

**Strategic Conversations
Volunteer Presidents & Presidents-Elect
Redacted Minutes – Call #3: Membership Recruitment & Retention
Fall 2016**

Facilitators:

Debbie McKinney, President, Volunteer Council
Becky Odland, President-elect, Volunteer Council
Cindy Kidwell, Secretary, Volunteer Council
Caitlin Whealon, Volunteer Liaison, League of American Orchestras

Participants:

Group 1: (2) Midwest
Group 3: (1) South
Group 5: (1) Midwest

Volunteer Recruitment: What did you or a member of your organization do to recruit a volunteer over the last week?

Midwest:

- One participant secured brochures to distribute at a family concert in addition to passing them out to their music students. As a result, several parents offered to volunteer at an upcoming concert.

Central:

- A new member brunch was scheduled to facilitate conversation between new members and their sponsors (sponsors are current members within the volunteer organization). The goal was to communicate membership requirements and to encourage involvement within the organization.

HOW TO RECRUIT NEW MEMBERS, led by Becky Odland

- **[Gold Brook Project “Guild 101”](#), from Charlotte, NC:**
 - Membership program that pairs a new member with a mentor. There are four events during the year: an initial social, learning about the guild from leadership, a concert and social, learning about the symphony.
- **[Gold Book Project “Taking the League’s Pulse”](#), from Austin, TX:**
 - Membership survey was originally taken in 2006-2007. The survey asked for personal information (interest survey, occupation and skills) and multiple

choice questions asked for the preferred time of day for meetings, communication within the organization and fundraising. The survey was helpful in identifying members' skill sets and the commonality that members read the newsletter, and strengthened lines of communication between leadership and membership.

- **Gold Book Project “DPVA” from Dayton, OH:**
 - Annual spring membership lunch was experiencing a decline in attendance. The organization produced a modestly-priced video depicting the year in review and showed this during the luncheon. Attendance increased 104%. The video promoted pride in and a connection with the organization and showed what was available for volunteer involvement in the organization.
- **Gold Book Project “1st Annual Pictionary Tournament” from Nashville, TN:**
 - Organization conducted a “Pictionary Tournament” with questions focused on their League and orchestra. The event was a novel and fun way to recruit and retain members.
- **Newsletters**
 - South:
 - An organization charges for hard copies of newsletters sent in the mail. Members pay \$15 to receive four (4) issues each year. E-blasts are circulated once a month.

WAYS TO KEEP VOLUNTEERS, led by Debbie McKinney

- **Thank your volunteers and thank them again**
 - Use organization's stationery; write a thank you note every week
 - Send thank you notes after every event to every volunteer
 - Handwritten note delivered by snail mail impressive; email thank you also good
 - Encourage Board members to write thank you notes
 - South:
 - Post pictures of volunteers at work on Facebook
 - Midwest:
 - Volunteer appreciation night with open bar, appetizers, 2 free tickets to concert and recognition at the concert
 - Central:
 - Orchestra provides 25 concert tickets to League; members attend concert, dressed in red, and are asked to stand and be recognized

- **Create a team, best approach is to engage in a fun event**
 - New members are insecure and function best with a team.
 - College and university sororities often look for opportunities to meet volunteer hours required each semester.
 - High schools with National Honor Society members may be a source for volunteers who need to complete a specific number of service hours.
 - Young adults between the ages of 18-24 who have attended college volunteer approximately 26 hours per year. This is double the rate for those not attending college (13 hours per year).
 - Statistics: Unemployed individuals have a 27% higher chance of finding a job if they have networked with other volunteers. Among rural volunteers without college degrees, there is a 55% increase in finding a job.

- **Honor top volunteers, reward your volunteers**
 - Establish a “Volunteer of the Year” award.
 - Honor Co-chairs of an event.
 - Offer a 10% discount in orchestra gift shop.
 - Midwest:
 - Establish a “Lifetime Achievement” award.
 - Provide a discount for an orchestra concert package as a new member perk.
 - South:
 - Thank members by highlighting in newsletters.
 - Central:
 - Give plastic wristbands to volunteers for recognition; encourage them to wear to a meeting. Visible and inexpensive way to recognize volunteers and encourage conversation about a project the volunteer was involved in.

- **Creative recruitment methods**
 - Central:
 - New members given an opportunity to attend a concert rehearsal and then go to a restaurant for wine and cheese.
 - Offer membership a bus trip to a nearby city for a social outing (to see another’s League’s show house or museum). Promote a partnership with other arts organizations.
 - Midwest:
 - Same opportunity to attend rehearsals given to donors / trustees at specific levels.
 - South:

- Offer “enrichment outings” just for members (ie: lunch, shopping trips, vineyard tours, historical tours, Pilates/yoga classes)

Attracting members is a challenge

It is important to identify what makes people want to volunteer; what makes joining the organization special.

- Becky commented on information presented two years ago by a speaker at the national conference:
 - People need a sense of belonging
 - Families need to connect with their community
 - People are looking for something bigger than self
 - Love of music
 - Participants should look at their organization’s websites to make certain the topics mentioned above are captured in the words used on their websites

KEY TAKE AWAYS

- People join when someone asks them to join.
- With volunteer numbers down across the country, it is important to examine what volunteers need, how to make their time with the organization meaningful.
- Volunteers must be thanked for their efforts—make a call; write a note.
- It takes hard work to recruit and retain members.