

The Sphinx Organization and the Diversity Marketplace

TEACHER NOTES

For two decades, the Sphinx Organization has been addressing the stark disproportion of people of color in the world of classical music. This case study on Sphinx highlights its leadership's desire to improve the annual conference SphinxConnect, a gathering of music industry leaders and promising musicians from underrepresented groups. President and Artistic Director Afa Dworkin sees her organization as a crucial link between these audiences not only during the convention weekend but also throughout the year. Sphinx has already inspired a number of organizations to adopt or improve their diversity initiatives. By hosting SphinxConnect, the organization hopes to provide a forum for discussion of best practices on an even larger platform than its other program offerings. With one year under its belt, Sphinx is looking to enhance its annual convention, seeking the strongest program possible each year and offering points of contact year-round. The learning objectives and topics below represent the major areas of discussion around this case study.

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the problem of underrepresentation of minority groups in musical arts organizations and understand solutions for rectifying the imbalances.
- Assess the relationship of an organization's program offerings to its central mission.
- Evaluate the success of an annual event convention and suggest improvements for its staging.

Topics For Discussion

Programming

Dworkin, Venman, and Dowell will be making some revisions to SphinxConnect based on its inaugural run in 2017. The changes begin on site with a reconceived Expo Hall that will have longer hours and immediate access to maximize contact between presenters and artists. Planners have also decided to take suggestions for sessions and panels for the forthcoming SphinxConnect, an idea that was lauded by participants. Encourage the students to review **Appendices 1** and **2** to understand the feedback from 2017 and the scope of program offerings, respectively. Where is the emphasis across the entire weekend and what was its impact?

- With an understanding of the program design of the 2017 event and the comments from conference-goers, survey student recommendations for improving the sessions offered. Performance forums in particular play a large role, for example. What kinds of performing environments serve the mission of the Sphinx Organization? Are there too many performances at SphinxConnect? If the current offerings meet participant needs, how could these be enhanced?
- If more discussion panels and themed sessions were added, what topics should be addressed? Ask students to evaluate the 2017 session topics. What other programming possibilities did they suggest?
- The inaugural SphinxConnect program was determined by a planning team headed by Andre Dowell. Following the conference, programming ideas were solicited from participants in the 2017 event. How much should participant input affect future programming? How could planners recognize the programming contributions of past and current participants? What are the advantages and drawbacks of having participants play a greater role in forming future SphinxConnect programs?

Communication and Recruitment

Sphinx is keen on establishing regular contact with SphinxConnect participants throughout the year. The organizers aim to assist in the continuation of dialogues begun at each SphinxConnect gathering and to initiate new conversations that could develop into fruitful topics for future conventions. As mentioned in the case, Sphinx already maintains a SphinxConnect group on Facebook, which is a hub for dissemination of industry news and opportunities of interest to its constituents.

- Ask students to evaluate the Facebook group as the principal method of communication with participants. What are other forms of regular contact can be made with past participants? For example, the case highlighted that the organization will issue a video to assist with the Sphinx Orchestral Partner Auditions (SOPA) in advance of the next SphinxConnect conference for example. What other ideas can students propose?
- Membership in the SphinxConnect Facebook group is open to anyone with interest in the topic (subject to administrator approval), and only half were participants on site at the last SphinxConnect meeting. Given the gathering audience online, should any changes be made to the kinds of content that Sphinx provides?
- Dworkin and Venman see the growing Facebook group as a platform for recruitment for SphinxConnect. Without risking wear-out from requests for registration throughout the year, how can they tailor group communication to drive attendance? What incentives can be developed for registration?
- Participants in the 2017 SphinxConnect were sent an electronic survey to evaluate the conference. Ask the students to examine the survey presented in **Appendix 2**. What kinds of things were not asked in the survey but could be gathered?

Portfolio

Dworkin believes that the annual SphinxConnect has great power to fuel its mission to improve the racial diversity of the classical music world. However, the yearly conference is just one of several program initiatives that it manages. As the case explains, the Sphinx Organization houses its programs under four major pillars: Education and Access, Artist Development, Performing Artists, and Arts Leadership. SphinxConnect falls under the rubric of Arts Leadership, but the annual recognition ceremony known as the Sphinx Medals of Excellence is also in the category of Arts Leadership.

- Ask students to revisit the portfolio of programs described in the case, from the educational initiatives to the professional ensembles it sponsors. Two larger themes that run across the Sphinx portfolio are artist development and promotion of professional artists. Should the organization devote equal attention to each category? Can some parts of the portfolio be consolidated or expanded? How could this be achieved?
- Apart from SphinxConnect, which individual initiatives in the Sphinx Organization can serve its mission most directly and most widely?