

SYRACUSE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Syracuse Symphony Orchestra (SSO) is a full-time performing ensemble in Central New York State.²⁵ Like most other arts nonprofits, it relies heavily on donated income and has adopted a multidimensional fundraising approach.

Personal relationships are built primarily through events and receptions related to specific concerts. Relationships are also built around phone calls and personalized handwritten notes, whether as a thank-you or extending an invitation. Furthermore, assigning donors to a staff person to assist with any help regarding donations or ticket inquiries further develops these relationships. The focus of personal relationships is the core donor.

Direct mail is used year round and includes core, transitional, nonrenewed, lapsed, and nondonors. There are about five cycles that occur throughout the year with personalized letters going out to each of these groups. Further segmentation of these groups is done as well to enhance the personalization of the letter. For example, people who have attended a single concert receive a different letter from those who are concert series subscribers.

Telefunding is outsourced to a for-profit company and focuses on lapsed and nonrenewed donors, as well as single-ticket buyers who have never given in the past. After each concert, a list of single-ticket buyers is segmented into nonrenewed, lapsed, and nondonors. These people then receive a phone call from a representative who emphasizes what a great concert they had just attended. The SSO finds that this personal touch produces a good response: The group with the highest response rate is the nondonor group, with average gifts of \$100. Before telefunding, average gifts among this group were only around \$30, showing that this technique helps both in acquiring new donors and also increasing the average gift amount.