



## *Choral participation and activity in Ontario*

Summary of findings from research for Choirs Ontario and Choral  
Canada in 2017



This report summarizes the Ontario findings from three major research projects completed in 2017 commissioned by Choral Canada:

- 1) a public survey of choral singing and attendance;
- 2) a count of choirs; and
- 3) a detailed survey of choirs.

Research methods are outlined further in each section of this report.

A “choir” was defined throughout the research as a “choir, chorus or singing group of 8 people or more”.

*Researched and written by Kelly Hill*

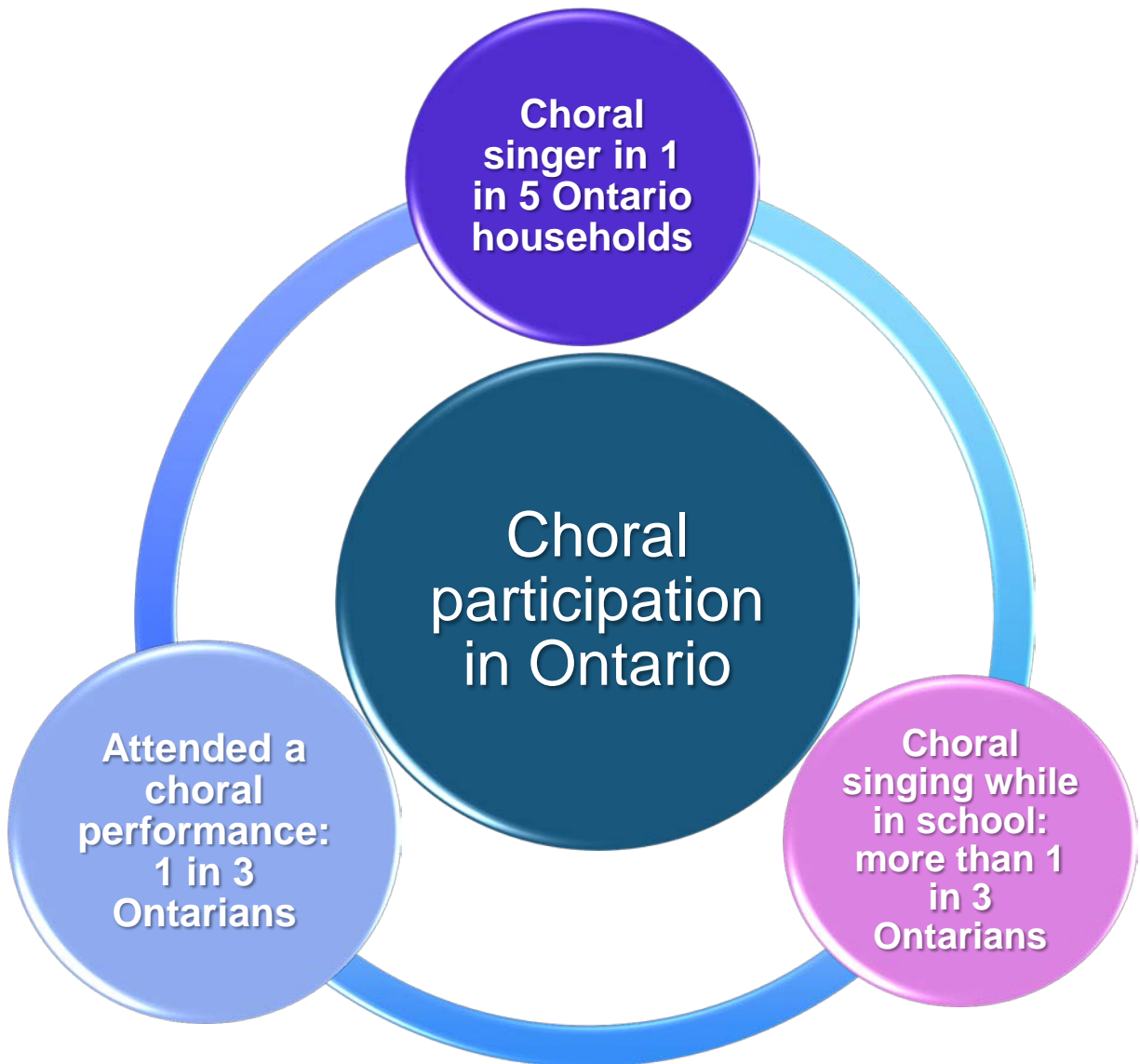


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## Choral singing and attendance in Ontario

Key research findings about choral singing and attendance in Ontario are highlighted in the graphic below, based on a public survey of 820 Ontarians.



## 1.6 million Ontarians sing in choirs

- 1.6 million Ontario residents sang in a choir in 2016.
- This represents 12% of the total provincial population (13.5 million: 2016 census).
- The 1.6 million choral singers would constitute the second largest city in the province, behind only Toronto (and almost twice the population of Ottawa).

### Children (under 18):

- There are about 740,000 Ontario children who sing in choirs.
- More than one in every 4 Ontario children sings in a choir (28%).

### Adults (18 or older):

- About 830,000 Ontario adults sing in a choir.
- About one in every 12 adults sings in a choir (8% of all adults).

### National data:

- 10% of Canadians sang in a choir in 2016 (3.5 million people).
- Children: 23% of Canadians under 18 sang in a choir.
- Adults: 7% of all Canadian adults sang in a choir.

*Source: Survey of 820 Ontarians designed by Hill Strategies Research and conducted by Innovative Research for Choral Canada in January 2017 (part of a survey of 2,000 Canadians).*

*Question: During the past 12 months, which members of your household, if any, sang in a choir, chorus or singing group of 8 people or more?*

## Over 3.5 million Ontario adults attend choral performances

- More than 3.5 million Ontario residents 18 or older attended a choral performance in 2016.
  - This equals 33% of the adult population (i.e., 1 in 3 Ontarians).



33% OF ADULTS IN  
ONTARIO ATTENDED A  
CHORAL PERFORMANCE  
IN 2016.

### National data:

- 28% of Canadian adults attended a choral performance in 2016 (7.8 million people).

*Source: Survey of 820 Ontarians designed by Hill Strategies Research and conducted by Innovative Research for Choral Canada in January 2017 (part of a survey of 2,000 Canadians).*

*Question: During the past 12 months, did you attend a performance by a choir, chorus or singing group of 8 people or more?*

## More than 1 in 3 Ontarians sang in a choir during their school days

- 4.1 million Ontarians 18 or older sang in a choir or other singing group when in elementary or high school.
  - This equals 38% of the adult population (i.e., more than 1 in 3 Ontarians).

### National data:

- 35% of Canadian adults sang in a choir during their school days (9.7 million people).

*Source: Survey of 820 Ontarians designed by Hill Strategies Research and conducted by Innovative Research for Choral Canada in January 2017 (part of a survey of 2,000 Canadians).*

*Question: When you were in elementary, middle/junior, or high school, did you participate in any of the following music activities? [Choir or other singing group]*

## Almost 11,000 choirs in Ontario

Based on a random sampling of churches and schools as well as a custom survey of choral organizations, it is estimated that there are 10,900 choirs in Ontario. Church choirs are most common (7,300), followed by school choirs (3,000) and approximately 600 other choirs (community-based, semi-professional, or professional).

Total # choirs	10,900	100%
Church choirs	7,300	67%
School choirs	3,000	28%
Community and other choirs	600	6%

Sources: *Random sample of churches and schools designed by Hill Strategies Research and implemented by volunteers in late 2016 and early 2017; Survey of choral organizations in 2017.*

The random sampling of churches and schools found that 57% of Christian churches and 43% of schools (at the elementary, middle, or secondary levels) in Ontario have at least one choir.

Note: *In the above table:*

- *Church = religious institutions within the Christian faith*
- *School = elementary, middle, and secondary schools*
- *Community and other = choirs outside of churches and schools (includes choirs in religious organizations outside of the Christian faith and in post-secondary institutions, as well as any choirs where some or all choristers are paid)*

Detailed methods:

- *Volunteers contacted a random sample of 148 schools and 232 churches in Ontario.*
- *The total number of school and church choirs was estimated based on the information from these calls.*
- *Existing lists of choral organizations (outside of churches and schools) were collected, largely from provincial choral associations.*
- *A survey of Canadian choirs was also conducted (with 164 Ontario choral organizations responding).*
- *The choir lists and survey list were de-duplicated to estimate the number of community and professional choral organizations.*
- *Some choral organizations contain many choirs, and a multi-choir count was developed from the survey data.*
- *The above estimates were added to create the estimate of the total number of choirs.*
- *The random surveys of schools and churches should provide very reliable estimates of choirs in these institutions. The estimate of community choirs is likely low, as no estimate was made of the number of community choirs that did not respond to the survey of choral organizations.*

**Over 300 Ontario-based choirs, choruses, and singing groups  
(and almost 13,000 singers) were represented  
in a national survey of choral organizations**

*The remainder of this report summarizes key statistics from a detailed survey of choirs.*

A total of 164 Ontario-based choral organizations representing 305 choirs, choruses, and singing groups (with 12,600 singers) provided complete (or reasonably complete) responses to a detailed online survey in December 2016 and January 2017.

***A range of choirs responded to the survey***

Choral organizations from 62 Ontario communities responded to the survey:

Alliston	Hamilton	Port Perry
Aurora	Holland Landing	Renfrew
Ayr	Kanata	Richmond Hill
Barrie	Kenora	Sarnia
Belleville	Kingston	Saugeen Shores
Brampton	Kitchener	Simcoe
Brantford	Leamington	St. Catharines
Cambridge	London	Stittsville
Carleton Place	M'Chigeeng	Sudbury
Cobourg	Milton	Sydenham
Collingwood	Mississauga	Tecumseh
East Gwillimbury	Newmarket	Thornhill
Edwards	North Bay	Thunder Bay
Eganville	Northumberland County	Toronto
Elmira	Oakville	Tottenham
Fenelon Falls	Onaping	Uxbridge
Georgetown	Ottawa	Waterdown
Glen Morris	Petawawa	Waterloo
Goderich	Peterborough	West Lorne
Gore Bay	Pickering	Windsor
Guelph	Port Dover	

As shown in the following table, many different types of choirs responded to the survey, but they do not match the estimates of the number of choirs in total (reported above, based on the random survey). **Because the responding choirs do not reflect the overall estimated percentage of each type in Ontario, responses should not be extrapolated to represent all Ontario choirs.** Respondents are more reflective of community choirs than other types.

Total # of choirs responding to the survey	305	100%
Church choirs	29	10%
School choirs	59	19%
Community choirs	183	60%
Semi-professional or professional choirs	19	6%
Did not report type of choir	15	5%

*In the above table, school choirs are defined differently than in the count of choirs (based on the random survey). Also, semi-professional or professional choirs were not counted separately in the count of choirs:*

- *Church = part of religious institutions (almost all within the Christian faith)*
- *School = part of educational institutions at any level (i.e., elementary, middle, and secondary schools PLUS colleges, CÉGEPs, and universities)*
- *Community = choirs (other than church and school) where almost no choristers are paid*
- *Semi-professional or professional = choirs where some or all choristers are paid, including (if applicable) choirs within churches or other community organizations.*

The average responding choir is 33 years old (i.e., established in 1984).

### *Choirs are engaged in their communities*

Choirs are involved in the social fabric of their communities. In their most recently completed years:

- 65% of responding choirs did community outreach (such as singing at hospitals, support facilities, other community events, etc.)
- 68% performed at charity concerts or singing engagements
- 59% performed at festivals, conferences, or ceremonial gatherings
- 59% had free concerts or singing engagements

Choirs, choruses, and singing groups appeal to Ontarians across all age groups. Among the responding choirs:

- 35% self-identify as an adult choir / chorus / singing group
- 29% self-identify as a children's choir / chorus / singing group
- 22% self-identify as a youth choir / chorus / singing group
- 13% self-identify as a mixed ages / multigenerational choir / chorus / singing group

### *Performances and attendance in choirs' most recent years*

*Survey questions about choral activities, volunteers, and revenues related to the most recently completed year or season for respondents' choir(s), chorus(es) or singing group(s).*

In their most recent years:

- 159 Ontario choral organizations reported their performances
- Total of 2,063 performances (including all performances in cases with multiple performances of the same concert / production)
- Average of 13 performances per choral organization
- Median of 7 performances (indication of the "typical" number of performances)

Regarding attendance, for their most recent years:

- 126 Ontario choral organizations reported their attendance
- Total (audience) attendance of 209,100
- Average yearly attendance of 1,660 per choral organization
- Median yearly attendance of 800 (indication of the "typical" attendance among choral organizations)

### *Volunteers*

Many choral organizations in Ontario have substantial volunteer support. In Ontario, the survey found that 1,850 volunteers were reported by 84 choral organizations (an average of 22 volunteers per reporting organization).

The survey also found that 34% of responding choral organizations in Ontario are completely volunteer run.

- *Volunteer run = no paid staff or regular contractors. In other words, no one who regularly works within the organization is paid, with the possible exception of contractors who only do occasional work for the organization.*



## *Choral organization revenues*

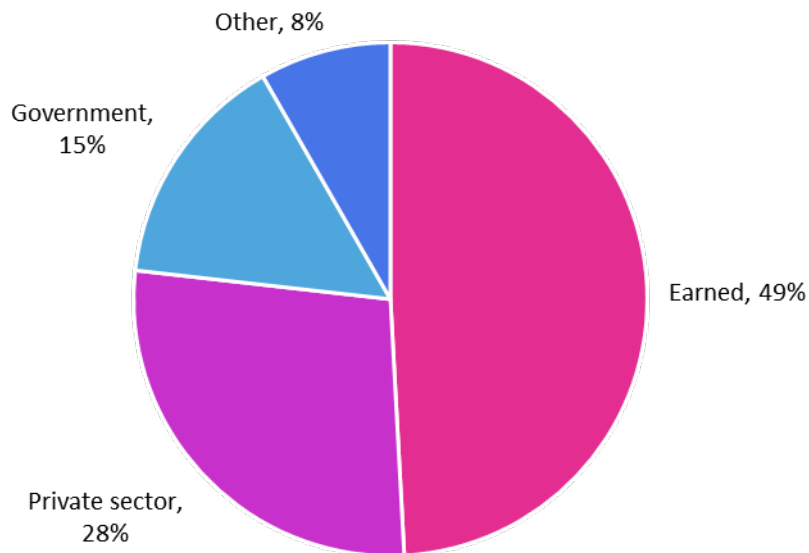
Choirs that are part of larger organizations, such as churches and schools, were not asked about their revenues if they could not easily separate their choir-related revenues from other organizational revenues. Of the 164 Ontario choral organizations responding to the survey, 69 (or 42%) reported their organization's operating revenues (excluding any capital / building projects) for their last completed year.

For the 69 Ontario choral organizations that reported their revenues, total operating revenues were \$6.1 million.

A typical Ontario choral organization has annual operating revenues of about \$19,000 (i.e., median revenues)

The breakdown of revenues is provided in the chart below (for the 69 Ontario choral organizations reporting their operating finances).

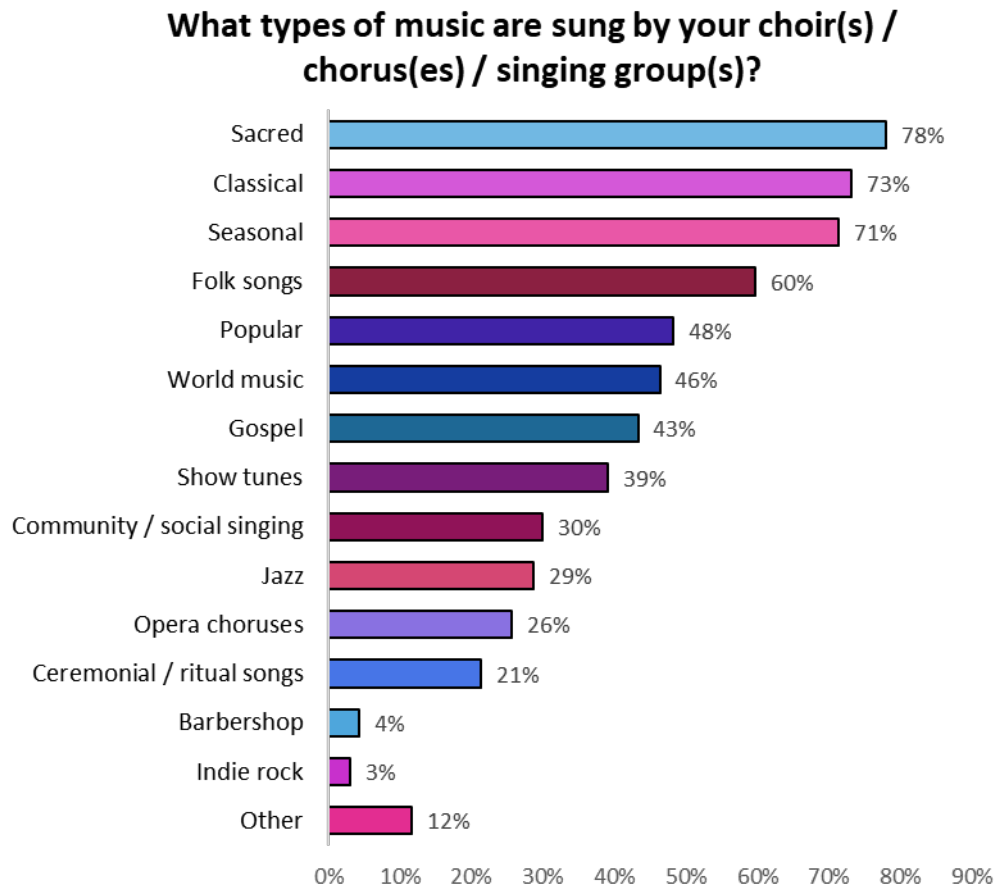
**Choral organization operating revenues  
(69 Ontario organizations reported revenues)**



*Source: Survey of 164 Ontario choral organizations for Choral Canada, Hill Strategies Research, 2017*

## *Choral repertoire*

Many different types of music are sung by Ontario choirs, choruses, and singing groups, as shown in the chart below.



*Source: Survey of 164 Ontario choral organizations for Choral Canada, Hill Strategies Research, 2017*

## *Commissions and Canadian content*

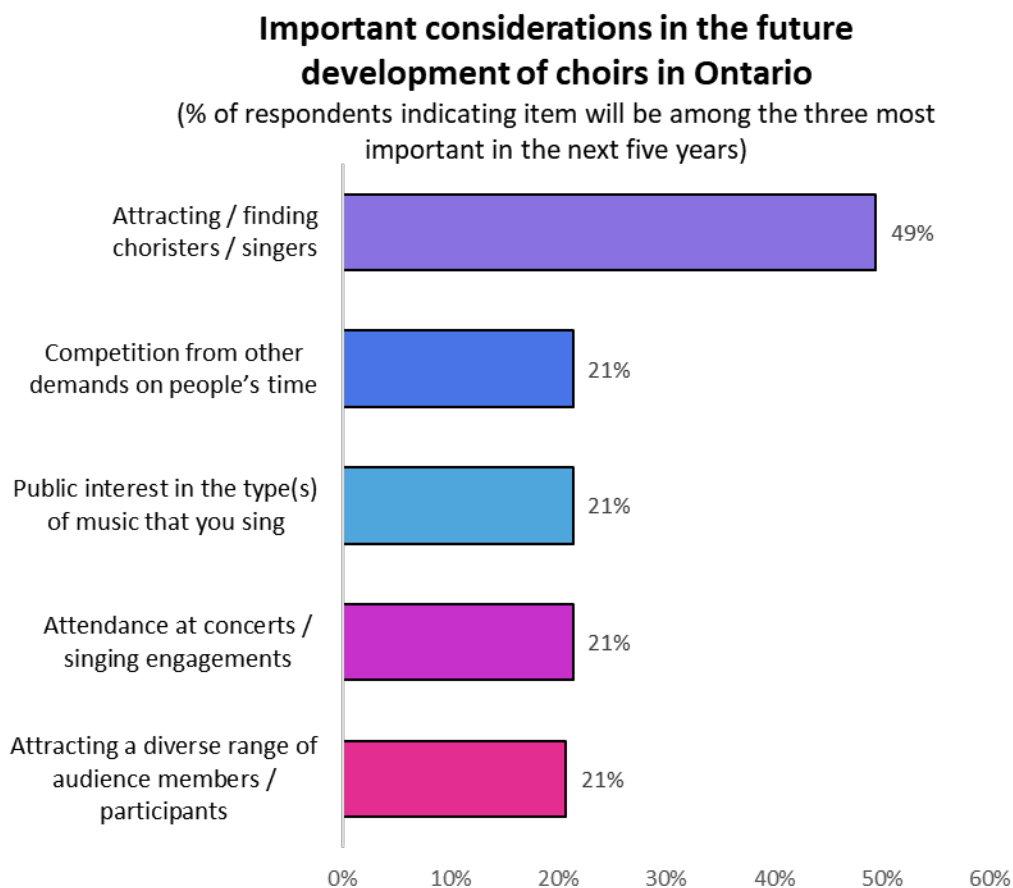
Canadian choral works are an important part of responding choirs' concerts and programs: 91% of Ontario choirs performed Canadian works in their last season. In 35% of Ontario choirs, Canadian works represent "about one half" or more of their programs.

Over 40% of responding choirs have commissioned works during the past 3 years (41%), and almost all of these choirs have commissioned works from Canadian composers (also 41% of all Ontario choirs).

## *Important considerations in the future development of choirs in Ontario*

Respondents were asked to select three of 19 items that would be **most important** in the development of their choral organization over the next five years. Typically, responses to this type of question focus on financial health, but this was not the case among the choral respondents.

In Ontario, as shown in the chart below, the most commonly selected item is “attracting / finding choristers / singers” (selected by 49% of Ontario choral organizations). A number of other important considerations for the future were selected by 21% of respondents: competition from other demands on people’s time, public interest in the type(s) of music that they sing, attendance at concerts and singing engagements, and attracting a diverse range of audience members or participants.



Source: Survey of 164 Ontario choral organizations for Choral Canada, Hill Strategies Research, 2017