

**Strategic Conversations
Volunteer Presidents & Presidents-Elect
Redacted Minutes – Call #4: Brainstorming on Ways to Improve the Next Major
Project
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 2: (1) Central
Group 3: (1) Central
Group 5: (1) Midwest

UPCOMING FUNDRAISERS (ongoing or new)

Sustainer Drive (South): One organization has renamed non-actives, previously called “Associates”, to “Sustainers” to better describe the role of their membership level.

- Attendance at meetings is not required, no volunteer hours are required, no participation in fundraising is required.
- A one-time tax deductible gift to the organization is the only requirement.
- In an effort to increase numbers, the organization’s leadership is sending a “year-end giving” letter to former members inviting them to rejoin as “Sustainers”.
- Sustainer membership dues are \$65; however, during this end-of-year drive, Sustainers may join for \$35.
- Sustainer-only evens are also planned.

Shopping Night (Central): An evening of shopping and dining with pre-determined restaurants giving 10% of proceeds to the Symphony League has netted approximately \$15,000.

Silent and Live Auctions

- Central:
 - Enlisting members under 40 years of age changed the type of items included (i.e., no furs). Popular items are “experiences” such as dinners in private homes, trips. Items that do not sell during the event are sold on line.
 - A car dealer donates a car that meets the specifications of an individual who both patronizes the dealership and participates in the League’s fundraiser. The car dealer is guaranteed a minimum amount, and the identified buyer opens the bid at the minimum amount. Typically, the car sells for a higher price and becomes a tax deduction for the purchaser. This idea could be translated to jewelry.
 - Silent auction is for hard goods; live auction is reserved for “experience” items such as trips.
 - A simple way to raise a quick \$10,000 is to solicit four (4) large corporations at \$2,500 each to buy a chance for a representative to conduct the symphony. Companies could recoup their \$2,500 by offering their employees the opportunity to buy a \$20 chance to conduct the symphony.

- Midwest:
 - Number of auction items limited to 30-40, valued at \$250 each. No baskets of smaller items are included.
 - Identifying a specific program that needs funding or additional support can bring out the generosity of participants during live auctions, as they can see what their donations are being used for.
 - An opportunity to conduct the home orchestra was offered during a live auction. The experience was so popular that the orchestra allowed a conducting opportunity for two (2) people during different performances. The live auction item raised approximately \$4,000.
 - A special electronic notification was set up to contact silent auction bidders during an annual fundraising event. When an individual was outbid, their cell phone would notify them with a ping. Software and set up cost \$3,000.

- South:
 - Consider a “rolling close” for a silent auction. Instead of a hard close at 10:00 p.m., announce that the auction will close at 10 p.m., but allow an auctioneer to go from item to item and close after allowing on-going bidding by the top two bidders.

On-Line Auctions

- Central:
 - New auction method brings in a broader pool of participants. A fee is required for the on-line service.

- Items are placed on-line one month in advance of live event. If an individual chooses to make the “maximum” bid, the item is taken off the auction prior to the event.

Past Successful Fundraisers

- Midwest:
 - 100 gift cards (valued at a minimum of \$25) are displayed on a large board and are available to attendees for \$25. Some lucky purchasers receive gift cards with a much higher value. Gift cards are donated by members of host committee.
 - The fundraiser game is a giant peg board. For \$50, party-goers pull one peg with chances to win one of four sporting event packages.
 - Craft Beer Event: With a ticket to the event, attendees could taste a selection of craft beers. Brass musicians from the orchestra provided entertainment. Some auction items were available. The event was popular with millennials and drew a huge attendance. The event was advertised on Facebook, the orchestra’s website, the organization’s webpage, and by word of mouth.
 - Wine Pull: Board members donate bottles of wine. A party is held in a private home to collect the wine. Individuals pay \$20 to pull a cork with a number matching the number on a bottle of wine. Bottles of wine are gone within the first hour, raising \$2,000-\$3,000.
 - Another organization who attempted wine pull had disappointing results due to passive volunteers who failed to “work” the event with energy and enthusiasm.
 - One organization used university sorority volunteers to assist with the wine pull as part of a show house. The energy and enthusiasm of the college volunteers created a successful event.
 - One organization conducted a wine pull at \$25 per bottle and a scotch pull at \$50 per bottle.

Attendance at Fundraising Events:

- Central:
 - Due to declining attendance, the organization made an effort to increase participants by lowering the cost to attend, announcing the gala far in advance, mailed ‘save the date’ cards, and pushed for board members to buy tables with an early discount price. (Lower attendance means fewer people bidding on auction items).
 - Participants who are guests of a table host and have not purchased a ticket themselves will likely bid on auction items.
- Midwest:
 - Establish a committee of table hosts. Committee members are responsible for filling a table.

Items for next Strategic Conversation Call

- South:
 - One organization was considering hiring a part-time employee to help with mailings and administrative assistant duties. Currently, all work is being done by volunteers. The participant requested information on ideas, pitfalls, and job descriptions.
 - Becky encouraged the organization to try the part-time position by establishing a job description, number of hours required per week and hourly wage or contract employee expectations.
 - Debbie cautioned about Board liability for any unpaid taxes. Independent contractor would be responsible for his/her own taxes.

- Central:
 - Membership requirements: One organization (Group 2) is invitation only and limited to a specific number of active members. Their concern was how to manage members who do not meet requirements (i.e., paying dues, purchasing tickets, attending meetings).
 - Encourage members who cannot meet minimum requirements for active membership to move to associate status.
 - Establish a provision for removal of member's not meeting minimum requirements.