

The Ideal Guild: involved • ageless • innovative • visible • fun • inclusive • communicative •

• diverse supportive • creative • resourceful • collaborative • proactive • generous • motivating • active •

• accessible • helpful • popular • educating • representative of opera • outreaching • friendly • strategic •

• hospitable • connected • dedicated • open • expanding • aggressive • non-elitist • cooperative •

• approachable • genderless • growing • inviting • timely • relevant • companionship • energetic •

• challenging • daring • integrated with hgo • service • stimulating • international networking •

• large • strong • forward thinking • self supporting • family • vibrant • community oriented •

• satisfying • caring • high tech • exciting • productive • economical responsible • welcoming • flexible •

Houston Grand Opera Guild Vision

Engage, involve, and retain a larger, more diverse membership in order to increase volunteer participation.

Houston Grand Opera Guild Mission:

The mission of the Houston Grand Opera Guild is to support HGO in its endeavor to bring together larger and more diverse audiences to experience grand opera. This will be accomplished by:

- Educating the opera and music theater audiences of tomorrow,
- Promoting active participants through service and events,
- Contributing financially to the opera where consistent with its education and service objectives.

Executive Summary

Periodically, every organization needs to evaluate its performance, to see if it's on track and meeting its goals. This is particularly important in a time of economic sluggishness, when people pay more attention to how they spend their money and their time. It is imperative that the HGO Guild evaluate whether it is performing at its highest possible level and gauge its direction for the future.

At the same time the Guild is proud of its accomplishments to date. It takes satisfaction in being an appreciated partner with Houston Grand Opera and in helping make Houston the vital opera-friendly community that it is. This plan is offered in the spirit of a champion or a diva who knows that introspection and analysis will help him/her perform even better.

At David Gockley's suggestion, we began to review our mission and current programs by first creating a strategic planning team. We followed with a meeting of more than 40 interested and resourceful members and guests at the Strategic Plan working session, May 17, 2003. Ideas generated at this meeting have been recorded in Appendix E. After a series of meetings, the planning team has summarized the strategic objectives in this document. Through the efforts of the nominating committee, the Guild has chosen a slate of officers for the coming year with the capability to steer the process and effect the transitions needed.

This plan contains ideas generated by the 14 team members, heads of existing programs and projects, and members who attended the Strategic Plan working session. It recommends and indicates guidelines to achieve these goals:

- Larger, more diverse Guild membership and leadership, and more active volunteers.
- Closer alignment with HGO and staff sponsors.
- An aggressive, can-do attitude toward new projects, with emphasis on follow through.
- Changes to Guild infrastructure relationships to improve membership, marketing, and website involvement in all Guild programs.

Concurrently, we want to determine if the Guild is meeting the needs and goals of the organization we were founded to assist — the Houston Grand Opera. In addition to benefiting the Opera, the Guild must plan its activities to be fulfilling and rewarding to its members while continually building and improving programs.

Starting with this document, we intend to recommend tactics to reach a large membership interested in volunteering, learning more about opera, and socializing with other opera-lovers. Our aim is that Guild membership be characterized by diversity, informality, and enjoyment. Activities of the Guild will involve members in the Opera community. As members become more involved, their appreciation of opera will increase, along with their patronage of, and contribution, to HGO.

The team by no means considers this to be a finished document. During the strategic planning process, many ideas were generated for new programs or changes to existing programs. The team has reported these (see Appendix E) but has intentionally deferred recommendations. We believe that each new Board must decide priorities for new programs.

It is the team's fervent wish that the new Board move the Guild toward fully possessing all of the attributes of an ideal Guild envisioned at our workshop.

Objectives and Tactics

Currently, to realize its vision and fulfill its mission, the Guild Strategic Planning Committee recommends the following objectives and tactics:

- I. **Objective: To increase Guild membership from all sources, including season ticket holders, annual fund donors, single ticket holders, direct pay members and arts patrons. Proposed tactics include:**
 - Membership and Marketing VPs to examine opportunities for joint mailings/ marketing during HGO subscription drive, annual fund campaign, HGO e-mail blasts, etc.
 - Marketing efforts including ads in publications, media releases, direct mail, e-mail messages, and other communications to support membership recruiting, expansion and retention.
 - Membership VP to have Recruiting Trustee position.
 - Recruiting Trustee to recruit volunteers to man information booth at performances and special events.
 - Education and Community Outreach VP and Trustees to design programs to not only meet our non-profit service mission, but additionally to introduce new audiences to volunteer opportunities and the programs of the Guild.

- II. **Objective: To double the number of active Guild participants in the next two years. An active participant comes to at least one program per year.**
 - Open most desirable programs to additional participants.
 - Take affirmative steps to invite non-active Guild members to participate in activities or on committees.
 - Design Education and Community Outreach programs to introduce new audiences to volunteer opportunities and the programs of the Guild.
 - Increase communication with members through e-mail.
 - Take affirmative steps to retain Guild members.

- III. **Objective: To modify existing programs where necessary to better meet the goals of HGO and the Vision/Mission of the Guild**
 - Guild President, VP & Trustee for program to meet with HGO staff to discuss changes and/or improvements to program, if any. Examine ways to partner with HGO (e.g., mailings, events).
 - Prior to the abovementioned meeting, Guild representatives to review report prepared by outgoing Board Members, and also review all input from Strategic Planning Sessions, if any, relating to programs.
 - Trustee to submit recommendations, based on the outcome of the meeting with HGO staff, to Guild Board for approval at the next Board meeting.

- IV. Objective: To develop and implement new programs (or projects or events) to better meet the objectives of HGO and the Vision and Mission of the Guild**
- Any Guild member may propose a new program/project/event for the Guild. This person will become the Champion of the program. It will be the responsibility of the Champion of the program to find a leader for that program as well as a Board sponsor. At that point, the Champion will complete a form that summarizes the program objectives, benefits and costs.
 - The Board sponsor for the program will present the idea to the HGO staff liaison. If HGO approves the idea, the program will be assigned an HGO staff member. The program will then be presented to the Guild Board.
 - New programs may be presented to and assessed by the Board at any time.
 - Upon Board approval of the program, the Champion and the Leader of the program may seek volunteers and begin implementing the program.
- V. Objective: To increase communication between HGO staff and Guild Board.**
- All programs must have an HGO senior staff sponsor who knows about the program, and offers guidance and resources when necessary for the program's success.
 - Two-way communication is key. The HGO sponsor should also advise the corresponding Guild Board sponsor of all HGO programs and directives that will affect the Guild. This is imperative for branding, identity, message continuity, membership retention, development, marketing and education, not to mention cost efficiencies that we must strive to attain.
 - The Guild will facilitate effective use of our volunteer resources. The Guild is currently surveying Guild membership for skills and expertise so that HGO and the Guild can better utilize those resources.
- VI. Objective: To increase communication among Guild Board members to enhance project outcomes.**
- Infrastructure committee consisting of the Guild President, Vice Presidents of Development, Marketing, Membership, and Education and the Website Trustee to meet quarterly to ensure that committees are working together to achieve maximum benefit.
- VII. Objective: To increase opportunities to communicate Guild activities/volunteer opportunities to all Guild members and the HGO community.**
- Work closely with HGO to define current channels of communication and find opportunities to “piggy back” on each. For example, the Opera sends out an e-mail blast before each performance that says “our records indicate you will be attending tomorrow night’s opera . . .” At the end of the email

could be a Guild plug: “Get Opera Active! Join the HGO Guild,” or “Visit the HGO Guild Boutique before the curtain rises.”

- Make a concerted effort to gather the e-mail addresses of each member and prospect for periodic communications by e-blast.
- Send out periodic electronic newsletters highlighting events and members (e.g., electronic version of Cues article.)
- Produce “Volunteer Opportunities” handouts to be distributed at the boutique or at a Guild lobby desk that outline immediate opportunities to get involved.
- Man information booth at the performances and other events to distribute Guild information about volunteer opportunities and membership.
- Increase communication among Guild committees about opportunities in other committees.

VIII. Objective: To strengthen leadership skills of existing Board Members and prepare for seamless Board succession.

- Provide annual orientation program for Board members.
- Identify and mentor existing Board members for other positions on the Board.
- Expand Board committees to include a larger pool of active members from which new Board members can be identified.

IX. Objective: To develop feedback mechanisms to measure progress/outcome.

- Develop a short feedback form to measure outcomes, both financial and non-financial, and strengths/weaknesses of a program/project/event.
- Provide feedback forms at Guild public events to judge audience response and to modify programs to meet defined objectives.
- Conduct focus groups in order to better understand the needs and attitudes of our target audiences.

Conclusion

The strategic planning team considers this to be a beginning — a living, dynamic document and the foundation of a plan that will:

- Direct our efforts to programs and volunteer activities that will increase involvement of members of the Guild,
- Attract diversity in new membership,
- Best serve Houston Grand Opera both financially and through volunteer support,
- And be the Guild we envision.

Respectfully submitted,

THE 2003 HGO GUILD STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE:

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