

**LAO Volunteer Council  
Strategic Conversation #3  
Membership  
November 3, 2021**

Present

Facilitators: Ginny Lundquist, Volunteer Council Conference Chair, 2021-2022  
Julie Meredith, Volunteer Council President, 2021-2022  
Laurie Skjerseth, Volunteer Council Member Recruitment Chair, 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. CST (Julie Meredith):

Julie called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for joining us again, announced that the subject was membership recruitment and retention, and began with a poll.

1. How many members are in your volunteer organization? 1-50: 6%, 51-100: 24%, 101-150: 24%, 151-200: 12%, over 200: 35%
2. What per cent of your membership is active? < 25%: 24%, 26-50%: 59%, 51-75%: 12%, 76-100%: 6%
3. What is the average age of your membership? 40-60: 29%, > 60: 71%
4. Why do people join your organization? What motivates your members? (Choose as many as apply) friendship: 65%, love of music: 94%, offerings of volunteer group: 47%, discount at shop: 6%, free tickets: 12%, access to musicians: 76%, members only events: 53%, other: 6%

Facilitator #1: Do you have different membership structures for people who volunteer versus non-volunteering members, etc.?

Participant responses:

- Active members, spousal members, supporting members, members of note, non-resident members. Some members like to work on big fundraisers but not the smaller fundraisers. Many years ago, we had a requirement of a certain number of volunteer hours but that caused members to drop out and we dropped that requirement.
- Three major areas we perform in and have three guilds. We don't coordinate very much but we'd like to. Single and family, regular and patron level memberships.

- Five separate committees. Each has their own bylaws and definitions of membership and requirements: active, sustaining (have been active for years but don't do as much), honorary (do less). Each committee decides on dues and requirements.
- Five levels: basic, higher pay levels, top two levels get name in program, top level doesn't have to volunteer, aged 70 and over (legacy member) don't have to volunteer. Most members are at the highest level of \$350 per couple for the treble clef society.
- Some organizations have ticket to ball required in membership dues.
- Our dues are around \$120 which includes hospitality. Members must buy \$300 ball tickets and must buy a subscription for the season. We have many subscription options, so the costs vary. We are limited to 70 members and must have a proposer and sponsors. Two categories: up to 70 women and have as many sustainers as we want. Sustainers have the same monetary requirements but don't have to attend the monthly meetings. A large portion of sustainers are just as active as our active members. We have a waiting list.
- New this year we offered a guild sponsorship from \$500-\$5000. The levels include varying numbers of tickets to the gala, includes membership dues, fees to two luncheons we have to pay for, and you being promoted as a sponsor of the organization. We raised \$60K at the beginning of the year. We have 250 members with 41 signing up for sponsorship. Others paid regular memberships. Some people just wanted the contribution but the bundled charge of \$500 was about the same as individual charges for the year if they paid separately. Everything was paid up front. Regular membership is \$45.
- We're a small guild (around 100). The board is resistant to changing dues amount of \$40.

Facilitator #1: What motivates your membership to join? It looks like a love of music, friendship, access to the musicians, members only events are high on the list.

Participant responses:

- We had music in homes events with prices that ranged from \$35-\$1000 per ticket depending on food, music, and venue. Usually, two to four musicians performed at each function and they were not paid.
- A guild member would host musicians in their home or at a restaurant. Many musicians signed up to do this.

Facilitator #2: I'll present some slides from a membership webinar called "Re-energizing Membership" (on [americanorchestras.org](http://americanorchestras.org) website).

- What does your symphony need from your volunteers?
  - fundraising
  - events
  - money for annual fund
  - service to save money on expenses - this is a valuable commodity so keep track of volunteer hours
- Align your orchestra needs with the volunteer structure
- Successful organizations have established membership committees to oversee recruitment and retention.
  - set goals in conjunction with the leadership
  - create a more diverse membership
  - make sure goals align with overall strategy
  - develop and communicate an action plan
  - celebrate your successes
- Are you reaching all segments of your community?
  - corporate partners - many require employee participation in community volunteer work
  - recent retirees become volunteers
  - music and art teachers
  - self-employed people with flexible schedules who view group as a networking opportunity
  - other attendees at fundraisers and concerts
- Do you understand your organization so you keep members?
  - mentoring to get new members involved
  - new member committee assigns mentor for two years
  - VC uses the president-elect position to help the leadership with mentoring
- Tracking software to help with what members want to do and can do
  - Volgistics
  - Volunteer Hub
  - Mobilize.us
- Recognize and reward volunteers
  - personal thank you notes from orchestra leadership and musicians
  - discounts for tickets or open rehearsals
  - recognition lunch or cocktail party

- Are we having fun yet?
  - FUN raisers to help keep people engaged
  - guest bartender night
  - music bingo was a membership event

Several people said that simply making phone calls is a good way to keep members interested.

Facilitator #1 asked what was working for different organizations.

Participant responses:

- We have a program for high school sophomores and juniors. Juniors are presented at a particular symphony concert. Their parents must be members of the volunteer organization. The problem is keeping them as members after the kids complete the program.
- We had some success with the under 40's but they have a different idea of engagement so you must be flexible.
- We have our own gala separate from the orchestra. It brings in more than \$100K with 400+ attendees. The gala is a "see and be seen event" but attendees don't join our organization.
- Our younger supporters don't want to fundraise. They just want to have fun activities.

Participant #1: How many of you have night meetings?

Participant responses:

- Our meetings are dinner meetings.
- The things that are just for members are usually during the day, but events open to the public are held on Sunday afternoons or at night.
- We haven't changed the time of events but are changing the times of membership meetings to accommodate younger members. We're considering having a couple of hybrid meetings for general membership.

Unfortunately, no one had any successes to share on getting younger members.

Participant comments:

- We proposed a fall membership drive with half price membership. It didn't happen. Did anyone else try this?

- Our non-members who work with the designer house get reduced membership, but this is not extremely successful.
- We have an elementary school docent program where docents visit the schools and give students information on what they will see and hear at the concert. People love to do this, but they don't want to join the guild. We run a youth guild for members 12-18 but we can't get the parent members who join the youth guild to join the regular guild. The youth guild man the coat check, have volunteer opportunities to get free tickets to concerts, there is a competition for youth guild recital, those in the recital have an automatic entry to compete in the "Salute to Youth" program that the symphony runs, backstage seminars where they tour backstage and have musicians talk to them about that night's program.
- We have docents for the school programs and the orchestra does not recognize them as volunteers since they don't belong to any of the committees.
- We have two businesses that we run, and our insurance requires that we have either member volunteers or paid employees.

Participant #2: Our organization is still a women's auxiliary. It's time to move away from this. How do we word our membership levels to include men?

The general consensus was that the by-laws of the organization must be changed so the membership is not limited to women.

- Most groups are mostly women but have some male participation.
- Have programs that attract men.
- We have lots of men who are members but not usually on the board.

Participant #3: Does anyone do anything to recruit members within specific fields?

Facilitator #2: Network with people in those specific fields and try to get them interested.

Facilitator #1: Thank you for attending and participating in today's meeting. Next week we will talk about diversity membership with Sharon Hatchett from the Chicago Sinfonietta.

The meeting adjourned at 4:16 p.m. CST

Respectfully submitted,  
Charlotte Lewis  
Volunteer Council Secretary