

Top Ways to Improve Union Density in Your Orchestra Bargaining Unit

1. Aim to create a workplace and workplace-adjacent environment where every musician feels comfortable speaking their mind and participating in the life of the collective. Examine your own biases and prejudices that may prevent you from engaging fully with every member of your orchestra. Encourage your colleagues to do the same.
2. Hold “orientation to the orchestra” session for new members of the orchestra. Members of the Orchestra Committee should meet in person with new members, perhaps over lunch or coffee. Provide each musician with an orientation packet that includes, at a minimum, a copy of the CBA, local bylaws, players’ association bylaws, and include information about the structure of the employer’s organization, your organization’s labor history and information (collected from current musicians – another way to get folks involved) about musician-friendly resources in your local community (dry cleaners, veterinarians, massage therapists, cafes, brewpubs, farmers markets, etc.). Make it clear to new musicians that membership is not about ‘paying dues to the third-party union’ but instead is the way we all support each other and our collective goals for better wages and working conditions.
3. Ask veteran members of your orchestra to help compile a labor history of the orchestra, highlighting the gains that have been made over many years of collective bargaining and the sacrifices made to achieve those gains. Include this history in your new musician orientation packet and invite one or more veteran musicians to join your in-person orientation sessions and speak about their experience in the orchestra.
4. Hold regular periodic orchestra meetings and share an agenda in advance of each meeting. Invite all musicians, members or not, but only allow non-members to attend part of the meeting, reserving the rest of the meeting (including any discussion of collective bargaining) for members only.
5. Engage all musicians in regular conversations (not just in a negotiating year) about how things are going in the workplace and what their concerns are. Each member of the Orchestra Committee should talk with a handful of musicians (divide the labor) on a regular and recurring basis. Get training from SSD about how to have an effective organizing conversation (see #15 below).
6. Encourage musician who express discontent to get involved in leadership roles. Encourage musicians who may not share your background to get involved. If they are not members, encourage them to join so they can participate fully.
7. Ensure that all nominees for orchestra/negotiating committee positions are members not only of the AFM but of the Local. This is an AFM policy requirement.

8. Find ways for musicians who are not ready to commit to the substantial demands of committee service to get involved: e.g., coordinating child care for orchestra meetings, planning social events, designing a logo, helping publish a newsletter, helping curate a social media media presence.
9. Publish a regular newsletter for your orchestra, include news items about the work the local and OC are doing on the musicians' behalf, including grievances filed, attendance at local labor council events and other collective actions. Include items about gains made by other workers (including other musicians) through collective action and tidbits of labor history, including the history of your own orchestra. Include fun facts about new (or not-so-new) members of your orchestra.
10. Hold one or more annual social events for musicians and their families. For example, hold a Labor Day barbeque at a local park with the local/players' association providing hamburgers/hotdogs (including vegetarian options) and musicians bringing their own beverages and a dish to share. Recruit members of the orchestra to participate in planning the event and to lead activities, like games and face painting.
11. In preparation for bargaining, survey ONLY members. Inform non-members that if they want to have their concerns addressed they need to stop freeloading and start fully participating in the life of the collective (i.e., become a member).
12. When ratifying a new CBA or side letter, allow ONLY members to vote. Non-members have no right to ratify an agreement. Inform non-members of this fact in advance of bargaining so they can make the decision to join.
13. Have one-on-one conversations with musicians who refuse to join, aimed at first understanding their resistance and then find a path for them to change their position.
14. Publish a list on your bulletin board and in your newsletter of the musicians in your orchestra who have refused to become members, despite the fact that you have thoroughly established how groovy membership really is.
15. Contact SSD for support! We can help provide training to your committee in how to have an effective organizing conversation, which can help transform difficult conversations into productive ones (see #5 and #13 above). SSD can also help you design and implement an effective internal organizing campaign.