

ACROSS THE BOARD

A PUBLICATION OF OPERA AMERICA FOR OPERA COMPANY TRUSTEES

From the President and CEO of OPERA America

For many, the fall heralds the start of your opera seasons. At OPERA America, it marks the beginning of a yearlong series of convenings – forums, symposia and an annual conference – that inform company staff and trustees in their work.

This issue of *Across the Board* looks back on learning points derived from our Opera Conference in June and anticipates some of the governance topics we will discuss at the National Trustee Forum in February.

We believe that the strength of an opera company is sustained by an effective partnership between staff and trustees. I hope this issue inspires you to join us this year and participate in these programs.



MARC A. SCORCA

Coaching Board Members to Succeed



Opera companies are experts when it comes to singers. They know how to coach, rehearse, encourage and affirm high-caliber performers on the stage. Too often, these same companies don't realize that applying the same supportive techniques to their trustees will produce high-caliber performers in the boardroom – and in the community – as well.

Marc A. Scorca, president and CEO of OPERA America, sat down with Michelle Myers, associate director for strategy and organizational development at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, to learn how one company nurtures its board to deliver results for the benefit of the organization and city.

MARC A. SCORCA: I was very impressed by the engagement and hospitality of the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis board of directors when we came to town for Opera Conference 2018 this June. You share responsibility for the engagement of your company's board members with

your general director. Tell me about your role.

MICHELLE MYERS: We have a large board: currently 55 voting members, 5 ex-officio members and 14 life members. And it is incredibly active and engaged, which I think is key to the success of our company. But

it's important to have the staff to support it. A big part of my role at Opera Theatre is to work with our board members and ensure they are informed, engaged and equipped to make decisions and lead on our behalf.

MARC: I think a lot of companies do not appreciate fully the amount of support needed for a board to be a good board. What do you consider the most important things you do?

MICHELLE: There are two key parts. The first is logistical: preparing all the reports and minutes for board and committee meetings. I strive to make sure they're not only accurate, but also clear and easy to understand, so we can keep our meetings focused on actual discussion and decisions. The second part is maintaining relationships one-on-one. It's incredibly important to keep board members engaged, so they feel connected to the company and to the mission.

MARC: I hear of companies with a total of three staff people and 35 board members, and I say to myself, "How can you maintain relationships with that many people? How can you make every trustee feel individually purposeful each year? How can each person feel *continued* >

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Opera

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PAST CHAIR
Trustee,
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Opera

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President & CEO,
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Theatre

Laura Kaminsky,
VICE-CHAIR
Composer

Kathryn Smith,
VICE-CHAIR
General Director,
Madison Opera

Evan J. Hazell,
TREASURER
Trustee,
Pacific Opera Victoria

Perryn Leech,
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Houston Grand Opera

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Festival

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The Atlanta Opera

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Pacific Opera Victoria

Woody Kuehn
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James A. Merritt
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Billie Jean Smith
Trustee,
Florentine Opera
Company

The National Trustee Forum Steering Committee is a group of leading opera company trustees invited to provide insight and guidance into OPERA America's programming for trustees.

interview continued

like he or she is contributing something to the health of the company, beyond just a contribution?"

MICHELLE: Exactly. It could be easy to lose track of them. Then they feel disengaged and the relationships start to erode. Your board members bring such skill, insight and passion. You want to make sure that you have some of your strongest relationships with them and that they are recognized and valued for everything they contribute.

MARC: How do you affirm that with your board members?

MICHELLE: We make sure our trustees are not only knowledgeable about the financial and business aspects of the company, but all the programming as well. We make it a point at every board meeting to dedicate time for matters that aren't just financial reports. We talk about the art and our programs. And we invite them to come. Of course, then we follow up – and re-follow up – to make sure that each board member is there, if he or she can be.

MARC: Do you follow up with each board member in a similar way about meeting attendance or other responsibilities?

MICHELLE: Yes! I might reach out and say, "We missed you at the last couple of meetings. Can I take you to coffee and update you on



“Having strong relationships with each board member can only positively impact other areas of one’s organization.”

what’s happening?” When it comes to other commitments, like bringing a friend to a prospective donor, we try to take good notes about what each person has committed to and follow up – not just to see if it’s happening, but to see if there is information or assistance they might need. Sometimes our chair or committee chair might reach out if their relationship is stronger.

MARC: How do you keep board members informed between meetings?

MICHELLE: I put together a communication plan each year for the board. That way, even in the months when we don’t have a board meeting, we have planned communication, even if it’s just a quick update from the general director or from me about what’s happening in the coming weeks. We try to be strategic about our communications, which is why I think the overarching plan is helpful.

MARC: I can imagine that a strong board chair might also step up to assist the staff at a small company. The partnership between board members and staff can be really transformative for an organization. What have been the benefits of OTSL’s investment in such proactive board member management?

MICHELLE: You are absolutely right. We are fortunate to have a wonderful board, led by our amazing chair, Noémi Neidorff. Our board members are incredibly engaged and informed about the company. That allows them to go out in the community and be our best ambassadors. They’re the ones bringing their friends and colleagues to our productions and programs. They’re the ones who are out there talking with corporations and foundations in the community. They’re the ones taking the lead and making generous financial gifts to the company. So I think the benefit is that we have incredibly passionate people who are well informed and excited about the company.

And another benefit is this: It is so rewarding to me and my fellow staff members to get to know our trustees and to hear why they’re excited about being on the board and supporting the organization. The board drives much of the spirit of a company. The partnership between the staff and the board helps shape the culture that makes us unique.

MARC: A lot of people from companies with budgets that are a fraction of yours will read this interview. They long to have one more person in the development department to do what you do. What advice would you have for smaller companies about delivering this personal attention to their board members?

MICHELLE: You have to make it a priority. It does take time, but I think having strong relationships with each board member can only positively impact other areas of one’s organization.

At Opera Theatre, although it might be in my job description that I work with the board, I rely on all of my colleagues to share the relationships. And I think there are ways to get board members involved and engage them in helping with the work that needs to be done. You can recruit them, one by one, as allies in building relationships with their peers. But staff will still need to take the lead.

Opera America Magazine

OPERA America’s quarterly magazine addresses the issues most important to industry professionals, from marketing strategies and governance practices to exciting new repertoire.



IN THE FALL 2018 EDITION:

- Making Opera More Welcoming to People of Color
- Opera as a Medium for Contemporary News
- Using Amplification in Opera
- The Impact of the New Tax Code on Philanthropy
- “My First Opera” with Anthony Roth Costanzo

YOU CAN SUBSCRIBE TO OPERA AMERICA MAGAZINE BY JOINING OPERA AMERICA AS AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER FOR \$75 AT OPERAAMERICA.ORG/JOIN.

National Trustee Forum 2019

THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21–22

New Attendee Orientation: Wed., Feb. 20

Special Performances and Dinners: Wed., Feb. 20 – Sat., Feb. 23

It is our pleasure to invite you and your fellow board members to join us for OPERA America’s National Trustee Forum this February in New York City.

The Trustee Forum is a two-day symposium for trustees of OPERA America’s Professional Company Members. It’s an occasion to connect with fellow trustees, share successful practices and gain insight into the complexities of opera management.

Our companies might differ in size and location, but we’re all facing the same challenges and opportunities – and the same changing environments in which we strive to produce the art form we love. We’ll remind each other of that love, too, with a program of curated performances in the Big Apple.

If you are interested in joining us, speak to your general director about being nominated. We hope to see you!

RUTH ORTH AND GLORIA PORTELA

Co-Chairs, National Trustee Forum Steering Committee

OPERA America Resources for Trustees

TRUSTEE QUICK GUIDE

For a listing of the resources and services available to you as a Professional Company Member trustee, download the 2019 Trustee Quick Guide at OPERAAMERICA.ORG/TRUSTEEQUICKGUIDE.

NATIONAL OPERA TRUSTEE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Each Professional Company Member is invited to nominate an exemplary trustee for consideration for a National Opera Trustee Recognition Award. Four American trustees and one Canadian trustee will be selected by a panel of peers and recognized at a dinner in New York City on February 22. Consult your general director and visit OPERAAMERICA.ORG/TRUSTEENOMINATION to participate; nominations due October 17.

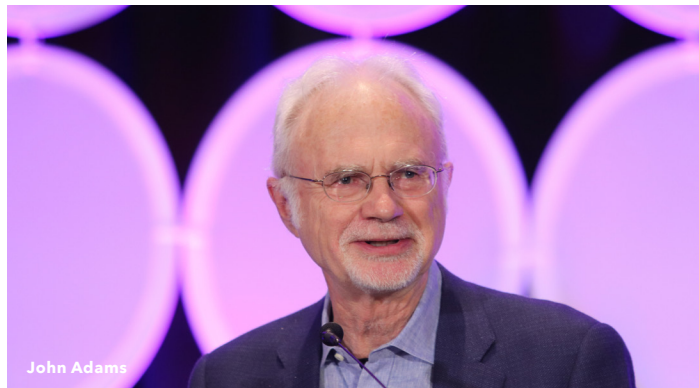
ANTI-HARASSMENT TOOLS AND RESOURCES

You can access a collection of tools and resources for helping opera companies prevent harassment and for individuals who have been victims of harassment, abuse and/or assault by visiting OPERAAMERICA.ORG/ANTIHARASSMENT.

COMPANY WORKSHOPS

OPERA America President/CEO Marc A. Scorca is available to lead board and staff workshops on topics including governance, civic engagement, leadership transitions and financial health. Consult your general director and contact Megan Taylor at MTAYLOR@OPERAAMERICA.ORG to discuss a workshop at your company.

At Opera Conference 2018: The Big Topics



WATCH THESE SESSIONS IN FULL AT YOUTUBE.COM/OPERAAMERICA. Next year's Opera Conference will take place June 13-16, 2019, in San Francisco. Registration opens December 6th at conference.operaamerica.org.

- Composer John Adams opened the conference with an impassioned keynote address in which he called on the field to embrace "a genuine musical and dramatic revolution."
- Opera Theatre of Saint Louis's former general director, Timothy O'Leary, joined a panel of leading thinkers from the St. Louis area to identify and dismantle patterns of racism that affect the opera ecosystem.
- In an all-conference roundtable, Adrienne Davis, an OTSL board member and law professor at Washington University, laid out successful policies and procedures to curb sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Tim Powers, director of sales and marketing at the Four Seasons St. Louis, shared insight into the hotel hospitality model and the ways various opera companies are adopting it with their audiences.

Surplus or Deficit: The Four Essential Balances

Board members spend a significant portion of every meeting reviewing financial statements. Repeated shortfalls and a large accumulated deficit can spell the end of the opera company. Financial reports are the center of attention, too, because they can be fit on one page, distributed via e-mail and discussed in short meetings. But on opening day of Opera Conference 2018, Marc A. Scorca suggested that finances are only one of four essential balances for board members to monitor.

1 FINANCIAL. Financial deficits result from a number of familiar factors. Does your company have a strong development program that recruits, acknowledges and stewards donors effectively up the donor ladder? Do you have productive marketing strategies across multiple platforms and media? Success in fundraising and marketing, however, are frequently the result of other critical factors.

2 ARTISTIC. Does your company have an artistic surplus or deficit? Does each season strengthen (surplus) or weaken (deficit) your company's reputation in the community? Is the artistic

quality compellingly good, such that board members are motivated to encourage friends, family and neighbors to attend? That subscribers renew and recruit others to subscribe? That people are excited about making contributions over and above the price of tickets?

3 CIVIC. With only a few productions each season, your opera company is likely "dark" most of year – in contrast to local museums that open nearly every day. In the current competitive philanthropic environment, opera leaders have to develop authentic partnerships and programs that increase the public value of opera beyond the walls of the opera house.

You have a civic surplus when allies who may not like opera express their support of your company as essential to the health of your city and its citizens.

4 HUMAN. Does your company operate with a human deficit, lacking enough people with the right skills at all levels of operation: staff, board and volunteers? Reducing staff is a frequent tactic to avoid a financial deficit. But if you do not have sufficient staff to manage the development, marketing, production, community service and governance functions, then you are at risk of incurring a financial, artistic or civic deficit.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT MEGHAN TAYLOR AT MTAYLOR@OPERAAMERICA.ORG.

THE NATIONAL OPERA CENTER AMERICA

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OPERA America is the national advocate for opera, dedicated to supporting the creation, presentation and enjoyment of the art form for artists, administrators, trustees and audiences.



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Fall/Winter 2018 Issue

- Coaching Board Members to Succeed
- Four Balances: Surpluses and Deficits
- Recap of Opera Conference 2018
- Invitation to the 2019 National Trustee Forum
- OPERA America Resources for Trustees

Future Trustee Meetings

NATIONAL TRUSTEE FORUM 2019 | New York, NY

February 21-22, 2019

OPERA CONFERENCE 2019 | San Francisco, CA

June 13-16, 2019

NATIONAL TRUSTEE FORUM 2020 | Washington D.C.

March, 2020

NATIONAL TRUSTEE FORUM FEBRUARY 21-22, 2019

NEW ATTENDEE ORIENTATION Wednesday, Feb. 20

SPECIAL PERFORMANCES AND DINNERS Wednesday, Feb. 20 - Saturday, Feb. 23

Contact MTaylor@operaamerica.org for details.

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