

giving voice *toolkit*

How to start a choir for people living with dementia and
their care partners in your community





Introduction Letter

Hello, and we are so glad you have decided to download the Giving Voice Toolkit! Giving Voice started with one simple choir. One simple choir that changed hearts, changed minds, and changed our vision as an organization from running one choir to inspiring and supporting the creation of choirs in every community.

The first Giving Voice Chorus was inspired from one basic idea - to redefine the stigma of what living with Alzheimer's and dementia in the community looks like. Too often when someone is diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia, there is an immediate sense of despair and loss. Compounded by community misunderstanding and a similar stigma, as symptoms worsen these feelings only multiply and self-isolation increases, thereby isolating and increasing the weight of responsibility for care partners as well.

This choral program was developed to redefine this reality, using the neurologically proven impact of music to increase well-being, but even more importantly: to create an opportunity to exist in a community where everyone understands, to increase feelings of value and worth as singers work together to prepare a performance for their community, to redefine community stigma and understanding through public performances, and so much more.

We're so passionate about this work and are so glad you've joined us on this journey!



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a few notes

Before we begin, below are a few notes to keep in mind as you work through this toolkit.

First, we want to make a few clarifications about vocabulary.

- Alzheimer's vs Dementia
 - We will interchangeably use the terms Alzheimer's and dementia, but there are a couple things to keep in mind. First, Alzheimer's and dementia are not technically synonymous. Dementia is an overarching term for a set of symptoms, whereas Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia. Second, individuals with *any type* of dementia or memory loss are always welcome in this program.
- Care Partner
 - We use the term care partner to refer to the primary person who supports an individual living with dementia. Often this is a spouse, but it could also be a sibling, a close friend, a child, etc. Additionally, care partner does not have to be interpreted singularly and can represent a multitude of people caring for a person with dementia.
- Session vs Semester
 - We typically refer to this program in terms of sessions or semesters. When we say either of these words, we mean the same thing - a group of rehearsals followed by a performance.
- Choir vs Chorus vs Chorale
 - We will also use the terms choir, chorus, and chorale interchangeably. A choir by definition is an "organized group of singers," which is the basis for this program. While some people like the formality of the word chorus or chorale, others resonate with the more colloquial choir, so we mix it up.

Second, we want to make a note that while we will share what we have learned to work best, we strongly believe that creating and running these programs is not a one size fits all situation! The most important thing is what works best for your singers, as their experience is the heart of this program. If your program is creating community, hope, and value for your singers, you're doing it right.

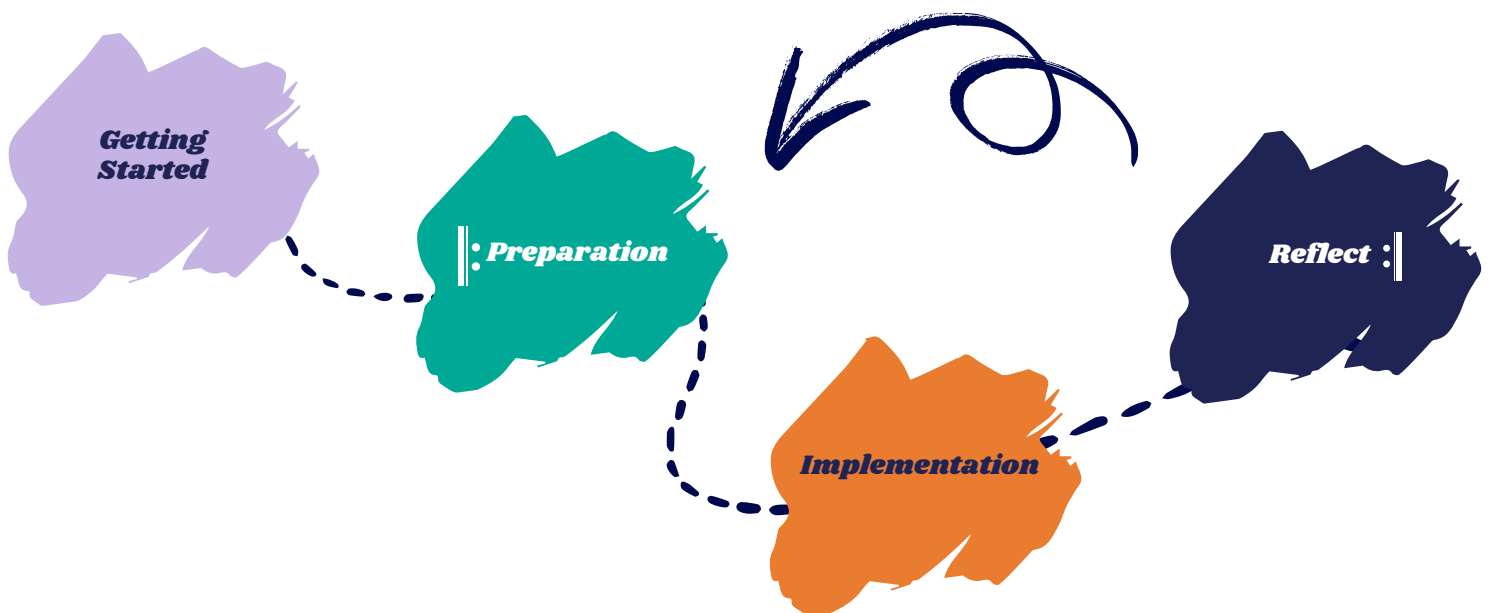
Third, this toolkit is just the beginning! Our goal is to support you in multiple ways, which at this point includes:

- A free 1:1 consultation with a Giving Voice team member after you've read through the toolkit
- Customized training packages
- The Giving Voice Network where you can learn from and connect with others doing this work
- Ongoing resources
- The annual Giving Voice Educational Conference

The Roadmap

Let's get started! This toolkit is designed to be a roadmap, guiding you through the steps of starting and running this program. If you are just starting your program you will begin with the first step on the roadmap, **Getting Started**, where you'll be led through all of the basics you need before being ready to recruit singers and prepare materials for your first semester. Once the basics are taken care of, you'll move on to the second step on the roadmap, **Preparation**. Here, you will be led through all of the preparations like selecting music, recruiting singers, and creating a dementia-supportive environment. Once your preparations are done, the **Implementation** step on the roadmap will guide you through the details of running your rehearsals and planning a performance. Finally, in **Reflect**, the last step on the roadmap, you'll learn the importance of receiving feedback and reflecting on your semester before repeating back to the preparation step as you get ready for your next semester.

At the end of this toolkit you will also find a handful of supplemental documents. These documents will be referenced throughout the toolkit and are an extra layer of support as you get started.





Getting Started

your personal why

The very first question to ask yourself is why are you doing this work? If you're here and reading this, you are passionate about improving the lives of people living with or caring for Alzheimer's and other dementias. But what's your personal why? Why are you committed to making this impact in the world? Take a moment to write this down and put it somewhere you'll remember. This work, like anything worthwhile comes with its' moments of joy as well as difficulty. Referencing this why during those difficult times will help you stay true to your motivation.

determining community need

Once you have your personal why in mind, it's important to spend some time on this next step, which is to determine the need for this type of program in your community. Doing this does not need to be complex or expensive, it can simply mean reaching out and talking to multiple and diverse sources you think might have the pulse of this community. A few organizations to start with might be: churches, senior centers, support groups, memory cafes, Alzheimer's Association local chapters, Meals On Wheels programs or anything else you can think of that has a relationship to Alzheimer's or other dementias.

program structure

Now let's go over the basics of the program itself. The program structure for your choir may look very different based on your resources and the community you're working with but the most important thing to consider is that your choral program has regularly scheduled rehearsals (we recommend once a week) that culminate in a performance at the end of the session. Below, we'll share the structure we use for a Giving Voice Chorus.

The Giving Voice Chorus program structure

- Each semester consists of 12 - 16 weekly rehearsals followed by a performance
- Each weekly rehearsal is an hour and a half followed by at least 30 minutes of social time and snacks
- Each weekly rehearsal consists up a warm-up, rehearsal time, a *Move & Groove* dance break, a *Get to Know Me* moment, the ritual closing song, and social/snack time
- One year is divided into three semesters: fall, spring, and summer (though summer tends to look a little different than a typical semester due to varied summer schedules & a shorter time period)
- The ensemble is roughly two thirds people living with dementia and their care partners and one third volunteer singers
- Volunteer singers sit next to singers who needs support and care partners are able to sing in their own section if they choose to
- Everyone is welcome regardless of musical ability



finding a program partner

If you are an organization coming to this work, you don't necessarily need a program partner because you may already have much of the infrastructure to successfully develop this program. That in mind, as you read through the toolkit, consider areas where you might benefit from collaborating with others. While you won't necessarily need another organization to host the program, you may find different types of partnerships and collaborations to be helpful.

If you are an individual coming to this work, you have two main options to successfully run this program: to find a program partner that will collaborate to host the program or to start your own non-profit. We'll discuss the option of starting your own non-profit in the next section, but first let's dive into more of what it means to find a program partner.

A program partner essentially means creating a formal or informal partnership with an existing organization to run your program. This partnership can look many different ways depending on your needs and their resources. It may be as simple as an organization allowing you to use their space, but you're in charge of the rest. It may be the choir program becomes fully integrated into their organization to the point where they are funding it, hiring staff, helping to recruit singers, and more. As you move through the process you'll find a balance that is the most mutually beneficial for both of you. To start, begin by listing all of the possibilities in your community. We suggest reviewing the *rehearsal location* criteria first on the next page, as it will make narrowing down the list a bit easier. To get you started consider the following types of organizations: music schools, churches, libraries, community centers, VFWs, public schools, private schools, etc. When possible, we recommend trying to avoid hosting the program in a skilled nursing or assisted living facility. While everyone with dementia is absolutely welcome in the program, keep in mind that there are *many* individuals with dementia still living in their homes. Often, it is these individuals and their care partners who are in need of a program like this the most. Therefore, by hosting the program outside of a skilled nursing or assisted living community, it makes everyone feel comfortable to join and furthermore, supports the important subliminal message that people living with Alzheimer's belong in the community and have value to bring to it.

starting your own non-profit

Some champions who are looking to start this program may be interested in seeking non-profit status and ultimately running their own organization. Typically, we recommend starting your journey by creating a program partnership and then moving toward the non-profit step once you're more established, but if you're interested in taking that step right away, or you're unable to create a program partnership, that's certainly an option! This process is very detailed and won't be covered in this toolkit, but if you're interested in learning more, we suggest seeking resources from the National Council of Non-Profits (<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>) or mention your interest at your free 1:1 consultation and we'll share customized training options!

choosing a rehearsal location and time

Whether you choose to start your own non-profit or are working to develop a program partnership, the following criteria and suggestions are important to keep in mind when finalizing where and when you will have rehearsals.

When thinking about your rehearsal location consider the following:

- Travel and driving accessibility (especially if you live in a location with difficult weather conditions like heavy rain or snow)
- Accessibility of the building and rehearsal space for individuals with limited walking mobility
- Availability of a room with chairs for 30 - 50 participants for the rehearsal itself (music stands are a bonus)
- Availability of a room with chairs and tables for 30 - 50 participants (for socializing and snack time before or after rehearsal)
- An onsite piano (eliminates the need to transport an electric piano or other accompaniment instruments and can offer a better experience if it's acoustic)
- Sound equipment including a microphone and speaker system (this is optional, but keep it in mind as your choir grows. It may become necessary to ensure anyone hard of hearing can easily participate)

When deciding on the rehearsal time, we encourage choirs to select a time that can be consistent week to week and is between the hours of 10 am and 3 pm. We've found this to be the most supportive of our singers because they are less fatigued and can avoid driving in the dark.

program staff

Next, it's time to create your team that will implement the program! Tasks generally fall into three primary areas of responsibility, which we've organized into three different roles: music director, accompanist, and program manager. Of course the list of accountabilities described on the next page can be divided up in any way that is best for your program.





Music Director

- Selecting & adapting music
- Planning and leading all rehearsals and performances
- Creating weekly materials like practice recordings and handouts
- Communication with singers

Accompanist

- Accompanying weekly rehearsals and performances
- Assisting the director in rehearsal facilitation (as agreed upon)
- Assisting in the creation of practice recordings (as agreed upon)

It's important to note that the accompanist may or may not be a pianist. While piano is the typical accompaniment instrument, and is generally the most versatile, based on your resources and singer preferences you may also use a guitar, a drum, etc.

Program Manager

- Developing & maintaining any partnership or location agreement
- Developing & managing program logistics and administrative details including registration, semester calendars, singer/volunteer information, and more
- Managing rehearsal equipment and materials each week
- Managing all business and financial affairs of the chorus program
- Marketing & recruitment
- Developing and maintaining any digital presence (social media, website, email, etc.)
- Volunteer and/or singer communications
- Volunteer and staff training

Depending on your situation, you may have existing staff that are able to take on these accountabilities or you may have to hire additional team members. While anything can be a volunteer role, paying this positions fairly will make everyone feel valued and improve long-term sustainability. Later in the toolkit, we'll talk about creating a budget so you can plan for costs up front!

program volunteers

For roles outside of the primary team positions, volunteers can be a huge resource for any non-profit organization or program. When a role is appropriately matched with their talent, interests, and availability, volunteers can become a part of your program family! There are a myriad of ways in which volunteers can support this work. We'll list several ideas on the following page, but remember that aside from the volunteer singer role, none of these are requirements.



For volunteers interested in a regular and consistent commitment:

- Volunteer singer (responsible for singing next to those who need extra support during rehearsal)
- Rehearsal volunteer (helps with administrative and logistical tasks at rehearsal each week)
- Rehearsal Greeter (greeters singers as they arrive each week)
- Snack volunteer (responsible for bringing or organizing snacks each week)
- Communications volunteer (marketing, emails, etc)
- Administrative volunteer (administrative tasks throughout the semester/year)
- An ambassador (responsible for spreading the good word about your program)

For volunteers interested in short-term commitment:

- Concert volunteers (event prep, ticket takers, set-up/tear down, ushers, etc)
- Fundraising event volunteers (planning, logistics, set-up/tear down, emcee, etc)
- Special skills they can offer like photography, videography, or graphic design
- Project-based tasks such as material preparation, program stuffing, envelope stuffing, etc

The list of possibilities for volunteer tasks is endless. We encourage you to truly get to know your volunteers and create opportunities for them that fit their needs. Not only can they help you to implement your regular program tasks but sometimes they allow for extra and fun program elements that you wouldn't have had capacity to do otherwise.

the importance of collaboration

Don't be afraid to collaborate! The arts, humanities, and mission-based world is an amazing one, but generally a world that requires a lot of creative problem solving and working together to be programmatically and financially successful. So, don't feel the need to do it all! Work with people to trade favors, create partnerships, and lend relevant expertise. This type of collaboration can provide creative solutions, increase strength and sustainability, and ultimately increase the impact of your program.

creating a budget

Finally, you'll want to create a program budget. In the program budget, do your best to estimate the costs of the program, then plan anticipated revenue to cover those costs. We've included some sample budget categories in the *Supplemental Documents* section at the end of this toolkit to get you started.

Congratulations! You finished the first step on the roadmap. At this point, you should have the basics of your program established. Now it's time for the next step, *Preparation!*



Preparation

Welcome to the second step on the roadmap, *Preparation!* It's time to dive into the work needed to prepare for your first day of rehearsal.

registration

Before you start recruiting, you'll want to determine how people will register for the program. Some people keep it very simple and manually collect registration via email or phone. Others may choose to use a more formal online registration tool. Either of these will work, so choose what works best for you. As people register, consider at a minimum collecting the following information:

- Name
- Emergency Contact Information
- Preferred Vocal Part & Experience

If you are requiring at least one care partner to register with each person living with dementia, we recommend collecting both of their information at once. It can also be a good idea to take note of who is living with the diagnosis if it is made clear. This can help with creating a seating chart for rehearsal later.

recruitment

It's time to start recruiting! First, you'll want to create a few materials. We recommend a flyer, a social media post, and a written paragraph that could be read aloud as an announcement. Try to include the following information: the name of the program, where and when it will be held, a brief description, a cost (free or other), contact information for questions, and a way to register.

Next, make a recruitment plan. Here are some ideas as you consider what will work best for you:

- Connecting with businesses, organizations or related programs
- Connecting with individuals within a related profession
- Posting flyers at public places
- Creating posts and events on a website or social media
- Asking family and friends to spread the word!

To get you started, here is a list of people and places you might be able to connect with in your community:

Clinics, breweries, senior centers, Alzheimer's Association chapters, memory cafes, coffee shops, libraries, VFWs, art centers, music stores, schools, universities, music schools, city programs or events, local non-profits, music teachers, music therapists, doctors, nurses, social workers, students, high school teachers, and professors



selecting your music

Selecting your music can be one of the most exciting parts of the preparation process and one of the most varied based on the needs and preferences of your singers. For example, Giving Voice Choirs, which typically stem from the traditional European choral tradition, order and use traditional choral repertoire during rehearsal. Other choirs may use lyric sheets only and teach the parts through aural repetition. Others still might not use any music, but rather learn and improvise the parts by ear, because that's their cultural music tradition. No matter how you choose to go about this, keep the core component of this program in mind, which is to rehearse and prepare a collection of music that will be performed publicly for your community.

Regardless of how you choose to teach the music, there are a few criteria to keep in mind to be supportive of your singers living with Alzheimer's or other dementias.

1. Select well-known music
 - a. Music that remains in memory the longest is typically music an individual listened to in their teens and early twenties. This also includes songs that a person has heard throughout their life such as music that's associated with particular events or traditional folk songs (in the United States an example would be Happy Birthday or the national anthem).
2. When choosing music or creating vocal parts, keep the range of notes to a minimum. As a voice ages, it naturally loses its' range, therefore particularly high or low notes can be difficult and frustrating for many older adults to sing.
3. If using music, select or adapt music to be free of any codas or repeat signs. Music that requires the singer to jump around often requires a lot of executive functioning, a skill that becomes difficult with dementia.
4. Select or teach music with 2 - 3 parts. This of course depends on your singers, but whenever you can create harmony, it can be really gratifying and a good challenge. Adding instrumentals or dynamics is another great way to bring color to a song if your singers are more comfortable singing in unison.
5. When possible, select or print lyrics in a large-print format. As eyes age, visual acuity tends to decrease, therefore large print will be helpful for many of your singers.

It's important to keep copyright considerations in mind when selecting and preparing music. When you order music, make sure to order as many copies as number of singers. If you're only using lyric sheets, it is still a good idea to order as many copies of the music as singers in your choir, because the lyrics are still a part of the copyrighted work. If you wish to adapt a piece of music, you need to first get permission to do so. Usually you will request this through the publisher, but if not, the publisher should be able to direct you to the correct place.



With any questions regarding copyright, we advise taking some time to speak directly with a copyright lawyer. This directory from Volunteer Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts can help you find lawyers in your area that offer free consultations for arts organizations. If this program does not exist in your state yet, you can use resources like this one (<https://lawyers.findlaw.com/intellectual-property-law/>) to find copyright lawyers near you for hire. And don't be afraid to ask if they're willing to do pro bono work. They might say no, but when people understand what you're doing they are often willing to help.

dementia-friendly considerations

In addition to the criteria above, consider the following steps to make your music supportive of your singers with dementia

- Have lyric sheets available to be inclusive of singers who don't read music
- Clearly mark the beginnings of phrases with a letter (i.e. A, B, C, D, etc) on music and lyric sheets. With this system, a singer can more easily navigate the music when a director calls out a letter to practice a certain phrase.

creating practice recordings

Individuals with dementia can absolutely learn new things, but like any learning, consistent repetition is particularly important for this community. Therefore, recordings that singers are able to practice with at home are an extremely important part of creating a dementia-supportive program. For each song, we recommend creating a recording that highlights individual parts as well as a recording that has all of the parts and accompaniment together.

preparing music binders

At Giving Voice we create music binders for our singers every semester. If this is possible for you to do, we find this to be a very supportive gesture for your singers, because it keeps everything organized and helps singers to easily find their music or lyrics during rehearsal. We use 3-ring binders and include the following: the music, numbered tabs to separate each song, a pencil pouch and pencil, an index with song names and tab numbers, an information sheet, and a cover sheet where they can write their name.



training staff and volunteers

Now that you have all of your physical materials ready, the last but certainly not least step of *Preparation* is educating your staff and volunteers on Alzheimer's and other dementias so they can best support this community.

We recommend the following resources:

- These training recordings produced specifically for the Giving Voice program by Angela Lunde from Rochester Mayo: <https://www.resoundingvoices.org/chorus-staff-volunteers>
- An in-person or virtual training from Dementia Friends USA: dementiafriendsusa.org
- This document from the Alzheimer's Association called Tips for Successful Communication at All Stages of Alzheimer's: https://www.alz.org/national/documents/brochure_communication.pdf

It's also important to be trained on reporting suspected abuse. People with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia are particularly vulnerable to physical, emotional, financial, and other forms of abuse. It is your responsibility as staff and/or an organization to understand warning signs and report suspected abuse if you see it. We suggest the following document for training on this topic: <http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-elder-abuse.asp>

If you're interested in program specific training for your director and staff/volunteers, please let us know at your 1:1 consultation! Everyone comes to the work with a different set of skills, so our best advice is to start with the skills you already have and build from there. Since the director role is responsible for leading the weekly program, we've also included a brief document in the Supplemental Documents section at the end of this toolkit called *Director Tips & Tricks*.

Congratulations! You have finished the second step on the roadmap, *Preparation*! It's time to put all that hard work to use as you implement your program semester.



Implementation

Now that your preparations are done, let's talk about everything you need to know to implement your semester! To begin, we'll discuss the importance of following a consistent rehearsal format and share some recommendations.

rehearsal format

Choosing a rehearsal format that can be consistent week to week is very important to be supportive of your singers with Alzheimer's. At Giving Voice, we've fine-tuned our rehearsal format and we would love to share it with you. We'll detail below what we do and why we find it important, but as always, get to know your singers and adjust as needed to meet their needs.

1. Vocal Warm-ups

- Vocal warm-ups that include movement set the stage for success for your singers. Vocal warm-ups should include a variety of sounds and range of notes, and we recommend incorporating movement wherever you can. Movement in particular acts as a "primer" for the brain, increasing its ability for new learning, so it's especially important to incorporate for people living with Alzheimer's and dementia. Adding in a bit of silliness to make people laugh can be helpful as well, as it will energize your singers and start the rehearsal off with the right priority.

2. Rehearsal Time

- a. We typically rehearse 2 - 3 songs for about 15 - 20 minutes before taking a break.

3. Move & Groove Break

- a. The brains of people with dementia are often working twice as hard as a brain without dementia, so remember that rest is essential. While you could simply take a short break, we like to incorporate activities. This way, singers remain engaged in the rehearsal and it offers an opportunity to build connection amongst the singers! During our first break which we call the *Move & Groove*, singers are invited to move their bodies in whatever way feels comfortable while a song is played.

4. Rehearsal Time

- a. We spend another 15 - 20 minutes rehearsing music.

5. Get To Know Me Break

- a. During this break, individual singers are invited to share their story. This is a fantastic opportunity to get to know your singers and helps singers feel valued and connected.

6. Rehearsal Time

- a. Depending on time, we typically rehearse until the end of rehearsal without another break.

7. Closing Announcements

8. Closing Song

- a. We've found that singing a ritual closing song can be a great transition to end the rehearsal. It also becomes something consistent that singers look forward to! We use the song, *Happy Trails*, which you are welcome to use!

9. Social Time

- We strongly encourage creating a space for social time. One of the beautiful parts of this program is that it allows people to engage with others going through the same thing in a safe and joyful space. A designated time to connect and perhaps enjoy a snack or cup of coffee is a wonderful opportunity for this.

tips for the first rehearsal

Once your semester gets going, most rehearsals will look very similar, but there are a few important considerations to keep in mind for the first rehearsal of the semester.

1. Singers will need to be directed to the rehearsal space. Consider making signs and hanging them throughout the building or bringing a few volunteers or friends who can greet people as they arrive and point the way.
2. You will need to do a handful of administrative tasks including: taking attendance, registering any walk-ins, getting media release forms signed, offering name tags, and giving people their binders/music. Of course, there are a handful of ways to cover these tasks, but we've found the most ease and efficiency by creating a "check-in table," where you can take care of everything at once as people arrive.
3. People will need to know where to sit. Eventually we recommend creating a seating chart and placing name tags on each chair before rehearsal, but on the first day, it's generally easiest to have people sit wherever they'd like. As you gather information and get to know everyone you can create a more formal seating chart.
4. During the rehearsal, keep in mind that the focus for the first day is on getting comfortable and having fun. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to introduce themselves and keep the learning simple. The goal is for all singers, regardless of musical ability, to walk away feeling confident and excited for the next rehearsal.

Media Releases: *Having signed media release forms ensures that you are able to take and use images and videos of your singers for things like recruitment, concert programs, etc. At the end of this toolkit in the Supplemental Documents section you will find a template you can use.*

semester overview

When thinking about the semester as a whole we thought it'd be helpful to share what we've found to be the typical stages of each semester.

1. The singers are becoming familiar with new music, new members, and for some, a new environment. Singers need patience with each other and the music director needs flexibility and adaptability in teaching the music and maintaining a joyful atmosphere at rehearsals. Careful planning by the music director ensures a smooth rehearsal.
2. After a few weeks of rehearsal, the singers understand many of their musical parts. The routine of the rehearsal is now familiar. Personal relationships are formed among singers, volunteers, and staff. Rehearsals become more relaxed as the singers begin to master songs and become accustomed to the routine.
3. In the final few weeks, the rehearsals focus more on the scheduled performance, leaning particularly into the more difficult pieces. For the simpler songs, singers are able to really listen to each other and focus on the details of musicality like dynamics and expression.



planning a performance

As mentioned previously, having a performance at the end of your semester is an important part of this program! Here's why:

- Having a performance sends an important non-verbal message to your singers and your community that people living with Alzheimer's or other dementias have something of value to contribute to their community.
- A performance is a great opportunity to incorporate community education & advocacy for Alzheimer's and other dementias.
- A performance is a great opportunity to get the word out about your program and recruit more volunteers and singers.

A concert at the end of the semester is a typical practice for this program but you may choose to also do "pop-up" performances throughout the year. There is a lot of value to these types of performances, but we do encourage you to keep the wellness of your singers at the heart of your decisions. While some newness is very beneficial, too much can be anxiety-inducing so just keep that balance in mind. Now, let's dive into the details of planning a performance!

Location, Date, and Time

First, you'll need to determine the location, date and time. When possible, we encourage you to have the performance in the same location as the weekly rehearsal. Even if it's in a different room, having the performance in the same location creates a sense of ease in your singers since it is familiar. If you need to choose a new location, we recommend planning 1 - 2 dress rehearsals in the new space so singers can become acquainted. When choosing a location keep in mind that you will need: a "green" room where singers can keep their belongings, a performance space where there's room for an audience, and a gathering space for socializing and snacks afterwards.

When selecting a performance date & time, we recommend choosing a time in the morning or afternoon, to avoid overall fatigue and the need to drive in the dark (the same reasons we recommend this time for rehearsals). Some choirs will use the exact same time and day of the week as rehearsals for the sake of consistency, while others opt for a weekend so more people are able to come.

Run of Show

Once your location and date are set, it's time to prepare the run of show! In addition to thinking about the order of songs, consider the need for breaks every few songs for your singers. At Giving Voice, we see the performance as an opportunity to show the community everything our singers can do and how much more they are than just their diagnosis, so we incorporate an element of story-telling into our concerts. In between every few songs, a singer stands up and shares their story. Audience members regularly tell us that this is their favorite part of the concert. They are able to see how impactful this program is and get to know the stories behind the faces.



Preparing Your Singers

The most important aspect to preparing your singers for the concert is to clearly communicate the timeline and logistics of the event as well as anything they need to do. Things to communicate include: What to wear, what to bring, when to show up, where to go, and the schedule of events (including warm-up, bathroom break, walking on stage, etc). We also recommend running through the concert performance in full as many times as possible before performance day.

Printing a Program

Next, it's time to create a concert program. We suggest printed programs, but there is always the option of creating a digital program that audience members see on their phones via a QR code. Programs bring a sense of professionalism to the event, which further supports the narrative you're trying to emphasize - that people living with dementia have something to offer their community.

Advertising Your Performance

Finally, you'll need to advertise your event. Advertising your concert is much like recruiting for your program. There is no one right way to do it and a lot of options. We recommend: Printing a few postcards singers can pass out to friends and family, sharing on social media sites and/or your website, posting flyers around town including the location in which the concert will be held, and advertising in local publications.

Day Of

We have found it best to have singers arrive about an hour before the performance to warm-up and run through songs for 30 minutes, while allowing the remaining time for singers to rest, have a snack, and use the restrooms. During the warm-ups, remember that many people may be nervous, so make sure that you are leading with joy and enthusiasm, and not fixating on a perfect performance. The best thing you can do right before a performance is make singers comfortable, confident, and excited to share all this hard work with family, friends, and community members.

Last... don't forget to smile. Singers often forget this along with the director, but as we all know, a smile goes a long way.

Congratulations! You have finished the *Implementation* step on the roadmap, meaning that your semester is complete!
There is one more crucially important step, on the roadmap, *Reflect*. So, let's get into it.



Reflect

This final step on the roadmap is brief, but an essential component to building a program that will be sustainable, effective (and fun!) for a long time to come. In *Reflect*, we will guide you through engaging in personal reflection and seeking feedback from singers, staff, and volunteers to make your program the best it can be.

personal reflection

Take the time to reflect on the experience of the previous semester. What were the most impactful moments? What was difficult? What was inspiring? When did your singers seem the happiest? How did the audience receive the performance? What is something new you'd like to try? Ask yourself any and all questions you can think of and don't be afraid of the answers. Remember that this is a learning process, a huge part of which is adapting your program to fit the needs of your singers which is an ever-changing component. So, be honest and be kind. When you feel you are done, we encourage you to end your personal reflection by listing all of the things you are proud of and any moment you can remember where someone smiled.

singer feedback

As we've said numerous times, your singers are the heart of this program, so their experience is the most important one. Therefore, receiving feedback from singers to improve the program for the following semester is a must. There are a couple of ways we recommend going about this. One suggestion is hosting a listening session the week after the concert. Often, choirs will utilize the same rehearsal space and time to keep it simple. It's also a nice way to wrap up the semester. During the listening session, we recommend having a volunteer or friend lead the session, so that singers feel comfortable sharing their true feelings.

You can also use surveys to collect feedback. This could be a printed survey or an online survey sent via email. Typically you'll get the best response rate if there's a place and time where everyone can do it together, so keep that in mind.

staff and volunteer feedback

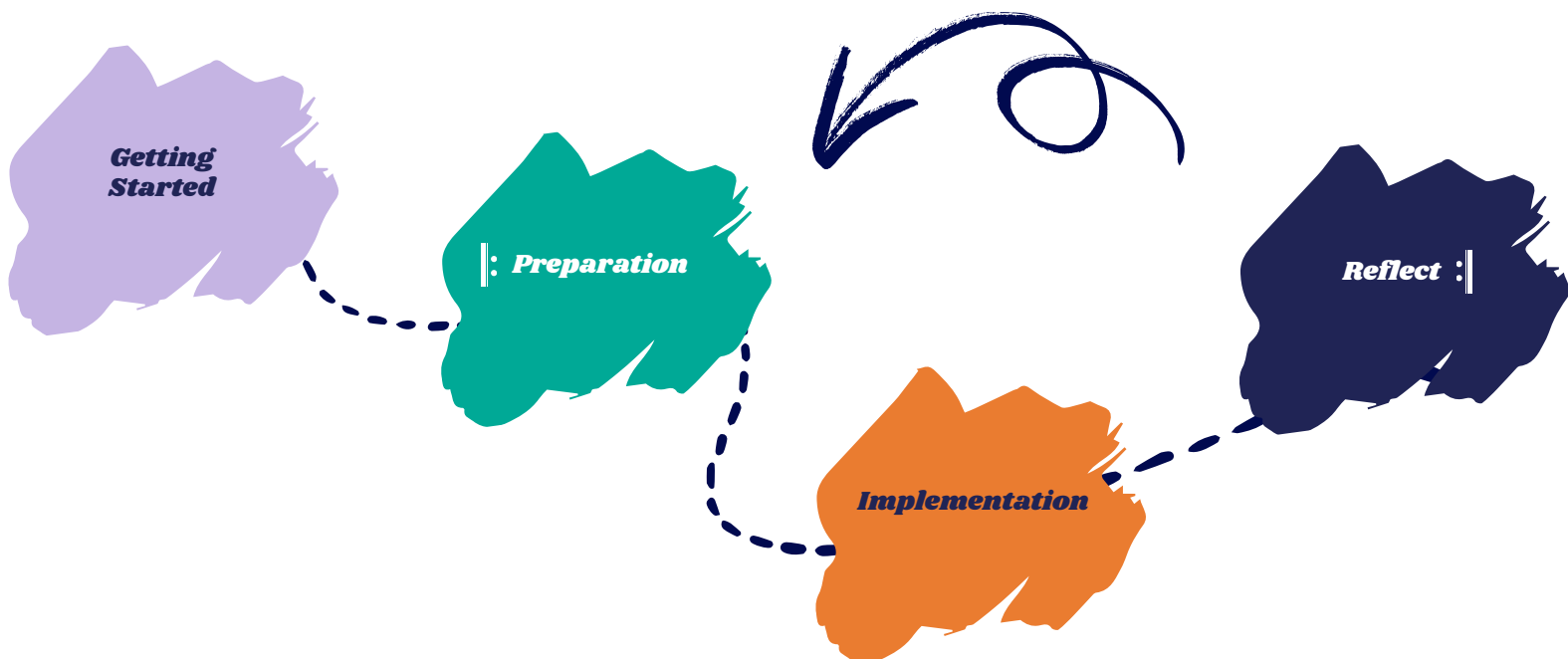
Next, you'll want to get feedback from your team and volunteers. These are the people that make the work happen, so considering their feedback to keep them happy and fulfilled is very important! As with receiving feedback from the singers, we suggest creating opportunities for team members and volunteers to be able to share feedback anonymously or to a third party facilitator. Again, a listening session or a survey are great options.

implement feedback and share

The final step of this process is reviewing all of the feedback you've collected and assessing what you can incorporate into the following semester. Of course, you can't make everybody happy, but focus on the common themes and go from there. Once you've reviewed the feedback and decided on a course of action, we strongly recommend communicating this with your singers and team. People appreciate knowing that their concerns were heard, and by keeping feedback a transparent process, it can create a strong sense of trust and value, motivating people to continue to engage in the program and tell all their friends about it.

rest & repeat

Congratulations! You did it! You have implemented an entire semester of a truly life-changing program for the people in the Alzheimer's community and your community at large. Take a moment to let that sink in, and treat yourself to something special. Once feedback sessions are done and you've created a plan to address any concerns, take some well-deserved time to rest. Because before you know it, you will be back in the *Preparation* step on the roadmap, getting ready for your next semester.





A Final Note

Once again, we just want to say that we are so excited, proud, and inspired that you have decided to pursue this program. You are truly making an incredible impact on your community. And we want to encourage you, that while it might be a lot of work at the beginning, eventually you will get into a flow, and as the program improves and your community sees the value of the program, soon you'll be expanding to two choirs instead of trying to fill one.

We want to remind you that we're here to support you on this journey in more ways than one, so the next step is to schedule your free 1:1 consultation with a Giving Voice team member. You don't need anything prepared for this meeting, it's simply an opportunity for us to hear your vision, where you're currently at in your process, and the challenges you're facing. If we're able to offer any support or connections, we will! At that time, if you are interested in additional training, we can also talk about customized training packages. Finally, make sure and join the Giving Voice Network! The Giving Voice Network is free to join and was created with the intention to connect everyone doing this work to be able to share knowledge, stories, ideas, and more. As a member of the network you'll also be invited to our annual Giving Voice Educational Conference, monthly network chats, and community conversations. To schedule your free consultation and/or join the Giving Voice Network, email Jackie, our Director of Education at jackie@givingvoicechorus.org. We look forward to connecting with you!

- the Giving Voice team

Director Tips & Tricks

To further support your success and impact as the director of this extremely special choir, we've compiled a list of tips & tricks from directors that have been doing this work for a long time.

1. Rehearse 4-6 songs each week as the chorus is learning.
2. Start the semester by learning the easier songs, moving towards the more difficult songs as the semester progresses (this helps memory of the difficult songs because it allows more exposure to the difficult songs right before the concert).
3. Sing through the songs in their entirety after working on specific sections.
4. Anticipate the passages where singers will be challenged and work on those challenges from the beginning.
5. Make sure your instructions are consistent from week to week.
6. Use a microphone so you can easily be heard. A headset mike will leave both hands free.
7. Establish a system of visual and physical cues that your singers clearly understand to remain focused on the music director.
8. Establish an adaptive conducting style (i.e. with index fingers pointing the rhythmic syllabic division) and use of some exaggerated facial features.
9. Identify one or two main ideas that the singers can associate with each song (i.e. rhythm, the story, or dynamics) and reinforce them each week.
10. Consider using simple movements for singers to do with particularly difficult songs to help them remember.
11. Encourage the use of the practice recordings.
12. Consider what mode of learning is most appropriate for each piece. For example, a gospel piece might be best learned by ear, rather than using printed music.
13. Be flexible!

Common Q & A

Is this program considered music therapy?

No, but music therapy principles and knowledge are often incorporated into the program to increase its impact. Music therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed (CBMT board-certified) professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. A good way to think of music therapy is to compare it to physical therapy. Physical therapists are trained and certified professionals who you see to achieve a very specific goal. Music therapists are also trained and certified professionals you see to achieve a specific goal, but instead of using an expertise of physical functions to do so, they use an expertise in music.

Due to the cognitive symptoms that come with dementia, does the chorus have to re-learn everything each week?

Like a rehearsal with any chorus, there is some repetition from week to week, but there is also a learning process that occurs over the entire span of weeks. Encouraging practicing at home with the practice recordings will significantly improve retention.

How is this different than a sing-along?

The key difference between a choir rehearsal and a sing-a-long is that in a choir rehearsal, a community of singers is working together to prepare pieces for a performance. During a sing-a-long, singers are typically singing through music one time with no pausing or going back to improve the performance.

How many singers should ideally be in a chorus?

As a general rule of thumb, we recommend a minimum of 25 singers in total, just to make everyone feel comfortable even if they don't consider themselves a singer. That being said, when first starting out, it's common to start with much fewer! Many choirs starting out will have 10 - 12 singers and that is perfectly ok. Give it time and word will spread.

Is Giving Voice available to advise us as we plan our chorus?

Yes! We offer one free 30-minute consultation with a Giving Voice staff member, and if you are interested, we can work with you to develop a customized training package for your program's needs! And don't forget to join the Giving Voice Network where you'll have access to ongoing resources and the wisdom and support of others doing the same thing.

Is there a way for us to communicate with other choruses like ours, to share experiences and exchange ideas?

Yes! The Giving Voice Network was designed to do just that. It is free to join and shares opportunities for network zoom chats, community conversations that focus on certain topic areas, information about our Giving Voice Educational Conference, and more.

**Can we recruit people living in skilled nursing facilities?**

Yes! While we encourage programs to not be *hosted* in skilled nursing facilities, all people living with dementia and their care partners are welcome in the choir.

Do I have to have an accompanist?

It's strongly recommended but nothing is required. With a lack of resources, some directors will also be the accompanist during rehearsals. It presents more challenges but is not impossible.

Are care partners required to participate in the program?

We strongly recommend it. It increases the safety and comfort of the person living with dementia during the rehearsal and creates a regular and reliable source of transportation. Additionally, there are so many benefits for the care partner to participate in this program! We hear time and time again from care partners that they get as much out of rehearsal as their loved one. Not only is it a joyful experience, but it offers an opportunity to connect with their loved one in a new way. Remember that when possible, each singer with dementia will be assigned a volunteer to allow the care partner to sing in their own section or simply just watch and enjoy the chorus experience.

Should I charge a program fee?

This is completely up to you and we've seen it done both ways. We usually charge because we feel that it creates a higher level of commitment to showing up to rehearsal each week, but some people don't charge at all because they don't want it to become a barrier to participation. You might also consider the option of charging a fee but offering scholarships.

How many volunteers singers do you recommend?

The ideal number of volunteers would be one for each person living with dementia. This ensures that everyone has a partner to assist without the choir becoming all volunteers.

Should I charge for the concert?

When it comes to charging a fee for your concert, choirs all do this a little differently. At Giving Voice we charge a nominal fee or use a "pay what you can" structure to bring that sense of professionalism to the event while still making it financially accessible. People who are able are usually gracious if they know the money is going directly toward the program and helping more singers to be able to participate.



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Sample Budget Categories

Income

Donations
Fundraising Events
Sponsorships
Registration Fees
Concert Ticket Sales
Grants (if applicable)

Expenses

Music Director Salary
Accompanist Salary
Program Manager Salary
Music
Supplies
Training Fees
Printing and Copying
Postage and Delivery
Rehearsal Rental Space
Rehearsal and Concert Snacks
Concert Venue