

Operations Report to the Board February 19, 2026

Introduction

This operations update provides the Board of Directors with an overview of key organizational, governance, and operational work completed since the November 2025 meeting. The updates outlined below align with AEF's 2026 – 2028 Strategic Plan and approved operational priorities, with particular focus on:

- Enhancing the member experience and engagement
- Ensuring organizational sustainability and operational capacity
- Strengthening governance, policy, and Safe Sport compliance
- Modernizing systems to support effective delivery and accountability

The work during this period has been largely foundational in nature. While much of it is not immediately visible to members, it is essential to long-term stability, risk management, and the organization's ability to deliver programs and services effectively in 2026 and beyond.

Organizational Structure, Functional Alignment, and Capacity

Functional Alignment and Role Clarity

Over the past several months, staff completed a structured functional alignment process to confirm AEF's core operational areas and clarify how work is shared across the organization. This work directly supports the Strategic Plan priority of strong team performance and operational effectiveness and responds to increasing complexity across programs, compliance requirements, and member services.

This work was undertaken while the organization has been operating with reduced staffing capacity, due to the temporary absence of a full-time team member. While this absence has resulted in short-term salary savings, it has also significantly increased workload pressures across the remaining team. Given the size of the organization and the duration of the absence, it was operationally necessary to proceed with functional alignment and role clarification to ensure continuity of service, appropriate coverage of responsibilities, and staff sustainability.

The organization could not pause core planning and operational work without creating service gaps, operational risk, or undue strain on remaining staff. The functional alignment work allowed AEF to redistribute responsibilities more effectively, reduce reliance on informal workarounds, and maintain service delivery during this period.

As a result of this work:

- All staff job descriptions were updated to reflect confirmed functional areas and clearly defined lead and support responsibilities
- Decision-making authority, handoffs, and shared service expectations were clarified
- Cross-functional collaboration was strengthened, reducing reliance on single-role knowledge and informal workarounds
- A stronger foundation was established for operational continuity, performance management, and planning

Staff completed a final clarity-focused review of their individual job descriptions to confirm alignment and accuracy. This review was intentionally scoped to confirmation and refinement, based on current operational needs, and did not reopen structural decisions. The finalized job descriptions are now in effect and guiding work.

Staffing Capacity and Operational Support Planning

Through the functional alignment process, we identified a consistent capacity gap at the support level, particularly in the following areas:

- Coaching and sport development administration
- Event logistics and operational follow-through
- Data management, reporting, and documentation
- Administrative coordination across functions

To address this gap, the Executive Director, with staff input, has developed a full-time, entry-level operational support position focused on practical, hands-on tasks that support service delivery without expanding senior-level roles. The intent of this position is to:

- Reduce sustained workload pressure on existing staff
- Improve consistency, follow-through, and timeliness of execution
- Increase organizational resilience during peak operational periods
- Support cross-training and shared responsibility across the team

The role framework and job description have been developed and are ready to proceed. Implementation timing will be determined once there is clarity regarding staffing capacity related to the current temporary absence. This approach ensures that AEF is prepared to act quickly if needed, while remaining respectful of the leave process and maintaining responsible workforce planning.

Finance and Compliance – 2025 Year-End Overview

The 2025 fiscal year, while still in draft, indicates both operational complexity and disciplined financial management. Despite service provider transitions, a website overhaul, and the delivery of national-level events, AEF maintained financial stability while advancing strategic priorities.

The year-end position thus far reflects strong internal controls, prudent cost management, and responsiveness to economic conditions affecting members and partners.

Membership Revenue

Membership revenue for 2025 was modestly below projections, primarily due to softer renewals across individual, club, and business categories. Renewals were 3.4% below budget, reflecting relatively strong retention given broader economic pressures.

Membership renewals launched mid-November due to the HorseReg transition. Unlike the prior year, this transition did not negatively impact liquid cash levels, demonstrating improved planning and financial oversight.

Education and Event Revenue

Education revenue increased in 2025, driven by the successful hosting of the National Coaching Symposium, including:

- \$20,000 from the National Education Fund
- Corporate sponsorship
- Ticket revenue

Online Coaching Cohorts and Evaluations continued to perform well and generated a modest surplus, contributing to cost recovery and supporting future programming. This area remains a strategically aligned and scalable revenue stream.

Retail Revenue

Gross Shopify (online store) sales for 2025 totalled \$11,698, reflecting:

- Reduced Rider Level Manual purchases due to the anticipated update of the national Learn to Ride program, as implementation timelines at the national level have continued to shift.
- Broader economic pressures affecting discretionary spending

Retail continues to serve as supplementary revenue rather than a core funding pillar.

Grants and External Funding

AEF received \$81,700 in Association Development Program core funding, consistent with prior years and critical to operational stability.

An application for Trail Manager has been submitted and signed with the GOA, which includes potential access to approximately \$15,000 in capital equipment funding in the short term. This supports AEF's recreation and stewardship priorities.

Member Funding and Scholarships

In 2025:

- \$12,053 was distributed through individual and club funding programs
- Five Marlene Waldner Youth Bursaries were awarded
- One Educational & Industry Scholarship was awarded

Public recognition of scholarship recipients increased visibility and generated renewed donor interest, particularly in the Waldner fund.

Donations and Revenue Mix

Donation trends reflect economic conditions:

Positive trends:

- Scholarship donations and pin sales increased, with pin sale revenue directed to the scholarship fund. Public recognition of scholarship recipients correlated with an increase in donor participation. While individual contributions remained modest, the number of donors rose following award announcements, indicating that visibility and storytelling positively influence engagement.

- Trail Supporter donations also increased, particularly following targeted communications highlighting trail initiatives and stewardship work. While overall dollar amounts remain moderate, donor participation grew by approximately 50%, demonstrating that clear communication of program impact directly supports giving behaviour.

Area of concern:

- The General donation category continues to decline year-over-year

This reinforces the importance of exploring diversified revenue streams and strengthening long-term fundraising strategy.

Financial Sustainability Outlook

While AEF maintained stability through a year of transition and increased operational demand, the current model requires careful management.

Sustaining service levels, compliance obligations, and program growth will depend on:

- Continued membership stability and retention
- Strategic revenue diversification
- Grant and sponsorship development
- Alignment between staffing capacity and workload

These considerations will inform planning discussions for 2026 and beyond.

Membership Overview and System Modernization

Membership Trends and Retention

As of February 6, 2026, AEF membership stands at 7,258 members, compared to 7,039 members at the same point in 2025. This represents steady year-over-year growth and continued engagement across Alberta's equestrian community, supporting AEF's strategic priorities related to sustainability and member experience.

Adult memberships increased year-over-year, while youth memberships remained relatively stable. Membership levels within affiliated organizations, including Jump Alberta and AEVA, continue to show modest growth.

Auto-Renewal and Predictability

Auto-renewal continues to be a key operational focus to improve retention, reduce administrative burden, and create a more predictable renewal base:

- 621 members successfully renewed early through auto-renewal
- 3,124 members are currently enrolled in auto-renewal for 2026

These results reflect the impact of targeted communication and improved systems and provide greater certainty early in the membership cycle. Increasing auto-renewal adoption remains a priority for future years.

System Modernization

Continued use and refinement of the HorseReg database has improved membership tracking, processing efficiency, and data accuracy across individual, club, and business memberships.

The full reintegration of all membership categories into a single system represents a significant operational milestone and supports long-term planning and reporting.

Club and Business Memberships

Club and business memberships showed a modest decline early in the year, reflecting a transition period rather than a reduction in engagement. This year, club and business memberships were fully reintegrated into HorseReg, strengthening data accuracy, consistency, and long-term tracking and establishing a clearer baseline for future retention efforts. In addition, the launch of online club and business memberships in HorseReg occurred slightly later in the renewal cycle; as a result, additional renewals are expected throughout the year.

A new, updated online Club and Business Directory is now live on the website with auto-updates through HorseReg, increasing visibility and making it easier for members and the public to access current information. Continued communication and outreach efforts are underway to reinforce the value of club and business membership and support improved renewal outcomes over the remainder of the year.

Active Living Programs and Participation

AEF's Active Living programs continue to support lifelong participation and non-competitive engagement, aligning with the Strategic Plan's focus on inclusion and wellness.

Ride & Drive

As of February 2026:

- 150 participants are registered, including 85 new participants
- The program was successfully launched online, significantly improving member experience and administrative efficiency

Member feedback continues to be positive, with participants citing motivation, enjoyment, and increased connection with their horses and the outdoors. In 2025, four members reached the 2,000-hour milestone, demonstrating long-term engagement.

Live Outside the Box (LOTB)

LOTB, a free program, continues to engage youth aged 7–15 in healthy, active lifestyles:

- 167 youth signed up for 2026, consistent with 2025 participation
- Plans are underway to launch the program online, improving accessibility and efficiency

Program outcomes and prize recipients will be featured in *Alberta Bits* following completion.

Coaching, Sport & Development

AEF's Coaching, Sport, and Development portfolio continues to advance strategic priorities related to coach development, athlete pathways, competition integrity, and alignment with

national standards. This year, the focus will be on expanding access, improving reporting consistency, and strengthening provincial infrastructure.

Coaching- Coaching Statistics and National Alignment

AEF has transitioned to utilizing the Equestrian Canada Coach Listing as the official reference for active Alberta coaches. Prior listings were maintained internally in a spreadsheet, which limited reporting accuracy and alignment with nationally verified data. As a result, we now have:

- 229 active Alberta coaches, as reflected in EC's national listing
 - Includes NCCP Certified Coaches
 - Includes EC Licensed Coaches

This shift ensures:

- Alignment with nationally verified certification and licensing data
- Improved reporting accuracy
- Consistency between provincial and national records

Using a single verified source reduces discrepancies and strengthens data integrity across the system.

NCCP Online Training Series

AEF has launched a new NCCP Online Training Series, designed to increase accessibility and frequency of professional development opportunities for Alberta coaches.

The series:

- Offers modular, NCCP-aligned training sessions
- Supports coaches working toward certification
- Provides continuing education for certified coaches
- Reduces geographic and travel barriers
- Allows for year-round engagement

Registration for the Winter series is open, with the first session commencing February 22, 2026. This represents a strategic shift toward increased flexibility and responsiveness to our coaching community within the coaching pathway.

Expanded Training and Evaluation Opportunities

The start of the year reflects the continued expansion of both training and evaluation opportunities through a combination of online and in person.

Training:

- AEF NCCP Online Training – Winter Series (Feb 2026)
- NCCP Equestrian Modules – Live Sessions (May 2026)
- AEF NCCP Online Training – Fall Series (Sept 2026)

Evaluation:

- In-person evaluations (Calgary & Edmonton – Spring 2026)
- Online video evaluation intake (Spring, Summer, Fall 2026)

The continued separation of training and evaluation provides flexibility, allowing coaches to complete certification requirements in alignment with business and competition schedules. This model improves access while helping to maintain certification standards.

Athlete Development

Learn to Ride / Learn to Drive (LTR/LTD)

Equestrian Canada continually announces updates to the national Learn to Ride / Learn to Drive framework as part of broader modernization efforts. AEF is actively monitoring these developments and positioning for provincial implementation once national systems and administrative processes are finalized.

In the interim, AEF will:

- Continue offering and operating the current LTR program
- Maintain existing assessment processes
- Ensure uninterrupted service to coaches and facilities

This approach ensures that the transition occurs smoothly for evaluators, coaches, and participants. Implementation will proceed once logistical and communication frameworks are clearly established at the national level.

Competitions

The Wild Rose Competition Program, Alberta's grassroots competition framework, emphasizes accessibility, safety, equine welfare, and structured athlete development. Winter is traditionally a lighter sanctioning period; however, planning and application intake for the 2026 competition season is underway.

Winter Competition Activity (to date):

- Wild Rose Schooling Shows – 5
- EC Bronze Competitions – 5

Winter development priorities include:

- Continued integration of Dressage within the Wild Rose Provincial Circuit
- Monitoring uptake of Working Equitation sanctioning under the WECan agreement
- Review of sanctioning processes to improve clarity and efficiency

The Wild Rose program continues to balance accessibility with structural alignment to Equestrian Canada frameworks.

Officials Development

AEF has seen increased demand for Provincial Officials certification following a recent Equestrian Canada rule change requiring EC Licensed Officials to also hold Provincial Officials status to officiate at provincially sanctioned events.

As a result:

- Interest in AEF certification has increased
- Administrative processing and inquiries have risen

- Greater clarity around maintenance and eligibility requirements is required

AEF Officials (current)

- 63 total carded officials
 - General Performance – 18
 - Hunter/Jumper – 24
 - Dressage – 10
 - Driving – 2

Development of the Provincial Officials Curriculum remains a 2026 priority. Current work includes framework drafting, identifying discipline contributors, and outlining education, mentorship, and maintenance standards.

Upcoming Officials Education

AEF / EC Hunter & Jumper Stewards Clinic – March 1, 2026

Delivered in collaboration with EC, this clinic supports:

- Development of new Provincial Officials
- Maintenance requirements for current officials
- Professional development for EC Licensed Officials
- Upgrading pathways across streams

AEF / EC Dressage Judge Clinic – July 31 – August 2, 2026

This clinic will be delivered alongside a competition sanctioned as both Wild Rose and EC Gold, creating an applied learning environment. The integrated format strengthens rule interpretation, consistency, and alignment between provincial and national standards.

Strategic Positioning

Across Coaching, Athlete Development, Competitions, and Officials, efforts have focused on:

- Increasing access and flexibility
- Strengthening alignment with national standards
- Improving system clarity

This portfolio continues to require careful coordination due to ongoing national-level adjustments and issues, but remains central to AEF's mandate in supporting coaches, officials, facilities, and athletes across Alberta.

Communications and Marketing

Communications efforts continue to support member engagement, organizational visibility, and timely information sharing.

Website Performance

From October 1, 2025 to January 31, 2026:

- 6,890 clicks to the website from Google searches
- 68,600 impressions, with January as the strongest month

Top pages accessed included the Homepage, Membership, Renewal Information, and Insurance. Mobile devices remain the primary access method, reinforcing the importance of mobile-friendly content.

Email Communications

Between October and January:

- 175,536 emails delivered
- 51.1% open rate (above average)
- 3.7% click-through rate (well above average)

These results demonstrate strong engagement and confirm email as an effective channel for member communication.

Social Media and Public Information

Social media engagement remains strong:

- Facebook: 244,400 views, reach of 74,000
- Instagram: 48,100 views, with interactions up 102%

Equine health communications related to EHV-1 were among the highest-performing content, reinforcing AEF's role as a trusted, timely information source.

Annual Provincial Awards

The 2025 Annual Provincial Awards selection process has been completed following a detailed review by the Scholarships & Awards Committee, chaired by Nicolas Brown. The committee reviewed 47 nominations representing 31 nominees, a decrease from the prior year, and met by electronic conference call on January 15, 2026, to finalize its recommendations.

Based on the committee's assessment, recipients have been selected for the following award categories:

- Outstanding Horse of the Year
- Outstanding Stable/Facility of the Year
- Outstanding Athlete/Rider of the Year
- Outstanding Instructor/Coach of the Year
- Above & Beyond Award
- Sportsmanship Excellence Award

Due to a lack of eligible nominations, the committee was unable to recommend recipients for the Outstanding Equine Personnel and Outstanding Volunteer categories this year. The committee also noted the following, which they consider may be impacting the awards program, including:

- A decline in nominations compared to prior years
- Ongoing challenges with eligibility and evolving criteria, particularly in the Instructor/Coach category

The committee recommended increased promotion of the awards program by both the Board and committee members for the 2026 cycle and identified the need to update the Committee's

Terms of Reference, which have not been substantially revised since 2020. This work is expected to come forward to the Board in 2026.

Stride With Us – Board Attendance and Logistics

The 2025 Annual Provincial Awards will be formally presented at Stride With Us during Horse Expo on **Saturday, April 25, 2026, from 2:30 – 4:30 p.m.** at Westerner Park, at the AEF presentation stage in front of the AEF booth.

All Directors are expected to attend this event as part of their Board responsibilities. AEF will be covering hotel and travel costs for Directors for the evening of April 25, as the Board Meeting will take place the following day on **Sunday, April 26, 2026, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** Directors are encouraged to plan their travel accordingly to support full participation in both the awards presentation and the Board meeting.

Board visibility and participation at Stride With Us play an important role in reinforcing the credibility of the awards program, recognizing excellence within the equestrian community, and strengthening AEF's connection with members and stakeholders.

Governance and Policy Modernization (Operational Update)

Organizational Policy Manual – Consolidation and Rebuild

Significant time continues to be dedicated to the full consolidation, modernization, and restructuring of AEF's governance and organizational policies. This work represents a foundational governance initiative rather than incremental policy updates.

Key elements of the work underway include:

- **Comprehensive policy inventory and audit**
 - Reviewing all historical policies currently on file
 - Identifying gaps where policies were missing, outdated, duplicated, or misaligned
 - Retiring obsolete documents and reconciling inconsistencies across governance, operational, and program areas
 - Integrating the Safe Sport policy manual and language
- **Development of a single, coherent Organizational Policy Manual**
 - Establishing a clear policy hierarchy and governance framework
 - Aligning governance-level policies with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and best practices
 - Clearly delineating Board governance responsibilities from operational authority delegated to the Executive Director and vice versa
- **Creation and integration of appendices**
 - Centralizing supporting documents, such as bylaws, terms of reference, HR policies, Safe Sport, and standard forms and agreements
 - Ensuring appendices are current, cross-referenced, and structured to support future updates without destabilizing the core manual

- **Future-focused governance design**
 - Policies are being written to support continuity and Board turnover
 - Language is principle-based where flexibility is required and prescriptive where legal, fiduciary, or risk considerations apply

Given the scope and interdependence of the policies, the Organizational Policy Manual is being developed as a complete, integrated framework, rather than as individual policies advanced in isolation. This approach supports internal consistency, effective risk management, and efficient use of Board and committee review time.

Timeline and Approval Path

- A draft Organizational Policy Manual is targeted for completion in advance of April
- The preferred pathway is review and approval by the new Board
- The draft will be brought forward to the Governance Committee for review before the AGM, to ensure continuity and risk mitigation

Safe Sport Policy – Status and Implementation Readiness

Safe Sport implementation is nearing completion and has progressed in parallel across governance, legal, and operational readiness streams.

Progress to date includes:

- Adoption of the Alberta Safe Sport Complaint Mechanism (ABSSCM) and the Alberta Universal Code of Conduct (AB UCC) as AEF's formal Safe Sport complaints pathway
- Comprehensive updates to the Safe Sport Policy Manual to align with provincial requirements and AEF's broader governance framework
- Pro bono legal review completed by Dentons Canada LLP, strengthening compliance and risk mitigation
- Development of supporting education, communication, and implementation materials

In preparation for formal approval and rollout:

- A soft launch of AEF's Safe Sport webpages has been completed to test functionality, accessibility, and clarity for members and stakeholders
- A coordinated media release is planned upon AEF Safe Sport Policy Manual re-approval to clearly communicate AEF's Safe Sport framework, reporting mechanisms, and organizational commitments to the broader equestrian community

The updated Safe Sport Policy Manual will be brought forward for Board re-approval as the final governance step.

Equestrian Canada (EC) Relations

AEF continues to navigate significant administrative and system-level challenges related to EC. These challenges are longstanding and systemic, and they continue to place a disproportionate burden on staff while negatively affecting service delivery to members. Significant staff time continues to be redirected toward clarifying national processes, responding to member concerns, and mitigating operational impacts arising from national-level decisions.

The relationship between EC and the Provincial/Territorial Sport Organizations (PTSOs) remains strained. Despite multiple efforts over an extended period to address issues through operational channels, progress has been limited, necessitating escalation to the EC Board of

Directors; a response is expected from the EC Board by March 15, 2026. Key areas of concern include program rollout readiness, role clarity between national and provincial bodies, communication gaps, and the absence of timely, consistent, and transparent engagement with PTSOs. In what year was Canada's National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) first launched. The first two directors who respond correctly will win a small prize. These issues have contributed to diminished confidence across the system and have operational consequences for AEF, including increased workload, reputational risk, and inefficiencies in program delivery.

Of particular note, no PTSO has executed a collaboration agreement with EC for 2026. This unprecedented situation reflects broader concerns regarding governance, accountability, and alignment at the national level. AEF continues to engage collaboratively and in good faith; however, it is increasingly clear that continued provincial intervention to compensate for national gaps is not sustainable. As a result, AEF is prioritizing the responsible use of staff capacity and member resources, ensuring that provincial efforts remain focused on core mandates and direct member value.

The Executive Director remains involved in national discussions on an as-needed basis, advocating for improved governance practices, clearer accountability frameworks, and a more effective NSO/PTSO partnership model. These efforts are intended to support long-term system stability, protect AEF's operational integrity, and ensure that decisions affecting Alberta's equestrian community are informed, realistic, and responsive to the needs of participants, coaches, officials, and volunteers.

Conclusion

Since the November Board meeting, we have focused on foundational work that strengthens governance, operational clarity, financial oversight, and long-term sustainability.

This period has required careful navigation of staffing capacity constraints, national system uncertainty, and evolving program requirements, while maintaining service delivery, advancing strategic priorities, and preserving financial stability. The work undertaken, particularly in governance modernization, Safe Sport implementation, staffing alignment, and system integration, positions AEF for improved continuity, accountability, and operational resilience.

While external pressures and economic conditions continue to influence membership behaviour, donation patterns, and national program rollouts, AEF remains stable, disciplined, and strategically focused. Continued attention to revenue diversification, staffing capacity alignment, and national advocacy will be critical in the coming year.

The organization is entering the next phase of 2026 with a clearer structure, stronger internal controls, and a governance framework designed to support both present demands and future leadership transitions.

Respectfully submitted
Sonia Dantu
Executive Director