



The Idea

Introduction

Barbershop harmony has always been about more than music. It's about belonging, shared moments, and the joy of making something greater than the sum of its parts.

As the British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) looks to the future, this project invites us to explore how that spirit can reach more people — how we can share harmony with new singers, new audiences, and new generations.

This isn't a replacement for what we already do well. It's an exploration of *what else could exist alongside it* — new routes for discovery, learning, and performance that complement our cherished conventions and contests.

We are not starting from zero. We're beginning from strength — from decades of community, musicianship, and dedication — and asking:

What might happen if more people could experience that same magic for the first time?

For ease of reference throughout this and future documents, this initiative will be referred to simply as *One Voice*. This helps maintain clarity and consistency as the vision evolves, while reminding us that this is a single, connected effort to grow and strengthen barbershop harmony in the UK. This is not the final name for the event that will run - name ideas are appreciated!



A Vision of Possibility

The One Voice concept proposes a *festival-style* model that brings together contests, workshops, and social singing under one accessible, low-cost umbrella.

Each of these elements plays an important role:

- **Contests** give us purpose and energy — a shared focus that pushes musical excellence while celebrating achievement.
- **Workshops** serve as gateways — whether you're an established barbershopper or a singer from another musical background, they offer a bridge into our artform.
- **Social singing** keeps the heart of barbershop beating — informal tags, afterglows, and shared laughter reminding us why we do this.
- **A new environment** brings these threads together, showcasing barbershop harmony as both an artform and a community.

Imagine a weekend where:

- **Quartets, choruses, and small ensembles** perform side by side — each singing a barbershop piece and a song of their own choosing.
- **Workshops** run throughout the day, introducing vocal harmony to curious singers and helping existing members grow their skills.
- **Social spaces** are alive with informal singing — a place to meet, tag, and celebrate.
- And where **barbershop sits proudly within a wider world of vocal harmony**, sparking collaboration and creativity across styles.

These are examples, not fixed plans — starting points to inspire your ideas and contributions.



Guiding Themes

As we shape the details, several themes will help steer our collective imagination.

1. Accessibility & Affordability

Many singers love the idea of convention-style experiences but can't commit to full-weekend costs.

A *Pay-As-You-Go* approach — one flat price per participant — could allow flexible attendance while maintaining quality.

For instance: a one-day ticket might include contest entry, workshops, and social singing for £30.

How might we design events that feel both premium and approachable — affordable to newcomers while delivering value to our members?

2. Openness & Invitation

This project is about opening our doors wider — not redefining who's inside, but welcoming those who haven't yet found their way in.

Perhaps a community choir could join an "open quartet" workshop, or a local university group could perform their first tag at an afterglow.

This openness creates pathways for singers of all kinds to discover barbershop as an artform — from the curious hobbyist to the lifelong musician.

What small, visible acts of welcome could make someone's first encounter with barbershop unforgettable?

3. Learning & Development

Education has always been central to BABS' mission. One Voice could offer focused, flexible learning opportunities — from beginner sessions to advanced coaching.

Imagine rotating workshops on vocal blend, arranging, or performance craft — led by both BABS educators and guest specialists.

This space isn't only for newcomers; it's also for those wanting to improve their singing, refine their craft, or develop as leaders and educators.

How could we use these spaces to nurture new talent while keeping seasoned singers inspired?



4. Collaboration & Connection

The Festival format creates natural links between choirs, quartets, schools, and wider musical networks.

We might see partnerships with university a cappella societies, community ensembles, or regional music hubs — all discovering the joy of ringing chords together.

Collaboration strengthens us, and shared creativity reminds us that harmony is bigger than any one organisation.

How can we ensure these collaborations enhance what we do and make UK barbershop stronger together?

5. Sustainability & Imagination

A lighter, modular format allows growth without over-stretching volunteers or budgets. But what if we went further?

What if barbershop met the street festival scene? Or a regional “Harmony Hub” took over a community centre for a day? What if digital livestreams allowed international audiences to join us virtually?

This theme invites imaginative, out-of-the-box thinking. How could we design something that’s ambitious, unexpected, and scalable over time?



Shaping the Future Together

The One Voice project will develop through open discussion and co-creation. Working groups will help refine key areas such as:

- Event delivery and logistics
- Education and outreach
- Finance and sustainability
- Marketing, partnerships, and community engagement

Each group will bring ideas, test options, and feed them into a shared vision. No single document is final; each phase builds on your insights.

Our direction is clear — to grow the reach of barbershop harmony and to create spaces where every voice feels welcome — but *how* we achieve that is up to the creativity and collaboration of those who join the journey.

A companion document will follow, outlining the **planning and delivery stages** of One Voice, including working group structures, roles, and timelines.

The Spirit of One Voice

At its heart, One Voice is about connection.

It's about the spark in someone's eyes when they sing their first tag, the warmth of a chorus ringing a final chord, and the friendships formed long after the stage lights dim.

The best of barbershop has always come from community — from people daring to try, to teach, to listen, and to sing together.

This initiative simply asks:

What could happen if we invited more people to share that moment?



Anyone can be involved — whether you sing with BABS, LABBS, Sweet Adelines or another organisation entirely. Every contribution, every voice, strengthens the whole.

Next Steps

Over the coming months, we'll be gathering expressions of interest to join the working groups, attend the pilot Festival, and help shape the model.

Whether your passion lies in performance, organisation, or imagination — your input matters. Together, we can use the skills of all members to make UK barbershop stronger and more connected than ever before.

Exploring what's next for barbershop harmony — together.