



Columbia Choirs

2025-2028 Strategic Plan

INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND	2
MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES	2
STRATEGIC PLANNING	4
SWOT ANALYSIS	4
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES	5
NEXT STEPS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING	7

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in early 2022, the Board of Directors and staff leadership of Columbia Choirs partnered with consultants from 501 Commons to evaluate the organization's health and set a clear strategy for growth. That process resulted in a three-year plan that guided our work through 2025, helping us recover from the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, transition to new leadership, and establish strong organizational systems.

Today, Columbia Choirs has regained stability and is entering a new period of opportunity. Membership has grown, new outreach programs have launched, and our visibility in the community has increased. At the same time, evolving community needs and an increasingly complex operating environment require us to build on our progress with fresh vision and strategic focus.

This document lays out our strategic priorities and objectives for 2025–2028. It reflects our commitment to artistic excellence, financial sustainability, inclusivity, and community impact, and it establishes a clear implementation plan to ensure accountability and progress at every level.

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1984, Columbia Choirs is a community choral nonprofit organization based on the Eastside. For more than four decades, Columbia Choirs has been a musical home for singers of all ages to find their voice, express themselves, and build lasting connections.

Today, Columbia Choirs offers eight performing choirs for children, youth, and adults, as well as outreach programs that bring choral music into local elementary schools and community spaces. Each season includes high-quality musical learning opportunities and a diverse calendar of public performances, showcasing a wide range of repertoire and celebrating underrepresented voices.

Since consolidating all operations under Columbia Choirs Association in 2017, the organization has grown into a robust and multifaceted 501(c)(3) nonprofit, stewarding programs that reach hundreds of singers and thousands of audience members each year.

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Through discussions with staff leadership and members of the Board of Directors, new mission, vision, and values statements were adopted in summer 2022. As we enter this next strategic planning period, Columbia Choirs will continue to be guided by the same identity statements that have shaped our work over the past three years.

Mission

To bring together people of all ages and backgrounds to learn through music and experience the joy of choral singing.

Vision

A community where choral singing is essential and accessible to all

Values

Artistry

- We nurture the development of life-long singing skills
- We perform high-quality music, with a focus on uplifting under-represented voices
- We offer singers a range of memorable performance opportunities

People

- We honor all individuals for who they are and encourage self-expression through art
- We believe that everyone deserves access to meaningful artistic experiences and educational opportunities
- We achieve group success by centering personal growth and cooperation

Community

- We create a safe environment for members to thrive
- We foster deep connections between singers of all ages
- We build connections within our community to enrich the world around us

Over the past several seasons, the Board of Directors and staff leadership have renewed Columbia Choirs' commitment to creating an environment where all singers feel welcome and able to participate fully. The statement below was developed to elevate this commitment alongside our mission, vision, and values and continues to guide our work today.

Increasing Access & Creating a Sense of Belonging

Choral singing is strengthened by a rich and diverse collective of individual voices.

Columbia Choirs celebrates the diversity of its singers and families and is committed to creating an environment that is inclusive of all singers no matter where they come from, what they believe, or how they identify.

Columbia Choirs acknowledges that extracurricular choral programs can be inaccessible to some singers, due to inadequate resources or feeling unwelcome because of their background or identity. We will continue to examine our programs and organization to reduce existing barriers that prevent those community members from participating. Through financial aid and new outreach programs, we aim to reach more singers of all ages and lower the barriers to access.

By respecting each singer's individuality and celebrating our collective richness as humans who love to sing, we will create a stronger community for all.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is a multi-step process. Columbia Choirs' first comprehensive strategic plan was developed between 2022 and early 2023. During that process, the Board of Directors and staff leadership, with support from consultants at 501 Commons, conducted a thorough assessment of organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and established updated mission, vision, and values statements to guide the organization's work.

That initial plan provided a foundation for growth, helping Columbia Choirs recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthen internal operations, and expand programming.

Building on that progress, the Board of Directors and staff leadership began a new planning process in 2024 to evaluate current conditions, set updated strategic priorities and objectives, and create a clear roadmap for the next three years. This updated plan reflects the lessons learned and successes achieved over the past strategic period and sets out the actions needed to continue moving the organization forward.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Moving ahead, Columbia Choirs must maintain a clear understanding of its position in the community, as an organizer of arts and culture programs. As a part of this understanding, leadership examined the external and internal environment to identify its strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for and threats to the organization. The results of this effort are summarized below.

Strengths

41 years of history of CC

- Established presence, credibility
- Huge constituency base

Track record of successful programs, e.g., retreats, concerts, opportunities for singers in community

Unique offering of music as a community builder: We address a wide range of ages and types of singing – anyone can find a place

Artistic leadership – well connected, forward-thinking

Strong core values

Opportunities

Showing that choir is more than the standard offering

Most opportunities are collaborative opportunities

Revisit or identify new ways to meet the community where they are, e.g., schools (where programs are always in flux), churches, cultural and musical groups to enrich our programming, connect singers and work with others

Relatively affluent community for donors, members, sponsors, funders

Ways to make music more accessible

Singing has family and community-building power

Singing is a lifetime activity – bridging the gap from youth to adult choirs

Partner with UW to create a community of young singers who then 'graduate' to Columbia Choirs

Provide social, informal opportunities for adults (

Weaknesses

Requires different types of skills to deliver

Relatively young nonprofit in current form

- Learning and growing in terms of compliance, working relationships
- Lack of established fundraising mechanism and events, as well as long-standing donor relationships

Threats

The economy. Possible recession. CC is seen as an extra-curricular activity

Busy schedules and competing priorities

Existing perceptions of choirs

Choral music seen as 'white-centric'

Existing political environment: Ensuring the music isn't politicized

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & OBJECTIVES

Strategic Priorities are organization-wide goals designed to achieve a group focus on the most important needs of the organization and drive action in the months and years ahead. The Board of Directors and staff leadership have identified the following Strategic Priorities for the next three years:

- | | | |
|------------|---|----------|
| Priority 1 | Build financial sustainability through diversified funding and revenue growth that supports our mission. | Critical |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase contributed revenue share to 40% of the annual budget by FY28 through grants, sponsorships, and individual giving.• Implement a donor management system to strengthen relationships and improve stewardship.• Strengthen financial management through improved reporting, cash flow analysis, and board training. | |
| Priority 2 | Strengthen and enrich core artistic programming to inspire singers and audiences. | Critical |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase membership across all choirs to 380 singers by FY28.• Expand participation in summer camps, tours, and retreats by 25%.• Conduct annual member surveys and listening sessions to inform program improvements.• Expand our Guest Artist Program to more consistently engage diverse and accomplished artists to uplift unique voices and enrich our singers' musical experiences. | |
| Priority 3 | Expand outreach programming and create innovative community experiences that increase access to choral music. | Critical |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launch new enrichment choirs in underserved areas and strengthen existing programs to build a consistent, prominent presence within schools.• Partner with local school districts to assess needs and explore collaborative approaches to ensure equitable access to choral programs across all schools.• Create an all-ages community singing event series to make singing accessible to everyone and enrich the cultural life of our community.• Produce performances in new, public venues each year.• Launch a choral festival in collaboration with local youth choirs, in Summer 2028, to unite choirs from the Seattle area and around the world to connect through singing. | |

Priority 4	Invest in people, culture, and infrastructure to sustain a strong and healthy organization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire additional administrative staff to support growth and excellence. • Define board roles and strengthen committee engagement to advance the organization's mission. • Expand volunteer recruitment, training, and recognition to build a culture of volunteerism. • Expand employee benefits in key areas such as retirement, health insurance, and professional development. • Explore options for a central office and rehearsal space to support operations, cross-choir collaboration, and community connection. • Foster greater collaboration among artistic staff through additional meetings and shared learning experiences. 	Important
Priority 5	Enhance communication and marketing to grow our reach and welcome more singers and supporters. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase presence at community events, such as Derby Days, Redmond Lights, etc., to connect with community members and promote programs. • Invest in new advertising channels to reach diverse audiences. • Optimize website for user experience and search engine discoverability. • Utilize analytics and market research to improve marketing efforts. 	Important
Priority 6	Deepen relationships with schools, underrepresented communities, and partners to advance connection and advocacy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen partnerships with local organizations and cultural groups, such as Eastside Pathways and its partner organizations. • Partner with relevant nonprofit organizations in conjunction with concerts and events. • Build and strengthen relationships with educators and community leaders through regular engagement. • Increase staff and board participation in civic and cultural events in the community. 	Desirable

Priority Key

Critical – must be accomplished in a certain period

Important – will have a positive, significant impact on the organization

Desirable – will help performance but is not as significant as others

NEXT STEPS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

The strategic priorities and objectives outlined in this plan provide the framework for Columbia Choirs' growth and impact over the next three years. In the coming months, the Executive Director, Artistic Director, and Board of Directors will develop a detailed Implementation Plan. This will include specific initiatives, timelines, responsibilities, success metrics, and resource considerations for each strategic objective.

The Implementation Plan will be adopted by the Board of Directors in Fall 2025. This approach ensures thoughtful planning, alignment with organizational capacity, and clear accountability as we move into execution.