

Laying the Foundation at the San Francisco Girls Chorus

Foundations are not-for-profit entities that provide financial support to other organizations or individuals for educational, cultural, scientific, or other charitable purposes. For many musical arts organizations, support from foundations remains an integral source of funding, whether for general operations or for targeted opportunities. The San Francisco Girls Chorus, an internationally renowned performing ensemble and choir training program, receives over 15% of its annual revenue from institutional donors, which includes not only foundations, but also corporations and government agencies. With programs expanding and sometimes unpredictable funders, the executive director of the San Francisco Girls Chorus has charged the development team with strengthening the organization's foundation relations and growing the level of support in this area. This case explores the inner-workings of the organization's interaction with various foundations. After a brief history of the San Francisco Girls Chorus, the case spotlights foundation research conducted by the organization and the steps it has taken to develop relationships with foundations. The case asks the reader to suggest improvements to the foundation review process, identify new foundations, and assess a situation when an organization's programming and fundraising opportunities may be in conflict.

San Francisco Girls Chorus

This case study was prepared by Eric Michael Laprade. *The Eastman Case Studies* are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements or sources of primary data nor are they to serve as illustrations of effective or ineffective leadership or decision making.

History

One of the most well-known and highly regarded programs of its kind, the San Francisco Girls Chorus (SFGC) was founded in 1978 by Elizabeth Appling. Appling was inspired to launch the chorus, having witnessed a lack of vocal education opportunities for young women in the San Francisco Bay area, coupled with a strong demand for highly trained female singers from the region's arts organizations. She served as music director of the SFGC from 1978 to 1992. The organization is unique in that it functions as both a professional performing ensemble and a choir school for young women between the ages of 5 and 18. Of particular note in the organization's history are multiple high-profile collaborations and performances. The choir has appeared with the San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Symphony,

"The San Francisco Girls Chorus is a treasure. Their training, musicality, and vibrant spirit are evident whenever they perform. I have enjoyed our long association and look forward to many years of collaboration."

– Michael Tilson Thomas

Kronos Quartet, New York Philharmonic, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and many others. The choir maintains a close relationship with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, having performed on its Grammy Award-winning recordings of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 8 'Symphony of a Thousand' (2009), Mahler's Symphony no. 3 and 'Kindertotenlieder' (2004), Carl Orff's

Carmina Burana (1993), and the orchestra's Stravinsky album (2000). The choir can also be heard on the film scores of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (2000) and *What Dreams May Come* (1998).

The organization's artistic programming is as diverse as its collaborations. Each year, the choir performs

over 100 works, with composition dates spanning over six centuries. Its repertoire ranges from classical and contemporary to folk and world musics and has required engagement with 12 different languages. Empowering young female choristers and highlighting the lyrical quality of the female voice, the SFGC has commissioned and premiered over 30 new works, including compositions by such notable female composers as Meredith Monk, Chen Yi, Libby Larsen, Augusta Read Thomas, Emily Doolittle, and Alice Parker. An organization of international prominence, the SFGC has been invited to perform at the World Choral Symposium in Kyoto, the World Children's Choir Festival in Seoul, and the Gateway to Music Festival in Beijing. In a 2015 review of a collaboration between the choir and the early music ensemble Tenet, *San Francisco Classical Voice* noted: "San Francisco Girls Chorus is a vocal ensemble of immense flexibility with a sound that is both homogenous and distinct. The girls' voices blend beautifully, and the soloists and small ensembles from within the group are excellent. The chorus sang the entire program from memory, and there was neither a note out of place nor did the performance seem over-rehearsed."

Under the current leadership of Lisa Bielawa (Artistic Director), Valérie Sainte-Agathe (Music Director), and Beth Schechter (Executive Director), the organization presents over 70 live performances and reaches more than 50,000 people each year. A diverse cohort of over 300 young women from nine San Francisco Bay counties participate in the SFGC programs. A rigorous, four-level chorus school curriculum prepares students to sing in the premier ensemble of the organization. In addition to

The mission of the San Francisco Girls Chorus is to create outstanding performances featuring the unique and compelling sound of young women's voices through an exemplary music education program

– SFGC Mission Statement