. Scholarship and publishing — the strongest single argument	• ETR&D is the only journal in the field devoted entirely to research and development in educational technology, with distinct Research, Development, and Cultural & Regional	• UPCEA generates a large volume of original national data every year and has no scholarly outlet of its own. AECT has three owned journals plus three sponsored open-access journals.	• The most natural pitch in this study: QM has 60,000+ trained professionals doing applied quality work, an annual research conference, a	• Framing that works for all three audiences: your practice is already research. AECT is where it becomes literature.

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	Perspectives sections — three doors for three kinds of manuscript. • TechTrends bridges research and practice and is an unusually good fit for the applied work OLC members already do. • Membership includes the full digital Reference Library — journals plus handbooks and reference works — for $225. Institutional subscriptions to those journals alone cost far more. • Reviewing and editorial service in AECT counts as national scholarly service on a CV in a way conference proposal review generally does not.	• The Journal of Formative Design in Learning explicitly welcomes evaluation studies, action research, case studies and reflective practice from practitioners and early-career authors. • The International Journal of Designs for Learning and The Journal of Applied Instructional Design are open access and design-case oriented — ideal for documenting what an online unit actually built and why. • Publishing turns internal institutional work into a field-level contribution, which is how a capable director becomes a recognized national voice.	research library and a research director — and nowhere of its own to publish. • The Journal of Formative Design in Learning explicitly welcomes evaluation studies, action research and reflective practice — exactly the shape of a QM implementation study. • The International Journal of Designs for Learning and The Journal of Applied Instructional Design are open access and design-case oriented — ideal for documenting a course redesign that passed review. • QM Research Colleagues already write and publish. AECT is the obvious venue, and $225 includes the whole Reference Library alongside the publishing opportunity. • Reviewing and editorial service at AECT is national scholarly service in a way serving on a course review team is not — different and complementary, not better.	• The membership economics are favorable — $225 buys both the library and the venues. A single published article is worth more to most careers than a decade of dues. • A point to state honestly rather than hide: AECT currently has interim editors at TechTrends and the Journal of Formative Design in Learning, with searches under way. That is an opportunity as much as a caution — editorial leadership roles are genuinely open. • The fair counterpoint to acknowledge: two of the three now publish an annual national data product (UPCEA's benchmarking study, QM's CHLOE) and AECT publishes none. Saying so makes the publishing argument land rather than sound defensive. • Invitation rather than recruitment: come and publish with us. That is a lower-friction ask than "switch memberships," and it converts better.
2c. Career formation, students and community	• The Graduate Student Assembly, with full representation on the AECT Board. OLC has no student structure; its $550 student conference rate is a discount, not a community. • A $125 student and retiree membership and a $325 early-bird convention rate. For an OLC member who supervises graduate students, AECT is where those students belong. • The Design & Development Competition pairs student teams with mentors from other institutions across a multi-phase, months-long project — free to enter. • Eleven divisions with elected boards, so an individual can reach visible national leadership quickly — though since the March 2025 restructure those divisions share a single seat on the AECT Board rather than holding one each.	• Everything above, with added force: UPCEA has no student membership, no student rate and no student structure at all. A UPCEA member who teaches or advises graduate students has nowhere inside UPCEA to send them. • AECT's Early Career Symposium, plus Foundation scholarships, internships and summer leadership participation, builds the pipeline that will eventually staff UPCEA member institutions. • Division and committee service gives a mid-career UPCEA member a route to national visibility that does not depend on their employer maintaining a membership. • A genuinely international community: nine international affiliates including ASCILITE, KSET, JSET, HKAECT, Thai AECT and IPTPI, with GDP-indexed dues from $57.	• QM has no student membership, no student rate and no student assembly. AECT has a Graduate Student Assembly, a $125 student membership and a $325 convention rate. • The Design & Development Competition pairs student teams with mentors from other institutions over months — a structural analogue to QM's peer review teams, but aimed at formation rather than certification. • Eleven divisions and committees give an individual a route to visible, elected national leadership. QM's leadership roles are functional — Coordinator, reviewer, facilitator — rather than elective. • AECT's international affiliate network plus GDP-indexed dues from $57. • The honest overlap to name: QM IDA is a real instructional design community, free with a $195 subscription, and it directly overlaps AECT's Design & Development Division. AECT's argument here is scholarly depth and governance, not community access per se.	• If these organizations want a steady supply of well-prepared instructional designers and online learning leaders, AECT is where that supply is currently being formed. That is a shared interest, not only an AECT talking point. • Three of the four have no student membership at all. AECT is the field's only pipeline, and that is a stronger claim at four organizations than it was at three. • AECT is the affordable entry point for early-career professionals and for colleagues in lower-income countries — reach none of the other three attempts. • For individuals: AECT is the membership that survives a job change, a budget cut or a retirement. • This argument lands best with the people at OLC, UPCEA and QM who supervise, teach or hire. Aim it there first.
2d. Value proposition and price	• $225 regular and $125 student or retired, against OLC's $195 individual — comparable entry costs with very different contents. • Five days at the AECT convention for $490 member early bird, against four days at OLC Accelerate for $995 at the academic member early-bird rate — the fair comparison, since AECT has only one academic rate. Roughly half the cost for one more day. • AECT offers a one-day convention rate of $220; OLC offers no partial-attendance option.	• AECT can be joined by an individual for $225. UPCEA cannot be joined by an individual at all, except at the $65 emeritus rate. • Five days at the AECT convention for $490 member early bird, against three days at UPCEA's Annual Conference for $1,045. • Pre-convention workshops at $15–$20 for three to four hours — the best value per hour anywhere in the field.	• AECT regular membership $225 against QM's $195 individual subscription — nearly identical prices for very different things. QM buys a rubric and a toolset; AECT buys a library and a field. • Five days at the AECT convention for $490 member early bird against three days at QM Connect for $945 at the equivalent early-bird member rate — roughly half the price for two more days. • A one-day AECT convention rate of $220 against QM Connect's $575 member single-day rate.	• The pitch to a cost-conscious professional is simple and true: AECT is by a wide margin the least expensive way to belong to a national organization in this field, and the only one that belongs to you rather than to your employer. • The five-day convention at $490 is the single most quotable number in the entire comparison. On a like-for-like basis — all early-bird member, academic-equivalent rates — the field is AECT $490 for five days, QM Connect $945 for three, OLC Accelerate $995 for four and UPCEA $1,045

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	• At AECT the dues include the journal library. At OLC the journal is free to everyone and the paid benefits are discounts.	• GDP-indexed international membership from $57 to $169 reaches colleagues that UPCEA's $980 minimum does not.	• Pre-convention workshops at $15–$20 for three to four hours against QM's $220 APPQMR. Different products, but the per-hour value gap is worth stating. • The fair counterpoint: QM's $195 delivers a credential pathway and an ID community AECT does not offer. Most serious practitioners should hold both — and at $420 combined that is an easy case to make.	for three. Use these rather than headline rates; the claim is then unassailable. • The counterpoint to acknowledge up front: AECT's professional development offering is modest and it issues no credential, while three of four competitors do. Acknowledging that makes the rest of the case more credible. • So the honest ask is complementarity, not conversion: join AECT for scholarship, identity and community, and hold whatever else your work requires.
Question 3 — If AECT were to partner with these organizations, what synergies would be created? What specific projects could we work on, and what problems could we address together? *Columns read as: an AECT–OLC partnership | an AECT–UPCEA partnership | an AECT–QM partnership | what all four could do jointly, and shared field-level problems*				
3a. Precedent worth building on	• No formal AECT–OLC partnership appears in public sources, which makes this open ground rather than contested ground. • OLC has an established habit of co-producing with partners — the Faculty Development and GenAI Playbook with Every Learner Everywhere is a recent example of a jointly branded, freely distributed publication. • OLC's Quality Scorecards are revised periodically, and revision cycles are natural insertion points for a research partner. • OLC's Online Learning journal is Diamond open access with no author fees, and AECT's three sponsored open-access journals operate on similar principles — a shared publishing philosophy to build from.	• UPCEA has already demonstrated it will co-own a flagship event with a peer association: Convergence is jointly presented with AACRAO, and the two have co-published research with Modern Campus. • That is a proven template. UPCEA knows how to share a conference brand, a program committee and a revenue model with another association. • UPCEA's eDesign Collaborative Network is an instructional design community living inside an enterprise association — an obvious point of contact with AECT's Design & Development Division. • UPCEA's research operation regularly seeks co-authors, partner data sets and joint sponsorship.	• QM already co-produces a conference with a peer association: the Policy to Practice Summit is run jointly with WCET and is open exclusively to members of both organizations. The most directly transferable precedent in this study. • QM co-brands research routinely — the CHLOE Project with Eduventures and Bay View Analytics, and the AI Review Assistant with Noodle. QM is comfortable sharing a mark. • An implicit relationship already exists: QM's Rubric Committees depend on literature reviews of externally published research, much of it in AECT journals. It has simply never been formalized. • QM Research Colleagues is a standing scholarly affiliation with no publishing venue of its own — a ready-made partner community that needs exactly what AECT has. • No formal AECT–QM partnership appears in public sources. Open ground, and arguably the easiest of the three approaches.	• All four already know how to co-produce with a peer organization: AECT with SITE through the National Technology Leadership Coalition since 2008, UPCEA with AACRAO on Convergence, QM with WCET on the Policy to Practice Summit, and OLC with Every Learner Everywhere. Nobody has to invent the model. • AECT also maintains nine international affiliates and two domestic affiliates, so it has standing liaison structures and reciprocal conference arrangements to model from. • AECT's March 2025 board restructure makes this a better moment to act, not a worse one. Inter-association agreements are broad and cross-cutting, and their benefit is hard to attribute to any single division — precisely the kind of proposal that struggles in a board where eleven divisions are separately represented. The new board is compact and officer-weighted, so a partnership decision can be taken by an executive body rather than negotiated across eleven constituencies. • The CEO's ex officio seat matters just as much. Every one of these partnerships was struck staff-to-staff: UPCEA and AACRAO, QM and WCET, OLC and Every Learner Everywhere. Peer organizations transact through a chief executive, and AECT now has one at the board table — which makes AECT a more legible counterparty than it was under a wholly volunteer-officer structure. • The honest trade-off to name: consolidation also means divisions can no longer carry a proposal to their own board seat. Partnership ideas that start in a division now need an officer or the Division Representative to champion them, so divisional initiative has to be paired with executive sponsorship earlier than before. • A useful starting position: all four are small relative to the problems the field faces, and none

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				competes with the others for precisely the same revenue. • The coalition model — a standing agreement with an annual summit — is well within reach and requires no merger, no shared governance and no financial entanglement.
3b. Joint programming and events	• A co-branded track or summit: AECT curates a research foundations strand at Accelerate; OLC curates an applied practice strand at the AECT convention. Low cost, high visibility, no shared revenue risk. • Reciprocal member registration rates — each organization's members register at the other's member rate. • Jointly designed pre-conference workshops. AECT's run $15–$20 for three to four hours; OLC's Immersion Classes run $345. A joint offering could sit productively between the two. • A shared virtual event. AECT's Online Conference (March) and OLC's Elevate (August) do not compete on the calendar; a co-hosted single day in a gap month would cost little and reach both memberships.	• An instructional design summit co-produced by AECT's Design & Development Division and UPCEA's eDesign Collaborative Network — two communities serving overlapping people who rarely meet. • Follow the Convergence model: a jointly presented conference on a topic neither organization owns alone. Learning design for credential innovation is the obvious candidate. • A reciprocal speaker exchange — AECT scholars present research at SOLAR or the Annual Conference; UPCEA leaders present enterprise context at the AECT convention. • Co-badged professional development. UPCEA's new Digital Learning Academy needs research-grounded content; AECT has the authors.	• The lowest-hanging fruit in the entire partnership analysis: a joint research track. QM's Research Online Conference is a half day in April at $75; AECT's Online Conference is three days in March at $195. They do not compete for dates or audience and could cross-promote immediately at zero cost. • Cross-program the QM Research Online Conference with AECT's Research & Theory Division — QM supplies the practitioner audience and the implementation questions; AECT supplies the methodological depth. • Reciprocal member registration rates at QM Connect and the AECT convention. QM's member / non-member spread is only $50, so this costs QM almost nothing and signals a great deal. • A joint pre-convention workshop at AECT27: QM already runs “Designing Quality Online Learning Research” as a three-week course; a condensed version in AECT's three-to-four-hour format would serve both memberships. • Follow the WCET template directly — a members-only joint virtual summit on learning design research and quality standards. QM has run this exact play.	• Calendar coordination is now urgent rather than tidy. Four flagship events fall inside six weeks: QM Connect in late October, the AECT convention in early November, OLC Accelerate in mid-November and UPCEA MEMS from late November. • A shared, published field calendar — conventions, conferences, proposal deadlines, virtual events — is the cheapest, most visible and least controversial first collaboration available to all four. • A joint graduate student and early career day, hosted at whichever conference is nearest, would give students exposure to all four communities and give the other three a pipeline they currently lack. • Co-location, even once, would test the appetite for deeper collaboration at very low risk.
3c. Joint publishing and research	• Co-develop the evidence base for the next Quality Scorecard revision — AECT scholars conduct validation research and publish it in ETR&D or TechTrends while OLC retains and maintains the instrument. • Paired special issues. Online Learning and TechTrends could run companion issues on a shared theme — quality assurance, AI in course design, accessibility — cross-citing one another. • Co-published practitioner guides, combining AECT's Center of Excellence for Publishing with OLC's playbook production capacity. • Shared open-access infrastructure. Both run no-fee open access journals; combining editorial training and reviewer pools would strengthen both.	• The most obvious synergy with UPCEA: it generates original national data annually and has no journal; AECT has six journals and a standing need for significant data-driven manuscripts. A formal arrangement giving UPCEA research a peer-reviewed home would serve both. • Co-produce a national instructional design workforce study — headcount, reporting lines, salary bands, credential requirements and career paths. Neither organization has published one. • A joint annual state-of-the-field report combining AECT's scholarly synthesis with UPCEA's benchmarking data. • Co-authored policy-relevant research: UPCEA has the policy channel, AECT has the research credibility.	• The headline opportunity: QM has tens of thousands of trained professionals, an annual research conference, a research library and a research director — and no journal. AECT has six. A standing arrangement giving QM-related research a peer-reviewed home would serve both immediately and cost neither much. • A TechTrends or JFDL special issue on quality assurance in online course design, guest-edited with QM Research Colleagues. Low cost, high visibility, and it converts two decades of applied work into citable literature. • Co-develop the validation evidence for the rubric revisions. QM released Rubric Version 2.0 in March 2026 and simultaneously moved higher education certification reviews from three reviewers to two. Whether two reviewers produce results equivalent to three is an empirical, measurement-theoretic question — exactly AECT's ground. • The AI gap is live and shared: QM added AI guidance language to the rubric but was explicit that it is guidance, not policy or expected	• A four-organization research agenda would carry weight with funders that none commands alone. Foundations fund coalitions more readily than single associations. • Shared reviewer pools and editorial mentoring would ease a real constraint — all four depend on volunteer reviewers, and AECT currently has interim editors at two journals. • A common data standard for describing online programs, credentials and instructional design roles would make all four organizations' research interoperable and far more useful to members. • Every one of these projects plays to AECT's strength. In any negotiation, AECT's leverage is that it owns something all three others need and cannot build quickly.

Question / Theme	Online Learning Consortium (OLC)	UPCEA	Quality Matters (QM)	All Three — and All Four Together
			practice. Guidance issued ahead of evidence is where AECT research belongs, and QM has effectively said so. • Co-publish a QM-focused volume in AECT's Springer book series, drawing on twenty years of implementation case studies that currently live only in conference presentations.	
3d. Shared problems worth tackling together	• Quality assurance for AI-assisted course design. OLC has the rubric and the Course Review Assistant GPT; AECT has the researchers who can test whether AI-assisted design actually improves learning. • Accessibility compliance. Title II web accessibility requirements are pressing on institutions now. OLC has the practice guidance; AECT has the design research behind it. • Demonstrating the value of instructional design. Members of both organizations struggle to show administrators what ID work is worth.	• Credential quality. The alternative credential market is expanding faster than any shared standard for what a good credential looks like. UPCEA convenes the credential innovation leaders; AECT holds the assessment and design expertise. • Regular and substantive interaction, and what counts as meaningful instructor presence — simultaneously a policy question (UPCEA's territory) and a learning design question (AECT's). • Workforce supply. UPCEA member institutions hire instructional designers; AECT programs produce them. Neither has mapped the gap.	• Does certification improve learning? QM certifies courses against design standards; the outcome evidence is thinner than the adoption figures suggest. This is QM's most important unanswered question and AECT's methodological home ground. • AI in course design and review. QM has shipped an AI Review Assistant in beta and added AI language to the rubric; AECT has the researchers to test whether AI-assisted review is valid, reliable and equitable. • Accessibility. The 7th Edition was framed around accessibility and inclusion, and Title II deadlines are pressing institutions now. • Inter-rater reliability. QM has just changed its reviewer model from three to two; reliability in peer review is a classic measurement problem with a deep literature AECT scholars know well. • Instructional designer formation. QM trains tens of thousands of people to apply a rubric; AECT educates the people who design the programs those rubrics evaluate. Nobody has mapped how the two pipelines relate.	• Generative AI is reshaping this field faster than any single association can respond. Four organizations issuing separate, uncoordinated AI guidance serves nobody — and all four issued something in 2025–2026 without consulting the others. • The credibility of online and digital learning is under renewed external scrutiny — completion, fraud and "ghost students," return on investment. A united, evidence-based voice would be more persuasive than four separate ones. • Association sustainability itself. Every association with a single flagship event carries the venue and attrition exposure that pushed OLC into Chapter 11. Shared venue negotiation, shared back-office services or co-located events would reduce risk for all four. • The pipeline problem. The field needs more well-prepared instructional designers and online learning leaders than it produces. AECT forms them; the other three employ, train and credential them. Nobody owns the handoff.
3e. Practical first steps	• Propose a reciprocal member registration rate for 2027 — the lowest-cost, highest-visibility gesture available to either party. • Offer AECT reviewers and researchers for the next Quality Scorecard revision cycle. • Invite OLC's editorial leadership to a joint session with AECT's Center of Excellence for Publishing at AECT27.	• Open a conversation between AECT's Design & Development Division leadership and UPCEA's eDesign Collaborative Network chairs. A two-email start with no budget implications. • Propose that AECT journals serve as a peer-reviewed outlet for UPCEA research, beginning with a single co-badged special issue. • Explore a jointly presented instructional design summit on the Convergence model.	• Invite QM's Director of Research and the QM Research Colleagues to a joint session with AECT's Research & Theory Division at AECT27. Two emails, no budget, high symbolic value. • Propose a TechTrends or JFDL special issue on quality assurance in online course design, co-edited with QM. • Offer AECT reviewers and researchers for a validation study of the two-reviewer certification model — a concrete, time-bound, mutually useful first project. • Propose reciprocal registration rates for QM Connect 2027 and AECT27. • Open a conversation between AECT's Design & Development Division and QM IDA leadership — the two most directly overlapping instructional design communities anywhere in this study.	• Convene a low-stakes four-organization leadership breakfast or virtual roundtable, with no agenda beyond calendar coordination and identifying one shared project. • Agree on the one thing all four can say together about AI and learning design, and publish it jointly. • Use AECT's NTLC experience as the template — a coalition with a standing annual summit, not a merger. • Lead with what AECT uniquely brings: journals, scholarly credibility, standards and definitions, and a student pipeline. Those are assets the other three need and would find slow and expensive to build. • Route it correctly under the new governance. A proposal that begins in a division should pick up an officer or the Division Representative as sponsor before it reaches the board, and the opening conversation with a peer organization should be CEO-to-CEO — that is how the other three do this.

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				• Sequence the approaches. QM is the easiest first conversation — open ground, a demonstrated appetite for partnership, and a clear unmet need AECT can fill.