

LAO Volunteer Council  
Strategic Conversation #5  
Fundraising  
November 17, 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

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 Fundraising. She talked about the Volunteer Council, mentioning that there are members from all over the United States and all sizes of organizations.

She also said that one of the best places to go to get ideas for fundraising is to attend the League of American Orchestras' National Conference. There is a dedicated track for volunteers. It addresses just volunteer issues: networking activities, fundraising ideas, etc. It will be held June 1-3 at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles and hosted by the Los Angeles Philharmonic. There will be a concert by the LA Phil in Walt Disney Hall. Registration opens in February and you can find out more information at [leagueconference.org](http://leagueconference.org).

We started with a small poll on fundraising by volunteer organizations during the COVID pandemic.

1. 92% cancelled or postponed fundraisers during the pandemic. This was all but one participant but that participant stated that her organization does not fundraise so there was nothing to cancel.
2. 58% did have fundraisers but they were held in different ways.
3. 58% raised funds without holding events.
4. 50% said they would keep the changes they made during COVID.
5. 83% will continue to have long standing successful events.

Participant #1: We held an auction online instead of in person. We built a storefront and sold arts and crafts as well as items to bid on. We had a Facebook live presentation with interviews and music. We used local advertising for free and raised almost \$30K. We also held a golf event that raised over \$30K. The golf event was brought back since it would be outside. Luckily the weather cooperated. We had hole sponsors as well as other types of sponsors. It was so successful that we will put on another one next year and include tennis.

Participant #2: We did a Facebook raffle with mailings and a live drawing. We did a golf scramble with sponsors and made \$2500 the first time and around \$3500 the second. We are planning our third golf scramble since they were pretty successful. Golf scramble: teams of four with different kinds of teams

with different price levels: men, women, men and women. You can purchase mulligans at the beginning, nine holes with prizes for best score, best putt, etc. There was a dinner and non-golfers could purchase dinner only tickets that are higher than if you golf as well. This was to get non-golfers involved. Orchestra musicians played. We might use young artist winners this year if it is more of a family event.

Facilitator #1: Rather than have a gala, one organization simply solicited donations with a "non-event" event. They had a series of mailers that said things like "two weeks to not have to find a dress to wear", etc. They did a countdown to the event and raised a decent amount of money for this.

Participant #3: We used to have various support groups do one large fundraiser taking over a mansion with boutiques, etc. This went on for several days. Now we take opening night as a fundraiser asking members to either buy opening night tickets or donate that equivalent. We had 100% participation and raised more money for a lot less work.

Participant #4: What platform did you use for your Facebook storefront and auction?

Participant #1: You have to build the storefront on the website you use. It looked like you were shopping with items and inventory. It was done through Club Express. What was posted on Facebook was the live presentation. The symphony staff helped us with the live and filmed presentations. It went on for about 4 or 5 hours.

Facilitator #3: Our organization holds what is sort of a non-event. Our orchestra holds a park concert each spring. We walk around asking the audience to put donations into yellow buckets. What is very beneficial is having stickers to put on people who donate. The kids loved these and you don't ask people twice once you see a sticker.

Facilitator #1: Are there any COVID changes that you made and will do again?

Participant #1: We are going to do our golf event again and include tennis this time. We may do the online auction again. We have to do something because we may not be able to have our designer house yet.

Participant #2: We will do our golf event again and hope to have additional family-oriented events in it to make it a little different. We may use an online software program to do an auction and raffle in the spring. We used it for Whiskey at the Warehouse. We use a building that is like a warehouse where you bring in what you need. We have entertainment, silent auction, raffle, and sell sponsorships. Pre-COVID we always sold out. Some items are whiskey related and one item has the maestro cooking your dinner.

Participant #5: We have five different committees that each have their fundraising events and one or two events that have all volunteers working together. We were planning our musician appreciation luncheon where members pay and have musicians join them. This was in the planning stage when we had to shut down so we asked people to donate the \$65 cost of the luncheon since we couldn't have it live. One member made music facemasks and if you donated at least \$50 you received a facemask. Another committee went virtual with their lecture luncheon and had a guest speaker and musician. This was done

with orchestra digital stage performances. We actually raised more money than the luncheons normally make since we didn't have to pay for the food. They will probably do it again this spring but will not continue in the future as the in-person aspect is definitely missed.

Facilitator #1: Some people are music groupies and we tried to capitalize on that. We bid out skiing with the principal violist, a salon concert with the asst. concertmaster and pianist at a home, dinner GC for dinner with the concertmaster and his violinist wife. The hardest part was setting up the dates after the auction occurred because the musicians didn't want their personal numbers given out. It was more work than the event.

Some groups have long standing events and others re-invent every year. What works for your organizations?

Facilitator #2: We have an event that is in its 27th year and held at a golf club on the shore of a lake so the location is lovely. It is three events in one: golf tournament, afternoon cocktail reception on the lawn with an orchestra concert followed by a dinner. It is a fun event with people selling raffle tickets. It is festive and has been very successful. Some years we auction the ability to conduct one piece at the next year's event. We can have up to 400 guests. We make anywhere from \$35-55K from sponsors, raffle tickets, and tickets sold. Next year we will have an honorary golf chair from the local university. This is the retired band director from the marching band. He retired after 50 years and is legendary so is a huge draw. Each year we try to add something to make it special.

Facilitator #3: We have two things that are about 60 years old. One is a book fair: volunteers collect books all year and have a three-day sale in June. The other is a resale shop selling high end gently used items - a women's boutique. Both have very dedicated volunteers. The book warehouse is open two days a week for sorting and pricing. The sale is held on a three-day weekend at the beginning of June. The dress shop is open from 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. It has some paid employees as well as volunteers. The book fair usually donates \$45-50K and the dress shop closer to \$75K annually toward our pledge to the orchestra.

Participant #1: Our biggest event is a designer house held every other year with a tent on site. It usually brings in over \$100K. We've done at least 25 houses. This is a huge project. The people cannot be in the house for three months. Designers submit designs on the room and spend their money to decorate it. We do the advertising, hosting, and ticket sales. We have special events and a boutique. You can have lunch on site. Businesses will rent the tent there and cater parties that include a tour of the house. The designers have 30 days to decorate, it is open for 30 days, and then 30 days to put back to the way the owner wants it. It takes around 9-10 months of planning and work. It takes a lot of volunteers. Many of the volunteers won't join our organization.

1. find an unoccupied house if possible
2. take over the house for 3 months
3. use high end designers who present designs
4. the committee chooses the designs they want
5. designers pay for all furnishings they use

6. the house is open for 30 days
7. special events can be held by renting the house
8. it takes 9-10 months of planning
9. many of the volunteers do not join the organization
10. designers can sell what they put into the house
11. designers have 30 days to do the room and 30 days to put it back - if owners do not like a paint color it is put back to off white
12. designers get a lot of business by showcasing their work

The designers are very busy now so we may not be able to do one this year.

Comments:

- Some have done tours of homes with high end kitchens so there was less work.
- One city used to do one with a newly constructed house.
- Some will probably not do one this year because materials are not available, and designers are fully booked with business.

What about something that is quick and easy or one and done?

- Our symphony was remodeling one year, and we sold the furniture being replaced: meeting tables, TVs, lawn chairs, etc. We took advantage of a onetime opportunity.
- We have a series of four Sundays held in homes. Light refreshments with music by orchestra musicians. The cost is \$40 each.
- We do something similar. We try to have six a year but this year we hope to have four. We pay our musicians, but many orchestras can have the musicians do this without having to pay them.

Julie shared the League's website ([americanorchestras.org](http://americanorchestras.org)) and pointed out that the Volunteer Council link is under the Connect tab. Every year at Conference we highlight the best projects and programs that organizations do. There are handouts which are on the website. You can click on them and have a two page .pdf of the projects. They tell you who the contact person is for the project. We're presently working on getting this into one large .pdf so you don't have to search as much. This is a great resource.

Don't underestimate the power of Google searching and Pinterest under non-profit fundraising. You must know your audience and community so you can leverage the assets in your orchestra. Musicians are usually willing to help.

Facilitator #2: Don't underestimate the power of connections people want to have with the musicians by meeting them in person.

Knowing the musicians carries over to enjoyment at the concerts.

The minutes will be published on the League website.

Julie thanked everyone for attending and adding so much to the conversations.

The meeting adjourned at 4:13 p.m. CST

Respectfully submitted,  
Charlotte Lewis  
Volunteer Council Secretary