

Operations Report to the Board

February 20, 2025

Introduction

This operations report provides the Board of Directors with a comprehensive update on the Alberta Equestrian Federation's (AEF's) ongoing initiatives, financial health, membership trends, and strategic progress. By aligning our daily operations with the broader objectives outlined in our five-year strategic and operational plans, we continue to drive meaningful growth while adapting to emerging challenges and opportunities.

The following report outlines key milestones achieved, areas requiring attention, and strategic enhancements that support our commitment to serving Alberta's equestrian community. It includes updates on grant funding, membership growth and retention, communications strategies, competition development, recreational updates, programming, and ongoing system improvements that will strengthen our operational efficiency. With a focus on financial sustainability, engagement, and service excellence, this report underscores the collective efforts of our team and stakeholders in advancing our mission.

Grant Overview and Funding

Association Development Program Grant

- **Type/Project:** Core Government of Alberta (GOA) funding
- **Amount:** \$81,700
- **Payment Schedule:** Two payments of \$40,850 each in July and November 2024
- **Current Status:** \$0

Active Living Program Updates

Ride & Drive

- **2025 Registered:** 127
- **2025 Renewed:** 135
- Members continue to log hours riding or driving, earning rewards while staying active with their horses.
- Five members reached the 2000-hour milestone in 2024!
- Logbooks and welcome letters for 2025 are currently being mailed out.

Live Outside the Box (LOTB)

- **2025 Total Signed Up:** 120
- **2024 Total Signed Up:** 162
- This program engages youth (ages 7-15) in tracking horse time, physical activity, and healthy eating habits.

Membership Overview

As of the time of this report, we have 7,039 members, slightly below last year's renewal rate. We anticipate an increase in all categories with upcoming renewal reminders planned for the end of the month.

- Current membership stands at 7,039, slightly below last year's numbers.
- Youth memberships declined slightly, while adult memberships remain relatively stable.
- Business and Club memberships are the same compared to previous years.
- Jump Alberta and AEVA memberships have decreased compared to last year.

Membership Revenue and Renewals

The majority of membership revenue was received in January 2025 instead of December 2024, generating approximately \$635K in cash inflows and strengthening AEF's financial position. This includes 5,544 Adult and 1,495 Youth memberships, along with secondary purchases and donations, accounting for 55% of planned membership revenue. This reflects a 7% increase over the previous year and a 9% increase over January 2023.

Payment Processing

To manage rising costs, as the board will recall, we updated our model for 2025, applying credit card and online processing charges back to all transactions. This adjustment has been effective in keeping us on track with our financial targets for the year.

Membership Database Update

We are actively pursuing a new database solution in response to ongoing issues with MyMembers. After evaluating several options and a number of RFP's, we are now in the demo phase with our top choices for 2026. The new system aims to resolve technical challenges, streamline operations, improve efficiency, and align with our strategic goals. The upgrade is expected to enhance member experience and support future membership growth. Note that it is likely we will move back with a past provider as we have learned that there are very few systems that can handle the complexity of our model, e.g. insurance, reporting, etc. This information is to remain confidential until a new provider has been selected.

Business & Club Memberships:

Currently, Business and Club memberships are processed through WIX. Integration with the new database system will consolidate all membership-related processes, providing greater flexibility and efficiency. This unified approach will optimize operations, foster growth opportunities, and enhance the member experience.

Third-Party Memberships:

We currently manage contracts with Jump Alberta and AEVA manually due to system limitations. The new database system will enable seamless third-party access, improving operational efficiency and strengthening our partnerships with these key stakeholders.

Communications and Engagement

Website Management

- **Managed Continuous Updates:** Based on requests from both team and visitors.
- **Google Report for January 2025:**
 - There were 642 Business Profile interactions (up 26% from January 2024)
 - 1,567 people views our business profile in January 2025. (up 93.5% over January 2024)
 - 77% were searched on desktop vs. 13% on mobile
- **Top Google searches were:**
 - aef
 - alberta equestrian federation
 - alberta equine federation
 - alberta equestrian
 - aef insurance
- There were 483 website clicks made from our Google Business Profile.

Graphics Creation

- **Notable Graphics Created (2024):**
 - Annual Awards 2024 marketing design
 - Key calendar events (Christmas, New Years)
 - Social media graphics
 - Board Nominations and AGM

E-News

- **Average Open Rate (Oct. – Dec. 2024):** Average 46% open rate
- **Important Communication (Board Nominations, Alberta Bits Winter Issue, Funding Deadlines):** 46% open rate.

Alberta Bits

- **Produced:** Fall and Winter issues. Due to the Canada Post strike, the Winter Issue was only published online, as it would not have made it to members' inboxes in a timely fashion.
- Through RFP process, we have sourced a promising **new custom editor** and publisher for Alberta Bits. Looking forward to working with Odvod Media to redesign and refresh Alberta Bits with a modern layout, new writers, and more storytelling to highlight members. The new publishers will also be able to save us money on online publishing with a new platform to host an online pdf magazine flipbook. We will be streamlining Alberta Bits to three quality issues per year.

Social Media

Facebook (Nov. 1, 2024 – Jan 31, 2025): 146.5K views, reach of 46.9% (up 16% over previous three months)

- **Mentionable Posts:**
 - Remembrance Day (Nov. 11): Over 11K views
 - Repost from Grande Prairie County large animal rescue of a horse in a pond (Nov. 19): 5K views
 - Canter Away Current, Crystal Kroetch (Dec. 3): 3K views
 - You might be a horse show competitor if... (Jan. 13): 29K views

Instagram (Nov. 1, 2024 – Jan. 31, 2025): 21.2K views, reach of 6.8K (up 79% over previous three months)

- **Mentionable Posts:**
 - Remembrance Day (Nov. 11): 5K views
 - Wildfire alert (July 23): Reach of 2.5K
 - Educational funding opportunity (Aug. 20): Reach 366

Master Strategic Communications and Marketing Plan

- **Final Draft** of the organization's communications and marketing plan created in consultation with Julia Harvie-Shemko of Red Thread Communications has been delivered. This plan will be further proofed, with specific marketing pieces to be incorporated in alignment with the audience, messages, and appropriate tools as they are developed.

Annual Awards

The 2024 Annual Provincial Awards, which honour outstanding achievements within Alberta's equine community, have been declared. These awards recognize individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the equestrian community, enhancing the overall environment and experience for participants.

Key Details:

Winners:

1. **Outstanding Stable/Facility:** Vantage Point Equestrian
2. **Outstanding Horse:** Kavalia, Owner Jeanine and Angelique van der Sluijs
3. **Outstanding Instructor/Coach:** Suzanne Le Gars
4. **Outstanding Equine Support Personnel:** Scott Billings
5. **Sportsmanship Excellence Award:** Karla O'Brien
6. **Outstanding Athlete/Rider:** Molly Hamilton
7. **Outstanding Volunteer:** Brenda Henrikson
8. **Above and Beyond Excellence Award:** Jacey Rhinehart

Award winners will be celebrated April 25, 2025, at the Stride With Us awards gala and banquet in conjunction with Horse Expo at the Red Deer Resort and Casino. Award winners have been notified. Special thanks to the volunteers on this committee who contribute to this important initiative for our community.

Competitions, Athlete and Officials Development

Competitions

We administer provincial competitions at a grassroots level within the framework of Wild Rose. The Wild Rose Rule Book and provincially certified officials form the foundation of this initiative. Additionally, we oversee the Bronze and Silver level competitions sanctioned by Equestrian Canada (EC). In 2024, we introduced updates and pilot programs to Wild Rose competitions. The goal was to enhance provincial level competitions while prioritizing safety and equine welfare. We are early in the 2025 competition season so there are only a handful of sanctioned competitions thus far. New to 2025 will be the addition of Dressage to the Wild Rose Provincial Circuit.

Competition Level	2024	2025 (as of Feb 10, 2025)
Wild Rose Competition Sanctioning (All Disciplines)	30	1
Wild Rose Schooling Show (Hunter/Jumper, Dressage)	16	6
Wild Rose Provincial Circuit (Hunter/Jumper, Dressage*) Dressage added to PC in 2025	27	1
EC Bronze	14	7
EC Silver	2	0

Win Your Entry

To enhance participation in Wild Rose competitions and foster grassroots athlete development, we have established an incentive program. Each Wild Rose competition provides us with a comprehensive list of all entrants. From this list, one participant is randomly selected to receive a reimbursement of entry fees, up to a maximum of \$100. For 2024, a total of 16 Wild Rose competition participants received \$1324.00 in reimbursements for the 2024 season.

Wild Rose Competition Program updates

We made several updates in 2024 to the Wild Rose Competition Program for the equestrian community to adapt to the changing landscape of equestrian sport and improve the overall experience. These updates are aimed at enhancing the value of Wild Rose competitions, while also raising the standards of safety, inclusivity, and horse welfare. For 2025, dressage has been added to the Provincial Circuit, providing points accumulations and year end awards for our Wild Rose Dressage competitors.

Officials Program

As the Wild Rose Competition Program continues to expand and evolve, it is essential that our Officials program offers robust professional development opportunities for both existing and new officials. This will empower them to perform their roles effectively at AEF-sanctioned competitions. In 2025, the AEF will partner with competition managers to organize official clinics that coincide with Wild Rose competitions, ensuring our officials are well-equipped to meet the demands of their responsibilities.

Current Officials

	As of Feb 10/25
Total Number of AEF Carded Officials	60
General Performance Official	21
Hunter/Jumper Official	24
Dressage Official	13
Driving Official	3
Carded Steward	7

Education and Coaching Programs

National Coach Developer Symposium 2025

AEF will host a **2025 National Coach Developer Symposium and PTSO/EC Leadership Meetings** in Calgary from September 8–12, 2025. The AEF is leading the organization in collaboration with EC. The Sport and Recreation Manager is chairing the symposium planning committee, while the Executive Director is overseeing the leadership meetings, ensuring a strong strategic focus. The Project and Event Coordinator is managing logistics and assisting with select sessions, with all AEF staff contributing as the event approaches. This combined event will facilitate critical discussions on coach development, leadership, and sport governance, with a particular emphasis on expanding Coach Developer (CD) training. AEF successfully secured \$20,000 in funding from the National Education Fund (PTSO funds) from EC to support this initiative, reinforcing its commitment to enhancing coaching accessibility and national collaboration.

Coach Developer Training Expansion

A comprehensive review of the CD team identified a significant gap in Edmonton and surrounding areas, where there is a need for additional CD training. Expanding the number of trained CDs in this region will directly support the growth of certified instructors and coaches, particularly in northern Alberta. Addressing this gap aligns with our strategic goal of increasing coaching accessibility and capacity across the province.

Locker System Record Corrections – A National First

Our province is the first in Canada to successfully correct all CDs' records in the locker system, resolving a long-standing issue that has affected the equestrian community for decades. This

achievement was made possible through a collaborative effort between AEF, the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), and EC. The process we developed is now being adopted by other PTSOs to rectify their own records. The CD team has expressed immense gratitude, as this correction ensures accurate certification records and recognition for their qualifications. The project was successfully completed in December 2024.

Learn to Ride Rider Levels and Assessments – Growing!

Participation in the Learn to Ride Western and English program has shown fluctuations over the years. In 2018, there were 96 assessments conducted, increasing to 106 in 2019. However, participation declined in 2020 and 2021, with 81 and 77 assessments, respectively, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant rebound occurred in 2022, with assessments rising to 169, followed by continued growth in 2023 with 203 assessments. In 2024, the program reached its highest participation level to date, with 206 assessments conducted.

Coaching Program – Growing!

AEF continues to make significant strides in its coaching program, ranking third among provinces in Canada for the highest number of certified instructors and coaches, following Ontario and Quebec. In 2024, AEF certified 28 new instructors and coaches, up from 26 in 2023, with an additional six instructors from the Fall 2024 Cohort still completing their evaluation process. The EC NCCP English and Western Cohorts saw steady participation, with the Winter 2024 Cohort enrolling 14 candidates and the Fall 2024 Cohort welcoming 17 candidates. While many successfully met certification standards, some opted to postpone their evaluations for additional practice or required re-evaluation. The upcoming Winter 2025 Cohort currently has 21 candidates, who are completing their theory portion before evaluations begin in May.

In-person evaluations played a crucial role in the certification process, with private and public coaching evaluations taking place across Alberta. The English Private In-Person Coaching Evaluation in Calgary resulted in two successful certifications, while an evaluation in Sherwood Park saw three candidates achieve English Competition Coach certification. The English Public In-Person Coaching Evaluation faced challenges, including a canceled prep clinic due to low registration, but still saw five successful certifications at the evaluation in Carseland. As AEF's coaching program continues to grow, the organization remains committed to providing quality training and evaluation opportunities to support equestrian professionals in Alberta.

Recreation – Trails, Public Awareness and Safety Projects

Final Report for Crown Land Recreation Partnership Grant

Funded by the Public Lands Trail Program Grant, the trail initiative projects comprised of:

Responsible Trail Use: This project aimed to create equestrian trail riding instructional videos covering best practices and safety regarding trail riding. Filming was conducted in September near Didsbury. Many thanks to Banff Trail Riders for providing the location, staff, horses, and equipment needed. Thanks also to Corus Entertainment for organizing, filming, and producing the films.

Share the Trails: This program was designed to share and promote information to various trail users about sharing the trails with equestrians and safe practices. In 2024, the team returned to Canmore to host a trail safety day alongside the Bow Valley Riding Association, Canmore and Area Mountain Biking Association, the Alpine Club of Canada, and the Biosphere Institute.

In addition to the trail safety days, 100 metal trail signs were purchased, adding to the 50 that had been purchased prior to this grant. Of the 150 signs, 124 were sent out to the equestrian community. 1,000 Share the Trail brochures and magnets were also distributed.

Unite the Trails: The Unite the Trails Virtual Conference brought together equestrian trail riders from Alberta to discuss important topics such as securing government funding and planning for trail maintenance and enhancement. The conference focused on key points such as the importance of unified advocacy, the proposal for a provincial umbrella organization, and specific action items to improve trail maintenance. On the one-page AEF strategic plan what is the fifth priority listed? The first two board members that reply with the correct answer, will win a prize. The discussions addressed challenges related to trail conditions, permit acquisition for maintenance, chainsaw certification, standardized trail classifications, and improved maintenance prioritization. The conference successfully united equestrian trail riders and fostered collaboration for better trail maintenance and funding in Alberta. Comprehensive conference materials, including recordings and summaries, were made available for those who could not attend.

The final report was submitted on November 13, 2024, and we received some very positive feedback about the final reporting.

Public Lands Trail Program Grant Application

On Dec. 6, 2024, we applied for \$105,952 from the same funding listed above, the Public Lands Trail Program Grant, to fund the 2025 Trail Stewardship and Safety Project which will consist of three key components (projects):

- A) **Equestrian Trail GIS Mapping and Cataloging:** A multi-year project leveraging GIS technology to identify and map equestrian trails on Public Land Use Zones across Alberta, culminating in a comprehensive catalog of AEF Trail Maps.
- B) **AEF Public Awareness Outreach Campaign:** Creating and broadcasting public service announcements/commercials to promote responsible trail use, with outreach to the public through local TV networks, radio, and social media.
- C) **Mesa Butte North Fork Staging Area Safety and Access Improvements Feasibility Study:** Addressing safety and access challenges at the Mesa Butte trailhead to accommodate diverse user groups, including equestrians, stock owners, and STARS.

Our application was received, and a few additional questions were asked. Additional information was provided to the Public Lands Manager in January, and AEF is awaiting the province's final decision.

Conclusion and Closing Remarks

AEF continues to make significant progress in its operational and strategic objectives. Through enhancements in membership engagement, financial sustainability, communications, and competition development, we are strengthening our organization and fostering long-term growth.

Key initiatives, including database improvements, refined membership strategies, and an enhanced communications approach position us well for the future. Our commitment to transparency, innovation, and member service remains at the forefront of all activities. As we move forward, we remain dedicated to adapting to industry shifts while ensuring we provide meaningful value to our members and stakeholders.

This report reflects the collective efforts of our team, volunteers, and partners who contribute to our shared vision. We appreciate the board's ongoing support and look forward to continuing to drive success in Alberta's equestrian community.

Respectfully Submitted

Sonia Dantu