MAGNIFY THE IMPACT
Multi-Year Strategic Action Plan for the New Haven Symphony Orchestra
Commencing with the 2013-2014 Season

OVERVIEW

Current Environment
More than 120 years of vision, values, commitment, and achievement have combined to create today’s New Haven Symphony Orchestra (NHSO) – the nation’s fourth oldest orchestra. Since 1894 when Morris Steiner persuaded a group of New Haven musicians to form a symphony orchestra and its first audience performance in 1895, the NHSO has striven to provide its audiences with high quality professional performances that have transformed the NHSO into today’s accomplished symphony orchestra.

Since adopting its 2010 Strategic Plan, which was prepared with the assistance of the League of American Orchestras, the NHSO has made great strides in a wide range of strategic areas. The orchestra, under the leadership of Music Director William Boughton, has achieved a level of artistic excellence that has generated excitement and new opportunities. Our roster has been enriched by the recruitment of world-renowned concert master Ani Kavafian and several other distinguished musicians. Cheever Tyler celebrated NHSO musicians with a photographic portrayal. The NHSO garnered critical acclaim by winning a “Critic’s Choice” award from Gramophone Magazine for its first recording of the music of William Walton on the Nimbus label. ASCAP recognized NHSO’s commitment to new music with two ASCAP Awards for Programming of American Music and ongoing grant awards supporting the Young Composers Project.

The NHSO has also strengthened its management team, with a new Executive Director and General Manager rising from within and with the recruitment of a new Finance Manager and new Directors of Development, Education, and Marketing. In addition, the Board of Directors is now led by a reinvigorated Executive Committee, including a Board President who also serves on the Board of the League of American Orchestras. Under this leadership, the NHSO has increased both its endowment by $8,000,000 from the Richard English Estate through the Greater New Haven Community Foundation and its cash reserves by more than $280,000, overhauled its accounting and budgeting systems, increased subscriptions, and finished in the black for the past three years.

During the same period, the NHSO successfully launched a regionalization program that has expanded the reach of the orchestra to new markets and audiences across Connecticut and beyond. The orchestra continues to build community partnerships and expand fee-for-service engagements.

NHSO’s education department has integrated its programs into school curriculums and instituted a new link between education and symphony series programming. The Composer-in-Residence Program has not only enriched our concerts with new works but also made it possible for young composers to work with Augusta Reed Thomas and other leading American composers as mentors. This season’s Young People’s Concerts and educational residency programs, featuring hip-hop/classical violinist Daniel Bernard Roumain, created unprecedented excitement in the community and schools, and marks a new era of innovation and leadership in the organization’s education programs.
Challenges
Notwithstanding these successes, we continue to face a complex and highly competitive environment. Orchestral music is readily accessible digitally and through an increasing number of performing organizations. Southern Connecticut has the seventh highest concentration of arts organizations in the United States. Nationwide, subscription ticket sales are down as the average audience age increases. To thrive in the coming years, we must improve our capability to think creatively and strategically and to embrace change as a fundamental commitment of a vibrant orchestra. *We must become more agile, flexible, and engaged with the diverse audiences and communities we serve. We must plan and act more deliberately and comprehensively to realize our vision of exceptional artistic quality, expanded audiences, and increased revenues.*

Need for a New Strategic Plan
This Strategic Plan (the Plan) builds on past successes and is designed to position the NHSO to become a leading regional orchestra dedicated to increasing the impact and value of our music for ever-expanding audiences. The primary purpose of the Plan is to enable the NHSO to improve and expand services of artistically excellent programming in a financially sustainable manner. The planning process has already strengthened the organization by demonstrating that enduring success depends upon all of us working together with the communities we seek to serve.

To realize our vision, the NHSO must:

- Design and present a continuous successful artistic program of high quality concerts and education programs, which include standard and innovative compositions, through a combination of *major symphonic works* in New Haven with repeat performances in regional venues; *chamber and smaller orchestra programs* repeated throughout the region; and *pops, family and student concerts* also repeated through the region that will attract large, diverse, and growing audiences.

- Structure and offer opportunities for NHSO musicians and staff that will enhance individual professional creative growth and satisfaction as an NHSO member and enable continuous improvement in music performance and operational effectiveness of the orchestra.

- Provide engagement and communication networks throughout the region that effectively develop and maintain well-informed connections with our communities, thereby enhancing their loyalty to NHSO music.

Plan Outline
The Plan sets forth a road map for the NHSO developed through extensive participation of the NHSO Board, staff, musicians, committees, audiences, and a consultant provided by the League of American Orchestras; research conducted by the Strategic Planning Committee; and extensive discussions with senior management. It identifies the NHSO’s current and foreseeable future needs and opportunities and, then, lays out the means and steps necessary to ensure that the NHSO has the human and financial resources, dedication, and leadership to implement the Plan.

The Plan is based on an overarching vision and mission of the NHSO, which underpin its strategic goals, principal enabling objectives, and key initiatives. In recognition that our needs and solutions will change over time, the Plan provides the necessary flexibility for the organization to adapt. As a living document, the Plan needs to be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary. It provides a framework for continuous measured results, constant reassessment, and timely adjustments.
The Plan is presented in eight sections:

- Overview
- Vision and Mission
- Strategic Goals
- Principal Enabling Objectives and Initiatives
- Annual Review of Objectives and Initiatives
- Key Performance Indicators
- Time Frame, Monitoring, Resource Allocation, and Risk Management
- Conclusion

VISION AND MISSION

The enduring Vision of the NHSO is to celebrate our classical heritage, enriched with new American compositions, through expanded opportunities for orchestral performance and music education.

We carry out our Vision through:

1. Artistically excellent and diverse performances by orchestra members and guest artists to wider audiences centered in symphony and pops concerts and performances by chamber orchestras and ensembles
2. Promotion of a wider appreciation of American music through commissions, performances, and educational programs in multiple venues that feature the rich diversity of cultural influences on American music
3. Support of classical music education, especially through partnerships with school music programs, integrated curriculum development, and youth and community orchestras
4. Performances that introduce to children and families our classical music heritage and the major forms of its presentation
5. Social networks, recordings, broadcasts, and new media that celebrate the rich heritage and variety of classical music

Our Mission is to increase the impact and value of orchestral music for our audiences through high quality, affordable performances and educational programming. Our musicians aspire to inspire, delight, challenge, and unite larger and more diverse communities.

STRATEGIC GOALS

As with other American symphony orchestras, the NHSO faces both challenges and opportunities. To address these challenges and to achieve our Vision and Mission, this Plan focuses on three strategic goals: (1) increase our impact by programming the NHSO for sustained success; (2) improve our organizational effectiveness; and (3) share our story persuasively, consistently, and effectively with regional communities. These goals will guide the NHSO as it decides when and where to apply scarce monetary and human resources to better serve our communities and meet commitments to our musicians, staff, funders, and volunteers.

GOAL 1: Increase our impact by programming the NHSO for sustained success

- Grow the NHSO’s value and audience by increasing the number of performances with various sized orchestras in more venues
Enhance our financially sound business operations by increasing performance and service revenues, expanding the Symphony’s fundraising and marketing efforts, and strengthening and building new strategic partnerships and other relationships across the region.

Investigate new options for individual musician career opportunities, thereby enabling our musicians to increase their role as members of the NHSO and to enhance their commitment to the expansion and growing impact of the NHSO.

GOAL 2: Improve our organizational effectiveness

Strive for higher artistic performance and educational capacity through a more flexible and effective organization with improved business practices and infrastructure.

Devote particular emphasis to the development of well-prepared, well-equipped, and appropriately empowered personnel – musicians, staff, volunteers and board members – committed to the NHSO’s mission and culture.

GOAL 3: Share our story persuasively, consistently, and effectively with regional communities

Build a unified and integrated communications and community engagement capability, using both conventional and electronic media, to improve information flow within our organization and to external audiences so we can reach the right person the first time, enhance collaboration, connect with communities not yet served, and listen more closely to what our audience is telling us, thereby earning audience loyalty and building brand equity.

PRINCIPAL ENABLING OBJECTIVES (PEO) AND INITIATIVES (I)

In order to achieve these strategic goals, it is essential to prioritize our activities. Certain actions are a necessary part of the planning process; others will guide changes in organizational operations. The NHSO leadership has set six Principal Enabling Objectives (PEOs) as the framework for the Initiatives (I) needed to reach the Goals of this Strategic Plan.

PEO 1: Program Planning and Regional Development for Sustained Success

1.1. Enhance the NHSO’s organizational capability for multiyear program and regional planning to enable better analysis, design, and development of alternative scenarios for increasing the size of audiences and the scope of the NHSO artistic programs, including options for composition selection, various orchestral sizes, types of performance, number of soloists, target audiences, days and times for performances, and venues for repeat or unique performances.

1.2. Develop NHSO regional partnerships for expanding access to live performances through repeats of NHSO symphony series, other concerts, and special projects with local sponsorships. Search for examples of partnerships and relationships formed by orchestras with local organizations serving regions in other parts of the nation that might inform our partnership development.

1.3. Analyze the various options above by comparing estimated costs of rehearsals, performances and operations and projected audiences and revenues by individual types of performances and by season. The planning must provide for assessment of risks and opportunities as well as periodic evaluation of results for mid-course corrections.
PEO 2: Better Integrate Orchestral Performances and Education Programs

I.4. Increase projects that integrate orchestral performances and education programs with the intention of increasing student interest in playing and appreciating orchestral music and relating their familiar contemporary music forms to classical traditions

I.5. Increase cooperation with other music education providers to assist schools in strengthening their programs and encouraging family and community interest in NHSO music

PEO 3: Increase Financial Resources

I.6. Increase earned income and contracted services from a variety of performances during different times of the day and evening; increase Board giving, annual donations, sponsorships, and corporate giving; diversify and increase foundation grants; and grow endowed funds

I.7. Develop a special strategy for planned giving, including legacy commitments

PEO 4: Strive for Continuous Improvement

I.8. Provide a creative and supportive artistic environment to attract and retain high performing musicians and staff who are both committed to the vision and priorities of the NHSO and well-prepared and capable of both independent and collaborative action on behalf of the NHSO

I.9. Investigate employment structures that offer individual musicians the option to commit a more substantial part of their time to NHSO education and coaching, thereby enhancing their personal advancement and the expansion of NHSO programs

I.10. Develop key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the overall backing and endorsement for our services and our market presence in selected service areas

PEO 5: Better Connect the Orchestra with Audiences and Communities

I.11. Assess current capacity for regional communications, including use of social media, and evaluate audience relations and engagement to determine how to strengthen these capacities, both externally and internally, to more effectively connect with both current audiences and targeted new audiences in locales and diverse communities not currently served by the NHSO

I.12. Design and implement a plan for regional communications, community engagement, and more special benefits to our communities

PEO 6: Market for Expanded Service

I.13. Identify our target audiences then assess current marketing efforts and revise the marketing plan as appropriate to encompass regional extension of NHSO performance and education services. The plan should focus on providing greater opportunity for community access and event attendance, donor and sponsor support, and customer satisfaction through various channels, such as the NHSO website, social networks, recordings, broadcasts, print, and communication events.
ANNUAL REVIEW OF PRINCIPAL ENABLING OBJECTIVES AND INITIATIVES

Each year NHSO committees, operational units, and staff will review progress on the Objectives and Initiatives, and report on progress to the NHSO Board for approval. The Initiatives may be adjusted after each annual review of the Work Plan to reflect progress toward long-term strategic goals. As each milestone is achieved, new initiatives will be added based on a three-year rolling Period of Focus (PoF).

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The NHSO is committed to measuring our progress in achieving the Principal Enabling Objectives and the Strategic Goals in a systematic, collaborative, and integrated manner to ensure continuous assessment and improvement. To this end, we will employ three complementary sets of processes:

- Systematically poll current audiences and participants on their satisfaction with the delivery of specific services and products and their recommendations for improvements and additions
- Poll prospective audiences and participants on their views of the Orchestra’s offerings and their inclination to attend and conduct other market research
- Identify peer orchestras then, as appropriate, benchmark our outcomes by comparing such metrics as audience growth, retention, and satisfaction; financial results, including percentage of earned and unearned income; number of services; and size of endowment, all in line with recognized best practices

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the measurements used to audit, track and identify the Plan’s success. The measures that matter are those that reinforce the vision and mission of the NHSO. They will help NHSO to identify the strengths it can build on, the weaknesses that we must correct, and the opportunities that can be exploited. We will use KPIs to measure the overall backing and endorsement for our services and our market presence in selected service areas.

The key performance indicators (KPIs) may include but may not be limited to:

- Annual attendance (paid and unpaid)
- Added venues and extended performances
- Donor contributions, grants, and sponsorships
- Earned and net income (e.g., actual versus projected budget, series and concert earned income, trust and endowments, contributed income, annual fund, special events, cash position)
- A ratio of paid NHSO concert attendees and the number of likely music buyers in communities served
- A ratio of students reached by our programming in a given school system and the number of students in that system, with special emphasis on systems with limited or no formal classical music offerings
- Artistic peer review of the orchestra’s performance
- Audience reactions, including number of standing ovations and other feedback
TIME FRAME, MONITORING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION, AND RISK MANAGEMENT

This Plan (in conjunction with the Supplemental Organizational Work Plan contemplated hereby) employs a three-year rolling Period of Focus (PoF) aimed at turning purpose into performance, intention into results, and vision into reality. The diagram below illustrates the three-year rolling time frame.

The Plan encompasses a project-based approach to implementation and management through the development of a portfolio of variable-termed actions as described earlier. These actions are basically smaller-sized units of strategy planned at a more detailed level by key management personnel and reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee and Board over a shorter time frame than that of the strategy itself (which is reviewed annually).

As noted earlier, measuring, auditing and tracking are keys to the Plan’s success. The NHSO management and Board must regularly review and measure progress, which may necessitate plan adjustments. Thus, it is recommended that the Executive Director deliver a brief strategic report at every Board meeting, which should note any milestones reached or missed and address any other matters of strategic significance. Indeed, it is highly recommended that strategy be included as an item on the agenda for every Board meeting to reflect its importance to the organization.

We will use traffic light summary dashboards that show the overall status of each Strategic Goal, Principal Enabling Objective, and Key Initiative (red, amber, and green). In the event of amber or red signals, the Executive Director and Music Director will investigate each shortfall and together develop milestones, outcomes, and brief explanatory notes then will present progress reports and any proposed changes to the Plan to the Board of Directors.
Responsibilities

Within the Plan, key stakeholders are assigned the following responsibilities:

1. **Development of the Strategic Plan** – NHSO President, Executive Committee, and Strategic Planning Committee in consultation with musicians, staff, and community representatives

2. **Approval of the Strategic Plan** – NHSO President and Board of Directors

3. **Development of the Supplemental Organizational Work Plan**, including objectives, measurements, and tactics, for achieving the organizational strategy – NHSO Executive Director and Music Director in consultation with the Strategic Planning Committee

4. **Approval of the Supplemental Organizational Work Plan** – NHSO Executive Committee, Executive Director, and Music Director

5. **Actual planning review** – NHSO Executive Director, Music Director, and General Manager, with input from musicians and community representatives

6. **Review of strategic performance** – NHSO Board of Directors and Strategic Planning Committee after consultation with the Executive Committee and community representatives

Providing Resources for Planning Process and Managing Risk

**Resources for Planning** The strategic planning process is vital to determining the courses of action most likely to realize the NHSO’s Vision and Mission. The process must be an integral and on-going part of the organization’s work. Resources must be budgeted and secured to implement the Plan beginning in the first three-year cycle after its enactment. In particular, the NHSO management and Board must specifically allocate Board member and staff time and commit the necessary financial resources for the appropriate special studies, alternative programmatic scenarios, analysis, implementation and evaluation, which will likely require outsourced expert assistance. We recognize that such allocations are essential investments in our future, just as for-profit corporations must make commitments to planning, research and development.

**Managing Risk** It is critical for the NHSO to enhance its risk management procedures for identifying and assessing vulnerability of critical assets to internal and external threats; determining the likelihood and consequences of potential risks; and identifying ways to reduce those risks and to prioritize risk reduction measures based on the Strategic Goals, the Principal Enabling Objectives, and the Key Initiatives. In addition, the overall strategic planning process must be permeated with close attention to analyzing potential “risks” associated with alternative proposals for major changes in strategic direction. This overall focus on risk analysis will help the NHSO select the best options among possible major paths of action so the NHSO can seize the most attractive opportunities while mitigating any unavoidable risk.
CONCLUSION

The 2013-2018 Strategic Plan serves as a decision-making guide for individuals and teams and is designed to promote creative and decisive thinking, planning and actions on issues large and small. It explains the “how and why.” The next stage is to plan for implementation and management of the strategy, which is the “when, where, and who.” This will be embodied in the Supplemental Organizational Work Plan. Once fully implemented, the Plan will set direction and priorities, help get everyone on the same page, simplify decision-making, drive alignment, and communicate the NHSO message.

The NHSO has made great strides since it developed its last strategic plan in 2010. Building on this sound foundation, NHSO is poised to become a preeminent regional symphony orchestra that combines exceptional artistic quality and range with sustainable financial security. Achieving the goals set forth in this Plan will enable the NHSO to better serve and help unite the diverse communities in which it performs and provides educational services. Increased agility and flexibility, coupled with creative and rigorous strategic thinking and ongoing assessment against stated objectives, will turn purpose into performance, intention into results, and vision into reality.