

Growing Families at the Amherst Early Music Festival

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Understand the dynamics of staging an annual musical arts festival.
- Discuss the benefits of retaining human talent and institutional knowledge.
- Recognize the rewards of developing an organizational culture that focuses on the well-being of those within it.
- Develop a childcare policy for an arts organization.

Topics For Discussion

Staging an Annual Festival

- The Amherst Early Music Festival is one of the world's most respected festivals of its kind, greatly expanded from an annual summer workshop for early music begun in 1963. Under Executive Director Marilyn Boenau, the festival has grown to offer instruction from almost 100 early music professionals to a student body of more than 400. The principal festival runs for two weeks in early July – after the July 4 holiday – with students being able to choose one week or both depending on their course of study. Review the structure of the festival with students and examine its broad success, independent of the issue of childcare.
- ♦ In addition to the flagship summer festival, the organization also offers smaller workshops throughout the year at various locations. This allows the AEMF to maintain contact with its students year-round. Review the number of events each year before and after the festival. From what is divulged in the case about these satellite workshops, do they seem beneficial to organization as a whole, or might they drain time and resources away from planning and recruiting for the festival?
- Because the Amherst Early Music Festival does not have its own facilities, it must put most office equipment, scores, sets, costumes, and other festival essentials in offsite storage near Connecticut College where the festival is hosted. Each year, staff and work-study students have about a week to move everything from the storage facility onto the campus and set up the classroom, rehearsal, and performance spaces. What were some other challenges of hosting a festival in a space that is not permanent? How could the AEMF streamline requests for spaces with Connecticut College

to minimize disruption each year? Would there be any benefit to seeking a permanent office or festival space? What if the festival only utilized classroom space and asked students to lodge outside of Connecticut College?

- ♦ Faculty, staff, and students all live in the residence halls at Connecticut College during the weeks of the AEMF. While a few choose to live off-campus in a hotel or rental, the majority live on-site, including Marilyn Boenau, Festival Director Frances Blaker, and Assistant Festival Director Emily Eagen. Discuss how these accommodations could affect the staff's work-life balance. What are some drawbacks to being on call 24/7? Are there any advantages for the staff and faculty?
- ♦ The demographic base for the AEMF is growing older on average. Many participants have been attending the festival for decades, some since its inception. Other students join during their college years, but then stop attending once they enter early adulthood. Given the older demographic of the majority, what are some steps the board can take to recruit a younger demographic, particularly those for whom childcare is not an issue?

Organizational Focus on Retention and Well-Being

- As the executive director mentions in the case, the AEMF can only pay faculty and staff a modest fee. The festival tries to make up for it with other perks such as free room and board, the flexibility to take a few days off to take a higher paying/higher profile gig, etc. Ask students to investigate research on what makes workers satisfied in an organization. Is the AEMF on the right track or should further adjustments be made to ensure retention of staff and faculty year to year?
- Work-study students have always played a major role in running the AEMF, fueling its growth year to year. Student workers are offered a small discount on their tuition. For example, a first-year work-study student typically receives \$200 off the \$650 per week tuition (not including housing which adds between \$210 and \$420 per week, and a meal card which adds another \$194 per week). What are the benefits to the festival by relying so much on work-study students to keep things running? What are the advantages for the students? What are some drawbacks to using such a system?
- ♦ Assistant Festival Director Emily Eagen has been at the Amherst Early Music Festival since 1989, starting as a work-study student and working her way up to her current position. In certain ways, this is exactly how the work-study program was envisioned to operate. How does the AEMF benefit from retaining the same staff like Emily from year to year?

Childcare Accommodations

- The case centers on the question of childcare within the context of the Amherst Early Music Festival. The issue was first raised by faculty members Hsuan-Wen Chen (harpsichord) and Jason Priset (lute). When the AEMF accommodated their childcare needs in 2010, the positive experience paved the way for more to take advantage of the festival's helpful but unofficial policy of accommodation. Within a few years, the festival went from having one child on campus to numerous families and children, creating an atmosphere of "festival friends." The organization eventually had to convert almost an entire floor within the residence hall to lodge the growing number of families. What changes (positive and negative) occurred at the festival as a result of more accommodations for families?

- ♦ For faculty and staff who need to bring a caregiver, the AEMF is able to offer additional room and board at no additional charge and without any cuts to pay. If the AEMF developed an official policy and offered it to its students, they could charge for the extra room and board, thus being accommodating while not diminishing profits. What are some things the festival should consider to make this an appealing recruitment tool and not something that could be financially prohibitive?
- ♦ Given that the AEMF sees a major gap in its participants after college age through middle age, what additional workshops or endeavors can the festival branch into to maintain the connection with young artists who might be starting families and encourage them to continue their relationship with the AEMF?
- As the families grow and new families emerge among faculty and staff, the AEMF realizes it may need to devote more resources to host children and caregivers. Recalling that Connecticut classifies any program that accepts more than three students under the age of 16 as a camp, how can the AEMF develop more formal programming for children and families without straying from its principal mission to bring high quality education and performances of early music to the wider public?
- ♦ Marilyn and others at the AEMF are convinced that the childcare accommodations have been a net positive for the festival. The case concludes with a scenario featuring an upcoming board meeting in which questions of childcare are on the agenda. Board members have raised the question to Marilyn and Emily of whether an official childcare policy for their faculty or staff would be prudent for the AEMF. The tradition of childcare accommodations has remained unofficial to this point and has traveled by word of mouth and observation of the atmosphere.
 - In what ways has the current childcare policy defined the culture at the AEMF? Would the community as a whole benefit from an articulated childcare policy? What are the risks of stating a policy of this sort in writing?
 - For the recommendation that Marilyn and Emily owe the board, instructors may assign students a memo or presentation with their suggestions for moving forward on a policy. These may be collected in advance and sorted for discussion. Recommendations may also be shared live in class, perhaps in groups. Chart the range of suggestions for dealing with the issue of childcare. Students may develop a budget projecting the impact childcare would have on the festival's budget, from what is given in the case. Prompt students to consider offsets to the expenses incurred from offering childcare.