

[aelaq]

2025-2029 Strategic Plan

Visibility, Voice, and Vitality:
A Five-Year Vision for AELAQ

CONTENTS

Land Acknowledgement

Opening Letter

About AELAQ

Vision, Mission

Values

Theory of Change

The Planning Process

Organizational Context

Strategic Objectives

Organizational Foundations

Implementation & Timeline

Monitoring & Evaluation

Next Steps

2025–2029 At a Glance

- 5 strategic priorities focused on programs, advocacy, digital access, and sector resilience
- 13 concrete actions to strengthen member support, visibility, and infrastructure
- 13 key outcomes tracked through a practical, capacity-aligned evaluation framework
- Midpoint refresh in 2027 to recalibrate and respond to evolving needs
- Rooted in our vision, mission, values, and member input

Land Acknowledgement

The Association of English-Language Publishers of Quebec (AELAQ) acknowledges that our work takes place on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka Nation, in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), a historic gathering place for many First Peoples.

As an association that supports English-language publishing and literary creators in Quebec, we recognize the responsibilities that come with working on this land. We are committed to ongoing learning, and to amplifying Indigenous voices, languages, and stories through our programs, partnerships, and publications.

Opening Letter

It is probably an understatement to say the last five years have been challenging for independent publishers. Following not just the difficulties and disruptions of the pandemic but also the resilience and new initiatives of the book industry during this period, external factors have added a great deal to everyone's workload. AELAQ's staff and Board of Directors thought it was the right moment to survey our members, gather feedback, and organize this information into a cohesive plan for the coming years. We hope that this exercise will focus AELAQ's priorities to better assist our members in their business operations and the promotion of their books and authors. We wanted to know what is working for you, what you think could be improved, and what new initiatives you would like to see in the coming years.

By conducting this strategic planning review and report, we also hope to free up some time for AELAQ's staff to dedicate to operational activities. As we know, funding applications can take up an extraordinary amount of time. In the case of SODEC, for example, their "Programme d'aide aux associations et aux organismes à mandat collectif" makes it possible for organizations to switch from an annual application to a three-year application. However, organizations must complete a strategic planning review to do so.

To facilitate this strategic plan, in the fall of 2024, AELAQ's staff and Board of Directors circulated a call for proposals widely through publishing and not-for-profit forums. We received dozens of applications and narrowed these down to a shortlist of five. Priority was given to applicants that were familiar with cultural industries and non-profit organizations, with additional emphasis placed on applicants with experience working with anglophone cultural non-profit organizations operating in Quebec. Following interviews with shortlisted applicants, we were very happy to engage Ledwell Strategies' Thomas Ledwell and Julie Kon Kam King. We are grateful to them for their excellent work in collecting the feedback of our members, our external partners, our staff, and our Board and providing us with an informative qualitative and quantitative analysis of how we fit into our community.

Thank you to everyone who participated in AELAQ's strategic planning review. We are grateful to our members for your time, for your candour, and for your recommendations. This process has been constructive and we are glad to have a centralized analysis of your needs, hopes, and shared goals. Our thanks to Thom and Julie for their good questions, for their enthusiasm and curiosity in learning about the work of AELAQ and our members, and for providing us all with an informed bird's-eye view of our cultural sector and activities.

AELAQ Strategic Planning Committee

Luc Bossé, President, Board of Directors
Alexandra Sweny, Production Coordinator, AELAQ
Ryan Van Huijstee, Secretary, Board of Directors
Rebecca West, Executive Director, AELAQ

About AELAQ

Our Vision

We envision a vibrant and diverse English-language publishing community in Quebec celebrated for its critical and literary contributions to Quebec and Canada.

Our Mission

To cultivate creativity, advocate for our members, and build a resilient English-language literary ecosystem in Quebec.

Our Guiding Values

COMMUNITY: We foster a strong, collaborative, and inclusive network where publishers, authors, and cultural partners connect, exchange, and contribute to a vibrant critical and literary culture.

CULTURAL LEADERSHIP: We strengthen and amplify the voices, stories, and histories of English-language literature in Quebec, recognizing publishing as a vital creative and cultural endeavour.

CREATIVITY: We believe in the power of storytelling and original thought to enrich culture, expand perspectives, and strengthen critical and literary expression across genres, formats, and communities.

ADAPTABILITY: We navigate changing landscapes—technological, political, environmental, and economic—with agility, openness, and a commitment to continuous learning and innovation.

INTEGRITY: We lead with transparency, fairness, and responsibility, advocating for our community and upholding the principles of freedom of expression, professional excellence, equity, and public trust in all we do.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Beneficiaries	Approach	Impact
English-language Publishers	<p>Sector Strengthening & Member-Centred Programming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Supporting publishers through mentorship, advocacy, and flagship programs.Bolstering professional development and digital capacity.	A resilient, connected, and visible English-language publishing ecosystem in Quebec, where small and mid-sized presses thrive and are recognized for their cultural value.
Sector Partners (publishers, libraries, booksellers, writing associations)	<p>Amplifying Diverse Sector Voices & Equitable Visibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strengthening the role of English-language publishers in Quebec's cultural landscape.Fostering partnerships, outreach, and collective action.	Publishers and partners have the tools, networks, and strategies to thrive within a rapidly changing sector.
Readers & Book Buyers	<p>Expanding Access & Building Diverse Readership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increasing access to the English-language publishing community and opportunities to engage with local authors.Creating dynamic platforms for readers and book buyers to connect with local publishers in Quebec.	New audiences and allies are engaged, reinforcing community and public support for local English-language publishing.

Organizational Context

It is a pivotal moment in the evolution of the AELAQ and its members. In recent years, the organization has strengthened its role as a connector, advocate, and champion for English-language publishers in Quebec. Through its flagship initiatives such as the *Montreal Review of Books*, the Read Quebec Book Fair, and ongoing member services, AELAQ continues to build trust, visibility, and momentum in a sector shaped by both opportunity and precarity.

The publishing ecosystem in Quebec, as elsewhere, is undergoing a period of rapid change. While small and mid-sized English-language publishers continue to produce acclaimed and innovative work, they face complex and overlapping pressures: increasing production costs, funding gaps, technological disruption, and the demands of discoverability in an oversaturated market.

Despite these challenges, there are emerging opportunities for AELAQ to grow and flourish in a re-defined landscape. AELAQ's greatest strengths lie in its network of dedicated members, its strong track record of cultural programming, and its ability to convene and collaborate across sectors. As appetite grows—for local stories, for inclusive literary spaces, for innovative approaches to distribution and audience engagement—AELAQ is uniquely positioned to respond to these needs and help shape what the sector looks like going forward.

This strategic plan identifies objectives and strategies for AELAQ to position itself, respond directly to the needs of members, partners, and community stakeholders, and reinforce a resilient, connected, and visible English-language publishing ecosystem in Quebec.

The Planning Process

Between February and May 2025, AELAQ engaged in a member-informed strategic planning process to develop this multi-year roadmap. Led by Ledwell Strategies, the process combined document review, a sector landscape analysis, and targeted consultations with AELAQ's members, Board, staff, and key stakeholders.

Engagement included the following:

- An omnibus survey completed by members, community partners, and contributors
- In-depth interviews with representatives from member publishers
- A facilitated working session with AELAQ's Board
- Ongoing collaboration with a Steering Committee of Board members and staff

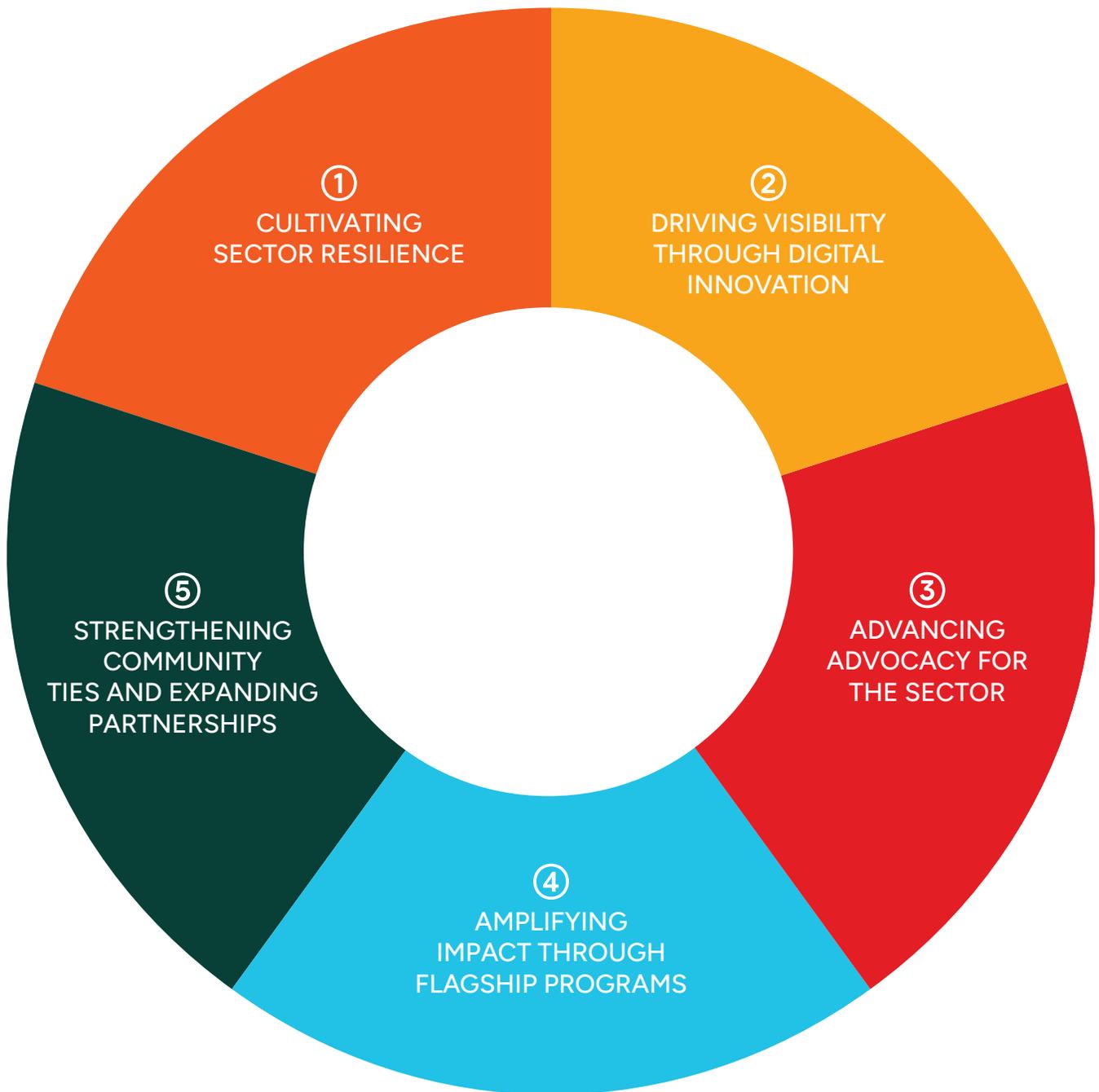
This process focused on gathering diverse perspectives to ensure the plan is grounded in sector realities and shared direction to provide a clear framework to guide AELAQ's growth over the next several years.



Strategic Priorities 2025–2029

Overview

Over the next five years, AELAQ will focus on five interconnected priorities that strengthen sector capacity, improve member visibility, and deepen AELAQ’s role as a connector and advocate. These priorities build on the association’s strongest assets—its flagship programs, its collaborative spirit, and its ability to respond to the evolving needs of English-language publishers in Quebec.



OBJECTIVE 1

CULTIVATING SECTOR RESILIENCE BY REINFORCING LEARNING, MENTORSHIP, AND NETWORKS

AELAQ will invest in sector-strengthening by offering enhanced professional development programming that addresses knowledge and network needs that are critical to a thriving English-language publishing sector in Quebec. By focusing on mentorship opportunities, multi-year professional development events, and peer-driven learning, this focal area will address both immediate and long-term gaps that are currently challenging the sector's sustainability.

KEY ACTIONS:

- Map key topics for member-focused professional development on export readiness, grant writing, and digital innovation
- Pilot mentorship pairings between emerging and experienced publishers to foster knowledge transfer and sector sustainability
- Facilitate diverse peer and intergenerational learning networks for collaborative problem-solving

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- A more confident, connected, and future-ready publishing community
- Strengthened sector leadership and knowledge continuity
- Member publishers adopt more adaptive and sustainable business models

OBJECTIVE 2

DRIVING VISIBILITY THROUGH DIGITAL INNOVATION

To remain relevant and accessible in an evolving publishing landscape, AELAQ will modernize its communications, digital infrastructure, and member-facing platforms. This strategic priority requires both internal operational upgrades and outward-facing improvements that will help publishers engage more effectively with AELAQ and also reach new readers, amplify their visibility, and adapt to technological shifts shaping the sector.

KEY ACTIONS:

- Enhance AELAQ's digital presence and ecosystem for improved accessibility and user engagement
- Refresh AELAQ & *Montreal Review of Books (mRb)* branding to better reflect contemporary values and design

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- AELAQ's digital platforms are more accessible, discoverable, and user-friendly
- AELAQ's refreshed digital presence reflects its leadership, creativity, and community values

OBJECTIVE 3

ADVANCING ADVOCACY FOR THE SECTOR

To ensure lasting impact for its members, AELAQ will lead with a clear and coordinated voice on policy issues affecting English-language and independent publishers. By advancing sector-specific priorities and building shared advocacy agendas with peer organizations, AELAQ can champion equitable funding, cultural recognition, and the visibility of minority-language voices in Quebec and across Canada.

KEY ACTIONS:

- Advance advocacy for minority-language publishers and equitable representation in cultural policy
- Develop shared advocacy agendas with literary and publishing sector partners

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- AELAQ is a recognized and credible voice for its advocacy on cultural policy and publishing issues
- Members benefit from coordinated, sector-wide advocacy and enhanced access to resources and policy influence

OBJECTIVE 4

AMPLIFYING IMPACT THROUGH FLAGSHIP PROGRAMS

AELAQ's most valued programs—*Montreal Review of Books* and the Read Quebec Book Fair—are pillars of visibility and connection for English-language publishing in Quebec. This strategic priority focuses on strengthening these programs through design innovation, format experimentation, accessibility integration, intentional inclusion of works by voices from underrepresented perspectives, and audience feedback.

KEY ACTIONS:

- Refresh the *Montreal Review of Books* with updated design and expanded digital discoverability
- Innovate and expand the Read Quebec Book Fair through diverse partnerships and accessible formats
- Extend reach through collective showcases and targeted promotional initiatives

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Flagship programs are refreshed and more widely recognized across Quebec and beyond
- Member publishers benefit from expanded visibility and reduced barriers to participation
- Programs better reflect the diversity and needs of communities they serve

OBJECTIVE 5

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY TIES AND EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS

AELAQ's strength lies in its ability to convene, connect, and collaborate. This priority focuses on cultivating deeper relationships with literary, cultural, and educational partners across Quebec and beyond—expanding the association's reach and influence while creating new opportunities for members. Activities reinforce sector resilience, build bridges across communities, and amplify the voices of English-language publishing.

KEY ACTIONS:

- Co-program with archives, libraries, and cultural festivals to expand audience reach and visibility
- Facilitate inclusive shared spaces for dialogue, resource-sharing, and collaborative problem-solving
- Convene the sector through accessible annual and hybrid member events that strengthen relationships

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- AELAQ strengthens its role as a connector across the literary, educational, and cultural sectors
- Members benefit from increased visibility, audience development, and peer learning
- Sector cohesion and resilience are reinforced through dialogue and alignment



Organizational Foundations

Supporting our five strategic objectives is a commitment to strengthen AELAQ's internal capacity and sustainability. Over the next five years, we will:

- Develop governance policies that align with our values and support equity goals
- Create a fund diversification strategy to explore new funding opportunities
- Enhance succession planning for Board and staff to ensure leadership continuity
- Establish a risk management framework to address potential challenges proactively

These foundational elements will ensure AELAQ has the organizational resilience to deliver on our strategic priorities while remaining responsive to member needs and evolving sector realities.

AELAQ is committed to ensuring diverse perspectives inform our governance and decision-making. We will maintain gender parity on our Board of Directors and committees, while working toward one-third representation from equity-deserving communities—reflecting the diverse publishing ecosystem we serve.

Implementation & Timeline

Timeline & Strategic Milestones (2025–2029)

2025–2026: FOUNDATION & LAUNCH

- Finalize vision, mission, values, and Theory of Change
- Develop internal governance policies
- Design fund diversification strategy
- Launch pilot initiatives related to mentorship and professional development
- Begin enhancing AELAQ's digital presence

2026–2027: EXPANSION & EVALUATION

- Expand flagship programs and member engagement initiatives
- Implement revenue diversification strategies
- Continue digital and visibility infrastructure improvements
- Conduct mid-cycle plan refresh and adjust strategies

2028–2029: CONSOLIDATION & SUSTAINABILITY

- Deepen cross-sector partnerships and expand regional/national presence
- Formalize successful pilot initiatives into ongoing programming
- Prepare for next strategic planning cycle



Monitoring & Evaluation

AELAQ is committed to tracking progress in a way that is meaningful and responsive to member needs. A lightweight evaluation framework will guide annual reflections, inform strategic decisions, and demonstrate impact to funders and partners.

What We'll Measure :

Professional development impact, digital engagement, advocacy effectiveness, program participation, and partnership growth.

Key Monitoring Activities :

- Annual member feedback survey to assess alignment and capture evolving needs
- Tracking of participation, engagement, and outcomes across all five strategic areas
- Mid-term plan refresh in 2027 to recalibrate and refine priorities
- Annual progress updates for members and stakeholders

Your feedback is essential to our evaluation process. Throughout this five-year plan, we will create regular opportunities for members to help assess our progress and shape our response to evolving needs.

Next Steps

This strategic plan represents the beginning of an exciting new chapter for AELAQ and the English-language publishing community in Quebec. As we move from vision to action, we look forward to working collaboratively with our members, partners, and wider community to bring these priorities to life.

- **SUMMER 2025**: Finalize detailed implementation plan with specific metrics and targets
- **WINTER 2026**: Launch first annual member survey to establish baseline measurements
- **SPRING 2026**: Report on annual progress to members and stakeholders
- **FALL 2027**: Conduct comprehensive mid-term review with member consultation

We invite members to engage with aspects of the plan that align with your interests and expertise. We believe that by working together, we can create a more vibrant, visible, and sustainable publishing ecosystem that celebrates the unique contributions of English-language literature in Quebec. This plan is not just AELAQ's roadmap—we hope it reflects our collective vision for the next five years, and we look forward to embarking on this journey with you.

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The 2025-2029 Strategic Plan
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