

## DIY RELEASING MUSIC HANDBOOK - OPEN SOURCE

Firstly I want to pay my respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation on whose land I have been able to practice my language and culture. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present and acknowledge the thousands of generations of music, song and storytelling that continue to this day. What I have learned on these lands is a tiny dot compared to the True Owners.

I offer this knowledge as a free source to all artists in the hope that you will tell the truth about how this land was stolen and to consider how your music and art practice will embody reparations and the return of land back to First Nations.

Knowledge isn't knowledge unless it is shared - freely. Everything I've written here I've learned from my music community. I have done nothing on my own. If you have a spare few dollars please pay forward your appreciation for this exchange of knowledge to [Pay the Rent](#).

This is an **open source document** which means **you can leave comments** for anything you want to add from your own experience as a musician on these lands. There are many areas I have not covered. Accessibility is one I would love to see included. I will moderate the document to make sure it continues to make sense to the reader. I am open to all feedback but please do it with kindness. For the safety of this open source space anyone abusive will be removed.

## WHY I WROTE THIS

The purpose of this handbook is to help you release your music as an independent, self managed artist on this continent. To provide you with the framework, structure and support to be accountable to your music business and keep you on track as you project manage and lead a team. The team might be your band and sound engineer, or it might include a booking agent, record label and publicist. Whether this is your first time, or you have released music before, the tools in this book have been shaped with you in mind, by people who have walked the independent path of DIY music on this continent.

## THE TRUTH

I started the I Manage My Music workshops in 2011 after my second album took me into debt. Until that moment, I had never seen my music as a business, it was more of a 'hobby' that had ballooned into a career. There was something anti-art about calling my music a business. The responsibility that came with it scared me. I remember one of our guest speakers Gareth Liddiard (The Drones/ Tropical Fuck Storm) saying, "If you're going to sell your records or charge people to see you play live - then you're running a business."

Going into debt helped me to see that if I kept on the path of business denial, within a couple of years I wouldn't be playing music outside of Melbourne. I wouldn't be able to tour and pay my band or make records. And there was nothing I wanted to do more.

In April 2010 I made the decision that I would never again go into debt for my music. If I needed to make a record for \$5000 and I only had \$3000, then I had to find a way to raise the funds. No more borrowing from my family. I cut up my credit card.

13 years on and I haven't debted to my music practice. I've made four more albums, toured to the U.S, U.K and Europe multiple times, co-founded and managed an independent record label and learnt about the industry I'm part of.

My promise to you is that I will tell the truth about releasing music. It might hurt a bit, but at least you can make your own decisions about what you are able to commit to. I hope this handbook helps you to get clear around the business, so that you can share what the world needs as much as food, water and air – music.

## **THE METRICS OF SUCCESS**

Today my metrics of success sit outside of capitalism as the guiding force. Streams, album sales and ticket sales are great and mean I can make the next body of work and pay people properly but what really matters to me are the metrics below:

- 1) How much connection and joy was there in the process of making the work? Did we take care of the land and each other while we were making the work?
- 2) Is there a community around me that cares about the work as much (or near enough) as I do?
- 3) Am I working with people across many generations and backgrounds?
- 4) Have I created a safe enough environment where people can give me feedback if things aren't working for them?
- 5) Does my show feel culturally safe for people onstage and in the audience?
- 6) To the best of my ability do the live venues I play at feel inclusive of all genders and for those with disability access needs?
- 7) When I play a live show do people come up to me afterwards and tell me personal stories about how the songs have connected with them?
- 8) When I release new music do people send me messages to let me know how my music has been a part of their day / life?
- 9) Does my music engage with the truth of the land where I am playing? Have I taken the time to know something about the people whose land I am on?
- 10) Does my music tell a story about who I am and where I come from? Does my body of work reflect my values and beliefs?

## **DEFINE YOUR LEVEL OF SUCCESS**

This concept was first introduced to me in a keynote address by artist manager John Watson. My initial thought was, world famous of course. Isn't this what every aspiring artist wants? Finally all of my worries, financial and otherwise would be taken care of. But over the years this has changed.

I have often spoken about professional envy. Being envious of my successful peers but not willing to do what they had done to achieve it. I didn't want to move to America and start again, and yet I was envious of those who had. I didn't want to spend 9 months of every year on the road touring but somehow thought I was entitled to the same kind of success as those who did.

***What do you want?*** That's the question you need to answer. Often what's holding us back from either achieving our career goals or being present to the life we already have, is our inability to answer it honestly. It's a scary question because it puts the responsibility back on ME. No more blaming others when things don't go my way. No more longing for things without putting in the time and working for them.

So here's your chance! Write it down just for you. What do you truly want to achieve with your music? It's OK if you want to live in a beautiful home with your pets and children, but you may need to adjust the expectations you place upon yourself. It's OK if you only want to tour Australia or play shows in your hometown. It's OK if you want to spend the rest of your life on tour. Whatever you want is OK. What isn't OK is not being clear about what you want and then torturing yourself and those around you because you're not willing to take the actions toward it.

## **BUSINESS SEPARATION**

Most musicians never go to business school. We're dreamers, not number crunching realists. The good news is that you don't need to. But there are some basic tools that are going to help you. Here's my top three:

- 1) Open a separate bank account for your music. This way your personal savings and business savings are entirely separate. Anything you make from music goes into your music account. If you're not making money from your music yet, set up a direct debit from your personal savings of \$20 (or more) to go to your music business account every week. This helps to keep the goal energised and in your mind. Savings however small, are savings.
- 2) Do not use the money in your music account for anything that is not music related. Respect those savings. You are building something valuable.
- 3) Keep your day job. The reality of being an artist in Australia means we need to have a job outside of our creative practice. A job that feeds us, clothes us and keeps a roof over our head. It might be music related (venue booker, recording engineer) and it might not be. The most important thing is to see your music as your baby. Would you expect a baby to support your basic needs?

These simple tools move us into **clarity**. This is a word I'll use a lot. The success of any project can be measured by the clarity you bring to it. Be clear about your business. Designate space for it in your life and the rewards will far outweigh the time you put into it. Just try it and see.

## **DEBT AND VAGUENESS**

Debt is really just the outcome of being vague. Spending while you close your eyes and look the other way. The feeling at the ATM while you cross your fingers and hope there will be enough in your account to pay the rent. The dread of having bills that need to be paid *right now* and not having the means to do so.

Worst of all debt erodes our creative self-esteem.

## **THE REALITY**

The reality of being an artist in so called Australia is that we live on a huge continent, down the end of the world, with a small population. The entire population here isn't even the population of greater Tokyo. The audience we can play to is limited and touring to the other side of the world is expensive and time consuming. So we have to get smart.

Debt is the number one killer of creativity.

Why? Because it tells us that it can't be done. It's an oppressive weight that takes all of the lightness and fun out of making music. *Don't go into debt*. Easier said than done but set the challenge.

When you are showing up to your relationships (creative or otherwise) with the need for financial support there's always going to be a strange uneven dynamic at play. Being an artist already makes us the odd one out in our family. Being an artist in debt to *them* just makes you feel like a loser.

Stop debting and watch strained relationships with family, partners and friends transform.

## **ISOLATION**

A lot of artists isolate. I want to acknowledge that neurodiversity, disability, mental health, colonisation, marginalisation and addiction can play a large role in this. Please read this as a general overview and not one that wishes to exclude anyone. As an alcoholic now in recovery I knew that I needed outside help and community to recover and heal. Once I was able to take care of my alcoholism I could look at the questions below with some capacity.

What's the difference between focused time put toward your creative goals and isolation? In the first scenario you are:

- Involved in your creative community
- Playing gigs or open mic nights

- Going out to shows and supporting your friends
- Jamming with like minded artists and writing with others
- Creating for the sake of creating whatever the medium

Isolation is the opposite of this.

- You feel separate from what's going on but too afraid to put yourself out there
- You don't feel part of the community and you rarely go out to see local bands
- You dream of someone 'discovering' you. Someone powerful and influential stumbling across your music online and realising your genius
- You spend more time *thinking* about what it will be like *when* rather than working with where you are today and creating something new

**No-one is waiting to discover you. I felt so much freedom when I realised this!** Everyone is too busy with the barrage of things they need to do on a daily basis just to pay the bills.

**Discover yourself.** Get out there. Support others. Work on your craft and collaborate. Play in other people's bands. Help to put together and promote a joint bill with bands in your community. Learn about your music community and those who have come before you. Start where you are.

## THE TEAM

Traditionally a team might consist of a band, manager, live production crew, record label, booking agent, publisher and publicist. Very few artists in so called Australia will ever have a full team and you don't need one to release your music and tour. You might be booking your own shows and doing just fine. You may have your own record label. You may not need to spend money on a publicist or digital marketing yet.

There is no shame in sending your music out to radio or venue bookers. Doing it yourself is the best way to learn about your local scene and it means that when you hire others to do it for you, there's an understanding of the role and what they need to be doing on your behalf. See more toward the end of this handbook about community radio and why it's so integral.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SELF-MANAGED?

*Being self managed means taking on the responsibility of overseeing the project from start to finish.* It requires you to have the vision or goal and then work out the steps you'll need to take to meet them. It will mean time spent each day on email, connecting people on your team, setting deadlines and making sure that tasks are completed on time.

Management is about relationships with other people. How you interact with people is as important as the job they are doing for you. There's a saying I have always loved, "Be nice to people on the way up because you'll meet them again on your way down."

## **BUT I DON'T WANT TO MANAGE MYSELF**

Don't worry about getting it 'right', we all learn on the job. The more you understand the role the better equipped you'll be to oversee a manager and/ or team in the future. Managing yourself is punk.

## **GETTING OLDER**

At a certain age you start to notice something happening to your peers, it usually starts around the 33-40 mark where the reality of our lives now comes into focus. The dreams of youth can no longer be masked by hope. You are well and truly an adult. Most of your friends now have families and mortgages. How do you balance your creative work with other jobs and life itself?

There are those that manage to do both, often with the help of a supportive partner who is able to take on the lion's share of daily parenting duties.

The reality is that many talented artists never make an income that can support their basic needs let alone buy a house or go on a holiday. And sometimes those 'other jobs' take you away from your song-writing. But what's the alternative? To not create at all?

As you get older it can feel like other people are having more success than you. You know you have something just as valuable to contribute but that break never came *or* just when it looked like you had your ducks in a row, one of them floated off in the other direction. Maybe they weren't your ducks in the first place?

How do we acknowledge ambition and still have peace of mind? How do we have goals without giving up completely when they don't unfold according to our plan? *We get a life*. We take care of ourselves. We find balance. We love ourselves *so much* that external approval or success no longer needs to happen in order for us to feel like we are enough.

If you are having a cynical reaction to this then I challenge you to look at your life as it currently is. Where do you deprive yourself? I want to reiterate that many factors can play into why someone is unable to take care of themselves in the way they may need to. Poverty, class, racism, transphobia or coming from a marginalised background are factors for why these aspects of care could be difficult or unattainable for you. Be gentle when answering.

- Do you eat food that nourishes you?
- Do you exercise regularly - maybe a walk by the river or some stretches at home?
- Do you have any addictions or dependencies that are getting in the way of your creative work?
- Are you connected to friends and community?
- How do you give back to your community?
- Do you have other creative pursuits or things you like doing just because it's fun?
- Is your B job (money maker) healthy for you mentally and physically?

- Do you wear clothes that make you feel good?
- When was the last time you took a break from life and work? (even a few nights at a friend or family members house in the forest or near the beach)

Most importantly, how loud are those negative voices and whose voice is it? When you are taking care of yourself, do the voices quieten? To envy another person's success is to feed the belief that there isn't enough. Letting go of these negative self beliefs can be a beautiful act of care.

And what about *those people* who just get whatever they want without even trying? It's none of our business. We'll never know another person's internal struggle. And even those who we deem as 'successful' doubt their worth just as much as we do but with the weight of expectation on their shoulders.

What I've come to realise is that the talented and the hardworking don't always become commercially successful. That even when you do everything right it doesn't equal perfect outcomes.

***There is no justice and nothing owed to you. It's not like some professions where you can work your way up. There is no job security. Choosing to be an artist is one of the biggest risks you could ever take. But if life is short and you want an adventure - then it could be the path where you are going to learn a lot about yourself and others.***

## **THERE ARE NO RULES**

If you can see a way of doing things that no-one else is doing then DO IT! We are creative people and when we bring that imagination and energy to the way we talk about our music and share it with the world it makes an even greater impact.

## **PAYING OTHERS WHAT THEY'RE WORTH**

This can be one of the most difficult conversations to have with band members. In the past I had so much shame around money and my inability to manage it. The main fear was a fear of rejection. What if I have the money conversation and they say no to my offer?

I'm a solo artist who plays and records with a band. That doesn't mean that creative collaboration doesn't happen when we're in the rehearsal room but the bones of the song - the arrangement, lyrics and music are solid before I start pre-production. Unless we have agreed to co-writing before we have entered the rehearsal space, all I expect from the band is their interpretation of my song. I don't often write 'parts' for my players so I acknowledge they are bringing their creative imagination to the process and I pay them accordingly. In some instances I pay a percentage of my publishing royalties to band members but they are usually long standing collaborators not session players or one off guests.

Once we have agreed upon a fee for their time in pre-production and recording then we can enter the space. That conversation has to happen beforehand. Not wanting to talk about money with band members is a form of subtle manipulation. Being afraid of the conversation is no excuse not to have it. Believe me I've made that mistake in the past and lost the respect of my players in the process.

## **WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO**

You're reading this handbook because you are interested in releasing and touring music you have created. When I say music, I'm talking about music that is original, that's been written and recorded by you, the artist. You own the work. I am going to assume you have recorded, mixed and mastered the song or collection of songs and you are now ready to release them.

## **LET'S GET STARTED – Mapping Exercise**

Make a date to sit down with another member of your band or a close friend in music. You want to talk to someone who has some understanding of the process you are about to embark on. Perhaps you have a trusted mentor you can call on, or there is someone in your music community whose opinion you respect. The most important thing is that they are supportive of you and able to listen.

**Set a timer for 10 minutes and talk them through what it is you want to do. Ask them to take notes if they have any questions, they will have time to ask you these at the end of your 10 minutes. This is your time to talk the project through. Have a look at the questions below to help flesh out your spiel. Go!**

- 1) Do you want to release a standalone single or will it be part of a larger body of work, like an EP or Album?
- 2) If it's part of a larger body of work, how many singles do you want to release? (Two or three prior to the EP or Album release date is standard.)
- 3) Have you saved or secured any kind of funding to create single or album artwork, photos (solo or band portraits), video clips, digital assets (like teasers) VISUAL COLLATERAL. It's super important in a world where we spend a lot of our time scrolling through feeds. Do you have funding to make these things happen?
- 4) Will you be creating clips and photos for more than one single?
- 5) Do you know of photographers, film makers, artists or designers whose work you are drawn to that you would like to work with? Do you need to do more research in this area? Are there other bands or artists whose visual approach you admire? Who have they worked with to create these things?



- 6) If you don't have funds to create your visual collateral, how do you plan to raise them? Will you save, go for a grant, organise a fundraiser show, set up a patreon platform or crowd fund? Remember you want to avoid debting, how can you achieve this goal, are there favours you can call in, are you able to exchange your skills for someone else's?

These questions will no doubt lead to more questions. This is GOOD. *The more time you spend fleshing out the planning stage and spotting any areas where your plan may have holes, the less likely you are to run into overspending or debt.* Ask your friend or mentor for their feedback at the end of the session. Can they see any areas that you may have glossed over or not considered yet?

### **Having some feelings? Overwhelm.**

The process of getting clear about our goals can sometimes leave us feeling overwhelmed. All of a sudden the task that felt so easy, 'the dream', becomes a reality and we see that there's a whole lot more we need to consider before going forward. Some of the feelings that accompany overwhelm can be depression, despair, resentment, grief, envy and more. These are BIG feelings, take some time to respect them.

*Allow yourself to feel overwhelmed.* Share it with your friend or mentor. And then work out ways you can support yourself through the process. Maybe you will need to delegate by setting tasks within the band so you're not left with all of the hard labour. Maybe you will need to structure a timeline that is flexible and can be pushed back or extended if needed. It's great to have clear goals but there is no rush, especially if it puts your health at risk.

***'The planning you are doing now is your blueprint. It will define the energy around the project. All we really have control over is how we decide to go about the process, the outcome is not ours to determine. Take the time to create a process that leaves you feeling inspired and moving forward.'***

Perhaps you have to adjust your ambitions to suit the reality of funding available to you. This is the beginning of a sustainable business practice. If you can live in the reality of where your business currently is, you can slowly build to where you want it to be. If we overstep or push too hard at the start, we can become disheartened, burdened by debt and more likely to abandon our creative work.

### **You have new music and now you want to release it.**

The focus of this handbook is to help you assemble and oversee a plan for releasing new original music. That means music that hasn't had a public release before. One question that would often come up at our workshop was - is it OK to re-release music? Perhaps you put something up on your Bandcamp profile and mentioned it on Facebook but never followed it up with servicing to radio, digital streaming services or media. Can you take it back, repackage and

release it again? There are no rules. If you feel like you want to give it a proper chance then go for it.

If you have already serviced the song to DSP's (digital service providers like Spotify/ Apple/ Amazon) then you will need to take it down first. This means getting in touch with the aggregator who put it up for you (Tunecore/ CD Baby/ Ditto) and asking them to pull it down from these services. Would I do it myself? Probably not, especially if it has already been on streaming platforms outside of Bandcamp. Rather than leading with this song as a single I would hold it back as a bonus track, B-side or put it on my next EP or album.

## **COVERS**

What about a cover as a single? Covers are great, especially when you bring something new to them. Would I release one as a single? Probably not. Again this isn't a steadfast rule, nothing I say here except *don't go into debt* is a rule. They are opinions based on my experience. Why wouldn't I? Because I am establishing myself as a songwriter. I want my original work to be what defines me. Perhaps later in a career where your voice is well known, releasing a cover can be a point of interest but early on, I would hold them back as B sides or something to offer to fans.

Do you need permission to cover someone's song? *Only if you want to distribute and sell your own version of the song.* If you're playing the cover as part of your live set then all you need to do is add it to your APRA live performance register at the end of each financial year. If you're recording the cover you can get a mechanical license from the publisher of the song. If you want to place a video of the song on platforms like Youtube (this includes a version of you singing it) then you need a sync license from the publisher.

I'm not going to go into great detail around these licenses, there is plenty of information out there, especially regarding Youtube and monetisation. One thing I will say is that it's very rare you'll have publishers hunting you down for these licenses if you don't yet have your own publishing deal. If you want to be on the right side of the law then by all means be thorough. If you have a publishing deal of your own, then their job will be to take care of negotiating these licenses for you.

## **WHAT YOU NEED**

You have a mastered WAV of your new single. It might be part of an EP or an Album or it may not be. Plenty of artists choose to release singles these days without attaching them to a specific body of work. At the beginning of a career where you are finding your sound or don't yet have the resources to record an EP or Album, releasing singles can be a manageable way to get your work out there. The process will teach you some things about your audience, what worked, what you could do better next time – the things you missed or didn't yet know about.

***'The best way to learn about releasing new music is to do it.'***

Before you start the process here are some things you will need to do:

- 1) Register the song with APRA and become a member if you aren't already. APRA is the Australasian Performing Rights Association. Their main job is to collect royalties for the performance of your songs (live or broadcast) and pay you. Make sure to acknowledge any co-writers and assign them an agreed upon percentage. This can all be done in the backend of the APRA works registration.
- 2) Assign an ISRC (International Standard Recording Code) to identify and catalogue your song. The ISRC allows you to get paid for digital music sales by ensuring that your royalties are tracked properly. ISRC codes are necessary to sell or stream your music on digital service providers like Amazon and Spotify. You can purchase a code from [isrc.com](http://isrc.com) but you will automatically have one assigned by whichever digital aggregator you choose to upload your song with. There are many but Tunecore, CD Baby and Ditto are the ones most frequently used in Australia. [Here's a list of digital aggregators and how they rate.](#)
- 3) If you are not licensing the copyright of the recording to a label then you should register with PCCA. What's the difference between APRA and PCCA and why do you need to register your work with both? [Here's some info to help you understand copyright better.](#)
- 4) Create artwork for your single which includes your band / artist name and the title of the song. This will be the cover that goes up across digital service providers. Spotify requires that your artwork be a complete square JPEG file, no more than 4MB in size and no less than 640 px width or height. Make sure to find out the specs for each site you are uploading to.

Perhaps the song you are about to release is standalone and you don't see it as part of a larger body of work. Although there are no hard and fast rules, most streaming services like Spotify see an album as more than 30 minutes in length and 7 or more songs. Generally speaking an EP is shorter, about 4-6 songs and is sometimes referred to as a mini album.

I think it's cool to release singles on their own, just to keep your music in people's minds. It can be fun to record and release a song without having to think about how it fits into a bigger plan.

## **WHY MAKE AN ALBUM**

This question is best answered when you look at the collection of songs you have written. Does it feel complete at 4 or 5 songs? Maybe they're songs you want to release between albums? Or something you want to sell on tour as a means of making more income. No rules.

I'm not hugely prolific so I generally release albums. This happens about every four years if I'm lucky. If you wanted to release work without putting in the same amount of planning as an album campaign then an EP might be the way to go. One thing to remember is that (in most cases) EPs aren't given as much press coverage on release.

My third album *In Blood Memory* was 7 songs in length and came in at 32 minutes. It was almost ineligible to be nominated for the Australian Music Prize. Still snuck onto the shortlist though.

### **WHY RECORD LABELS?**

I co-founded Milk! Records because I couldn't see the point in sharing 50% of profits with a label when I had financed making the album. I was also curious to see if outsourcing certain roles like PR and physical distribution and using an aggregator for digital distribution would see me make a greater profit. It did, but I had to work for that money.

Most independent labels in Australia won't have more than \$10,000 to advance you. If you're low on funds and it helps you to finance a clip or tour, then it's worth considering. Remember that your advance is recouped against sales of your music and any syncs you might procure. Until the advance is recouped you (and the label) won't pocket any profit.

Most labels will offer the services of a Label Manager who can:

- 1) Make sure your music is on streaming platforms and in brick and mortar stores.
- 2) Service to national and local radio and submit to streaming platforms for playlisting in the territory you are contracted.
- 3) Coordinate a promotional and marketing campaign so people know you have new music out. Help create digital assets for social platforms to accompany the campaign.
- 4) Work with you and your team to plan and execute the roll out of your album. They'll work to a release timeline, help you make a decision around what singles you'll release and remind you when you need to deliver key assets like singles and videos.

The most common deal with an indie label is 50/50 on profits once the advance has been recouped. Labels ask from anywhere between 5 - 10 years (usually on scale with the amount of the advance) to license the master recording of your album which means you have plenty of time to recoup and most albums do.

There are definitely good reasons to release with a record label, especially if their roster has some well known and respected artists that you feel a connection with. They may have a loyal

following on social platforms and a healthy mailing list. A label may also have relationships in place with key radio, streaming and music publications which can help you to be heard.

## **STARTING YOUR OWN LABEL**

I once asked BRIGGS why he started the Bad Apples Music record label. He said there were really no commercial incentives in opening a boutique independent label anymore and that he started his own label to make sure First Nations artists were taken care of with the respect, support and cultural understanding they deserved.

Getting signed to a label can be hard. Most boutique indie labels are under-resourced and not able to release more than a handful of records each year (if they're committed to doing it properly). Putting in the work of setting up your own label is a lot of work but worth it. Again labels are not necessary or that relevant any longer - just go release your music!

## **GRANT FUNDING**

I see applying for grants as formulating a business plan with a \$5-\$15,000 carrot dangling at the end. I hate doing them but they make a world of difference and provide us with that all important cash flow so we don't need to keep hitting up friends, family and partners for funding (not so great for the ol' self esteem after a while).

Over the years of running I Manage My Music workshops and masterclasses we spent a lot of time looking at the steps needed in planning your next music project before you start. Here are some tools you can use to get clear about what you are going to do with a particular focus on applying for grants. For music touring, recording projects and creating new work check out your local government and even local councils who provide funding for all states and territories. Here in so called Victoria we have Creative Victoria which is music and arts specific. There is also the national funding body Music Australia.

1. Before beginning any project, get clear about what it is you actually want to do/create. Sit with a band mate or business partner and talk it out loud while they take notes. Get some feedback and see if/where there are any holes (vagueness) in your plan.
2. As you list the ACTIONS you will need to take toward fulfilling your plan/goal it will become apparent where you most likely need to spend some cash. So now you can go about meeting with appropriate people and getting quotes. Make sure to get three quotes for any one job (i.e. three quotes from CD pressing facilities) this will make sure you don't overspend on a project and teach you about the different service providers out there.
3. Now that you have a realistic overview of what your project is going to cost and you have these figures ON PAPER and IN QUOTE FORM. You are ready to put together a working spending plan (budget is such a restrictive word) for your project.

4. Now to the **TIMELINE**. It's very important to be **REALISTIC** and not apply crazy amounts of pressure on yourself. The most important thing is that you keep your timeline flexible, so if plans change you don't need to have a melt down. Creativity needs focus, but too much pressure can cause stress which transfers into procrastination and depression. Remember creative projects are much more fulfilling when you are having **FUN**.

**Your PLANNING should incorporate these basic things:**

1. What am I going to do?
2. How do I plan to do it?
3. What will it cost me to do it?
4. What are the benefits and outcomes of doing this for career longevity?

This is pretty much what every funding body grant application is going to ask you. They want to see that you are a) Living in reality b) Planning ahead c) Aware of exactly what you need to do in order to complete your project.

**When you begin any kind of grant application make sure to:**

1. Read the guidelines for eligibility.
2. Read the guidelines for eligibility.
3. Read the guidelines for eligibility and **underline anything you don't understand**.
4. **Call up the project officer and ask them about the things you don't understand**. Their contact number will be on the application and answering your queries is one of the tasks they are getting paid for.
5. Make sure your budget **BALANCES** in both income and expenditure.
6. Get someone to read over your budget who has experience with financial planning (even a family member who sets up budgets for work projects).
7. Be honest about where you are in your career, the panel are usually artists and industry practitioners who have a good understanding of the scene and where you likely fit into it, so there is no need to oversell yourself.
8. Be very clear about how this project is an important step in your career and the benefits that will come from completing this project. Let us see that you have a long-term goal for your creative aspirations – a **VISION**.

9. Start your grant early and do a little bit often rather than doing it all the day before. You'll be less likely to leave things out of your application this way. Remember you need to send music, bios, support material and quotes for most grants so give yourself PLENTY of TIME.

10. Even if you don't get the grant you have a BUSINESS PLAN at the end of the process. You will be clearer about how you can make your next music project and be less likely to run into debt. **Call the project officer and ask if there were areas you could improve in your next application, they are also paid to do this!** It can take a few goes before you get it right. Don't give up.

## OUR BIGGEST MISTAKES

There are common mistakes we make as self managed artists, believe me I've made them all! Here are the Top 5 missteps many artists make at the beginning of their career...

### 1. (Don't) Isolate.

If you're sitting at home uploading your songs to online platforms waiting to be discovered then you're doing yourself a great disservice. Music is about playing with people, to people. Go out and support your local music community. It's amazing how many opportunities start to come your way when you take notice of what other people are doing. Go see three bands a week, minimum.

### 2. (Don't) Go into debt.

The number one killer of creative projects is debt. It's so easy to get into and so hard to get out of. In service to our 'dream' we strain relationships with partners, friends, and family by borrowing beyond our means. Do everything in your power to be sustainable from the start. Go for grants, play fundraiser shows, use crowdfunding or Patreon platforms. You'll feel heaps better about yourself too.

### 3. (Don't) Think a record label or manager will save you.

No one can make you famous. Too many artists put the cart before the horse trying to find interest before there's any kind of buzz or respect for what they are doing. The best way to find an audience is to create your best music. Spend time on writing, recording and rehearsing your live show. Develop your practice as an artist. The stronger your songwriting and performance becomes the better your chance of attracting a manager or label that wants to work with you.

#### **4. (Don't) Employ a publicist before anyone knows who you are.**

Rather than spending thousands of dollars employing someone to send your music around, do it yourself. We have an amazing community radio network in Australia and people are listening! Tune in, check out their websites, take an interest in shows that are playing new Australian music. Then send your music to that person with a personal note. Again, if you take an interest in your community then chances are people will give you a spin.

We have a great service in Australia for servicing your latest single or full EP or Album release to radio called [AMRAP's AIRIT](#). Personally, when servicing a new song to radio, I like to do a lot of research myself. Jump online and go and check out the specialist programs on your local community broadcasters like (click on these links and it will take you straight to their programs listing) [Triple R](#) [PBS](#) [FBI](#) [Edge Radio](#) [RTR](#) [4ZZZ Radio Adelaide](#) and of course our national broadcaster Triple J and Radio National. There's local ABC and a many more community broadcasters well worth investigating but time spent looking at specialist programs that suit your style of music means two things:

1. When you send them your music it's targeted to your genre or style.
2. You can start to build your own relationships with broadcasters.

REMEMBER community radio broadcasters do it for LOVE not money. Most of them are not playlisted so you have an excellent chance of getting your music a spin.

#### **5. (Don't) Forget to plan ahead.**

It's easy to get excited and jump head on into a recording project before you've really thought out what you are doing. Take some time to sit down with another bandmate or close music friend and talk through what you want to do next. They can be the sounding board and also help you see where there might be holes in your plan. Are you going to make a clip for your single? Is it going to be an album or an EP? Will you tour the release? Where is the funding coming from? Who's going to mix your record? Take the time to answer these questions before you commit. Excellent planning makes for a much easier release experience and ultimately greater success.

## **DIY DISTRO**

So what's essential?



1. Find a digital aggregator. A lot of people use Tunecore, Ditto, CD Baby and most of them have different services they can match to take your songs further. They'll upload your song, Album or EP to Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon e.t.c
2. Open a Bandcamp account and link from your website store to your Bandcamp page. You can also sell physical merchandise through bandcamp. It just means a trip down to the post office once or twice a week to send off your albums, tees e.t.c
3. Compile a list of the great independent record stores in Australia who have survived because they cater to a niche market and stock quality music. See what they stock and if your music fits the bill. Then touch base and see if they might be interested in stocking a small amount of your Vinyl. Here's a helpful list of retailers who also take part in [Record Store Day](#) each year. They love vinyl and limited releases AND like community broadcasters they do it for the LOVE.

## **DIY SOCIAL MEDIA**

1. MOST IMPORTANT ABOVE EVERYTHING ELSE IS HAVING YOUR OWN MAILING LIST. Whether that's Mailchimp who offer their service for free initially or paid services, having a professional newsletter – a way for people who dig your music to subscribe to you – is super important. WHY? Because the cheapest, most direct marketing is straight to someone's inbox. They've signed up because they like you so it's not a hard sell.

2. Instagram, TikTok, Threads.

To be honest I get a little tired of all the Social Media carry on. I reckon find one or two platforms that feel good and keep them fresh.

## **Stats and Tracking your success**

1. If you want to keep up to date with *who* is talking about your music and *when* [Google Alerts](#) is a fantastic free service. Anytime your name is mentioned an email comes direct to your inbox with the link or news story.
2. A good mailing list application as mentioned above will have stats showing you how many people are opening your mail and clicking through to your links. You can get a good idea of what newsletters are connecting and why.

## **DRAFT AGREEMENTS & TAX LAW**

1. A wonderful online resource for indies in Australia can be found at [AMIN](#) where they outline what to look for in standard licensing and distro deals as well as providing information on Tax Returns and what you can claim.

2. [Music Arts Law Australia](#) also have some sample agreements worth checking out before you do business.

3. Want to tour overseas? Make sure to check in with [Sounds Australia](#) first.

4. If you're releasing music yourself (being your own record label) then make sure to register as a member with the PPCA and APRA

It's a lot of work huh? But we owe it to ourselves as small business practitioners – whether we are managed or not – to understand the business of the industry we are working in. As overwhelming as it can feel, you're starting by reading this. Good on ya!

[Jen Cloher](#)