

Organising a Federation Festival



Scoca

**A step by step guide for Associations hosting
(or thinking of hosting)
an Annual Festival**

Contents

Introduction	3
Contact the Federation and book the Year	3
Contact the Cathedral and book the Date	4
Form a Festival Committee	4
Obtain Facts & Figures from other Associations	4
Find Accommodation	4
Things to consider when choosing a Hotel	5
Plan the layout of the Weekend	5
Things to consider when setting your Programme	6
Ask the Dean to be President of the Federation	8
Book your Principal Speaker(s)	8
Appoint a Representative to sit on the Federation Executive	8

The Year before

The Flyer	8
Nominate the Federation President & Issue an Invitation at the AGM	9
A Series of Articles for your Festival Year's OAC Magazine	9

Festival Year

Finalise your Budget	9
Sort out Cash Flow	10
Produce the Booking Forms	10
Membership Cards	10
Merchandise	11
Book Speakers	11
Arrange Transport	11
Book Entertainment	11
Organise the Catering	12

Six Months before

Send out Booking Forms & Covering Letters	12
Collect Money	13
Send out Booking Confirmations	13

The Month / Six Weeks Before

Confirm Arrangements and Numbers	13
Welcome Packs	13
The Budget	14

The Week Before	14
------------------------	----

The Day the Festival Begins	14
------------------------------------	----

Once it is Over	15
------------------------	----

Introduction

This information has been produced to help an Association decide if they want to host an Annual Festival and then act as a guide to help plan and run the event.

It should be stressed that it is only a guide and not prescriptive. It is based on past festivals which have followed the same basic format, but each has injected their own individuality to the programme.

The terms “Cathedral” and “Dean” are used throughout but include all choral foundations affiliated to the Federation and their respective senior clergy, etc.

Hosting a Festival is a chance to let other former Choristers see the delights of your City, your Cathedral and its musical tradition. It is also an opportunity to celebrate, especially if your Association or Cathedral is marking a special anniversary or event. It doesn't matter if your Association is large or small. It only takes a few of you to make the arrangements and run the weekend, but obviously the more of you there are to help, the easier it will be. The main thing to consider is the co-operation of your Cathedral's Dean and Chapter and Director of Music/Organist. Their support and input is vital and needs to be in place at the outset of any plans.

Contact the Federation and book the Year

Having agreed to host a festival the first thing to do is contact the Federation Secretary and book the year you would like. It should be noted that the Federation does have bookings a number of years in advance so you will probably be looking at a date in several years time. Once the booking is confirmed by the Federation it will be on the Federation website www.fcoca.org.uk.

Contact the Cathedral and book the Date

When you have the year booked with the Federation, you need to consult with your Cathedral's Dean and Chapter and Music Department to decide which weekend you want. Festivals are held in late June, early July or September as the AGM is held in May. It obviously needs to be at a time when the Cathedral Choir is in residence and during the warmer months of the year. Once the date has been decided, advise the Federation Secretary and make sure it is in everyone's diary, especially the Cathedral's. At this stage, you may also need to re-iterate to the Cathedral that the selected dates are firm and cannot be changed.

Form a Festival Committee

Also before you go much further, you may feel it necessary to form a Festival Committee and then nearer the time, recruit extra help to take on various tasks over the weekend. You may also find it very useful to include a representative of the Cathedral.

Obtain Facts & Figures from other Associations

Before you can plan your programme and especially the costings, you will need to contact the associations who have hosted the previous three festivals and obtain numbers of delegates who attended. This will give you some indication as to how many are likely to require accommodation and attending each event.

You will also be able to obtain mailings lists for when you are ready to send out the final programme and booking form. At every stage of your planning they can be a very useful resource and they will be able to tell you what worked and what went wrong so that you can learn from their experiences

They will also be able to provide you with sample flyers, booking forms, budget sheets, accounts, etc. The Federation Secretary will also be able to help with samples of flyers and booking forms.

Find Accommodation

As soon as you have a date confirmed try and book your accommodation. You may also need to cater for one or two disabled and less able delegates. Breakfast needs to be supplied and depending on other plans you may need other meals as well. You may also need a small number of extra rooms available on Saturday night for guests or those coming just for the day.

Accommodation used to be in University halls of residence but in recent years hotel accommodation has been the norm. Handling accommodation bookings for all attendees can be onerous, so most recent festivals have asked attendees to book their own accommodation, but providing the name of a recommended hotel and a list of alternatives would be beneficial.

Recent experience has shown that having everyone in one main hotel works much better. Some Associations have arranged very good deals with hotels, fixing prices two, three or even four years in advance, getting discounted rates for booking a large number of rooms or even the whole hotel or putting together a whole weekend package of accommodation and meals.

Things to consider when choosing a Hotel:

- Is the hotel of good quality and will you be happy putting people in it?
- Is it in a convenient and preferably central location (using additional transport is time consuming, difficult to manage and costly)? *Ripon Spa Hotel – Ripon Festival 2008*
- Has it enough single rooms?
- Is there a lounge area for delegates to relax during any free time they might have?
- Is there ample car parking (most delegates travel by car, 40+ spaces will be needed)?
- Can you have exclusivity (i.e. you don't want a wedding disco going on till the early hours of the morning)?
- You need an area where you can set up a reception point for the Friday and an information point for the whole weekend. Can you easily set this up without getting in the way?

Once you have made your choice, book it. Make sure that you confirm, and have confirmed, absolutely everything you have discussed and agreed in writing. Staff at hotels change on a regular basis, and the person you started dealing with may not be the same person you deal with over the actual weekend.

However, if your city does not have a big enough hotel, the location does not work, or the finances do not allow, you may decide to let delegates make their own arrangements and supply a list of establishments to choose from. You will then need a definite base for the weekend so delegates know where to register, where to find information and assemble for various tours and activities.

Plan the layout of the Weekend

The first thing to remember is that nothing is set in stone. There is no specific format to follow and your Association is free to do what it likes and should be actively encouraged to do so. However, each Festival does follow a very similar basic programme as outlined below:

Friday

12.00 noon.	Delegates begin to arrive
2.00 p.m.	Optional Tour / Exhibition
4.00 p.m.	Tea and welcome by the Federation President
5.00 p.m.	Evensong
6.30 p.m.	Civic Reception
7.00 p.m.	Dinner
9.00 p.m.	Compline
9.30 p.m. onwards	Free time at the Hotel

Saturday

7.30 a.m.	Communion
7.30 a.m. onwards	Breakfast
Morning	Optional tours
11.45 a.m.	Organ Recital
Lunch	Delegates to make their own arrangements
Afternoon	Free Time
3.30 p.m.	Rehearsal with Cathedral Choir for Evensong
5.00 p.m.	Festival Evensong
7.00 p.m.	Pre Dinner Drinks (earlier if possible depending on the time of Evensong)
7.45 p.m.	Festival Banquet

Sunday

9.30 a.m.	Sung Eucharist
11.15 a.m.	Sung Mattins
12.30 p.m.	Farewell Reception followed by
1.00 p.m.	Optional Sunday Lunch

Things to consider when setting your Programme

Friday

- The vast majority of delegates are retired and tend to arrive at the venue early to meet up with old friends, often arranging to have lunch either at the hotel or a local hostelry.
- It is helpful to have someone from your Association manning a welcome desk from noon or 1.00 p.m. at the latest.
- Afternoon tea is often accompanied by an official welcome, usually by your Dean or your Association's President/Chairman.
- It is very much the hope that every Association will include Compline in their plans. It has become a Friday night treat to walk back into the Cathedral at twilight to sing the last office of the monastic day. The Federation now has orders of service printed which can be used (contact the Federation Secretary) and we can usually rustle up enough singers and a cantor to sing the service ourselves, but the inclusion of the Cathedral Lay Clerks is always very welcome.

Saturday

- Many Festivals have had an early morning Communion service.
- There is usually at least one tour or activity based around the Cathedral or a local tourist attraction.
- Some Associations have chosen to charge extra for these tours and asking delegates to book (and pay for) them in advance. This has proved successful as delegates do not have to pay for what they do not want, but it does focus the mind of the delegates to actually turn up on the day.
- Lunch can be provided but lately this has been left to the delegates to make their own arrangements, freeing up your time and allowing people to eat as much or as little as they require.
- Sometime during the day there is usually an Organ Recital.

- It is hoped that delegates will be allowed to sing with the Cathedral Choir for at least one piece during Festival Evensong. This is a decision for the Director of Music to take, but it should be actively sought. Many of the Old Choristers attending are very capable and enjoy singing together.
- It is customary for the Chairman of the Federation to read one of the lessons at Evensong. The Federation prayer can also be included (see “Who we are” page on the website “www.onceachorister.org”).
- After Evensong there needs to be time for delegates to freshen up and change.

The Banquet:

- This could be in the hotel but external venues have included Castles, Masonic Halls, Museums, Town Halls and even a Library which does add to the ambience.
- There will be extra delegates attending just for the day as well as members of your own Association and Guests.
- Optionally wine can be available to purchase by those who wish, and an appropriate opportunity for sales during the Reception beforehand works well.
- The number of speeches and who does them is entirely up to you, but bear in mind the length of the evening's programme.
- There are normally three toasts, the Loyal Toast followed by the National Anthem (sung and often two verses) before the speeches begin plus ‘The Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers’ Associations’ and ‘Our Guests’.
- Round tables work better than long rectangular ones.
- There is normally a table plan and members of the same Association are usually seated together.
- Dress code tends to be lounge suits for gentlemen and please encourage individual association regalia to be worn
- You will need a Master of Ceremonies.
- The acoustics of the venue may require a public address system for the speeches.
- Musical entertainment is always well received!

Sunday

- There tends not to be any official engagements other than possibly a farewell.
- Many delegates will attend at least one of the services in the Cathedral, most attending the main Eucharist service.
- In the last few years an optional Sunday lunch has been arranged. This has been well received, the cost being an extra charge on the weekend.

These points are just for consideration, they are not rules set in stone and you are free to do whatever you want. If you wish to add some form of entertainment or add something specific to your City or Cathedral you should. A time for mutual discussion would also be welcomed by delegates who often take away from such meetings much to discuss with their own associations. It is entirely up to you.

However, the Federation Executive Committee do feel that three things should be included if at all possible. These are:

- Compline on Friday evening
- The Old Choristers singing with the Cathedral Choir during Saturday Evensong
(If this is not possible, could they be included in the Friday or Sunday services? Also consult with the Director of Music and try to choose at least one traditional piece that former choristers will recognise)
- The Chairman reading a lesson at Festival Evensong

Ask the Dean to be Festival President of the Federation

As soon as you have booked your Festival you should approach your Dean to ask if he/she is willing to be the Festival President of the Federation during the festival. The Presidency now runs for the duration of the festival and is really only a ceremonial role. As President, your Dean will not be expected to attend any Federation events other than the Festival, where they will have some official duties depending on your itinerary.

Book your Principal Speaker(s)

At the Banquet it is customary to have a number of after dinner speeches (see section on 'The Banquet' above) and you may wish to have someone well known, maybe someone high up in the world of church music or someone you just know will give an excellent speech. The chances are that if they are good and well known on the speaking circuit, they will receive requests and bookings from all sorts of people and often several years in advance. If you want to secure their services, make a request and/or booking as early as you can.

Appoint a Representative to sit on the Federation Executive

A representative of your Association will be invited to join the Federation Executive Committee for up to two years before your Festival and for the first meeting after it. They will be asked to attend Executive meetings (usually two a year) to give reports on how plans and arrangements are progressing and also to seek any advice that may be needed.

The year before the Festival

The Flyer

During the year leading up to the Festival opportunity to produce a flyer that may be distributed at the AGM and, in electronic format (.pdf) posted on the Federation website, www.fcoca.org.uk .. This flyer gives an invitation to attend the Festival, advance notice of

the proposed itinerary and any other details that you wish to include. The flyers should be produced by you locally.

Some flyers have also included a tear off slip for people to send back with their name and address expressing an interest to attend. This allows you to prioritise sending out booking forms when the time comes.

Nominate the President and Issue an Invitation at the AGM

The representative of your Association will be required to attend the Federation's Annual General Meeting in the year prior to your Festival to both nominate your Dean as Festival President of the Federation and to give advance notice of your Festival. The notice usually takes the form of a brief formal invitation to attend followed by a short explanation of what is planned, usually with reference made to your Flyer which will be included in the OAC magazines distributed at this meeting.

Assemble a series of Articles for your Festival Years OAC Magazine

The "Once a Chorister" magazine is now published on-line through the Federation website www.fcoca.org.uk. Details of your Festival may be included and could include articles about your Festival, your Cathedral and possibly your city. Contact the Federation Secretary for details about when copy for the magazine is required. secretary@FCOCA.org.uk

Things that need to or could be included are:

- A welcome by your Dean as the President of the Federation
- The Festival Programme
- Information about the choir and organ
- Biographies of the Director of Music, Organists, relevant clergy and possibly Head of the Choir School
- Information and history about tour venues
- Anything of interest that relates to the Festival

Please take a look at back copies of "Once a Chorister" to see what other Associations have produced and talk to the Federation's Publications Officer for guidance.

Festival Year

Things are going to start getting busy now. Your Festival Committee may need to meet on a more regular basis and final decisions need to be made if you haven't already done so.

Finalise your Budget

The first thing is to finalise your programme and get all arrangements and costs confirmed in writing. You then need to produce an accurate budget to work out your ticket price. Don't forget that you will need **Non Resident** and **Banquet Only** as well as **Full Resident** tickets. This needs to be as accurate as possible, with as little guess work as possible. The aim is to at least break even and hopefully make a small profit, but plans for excess profits should be avoided.

When working out your budget there are many items that will need to be paid for on a per person basis. However there will be some block costs such as: printing & stationery, postage, room hire, production of flyers, banquet guests, transport, welcome packs, music, etc.

Things you need to consider when setting the budget

- The expense of these weekends is becoming an issue and should be kept in check
- Is the expenditure really necessary?
- Is the cost actual or estimated? If estimated, what is the likely increase?
- Is V.A.T included?
- Have you included the hire of any equipment needed such as a PA system at the banquet?
- The easiest way to reduce costs is to keep your guest list to a minimum.

Sort out Cash Flow

When you are confirming bookings etc. you may be required to pay deposits, some of which may be considerable. Decide how you are going to deal with this. You may have sufficient funds in your Association's account but it is more than likely that you will need to acquire some extra funding. If this is the case and you don't have an affluent benefactor, think about setting up some sort of interest free loan system with your Association's members to give you a working fund.

Produce the Booking Forms

Once you have your budget and ticket prices fixed, you can start producing your booking forms and other paperwork you will be sending out. You need a certain amount of information from each delegate and potential delegates need to know about the accommodation, the programme for the weekend and the ticket options. This can either be contained as part of the booking form or in a separate covering letter, but should include explanations of what is included in the price, various options and any extras that delegates may wish to book. If you have negotiated special rates at the hotel for Thursday and Sunday nights, they need to know how to book them.

Recently some associations have set up a website with online registration and electronic payment options.

For data protection purposes, you will also need to include a 'tick box' with the wording *"Please tick this box if you are happy for your contact details to be sent to the organisers of future festivals"*

Set a realistic closing date for bookings at least six to eight weeks before the date of the Festival.

Decide what your policy on cancellations will be. This might be influenced by the hotel and other service providers, but you should make it clear from the outset what delegates will lose financially if they cancel bookings after certain dates.

Membership Cards

All delegates attending the Festival need to wear a Federation Membership card. Those who have not attended before or who have lost their card will need to order another one **directly from the Federation** together with a lanyard and holder, at least two weeks before the event. Please mention this in the covering letter and refer delegates to the Membership page on the website at www.fcoca.org.uk .

Federation Merchandise

To save on postage costs, delegates can also be advised in the covering letter to order any merchandise requirements at least two weeks before the event, so that they can be collected and paid for at the festival. They should be directed to the merchandise page on the website www.fcoca.org.uk .

Book Speakers

You may have already booked your principal Speaker for the banquet but at this point, if you have not already done so, you need to put some thought to the many speeches you are planning and who you are going to invite to give them. Speakers may involve a fee which needs to be budgeted for and they may need accommodation. Speeches need to be good and short. You probably need to put a limit on their length, say a maximum of 10 minutes each with possibly 15 minutes for your principal speaker, and stick to it.

Arrange Transport

If you need to move delegates a greater distances than it is realistic to walk, you will therefore need to employ the services of a local coach company. **This can be very expensive**. In the summer months, coaches are in great demand and so you will need to book them early and build the cost this will incur into the budget.

However, if venues are within a fifteen or twenty minute walk, then coaches should not be needed. However, you may wish to consider some sort of transport, be it your Association members' cars or the school minibus, for those delegates who find walking more difficult.

A word of caution, if you use coaches to transport delegates to the banquet venue you have to specify a pick up time which can be very difficult to stick to. Banquets have been known to end very abruptly because coaches are waiting to take delegates back to the hotel. Try to find a venue that is within walking distance.

You may also need to arrange disabled parking facilities at each of your venues.

Book Entertainment

On the Friday evening, or occasionally during the Banquet on the Saturday, there might be some sort of entertainment laid on which either accompanies the drinks reception or follows the meal. Usually musically related and often performed by the Lay Clerks or pupils of the School, it is always appreciated and well received. Not every Festival does this, but if there is something specific that you would like to put on, organise it and book it well in advance.

Organise the Catering

Get the choice of menus sorted well in advance. Good food is becoming a trademark of these weekends and after meeting up with old friends it is usually next on people's list of why they attend.

The Hotel will need to provide breakfast and it is best if there is a choice. You need to offer a traditional English breakfast but some do prefer to eat continental style. Most hotels offer a buffet service which is ideal. Remember, a roll and jam for everyone will not do! Also offering different times for breakfast avoids everyone arriving at once. This can be done when delegates register on Friday. Experience shows that 7.30 a.m. is as popular as 9.00 a.m. and with a middle sitting at 8.15 a.m. there are no tedious queues and the hotel kitchen can manage their time better.

Decide what you want to serve at the two evening dinners, paying particular attention to the Banquet. Remember that the caterers need a fixed menu where everyone eats the same food. Therefore, you need to take sensible and safe options and nothing too exotic. Don't forget a vegetarian option as well!

If you are providing the drinks with either evening meal, make sure you have a selection of non alcoholic ones as well. Half a bottle of wine per person is usually the norm, especially with a large meal like the Banquet and a choice of red and white is now usual, irrespective of what food you are serving. Whatever you decide to do, you will need to provide wine for the top table at the Banquet.

You should provide at least a cup of tea on the Friday and Saturday afternoon. This is often done by the Association's members and their spouses, but if you are getting caterers to do it book them early. If you are doing it yourselves, make sure you have access to the equipment you will need, 150 cups of tea takes an awful lot of hot water.

If you are providing lunch on either day, decide the venue, the menu and get it booked.

Six Months Before

Send out the Booking Forms and Covering Letters

If you are hosting your Festival in late June / early July, try to send out your booking forms during February/March, giving potential delegates plenty of notice but to keep away from the busy Christmas period. If you decided to operate a priority booking system on your flyers, send your initial booking forms to those who replied using those slips and those who attended the previous year's Festival.

Send a second batch of forms to those who attended the Festival before last (who have not already received one).

You also need to send a small supply of booking forms to all Association Secretaries and Representatives who can then circulate them to any of their members who are interested. The latest list of details for all individual Association contacts is on the Membership page of the Federation or you can ask the Federation Secretary to email them to you in envelope format to print off.

The Federation Secretary will also email an electronic copy to all association contacts and arrange to have this put on the website.

Collect the Money

Almost as soon as the forms go out, they will start returning. Devise a good and accurate way of recording the bookings and bank the cheques as they come in.

Send out Booking Confirmations

Once bookings have been received and the cheques cashed, you should send out a confirmation email or letter to each delegate, outlining what has been booked and giving any additional information that you think is required. You should also send out directions on how to reach the hotel, with a map and give specific details about where to park.

The Month / 6 weeks before

Confirm Arrangements and Numbers

The closing date for applications will have now arrived (although there may have been one or two late comers) so you now need to confirm all your bookings giving numbers attending. These will include;

- The room allocation with the hotel.
- The numbers and special requirements with the various caterers you will be using.
- The number of tour leaders you require for the numbers booked or expected on your tours.

- The transport arrangements if you have any.
- The final arrangements with the Cathedral clergy and Music department.

Welcome Packs

On arrival at the Festival, each delegate is traditionally given a welcome pack. This usually contains a list of delegates listed under their Associations, a final itinerary with any specific timings and groupings, a map of the city and tourist information leaflets. Several Associations have managed to obtain guide books from their cathedral bookshop which make a superb souvenir of the weekend. Gather the leaflets and information together that you wish to put in this pack, as well as purchasing some plastic wallets or envelopes to make them up in. However, leave the delegate list to the last minute, it is bound to change! These are usually given out at registration on Friday, but there may be some delegates who arrive after registration closes or on Saturday, so you will need to make provision to get the packs to these delegates.

The Budget

Review the finances and just check that enough money has come in to cover the costs. Hopefully you will be the right side of the balance sheet and will be heading for a small profit. If you are, is it reasonable or do you need to plough some of the money back into the weekend. If not, look at how costs can be pared down.

The Week Before

In the last few days re-check all arrangements

- Take the time to go and see all the people you have employed or asked to do things over the weekend.
- Make sure that all the volunteers from your Association know their tasks and the time they need to be at their appointed position.
- Check that the logistics of getting delegates from one place to the next is in place and will work and confirm meeting points for tours etc.
- Acquire a large display / notice board to act as your information point
- Produce participant lists for each activity to be put up at the information point, along with start times and meeting points.
- If necessary, put up direction signs around the city to help get delegates to the hotel. The Federation has a supply of hard plastic direction arrows, but it is probably just as easy and effective to produce A4 paper signs and laminate them if you have the facilities.
- Put in a prayer or two for a hot and sunny weekend!!!!

The Day the Festival Begins

Relax and let it happen, your planning should mean that it will all work like a well oiled machine. However, if there are any problems, don't panic.

- Set up your reception point and make sure it is manned from about mid-day onwards. You should plan to have at least one person there for the rest of the day as you are bound to have some late arrivals.
- Set up your information point with the relevant information delegates will need for the weekend. This may well be a repeat of information in the welcome packs, but it is useful to have it on display and within easy reach all weekend.
- As delegates arrive, greet them with a smile and welcome them. Assist any that need help with bags etc and once registered, point them in the direction they need to go, be it the hotel reception, the toilets or a cup of tea.
- There are bound to be lots of questions asked by delegates, directions needed and recommendations of where to eat.
- During the weekend, be aware at all times of what is going on and what is happening next.
- It takes time to get delegates together to move on to the next activity, so give yourselves plenty of time to get anywhere.
- Have stewards ready to guide groups from one place to the next and to let delegates know the arrangements when you get there.

The main thing is, enjoy it. It will soon be over, so make the most of it.

Once it is all over

After you have cleared up, the first thing is to have a break. You may be more tired than you would ever imagine, so sit back and relax in the knowledge that you have given much pleasure to a lot of people. This will almost certainly be expressed in many letters and messages you will receive.

The Festival Treasurer will need to finalise the accounts once all the bills have come in. You will hopefully have made a little surplus or profit and that is yours. However, if you have not broken even, do approach the Federation Treasurer. We will not see your Association out of pocket.

On the converse, if you have made a surplus or profit, it is hoped that you will see fit to donate some of it to the Federation's General Fund; 33% is thought to be a suitable proportion.

Your Representative will be expected to attend the next Federation Executive Meeting to give a report on how the weekend went. At this point, you should have some idea of how finances have worked out, what worked well and the problems you encountered over the course of the weekend.

There is usually a Report of the Festival in the following OAC magazine.

At some point you are bound to be contacted by the host Association of the next three Festivals who will want as much information as possible, just as you did.

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