

ARS: FAQ and Talking Points for Member Organizations

November 18, 2010

What is FMC doing?

Launching a multi-method research project will collect information from a diverse set of US-based musicians about the ways that they are currently generating income from their music or performances, and whether this has changed over the past ten years.

Why is FMC doing this work?

There have been meteoric transformations in how musicians create and distribute their music over the past ten years, and significant disruptions to the traditional music industry business model. Many observers are quick to categorize these structural changes as positive improvements for musicians across the board, but we think this is painting with too broad a brush. To this point, measurements about the effect of these new technologies on musicians' ability to make a living have either been anecdotal or speculative. Even the most esteemed books about copyright in the digital age are largely based on theory, and lack qualitative data.

FMC's research goal is to examine the issue from many different musicians' perspectives, so we can get a more robust and realistic sense of what it's like to be a working musician in the 21st century. FMC believes that this proposed research is essential to understanding how changes in the music landscape have really affected musicians, and how they could affect the arts and culture field in general, that will inform the development of successful models in the future.

Research questions

We seek to find out: what percentage of musicians' income comes from each possible revenue source? What is the ratio among different sources, whether it be royalties, money from gigs, t-shirt sales, or any of the 29 other meaningful revenue streams that FMC has identified? Has the ratio changed over time and, if so, what are the factors that have conditioned these changes? Finally, are the revenue stream ratios different for artists working in different genres and at different stages of their careers?

Who is FMC studying?

All US-based musicians, singers, songwriters and composers who are 18 years or older, who have at least 6 recording credits on commercial releases. In the rest of this document we refer to this group using the umbrella term "musicians".

Research components

In-person interviews with a small but diverse set of musicians in 2010-11, followed by a widely distributed online survey in 2011. We are also reviewing any accounting and royalty statements they feel comfortable showing us, with an understanding that any financial information is not identified with any particular band or label. We feel that this multi-method approach will help us to get the best snapshot of different musicians' income streams and create a more robust and meaningful report.

Why is FMC reaching out to organizations, unions and PROs?

We know that the ultimate success of this project is based on how many different musicians participate in the project, especially in the online survey. This is why we're reaching out to over 50 membership organizations/unions and PROs now so we'll be able to encourage as many musicians as possible to take the survey when it's in the field in the summer/fall of 2011.

What does FMC want organizations to do?

We would like you partner with us on this project. Here are four options:

1. Introduce us to someone who you think should be interviewed in the case study stage. We're keen on speaking with artists who work in different genres and at different stages of their careers. Let us know if you have an artist that might be interested in speaking with Jean or Kristin.
2. Encourage your members/artists/constituents/clients to take the survey:
 - ✓ Send out a paragraph via newsletter
 - ✓ Post a message to your blog, Facebook or Twitter
 - ✓ Let us run an ad in your magazine
 - ✓ Directly email your membership

In all cases above, FMC will provide you with draft language, images and links to details.

3. Participate in a stakeholder review of the survey question set. We plan on drafting and testing the survey question set in the next few months, are we're looking for a few folks at key organizations who would be willing to kick the tires before it's launched.
4. Join the more formal research advisory committee for this project, and give feedback on the structure of the project and how we interpret the data.

We recognize that getting your members to participate in a survey is difficult, and that you may want to reserve your "asks" of your members for a survey that you are doing yourself. That said, we think you will understand that the kind of research are doing has the potential to benefit the entire field, and we want to make sure your members are represented.

What do organizations get if they participate?

You can be credited in all of the marketing and reports that come out of this project, if you want. We can also potentially give you a breakout of survey data for any members who designate their membership in your organization during the survey phase.

What kind of input do organizations get in the survey questions?

If your organization wants to become a project partner, you will have the opportunity to review and give feedback on the survey questions before they are finalized.

Who else is partnering with FMC?

We are working with Pew Internet and American Life Project to develop and administer the survey. They will also do the analysis and help disseminate the study when it is released.

Does FMC have sample case studies or a sample survey to review?

We will have some draft sample case studies available in December 2010, and we will have a draft survey by March 2011, which will give you a sense of what kinds of questions we're asking.

What is FMC's timeline?

We are hoping to complete interviews for 20 case studies of artists from a wide range of genres and roles by late spring 2011. Marketing for the survey will begin in early summer 2011, with a tentative launch for late summer or fall 2011.

Who is funding this study?

This two-year project is currently 40% funded, and we seek support from a wide range of groups. Right now our largest funder is a prominent foundation, and we also have support from the Ford Foundation and Google. We are seeking support from additional groups including: Joyce Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation, Haas Sr Fund, MacArthur Foundation, the Music Publishers Association of the United States, the Copland Fund and the Copyright Society. If you have suggestions for additional folks to approach with this project we would appreciate them.

Who is on your research advisory committee for this project? What do committee members do?

The research advisory committee will be composed of 6 to 12 social research experts who have experience studying artists and the creative industries. So far we have confirmed Mary Madden at Pew Internet and Peter DiCola from Northwestern University Law School. Research advisory committee members will be asked to give feedback on protocol, the survey instrument, pilot case studies, and our initial findings. This is a volunteer board that will only meet virtually.

What are next steps?

If this project is successful, we'd like to expand the scope of the work and look at musicians working in other countries. We'd also like it to be repeated on a regular basis – say every 5 or 10 years in the US – so we could really build some valuable longitudinal data. Of course, all of this future work is funding dependent.

What are you expecting to prove with this information?

FMC isn't out to "prove" anything. Like all researchers, we have hypotheses that we're testing. We don't know the outcome of the research, so it's hard to say what the conclusions will be. We are clear about why we think this work is important. To this point, measurements about the effect of these new technologies on musicians' ability to make a living have either been anecdotal or speculative. FMC's research goal is to examine the issue from many different musicians' perspectives, so we can get a more robust and realistic sense of what it's like to be a working musician in the 21st century. FMC believes that this proposed research is essential to understanding how changes in the music landscape have really affected musicians, and how they could affect the arts and culture field in general, that will inform the development of successful models in the future.