

2026 National Conference Agenda—Executive Directors, Group 7-8 Orchestras

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>.

Monday, June 1, 2026

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

1:00pm-1:30pm Intro, Welcome, Objectives

Welcome to Baltimore! Quick introductions will include taking your “Parking lot topics” for discussion as time permits throughout the week, so come with your burning questions.

*Facilitator: **Libby Watson**, Adrian Symphony Orchestra*

1:30pm-2:30pm The Audience-Building Board

This session explores how to inspire and equip board members to become confident, authentic advocates who bring new audiences through personal invitations and peer influence. Grounded in the idea of concerts as “experience” and “credence” goods, we’ll examine why people attend and how trust drives those decisions. Participants will leave with simple, practical tools to help board members invite, engage, and grow audiences in sustainable ways.

*Speaker: **Libby Watson**, Adrian Symphony Orchestra*

6:15pm Optional Group Dinner on Monday or Tuesday ([RSVP and details](#))

Tuesday, June 2, 2026

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

3:00pm-4:00pm Planned Giving 201

Back by demand, Cat Heitz New will take us into a deeper level conversation about Planned Giving. We'll revisit the foundations of a sustainable Planned Giving program and focus on the activities that drive results once those foundations are in place, including where and how to promote planned giving. Bring your questions and real-life scenarios so we can troubleshoot together and ensure you leave with practical next steps you can put to work right away.

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

4:05pm-4:45pm

Live Film on a Small Budget

Learn how presenting a live film concert increased ticket sales, expanded audiences, and strengthened overall revenue. With continued growth in both subscriptions and single-ticket sales, this session shares how a high-cost project has created lasting momentum.

*Speaker: **Ellen Fenner**, Minot Symphony Orchestra*

4:45pm-5:00pm

Quick Fire Parking Lot Topic

We'll pull from our Day 1 list of topics or trade notes on some Conference sessions of note.

Wednesday, June 3, 2026

11:15am-12:45pm

Constituency Meeting Block 2

11:15am-12:15pm

Putting AI to Use for Small Budget Orchestras

In this session we'll hear from a few EDs within the group who have begun putting AI to use in a variety of ways. There will also be time for open conversation to raise questions, concerns, and swap recommendations.

*Speakers: **Susan Cort**, Hershey Symphony Orchestra; **Samantha Johnson-Helms**, Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra; **Ula Kauppi**, Lynchburg Symphony Orchestra; **Daniel Ponickly**, Fairbanks Symphony Orchestra*

*Facilitator: **Amy Lindstrom**, Rochester Symphony*

12:15pm-12:45pm

Wrap Up, Takeaways, Adjourn

As we leave Conference, what will we choose to take with us? How do we stay connected and energized by what we've learned? We will identify strategies to keep the momentum on our path and deepen relationships that will fulfill us as we return home.

*Facilitators: **Libby Watson**, **Amy Lindstrom**, **Ellen Fenner***

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.