



# PLAN '25

## Will you be prepared for the evolving funeral and cemetery professions?

BY STEPHANIE RAMSEY

Unbelievably, the 21st century marks its 25th year shortly. With 2025 just around the corner, it's a pivotal moment to reflect on the evolving needs and expectations of families, as well as broader societal shifts impacting how we handle death and mourning.

The next few years promise significant changes driven by technological advancements, shifting cultural attitudes and evolving demographic trends. How can funeral professionals prepare for these changes to better serve their communities and continue to be profitable? Let's explore the key areas to consider as you formulate your plan.



The Foresight 2024 Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study (FCCBS) highlights several technological trends that are reshaping the funeral and cemetery profession. Embracing these changes is crucial for staying relevant.

### 1. Virtual and Hybrid Services

Many funeral homes have already implemented or are planning to implement virtual or hybrid services. Based on Foresight's 2023 Funeral and Ceme-

tery Consumer Behavior Study, 67% of consumers were willing to pay for the convenience of having everything available online. This trend, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is expected to continue to grow. Investing in high-quality streaming technology and digital platforms is no longer optional but a necessity to meet this demand. Virtual services allow families to include distant relatives, expanding the scope and accessibility of memorial events.

### 2. Digital Memorialization

More families are showing a preference for digital memori-

alization options, such as online guest books and virtual tributes, over traditional methods. This reflects a shift toward more interactive and multimedia ways of commemorating loved ones. Developing partnerships with technology providers or investing in in-house digital solutions can meet this demand and enhance client satisfaction. Offering customizable digital memorials can differentiate your services and cater to modern preferences.

### **3. AI and Automation**

AI is increasingly integrated into various business aspects across all industries. The funeral and cemetery profession, despite its initial reluctance, is finding itself drawn into the AI world as well. Foresight's 2024 study, however, illustrates that 48% of consumers do not have confidence that they would receive a positive technological experience despite their desire for one.

AI's potential to streamline operations and provide personalized recommendations is significant. Implementing AI tools can enhance efficiency and improve overall client experience, aligning with profession trends and expectations. Clearly, this is the preference of the consumer and businesses will need to adapt to meet that challenge.



### **ADAPT TO SHIFTING CULTURAL ATTITUDES**

#### **1. Personalization and Customization**

Families are seeking more personalized and meaningful funeral services. This growing demand for customization includes unique themes, bespoke ceremonies and tailored rituals. Offering customizable service options and engaging in open conversations with families about their pref-

erences can meet these expectations and provide a more personalized experience.

### **2. Eco-Friendly Practices**

The 2024 study highlights that 48% of consumers perceive traditional cremation as the most environmentally friendly choice, ahead of other eco-friendly funeral options such as green burials (45%) and biodegradable caskets (40%). Most consumers do not understand the options fully to make informed decisions. Regardless, this reflects a rising environmental consciousness and a desire for sustainable practices. Incorporating these options into your service offerings aligns with modern values and can attract a broader clientele. Providing eco-friendly choices not only meets current trends but also positions your business as environmentally responsible.

### **3. Diverse Cultural and Religious Needs**

As the demographic landscape becomes more diverse, funeral homes should consider focusing on adapting services to accommodate various cultural and religious practices. Providing staff training on diverse traditions and collaborating with community leaders to ensure respectful service are essential. This adaptability will help meet the needs of a diverse clientele and enhance your reputation within the community.



### **ADDRESS DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS**

#### **1. Aging Population**

The baby boomer generation, now aged 60 to 78, represents more than 70 million people, according to Statista.com. This aging demographic will lead to

increased demand for funeral services. Preparing for this shift involves scaling your services to accommodate a larger volume of clients and offering products and services that cater to this generation's preferences, including pre-planning options.

### **2. Changing Family Structures**

Modern family structures are becoming more varied, with less than 46% of households now consisting of two married parents, according to Julie A. DiAlessi-Lafley, author of an article appearing in BusinessWest.com, "The Decline of the Nuclear Family." Recognizing this shift in family structures is vital to how families are served at the time of death. Offering flexible and inclusive services that accommodate diverse family dynamics is crucial. Understanding and respecting these variations can help provide comprehensive support and build strong relationships with families.

### **3. Rising Financial Concerns**

Economic pressures are leading many families to seek more affordable funeral options. Offering transparent pricing, package pricing and a range of service options can address these concerns while maintaining high standards of service. Providing budget-friendly options ensures that your services remain accessible to all.



### **ENHANCING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

#### **1. Community Outreach and Education**

The 2024 study emphasizes that 38% of consumers expressed an interest in funeral homes hosting informational sessions. This supports funeral homes invest-

ing in community outreach and educational programs. Engaging with the community through workshops, seminars and online content can establish your organization as a trusted resource. Providing valuable information on funeral planning and grief support helps build trust and positions your organization as a community leader.

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## 2. Partnerships and Collaborations

Today, it is not uncommon to find funeral homes collaborating with such local organizations as churches and senior centers. Building these partnerships can enhance your community presence and lead to increased referrals and visibility. Developing strong relationships with local organizations can create mutually beneficial opportunities and strengthen your position in the community.

## 3. Customer Experience and Support

Exceptional customer service and support set your organization apart. The 2023 FCCBS noted that 31% of families choose location based on previous experience, and consumers prioritize compassionate and supportive experiences when choosing a funeral provider. From the initial contact to aftercare, ensuring a compassionate and supportive experience can lead to positive word of mouth and long-term relationships.



## ADAPTING HR PRACTICES TO IMPROVE PROFITABILITY

To navigate the evolving professional landscape and enhance profitability, adapting HR practices is essential. The 2024 FCCBS highlights staffing challenges as the most critical issue facing the profession in the next three to five years. Addressing this issue is an absolute must. A multi-pronged approach is the most likely to produce successful results.

### 1. Investing in Staff Training and Development

Funeral homes are increasing their investment in staff training and development. Providing comprehensive training programs not only improves service quality but also enhances employee satisfaction and retention. Investing in your staff ensures that they are equipped to handle the demands of an evolving profession and provide exceptional service to families.

### 2. Enhancing Recruitment and Retention

Effective recruitment and retention strategies are crucial for maintaining a skilled workforce. The 2024 FCCBS reveals that 33% of funeral homes are focusing on improving recruitment processes to attract top talent through self-promotion. Developing a strong employer brand, offering competitive compensation and creating a positive work environment can help attract and retain talented professionals. Additionally, recognize that such non-direct compensation benefits as flexible scheduling are very much attractive to employees. A well-trained and motivated team contributes to improved service quality and operational efficiency.

## 3. Implementing Performance Management Systems

The 2024 study indicates that 21% of professionals value recognition. More funeral homes are adopting performance management systems to enhance employee performance and accountability. Implementing clear performance metrics and providing regular feedback can help improve individual and team performance, creating the opportunity to provide recognition for achieving objectives.

## 4. Promoting Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being is increasingly being recognized as a factor in business success. Funeral homes may want to implement wellness programs to support employee health and work/life balance. Offering wellness initiatives, such as mental health support and flexible work arrangements, can improve employee satisfaction and productivity. A healthy and engaged workforce contributes to better interaction with families and stronger overall business performance.

**Offering flexible and inclusive services that accommodate diverse family dynamics is crucial today.**



## FINANCIAL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

### 1. Investing in Infrastructure

It would be wise for funeral homes that have not already done so to consider investing in

**Investing in your staff ensures that they are equipped to handle evolving professional demands and provide exceptional service.**

upgrading facilities with a mind toward technology. Although this might represent a significant investment, it is necessary for staying competitive. Upgrading infrastructure, improving facilities and investing in staff training in technology can enhance service quality and operational efficiency, and provide long-term benefits.

## 2. Fortifying Revenue Streams

Focusing on additional revenue streams can stabilize income and at the same time meet the needs of families you serve. While funeral homes have offered preneed services for years, it is worth taking a second look, determining if the business is maximizing the opportunity available through preneed, as well educating families on the value it provides.

Additional revenue streams may exist through memorial products and grief support services. Reevaluating your revenue sources may identify a more comprehensive range of services for clients and add additional financial stability.

## 3. Risk Management

Developing a comprehensive risk management plan is crucial for business continuity. Many funeral homes have implemented financial reserves and contingency plans to navigate unforeseen challenges. The fluctuation

of death rates across the nation leads to cash flow uncertainty at different points throughout the year. This can be related to the business' physical location within the county. A well-developed risk management strategy helps your organization remain resilient in the face of unexpected repairs or low mortality rates.

As we approach 2025, the funeral and cemetery professions face a landscape filled with both opportunities and challenges. By embracing technological advancements, adapting to shifting cultural attitudes, addressing demographic changes and enhancing your firm's community engagement, funeral professionals can position themselves for success.

Strategic planning and proactive adaptation are keys to meeting the evolving needs of families while maintaining the core values of empathy and respect that define the profession. Your plan for 2025 should center around understanding and responding to these changes, thus ensuring that your services remain compassionate, relevant and responsive to the needs of the communities you serve ☰

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