



Strategic Plan 2024

CONTEXT

North Carolina is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation. Already, a majority of adults in the state were born elsewhere, creating an enormous challenge for the promotion and appreciation of North Carolina's natural and cultural resources, such as literature, history, environment, music and art.

The North Caroliniana Society should be the premier organization for convening Tar Heels devoted to enhancing the cultural institutions of our state — for helping those people find one another, collaborate with one another, and mentor a rising generation into a sustained love and appreciation for the state.

MAINTAINING FOCUS

The Society occupies a unique place in the state's cultural landscape, reflecting the vision and priorities of its founders: H.G. Jones, William S. Powell, and Louis M. Connor, Jr. By remaining closely focused on the production and dissemination of scholarship related to North Carolina's past, present and future, the Society plays a vital role in strengthening the long-term infrastructure that enriches our state's cultural life.

This necessarily demands a patient focus on projects and institutions that perform steady, vital, and often-overlooked work to support scholars, authors, historians and educators. Above all else, the Society must remain disciplined in evaluating all of its activities through the lens of this mission, avoiding the temptation to enter new fields or pursue new opportunities at the expense of its core work.

MEMBERSHIP & ENGAGEMENT

The Society's most important asset is the social capital of its membership. The collective energy, expertise, and commitment of Society members constitute the most important resources that the Society can marshal for the furtherance of its mission.

Thoughtfully growing and maintaining membership and increasing the depth and tempo of member engagement should be one of the Society's highest priorities in the next several years. We intend to achieve the membership goal of 275 in 2027.

The Society can play an essential role as a convener and social hub, fostering organic collaborations among members that can strengthen North Carolina's cultural sectors while mentoring a new generation of Tar Heels committed to the state's public life.

- ❖ **Actively recruit new members with an eye toward better reflecting the diversity of North Carolina – by race, gender, geography, age, and expertise.**

As the state continues to grow and change, the Society's membership must evolve, as well. Greater representation across the state's regions and cultural sectors should be a priority, and special attention should be given to recruiting and actively mentoring younger members.

- ❖ **Establish a membership engagement committee to explore new opportunities for encouraging connections among members.**

Strengthening membership engagement could include additional meetings beyond the annual gathering in Chapel Hill, with an emphasis on social events outside of the Triangle to enable members to meet and learn more about each other; a regular newsletter to inform members not only about the Society's work, but about relevant projects or professional developments from members' organizations; online social networks to allow members to connect and follow one another; or other activities as the committee may develop.

The committee may also wish to explore different tiers of engagement or membership, recognizing those who contribute most regularly to the work and social life of the Society. In all cases, the goal should be to strengthen organic relationships among members and increase their sense of affinity as Society members.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT & PARTNERSHIPS

Since its inception, the Society has focused its support on a limited number of well-established partner organizations. The stability and longevity of those relationships has been important to the Society's identity and to its influence, given the relatively modest size of the endowment available to finance grants and projects.

At the same time, the Society's membership is often in the position to identify new and potentially fruitful collaborations or one-off projects that might further the Society's mission and provide limited but timely support to cultural and historical organizations that do not have ready alternatives.

To accommodate these competing priorities, the Society should:

- ❖ **Maintain a core stable of long-term, committed partnerships and dedicate nondiscretionary resources to sustain them.**

Support for the North Carolina Collection at UNC Chapel Hill is a long-established commitment under the Society's founding charter; the Archie K. Davis Fellowship has been a continuous commitment since 1988; annual support for the Carolina K-12 program of Carolina Public Humanities is now in its eighth year; and the North Carolina Office of Archives and History depends on the Society for partial support of National History Day and the *North Carolina Historical Review*.

These core partnerships should be backed by budgeted funds that are managed for steady, long-range sustainability (and growth as possible) and not subject to regular repurposing. The expectation of continuing support allows the Society to exercise sustained influence with core partners, deepening the impact of its investments.

The Society's executive committee should evaluate the effectiveness of those partnerships and consider any changes in the Society's core commitments every 2-4 years, or any time there are substantial changes in the mission or activities of core partners. New core partners should be established only if there are sufficient funds to sustain a minimum four-year commitment.

- ❖ **Study how the Society can entertain one-time projects or pilot collaborations and set consistent guidelines for awarding those funds (a possible *catalyst/opportunity fund*).**

The Society's executive committee should consider reserving a designated pool of money, which from time to time may be expended, on limited or one-off projects, with the size of this pool varying depending on fundraising and endowment

performance so that the core partnerships can be held stable. The Society should also consider making periodic appeals to both those in the membership who have called for a “catalyst/opportunity fund” and the Society as a whole, to support this “catalyst/opportunity fund” in particular.

The Society will continue to publish (in the manner of recent books such as *Religious Traditions of North Carolina*, and *Jim Crow in North Carolina*); to use our convening power on occasion to gather fellow citizens to discuss issues of the day and the future; and to serve when needed as a catalyst for the good of the preservation, conservation and other Society aims (as we did in a contributory way in the process of saving Hayes in Edenton).

- ❖ **Continue to establish consistent criteria (with the Grant Review Committee) for soliciting and evaluating funding proposals, offering a clear rationale for how all funded projects contribute to the Society’s mission and report on the impact of such expenditures.**

FUNDRAISING

The Society has historically taken an informal approach to fundraising, relying on planned gifts and a “light touch” annual appeal. To grow support for core partners and open greater scope for additional ‘catalyst’ projects, the Society should strengthen its fundraising model.

- ❖ **Endowed funds should be managed for long-range sustainability (and growth as possible).**

The Society is rightly focused on long-term impact. Endowment funds should be managed for consistent reinvestment, allowing principal to grow so that downstream expenditures can increase. The Society should maintain its relationship with the UNC Investment Fund’s investment opportunities and yields.

- ❖ **Annual giving should be strongly encouraged.**

The current annual appeal should be strengthened — with digital appeals playing a larger role — such that some level of annual giving is an expectation of active membership. This does not mean a strict requirement, but rather a shared commitment on the part of all active members.

- ❖ **Consider dedicated campaigns for specific goals.**

The Society’s annual spending report can be expanded to include specific fundraising goals, highlighting proposed projects or expansions of work that would be possible with additional giving. Tying fundraising to specific goals can make it easier to appeal to member interests. Accompanying online appeals to membership should be developed.

- ❖ **Opportunity of Legacy Memberships should continue to be shared.**

“Even if we cannot live forever, our good deeds can, by becoming Legacy Members of the North Caroliniana Society.”

PROMOTION AND VISIBILITY

“Substance, not show,” is core to the Society’s identity, and a fitting ethos for an organization devoted to a state with *esse quam videri* on its seal.

Yet there is an important distinction between promoting the Society for its own sake and promoting the excellent and important work of its members and partners. Given the breadth of insight and energy among Society members, and the growing need to introduce new North Carolinians to their adopted state, there are ample opportunities for a more energetic approach to the “promotion of increased knowledge and appreciation of North Carolina’s heritage” under the North Caroliniana banner.

- ❖ **Make Society imprints and materials more easily accessible online.**

Creating easily shareable online versions of Society imprints and other materials will make it easier for members to share information with their wide networks, and for the Society’s core work to gain a larger audience. Nearly all of the Society’s printed materials should have online counterparts.

- **Add staff capacity – via part-time contractor or a multi-year intern – to ramp up online communication.** See additional detail under Operations & Governance, below.

- ❖ **Encourage press coverage of Society awards and sponsored events.**

The Society should issue press releases and/or produce its own journalistic accounts of award winners and sponsored activities, and share those with media outlets across the state. Society members who have their own communications channels – columns, newsletters, television programs – should consider featuring Society work in those outlets.

- ❖ **Encourage members to identify publicly as part of the Society and share the Society’s work and priorities with their broader networks.**

Identify Society members with the interest and capacity to carry the Society’s mission into different venues – everything from Rotary Clubs to professional associations – to promote a wider awareness within North Carolina of the Society’s interests and achievements.

- ❖ **Highlight the Society’s involvement with upcoming anniversary events.**

Society members will be closely involved with planning for America 250 events across the state, and the Society’s 50th anniversary is approaching. Those two occasions may present high-profile opportunities to celebrate the Society’s contributions.

OPERATIONS & GOVERNANCE

For many years, the Society operated solely on the energies of its member-volunteers. The addition of an executive director in 2019 has added to the organization's capacity, but it remains operationally lean. To achieve some of the goals outlined above, the Society may need to consider additional staff capacity.

- ❖ **Update and clarify the responsibilities and authorities of the executive director.**

The work of the Society's executive director has developed and grown organically, driven largely by emerging needs and requests. With the benefit of experience and with input from the current executive director, the Board should formalize the duties, authorities, and limits of the executive director's role. Having a fuller and clearer picture of those responsibilities can guide the board in providing the necessary support to execute the recommendations of this plan.

- ❖ **Continue to formalize grantmaking processes and other financial procedures.**

- ❖ **Strengthen digital communications capacity.**

A part-time staff member or contractor with digital media expertise can help execute the recommended activities around member engagement, fundraising appeals, and greater visibility for Society activities. A dedicated intern, preferably a graduate student committed for more than one academic year, could also contribute to these efforts.

- ❖ **Develop a larger committee structure.**

The recommendations above would be well-served by dedicated board committees to oversee membership engagement, grantmaking and reporting, fundraising, and promotion. A more robust committee structure would allow for greater membership engagement, channeling of volunteer activities, and accountability for progress.

This plan will remain in effect until the adoption of its successor.