

"Preserving the Legacy"

A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas

Strategic Plan
2022-2024



*In Loving Memory
of
Terri Joelle Chambers*



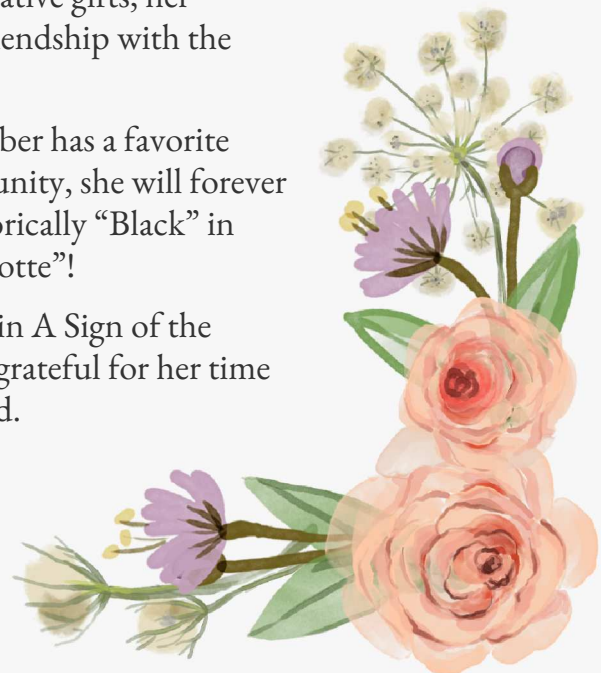
A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas dedicates their Strategic Plan to the memory of Ms. Terri Joelle Chambers.

Terri joined the A Sign of the Times (ASOTT) Family as Band Manager in 2003 and held that position until 2010. Her spirit, work ethic and creative excellence remain the “standard” by which ASOTT volunteers and contractors alike are held!

She served on the ASOTT Board of Directors until 2020 when her health began to fail. Even then, she shared her creative gifts, her commitment to the Black community and her friendship with the organization. We were always on her mind.

Terri left us too soon. Every ASOTT band member has a favorite “Terri” story. Throughout the Charlotte community, she will forever be the quintessential tour guide to all things historically “Black” in Charlotte and the embodiment of “Queen Charlotte”!

Terri Joelle, as she was known, was instrumental in A Sign of the Times becoming who we are today. We are ever grateful for her time with us, and her memory will be forever cherished.





CONTENTS

04	STRATEGIC PLAN COMMITTEE PARTICIPANTS
05	ORGANIZATION HISTORY
06	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
07	THE LEE INSTITUTE APPROACH
08	PROCESS
11	STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
24	RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC PLAN COMMITTEE PARTICIPANTS



Board/Advisory Committee Members

Pervis Lee, III
Board Chair

Timothy Gibbs
Board Vice Chair

Tiffany Taylor

Ronald J. Ross

LaTanya Johnson

Wisdom Jzar

Meg Whalen

Cedric Steele

Sheryl Smith

Linda Green

ASOTT Staff

K. Tyrone Jefferson
Founder and Executive Director

Toni Tupponce
Program Director

The Lee Institute

Chrystal Joy
Managing Director



A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas (ASOTT) is a nonprofit organization operating on Charlotte's West Side. Founded in 2006, the organization's mission is **to preserve the legacy of the African Diaspora through music, dance and the spoken word.**

Charlotte native Tyrone Jefferson initiated a composers "Big Band" in 1999, made up of Charlotte's best Black musicians. They played Jefferson's original compositions and arrangements of jazz standards. They found that music of great Black musicians – throughout the African Diaspora – represent the culture and tell the stories of its people.

Realizing that Charlotte's "west-side" communities - once rich with live music from iconic Jazz and R&B entertainers performing at the *HiFi Supper Club* and *Historic Excelsior Club* - seldom heard live music, he decided to change that dynamic by taking the music to them!

Further, following his passion to "share (Black) history that we never learned in school," he formed the non-profit as a vehicle for sharing stories of Black and Brown people that:

- Foster racial and cultural pride
- Challenge and/or correct the revisionist and destructive versions of Black history perpetuated throughout education systems
- Reverse negative images of inadequacy and self-hatred
- Improve dynamic conversations around race and cultural equity within and outside of the Black community,
- Help improve the trajectory of young Black lives through positive self-awareness and cultural study, and
- When appropriate, use music, dance and the spoken word as a thread to share knowledge and support the telling of our stories.

The Board of Directors of A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas initiated a strategic planning process in 2020 to develop its strategy for organizational growth, sustainability, and creation of a Black Research and Performing Arts Center (BRePAC) – a physical space to be established on the westside of Charlotte to serve as:

- A physical home for A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas and its programs,
- A shared space for artists – especially artists of color – to grow, practice and perform,
- A collaborative library for the research and study of Black history throughout the African Diaspora,
- A space for thought, dialogue and conferencing dedicated to racial and cultural equity, and
- A state-of-the-art recording and performing arts center.

In January 2021, The Lee Institute was engaged as the process facilitator to support development of the organization’s strategic roadmap.

The plan is structured around five (5) major organizational pillars:

- Organizational Direction
- Fundraising/Resource Development
- Programming/Black Research & Performing Arts Center (BRePAC)
- Marketing, Communications and Technology
- Operational Support

A Sign of the Times is grateful to the Knight Foundation and the Arts and Science Council of Mecklenburg County for funding the Strategic Planning Process.



**KNIGHT
FOUNDATION**



Culture For All.

The Lee Institute uses a three-phase approach to strategic planning.

The design of this process was structured, but intentionally nimble to allow for adjustments in scope, for participation of additional stakeholders as appropriate, and to accommodate for the challenging schedules of the committee and board members to meet collectively.

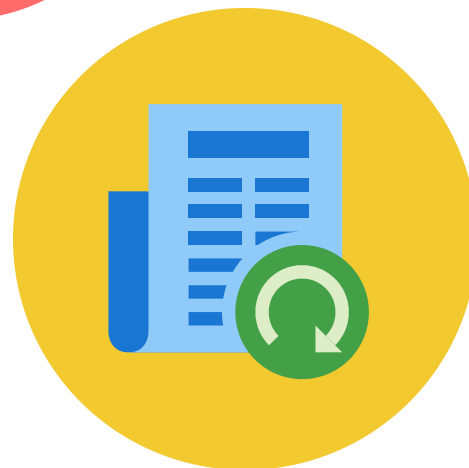
Design Process:

Discovery &
Visioning



Research & Validation

Strategic Planning
Retreat & Final
Report





The Lee Institute worked closely with A Sign of the Times staff and board to facilitate an organic process that allowed for focus on most immediate needs of the organization while also creating space for big picture thinking around the opportunities and intended direction of the work. Areas of focus during the engagement included:

- Strategic Priorities
- Operational Support Needs/Staffing
- Board Engagement, Roles, and Responsibilities

Strategic Priorities

The Strategic Planning Committee ("Committee") reviewed the history and trajectory of A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas. Since its inception, the organization has been successful in building brand recognition for the Band and creating a positive reputation and following to attend their performances. The focus on "edutainment" has created unique spaces for audience members to listen to and experience live jazz while learning about the history of the African diaspora. The Band has been a significant funding stream for the lesser-known work of the nonprofit which exists to extend the focus on programming to

- sustain and share principles, values, culture and rich history of the African diaspora; and
- provide opportunities where the tradition of Black Music can be shared.

During the pandemic, as with most other things, gigs paused due to social distancing and shutdowns. This impacted the ability to build revenue but allowed for a refocus on priorities for the organization going forward.

The Committee discussed the desire to focus more strategically on building the legacy of A Sign of the Times: the Black Research and Performing Arts Center (BRePAC). BRePAC is intended to celebrate the legacy of and highlight the rich Black culture in the Charlotte community, particularly the West side. It will provide the necessary building blocks to encourage hope and self-esteem for Black youth who often do not get the benefit of learning about Black culture in traditional educational settings. BRePAC would be modeled after the Hayti Heritage Center in Durham and the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia in its focus on story-telling and transfer of knowledge between generations. Programming within the Center would focus on delivering messages through music, dance, art, and amplification of Black history. While the target audience will be the Black community, the BRePAC would welcome all who want to be a part of and learn from the community's rich past and its connection to the larger African diaspora.



Operational Support Needs/Staffing

The Committee also spent significant time learning about the internal operations of the nonprofit, which are supported by two staff members who serve on a volunteer basis: the Executive Director/Founder and Program Director. As with a number of grassroots, Black-led nonprofit organizations, there exists the challenge of capacity. During the course of the strategic planning process, staff identified the priorities for operational support, prioritized timing of roles needed to move efforts forward, and shared which roles should be paid positions or volunteer opportunities. Volunteer opportunities were intended to be filled by Board members or outreach to community members who have relevant skills and would be interested in supporting A Sign of the Times' work and mission. Long term, there would be financial capacity to expand the paid staffing model to fully execute the organizational priorities.

Board Engagement, Roles, and Responsibilities

The Lee Institute facilitated a session focused on nonprofit Board roles and responsibilities early in the engagement process and continued to reiterate the critical need for the Board of Directors' engagement in driving organizational success, especially in grassroots nonprofits. Smaller working Boards especially need to identify board and committee members and volunteers to help support execution of strategies to move the mission and priorities forward.

Not unlike other nonprofits, A Sign of the Times has the challenge of Board Member engagement, recruitment, and retention. The sector locally has experienced the issue pre-pandemic, but as we re-emerge to find a new normal, individuals are re-evaluating their personal and professional priorities in addition to where they choose to spend their time, talent, and treasure. This makes it even more critical to focus on retention of active and involved Board Members and to recruit supporters of the mission to lean in where their skills, expertise, and access are most needed.

The Board Chair made individual phone calls to each Board Member to discuss recommitment to the organization and hear what would help increase their engagement with the organization.

Each Board Member was asked what could be done to help increase participation on the Board to gauge needs and opportunities for process improvement with regular convenings. Board Members were asked to each commit to participation on at least one committee and each committee was asked to meet at least once per month to make progress towards the organization's mission.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1

Organizational Direction

We will maintain focus on our mission and align our work with our vision for Black and African-American communities.

2

Fundraising/Resource Development

We will develop a culture of enthusiasm for fundraising and develop a plan to ensure financial viability and sustainability for the organization.

3

ASOTT Programming/BRePAC

We will focus on meaningful programming that focuses on preserving the legacy of the African Diaspora to be delivered through the Black Research and Performing Arts Center (BRePAC).

4

Marketing, Communications, and Technology

We will build and maintain the brand of the organization through consistent promotion of the mission and use technology to support growth and sustainability.

5

Operational Support

We will provide operations support to the staff as capacity is built for scale and sustainability.



Strategic Priority 1:

Organizational Direction

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: Organizational Direction

1 Strengthen Board of Directors with enthusiastic community volunteers and advocates who are committed to sharing the organization's vision and mission.

Objective:

Increase Board membership by 6 new members.

- Determine expertise and skill sets needed for ASOTT Board success
- Recruit new members for ASOTT Board based on those skill sets from Arts and Science Council Leadership Training roster, community stakeholders including Historic West End Partners, Arts and Science Council, Knight Foundation, etc.
- Design and conduct orientation of new Board members to ensure Board readiness and success
- Increase training opportunities and cross-organizational learning or mentoring opportunities to strengthen Board skills

2 Annually assess ASOTT Vision and Mission Statement.

Objective:

Reconsider current vision and mission statements at first meeting proceeding Annual Retreat.

- Consider verbiage of vision and mission statements for clarity and efficacy
- Consider their alignment to existing and planned ASOTT programs
- Consider their alignment to existing and potential community and creative partnerships
- Consider their alignment with ASOTT brand and marketing efforts
- Consider individual board or committee member's activity around any program effort based on their skill set, personal interest, or experience

3 Strengthen Board Executive Committee and Standing Committee leadership.

Objective:

Ensure all Board Executive roles are filled.

- Review job description and expectation of Board leadership
- Conduct election of officers to serve as Secretary and Treasurer
- Provide training opportunities through ASC or other nonprofit training entities
- Clarify/establish best working relationship between Board officers and staff

Strategic Priority 2:

**Fundraising/
Resource
Development**



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: Fundraising/Resource Development

1 Ensure 100% annual Board financial participation.

Objective:

Establish date and/or payment schedule for annual Board member assessment.

- Consider Board annual assessment amount
- Include assessment fee in Board signed commitment document

2 Develop and adopt plans for ASOTT sustainability.

Objective:

Assess work objectives, key skill sets and weekly hours of ASOTT volunteer staff (Executive Director and Program Director) to determine appropriate salaries for full- and part-time staff.

- Retain human resource consultant to conduct market salary study for ASOTT staff positions
- Review and adjust ASOTT job descriptions for appropriateness as compared to comparable job descriptions nationally

Objective:

Establish fundraising plan to ensure financial viability and sustainability.

- Engage marketing expert to support board efforts in telling the "ASOTT story" effectively
 - Identify programming priorities
 - Re-apply for Mecklenburg County Culture Blocks Grant
 - Re-apply for Infusion Grant Funds
 - Engage grant writer to research and apply for appropriate grants for ASOTT and BRePAC



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: Fundraising/Resource Development

- 3** Create opportunities for ASOTT collaboration and partnerships with key Charlotte organizations, corporations, and institutions to strengthen ASOTT position in the community as a whole and Charlotte's west side.

Objective:

Initiate opportunities to partner with community institutions like Johnson C. Smith University, Queens University, UNC Charlotte, Historic West End Partners, local faith-based institutions, Charlotte – Mecklenburg Library System, and Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools on interactive programs promoting Black culture and history, community conversations around cultural equity, etc.

- Host invitational event for key west Charlotte leadership to introduce and share benefits of ASOTT programs and the potential for BRePAC
- Offer cultural or historic programming assistance to Queens University, JCSU, and UNC Charlotte
- Query key corporations about African American affinity groups for partnerships
- Design and offer Black History programming to schools in the Charlotte area

Objective:

Develop and initiate artists collective to promote partnerships among Charlotte artists and arts organizations, particularly around issues of cultural equity.

- Survey local artists and arts organizations around interest in participating in a collective, design and desired outcomes of a collective that might fall under auspices of Black Research and Performing Arts Center (BRePAC)
- Develop marketing, fundraising, and design strategies to compliment BRePAC Capital Campaign process and introduce it to potential partners



Strategic Priority 3:

**ASOTT
Programming
and BRePAC**



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: ASOTT Programming and BRePAC



1 Establish Board oversight of ASOTT program objectives to ensure that all programs are mission driven and impact ASOTT's vision for community impact.

Objective:

Design and implement process for Board leadership and committee involvement in ASOTT programs.

- Determine minimum number of ASOTT programs that Board Members should be required to attend and provide volunteer support
- Assign Board Members to participate in various ASOTT programs including:
 - Fourth Sunday Jazz
 - Annual Black History Concert
 - KWANZAA
 - Bridging Musical Worlds
 - Giving Thanks
 - Scholarship Process Development
 - Others as developed

Objective:

Secure physical location for ASOTT Administrative Offices on Charlotte West Side (preferably within Beatties Ford Rd. Corridor).

- Initiate conversations with key community institutions around use of co-adaptive space - possible locations/contacts include: JCSU, Arts Factory, Second Ward Alumni House, West Charlotte Land Trust and LISC.
- Second tier institutions to survey include: First Baptist West, Mecklenburg County Health Department, etc.
- Establish relationships and partner with local developers and community leadership to locate and fund temporary space for ASOTT and BRePAC programming

Objective:

Identify and apply for funding for BRePAC feasibility/case statement.

- Apply for Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation grant
- Apply for financial support and/or resources from LISC
- City of Charlotte – Mayors Racial Equity Fund
- Beatties Ford Road Corridor Funding initiative

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: ASOTT Programming and BRePAC



2 Assess and Evaluate Existing ASOTT programs for viability and mission connectedness.

Objective:

Assess programming for mission alignment.

- Identify and articulate the problem that each program is intended to solve
- Clarify how ASOTT programs ameliorated a community issue
- Determine and describe desired outcomes of each program by socio-economic category
- Determine measures of success for each program

Objective:

Build coalition of like-minded artists, arts organizations, historians and community institutions of learning and worship around promoting programs that share history that you never learned in school – using music, dance and the spoken word.

- Initiate by-annual meeting with Charlotte creatives and arts organizations to “brainstorm” or “riff” on possible joint programs and marketing efforts
- Look for opportunities for program partnerships – especially among varied generations – using programs like:
 - Listen
 - Women Speak Podcast
 - Annual Black History Concert

Objective:

Participate in or create a Charlotte West Arts Community Calendar.

- Apply for City or ASC grant to hire intern to research and reach out to artists and institutions on the West side of Charlotte
- ASOTT Staff and Board “show up” in creative spaces other than their own to build relationships and promote ASOTT and BRePAC programs
- Publish and promote ASOTT and support other artistic events throughout Charlotte’s west side

Objective:

Initiate the assessment of the process and outcomes of the A Sign of the Times Scholarship Program and determine changes or improvements to be made.

- Review process for past awards
- Review and improve application and selection criteria for awards
- Review and improve scholarship marketing and corporate/philanthropic funding for scholarship awards
- Establish ongoing role for scholarship recipients with ASOTT or BRePAC

Strategic Priority 4:

Marketing, Communications, and Technology



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: Marketing, Communications, and Technology



1 Create a Strategic Marketing and Communications Plan for ASOTT.

Objective:

Initiate the development of update of strategic marketing and communication process.

- Hire/engage marketing contractor for social media improvement and branding
- Review current narrative of ASOTT as step toward revised branding and communications
- Ensure consistent messaging across media platforms and in verbal or printed narratives
- Create compelling impact statements/communication around funding, resources and programs

Objective:

Initiate Board of Directors telling the ASOTT story throughout community.

- Ensure that each ASOTT Board member has their personal ASOTT story that they can refer to as they speak on behalf of the organization
- Ensure that each ASOTT Board member can recite the ASOTT mission statement
- Staff and Board members work to ensure that “elevator speeches” are relevant to the mission of the organization and can be readily shared with potential funders or stakeholders
- Solicit Board members to open and close all ASOTT sponsored events with audience “ask” and statement of appreciation.
- Implement Board training to lead or participate in conversations around cultural equity within community

2 Establish and maintain technology to support ASOTT growth and sustainability through all desired social media platforms and through one-on-one customer relationship management.

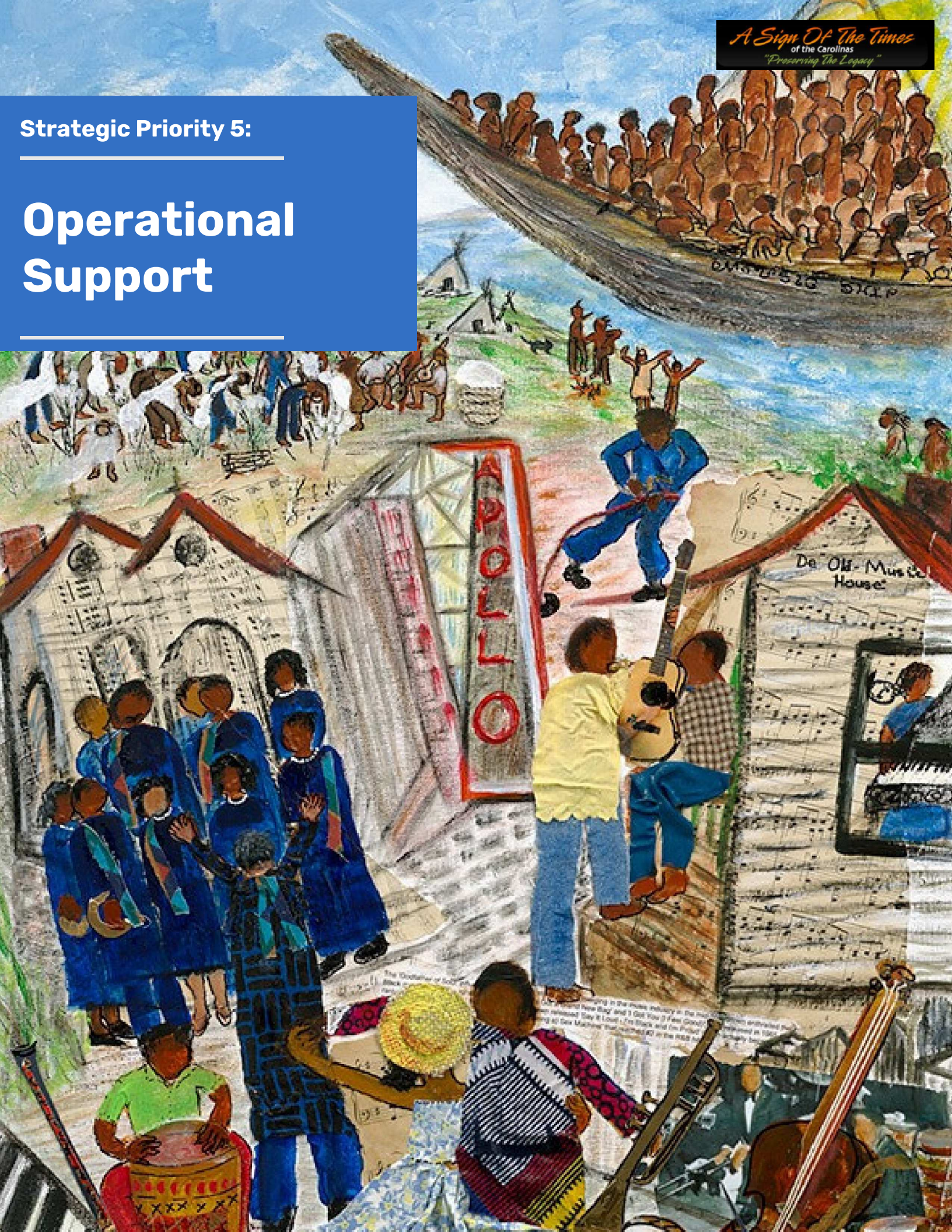
Objective:

Develop plan to create and manage content for social media platforms to drive ASOTT messaging.

- Hire social media management contractor
- Identify target audiences and best social media platform to reach them consistently
- Establish target numbers for website, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
- Effectively utilize print media and email

Strategic Priority 5:

Operational Support



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: Operational Support

1 Operational support of ASOTT staff that ensures organization runs smoothly and effectively.

Objective:

Define and assign operational roles that Board Members can fill until paid staffing can be afforded.

- Establish ad hoc committee to voluntarily provide regular assistance to staff based on their skill set, time and program/project need
- Establish and maintain regular meetings between Executive Director and Board Chair to determine gaps, review ASOTT financials, major contracts, etc.





Recommendations for Implementation

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION



The Board and Staff of A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas spent significant time between 2021 and 2022 to develop an intentional strategic plan for the evolution of their impact. While their work and the BRePAC are inviting to the local and at large community, priorities are intentionally rooted in efforts to serve the needs of the Black community in Charlotte. In order to maintain the positive momentum created during the strategic planning process and hold the Board and Staff accountable for plan execution, we recommend the following for immediate implementation:

- Ensure that regularly scheduled Board Meeting agendas allow for committee updates at each session. This will create an expectation that work should be done between Board Meetings by committees and that updates on progress around strategic priorities be provided to the full Board at each meeting.
- Initiate Executive Board meetings in advance of regular Board Meetings to prepare the agenda. The Board should work with Staff to determine what should be discussed during the meeting, how much time should be spent, and what decisions need to be made so that materials can be distributed in advance. We recommend that someone on the Executive Board take on the role of consolidating and distributing the materials to the full Board.
- Focus on Board development as a priority. There are gaps at the Executive Board level that need to be filled with individuals who have a passion for the mission of A Sign of the Times and the skillsets needed to execute the work. All members of the nonprofit (Board and Staff) should stretch to become more comfortable telling their individual “why” stories to build relationships with others in the community who could be supporters, donors/funders, Board, or committee members. They should identify a fundraising consultant to help them develop their pitch and utilize the skill to build knowledge of the mission and intended impact in the community.
- Encourage transparent and authentic conversations about opportunities and challenges with and between each other as stakeholders in the organization. Discuss what seems undiscussable. If there are barriers to success, we recommend being intentional about having discussions as a group and leaning on consensus for decision-making. It is the Board’s role to be involved and engaged and to drive the direction of the organization so we encourage each member to really lean in.

We have truly enjoyed working with the board and staff of A Sign of the Times of the Carolinas and look forward to seeing what comes next!



About The Lee Institute

Founded in 1997, The Lee Institute lives its mission to build great communities by supporting nonprofit, public and community organizations, and by leading and guiding collaborative efforts.

We put our expertise, training, experience and community knowledge to work primarily across the Charlotte region and the two Carolinas.

Our work is organized in three areas: strengthening nonprofits, engaging people, and empowering leaders.