

The Pittsburgh Music Ecosystem Study:

ACTIVATING A COMMUNITY RESPONSE



Executive Summary

Pittsburgh's music ecosystem spoke up for this study. This complex and interconnected system of creative and business professionals provided an overall picture of economic struggle and frustration. However, data from interviews, focus groups, and an online audit of 1,800 respondents also reveal a number of improvements already in motion. With a long-term focus on developing the following five areas (Leadership, Career, Industry, Policy and Audience), Pittsburgh's music people with the support of their community can adjust course, stabilize and grow their ecosystem.



Leadership Development

For a variety of reasons, leadership has not emerged from within Pittsburgh's music ecosystem in the way we might expect to see from other groups or industries. There is also a lack of civic involvement. 88% of Pittsburgh music people do not participate in government or business gatherings of any sort. Thus, in various domains of policy, economic development, nonprofit or philanthropic support, music-related issues just aren't getting addressed. Therefore, this study's primary recommendation is a two-part development of leadership skills for music ecosystems, to include:

Civic Engagement Training Program:

A bootcamp or series of workshops to develop skills in areas such as public policy-making, community development, cross sector collaborations, systems change, nonprofit administration, all with the goal of helping music community members elevate the ecosystem's capacity to become more accountable for its own needs and interests.

Music Industry Change Initiative:

A larger and more sophisticated structured change initiative bringing together representation of various music sub-sectors along with community leadership in government, philanthropy, nonprofits and private sector into a formal cross-sector collaborative body aligned on specific outcomes for Pittsburgh's music scene. This effort is not a new organization or "gate-keeper" but rather a 3-year initiative with dedicated administrative support that would sweep a path and develop working groups focused on finding longer term solutions to root-cause issues affecting Pittsburgh's music world.

"If you are trying to make this city more industry friendly you should start by building up from the foundation."



Career Development

Every sub-sector of economic activity in Pittsburgh's music industry is built around the output of its creative workforce. However, we also see that 50% of these creatives played 10 or fewer gigs last year. We can help musicians, most of whom are sole proprietors, find more time to be creative by improving and expanding their music business skills. Specific recommendations include development of a multi-institution music education pipeline, an intensive grant program for artists/bands creative development, and a wider range of music industry workforce training seminars rather than just entry-level education. In addition, small wins that could be pursued in the short term include a royalty registration drive and a series of musician revenue development workshops.

"Get bands to admit if they are here to work or if it's just a hobby. So many can't decide and don't want to commit but want the recognition and pay of a real working band."



"Pittsburgh needs to update its local laws, so music can be played at bars. The venues are dwindling as the scene is growing! We need more quality places to play!"



Regulatory Reform

Despite a complex regulatory landscape, and a history of punitive approaches to nightlife, the City of Pittsburgh is rethinking its legacy systems and can make significant strides in reducing regulatory compliance concerns for music venue operators. At the same time, if leadership within the music ecosystem can better develop and organize itself and provide clear feedback to help shape policy, especially those that impact community standards for public safety, economic conditions for the industry will improve.

Specific recommendations include waiving amusement tax for live music venues under 350 in capacity, centralization of sound complaints into a 311 process, a partnership strategy for music-friendly districts to develop new locally-controlled sound ordinance overlays, adoption of a best-practice sound management strategy, a pilot program to temporarily explore hybrid uses and a more diverse classification of nighttime venues in zoning and land use code, and finally, giving the Office of Nighttime Economy a clearer role in the city code, which would allow it to better manage a coordinated partnership approach with music industry operators.

"From my 3 years in Pittsburgh, I see a promising cultural scene and a busy entertainment industry, but very little 'music industry' that is concerned with the actual commercialization of music."

"Audience development ranks 1, 2 and 3 for me. Nothing else comes close to it. Good venues with good experiences and good bands, then everything else falls into place."



Industry Development

Pittsburgh's diversity of professionals providing services for the music industry (in 42 separate sub-sectors) is world-class, but they are underutilized by local creatives, who are more apt to struggle in "do it yourself" (DIY) strategies. There are gaps in expertise and many providers as generalists may not have the specialization of skills necessary to compete nationally. Recommendations include creation and maintenance of a central directory of service providers, development of a Pittsburgh Music Venue Alliance, increased networking opportunities both within and across sub-sectors, more mentoring opportunities for younger industry entrants, a regional alliance with neighboring cities to develop shared resources, and finally a live music venue best practice guide.



Audience Development

Changing interest in live music is a great concern especially for Pittsburgh's local music scene, despite data that indicates an optimistic outlook for growth of local music programming over the next three years. There are a range of strategies to help stimulate interest and shift perception of the value of local music, including launching a Love Pittsburgh Music Month, developing a master gig calendar, creating a basement music festival, curating patron-centered live music experiences often in non-traditional places (supported by a music fan survey), certifying skilled audio engineers, providing micro-loans for music venue audio installations, supporting radio that features local music, and coordinating new models of local music patronage.

This study provides a starting point and benchmark for change. Just by becoming aware of its own interconnectedness (the premise of the music ecosystem), Pittsburgh's music community can activate a response, especially with an initial focus on building its own leadership capacity. This enables music people to start working collaboratively across sectors on deeper systemic issues affecting development of careers, audience, industry and music-friendly government policy. By resisting the temptation of quick fixes, true population-level change for the thousands of participants in Pittsburgh's music ecosystem will become possible, and music can become more widely embraced for its powerful potential to help drive Pittsburgh's resurgence as an exceptional and vibrant place to live.