Overview of New Voices Bay Area TIGQ Chorus

New Voices Bay Area TIGQ Chorus (NVBA) was created because the Bay Area does not yet have a chorus dedicated to serving and empowering this community. In the United States, choral ensembles—in schools, communities, and religious institutions—are the most common way that amateur musicians participate in musical activities. However, TIGQ (transgender, intersex, and gender-queer) people face significant barriers to participation. Standard choral method sorts singers rigidly by sex (female sopranos and altos, male tenors and basses); yet TIGQ people’s vocal stories are often more complex. Directors are typically not trained to teach and respectfully include those whose vocal ranges may be in flux or do not “match” the gender presentation of the singer.

As a result, TIGQ singers often hesitate to participate in choruses out of concern that they would not “fit in” or be welcomed, regardless of best intentions. Yet the TIGQ community is in desperate need of social and artistic outlets. The community has long had extremely high rates of poverty, unemployment and dropping out of school, and astronomical suicide rates. Research demonstrates that participating in choirs provides marginalized people with healthy opportunities for self-expression, music education they would otherwise likely not receive, social connection that combats isolation and shame, and positive feedback and support. A chorus dedicated to the TIGQ community will quite literally allow people to raise their voices when they are rarely encouraged to do so. Similar ensembles in Boston and Los Angeles have recently been founded, and are meeting with great success in both their artistic and social mission.