



at La Salle University, School of Business

COMMONWEALTH YOUTHCHOIRS

Strategic Plan FY11-15

*Developed in collaboration with The Nonprofit Center
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2009-2010*

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

From January 2009 to April of 2010, The Nonprofit Center at La Salle University's School of Business worked with the Commonwealth Youthchoirs (CY) to develop a strategic plan. In an effort to involve many of CY's key stakeholders, board members and key artistic and administrative staff were interviewed; current and past parents of choir members participated in an online survey; and longtime members of both the Keystone State Boychoir and Pennsylvania Girlchoir participated in focus groups. A limited number of interviews of external stakeholders, particularly artistic partner organizations, were also conducted.

Following this research phase, the board and key leadership staff participated in a planning retreat, at which the organization's core values, key artistic priorities, and major organizational development goals were identified. Teams of board and staff members then worked to develop outcomes and strategies for each goal area. CY's Executive Committee collaborated with the consultant to reconcile the teams' work and develop this strategic plan.

Commonwealth Youthchoirs is a relatively young organization that has experienced a remarkable degree of success in a short time frame. The planning process was viewed as an opportunity to reflect on this success, tackle issues that had been raised by the organization's rapid growth, and plan for a stronger infrastructure to support future work. The goals of the plan ultimately reflect this, prioritizing continued development of the choirs' programs alongside enhanced administrative structures and increased revenue generation.

The leadership of Commonwealth Youthchoirs intends to implement this plan over a five-year time frame. It is anticipated that this five year period will be divided into three phases, each of which will last approximately 18 months. This implementation timeline provides adequate opportunity to fundraise for and organize the major initiatives highlighted in the plan.

MISSION

The Mission of Commonwealth Youthchoirs is to provide superior choral music education and performance opportunities for young people from diverse economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Anchored in deep caring and respect for each individual singer, our choral programs will promote camaraderie and self-discipline and nurture leadership skills, in the pursuit of artistic excellence that uplifts and inspires performers and audiences alike.

CORE VALUES

The choirs of Commonwealth Youthchoirs are passionate in the pursuit of excellence in choral music performance. We believe that the deep and caring connection between our choral directors and our young singers is as essential to musical achievement as is musical knowledge. Our choral learning communities nurture self-discipline, commitment, bonding, and leadership in our singers. We value diversity in repertoire, in the cultural experiences we provide our young singers through touring, and especially in the backgrounds of our community's members and our audiences.

WHAT WE ARE

CY began in 2001 with one choir – Keystone State Boychoir – whose founders believed our region needed a boychoir that would draw *unabashed joy* in music-making from treble boys who would then sing through their voice and continue in the choir through high school. Deep caring for our young people, a constant striving for musical excellence informed by musical understanding and knowledge, and a commitment to diversity in both its artistic and social meanings have been consistent threads woven through CY's decade of existence. Pennsylvania Girlchoir, joining the organization in 2004, embraced these same values.

CY values inclusiveness and seeks to remove barriers (financial, social, and cultural) that may otherwise obstruct participation of interested and committed young people in our choirs and programs. CY also values the differences of artistic and stylistic emphasis that distinguish our choirs, one from the other. We do not seek a single uniform approach to repertoire, performance style, or approach among our choirs and programs. We value differences and the learning that comes from witnessing differing forms of musicianship. We also recognize the cultural and innate gender differences inherent in our choirs' differing personas, methods, and artistry. While honoring these differences and variations in our choirs, we remain unified in our overarching values of cherishing and respecting our individual choir members. We aim to draw heart-felt music-making from our young choral singers – music-making that transports both the singers and their audiences to new heights.

International travel and repertoire that features music from around the world are integral to our program. Our young people have sung on all seven continents, engaging audiences from Antarctica to Iceland, from Hanoi to Prague. Staying in homes around the world, they have made personal connections with people in other cultures, and served as ambassadors of our region and nation.

While our boys and girls value the fun of their choir experience, CY's adults – parents, volunteers, and board members – have always valued the character-building benefits gained by our young people through their dedicated involvement in CY choirs. Self-discipline, self-confidence, perseverance in pursuit of a positive result, enthusiasm for achieving common purpose, respect for others, learning team-work and seeing its benefits, valuing excellence in creation through experiencing it, learning leadership (in singing and in non-singing aspects of choir life) – these are some of the character-building values that our young people learn through their experiences in CY choirs.

CY operates as an artistic confederation, with a strong and supportive administrative center. As an organization, CY stands unified now in the belief that supporting the artistry of CY's choirs – the pursuit of excellence rooted in caring and compassionate musical leadership – is centrally important both to the success of CY's choirs artistically, and to the individual growth that each chorister experiences through their participation. CY exists to involve its young people in creating beautiful, insightful, and compelling choral performances, and through that work, our young people grow, mature, and develop their character.

We who form the leadership of youth choir organizations such as CY, dedicated to choral excellence, are the stewards of an utterly unique youth experience without parallel in the western world: an art form where dedicated young people, with talented guidance, can perform on the great stages of the world with the greatest orchestras, singers, dancers, and soloists *as peer performers during their middle/upper school years*. This occurs nowhere else in the performing arts. We are custodians of something truly magnificent.

GOALS & OUTCOMES

Goal #1: Enhance CY's music program to include additional music theory training, giving participants greater insight into music-making.

By August 2015, CY will have:

- A progressive music theory and sight-singing program that challenges participants to continually strengthen their skills;
- Two music summer camps for boys and girls in grades 3-8, which provide an intensive opportunity to enhance music skills;
- An ongoing, formal process of evaluating the artistic program to ensure that desired music and learning outcomes are being met.

Goal #2: Launch programs that support ongoing choir recruiting and encourage diversity in choir membership.

By August 2015, CY will have:

- A co-ed music program for first and second graders, with the potential to expand to serve kindergarten and preschool students;
- An expanded FYI (*Find Your Instrument*) program capable of serving multiple sites;
- Strengthened programming in ways that increases its positive impact on students who lack access to music education.

Goal #3: Strengthen Commonwealth Youthchoirs' capacity to provide support to its member choirs.

By August 2015, CY will have:

- Effective parent and volunteer involvement;
- A business model (including appropriate personnel structures) that provides the support needed to achieve artistic and community goals;
- Greater investment in developing strategic opportunities (i.e., fundraising, performance partnerships, etc.) through re-positioning the Executive Director's role;
- A standard method for evaluating opportunities to partner with other organizations/initiatives to determine whether the opportunity is in the best interests of CY.

Goal #4: Increase revenue to meet the expanding needs of programs.

By August 2015, CY will have:

- Optimized earned income from tuition and ticket sales, taking into account both our core values and the value of the services we deliver;
- Increased both the number of foundations supporting CY and the dollars raised through foundation grants;
- Implemented a structured program to cultivate individual donors that is beginning to increase major gifts.
- Ensured that all qualified students can participate even if they cannot afford tuition and expenses.

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- An ongoing, formal process of evaluating the artistic program to ensure that desired music and learning outcomes are being met.

Strategy #1: Define and institute a theory and sight-singing program with objective measurements and clearly defined levels.

- Phase 1: Review programs at other comparably-sized choirs to understand options and best practices.
- Phase 1: Review the choirs' current schedule to accommodate upgraded/enhanced theory training. Determine whether other changes are needed in order to support the theory program (additional music instructors, extra rehearsal time, tuition increases?).
- Phase 1: Research grants to support curriculum development.
- Phase 2: Create or select a curriculum for the program that has clear learning objectives.
- Phase 2: Develop a clearer list of criteria for advancing from choir to choir.
- Phase 2: Develop a mechanism for testing proficiency at each level of theory and sight-singing.
- Phase 2: Revise the choirs' current schedule to accommodate theory training.
- Phase 3: Secure funding for technology or other resources to support the program ("Clicker" computer software, theory notebooks, etc.)
- Phase 3: Implement the new program.
- Phase 3: Evaluate the initial results of the program, and continue to adjust as needed to ensure good results.

Strategy #2: Develop Summer Camp Programs for Boy and Girls, 3-8th grades, to increase CY program outreach and community visibility.

- Phase 1: Determine written outcomes for the camp program.
- Phase 1: Formalize collaboration with Penn Charter School to support the camps.
- Phase 1: Plan for adequate administrative and music staff; budget program expenses with the goal of making the camp program self-funding.
- Phase 1: Develop a written camp curriculum that ties in to the choirs' main goals.
- Phase 1: Promote camp to current participants; look for ways to support Penn Charter's marketing program to attract new participants.

- Phase 2: Evaluate the camps' success at achieving desired outcomes, both for participating students and for CY as an organization; determine future plans for the program.
- Phase 2 & 3: If initial outcomes indicate, continue to support the camp program.

Strategy #3: Implement a formal external review and evaluation of the artistic program.

- Phase 1: As part of the program development work carried out in Strategy #1, outline the criteria by which the artistic program should be evaluated.
- Phase 1: Begin recruitment of prospective evaluators representing professional accomplishments and experience as conductors of music at the highest levels (i.e. Rollo Dilworth, Donald Dumpson, Jeffrey Brillhart, Donald Nally, Alan Harler, James Jordan, as well as well-regarded youth choir conductors such as James Litton).
- Phase 2: Begin a program of outside evaluation visits (annually or bi-annually) to provide feedback on how well the program curriculums are helping students to meet the stated learning objectives.
 - Evaluators to visit each choir twice to three times during the season and provide a written evaluation.
 - Budget for honorarium of \$150-\$250 per evaluation visit.
- Phase 3: Review evaluations and determine actions to be taken to continue strengthening the program.

Goal #2: Launch programs that support ongoing choir recruiting and encourage diversity in choir membership.

By August 2015, CY will have:

1. A co-ed music program for first and second graders, with the potential to expand to serve kindergarten and preschool students;
2. An expanded FYI (*Find Your Instrument*) program capable of serving multiple sites;
3. Strengthened programming in ways that increases its positive impact on students who lack access to music education.

Strategy #1: Work with education and community-based organizations (Philadelphia School District, charter schools, home school organizations, Salvation Army, etc.) to identify areas of need and opportunity for music education/enrichment programs.

- Phase 1: Identify the underserved locations within the city with initial focus on the Northwest corridor, since this area is where both PG and KSB rehearse.
- Phase 1: Identify potential funding streams (grants, etc.) that will support FYI program expansion.
- Phase 2: Develop a plan for expanding FYI sites to serve more young people who do not otherwise have access to quality music education.
- Phase 3: Promote FYI as a core program of Commonwealth Youthchoirs, since it demonstrates our commitment to engaging children from all backgrounds in high-quality music education.
- Phase 3: Evaluate the logistics and support that would be needed to formalize efforts to recruit promising FYI participants into PG and KSB, and determine what actions we can feasibly take to link these programs.
- Phase 3: If feasible, build a more active recruiting program for KSB/PG as part of FYI.
- Phase 3: Conduct a formal program evaluation of FYI, to assess the results of the pilot phase, determine how well it is helping CY to carry out its mission, and determine its future direction.

Strategy #2: Develop an FYI apprentice program for students pursuing Master's degrees in Music Education, in order to increase trained staff who can lead FYI program sites.

- Phase 1: Network with organizations that have apprentice programs to understand how they implement the program and maintain benefit without resource drain.
- Phase 1: Evaluate which universities would be willing to work with CY in establishing an apprentice program.
 - Build relationships with faculty members.
 - Determine how to make an FYI apprenticeship a credit project from which the student would gain specialized training in engaging under-served youth in choral singing.
- Phase 2: Develop apprentice "job descriptions" that clearly outline the benefits and responsibilities.
- Phase 2: Recruit, select, and orient new apprentices.

- Phase 3: Evaluate the initial success of the apprentice program, and determine its future direction.
- Phase 3: If apprentice skill warrants it, hire former apprentices to lead FYI program sites.

Strategy #3: Research options for developing a music education program for first and second graders, with the goal of better understanding the costs and benefits.

- Phase 1: Identify and engage in dialogue with music educators who have special expertise in the area of music education for young children.
- Phase 1: Review existing curriculums and either select one as our program model, or develop our own curriculum.
- Phase 2: Develop a business plan for the program that would outline the investments needed to launch the program successfully, and predict the likelihood of its being revenue-neutral.
 - Identify resources available in the community.
 - Research potential grants.
 - Analyze the benefits of launching CY's own music program for younger students as opposed to partnering with an existing program.
- Phase 3: If business plan indicates a likelihood of success, launch the early music education program.

Goal #3: Strengthen Commonwealth Youthchoirs' capacity to provide support to its member choirs.

By August 2015, CY will have:

- Effective parent and volunteer involvement;
- A business model (including appropriate personnel structures) that provides the support needed to achieve artistic and community goals;
- Greater investment in developing strategic opportunities (i.e., fundraising, performance partnerships, etc.) through re-positioning the Executive Director's role;
- A standard method for evaluating opportunities to partner with other organizations/initiatives to determine whether the opportunity is in the best interests of CY.

Strategy #1: Launch a program to foster alumni engagement, as the foundation of a community that will support CY choirs in the long-term.

- Phase 1: Talk with older choirs (like the San Francisco Girlchoir and Northwest Choirs) about what they do to keep alumni engaged.
- Phase 1: Talk with older choir members (or those who have recently graduated) and their families about how they would like to stay in touch with the choirs.
- Phase 1: Recruit recent alumni from KSB and PG to lead efforts to organize alum groups for each choir.
- Phase 2: Institute some annual traditions that would invite alumni to sing with the choir (i.e., an annual song at the holiday concert where all previous members are invited on stage).
- Phase 2: Consider hosting reunion events for KSB and PG alumni and their families.
- Phase 3: Having established a community of alumni singers and families, begin a fundraising effort to build their financial support.
- Phase 3: Begin identifying CY alumni who could become board members.

Strategy #2: Develop the volunteer management system to more effectively organize volunteer work.

- Phase 2: Find out what stakeholders are willing to do on a volunteer basis.
 - Conduct a parent survey to determine possible roles and levels of commitment.
 - Consider other sources of volunteers and ask those participants about how they might be willing to participate.
- Phase 2: Talk to other youth choirs about their volunteer management systems.
 - In particular, talk with Princeton Girlchoir and Maryland State Boychoir about their well-established parent volunteer programs.

- Phase 2: Redesign volunteer management systems in order to more effectively support the individual needs of KSB, PG, and CY.
- Phase 2: Build volunteer leadership training and mentoring into the program, so that new leaders are always in development.

Strategy #3: Evaluate current operating practices and staff structure, and determine opportunities to strengthen the business model.

- Phase 1: Evaluate the current human resources structure and operating practices to determine what work needs to be completed in order for CY to effectively support programs.
 - Secure grant funding for a staff audit that evaluates current staffing and proposes effective changes.
 - Consider how paid staff and volunteers can best be organized.
 - Assess compensation options for staff.
- Phase 2: Begin to implement new human resources structure as funds permit.

Strategy #4: Develop a standard process for evaluating expansion opportunities.

- Phase 1: Form a standing expansion evaluation committee to establish a clear and consistent set of criteria for adding additional partner organizations or initiatives to the CY umbrella.
 - Develop the committee structure so that it includes artistic, administrative, and board members. Members must be willing to serve whenever a viable option for partnership or acquisition arises.
- Phase 1: Research and evaluate other music organizations to understand their methodologies for expansion including optimal choir size and opportunities afforded through their growth.
 - Research the type of expansion (growth in numbers or through partnership) other organizations have used and the associated benefits and costs.
 - Evaluate the methods utilized by these organizations to maintain quality given increases in size (ex: performing or non-performing groups and various combinations).
 - Determine lessons learned from launching new programs versus absorbing existing programs.
- Phase 1: Establish a consistent method of evaluation with defined parameters that will be used to evaluate every organization under consideration (possibly to include a one year board member exchange).

Goal #4: Increase revenue to meet the expanding needs of programs.

By August 2015, CY will have:

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- Increased both the number of foundations supporting CY and the dollars raised through foundation grants;
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- Ensured that all qualified students can participate even if they cannot afford tuition and expenses.

Strategy #1: Build marketing programs aimed at sustaining strong, diverse program enrollment, cultivating audience engagement, and promoting the choirs' reputations as the "top of mind" youth choirs within the artistic community.

- Phase 1: Develop a multi-year marketing plan that addresses the positioning of our choirs' brand(s) and includes strategies designed to sustain choir enrollment, promote audience engagement, and build each choir's reputation as the "first choice" other arts organizations think of when they need to hire a youth choir.
- Phase 1: Develop the website so that it can be an effective communication tool for multiple constituencies.
- Phase 2: Fund and implement the plan in the sequence recommended.
- Phase 3: Evaluate initial results, set new marketing objectives, and determine next steps.

Strategy #2: Optimize earned revenue from core programs and performances.

- Phase 1: Assess tuition pricing for each choir, and for each choir level. Consider implementing a graduated pricing system that raises tuition as students' commitment to the choir grows (i.e., lower tuition in point-of-entry programs, higher tuition for Grads/Motets).
- Phase 1: Designate front rows of each concert venue as "premium seating," and charge more for those tickets.
- Phase 2: If tuition pricing is changed, develop a communications strategy to explain the new system to participating families.
- Phase 3: Develop strategies to increase revenue from hired engagements in ways that support the overall program goals of each choir.

Strategy #3: Increase investment in fundraising.

- Phase 1: Research and implement an effective database for donors and prospects.
- Phase 1: Expand the grantwriting consultant position to be a half-time Development Associate.

- Phase 2: Implement other fundraising infrastructure improvements (data tracking, materials, etc.) in order to strengthen the program's base.
- Phase 3: Assess results from the increased investment in fundraising; determine how the results should influence our next steps.
- Phase 3 and ongoing: Continually assess the results we achieve through our investment in fundraising, to ensure that we are achieving the return we need.

Strategy #4: Increase investment in cultivating major donors.

- Phase 1: Enhance the structure for the individual giving program – adding donor levels, incentives, and a more predictable solicitation schedule.
- Phase 1: Develop strategies specifically aimed at increasing scholarship support, in order to meet our goal of providing access to students who do not have the financial resources to pay tuition and other expenses.
- Phase 1: Provide training for the board and leadership volunteers in individual giving, to better position CY to move away from raffles/events and towards individual solicitation.
- Phase 1: Develop moves management system for major individual donors giving at the \$1,000 or above level, to track each prospect's progress and coordinate cultivation activities of board and staff members.
- Phase 2: Re-organize major giving program to include naming opportunities (events, scholarships, awards, positions).
- Phase 2: Develop methods of staying connected to parents of choir members once they have graduated.
- Phase 2: Determine “matching” system for board members and major donor prospects, so that individual relationships can be cultivated.
- Phase 3: Solicit major gifts and cultivate relationships to build long-term investment from donors.