

Culture Shock: The Merger of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra & Music School

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Analyze the factors which could bring together two arts organizations in a large-scale collaboration or merger.
- Highlight the types of challenges that two entities face when they are in the early stages of collaboration, and explore potential tactics to mitigate such challenges.
- Detail the steps that leadership can take to produce a shift in culture among all stakeholders in a new organization.
- Analyze the current state of a partnership and recommend initiatives for maximizing the benefits of a collaborative environment.

Topics For Discussion

• Maximizing Merger Benefits

- ♦ **Orchestra Patrons' Involvement in the Music School:** Should the RIPOMS try to increase interest in music school programs with its orchestra patrons? What types of music school programs and opportunities might RIPOMS offer to orchestra patrons?
- ♦ **Integrating Orchestra and Music School Programs:** What barriers does the RIPOMS face in engaging more orchestra members to teach at the music school? What other types of innovative programs or crossover are possible? What does a fully integrated RIPOMS look like?
- ♦ **Link Up:** Should music school administration be responsible for the management of the orchestra's education series? At what point does collaboration/crossover between orchestra and music school programs become counter-intuitive? How can orchestra members' concerns be addressed with the burgeoning *Link Up* program?

• Analyzing the Success of the Merger

- ♦ What factors ultimately allowed the RIPOMS merger to achieve success?
- ♦ What steps should two organizations take to determine if a merger or collaboration is feasible and beneficial? What was missing from the RIPOMS process?
- ♦ **Community focus:** A theme of the RIPOMS merger was meeting the needs of the community and the organization's mission to provide high-quality music performance and education to the region. In considering a merger, what steps should administration take to understand the needs of a community?

- ♦ **Ideals and vision:** What role did ideals and vision play in the initial genesis of the merger? How did these ideals and vision relate to the organizational and logistical challenges that the organization faced after the merger?
 - Do the RIPOMS mission, vision, priorities, and values (**Appendix 2**) represent a merged organization? Do the priorities and values support the mission? What is missing from the document?
- ♦ **Effectiveness vs. Efficiency:** What is the relationship between efficiency and effectiveness in an arts organization? How are they measured in arts organizations? Is one more important than the other? What impact did this dichotomy have on the RIPOMS merger? How did these two factors both challenge and enhance the RIPOMS?
- ♦ **Leadership and Mindset:** What role does leadership play in the success or failure of a merged organization? In light of the economic crisis of 2008, what part did leadership and mindset play in how the situation was addressed? What mindset was present through the crisis and how much can a single individual impact an arts organization?
- ♦ **Organizational culture:** How does an organization enact cultural change among stakeholders? When two entities collaborate or merge, what are the benefits and drawbacks of a single culture dominating in the new enterprise?
 - It took over seven years for the RIPOMS to enact any serious or tangible cultural evolution. What steps could have been taken to jumpstart cultural work after the merger?
 - What are the barriers to cultural development in an arts organization? As a leader, how would you overcome these barriers?
 - How could the organizational chart (**Appendix 1**) be restructured to better represent the merged entity? What might an organizational chart look like for two professional chamber ensembles that share marketing, finance, and development resources? What steps can the leadership take to turn the skeleton of the organizational chart into a cohesive culture that is embraced by all stakeholders?