

The Austin Symphony Youth Leadership Council The Women's Symphony League of Austin

Slide 1 - Logo

Good morning. I am delighted to be here to tell you about the Youth Leadership Council, a completely new fundraising project of the Women's Symphony League of Austin.

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Slide - Acronyms

First, a note about acronyms. I will be using "YLC" to refer to The Youth Leadership Council, "WSL" for The Women's Symphony League of Austin, and "ASO" for The Austin Symphony Orchestra.

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This project got its start two years ago when the WSL was looking for a new fundraiser. A task force was convened in the spring and considered a number of different ideas, and ultimately decided upon the Youth Leadership Council. It was a winner because [\[Click\]](#) it targets youth, which fits our demographics, [\[Click\]](#) it's about Leadership, a hot topic for teens looking toward the college application process, [\[Click\]](#) it fits the outreach mission of both ASO and WSL, and [\[Click\]](#) it's in our roundhouse – WSL members have the skill set to execute.

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We thought it would take a year to launch, but our President told us we could not wait that long. So, we pulled it together over the summer! We researched other youth programs with Leagues around the state and found there was nothing else like this. So, we designed the program from scratch and market-tested fee levels. We created the application forms and marketing materials and set up our website page. We formed a committee, lined up our program presenters and started

recruiting members. And by September of that year, we held our first Youth Leadership Council program!

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The YLC formula is very simple, with three components. [\[Click\]](#) We put on four leadership programs per year, we offer optional community service opportunities, and we hold an annual recognition event. I will now speak to each of these three components.

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The leadership programs are the main focus of the YLC. (And by the way, we don't use the words "meetings" or "speakers" – a guaranteed turnoff to teens. Instead, we say "programs" and "program presenters.") [\[Click\]](#) The four programs are held on Sunday afternoons, the last weekend of September, October, January and February. We chose these dates to best fit student schedules. [\[Click\]](#) Each program features a presenter from the world of business, the arts, education or government. [\[Click\]](#) The programs also include a brief leadership development activity.

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The leadership development activity is an easy, fun icebreaker-type activity that you may have seen at a business conference. In these photos, you can see teams of students tossing a ball according to specific instructions, and turning over a sheet using only their feet. These activities help the students get to know one another and also keep the sessions lively.

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We were a little nervous at first about finding program presenters, but it turned out to be fairly easy. Our great league has lots of ideas and contacts.

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The second component of the YLC is the optional community service opportunities. The beauty of this piece is that we didn't need to do any additional work. We are simply connecting our student members with ASO's award-winning children's education programs and other WSL outreach and fundraising activities. In this slide you see one of members helping to decorate for a POPS concert, another doing make-up for one of our little models in the Red Haute Valentines Style Show, and two volunteers dressed to welcome families to the ASO Halloween Concert. These opportunities are optional, and the students earn community service hours for participating.

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The annual recognition event is also designed to be as simple as possible. We specifically rejected the idea of yet another fancy dinner event and decided instead to hold a reception prior to an ASO concert in the spring. This has the added benefit of introducing many of the students (and some parents, too) to the symphony for the first time. As part of this event, a program insert is created for the concert programs, 3,000 of them, and the students are recognized from the stage with an announcement by Maestro Peter Bay. It is a fun way to cap the year for the students and their families.

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So, that's the program in a nutshell. Now I will turn to the finances.

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Membership fees are the primary source of revenue. The annual membership fee is \$395. We offer a discounted membership of \$325 to children and grandchildren of WSL members. The first year we recruited only sophomores and

juniors, so this past year we added a \$295 membership rate to encourage rising seniors to return for another year.

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Our ASO Board President came up with a brilliant idea – and got a board member to underwrite 4 scholarships for children in need. This allowed us to avoid an image of exclusivity, and was a win-win – because the scholarship money was additional revenue for us. We plan to expand the scholarship component in future years, as we have other donors interested in this.

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The YLC is a very efficient fundraiser. In the first year, we attracted 47 members. Not bad for something no one had ever heard of. We generated a little over \$16,000 in membership revenue. Donors underwrote the annual reception expenses, and actual programmatic expenses were very low – some pizza or queso and a few supplies. Credit card fees are an additional expense. But you can see that the bottom line was roughly equal to the membership revenue of \$16 thousand.

[Click] In the second year (which we just completed), we doubled the number of members from 47 to 94. Almost all of the membership revenue of \$33,000 flowed to the bottom line.

[Click] Next year we are projecting to reach our target membership level of 120 students, with revenue and net income of approximately \$42 thousand, and

[Click] by Year 5, we plan to hold membership steady at 120 but increase fees by \$100 per category in response to demand. We would then have a mature fundraiser generating well in excess of \$50,000 each year for the Symphony.

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Now a little about how we do it.

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A good committee is of course critical to execution. The committee should consist of a Chair and Chair-elect, and Chairs of Membership Recruitment, Database, Program Logistics, the Recognition Event, Community Service and Communications. Ideal committee members are parents of teens, for obvious reasons.

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I would like to conclude with a few lessons learned. Most important, **[Click]** keep it simple. Throughout our first year, we resisted adding additional features that sounded great but were not sustainable from year to year. **[Click]** We also learned that the community service opportunities, while an important recruiting tool, were not as utilized as we thought. This was fine, however, as you recall we weren't doing anything extra to offer these opportunities. Another important thing is, **[Click]** kids don't read e-mail. We communicated with them through texts and social media, although their parents did read the e-mail. And finally, **[Click]** students want to be involved, so use them. We involved students in programs, in recruiting and in planning.

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It's a winning formula, when students are happy and engaged.

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I hope I have provided enough of an overview to interest other leagues in trying the same thing. We would love to see other Youth Leadership Councils get started around the country. Thank you.