



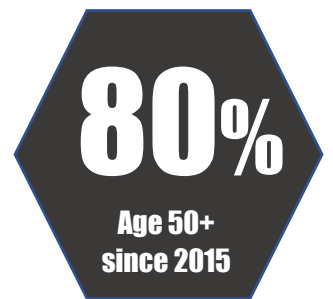
A ROAD MAP FOR EXPANDING H.M.G.S. INC.

2023 Proposal by Greg Wagman & Miles Reidy

SUMMARY

HMGS Inc. provides an invaluable service to historical wargamers across the US mid-Atlantic and beyond. Organizing live, in-person conventions is the ultimate expression of our social hobby. Over the last decade, the challenges confronting HMGS have become increasingly clear—an aging membership, steadily eroding show attendance, and rising monetary inflation escalating show costs. HMGS is not alone in facing these challenges. Internationally, historical wargaming is “graying” at an escalating rate, as well. Thanks to years of data from the WSS Great Wargaming Survey, averaging over 10,000 responses per year, we know that our hobby has seen an **80% increase** in gamers over the age of 50 between 2015 and 2022.

Despite the challenges, there are reasons for optimism. “Gaming culture” has never been more popular among young people, board gaming has experienced a renaissance, 3D printing will continue making miniatures more accessible, and social media tools allow us low-cost access to a global audience. To seize on these positive trends, HMGS cannot stand still. Outstanding initiatives like NextGen have been advanced, but more work lies ahead. Now, more than ever, our members need to consider forward-thinking changes focused on three growth priorities:



- 1. INCREASE CONVENTION ATTENDANCE**
- 2. IMPROVE THE CONVENTION EXPERIENCE**
- 3. IMPROVE HMGS INC. CASH FLOW**

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper details ten recommendations, each of which speak to one or more of the priorities above. These are presented as specific, actionable initiatives, many of which can be adopted in less than a year.

- 1. Consolidate to Two Flagship Shows**
- 2. Sponsor Smaller Regional Events**
- 3. Revamp the Awards Program**
- 4. Saturday Night Signature**
- 5. Walk Up Opportunities**
- 6. Offer Premium Services**
- 7. Re-Evaluate HMGS Membership**
- 8. Showcase Event Signage**
- 9. Exit Surveys**
- 10. Hire a Social Media Manager**

CONSOLIDATE TO TWO FLAGSHIP SHOWS

THE PROBLEM: HMGS Inc. currently organizes three shows each calendar year: Colds Wars in March, Historicon in July, and Fall In in November. Adepticon's impact on Cold Wars is a well-known, specific issue. But it is only one example of the challenges HMGS faces in the future for its main shows: (1) Calendar competition with other events; (2) An aging, declining membership; (3) A limited pool of volunteers to assist at all levels; (4) Falling show attendance; (5) Difficulty securing quality venues with enough floor space to host a large show.



PROPOSED SOLUTION: Consolidate to one large summer and one large winter show to create scarcity. This makes the remaining conventions special, “can’t miss” events. Reducing the organization’s focus to two large conventions provides more time and energy to be spent improving the quality of the shows, which will also serve to boost attendance and show profitability long-term. Board members have consistently pointed to a lack of suitable venues, which forced HMGS back to Valley Forge in 2023. Consolidation lessens the need to settle for substandard venues that run the risk of diminishing the reputation of HMGS events. To draw a larger audience, we need to focus on event *quality*, not event quantity. The board should be strongly commended for securing an affordable, longer-term agreement with the downtown Lancaster Marriott convention center. This is an example of an outstanding venue—modern, with a great convention floor plan and ample food options.

NEXT STEPS: Eliminate Cold Wars 2024. Retain Historicon as the summer show in early July. The proposed winter show should remain in November—its name could be Fall In or Cold Wars. Maintain a laser focus on improving the quality of the two main flagship shows in 2024 and beyond.

We informally polled 65,000+ viewers on Little Wars TV and learned that the quality, layout, and site amenities of a venue are major considerations motivating gamers to attend a show. High quality venues are more likely to lead to higher future turnout.



70% of wargamers say “the quality of a venue can sway my decision to attend a show.”

SPONSOR SMALLER REGIONAL EVENTS

THE PROBLEM: As noted earlier, the limited pool of HMGS board members and volunteers is already stretched thin and we cannot expect them to keep piling on more responsibilities. Trimming the primary focus to just two flagship shows reduces the workload but does raise two related problems. Fortunately, both share the same solution. One problem is that some members will be averse to change and not appreciate the loss of a March event. They may see this as a step backward. A second problem is that HMGS's overall lack of shows means it struggles to provide wide geographic representation for interested members up and down the US East Coast.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: The loss of one large show can be offset by regional events catering to fewer attendees in smaller venues. HMGS faces well-known challenges locating venues with sufficient floor space for flagship events, but shows with a projected attendance of 500 or less will open doors to a new world of venue possibilities. As a bonus, many vendors would find the prospect of new geographic locations an exciting opportunity to reach a fresh customer base. Let's consider two potential approaches for how HMGS might support localized, regional shows:

STARTING FRESH

Creating a new show—even a small one—requires significant logistical effort and 1-2 years of diligent planning. An enthusiastic sponsoring club would need to help spearhead local efforts, backed by financial and organizational support from HMGS. A leading volunteer within that club should be brought on as Assistant Convention Director for one of the 2024 HMGS shows to gain collaborative operational experience.

SPONSORED BRANDING

Rather than kickstart a new show, HMGS can co-brand or become a leading advertiser for a smaller, existing regional wargaming event. These are 150-250 person shows with an existing infrastructure that HMGS could inject with additional funding to expand, or simply advertise for exposure. Feeder shows like ScrumCon can serve as a hub for regional recruitment to funnel new members to HMGS's flagship events.

NEXT STEPS: To start, HMGS can allocate funds to become a primary, well-displayed advertising sponsor of multiple existing regional shows, as they have smartly done with ScrumCon in recent years. These efforts might also include a showpiece participation game (subsidized by HMGS) with HMGS branded signage and flyers. Meanwhile, recruitment efforts should be made in 2023-24 to identify an active club outside of the core PA-NJ-MD market that could serve as a future co-sponsor for a *new* show. Proper training and planning will require years, but a clear goal could be set now to find this partner, develop local infrastructure, and aim to start a new regional event in 2025-6, with a first-year attendance goal of 250+ visitors. Emphasis south of Washington DC or north of New York could expand HMGS's geographic reach. Toward this end, we understand that tentative steps are already being taken in North Carolina. This is an excellent start.



REPURPOSING COLD WARS?

If Cold Wars is eliminated as a casualty of focusing on two flagship shows, why not consider re-branding Cold Wars as the first new, regional show? A slimmed-down size and regional approach opens the door to exciting new venues that HMGS would have previously considered too small for a full-size convention.

REVAMP THE AWARDS PROGRAM

THE PROBLEM: Everyone likes to be recognized for their work. Game Masters are no exception. It's difficult for a convention attendee to know which games have won awards or see those games spotlighted after the show. "Best of Show" is not even awarded until Sunday, by which time most attendees have already left. In some cases, major awards are not announced until well after a show has ended! This robs GMs of opportunities for recognition and attendees of opportunities to see the best games in person. Winning games are not even spotlighted after the show with quality photographs available online. What does Historicon 2022's "Best of Show" winning game look like? Not sure. Inexplicably, no photos are posted or organized.



SOURCING PHOTOS

HMGS deserves credit for a smart, recent initiative to leave business cards on the tables of award-winning sessions, encouraging attendees to email their photos of award-winning games directly to HMGS. This is a creative idea. Here's another—could the judges themselves take and share photos of the winners?

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Offer a wider range of awards to spread more recognition among Game Masters. "Best Terrain Modelling" or "Best Participation Demo Game" are examples of new categories that could be offered. Game Masters who have won previous "Best of Show" awards should be noted in the PEL for attendees to see. Banners or table signs could be placed at prior award-winning Game Master tables for attendees to easily identify. HMGS should prioritize social media coverage of all award winners, including at least one high-quality photo of each winning game. These should be available on the HMGS.org website, as well as shared on platforms liked Facebook, where HMGS's account is largely inactive.

NEXT STEPS: Identify new award categories and implement them immediately, at Historicon 2023. Ensure all show awards are announced no later than Saturday night, at the show. Compile a centralized list of previous award winners for each show, stretching back at least 5 years. Note award winning Game Masters in the Historicon PEL and commission at least 5 printed banners for "BEST OF SHOW" former winners, to be placed at their tables on convention day. Appoint a Social Media Manager and turn over the HMGS Facebook account to the manager for Historicon 2023. Direct show award judges to photograph winning tables with modern cell phones or a HMGS-owned camera for social media posting.

GM AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

HMGS should establish a private Facebook Group, by invitation only, for award-winning GMs. This provides the organization with direct points of contact with top contributors and a way for those gamers to connect, as well.

It's also the ideal recruiting pool for games HMGS may want to directly sponsor at Adepticon or PAX for exposure.



Facebook Groups

There are alternatives to Facebook. It could be as simple as a private, HMGS-managed email list!

SATURDAY NIGHT SIGNATURE

THE PROBLEM: Throughout the 1990s, Saturday nights were considered a highlight of each HMGS show, packed with all-night gaming and a party atmosphere. Today, due largely to an aging membership, Saturday nights are increasingly deserted. Many attendees leave to begin driving home Saturday afternoon. This also leads to slower Sunday turnouts, which also impacts vendors.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Create and promote a signature event Saturday night of each tentpole show. This could be a special Wally's Basement free session, one of the existing tournaments, a new tournament, or a board game event. A major show award announcement for "Best of Show" and "Best Theme Game" should be made with much fanfare on Saturday night as a further incentive to stay the night.

NEXT STEPS: Survey convention attendees with a Historicon 2023 exit survey to develop a list of signature event ideas. Immediately implement an award announcement program for Saturday night.

WALK UP OPPORTUNITIES

THE PROBLEM: Registration for games—whether done online or in person at the show—can present an intimidating barrier to new show attendees. Newcomers should be a special target demographic for HMGS to improve long-term attendance. But even for experienced convention-goers and day-trippers, providing opportunities for shorter games would allow them to engage with more games. Many events run at HMGS conventions are 3-5 hours long (in part, because Game Masters are trying to qualify for free admission). Not every attendee has the time or inclination to commit half of their day to one game.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Encourage and promote opportunities for shorter games, in addition to the standard, longer-format games. Demo games in the vendor hall are an excellent avenue to engage with attendees, though floor space here can present a challenge at certain venues (see Recommendation #1 for why venue selection is so critical). Changing the format for how Game Masters can qualify for free show admission could create opportunities for short-form games that include openings for unregistered "walk up" players. Might an expansion of demo games by manufacturers also be an add-on revenue opportunity for HMGS?

NEXT STEPS: Test pilot a walk-up demo experience at Historicon 2023 with no preregistration option. GMs who agree to run demo games should be eligible for awards and free admission. Print and provide large, clear signage identifying these demos as "Walk Up" experiences so attendees know they can join freely.



CHARGE FOR PREMIUM SERVICES

THE PROBLEM: HMGS suffers from limited (and shrinking) revenue streams, saddled with high expenses to organize and stage conventions. Show attendance has been on a steady slide for over a decade, well *before* COVID. Over a 15-year period, Historicon attendance declined over **30%**. COVID marked a particularly devastating inflection point for gross revenue and operating margins. When studying the two-year periods before and after the 2020 lockdown year, gross revenue dropped **61%** and operating margins collapsed by **72%**. It's clear that HMGS needs to develop new income streams and bump up existing streams for better cash flow.

THE INCOME STATEMENT

As a nonprofit, HMGS's tax returns are public record from the IRS. Over the last 5-year period, net reported income averaged just \$4,756. The only two sources of regular income are conventions and dues.

\$4,756

2017-22 avg.
annual income

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
ANNUAL REVENUE	\$295,817	\$310,117	\$320,312	\$90,166	\$117,146	\$128,145
ANNUAL EXPENSES	\$273,110	\$277,672	\$306,929	\$142,807	\$113,132	\$199,517
NET OPERATING INCOME	\$22,707	\$32,445	\$13,383	\$52,641	\$4,014	\$8,628
COLD WARS ATTENDANCE	2,009	1,812	1,812	1,438	-	-
HISTORICON ATTENDANCE	2,353	2,579	2,168	-	1,822	2,148
FALL IN ATTENDANCE	1,797	1,620	1,563	-	-	1,556

PROPOSED SOLUTION: We can look to other “for profit” gaming conventions across the country to see ideas in action. Some of these include premium services that could be offered for an additional cost with little to no additional investment by HMGS. Hobby University is an excellent example, where a limited number of specific classes could be offered as Premium courses. Instructors for those classes would need to be compensated with a percentage of sign-up fees. “Early Bird” pre-registration windows for games in the PEL or “First Look” room block deals could be offered for an incremental, upgraded cost. There are any number of opportunities for HMGS to increase show revenue with add-ons.

NEXT STEPS: Survey convention attendees with a Historicon 2023 exit survey to find out what perks they would be most interested to see in the future. Test a “premium convention badge” model at Fall In 2023.



Adepticon's ticket model offers tiers from \$25 to \$100, plus an additional \$5—\$25 per game played. Could a similar format work for HMGS? It's one possible approach worth considering through forecasting.

RE-EVALUATE HMGS MEMBERSHIP

THE PROBLEM: HMGS Inc. derives approximately 20% of its annual revenue from membership dues. This represents one of the only regular income streams for the organization, but the “benefits” of membership are few and far between. The principal benefit is a convention ticket price discount, as evidenced by plunging memberships in 2020 when COVID cancelled Historicon and Fall In. Annual membership dues fell by over 50% that year because HMGS offers no other value proposition for becoming a member. An aging attendee base only signals a future decline in membership dues.



PROPOSED SOLUTION: Membership dues should, in theory, provide HMGS with a reliable income stream uncorrelated to conventions. But this means creating additional value for members, such as exclusive access to a library of War College talks in podcast or video form. It may also be worth evaluating a more radical future approach designed to grow the size of the mailing list. Why? Because expanding the membership base gives HMGS a wider reach directly advertising upcoming shows. What if membership cost \$10 a year and did *not* include any convention ticket discount? Decoupling membership from regional convention discounts may even allow HMGS Inc to widen its appeal beyond the US East Coast and draw upon nationwide support.

NEXT STEPS: Use future exit surveys to ask members what benefits they might find useful. If sufficient value cannot be provided for membership, run a financial model to project the impact of \$10 dues.

SHOWCASE EVENT SIGNAGE

THE PROBLEM: HMGS shows feature some truly awesome tabletop wargames. It’s one of the primary reasons gamers come to the show in the first place—to be inspired by stunning terrain and miniatures! But award-winning games are not given any special placement or treatment. They are not marked with unique signage.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: HMGS could print five large “feather banners” like the ones already used to signal Hobby U or the War College. Alternatively, posters could be printed before the show noting the time *and location* of 4-5 showcase events attendees won’t want to miss. Not only does this help attendees find top quality displays, it may foster a friendly spirit of competition among GMs for the honor of getting a banner, table sign, or poster placement. The bottom line is this: **We need to spotlight our best-looking games.**

NEXT STEPS: Print five new “Showcase” banners or table signs for Historicon 2023.

At Historicon 2022, perennial award-winning GM Bruce Weigle brought his custom Malta table. It was one of the most visually impressive displays at the convention last July. But throughout the weekend, countless attendees stopped to ask us, “WHERE IS IT?”

Attendees struggled to find Bruce’s game, which was stuffed into the back corner of a dimly lit ball room with zero signage. That’s a missed opportunity.

The MALTA DILEMMA



EXIT SURVEYS

THE PROBLEM: HMGS receives direct feedback from in-person membership meetings held at off-hours during conventions. These meetings are limited to dues-paying members. And what about the vendor side of the equation? Dealer hall fees from vendor booths provide a significant source of show revenue. What proactive steps are being taken to source and collect feedback from HMGS’s vendors? A data-driven approach to both groups—attendees and vendors—could yield valuable insights for future show planning.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Establish a brief “exit survey” hosted by an online platform like Survey Monkey, which can be used to gather impressions from show attendees. Post links to the survey at the venue with clear signage, in the PEL, and directly email attendees a link when they register. Provide an on-site computer where attendees can also answer the survey immediately, on location. If survey completion rates are too low, consider offering prizes or a raffle for random entries to entice higher response rates.

NEXT STEPS: Build an exit survey with no more than a dozen questions for Historicon 2023. To provide reliable and useful future data, this survey must be developed by an HMGS member with a professional data science background. A random questionnaire will prove to be of little use without proper development.



A FEW SAMPLE QUESTIONS...

How many games did you play this weekend at our show?
 Have you ever taken a class at our free Hobby U. program?
 How many tabletop shows do you attend each year?
 Do you anticipate attending HMGS’s next event at _____?
 What would make you want to bring a friend to our next event?
 What benefits would you find useful from HMGS membership?

HIRE A SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

THE PROBLEM: We live in a social media culture, and historical miniature wargaming is no exception. Very active communities exist for tabletop gamers on YouTube, Reddit, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. HMGS has an inactive Facebook page. In today’s day and age that, quite simply, is a problem. When we posted our convention recap video on YouTube, one viewer left a typical comment: “I didn’t know about this convention though. That’s why I did not go.” And this comment was not an isolated one.

“I didn’t even know there was a convention lol.” --Bandit

PROPOSED SOLUTION: HMGS needs a far more aggressive social media presence. If volunteers within the organization cannot be found, money from the budget should be diverted to hire a social media manager as a high priority. It is almost impossible to overstate how essential it is for an organization like HMGS to be active sharing photos, short videos, and promotional material to advertise events. And due to the visual nature of our hobby, amazing photo opportunities already exist!

NEXT STEPS: Hire a professional photographer to cover Historicon 2023 and provide digital assets to HMGS. A social media manager—volunteer or paid staff—should be actively posting content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Use these assets to celebrate award winning games and promote the next convention, Fall In 2023.

THINKING BIG.

The ten ideas presented above are examples of short-term tactical planning. It's smart to start small, with achievable goals. But what about a bolder, bigger strategic vision for the future? What could that look like?

This paper specifically addresses HMGS Inc, commonly known as "HMGS East," the most financially secure chapter of what is otherwise an unrelated group of similar nonprofits. HMGS Midwest, HMGS South, and other regional entities do exist. These chapters communicate but do not coordinate on a national level. In fact, while they share the acronym H.M.G.S., the national chapters are not officially or legally related. And this comes as no surprise. After all, historical miniature wargamers are a disparate sort—thousands of hobbyists paint and play across the country, sometimes unaware of fellow gamers who live in their own city or town. There is no convenient, centralized "town square" for members of our hobby to gather, to meet, or to organize.

IMAGINE a long-term strategic plan, spearheaded by HMGS Inc., to change that.

In the ultimate example of long-term strategic planning, HMGS could establish an exploratory committee to evaluate options for an official HMGS App. This could be a game-changing proposition for a hobby lacking tools for player coordination. Everyone has a cell phone in their pocket, and a limited complexity app would provide HMGS Inc. with the means to revolutionize conventions...and much more.

The clearest application for a HMGS app is to manage conventions large and small. This app could instantly provide players with a centralized event calendar, a way to see the PEL for games being run, the ability to "tap" and register, sign up for individual games, and see the number of seats remaining in games. Hotel room blocks, Hobby U classes, and War College talks could all be tracked. A basic profile feature can collect membership dues and enable automatic renewal.

During a convention, live push notifications might alert players to open seats in signature events or enable manufacturers to announce demos in the vendor hall. This last point hints at one of many long-term ad revenue opportunities to help offset possible app development costs.

Beyond the convention experience, imagine what such an app could do for the historical hobby community outside the reach of HMGS's current East Coast footprint? This smart phone app could include a Club Finder for player groups around the country to help locate each other. Its calendar feature could include other HMGS chapter events, like Little Wars in Chicago or Huzzah in Maine. Each of these features are basic, text-based functionality. The ability to integrate tabletop photos would open the door to more exciting angles.

If this sounds like a fanciful, expensive idea...it doesn't have to be. There are commercially available apps for event management with semi-custom features like "Tabletop.Events" or off the shelf app frameworks HMGS could build on top of with a limited development budget. Even a fully custom app developed from the ground up is not out of the question as a long-term, 3 to 5-year investment. All three options should be in play.



THE ROAD FORWARD

There's so much that HMGS does *right*. We should begin by acknowledging the spirit of volunteerism that keeps this nonprofit going. And then, we should ask how the rest of the membership can build on that foundation. The suggestions in this paper are one place to start, but additional ideas can and should be solicited. Few of the proposals presented here are new and most have been suggested by members in the past. HMGS has taken strides forward in recent years, including a major initiative to spin-off HMGS NextGen as an organization dedicated to school and library outreach. We need to continue supporting forward-thinking approaches like this so that we don't stop at NextGen.

And the ideas shouldn't stop at ten. How can we incorporate historical board games into our miniature shows, appealing to the crossover crowd? What if we expanded the current board game library into active tournaments for *Undaunted* or *Axis & Allies* or other popular games?

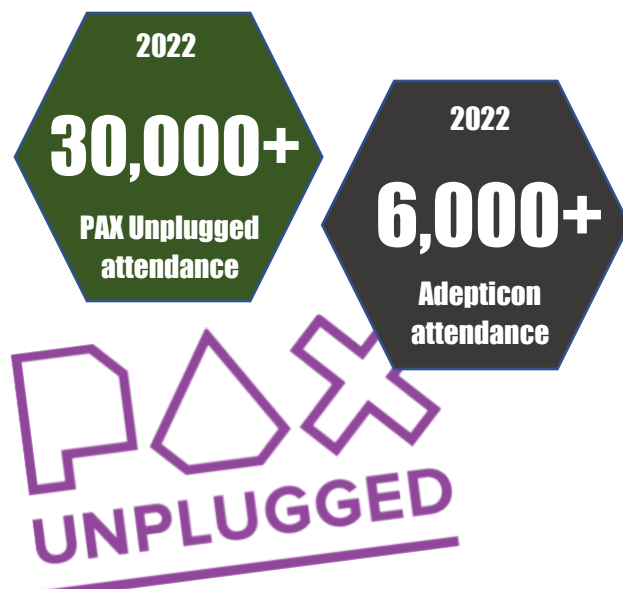
Speaking of crossover, why can't HMGS pay to send a few of its best GMs to stage visually impressive games at Adepticon or PAX Unplugged? These two shows alone—one of which is in the heart of HMGS Inc.'s mid-Atlantic membership base—see nearly 40,000 annual attendees. That massive gaming audience should be fertile recruiting ground. At a minimum, these are types of events where HMGS simply must have an advertising presence—even if that presence costs real dollars and requires a budget line item.

These ideas are only the start of what should be a very bright future for HMGS. But this paper intends to go beyond the "idea" stage by laying out direct, actionable steps that can be taken immediately—and in most cases, at minimal financial expense. **But they will require initiative and volunteers willing to take on new roles and new projects.** If you're reading this paper, could you be part of that solution?

The role HMGS plays in our hobby is an essential one, and implementing any of these proposals could help ensure our nonprofit does not simply *exist* in twenty years, but grows larger and stronger. Consider this:

Can Historicon 2030 draw 5,000 attendees?

WHY NOT?



JUST THE BEGINNING...

11 WEBSITE REFRESH

The HMGS.org website needs a visual overhaul—one where stunning wargame photographs are front and center.

12 BOARD GAME TOURNAMENTS

Formally bring historical board games into the HMGS tent by fostering and publicizing limited tournaments.

13 BIG SHOW OUTREACH

Subsidize top GMs to stage exceptional historical games at PAX Unplugged or Adepticon with official HMGS signage.

14 Traditional Advertising

Evaluate traditional print magazines like *C3i*, *WSS Magazine*, & *Wargames Illustrated* for potential print adverts.

Greg Wagman & Miles Reidy are members of the YouTube channel Little Wars TV. As a personal project, this paper is not authored or sponsored by LWTV.