

Major American Symphony Orchestras and the Fundraising Gala

By
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A Master's Project Presented to the Arts and Administration Program of the
University of Oregon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Science in Arts Management.

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and strokes, positioned above a horizontal line.

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EDUCATION

Master of Science in Arts Administration

-Specialization in
Performing Arts Management
-Certificate in
Nonprofit Management
2018
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR

Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance

2016
Pacific Lutheran University
Tacoma, WA

COMPUTER SKILLS

Microsoft Office Suite
Adobe Suite
Tessitura
VISIO
Enterprise
Advance
iMovie

EXPERIENCE

Assistant Event Coordinator

Scheduling & Event Services | University of Oregon, Eugene, OR | Oct. 2017 - Present

- Planned, staffed, and resourced over 350 events
- Used organizational skills to follow complex event planning procedures
- Used customer service skills to communicate with clients about their event needs
- Updated over 150 detailed room diagram templates in VISIO

Special Events and Corporate Development Intern

Seattle Symphony, Seattle, WA | Summer 2017

- Assisted in the planning and preparation of the Opening Night Gala 2017, which raised \$1.7 million
- Researched corporate sponsor prospects
- Received training in Tessitura

Artistic Productions Intern: Chamber Music Festival

Icicle Creek Center for the Arts, Leavenworth, WA | Summer 2017

- Coordinated festival operations, including making schedules, writing programs, and editing faculty artist contracts
- Filmed and edited a series of promotional videos for social media
- Stage managed 9 chamber music concerts and organized 6 post-concert receptions
- Coordinated travel plans for faculty and students from all over the world

Development Intern

Eugene Symphony, Eugene, OR | Jan 2017 - Feb 2018

- Provided event planning support for GALA 2017 and 2018
- Crafted Facebook posts for promote gala auction packages
- Thoughtfully created a post-gala evaluation survey for attendees
- Created ideal event flow by working registration, checkout, and recording purchased auction items

Personnel Management Intern

Eugene Symphony, Eugene, OR | Jan 2017 - March 2017

- Researched and reviewed musician collective bargaining agreements
- Created new attendance tracking system
- Prepared calendar with instrumentation notes for upcoming season

Development Assistant

School of Music and Dance | University of Oregon, Eugene, OR | Jan - Dec 2017

- Developed corporate sponsorship package by researching comparable universities
- Assisted in planning donor events in anticipation of 50th year of *chamber music* series
- Grant writing and research for World Music Series
- Formal training in Advance database

EXPERIENCE CONT.

Listener Services Associate

KNKX 88.5 FM (formerly KPLU), Tacoma, WA | Aug 2015 - Sept 2017

- Provided donor relations for radio station listeners and members
- Respectfully handled confidential donor credit card information and contacts
- Fielded questions during \$7 million campaign to "Save KPLU"
- Gained donor database experience in Enterprise

Lobby Staff Coordinator

Lagerquist Concert Hall | Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA | Sept. 2012 - May 2016

- Managed, hired, and scheduled 12-15 lobby staff for all music department events
- Communicated clearly and frequently with large groups of staff and volunteers
- Took initiative to restructure staff during budget cuts to avoid layoffs
- Travelled with Christmas Concert tour to provide event support and sell merchandise
- Enforced concert hall etiquette and provided customer service to patrons

Office Assistant

Music Department | Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA | Sept. 2013 - Aug. 2016

- Managed choral and instrumental library inventory
- Sold Christmas concert tickets (2,000 tickets, sold out in 2 hours)
- Assisted students with registration and advising

Engagements Intern

Symphony Tacoma, Tacoma, WA | Sept. 2015 - May 2016

- Gained knowledge of how a professional symphony orchestra operations
- Worked with vendors while planning special events
- Updated employee handbook to include social media clause
- Crafted Facebook posts to promote the new vehicle donation program
- Document and organized special event inventory

Program Assistant and Head Counselor: Young Pianists Camp

Icicle Creek Center for the Arts, Leavenworth, WA | Summers, 2011 - 2017

- Supervised 15-20 middle and high school students for 7-day festival
- Planned and coordinated successful execution of camp activities
- Created complex practice and lesson schedules
- Lead team of 3-5 counselors

References available upon request

ABSTRACT

Virtually every large symphony orchestra holds a fundraising gala. Formal events like these are costly in terms of both time and monetary resources, yet they yield a relatively small profit when compared to direct solicitations for funds. Nevertheless, special events serve important purposes beyond fundraising, like stewardship, networking, and prospecting, so they are worth the time and energy for most organizations.

This research project looks at the galas of 10 symphony orchestras in the United States (nine of which have budgets over \$20 million) and compares the use of various gala components, dollars raised, and staff perceptions. The purposes of this study are to 1) gain a better understanding of which gala elements contribute to the event's success, 2) find other gala purposes and ways to measure a gala's success beyond just fundraising, and 3) discover the unique ways that symphony orchestras are utilizing the gala model in comparison to non-performing arts nonprofits. This master's project culminates in six major recommendations as well as a Symphony Orchestra Gala Planning Toolkit, which includes timelines, checklists, and evaluation forms.

KEYWORDS: gala, gala component/element, special events, fundraiser, major symphony orchestra

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Chapter 1: Introduction

BACKGROUND

Nearly every symphony orchestra in the nation holds a gala or other similar, formal fundraising event. They give the organization an extra boost of revenue, provide important social exchanges, and are a great way to recruit new donors. However, there is surprisingly little literature on the gala. The problem is that the gala is such a widely used model, but there is no specific literature about the unique ways that the gala can be used for symphony orchestras, or any other arts organization for that matter. Symphony orchestras across the country each hold very similar events, following the same traditional model that has been only slightly modified over the years. Meanwhile, some orchestras, especially smaller and newer orchestras, are finding that their events are not well attended and are not yielding enough profit to make the event worth having. There is no literature that allows orchestras to learn from each other or from scholarly research in order to provide recommendations for a successful fundraising event within performing arts organizations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

In my internships and experience working with symphonies on their fundraising galas, they all seem to follow a very similar format. However, these

organizations are often looking for new and creative ways to improve their galas. Unfortunately, symphony orchestras often do not communicate with other symphonies in the region (or beyond) to share ideas, at least not about fundraising ideas.

Special events are defined as unique, temporary rituals. More specifically, galas are marked by a special performance (Bladen, Abson, & Kennell, 2014). In this way, symphony orchestras are allowed a unique take on the gala, as opposed to other non-arts nonprofits. The purpose of a gala is to recruit, keep, and thank donors, and fundraise (Carpenter & Blandy, 2008).

Most scholarly fundraising and nonprofit literature about special events briefly seeks to define "special event" and articulate the potential purposes of such events. In the literature offering best practices for event managers for arts and cultural events, the focus is broad, referring to any major event put on by any kind of organization, nonprofit or otherwise. These writings are mainly based on personal professional experience.

When it comes to recommendations and best practices, the literature takes a broad approach and addresses special events as a whole, for organizations across all sectors. While many of these practices such as event design, operations, marketing, legal issues, and so on (Bladen et al., 2014) can be applied to nonprofit arts organizations, the literature fails to address the unique role of performances at a gala and how this framework can be effectively used by performing arts organizations, like symphony orchestras.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Purpose statement

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the symphony gala landscape in major American orchestras, so as to encourage these organizations to learn from one another, and to provide a framework of recommendations to symphony orchestras in the future.

Methodological paradigm

I position myself within the interpretivist constructivist methodological paradigm. With this paradigm, I am attempting to gain an understanding of the current state of the symphony gala by taking into consideration the thoughts and opinions of the special events staff at these organizations as well as gathering empirical data from them.

Role of the researcher

As a researcher, I bring my own set of biases to the data collection and interpretation. I have participated in galas for the Seattle Symphony and Eugene Symphony in an intern and volunteer capacity. I am already familiar with the organization, the event, and the staff in both cases. It is my professional goal to go into this field and seek employment at one of the 25 orchestras researched in this master's project.

Research question

How can symphony orchestras most effectively use the gala model for fundraising?

Definitions

1. *Gala component or gala element*: items that may be included on the gala program, seen at a gala, or incorporated within the larger gala season event
2. *Major Symphony Orchestra*: professional symphony orchestras with some of the largest budgets in the country; Group A orchestras as categorized by the League of American Orchestras as having a budget of \$20 million or more
3. *Gala*: a social occasion with special entertainments or performances

Delimitations

For the purpose of this study, only symphony orchestras in Group A (as categorized by the League of American Orchestras) were analyzed, with the exception of the local Eugene Symphony and Oregon Symphony.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small number of responses received. Because this study reaches out to the largest symphony orchestras in the country, the staff members were busy and many could not get back to me. Additionally, a portion of the survey asked for thoughts and opinions from one

representative of the organization. This one person's opinion may not reflect the attitude of the organization as a whole, and this was taken into account when analyzing the responses. Findings from this research are not generalizable to all symphony orchestras, but nonetheless will provide valuable information.

Benefits of the study

With the completion of this study, symphony orchestras of all sizes will hopefully have a publication to refer to when looking for new ideas and recommendations for their galas. By learning what the largest, and therefore (arguably) most successful organizations are doing, other symphonies across the nation can implement these ideas and have more successful galas.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach/dimensions of research

By sending surveys to Special Events Managers from 25 major symphony orchestras, interviewing the special events staff at the Seattle Symphony, Oregon Symphony, and Eugene Symphony, and conducting participant observation at the Eugene Symphony gala 2018, I was able to gain a better understanding of the diversity of the symphony gala and learn why the organizations chose to include or exclude certain gala elements. This was a qualitative study that that occurred January to April 2018.

Strategy of inquiry

To begin, a literature review was conducted to contextualize the field of special events and nonprofit performing arts fundraising. Next, surveys were sent out to 25 major symphony orchestras across the country (with the exception of the local Eugene Symphony) in order to take a brief inventory on the kinds of gala elements being used and to glean any telling anecdotes about what did and did not work at each gala. To supplement the survey data, interviews were conducted with special events staff from nearby orchestras (Seattle and Eugene) to gain deeper understanding of what makes a successful gala based on the perspectives from professionals in the field. Lastly, participant observation at the Eugene Symphony GALA 2018 provided a first-hand account of event flow, logistical details, and an indication of general audience satisfaction.

Overview of research design

This study took a snapshot of what major American symphony orchestras were doing at their galas in the 2017-2018 season in order to understand how symphony orchestras can most effectively use galas for fundraising and other purposes unique to each organization. Surveys were sent to the staff members in charge of the special events teams at 25 major symphony orchestras.

Site Selection

In selecting the symphony orchestras to survey, I started with a general web search of major U.S. symphony orchestras, which yielded keywords such as, “best”, “oldest”, “highest-paid musicians”, “largest staff”, and “largest budget”. Any orchestra that showed up on one of these articles made it onto the list of 25 orchestras. I cross checked this list and confirmed that all were registered Group A orchestras on the League of American Orchestras website, with the exception of the Eugene Symphony and Oregon Symphony.

1. Los Angeles Philharmonic+
2. New York Philharmonic
3. Boston Symphony+
4. Chicago Symphony
5. Cleveland Symphony
6. Philadelphia Symphony+
7. National Symphony Orchestra
8. San Francisco Symphony
9. Seattle Symphony*/+
10. Dallas Symphony Orchestra +
11. Baltimore Symphony Orchestra
12. Pittsburgh Symphony
13. Minnesota Orchestra+
14. Cincinnati Symphony
15. Detroit Symphony
16. San Diego Symphony
17. St. Louis Symphony+
18. Houston Symphony
19. Atlanta Symphony
20. Indianapolis Symphony+
21. Milwaukee Symphony
22. Nashville Symphony+

- 23. Utah Symphony
- 24. Oregon Symphony
- 25. Eugene Symphony*/**/+

*Conducted in-depth interview

**Conducted participant observation

+Responded to survey/interview

Participant Selection

Each of the Group A orchestras has specific staff members devoted to special events. Surveys were initially sent to the staff member at the highest level. If the senior most staff member in the special events sub-department was unavailable to complete the survey, the survey was sent to another special events staff member. The interview with Seattle Symphony was conducted with the Special Events Manager, Zoe Funai. The interviews with the Eugene Symphony were conducted with Development Director, Sara Mason, and Donor Relations Manager, Ashley Petsch.

Participant Observation

On the date of the Eugene Symphony GALA 2018 (February 3, 2018), I observed gala elements, logistical elements, overall energy of guests/patrons, and staff relations in regard to volunteers, interns, guests/patrons, vendors, musicians, and other staff. Prior to the event, I participated in and observed aspects of the gala planning process.

Document Analysis

Any documentation provided by the interviewed and observed organizations (such as planning documents, past gala summaries, checklists, etc.) was analyzed in order to better understand what is done at the gala, how the planning process happened, and what elements of planning an execution were successful.

Numbers and Demographics

Overall, there were 8 survey participants and 3 interview participants. The special events staff members filling out the survey for each organization were mostly female, 25-50 years old, Caucasian, and located in a major U.S. city. Participants were recruited through email.

Timeline

Surveys, interviews, and participant observation were conducted in February-April, 2018.

Anticipated ethical issues

My research analysis compares the different tactics and elements used in galas and identifies recommendations. In doing so, some symphonies surfaced to the top as successful and others were less successful. Pointing out these organizations could potentially produce some negative backlash to the

organization or special events staff. To counteract this risk, I shared my research analysis with the participants and framed less successful tactics as recommendations instead of failures, being careful to aim criticism on the gala element (or absence thereof) instead of the organization.

Expectations

I expected to discover three patterns. First, galas that gear their programs towards emotional appeal will be more successful. Second, galas that utilize more efficient elements (i.e. raise the paddle fundraising rather than curated auction packages) will be more successful. Third, symphonies in the largest cities that attract high-profile guests will be more successful. In other words, I expected that the organizations with the largest budgets would have the most successful galas.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Overview

Research participants were recruited by email. Survey data was collected in the form of an online survey through Qualtrics survey software. Surveys took approximately 10 minutes of the participant's time. Participant observation took place on the day of the gala, February 3, 2018, and the days leading up to it, at the Eugene Symphony Offices and Hilton Eugene. Interviews were 60 minutes and took place in the offices of the Seattle Symphony, Oregon Symphony, and

Eugene Symphony. These interviews were recorded with an audio recording device, with participant's consent. Only the principle investigator had access to the audio recordings of these interviews. At the completion of the research process, immediately after the final research paper is written and turned in, the audio recordings were deleted from the device on which they were recorded.

Data Collection

Surveys

Participants answered questions in a survey format online through Qualtrics. Questions gathered information about what elements the organization included in their last gala, what went well and what needs to be reconsidered for next year's gala. After the surveys were completed, part of the data processing involved charting and graphing the results to better visualize and analyze the data. Data was stored on a password-protected Qualtrics account and offline on a password-protected laptop.

Interviews

Participants answered questions in an interview format in the offices of the respective symphony staff member. If participants were willing, the interviews were audio recorded in order to ensure exact wording and a higher degree of accuracy than note taking. After the interviews were completed, part of the data processing involved summarizing in writing

each interview recording to better analyze the data. Data was stored on a password-protected laptop.

Observations

On February 3, 2018, I attended the Eugene Symphony GALA 2018. This observation lasted approximately 6 hours, the length of the gala event plus the preparation. I collected observations about gala elements, logistical elements, overall energy of guests/patrons, and staff relations in regard to volunteers, interns, guests/patrons, vendors, musicians, and other staff.

Data Analysis

Data from surveys, interviews and observations was analyzed qualitatively. All survey and interview questions were about the gala elements, and all observations and document analysis was also strictly in search of patterns of successful gala elements. Using the conceptual framework mentioned above, all data collected was compared to one another and analyzed for successful patterns and recommendations.

Data reporting

Data from surveys and interviews used the names and job titles of each participant, as outlined in the terms accepted by each individual

before participating in the survey or interview. Audio recordings were only be utilized by the researcher, and only for the purpose of organizing and analyzing the data.

Research population and recruitment methods

Survey participants were those who responded from the 25 symphony orchestras listed above, with the title of special events director/manager/coordinator. Interviewees were the special events staff from the Seattle Symphony, Oregon Symphony, and Eugene Symphony. Survey and Interview participants were recruited through email. See Appendix D and Appendix E.

Informed consent procedures

Survey and interview participants were informed of any and all potential risks they may incur due to their participation in this study. Consent forms were provided by the researcher and signed by the interviewee before interviews took place. See Appendix F for consent forms that were provided to interviewees.

Provisions for participant and data confidentiality

Interview participants signed an informed consent form before participating in the interview, authorizing use of their name and occupation in

this study. All audio and written data collected in these interviews were stored on a password-protected computer. All data will be destroyed within one year of completing this master's project.

Potential research risks or discomforts to participants

Psychological risk:

Topics that are difficult to speak about or may provoke reactions from the interviewee may be discussed by either the researcher or the interviewee, resulting in potential mental harm, including but not limited to feelings of stress, guilt, embarrassment, or other emotions.

Social risk:

Discussing topics related to the research in the interviews may result in participants receiving a negative reaction from others, negative standing in a community, and/or decreased access to otherwise available roles or groups.

Economic risk:

Discussing topics related to the research in the interviews may result in loss of present or future employment, opportunity for career advancement, or other outcomes related to participation in this research.

Potential benefits to participants

Potential benefits to participants in this study include a new or deeper understanding of the state of the American symphony gala today, new and unique elements or tactics employed by other symphonies, and/or recommendations for producing a more successful fundraising gala.

Data collection and disposition procedures

All data were collected and disposed of by the principal researcher. After the final paper was complete, the principal researcher disposed of all typed documentation and audio recordings by deleting them.

Preliminary coding and analysis procedures

Coding for this research study assisted in organizing and analyzing all data. The codes were keywords or phrases that allowed the data to be grouped and narrowed. As more data was collected and coded, themes and patterns began to emerge for analysis.

Strategies for validating findings

The researcher took measures to increase validity in this study. Data were collected persistently, with a high degree of accuracy. Clarification was requested as needed in interviews. Additionally, peers and advisers reviewed and critiqued this study at all stages to ensure sound methodologies, logic, and

analysis. Disconfirming evidence was also sought in order to avoid only acquiring data that supported the expected results.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT “PRODUCT”

The resulting product of this master’s research project is the nation’s first Symphony Orchestra Gala Planning Toolkit. This toolkit includes a timeline, checklist, and evaluation form. The purpose of this toolkit is to provide materials for beginning professionals in symphony orchestra special events.

INVESTIGATOR EXPERIENCE

The principle researcher has a Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance. The researcher has also held jobs and internships with organizations such as Seattle Symphony, Symphony Tacoma, Eugene Symphony, University of Oregon School of Music and Dance, Icicle Creek Center for the Arts, University of Oregon Event Services, and Pacific Lutheran University Music Department. Areas of experience include development, special events and stewardship events, front of house management, social media marketing, personnel management, stage management, and grant writing. She plans to pursue a career in development and special events at a symphony orchestra or other classical music organization.

Chapter 2: Symphony Orchestras Today

Symphony orchestras make up one of the largest groups of nonprofit performing arts organizations. The League of American Orchestras has over 1,224 registered orchestras of all sizes (Voss, Voss, Yair, & Lega, 2016). The LAO categorizes these organizations into five “Groups” by budget. Group A orchestras are the largest with budget expenses of \$20 million or more, and Group E orchestras have budgets under \$300,000 (Voss et al., 2016). Nearly two thirds of all orchestras fall into Group E (Voss et al., 2016). Meanwhile, 20% of all programs and activities are produced by the orchestras in the top 2% budget bracket (Voss et al., 2016).

Contemporary Issues and the Need for Contributed Revenue

As Michael Kaiser (2015) says, humans have always had the need to create and to be entertained, and therefore, people have always been willing to pay for the arts. The arts have never been able to pay for themselves without the aid of contributed revenue. This is due to a number of factors. One is the productivity problem. While other industries can increase efficiency in the production of their product, symphony orchestras are limited to increasing the efficiency only in administration and not in the production of the music itself (Baumel & Fuller, 1964). For example, it takes the same number of musicians the same amount of time to learn, rehearse, and prepare Beethoven's 9th

Symphony as it always has. Orchestras cannot sustainably save costs by cutting rehearsal times, cutting musician wages, or cutting whole musician parts out of the piece. Therefore, symphony orchestras have fewer tools to battle the effects of inflation when it comes to keeping costs down. “Orchestras suffer from the productivity issue more than other arts organizations” because they are the “least flexible and the least visually oriented” (Kaiser, 2015, p. 55). Thus, turning a profit with only earned income is not plausible for nonprofit symphony orchestras.

Furthermore, symphony orchestras have a limitation on concert revenue based on the number of seats in the venue. There is a cap on how much money each performance can earn. Adding additional performances to meet demand comes with more costs to produce another performance. To keep up with the rising cost of overhead and inflation, orchestras have the option to raise ticket prices (Kaiser, 2015). However, an organization can only raise its fee for service so high before it becomes out of reach for the consumer. Then, instead of increasing revenue, the organization loses its consumers, their largest source of earned revenue.

Another way to sell the same product (concert tickets) is through subscriptions. Subscriptions allow patrons to essentially buy season concerts in bulk for a lower price. The payment upfront provides cash flow for orchestras at the beginning of the season, a key time when many costs arise. Subscriptions also lock in a patron's commitment to attend several concerts. When a

consumer buys a subscription package, they are likely to be more interested in some concerts than others, but they buy the whole package because they are attracted by their favorite headliner concerts, the discounted price, and any benefits the symphony provides to subscribers. Buying a subscription prompts patrons to attend concerts they would not have otherwise attended. These are usually concerts with unfamiliar or newer repertoire choices. The impact of this can be great, because it exposes larger audiences to new music, or music they are not interested in. At best, these patrons leave the concert hall with a new favorite piece or composer. At worst, the patron was uncomfortable for an hour or two, but was still exposed to something new and their horizons were broadened. These impacts go beyond financial viability and contribute to the fulfillment of the respective missions of these symphony orchestras, which often include goals of education and enrichment, in addition to the ongoing investment in the development of the art form.

Subscriptions provide solutions to many of the problems presented in the symphony orchestra organizational model. Unfortunately, subscription purchases have been on the decline since the 1970s (Bernstein, 2014). In a study done by the League of American Orchestras, single ticket sales exceeded subscription sales for the first time in 2013 (Voss et al., 2016). Not only subscription purchases, but general symphony attendance has been declining (Bernstein, 2014). Symphony attendance dropped by 10.5% between 2010 and 2014 (Voss et al., 2016). There was also a decrease in available government arts funding and an

increase in ROI demands from corporate partners willing to provide sponsorships. Even when symphony attendance, subscription purchases, and outside forms of funding were at their best, earned income was still not enough to keep a symphony orchestra financially solvent.

While symphony orchestras in the nonprofit model have never been able to profit on earned revenue alone, the decline we have experience in attendance, subscription sales, and other sources of funding can be attributed to our changing world in the following ways:

...economic instability, the Internet explosion, the death of the recording industry, the near-death of subscriptions, the renewed focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and resulting swoon in the liberal arts, the introduction of movie-theater opera, the erosion of newspaper readership and its threat to serious arts criticism, the aging of the donor base, the raiding of endowments, and the search for “new models.” (Kaiser, 2015, p. 22)

With these changes, we begin to see audiences with shorter attention spans, preferring shorter “highlight” versions of the classics and a resulting commoditization of the arts (Kaiser, 2015). Smaller orchestras now have to compete with the YouTube clips of the LA Philharmonic. We are seeing a weeding out of small to midsize orchestras. The surviving organizations are the very small and unique community orchestras or the largest institutions that have the most money (Kaiser, 2015). These are the organizations that have the means to create major events and programs that attract the wealthiest patrons.

All of these problems plague nonprofit performing arts organizations. Therefore, contributed revenue streams are vital to the lifeblood of symphony orchestras. In most symphony orchestras, contributed revenue makes up nearly

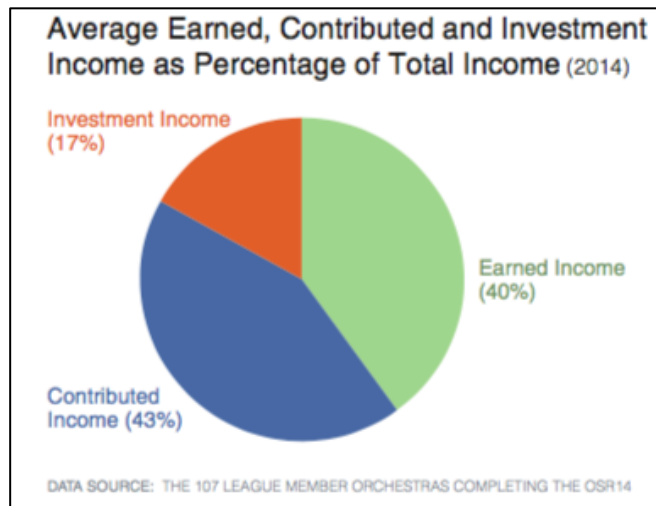


Figure 1:
Income Breakdown
(Voss et al., 2016)

half of the revenue budget, while earned revenue and investment income comprises the rest, as shown in Figure 1 (Voss et al., 2016). Contributed revenue tends to be a more stable source of income compared to earned revenue. Contributed income weathered the recession and fluctuated less than its earned income counterpart (Voss et al., 2016). Of that contributed revenue, about 10% comes from special events, like galas (Voss et al., 2016).

Because of the monetary and nonmonetary functions of special events discussed in the first section of this literature review coupled with the demonstrated need for different sources of contributed revenue, galas have become a necessary and highly anticipated staple in the symphony season.

Organizational Departments and Their Roles in the Gala

As nonprofit performing arts organizations, large symphony orchestras follow a similar organizational structure. The governing body of every nonprofit symphony orchestra is the board of directors. The board has the fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interest of the organization, making sure it is well run and holding true to its mission (Stein & Bathurst, 2008). The board is the direct authority of both the executive director and the music director. Though some organizations put one position above the other, the executive director and music director are typically given equal authority and work together to lead the organization and report to the board.

The music director, also known as artistic director or conductor, is the leader of the orchestra's artistic vision. This person assembles the musicians, plans the season, conducts the orchestra, and manages any associate conductors, guest conductors, and the choral director. There may also be an assistant to the music director, especially in large orchestras. The music director plans the season with the help of the staff in the artistic planning department. In some cases, the music director shares the authority over this department with the executive director. In other cases, artistic planning falls under the sole authority of the executive director.

The executive director, often called president or chief executive officer in large symphony orchestras, is responsible for implementing the music director's artistic vision and managing the rest of the staff in order to do so (Stein &

Bathurst, 2008). Though departments and lines of authority vary from orchestra to orchestra, the main departments found in these organizations are finance, marketing and communications, development, education and community engagement, orchestra operations, and artistic planning. Depending on the venue situation of the orchestra, facilities and venue management will sometimes be a large department housed within the orchestra staff.

The finance department in a symphony orchestra can include several departmental subgroups that might stand alone in some orchestra, depending on their size. These subgroups include human resources, information technology (IT), payroll, facilities and venue management, box office, and front-of-house management (Stein & Bathurst, 2008). The staff in this department assist the gala planning team in budgeting, transaction processing for tickets, auction purchases, and other donations made during the gala. The finance department will also be involved with purchases made for the gala. For example, these staff members will sign off on the payments for the venue rental, caterers, decor, auction items, etc. as well as the salaries and artist fees for the staff members and musicians involved in planning, attending, or performing at the event.

The marketing and communications department is responsible for all revenue earned from concert tickets, concessions, and other fees for service (Stein & Bathurst, 2008). They are also responsible for "crafting the institutional image and generating publicity for each of the shows and events" (Stein & Bathurst, 2008, p. 29). This department can include public relations, if it is not a

standalone department. The marketing department plays a crucial role in garnering attendance for the gala (and preceding concert, if there is one). However, this role varies depending on the intended audience of the gala. If the organization only invites existing major donors, the responsibility falls less on the marketing department and more on the major donor officers in the development department. If, however, the organization advertises and invites anyone in their database or open up the event to the general public, the marketing department would harbor much more responsibility for attendance. The marketing and communications team designs the overall theme and aesthetic of the gala, which manifests on the invitations, programs, and any other signage and advertisements for the event. The gala may also include a slideshow or video about the symphony's impact in the last year, for example, and these media are often put together by the marketing and communications department.

The community and education department is responsible for all of the educational and outreach programs for both children and adults (League of American Orchestras, 2018; Stein & Bathurst, 2008). The gala can be a great place to share about the symphony's community and education programs, because these are often a large part of the symphony's impact. This is also an area that donors are more eager to fund. Therefore, the education and community engagement department is often recruited to make some sort of presentation to the gala audience. Whether this takes the form of a video or

slideshow, as mentioned above, or a guest speaker who is a teacher, student, or community member involved in one of the programs will depend on the organization.

The orchestra operations department is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the orchestra, which include contracting for musicians and guest artists, tour planning, the music library, technical operations, and stage management (League of American Orchestras, 2018; Stein & Bathurst, 2008). This department is less involved with the gala planning process. However, if the gala includes a performance that involves the orchestra or at least a few of its members, that will be included in the musicians' contracts. It is also common practice for the gala planning team to have orchestra musicians attend the gala. This can add a celebrity factor to the guest list while also serving as a tool to fill gaps in the seating chart.

The artistic planning department is another department that is only lightly involved in the gala process. This department is responsible for season planning, selecting concert repertoire, and booking guest artists (League of American Orchestras, 2018). Their role in the gala is increased if the gala is connected to a concert or if there is a performance involved at the gala itself. Nevertheless, the gala is an all-hands-on-deck caliber event, so almost all symphony staff will be required to attend the event, whether to help greet and socialize with guests or to fill a volunteer role, like helping at the registration table or assisting with crowd control and event flow.

Lastly, the department that has the most responsibility for the gala is the development department, due to the fundamental fundraising nature of the event. The development department is responsible for all fundraising activities of contributed revenue for the symphony. This includes small gifts, major gifts, planned gifts, donor relations and stewardship, corporate sponsorship, foundation and government grants, and special events (League of American Orchestras, 2018). Large orchestras can have one or more staff members specifically devoted to special events while smaller orchestras make events a major aspect of all development staff job descriptions. Since this study focuses on large orchestras, the gala planning team is often made up of the development director, the special events staff, and gala committee made up of board members. This committee helps staff plan the gala, gives ideas and feedback, offers their connections with vendors and prospective attendees, etc., but the development staff has the final say in all planning matters. Therefore, the gala committee is more of an advisory committee to the staff members.

There are several elements of the gala that the development department is responsible for. Galas are heavily sponsored events, so the corporate relations staff member is very busy finding creative ways for corporate partner to get involved. Major sponsors will sponsor the event as a whole, and these corporations are often given a whole table at the gala as a corporate benefit. Other smaller corporate partners will decide to sponsor a specific aspect of the

event, like the bar. Others will give in-kind donations, like auction items, wine, centerpieces, and so on. These sponsors are given recognition with various logo placements in the program booklet, slideshow, and other forms of signage.

Another major aspect of the gala is attendance and seating charts. While corporations may get a whole table to fill with anyone they would like, most other attendees RSVP as couples or individuals. It is then the task of major donor officers to collaborate to seat their donors at a table with other people they know or think they might get along with. This is when the major donor officers' detailed knowledge of the donors in their portfolios becomes very important. Like a big, complex puzzle, the seating chart is often the last aspect of gala planning to be completed due to last minute seating requests, late RSVPs, illness, and no-shows.

These major gift officers also play a large role in inviting donors to galas. Inviting a donor to a special event is a good cultivation tactic on the path to a major gift (Klein, 2016). Like a capital campaign, it is also advisable for the development department to secure a few major donations before the gala, so they can count on some of their most reliable donors to start the bidding or paddle raise on the night of the event. This ensures that there are no awkward silences after an ask is made at the gala. This requires that major gift officers work the gala into their cultivation plans of some of their donors.

Volunteer management becomes a major duty of special events and development staff during gala season. Special events are heavily reliant on

volunteers for tasks such as stuffing invitation envelopes, making place settings, manning the registration or check-in tables, and helping with the setup and takedown of the event. Because large events have so many moving pieces, it is critical that special events staff members are clear and organized when communicating to volunteers, in addition to making sure to thank them after the event is over. Some large orchestras have designated volunteer coordination staff, but otherwise the task falls to the special events staff.

Large special events like symphony galas take teams of people to successfully coordinate. It is important for all staff to know their roles within the gala planning process. When done well, galas can be much needed revenue boost and raise morale of both the staff and attendees.

Chapter 3: Fundraising Galas in the Nonprofit Sector

Nonprofit organizations utilize several different strategies to raise money, and one is the fundraising gala. These special events are notorious for taking large amounts of staff time, energy, and money while yielding only a small profit. Nevertheless, galas are worthwhile events for symphony orchestras because they also serve several other purposes, and the successes of these purposes can be measured in other ways besides just the profit.

For most major symphony orchestras in the United States, the gala is the largest event of the season. Nearly every symphony holds a gala. A gala is a formal special event, usually held annually. Galas tend to involve a special performance. Because of the element of performance, galas are particularly relevant fundraising events for symphony orchestras. Galas typically include a dinner and an auction or paddle raise. Attendees are usually existing major donors and some new major donor prospects. While these are the typical elements of a gala, there is no single correct way to plan a gala. Many organizations take great creative license to keep these special events interesting and innovative.

Classical music organizations often have an elitist reputation, which is conveyed through unspoken rituals such as dress code and holding applause in between movements. Symphonies use this reputation to their advantage by

holding these spectacular, formal events, making sure to appeal to their most high-class and affluent audiences.

The gala model has some drawbacks when utilized by symphony orchestras. Because galas are often attached to a season concert, patrons must endure a long evening. Organizers will add pre-concert receptions, intermission receptions, pre-gala cocktail hours, and other elements to the concert and gala, which already have a duration of a couple of hours each. For aging audiences, the whole engagement becomes too long, and they become irritable by the time the fundraising portion of the evening arrives. To avoid this problem, some symphonies are troubleshooting by connecting the gala to a special concert that is shorter than a typical season concert. For example, several orchestras have invited the band Pink Martini to perform for an hour-long concert, as opposed to having the whole orchestra on stage for a two-hour concert, as is typical for the rest of the season concerts. Alternatively, they skip the concert altogether and invite a small group of musicians to perform short chamber works during the gala program, at the gala venue.

In the nonprofit sector, special events in general serve many purposes. One is to “call attention to the organization and attract people to it at a particular time” (Klein, 2016, p. 181). Another purpose is to broaden the base of an organization’s donors and beneficiaries/participants, bringing in “new money” (Klein, 2016, p. 181). A third purpose is to “raise the overall visibility or profile of the organization” (Klein, 2016, p. 181). Special events also serve to

cultivate donors and get extra income from current donors (Webber, 2004). Lastly, events serve to recruit, keep, and thank donors (Carpenter & Blandy, 2008). Inviting a donor to a special event is just another way to engage and cultivate them, deepening their relationship with the organization. Major donors appreciate extravagant parties such as galas, and although they often pay large sums in admission price and give even more during the auction or paddle raise, the speakers or presenters on the gala program use their time on stage to thank those in the room for their existing support and show them the impact their money has had in the past season.

When looking specifically at galas, a major goal of a gala is to raise money. However, special events are very expensive, take an enormous amount of effort, and usually only yield a small profit. Raising money is not actually the strong suit of events (Klein, 2016). There are other significant social purposes to holding a gala.

Galas allow major donors to be seen and to see each other, thus creating a sense of camaraderie (Inoue, 2016). This allows donors to identify more strongly with the organization. Organizations do not often get the chance to have all of their top donors in one room together, especially not in an atmosphere where the organization has their attention and can address them as a whole. Second, attending a gala can bring the donors a sense of personal achievement and allow them to show off their generosity. Philanthropists like to be seen, and galas provide them with this opportunity. Galas also serve to maintain the brand name

of the organization, especially if the event is large enough to garner attention from the press. Lastly, galas act as stewardship events, creating a space for major donors to have fun (Webber, 2004), in addition to giving more. All in all, galas serve to benefit the attendee just as much as, if not more than, the organization.

The main attendees of a gala are the organization's existing major donors and their friends. This allows them to socialize with their families, friends, and fellow donors who care deeply about the symphony. However, galas are an effective tool for bringing in new donors and new money. Galas seek to "attract a broad range of donors, including those who may not have a strong interest in the cause" (Inoue, 2016, p. 349). People or corporations who have never given to the symphony before must be able to expect some benefit from the gala if they are going to pay a steep price for admission, and potentially more with an auction or paddle raise. These benefits include, but are not limited to, networking opportunities, camaraderie, and warm glow (Webber, 2004).

Donor development is another non-fundraising purpose of galas. Acquiring new donors takes more time and energy than cultivating donors. Special events can be a useful tool for this acquisition (Webber, 2004). The organization can offer newcomers a one-time glimpse into the mission and networks they have to offer while only requiring a one-night commitment. Not to mention, the prospect gets the benefit of enjoying a high-profile party. If they

like what they see, they can choose to commit more to the organization in the form of money, time, and overall dedication.

According to Webber (2004), the reasons a person has for attending a gala can be broken down into seven different motivations. The first is a *philanthropic* motivation, in which the donor truly believes in the organization's cause. The second is a *private* motivation, in which the donor is simply attracted to the spectacle of a fancy event, networking opportunities, or some other private benefit the donor can stand to gain. The third is *prestige*, in which the donor stands to benefit from social status and being seen as wealthy. Fourth is *leadership*, in which the donor is leading by example and encouraging others to make a gift. Fifth is a *relationship* with the organization, in which the donor has directly benefited from the services of the organization in the past. Sixth is *warm glow*, which can take two forms; the donor gets a warm feeling by donating or by being there for their friends organizing the event. Lastly, there is the motivator of *peer pressure* from those encouraging the donor's attendance (Webber, 2004). Gala organizers would do well to address each one of these motivations with their event.

While there are several reasons for a patron to attend an organization's special event, each motivator can be categorized into one of two categories: causal and non-causal (Inoue, 2016). Some patrons love the arts or classical music in particular and make it a priority to fund the cause they love. Others attend these events merely for the instrumental benefits of networking, being

seen as wealthy, social connections, etc. (Webber, 2004). Patrons who attend these special events mainly because of their commitment to the cause are more likely to give to the organization in the future than those who attend for non-causal reasons (Inoue, 2016). For those who attend special events for non-causal reason may give to the organization in the future, but this decision is affected more heavily by the factors of perceived camaraderie at the event and overall event satisfaction (Inoue, 2016). Therefore, the better the organization executes these two factors at their event, the more likely it is that non-causal attendees will make a gift to the organization in the future.

Inoue (2016) presents Social Exchange Theory as a key factor in special fundraising events. *Social Exchange Theory* is the idea that two parties benefit from an exchange (Inoue, 2016). In the case of symphony galas, the organization hopes to gain more money from existing donors, new money from new donors, and future donations from attendees, while attendees are hoping to gain social capital, warm glow, business networking opportunities, a fun evening, etc. (Webber, 2004). Therefore, if gala organizers hope to secure donations from their attendees in the future, they must be prepared to use the gala to provide attendees with something of value in order to make a true exchange (Inoue, 2016).

The most common form of fundraising at galas is through an “open-cry” auction. In most cases, depending on the price of gala admission, the auction is what brings in the largest portion of the revenues on the night of the gala.

Because these kinds of auctions are very public in nature, donors are able to show their wealth to everyone in the room (Webber, 2004). For the same reasons, this introduces an element of competition, not only between donors bidding on the same item, but between everyone in the room. They feel pressure to participate by bidding on something, even if no purchase is made (Klemperer, 1999).

Auctions are most effective when the items are priceless, unique, or have value that is not easily quantifiable (Webber, 2004). This makes it more justifiable for a donor to place a large bid. When an auction is part of a gala, the "Pareto rule" applies, which means that 80 percent of the revenues come from 20 percent of the attendees (Koch, 2011). Auctions typically make up the main portion of the night, therefore, gala organizers must be careful not to include too many other fundraiser elements of the night, such as raffles or the like. Webber (2004) says that attendees can feel overwhelmed by too many different forms of fundraising in one event.

The success of a fundraising event can be evaluated by more than just the net profit dollar amount. One measure of success is attendance, looking at not only how many people were there but *who* was there, in terms of major donors and other high-profile individuals. Organizations can measure success by looking at media coverage of the event. However, this is only a useful tool for large scale events held by large organizations that attract this kind of media attention. Organizations can measure general "buzz" of the event through

social media, use of hashtags, and feedback from the perspectives of staff, volunteers, and attendees. This information can be gathered by sending out a survey after the event. Likewise, organizers can measure the success of the event logistics, noting which elements went well and which elements had a negative impact on the evening (Klein, 2016).

Symphony galas require unique considerations in comparison to other nonprofit special events. They cater mostly to their existing major donors, they share the evening with a concert or other special musical performance, and they tend to be much longer than the average fundraising event. However, the social purposes and stewardship effects of galas provide long term benefits in terms of donor retention and camaraderie. Thus, the gala is an integral part of nearly every symphony's fundraising plan.

Chapter 4: Findings

There are many logistical elements to a symphony gala. This research project seeks to identify current issues with these elements and their role within the gala model. This research also seeks to gain insight into which elements tend to work well and contribute to the success, in its many forms, of the event. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of this research, one gala element at a time.

Concert

One element that all nine large symphony orchestras included was a concert. Respondents generally concluded that associating a concert with the gala had a positive impact on the event. Kathleen Pendleton of the Boston Symphony Orchestra said, "We have received positive feedback on the concerts, including the program, artists and performance." Amy Thorstenson of the LA Phil said, "The headliner of the Hollywood Bowl Opening Night concert can excite additional patrons to purchase tables." Tab Boyles of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra also mentioned high profile guest artists as positively impacting the success of the gala.

Still, some organizations struggle with the concept of associating a concert with the gala. Sara Mason of the Eugene Symphony, an smaller organization that does not typically add a concert to the gala, said, "In an ideal world, we'd have a gala performance every year. However, logistically, it's an

awful lot for our staff to mount an event and a performance on the same night.”

Zoe Funai of the Seattle Symphony pointed out that associating concerts with galas can present some issues. With the concert and gala, the whole event can last around six hours.

A lot of other nonprofit galas follow a strict pattern: you come from 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm for silent auction, drinks, and appetizers; 7:30-9:30 is dinner, a seated program, raise the paddle, and a live auction; and after that, there is an after party. They all follow that same model, and they all raise a couple million [dollars] each. So, our gala is limited by having this long evening, but it also helps our fundraising, because coming off of the high of the concert does help. It's a double-edged sword.

Another issue presented by gala concerts is the fact that they are attended by more than just the people who are planning to go to the gala afterward. Mason said:

We have to make sure it's the kind of performance we can fill regardless of the gala... It would be ideal if it was a one-hour performance, because then you still have plenty of time to have your whole event...but we can't sell out our hall for a one-hour performance. The potentially 2,000 other people aren't going to want to buy a ticket [for a one-hour concert] ... They want to get their money's worth.

Nevertheless, three symphony respondents said they would alter the concert experience by making it shorter. Kristin Lamprecht of the St. Louis Symphony said that at their 2017 gala, a “45-minute concert was just about right and still allowed time for dancing after concert.” It seems that from the perspective of symphony events staff, 45 minutes to one hour is an ideal duration for a gala-associated concert, at least for those attending the gala afterward.

The issue of being able to sell a shorter concert to the general public can be dealt with in creative ways. For example, for the GALA 2018, the Eugene Symphony took the concert out of the concert hall and brought it onto the gala venue stage. They had a small chamber orchestra made up of symphony musicians perform a short set at the gala as the guests ate their dinner. This new method provided solutions to existing problems but also presented new issues. Mason mentioned that in the setting, the performance came across as “background music” and was “a bit of a disservice to our conductor and musicians” in that sense. There was also a delay in turning over the stage for the next speaker. However, implementing this solution in other symphony galas would shorten what could be an exceptionally long evening, cut costs on venue and artist fees, and eliminate the issue of transportation from concert venue to gala venue.

Making every effort to keep concerts part of the gala program appears to be worthwhile, based on the fact that most large symphony orchestras continue to include them, despite their challenges. Ashley Petsch of the Eugene Symphony says, “Performance is what we do. That is the core of our work. So, it’s important to our patrons and it’s important to the organization that we are featuring that, and we are highlighting the fact that that’s our core purpose.” Evidently, the concert element is one of the unique ways that symphony orchestras can use galas to their advantage.

Transportation

Of the four respondents who host their gala in a hotel ballroom, three reported dissatisfaction with some aspect of the transportation from the concert venue to the gala venue. Funai (Seattle) reported logistical complications, such as shuttle drivers not following specific directions to navigate a busy city block, the lack of a dedicated staff member or volunteer to manage the process, and the fact that gala patrons “don’t like to be told what to do,” making the crowd hard to organize. Lamprecht (St. Louis) recalls a past gala where transportation between venues was, “quite a mess.” The organization now holds the dinner and the concert in one venue, so no transportation is needed. In contrast, Carol Ann Arnell of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra considered transportation as something that added to the overall satisfaction of the evening. She said, “the Gala venue is two blocks from the concert hall and we provide shuttle buses between the two venues. If the weather is mild, the majority of the guests will walk to the other venue.” The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra offers a service in which “guests can drop off their car with the valet at the concert venue and retrieve it at the gala venue after dinner.” It seems that choosing a gala venue within walking distance and offering other special services transportation services could be well worth the extra effort.

Theme

The respondents whose gala incorporated a theme reported positive responses. Pendleton (Boston) stated that, “If the theme ties directly into the program attendees feel a stronger connection.” McKenna Macko of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association reported that their gala also used a theme derived from the program and said, “This was praised by our attendees and turned out to also be a good selling point.” A programmatic theme is a concept that can inform gala décor, dress code, and other aesthetic components. For example, Symphony Tacoma held a Pictures at an Exhibition-themed gala. The concert was, of course, Pictures at an Exhibition, and the gala was held at the Tacoma Art Museum, to fit the “Exhibition” theme. The dress code on the invitations was, “Cocktail attire: Russian-inspired flair encouraged”. Not all themes must be program-related, though. Delaney Gray of the Nashville Symphony said, “Our event is held in the winter, giving us lots of excellent decor themes to work with.” On the other hand, Tab Boyles of the Dallas Symphony pointed out that some themes can come across as “hokey” to the patrons. Nevertheless, themes can be loosely defined and subtle, providing an intentional atmosphere without being overwhelming.

Pre-Concert Reception

One gala element that had conflicting responses was the pre-concert reception. In previous discussion about the length of these events, especially

those that include concerts, the pre-concert reception is yet another addition to the gala timeline, making the evening that much longer. Boyles (Dallas) said these receptions allow necessary time for “photos [and] socializing.” Macko (Philadelphia) said at the symphony “provided [the reception] as a benefit to a certain level of sponsorship, [which] makes our guests feel extra special.” On the other hand, Pendleton (Boston) mentioned that there was, “limited time and space during the pre-concert reception,” which is more of a logistical consideration rather than a negative response from patrons. Macko (Philadelphia) reported similar issues, saying, “There is always a challenge with space due to the number of guests that sign-up at this level. It's a good, but an unsolvable problem.”

Meanwhile, both the Eugene and Seattle symphonies have recently done away with their pre-concert receptions. It appears that, since space and time seem to be the issues surrounding pre-concert receptions, the ideal use of these receptions is to offer it to the patrons who purchased the highest level of ticket/table and board members. Thus, the number of people to attend will be controlled. Furthermore, these will theoretically be your most dedicated patrons who will, therefore, be more willing to spend the extra time at the event. Though not a perfect solution, it allows the most excited patrons to mingle with their friends have time to socialize before having to remain silent in a concert that could last up to two hours.

Fundraising

To my surprise, very few respondents raised money at the gala by including an auction or a paddle raise. Six of the organizations earn their event revenue from ticket and table sales and/or sponsorships alone. One organization includes a paddle raise, and two of the organizations do both an auction and a paddle raise. Petsch, of the Eugene Symphony, one of the organizations that includes an auction, said,

Many groups are moving away from doing auction packages because they are expensive in both time and money to solicit, they are expensive on the staff side to coordinate, they are expensive financially to book travel and pay for transportation and food and whatever else. And the follow-up is expensive on staff time... Frankly it's a really hard way to raise money... Our data show the fewer auction packages we have, the more they sell for... and the more people give outright [during the paddle raise].

The Eugene Symphony usually includes a raffle or other small money-makers during the event. Mason (Eugene) said, "Incidental things are easy to raise money around. I don't think they take away from the gift from the heart [paddle raise]. I think a lot of people didn't even realize they spent 100 dollars on champagne." Therefore, it can be concluded that even though an increased number of auction packages can decrease fundraising efficiency and effectiveness of the paddle raise, other incidental fundraisers on the side do not impact the effectiveness of the paddle raise.

Emotional Appeal

The emotional appeal and resulting ask during the program have proven to be one of the most sensitive aspects of the gala. Mason (Eugene) shared an anecdote in which one speaker gave a very moving presentation, but was unfortunately followed by a less moving speaker, who then made the ask to begin the paddle raise. “The room died,” she said, and this was reflected in the funds raised. Petsch (Eugene) said, “You really want to make sure that the people who are talking right before your appeal are going to tug at the heart strings and make people want to give. People give because they feel something.” Lamprecht (St. Louis) also said they were able to have “passionate speakers with connection to honoree, demonstrating [their] love of honoree and orchestra,” which had a positive impact on the gala. Arnell (Indianapolis) said, “We keep the speaking short and sweet as the guests have just sat through a concert and moved to a second venue of the night.” In another positive anecdote, the Seattle Symphony was able to experience huge success with the use of an emotional appeal video. The 2017 Opening Night Gala honored Dale and Leslie Chihuly, and they were the subject of the video. The video produced a powerful emotional response, which was clearly reflected in the results of the paddle raise, when the symphony nearly doubled what it raised the year before. “The appeal video is a very important part of getting to the ask,” said Petsch (Eugene). Whether reflected in dollars raised or the general buzz in the

room, these examples show that emotional appeals leading to the ask can be a symphony's most powerful tool.

Volunteers

Another element that can make a big impact on the gala is the volunteers. Mason (Eugene) shared, "Gala volunteers can make or break the experience. We had a year where they were very demanding, very involved, hyper directive, and it really exhausted the staff." Since then, the Eugene Symphony has made some changes in their volunteer situation. "We really invested a lot of time and energy into building relationships with volunteer organizations to make sure we could staff our gala, which was good because it took the burden off staff, and it made the event run better. It makes the patron experience better," said Petsch (Eugene).

Guest List

There were mixed responses to the question of who gets invited to these symphony galas. Some organizations advertise to everyone, symphony-related or otherwise, some invite only those on their mailing list (people who have purchased tickets or donated), and some only invite donors who have given above a certain level. The patrons these organizations choose to invite depend on the perceived purposes of each gala, which are also different across the board.

Purpose

All respondents agreed that the first purpose of the gala is to *fundraise*. These organizations would not likely hold a gala if they were only going to break even or lose money. However, six respondents said that gaining *new donors* and *stewardship* were two other main purposes of the event. Petsch (Eugene) said,

They are a great chance to get people involved that wouldn't normally participate in other ways. There are very few other instances where you can concentrate a large amount of capacity dollars and actually generate those capacity dollars in an evening.

Petsch goes on to point out that galas are “great awareness building opportunities”, they “generate good will in your community”, and they allow the symphony to build on the perception of “whatever brand it's trying to convey.” The Eugene Symphony has made a push in the last couple of years to include both qualitative and quantitative goals in their gala planning process. Petsch gave the examples of meeting five new patrons with which to follow up with coffee or getting a high-profile philanthropist to attend as qualitative goals.

Mason (Eugene) stated, “The ultimate goal is a revenue goal. It's a fundraising event. We have a target that we have to hit. Secondly, I think it's also an opportunity to tell our story of community service and education to all of our patrons in a very specific and targeted way.” Like some of the other survey respondents, Mason does not view the gala as a stewardship event. For her, the gala comes down to “the storytelling of your work, the networking and social

connections that you build are really big, cultivating donors, and prospecting and winning over new people.”

Contrastingly, Funai (Seattle) would consider the gala to serve a stewardship purpose. While she agrees that the main purpose of a gala is fundraising, she said, “The second purpose is having a centralized event for our donors to get together. It’s a great stewardship opportunity.”

Though most nonprofit event literature emphasizes the opportunity to gain new donors, not everyone agrees that a symphony gala in particular is best suited to serve this purpose. “You definitely want to continue growing the event, or else it’s just going to stay stagnant... It is a way to bring new people in to the symphony, but I don’t think it’s necessarily the best hook,” said Funai (Seattle).

Other unique responses to the question of a gala’s purpose include bringing “high profile guest artists to the symphony,” (Boyles, Dallas), connecting musicians to donors, (Macko, Philadelphia), and drawing attention to the new season (Arnell, Indianapolis). In fact, over half of respondents held their galas in September to celebrate the opening of the new symphony season.

In summary, it is easy to conclude that the first purpose of a symphony gala is to fundraise. However, this is almost never the sole purpose. Galas provide opportunities for networking, bringing in new people, stewardship, sharing the symphony’s story with donors, celebrating a specific occasion, and more.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

In this study, I sought to gain insight on the question, "How can symphony orchestras most effectively use the gala model for fundraising?" With this project, I also sought to understand the other potential purposes of galas and take a snapshot of what some orchestras around the country are doing with their galas today. Based on my review of nonprofit special events literature and my research, I discovered that the degree to which an organization succeeds in fulfilling its secondary purposes has an important impact on the fundraising success of a gala.

To find the answers to my research questions, I conducted surveys and interviews. In my survey, I included 18 questions asking about the inclusion of certain gala elements, whether those elements had positive or negative impacts on the overall satisfaction of the event, as well as other general information about the gala. In my interviews, I took a more in depth look at all of the survey questions and asked follow-up questions as prompted. I reached out to 25 American symphony orchestras and ended up with a sample of 10 organizations. I received survey responses from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, and St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. I conducted interviews with one

Seattle Symphony staff member and two Eugene Symphony staff members. All in all, I collected eight survey responses and three interview responses.

Through this collection of data, I discovered new gala purposes, identified elements that are not consistently successful, heard about new and creative solutions of typical problems, and identified a consistent pattern of gala layouts across the country. The following are six of my major findings and their resulting recommendations.

Long Live the Concert

Nearly all major American symphony orchestras associate a concert with their gala. Because concerts are central to the offerings of the symphony orchestra, it makes sense to include them with the gala. Gala-associated concerts can attract high-profile guest artists, which in turn attract more patrons. Likewise, gala-associated concerts can attract large audiences, which in turn can attract high-profile guest artists. When transitioning from concert to gala, patrons can bring with them the excitement from hearing an exceptional performance, which can have a positive impact on donations.

Concerts can significantly increase the length of the gala evening, so my recommendation is to find ways to shorten other elements of the gala. Begin by eliminating receptions before and in between gala events. If these receptions are not successfully fulfilling a specific goal or purpose, they become a drain to both gala planners and patrons. Next, keep the speakers and presentations at

the gala as concise as possible without sacrificing the quality of an emotional appeal. If the evening is still too long after implementing these strategies, find a creative way to shorten the concert itself. Assess whether non-gala concertgoers would still buy tickets to a one-hour concert. Consider holding a small chamber performance at the gala venue.

Rethink Transportation

The logistics of transporting gala patrons between venues has proven to be fickle but necessary component to some galas across the country. Gala patrons do not like to wait in line for shuttle buses, and guests are often in attire unfit for walking through the city, especially at night. My recommendation is to invest in extra luxuries, like valet services or a post-concert reception for those waiting for shuttles, to distract patrons from the fact that they are being organized. Anything that makes a patron feel like a VIP will help alleviate the irritation that comes from the unglamorous activity of waiting to be bussed to another location. If an organization is dramatically rethinking their gala format, consolidating to one venue could be worth considering, so the transportation issue can be eliminated altogether.

Fundraising: The Simpler, the Better

I was surprised to discover how many symphony orchestras fundraise through gala admission and sponsorships alone to raise funds. Though some

orchestras continue to use an auction or paddle raise to raise additional funds at the gala, the trend seems to be moving away from these methods. For example, the Eugene Symphony found its fundraising efforts to be more successful when consolidating to fewer auction packages. Therefore, my recommendation would be to move from auction packages to just a paddle raise. This can help shorten the long evening and help refocus efforts to other event logistics and the one, central ask. It can also decrease the bombardment of asks placed upon patrons throughout the evening. For a more radical reconsideration of gala fundraising, an orchestra can consider eliminating any additional forms of fundraising at the gala itself. This can further shorten the evening, eliminate certain aspects of registration and checkout, and allow development staff to keep their focus on non-gala asks.

Strategic Speakers

Through this research, it was clear that finding the right speakers and placing them at the right moment within the gala program was of the utmost importance. These speakers need to have a close connection to the symphony, make a compelling emotional appeal, and do so with superb public speaking skills. My recommendation is to start your search for speakers with the major figureheads of your organization. Board Chairs, Music Directors, and Executive Directors can often carry celebrity status. If they are compelling speakers and have the right angle to make the ask, they could be the perfect fit. Next,

expand your search to high-profile community members, board members, guest artists, award recipients, or someone who has had a particularly impactful experience with your organization. My next recommendation would be to script the speakers well. Have several eyes on the script to edit and add notes.

Additionally, it was identified that including a video associate with some emotional appeal proved to be a successful gala element that had a significant impact on giving, if the organization included a paddle raise. The content of the video can, for example, highlight the impact of the symphony orchestra in the community or honor an individual who has had a significant impact on the symphony organization. To ensure a high quality product, it is recommended that these videos be professionally done. The speakers in the video should be chosen strategically because their emotional contribution will directly affect the speaker making the final ask.

Prioritize Purposes

The most significant discovery from this study was the numerous purposes each symphony orchestra has for their gala. Aside from the clear fundraising goal, symphony orchestras use the gala model to attract new donors, steward existing donors, share their story with key constituents, connect donors to the symphony musicians, attract high-profile guest artists, create good will within the community, provide networking opportunities, and the list could go on. My recommendation would be to define as a staff the clear goals for your gala. Set

both quantitative and qualitative goals. Then, prioritize those goals. Decide which purposes are most important to the mission of your organization.

Avenues for Future Research

This research on symphony galas and the resulting Symphony Orchestra Gala Planning Toolkit is the first of its kind. In the existing nonprofit fundraising literature, little reference is made to special events, and very little still on galas in particular. While some of this fundraising event literature can apply to galas, the majority of this event information is not relevant to such a high-profile, formal event. These kinds of events need special consideration as they deal with a completely different kind of audience with different needs, desires, and expectations. Galas can also play a much more significant role within the organization, as evidenced by the vast array of unique gala purposes discussed above. From the perspective of performing arts organization literature, there is next to nothing that mentions galas. When mentioned, the literature simply identifies that they are a commonly used fundraising technique. Literature on large, general events fails to consider the unique role that fundraising plays on these events. Neither the performing arts field, events field, nor the nonprofit fundraising field provide enough literature on formal event logistics, donor psychology at galas, or the impact of galas on an organization as a whole.

This research takes the first steps in identifying the widespread use of galas within one type of performing arts organization. It also begins to unpack the

question of why galas are so well suited for use by symphony orchestras and other nonprofit performing arts organizations. Lastly, this research project identifies and defines specific gala elements and formalizes a commonly used gala program layout, including helpful tools to assist in the planning of these spectacular events. This research and its resulting toolkit are a reflection of thoughts and processes commonly used by professionals in symphony orchestra special events today.

Introduction to Toolkit

The pages that follow make up a pithy gala planning toolkit for symphony orchestras, based on the recommendations above. First is an extended timeline, spanning two years before the event, which also serves as a checklist for several standard gala elements. Next is a run of show timeline for the day of the event, taking into account behind-the-scenes aspects as well. Last is a brief evaluation form that allows special events teams to debrief and evaluate the success of their gala in its many forms. It is helpful to document suggested ideas moving forward so that they are not forgotten when the time comes to plan the next gala. This toolkit is meant to be concise in order to value the time of the ever-busy event staff of symphony orchestras.

Symphony Orchestra Gala Planning Toolkit

Alexa Bayouk

Gala Planning Timeline

2 years out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date • Book venue • Recruit guest artist • Decide concert repertoire
1 year out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create event committees and select Chairs/Co-chairs • Theme and décor • Establish budget
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solicit corporate sponsors • Select speakers • Catering and alcohol • Book vendors (DJ, photographer, etc.)
3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Kind sponsors • Design and order invitations • Update events web page
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit volunteers/interns • Send invitations • Book transportation • Order centerpieces and other décor
1 month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize script • Finalize program • Assign volunteer and staff duties
2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize run of show (including setup/tear down) • Train volunteers • Finalize seating chart • Assemble gala kit (emergency supplies, pens, sewing kit, etc.)
Follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close out income/expenses • Thank sponsors, volunteers, gala committee, etc. • Evaluation

Run of Show

Set Up	
10:00 am	Setup gala venue for vendors
1:00 pm	Staff/volunteers change and get ready
Concert	
3:00 pm	All staff in place
3:30 pm	Registration Opens Pre-concert reception
5:00 pm	Concert
6:00 pm	Intermission reception
7:00 pm	Concert ends Begin transporting guests to gala venue
7:15 pm	Cocktail hour at gala venue
7:55 pm	Last shuttle leaves concert venue
Gala	
8:00 pm	Gala program begins Dinner Presentations
9:15 pm	Fundraising
10:00 pm	Music and Dancing
Tear Down	
11:00 pm	Last guests leave Celebrate! Clean up

Qualitative Evaluation

On a scale from 1 (did not meet goal) to 5 (exceeded goal), how well did your gala meet each of these goals? (circle)

Met fundraising goal	1	2	3	4	5
Media Coverage	1	2	3	4	5
Event Flow (logistics)	1	2	3	4	5
Stewardship	1	2	3	4	5
New donors	1	2	3	4	5
Telling story of impact	1	2	3	4	5
Attracting high profile guests	1	2	3	4	5
Attracting high profile guest artist	1	2	3	4	5
Generate “buzz” for the season	1	2	3	4	5
Connect musicians to donors	1	2	3	4	5
Other:	1	2	3	4	5

Identify 3 aspects of your gala that went well:

Identify 3 aspects of your gala that need work:

Identify 3 new ideas for next year's gala:

References:

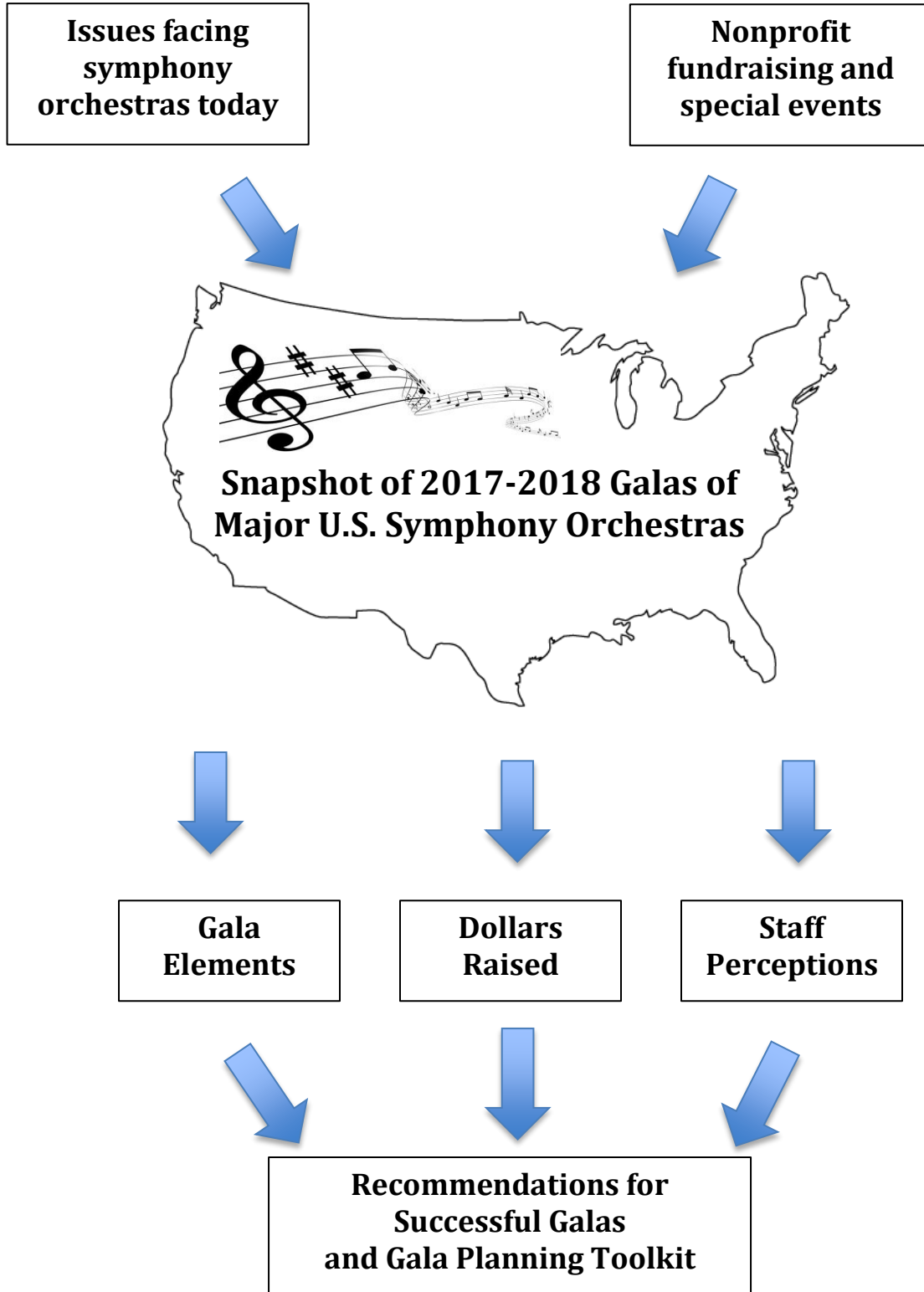
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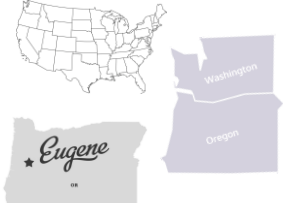
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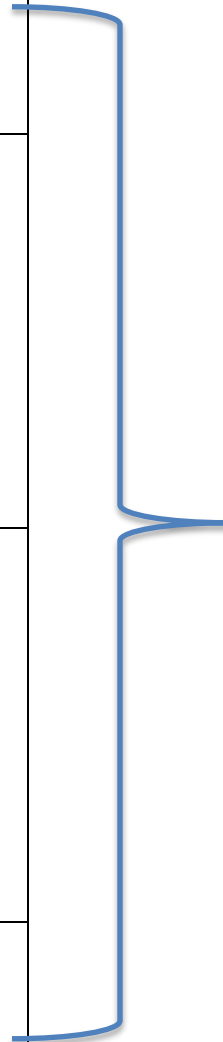
Appendix A

Conceptual framework schematic



Appendix B
Data collection schematic

<p>Surveys</p> <p>Comparative Analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gala Elements • Dollars Raised • Staff Perceptions
<p>Interview</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gala Elements • Dollars Raised • Staff Perceptions • What works, what doesn't
<p>Participant Observation</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gala Elements • "Buzz" in the room • Planning process • Behind-the-scenes staff relations
<p>Document Analysis</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Documents • Past gala information • Checklists and timelines • Other



Appendix C

Research instruments

Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. Describe the elements of your annual gala: what do the patrons experience throughout the night? (i.e. Concert, dinner, auction)
2. Why do you include these particular elements?
3. Why do you order the evening in this way?
4. How have you altered the format of your gala in past years, and why? What would you change or add in the future?
5. What would you say is successful about your galas? Unsuccessful?

Data Collection Sheet for Participant Observation

Study Title: *Major American Symphony Orchestras and the Fundraising Gala*

Date: February 3, 2018

Activity Location: Eugene Hilton, Eugene Symphony offices

Activity: Gala Attendee, Gala Volunteer

Details:

CODING

OBSERVATION

NOTES



Appendix D

Recruitment instruments

Recruitment email to **interview** participants:

Dear (participant):

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Major American Symphony Orchestras and the Fundraising Gala*, conducted by Alexa Bayouk from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore how symphony orchestras can most effectively use the gala model.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your role as a special events staff member at a symphony orchestra. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, sometime in January-March, 2018. In addition to taking handwritten or typed notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at abayouk@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Patricia Lambert at pdewey@uoregon.edu.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will follow up with you soon by email to answer any questions you might have and to hopefully schedule a time to meet for an interview.

Sincerely,

Alexa Bayouk

Appendix E

Recruitment instruments

Recruitment email to **survey** participants:

Dear (participant):

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Major American Symphony Orchestras and the Fundraising Gala*, conducted by Alexa Bayouk from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore how symphony orchestras can most effectively use the gala model.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your role as a special events staff member at a symphony orchestra. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in an online survey, lasting approximately 10 minutes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at abayouk@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Patricia Lambert at pdewey@uoregon.edu.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will follow up with you soon by email to answer any questions you might have and to hopefully schedule a time to meet for an interview.

Sincerely,

Alexa Bayouk

Appendix F
Consent forms

Major American Symphony Orchestras and the Fundraising Gala

Alexa Bayouk, Principal Investigator
Arts and Administration Program
School of Planning, Public Policy and Management
University of Oregon

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Major American Symphony Orchestras and the Fundraising Gala*, conducted by Alexa Bayouk from the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to explore how symphony orchestras can most effectively use the gala model.

There is a gap in the literature describing practices fundraising galas, especially for symphony orchestras and other performing arts organizations. To begin to address best practices for symphony galas, this study aims to take a snapshot of the symphony gala landscape across major U.S. symphony orchestras through surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your role as a special events staff member at a symphony orchestra. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, lasting approximately one hour, sometime in January-February, 2018. In addition to taking handwritten or typed notes, with your permission, I will use an audio recorder for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone calls or email.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. All research records will be stored on a password-protected computer, and hard copies of documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Audio recordings will be saved on a password-protected laptop. Research records will be retained through completion of this research project for validation purposes and shortly past publication of the master's research project; research records will be destroyed one year after completion of the study. Only the principal investigator and the faculty research adviser will have access to these records.

There are minimal risks (loss of privacy and/or breach of confidentiality) associated with participating in this study. To maintain credibility of the research, I intend to identify participants and use quotes from participants in the final publication. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below,

demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. You will have the opportunity, if you wish, to review and quotes and paraphrasing of your statements prior to publication. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the cultural sector as a whole, especially in the Pacific Northwest region. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at abayouk@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Patricia Lambert at pdewey@uoregon.edu. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and initial the following statements to indicate your consent. Because interviewees differ in their wishes for information to be collected during the interview and in reviewing the information before publication, please specify your understandings and preferences in the list below:

_____ I understand that I will be identified as a participant in this research project.

_____ I consent to the use of note taking during my interview.

_____ I consent to the use of audio recording during my interview.

_____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

_____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

_____ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that

I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study. I understand that the principal investigator will send me by email a copy of all of the quotes and paraphrases that are directly attributable to me, and that I will have the opportunity to approve and/or revise these statements by a clearly defined deadline.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Alexa Bayouk
abayouk@uoregon.edu