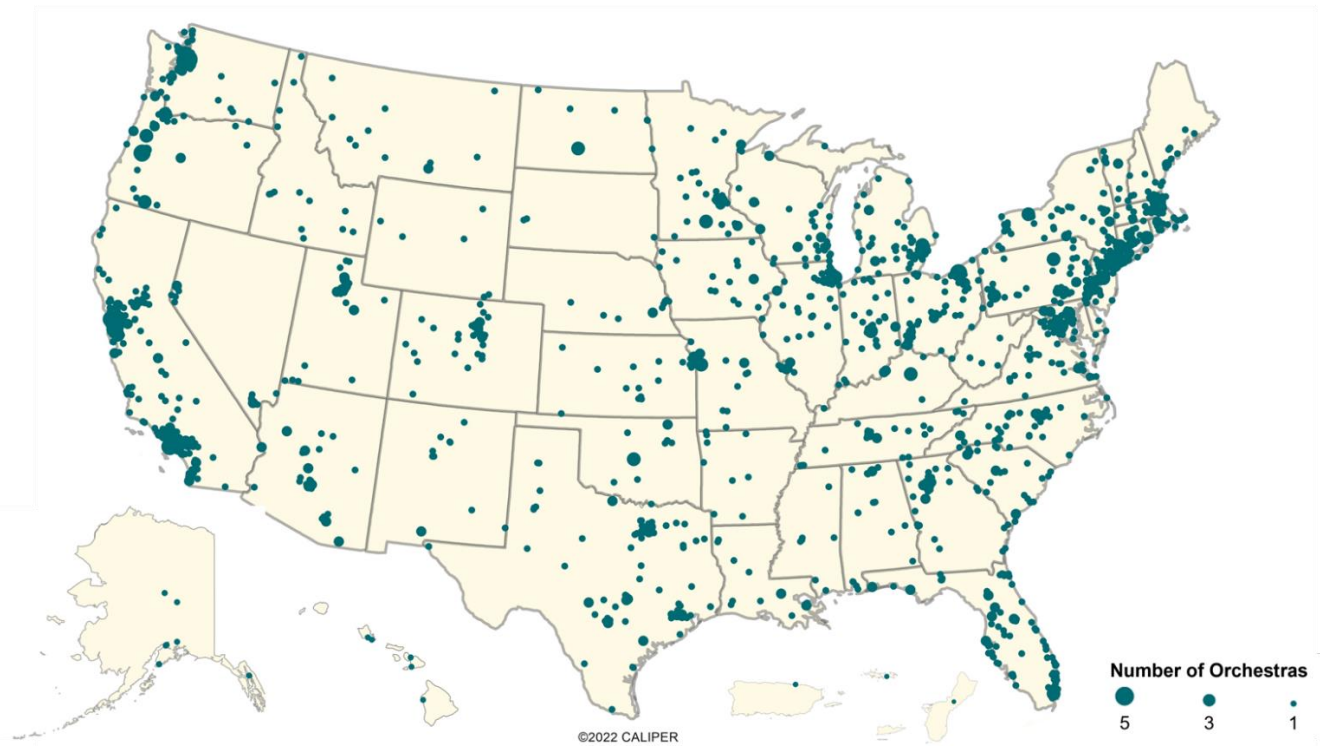


# Orchestras at a Glance

October 2023

## Orchestras serve communities large and small

There are approximately **2,000** professional, community, and youth orchestras in the U.S. which exist in all 50 states and perform in virtually every community. Annual budgets for orchestras range from less than \$30,000 to more than \$100 million; **80% of all orchestras had budgets under \$300,000 in 2021.**<sup>i&ii</sup>



*This map depicts the 1,984 orchestras identified through a partnership between the League of American Orchestra and SMU's DataArts. This data is derived from IRS tax filings and DataArts' Cultural Data Profiler, all for fiscal year 2021 & 2022.*

## Orchestras are a vital part of America's musical landscape

America is brimming with extraordinary musicians, live concerts, and orchestras as unique as the communities they serve. Orchestral musicmaking is flourishing in our country, encouraging creativity and bringing people together to share the experience of live music, as orchestras implement new strategies to diversify participation in the art form. Orchestras provide **lifelong musical experiences and participation in the creative process.**

In 2019, adult orchestras alone offered more than 32,000 performances – of which 35% were free of charge – and reached almost 19 million audience members.<sup>iii</sup>

**Orchestras at a Glance** uses data from several League publications and partners; the most common source is the League's Orchestra Statistical Report (OSR). The OSRs for the 2018-2019 season and 2020-2021 season (the most recent OSR) are used here to report on the orchestral field before the Covid pandemic and during its recovery, whichever is more appropriate.

People are uplifted by orchestras during times of celebration and sorrow. Music and the arts are critical to a healthy society, and the drive to perform continued throughout the pandemic. During the pandemic, a survey of the 2020-21 season indicated that orchestral music was being delivered digitally—much of it free of charge (64%)—when in-person concerts could not happen. Orchestras moved their performances online during the 2020-21 season, with orchestras providing live-streamed concerts (81% of orchestras), streaming of archival recordings (41% of orchestras), and new creative content curated specifically for social media (59% of orchestras).<sup>iv</sup> Many orchestras are continuing to present innovative programming and new approaches to concert formats as audiences return to live performances.

## Orchestras are significant contributors to the creative workforce and fiscal health of communities

Orchestra expenses totaled approximately \$2 billion in 2019.<sup>iii</sup>

Orchestras' economic impact far exceeds direct expenses -- as orchestras create jobs, engage in commerce with local businesses, and spur local expenditures on related goods and services (hotels, restaurants, parking, and more).

Orchestras are often the largest arts employer in a community, with up to 100 musicians on-stage. The pandemic has posed extraordinary challenges and opportunities for orchestra employment, and they are coming out of this period with new energy to adapt to the changed environment. More than 90% of orchestras indicated that federal pandemic relief was essential to maintaining their workforce. **In 2021, orchestras filled over 190,000 paid and volunteer positions.** Even during this year when many organizations closed their doors, orchestras hosted over 76,000 volunteers, 19,000 board members, 14,000 administrative positions, and 81,000 musician positions.<sup>v</sup>

In 2019, there were approximately 119,000 musician positions filled by orchestras across the United States. That same year, each orchestra engaged between 51 and 272 musicians, on average.<sup>iv</sup>

## Orchestras contribute to the creative, civic, and educational vitality of communities

Orchestras contribute to healthy societies through their active participation in civic life, as communities with orchestras draw together musicians, volunteers, philanthropists, and other civic-minded stakeholders. Orchestras enhance the quality of life in their communities by collaborating with school systems and other local partners to deliver programs on and off the stage. Orchestras offer a wide variety of programs tailored to meet community needs, including pre-school learning, in-depth residencies in schools, afterschool partnerships, educational classes for seniors, and health and wellness programs.

In 2019, U.S. orchestras performed over 10,000 educational and community engagement concerts, serving almost 2.6 million participants — many of whom attended for free.<sup>iv</sup>

There are more than 400 youth orchestras across America, involving young musicians in the joy of music-making and all its ancillary benefits.<sup>i</sup>

Comprehensive music education helps prepare students to succeed in school, work, and life. That is why the great majority of orchestras engage in **advocacy on behalf of in-school music education** in their communities. Students “play their part” by collaborating with their fellow orchestra musicians to develop skills, self-discipline, and individual expression. This work did not stop during the pandemic: orchestras partnered with caregivers, schools, and community-based organizations to offer **online opportunities for learners of all ages**, with nearly three-quarters (72%) of responding orchestras creating new programs and partnerships amid the pandemic, and 61% livestreaming educational programs and events.<sup>iv</sup>

### Orchestras have increased investment and representation for racial & gender equity

Orchestras across all budget sizes and geographic locations have substantially increased the presence of women and BIPOC composers, conductors, and artists in their programming over the past several years. Today’s orchestras are increasing their investments in equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), creating fellowships for musicians and conductors of color; developing community-centered residencies for composers; investing in senior staff positions to lead EDI efforts; and working to establish more equitable organizational cultures. The League of American Orchestras is accelerating field-wide progress through vital resources and grants, and hundreds of hours of EDI discussion and learning across our digital and in-person programming throughout the year.

Between 2015 and 2022, performed repertoire rose from 1.6% to 11.8% for women composers, and from 3.2% to 16.9% for BIPOC composers.<sup>vi</sup>

Over the past several years, the League has disbursed more than 96 grants totaling over \$2,519,515 to help orchestras create more equitable, diverse, and inclusive organizational cultures; disbursed 16 grants to women composers totaling \$300,000 to support the commissioning of new works and an additional \$20,000 has been granted to 16 orchestras to support the performances of these works; and, in partnership with the Sphinx Organization and the New World Symphony, 839 grants for 705 Black and Latinx musicians totaling \$624,000 as part of the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS).

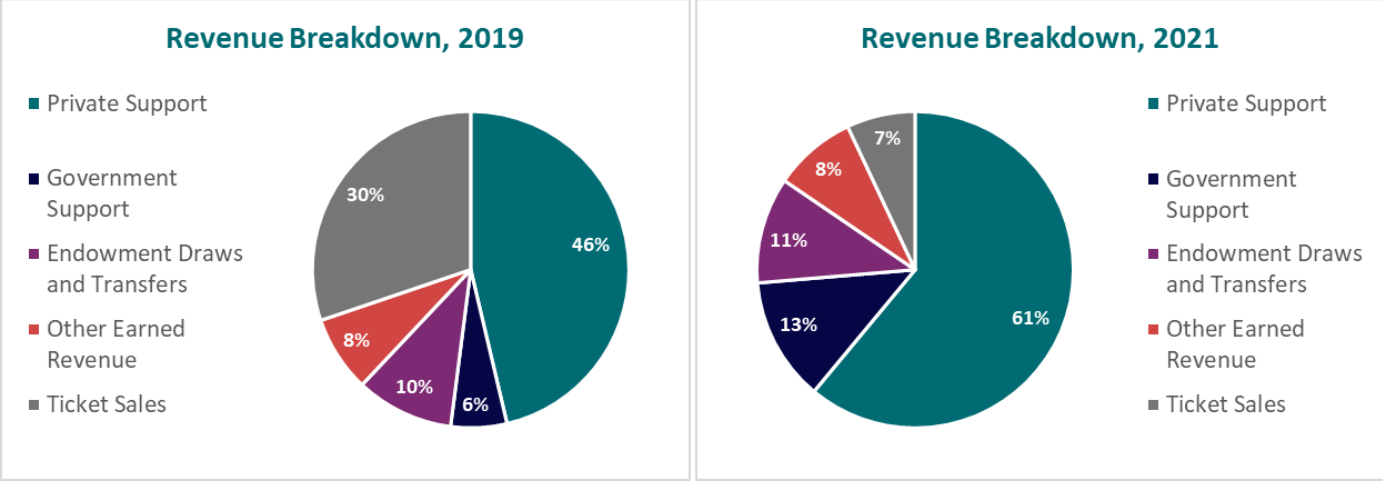
### Orchestras deliver on their nonprofit mission thanks to charitable contributions from a broad base of donors

During the 2020-21 season, 75% of the charitable gifts to orchestras from the general public were under \$250, demonstrating that community members with a wide range of economic means find value in their local orchestras and invest in their sustainability.<sup>v</sup>

Orchestras are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. Individual and institutional donors are critical to helping orchestras make music and services available to their communities, and contributions far outweigh ticket sales as a revenue source. The charitable gifts that make the work of orchestras possible come from donors across the economic spectrum. Given rising costs and the ongoing constraints on earned revenue throughout the pandemic, charitable giving is an even more critical source of support.

### The music and community partnerships of U.S. orchestras are made possible through a combination of philanthropy, government support, and ticket sales

During the pandemic, orchestras relied heavily on government and private support to continue their work. The following charts depict orchestras’ operating revenue for fiscal years 2019 and 2021, and highlight the stark decrease in ticket sale revenue and increased reliance on contributed revenue due to Covid 19.<sup>iii&v</sup>



**Want to Learn More About the Orchestra Field?**  
**Visit the League’s Research and Resources Website at:**  
<https://americanorchestras.org/learn/resources-data-and-research/>

The **League of American Orchestras** champions the vitality of music and the orchestral experience, supports the orchestra community, and leads change boldly. The only national organization dedicated to orchestras and their communities, the League supports the field through advocacy, research, convenings, leadership development, artistic programs, and grants. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League includes nearly 25,000 musicians, conductors, orchestra staff, board members, volunteers, and business partners working within our membership of 1600 world-renowned orchestras, community groups, summer festivals, student and youth ensembles, conservatories and libraries, businesses serving orchestras, and individuals who love symphonic music.

*i* We know the approximate number and budget of orchestras due to IRS data, provided by SMU DataArts.  
*ii* The League had previously reported that there were 1,600 orchestras in the US. This year we used additional methods of combing IRS data to arrive at an updated figure. These methods include reviewing 'EZ File' submissions (for orchestras with annual budgets under \$50,000) and undertaking a text-based search of organizations that used tax filing codes not typically associated with orchestras.  
*iii* This estimate is based on the League’s 2019 OSR and IRS data.  
*iv* These figures are drawn from 124 orchestras who completed the League’s August 2020 COVID-19 Impact Survey.  
*v* This estimate is based on the League’s 2021 OSR and IRS data.  
*vi* These figures are drawn from the 2022 Orchestra Repertoire Report, produced by the Institute for Composer Diversity in partnership with the League of American Orchestras.