



The Engage–Amplify–Pipeline Framework: Audience Engagement and Sustainability in a Regional Orchestra

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Abstract

Background: Regional symphony orchestras play a vital role in preserving culture and fostering community connections; however, many face challenges in sustaining audience engagement and ensuring long-term relevance. **Objectives:** This study developed a diagnostic framework for audience engagement and sustainability in regional orchestras by examining engagement, educational outreach, digital interaction, and perceptions of accessibility through an in-depth case study of a mid-sized regional orchestra in Indiana, American Midwest. **Methods:** Guided by serious leisure theory, cultural capital theory, audience segmentation, and nonprofit sustainability frameworks, this study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to analyze the data. Survey data were collected from current audience members ($n = 79$), local educators ($n = 19$), and community residents ($n = 68$), supplemented by nine semi-structured qualitative interviews coded using NVivo matrix analysis across 19 thematic categories (484 references). Descriptive statistics identified general patterns of participation, while thematic analysis of the interviews illuminated motivations, perceptions, and lived experiences. **Results:** The findings indicate that meaningful emotional experiences drive repeat attendance, whereas barriers such as scheduling, limited awareness, and perceived exclusivity limit broader participation, particularly among younger audiences. Educational programming produces exceptional educator-reported outcomes but remains largely invisible in the broader communities. **Conclusions:** This study offers the Engage–Amplify–Pipeline (EAP) framework as a diagnostic model for regional orchestras navigating audience engagement and sustainability challenges, derived from and illustrated through a mixed-methods case study. The implications for leadership strategy, audience development, and nonprofit sustainability are discussed, along with considerations for applying this framework to comparable institutions.

Keywords: audience engagement; regional orchestra; nonprofit sustainability; mixed-methods; cultural capital; arts leadership

Paper type: Research article

Introduction

Regional symphony orchestras face sustainability challenges that are both local and national in scope. Across the U.S., organizations are grappling with structural pressures related to changing audience behaviors, the development of new and younger audiences, constrained financial resources, and evolving patterns of cultural participation (League, 2024; Ostrower, 2024). Industry data indicate that audience behavior has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. While younger patrons account for a growing share of ticket purchases, and new ticket buyers accounted for 40% of all sales in 2023, orchestras continue to face challenges in converting new ticket buyers into sustained participation and in maintaining support from existing patrons (League, 2024). Within this broader context, regional orchestras occupy a distinctive and often precarious position as they seek to sustain their artistic excellence, financial stability, and community engagement. For Indiana's oldest professional orchestra, the Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra (THSO), founded in 1926, this challenge is both immediate and of generational significance (Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra, n.d.).

The Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra (THSO), founded in 1926, is the oldest professional symphony orchestra in Indiana (Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra [THSO], n.d.). The organization provides a subscription concert series, chamber performances, educational concerts, and school tours, reaching approximately 3,000 fourth-grade students throughout the Wabash Valley and more than 75 free community engagement and education events each season (THSO, n.d.). However, like many orchestras nationally, the THSO operates in a changing audience and cultural environment. National orchestra data indicate shifts in audience composition, including an increase in ticket buyers and donors under the age of 60, as well as changes in ticket sales, subscriptions, and audience engagement strategies (Nelson & Yair, 2024). Within this context, the present study examines the extent to which THSO's community engagement activities are associated with awareness, participation, and patronage among residents of the Wabash Valley, with particular attention to younger community members.

The challenges facing THSOs are neither unique nor parochial. The League of American Orchestras (2024) documents comparable demographic patterns and audience development challenges across U.S. orchestras, while research from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (2022, 2024) and Tröndle et al. (2025) identifies related patterns in European orchestral audiences in the UK. Therefore, findings and frameworks derived from a rigorous empirical examination of one regional institution could carry meaningful transferability for the field of global arts leadership, particularly for the substantial population of mid-sized orchestras that share THSOs' combination of institutional quality and regional positioning.

This study was designed to empirically examine these dynamics and, based on the examination, to develop a diagnostic framework that regional orchestras can apply to their audience engagement and sustainability challenges in the future. Using the Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra as an in-depth case study and employing a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design that integrates three survey instruments with qualitative semi-structured interviews, this study investigates four interrelated research questions and, based on its findings, derives a transferable strategic model for the broader field of regional arts management.

Research Questions

RQ1: Which demographic and psychographic factors are associated with sustained audience engagement in regional orchestras

RQ2: How does participation in educational programming and digital engagement influence community perceptions of accessibility and attendance motivation in the context of a regional orchestra?

RQ3: What barriers commonly limit broader community participation in regional orchestras, and what strategies can be used most effectively to reduce them?

RQ4: How can the integrated findings inform a strategic model for sustainability that is applicable to comparable regional orchestras?

The central research hypothesis is that the THSO's sustainability challenge is not primarily a question of the breadth or existence of its artistic and educational programming but rather a visibility and audience-development pipeline problem. The THSO maintains an established portfolio of professional performances, educational programming, and community engagement activities (Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra [THSO], n.d.). The most consequential strategic work ahead lies in connecting existing programming and community impact to community members who are unaware of its existence and are not participating.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in four intersecting theoretical traditions that provide a robust framework for understanding audience behavior in art organizations. Serious leisure theory (Stebbins, 2015) characterizes sustained participation in cultural activities as an identity-forming pursuit defined by perseverance through challenges, skill acquisition, and the accumulation of social capital within an institutional community. For highly loyal orchestral patrons, attendance is not merely an act of aesthetic consumption but a component of personal and civic identity, with direct implications for donor cultivation and retention strategies.

Cultural capital theory (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007) situates classical music attendance within the structures of educational attainment and social stratification, predicting that individuals with higher educational exposure are more likely to engage with such institutions. This framework is essential for understanding the current demographic profile of the THSO audience and the structural challenges in extending participation across educational and socioeconomic boundaries.

Audience segmentation research (Tröndle et al., 2025) provides a typological lens for differentiating motivational and behavioral patterns across patron groups, enabling more targeted communication and programming strategies than a unified model would. Tröndle et al.'s classification of visitor types, including Aesthetically Engaged, Community Champion, and Ambivalent Visitor, informs both the analysis of psychographic survey data and the strategic framing of audience development recommendations for the future.

Nonprofit sustainability theory (Moldavanova & Wright, 2020; Vidican-Teohari & Brancu, 2025) conceptualizes organizational viability as extending beyond operational

efficiency to encompass the alignment of organizational strategy, community relevance and sustainability. Moldavanova and Wright's (2020) examination of nonprofit arts organizations, together with Vidican-Teohari et al.'s (2025) integrated approach to sustainability in performing arts management, provides a theoretical foundation for the EAP framework introduced in this study.

Methodology

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), in which quantitative survey data were first collected and analyzed, followed by qualitative interview data to elaborate on the quantitative findings. This design is particularly appropriate when descriptive patterns in survey data generate interpretive questions that structured interviews can address with greater nuance than closed-ended instruments can. A single-institution case design was deliberately selected for model development. Triangulating multiple data sources and stakeholder populations within one institution allows the resulting framework to be built on methodological depth before its broader application and testing across sites, an approach consistent with case-based theory-building traditions in organizational research.

Participants and Data Collection

Three survey instruments were administered during the spring 2026 concert season: a current audience survey distributed via THSO email and social media channels (n = 79), an educator survey distributed to teachers who had participated in THSO's Adventure Concert educational programming (n = 19), and a community survey distributed through Wabash Valley community Facebook groups, local organizational networks, and direct outreach (n = 68). The instruments were designed to assess demographic characteristics, psychographic motivations, engagement history, perceptions of barriers, and awareness of THSO programs.

Following the quantitative data collection, nine semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted via telephone and Zoom web conferencing platform with audience members who volunteered for follow-up participation at the conclusion of the audience survey. The interviews lasted approximately 15–30 min and explored the participants' motivations, emotional experiences, perceived organizational strengths, and recommendations for improvement of the program. All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College prior to data collection (approval date: March 12, 2026). Participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymized using pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and frequencies and percentages were calculated for all categorical and Likert scale items. Owing to the sample size limitations, the findings are presented as descriptive and exploratory rather than inferential. Formal hypothesis testing results were interpreted as directional patterns relevant to the research questions rather than as definitive statistical conclusions.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using NVivo matrix coding across 19 predetermined thematic categories derived from the research questions and theoretical framework. A total of 484 coded references were produced across all nine

interviews, enabling a quantitative comparison of thematic salience across participants and the systematic identification of convergent and divergent patterns. The sequential design facilitated integration at the interpretive stage, where quantitative patterns were examined alongside qualitative themes to generate a more complete explanatory account than either research method could provide alone.

Limitations

The sample sizes across all three survey populations were sufficient for descriptive analysis but insufficient for inferential statistical tests. The intended total of 300 respondents was not achieved; the actual totals of 79, 19, and 68 constrained the ability to detect medium-effect size relationships with adequate statistical power. Therefore, all quantitative findings should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, the qualitative interview sample was drawn entirely from self-selecting current audience members, underrepresenting the perspectives of non-attenders and lapsed patrons. Longitudinal data and organizational financial records were unavailable for this study, precluding more comprehensive sustainability modeling. As a single-institution case study, the EAP framework proposed here should be understood as a starting model derived from the empirical patterns of one regional orchestra in Japan. Its indicators and thresholds have not yet been tested across multiple institutions, and applying and refining the framework in comparable regional orchestras is an important area for future studies.

Disclosure of Artificial Intelligence Use

AI tools (specifically, Claude by Anthropic) were used to assist with manuscript formatting, structural organization, and editing for clarity and conciseness during the preparation of this manuscript from the original thesis. All ideas, analyses, interpretations, theoretical arguments, and conclusions are the author's original contributions. All data collection, analysis, interpretation, and framework development were conducted exclusively by the author using NVivo matrix coding, descriptive statistical analysis, and original theoretical synthesis. The AI did not analyze the research data. All AI-assisted content was reviewed, revised, and verified by the author to ensure accuracy, alignment with the original research data, and consistency with APA 7th edition standards.

Results

RQ1: Demographic and Psychographic Predictors of Engagement

As shown in Table 1, the current audience demographic profile ($n = 79$) was consistent with national benchmarks for regional orchestras but was significantly skewed toward older cohorts. Sixty-nine percent (69.6%) of respondents ($n = 55$) were over the age of 55, while only 8.9% ($n = 7$) were between 18 and 35 years. Educational attainment was uniformly high: 87.1% held a bachelor's degree or higher, 42.3% held a master's degree, and 17.9% held a doctoral degree. Household income was similarly elevated, with 65.8% of participants reporting annual incomes above \$50,000. These patterns align with the cultural capital theory's prediction that classical music attendance correlates with higher educational attainment and acquired cultural competencies (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; öndle et al., 2025).

Audience tenure was deep: 38% of respondents had attended THSO performances for more than ten years, and 38% attended four to five events per season. Only 9%

attended for the first time. These attendance patterns are consistent with the characterization of sustained cultural participation as identity-forming and reinforced by social belonging in serious leisure theory (Stebbins, 2015).

Psychographically, respondents were asked to select all the attendance motivations that applied; supporting the local arts community was the most frequently cited (68%, $n = 56$), followed by specific repertoire or composers (63%, $n = 52$), guest artists (38%, $n = 31$), and socializing with friends or family (34%, $n = 28$). The primacy of community support as a motivational frame suggests that for many THSO patrons, attendance functions as an act of civic investment, a distinction that has direct implications for cultivating such donors. Audience members motivated by institutional loyalty rather than programmatic preferences may be more responsive to philanthropic appeals grounded in community impact than to specifics of artistic programming.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Current THSO Audience Members (n = 79)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age	18–35	7	8.9%
	36–55	17	21.5%
	> 55	55	69.6%
Education	High school / Some college	10	12.8%
	Bachelor's degree	21	26.9%
	Master's degree	33	42.3%
	Doctoral degree	14	17.9%
Income	< \$50,000	10	12.2%
	\$50,000–\$100,000	27	32.9%
	\$100,000–\$300,000	27	32.9%

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding and prefer not to say" responses.
Source: Author's analysis of current audience survey data (2026).

RQ2: Educational Programming and the Digital Gateway

The educator survey ($n = 19$) yielded uniformly positive assessments of the THSO educational programming. Seventy-four percent of educators rated the most recent THSO program as excellent ($n = 14$), and 21% rated it as very good ($n = 4$); no educator rated the program as fair or poor. Student engagement was similarly exceptional: 60% of educators ($n = 12$) reported that students were very engaged during the program, and 35% ($n = 7$) reported extremely engaged. Combined agree and strongly agree responses exceeded 95% for both age-appropriateness and curriculum alignment. As indicated in Table 2, 84% indicated that they were very likely to request another THSO program, 95% were very likely to recommend THSO to colleagues, and 84% were very likely to encourage student families to attend a concert, constituting a net promoter profile that is rarely achieved in arts-education assessment.

Table 2

Educator Survey Key Findings: Program Ratings and Future Engagement Intent (n = 19)

Measure	Top Response Category	n	%
Overall Program Rating	Excellent	14	74%
Student Engagement	Extremely Engaged	7	35%
Age-Appropriate Content	Strongly Agree / Agree	19	100%
Curriculum Connection	Strongly Agree / Agree	19	100%
Will Request Again	Very Likely	16	84%
Will Recommend to Colleagues	Very Likely	18	95%
Will Encourage Families to Attend	Very Likely	16	84%

Note. The percentages reflect valid responses; one to two respondents did not answer all items.

Source: Author's analysis of educator-survey data (2026).

Against this backdrop of programmatic excellence, a striking finding from the community survey revealed that 53% of community respondents (n = 36) were unaware that THSO offered educational programs in local schools before completing the survey. This constitutes a value invisibility problem: the organization produces exceptional community impact through educational channels that the community is unaware of. The National Endowment for the Arts (2023a) reported that 75% of adults participated in the arts through electronic or digital media in 2022, while 82% reported engaging with arts activities through digital media between 2021 and 2022 (National, 2023). Limited awareness of an organization's educational mission and community impact may reduce community members' motivation to attend and engage (OECD, 2022).

RQ3: Barriers to Broader Community Participation

Community respondents who expressed low attendance likelihood (n = 56, multi-select item) identified scheduling and timing of events as the most frequent barrier (n = 16, 28.6%), followed by lack of awareness of upcoming events (n = 13, 23.2%), ticket prices (n = 7, 12.5%), and programming that does not appeal (n = 6, 10.7%). This barrier profile diverges meaningfully from national audience research, in which affordability remains a significant consideration for cultural participation (LaPlaca, 2021). Within the THSO community sample, ticket cost ranked third, consistent with the current audience finding that 96% of active patrons rated THSO ticket prices as very affordable or fairly priced. The data suggest that non-attending community members may harbor unfounded cost assumptions that proactive pricing communication can address.

Venue accessibility received the lowest mean satisfaction score of any measured experience dimension among current audience members (M = 4.46), with stairs repeatedly identified in open-ended responses as a physical barrier. This finding is significant given that 69.6% of the current audience was over 55 years old, a cohort that is increasingly susceptible to mobility limitation. Accessibility-centered design can signal institutional values in ways that extend beyond those directly affected by access barriers (LaPlaca, 2021).

Qualitative interview data corroborated and contextualized these findings. The NVivo matrix analysis coded Engagement Factors (n = 78, 16.1% of all references) and Community Connection and Belonging (n = 48, 9.9%) as the most frequent thematic categories, substantially outweighing barrier-related themes, which accounted for 71 of the 484 references (14.7%). This asymmetry is theoretically meaningful; even among participants who reported accessibility or scheduling concerns, the narrative weight of what makes THSO compelling consistently exceeds that of what hinders participation. Barriers are real and addressable; however, from the perspective of current participants, they are not a dominant issue.

Table 3
Community-Reported Barriers to THSO Attendance (n = 56, Multi-Select)

Barrier	n	% of Respondents
Scheduling or timing of events	16	28.6%
Was not aware of upcoming events	13	23.2%
Ticket prices	7	12.5%
Programming does not appeal	6	10.7%
Accessibility concerns	5	8.9%
Parking or transportation	4	7.1%
No one to attend with	3	5.4%

Note. Respondents could select all applicable barriers. The percentages reflect the proportion of 56 the respondents.

Source: Author's analysis of the community survey data (2026).

RQ4: The Engage–Amplify–Pipeline (EAP) Framework

The integration of quantitative survey patterns with qualitative thematic elaboration produces a more coherent and consistent picture: the THSO maintains an artistically strong, educationally impactful, and community-valued institution, whose primary sustainability vulnerability is reach rather than quality. Three cross-population convergences structure this conclusion.

First, quality was not an issue in this study. Eighty-two percent of current audience members rated the concert experience as excellent or good, 100% of educators rated educational programming positively, and 75% of community respondents reported a positive impression of the THSO. Interview coding confirmed these assessments through the high frequency of Emotional Response (n = 32) and Overall Experience Perception (n = 36) references.

Second, awareness was a problem. Fifty-three percent of community residents were unaware of THSO's educational programming, and 27% reported no familiarity with THSO's offerings. Digital and Social Media Outreach was coded 17 times in the interview matrix, and Awareness and Information Gaps eight times, corroborating survey evidence that the organization's communications infrastructure does not match the quality of its artistic product.

Third, demographic risk is both structural and compounded by other factors. The 60-percentage-point gap between the over-55 cohort (69.6%) and the combined under-35 cohort (8.9%) is consistent with the national patterns of arts participation (National, 2023). However, this is particularly consequential in regional markets, where

alternative professional orchestral offerings are limited and the educational pipeline for new audience development is concentrated in a small number of institutions.

These three convergences provide the empirical foundation for the Engage–Amplify–Pipeline (EAP) framework, as indicated in Table 4, which organizes the strategic implications of this study into three, interdependent imperatives.

Table 4
The Engage–Amplify–Pipeline (EAP) Strategic Sustainability Framework

ENGAGE	AMPLIFY	PIPELINE
<i>Retain and deepen the current audience</i>	<i>Make organizational excellence visible to the community</i>	<i>Convert education participants into the next generation of patrons</i>
• Venue accessibility audit • Evening scheduling flexibility • Proactive pricing communication • HVAC resolution at Tilson Auditorium	• Weekly mission-driven digital content • Educator testimonial amplification • Behind-the-scenes musician storytelling • Social media advocacy activation	• Educator Ambassador Program • Flexible young patron ticketing • Post-concert social programming • Young professional network events

Note. The EAP framework was derived from the integrated mixed-methods findings of this study. These imperatives are interdependent and mutually reinforce one another.
Source: Author’s illustration (2026).

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on audience engagement, nonprofit art sustainability, and regional orchestral leadership. By advancing the understanding of these interconnected domains, this study illuminates the complex dynamics that influence audience development, organizational resilience, and leadership practices within regional orchestras.

Serious Leisure Theory in a Regional Context

This study reinforces the applicability of serious leisure theory (Stebbins, 2015) to regional orchestral audiences while identifying a dimension of community identity, civic pride, and institutional investment that is more salient in regional markets than in metropolitan ones. For the Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra’s most loyal patrons, attendance is not merely aesthetic consumption or social recreation but an expression of civic commitment to a community institution. This finding has direct implications for donor cultivation: messaging that connects ticket purchases and philanthropic contributions to community outcomes, youth development, cultural identity, and economic vitality may be more effective with this audience than programming-focused appeals. Moldavanova and Wright (2020) suggest that nonprofit arts organizations that strategically align their missions and community engagement are better positioned to strengthen their long-term sustainability and community impact.

The Digital Gateway in Regional Markets

This study provides empirical grounding for the digital gateway phenomenon (National, 2023; Royal, 2024) in a mid-sized regional market, where dynamics differ from those of metropolitan organizations. In larger cities, orchestras benefit from ambient visibility

through advertising, media coverage, and cultural density. Visibility must be actively constructed in regional markets. The finding that 53% of community residents were unaware of the THSO's educational programming despite its high quality and extensive reach suggests that in regional markets, a digital content strategy is not supplementary to sustainability planning but is foundational to it.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (2024) documented significant changes in orchestral audiences, finding that newcomers to orchestral music now outnumber long-time classical music enthusiasts. Its research also demonstrated particularly strong engagement among younger audiences: an earlier RPO study found that 65% of people under 35 regularly listened to orchestral music, compared with 57% of those aged 55 and older, while younger audiences were substantially more likely to engage with orchestral music through streaming, online videos, podcasts and social media (Royal, 2022). These findings suggest that digital engagement and contemporary content delivery methods represent meaningful opportunities for regional orchestras to expand their awareness and develop younger audiences.

Filling a Gap in Nonprofit Sustainability Research

The EAP framework introduced in this study responds to the identified need for empirically grounded approaches to sustainability and audience development in regional orchestral institutions (Ostrower, 2024; Vidican-Teohari & Brancu, 2025). Existing research has examined organizational strategy, sustainability, and audience development in nonprofit arts organizations (Moldavanova & Wright, 2020; Ostrower, 2024). The EAP framework differs from existing models in several ways: it prioritizes leveraging existing programmatic strengths rather than prescribing new programming investment; foregrounds communications and digital visibility as strategic imperatives rather than operational afterthoughts; and explicitly addresses the pipeline challenge, the long-term challenge of converting educational participants into future audience members and donors, as a primary sustainability concern rather than a secondary mission objective.

Simjanovska and Karjalainen's (2022) finding that orchestras that increased community outreach by 40% demonstrated significantly higher financial resilience provides empirical support for the Amplify and Pipeline imperatives as financially, not merely mission-relevant, strategic priorities. The Giving USA Foundation (2025) documented that arts giving rose by 9.5% in 2024, the highest growth rate in the nonprofit sector, suggesting that the philanthropic moment for cultivating younger donors is open and that organizations with strong educational pipeline programs are well positioned to capitalize on it.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the integrated findings and the EAP framework, this study offers seven prioritized recommendations for the THSO and comparable regional orchestral institutions. These recommendations are designed to leverage existing strengths rather than require wholesale programmatic transformation and to be implemented within realistic resource constraints.

First, an Educator Ambassador Program should be established that formalizes the relationship with 95% of educators who expressed a high likelihood of recommending THSO to colleagues. Providing participating teachers with shareable digital content,

short video clips of student experiences, social media graphics, and templated family communication letters would extend THSO's community reach through trusted institutional channels at a minimal cost.

Second, launch a mission-driven digital content strategy organized around three pillars: behind-the-scenes musician storytelling, documentation of educational program impact, and patron and educator testimonials to build a community around the program. Content should be distributed consistently on a weekly basis across platforms relevant to the target demographics and explicitly linked to ticket purchases and educational objectives.

Third, daytime, outdoor, and alternative format programs should be expanded to address the scheduling conflicts identified as primary barriers to non-attenders. Open-air summer performances, afternoon chamber ensemble events in community venues, and informal public-space concerts would collectively address scheduling, accessibility, and perceived exclusivity barriers while reaching audiences who identify community and outdoor events as their preferred format.

Fourth, address venue accessibility as a strategic priority through a comprehensive audit in partnership with disability access specialists, followed by either structural improvements or clear and proactive accessibility communication describing available accommodations, accessible seating, elevator access, and parking proximity to the venue.

Fifth, implement proactive ticket pricing communication that addresses the perception gap between actual affordability (96% of current patrons find prices very affordable or fairly priced) and cost assumptions that rank pricing as the third community-reported barrier to attendance.

Sixth, resolve the Tilson Auditorium temperature conditions, identified by 38% of educators as the single most consistently cited operational barrier in an otherwise excellent experience.

Seventh, develop a Young Patron Pipeline Initiative incorporating flexible ticketing architectures, young professional networking events aligned with concert programming, and post-concert social components that create informal community gathering opportunities, the engagement format most frequently cited by interviewees as meaningful for converting new attendees into regulars.

Conclusion

This study examined audience engagement, educational outreach efficacy, and community perceptions of accessibility at a mid-sized regional orchestra using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. Its central finding is both diagnostic and hopeful: the organization maintains an artistically strong, educationally impactful, and community-valued institution whose most pressing sustainability challenge is not quality but visibility and pipelines. The distance between an organization's demonstrated excellence and the next generation of audience members is not a quality problem to be solved through programmatic overhaul, but a communications and pipeline problem to be addressed through strategic investments in digital visibility, educator relationships, and young patron cultivation.

For the global community of arts leadership scholars and practitioners, this study demonstrates that the methodological combination of multi-population survey data and NVivo-coded qualitative interviews offers a replicable and high-yield approach to the diagnostic challenges facing regional orchestral institutions in the United States. The EAP framework is designed with transferability explicitly in mind: its three imperatives—engaging existing audiences, amplifying organizational excellence into the broader community, and building an educational pipeline into future patronage—address dynamics that are structurally common across regional orchestral institutions in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and comparable international cultural contexts. Regional orchestras that sustain community relevance strengthen not only their own institutions but also the broader global ecosystem of live orchestral music and the civic values it embodies (Moldavanova & Wright, 2020; OECD, 2022).

The EAP framework proposed in this study offers a structured and empirically grounded response to this challenge, which is possibly replicable across comparable mid-sized regional orchestral institutions and applicable to the broader field of nonprofit arts management. As the research literature on nonprofit sustainability consistently documents, organizations that fail to renew their audiences face eventual irreversible decline (Moldavanova & Wright, 2020; Vidican-Teohari & Brancu, 2025). The Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra and the field of regional orchestral leadership more broadly have the institutional quality, community goodwill, and programmatic foundation to prevent this outcome. This study provides an evidence-based framework to do so deliberately, efficiently, and in a manner that builds on genuine strengths rather than importing generic solutions into communities that deserve and require approaches responsive to their own cultural landscapes.

This study was limited by its single-site design and sample size, which precluded formal inferential statistical testing. Future research should pursue multi-institutional comparative designs across Midwestern regional orchestral markets, longitudinal tracking of educational program participants to directly assess pipeline conversion rates, and structured focus group inquiry into community messaging preferences to inform the development of digital-content strategies.

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