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# Generation Z Leaders' Perspectives of Professional Organizations in Music Education

Students from Generation Z (Gen Z) have entered undergraduate music education programs with differing perspectives from the generations before them, which may influence their involvement in professional organizations. Gen Z commonly includes anyone born between the years 1995 and 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). A better understanding of Gen Z music student leaders' perspectives of and experiences with professional organizations may improve these organizations' relevance to a new generation. The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore four Gen Z National Association for Music Education (NAfME) Collegiate leaders' perspectives of the successes and struggles they face in the running of their chapter and their views on the role and benefits of professional organization membership. Qualitative data analysis resulted in participant descriptions and revealed three primary themes across all chapters: communication, member engagement, and professionalism. Gen Z participants viewed professional development, advocacy, and networking opportunities as the most important benefits of professional organization involvement.

*Keywords: music education, professional organizations, leadership, Generation Z*

## Introduction

Involvement in professional organizations has long been considered an effective way for music teachers to access professional development, resources, connect to experts in their field, and seek out the camaraderie that can help prevent feelings of isolation that can occur when one is the only music teacher in a school (Lambert, 2012; Madsen, 2010). However, many students from Generation Z (Gen Z) have entered undergraduate music education programs with differing experiences, worldviews, and perspectives from the generations before them, which may influence their involvement in professional organizations. Gen Z common-

ly includes people born between the years 1995 and 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). The purpose of this research was to examine the successes and struggles of a selection of Gen Z National Association for Music Education (NAfME) Collegiate chapter presidents and discover their perspectives of the role and benefits of professional organization membership in music education.

## Literature Review

### *Professional Organizations in Music Education*

Professional organizations in music education provide many benefits for teachers. Madsen (2010) described some of the benefits of participation in NAfME for music teachers and their students. Benefits for music teachers included access to research and best practices journals, a community of like-minded individuals, and opportunities to collaborate with teachers of other music specialties. Benefits for students of teachers who are members of NAfME included the ability to participate in events like Honors Choir, All-State Band, and other similar events. Finally, Madsen discussed NAfME's role in advocacy and lobbying as a benefit to both teachers and students. Lambert (2012) outlined the benefits of NAfME, pointing out the longevity of the support provided for teachers from their collegiate years through retirement. Gilbert (2016) discussed professional organizations more broadly, stating that professional organizations can help teachers integrate specific ideas into their classrooms.

NAfME has made several public statements about the benefits of membership. The benefits for pre-service collegiate members, as published by NAfME in the *Music Educators Journal*, are: a) increased professional credibility; b) a network of professional contacts; c) access to job opportunities; d) insight into the professional world before taking a first job; e) a forum to exchange ideas through the internet and also at conferences; f) opportunities for leadership; g) exposure to new teaching methods, techniques, and innovations; and h) financial discounts on education materials for members, especially students (Lambert, 2012). Benefits for in-service members, according to the NAfME website at the time of this research, included advocacy, professional development, access to journals, an online learning community, ability to participate in student performance and adjudication events, and various financial benefits, such as insurance programs for teachers (National Association for Music Education, n.d.). In this research, I sought to discover whether or not my participants' views aligned with previous literature and statements on the benefits of NAfME membership.

### *Generational Cohort Theory*

The term “generation” has evolved over recent decades. Originally, authors defined a generation as a time-based genealogical concept: the succession of a parent by his or her children, or approximately every thirty years (Berger, 1960). In more recent decades, however, “generation” has taken on a new meaning in published literature. The concept of a generational cohort, along with its sociological implications, began appearing in the literature in the 1950s (Mannheim, 1952). In the following decades, authors continued to note the impacts of technological advances, world events, and social upheavals on groups of people born around the same time (Arsenault, 2004; Berger, 1960; Dulin, 2008; Ryder, 1965; Sessa et al., 2007). World events and social advancements that take place during one’s youth and adolescence typically hold the most weight. Sessa et al. (2007) added that “a generation is a social creation rather than a biological necessity” (p. 49).

Since the 1960s, researchers have noted the impacts of generational cohort on values, worldview, and beliefs. Many authors have found that members of a generation tend to share “generational mentalities,” “zeitgeist,” or “the spirit of an age” (Arsenault, 2004; Berger, 1960; Dulin, 2008; Ryder, 1965; Sessa et al., 2007). Formal theories related to generational similarities are more recent. In the 1990s, Strauss and Howe (1991) published the Generational Cohort Theory (GCT), and other authors continued to refine their concepts. GCT states that people born in similar years with similar social contexts and similar experiences tend to share certain attitudes and values, and that these similarities tend to cycle back around approximately every four generations (Sessa et al., 2007; Strauss & Howe, 1991). It is important to note that generational cohort is one facet of a person’s identity that may be intersectional with other aspects of identity, including but not limited to race, gender, sexual and attractional orientation, and socio-economic status. Not every member of a generational cohort shares the same experiences or perspectives; however, GCT can serve as a lens through which one can examine the impact of societal or global events on people of a particular age. In this research, I specifically examined Gen Z as it exists within music education in the United States.

### *Generation Z*

While it has been acknowledged that there are inconsistencies and overlap in the labeling of the beginning and end of any generation (Sessa et al., 2007), Generation Z (also called Gen Z, iGeneration, or Net Generation) includes anyone born between the years 1995 and 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Given the youth of this generation at the time of this study, there is limited research and

literature exploring characteristics and behaviors of Gen Z as they enter young-adulthood. With a resurgence of pop culture references to generational differences in recent years, popular media, opinion news pieces, and social media references to Gen Z abound. However, these pieces are usually based on casual or anecdotal observation as opposed to formal research.

Seemiller and Grace (2015) wrote about the connections between social developments and some of Gen Z's common traits. The rapid advancement of technology in recent years (and its ubiquitous integration into everyday life) gives Gen Z a desire to solve their own problems and not rely on the problem-solving skills of others, especially older people. This trait was confirmed by Andrea et al. (2016), who found in their mixed-methods study that Gen Zers would prefer to work with other Gen Zers as opposed to working with older generations. Gen Zers' self-reported characteristics include compassion, loyalty, thoughtfulness, open-mindedness, responsibility, and determination (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). These traits, along with easy and constant access to local, national, and world news, have led Gen Z to an increased awareness of social issues at a young age when compared to older generations.

Authors in the field of music education have provided a few glimpses into common traits among Gen Zers. In an article for music teachers who are having trouble encouraging Gen Z students to practice, Crappell (2018) purports that Gen Z's constant immersion in the Internet causes a desire for instant gratification and an effort to multi-task. In their multiple case study exploring the differing perspectives of music education professional organization leaders from several different generations, Nolker and Ramsey (2020) found that, of the four generations represented in their study, the Gen Z participant was the most comfortable with technology, reflexive to the communication needs of individuals within the organization, and held mentors from her own generational cohort in as high a regard as those from older generations.

While some research exists on this young generation, there is less literature than that of the older generations. Continued research is needed to further understand which characteristics of Gen Z are evidence-based and which are simply stereotype. The findings of this study add to a growing body of literature on Gen Z in music education and may help music teacher educators (especially those serving as faculty advisor for a NAFME Collegiate chapter) better understand how to engage their students in professional organizations.

The purpose of this research was to explore four Gen Z leaders' perspectives of the successes and struggles their NAFME Collegiate chapters faced and their beliefs about role and benefits of professional organization membership in music education. I investigated the participants' perspectives through the lens of their

generational cohort to understand how these organizations can best meet their needs. I sought to answer two questions: a) What struggles and successes are Gen Z student leaders in four successful NAFME Collegiate chapters experiencing in the running of their chapter?, and b) What do these Gen Z student leaders view as the benefits of participation in music education professional organizations?

## Method

### *Design*

I used a basic qualitative inquiry design for this study. Qualitative research is ideal for answering research questions that involve individuals' perspectives due to the focus on emergent qualities, themes, and phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, analysis and discussion of data collected during this study focused on examination of emergent themes. I used an interpretive and constructivist framework for this study, acknowledging that participants' realities are constructed from their experiences. Researchers employing a basic qualitative design should seek to discover "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Each participant in the study was the current president of their respective chapter and a member of the Generation Z cohort. I used a thick, rich description, characteristic of qualitative research, to describe each participant's experiences and context in addition to discussion of emergent themes and understandings discovered through data analysis.

### *Participant Selection*

I selected participants for this study based on a number of criteria: participants must be members of the Generation Z cohort, be a NAFME Collegiate member in a college or university, and hold a leadership position. Presidents (or similar leaders) of each active NAFME Collegiate chapter in the author's state received recruitment materials, and participants were selected from those showing interest.

After recruitment materials were sent, I received interest from four potential participants. While respondents represented several points of diversity, all potential participants who responded to recruitment materials were White; therefore, there was no variety in the study participants with regard to race. The lack of racial diversity in the respondents may be due to an underrepresentation of students of color in NAFME Collegiate leadership, which should be investigated in future research. The four participants in this study (and their chapters) represented the following variations: two participants were from large public universities, one was

from a medium private university, and one was from a small private university. All universities represented in this study were considered primarily residential schools (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2018). Two attended urban universities and two attended suburban universities (U.S. News and World Report, n.d.). Three identified as female and one identified as male. Two had a choral concentration and two had an instrumental concentration. Two of the NAFME chapters had large membership and state-level activity, one had moderate membership and state-level activity, and one had a smaller membership and less state-level activity, but higher site-level and community activity. In the following section, I provide a description of each participant and chapter.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data collection for this study included one round of individual participant interviews and one focus group interview as the primary data sources. Secondary data sources included informal follow-up conversations and emails. I collected data from February through May of 2019. All interviews were semi-structured and took place either in person or via video call. Individual interviews lasted approximately 30-50 minutes, and the focus group interview lasted approximately one hour. The initial individual interview allowed a chance to gain some background information and the participants' views on their chapter as well as their leadership values and experiences. In the focus group, participants discussed the topics in further detail and explored similarities and differences between their perspectives on professional organizations in the music education profession as a whole. Following the focus group interview, I communicated with each participant via email to see if they had any final thoughts to share or feedback on the emergent themes discovered during data analysis. This communication also served as a member check for trustworthiness.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis. During the first cycle analysis of the individual interviews, I used initial and in vivo coding in an effort to remain open to emergent concepts and break down the data into discrete parts (Saldaña, 2016). I used the initial codes to develop a codebook for each participant, which then informed the focus group interview questions. Following initial coding of the focus group data, I used second level coding to reassemble all codes into categories (Saldaña, 2016). I categorized codes for each participant, and I also created categories of codes that were salient in multiple participants' experiences. I used the categories for the individual participants to create the participant descriptions and used the categories for the codes common to all of the participants to create the theme descriptions.

Prior to and during data collection and analysis, I reflected on how my bias as a member of a different generational cohort (Gen Y/Millennial) and my own prior experiences in NAFME Collegiate leadership could potentially affect this research. As a member of a different generation, I may perceive global and societal events differently than the participants due to my older age at the time of those events. Additionally, my experiences as a leader in my own NAFME Collegiate chapter as an undergraduate may impact interpretation. Therefore, to address these biases and provide as accurate a representation of the participants' perspectives and experiences as possible, I employed the following trustworthiness measures: member checks (completed via email communications following interviews as well as informal verbal conversations), peer review of coding and themes, inter-coder reliability, and researcher reflexivity. Throughout data analysis, I shared codes, categories, and themes with my faculty advisor for discussion and feedback. I had a research assistant code the data from the individual interviews and focus group, and then we compared and discussed our codes and categories for consistency in themes. Once data analysis was complete, I communicated the themes and findings with the participants to ensure the findings accurately represented their views.

## Findings

For the sake of clarity, rather than giving each university and each participant their own pseudonym, I referred to each NAFME chapter by the participant's pseudonym (e.g. "Stephanie's Chapter").

### *Stephanie's Chapter*

When Stephanie took her position as president of her university's NAFME chapter, she was already in her fourth year of her double major in Music Education and Vocal Performance. She watched as her chapter grew from 15 or 20 active members to 57 active members in the time that she had been at this university. However, she knew that her school, an urban, mid-sized, public university, could support even more growth. Drawing from her prior leadership experience in things like a cappella groups, color guard, and teaching at a fine arts summer camp, Stephanie knew the direction in which she wanted to lead her chapter. When the previous President stepped down, Stephanie gladly accepted the role of interim President. The following semester, she was elected by her chapter to continue in her role as President.

When Stephanie called a NAFME meeting to order, she followed a traditional meeting structure. Her meetings included an approval of the prior meeting

minutes, “old business,” and “new business.” Her leadership structure, on the other hand, was anything but traditional. When she took over as president, she renamed all of the leadership positions in the chapter to be “less generic” and more specific to the jobs that needed to be done. Her position became Executive Chair, and her fellow leaders were given titles like Advocacy Chair and Financial Chair instead of Vice President and Treasurer. As part of her goal of giving the chapter a purpose for her fellow undergraduates, she established a Representative Board, whose job was to create meetings, events, and opportunities that she said were “created by the chapter, for the chapter.” Stephanie believed they could reach this goal together if every member felt empowered, heard, and trusted. Her focuses as a leader were finding purpose, both for the chapter as well as each individual, and providing equitable experiences for every member of the chapter.

### *Jacob’s Chapter*

Jacob’s hands were quite full during the data collection period. As a senior music education student, student teacher, and NAFME president at a small, suburban, private university, he kept busy. The NAFME chapter at his school was fairly large for the size of the program; they had about twenty active members. While trying to balance his student teaching schedule and the needs of his chapter, he found that delegation was key. Jacob was working to establish a leadership structure that would allow tasks to be spread more evenly among members, and to encourage members to take initiative regardless of whether or not they were on the leadership team. Like Stephanie, he wanted to help establish a clear purpose for the chapter.

Music education students at Jacob’s school were required to be a member of a professional organization in music, but they had several options from which they could choose. Jacob’s goal was to communicate the importance of NAFME to all music education majors beyond simply meeting the requirement. He indicated the importance of the professional development, networking connections, access to the journals, and access to the state conference and student events for both pre-service and in-service music educators as some of the benefits of membership.

### *Diana’s Chapter*

Diana was a confident, well-spoken junior and president of the NAFME chapter at her urban, mid-sized, public university. Her chapter had over thirty active members and a consistent leadership board of four members. Because of their numbers and leadership, her chapter had a high level of site- and state-level



leadership presence in NAFME. However, Diana wanted to encourage even more members to be active in meetings and events.

Diana's goals for her chapter were better communication and more member involvement, and she believed that these two ideas were connected. In her experience, while texts or social media messages may have been a quicker way to get a response, she found that face-to-face communication was often more effective in encouraging others to get involved. Diana also believed that an important part of encouraging member involvement was teaching members how to balance their workload. She purported that this is a life skill that will follow them into their careers as well. Diana hoped to help her chapter members make decisions about how to balance their workloads so that they could take part in important professional opportunities.

### *Maggie's Chapter*

Maggie's university was the most different from the other participants. She attended a small, suburban, private university that had only eight students in the music education program at the time of our conversations. When she spoke about her school, Maggie beamed with pride. She discussed how close she was with the other music education majors, and how she found it easiest to simply talk to them in person when she needed to communicate information or announcements about the chapter. After all, they were all required to be members of the NAFME chapter, of which she had recently become president. Their chapter focused primarily on site-based events and community outreach programs, and the pre-service members viewed it as a social community where they got time to spend with other like-minded individuals.

Maggie's goal as a leader was to encourage participation from the freshmen. She desired to serve as a mentor for them as they began their music education journey, and to provide a chapter that supported them with teaching opportunities and resources. She led the school's community outreach music program and organized and encouraged the other members of her chapter to teach as well. Providing teaching opportunities for her members was one of her top priorities, along with face-to-face communication and relational leadership.

### *Chapter Successes and Struggles*

As participants discussed their work with their NAFME chapters, it became clear that the aspects of the chapter with which they were struggling the most were also what they viewed as most important for their chapter's success. Par-

ticipants attempted to remedy communication, professionalism, and engagement problems, while also citing these themes as paramount in retaining membership. While describing the benefits of membership in NAFME, the leaders indicated that professional development, advocacy, and networking opportunities were the most important to them and their Gen Z peers.

**Communication.** One common concern among participants was communication. Each one used a combination of face-to-face, social media, and digital methods to communicate important information to the chapter and to advertise chapter activities. Technology was a common theme in all conversations about communication, as each leader knew that the members of their chapter were constantly using their phones and accessing social media. However, they sometimes struggled to communicate effectively through technology.

*It is very difficult to communicate with the board. I can send text messages, but if I ask them a question, if I say, "Hey, can somebody come help me with this?" I hardly ever get a response... but I've found that going and talking to the person, like in person, not on the phone or anything, they'll be like, "Oh yeah, sure. I can help." (Diana, Individual Interview)*

Several found that face-to-face communication was the best way to recruit other students for tasks or events.

*I really prefer in-person [communication]. I think part of that comes from me just being a very animated person in terms of my face and my body gestures, and none of that can obviously be communicated via text or email or phone call... I just don't feel as genuine as I am in-person. (Stephanie, Individual Interview)*

Participants stressed that the nuance and urgency that accompanies face-to-face interaction is not as effective through digital communication methods. Though they were comfortable using technology to communicate as digital natives, they also recognized it as a tool that has benefits and drawbacks in certain scenarios. Additionally, an excess of communication methods sometimes caused messages to go unnoticed or ignored by members who were overwhelmed by multiple messages.

At the conclusion of the focus group interview, all four participants decided to continue communication with each other following the conclusion of the study. They decided that the communication across chapters allowed them the ability to exchange ideas and helped them find potential answers to problems and struggles they faced. This indication of reciprocity (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in this research

may suggest that inter-chapter communication may benefit other NAFME Collegiate chapters as well.

**Member Engagement.** The chapter leaders in this study saw the most growth in their organizations when they engaged membership in constant opportunities for activity. Regular meetings were key to improving activity overall. Participants noted that membership dropped following years where regular meetings did not take place. Outside of regularly scheduled meetings, the leaders' Gen Z peers craved opportunities for community outreach. Each of the chapters worked to provide these opportunities:

*We do [outreach program name]... [we] teach piano lessons and we have a beginning class session [where we] will teach a song or something and it's [for] kids from like [ages] four to seventeen... It's a very wide range and parents [join] as well. So it's very cool. (Maggie, Individual Interview)*

*We recently created the position of Outreach Chair, which is going to be our person to head up service projects that are mostly for the purpose of benefitting the community rather than internal affairs that would benefit us. (Stephanie, Individual Interview)*

Jacob also stated that "We're working on organizing little clinics for schools in the area... We [also] attempted to do some instrument petting zoos." Students in Diana's chapter also "did a benefit concert on Tuesday for a local middle school, and up until then we were doing fundraisers [for them]."

When discussing the weaknesses of their NAFME chapters, all participants discussed the need for purpose within the organization. The purpose extends to both the individual members as well as the organization as a whole.

*I don't remember seeing any events get hosted. I don't remember the chapter doing any service projects. It didn't really feel like the chapter had a purpose then... then there was a new, younger slate of people who were more committed to making the chapter more visible to the Music Ed students here, giving the chapter the purpose that we had been lacking in the past. (Stephanie, Individual Interview)*

Similarly, some participants noted that the members of their chapter have trouble turning their ideas into action.

*What our chapter has been struggling with is just getting the rest of the members to feel like they can also step up and show that initiative and plan events and you know, pose their ideas and be like, "Hi, I really want to do this"...and*

*feel competent enough to actually execute that instead of just “Here’s a great idea”. And I’m like, “Great, do it.” And they’re like, [shakes head “no”]. (Stephanie, Focus Group Interview)*

*They just kind of will like float and not help at all. And it’s just, like, very frustrating because I’m running everything. I think it’s because they’re like, “Oh, I’m a freshman, I don’t have to do anything”. (Maggie, Focus Group Interview)*

Each participant talked about mentoring younger students to help them grow into leadership roles. Task delegation was important for avoiding leadership burn-out.

*I think, for our chapter, it’s mainly just getting [someone else] to do everything and actually divvy out tasks... this semester I had no relief person step forward and since I’m student teaching, I’m not there much... So that was one really big issue this semester: that we didn’t, we haven’t done anything because no one really - they’re waiting for me and I only have so much time. (Jacob, Focus Group Interview)*

Participants believed that finding the purpose of the organization, along with encouraging individual members to take initiative by getting involved in jobs, leadership, and project planning, were helping to increase their number of active members.

**Professionalism.** Some of the participants’ chapters required music education majors to be members, while others did not. Interestingly, Stephanie’s university (which had the largest NAFME membership of the four chapters in this study) was the only one that did not require membership for music education students. Stephanie noted that membership was considered a professional expectation.

*My freshman year it was required to be a member, and we had to do two conference sessions. The past year or two it’s actually changed so that you don’t have to be a member of NAFME or any other professional organization. You don’t have to go to conference. It’s more of like a professional expectation... Now that it’s no longer a requirement, there is somehow more value to it for people and a little bit more freedom, I guess, in terms of the creativity. So people are more inclined to bring all they have to the table in that it’s not like, “oh, it’s that thing we have to do.” (Stephanie, Focus Group Interview)*

The focus on professional expectation as opposed to requirement for the degree program seemed to positively impact the attitude with which members approached meetings, events, and leadership in Stephanie’s chapter.

Participants noted other struggles related to professionalism in their chapters, including organization, lack of initiative, and the role conflict of being both a friend and a leader simultaneously. Participants noted feeling awkward about having to enforce rules when the culprit was a friend.

*If someone signed up late... we had to tell them they could not go because they didn't meet the deadline. That was probably the toughest, because one of them was a friend and colleague, so I'm like "Hey, no, you really can't go. You didn't meet the deadline." (Jacob, Individual Interview)*

This dichotomy was especially difficult for Maggie, whose university was quite small with a close-knit community of students.

*So I ended up having a meeting with them and talking to them without my advisor there, and... it was really hard for me because I'm really good friends with them, too. So it was like trying to separate that and be the president as well. (Maggie, Individual Interview)*

While the participants struggled with issues of professionalism in their fellow leaders and members, they also noted that instilling professionalism in their members was an important part of their work as a chapter.

### *Benefits of Professional Organizations in Music Education*

Participants also responded to questions regarding the benefits of professional organizations within the music education profession. Three themes mentioned by all participants were professional development, advocacy, and networking opportunities. When asked about these benefits, some of the responses were as follows:

*Learning how to be a better educator. At our meetings, we do presentations on discipline or things that you wouldn't learn in a classroom in college. We have somebody who's been teaching for a while come and talk about things that they learned when they started teaching. (Diana, Individual Interview)*

Students in Diana's chapter valued the opportunity to expand on and supplement what they were learning in their music education classes. Diana sought to provide opportunities for growth and for chapter members to have input on meeting and guest presentation topics.

Speaking on the benefits of chapter membership, Stephanie said, "I'm of a mind that we should be as invested as possible in this profession and advocating for music as an art form, as a part of education, and really knowing that it has value." Because of her drive for music education advocacy (and that of her col-

leagues), members of her chapter were quite involved in state level leadership and advocacy efforts. Jacob also added,

*You'll have people to email or call and be like, "Hey, can you come listen to my band before MPA? Hey, can you do this for me? Do you have any suggestions on what I can do?" Stuff like that. (Jacob, Individual Interview)*

All participants mentioned the importance of networking opportunities, especially with local teachers.

## Discussion and Implications

Through my first research question, I sought to discover the successes and struggles that these Gen Z NAFME presidents were encountering in the running of their chapter. The participants indicated that they experienced struggles in the areas of communication, member engagement, and professionalism. In an age where technological methods of communication are ubiquitous, and with a generational cohort of digital natives during whose adolescence the use of cell phones and social media were commonplace (Seemiller & Grace, 2015), it would seem that communication should not be a problem. However, all participants indicated problems with communication among their chapter. Sometimes face-to-face communication was more effective for communicating particularly urgent matters, or in situations where a personal touch was important or helpful. The need to be reflexive to the communication needs of the recipient instead of the sender was consistent with Nolker and Ramsey's (2020) findings related to their Gen Y and Gen Z participants.

While participants often struggled to engage members, chapter activities and events that provided opportunities for community outreach seemed to be the most enticing to their members. This motivation for engaging with and benefitting the community rather than just the chapter or the university is consistent with what Seemiller and Grace (2015) refer to as Gen Z's "change agent mentality" (p. 129) that causes them to be particularly driven by social issues. The need for a clear chapter purpose and ample opportunities for meetings, jobs, and leadership roles aligns with Gen Z's tendency toward relational, strengths-based leadership (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). The consistency in these needs between chapters reinforces the idea that perceived individual benefit and growth is an important motivator of members of the Gen Z cohort (Nolker & Ramsey, 2020).

The increase in member engagement that Stephanie witnessed after membership shifted from being a course requirement to a professional expectation is an interesting indicator of a potential generational difference. Driven largely by a

combination of peer and faculty expectation as opposed to a strict mandate from faculty alone, Stephanie's experience with this phenomenon aligns with research indicating Gen Z's higher level of trust in members of their own cohort than those of older generations (Andrea et al., 2016; Seemiller & Grace 2015).

While each participant noted struggles with communication, member engagement, and professionalism, they also described ways they were working to remedy these issues in their chapter and had found successes in these areas as well. Chapters facing similar struggles should consider a few options for addressing them. First, faculty advisors should work with chapter leaders to establish consistent communication methods that are reflexive to the needs of the recipient(s). While Gen Z is a cohort of digital natives, advisors should not neglect the power of face-to-face communication and recruitment strategies. The participants in this study found that face-to-face communication was the best way to recruit members for the chapter, activities and events, and leadership. Chapters should have regular meetings and provide regular opportunities for leadership and chapter events with a particular focus on community outreach programs that will connect with Gen Z's change agent mentality and interest in issues of diversity and social justice. Advisors should encourage members and leadership to create a clear purpose or mission statement for the chapter so current and prospective members feel their engagement has a direction or focus. They should also build a professional expectation for membership that becomes part of the school or program culture and is driven by both students and faculty instead of just listing it as a degree or class requirement. Faculty should also model this professional expectation in themselves by attending conferences, meetings, and events.

Through my second research question, I wanted to find out what these Gen Z leaders viewed as the benefits of professional organization involvement for music educators. They were most focused on professional development, advocacy for the profession, and networking opportunities. These themes were largely consistent with NAfME's public statements on the benefits of membership (Lambert, 2012; National Association for Music Education, n.d.). However, an interesting distinction occurred between the concept of professional network and social community. Madsen (2010) indicated that a social community of like-minded individuals is a benefit of professional organizations in music education. However, of the four participants in this study, only Maggie mentioned social community, and she had previously mentioned that her program was small enough that the students already shared social bonds. The other participants seemed to view their chapters less as a social community and more as a professional network or task force. This dichotomy between the literature and the findings in this study may indicate a difference due to generational cohort.



Faculty advisors and organization leadership might consider focusing on addressing these needs and advertising these opportunities to potential members. These Gen Z participants wanted their meetings to supplement and expand their music education curricula and go beyond what they may learn in methods classes. They appreciated opportunities to meet and talk with in-service teachers to learn and build their professional networks. They also desired the ability to be engaged in advocacy for music education. Faculty advisors may wish to help students advocate at the university, state, and national level, as well as providing support should they wish to seek leadership opportunities in their state music educators association.

Several of the themes discussed may be important to consider in other music education contexts as well. Music education faculty members should acknowledge Gen Z students' varied communication needs despite being digital natives and consider that face-to-face communication may be more effective in certain situations. They should also provide opportunities for community engagement and outreach in an effort to connect to Gen Z's change agent mentality throughout their music teacher education programs. Finally, leaders of music education professional organizations should consider Gen Z teachers for leadership roles. Their changing perspectives provide variety that could enrich leadership teams despite their relative youth in the profession at this time.

Generalization is not a goal of qualitative research, and the perspectives of these four participants are not meant to be generalized as representing the entire Gen Z cohort. However, the insights gained may be of interest to music teacher educators working with Gen Z students, those in music education professional organization leadership, and faculty advisors for NAFME Collegiate chapters who are encountering struggles similar to those described by these Gen Z participants. While participants represented variety with regard to gender identity, music concentration area, and university context, the lack of racial diversity in respondents is a limitation of this research. Marginalization faced by music education students of color is well-documented (Lechuga & Schmidt, 2017; McCall, 2015, 2017; Robinson & Hendricks, 2017); therefore, student leaders of color may have experiences with or perspectives of music education professional organizations that differ from those shared in this research. Future research should explore and critique the potential underrepresentation of students of color in collegiate leadership of music education professional organizations.

## Conclusion

The arrival of Gen Z in the music teaching profession initiates a need for better understanding of this new generation. Given Gen Z's youth, further research



is needed to explore the consistency of their worldviews and values across different contexts and as they continue to age and mature. Given their technological fluency, open-mindedness, and drive for social change, members of the Gen Z cohort have a lot to offer our music education professional organizations. Music teacher educators should seek to foster their Gen Z students' leadership potential, and current professional organization leadership should work to recruit, retain, and engage their Gen Z members.

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