

Guild 101—Engaging New Members

A strategy of The Symphony Guild of Charlotte, Inc.

Charlotte Symphony
301 S. Tryon Street
Charlotte NC 28202

Orchestra Size: Group 2

MSA Population: 2,335,000

Presenter:

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Project Overview: Our Guild is continuing to work to bring in new members as they are critical to the long-term viability of our organization. Bi-annually, we have our Overture event late in the spring, a program designed to raise friends and funds. Twenty new members joined during the event; then 17 additional members joined throughout the year for a total new member class of 37. We had a challenge to educate these new members!

Project Goals: We needed to develop a program to educate our new members about (1) who we are, how The Guild operates and what are the volunteer opportunities, (2) how The Guild fits into the Charlotte Symphony family, (3) to make personal communications stronger, the new members needed to get to know each other, as well as our current Guild members and leaders as Guild leaders needed to understand and tap the new members' potential.

Project Description: Given the very large class of 37 new members, four Guild 101 events were planned, two focused on training and two on social interaction. The event calendar began in the summer after the beginning of our June 1 fiscal year, so that we could get the new members engaged quickly. The other 3 events were spaced during the year when our general membership meetings were not scheduled. New members were each assigned a mentor. Guild executive board members were invited to join the new members and their mentors at each event, which was held in a member's home. Our seasoned Guild members signed up to bring food, wine, other beverages and door prizes.

- Summer - First meeting was a social event, "Getting to Know You". The icebreaker, designed by the Membership VP, focused on learning facts about the new members. The executive officers briefly described their history with The Guild along with their current roles. The program included an overview of both future Guild events and the upcoming Guild 101 events.
- Fall -
 - Kicked off with a social hour and was themed "Everything you always wanted to know about The Guild". New members were divided into small groups in different rooms of the house and the 5 Vice Presidents rotated in 15 minutes increments to educate the new members in more detail.
 - At suggestion of a member of the New Members' team and herself a recent new member, created a one page - 2 sided - comprehensive handout, so that new members would have one convenient point of reference about Guild activities and events. The handout was designed to be very user friendly; and, as noted, the content was developed through the eyes of the recent new member who suggested it.

- Winter - Since many of our new members were not regular symphony attendees, the New Members planned a February social outing to our concert hall for a Charlotte Symphony Pops concert. Mentors were encouraged to contact their mentees and attend the concert together. Arranged to have group tickets available at the customary 20% discount.
- Spring - Began with a social hour with wine and appetizers and featured a violin quartet from the Charlotte Symphony Youth Orchestra. The hour long program "Getting to Know the Charlotte Symphony Family", began with the Charlotte Symphony President and Chief Executive Officer giving us the state of the orchestra. Representatives from the Oratorio Singers (the choral group), Pulse (the young affiliates) and the Youth Orchestra Parents Association followed. The Guild President-Elect spoke about The Guild's new signature fundraiser planned for the fall.

Financials: Costs were minimal as venues, food, and beverages were donated. We did provide the musicians with a small gift for playing for us.

Volunteers:

- The Membership Vice President and the two New Member Co-Chairs, with input from the President, planned and executed all events.
- The two co-chairs split the responsibility: one handled the social events and one handled the education events. The co-chairs were responsible for the logistics of each event - the venue and venue layout, food and beverage, door prizes, tickets, youth musicians and thank you gifts for each performer, and welcoming musicians, new members, mentors, executive board members and speakers.
- Attendance reservations for new members, mentors and executive board members were handled on-line with SignUpGenius. Food, wine and door prize donations were also done with SignUpGenius with new members exempt from providing donations.
- Mentors called their mentees with an invitation to attend.
- Office Administrator sent the invitations electronically, created the SignUpGenius interface and made nametags. This year a volunteer designed the online invitations; however, future invitations will be handled by our Office Administrator.
- Symphony Staff assisted with group ticket purchases for the concert event.
- Suggestion: Although the planning and execution of each program can be handled by one volunteer working alone, we found it helpful to have two committee members work together on the education events because of the scope of the tasks. This way the volunteer event planners do not feel overwhelmed.

Successes:

- The new members who joined at Overture brought in some of the other new members as the year progressed. We believe the care we provided through our early social interaction directly contributed to this. The effects on long-term membership retention will not be seen for a few years. Having a vibrant mentoring program in place and making sure new members are engaged in the right volunteer opportunities are critical components of membership retention along with orientation and training.
- The handout has been a ready reference on our website and can easily be updated and reposted as things change.
- Seasoned members who attended the programs enjoyed the social aspects, plus they too learned additional details about the workings of The Guild.
- The "Symphony Family" program has never been presented to the general membership and many current members at the training indicated that they also benefited from this.

Submitted by:
Sallie Moody
President 2013-2014