

The Chicago Sinfonietta – Case Study

A Chance Encounter, An Idea Takes Root

It was early in 1968 and Paul Freeman, a thirty-two year old African-American conductor, had just arrived at the Atlanta airport very late at night after a long red eye flight from the west coast. As he walked through the deserted terminal he noticed a familiar face. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was waiting to board a flight and Paul, who had met him a few years earlier at a Nobel Peace Prize event in Stockholm, went up to him to say hello.

Paul was fairly certain that Dr. King would not remember their short introduction, but before he even finished his sentence explaining who he was and when they had met, Dr. King interrupted and said, “Maestro, what brings you to Atlanta in the middle of the night?” Paul explained that he was there to conduct the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and that he would in fact be the first person of color to ever do so. Dr. King replied, “Hallelujah! The last bastion of elitism.” Paul thanked Dr. King for his good wishes and went to retrieve his luggage. It was less than three months later that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

As Paul reflected many years later on this unexpected encounter followed by Dr. King’s sudden and tragic death, he cited it as the moment when he decided to dedicate his efforts to creating opportunities for people of color in classical music. His chance meeting late one night in the Atlanta airport was effectively the moment where the seed of creating an orchestra dedicated to promoting diversity and inclusion in classical music was sown. This was the moment of conception for an idea that was to become the Chicago Sinfonietta.

The Right Place, the Right Time

After Paul’s encounter with Dr. King he continued developing his craft as a conductor and earned a strong reputation for his podium presence, as a recording conductor, and for his programming acumen. He held posts as Associate Conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra from 1968-1970 and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra from 1970-1979. Paul served as Music Director of the Victoria Symphony in Canada from 1979 to 1989, and it was during this period that he guest conducted over 100 orchestras throughout the U.S., Canada, and the world. For many of these performances, he became the first conductor of color to perform with these orchestras.

By the mid-1980s Paul decided that the time was right to start his own orchestra -- an orchestra that would reflect the people of the community in which it performed, and an orchestra that would provide opportunities for those musicians, soloists, and composers who weren’t traditionally seen or heard in America’s classical music concert halls. He felt that Chicago was the right place to do this despite years of racial strife that occurred in the wake of the election of the city’s first black mayor, Harold Washington. Despite this history of racial discord, not to mention the inherent challenges of starting a symphonic orchestra from scratch anywhere, the Chicago Sinfonietta performed for the first time on October 11, 1987 at Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois.

But even before the first notes were performed, the Sinfonietta took an alternative course. Because of Paul’s belief in the value of diversity and inclusion, the orchestra’s board, staff, and

orchestra members was comprised of a mix of people from disparate racial, gender, age, and economic backgrounds. There were few slots available in Chicago's established orchestras so with a series of phone calls and word-of-mouth recommendations, the orchestra's ranks were soon filled by a hungry, young, diverse group of musicians, many of whom are still performing with the Sinfonietta today. The culture of the Sinfonietta was inclusive from its earliest days and remains so today.

The music that was programmed also reflected this core value. Paul had become well known for championing composers of color through his recordings of the groundbreaking *Black Composers Series*, a nine record set released by Columbia Records between 1974-76. The seldom-performed music from these LP's figured prominently in Sinfonietta concerts and exposed audiences to these orchestral gems. And as noted above, the audience was diverse as well. A group of mostly African-American professionals rolled up their sleeves and reached out to their family and friends to help launch the Sinfonietta. Founding board chair, Jim Paglia, explains one tactic that proved particularly effective in building the audience:

“We held over 200 coffees in the living rooms and kitchens of our friends, and the friends of our friends. At each coffee Paul, myself, a musician, or some other representative would speak about the orchestra and our vision for the Sinfonietta. Everyone was then invited to subscribe, and many, if not all in attendance signed up. We built the audience one person at a time.”

The audience was comprised of close to 50% people of color with the majority being African-American, and this was similar to the demographics of the board, staff, and musicians. The Chicago Sinfonietta became the model for diversity and inclusion among U.S. orchestras. But the question remained, was it built to last?

Building an Institution with Diversity and Inclusion as Core Values

The Chicago Sinfonietta has lasted. From its grassroots beginnings in the late 1980s, the orchestra went on to release fifteen recordings, conduct six overseas tours to great critical acclaim, perform twice at the Kennedy Center, and present twenty-seven subscription seasons in Chicago's western suburbs and at Symphony Center in downtown Chicago. In addition, the Sinfonietta had a nine-year relationship with the Joffrey Ballet as this world-renowned dance company's pit orchestra. While there were times of struggle along the way, the Sinfonietta had stayed true to Paul's vision of an orchestra dedicated to diversity and inclusion.

These core values were and continue to be manifested in a number of ways. As noted above, Paul championed music composed by people of color, and it was fairly typical for the Sinfonietta to program at least one work per concert. While this might not seem overly impactful, a recent survey of all orchestral performances by the Sphinx Organization showed that only 1% of the music performed by America's orchestras is composed by people of color.

Additionally, Paul regularly took young diverse soloists under his wing and mentored and supported their development. He gave a promising young cellist his first professional job by hiring him for a concert at age 15. That young cellist, Yo-Yo Ma, still remembers Paul's support and graciousness and performed at an event honoring Paul in 2011. Other diverse artists including violinists Melissa White and Adé Williams performed with, and were promoted by Paul

well before they became Sphinx Competition Laureates. Adé performed with the orchestra for the first time at the age of six and Melissa received financial assistance for her musical development with the help of Paul and the orchestra. Melissa recalls:

“Dr. Freeman has been an endearing mentor to me as a musician and has significantly influenced my career as a violinist. He took me under his wing at a young age, for which I'm extremely grateful, and provided me with important guidance and exposure that allowed me to blossom as a performer very early on. I had the privilege of first performing with this (Chicago Sinfonietta) ensemble when I was eleven-years-old, and I'm honored that we've maintained a close relationship. The musical projects that I've enjoyed with the financial support and musical backing of the Sinfonietta has been extremely helpful to my career.”

Despite these and other similar efforts, the informal nature of Paul's support did not have the long-term impact that could change the field in a discernable way. According to data collected by the League of American Orchestras in the mid-2000s, less than 3% of U.S. orchestra musicians were of minority background. Further, a survey of America's top orchestras (budgets of \$1 million or more) conducted in 2004 by Julliard Professor Earl Carter showed that the number of African-American musicians employed by these orchestras was similarly low compared to other groups. The Chicago Sinfonietta reported seventeen African American musicians employed out of our total roster of fifty-five musicians. By comparison, the next highest number reported by any orchestra surveyed by Professor Carter was four. When the Latino and other minority members of the orchestra were added in, the Sinfonietta took the stage with close to 40% of its members being people of color and a near 50/50 balance along gender lines.

With that as a backdrop, highlighting the orchestra's unique commitment to diversity and inclusion became a key element of the organization's marketing strategy. After Professor Carter's research was published Executive Director Jim Hirsch began publicly referring to the Sinfonietta as “the nation's most diverse orchestra”. Tag lines like, “Music, Excellence, Diversity” were employed, and conversations with funders and sponsors focused on the Sinfonietta's unique position both locally and nationally. In a crowded classical music/arts market like Chicago, the ability to differentiate itself became a critical ingredient to the organization's success.

As this positioning strategy was put into effect, other tactics that would prove to be effective were developed and implemented resulting in significant revenue enhancement. CS board member Robert Ingram suggested one particularly successful initiative in 2005. At that time, Bob was working in a corporate diversity and inclusion position and suggested that CS create an event geared towards attracting other executives like him. Chicago has large number of corporate headquartered and most employ people specifically charged with managing D&I initiatives. Clearly there was an opportunity for the orchestra to leverage its unique mission. Jim Hirsch remembers:

“Every year we performed a Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the national holiday in January. This concert was always our most popular event of the season, our biggest ticket seller, and had become *the* place to be on MLK day. Bob Ingram suggested that we host a reception prior to the concert and invite all of the corporate D&I professionals, many of whom he knew personally, to attend the

reception and stay for the concert. We came up with the idea of hosting an annual Arts & Diversity Reception that would showcase the orchestra, provide the corporate D&I community a great networking opportunity, and feature a high-profile speaker. In our first year we were able to attract a good number of sponsors and over 300 people attended the event. We've been hosting this event ever since."

The Arts & Diversity Reception proved to be even more successful than had been first imagined. There were a good number of companies that wanted to support the event, and most years the Sinfonietta was able to secure four or more sponsors at a fee of \$4,000-\$5,000 each. This was sufficient to cover all costs, overhead, and contribute profit to the bottom line. Many of the relationships with reception sponsors grew into much deeper involvement including having their executives serve as board members, additional sponsorships and donations for other events, and gala table sales. Every year the reception brought new people into the concert hall and advanced critical relationships in an incredibly effective manner, all while reinforcing the Sinfonietta's core values.

The Sinfonietta was able to find other allies and sources of support in advancing this work, and more importantly, making it sustainable. Foundation, corporate, government, and individual donors have stepped up to help the orchestra including:

- A \$50,000 Lead Sponsorship of the organization's Project Inclusion Initiative in 2009 and a three-year, \$300,000 grant for this program's expansion by a major national foundation that was approved in 2013
- Securing over \$30,000 annually from corporate diversity & inclusion budgets for events like the Arts & Diversity Reception
- A \$75,000 - \$100,000 grant received annually from a major Chicago foundation that focuses on organizations that promote diversity and access to the arts
- Well over \$150,000 of annual support from individuals and over \$250,000 from corporations and foundations directly attributable to our D&I work

The Chicago Sinfonietta's financial model has been significantly strengthened through securing these and other sources of support for this work.

The End of an Era: Paul Freeman Retires

In 2008, after twenty-one years on the podium, Paul Freeman announced that he would retire from the orchestra he founded at the conclusion of the 2010 Season.

Because of its mission and core values, the search team decided not to advertise the position or announce it to the field at large. Instead, the organization drafted a Music Director Profile that outlined the qualities the Sinfonietta was seeking and began identifying individuals who fit the profile description. Over forty candidates were found and from that list eight finalists were invited to audition.

Over the next eighteen months the candidates rehearsed and performed with the orchestra, met members of the search committee, and went through a thorough vetting process. The Sinfonietta's musicians evaluated every candidate via a confidential survey, and other

impressions were collected formally and informally from the administrative staff, audience members, and experts in the field. The results surprised everyone. Jim Hirsch recalls:

“At the beginning of the process I would have pretty much bet the mortgage that Paul’s successor would be an African-American. But as we went through the process with the search committee, musicians, and other stakeholders, our thoughts and discussions about what diversity meant lead us to a much broader, more inclusive definition.”

At the end of the two-year search process, the committee brought two very talented candidates to the board for consideration and presented the case for both at a dramatic, three-hour meeting. Their recommendation was to appoint Mei-Ann Chen as Paul’s successor, a young, up-and-coming Taiwanese conductor who would later refer to herself as “the darkest of dark horses” at the beginning of the process. The board, comprised of over 50% people of color at the time of the meeting, discussed the merits of both candidates at length. Mei-Ann’s talent, incredible energy and passion, and her deeply held belief in Paul’s vision had won the hearts and minds of most everyone who had met or watched her conduct. Still, for many this was an incredibly tough decision. The board of the country’s most diverse orchestra was confronting a very tough decision that could have consequences affecting attendance, donations, and more. Would an organization dedicated to promoting diversity and inclusion deny someone an opportunity due to their race? Former board chair Tara Dowd Gurber:

“After hearing from everyone present at the meeting, Paul was the last person to speak. He talked about how talented the candidates were and about his deep respect for both conductors. But after a short pause and a deep breath, he said that he believed Mei-Ann Chen was the right person for the job, someone he knew would be a champion for the orchestra’s mission, and someone he trusted with, as he called it, ‘his baby’. Paul’s ‘blessing’ of Mei-Ann’s selection quickly led to the vote to appoint her as his successor, and as we left the meeting we felt, no, we knew that we had done the right thing.”

Mei-Ann Chen was appointed as the Sinfonietta’s Music Director in June of 2010 and on May 23, 2011 Maestro Paul Freeman stood in front of his orchestra for the final time. In a concert dedicated fittingly to “Women in Classical Music”, Paul conducted the final work on the program and then, in an emotion-packed moment, handed Mei-Ann his baton, both literally and figuratively. Paul Freeman had touched so many people throughout his 50+ year career, and as he left the stage hand-in-hand with the young Asian woman who would be charged with continuing his work, the audience, the musicians, and all in attendance rose to their feet to honor his music-making, his courage, and his legacy. A new era was about to begin.

While Mei-Ann’s appointment was met with great interest and support by most people associated with the orchestra and in the community, not everyone was pleased or in agreement with the decision that had been made.

Change can be Difficult, and Some Changes are Harder Still

A long-time Sinfonietta supporter and classical music writer, Barbara Wright Pryor, had been a leader of the African-American community’s small but committed classical music fan base for

many years. She wrote reviews and previews in local newspapers and ardently supported classical music performances by African-American composers, conductors, and musicians. Barbara, and many of her readers had loyally supported the Sinfonietta since its founding, and most felt that Paul was *their* conductor and the Sinfonietta was *their* orchestra. Ms. Wright Pryor believed that Paul's successor had to be an African-American. A few people perceived the selection of Mei-Ann Chen as a repudiation of the orchestra's mission and worse, of Paul Freeman's legacy. One prominent classical music leader called Mei-Ann's appointment "a slap in the face".

Given that a good portion of the core the orchestra's audience was African-American, the question was, how widespread would this negative reaction be? It was a question that the leaders of the orchestra had been pondering for months as it became clear that Mei-Ann was a serious contender for the appointment. Jim Hirsch recalls:

"I remember asking one of my mentors, Andrés Tapia, who was Global Diversity Officer for Hewitt back then, if this appointment would be construed as a step back from our commitment to diversity and inclusion. He asked if we had proactively sought a diverse talent pool and given all of the candidates an equal chance to win the position. When I explained whom we had invited to audition and how we had conducted the process, he said it was clear that we had fulfilled our responsibility. While it was nice to receive assurances from an expert that we had conducted the process properly, there was still concern over what the reaction might be."

Still, how would our audience, donors, and musicians react? We got the answer quickly and emphatically.

A New Way of Thinking: Diversity in a Global Framework

Over 7,000 people gathered on a slightly cloudy Sunday evening in August of 2011 at Chicago's Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park. In a concert entitled, "Hello Chicago", the Sinfonietta was about to welcome it's new Music Director, Mei-Ann Chen, to launch her tenure with the orchestra with a free outdoor concert. Programming this first big concert wasn't exactly easy. Mei-Ann wanted to showcase the musicianship of the ensemble and conduct works that she loved. But she also recognized that what she chose to perform, and the guest artists she invited to join the orchestra would send signals to the community about who she was and what she believed in. Mei-Ann remembers thinking about how to launch her directorship in Chicago:

"I wanted the selections to honor Paul Freeman's legacy first and foremost, but to also showcase the orchestra and entertain the audience. And so the idea of musically 'visiting' Chicago's varied neighborhoods was developed, and it provided a great vehicle to program works that reflected the city's diverse populations and cultures. It turned out to be an incredible evening and a wonderful start to my work with Chicago Sinfonietta and the community!"

This concert that featured the works of African-American, Mexican, Chinese, European, and American composers helped to lay the foundation for Mei-Ann's and the orchestra's direction moving forward. Diversity began to be recast in much broader strokes, moving from the

orchestra's roots in Chicago's south side African-American neighborhoods to embracing and exploring other cultures, socio-economic groups, and peoples.

Diversity 2.0

It's an interesting question. How does a thirty-seven year old Taiwanese woman take the baton from a seventy-three year old African-American man and advance a twenty-four year institutional history of promoting diversity and inclusion in a field that has not exactly made great gains in that regard for decades? How does she honor and continue work that had begun years before but still put her own stamp on how the orchestra fulfills its mission? How does the organization bring all of the key stakeholders into the conversation and achieve some form of consensus without losing people along the way? The Sinfonietta's team did well on some levels but missed a few important opportunities to engage key stakeholders as its approach to diversity and inclusion evolved.

What worked well:

- The organization's staff, board, musicians, and volunteers engaged in a productive planning process that considered what diversity and inclusion should look like moving forward. Given that D&I was (and is) the frame through which the Sinfonietta views its work, these discussions were thoughtful, and at times, difficult. The outcome of the planning process was a broader, more inclusive definition of diversity that all felt was more in step with what was happening in the city, state, and country. We function in a global environment; therefore we felt that our view of the world, and our work, should be similarly focused.
- The first ever collective bargaining agreement was reached and the orchestra's unique mission was an important consideration in developing the document. The union was responsive to the organization's core values.
- Refocusing the orchestra's programming to this broader, more inclusive definition of diversity gave credence and visible proof to its commitment to continue and build on what had gone before. Concerts featuring Latino, Jewish, Middle Eastern, Indian, and African-American repertoire, themes and guest artists drew record numbers of new, younger, and even more diverse audience members.
- The Sinfonietta's educational programs were also re-examined and updated to be in better alignment with this new definition.
- The board, staff, and musicians continue to reflect our commitment to D&I, and our mission and work have enabled us to successfully attract strong people to our organization.
- As noted above, the Sinfonietta has been successful in accessing funding for its programming.

What didn't work well:

- While a few of the musicians were actively involved in the planning discussions, the programming changes that were being contemplated and eventually introduced were not adequately explained to rest of the orchestra members. Some of the musicians were

surprised by the new direction and some distrust and ill will resulted. The need to consider all elements of change management was a hard-learned lesson.

- The mission statement was updated and significantly shortened. As a part of that work, the word “diversity” was removed resulting in some expressions of concern by a few donors and audience members. The current mission statement reads: “The Chicago Sinfonietta is a professional orchestra that forms unique cultural connections through the universal language of symphonic music”. Again, thinking more carefully through the implications of this change and communicating it more effectively might have reduced people’s concern about what could have been perceived as a change in direction.
- A handful of long-time members of the audience, donors, and even some individuals outside of the Sinfonietta family perceived this evolution as a repudiation of Paul Freeman’s vision. Some critical comments appeared on a website, though by and large, most people understood and supported the decisions being made.

The transition from Paul Freeman to Mei-Ann Chen went incredibly well. It turns out that Mei-Ann’s own journey to the podium, while different from Paul’s in many ways, was not without its own challenges. Overcoming obstacles and seemingly impossible odds was something she had great experience with.

“I remember as a little girl of ten wanting to be a conductor,” recalled Mei-Ann. “But I was not encouraged to follow my dream because when I was a little girl, Asian woman didn’t become conductors. But I saw music as a way to communicate with others, and I refused to give up my dream, though at times it felt like the number of rejection letters I received in my quest to become a conductor was more than all the notes I had ever conducted from the podium! My love for music and my passion for sharing this love with others kept me going even when things looked the darkest.”

Her perseverance paid off. Mei-Ann Chen burst onto the international music scene by winning the prestigious Malko Prize in 2005, the first woman to be awarded the First Prize in the competition’s history, and soon after secured appointments as the Assistant Conductor with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Robert Spano, followed by an appointment with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop. In early 2010 the Memphis Symphony Orchestra appointed her as Music Director. The Sinfonietta followed suit soon after, followed by an ever growing list of international guest engagements.

Mei-Ann has taken the organization’s commitment to championing for diversity and inclusion in important new directions while honor and building on Paul Freeman’s work. She continues to showcase the works of composers of color at almost every concert, and recently has programmed the works of Florence Price, the first African-American composer to ever have a work performed by a major U.S. orchestra, with the Chicago Sinfonietta, the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, and with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra during their 2013 River Festival. In addition, she is championing the careers of diverse soloists like Adé Williams and diverse conductors like Roderick Cox by showcasing them with her two orchestras and others around the country.

In 2014 thanks to the support of the Andrew Mellon Foundation and others, Mei-Ann helped launch of one of her pet projects that she and the Sinfonietta staff had been developing since

she was first appointed in 2011: The Project Inclusion Conductor Fellowship. Project Inclusion, the organization's professional development program for early career diverse musicians, began years before Mei-Ann's appointment. Her expansion of the program was a logical extension of the earliest days of Paul Freeman's work at the Sinfonietta.

Project Inclusion: Institutionalizing Paul Freeman's Legacy as a Mentor

During a strategic planning process conducted in 2006 the planning team came to the realization that more should and could be done to address the dearth of minority musicians in American orchestras. While Paul's informal work with a handful of young musicians was laudable, and in some cases truly impactful, though on a small scale, the planning team decided that a formal program was needed to focus the organization's efforts. It wasn't enough to simply model diversity on stage and off. It was time to proactively address this industry-wide shortcoming.

It seemed clear that one reason why the number of diverse musicians on stage was so low was in part due to the limited number of candidates ready to compete for and win jobs. Working with members of the orchestra, board members who worked in the corporate diversity sector, and other advisors, the staff began to develop a program to directly address the number, experience, and readiness of diverse candidates. The Project Inclusion Fellowship program was designed to give 3-6 qualified, early-career, diverse candidates a two-year professional development opportunity.

The program was rolled out at the 2007 Arts & Diversity Reception with the first six fellows being introduced to the guests and then performing with the orchestra for the very first time. Each fellow admitted into the program was to receive:

- The opportunity to rehearse and perform with the orchestra at the same per service fees paid to regular CS musicians;
- Four one-on-one mentoring sessions with senior members of the ensemble;
- Master classes and mock auditions to help prepare the fellows to compete for orchestra positions;
- The opportunity to perform as a member of the Project Inclusion Chamber Ensemble that added 35-50 paid performance opportunities each year;
- The opportunity to request travel assistance for auditions; and
- Assistance in securing other positions in the classical music field.

Project Inclusion attracted a good deal of funding from foundation and corporate partners since its inception. Aon Cornerstone Solutions was the first major corporate funder in 2009 with a Lead Sponsorship investment of \$50,000. Since that time other supporters have been secured including the Joyce Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, and most recently, the Mellon Foundation that approved a three-year grant. This support has enabled the Sinfonietta to serve twenty-eight musicians through this program with nine who have secured positions in orchestras or closely related jobs in the field.

In 2012 the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra, in collaboration with the Sinfonietta, created a summer Project Inclusion Fellowship that has enabled eight musicians (four string players each

year) to perform during the last two seasons. The summer fellowship enables the musicians to rehearse and perform with the orchestra and perform a series of free chamber music concerts all over the city.

The most recent initiative rolled out in September of 2014, the Project Inclusion Conductor Fellowship, was the idea of Music Director Mei-Ann Chen, and was inspired by Paul's work with diverse musicians and conductors. When she was first appointed as Paul's successor, Mei-Ann knew that she wanted to put her own stamp on the orchestra's commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion in the field, and her own difficult journey to the podium, and helping early career diverse conductors felt like the perfect fit. Mei-Ann Chen spoke about this program and said:

“Today's Music Directors have to be not only skilled on the podium, but also adept and comfortable with fundraising, marketing, programming, working with all of the different constituencies of an orchestra, and more. Not everyone has the honor of working with the American League of Symphony Orchestras, or is fortunate enough to find a mentor very early on to teach you about the off-the-podium skills you'll need as a Music Director. These skills are just as important to the position as the work you do on the podium, and are a large part of the job. By developing a program specifically for diverse conductors that would provide this training and mentoring, I feel we have expanded and built upon the Sinfonietta's original mission, and also built upon Maestro Freeman's legacy.”

The Project Inclusion Conductor Fellowship has provided five early career, diverse conductors the opportunity to come to Chicago four times during the Sinfonietta's 14-15 Season to work with Mei-Ann, Cliff Colnot, Henry Fogel, and many others to learn both on-the-podium and off-the podium skills needed to succeed as a music director and conductor.

The Diversity and Inclusion Framework

With Mei-Ann Chen's contract extended through the orchestra's 30th Anniversary Season in 2017-2018, a board of directors, staff, and ensemble well aligned behind the organization's core values of pursuing musical excellence by embracing the values and benefits of diversity and inclusion, and a good track record of executing programming, growing new audiences and reflecting the community it serves, the Chicago Sinfonietta is well positioned to leverage these attributes for its future success. Paul Freeman's chance encounter with a civil rights icon, Mei-Ann Chen's long journey from a small town in Taiwan, and many other committed individual's efforts and support have converged to make the Chicago Sinfonietta a model for enabling and respecting all of the voices of the community to be seen, and to be heard.

Best Practices/Key Learning:

- The Chicago Sinfonietta has intentionally and systematically worked to reflect its community at every level of the organization including its board, staff, musicians, and audience members since its founding in 1987. Achieving a high level of diversity requires a long-term commitment driven by the organization's senior leadership. Relationships and credibility are earned over years and decades, not overnight. It is critical to understand and communicate what the long-

term goals of this work are, achieve alignment across the major stakeholder groups, make an investment of human and financial resources, and measure results.

- Having the participation, understanding, and support of the musicians is critical. They need to understand and help formulate D&I initiatives.
- By hiring diverse soloists, programming works by diverse composers, and presenting thematic concerts like its Martin Luther King, Jr. and Day of the Dead performances, the Sinfonietta has become more relevant to a broader cross-section of its community. As a result, it has attracted younger, more diverse audience members and seen a significant increase in ticket sales in the last three years. This work becomes sustainable, and eventually indispensable, if there is some level of ROI that can be built over time. For the 2014-15 Season the orchestra will see an 8% increase in subscription sales and is projecting a 23-25% increase in ticket sales as compared to the 13-14 Season. That following a season that saw single ticket sales increase by over 50% from the year prior.
- The Sinfonietta has worked diligently to differentiate itself from other orchestras by showcasing its commitment to D&I through numerous channels. This has resulted in initiatives like its annual Arts & Diversity reception that attracts financial support and helps to advance critical relationships with the corporate community. Orchestras have the resources and opportunity to create events like the Arts & Diversity Reception that can serve as a point-of-entry opportunity for new, diverse audiences and donors, all while attracting support to assist in doing so.
- Members of the Chicago Sinfonietta staff and board often attend events presented by organizations that work with diverse groups as a means of meeting and cultivating relationships. The Chicago Urban League, Chicago United, the National Museum of Mexican Art and others host events that attract the types of people we want to involve in our work. Find out what organizations in your community has events that attract the type of people you want to meet and attend as many as possible.
- The Project Inclusion program has enabled the Sinfonietta to access critical funding for advancing its mission and core values and has had the added value of enhancing its diversity profile in the most visible of all ways – on stage. Additionally, CS has enhanced earned income through booking the Project Inclusion Ensemble at community events and has leveraged these and other free performances to raise the organization’s profile and draw in new audiences. Orchestras might consider partnering with the Sinfonietta on developing a Project Inclusion initiative in your market or develop a homegrown program to advance D&I.

Resources:

Chicago Sinfonietta (Project Inclusion)

<http://www.chicagosinfonietta.org/education/project-inclusion/>

Sphinx Organization

<http://www.sphinxmusic.org/>

Grant Park Symphony Orchestra Project Inclusion information:

<http://www.grantparkmusicfestival.com/festival-connect/project-inclusion>