

The Importance of Fundraising: Securing the Future of the Lynchburg Symphony Orchestra

Symphony orchestras are a favorite form of cultural exposure, entertainment and music education for millions of Americans. The ability for audiences to experience live performances is the result of many factors, including financial resources. According to a study published in 2016 by the League of American Orchestras, 43-percent of income of its member orchestras was derived from various forms of contributions. No matter whether the ensemble is from a large or small city, a common characteristic is that ticket sales alone do not entirely fund an orchestra.

The Lynchburg Symphony Orchestra is similar to other music organizations when it comes to financial needs. "The LSO is grateful for its team of volunteers who share so much of their time and talent," says Erika Mork, the LSO's executive director. "At the same time, we still have costs of operation." Those include administrative expenses, costs of purchasing or renting music, and maintenance of instruments.

One means of funding is through different types of grants. "We seek grants from foundations, corporations, service organizations and government agencies," says Mork. "For example, The Greater Lynchburg Community Foundation has been a valuable source of funds for our Musicians in the Schools program, which exposes students to symphonic music and different types of instruments."

The LSO is also the recipient of a grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts. Mork says applying for that grant is a big project, because of the robust application requirements. "Organizations must meet standards for artistic excellence, organizational capacity, financial management, audience development, and community outreach," says Mork. Applicants for the grant must show they are a well-run arts organization in the Commonwealth, worthy of receiving state funding. "We are responsible to the people of Virginia to be a high-quality organization that brings value to our community."

Grants also differ according to how the funds may be used by an organization. While some grants are restricted to specific purposes, others provide general operating support. "Providing funding for general operations is a wonderful gift to an organization because it allows the organization to spend the dollars wherever they are needed most," Mork says. "That involves a lot of trust by the funding entity, and we work to be good stewards of those resources."

Applying for grants is a detailed process that starts with understanding the needs of the organization, and then matching those needs with a potential funder's interests. "It takes quality research on funders to ensure we meet their guidelines, such as geographic or budget limitations," says Mork. "It's

essential to find the right fit between the organization and funder." She says applications typically require organizational information such as history and mission, summaries of activities and programs, future goals and plans, and methods of evaluation.

Mork says there often are opportunities for members of a community to support the LSO through their place of employment. "Some companies will provide mini-grants to match what their employees give," Mork notes. "Individuals should ask their employer if they can donate with this in mind." She adds that, in other cases, companies will donate if their employees volunteer for an organization like the LSO.

"Philanthropy and public support, including grants, are incredibly important to the LSO," Mork says. She says the LSO, in return, offers many benefits to the area. "Arts and culture make people want to stay, work and live here," Mork says. "There is also an economic benefit to having a thriving arts community."

Grants are essential to the future health of the LSO, but Mork says it goes beyond just the funds. "It's all about relationship building and people helping to get things done," she notes. "It takes all kinds of support, from individual gifts to grants and business advertising to make the work of the LSO happen."