

# Transformative Community Engagement

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## Programming to address “Social Justice”

1. Many arts organizations are programming concerts in an attempt to become more “diverse” or perhaps “relevant”.
2. Concerts that address current social issues: Black Lives Matter, women’s rights, #MeToo, addressing truth telling around the history of Indigenous People.



## Programming for “Social Justice”

But what does incorporating “social justice themes” really mean?

Are we really connecting to the communities where we live  
OR communities from which the music originated?



## Confessions of a 20-something white activist...





## Questions to Ask

1. Are we creating social change if nothing changes within our own singers/choruses?
2. As we take on social issues, is our programming balanced with internal education and openness to transformation?
3. Rather than asking “how can we become more diverse?” Ask “where can we get involved in our community?”



**BORDER|**  
**CROSS|SING**



**FESTIVAL DE LAS  
CALAVERAS 2017**

**Calaveras Festival, 2017**







# Relevance

“For something to be relevant it must yield a positive cognitive effect. It is not enough for it to be familiar, it has to bring something new to the table.” - Nina Simon

# Access

“Arts and culture organizations must understand themselves not as arbiters of taste, but as creative homes for the people.” - Deborah Cullinan

# Representation

“Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.” - Gloria Anzaldúa



# How We Make Our Community Sings Relevant to Latinxs

Each event **tells a story that resonates** with Latinx experiences.

Each event **creates an intentional connection** between the Latinx community and other communities in the Twin Cities.

Each event **brings something new** to how Latinxs view themselves or are viewed by others.

Each event starts with elements already relevant to the Latinx community, and then **mobilizes** Latinxs towards something else.

# How We Make Community Sings Accessible to Latinxs

Each event takes place at a **convenient** time and location.

Each event is provided **free of charge** or on a pay-as-you-will basis for people from specific Latinx communities.

Each event is bilingual, includes visual aids, and room for questions and conversation to make it **easy to follow**.

Each event includes elements that may be **familiar** to people from specific Latinx communities.

Each event takes place in a loose, somewhat **informal** atmosphere.

# How We Make Our Sings Representative of Latinxs

Each event involves a **collaboration** with Latinx artists or organizations.

Each event is **researched in depth** and reviewed by specialists in its content to minimize the risk of misrepresenting the music or cultural context.

Each event involves intentional **recruitment** of Latinx singers and performers.

Each event deliberately discusses the music's spiritual, historical, and cultural **context**.



**ONE** MINNESOTA'S LGBTQIA  
**VOICE**  
MIXED CHORUS



# Building Our Arts Community

Adapted from *Engagement Essentials* by Doug Borwick

## Community Engagement 1.0

*Benefits Chorus and community... unless no one shows up.*

- Get a grant. Create a project.
- Find some poor people.
- Tell them why they should get involved.
- Be surprised when they don't show up.

1. Hi, were doing this concert about racism.
2. Seems like that's an issue that you're dealing with and we want to support you.
3. We'd love you to come to the concert. Here are 100 free tickets. See you there!
4. PS. Could someone from your organization speak right before we ask for donations?

# Transformative Engagement

## The Arts 3.0

### Transformative Engagement:

*Chorus, collaborative partner, and community/audience benefit.*

*Goal is to create **enthusiasm, learning and transformation** for all three communities above.*

1. Thanks for meeting. Tell me about your organization.
2. Here's what we're doing and how it might connect to your goals.
3. What would you like us to know/understand about your community?
4. Who are the people who can best teach and guide us in understanding your community?
5. Do you have an event coming up where I could visit or volunteer?
6. What do you recommend as next steps?





## Music of Immigrants to Minnesota

- I attended several workshops about refugee and immigrant experience in MN, collected stories and statistics.
- Asked each singer to attend at least one music or cultural event in Minneapolis where they were the minority. No agenda except to listen, learn and experience what it is like to be a visible minority.
- Held a potluck and singers cooked food from their own culture/backgrounds.

## Community Partner: Green Card Voices



- Met with Green Card Voices youth to ask what goals they had for the collaboration.
- Stories and photos were portrayed in a huge display of 12 panels in the concert hall lobby. Youth signed and sold books.
- Nima met in advance to teach pronunciation for Somali national anthem and clarify the history of the song and translation.
- Nima shared her story of immigrating from Somalia and of coming out.

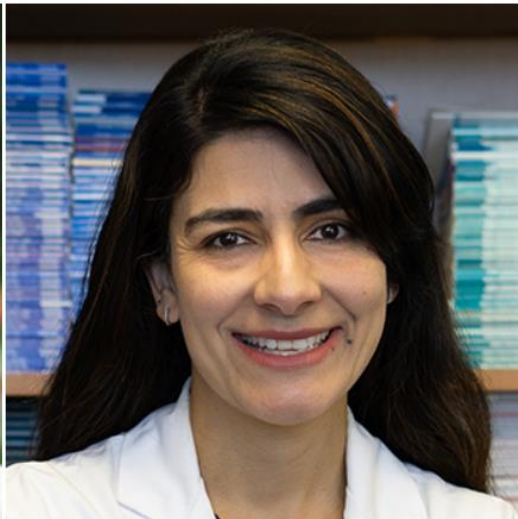


- Angel, El Salvador, coached our Spanish pronunciation
- Performed a spoken narrative as part of a Spanish song about finding home
- Angel told his immigration story along with his coming out story.
- Made sure that one concert was completely free for anyone to attend.

# Continuing Partnership: Green Card Voices

[home](#)[videos](#)[programs](#)[books](#)[get involved](#)[donate now](#)[store](#)[podcast](#)[gala 2020](#)

We're Here. We Have A Story. We Play A Role.







## Music of Immigrants to Minnesota

- Hmong HS student coached us on the Hmong language for a song by student in a school where One Voice had performed.
- Norwegian folk song. Local dancer taught a traditional Norwegian dance.
- Sharon Day, Ojibwe elder, workshop about the arrival of her ancestors to Minnesota and taught one of the songs we sang in the concert.
- Gay, Muslim composer in Toronto via Skype.
- Concert program include 12 Action Steps that audiences were encouraged to take in support of their immigrant neighbors.



## ReMembering: Singing Water

Exploring Minnesota as a place of both home and exile for LGBTQ and Indigenous people

- Relationships built from our first collaboration
- Participating in community events for over two years
- Invited to serve as a vocal coach for Ikidowin, Indigenous youth theater
- Will perform parts of the concert at All Nation's Church and on concert weekend will provide free busing to the concert venue.



# Preparation and Performance Practice

1. **Seek out music** composed and arranged by individuals rooted in that culture. Support them financially!
2. **Research** the history behind the text, what stories accompany the song, what is the sub-text?
3. **Plan** your score and rehearsal preparation with the same diligence as we use for a western classical work.
4. Focus on **authentic style** including vocal tone, articulation, phrasing, expression, instrumentation.
5. **Be intentional** about who is featured on stage.



## Planning for Transformative Engagement

- **Listen** more than you talk.
- Be willing to **give up control**. Know that the outcome may take a completely different form than you were expecting.
- This will take SO much **time** and advanced planning. Created a planning grid to help guide the process.
- You can't do it alone. Identify community experts or **guides** to help you begin to understand your partners.
- **Train and educate** your chorus BEFORE you invite guests into your space or visit your collaborator's event.
- **Get involved** in events that your collaborative partner is planning.
- If you **feel uncomfortable**, great!

## Collaboration Pitfalls

- **Lack of internal education** and preparation.
- The danger of **cultural appropriation** vs **cultural appreciation**.
- Failing to ask **WHY** are you programming this music.
- Taking the lead without slowing down to **engage your partner**, ask questions and understand their goals.
- Assuming that people from non-white communities want to hear this music.



# Transformative Engagement Planning Grid

<b>Project Title &amp; Chorus</b>	<b>Concert Title</b>
<b>Collaborative partner</b>	
<b>Community Experts</b>	Who are the experts in your community that can bridge between your two organizations, help with training or facilitate conversation?
<b>Internal Training</b>	What kind of internal training will your chorus need? What does your collaborative partner suggest?
<b>Listen &amp; Experience</b>	How/where will your chorus participate in an activity hosted by your collaborative partner?
<b>Message</b>	What is the simple message you want to convey through this artistic project?
<b>Goal Setting</b>	<p>Create up to 3 basic goals for the partnership – together!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<b>Challenges</b>	What challenges do you anticipate for the project in general?





Home » Resource Center

## A New Harmony: Equity, Access, Belonging

View the **A New Harmony Workbook** – [PDF](#). To request a printable workbook, contact [GALA Choruses](#).

GALA choruses have a unique opportunity to explore issues of equity, access and belonging because our choruses offer more than just a place to sing: they are also communities of belonging.



GALA Choruses has designed a new workbook to help explore these conversations. Early drafts focused on a model called DEI: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. But the more GALA's Open Table Committee explored the vision of **A New Harmony** we realized we could create a new way to frame this conversation without using the word "diversity", which is overused today, or "inclusion" which innately infers that some people are *in* and others are *out*.

It is the belief of GALA Choruses that these topics are valuable for every member chorus. We hope that these conversations will inspire and launch your chorus on a journey toward equity, access and belonging.

The following tabs contain additional resources for further conversation.

► Mobility and Ability

► Race and Ethnic Identity

► Gender Identity

► Sexual Orientation



### Transgender Voices

Explore video shorts, workshops and resources for [transgender singers](#) and [voice teachers/conductors](#) working with trans and non-binary singers.

"We live in a world of rapidly changing demographics. Building a chorus that truly reflects the community in which your chorus lives is a revolutionary act that can ensure your chorus' health and well-being for decades."

– Maria-Elena Grant, GALA Board Member

### Infiltration

[AORTA explores](#) how oppressive systems can infiltrate non-profit organizations.

## Responses, Thoughts, Questions



## 12 Tips for Transformative Engagement

1. Listen and ask
2. Serve food
3. Carefully plan internal training
4. Do your homework: performance practice & culture
5. Anticipate ways to welcome
6. Participate in community partner events
7. Balance creative with contracts
8. Compensate generously
9. Share advertising and promotion
10. Stay in touch
11. Embrace the possibility of transformation
12. After the experience, explore how this collaboration can change your organization (leadership, donor base).

## For more conversation contact

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