

Forward

The curtain is ready to open. Fifty young women are on the risers, ready to sing. The audience is filled with family and friends, and the girls can't wait to show off what they have learned throughout the day. Anticipation is high, and you are amazed that the culmination of months of planning and preparation is at hand.

The festival chorus performs enthusiastically to a cheering crowd. Afterwards, the girls sing tags they have learned during the day, take pictures, exchange information, and promise to keep in touch and come to the next festival. The air is full of excitement, joy, and anticipation!

Planning and executing a Young Women in Harmony (YWIH) festival takes organization and dedication. The adults and young women involved must be passionate, organized, and persistent. The end result, if the festival is planned well, is immensely gratifying for all involved – and it spreads the love of barbershop to young singers, far and wide.

This manual will take you through the entire process of planning and executing a successful YWIH festival, from beginning to end. Included are stories of successful and not-so-successful festival experiences, sample forms and letters, advice from experienced festival planners, and lists of current and helpful resources.

We hope that this will be a source of help and inspiration to you. And, most of all, this handbook is intended as a “thank you” for your willingness to give of your time and talent to spread the love of barbershop singing to future generations.

Getting Started

You are ready, willing, and able to plan a YWIH festival. Maybe you participated in one when you were younger. Perhaps, you observed a festival and thought “I can do that.” You may just have a passion for barbershop singing and want to spread the joy as far and wide as possible. Or, it may be all of the above!

Regardless of the reason, you want to know how and where to begin. Where can you recruit singers? Who will help with the logistics? What about a venue? Who will work with the girls on the day of the festival? There are so many questions when you start your first festival, and it truly takes a village to make it happen. But, you absolutely can make it happen!

What to expect for your first festival

For many planners, their first festival is a learning experience. Planners learn what to do and not to do, how to organize even better for upcoming events, and how to bring in more singers for the future. Planners can also draw from other festival organizers, learning from others’ experiences and sharing wisdom gleaned from successes and opportunities for growth.

Number of Singers

Large festivals are happening all over the country. Some festivals can have up to 200 singers and last a couple of days. Rarely do first-time festivals have a large number of participants. The “mega festival” is usually a culmination of several years, starting with smaller numbers and growing exponentially as word-of-mouth spreads and the planners become more organized. It takes time to build connections, promote the event (usually by word-of-mouth), and forge relationships with schools and music educators.

Many times, planners connect large number with success, which is understandable. However, a successful festival can be defined more accurately through excellent organization and satisfaction of the participants. A majority of first-time festivals boast no more than 20 singers and sometimes have to “supplement” with chorus members to get a balanced ensemble. But, if the participants have a wonderful time, learn something about barbershop singing, and want to come back next year, the festival can be considered to be extremely successful.

Well-organized and publicized festivals that happen on an annual basis are the ones that are most likely to grow, in singers and reputation. If the young women have a positive experience, they will go back to their schools and music classes and enthusiastically become your best event promoters, bringing friends and family with them the following year.

The First Step -- Choosing Committees and Leaders

Choosing people to assist with planning a YWIH festival can be difficult at times. Some women feel that they have trouble connecting with younger singers, and therefore perceive that they cannot contribute to a YWIH event. Some are more enthusiastic about working with younger singers, but they may not feel comfortable dealing with logistics or organization. And, of course, many people, especially Sweet Adelines, are busy with multiple obligations in and out of chorus.

When you recruit committee members, be sure to have roles and responsibilities pre-defined. Your committee leaders should be aware of exactly what will be expected of them and the time commitment involved. Have roles prepared for those who are organized but not necessarily comfortable working directly with young people – and vice versa. Flexibility, of course, is always a must – you will most likely find the need to redefine and tweak the committee roles as you go along. Think through the festival from beginning to end, and make sure you have all your bases covered.

Some committee roles and expectations may include:

Role: Team Leader

Time Commitment: Monthly

Skill Set: People and organizational skills

Description: Organize and facilitate meetings; keep track of action steps and timelines

Role: Finance

Time Commitment: Bi-Monthly or As Needed

Skill Set: Financial Planning; Budgeting

Description: Plan budget for festival; research grants and funding

Role: Publicity

Time Commitment: Monthly

Skill Set: Publicity; marketing; communication/contacts

Description: Publicize festival through flyers, email, letters; connect with schools and other educational organizations

Role: Social Media (can be the same as publicity)

Time Commitment: Monthly

Skill Set: Computer and social media

Description: Create and maintain social media publicity

Role: Venue

Time Commitment: As Needed

Skill Set: Research; Connected with community

Description: Scout and locate appropriate venue for festival; negotiate use of facility

Role: Music

Time Commitment: As Needed

Skill Set: Knowledge of music (especially YWIH); connections with Sweet Adelines; Communication

Description: Procure a clinician and quartet (if needed) for festival; communicate travel and other expenses to Finance Leader; order music and learning tracks for festival

Role: Logistics

Time Commitment: As Needed and Day of Festival; likely the most “time intensive” role

Skill Set: Organization; multi-tasking; people skills

Description: Recruit and schedule volunteers for the festival day; plan meals; organize venue (opening and closing, breakout rooms, risers); procure transportation and lodging for clinician/quartet

The Next Step -- Delegating Responsibilities

Once you’ve determined what roles/committees you will need for your festival, it’s time to sit down and consider your ideal leader for each role. A YWIH Festival committee worksheet is included with this handbook to assist you in organizing the process of choosing committees and leaders.

Keep in mind that it is always good to have a first and second (and third) choice. Communicate directly with each person, either face-to-face or by phone. That way, your intended choice can ask questions and receive immediate feedback. Be sure to convey your enthusiasm and passion for the event, the intended end result, the basic timeline, and of course, the expected responsibilities and time commitment.

A sample “script” for communicating with potential committee leaders:

Hi, _____! I’m calling to talk to you about an event I’m planning for next year. I’m really excited about it, and I know it’s going to be an amazing experience for everyone involved. I’m talking about a Young Women in Harmony festival. Are you familiar with these festivals, or have you ever attended one? I was able to observe _____’s festival last year, and I was overwhelmed by the impact this event had on the young singers and the people who planned the festival. I know that our chorus can make the same difference in young women’s lives next year.

I wanted to talk to you, because I’m planning leadership roles in this festival, and you immediately came to mind as someone who would be a great musical leader. You have connections with directors and quartets, and you are such an excellent communicator. Our musical committee needs a leader who could commit to helping find a clinician for our festival and then communicating with that clinician to determine what music would be sung. The committee would also be in charge of ordering music and learning tracks for the festival. The time commitment would be only what is needed to complete the above tasks, and most communication would be via phone or email. I would love to have you involved in this festival, and I hope you’re able to take on this role. Do you have any questions?

It is important for the potential leader to know that you have a personal connection with this event (and, hopefully, they will have something to share, too). Be sure to let them know exactly why you want them to fill the role, what you think their strengths are, and how much you would like for them to be a part of a very special event.

If this person is unable to fill the role, it can be helpful to ask them if they recommend anyone that would be available (this allows them to still be involved in a small way, and it may widen your pool of potential leaders) and to ask them if they want to be considered for future festivals or for a less time-intensive role, such as a volunteer the day of the festival or as a member of a committee, rather than a leader. The important thing is to communicate your enthusiasm and make it contagious!

Making It a Reality -- The Initial Meeting

Once all of your committee leadership roles are filled, the team leader will need to call a group meeting to get everyone started and to answer any questions the leaders may have. The leaders will want to know what their roles will entail, what the overall timeline will be, how much autonomy they have, and where to start. An initial meeting outline may look something like this:

1. Call to order
2. Establish norms for meeting (i.e. discussion protocol, expectations for respectful discussion, etc.)
3. Leaders introduce themselves and their respective roles
4. Team leader distributes job descriptions and answers questions
5. Committee leaders collaborate to formulate overall timeline for festival planning
6. Committee leaders define their roles within the master timeline and establish connections with other leaders
7. Team leader communicates logistics to leaders: how they can choose their committee members, delegation of responsibilities, how often they need to communicate with team leader and each other
8. General discussion; additional questions; meeting adjourned

The end products of the initial meeting should include a master timeline, a clear idea of roles and responsibilities, a list of potential committee members for each leader, and a positive, exciting beginning to your first festival!