

Cumulus at

30

The CEB VII Strategic Plan
2019–2022

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Introduction

This Strategic Plan captures the direction and priorities of the Cumulus Association under the stewardship of the current Cumulus Executive Board VII (CEB VII) elected by Cumulus members in June 2019 for a three year service through 2022. The three-year plan builds on the strengths and values of Cumulus as a thriving global association.

With 2020 marking the 30th anniversary since Cumulus' founding in 1990, our association has experienced a trajectory of remarkable growth in establishing itself as an academic forum that strives for excellence and innovation in promoting a diversity of approaches to art and design education and research globally. Today, Cumulus spans all five continents and brings together more than 300 members across institutions of higher learning that are distinguished for their programs in art, design and media. Cumulus' commitment to building sustainable, human-centered and creative societies, its effectiveness as a hub for academic internationalization and mobility, and its advocacy for knowledge exchange and partnerships with organizations and industries of many kinds make it a uniquely dynamic organization.

This Strategic Plan recognizes the opportunity Cumulus has to leverage a legacy of accomplishments and build on a strong foundation as a learning organization. In a context of profound changes for our association's disciplines and the field of higher education at large, the plan also proposes strategic objectives tied to projects and milestones that we believe are critical for us to realize.

As we contend with a rapidly evolving and complex landscape for cross-cultural exchange and a new era of deepening economic disparities and societal and environmental strife, Cumulus' charge to forge partnerships that create community beyond borders is more relevant than ever. The call for the Cumulus family to respond to the challenges and opportunities of our time with creativity and responsibility has never been greater.

With this strategic plan, we envision a process of organizational transformation that will ensure Cumulus keeps bringing unique value to its growing and diversifying membership. Reliant upon the association's values and focused on important pillars for action, I am confident this plan will support the objectives and aspirations of our Executive Board and will represent an essential guidepost as we continue working together with the Cumulus Secretariat and our members to secure Cumulus' future for the next thirty years and beyond.

Mariana

Mariana Amatullo, PhD
President, Cumulus
June 2020

Our Strategic Planning Approach

The strategic plan distills discussions that have taken place amongst our Executive Board over several months, particularly during the period of August 2019 through February 2020 during the first seven months of our mandate.

The plan is the outcome of a shared governance process the Board followed through several hands-on strategic planning workshop sessions during the Cumulus Board meetings of Medellín and Bogotá in October 2019 and New York City in February 2020. While the Board finalized the strategic plan only shortly before the virtual Cumulus General Assembly of June 2020, the pillars that provide the framework for the plan as well as the key initiatives and projects within the plan came together and were launched shortly after our first Board meeting in October 2019. Since then, we have taken “a divide and conquer approach” with Board sub-committees that have been making steady progress on a number of initiatives already. Our changing world of closed borders and disrupted travel in the wake of the COVID19 pandemic has naturally impacted our Cumulus conferences and plans for 2020 short-term. However, on a more positive note, the crisis has accelerated some of our Board’s project priorities such as the launch of new virtual programs and spaces for engagement for our members. Now that the full strategic plan is in place, we anticipate to advance our work with full speed ahead.

Our strategic planning approach has involved examining Cumulus’ theory of change, and we have embarked on a rigorous analysis of our association’s internal capabilities and our external environment. Throughout, our process has pushed us to interrogate ways to continue bringing maximum value to our members.

The purpose of our strategic plan is to draw from an aspirational vision for Cumulus that builds on the strengths of our association and our mission and values. The strategic plan connects that vision with a set of three pillars or focus areas that have emerged as a priority framework for our Executive Board to channel our efforts. The framework of our pillars is in turn linked to strategic objectives and projects with milestones that cascade from our key focus areas and point to what success might look like for this plan.

Our New Strategic Plan stems from our core mission and values and sets the vision we have for Cumulus to thrive in the future

Cumulus Mission

Cumulus' underlying purpose is captured in this updated statement that stems from our association's Statutes. We draw from it in our plan.

Cumulus is the leading global association to serve art and design education and research. We are a dynamic forum for knowledge exchange and best practices and a committed advocate for the positive role of designers and artists in shaping a better world.

Our Values

Values unite us. They represent core beliefs that keep us aligned and true to our mission.

Cumulus' aims and tasks as articulated in our Statutes point to the core values of our association. During our strategic planning process we challenged ourselves to examine these values closely and surfaced opportunities to inform our objectives by re-asserting the significance of these values.

We value **excellence** and **innovation** in art, design and media

We value the power of **dialogue** and **global engagement**

We value the **diversity** of our members and the **plurality** of their approaches to pedagogy, research and practice

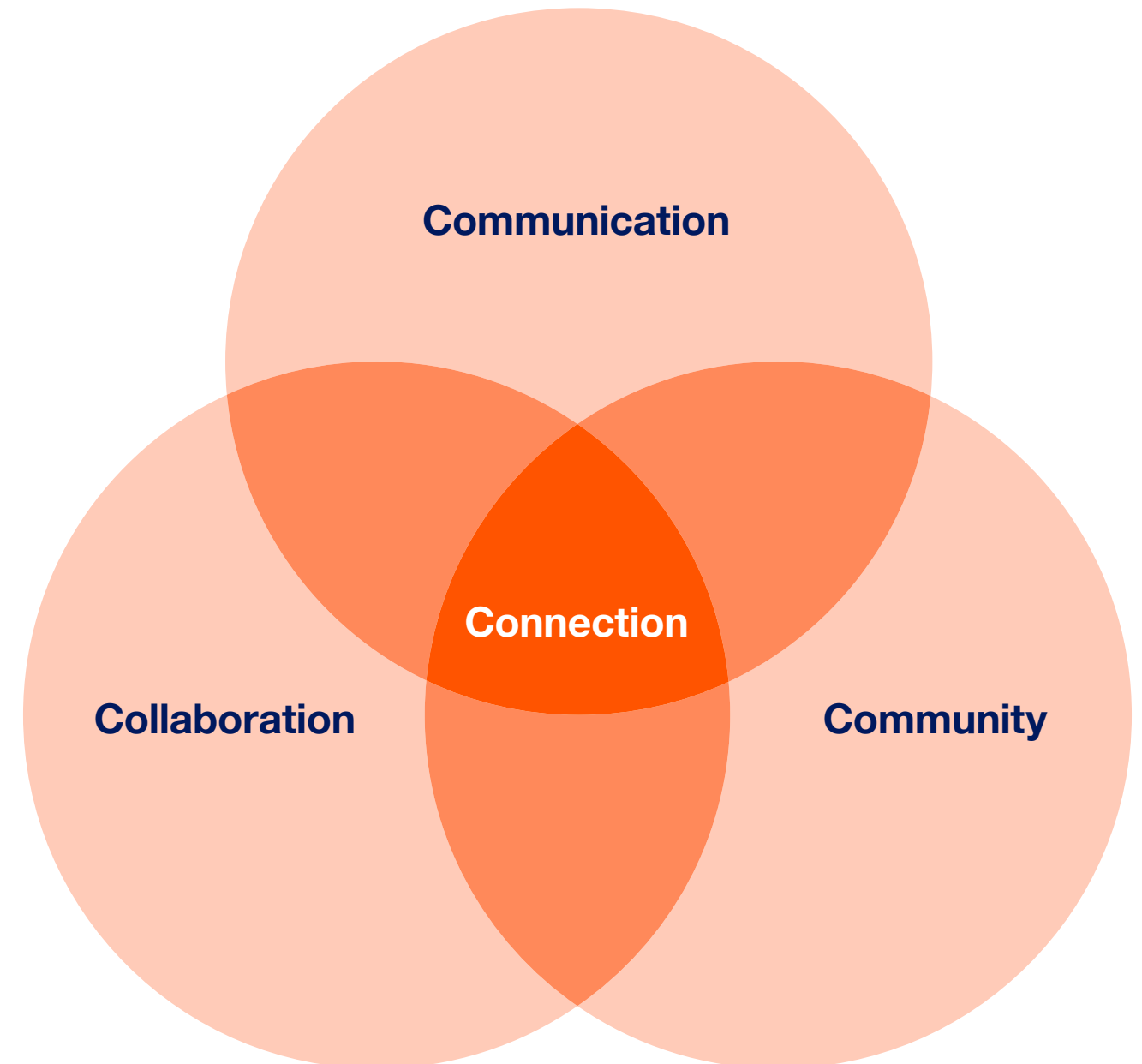
We value the **social and environmental responsibility** of our disciplines

Our Vision

All strategic plans are driven by a clear vision statement that encapsulates what we stand for and where we want to go. The focus areas, strategic objectives and projects that we outline in this strategic plan are meant to contribute significantly to advancing this vision.

To be the premier global network that brings together art and design educational institutions of higher learning to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange in pedagogy, research and practice, forming a community that leads by design and promotes the role of designers and artists in creating sustainable and humane futures for all.

Our Pillars: Communication, Collaboration and Community The 3 C's



Communication

In its basic definition, communication is a process by which information is imparted and exchanged. As the leading global association of art, media and design colleges and universities, Cumulus has become an increasingly dynamic and distributed network.

Our association lives amidst a rich and diverse landscape of other regional and international networks and professional organizations, many are also our partners. In this context, the capacity for Cumulus to devise a multi-faceted communication strategy that stands out with authenticity, leverages digital and social media networks, and connects our members and partners via accessible, interactive and participatory channels, is a chief imperative as we contemplate Cumulus' next 30 years.

Collaboration

To establish a network for collaboration beyond institutional and country boundaries was a key motivation for the founding of Cumulus shortly after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1990.

The steady work of our Secretariat and that of our prior Presidents and Boards has extended that original vision. Today Cumulus counts robust partnerships with a number of prestigious associations, organizations and networks globally. Fully leveraging the growing scope of these partnerships strategically will demand that we rely on new practices, systems and resources.

For our members, the substantive collaborations that ensue from our conferences and working groups are at the root of the distinct value proposition of our network. The diversity of regions, academic environments and cultures represented by our growing membership invite renewed opportunities for connection and “creative linking.” As we contemplate our future, it will be of critical importance that we expand access to modes and platforms for inclusive collaboration that will keep our interactions intentional and meaningful.

Community

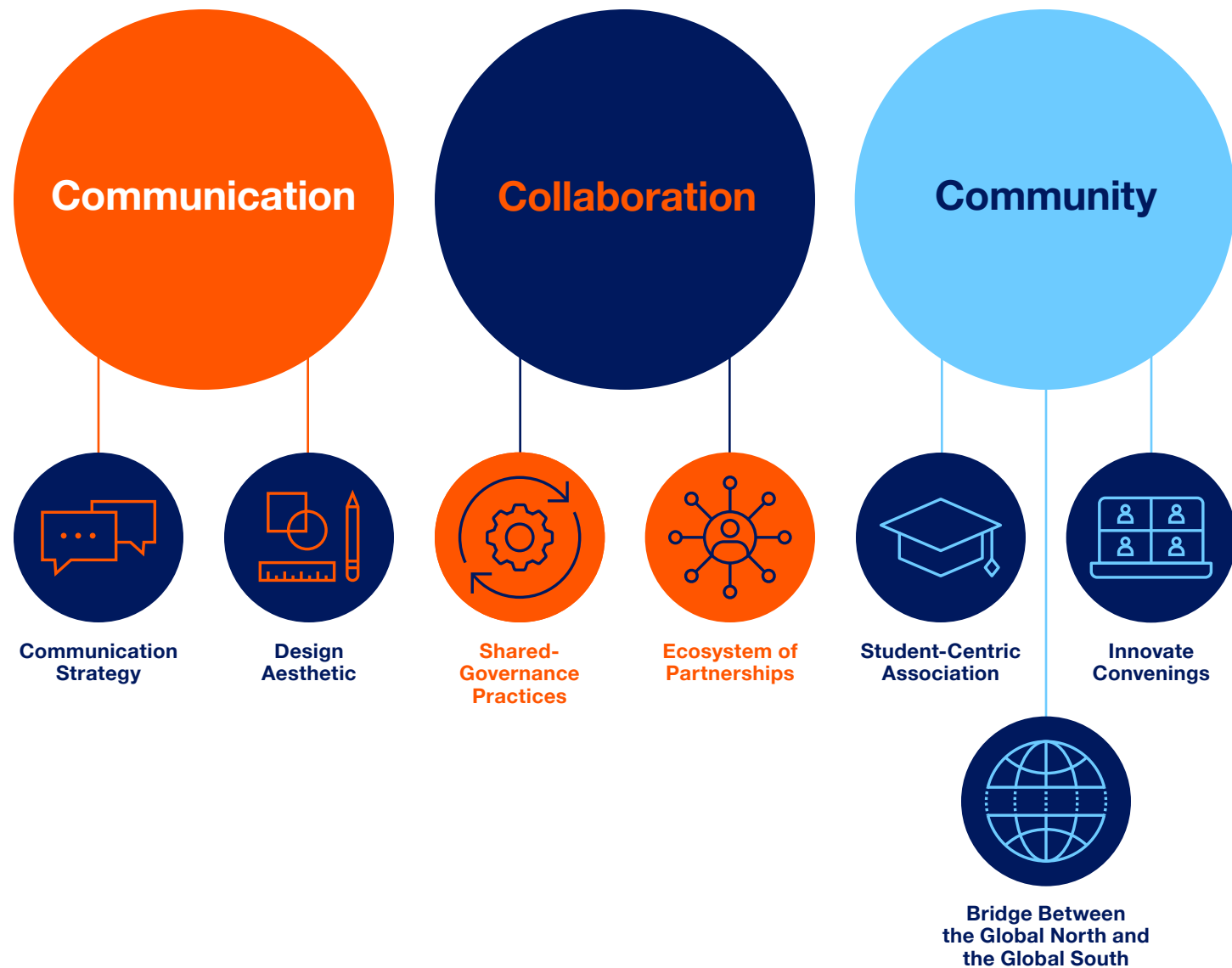
Community typically connotes a sense of a common purpose and “belonging” in a group and manifests in the touch points that our communications and activities make tangible. As we grow in scale and geographical diversity, new questions arise about how we might design new means for institutions to access our membership.

We must continue strengthening our governance, competencies and resources to meet the evolving needs of our members. It will be critical to make plans for sustainable growth. We have an important responsibility to develop programming that honors the distributed nature of our network in the Global North and Global South, while serving a plurality of stakeholders in our institutions, including faculty and staff as well as our students. Cultivating a truly inclusive Cumulus community that comes together via a broad typology of activities, from face-to-face networking to virtual encounters is paramount.

In a world made more uncertain due to climate change and a degraded environment, the ecological footprint of our actions as a global network should rise to the forefront of our awareness as we move forward. We have the responsibility to harness the legacy of our association as a champion of responsible global citizenship with influential manifestos such as the Kyoto Design Declaration. In a context of urgency and high stakes, our community is uniquely poised to be an effective advocate for the role of art and design in shaping sustainable and human-centered societies that may fulfill the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our Strategic Objectives

We have identified **seven strategic objectives** that are aligned with our three pillars and represent the high level areas that we must tackle to advance Cumulus forward at this time in its history.



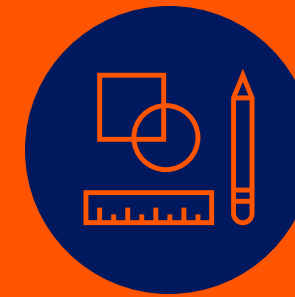
Communication Pillar

Stemming from the Communication Pillar we have identified the following two objectives



1. Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Communication Strategy

We will create a new digital and multi-channel communication platform for Cumulus that will integrate an editorial strategy for high-quality content generation and leverage new technologies with the goals of 1) making our information more accessible and effective, 2) activating engagement with our members and partners and 3) deepening our commitment to knowledge exchange of timely content. Our comprehensive approach to communication will broaden Cumulus' outreach globally and maximize our members' visibility, enabling new communities of practice to form and dialogue.



2. Embrace a Contemporary and Inclusive Design Aesthetic

We will work to continue elevating the Cumulus unique brand by infusing all of our programs and activities with a contemporary and inclusive design aesthetic that is in keeping with our standing as the only association of universities and colleges of art, design and media.

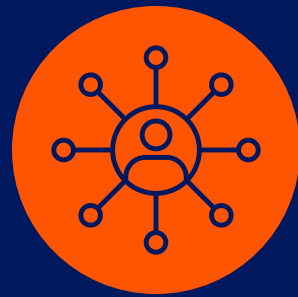
Collaboration Pillar

Stemming from the Collaboration Pillar we have identified the following two objectives



1. Strengthen our Shared-Governance Practices

We will identify strengths and gaps, adopt the necessary new systems and further codify our processes for decision-making to maximize responsiveness to our members' needs. We will reinforce the transparency of all of our association's operations, following a structure that puts partnership, accountability, and shared ownership front and center. We will adopt a new financial planning process that will aim to identify additional opportunities and actions to ensure Cumulus continues on a path of sustainable growth.



2. Build upon our Ecosystem of Partnerships

We will nurture existing partnerships of value; we will revisit dormant alliances and we will assess how to put in place additional criteria and processes to prioritize efforts in order to continue diversifying our ecosystem of partnerships. We will target the development of new strategic partnerships intended to increase our impact and reach as an association committed to a global citizenship agenda that advocates for the role of artists and designers as positive agents of societal change. We will aspire to become "a network of networks," that inclusively mobilizes our collaborators to further the influence of our disciplines.

Community Pillar

Stemming from the Community Pillar we have identified the following three objectives



3. Evolve Cumulus to Become a More Student-Centric Association

Building on successful initiatives such as the Cumulus Student Ambassador's Program and the Cumulus Green competitions, we will identify activities and facilitate the shaping of new programming that will help create an expanded presence of our students in our conferences. Via an intentional engagement strategy, we will bring forward our students' perspectives into the core of the Cumulus family, celebrating a vibrant student community that will have an increased sense of belonging and connection to our association.



4. Innovate our Convenings

We will explore new formats in our conferences and virtual convenings to foster a sense of community that may mobilize different stakeholders (from academics to practitioners) and champion the open flow of ideas, dialogue and transfer of knowledge among our members. Virtual convenings and the activities of our Working Groups will allow broader participation and embrace a globally diverse body of members—an effort bound to expand on the number of pioneering Institutions that will be able to access and join the Cumulus family.



5. Create a Bridge Between the Global North and the Global South

As a global community, we will seek to advance contemporary knowledge, debate and dialogue about art and design discourses and practices in the Global North and in the Global South. The aspiration will be to create new bridges for reflection, exchange and learning via our members and partners and within the context of our conferences and programs. As part and parcel of this work we will also launch a systematic effort to attract new members in underrepresented regions.

Our Projects: What Success Will Look Like by 2022

The following are our priority projects. Their realization will make our strategic plan actionable and successful by the end of our term.

1. Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Communication Strategy

- We will increase the substance of our communications with an intentional editorial strategy for all of our publications
- We will strengthen our social media presence and messaging
- We will adopt an iterative approach to building an interactive digital platform that increases member engagement, houses virtual programming and fosters partnership connections
- We will commission a new website that builds new capacity and visibility for Cumulus and its members

2. Embrace a Contemporary and Inclusive Design Aesthetic

- We will survey our members and engage them in a participatory research process to update our mission and vision statements, aligning these with the evolving state of our association
- Grounded on a study of the legacy of Cumulus to date and the current competitive landscape for art and design international organizations, we will refresh our visual identity to express who we are as a global association with renewed relevance
- We will develop and implement a new visual system for Cumulus that establishes clear standards for the use of our marks and imagery, reinforcing the positioning of our brand and the design aesthetic of our association

3. Strengthen our Shared-Governance Practices

- We will further codify our governance processes to work collaboratively, efficiently and ethically
- We will identify opportunities to strengthen practices that further the transparency and accountability of our decision-making
- We will help our association become more data-driven and leverage our research in the service of our members
- In keeping with best practices of international associations, we will introduce the Treasurer role in the Executive Board and jump-start new efforts to design a financial plan for sustainable growth and the long-term financial health of our association
- We will build a Strategic Reserve Fund from Cumulus Assets and consider secure investment models for the association

4. Build upon our Ecosystem of Partnerships

- We will organize our partnership agreements as part of a systematic repository that will help improve the project management and tracking of the goals, commitments and outcomes of our collaborations
- We will start a practice of establishing clear criteria and sunset clauses in all MOUs to invite the opportunity to periodically assess and strengthen the work with partners over time, maximizing joint learning and reinforcing trust
- We will explore partnering “outside the box:” we will seek mission-aligned organizations, industry partners, foundations and networks that can amplify our ability to secure new resources and bring new initiatives and value to our members
- We will develop consistent communication protocols to amplify the visibility of our strategic alliances and celebrate how we are better together than alone

5. Evolve Cumulus to Become a More Student-Centric Association

- We will build on the latest lessons and accomplishments from the Cumulus Green competition series and establish a playbook for the competition to continue running every two years, leveraging the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals as the basis for the competition brief
- We will re-launch the Cumulus Ambassador Program with an updated series of features and benefits informed by the insights of our existing Cumulus Student Ambassadors
- We will survey our students and explore how to design a “for students, by students” platform. We will create dedicated student-based spaces for learning and exchange, for showcasing work, and for publishing and networking in our conferences and programs
- We will establish new channels of communication to feature stories and perspectives from our students on a regular basis and identify new grant opportunities and financial support to expand access

6. Innovate our Convenings

- We will initiate a new dialogue with the Cumulus family to understand expectations, needs and aspirations for how Cumulus conferences might evolve in formats, frequency and participant experience. Our goal will be to articulate updated criteria that will allow us to keep upholding the “magic sauce” of the Cumulus conferences while fostering innovation
- Building on the contributions of prior Boards and the know-how of our Secretariat, we will design a new conference handbook as a tool for our members and conference hosts.
- We will work to revise the process and improve upon the guidelines of our call for conference proposals with the aim of providing new tools and resources for members to have a seamless experience in interfacing with our application process and to develop stronger proposals
- We will strengthen Cumulus’ key programming and the presence and contributions of Cumulus Working Groups and strategic partners in our conferences

7. Create a Bridge Between the Global North and the Global South

- Building on the work of prior Boards, we will investigate how to establish new inclusive fee models in order to open Cumulus to institutions that have not been able to afford participation in our network
- We will research the possibility of establishing a solidarity model for institutional membership and conference fees to increase access to our network
- We will survey partner networks and key institutions in the Global South to learn how to improve on an intentional outreach strategy to continue increasing the diversity of our membership and programming
- While upholding English as our association’s lingua franca we will explore new opportunities to design and host programming that recognizes the multiplicity of our members’ cultures and languages, helping facilitate inclusive spaces for all to come together

Our Board, CEB VII (2019–2022) is constituted by Mariana Amatullo, Cumulus President; Rachel K.B. Troye and Philipp Heidkamp, Vice Presidents; Adam de Eyto, Board Treasurer and Board Members José Allard, Lorenzo Imbesi, Michael Krohn, Teemu Leinonen, Robin Turner, Anne Pikkov and Xiao Yong.

Acknowledgments

In putting together the Cumulus at 30 Strategic Plan of CEB VII, our Board recognizes that it stands on the shoulders of many of our colleagues in prior Cumulus Boards who have helped bring Cumulus to its current stage of maturity and success over the past thirty years. We are also especially grateful for the inspiration and leadership from our Presidents Yrjö Sotamaa (Cumulus President Emeritus), Christian Guellerin and Luisa Collina (Honorary Presidents).

As we look ahead, we are thankful for the partnership and hard work of our Cumulus Secretariat team, Eija Salmi and Justyna Molik, as well as for the support of Aalto University as the host institution of our Secretariat through 2025. As we take the next steps, we invite partners and members to reach out to us with ideas that may inform the initiatives and projects we outline. Here's to our collaboration!

cumulusassociation.org