

## How the Larimer County Immediate Needs Grant Made It Possible for the Fort Collins Symphony to Host Its Youth Education Series and Family Concerts in 2022

The Larimer County Immediate Needs grant (LCING) funding arrived at a time when the Fort Collins Symphony (FCS) most needed financial support and encouragement. Since the pandemic began in Spring 2020, the FCS had found many creative and safe ways to keep our musicians employed and our community engaged. We were particularly proud of the fact that we were the only professional orchestra in the nation to safely perform a concert to a live audience on July 4, 2020 at the Holiday Twin Drive-In Theatre!

For over 1-1/2 years, the FCS became adept at “juggling bubbles” and doing the “pandemic pivot.” That being said, when the Poudre School District sent an email on January 4, 2022 informing us that due to the rise in COVID cases we needed to cancel the Youth Education Series concerts scheduled for mid-January, we were at the end of our ability to juggle or pivot. Aside from losing money on cancelled airfare and lodging for our guest artist, the thought of rescheduling the concerts seemed impossible. Prospects of herding cats would be easier than finding dates and times that would work for the Poudre School District, 54 musicians, a very busy Maestro and guest artist, our host facility, and the Symphony’s already full schedule. The spark needed to turn the concerts from being cancelled to rescheduled came in the form of a phone call when Lawrence County Commissioner Kristin Stephens informed us we were awarded a LCING.

Support from the LCING gave us the impetus to do what was initially believed to be impossible—move the youth and family concerts to the spring. Remarkably, there was only ONE week during the entire spring that worked for our musicians, Maestro, guest artist, venue, and the Poudre School District. When it was learned that we were hosting the concerts in March, there was enough demand to add two concerts for so that charter, private, and several Weld County classes could attend.

On March 8 and 11, 2022, the Fort Collins Symphony, Maestro Wes Kenney, and guest composer and narrator Gregory Smith performed SIX 45-minute educational concerts to over 2,500 students at Timberline Church. (Normally the FCS hosts over 4,000 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders for the YES concerts but health protocols required students to be socially distanced.) Then on March 13, the Friends of the Symphony sponsored a slightly longer version of the concert for over 600 families to enjoy.

Following the concerts, the FCS received more than 1,000 letters from students who attended. The following are a couple of examples of comments received:

- “The concert inspired me so much that I know I want to play the flute in middle school.”
- “Your symphony was the most beautiful musical concert I have ever heard. The music really made me feel so alive. I never realized until now how much music means until now.”

A member of the education committee who reviewed the letters sent the following email: “It’s obvious from these letters how much the students enjoyed the concert! They “got” just what we hoped-- that symphonic music is way better live than on YouTube, that it can be FUN, you can

use your imagination instead of being fed visual images, and that it DOES take a lot of musicians to make such beautiful music. They were such an affirmation of our incredibly talented and hardworking musicians, staff and volunteers. Personally, I LOVED the concert too and will make every effort to attend every year. I don't know who had more fun, the musicians or the audience. It was so entertaining!"

Although funding from the LCING has helped the FCS in many other ways as we continue to rebuild audiences and recruit new musicians, it most notably made it possible for the orchestra to once again have a lasting impact on youth in our community. We, at the Fort Collins Symphony, are deeply grateful to Larimer County for making the YES and Family concerts possible.

--Mary A. Kopco, Executive Director  
On behalf of the Fort Collins Symphony Association  
September 8, 2022