



MUSIC COLUMBUS[★]

3-Year Strategic Plan | 2026–2028

From Research to Action

Music Columbus is 10 years old. We are entering a second chapter in our development with a new Executive Director and a renewed sense of purpose.

A decade in, Music Columbus has started to carve out its place in the Columbus music community, but in order to grow, we must clarify our purpose, scale our impact, and secure sustainable resources. This is the moment to leverage our research into an actionable, formal strategic plan that will guide our organization internally and the development of our music community as a whole.

This plan is ambitious but achievable. Not because it promises to make Columbus the next Nashville, but because it commits to making Columbus fully, powerfully, and sustainably itself.

What Is Changing

Based on years of conversations and research, we have created a strategy that will refocus Music Columbus around a clearer mission and vision. It will require change to achieve our goals. We will:

- 1 Engage our community in more sustained and transformative ways via ongoing input through a venue alliance, an artist advisory council, and intentionally diverse partnerships
- 2 Scale programs with a proven success rate. We have programs that are making a difference; now is the time to implement strategies that grow their impact.
- 3 Sunset programs that no longer serve our mission. If a program is not aligned with our goals and our unique value as an organization, we will identify appropriate ways to either transition that program to an appropriate partner or discontinue it.
- 4 Grow demand for live and local music through expanded collaborative marketing and audience development initiatives.
- 5 Elevate the story of the exceptional music scene that already exists in Columbus and double down on advocacy for economic investment in our sector.

Mission, Vision, and Values



Mission: Music Columbus powers the ecosystem where music thrives.



Vision: A Columbus where music means opportunity, careers, and belonging for everyone.



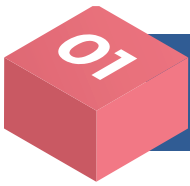
Big Hairy Audacious Goal:

In the next ten years, Music Columbus will double the economic impact of Columbus music: more money in artists' pockets, more revenue on venue balance sheets, and a stronger industry. In that same time, by 2036, we will become the region's catalyst for all things music.

Strategic Framework: Three Pillars

The following three pillars represent the organizing logic of this plan. Each addresses a distinct and critical gap identified in the research, and together they form a mutually reinforcing strategy for sustainable growth.





Pillar 1: Strengthen Our Professional Music Ecosystem

Strategy 1.1: Grow Artist Opportunity & Economic Sustainability

Columbus nurtures talent but loses it when artists cannot access career opportunities or sustain themselves financially. Addressing this requires direct support in the form of concrete economic growth mechanisms.

Objective 1.1a: A majority of musicians report confidence in their ability to stay and build their career in Central Ohio.

Tactics

- Collaborate with Promowest, CASE, and independent venues to identify opportunities for increasing the amount of local performances taking place on our major stages.
- Build out increased networking opportunities for Columbus musicians to connect with major music industry professionals across the country/world from here in Columbus
- Create a local musician sync catalog and provide music supervision and licensing services to Columbus corporations and marketing agencies, leveraging local music to grow local brands.

Objective 1.1b: Columbus' professional musicians report an average income from music that is on par with the standards of a living wage.

Tactics

- Create a Revenue Diversification program helping artists build income beyond live performance: including digital content, sync licensing, merchandise, and teaching. (Web-based curriculum.)
- Launch a Musician Sustainability Fund providing merch funding and touring support for working Columbus artists.

Strategy 1.2: Provide Comprehensive Professional Development & Music Business Education Opportunities Across All Career Stages

A significant knowledge gap exists across all career stages: from emerging artists who don't know how to register with PROs to mid-career professionals who lack marketing and touring skills.

Objective 1.2a: The Columbus music community reports 90%+ satisfaction with the professional development resources and opportunities offered/accessed via Music Columbus.

Tactics

- Assess current professional education programming and scale those with potential for greater impact; discontinue or pass off programs that don't align with strategic priorities and mission.
- Provide publishing administration support services for Columbus musicians to ensure they are registering and protecting their IP rights and accessing all royalty streams available.
- Educate artists on all opportunities available to them as entrepreneurs.

Strategy 1.3: Advocate For and Support A Music Infrastructure That Makes Live and Local Music Possible

Without thriving venues at every scale and music industry services, the ecosystem collapses. Music Columbus should advocate for and support the built infrastructure that makes live and local music possible.

Objective 1.3a: Columbus sees a growth in venues and new music businesses, especially in areas identified as gaps in the local scene via the Greater Columbus Music Census.

Tactics

- Establish and cultivate a Venue Alliance that connects independent music venues and builds partnerships that strengthen the entire venue ecosystem.
- Amplify concerns facing venues within the broader Columbus community and advocate for policies that address them.
- Identify opportunities to collaborate with music businesses across programming, leveraging expertise while sustaining our recording studios, record stores, etc.
- Leverage partnerships and current capital investments to maximize potential for a revenue-generating home for Music Columbus and partners.



Pillar 2: Unify & Amplify Our Music Scene

Strategy 2.1: Lead Cross-Sector Collaboration and Coalition-Building That Breaks Down Music Silos

Different music genres and organizations currently operate in silos. Music Columbus should be the connector and lead collaboration that benefits all.

Objective 2.1a: Coordinate internal collaboration and regional advocacy among music and arts peers.

Tactics

- Build on relationships with independent venues, GCAC, Columbus Symphony, Jazz Arts Group, and other music nonprofits and businesses to build trust and create organized advocacy strategies and messaging.
- Build an Artist Advisory Council that represents a broad cross-section of the community and provides ambassadors who connect the community to our programs and mission.

Strategy 2.2: Prioritize Audience Development and Grow Demand for Live & Local Music

Demand for local music has still not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels, yet we know that audience demand is critical to the success of our local artists. Music Columbus must take a proactive approach to cultivating audiences and capitalize on our city's growth as an opportunity to capture new audiences.

Objective 2.2a: The majority of music audiences report they are happy with the variety, frequency, and quality of music in Columbus. A majority report experiencing live music at least once per month.

Tactics

- Create a Music Columbus membership program for audiences to access unique live music events and experiences.
- Invest in digital marketing and targeted campaigns that reach Columbus' young professional demographic with local music content. (Inspired by the 'Got Milk?' campaign model.)
- Work with the Venue Alliance to create a comprehensive and user-friendly music calendar that makes finding local music simple and accessible.

Strategy 2.3: Elevate Music Columbus' Brand

Elevating our brand will help us grow our mission impact and reach. Prioritizing brand strategy will help us overcome some existing brand confusion and increase awareness and engagement.

Objective 2.3a: 70% of those randomly surveyed in our region know about Music Columbus and our mission.

Tactics

- Grow strategic event marketing partnerships that align with Music Columbus' mission and values to elevate brand recognition.
- Define a brand and brand strategy that reflects Music Columbus' refined vision and sets up the organization for growth.





Pillar 3: Grow Music's Economic Role

Strategy 3.1: Grow Cross-Sector Music and Tourism Partnerships

Music tourism is the single largest component of music's economic impact in Columbus. A focused strategy to grow this segment would generate significant returns.

Objective 3.1a: The Columbus region elevates music as a major piece of our cultural identity.

Tactics

- Formalize a partnership with Experience Columbus to develop a music-focused visitor marketing campaign, integrating music into the Columbus tourism brand.
- Explore a Columbus Music Week concept – an annual multi-venue festival showcasing local artists and attracting regional visitors.
- Work with the state, city, county, CASE, AEG, festival promoters, and venues to communicate opportunities in the market for targeted city-led investment that can help bring exceptional music events to Columbus.

Strategy 3.2: Leverage Music as a Talent Attraction and Retention Tool

Columbus' knowledge economy depends on attracting young professionals. A vibrant music scene is a demonstrable factor in that competition.

Objective 3.2a: Major Columbus employers showcase music in their recruitment tools and content.

Tactics

- Partner with major Columbus employers (Intel, JPMorgan Chase, Nationwide, OSU, Abercrombie, Root, Huntington) to articulate music's role in talent attraction and quality of life.
- Position Music Columbus as a partner to economic development agencies – JobsOhio, Columbus 2025, Columbus Partnership, Columbus & Ohio Chamber, DCI – with a clear narrative about music's role in Columbus's growth story.
- Target conference and event attendance that elevates Columbus' identity as a welcoming and thriving music community.
- Prioritize engagement with key national organizations with influence in the areas of music city development and advocacy (Recording Academy, Association of Music Offices, NIVA, etc.).

Implementation Roadmap

Strategy progression will look like gradual growth over three years across all three pillars. Year 1 & year 2 will focus largely on development of strategies to progress Pillars 1 & 2. Year 3 will build upon this work and lay the groundwork for significant growth in Pillar 3 beyond the timeline of this Strategic Plan.

Year 1 - 2026

 Pillar 1: Strengthen Ecosystem	 Pillar 2: Unify & Amplify	 Pillar 3: Grow Music's Economic Role
• Venue Alliance launch • Revenue Diversification programming - research, design & fundraising • Existing program reevaluation, design for scaling or sunset • Music Monday - reimagined for increased/deeper networking opportunities • Gift of Music - sunseting • Earn As You Learn - design scaled professional development for industry • Incubator - assessment, scaling and redesign as appropriate • Publishing Administration support services - design system and training materials, identify funding for 2027 launch • Music Hub - define project goals that align with strategic vision and clarify capital funding opportunity (outcome will define subsequent year actions)	• Artist Advisory Committee - establish and cultivate • Fan Membership program - design and pilot • Event marketing partnerships - define guidelines, value proposition, and target partnerships • Simple brand guideline creation	• Partnership building with Experience Columbus and target Columbus employers • Advocacy Push for Ticket Fee direct support and FRAC recommendations refinement • Actively engage key national music advocacy orgs and encourage presence/activation in Columbus (ie: The Recording Academy, Association of Music Offices, NIVA, etc.)

Year 2 - 2027

 Pillar 1: Strengthen Ecosystem	 Pillar 2: Unify & Amplify	 Pillar 3: Grow Music's Economic Role
- Revenue Diversification programming - Pilot initiatives - Publishing Administration support services - launch - Existing program scaling - Music Monday - implement as reimagined - Earn As You Learn -phase scaled professional development for industry - Incubator - assessment, scaling and redesign as appropriate - Collaborate to bring more local performers to major Columbus venues and stages	- Fan Membership program - market and grow - Event marketing partnerships - continued growth - Work with Venue Alliance and Experience Cbus to determine viability and plans for a music calendar - Build & lead organized advocacy strategies for the whole music sector	- Cbus Music Week - identify key partners, 2029 dates, fundraising strategy, & early plans - Advocacy Push for Ticket Fee direct support and FRAC recommendations refinement - continued as needed - Work with government, CASE, AEG, festival promoters, independent venues, nonprofit music orgs, etc. to communicate opportunities in the market for targeted city-led investment that can help bring exceptional music events to our city.

Year 3 - 2028

 Pillar 1: Strengthen Ecosystem	 Pillar 2: Unify & Amplify	 Pillar 3: Grow Music's Economic Role
- Revenue Diversification programming - Assess & refine - Launch a Musician Sustainability Fund to provide micro-loans for merch/touring funding - Continue to refine new and legacy programming, scaling for greater impact	- Fan Membership program - market and grow - Event marketing partnerships - continued growth - Invest in a major music marketing campaign (inspired by the 'Got milk?' campaign)	- Cbus Music Week - fundraising & partner coordination, marketing, & lineup for 2029 launch - Develop education campaign & media resources for major Columbus employers & economic development agencies - Target conference & event attendance that elevates Columbus" music identity