

FAQs (DRAFT)

1. What is the Endow the Encore Campaign for La Crosse Symphony Orchestra?

In early 2025, the LSO Board of Directors and Executive Director reviewed its strategic plan and vision for growth and determined that a larger endowment would provide a reliable revenue stream that would allow the organization to expand its programming for general audiences and youth education, ensure musician compensation remains competitive, and contribute to operational support necessary to run the organization.

2. Why is the endowment campaign needed?

Campaigns are a highly effective way to generate energy and enthusiasm around a fundraising goal. They are short and focused, allowing an organization to leverage its board and volunteers to expand its fundraising capacity. While gifts in wills and other estate gifts are the most common way an organization grows its endowment, LSO cannot wait to receive these gifts if it is to grow its impact now. The campaign readiness study demonstrated that there is already a willing number of people ready to pledge that can be paid over time or contribute an outright gift to the endowment should they be asked. In fact, LSO received more than \$500,000 in response to the campaign readiness study alone.

3. Is LSO having trouble meeting its budget?

No. LSO has consistently operated within its budget over the last seven years. However, rising costs for musicians and venue rental across all budget categories are hindering LSO's ability to grow, let alone maintain its current array of concerts and programming. Unless LSO increases its income through philanthropy and sponsorships, it will be forced to scale back the programming the community has come to expect.

4. Why is LSO not spending its current endowment draw?

LSO draws 5% annually from its current endowment. Since 2013, the endowment has generated \$885,000 in gains at an average annual return of 6.8%. This is approximately \$70,000 annually. Earnings in excess of the 5% draw are reinvested in the endowment, providing additional growth and serving as a hedge against inflation.

5. Can LSO increase ticket prices to cover increased costs?

Although people will pay large amounts to attend a sporting event or a popular music concert, that is not the case for attending a live classical music performance, regardless of the musicians' quality and caliber. Based on the operating expenses of putting on a full concert, ticket prices would exceed \$180. This is an unrealistic amount to ask when LSO seeks to keep its music accessible to many in the community. While LSO evaluates its ticket pricing annually and will increase prices when necessary, the result of such significant increase would be a precipitous drop in attendance, wiping out any potential gains from increasing the price.

6. When will the campaign begin, and how long will it last?

Campaign planning started in February of 2026. The intent is to publicly launch the campaign on September 10 and conclude in February 2027 or when the goal is achieved, whichever comes first. Gifts and pledges toward the campaign can be paid over 3 - 5 years.

7. Who is leading or involved in the campaign?

The campaign will be led by co-chairs Chau Nguyen, Kelly Colgan, and David Reedy with the assistance of a Steering Committee comprising board members, community members, and business leaders. As Executive Director, Eva Marie Restel will serve as the staff lead supported by Crescendo Fundraising Professionals. A complete list of community volunteers can be found in the Case Statement or at www.lacrossesympphony.org/campaign.

8. Are LSO Board Members involved with this campaign?

Yes. Every board member is involved in some way in the campaign on one of the five pre-campaign committees to provide input and feedback. Moreover, all Board members have made or pledged a gift to the campaign.

9. How long is the campaign?

The public phase of the campaign will launch on September 10. This phase should end by the end of the year or sooner if the goal is reached. However, LSO will always seek to grow its endowment through both contributions and investment earnings.

10. Why does the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra need a bigger endowment?

Historically, orchestras across the country rely on philanthropy, grants, sponsorships, and endowment draws to deliver high-quality concert performances. LSO is not unlike every other orchestra in the country. This reliance on philanthropy, grants, and sponsorships makes an organization susceptible to unexpected changes in someone's giving behavior or sponsorship plan. By increasing its endowment, LSO will have a more dependable revenue source on which to build its annual budget.

11. How will LSO use the additional funds generated by a larger endowment?

LSO will always rely on annual contributions, grants, and sponsorships as a significant part of its income. A larger endowment will add a stable, consistent stream of income. The projected \$175,000 increase will be allocated to artist compensation (26%), concert offerings (23%), youth education (23%), and operational enhancements (23%).

12. What happens if LSO does not reach the goal?

The campaign readiness study indicates the goal is attainable. In fact, LSO received more than \$500,000 in contributions before the campaign started. In the unlikely event that LSO is unable to reach the \$3.5M goal within the campaign time frame, it will continue to encourage gifts to the endowment within its overall fundraising plan. In the meantime, it may have to scale back on some of its planned programming. On the other hand, if LSO exceeds the goal within the campaign timeframe, it will continue to seek and encourage contributions to the endowment as part of its overall fundraising plan.

13. What are the potential negative consequences of having a larger endowment? Will people stop making annual gifts?

The need for annual operating support will not change. Annual fundraising and sponsorship requests will continue. It is possible that some impact on annual fundraising may be experienced during the campaign. However, LSO will take this into account when planning its annual budget over the next five years.

14. Does the Symphony have a strong history of receiving philanthropic support?

La Crosse and the surrounding community have demonstrated a willingness and dedication to supporting LSO with charitable gifts and sponsorships. LSO also has a history of success in securing grants from both private and corporate foundations.

15. Will people actually support this campaign when there are people in our community who can't afford food or housing?

It is understandable that great needs exist in La Crosse and communities across the country. Each donor will need to determine how they wish to spend their philanthropic dollars to meet the needs of the La Crosse community. The LSO Board believes this goal is also meaningful and necessary to support the community's quality of life.

16. What does a symphony orchestra bring to a community such as La Crosse?

A symphony orchestra strengthens a community by offering accessible live music, fostering connection and creativity, enhancing mental well-being, and encouraging local and young musicians. It becomes a source of civic pride, bringing diverse audiences together. The presence of professional performing arts in a community improves quality of life, builds cultural understanding, enhances community pride, and contributes to lifelong learning.

17. Alexander Platt is a high-caliber conductor who attracts patrons and musicians. What happens if he leaves?

There will always come a time when a conductor, the Executive Director, or musicians will leave. In the case of Alexander Platt, LSO has a contract with Maestro that extends through 2035. However, the unexpected happens every day, should something cause Maestro to leave prior to the end of his contract, LSO has an assistant conductor ready at any moment to take over for Alexander Platt. Additionally, this person would stand in until a new conductor is hired. The LSO Board is prepared to search for another conductor of his caliber.

18. What is the succession planning for the Executive Director?

While LSO is grateful to have someone as competent and devoted as Eva Marie Restel as its Executive Director, at some time, all organizations will experience leadership change. She has indicated a plan to stay in her role for another five to ten years. However, the board already has a plan in place when that time comes or should it come sooner than anticipated. It is critical that LSO has the financial resources to attract someone of equal or greater caliber. A healthy endowment will position LSO to offer a competitive compensation package.

19. Has LSO considered relocating its concerts, given the increased rental costs for the concert venue?

LSO has had an excellent, longstanding, and collaborative relationship with Viterbo University and the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. One of the primary reasons FSPA invested in the Viterbo Performing Arts Center was to create a home for LSO. The venue meets and exceeds LSO's needs, which no other venue

can match. Viterbo University has significantly undercharged LSO rental rates for decades. With budget challenges facing higher education and all nonprofit organizations, it was no longer fiscally wise for Viterbo to keep rental rates artificially low. They were considerate of LSO's budget and provided ample time to allow LSO to prepare its budgets accordingly.

20. I already have LSO in my estate plan. Does that count toward the campaign goal?

Thank you for your generosity through a legacy gift! Planned gifts are an essential part of LSO's long-term fundraising initiatives. However, to provide the most immediate impact for LSO, the campaign will only count current gifts toward the \$3.5M goal. If you are considering making an irrevocable gift, please contact Eva Marie Restel.

21. How do I give a gift to the campaign?

Donors can support the campaign by making a pledge or an outright gift. Both can be paid using cash and cash equivalents, stock, mutual funds, IRA Qualified Charitable Distributions, and more. Details can be found in the case statement, online at www.lacrossesympphony.org/campaign, or by contacting Eva Marie Restel.

22. Will my modest gift make a difference?

Gifts of any size are encouraged and critical to the success of this campaign. Options to make a pledge payable over time or sign up for a monthly recurring contribution may make it easier to increase your impact.

23. Are there any tax benefits for contributing if I no longer itemize my tax deductions when filing?

Yes! New in 2026 is a provision allowing non-itemizers to deduct contributions to public charities of up to \$1,000 per filer. That means a married couple filing jointly can deduct up to \$2,000. LSO is a registered 501(c)(3) charity and can receive such contributions provided they are cash or cash equivalents (check, debit, EFT).

There are also tax incentives when making a gift with a highly appreciated asset, such as stocks or mutual funds. By donating stock or other appreciated assets directly to LSO, you avoid paying any capital gains due. Please contact Eva Marie Restel for instructions.

For individuals with an IRA of 701/2 or better, there is the option to make a Qualified Charitable Contribution (QCD) of up to \$111,000 from their IRA. Those who are age 73 and better may count their QCD as part of their Required Minimum Distribution (RMD). The advantage of the QCD is that when it is directed to LSO, it does not impact the IRA owner's income.

It is always best to contact your professional tax advisor when considering tax advantages for charitable giving.