

American Mensa's Strategic Plan

2026-2029

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Summary

American Mensa stands at a pivotal moment in its history. Long-term membership trends, an aging demographic profile, and changing expectations about member value underscore the need to evolve and strengthen the organization's relevance. Members and leaders alike have called for intentional, forward-looking change to ensure Mensa continues to thrive.

This is a uniquely promising moment. A newly constituted Board brings fresh energy and perspective, and the wider world is reexamining intelligence as artificial intelligence rapidly advances. As AI systems become more capable, public debate increasingly turns to what remains distinctly human about intelligence, creativity, judgment, and connection. Over the next three years, Mensa will step into that conversation: convening members and the public for nuanced, evidence-based exploration of intelligence in all its forms and demonstrating the enduring value of a living, human community of curious minds.

Guided by extensive member feedback, this plan organizes Mensa's work into five interdependent strategic pillars: Membership Growth & Outreach; Member Experience & Retention; Technology & Operational Efficiency; Sustainable Revenue & Events; and Trust, Culture & Safety. Together, these pillars are designed to halt and reverse membership decline, modernize how Mensa shows up in the world, strengthen financial and event performance, and rebuild trust so that people of all ages and backgrounds experience Mensa as a relevant, welcoming home for high intelligence.

This three-year plan commits to:

1. **Membership Growth & Outreach** – Make Mensa easier to discover, understand and join, and improve the age balance by attracting more gifted youth and young adults through modernized messaging, offerings, and communication channels
2. **Member Experience & Retention** – Make membership consistently worth the dues so members renew by delivering a reliable minimum experience locally, supplemented by strong regional and national offerings
3. **Technology & Operational Efficiency** – Use practical, affordable tools and simplify processes to reduce manual work, improve reliability: freeing volunteers and staff to focus on membership growth and member experience
4. **Sustainable Revenue & Events** – Ensure signature events are financially sustainable and build more stable revenue sources so that Mensa can grow its investment in membership growth and member experience
5. **Trust, Culture & Safety** – Rebuild trust by making decisions and finances easier to understand, fostering a culture of inclusion and community, and ensuring that events and communications are welcoming and safe

Each pillar has clear outcomes, metrics, and ownership. Progress will be tracked quarterly, and the plan will be integrated into all board agendas, budgeting, and organizational decisions.

Over the next three years, we will move with purpose—from building a strong foundation in 2026, to expanding our reach in 2027, to optimizing and envisioning our future by 2028. In the first year, we'll define success, strengthen our culture, launch key systems, and show clear progress toward our goals. In the second, we'll grow what works—modernizing our digital presence, deepening leadership development, and broadening programs that connect and inspire members. By the third year, we'll solidify our gains, measure lasting impact, and position our organization for continued growth and relevance. Together, these steps will create a modern, inclusive, and trusted community ready for the next decade of success.

Strategic Plan

1. Our Mission, Vision & Core Challenges

Mission

Mensa brings together people of high intellectual ability to:

- Promote human intelligence and intellectual development
- Foster friendship and social connection among members
- Engage in meaningful social and educational activities
- Explore ideas and contribute to positive change

Vision

A thriving, inclusive global community where highly intelligent people of all backgrounds find belonging, intellectual stimulation, and the opportunity to use their abilities for good.

Core Values

- Intellectual curiosity – Celebrating open inquiry and diverse perspectives
- Inclusion & belonging – Welcoming all who qualify, regardless of age, background, or identity
- Trust & transparency – Leading with integrity and clear communication
- Community – Valuing friendship, mentorship, and mutual support
- Excellence – Maintaining high standards in our programs, governance, and operations

The Challenges

Our membership survey (2025) revealed a cascade of interconnected problems:

Issue	Impact
Membership decline & aging	Long-term net loss, overrepresentation of members 45+, underrepresentation of youth and young adults (under age 40).
Weak value proposition	Rising dues with stagnant or unclear benefits; dissonance especially outside major local groups. Members don't know "why" Mensa exists beyond socializing.
Volunteer burnout & uneven experiences	Local group quality varies dramatically; small/isolated groups struggle. Volunteers are overextended; no succession planning.
Outdated technology & brand lag	Website, app, digital infrastructure, and social media underutilized. Brand perception as elitist and socially awkward; losing relevance in conversations about intelligence, AI, and giftedness.

Issue	Impact
Governance dysfunction & trust deficit	Excessive focus on bylaw minutiae, weak strategic follow-through, concerns about how/when executive sessions are used, and perceptions of opacity in some board decision-making processes.
Culture & safety concerns	Some members feel unsafe at events; concerns about member behavior and lack of consistent code of conduct. Diversity and inclusion concerns.

Membership decline, aging, burnout, and governance dysfunction are not just isolated annoyances; together they point to a system that is slowly losing the capacity to attract, serve, and be trusted by the people it exists for. Each issue erodes a different part of the membership "flywheel" (recruit → engage → lead → renew), so left unaddressed they compound into accelerating decline rather than a problem that will fix itself.

Membership decline & aging

When membership shrinks and skews older, the organization loses the critical mass needed to sustain vibrant local groups, special interest communities, and events that appeal across life stages. Fewer younger adults means weaker succession pipelines and fewer leaders prepared to carry the culture and operations forward, so retirements, health issues, or burnout hit harder and take longer to recover from.

Weak value proposition

If dues rise while benefits feel stagnant or unclear, members understandably begin to see Mensa as an expensive social club rather than a place that measurably enriches their lives, which drives non-renewals and discourages prospects from joining in the first place. When members cannot articulate a compelling "why" beyond socializing, the brand becomes vulnerable to criticism that intelligence alone is not a meaningful organizing principle, reinforcing perceptions that Mensa is elitist or trivial rather than impactful.

Volunteer burnout & uneven experiences

Overreliance on a small circle of highly committed volunteers leads to exhaustion, conflict, and eventual departures, which can collapse a local group's activity level almost overnight. Uneven group quality—some regions thriving while others feel inactive or unsafe—creates a lottery experience for members, so one bad or empty local chapter can negate any national-level benefits and fuel the narrative that "Mensa doesn't do anything for me."

Outdated technology & brand lag

When the website, app, and digital infrastructure feel clunky or dated, members (especially younger and neurodivergent members who live online) experience friction at every interaction—joining, renewing, finding events, or connecting with peers—which signals that the organization is out of touch. Underused social media and a brand voice that does not show up in current conversations

about intelligence, AI, and giftedness make Mensa easy to ignore, particularly for high-ability people who already have rich online communities competing for their time and identity.

Governance dysfunction, trust & culture

Boards that spend disproportionate time on bylaws minutiae or internal politics instead of strategy and oversight create drift: plans are adopted but not implemented, leaders churn, and members lose confidence that problems will be addressed. Concerns about executive session, opaque decision-making, or perceived factions feed a trust deficit in which members assume bad faith, making it harder to recruit leaders, pass needed reforms, or enforce standards of conduct.

When some members feel unsafe or unwelcome, or see misconduct go unaddressed, they disengage quietly or leave, and prospective members hear about those experiences long before they see any official messaging. Inconsistent application of a code of conduct, especially around harassment and inclusion, signals that psychological safety is a matter of who you know rather than clear rules, which is especially damaging in a community built around intellect and debate.

If we do not address these issues systemically and urgently, membership will continue to decline.

Strategic Pillar A: Membership Growth & Outreach

Why This Matters

Reversing membership decline and rebalancing age demographics is a prerequisite for Mensa's survival and all other strategic work. Without stabilization of the membership base, volunteer energy, event capacity, and financial sustainability all become unsustainable.

Desired Outcomes

- Year 1: Slow membership decline to near zero; establish baseline of age-cohort mix
- Year 2: Achieve modest net growth (1–2%)
- Year 3: Achieve 3–5% annual growth with improved age distribution; increase youth-to-adult conversion rate by 30%

Key Metrics

- Membership count: Total members year-over-year
- Net growth rate: New members minus departures as % of prior year
- Age cohort distribution: % of members under 35, 35–44, 45–54, 55+
- First-year retention: % of new members who remain after 1 year
- Youth-to-adult conversion: % of gifted youth members who rejoin as adults

Strategic Pillar B: Member Experience & Retention

Why This Matters

Membership growth alone is insufficient; we must retain members and make them glad they're members. A perceived gap between dues and value—especially among younger members and those

outside major groups—is eroding retention and referrals. This pillar makes the case for membership tangible and consistent.

Desired Outcomes

- Year 1: Establish baseline on member satisfaction, value perception, and retention; implement minimum viable national and local experience.
- Year 2: Increase overall member satisfaction (NPS/value rating; reduce first-year churn)
- Year 3: Improve % of members reporting "happy" or "very happy" with membership value

Key Metrics

- Net Promoter Score (NPS) or member satisfaction survey (improve by Year 3)
 - Value perception: % of members rating value as "meets" or "exceeds" expectations
 - Overall retention: % of members renewing annually
 - First-year retention: % of new members renewing after Year 1
 - Code of conduct incidents: Reported incidents to be investigated and outcomes communicated in adherence to established policies, to promote member confidence in the fairness, consistency, and effectiveness of the code of conduct process
 - Volunteer satisfaction: % of volunteers reporting adequate support and manageable workload
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Strategic Pillar C: Technology & Operational Efficiency

Why This Matters

Mensa has a strong foundation and a loyal community, but operational inefficiencies and outdated technology create friction for members, volunteers, and staff. Manual processes consume staff time that should be devoted to strategy; clunky digital experiences signal organizational stagnation; and our brand voice has not kept pace with contemporary conversations about intelligence and AI. This pillar modernizes how we operate internally and how we show up externally—streamlining processes, elevating our digital presence, and positioning Mensa as a relevant voice in the evolving conversation about human intelligence.

Desired Outcomes

- Year 1: Complete digital infrastructure assessment and identify operational bottlenecks; launch electronic testing; implement foundational automation; refresh social media strategy and position Mensa in AI/intelligence conversations.
- Year 2: Deliver modern, accessible digital experiences that improve discovery, engagement, and ease of participation; reduce manual operational overhead through process improvements and automation; demonstrate measurable time savings and reliability gains.
- Year 3: Establish Mensa as operationally efficient and digitally contemporary—with credible, accessible admission pathways; streamlined internal processes; and a modern, inclusive voice in conversations about intelligence, talent, and belonging.

Key Metrics

- Operational efficiency: Staff time spent on manual/administrative tasks vs. strategic work
- Process reliability: Member-facing process error rates and turnaround times (admissions, renewals, inquiries)
- Brand awareness: % of target demographics aware of Mensa (via brand tracking survey)

- Electronic testing volume: % of new members tested via online vs. paper pathways
 - Prospect-to-member funnel conversion: % of leads converting to inquiries; % of inquiries to testing; % of testing to membership
 - Member platform adoption: % of members using app or member portal
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Strategic Pillar D: Sustainable Revenue & Events

Why This Matters

Events are Mensa's primary member touchpoint and a significant revenue driver. Currently, event economics are unclear, and Mensa lacks a diversified revenue strategy. This pillar clarifies event purpose, ensures financial sustainability, and builds new revenue streams.

Desired Outcomes

- Year 1: Establish clear financial and member-experience targets for all signature events; define non-dues revenue strategy
- Year 2: Achieve positive net margin on flagship events (AG, Mind Games, regional conferences)
- Year 3: Non-dues revenue represents 25–30% of total revenue; events are consistently perceived as "worth it"

Key Metrics

- Non-dues revenue share: % of total revenue from events, sponsorships, donations, licenses.
 - Event net results (margin): Revenue minus direct and allocated costs for each major event
 - Sponsorship net revenue (margin): Total annual sponsorship and licensing income (target: 3:1 ROI by Year 3)
 - Attendee satisfaction: NPS or satisfaction rating for each major event
 - Attendee demographics: % of attendees under 45, gender, geographic diversity (track trend)
 - Volunteer satisfaction: Survey of event volunteers on support and experience
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Strategic Pillar E: Trust, Culture & Safety

Why This Matters

Mistrust between some members and leadership, perception of opaque decision-making, and excessive focus on procedural minutiae over strategy undermine organizational effectiveness and member confidence. Rebuilding governance culture and transparency is essential to member retention, volunteer engagement, and organizational health.

Desired Outcomes

- Year 1: Establish a shared governance foundation for collaboration between AMC and staff, including common training, role clarity, and a streamlined bylaws framework.
- Year 2: Establish clear metrics on board culture; reduce governance-driven crises
- Year 3: Achieve measurably higher member trust in governance; AMC perceived as strategic, not reactive

Key Metrics

- Governance training completion: % of AMC members completing annual training (target: 100%)
 - Staff satisfaction with board relationship: Annual survey (target: improve from baseline)
 - Hearings/discipline incidents: Trend analysis (goal: reduce through culture improvement and fair process)
 - Non-dues revenue associated with co-branded initiatives, member awareness of and participation in Foundation programs, and perceptions of Mensa–Foundation alignment in member surveys.
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2. Implementation, Ownership & Accountability

Governance & Execution Framework

The AMC sets strategic direction and approves the outcomes and metrics in this plan. The Executive Director leads implementation and operational planning with staff. Pillar Leads serve as Board-level sponsors responsible for monitoring progress against Board-adopted outcomes and metrics, and for bringing recommendations and concerns to the full AMC. Pillar committees provide input and serve as force multipliers, but do not supervise staff.

Board Ownership

The Board of Directors establishes strategic direction, approves organizational priorities, defines success measures, monitors progress toward outcomes, and holds the Executive Director accountable for implementation. The Board exercises its oversight role through:

- Quarterly strategic scorecards
- Annual strategic plan review
- The Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee

Executive Director Ownership

The Executive Director is responsible for operationalizing the Board-approved strategic plan. This includes translating strategic direction into actionable operational plans, aligning staff and resources to advance the Board's priorities, and managing implementation on a day-to-day basis. The Executive Director is accountable for keeping the Board informed of progress, risks, and resource needs, and for adjusting execution as necessary to achieve the intended outcomes.

Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee (SP&O)

The Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee supports the Board in exercising its governance role over this plan. The Executive Director and staff lead implementation; the Committee ensures that:

- Board-approved outcomes and metrics remain the primary lens for organizational priorities.
- The strategic scorecard framework (metrics, formats, traffic-light status) is maintained.
- Quarterly reviews of pillar scorecards are coordinated with Pillar Leads and the Executive Director.
- Emerging risks or persistent under-performance on key metrics are brought forward to the full AMC with recommended options for action.
- The annual strategic plan review is led and updates are recommended to the Board.

Strategy Leads

Each strategic pillar has an assigned Board-level sponsor (Strategy Lead) who is accountable for **oversight**—not execution.

Responsibilities:

- Partner with the Executive Director and staff to ensure accurate, honest pillar scorecards.
- Present key highlights, risks, and recommended course corrections to SP&O and the Board.
- Ensure that Board-approved outcomes and metrics remain the primary lens for decisions in their pillar.

Suggested Strategy Lead assignments (to be appointed by AMC Chair with advice and consent of the AMC & Executive Director)

Strategy Pillar	Strategy Lead	Staff Partner(s)	Committee Support
Membership Growth & Outreach	Marketing Officer	Marketing Director	MG&O Committee
Member Experience & Retention	Membership Officer	Membership Director	ME&R Committee
Technology & Operational Efficiency	Chair, T&OE	Director of Technology	T&OE Committee
Sustainable Revenue & Events	Chair, SR&E	Licensing & Events	SR&E Committee
Trust, Culture & Safety	Chair, TC&S	Executive Director	TC&S Committee

Strategic Pillar-Aligned Committees

Each strategic pillar is supported by a designated committee that brings member insight and field experience into strategic planning and execution. These committees partner with the Executive Director and staff on strategic initiatives; they do not supervise staff or own execution. They advise the Executive Director and Pillar Lead and may take on volunteer-appropriate projects as a force multiplier. The AMC establishes these as standing committees, classified as action or advisory committees as provided in their written charges.

These committees play a primary role in shaping and refining the Key Projects (implementation pathways) associated with their pillar, ensuring that implementation plans are grounded in member insight and field experience while remaining aligned with the Board-approved outcomes and metrics.

- **Membership Growth & Outreach (MG&O) Committee**
Advises on pillar-related subjects including recruitment, personas, youth and young-adult pathways, and digital/national membership experiences.
- **Member Experience & Retention (ME&R) Committee**

Advises on pillar-related subjects including minimum viable member experience, volunteer pipeline/support, and member value/retention strategies.

- **Technology & Operational Efficiency (T&OE) Committee**

Advises on pillar-related subjects including technology priorities, member-facing digital experience, and data/CRM implications for the plan.

- **Sustainable Revenue & Events (SR&E) Committee**

Advises on pillar-related subjects including event portfolio strategy, non-dues revenue opportunities, and member-value alignment for events.

- **Trust, Culture & Safety (TC&S) Committee**

Advises on pillar-related subjects including governance culture, bylaws modernization, code of conduct, psychological safety, and Foundation partnership.

These committees report to their respective Pillar Leads and provide input to the Executive Director and staff on their functional areas.

Decision & Accountability Cadence

Monthly: Staff team, led by the Executive Director, reviews the strategic metrics dashboard and flags risks to Strategic Pillar Leads.

Quarterly: The Executive Director prepares organization-wide strategic scorecards with staff. Strategic Pillar Leads and the Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee review the scorecards and elevate them to the AMC, highlighting:

- Metrics movement (green/yellow/red)
- Key actions completed and in flight
- Risks and proposed course corrections
- Upcoming quarter priorities

If a pillar remains in red status for two consecutive quarters, the Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee will place it on the AMC agenda with specific decision requests.

Annually (at the planning meeting): The Executive Director and Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee jointly present a full review of the 3-year plan and recommend a refresh of priorities and budgets for AMC decision, if applicable.

2029: In 2029, the Board will intentionally step out of the rolling strategic cycle to conduct a comprehensive, future-focused review of the organization's direction, using foresight and environmental scanning to inform the next phase of strategy.

Integrating the Plan into Board Governance

1. **Board Agendas:** Every motion on the board agenda must cite which pillar(s) and metric(s) it supports, or explain why they lack that information. If a motion doesn't align with strategic priorities, ask: *Why are we considering this?*
2. **Budgeting:** Budget requests must be tied to strategic pillars. The Finance Committee reviews proposals through the lens of: *How does this advance strategic goals? If it doesn't, why are we considering funding for this?*
3. **Volunteer Onboarding:** Every new volunteer receives a copy of the strategic plan and understands how their role contributes.
4. **Organizational Alignment:** Operational work should be prioritized to align with the strategic priorities outlined in this plan.
5. **Member Communication:** Public progress updates, showing movement on key metrics and celebrating milestones.
6. **Regional Communications:** RVCs receive quarterly scorecard summaries to share with local leaders and members, showing how Mensa is evolving.
7. **Strategic Coordination:** The Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee coordinates these governance practices across pillars.

Conclusion

Mensa is at an important moment. While membership trends and trust challenges are real, the member insight leveraged for this plan—and the clarity of the feedback shared—represent a rare opportunity. There is a shared understanding of the challenges we face and a collective commitment to a path forward.

This plan is ambitious, but not unrealistic. It asks us to:

- Prioritize member experience over procedure
- Invest in people (volunteers, staff, leaders) as our greatest asset
- Communicate openly and measure progress honestly
- Embrace change while honoring Mensa's history and mission

Every member, volunteer, and leader has a role. The strategic pillars are clear. The ownership is distributed. The metrics are transparent. It's our turn to execute.

Appendix A: Key Definitions

Strategy Owner (Pillar Lead): AMC member accountable for Board-level oversight of pillar outcomes and the pillar scorecard; reports quarterly; recommends strategic priorities and course-corrections within the pillar, in partnership with the Executive Director and staff. Strategy Owners do not manage staff, but ensure that Board-approved outcomes and metrics remain the primary focus.

Staff Partner: National Office or regional staff member(s) executing initiatives under the direction of the Executive Director.

Metric: Quantifiable measure of progress toward outcome (e.g., membership count, NPS score, event attendance). The AMC will adopt operational definitions and baselines as part of the first scorecard cycle for each initiative, and reviewed annually as part of the rolling plan.

Initiative: Multi-quarter or multi-year program or project supporting a pillar outcome

Scorecard: Quarterly report showing metric movement, actions completed, risks, and next steps for each pillar

Pillar-Aligned Advisory Committee: Board-appointed committee that provides subject-matter expertise, field insights, and member perspective to support a specific strategic pillar; advisory role only, does not supervise staff.

Appendix B: Glossary & Acronyms

- **AMC:** American Mensa Committee (national board)
- **ASIE:** Actions Still in Effect (Mensa Bylaws supplemental document)
- **RVC:** Regional Vice Chair
- **YAM:** Young Adult Member
- **NPS:** Net Promoter Score
- **CRM:** Customer Relationship Management system
- **KPI:** Key Performance Indicator
- **Personas:** Archetypal member profiles based on data and feedback
- **Minimum Viable Experience:** Baseline offerings (events, communications, support) expected of all local groups
- **MG&O:** Membership Growth & Outreach Committee
- **ME&R:** Member Experience & Retention Committee
- **T&OE:** Technology & Operational Efficiency Committee
- **SR&E:** Sustainable Revenue & Events Committee
- **TC&S:** Trust, Culture & Safety Committee
- **SP&O:** Strategic Planning & Oversight Committee