League of American Orchestras

Advancing the Orchestral Experience for All

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: An Evolving Strategic Framework

January 18, 2019

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the League of American Orchestras launched an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) planning process to guide and focus its work. It began with extensive listening and learning directly from orchestra staff, boards, and musicians about the state of EDI conversations and efforts in their home orchestras as well as their expectations of the League. This phase of planning involved data collection through stakeholder interviews, facilitated focus groups, and a field-wide survey.

A total of 22 focus groups/interviews involving 145 key stakeholders were conducted between January and May 2018. In addition, a field-wide survey was conducted in June and July, 2018 that received 194 responses, complementing the data from the stakeholder interviews. Combining the stakeholder interviews with the surveys allowed themes emerging from the stakeholder interviews to be tested on a larger scale.

The EDI Committee of the League Board then processed the input, and recommended a vision statement, values, goals, and strategies for its EDI work. The full Board of the League provided further input and endorsed the plan as an evolving strategic framework at its meeting on October 25, 2018. The framework is expected to evolve as the League and its membership engage with this work and continue learning.

Defining Our Terms

What does the League mean by equity, diversity, and inclusion? And what are the meanings of some of the other terms that appeared frequently in this planning process, such as "oppression" and "tokenism"? Here is a brief glossary of terminology used throughout the listening, learning, and planning process that led to this document:

> **Equity:** Improving equity is to promote justice, impartiality, and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the underlying or root causes of outcome disparities within our society (how and where power and resources live).

Diversity: The demographic mix of a specific collection of people, taking into account elements of human difference including:

- Age
- Differing abilities
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Gender identity and expression
- Geographic location
- Marital and family status
- National origin and immigration status
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Socio-economic status/economic background

Inclusion: Refers to the degree to which individuals from a wide range of backgrounds are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes within an organization or group. While a truly "inclusive" group is necessarily diverse, a "diverse" group may or may not be "inclusive."

Tokenism: The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality.

Oppression: Any attitude, action, or institutional structure that subordinates a person because of their membership in a targeted group.

Bias: A conscious or unconscious preference that inhibits a person's capacity for impartial judgment.

Discrimination: Unfair or unequal treatment of an individual (or group) based on certain characteristics of identity.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Vision
Orchestras attain unparalleled heights of artistry and celebrate broad-based audience and community engagement, having understood, embraced, and acted upon principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The League's authentic practices are a model for orchestras and its programs are fully deployed in support of orchestras' progress in EDI.

Values
We believe that a commitment to EDI is:

- *Foundational to upholding the principles of equality and fairness inherent in American democracy.*
- *Imperative for meaningful, authentic, and relevant relationships with audiences and communities.*
- *Fundamental for creating cultures where creativity flourishes and all staff, musicians, and boards are supported in bringing their full identities into their orchestras.*
- *Necessary for the innovation that orchestras must continually pursue to adapt to their changing environments and to be fiscally secure and artistically vibrant.*
- *Vital in attracting and retaining the highest levels of talent to our organizations.*
- *Essential to the long-term vibrancy of orchestral performance and the viability of the institutions that support it.*

We approach this work with:

Humility, acknowledging that the answers can be elusive and uncomfortable, but entering into the work of EDI with openness, objectivity, and deep institutional commitment.

Transparency, as the bedrock of learning, defined by clear communication across stakeholders and frankness about successes and challenges in becoming equitable institutions.

Authenticity, realizing that EDI is a sustained practice that rejects tokenism and instead embeds equity across the institution.

*Purpose and action***,** taking meaningful, sustainable action, recognizing that orchestras have previously expressed commitments to diversity while achieving little sustainable progress around diversity and equity and that people of underrepresented and marginalized identities in orchestra settings experience the disadvantages of the status quo daily.

Goals
The interview and survey process allowed the League to understand the greatest obstacles and challenges as articulated by field stakeholders. These goals stem directly from common interview themes and represent aspirations the League is most uniquely positioned to address:

Goal #1: Build Common Understanding and Agreement as to Why EDI Is Important
Name the many reasons why EDI work is core to success in orchestras, building understanding as the foundational tool in helping orchestras speak with their own internal stakeholders regarding the "why." Explicitly link EDI with artistic growth, refuting the bias within the common statement that EDI is correlated with compromise or loss of artistic quality and bringing this often-unspoken concern forward publicly in order to break down a common barrier to EDI progress in the field.

Goal #2: Support Practices and Culture that Advance EDI Progress
Acknowledge the elements of orchestra tradition and ongoing practice that can perpetuate the bias and oppression cited frequently by orchestra stakeholders during interviews and via the survey and help orchestras develop inclusive and equitable practices.

Strategies
To advance these goals, and as encouraged by its stakeholders, the League has developed the following strategies:

Goal #1: Build Common Understanding and Agreement as to Why EDI Is Important

1. **Develop an EDI framework** that orchestras can use to develop or clarify their understanding of the meaning of equity, diversity, and inclusion and work toward alignment among their constituents. The framework would be a written document offering context, definitions, and an articulation of the various cases for EDI. Like a message framework, it would not be intended as a boilerplate for adoption, but rather a foundation and springboard for dialogue among constituents within individual orchestras, inspiring reflection, shared understanding, and authentic action. This framework would be created by a working group of individuals in and outside the orchestra field and led by a facilitator with content expertise.

2. **Define a field-wide vision and associated indicators of success**. Articulate a vision for EDI success that inspires reflection and action and offers sample benchmarks of progress, also recognizing that each orchestra enters this work at its own unique point of development.

3. **Elevate underrepresented voices in the field and center EDI as a topic** through print and online communication of the industry's work around EDI, acknowledging the painful history of discrimination within the orchestra field while also illustrating the field's commitment to EDI in a concrete and positive way.

Goal #2: Support Practices and Culture that Advance EDI Progress

1. **Convene and facilitate ongoing conversations** that connect and support peers working to advance EDI activity in their orchestras, addressing the processes and practices that inhibit progress and supporting emerging new practices. Create online forums, peer calls, national convenings, and affinity groups. Connect areas of functional expertise while also breaking down existing communication silos. Engage music directors, artistic administrators, and artist managers more deeply in national EDI discussions.

2. **Grow and curate a robust set of resources** that support orchestras' EDI work, including artist and repertoire databases, guides to ALAANA (Asian, Latinx, African, Arab, and Native American) and women composers and performers, case studies, staff and board development resources, etc. A great deal of material already exists; the League's role is to help orchestras by aggregating, filtering, and disseminating information through its online EDI Resource Center.

3. **Help orchestras acquire the expertise necessary to advance their EDI objectives.** Through grants to individual orchestras to retain EDI experts**,** help build internal capacity to advance understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion and foster emerging new practices. Through this effort, support internal orchestra culture work around EDI, such as capacity building, planning and alignment, improving competencies, and measuring progress.

4. **Model best practices within the League.** Consistently practice decision-making through an EDI lens. Create and execute an internal plan for EDI action (which could include the articulation of an ongoing EDI learning and development strategy, examination of board and staff recruitment and retention practices, and consideration of vendors, suppliers, and contractors, among other areas of focus).

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS

- **Orchestras develop greater understanding of the nuance and complexity of EDI**, e.g., recognizing the unique dynamics of race and ethnicity in orchestras and acknowledging that they are two of many intersectional characteristics of personal identity.
- **Orchestra boards, staffs, and musicians are better aligned in their understanding of and commitment to EDI as a central organizational value.**
- **EDI principles are modeled holistically across the actions of orchestras.**
- **Orchestra programming and engagement with the community are built around an authentic, ongoing commitment to EDI.**
- **Internal organizational structures such as staff recruitment and retention, auditioning, and board development and retention incorporate best practices in EDI.**
- **Orchestras become more demographically diverse—on stage, on staff, and in the board room.**
- **Orchestras build consistent and sustainable space and resources for thinking, learning, and action around EDI.**