



Advancing Collaboration with Save The Music Foundation

Approach to Collaboration

At Save The Music, collaboration is at the heart of all our projects. Through our school district partnerships, we invest in public school music education. When we make a grant for musical instruments, equipment, or professional development for teachers in a school district, the school district's commitment and active participation ensures that the program works. When we make a capital investment in a school, the school district then makes a budgetary investment of teacher time, classroom space, and scheduling music during the school day. We try to work with everyone in the district - the teacher, the principal, the music supervisor, the superintendent, the school board - and also the larger community music ecosystem of local non-profits, music artists and philanthropies.

We do a lot more now around convening people, collecting data, and developing a shared vision for a project before we embark on fundraising. We hosted

a convening in New Orleans and brought together around 150 different people in the music education community. We rallied them around the idea of every child in each school having a music education, which created this coalition group that we brought to funders.

We're a fundraising as well as a granting organization, so we work with large philanthropies to build out our plans. In Newark, New Jersey, we're in the fourth year of a five-year plan to invest in over 40 schools in the area. At the end of the project, 98% of students in the area will have access to music education, compared to the initial 50%.

At a high level, we need to activate the whole music ecosystem in a community for our projects to work. We bring together different stakeholders, and our programmatic role is to invest in each school. These projects only work with that level of collaboration.

Application of the 9 Considerations for Collaboration

Build Trust

In our community work, we want to spend time with the people we're hoping to serve by listening to them and building our work around what they need. Our hope is that this bottom-up approach helps to build trust. In New Orleans, we build trust by showing up in person and taking the time upfront to listen before we step in with any of our ideas about how we can make things better.

On the other hand, we like to spend a great deal of time with the people within the school districts we work with; our program team does weekly video calls with teachers, administrators, and superintendents across the country as we try to build strong relationships. Collaboration allows us to achieve the impact we hope to have.

Have a Vision

We envision that every student at every school in the US will have music as a part of their education. The implementation of our vision is dependent on our community-driven projects. We want to have a very clear idea of what we do. At the moment, we're bringing in remote and technology partners to help us with the 50% of students who don't have laptops at home. Many teachers had to learn how to teach music remotely in as little as a day. We try to stick to what we do, and as circumstances evolve, we bring in collaborative partners in different communities to address differing needs.

Seek to Assure the Success of Your Collaborators

We're big believers in clear, transparent, and specific partnership agreements. We spend time with our partners coming up with plans before we implement them. As a national organization with a reliable brand name, we hope we are creating a space for local partners to work together in new ways, so we can collectively work towards the finish line.

Take Stock

Every other year, we come together for a SWOT

analysis. As a group, we lay out what we think our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats might be. We've discovered that the effectiveness of the teacher is a significant factor in our success within a given school, and have been investing more time and resources into professional development for teachers. We aim to be rigorous in our identification of what we excel at – bringing people together, creating projects, and catalyzing music ecosystems.

Start Small

Before the pandemic, we had a relatively small teacher resources page, but recently, we've seen a demand for more information about how to teach and make music online. We started with one staff member scouring the web and talking to partners. We've had such an amazing response to the remote learning resources page, we've decided to invest more into it to see if we can get funding to build it out into a much bigger remote learning and teaching hub.

On a larger scale, if we're aiming to tackle a 50 or 100 school project in LA or New York, we plan to stage the project over several years. Within that time frame, there are phases where we could build out funding for the first one to two years and see how it goes before building more momentum. This method often works for us because it builds enthusiasm for the project, and people can see students thriving and making music. Funders and partners see the schools becoming warmer, more welcoming places.

Fail Fast, and Build Rigorous Feedback Loops

We see this notion on the school district side of things as well. When we're beginning a project, we might come across the first 20 schools with enthusiastic principals, great teachers, and strong communities. However, as we progress further into the project, it becomes harder to reach our goals as we might encounter a tougher set of schools with intrinsic or structural challenges. Our projects,

phased over certain timeframes, always leave room for natural reassessment or retrospective points.

Take a Portfolio Approach

We don't approach a school district or community with a preconceived notion of how music works for them. We have a portfolio of grant types that span from K through 12. We've been expanding and testing by working with districts on Pre-K through third grade as a different set of options, then also in high school with music technology, recording, production, and more. We operate with four different grant types, and we see how we can adjust based on demand from the school districts. We also take a portfolio approach on the funding side. We have a diverse set of funders – from philanthropists to our board, and our corporate partnerships with companies such as JetBlue or Toyota.

Consider Non-traditional Partners

In the music and arts sector, there's much discussion about STEM to STEAM – taking STEM education and

adding the arts. We search for opportunities to link STEM to the arts, as musicians can hone their listening skills or enhance their creative problem-solving ability. When students learn music, they're learning a set of skills and abilities that translate well to any environment in the working world.

Keep Your Donors Apprised of Your Collaborations

In our New Orleans gathering, we brought together arts partners, music teachers, but also funders. We want funders to be a part of the co-creation process, and we're able to have conversations because we've been bringing them along with us. We're always bringing funders into schools, our meetings, and our showcases. We held an amazing event in Washington Heights with bands from every New York City borough. Around 200 people were in the auditorium – including funders. We want to maintain an active, collaborative conversation with funders in a way that feels natural as a part of our work, rather than acquiring the funding and sending them a report a year later.

Future Collaborations

Since we are so community-driven, we are always on the lookout for the right mix of stakeholders or big communities who are willing to work with us. We're currently looking to aggressively scale our California and New York City projects.

In the music industry, MusiCares is the gold standard for nonprofits in terms of healthcare. We would love Save The Music to be for education what MusiCares is for healthcare in the music industry.



Henry Donahue,
Executive Director
Save The Music Foundation

About the Organization

Save The Music Foundation helps students, schools, and communities reach their full potential through the power of making music. The organization was founded by MTV Executive, John Sykes. After being a principal for a day at a Brooklyn school, he could see the music program was at risk and wanted to help. In 1998, we became a nationally recognized non-profit organization restoring public school music programs. Since our inception, we have been working in 42 states. Save The Music Foundation also advocates for legislation that supports equal opportunity in music education on the local, state, and national level.

Disclaimer: All participants were interviewed about past collaborations through the framework of the 9 Considerations for Collaboration. Naturally in some organizations, not every one of the considerations are applicable to their circumstances.