League Information Brief
May 2010

*Fearless Journeys: Innovation in Five American Orchestras*
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Edited by Catherine Maciariello
A new publication of the League of American Orchestras.
Available online in PDF, Kindle and ePub formats at americanorchestras.org.

Significance of the study
*Fearless Journeys* is the report of a 2009 League study, funded by MetLife Foundation, which explored and documented five examples of promising innovative practices in American orchestras. This is the first formal attempt to define and to understand the organizational factors that support innovation in orchestras. This information is critical for orchestra leaders; it also documents an increasing resilience in the orchestra field as a whole.

Background
The modern American orchestra was built on a well-established operational structure. As the pace of change picked up in orchestras’ environments, some began to experiment with new approaches to delivering on their missions. These experiments have touched many different areas and organizational practices. In 2009, as orchestras confronted the challenges caused by the economic downturn and accelerated cultural changes, the League initiated this study.

The approaches outlined in *Fearless Journeys* do not offer a silver bullet; in fact, some of the orchestras in this study continue to confront major challenges despite their good work. It is the spirit behind these strategies that the study hopes to encourage. Orchestras and their stakeholders must recognize that the risk-taking of innovation is necessary if orchestras are to continue to offer exciting musical experiences that are vital to American life.

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<th>Case Orchestras at a Glance</th>
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| **Atlanta Symphony Orchestra** | Established: 1945  
Budget: $45,600,000* |
| **Los Angeles Philharmonic** | Established: 1919  
Budget: $94,500,000* |
| **Memphis Symphony Orchestra** | Established: 1952  
Budget: $4,494,601* |
| **Pacific Symphony** | Established: 1978  
Budget: $16,110,047* |
| **The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra** | Established: 1959  
Budget: $13,220,078* |

*2008-2009 season*
The Five Case Studies

- **Atlanta Symphony Orchestra**: Faced with financial challenges and widespread disaffection among constituents, the ASO built a collaborative, cross-constituent organizational culture that eliminates silos and increases synergy.

- **Los Angeles Philharmonic**: The opening of Walt Disney Hall provided leverage to open the orchestra’s “high art” doors to a wider public, focusing on a commitment to contemporary music and creative interdisciplinary projects.

- **Memphis Symphony Orchestra**: The MSO responded to a severely declining audience and revenue base and increasing community irrelevance by embracing a new mission of public citizenship, building artistically engaging community partnerships that use musicians’ artistic talents and leadership to serve community needs.

- **Pacific Symphony**: Located in a fast-growing decentralized metropolitan area near Los Angeles where Western classical music traditions are increasingly unfamiliar, the orchestra made deep cultural connections with its community by developing new approaches to contextualizing music.

- **The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra**: With a goal of building its strength as a leading chamber music orchestra, the SPCO vested decision-making power in musicians and replaced the music director with a rotating team of Artistic Partners.

**Key Finding: Common Factors of Innovative Orchestras**
The analysis of data from the five studies revealed six factors common to all the organizations that had nurtured innovation:

- a committed and resolute leadership
- an expansive, clearly articulated vision
- an open artistic decision-making model
- coordination by an appointed integrator
- a prolific use of partnerships
- a foundation of artistic excellence

**Defining Innovation**
The research framework defined an activity as truly innovative if it is:

- *Meaningful*. Does it have a purpose and objective? Does it address one of the key areas that affect the orchestra’s well-being, i.e. artistic product, community engagement, organizational capacity, etc. in a novel way? Does it change fundamental assumptions and practice? Does it generate positive response among organizational constituents and the field in general?

- *Effective*. Does it solve the problem it was designed to address? Does it increase creativity and capacity within the organization? Does it help attract top talent and facilitate access to time, money, and staff? Does it engage new prospects/patrons uncommitted to the art form as well as
traditional subscribers and patrons? Does it produce revenue? Does it change audience demographics?

- **Sustainable.** Can the activity be replicated? Is it adaptable? Does it perpetuate a culture and infrastructure of innovation? Does it provide a framework to evaluate impact and make decisions? Does it capture lessons learned and turn them into institutional knowledge that enhances skills and capabilities? Does it generate ongoing support from the organization’s leadership and Board?

**Methodology of the Study**
Organizational psychologist Dr. Lela Tepavac of Fit Leadership LLC created a conceptual framework for the research based on a review of existing innovation literature, innovation models in other industries, and interviews with experts in the orchestra field. Concurrently, the League asked member orchestras to describe their innovative activities across a variety of areas. From among the 150 responses, the League and a project Steering Committee selected five orchestras to participate.

Researchers visited the five orchestras in March and April 2009. They interviewed approximately 20 people from each orchestra -- a total of 94 people -- including presidents and CEOs, music directors, board members, musicians, staff, external collaborators, consultants, and community stakeholders. Interview questions varied across participant groups. The researchers gathered information about orchestra history and context, and documented the emergence and implementation of innovation, critical success factors, impact, lessons learned, and future plans. The researchers also conducted focus groups with musicians, staff members, and community representatives.

They used a specialized computer application to process and analyze the qualitative data, created a case study framework, and drafted the studies based on the qualitative data analysis. A member of the Project Steering Committee served as the first reader for each case study. Each orchestra then reviewed the final draft of its section for clarity and accuracy. The researchers, editor Catherine Maciariello, and the League collaborated on the overall analysis and the distillation of lessons learned from the five case studies.

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