

From Surviving To Thriving:

PREPARING YOUR CHORUS TO SUCCEED IN A
CHANGED WORLD

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BOARD MEMBER, GALA CHORUSES INC.

From Surviving To Thriving...



BERKSHIRE CHORAL
INTERNATIONAL

If you love to sing choral music, your voice belongs at BCI.

We create one-of-a-kind experiences
for singers with inspiring conductors
in stunning locations around the U.S.
and across the world.

berkshirechoral.org



From Surviving
to Thriving

Srsly?



2020

From Surviving to Thriving

Agenda

- ▶ A Complicated Environment
- ▶ Priorities for the Short Term
- ▶ Prepare Your Chorus Culture to Meet a Changed World
- ▶ Self Guided Action Plan

Three Crises (*at least*)

▶ COVID-19

- ▶ An existential threat to the art of choral singing and the culture of choral communities
- ▶ Health and economic insecurity until an effective vaccine is widely distributed...
- ▶ Long-term changes to group activity we take for granted

Three Crises (*at least*)

- ▶ COVID-19

- ▶ INJUSTICE/NO JUSTICE

 - ▶ Black Lives Matter

 - ▶ Systemic racism in the arts and a lack of representation and engagement

Three Crises (*at least*)

- ▶ COVID-19
- ▶ INJUSTICE/NO JUSTICE
- ▶ DYSFUNCTIONAL CIVIC DISCOURSE
 - ▶ Epic breakdown of trust, logic, and societal norms
 - ▶ Exacerbates pain of the first two crises



How do we make *that* world more like a chorus?
A place where every voice is
welcome, safe, heard, and respected?

Challenge 1: Surviving

Put on your oxygen mask
before assisting others





The question that should be driving
your actions:

- ▶ What do we need to do *now* to ensure that our organization is alive and financially viable when we can resume singing *in person, for audiences?*



What do we need to do now to ensure our organization is alive and financially viable when we can resume singing in person for audiences?

▶ **Avoid Magical Thinking**

- ▶ Passion is not always our friend
- ▶ “Confront the brutal facts of your current situation” – Jim Collins
- ▶ Brainstorm a Stop Doing list



What do we need to do now to ensure our organization is alive and financially viable when we can resume singing in person for audiences?

▶ **Act with Financial Rigor**

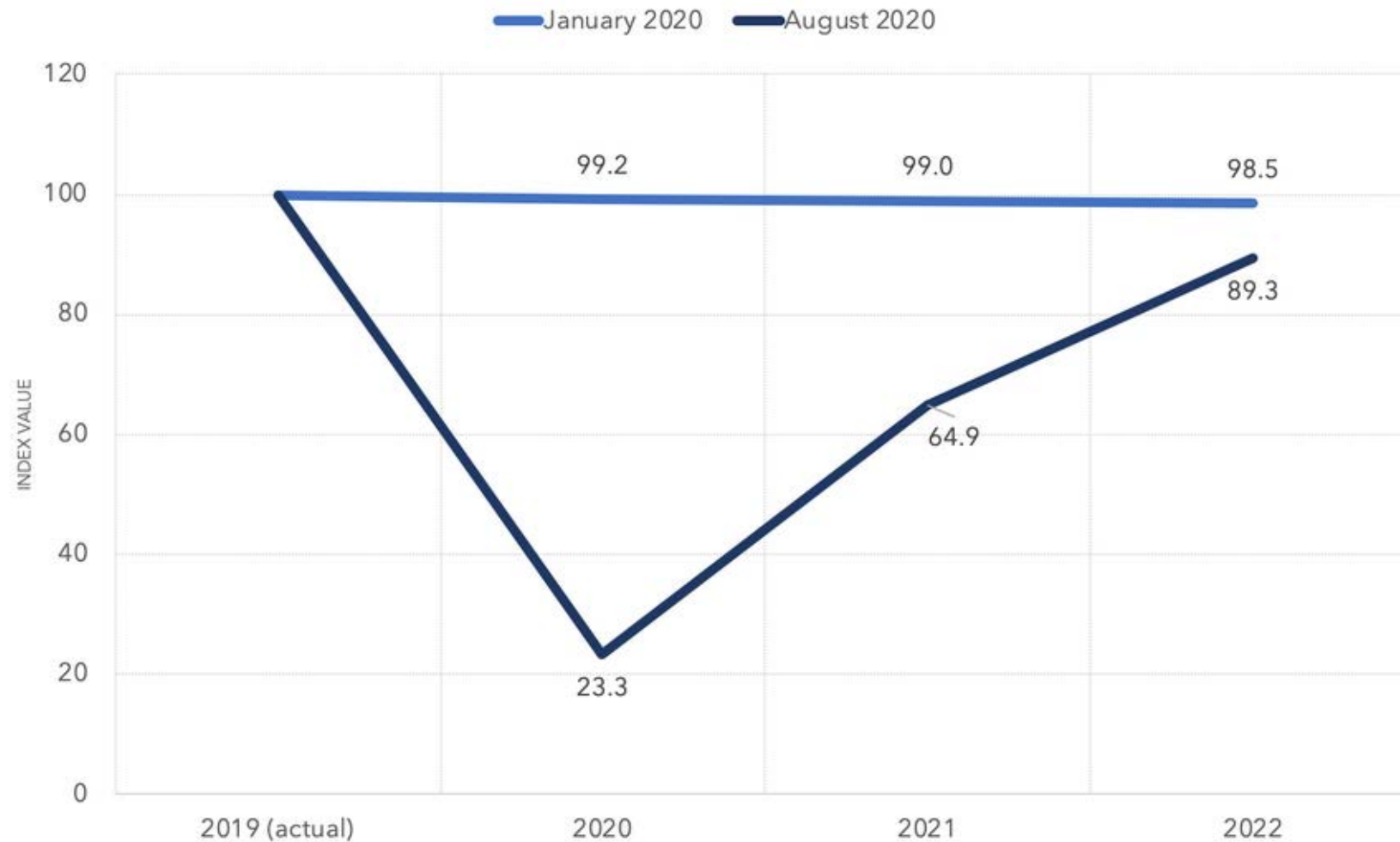
- ▶ Understand (and set aside) the minimum financial resources you will need to resume operations
- ▶ Multiple timeline scenarios to re-start in person and your financial burn rate

Broadway: May 2021 (maybe)

Metropolitan Opera: Fall 2021

BCI: Summer 2022

<https://www.colleendilen.com/2020/08/05/market-potential-what-attendance-can-cultural-entities-expect-in-2020-data/>





What do we need to do now to ensure our organization is alive and financially viable when we can resume singing in person for audiences?

▶ Rally Your Internal Community

- ▶ What low/no cost things can you do to care for your singers and close supporters

▶ Coping with Ambiguous Loss

Ambiguous loss is a loss that occurs without closure or clear understanding. This kind of loss leaves a person searching for answers, and thus complicates and delays the process of grieving, and often results in unresolved grief.

- ▶ How can you make the best use of non-singing time

What do we need to do now to ensure our organization is alive and financially viable when we can resume singing in person for audiences?

► Communicate

- Transparent leadership inspires trustworthy behavior
- Develop a shared vision and narrative for how your organization will get through this (*what's the story I can believe in?*)
- Inspire your constituents to invest in your vision
- Online content...

“So many good intentions, so little joy.”

- John Pareles, NY Times 7/21/20

Challenge 2: Position Your Organization to Thrive Beyond Crisis



ARE WE GOING BACK TO THE
SAME WORLD?

SHOULD WE?

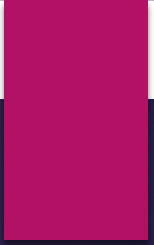


“

*This will be our reply to violence: to make
music more intensely, more beautifully,
more devotedly than ever before.*

”

-LEONARD BERNSTEIN



“ *But this sorrow and rage will not inflame us to seek retribution; rather they will inflame our art. Our music will never again be quite the same. This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.* ”

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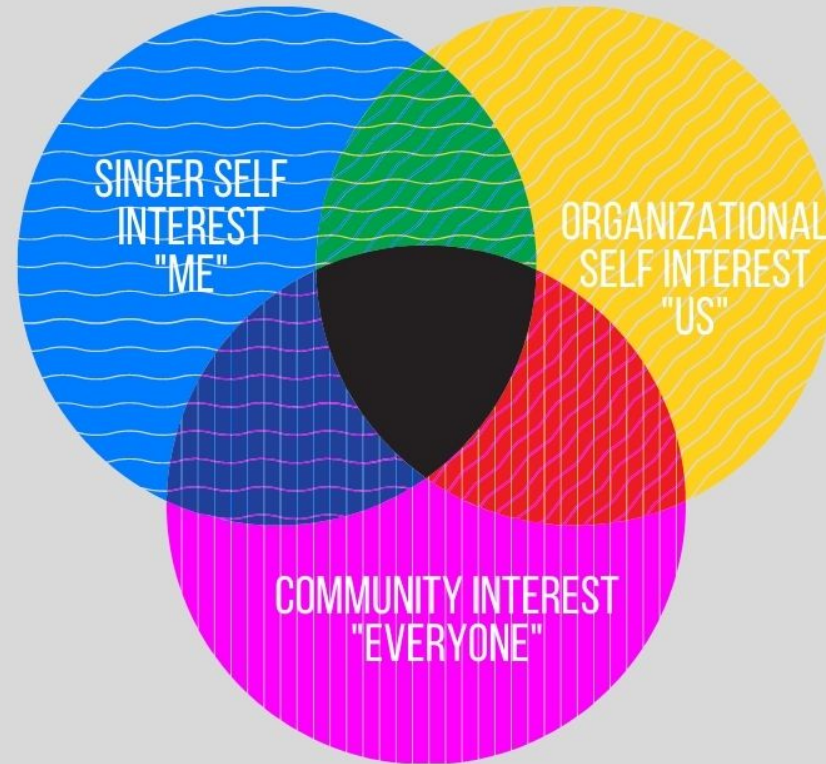
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How do we inflame our art
for a world that will never again be quite the same?

3 Frames that Shape Our Decisions

**CHORAL
FRAMES**



3 Frames that Shape Our Decisions

- ▶ “ME” The **singer self-interest frame** comprises the personal experiences of participants in the organization – the blend of volunteerism, artistic fulfillment, activism, personal relationships, etc. With many unique voices, that makes for a complex blend of motivations and desires.

3 Frames that Shape Our Choral View

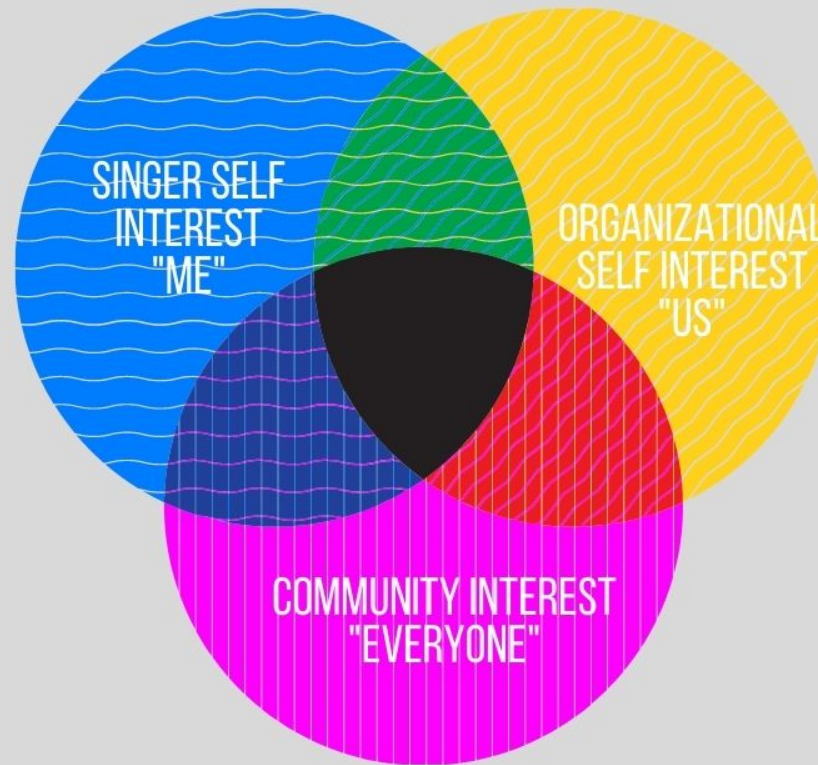
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- ▶ **"US"** The **organizational frame** represents a united choral vision. It's how we forge broad areas of agreement among our singers to support artistic vision and mission. We choose to put the best interests of the organization above our personal preferences.

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- ▶ **"EVERYONE"** The **community interest frame** is how the organization serves and interacts with the broad array of audiences, donors, civic leaders, and organizations in our world. Community is where our mission meets the road and why legally we can be a non profit organization. We have to provide public value.

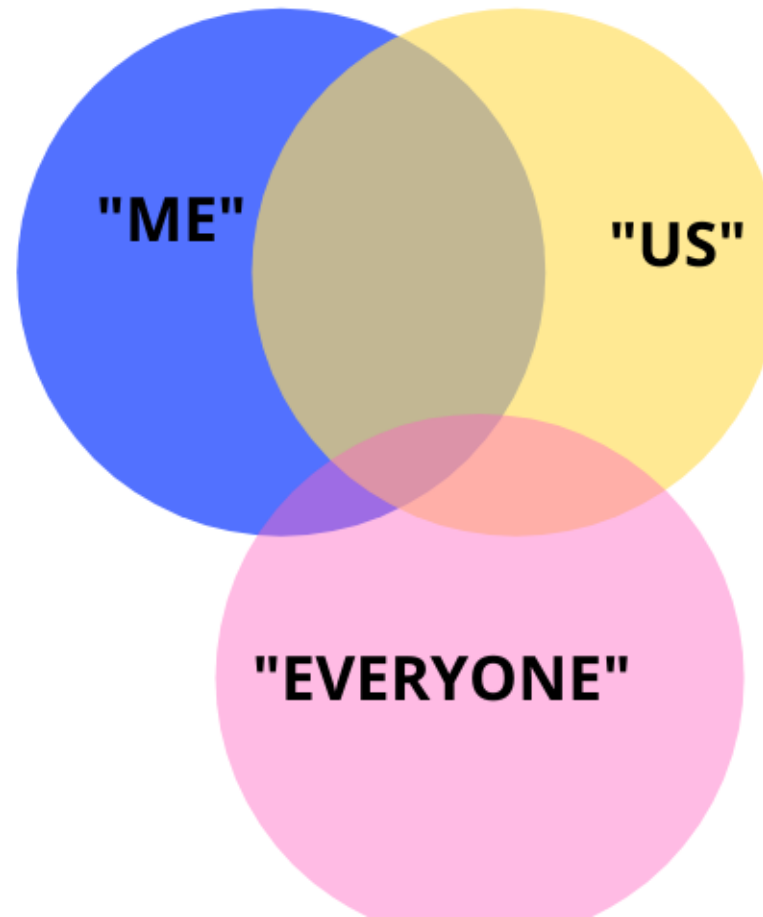
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Choral Frames in Reality

To be relevant in our
changed world, we
must elevate the
community frame



3 Frames that Shape Our Decisions

Elevating the “Everyone” Frame requires:

- ▶ Balance among competing priorities
- ▶ Sincere understanding and buy-in of organizational vision
- ▶ An orientation that being part of a “membership organization” comes with obligations, not just rights
- ▶ A de-escalation of internal drama. Chorus drama is the black hole that chews up energy and repels resources.

Action Plan

Post-COVID Organizational Preparedness

- ▶ 1. List at least 3 ways you think the post-COVID world will be different for your singers.
- ▶ 2. List at least 3 ways you think the post-COVID world will be different for your audience.
- ▶ 3. What could your organization be doing now to address some of those issues or changes?
- ▶ 4. Has your organization identified a realistic financial path to ensure that you can operate in Fall 2021?

Action Plan

- ▶ 5. Assuming a return to in-person concerts, does your organization have the necessary cash flow or has it reserved sufficient funds to restart programs? (*Do you know what your minimum expenses would be to get from first rehearsal until your first concert revenue is received*)?
- ▶ 6. If the return to “normal” audiences is a multi-year curve, have you thought about how to adjust or bend your operations plan to match this curve?
- ▶ 7. Bonus Question: Are the majority of strategic and budget decisions that your organization is currently making focused on your post-COVID return or on present day operations?

Action Plan

Mission-readiness for a Changed Environment

- ▶ 1. List 3 distinct bullet points or short sentences describing how your organization currently creates public value. How do you serve the larger community? At least one should not be directly related to LGBTQ+ identity.
- ▶ 2. What is one new (or substantially re-focused) community connection, collaboration, project or cause that your organization can become involved with over the next 3-6 months to broaden your community relevance?
- ▶ 3. What would it take internally to make that happen (list)?
- ▶ 4. What would it take externally to make that happen (list)?
- ▶ 5. Who do you need as allies to make it happen?
- ▶ 6. How could you dedicate member time and attention in the next six months to improve or advance organizational understanding and buy-in for the “Everyone” framework that puts community value on an equal footing with member and chorus priorities?

“

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”

Questions & Conversation

Steve Smith

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Links to resources

Intention to visit

<https://www.colleendilen.com/category/covid-19-updates/>

Cultural Data

<https://culturaldata.org/pages/long-haul/>

Wolf Brown Audience Outlook

<https://www.audienceoutlookmonitor.com/>

Ambiguous Loss

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-sickness-and-in-health/202005/covid-19-and-ambiguous-loss>

Mass Cultural Council

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/blog/managing-in-an-age-of-crisis/>

GALA New Harmony – Equity, Access, and Belonging

<https://galachoruses.org/resource-center/a-new-harmony>