



# BOSTONLYRIC OPERA

## Principal Gifts Officer

*Boston, MA*

Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) seeks a proven and entrepreneurial Principal Gifts Officer (PGO) to join the Company at a time of vibrant renewal and ambition. Buoyed by the arrival of a new Artistic Director, the near completion of a successful \$11 million Opera & Community Studios campaign, and receipt of a capacity-building grant, BLO has set the stage for a comprehensive 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary campaign in the 2026/27 Season. A highly strategic fundraiser, the PGO will bring experience with blended asks and demonstrate an understanding of how complex financial assets might unlock donor potential in ways that inspire transformational giving. Employing innovative approaches and a robust cadence in a personal portfolio that includes BLO's constellation of supporters in New England and beyond, the PGO will play a critical role in identifying and securing principal gifts that fuel the comprehensive campaign and fortify BLO's national reputation for the quality of its artistry and vibrant role in the city's artistic life.

Boston Lyric Opera is dedicated to creating compelling operatic experiences throughout the greater Boston area that welcome new audiences, break new ground, and enrich community life. BLO offers an evocative, intersectional approach to storytelling, music, and design that welcomes fresh perspectives and celebrates the rich history of opera while reenvisioning the art form in ways that inspire new connections, making opera accessible and relevant to today's culture. Carefully cultivated community connection is a fundamental part of BLO's DNA: for decades the Company has featured leading and emergent artists, conductors, directors, and designers from around the world for its mainstage season, while working with nonprofit, educational, and community partners across New England to offer hundreds of free and affordable all-ages and youth-focused programs in classrooms, public venues like BLO Street Stage, and digital productions. Now, BLO is expanding its reach by offering a window into the creative process with rehearsals and events at its new headquarters and community studios. This inclusive approach is one that invites and embraces all audiences from performance attendees, arts patrons, and neighbors, to deeply engaged donors and volunteers, and BLO is seeking a seasoned fundraiser who can harness the Company's innovative spirit and expanding audience to garner philanthropic support.

The Philanthropy team, led by Chief Philanthropy Advisor Ishan Johnson, works with Stanford Calderwood General Director & Chief Executive Officer Bradley Vernatter to secure major, planned, and principal gifts, partnering closely with the board and BLO's artistic leaders. The PGO will use creative and sophisticated identification, cultivation, and solicitation methods to deepen relationships with high-net-worth donors and their networks, with a focus on closing gifts of \$1 million and above. Along with the Director of Campaign and Philanthropy Operations, the PGO will serve as co-liaison to the Campaign Committee, leading strategy and training support for prospect identification and peer solicitation activities. The PGO will be knowledgeable about the nuances of fundraising for the arts and the budget model for performing arts nonprofits.

Candidates should have at least seven years of directly applicable fundraising experience, proficiency in a resource-lean organization, and ability to craft creative cultivation plans. Leading candidates will have broad experience in principal and planned gifts from which to draw when guiding complex gift conversations and strategies—ideally in a campaign setting. Attuned to delivering an exceptional donor giving journey, PLO candidates will exhibit strength in building nurturing productive, collaborative relationships with leaders and staff across an organization and a coordinated and thoughtful approach to all activities meant to engage prospects and donors—from identification and solicitation to gift closure and stewardship. The ideal candidate will be a self-assured, results-oriented individual who leads by example with a collegial and accessible style.

## Boston Lyric Opera

Since its founding in 1976, Boston Lyric Opera has produced world and U.S. premieres, Pulitzer Prize-winning operas, and notable commissions and coproductions, ranging from live stage shows to films streamed worldwide. Each year, BLO presents over 150 public performances, including mainstage programming and free community and education offerings, welcoming over 25,000 audience members. These programs are enhanced by partnerships with local cultural organizations including the Boston Public Library, Boston Public Schools, and many more.

BLO launched a new [five-year strategic plan](#) in 2022, prioritizing four strategic pillars: Programming, Community, Space, and Leadership, along with a renewed commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility. BLO employs over 800 artists and creative professionals annually—vocalists, instrumentalists, artisans, stagehands, costumers, scenic designers, administrators, and beyond. The Company is proud to play a significant and meaningful role in Boston’s vibrant arts community.

### Bradley Vernatter

#### Stanford Calderwood General Director & Chief Executive Officer

Bradley Vernatter is the Stanford Calderwood General Director & Chief Executive Officer of Boston Lyric Opera, the Company’s top leadership role. Now in his 12<sup>th</sup> year with BLO and leading the company since 2021, he has guided BLO’s recovery from the pandemic, driven the funding campaign for and the move into its Opera + Community Studios, and shaped the organization’s strategic plan, which will lead BLO into its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season in 2026/27. Throughout his career, Vernatter has produced a range of operas, multidisciplinary performances, and media productions.

In 2020, he was recognized by *Boston Business Journal* as one of Boston’s “40 Under 40” rising young leaders. He was a member of the YW Boston LeadBoston 2022 cohort and served on the board of advisors at Artists For Humanity, a nonprofit that empowers teens through employment in the arts. Additionally, he contributes to social entrepreneurship projects addressing access to basic services.

Previously, Vernatter served as BLO’s Acting General and Artistic Director, after having served as the Company’s Chief Operating Officer. Before BLO, he was Director of Operations for Opera Omaha and Associate Producer for the Company’s ONE Festival. He held artistic and management positions with Wexford Festival Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, the Castleton (VA) Festival, and the Miller Theatre at Columbia University.

Vernatter holds a Master of Business Administration from the IE-Brown MBA program (Madrid/Providence, R.I.), a Bachelor of Arts from Otterbein College, and a certificate in professional fundraising from Boston University. He is an alumnus of the OPERA America Leadership Intensive, through which he has participated in the Civic Action Group and as a grant reviewer.

### Nina Yoshida Nelsen

#### Artistic Director

Nina Yoshida Nelsen made her Boston Lyric Opera performing debut in 2021 as Mamma Lucia, *Cavalleria Rusticana*. She was featured as a singer and storyteller in the filmed documentary-concert *B.*, which marked an artistic culmination of BLO’s “The Butterfly Process.” She joined the company as an Artistic Advisor in 2021,

participating in artistic discussions and decisions, company auditions, and more. Most recently, she served as dramaturg for BLO's widely acclaimed 2023 production of *Madama Butterfly*.

Nelsen has performed traditional and contemporary operatic roles throughout North America and Europe, including performances with Washington National Opera, Lincoln Center, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, and Avery Fisher Hall. Nelsen recently sang Melissa, *Alcina*, Seattle Opera and the title role of *Carmen*, Indianapolis Opera. She debuted last season with Opera Carolina as Suzuki, *Madama Butterfly*; made a role debut as Marcellina, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Utah Opera; and reprised Mother Chen, *An American Soldier*, Perelman Performing Arts Center.

As Co-Founder and Board President of Asian Opera Alliance, Nelsen has worked to uplift Asian artists, and to advocate for greater representation within the industry. She was recently featured in TIME Magazine and was the subject of an NHK World documentary centered on Jack Perla and Jessica Murphy Moo's opera *An American Dream* and Nelsen's origination of the role of Hiroko Kobayashi at Seattle Opera.

A Boston University alumna, Nelsen received an undergraduate degree in violin and psychology in 2001 and a Master's degree in voice in 2003. She also studied at Philadelphia's prestigious Academy of Vocal Arts, where she received an Artist Diploma in 2009.

## Ishan Johnson

### Chief Philanthropy Advisor

Ishan Johnson is the Chief Philanthropy Advisor for Boston Lyric Opera and joined the team in 2023. Prior to BLO, he served as Associate Director, Philanthropy for the Art Institute of Chicago and previously was Associate Director of Development for Chicago Opera Theater.

A respected fundraiser, speaker, and moderator, Ishan has been featured on panels with the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, AFP Chicago, AFP Massachusetts, Boston University, the Philanthropy Club of Chicago, University Club of Chicago, Easterseals, Chicago Opera Theater, Grantmakers Association of America, and the Arts Club of Chicago. Most recently, he served as a mentor in the inaugural Opera Leaders of Color Mentorship Program with Opera America.

Ishan holds a Vocal Performance degree from Boston University and maintained a professional career as an opera singer for more than a decade. A graduate of the AFP Chicago Fellows program, Ishan proudly served on the chapter's Board of Directors as Vice President of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access. Ishan is an alumnus of the Coca-Cola Scholars Program, a Member of the Arts Club of Chicago, and serves on the Boston University Alumni Council. He obtained his CFRE (Certified Fund Raising Executive) certification in 2022.

## Philanthropy at BLO

BLO's Philanthropy team comprises a growing staff responsible for annual, major, principal, and planned gifts, prospect research, membership and donor pipeline development, stewardship, and management of the Company's committed and generous volunteers. Together with the CEO, Artistic Director, board chair, and board president, the Philanthropy team achieves ambitious contributed revenue goals of \$9 million+ that enable the Company to achieve its vision and mission.

The Philanthropy team works in close partnership with External Affairs, a team responsible for CRM administration, institutional giving, marketing, subscriptions and ticketing, and audience development.

The Company is in the closing stages of its \$11 million capital campaign to expand and renovate its studios and administrative center in the [Opera + Community Studios](#). Planning is well underway for a significant comprehensive campaign in celebration of BLO's upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Silent phase efforts are auspiciously underway for a significant comprehensive campaign in celebration of BLO's upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with top campaign priorities identified and several seven-figure gift commitments secured. In addition to supporting artistic and community programs, the campaign is designed to grow the Company's endowment, currently valued at \$18 million.

## Principal Gifts Officer

The Principal Gifts Officer is a frontline fundraiser and is responsible for the successful development and execution of the Company's program for all philanthropic gifts of \$1 million or more from individuals, including family foundations and estates, planned gifts, and commitments to the organization for both general operating and campaign initiatives. Central to the Principal Gifts Officer's role is evaluating various gift opportunities and giving vehicles and recommending the most suitable in line with the prospect's philanthropic goals, interests, and financial situation and in keeping with BLO's priorities and 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Campaign attainment. While general operating support is essential for BLO's art form, the organization understands the importance of investing in a variety of funding vehicles, including the creation of an organization-wide planned giving program.

The PGO rigorously manages a portfolio of principal donors and prospects, achieves annual fundraising goals, and helps to ensure the success of long-term capital and deferred goals. The PGO will partner with philanthropic counsel and BLO's CFO to develop appropriate protocols and identify resources needed for contract creation and oversight of planned giving vehicles. This role reports to the Chief Philanthropy Advisor, who manages, stewards, and coaches the Philanthropy department in meeting their revenue targets. The PGO will work directly with the CEO and Board leaders. Along with the Director of Campaign and Philanthropy Operations, the PGO will co-lead the Campaign Committee.

## Essential Duties

- Manage, grow, solicit, and steward a portfolio of approximately 50 households that can give at the principal gift level. Identify, cultivate, and solicit BLO donors and prospects for gifts of \$1 million or more. Cultivate and solicit donors for multi-year commitments, creating sustainability for the organization in future years. Meet assigned activity and revenue goals.
- Develop and maintain a multi-faceted principal gift solicitation program, including a strategic operating plan, identifying priorities and prospects, assigning prospect ratings, and recommending goals for future support. Identify and leverage Board and other network links to prospects and donors.
- Devise and implement cultivation and solicitation strategies. Initiate and maintain contact with current, past, and prospective donors, promoting positive donor relations efficiently. Identify disaffected or disinterested donors and devise strategies to encourage/redirect their interests as appropriate. Engage volunteers proactively as needed.
- Prepare funding proposals, talking points and strategies, assessments of potential support, briefings for the CEO, and stewardship reports for all assigned prospects; ensure that all interested parties are involved in key efforts focused on specific prospects; document all substantive prospect contacts.

- Serve as a resource and role model to staff on matters of prospect strategy and offer new approaches and techniques; seek to provide creative solutions to complex solicitations; remain current with evolving trends in philanthropy as well as economic trends in the national and Boston business sectors.
- Coordinate with internal constituents on BLO needs, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship strategies with regard to potential donors. Keep abreast of BLO activities and disseminate BLO information to donors, prospective donors, volunteers, and team members as appropriate.
- Review campaign analyses, generate goals, forecasts, and reports, and implement strategies in accordance with an annual business plan. Co-lead the Campaign Committee with the Director of Campaign and Philanthropy Operations.
- Contribute to strategic direction and creative solutions for overall fundraising and donor care.
- Collaborate with the Philanthropy Researcher to maintain research on prospects and donors. Coordinate with colleagues to ensure gift entry, acknowledgements, and donor research remain consistent and efficient.

## Experience and Qualifications

The ideal candidate will bring many of the following professional qualities and experiences:

- Bachelor's Degree and a minimum of seven years of fundraising experience in moves management systems, or equivalent combination of education and experience
- Demonstrated ability to personally and consistently close six-figure or larger philanthropic gifts; experience at the seven-figure gift level strongly preferred
- Experience utilizing industry-standard best practices and a donor-centric approach in managing a donor portfolio of approximately 50 individuals and determining donors' philanthropic interests related to specific fundraising goals, ideally in a campaign environment
- Proven ability to build and maintain long-term donor relationships. Ability to leverage relationships to strategically solicit donors, maximizing their full philanthropic capacity
- A high level of comfort and effectiveness working with high-net-worth individuals and corporate business leaders, domestically and internationally
- A sophisticated understanding of blended giving and complex assets that incorporate planned giving outreach, solicitation, and stewardship approaches and a solution-focused approach to philanthropy that subscribes to the idea that there are no dead ends, but multiple avenues to pursue
- Excellent written and oral communication skills; behavioral and linguistic flexibility as well as strong intellectual and social curiosity
- Demonstrated ability to synthesize and prioritize information from a wide array of sources while maintaining attention to detail and effectively managing overall workflow

- Ability and willingness to travel
- Experience using Tessitura (or similar) CRM software
- Proactive, productive team contributor with a positive attitude and a mindset that's persistent, results-oriented, and driven to succeed
- Appreciation and respect for principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Demonstrated ability to follow through on commitments and take responsibility for outcomes
- Demonstrated initiative, drive, and a resourceful and data-driven work ethic inspired by bold individual and team fundraising goals
- Creativity, innovation, and flexibility, with excellent organizational and analytical skills
- Ability to work independently, manage multiple projects effectively, and maintain a high degree of professionalism and confidentiality in a team-oriented, complex environment

## Location and Schedule

BLO's offices are located in the [Opera + Community Studios](#) in Boston's historic waterfront neighborhood of Fort Point, a creative area for working and living artists. The Studios were established through a partnership with Midway Artist Studios and comprise 16,000 square feet of space designed as a hub for artistic creation and cultural collaboration featuring multiple spaces, including BLO's offices, gathering spaces, and rehearsal studios.

BLO provides a hybrid work schedule, offering employees the opportunity to work primarily remotely, when circumstances allow. The PGO should be available to attend BLO events and performances as needed.

## Compensation

Compensation is highly competitive and budgeted to start at \$150,000 annually. Flexibility linked to experience and performance will be entertained for outstanding candidates. Boston Lyric Opera offers a competitive benefits package, which adds significantly to the employee's total compensation package.

## Interested in Learning More?

Boston Lyric Opera has partnered with Talent Citizen to assist in this recruitment. Please contact Founder and President Tracy D. Welsh and Managing Director Rachel K. Partin to share your resume and cover letter via email at: [blo-pgo@talentcitizen.com](mailto:blo-pgo@talentcitizen.com).

*Boston Lyric Opera values diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive environment for all employees. All qualified candidates will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, disability, age, or veteran's status or any other protected category. BLO is an equal opportunity employer.*