

Guide to creating an Open Mic Event



SUSHEELA DANIEL, NORDIC DIVERSITY TRAINERS

Step 1 What type of an open mic are you organizing?

The first thing you need to do is figure out what kind of an open mic event do you want to organize. Does it have a specific theme or topic? What type of performances do you want to focus on, music, poems, stand up comedy? or only one? If music, any particular type of music? What languages are performers allowed to use, all?

Step 2 For whom is this event?

Decide whom this event is for. Is it open to all performers and what about the audience? Or is perhaps the audience open to all but your event is to create a space to encourage for example female performers, people of color, a particular age group only? There are many options but be very clear about your target group and that you communicate it clearly too so that there is no confusion about it at the event itself.

Step 3 Select a venue, date and time

Keeping your target audience and performers in mind, pick a date and time for your event and then a suitable venue to have the event in. It can be a cafe, restaurant, bar or any place where you ideally have some kind of a stage. The more ambience and cozy/positive atmosphere the place has, the better.

Step 4 Make sure the venue is accessible

All people, regardless of physical ability, should be able to attend your event so make sure that the venue you choose is accessible and that there is an accessible bathroom too. Make sure the stage is accessible too, not just the audience area. Try to at all cost avoid venues that have accessibility issues but if for some reason you can't, this needs to be communicated clearly in advertising and event page / info.

Step 5 You need an amazing sound system

For your event to succeed, for your performers and your audience to be satisfied and happy, you need an excellent sound system for your event. Either the venue already has one or you bring your own but make sure there is a good quality microphone (do not organize an open mic without a microphone, ever.) The speakers and other sound system equipment must deliver high quality good sound. Also check that performers can connect their phone or bring their own music.

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Step 6 How many minutes does each performer have?

An open mic event typically lasts around 3 hours, can be less and can be more. Depending on how many performers you are expecting, the length of the event and what type of performances, decide how long each performer has on stage. Typically at open mics performers have 5-10 minutes each. 10 minutes is a pretty long time so try not to have slots longer than that. Also decide if each performer can sign up only once (recommended, unless there is no one else who wants to perform, you can allow people to perform again).

Step 7 Create simple rules for your open mic

Have rules such as how many minutes each performer has, what is allowed and what is not. Do's and don't's. You should be clear about the consequences, if any, if rules are not followed. It is recommended to not be too strict but time slots should always be managed well and maintained, else your event can turn out to be a disaster and the audience can get bored as well. Decide how the rules will be presented at the beginning of the event and possibly in the event description.

Step 8 How do performers need to sign up?

Decide if you want participants to sign up in advance for example by email or will all sign ups happen at the event directly and is it on first come, first served basis. If participants should sign up at the event, by what time can they start signing up and can they keep signing up (if places left) throughout the night? (Recommended as some people might be shy and decide only once they arrive and have gotten a feel for the place and how welcoming the atmosphere is.)

Step 9 Open mic's should be free

You should not charge an entry fee to your event. Open mics should be free of charge, making the threshold for first timers to get up on stage as low as possible and also attracting as much of a crowd as possible. However, performers should be offered something after they get off stage, either something to eat or at least a drink. This encourages performers to sign up as well as shows that you care about your artists. It's a sweet and recommended gesture.

Step 10 Will there be something to eat and drink?

Depending on your venue, they might have drinks and food for sale. If not, make sure at least drinks are available either for free or for sale. If possible, having snacks or proper food for sale is a great plus, it will get participants to stay longer and enjoy the event better. Make sure the food and drinks are vegan and ideally gluten free so that most people can have them and so that no animal has been exploited or killed in the process of preparing the food, this creates good energy and is a great way to introduce people to delicious vegan food.

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Step 11

Get your open mic an entertaining host

A host that keeps the crowd engaged, is genuine and respects the performers is compulsory for your open mic. Being funny is a huge plus. Having a boring host can ruin your event. So make sure you invest in a good host, a comedian can be a good choice - but with comedians make sure you know what type of jokes they are making and if they are suitable, for example, they should not be racist. They don't need to be professional hosts or comedians, they just need to be good.

Step 12

For the flyer/event ad

Decide if the entire event is open mic or would you like to have any confirmed acts of someone more experienced to draw a crowd or set the mood. This could be a more known person too but that is not a must. But for your marketing it can be an option to add an artists face to it, but it is just an option and it works without as well. Also if you yourself know any good performers or even just beginners belonging to your target group of performers, do invite them to come perform.

Step 13

Ensure safety

Make sure safety measures are taken when it comes to your venue and event. Do you need an insurance for the event? Does the venue have an insurance? Is there a fire alarm? Will there be guards/bouncers present, are they needed? Discuss with the venue owners and possible staff present, who is responsible for what in case of a problem or emergency. Better be safe and well prepared than sorry.

Step 14

Gather your open mic night crew

Apart from a host, decide if you need a DJ to play music too, ie will you have a break half-time with music or will the host keep the audience entertained throughout. In addition, you will need a person who is responsible for signing people up, keeping a list of the performers and the order. You and the host should have copies. You need a photographer to capture the vibe of the night and of the performers - but ask for permission as they might get distracted or nervous when on stage. For your next event you can use these pictures to attract a crowd. Also, one person should be there for the performers, answering their questions, can be the same one who signs them up.

Step 15

Be sure to communicate all the above clearly

Whatever you want your event to be - be sure to communicate it effectively and clearly in all your marketing for the event. So that the performers know what kind of an open mic it is and that they are prepared and so that the audience knows what to expect. Come up with an authentic and attractive name for the event on market it across social media platforms. Remember to create a sharable Facebook event that you post in or keep active to hype the event prior to it. Make people feel like they are welcome and try to encourage people to perform for the first time too.

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Step 16

Be on time and prepare

Make sure you arrive early at the venue. Check that the microphone works, sound is clear and loud enough. Ensure it is easy to adjust the microphone height for performers of different height. Have at least two chairs on stage. Make sure performers can connect their phone to the sound system. Place papers and pens at each table for an easy way to encourage people to sign up. You can also ask people to sign up directly with the person responsible for it.

Step 17

What will you do if something inappropriate is said?

You need to be clear what kind of speech and behavior is acceptable on stage and where you draw the line. And if someone crosses the line and for example says something racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or disrespects any group of people, what will be done about it? You can remind participants of how much time they have and what is not allowed but if something goes wrong, make sure you have a plan how to respond.

Step 18

Make sure your host knows the do's and don'ts

Keep your host informed in the way that you would like them to interact with the performers. For example, is it okay for the host to ask the performer where they are from or about their background on stage? Some questions can be sensitive and make performers uncomfortable even when asked with good intentions so if you have any such issues then communicate it to the host to avoid any slips on stage.

Step 19

Encourage people to sign up

Have the host encourage people throughout the night to sign up by repeating it and making people feel welcome and that there are no expectations for perfection and that you want to see new faces on stage. There might be many shy people who are not sure about performing and just need that extra push. This way the paper and pen at the tables can make it feel easier to sign up and you can have someone regularly go around collecting papers. You can also just have performers raise their hand if they want to perform.

Step 20

Encourage the audience to interact

In countries like Finland, the audience can be very silent and it's hard to know if the audience is actually enjoying the performance. It can also make the performer feel insecure. A great way to fix this is to have the host encourage the audience to be interactive by clapping, making noise, snapping their fingers or cheering when enjoying and to show support to the artist. The host can for example make the audience practice all these methods once - can be a good icebreaker too. Having shakers for the audience to shake when enjoying a performance can also add something extra to the show.

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Step 21 **Announce the performers in advance**

Let the host know how much in advance the next performer will be announced, 5min or 10min in advance? Some musicians might need time to tune their instrument and others just need a few minutes to mentally prepare etc. When announcing the next performer, it can also be mentioned what type of performance is coming up, is it a song or perhaps a spoken word poem?

Step 22 **Record to Instagram stories**

With permission - have a person responsible for taking short videos for Instagram and Facebook stories and be sure to tag the artist and add relevant hashtags. When you tag the performer, they will share the content on their own page which is free marketing for you and gets people interested in your upcoming open mics. Don't record everything just short clips of different acts and maybe longer ones of the most interesting ones.

Step 23 **Encouragement tip**

After each act it's good for the host to repeat the performer's name and the host can ask the performer to share where on social media the audience can find them. The person in charge of taking sign-ups or the host can go up to each performer after their set is over and thanking them personally for coming and giving them some words of encouragement and appreciation - genuine words of course. This will boost the performer's confidence, make them feel like they are appreciated and they will feel like coming back to perform.

Step 24 **Having a strong beginning and end**

Plan something interesting for both the beginning of the open mic and the end. The opening should create a welcoming and positive atmosphere and make people feel connected to the show. An open mic can boost or break a performer's confidence - it has the power to bring people together to support one another, celebrating small achievements instead of expecting perfection. The end of the event should leave people feeling like they want to return.

Step 25 **Follow up**

At the end of the open mic, market your next event, thank the audience and the performers. Encourage feedback. Have a paper at the tables which asks to rate the open mic and leave a comment. If it's too long most people won't bother doing it. You can also have a form online but it's harder getting people to do it later. Feedback is such a valuable way to know what to improve in the future, what was especially appreciated and what you could do better. You can also talk to people directly at the open mic gather some feedback that way. You can also use the positive feedback to market your upcoming events.