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## *Artistry, respect, commitment: Mission statements and guiding values for children's choirs*

*By Tamara Schupman, R&S Chair for Children's Choruses*

The Spokane Area Children's Chorus (SACC) receives regular inquiries concerning how to start up a children's chorus. Even though we know they are looking for the nuts and bolts, the handbooks, forms, schedules, etc., and we are more than willing to share what we've collected, it's vital to their success that they begin with a statement of intent. A founding conductor, a group of parents, a committee or a board of trustees can form this statement. But all decisions for the children will hinge on a mission statement.

The statement does not need to be long and it can be supplemented through guiding values. At SACC, we have worked through issues such as "are we education based or performance based?" "Is this an organization that strives to represent the whole community of Spokane or the community of people who can afford extracurricular musical activities for their children." These questions take soul searching for yourself and your community. They are also not set in stone and can evolve and change. But they must exist as a point of reference for the myriad of decisions that will face you down the road. These decisions will be easier with a mission statement guiding you.

If you are able, it is helpful to bring in a facilitator to help with the process. There are people in the business and arts sectors that are skilled in helping organizations develop mission statements. Find them and use them if you can. Each community, conductor, parent group and board are unique, so the existing mission statement for Spokane is not necessarily yours. But we would like to share ours with you and invite you to call us with any questions concerning its birth: ***The Spokane Area Children's Chorus provides youth with a choral music experience where successive levels of high artistic achievement and performance are fostered in each participant.***

We also engaged our young artists with developing the guiding values to steer us through this mission. The singers, to help them connect to our mission for them, formed these statements:

**Artistry:** *in all music, in performance and in our daily lives*

**Respect:** *for all music, for the rehearsal space, for the conductor, for fellow choristers, for fellow musicians and for our audience*

**Commitment:** *to our music, to rehearsal, to SACC programs, to all performances, to each other*

We call this the ARC. At SACC, we merely refer to the ARC, and it elicits a response especially from the older students that demonstrates their understanding of why they choose to be with our chorus. It is our most vital tool in focusing the singers.

I want to encourage community and educational choruses to form a mission statement and guiding values before the rest of the forms and programs are put into place. The students as well as your support mechanisms need to support this statement in order to facilitate success and growth. The time spent here will speed the rest along. Just remember that a thoughtful intention at this level can truly pave the way for great things to happen. Contact other children's choruses that you admire, ask for their mission statement. Aspects of their sound and musicianship will be revealed to you through these statements. Be unique, thoughtful, creative, personally and community minded in forming yours. And engage your students in the guiding values.