



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guide for the Group Singing Sector

Choirs and singing groups can be inclusive and diverse, and this can be the impulse to achieve excellence within groups and society. We, at Sing Ireland, believe that in leading by example we can begin to create positive change in the inclusivity and diversity of choirs in Ireland.

This guide is not exhaustive and each singing group must take responsibility for its own legal duty to ensure that discrimination does not take place in their groups. Sing Ireland has no jurisdiction over the operations and governance of singing groups nationally and so cannot be held liable for any actions undertaken that are in breach of any discrimination or other laws.

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Introduction

This Guide has been prepared by Sing Ireland to help singing groups and choirs in Ireland to recognise discrimination and to encourage inclusivity and diversity. A large part of being more inclusive and promoting diversity is to understand our own unconscious biases. By understanding our own biases, we can then work to create inclusive communities and environments. Below there is a bias test that has been developed by Harvard, to aid individuals with understanding their own unconscious biases. The criteria you'll find within the link are extensive, and should provide a test for any ground you have in mind. (Implicit Association can be seen as identical to Unconscious Bias for the purpose of these tests). It's important to note that these tests aren't definitive, and anyone that is unprepared to encounter interpretations that they may find objectionable are asked not to proceed with the tests.

External links:

Harvard's Implicit Association Test - <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Ways to find and fix unconscious bias - <https://www.boyden.com/media/checking-your-blind-spot-ways-to-find-and-fix-unconscious-bias-7627148/index.html>

5 tips to reduce unconscious workplace bias - <https://blog.iii.ie/inside-track/5-ways-to-reduce-unconscious-bias-in-the-workplace>

This document will refer to the equity of individuals. This differs from providing equality in organisations and society. Equity recognises the discrimination individuals and communities have experienced. It strives to provide support and resources to those that have experienced exclusion or discrimination, so that everyone can participate in society to the same level. By addressing equity rather than equality, Sing Ireland is hoping to develop the inclusivity of group singing and choral singing in Ireland. This document will use examples to explain how equity can be provided to those that have experienced discrimination or exclusion.

Finally, Sing Ireland will use the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals** to guarantee that developments are lasting. Goals 3, 5, and 10 of the *Sustainable Development Goals* will be a particular focus for us as we grow and develop. These are: 3. Good Health and Well-Being, 5. Gender Equality, 10. Reduced Inequalities.

Grounds for Discrimination

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded due to their gender or sexual orientation. This applies to all sexual orientations or gender identities. Some possible gender identities are female, male, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, pangender, and all, none, or a combination of these. There are many more gender identities than listed here.

It's customary for choirs to use binary (male or female) language and terminology. We would urge leaders of singing groups to be wary of how this language can make a person who does not identify as either male or female feel ostracised within the group. Concert dress and ensemble type may also be barriers that are experienced by individuals. **'7 tips to make your choir inclusive of gender diversity'** below is particularly helpful in understanding the barriers that are in existence for some people, and how we can work collectively to remove them.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Use non-gendered language when addressing sections of the choir – e.g., “Sopranos and Altos” instead of “Women”. Consider the structure of the ensemble as well; labelling a choir by voice-type rather than gender can be more inclusive.
2. Show your support to LGBTQ+ communities to encourage their participation. Language in your public content and using safe space stickers can be positive signs and could welcome individuals from the LGBTQ+ community.

External links:

Tips on making choirs gender inclusive - <https://resources.encoretours.com/backstage-blog/7-tips-to-make-your-choir-inclusive-of-gender-diversity/>

Glossary of possible gender terms - <https://www.healthline.com/health/different-genders#a-d>

Lgbt.ie trans and gender expression - <https://lgbt.ie/get-information/trans-and-gender-expression/>

A website providing discussion and resources surrounding LGBTQ+ issues in choral music - <http://www.queeringchoir.com/>

Race

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded due to their race. A race can be described as a grouping of humans based on shared physical or social qualities, generally viewed as distinct by society. Modern science regards race as a social construct; an identity which is assigned based on rules made by society. While partially based on physical similarities within groups, race does not have an inherent physical or biological meaning.

It is important to give each race an equitable opportunity to participate in choral activities. An example of breaking down racial barriers could be providing language assistance to non-native English speakers in a safe and welcoming space, so that they can enjoy their choral experience as much as a native English speaker.

It is also important to note that “colour-blind” or “colour-blindness” is not a term that should be used when discussing approaches towards racial inclusivity. This term ignores the inequity experienced by many racial groups. Simply put, in the colour-blind article linked below, “Colorblindness (*sic*) denies the lived experiences of other people.” By acknowledging the diverse experiences experienced by all, we can then work towards creating a more inclusive community.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Become aware of structural and unconscious racism. This can help an ensemble to work towards removing racial barriers.
2. Seek to understand the social structures of different racial groups, and use that to inform your choir’s inclusivity.

External inks:

Colour-blindness - <https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/relationships-love/a32824297/color-blind-myth-racism/>

Structural racism and unconscious biases surrounding racism -

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/30/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-white-people-about-race>

Member of the Traveller community

The Irish Traveller community is a recognised indigenous ethnic group of Ireland. Members of the Traveller community must not be excluded or discriminated against.

With this comes the responsibility to all service providers to provide services suitable and sympathetic to the lifestyle and culture of the Traveller community.

An example of this would be being sympathetic to the nomadic lifestyle of Travellers, and understanding that commitments and expectations made of certain sectors of society can't be made equally to the Irish Traveller community.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Understand the nomadic obligations of the Traveller community and consider how this would affect an individual's participation within an ensemble.
2. Consider how the ensemble could better engage with the Traveller community, especially in the local area.

External links:

The Irish Traveller Movement - <https://itmtrav.ie/what-is-itm/irish-travellers/>

HSE's Interculture Guide -

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/socialinclusion/interculturalguide/traveller/traveller.pdf>

The National Geographic's four year photographic project on Irish Travellers -

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/article/irish-travellers-uphold-the-traditions-of-a-bygone-world>

Disability

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded because of any disability they may have, both visible and invisible. Around 10% of the Irish population have some form of disabling condition, and to make sure they are included in community activities we need to be prepared to provide the appropriate facilities and support. Simple factors such as the rehearsal venue being wheelchair accessible and having disabled toilet facilities can be the difference between someone living with a disability being a member of a choir or not.

Organisers of singing groups and choirs should take the initiative to create inclusive environments for people with disabilities. This means ensuring that there are facilities and supports in place before a person with a disability joins a group. Demonstrating that you have supports in place can be encouraging, and may lead to more participation from individuals who live with disabilities.

Not all disabilities are visible, therefore language and actions should always be inspected, as to not discriminate against an individual that may have an invisible disability.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Ensure that disabled facilities are available at rehearsal and performance spaces. This includes, but is not exclusive too, ensuring that the venue is wheelchair accessible and that there is an accessible toilet.
2. Being prepared to provide facilities and safe spaces for anyone with intellectual or sensory disabilities.
3. Being conscious of invisible disabilities and addressing language and actions so not to exclude or discriminate against anyone.

External links:

6 things to be more disability inclusive - <https://shegeekout.com/six-things-you-can-do-today-to-be-more-disability-inclusive/>

The National Disability Authority of Ireland - <http://nda.ie/about-us/>

The Disability Federation of Ireland - <https://www.disability-federation.ie/>

Age

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded due to their age. Age discrimination can occur at any age and is not exclusive to certain age categories. Sing Ireland is already working hard to provide age appropriate choral experiences for all. Some of these include the Irish Youth Training Choir, the Irish Youth Choir, and Ageing Voices.

It's important that there is an equal opportunity for all ages to participate in choral singing in Ireland. Choral and singing activities can often be focused on children and young people. Sing Ireland would like to encourage more opportunities for people in other age groups to enjoy the health enhancing benefits of choirs and groups singing.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Arranging age-appropriate choral experiences; consider how you can engage with harder to reach age groups.
2. Being conscious of selecting age appropriate repertoire and of arranging age appropriate activities.

External links:

Sing Ireland's Ageing Voices Resources and Workshops -

<https://www.singireland.ie/news/ageing-voices-resources-workshops>

Creative Aging International - <http://www.creativeageinginternational.com/>

Tackling ageism in the workplace - <https://www.irishtimes.com/special-reports/diversity-inclusion/tackling-ageism-in-the-workplace-1.4051106>

Religion

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded due to their religion. The last census showed that Ireland's religious tapestry has never been more diverse, with more people than ever either being of non-christian religions or not being religious.

Being inclusive to all religions means being sympathetic to all the commitments religions require of believers. Some individuals may have to fast or abstain from certain foods. Some activities or language may be considered blasphemous. Religious clothing must also be respected and considered when arranging the concert dress of a choir.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Being aware of religious holidays when scheduling rehearsals and concerts.
2. Respecting all religious clothing.
3. Ensuring that the repertoire chosen isn't discriminatory against any religion.

External links:

A guide to a few of the religions practiced - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>

A guide to Christian denominations - <https://www.pcabookstore.com/samples/13393.pdf>

A guide to religious clothing - <https://www.patheos.com/galleries/religious-clothing-explained?p=1>

Family Status

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded due to their family status. Family status is described as being in a parent/child relationship, but does not limit itself to biological or adoptive parents of children under the age of 18. Individuals that are a resident primary carer or parents of a person with a disability are also considered to have family status. Discriminating against these individuals due to the fact that they have family status is exclusionary.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Being compassionate to the demands of being a parent/guardian/carer, and creating opportunities for these individuals to participate in choral singing.

External links:

Explanation and example of 'main carer' - <https://www.ihrec.ie/your-rights/i-have-an-issue-at-work/what-categories-of-people-are-covered-by-the-employment-equality-acts/explanation-of-main-carer/>

Marital Status

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded due to their marital status. Marital status can mean being in a marriage or civil relationship recognised by the State or not. Someone being excluded due to marital status could be made to feel different or less important than other people due to their marital status. A common example would be when single women persistently get asked if they are planning on getting married. The marital status of an individual shouldn't make an individual feel uncomfortable or judged. It's also important to remember that marital status isn't exclusive to being between men and women.

Some Suggested Actions

1. Being sensitive to an individuals' marital status and making sure that everyone from all kinds of marital status' are included and welcomed.

External links:

Explaining Marriage and Civil Partnership Discrimination -

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/marriage-and-civil-partnership-discrimination>

Rights of same-sex couples in Ireland-

https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/cohabiting_couples/rights_of_same_sex_couples.html

Socio-economic status

Individuals must not be discriminated against or excluded due to their socio-economic status. Sing Ireland is developing programmes and projects which would lead to choral participation being an option to all. To make this a reality, we have to consider the socio-economic status of individuals, and how this affects their ability to participate with singing groups and choirs in Ireland. Individuals that face financial difficulties may have the opportunity to participate in group singing removed as an option due to costs that they can't afford. Individuals that have lower socio-economic status may feel unwelcome to be a member of a choir that have more members with higher socio-economic status. Making everyone from every socio-economic group feel welcome is vital to be an inclusive and diverse group.

Some Suggested **Actions**

1. Ensuring that there are no financial barriers in place which would exclude some members of society from being able to participate.
2. Being compassionate to the individual circumstances of participants.
3. Ensuring that no one is excluded from social activities of the choir due to their socio-economic status.

External links:

Awareness of Socio-economic Diversity -

<https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/SocioeconomicDiversityAwareness>

Actions

As part of Sing Ireland's Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Policy, actions have been formed to guide the next steps of developing the inclusion and diversity in choirs and singing groups in Ireland. These actions are positive steps that we and our members can take to enhance the choir and singing group sector in Ireland through inclusivity and diversity. Some of the actions are:

1. Create opportunities for marginalised communities in Ireland to engage and experience choral music through performance opportunities or attending a performance by your group.
2. Create opportunities for extreme age demographics to engage with choir music; through attending performances or participating in choral activities.
3. Diversify the choral repertoire used and endeavour to include works by composers from backgrounds that often face discrimination.
4. Analyse the organisational structure of the group, and pinpoint opportunities to enable and encourage diversity within the choir or singing group.

With these actions Sing Ireland hope to be able to be more Inclusive and Diversify the choral and group singing sector in Ireland.

Incident pathways

When an incident of exclusion or discrimination occurs here are some steps a choir or singing group should take.

Organisational Investigation –

1. Contact the party that made the complaint. Find out if they want to make a formal written complaint. Set out a response timeline – 3-10 days is good practice.

2. If a formal complaint is being made investigate the complaint. Request a response or a submission from the party who the allegation refers to.
3. Convene a disciplinary panel (which includes an external panel member) to examine the submissions and all available evidence connected to the incident.
4. Having examined submissions/evidence, decide on the appropriate course of action.
5. Record all outcomes of steps 1-4 as they occur.
6. Take written reports of the panel's examination, stating clearly the actions it has taken and the reported complaint. Keep this written report as a record.

Civic Investigation – Report to statutory agency, Gardaí or other statutory agency.

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