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**AMIS INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL FESTIVAL  
HOSTING HANDBOOK  
(This includes all MS Honor Band Festivals, MS Honor Choir Festivals  
and the Junior Honor Orchestra Festival)**

**Why host this Festival in your school?**

Any AMIS Festival is an enrichment for a school community. It highlights the music department in your school and inspires everyone. It is a great community builder and a good way to liaise with your school administration, the PTO and the other members of your arts department.

**Which facilities and equipment are required?**

**Rehearsal:**

You will need one large room for the duration of the Festival (Thursday morning through Saturday evening). This room should be large enough to hold a concert band or string orchestra (60 – 80) seated musicians with stands and a conductor), or in the case of a choir festival, 70-90 singers in seats and on choir risers, plus the piano. During the Festival there will be sectional rehearsals. Ideally sectionals may involve the use of 6-8 rooms to accommodate large sections like the clarinets and small sections like the double reeds. However, if these are not available, it is possible to handle the sectionals with only 2 or 3 rooms available, by careful and creative scheduling. The orchestra will need 5 rooms for a full sectional rehearsal. Choir festivals will need 3 rooms for sectionals. You may also need a room for solo auditions or working with small groups needing special help.

Remember you do not need the sectional rooms all the time. Arranging to get these rooms at the required times is an important and sometimes problematic task. To a large extent, the rehearsal schedule can be built around the availability of facilities. This will take close coordination with the conductor.

**Concert:**

For the final concert on Saturday night the venue should be a suitable concert venue with appropriate acoustics, lighting and seating for both performers and audience. Ideally this will be the school theatre. In some instances it may be necessary to find out of school concert facilities. Cost and ease of getting to and from the concert site on the Saturday of the festival are both considerations.

**AMIS Headquarters:**

The AMIS organisers will need a place to hook up their computer and printer (two plugs), internet access, access to a photocopier, a fairly large work surface for assembling packets. A phone is helpful but not absolutely necessary as they will have a mobile with them. This will need to be available on the Tuesday before the festival so all registration materials are ready for Wednesday arrival of participants. It is helpful if this is not in a classroom full of students or in the staff lounge. However, sometimes a corner of a lounge or classroom is the best space available.

**Teacher Headquarters:**

The teachers will need a room to work, relax, gather, store coats, etc. A supply of suitable drinks and snacks is always appreciated. Usually the school or the PTO will donate coffee, tea, water, etc. However, if necessary, AMIS can pay for some basics like instant coffee and teabags. A bit of fruit or a few cookies is an added bonus, but not absolutely necessary. Either in that room or somewhere else in the school, it is really helpful for teachers to have somewhere to check email. Often a school's IT department will assign a temporary sign in password for the teachers for the duration of the festival. Sometimes the AMIS Headquarters and the Teacher Headquarters are in the same room.

**Medical/health facilities:**

If possible a nurse should be present throughout the Festival and be provided with an appropriate room and equipment. Usually the school nurse can be available through Friday, and is sometimes on duty on Saturday due to sporting events taking place at the school. If not, someone who has had first aid training and who has access to a first aid box should be available throughout the day and evening on Saturday.

### **Dressing rooms:**

Students and teachers will need somewhere to store their concert clothes during the day on Saturday. You will need to use classrooms as dressing rooms unless your school theatre, or the theatre being used for the concert, has large dressing room areas. You'll need to find clothes racks that can be put into the dressing rooms for hanging concert clothes. If there are large windows in the door or in the walls of the rooms you will need to cover them with paper for privacy.

### **Dining Area:**

Sometimes lunches can be scheduled before or after the regular school lunches so the musicians can eat in the cafeteria. Sometimes it is necessary to find hallway or classroom spaces where students can eat sandwich lunches provided by the cafeteria, the PTO or arts support parents, or an outside caterer such as Subway. This will vary from school to school, but you do need to think about this. Snacks of fruit and water or juice can usually be served just outside the rehearsal hall or in a nearby room.

### **What housing requirements will the community need to provide?**

There are approximately 60-75 students (sometimes up to 80 or 85 for choir festivals) who will require housing with families from Wednesday night through to Sunday morning. AMIS will ask you for an upper limit of students you feel you can house. If a group needs to come a day early or stay an extra day because of travel arrangements, you will usually need to book rooms for them in the festival hotel. See the special housing guidelines for more detailed information about housing. Visiting teachers and the AMIS team will require rooms in a hotel nearby. Estimated adult numbers will be available from AMIS headquarters early in the planning process. There are usually 20-30 adults involved. The AMIS team usually arrives on the Monday before the festival.

### **Transport:**

In some cases public transport can be used almost exclusively during the festival, if it is very good and convenient (as was the case in Zurich recently.) If groups are expected to take public transport to the school upon arrival, you will need to provide really detailed information to help them. It is daunting to be in a new city with a group of students and their instruments. Sometimes it is school policy to meet visiting groups at the airport or train station. This is always really appreciated by the visitors! Find out if this is a possibility at your school. Sometimes teachers will be glad to pay for minibus transportation upon arrival. If your school doesn't meet visitors, try to find out about this option and how to arrange it so teachers can make a decision about whether or not they want to use it.

If teachers can take public transport, or better yet walk, between the hotel and school they will do so. If taxis seem the best option, they will be willing to share. In many instances a school organizers mini bus transportation each morning from the hotel to school and returning to the hotel at the end of the day's activities. You will also need to provide telephone numbers for a reliable taxi firm or two that teachers can use if they need to make any personal trips during the festival.

### **Which date?**

AMIS will ask you to suggest several dates for the Festival. The MS Honor Band festivals and the Junior Honor Orchestra are traditionally between February and April. The MS Honor Boys Choir Festival is usually one of the first two weekends in October, and is always in the early autumn. The MS Honor Girls and Mixed Choir Festivals are held the end of April or beginning of May. Check your school calendar as early as possible to find an appropriate time that fits in with your school events. It is also a good idea to choose a time when you know that you personally, as host/Festival organiser, will be under as little pressure as possible! Think about facility demands for your school from other organisations within the school such as sports, MUN, ISTA etc.

### **What should be done before AMIS arrives?**

- 1. Preparing for the Festival:** Talk to the school administration, faculty, facility maintenance people and PTO early on and explain to them the nature of the Festival and request their support. Ask specific questions about what the school will be willing to pay for and what expenses they would have to incur while the Festival is in the school. Usually schools will absorb photocopying costs, paper for the program, custodial and cleaning costs, telephone and fax costs to schools requiring specific information. Frequently they will also cover at least some of the following festival costs: food for breaks for directors or students, Directors' reception, flowers for the concert venue, transportation.

Check (with the help of officials or secretaries within the school) to see what the **visa requirements** are for visitors from various countries. **This needs to be done early on in the planning** because in today's world it sometimes takes a long while to secure visas. Draft a letter of invitation which can be personalized for students requiring visas. It will generally need to be sent by fax to the consulate where the student is requesting the visa and to the music teacher bringing the students. It will then need to be sent as a hard copy to the music teacher so the student can also have it in hand when applying for the visa. AMIS can help with a draft visa letter.

Contact the school community to generate support for the Festival and help with the housing. (see housing guidelines) Explain the complete programme and needs to all of these people well ahead of time.

Keep everyone informed of arrangements at all times and send out several reminders in the months/weeks preceding the Festival. Invite all helpers to the concert.

Arrange for the AMIS banner to be hung above the performance area. It will be necessary to request release time for yourself for the duration of the festival, beginning with Wednesday when schools arrive. It may be necessary to ask for some release time for other members of the music faculty to aid in the running of the Festival.

- Housing:** See the AMIS housing guidelines. Get someone to help you arrange the housing. This could be the Activity Coordinator, if you are lucky enough to have one, or find one person to act as **housing coordinator** and make them totally responsible for this. This should be your most reliable and organised, best-networked person.

Book a hotel for the adults participating in the Festival. This is usually chosen largely by convenient location. It may be a simple three star hotel or it could be a four or five star hotel that your school has negotiated a special rate with. Most of the rooms needed will be singles.

- Catering:** Make sure that the **cafeteria** or your **food provider** knows about the extra numbers arriving at the school and what they need to cater for. Get a **food coordinator**. Arrange the most convenient time for the cafeteria to have these guests for lunch and then work the information into the rehearsal schedule.

Water should be available for students and snacks such as fruit or fruit juice should be available for them at all breaks. Usually students are issued with water bottles at the first rehearsal and are expected to refill these throughout the festival. Sometimes these snacks and the water are donated. If not, AMIS will reimburse for these expenses.

.A pre-concert dinner for all participants and teachers involved with the Festival is normally held in the school prior to the final concert on the Saturday night. It is usually a hot meal (such as pasta) with salad or soup and simple dessert.

The cost of lunches on Thursday, Friday and Saturday and the pre-concert dinner on Saturday are covered in the registration fees paid by each participant.

- Budget:** You will be asked to prepare costs estimates and to establish what your school community plans to cover and what AMIS will need to reimburse you for. As a general rule, the basic budget should be no more than £40 or € 60 per person to include food, transport, t-shirts, and incidentals like renting of instruments. Sometimes in exceptional circumstances it needs to be higher but this should be worked out with the AMIS office ahead of time.

If someone donates items we generally must pay for from the budget, this amount, or most of it can often be added to the scholarship fund, unless it is needed for other budget items which are greater than usual. Possible donors should be made aware of this.

- Travel:** Provide detailed and accurate instructions on how to get to your school from the airport or main railway station. Provide road directions too, in case some people are coming by car. It is a very good idea if all this information can be supplied early so it can go on the web site. If possible arrange for someone to greet the visitors on arrival, either at the airport/station or at the school entrance.
- Directors' dinner:(s)** Arrange a suitable venue for the Directors' dinner and make the necessary reservations for this. It is normally held on Friday evening, although it could be on Thursday if necessary. The cost is generally under €50, in some cases considerably less than that, depending on the festival venue.

There is often a Directors' informal reception or get-together of some kind on Thursday evening following the first day of rehearsals. In some schools one of the administrators may wish to host a buffet dinner for the visiting teachers. If there is no special event on the Thursday, you should have some restaurants to suggest to the visitors in case they would like to go out individually or in small groups (which is usual.) Occasionally it will work best to reserve an informal restaurant for the majority of the teachers to eat at as a group.

- Instrument Rental:** (when necessary). If special instruments or extra equipment is required, arrange to rent what you do not have. In the case of band festivals this is usually percussion equipment, or occasionally a string bass or tuba. In the case of an orchestra festival, it is frequently necessary to rent string basses unless your school happens to own a fairly large number of these. This may also be true of music stands, although these can usually be borrowed.

Check with your administration how much they are willing to pay and how much AMIS will need to pay. Sometimes a visiting student will ask you to rent them a tuba, since these are very hard to transport. In that case they will arrange to pay you for the rental costs.

6. **Concert Recording:** Festival concerts are recorded, and a CD sent out to each participating school for them to copy and distribute to the participating students. This should be of good sound quality but does not need to be professional quality, carefully mixed. Assign someone you can trust to do a sound check, set up the equipment and record the concert. If you have a good technical department in the school they will help out. If you must hire someone, this does not need to be a high-powered professional recording engineer. If considerable cost is involved, check with AMIS before contracting an expensive company to do this. You will be expected to copy the master CD for each school and to post the CD to each participating school. AMIS will reimburse you for the materials and postage, unless your school wishes to donate this.
7. **Rehearsal schedule:** Create a schedule of rehearsals for the Festival. You will want to send your draft to the conductor and to AMIS for feedback before it is finalized. AMIS will provide an outline for you to work from. Pin up rehearsal schedules on all the doors of the rehearsal rooms and anywhere else you think people will need to look for them.

The draft schedules will be sent to schools ahead of time. A copy of the schedule should also be included in the information packs which are given to all participating school when they check in.

8. **Signs:** Signs indicating important locations such as bathrooms and rehearsal rooms should be put up for your visitors. It is also good if you have a welcome sign of some sort at the school entrance to greet the festival participants. You should also prepare a sign with each school's name which can mark the area in which they are to put their luggage when they arrive and where they can wait for host families.
9. **Rehearsal spaces:** Prepare the rehearsal spaces. Arrange the chairs, stands, amps and other equipment and hang the name of each participating student over their music stand. AMIS will make the signs for the stands. (For the main rehearsal area you will need approximately 70 chairs and 50 stands for an instrumental group or enough chairs plus risers and a conductor's stand and piano for the choral festivals.

Provide a box of pencils for rehearsal.

10. **Concert Set-up.** In setting up for the concert, you will have help from the assigned stage manager for the festival and from the other teachers. Ensure that microphones and any other necessary equipment are in the right place for recording the performance. At least one public address microphone should be set up for the speakers who will address the audience unless the theatre has very good acoustics.
12. **Lighting:** Check that the lighting is sufficient for the musicians. If you have a stage with lighting make sure someone is available to do the lighting for you. The lighting set up should be done before the Festival rehearsals begin although it will need adjusting. Do not allow lighting checks to be done during rehearsals if it is at all possible to avoid this.
13. **Information packages:** You will need to help the AMIS crew to prepare information packages for the participating schools with schedules, information about the school, cafeteria vouchers (if you are using them), name tags, concert tickets, etc., but AMIS will provide the name tags and most of the other paperwork. Maps are something you should organize.
14. **T-shirt:** Decide on your tee-shirt design and consult with AMIS headquarters about price, sizes, quantities and colour to be ordered. Make sure your supplier can deliver well before the Festival. You will need to include an AMIS logo on the tee shirt.

## 15. Extras.

**Poster and program:** You will need a concert poster and a design for the concert programme. You may wish to use the regular AMIS logo on the program. The program will need to be printed on A3 paper of 120-160 grams. Most good photocopiers can handle these weights. Depending on the size of your concert venue and your expected audience, you should advertise to the wider community so as many people as possible hear the final concert. You may want to make tickets and sell them prior to the concert night, you may want to give tickets but not charge for them, or you may decide not to use tickets, depending on the usual practice at your school. When an outside facility is used, it is generally necessary to sell tickets in order to defray the cost of renting the facility. In most instances we encourage donations to the AMIS scholarship fund instead of charging for tickets. If you use tickets, you will need to provide tickets for all participating Directors, AMIS staff and guests as well as host families. Your PTO or your arts support organization should be involved if possible. They may want to offer refreshments at the end of the concert.

**Concert details:** Arrange for someone to prepare the concert location – clean up after final rehearsal, prepare seats, decorate with plants/flowers, etc., provide a table with reserved/paid tickets, check tickets, give out programmes, prepare and serve refreshments if offered. Teachers will be happy to help in tidying up before the concert but will want to be free to greet parents and talk with students immediately before and after the concert.

**Assembly:** It may be possible for your Middle School (or other sections of your school community) to be offered a brief assembly performance, usually done at the end of the day on Friday. This should be arranged in consultation with the Festival conductor and AMIS, as well as the relevant administrators. It's a great chance to publicise music in your school!

**Sightseeing or other activities:** Depending on your rehearsal schedule and the expectations of your housers, you may want to arrange a brief outing within the host locality. This could be a sightseeing walk, a visit to a local attraction, a chance to see the town, or cultural tour.

**Performing Rights:** You will need to find out from the performing rights society in your city/country what fees must be paid for the right to perform our concert. You probably already pay this organization for the right to perform your own concerts. In fact the school may have an annual agreement with this organization to cover all performances in your school. You will need to emphasize that only archive recordings are made of the concert and that CD's will not be sold to the public. You should make sure it is known that AMIS is a registered charity.

**Thank you's:** Make sure you have a complete list of all who need to be thanked. These should include your housers, administration & secretaries, Director, PTO people, custodians, sound & lights people, catering, parent & student volunteer workers. These will also be included in the program so AMIS will need the list ahead of time. And remember, you can never write too many thank-you notes!