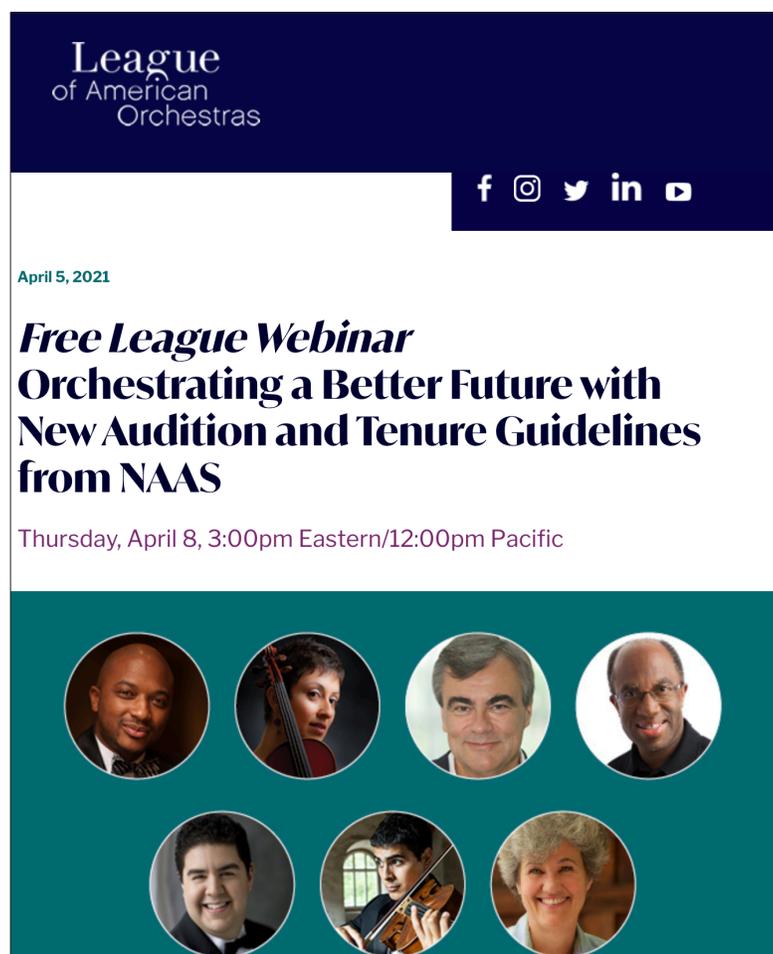


# Orchestrating a Better Future

Few activities are as central to orchestras as auditions for musicians. “Blind” auditions, in which musicians perform behind a screen to shield their identity, were instituted in the 1970s to redress the longstanding exclusion of people of color and women from orchestras. While blind auditions were successful in some regards, particularly in increasing the proportion of women musicians at orchestras, the percentage of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) musicians has not risen significantly over time. Earlier this year, the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS), a collaboration of the League of American Orchestras, the Sphinx Organization, and the New World Symphony, recommended new audition and tenure guidelines to address the inequity of processes for people of color to gain permanent employment in American orchestras. The guidelines suggest new ways to approach the audition process to create more diverse, equitable American orchestras; NAAS acknowledges that any changes to current practice suggested in these guidelines are subject to collective bargaining.

Here are new Audition and Tenure Guidelines as issued by the National Alliance for Audition Support.



League of American Orchestras

April 5, 2021

**Free League Webinar**  
**Orchestrating a Better Future with**  
**New Audition and Tenure Guidelines**  
**from NAAS**

Thursday, April 8, 3:00pm Eastern/12:00pm Pacific

On April 8, the League of American Orchestras presented *Orchestrating a Better Future with New Audition and Tenure Guidelines from NAAS*, a webinar exploring the guidelines from the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS), a collaboration of the League of American Orchestras, The Sphinx Organization, and the New World Symphony. The webinar is available on demand at <http://bit.ly/orchestratingabetterfuture>.

## NAAS-Recommended Audition and Tenure Guidelines

The processes for people of color to gain permanent employment in our American orchestras are not equitable. Exclusion, harassment, and the lack of access to education, mentorship, and networking opportunities have all impeded their participation in the orchestral field. These discriminatory practices have barricaded the door to our Black and Brown colleagues for the past century.

The exclusion of these musicians has resulted in the loss of their valuable musical and creative contributions, which ultimately diminishes the relevance and impact of the orchestral experience for everyone. Our shared belief in the universal benefit of music for all people is the central tenet of our existence. Our orchestras must find their unique path to greater inclusivity in order to better engage with all their diverse stakeholders.

Despite well-intentioned initiatives over past decades to broaden our racial and ethnic representation, the numbers remain unacceptably low. Aspects of our audition/tenure processes continue to contribute to the legacy of systemic racism that has existed in our country since before the very first orchestra was founded. If we are to arrive at a fair representation of Black and Brown musicians onstage, we need to examine ourselves and our audition/tenure processes.

With the mutual understanding that there is both an immediate need and a desire to attain greater diversity and inclusion at all levels of our orchestral associations, we offer these audition/tenure guidelines in the hope that they will move us closer to the goal of equal representation.

### NAAS Recommended Audition and Tenure Guidelines

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With the mutual understanding that there is both an immediate need and a desire to attain greater diversity and inclusion at all levels of our orchestral associations, we offer these audition/tenure guidelines in the hope that they will move us closer to the goal of equal representation.

#### The following elemental principles run through both the audition and tenure processes:

1. A shared understanding between board members, music directors, administration and musicians that our orchestras should reflect the racial makeup of the communities they serve and should in good faith pursue that goal. Orchestras ought to assess themselves and their communities to determine their representative needs.

Read and download the *New Audition and Tenure Guidelines* from NAAS at <http://bit.ly/NAASguidelines>.

The following elemental principles run through both the audition and tenure processes:

1. A shared understanding between board members, music directors, administration, and musicians that our orchestras should reflect the racial makeup of the communities they serve and should in good faith pursue that goal. Orchestras ought to assess themselves and their communities to determine their representative needs.
2. Training in anti-racism, implicit bias, and group communication skills is imperative at all levels of the organization, particularly for those individuals directly involved in the auditions and tenure review of new musicians.
3. Setting concrete/time-bound benchmarks toward reaching the target goal of inclusivity are strongly recommended. E.g.: Orchestras would explore, where necessary negotiate, and then implement pathways to increased diversity within the first season of adoption.

### Audition Guidelines

With the understanding that there is no “one size fits all” archetype for audition procedures, we offer up these recommendations for discussion and exploration. Our hope is that these ideas will inspire an evolving understanding of the audition process as it now stands and how it might be more equitably applied in the future. All parties must recognize that these concepts fall within the purview of existing collective bargaining agreements and are therefore subject to mandatory bargaining.

1. Consider granting all applicants a live audition—no screening of resumes.
2. Recruit applicants of color, Black, and Latinx, for a higher degree of representation within the audition

pool. The NAAS Musician Database lists qualified musician candidates. In addition, Sphinx Orchestral Partners Auditions (SOPA) is an audition preview opportunity for NAAS partner orchestras to hear live auditions of potential candidates.

3. Fully screened auditions from first through last rounds.
4. In cases of automatic advancement or invitation to later rounds, interrogate the determining criteria. Are there ways to ensure greater diversity? Try to include a percentage of Black and Brown musicians, at least 25%, into those automatically advanced rounds.
5. “No-hire” auditions are an expense and frustration to all parties. Strongly encourage that a decision will be made to hire by the end of that process.
6. Consider if the use of “trial weeks” inappropriately places candidates in the untenable position of having to “fit in” and meet unknown expectations. Information gleaned during trial weeks could be obtained through the audition process or during the probationary period.
7. In addition to musical excellence, a musician’s ability to serve as a cultural ambassador or spokesperson may be of value to orchestras. Where an orchestra’s bargaining partners (musicians/union and management) agree that such additional skills are desirable in new musician hires, the parties will need to develop and agree upon ways of evaluating applicants in addition to the blind audition. A consultant with expertise in equity and diversity may be helpful to the bargaining parties in developing specific methods and processes for extra-musical evaluation, as may the involvement of diverse musicians and community leaders.

### Tenure Review Guidelines

1. Create a process of shared feedback throughout the tenure review that is transparent to the musician candidate, the music director, and relevant musician committee and section members. Constructive and direct feedback should be shared at a minimum of every six months for a two-year tenure process and every two to three months for a one-year process.
2. At the start of the tenure process, a meeting should be scheduled with the tenure candidate, musician committee representatives, and a representative from management to clearly explain the tenure process and the rights of the candidate.
3. In the interest of assisting in a positive outcome, the musician committee, in consultation with the candidate, should identify a musician advocate or ombudsman who can guide the candidate through the tenure process and assist in communication with other musicians and management.
4. The relationship of the candidate, musician committee, and orchestra should be collegial and respectful. Candidates should be encouraged to share their own feedback.

## RESOURCES

Read the New Audition and Tenure Guidelines from NAAS at <http://bit.ly/NAASguidelines>.

On April 8, the League of American Orchestras presented *Orchestrating a Better Future* with New Audition and Tenure Guidelines from NAAS, a webinar exploring the new guidelines from the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS), <https://americanorchestras.org/national-alliance-for-audition-support/>, a collaboration of the League of American Orchestras, The Sphinx Organization, and the New World Symphony. The webinar, free for League members, examined how the NAAS audition and tenure guidelines offer paths forward in eliminating the discriminatory practices that have long impeded people of color in the orchestra field, recognizing that any ideas in the guidelines operate under existing collective bargaining agreements and are subject to mandatory bargaining. Panelists included Andre Dowell, chief of artist engagement, the Sphinx Organization; Afa S. Dworkin, president and artistic director, the Sphinx Organization; John Kieser, executive producer of media, New World Symphony; Michael Morgan, music director, Oakland Symphony; Tito Muñoz, music director, the Phoenix Symphony; Bill Neri, project manager, NAAS; and Meredith Snow, ICSOM chairperson, and violist, Los Angeles Philharmonic. Watch the webinar on demand at <http://bit.ly/orchestratingabetterfuture>. Contact League Member Services at [member@americanorchestras.org](mailto:member@americanorchestras.org) with questions.

Read *Symphony* magazine's Spring 2021 article "Rethinking Blind Auditions," a panel discussion about the audition process among Black musicians, at <https://americanorchestras.org/rethinking-blind-auditions/>.

### NAAS Audition and Tenure Guidelines Committee

The following thought partners were involved in the creation of the document and endorse its message.

#### Administrators

Anna Kuwabara, Executive Director, Albany Symphony

John Kieser, Executive Producer, New World Symphony (Guidelines Committee Co-Chair)

Mark Hanson, Executive Director, San Francisco Symphony

Afa Dworkin, President and Artistic Director, Sphinx Organization

#### Union Officers:

John Michael Smith, President, Regional Orchestra Players Association (ROPA)

Meredith Snow, Chair, International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM) (Guidelines Committee Co-Chair)

John Lofton, Board of Directors, American Federation of Musicians Local 47

#### Music Directors:

Michael Morgan, Oakland Symphony

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#### Musicians:

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Alberto Suarez, Principal Horn, Kansas City Symphony, and Member, NAAS Artist Council

Naomi Bendorf Frisch, Principal Oboe, Illinois Philharmonic, and Attorney, Illinois Advocates LLC

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Shana Bey, Associate Orchestra Personnel Manager, Los Angeles Philharmonic

Matt Oshida, Orchestra Personnel Manager, Modesto Symphony Orchestra

#### Ex Officio:

Andre Dowell, Sphinx Organization

Bill Neri, Sphinx Organization

## Rethinking Blind Auditions

Blind auditions, in which musicians perform behind a screen to shield their identity, were instituted to redress the longstanding exclusion of people of color and women from orchestras. Blind auditions were successful in some regards, but the percentage of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color musicians has not risen significantly over the years. Is it time to rethink blind auditions? Here, Afa Dworkin moderates a discussion in which several Black musicians offer their views on where things stand now, share their lived experience, and suggest new ways to approach the audition process to create more diverse, equitable American orchestras.

Discussion moderated by Afa Dworkin.

Starting in the 1970s, American orchestras implemented "blind auditions," whereby screens concealed musician candidates from the audition committee and promised anonymity. The impetus

belonged to a self-reinforcing network. Musicians' unions were segregated until the federal government ordered the merger of Black and White unions in 1967. Some adjustments were made

In Spring 2021, *Symphony* magazine published "Rethinking Blind Auditions," a panel discussion among Black musicians about the audition process. Read the complete article at <https://americanorchestras.org/rethinking-blind-auditions/>.

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