



MINNESOTA BRASS

DRUM & BUGLE CORPS

September 21, 2018

Dear Friend of Minnesota Brass,

I am pleased to share with you the stakeholder engagement report from Red House Consulting. This report attempts to clarify the pressing issues that Minnesota Brass alumni, friends, members and staff have all been contemplating during the past year. The report demonstrates areas of shared commitment as well as areas of disagreement among our stakeholders.

On September 26, the Board of Directors will hold a Town Hall Meeting to review the findings in this report and discuss next steps for the organization. This approach is a direct response to one of the common themes we heard throughout this process regarding the need for improved communication and greater transparency. I hope you will plan to attend this meeting at 6:30 p.m. which will be held at Olsen Theilin, 2675 Long Lake Road in Roseville, Minnesota.

One of the organization's pressing issues is new leadership. As the report articulates, "MBI's impending board and administrative leadership transition is a source of concern (where will the leaders come from? Will they have what they need to succeed?) and of opportunity (this is a chance to recruit individuals with the skills, ideas, and energy MBI needs to thrive and survive)." As announced earlier, several of us who have been involved in the leadership of Minnesota Brass are planning to step down in the coming year. The board has announced plans to hire three new administrative leaders to move the work forward.

This new team will ultimately be responsible for creating a shared vision for Minnesota Brass's next chapter. They have an opportunity to leverage our many strengths as an organization and chart the course for the future. I hope you will consider stepping up to take on one of these roles or encourage talented individuals in your network to do so. Previous experience with Minnesota Brass is not required. For the organization to thrive in 2019 and beyond, we need an energetic, passionate group of leaders who are ready to build the future.

In addition to the new administrative team, we will also be adding new members to the board of directors in the coming months. At the Town Hall meeting, I will share details about how to be considered for membership on the board. The board will have many large issues on its plate in the future and will require strategic thinkers who are able to see the long-term view. We especially need age, gender and racial diversity on our board to better reflect our community.

Thank you for your commitment to Minnesota Brass. My leadership role with the organization will come to a close in October of 2019. I am looking forward to supporting the new team during this time of transition and being the corps' number one cheerleader for many years to come!

For All We Know,

Eric Molho
Chair, Board of Directors

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Executive summary

Purpose of the project

In July 2018, Red House Consulting was engaged to help Minnesota Brass gather input for its next strategic plan. To that end, Michael Kumer and Jocelyn:

- Conducted one-on-one interviews with 6 leadership and staff
- Facilitated two focus group sessions for ~25 members, alumni, and staff
- Facilitated a focus group session for ~25 board and staff
- Created a survey that drew 132 responses from MBI members, alumni, board, staff, administration, and supporters

Along the way, we drew on Michael’s decades-long association—as a member, educator, and judge (and later as a consultant)—within the marching arts community, and upon our nonprofit consulting experience more generally.

Our report describes the critical issues we believe MBI needs to address in its next strategic plan and recommends steps MBI can take to strengthen its organizational capacity.

We greatly appreciate the input received from MBI’s stakeholders who very openly shared their experiences, knowledge, and feelings about the organization.

Critical issues

Mission, vision & values

MBI stakeholders truly value their association with MBI and are proud of its longstanding contributions to the marching arts. Because of changes in the marching arts landscape and within MBI, some fear the potential loss of reputation and well-respected traditions.

MBI’s sense of identity and purpose is in flux. Stakeholders disagree on which age groups should be served, at what level(s) MBI should compete, what the performance goals should be, and generally how MBI should fit into the Minnesota marching arts community.

Stakeholders say MBI needs to place greater emphasis on the core values of mutual accountability, trust, respect, transparency, and the pursuit of excellence. *Doing so, stakeholders believe, will promote a healthier, more positive, and more professional organizational culture.*

Leadership

MBI’s impending board and administrative leadership transition is a source of concern (where will the leaders come from? Will they have what they need to succeed?) and of opportunity (this is a chance to recruit individuals with the skills, ideas, and energy MBI needs to thrive and survive).

Members, alumni & volunteers

Member and alumni recruitment and retention rates are down. It is more challenging to find individuals willing to consider board, administration and other forms of leadership. Members, alumni, and volunteers say they are asked to take on too much, or feel that tasks are not well defined.

Past and present performers primarily wish to feel that it matters that they participate in the Activity and that their participation is valued. They want stronger social connections with their fellow performers and alumni, and with leadership.

Administration

Administrators are stretched thin. Lack of agreed upon goals and diminished energy among long-time “doers” is demoralizing and hampers effective planning and communications.

External relations

To improve MBI’s reputation and recruitment, stakeholders believe MBI needs stronger relationships with schools, colleges and universities, the local community, and other regional and state drum corps. In the absence of leadership consensus and developed administrative capacity, it has been a challenge to build – or in some cases – rebuild relationships.

Stakeholders stated that MBI needs to share its history so that people inside and outside the organization understand how it is special. More needs to be done to tell the MBI story in personal and engaging ways.

Understanding the challenges

Technical challenges have known solutions that can be implemented by current know-how. *Adaptive challenges* can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Adaptive changes are hard because they require that people tackle tough questions, push people’s sense of responsibility beyond current norms, and inevitably carry some experience of trade-off and loss.

The majority of the critical issues confronting MBI are adaptive.

For adaptive change to take hold requires more than formal top-down decisions. MBI leadership needs to create a space (figuratively, at least) where all stakeholders come together to address the organization’s adaptive challenges. All stakeholders need to engage with the issues of:

- How the different visions for MBI can be reconciled
- What is important to leave behind, and what is important to retain, as MBI moves forward
- What new practices and policies do we need to refine or replace the practices and policies that are no longer working
- How MBI needs to positively engage, motivate, and recognize stakeholders for their contributions

High-level recommendations

- Put in place an MBI Board of Directors with the capacity, skills, and desire to foster adaptive change
- Hire administrative staff who want to participate in the process of adaptive change—and who will fully support the outcomes of the change process
- Invite members, alumni, volunteers, and staff to actively contribute to this process
- Create and implement an adaptive change process that helps to reconcile divergent opinion (e.g., bring back the drum corps, focus on winter ensembles, focus on all ages, etc.), helps to rebalance MBI roles, responsibilities, and workload more effectively, and helps members, alumni, and others feel more connected to the organization and positive about its future

Additional Discussion

The interviews, focus groups, and online survey responses illuminated MBI's challenges—and also opportunities to strengthen, grow, and sustain the organization and its culture.

Interviews & focus groups

Input from these sessions coalesced around the following themes and recommendations:

Mission, vision, values

- Decide what MBI wants to be (all-age, junior, senior) and how we fit into the Minnesota marching arts scene
- Make the mission/values of the whole organization known or visible
- Have each performing group's mission statement align with the mission statement of the full corps
- Excellence: create an MBI system for best practices and training
- Transparency: ensure strong, reliable communication from leadership and throughout the organization; open board meetings to the public; make board meeting minutes accessible to members
- Respect: educate the entire organization on respectful, age-specific communications; respect the time of your volunteers
- Trust: share focus group report and other strategic planning activities and outcomes via Facebook, email, and corps meetings
- Accountability: foster a culture of accountability at all levels
- Gratitude: be thankful for the organization's financial stability and acknowledge contributions from all stakeholders

Leadership development

- Conduct a skills/talents audit of current stakeholders (members, alumni, board, parents, etc.)
- Launch a plan for leadership development for staff, future board members, and future administrative leaders
- Define desired leadership roles, expectations and skillsets (this allows members to evaluate their ability to move into these roles)
- Help leaders develop their leadership skills:
 - Create a training program for each level of the organization (including training on sensitivity, bullying, sexual harassment, and harassment)
 - Offer basic project management training
 - Create an internship program to ensure succession planning for administrators, executive, board and staff
 - Institute a training period in which new leaders shadow existing leaders
 - Create a senior mentorship circle
- Plan for leadership transitions years in advance
- Create a leadership succession plan
- Create a culture of direct personal involvement and support for all summer and winter ensembles

Leadership recruitment & retention

- Identify the next generation of leadership
- Articulate leadership recruitment goals
 - Seek out diversity; encourage women in leadership roles
 - Search for staff/leadership who can be passionate and dedicated primarily to MBI
 - Attract volunteers who want to develop leadership roles or talent
 - Seek leaders willing to divide up the workload and delegate tasks
 - Identify music educators interested in leadership positions
- Formulate leadership recruitment tactics
 - Don't wait for people to come and ask to be involved
 - Develop an elevator pitch explaining why people would want to volunteer or lead
 - Advertise open leadership positions widely through small group discussion, all-call emails, and personal outreach
 - Have current board members reach out directly to individuals in the organization who exemplify leadership potential
 - Ensure membership knows the MBI history, which may encourage individuals to consider assuming leadership roles

Board recruitment, development & retention

- Articulate board recruitment goals
 - Expand the size of the board to build diversity of talents, skills and ideas
 - Ensure the organization is thoroughly represented
 - Increase winter program representation
 - Include a current marching member
 - Create a membership seat that functions as an opportunity to interpret the membership experience to the rest of the board
 - Ensure that required professional expertise is represented
 - Financial management and planning
 - Policymaking
 - Legal
 - Recognize and affirm that a stronger board leads to stronger programs, which further strengthens the board, leading to even stronger programs—a reinforcing cycle
- Formulate board recruitment tactics
 - Recruit new board members
 - Invite non-marching members and non-MBI members to join the board
 - Find ways to continually generate interest in board participation
 - Let the entire corps know about upcoming board openings
 - Encourage individuals to attend or participate in board meetings
 - Tap into the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits to identify board talent
- Formulate board retention/professional development tactics
 - See and recognize board members as resources that we need and use
 - Create a functional board development committee
 - Raise the profile of board members: e.g., strongly encourage them to engage with members at rehearsals, performances, and social events

- Develop a board mentorship program
- Develop a board appreciation program
- Enable board members to join the DCI Consortium
- Enable board members to attend major championships (DCI, WGI, BOA, etc.)
- Encourage board members to connect with board members at other corps and nonprofits

Administrative recruitment, development & retention

- Encourage board members and administrators to get to know current members and newer alumni (5-10 years out) to identify potential good fits for each administrative role
- Consider parents, friends and family for these roles, not just alumni
- Recruit the next administrators from within the current ensembles
- Create a grant-funded administrative mentorship program
- Create committees on which volunteers and alumni serve for specified terms; committee co-chairs will gain experience that will help them move into administrative roles
- Send more staff to the DCI Board Consortium
- Provide sabbaticals to prevent burn-out

Member recruitment & retention

- Create a recruiting mechanism: e.g., establish a recruitment team and plan
- Focus on talent with the potential to continue performing for years (e.g., college-age)
- Demonstrate a reliance on more than corps members to recruit new members
- Make it simple to participate in the activity
- Reduce the time commitment (moving Wednesday rehearsals to Friday was a good idea)
- Strengthen the esprit de corps:
 - Prepare a member booklet that identifies staff, board and management and shares their backgrounds
 - Invite board members to attend rehearsals and meet members
 - Help members in all sections get to know each other (rehearsals are spent working hard and getting better, which is great, but time spent getting to know fellow members would help make the corps stronger)
 - Create more opportunities after rehearsals for social time and ways for members to connect
 - Discourage the formation of cliques or factions within the organization
 - Advertise about performance opportunities
 - Ask current, younger members about their MBI experiences
- Strengthen individual excellence:
 - Encourage preparedness to take full advantage of rehearsal and performance time and effort
 - Train students to perform their craft
 - Inspire young musicians
- Make membership costs more equitable and affordable
 - Stop “buying membership” (subsidizing some members’ costs but not others’)
 - Lower the dues to make the activity more affordable

- Offer discounts on dues based on years of membership
- Reimburse members for long-distance travel expenses
- Investigate grant and scholarship opportunities to underwrite dues costs

Alumni recruitment & retention

- Create an administrative staff position:
 - Director of alumni development and communication
 - Alumni coordinator
- Foster alumni engagement:
 - Connect with alumni
 - Form a (fully-supported) alumni booster group
 - Seek alumni from 2000 on who want to be engaged with MBI
 - Engage alumni in active, alternative performance opportunities
 - Recruit alumni as volunteers: e.g., young alumni to assist with off-field tasks and jobs
 - Create a quarterly alumni social event schedule: e.g., bowling, skiing, etc.
- Recognize alumni:
 - Highlight contributions from past members/alumni
 - Honor the decades: what happened to the 70th season?

Volunteer recruitment & retention

- Build backup support for volunteer team(s)
- Support and appreciate volunteers:
 - Create a program of volunteer rewards
 - Publish volunteer profiles in the newsletter
 - Send thank you cards from members
 - Take volunteers out to lunch
 - Introduce volunteers to ensemble members

Instructor recruitment & retention

- Recruit more teachers
- Let instructors instruct; don't micromanage instruction
- Pay well

Performance goals/age-level(s)/capacity

- Realize that MBI is in a paradigm shift and can be what it wants to be—and can go where the audiences are
- Clarify performance goals and expectations:
 - Perform with excellence
 - Reestablish drum corps performance excellence
 - Return to drum and bugle corps
 - Be the best
 - Perform in an entertaining way
 - Be okay not being the best
 - Increase the challenge, don't lower the bar; challenge members in all ensembles to improve and excel

- Focus on experience rather than on winning a championship
- Focus on fun rather than on winning
- Understand what happened to the hornline after 2016
- Clarify age levels:
 - Define realistic age-specific parameters for each performing group
 - Run MBI like a senior corps, not like a junior corps
 - Focus on all-age drum corps
 - Maintain at least one all-age brass component
- Evaluate capacity:
 - Consider whether MBI can support both membership and leadership for 4 drum corps—and adjust strategy accordingly
 - Don't overextend the organization: "get back to basics"
 - Don't be afraid to go down a class (when I heard about not fielding a corps this summer, my hornline friends and I kept asking why we didn't go down a class)

Programming

- Expand performance opportunities:
 - Create more performance opportunities
 - Create a concert season
 - Stage a culminating—but maybe not competitive—event at the end of the season
 - Offer a performance venue for drum corps members of all ages
- Consider participating in WGI only
- Fully support all MBI ensembles
 - Strengthen/grow the winter ensembles
 - Launch new WGI winds ensemble
 - Continue the WGI color guard
 - Continue the WGI drumline
 - Focus on creating a winter horn ensemble
 - Offer a rehearsal schedule that runs January through April
- Have leadership reach out to other DCA corps and reach out to the people in charge of finals and change the date to 1-2 weeks earlier so educators and students can more easily march
- Crowdsource show ideas
- Encourage design team to avoid choices that add complexity and burden for the performers (and detract from the performers' focus on core performance responsibilities); critically evaluate prop ideas

Operations

- Create annual organizational goals
- Write down collective wisdom, i.e., "how we do stuff"
- Have a year-round, permanent home
- Define staff and management roles and create clear job descriptions
- Expand administrative staff (to relieve burden on board and Executive Director):
 - Hire a paid administrator
 - Create a staff coordinator position

- Create a fundraising coordinator position (and/or team)
- Create an equipment maintenance position (and/or team)
- Expand grant writing skills and capacity
- Find ways to balance the workload:
 - Explore opportunities to outsource non-value-added administrative tasks
 - Break down projects into bite-sized chunks and let new people accomplish those tasks
 - Groom current directors/staff to embrace members/alumni who like to help
 - Use interns: e.g., college-age media specialists for social media video, photography
 - Advertise organizational needs on nonprofit job sites, college campuses, etc.
- Develop a sustainable financial plan
- Execute needed trailer repairs

External relationships

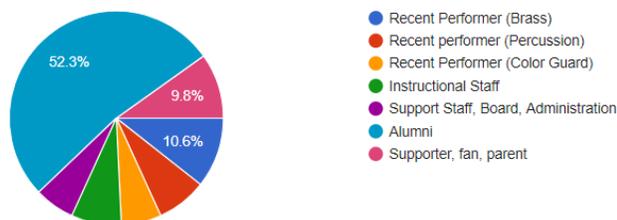
- Partner with schools, school districts, colleges and universities:
 - Market MBI as an option for students in high school ensembles
 - Partner with high schools that lack band programs
 - Invite band directors to join an MBI advisory group
- Partner with the local community:
 - Provide entertainment: perform or participate in free concerts, events, etc.
 - Serve the local marching bands and other local music communities
 - Secure sponsorships from community organizations
 - Secure sponsorships from corporations and foundations
- Partner with drum corps in the area and the state:
 - Create performance and social events
 - Offer clinic opportunities
- Describe and quantify MBI quality and impact so that circuit or parent organizations value MBI (i.e., to address the perception that “DCA doesn’t like us”)

Marketing & advertising

- Define and know your (section) consumer—they are not all alike
- Tell the story: share how MBI became what it is today
- Secure photographer coverage for all individual ensembles
- Secure earned and social media coverage (e.g., for practices, performances, competitions)
- Move to a communication platform that works better than Facebook
- Print business cards with corps name and contact information
- Produce a promotional video
- Put our logo on our trucks
- Cultivate media contacts

Online survey

A total of 132 individuals participated in the online survey. Respondents self-identified as follows:



Of the 132 respondents, 101 (76.5%) self-identified primarily as performers (members or alumni), which is important to note when looking at how they ranked the relative importance of critical issues.

Among the nine critical issues presented, respondents ranked the following three issues as having the highest priority:

1. Improve the performer experience (67%)
2. Strengthen alumni participation (39%)
3. Strengthen instructional staff (37%)

As the table below indicates, “improve the performing member experience” received more than three times the #1 priority votes than any other critical issue rated a #1 priority, and it received more #2 priority votes than any other critical issue.

Respondents ranked the following issues the lowest priority:

1. Articulate mission, vision, and values (48%)
2. Improve marketing and external relations (44%)
3. Strengthen board leadership (40%)

We suggest the majority the respondents view the organization (and its issues) primarily through the prism of their experience as members and alumni, and also through their experiences with MBI instructors. While these numbers suggest that articulating the mission, vision, and values is not particularly important, we do know from the interviews and focus groups that MBI’s values (e.g., respect, accountability, etc.) do matter—to all stakeholders. At the end of the day, all of these issues are interconnected; all of them contribute to the perceived quality of the performing member’s experience, strength of alumni relationships, and quality of instruction.

Critical issue	Number of respondents who ranked the critical issue priority number...								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Articulate mission, vision, values	15	11	9	14	6	13	13	10	41
Strengthen administrative leadership	8	15	16	15	17	16	15	21	9
Strengthen board leadership	5	4	10	18	17	15	22	19	22
Strengthen instructional staff	11	12	26	9	26	21	11	13	3

Critical issue	Number of respondents who ranked the critical issue priority number...								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strengthen alumni participation	15	22	15	21	13	18	12	12	4
Improve the performing member experience	50	24	14	4	8	10	5	7	10
Improve organizational operations	5	20	21	18	11	17	17	14	9
Improve marketing & external relations	9	10	11	14	18	12	23	21	14
Strengthen leadership involvement in summer & winter ensembles	14	14	10	19	16	10	14	15	20

The survey asked the following open-ended questions:

1. *What are the most important aspects of your Minnesota Brass experience that you think should be retained?* (114 responses) This question recalls two of the critical issues noted above: 1) how can different visions for MBI be reconciled and 2) what is important to leave behind and what is important to retain as MBI moves forward? Responses echoed the issues and themes that surfaced during the interviews and focus groups:
 - a. An organization that is like a family (18%)
 - b. Excellence of performance, competition, entertainment, and/or instruction (18%)
 - c. The drum corps tradition (13%)
 - d. The value of having fun (9%)
 - e. The value of competition (8%)
 - f. A sense of community and belonging (4%)
 - g. Strong volunteers (4%)
 - h. Flexibility in scheduling (4%)

2. *How can the organization better leverage the passion and skills of alumni and other stakeholders?* (108 responses) This question recalls the other two critical issues noted above: 1) what new practices and policies do we need to refine or replace the practices and policies that are no longer working and 2) how MBI needs to positively engage, motivate, and recognize stakeholders for their contributions. Specific recommendations focused on:
 - a. Asking for—and receiving—help to support to carry out specific, well-defined MBI projects and tasks (32%)
 - b. Well-organized recruitment (24%)
 - c. Ways to make people feel respected and valued (18%)
 - d. More and better communication (13%)

- e. More personal connections (13%)
 - f. More effective planning (6%)
3. *Is there anything else you'd like to share?* (92 responses) This question helps lay the groundwork for the conversations that need to be part of the adaptive change process. Responses here tended to amplify responses to questions 1 and 2—and were sometimes quite pointed in their concern or criticism—as well as their hope for the future. Here are some of the more representative comments, quoted in full:

Culture

- Creating a culture of shared ownership and respect is the most important thing in my mind. Give us a good reason to come back every year.
- Build a hornline culture of family, fun, education, and great music making.
- Not only should MN brass be concerned with the final product but should be aware of the overall experience from the members.
- My summer with brass is one of the best summer experiences of my life.

Community/family

- Focus on developing camaraderie between everyone - the focus on community and relationship building should come before winning.
- I would love for brass to be around for my kids when they get older so that we all may enjoy drum corps.
- The thing that makes MBI so unique is the ability to have a life, a job, a career and still be able to participate in the activity.
- I love this organization with my full heart.

Leadership

- Without effective leadership, our future options are limited.
- The board's decision to not field a corps was very disappointing.
- The board deserves help. They're working hard and I appreciate it.
- I appreciate every single board member's tireless work, dedication, and love for our MBI family.
- The people in charge (executive director, board) need to want to have the corps exist. If there are people in those highest leadership positions that don't want this with all of their might, they should be replaced with people who do.
- Articulating the mission is critical for a new leadership team to function. Understanding what MBI is now (which may be different than what it used to be, there are many other ways to perform that don't necessarily involve DCA) will drive every decision that comes later.
- Move quickly, and don't be afraid to make big changes to right the ship. MBI can return to the field if that's what the organization wants.

Communication

- I've always felt like there isn't enough information given to the new members.
- There appears to be a clear disconnect between the administrative leadership and the membership. This disconnect must be overcome if the organization is to survive.
- From afar, the reasons given for going inactive seemed inadequate. It looked more likely that there was an additional agenda (lack of faith in DCA's continued existence?), or other reasons (#metoo accusations?) which were not explicitly stated. I would

recommend that if there are such things, that leadership own them, even retroactively. A disease cannot fully heal unless it is accurately diagnosed, and then treated.

Excellence

- The organization is doing a great job, but continue to strive for that the upper echelon attitude, style, and decision making with everything we do; staff choices, show designs, equipment, etc.
- MN Brass has been the place to go if you want to perform at a high level in drum corps in this state. It needs to maintain that status if it is to continue to recruit talented performers and instructors.
- Improve cooperation among admin, instructional and leadership staff. They're not always on the same page, and some staff aren't cooperative.
- Don't make music or marching so hard. Let individuals participate based on their desire to be involved, not their expertise in playing or marching. Everyone wants to be needed and wanted. MN Brass's organization is respected and admired. We need members that want to be a part of the organization. It's not just about winning.

Respect

- I was extremely turned off as to how administration allowed certain instructors to treat the ensemble with such disrespect for years and was not held to a higher standard.
- The corps really needs to create a culture of treating individuals like adults and not like children and helping individuals rise to the occasion of performing with an older group.
- I think it's very important to discourage cliques, gossip, talking behind people's back, and negativity of all kinds
- It has always felt like alumni are hanging around the edge and included as an afterthought.
- Transparency is key for keeping the older membership feeling like they are valued.

Recruitment/external relations

- Be a more positive influence on high school bands - work WITH band directors - so they send their students to MBI.
- Doing more community involvement would definitely help. If people in the real world, most of whom have never heard of drum corps, can see Brass having fun and doing good things for the community REPEATEDLY, then it may draw in more people who think that looks fun, also it would make people more willing to help us.
- As a music educator, I work to encourage students to march and continue marching in corps if they so choose. But it's difficult to get students excited about marching MN Brass unless they see it. And the best way they see it is by having a show for them.
- Getting back to recruiting based on potential members' desire for competitive success may be an effective avenue to get young people involved again.