



INVESTING IN THE HEART OF THE ARTS

The La Crosse Symphony Orchestra (LSO) is a cornerstone of cultural life in our region, offering exceptional performances, advancing arts education, and contributing to La Crosse's economic vitality with record-breaking attendance of more than 6,000 last year. It is unusual for a city the size of La Crosse to have a professional orchestra, and it is a gem that should be nurtured and grown.

The Symphony is more than a stage and a score—it is a gathering place that binds our community together. In the concert hall, families sit side by side with students hearing their first live performance, and seniors who have cherished decades of music in La Crosse. These shared moments transcend generations, creating traditions and memories that last long after the final note fades. Just as the Mississippi River runs through our city, music runs through the spirit of La Crosse, a source of civic pride that reflects who we are and what we value as a community.

LSO provides lifelong musical experiences for people of all ages, with a special emphasis on introducing young people to the power of live symphonic music. Through its partnerships with schools and community organizations, LSO reaches more than 5,000 children and youth each year. A cornerstone of this outreach is the annual Symphony for Youth concert, which welcomes third, fourth, and fifth grade students from both public and private schools to experience classical music in a professional concert setting.

LSO also collaborates with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse, the School District of La Crosse, and the La Crosse Area Youth Symphony Orchestras on Play It Forward—La Crosse, a community-wide instrument drive. Donated instruments are distributed through the Boys & Girls Clubs Fine Arts Music Program, which provides after-school instrumental instruction at club sites in La Crosse and Holmen. These instruments give students who might not otherwise have the means to purchase one or afford private lessons the chance to explore music-making.

Additional programs, such as Scholarships and Angels in the Audience, further break down barriers, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to discover, learn, and be inspired by music.



With an annual budget of \$825,000 and a \$1.5 million endowment, the Symphony relies on ticket sales, sponsorships, fundraisers, and philanthropy to sustain its operations. Beyond numbers, the Symphony helps define La Crosse as a vibrant place to live, work, and raise a family. Communities with rich cultural offerings are more attractive to businesses, new residents, and visitors alike, and a symphony orchestra is a powerful symbol of that vitality. The LSO is proud to be one of the elements that make our region thrive, bringing personal musical enjoyment and experiences that build the community's attractiveness and quality of life.

Ticket sales cover just 30% of concert costs, which is slightly below the national symphony average of 35%. The remaining 70% is funded primarily through sponsorships, compared to the 65% national average. However, due to rising costs of presenting high-quality performances and the increasing unpredictability of sponsorship funding, maintaining this balance grows more challenging each year. Sustaining excellence and expanding community impact will require planning to ensure long-term sustainability. LSO is taking steps now to build a more resilient financial foundation for the future.

At the core of the Symphony are its professional musicians. Rising travel and lodging costs, combined with increased demand for talent across the region, have increased the expense of attracting and retaining top-tier performers.

After careful research, LSO's management team discovered that its musicians were paid drastically less than the industry standard. To remain competitive, LSO is raising compensation for all musicians across the 2024–25 and 2025–26 seasons. The overall rate increase across these two seasons is an 18% pay increase, which brings LSO in line with comparable regional orchestras.

Rising facility costs have had a significant impact on LSO's operations, even more than musician compensation increases. Between the 2024–25 and 2025–26 seasons alone, rental rates are set to rise by an estimated 41%. The following year is expected to bring an additional 28% increase, followed by an estimated 15% increase the year after that. In total, this represents an 84% increase over just three years, a dramatic rise that places more strain on the

Symphony’s operating model than any other factor and underscores the urgency of building a stronger financial foundation. This cost increase is not sustainable under LSO’s current operating model and highlights the urgent need for increased support and long-term planning.

To ensure long-term sustainability, LSO seeks to grow its

endowment by \$3.5 million, raising the total to \$5 million. This expansion will increase the annual draw from \$70,000 to \$250,000, providing reliable funding for musician compensation, keeping the ticket prices reasonable, reducing reliance on unstable revenue sources, and guaranteeing continued endowment growth.

2023 – 2024 Fiscal Year:

Symphony	Revenue	Ticket Sales	Sponsorship %age
La Crosse Symphony	\$635,669	27.5% (2025 30%)	69.3% (now 67%)
Minnesota Symphony	\$45,012,946	20%	78%
Madison Symphony	\$6,040,000	34.8%	64.3%
Fox Valley Symphony	\$687,000	35.3%	65.2%
Dubuque Orchestra	\$6,477,719	6.9%	86.1%

Ideal benchmark: 35% ticket sales, 65% sponsorships

Compared to peer orchestras, LSO relies more heavily on sponsorships and falls short on earned revenue from ticket sales. While orchestras like Madison and Fox Valley, significantly larger programs, maintain more balanced models with higher priced tickets, LSO’s current structure leaves it more vulnerable to funding fluctuations. A stronger endowment will help stabilize the Symphony’s finances and ensure it can meet its commitments while maintaining the ticket prices at the 30 percent rate.

A total \$5 million endowment, an increase of \$3.5 million, will:

- Provide long-term, reliable support for professional musicians.
- Keep ticket prices affordable and concerts accessible to all.

- Reduce dependence on unpredictable sponsorship revenue.
- Expand music education and outreach across the region.
- Strengthen La Crosse’s broader arts and culture ecosystem.

Since 2013, the Symphony’s endowment, managed by Trust Point, has generated \$885,000 in gains, with an average 6.8% annual return, demonstrating strong financial stewardship and readiness for growth.

A campaign readiness study will be conducted on November 6, including confidential interviews, focus groups, and online surveys. No formal solicitations will take place during the study.



Your voice can help shape the Symphony’s future.

For more information on how to provide feedback, contact **Eva Marie Restel**, Executive Director, at exec@lacrossesymphony.org.