



Information for New Porchfest Organizers

We held the first Porchfest in Ithaca in 2007. It has grown every year since then, and it has been a lot of fun. The idea is catching hold in other places; there are now more than 125 other Porchfests all around North America (we keep a list [here](#)). What's great about Porchfest is how simple it is—even though 180 bands play our Porchfest each year, it has been just three people organizing and running the whole thing (until 2018, when we added a fourth organizer to be in charge of food vendors). We pay for it all via a grant from a local housing non-profit, Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, along with profits from t-shirt sales and some donations from folks in our neighborhood.

The way it works in Ithaca is that musicians play on their own porch or find a friend who lives in the neighborhood and play on theirs. We don't assign the porches or match musicians with porches. We make maps (both printed and online/interactive) that show who will be playing where, and people walk around the neighborhood listening to music all afternoon.

Signing up musicians

We have pretty much accommodated everyone who wants to perform, because we think of it as an event by and for the community. We look for diversity in music styles and will directly ask bands and musicians that we think will add to the event, but mostly the bands approach us. If they have a place to play and agree to play acoustically or keep their amplified volume low, they're in. Fortunately, there are lots of great musicians here, and the quality has been very good.

We ask each band to give us their name, the address where they will be playing, and a short blurb about the group. If they have members playing in other bands at Porchfest or they have a strong preference about when they play, they let us know that too.

As our Porchfest has grown, we've added a couple of rules:

- 1) Performers may list no more than three conflicts with other groups with whom they share members. This keeps our job from becoming overly complicated.
- 2) No more than three performers may sign up to play the same porch. There are six time slots, and this keeps a single porch from monopolizing their block for the entire event, since it's problematic to schedule performances directly next door to, or across the street from, each other.
- 3) In 2018 we decided that the first hour of the event would be acoustic acts only. Although we always encourage bands to play quietly, we do have some loud groups, and we wanted to find a way for acoustic acts to play free of noise competition. It turned out to be a nice way to ease into the day as well.

Scheduling

Once we know where the musicians will be playing, we schedule them so that bands aren't playing too close to each other. We have six time slots, one hour apiece, and require performers to end on time, even if they start late for some reason, so that anyone scheduled near them in the next time slot can start on



time without sonic competition.

Maps

We make the maps using Google Maps. It's easy to use and gives a good visual of where people are playing. We transfer the maps into a design program to make the printed maps, and add addresses, band names, blurbs, and other information.

Interacting with the city

Ithaca requires us to apply each year for a special event permit. They also require us to have liability insurance, naming both Porchfest's organizers and the city itself as covered parties; it's pretty painless to arrange through a local broker, and costs us about \$500. We attend a special events committee meeting as part of the permitting process, where we discuss our plans and the city's concerns with a committee including representatives from the police and fire departments, as well as traffic, parking, and other officials. They're generally very supportive and helpful.

Interacting with the neighborhood

Our neighborhood has a large and active email listserv, our primary means of communicating with our neighbors about Porchfest. We make every effort to keep the community posted about Porchfest plans, from announcing the date months in advance to announcing which streets we'll be closing closer to the event. We also set up a Google Voice phone number that rings to all three organizers' cell phones, so that people can call or text us with noise complaints or other issues on the day of the event.

Volunteers

We engage a corps of about 50 volunteers to help out on the day of Porchfest. They are mostly stationed at the barricades, where they ask cars to drive around the closed portion of the street and escort cars through if necessary, and they transmit concerns to the organizers and hand out maps. Some volunteers staff the information table and hand out maps there. 2015 was the first year we directly engaged volunteers for traffic and volume patrol, and we're still figuring out some of the logistics there.

Promotion

We do most of our promoting online via our [website](#), [Facebook page](#), [Twitter](#) and [email list](#). We send a press release to the local media when the date is announced, and another when the lineup and schedule are complete. A local artist has made an original painting or illustration for the event every year, and we use the image on our website, map/schedule booklets, t-shirts and bumper stickers.

We have a sign painting party each year, a week or two before the event. Hand-painted yard signs that say "Porchfest" go to every house where there will be music.

Food and restrooms

Until 2018, we did not directly organize any food vendors under our event permit. Food trucks and street vendors would ask us if we were okay with them getting their own permits and setting up near the park in the middle of the neighborhood, and we absolutely welcomed that. Starting in 2015, our sponsor organization organized a large food truck roundup in the parking lot of a property they own in the neighborhood, which was very popular. We included information about it in all our promotion. In 2018



the city made it clear that they wanted the food trucks to be included in our event permit. We brought on another volunteer organizer to do that. She created an application and accepted five food trucks. They all had a very successful festival, and we're likely to add more food trucks next year.

Several restaurants and churches in the neighborhood have agreed to be designated on our maps as restroom locations open to the public over the years. Our sponsor organization also rented a couple of port-a-johns starting in 2015 to provide greater access. Now we organize that effort as well and distribute six port-a-johns throughout the neighborhood.

Timeline

It goes something like this:

Several months in advance: announce date to neighborhood email list + media; start application process for event permit and insurance coverage; meet with our sponsor to discuss plans for this year's event

10 weeks before: open performer signups, send first press release announcing date again, as well as any special plans or changes for this year

6 weeks before: close performer signups and start working on schedule

2 weeks before: map and schedule done, finalize street closures, sign painting party, press release with schedule and street closures

1 week before: yard signs picked up or delivered (although at this point, many performers keep theirs from previous years)

Communicating with other Porchfests

We have a private Facebook group for Porchfest organizers to meet, ask questions, share experiences and more. We all do things a little differently, depending on the nature of our individual communities, and it's really informative to see what other Porchfests are doing and have that supportive community available. Let us know if you'd like to join!

More information

You can find this year's map and list of musicians at our website – www.porchfest.org. Feel free to ask us all your questions. And we'd love to hear all about your Porchfest if you end up doing it!