

# 2023-2026 Strategic Plan





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# Introduction

## Background & History

Under the direction of founder Donald Kendrick, Hamilton Children's Choir offered local youth the opportunity to sing high-quality music beginning in 1975. It has since evolved into six choral music programs that engage over 200 young singers from ages 18 months to 24 years. For 18 years, HCC had been under the artistic direction of the internationally acclaimed Zimfira Poloz, during which the choir had several international guest appearances, competitive successes, and high-profile invitations. In 2022, Melanie Tellez replaced Zimfira as Artistic Director, and under her innovative and passionate leadership, along with her team of artistic staff, Hamilton Children's Choir remains dedicated to exploring fresh approaches to choral music that reduce barriers, strengthen the choral artform and demonstrate music integrity as we move toward our next important milestone - our 50th anniversary, in 2025.

The HCC organization is governed by a board of twelve directors, is led artistically by the Artistic Director who manages sixteen artistic staff, consisting of conductors, collaborative musicians and rehearsal assistants, and the Executive Director and four administrative staff who manage the organization.

## Programming

Hamilton Children's Choir is a community-based program that prides itself with six different choral programs that offer instruction and performance from first exposure to choral music to curated, concert performances and touring opportunities. The level at which a chorister participates is based on their overall ability which is demonstrated during their vocal assessment and combined with other factors such as their musical experience, knowledge, and maturity. Chorister placement is at the discretion of the Artistic Director.

### **Kolibro (Hummingbird) 15 months to 6 years**

An introductory choral program for very young singers age 18 months to 6 years that focuses on tone matching, hand signs, rhythmic puzzles, listening games, creativity and singing games that are simple and fun. Rehearsals are held weekly and there is a performance at the end of the year. No vocal assessment is required.

Rehearsals: 45 mins - weekly  
Performances: 1 per season



### **Komenci (Begin) 6 to 8 years**

Once youngsters can read, they are ready to truly “begin” their musical journey with HCC. This primary choir offers a child's first exposure to choral music and teaches the foundations of music theory and choral singing while having fun. Singers are introduced to basic concepts of vocal production, sight singing, ear training and theory. Through the use of folk songs, musical games, unison and 2-part songs, young singers will develop an understanding of their individual musical and vocal abilities, and how to use these skills in a choral context. All program candidates require a vocal assessment.

**Rehearsals:** One rehearsal per week

**Choir Retreats:** 2 retreats per season, 2 hours in length

**Performances:** 2 per season

### **Esplori (Explore) 8 to 11 years**

After choristers are confident in matching pitches and holding their own part, they can use their skills to “explore” more music and dive deeper into more challenging two and three-part music, and more advanced music theory. Singing in Esplori allows choristers to enhance concepts of vocal production, sight singing, ear training and theory. This choir performs up to four times per season and will enjoy 2 choir retreats during the choir season. Choristers also “explore” through participation in a weekend multi-junior-choir workshop, where they can hear other choirs, build friendships, and work with guest conductors. All program candidates require a vocal assessment.

**Rehearsals:** One rehearsal per week

**Choral Retreats:** 2 choir retreats per season, 3 hours in length

**Performances:** maximum 4 per season

### **Esprimas (Express) 10 to 14 years**

When choristers can confidently sing in two and three parts, and when they are ready for two rehearsals per week, they can now place more attention on how to “express” themselves through more mature emotions and more complex musical themes. These choristers, approximately age 10 to 14 yrs, must attend a season kick-off camp in August, where they grow as a team and focus on individual skill development. During the season, Esprimas also participates in a weekend multi-choir workshop, and adds a touring component to prepare singers for the highly demanding schedule of Illumini. All program candidates require a vocal assessment.

**Rehearsals:** Two rehearsals per week

**Choral Festival:** Junior Treble Festival each season

**Choir Camp:** five full days of rehearsals & music activities

**Performances:** maximum 6 per season



### **Ilumini (Brighten) 12 to 18 years**

For artistically and musically experienced singers, Ilumini forms the touring and recording core of the HCC choral program. Singers are selected for these choirs on the basis of their commitment to the art of choral music and their desire to share their talents with audiences at home and around the world. Mandatory attendance is required at an annual choir camp. A commitment to participate in numerous performance opportunities in the community is required as well as touring locally, nationally or internationally each year.

**Rehearsals:** Two rehearsals per week

**Choral Festival:** Senior Treble Festival

**Performances:** maximum 8 per season

**Choir Camp:** five days of rehearsals & music activities held overnight

**Tour:** one per season

### **Profunda (Deep) 14 to 24 years**

Profunda is a series of 8-week choral projects culminating in a performance with an established SATB choir. This is a project program for changed voices that allows singers to join HCC's changed voice cohort alongside larger SATB ensembles. Individuals can sing tenor, baritone, or bass... or something slightly in between!

**Rehearsals:** 4 rehearsals with just Profunda, 4 with the full performing ensemble and conductor.

Project Performances with McMaster University Choir, Bach Elgar Choir, other local choruses



## Planning Process

The strategic planning process unfolded over a 9-month period, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and facilitated by consultant Jenny Ginder of Ginder Consulting.

Following project start-up and a review of all background documents, the consultant undertook case study research into three choirs to learn from their varied experiences. Online research was supplemented by an interview with the leadership of each organization. The three choirs selected by the Artistic Director for this research were Leioa Kantika Korala (Spain); Vancouver Youth Choir (Vancouver) and Young People's Chorus of New York City (New York).

The findings provided insight into the key characteristics of each choir, in addition to some of their successes and challenges. The findings were compiled into a Comparative Research Report that helped frame the subsequent HCC parent and chorister consultation process and discussion topics.

Consultation then commenced with two electronic surveys, one for parents/guardians and a second for choristers. The survey questions explored themes raised during the comparative research plus those identified by HCC senior management. The survey results led to a decision to host two virtual roundtable discussions with parents/guardians, and one in-person roundtable discussion with Illumini choristers to delve deeper into these themes. A written report capturing the findings from the surveys and roundtables was prepared.

The two research reports were shared with the full Board of Directors and staff as the foundation for discussion during the Strategic Planning Retreats.

The Board and staff participated in two in-person retreats, each lasting approximately 6 hours, undertaken one week apart. At the retreats, participants reviewed the research material and discussed, debated, and reached a consensus on key elements of the Strategic Plan. Using the Consensus Workshop methodology, participants identified their shared vision for HCC's future, the obstacles that would block their ability to realize the vision and the strategies to overcome these obstacles. Retreat participants also considered the core elements of their mission (what they do, for whom, and why) and the values that drive their decision-making. Reports from each retreat were prepared by the consultant. The consultant also hosted four supplementary virtual discussions with members of the Board and staff who were unable to attend the retreats.

After the retreats, a Working Group was struck, comprising two Board members and three staff. The Working Group met regularly with the consultant to shape and then draft this Strategic Plan. The Plan was then reviewed and approved by the full Board of Directors on April 3, 2023.



## Plan Development

This Strategic Plan is the result of extensive deliberation, as described above. Building upon the issues and ideas generated through research and the Board/staff retreats, the Working Group prepared a new Mission Statement and set of Values that reflect HCC in 2023 and that will guide the organization in the years ahead. The plan also includes four new Strategic Directions, supported by objectives, actions and timelines.

The four Strategic Directions are all of equal importance and will be undertaken concurrently.

- Purposeful artistic programming
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Intentional, accessible community engagement
- Organizational structures and capacity

## Mission Statement

Hamilton Children's Choir is committed to providing children and youth with rich musical education and performance opportunities, to create a sense of belonging, nurture personal growth, and experience the benefits of community.

## Values

### Equity

We strive towards becoming an equitable community and mitigating barriers to participation.

### Growth

We care about the child and their development, and believe music can be a meaningful way to foster growth.

### Artistic Integrity

We seek to inspire and motivate our singers to grow their musicianship through literacy and intentional practice, and challenge any self-limiting beliefs.

### Creativity

We are committed to being ever-evolving, and to uncovering new voices, new ideas, and new ways to present choral music.



### Collaboration

We believe that through collaboration we can foster a sense of belonging and create a more thriving and connected community.

### Diversity

Hamilton is diverse and we actively strive to be its reflection, enabling our collective community to be more empowered.

## Strategic Directions

### Goal A: Purposeful Artistic Programming

After 19 years of consecutive artistic leadership, HCC acquired a new Artistic Director in July 2022 to lead the organization artistically into its 50th anniversary year (2025) and beyond. At the same time, HCC has been in rebuilding mode after the COVID-19 pandemic. With a new Artistic Director in place and additional artistic staff added, HCC is ready to re-examine how its program offerings can be improved.

Based on the feedback obtained through parent/chorister surveys, parent/chorister roundtable discussions and retreat sessions, both in-person and virtually, HCC must consider new and more balanced alternatives to programs so they can better meet the needs of our young people and families who have been impacted greatly by the pandemic.

Using an EDI lens will be required to ensure more diverse music repertoire selection and programming introduced will be equally accessible for any child while ensuring all artistic programming achieves the music-making integrity it is renowned for.



Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Widen our impact through inclusive and strategic artistic programming	Introduce new programs to meet different levels of commitment	✓	✓	✓		AD/Artistic Committee
	Explore multiple locations and formats outside of our full-year enrolled programming	✓	✓			AD/Artistic Committee
	Hire guest artists and collaborate with others who can deepen the integrity of our work through diverse expertise; Engage with new and under-represented guests rather than reverting to only well-known artists.	✓	✓	✓	✓	AD
	Learn and perform more culturally diverse repertoire at all levels of program	✓	✓	✓	✓	AD
Prioritize music-making integrity	Review and adjust music theory program resources and structure to ensure integrating theory into regular practice in addition to utilizing written methods of demonstration		✓	✓		AD/Music Theory Program Team
	Develop (and continue to evolve) progressive warm-up sequences that integrate theory and clarify expectations for each ensemble		✓		✓	AD
	Provide 3 (paid) PD days for artistic staff to increase shared knowledge and confidence in delivering HCC curriculum		✓	✓	✓	AD (implementation) /ED (budgeting)
	Supplement existing theory content to ensure greater representation of repertoire and theory beyond the Western canon.			✓		AD/Music Theory Program Team





Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Increase transparency and reduce barriers to entry	Identify the awareness level of the financial assistance (FA) program and include a strategy in the communication plan for improvement.		✓			ED & Marketing Associate
	Evaluate the FA program to determine any perceived barriers to entry and make any necessary adjustments.		✓			ED
	Design a system that obtains feedback to better understand reasons for declining opportunities or program exits (choristers, volunteers, staff).		✓			ED/Marketing Associate/ Community Engagement Committee



## Goal B: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Taking a stand on denouncing racism, intolerance, and exclusion is not enough. In 2023, HCC embarked on the start of an EDI training and education effort with the understanding that it is just a start. There is still much work to do. Since the HCC leadership and staff are predominantly white, there needs to be a more thoughtful effort of reviewing all organizational elements using an EDI lens to identify better methods/approaches that will help create trust that HCC is a safe, equitable and inclusive organization that opens its doors to underserved and marginalized communities..

Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Create an organizational structure through which EDI can be consistently examined and improved.	Develop an organization EDI strategic plan which includes timelines, actionable steps, outcomes and deliverables; includes strategic plan elements where appropriate.	✓	✓	✓		ED/AD
	Identify an EDI staff and board lead/committee to ensure collective commitment		✓			ED/Board Chair
	Update organizational practices to align with EDI strategy			✓		ED/AD
Develop an inclusive mindset/culture (organization) to ensure sustainable delivery and organizational commitment to EDI practices	Provide EDI training & group discussions for board and staff to collectively build EDI knowledge and understanding		✓	✓	✓	ED & Programming Manager/HR Committee
	Create EDI core competencies to address organizational biases		✓			ED & Programming Manager/HR Committee
	Incentivize EDI for employees, board members, and program members (reward structures)			✓	✓	ED & Programming Manager/HR Committee
	Develop structures/policies to address complaints/EDI concerns.		✓	✓		ED & Programming Manager/HR Committee



Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Grow community trust in EDI organizational commitment	Communicate our commitment to equity to stakeholders			✓	✓	ED/Marketing Associate
	Track and communicate intentional application of EDI throughout the organization			✓	✓	ED/Program Manager /HR Committee /Marketing Associate

## Goal C: Intentional, Accessible Community Engagement

With the combination of limited human resources and membership growth prior to COVID, the ability to implement internal engagement opportunities became a challenge (cost, time, etc.) That reduced sense of community even worsened with the pandemic. There are signs as we experience post-Covid there is an increased level of interest by others to engage more on a personal level with all aspects of HCC. As an organization, a greater cultivation of community partnerships and connections with others will be an important element to the rebuilding of the organization.

Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Improve engagement with parents/guardians	Develop an internal community engagement strategy that purposely engages singers, parents, volunteers and staff		✓			ED/Marketing Associate/ Community Engagement Committee
	Schedule intentional social gatherings/events to strengthen organizational community & culture (family picnics, invite parents to sing one song during concert)		✓	✓	✓	ED/AD/ Programming Manager/ Marketing Associate/ Community Engagement Committee
	Research and implement better communication system that allows for direct dialogue between parents/guardians (i.e. ride-sharing)		✓	✓		ED/Program Manager

Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Invest in greater community engagement to build organization awareness/foster support.	Develop a community engagement strategy that advances HCC commitment to EDI and builds greater community awareness (volunteer for music initiatives, new/different music collaborative partnerships, community performances, etc.)		✓	✓	✓	ED/Marketing Associate/ Community Engagement Committee
	Create new opportunities that engage HCC Alumni with 50th Anniversary in mind.	✓	✓	✓	ED/Marketing Associate/50th Anniversary Committee	

## Goal D: Organizational Structures and Capacity

Due to limited human resources, HCC is currently struggling with meeting existing programming demands and anticipates this challenge to grow as the organization rebuilds itself as a result of the pandemic. During the strategic planning process key areas needing improvement were identified such as clarity of staffing roles & responsibilities, staff communications, new or enhanced programming decision-making processes, volunteer capacity, and administrative vs. artistic staff work collaborations.

HCC has historically approached planning for the administrative work by responding to the artistic planning & program needs outlined on a seasonal basis and, in some cases, in response to an ad hoc perceived organizational need. This has enabled a lack of clarity about portfolios and assignments in regards to artistic plans and created a false sense of administrative capacity to support programming plans.

This is an opportune moment to re-evaluate how HCC operates as a whole, identify areas for improvement and implement those changes that will have a positive impact on its future sustainability.



Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Improve organizational policies, processes, roles and expectations	Conduct an organization structure audit	✓				ED/AD/Consultant
	Review and update job descriptions with clearly outlined expectations		✓			ED/AD
	Develop an HCC social calendar and events to help improve staff (board, artistic, admin) engagement and strengthen working relationships	✓				ED/AD/Community Engagement Committee
	Produce an organizational policy & procedure manual		✓	✓	✓	ED/AD/ Program Manager
	Conduct a review of the existing organizational planning process and update the overall process to improve plan implementation.	✓				ED/AD/Staff
	Create Executive Director retirement succession plan		✓			Board/ HR Committee
Strengthen governance	Decide on a governance model i.e. working vs. strategic board vs. hybrid that is a fit		✓			Board
	Actively recruit more diverse membership	✓	✓	✓	✓	ED/AD/HR Committee
	Evaluate and re-configure board working committee structure to best support the organization	✓	✓			Governance Committee

Objective	Action	2023	2024	2025	2026	Responsibility
Optimize human resources	Create and implement an orientation system for new staff, board and volunteers to build better organizational understanding		✓			ED/AD/HR Committee
	Conduct an assessment of volunteer recruitment and determine new methods or opportunities to engage volunteers			✓		ED/Program Manager/HR Committee
	Identify new methods to improve staff work autonomy (assignment of work-specific budgets)		✓	✓		ED
	Determine new HR strategies to retain quality staff		✓			ED/HR Committee
Strengthen financial sustainability	Identify new revenue generating opportunities (public camps or special events)		✓	✓	✓	ED/Marketing & Fundraising Committee
	Research and implement new fund development strategies to support organizational growth plans	✓	✓	✓		ED/Marketing & Fundraising Committee
	Develop new methods that cultivate new donors and grow existing donor contributions	✓	✓	✓		ED/Marketing & Fundraising Committee
Strengthen NPO knowledge on sustainable structures and processes	Learn more about current NPO practices that would benefit HCC operationally & implement operational changes accordingly.		✓	✓	✓	ED/Governance Committee



