

# 2021 Contest Expansion Revisitation

## DPC Discussion

July 15, 2021

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# Prep Work - Review

Please take a moment to review the following items before proceeding with this document:

1. Please review this video: [EIH Announcement](#)
2. Please review this communication: [2019 Contest Expansion Plan](#)
3. Please review this communication: [2019 Contest Expansion Feedback](#)
4. Please review this communication: [2019 Contest Expansion FAQs](#)

## Why Are We Revisiting This Work?

Earlier in 2021 there was an effort by some individuals to bring together a proposal to be given to the board - asking that the 2019 contest expansion plan be revisited. The effort may have started with good intentions but at the conclusion it left a number of people upset, angry and confused.

After discussion with BHS President John Donehower, a decision was made to have Steve Denino bring this topic through the SPC as a board-sponsored revisitation.

## Why are We Revisiting This Work Right Now?

The start of the 2022 contest cycle is nearly upon us and the large milestone that might be impacted is the Charlotte convention in 2022. Additionally a decision may affect how some districts approach their fall conventions. A decision needs to be made soon.

## Timeline

June 11	Begin Discussions with Context Expansion Working group
July 7	Discussion with Strategic Planning Committee
July 18	Discussion with DPC
By July 23	Proposal Given to BHS Board
Week of August 2	BHS Board Decision and Communication

# Summary of Thought for DPC Discussion

## Regarding Morality

I know that for many this contest expansion conversation is EXACTLY an issue of morality (doing the right thing). However, we must come to grips that this IS NOT an issue of morality for EVERYONE. I'm not yet willing to give up on the possibility that a suitable outcome can be accomplished without forcing the morality issue. In other words, there may be multiple paths to a common conclusion without forcing everyone to travel the same path.

If you feel like I am disrespecting your position of morality, I do apologize. I respect you and your position. It just isn't a path that we can take everyone down with any degree of reasonable success. And if anyone insists on that being the only path, well then - politely said - we already know your position.

## Historical Reference

Since 1939 our organization has recognized a quartet champion who represents the best of the best – the best of the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS/SPEBSQSA). That's a tradition that started 82 years ago.

Fast forward to June 19, 2018 when the following press statement was given: ([link](#))

*Beginning today we welcome women to join the Barbershop Harmony Society as members.*

That announcement also says:

*Your barbershop experience will always be yours to choose.*

... and it also says:

*We believe that preserving the experience of men singing together and welcoming women as members of the Barbershop Harmony Society are compatible ideas.*

Fast forward just a bit further to December 2019 when the contest expansion plan was announced and in which the following was communicated: ([link](#))

*The Society Board has approved the International Contest Expansion to include:*

- *Three classifications of ensembles: Men, Women, and Mixed Harmony.*
- *A champion and up to four additional medalists named in each classification based on cumulative score across all rounds. In all cases, men compete only against other men, women against other women, and mixed harmony groups against mixed harmony groups. No single overall champion will be named.*
- *The current number of competitors in the Quartet Semifinals (20) and Finals (10) will be maintained, with no distinction of classification to advance.*

So now it is July 2021, and we understand that there are some concerns with the contest expansion proposal - one of which is the lack of continuity between a tradition that started in 1939 - the naming of a champion.

Additionally, we understand that the pursuit of compatible ideas has since drawn lines of deep passion and emotion, often stirring up statements of morality and absolutes. This pursuit of compatibility – specifically as it pertains to the recognition of champions within the Barbershop Harmony Society is one that has no path that will make everyone happy. And so we challenge ourselves to explore options where we fulfill our promises while remaining true to the vision of the BHS (Everyone in Harmony).

## Framework Leading to a Proposal Path Forward

Avoiding the issue of morality requires acceptance of the following key items:

1. We have a history of all-male quartet champions but the contest was not specifically to name all male champions but rather to name the “best of the best” from our organization and therefore, of course we have a history of all-male champions because we were an all-male organization.
2. When we became an open membership organization, it naturally follows that the determination of the “best of the best” from our organization would come from our membership and therefore, of course we will now have an open contest because that is who we are now.

After considerable conversation around how to address the compatibility idea between:

- A genderless open contest
- Recognizing our champions
- Preserving the experience of men singing together
- A genderless membership model

**I would like to explore the following with the DPC on July 18th:**

The International Convention in July will remain the pinnacle of our contest process to identify and recognize the “best of the best” that the Barbershop Harmony Society has to offer.

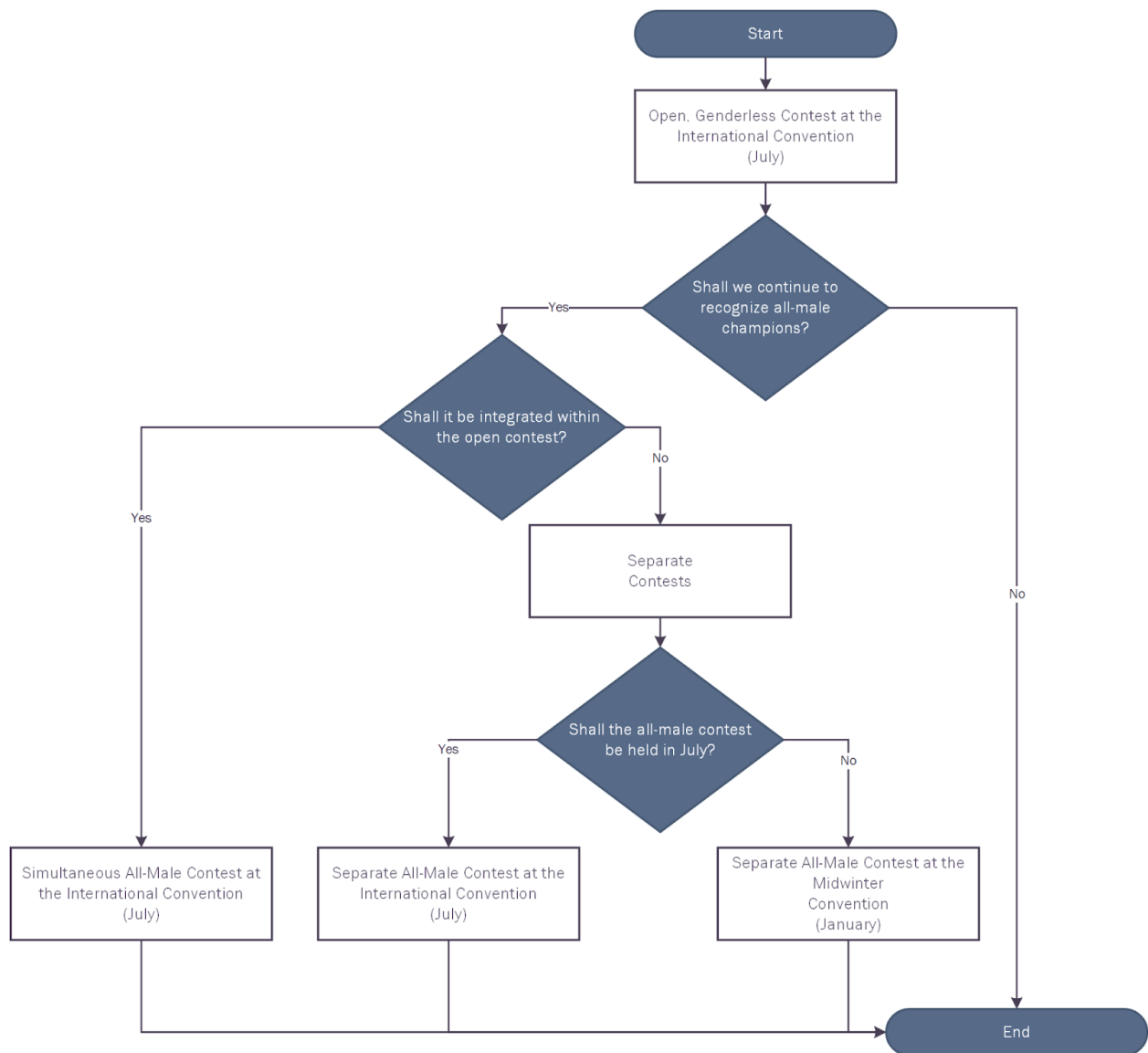
Given that the Barbershop Harmony Society is now an open membership organization it naturally follows that our “best of the best” must come from a position of representing that opportunity for our entire membership.

Therefore, in Charlotte (2022) the quartet and chorus contests that determine our international champions will be genderless and open. Any singing ensemble that is invited to compete has an equal opportunity to be recognized as the “best of the best”.

## Additional Considerations:

**SJD: I would also like to work through this flow diagram (below) with the DPC on July 18 to receive thoughts and impact**

What then remains is how to deal with compatibility as it pertains to our history of all-male champions (as a function of preserving the experience of men singing together). Options are derived from the following sequence of thought:



Additionally, we will need to pursue the question of if there is a desire for an all-female and/or all-mixed competition. If the answer is yes, then a similar determination of when/where/how will need to be made.

Once we have an understanding of the male, female and mixed contest solutions there remains a question of medals and recognition that cannot be unpacked until we understand the outcome of the flowchart above. The specific concern being that there will not be a specific recognition of female and mixed quartets (meaning anything other than the open contest) - then to award separate medals to the top 5 all-male ensembles creates a gender separation that reintroduces a host of issues.

### **SJD Note to the DPC:**

The remainder of this document is provided for additional context and an opportunity to review the work performed earlier in this process. I encourage you to continue reading for context as well as watch the linked videos.



# Working Group Recap

## Working Group Ask

Given the contest expansion communication from December 2019, are there any recommended modifications that the BHS Board should consider for implementation in the contest cycle for Charlotte (2022)?

## Working Team Members

- **Jay Althof** District President, Land of Lakes
- **Steve Armstrong** Chair of Contest and Judging
- **Tim Beutel** AIC Member
- **Blair Brown** Board Member, Voice from Mixed Ensemble Community
- **Steve Denino** Board Member (Facilitator)
- **Brandon Guyton** AIC Member
- **Chad Guyton** AIC Member
- **Jim Henry** AIC Member
- **Melody Hine** Youth Advisory Council, Voice from Female Ensemble Community
- **Julian LeFlore** Lead of Quin-Tones
- **Marty Monson** BHS CEO
- **Tim Waurick** AIC Member
- **Cy Wood** Voice from the LGBTQI+ community
- **David Wright** Barbershop Historian (and more)

## Comments from the Facilitator

From Steve Denino - working group facilitator:

The members of this working group were selected as they represent a diverse set of opinions. Of utmost importance was that we avoid becoming an “echo chamber” where all that was heard was the same point of view.

The BHS Board of Directors will not be surprised that this is a passionate topic with a variety of opinions. What I can report is that all conversations were treated with respect and a common love for barbershop and the longevity of the Barbershop Harmony Society.

It is also important to note that within those passionate voices is a disagreement on how to proceed forward. The names listed above are not necessarily all in alignment with any conclusion coming forward. That being said, having their voices in the process is critical to ensuring that multiple opinions have been expressed.

## Recap of Discussions

At the core of this task, there are two consistent themes that will need to be considered:

1. What is an acceptable pace of change (recognizing that there is risk in going too fast AND ALSO in going too slow)?
2. How shall we handle the organizational change management needed to enact any modifications to the existing contest expansion plan?

We recognize that the decisions regarding risk tolerance and change management belong to the BHS Board and so we will in this document give some context for consideration.

Additionally, there are some common understandings that must be expressed for full context:

1. As all members of this team are leaders within their respective communities, it is a given that it is easy to hear feedback from people who share our individual beliefs/concerns. As such no one person is in a position to speak for the whole of BHS membership.
2. There is no single decision that will make everyone happy. As such, the BHS Board will be asked to consider a decision that knowingly will upset a group of (present and future) members while delighting another group of (present and future) members.
3. We must continue to acknowledge that the international contest in terms of experience for the average barbershopper only affects approximately 30% of the membership. The “barbershop your way” message is still largely directed at the local (community) level.
4. **This working group as a whole has agreed that our ultimate destination is a genderless open contest.** The question at hand is not if this is our destination, but when shall we arrive and what are the steps if we choose an incremental approach.

**SJD Note: At the time the question was raised in the meeting there were no objections to this ultimate destination. Since that time I have received remarks from some individuals who do not agree with this statement.**

## Advice for the BHS Board of Directors

We understand that any activity by the BHS Board will result in one or more communities of interested people (past, existing, and future members) becoming upset with the direction. A middle ground that makes everyone happy just doesn't exist.

From team member Jay Althof:

*It is important to carefully manage the communication of any change from what was announced in December, 2019 because that contest approach was positioned as the result of gathering input from members. And many members remember hearing about and/or participating in surveys at that time.*

*Unfortunately, there is an undercurrent of mistrust, as it has been perceived that HH "pushes change" without enough member input. So we are not only working to determine what the future of contests will be, but also working to manage the transition to the future state that recognizes member trust concerns.*

Our advice is that no matter which path is chosen, that the BHS Board should agree to reset the way you communicate. Words such as transparency, honesty, integrity have been used multiple times as an opportunity for the BHS Board to embrace as they step into this challenge.

## Concerns with the 2019 Contest Expansion Proposal

The following are items that the working group discussed at length:

1. No overall winner
2. The opportunity to compete again
3. Existing quartet qualifying score is higher than in previous years
4. Clarification of participation in multiple ensembles
5. Devaluation of medals
6. Perpetuation of the gender classifications

### No Overall Winner

For the past 83 years, the international contests resulted in a conclusion of a "best of the best" overall winner. Currently, this would not be the case for the Charlotte convention.

The working group advises that an overall winner of the Charlotte international contest be recognized. (We already know the audience is going to do this why wouldn't we do it)

### The opportunity to compete again

In conjunction with the recognition of an overall winner, the working group advises that **only** the overall winner is excluded from competing again.

## Existing Quartet Qualifying Score is Higher than in Previous Years

Given that the Charlotte convention will be our first convention after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, in the spirit of enabling more barbershoppers to experience the contest stage the working group advises that the qualifying score for quartets be lowered back to 76.

## Clarification of participation in multiple ensembles

The working group advises that any individual may compete in multiple ensembles that have qualified.

## Devaluation of medals

The current contest expansion plan includes that the top five of each gender classification will be awarded medals. The concerns with this approach include:

- In the case of quartets, multiple medalist winners would not be in our top ten final round.
- In the case of both quartets and choruses, it is conceivable that the medalist winners may not be the highest scoring ensembles
- The separation of medals by gender classification continues to perpetuate the differences (separate but equal)

The working group advises that only five quartet and five chorus medals be awarded - to the top scoring ensembles.

## Perpetuation of the Gender Classifications

The perpetuation of the gender classifications is deeply concerning. There are social issues that are more fully understood than even a few short years ago - including the inclusion of non-binary gendered individuals who do not have a clear place to compete as barbershoppers.

Given the advice that our destination is a completely open and genderless contest, to continue to organize our international convention in this manner does not move the organization toward inclusion.

On the other hand, there are concerns and considerations that societal pressures will cause our BHS chapters that have chosen to remain in a single classification (for non-contest purposes) will be forced to become open and therefore the protection of the all-male experience is at risk.

While the event that is a contest being open and genderless does not directly imply a move toward only open chapters, it might be an indirect outcome and must be considered.

## Framework for Advice: Acceptable Pace of Change

As a framework for advice, the pace of change can be characterized in four options:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Do Nothing                                    | Not advisable   |
| 2 | Go Faster<br>Straight to the Destination      | Preferred with considerable concern about speed of change, change management, communication and the ability of the board to manage these concerns |
| 3 | Go Faster<br>Incremental Steps to Destination | Advised if unable to manage the concerns expressed with option #2   |
| 4 | Go Slower                                     | Not preferred   |
| 5 | No Contest In Charlotte                       | Not advisable   |

The working group refrains from making a recommendation as there are considerations beyond the scope of this discussion.

Regarding options #2 and #3, the overall approach is to continue to encourage as many members as reasonably possible to have the International Contest experience.

Additionally this advice is not unanimous from the working group.

## Consideration #1: Do Nothing

This consideration has received the least amount of attention. While there is value in staying the course we have discussed multiple times that we are in a different place than we were in December 2019 and we have an opportunity coming off the pandemic to realign to a better understanding for the BHS membership.

### **Pros**

- Does not introduce more change for the membership

### **Cons**

- Does not address any of the advice given by the working group regarding the 2019 contest expansion plan

### **Framework for Communication (DRAFT)**

The BHS Board of directors recognizes that change is difficult, and it takes time for an organization to transform. While we remain fully committed to the BHS vision of Everyone in Harmony, we choose to leave the 2019 contest expansion plan in place for Charlotte so that together we may learn how the inclusion of womens and mixed ensembles in our contest will enrich the barbershop experience.

## Consideration #2: Go Faster - Straight to the Destination

This would be the option if the BHS Board decides that the appropriate balance of risk associated with the health of the BHS should be addressed by going all in our future.

### Pros

- Supports the notion that it is important that we realize the benefit of Everyone in Harmony as quickly as possible
- This consideration places the path of the BHS clearly in the direction of our future.
- The majority of our members do not participate in the contest experience and as such the overall membership risk and exposure is low.
- Exposure to the larger barbershop community

### Cons

- Without effective change management and communication, this may further divide the membership that has not fully embraced the vision of Everyone in Harmony.

### Framework for Communication (DRAFT)

The BHS Board of directors recognizes that change is difficult, and it takes time for an organization to transform. That being said, we've all learned a lot during the past few years and the opportunity for the BHS to transform itself in alignment with the beautiful future of Everyone in Harmony coming out of the pandemic requires that we begin that transformation immediately. The BHS board believes so strongly in the future of the Barbershop Harmony Society that we proclaim that it is essential that we arrive at that destination as quickly as possible.

Our path to that destination includes the following approach for the Charlotte convention:

- There will be recognition of an overall winner of both the chorus and quartet contests
- A person may compete in multiple ensembles
- We are lowering the qualifying score for quartets back down to 76 (chorus qualification for Charlotte remains as previously communicated)
- Only the top five scoring ensembles in both the chorus and quartet competitions will be recognized as medalists

## Consideration #3: Go Faster - Incremental Steps to the Destination

This would be the option if the BHS Board decides that the appropriate balance of risk associated with the health of the BHS should be addressed in one or more steps toward the end goal.

### **Pros:**

- Supports the notion that it is important that we realize the benefit of Everyone in Harmony as quickly as possible balanced with time for the membership to embrace this change.
- This consideration places the path of the BHS clearly in the direction of our future.
- The majority of our members do not participate in the contest experience and as such the overall membership risk and exposure is low.

### **Cons:**

- Without effective change management and communication, this may further divide the membership that has not embraced the vision of Everyone in Harmony.
- Risks the disenfranchising of people who will be our future.

### **Framework for Communication (DRAFT)**

The BHS Board of directors recognizes that change is difficult, and it takes time for an organization to transform. That being said, we've all learned a lot during the past few years and the opportunity for the BHS to transform itself in alignment with the beautiful future of Everyone in Harmony coming out of the pandemic requires that we begin that transformation immediately. The BHS board believes so strongly in the future of the Barbershop Harmony Society that we proclaim that it is essential that we arrive at that destination as quickly as possible.

As a large step toward that destination we will be taking the following approach for the Charlotte convention in 2022:

- There will be recognition of an overall winner of both the chorus and quartet contests
- The winner of each gender classification for both chorus and quartet contests will be recognized with a new trophy presentation
- A person may compete in multiple ensembles
- We are lowering the qualifying score for quartets back down to 76 (chorus qualification for Charlotte remains as previously communicated)
- Only the top five scoring ensembles in both the chorus and quartet competitions will be recognized as medalists



## Consideration #4: Go Slower

This option should be considered by the BHS Board if acceptable risk suggests that additional time is required to address a cultural realignment within the organization.

While not widely discussed in the working group, considerations included:

- Keeping the July convention as an all-male (only) experience
- Moving the women and mixed ensembles to Midwinter

Ultimately these options did not fit well with the consideration of the ultimate destination of an open, genderless contest.

### **Pros**

- Further clear statement of support for the all-male experience

### **Cons**

- Creates further separation of gender classifications within the contest experience
- Expected to result in a number of mixed and women's ensembles to not participate
- Devalues the youth contest/evaluation experience
- Devalues the relaxed atmosphere of Midwinter

### **Framework for Communication (DRAFT)**

The BHS Board of directors recognizes that change is difficult, and it takes time for an organization to transform. While we remain fully committed to the BHS vision of Everyone in Harmony, we believe we have moved too quickly without adequate support for the all-male barbershop experience.

As such, we will be realigning the international contest in Charlotte back to our roots - an all-male experience. Considerations for women and mixed ensembles will be given at a future time, likely at the midwinter convention.

## Consideration #5: No Contest in Charlotte

This consideration was raised by the Strategic Planning Committee during review. The thought being that this might be the right time to put the contest experience into the proper perspective within the mission of the BHS. The idea is so new that there are some questions still to be answered, but essentially the idea is that there will still be a convention, it just may be much more like a festival.

A subset of the working group came together to discuss this additional option and advises that this consideration not proceed. The group agrees with the premise that far too much emphasis is placed on competitions and appreciates the concept. That being said - the group also **strongly recommends against removing the competition element from the planning for the Charlotte convention.**

### Pros

- Enables a significant shift toward a barbershop experience that is not driven by the elite experience of competition

### Cons

Such a culture shift should mean adding, not removing

- Competition is a part of our identity, part of our DNA
- Members like that it is there
- This is a driver for why many ensembles are coming back together after the pandemic
- There is a lot of worth that comes from our contests
- **Removing the competition from Charlotte makes the international convention a "can miss" instead of a "can't miss" event.**

### Framework for Communication (DRAFT)

The BHS Board of directors recognizes that there is an over-emphasis on the contest experience as it relates to the overall barbershop experience that our quartets and choruses engage in regularly at the local level. We believe it is time to realign and to use the Charlotte international convention to reset and celebrate barbershop in a manner that is more consistent with the barbershop community as a whole.

## A Final Piece of Advice to the Board

The working group clearly understands that there is no path through this challenge that will make everyone happy. There will be a group of individuals who will be unhappy, even if you do nothing.

As such, the working group offers that you consider the future of the BHS and the people who represent that future. It is important to not risk the future membership while balancing desires of the current membership in this decision.

## Videos: In Their Own Words

The members of the working group were given the opportunity to submit a short video so that they can speak directly to the BHS Board. Here are the videos that were submitted:

- [Jay Althof](#)
- [Steve Armstrong](#)
- [Blair Brown](#)
- [Jim Henry](#)
- [Melody Hine](#)
- [Cy Wood](#)
- [David Wright](#)