

FROM ATTIC TO CLASSROOM

A GUIDE TO ORGANIZING A MUSICAL
INSTRUMENT DRIVE FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

CREATED BY: **WQXR** ||

BACKGROUND

This guide is drawn from lessons learned during two musical instrument drives sponsored by New York's classical music radio station, WQXR. Students in under-resourced music programs across the New York City area benefited from the roughly 6,000 musical instruments donated through the drive. These unplayed instruments—dug out of basements and attics by motivated and generous citizens—found new lives in the hands of schoolchildren around the region and are now supporting music education for more than 15,000 public school students annually, plus additional students in community music programs. Partnering with leading classical music artists and organizations, the New York City and Newark school districts, philanthropic organizations, media outlets, and the instrument retailer Sam Ash Music Stores, WQXR not only organized and led the complex process from donations to distributions but also learned a lot along the way.

The ultimate success and impact of the instrument drive program relied on staff and volunteers, detailed planning and an array of logistics, generous grant funding, and thoughtful attention to marketing and PR. The instrument drive at WQXR also benefited from the wisdom and experience of Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation, which has a long history of collecting and donating musical instruments. Using knowledge gained by both the achievements and stumbling blocks WQXR experienced, this guide was created to help you approach a similar drive in your own community.

PLANNING AN INSTRUMENT DRIVE: 7 QUESTIONS TO ASK AND ANSWER

Before launching an instrument drive in your community, your organization will need to determine when and whether the time is right, and ensure that the program is adequately resourced. As you will read, a successful instrument drive requires time and cash for staffing, space, marketing, instrument repair, and instrument transportation, among other expenses. An important component of planning is securing project-based funding to support these activities.

A musical instrument drive can be a big undertaking. Start by considering the following seven questions as you explore possibilities, plan the drive, and get ready for implementation.

QUESTION 1:

WHO CAN WE RECRUIT AS PARTNERS AND ALLIES?

A successful musical instrument drive requires multiple partners working in different capacities. Consider all the allies you can tap into to make the drive a success. You will need support from the local music community and other community-based organizations across your region, as well as enthusiastic promotional partners.

The partners in your community that can help make the drive a success may include:

SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

If you plan on distributing donated instruments to schools, be sure the school district, individual schools and principals, as well as music teachers, are on board. You will need to lean on their expertise as you consider distribution of instruments.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Think mayor, city council members, and school district leadership. Citywide buy-in will help legitimize your drive as well as help support the necessary publicity to gather a maximum of instruments. Explore government or area funding opportunities as well.

MUSICIANS & MUSIC-RELATED STORES

Local musicians can be spokespeople for the drive or help with publicity. Professionals in the music business may also be helpful with instrument assessment and repair. These stakeholders may also be willing to contribute instruments or other financial support.

MEDIA PARTNERS

An instrument drive with plenty of publicity is more likely to engage potential instrument donors. You'll need to reach out to local media to help promote the drive. Consider what kinds of stories you might be able to share, and keep

local radio, newspapers, and television media outlets in the loop throughout the drive.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

How will you identify which instruments are most needed and for what age groups?

Who among your elected officials might make a great spokesperson?

How can your city officials help spread the word?

Who might help you kick off the drive? Which local musicians might be willing to promote the drive?

Who might help with promotion and marketing?

What music organizations could be involved in spreading the word to instrument owners?

Can any local music organizations serve as drop-off sites?

Which local media outlets might become promotional partners?

How can you create and share photos, videos, and stories from the instrument drive?

QUESTION 2:

HOW WILL WE PREPARE FOR AND HANDLE THE PHYSICAL LOGISTICS OF A DRIVE?

Whether your organization is planning on collecting a dozen instruments for one music program or thousands of instruments for multiple school districts, figuring out the physical logistics of a drive requires attention to detail and good project management.

DETERMINE WHICH INSTRUMENTS YOU'LL COLLECT

Establish guidelines for types of instruments accepted. It's unlikely that you'll want to collect every instrument imaginable. For example, pianos may be particularly difficult to repair, move, and house. Xylophones are bulky and schools only need one or two. If your drive is for beginning students, they may have less need for trombones, string basses, and other large instruments. What about electronic equipment like amplifiers and microphones? Clear guidelines and communication with donors prevent having to turn people away at the donation site with instruments you cannot use.

DONATION COLLECTION

For collecting donations, you will need drop-off venues that accommodate crowds of donors, volunteers and paid staff, and the instruments themselves (imagine a room full of guitars and trumpet cases). The space itself should be weatherproof and secure to protect the instruments from the elements and from theft. Donation sites should be staffed so that donors can be provided with a receipt for their contribution.

INSTRUMENT STORAGE

Once the community has donated unused or underplayed violins, trumpets, or piccolos, the instruments will need to be stored

while they are assessed, repaired, and awaiting distribution. Consider how many instruments you expect to collect and locate appropriate storage. This might be an in-kind donation (such as a church basement, community room, or a theater's back room) or rented facility (like a warehouse). Keep in mind that the instruments may be in storage for multiple months depending on your timeline and the number of instruments you collect.

TRANSPORTATION & DISTRIBUTION

If your drop-off venue and instrument storage are not located at the same facility, you'll need to consider the transport of the instruments including vehicle type and size and who is qualified to drive it, if needed. Once the instruments are ready for distribution to schools and students, they will need to be transported once again. Be sure to budget for this expense both in terms of time and cost.



QUESTION 3:

HOW WILL WE BUILD EXCITEMENT FOR THE INSTRUMENT DRIVE?

A musical instrument drive will be most successful when the community is excited and invested. Promote the donation of instruments by holding an event to launch the drive and enlisting media and community partners to share stories about the instruments' past and future uses.

LAUNCH EVENT

With the help of local luminaries (such as the mayor, school board, or musicians), launch the instrument drive with a community event. Hold a concert, forum, question and answer session, or other event that fits with your organization's mission and your community's culture. Plan for this event by considering venue, budget, and timeline.

PUBLICIZE THE DRIVE

A launch event is a perfect opportunity to invite local media to cover the attendance of celebrities and local leadership, as well as highlight the stories of students or schools that will benefit from the donated instruments. One way to capture stories during the drive is to ask instrument donors to share the story of their instrument when they donate it. Then you can use these stories for media like newsletters, press releases, and local news shows.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Who can help you plan the launch event and who might welcome the chance to collaborate with you?

What spokespeople might participate in a live event and in the drive?

How could music students and teachers be involved?

How will you prepare for storytelling around the launch event and drive?

What photographers, videographers, or journalists might help promote the drive?



QUESTION 4:

HOW WILL WE COLLECT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS?

You will need to establish an overall timeframe and specific dates for donation collections, and build a plan for staff and/or volunteer time so that instruments can be left with a person and donors can be thanked.

DETERMINE THE TIMEFRAME OF THE COLLECTION PERIOD

Will the drive last only a few days? Two weeks? Longer? Can donations be accepted only during regular business hours? On the weekends?

SELECT A LOCATION OR MULTIPLE LOCATIONS, AS NEEDED

Will there be a central site? Multiple drop-off sites? Will you use commercial spaces? Private companies? Will you accept donations that need to be picked up?

PLAN FOR STAFFING OF THE DROP-OFF CENTER(S)

Will you use paid staff? Volunteers? What kind of training will these individuals need? How will they be scheduled?

COLLECT DONOR AND INSTRUMENT INFORMATION

Be sure to gather information about each instrument and donor. You'll not only be collecting instruments, you'll be collecting stories. Keep track of information such as:

- **Make, model, and serial number of instrument**
- **Information about the instrument's provenance, age, and history**
- **Donor's contact information**
- **Donor's valuation of the instrument to provide a receipt for tax purposes**



WQXR'S INSTRUMENT DONATION TRACKING SYSTEM

When WQXR held an instrument drive in New York City, they worked with a tech company to develop a web-based database. This system tracked donations including instrument condition, donor, and location, as well as follow-up data such as repair costs, destination, and recipient information.

The database (affectionately named "Lenny" after Leonard Bernstein) allowed donors to enter their information, eliminated spelling and handwriting errors, and also streamlined the intake process. While not every organization is going to develop a proprietary database, a similar result could be achieved by using Excel or similar spreadsheet program to create a database of donated instruments.

QUESTION 5:

HOW WILL WE MANAGE THE ASSESSMENT AND REPAIRS OF DONATED INSTRUMENTS?

In order to provide students and schools with functioning, useful instruments, it will be necessary to assess the condition of the incoming instruments. Does that guitar need new strings? Is there a bow for the violin? Does the trumpet have a case? Careful assessment of the instruments is a time-consuming yet vital step in the instrument drive.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

You will need to determine specific minimum criteria for each instrument. There will be some overlap, but the same standards won't apply across wind, string, and percussion instruments. Enlist the help of professionals and experts to determine the criteria. See WQXR's assessment criteria on page 13, as a sample to study.

ASSESSORS

Budget and plan for paid or volunteer professionals to assess each individual instrument. Besides considering the condition of each instrument, assessors will need to note any missing parts such as bows, mouthpieces, or cases.

REPAIRS

Make a plan for the repair of instruments, including factoring in additional costs for replacement parts. School district music departments may already have trusted professionals that can do repairs and may have those repairs covered in their budgets. However, many school districts cannot afford repairs so your drive may need to budget for this expense. Also consider what you'll do with any instruments that cannot be repaired.

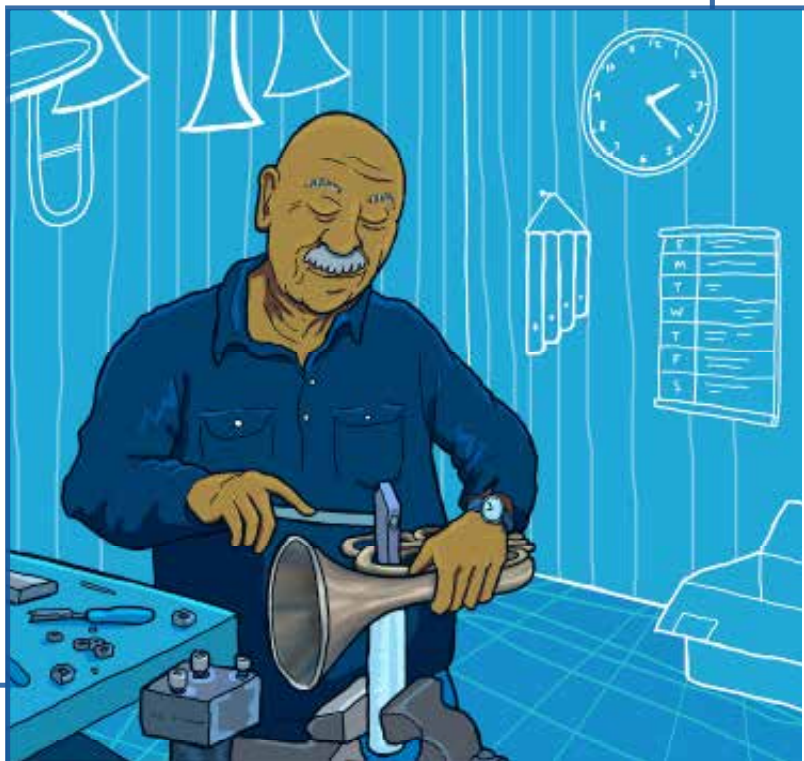
SPACE FOR ASSESSMENT

In addition to needing storage space for the instruments during this phase of the drive,

consider the space requirements for carrying out the assessment and repair process. Will instruments be transported to a different location for repairs and, if not, does the storage facility have adequate conditions for working on the instruments?

CAN'T REUSE? RECYCLE

WQXR received some instruments that, after assessment, were deemed beyond repair. For these donations, WQXR worked with Materials for the Arts, a New York City-based center that recycles unneeded items to be repurposed as art supplies. Damaged instruments may not be usable for playing music, but they might find new lives as art projects. There may be a similar organization or other resource in your community.



QUESTION 6:

HOW WILL WE DETERMINE WHO RECEIVES DONATED INSTRUMENTS?

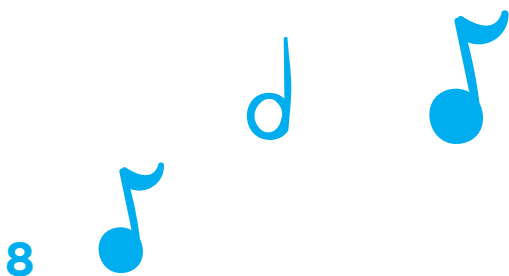
Whether you collect 60 instruments or 6,000, you will need a plan for distributing them to schools, music programs, or other organizations. To enhance the credibility of the drive, it is important to enlist an objective third party to help determine who will benefit from the donations. Determine the criteria for school districts, schools, or other organizations that wish to receive donated instruments.

CRITERIA FOR RECIPIENTS MAY INCLUDE:

- Does the school have a licensed music educator and how long has the school's music program been in place?
- Does the budget reflect an expanded music program? If the school receives additional instruments, is the school prepared to teach more students?
- Is the music program thoroughly supported by the school's and district's leadership?
- Is the program able to adequately implement, store, and care for instruments?



Once recipients have been selected, the musical instruments will need to be moved from storage to students. Whether you use the same transportation logistics as before or not, be sure you have a plan in place for getting instruments to their final destinations.



QUESTION 7:

WHAT STORIES WILL WE TELL ABOUT THE DRIVE?

Music is a powerful form of expression and communication, and the stories behind both the instrument donors and recipients will likely be powerful as well. From collecting instruments to getting them into the hands of students, keep track of the stories about the original owners, the music students, the organizations involved, music teachers, and the progress toward your collection goals.

COLLECTING THE STORIES

As musical instruments are donated, keep track of the instruments' histories alongside instrument make, model, and condition. Was that violin played at Carnegie Hall? Did this guitar come from Mexico? Did someone's grandmother learn to play that flute during the Depression? Create an inventory database to manage details about each instrument and the story behind each one.

SHARING THE STORIES

As you hear and collect these stories, share them on social media, on local and national media outlets, and within your organization's website, newsletters, reports, and events. Use compelling stories for future funding requests, to solicit more donations, or to thank donors. Share the stories of the instruments and donors with the recipients—and vice versa.

FOLLOW-UP

While stories that tug at the heartstrings are important, consider the success indicators for your drive. Is your organization hoping to collect a certain number of instruments? Is the drive addressing a local issue or inequity? Does your organization aim to increase awareness or outreach through the drive? Outline the indicators you want to track and make plans to measure them.



SUMMARY

Now that you've thought about the questions you need to ask as you consider creating an instrument drive, go back to the beginning of this guide. These questions—and their answers—will help you make a plan for your drive.

Consider:

- Building a fundraising plan that might include grant applications, individual donor appeals, or other funding
- Budgeting for staff, personnel, and logistics including the launch event, collection center, storage, and assessment and repairs, as well as a budget for marketing
- A timeline of the drive that maps the requirements for promotion, the launch event, the drive itself, repairs, distribution, and celebration

Seven questions may not sound like a lot, but having complete and well-thought-out answers to these questions will help ensure a successful musical instrument drive. Music students and teachers in your community will be thankful that you've helped advance music education. And dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of musical instruments will find new homes and new places in the hearts and minds of children and families.



“MUSIC TOUCHES MY HEART AND THESE TEACHERS LIKE MUSIC A LOT. THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION!”

– 4th grade student at Bronx Global Learning Institute for Girls

“I WAS SO EXCITED TO FIND BRAND NEW (TO US!) INSTRUMENTS IN EXCELLENT WORKING ORDER AND NICE, STURDY CASES. I IMMEDIATELY STARTED REPLACING THE OLD, LEAKY AND DENTED INSTRUMENTS MY STUDENTS WERE STRUGGLING ON.”

– P.S. 200 The Benson School

“IT WAS OUR PLEASURE GIVING YOU MY MOTHER’S VIOLIN. TODAY WE HEARD A VIOLIN PIECE ON WQXR AND REMEMBERED WHEN SHE HAD PLAYED THAT PIECE.”

– Bob and Edna, instrument donors

“I REALLY ENJOY PLAYING MUSIC AND WITHOUT YOU I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO!”

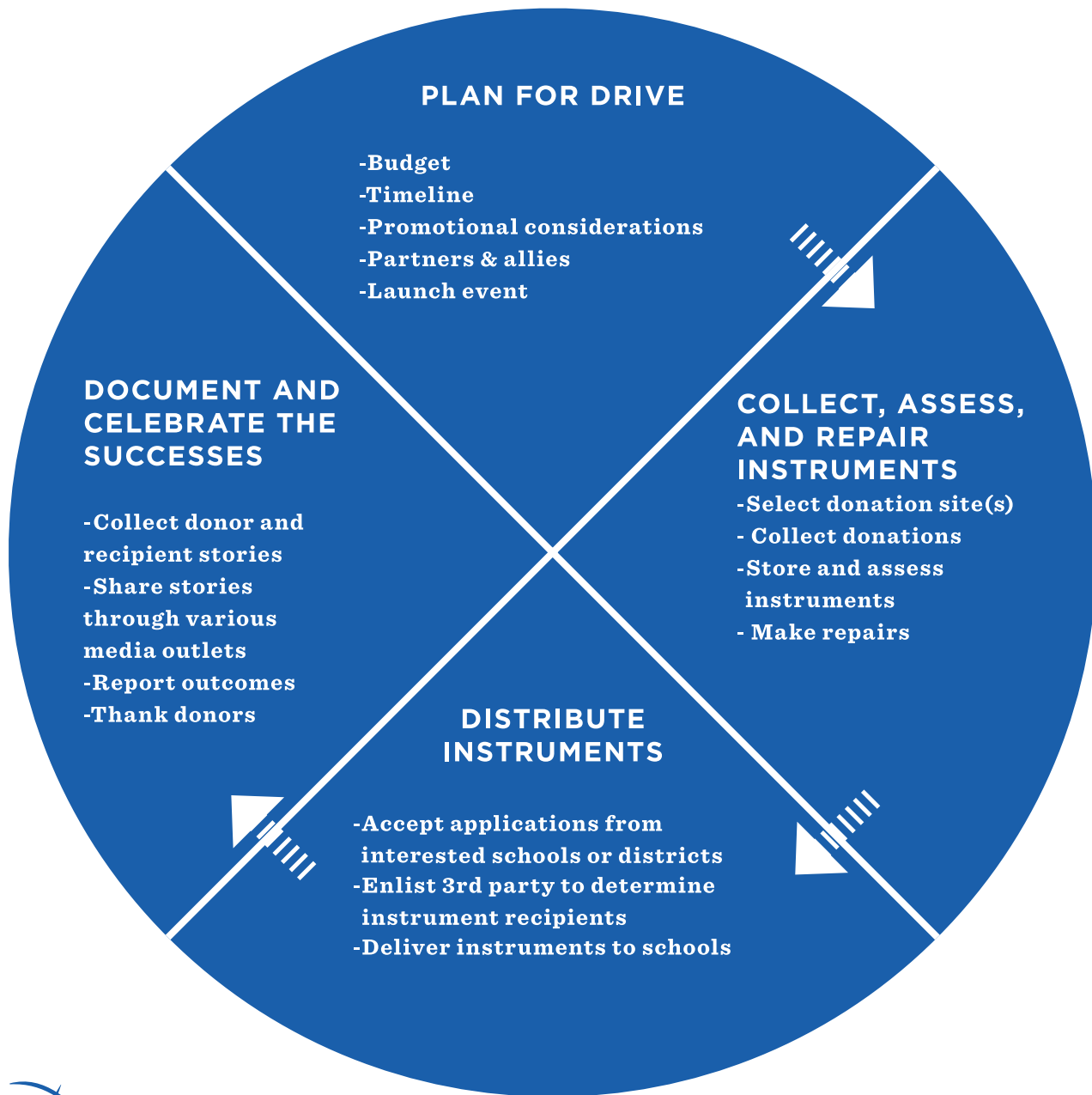
– 9th grade student at Medgar Evers College Preparatory School

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HITTING ALL THE NOTES IN YOUR INSTRUMENT DRIVE



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Newark Public Schools
New York City Department of Education
Sam Ash Music Stores

Additional Partners:

92nd Street Y
Brooklyn Flea
The Bronx Museum of the Arts
Brooklyn Music School
Carnegie Hall
InterContinental New York Barclay
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Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts
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SoundCloud
Uber

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WQXR'S INSTRUMENT ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

STRINGS: VIOLIN, VIOLA, CELLO & UPRIGHT BASS

- Strings
- Bow with 50% or more hair intact
- All tuning pegs
- Properly fit bridge
- End pin (cellos & basses)
- No large cracks in the body of the instrument
- No open seams in the body of the instrument
- Intact sound post
- Case

BRASS: TRUMPET, TROMBONE, FRENCH HORN, BARITONE HORN, EUPHONIUM

- All keys in working order, no frozen or stuck keys
- No major dents in the body of the instrument
- Instrument-specific mouthpiece
- Slide in working order (trombone)
- Case

WOODWINDS: PICCOLO, FLUTE, CLARINET, OBOE, SAXOPHONE (SOPRANO, ALTO, TENOR, BARITONE)

- All keys must be intact and in working order
- New pads
- All cork must be intact
- Mouthpiece (clarinet, saxophone, oboe)
- Reed (single or double depending on instrument)
- Intact and well-fit neck joint (saxophone)
- Properly fit headjoint (flute)
- Case

GUITAR: ACOUSTIC GUITAR, ACOUSTIC BASS GUITAR, NYLON STRING GUITAR

- Strings
- All tuners
- Properly fit bridge
- Functioning and well-fit bridge and nut
- Bridge pins (steel string acoustic guitars & basses)

ELECTRONIC INSTRUMENTS: KEYBOARD, GUITAR, BASS

- All electronic components in working order
- No dead keys (keyboard)
- Working bridge pick-ups (guitar, bass)

PERCUSSION (HAND PERCUSSION, DRUM SET)

- Intact drum head
- All necessary hardware

