

Reading Choral Society Long-Range Strategic Plan

2008 Operational Objectives

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Strategic Assessment.....	2
Strengths	2
Weaknesses.....	3
Opportunities	4
Threats	5
Strategic Assumptions.....	6
Key Issues	6
Mission Statement.....	7
Vision Statement	7
Long-Range Strategies.....	8
Critical Measures of Success	10
2008 Operational Objectives	11
Appendix	
2008 Operational Objectives	
2008 Timeline	
Critical Measures of Success Worksheet	

Introduction

This document is the result of a series of retreats conducted with the leadership team of the Reading Choral Society in late 2006 and January 2008. During these meetings, the participants

1. analyzed the state of the organization — its strengths and weaknesses — as it exists today.
2. defined the community environment — its opportunities and threats — now and into the future.
3. defined a series of strategic assumptions to be considered as givens throughout the planning process.
4. identified the key issues facing the organization.
5. revised the mission statement and developed a vision statement for the organization.
6. defined the long-range strategies and supporting strategic actions to be used by the organization to achieve its vision and fulfill its mission.
7. established the *Critical Measures of Success* that will be used to evaluate the organization's progress as it moves through its strategic plan.
8. targeted the specific, short-term actions to be taken to implement the long-term strategies and assigned accountability to the appropriate individuals within the organization.

In January 2008, the team met to review and refresh the plan. A review of the Strategic Assessment was completed, two new opportunities were identified, and the Long-Range Strategies were affirmed. The team reviewed the 2007 Operational Objectives and Critical Measures of Success to determine the accomplishments of 2007. New Operational Objectives and specific short-term actions were established for 2008.

The results are as follows.

Strategic Assessment

Strengths

The strengths of the Reading Choral Society, as identified by its leadership team, fall into seven categories.

1. Our music program
2. Our collaborations/partnerships
3. The diversity of our music
4. Our administrative systems
5. Our history and reputation
6. Our leadership
7. Our financial status

More specifically,

Our music program

- We give our singers the opportunity to develop their talent, perform for the public, and have a lifelong learning experience.
- We welcome all who pass our audition to join our chorus.
- Our organization provides an opportunity for singers to continue to perform throughout their adulthood.
- We have been able to perform significant music well.
- We are the only area chorus to regularly perform a repertory of music for large chorus.

Our collaborations/partnerships

- We collaborate with other choral groups, such as Berks Classical Children’s Chorus (BC3).
- We have developed an administrative working relationship with BC3, providing our back office support and our public “face.”
- We have worked and performed with other musical organizations, e.g. Reading Symphony, West Chester University, etc.
- We have the longtime support of the Reading Musical Foundation, which provides about 30 percent of our revenues.

The diversity of our music

- We are known for our diverse performances.
- We expose our audiences to new and unique music as well as known Choral Masterworks.
- We perform in a variety of venues.

Our administrative systems

- We have a computer-based contributor database.
- We have over 4,000 names on our mailing list.
- We have started a coordinated fund-raising effort.

Our history and reputation

- We are the second oldest choral society in the U.S.A., providing over 130 years of outstanding choral music to Reading and Berks County.
- Our audiences recognize us as an outstanding chorus and return for future performances.

Our leadership

- Our all-volunteer leadership is engaged and committed, enabling them to motivate the members.
- We are known for our outstanding professional musical director.

Our financial status

- We are financially solvent, have no debt, and have a reserve of almost one year’s operating budget.

Weaknesses

The weaknesses of the Reading Choral Society, as identified by its leadership team, fall into five categories.

1. Our lack of member involvement and growth
2. Our lack of resources and communitywide support
3. Our lack of consistent fund-raising and development
4. Elements of our performance
5. Venue availability

More specifically,

Our lack of member involvement and growth

- Some of our members lack commitment.
- We do not welcome and mentor new members well.
- We do not have a way for non-singers to become involved with the organization.
- We are losing members to other choral organizations.
- We lack a sense of “community” within the society.

Our lack of resources and communitywide support

- We are not well known in the community.
- We are an all-volunteer organization, and members are often not able or are unwilling to provide the support and resources needed.
- We depend on our singers to sell performance tickets and solicit contributions.
- We are overly dependent on the Reading Musical Foundation for support.

Our lack of consistent fund-raising and development

- Most of our contributions are for less than \$100.
- Our revenue has remained the same, while our expenses have increased.

Elements of our performance

- We do not always perform at our best.

- We depend on volunteer, nonprofessional musicians for our singers.
- Choral singers sometimes are not recognized as skilled musicians.

Venue availability

- We find it difficult to schedule performances due to available venues and dates.

Opportunities

The opportunities facing the Reading Choral Society as it moves forward fall into six categories.

1. Program opportunities
2. Membership opportunities
3. Marketing opportunities
4. Collaboration/partnership opportunities
5. Funding opportunities
6. Staff opportunities

More specifically,

Program opportunities

- Repeat our performances in additional Berks or regional locations.
- Change our music selection to broaden its appeal to the general public.
- Develop an additional, smaller traveling chorus.
- Perform a special program as part of the Pagoda’s anniversary celebration.

Membership opportunities

- Increase our singing membership.
- Develop a stronger “community” within the society.
- Find a way to involve non-singing supporters as part of the society.

Marketing opportunities

- Partner with BCTV to broadcast our performances.
- Increase our exposure in the media and enhance our public awareness.
- Increase our ticket sales to our current performance.
- Increase our public name recognition by partnering with other regional arts organizations’ promotions.

Collaboration/partnership opportunities

- Strengthen our relationship with BC3.
- Become the resident chorus at RACC’s Miller Auditorium.
- Increase our cooperation/collaboration with the Reading Symphony.

Funding opportunities

- Seek support from other music-friendly foundations.
- Find a funding source to reestablish our Christmas Messiah concert.

Staff opportunities

- Hire a new music director who has vision and can move the entire organization forward.

Threats

The threats currently facing the Reading Choral Society fall into two basic categories.

1. Those threats primarily within our control.
2. Those threats primarily outside of our control.

More specifically,

Those threats primarily within our control

- Our singers only stay involved for five to six years.
- Reading Musical Foundation may decrease their support.

Those threats primarily outside of our control

- We have competition for singers and audiences from Lancaster's Wheatland Chorale.
- Other musical entertainment providers could schedule performances that conflict with our performance and reduce our ticket sales.
- Choral music is often considered less popular than other types of music.
- Choral music is not the public's top choice for musical entertainment.
- The trend is for the public to seek their musical entertainment in the comfort of their home and not attend live performances.

Strategic Assumptions

In addition to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as previously defined, we have identified the following assumptions and consider them to be givens that must be recognized as we develop our long-range strategies and move forward through our planning process.

- Berks County is a giving community that supports the arts.
- Choral music does not have funding support as strong as other forms of music.
- The public will have more and more choices for musical entertainment.
- We must pay union scale for instrumental musicians to perform with us.
- There will be increased pressure for members' time.
- Participation in our chorus will be by volunteer singers.

Key Issues

Based on the identification and analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses and potential opportunities and threats as detailed previously, we have concluded that the following key issues must be addressed in the Reading Choral Society's long-range plan.

- How can we become financially sound and stable on a consistent basis?
- How can we decrease our reliance on the Reading Music Foundation for our revenue?
- How can we increase our ticket sales?
- How can we increase our fund-raising efforts to help fund our program/performance expansion?
- How can we increase our local marketing activities?
- How can we improve our public image and awareness?
- How can we increase the number and the type of our performance offerings?
- How do we better engage, support and increase our membership?
- How can we recruit and develop more volunteers and supporters?
- How can we strengthen our partnerships/collaboration with other organizations that support our mission?
- How can we consistently perform at our highest level?
- How can we identify and develop future leadership?

Mission Statement

The mission of Reading Choral Society is to perform, foster and advance choral music in the Reading and Berks County Community.

Vision Statement

In 2006, as the leadership of Reading Choral Society begins its planning activities, it has created the following vision of the outcomes of its efforts.

The Reading Choral Society is a diverse community of choral singers and supporters who promote and foster the enjoyment of choral music in Reading and Berks County. Our high-quality artistic and administrative staff makes us an independent, financially stable community asset.

Our commitment to artistic excellence and the development of our members' talents position us as the "go to" resource for other choral organizations. We are broadly known for our outstanding sold out performances of the works of the Great Masters, other composers and commissioned artists. Because of our members and diverse programming, our chorus is recognized as the premier performing choral organization in our region.

Long-Range Strategies

Based on the strategic assessment as detailed previously, Reading Choral Society has identified four overriding strategies, with supporting strategic actions, it will implement in its efforts to fulfill its mission and achieve its vision.

Reading Choral Society will explore and develop relationships with other community organizations to enhance its performance opportunities and further its mission.

Strategic actions

- Explore with Reading Area Community College (RACC) bringing together the Reading Choral Society and other choral groups to become part of RACC's Miller Auditorium programming.¹
- Explore with the Reading Symphony the expansion of choral performances with the symphony.
- Perform one of our concerts at additional venues or at additional performance times.
- Develop relationships with other choral groups and musical organizations to expand our performance capabilities.
- Reestablish the Christmas holiday Messiah concert.
- *Start an additional smaller traveling chorus.*

Reading Choral Society will increase its membership to one hundred members, including both traditional singers and new, non-singing members.

Strategic actions

- Survey the membership to evaluate their likes and dislikes.¹
- Provide for an accompanist to be at all rehearsals starting with the 2007-2008 concert season.¹
- Develop a program to improve our members' musical skills.
- Survey and conduct exit interviews of departing members to determine cause.
- Develop and implement a mentoring program for new members.
- Improve communication between the board and the membership.
- Develop and implement a non-singer membership.
- Expand our membership "scholarship" program.
- *Develop a membership recruitment program that targets young adult singers.*
- *Develop a program that encourages past members to renew their membership.*

Reading Choral Society will increase its revenue by increasing its performance ticket sales to 33 percent of its income budget and by raising its non-Reading Musical Foundation contributions to \$20,000.

Strategic actions

- Develop and implement a coordinated fund-raising plan.¹
- Review our pricing structure for ticket sales and modify as needed.¹
- Increase the Society's public awareness through a planned marketing effort.
- Implement a directed marketing effort for ticket sales (email, etc.).
- Develop a members' ticket sales program with incentives.
- *Plan and conduct a fund-raising event that features a performance by the RCS.*

Reading Choral Society will strengthen its board of directors by identifying and nurturing new board candidates, while reducing its reliance on the board members to perform operational and administrative functions.

Strategic actions

- Identify and move administrative/operational functions to outsource providers.¹

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- Formalize a board of director’s evaluation, needs assessment, and development process.
 - Explore training programs for board and committee members through community organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce.
 - Hire a part-time executive director.
 - *Identify and recruit individuals from outside RCS that can bring needed expertise to the board of directors.*

1 = completed in the first year of the plan

italics = new to the plan this year

Critical Measures of Success

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of and progress toward its long-range strategic plan, Reading Choral Society will measure and track the following *Critical Measures of Success*. The leadership team will review the results on a regular basis.

- Membership data including:
 - total members
 - number of members by membership category
 - number of singer members performing
 - number of new members
 - number of dropped members
 - average length of membership
- Dollar amount of membership dues income
- Number of tickets sold and ticket revenue
- Ticket income as a percentage of total income by venue and concert
- Percentage of members who have sold tickets
- Number of new names added to the contact mailing list
- Dollars spent on concert promotion and advertising as per ticket sale
- Number, by category, of gifts/donors from non-foundation donors
- Dollar amount, by category, of gifts from non-foundation donors
- Number of media references
- List of administrative/operational tasks outsourced, and the hours purchased
- List of identified potential new leadership and those who accept nomination
- Number of board and committee members that received outside training and dollars spent on the training
- Contributed dollars raised by member, including gifts in kind

2008 Operational Objectives

During the second year (January 2008 through December 2008) of this long-range strategic plan, Reading Choral Society will implement the following operational objectives.

- Develop and implement a mentoring program for new members. *Rebecca*
- Survey and conduct exit interviews of departing members to determine cause. *Sue*
- Explore with the Reading Symphony the expansion of choral performances with the symphony.
Don
- Perform one of our concerts at additional venues or at additional performance times. *Mollie*
- Develop a program to improve our members' musical skills. *Rebecca/Shappy*
- Increase the Society's public awareness through a planned marketing effort. *Donna*
- Formalize a board of director's evaluation, needs assessment, and development process. *Rachel*
- Identify and recruit individuals from outside RCS that can bring needed expertise to the board of directors. *Bill*