



Building Communities under the Stars with Music for All

Levitt Pavilions for the Performing Arts

Program Requirements and Best Practice Guidelines

Background

In 1973, the first Levitt Pavilion for the Performing Arts opened on the banks of the historic Saugatuck River in Westport, Connecticut. For thirty-one years, music under the stars has been part of summer life in Westport; modern-day concerts on the village green; free to residents and visitors alike. In the summer of 2003, two new Levitt Pavilions opened with free evening concert series for family audiences relaxed on grassy lawns; one in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and the other in Pasadena, California, and in 2007 a Levitt Pavilion in Los Angeles presented its first concerts in MacArthur Park. In 2008 Levitt Pavilions will open in Arlington, Texas and Memphis, Tennessee, and in 2009 a new Levitt Pavilion will be built in Westport, CT. Mortimer Levitt funded the Mortimer Levitt Foundation, dedicated specifically to supporting additional Levitt Pavilions across the U.S., from coast-to-coast. The goal is to provide a broad assortment of free music to entertain, enrich and inspire the lives of children and families, regardless of family composition, economic situation or musical taste. Our experience says that in the process, the shared music helps to build a stronger sense of community and opens avenues of cooperation and communication across cultures and neighborhoods throughout the host city.

Public/Private Partnership

One of the keys to the success of the Levitt Pavilions is the shared sponsorship of the facility and of the concerts; shared between the Levitt Foundation, the city in which it is located, and the private local active supporters who become the guiding force for the Pavilion's creation and sustenance. The Levitt Foundation serves as a catalyst for mobilizing the local community into concerted effort, by providing matching funds, a successful model and guidelines, and an active partnership in the creation and operation of the Pavilion and its summer program. The program can only be successful with the full support and enthusiastic participation by both the local government agencies, and by the community's private leadership. The Foundation not only cannot do it alone, it cannot even be the primary force in creating a new Levitt Pavilion; that has to come from the community itself.

Specific Program

There are many valuable and worthwhile programs in support of music and the arts. While the Levitt Foundation appreciates those efforts, the Foundation has only one, very specific program that it funds: the creation or restoration of music “bandshells”, in dedicated open public recreational spaces of at least an acre, plus the necessary parking, and the subsequent production of 50 free concerts each summer; Magic, under the stars.

The basics of the Levitt donation are as follows:

- \$300,000 will be available as a matching grant to be used for capital expenditures associated with the construction or rehabilitation of a new or existing bandshell. The building shall include professional theatrical lighting and a professional sound system, as well as dressing rooms, toilets, storage space and a welcoming arch. Raising the balance of the funds necessary to construct or rehabilitate the Pavilion is the responsibility of the local community.
- An additional \$625,000 is available from the Foundation, also as a matching grant, payable over five years at \$125,000 per year. The funds are to be used for the costs of entertainment at the 50 free concerts provided each summer. It is expected that the balance of the costs of operating the Pavilion and putting on the programs will be raised from a combination of local private donations and sponsorships, fund-raising events, rental of the bandshell to other groups, and local government contribution of services and facilities. It is expected that the amount to be raised locally will be at least \$250,000 annually.
- An additional \$15,000 per year for up to 25 years for fees and travel expenses associated with music industry & professional conferences sanctioned by the Mortimer Levitt Foundation for Executive Directors of Friends of the Levitt Pavilion in good standing.

Requirements

In exchange for the \$1,000,000 donation by the Levitt Foundation, and to receive supplemental conference fees, the following requirements must be met:

- Permanent naming of the bandshell as the Levitt Pavilion for the Performing Arts.

- Creation of a 501(c)(3) separate tax-exempt entity, called the Friends of the Levitt Pavilion – (insert the name of your city here), which will have overall responsibility for the free concert series at the Pavilion each summer, and will be responsible for accepting and administering the grants from the Levitt Foundation.
- Establishment of a Board of Directors who will take responsibility for raising the matching funds required to put on the programs, hiring an executive director to handle the day-to-day responsibilities of the Pavilion and booking the acts, and signing the necessary agreements with the Levitt Foundation and the City.
- An agreement with the City or other appropriate public agency(ies) to provide the land, structure, parking facilities, and facility maintenance, to the Friends of the Levitt, in the form of a long-term (99 years) facilities lease for the months of the summer concert series each year. In other times of the year, or in hours during the summer weeks that do not conflict with the free concert series, the City can use the bandshell for its own productions, or rent out the facility to others to offset the costs of maintenance.
- An agreement with the Levitt Foundation that the Friends of the Levitt Pavilion will produce fifty free summer or seasonally appropriate evening concerts each year, as a condition of the matching grant. The concert series can cover all genres of music that are popular with the surrounding communities, including Latin, dance performances, jazz, raga, reggae, blues, world music, country, bluegrass, roots, Broadway, cabaret and programming for children. More formal programs, such as classical music, opera, and Shakespeare are NOT part of the 50 Levitt concerts, but may be included in marketing materials as additional presentations. The Pavilion may be used for such performances, but at times that would not conflict with the Levitt summer series of 50 concerts under the stars. The targeted nightly attendance is 1,000 with an audience range between 450 and 1,700 per show achieved during the fourth season.

The following Best Practice Guidelines are provided as a template for developing Levitt Pavilions that are functionally complete for the purposes of producing a quality musical experience, and aesthetically pleasing, to best represent the Levitt program, and to be a long-lasting asset for the community. It is understood that each community and each Pavilion is unique, so the interpretation of the guidelines will vary with the site and the circumstances. However, variations from the guidelines will need to be cleared with the Foundation.

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Site Size

The site should be a minimum of one and a quarter acre in size, with sufficient additional adjacent or nearby land to accommodate the parking for performances. Typically, that is at least an additional acre in size, although shared parking is possible with existing surface parking or parking garages in the immediate area. Sufficient spaces must be assured, by written agreement, for the summer evening hours of the free concert series.

Site Development

The site should be designed so that audience capacity is approximately 2,000 persons, with casual lawn seating in front of the stage. The site should either have a natural bowl, or be graded so as to provide a gradual upslope away from the stage, such as to provide optimum viewing, yet maintaining an intimate, casual, relaxed, “Magic Under the Stars” ambiance. If permanent seating is required, either because of city codes or ADA requirements, it must be located on the sides or at the back of the bowl so that seating does not block the clear lawns in front of the Pavilion.

Structure

Whether new construction or refurbishment of an existing structure, the Pavilion must meet the basic requirements of providing an open air stage with roof, side truss capabilities, dressing rooms, toilets, storage space for sound board, light board, and other equipment, as well as electrical, plumbing and telephone systems. All components shall be installed to meet or exceed local building codes. The architectural plans shall be mutually acceptable to the local community sponsors and to Mortimer Levitt and the Mortimer Levitt Foundation. The architect of record for the project shall coordinate with the Mortimer Levitt Foundation to ensure all specification standards are met.

Lighting & Sound

Professional lighting and sound systems appropriate to Levitt Pavilion standards are a requirement for the Foundation’s grants.

Landscaping

The site will have attractive landscaping appropriate to the venue, including grading to a gradual bowl shape, an underground sprinkler system, 4 to 5 inches of topsoil, grass sod or sprig, walkways, plantings, and sufficient lighting for safety, both at the Pavilion and in the parking areas. The project shall include a welcoming arch at the entrance to the Levitt Pavilion site, with attractive lighting and landscaping.

Fund Raising

The Friends of the Levitt Pavilion – (your city), will be responsible for raising matching funds of at least \$250,000 per year for the ongoing production of the free concert series each summer. That is typically accomplished by a combination of efforts, which includes minimum pledge requirements by Board members, producing two (or more) major fund-raising events each year, sponsorships of individual concerts or series by local businesses, grants from governmental agencies and Foundations, and individual donations.

Professional Standards

The Friends must maintain professional standards in all areas as set by existing Levitt Pavilions, including customer service, show promotion, fundraising, logistics, technical, security and safety issues.

Employees

The Friends will need to hire an executive director, development director and office administrator who will have overall responsibility for the Levitt Pavilion free concert series. They will have to book the acts, coordinate with the various stakeholders of the program and the facility, assure the quality of the sound and lighting, oversee the budget and help raise the matching funds, oversee marketing & website development, manage the database, make sure that the facility is being properly maintained by the city, hire and supervise the technician/stage managers required for the performances, write grants, hire summer interns and manage mailings & oversee benefit logistics.

Website

The Friends will create a website, [www.levitt\(YOURCITY\).org](http://www.levitt(YOURCITY).org), that will be usable by the opening of the first concert. It will include a listing of all the concerts and links to the various performers appearing in the series, and will offer information about the organization, special events such as benefits, and a means to make donations online, and links to subscribe to the email newsletter of the Friends and to “tell a friend” feature. Eventually the site should become multi-lingual to reflect the needs of the surrounding population.

Advertising

The Friends will need to create advertising campaigns, PR opportunities, sponsorship programs, and community service involvement to promote the Levitt Pavilion free concert series. Coordination with the other Levitt Pavilions offers the possibility of shared resources for joint booking, best practice illustrations, combined marketing efforts and mutual support.

Series Format

To build an environment of trust for local audiences, series programming is recommended. For example, every Wednesday night might feature programs for young children, Thursday nights, American Roots, Friday nights, World Music, Saturday nights, Latin music, and Sunday night, Jazz & Blues.

Demographic Assessment- Understand Your Community

Understand the cultural needs of the population surrounding the band shell. Obtain the demographics of the area within a ten-mile radius, assess the cultural needs and program your series accordingly.

Family and Community Enjoyment

The experience of the Levitt Pavilions is one of relaxed family enjoyment under the stars. The lawn environment allows parents to bring infants & toddlers, and provides a social equalizing environment that comfortably allows people of all races, ages and economic stratum to mix in a relaxed fashion. Many families make an evening of it, and bring picnic

baskets and spread out for dinner on the lawn. Lawn chairs and blankets are the norm, and the Friends of the Levitt can rent out extras for a few dollars to those who don't choose to bring their own. The Friends can also earn additional income through concessions stands at the performances. Water, soft drinks and various snacks sell well. It is also possible to sell box lunches, or sandwiches for those who came without a picnic basket.

We look forward to answering any questions you may have about the Levitt Pavilions, and hope that we can work together to create a new or rejuvenated venue for free live music concerts for the benefit of your community.

SUGGESTED RESPONSIBILITIES for BOARD MEMBERS of the FRIENDS of LEVITT

- A. Regular attendance and participation at board meetings
- B. Active participation on at least one committee
- C. Minimum annual gift of \$2,500 to Friends of the Levitt Pavilion
- D. Attend at least six performances each season at the Levitt
- E. Fill a table at the annual benefit and/or support it with a sponsorship gift
- F. Serve as an advocate for the Levitt Pavilion in the community
- G. Bring people with you to performances at the Levitt