

# Employee Engagement Workbook Series

## Corporate Arts Challenges

This series of workbooks centers on employee engagement, or using the arts to foster and improve the work environment in businesses. Written by practitioners in the field, this series will help arts groups gain inspiration and practical tips to guide the creation and growth of employee engagement in local communities.



## **About Americans for the Arts Business Volunteers for the Arts®: Employee Engagement**

Business Volunteers for the Arts® (BVA), a national skills-based management consulting program created in 1975, has been overseen by Americans for the Arts since 2005. In recent years, we have seen a multitude of changes in the corporate volunteer environment, with shifting interests from both the employees who volunteer and the businesses in which they work. As a response to this shift, the Americans for the Arts Business Volunteers for the Arts® (BVA) Network now includes employee engagement resources on programs such as virtual volunteering, corporate arts challenges, skills-based volunteering, arts-based training programs, consultant events, mentoring, hackathon events, team-based volunteering, and more. This workbook on arts-based training in the workplace is one in a series written by practitioners in the field who have successfully designed and implemented such programs. Find out more at [www.AmericansForTheArts.org/BVA](http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org/BVA).

Americans for the Arts recognizes that engaging business professionals and employees through the arts is key to fostering a desirable work environment, increasing efficiency and morale, and building the competitive advantage of a business. Employees can be engaged through the arts in a number of ways, and Americans for the Arts serves as a resource, guide, and hub for all the information needed to start, sustain, or transform a successful employee engagement program.

## **About Corporate Arts Challenges**

This workbook focuses on one of the many ways arts organizations can work with businesses: corporate arts challenges. Corporate arts challenges can be broadly defined as any event that encourages creative participation from business employees in any artistic discipline in a friendly competition. This can include battle of the band competitions, juried employee art shows, or team-based challenges that present groups with a problem that must be solved through innovation and teamwork.

Workplace art competitions put the spotlight on amateur artists and encourage creativity and teamwork in the workplace. Co-workers enjoy discovering each other's talents, sharing their creative endeavors, and cheering each other on.

## **About This Workbook**

Each workbook in this series is based on a specific organization's programs, philosophy, and tactics to generate positive engagement programs for the business community. This workbook features the work of ArtsWave, in Cincinnati, OH.

ArtsWave's corporate arts challenge, CincySings, brings the arts into the workplace by organizing a friendly, amateur singing competition featuring choirs of company employees. Designed to foster camaraderie and build company pride, CincySings participating companies invite their employees to form small singing groups to represent their company in the citywide competition hosted by ArtsWave.

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## PROGRAM BASICS

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ArtsWave is one of the nation's first and largest **United Arts Funds**.<sup>\*</sup> With the support of tens of thousands of individuals and companies each year, ArtsWave supports more than 100 arts organizations across the Greater Cincinnati region with grants, services, and strategic initiatives. Founded in 1927, the organization has evolved many times. Corporate workplace campaigns are a vital component of ArtsWave's annual fundraising, and individuals who give through workplace campaigns make up 56 percent of the more than \$12 million in annual contributions.

For several years, ArtsWave has heard from its many corporate partners about the importance of employee engagement in their talent attraction and retention strategies. Research showed that arts engagement had a significant correlation with civic engagement and a positive view of the region. ArtsWave considered how it could be a better partner by developing programs that both increase employee engagement through the arts and increase support for the community campaign.

ArtsWave's CincySings began in 2014 with the purpose of bringing the community together to celebrate the arts in the region and spread awareness for the annual ArtsWave campaign. The competition has grown to become one of ArtsWave's signature annual events with 12 companies participating in 2015. Companies hold internal singing competitions to select their company champion choir, and the competition culminates in an evening performance for the top choirs from all participating companies. Hosted by celebrity artist Drew Lachey, the high-energy final performance draws more than 2,000 audience members, mostly employees and their families. The event raises funds for the annual campaign and also creates significant media attention, which builds awareness for ArtsWave and the arts in the Greater Cincinnati region.

<sup>\*</sup>United Arts Funds (UAFs) are local arts agencies whose function is to provide ongoing fundraising support to arts groups by consolidating cultural fundraising efforts in one organization, and use their knowledge of the cultural community to disperse the funds accordingly.



2015 CincySings competition.  
Photo by Matt Steffan.

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## ORIGIN STORY

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In 2012, Cincinnati was the proud host of the World Choir Games, marking the first time the event was held in the United States. There were approximately 15,000 active participants from 64 countries involved in the choir competition, which resulted in profound cultural impact throughout the city, helping to solidify Cincinnati's moniker: "The City That Sings." This sparked choral creativity from some of the most unlikely of places—including within ArtsWave's workplace giving campaigns at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and Procter & Gamble. Both companies began holding employee choir competitions as part of their annual ArtsWave campaigns to drive awareness and participation. These competitions became annual staples and sources of employee engagement for both companies.

What do these events look like? Imagine hundreds of employees packed into auditoriums to watch their co-workers sing everything from doo-wop to hip-hop to Motown. Choirs range in size from 4 to 20 members. Colorful handmade costumes and choreography set some groups apart, while others concentrate on tight harmonies. Some choirs form around company operational divisions, while others bring together employees from different parts of the business. Talent and quality vary widely, but everyone has a ball performing for their peers. Choirs are judged by panels of professional experts recruited from theater and music organizations in the community.

Inside each company, a dedicated team of volunteers coordinates the event: recruiting participants; procuring prizes; inviting professionals to serve as judges; arranging rehearsal space and time; and managing the production of the event. These volunteer producers often have a background in theater or choral performance. The time invest-

“Imagine hundreds of employees packed into auditoriums to watch their co-workers sing everything from doo-wop to hip-hop to Motown.”

ment for these teams is significant, but their passion for the project is high and their supervisors provide them the time needed because they see the value of the employee engagement.

In 2014, the chair of the ArtsWave community campaign, Melanie Healey from Procter & Gamble (P&G), observed the energy and excitement that the annual P&G Sing Off created among employees. She set forth a challenge to a combined team of passionate P&G employees and ArtsWave staff: could we expand the Sing Off competitions at P&G and Children's Hospital to more companies and create a citywide singing competition?

The team went to work, meeting with ArtsWave partner companies to pitch the Sing Off idea, gaining interest from eight new companies. Cincinnati native and Broadway celebrity, Drew Lachey, agreed to serve as host for the culminating performance. After years on the road, Drew had returned to his hometown to start a family and his own arts training program. A Procter & Gamble staff member connected with him upon hearing that their kids attended the same local arts school. A natural booster for the community and the arts, Drew began working with local companies and nonprofits to raise the profile of great causes. To help coach the participating groups, ArtsWave recruited coaches from local arts organizations including choral directors, theatre artists, and professional musicians.

### Questions to Consider

- ▶ How are you helping businesses connect the dots between arts engagement, employee engagement, and retention?
- ▶ Are your business partners seeking ways to boost employee morale and creativity? How can you help them address this need?
- ▶ Do you have arts partners who can serve as professional consultants, coaches, or judges for the competition?
- ▶ Do you have people within the business community who can serve as advocates and provide logistical support?
- ▶ Are you encouraging and celebrating amateur art-making in your community as part of your larger arts ecosystem?
- ▶ Can this program help strengthen your mission or give you better exposure and relationships in the business community?

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# RESEARCH & PLANNING

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The early versions of the internal Sing Off competitions at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and Procter & Gamble (P&G) in 2012 and 2013 served as the research and development phase for CincySings. As ArtsWave began planning for the citywide competition, the staff interviewed employees and volunteers from both companies to determine what factors made for a compelling event.

## 1. Drive For Greatness

By their very nature, choral competitions require people to work in teams. Most teams put in hours of rehearsal, plus time planning costumes, scripts, and choreography. At both companies, teams initially formed inside departments, strengthening interpersonal dynamics among immediate colleagues.

## 2. License to Be Creative

Large companies, by necessity, demand a more formal culture. For participants and observers, a Sing Off provided time and space to “let their hair down” and have fun.

## 3. Desire to Win

The prizes for winning the competition at both companies were relatively minor in value: a pizza party for the winning team and swag bags of P&G products. Instead of going after glitzy prizes, teams seemed to be motivated purely for the bragging rights. The insight for company leaders was that recognition by peers, especially for one's talents, could be a powerful morale boost for employees.

## 4. Ability to Define Success

Naturally, some teams had more talented members than others. Quality and style of performance varied widely, yet the audience of co-workers was enthusiastic and supportive of every choir. Based on this, ArtsWave worked to develop a judging rubric that left room for a wide variety of styles and skill levels, adding flexibility for added recognition categories.

## Building the Internal Team

In the first year, P&G provided three staff members to serve as CincySings project leaders. They steered the creation of all the brand assets, developed the pitch deck, and accompanied ArtsWave staff on company calls to recruit companies to the cause. They also served as director, scorekeeper, and chief volunteer coordinator for the event itself.

ArtsWave identified two staff members who had professional theater experience to work with the director of the event as stage managers and producers. ArtsWave's Director of the Corporate Campaign served as primary liaison to the P&G volunteer team and chief recruiter for companies.



2015 CincySings competition.  
Photos by Matt Steffan.

## Branding & Marketing

Experts from P&G Marketing division aided in the creation of the CincySings name, logo, and brand assets. They also assisted in market research to confirm that singing competitions were indeed still popular amongst the masses, citing *American Idol* and *The Voice* television shows as primary examples for this trend.

## Recruitment of Companies

A Sing Off is nothing without contestants! ArtsWave focused first on recruiting its largest partner companies, including those that had both significant employee bases from which to form teams, and a desire to boost employee engagement. The staff also targeted a few companies that had no existing participation in the annual campaign to see if this approach might be a way to begin new relationships. All participating companies were expected to make a corporate gift to support the campaign.

The request made to companies was a significant one: encourage employees to form teams and then run an internal singing competition during the ArtsWave campaign to select a champion team to represent the company in the culminating city-wide CincySings competition. Running these internal Sing Offs required a coordinator inside the company to handle scheduling and logistics. Most companies held a special event in an auditorium for their internal competition with judges recruited by ArtsWave. Some companies found that this format was not workable, so they had teams submit videos to internal websites. All company employees were invited to vote through the website for their favorite team, which was selected as company champion.



ArtsWave staff and project leaders developed a PowerPoint presentation to use to “pitch” the idea of CincySings to different companies to get buy-in and recruit company employees across Cincinnati. The pitch deck, which you can find in the supplemental materials, includes information about the competition, examples from company Sing Off competitions, key rules, suggested timeline, budget recommendations, and photographs. You can also find the Sing Off event host instructions and CincySings official rules in the supplemental materials.

## Partnerships

### Businesses

For the first year of CincySings, ArtsWave concentrated on engaging some of its largest partner companies for the competition. Companies like GE Aviation, Kroger, and TriHealth have some of the largest employee populations in the region. These companies have long histories of supporting the ArtsWave annual campaign and many have representation on the boards of local arts organizations and ArtsWave’s Board of Trustees. These board members shared challenges with talent retention in the region, proving that engaging employees had become a top business priority.

As ArtsWave campaign managers held their annual fall meetings with leaders and volunteers at these companies, they introduced CincySings as a new tool to support the annual campaign and improve employee engagement in a fun, innovative way. Many were intrigued by the opportunity, though unsure of how to execute the strategy. Having testimonials from P&G staff who managed the Sing Off made a real difference in getting companies on board. Knowing that the concept had been vetted at two of the region’s largest companies gave CEOs reassurance that it could work at their companies.

Additionally, ArtsWave used CincySings as a way of starting new conversations with companies that had not previously been open to running workplace campaigns. One new company to the region saw CincySings as a great way to bring its diverse workforce together. It fielded a single team and made a first-time corporate contribution to the campaign, in addition to buying hundreds of tickets to the performance so that many employees could attend.

Offering CincySings as a tool for employee engagement helped ArtsWave develop existing relationships with companies in a new way. What had been a one-way financial transaction began to feel more like a partnership with direct and immediate benefits for their employees. This also made it easier to discuss the more intangible benefits of the arts—the ripple effect created in the broader community—that many business professionals unfamiliar with the arts find difficult to understand.

### Arts Organizations

ArtsWave has a long history of partnering with local arts organizations in service of its community campaign for the arts. Arts leaders serve as speakers at workplace campaigns, artists perform at fundraising events, and organizations donate tickets to be

“CincySings made it easier to discuss the more intangible benefits of the arts that many business professionals unfamiliar with the arts find difficult to understand.”

## Steps to Establish Business Partnerships

1. Make a list of potential partners, starting with your most well-established relationships.
2. Arrange a meeting and make your pitch for a corporate arts challenge as a tool for employee engagement.
3. Engage upper management and build their excitement and support for an internal company event.
4. Identify internal “champion(s),” the person or people who will actually plan and execute the company competition.
5. Stay close to the company, offering help every step of the way including offering templates, performance planning assistance, and even coaching.
6. Have members of your staff attend the event to cheer on the amateur artists and document the event.

given away as prizes. The arts community understands the incredible value of a United Arts Fund for the region, and has proven time and again to be a great partner.

CincySings focuses on amateur artists, but ArtsWave saw an immediate need for partnerships with local professionals to serve both as coaches and judges. Recruiting from the region’s diverse and robust music and theater community, ArtsWave provided artist judges for internal company Sing Off events. Once a team was selected from a company, ArtsWave matched them with an artist coach to begin rehearsing. Coaches devoted extra hours to rehearsing teams and refining their performances in advance of the big event. This greatly increased the confidence of the performers and the overall quality of the event.

In selecting arts partners to be coaches and judges, ArtsWave learned to look for the following skills:

### Coaches

- ▶ Teaching and/or training experience
- ▶ Desire to help amateurs perform and feel their best
- ▶ Willingness and ability to devote time for at least two rehearsals
- ▶ Warm and enthusiastic attitude

### Judges

- ▶ Expertise in the field with knowledge of different styles and genres
- ▶ Ability to articulate criticism in a positive, cogent, and concise manner
- ▶ Comfort with improvisational banter with emcee and other judges
- ▶ Charisma and an outgoing personality
- ▶ Genuine enthusiasm for the work of amateur artists

P&G volunteers also learned in the R&D years to provide the judges with a preliminary training session to discuss the rules of the event, the rubric for scoring, and what to expect from amateur teams. An informal lunch proved to be the best setting for this and increased the judges’ comfort with each other before the event. You can view both the coaching guidelines and the CincySings judges’ scorecard in the supplemental materials.

## Funding

From the beginning, the hope was that CincySings would raise awareness for the ArtsWave community campaign as well as new sources of revenue. Like most fundraising special events, sponsorships and in-kind donations were key to making the event profitable.

## Revenue Sources

### In-Kind Sponsors

The most important in-kind sponsorship for CincySings was Cincinnati Arts Association. Through a strategic partnership agreement, they provided the venue for the event, including union labor costs and special equipment rentals. Depending on the scope of an event, venue expenses are likely to be the largest chunk of the budget.

ArtsWave successfully solicited in-kind gifts for smaller items including trophies, advertising, catering, and printing. These sponsors received ads in the event program and recognition from the stage. Finally, several partners provided special prizes for the winners in the form of performance opportunities. The winning team sings the national anthem at a Cincinnati Reds game and with the Cincinnati Pops orchestra at one of their summer concerts. The runner-up teams have performed at University of Cincinnati sporting events, the Cincinnati Zoo, and in other regional events—which brings more visibility to the arts in Cincinnati and ArtsWave.

### Sponsorship

A signature event like CincySings provides a unique opportunity for sponsorship. Sponsor dollars cover costs associated with marketing, volunteers, event management, VIP events, and other miscellaneous costs. If a competition involves multiple companies, consider approaching a business for a sponsorship that specializes in business-to-business services.

CincySings has attracted two key sponsors whose business objectives align with the employee engagement focus of the event. Accenture, a large national firm with a strong presence in Cincinnati, recognized that many of their current and prospective client organizations were participating in CincySings. For Accenture, sponsoring an event created to increase employee engagement made sense as it continued to build its brand as an innovative leader in strategic management and operations.

*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, the region's major newspaper, recognized the Wild Card competition as an opportunity for a fun, interactive digital engagement with its readership. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* came on as a media partner in the second year of the event and hosted the Wild Card video voting on its main website, Cincinnati.com. This marked the first significant partnership with the *Enquirer* beyond a traditional in-kind contribution of advertising space for the campaign. Voting in the Wild Card competition increased from 1,000 votes in 2014 to 8,000 votes in 2015 because of this partnership.

### Ticket Sales

In its first year, the CincySings project team relied on Cincinnati Arts Association for its expertise regarding ticketing models and pricing. The initial team chose to keep prices fairly low, with a starting price point of \$20 for individuals. Companies were invited to purchase tickets in bulk at a slightly discounted price. This was adjusted in year two with the addition of tiered ticket prices for premium seats.



2015 CincySings competition.  
Photos by Matt Steffan.



## Expenses

### Hard Costs

Like most productions, primary expenses include venue and equipment rental, professional labor, marketing and advertising, and printing of collateral materials. Many venues and ticketing services also have ticket processing fees that may impact your budget or ticket pricing. If prizes are awarded, the budget should include the cost for trophies, ribbons, certificates, and swag bags. Satellite events such as VIP receptions or after-show parties can also have significant expenses such as catering.

For events that happen internally at companies, costs may be significantly less. However, companies need to know if they have to budget for special equipment, prizes, or any other materials.

## Staffing

In year one, the CincySings production was largely managed by the combined team from P&G and ArtsWave. Luckily, there were a number of team members with extensive theatrical experience ranging from professional directors, stage managers, and actors. This experience was extremely helpful when planning the ins and outs of the performance including ordering the team performances, setting cues, and calling the show.

The CincySings event was largely dependent on volunteers the day of the event. ArtsWave staff and other volunteers were enlisted to help with various duties including backstage production, talent wrangling, and many other duties. Roles included:

- ▶ **Volunteer Wrangler:** A volunteer assigned to oversee all non-staff volunteers.
- ▶ **Emcee and Judge Wrangler:** ArtsWave staff person to make sure emcee and judges are where they need to be and that they are not overrun by fans.

- ▶ **Score Keeper:** ArtsWave staff person who collects judges' scores and keeps master sheet of totals. This person also oversees the judges' deliberations for winning teams.
- ▶ **Stage Manager:** ArtsWave staff person with extensive theatrical experience who calls cues for the show and works with the facility union staff to execute the show.
- ▶ **Back Stage Manager:** Makes sure teams are in place on time and that the backstage traffic keeps moving.
- ▶ **Assistant Stage Manager:** Assists backstage as needed.
- ▶ **Pre-Show Table Worker:** ArtsWave staff person armed with literature about the organization to promote the campaign and manage fan favorite voting.
- ▶ **Fan Favorite Vote Collector:** Collects fan favorite votes, for which \$1 = 1 vote for a patron's favorite team. Staff member takes "votes" via square app, cash, or check.
- ▶ **Team Wranglers:** Each performing choir is assigned a person who walks them from their seats to the backstage before the performance and back again immediately following.

## Roles at the Venue

Depending on the venue for your performance, you may be working with a combination of professionals and volunteers to fill the following roles:

- ▶ Lighting Designer
- ▶ Light Board Operator
- ▶ Spotlight Operator
- ▶ Sound Technician
- ▶ Sound Board Operator
- ▶ Stagehand

## Questions to Consider

- ▶ Do you have on-staff expertise in backstage operations: directing, stage management, lighting, and sound design? If not, can you recruit professionals or skilled amateurs to help you? Are you willing to budget for their expertise?
- ▶ What are the technical features of the venue? Are you required to use union stagehands and technicians? Does the venue have all of the sound and lighting equipment you need or will you need to rent that equipment separately?
- ▶ Who will be your emcee? Consider who has the right combination of energy, stage presence, and experience.
- ▶ Can you recruit expert judges to volunteer their time? Be sure to create a well-rounded panel—for example, include a jazz musician as well as a traditional choral conductor.
- ▶ Do you have enough volunteers to handle both front-of-house operations and team management?

# IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM

## Step 1: Setting Goals

### Goals for Year One

In the pilot year, ArtsWave did not know what to expect. The goals set for the first year revolved around participation and revenue, with the aim of recruiting 10 teams from 10 participating companies and netting at least \$20,000 in revenue.

### Actual Results for Year One

ArtsWave was successful in recruiting teams from 10 companies, including two that had no prior participation in the ArtsWave community campaign. The event raised a total of \$27,000 in ticket sales, mostly bulk sales to companies that wanted to support their teams at the event.

| Goals for Year Two (2015)  |
|--|
| Renew all 10 companies from 2014   |
| Add 5 or more participating companies  |
| Increase giving at each participating company  |
| Increase attendance to 2,000+  |
| Increase total revenues to \$40,000+   |
| Secure sponsorships for \$10,000 or more   |
| Actual Results (2015)  |
| 8 of 10 teams renewed  |
| 4 new companies  |
| 8 out of 11 companies increased giving   |
| <b>Total Revenue</b><br>Total Ticket Revenue: \$32,737<br>Fan Favorite: \$1,692<br>Sponsorship: \$10,000<br>Total Income: \$44,429 |
| <b>Sponsorships Achieved</b> via Accenture   |

## Step 2: Setting the Timeline

- ▶ 10-12 months out: Determine date for event, and identify and reserve performance venue
- ▶ 8-10 months out: Schedule pitch meetings and start enlisting companies to host internal Sing Off competitions to determine their company's champion choir
- ▶ 4 months out: Solidify companies participating in the competition
- ▶ 4-1 month out: Participating companies hold internal Sing Offs to determine their company champion that will compete in the semi-finals
- ▶ 2 months out: Press release, semi-finals companies determined
- ▶ 6 weeks out: Tickets for the finals go on sale
- ▶ 1 month out: Hold semi-finals competition to identify 10 teams for the final competition
- ▶ Post semi-finals: Connect winning teams with professional coaches
- ▶ 2 weeks out: Wild Card voting, media tour
- ▶ 1 week out: All teams and program details finalized
- ▶ 1 day out: Hold rehearsal for teams and crew

## Step 3: Finalizing the Teams

### Wild Card Competition

In an attempt to include the general singing public, ArtsWave initiated the Community Wild Card competition in year one of CincySings. The idea was to encourage church choirs, community theatre groups, friends, and families to submit application videos so the public could vote for its favorite team as the final entrant into the competition. However, this leg of the competition did not attract new community participants as expected. Instead, it became a "second chance" round for teams that did not win at their respective company Sing Offs. In year one, the Wild Card winning team was the runner-up from the Cincinnati Children's Hospital singing competition. In year two, there was an increase in team submissions, but again, all of the entries were from teams that did not move on in their company competitions. In year two, the votes were so close between the top two teams that ArtsWave made the executive decision to allow both teams to compete. Both teams ended up winning accolades at the event. The official Wild Card competition rules are included in the supplemental materials.



## **CASE STUDY: Wild Card Winners— A Chance to Get Back in the Competition!**

When the announcement was made, the “Just Roll with It” team was crushed. They were second place in the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and Medical Center Sing Off Competition. Despite singing their hearts out to Pharell’s “Happy,” they would not be going on to the CincySings final in April.

Then they heard about the Wild Card competition, and used a video camera to record their song. Once the voting started, they sent friends, co-workers, and family members to ArtsWave’s voting site again and again. When the dust settled a few days later, their situation had turned into a classic reality-show competition story: the plucky team that gets eliminated too early and fights its way back into the competition.

On the night of the event, they were the last to perform and got a huge reaction from the crowd. Ultimately, they were crowned runners-up for the competition.

**CincySings 2014 Wild Card winning team Just Roll With It, from Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, performs onstage at the Aronoff Center, April 2014. Photo by Jason Sheldon.**

### **Semi-Finals**

With the increase in popularity for the event in year two, ArtsWave added a second leg to the competition between the company Sing Offs and the final CincySings event. The ideal number of teams in the final competitions is around 10–11 teams in order to keep the show at two hours. In year two, four teams were guaranteed entry directly into the final competition, and eight teams competed at the Semi-Finals for the remaining five positions in CincySings. The 10th and final position was held for the community Wild Card winning team, which was determined by online voting after the semi-finals results were shared. It was ultimately decided that two of the Wild Card teams would be granted entry into CincySings given their neck-and-neck points on the voting site. Ultimately there were 11 teams in CincySings in 2015.

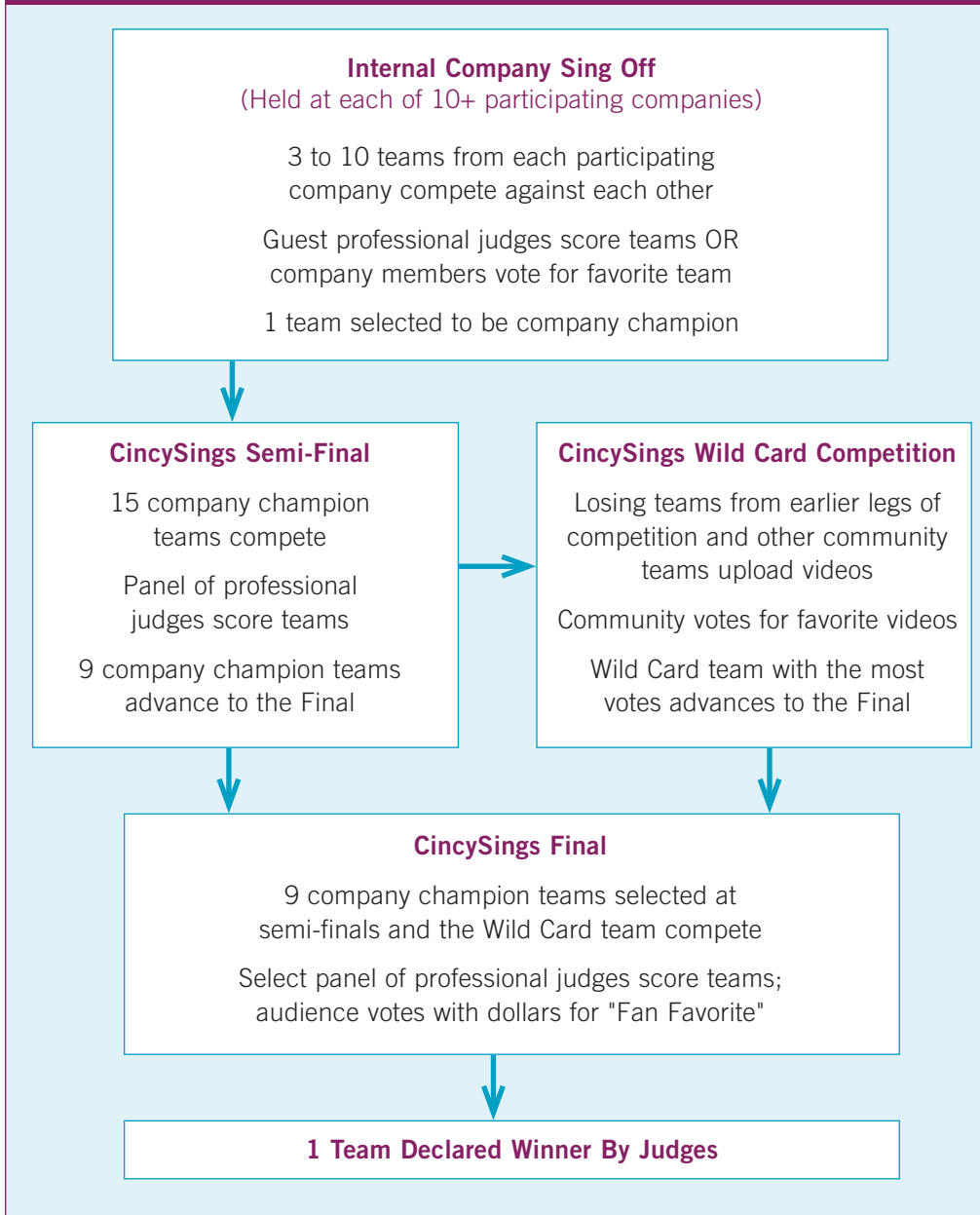
### **Step 4: Putting on the Show**

CincySings follows a structure much like a traditional theatrical performance or award show, taking approximately two hours from start to finish. At the top of the show, the emcee greets patrons, briefly explains the competition, introduces the judges, and explains what ArtsWave is and who it supports.

Once the rules are explained, the competition begins and the first team takes the stage. The order of the teams is deliberately planned by the show’s director to ensure that less skilled teams are given time to shine while highly skilled teams take key positions in



## How to Win CincySings



the evening, such as the opening and closing of each act. Ten competing teams is the ideal number; this allows approximately 5–7 minutes per team for set up, performance, and comments from the judges. With a two-hour program, an intermission is necessary for patrons. This allows the program to be split with around 4–5 teams performing in the first half and 6–5 teams performing in the second.

It is also important to consider what will happen while the judges make their deliberations. If the competition is tight or if many awards are being given, the judges may take anywhere from 5–10 and even 15 minutes to make their decisions. Featuring a dance performance, video, or hearing from a speaker are all good ways to cover this gap in

performances. Featuring a professional singing group is not recommended during any portion of the event, as the participating employee singers are amateurs and hearing a professional group perform can be intimidating. It is best to allow the employee singers to be the only singing talent at the event.

Once the judges have chosen their winning team or teams, the emcee presents the accolades and the event concludes.

## Satellite Events

### Pre-Show VIP Reception

An opportunity both to thank key sponsors and the leaders of participating companies, this relaxed wine-and-cheese event also provides a cultivation opportunity for prospective donors.

### Post-Show Wrap Party

ArtsWave hosts an official after-party for the patrons, competitors, judges, staff, and partners with a local bar, which provides discounted drinks to the participants. While optional, this celebration is great for morale after the event and gives teams the opportunity to congratulate one another.

### Fan Favorite Voting

In year two, ArtsWave added the Fan Favorite vote in order to generate more income from the event. Once the winning teams were named and the special awards given out, the voting was opened up to the audience to choose its favorite choir by way of donation dollars, for which \$1 equaled one vote. ArtsWave created voting envelopes to collect the cash or check donations; the envelopes included check boxes on the outside allowing the patron to choose his or her favorite from the list of performers. Apple Squares were also used for credit card donations. More than 800 people cast Fan Favorite votes, donating an additional \$1,692.

## Questions to Consider

- ▶ Is there a way to expand the event to allow different companies to compete against each other?
- ▶ If your competition is a performance, how many different teams can you reasonably accommodate? Does this create a cap for the number of companies you engage in the competition?
- ▶ How can you involve the general public in the competition? Can they vote online or at the performance?



2015 CincySings competition.  
Photos by Matt Steffan.

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## LESSONS LEARNED

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- ▶ **Consider logistics.** Make sure that performers know how and when to get backstage, that they have as direct a path as possible, and that someone on the team or a volunteer usher knows how to get them from their seats to the stage and back again. Teams will want to watch their competition so they will require seating within the audience. For the award presentation, sending one representative to the stage before the awards are announced makes it easier to pass out the accolades. For the highest honors awarded, ask the rest of the team to make their way to the stage to join their representative after the announcement. Be sure to capture photos of the winning teams.
- ▶ **Fill the house.** Giving away complimentary seats to volunteers or friends of the organization is a great way to fill the house. It is always better to have a full house with many complimentary guests than an empty house.
- ▶ **Recognize that it's not fun to lose.** Everyone loves to compete, but it's hard after investing so much time, energy, and personal ego to walk away without the trophy. While professional artists rapidly become hardened to rejection through experience, amateur artists may be distraught when they do not win. In the CincySings competition, teams may be cut during the semi-finals round or lose in the Wild Card round. It's important to make it clear up-front how many spots are available and what the judging criteria is. Ensuring that judges are qualified experts and representative of the community should help to make everyone feel that things are fair.

At the event itself, backstage volunteers and staff should be forewarned that amateur artists may be upset at the outcome and should be armed with the right things to say in that situation. Consider recognizing some teams as runners-up or for spe-

cial awards. There is a temptation to “give everyone a trophy” but we recommend against that mentality. Keep things positive by encouraging participation during the next round or Wild Card competition and remind them there is always next year.

- ▶ **Provide a staging area for the competitors.** They will likely have interesting costumes and they will want to warm up. If you can provide competitors with a dressing room and a rehearsal space, you should.
- ▶ **Get great photos and video.** Pictures are what sell new companies to participate in the future. Be sure you capture a group photo of every team, photos of the audience enjoying the performance, and pictures of your emcee, judges, and other VIP guests. Video is equally helpful when selling the Sing Off idea to companies. This event concept is completely foreign to many business professionals, so being able to show them specific examples of the performances helps to explain the show. Since this is a singing competition, you should also do your best to capture quality audio from the performances. Most theaters have sound boards which allow for recording directly through the microphone system.
- ▶ **Encourage everyone to use social media.** CincySings provides a huge opportunity for visibility in the community, as well as for reaching new audiences. ArtsWave would be missing out if it didn’t let everyone involved—participants, hosting companies, and audience members—know how they can share photos and videos from the events. In the supplemental materials you’ll find social media guidelines for promoting and talking about CincySings on a number of social media platforms.
- ▶ **Make it easy for companies to purchase bulk tickets.** Company purchases will likely be your largest volume of ticket sales. The purchase comes from a central budget and tickets are used as incentives during their campaign for volunteers, the families and friends of the singers, etc. Ask your ticketing vendor to set up individual tracking codes for each company to make it easy to benchmark company ticket sales.
- ▶ **Work very closely with the ticketing service.** Make sure seats are allocated in a way that makes sense. If you have VIP attendees, such as CEOs from the competing companies, they should be given the best seats in the house. Staff and volunteers will likely need seats, as will the competing singers, coaches, family, friends, and any other audience members. Before tickets go on sale to the general public, be sure to block certain sections of seats for these specific purposes.
- ▶ **Have great volunteers.** There is no way your internal staff can handle the execution of the event by themselves. Don’t be afraid to enlist help from volunteers or partners.
- ▶ **Hire an engaging host.** The emcee carries the performance; it is his or her job to make sure the vibe stays positive and the show keeps moving. Enlist a professional emcee who can gauge the audience and be flexible and adaptive to changing conditions. The best choices for emcees are newscasters, theatrical performers, and seasoned public figures.
- ▶ **Engage credible judges.** The judges have the difficult job of providing feedback to amateur singers. This can be a daunting task considering the wide variety of experi-



2015 CincySings competition.  
Photo by Matt Steffan.

ence an event like this will include. Judges need to be coached to make sure they understand how to give feedback in a way that is both constructive but also positive. In addition to having the knowledge to give this feedback, the judges must also have personalities engaging enough to keep the audience interested and entertained by their comments.

- ▶ **Secure a convenient venue.** The proximity of the venue is very important to consider when choosing your event space. Downtown urban locations are usually best considering their proximity to the companies who will likely be participating in your competition. Be sure you have enough capacity for your audience, but be careful the venue is not so large that it would appear empty if you do not fill it. Keep in mind parameters of certain performance spaces; some theaters require union crew to do all set and lighting.
- ▶ **Shape the performance for the audience.** Get an experienced director to shape the show in a way that keeps things lively for the audience. Start the show with a bang, go into intermission with a fun piece, and be sure to end the show on a high note. One trend we have seen is that teams toward the end of the show are typically scored higher by the judges. Keep this in mind as well.
- ▶ **Be flexible.** As is the case with most theatrical productions, something will most definitely go wrong, but with the proper planning and the right attitude, you and your team will make it through unscathed. Remain flexible and adaptable to changing situations and remember to be kind and patient with your performers.
- ▶ **Measure impact.** Is a successful competition one that raises employee participation in fundraising for your organization? Is it one that increases morale and strengthens bonds with co-workers? Sometimes the metrics for success are not clearly defined. If you look beyond the traditional number metrics, surveys and informal sensing are always helpful to capture impact.



2015 CincySings competition.  
Photo by Matt Steffan.



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## EVALUATION & MOVING FORWARD

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### Evaluation

In its first year, the outcomes for CincySings were relatively simple: increase awareness of the ArtsWave community campaign and raise additional dollars for the campaign. As the staff became more aware of the impact the event was having on employee engagement, they developed more specific outcomes.

Desired CincySings outcomes include:

- ▶ Engage employees in a creative team-building activity
- ▶ Raise awareness for ArtsWave and the arts in the Greater Cincinnati region
- ▶ Improve employee engagement and morale at participating companies
- ▶ Raise additional funds for the ArtsWave community campaign
- ▶ Increase employee participation in the community campaign at competing companies

While ArtsWave identified outcomes related specifically to its role as a United Arts Fund, other arts organizations that do not operate such campaigns could tie goals to general fundraising efforts for the organization.

ArtsWave is committed to thoughtful, objective measurement of outcomes for all of its programming, and works to train arts organizations in best practices for impact measurement. ArtsWave uses multiple tools to evaluate the success of CincySings.

- ▶ **Audience Survey:** A paper survey inserted into the program invites audiences to provide feedback and gathers demographic information. The questions and results of this survey are provided in the supplemental materials.
- ▶ **Participant Survey:** An online survey is sent to participants via email after the event and asks for both quantitative and qualitative feedback. The questions and results of this survey are provided in the supplemental materials.
- ▶ **Feedback from Key Stakeholders:** Board members, participating company leaders, ArtsWave staff, and other stakeholders are asked to provide feedback through email and personal conversations.
- ▶ **Media Coverage:** ArtsWave tracks media mentions, reviews, and coverage for the event using online tools.
- ▶ **Internal Team Debrief:** After the event, the internal ArtsWave team meets to review every aspect of the event from ticket sales and survey responses to run-of-show issues to stakeholder feedback. All of this information is captured and shared with ArtsWave management.

## Moving Forward

The initial goal of CincySings was to increase awareness of the arts and the ArtsWave campaign. In 2015, 88 percent of participants said that both their awareness of ArtsWave and their appreciation of the arts in the Greater Cincinnati region increased because of their involvement in CincySings. However, much to the surprise of the planning team, what began as an awareness building enterprise became a highly successful employee engagement program. As CincySings continues to grow, ArtsWave continues to explore these implied benefits of the program.

For future events, ArtsWave would like to include at least 17 teams in the overall competition; approximately 15 teams in the semi-finals and 10 teams performing in the final. The goal is a 24 percent increase in ticket sales and a comparable increase in Fan Favorite votes. According to Cincinnati Arts Association, events similar to CincySings hosted in Cincinnati take about three years to become popular. One particular event, a similar fundraising competition featuring amateur dancers, saw a 50 percent increase in ticket sales in year three over year two. With this in mind, the goal is to increase attendance by 30 percent.

In addition to the attendance goals, there are tentative goals surrounding employee singer participation in the ArtsWave community campaign. 51 percent of participating singers made a gift to the ArtsWave community campaign with an average gift of \$125. 100 percent participation is somewhat unrealistic, but the hope is to see an increase from these participants given their direct involvement in the arts and the campaign.

As ArtsWave pitches Sing Offs to new companies, it highlights the employee engagement benefits of the program. Studies show that engaged employees are better employees. Companies see lower absenteeism, less turnover, higher customer metrics, greater productivity, and increased profitability. Survey results from CincySings indicate that 94 percent of participants felt strengthened bonds or new bonds with co-workers. Capitalizing on this effect, ArtsWave makes sure to share these statistics as the idea is pitched.

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## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

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Available on the Business Volunteers for the Arts® page at [www.AmericansfortheArts.org/BVA](http://www.AmericansfortheArts.org/BVA)

- PITCH DECK
- SING OFF EVENT HOST INSTRUCTIONS AND CINCYSINGS OFFICIAL RULES
- COACHING GUIDELINES
- JUDGES SCORECARD
- OFFICIAL WILD CARD RULES
- SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES
- AUDIENCE SURVEY AND RESULTS
- PARTICIPANT SURVEY AND RESULTS

### Other Americans for the Arts Resources

For more information on engaging employees through the arts and partnering with the business community:

Visit the [pARTnership Movement](#), an initiative from [Americans for the Arts](#) to reach business leaders with the message that partnering with the arts can build their competitive advantage.

View our pARTnership Movement tool-kits, [Bringing the Arts to the Workplace](#) and [Employee Engagement and the Arts](#).

Watch our [on-demand webinars](#), including one on [Engaging Business Employees Through the Arts](#).

Send us an e-mail with any questions: [privatesector@artsusa.org](mailto:privatesector@artsusa.org).





Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts in America. With more than 50 years of service, we are dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts.



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