

The Alexandria Harmonizers 2018 — 2022 Strategic Plan

October 2018



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Executive Summary

Over four years ago, the board of the Alexandria, Virginia Chapter of SPEBSQSA, Inc. (also known as the Barbershop Harmony Society chapter or “BHS chapter”) concluded that the chorus should focus itself outward, engaging more in service and celebration with the local community while still sustaining its historic connection to the international barbershop world. Following a period of planning and reorganization, the chorus has better established itself to achieve that mission. As the Alexandria Harmonizers enter our eighth decade, the leadership of the chorus has now developed this plan to enhance the organization and guide its activities for the next four years.

This plan will guide a new effort to move us down that path set four years ago. After consulting with chorus members, researching comparable choruses in the region, and evaluating the Harmonizers’ own organizational status and needs, the board of both the BHS chapter and Alexandria Harmonizers, Inc. (“AH, Inc.”) have adopted a new mission statement, supported by four goals and related objectives. The mission, goals and objectives seek to sustain the chorus’s historic excellence while better positioning it to serve the broader community.

Alexandria Harmonizers’ Mission Statement:

“Enriching lives through vocal harmony in the greater DC area.”





	 Vocal Quality	 Community Impact	 Brand Awareness	 Financial Health
Goals	1.0: Attain the highest level of vocal quality	2.0: Enhance community impact	3.0: Increase awareness of the Harmonizers brand throughout the Greater DC Area	4.0: Achieve sufficient financial health to fulfill the mission.
Objectives	1.1: Improve individual member performing abilities. 1.2: Elevate members' focus on excellence. 1.3: Build infrastructure to support members' experience.	2.1: Improve participation in local community events. 2.2: Instill a sense of community mission among the members. 2.3: Build partnerships with targeted schools. 2.4: Build partnerships with veterans' organizations. 2.5: Deepen relationship with Alfred Street Baptist Church.	3.1: Gain understanding of brand awareness. 3.2: Develop and execute a marketing plan. 3.3: Hold a predictable concert season and recognizable annual event.	4.1: Raise sufficient funds to hire a full-time administrative staffer. 4.2: Establish donor/ fundraising infrastructure to manage development activities. 4.3: Improve membership involvement in fundraising.

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Introduction

Purpose

This strategic plan provides focus and direction for the next four years, as the Alexandria Harmonizers enter our eighth decade of vocal excellence.

In 2018 the Harmonizers celebrated our 70th anniversary as a member chorus of the international Barbershop Harmony Society. The chorus has experienced remarkable success over those seven decades: it has four times won gold medals in international barbershop choral competition; it has appeared at venues like the Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap, Strathmore Music Center and Carnegie Hall; it has performed internationally in China, Canada, France and Germany; it has collaborated with vocal and instrumental musicians in many genres, exploring a broad range of music; and it has brought delight in vocal harmony to countless thousands throughout Alexandria and the broader DC region.

Rather than resting on these successes, the chorus has sought to imagine an even more productive future for itself. In late 2015, the BHS Chapter board adopted a new organizational plan to give the chorus greater resources to serve the community. That plan recommended the creation of a second nonprofit corporation (now Alexandria Harmonizers, Inc.) A joint operating model would coordinate the activities of the two corporations, and increase volunteer effectiveness by moving operational duties to volunteer teams who would not also serve on either board. The development of a new Harmonizers strategic plan was the final step in moving forward with the new organizational plan.

This final document is intended to provide a guide for chorus operations over the next four years. But more broadly, it will move the chorus down the path decided on four years ago — a path of developing greater choral resources to support expanded community service. The specific goals and objectives offer a blueprint for action and also a measure of our performance toward the broader mission.

Current Environment

The Harmonizers engage with a broad range of choral groups across the nation, but the chorus lives principally in two worlds: the diverse and dynamic community of musicians in the greater Washington region, and the member choruses of the international Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS).

As one of the area's premier choruses, the Harmonizers have had the honor of performing for U.S. presidents, Congressmen and women, senior government leaders, and a host of local fans. The chorus has been actively engaged local, regional, and national events that bring harmony to a broad range of audience types and ages. A review of other large choruses in the region shows that the Harmonizers have done all of this on a lower budget and with less staff support than any comparable chorus.

Additionally, as proud members of the BHS, the Harmonizers are excited to connect the chorus's mission with the BHS's recent vision of [Everyone in Harmony](#). The chorus looks forward to ensuring harmony is more than just singing and performing. The Harmonizers have been blessed by dedicated individuals who have repeatedly made the chorus a success and will continue to break new ground by expanding our possibilities. As a chorus that often leads the Society in generating exciting out-of-the-box opportunities for community engagement, the Harmonizers will actively support the BHS in achieving the vision outlined in June 2017.

Mission, Goals, Objectives Overview

Mission

Enriching lives through vocal harmony in the greater DC area.

Goals

- 1. Attain the highest level of vocal quality**
- 2. Enhance community Impact**
- 3. Increase awareness of the Harmonizers brand throughout the greater DC area**
- 4. Achieve sufficient financial health to fulfill the mission**



Objectives

Objective 1.1: Improve individual member performing abilities.

Objective 1.2: Elevate members' focus on excellence.

Objective 1.3: Build infrastructure to support members' experience.

Objective 2.1: Improve participation in local community events.

Objective 2.2: Instill a sense of community mission among the members.

Objective 2.3: Build partnerships with targeted schools.

Objective 2.4: Build partnerships with veterans' organizations.

Objective 2.5: Deepen relationship with Alfred Street Baptist Church.

Objective 3.1: Gain understanding of brand awareness.

Objective 3.2: Develop and execute a marketing plan.

Objective 3.3: Hold a predictable concert season and recognizable annual event.

Objective 4.1: Raise sufficient funds to hire a full-time administrative staffer.

Objective 4.2: Establish donor/fundraising infrastructure to manage development activities.

Objective 4.3: Improve membership involvement in fundraising.

Goal 1: Vocal Quality

Attain the highest level of vocal quality.



DESCRIPTION

Vocal excellence has always been the first goal of the Alexandria Harmonizers, and it remains a necessity in achieving the Harmonizers' broader goals. The Harmonizers' hard work in rehearsal and in personal time produces quality performances that have been recognized in competition, in prestigious bookings and in audience support. The Harmonizers have identified specific objectives that will help ensure continued excellence in all the chorus's performances.

OBJECTIVE 1.1: Improve individual member performing abilities.

The chorus's sound begins with the performance of each singer, and improvement in individual members' singing is the first objective to be met under this strategic plan. A range of activities, including coaching, recording and rehearsal, may contribute to this objective.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: Elevate members' focus on excellence.

While each member of the chorus is already motivated toward excellent singing, chorus rehearsals and interactions with the music leadership can improve that focus. The chorus will ensure that members' rehearsal experience is structured to lead to greater excellence.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: Build infrastructure to support members' experience.

The production of each Harmonizer event has always relied on individual member responsibility for all practical aspects of rehearsals and performances. The chorus will build infrastructure to support member engagement and fraternity, finding ways to expand volunteer support and relieve the burden on members to track the details of deadlines, scores and costumes. This will allow singers to focus on singing excellence, while maintaining the chorus camaraderie that defines the Harmonizer experience.

OUTCOME AND IMPACT

Implementation of this goal over the next four years will create a chorus with a culture of excellence engaged in a mutual endeavor of continuous improvement in vocal production. That chorus will form the cornerstone of the Harmonizers' mission, as superlative singing more deeply touches the hearts of the singers, audiences and fellow performers, and thus improves lives.

Goal 2: Community Impact

Enhance Community Impact



DESCRIPTION

The Harmonizers have always made a significant contribution to the life of the community, performing at local festivals, restaurants, schools, senior homes and government buildings. But our presence in the community has also been somewhat ad hoc, without specific intention or strategy. This goal will organize the Harmonizers' community connections into an overarching effort to engage and benefit the Alexandria community and the larger DC region. As the plan develops, additional elements of the community may also be targeted.

OBJECTIVE 2.1: Improve participation in local community events.

The Harmonizers will identify the reach of our impact on the community and develop a clear, multi-year plan for the chorus's participation in civic events.

OBJECTIVE 2.2: Instill a sense of community mission among the members.

By emphasizing the chorus's benefits to the community and the mission of enriching lives, the Harmonizers will engage individual members of the chorus to understand and value their own impact on audiences.

OBJECTIVE 2.3: Build partnerships with targeted schools.

The Harmonizers have brought the joy of vocal harmony to thousands of school children. Moving forward, we will focus on creating a deeper, continuing connection with targeted schools where we can offer further benefits to music education.

OBJECTIVE 2.4: Build partnerships with veterans' organizations.

The Harmonizers singers include numerous current and former military members, and the Harmonizers at times have provided many performances for military and veterans groups. The chorus will set out a clear strategy for connecting with veterans' organizations and provide regular vocal support for veterans' events.

OBJECTIVE 2.5: Deepen relationship with Alfred Street Baptist Church.

Over the past eighteen months, the Harmonizers have built a vocal connection with the Men's Chorus of one of the oldest churches in Alexandria, Alfred Street Baptist Church. That connection has included the creation of a local festival for choruses in the area. The Harmonizers look forward to continuing and deepening this connection with the community.

OUTCOME AND IMPACT

By implementing measures to achieve this goal, the Harmonizers will expand and coordinate our opportunities to engage the Alexandria community and DC region. These efforts will lead to dozens of annual performances and collaborations, bringing vocal harmony to thousands of members of the community and enhancing lives through the joy of music.

Goal 3: Brand Awareness

Increase awareness of the Harmonizers brand throughout the Greater DC Area.



DESCRIPTION

The Alexandria Harmonizers often describe ourselves as “the best-kept secret in Alexandria.” Although Harmonizer performances have been seen literally world-wide, and on numerous network television shows, and the chorus has been sought out for performances in prestigious venues, most of the local community is barely aware of our existence. The chorus will engage in an organized branding and public communications campaign to increase regional awareness of the benefits we offer to the community.

OBJECTIVE 3.1: Gain understanding of brand awareness.

The lack of awareness of the Harmonizers is partly a result of the Harmonizers’ own lack of awareness of what our brand is or should be, or how to convey that publicly. The chorus leadership will engage in a new effort to understand our brand and how brand communication will enhance community visibility.

OBJECTIVE 3.2: Develop and execute a marketing plan.

For many years, the Harmonizers have marketed individual events separately, with no coordinated strategy and no general marketing of the chorus’s work. In tandem with developing a distinct brand, the chorus will adopt a new marketing effort that highlights the many aspects of the chorus’s contributions to the community as well as individual concert programs.

OBJECTIVE 3.3: Hold a predictable concert season and recognizable annual event.

Over the last few years, the Harmonizers’ produced concerts have become unpredictable, with venues and dates changing annually. Even dedicated fans have had to work to track the performances. The chorus will establish a predictable concert schedule in predictable venues, with the target of establishing an annual schedule that may be marketed well in advance as a concert “season.”

OUTCOME AND IMPACT

Completing this goal will lead to greater awareness of the Harmonizers and our contributions to the community, from the schools and churches of Alexandria to the residents of the greater DC area. The Harmonizers will expand our social media followers by an order of magnitude, appear in a dozen news stories each year, and drop the tag of “the best kept secret in Alexandria.” The resulting improved awareness of the chorus will expand audiences and singing opportunities, bringing the life-affirming value of vocal harmony to hundreds more people every year.

Goal 4: Financial Health

Achieve sufficient financial health to fulfill the mission.



DESCRIPTION

Every organization depends upon financial resources to achieve its objectives. The Harmonizers have long survived on a very lean budget for an enterprise of our size, with no paid staff, limited contracted music leadership, and enormous commitment from several unpaid volunteers who keep chorus operations going. Additional financial resources are necessary to supplement this volunteer effort and provide necessary support to increase the Harmonizers' community outreach.

OBJECTIVE 4.1: Raise sufficient funds to hire a full-time administrative staffer.

In order to achieve the Harmonizers' mission and complete the goals of this strategic plan, the Harmonizers must find the funding necessary to hire administrative support. No chorus of similar size or ambition in the DC region operates without paid staff; many have several full- and part-time employees. The Harmonizers will always rely on volunteer assistance and the commitment of chorus members, but the chorus will also employ administrative staff to allow the singers to focus more on vocal quality and community service, reducing their day-to-day administrative duties.

OBJECTIVE 4.2: Establish donor/fundraising infrastructure to manage development activities.

The Harmonizers have devoted more effort to fundraising over the last three years, increasing our connection with patrons and supporters as we communicate the chorus's financial goals. But we lack essential infrastructure to support these operations. The Harmonizers will acquire the

software necessary to integrate data on donors, ticket purchasers, grant awards and other support.

OBJECTIVE 4.3: Improve membership involvement in fundraising.

Originally founded along the lines of a fraternal organization, for decades the Harmonizers expected support for the chorus to come almost exclusively from ticket sales and singer contributions. As the chorus has adopted a mission that focuses on community enhancement, members of the chorus have begun to see the Harmonizers as worthy of community support. By continuing to shift the singers' perspective to value their vocal excellence as a benefit to others, we will engage chorus members more fully in financial development.

OUTCOME AND IMPACT

By the end of the next four years, the Harmonizers will triple the chorus's support from individual donors and grant funders, maintaining the financial health necessary to provide administrative assistance and allow enhanced musical education and performances in the community. This increased capacity will enable the Harmonizers to bring the enjoyment and inspiration resulting from vocal harmony to a greater cross-section of the community.



Implementation is the obvious challenge presented by this strategic plan. As always the Harmonizers will rely on many volunteers and supporters to achieve these milestones. The dedication and talent of the Harmonizer singers remain the most important elements of success for the Harmonizers, but the assistance of many others will also be needed to complete this plan.

In addition to developing the long-term plan, the strategic planning team developed and prioritized a list of initial activities, with an identification of the operations teams that would be responsible for each. The input from the member focus groups was especially helpful in prioritizing these activities. Now that the two boards of directors have approved the plan they will work with the operations teams to implement these and other activities to carry out the plan, as overseen by each board.

The Harmonizers' Executive Director will oversee the work to execute the plan, including creation of a new operating team to be responsible for community service activities — a need identified by the strategic planning team. The Executive Director's existing weekly operations team meetings will ensure that progress is being made against the goals and objectives.

As the Harmonizers begin to work through these initial activities, the operations teams will also begin to identify further activities necessary to achieve the goals and objectives. Annually the boards of directors will review the actions taken and the further plans developed by the operations teams. These annual reviews, in addition to regular board meetings, will ensure plan implementation and also identify any needs for plan revision.

The plan is structured so that success toward each of the objectives will make remaining aspects of the plan easier to achieve. Thus, the completion of a few initial steps toward each objective should improve the chances of success for all operating teams, and increase enthusiasm toward reaching the goals. We expect that with organized effort the dedication and support of our volunteers and donors will bring the plan to fulfillment.

Appendix A — Methodology

The Harmonizers initiated the strategic planning process in the fall of 2017 with a survey completed by more than 100 Harmonizers. That survey was supplemented by in-depth interviews of members of both boards, several of the key operations team leaders, and a few other Harmonizer leaders. In total, the team completed more than 30 interviews. Following the survey and interviews, the team also conducted a benchmarking survey of the finances of other choruses in the region and a closer comparative analysis with two major DC choruses. After compiling this information, an ad hoc strategic planning team convened to work on the plan. Once a draft strategic plan was developed, we conducted four focus groups among members of the Harmonizers to get feedback before the plan was finalized.

The Harmonizers would like to express their enormous gratitude to Marie Muscella and other members of her team from MITRE Corporation — Dan Pisano, Shane Patterson and Reed Livergood — for their invaluable assistance in developing this plan. Without Marie, this strategic plan simply would not exist.



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