

# A New Board Member's Guide to the Landscape of American Orchestras

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# League Contact



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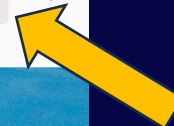
# Housekeeping

- » This webinar will be recorded. The recording, transcript, and slides will be made available by the end of the week.
- » Please ask questions in the Q & A as we go along. The presentation will last approximately 45 minutes, with questions for a further 15 minutes at the end.
- » Additional useful information is available on our website under the “Related Resources” tab here:



## Access Benefits from the League

- » Your orchestra's membership in the League provides you free access to a wealth of governance resources and orchestra field research at [www.americanorchestras.org](http://www.americanorchestras.org)
- » Some of our member-only website resources require you to sign up and login with your own personal account
- » If you don't already receive our latest articles and news emails, please sign up for *Symphony* at: [www.symphony.org](http://www.symphony.org)



FEATURE STORY Nov 21, 2025

## Climate Commissions

Increasing numbers of composers and musicians are creating works that celebrate our planet and express concern about climate change. Cellist Gautier Capuçon's Earth-inspired *Gaia* project features 16 world premieres for cello by contemporary composers commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony.



NEWS BRIEF Nov 21, 2025

### Arts Groups Declining NEA Grants in Light of Rules Restricting D.E.I. Initiatives

Industry News



NEWS BRIEF Nov 21, 2025

### What Happens When Football Great Marshawn Lynch Takes the Houston Symphony Podium



League of American Orchestras:  
Championing the vitality of music and the orchestral experience,  
supporting the orchestra community, and leading change boldly.

## Benefits of League Membership for Orchestra Board Members

Your orchestra is part of a vibrant community of 1,600 organizations and individuals across North America that belong to the League of American Orchestras—the only national organization dedicated to orchestras and their communities. Our diverse membership includes world-renowned orchestras, community groups, summer festivals, student and youth ensembles, conservatories and libraries, businesses serving orchestras, and individuals who love symphonic music. We thank you for being one of the nearly 9,000 orchestra board members across the country.

Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League helps orchestras acknowledge and address the most critical issues head on: leading in times of rapid and profound change, responding to changing audience patterns and tastes, understanding and adapting business models and practices, and deepening relationships with communities. Led by President and CEO Simon Woods with a 26-person staff headquartered in New York City, the League is a \$6.5-million organization funded about 30% by membership dues, including dues your orchestra pays, and 70% by fundraising and earned revenue. The League is grateful to orchestra board members for their service to their orchestra and for their major giving support to the League, and we always insist that their home orchestra remain their top priority.

**The work of the League is both broad and deep:**

**Vision:** A thriving future for orchestras and their communities that celebrates creativity, artistry, and inclusion.

**Mission:** To champion the vitality of music and the orchestral experience, support the orchestra community, and lead change boldly.

Find answers to questions and guidance on almost any aspect of orchestra governance and management on our website, [americanorchestras.org](https://americanorchestras.org), or by contacting:

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# Hosts



## Doug Hagerman

### **Immediate Past Chair, League of American Orchestras**

- Past Chair, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra
- Retired Senior Vice President and General Counsel, Rockwell Automation, Inc.



## Simon Woods

### **President and CEO, League of American Orchestras.**

- Chief Executive, Los Angeles Philharmonic
- President and CEO, Seattle Symphony
- President and CEO, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra
- Chief Executive, Royal Scottish National Orchestra
- Vice President of Artistic Planning and Operations, The Philadelphia Orchestra
- Recording Producer: EMI Classics, London

# Agenda

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1. Introduction to the Orchestra Field | Simon Woods   |
| 2. Governance of Orchestras            | Doug Hagerman |
| 3. Issues and Trends                   | Simon Woods   |
| 4. League Programs and Resources       | Simon Woods   |
| 5. Q & A                               | Doug Hagerman |



# 1. Introduction to the Orchestra Field

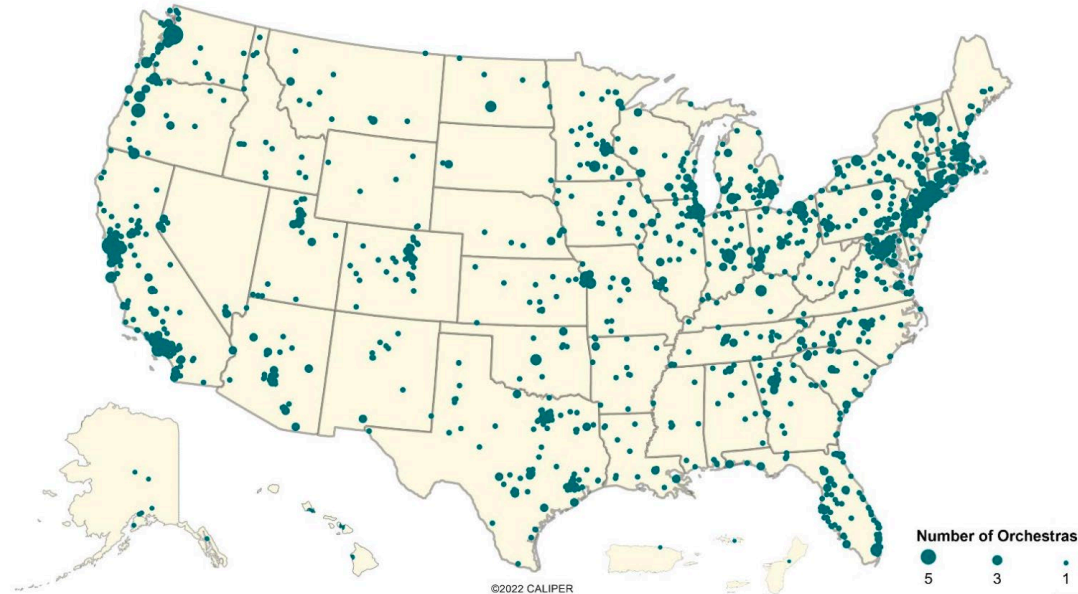
# Orchestras at a Glance

October 2024

League  
of American  
Orchestras

## Orchestras serve communities large and small

There are approximately **2,200** professional, community, and youth orchestras in the U.S. which exist in all 50 states and perform in communities of all sizes. Annual budgets for orchestras range from less than \$30,000 to more than \$100 million; **77% of all orchestras had budgets under \$300,000 in 2022.**<sup>i & ii</sup>



## 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.**

**26,000**

*orchestra performances<sup>iii</sup>*

**28%**

*of performances were  
completely free<sup>iv</sup>*

**22.6 million**

*total orchestra attendance<sup>iii</sup>*

Teal boxes represent data from the 2022 - 2023 Season,  
unless noted otherwise

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

**\$2.5 Billion**

*direct orchestra expenses went  
back into local economies<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 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.

**6,500**

*educational and community  
engagement concerts*

**1.8 million**

*attendance at education and  
community engagement concerts<sup>iv</sup>*

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

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, with 72% 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. Given rising costs and the ongoing constraints on earned revenue throughout the pandemic, charitable giving is an even more critical source of support.

**72%**

*of charitable gifts to orchestras from  
the general public were under \$250<sup>iii</sup>*

# Orchestras of All Shapes and Sizes

- » Everything from full time 52 weeks salaried to per service to volunteer
- » Lines of business: classical/pops/specials/education
- » Venues: own/manage/lease/rent per concert
- » Many (but not all) are members of the American Federation of Musicians
- » Staff size from 1 to 1,000
- » Budgets from \$30,000 to \$200M
- » Urban, suburban, rural, all 50 states
- » Smaller orchestras: all concerts conducted by a music director who is an employee or independent contractor, often living in community. Large orchestras: music director conducts a third or fewer of concerts, usually visits a few times per year.

# League Members



- 482 adult orchestras
- 113 youth orchestras
- 12 international orchestras
- 11 collegiate
- 1,117 individuals
- 127 business partners
- 116 institutions

(as of June 30, 2025)

# Budget Categories

Group Number	Operating Expenses
Group 1	> \$20,000,000
Group 2	> \$7,000,000
Group 3	> \$3,500,000
Group 4	> \$2,200,000
Group 5	> \$1,100,000
Group 6	> \$700,000
Group 7	> \$225,000
Group 8	< \$224,999

# Number of Member Orchestras

Group 1  
**32**

Group 2  
**26**

Groups 3, 4  
**70**

Groups 5,6  
**118**

Groups 7,8  
**238**



## 2. The Governance of Orchestras

# Ten Unique Things About Orchestra Nonprofit Board Governance

1. Three-headed leadership model
2. Variations in reporting lines for the three leaders
3. Orchestra musician representatives on board and committees
4. Some unique committees – Community Engagement; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; Artistic
5. Lack of clarity of board role in artistic matters
6. Difficult business model with widespread structural deficits, dependency on heroic philanthropy, and (often) undercapitalization
7. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as an imperative for our field
8. Combatting perceived elitism/narrow value
9. Unique processes for selecting CEO and Music Director, influenced by Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) if have one
10. Need for constructive relationships with musicians: involve them in governance

# Background

## » Constituencies of an orchestra

- Musicians
- Staff
- Board
- Volunteers
- Donors
- Audience
- Community
- Students

## » Sources of governance authority: state statutes and by-laws

# Orchestra Leadership Model

- » CEO reports to the Board Chair
- » Music Director (MD) sometimes reports to Board Chair, sometimes to CEO
- » Board Chair doesn't have sole power to hire and fire CEO or MD
- » Musicians and others almost always involved in CEO selection and MD selection
- » CEO and MD share leadership and must adopt a collaborative relationship
- » Job Descriptions: CEO and MD — evolving roles
- » Strong relationship between CEO and Board Chair is essential: Thought partners
- » Board should represent the community and take an external vantage point

# What Does a Board Do?

- » Act as representatives of the public to maintain:
  - The mission, vision, and values of the organization
  - The integrity of the organization
- » The Board's purpose is to take community investment and translate it into public value

## Board

- » Oversight: Set metrics and accountability processes
- » Make policies
- » Provide input to and approve strategy
- » Evaluate and give feedback
- » Collaborate with CEO and ask strategic questions

## Staff

- » Management: Plan, organize, execute, direct
- » Implement policies
- » Plan and budget to execute strategy
- » Report progress and outcomes
- » Collaborate with board and keep them informed

## Board 's Collective Responsibilities

- » Shape and clarify values, vision, and mission
- » Set strategic direction and ensure effective planning
- » Select, evaluate, and support the chief executive and music director
- » Monitor performance and impact of programs and services
- » Ensure adequate financial resources – networking and fundraising
- » Protect assets and provide financial oversight
- » Build and sustain a competent board
- » Ensure legal and ethical integrity
- » Enhance the organization's public standing

## Board Members ' Individual Responsibilities

- » Understand and support the mission
- » Follow trends and developments affecting orchestras
- » Participate in development activities: Be an ambassador, advocate, asker
- » Make a personally significant annual gift
- » Prepare for and participate in board meetings, committees, and other activities
- » Review financial statements and budgets
- » Act knowledgeably and prudently when making recommendations about how funds should be spent
- » Respect abilities of chief executive and music director; assist when asked
- » Identify and cultivate potential board members; mentor new members
- » Be an advocate for the organization

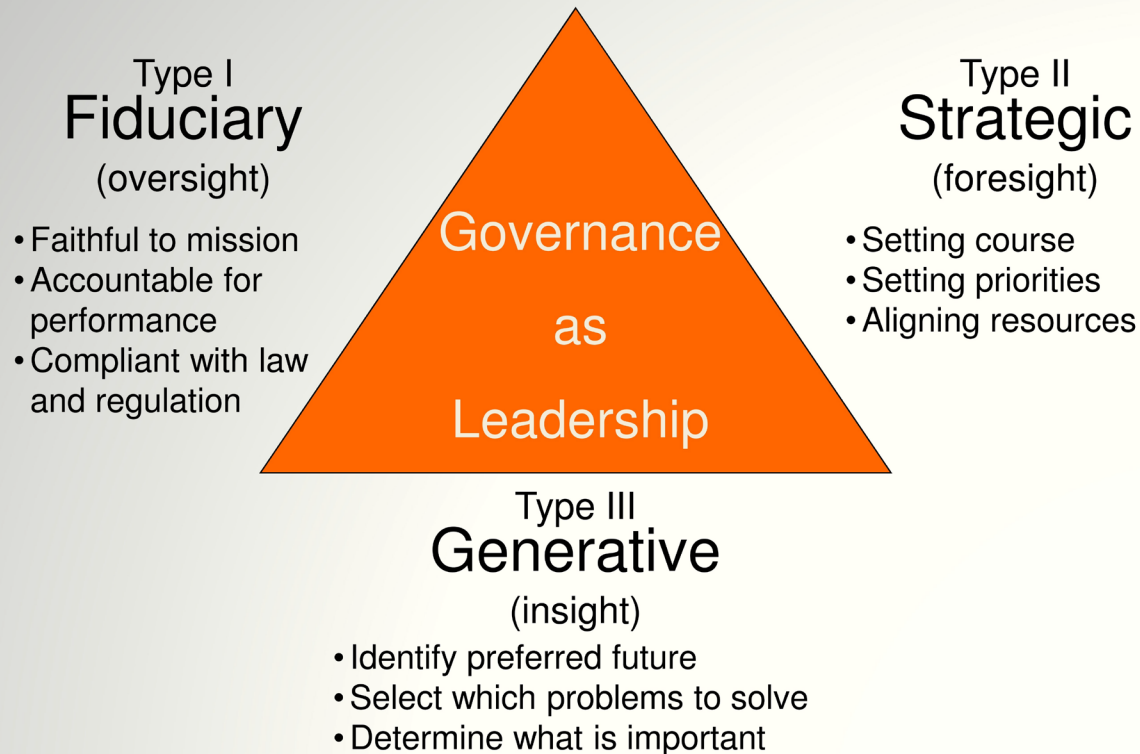
## Considerations in Building a Board

- » Cultivation and recruitment of candidates
  - Where do we look?
  - Diversity of all types
  - What we are looking for: passion for the mission / love of the music; familiarity with non-profit governance; belief in community engagement and other values; willingness to advocate for the orchestra and participate in fundraising
- » Nomination by Governance Committee
  - Set explicit expectations with candidates
- » Election by the board –become “directors” under state law and by-laws
- » Terms
- » Onboarding
- » Making resources available – online collaboration tools



# *Governance as Leadership*

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## Making the Case for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion In Orchestras:

A Guide from the League of  
American Orchestras

### Introduction

"Diversity is not our problem, it's our promise. It's our promise because it leads to unparalleled heights of creativity, expression, and excellence. It's our promise because it leads to higher performing and more sustainable institutions. And it's our promise because it allows us to live by our democratic ideals of fairness and equality."

The Honorable Elijah Cummings, speaking at the League of American Orchestras 2016 National Conference

This guide is intended to help the orchestra field take action to become more inclusive and welcoming of all people and all differences. It is offered amid America's current reckoning with 400 years of oppression against Black people, underscored by the recent police killings and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and Brown Americans. It follows the League's [Statement on Racial Discrimination](#) issued in August 2020. The League will offer further resources to support orchestras on their journeys toward antiracism and equity, including the upcoming re-launch of the EDI Resource Center.

Orchestras have a long history of discrimination<sup>1</sup>, and data on their recent past reveals no change in representation of Black musicians in orchestras for 25 years, hovering at 1.8 percent.<sup>2</sup> Board and staff representation is similarly static and well below that of nonprofit peers. This is despite various programs intended to increase onstage racial representation<sup>3</sup> and the oft-espoused desire of orchestras to reflect their communities. Today, a continuation of the status quo poses a serious threat to orchestras, as stakeholders demand that nonprofits supported by federal tax policy fully reflect their communities.

## Why does equity, diversity, and inclusion matter to orchestras?

- » **Enriching to the musical performances** that are at the heart of the orchestral experience
- » Essential to the **long-term sustainability** of orchestras in the context of the changing demographics of the country
- » Vital in **attracting and retaining talent**
- » Central to a **culture of innovation and collaboration**
- » Imperative **for authentic relationships with communities**

## 3. Issues and Trends

# Audiences

- » In the 2024-25 season **orchestras continued to outperform the wider performing arts sector**, with total ticket sales up 6% since the 2022-23 season, and total revenue up 23%.
- » Orchestras continued to attract **new ticket-buyers**, with the total number of customer households growing by 14% between 2022-23 and 2024-25.
- » **Single-ticket sales** also continued to grow this season, with sales rising 9% in volume and 27% in revenue.
- » **Subscription and membership sales** strengthened during the same time period, with ticket volume increasing 4% and revenue rising 11%.

# Fundraising

- » The long-term trend toward a broadening national base of support for orchestras continued, with the **number of individual gifts rising 10%** between the 2022–23 and 2024–25 seasons.
- » Revenue from these **gifts grew by 6% but was tempered by a 4% decline in average gift size**, as the number of gifts from older, wealthier patrons declined.
- » While orchestras experienced more modest growth in individual giving during the period 2022-23 and 2024-25 than before the pandemic, this **upward trend remained notably stronger than the 9% decline in individual giving revenue** seen across the broader performing arts sector.

# Finances

High-level financial performance indicators from FY24 Orchestra Statistical Report (165 orchestras):

<b>+7.1%</b>	Average Change in Net Assets
<b>4.7%</b>	Average Endowment Draw
<b>+10.2%</b>	Average Return on Investments
<b>26</b>	Average Weeks Expense in Liquidity
<b>34%</b>	Subscription Sales: Average % of Performance Revenue
<b>55%</b>	Single/Group Ticket Sales: Average % of Performance Revenue
<b>4%</b>	Tour Revenue: Average % of Performance Revenue
<b>7%</b>	Other Performance Revenue: Average % of Performance Revenue
<b>\$0.11</b>	Average Cost of Fundraising per Dollar Raised (including staff)
<b>\$0.48</b>	Average Cost of Sale per Dollar of Tickets Purchased (including staff)
<b>\$32</b>	Average Performance Revenue Per Attendee

# Field Demographic Snapshot

## Programming

- Dramatic increase in performances of **music by women and composers of color**. In 2023-24, women and composers of color accounted for **23%** of U.S. orchestras' programming, up from just **5%** in the 2015-16 season
- Proportion of works by **living composers grew from 12%** in 2015-16 to **23%** in 2023-24
- Occurred across **all orchestra budget groups and all regions**

## Staff and Board

- **Staff members** are the most diverse areas of orchestras, but not in top positions
- **Executive Directors** are roughly 50/50 men to women, but men dominate in larger budget orchestras
- **Board diversity** has improved significantly in last decade, and 1 in 6 now identify as people of color
- But **boards** are still less racially diverse than nonprofit organizations in general, and women are still under-represented

## Artists

- Significant increases in **women conductors** and **conductors of color** in last decade
- But most **music directors** are still white, and only 1 in 9 music directors are women
- Approximate gender parity among **musicians**, but again men dominate in larger budget orchestras
- Increase in Asian and Asian-American **musicians**, but Black and Latino representation has barely moved in last 20 years

## Key Themes in the Field

- » Relevance: building a broader audience base, broadening demographics, building deeper community connections
- » Programming, creativity, and new forms of presentation
- » Financial and organizational sustainability
- » Organizational culture and alignment
- » Youth development and participation
- » Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- » Tension between past and future, tradition and adaption
- » Leadership development



## 4. League Programs and Resources

# About the League

- » The American Symphony Orchestra League was founded in 1942, with the first national conference occurring that same year.
- » Later relocated from Washington D.C. to New York, and rebranded as League of American Orchestras
- » 26 full time staff, plus contractors – writers, researchers, consultants, facilitators, etc
- » HQ is in New York, but the organization is largely virtual with staff in New York, Boston, Rochester, Detroit, Chicago, Grand Rapids, Milwaukee, Austin, Houston, Washington DC
- » ~\$7M annual budget. Income roughly divides in three: membership dues, earned revenue, fundraised

# Vision and Mission

## Vision

A thriving future for orchestras and their communities that celebrates creativity, artistry, and inclusion

## Mission

To champion the vitality of music and the orchestral experience, support the orchestra community, and lead change boldly

# League Board

- » National board – all major regions of country represented
- » 54 directors
- » Largest sub-group within League board is board members of orchestras
- » Others from across music business, including musicians, conductors, soloists, staff, composers, educators
- » Field representation: ex-officio members represent CEO Groups 1, 2, 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, Youth Orchestras, and Volunteer Council

# Major Programs

League  
of American Orchestras

## In Person

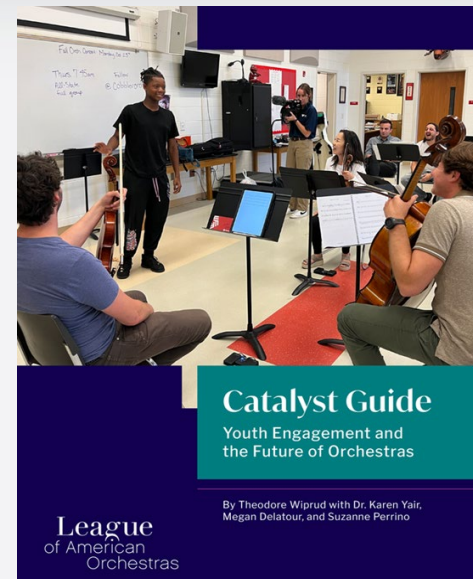
- National Conference
- Midwinter Managers Meeting
- Seminars/Webinars
- Essentials of Orchestra Management
- Personnel Management Intensive
- Toulmin Women Composers Program
- Anne Parsons Leadership Program
- Inclusive Stages



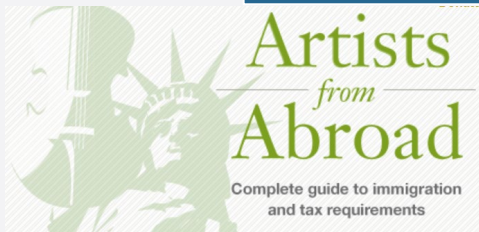
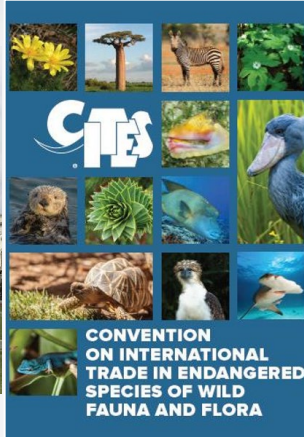
# Major Programs

## Publications

- Knowledge Center
- Noteboom Governance Center
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource Center
- Finance Resource Center
- Orchestra Statistical Report
- Demographic Report
- Salary & Benefits Survey
- Research Reports
- Case Studies

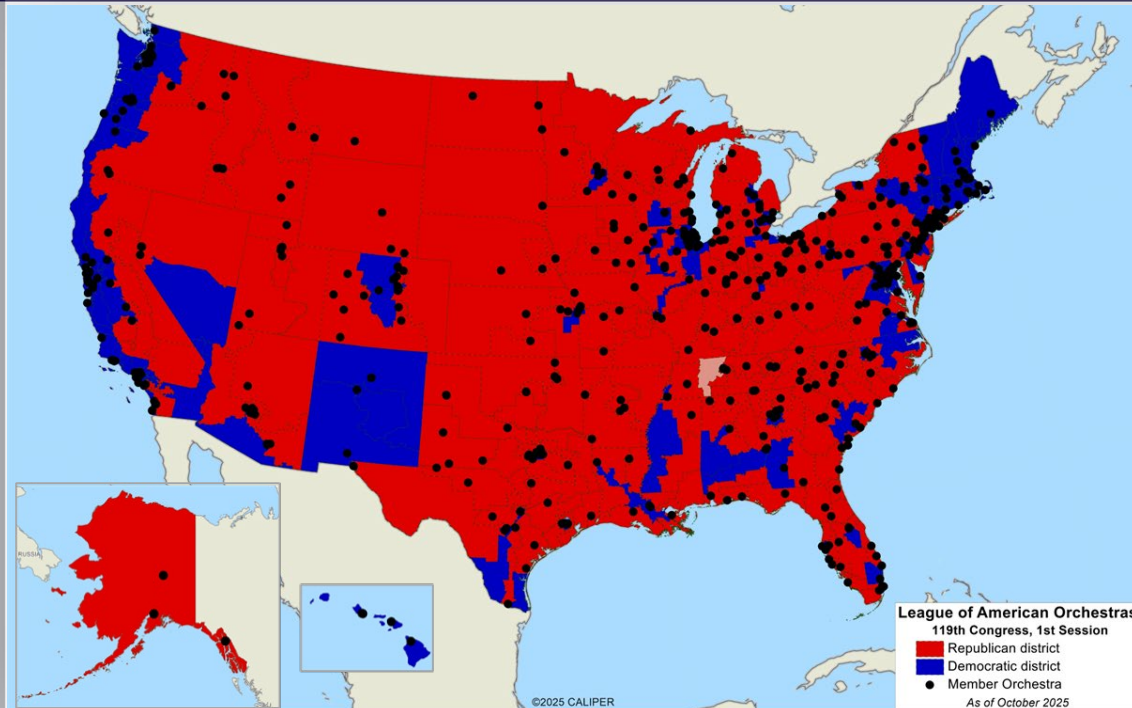


# Advocacy



- **League plays leadership role in arts advocacy**
- **Advocacy:** White House, Administration, Congress, and Nonprofit Sector
- **Assistance to orchestras:** Executive Order compliance, Visa Support and [www.artistsfromabroad.org](http://www.artistsfromabroad.org), Travel with Musical Instruments, and Charitable Giving Trends
- **Supporting orchestras' advocacy in their communities:** Music Education Advocacy Tools, Public Value Toolkit, *Playing Your Part* Guide

## Member Orchestras by Congressional District – 119th Congress (2025)



The League represents orchestras in 304 out of 435 Congressional districts, plus D.C., and in every state.

**Together, we reach 100% of the Senate and 70% of the U.S. House of Representatives!**

And with our members evenly represented by both parties, continued bipartisan support for issues that impact orchestras remains critical.  
(As of October 2025)



# Resources for Navigating the Changing Landscape

Updated November 18, 2025

Recent shifts in the policy environment include numerous executive orders and corresponding court action on diversity, equity, inclusion, and gender identity. Given the uniqueness of individual orchestra programs as well as state and local nuances, the League is not able to offer direct legal guidance. Instead, we recommend that orchestras engage their boards—and potentially local legal counsel—to help them uphold their values and advance their missions in the emerging compliance environment.

The following recent resources can help inform next steps. The League will continue to monitor developments and update this list over time.

## Overviews of Federal Actions



*Within the first month of the new Administration, 75 executive orders have been signed, many having a cross-cutting impact on federal agencies, funding, and compliance requirements for the arts and nonprofit sectors.*

**General FAQs on Executive Orders** from the National Council of Nonprofits highlights the most critical and urgent questions for the non-profit sector.

**Executive Orders Affecting Charitable Nonprofits** is a comprehensive Executive Order Tracker, regularly updated to reflect related court action.

**DEI Initiatives: Know How to Mitigate Risk** is a February 14 *NonProfit Times* article on how to assess and respond to potentially adverse legal and regulatory consequences of the executive orders, while maintaining progress towards nonprofit missions.

**League Overview: National Endowment for the Arts Grants** summarizes the latest changes to NEA grantmaking in response to the orders, and offers key considerations for

## IN THIS SECTION

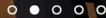
[Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource Center](#) →

[Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Data Hub](#) →

## Catalyst Guide: The Power of Inclusion

Discover how an orchestra's staff and musician culture can be the cornerstone of its success.

EXPLORE THE GUIDE



# Catalyst Guide: Power of Inclusion

Discover how an orchestra's staff culture can be the cornerstone of

EXPLORE THE GUIDE

Find the resources and knowledge you need to strengthen your organization, lead effectively, and advance your career.

## Overview

## Events & Webinars

## Learning & Leadership Programs

## Artistic Programs

## Grant Programs

## Resources, Data & Research

## Symphony

## TOPICS

Advocacy

Artistic Planning

Audience Engagement

Climate Change

COVID-19

Cultural Exchange

Development & Fundraising

Disaster Relief & Preparedness

Education & Community Engagement

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Executive Leadership & Management

Finance

Governance

Health & Wellness

Human Resources

International Artists/Visas

Marketing & Communications

Music Distribution and Licensing

Operations

Repertoire & Commissions

Travel with Instruments

Youth Orchestras

## 5. Q and A