

ORCHESTRA BOARD PROFILE

IN FEBRUARY 1995, the American Symphony Orchestra League conducted a study of orchestra governing boards designed to learn about policies and procedures related to boards of directors, officers, committees, orchestra financial operations, and executive staff; 229 orchestras participated in the study.

The following summary of the League study suggests a profile of orchestra governing boards in the United States. The profile shows both the similarities and the heterogeneity of the orchestra field. Some policies and procedures are in force in virtually every orchestra, while others are related to variables such as orchestra mission and size.

While the *Guide to Orchestra Governance* describes board practices that are characteristic of successful orchestras, the following results of the League study illustrate that there is room for a great deal of improvement. Although the majority of the boards studied may follow a particular procedure or policy, the reader should keep in mind that the best practice is developed in careful consideration of each orchestra's needs and its commitment to the community.

Detailed information collected from the study is published in a comprehensive report—*Policies and Procedures of Orchestra Governing Boards*—available from the American Symphony Orchestra League.

Board Organization

- Nearly all orchestra governing boards are called boards of directors.
- More than half of the orchestras responding have no other boards besides the board of directors. A few orchestras have honorary boards, advisory boards, or other types of boards.
- Every orchestra that responded to the survey has a mission statement. Most orchestras (78 percent) have long-range plans, and most have formally reviewed these plans within the last two years.
- Nearly all orchestras (86 percent) have active volunteer support groups; the largest orchestras all reported having such a group.

- The size of the full-time paid staff ranged from an average of 2 in small orchestras to an average of 53 in large orchestras. Only 16 of the 53 smallest orchestras surveyed reported any full-time staff. Generally, part-time paid staffs were small, ranging from 1 to 6.

Board Size

- The average size of the boards responding to the study ranged from 20 to 70, with larger orchestras having larger boards. Orchestras report that most of their board members have regular voting status, and most boards also report having a small number of ex officio voting, honorary, and nonvoting members.

Board Selection

- New members of orchestra boards are usually elected by the board itself. In 34 percent of the orchestras responding—and in half of all orchestras with budgets more than eight million dollars—board members are elected by the membership of the corporation.

Board Composition

- Most orchestra board members are between 36 and 70 years of age. Few orchestras reported having board members 35 or younger (9 percent) or 71 or older (11 percent).
- White men and women dominate orchestra boards; only a handful of board members are black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific, or American Indian. Most boards have not adopted a written policy regarding cultural inclusiveness for the orchestra.
- Orchestra board members are usually corporate CEOs or business owners (21 percent), senior executives (21 percent), or not currently employed (23 percent).
- Few executive directors (11 percent) have either ex officio voting or full voting status on boards of directors. Executive directors usually attend board meetings either as nonvoting ex officio members of the board or with no official board capacity.
- Ex officio members include most often the executive director, music director, and volunteer association

president. Ex officio members of boards responding to the study are sometimes voting members (41 percent) and sometimes nonvoting (54 percent).

- Musicians serve on the boards of more than half of the orchestras responding to the study (66 percent), usually as voting members. Musicians are generally voting members of board committees as well, in particular the long-range planning, education, and artistic advisory committees.
- Paid staff professionals other than musicians typically are not full voting members of orchestra boards; they are slightly more likely to be full voting board members in large orchestras.
- In most cases (72 percent), paid staff professionals do not serve as officers of the corporation that operates the orchestra. When they do, they are usually named as such in the bylaws. It is the executive director who most commonly serves as an officer.

Length of Service

- The majority of orchestra boards (82 percent) set three-year terms for board members, some of these also allowing terms of other lengths. About half (53 percent) of the surveyed boards place no limit on the number of consecutive years a board member may serve; of those that do set a limit, six consecutive years is typical. Some orchestras (33 percent) specify that a member must be off the board for a year or more before being eligible for reelection.
- The most common term of office for board presidents and other officers is one year; board presidents typically serve from one to two years. Few boards place a limit on the number of consecutive terms a board president or other officer may serve. Most boards do not prepare for succession by having a formal president-elect position, although some boards are beginning to establish such a position.

Board Meetings

- More than half of orchestra boards studied (56 percent) hold monthly meetings. The exception is the boards of larger orchestras, which tend to meet four or six times a year. Most boards meet at a regularly scheduled date and time; meetings generally last from one to two hours.

Board Committees

- Orchestras generally report about nine committees, with larger boards reporting more committees. The most frequent ongoing committees are, in order of frequency: executive, development, finance/budget, nominating, marketing, long-range planning, artistic advisory, education, and personnel. Nearly eight in ten (79 percent) orchestras report committees that include members who are not members of the board.
- The average size of an orchestra board executive committee is 10, with larger boards reporting larger executive committees. In general, executive committee members include board officers, the immediate past board president, committee chairmen, the volunteer association president, and the executive director. More than half (56 percent) of executive committees meet monthly.

Board Education and Self-Evaluation

- New board members receive formal orientation conducted by board and staff members in 64 percent of the orchestras in the study. About half of the orchestras in the study (55 percent) produce handbooks for board members.
- Six in ten (61 percent) of boards studied have never conducted an evaluation of their own performance. Board self-evaluation appears to be a recent phenomenon; 24 percent of those orchestras that have conducted an evaluation did so within the 12 months preceding their response to the survey; 12 percent reported having conducted an evaluation more than five years ago.
- Only one in ten boards (10 percent) have written mechanisms for evaluating the performance of individual board members. Slightly more have written evaluation mechanisms for the music director (16 percent), and the executive director (25 percent).

Individual Board Member Responsibilities

- More than half (53 percent) of orchestra boards have written job descriptions for board officers; fewer boards have job descriptions for committee chairmen (41 percent) and board members (37 percent). Nearly one in ten (28 percent) have no written job descriptions.

- Sixty-two percent of orchestras surveyed require board members to make an annual contribution; 81 percent of these orchestras state this policy in writing. More than half (51 percent) specify a minimum gift amount required from each board member. Most orchestras (81 percent) report that between 75 and 100 percent of their board made personal contributions in the 1994-95 season.
- Nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of orchestras surveyed reported that their board members express their commitment through the purchase of season tickets, although most orchestras do not require them to do so.
- More than six in ten (63 percent) of the orchestras in the study have a written policy regarding attendance at board meetings.

- Only one-fourth (24 percent) of boards have written policies related to conflict of interest.

Board Relationships

- Nearly all executive directors (93 percent) attend board meetings, and most also attend executive committee meetings. Two-thirds (66 percent) of the executive directors—and most of those in large orchestras—attend nominating committee meetings.
- Music directors generally attend board meetings, and about half attend executive committee meetings as well. They rarely attend nominating committee meetings. The smaller the orchestra, the more likely it is that the music director will attend board meetings regularly. ∞