

## **2026 AFM Western Conference report**

AFM President Tino Gagliardi

- Upcoming Convention in Ottawa
- Excitement and enthusiasm for the growing AFM organizing department
- Recent IEB meeting in Puerto Rico - continue to grow and support there

AFM Organizing Director Gabe Kristal

- Talked about the organizing structure - a designated organizer for each AFM region
- Each regional organizer will visit a Local in their jurisdiction once each month
- Hopes to canvas every Local in the next two years

AFM Secretary Treasurer Ken Shirk

- Cybersecurity is a growing risk - union members should take advantage of Union Plus benefits (ID protection, discounts) to safeguard finances and tech
- The AFM Convention in Ottawa is a key working meeting that sets union direction - all members can attend as observers
- Rapid societal and economic change has weakened labor, especially through deregulation and the rise of the gig economy
- Unions = essential regulation for fairness - they provide stability, fair wages, and remove “race to the bottom” competition
- Future focus: rebuilding industry structure - musicians must organize and reshape systems to sustain viable careers

AFM VP from Canada Alistair Elliott

- Solidarity is the foundation of union strength - across locals, countries, and levels of leadership, it drives real change
- Cross-border advocacy is a top priority - focused on improving U.S. visa processes for Canadian musicians through coordinated labor and government efforts
- Unified labor voice is growing - partnerships with groups like the Canadian Labour Congress and AFL-CIO are amplifying impact
- AI is a major emerging issue - musicians need protections around consent, credit, and compensation for their work
- Momentum is building despite slow systems - continued organizing, negotiation gains, and political engagement are key to long-term progress

#### AFM VP from the US Dave Pomeroy

- Echoed growing concerns about AI through his performance of an original song he wrote

#### MPTF Trustee Greg Linn

- Music Performance Trust Fund is in transition - new leadership alongside key retirements marks a period of change and growth
- Strong financial outlook - streaming revenue growth continues to support funding and long-term stability
- Leadership updates - internal promotions and new hires aim to strengthen operations and grant programs
- Expanded partnerships and programming - continued collaboration with major arts organizations and cultural initiatives
- Positive outlook for 2026 - focus on growth, community impact, and supporting musicians through funded performances

#### AFM SSD Director and Special Counsel Rochelle Skolnick

- SSD is busier and more robust than ever with the addition of two new negotiators
- Everyone is spread thin with high workloads
- Provide assistance for negotiations, financial analyses, and legal counsel
- Beginning work on advocacy and protections for substitute and extra musicians in orchestras
  - Equity gaps persist - overscale disparities and the precarious conditions of subs & extras (limited benefits, job insecurity) undermine fairness and collective bargaining
  - Reform is urgent and emerging - growing efforts aim to improve protections, compensation models, and workplace accountability for vulnerable musicians

#### AFM EMSD Director John Painting

- The core mission of the Electronic Media Services Division is to ensure recording musicians can build sustainable careers through strong contracts and enforcement
- AI is a major threat and priority - focus on consent, credit, and compensation to protect human musicians' work
- Recent bargaining wins are significant - wage increases, improved health contributions, streaming/residual gains, and first-ever AI protections
- Contract clarity is critical - understanding agreement scope (e.g., DJs, film vs. recording work) ensures proper pay, credit, and benefits
- Member engagement drives success - organizing and participation are essential for upcoming negotiations (especially the Sound Recording Labor Agreement)

### ROPA President Steve Wade

- ROPA 2026 Conference (Dallas, July 27–30) will cover key topics: finance, labor law, workplace culture, and organizing
- Focus on strategy & education: financial analysis, legal updates, and building stronger workplace relationships
- Right-to-work states are a major challenge - they weaken unions and create tougher bargaining conditions
- Organizing is essential: success depends on relationships, persistence, and community engagement
- Broader labor momentum matters: recent political shifts show growing support for unions and worker power

### TMA President Heather Boehm

- Onstage musicians are growing in theater, but pay standards are inconsistent and often insufficient
- Extra duties = extra pay (movement, memorization, acting), percentage-based increases are best
- Costs & time must be covered (costumes, fittings, rehearsals, prep time, subs)
- Higher visibility = higher expectations—musicians are judged musically *and* visually
- Define everything in negotiations: scope of work, safety, rehearsals, facilities, and media use

### ICSOM Chair Keith Carrick

- The 2026 Conference in Honolulu will emphasize connection across the union, despite geographic distance
- Solidarity is the central theme - every orchestra and local matters equally, no matter how remote
- Presence matters in negotiations (e.g., Hawai'i Symphony CBA) - supporting colleagues strengthens the whole union
- Local issues are collective issues - wages, conditions, and job security affect the entire profession
- In uncertain times, unions provide stability - the answer is stronger engagement, not isolation

### RMA President Allen Fogle

- Recording Musicians Association is actively organizing, especially in Los Angeles - building membership, leadership, and political partnerships
- Key negotiation priorities: healthcare (essential for sustainable careers) and AI protections (credit, consent, compensation)
- AI is an urgent issue - musicians must control and be paid for how their work is used in new technologies
- Strong member engagement is driving momentum - rank-and-file participation is central to bargaining power
- Looking ahead: upcoming contract negotiations (SRLA, film/TV) will build on recent gains like streaming residuals

### OCSM President Robert Fraser

- Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians marks 50 years - highlighting both progress and ongoing challenges
- Core issues haven't changed much since 1976: wages, working conditions, auditions, governance, and employment status
- Some gains made, but work remains - many longstanding concerns are still actively negotiated today
- The 2026 Conference in Winnipeg will focus on negotiations, education, and engaging newer delegates
- Improved communication strategies (smaller group reporting, tech use) are helping strengthen collaboration

### FMA President Nate Omdal

- The Freelance Musicians Association represents freelance musicians - focused on economic security, fair standards, and stronger collective voice
- Now an official AFM player conference, giving freelancers formal representation at the AFM Convention and within union decision-making
- Advocacy priorities: better pay, benefits (healthcare), contract enforcement, digital rights, and protections in emerging work
- Organizing and community-building - monthly meetings, member-led initiatives, and collaboration with locals and allied unions
- Equity-centered mission - addresses systemic inequities and expands access/resources across the freelance music industry, membership is only five dollars

Organizing panel discussion with Gabe Kristal (AFM Organizing Director), Ed Gutierrez (AFM Organizer), and Wages Argott (AFM Freelance Services Director)

- AFM organizing efforts are expanding - programs like “Play Your Part” are building grassroots power among freelance musicians
- New organizing structures are emerging - e.g., Puerto Rico’s Indie Musicians’ Organizing Committee to unify and advocate locally
- Teaching artists are organizing nationally - YOLA educators won union recognition, seeking job protections, clarity, and career pathways
- Organizing can protect programs - union action helped reverse a YOLA site closure and strengthen community impact
- Collective action drives dignity - True Concord orchestra musicians continue pushing for union recognition and fair bargaining rights
- Union contracts provide critical protections, including guaranteed work, fair pay scales, and regulated conditions
- “Stronger Together” campaign builds awareness - AFM is engaging musicians at major conferences and industry events
- Education + outreach = organizing pipeline - targeting students, educators, and professionals early in their careers
- Gig economy challenges require collective solutions - focus on fair pay standards and reducing competition-driven exploitation
- Freelance co-funding supports local innovation - over \$85K allocated to organizing, staffing, events, and member services
- Locals are using funds creatively, from hiring organizers to launching booking platforms and hosting training programs
- Infrastructure investment is growing - facilities, digital tools, and staff expansion to better serve members
- Freelance Musicians Association provides a unified voice - structured space for freelancers to organize, strategize, and advocate
- Member-led structure is key - committees, elections, and bylaws are building long-term organizational strength