

Fostering Intergenerational Community

Notes from the workshop discussion on Friday January 9th, 2015 at the third annual Youth Traditional Song Weekend

Youth Traditional Song Weekend is a youth-focused (though not youth-exclusive) weekend for young singers and aspiring leaders in the trad song community. This document is the product of group discussions in a workshop attended by members of the YTS community. This document does not represent a set of rules or endorsements by the individuals or organizers, but is meant to share out the thoughts and ideas discussed in the workshop.

✓ Checkmarks indicate that multiple groups or individuals shared or experienced that idea or thought.

→ Arrows indicate possible solutions to issues that were discussed in Question 2

1. What Works? What are some things that you have seen that work well to foster a great intergenerational singing community? What have you done or seen an attendee or organizer do or say to make you or someone else feel welcome and supported?

- Parents bringing kids ✓
- Songs that are easy to join in on
- Community overlap between different circles
- Friends bringing friends
- Lyrics available
- Greetings: Calling people by their names
- Encouraging people, letting them know the ways they can participate
- Inviting others, especially if they're not your age
- Mission-driven events
- Leaders/organizers modeling good behavior
- Follow, support, and engage with the leader of each song
- Be aware of ageism & assumptions
- Leader(s) setting the tone (supportive & loving) ✓
- Non-judgmental celebration of all contributions ✓
- Variety of communication types to invite people to the event (email, paper flyers, calls, social media)
- Focus on activity and experience more than the individuals
- Random singing order with light guidance - facilitation
- Location & accessibility (eg. if in a bar, one that serves food for those underage; public transit)
- Inviting people to lead & continue asking
- Have a clear structure - transparency of structure ✓
- Age as a state of body, not of mind
- Experienced community members inviting new ones in

- Treat everyone as peers
- Valuing intergenerational communities as families
- Young leadership
- All ages present

2. What doesn't work? What could be improved? What have you done or seen an attendee or an organizer do or say to make you or someone else feel unwelcome or unsupported?

- Ditch & switch - leaving a friend
- Tokenization & stereotypes ✓ ✓
- Closed invitations
 - varied venues and open invite works better
- Lack of communication ✓
- Lack of financial accessibility ✓
- Telling people off
- The same few people singing
- Policing: "that's not how it is in the book!" or "we don't do it that way!"
 - be open to new ideas
- Criticism of song choice or performance ✓ ✓ ✓
- Criticism of where the singer learned the song
- No positive feedback - crickets crush! ✓
 - acknowledgement/appreciation are great!
- Talking with neighbors during a song
 - it's more respectful to leave, but that's not great either
- Exodus when someone starts singing
- Cliques ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
 - be willing to branch out socially - groups can welcome one another
- Suspicion of newcomers - questioning them for credentials
- Discouraging song ideas and contributions
- Not welcoming variations of a song
 - encourage and support variants
- Inside jokes ✓
- Letting one or a few people dominate a group ✓ ✓
- Intrusive instrumental accompaniment (accompanist assuming that it's welcome)
 - clear communication about this helps!
- Criticism
 - OK/helpful in some singing settings
- Closed or inaccessible venue

- Closed traditions: Unspoken assumptions, exclusion of those not “in” it, “we don’t sing it that way”
- Passive-aggressive responses (eye-rolling, etc.)
- Lack of leadership
- Controlling leadership
- Not fostering new leadership
- Reluctance to change - leads to ruts!
- Not following up with a new person
- Time of day
 - be aware of this when planning
- Only the organizer interpreting feedback
 - have multiple sources and listeners for feedback
- Overthinking and making negative changes
- Requests can be negative - tells someone to do what you want
- Guilt & guilt-tripping

3. How can we, in our own communities, bring up ways to address these issues? How can we take these conversations home? Where do we go from here? Action items!

- Vary/change practices
- Change leaders ✓
- More volunteers jumping in
- Change venue to draw more ✓
- Create an offshoot event ✓
- More time for more people to sing
- Have an additional moderated discussion/communication (with voice for all!) beyond the event itself
- At the beginning, explain how the session is run
- Organizer support group
- Approach organizer(s) one-on-one to address an issue
- Non-musical gathering time - announce at the event ✓
- Invitations to join in planning
- Lots of ways to get feedback, perhaps anonymously
- Invite someone to observe and give feedback
- Bring conversations back to community members and leaders - minutes ✓
- Be brave! People may seem aloof if they’re comfortable (or uncomfortable)
- Share notes and ideas widely/publicly, not just with individuals
- Have a range of ages in leadership
- Discuss what leadership is and how to do it

- Mix instruments and singing
- Identify problems and address them
- Find other who want to work with you to create change
- Share songs, or think about ways to make lyrics accessible (online, books, temporary writing)
- Modeling great behavior, and talking to “ringers” to help - don’t have to be a leader to model!
- Be explicit about good behaviors
- Recruit troublemakers to be helpers
- If you mess up, own it and apologize
- Debrief with a buddy after a session, especially if they’re new
- Avoid “inner circle”/clique structure
- Empathize with people who are new - what was it like for you?
- Explicit community building