Recruiting Grade-School Students from Your Community

- Get Organized. Develop an application/permission form for parents to complete, as well as inexpensive informational flyers to help answer frequently asked questions about the program and encourage participation. Be sure to address anticipated barriers to participation, such as parking issues on campus, class schedule conflicts (time of day and days of week), cost-efficient options for instrument rentals, and other aspects of the program to help eliminate parents' and children's reservations about participating in your String Project.

- Target Your Approach. Since the majority of parents learn about String Projects from their child's school, ensuring public school administrators and teachers endorse the program should be a main focus of your recruitment activities. Develop criteria to target public schools in your community that show the best signs of generating good returns. These might be schools with no existing string program or schools with students in search of music instruction in addition to that provided their school's existing programs.

  Some String Projects target schools by proximity to the campus – the closer the better. In urban areas, look for schools on bus and metro lines where commuting to and from classes is easiest. And many view private schools and homeschoolers as potentially untapped sources of new students. Keep your recruitment strategy focused, but also cast your net broadly to attract children from schools outside your immediate district. Working with your local media or contacting principals directly are good ways to build a broader range of awareness for your String Project.

- Take Your Show on the Road. Prepare mini-recitals and perform with your Master Teachers and student teachers at local public schools. Project Directors often say that the face-to-face experience of talking with children and playing the instruments is the single most effective way to recruit children. Collaborate with public school principals and music teachers to promote upcoming on-site demonstrations and iron out logistical considerations in advance. Remember, it may take visits to numerous schools to achieve your recruitment goals.

- Build Relationships. Public schools that show great support for String Projects and actively help recruit children for enrollment often have an effective advocate on staff. Develop working relationships with principals and teachers at target schools and provide the information and support they need to be effective advocates for your String Project.

- Roll Out the Welcome Carpet. Host on-campus informational sessions for parents, children, and public school administrators and teachers. Invite parents of current participants to share their experiences. Be sure your Master Teacher openly discusses classroom structures, program requirements, and the learning experience, and let parents know they're welcome to attend classes. Alleviate parents' hesitation about leaving their children on a university campus by giving

your student teachers the responsibility of escorting children upon arrival to and departure from weekly classes.

- Alert the Press. Solicit free coverage in local television, radio, newspaper, and other media outlets via press releases and public service announcements. Announcements about open enrollment or schedules for free concerts make for excellent content. Purchasing advertising space in newspapers and local arts publications yield varied results and can become expensive. Research the readership of publications to ensure you reach intended audiences.

- Make the Connection. Review monthly schedules for public events attended by parents who may be interested in enrichment programs for their children. Collaborate with event organizers to get your String Project flyers and application forms distributed. Target symphonies, concerts, and orchestras, or other major youth programs or events in your community.

- Meet One-on-One. Schedule individual meetings with principals, supervisors of music, and music teachers at public schools. Though found to be effective by some String Project directors, this approach is often time intensive and may yield limited results. The key is to target specific schools where you stand the best chance to state a compelling case and win support and collaboration.

- Aim for the Top. Contact the superintendent of public schools or the head of public school music programs. Describe the program and send a supply of applications, informational flyers, and articles about your String Project. Ask the superintendent's office to send the materials to public school principals and teachers and request they distribute the materials to students at the school.

- Team Up with Parents. Recruit the parents of former students to spread the word. According to first-year evaluations, 97% of all parents say they would recommend the program to other parents in their community. Let them! In fact, find ways to encourage their recruitment activities by providing supplies of informational flyers to interested parents or develop some type of incentive program for top recruiters. Look for effective ways to help parents spread the word and recruit new students.