

## Sustaining Queer Choruses: Organizational Resilience through Governance, Equity, and Capacity

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### Abstract

Organizational resilience is a central concern for queer choruses. A review of the literature on nonprofit leadership, diversity practices, and community arts organizations has shown that resilient systems develop through coordinated governance structures, cultures of equity and belonging, and strong operational capacity. Governance contributed to resilience by establishing structures that distribute responsibility, support accountability, and sustain continuity. Equity and belonging influenced organizational stability through practices that strengthen psychological safety, representation, and collaborative participation. Operational capacity further supported resilience by providing documentation, administrative tools, and financial systems that enable reliable functioning. Examining governance, equity and belonging, and operational capacity offered insight into how queer choruses maintained cohesion and mission alignment across changing conditions. Based on this literature review, I offer organizational practices for queer chorus directors and boards that support long-term participation and artistic continuity in community-based LGBTQ+ ensembles and outline directions for future research.

### Keywords

Queer choruses, organizational resilience, nonprofit leadership, equity and belonging, community arts, LGBTQIA+ organizations

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### Introduction

Queer choruses rely on shared artistic identity, volunteer engagement, and community connection to sustain their work across changing social and organizational pressures. Researchers have found that nonprofit leadership and community arts organizations develop resilience when structures support continuity, shared responsibility, and clear organizational practices (Adams, 2010; Charles & Sloan, 2024). Scholars have further demonstrated that participation is strengthened when systems align values, communication, and expectations across diverse communities (Ostrower, 2008; Alberdi & Mulcahy, 2008; Cuyler, 2008). Understanding how queer choruses maintain stability requires attention to the internal conditions that shape decision-making, community experience, and administrative functioning. This literature review framed organizational resilience as a set of practices that support mission alignment and collective identity during periods of change.

The perspectives presented in this article were informed by experience in nonprofit leadership, academic training in organizational psychology and public administration, and long-term engagement in queer choral communities. The literature review was grounded in more than a decade of service on the board of Empire City Men's Chorus, including ten years as treasurer, which provided sustained exposure to the organizational, financial, and cultural dynamics influencing community-based arts groups. This experience offered practical context for examining how organizational structures, cultural practices, and community values shaped resilience in volunteer-led arts organizations. This background shaped the interpretive lens through which I developed the observations and recommendations presented here.

In this literature review, I examined organizational resilience in queer choruses through three interconnected areas: governance, equity and belonging, and operational capacity. Prior research on nonprofit and community-based organizations has shown that governance practices, equity-focused cultures, and administrative capacity shape the internal functioning and stability of small volunteer-led groups (Ostrower, 2008). Focusing on governance, equity and belonging, and operational capacity clarified how internal practices influenced community experience, participation, and organizational continuity. Based on this literature review, I developed an analytic approach for examining how queer choruses sustained stability, cultivated shared purpose, and adapted to common challenges in volunteer-driven arts organizations.

## Governance

Sustainable leadership and strong governance are essential for the long-term health of LGBTQIA+ choruses. Many queer choruses depend on a small number of volunteers who carry significant administrative and relational responsibilities, often without formal structures to guide their work. Charles and Sloan (2024) found that accountability in arts organizations rests too heavily on individuals rather than shared processes. Furthermore, Bass and Riggio (2006) noted that leadership capacity grows when organizations cultivate systems that encourage shared responsibility, skill development, and healthy decision-making practices. Based on this literature, I concluded that formalizing governance systems strengthened leadership sustainability in queer choruses, providing a foundation for examining governance practices that support continuity and shared leadership.

Governance practices that reduce burnout and encourage succession planning support leadership sustainability in queer choruses. Adams (2010) found that leaders from marginalized communities were often overextended because they held both professional and cultural responsibilities, particularly in identity-based arts settings. Charles and Sloan (2024) highlighted that financial and organizational accountability improved when board members provided consistent support through clear expectations, documentation, and shared responsibility. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) demonstrated that inclusive leadership practices fostered psychological safety, enabling members to contribute openly and to view learning as part of organizational growth. Applied to queer choral organizations, governance practices supporting shared responsibility and psychological safety could help maintain stability and momentum as membership and leadership change over time.

Volunteer-led organizations that maintained accurate records, consistent communication patterns, and transparent policies developed more stable foundations that were less vulnerable to leadership transitions or unexpected challenges. Adams (2010) emphasized that written processes helped prevent the loss of organizational knowledge, a common issue in groups with high volunteer turnover. Pless and Maak (2004) found that integrating diverse perspectives into leadership processes strengthened accountability and supported organizational climates in which participation was valued. In queer choral organizations, shared leadership structures and psychologically safe environments could enable volunteers, board members, and artistic staff to participate more effectively by recognizing diverse perspectives and treating errors as opportunities for learning.

Effective boards approach governance as an ongoing process that responds to community needs, organizational growth, and changing social conditions. Queer choruses operate within dynamic cultural environments in which membership demographics, artistic goals, and community expectations shift over time. Boards that emphasize reflection and adjustment in their governance practices support long-term sustainability by responding deliberately rather than reactively. In queer choral organizations, board members and organizational leaders can align leadership practices with evolving mission priorities and community values through this adaptive approach. Governance practices that support continuity and responsiveness also shape the

organizational conditions under which equity and belonging develop, making equity and belonging the next area of organizational resilience to examine.

## Equity and Belonging as Resilience

Equity and belonging are essential concerns for LGBTQIA+ choruses. Researchers studying queer choral communities and nonprofit organizations have emphasized that participants value environments in which they feel included, supported, and recognized as full members of the community (MacLachlan, 2020; Balén, 2017; Bernstein et al., 2016). Balén (2017) noted that queer choruses often reflect broader social inequities, including racism, classism, and transphobia. Organizational research has further shown that diversity alone does not produce inclusion unless governance and leadership practices enable voice, participation, and shared decision-making (Buse et al., 2014; Bernstein et al., 2016). For these reasons, governance practices that intentionally cultivate equity and belonging play a critical role in sustaining inclusive participation and leadership pathways within queer choral organizations.

Surface-level inclusion does not create the same conditions as structural equity. Bernstein et al. (2016) argued that representation and visibility alone do not ensure meaningful participation or shared leadership when organizational practices fail to distribute voice and decision-making authority. Similarly, Buse et al. (2014) demonstrated that diversity initiatives improve governance outcomes only when leaders adopt inclusion behaviors that enable marginalized members to influence decisions. Belonging depends on whether members feel empowered to contribute to artistic and organizational choices, particularly when their perspectives or identities differ from established norms. In community arts organizations, Cuyler (2008) discussed how participation strengthens when systems distribute responsibility and authority more evenly across members. As MacLachlan (2020) observed, outward commitments to diversity can mask persistent internal inequities in representation and decision-making, which weaken participation and organizational cohesion over time. Collectively, the scholarship indicates that leadership and governance practices enabling meaningful participation, shared authority, and sustained engagement across difference support the development of equity and belonging.

Belonging also develops through relational and psychological dynamics that shape how members experience the ensemble. Scholars examining community music and volunteer organizations defined belonging as an organizational condition in which members experienced mutual recognition, meaningful participation, and shared responsibility through sustained engagement in collective practice (Holly, 2016; Bryer, 2019). In queer choruses, community music spaces provided opportunities for identity affirmation, interpersonal connection, and shared purpose, which strengthened belonging when members felt recognized and respected (Balén, 2017; MacLachlan, 2020). Relational and psychological conditions within organizations also supported psychological safety, which researchers associated with healthier group functioning and more constructive engagement in mission-driven organizations (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Research rooted in Self-Determination Theory further emphasized that environments supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness strengthened motivation and long-term participation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2023; Forest et al., 2023). Across this scholarship, belonging emerged as a core organizational condition shaping participation, engagement, and continuity in volunteer-driven ensembles.

Equity further required structural attention to the policies, practices, and norms that guided decision-making and power within organizations. Scholars examining culturally diverse arts organizations emphasized that equity was practiced consistently only when organizational structures aligned with stated institutional values, rather than functioning solely at the level of rhetoric (Ostrower, 2008; Alberdi & Mulcahy, 2008). When organizations



lacked mechanisms for structural accountability, they often reproduced the very exclusions they sought to challenge. Balén (2017) and MacLachlan (2020) observed that inequities in leadership access, rehearsal environments, and participation expectations frequently undermined stated commitments to justice within queer choral communities. Across these studies, equity emerged as a structural condition dependent on how organizations aligned governance practices with stated commitments to justice and inclusion.

When leaders and members of queer choruses integrate equity into an organization's foundational practices, they strengthen organizational resilience by fostering commitment to dignity, accountability, and collective growth. Balén (2017) documented how inequities in participation and leadership within queer choral communities undermine sustained engagement, particularly for singers marginalized by race, gender identity, or access. MacLachlan (2020) similarly observed that outward commitments to inclusion often fail to translate into equitable participation when internal practices do not align with stated values. Research on community arts organizations showed that participation and continuity increase when leadership structures distribute responsibility and voice more evenly across members (Cuyler, 2008). Organizational scholars further associated inclusive leadership practices and psychological safety with sustained engagement and healthier group functioning in mission-driven organizations (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Through such practices, queer choruses cultivate communities capable of sustaining cohesion while navigating internal challenges and external change.

## Operational Capacity

Operational capacity determines whether community-based arts organizations can sustain their work through change and transition. Ostrower (2008) described operational capacity as encompassing the systems, tools, and administrative structures that supported day-to-day organizational functioning in arts organizations. Kim and Bradach (2012) found that nonprofits sustained effectiveness over time by investing in administrative processes that supported coordination, communication, and financial stability. Lecy and Searing (2014) similarly showed that chronic underinvestment in core administrative functions weakened organizational continuity and constrained long-term capacity. In this sense, operational capacity functions as a foundational dimension of organizational resilience by supporting continuity across leadership transitions and changing organizational conditions.

Operational capacity extends beyond financial resources to include the administrative systems, communication tools, and organizational processes required for consistent functioning. Queer choruses relied heavily on volunteer labor to sustain rehearsals, communications, and artistic work, and such responsibilities proved difficult to maintain without clear and dependable systems. Kim and Bradach (2012) found that nonprofits became more stable when leaders strengthened back-office processes, expanded administrative capacity, and developed repeatable systems that reduced dependence on any single volunteer or leader. Lecy and Searing (2014) similarly showed that weak investment in core administrative functions limited organizations' ability to manage transitions and sustain long-term operations. These findings identified operational capacity as a critical factor in maintaining organizational stability as leadership, membership, and programming evolved.

Staffing structures, including both volunteer and paid roles, represent an important component of operational capacity in queer choruses. Many ensembles relied heavily on volunteers to manage essential administrative and relational tasks, often concentrating multiple responsibilities in a small number of individuals, a pattern that Lecy and Searing (2014) associated with organizational vulnerability during periods of turnover or burnout. Their analysis of nonprofit capacity further showed that chronic underinvestment in administrative infrastructure placed sustained strain on volunteer labor and weakened operational stability. Kim and Bradach (2012) found that organizations strengthened continuity when leaders made strategic investments in administrative capacity,

including paid staff roles, that were aligned with available financial resources. In queer choruses, staffing approaches that balance volunteer commitment with appropriately resourced administrative support may help preserve institutional memory and support leadership transitions over time.

Operational capacity ultimately reflects a queer chorus's organizational values. Ostrower (2008) showed that investments in administrative systems, documentation, and coordination practices signal how organizations prioritize accountability, continuity, and mission alignment in arts settings. Kim and Bradach (2012) found that nonprofit organizations strengthened long-term outcomes when leaders aligned resources with mission priorities, clarified operational expectations, and developed systems that supported consistent performance. Lecy and Searing (2014) similarly documented how sustained attention to administrative infrastructure reduced organizational fragility by supporting continuity beyond individual leaders or volunteers. In queer choruses, investments in documentation, communication infrastructure, and administrative processes provide practical foundations for sustaining mission-driven work across leadership and membership transitions. The interaction of governance, equity and belonging, and operational capacity points toward several areas where future research can strengthen understanding of resilience in queer choruses.

## Call for Future Research

Many LGBTQIA+ choruses operate in environments shaped by economic pressures, volunteer turnover, and evolving community expectations. Building on existing research on nonprofit and arts organizations, future research can deepen understanding of how queer choruses sustain themselves over time. Rather than treating resilience only as a response to disruption, scholars can examine resilience as an ongoing organizational practice shaped by identity, community, and artistic purpose. This perspective situates queer choruses within broader conversations about how community-based arts organizations navigate change while remaining grounded in mission and values (Adams, 2010).

Future research can also examine how queer choruses build and maintain governance structures that support stability over time. Ostrower's (2008) work on arts governance highlighted the importance of role clarity, shared responsibility, and participation in sustaining organizational functioning. Extending this line of inquiry, scholars could explore how board composition, leadership pathways, and decision-making practices influence continuity, conflict resolution, and organizational well-being in queer choral organizations. Such work would clarify how governance practices operate within identity-based arts communities where leadership and membership are closely intertwined.

Additional research can focus on volunteer motivation and participation in ensembles that rely heavily on unpaid labor. Lecy and Searing (2014) demonstrated how underinvestment in administrative infrastructure placed sustained strain on volunteer labor in nonprofit organizations. Future studies could examine how queer choruses structure roles, distribute responsibilities, and support leadership development in ways that sustain engagement and preserve institutional memory across membership cycles. This research would deepen understanding of how operational capacity develops in volunteer-driven arts organizations.

There is also a need for research examining how organizational practices shape equity and belonging in queer choruses. Scholarship on queer choral communities documented how access to voice, representation, and leadership opportunities influenced participation and community experience (Balén, 2017). Future research could investigate how rehearsal environments, governance practices, and internal policies shape experiences of belonging across differences of race, gender identity, class, and ability. Such work would strengthen understanding of how equity and belonging function as organizational conditions that support resilience.

Future research can further explore how governance, equity and belonging, and operational capacity interact to produce distinctive patterns of resilience in queer choruses. Lengnick-Hall and Beck (2005) emphasized that resilience emerges from the interaction of organizational systems rather than from isolated practices. Applying this perspective to queer choral organizations would support a more integrated understanding of how community-based arts groups sustain musical, relational, and organizational commitments over time. This work would also contribute to arts management scholarship by highlighting how organizations rooted in marginalized identities develop resilient practices aligned with shared values and long-term aspirations.

## **Conclusion: Sustaining the Song**

Queer choruses function as spaces of connection, affirmation, and shared purpose and as platforms for social justice and hope within their communities. Belonging is supported when members are invited to participate fully and are recognized in their dignity and wholeness. Organizational practices that sustained stability, clarity, and inclusion shaped how queer choruses adapted over time, alongside artistic commitments that brought singers together in common purpose. Structural and cultural factors supported the capacity of ensembles to respond to changing circumstances.

Sustaining a queer chorus has involved ongoing attention to leadership, community experience, and administrative systems. Volunteer leaders, artistic directors, singers, and supporters have worked together to maintain conditions that enabled artistic and organizational life to flourish. Internal collaboration required intentionality, distributed responsibility, and practices that supported clear communication and consistent functioning. Such work expressed a shared commitment to nurturing organizational environments that sustained both mission and music.

In periods shaped by shifting cultural, economic, and social landscapes, organizational resilience has taken on particular significance for LGBTQIA+ ensembles. Queer choruses have demonstrated how community arts organizations respond to uncertainty with creativity and alignment. Within queer choral organizations, resilience appeared as a collective process grounded in purpose and accountability, sustained through connection, shared values, and responsiveness to change. Sustained connection, shared values, and responsiveness to change position queer choruses as important examples of how identity-based community organizations navigate change.

The history of queer choruses has included decades of community-building, advocacy, and care, and those experiences continue to inform present work. As ensembles evolved, organizational stability depended on the strengthening of governance, the cultivation of equity and belonging, and the reinforcement of operational capacity. Each of these dimensions supported continuity, participation, and mission alignment by shaping internal structures and cultural practices that guided ensemble life. Sustained attention to governance, equity and belonging, and operational capacity supported continuity across organizational transitions.

In this article, I have argued that organizational resilience reflects the values an ensemble chooses to cultivate. Investments in governance structures, attention to equity and belonging, and efforts to build operational capacity reinforced dignity, community, and shared purpose within queer choral organizations. Such investments position LGBTQIA+ choruses to remain vital spaces of connection, creativity, and community expression.



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