

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 - 2028



Prepared May, 2024

Background

In late 2015, the BHS Alexandria 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 now also serve on either board. 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 sought to imagine an even more productive future for itself. 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. 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.”) adopted the following mission statement:

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

The first strategic plan to meet this mission was defined by four goals and related strategies. The original intent was that the plan would be reexamined every five years and updated if needed. Other changes since the first strategic plan include the change to use the same board members for both the chapter and AH Inc board starting in 2022. This reduced the number of volunteers needed to serve on the two boards, as well as eliminating gaps and overlaps in board decisions and responsibilities, since the board members represent both organizations every time they meet. The other significant change that is still being implemented is the new brand name Alexandria A Cappella Collective (AACC), to be used to represent the total membership of the organization as it adds new ensembles. This does not replace the existing legal names, but is used for promotional purposes to show an expanded entity that has multiple ensembles. The Alexandria Harmonizers will be rebranded to “The Harmonizers”. The first ensemble to be added was Metro Voices in 2022-2023, with other ensembles envisioned to be started over the next few years. The plan below reflects these new branding names.

Summary of Changes

This revised strategic plan provides focus and direction for the next five years. The plan reflects two major differences from the previous plan:

- 1) The plan adds 2 new major goals – organizational growth and culture of fellowship.
- 2) The goals are used as Measures of Success. Everything the organization does should be contributing to one or more of these.
- 3) The plan originally had Objectives, which was a mix of strategic actions as well as tactical actions. This revision includes strategies for achieving each of the measures, and sometimes some examples of how those strategies may be accomplished. However, the intent for this document is not to provide specific “how”s (tactical), but rather “what”s (goals) that will guide the organization in fulfilling its mission effectively.

Mission Statement

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

Goals (Measures of Success)



Each of these goals will be measured on a scale of 1-5.

Impact level - 1=negative, 2=neutral, 3= minimal, 4 = medium, 5 = significant

When evaluating specific actions or initiatives, their impact on one or more of these goals will be evaluated according to this scale. If none of the 6 measures are at least a 3 or more, then the initiative should not be used.

Goal 1 – Quality

Description

Vocal excellence is the first thought that comes to mind when discussing quality. It's the characteristic that has the most impact on audiences. But an organization needs to maintain high standards in everything it does – communications, show preparation, fund-raising, etc. The following strategies can be used to ensure that everything AACC does meets this standard of excellence.

Strategy 1.1: Use qualitative and quantifiable metrics.

Whenever possible, use metrics to measure a baseline, and then evaluate changes in the baseline to monitor improvement or potential declines. These may be used across the organization – singers' skill with a song, effectiveness of fund-raising events, audience sizes at shows, etc. More data leads to a better understanding of what works well and what needs improvement.

Strategy 1.2: Use review cycles for process management.

Using a review cycle for process management involves regularly assessing and refining organizational procedures. Through periodic reviews, adjustments are made based on feedback, changing requirements, and evolving goals, ensuring that processes remain efficient, effective, and aligned with the organization's objectives. This iterative approach fosters continuous improvement and adaptability within the organization. Two examples already implemented within the organization are the annual reviews and the recording process run by the music team.

Strategy 1.3: Encourage continuing education.

Music education is important to improve singers' performance abilities, but so is education in other areas important to the organization, such as current technologies, branding methodologies, improved fund-raising techniques, etc. Some examples of different ways to do continuing education include:

- **Workshops and Masterclasses:** Organize regular workshops and masterclasses conducted by skilled vocal coaches and professionals in the industry. These sessions can cover various aspects such as vocal techniques, stage presence, and performance skills.
- **Guest Lectures and Seminars:** Invite renowned singers, musicians, and experts from related fields to deliver lectures and seminars on topics relevant to singing and music. These sessions can offer valuable insights and inspiration to members.
- **Music Theory and Ear Training Classes:** Offer classes or online resources focused on music theory, sight-singing, and ear training. Building a strong foundation in these areas can enhance singers' understanding and proficiency in music.
- **Performance Opportunities:** Provide regular performance opportunities for members to showcase their skills and receive constructive feedback.

- **Learning Groups:** Encourage the formation of small peer learning groups where members can practice together, share knowledge, and provide support to each other. This fosters a collaborative learning environment within the organization.
- **Online Learning Platforms:** Curate a list of reputable online learning platforms or courses. Provide access to these resources or subsidies to encourage members to continue their education independently.
 - **Scholarships and Grants:** Establish scholarships or grants to support members pursuing formal education or attending workshops, conferences, or camps outside the organization.

Outcome and Impact

Using these strategies to achieve this goal over the next five years will yield the following benefits:

- **A culture of excellence engaged in a mutual endeavor of continuous improvement in vocal production that will form the cornerstone of the AACC mission.** Superlative singing more deeply touches the hearts of the singers, audiences and fellow performers, and thus improves lives.
 - **Increased Accountability:** Metrics provide a quantifiable way to measure the effectiveness of processes and track progress towards organizational goals. Review cycles ensure that leaders regularly assess performance against these metrics, fostering accountability for results and driving continuous improvement efforts.
 - **Improved Responsiveness:** Continuous review and refinement of processes enable organizations to identify and address issues promptly. Leaders can leverage metrics to pinpoint areas where quality may be lacking and implement measures to improve, ultimately leading to greater efficiency.

Goal 2 – Outreach

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 direct the AACC into a focused effort to engage and benefit the Alexandria community and the larger DC region.

Strategy 2.1: Identify team members responsible for outreach initiatives.

AACC currently does not have a team responsible for Outreach. Instead, various members raise opportunities to the Music Team or other leadership and suggest an engagement. Creating a team specifically responsible for outreach efforts will give focus and accountability to these efforts.

Strategy 2.2: Build an inventory of local community events suitable for engagement.

Compile a list of local community events and venues that would be good places to impact the community. Include info on each that reflects the level of impact an engagement would have – such as estimated audience size, estimated revenue, estimate size of network that the event is part of, etc.

Strategy 2.3: Create processes for efficiently and consistently making engagement decisions.

Instead of evaluating each opportunity using off-the-cuff decision making, • Formalize the approach • Create a multi-year plan for the events • Create and use templates to make the decision process repeatable and consistent.

Strategy 2.4: 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.

Strategy 2.5: Build partnerships with local organizations.

Whether it's Alfred Street Baptist Church, schools, senior centers, hospitals, veteran organizations, or others, an ongoing relationship works much better than an occasional contact.

Outcome and Impact

Using these strategies over the next five years will give our mission a greater focus - bringing vocal harmony to thousands of members of the community and enhancing lives through the joy of music. This goal is tied closely to the next one, Branding, which is based on the local community understanding who we are.

Goal 3 – Branding

Description

Before the recent approval of new brand names, the Alexandria Harmonizers often felt they were “the best-kept secret in Alexandria.” Although Harmonizer performances have been seen worldwide, on numerous network television shows, and has been invited for performances in prestigious venues, the prevalent feeling is that most of the local community is barely aware of our existence. AACC must engage in an organized branding and public communications campaign to increase regional awareness of the benefits we offer to the community.

Strategy 3.1: Find people with expertise in branding to assist in building a marketing plan.

Our organization has had several attempts to create new logos or other branding. Each attempt has been lengthy, awkward, and frustrating – mainly because our organization lacks the skillset internally to be able to approach branding smoothly and efficiently. Find the resources outside the organization to facilitate a well-structured marketing plan and monitor the execution of the plan to ensure successful messaging.

Strategy 3.2: Consistent Brand Messaging

Ensure that all brand messaging is consistent across all touchpoints, including website, social media profiles, marketing materials, and audience and donor communications. Consistency builds trust and reinforces our brand's identity in the minds of our audience. Develop clear brand guidelines that outline our brand voice, values, and visual elements to maintain consistency effectively.

Strategy 3.3: Create a long-term calendar (2+ years) that can be used for a predictable concert season and recognizable annual events.

Creating a long-term calendar of events removes uncertainty from potential audiences – they can see what to expect from AACC for the future. Removing that uncertainty strengthens the brand by providing confidence that AACC doesn't just swerve from event to event, but that it has a deliberate roadmap for its future and a set of predictable events that can be expected every season.

Strategy 3.4: Collect testimonials to be used in promotions

It's one thing for an organization to tell its story, but an even stronger story is told through the voices of those we've impacted. Reach out and get those stories whenever possible and use them as testimonials in promotions.

Outcome and Impact

Just as weak, inconsistent branding can make an organization feel like a “best kept secret”, strong, clear branding will fuel growth for AACC. This growth will happen in the size of our audiences, the number of sponsors and their contributions, the membership of AACC, the number of new singers from the community, the number of performance opportunities, and in the number of volunteers helping AACC fulfill its mission.

Goal 4 – Financial

Description

Every organization depends upon financial resources to achieve its strategies. AACC has operated 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.

Strategy 4.1: Build and grow a development team sufficient to drive fund raising.

Find volunteers who can help with the following functions of a Development team:

- Fundraising and Donor Relations:
 - Developing and executing fundraising strategies to secure financial support from individuals, corporations, foundations, and government agencies.
 - Cultivating relationships with donors, sponsors, and grant-making organizations through personalized communication, stewardship activities, and donor recognition programs.
 - Planning and organizing fundraising events, campaigns, and appeals to engage donors and generate revenue to support the organization's programs and initiatives
- Grant Writing and Management:
 - Identifying grant opportunities from public and private sources that align with the organization's mission, programs, and funding needs.
 - Researching grant requirements, preparing grant proposals, and submitting grant applications in accordance with deadlines and guidelines.
 - Managing grant-funded projects, ensuring compliance with grant agreements, reporting requirements, and funding restrictions to maintain positive relationships with grantors and secure future support.
- Membership Programs and Patron Engagement (note – this is not the same as chapter membership):
 - Developing and implementing membership programs and patron engagement initiatives to cultivate a loyal base of supporters and advocates for the organization.
 - Designing membership benefits, incentives, and recognition opportunities to attract new members and retain existing ones.
 - Providing personalized stewardship and VIP experiences for major donors, patrons, and sponsors to strengthen their connection to the organization and foster long-term loyalty.

- Endowment and Planned Giving Programs:
 - Managing endowment funds and planned giving programs to secure long-term financial support for the organization's mission and programs.
 - Cultivating relationships with donors interested in making legacy gifts, bequests, or planned gifts to the organization. Collaborating with legal and financial advisors to facilitate planned giving arrangements, such as charitable trusts, annuities, and estate gifts, and ensure compliance with relevant regulations and best practices.

Strategy 4.2: Evaluate and refine usage of donor/fundraising infrastructure to manage development activities.

AACC now has experience with a number of different software platforms, including Keela for contact management, GiveButter for fund-raising events, Groupanizer for membership info, etc. Each platform has its strengths and weaknesses. Review each, and commit to the best solution(s) for supporting our development efforts.

Strategy 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 AACC has adopted a mission that focuses on community enhancement, members should understand and agree that our ensembles are worthy of community support. The best way members can help is by encouraging their network of family, friends, and business associates to give their time, energy, and/or financial support so that we can bring our music to a broader audience in our community.

Outcome and Impact

AACC is growing, and with that growth comes increasing pressure to have the finances required to maintain the organization. We have added the new ensemble, Metro Voices. We will add a youth ensemble and a seniors ensemble within the next couple of years. New ensembles require paid directors, as well as increasing demands for rehearsal space and performance venues. Successfully meeting the goal of financial stability will allow AACC to bring the enjoyment and inspiration resulting from vocal harmony to an ever greater cross-section of the community.

Goal 5 – Growth

Description

This goal focuses on the growth of AACC as a planned, managed process. This goal is intertwined with all the other goals, since a larger organization means more resources that can be directed towards achieving those goals.

Strategy 5.1: Host periodic visioning workshops.

Beyond the review and revision of this strategic plan, AACC needs to start its planning process as a longer-term view of its performances and activities instead of the myopic view it has traditionally held. Holding small-group discussions to consider those long-term events is key to providing enough time and foresight to making those events successful.

Strategy 5.2: Develop and execute a recruitment plan.

The membership team is constantly devising ways to invite new members to AACC. What is not currently planned is what the next five years should look like in terms of paid or volunteer staff to help the organization evolve.

Strategy 5.3: Build a communication team and strategy.

The current communications are managed by a single director with the assistance of the General Manager and the Executive Director. A more scalable solution that more adequately meets the communications needs of AACC is to use a team approach. As an example, one member of the team may do website maintenance, while another member handles social media, while yet another handles inter-organizational relationships. Good communication plays a critical role in the growth and success of an organization in several ways:

- **Alignment of Goals and Vision:** Effective communication ensures that when all members share a common understanding of the organization's mission, vision, and goals, they can align their efforts and work towards common objectives, driving progress and growth.
- **Clarity and Direction:** Clear communication provides members with the information they need to perform effectively. It clarifies expectations, priorities, and deadlines, reducing misunderstandings and errors that can hinder growth.
- **Innovation and Adaptability:** Open communication fosters a culture where members feel comfortable sharing ideas, feedback, and concerns. This encourages innovation, creativity, and problem-solving, allowing the organization to grow in a consistent manner.
- **Member Engagement and Motivation:** Good communication cultivates a sense of transparency, trust, and inclusion within the organization. (Contributes to Goal #6).
- **Effective Decision-Making:** Clear and timely communication enables faster, more effective decision-making processes, facilitating agility and responsiveness to internal team activities as well as external performing opportunities.

- Sponsor and Audience Satisfaction: Clear, responsive communication with audiences and donors builds trust, loyalty, and satisfaction, leading to repeat attendance, positive word-of-mouth, and sustainable growth. (Goals #2, 3, 4)

Overall, good communication is a cornerstone of organizational growth, enabling alignment, clarity, innovation, engagement, and effective relationships both internally and externally. Organizations that prioritize communication as a strategic imperative are better positioned to achieve their goals, adapt to change, and thrive in dynamic business environments.

Strategy 5.4: Seek community members with relevant experience to serve on the board.

Board members from the community can offer one or more different major contributions to the board.

1. Professional background in non-profit organization skills needed, such as law, finance, fund-raising, operations, etc.
 2. An ability to sponsor AACC, or a network of potential sponsors who would be willing to support AACC.
 3. A network of community contacts who would be willing to serve on the board based on #1 or #2.
- Strategy 5.5: Seek community members with relevant experience to serve as volunteers. As AACC tries to make a greater impact in the local community, it will need more resources than the limited number of members it has. Finding volunteers from the community who can help AACC make a greater impact in the community is a more scalable solution.

Outcome and Impact

Growth of AACC can bring numerous benefits, both internally and externally. Here are some key advantages:

- Increased Impact and Outreach(Goal #2): As AACC grows, it can reach a larger audience. More people can benefit from its programs, performances, and educational initiatives, leading to a deeper integration into the community.
- Enhanced Financial Stability(Goal #4): Growth often means increased revenue streams, such as ticket sales, memberships, donations, and sponsorships. This diversified income can help the organization become more financially stable, reducing reliance on a single funding source and providing resources for long-term sustainability and growth.
- Expanded Opportunities for Artists and Creatives: A larger AACC organization can offer more opportunities for performers and creatives (e.g. choreographers, script writers, etc.) to showcase their work, collaborate on projects, and receive support for their artistic endeavors. This can contribute to the development of local talent and the cultural vibrancy of the community.
- Improved Infrastructure and Resources: With growth comes the ability to invest in better facilities, equipment, technology, and staff. This enhanced infrastructure can improve the quality of productions, exhibitions, and programs, leading to a better experience for both singers and audiences.

- Greater Visibility and Prestige (Goal #3): A growing arts organization is often perceived as more successful and reputable, attracting attention from media, donors, sponsors, and potential collaborators. This increased visibility can lead to partnerships, endorsements, and opportunities for national or international recognition, further elevating the organization's status and influence.
- Increase in Social Cohesion (Goal #6): An increase in community engagement and involvement can foster a sense of belonging, promote social cohesion, and contribute to the overall well-being and enrichment of the AACC members.
- Capacity for Innovation and Experimentation: With resources and stability, AACC can take more risks, experiment with new ideas, and innovate in their programming and artistic offerings. This creativity and willingness to push boundaries can lead to groundbreaking performances, exhibitions, and experiences that captivate audiences and inspire other organizations in the field.

Goal 6 – Culture of Fellowship

Description

The following strategies address the goal of creating an environment within AACC that promotes member satisfaction and encourages member participation in the activities that help AACC achieve its mission.

Strategy 6.1: Engage HR-experienced resources.

These resources can provide guidance, suggested policies, training, and processes to cover topics such as:

- Harassment
- Child protection
- Diversity and inclusion
- Welcoming guests
- Onboarding new members
- Member retention

Strategy 6.2: Encourage Open Communication and Transparency.

Provide members with multiple channels of how to share ideas, concerns, feedback. These channels can include small group meetings, suggestion box, surveys, designated leaders. The other key to this is the member needs to feel the feedback has been heard and appropriate action(s) is being taken. This means a timely response to feedback is important to foster the usage of these channels.

Strategy 6.3: Support Team-Building Activities and Events.

This does not mean just finding social events so that members can interact outside of weekly rehearsals. This can include the annual retreat with coaches. It can also include hosting small group sessions about topics AACC needs to address, such visioning, improved use of technology, improving communications, or any of the other challenges we have in making AACC a better organization.

Strategy 6.4: Lead by Example.

Leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for organizational culture. Lead by example by demonstrating empathy, humility, and respect in your interactions with members. Show genuine interest in members' well-being and personal development, providing support, guidance, and mentorship as needed.

Outcome and Impact

Having a culture of belonging and fellowship within an organization means creating an environment where every individual feels valued, respected, and included. In such a culture:

- **Belonging:** Employees feel a sense of belonging when they are accepted for who they are, regardless of their background, identity, or differences. They feel connected to the organization and its mission, knowing that they have opportunities to make contributions to the success of the mission, and that their contributions are appreciated and recognized.
- **Fellowship:** Fellowship refers to the camaraderie, mutual support, and sense of community among the members. It involves building strong relationships, trust, and collaboration within teams and across the organization. Members feel like they are part of a cohesive group working towards common goals.

Conclusion

Implementation is the obvious challenge presented by this strategic plan. As always, AACC will rely on many volunteers and supporters to achieve these goals. The plan is structured so that success is measurable and monitorable. We expect that with organized effort the dedication and support of our volunteers and donors will bring the plan to fulfillment.