Music Workers Alliance Work to Date (as of January 2021)

JUNE 2019: MWA is founded as an indie musician and DJ committee of NYC Artists Coalition. Its founding members included two members of the NYC Nightlife Advisory Board who noted the lack of public discourse of the plight of working musicians and DJs in the local policy space.

OCTOBER 2019: The group, still under the NYC Artists Coalition umbrella, meets with the Commissioners of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and the Mayor's Office on Media and Entertainment to discuss four areas where New York City can move towards a more musician and DJ - friendly ecosystem. These areas included: a potential venue rating system, a music census for NYC, establishment of a workers center, and a commitment that publicly-funded venues would honor a minimum wage for artists and workers.

NOVEMBER 2019: The group, still under the NYC Artists Coalition umbrella, works with NYC Council Member Brad Lander to give input on the potential impact of proposed Freelance isn't Free legislation updates, particularly around the unique conditions of music that require special consideration when designing labor protections for freelancers.

FEBRUARY 2020: The group, still under the NYC Artists Coalition umbrella, meets with Governor Cuomo's office and members of the NYS Legislature to give input on the potential impact of proposed gig-worker legislation, and begins meeting with labor and advocacy groups to discuss possible unintended consequences for musicians and potential ecosystem solutions that would strengthen the social safety net for all freelance workers, including musicians and DJs.

MARCH 2020: Music Workers Alliance is established as an independent entity, with a steering committee that has grown to include representatives from local NYC musician and DJ organizations including Arts for Art, Building Beats, Discwoman, Indie Musicians Caucus and the Jazz Committee of Local 802 AFM, MOMENT NYC, Musicians for Musicians, Sound Mind Collective, Underground Producers Alliance.

During the pandemic MWA's work has taken on a new urgency. From March to Summer 2020, MWA:

- Established social media and web presence, launched regular open organizing meetings for musicians and DJs, and offered support to music workers who were applying for unemployment.
- Requested State government relief for all gig economy workers and began coordinating with artist and freelancer groups across the country.
- Launched a letter campaign calling for unemployment benefits to be extended to all workers impacted by Covid-19 in partnership with Local 802 of the American Federation of Musicians and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music (AACM).
- Hosted webinars on social services to assist musicians and DJs with rent relief, renegotiating health insurance and debt, and mental health as well as copyright 101 for DJs, and a music community panel on "Forever Money and Structural Racism in the Music Industry"
- Launched the "Economic Justice in the Digital Domain" petition to demand that Facebook, YouTube, and Google share their COVID profits and end mass online copyright infringement (coverage by NPR, Downbeat, Brooklyn Vegan, and Mic). The petition, which reached over 5,000 signatures, was entered into the Federal record as part of the Senate Subcommittee on Intellectual Property hearing on use of artist works on platforms like YouTube and Facebook.
- Launched the Unemployment Countdown Clock and Unemployment Stories Campaign, which highlights the unique challenges that live performance faces and the problems with the unemployment system through the individual stories of musicians, which are shared with their federal and state representatives.

“I'm applying for jobs every day, to no avail because I don't have experience or training for anything else than what I do.”

“My job won't just come back as if nothing happened... Our entire industry is a flailing mess.”

“I was thriving as a Broadway pianist & now I feel like I have lost everything. I’m doing occasional work as a housekeeper which is unsafe during Covid but all that I have & receiving unemployment.”

“If I were still in the corporate world, I’d be getting paid but as a musician, if you don’t show up, there’s no money for you”

“Continuing to pay my mortgage is probably the biggest anxiety I have. I was thankfully able to receive a 3-month suspension from my bank, but that ended last month.”

“But the entire industry is just folding - it's a huge blow that makes me realize just how vulnerable we are as music workers, and how dismissed we are.”

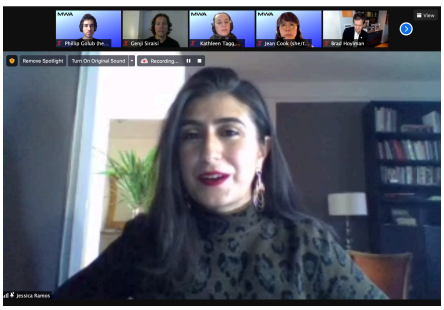
“My lease is ending July 31 & I will likely be putting my belongings in storage. I cannot justify starting a new lease if there is still no work in the Fall and unemployment benefits end.”

“As a singer, I am considered a super spreader and so I don't think I will work until there's a vaccine.”

“The impending expiration of $600 weekly unemployment benefit on July 31 will be a devastating blow. If it is not renewed or extended, I will not be able to make ends meet here in New York City.”

FALL 2020: MWA partnered with a number of freelance worker, music industry, and labor groups to coordinate and push for unemployment relief. This included organizing a March for Survival (coverage by The Pace Report) and a Musicians and DJ Town Hall (coverage by City and State NY), hosting phone banks mobilizing hundreds of music workers to call elected officials and request extend pandemic unemployment insurance for gig workers, and, noting the lack of data about the specific challenges of musicians and DJs, conducting a How Are We Surviving survey (coverage by PBS Newshour).







WINTER 2020: MWA formalized its structure and agenda, including establishing governance structure and democratic process, membership criteria, steering committee, standing committees, and working groups.

For more on MWA, visit www.musicworkersalliance.org