

Engaging Membership for Retention



PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

After 19 years of significantly declining membership, a five-year strategic plan to sustainably grow membership was developed and began implementation in the 2020-2021 season. After **growing by an astonishing 72% growth rate** in the first three years, the focus shifted to retaining new members and finding ways to keep current members as sustainable growth is only possible when an organization adds new members and retains members over time. New members are the most vulnerable to not renewing so they were the primary focus for our retention plan. Thus, the fourth year of the five-year strategic plan focused on retention and the theme was Engagement.

GOALS:

The goals were to build new processes for retention that could be used in future years to continue sustained growth, have an overall renewal rate of 80%, and a renewal rate of 65% for new members.

STRATEGIES:

We doubled the number of **New Member Mentoring Chairs** from one to two and restructured their roles to communicate more and build stronger connections with new members. We created a New Member Handbook and two formal checkpoints to see how they were doing.

We had **new volunteer opportunities** to serve as concierges at Symphony performances and staff the Annual Fund table. These opportunities were first offered to new members who took full advantage of the opportunity. They were able to make new friends and for some opportunities, they received free Symphony performance tickets which got them into the hall, often for the first time. Many of the new members began to purchase tickets on their own.



New Member Days were developed for volunteering at the Symphony's Student Concerts to give new members another opportunity to get even more involved with volunteering and to meet new and current League members.

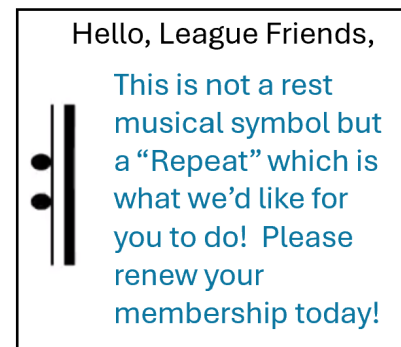
Volunteering proved to be a catalyst for renewal. Eighty-eight percent of new members who served as concierges or worked the Annual Fund tables and 88% of new members who volunteered at Student Concerts renewed their memberships versus an overall renewal rate of 75% for new members.

We encouraged both new and current members to register for our Members Only section on our website this past year much more than the previous years to get them more engaged. New member registration **increased to 50% over 19% the previous year** and current member registration **increased to 30% over 20% the previous year**.

For Longtime members with 30 and more years of membership, we sent them special emails and letters noting their years of current membership. We had only calculated their membership years just the year before. This resulted in **100% of these members renewing** versus 90% in previous years.

We also had a **renewal announcement at events** and those who had not renewed were contacted at the event by a member of the Membership Team.

To encourage new and current members to renew, we increased the frequency of renewal notices. We also used **musical references** in the notices to ensure we got their attention.



RESULTS:

All goals were met and exceeded. We had a **90%** renewal rate of all members and a **75%** renewal rate for our new members. Most importantly, we built **new processes** that will continue to sustainably grow our membership in the future. And since we had to minimize spending, we had no costs associated with our new engagement processes.

This project year is the fourth year in the **highest four-year growth** in our League history since 1937 and the highest number of members in 19 years. The Houston Symphony League also gained \$43,700 in dues which is **another historical League record**. Each year of the strategic plan set a new record for dues. And we look poised to create new records in this upcoming year.

IMPACT:

The impact is much greater than just the increased revenue from membership dues, we gained additional volunteers and donors and an increase in ticket sales. We are supporting our beloved Houston Symphony.

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