

How to Organise a Low-Budget Festival

Using the Example of YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019



Guidelines of the European Choral Association - Europa Cantat (2019)

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| (1) Organising YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019..... | 2 |
| (1.1) Preliminary Thoughts | 2 |
| (1.2) Involvement of Local Partners..... | 4 |
| (1.3) Sources of Income | 7 |
| (1.4) Where to Cut?..... | 7 |
| (2) Assessment | 9 |
| (3) What Worked for Us and Might Work for You..... | 11 |
| Conclusion | 12 |

Introduction

Festivals are an integral element of today's choral world. The Event Calendar on the website of the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat¹ gives an impression of the sheer number of choral festivals there are, although this list is by no means complete. No wonder that festivals seem to be especially popular in summer. Although they are no holidays for the participating choirs, strictly speaking, and often require a lot of serious (musical) work effort, festivals represent a break from everyday life for the participants where they can get away from their routine, to another place, to encounter both new people and new music. Choral festivals serve a *dual purpose*, having both a strong musical and an interpersonal aspect.

The *musical aspect* is perhaps the most obvious one. A (participative) choral festival is, by definition, centred around choral music, with choirs coming together to sing, to perform and to rehearse with each other. Such festivals typically offer different ateliers or workshops, providing choirs with the possibility to study new choral literature under the leadership of experienced and renowned conductors. This training element, however, is not limited to a top-down approach, in the sense that choirs are taught by the expert conductors. The ateliers and the whole festival also create an atmosphere of *peer-to-peer learning*. Different choirs learn from each other, and so do conductors. Many festivals offer guided *study tours* for conductors, organised trainings including sitting-in on rehearsals and in-group reflective talks about the experience from watching other conductors, experiencing new techniques and pedagogic models. Additionally, festivals represent the perfect opportunity for informal talks with colleagues and peers, discussing approaches, experience and new trends and enlarging professional networks. It is therefore safe to say that festivals are, in addition to masterclasses, one of the major training opportunities for singers and conductors alike.

Having said this, the *interpersonal aspect* of a choral festival is arguably just equally as important. More often than not it correlates with intercultural learning, as travelling has become increasingly convenient and affordable over the last decades and thus allowing an ever-growing number of people from different places to participate in international events. Meeting people from different cultural backgrounds definitely helps to broaden one's mind and to develop intercultural understanding and competences. Choral festivals are therefore highly important, especially for younger people. Even if young people do not have intercultural encounters in their personal life - for example because they come from a socio-economic background that does not allow them to travel much or they live in a region with little multicultural population - participating in festivals as a member of a choir can offer this experience and can foster open-mindedness and new friendships across political and linguistic borders. And by the way, it's a lot of fun, too!

Choral festivals thus serve important purposes and are ever-increasing in popularity. But there are also some hurdles to take in organising a choral festival, not the least of which being finance. The budget of a festival, depending on the festival's size and character, may well be a six-figure amount of Euro, sometimes even more than this. It is however possible to organise festivals on a lower budget as well.

There might be multiple reasons, both forced and intentional, for a festival being a low-budget one. A lack of available funding or your staff's inexperience in applying for funding

¹ < <https://europeanchoralassociation.org/activities-listing/> >

might be the most obvious reasons to impact the budget, but it can also be a conscious decision to keep the budget small, in order to create an amateur or low-budget atmosphere around the event, or determined by the amount of time your organisation can or want to invest in the preparations, including fundraising.

The size of the budget directly affects the character and the size of the event. One would however be too quick to see a small budget as a mere threat and an insurmountable obstacle to the success of the event. In this paper we will present the festival YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019 as an example of a low-budget festival. We will be discussing the planning and the festival itself and the impact the budget had on the nature of the festival.

(1) Organising YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019

(1.1) Preliminary Thoughts

YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019 was organised by the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat (ECA-EC) in the city of Bonn, Germany, where ECA-EC's offices are located. This festival was designed to bring together children and youth choirs from Bonn with choirs from other parts of Germany and abroad. Analysing the situation of local choirs, ECA-EC encountered a strong desire of the local choirs to take part in international choral festivals - the likes of ECA-EC's EUROPA CANTAT or EUROPA CANTAT junior - which they could not do due to financial limitations. The result of this little survey was the creation of an international festival in Bonn, giving local choirs the opportunity to participate and at the same time increasing the visibility of ECA-EC in the region.

ECA-EC's main focus lies on activities across Europe, connecting its membership in 40 different countries². Since 1961, the triennial EUROPA CANTAT festival has been their flagship-event. Member organisations of ECA-EC take turns to host the EUROPA CANTAT festival, thus the festival has been held in 17 different cities throughout Europe.³ EUROPA CANTAT unites more than 4000 singers from all over the world to share their passion for singing, discover one another's culture and to attend workshops, ateliers and concerts together. The budget for this major festival has varied between 1,5 million and 4 million EUR for a ten-day festival, with 2.500 to 4.000 paying participants and up to 7.000 people involved, including guest choirs, orchestras, instrumentalists, soloists, staff, volunteers and invited guests. Numerous parallel events and more than 100 concerts are offered during the festival. The costs per paying participant at these highly subsidized festivals vary between 750 and 1400 EUR approximately.

Being a pan-European association with a focus on these kinds of events, it was not possible for ECA-EC to invest equally as many resources into YOUTH CHOIRS IN

² Correct as of 2019. < <https://europeanchoralassociation.org/about-us/who-we-are/members/> >

³ Correct as of 2019. < <https://europeanchoralassociation.org/activities/ec-festival/> >

MOVEMENT, both in terms of staff and of finances. Hence the decision was taken to organise YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT as a low-budget festival.

Moreover, YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT was always thought to serve as a model low-budget festival, providing, together with this paper, both encouragement and guideline for others who want to organise a low-budget event as well. In accordance with its vision 'to foster cooperation and mutual understanding' and 'to promote collective singing as a tool for education and community-building'⁴, ECA-EC has a strong interest in the development of new formats of international meetings, workshops and festivals. Providing guidelines for organising such events will hopefully encourage other organisations to try to set up their own events that will benefit the European choral sector.

This was the starting point for the planning of YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019. The first informal talks with local conductors were had in 2017, two years before the intended date of the festival. A more formal meeting was held in February 2018 with Sonja Greiner, Secretary General of ECA-EC, Pavel Brochin, the then-intended and later approved artistic director of YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT, and conductors from Bonn and the surrounding region who were interested in participating. It was agreed on six to eight ateliers, offering different levels of difficulty and focus on different age groups, thus making the festival accessible for a large number of different types of choirs. Ateliers focussed on very young participants, from the age of six, would mostly gather local choirs, because children choirs with singers of such a young age are less likely to travel abroad for a festival than older choirs. Hence, possible atelier conductors for this kind of atelier would not only have to be excellent with young children, but also able to lead atelier rehearsals either in German or, even better, in a mostly non-verbal way. In order to find a suitable date for the festival, three suggestions were made to have a poll with local conductors to see which one would be most convenient for the majority of potential local participants.

A general rough schedule for the festival was designed in this meeting, too. It was agreed on that the festival should run from Wednesday until Sunday. After the arrival of the guest choirs on Wednesday afternoon there would be an opening concert on Wednesday night. Atelier rehearsal should be held on Thursday, Friday and Saturday morning. On Thursday night there should be a concert where all the participating should have the opportunity to present a piece from their repertoire. Friday night should see a number of parallel choir-to-choir concerts, concerts in which two or three choirs sing together, roughly half an hour per choir. These concerts could be held in smaller churches, school, community centres, etc., and would preferably see local choirs and choirs from abroad in the same concert. The atelier results should be presented in a closing concert on Saturday afternoon. With regard to the young age of some of the participants, it was noted that one concert with the results of all the ateliers, about 15 to 20 minutes each, plus speeches would be too long, so the final presentation was split in two concerts. On Sunday, choirs should have the opportunity to sing during church services, preferably in those parishes who were involved in the festival (see below).

In exchange for bringing an international festival to Bonn and in light of the limited resources ECA-EC could invest in this, local participants co-hosted and in parts also co-organised the festival, which will be discussed further below. Furthermore, we did not ask any

⁴ < <https://europeanchoralassociation.org/about-us/> >

participation fee from any of the participants to make the festival even more inclusive and accessible for a wide range of different choirs. On the other hand, participation fee normally represents a considerable income in a festival's budget. It was clear that without a participation fee, we could not offer the same amount of services to the participants as one would get in other, fee-paying festivals.

ECA-EC decided that they cannot organise the festival using the regular staff resources they had in their office. Therefore, it was decided to employ a *trainee* for 12 months who would be charged with preparing and managing the festival, with assistance of the office staff. Employing a trainee on a one-year contract is a cost-effective way of enlarging your staff temporarily to set up a certain project and certainly an idea to consider when preparing a low-budget event.

(1.2) Involvement of Local Partners

(1.2.1) Choirs

As discussed above, we involved local choirs in the organisation of the festival to make the workload more manageable for ECA-EC. In exchange for bringing a festival to Bonn and in view of the complete absence of participation fees we asked the local choirs to contribute to the organisation.

One of the first interaction with the local choirs was deciding the date for the festival. The suggestions were the bank-holiday weekend on Corpus Christi in May, the last week before the summer holidays in late June or the first week of the summer holidays in July. All options had a lot of pros and cons to them and there was no date that suited everybody. In the end, the majority voted for the last week of the summer term, considering that all important exams in school would have been over by this time and pupils might be excused from lessons easier than during the term, but might not be already on holidays with their families either. Nevertheless, since this vote was not unanimous, some choirs that wanted to participate originally, already abandoned the project at this stage.

A second field where we wanted to rely on local choirs was in finding suitable venues for both rehearsals and concerts. This was a double challenge, as the venues should not only be suitable for choir rehearsals or concerts, given our limited budget they should also be affordable or free of charge if possible. Four out of eight rehearsal venues were provided by participating choirs. Three participating school choirs offered to host atelier rehearsals in their schools. This had the benefits that we did not need to pay for using the rooms and did not need to send festival team members to supervise the rehearsals, since the school choirs and their conductors were present, anyway, and cared for setting up the room and assisted as contact persons for the guest choirs. One other choir offered us to rehearse in their parochial house, for which they charged us only a small sum. They also took care of the logistic needs and supervised the rehearsals themselves.

As for concert venues, we found three venues for the Friday night concerts through participating choirs. Two of the choirs offered us to host the concert in their respective parish church and one other local choir is on friendly terms with the management of a monastery just outside the city, giving us the opportunity to have one concert in this beautiful scenery. Even though one of the churches would probably not have been first choice if we had the money to spend on concert venues, involving local choirs and their network to find good, and sometimes new concert venues, can definitely pay off, as the example with the monastery shows.

The biggest contribution we asked from the choirs was to host guest choirs. As already mentioned, we tried to make this festival widely accessible by not asking for a participation fee. However, choirs from outside Bonn, both from abroad and from other parts of Germany, would still have to pay their travels and their accommodation in Bonn. Since we could not help them to reduce their travel costs, the idea was to try to find local hosts. The initial idea was that every participating local choir should be prepared to host one guest choir. Ideally, guest and host choir would sing in the same atelier and perform together in the same concert on Friday night, so that the choirs could spend a lot of time together which hopefully would create a more permanent cooperation between the choirs, also after the end of the festival with potential mutual visits and projects.

Needless to say, choirs had different levels of involvement in the end. Thirteen out of the seventeen local choirs stated in their registration that they would be prepared to host a guest choir. However, many of the local choirs were either quite small and could offer too few hosting opportunities for a whole choir or they were quite restrictive on the age of the guests. Understandably, a children's choir does not necessarily want to host a youth choir with singers of 18 or 20 years of age. However, some of the guest choirs explicitly wished not to be hosted in local choirs but preferred to book a hostel for themselves. In the end four out of the eight guest choirs were hosted by local participants, the other four booked accommodation for themselves.

But we had also two cases where we could not find a host choir for potential participants from abroad who as a result cancelled their registration.

Overall, we had a lot of support from the local choirs. They did a lot of advertising within their own networks, so that all the festival concerts had a very big audience. The choirs also provided a lot of snacks and drinks for the concerts, setting up buffets with home-made salads and cakes to be eaten during the break or after the concerts. This created very special moments during the festival and an enjoyable atmosphere for both local choirs, guests and the audience.

(1.2.2) Churches and Parishes

There are a multitude of churches in the city of Bonn, of a lot of different creeds and confessions. Cooperating with them was in our own interest, as churches often are the perfect venues for a choir concert. As mentioned before, we had church choirs participating in the festival who offered us their churches or parochial houses as venues for concerts and rehearsals. In addition, we cooperated with a Protestant church that organises a lot of concerts

and was prepared to do the advertising for the event, even none of their choirs did actually participate in our festival. We thus had a good audience despite the fact that none of the three choirs performing had a connection to this specific church. In return we agreed to hand over a certain percentage of the donations received to the church, so that the price we would pay in the end depended on our income.

In another case the cantor of a local church offered us to negotiate the rent for a rehearsal room after having heard of the low-budget nature of our festival which subsequently led to a considerably lower rent.

Normally choir concerts in this region of Germany are held in either protestant or catholic churches, as they are the predominant confessions. But we also approached a Russian-orthodox church in Bonn to have a concert there in the frame of the festival. The result was astonishingly positive for us. The parish was very happy to host a concert in their church, as they rarely are approached by choirs from outside the orthodox community and were very keen on offering their parishioners another kind of concert. Also, they saw the opportunity of increasing their visibility in the town with hosting this concert which would attract audience from outside their community, namely a lot of friends and family of the local choirs. Not only did the parish refuse on charging us any rent for the concert, they also provided drinks and refreshments not only for the choirs, but for the audience as well to be had during the break. Other than finding an outside-the-box concert venue for our festival, we also managed to offer an important intercultural encounter to the singers, as most of them would have never set foot in an orthodox church before. Accordingly, they were very interested in the gilded images, the magnificent altar and other object and the people from the parish willingly answered all their questions.

(1.2.3) The Municipal Music School

We also cooperated in different ways with the municipal music school. Since one of our atelier conductors was a teacher at the music school, she was able to secure a free rehearsal hall in one of the school's building. Through her we also had the possibility to borrow a number of instruments needed for some of the Ateliers. These personal contacts allowed us as well to rent a convenient room for our workshop for conductors in another of the school's buildings for a good price.

(1.2.4) City Council

Cooperation with the local authorities is indispensable for an event like this. Not only do they usually give direct funding but are also able to support your event in a non-financial way. The City of Bonn offered us a substantial discount in the advertising fee for posters in public places in the city, like advertising columns or display cabinets. Without this discount, we could not have afforded to pay for it and consequently would not have had advertising in the city. They also granted us a discount on the rent for the school hall where we had the closing concerts of the festival.

Contacting the City Council and local authorities is always worth the troubles! Even if at times it may take a lot of time to go through the bureaucratic procedures and it not always pays off in real support, every inquiry increases your visibility in the city and can, if not this time, pay off the next time!

(1.3) Sources of Income

Since we did not ask for a participation fee, we had to go without a substantial income generated by the project. Neither did we sell tickets for the concerts, though we asked the audience to donate after the concert. This not only renders concerts more inclusive, allowing people with tight budgets or big families to see the concert and is more inviting to parents of participating children, it usually has a good financial outcome, too, and might have advantages with regards to paying for musical copyright or tax. However, it is of course less predictable, and it is difficult to plan donations when drafting the budget before the actual event. In the end our income was higher than expected, nevertheless the donations only represented 7% of the total budget.

The major source of income will usually be public funding. This may include funding from local and regional authorities, like the City Council and the Regional Council, funding from the national level, e.g. from the ministry of culture or youth, and funding from European level, like the Creative Europe programme of the European Union. Combining different sources of income means that the individual contribution from each of the funding bodies is not that big and if one body refuses to fund, the event as a whole is not necessarily in danger.

However, the situation for public funding and the regulations how to apply for it may differ from country to country and it is therefore difficult to make general statements. YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019 received financial support from the City of Bonn, the regional body 'Landesverband Rheinland', the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, with the funding sum varying between 5.000 and 12.500 EUR. The total budget for the event was around 38.000 EUR for an event with around 665 participants, which represents a budget of 57 EUR per participant (compared to several hundred to over a thousand EUR per participant at the triennial EUROPA CANTAT Festival)

It is of course also possible to look into private sources of funding. This however requires expertise in fundraising strategies. We did not have income from private sources for this festival. What could work as well is selling advertising space in your festival booklet. We have done it in the past, but not for YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019.

(1.4) Where to Cut?

It is self-evident that a low-budget festival cannot offer all the services you would expect from a fully-grown festival. We will give some ideas below on how to keep the expenses low, while also pointing out where are the challenges and dangers of having to make these cuts.

We did not organise common meals for all the singers, although this usually is a perfect place in a festival to meet others outside rehearsal or concert situations. Neither did we provide drinks for the singers during the rehearsals which, in our eyes, was not necessary, also from an environmentalist point of view. We informed all the participants before the festival that it was perfectly safe to drink tap water in Germany and that all the venues had lavatories, so the singers could easily refill their water bottles on the spot. Although this was indeed meant as an eco-friendly approach to reduce plastic waste it also did save us some money and logistic capacity to deliver water bottles and cups to all the venues and to clean them up afterwards. This worked really well, and we only received positive feedback for it. For the final evening we were able to provide some snacks and drinks for the participants.

We managed to cut costs substantially in communication. We focused on a few simple communication elements, namely a festival brochure, a flyer and posters. They were kept simple so we could do them ourselves without having to pay a professional graphic artist. We mostly used the subsidized offer of the city to hang posters and we used posters to advertise in the concert venues. We also distributed posters and flyers to the participating choirs from Bonn. There were some articles about the festival on local media, but we did get comments about the festival not being visible enough. This is the price you pay if you keep your communication budget low. On the other hand, we had very good audiences for all the concerts, to a large degree down to the high number of local participants which triggered a lot of their friends and family to visit the concerts. Local participants spreading the word about the festival represents indeed a means of communication that comes free of charge.

While it was indispensable to foresee some personnel costs (we included six months full-time work of the trainee in the festival budget which represents 30 per cent of the total budget), we did not employ a paid festival team for the time of the festival, but had a group of volunteers supporting us. We are very grateful for this which allowed us to save a lot of money. For the four ateliers where we had no local conductor being the responsible person for the room, we had one of our volunteers to coordinate the rehearsal, opening and locking the rooms before and after the rehearsals, showing the choirs the premises and being the first contact point for them. The volunteers also supported us during the evening concerts in setting up the venues, coordinating the choirs during the concerts and asking for donations after the concert. This was an important resource to have, it would have been impossible to run the festival without this additional workforce. The downside of working with volunteers is that they often tend to be elderly people, especially if you organise your event during the week and outside school and university holidays and you cannot pay your volunteers a little fee. We would sometimes have needed younger and physically more robust people and so the workload for the trainee working as main manager was more than we would have wished for.

There were other cuts we had to make, mainly in the logistics of the festival. As mentioned above, a lot of venues were offered for free to us, though for some of the bigger venues we had to pay the usual rent. The costs for renting venues for rehearsals and concerts represented 13% of the total budget. On the other hand, with the venues we did not have to pay we did not have much choice and had to take the rooms and venues that were on offer - even though they were not always the perfect choice.

We did not offer a guided Study Tour for YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019. That was another point where we had to save costs. However, we wanted to give single conductors the possibility to come to Bonn and to take this festival as a learning opportunity, so we did

invite them to Bonn, providing them with the information needed on the ateliers and the repertoires but asked them to organise the rest for themselves. Six conductors took the opportunity and came to visit the festival. We also offered a workshop for conductors for which Ken Wakia, one of the Atelier Conductors kindly agreed to lead it. The group of conductors studied an African folk song which they performed together in the evening concert on Thursday night which was one of the highlights of the concert, in addition they received information about projects and activities that could be interesting for them in future. Since we did not have to pay an additional instructor for this workshop, it only cost a little money to rent the room for the workshop, so we did not need to charge any participation fee for this either.

Many expenses for were non-negotiables. The fees for the atelier conductors and the choreographers are a given (though at the lower rim of what professionals are usually paid and should be paid for this kind of work), their accommodation, travel costs and meals equally so. For YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT we had eight ateliers with ten atelier conductors and choreographers in total which represents a substantial part of the expenses for the festival (45% of the total budget). But if you want to attract good musicians to your festival, low-budget or not, you cannot cut on their fees.

Planning a low-budget festival we found it highly important to communicate to all of the (potential) participants as well as to the atelier conductors the nature of this event. Everyone should know what to expect and what is on offer before coming to the festival, this avoids disappointment and negative atmosphere.

(2) Assessment

On 26 June 2019, 25 choirs came together for the opening concert of YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019. 17 of which came from the city of Bonn and the surrounding region and were to different degrees involved in the preparation of this festival, as mentioned before. Two further choirs came from different parts of Germany (Wiesbaden and Bensheim) with six other choirs from abroad (Russia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland). We counted 664 participants in total, 460 of which from Germany and 204 from other countries. The total number of participants was somehow lower than expected, mostly because we were not able to accommodate all foreign choirs who asked for it in the families of local choirs so that two choirs cancelled in the end.

We created a feedback survey after the festival that was sent out to all participating choirs, volunteers and conductors in order to evaluate our own work, to draw conclusions for further events and to have valid points about the advantages and disadvantages of organising a low-budget event for the creation of this guidelines. The following points are mostly based on the feedback we received.

The venues we had for our concerts and rehearsals were generally speaking very suitable. There was some criticism about two of the rehearsal rooms being too far away from the city centre. Those were rooms in the schools that we could use for free, as discussed

above, so this is a minus point we knew before but one that we accepted. Also, the venue for the closing concerts was not perfect, again due to the lack of choice, also due to the fact that the city of Bonn does not have many venues that fit enough people in the audience.

The musical aspects of the festival were rated very high by everyone who completed the feedback survey. This was a sign for us that it was the right decision not to cut on the musical aspects and still try to get top-class conductors for this festival. Especially some choirs who do not regularly participate in festivals relished the opportunity to work with and learn from conductors they would normally not have to opportunity to meet.

As already mentioned, we were not able to find host choirs for all our guest choirs. But those who did stay with local choirs enjoyed their time very much and were grateful for this insight in German culture, as an addition to the musical aspect of the festival. Although some linguistic difficulties occurred, especially when hosting young choristers, we think that this concept was a success and we are grateful towards the local choirs and their families for being such good hosts. We have heard from two choirs at least that there might be common projects further down the line which again is a highly positive outcome of this festival.

We also asked if the participants were happy with the amount of services provided and what they had to organise for themselves and if they would have preferred to pay a participation fee in exchange for more offers and a less '*low-budget*' festival. 75% preferred to keep it the way it was organised, which shows that there is an acceptance for the low-budget character if clearly communicated. Those who would have preferred more services offered and would have been prepared to pay a participation fee mentioned sums between 15 and 100 EUR per person.

The overwhelming feedback we received, both informally during the festival and formally through the survey afterwards, was very positive. In the survey we asked to rate the festival and received an average of 7.6 out of 10.

As mentioned above, the municipal music school offered us instruments for free to use in the ateliers and the final concert. Being able to use those instruments for free is great, however, operating on a small budget that did not allow us to have surplus staff, the time to set up, to pack and to transport the instruments from one venue to the other added significantly to the working time and was, after all, too much. We also needed to rent a van to transport the instruments, which added significantly to the festival budget. With hindsight, we should have probably rejected the offer to borrow those instruments for free and not have offered them to the atelier conductors, in order to keep the logistics of the festival basic and manageable.

(3) What Worked for Us and Might Work for You

Some of the lessons we learnt with YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019 might be something you want to look into when organising your own low-budget festival:

- The cost for staff could be reduced in hiring a trainee or a part-time employee for the preparation of the festival, if applicable. To make up your team during the festival, you can try to find volunteers. This is not always easy, especially when you need people with profound expertise, but it will have a drastic impact on your expenses.
- Involve local partners! That is something one should do anyway for any event, but the lower your budget, the more you have to rely on partners who do not charge you for assisting you, because they feel that they are part of something. Furthermore, an event deeply rooted in the community can create a very special, welcoming atmosphere.
- Keep things simple! Plan a musical programme without orchestra and soloists. Try to keep the number of instruments and technical equipment small as well. If you invite top-level conductors and maybe some choreographers (a must-have when you call your festival 'Youth Choirs in Movement') they can do wonderful workshops also with a cappella repertoire or just using a piano and some small percussion instruments.
- Think outside the box! We asked the Russian-orthodox church to have a concert there, why not asking the local mosque next time? You would be amazed about the possibilities on offer when you leave the beaten tracks. They will probably charge you even less because it might be something new and exciting for them, bringing them visibility and a positive image - a classical win-win situation.
- Clear communication is the key! Don't be ashamed of your low-budget event. Tell your participants and partners what you have in mind and what they can expect from your event. Also tell your supporters! See a low-budget festival as an inclusive event where a lot of people can and should participate in.

This list represents only some ideas and is by no means complete. We're looking forward to hearing your experience in organising a low-budget event and to profit from your lessons learnt.

Conclusion

The success of YOUTH CHOIRS IN MOVEMENT 2019 showed that financial limitation does not mean you cannot set up an international choral festival. If you accept the importance of such a festival for the participants, both for musical and personal development, you will find solutions to overcome the financial aspect. It can also have community-building effects if for example one of your local partners finds that it is after all not that difficult to organise a concert in their local church or community centre and they go on doing it also after the festival.

In our opinion, low-budget festivals can be a good and meaningful addition to the big festivals already in existence. They are usually more accessible and can offer choirs the opportunity to participate that usually cannot take part in international festivals.

For this reason, we would like to encourage everyone to set up their own low-budget festival and let us know about your experience. What did work well for you? What were the challenges? Which creative solutions did you find? We are looking forward to hearing from you!