

MAY 2020

# WHAT DOES SEASON PLANNING LOOK LIKE AMIDST COVID-19?

For community choral organizations coping with a  
global pandemic.

Written by Tori Cook  
Director of Sales & Marketing  
Chorus Connection



# INTRODUCTION

When I took a job at Chorus Connection back in 2017, I never imagined that I would be helping choral organizations survive a global pandemic. Yet, here we are.

Chorus Connection wrote our first “coronavirus” blog in March, and every day since, the situation has evolved rapidly. What we wrote a couple months ago may no longer be relevant. What we write now may not be relevant a few months down the road.

But nonetheless, community choral leaders have questions: When will I be able to rehearse with my chorus again? Will audiences want to attend concerts next season? Will I have to cancel my season? Should we go virtual?

In this piece, we'll explore those questions. We'll supply you with tangible things you can do now as well as a framework for making thoughtful decisions for your 2020-2021 season and beyond.

These are unprecedented times we're living in. At Chorus Connection, we don't have all the answers, but we'll do our best to equip you with the tools you need to make your own decisions and do the best you can for your choruses. Good luck and stay safe out there!



**TORI COOK**  
DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING  
CHORUS CONNECTION

## DISCLAIMER

At the time of writing this piece, some government officials and health experts say it is not safe for choirs to rehearse or perform together. This ebook was written to help choruses sustain their organizations and better prepare for a time in which it is safe to sing together again.

The ideas laid out in this ebook are based on our own predictions of how COVID-19 will impact community choral organizations. We present anticipated operational challenges and potential solutions to help choruses better adapt to this new reality. Choruses should use this ebook as a conversation starter within their leadership and as a means to begin putting an operational structure in place to better serve their future needs. The content in this ebook is not intended as medical or legal advice.

# A NOTE ON RISK

Before we begin, I want to talk about risk.

Many choral organizations recently attended a webinar on “What Science and Data Say About the Near Term Future of Singing”, hosted by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS). The webinar was full of useful information from well-informed medical experts and prominent choral leaders from Chorus America, Barbershop Harmony Society, and the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). During the presentation, the panelists thoughtfully spelled out the risks associated with singing together during the time of COVID-19 (with the information we know now) as well as some tangible takeaways for how to minimize risk in a group singing setting moving forward.

There are still a lot of unknowns, and the situation will continue to evolve over time. While one presenter, Dr. Lucinda Halstead, said she cannot imagine choruses being able to rehearse *right now*, she also said that the situation could change, and the risks could be minimized with enhancements to COVID-19 testing and drug treatments. She also wisely stated that, no matter what we do, the risk will never be zero.

We never started in a risk-free world to begin with, and we certainly won't be in a risk-free world even when a COVID-19 vaccine has been developed.

So, instead of giving you a directive on whether your chorus should or shouldn't plan to sing together again this year or beyond, I would implore you, instead, to continue to analyze the risks yourself and make that decision together with your board. (Always following the recommendations of your local government and health professionals, of course.)

In this ebook, you'll find sample risk assessments that you can take and elaborate on within your own organization. The threats and opportunities will vary greatly between organizations when factoring in the demographics of singers, the makeup of audiences, geographic location of your live events, and other factors. The risks will continue to change as the situation evolves, so it's important to readdress them on an ongoing basis.

**It's ultimately up to you** as organizational leaders to identify and weigh the risks, find ways to minimize risks as much as possible, and determine which risks, in the end, you are willing to assume.

# 5 WAYS TO SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

1

**Learn to adapt, quickly.** In a changing world, the organizations that succeed will be the ones that adapt quickly. Find out the new needs of your target audience and adapt quickly to meet their needs.

2

**Aim for flexibility.** Your organization will need to be very flexible this year. Ensure there's room for flexibility in everything you do from your vendor contracts to your attendance policies.

3

**Be willing to experiment.** No one knows the right thing to do right now. Organizations are going to have to try new things to see what works. And they'll have to fail a few times to see what doesn't work.

4

**Ask for help.** You're going to need a lot of help this year to make these changes. Don't be afraid to ask for help from your choral colleagues, your volunteers/staff, and arts advocacy organizations.

5

**Don't give up.** Your organization has an important purpose and people are counting on you to help them during these difficult times. Don't give up on your mission or your community. You can do this. You will do this. We believe in you.

SEASON PLANNING OPTION 1:

# WAIT IT OUT



# RISK ASSESSMENT FOR WAITING IT OUT

*There are many unknowns about the future of choral singing. This method gives you time to learn more before making final decisions. Waiting, however, could be viewed as inaction, or worse, retreat.*

## Threats:

- Waiting it out could look like inaction or retreat; unclear direction from the organization; potential negative impact on brand
- Confused members and ticket buyers
- No end date; indefinite limbo; stir-craziness
- Lose out to other competitor choruses with clearer direction; lose members, patrons, and/or donors
- Lack of purpose and activities to drive mission forward while waiting; members and patrons experiencing lack of purpose and community
- Inability to create meaningful work for staff and volunteers
- Health and safety of your community members coping with isolation

## Opportunities:

- More information could inform better decisions; could look like the smart thing to do; potential positive impact on brand
- Freed up time to focus on other projects for the chorus
- More flexibility to make changes, as no final decisions are being made now

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

*Managing Mass Confusion, Indefinite Limbo, and Lack of Purpose*

*Communicating purposefully with your members and patrons will help minimize risks of the "wait it out" method.*

- **Frequent communication even in times of unclarity.** We're all navigating difficult times. Patrons aren't going to expect choruses to do everything perfectly in the midst of a global pandemic. But they will want to be included in the conversation. Keep your patrons informed of your decision, even if your decision is to "wait it out."
- **Honesty and authenticity.** Don't pretend like you have everything together. It's okay to say "we just don't know yet." Being honest and authentic can help you win points with your patrons.
- **Explain the decision.** Let your patrons know how you came to this decision and what your ultimate goals are for them and the organization. How will this method better help you achieve your goals?
- **Set an end date.** To avoid indefinite limbo, set a date on which you will make a final decision about next season. Give yourself enough time to appropriately educate yourself on the evolving situation and enough time to plan your first performance.
- **Focus on your mission first.** Remind members and patrons of your mission and why the "wait it out" method will help you further that mission. Let them know about other ways you plan to deliver on your mission until you know more information about the situation. (See more information about finding your value on page 11.)

SEASON PLANNING OPTION 2:

# POSTPONE OR CANCEL YOUR SEASON



**P O S T P O N E D**



# RISK ASSESSMENT FOR SEASON POSTPONEMENTS

*Postponing your season is perhaps the easiest option from an emotional and time standpoint, but it comes with the risk of losing members, revenue, and even a sense of connection and purpose.*

## Threats:

- Financial sustainability without performances; loss of concert-related revenues such as ticket sales, sponsorships, and performance-based grants; inability to obtain new sources of revenue
- Inability to retain and utilize staff
- Inability to fulfill grant obligations
- Inability to fulfill mission; lost sense of purpose
- Decrease in membership and member-based revenues; inability to recruit, engage, and retain members
- Decrease in lost audiences upon return to regular performances
- Health and safety of your community members coping with isolation
- Loss of connection and brand awareness in community

## Opportunities:

- The ability to redefine mission and higher purpose
- New ways of delivering value could drive revenue in the future
- Utilizing staff in other value-driven and revenue-generating activities
- Keeping your existing community members healthy for later return to normalcy
- Focusing your brand and marketing on non-promotional, value-driven marketing which could elevate your brand

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

*Overcoming Lack of Purpose, Financial Losses, & Loss of Connection*

*There's never been a better time to redefine your mission and higher purpose. Look to provide value in order to minimize the risks of a season postponement or cancellation.*

- **Find your purpose.** How can your organization find purpose and deliver its mission without performances? (See page 11.)
- **Choose value opportunities.** Define a few key activities and opportunities that your organization plans to do in order to fulfill its mission and deliver value to your patrons.
- **Identify new sources of revenue.** Without ticket sales, how will your organization bring in the revenue it needs to survive? (See more on page 12.)
- **Explain the decision to postpone or cancel.** Let your patrons know how you came to this decision and what your ultimate goals are for them and the organization. How will this method better help you achieve these goals?
- **Stay in touch.** Establish a regular frequency and method of communication for your members and patrons during this time.
- **Give your community ways to connect with each other.** Provide them with a channel to communicate with each other. Things like member forums and community groups can be especially beneficial during this time.

# FINDING PURPOSE IN A PERFORMANCE-LESS WORLD

## If performances are a core part of our mission, where are we without them?

It's important to remember that performing is *what* you do, not *why* you do it.

In marketing, we define our higher purpose as the *why* behind what we do. Finding that higher purpose is a crucial part of defining an organization's mission, vision, and brand.

There's never been a better time to sit down at the virtual table with your board to find your higher purpose together.

The process is easy. Start by saying what you do — perform. And ask yourself *why*. Continue asking yourself *why* until you can't ask anymore. At the end, you'll be left with the core reason for why you do what you do. That, my friends, is your higher purpose.

Once you have your higher purpose, you'll need to establish new ways you can deliver that purpose to your patrons. In other words, let's repackage the *what*.

Start by having in-depth discussions with your board about the value you can uniquely provide to your patrons and members (see page 16). Identify a few key non-performance opportunities that will help you further your mission until you return to your normal concert season.

Below are a few ideas to help you get started. Choosing the right opportunities for your chorus will depend on your chorus's mission, as well as the time and ability you have to implement them.

## Sample Opportunities:

- Musical content, workshops, and lectures
- Small virtual performances or sing-alongs
- Partnerships with a charity that shares your mission
- Virtual fundraising for your organization or a partnered charity
- Meetings, hangouts, and activities for your internal community
- Supporting artists, music educators, and/or composers through commissioning works or other hired opportunities

# FINDING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

From a financial standpoint, you'll also need to find ways to balance the budget without performances.

Who knows? Without concert operating expenses, you may surprisingly find yourself sustainable even without any incoming ticket revenue! But it is also possible that you'll need to identify new sources of revenue to carry you through.

Consider the key opportunities and activities that you've defined in the previous exercise. Are there revenue opportunities there? Perhaps you can charge admission to a virtual event or sell goods or services, for example.

Consider also how your fundraising strategy will change. Are there grants that you are now eligible for, such as emergency funding grants? Are there opportunities for virtual fundraising activities? Consider assessing your donors to determine how individual giving could be impacted. Will your donors still be able to contribute to your organization?

Then, work with your board to lay out a financial plan for success without the need for performances. Take a look at the potential sources of revenue below to see if it sparks any ideas!

## Potential New Sources of Revenue:

- Ticket sales or suggested donations from virtual activities
- Individual giving
- Emergency and relief funding
- Operational and capacity grants
- Project grants for virtual activities
- Online fundraising
- Online sales of chorus swag, past performances, musical content such as workshops, courses, or lectures, etc.
- Member dues
- Interest on investments or savings

# STAYING CONNECTED INTERNALLY (MEMBERS)

1

**Host full chorus virtual hangouts.** Using video conferencing tools, schedule hangouts with your chorus. Try trivia, board games, and music lessons!

2

**Break out into teams** for some fun team-based, small group activities. Try dance competitions, creative DIY contests, or sing-offs.

3

**Converse in group forums** like Facebook or Chorus Connection. Share creative things you're doing in quarantine, recipes, and book recommendations.

4

**Host a watch party.** Gather online for a streamed performance or hunker down for a movie on your favorite viewing platform.

5

**Consider a virtual choir.** Create a background track, have singers record themselves, and clip the videos together to create a "virtual choir" video.

6

**Keep ongoing communications.** Continue to email your members with chorus updates and regularly gather their feedback through the use of surveys.

# STAYING CONNECTED EXTERNALLY (PATRONS)

1

**Get their feedback.** Talk to your patrons to see how they have been impacted by COVID-19. Get their feedback on what you can do to help.

2

**Send fun and relevant content.** Share fun content that your members create and send helpful resources to your patrons in a weekly newsletter.

3

**Keep them updated.** As the organization makes decisions for the future, keep your patrons updated and feeling included in the conversation.

4

**Invite them in.** Include your patrons in your key activities throughout the season. Let them join in on the fun, too!

5

**Give them the gift of music.** We're all going to be craving art in isolation. Keep your patrons' spirits high by bringing music right to their homes.

# COMPLETING "BACK-BURNER" PROJECTS

1

**Revisit the mission, vision, values, and brand.** Are your mission, vision, and values still true and accurate? Do they need to adjust in this new reality?

2

**Build out the strategic plan.** Do you have a 5-year plan for sustaining the organization? How has your strategic plan shifted due to this pandemic?

3

**Build an annual fundraising strategy.** How are you planning to pivot fundraising activities? What new revenue sources do you need to obtain?

4

**Start your contingency and succession planning.** Work on your operational documentation, including new processes for when the chorus will return.

5

**Streamline your operations.** Do a systems and processes review to find opportunities to streamline operations. Implement new systems to save time.

# BOARD DISCUSSION TOPICS

## **Finding Purpose:**

- Why do we perform? What does our community get out of it? What is the value we provide to them? Why does that matter?
- How can we fulfill our current mission without in-person performances? How can we repackage *what* we do and still deliver on the *why*? How can we provide the same value to our community with non-performance activities?
- If "performance" is a part of our mission, can we redefine what a performance means? Should we consider removing performance from our mission and focus on a broader musical mission?

## **Becoming Financially Sustainable:**

- Without a season, are we able to sustain the organization? What expenses are now unnecessary without performances? What are new sources of revenue we can consider?
- How will our member dues be affected if we don't have a season? Can we still provide enough value to them to justify member dues?
- How will our individual donors be impacted? Can we count on similar contributions in the coming years?
- Will our foundational giving be impacted? Which opportunities can we count on?

## **Communicating with Your Community:**

- What types of channels can we use to communicate with our members and/or patrons? How frequently should we touch base with our members?
- What types of tools can we put into place to allow our members and/or patrons to communicate with each other?
- What types of questions should we ask our members/patrons now and how often should we get their feedback as this situation evolves?
- How can we keep our members and patrons engaged with our organization and its mission during this time?



# BOARD DISCUSSION TOPICS

## **Operational Changes:**

- What changes in staffing do we need to make, if any, in order to make this new model successful?
- What tools do we need in place to make this new model successful?
- What types of back-burner projects can we prioritize while we wait to sing again?
- How long should we postpone the season? Can we look ahead to future seasons and how can we better prepare for that future?
- How will the postponement announcement be made?
- If situation changes and we are able to sing earlier than anticipated, what will we do?

SEASON PLANNING OPTION 3:

# PLAN YOUR SEASON, MINIMIZE RISKS



# RISK ASSESSMENT FOR PLANNING A SEASON

*Planning your season will help you stay connected with your choral community and fulfill your mission. But it could be the riskiest option in terms of health and safety. (See pages 2-3.)*

## Threats:

- Health and safety of members and audiences; serious illness or death
- Liability if something goes wrong; negative impact on brand
- High likelihood of event cancellations; time and emotional investment in planning a season that may not come to fruition; financial losses from event cancellations; negative impression left on ticket buyers
- Time and ability to effectively implement precautions and social distancing measures
- Singer drop-outs most likely from those in at-risk category
- Lower ticket sales from lack of interest, concerns over safety, or loss of at-risk attendees
- Accessibility of rehearsals and performances if excluding at-risk persons
- Additional health and safety expenses

## Opportunities:

- Fulfill performance piece of mission
- Show that organization is capable of appropriate event and risk management with potential positive impact on brand
- Help boost the economy
- Be one of the few organizations that bring art to their community during this pandemic
- Financial sustainability of organization through concert-related revenue

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Managing Singer Dropouts, Recruitment, & Retention*

*Community choruses can expect to have at least some singers drop out, especially from those in the COVID-19 at-risk category. We anticipate some recruitment and retention challenges.*

- **More feedback from members.** Choruses may need to utilize more membership surveys to stay attuned to their members' needs. Getting feedback before any final decisions are made will be even more important than ever before.
- **Providing multiple options to participate.** At-risk members may not want to participate in person, but they will still likely want to feel included. Giving them other opportunities such as virtual participation may be necessary.
- **Shifts in target recruitment audience.** When recruiting new members, we may find that at-risk persons will be excluded from a chorus's "target audience." This could raise accessibility concerns.
- **Digital recruitment.** Choruses may have to move to a digital audition and recruitment model.
- **Programming and plans for reduced rosters.** When programming and planning performances, choruses may need to plan ahead for reduced rosters.
- **Member handbook changes.** Member handbooks will likely be revised to include new information for "at-risk" members as well as new safety protocols.
- **More member policy flexibility and accommodations.** This will likely include less strict attendance policies, sick policies, etc. More time may be spent one-on-one trying to help accommodate member needs.

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Managing Audience Loss*

*Community choruses may expect reduced audiences especially from those in the COVID-19 at-risk category. Choruses will need to focus on safety and communication to keep their audiences.*

- **Acceptance is key.** Choruses will need to accept and understand that not everyone is going to feel comfortable attending live events right now — and that's okay. Forcing ticket sales won't help you or your patrons feel better.
- **Explain the decision to plan your season and/or host live events.** Let your patrons know how you came to this decision and what your ultimate goals are for them and the organization. How will this method better help you achieve these goals? Honesty and authenticity will go a long way.
- **Share information about the precautions you are taking.** Let them know what you are planning to do to keep them safe and any contingency plans you have in place for event cancellations.
- **Ask them to take precautions.** Let them know what they should do to keep themselves and others safe.
- **More upfront flexibility in ticket refunds.** Choruses may need better ticket refund policies in place to manage cancellations in the event of illness or changes in intent to attend.
- **Appropriately priced tickets.** While the instinct is to increase ticket prices to compensate for capacity limits, choruses may find that patrons won't be willing to pay a higher price. Or, they may find audiences are willing to pay more! Price tickets based on the value you are providing to your community and not only as a means to make ends meet.

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Preparing for Concert Cancellations*

*In the years ahead, we may see the continuance or return of COVID-19 outbreaks in certain areas. If live concerts are planned, this could mean a higher likelihood of event cancellations.*

- **Postponed season launches.** Choruses may wish to postpone season announcements until we know more about the situation.
- **Earlier conversations with venues and vendors.** Choruses may need to talk to venues and vendors earlier to get a sense of their reopening plans. Some vendors may cancel bookings forcing a search for alternatives.
- **Flexible contracts.** Choruses may wish to work with vendors to negotiate refundable payments and ensure there is a reasonable force majeure clause in place.
- **Financially break-even, stand-alone concerts.** Fully sustainable stand-alone concerts won't throw off the financial outcome of the whole season in the event one or more concerts are canceled.
- **Large projects postponed until 2021 or later.** If choruses are going to spend a lot of time and energy planning a large-scale performance, they'll want to make sure that performance has a high likelihood of happening. Larger projects may end up being postponed.
- **Cancellation communications plan.** Choruses will likely need to have an event cancellation communications plan and protocols in place.
- **Backup venues or contingency options.** Choruses may find themselves planning a fallback venue or alternative performance options to better prepare for cancellations.

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Creating Socially Distant Rehearsals*

*Upon approval of mass gatherings by local government, we may be able to return to in-person rehearsals. However, rehearsals may shift to a social distance model.*

- **Reduced frequency of rehearsals.** Choruses may need to consider reducing their in-person meet-up frequency.
- **Shortened rehearsal length.** Reduce the time of rehearsals and put focus more on activities that can only be done in-person during this time.
- **Rehearsal capacity limits and small group breakouts.** Rehearsals may need to be broken up into smaller groups such as sections or mini-choirs with staggered rehearsal times or alternating schedules.
- **Social distancing procedures.** Set up crews may need to specifically set up social distanced chairs or markers for their members.
- **Larger rehearsal venue or more rooms.** If additional space is needed, larger venues or additional rooms for group breakouts may be necessary.
- **Sick policy reconsiderations.** Choruses may need to be more strict with their sick policies demanding that sick singers stay home. They may also want to record all rehearsals, take detailed notes, and send these to absentees so they can practice at a later date.
- **Additional sanitation and health monitoring measures.** (See page 25 for more Information.)
- **Always follow the advice of your local government and health professionals when it comes to social distancing.**

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Creating Socially Distant Concerts*

*Choruses will likely need to plan for both the logistics of socially distant concerts and their audience's intent to buy tickets during or immediately following a global pandemic.*

- **Outdoor or spacious venues.** Early data suggests people will feel safer returning to cultural entities that allow for the freedom of movement in order to distance themselves from others.
- **House capacity limits.** Some estimate that venues will enforce a 25% max capacity. Choruses can adjust ticket prices accordingly and plan for more concerts, if needed.
- **Section capacity limits.** Consider reserved seating or signs to indicate max capacity in each row/section.
- **Reduced performance times.** Shorter programs and performances may help minimize the risk of exposure.
- **E-tickets and online ticket sales only.** Standing in line is not only annoying, it is riskier. Choruses may want to adopt a fully digital ticketing solution.
- **Staggered check-in times.** This can avoid crowding in the lobby.
- **Earlier open of house.** In order to allow for staggered check-in times and an uncrowded lobby.
- **Shift in target audiences.** As choruses market performances, "at-risk" patrons may be excluded in the target market which may raise accessibility concerns.
- **Virtual performance additions or options.** Even for in-person concerts, choruses may wish to livestream or record the performance so some can experience the concert virtually.
- **Always follow the advice of your local government and health professionals when it comes to social distancing.**



# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Implementing Sanitation Procedures & Health Monitoring at Live Events*

*In addition to implementing social distance measures, health monitoring and sanitation procedures may be necessary at all live events. Here's what choruses might expect.*

- **Health screenings at the door.** Some doctors suggest initial health screenings at live events to include temperature check, oxygen level reading, and symptoms check. When COVID-19 testing is available, it may be recommended to also check test results. Health training may be required.
- **Trainings on health and personal information privacy.** With health screenings come significant privacy concerns and considerations. Choral staff and volunteers may need health and privacy trainings to comply.
- **Enhanced sanitation measures.** Such as encouraging hand-washing, making hand sanitizer available, and sanitizing all rooms, chairs, and equipment frequently and between uses to reduce the risk of surface transmission.
- **Increased ventilation.** Replacing air or increased ventilation could lower risk of aerosol transmission. Choruses may need to educate themselves on ventilation measures, work with venues to secure equipment, and potentially purchase professional ventilation equipment on their own.
- **Enforced touching limitations.** Training staff and volunteers on limiting physical touch and communicating these limitations to all participants may be necessary.
- **Enforced use of safety equipment.** Participants may be required to wear masks and gloves to reduce risk of aerosol and surface transmission.
- **Ensure great venue partnerships.** Work with venues that can take on some of this responsibility.

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Managing Insurance, Liability, and Licensing Needs*

*And, of course, all of the legal stuff. What types of changes can choruses expect to make to their insurance, liability, and licensing?*

- **Expanded licensing for virtual options.** As we move towards virtual models or the ability to provide virtual options to participants, we may need to get additional licensing for activities such as livestream and rebroadcasting. (See pages 29-34 for more information.)
- **Reevaluated insurance policies.** Because the times are different, a reevaluation of insurance policies may be necessary. Increased liability insurance may also be required when planning mass gatherings.
- **Liability waivers.** Fitness companies are notorious for getting their visitors to sign waivers of liability. With increased health and safety concerns for mass gatherings, we may see the necessity of liability waivers for live event participants.

# BOARD DISCUSSION TOPICS

## **Health and Safety Considerations:**

- What are our local government and health agencies saying about whether it is safe for us to gather and perform?
- Are the health and safety risks currently low enough for us to consider coming together again? Knowing the risk will never be zero, what is the highest risk point in which we are willing to assume?
- Are we willing and appropriately equipped to follow all government-recommended protocols for mass gatherings at this given time? Will we be ready by the time we plan to come together again?
- Are we capable of putting appropriate health and safety precautions in place for in-person events?
- Are we willing and able to obtain and pay for the appropriate health and safety trainings required for staff and volunteers? And the appropriate health and safety equipment required?

## **Financial Considerations:**

- Does our financial landscape appropriately account for event cancellations? What is the total money we need to put down for the season and how much are we at risk of losing? Are we willing to negotiate flexible vendor contracts or assume some losses on non-refundable payments to vendors? How much in losses are we willing to assume in cancellations?
- What will ticket revenue look like if we have to apply venue capacity limits? Will hosting multiple performances allow us to bring in more revenue even though we'll still have more operational expenses? Are we willing to adjust ticket sale quantity or price based on house capacity limits?
- Are we at risk of losing ticket buyers, members, or donors? How much can we lose without putting the organization in financial peril? Are we eligible for new sources of revenue and, if so, what new revenue can we expect to bring in?

# BOARD DISCUSSION TOPICS

## **Willingness to Experiment:**

- Are we willing to put time and energy into planning performances with a higher likelihood of cancellation?
- Are we and our community (both internal and external) willing to be somewhat experimental with our rehearsals and performances?
- Have our singers and audiences expressed concern or interest in attending concerts? Are we willing to assume losses from singer drop-outs? Are we willing to lose potential ticket buyers and donors over this?
- Are we willing to put our brand at risk and assume liability if things go poorly?
- Are we willing to make our concerts less accessible, as we may need to make changes such as requesting at-risk persons to stay home? Are we able to provide alternative methods for them to participate?

## **Operational Considerations:**

- How will we enable our singers to rehearse their music? What type of rehearsal structure will we use? If we host in-person rehearsals, what types of precautions will we put into place to minimize risks? If we host digital rehearsals, what types of online tools will be necessary in order to help our singers rehearse and learn their music?
- How will we create a safe performance space for our members and audiences? What types of precautions will we put into place to minimize risks? How will we communicate this information to our audiences?
- How will we manage the liability considerations with our members and audiences?
- Do we have the ability to obtain the appropriate insurance and licensing for this? What is required and how do we obtain it?
- How will we market this appropriately to ensure the health and safety of our participants while also driving participation?
- What information should we gather from our members and patrons now? What types of check-ins should we do over time with our patrons?
- What are the protocols we should put in place for event cancellations? What contingency plans should we have in place?

SEASON PLANNING OPTION 4:

# PLAN A VIRTUAL SEASON



# ASSESSMENT FOR A VIRTUAL SEASON

*If we can't make music in person, going virtual could be our best option. But virtual performances present a variety of legal and financial risks that choruses will need to consider.*

## Threats:

- Time and energy invested into designing a new virtual choral model
- Technology sometimes doesn't cooperate; potential negative brand impact
- Advanced technical know-how is required and may be hard to find or expensive
- Accessibility for singers and audiences as not everyone will be able to participate; singer or audience reduction for those that don't feel included
- Singers' fears of performing alone
- Fear of in-person choral events being fully replaced by virtual setting in long-term; potential decline in future in-person participation from members or audiences
- Cost restrictions
- Advanced licensing and copyright requirements; programming limitations
- Limited networking and one-on-one connection opportunities

## Opportunities:

- Keep our singers and audiences engaged
- Continue making music fulfilling a part of our mission and bringing joy to those in isolation
- Bring together our internal community for a fun project
- Generate revenue from an online ticketed event
- Viral possibilities which could increase brand awareness and potentially generate more revenue in the long-term
- Retain staff and keep them working

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Managing Licensing and Copyright*

*Virtual performances may require more time and money into obtaining appropriate licenses and copyright.*

- **Expanded copyright holder permissions.** Choruses can expect to still comply with all copyright law and procedures. They may need to pay more to copyright holders for the rights to go virtual.
- **Required virtual licensing.** Choruses may need to obtain additional licensing for performances such as synchronization, mechanical, master, or print licenses.
- **Required union permission and additional fees.** With union musicians, additional permission and fees may be required.
- **Charging ticketing fees could increase risks and costs.** Choruses will be faced with the difficult decision to charge or not to charge ticketing fees. This choice will impact the licensing required and the legal and financial risks involved.
- **Programming and cost limitations.** Because copyright and licensing for virtual performances can be expensive, choruses may wish to limit their programming choices such as repertoire in public domain or a cappella works.
- **More commissioned or pre-commissioned works.** Obtaining copyright is much simpler when working directly with the copyright holder. We may see more commissioned works for virtual performances during this time.
- **Lawyers on board.** Choruses may wish to have lawyers on their boards to help them navigate this new model.

# WAYS TO MINIMIZE RISKS

## *Managing the Technical Logistics of Virtual Performances*

*How does one prepare for a virtual performance both logistically and from a risk management perspective?*

- **Livestream may not be an option.** Due to latency issues, a true "livestream" choral performance will not be possible unless the chorus can sing together in the same room. This presents health and safety issues of live events.
- **Music making will likely be pre-recorded.** Due to these issues, any music-making may need to be pre-recorded by each individual and then edited together in video editing software before being published online.
- **A combination of livestream and pre-recorded music may be possible.** While synchronous singing online isn't possible, choruses can host a livestream event with a speaker and emcee who plays the pre-recorded videos in between their live appearances.
- **Video editing software and video editor needed.** To produce virtual performances, a video editing software and editing technical know-how may be required. Budgets may include line items for video editors and/or software.
- **A video hosting solution.** Choruses will need a place to host their videos such as YouTube or Facebook. For private or ticketed online performances, choruses will need a video hosting solution that allows for private links accessible to only those with a ticket.
- **An online ticketing solution** may be necessary if choruses choose to sell tickets to their virtual performances.



# BOARD DISCUSSION TOPICS

## **Health and Safety Considerations (For Livestreams Only):**

- What are our local government and health agencies saying about whether it is safe for us to gather our singers for a livestream performance?
- Are the health and safety risks currently low enough for us to consider bringing only the chorus and musicians together again for a potential livestream? If so, are we willing and appropriately equipped to follow all government-recommended protocols for mass gatherings at this given time? Will we be ready by the time we plan to come together again?
- Are the health and safety risks currently low enough for us to consider coming together again? Knowing the risk will never be zero, what is the highest risk point in which we are willing to assume?
- Are we willing and appropriately equipped to follow all government-recommended protocols for mass gatherings at this given time? Will we be ready by the time we plan to come together again?
- Are we capable of putting appropriate health and safety precautions in place for in-person rehearsals or performances for livestream?
- Are we willing and able to obtain and pay for the appropriate health and safety trainings required for staff and volunteers? And the appropriate health and safety equipment required?

## **Willingness to Experiment:**

- Are our members and audiences interested in experimenting with virtual performances?
- Are we willing to make our virtual performances potentially less accessible to our singers and audiences that don't have the technical know-how? Are there ways to help make it more accessible?
- Are we willing to try something new even if we risk having it not go as planned?

# BOARD DISCUSSION TOPICS

## **Technical Considerations:**

- What does a virtual performance look like for our singers and musicians?
- Do we have the technical ability to pull off virtual performances? If not, how will we find and pay for technical assistance?
- What technical equipment is required for a virtual performance? What tools will we need and how much will they cost?
- Are we willing to put our brand at risk if things go poorly on the technical side? Could this potentially have a positive impact on our brand?
- What will the technical process look like in order for our singers to participate?
- What types of resources would we need to put together for our singers and audiences in order to participate in a virtual season?

## **Ticketing Considerations:**

- Would we charge tickets for virtual performances? What are the pros and cons of a ticketed versus a non-ticketed performance? How does this decision change the financial landscape of our season? How might this change the licensing required?
- What would the online process look like for a ticketed or non-ticketed performance? How would someone obtain a ticket and how would they access the performance?
- What types of online tools would we need in place in order to ticket the events?
- How might virtual performances shape the viewing audience? Would our typical audience members attend and appreciate a virtual performance? Will this drive new audiences? Will our target market shift?

## **Operational Considerations:**

- Do we have the ability to obtain and pay for the appropriate licensing for this? Do we have or can we get the appropriate permissions from all copyright holders and involved parties?
- How will virtual performances impact our staff? Will we require different skills, training, and/or personnel?

SEASON PLANNING OPTION 5:

# MIX IT UP



# WHY MIX IT UP?

There's no reason you can't take different ideas from this ebook and come up with your own model.

Mix together concepts from the wait it out method, postponement or cancellations, live events, and virtual events, to come up with something that works for your organization.

Here are a few sample models to consider:

## Model #1:

- Postpone season start date to January 1, 2021
- Plan a virtual performance for March
- Plan a live performance in May

## Model #2:

- Plan a complete 2020-2021 season
- Plan virtual performances in the fall/winter
- Plan live performances in the spring

## Model #3:

- Choose the wait it out approach
- Plan and announce your 2021-2022 season instead
- Consider adding impromptu performances to 2020-2021 depending on how the situation evolves

MOVING FORWARD

# YOUR 7-STEP ACTION PLAN



# FINALIZE YOUR SEASON

## *7 Steps for Moving Forward*

1

**Convene an expert team.** Bring together legal, medical, and insurance experts to work with your choral leadership as the situation evolves.

2

**Gather information.** Survey your members and patrons to learn about their needs. Follow your local government and health agencies to stay informed.

3

**Create a risk assessment** for your season using the information above as a starting point. Discuss the assessment with your board.

4

**Identify key activities** to host in the coming season. These may or may not include performances. Focus primarily on delivering value to your community.

5

**Develop a budget and strategy.** Identify new expenses and revenue as it pertains to your new model and remove any irrelevant items.

6

**Make your decision** based on your formal assessments. Strive for flexibility as we move forward in this uncertain time.

7

**Make an announcement** letting your members and patrons know what you're planning to do. Explain the decision and offer up ways they can help.

# IN SUMMARY

There's no easy answer that we or anyone can give you on whether you should or shouldn't plan your season. There are still so many unknowns and we must continue to monitor and evaluate the evolving situation. At the end of the day, only you and your choral leadership can weigh the risks and decide what is the best choice for your chorus.

What I do hope is that this ebook has given you a helpful framework for making these decisions. Perhaps it will drive meaningful discussions with your board or it will have sparked a few good ideas along the way.

No matter what happens, one thing is clear to me: choruses will always be here.

What we do has never really been about performing. It has always been about the higher purpose of connecting, sharing, learning, loving, inspiring, and okay, yes, making great music too.

When we truly focus on the value we can provide to our members and our communities, nothing will stop us.

Remember to:

1. Adapt quickly.
2. Aim for flexibility.
3. Experiment.
4. Ask for help.
5. Never, ever give up.

You got this!

-Tori Cook

Director of Sales & Marketing

Chorus Connection

# RESOURCES

- [Chorus Connection: COVID-19 Resource Center for Community Choruses](#)
- [Chorus Connection: Chorus Management Network on Facebook](#)
- [Colleen Dilenschneider: Which Cultural Entities Will People Return to After Reopening?](#)
- [Colleen Dilenschneider: What Will Make People Feel Safe Attending a Cultural Entity Again?](#)
- [The Post-Covid Concert Hall Catastrophe: Why Audience Attendance is the Least of Our Problems](#)
- [NATS: What Do Science and Data Say About the Near-Term Future of Singing](#)
- [San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus: COVID-19 Rehearsal Guide](#)
- [GALA Choruses: Quarantined Choirs Resource Center](#)
- [Chorus America: COVID-19 Resource Center](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)
- [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(U.S.\)](#)



Stay connected with your  
singers — 24/7, online.

Book a demo:

[www.chorusconnection.com/demo](http://www.chorusconnection.com/demo)

