

January 15th, 2021

## **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, 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.

### **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.

*Elemental principles continued...*

2. Training in anti-racism, implicit bias, and group communication skills are 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 cognizance 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 Audition \(SOPA\)](#) 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.

*Audition guidelines continued...*

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 audition 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 which 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 6 months for a two-year tenure process and every 2-3 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.

*Tenure review guidelines continued...*

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.

## NAAS Audition and Tenure Guidelines Committee

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

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