



2030

STRATEGIC PLAN

HOUSTON \neq SYMPHONY

SUMMARY

The Houston Symphony last embarked on strategic planning in 2014, which culminated in the Vision 2025 plan. This strategic plan is reaching its natural conclusion, and the Houston Symphony is proud of the accomplishments achieved through the Vision 2025 plan, which set the orchestra on a path toward artistic excellence, investment in top talent, and a modernized performance space.

As we enter our second season with Music Director Juraj Valčuha, we recognize the need to refresh our aspirations for the future and create a new strategic plan for this next stage of growth and development. Over an eight-month period, we engaged more than three dozen members of the Houston Symphony's Board, orchestra, and staff, as well as 100+ symphony constituents, to develop a new strategic plan that will guide our organization toward new goals and continued success.

As we chart our course toward 2030 and beyond, we've created a new vision to represent the Houston Symphony's aspirations and guide our strategic plan. This new vision is centered around the elements that are most important to our organization: a commitment to artistic excellence, our role as a cultural institution in Houston, and ensuring accessibility for all.

VISION:

World-class orchestra and Houston cultural leader, creating extraordinary musical experiences for all.

To better support our new vision, we've updated the Symphony's mission and values. Our mission and values are the foundation of everything we do, and it's critical that they align with our new vision to guide us toward success.

MISSION:

Inspire and engage a large and diverse audience in Houston and beyond through exceptional musical performances, and create enduring impact in our community.

VALUES:

Pursue excellence: We commit to the highest level of artistic and organizational quality.

Achieve organizational sustainability: We responsibly plan for and invest in our future to ensure that we remain an enduring institution.

Cultivate community: We build community by fostering relationships with a spirit of respect and interconnectedness.

Promote inclusion: We celebrate and promote diversity and inclusion in everything we do.

Supporting all of this are four strategic pillars, each with specific action plans and measurable outcomes. These pillars will serve as the blueprint for achieving our vision.

We will **establish the Houston Symphony as a world-class orchestra.**

We will **grow the endowment to transition to an endowment-based business model.**

We will **build the Houston Symphony to have enduring impact**, both through financial sustainability and engagement with our community.

We will **make extraordinary musical experiences available for all** by increasing accessibility and inclusivity in all aspects of our organization.

2030 VISION, MISSION, AND STRATEGIC PILLARS

STRATEGIC VISION & MISSION

VISION:
World-class orchestra and Houston cultural leader, creating extraordinary musical experiences for all

MISSION:
Inspire and engage a large and diverse audience in Houston and beyond through exceptional musical performances, and create enduring impact in our community

STRATEGIC PILLARS

1

Establish the Houston Symphony as a world-class orchestra

2

Grow the endowment to transition to an endowment-enabled business model

3

Build the Houston Symphony to have enduring impact

4

Make extraordinary musical experiences available for all



Each strategic pillar includes several initiatives that we intend to undertake over the next five years. Many of these initiatives will require incremental funding beyond the orchestra’s current budget. Therefore, we will seek additional funding support to execute these programs and enable the Houston Symphony to successfully achieve its vision. We are confident that with the support and commitment of our Board, we will secure the necessary resources as a condition to implement these initiatives and ensure the long-term success of the orchestra.

PILLAR 1:

ESTABLISH THE HOUSTON SYMPHONY AS A WORLD-CLASS ORCHESTRA

The Houston Symphony has made significant strides in achieving new levels of artistic excellence under the visionary leadership of Music Director Juraj Valčuha. As we chart a course for the future, we recognize the importance of fostering continued growth in our artistic endeavors and performance levels. This priority is widely shared among the Symphony's stakeholders, as evidenced by a recent survey in which a significant majority of respondents, including members of the Symphony's Board, musicians, and staff, identified continued artistic excellence and growth as a critical factor in the orchestra's future success.

To establish the Houston Symphony's reputation as a world-class orchestra, we will focus on the following goals and initiatives:

Retain and elevate top talent:

We must ensure we hire the highest caliber musicians through a refined audition process, as well as retain and elevate all our musicians through enriching artistic opportunities. Our analysis of the orchestra roster over the past five years has shown that we are effective in retaining talent compared to peer and top-tier orchestras. We must continue this trajectory going forward. To further elevate the orchestra's performance, we intend to provide more artistic opportunities, including providing chamber music opportunities and expanding the orchestra complement to match top-tier orchestras.

Work with more top guest conductors and guest artists:

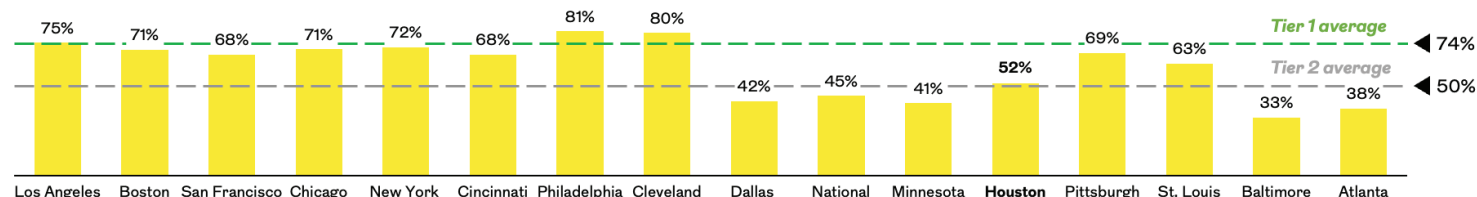
To enhance our musical experiences, we will collaborate with renowned guest conductors and artists across Classical and POPS programming. Our analysis of major U.S. orchestras revealed that top-tier orchestras have a higher percentage of prestigious guest conductors and artists in their season. We will endeavor to increase the number of prestigious guest conductors and soloists coming to the Houston Symphony in order to align with other top-tier U.S. orchestras.



PERCENTAGE OF PRESTIGIOUS GUEST CONDUCTORS AND ARTISTS IN CLASSICAL SEASON

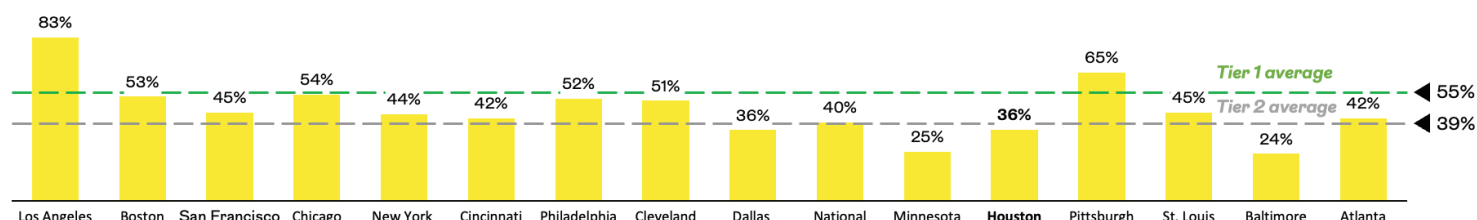
Prestigious Guest Conductors (2018–2023)

% of conductors identified as prestigious out of total guest conductors



Prestigious Guest Artists (2018–2023)

% of artists identified as prestigious out of total guest artists



Note: Prestigious guest conductors/artists are defined as those who have performed at a tier one orchestra more than once during the five-year measurement period. Excludes missing data from 2018–19 (Philadelphia, Atlanta, Cincinnati), 2020–21 (Cincinnati), and 2021–22 (Atlanta) seasons.

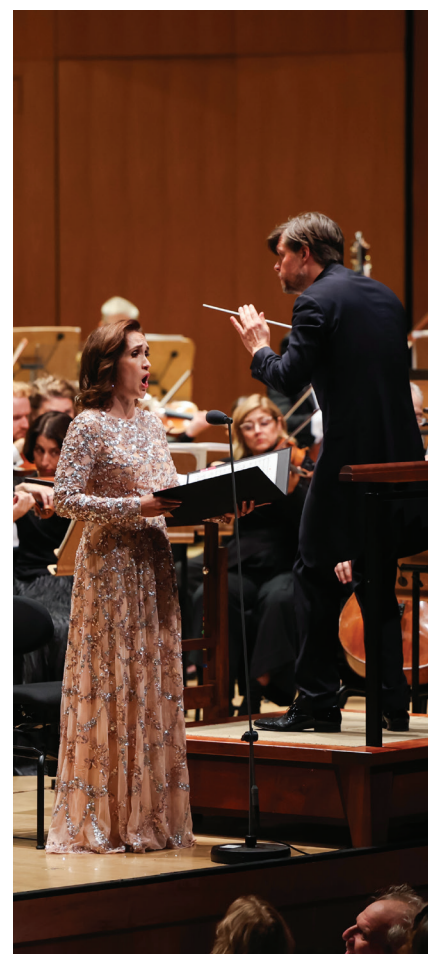
Source: Oliver Wyman analysis, orchestra press releases/season announcements

Regularly engage in touring and recording projects:

To establish ourselves as a world-class orchestra, we need to increase our visibility beyond Houston through touring and recording. A comparison with other major U.S. orchestras shows that most orchestras have returned to some touring over the past two years, while Houston has not toured. Additionally, the orchestra has released only three albums in the last five years. To address this, we will prioritize periodic international touring and focus on building our recording identity with unique commissions and performances that showcase Houston's distinct character. Touring and recording projects are critical for the orchestra's artistic development, for making our artistry more broadly accessible, and for cementing our reputation as a world-class orchestra.

Gain reputation in Houston and beyond:

To build our reputation as a world-class orchestra, we should increase our visibility beyond our local community and build awareness of the incredible talent we have here in Houston. To achieve this goal, we will prioritize enhancing the availability of our artistic offerings. This will involve expanding our presence on popular streaming platforms, broadcast and radio, and making our industry-leading livestream recordings more widely available. We will leverage these offerings and artistic achievements to increase our visibility beyond our local community by securing greater national and international media coverage of our artistic achievements.



PILLAR 2:

GROW THE ENDOWMENT TO TRANSITION TO AN ENDOWMENT-ENABLED BUSINESS MODEL

The Houston Symphony is committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organization and its mission to provide exceptional musical experiences for our musicians and audiences alike. As part of this commitment, we recognize the importance of growing our endowment to provide a stable source of funding for our artistic initiatives. This priority is widely shared among the Symphony's stakeholders, as evidenced by a recent survey in which a significant majority of respondents, including members of the symphony's Board, musicians, and staff, identified growing the endowment as a critical factor in the orchestra's future success.

Our analysis of major U.S. orchestras identified that some orchestras fund a significant portion (~20–30 percent) of their operations from regular endowment draws. In discussions with stakeholders, it was agreed that the Houston Symphony should work to transition to this type of business model by growing our endowment to a size that supports a larger percentage of annual operations, allowing the Symphony to further improve its financial position, to more effectively plan for the future, and to invest in strategic plan initiatives.



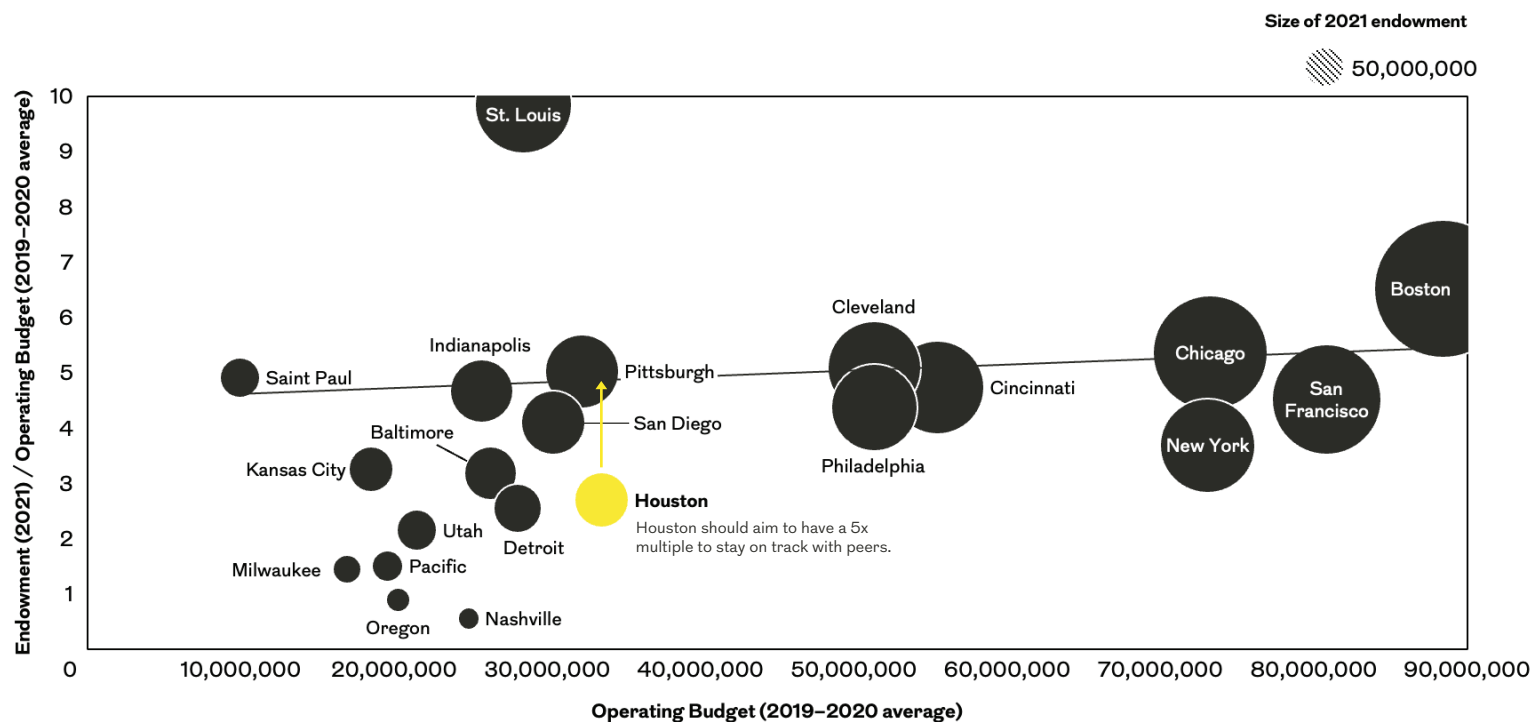
To transition to an endowment-enabled business model, we will focus on the following goals and initiatives:

Increase the size of our endowment to five times the annual operating budget:

We must prioritize fundraising efforts to increase the size of our endowment. An analysis of major U.S. orchestra endowment sizes in relation to their operating budgets showed that Houston's endowment is roughly two and a half times our average annual operating budget, while peer orchestras have a higher ratio closer to five times their annual budget. Achieving this growth will require significant effort, but we are committed to the task. To jumpstart our efforts, we aim to grow our endowment by approximately \$40 million over the life of this strategic plan.



ENDOWMENT AS MULTIPLE OF OPERATING BUDGET



Note: FY21 endowment balances used due to delays in published financial reporting. Average of FY19 & FY20 budgets used to avoid impact of pandemic operations on FY21 budget amounts.

Source: League of America Orchestras, orchestra audited financial statements



Promote endowment funds to encourage participation from more donors and support strategic initiatives:

Our strategic plan has identified initiatives that require dedicated funding to be undertaken. To secure the necessary resources, we will focus on funding major endowment categories, including funds dedicated to touring and recording; diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; and musician chairs. By doing this, we aim to provide a clear and compelling pathway for donors to support our key strategic priorities.

We acknowledge the ambitious nature of our endowment goals, and understand that achieving these goals will require significant effort and dedication. We will rely heavily on the unwavering support and commitment of our Symphony Board and key stakeholders. Their invaluable contributions and dedication will be instrumental in ensuring the success and sustainability of the Houston Symphony. Continuing on its growth trajectory, Houston is an international city that has the resources needed to support the endowment goals. We are confident that the board will be the standard bearers for our orchestra and set the stage for significant endowment growth.

PILLAR 3:

BUILD THE HOUSTON SYMPHONY TO HAVE ENDURING IMPACT

At the Houston Symphony, we take great pride in our role as a cultural and community leader in Houston. We recognize that our organization has the unique opportunity to inspire and enrich the lives of people throughout our city, and we are committed to ensuring that we continue to play this important role for generations to come. To achieve this goal, we recognize the importance of both building financial sustainability to ensure organizational longevity and creating deep impact in Houston communities.

To build the Houston Symphony to have enduring impact, we will focus on the following goals and initiatives:

Continue to develop a strong financial foundation:

Our strategic plan includes a focus on strengthening the Houston Symphony's financial foundation, which includes progressing recent efforts to enhance both earned and contributed revenue. We will strengthen our earned revenue through marketing enhancements, which include an improved digital presence and a simplified purchasing experience. We will focus on growing our contributed revenue by expanding our development staff to increase donor acquisition and retention. We will also focus on exploring new opportunities for contributions, which include increased corporate sponsorships and the introduction of a new POPS donor program. These efforts around increasing earned revenue will take place in a context where we continue our current, intense focus on controlling and reducing our expenses.

Add new revenue opportunities:

In addition to our in-flight earned and contributed revenue programs, we are actively pursuing new opportunities to bolster our financial sustainability. Through our strategic planning process, we have identified incremental revenue-generating initiatives, including expanding our outbound sales and customer service capabilities through adding a group sales focus to our box office and adding a group sales position. We will also continue to enhance collaboration between the artistic and marketing departments to optimize net revenues through our programming mix, particularly with the POPS series and special concerts, including adding presentations and increasing the number of performances of high demand shows.



Deepen impact in education and community engagement through enhanced offerings:

Our education and community engagement programs are among the best in the country in terms of reach and breadth of offerings. As we move forward, we will continue to prioritize these programs and expand them where there is demand. These include our highly popular student concert series, which we plan to expand which will serve more than 50,000 students this year with many schools further supported by musician classroom visits. By doing so, we will continue to provide high-quality music education and engagement opportunities to our community, and ensuring that the Houston Symphony remains a leader in this area.

PILLAR 4:

MAKE EXTRAORDINARY MUSICAL EXPERIENCES AVAILABLE FOR ALL

The Houston Symphony recognizes the importance of reflecting the diversity and cultural richness of the Houston community. We are proud to be situated in the most diverse city in the country, and we are committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout our organization. As we look toward the future of the Houston Symphony and the city we call home, we will prioritize making musical performances accessible to everyone, regardless of background or identity, as well as financial or geographic barriers.



To make extraordinary musical experiences available for all, we will focus on the following goals and initiatives:

Reduce financial and geographic barriers to attendance:

We are committed to making live music accessible to all by removing barriers to attendance. This involves expanding our free and low-cost ticket programming, which includes free youth tickets to any Classical series concert. We will also continue our successful senior center and hospital programming, which includes live performances and livestreaming options. Additionally, we will offer performances at smaller community events throughout the Houston area and larger venues outside of Houston, such as The Woodlands and Sugar Land areas, to broaden our reach and make our performances accessible to a wider audience.

Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout our organization:

We believe that symphonic music is for everyone, and we are committed to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all. We will actively seek out and feature diverse artists and composers and build relationships with underrepresented communities to ensure their voices are heard. To increase representation on stage, we intend to launch a fellowship program for musicians from historically underrepresented communities. Through these efforts, we will create a more diverse and inclusive musical community that reflects the richness and diversity of our city.



Improve access to quality music education:

Music education is critical to building a lifelong love of music and developing as a well-rounded person, and we are committed to providing high-quality educational programming to students, with a particular emphasis on those who lack access to these resources. To achieve this goal, we will expand our In Harmony violin instruction program to reach more communities and students. Additionally, we plan to introduce a new youth orchestra program, which will offer high-quality, affordable orchestra education led by Houston Symphony musicians. Through these initiatives, we strive to make music education more inclusive and enriching for students throughout our community.

ADVANCING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This strategic plan, including the strategic pillars, initiatives, and outcomes, will serve as a living, evolving tool to guide our decisions in the coming years. It is critical that the institution remain flexible and that we respond and adjust to evolving circumstances and priorities. As we go forward, we will regularly evaluate our strategies and plans to ensure the maximum return to the organization and the community, and to advance the Houston Symphony's financial sustainability.

The Strategic Planning Committee will serve as the central point for plan stewardship and advancement. In collaboration with the staff, orchestra, and other Board committees, the Strategic Planning Committee will be charged with the ongoing evaluation, implementation, and evolution of the plan.

SUMMARY

The Houston Symphony is at the forefront of a new era of growth and transformation. With an ambitious vision for the future, we are committed to being a world-class orchestra and a cultural leader in Houston, creating extraordinary musical experiences for all.

Our outstanding orchestra, dedicated staff, and Board, and dynamic Music Director Juraj Valčuha provide the foundation for our success. But to achieve our vision, we must work together to achieve new heights. We will further strengthen our artistic capabilities and resources, build a resilient financial foundation, deepen our impact in the community, and ensure that more people are able to experience the transformative power of music.

This ambitious plan requires significant investment and effort, and we are confident that with thoughtful planning and support, we can push ourselves to better serve our art form and community. Together, we will create a new era of musical excellence and community engagement that will inspire and enrich the lives of all who experience the Houston Symphony.



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