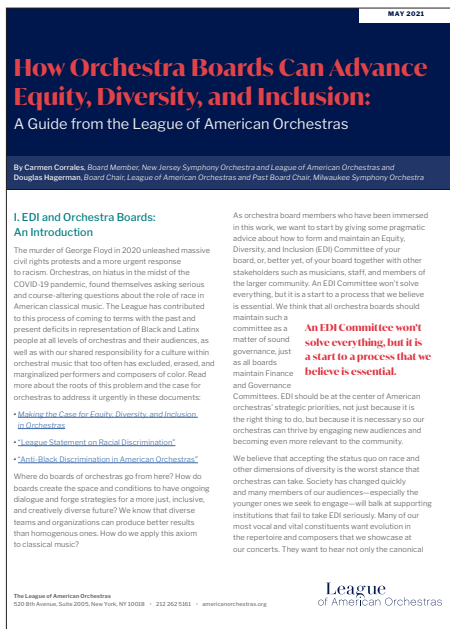


How Orchestra Boards Can Advance Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

A new guide from the League of American Orchestras makes the case for the vital importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion at orchestras—from the board perspective. *How Orchestra Boards Can Advance Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion* discusses the urgency of this work and offers practical advice, contextual information, and strategies for boards and orchestras to become truly representative of the communities they serve. The Guide was written by Carmen Corrales, a board member of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and the League of American Orchestras, and Douglas Hagerman, board chair of the League of American Orchestras and past board chair of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. Here is the introduction to the new Guide; read the complete *How Orchestra Boards Can Advance Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion* at <https://americanorchestras.org/edi-guide-for-boards>.

by Carmen Corrales and Douglas Hagerman



Carmen Corrales and Douglas Hagerman, co-authors of *How Orchestra Boards Can Advance Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: A Guide from the League of American Orchestras*

EDI and Orchestra Boards:

An Introduction

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 unleashed massive civil rights protests and a more urgent response to racism. Orchestras, on hiatus in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, found themselves asking serious and course-altering questions about the role of race in American classical music. The League has contributed to this process of coming to terms with the past and present deficits in representation of Black and Latinx people at all levels of orchestras and their audiences, as well as with our shared responsibility for a culture within orchestral music that too often has excluded, erased, and marginalized performers and composers of color. Read more about the roots of this problem and the case for orchestras to address it urgently in these documents:

An EDI Committee won't solve everything, but it is a start to a process that we believe is essential.

- *Making the Case for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Orchestras* (<https://americanorchestras.org/making-the-case-for-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-orchestras>)
- League Statement on Racial Discrimination (<https://bit.ly/racialdiscriminationstatement>)
- “Anti-Black Discrimination in American Orchestras” (<https://bit.ly/antiblackdiscrimination>)

Where do boards of orchestras go from here? How do boards create the space and conditions to have ongoing dialogue and forge strategies for a more just, inclusive, and creatively diverse future? We know that diverse teams and organizations can produce better results than homogenous ones. How do we apply this axiom to classical music?

As orchestra board members who have been immersed in this work, we want to start by giving some pragmatic advice about how to form and maintain an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee of your board, or, better yet, of your board together with other stakeholders such as musicians, staff, and members of the larger community. An EDI Committee won't solve everything, but it is a start to a process that we believe is essential. We think that all orchestra boards should maintain such a committee as a matter of sound governance, just as all boards maintain Finance and Governance Committees. EDI should be at the center of American orchestras' strategic priori-

ties, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it is necessary so our orchestras can thrive by engaging new audiences and becoming even more relevant to the community.

We believe that accepting the status quo on race and other dimensions of diversity is the worst stance that orchestras can take. Society has changed quickly and many members of our audiences—especially the younger ones we seek to engage—will balk at supporting institutions that fail to take EDI seriously.

Many of our most vocal and vital constituents want evolution in the repertoire and composers that we showcase at our concerts. They want to hear not only the canonical works, but also music from American composers of color and composers from other countries that has been historically and unfairly excluded. They also want to see more musicians and conductors of color. Undoubtedly, there is a shrinking but vocal segment of our constituency that wants everything to remain the same, but for the most part, consensus has built around the need to move toward a more inclusive future as we aim to reach wider audiences.

Institutional change begins at the top. Management and the board carry responsibility for turning good intentions into actions and grappling with hard issues.

In our view, boards should eschew ideological battles that only deepen divisions and instead focus decisively on the need for change that begins immediately. Institutional change begins at the top. Management and the board carry responsibility for turning good intentions into actions and grappling with hard issues. The work of EDI, however, does not end there for orchestras, but extends to multiple internal and external constituencies.

Change in orchestras necessitates a participatory process that brings together different stakeholders within each organization. Although there can never be total agreement on everything, orchestras function through persuasion and consensus building. Orchestras differ significantly from other types of organizations in that there are so many stakeholders who are essential parts of the whole. No orchestras can play without their violinists and bassoonists or without their CEOs and fundraisers, for example. Orchestras, by their very nature, require the participation (and motivation) of their stakeholders, including board members, staff, mu-

LEAGUE EDI RESOURCES

The League of American Orchestras' online Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource Center provides practical and helpful insights, advice, and a path to greater diversity and inclusion for every part of orchestras.

The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource Center includes a number of important readings, research, and examples within our field, and is a useful repository for resources to help change discriminatory systems and for musicians, managers, and board members of color to thrive in the orchestra field.

Visit the League's EDI Center at
<https://americanorchestras.org/learn/equity-diversity-and-inclusion/>

WHAT SHOULD ORCHESTRAS MEASURE?

Here are some ideas for what to set measurable improvement goals around:

Budget

- Percent spent on EDI work (define in advance what counts)

Staff

- Representation of staff by gender identity
- Representation of staff by race/ethnicity compared to community
- Share of management roles held by people of color
- Percent of promotions and new hires with a qualified diverse applicant in the candidate pool
- Pay equity
- Employee engagement survey results

Board

- Representation of board members by gender identity
- Representation of board members by race/ethnicity
- Demographics of those holding leadership roles

Artistic

- Representation of musicians by race/ethnicity
- Representation of guest artists and conductors
- Percent of programmed works by underrepresented composers

Community

- Outcomes of partnerships

sicians, volunteers, artistic leaders/conductors, audience members and donors, and members of the community. The point is that while delegating all decision-making about diversity to an EDI Committee would be just as inappropriate as making Finance Committee members completely responsible for all financial and investment decisions, we believe that change requires a communal process.

The board should model the kind of organization it wants.

An EDI Committee serves as a space for people related to the orchestra to talk to each other respectfully about equity, race, and other issues of diversity, as well as to work with management to bring diversity initiatives to fruition. We cannot overstate the need for spaces for people to speak about issues of difference. Through an EDI Committee, we can have these important conversations, demonstrating that we are all strong enough to endure and profit from these discussions. The focus of most arts organizations and orchestras currently, in terms of EDI, is race and racism. But there are multiple other areas of diversity—such as gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age—that should also be considered and discussed as part of the life and evolution of the orchestra.

EDI Committees can facilitate both understanding and addressing the particular challenges faced by different groups. Prejudice is highly specific to affected groups in ways that can both benefit and hinder individuals, depending on the context, for reasons extraneous to who they truly are or their true talents. Those prejudices—together with unequal access to music education, training, and other resources—affect individuals long before they appear at the orchestra door.

Board members play a critical role in creating an organizational culture that nurtures all musicians, staff, volunteers, and fellow board members.

One of the initial steps that most boards take is creating a more diverse board. But it has become clear that diversity does not work on its own without inclusion. Adding board members of color is insufficient if there is no effort to meaningfully include them in the work of the board. Inclusion is focused on making all members of the orchestra community, including the board, feel welcome and offering support as well as opportunities for leadership, connection, and growth. While a board may successfully recruit women and



Recent publications focusing on multiple aspects of equity, diversity, and inclusion from the League of American Orchestras.

people of color, for example, the effort will not succeed if those board members are tokenized or made to feel unwelcome and constrained.

In our experience, integrating EDI at the board level works best when BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) individuals are recruited, welcomed, and offered full participation on the board and in the committees that interest them. Inclusion of new board members begins at recruitment, when they are sought out for the skills and perspectives they bring to the board room, not just for what they represent. Unfortunately, there are too many examples of BIPOC board members in non-profit organizations who have been recruited and then ignored or sidelined, causing many to be wary of getting involved.

For inclusion and equity to follow diversity, the board must set measurable goals over time. The effort of setting goals and keeping them starts with plans put together by boards and management. An EDI Committee helps to keep diversity issues on the front burner, even as they may fade from the news.

Orchestras can retain and please their current audience while reaching a new, larger audience if they choose to view the world through a “yes/and” lens.

The board should model the kind of organization it wants. It takes persistent and resilient effort at all levels of the organization to advance EDI. Board members play a critical role in creating a culture that nurtures all musicians, staff, volunteers, and fellow board members. And it’s critical to engage music directors and conductors in this process, so that those in whom we vest artistic leadership become themselves the leaders of change.

The classical music world is enamored with its European heritage while simultaneously being increasingly eager to explore the omitted and unfamiliar parts of the broader classical tradition. Orchestras can successfully retain and please their current audience while reaching a new, larger audience if they choose to view the world through a “yes/and” lens. We are not suggesting leaving behind the great works of the canon that bring pleasure, joy, and comfort to millions of people, but rather exploring the many exciting and enriching works we haven’t heard, and building a new tradition for orchestras that reflects the world we live in. Perhaps we are dreamers, but we have seen it work, in part because as people, we are more connected than we think we are.

Black American composers have always been part of classical music, even as they have been ignored and erased. Latin American and Caribbean classical music traditions have continued in the context of other world classical styles, often incorporating Indigenous and African folkloric elements along with elements of jazz and other musical forms. LGBTQ+ people have always been among our greatest icons. Women have always been part of the tradition but have been ignored or omitted. Some of our most cherished soloists and performers have suffered from disabilities. Diversity is nothing new within the classical music world. What is new is recognizing and valuing that diversity so that we neither frame it as an exception nor deny it.

We should move forward with full confidence that through pragmatic effort, we can further programs and initiatives that bring together the best of classical music for our audiences. There is justice in diversity, but there is also the pleasure of discovering new works, new colleagues, and new friends, and of helping orchestras evolve toward a more sustainable future that reflects the true diversity and promise of America. 