

SUCCESS STORY: Virtual Music Camp Increases Attendance More than 600% Over In-Person Camp



COVID-19 Innovations and Responses

This is the fifth in a series of success stories detailing innovations by arts education organizations in response to pandemic-related closures and modifications.

About AEP Success Stories

The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States is a national network of more than 100 organizations dedicated to advancing arts education. AEP has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education since 1995 and is administered by Education Commission of the States. AEP is the nation’s hub for arts and education leaders, building their leadership capacity to support students, educators and learning environments. Through research, reports, convenings and counsel, leaders gain knowledge and insights to ensure that all learners — especially those that have historically been marginalized — receive an excellent arts education. To achieve its goal to expand access to high-quality arts learning opportunities for all learners, AEP gathers detailed information on success stories with the potential to be replicated in communities across the country.

The Success Stories project collects submissions from organizations that highlight successful arts education programs. These stories demonstrate the benefits of arts integration across the education spectrum and promote continued collaboration and learning for individuals and organizations working toward student achievement and success.

In 2021, AEP added a fifth priority area to success stories to capture innovations by partners and affiliates in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This success story highlights the work of Meyer Music and Band of Angels. This success story aligns with AEP’s new priority area: “COVID-19 Innovations and Responses.”

Arts Education Partnership staff interviewed Mike Meyer, owner of Meyer Music and founder of [Band of Angels](#). Meyer Music is a family-owned business serving 60 school districts across the Kansas City, Missouri area. Band of Angels is a not-for-profit organization founded by Meyer Music and Fox 4 Kansas City to provide musical instruments and scholarships for children.

SUCCESS STORY: Virtual Music Camp Increases Attendance More than 600% Over In-Person Camp

Interview

Please describe the innovation(s) you're sharing.

Band of Angels worked with University of Kansas (KU) to offer a virtual music camp in place of the annual in-person camp at KU. Band of Angels usually provides full scholarships for 50 children to attend the camp each year.

For the virtual camp, we wanted to offer camp-like experiences via Zoom. The camp also had a streaming component. We paid instructors to create tutorials and other virtual content to be streamed via YouTube and then paired that streamed content with live sessions.

Another component was time each day with guest artists. We had four artists who are nationally known for their work in the music industry, and they did sessions for the campers sharing their expertise in music and also talking about what it's like to audition for Beyoncé or play in the house band for American Idol. Students also had the option to pay a nominal fee for a private lesson via Zoom.

We wanted a social and fun component like an in-person camp, so we hosted a virtual bingo game at the end of camp to celebrate the experience. About 750 campers played. Manufacturers like Yamaha donated prizes, and everyone who participated got a t-shirt. We also had music trivia during the game.

The typical, in-person, pre-COVID camp had about 300 campers. As I mentioned before, 50 of those were scholarships, and the others were paid registrations. When we went to a virtual camp, there was no registration fee for anyone, and we had 1,950 campers from 46 states and five other countries. This showed us that this camp needs to exist virtually going forward alongside the in-person experience. I've lobbied KU to keep the virtual component, so we're going to do it again in 2021.

What were the precipitating factors that led you to do things differently?

We obviously couldn't do the usual in-person summer music camp, so when KU approached us to see if we'd be interested in collaborating on a virtual camp, we said yes.

COVID forced us to reconsider what we had been doing and see the benefits of reaching more children.

Who did you need to get involved, and were those relationships you already had or ones you had to build?

SUCCESS STORY: Virtual Music Camp Increases Attendance More than 600% Over In-Person Camp

We have a very close, strong relationship with KU. When we first started Band of Angels, I approached them about the scholarship program to send children to university music camp. That program started by supporting five students, and now we're at 50.

Through Meyer Music, I'm connected to musical instrument manufacturers, and each have a roster of artists who play their instruments. Prior to 2020, we had fundraiser galas for Band of Angels where these artists performed; they would spend the days leading up to the gala working with groups of students. By the time gala happened, they understood our organization's work and were all in. Those relationships really proved valuable when COVID happened, because most of their work as musicians was cancelled, too. Pulling them into the camp as clinicians had a mutual benefit: they got to work, and in return they had a deeper understanding and appreciation of our work. One of the benefits of a virtual camp was that no matter where students were geographically, they could relate to what these national artists were telling them.

We already had strong relationships with our funders at foundations and other grantmaking entities. They were so happy to see us taking lemons and making lemonade, making the best of a potentially bad situation.

Finally, we co-founded Band of Angels with Fox 4 Kansas City. As a television station, they have a platform to disseminate information broadly but not deep connections within the education community or an on-site instrument repair shop. The university has an established education network. Meyer Music has the music connections and specific expertise and space to maintain instruments. Everybody understands what they do and what others do well. It never becomes territorial; we're always collaborative.

What barriers did you encounter, and how did you deal with them?

There was a financial barrier when we decided to not charge a registration fee for the camp. Luckily, Band of Angels operates in a business mindset, meaning we typically hold some funds in reserve for emergencies. We were able to use those funds to support this work.

Getting information out to students and families was another barrier, specifically when it came to letting them know about the changes. We tapped into KU's network within the education community and used Facebook groups for music educators to get the word out.

If you could go back in time and do this again, what would you do differently (if anything)?

We would have produced more video content featuring professional artists in marketing so that students could get excited about who they would be learning from. It also would have been great to get students from previous years talking about their experiences and how much they learned as an incentive to get others to apply.

SUCCESS STORY: Virtual Music Camp Increases Attendance More than 600% Over In-Person Camp

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

My philosophy is, "if you can, you should." I believe that if you've got the ability to help someone, you should do it.

[Midwestern Music Camp](#) will be virtual again in 2021, scheduled for June 14-16.