



Collaboration

The jazz musician Steve Lacy said that "it is in collaboration that the nature of art is revealed." Collaboration between artists has created some of the most well known and loved music, movies and other works. Working with others can be a great way to expand your creative boundaries and share the burden of creating a new work, but collaboration can also have its pitfalls. There are many bands that break up and never speak again; co-authors who might share similar ideas but find they can't work together; and performance troupes where creative differences prove to be too much for them to work together.

How might you avoid some of these collaboration stumbling blocks? When you began a new collaborative project it is easy for the excitement of creation to take over, but pausing to take care of a few simple housekeeping issues can save a lot of headache in the long run. Here are few questions to ask yourself before embarking upon a new group project.

1. **What is the scope of the project?** What is it that you are producing? Are you forming a band? An ongoing writing duo? Bringing people together to record one album or make one movie?

Writing a statement about what exactly it is you are doing will not only make it clearer to you, but it will also help others to buy into the vision of the project.

2. **What is the term of the project?** Is this expected to be a one-time project such as a single album or performance that will be done in a year or less? Or are you forming a longer term group such as a band or a dance troupe?

Knowing the term of your collaboration can help make deadlines and expectations clear, this is particularly important if you are creating a work for someone else such as a soundtrack or performance piece for a particular show.

3. **Who owns the outcome?** Who owns the songs, choreographies, script, artwork, etc. that comes out of the project? Do individuals retain a share of the copyright or does the band or troupe own it? How will this continue to be administered after the project ends or the group disbands? Will you register the copyrights for a work with the U.S. Copyright Office?

Keep in mind that the moment you create a concrete form of a work by writing it down, filming it or recording it you have also created a copyright for that work. Not only that but everyone who contributes to the creation of the work, no matter how small or large their

contribution, has an equal stake in that copyright unless there is something in writing that says otherwise. This can save you a heap of time and money in the future should someone dispute ownership and will also help prevent the work from being used in ways you didn't intend.

4. How will people be compensated? Are participants being paid a one-time flat fee for participating? Will they continue to receive royalties after the project is completed? If it is a band or troupe, how will you share income from performances? Videos? Recordings? How much of your income goes into a general fund to help cover future group expenses?

Next to copyrights, money is probably one of the greatest sources of conflict in a group. Money can be a taboo subject when it comes to art, but when you are working in a group it is an issue that must be discussed. Making sure that you have a clear outline of how funds are to be distributed will save you a lot of future heartache.

5. What is each person's role? We have all been in that situation where something didn't get done because everyone thought it was someone else's job to do it. Making sure roles are clearly defined will go a long way to avoiding conflict. Some roles you may consider: a manager to make sure everything stays on schedule, a treasurer to manage the group's funds and to make sure everyone gets paid on time, a secretary to keep track of contracts and paperwork, and if you are a band or troupe, someone to take on the role of stage manager for gigs.

Okay. So you've set everyone down and had a conversation, maybe a few arguments, but in the end you have answered all of the above questions so now what? Now you need to find a way to put those into a concrete form such as a contract or band/troupe agreement, which we will discuss in our next newsletter!