League Volunteer Council
Strategic Conversation #2
Communications and Technology
October 27, 2021

<u>Present</u>

Facilitators: Julie Meredith, Volunteer Council President, 2021-2022

Janet Cabot, Volunteer Council President-elect, 2021-2022

Charlotte Lewis, Volunteer Council Secretary, 2021-2022

Samara Ungar, League of American Orchestras Constituent Liaison

Welcome and Call to Order at 3:02 p.m. CDT (Julie Meredith):

Julie called the meeting to order and thanked 15 participants for joining us again, announced that the subject was communications and technology, and began with a poll.

1. Does your organization distribute a newsletter? 7% by mail, 50% email, 14% both, 29% no
2. Does your organization produce a year-end report? 29% by mail; 7% by email; 64% no
3. Does your organization have a webpage? 50% yes, our own; 43% yes, part of the symphony's; 7% no
4. Does your organization have a Social Media presence? 50%, Facebook; 21%, Facebook and Instagram; 7% no

Facilitator #2: For those who do not have a newsletter, how do you communicate with your members?

Participant #1: We do not have a newsletter. We send an email two weeks and a second one five days before an event. We do a year-end report but do not send it out.

Participant #2: We use our website and send email information to all members. We also use in person meetings to distribute information.

Facilitator #2: We send out emails but they were random so people would miss them. We now use e-news: short items once a month, usually the first week of the month. We also have a monthly e-news with upcoming activities. We had a page in our symphony quarterly magazine, but it usually came out after the fact. The e-news served us well during the pandemic and even now.

Facilitator #1: Our newsletters included a lot of pictures which people love. The pictures also bring a lot of attention to our events.

Participant #3: Our orchestra sends out so much information so we give our information to the office. However, we found that our members were getting e-mail fatigue so we now do an electronic update with an introductory paragraph talking about some of the things going on as well as pictures from events. This is done once a month. Some of our musicians have also subscribed and send us information to include. Our website is woefully out of date. We're working with the orchestra to try to update the website.

Facilitator #2: Cross referencing with your symphony is a good idea. We share our items with the symphony staff. We want to create engagement and visibility for the volunteer organization but we don't want to overload people.

Facilitator #1: You must reach the right balance - enough to keep people informed but not so much that they quit reading emails. Have you gotten new members because they've read a post in symphony newsletter?

Facilitator #2: I think we've gotten a few but it is anecdotal. People have seen things and gotten involved from what they've seen us do during the pandemic. We did online events publicized in symphony newsletter that they found interesting. We did lectures and free online Zoom programs that people who weren't members tuned in to.

Participant #4: We have an electronic newsletter that we send out every Sunday with a You tube musical transcription at the end. The members enjoy that. The person who does the newsletter decides what to put as the musical addendum.

Participant #1: Anything that we send out to the public must be submitted through the symphony office. That's cumbersome and takes time. We are not a separate 501 (c) 3 so that's why we must go through the symphony office. We have to figure out how to streamline the process.

Facilitator #2: You might set up a meeting to see how the two entities can work better together. Inviting the symphony leadership to your board meetings to talk about their jobs helps everyone understand processes better. This could even work for general membership meetings as well.

Facilitator #1: Has anyone had a column particularly of interest to members?

Participant #5: We have "historical notes" that is a particularly interesting column - symphony duos that are interviews where people interview each other. The writer also adds things on past events and members enjoy this aspect of the newsletter.

We have a volunteer who oversees the website, Instagram, Facebook, etc. along with a couple of volunteers and a paid administrative assistant. She set up the store front for our online auction.

Facilitator #2: Did you know how to do this or learn it?

Participant #6: My background is in technology and process management. I was very comfortable. We undertook a big work effort to see what was available to update our electronic needs. We reviewed a lot of programs and chose "Club Express." It supports all kinds of clubs with a lot of tools available. We use it to host our website. It has a storefront. It does not integrate into Facebook, Instagram, etc. but you can click your connection in it. We think it's about $30-$40 a month. Cost depends on the number of members. We use it to send out all our communications with member and non-member databases. We've been pleased with very little downtime. We can sign on, pay for things, centralize more things so we're not sending things all over the place. We can sign up for membership online. There are three of us who oversee Club Express including the paid admin. asst. and a volunteer IT person.

Facilitator #2: It sounds like a great system for organizations that are separate from the symphony.

Your background points out that looking at your members to see what their backgrounds are is very important. Volunteers love to use their skills so find out what their skillsets are.

Facilitator #1: If you have an organization chart, please send it to me so I can share with the group.

Participant #1: What is the online payment capability you have and what does it cost?

Participant #6: We have our own merchant account and it is so much per transaction - maybe $.30 per transaction. We can integrate with PayPal or go through Club Express with merchant account.

Participant #7: Please describe your account because we use Stripe and have a 3% charge for each transaction. We have Square also and it's a little more expensive.

Participant #6: You just have to look around. We must use Square when we're onsite. We can use Club Express when we have the communication capability. Club Express doesn't work with returns so we don't use that for the merchant account since we have to be able to deal with returns.

Participant #8: I was treasurer a few years ago so I have a few other names to throw out: Authorize.net and Auctria (auction website). Stripe was not good for us - their customer service doesn't have a good reputation. We piggyback off our symphony with Authorize.net. We run through our symphony.

Our symphony uses e-tapestry non-profit software. We have a separate cart that looks the same on the website but is a different cart in the background that goes direct to our bank account. It costs around $700+ a year. For many years we had money go into the symphony account and we had to justify them after the fact - a lot of accounting hours.

Facilitator #1: You are a wealth of knowledge today. What other technology have you used to support your organization?

Participant #6: Club Express supports an app but we haven't done this. There is a cost. We have not recommended it to our members.

Facilitator #1: Have any of you used Doodle for taking polls? Doodle.com is a great way to schedule meetings.

Participant #2: Have any of you used digital Cheetah? It seems easy to use. Junior League and other orgs use this. It would be great to have this for symphonies.

Facilitator #2: We have a password protected directory online but it has been difficult to get our members to use it.

Participant #2: The password need doesn't seem to work as well. The app is very easy.

Participant #1: I tried to get our board and chairs to use Slack but they are not very receptive to technology.

Facilitator #1: We tried to use Slack on the Volunteer Council. Some would communicate through Slack and some through email. You have to all jump in or it doesn't work.

Facilitator #2: It is hard when you're not in an office where you don't have someone right there to get training or have questions answered right away. We tried.

Participant #9: We use Sign-up Genius. Is it easier or harder than Doodle?

Facilitator #1: They are different. Doodle works well for setting up a meeting time whereas Sign-up Genius allows people to volunteer at a particular time.

A sample of a Doodle poll was shared.

Doodle takes time zone changes which is great for meetings across the country.

Participant #10: I use Mac products. I produce things in Pages and struggle with Word things. I remind people to share things as a .pdf because we can all read them.

Facilitator #1: 71% of you use Facebook or Facebook and Instagram. Any tips to share.

Facilitator #2: One of the greatest things I found was that you can schedule posts for future dates. You can also create an "event" page on Facebook. It is another way to publicize something.

Facilitator #1: Can you edit a scheduled post?

Facilitator #2: Yes, any time before it is posted it can be edited. You can attach photos, etc.

Facilitator #1: Do you have to get permission to post pictures of people?

Facilitator #2: Best practice is that you should get permission. Definitely ask. Do not tag anyone without asking. ALWAYS get permission if the pictures include kids. The other thing is that we always give photo credits because photos are intellectual property.

Participant #8: Try to work with your symphony marketing director. We always ask them to share certain posts because they have a larger following. It brings their viewers to our site and advertises events to a broader audience.

Facilitator #2: We have a Volunteer Council Facebook page and we ask the League to share some of our posts.

Try to do new posts at least once or twice a month to keep the site fresh.

Facilitator #4: The League has very firm Standard Operating Procedures on how to use various vehicles of communications. Be sure you check with your organization to see what their SOPs are.

Facilitator #2: Connect with your symphony marketing department to find standards and policies. Use these to help establish yours.

Facilitator #1: Thank you so much for your interactions. Next week we will talk about member recruitment and retention. We will be joined by Ginny Lundquist from the Volunteer Council.

The meeting adjourned at 4:05 p.m. CDT

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Lewis
Volunteer Council Secretary