

**LAO Volunteer Council
Strategic Conversation #4
Attracting a Diverse Membership
November 10, 2021**

Present

Facilitators: Julie Meredith, Volunteer Council President, 2021-2022
Janet Cabot, Volunteer Council President-elect, 2021-2022
Charlotte Lewis, Volunteer Council Secretary, 2021-2022
Sharon Hatchett, Member, League of American Orchestras Board of
Directors, Samara Ungar, League of American Orchestras Constituent Liaison

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

Julie called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for joining us again, announced that the subject was Attracting a Diverse Membership and introduced Sharon Hatchett.

Sharon: Introduced herself as a past member of the Volunteer Council. As Membership Recruitment Chair, she was successful in recruiting diverse members to the VC. Her home orchestra is the Chicago Sinfonietta which was formed by a Black man because of the lack of meaningful opportunities for people of color in the classical music field. Sharon began with a poll and used the feedback from the poll to help lead us in our conversation.

While participants were answering the poll, some commented on the other kinds of diversity: gender, age, geography, and size of orchestra considered by the Volunteer Council when recruiting candidates.

Sharon mentioned that she would like to hear from participants on what you want to learn, what you have started to do, and what challenges and successes you have met.

Participant #1: We had no volunteer group eight years ago. We formed a volunteer group when a new executive director was hired. It began with 20 members, and we have about 15 in our volunteer group now. We have two new members - one who is young and the other is Black. They came to us rather than us going to them. Our Black member joined because of her sister who used to belong and the other is a budding composer interested in the Carnegie program.

Facilitator #2: To attract diverse members you must be intentional in your strategies and look at what diversity is in your community, including for example, age, gender, and ethnicity. Reach out to who you know and how they might be a resource to you.

- Reach out to people who attend a performance. Let them know who you are and what you do in your orchestra to not only learn about the benefits of getting involved, but to also serve as an ambassador for your organization's recruitment efforts.
- Tone at the top also matters! It is hard to drive change if there is no commitment from your leadership.
- There should be a communication strategy within an organization that includes information pertaining to your commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion ("EDI").
- Your EDI commitment should be brought to the attention of the community served by your orchestra and those with whom you wish to engage.
- Your organization must be clear in its message.
- Some studies indicate the value proposition for EDI because those organizations that embrace EDI typically outperform those that do not, in terms of creativity and overall effectiveness.

For purposes of our discussions, we are focusing on the volunteer organizations and not the orchestra.

Participant #2: My orchestra has had webinars including topics of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access. We have been charged with increasing diversity in our volunteer organizations, but we don't know how to do it. It's been difficult with the pandemic.

Participant #3: I've been in the workforce for many years and I'm coming back to our guild after time away from the volunteer community. Things have changed a lot in that time. It is important for the volunteer organization to look like what our community looks like and ours doesn't. Who do we go to for help?

Facilitator #3: You might look to your orchestra. Follow the lead of your symphony. Make known what you want to do. How did your symphony board do it? What connections did they make in the community? Reach out to your new board members?

Facilitator #2: The tone at the top is critical and we should grow a connection between the board of the symphony and the volunteer organization. We are engaging with the public and seeing a broader range of people for spreading the volunteer message.

- A successful event to engage with and connect with the community served by my own orchestra was a "Día de los Muertos" or Day of the Dead event held by the

volunteer organization on the same night of the “Día de los Muertos” concert performance. The volunteer organization pulled in members of the Latin community to not only create a Mexican dinner menu with support of local Mexican businesses, but also educational opportunities, face painting, Mariachi performers and dancers, and all guests were encouraged to dress in native apparel. Not only was the event a fundraiser, but the objectives also included community engagement, audience development, and potential subscribers, donors, and volunteers to the orchestra.

- The volunteer organization also held a Diwali festival aligned with the orchestras’ musical program honoring this festival. This event was equally successful and drew in members of the Indian community.
- Consider these examples as you look at your community to see what programs would be effective in attracting diversity.

Participant #4: Our symphony staff has become more diverse.

- Board has targeted the need to diversify itself.
- Symphony board has an EDI committee
- Our league is in the process of identifying this - we're aware and just beginning to delve into how to approach and achieve this.

Facilitator #2: Awareness is step #1. There is a resource list to look at and Julie has emailed it to you.

- The League has an EDI resource center with various topics on getting started.
- Volunteer organizations should have a voice in orchestra board meetings where possible so it's part of strategic discussions.
- There is a League webinar about creating an equitable environment. The resource materials shared by Julie Meredith includes this information.

Participant #5: I was on a committee of a different organization board researching EDI issues. The biggest recommendation was that any organization that truly values diversity should not just have a committee but should have a board member. "Don't just ask people to come to the dance, ask them to actually dance."

Facilitator #2: Don't just check the box. People must feel like their voice matters. Give them meaningful engagement because they may not understand the classical music world. Mentoring may be one way to make this engagement succeed.

Facilitator #3: Once we have new members how do we engage people? Find ways to give them meaningful opportunities. Friend to friend works better than cold calls. Have a plan to make new members welcome and have meaningful input.

Facilitator #2: I describe myself as a "friendly stalker". I have season tickets and invite friends to be my guests and introduce them to people. We have an MLK program with a private reception pre-event, which is followed by our signature MLK performance that concludes with all in the hall holding hands and singing "We Shall Overcome." This is about bringing people together.

- Approach people who attend performances and tell them about your organization.
- Reach out and connect with other organizations. Ask to attend a meeting to discuss your organization. Consider inviting members of the organization to events at your orchestra and considered bringing an ensemble to the organization to expose their members to your orchestra.

Participant #6: Are pre-concert or intermission tables effective?

Comments:

- Many participants said yes. Some had tables of their own and some shared a space with the symphony.
- Have specific information on upcoming events.
- Our board members staff the event and greet people. We've gotten new members that way and it definitely makes us more visible.
- Our symphony has a symphony ambassador program that greet people as they come into the hall. We are intentional to say hello and say that we are glad you're here.

Facilitator #2: You cannot sit back and assume they will come. You must actively seek them out. Share the benefits of upcoming programs that would be of interest to them. Sharing information about a lecture, etc. and that classical music has a history of diverse composers, conductors, musicians, etc. hits home with people new to classical music.

Participant comments:

- Our organization has an online program that is an hour long. A musicologist does the program which gives information about the performers and composers. This can provide lots of interesting information for people not familiar with classical music, particularly when the composers or performers are from a diverse background.

- Having a "general" arts program open to people interested in all types of art will help you engage with other groups.
- Connect with the boards of young people groups. Parents are always interested in what their children like and do.
- We have an outreach program in an inner-city area that provides free violins and lessons. Parents of kids who stay in it for many years parents get a guild membership and the kids get into the youth guild. We've found that most of these kids have never been downtown let alone to the symphony. The youth guild kids get free tickets to the symphony.

Participant #3: I loved hearing about the symphony boards and modeling after them. Our symphony board is very diverse, so we have to find out how they got that way.

Facilitator #3: Remember that we do not have to go this alone. We should reach out to our symphony board to ask for help on how they did something. We do not have all the answers.

Participant #5: Our league is not diverse, but we are working on it. Our orchestra created a mobile "music box" that flips open and becomes a stage and we have taken that into 70 zip codes. We've reached a very diverse population bringing the music to the people. That is easier than getting people to the symphony.

Facilitator #2: We do not have a "music box", but we do outreach programs with pop-up events by collaborating with community organizations. We also support community efforts to provide information about things like the importance of credit, the importance of education, and we help with other resource support.

Participant #7: We have a group called "In Your Neighborhood" which goes into underserved neighborhoods with the entire orchestra. It also goes into hospitals, parks, etc. to bring music to a diverse audience.

Participant #8: We have a program that has been all over the city with huge productions. We meet people and encourage them, but it is difficult to be engaged with them. The opportunities do not end up with getting a lot of people to join. We have a lot of kids that are involved but not that many parents are interested. We have talked about having a few parents as guest members and see if that might help.

Facilitator #1: How many men are in your organization?

Participants:

- we have one
- 2 men in their 40's who joined and are actively involved
- a reasonable number of men
- a reasonable number of men who are on committees and have become involved
- 25% to 33% of the organization are men and we have men on the board
- it's been a bit of a challenge.

Participant #7: has anyone tried going to PTA meetings?

Facilitator #1: we have booths at school concerts and have picked up some members that way.

Facilitator #2: Let parents know that joining the organization does not have to require a lot of time.

Other thoughts, questions, suggestions.

Facilitator #2: You must have an inclusive leader and allow members to talk about what is good and bad about your organization. This takes work but should not be intimidating.

Sharon thanked everyone for participating and said that she enjoyed doing the program. She noted that she is open to continuing contact with anyone interested and that the Volunteer Council knows how to reach her.

Julie thanked Sharon for presenting great information. She stated that next week's program will be on fundraising and will be the last in the series.

The meeting adjourned at 4:09 p.m. CST

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Lewis
Volunteer Council Secretary