



Operating Plan 2026

December 2025

Executive Summary

One of my favorite movies is *Apollo 13*, the story of the ill-fated third mission to land on the moon.

After an explosion tore open the command module, and at the moment of maximum uncertainty, Gene Kranz looked at his team in Mission Control and said, “Let’s work the problem, people. Let’s not make things worse by guessing.” It’s a reminder that while plans give us direction, it is the discipline of *planning* — and the hard work that follows — that allows teams to overcome challenges.

It is helpful to reflect again on a bit of our history.

In 2022, following the combination of the Association and Foundation under a single CEO structure, the boards worked together to create our first-ever joint strategic plan. That effort produced a shared vision and mission. Our mission is to *support the Academy, serve our graduates, and preserve the heritage of the institution and Long Blue Line*.

Equally important, the strategic plan helped us break down unhelpful stovepipes that had long divided the operations of the two organizations. Two finance teams became one. Two communications teams became one. And so on. Over the past few years, our combined organization has continued to refine and strengthen a truly unified approach to our mission. The foundational work of 2023–2025 — uniting functions, aligning strategy and establishing shared systems — has positioned us well for the years ahead.

Now, both the AOG and Foundation boards have endorsed our updated strategic plan that will expand on what we have achieved and guide us through 2028. [You can read the plan in full here](#).

The document in your hands — our 2026 Operating Plan — outlines our areas of focus in the year to come. It does not capture everything we do each day; our weeks are filled with many essential “must dos.” But our Operating Plan does reflect the major initiatives we must undertake together, in addition to the “must dos,” to achieve our strategic goals in 2026.

How will we do it? More than ever, our core value of **“many talents, one team”** is central to our success. We are an organization of individuals with many different roles — fundraisers and communicators, event planners and program managers, administrators, maintainers, IT specialists and finance professionals. Each person brings unique expertise. Yet, it is our collective strength, far more than our individual accomplishments, that moves us forward. This Operating Plan reflects that reality: Every objective touches multiple people, multiple functions and multiple talents working as one.

In the now cult-classic film *Road House*, the hero, Dalton, is immortalized by the simple instruction “be nice.” While he was referring to the mystical art of breaking up bar fights, perhaps we as an Association & Foundation might learn something as well. Amidst the pressures, challenges and unexpected obstacles that 2026 will present, we could begin with the same posture — “being nice.” As we work to respect and support our valued colleagues, and as we

push one another to achieve the goals outlined in the pages ahead, we would benefit from a bit of “nice” along the way. Our spirit of shared purpose and responsibility lies at the heart of our work in 2026.

Happy New Year,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark', on a light gray background.

Mark Hille '97
President and CEO

Engagement

Outcomes

1. Create and foster lifelong connections between the Long Blue Line and the Academy
 - a. Metric: Host a chapter leadership conference and recraft chapter support program in 2026 – OPR Alumni Relations
 - i. Connect with at least one chapter president/officer per week (Teams, Zoom, call, email/text, or in-person engagement), with the goal of contacting all chapters presidents individually at least once in 2026.
 - ii. Identify vacant positions/dormant chapters and deploy an email communication to graduates within a 75-mile radius of the original chapter location to gather interest in filling vacant positions.
 - iii. Maintain a quarterly meeting schedule with all chapters to ensure continuity of operations, distribution of pertinent information and feedback loops.
 - iv. Solicit input for when to hold chapter conference and the agenda.
 - v. Finalize details for the chapter presidents' conference and distribute to all chapters by the end of Q1.
 - vi. Develop a plan of action and milestones for planning, execution and hotwash of chapter engagements by the end of Q1.
 - vii. Research and evaluate a committee structure for chapters by the end of Q2.
 - b. Metric: Conduct CEO review of chapter program and report program enhancements to AOG board by early 2026 – OPR CEO/President
 - i. Work with Alumni Relations to present at the February 2026 board meetings.
 - c. Metric: Host at least two NextGen engagements and develop a NextGen activation plan – OPR Engagement
 - i. Implement the 2026 Engagement Roadshow to include NextGen activities and events for activation.
 - ii. Meet our grads where they are according to a monthly schedule of virtual and in-person touchpoints.
 - iii. Kick off roadshow in January and review activities during quarterly NextGen Advisory Council meetings for refinement and greater activation.
 - d. Metric: Execute 2026 graduate survey – OPR Engagement
 - i. Prepare graduate survey with Market Perceptions (third party research vendor), Communications (Wyatt) and Engagement (Naviere).
 - ii. Conduct survey in Q1.
 - iii. Included a targeted communication plan utilizing text and email.
 - iv. Achieve 16% alumni participation.
 - v. Brief the survey results to the AOG and Foundation boards in or prior to July board meetings and the release results to the graduate community.
2. Serve our graduates and families at critical moments throughout their lifetime

- a. Metric: Continue to enhance cadet engagements and the Firstie Departure program – OPR Alumni Relations of new second lieutenants – OPR Alumni Relations
 - i. By the end of Q2, in coordination with CW and the superintendent's office, develop a four-year program of touchpoints with cadets that should build toward and culminate in Firstie Departure, integrating the Prep School where applicable.
 - ii. Create a process for chapters that are in close proximity to first duty stations to receive, support and integrate USAFA 2026 graduates by the end of Q1.
 - iii. Develop milestones and touchpoints for graduates in their first five years of service (e.g., promotion to 1st Lt, etc.) by the end of Q2.
 - b. Metric: Create a program to help graduates transitioning to Guard or Reserve status by 2027 – OPR Alumni Relations
 - i. Connect with Air Force Reserve Command and Air National Guard personnel centers by the end of Q1.
 - ii. Connect with Air Force Personnel Center and USAFA A1 (personnel) by the end of Q3 about how we can coordinate and communicate to graduates.
 - c. Metric: Enhance the reach and distribution of *Here's A Toast: Gone But Not Forgotten* publication in 2026 and beyond, working to endow all or a portion of a print issue for every graduate member who wants one by 2028 – OPR Communications/Development
 - i. Publish *Here's A Toast* in the spring of 2026 and enhance the communications for the publication to generate more awareness and more interest.
 - ii. Communicate to AOG members the limited availability of no-cost print copies made possible by a late 2025 gift to endow a portion of the publication's printing and mailing.
3. Preserve and celebrate the Academy's heritage and the accomplishments of the Long Blue Line
- a. Metric: Complete Distinguished Graduate Memorial in 2026 - OPR Finance
 - i. Work hand in hand with stakeholders to ensure project is delivered by end of May 2026 and within budget.

Philanthropy

Outcomes

1. Raise \$37 million for the year
 - a. Metric: Focus on Erdle Field (baseball stadium), DeBerry Endowment, Tuskegee Memorial and other established and future priorities – OPR Development
 - i. Raise \$33.5 million in new cash, pledges and estate gift commitments (MG, PG, CFR) for Academy, AOG and Foundation projects with a particular focus on Erdle Field, DeBerry Endowment, Tuskegee Memorial and operating activities including *Checkpoints*, the Here's a Toast publication, reunions, tailgates and Next-of-Kin support.
 - ii. Meet activity targets for major gifts and planned giving:
 - Total number of donor visits: 1,010
 - Total number of discovery visits (qualify/disqualify): 350
 - Total number of solicitations (proposals): 310
 - Total number of gift commitments (accepted proposals): 170
 - Total value of solicitations (proposals): \$55.5 million
 - Total value of gift commitments (accepted proposals): \$20.75 million
 - New Polaris Society members: 30
 - b. Metric: Increase Founding Director Fund to \$35 million by 2028 – OPR Development
 - i. Secure five new Founding Directors under the age of 55
 - c. Metric: Meet a goal of \$10 million by 2028 (Next of Kin, *Checkpoints*, tailgates and reunions) – OPR Development
 - i. With the communications team, create cases for support for reunions, tailgates, Doolittle Hall and Academic Success Center and identify additional fundraising priorities that may require cases.
 - ii. Host at least eight Harmon events to increase awareness and support for projects/programs while cultivating and stewarding donors.
 - d. Metric: Host a series of strategic events engaging and building philanthropic support from the next generation – OPR Engagement
 - i. Implement the 2026 Engagement Roadshow including in-person and virtual events targeted at strengthening relationships with the NextGen community.
 - ii. Focus on heavily populated young alumni areas, conferences aligned with Air Force and Space Force priorities, and active chapters and parent networks.
 - iii. Conduct a quarterly hotwash of activities utilizing a cross-division working group and NextGen Advisory Council to refine effectiveness.

2. Achieve 5,500 graduate donors

- a. Metric: Increase annual participation to 20% by 2028 – OPR Development
 - i. Increase graduate acquisition donor counts by 5% over 2025
 - Utilize donor engagement work to increase acquisition conversion rates.
 - Execute Firstie Gift Program.
 - Increase the number of Falcon Funder club and affinity group projects and better support cadets in amplifying their fundraising pages.
 - ii. By the end of Q1, audit and improve the retention strategy for all donors.
 - Create a tailored communication journey for Year 2 donors that reinforces loyalty, demonstrates impact and encourages sustained giving.
 - Collaborate with Annual Giving to develop a regular cadence of reports that support this effort.
- b. Metric: Create a structured plan for life cycle of giving by class year – OPR Development
 - i. Assess current class giving and participation rates to establish a strategic solicitation plan.
- c. Metric: Deploy class connections to raise annual participation rates – OPR Development
 - i. Assess previous class identity annual giving solicitations to create a comprehension strategy to increase graduate participation.
- d. Metric: Support Academy entrepreneur programs – OPR Alumni Relations
 - i. Engage with other Service Academies to learn how they have supported entrepreneurs.
 - ii. Encourage graduates to establish an entrepreneur's affinity group.

3. Raise \$3.5 million for the Air Force Academy Fund

- a. Metric: Increase the number of Sabre Society donors in NextGen by 50% by 2028 – OPR Development
 - i. Build out Leadership Annual Giving program and focus IPS role on MGO-level gifts geared toward parents.
 - ii. Reimagine Sabre Society acquisition and donor retention strategy geared toward parent membership .
 - iii. Develop and implement two tailored retention communication plans for the Sabre Society — one for NextGen donors and one for non-NextGen donors — reflecting each generation's distinct preferences and priorities.
 - iv. Build API to connect Raiser's Edge to GiveCampus
 - v. Leverage the NextGen Advisory Council and MGOs' relationships to expand the NextGen prospect pool and strengthen the pipeline of potential Sabre Society donors.

4. Execute preparation for the next campaign, including preparation for the 2027 feasibility study
 - a. Metric: Conduct a feasibility study in 2027 – OPR Development
 - i. In Q1, the prospect management and research team will lead an effort to strengthen prospect data and capacity insights within RE/NXT and prospect data/research platform (iWave) and prepare for building a campaign lead prospect pipeline during Q2, which will feed the 2027 feasibility study.
 - ii. Throughout the year, with an emphasis in Q3, continue to optimize development officer portfolios as well as strengthen internal infrastructure.
 - iii. During Q4, provide a final recommendation on a plan forward for the 2027 feasibility study.
5. Secure \$700,000 in sponsorship revenue
 - a. Metric: Increase sponsorship revenue to \$1 million by 2028 – OPR Development
 - i. By the end of Q1, conduct a comprehensive assessment of marketable assets across the organization.
 - ii. By the end of Q2, develop a standardized tiered sponsorship model with defined benefits, pricing and category guidelines.
 - iii. By the end of Q2, build user-friendly media and sponsorship kits.
 - iv. By the end of Q3, build a diversified corporate prospect list and pipeline of 60 new companies.
 - Convert \$150,000–\$200,000 in new sponsorship revenue.
 - v. Strengthen sponsor stewardship, reporting, and retention (Q1–Q4)
 - By Q3, implement structured quarterly engagement and standardized impact reporting with all major partners.
 - Maintain 90% sponsor retention.

Stewardship

Outcomes

1. Accept, invest and steward gifts precisely as donors intend
 - a. Metric: Require proper use of gifts/distributions within one year of transfer to Academy – OPR Finance
 - i. Develop a strategy for enhanced use of donor funds within one year by developing a process for understanding existing gift balances at the Academy, reviewing underutilized funds both internally and externally held at USAFA and enhancing our communication with Academy partners to ensure use of funds by end of Q3.
 - ii. Require proper use of gifts/distributions within one year of transfer to the Academy by Q2.
2. Invest all human and financial resources smartly to maximize return and impact
 - a. Metric: Implement an enterprise-wide risk assessment and management program by 2027 – OPR Finance
 - i. Continue to work with our Academy partners to communicate and implement the quarterly cycle by the start of the 26/27 academic school year.
 - ii. Develop the initial risk plan and decision framework.
3. Nurture strong relationships with the Academy and partner organizations
 - a. Metric: Conclude comprehensive MOUs with the Falcon Foundation and AFAAC in 2026 – OPR CEO/President
 - i. Finalize the Falcon Foundation MOU by February 2026.
 - ii. Continue to work with AFAAC on joint fundraising efforts through upcoming projects like Erdle Field and the DeBerry Endowment.

Communications

Outcomes

1. Enhance and safeguard the brand and reputation of the AOG and Foundation
 - a. Metric: Develop and implement new usafa.org website features to increase its value to our audiences and support our strategic imperatives – OPR Communications
 - i. Search function and indexing to be completed for better accessibility by the end of Q1
 - ii. Pagination added to content hub page by the end of Q1
 - iii. Geolocation feature added to chapters and ambassadors pages by the end of Q3
 - iv. Increased accessibility (alt text) added to the entire site
 - v. Build/pull in other new pages: reunions (Q1), legacy classes (Q1), membership for all (Q1), campaign pages for Hosmer Visitor Center and Court of Inspiration (Q2), prep for 2027 AOG board election (ongoing) and prep for next big fundraising campaign (ongoing)
 - vi. Updated online donor honor roll to fit in with the new website by the end of Q1
 - vii. Presence for the NextGen Advisory Council – its members, its purpose and how to get involved by the end of Q2
 - b. Metric: Further develop the U.S. Air Force Academy Association & Foundation brand and its supporting sub-brands
 - i. Create new branded house logos for all approved sub-brands and make sure they are available for staff use on SharePoint.
 - ii. Continue the ongoing rebranding of collateral and projects across the organization, e.g., fundraising cases for support, programs, brochures, stationery, other strategic supplemental collateral.
 - iii. Continue training of staff on how to work with the brand to support the areas for which they are responsible and accurately represent where certain programs live across the Association & Foundation.
 - iv. Continually audit all areas where our brand is displayed to ensure top-quality execution and a mission-aligned Association & Foundation experience.
 - v. Create and implement a year-long communications plan for the Office of Gift Planning (sub-brand Polaris Society), in collaboration with our marketing partner, Crescendo, to educate potential donors and increase estate gift pledges and realizations.
 - vi. Educate USAFA leaders about the Association & Foundation mission through regular meetings and updates so they are able to effectively illustrate graduate and donor impact.

- c. Metric: Maintain Doolittle Outfitters' operating margin/increase the quality of products – OPR Alumni Relations
 - i. Refine product merchandise selection, deletion and addition strategy using reporting data to identify high performing and underperforming merchandise in Q1.
 - ii. Increase online sales to 35% of gross sales through utilization of the new commerce system for enhanced shopping experience.
 - iii. Optimize order quantity and purchasing frequency to reduce inventory on-hand value to \$350,000 in Q1 and Q4.
 - iv. Continue to build and tweak custom reports to support merchandise team in above endeavors.
- 2. Share the story of the Academy and our graduates in varied and effective ways
 - a. Metric: Develop and fully implement a comprehensive program to track and announce graduate promotions, appointments, confirmations and achievements by end of 2026 – OPR Communications
 - i. Continue to update and monitor distribution lists and news alerts and implement relevant announcements in our current graduate communications (i.e. *ZoomiEnews*).
 - b. Metric: Elevate production, content and audience strategy and reach toward a sponsorship plan for the Long Blue Leadership podcast by end of 2026 – OPR Communications
 - i. Create and implement a podcast audience growth plan.
 - ii. Meet in early 2026 to strategize a paid marketing plan for podcasts for implementation before mid-year.
 - iii. Continue to take a strategic approach when booking guests, and, once shows are produced, work with guests to disseminate content within their networks.
 - iv. Continue to leverage other channels to inform listeners about content, including *Checkpoints* advertisements and cross-promoting podcasts from other shows.
 - c. Metric: Increase measurable social media engagement through data-informed content and messaging, platform-specific strategies and two-way communication that strengthens our brand – OPR Communications
 - i. Increase social media engagement and audience by 5%.
- 3. Maintain readiness for successfully navigating crises and adverse developments
 - a. Metric: Prepare a formal succession plan for review by both boards – OPR CEO/President
 - i. Work with both boards to develop an organizational succession plan and present at the July 2026 board meeting.

Organizational Excellence

Outcomes

1. Continually compete to retain talent
 - a. Metric: Enhance employee recognition programs and support with Flight Crew – OPR Finance
 - i. Revamp Reward and Recognition program by June 2026 and increase platforms of communication with our team to broaden how and when we are communicating information.
 - b. Metric: Build a professional development training series for employees of all levels by 2027 – OPR Finance
 - i. Develop regularly scheduled database and constituent update best practice training program for employees based on department function.
 - ii. Develop and implement an organizational policy governing the use, sharing, and management of data with external shareholders.
2. Foster a culture of professionalism and high performance and an environment that fosters innovation
 - a. Metric: Conduct an employee survey in 2026 – OPR Finance
 - i. Complete 3rd pulse survey by September 2026 and implement monthly informational exchange program to deepen relationships with our team across the organization in Q1.
 - ii. Outside of the survey results, Finance will create a Net Asset Roll forward and Investment Holdings Report for the AOG to match those reports on the Foundation. Additionally, we will align the interfund balancing methods between the two orgs.
3. Exhibit our core values in everything we do
 - a. Metric: Roll out a new onboarding plan that educates employees on the organization and the Academy by 2026 – OPR Finance
 - i. Build enhanced onboarding experience for new hires.
 - ii. Implement 90-day new hire feedback surveys to check in on the process.
 - iii. Implement annual stay interview process for all employees to receive feedback and build on our culture.