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# YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS: SUPPORTING NEW GENERATIONS OF DECISION-MAKERS



A handbook by the youth  
committee 2019-2021  
of the European Choral  
Association

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# Foreword & words of thanks



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This handbook is the result of two years of work from the youth committee of the European Choral Association. The youth committee brings together motivated young singers, conductors, composers, and managers from all across Europe. You can find more information about it by scanning the QR code. Regarding this handbook, the youth committee would like to thank the following people:



- Sonja Greiner, Secretary General of the European Choral Association, for her priceless input, but also the entire office team and board of the European Choral Association for always supporting us;
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- Everyone who filled at least one of our questionnaires - *Youth involvement in member organisations, Your way to the youth committee, and How did you become involved in the choral community as decision-makers?*

# Introduction

*They have exalted notions, because they have not yet been humbled by life or learnt its necessary limitations; [...] they think they know everything, and are always quite sure about it; this, in fact, is why they overdo everything.*

How old do you think this quote is? 5, 50, 200 years old maybe? Wrong - the answer is 2400 years old! In the second book of his famous Rhetoric, this is how Aristotle described the younger generation - passionate, but unrealistic, unreliable and reluctant to self-questioning.

Defiance of young people is nothing new. However, as the generation born and raised with the Internet and without borders, young people of the twenty-first century will not settle for being heard by distracted ears. Some might find this statement exciting, others annoying. To the first ones, you can skip the introduction and dive straight into the following chapters. To the second ones, we managed to keep you interested in this handbook until now; you might want to read what is next.

Let's start with the one positive quality in this list - passion. Passion is what keeps young people determined to pursue a career in music or music management. It is what makes them find time for collective projects against the odds in an ever-changing life. Passion is also a prerequisite for innovation. In a voice, in a glance, in an email, it is what makes it hard to look away. And on a more pragmatic note, innovation is key to more funding.

Young people are unrealistic and reluctant to self-questioning, says Aristotle. To dismiss this argument, we only have to look at ourselves. During our term, which started in 2019, we have all had to deal with financial, family or health issues, and we all have friends struggling too. Reality hits hard, yet we have not given up. Covid made us question the meaning of our involvement several times, yet we have not given up. So if you want to support young people like us by involving them in decision-making in your organisation, you will significantly boost motivated young people's careers in a very competitive sector at a time when they need it most.

Unreliability is probably the hardest criticism to address. Member organisations have reported cases of young people losing interest in their own projects or simply disappearing from the network, and our plan is not to elude the issue. In this handbook, you can find advice on how to deal with young people dropping out because their life is changing or for any other reason. Fostering youth involvement in decision-making is still worth it, though, because those remaining will count on you, and seeing them grow up and assert themselves is priceless. Often literally, seeing what they can bring you in the long run.

**So, without further ado, let's go!**





Passing down the baton: from Urška Bittner Pipan, General manager of Europa Cantat Ljubljana 2021, to Silvija Pročkytė, Europa Cantat Junior Vilnius 2022 representative and chair of the youth committee of the European Choral Association 2019-2021  
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# Chapter 1. Why youth involvement works

*Try youth participation! Make it an attitude!*

The main purpose of this handbook is to support choral managers and leaders in their attempts to increase the youth involvement in their organisations. However, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu, so in order to improve the situation with youth involvement, there should be youth involvement first. As with any crusade to bring something new to the community, the fight for youth involvement can be hard, challenging and long. In this chapter we shortly name some main arguments supporting youth participation.

**They come to learn from you.** There are lots of young people who are eager to improve their managerial skills in the choral field. Being able to work with experienced managers will help them grow and be effective project managers in the future. They know this, and many are in the right state of mind to actively listen to you, support you, learn from you and contribute to your work now and in the upcoming years. For them, the experience and knowledge they gain can be both the reward for their job and the motivation to contribute more.

**They bring fresh ideas.** The world is changing fast, and different generations think differently. Involving young people is an opportunity to invite new ways of thinking into your processes and strategies. Young people may not be used to the methods you are using, the focus points you are mostly concerned with and daily issues you are dealing with, so they can bring something new to almost every field of our work.

**They bring a youth perspective.** Working with young people is the only way to truly understand the new generation. In order to be able to keep up with popular trends of young people, you need to have a representative group and hear the innovative ideas from them. If you are planning to create an event or project for young singers, don't forget to actually talk to the youth:

*Don't talk about young people, ask them!*

*Speaker at the forum on music and youth in connection  
with the Annual Meeting of the European Music Council*

**They are the future of your organisation.** Inviting young people is a very effective way to maintain the age balance within your organisation or association. Not only do they represent their generation, but after several years in the youth committee or being involved in decision-making in your association they can get elected to the board or contribute to your organisation in other beneficial ways. And in due time they may help your own association to maintain its success through the coming years.

*The day I have to go and leave my job, I hope that one of the former [youth participants of our programmes] will say 'I'm here, I want to apply.' And so we are also trying to build a future generation in this field.*

*Team member, international choral association*



The Eurochoir, a pool of young potential decision-makers: in the centre of the picture, Ruben Timmer, singer and manager of the Eurochoir 2021 and member of the youth committee of the European Choral Association 2019-2021  
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## Chapter 2. Ways of becoming involved

For this chapter, we talked to young people currently involved in the choral management field, and also adults who started working in the field when they were young. According to their stories, we discovered four common ways for young people to become involved:

- Growing up in a choral community. This includes singing in children's and youth choirs and taking some responsibilities within the choir, becoming an assistant to the conductor of the choir and joining them in local choral associations, also participating in choral events and at some point deciding to help with the organisation.
- Educational programmes and internships. More and more choral festivals and events offer internships or short educational programmes for managers and event organisers. This also works perfectly in terms of long-term commitment: participants of these activities learn the ways of the organizer and grow an attachment to the organisation. Moreover, the actual managers from the organisation or association get to know young volunteers, observe them „in the field“ and can decide to invite some of them for future collaborations.
- Volunteering for an event and staying in the community. Sometimes the public calls for volunteers are spread within non-choral youth organisations. This way, people from outside the choral world come to volunteer, fall in love, and decide to stay;
- Participating in a youth-related event or project and deciding to support it further. When the youth events are successful and interesting for the young people, they are grateful for the experience and sometimes willing to pay back and contribute to the further development of the project. Examples would be EuroChoir, National Youth Choirs, World Youth Choir, conducting master-classes or workshops, youth forums or youth choir festivals.

These four ways to get involved are not all specifically for youth, but that doesn't mean organisations cannot foster youth involvement by intentionally spreading the word and raising awareness of the opportunities they are willing to provide. So, if you want to search for young people, here are the places:

- **Member choirs or local choral communities:** there are always young decision-makers growing up within the community, and if you have youth choirs (or conductors working with youth) within your membership, they almost surely have the people you want.
- **Youth events, forums and festivals:** if you want young people, start with an event for young singers, conductors, composers etc. Reach out to the participants, invite them for the round table on youth-related issues of the choral world, try giving some of them tasks and see what will happen.
- **Youth-related non-choral organisations,** including student unions and universities. Volunteers can be found there, and many current decision-makers of the choral world started as volunteers.

**And here is a promise for you:** once you've started and found some, the process of finding qualified young volunteers will become easier. The more young members you have, the more interest you get. The more youth events you organise, the more young people come to you. Young singers will be willing to create projects for their own choirs under your banner and will become ready to take part in the decision-making process.

As for the ways to spread these open calls, the possibilities are endless:

*We put [the Call] out through various forums. We contacted other youth organisations, and then made sure all of the youth choirs in our membership - or a youth organisation equivalent - received the information. And we actually got a large amount of interest.*

*Executive board member, national choral association*

*I think that nowadays, the main communication channels for young people are mouth to mouth, peer to peer, and through social media. So for example, for the YEMP, we always send the information about the future YEMP to the former YEMPers, because they are the best ambassadors for the programme. [...] For the EuroChoir, we also write to the alumni network, but we also try to involve our member choirs or member organisations.*

*Team member, international choral association*

Besides, it is important to adjust one's strategy and expectations to the national or regional context. In some countries, it is indeed harder to find motivated young people than in others. For several French organisations, for instance, open calls did not meet the expectation of creating stable youth committees. Hand-picking dynamic conductors and teachers and laying them off through individual communication channels appears to be the best strategy in this country so far. In Norway, on the contrary, where organisations benefit from a generous subsidy policy on the condition that they involve young people in their boards of directors, there is enough budget to set up programmes to train people as young as 14 years old to take the lead of an organisation as soon as they turn 18.



# Reasons and motivation to join

Young people with a strong interest in choral music and management search for many different experiences. Some of them already have experience in the management field and want to share their experience with other young people. Some do not, but are very motivated and eager to contribute to your choral organisation. A good way to attract young decision-makers to your organisation is to find out what they are looking for, and leverage this. The main things that young people search for when they want to get involved are:

- Wish to contribute, to be a part of something bigger and to be involved;
- Wish to learn on the spot and gain new experience, collaborate and develop their network both with colleagues and supervisors. This also includes a wish to join an educational programme (a training activity);
- Wish to share their own experience and influence the event/project, wish to create more youth-related events and more opportunities for people like them to participate in events;
- Wish to promote your organisation and support it;
- Wish to try something new and get inspired for their own future projects and events, and wish to receive guidance on their ideas and activities.

A special point of interest is that young people want to work in an inclusive and kind environment. This is especially crucial for young parents, but also true for all young people, as their lives are changing rapidly with their education, jobs and moving to different cities and even countries. If the association is flexible and open to overcome these issues, redistribute the tasks where necessary and maintain communication, young people (or any people, actually) feel safer and usually are more open about the challenges they're facing, which at the end leads to a better flow of the collaboration.

As we wrote before, fruitful collaboration begins when the offer of the association meets with the wishes and expectations of the youth, also in terms of the level of responsibility and complexity and the types of task given. Making sure you have a clear terms of reference or job description in your Call and having a proper conversation before the work begins will greatly increase the chance of a mutually beneficial collaboration.

## Youth policies

**Youth policies** are sets of special youth-related strategies, terms and conditions an organisation decides to accept in order to involve young people. These policies include creative ways of including the young people, organising special youth events and offering additional benefits for young members. They are not completely necessary, but can make a commitment to your organisation far more attractive.

We will now focus on special offers, terms and conditions. Youth events and ways to involve young people in decision-making are described in Chapter 4.

There are many things that joining a choral organisation offers to a young professional. However, it is sometimes difficult for young people to claim all the benefits offered to them in the long-term. As young people are students or aspiring professionals, they usually have low budgets, varying perspectives, and it is sometimes hard for them to get attention and be noticed. What they are eager to gain is more experience, career advice and support from their older colleagues. So, the possible youth policies should mostly be focused on:

- Money (reduced membership fees or free membership for a limited period of time, reduced participation fees, grants, scholarships etc);
- Education (special master-classes for aspiring professionals, youth competitions, first-aid trainings, etc);
- Career perspectives (internships, or paid jobs, both in your association/member choirs and outside your region/country, job fairs, etc);
- Special youth programmes (round tables, national/regional youth choirs, etc).

Many choral associations have their own ways of supporting young members of the choral community, especially their own young members. According to the survey performed by the ECA-EC youth committee, currently, the most common offers for the young people from their choral associations are:

- Discounts or free participation in the (educational) events arranged by the associations and organisations;
- Support to join special youth ensembles, e.g. National Youth Choirs, EuroChoir, World Youth Choir;
- Lower membership/participation fees for young people;
- Support travel of young people to youth and/or choral events to gain experience;
- Internships and/or job fairs, support in career development;
- Scholarships and/or grants for young people;
- Round tables, symposiums, conferences designed to give young people a voice and a platform for communication and networking.

These special terms are aimed to support young members, but this is also an investment into the future of the association.

*By the time I decided to join the youth committee of the European Choral Association, I had already learnt a lot from the association, so I thought that now it was my turn to give lots of things back! :)*

*Member of the youth committee of the European Choral Association*

# The right people for the right positions

Hopefully, two things have been made clear: First, you should want youth involvement in your organisation, and then, you should know where to find these young people. Of course, not all of them are equally suitable for your volunteering or decision-making positions - you want the right person for the job. Read all about how to select this new generation of decision-makers in the next chapter.



Volunteers at the Europa Cantat Ljubljana 2021 festival  
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# Chapter 3. Individual youth involvement

## Volunteers in your events

**Volunteers** are people who give their time to help an organisation or an individual without being paid for their contribution. They are often a crucial part of an event (or organisation), and are usually invited to help with issues that do not imply any decision-making. The best-known benefits of volunteering are the opportunities to contribute to the community, learn new skills, make new friends and expand your network, boost your social skills and get in touch for the first time with the organisation or field you are interested in. Not all volunteer positions require special skills. However, regardless of the skills required to fulfil a volunteer position, it is always a good idea to meet potential volunteers, to find out together what drives them and where they would best fit.

A few common ways to find young volunteers are:

- Searching within the membership (local choirs, their friends);
- Attracting students (through local high schools or student associations, not necessarily departments of culture, arts, or music only);
- Getting in touch with local youth organisations (including but not limited to student associations or student choirs);
- Making an open call for volunteers in the local media.

It is also important to understand what your potential volunteers are looking for in a voluntary position. It can be helpful to stress these points in your communication. For youth volunteers, the most common reasons are:



- Participation in an event without having to pay the fee and thus at least attending parts of the programme;
- The position is a good addition to their resume (especially important for students, as it can in some cases help them to get a scholarship);
- Curiosity and willingness to take their first steps as event managers or in a particular field of work;
- Longing for belonging: wishing to contribute (individually or with a group) to the community or to help a friend, teacher, colleague or family member, or wishing to meet people and make new friends
- Recognition

Finally, here are a couple of tips on how to deal with volunteers in general:

\*

- Never take everyone, as not everyone will be a suitable candidate - it helps to speak to your volunteers in short interviews. You need to know what your volunteer is looking for and is able to bring to the table, and vice versa;
- Make sure your volunteers have some opportunities to enjoy the festival or event: 8-hour or even 12-hour shifts are not attractive;
- Remember that you need a budget for volunteers. You might want to give them T-shirts or badges, so the participants would recognise them. If they stay at your event for a full day, meals should be provided. In case of the several-days-long event, accommodation and sometimes even travel expenses for experienced volunteers from other parts of the country or even abroad might be required. Though many volunteers are also prepared to come covering costs themselves, especially if they can participate in parts of the programme free of costs.;
- Don't forget to thank your volunteers, with a party, a thank you meal, and/or a small present!
- After the event, don't forget your volunteers - look for ways to include them sustainably in the network of your organisation. An experienced volunteer is better than an inexperienced one.

## Junior decision-makers in your events

A **junior decision-maker** is a team member who joins your event - either with preparations or during the event only - on a voluntary basis, but has more experience and can handle more responsibilities than a regular volunteer. These junior decision-makers can appear as part of an official training programme or an internship, where they are part of the event, project or organisation for a long(er) duration.

However crucial, volunteers or junior decision-makers should not cover all the positions in a festival team. There always should be other people in charge, capable of taking decisions and responsibility when necessary. These team members will cover the most important positions, and can be supplemented or aided with one or more junior decision-makers who come to help out on a voluntary basis.

Here are some examples of positions for junior decision-makers:

- (Assistant) volunteer coordinator
- Info-point or guest office host
- Host of the concert hall/venue
- Backstage coordinator
- Social media channels coordinator, e.g. Instagram content coordinator
- Assistant to the core team manager, e.g. production office leader assistant

Junior decision-makers are people that can handle a small part of the workload in your project or event. Preferably it is a part that they know everything about, whether through their work experience or previous participation in your organisation. They are not ultimately responsible, but they also don't need someone to always tell them what to do and how. Junior decision-makers should be trusted with some power, so finding motivated candidates that you can trust is a challenge. Some ways to find a junior decision-maker are:

- Open call with a CV and/or motivation letter required: this gives you an idea of their previous experiences. Have they been volunteers for similar events or at similar organisations already?
- Search through your membership. In the case of choir organisations, there should also be choir managers: maybe your members are, or can recommend, the person you are looking for.
- Search through the volunteers of your previous events who already know the event, the association, and/or your management style. Maybe they want to return, in another position with more responsibility.

It is an important and challenging task to choose the right people for the job among all the applications. First of all, try to think in advance about the positions that you can entrust to a junior decision-maker. Count these positions to estimate the total number of people you need. Based on the list of positions, you can derive general requirements you have for the people that may fill them. Here are some more tips, from our experience and that of the membership of the European Choral Association:

- You might want to include the core team of your event into the selection procedure/committee. In the end, they will be the ones working with the volunteers;
- Organize some (online) interviews between potential volunteers and members of your team.
- A shining resume with multiple degrees is not what matters most: earlier experiences at events like yours (paid, but also voluntary) are also very important.
- If your event is a recurring one, participation in previous editions can help significantly.
- Diversity, as well as gender, age and geographical balance, is always important and helpful - also in your pool of volunteers.

Finally, here are a couple of tips on how to deal with junior decision-makers:

- A short introductory course is a good way to start the work:
  - Introduce the structure of the festival and the core team;

- Try to prepare your decision-makers for the most typical crises they are about to meet in their jobs;
- Give a tour of all the locations of the festival;
- It can be a good idea to have these juniors shadow their superiors, like 'flies on the wall', some days in advance. This way they can observe the working process in their department.
- If you arrange an interactive introduction course, it can be a good idea to distribute people to the positions after the course, as you will know their abilities better by then.
- Create a waiting list. There will always be one or two people who need to cancel their participation at the last moment.
- Invite the ones who didn't meet your selection criteria, to join as 'regular' volunteers.
- Make sure you give your junior decision-makers what they come for: experience, access to new skills, networking or social gatherings, certificates, small salaries if applicable.
- Also make sure that they know what they will not get: expectation management is deeply connected with their motivation both to contribute to your event and to their future commitment to the organisation and management in the choral field in general.
- Make junior decision-makers understand that they come to contribute significantly to your event, not just to help as a volunteer, so they need to take their positions seriously and understand the responsibility.
- Last but not least, prepare your core team managers to share some of the responsibilities with their new colleagues.

In the Europa Cantat festivals, we train and use junior decision-makers in a special Young Event Management Programme. It is described more precisely in Chapter 6. Here we will only state that, over the past years, various participants of the programme committed themselves for a longer period when they joined the youth committee of the European Choral Association or found positions in national and international cultural organisations.

## Young people as members of your project teams, working groups or boards

The work of any organisation, including choral associations, usually includes projects and activities (events, campaigns, etc) as well as daily work (communication, finances, membership administration, etc). Young people can and wish to significantly contribute to both, if being included properly.

We are now talking about permanent or long-term collaboration, not just for one event or project. Every organisation has its own way of distributing positions in working groups or project core teams. However, these are usually found within the board and/or the staff of the organisation. Therefore the process of finding and selecting young people for these jobs doesn't differ much from the usual procedure applicable to people of all ages. However, there are some important issues.

1. **Getting there.** The first issue is the actual ability to contribute on such a high level. If for instance your board is elected, not selected, and you want some particular young people to join the board, they might need your help getting there. Whenever there are other, more older (and therefore more experienced) people running for a position, it becomes difficult for aspiring young professionals to get elected. If your bylaws allow you to add or co-opt a board member, you could consider this option. If they don't, make sure to raise awareness of the necessity to have all the generations represented and put them in the spotlight. You can also speak to your members and encourage them to suggest young candidates to the board.
2. **Long-term commitment.** The second issue is commitment. Inviting a young volunteer for an event is one thing; they come and go after the event ends, but permanent collaboration is another story. And different tasks and jobs require different levels of commitment.
3. **Intergenerational communication.** Last but not least, an important topic is intergenerational communication within these working groups and project teams. Trust issues might appear here, and usually only time and fruitful collaboration will help, but a gentle warning about some special youth-related issues won't hurt:

*It is important to prepare your board well, for example, to say, 'Look, these are young people who may not always be able to invest the same amount of time, because their studies require full attention or because they are starting a new job. Even though you can also have these challenges with older people, it will more often happen that some young people will drop out at some point, for a certain reason. We might have people under exam stress and therefore cannot do anything, have to write their Master's paper, or start a new job, or move abroad and out of your reach, etc. We're aware of that, but we can never know for sure, and this is not a reason not to include them.'*

*Team member, international choral association*

## Being a member of a project team

When a young person decides to join a project team, it is mainly the idea behind it that grabs their attention, and the existing team.

*Young people give great importance to the team, and the way the team works: the team atmosphere, and flexibility. Young people these days are no longer necessarily loyal to a company or other 'conventional' organisation structure, they don't identify with it anymore. This is true in the world of culture, too. In the freelance age, they work for many managers and producers. They work where there's a great team.*

*Board member, national choral association*

Invite people to contribute to your work in a direction that is relevant for them, and they will come, and they will stay. Offer them an opportunity to work with other young people, supervised by some experienced choral managers, and your offer will become the dream of every aspiring professional in the choral world. And as projects usually have timelines, stages, and expected



results, you won't need to keep your team members motivated year after year. Moreover, after the project is finished, young team members will most probably be interested in a new collaboration, so they'd likely accept an offer to join the team of your new project.

## Being a member of a permanent working group or board

Daily maintenance of an organisation or association, or participation in a permanent working group (with no specific timeline and work structure) can be a hard task for any volunteer. From the input we've collected, it is a common perception from the elder decision-makers that young people today are less interested in the daily management of an association. They feel less need to unite and don't always see the point of choir organisations or associations at all. This is, however, not always the case, as there are clearly young people who are willing to contribute this way. The whole point is that you need to search for them carefully.

Who are these people? They are the ones who already have an attachment to your organisation, namely:

- Active participants of your events or projects, especially the ones for youth collective singing if you have them;
- Volunteers and junior decision-makers from your events and festivals;
- Young people who once received a scholarship, grant or other support from your association;
- (Former) project team members;
- Former interns;
- Young people active at a local/regional or national level who want to go "one level up" and become active in a regional/national or international organisation.

These young people have some history with your organisation or a similar one, and some of them will want to contribute, to pay you back. Their attachment, however, will need some reinforcement and support on the way, and there are many ways to support them.

- Hear them out. Invite these young people to important meetings and ask their opinions, encourage them to speak up and create a bridge between the generations;
- Put them in the spotlight. Recognition is an important part of encouraging anyone to stay. Use your communication channels to shine a light on your young people's projects as frequently as you would do so with projects from your board, team or partners;
- Let them represent you. Send them to an event created in partnership, let them make a presentation at their college. This will make them feel trusted and acknowledged:

*I felt a responsibility because I wasn't just sent to observe, but I was often sent to give a little presentation on Europa Cantat or the European Choral Association. I couldn't just go there and have fun, I would also have to be a good face for the association.*

*Former youth committee member, decision-maker of the choral world*

# Young people maintaining their own projects in your association

*What I would have liked, but didn't succeed at, is for the youth to come knocking on the door and say, 'Here we are'.*

*Board member, national choral association*

Young people carry around lots of exciting ideas, yet they sometimes cannot manage to make them a reality, as they simply don't have enough experience in choral management and project maintenance. Some of these ideas may not be suitable for implementation, others might need to be further developed or do not fit your strategy at all. However, there undoubtedly will be great ones. There are three ways you can respond to such ideas: you shoot them down, you take the idea and implement it yourself, or (if the project is not too big) you let them create their own project within the framework of your organization.

You can meet these young people with exciting ideas on youth forums, at round tables, sometimes even in a small talk over coffee at some choral festival. If you have an event for youth choirs in the programme of your association, try to find an hour in the schedule to organise a round table on new ideas from young choral enthusiasts! It will be inspirational both for you and for the singers.\*

Finding someone capable who can not only formulate a great idea but also to turn it into a real project, is the next step. A logical way is to offer such an opportunity to trusted volunteers who have already worked with your association and are therefore more experienced, as mentioned above. However, young people are good at searching for collaboration within their social network - if necessary, they could form a working group by themselves. Should you need it, they may produce a project plan for your board or managing staff.

Between the efforts you are willing to make, the resources you are willing to share, the abilities and skills your young volunteers have and are ready to develop, and the amount of work the project actually requires, there is always common ground from which to start working together. It's up to you as a board member or manager to decide how much freedom you can give them and how supportive you wish to be. What is important is that the board and employed staff consciously take the decision to go forward with one of the projects suggested, to support the young people in their implementation and accept the outcome even if it may differ from what they themselves would have chosen to do:

*Often you have young people who are willing to work, and they have very good ideas and are very practical in implementing these ideas. They often don't need much help with their own project, only sometimes in a specific area, which they don't really know how to manage because they lack experience - how to fundraise, for example, or how to deal with the budget, and this is where I could personally give support.*

*Youth representative on the board of a national choral association*

Key points for having (a group of) young people managing their own project(s) in your organisation are the following:

- Mentors and coordinators. At least one board or team member should be willing to stay in contact with the project, observe the job and be there to answer questions and give support.
- Project and budget approvals and deadlines. The project probably needs to be approved by the board before being executed, and it's both the mentors' and the team leader's job to oversee that the project is happening as planned both in terms of timeline and budget.
- Youth-related projects can be supported by the state youth involvement programmes. If your organisation does not have contact with those yet, this might be the opportunity to change it. Examples of such programmes can be found in Chapter 6. You can search for such programmes on the webpages of your ministries of culture or/and education. In Finland, for instance, a national youth policy programme is published by the Ministry of education and culture.
- Communication (both within the project team and between the board and the project team) is important!

And here is one story of how it can happen from one of our member organisations:

*The first meeting was a debate of ideas, needs, etc. I put proposals on the table, then we reviewed them during a second meeting with arbitrations to be made together. Are we going there for a one-off thing? Do we see something permanent there? What will be the weight of each person's commitment? We have to prepare things and all that, we did it together. And then we did it, and everyone worked. Our association managed the international supervision, invitations, contracts, finances, and looked for places. But the content, they managed in autonomy, almost. We piloted a bit, of course, but still. And it's still like that now.*

*Board member, national choral association*



Generations of youth committees of the European Choral Association

Top row: Burak Onur Erdem, Jan Schumacher, Iva Radulovic, Flannery Ryan, Klara Maljuga

Bottom row: Silvija Pročkytė, Alberto Palacín Fernández, Zeynep Eren Kovankaya, Ruben Timmer,

Mathilde Sanchez, Anna Bobrikova

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## Chapter 4. The youth committee

A youth committee is a group of (usually) young enthusiasts who give the organisation a youth perspective, support the board and work in the frame of the organisation. It is usually arranged in terms, which give the youth committee a timeframe to work with. Often a committee is selected or revisited every 2-3 years.

**Disclaimer:** *this chapter is written mostly according to the experience of the European Choral Association with its youth committee, with some help from our member organisations. We describe the way to form, maintain and evaluate the youth committee of the European Choral Association. There are, of course, many other ways to deal with this matter.*

### Five things you need to know before considering launching a youth committee

#### **1.No, it won't start working from Day 1.**

The youth committee is not like any normal working group you form in your association such as working groups within the board. Launching a youth committee means that you are inviting new people to your team, you're forming a new element in the structure of your organisation. The



members of the youth committee will need some time to adapt, get to know each other and start working. They will need some more time to take over the projects you give them (if there are any) and even more time to plan and operate their own projects. Even if not all the members of the committee are new to your association, don't expect to see significant results after one week.

**2.Yes, some of the youth committee members will probably let you down.**

Life changes very fast, especially when you are young. People in their twenties graduate from their universities and decide to take another degree, they start new jobs, they can move to different cities or even countries, they marry and decide to have kids. There will always be some crucial changes in their lives, and sometimes it will mean that they suddenly can't work anymore. This is a point in an agreement you sign when dealing with young people. That's why you have a committee, not just one young individual who is doing all the work by himself. You can replace or simply extract one member, and the committee will stand. (And if you are honest, the same often happens on the board level, with a specific board member dropping out or not dedicating as much time to the work in the board as expected, even though the reasons may be different - so when it happens with a young person there is no need to be more critical or disappointed than when it happens with an older person).

**3.Yes, the youth committee will need (financial) support.**

If you want them to work effectively, you need them to meet personally at least a few times a year, and you can't expect them to pay for their travel, since most of them don't have regular salaries yet. If you want their projects to be professional, they also will need a working budget. A good thing is that young people are used to being creative about living and working with minimal expenses. Another good thing is that you don't need to pay them for their work, and that there may be government programmes supporting these kinds of youth projects. With the youth committee in your structure, you may be able to apply for this additional funding.

**4.Yes, the members of the youth committee will grow up.**

And not all of them will stay as enthusiastic and involved, they may have less and less time, as they will start their families and their own jobs, and some of them will decide to leave the choral world for good. This is why now is the time to invite them and help them to grow up for both their and your organisation's benefits.

**5.Yes, it's worth it.**

# How to find and choose people for your youth committee

If you are about to create a youth committee, start with drafting a 'portrait' of your potential young colleagues. Who are those young people you want to see working next to you? At the European Choral Association, we have defined ours as *"young people between 18 and 30 years old with a strong interest in choral music and management, willing to affect, with enough time, motivation and strong will to contribute to the choral music life of today and tomorrow."* We try to find young people who are connected with their regional/national choral association, or those who have been part of one or several of our youth events, and while selecting, keep in mind the balance in age, gender, background, and nationality. It's your call, so don't hesitate to draw your own picture!

When you are about to launch a youth committee, an **open call** is one way to start the recruitment. Spread the call through youth organisations, institutions and universities, youth forums, and, of course, student and youth choirs. It's up to you, whether you want them to bring recommendation letters and CVs, but a motivation letter or a motivation question in a registration form is a must! You can also ask them to write down three goals they want to achieve within the committee or ask them to submit a little video. This information will provide insight into your possible youth committee members, which helps significantly in the selection process. Another option could be an internal call within the membership.

*In our call, we made it clear that we wanted to do specific things. It was very clear that we wanted to achieve growth in youth choral activity in our country, and we wanted the youth committee to be really involved in that. So they felt a need for them to get involved, and they felt that they would achieve something, and that has happened.*

*Executive board member, national choral association*

A combination of both is also a possibility, and former youth committee members may also be good "ambassadors" who can spread the word in their own networks. In any case, representatives of your member organisations/choirs in your youth committee will make your network stronger.

How many people should be in a group? The answer depends on how many tasks you are willing to give to the committee, what are the costs you need to cover and which budget is available. At the European Choral Association there are 7 to 8 committee members with one directly connected to the next Europa Cantat Festival - and from our experience, it should be five at the very least. With more than nine, the internal coordination becomes an almost impossible challenge, especially with flexible jobs and the fast-changing lives of young people.

Here are some tips on how to select the youth committee members:

- It can be useful to form a selection committee for the task, so that the process becomes transparent and less subjective.;
- Decide in advance the number of members your youth committee will have. Geographic diversity in a group is important. If you are a national or international organisation, make sure that different regions or countries are represented;
- Background diversity in a group is important. The youth committee works as a team, having different skills between them is an asset for their projects;
- Gender and age balance is important;
- Take at least some people who you've worked with before, or who at least participated in your events. Emotional attachment to the association increases the long-term commitment which is necessary for the youth committee members;
- If you are searching for dynamics and a new perspective, take an "outsider", a new person to your association, as this person will have different ideas and different visions;
- Create a waiting list. It might happen that due to crucial life changes a member of the youth committee will drop out in the middle of the term, then you can call someone from the waiting list or decide to move on with a reduced number of members.

The youth committee is usually selected every 2-3 years, as it is hard for a young person with a fast-changing life to declare commitment for a longer term. However, it is a good idea to have one or two members of the youth committee stay for a second term. They can carry the legacy of the previous youth committee over to the new one and help get the new members started.

## Maintaining a youth committee

As a reminder, here is the definition of the youth committee that we gave at the beginning of the chapter: a youth committee is a group of (usually) young enthusiasts who give the organisation a youth perspective, support the board and work in the frame of the organisation. It is usually arranged in terms, a committee is selected every 2-3 years.

In order to organise the work of the committee, an internal structure helps. Several possible positions can form this internal structure.

**Chair:** chairing the meetings, preparing agenda, controlling the timelines of the projects, making everyone work, representing the youth committee at the board meetings

**Vice-chair (optional):** supporting the chair, stepping in for the chair if needed

**Secretary:** scheduling the meetings, taking the minutes during the meetings, managing the internal mailing processes in collaboration with the chair.

**Communication (optional):** dealing with external communication of the committee (e.g. messages to the board, spreading the calls through membership when appearing, like invitations to participate in a project, questionnaires, or spreading the word), preparing the social media content for youth committee projects

**Treasurer (optional):** managing the budget of the youth committee (if applicable)

Of course there are also other possible structures such as dividing the group into different project groups or topics. Nevertheless some positions such as a chair are a must if the youth committee should function in the long run.

How to ensure that the youth committee supports the board? Firstly, determine the directions in which the youth committee is going to work in advance. At the beginning of the term, you can give them the topics to focus on. You can also offer some project ideas that have been on the table for a while but have not been realized, to see if the youth committee might find them interesting. It is, however, important to give them a chance to choose their own projects and priorities as long as they fit the strategy and general programme of your organisation and are feasible work-wise and financially. These ideas can then be approved by a board or manager. In this way, the activities of the youth committee would be in the frame of the organisation.

- It might not be a good idea to associate young people with fun and games and only give the youth committee not-so-serious tasks. From experience, this can give the youth committee a reputation of just a group of people having fun and not doing serious work. On the other hand, youth-related topics like youth choral education, development of the youth choirs, and so on, can be a good place to start both from the point of interest of young people and governmental programmes for supporting the youth activities.

The youth committee is arranged in terms for many reasons, but the most important one is a timeline. At the beginning of the term, the committee knows exactly when their job is meant to end, so they can create a timeline for their projects and plan their work for the whole term.

- The term of the youth committee of the European Choral Association is three years, which may seem long, but that doesn't mean all of the projects have to be that long. Some of the projects should be short-term. This is also to get a good balance between short-term successes and long-term deadlines, since only working with long deadlines may suck the energy out of any group.

An important part of maintaining the youth committee is to make them feel included, and make sure their job is visible to, for instance, the board and to the membership. There are many ways to do it:



- Include reports of the youth committee into the annual reports of your organisation;
- Give the youth committee some time/space during your general assembly to present their work to the membership;
- Give the youth committee some profile on your social media and at your events;
- Invite the youth committee members to participate in the projects, working groups and events of your organisation;
- Give them voting rights (at least 1 voice for the whole committee) at (board) meetings and/or general assemblies (one possibility to give them voting rights in the general assembly is to offer them a free individual membership for the duration of their term)

Last but not least, the responsibilities of the youth committee should be made clear at the outset, and be explained both to them and to the board. In the European Choral Association, the responsibilities of the youth committee are the following:

- With the help of their mentor(s), the youth committee should choose the directions they are going to work in. Within these directions, the youth committee should create some projects and activities, both independent and within the existing events and projects of the association;
- The youth committee must create a strict plan for their projects and activities with a timeline covering the whole 3-year term. The plan should be approved by the board;
- The youth committee must regularly report to the team and board about the progress and changes in the plan and ask for the approval of the main steps;
- All the members of the youth committee are obliged to appear regularly at the meetings of the committee (twice a year in person, once or twice a month online);
- All the members of the youth committee should support the association and contribute to the projects and events of the Association, if possible;
- All the members of the youth committee should contribute to the other work of the organization - for instance in other working groups within the association;
- One member of the youth should participate in every Board meeting. All the members of the youth committee should join some parts of the “life” meetings of the board when invited;
- It is recommended to plan at least one meeting of the youth committee pre year which “overlaps” with a board meeting so that the two groups meet regularly.

These responsibilities, of course, depend on the tasks you give to the youth committee in your organisation.



Maša Medved, former member of the youth committee of the European Choral Association and team member of Europa Cantat Ljubljana 2021, and Mihela Jagodic, programme manager  
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## Chapter 5. Experiences with youth involvement

### History of the youth committee of the European Choral Association

*It was the year 1995. Sonja Greiner attended her first board meeting with the board of Europa Cantat - European Federation of Young Choirs. There were 12 men and 1 woman on that board, and the youngest board member was 50 years old. A long path towards age balance and youth involvement was still lying ahead of them...*

The whole youth involvement process in the European choral community started with a European Parliament of Young Musicians. This was founded back in 1994, as a result of the common efforts of AGECE (European Union of Choral Federations) and KOTA (Hungarian Association of Choirs, Orchestras, and Folk Ensembles). Europa Cantat - EFYC participated in the organisation of the Parliament from the second edition. From 1998, the Parliament was under the patronage of the European Music Council and started working not only for choirs but also for instrumentalists.

*...it is necessary to improve the situation of music in Europe. Young musicians have their own ideas in the development of these improvements, so they are brought together in the EPYM (European Parliament of Young Musicians). Here, they represent the youth voice from European countries. The members come from all over Europe (from Spain to Finland), and work together, bringing a lot of enthusiasm and positive ideas on how to improve the situation.*

*from the leaflet of the 5th Session of the European Parliament of Young Musicians, supposed to happen in Strasbourg in September 2000*

The board of Europa Cantat - EFYC decided that they also wanted a youth representative on their board. The statutes at that time allowed the board to co-opt a member or two, so this person didn't need to be elected, and they used this option to get a young person added to the board. This setup worked for some time, however they realized that having one young board member does not mean an entire generation is represented. So, a new approach was needed. First, the Working Group Youth of the European Music Council was formed. Ultimately, in 2004, the first youth committee was installed. Since that time, one representative of the youth committee has always been joining the board meetings, but it was the whole Committee working and giving input through this representative.

These efforts paid off quite fast, as from every youth committee since then, there have been people elected to the board. As the statutes allow board members to be elected three times, these former youth committee members, after 3 or 6 years in the youth committee, could remain in the board for another 9 years. With this renewable source of experienced representatives of a younger generation, the association is now successfully maintaining a good age balance within the board.

Former youth committee members are now big players: chairs of music commissions for main events of the European Choral Association, presidents or managers of organisations such as the European Music Council, the International Federation for Choral Music or national choir organisations: investing in young managers pays off in the long term, as well as the short term.

## Stories from our member organisations

In this subchapter, we briefly tell a few stories that our member organisations decided to share with us. Different forms of youth involvement are mentioned here: both successful and unfortunate stories are told.

The youth committee was formed as the only working group in the country managing youth choral singing operated by (mostly) young people. The call was spread openly through youth organisations and youth choirs. The offer was specifically to work on the topics of youth choral education and choral repertoire for schools. Later the committee was asked to bring their own ideas for the projects which were then approved by the board. At first, the committee was coordinated by the executive staff and board members, so it was a common effort. The association received governmental funding for youth-oriented projects, but this also led to the growth of the responsibilities of the executive staff. After re-visiting the structure of the committee, this group has become more independent. The first youth committee term was not fixed in length, the plan for the future is to re-select new members every three years. The youth committee is formed of young people and specialists working in the field of youth choirs and choral education.

The association focuses on individual support they are willing to offer to the young people who have ideas, but maybe don't know in all the details and steps how to proceed with them.

The association itself was created with a major focus on youth choirs, but as the years passed, the board grew up together with the membership, and no new young people joined. Several attempts were made to re-establish a working group focused on youth. The association decided to invite young people to join a team for a project, not a committee or a board to manage the association itself, as there was next to no interest within the youth to deal with the maintenance of the association. Young people are, in their experience, attracted by a great team of other young people, not with association management business.

The youth committee has met several times, several long-term projects were discussed but never performed. Lack of communication and next to no emotional attachment of the youth committee members to the association led to the loss of interest from the youth committee members' side, and after several attempts to restore the communication, the board decided to put their energy in a rather person-to-person than group-to-group interaction with the youth. The youth committee brought some ideas and gave useful input in terms of the needs and wishes of their generation, but did not become an effective working group of the association.

The youth committee has existed for many years and is quite a success. There are 10 people on the committee, and 6 of them are younger than 25 years old. They meet online every 2 weeks and "live" 6 times a year. The youth committee has its own tasks and budget. They are trusted with different tasks, including management, solving technical issues, taking over media and communication, and even finances. They are mainly focused on projects for children and youth.



YEMPers from Europa Cantat Ljubljana 2021  
© Tamara Domjanič - Europa Cantat Ljubljana 2021

## Chapter 6. Existing youth involvement programmes

This chapter may be the shortest, but is not less important. We have gathered some sources that showcase some (definitely not all!) youth involvement projects that are done by other international cultural organisations. If you'd like some further reading, you might want to take a look at the links below.

### STAMP | Shared Training Activities for Music Professionals

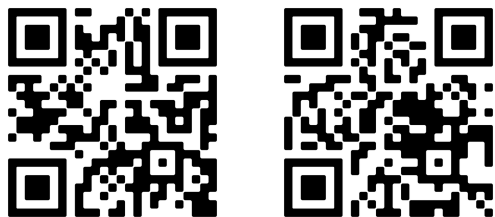
STAMP is a project of the European Music Council that was launched to increase cooperation and networking in the music sector. The results of the project are several exemplary tools that can be used as templates or handbooks to organise trainings and international knowledge exchange. Among the results of the STAMP, there are the following tools that can be used to increase youth involvement:

- Online courses on Entrepreneurship in Music and International Networking and Cooperation;
- Handbooks on Social Inclusion for Disadvantaged Youth and Audience Development;
- Handbook and a toolbox about the YEMP programme, see below.



## YEMP | Young Event Management Programme

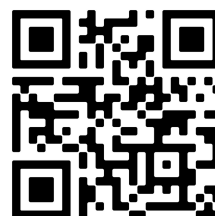
The Young Event Management Programme is a special training for young people interested in event organising. The programme takes place every three years and is connected to the Europa Cantat festivals. Participants of the programme arrive a week before the Europa Cantat festival, take part in a training weekend, participate in the final preparation week of the festival and join the team during the festival itself as junior decision-makers.



A detailed description of the YEMP and a handbook on the programme (on the left) can be found on the webpage of the STAMP project together with a Toolbox for event managers (on the right). These materials (partly collected by the youth committee of the European choral association) can be used both for educating young people you have in your association and for organising a similar programme at your events.

## The EMC Fellowship Programme

The Fellowship Programme of the European Music Council invites seven aspiring professionals occupied in the music field to become members of the EMC and actively participate in their events and projects. Fellows are provided with a travel grant to attend the European Forum on Music and included in the EMC's internal communication. The Fellowship programme gives young people an opportunity to develop their networks, grow professionally and internationalise their careers.



## EU Youth Strategy for Culture



Culture and creativity are on the agenda of the Youth Strategy of the European Union. The aim here is to support creativity and innovation: actions are being taken to increase access to culture and cultural exchange, support the development of creativity, young talents and entrepreneurs, promote partnership and diverse education and training in culture.



# UNESCO initiatives to support youth involvement in culture

First of all, it's worth mentioning the UNESCO Youth Programme 2014-2021 (more information in the QR code to the right) aimed at amplifying the voices of the youth, supporting early career and youth employment and linking culture and education.



Among all the programmes monitored and/or supported by UNESCO in the field of culture and youth participation, two attracted our attention:



- Greece, 2016, special programme *Support of youth participation in culture and in the use of new technologies*. The programme aimed to enhance youth participation in culture. Special cultural and educational events for young people were offered in different regions of Greece. Reduced participation fees for young people were introduced. Special support was given to youth entrepreneurship;
- Belarus, 2014-2015, the special programme *Support for talented young people and youth cultural initiatives*. The aim was to increase the number of youth collectives and associations within the country and also to support youth initiatives. Festivals, competitions, forums, cultural and educational events for children and youth were organised in the frame of Year of Youth (2014 in Belarus). Special grants and scholarships were offered.

# Epilogue. Just the beginning

Youth involvement in decision-making as a goal, at least in the choral sector, is something rather new - twenty-five years old at most. As managing the choral sector became a competitive profession, young people became increasingly interested in training opportunities such as youth committees. Sometimes, their lives come in the way of carrying projects out until the final phase, but some organisations in various European countries have managed to build a youth involvement model which works for both themselves and their target youth group. Throughout our investigation process, though, we could still identify some stubborn prejudices and assumptions regarding youth involvement in decision-making. In the end, the main one is probably a common misunderstanding:

*If I may, in relation to older people, we are - it's a cliché - in a parent-child situation, in the sense that we expect guidance from adults. At this point in our lives, between 20 and 30 years old, we also realize we are in a phase where we are becoming those who can guide, and more senior staff or board members don't necessarily expect to give guidance. So if you don't take initiative, if you wait for guidance, ultimately, you can become very frustrated.*

*I remember we [...] had a workshop about involving young people in different organisations. I remember we were discussing this misunderstanding, and the young people were saying "yes, but all the same, it's important for us to know if we are doing well, if we are doing what we are expected to do". Nevertheless, the leaders of the organisations replied "If we make you come, it is up to you to be completely free, and proactive". You see, I could sense a tension there, at the very place where we expected the opposite to happen: young people offering things on their own and confronting elders who would not want to budge.*

*Former member of the youth committee of the European Choral Association*

Communication, as seems to be the case always and everywhere, is key.

We hope this handbook will help you pave the way towards a future more inclusive of young people in decision-making. If you have any further questions, you can reach out to us via email at [youthcommittee@europeanchoralassociation.org](mailto:youthcommittee@europeanchoralassociation.org). Ourselves or, from 2022 onwards, our successors will be happy to support you.

**Sincerely yours,**

**The youth committee of the European Choral Association 2019-2021**



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