

A Boston Musician's Journey (Literally) for Professional Development



Every few months since 2017, Wendy Putnam boards a plane in Boston for the 90-minute trip to Philadelphia. While travel is not new to the veteran violinist in the acclaimed Boston Symphony Orchestra, Wendy will not be performing on these trips, but rather participating in an educational experience that will immerse her in nonprofit best practices.

Wendy, who is also the founder and director of the Concord (MA) Chamber Music Society (CCMS), is serious about the business of nonprofits and is earning a [Customized Certificate from The Nonprofit Center](#).

While Boston is renowned as an educational hub, Wendy could not find a selection of classes in nonprofit skills that were accessible during her available time and were not part of a degree program. A Google search led her to what she was looking for – a range of individual classes in specific areas of nonprofit leadership, education and management. Her first experience with a fundraising class has evolved into Wendy's commitment to earning a [Build-Your-Own Certificate](#), designed in conjunction with Rob Fennell, The Center's Education Programs Coordinator, comprised of classes in the various skills she wants to acquire and hone.

Wendy explained that an early experience with a symphony in New Orleans that folded because of economic challenges and poor management, compelled her to invest in learning essential management skills. "My initial priority wasn't to earn a Certificate," Wendy said, "I just wanted to be better prepared to help organizations I was involved with to grow and thrive," she said.

But she continued to find classes that she knew would be useful in many capacities, citing in particular leadership, communications, finance and even fundraising classes. "Fundraising is, after all, about relationships, learning the best ways to connect with people, and understanding how their needs, desires and behavior changes over time," she explained. She added that her leadership style has evolved and been influenced by what she has learned in her Nonprofit Center classes.

Wendy states that "many large arts organizations are slow to change, and they will need to recognize that and adapt so they can remain relevant and continue to enhance the culture of their communities." She added that her classes have also helped her come to better understand her role as a founder and that she is applying that knowledge to benefit the Concord Chamber Music Society and is also sharing best practices with her board.

Wendy's routine around her Nonprofit Center classes is to fly to Philadelphia the night before a class, stay overnight, take in some of Philadelphia's history, culture (and food) and then fly back to Boston the next evening following her class. As the woman who began playing the violin at age three and made her first concert appearance at age nine, nears completion of her Certificate, she recalls her original motivation for seeking Nonprofit Center classes: to educate herself so she could help her organization grow until it is strong enough for her to step aside. A fitting cadence, one might say.