

ROPA Report 2026

Good morning, everyone.

I bring warm greetings from the members of ICSOM and our Governing Board. It is always an honor to attend the ROPA Conference, especially so soon after many of us were together at the AFM Convention in Ottawa.

Since returning from Ottawa, I have reflected often on what we experienced there. The convention was sometimes stressful and contentious, as delegates debated serious questions about the future of our union. Yet what I keep returning to is my gratitude for what we witnessed: a raw, vibrant, and deeply human form of democracy.

We will never agree about everything. But democracy is measured not by the absence of disagreement, but by whether people can participate meaningfully, be heard, and remain committed to one another after the voting is over. From that perspective, democracy is alive and well in the AFM.

ROPA was well represented in Ottawa. I especially want to recognize Steve, Rick, and Karen. They came prepared, stayed engaged, and ensured that the experiences of ROPA musicians—particularly those in smaller-budget orchestras and Locals—were part of the conversation. Their effectiveness also reflected the work of the entire ROPA Governing Board.

One of the convention's most important accomplishments was the modernization of the AFM Strike Fund.

The Strike Fund supports musicians during a work stoppage and strengthens our position before one begins. Musicians should be able to reject an unacceptable contract knowing support is available, and employers bargain differently when they know the union has resources behind its members.

The previous structure tied an orchestra's contribution and benefit level directly to its minimum weekly salary, which could make participation difficult, especially for smaller orchestras. The reforms approved in Ottawa separate contribution levels from minimum weekly scale. A participating orchestra, together with its Local, may now select from an expanded range

of contribution and benefit levels. No orchestra will automatically move into a higher tier simply because wages increase, while orchestras seeking stronger protection will have a clearer path to build it. This flexibility may allow more ROPA orchestras to participate or strengthen their benefits over time.

This year, ICSOM, together with ROPA and the AFM, has also continued negotiations for a successor Integrated Media Agreement. We are seeking an agreement that reflects how media is used today while protecting fair compensation and union standards. Technology will continue to evolve, but innovation cannot become an excuse to diminish the value of our performances or weaken standards musicians have spent decades building.

We are also preparing for the ICSOM Conference in Honolulu, hosted by Local 677 and the musicians of the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra. Honolulu may be the most remote conference site ICSOM has ever chosen, but that distance is part of why being there matters.

Solidarity has no center and no edge. Musicians in Hawai'i—and in every remote workplace—should know that their challenges matter throughout the Federation. No orchestra should feel alone, and the strength of our union depends on our willingness to show up for one another.

All of this work points toward a larger question: What kind of union are we asking musicians to join?

Building the union is not only about membership. It is about trust. Musicians will not commit themselves to a union that feels distant, unwelcoming, unsafe, or ineffective. They need to know they are well represented, that their voices matter, and that their participation can influence the organization.

We must have a clear vision of the future and the power to make it real. We must be capable of defending our members, courageous enough to stand for what is right, and worthy of musicians' trust. The deeper purpose of a union is dignity: the belief that workers deserve a voice, that no one should stand alone, and that our safety, our futures, and our work are worth defending.

At a time when labor rights, institutions, and vulnerable communities are under tremendous pressure, we must be smart and strategic, but we

cannot retreat. We must continue building workplaces that are safe, fair, welcoming, and equitable. We must continue to organize, recruit, and defend one another.

That work does not belong only to officers or Governing Boards. The union is the delegate who asks a difficult question, the committee member who follows up with a colleague, the steward who documents a contract violation, and the musician who responds to a survey, attends a meeting, or speaks up when something does not feel right.

As you move through this convention, listen to one another. Ask difficult questions. Disagree honestly and respectfully. Make room for newer voices. Share what you have learned, and return home prepared to put at least one new idea into action.

Thank you for the work you do throughout the AFM. Thank you to Steve, Rick, and Karen for representing ROPA so effectively in Ottawa, and to the entire ROPA Governing Board for the preparation and support that made their work successful.

ICSOM learns from your fights. We are strengthened by your victories. We are proud to stand beside you, and we look forward to continuing our work together.

Thank you.