



NATIONAL COLLEGIATE CHORAL ORGANIZATION

July 13, 2020

On behalf of the Executive Board of the National Collegiate Choral Organization, I wanted to give you an update about our past and future work. As you may know, a new two-year NCCO service term began for the Executive Board and half of the National Board on January 1, 2020. At the start of this term, little did we know that the world we knew then would, within just six months, come to bear no resemblance to the world that we know now.

What We Have Done: Our First Six Months

Our Journals & New Commissioning Fund

January and February brought a regular rhythm to our usual non-conference calendar year. In addition to publishing our latest volume of [The Choral Scholar](#), we have also acquired two journals that have been part of Chorus America for many years—*American Choral Review* and *Research Memorandum Series*—and they will soon be integrated into our online offerings. The Executive Board also moved forward with establishing the [Marguerite L. Brooks Commissioning Fund for New Choral Music](#), and we began to sketch plans for the 2021 NCCO conference.

Webinars

As you know, however, the world changed dramatically with the onset and spread of COVID-19, which caused all college and university campuses to quickly move all in-person instruction online. In response, our Executive Board, along with several national board members and colleagues, got to work and produced seven webinars, which would come to be known and archived as our Webinar Series Number 1: [Collegiate Choral Programs at the Onset of the Coronavirus Pandemic](#).

Virtual Choir Position Paper

Also part of our COVID-19 response is a position paper, [Virtual Choirs in Higher Education](#), prepared by our [Task Force on Ensembles in the Collegiate Curriculum](#), chaired by Joey Martin and with principal author, Nicole Aldrich. The document is available in two formats: the [full version](#)—with all findings, reasoning, and citations—as well as the Summary for Administrators designed to present the key findings in a quickly digested format helpful to those making decisions.

Download [Virtual Choirs in Higher Education](#) (22-page PDF, 3.8 Mb)
Download the report's [Summary for Administrators](#) (2-page PDF, 1.2 Mb)

#ChoirIsNotOver

We also launched our #ChoirIsNotOver campaign through social media—including the new [NCCO Instagram account](#)—with many of our members offering words of inspiration and hope in a time of unrest. We also recognized that we needed to hear from you to know how to best serve you, and we launched a survey for your feedback, which we are still using to inform our work.

View the YouTube Playlist of [#ChoirIsNotOver Testimonials Playlist](#)

Task Force on Expanding Choral Pedagogy

In moving forward with unknown conditions and factors for the coming academic year, we established a second task force, our [Task Force on Expanding Choral Pedagogy](#), chaired by Elise Hepworth. The charge of the task force is to support choral pedagogues at the tertiary level by identifying relevant research and developing practical resources aimed at adapting and adding to current pedagogies while the landscape of education shifts in a COVID– and post-COVID–influenced era. We are happy to report that a paper by the Task Force is forthcoming, and many of you have also filled out a survey as part of that work.

COVID-19 Research

Additionally, NCCO partnered with an international coalition of performing arts organizations to combine resources and commission a study of the effects of COVID-19 aerosol transmission in performing arts performance settings. The study is being led by Shelly Miller, Ph.D., a Professor of Mechanical Engineering and faculty in the Environmental Engineering Program at the University of Colorado Boulder. We anticipate preliminary results very soon.

A Racial Reckoning

Then, on May 25, George Floyd was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer, which refueled the 400-year-long burning flames of racism in the United States. Exposure to this second pandemic, racism, prompted the Executive Board to look inward, keenly aware of our unique leadership role as a national organization to effect change.

Our Executive Board—Miguel Ángel Felipe, Elizabeth Swanson, Matthew Ferrell, Marie Bucoy-Calavan, Mark Nabholz, and me—acknowledges that we each have our blind spots, and we are not equipped to navigate forward without help from and collaboration with everyone. Furthermore, the NCCO Executive Board acknowledges that academia is an institution that has been, tragically at best, a complicit supporter of systemic racism. The NCCO Executive Board recognizes that these excruciating events of injustice in George Floyd's murder—as well as other murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others—have created a pivotal moment in history that must bring change, and we accept our responsibility to elicit, create, and integrate meaningful and long-term changes within the choral field at the tertiary level. Our greatest hope is that such long-overdue changes to end systemic racism, and racism in all its forms, will take hold at a grassroots level—extending to our membership and to their respective institutions, communities, and backyards for generations to come.

Where We Are Headed

We are newly-committed to a process of taking stock of our organization and owning any areas in which we fall short of meeting the treasured principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access.

Although there is still much work to be done, there is some evidence to suggest that NCCO has been moving in the right direction over the past several years, especially as it relates to demographic diversity and diversity of perspectives in our organization:

- **National Board Composition**
 - Our 2014–2015 National Board included:
 - 32 white men (64%),
 - 13 women (26%), and
 - 8 people of color (16%).
 - Our current 2020–2021 National Board includes:
 - 19 white men (38%),
 - 21 women (42%), and
 - 15 people of color (30%).
- **Conference Selection Committees**
 - In 2015, the selection committees for our conference were made up of:
 - 26% women and included
 - only 1 person of color out of 34 individuals (a paltry 2.9%).
 - In 2019, the selection committees for our conference were made up of:
 - 60% women and included
 - 20% people of color.
- **Conference Performing Choir Conductors**
 - In 2015, of the thirteen performing choirs at our conference,
 - 9 were led by white men (69.2%),
 - 2 were led by women (15.3%), and
 - 2 were led by people of color (15.3%), including
 - 0 African Americans.
 - In 2019, of the fourteen performing choirs at our conference,
 - 7 were led by white men (50%),
 - 4 were led by women (28.5%), and
 - 4 were led by people of color (28.5%), including
 - 3 African Americans.
- **Conference Headliners**
 - In 2015, our 2 headliners were
 - 1 white man of European origin and
 - 1 white woman of European origin.
 - In 2019, our 2 headliners were
 - 1 Latin woman from South America and
 - 1 African American man.
- **Conference Panels**
 - In 2015, one of our panel discussions was
 - “Teaching Choral Literature at the Graduate Level” and included
 - 4 of 4 panelists were white,
 - 2 women and
 - 2 men.
 - In 2019, one of our panel discussions was
 - “Considering Culture in Programming and Performance” and included
 - 4 of 4 panelists were people of color,
 - 3 women and
 - 1 person who identifies as non-binary.

While these statistics represent progress, there is much work still to be done. And, this progress is potentially fleeting, as there are no structures in place that assume these trends will continue. They are instead a reflection of the priorities of individuals in leadership (your current and past Executive Boards), and while we have been committed to this demographic change, there is nothing that currently prevents these changes from being reversed. We have not enacted structural, systemic change. The increased awareness that the past six weeks has brought in the wake of George Floyd's murder has awakened us to heightened clarity that we can do better. We can do so much better.

Our Way Forward: Unprecedented National Board Meeting

To envision an inclusive path forward together, the current [NCCO National Board](#) will meet virtually later this summer. This is unprecedented, as it will be the first time in our organization's history that the National Board will meet apart from our biennial conferences. Our goal is to begin work on our organization's first-ever strategic plan that incorporates the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) into the very fabric of NCCO's activities and architecture. This meeting will be guided by an IDEA professional. And while we do not yet know the facets of this plan or the subsequent actions that will be needed, we know that we must move forward in this direction for the future of our profession and art form.

We admit that we don't know quite how all of this will unfold, and we humbly ask for your help and participation. We have begun and will continue to reach out to those who can offer meaningful guidance based upon their experiences as BIPOC musicians and academics, and we pledge to continue to welcome input from anyone who has such valuable perspectives. We also recognize that this is difficult work and that we will make mistakes and missteps along the way, but we pledge to you that we will be intentional in our actions and dialogue, as we continue to develop as stewards of the human spirit through song.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. DiOrio', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Dominick DiOrio, President

With the NCCO Executive Board

Miguel Ángel Felipe, *President-Elect*

Elizabeth Swanson, *Vice President*

Marie Bucoy-Calavan, *Secretary*

Matthew Ferrell, *Treasurer*

Mark Nabholz, *Chief Editor of Publications*