Strategic Plan 2021-26
As of 2021.11.16
Mission & Values

Merit School of Music transforms the lives of Chicago-area youth through removing barriers to high-quality music education.

Merit School of Music achieves excellence through expert teachers who create a deep, inspiring, and motivating learning experience for a diverse student body.

➢ We create a culture of musical and personal excellence by igniting passion and nurturing persistence.
➢ We cultivate a welcoming, generous, vibrant community of learning.
➢ We collaborate with innovation, accountability, and empathy.
➢ We celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion – so everyone belongs.
Impact of our Vision

**WHO we serve**
Merit works with Chicago-area youth with any musical interest representing the rich diversity of our Chicagoland community

**WHERE we focus our work**
By making programs accessible through a state of the art building in the heart of Chicago’s West Loop and beyond through a network of partner, community hubs, and virtual offerings

**Our ultimate OUTCOME**
The leader for diverse and inclusive music education pathways, where students, staff, and faculty thrive
Vision

Merit is Chicago’s destination for excellence & inclusion in music education for all.
### Strategic Priorities to meet our Vision

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational &amp; Educational Excellence</th>
<th>Our Values &amp; IDEA</th>
<th>Funding &amp; Sustainability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make investments to improve upon the infrastructure and systems that will enhance quality in education, cross-team collaborations and customer service delivery model.</td>
<td>Fully operationalize our values by integrating Inclusive, Diverse Equitable, and Anti-Racist initiatives and practices across the organization. It’s about doing what we say.</td>
<td>Lay the groundwork for a comprehensive campaign while also scaling our programs and other offerings to reach peak profitability in order to fund our mission long-term.</td>
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<th>Programs &amp; Partnerships</th>
<th>Physical Imprint</th>
<th>Industry Leadership</th>
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<td>Develop and refine programs and partnerships that are mission-aligned and expand our diverse and inclusive community.</td>
<td>Provide a state-of-the-art facility and expanded options for how and where students can access our programs and lessons in their communities.</td>
<td>Build broader awareness and recognition as the leading provider of high quality music education through investment of marketing and deeper engagement of thought leadership activities in the field.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key Objective 1</td>
<td>Action Items</td>
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| Make strategic investments in the resources, tools and systems necessary to attract and serve a broader student base at scale | • Take Compass recommendation to hire VP level Enrollment and Student Services leader to focus on driving student growth and recruitment marketing (complete)  
• Take Compass recommendations to invest in Marketing function starting with brand alignment and website re-design (in progress)  
• Invest in IT/Data Governance capabilities to ensure effective capture of customer insights that inform data-driven decision making on program efficacy, enrollment forecasting, etc.  
• Investment in faculty and staff compensation to attract, retain, and train the highest quality employee  
• Offer enhanced professional development and training opportunities for staff and faculty from onboarding to ongoing skills development |

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<tr>
<th>Key Results Associated with this objective</th>
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| • Year 1-2: Rebuild student enrollment to FY19 levels for tuition-based programs  
• Year 3-4: Grow student enrollment and related revenue  
• Year 5: Achieve total student body of 4,000 |
### Key Objective 2

Model year over year financial growth through consistent and sustainable revenue streams

### Action Items

- Using insights from Baker Tilly Program KPI model and Compass' financial modeling tools, develop a program evaluation assessment determining program priority, efficacy, and profitability
- Identify gaps in music education programs that Merit can deliver with excellence (ideas include: Adult Education, Music Therapy)
- Conduct assessment of MMIC and CMPI programs to determine feasibility of adding on full-paying sites as well as providing seed money for others to support mission driven work
- Establish clear value indicators for investment in Merit to drive a comprehensive campaign that will increase endowment and financial aid

### Key Results Associated with this objective

- Year 1: Maintain financial aid to revenue rate balance achieved in 2021; Launch silent phase of comprehensive campaign
- Year 2-3: Add at least one full-paying MMIC/CMPI site;
Organization-wide objective: Growth

**Key Objective 3**
Increase Merit’s imprint in Chicago through improvement of physical plant and deepened community presence

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<td>• Building on Merit’s financial modeling tool and peer institution audit documents, understand the conditions necessary to establish sustainable community hub(s) or partnership program(s) that drives revenue and student growth in the Chicago market; identify potential locations for community hubs</td>
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<td>• Assess Merit’s current deferred maintenance needs and costs to update current building versus a full rebuild/addition of a third floor and determine best course of action in coordination with trustees</td>
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<td>• Utilize Compass’ M&amp;A discussion guide</td>
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<td>• Year 1: Determine community hub/partnership location(s)</td>
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<td>• Year 2-3: Start to execute on deferred maintenance repairs or rebuild plan</td>
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<td>• Year 4 – 5: Open 1 – 2 community hubs</td>
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What is at stake today?

• Merit has a powerful and relevant mission.
• We are in a moment of opportunity, challenge, and critical need.
• To sustain a vital organization and grow our impact, we must invest significantly in people, infrastructure, and analysis now.
• Our decisions today shape the future of our school.
• Together we will create the firm foundation critical to needed future growth.
Year 1 + 2 (FY22 & FY23)

• Merit imperatives, creating foundation for growth and success:
  • Rebuild Enrollment to pre-pandemic levels
  • Increase digital advertising & refresh branding / new website
  • Improve systems: streamline processes & upgrade/integrate technology
  • Organizational structure, hiring and compensation commensurate with mission and quality (faculty and staff)
  • Extend Instrumental & Vocal Music to 12th Grade
  • Begin analysis of potential new program offerings, renovation for 38 S. Peoria, and community hubs that drive enrollment and grow earned revenue
  • Determine optimal future for CMPI post-Mellon
  • Begin silent phase of comprehensive campaign

Year 3 (FY24)

• Begin strategic program expansion. Top possibilities include:
  • Expanded Merit Music in Communities programs
  • Music therapy program
  • Continuing Education opportunities

Year 4 - 5 (FY25- FY26)

• Launch Public Phase of Comprehensive Campaign
• Launch Merit Community hubs/branches
• Renovation/expansion begins at 38 S. Peoria