

Various Voices Festival 2026 – Call for Bids

Various Voices is the European LGBTQ+ Choral Festival and this is a call for bids for members choirs to host our 16th Various Voices Festival in 2026

Introduction

The Various Voices Festival is the main decision that Legato takes. Currently the Board arranges the member choir's to vote on the final decision. There is little, if any rigorous testing of the bids and financial proposals. The last 3 Festivals MunichMunich, Dublin and London, have been financially and artistically successful and this is more through the skill of the organisers, rather than careful monitoring, supervision and support by the Board. The board has reviewed this process and are making changes to the process and decision making.

The Board Responsibilities are to

- a duty to its members and stakeholders to ensure the Festival is a success - protect its investment of the loan and the license fee - protect its asset the VV Festival and the reputation of the festival for future use - protect the reputation of Legato as a responsible supervising authority - ensure a positive legacy for Legato and the VV Festival - make sure the Festival meets all the necessary criteria for all members and stakeholders - ensure that the Festival it is a success both financially and artistically - help and support the host group to make sure they succeed with this large undertaking - have a duty of care to the host to work so they do not go bankrupt the group or burn out the team members and host group by supporting them

The member choirs will continue to be involved in the decision making by reviewing the final bids and score each of the final shortlisted bids against a predefined list of criteria. The board will give considerable weight to the choirs members scores and views when they select who will host the next festival. At the festival closing event there will be a handover ceremony to the successful bidding team.

The timetable allows for an initial expression of interest stage. The shortlist of bidders will send in their bids document for review and feedback, so they can edit their final bids. Each final bid document with a video will be uploaded onto our website and all member choirs will be invited to review the bids and to give each bid an easy to understand online score. The timing allows the winning bid six months in advance of the next festival to meetup, look and learn.

Support and advice will be available at each stage to all bidders, to ensure the quality of the bids and that each bidder presents their best case to host the festival.

The board has reviewed the previous bid process and decided to expand and develop the process, to provide more support to the bidding groups.

The key changes are

1. **An initial expression of interest** , a general outline of each hosts proposal will be required and the Board will draw up a short list of at least three bidders.(see B. Content and structure of the

application for details of content)

2. **Working with the board** is an essential element of success, we want them to succeed.
3. Each **shortlisted bid** will include further additional information. In the board assessment process greater importance will be given to the financial viability, realistic budget, a good artistic vision, the delivery plan, a strong team, great locations, exciting venues and lots of great ideas. The bid document will include an outline of the festival offer to participants with range of possible participation costs, which is for information only.
4. **The board will review and assess each bid** and give a written report for each bidder.
5. The bidders will then get an opportunity to **edit their bid documents** based on that report.
6. **The final bid documents and a video presentation** to best compliment the printed document will be published along with the Board assessment report on the Legato website.
7. Each choir will be able to **download and view the bids** online.
8. Each member's choir will have the opportunity to complete a **simple score sheet** .
9. The bidders and board should consider webinars and other ways for our **member choirs to interact** with the bidders and the board.
10. The board will give considerable weight to the choirs members' scores and views when they select **who will host the next festival**.
11. The **timetable for this bidding process** will be brought forward to be completed at least six months before the Festival commences, so the successful bidding group will have time to spend with the current host group to view, review and learn.
12. At the VV Festival closing ceremony, there will be a **handover to the new VV host group** .

Our Various Voices Festivals

Our 12th Festival, held in London 2009, attracted 60 choirs and 2,000 singers from 14 countries in what was a spectacular and extra-ordinary four-day event. The 13th Various Voices festival, held in Dublin in June 2014, hosted by Gloria, Dublin's Lesbian and Gay choir, registered almost 80 choruses from Europe and around the world. The 14th festival held in Munich in May 2018, hosted by the four local choirs Philhomoniker, Melodiva, Regenbogenchor and Lilamunde was a resounding success with major shows , concerts and performances across the city and online. The upcoming 15th Festival was awarded to Bologna 2020, this and the previous events are a fantastic testament to the continuing popularity of LGBTQ+ choral festivals.

The Various Voices Festival is owned by Legato and is licensed to organisations with a limited liability status to host a Various Voices Festival under the authority and with supervision from Legato. The hosts mission should include the objective to support equal human rights for all, by improving the quality of the venues and festival experience for all our stakeholders.

About Legato

Legato was founded in 1997 to facilitate communication and dialogue between lesbain and gay choirs in Europe and to promote co-operation and support between choirs. One of Legato's main responsibilities is to ensure that a choral festival takes place every four years. We do this by encouraging choirs from different cities to bid to bring the festival to their city, selecting the best bid and supporting the local choir in any way possible to host a successful festival. Over recent years the members have asked the board to expand the activities of Legato and find ways to better serve its

membership. As part of the board's response to this instruction, the Board has created a team of previous Various Voices Festival directors who are assisting the Board to better meet its responsibilities to all.

Legato is committed to support the creation and development of choirs and has created the Legato and Various Voices policy on support for members choirs. To assist Legato with decision making on the support and application of resources to members and as a basis for Various Voices Festival policies. This policy is a starting point for festival organisers and bidders to decide how to support member choirs to attend the Festival. We want the process to be transparent, open and fair to all members.(see Appendix)

Invitation for bids The Legato Board invites all European member choirs and ensembles to apply to be the host of the 15th Various Voices Festival in 2026. Group collaborations are encouraged both with local choirs, cities and other LGBTQ+ groups.

A. General framework for the festival

1. Participants: The festival is open to members of Legato (European Choral Association) and Gala Choruses (North American based Choral Association). Membership in one of the two associations is a prerequisite for participation. Although Various Voices is mainly an European LGBTQ+ choir festival, it is open for every choir throughout the world with temporary membership (details to be agreed)..

Qualifying Member choirs must have continuous fully paid membership of the respective association, since the date of the last festival or since the date that the choir first joined the respective association. Back subs may be required to be paid by members who are not up to date with their subs.

2. Vision: The Festival showcases the colourful diversity of LGBTQ+ choral singing and is an impressive artistic and cultural event. The programme facilitates and encourages the exchange of information and contacts between the participating choirs, the host city and the surrounding area. The host venues should ideally be involved in some way in the festival, to publicise the existence and excellence of our LGBTQ+ choral tradition amongst the general public and to engage as audience and participants in free events..

3. Festival activities: The festival should provide sufficient physical space and time for each participating choir to have an equal amount of time to perform their own musical programme in a concert. In recent years choirs have been allocated a 30 minute slot each, though this can vary from festival to festival.

The festival should include other larger concerts, opening, closing ceremonies and “Gala” concerts, outreach performances, choral activities around the whole area, as many events as possible should be open to the public.

The festival could include workshops, meetings, round tables, exhibitions, conferences, seminars, social events, daily get-togethers, after show events and parties to give the delegates a variety of opportunities to learn, share, see, meet and celebrate our LGBTQ+

culture and life with one another and others.

The Board must approve any major planned deviation from this traditional template.

4. Funding for Choirs: The attendance of choirs without sufficient financial resources, especially from parts of Europe as agreed with the Board, should be supported. More information is outlined in the Appendix.

5. Venues: Recent experience is that over 100 choirs attend, bringing 3-4,000 singers and 2-3,000 family, friends, partners, spouses and allies, engaging with possibly 10,000 members of the public. The festival programme, as well as the venues for concerts, other activities and events should be able to accommodate a festival of this size. Participants are expected to be able to attend and enjoy as much of the Festival activities as possible, so the location of venues is an important factor. Engaging with stakeholders and the local community needs to be factored into venue capacity.

6. Host Financial Assistance:

An interest free loan of 30,000 euros is available to the successful bidder. Applications should include an outline of the cash flow forecast, showing when the loan money is required. The loan may be paid in smaller amounts at the discretion of Legato.

This amount must be paid back after receipt of the first revenues or at least before the festival begins as detailed in the festival agreement.

These funds are ring-fenced by the Board of Legato to support organisers of future festivals.

7. License Fee - a festival license fee is payable as detailed in the festival agreement. The fee is payable in two parts. Part one, 20,000 euros is payable before the festival commences and the Part two, 25% of any festival surplus, is payable after the festival.

8. Help, support and advice: The Board and those teams who have organised previous festivals can provide ongoing help and advice, to support the bidding teams on request and will offer further help and advice to the winning host team.

9. Reporting to the Board: The reporting requirements are laid out in the agreement, with milestones set out, along with the supervision and reporting requirements to the Board and membership. We would encourage all bidders and hosts to make maximum use of this valuable resource of experts.

10. Board Visit: The board may need to arrange a site visit and you should make a small provision for this in your budget.

11. Insurance: you will need public and employee liability cover and you should consider getting event insurance as detailed in the Festival Agreement..

12. Professional Fees: as far as possible bidders should advise in the bid details and professional fees for agents, advisors, other professionals and suppliers that you may be considering. Include provision for any costs to setup your limited liability company, office

space and other support.

13. Financial and Social Impact Impact: All bids should include an assessment of the financial benefit impact to their host city/s. Plus an indication of the social impact of the Festival on the host city/s social structure/society. Advice in the Appendix.

14. Environmental impact and sustainability : to assess environmental objectives, sustainability objectives and community impact of your festival plan. We all want to ensure we take care of the planet and act in a responsible and sustainable manner. Local organisations and governments can provide help and advice about how best to achieve this and help you to outline how you can meet these requirements in your bid document.

15. Accessibility: to provide a report to review the accessibility to venue's and their openness to ensure everyone can fully engage with the festival. To assess and evaluate what support is needed (a gap analysis) for maximum engagement for participants, audiences and all stakeholders, outlining how you might tackle this challenge, including any costs to achieve this in your budget...

16. Festival Legacy: to provide an outline of how the festival will be recorded for posterity and to help and support others to host a festival. - media, images, video, document archive, workbooks or tool kits developed from the festival activity.

17. Future Host Learning: the team must agree to be willing to help the next hosts with their acquired expert knowledge.

18. Festival Evaluation: the successful bidding team agrees to carry out and publish an evaluation report on their Festival and allocate money in their budget for this purpose. To provide the Legato board within 6 month after the festival with a substantial detailed financial and statistical report in order to support the following hosts with sufficient information, This will be published on the Legato website. See appendix for an example.

19. Provision of the costs for all reports should be included in your budget.

. B. Content and structure of the application

Stage 1 - Expression of Interest

The Application must be submitted using the following structure so that information can be compared and scored across a number of different bidders. You should read the full bidding document and access any appendix documents online, so you are fully informed about the expectations and commitments to host a Various Voices Festival before proceeding. This will also ensure you cover everything required in your bid.

Potential applicants can ask for help and advice from the Board and others

1. The bid document must be submitted as a PDF file, format A4. maximum length 2 double sided pages (4 pages in total) with the font size no smaller than 11 pt:
2. The bid document should be in written English text format, the use of pictures and

illustrations etc should be kept to a minimum to maximise the expression of Interest content. This document can be translated and supplied in other languages as long as the main document is in English.

3. The following headings must be used on the bid document - not necessarily in this order

- a. About our area - An introduction to the location, area, city or cities, geographical location, size, population, transport links etc
- b. About us - Profile of the bidding team with the organisation's experience with any team member special skills.
- c. Vision - A vision for the festival outlining the 10 key elements that will be the standout elements of your festival offer.
- d. Support - Outline what support you expect or have already initiated with national, regional or local governments, funders, companies, organisations and any others you may plan to partner with to fund and deliver your festival vision
- e. Venues - An overview of the potential venues you plan to use, with an idea of capacity and accessibility, the location of each venue in relation to your festival map if you plan a wider range of venues/spaces..
- f. Staying - how do you propose to deal with accommodating festival participants and visitors to your area, outlining capacities and ease of locations to venues and transport and accessibility friendly accommodation.
- g. Diversity - overview of your LGBTQ+ community and prevailing social and legal attitudes, the pros and cons of the diversity of your area and how the festival might impact and how supportive do you expect your community / society to be.
- h. Why you - What is special about you, your area or your bid that will mark you out from the other bidders - *what makes you special*.
- i. Cover Letter and Statement - Please send a cover letter and include this statement: We have fully read the bidding document and are willing and able to host the Festival. We fully understand the requirements and we are willing in principle to accept the terms of the Various Voices Festival Agreement, to work with the Board of Legato and understand the financial and other obligations to host the Various Voices Festival.
- j. Applications must be submitted by email as per the timeline,

Stage 2 - The shortlisted bidders

The Application must be submitted using the following structure so that information can be compared across a number of different shortlisted bidders:

1. The bid document must be submitted as a PDF file, format A4 and supported by a video presentation.
2. The bid document should be in written English text format, with pictures or illustrations etc. the bid documents can be translated and supplied in other languages as long as the main document is in English.
3. The following headings must be used on the bid document - not necessarily in this order, each chapter to be a maximum of two pages, font size no smaller than 11 pt:
 - a. Cover with Festival-Title/Tagline/Slogan, date, location, contents.
 - b. Information about the bidding team / organiser / choirs / organisations, include details of agents or professionals or other known suppliers you plan to use and team member special skills.
 - c. Vision for the festival - outline your big picture what you want to achieve, deliver and leave behind.
 - d. Program highlights, concerts and other activity ideas of what the festival will look like the concert halls, other venues, spaces and outreach concert locations
 - e. Accommodation overview to include possible hotels and/or private accommodation host options and capacity. Or other proposals on accommodation.
 - f. Budget - with a draft budget in spreadsheet format, to include the number of choirs and singers planned for the number of other participants and stakeholders planned for an indication of the range of participation costs an outline of what may be included in these costs any other income streams major headline anticipated expenditure, venues, marketing to include all elements listed in this bidding document. Each concert venue/space should list planned expenditure for each Company with limited liability setup and startup costs Insurance, office costs, accountancy fees. Bank and credit card fees Professional advisors, agents or other providers fees Contingency of at least 10% should be included An example of a budget is included in the Appendix.
 - g. A video presentation to compliment the printed document.
 - h. Marketing plan with timeline and actions with budget for costs
 - i. Partners, sponsors, supporters, to include letters and documents with any promises or expectation of grants, financial support, sponsorship or "in-kind" offers. Outline of possible opportunities to apply for grants or funding, outlining criteria and support levels. Applicants are advised to be very conservative about including any of these figures in your budget until the money or contracts are signed and guaranteed..

j. Anticipated financial impact report to the city, region and country, to understand the potential income you bring to your country, city, area that will assist you in seeking support, funding or grants. (see Appendix).

k. Environmental impact assessment, environmental objectives, sustainability objectives and community/social impact.

l. Accessibility report to support the maximum engagement for participants and audiences.

m. Support funding outline and explanation for choirs without sufficient financial resources.

n. Legacy, sharing, learning and festival evaluation.

4. Please note that all information provided is a draft outline only of plans and budgets.

Do not finalise venue bookings or events or enter into **non-cancellable** agreements or sponsorship commitments until a Festival Agreement is signed with Legato. See appendix for Festival Agreement. Legato is not responsible for any expenditure that is not agreed in advance with Legato in writing by the Board.

5. Data should be reasonable, realistic, affordable and attainable.

6. Beyond the video presentation and bid document any further marketing campaigns or promoting events to promote your bid must be approved by the Board in writing in advance of any other approaches to member choirs or individuals.

C. Timeline of the application- deadline is midnight CET on each date.

1 March 2020 Call for bids.

1 July 2020 Expressions of interest application due.

1 September 2020 The shortlist of applicants will be announced.

1 May 2021 Short listed Applicants to submit bid documents for initial assessment.

1 June 2021 An assessment of each bid will be sent to each application to edit bids.

1 July 2021 The final edited bid and video due.

1 August 2021 Each of the Legato member's choir is advised of your bid document and video and can complete a simple score sheet to be taken into consideration by the Board.

1 September 2021 Members choir input closed and any additional consultation.

The board may require additional information or a site visit

1 December 2021 The bidding teams will be advised about the winning host team.

19 June 2023 - Formal announcement and handover ceremony in Bologna Closing Ceremony

If you have any questions or require any clarification or support please get in touch with the Board: variousvoices@legato-choirs.com

Submit applications to: variousvoices@legato-choirs.com

We look forward to hearing from you

Legato Board: February 2020

Appendix available online at Legato website <https://www.legato-choirs.com/>

including the draft Festival agreement,

- Choir Support Document
- example of a budget
- other policies and advice sheets