

## **2026 National Conference Agenda—Development**

*All times below are Eastern Time. Agenda content subject to change.*

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The following agenda describes sessions specifically designed for the above-mentioned constituents. For a full listing of Conference events and larger sessions, please visit <https://leagueconference.org/full-schedule>.

### **Sunday, May 31, 2026**

#### **2:00pm- 5:00pm    Build Your Fundraising Year to Drive Cash Flow and Donor Growth**

Arts leaders know they need to grow fundraising, but limited resources often stand in the way. In reality, it's not about doing more—it's about taking the right actions at the right time to build momentum and drive results.

In this three-hour workshop, you'll learn how to strategically sequence your fundraising calendar to target the right prospect pools with the right tactics. Each segment requires a distinct approach, and knowing how to balance your time, money, and people across them is key to sustainable growth.

Bring your full team: executives, board members, and development leaders. You'll leave with a clear plan for your organization that defines whom you'll target, how you'll reach them, and when you'll engage them.

*Speaker: **Catherine Heitz New**, Chief Executive Officer, RSC Associates*

*\*\*Note that this seminar is not included in your Conference Registration\*\**

*Cost: \$330 League Member / \$410 Not-Yet-Member*

**Monday, June 1, 2026**

**9:00am- 12:00pm Raising the Bar on Board Engagement**

Good governance should be the starting point for how your board, executive team, and artistic leadership work together. When done well, solid governance creates meaningful board engagement, which in turn adds real value to an orchestra's relevance and resilience. But what should the board be engaged in, and when? What prevents board members from contributing productively? How can executives and board chairs make the most of their boards?

This interactive session will help board members and executives explore governance principles and best practices to:

- Use board processes and procedures for more than just fiduciary accountability
- Design meetings that address strategic issues and leverage board expertise in the room
- Establish group norms to motivate board members beyond baseline expectations
- Strengthen relationships between board members and with executive and artistic staff

Board issues will be examined from multiple perspectives—board and staff, larger and smaller orchestras—with an emphasis on practical tips and common pitfalls. Together, we will unpack challenges related to sharing information, decision-making, and strategic leadership in a way that elevates the work of the board and activates appropriate board member engagement.

***Speaker: Marla Bobowick, Nonprofit Governance Consultant***

***\*\*Note that this seminar is not included in your Conference Registration\*\****

*Cost: \$330 League Member / \$410 Not-Yet-Member*

**1:00pm-2:30pm Constituency Block Meeting 1**

**All Development Staff Constituency Meeting**

One of the highlights of our National Conference is time to meet with peers working in similar roles across the country.

For this session, Lisa Brown Alexander, founder of Nonprofit HR, will lead a session tailored to fundraisers on achieving balance and avoiding burnout.

**Tuesday, June 2, 2026**

**8:30am-9:45am**    **The New Landscape for Charitable Giving Incentives**

While the impulse to give comes from the heart, the size and timing of charitable donations is strongly influenced by federal tax policy. Major changes in giving incentives take effect in 2026, with potential for both expanding the base of donors to orchestras and changing the pace and scale of current donations. This practical session will walk through the adjustments in tax policy that are likely to shape giving at the individual, corporate, and foundation levels in the coming years and what to expect from donors going forward. Experts from the wider nonprofit sector will partner to describe what's new, how it could influence private philanthropy, and how to talk with your orchestra's supporters about these shifts in simple, clear ways.

**Speaker(s): Kathleen Gregory**, *Director of Development, Public Justice Center* and **Sally Schaeffer**, *President, Uncorked Advocates*

**10:45am-12:00pm**    **"The Art of the Ask" in Today's Donor Landscape**

Fundraising asks don't fail because of the dollar amount—they falter when conversations lack purpose, curiosity, or a clear path forward.

In today's fundraising landscape, donors are responding to conversations that feel intentional and authentic. This highly interactive session will equip you with a practical flow for those conversations, transforming the "ask" into a guided dialogue that builds trust.

You'll learn this relationship-centered framework, including how thoughtful preparation, step-by-step permission, and strategic follow-up lead to stronger donor engagement and better outcomes.

In this 75-minute session, participants will walk step-by-step through the full conversation arc, from sparking curiosity to securing the commitment, giving you tools you can use immediately in your next donor meeting or to coach your team with confidence and clarity.

**Speaker(s): Nicki Inman**, *Project Consultant, RSC Associates*

*This session has been sponsored and developed by RSC Associates.*

**3:00pm-5:00pm**    **Constituency Block Meeting 2**

**All Development Staff Constituency Meeting**

One of the highlights of our National Conference is time to meet with peers working in similar roles across the country. **Session Details to be Announced.**



**Wednesday, June 3, 2026**

**9:00am-10:15am**    **Transformational Gifts, From Wishing and Hoping to Receiving and Growing**

Transformational gifts can redefine what is possible for orchestras. But how do these gifts actually happen?

Get a behind-the-scenes look as leaders from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra share the stories of two extraordinary gifts to their organizations— a \$50 million gift to the CSO and a \$2 million gift to the SDSO— that had an incredible impact.

This panel discussion will demonstrate:

- How transformational gifts emerge
- The critical steps that move an ambitious idea toward a realized commitment
- The conditions that inspire donors to invest at a truly impactful level
- The essential role board members play in securing these gifts by cultivating relationships and inspiring generosity

Designed for orchestra leaders, board members, and fundraising professionals, this session offers practical lessons and strategic perspectives on cultivating and securing gifts that can radically change an orchestra's ability to pursue its mission.

**Speaker(s):** **Jeff Alexander**, *President, Chicago Symphony Orchestra*; **Sarah Generes**, *Vice President, Development, League of American Orchestras*; **Dale Hedding**, *Vice President of Development, Chicago Symphony Orchestra*; and **Jennifer Teisinger**, *Executive Director, South Dakota Symphony Orchestra*

**11:15am-12:45pm**    **Constituency Block Meeting 3**

**Chief Development Officers Groups 1 and 2**

For this session, chief development officers from Group 1 and 2 orchestras will participate in a facilitated discussion on issues including campaign planning and execution, balancing team leadership and personal fundraising work, and other topics from a recent survey of this group.

**All Development Staff**

For this session, development staff will participate in facilitated discussions on topics to be announced.

Notice: It is important to keep in mind antitrust rules governing competition that apply to this group discussion. While the agenda for this group includes discussion of a variety of issues that are crucial to orchestras' planning and strategies, the goal is not to agree on a single approach to these issues. With the benefit of analysis and discussion, each orchestra will be able to decide independently what course of action is best for its own organization. We ask you to avoid comments that relate to your orchestra's current or future plans for ticket or event pricing (actual ticket prices, discount amounts), bargaining (including collective bargaining agreements or with vendors), or compensation. Please consult the [League one-page Antitrust Overview](#) for more information, available at [www.americanorchestras.org](http://www.americanorchestras.org).