

Strategic Plan 2024-2027



ACADEMY OF MUSIC

MISSION

Our mission is to enrich the Pioneer Valley's quality of life by offering first-class performing arts and film presentations in a historic theater of national significance. Encouraging the use of the historic stage for social, educational, and professional events, the Academy of Music seeks a broad and diverse audience through its programming and outreach efforts.

ARTISTIC GUIDELINES

In order to carry out this mission, an artistic vision of the Academy of Music, a values-based, nondiscriminatory organization, looks to realize these goals:

To nurture and sustain community-based organizations and causes that address the needs, concerns, and hopes of the Pioneer Valley. To serve the widest audience possible while benefiting said organizations and causes.

To identify less recognized local and regional performing arts organizations who have the potential to contribute to the cultural landscape of the Pioneer Valley. To guide and nurture those organizations toward successful projects at the Academy of Music by strategizing optimal costs, using creative solutions to work with other organizations, maximizing impact, building audiences, and networking with like-minded arts groups.

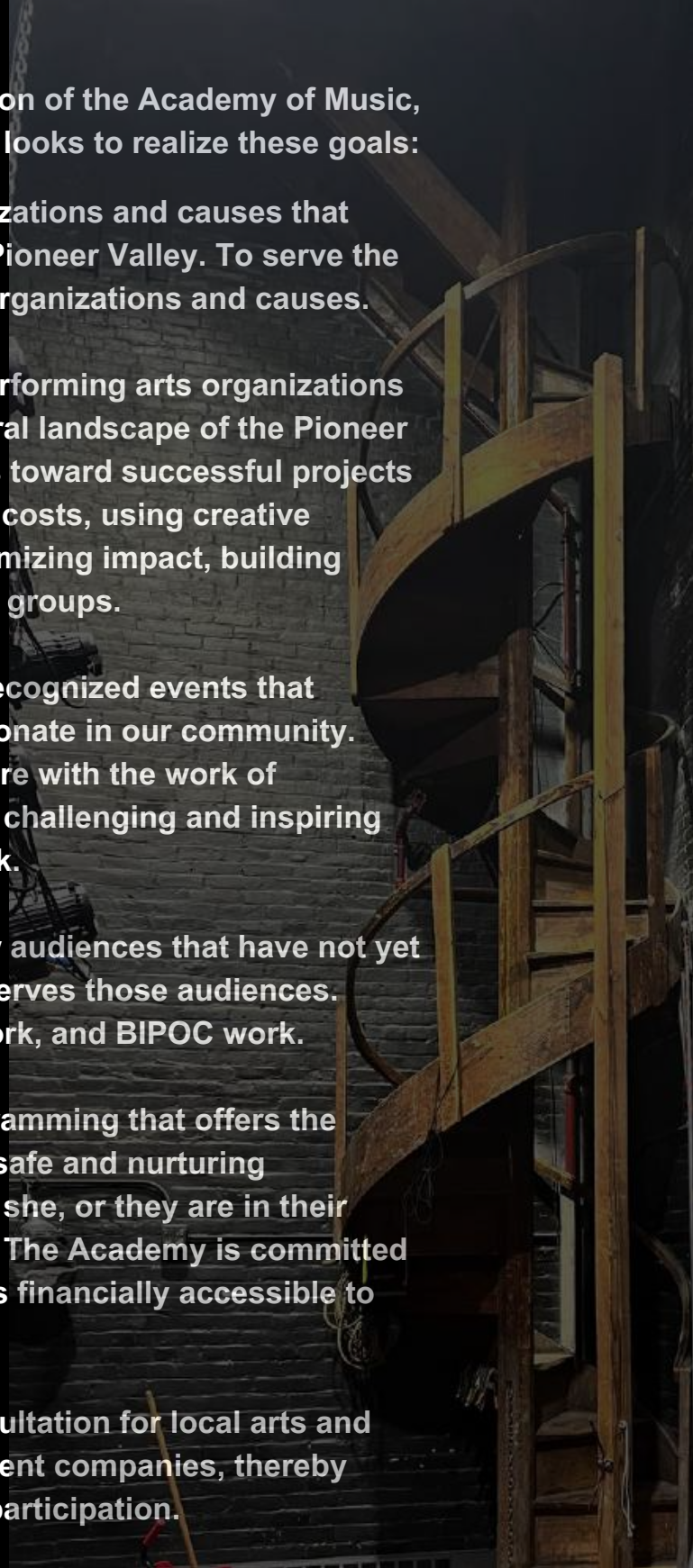
To identify and present globally and nationally recognized events that address the ideas, concerns, and hopes that resonate in our community.

To affiliate these works of a global/national stature with the work of community-based organizations with the goal of challenging and inspiring audiences with powerful and transformative work.

To identify under-recognized audiences and new audiences that have not yet been developed and to craft programming that serves those audiences. Identified areas include new work, LGBTQIA+ work, and BIPOC work.

To produce and present youth educational programming that offers the opportunity to explore the creative process in a safe and nurturing environment while meeting each child where he, she, or they are in their development regardless of experience or ability. The Academy is committed to ensuring that youth education programming is financially accessible to students.

To provide a home, support, guidance, and consultation for local arts and arts education organizations and Academy resident companies, thereby maximizing their impact in building community participation.



OUR COMMITMENT

The Academy of Music Theatre is committed to supporting our community and taking actions that increase equity and inclusion in our organization and the community. The arts have always been an important vehicle for people to express and understand diverse perspectives and experiences. Equally important, art can be an agent for change with the ability to shine the spotlight on social inequities.

As a venue for the arts, we seek to sustain an inclusive and equitable space where everyone who walks through our doors feels valued and respected. We recognize that strength comes from diversity, and we will work to ensure that patrons, artists, employees, volunteers, vendors/promoters, and community partners feel welcome regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, ability, religion, or other identities.



The Academy recognizes that the path to equity and inclusion is long and steep. We hope that together we can achieve a deeper understanding of prejudice and its impacts to create a better, stronger, and more just world. As an organization, and as individuals, we need to listen more, and more carefully, to put our collective energy and vision toward uprooting racism, sexism, violence, hate, and their destructive legacies.

We will strive to ensure that all voices are heard and shared in a safe environment. We will continually seek opportunities to engage, learn, and discuss topics related to this essential work in order to build a stronger theater by ensuring that programs and institutional policies reflect our values.

**“I’ll tell you what freedom is to me: no fear.
I mean, really, no fear.” *Nina Simone***

ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The Academy of Music is an institution like no other. A historic gem of grand scale and elegant design with a storied past, the Academy offers a unique platform for local, regional, and national performing artists. Located in downtown Northampton, Massachusetts, the privately managed nonprofit theater has presented a rich selection of music, plays, musical theater, dance, and films for 133 years.



In the late 19th century, Edward H.R. Lyman, a philanthropist and Northampton native, had a vision for a new venue for culture and theater in his hometown. On May 23, 1891, the 1,000-seat Academy of Music theater opened its doors to the public for the first time. One year later, Lyman deeded the Academy to the Citizens of Northampton, making it the first municipally owned theater in the nation.



The theater provides a major economic impact to the city and surrounding towns. The Academy of Music is downtown Northampton's leading visitor destination, based not only on total ticket sales, but also on the consistent delivery of visiting patrons to Northampton and its 100+ shops and restaurants. The Academy is an integral part of daily life and culture in Northampton, connecting people, providing a space for the community to gather, educating budding performing artists, and above all, creating experiences for people that will last long after they've left the building.

The Board, staff, volunteers, and members of the Academy community could not be prouder of the courage and tenacity demonstrated by the organization over the past four years. Like most Presenting houses, the Academy was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept of a theater going dark for an extended period of time is unthinkable—until it happens.

The organization rallied, responded, and adapted in order not just to survive, but to learn and improve during one of the most challenging periods in its 133-year history. While shut down for 18 months, the Academy renovated its downstairs bathrooms and initiated a full fire suppression system. Free of charge, they offered the stage to local artists to create virtual content for patrons, and they provided much needed educational programs.

In the fall of 2021, the doors opened to a reticent market, but with vaccine and masking requirements, the Academy built the trust of its patrons who explored gathering once again. Three years later, the organization is at pre-COVID levels with artists and patrons alike sharing in story and connectedness.

THE ACADEMY IN 2024

The Academy is currently led by eight voting members of the Board of Trustees, an ex-officio in the Mayor of Northampton, and an honorary Board member in the President of Smith College. Executive Director Debra J'Anthony, who has 32 years of experience leading community-based arts organizations, manages the staff which includes a full time Technical Director, Theater Manager, Director of Finance and Administration, Education Director, and Box Office Manager. Front of house support staff and many volunteers round out the dedicated team who continue to ensure the successful day to day running of the Academy.



In 2023, Debra J'Anthony informed the Board of her intent to retire in 2026 after 19 years of service to the Academy. A substantial grant from Barr-Klarman Massachusetts Arts Initiative awarded in 2022 supported the completion of a full Leadership Transition plan (as well as this strategic plan), which will guide the organization through the preparation for and hiring of the organization's next leader.

PROGRAMS

In 2024, the Academy's programming continues to fall into the following four categories:

- Academy Productions: Producing plays, the Valley Voices Story Slam, and the Regional Youth Poetry Slam
- Academy Presentations: Presenting national touring artists
- Rentals: Renting the hall to local arts organizations and promoters who present national touring acts
- Education programming: Offering programming for ages 5-17 in dance, show chorus, and musical theater, and producing two musical theater shows annually



LOOKING AHEAD

Much has been experienced and learned over the past four years. Even though the Academy is mostly back to familiar ways of doing things, they are changed. As a result of COVID-19, people have different relationships with their working lives, sense of place, way of being together, and how they interact and engage with the presenting arts and entertainment in general.

Additionally, while the world reeled and strained under the stress of managing a global pandemic, long-existing and systemic racial, gender-based, and socio-economic inequities were yet again exposed and continue to threaten. These societal challenges and awakenings trickle down to organizations in terms of programmatic decisions, funding sources, and the cost of doing business. The Academy is already experiencing, and is anticipating, the following shifts and trends during the planning period:

- Increased costs for artists and hospitality
- New funding models: changes in the criteria for grants and foundations to reflect DEIAB priorities
- Greater competition for sponsorship dollars
- Technology, including AI, is an integral part of arts presenting = opportunity.
- The cost of keeping up with changing technology and enhancing and building our theatrical equipment to meet our renters' needs = challenge
- New voices are rejecting the status quo = opportunity to develop new mechanisms to invite feedback, input, and to make decisions in more inclusive ways

The Academy has proven over the last four years that it is more than up to these challenges and is ready, with the guidance of this strategic plan, to build for the future by continuing to engage the community, expand its programs, and adapt how it does business so it continues to be relevant, inclusive, and, of course, financially sustainable.

PLAN PURPOSE AND OVERARCHING SUCCESS MEASUREMENT

The purpose of the 2024–2027 strategic plan is to lay out the work that needs to be done and the steps that need to be taken to get that work done between now and the end of the first year of the next Executive Director's tenure. The overarching objective is to build organizational capacity to ensure the theater's operations, programs, resources, and impact in the community is sustained and strengthened through a leadership transition and beyond.

If the Academy is successful in executing this plan, the organization will attract a dynamic new Executive Director who will inherit a diverse and engaged Board, a stable and skilled staff, a balanced budget with reserves, a maximized facility, and a community (internal and external) that is ready and open to looking ahead to the next significant chapter in the Academy's development.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The plan's three priorities inform each other and are interdependent; the success of this plan relies on each of these three priorities working concurrently and together. They are not listed in order of priority.

Strategic Priority A. Investing in our leadership

This priority recognizes both the challenges of and the need to attract, retain, and develop the Board and staff. It also recognizes an imperative to distribute the work of the organization among a larger and more diverse group of people. A stable, skilled, and invested leadership will be essential in sustaining the organization during the planned (or an unplanned) leadership transition.

Strategic Priority B. Community engagement and programming

This priority is grounded in the fact that the Academy of Music belongs to the people of the City of Northampton and is deeply committed to serving the city and its surrounding communities. It is also informed by the organization's Artistic Guidelines, which speak to a commitment to serve a broad range of communities through its programming. The work within this priority area will center its attention on inclusion, equity, and amplifying the voices of the people who contribute to and benefit from this historic theater. It is designed to bring those voices to the table so that they may share in the responsibility of sustaining this great asset, as well as ensuring that programming is responsive to the needs and desires of the community.

Additionally, this priority aims to focus the organization's available time and attention on those community relationships that require strategic investment during the planning period, with the goal of rooting people's sense of belonging to the theater ahead of the current leader's retirement in 2026. These investments include continuing to build trust with historically underrecognized communities, sustaining and developing the programs already in place for and with those communities, and strengthening mutually beneficial relationships with local businesses and artistic partners for them to lend their voice, expertise, and support behind a new leader.

Strategic Priority C. Building our resources

This priority responds to the fact that the theater is still settling post-pandemic, and that the operating cost of running the Academy on a day-to-day basis has and will continue to increase. These facts, along with the attendant costs of the capacity building the organization wants to do within the planning period, mean that the organization needs to adjust the current business model to include a sustained increase in financial resources. Additionally, a strengthened revenue model, both earned and contributed, will allow for the potential of a slowing and/or decrease in the organization's usual earned revenue sources due to economic uncertainties during the plan period, the costs associated with executing a leadership search, and the potential of a dip in contributed revenue following a long tenured leader's departure.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Strategic Priority A - Investing in our leadership

Goal A.1. By 2027, the Academy of Music's diverse and engaged Board of Trustees will lead the Academy utilizing strengthened governing practices, a thriving and inclusive committee structure, and by representing the organization both internally and externally.

Objectives

- Run a public Board recruitment drive in 2024–25 and build systems for ongoing cultivation, recruitment, and retention
- Develop a practice of and plan for increasing the Board's presence both at Academy events and out in the community for the purposes of networking, advocating, building alliances, friendraising, and fundraising
- Strengthen and expand the committee structure by utilizing the time and expertise of Board members more effectively, and by distributing the work of the Board amongst other engaged community members by inviting them to participate in committees
- Habitually invite staff, volunteers, and other key stakeholders to the table for the purposes of gathering feedback and input, and incorporating their wisdom and perspective in the organization's planning and decision-making processes

Goal A.2. By 2027, the Academy of Music is retaining a staffing team that fully utilizes their individual and collective expertise to ensure the effective and efficient day-to-day operations of the theater.

Objectives

- Create a strong workplace culture that promotes a healthy work-life balance, fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion, and invests in staff members' professional development
- Reinforce organizational capacity with an ongoing cross-training practice that ensures staff have a working understanding of the overall operations in addition to their own area of expertise and responsibility
- Establish a working and mutually beneficial relationship between staff and Board of Trustees through regular and routine interactions
- Prioritize when hiring for future positions the need to a) offer a competitive compensation package, and b) increase racial diversity among the staff by adopting current and best hiring practices to encourage people of color to apply

Goal A.3. By 2027, the Academy of Music will have executed its leadership transition plan by celebrating and recognizing the tenure of the outgoing Executive Director, preparing the organization for and conducting a national search for a new Executive Director in 2026, and by setting that new leader up for success through a thorough onboarding process.

Objectives

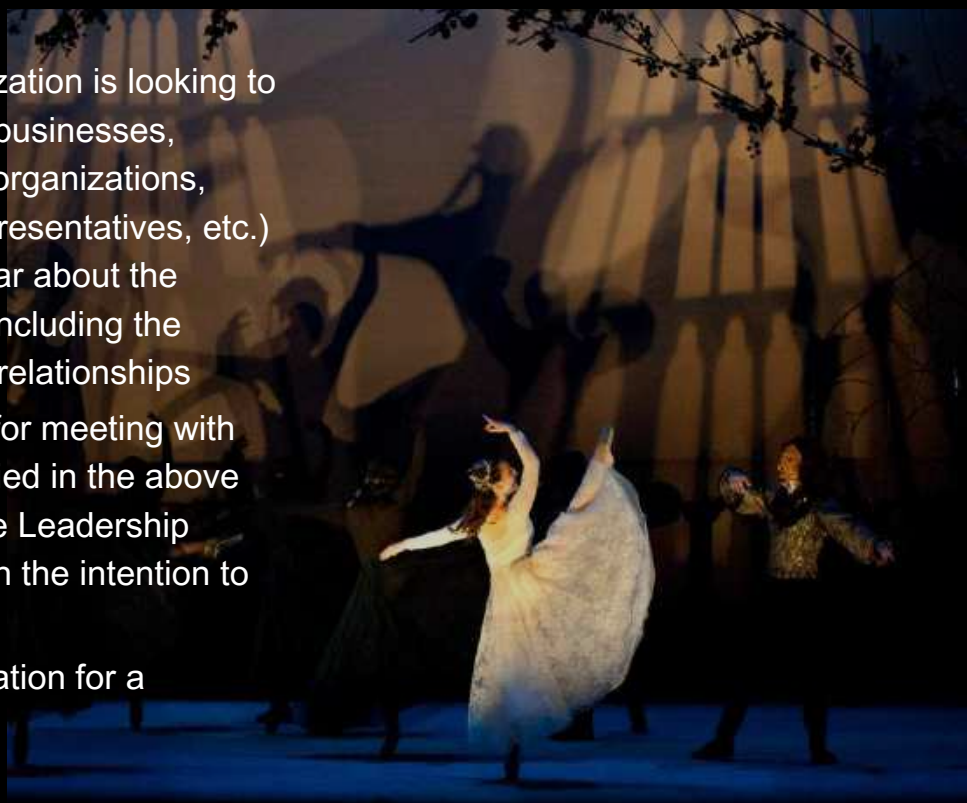
- **Prepare the organization for a leadership transition in 2026 by:**
 - Securing robust Board membership, expertise, and availability to bring to the transition, from the search process through the onboarding of the new Executive Director
 - Preparing the staff so they can effectively contribute to the search process and feel empowered to orient and support the new Executive Director during their onboarding year
 - Creating a communications strategy and notification plan for announcing the Executive Director's departure that engages stakeholders in the continued success of the organization under new leadership
 - Freeing up the time and energy of the Executive Director by the end of 2024 to focus on external relations and community engagement for the remainder of her tenure
 - Ensuring the outgoing Executive Director is recognized and appreciated through a clear and transparent offboarding process, as well as events and celebrations that both honor her contributions and engage the wider community in the organization beyond her tenure
- **Execute a search for the Academy's next leader beginning in late 2025 with the goal of having them in place by July 1, 2026**

Strategic Priority B. Community engagement and programming

Goal B.1. By 2027, the Academy of Music will have reinforced and expanded its community relationships with the dual aim of a) creating an engaged list of partners, sponsors, and funders who will advise, show up for, and support the Academy during the leadership transition and beyond, and b) identifying the needs and desires of the community and working together around areas of shared interest to provide programming and services that will enrich the lives of people who live in the Pioneer Valley.

Objectives

- Identify relationships that the organization is looking to rebuild, strengthen, or initiate (local businesses, corporations, large institutions, arts organizations, community leaders, officials and representatives, etc.) and an attendant strategy that is clear about the Academy's objectives for doing so, including the reciprocal benefits of building those relationships
- Design a project management plan for meeting with and building the relationships identified in the above objective. Integrate that plan with the Leadership Transition notification plan along with the intention to build a community committee
- Form a focus group to lay the foundation for a community engagement committee



Goal B.2. By 2027, the Academy of Music will be executing on a clear and responsive education program vision that will offer programming that meets current and anticipates future demand, compliments the programming of other institutions and the public schools, and supports the development of young people ages 5–17 and of all abilities and socioeconomic status.

Objectives

- **Create a vision and action steps for developing education programming that:**
 - Addresses barriers to program growth and income generation such as staffing, rehearsal space, and waitlisted programs
 - Creates annual impact measurement goals and implements evaluation and assessment mechanisms that include student and parent feedback
 - Assesses local and regional gaps in technical and skills-based programming and builds programs in response to the findings
 - Identifies barriers to access to programming



Strategic Priority C. Building our resources

Goal C.1. By 2027, the Academy of Music has strengthened its business model and financial position to accommodate and sustain increasing operating costs, to absorb leadership transition costs, and to provide the necessary stability and comfort for the new Executive Director to envision and execute the organization’s next chapter.

Objectives

- Increase earned revenue by 1.5% year on year during the planning period to accommodate increasing operating costs
- Develop the organization’s ability to raise money and grow contributed revenue by 17% over the three year planning period
- Anticipate and track the costs of a leadership transition by creating a leadership transition budget or budget line and allocating resources accordingly
- Maintain the organization’s reserves at the level of at least \$500,000



CONTRIBUTORS

With thanks to

BKMAI - Barr-Klarman Massachusetts Arts Initiative

TDC - The Development Corporation

The City of Northampton

Lorna Jane Norris - LJN Advisory LLC

Academy Staff

Debra J'Anthony - Executive Director

Melanie Slabaugh - Theater Manager

Dori Parkman - Director of Finance and Administration

Emily Leue - Technical Director

Kyle Lawrence - Education Director

Kadence Cole - Box Office Manager

Academy Board

Andrew J. Crystal - President

Minh Ly - Vice President

Sara Smiarowski - Treasurer

Linda McInerney - Co-Clerk

David Mintz - Co-Clerk

Emily Wojcik

Isabelina Rodriguez

Annie Lesko

Gina-Louise Sciarra (Mayor of Northampton - Ex-Officio)

Sarah Willie-LeBreton (President of Smith College - Honorary Board member)

Former Board members

Stuart Mieher

Brian Foote

A detailed version of this plan is available upon request

The logo for the Academy of Music, featuring the words "ACADEMY OF MUSIC" in a stylized, serif font. The "A" is large and prominent, and the "M" has a unique design with a small figure-like element at the top. The text is in a dark red or maroon color.

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