

2017
Strategic Conversations
League of American Orchestras Volunteer Council

REDACTED MINUTES – CALL #4

Fundraising

Volunteer Presidents & Presidents-Elect

Wednesday, November 15, 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 two (2) participants. Tiffany Ammerman, President-Elect, Volunteer Council; Beth Wise, Secretary, Volunteer Council; and Caitlin Whealon, Liaison, League of American Orchestras (LAO) Volunteer Council. An additional participant was unable to join the call but provided information via email.

I. Becky reminded all that the topic for this conversation is Fundraising.

II. General questions on fundraising:

a. Current fundraisers.

1) The Show House is held every two years. They are expanding the length of opening from 3 to 4 weeks this year and are open 6 days (Tuesday -Saturday and Sunday afternoon). This raises between \$50,000 and \$100,000. A different designer decorates each room. A significant amount of funding comes from sponsors and from three parties: 1) Bare Bones, before the house is decorated, which will include an art sale this year, 2) Girls Night Out, and 3) Crescendo. The Guild pledges \$50,000/year to the orchestra, so they carry over any excess for the off year. In the past, a volunteer coordinated the decorators; having a decorator coordinate this year has resulted in happier participants and more sponsors.

This requires many volunteers - 500 docents, etc. for 4 weeks (house has 8000 square feet). Many others outside their organization volunteer. Participant was asked if they have trouble finding chairs. She responded that, while they may have to ask more than one person, there was generally no problem. Items on display are for sale through the gift shop. This year, they will prepare and serve their own lunch refreshments rather than using a caterer, hoping to increase proceeds.

This project has been done for 30-40 years, usually in the spring. Tickets are \$20-\$25, or one can buy 'run of house' for \$30-35. The Symphony puts ads in in their program and announces from the stage, local magazines promote, and TV spots are used for promotion. They have gained some new members through this, but there are others who just want to volunteer for the show house but are not interested in joining the Guild.

2) They have considered a Show House but have not pursued. The Friends are currently in the throes of determining future fundraising efforts. For the second year, they have had a fall luncheon as a kickoff for the Kinder Konzerts. The last one made \$26,000, and they will probably continue to this project. The lighted birch trees (2'tall) hung with small instruments were used as centerpieces and then sold for \$100 each. They have gained new members from this event.

They are discussing bringing back the "It's in the Bag" luncheon in the spring. All parts of this fundraiser are tied to upscale handbags and accessories. Getting sponsorships is the key to success. They are looking at other ideas as well and want to find something that they can do annually which will be identified with the Friends.

They hosted two special dinners this past summer - "Under the Stars" and "Under the Lights" in lovely homes. All was furnished/donated so the proceeds were clear profit. Hosts provided catering, the wine was donated, and ~20 people attended each. They reviewed Detroit's brochure for ideas. Members helped serve and clean up.

Testimonials at the luncheon regarding Kinder Konzerts and Kinder Konzerts on the Road added a great deal. The luncheon had two donors who agreed to match up to \$10,000. In the past, they also held a Vintages of Note wine dinner. This was successful but dependent largely on sponsors, some connected to members.

3) They host a fall event. The Symphony League helps the Orchestra Board with the event, and they combine forces with the regional arts center for events leading up to the opening concert. The city closes off 2 blocks on the main street, and they put up a huge tent. The event is more like festival. They begin with a free open rehearsal, opening concert with classic rock band music, and activities continue for the next week. Sponsorship tables are sold, and local restaurants serve the tables at the concert. They have a slide show from previous year which includes sponsors. Wine tastings are hosted both nights. This is the largest attendance they have at any concert.

They are working to increase younger audiences, and these events have helped; the older audience likes them as well. They have a dance floor, and the audience can move around during the concert. This year's theme was the music of James Bond. Many dress according to the theme (e.g., for the Beatles theme, four orchestra members recreated Abbey Road photo). Saturday evening is a costume party with other James Bond music. There is a celebrity martini-making contest, movie night, Dixieland band at noon on the square, meet your orchestra. These events involve the entire community with over 100 volunteers, not just the League and the Board. They do not lose volunteers, since everyone feels like this is their concert. The city considers this concert their premiere event as it brings others to city which translates to dollars for the city.

This was born from an effort to revitalize downtown. The League worked with the conductor, Arts Council, and the City. The street is blocked Wednesday-Saturday, and they added an

outdoor venue, restaurants, wine tastings. This was never intended to raise money, but rather to increase attendance and awareness. However, this is the only concert that fully pays for itself. Everything is free until the night of concert. Tickets are \$25 for adults, and there are many sponsor opportunities, including \$1000 for table of 10 premium seats; \$500 for table of 6. There is essentially unlimited seating, and control of gates is easy because they are between buildings.

The League also has Bunco and Golf Tournaments, and a Symphony Ball for high school senior boys and girls. This drew members in previous years, but now is not as well attended as in past or as downtown concert.

4) The Symphony Ball is held in the fall and has just celebrated its 54th year with presentation of 42 debutantes. These young ladies are college sophomores who are presented at a formal Ball. This year there were over 1,050 attendees. This event raises between \$125,000-\$150,000 annually. There are no sponsorships for this event; funds come from deb fees, deb tables, general reservations, and donations.

The Crescen-Dough Auction celebrated its 45th year last spring. There are both a silent and live auction, with 400-500 items (less than 30 are usually in the Live Auction). Items are donated by local merchants, and others provide donations in the form of Community Underwriting. There is also Guild Underwriting. Perhaps the most popular items are the parties and other experiences offered in the Live Auction and the Items of Note section of the Silent Auction. This casual event raises \$130,000 - \$170,000. One extraordinary year the profits were over \$220,000.

5) Becky described the successful "Gift Card Wall" used by another local organization. Each card is worth at least \$25, people pay \$25 and choose card. The 100 cards last year sold out in 30 minutes. This is part of a dinner event/auction. Reception games could include a wine pull, gift cards, etc.

6) One league has added a large gala fundraiser to its annual Show House (not at the same time of year) and this year has proven to be the most successful. However, it may have been that the large gain was due to it being the "going away" party for the current Maestro who is retiring at the end of this season. Our Philharmonic was instrumental in sponsorships, donor participation and some funding.

While a gala is not a new concept for any Leagues, it was a suggestion from our ESCCO Team to diversify how we raise funds and not just focusing on the Show House. It will be interesting to see if we continue to gain momentum as well as participants and sponsors moving forward with this event. The league is fully aware that while the gala and Show House are fun events as well as friend-raisers, they are the most expensive types of fundraising both in volunteer and staff time as well as actual costs associated.

They are also looking to restart our "Notable Occasions" fundraisers which are more targeted events to members and some Phil donors.

b. Fundraising both Corporate and Individual

One league is looking at new ways to engage our corporate giving avenues. Right now they are very much individual focused and mostly that is from the active membership. While corporate giving is something that many non-profits think will be lucrative, for most nonprofits it is a small percentage of their budgets (if any). Cultivating the individual and finding out how your organization connects to them is always more lucrative. But true cultivation takes effort and lots of time for your organization. And younger generations often want to see their dollars at work now - not years from now (i.e., endowments). It will take some effort to educate the next generations to the importance of both the here and now and the future. But it will also take our organizations being willing to listen and learn what is being said from our newest and potential members. Our Leagues cannot just hope that individuals will come around to our ways. We need to begin to be open and work to see what donors are looking for from our organizations. We cannot continue to be the League of our mothers and grandmothers or we will be a thing of the distant past.

c. Getting "More Bang for our Buck"

One league is currently in the process of reviewing our fundraisers and looking at strategic ways to make sure we are getting the most of our fundraising efforts. We are trying to work smarter, not harder while still engaging in activities that allow our members to feeling connected to our mission and each other. The Show House is one of those fundraisers that is time consuming, but also a way for our membership to connect. Many of our members found their way to us through this single event. So the thought of retiring a fundraiser like Show House, that has been a friend-raiser as well, is a difficult one for our League. As a fundraiser, we have seen the profits decline over the last decade, as well as the availability of quality homes in our area, and many other "Designer Homes" have cropped up in the last several years, but our membership wants to continue with this fundraiser.

d. Raising dollars without competing with the orchestra's fundraising

It does seem that often times we are competing for the same funders. Many of our membership overlap through season ticket holders, patrons, etc. But the funds we raise go specifically to the education efforts of our Phil as well as our annual donation to them directly. However, we are only about 1% of their current annual budget, so our donation is more from tradition than an actually impactful on their existence. Thankfully we work well with our Phil staff and they understand what we bring to the table.

e. Successes and challenges of fundraising events are addressed in above discussions.

f. Partnering with other organizations

One group has accomplished joint fundraising with local Arts organization. They also will invite members from other organizations to their events and are looking at joint memberships which might benefit both organizations. The goal is to boost memberships and raise funds.

Another group partners with other organizations for events that are not fundraisers. Partnering with the Girl Scouts for Journeys in Harmony, which teaches the scouts about music from their own instrument (their voice) as well as instruments. We also partner with arts associations for grant funding.

As for fundraisers we have found that the competition for dollars inhibits most collaboration efforts in our community. While Maestro's Ball this year was a huge collaboration with our Phil, it is not the norm for other fundraisers. In addition, in fundraising situations, it's typically lopsided with effort vs. division of profits. It can make for significant stress between nonprofit entities if not done perfectly and with all parties feeling like they gained as much as spent in dollars and volunteer efforts.

g. Special Event Ideas

Becky noted that special anniversary events (retirement, 50th, 55th, etc. anniversaries) are often good opportunities to bring back former members and presidents.

Tiffany commented that it might be good to have a reunion of past debs, ball chairs, presidents, etc.

One group is celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. They have asked members to donate \$50 for 50th and have raised funds for two major projects. They will present fake check for all they have donated to symphony.

Beth described their Past Presidents' activities, including a scholarship fund and a spring luncheon to honor the incoming President. String scholarships are funded solely by donations from past presidents. At the spring luncheon, each past president writes a note to the incoming president with "words of wisdom" or a humorous anecdote. For their 50th anniversary, the Guild conducted an internal fundraiser to commission a composition by a woman composer. This was presented at the first concert of the anniversary season with the composer present.

III. The topic for the next call (November 29) will be an update on the League's June Conference in Chicago. Camille Williams, Conference Chair, will join the call. The meeting was adjourned on the hour.

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