

PLAN THE TRIP, SAVE THE SEASON

WHY SMART TRAVEL PLANNING IS THE
SECRET WEAPON OF SUCCESSFUL SHOW CHOIR
PROGRAMS

by Ed Bauer





There are few moments in a show choir season more exciting than announcing the competition schedule.

The room erupts.

Students immediately begin imagining trophies, hotel stays, bus rides, and late-night pizza runs.

Parents start calculating how many weekends they will spend in gymnasiums.

Booster presidents quietly begin wondering if it is too late to take up a less stressful hobby.



And directors stare at a spreadsheet that looks suspiciously like the federal budget.

Travel has become one of the largest expenses facing show choir programs today. Between transportation, lodging, meals, registration fees, and the occasional emergency trip to a pharmacy because someone forgot deodorant, costs can escalate quickly.

Yet the programs that travel successfully year after year are not necessarily the wealthiest.

They are simply the best planners.

The secret to successful travel isn't finding money at the last minute.

It's building a plan long before the first bus leaves the parking lot.

The Earlier You Plan, The Cheaper It Gets

Every experienced director learns the same lesson eventually:

Travel rewards the early bird.

Unfortunately, many programs begin serious planning approximately three days after they should have started.

The moment a competition schedule begins taking shape, travel planning should begin as well.

Consider the major expenses involved in even a regional competition:

- Entry fees
- Charter buses
- Driver lodging
- Fuel surcharges
- Hotel rooms
- Meals
- Emergency expenses
- Student scholarships

Now multiply those expenses across an entire season.

Suddenly, "We'll figure it out later" becomes a terrifying strategy.

One of the smartest moves a booster organization can make is creating a preliminary travel budget before the season even starts.

Estimate high rather than low.

Nobody has ever complained that a trip came in under budget.

Understanding the True Cost of Local Competitions

Many directors underestimate local competition expenses because the event appears close to home.

A competition only 90 minutes away can still generate significant costs.

Ask yourself:

Will students need charter buses?

Will meals be provided?

Will equipment require a separate truck?

Will the group need additional rehearsal time?

Will parent volunteers be needed?

A "cheap" competition often becomes much more expensive when hidden expenses appear.

A useful budgeting exercise is calculating the per-student cost for every event.

This creates a realistic picture of what participation truly costs and helps boosters prioritize spending.

Sometimes the competition with

the lowest entry fee ends up being the most expensive trip.

Regional Competitions: The Middle Ground

Regional travel introduces another layer of complexity.

Now you're likely adding hotels.

For many programs, this is where costs begin accelerating faster than choreography changes.

A few hotel-planning hacks can save thousands:

The moment a competition schedule begins taking shape, travel planning should begin as well.

Book Earlier Than Feels Necessary

Hotels reward groups that commit early.

Waiting often means fewer room choices and higher rates.

Negotiate Group Blocks

Many hotels offer complimentary rooms or discounts after a certain number of rooms are booked.

Ask.

The worst response you'll receive is "no."



Compare More Than Price

The cheapest hotel is not always the cheapest option.

Consider:

- Distance from venue
- Parking costs
- Breakfast availability
- Security
- Bus access

A hotel twenty dollars cheaper per room can become much more expensive if buses spend hours shuttling students across town.

The National Competition Dream

At some point, every show choir program starts discussing a national-level trip.

The conversation usually sounds something like this:

Student: "We should compete nationally."

Director: "That sounds exciting."

Booster Treasurer: "I need to sit down."

National competitions create unforgettable experiences, but they require a completely different level of preparation.

These trips may include:

- Airfare
- Multi-night lodging
- Equipment transportation
- Ground transportation

- Additional meals
- Attraction tickets
- Insurance considerations
- Contingency funds

The biggest mistake programs make is treating a national trip like a larger version of a regional trip.

It isn't.

It's an entirely different project.

Many successful programs begin fundraising for national travel eighteen to twenty-four months in advance.

That timeline isn't excessive.

It's responsible.

The "Trip Fund" Strategy

One of the smartest financial moves a booster organization can make is establishing a dedicated travel reserve fund.

Think of it as a travel savings account.

Instead of scrambling every season, the organization gradually builds reserves.

Benefits include:

- Better cash flow
- Less fundraising pressure
- Greater flexibility
- Reduced family stress

Programs with healthy reserves can often secure travel opportunities that would otherwise be impossible.

The goal isn't simply paying for this year's trip.

The goal is creating long-term stability.

Transportation: The Part Everyone Forgets Until It's Too Late

Nothing creates panic faster than transportation logistics.

Well, except maybe losing costumes.

Transportation should be secured earlier than most directors think necessary.

Bus companies are experiencing increased demand nationwide.

Competition weekends often overlap with:

- Athletic events
- School field trips
- Tourism seasons
- Corporate travel

The earlier transportation is secured, the better.

Transportation Planning Hacks Request Quotes from Multiple Providers

Rates vary significantly.

A little comparison shopping can save thousands.

Reserve Before Final Numbers Are Available

Most companies can adjust passenger counts later.

What they can't do is create buses that have already been booked by someone else.

Build Extra Capacity

Every director has experienced the mysterious growth of equipment.

The props become larger.

The costumes become bulkier.

The sound equipment multiplies overnight.

Leave room.

Future you will be grateful.

Overcoming School Administration Concerns

Let's address another reality.

Not every administrator gets excited when a show choir proposes traveling hundreds of miles with teenagers.

Administrators typically worry about three things:

- Safety
- Academic impact
- Financial risk

The good news?

These concerns are reasonable.

The better news?

They can be addressed.

Present Solutions, Not Problems

Administrators appreciate preparation.

When presenting travel plans, include:

- Detailed itineraries
- Safety procedures

- Chaperone ratios
- Emergency contacts
- Academic plans
- Budget projections

The more questions you answer before they ask them, the more confidence you create.

Demonstrate Educational Value

Travel is not simply recreation.

Show choir travel develops:

- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Responsibility
- Cultural awareness
- Performance skills

When framed appropriately, travel becomes an extension of the educational experience.

Show Financial Responsibility

Administrators become much more comfortable when they see:

- Fundraising plans
- Booster support
- Sponsorship commitments
- Budget contingencies

Confidence grows when financial surprises decrease.

Addressing Parent Concerns Before They Become Problems

Parents often have concerns they may not voice immediately.

Successful programs address those concerns proactively.

Concern #1: Cost

Families need information early.

The sooner projected costs are available, the more time parents have to plan.

Avoid surprises.

Parents dislike surprise expenses almost as much as directors dislike broken microphones.

Concern #2: Safety

Clearly communicate:

- Hotel supervision
- Chaperone procedures
- Curfews
- Transportation plans
- Emergency protocols

Confidence increases when details are transparent.

Concern #3: Missed School

Provide clear academic expectations.

Many parents support travel when they see accountability measures in place.

Concern #4: Value

Parents want to know what students gain from the experience.

Share stories.

Share photos.

Share testimonials.

Show the educational and personal growth that results from travel.

Fundraising Before You Need the Money

The best fundraising strategy is surprisingly simple:

Start earlier.

Many programs begin fundraising after expenses have already appeared.

This creates stress for everyone involved.

Instead, create a year-round fundraising calendar.

Potential opportunities include:

- Sponsorship campaigns
- Community performances
- Alumni support programs
- Special events
- Online giving campaigns
- Merchandise sales

When fundraising becomes consistent rather than reactive, financial pressure decreases dramatically.

The Magic of Incremental Payments

One national trip costing \$1,500 sounds overwhelming.

Twelve monthly payments of \$125 sounds manageable.

Breaking expenses into smaller installments reduces anxiety and increases participation.

Families appreciate predictability.

Booster organizations appreciate improved cash flow.

Everyone wins.

Why Reward Trips Matter More Than You Think

At first glance, reward performance trips may seem like luxury items.

They are not.

They are investments.

Whether it's performing at a major venue, participating in a festival, or taking a showcase trip after a successful season, reward travel creates powerful benefits.

Students remember these experiences for years.

Sometimes decades.

Ask alumni about their favorite show choir memories.

Few immediately mention a rehearsal.

Many immediately mention a trip.

The bus ride.

The hotel experience.

The performance destination.

The friendships.

The shared adventure.

Those memories become part of the program's culture.

The Recruiting Power of Travel

Travel can also become one of the strongest recruiting tools available.

Prospective students want experiences.

Parents want opportunities.

A vibrant travel program demonstrates both.

When younger students see older performers traveling, competing, and representing the school in exciting venues, participation becomes aspirational.

The program gains momentum.

Enrollment grows.

Community support increases.

The cycle becomes self-sustaining.

A well-planned reward trip isn't merely an expense.

It's a marketing tool.

It's a retention tool.

It's a recruiting tool.

And perhaps most importantly, it's a morale tool.

Final Destination

Every successful show choir trip begins long before anyone boards a bus or steps onto an airplane.

It starts with planning.

It starts with budgeting.

It starts with anticipating challenges before they become crises.



The directors and boosters who master travel planning understand a simple truth: logistics may not be glamorous, but they make the glamorous moments possible.

The standing ovation.

The championship announcement.

The unforgettable performance.

The memories students carry long after graduation.

Those moments don't happen by

accident.

They happen because someone booked the buses early, secured the hotel block, answered parent concerns, built the budget, and raised the funds months before they were needed.

Travel planning may never earn a trophy.

But it often determines whether your students get the chance to chase one.

And that's a journey worth planning.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ed Bauer has been in publishing for over twenty years. He was introduced to Show Choir by his daughter and he is forever grateful to her for this wonderful gift.