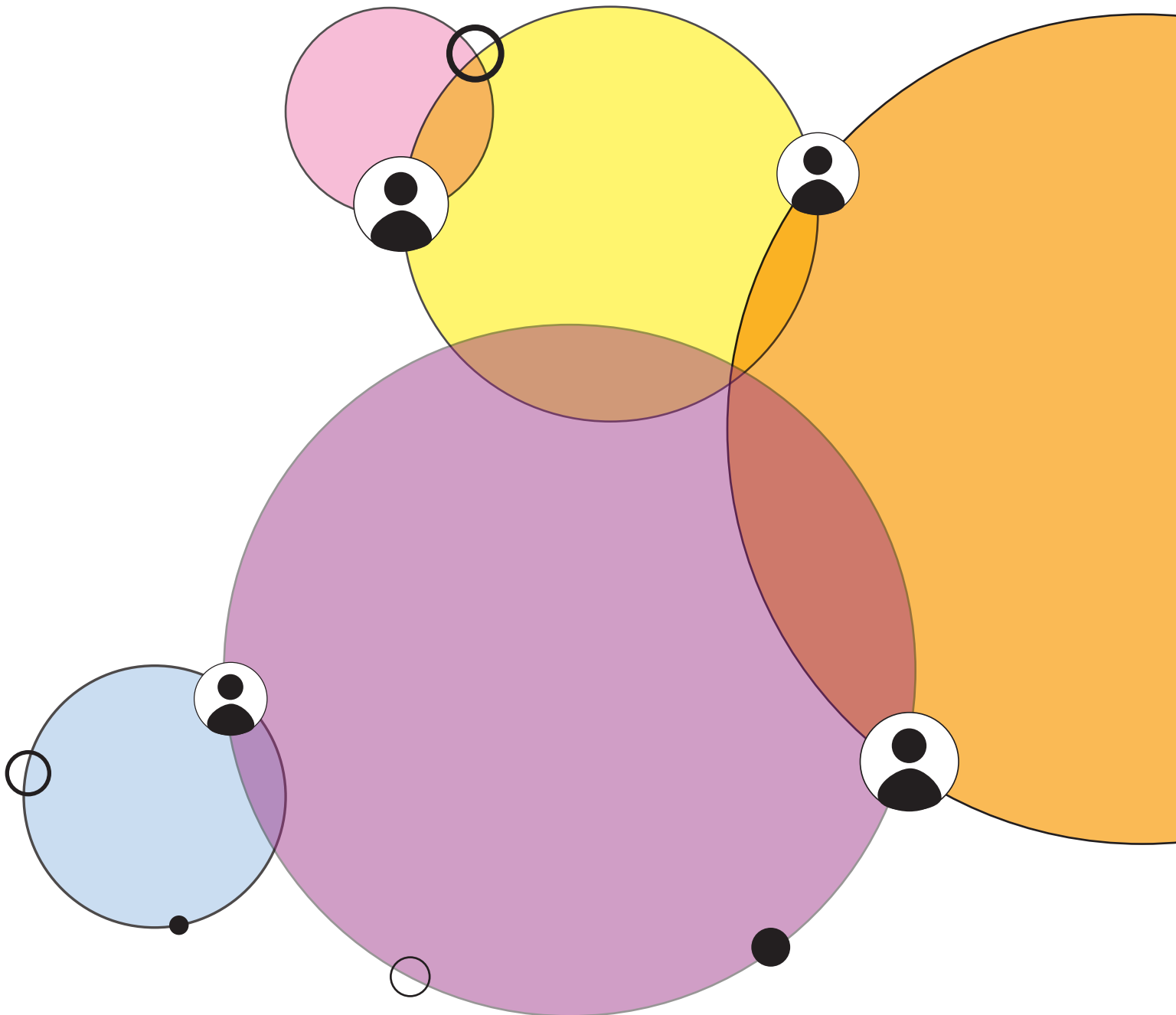
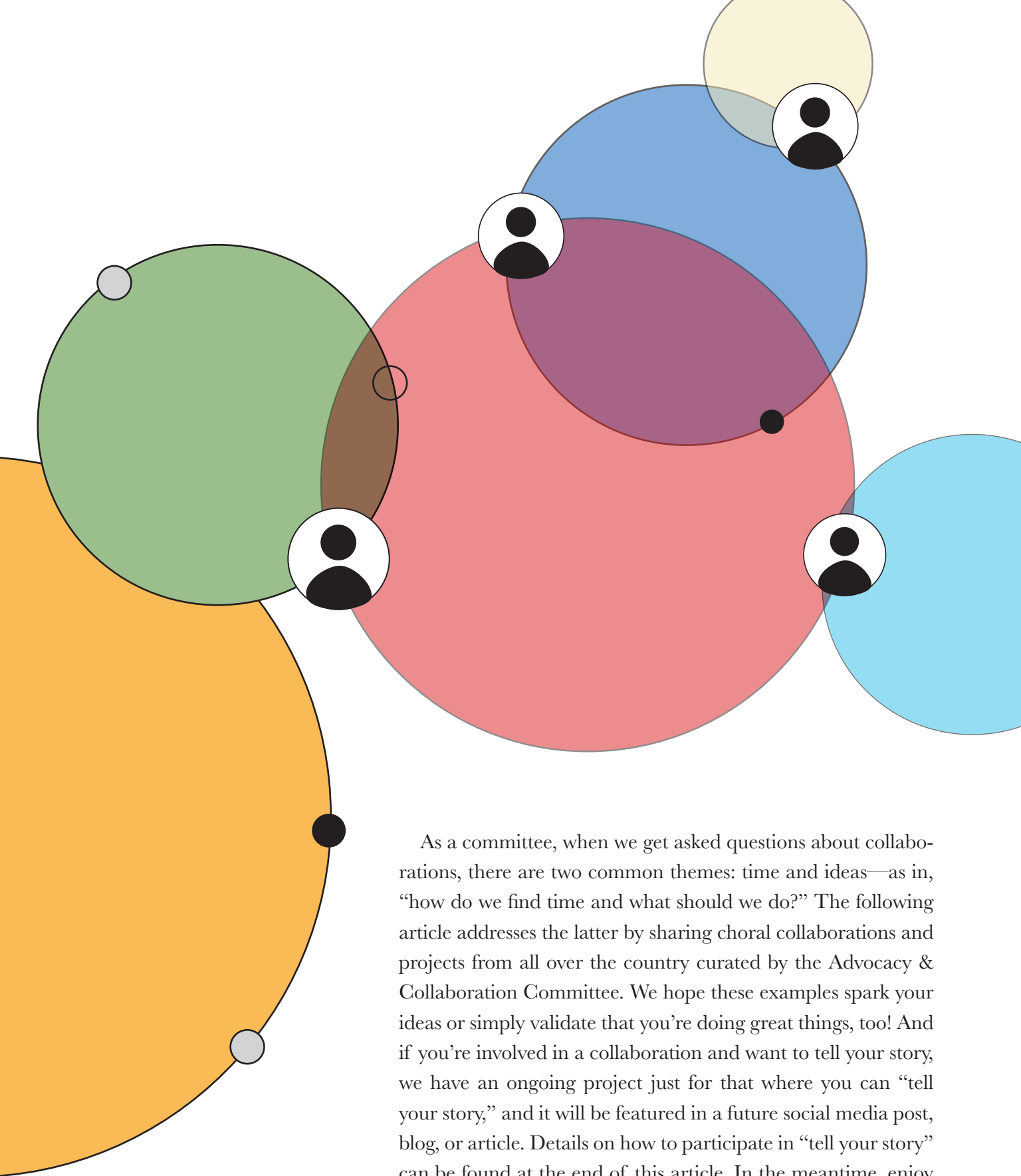


# Collaboration Spotlights

Compiled by the Members of the  
Advocacy & Collaboration Committee





As a committee, when we get asked questions about collaborations, there are two common themes: time and ideas—as in, “how do we find time and what should we do?” The following article addresses the latter by sharing choral collaborations and projects from all over the country curated by the Advocacy & Collaboration Committee. We hope these examples spark your ideas or simply validate that you’re doing great things, too! And if you’re involved in a collaboration and want to tell your story, we have an ongoing project just for that where you can “tell your story,” and it will be featured in a future social media post, blog, or article. Details on how to participate in “tell your story” can be found at the end of this article. In the meantime, enjoy these dynamic and diverse collaborations.

### Back Bay Chorale

Submitted by: Susanne Powers, Executive Director

Location: Boston, Massachusetts

[www.bbcboston.org](http://www.bbcboston.org)

### Program or Project Title:

Bridges ESOL Chorus



Through the universal language of music, the ESOL Chorus provides a powerful platform for English-language learners from various backgrounds to come together, make music, and find joy and community amidst the challenges they face. The ESOL Chorus serves as a beacon of hope and solidarity for individuals navigating the complexities of adapting to a new language and culture. Through our partnership with the Boston Public Library we have been able to create an environment that fosters language acquisition and cultural exchange. From September through May, our weekly classes create an inviting community of Back Bay Chorale volunteers and Boston-area English learners to make music together and sing in public performances in Boston.

The program teaches music literacy, English vocabulary, and vocal technique, as well as conversational skills. Many of our ESOL students are immigrants who seek the opportunity to make connections in the community. Our community engagement coordinator and Bridges choral director, Riikka Pietiläinen-Caffrey, and our Back Bay Chorale volunteers create a safe, re-

laxed, and fun way for English language learners to feel equally empowered when making music together. In all other aspects of daily life, having a significant language barrier limits one's opportunity for full individual expression. But music is the great equalizer where people united in song become one cohesive micro-community, and where everyone belongs equally.

### What is the most successful aspect of the project?

Many non-English-speaking immigrants are at risk of experiencing loneliness and isolation. A recent UCLA study shows the rate of serious psychological distress more than doubled between 2019-2021 for immigrants who have been in the U. S. fewer than five years. The Back Bay Chorale offers an innovative way to combat the stresses related to navigating daily life and an increasing anti-immigration rhetoric in the U. S. We offer a community where new English skills are being practiced in a fun and safe setting, while forging meaningful friendships. Through IPA and carefully chosen repertoire, the newly acquired vocabulary is being reinforced, requiring the singer to pronounce the text rhythmically and unified through repertoire. During class, our students are given the opportunity and time to share elements of their cultural backgrounds and other personally meaningful experiences. This is a profound outlet for stress and supports the feeling of being welcomed and belonging in their newly chosen home country. Every fall and spring we also sing at the Naturalization Ceremony at Faneuil Hall!

### What is the collaborative element of your project?

Our ESOL classes don't follow the conventional teacher-student class model. Our ESOL chorus classes include native English-speaking Back Bay Chorale volunteers and BPL library staff, all learning the music together and participating in the discussion groups. Our current choir director, Riikka Pietiläinen-Caffrey, is also an immigrant and non-native English speaker. Including experienced BBC singers reduces the students' fear of feeling exposed when trying out new words. Aside from helping our students learn English, our ESOL Chorus program is so much more: singing

side by side with our BBC singers in concerts, giving back to their new community, creating something joyful, feeling seen and heard, and being part of a larger community. All this has a profoundly positive impact on the lives of our singers, which we hope carries over to all aspects of their lives in this city they have chosen to be their new home.

### Cincinnati Youth Choir

Submitted by: Robyn Lana, Artistic Director of Cincinnati Youth Choir; Keri McGuire, Director of Cincinnati Choral Academy

Location: Cincinnati, Ohio

<https://www.cincinnatichoir.org>

### Program or Project Title:

Cincinnati Choral Academy



The Cincinnati Choral Academy (CCA) is an El Sistema-inspired approach to music education providing no-fee membership in the extensive after-school choral program created by the Cincinnati Youth Choir (CYC). Supported as a collaboration with the CYC, the Cincinnati May Festival, and the Vocal Arts Ensemble, CCA serves students in Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) that are designated as Title 1. Through the art and teamwork established in choral singing, CCA's mission is to enrich and educate the community by building outstanding young leaders. The program is offered in seven schools to children in grades three through six. The learning environment is safe and creative, provid-

ing musical excellence while celebrating cultural diversity.

### What is the most successful aspect of the project?

CCA experienced tremendous growth during the 2023-24 school year. Currently, CCA serves seven CPS schools and is impacting the lives of 133 students and their immediate communities, with a growing list of schools requesting to participate. Through events and performances with the combined CYC choirs, CCA forms lasting relationships with children in urban communities and their choral colleagues in suburban and rural communities. The seven CCA schools combine as one large ensemble within CYC but also perform individually for their schools and in neighborhood-specific community events.

### What is the collaborative element of your project?

CCA exists as an intentional partnership between the Cincinnati Youth Choir and the Cincinnati Public Schools. Together, they identify target schools whose students would benefit from this free after-school program. CCA singers also participate in numerous musical and artistic collaborations, such as performing with other CYC choirs, working with guest artists, and par-



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icipating in the CYC-hosted Cincinnati Public School Honor Choir conducted by Dr. Rollo Dilworth and Robyn Lana. CCA is a vital part of the CYC fabric, and singers throughout the program benefit from these shared experiences.

### **Common Ground Voices (Jerusalem)**

Submitted by: André de Quadros

Location: The Holy Land: Galilee, Jerusalem, and beyond

#### **Program or Project Title:**

Common Ground Voices



Common Ground Voices (Jerusalem) was founded in 2016 as a peace-seeking music and dialogue project between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. The ensemble operates on a project basis with annual residencies mostly in the Holy Land. Since 2016, CGV(J) has worked to build understanding between a broad cross-section of communities through workshops, community engagement, and collaborating with local organizations such as Combatants for Peace. The repertoire represents an artistic fusion between music from Arabic, Hebrew, and Yiddish traditions, as well as world music. CGV (J) has had residencies and projects in Germany and Sweden, as well as in Galilee and Jerusalem.

#### **What is the most successful aspect of the project?**

It is challenging to discuss success of a choral project

alongside a war. Perhaps its success lies in its durability and the commitment of so many people who continue to struggle against polarizing narratives to devote themselves to creative and justice-focused choral expression.

#### **What is the collaborative element of your project?**

The essence of this project is collaboration at all levels. Participants select repertoire, fuse them together, and create participatory peacebuilding circles. Not only is CGV (J) essentially collaborative in decision making, but it works at all levels on building consensus.

### **El Faro Youth Chorus**

Submitted by: Gabrielle Dietrich

Location: Albuquerque, New Mexico  
[abqcorolux.org/elfaro](http://abqcorolux.org/elfaro)

#### **Program or Project Title:**

El Faro Youth Chorus



El Faro Youth Chorus (EFYC) is the first-ever trauma-informed choral ensemble. Founded in October 2021 as a youth outreach program of ABQ Coro Lux (an auditioned community chorus in Albuquerque, New Mexico, conducted by Bradley Ellingboe), El Faro Youth Chorus welcomes young people ages seven to eighteen to learn musicianship skills and healthy vocal technique as they also learn about emotional regulation, self-awareness, healthy social relationships, and

leadership through collaboration. Our chorus values (as selected by choristers) are: kindness, collaboration, growth, harmony, and fun.

Dr. Gabrielle Dietrich, the conductor of EFYC, is a survivor of childhood trauma. During the summer of 2020, Gabrielle read Bessel van der Kolk’s “The Body Keeps the Score” and not only recognized herself in the stories included in the book but was also inspired by Dr. van der Kolk’s descriptions of the kinds of therapeutic environments that brought his patients solace, including choruses. Sadly, many choruses impede the inherently restorative aspects of choral singing through authoritarian, exclusive, or socially unjust approaches; recognizing the ways in which choral singing helped her as a young person, Dr. Dietrich began with the question: “What if we (conductors) got out of the way and intentionally allowed our choirs to be a place that centered safety, humanity, and wellness?” Later that summer, Gabrielle moved to Albuquerque and learned that New Mexico is tied with Arizona for the highest rate of Adverse Childhood Experiences (events that predispose individuals to experiencing post-event trauma) in the country. It was clear to her that this was an idea whose time had come and she was in the right place to carry out this work.

### What is the most successful aspect of the project?

El Faro Youth Chorus singers have had the opportunity to work with several distinguished conductors (including Dr. Rosephanye Powell and Dr. Anton Armstrong) and were the subject of a regional Emmy Award-winning news piece in December 2022 ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QHdKX8C4Ic](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QHdKX8C4Ic)). These experiences have been inspiring for our singers and staff, and yet, we consider our chorus community to be our proudest achievement. Our singers feel safe to express their opinions, disagree vigorously, and still come together around their shared love of singing. In a world plagued by division and tribalism, this kind of openness is something we all should aspire to cultivate.

### What is the collaborative element of your project?

As mentioned above, our singers selected their own

chorus values, and our rehearsals embody collaboration through allowing the singers themselves to be subject matter experts when appropriate (e.g., when we sing a piece in Spanish, Spanish-speaking students coach pronunciation), allowing singers to honor the cues of their own bodies (e.g., singers don’t have to ask to use the restroom), and encouraging mentorship between more experienced and less experienced singers. These are all ways of empowering singers and decentralizing authority, which in turn encourages self-advocacy, body awareness, and personal agency. As the comedian John Hodgman often says in his podcast, each singer is a “whole human being in their own right.” Their voices belong to them as individuals, and our purpose as conductors is not to objectify them as “our instrument,” but to nurture them as they grow into who they choose to be.

**Glenn Korff School of Music &  
International Quilt Museum,  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
Submitted by: Rhonda Fuelberth  
Location: Lincoln, Nebraska  
<https://arts.unl.edu/music/i2choir>

**Program or Project Title:**  
i<sup>2</sup>Choir: Inclusive, Intergenerational,  
Exponentially Better Together



i<sup>2</sup>Choir is an inclusive and intergenerational choral ensemble that has partnered with the University of

Nebraska-Lincoln Glenn Korff School of Music and the International Quilt Museum to provide music-making opportunities for individuals of all abilities. Participants range in age from fifth grade to adults. The community choir is open to all participants who can sing or who want to learn to sing. Participants are encouraged to join in cross-age, cross-ability groups or “singing teams” of two to four who want to participate in the ensemble together. Membership is made up of individuals who wish to sing with, and support, family members and friends with a variety of physical, sensory, and cognitive challenges.

Using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>), musical growth activities are designed to maximize the learning potential for everyone who participates. i<sup>2</sup>Choir seeks to be an agent of social change both internally, through the process of exploring various issues within the rehearsal environment, and externally, by presenting performances that encourage audience participation and reflection. It is our intention that audience members connect to the power of their own voices and use them to advocate, to act, and to promote access, inclusion, diversity, and belonging within our communities.

The values and goals underlying i<sup>2</sup>Choir are encapsulated in its name. The lowercase “i” signifies the importance of technology as a learning tool, especially beneficial for those who face challenges in accessing information without its regular use. Additionally, the “i” represents “inclusive” and “intergenerational,” reflecting both the diversity of our singers and our mission to enhance access for the broader community, regardless of age or ability. The exponent suggests that expanding our reach and relevance can lead to exponentially greater outcomes than we might have anticipated.

### **What is the most successful aspect of your project?**

#### *Meaningful Connections*

The most palpable success of the i<sup>2</sup>Choir Project has been the impact of singing on the lives of our singers and our community. The relationships built within our immediate community are also very special. Participating in this creative endeavor together—all un-

der the umbrella of mutual respect—is what makes i<sup>2</sup>Choir an impactful program.

#### *Universal Design*

One of the project outcomes for the i<sup>2</sup>Choir Project is the implementation and documentation of Universal Design for Learning Principles as a framework for music instruction. What makes i<sup>2</sup>Choir unique and successful is our focus on proactive planning for learner (singer) variability. In the same way that universally designed buildings are constructed for ease of navigation by all people, universally designed learning spaces can be purposefully and proactively constructed for all singers, no matter their abilities or stage of musical development.

### **What is the collaborative element of your project?**

#### *Organizational Collaboration*

i<sup>2</sup>Choir represents a partnership between the Glenn Korff School of Music (GKSOM) and the International Quilt Museum (IQM). Quilting and choral music making are metaphors for community. Both the quilter and the choral musician use their respective materials to create patterns that express both collective (past practices and traditions) and individual artistry. In quilting and in choral singing, each piece/singer is beautiful, independent of the other pieces/singers, but when combined, they create something rich in dimension, full of meaning, and unique to that particular moment in time.

#### *Participant Collaboration*

In i<sup>2</sup>Choir, each singer brings something unique to the ensemble. We recognize and appreciate the distinct contributions of every member. By identifying and leveraging their individual strengths, we foster a sense of ownership and belonging among our participants. In i<sup>2</sup>Choir, we emphasize effort and the journey towards mastering key artistic concepts. All musical activities are structured around a central conceptual theme. For instance, a rehearsal might center on breath management and phrasing with all related learning activities aligning with this focus. Singers receive encouragement and guidance from one another, fostering rela-



tionship-building and exchanges that highlight each member's unique strengths.

**Suggested Resource:** Fuelberth, Rhonda J. "Lessons from i<sup>2</sup>Choir" in *Relevance in the Choral Art: A Pathway to Connections*, edited by Tim Sharp (United Kingdom: GIA Publications, Incorporated, 2021): 155-182.

### Inspire and Empower SA Festival

Submitted by: David Verdoni

Location: Sarasota, Florida

[www.inspireandempowerfestival.org/home](http://www.inspireandempowerfestival.org/home)

#### Program or Project Title:

Inspire and Empower SA Festival



The Inspire and Empower SA Festival is a one-day Leadership and Choral Festival open to SA singers in grades seven to twelve. It stemmed from an interest in increasing access to musical and personal growth opportunities to populations in the choral world that we felt are often overlooked; middle school-aged singers and SA voices, which we often have an abundance of when compared to Tenor and Bass singers. This day is focused on process, growth, and collaboration. It is currently held at the high school we work at in Sarasota, Florida. We bring in two clinicians for the day. One clinician conducts the honor choir during the day on music that is learned onsite. The second clinician

works with the teachers of the participating students, providing interactive professional development as well as facilitating leadership focused sessions with the participating students.

#### What is the most successful aspect of the project?

The success is two-fold: Providing a space in which middle and high school students can learn and work together and make music together for a day. Second, providing teachers with a professional development opportunity in a personal way where you can interact with other participants and the presenter in a space where you feel comfortable to ask questions and collaborate with colleagues.

#### What is the collaborative element of your project?

Middle school students work with high school students throughout the entire experience with the leadership clinician and the choir clinician. The attending directors actively participate in the festival by collaborating with the PD clinician on topics relating to teaching in today's choral classroom.

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### Minnesota Chorale and Border CrosSing

Submitted by: Kathy Saltzman Romey and Ahmed Anzaldúa

Location: Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota  
mnchorale.org, bordercrossingmn.org

#### Program or Project Title:

Bridges/Puentes: Expanding the Canon Series



The Minnesota Chorale and Border CrosSing launched a collaborative, annual series in 2021 titled “Expanding the Canon,” curated and led by nationally-recognized BIPOC conductors. Each program seeks to re-imagine and explore the modern-day relevance of works from the choral canon. A ten-day artist residency provides the two professional choirs with the opportunity to collaborate with conductors noted for their commitment to innovative programming, social justice advocacy, and community building. The Twin Cities series is intended to broaden the scope of repertoire presented by both ensembles during the concert season. Each of the guest conductors is deeply invested in the education of the next generation, and committed to creating opportunities for people to experience choral music as a way of building community while breaking down societal and cultural barriers. Collectively, they represent leaders of the full panorama of choral ensembles, from academic and church-based choirs to community and professional choruses.

#### What is the most successful aspect of the project?

“Expanding the Canon” has enabled the Minnesota Chorale, Border CrosSing, and local audiences to experience the leadership and expertise of dynamic conductors of color from across the country. The project promotes greater equity and inclusion in the field of choral music, and redefines our experience of the choral canon through innovative programming, which uplifts the work of marginalized composers and performers.

The primary beneficiaries are the host organizations, their singers, and artistic staffs. The series provides the choirs with exposure to new repertoire and concert experiences of high artistic merit amplifying underrepresented voices, equity and inclusion, and socially-relevant issues. The program also offers the opportunity to work with skilled BIPOC conductors whose knowledge and insight have a lasting impact on future programming, audience cultivation, and community engagement.

The combined audiences of both organizations also benefit from this series, as do participants in civic workshops and educational activity. Just as the two choirs are eager to learn from guest conductors and their programming, audiences are also excited to engage with new music and composers, and grow through their concert experiences with each of the conductors. We have long believed that while the canon of classical music is broad, we are all diminished as long as its scope is limited. The creative energy of juxtaposing works from that canon with music by composers unfamiliar to our choirs and audiences expands our collective thinking and provides the foundation for deeper systemic change.

#### What is the collaborative element of your project?

“Expanding the Canon” builds on collaborations between the two project partners dating back to the founding of Border CrosSing in 2017 and is presented under the Minnesota Chorale engagement program Bridges and Border CrosSing program Puentes. As independent and allied organizations, the two choirs have partnered in concerts of traditional and contemporary

choral works in new languages and contexts, and explored programming that furthers the missions of both organizations. "Expanding the Canon" features one to two conductor residencies each season in a program utilizing personnel from both choirs, as well as instrumentalists specific to the selected repertoire.

Conductors are in residence for ten days in the Twin Cities, leading rehearsals and concerts of their programs as well as presenting public workshops and singalongs specific to the concert repertoire, seminars at the University of Minnesota, and engagement activity through the educational programs of the Chorale and Border CrosSing. Artistic directors Kathy Saltzman Romey and Ahmed Anzaldúa, along with their administrative staff, alternate as project leaders and work closely with each conductor to ensure that the two ensembles are properly prepared prior to the residency. Guest artists are recognized in the field for

their achievements as conductors, composers, arrangers, producers, singers, scholars, and educators, and have included:

Adrian Davis, Minneapolis, MN – Bridges/Puentes: Black Voices Amplified (Fall 2021)

Anaida Carquez, Miami, FL – Puentes: Creer / Bridges: Believe (Spring 2022)

Alexander Lloyd Blake, Los Angeles, CA – Bridges/Puentes: Singing Truth – An American Conversation (Fall 2022)

Anthony Trecek-King, Boston, MA  
Puentes/Bridges: In This Lan' (Spring 2024)

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### Muslim Choral Ensemble

Submitted by: André de Quadros

Location: Sri Lanka

<https://muslimchoralensemble.com>

### Program or Project Title:

Muslim Choral Ensemble



The Muslim Choral Ensemble is the world's first and only choir that is exclusively devoted to the collective singing of devotional traditions of Islam. MCE's mission transcends the mere presentation of spiritual performances; rather, it encapsulates a profound commitment to inspiring audiences to appreciate the intricacies and beauty inherent in Islamic devotional music while preserving cultural integrity. This dedication is underscored by the ensemble's efforts to revive endangered traditions within the contemporary context. The ensemble is partly anchored in the intricate compositions and devotional poetry inherent in repertoires from the Sufi mystical tradition of Islam, which was once a vibrant expression of spirituality, and now contend with potential disappearance due to modernization.

### What is the most successful aspect of the project?

The ensemble has succeeded in launching the World Muslim Choral Ensemble in 2022, attracting instrumentalists and singers from various countries.

### What is the collaborative element of your project?

MCE collaborates with the local minority Muslim community and international choirs locally and abroad. In 2018, MCE engaged in intercultural work at the Yale International Choral Festival.

### Resounding Achord Productions and San José State University

Submitted by: Kristina Nakagawa

Location: San Jose, CA

[www.resoundingachord.org](http://www.resoundingachord.org)

### Program or Project Title:

Summer Conducting Lab



The Summer Conducting Lab, started in 2015, is a partnership between Resounding Achord Productions (RAP) and San José State University's Three-Summer Master's Program that gives conductors-in-training an opportunity to work with a choir in a rehearsal setting, gaining valuable podium time and real-time feedback. The sessions are held in the parish hall at a local Episcopal Church, where Resounding Achord regularly rehearses, and gives singers in the area an opportunity to continue singing during a season when most organizations are on their summer break.

During the six two-hour sessions, three to five conductors work with the all-volunteer choir, comprising adult singers from across Silicon Valley. Occasionally high school and college-age singers participate. Conductors are students in the master's program, current



regular-term students at SJSU, or members of the greater community. Singing participants are asked to do their best to respond to the conductor's gesture, regardless if they have performed the piece in the past. On occasion, the conductors are given a moment to take the choir through one of their favorite warm-up exercises. Dr. Jeffrey Benson and Kristina Nakagawa provide feedback to the conductors both during the session and afterward in private communication.

In terms of costs, a professional collaborative pianist is hired, and a space is rented. Music is selected from Resounding Achord's recent repertoire and supplemented with works that the SJSU program has been focusing on during their classes.

### **What is the most successful aspect of the project?**

Approximately 100 conductors have benefited from participating in the program, and there are nearly 100 singers who sign up to sing each year. As one participant noted, "The Summer Lab Choir during the SJSU master's program is by far one of the best and most transformative experiences of the program. Having the experience of working with a live choir that really responds to each movement you make, and having a clinician on hand to give you direct feedback that you can try in that moment, is incredible."

### **What is the collaborative element of your project?**

This program is entirely collaborative from start to finish. Resounding Achord Productions' (RAP) administration works with Dr. Benson beginning early in the spring to schedule the lab sessions and review repertoire to ensure that music is ready for all participants at the first meeting. RAP secures the venue, hires the collaborative artist, and manages all communications to the singers, and Dr. Benson manages scheduling the conductors. If the conductor is part of the three-summer master's program, he also meets with them privately, both to prepare for the session and also to work on aspects of what they experienced afterward.

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### **Tacoma Refugee Choir**

Submitted by: Erin Guinup

Location: Tacoma, Washington

[refugeechoir.org](http://refugeechoir.org)

### **Program or Project Title:**

Tacoma Refugee Choir



Amidst an epidemic of loneliness and ongoing divisiveness in our communities, the importance of creating spaces where connection and a spirit of welcoming can thrive for all community members cannot be overstated. One of the most joyful ways to develop a sense of belonging is singing with others. As we fulfill our mission—creating spaces for authentic expression, interconnection, and healing through song and music—we are meeting this fundamental need.

Since 2016 we have been welcoming immigrants, refugees, and allies into the Choir, with current membership including forty-five people from seventeen countries, including Iran, Ukraine, Belarus, D.R. Congo, Rwanda, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Cambodia. At weekly rehearsals and performances, we sing, dance, hug, and share our challenges and triumphs. Members are invited to actively contribute to the creative process, and after eight seasons, members have collectively written over thirty original songs that are frequently shared in the community.

### **What is the most successful aspect of the project?**

The most successful aspect of the project lies in the Tacoma Refugee Choir's commitment to nurturing a



supportive community. Choir members often refer to TRC as their family. This deep sense of belonging has proven transformative, particularly for individuals who lack local family ties. Through weekly in-person check-ins and an active WhatsApp group, choir members help one another through life's challenges and celebrate milestones such as graduations, births, citizenship, and new jobs. These relationships translate to trust and vulnerability within the creative process and enable rapid collaboration in the synthesis of new songs.

### What is the collaborative element of your project?

Our repertoire and pedagogical approach, rooted in an aural tradition, are grounded in a spirit of collaboration. By deliberately creating space for choir members to co-create each piece, influencing elements such as harmonies, lyrics, composition form, and choreography, we aim to instill a sense of ownership and

creative autonomy, which can contribute to healing from trauma. Our repertoire includes texts that appeal to our diverse membership, including cultural songs introduced by members, original compositions created by choir members and staff, and one to two octavos per season taught by rote, often with some adaptation. For example, we taught Coty Raven Morris's "Who I Want to Be," and a choir member was inspired to create a spoken word element to include in the middle of the song, which we incorporated with composer's permission.

Additionally, our collaborative spirit extends beyond our choir community through our Welcoming Artists Series. This initiative involves partnering with guest artists for each concert, many of whom are introduced to us through existing choir member connections. Past collaborations have featured artists from diverse cultural backgrounds such as Mongolia, Venezuela, Ukraine, DR Congo, and Cuba. These partnerships enrich our



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performances, deepen cross-cultural understanding, and further amplify the spirit of collaboration and inclusivity within our project.

### **The Choral Project**

Submitted by: Daniel Hughes, Artistic Director

Location: San Jose, CA

[www.choralproject.org](http://www.choralproject.org)

#### **Program or Project Title:**

Winter's Gifts



The Choral Project presents an annual collaboration with the highly acclaimed San José Chamber Orchestra (Barbara Day Turner, Music Director). The collaboration is called Winter's Gifts, and it features classical and world music from the diverse cultures with which we are blessed in the San Francisco Bay Area; this program's themes have included honoring celebrations of light (Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Diwali, etc.), New Year/Lunar celebrations (Chinese New Year, Tet, etc.), and music about the winter season (Solstice, Yule, etc.).

#### **What is the most successful aspect of the project?**

The most successful aspects of this annual collaboration are the nature of the repertoire (both ensembles share a similar programming aesthetic) and the format of the program itself. The concert runs approximately seventy-five minutes with no intermission, organized into four concert sets. Barbara Day Turner (the conductor of the chamber orchestra) and I (the artistic

director) alternate conducting each set. Each year we trade who begins and who ends the concert. Within each set, there is no applause, so the "mood" of the pieces flow into one another, creating a program that is both reflective and energetic but never forced.

#### **What is the collaborative element of your project?**

Sharing the podium and stage with a world-class orchestra, the organic essence of the repertoire, and the emotional/spiritual effect of the program.

### **Tucson Girls Chorus**

Submitted by: Marcela Molina

Location: Tucson, Arizona

[www.tucsongirlschorus.org](http://www.tucsongirlschorus.org)

#### **Program or Project Title:**

Community Engagement Program



The Tucson Girls Chorus programs are created based on the belief that all girls deserve access to a high-quality choral education that provides an empowering space for girls to share their voices. TGC's Community Engagement Program was founded in 2013 and was created to remove barriers that prevent families and singers from participating.

This program, central to our mission, allows the TGC to focus on digging deeper and expanding services. We provide robust scholarships and dependable subsidized programming to our partner school partici-

pants to ensure access to all. This includes operating choirs that meet weekly in underserved communities (Las Estrellas Engagement Choirs) and hosting one-day choral festivals for singers from around the Tucson community. As the program has grown over time, we are now able to connect with current and future music educators to offer a variety of support. This support is provided through visits by the TGC staff to schools at no cost to the school (includes lessons and clinics), free professional development sessions, and internships for undergraduate University of Arizona music education students. Additionally, TGC recently launched a Music Teacher Mentorship program aimed at increasing music teacher retention in Tucson. This new program pairs an interested music teacher with a TGC staff member for bi-weekly observation with instructional and/or curricular support.

Our Engagement Choirs meet weekly at partner schools throughout the school year for one-hour rehearsals led by versatile and highly qualified conductors who have experience working with marginalized communities. Participants are girls (grades 2–5), whose schools do not otherwise have a choir program onsite. Participation ranges from twelve to twenty singers at each location. Las Estrellas choirs sing a diverse repertoire that aims to reflect and validate both dominant and non-dominant singing styles and traditions in the Tucson community and the world.

### What is the most successful aspect of the project?

When Dr. Marcela Molina became the TGC's director in 2006, she developed a vision of creating opportunities for all girls in the Tucson area to experience



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the many benefits of singing together and the values of the TGC's programming. The TGC's main building and rehearsal location is in an affluent part of the city, and although our robust scholarship program helps to remove financial barriers, it does not address the many other barriers that prevent youth from accessing group singing in a choral setting.


We identify sustainability and adaptability as the two main aspects of success in this program. The TGC's Engagement Program began in 2013 with Engagement Choirs as partnerships with schools and community organizations throughout Tucson. The first Engagement Choir was in partnership with a tuition-free private school that was serving primarily African refugees. Throughout this partnership, the TGC learned the importance of communication, flexibility, and ensuring the conductor is a qualified and experienced music educator. The TGC's current school partnerships are based on relationship building and the TGC positions itself as learners within the school community.

After some failed attempts, a pillar success today is our sustained partnership with seven schools/communities in three different school districts: Five are elementary schools, including a virtual program on the Tohono O'odham nation in partnership with the Native American Advancement Foundation (NAAF), and partnership at a middle school in south Tucson that supports students in pursuing education of all kinds, including trade schools and other professional programs. Through our Community Engagement programming, we have engaged youth and families within the community in a manner that is productive and constructive.

### **What is the collaborative element of your project?**

The TGC's Community Engagement Program focuses on meaningful collaborations that provide access to subsidized programming for K-12 students and music educators. Engagement Choirs rehearse weekly at partner schools in Amphitheater, Tucson Unified School Districts, and the Guvo District at the Tohono O'odham Nation. Partner schools facilitate communication between the TGC and families and offer logistical support and valuable insight into the unique culture and needs of each school. TGC's partnership with the

Native American Advancement Foundation (NAAF) at the Tohono O'odham Nation (TON) serves students through a virtual format, and aims to develop music education capacity in the western region of TON to increase music programs in schools.

TGC's collaborations are designed to adapt to the characteristics of each specific community and to allow for flexibility to embark on creative initiatives. Our engagement programs are co-created with school partner leaders, and each program looks different. Across all of our programs, we've prioritized creating full access for all singers and developing culturally affirming community collaborations. In this co-creative process, it's been our great honor to thread connections with our singer-leaders and their families. Our engagement families continuously nudge us into a deeper understanding of our own values and how to practice. We've built a network of cultural partnerships to offer free public performances in collaboration with other community arts organizations to provide relevant and culturally affirming concerts in our singers' own neighborhoods. 

### **Share Your Story!**

We know so many wonderful projects are happening throughout ACDA. These spotlights are just a few incredible collaborations, and we would love to hear about yours. How can you "Share Your Story"? Email the committee at [advocacyandcollaboration@acda.org](mailto:advocacyandcollaboration@acda.org) or visit ChoralNet to learn more: <https://choralnet.org/archives/684896>.