

**2017**  
**Strategic Conversations**  
**League of American Orchestras Volunteer Council**

**REDACTED MINUTES – CALL #1**

**Volunteer Presidents & Presidents-Elect**

**Wednesday, October 4, 2017**

**12 p.m.- 1 p.m. (Pacific) / 2 p.m. – 3 p.m. (Central) / 3 p.m. – 4 p.m. (Eastern)**

Becky Odland, President, Volunteer Council (VC), greeted participants as they joined the call and welcomed six (6) participants. In addition, two (2) facilitators participated: Beth Wise, Secretary, Volunteer Council; and Caitlin Whealon, Liaison, League of American Orchestras (LAO) Volunteer Council.

**I. WELCOME AND WORKING AGREEMENT**

Becky thanked participants for setting aside time for the Strategic Conversation calls. She explained that these are offered by the VC for organizational leadership in hopes they will be helpful. Becky reviewed the upcoming dates and stated that participants will receive minutes of the previous meeting and the agenda for the upcoming meeting ahead of time.

Becky requested that everyone be an active participant, listening as well as contributing. She asked that, when speaking, each participant first state your name. She encouraged all to identify challenges and problems faced by each organization and stated that facilitators could possibly assist with ideas from other groups across the nation. She reminded participants that information from the call remains confidential. Becky asked if the participants would be agreeable to sharing email addresses to further address issues if desired; all agreed. Becky will provide those to each participant prior to the next call. She then asked each participant on the call to introduce her/himself. (Note: those not present today will have an opportunity to introduce themselves next time.)

**II. INTRODUCTIONS**

Becky Odland, President, Volunteer Council; Beth Wise, Secretary, Volunteer Council, Caitlin Whealon, League Meetings & Logistics Coordinator, and six (6) participants from around the country introduced themselves.

During participant introductions, discussion of challenges and successes included the following:

**Participant 1**

- Among successes are the annual Fundraiser and that they are good ambassadors for orchestra.
- Challenges are largely membership related: average age is 70s, currently about 30 members. They have wonderful traditions but find it difficult to attract young people at the

same time as honoring those traditions that members value so well. They need young people to assist, especially since they would like to do multiple fundraisers.

- They use a calendar year schedule, which puts them out of sync with the orchestra's July 1-June 30.
  - Due to less formal concerts, different music, shorter concerts with wine tasting, a variety of formats, it seems the audience is changing and more younger people are coming to the traditional concerts.
- Participant 2
- Challenges include attracting younger volunteers. Many volunteers are older and there is a need for succession planning. Sometimes there are too many volunteers without enough for them to do. This presents problems, since turnaround takes time and they certainly want volunteers to feel needed and utilized. Volunteers' relationship with orchestra, through the Development department, works well. One person in this department serves as liaison with volunteers.
  - The Fiscal year is Sept 1 – Aug 31 (more or less matches the Symphony season) with dues paid in September. Contribution to the orchestra is primarily from dues or an endowment (musical instruments, music stand lights, music library boxes, etc.) Symphony gives volunteers complimentary tickets - one for each 4 hours volunteering. This is not a fundraising organization.

#### Participant 3

- Fiscal year is June 30 – July 1, and the president serves a one-year term.
- Successes include education-focused activities (concerts, competition) and their Designer House.
- Challenges include recruiting members and fundraising. Most of the work is done by 10% of members. The challenge is to prevent burnout of these 25-30 people.

#### Participant 4

- The president serves a one-year term, June calendar.
- Successes include fundraising, education, engendering good will among participants.
- Challenges are raising sufficient funds (competition with other groups, decreasing private industry sources, and other restrictions on fundraising contacts), engaging new members in a positive way for all organizations, and the non-engagement of young people (less commitment to philanthropy).

#### Participant 5

- June-May fiscal year, and the president serves a one-year term.
- Successes include retention of long-serving knowledgeable members and survival of the 2008 financial crisis.
- Challenges include overuse of members (200 but only small group are active), lack of strong leadership pipeline. Guild history has been positive but sometimes leads to resistance to change, especially with older members.

#### Participant 6

- The fiscal year is July 1 – June 30, and the president serves a one-year term. This is actually a three-year commitment, considering the years as president-elect and as past president. The president also serves as liaison on the Board.
- Successes include a close partnership with the orchestra, education projects, and volunteers who work hard to live up to mission.
- Challenges are in membership (especially with active members). They are striving for a more diverse group (age, background, etc.) and are pleased to have three men on their board this year. The intergenerational disconnect (older ones resist change, do not use internet, social media) complicates the problem. A large budget crisis in the schools is causing difficulties in participation in free concerts (cannot afford transportation). This is the final season for the Music Conductor who has been with them since 1987 with excitement for him on his retirement and for welcoming the new Music Conductor.

Becky asked about the recent organizational restructuring of one of the Leagues. They have hired an Executive Director and are still in process of restructuring things, working to be sustainable for the long haul. This seems to be working well. In the interim, they have used funds from their endowment to pay their orchestra pledge. They now need to get back to managing without borrowing to sustain organization and fulfill commitment to orchestra.

Becky indicated she had reviewed the orchestra websites and had some observations to share. Due to time constraints, these will be discussed on the next call.

### **III. PRIORITIZE TOPICS FOR NEXT CALLS**

Becky requested we capture topics for future conversations, and these were identified:

- 1) Membership – many factors identified in discussions (above).
- 2) Intergenerational relationships – disconnect between old and new. Not just age, but change is in play.
- 3) Question for discussion: Many of call participants have 5 years or less experience yet are in leadership positions. How/why does this occur?
- 4) Missions of organizations
- 5) How many members of volunteer organizations are ticket subscribers?
- 6) How do other leagues participate in extra concerts done by symphonies?

Becky stated that some of these might be addressed by polling the group (e.g., number 5). She reiterated that email addresses and agendas will be provided to participants prior to the next call. She thanked participants for their time and input, and the call concluded at four (4) minutes after the hour.

*Respectfully Submitted,  
Beth Wise, Secretary, Volunteer Council*