

LANCASHIRE
COUNTY OF
SONG

**THE CHOIR AND
SINGING GROUP
RECRUITMENT
TOOLKIT**



**A guide to attracting
new members –
and keeping them**

INTRODUCTION

Why create a toolkit for singing groups?

Fundamentally, choirs and singing groups need people to exist. For many, finding the confidence to sing, and the joy of taking part is about being surrounded by a larger body of voices and sound.

This recruitment toolkit aims to help support choirs and singing groups find and retain new participants, and develop your membership. It is a response to the results of the *'Holding Our Breath'* report on the impact of COVID on community singing in Lancashire, and ongoing enquiries asking for support.

The research showed that concerns about recruitment and retention were particularly pressing for groups, with 93.3% looking to recruit and 28.9% worried about long term viability should they be unsuccessful in finding new members. Nearly two years on from that work, grassroots singing groups have proved resilient, with new initiatives flourishing – but some choirs in the region have indeed disappeared.

It is our hope that we can contribute to you continuing to grow in a way that reflects your individual voice.



Young singers at Encounter Festival, Preston /
photo by Michael Porter

Who is this resource for?

This toolkit is aimed at community choirs, singing groups, leisure time singing organisations, groups that use singing as their social activity, groups that sing with a particular aim – for example for health benefits. It includes the world that used to be called ‘amateur choral’, even if that is a term most of us have left behind, but is broader than that too. Members will be taking part because they want to, which is worth remembering all the way through recruitment. It’s not aimed at fully professional choirs or groups that use singing commercially (e.g. wedding bands).

It is people within these groups that will make this activity happen, choir leadership, committees, Musical Directors, community engagement directors and group members in general. There will be much in this that is relevant to people working in the wider participatory arts scene, but the thinking is very much focused on singers.

As this has been created as part of Lancashire: County of Song, we have drawn on examples from Lancashire and the resources include many links specific to the region. The advice bears in mind Lancashire’s specific geography mixing rural, coastal and dispersed urban areas, and that the county does not have any large professional subsidised ‘flagship’ musical institutions. However, the principles of this toolkit apply anywhere. You can adapt the link suggestions to search for equivalent organisations in your area (e.g. Community & Voluntary Service (CVS) organisations, Business Improvement District organisations (BID) and music education hubs).

How to use this resource

This toolkit is been informed by and developed from experience shared by a range of community singing and engagement practitioners, in particular responding to the County of Song recruitment survey. These are starting points to get you thinking about how to attract new members and keep them in a way that works for your group. There are themed sections with a selection of ideas to address each theme, case studies and quotes to illustrate the points, links for further research and a set of questions to help you reflect on the content. The ‘Making a Plan’ and ‘Setting Goals’ section has examples of processes to follow to put your ideas in to action.

The prompts and ideas to draw on in this toolkit include resources – *things you have*, and processes – *things you do*. These all flow from values – *things you are*.

This is a toolkit – and like an actual bag of tools – you won’t necessarily need all of them all at once. There is no one weird secret trick that will suddenly solve everything for you. It is about deciding on what you need to do and applying that with patience.



CONTENTS

2 INTRODUCTION

- 3 Who is this resource for?
- 3 How to use this resource

5 UNIQUE APPEAL

- 6 Defining what you are
- 6 Identifying your singers
- 7 Creating the description of what you are and do
- 8 Showing who you are and what you do
- 8 Getting the language right
- 8 Other resources
- 8 Being excellent
- 9 Making sure you are up to date
- 9 Your reflections

10 VISIBILITY

- 11 Have a clear communication channel in to you
- 11 Being visible online
- 12 Maintaining online resources
- 12 Creating promotional material
- 13 Using word of mouth
- 13 Maintaining a mailing list
- 13 Creating publicity about your group and events
- 14 Using events as a recruitment opportunity
- 14 Your reflections
- 14 Links

15 WELCOME

- 16 Creating a welcoming culture
- 16 Supporting the joining process
- 17 Considering when you welcome new members

- 17 Attending for the first time
- 18 Preparing new members' resources
- 18 Following up with prospective new members
- 18 Creating welcoming working practices
- 18 Keep communicating
- 19 Being inclusive
- 20 Your reflections
- 20 Tools for managing choirs
- 20 Links about inclusivity

21 CONNECTION

- 22 Using the venue where you meet as a resource
- 22 Potential types of partner for your group
- 23 Finding ways of involving your connections
- 24 Your reflections
- 24 Contacts and connections links:
 - Cultural and Third Sector Networks
 - Youth organisations and networks
 - Creative health organisations

25 MAKING A PLAN & SETTING GOALS

- 26 Examining why you want to recruit
- 26 Launching a recruitment process
- 26 Setting goals
- 27 Keeping data
- 27 Assessing data
- 27 Your reflections
- 28 What Next?
- 28 Links for further reading
- 28 Links for organisations supporting choirs

29 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 30 About the Author - Loz Kaye
- 30 About County of Song

UNIQUE APPEAL

Every choir or singing group has something that makes you stand out, and is the reason why you meet and sing together. It is being clear about what this is and why it is exciting to you that will be at the heart of why people will want to join. What do you bring to the table that others do not?





Defining what you are

As a group, agree what you are and do. Communicating it will be key to attracting and retaining members. For well established groups, it is important to come back to this, even if you assume everyone understands it.

- Decide *what defines you musically* in terms of genre. For example Lancashire has groups singing gospel, opera, show music, classical music, Nasheed and so on. Even for groups who sing a variety of music, there tends to be a range of genres you work with. It is important to give people a sense of what music you enjoy singing.
- Decide what defines your *musical working practices*. For example – working with or without musical notation or lyrics, singing with or without accompaniment, expecting to people to perform without books, using improvisation. Identify which of these practices are important to you in terms of how your group works best and why.
- Agree if you have a particular *social mission or focus*. For example singing with particular groups – parents and carers, veterans, young women, visually impaired people, people affected by dementia, improving lung health, raising money for charity, combatting loneliness. If you do, be clear why that is key for you.

- Decide if serving a *particular place* is an important part of your purpose. Thinking about your radius, how people feel connected to place, and how that translates in to travel / public transport is particularly important in Lancashire's geography. For example, Whitworth Community Choir suggests a smaller catchment area than Rossendale Male Voice Choir – both have their advantages and disadvantages. Or you may work independently of place, for example project by project or meeting online.
- Pinpoint what *values* you have as a group, and how that relates to what you are musically and socially.
- Agree on what makes your group *feel special*. This may be a whole range of experiences such as moments in rehearsals, types of event you do, or the social life of the group.

Identifying your singers

- Consider how what you are translates into *who is likely to take part*. Identify where you can find potential choir members and which groups you are looking to recruit from.
- *Make sure these people are included* in forming the description of what you do and how you work.
- Research *who else is working with the same target groups in the area* – not just in singing. Avoid any clashes, but also think in terms of potential collaboration (see the 'Connection' section, page 21).



Artz Singers, Skelmersdale / photo by Caroline Eccles



Creating the description of what you are and do

Turn these decisions about what your unique appeal is in to a description of who and what you are. Do this in a way that takes your target group/s in to consideration. For new choirs this will mean taking some time for writing. For established groups, gather together the information you have from various sources – look at how consistent it is, and consider if it is still relevant.

- Make sure your description is *well defined and clear*.
- Include *what you do*, both as a practice e.g. rehearsals, and other types of activity such as performances, competitions, wedding bookings, charity work, flash mobs and so on.
- You may want to *include things that you don't do* if you think that might put off prospective members.
- If you work with young people, include the *age range you cater for*, and decide why you have particular age cut off points.
- Make sure you don't just describe the nuts and bolts of what you do, but also *include the experience* – fun, challenge, learning, joy, friendliness and so on.
- You can *develop an 'elevator pitch'* – a short description of the essential points of who you are to make communication easy, and that you are consistent.

Example of a singing group description from The Gregson Centre website:

Breath of Fresh Air Choir

Wellbeing

11 November @ 1:30 pm - 3:00 pm

Age Range: 18+

Ability Level: All abilities welcome

'Breath of Fresh Air' is a new choir for adults with asthma, COPD or breathing conditions. Thanks to funding from the Population Health Fund in collaboration with Queens Medical Practice, the we've been able to start this super relaxed, super fun and super important choir.

There is evidence that singing is good for people with lung conditions like asthma and COPD helps improve quality of life. On top of that, creative and social activities have been proven to massively boost positivity. Taking health support into community settings outside of clinical spaces offers a holistic approach and can be incredibly beneficial.

There is no need to book these sessions, you can simply turn up. We are able to offer these sessions on a "pay as you feel" and "pay as you are able" basis but we ask for a voluntary donation of £5 to cover running costs and to allow the choir to continue running in the future.

For an informal chat or to ask any question, email choir lead Charlie Brown at breathoffreshair@gregson.co.uk



Showing who you are and what you do

The more you can make communicating your unique appeal concrete, the easier it is for people to get interested in you. Create resources that show who your group is.

- Source *personal testimonials* from your group about what you do and why it is important and enjoyable to them.
- Have a library of *pictures*, reflecting your music making, break and social time, and the spirit of your group. Be authentic and avoid using stock pictures or AI.
- *Make video and audio* of you singing to demonstrate the types of music you love and the ways you work.
- Put together *information about key members in your group* – the Musical Director, founders, committee, accompanists that reflects why they are great at leading what you are about.

Personal testimonial example:

“We love coming to this group – it always makes us feel happy and we go home humming and chatting and looking forward to next week!”

P and D, members of Lytham Dementia Singalong Group

Getting the language right

Look at how you describe your group and check that the language is clear and appeals to your target participants.

- *Your name* and whether you describe yourself as a singing group, choir, chorus, glee club, sing-along session and so on will immediately give an impression what type of experience you offer. You can embrace this, or sidestep it with a different approach to signalling who you are, like the Ribble Rousers, Sing it Big or Seagull Cafe, for example.
- Equally, *how you describe your musical leadership* sends particular signals. For instance – a conductor, musical director, choir leader, facilitator, session leader all indicate different kinds of relationships between the group and leadership.
- If you use any *specialist terms*, make sure they are clear. For example not everyone may understand what ‘a capella’ means. You might want to include a glossary or question list. You don’t have to avoid specialist terms or ‘dumb down’, just make sure you include your target groups.

Other resources

There are other tools in communicating your identity, all of which should reflect your goals and values.

- A group *logo*. This should communicate the key element that defines who you are, whether that is musical, social or about place.
- You may want a *‘strap line’* that describes what you are in one short phrase. This is particularly useful if your group name is more poetic or humorous. For example: *“Women Rockin’ Harmony Choirs bring a new dimension to choral singing by blending iconic rock and pop songs with simple stage movements.”*
- Many groups have *clothes* that identify you, whether that is a T-shirt with your logo, a uniform, or something more informal like a colour scheme or using a feather boa. All of this communicates what kind of group you are.

Being excellent

More than anything, *being really good at what you do*, and communicating that, will attract members and keep people engaged. *Decide what excellence is for you* and be as specific as you can. It can be about leading in a certain genre, your social impact, your musical facility, the health benefits of what you do, including marginalised communities, the amount you raise for charity, doing well in competitions. Being excellent doesn’t have to be about elitism, it is about achieving what you set out to do together.



Making sure you are up to date

Setting out your unique appeal is not something that just happens once, it is an on going process, particularly as membership or leadership of the group changes.

- *Put time aside to revisit your mission and values* with your committee, musical leadership, group and anyone else with an interest, such as funders.
- *Think about if there are any tensions in the different elements of what you are* (musically, mission etc.) that might make what you do confusing to prospective members.
- Assess whether any of the resources you have are *starting to feel out of date*. This includes anything from text you have written, to logos and choir uniforms.

Your reflections

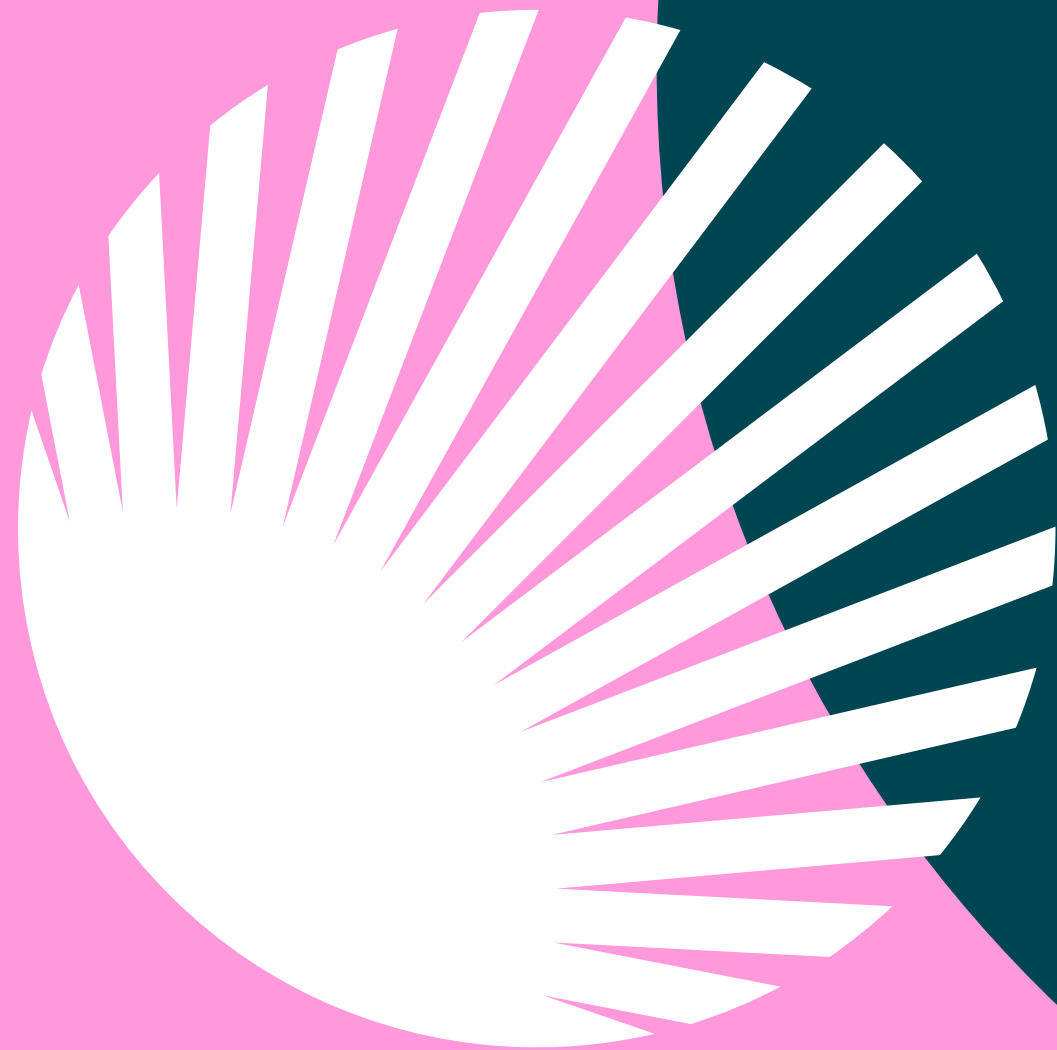
- What is most important to you about what your group is?
- What identifies you musically and how you work?
- Look through text you have about how you describe yourselves.
- Is it up to date? Does it fully reflect who you are and your values?
- Is it time to change anything about who you are and what you do?



Rosendale Male Voice Choir / photo by Caroline Eccles

VISIBILITY

To bring in the singers you want, you will need to be as easy to find as possible for anyone interested in your kind of music making. You will need to be proactive too in making sure you can be found. Mobilise your group to come up with the best ideas to increase your visibility, they will come up with the most effective, local and appropriate approaches.





Have a clear communication channel in to you

- Agree the *communication channel/s in to you* for prospective new participants. This will usually be an email, potentially a phone number as well, and possibly a sign-up page on a website.
- You would usually have a way to contact you other than a website page, as many people will want to feel that they are dealing directly with a person. On the other hand, if the only contact you publicise is a phone number, then people may be nervous about ‘cold calling’.
- *Be consistent* with the main way to contact you across online and physical resources like posters, leaflets and noticeboards.
- Agree *who is responsible for the communication channel* and check it regularly and respond in a timely fashion.
- Be prepared for the *response* to an initial enquiry. Be clear about key information about rehearsals / sessions, where, when, any costs or free sessions, and anything else important to you- for example voice parts if you use them.
- Every part of this initial contact should feel approachable and welcoming, and reflect your identity and values.

- For many smaller groups the contact details you share may be personal, for example the Musical Director’s own email. Do think about how much of your personal information you want public. Personal contacts tend to get out of date quicker than group based ones – for example an email like committee@lancashirechoir.com

Being visible online

Whatever demographic you sing with, you will want to think about having an online presence. Social media now tops surveys of where people get their information from. This does not necessarily mean you need to be ‘tech savvy’. Use the group or organisations you work with to get any support.

- Have a *relevant social media presence*. The most frequently mentioned by singing groups is Facebook. Having a Facebook page allows you to host details of how to contact you, information about your group and to have regular updates.
- You can use *services to share video and audio content* that demonstrate your music making and for more informal moments too – examples are YouTube, Vimeo, TikTok, SoundCloud.
- If you have a video channel, consider making a *video specifically for recruitment purposes*, drawing on personal contributions from the group.

- As you grow, you may well want to have your own *website*, or you may already have one. It is particularly useful for hosting contact forms for prospective new members. It also makes a clear ‘shop window’ for who you are, and signals that you are serious about what you do. Think about what you want a website to achieve for you, it does not need to be complicated.
- If you don’t have or want to maintain your own website, you may be able to use another organisation to host information about you, for example the venue where you meet. You can use the County of Song community singing map to do this too – see the link below.
- You could have a *blog*, if you have enough ongoing content to share. This can give a personalised view of what your group is about, and establish your voice.
- You can use an *online tool like Eventbrite to manage events*, and announce new members’ evenings. You can grow a following here and analyse where interest is coming from.
- In all of these channels, have a clear ‘*call to action*’ about how new members can get involved.



Maintaining online resources

- Agree **who** is responsible for updating these channels.
- Make sure **time** is put aside by the person / people responsible for posting to these channels.
- Make sure that channels are **up to date**, particularly contact information.
- Be as **full in your information as possible**, for example including the postcode of the address of your session venue.
- **Update about events, and other specific dates** – for example term starts, and do that in good time. You may want to plan a timetable of key dates for posting.
- Ensure your online presence is accessible, for example by **using ‘alt text’** on images to describe them for people with visual impairments. This is particularly important for images that contain a lot of text, such as concert posters.
- **Agree on the voice or tone** of your online presence, this should reflect your unique appeal.
- **Celebrate your successes**, and include the ongoing experiences of the choir – social as well as musical.

“... most of the time it’s the social aspects surrounding the process that are the best selling point for new members.”

Jakob Melchior

- Use the online presence of the musical leadership and the group to help promote you. Tag them in posts (in moderation!) and create online resources to share e.g. graphics for sessions and events, you can use a tool like Canva.

It is worth saying that the online world is constantly changing, so you will want to review your presence. It is probable that some channels will stop being useful, or stop reflecting your values. Do not waste time feeding social media that is not useful or feel right to you.



Promotional material from Clitheroe Grand Choir

Creating promotional material

Of course, you will want to have physical resources to help you boost your visibility too.

- Typically, it is useful to make **A5 printed flyers** with the group name and key recruitment information to be able to give out and put on local notice boards. You may want to make larger **posters** as well.
- Work with the group to think of the best place to **distribute flyers and posters** – for example local notice boards, the venue where you meet, in libraries, in cultural or community venues.
- Check the **design** of any printed material you produce, and whether it reflects the feel of your choir.
- Again, make sure your resources are **clear and up to date**.
- It can be useful to have other physical resources for the musical leadership / committee to support networking, for example **business cards or letter heads**.
- At events that you run or where you are attending, you can use banners or flags with your logo, or **information pull ups** to promote your group.



Liverpool Rainbow Chorus / photo by Joel Goodman

Using word of mouth

“Current singers are far and away the biggest cheer leaders for your ensemble.”

John Parker

- Ensure that group members are engaged with any recruitment initiative you have, and have the material to support them, for example flyers or online links of how to get involved.
- You can create events that particularly draw on the group’s contacts such as *‘bring a friend’ sessions*.
- You can encourage members with offers like an *‘introduce a member’ discount* on any membership fees you have.

Maintaining a mailing list

- Keep hold of contacts in a *mailing list*, you may want to have two, one for ‘current members’ and a ‘broader supporters’ mailing list. Managing some form of contacts list is probably the most essential task for managing members and support.
- **Maintain this list** in any form you are familiar with. This could be a Word list or Excel document, and a mail out list on your email client. As you grow you may want to use a service to help manage this, such as Mailchimp or equivalents.

- Visibility is important internally too, so mail regularly with relevant information, like updates about term starts, new repertoire or upcoming events.
- Use every opportunity you have to *increase the size of the mailing list*, such as performances or networking events. You can do this through sign-up sheets or letting people know about your online presence.

Creating publicity about your group and events

Marketing is a bigger subject than this toolkit, but think how you might publicise your group and what you do already.

- Source active *local newspapers, magazines and websites*. Look for any publicity channels that reflect your particular interests, such as health or particular music styles.
- Think of stories about what you are doing that would interest these channels. Write *press releases* or *post updates* on local social media neighbourhood press groups.
- **Maintain a list of relevant press contacts** and other people / organisations that can promote what you do.
- Consider *advertising* through print and online media. Plan the timing, for example typically starting a month before a term start or new members event.



Using events as a recruitment opportunity

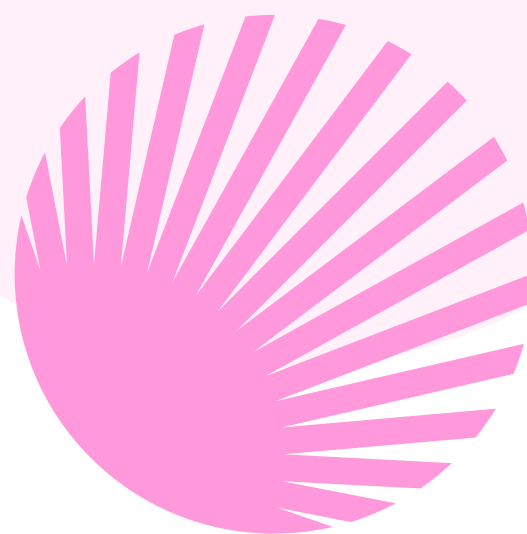
Anything that you do where the public is present or you invite the public in is a great moment to boost recruitment.

- Any performance you do is an opportunity to reach new singers. Be ready to take the opportunity with a note in the programme, an announcement at the performance, having a sign-up sheet. Make it clear how you can connect with the group, for example tell people they can take a flyer at the exit, or meet a member of the group at the end.
- When possible, *use an online ticketing service* for registrations and tickets. You can use this to check people in at the door which will allow you to know who attended the event and follow up with afterwards.
- For any group with a community focus, *identify community events you could take part in*, such as festivals, community centre open days or charity events. Have people free to talk and to leaflet.
- You can have *open rehearsal* events, where people can come and experience how you work.
- You can hold *one off taster events*, for example summer holiday workshops, a 'come and sing' event, workshops with a visiting professional. These can give an opportunity to advertise, and prospective new members can get a feel for you without having to make too big a commitment initially.

- Plan how you might make these events fun and memorable, with food and drinks or anything else you can think of!

Your reflections

- **With the group – how did people first find out about you?**
- **Do you have all the resources you need for people to find you?**
- **Are you putting enough time aside to update online resources?**
- **How could you use events you are part of to promote your group?**
- **Do you have a way for participants to contribute new ideas about promoting your group?**



Links

[Lancashire Community Singing Map](#)

[Lancashire Choir of the Year competition](#)

[Chris Rowbury How to start your own community choir — Getting the word out](#)

[Chorus Connection: Choral Marketing 101](#)



Jo Jingles, Crawshawbooth / photo by Caroline Eccles

WELCOME

Recruitment is more than just a question of advertising and getting people to turn up that first time. It is an ongoing process of continuing to make participants feel welcome.





Creating a welcoming culture

“Retention is nurtured through creating a welcoming and supportive environment”

ChoirGenius

Being welcoming is deeper than just being nice (hopefully that comes naturally). It is about reflecting on what a supportive environment means to you.

- Agree what about your group is welcoming and engaging, and how you can maintain that week in, week out.
- For many people, coming to a new group, let alone opening their mouth to sing is a big step. Decide what you can do that will mean the experience is not too overwhelming.
- Agree how to manage the balance your group makes between the focused work singing needs with space for fun and lightheartedness.
- Plan ways to show you value your members.

Supporting the joining process

Manage how potential singers shift from being people first contacting you, through turning up to join in, to becoming members of the group.

- *Establish the joining process* for your group and make sure it is easy to understand. For example if you have a particular members' sign up, any information you need, being clear about any initial free sessions or subscription costs, how new members are included in internal singing group communication. Ask if potential members have access needs.
- You may have *‘what you need to know’ sheets or even a handbook* with information about you. This doesn't have to be all heavy, it can include lighthearted things too.
- Some groups establish a *buddy system* – formal or informal, pairing existing members with new ones. They can help with questions, giving information and check in outside of sessions as well.
- You may even establish *a new recruits programme* – introducing working practices, going through current material, and giving an induction in to the group. This is only really feasible for larger choirs.



Light Up Lancaster performance / photo by Robin Zahler



Considering when you welcome new members

Whether you allow prospective members to come for the first time at any session, or whether you ask them to come for the first time on a specific day will affect the welcome they receive. Your approach to this will obviously depend on the size of your group, and your style of music making.

- Many groups ask new people to come first on *new members sessions*, and make these a focus for advertising. These can be typically once a month, at term or half term starts, or at the beginning of a project. The disadvantage can be that if people wait too long they may lose interest.
- For new members sessions, plan *the welcome*. Typically, you would want to give people *name badges / stickers*. Make sure that any musical material you need is ready, such as lyrics or notation.
- The Musical Director will need to *think about the songs for the new members evening*. You will probably want to do some material that is new to everyone, so everyone experiences being on the same footing. However, you may want to include some time on one of the fast favourites of the group to demonstrate people at their most engaged and the sound at its best.

- You can include non-musical activity such as *icebreakers to help people get to know one another* as part of a new members session, for example name circles, getting people in groups to discuss the day they have had or their favourite songs, putting out a world map and getting people to talk about where they have been or would like to go. Design this considering what your group is likely to be comfortable with and enjoy.
- If you do allow people to come at any point, *consider what that experience is going to feel like* for anyone coming for the first time. For example, you could use warm up time to introduce people to how you work together.

Coming for that first time

In your initial contact, you may want to ask if there is any way you can support people coming to their first session. The aim is to make that first experience of your group as easy and welcoming as possible.

- If your venue allows for it, you may want to *arrange to meet them in the venue*, for example in a cafe space and introduce some members from the group.
- If that is not possible, *you could arrange to meet outside the space* to come in. In larger venues it can be helpful to have people on hand to guide new members through the space.

- It is helpful to let people know about *transport options* coming to sessions– parking and public transport. Include information for blue badge users and how disabled people can park as close to the entrance of the venue as possible.
- Have designated existing members you know who will be present ready to act as *welcome agents*, telling people any useful information like where sections sit or where the loos are and taking time to say hello.
- Try to *avoid making any assumptions* about people when they come for the first time based on how they look or how they seem. For example in choirs that sing in SATB, avoid assuming people will sing a certain part from their appearance. Preferably explain ahead of time about how you work.

“Respecting the individual’s right to stand out of the perceived norm is crucial. For example, not all sopranos will be women, not all bass singers will be men, and vice versa, so steering clear of making any assumptions is important.”

Majojo Kuss



Preparing new members' resources

Make sure that new members have access to everything they need to be comfortable and ready to join in.

- Have *music / lyrics prepared* if that is how you work, in physical and digital versions. If you have a music library, let people know how to use it.
- It's very useful to have *track recordings* with individual parts and the whole arrangement available, particularly for current repertoire that new members are catching up with.
- You may want to use *online tools to store and access material*, such as Google Drive or Dropbox. Let new members know how to access them.
- Let new members know how to access other resources, such as Whatsapp social groups.

Following up with prospective new members

- Check in with new members after the first sessions. This would typically be via a *follow up email*, giving information about any next steps they need to take.
- Make sure that new members have information they need about upcoming dates and anything else important for your group, such as current repertoire.

- You can plan a *fun event outside of choir* as social time so prospective new members can get to know current members. Get your group to come up with the best ideas for what that event should be!

Creating welcoming working practices

- You may want to include *dedicated opening and closing songs for your session*, an opening song would typically include participants' names. Or you may use set warm up and warm down sequences.
- For larger groups working in parts, you can include *sectional rehearsals*. This cuts down time for singers waiting to hear their parts, and is a chance to check in with a smaller subgroup.
- Set up ways to *directly involve participants' input* – it is an active way to show you value them. You can co-create repertoire with the group, ask for ideas about performance opportunities, include participants' views in how the group is run.
- *Breaks and social time are also part of working practice!* Some groups may want to start with a brew, and make sure you have the facilities to provide and manage refreshments.

Keep communicating

“Many people don't like being in that strange state where they don't quite know what they are doing and are a bit lost. It's not a nice feeling.”

Chris Rowbury

- Make sure you are *regularly updating members* using the channels mentioned above. Be clear about what people need to know about dates, events, music, and anything else that is expected of them.
- Include *recognition of members' achievements* and contributions in the group's communications.
- Use tools for *internal communication to build a sense of community*, for example with Whatsapp groups. Make sure this stays supportive and fun.
- For larger groups, you may want to start using dedicated *online tools to help managing choir groups and communication*, such as the Making Music platform, Choir Manager or Choir Genius.
- Create opportunities for *feedback* and growth. Build a sense that people are still welcome, however long they have been with the group.



Being inclusive

The more inclusive of diverse groups you are, the more people you have to potentially recruit and retain. Consider what barriers there may be to people joining or wanting to stay in your choir.

- Check how *accessible* your session venue is for people with disabilities, and include access information like lifts when describing where you meet. Describe any access needs your group has to anywhere else you go as a group, for example for performances, drop in sessions or festivals.
- With your Musical Director, think about how inclusive your *working practices* are for different groups, and whether you want to make any adjustments. For example, read the *'Singing Side By Side'* guide for supporting mental health inclusive choirs.
- Decide if you need to *adapt your resources* to remove barriers to participation. For example, see Illumination Choir's work including people with visual impairments.
- For groups with subscriptions, not being able to afford it may stop people wanting to stay with your choir. Many address this by concessionary rates or having 'pay what you can' schemes. You could apply for funding or raise money to cover your expenses to keep the cost of subscriptions down.
- Communicate *how* you are inclusive, publicly and within the group. You can consider having an *inclusion statement / policy*, and having that on your website.

Illumination Choir, Preston – working inclusively

“Regarding music sessions for people with visual impairment, there are three main areas to consider.

Firstly, I choose the songs and allocate parts in a way that accommodates those who have no way to easily access the lyrics other than to learn them through repetition. There are those who are able to access lyrics themselves but I produce large print lyrics sheets for several of them whilst another needs small, bold print. Some want electronic copies several weeks in advance so they can use software to speak the lyrics to them for learning or arrange to have the lyrics printed in Braille which means knowing when new songs will be needed and having them ready well in advance.

Secondly, the leading all happens through the sounds of my speaking, my singing and my keyboard. No hand gestures to indicate pitch, pulse, entries, note ends because most of the choir would be unable to see them and it is unfair on those who cannot.

Thirdly, in assembling for the practice, in assembling for performance, in presenting a performance to an audience (which way to turn to face the audience, for example), in attending other venues for performance (which we haven't yet had to do), there needs to be consideration of the additional obstacles that would be presented and accommodation for support and guide dogs.”

John Aveyard, Musical Director



Nasheed Choir at Encounter Festival, Preston



Your reflections

- What is the experience for someone coming to your group for the first time?
- How clear are the steps new members go through – arriving – signing up – committing to events?
- How do you follow up with new members?
- How do participants feel investment in what you do?
- Are there any musical working practices you could adjust to help the feeling of welcome?



Tools for managing choirs

[Making Music](#)

[Choir Manager](#)

[Choir Genius \(American focus\)](#)

Links about inclusivity

[What do I need to know about inclusion?](#)

[HEARD Model – Youth Music](#)

[Inclusive North \(Lancashire BME Network\)](#)

[Singing Side By Side – Mental Health Inclusive Singing Groups](#)

[Disability Equality NW](#)

[Attitude is Everything – improving access together](#)

[Proud Voices UK and Ireland LGBT choir network](#)

[Social Media Accessibility: Alt Text on Social Media](#)

[Chris Rowbury – “Avoiding the ‘C’ Word: Choir”](#)

CONNECTION

While the process of recruitment is very much about getting individuals to join, this is made very much easier working in partnership with other organisations. This is particularly the case for singing groups with a social or health focus. We are all part of a wider cultural ecosystem, and the help you may want to draw on is out there.





Connection

- Think about who you collaborate with. *Identify who else shares your interests, mission and values*, especially locally to your group.
- Think about what kind of support you might need for growing your membership, for example- contacting certain groups of people, finding event venues, marketing, accessing funding to help a recruitment drive. Identify organisations and key individuals who could help you get that support.

Using the venue where you meet as a resource

Singing groups meet in a wide variety of places – such as community halls, health centres, cultural venues, schools, church halls or libraries. All of these types of venue have their own wider public and organisations associated with them that you can access.

- *Contact other people and organisations that use the venue*, you may be able to work together, or they may have potential members for you.
- Find out what *resources the venue has that you could use to promote your group*, for example a notice board, leaflet rack, website, newsletter, friends group.
- Organisations that run venues may also be able to provide you with *logistical support* such as running an event or advice on getting funding.

Potential types of partner for your group

There are a broad range of potential partners and resources that can help you connect directly to the people you want to reach.

- *Local cultural networks* can help with connecting to other organisations, and help you understand what is happening culturally in your area. They will have channels you could use to publicise any recruitment drive or events.
- There will be *local events and festivals* near you - music festivals, religious celebrations, remembrance day, bonfire night and so on. Find out the calendar of local events, these can be opportunities to share your singing in public and find new members.
- There are a wide variety of *‘third sector’ organisations* including community groups, voluntary organisations, faith and equalities groups, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives, community interest companies, and housing associations. Research which third sector groups are in your area and who support the same kinds of aims as you do. They can help you to reach like minded people.
- You can use local Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) to help you find relevant third sector organisations and activity. CVS organisations will have channels like email newsletters, and organise events like volunteers fairs that you can use to promote yourselves.
- Singing groups working with young people should coordinate with other *agencies representing young people* to be consistently successful in attracting new participants. These can be schools, local authority music services, youth charities, youth voice groups.
- Business focused networks like *Chambers of Commerce and Business Improvement Districts* can help you find a different set of contacts, and can promote you locally and access events. For example Morecambe BID, which has an events calendar morecambebid.com/morecambe-events
- If your group has a health focus, *research local health and wellbeing groups and services*, health centres, mental health support groups, health specific charities. For more established groups with health professional contacts, you could explore working together on social prescribing: improving health and wellbeing through connecting with organisations and activity that supports social, emotional and practical needs.
- As ever, ask your group to come up with suggestions for types of partner, and find out if they have useful *personal contacts*.



Finding ways of involving your connections

Work with your committee, musical leadership and group on ways to activate these connections, for example:

- *Run taster sessions* at local community groups, meetings, or drop-ins to introduce what do to people you want to include in your recruitment. You may want have a core from your group to help support this musically to make it an engaging experience.
 - Run *open rehearsals* with invitations or *VIP evenings* so potential partners can come and see what you do. It is much easier to get people to support you if they feel involved and have a first hand experience of your work.
 - To help partners be invested, *advocate for the benefits of singing* and share information on its positive impact on health and combatting loneliness.
 - You could help support local charities or voluntary groups, for example with a *fundraising event* which is also a recruitment opportunity.
 - Once you are connected, *get your partners to mention you*, share your information, links, social media, and include you in their communication like newsletters and e-mailouts.
- For groups interested in social impact, examine the ways partners like Local Authorities can help support you *access funding* to grow your activity. For example- Artz Centre in Skelmersdale received UK Shared Prosperity funding to support one to one mentoring, connecting with Friends of Upholland, and creating new pathways into the arts.
artzcentre.co.uk/directors-blog/artz-centre-receive-government-funding-to-help-tackle-social-issues/





Your reflections

- Who are your partners?
- Are you connected to others that use your venue?
- What organisations locally share your mission?
- What connections do your group members have?
- What place do you see yourselves as having in your community?



Contacts and connections links

CULTURAL AND THIRD SECTOR NETWORKS

[Lancashire Association of CVSs \(Community and Voluntary Service\)](#)

[Lancaster Arts City](#)

[Blackpool Social Club](#)

[Old Electric Creative Network](#)

[Brewtime Collective Preston / Brewtime Collective Preston Facebook](#)

[Natural Voice Network](#)

YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

[Lancashire Music Education Hub](#)

[LCEPs \(Local Cultural Education Partnerships\)](#)

[Lancashire Youth Challenge](#)

[Escape to Make](#)

[Curious Minds](#)

[Blaze](#)

CREATIVE HEALTH ORGANISATIONS AND INFORMATION ON THE BENEFITS OF SINGING

[The National Centre for Creative Health](#)

[What Works Wellbeing](#)

[Alzheimers Society](#)

[The Bay Health Festivals](#)

[UCLan Social Prescribing Unit](#)

MAKING A PLAN & SETTING GOALS



It may be that you will just want to use a few of these ideas and prompts to supplement what you are already doing. However, if you want to make a significant difference to your recruitment and retention, you will need to make a plan. The more concrete you can be about your aims, your goals, what you are going to do, who is going to do it and when the better. And the easier it will be to see what is most useful.





Examining why you want to recruit:

- The reasons may be musical, most often to have enough people to make a good sound or to have a solid group on each part if you do harmony singing for singers to feel confident. It could be about the number you want to have in the room to make it ‘feel’ energetic and well attended.
- The reasons may be financial, for example needing a certain number of people paying subscriptions to break even on venue and professional costs.
- The reasons may be social, particularly if your group has a particular community mission, for example wanting to engage as many people as possible in your dementia friendly singing group.
- This will inform what goals you set and the decisions about what feels most appropriate to do to work towards them.

Launching a recruitment process:

- Set up a *team responsible for managing recruitment and retention*. Discuss the reasons for wanting to recruit and retain members. You may want to include people who aren’t active members of the group, but who support what you are doing.
- *Agree goals*, how you are going to manage them and a *process to follow* – make that about having the resources you need and deciding on what you are going to do.

- *Work through the italicised prompts and answer the reflections* in this toolkit to help generate ideas for what you need and what activities you are going to run.
- Set a *time* when you are going to do this, for how long and when you are going to check how things are going. Make sure the people involved have the capacity to do this, especially if they have other roles in the group.
- Get *buy in* from the whole group, and show how this is going to benefit everybody. Think about how to communicate what you want to do, for many groups it shouldn’t feel like you are embarking on some big corporate exercise!
- *Prepare any materials* you might need – e.g. publicity, online resources.
- If you need to, *set a budget*, for example for posters or advertising.
- Through all of this, *be honest* about anything you are worried about. It could be concerns about not being able to continue the group or that the feel of the group might change with new members. Others will have faced these types of worries and be able to help if you voice them.

Setting goals

Decide what success looks like, and be specific.

- For musical and financial reasons your goals could be increasing numbers of new members. Put a number on that – 5, 10, 15. Think about when you want to assess that, to ensure they have stuck with you.
- Other *numbers* you might want to set for goals are: an average number in rehearsals, a certain number committed to performances, numbers in each vocal part, numbers from a particular demographic.
- You can also set *goals relating to your process*, for example numbers of new organisations engaged, leaflets given out, making sure your Facebook page has new content every week.
- You can set out to *launch a new recruitment initiative successfully*, for example starting new members’ sessions or holding taster sessions with a community group.

“Across all my three choirs, numbers have settled between 30 and 40, but the really critical number is 40 both financially and psychologically,”

Respondent to the “Holding Our Breath” survey



Keeping data

For any goals you set, you will need to decide how you assess them and what information you need to know if you are making progress towards them.

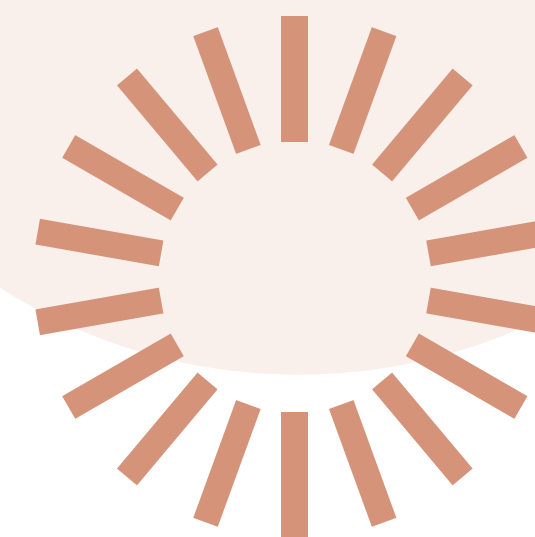
- The most common form of numbers collection is a *register or sign-in sheet* at sessions. This can feel a bit like being at school, so tell people why you need to do this.
- Other types of data to collect are numbers from performances, including audience and data from any event or ticketing platforms.
- You can also collect more complex information with tools like *paper surveys or online forms* like Google Forms, you could explore questions like how people found your group and what keeps them coming.
- If you do collect anything personal, be responsible with how you store it and who has access to it. GDPR was not meant to stop community choirs recruiting, all you need to do is to be mindful.

Assessing data

- Set aside time to *go through the data with your recruitment team*. Reflect on whether you met goals or not, and if the trend is in the direction you want. From any narrative responses, look at what new members and the group think is successful.
- Review any resources and new processes you have set up, discuss whether they are *clear, accessible and welcoming*.
- Write down any *recommendations* for what to do next, and if you should stop doing anything.
- *Not all initiatives may pay off immediately*, so you may need to be patient and try ideas more than once. After all, bear in mind that most groups wouldn't sing a new song perfectly straight away...

Your reflections

- Why are you recruiting?
- Who could move your recruitment plan forward?
- Do you need more help to make and carry out a recruitment plan?
- How many people do you want to recruit and who?
- How will you measure this, and when?
- And. How do you feel now you have read this?





What Next?

We hope you find this County of Song toolkit a useful introduction to recruitment and retention. Let us know how you get on and do share any tips that we have missed by emailing us artslancashire@gmail.com

You can keep up to date with the latest from County of Song by subscribing to our [Substack](#)

Good luck and keep singing!



Links for further reading about singing group recruitment

[Director Tips for Choir Recruiting – John Parker](#)

[From the Front of the Choir – Chris Rowbury](#)

[Recruitment Strategies for Adult Choirs – British Columbia choral federation](#)

[Enhancing Choir Recruitment and Retention – Choirgenius](#)

[Chorus Connection – The Ultimate Guide to Singer Recruitment](#)

[Kirsten Oberoi – The Hard Truth About Recruitment – Chorus Connection](#)

[The Context of Workplace Choirs from the BBC's 'The Choir' - Tips on Recruiting Members](#)

Links for organisations supporting choirs

[The National Association of Choirs](#)

[Making Music](#)

[Music in Offices](#)

[Sing For Pleasure](#)

[The Association of British Choral Directors](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation of this toolkit was made possible by support from Lancashire County Council and Arts Lancashire.

Thanks to all who took part in sharing ideas and resources for this toolkit: **Matt Baker, Stef Portersmith, Alina Shaukat, Majojo Kuss, Rachel Coupe, Tanya Lawrence & Jackie Speight, Jon Aveyard, Charlie Brown, Jakob Melchior, Naomi Albans, and these choirs and organisations: A Handbag of Harmonies, Proud Marys, University of Chester Choir, Well Arty Choirs, Lytham Community Choir, Preston People's Choir, Women Rockin' Harmony Choirs Blackpool and Fylde Coast Veterans Choir, Preston Music Workshops, Illumination Choir, A Breath of Fresh Air, The Gregson Centre, Hope Mill Community Choir.**





LANCASHIRE COUNTY OF SONG

About The Author - Loz Kaye

Loz Kaye is a Musical Director, choir leader, composer, educator and consultant. He is currently Director of County of Song and Encounter Voices, Musical Director of Hope Mill Community Choir and Director of Sound at Separate Doors theatre company. He has a long association with culture in Lancashire, having worked for Horse + Bamboo, More Music and the Lancashire 2025 City of Culture bid. He has taught widely including at GITIS Scandinavia in Denmark, LIPA and Salford University. He is passionate about inclusion in the arts, his work with LGBTQ+ choir Manchester Proud Chorus was recognised for this including a National Diversity Awards nomination.

About County of Song

The *County of Song* programme is a vibrant celebration of the power, diversity, and joy of Lancashire's voices. Evolving from the inspiring efforts of *Encounter Voices*, the renowned *Lancashire Choir of the Year* competition, and various community groups across all districts, it aims to showcase the rich tradition of singing in Lancashire. By spotlighting the county's impressive vocal talent, *County of Song* seeks to nurture and expand participation, inviting new generations to experience the magic of music—both as performers and as enthusiastic audiences. *County of Song* is a testament to Lancashire's thriving musical spirit, uniting communities through the universal language of song.

Loz Kaye at Encounter Festival, Preston / photo by Michael Porter

