

# America's Performing Art

A Study of Choruses,  
Choral Singers, and Their Impact





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## A Study of Choruses, Choral Singers, and Their Impact

### Chorus Impact Study Report on Findings

Chorus America

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# Foreword

In its service to professional, volunteer, children/youth, and symphony/opera choruses, Chorus America has long been aware of the broad reach of the choral music art form. But much of what we have known about the overall impact of choruses has been anecdotal. Until now, we have not had data to document and illustrate many of the unique and important aspects of choruses, choral singers, and their impact on communities.

A growing body of research on the importance of all of the arts indicates that they can help enrich communities, improve education, and enhance quality of life. But the results of this project by Chorus America show that choruses and choral singers are leaders in improving community life—and that, if properly leveraged, they could play a more important role.

The following report shares what we have learned through Chorus America's Chorus Impact Study. This ground-breaking study comprises several research components: 1) questions posed to the general public in two national telephone polls; 2) six focus groups with choral singers in three regions; 3) an in-depth telephone poll of 623 professional and volunteer choral singers from across the United States; and 4) data gathered from the range of organizations that support specific kinds of choruses for use in estimating the total number of choruses across the country. In addition, another 347 singers were surveyed in the telephone poll to compare the findings in two different regions with the national findings.

Through this research we collected data about all kinds of choruses—not just the types that are generally members of Chorus America—to arrive at an estimate of the total number of choruses in this country. Finally, we drew upon data previously gathered by Chorus America and by other organizations to provide a context for interpreting the information presented here.

During the process of analyzing data from this first-ever study of the choral field, Chorus America and project analysts have identified areas for future study, including, for example, issues of diversity in choruses. The data gathered through this project represents Chorus America's first venture in national research and has laid an important foundation for future inquiry. The results have reaffirmed Chorus America's dedication to continue its efforts to gather and disseminate information about the choral field.

In any attempt to study the immense choral community, one thing becomes very clear: The choral field represents a huge diversity of organizations, repertoire, and participants. This report is designed to generate action from chorus and community leaders by helping them better understand the potential of the choral field in addressing cultural and civic needs. But not every finding in this report will resonate with every chorus, or every choral singer. To aid readers in their understanding of these findings, we have referenced data from a variety of sources. Although these other studies are not always directly analogous to Chorus America's, we included them to provide additional context in interpreting the survey results.



The choral field represents a huge diversity of organizations, repertoire, and participants. This report is designed to generate action from chorus and community leaders by helping them better understand the potential of the choral field in addressing cultural and civic needs.

The results of this project by Chorus America show that choruses and choral singers are leaders in improving community life—and that, if properly leveraged, they could play a more important role.

We hope the report will be used in three important ways:

- *To guide* individual choruses along their own paths of success. The areas of inquiry are meant to spur similar inquiries by choruses in various communities. By making the questionnaires and data available, we invite others to build upon and/or replicate this research.
- *To inform* policymakers, funders, educators, and others about the many ways in which choruses can help them accomplish their goals.
- *To provide data* to inform other arts organizations and their research so that choruses are not overlooked in the search for ways to reinforce and reinvigorate cultural and civic life today and tomorrow.

We hope that this document will help further Chorus America’s mission “to strengthen choruses and increase appreciation of choral music so that more people are enriched by its beauty and power.”



John Alexander  
President



Ann Meier Baker  
Executive Director



# Executive Summary

**E**arly in 2002, Chorus America, the service organization for choruses in North America, embarked on a study of the scope and presence of choruses in American society. The study was conducted by two firms: Robinson & Muenster Associates, Inc. (Sioux Falls, SD), for the quantitative research, and GSC Communications, Inc. (Swarthmore, PA), for the qualitative research. These firms conducted nationwide telephone polls, focus group interviews, and assembled data from various other sources, to provide the basis for the final report, edited and supervised by Chorus America. This study presents the first-ever scientifically derived overview of the enormous chorus “industry” in America today.

The primary purpose of the research is to document the level of participation in choral singing, survey certain attitudes and motivations of choral singers, and to compare this data with specific behaviors of the general public—in sum, the study establishes some general characteristics that distinguish choral participants from the rest of society and examines the kind of impact they have in their communities.

The study found that far more people participate in choral singing than in any other performing art. Based on a random national poll of 1,000 adults, the report found that in 15.6 percent of households, one or more *adults* had performed publicly in a chorus within the last 12 months. That amounts to 23.5 million adults. When children were included in the analysis, the number jumped to 18 percent of households, or 28.5 million adults and children. The poll confirms that choral singing is America’s participatory art form of choice; a major 1997 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) survey found that more Americans sang in choruses than publicly participated in any other performing art.

Underscoring this popularity is another statistic: More than one-third of the respondents in a poll of 623 choral singers said they regularly sing in more than one chorus. This is consistent with the study’s determination of the number of choruses active today, and the high level of commitment of the participants.

The report establishes that there are approximately 250,000 choruses in the United States: 12,000 professional and community choruses, at least 38,000 school choruses, and 200,000 church choirs. There are probably more choruses than any other kind of performing arts organizations in the country.

One of the key findings of the research for policymakers is that most singers are exposed to or participate in choral singing early in life. Of the choral singers surveyed, 56 percent grew up in homes where another family member sang in a chorus, and nearly two-thirds reported they frequently heard choral music on the radio or on recordings in their homes as children. Nearly three-fourths said their parents or siblings attended choral performances. Nearly 69 percent said they had their first choral experience in elementary or middle school. Clearly, the early exposure to choral singing is an enormous influence on the choices adults make later in life. These early influences set the stage for active involvement in the arts and in other aspects of modern life, as borne out by other findings in the study.



The primary purpose of the research is to document the level of participation in choral singing, survey certain attitudes and motivations of choral singers, and to compare this data with specific behaviors of the general public—in sum, the study establishes some general characteristics that distinguish choral participants from the rest of society and examines the kind of impact they have in their communities.

As several findings of the study illustrate, an early introduction to the performing arts is an important component of improved socialization, community involvement, and development of academic skills in general. Choral singing—because of its emotional content, its discipline, and its requirement for personal interpretation and communication—plays an extraordinary role in an education system that seeks to benefit both the individual and society.

The policy implications of this finding are important. As Americans seek to address long-term social problems, and debate the goals and content of public education in particular, the body of research showing the positive influence of the arts continues to grow. As several findings of the study illustrate, an early introduction to the performing arts is an important component of improved socialization, community involvement, and development of academic skills in general. Choral singing—because of its emotional content, its discipline, and its requirement for personal interpretation and communication—plays an extraordinary role in an education system that seeks to benefit both the individual and society.

The study also found that choristers are very active in their communities, even apart from their chorus participation, and behave in ways that are important to community building. Nearly 76 percent of choral singers report performing other volunteer activities. In comparison, Independent Sector’s 2001 edition of *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* found that 44 percent of adults volunteered with organizations. Sixty-three percent of choristers report charitable giving to other arts organizations, compared with 18.8 percent of American households reported in the Independent Sector study.

In this same general finding, the most important insight came from the detailed discussion in the focus groups involving chorus participants. Overwhelmingly, they reported a belief that their choral participation inspired them to improve a range of skills useful in their social and professional interactions:

- **Teambuilding.** Choral singing teaches people “to row in the same direction,” and to cooperate.
- **Listening and following.** Taking direction is essential for the organization to work,

both in terms of interaction and the actual performance of music.

- **Creativity.** Singing requires and stimulates expression, and calls on the mind to engage an abstract idea.
- **Social interaction.** Choruses help participants develop confidence and “spread their wings” socially.
- **Discipline.** Commitment to any organization requires one to manage time, and this is especially true of choruses. Because the concept of choral singing is very dependent on individual contribution to achieve the desired goal of the group as a whole, each participant must develop and sustain disciplined habits and commitments.

The emphasis on these skills is not only beneficial to the individual, but to others around the individual and to society as a whole. The improvement of the above-named skills helps choristers in their work, in their family life, and in their community participation. Beyond this practical application, however, is something perhaps just as valuable: When people work closely together to achieve an artistic goal, they often learn about other people, many quite unlike themselves. A number of choristers report that one of the chief nonartistic benefits of singing in choruses was the opportunity to mix with people they ordinarily would not meet. For example, one said, “These people whom I love dearly are politically or religiously very different from me.” Another said, “We wouldn’t be together for any other reason except for the music. That connection with people exposes us to other ideas and approaches that aren’t otherwise available.”

The study found that choristers felt strongly that this component of their choral experience—the bridging of social gaps, the opening to different perspectives on life, even apart from the music itself—is one of the most rewarding and sustaining aspects of their choral singing. Considering the popularity and wide range of choral singing across the country, the study observes that the social impact of choruses perhaps bears further investigation in the future.

In addition, the study specifically presents data that choral singers are generally well informed and politically aware. While 32 percent of Americans responding to a national survey by Social Capital Benchmark in 2000 said they read a newspaper each day, 71 percent of choristers in the study report doing so. Basically, three-quarters of people in choruses read newspapers, versus an estimated one-third of the adult general public.

About 42 percent of choristers report making contributions to a political party or candidate, whereas the National Election Studies (NES) at the University of Michigan reports that only 7 to 10 percent of those responding in their national surveys for

the past 20 years have done so. Similarly, 20 percent of choral singers report having worked for a political party, while the NES research estimates the general population number at 7 percent.

The study found that choral singers are joiners in, and major consumers of, the arts. The 1997 NEA national survey of public participation in the arts said that 35 percent of its respondents reported visiting a museum within the previous 12 months, whereas 82 percent of choral singers reported doing so; 40 percent in the NEA study reported attending the theater at least once in the previous year, while 82 percent of choristers did so according to the Chorus America study. When choristers were asked about other arts disciplines, the results were essentially the same, with choral singers reporting more than double—sometimes more than triple—the attendance levels of the general public.

The level of commitment to the choral art was further demonstrated when choristers were asked how often they attend choral concerts other than their own. Nearly half said they attend one to three concerts other than their own in a year, and more than one-third said they attended more than three concerts.

Finally, the study reinforces something not surprising but nonetheless important. The chief motivations for participating in a chorus are tightly intertwined: The music itself, the personal fulfillment that it brings, and the sense of beauty and power it imparts to the audience. Most choristers have had some level of professional training and take their singing very seriously—it is not merely a “spare time” hobby. The choral repertoire, the grandness of the sound, and the response of the audiences combine to provide the satisfaction and exhilaration that keeps them coming back. The study finds that choristers strongly believe that the impact of their singing is an enormous good to society, and that this is a way of “giving back” to their communities. This belief can scarcely be disputed, given the outpouring of public feeling at many memorial concerts across the country after September 11, 2001—millions of Americans sought choral music in their communities as a way of expressing grief, sympathy, and unity in the wake of the terrorist attacks, and America’s choruses gave thousands of special concerts for this purpose.

At all times, singing is seen by choristers not only as a release from the pressures of daily living, but as a means to inject beauty and meaning into their lives. Singers widely feel that the artistic level of the groups is pushed ever higher, and the chief reward for the effort resides in both the individual enrichment earned by the singer and the demonstrated appreciation by diverse audiences.

The sum effect of the study’s seven itemized overall findings is that:

- Early introduction in life is key to lifelong interest in choral music, and sets the stage for many positive social and personal benefits through that experience.
- Choral singers are apt to be highly involved in their communities, not only in the arts but in other positive social and civic activities as well.
- Choral singers tend to be better informed in general than most Americans.
- Choral singers overwhelmingly report that choral participation improves their lives and their contributions to society in myriad ways.
- Choral singing is far and away the most popular public arts activity in America.
- Choral music has the highest number of organizations of any performing arts discipline.

The study found that choristers felt strongly that this component of their choral experience—the bridging of social gaps, the opening to different perspectives on life, even apart from the music itself—is one of the most rewarding and sustaining aspects of their choral singing.

# America's Performing Art: A Study of Choruses, Choral Singers, and their Impact



## Finding 1

*More people participate in choral singing than in any other performing art. Many regularly sing in more than one chorus.*

In 1997, the NEA conducted a national Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. Among other things, the survey asked respondents if they had personally performed or created works within the past year. Those who responded affirmatively were asked if they had publicly performed or exhibited their works. The NEA survey found that choral singing has broader reach and appeal than any other public arts activity. In the NEA survey, 10.4 percent of adults said they had performed publicly in a chorus within the last year. The public exhibition of painting and drawing was the second most popular form of participation, with 2.9 percent of adults participating.

### Numbers of Americans Who Perform in Choruses

- 23.5 million adults perform in a choir or chorus
- 28.5 million adults and children perform in a choir or chorus

*(A 1997 study by the National Endowment of the Arts indicated that 10 percent of adult Americans sing in a chorus.)*

The finding was intriguing and so significant to the choral community that Chorus America decided to conduct its own national poll.

### Chorus America's Poll

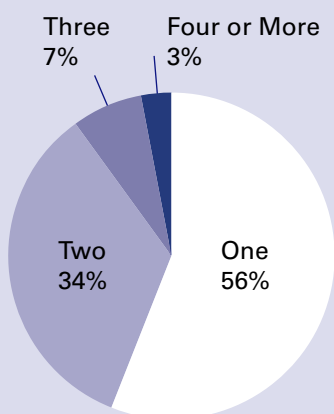
Our objectives were both to test the NEA conclusions and to determine if the numbers had changed substantially since 1997. Chorus America's methodology was close to (although not identical to) the NEA's; the results suggest that choral singing may be even more extensive than what the NEA found.

Chorus America's poll of 1,000 randomly selected members of the general public concluded that in 15.6 percent of households one or more adults had performed publicly in a chorus within the last 12 months. That amounts to 23.5 million adults. Among the 15.6 percent of households responding positively, 5.8 percent had *more than one choral singer*, or a total of 13.4 million adults.

If you include children, in 18 percent of households at least one adult or child sang in a chorus or choir, or a total of 28.5 million adults and children. Of the 18 percent, 6.4 percent of households had *more than one adult or child* who sang in a chorus, or a total of 14 million adults and children. (For more details, see the Appendix on Methodology and Demographics.)

Figure 1:

### Number of Choruses Choral Singers Belong To



*Chorus America's poll confirms that choral singing is America's performing art of choice. More Americans engage in the public performance of choral singing than in any other art form. In fact, no other public form of artistic expression even comes close.*



In addition, not only are large numbers of Americans performing in choruses, but many of them are singing in more than one chorus. About one-third of respondents in the poll of 623 choral singers said they sing in two choruses and another 10 percent sing in three or more choruses.

## Finding 2

### *There are approximately 250,000 choruses nationwide.*

Since the choral field is so diverse and growing so fast, it has always been difficult to know how many choruses exist in North America. To estimate the number of choruses, we began by gathering membership information from the organizations that support particular kinds of choruses. For example, while Chorus America’s membership is largely composed of independent choruses, the American Choral Directors Association includes mainly church and school choral directors. Many organists in the American Guild of Organists also lead choruses as part of their church positions. And the Music Educators National Conference—an association that supports all kinds of K-12 music teachers—also has as a subset of its membership directors who lead school choruses. Of course, some directors may be members of more than one of these associations.

We also looked at the results of other studies, including one by Market Data Retrieval that provided insights into the number of choral directors in public and private schools at all levels; another one from Fort Worth-based Trimedia, which specializes in church marketing; and one from the Hartford Seminary/Hartford Institute for Religion Research, to understand the pervasiveness of church choirs.

From the analysis of this data, Chorus America’s project researchers estimate that there are 250,000 choruses nationwide. That total would include about 12,000 professional and community choruses (which includes the 700 mostly independent choruses that comprise Chorus America’s membership), at least 38,000 school choruses, and 200,000 church choirs. (For more details, see the Appendix.)

## Finding 3

### *Interest in choral singing develops early in life and is influenced by school and family experiences.*

The Chorus America survey data and focus group interviews all suggest that the roots for choral singing are generally planted early—either through family or school experiences. According to the survey of 623 choral singers, about 56 percent grew up in homes where somebody else sang in a chorus, and about two-thirds said they heard choral music on the radio or on recordings in their homes. In addition, nearly three-quarters said their parents or a sibling(s) attended choral performances.

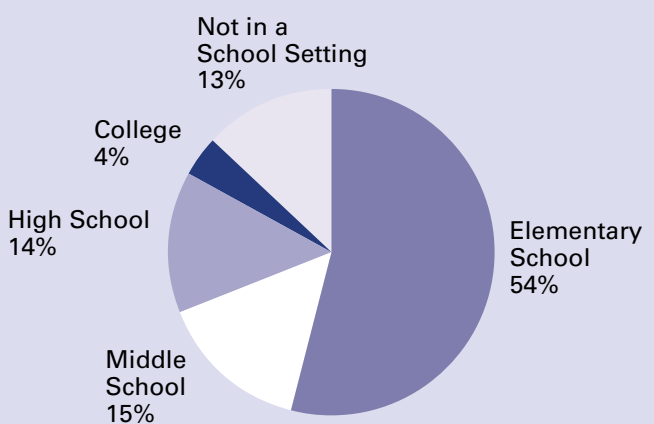
Many choristers recalled experiences like this one from a focus group participant: “Singing was a part of our family life... and a part of my upbringing.”

### Music in Schools

The Chorus America data shows that nearly 69 percent of chorister respondents had their first choral experience in elementary or middle school. Most also played a musical instrument at one point in their lives—nearly 92 percent. These findings have implications for education policymakers, many of whom have de-emphasized or abandoned music education opportunities for youth because of the importance they have placed on so-called core academic subjects. In most of the focus groups, participants

Figure 2:

#### First Choral Singing Experience



## Building Leadership Skills

Our conversations with focus group participants helped us understand that certain skills developed through their chorus work help them assume positions of leadership. Every chorus, for example, calls on some individuals to take leadership responsibilities, from serving as section leader or chorus president to coordinating fundraisers or concert production. Some other skills cited by the focus group participants also would appear to make them more effective in community work, as well as help them become more connected to the dynamics of their community. They include the following:

- **Teambuilding skills.** Choral singing teaches choristers “how to row in the same direction.” Understanding the importance of blending vocally is as critical to the music as it is to personal interaction. As one said, “You have to learn to sublimate yourself and learn to cooperate.”
- **Listening and following skills.** Learning how to take direction is fundamental to the success of any organization, especially in choruses, where following the lead of a conductor makes the difference between great art and a poor performance.
- **Creative skills.** Singing is an art form process that stimulates and encourages creative expression. “Humankind needs to enjoy expression,” said one chorister. “Those of us who have been able to make music have been enriched this way.”
- **Social skills.** Choral singing has helped some spread their wings socially and develop confidence.
- **Discipline.** Choral singing requires people to be organized and disciplined in their everyday lives. Balancing rehearsal schedules and concerts with day jobs and other commitments forces choristers to manage their time carefully.
- **Personal commitment.** Choristers recognize that they are part of a larger community and that their fellow choristers rely on them to make a level of commitment that ensures a consistent standard of performance. They understand and respect the responsibilities they have to the people in their section and to the chorus as a whole.



were very critical of this trend. When asked what could be done to improve the public’s appreciation for music and other arts, the strategy they recommended most often was to shift priorities back to arts education in public schools.

A study released in May 2002 by the Arts Education Partnership reviewed a body of recent research on the benefits of the visual arts, music, drama, and dance. The report, *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*, outlined important relationships between arts education and students’ academic and social growth.

Because of their participation in the arts, children appear to experience the following effects: improvement in reading skills, language development, and writing skills. Improvements also were noted in the ability to focus and concentrate, as well as to develop skills in expression, persistence, imagination, creativity, and problem solving. In addition, improvements were observed in social skills, particularly in positive behavior, ability to express emotions, courtesy, tolerance, conflict resolution, and attention to moral development.

The National Governors Association (NGA), drawing on past research, released an issues brief in May 2002 outlining how the arts enhance workforce readiness for students. The NGA noted positive associations between study of the arts and certain desirable student behaviors. It said, for example, that students who participate in the arts at least nine hours a week for at least a year also happen to be:

- Four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement;
- Three times more likely to be elected to class office;
- Four times more likely to win a school attendance award;
- Four times more likely to participate in a science and math fair;
- Four times more likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem.

The Chorus America study, when combined with this other data, sends an important message to parents about the importance of early exposure to arts experiences and the role of schools and family life in providing these opportunities for lifelong learning.

## Finding 4

### *Choral singers help build strong communities and bridge social gaps.*

A growing body of work is now emerging that explores the role of citizens in their community. Historians and sociologists are interested in the subject because they see strong correlations between a well-functioning democracy and commitment to community institutions and communal behavior. As noted in *Better Together*, the Saguaro Seminar’s report on civic engagement in America, “communities that sing together (literally and metaphorically) better achieve the government they desire.”

Acts of community have been particularly visible in times when our nation was in peril. In the days and weeks after Pearl Harbor, for example, a nation of volunteers committed to the nation’s collective survival went into action. As Robert Putnam, a Harvard University sociologist and author of *Bowling Alone* notes, a Civilian Defense Corps swelled from 1.2 million Americans in 1942 to 12 million in 1943, neighbors built victory gardens, students sold war stamps, and the general public was encouraged to buy small denomination war bonds.

These acts of self-sacrifice and volunteerism helped weave a fabric of community out of a culture of collective responsibility. The generation that emerged from this effort turned out to be more socially committed and engaged in their community than the generations that have followed. They joined bowling leagues, PTAs, garden clubs, and social service organizations. They knew their neighbors and socialized with them regularly. They read newspapers and took pride in participating in the democratic process as informed citizens.

All of these activities of community engagement promote what social scientists call “social capital,” which results in more support networks and a lessening of problems like crime, drug abuse, and urban decay. But most of the data gathered by social scientists today suggest that social capital is diminishing, that more people are “bowling alone.”

In his search for what can be done to stop the erosion of community and social capital, Putnam and colleagues concluded that that the arts provide a “powerful way to transcend cultural and demographic boundaries.”

### Chorus America’s Poll

This conclusion about the role for the arts was of particular interest to Chorus America. If singing in a chorus helps build social capital, we wondered how choristers behave in their communities. Do they participate in organizations and volunteer in their communities? Have they developed skills that allow them to be more engaged in their communities? In many cases we found that the answer was yes.

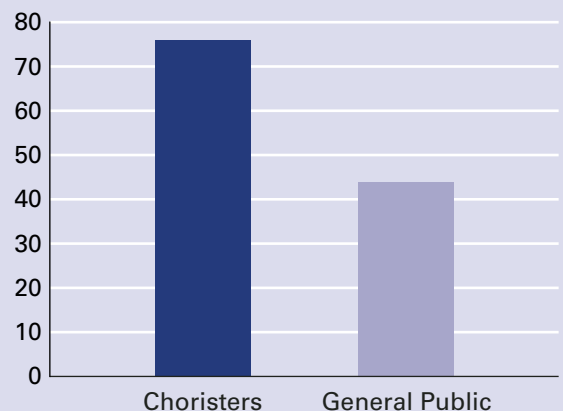
To determine their level of community involvement, we asked professional and volunteer choristers a series of questions about volunteerism, membership in civic organizations, the skills they have developed that are useful in community work, their charitable giving, their ability to mix with people of diverse backgrounds, their sociability, and their level of political activism.

### Volunteerism and Civic Leadership

We asked survey respondents how often they volunteer their time in the community, exclusive of their involvement with their chorus. Forty percent said they volunteer fairly often or frequently, and another 36 percent said they sometimes volunteer, making a total of 76 percent of chorister respondents who volunteer in their communities. Nearly 20 percent of choristers also hold leadership positions—as officers or committee

Figure 3:

#### How Often Choral Singers Volunteer vs. General Public



## In Chicago, Bridging Social Gaps for 46 Years

Founded 46 years ago by Rev. Christopher Moore, the Chicago Children’s Choir was envisioned as a multiracial ensemble that would cross class, cultural, and economic boundaries and promote understanding through high-quality performance of great choral music. Today, that vision is realized through a vast choral music education program that serves more than 3,200 students in a sequential program that includes choral training in 52 Chicago elementary schools, five community-based after-school choirs, and the internationally known Concert Choir.

The Choir is directed by Josephine Lee, at 26 the youngest director in the Choir’s history, and one very in tune with the Choir’s original mission. “This diversity also has a powerful musical impact,” says Lee. “I see the sound of the Concert Choir growing from the tonal qualities of the many cultures; many races coming together in a way that transcends any one of them alone. The sonorities that are created by children of varying ethnicities—Asian, Latino, Caucasian, African American—enable the Choir to perform a vast repertoire from around the world with confidence and feeling.”

Lee is the first winner of the Robert Shaw Conducting Fellowship, an annual cash award given by Chorus America to recognize talented young choral conductors and to support their further professional development. “So much of Robert Shaw’s life reflects that which is so important to me: respect for diversity, a commitment to youth, and a vision of music as a means for social progress,” says Lee.

An American of Korean descent, Lee will use the award to deepen her understanding of and exposure to choral music in South America. She anticipates that this will help her to open “new cultural and musical windows for our young singers,” as well as to support the Choir’s commitment to cultural diversity. She says that her Latino singers—who are joining the Choir in increasing numbers and represent the fastest growing segment of Chicago’s population—will have “the opportunity to experience the most authentic forms of music from their heritage,” which she believes will help to strengthen their identities.



members—in a civic organization. By way of comparison, a 2001 report by Independent Sector, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, finds that 44 percent of adults over the age of 21 volunteered with a formal organization in 2000.

## Charitable Giving

Choral singers financially support the operations of nonprofit organizations and arts organizations, including their own choruses. Nearly 45 percent said they give more than \$250 a year to nonprofits such as United Way, Red Cross, or other social service or health-related organizations. Another 15 percent said they contribute \$100 to \$250 a year.

Sixty-three percent of choristers report charitable giving to other arts organizations. About 36 percent contribute \$100 or more each year to support the operations of other arts organizations, not including the price of tickets; another 27 percent said they give up to \$100 a year. This compares favorably with national data from Independent Sector in 2001 (*Giving and Volunteering in the United States*), which says that 18.8 percent of households contribute to arts/culture/humanities with an average gift of \$234.

About 36 percent of choristers said they give \$100 or more a year to their own choruses, including 18 percent who said they contribute more than \$250 a year. Another 30 percent said they contribute up to \$100 a year. These contributions are exclusive of money spent for chorus dues, apparel, or music fees.

## Sociability

Social behavior is an important aspect of community engagement and building social capital. The Chorus America data suggest that choristers are very socially active. A hefty majority of the 623 choristers we polled—87 percent—said they regularly entertain friends at home or meet them informally outside the home. A majority of them—58 percent—also agreed strongly with the statement that they socialize with fellow choristers outside of rehearsals and performances and another 26 percent agreed somewhat. And nearly three-quarters—74 percent—agreed strongly with the statement that they develop new friendships with members of their chorus.



Our focus group participants agreed not only with assertions that they have befriended members of their choruses, but also that their membership in choruses has given them the confidence to increase their social network elsewhere. Several also noted that their choruses provided them with support in times of personal crises.

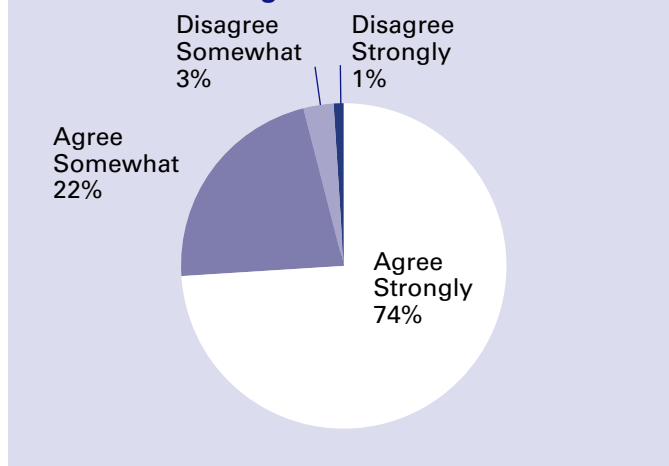
### Bridging Social Gaps

Choristers also say that organized singing has allowed them to mix with people unlike themselves—something that social scientists call “bridging” and say is critical for building social capital. Indeed, a number of focus group participants indicated that one of the chief nonartistic benefits of singing in choruses was having the opportunity to mix with people they ordinarily would not have met. Although children were not included in the survey of choristers, children/youth choruses are especially effective in bridging cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, bringing together children from all segments of a community. The following are comments we heard from adult choristers about their experiences:

- “These people whom I love dearly are politically or religiously very different from me.”
- “Choral singing builds on cultural awareness and helps with relationship-building, no matter what your ethnicity.”
- “We wouldn’t be together for any other reason except for the music. That connection with the people exposes us to other ideas and approaches that aren’t otherwise available.”
- One chorister said the respectful relationships she developed in the chorus made her more tolerant and less likely to pre-judge homosexuals, despite her religion’s teachings that homosexuality is sinful.
- “Our chorus is a huge social melting pot. You have the opportunity to meet people from every age group, social background, and ethnic background.”

**Figure 4:**

### Develop New Friendships with Other Choral Singers



The following are comments we heard from adult choristers about their experiences:

## Finding 5

### *Choral singers are well informed and politically aware.*

One of the issues that concerns social scientists who study communities is that people are less and less interested in the workings of their government, current affairs, or other matters affecting their community. Citizens who have no interest in these matters and take no steps to inform themselves are not fulfilling the duties of citizenship.

The Saguaro Seminar’s report on civic engagement in America uses various measures to gauge levels of engagement, including newspaper readership, voting behavior, political giving, and political activism. Some of these measures obviously suggest higher levels of engagement than others: reading a newspaper requires less effort and is more common than running for political office.

We asked choristers questions similar to those asked by the Saguaro Seminar and compared the results with other related research. While the related research is not always directly analogous, we included it to provide additional context in understanding the Chorus America data. In every case, the engagement levels of choristers appear to be higher than those for the population at large.

### Newspaper Readership

Research shows that post baby boomers—those who were born after 1964—are substantially less knowledgeable about current events than the generations preceding them. Civic engagement experts attribute the gap in large part to precipitous drops in newspaper readership. In 1965, daily newspaper readership among those under 35 was about 66 percent. According to the Social Capital Benchmark survey, 16 percent of respondents under 35 in the year 2000 said they read a newspaper every day. Overall,

## Choruses Respond to the Tragedies of September 11

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, the response of many Americans was to sing together. Candlelight vigils across the nation found large numbers of people spontaneously raising their voices in patriotic songs, like “God Bless America” and “The Star-Spangled Banner,” as well as songs of peace, faith, and mourning. Being together had suddenly become hugely important, and singing together a central part of that.

American choruses responded almost spontaneously to this terrible time by doing what they most love to do—singing together. Choruses from Alaska to Florida offered impromptu performances, often in unconventional places. They participated in larger assemblies of performing arts groups, raising money for disaster relief, or simply providing a focus for communal shock and grief.

Jeffery Watson, who directs the Capitol Hill Chorale in Washington, D.C., watched the smoke rise from the Pentagon on September 11. “I started thinking about the choir, about singing, and what we could do. As musicians, it’s important to have that community through singing.”

Watson’s idea was an open sing of the Faure *Requiem*, held in a local church. Two hundred people came to sing and another 100 showed up to listen. “There were no tuxes. Everyone stood together in pews. We didn’t make any fuss. And when we finished ‘In Paradisum,’ we just stopped and stood there. The silence afterwards was deafening in its depth. It did what we intended—it brought a renewed sense of hope.”

Just six blocks from “ground zero” in New York City and two months after the attack, The St. Cecilia Chorus (pictured) gave 20 free outdoor performances of traditional holiday and patriotic music to thousands of enthusiastic and often emotional listeners.

Choral groups were also part of much larger community efforts. The Anchorage Concert Chorus sang the opening and closing hymns at a community-wide memorial at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts, which was broadcast on television and radio. In Washington, D.C., three choruses—The Washington Chorus, the Choral Arts Society, and the Cathedral Choral Society—joined the National Symphony and Leonard Slatkin for a free concert at the Kennedy Center, broadcast live over public radio and later on television. The Metropolitan Chorus of Arlington joined local and state dignitaries in Arlington’s Day of Remembrance and Appreciation, to remember those killed in the attacks and to honor the police, fire, and emergency medical personnel who participated in the rescue efforts at the Pentagon.

Many of the concerts offered audience members the opportunity to contribute to efforts for disaster relief. A concert organized at the behest of the Mayor of Tampa brought together the Florida Orchestra, the Tampa Bay Master Chorale and other choruses, for a program that was attended by 9,000 people and raised \$100,000. The Philadelphia Singers joined with the Philadelphia Orchestra for a concert that was carried on PBS and NPR, raising \$70,000. The Connecticut Master Chorale sang in an Ecumenical Memorial Concert for Victims, collecting \$3,348 for the Red Cross. The Washington Chorus, which collaborated in a joint concert with the Choir of the Basilica of the National Shrine, collected \$26,000 for the Washington Family Relief Fund.

The Minnesota Chorale offered this statement in their program book: “At a time of sorrow, rage, and uncertainty, we of the Minnesota Chorale find strength and consolation in helping our community to process life through music... Here, as in all that we do, we celebrate the human voice and its power to educate, enrich, unite, and inspire.”



the Social Capital Benchmark survey showed that 32 percent of respondents were daily newspaper readers. That compares with 71 percent of the chorister respondents who said they read a newspaper every day.

## Voting Behavior

A very high percentage of choristers—93 percent—responded that they vote regularly in national and local elections. The percentage is substantially higher than the number recorded in the Social Capital Benchmark survey, in which 69 percent said they voted in the 1996 presidential election. (Both numbers are quite a bit higher than the actual numbers who vote, suggesting that Americans might not be truthful to pollsters on the subject.)

## Political Giving

Another measure of engagement is the act of making political contributions. Over the years, contributions to political parties have increased significantly as people substitute checkbook participation for personal participation. Again, choristers are more likely to make contributions to political parties and candidates than the public at large. About 42 percent of choristers said they have made contributions to a party or candidate. National data (from *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, published by Harvard University Press) suggests political contributions at the rate of 23 percent. (According to the National Election Studies at the University of Michigan, which has been surveying voter behavior every two years since 1952, contribution rates are even lower. When asked if they had contributed to a candidate or party in the current election cycle, 7-10 percent of respondents have answered affirmatively for the last 20 years.)

## Other Activism Indicators

According to the National Election Studies, the number of Americans who have worked for a political party has plummeted in recent years. In 1970, 7 percent of respondents said they had worked for a political party or candidate; every year since 1986, the participation rate has been about 3 percent. In the Chorus America survey, 20 percent of the choristers said they had worked for a political party (the question included no time reference). Nearly 4 percent of choristers said they have run for or held political office.

### Finding 6

## *Choral singers are joiners and major consumers of culture and the arts.*

Not only do choristers join organized groups in large numbers, but they are also significantly more active consumers of culture and the arts, attending community cultural offerings in much higher percentages than the general public.

## Religious Organizations

The Social Capital Benchmark survey showed that 65 percent of Americans belong to a church or synagogue. For Chorus America's respondents, membership in religious institutions is higher—76 percent.

Figure 5:

### Worked for a Political Party

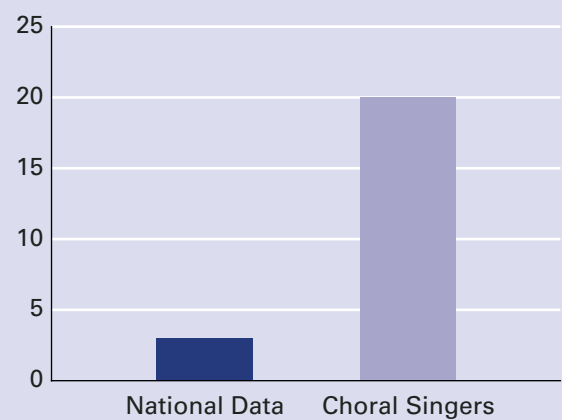
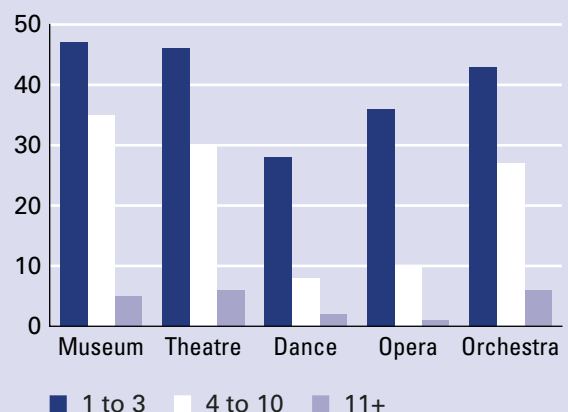


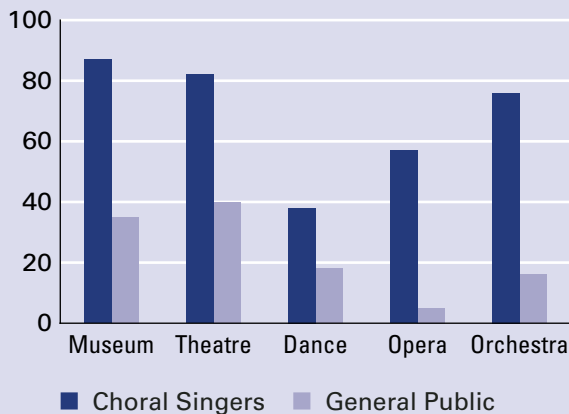
Figure 6:

### Choral Singers' Attendance at Arts and Cultural Events



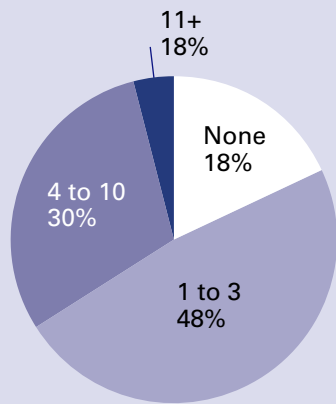
**Figure 7:**

**Attended at Least One Performance in Past Year: Choral Singers vs. General Public**



**Figure 8:**

**Choral Singers' Attendance at Choral Performances**



to an opera in the past year, compared with 47 percent of choristers. Attendance at orchestra performances\* fell about in the middle of preferences for both choristers and the general public, but more choristers attended an orchestra performance (76 percent attended at least one concert) than NEA respondents (15.6 percent). (\*Chorus America's survey specified orchestra performances; NEA's study asked about classical music performances.)

Of significance to communities with multiple choruses is the finding that choral singers also attended choral concerts in high numbers, supporting groups other than their own. Nearly half of respondents said they attended one to three performances each year, and another 30 percent said they attended between four and 10 performances.

Surveys by Gallup, Roper, and others show that average weekly church attendance over the last 25 years has decreased about 10 to 12 percent to around 37 percent. In the Social Capital Benchmark survey, 36 percent of respondents said they attended religious services at least once a week. Choristers obviously have another reason to attend religious institutions aside from worship, and that is to sing. About 73 percent of our chorister respondents indicated that they regularly attend a church, synagogue, or mosque.

### Culture and the Arts

We were able to make comparisons between choristers' cultural preferences and attendance patterns and those of the general public by reviewing data collected by the 1997 NEA public participation in the arts survey cited earlier. The comparisons showed that although choristers' preferences for cultural activities closely parallel the general public, choristers are significantly more active in their attendance and patronage of culture and the arts than the general public.

Choristers, like the general public, reported that visiting art museums was their preferred arts activity, but while 35 percent of the NEA respondents said they had visited a museum within the last 12 months, 87 percent of choristers said they had done so. And although attending theatre productions was also ranked high in preferences for both choristers and NEA respondents, a higher percentage of choristers (82 percent) than NEA respondents (40 percent) attended at least once in the previous year.

Dance and opera were preferred less by both choristers and the general public, but again, the percentages for chorister attendance at these events were higher. Only 18 percent of the NEA respondents had attended a dance performance at least once within the past 12 months, compared with 38 percent of choristers. Only 4.7 percent of the NEA respondents had gone

## Finding 7

### *Choristers are motivated by making beautiful music, enriching their communities, and personal fulfillment.*

The Chorus America research helped us understand what motivates singers to join choruses and what they get out of the experience. The primary reason for joining a chorus is the music. In focus groups choristers took issue with the characterization of choral singing as just a hobby or pleasing avocation. Most are trained and take their singing seriously and, like other professionals, work hard at developing their skills. The majority of choral singers have also taken voice lessons.

Although some choristers are capable of performing as soloists—and many do—the thrill they get out of choral singing is generally different. Many focus group participants explained that they have chosen to sing in choruses because they enjoy combining their own skills with the skills of other talented people. “The whole is greater than the parts,” one chorister noted. “When we get together as an ensemble, there’s a thrill and excitement that is completely different from singing solo. The excitement of an ensemble when it gets tight and is doing something well—it’s an incredible high.”

It is the choral repertoire, the scale of choral singing, and the grandness of the sound that provide choristers with the satisfaction and exhilaration that keep them committed. As artists, they not only enjoy the result, but also the creative process of getting there through rehearsals. Experiencing the transformation of a work from sheet music to the concert performance is a rich and satisfying experience. As one chorister explained, “It’s the journey, not necessarily the performance.”

Singing in choruses motivates choristers to hone and expand their skills and repertoire. It pushes them to perform at their personal best, which is artistically rewarding. “The more you are singing, the better your voice becomes,” one chorister noted. “I also love sitting next to a great singer and listening; it makes me motivated to sing better.” Another said, “I feel as an artist that I am held accountable by the artistry that surrounds me and it helps me rise to a better occasion.”

### Enriching Communities

Choristers are very much driven by the effect they have on their audiences and their community. They believe they add beauty to the lives of their community of listeners and thrive on the effect that a beautiful, well-crafted performance has on their audiences. Following are some of the comments we heard in the focus groups on this subject:

- “I am very much motivated by the audience. It’s not just the gift of being able to perform; it’s the elevating standards. I like to feel like I’m converting some people and causing them to come back for more.”
- “The level of artistry and choral singing in the organizations I’ve participated in over the years has been so high, that not only do you make a beautiful sound, but you generate something that speaks to your heart and to the hearts of the audience. So it’s more than what we do for our own personal growth.”
- “We’ve done many concerts where we’ve had the audience jump to their feet at the end of the concert because what we did was just so exciting, so well done, so tightly put together that they couldn’t contain themselves—you get such a rush from that.”
- “When things go right, there is a communion with the audience that comes from creating pleasure.”
- “When I know afterwards that I really touched a soul, that means a great deal to me.”

Choristers also noted the connections they have made with their communities through chorus education and outreach programs, and the pride the community feels in their chorus’s work. Focus group respondents cited occasions when their chorus had “given back” to their community through programs in schools or other nontraditional performance venues.

In times of crisis, choruses of all kinds in all places prove to be important community resources. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, and again during the one-year anniversary of the attack, choruses across the country were quick to provide free concerts for their communities as a venue for expressing grief, sympathy, and unity.

### Personal Fulfillment

Beyond the opportunity to exercise their skills and the impact they have on their audiences, choristers said they are motivated to sing in choruses because they find it personally fulfilling. They described singing as intellectually stimulating, something that is spiritually elevating and demonstrates to them the beauty of life.



## David Rockefeller Jr. on the Joys and Virtues of Choral Singing

Philanthropist David Rockefeller, Jr. is not only an avid supporter of the arts, but also a committed and accomplished chorister. The 61-year-old trustee of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund says he has been singing regularly in choruses for 50 years.

“I think singing is the most satisfying connection between art and human energy,” he explains. “Energy expression and artistic expression are fused in the act of singing in a way that maybe no other instrument equals. And that is very pleasurable.”

Rockefeller has been singing with the Boston Cantata Singers since 1965, a year after the highly successful chorus was founded. The group, which performs regularly at the New England Conservatory’s Jordan Hall, began singing Bach cantatas, branched into pre-Baroque music, and later expanded into contemporary compositions. Its repertoire today spans music composed in the 16th to 21st centuries, including works it has commissioned.

Rockefeller says choral singing has afforded him musical opportunities he could never have hoped to experience as an individual performer. “I’ve been a professional singer for brief periods but my career is not music,” he explains. “I’ve had the fortune of performing with Leonard Bernstein, Erich Leinsdorf, and Colin Davis and there is no way they would have asked me to perform as a soloist.”

Many singers, including Rockefeller, believe that choral singing is a physically satisfying and cleansing experience. He describes it as “head clearing and body clearing,” evoking feelings that are tantamount to the endorphin rush that athletes get from exercise.

Rockefeller says it is vitally important to consider the connection of choruses to their communities and to the improvement of the human spirit. “I don’t think singing together solves problems—but I think there is a sense of intrinsic meaning that comes from singing. And it gives people hope and a sense of meaning in the face of terrific evidence of how man can treat man very badly, or how attachment to the material things of the world can just disappear... Well, there is always music. If you connect to that, you can retain hope and meaning in the face of lots of bad news.”

As a strong promoter of community well-being, however, Rockefeller believes the benefits of singing go far beyond the personal. “I think music generally, but choral music more than any other style of music, has the power to draw people to the stage and to the concert hall,” he says. “Many choral organizations have a friendship and community link between those who are on stage and those who are in the audience.”



They said singing is intellectually enriching because it pushes them to understand what is behind the musical work—the theory as well as the composer’s inspiration. “The challenge and joy I get from the rehearsal experience itself and the process of learning is rewarding,” one chorister said. “Not just the music and the notes, but also learning about the composers themselves and music history—we get a lot of that from our conductor, who is versed in musicology. So we not only make beautiful music, but we learn about the composer and the world at the time the piece was written. It’s really a very enriching experience.”

A number of choristers described singing as not only a release from daily living, but also as a means to inject beauty and meaning into their lives. “After having worked all day long as a computer programmer, the challenge and joy of learning about the music and the composer are tremendously rewarding.” It also helps some people develop a sense of purpose and self-confidence. “When you start to sing, you think, ‘This is something I can do,’” one chorister said. In virtually every focus group, somebody described choral singing as spiritually uplifting.

# Recommendations

This project is designed to help leaders of choruses and communities better understand the potential of the choral field so that they can address the cultural and civic needs of communities. The findings, by themselves, are a rich resource that can be used to articulate the characteristics and accomplishments of choruses, to inform planning and decision-making, and to make the case for support of this important field. In addition, it is our hope that the findings will inspire new and creative connections between choruses and their communities, serve as a call to action to leverage the benefits of choral participation, and make that opportunity accessible to an even wider public.



## Recommendations for Leaders of Choruses

1. Schedule meetings with community leaders to share findings from this study and to show how your choristers are specifically involved in your community. Encourage choristers to identify themselves within their communities as important and engaged citizens.
2. Cite data from this report in proposals to grantmakers and corporate sponsors. Use the data to build a case for the community and artistic benefits of your work, as well as for the broad market for this performing art.
3. Invite civic leaders and elected officials to your concerts. Recognize each performance as an advocacy opportunity.
4. Develop a local media strategy around the study. Write an op ed. Invite a reporter to your concert, rehearsal, or board meetings. Take the time to share this data along with information about your own chorus's activities.
5. Share findings from this study with members of your audience through pre-concert lectures, printed programs, donor receptions, subscriber letters, chorus newsletters, and your website to help establish an awareness of the scope and impact of choruses nationally and to increase the profile of your chorus locally.
6. Encourage more members of your chorus to join those members who already make the chorus part of their family's philanthropy each year. Those who know the organization best need to support it as well. This makes it easier to ask others in the community to make charitable contributions.
7. The study shows that choral singers are major consumers of culture. Share this information with other community arts organizations to consider collaborative marketing and fundraising efforts that could benefit all the arts in your community.
8. The study shows that choral singers attend choral concerts other than their own. Consider how you might use this information to collaborate with choral colleagues and build greater awareness of and attendance at all choral concerts in your community.
9. The study demonstrates that more than half of choral singers had their first choral experience in elementary school. Share this information with choral music teachers (you may have quite a few in your chorus), school board members, and community education leaders. Use it to advocate for strong chorus education programs and collaborative partnerships with local schools.
10. The study demonstrates a correlation between choral singing and civic-minded behaviors. Share this information with community and education leaders to support efforts that keep school music programs strong at every grade level.

## Recommendations for Community Leaders and Policymakers

1. Choral singers behave in ways that build strong communities. So tap choruses as a vehicle for inspiring community pride and identity, fostering civic engagement, and convening diverse groups of citizens.
2. The study documents that more than 15 percent of adults (and 18 percent of adults and children) sing in a choir or chorus. Consider the power of your numbers, and how you can be a force to mobilize and galvanize positive change in your local communities.
3. Look for ways to involve choruses in community gatherings and events.
4. Get to know the choruses in your own community. Who are they? Where and when do they perform?
5. Do your part in making certain that your town, region, and state benefit from a healthy arts sector. Give your consideration to policies that encourage the development of choruses and other arts organizations. Include choral and other cultural leaders in your community development or economic development planning. And help every child have the opportunity to participate in chorus or other music opportunities in school.
6. Understand choristers as a highly informed, mobilized, and influential constituency.

## Recommendations for Funders

1. The study suggests that grants to choruses advance cultural programming priorities, but also other nonmusical priorities including civic engagement, community activism, arts education, and preserving community heritage. Have program officers work with local choruses to help foster the collateral benefits of choral organizations.
2. Examine your own grantmaking. How does your funding of choruses compare to that of other music or civic groups? Are there categories in which choruses might be competitive applicants? How might you recruit more applications from choruses?
3. Involve representatives of the choral community in your convenings, research, policy, and planning dialogues.

## Recommendations for Parents and Educators

1. Advocate for the arts in your schools. Support chorus programs, and make sure that teachers, principals, and your school board hear from many parents about the importance of choral programs in your local education system.
2. A great deal of research exists—both in this study and beyond—suggesting that music and arts education for children benefits their learning, cognitive development, and well-being. Use that research.
3. The study indicates that by introducing children to music performance in the elementary years, we help to create future performers and consumers of arts and culture well into their adult years. The study also indicates that singing with a choral group has collateral benefits, such as fostering behaviors that lead to good citizenship.
4. When advocating for your school's music program, remind decisionmakers that choral singers not only are more likely to model civic-minded behavior as adults, but that choral singing is an activity that fosters personal fulfillment and beauty for a *lifetime*.
5. Choral singing is greatly influenced by family experiences. Take your children to a choral concert, sing with them at home, attend their concerts, and encourage their participation. The study clearly demonstrates that the gift of music will serve them long into the future.



# About Chorus America and the Choral Music Profession

The research in this report shows that there are likely more than 250,000 choruses across the United States, including school, church, community, and professional choruses. This staggering number indicates the broad reach of choral music that no other art form can claim.

Chorus America adds value to the whole field of choral music, but is best known for its service to *independent choruses*—those that rely on a successful nonprofit organizational infrastructure for their success and are *not* affiliated with a parent institution such as a school or church that provides financial support. These independent choruses make up the vast majority of Chorus America’s members, and generally fall into one of four groups: professional choruses; volunteer choruses; children/youth choruses; and/or symphony/opera choruses. Over the years, Chorus America has gathered a substantial body of information about these choruses, which are the backbone of the choral music profession.

Independent choral groups are diverse in the broadest sense: involving young and old, and including people from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and with a wide range of incomes. They come together to perform in myriad musical styles and genres in ensembles both large and small. They perform in concert halls, churches and synagogues, school auditoriums, community halls, and outdoors in parks and at festivals. They reach audiences that cut across all segments of the population regardless of age, economic status, religious affiliation, or ethnic origin. Some choruses employ professional singers with significant musical backgrounds and training. Others are rooted in volunteerism, and their mission is to involve singers from the community who share a love of singing. Still others combine a core of paid professional singers with volunteers.

Like all performing groups, independent choruses depend upon a combination of earned and contributed income to support their work. Income is earned through sales of tickets, CDs, fees for contracted performances, and other products. Choruses incur expenses related to marketing and producing their performances. Contributed income comes from individuals, foundations, corporations, and government agencies or through special fundraising events.

The fastest growing segment of the choral field is children/youth choruses. A growing body of research documents the correlation between music and intellectual development in children. Music educators, parents, and other concerned adults are forming independent choruses for young people to increase opportunities for music performance, especially to counter the decline in music instruction in public schools. The majority of independent adult choruses also offer “education/outreach” programs and performances that reach new and under-served audiences through free concerts in friendly, convenient venues.

The choral art form is kept vibrant and alive through the active commissioning of many ensembles. Choruses work creatively and collaboratively with composers to ensure that the choral repertoire is continually reflective of contemporary themes and musical genres.

The power of choral music lies in the fact that the voice is an integral part of what it means to be human—part of our shared experience—and thus part of our spirit. Singers are able to make music anywhere, at anytime, with fewer barriers to performance than in many other forms of music. And because choral music embodies two of the most powerful forms of human expression—music and language—choral musicians and their audiences share a close connection.



## **Chorus America**

Chorus America's mission is to strengthen choruses and increase appreciation of choral music so that more people are enriched by its beauty and power.

Chorus America serves the spectrum of professional, volunteer, children/youth, and symphony/opera choruses. To accomplish its mission, Chorus America provides information, publications, conferences, consulting, training programs, surveys, networking, and awards to support choruses in North America. Although this project included data about a number of affiliated choruses, Chorus America is best known for its unparalleled ability to enhance the organizational strength of independent choruses through services that address infrastructure, management, and board development issues. No other organization currently offers the array of programs that support the public presentation of choral music. In addition, Chorus America's conducting programs have a reputation for providing artistic directors with skills, tools, and advice that help them in their day-to-day efforts to present first-rate and appealing concerts.

Since its founding in 1977, legions of choruses have benefited from Chorus America's services and networking clout to boost their own effectiveness. When Chorus America helps choral professionals do their jobs more effectively, it can mean the difference between growing and prospering in a responsible manner, or barely staying afloat. It can mean the difference between reaching new levels of artistic and organizational excellence, or remaining static.

More than 1,400 members belong to Chorus America, including choruses, individuals, and businesses. This influential group of conductors, arts administrators, board members, singers, and choral music lovers are at the core of a dramatically expanding choral movement in North America.

Chorus America is located in Washington, D.C. and is governed by a national board of trustees.

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# Appendix: Methodology, Demographics, and Works Cited



## Telephone Poll of Choral Singers

The Chorus Impact Study relies on data gathered in May through July 2002 through quantitative and qualitative research. Robinson & Muenster Associates Inc., a national polling firm based in Sioux Falls, S.D, conducted the quantitative research, which included three national polls. GSC Communications Inc. of Swarthmore, Pa., conducted the qualitative research, which included focus groups in three cities.

RMA contacted by telephone 623 individuals randomly selected from lists of choristers who sing in choruses based in communities around the country and in Canada. The interview script consisted of 76 questions. Interviews with respondents who no longer sang in a chorus were terminated after three questions. Of those contacted, 98.1 percent said they regularly sing in a chorus; the remainder said they used to sing a chorus.

Singers from these lists were over-sampled in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles so that conclusions could be reached about singers in these areas. In Washington, 181 additional respondents were contacted, including 98.9 percent who said they regularly sing in a chorus. In Los Angeles, 166 additional respondents were contacted, including 92.2 percent who said they regularly sing in a chorus. (See Chorus America's website for the telephone survey instrument.)

The sampling margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 4 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. This margin of error only applies to responses of the entire sample population (N=623). The margin of error will be larger when looking at the responses of smaller cells isolated by cross tabulations. The sampling error for the over-sampled areas is 7 percent.

## Lists of Choristers and Demographics

Best efforts were made to use chorus lists from different regions of the country. The lists included choruses from 31 states plus the Canadian province of British Columbia. (Lists were provided from the following states: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin.) Forty-one percent of respondents came from the Northeast, 9 percent from the South, 20 percent from the Central region, 17 percent from the Mountain West, and 13 percent from Pacific states.

The lists, however, were not representative of the whole universe of choral singers in the United States. Such lists are nearly impossible to find. For that reason, the conclusions reached in the national telephone survey, as well as in the over-sampled cities, are useful in making descriptive statements about choral singers, but they do not represent a statistically valid random sample of all chorus singers in the nation. In addition, statements comparing certain findings from this research and research done by others, in particular research about civic engagement, are offered simply as observations, not as statistically reliable conclusions.

## Income and Education

Choristers in our sample were well educated and had relatively high incomes. A plurality had completed graduate school (45 percent) and another 40 percent were college graduates. Add to that another 9 percent who had some college education or had attended junior colleges, and a full 94 percent had education beyond high school. Year 2000 Census Bureau data show that 26 percent of adults 25 and over have completed a bachelor's degree or more.



### *Level of Education*

- 0.6% 1-11th grade
- 4.3% High school graduate
- 1% Non-college post H.S. (e.g. tech)
- 9.2% Some college (jr. college)
- 40.4% College graduate
- 44.5% Post-graduate school

Their income levels were also relatively high compared with the 2000 median household income of \$42,100, as calculated by the Census Bureau. More than 40 percent of choristers had household incomes of more than \$75,000.

### *Household Income*

- 3.4% Under \$20,000
- 20.7% \$20,000 to less than \$50,000
- 21.5% \$50,000 to less than \$75,000
- 20.1% \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
- 13.2% \$100,000 to less than \$150,000
- 7.7% More than \$150,000
- 13.3% Don't know or refused

### **Age, Region, Race**

Our survey of 623 singers showed a good cross-section of ages: 12 percent were 14-30 years old; 30 percent were 31-45 years old; 46 percent were 46-64 years old; and 12 percent were older than 65.

The sample also included choristers from a broad range of communities, from rural to urban. About 32 percent were from urban areas, 58 percent from suburban, and 10 percent from rural areas.

With regard to race, 93 percent of the singers surveyed said that they were White, 1.8 percent Black or African American, 1.4 percent Asian, 0.2 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.3 percent Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 1.6 percent reported that they were some other race, and 1.4 percent refused to answer. One area for future inquiry includes an in-depth look into the diversity of choruses.

### **National Omnibus Polls**

In addition to the in-depth telephone survey of 623 individuals, two questions were added in May to a national omnibus poll of 1,011 individuals selected randomly by telephone. The omnibus surveys were conducted by ICR, a national polling organization with offices in four states. Up to four attempts were made to reach each telephone number. The questions were:

- How many people in your household, if any, sing in a choir or chorus?
- Would you agree or disagree that being involved with a chorus has caused you or a person in your household who has sung with a chorus to meet and socialize with people who would not ordinarily be met, or has caused you to be more involved in community activities? Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

Two more questions were added to a national omnibus poll of 1,000 individuals in July to further clarify the responses in the first omnibus poll. The July poll limited respondents to adults and it split up the second question asked in the May omnibus poll. The questions were:

- How many people 18 years old or over in your household, if any, sang in the last 12 months in a public performance or rehearsed for a public performance? (Note that the wording of this question is very similar to the wording of a 1997 National Endowment for the Arts survey on arts participation, except that it asked respondents to identify all adult singers in their households. The NEA poll only asked the respondent to indicate if he or she sang in a chorus.)
- Would you agree or disagree that being involved in a chorus has caused the adult chorus members in your household to become more involved in community activities? Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly?

Each omnibus poll consisted of two parts. The first part included a series of inserts containing proprietary questions. Because of the broad range of subjects covered by these inserts, an appropriate transitional statement introduced each section to ensure complete respondent attention and understanding. The second part of the questionnaire included standard demographic and classification data. The introductory statement to the overall omnibus survey was as follows: "I am calling from ICR, a well-known national research firm that works with major television networks. We are interested in peoples' opinions regarding current events and trends and would appreciate your help and insight." The sampling error for the omnibus polls is plus or minus 3 percent.

## Estimating the Number of Choral Singers

A total of 1,000 respondents were contacted randomly by telephone in two separate national omnibus polls (described above). In one poll, we asked the respondents how many people in their households participated within the last 12 months in a public choral performance. In the second poll, we asked how many people 18 years or older in their households participated in a chorus. For each of the polls, responses were broken into five groups: the percentage of households where one person participated in a chorus; two persons participated; three persons participated; four persons participated; and five or more participated.

We then converted the percentage of households in each group into the total number of people in households with phone service who responded affirmatively. To calculate this number, we multiplied the percentage of households in each group by the total number of households with phone service (101.6 million according to the U.S. Census Bureau).

For example, one survey showed that 4.5 percent of households polled had 2 members who participated in a choir or chorus. We multiplied 4.5 percent times the total number of U.S. households with telephones and came up with a total of 4.6 million households with telephone service ( $.045 \times 101.6 \text{ million} = 4.6 \text{ million households with telephone service}$ ). We then multiplied the number of households with telephone service (4.6 million) by the two people in those households who responded affirmatively to reach a number of 9.2 million people.

We completed this calculation for each group and then added the totals together to get the total number of Americans who are living in households with phone service and sing in a choir or chorus.

## Estimating the Number of Choruses

We estimate that there are 250,000 choruses nationwide, using membership figures collected by school, church, community, and professional choral organizations in combination with estimates based on marketing data. That total would include at least 38,000 school choruses, 200,000 church choirs, some 12,000 professional and community choruses, as well as the 700 mostly independent choruses (professional, volunteer, symphony/opera, and children/youth) that comprise Chorus America's membership.

In a survey done by Market Data Retrieval, about 32,700 teachers in 2001 identified themselves as choral directors in public and private schools at all levels. That number was up slightly from the year 2000. In addition, a national association of music educators estimates that 15 to 20 percent of school chorus directors lead more than one chorus, and many direct more than two choruses. Multiplying 32,700 by a factor of 1.15 comes to just over 38,000, and the number may well be higher, as some chorus directors lead more than two choruses and some may not have been identified by the MDR survey.

We arrived at 200,000 as the number of church choirs using two different approaches. In the first approach, we begin with the total number of churches in the U.S., and that total is about 305,000, according to marketing data from Fort Worth-based Trimedia, which specializes in church marketing. That is a higher number than the 257,000 cited by MCH of Sweet Springs, Mo., which provides data on a wider range of markets. However, the 305,000 figure is accepted by the Hartford Seminary/Hartford Institute for Religion Research, a top academic resource in this field.

About 180,000 churches have music programs, according to marketing data from Trimedia, and a conservative estimate is that 150,000 of those have choirs. Many have multiple choirs, including youth and children's choirs. A conservative multiple factor of 1.2 would put the total of choirs for these churches at 180,000, and a factor of 1.33 would put the number at 200,000 choirs.

The second method of estimating church choirs begins with the membership figures of the 21,000-member American Guild of Organists. National and regional AGO officials estimate there are 10 church organists for every AGO member, which would mean about 210,000 church organists. Church music specialists say that in recent years the total number of organists nationwide may be dropping as praise bands become more popular. Even reducing the 210,000 estimate by one quarter, the total would exceed 150,000 church organists. The overwhelming majority of those churches, perhaps 90 percent, have choirs, regional AGO officials say, and many have multiple choirs, likely pushing the total of choirs in churches with organs to around 170,000. Adding choirs in churches that do not have organs would push the total toward 200,000.



Arriving at a figure for independent professional and community choruses is more difficult, but the total could easily be 12,000. The American Choral Directors Association alone includes in its membership directors of 1,000 professional choruses and 5,000 community choruses. If no more than half of the directors of all professional and community choruses in the nation are members that would add another 12,000 choruses to the total. Additionally, Chorus America counts as dues paying members just over 700 choruses (professional, volunteer, symphony/opera, and children/youth).

## Focus Groups

Six focus groups were convened on May 6-8 and May 15 in the following cities: Los Angeles; Stockton, Calif.; and Washington, D.C. A total of 71 chorus singers recruited from lists of chorus singers supplied to Chorus America participated in the groups.

- May 6, Los Angeles: Group 1 had 10 participants; Group 2 had 14 participants
- May 7, Stockton, Calif.: 14 participants
- May 8, Los Angeles: 14 participants
- May 14, Washington, D.C.: Group 1 had 10 participants; Group 2 had 9 participants

The groups were moderated by a professional moderator from GSC Communications using a guide developed in cooperation with Chorus America. In most cases the sessions lasted longer than the scheduled 90 minutes. (See Chorus America's website for the Moderator's Guide.)

It is important to note that qualitative focus group research has limitations. Focus groups measure the emotional and behavioral dispositions of a select, targeted audience. They reveal the sentiment of a group of individuals and may uncover *how* and *why* people hold a certain belief, but they can never reveal *how many* people feel the same way.

## Areas for Future Study

Through this project, Chorus America has identified a number of areas for future studies, such as the aforementioned questions about diversity in choruses. Another issue deserving attention is about "causality." It is difficult to determine cause and effect when it comes to the behavior of choristers in their community. Does organized choral singing attract people who are skilled, friendly, and naturally inclined to civic duty, or does being involved in a chorus cause people to become more civically engaged?

In the current study, we posed the question directly to respondents in two different polls. In the national omnibus poll of 1,000 random individuals, we asked those identifying themselves as *adult* choristers if they agreed that being in a chorus has caused them to become more involved in community activities. Nearly 70 percent of the choristers agreed, but the percentage was split between those who agreed strongly (31 percent) and those who agreed somewhat (38 percent). Only 14 percent disagreed with the statement.

We asked two other similar questions in the in-depth telephone survey of 623 randomly selected individuals from choral lists around the country. In the first question, we asked if being involved in a chorus caused them and other choristers in their household—adult *and* children—to meet and socialize with people they would not ordinarily meet or caused them to become more involved in community activities. The results: 63 percent agreed strongly, 25 percent agreed somewhat, and the remainder disagreed.

The second question asked choristers if they believed their involvement in a chorus caused them and others in their household (adults and children) to volunteer for social service activities. The response to this question suggested the weakest association between choral singing and engagement: only 41 percent agreed, including 18.8 percent who agreed strongly and 22.2 percent who agreed somewhat. The 59 percent who disagreed was nearly evenly split between those who disagreed strongly and those who somewhat disagreed.

The range of responses to these three questions suggests that choristers agree that singing helps them become involved in community activities and puts them in touch with people they would not ordinarily meet. Both of these are desirable outcomes of engagement and add to social capital. They seemed less certain, however, about the relationship between choral membership and involvement in volunteer activities.

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