

A Conversation: What Do Science and Data Say About the Near Term Future of Singing?

Chorus America, National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Barbershop Harmony Society, and Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA)

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There is a cycle of readiness, response and recovery in disaster management circles. Mostly today we've been talking about response and recovery, so I'm going to fill in about the concept of readiness in the arts in general, and then look at some specific ideas in this current situation. Most of what I'll talk about focuses on organizations rather than individual artists, but there certainly is crossover.

What is readiness for arts and cultural organizations?

- Having policies, processes, documents and trainings/drills in place to keep your operations going, and building this concept into your planning and operations on an ongoing basis.

Why is planning important?

- You don't make good cognitive decisions in the moment of a crisis. Human-caused and natural disasters.

At ArtsReady, we recommend this framework for readiness planning: using an all-hazards concept, and looking at all of your critical functions. You want to have a Plan B for each one.

All hazards means, if your access to a resource is cut off, it doesn't matter how. If – in normal times - your accompanist can't come to rehearsal, whether because they have a fever, or they've eloped to Tahiti, or their basement was flooded yesterday, the point is you don't have an accompanist.

What are the **critical functions** of arts organizations? Developed over ten years by arts administrators, business continuity experts and the cultural heritage sector.

- People – artists, crew, administrators, audiences
- Programs – concerts, educational activities, competitions, special events
- Facilities – any spaces used for administration, rehearsal, performance, exhibition, storage and prep.
- Finances (includes insurance)
- IT
- Communications
- Collections and Assets
- Training and drills
- Community

This crisis is different because the threat is invisible, and there's no sense of an end to it, unlike a fire or a protest or a tornado.

No guilt - start where you are. You've probably done some readiness planning already, which you can now consolidate and assess to build on. If not, just start to take small steps now.

What might be helpful in this particular moment:

Have an internal and external communications protocol and keep UP TO DATE

In March, my message to arts groups was, You cannot overcommunicate. However, now that we've gotten our legs under us a little bit and can look forward, this might not be as true. We are now bombarded with information. Still, I think that sharing and transparency is very important.

Consider issues of privacy and sensitivity in your decisions.

I can imagine that your group's members will feel a tension between wanting to be with, and having a commitment to the group, vs being sick and staying away. If you don't feel well, don't make someone send you home.

This leads to the idea of an ombudsman or safety officer. A readiness plan should always include the existence of a response team, and one lead member, through which all incoming and outgoing communication goes. They're not a filter or a censor, but information collection and management and communication is the most critical act in an emergency. In terms of COVID-19, this person, or a partner, may be tasked as an ombudsman or safety officer. Responsible for the physical safety steps, but also can be a neutral person to receive questions and concerns.

Another obvious tenet is, if you see something, say something – a backpack in the wings with no obvious owner, or a stack of chairs blocking an emergency exit. Where we are now, you may observe a colleague not following the safety protocol, or they're sneezing – having someone like the safety coordinator to talk to, to handle it, means you don't have to either confront them, or silently be anxious.

Readiness means an investment of some time and money. You should already be investing in good data security and backup; appropriate levels and types of insurance, etc. Now, you'll have to budget for masks, sanitizer, signage/floor markers, and a volunteer or staff person to sanitize space. Dr. Seelig's piece [San Francisco Gay Mens Chorus] has so much good information in it, please read! When you start to gather again, – what about borrowed/rented space? How do you work with the other groups that may also use the space?

Don't make any big commitments now – with potential waves, you need to be as nimble as possible. If you re-open, plan for the best way to prepare yourself if you have to close down again.

Use this down time to plan. Put things in place – record interviews, document historical events, build in redundancies and cross-trainings. Have key personnel document their work processes. If they do this by describing it to another person who documents it – boom! You've already got a good leg up on the cross training.

I heard a quote earlier today which I think is very wise in this puzzling time: Seek clarity, not certainty.

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