

MUSIC WORKERS ALLIANCE

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Shared Purpose (our mission)

MWA is an organization of, by, and for independent music workers. MWA seeks to initiate, organize, and support collective action that empowers independent music workers.

Focuses of Work (our priorities)

- 1) Fighting for music workers at the federal, state and city levels for access to benefits, fair protections, and jobs

For example: Safe reopening of live music, access to UI benefits and social safety net for freelancers, use of public resources to support music workers directly, guarantees that all recipients of public funding and subsidy pay music workers fairly,

- 2) Economic justice and fair working conditions for music workers in live venues and recorded music settings

For example: Fair contracts, contracts for all, minimum pay rates, fair pay from venues that stream gigs, protections against discrimination and harassment: respect for the right of all music workers to receive a fair share of all the wealth generated by our labor.

- 3) Economic Justice in the Digital Domain

For example: Fair copyright protections, stopping mass online copyright infringement, fair pay and rules for streaming, expansion of fair opportunities for DJs to monetize online sets

- 4) Social Justice/Culture shift (equal access for people of color and other underrepresented groups in the industry)

For example: fighting against discrimination in hiring and pay, fair royalties, and fighting to get past work recognized and paid

Operational Bylaws

Steering Committee: Composition and Purpose

The Steering Committee determines the direction of MWA in fulfillment of the organization's mission and is the final decision-making body of MWA.

The Steering Committee will plan to meet weekly, but no less than biweekly.

Voting members of the Steering Committee will all be music workers.

The Steering Committee will strive for diversity of race, ability, sex, age, gender identity and expression and sexual orientation and may prioritize these factors when recruiting new members.

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The Steering Committee is at least 6 but no more than 15 members.

The Steering Committee has the right to veto any decision of a Standing Committee or subcommittee thereof (see list of six standing committees below) that is contrary to the mission or bylaws of MWA, against the law, or poses a dire threat to the organization as a whole. Steering may also send a decision back to a committee with comments and a request that that committee further refine a proposal.

Every Steering Committee member has a right to attend any MWA committee or subcommittee meeting, and shall be given notice of the scheduling of such meetings by the chair(s) of the relevant committee on request. Such attendance rights do not automatically confer voice or voting rights.

Steering Committee: Election and Term of office

The current¹ Steering Committee of MWA is: John Medeski, Phillip Golub, Kevin Ray, Marc Ribot, Anders Nilsson, and Gene Perla.

Elections will be held for the Steering Committee at the end of each year. A Steering term is 3 years in length.

Steering Committee members may be removed by consensus of all current Steering Committee members, not including the member proposed to be removed.

Grounds for removal shall include non-participation, failure to regularly attend Steering Committee meetings, discrimination or harassment of any MWA member, acting against the mission of MWA or otherwise in a manner harmful to the organization.

Names, emails and bios of Steering members are accessible to all MWA members².

The Steering Committee makes decisions by consensus. Definition of consensus: one or more blocks or 1/4 or more stand asides prevents consensus. After two good faith attempts to modify the proposal to reach consensus, an up/down vote may be taken to pass a proposal, requiring supermajority support of 3/4.

In order to further MWA's mission of music worker empowerment; or to replace Steering Committee members who have resigned in between election cycles; the Steering Committee shall have the right to appoint new Steering members in between election cycles. All appointees shall be MWA members in good standing who have demonstrated a willingness to participate in MWA activities. Appointment of such new Steering members must be approved by an absolute majority of all Steering members, including those whose resignation has caused the vacancy necessitating the appointment. All such appointed Steering members must stand for election by the membership in the next Steering election.

¹ Current as of March 1, 2025

² See here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/1biyN-bdz9aKRTbQfroboZs9KdpKSaLJI0BtO9NjeGcY/>

Steering Committee: Roles

Facilitator: Conducts the meeting. Aims to direct discussion toward decision-making; decides when to check for consensus on proposals. This role alphabetically rotates weekly. Can ask for a co-facilitator if needed.

Notetaker: Takes notes and sends them out via Slack or an agreed upon communication channel. This role alphabetically rotates weekly. This person takes notes during the meeting and the report should memorialize decisions and next steps.

Scheduler: Keeps list of facilitators. Reschedules or pairs up facilitators if needed. Reminds Steering about the upcoming meeting and tracks RSVP's. If no quorum is expected, meeting is rescheduled. The term of the scheduler position is twelve meetings.

The chairs of the committees are not necessarily members of Steering, but each committee should have at least one Steering Committee member on it.

Standing committees will be represented in the steering committee either by the co-chair(s) of that committee or from steering at large.

Secretary: Keeps records across the organization and tracks legal reporting.

Treasurer: Manages budget and accounts with support from fundraising/finance committee/chair.

The Steering Committee may appoint members of Steering to serve as President, Vice President, or other officer positions for the purposes of legal documentation.

Steering Committee: Proposals and Votes

Any steering member or committee chair can make a proposal. Proposals should be written, sent before the meeting to the Slack or an agreed upon channel 24 hours in advance if possible, unless limited by time-sensitive necessity (vote to accept at the beginning of steering meeting), and include all relevant information, why MWA should do it, and which committee it should be assigned to.

Each proposal needs to have a lead, someone willing to work on the proposal and move it forward.

The Steering Committee can approve, modify, table, or send proposals to a committee for discussion and recommendation.

If a member cannot attend a meeting, they may debate the proposal and proposal sponsor via Slack and can voice support, stand aside or block by virtual proxy.

An absent member may appoint a proxy from the Steering Committee to represent them at the meeting. The absent member must provide the proxy with written instructions, which shall be shared with the Steering Committee and delineate which votes the proxy should represent them on. However, due to the outcomes of debate, the proxy can be directed as to the member's vote preference, but are not held to it should the discussion change their mind.

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A quorum for decision-making on the Steering Committee for the purposes of the Steering Committee decision is a majority of members, including those who are present and voting by proxy. If quorum is not present, members present can make a decision to publish to the full committee, allowing for any blocks to come forward in a week's time, if time permits. If no consensus is reached, the proposal as it stands does not pass and no action is taken.

Definitions

A *music worker* is a musician, DJ/Producer, or sound engineer.

An *independent music worker* is anyone regularly working in the *indie sector* of the music industry.

The *indie sector* consists of the production of independent label or self-released recordings and work in the recording-related network of live venues and touring circuits.

Recording-related refers to any live gig, festival, and touring intended to develop, market test, promote recorded music, or access recording opportunities, and includes work in any touring circuits for which commercially available recordings are generally considered a pre-condition.

Categories of MWA Affiliation

There are two categories of affiliation with MWA: members and supporters.

MWA Members: Any self-identified independent music worker who supports the mission of the MWA may apply to join MWA as a member. However, MWA does not accept salaried elected officials or director level staff from AFM, SAG-AFTRA, UMAW, or similar organizations as full members.

We define music workers as musicians, DJs, sound engineers, or others who work with sound. We shall accept applicants as members if they: regularly participate in the making of commercially available sound recordings; are regularly paid to perform at live musical performances open to the public; are regularly paid to DJ in venues open to the public; are regularly paid to engineer sound in any of the above situations; or any combination of the above.

Non-music workers may participate by invitation of committees as such committees find useful and appropriate, but shall have neither voice nor vote in decision-making.

MWA Supporter: Anyone who is not a music worker who supports the mission of MWA may become an MWA Supporter.

MWA Members

Prospective members may apply to join MWA by filling out the form at musicworkersalliance.org/join. Applicants requiring accommodations can apply via other methods by contacting the Membership Committee at members.of.mwa@gmail.com.

All members will be granted access to MWA general membership meetings, the Slack space, and will be eligible to join working committees, ad hoc committees, and caucuses.

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Members have the right to participate in votes of the general membership. Some votes may be specific to music worker type or geographic area.

All members have the right to approach any member of the Steering Committee or any Committee chair with an idea for a proposal.

All members are encouraged to promote the mission of MWA and recruit new members.

Members may be removed by the Steering Committee. Grounds for removal shall include acting against the mission of MWA or otherwise in a manner harmful to the organization, including misconduct, discrimination or harassment toward other MWA members.

MWA Supporters

People may become MWA Supporters by filling out the form at musicworkersalliance.org/join.

Supporters will receive newsletters, calls to action, and invitations to special meetings, but are in general not invited to membership meetings or the Slack space and do not have voting privileges. Supporters will be encouraged but not required to make donations to MWA.

Supporters may be removed by the Steering Committee. Grounds for removal shall include acting against the mission of MWA or otherwise in a manner harmful to the organization, including misconduct, discrimination or harassment toward other MWA members or supporters.

Dues

Dues for MWA members pay are \$5 or more/month (\$60 or more/annually).

Those suffering financial hardship are encouraged to pay what they can, at minimum \$1/month. Financial hardship dues status shall be on the honor system. All requests to the Membership Committee for lowered dues requirements will be accepted. No one unable to pay full dues will be denied membership in MWA.

Voting on key organizational issues and election of officers will be open only to dues-paying members (including those paying at lower rates due to financial hardship).

We also have a Pay it Forward option, where members pay over the suggested amount, to support other members who are unable to pay full membership dues.

Standard Dues: \$5 month/\$60 year

Financial Hardship: \$1-5 month/\$12-\$60 year

Pay It Forward Suggested Amount: \$10 month/\$120 year

Committees

Six standing committees further the mission of the MWA. They are:

Organizing Committee

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Builds the capacity of MWA membership to take action; oversees and advises worker organizing campaigns and supports Workplace Organizing Committees; shapes organizing campaign proposals for steering; recruits members; solicits trainings for members and may evaluate the effect of every proposal and campaign on building the organization and music worker support; prioritizes solidarity and creates opportunities for leadership development within MWA to organize groups of members to go out and support the actions of our partners when/if possible.

Workplace Organizing Committees may be established by the Steering Committee for the purposes of organizing a specific venue, employer, workplace or series of workplaces. All voting members should be impacted by said workplace. Before undertaking a collective economic action against an employer such as a strike or boycott, the Workplace Organizing Committee will define the bargaining unit (for example, the music workers who have gigged at or for the business in question within a reasonable period of time) and make a good faith attempt to contact all members of the bargaining unit to ascertain the support of a majority of the bargaining unit before starting collective economic action. Before signing any agreement with an employer, the Workplace Organizing Committee will make a good faith attempt to ascertain the support of a majority of the bargaining unit through a ratification process.

Policy & Politics Committee

Manages relationships to elected officials and government agencies; proposes, plans policy and legislative campaigns, and executes those approved by steering (with other committees where appropriate); tracks relevant legislation, what's happening in government, the implementation of laws and policy to develop perspective on how MWA should/shouldn't act; manages relationships with partners around positions on policy; makes recommendations to steering when others come to us for co-signing policy statements; writes policy position papers in conjunction with Communications Committee; solicits experts and advisors to support the committee's work; evaluates the practicality and likelihood of success of all policy and political proposals.

Communications Committee

Speaks and advises on all external and some internal communications for MWA, as well as asking relevant expert advisors to vet all external communications for legal and risk issues; writes and sends public facing website copy, social media copy, press releases and statements; writes and sends monthly newsletter to members/supporters/ mailing list; handles external comms with other orgs, press inquiries and solicits and manages press and interviews; answers emails and inquiries about press; manages press database; works with Policy & Politics Committee and Organizing Committee when appropriate; creates materials for educational purposes and presentations and resources for members.

Data Team

Collects information, researches campaigns and targets; collaborates with and supports/ advises the other committees. Issues, campaigns and targets can be referred to the Data Team for further analysis by Steering or Committee chairs.

Membership Committee

Focuses on relationship building and member retention for the organization; writes and sends communications to members, with the help of the Communications and Organizing Committee

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as needed; routes inquiries from members to the appropriate committee or person; manages member database and Slack; supports member-driven caucuses/slacks/etc.; reviews applications for MWA membership; onboards members; runs and solicits training opportunities to build the capacity of the membership and the organization.

Fundraising & Finance Committee

Increases financial capacity and sustainability of MWA; researches and pursues options for funding through foundations, grants, government support, donors and grassroots funding; educates and coaches members on how to fundraise; manages fundraising events/campaigns/subcommittees etc.

Caucuses

Caucuses and Slack Channels (managed by Membership Committee) may be formed and managed by MWA members around informational topics, interests and identity groups. Ideas should be presented to steering and such caucuses should have a chair person who coordinates with steering.

Any group of MWA members may form a caucus. Caucuses wishing to be formally recognized/endorsed by MWA must submit a proposal to the Steering Committee.

Committee Chairs³

Chairs can be appointed or removed by the Steering Committee.

Chairs must regularly report the activities of their committees to the Steering Committee.

Chairs can direct activities and recruit their own members.

Chairs are responsible for scheduling and running meetings of their committees. Generally, regularly occurring meetings should be scheduled at least a week in advance, meetings notices should be posted to the Slack channel and also through calendar notices (including the MWA gmail address so it shows up on the master MWA calendar) and an effort should be made to accommodate the schedules of the most active members in the committee.

Chairs can make small decisions around their area of work that must be reported to the Steering Committee and are subject to review.

Major decisions should be proposed by Chairs to the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee can direct Chairs to take on projects.

Chairs can communicate with other Chairs independently to ask for help and should include those Chairs in discussions that impact their work.

Committees should focus on their area of work.

Committees should discuss any proposals sent to them by the Steering Committee.

³ Current committee chairs can be viewed here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/19LzCqXGp22NWGook6S9w1NVjr2ynWE0NSZhBL4-qdRo/>

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Any member of the committee or the chair can make proposals to their committee. The committee can modify, recommend or not recommend these proposals by majority vote. The consensus model is encouraged in committee decision-making where possible.

Chairs should report to the Steering Committee what their committee's recommendations are.

Chairs can and should make proposals to the Steering Committee that come out of their committees.

Chairs are responsible for reporting out on the activities of the group to the Slack channel, monitoring their committee's Slack channel, and addressing priority issues.

Chairs should seek the input of MWA Advisory Board members as appropriate to inform their work. Such advice should be shared with the committee when possible.

Chairs should seek to develop leaders in their committees.

Chairs are responsible for holding an inclusive and welcoming space and encouraging participation as much as possible.

Grievances

MWA is committed to providing a safe and inclusive space to all members in all MWA spaces. [MWA's Grievance Policy](#) describes prohibited behaviors and the grounds and process for filing grievances. The document can be found here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TmCNHjLFZ9TiEg72JX-y4vSULQJS9s_1/view

Legal Bylaws

MWA has applied for nonprofit corporation status with the state of New York and has filed a set of [legal bylaws](#) and established board members as part of the [certificate of incorporation](#).

Amendments

Amendments to the operational bylaws, legal bylaws, or to the Certificate of Incorporation may be proposed to the membership by the Steering Committee. Amendments to the operational bylaws may be proposed by members. A member may propose an amendment to the operational bylaws by furnishing signatures in support of the amendment from 10% or 40 members in-good-standing, whichever is less. Amendments and signatures should be provided in writing to the Steering Committee.

In the event of a proposed amendment, the Steering Committee shall notify the membership within two weeks. This notification shall include the text of the amendment, an invitation to an informational meeting, and shall outline a timeline for debate and voting. No more than six weeks shall pass between this notification and the end of the voting process.

Amendments to the operational bylaws, legal bylaws, or to the Certificate of Incorporation must be ratified by a majority of votes cast of a quorum of 15% of the general membership.

Points of Unity

A number of indie music worker organizations have sprung up in recent years and have grown exponentially during the Covid crisis. To build collective power and to prevent our groups from undermining each other we propose the following Points of Unity.

1. Foundational Principles

- A. The drive for profits exerts a downward pressure on wages.
- B. As indie music workers (musicians, DJs, sound engineers, and others who work with sound) we need to aggregate our power to win economic justice and prevent the drive for profits from destroying our livelihoods.
- C. It is the purpose of our organizations to aggregate music workers' power through collective economic and political action.

2. Democracy

Music worker organizing must be democratic. It can only succeed when the music workers on the gig have the right to determine:

- A. what businesses to target,
- B. what demands to make,
- C. what tactics and strategies should be employed to win those demands,
- D. when to end the action and what on what terms to settle (ratification).⁴

These rights, in turn, can only be upheld by an organization of, by, and, for music workers, governed by music workers, and accountable to music workers.

3. Independence

The American Federation of Musicians (AFM) has functioned successfully in direct employment (a.k.a. Fordist) sectors of the music economy in which it has held contracts since the 1940's. Examples include major label and major film score recording, network television, "club dates" (weddings, bar-mitzvahs, private parties), Broadway, symphonic, and more recently, conservatory music teachers.

However, the AFM

- A. doesn't permit DJs as members,
- B. is dominated by the core constituencies working the sectors mentioned above,
- C. is neither representative of nor accountable to indie-sector music workers,
- D. is constitutionally unable to offer the democratic rights outlined in point #2,

⁴ We adhere to the principles of democratic organizing and believe that we must develop standards to implement them, even in organizing situations outside NLRB processes mandating such democratic rights, and even in complex freelance situations in which precise boundaries are unclear.

- E. has been unable and unwilling to organize the indie sector (indie label recording and recording-related⁵ live performance), which now employs the vast majority of working musicians.

Until those conditions change we need to organize separately.

4. Anti-Racism, Anti-Sexism, Anti-Homophobia

We are committed to maintaining a safe and welcoming environment within which all BIPOC, LGBTQ, and women and non-binary members can participate freely and with a feeling of respect. We pledge to fight against the “tyranny of the majority” within our organizations through the encouragement of caucuses for underrepresented groups and through the active encouragement of diversity in leadership.

5. Solidarity

We pledge to actively support any organization committing to these principles by:

- A. coordinating actions and supporting each other’s campaigns wherever possible,
- B. resolving any issues internally and not engaging in public disparagement,
- C. respecting all boycotts, picket lines, and strike calls of our sibling organizations.

6. Relations With the AFM

Although we are critical of the AFM’s failure to represent indie sector music workers and do not recognize the AFM’s right to *exclusive* jurisdiction in the indie sector, we respect its jurisdiction and achievements in the sectors the AFM has under contract. We pledge:

- A. our solidarity with all brother, sister and non-binary sibling musicians who have organized through the AFM,
- B. to expel any member who knowingly and intentionally serves as strikebreaker by violating an AFM or AFM Local Do Not Work order in any action democratically supported by the workers of the business being struck,
- C. to work, wherever possible, in coalition with the AFM towards the goals expressed in this document.

We are workers in an unorganized sector of the music economy, not scabs.

7. Copyright

We support copyright as an essential workers’ right of music workers. Without copyright, there can be no fair market for recorded music, digitally distributed or otherwise.

⁵ By “recording-related” we loosely mean gigs where people play who intend to make records, have made records, are touring to promote a record, or are looking to gain press or buzz in the scene. This is distinguished from engagements in the wedding industry or the hotel bar industry, for example. Though this is not an exact definition, it generally describes the club scene and touring networks which, with a few exceptions (Cf. Nashville), has rarely been organized by the AFM.

We recognize the historic injustice committed against individuals and communities — in particular Black creators — who have too often been historically denied access to copyright. We call for a correction of past injustice, full restitution to those harmed, and the institution of future measures to assure that the full benefits of copyright are available to all creators.

We stand with all other “content creating” unions and stakeholders in calling for the reform of the DMCA to end mass copyright infringement.

We also support the right of every music creator to be properly credited for their work in all analogue and digital forms.

8. Indie Music Worker Empowerment

We seek whatever coalition will benefit our members’ interests: but we represent music workers, not employers or other businesses profiting from music workers’ labor, regardless of whether such businesses market themselves as “indie”, “artist friendly”, or “underground”. No business model is a substitute for the collective empowerment of music workers.⁶

Although many of us record for indie labels, we don’t believe that business arrangements in which artists are expected to fund some or all recording expenses out of pocket in exchange for larger back end payments are inherently “anti-corporate” or “progressive”.⁷

We are here to win economic justice for music workers from their employers: not to favor one class of employers, level of employees, or model of employment over another.

We call for the collective empowerment of music workers against exploitation, regardless of whether that exploitation is direct, or indirect; regardless of whether we are exploited by major label, major distributor, online service provider, live venue management, or indie label; regardless of whether the music worker being exploited is a citizen or undocumented, is labelled a “employee” or “independent contractor” by the state, pays their taxes on a W-2 or 1099, or works in the cash economy.

9. Political Platform

We stand for the right of all brother, sister, and non-binary sibling workers to organize against all who profit from our labor, and against racism, sexism, and every other “ism” that divides music workers on the gig. We believe it is the obligation of the state to protect all workers

⁶ On the contrary: the transfer of all the economic risk of making a recording onto the backs of artists creates an economic barrier to the participation of low-income people as artists and cultural workers. This is the principle form of structural racism in the music industry, chilling the expression of many talented, low-income BIPOC young people.

⁷ Such mythology ignores the fact that much indie production is a form of outsourcing — often for purposes of union avoidance — and generates corporate profits further down the line. No compelling case can be made that small businesses generally pay or treat music workers any better than large ones. Furthermore, the major labels remain the only unionized sector of the recording economy, where music workers are guaranteed good wages and benefits.

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suffering from unemployment and support copyright as a basic workers' right in our industry. Beyond that, we accept the diversity of our members' cultural and political beliefs. We impose no political litmus test for membership, nor do we impose any preconceived political agendas beyond those demanded by the members themselves in the course of our struggle for empowerment.