

Minimum Requirements and Guidelines for Organizing European Youth Music Festivals

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I. Introduction

Since 1985, the European Music School Union (EMU) and its member associations have accumulated extensive experience in organizing the European Youth Music Festival. With this document, the EMU aims to provide its members with practical guidelines to assist in the planning and holding of European Youth Music Festivals in their respective countries. The European Youth Music Festival is not a competition but a gathering that unites young musicians from across Europe to celebrate friendship and the joy of music.

Central to the EMU's strategic orientation is the goal to strengthen the role of young musicians and encourage all members to support cross-border projects with music schools. In all projects, emphasis should be placed on the educational, artistic and social benefits for the youth, as well as on sufficient opportunities for cross-border exchange and interaction among young participants. Additionally, these festivals provide a unique chance for participants to explore and appreciate the music and culture of the host country, fostering a deeper understanding and connection. These elements constitute the core strategic focus of these projects.

In the coming years, the EMU will continue to document valuable insights gained through the organization of festivals. This ongoing process will include updates to EMU's green policy as it relates to the planning and delivery of its events. This growing knowledge base will support member associations in envisioning a festival in their own country and encourage them to host such an event.

a. Division of Responsibilities between the Organiser and the EMU

Roles and tasks of the EMU

The EMU serves as the Patron Organization of the festival, overseeing its organization, financing, and main structural aspects from the early planning stages to the event's conclusion. As the Patron Organization, the EMU assumes no legal or financial liability for the festival. While the EMU is responsible for disseminating the invitation to its network of approximately 6.000 music schools across its member countries, the organizer must provide the EMU with promotional and marketing materials designed to encourage music school ensembles to participate in the event (see the Marketing Activities section for further details). Any major changes to the festival plans must be reported to the EMU. The organizer may deviate from specific requirements outlined in this document, but only with prior consultation and approval from the EMU board.

Roles and tasks of the organiser

The organiser holds full responsibility for the practical implementation of the festival, which may include, but is not limited to, establishing a legal entity for the purpose of organising the event if necessary, recruiting staff and managing the organisational team, and contracting service providers such as caterers, technicians, transport operators, and others essential to the smooth running of the festival. The organiser is also responsible for developing the overall concept of the festival, including the selection of venues and proposed dates, overseeing all marketing and promotional activities, and managing logistical and operational details, from accommodation to stage setups and transportation. In addition to operational responsibilities, the organiser is fully accountable for the financial aspects of the festival, including securing funding, sponsorships, and other forms of support, as well as ensuring proper financial management and reporting, including the submission of required documentation to funders and stakeholders. Organisers agree to comply with all mandatory requirements outlined in this document; while the accompanying guidelines are non-binding, they are recommended to support the efficient, high-quality, and successful organisation of the festival.

b. Festival Identity

The European Youth Music Festival is an event that welcomes between 2.000 and 7.000 young musicians. The international nature of the festival fosters a diverse and inclusive environment, with musicians from various countries coming together to celebrate their shared love for music. The festival

engages with the local community through public performances, parades, and other events, further enriching the cultural landscape.

To manage the complexity of the festival, organizers often establish dedicated legal entities specifically for the event. In addition, individuals are usually hired solely for the purpose of planning and executing the festival, as preparations can take up to five years. The festival spans a minimum of three days and features an opening and closing ceremony, bringing all participants together in a shared experience. Each participating ensemble is guaranteed at least two performances, allowing them to showcase their talent and contribute to the vibrant musical atmosphere. The long-term impact of the festival is evident in the continued musical development of its participants and the broader musical community.

Historically, EMU festivals have aimed to attract between 5.000 and 7.000 participants, with some editions featuring performances on more than 100 stages. However, in recent years, various factors such as changes in organizational structures, limited preparation time, and constraints in resources or location capacity have led to the organization of smaller-scale festivals. In recognition of these evolving circumstances, the EMU has revised its expectations, lowering the anticipated number of participants to 2.000. This adjustment is intended to make it more feasible for member associations to host festivals by reducing logistical demands, costs, and the need for extensive infrastructure. By embracing a more flexible and realistic approach, EMU hopes to encourage more organisations to host festivals and ensure the continued celebration of youth music across Europe.

II. Minimum Requirements

a. Procedures for applying for a festival

II.b.1. Member associations interested in organizing the festival, or those responding positively to an invitation from the EMU Board to apply, must provide letters of support from local and, if possible, national governments, indicating their general willingness to support the event.

II.b.2. Festivals must have a minimum capacity of hosting up to 2.000 participants.

II.b.3. Within four months of the EMU Presidium's decision to award the festival to a member association, the organizer must submit a budget proposal demonstrating that two-thirds of the costs are covered by support from local authorities, the national government, and/or other funding sources. Written agreements are not required at this stage, but the organizer must provide a clear explanation of how the funding will be secured.

II.b.4. The participation fee, which is proposed by the host organisation and must be accepted by the EMU, covers accommodation and subsistence cost (three varied meals per day, including at least one hot meal).

b. Location and accommodation

II.b.1. The festival should take place in cities or regions with sufficient accommodation and performance venues.

II.b.2. The festival organizer must provide clear information regarding available accommodations, ensuring that all promised standards are met.

II.b.3. Accommodation for participants must be indoors to mitigate weather-related risks.

II.b.4. The festival organization must provide each participating ensemble with a contact person. This person's name and contact details must be communicated in advance. The designated person or another representative must be present to welcome each arriving group at their accommodation.

II.b.5. If the festival takes place in several cities, they must be geographically close to minimize travel time between venues.

c. Participation, Registration and Communication

The earlier a festival is announced, the better. It takes considerable time to register ensembles for the event. Once the organizer announces the festival, the EMU must pass on the information to its members. These members sometimes need to translate the details into their own languages and disseminate them to their music schools. Within the music schools, the staff responsible for liaising with the national association must discuss potential participation with teachers and directors. The teachers need to make various arrangements, such as drafting a budget, securing external funding if needed, coordinating with students' parents, and handling all practical preparations. Since each of these steps requires time, it is crucial for the organizer to announce the event as early as possible.

It is furthermore important to note that ensembles from the host country typically make up a significant portion of participants—up to one-third. This is largely because they have the advantage of easier travel logistics, and those located nearby may not even require accommodation. Additionally, the festival usually represents a major project for the responsible association, that actively promotes it to its member schools, many of which are even directly involved in its organization.

Additionally, the following requirements apply:

II.c.1. Registration will occur in two phases: preliminary registration one year before the festival, and final registration six months prior to the event.

II.c.2. The festival organizer must develop a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy.

II.c.3. Registration forms must be comprehensive, gathering detailed information about each group and their performance requirements.

II.c.4. Participants must receive clear and timely information on accessing festival updates.

II.c.5. Promotional materials must be provided to the EMU, which will relay them to the music schools through its members.

II.c.6. Only music schools that are members of a national association affiliated with EMU may participate. Exceptions require approval from the EMU Presidium.

II.c.7. Post-registration, all communication must be directly managed between the festival organizer and the registered groups.

II.c.8. EMU must be credited as the Patron Organization in all promotional materials and media coverage. The EMU logo must be featured in festival brochures, and its name must be mentioned in key activities.

II.c.9. The applications must be approved by the national associations, which will determine participant eligibility if applications exceed capacity. In such cases, the EMU Board will establish national quotas.

II.c.10. Participating musicians should be mostly between 12 and 25 years of age.

II.c.11. Only groups should participate.

II.c.12. Each group may register one accompanying adult per ten participants under the age of 18. Additional adults must arrange their own accommodation.

II.c.13. The EMU Board must be invited as guests for the duration of the festival.

II.c.14. The host country may organize a pre-festival event, which is not an official part of the European Youth Music Festival.

d. Insurance and security

II.d.1. All participants and accompanying adults must have valid travel and health insurance for the festival duration. Groups are also advised to secure liability insurance.

II.d.2. The festival organizer must obtain general liability insurance for stages, equipment, and personnel.

II.d.3. The festival organizer must designate a 24/7 contact person for security and health issues and provide emergency contact details, including local hospitals and healthcare centers.

e. Transport

II.e.1. Groups must arrange their own transportation to and from the festival.

II.e.2. The festival organization must provide information on local transport options, though groups are free to make their own arrangements.

f. Performances

II.f.1. The performance schedule, including stage requirements, must be finalized at least three months before the festival.

II.f.2. The festival must include an opening and closing ceremony featuring all participants.

II.f.3. Each group must perform at least twice in different venues, including indoor and outdoor locations with significant public engagement.

II.f.4. Groups must bring their own instruments, though hosts are expected to provide large instruments such as harps, percussion, and double basses.

II.f.5. The festival organizer must provide an information package including concert schedules, performer details, venue locations, city maps, and other logistical information.

II.f.6. Efforts should be made to attract audiences to performances through marketing, venue selection, and coordinated programming.

II.f.7. Concert schedules should allow groups to attend and support each other's performances.

g. Evaluation

II.g.1. The festival organization must distribute evaluation forms to all participating groups and EMU member associations. The forms are developed jointly by the organiser and the EMU.

II.g.2. Evaluation results must be presented to the EMU Board within six months of the festival's conclusion.

III. Guidelines

a. Suggested Timetable and Organisational Stages

The stages outlined below, along with the suggested timeline, serve as a general reference. Most festivals may need to adjust these stages due to various factors, such as elections and political changes, shifts in the hosting association's board, time constraints related to funding periods, and other logistical considerations. The EMU board is well aware of these challenges, which is why the following concept is intended as a flexible guideline rather than a rigid framework, outlining the ideal process.

Stage 1: More than 5 Years Before the Festival

At this stage, the initial idea for the festival is conceived. Key considerations include the festival's basic concept, proposed date and location, potential partners, financial planning, and other foundational aspects. While not all festivals progress beyond this phase, we nevertheless strongly recommend discussing the concept with the EMU Board and Secretary General early on. We can provide valuable guidance even at this preliminary stage.

Stage 2: 2 to 5 Years Before the Festival

Once the decision is made to proceed with the festival and the EMU Board has signalled its approval, planning becomes concrete. The date and location are confirmed, and a budget is developed, outlining expected income sources and expenses. This phase is also crucial for securing political support and funding from public institutions and private sponsors (Please note: Sponsorship agreements require EMU Board approval to ensure alignment with EMU values.). The phase concludes with the festival organizer presenting a final concept to the EMU Board. This document should detail all practical and logistical aspects, along with a stable, balanced budget. The EMU Board then decides whether to award the event the official title of the European Youth Music Festival.

Stage 3: 2 Years Before the Festival

Once the EMU has granted approval, the festival is officially announced to EMU members. Ideally, this includes a formal presentation at the EMU General Assembly two years before the event. This phase also marks the beginning of marketing and promotional efforts (see section below). Around this time, individuals employed for the organization of the festival typically begin their work.

Stage 4: 1 Year Before the Festival

Approximately one year before the festival, registration opens. The festival organizer provides promotional materials for the EMU to distribute among its members. Regular exchanges between the organizer and the EMU team begin, ensuring smooth coordination. At this stage, (potential) participants will start reaching out with questions regarding travel, accommodation, performances, and other logistical matters. The festival team should be ready to handle a high volume of inquiries.

Stage 5: During the Festival

During the festival, all involved parties—festival organizers, the hosting association, and the EMU Board and team—will be present in the host country. Many participants and delegates attending the General Assembly and European Music School Forum will also stay for the festival. In most cases, this is not only due to their interest in the event but also because they have sent ensembles from their own music schools to perform. The host is expected to cover accommodation and subsistence costs for delegates during the General Assembly and Forum (see minimum requirements for organising a General Assembly). However, an additional fee may be charged for extra days spent during the festival.

Stage 6: After the Festival

Following the event, the organizer is responsible for collecting participant feedback. A debriefing meeting is held between the festival organizer and the EMU Board and team. This evaluation process helps assess the festival's success, strengthens cooperation, and provides recommendations for future editions.

b. Marketing Activities

The success of a festival, particularly in attracting a large number of participants, depends heavily on timely organization and a well-planned marketing strategy. While the responsibility for all marketing activities lies with the organizer, we have compiled a set of recommendations to provide guidance and support in developing an effective strategy that maximizes participation.

Corporate Identity

A festival's corporate identity is a key element in shaping its visual and conceptual character. It begins with a distinctive logo and consistent branding that reflect the festival's theme and focus. A carefully chosen color palette and typography create a recognizable aesthetic, while imagery and graphics—such as photographs and illustrations—help capture the festival's unique atmosphere. Additionally, a well-defined tone of voice and messaging ensure clear and consistent communication across promotional materials, social media, and the festival website.

Promotional Videos

Many successful festivals have relied on promotional videos to generate excitement and engagement. Typically lasting between one and three minutes, these videos provide essential information about the event, including footage of the host city and venues, music, event dates, a website link, and key branding elements. We strongly recommend working with professional videographers and editors to ensure high-quality production. In today's digital landscape, videos can be easily shared on social media, embedded in websites or included in newsletters, making them a powerful tool that connects with potential participants on an emotional level while effectively conveying information.

Dedicated Festival Website

The festival website serves as the primary marketing platform for promoting and communicating all aspects of the event. It should be one of the first promotional tools launched during the planning phase and updated regularly with accurate and relevant information. The website should prominently feature the following key elements:

- **Pricing Information**

Clearly outline the various registration and accommodation options available. Pricing should be fully transparent, making it easy for potential participants to understand the total cost of attendance based on their selected options.

- **Promotional Video**

Embedding the promotional video—ideally on the landing page—adds an emotional and engaging touch to the festival's presentation. This helps generate excitement and interest among prospective participants and partners.

- **Accommodation and Subsistence Details**

If the festival offers multiple accommodation options, these should be clearly described, including their features, locations, and visuals such as photos. The connection between each option and its corresponding cost must be easy to understand and fully transparent.

- **Practical Information and Logistics**

All logistical aspects should be comprehensively covered. This includes:

- Transportation details (e.g., bus parking, airport/train station transfers, rental options)
- Transfers between key festival locations (stages, accommodations, food areas)
- Performance-related logistics (e.g., stage setups, instrument lending, technical requirements)

All practical details should be presented in a clear, structured, and easy-to-navigate format.

- **Registration Link**

A direct and easily accessible link to the registration form must be included. The website should not only inform but also facilitate immediate action—participants should be able to register directly or via a clearly visible link.

- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

Each festival has its unique characteristics. Including a FAQ section can significantly reduce repetitive inquiries by addressing common questions in advance, thereby streamlining communication for organizers and participants alike.

Social Media

In recent editions, the importance of a strong social media presence for the festival has grown significantly. As a dynamic and fast-evolving landscape, social media offers numerous opportunities to connect with the festival's core audience—particularly young people, who naturally engage with digital platforms in their daily lives. While previous festivals have primarily used Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, there is ample room to explore and experiment with additional or emerging platforms to broaden reach and engagement.

A well-curated and regularly updated social media feed can be an effective tool to build anticipation and excitement among participants while conveying relevant information. Content can be based on the following:

- Key updates and announcements
- Showcasing the festival venues, including concert locations and special settings
- Introducing ensembles, bands, and performers who have registered
- Highlighting fun facts, behind-the-scenes content, or trivia related to the festival

By combining informative content with engaging storytelling, social media becomes not just a marketing tool, but an integral part of the festival experience—before, during, and after the event.

Information materials for direct mailings

A key element in the festival's communication strategy has consistently been the creation of an online brochure in PDF format. This format allows for all essential information to be consolidated into a single, easily shareable document. It can be distributed via email and other digital channels, making it highly accessible and efficient for outreach. The brochure plays a particularly important role in reaching the 6.000 music schools within the EMU network, serving as the primary tool for capturing attention when a new festival is announced. To be effective, the brochure should:

- Reflect the corporate identity of the festival in its design and branding
- Include all essential details such as dates, pricing, accommodation options, logistical information, and any other key elements that influence participation decisions
- Be clear, visually engaging, and well-structured to ensure easy readability

A well-designed PDF brochure remains an indispensable asset for both promotional and informational purposes, especially in the early stages of festival outreach.

c. Financial considerations

Organizing a European Youth Music Festival requires thoughtful and strategic financial planning to ensure the event is successful, inclusive, and of high artistic quality. While the host organization is fully responsible for the festival's budget, certain key financial principles must be upheld in alignment with EMU's expectations.

Purpose of Participation Fees

The participation fee—set by the host organization and approved by EMU—should cover only the direct, personal costs for each participant. These include:

- Accommodation, as promised by the organizer
- Full board: three meals per day, including at least one hot meal
- Local transportation between accommodation, rehearsal and performance venues, and festival sites

Participation fees must not be used to cover general festival expenses such as stages, sound and lighting equipment, or instrument rentals. These broader production costs should be financed through other sources, such as public funding, sponsorships, or cultural grants.

Avoiding Financial Dependence on Participant Numbers

The festival budget must not rely heavily on a high number of paying participants. Even if participation is strong, fee income should remain a complementary source of funding rather than the primary one. The financial plan must be stable and secure, even in the event of lower-than-expected registration.

Primary Sources of Funding

At least two-thirds of the overall festival budget should come from external sources, such as:

- Local, regional, or national government support
- Grants from cultural, educational, or youth-oriented organizations
- Sponsorships from private companies (subject to prior approval by EMU)
- In-kind contributions, such as free use of venues or services (provided these are reliably secured)

These funding sources should be arranged as early as possible to provide a solid financial foundation for the event. (See also sections II.b.3 and III.a.)

Note: Although not a requirement, several past editions of the festival have successfully aligned with the European Capital of Cultures. This scheme is usually a natural fit for the festival and can significantly facilitate access to public funding.

Transparency and Financial Accountability

Organizers must manage the festival's finances with integrity and transparency. This includes:

- Providing regular financial updates to core partners and funders
- Fulfilling all contractual obligations, including those to sponsors and service providers
- Submitting a final financial report to the EMU Board after the festival, detailing income sources and expenditure

Accessibility and Inclusion

To ensure that young musicians from diverse backgrounds can participate, organizers should strive to keep participation fees as low as possible. Where feasible, financial assistance—such as discounted fees or targeted support—should be offered to individuals or groups with limited means. This helps maintain the festival's accessibility and inclusive spirit.