

STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

**SAN FRANCISCO
GAY MEN'S CHORUS
PREPARED JANUARY 2019**

A PLAN FOR
THE FUTURE



 SAN FRANCISCO
GAY MEN'S CHORUS

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OUR MISSION

To lead by creating extraordinary music and experiences that build community, inspire activism, and foster compassion at home and around the world.

FROM SFGMC LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends,

2018 was a pivotal year for San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. Our 40th anniversary year began on the heels of a life-changing tour of the American South, our *Lavender Pen Tour*; Saw the release of a landmark album, *40*; Launched a new social justice student outreach program, *RHYTHM*; Hosted a sold-out run of *UNBREAKABLE*, a groundbreaking world premiere work by Tony Award-nominated composer Andrew Lipka; And, celebrated the lives of loved ones lost with a permanent legacy at the National AIDS Memorial Grove.

2018 is also the year the SFGMC committed to consciously crafting our future, to ensure that our next 40 years are as impactful as our first.

Our Board of Directors decided early in 2018 to commit to a process of Strategic Planning, and engaged Michael M. Kaiser. Mr. Kaiser is a well-respected arts administrator who served as president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Dubbed "the turnaround king" for his work at such arts institutions as the Kansas City Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre and the Royal Opera House, Kaiser has earned international renown for his expertise in arts management.

Working together closely with SFGMC board, staff, members, donors and select constituents, Mr. Kaiser engaged in a thorough planning process resulting in the plan summarized herein. In brief, this plan lays out specific tactics in the following areas that will help us achieve our mission:

**PROGRAMMING
MARKETING
FUNDRAISING
BOARD DEVELOPMENT
STAFFING
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

By focusing our attention on these strategic areas, we will be able to fulfill our mission in big and small ways achieving goals the likes of which the Chorus' founders could only have dreamed.

Sincerely,
San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus Leadership

INTRODUCTION

By any measure, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus (SFGMC) has been a tremendous success. For forty years, the Chorus has affected the lives of millions through its performances, tours, and educational and outreach activities. The Chorus initiated the gay chorus movement. But it is not an historical relic; the Chorus performances are stronger than ever and, RHYTHM, its new signature outreach program is groundbreaking. The organization is now at an inflection point. As it prepares to purchase its first permanent home, the need for community activism and social awareness is greater than ever, and the opportunities for expansion seem limited only by imagination and access to resources. This plan provides a roadmap for selecting amongst the many avenues open to the Chorus and to establishing a stronger revenue stream for funding.

METHODOLOGY

The first step towards accomplishing this mission was to evaluate the environment in which the SFGMC operates. Four levels of environmental analysis were developed:

1. Cultural institutions in North America
2. Not-for-Profit Choruses
3. Gay Choruses
4. San Francisco Organizations



BACKGROUND

All **cultural organizations in the United States** must understand that the environment is changing. There has been a systematic reduction in cultural education in the public schools that reduces interest and participation in cultural activities. The development of digital forms of entertainment have trained audiences to demand culture and entertainment whenever and wherever they want and has reduced the demand for in-person experiences. The primary donors to these institutions are growing older; their children are not necessarily as interested in providing support to cultural organizations in part because of the reduced amount of cultural education they receive.

Not-for-profit choruses face specific challenges. Chorus members often find that their professional lives and other obligations conflict with growing demand for the time needed for rehearsals, performances, outreach programming, and touring. Most choruses require members to pay dues; often members are encouraged to sell tickets and to raise funds as well. This can put a financial strain on members. Most choruses are also of modest size yet they must compete for funding and audiences with far larger, often more glamorous, institutions with large and potent boards and donor groups.

Gay choruses face the same pressures as other not-for-profit choruses. They also must compete with other organizations that address the needs of the LGBTQ community for funding and attention. This has constrained the size of gay choruses; in fact not one has a budget exceeding \$4 million.

“THE SAN FRANCISCO
GAY MEN’S CHORUS IS A
SERIOUS INSTITUTION. ITS
PRODUCTIONS ARE GRAND,
ITS HISTORY IS DEEP, AND ITS
DISCOGRAPHY IS LONG.”

- San Francisco Chronicle

San Francisco arts organizations face tremendous competition from the very large number of not-for-profit organizations in the region, in addition to high rents, high costs to attract and retain staff, and the general lack of institutional support from the area’s largest industry - high technology firms.

The second step was conducting an internal analysis of key stakeholders – including singers, board, staff, donors, volunteer, community members – that audited the current strengths of and challenges facing the SFGMC.

KEY FINDINGS

The institution has a series of strengths upon which to build:

- Historic role in the gay rights movement
- Highly popular performances at home and on tour
- Strong, engaged group of singers
- Dedicated board
- Hard-working staff
- Opportunity to purchase new building
- Two strong entrepreneurs as leaders
- Several major donors

These strengths are balanced against several challenges:

- Limited growth in annual fundraising
- Modest visibility beyond holiday shows
- Limited board involvement in fundraising
- Pressure on Chorus members to give, raise money, and sell tickets
- Some perception that role in the local community has diminished over time
- Frequent event additions and changes taxes the small staff
- Tight cash position
- Main performance venue is expensive and limited
- Limited clarity in strategic direction and ambition

CONCLUSIONS

This environmental analysis suggests that choruses must develop distinctive and engaging programming to attract new visitors, ticket buyers, and donors. They must market that programming aggressively to compete with new forms of entertainment. There is great competition in San Francisco for funding and visitors. Successful organizations must create strong, engaged, loyal families of donors. A strong board of directors is one major key to building this family. Another key is the ability to foster true community — a core competency and value which San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus will continue to express and to leverage toward continued success in the years to come.



STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC FOCUS



In it's 41st season and going forward, San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus will reflect the dynamism and importance of its home city and become a more visible and engaging organization, offering the best in choral programming while fully embracing its national leadership role.

This will require the continued development of a vibrant, differentiated set of performance, educational and outreach programs, and special events that embrace and take place throughout the entire local community. By engaging its community, the Chorus will become better known as the heart of San Francisco; by creating selective programs for the entire nation (and the world), the Chorus will become recognized as San Francisco's chief cultural ambassadors.

This leadership role, supported by a dynamic institutional marketing campaign and the creation of a development culture, will attract a larger family of ticket buyers, presenters, volunteers, and donors from all sectors of the community. Important programming, marketing, and donor cultivation will have the corollary benefit of attracting new board members who can provide strong governance and philanthropic leadership.

Achieving each of these strategies will require the Chorus to embrace planning at all levels, and to recognize the need to increase and retain staff.



The Statement of Strategic Focus summarizes a set of major new programming, marketing, fundraising, board development, and staffing strategies:

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #1 PROGRAMMING: To mount a set of new and expanded programs over the next five years that increase the impact of the institution in the years to come

#1

1.1 Create a culture of forward planning

- Maintaining a calendar of major performances one year in advance
- Planning major programs per season at least two years in advance

1.2 Refine our approach to SingOuts as community engagement opportunities

- Reducing the number of Sing Outs and ad hoc performances
- Focusing SingOuts on community engagement and high profile opportunities

1.3 Continue to grow RHYTHM

- Building the RHYTHM program by adding schools and new programs
- Creating an annual high profile RHYTHM performance

1.4 Develop programming for the new facility

- Creating a master class series in the new facility
- Creating an interview series in the new facility
- Creating Sing Ins in the new facility

1.5 Utilize technology to expand reach outside of the Bay Area

- Developing an SFGMC experience using virtual reality technology
- Developing a YouTube channel with interviews, performances, member videos, and on-line SingOuts

1.6 Create touring opportunities

- Developing a national tour to major cities, possibly including a United Nations performance
- Mounting an "It Gets Better" touring program

1.7 Create new partnerships that deepen our engagement in the community

- Creating a new outreach program, "SFGMC In Your Neighborhood"
- Creating opportunities for engagement around the theme of sustainability

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #2 **MARKETING:** To increase institutional and programmatic marketing of existing and new programs to facilitate the growth of the audience and donor base to support the new activities

#2 2.1 Research and create updated community membership program to reach 1,000 by 2021

- Coordinate direct mail and email campaigns
- Thoughtfully and aggressively use of social media platforms to grow this base of support.

2.2 Grow the SFGMC email to 100,000 names by 2021

- Solicit and process email addresses from all ticket buyers, donors, friends, and attendees at special events.

2.3 Regular follow up communication to ticket buyers after they attend a performance, offering opportunities for tickets to future performances and subscriptions to ensure that a large percentage of the audience become habitual buyers. Paid advertising will also be employed, selectively, for non-holiday performances to boost attendance.

2.4 Redesign the SFGMC website to highlight the many ways the Chorus supports its community.

2.5 Develop a rolling, 18-month institutional marketing calendar that reveals the depth and breadth of the institution's (enhanced) programming will help build appreciation among potential visitors, and especially potential donors, about the breadth and depth of the Chorus's programming.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #3 **FUNDRAISING:** Build a stronger fundraising base.

#3 3.1 Develop a **Prospect** list of 100-300 potential foundation, corporate, and individual donors. This list will be regularly reviewed by senior staff.

3.2 Create a series of **Cultivation** activities used to engage new donors, excite them about future programs, and learn of their giving priorities. Cultivation activities that involve 'back of house' experiences are the ones that are typically most effective.

3.3 Implement a tailored **Solicitation** strategy for each prospect. The strategy should, at least, include the optimal solicitor, the amount to be requested, and the project for which funding will be requested.

3.4 Ensure that **Stewardship** of each donor relationship builds a stronger relationship between the donor and the organization. This will encourage continued giving at higher levels.

3.5 Identify, recruit, hire and retain seasoned development staff members.

3.6 Integrate the annual fundraising effort with the capital campaign to ensure that donors are approached in a coordinated, effective manner.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

BOARD DEVELOPMENT: Grow and nurture and board of directors that are engaged with both the fundraising of the organization and key initiatives.

#4

4.1 The Board will empower the Nominating Committee to evaluate needs, select appropriate new board members and evaluate the contributions of each existing board member.

4.2 The Nominating Committee will refine the existing 'ideal board' framework that describes the characteristics that the Board members should possess, in total.

4.3 Board members will be encouraged to 'adopt' a project of special, personal interest. By allowing board members to learn about and participate in programs of interest, the institution will build a more engaged board and one far more likely to involve their friends and associates in funding the specific program of interest.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

STAFFING: Stabilize and expand the administrative staff of the organization.

#5

5.1 Staff will focus on employee satisfaction and the facilitation of a culture of warmth and engagement.

5.2 Grow the staff commensurate with the expanded budget and new home.

5.3 Begin executive staff succession planning to ensure that transitions are as smooth as possible and minimally disruptive to the day-to-day work of the organization.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

#6

DIVERSITY: (Re)confirm our commitment to diversity in all facets of the work of the SFGMC.

6.1 Continue to work to diversify staff, board, chorus membership, and leadership.

6.2 Design marketing programs that endeavor to create audiences that are as diverse as the community the Chorus serves.

6.3 Embrace inclusive hiring practices.

6.4 Host diverse community groups in its new home.

6.5 Create a Diversity and Inclusion Committee.



NEW HOME

The Chorus has a remarkable opportunity to purchase a new home, the first permanent home in its history. A lead gift has provided a strong foundation for a capital campaign that will support the purchase and renovation of the property and provide endowment funds to support operations. This new home will support rehearsals, master classes, interviews, SingIns, and other programming. It will also provide a new revenue stream, since the facility will allow SFGMC to offer prime rental space for external groups and events.



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This plan will only have value if it is implemented successfully. A detailed implementation plan was developed for staff use. For each strategy listed above, a responsible person or group was identified and a date for completion was determined.

FINANCIAL PLAN

A five-year financial plan for the Chorus was developed based on the strategies and the implementation plan discussed above. The five-year forecast indicates that the institution can pursue the program expansion plans and create a stable fiscal foundation at the same time.

IN CONCLUSION

The numerous contributors to this process — from the board, to the Strategic Planning committee members, to staff, to the many singers, friends, and constituents who were interviewed — each provided valuable perspective that helped to make this planning process thoughtful and inclusive. We feel confident that our next 40 years will be strengthened by this process.

San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus is both ready and excited to meet the challenges of executing this new strategic plan.

“**IN THIS TIME OF RISING INTOLERANCE AND DIVISIVENESS, THE WORK OF THIS TERRIFIC CHORUS IS MORE NECESSARY THAN EVER. PLUS, THEY SING GREAT!**”

- Stephen Schwartz
