



## AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS

# Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024

## HONORING OUR TRADITIONS. ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE.

The American Guild of Organists is pleased to share our 2021-2024 strategic plan: *Honoring Our Traditions. Envisioning Our Future.*

The AGO was founded in 1896 as an educational and service organization for the organ and choral music fields. Throughout the past 125 years, we have continued to set and maintain high musical standards and promote understanding and appreciation of all aspects of organ and choral music. Today, the AGO proudly serves more than 12,000 members and approximately 280 chapters throughout the United States and abroad.

We are an organization that is steeped in tradition yet forward-looking. As such, we are actively evolving to meet changing realities within and outside of our organization while staying true to our vision and mission:

**The vision** of the AGO is to engage, support and uplift every organist.

**The mission** of the AGO is to foster a thriving community of musicians who share their knowledge and inspire passion for the organ.

This strategic plan is our roadmap to expanding the AGO's reach, deepening our impact, and strengthening our organization. The heart of our new plan is delivering value to every member and helping our chapters thrive. To do so, the AGO is making a decisive shift to be more proactive, member-centered, and technologically enabled.

This transformational time is exciting for all of us at the AGO. We extend our sincere appreciation to those who contributed to the in-depth and insightful research, the thoughtful and reflective analysis, and the development of our new three-year strategic plan.

### ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The AGO recognizes that a well-crafted strategic plan is essential to charting a successful future. Over the past three years, we have focused on implementing the priorities articulated in our previous strategic plan, with notable results. We are now poised to build on those strengths.

Our 2021 – 2024 strategic plan is the product of a thoughtful and collaborative process that was led by a planning group composed of the AGO's National Council, Strategic Planning Committee, and staff. The process was facilitated by 2B Communications, a consulting firm with extensive experience working with the AGO and other associations and nonprofits.

The plan reflects the AGO's deep commitment to listening to our volunteer leaders and members and truly understanding and meeting their needs.

Planning steps included:

**Research:** Interviews with staff and volunteer leadership; online surveys to gather input from AGO’s membership, Strategic Planning Committee, Regional Coordinators, District Conveners, Chapter Leaders, and AGO Young Organist members.

**Operational Review:** AGO’s development, membership, and financial/budget trends.

**Facilitated Planning Sessions:** Three virtual planning sessions involving the National Council, Strategic Planning Committee, and staff; a final in-person session with the National Council. During the planning sessions and subsequent review and refinement cycles, the National Council and planning group thoroughly reviewed and vetted the research findings, engaged in robust discussions about the organization’s core issues, and arrived at the AGO’s top areas of focus for the upcoming three years.

**Plan Refinement:** Feedback and refinement steps after each planning session.

**Approval:** The National Council approved the plan on August 26, 2021.

*More than 5,100  
AGO members  
and 200 chapters  
shared their  
feedback and  
ideas via our  
surveys.*

## OUR AIMS, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The strategic plan is a dynamic document detailing the overarching aims, goals and strategies of our organization. It will serve to direct our programs and activities over the next three years. As this plan is implemented, the National Council and staff will continue to evaluate, refine, and update the goals and strategies in order to fulfill and fully realize the mission of the AGO.

### AIMS

The plan is designed to achieve a number of overarching outcomes:

- Attract and retain members who play and appreciate the organ.
- Welcome and include organists of all ages, races, and religions who play all types of instruments at all skill levels.
- Provide a valuable, engaging, and meaningful experience to all AGO members.
- Feature and recognize a diverse range of organists, instruments, composers, and musical genres.
- Support and strengthen AGO’s chapters.
- Maximize AGO’s organizational effectiveness and ensure its long-term sustainability.

### GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The plan is organized into three strategic goal areas:



## CHAPTERS & COMMUNITY

### GOALS

**Help chapters of all sizes function effectively.**

### KEY STRATEGIES

- Continue to develop practical chapter training and resources for chapter leaders, including tools explicitly geared to leaders of small chapters.
- Help small and/or struggling chapters identify and pursue their most viable paths forward.
- Provide programming that is suitable for chapter use.
- Update and roll out customizable member recruitment and on-boarding programs.
- Refine and fully implement a national chapter support program involving headquarters, Regional Councillors, and potentially District Conveners.
- Establish a formal process for regularly gathering chapter insights and benchmark data.

**Assist members with creating shared interest groups.**

- Design and implement a pilot program to enable members to form in-person or virtual shared interest groups.

**Goal: Invest in the next generation of organists.**

- Expand efforts to connect with middle school, high school, and college-level organists and musicians.
- Support programming aimed at attracting and retaining young organist members, including scholarships, other financial assistance, and access to practice instruments.
- Continue to build and enhance Pipe Organ Encounters and other signature programs.
- Increase opportunities for young members to serve in leadership roles.

## EDUCATION & RECOGNITION

### GOALS

**Understand and meet the educational needs of organists of all skill levels and career stages.**

### KEY STRATEGIES

- Evaluate, update and/or sunset existing education and skill-building offerings, as appropriate, to increase relevance and access (e.g., Expand resources for beginner and intermediate-level organists, and build a robust, high-quality video library).
- Continue to evolve and provide exceptional programming at national and regional conventions and increase access (e.g., Expand streaming and explore providing more scholarships).
- Create additional resources focused on career path support.

**Ensure that certifications continue to inspire organists to strive for excellence.**

- Conduct a thorough review of the AGO's current certifications and identify areas for improvement in content, exam preparation, and examination processes.
- Implement a plan to enhance the AGO's certification program, including expanding certification preparation offerings.

**Optimize AGO's competitions to achieve greater impact and visibility.**

- Identify opportunities to elevate AGO's competitions, including increasing prize money and ensuring that high standards are rewarded.
- Evaluate current competitions and make strategic adjustments, if warranted.
- Forge new alliances to expand reach and share resources.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY & EFFECTIVENESS

## GOALS

## KEY STRATEGIES

**Consistently deliver a purposeful and achievable volunteer experience.**

- Conduct a systematic review and redefine volunteer roles, as needed.
- Update and/or create volunteer structures, job descriptions, and transition processes (e.g., sunset some committees/functions, evaluate centralizing logistical support for national and regional conventions).
- Review and update volunteer recruitment, application, and selection process.
- Prepare and implement a sustained volunteer leadership training program that includes in-person and online components and easily accessible resources.

**Significantly expand the AGO's technological and marketing/communications capacity.**

### *Key Technology Strategies:*

- Complete the implementation of a new AMS and website, including CMS integration and a texting platform.
- Create a centralized and accessible online repository for documents related to functions, volunteer positions, events, chapter leadership roles and chapter operations.
- Expand technology support to chapters.
- Develop a longer-range technology plan encompassing the AGO's holistic needs, including privacy and security.

### *Key Marketing/Communications Strategies:*

- Ensure that the newly selected TAO editor supports and works collaboratively with AGO staff and volunteer leaders to maximize TAO's relevance to all members.
- Acquire the knowledge and skills required to develop and execute a robust, multi-channel marketing/communications program that supports all aspects of the AGO and includes the website, social media, and other communications.
- Formalize AGO's messaging strategy and increase proactive public relations.

**Increase fundraising to further strengthen the AGO's finances and ability to fulfill its mission.**

- Continue to build a well-rounded development program.
- Ensure that sufficient time and resources are dedicated to fundraising.

**Align AGO's operations with association norms and best practices.**

- Review the current membership categories and structure and determine whether adjustments may be advantageous (e.g., Explore offering an organization membership).
- Establish a formal human resources function and address related priorities including succession planning and implementing a new employee performance review process.
- Evaluate office space needs.
- Update budgeting to align with the strategic plan.
- Create accountability and collaboration for strategic plan implementation among the National Council and staff by adopting consistent and defined annual action planning and progress check-in processes.