



EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS NETWORK

June 14, 2023

“Do Membership & Subscription

Models Still Work?”

Darien Arts Center

The second EDN meeting of the year, held on **June 14, 2023**, was hosted by **George Colabella**, the new executive director at the Darien Arts Center. The meeting focused on **“Do Membership & Subscription Models Still Work?”** with brief presentations by three members from theatre, a symphony and a historical museum:

- **Hugh Hallinan** (Bridgeport’s Downtown Cabaret) has half of his pre-COVID audiences (from 60,000 to 30,000/year). Their Children’s Theatre (for ages 5-11 and their parents) is doing better than the Main Stage (Broadway musicals) and their 13 Musical Tributes do sell out. But Hugh is scratching his head trying to think of how to engage new audiences for the Main Stage and nothing has clicked. He’s eager to hear of other models.
- **Sandra Miklave** (Norwalk Symphony) reported subscriptions over 5 years have fallen from 240 to 140 (for a Hall that seats over 1,000). She feels they are growing - but slowly. Her major theme was the importance of getting on the radar of as many different subsets of the community as possible. For her the name of the game is partnerships with community and other cultural organizations (such as Stepping Stones, New Paradigm Theatre, The Maritime Aquarium and others). Her mailing list is 3800 but working with the Aquarium gets her onto their 20,000-person list. A DEI consultant made them do community focus groups which helped the orchestra hear what different groups want from a musical group - and that has helped spur their thinking about even more diverse locations and concert types.
- **Nancy Geary** (New Canaan Museum & Historical Society) spoke to how the 1889 Society was exclusive (you had to be recommended) but still had 50% of the town as members. Today, about 2% of the 25,000 New Canaanites are

members. When she came aboard 6 years ago Nancy couldn't figure out why anyone would become a member - they were so many levels but few or no benefits. Financial firm Viking Global donated a day of strategic planning around membership with a team of young analysts. They recommended (and the Museum adopted) a few key ideas, including having few membership levels (\$100 family, \$500, \$1,000 and \$5,000) with single simply-stated benefits; having a simple calendar-year membership year; have one day (a week or a month) that was free to everyone (Nancy herself made their popular Ice Cream Social, previously \$10/person, free and it has blossomed into a true community event). They started the new system in January and have 72 members join. They believe memberships will grow steadily. However Nancy pointed out that financially memberships will always pale against Major Donors, without whom the Museum would not exist.