
Audio Engineering Society



Conference Express Paper 3

Presented at the AES International Conference on
Breaking Barriers in Audio
2025 April 3–5, Virtual

This Express Paper was selected on the basis of a submitted synopsis that has been peer-reviewed by at least two qualified anonymous reviewers. The complete manuscript was not peer reviewed. This Express Paper has been reproduced from the author's advance manuscript without editing, corrections, or consideration by the Review Board. The AES takes no responsibility for the contents. This paper is available in the AES E-Library (<http://www.aes.org/e-lib>), all rights reserved. Reproduction of this paper, or any portion thereof, is not permitted without direct permission from the Journal of the Audio Engineering Society.

CROSSFADE Collective: Amplifying Diverse Student Perspectives Through Creative Collaboration

Naomi Wolfe¹ and Zeynep Özcan²

¹University of Michigan

²University of Michigan

Correspondence should be addressed to Naomi Wolfe (newolfe@umich.edu)

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the development and implementation of CROSSFADE Collective, a student organization at the University of Michigan designed to foster innovation and collaboration in electronic music and media arts among historically marginalized individuals. The organization addresses a perceived gap in available resources, specifically the absence of low-pressure, non-academic environments for project workshoping, peer feedback, and collaborative networking. Research, including community-engaged investigations and interviews with leaders of similar student organizations at other institutions, revealed a scarcity of spaces conducive to constructive dialogue on identity and representation within academic settings. This paper details the research process undertaken to identify key components of an effective creative community, drawing from interviews, academic coursework, and a focus group. It further outlines the implementation of the organization and analyzes its initial outcomes and future objectives, striving to serve as a framework for creating community-engaged student organizations.

¹ <https://myumi.ch/bVZ76>

1 Introduction

The landscape of electronic music and media arts, while innovative, has historically marginalized certain voices and perspectives [1, 2, 3]. Addressing this lack of diversity is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and representative creative environment [4]. CROSSFADE Collective originated as a community-engaged project within PAT 315/525: Diversity in Music Technology, a course offered by the Department of Performing Arts Technology (PAT) at the School of Music, Theatre & Dance, University of Michigan. CROSSFADE Collective¹ seeks to cultivate a diverse, creative, and collaborative environment for musical expression at the University of Michigan.

In practice, CROSSFADE Collective establishes self-imposed deadlines, offers performance and feedback opportunities, and sustains a creative space “by artists, for artists.” This approach is designed to amplify the diverse perspectives of creatives, particularly those of gender-marginalized artists, and to create an equitable, open, and aware field. CROSSFADE Collective aims to connect musicians, visual artists, engineers, and other interested creatives through bi-monthly meetings, educational workshops, publications, and communitybuilding initiatives, thereby forging a creative, empathetic, innovative, and artist-driven space.



Fig. 1: CROSSFADE's logo designed by Reese Ford

2 Foundational Principles of Community Engagement

Preparation for creating a community-engaged initiative involved a structured approach, beginning with participation in the Community Engagement Essentials Workshop at the University of Michigan Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning². This workshop provided a framework for effective community partnership, emphasizing the importance of understanding community needs, power dynamics, and long-term sustainability. We utilized this framework to guide the development of CROSSFADE Collective, focusing on three core principles: centering community-identified needs rather than individual assumptions, critically examining and addressing potential power imbalances, and planning for the organization's legacy and long-term viability [5]

Establishing a community-engaged space requires moving beyond individually perceived problems and focusing on community-identified solutions [6]. To facilitate this, the process began with a preliminary focus group involving interested students to ascertain their needs and expectations for a new community.

Furthermore, effective community-based intervention necessitates a thorough understanding of power dynamics and legacy, not only to prevent disruptive engagement but also to ensure a sustainable and constructive space [7]. To gain foresight, the authors consulted with two students in leadership positions within similar organizations at other universities. These discussions provided insights into long-term planning for the collective. Additionally, the preliminary focus group included questions designed to obtain information from University of Michigan students about how an organization could best support them.

Finally, after acquiring knowledge about community-engaged practices, successful comparable organizations, and the needs of peers, the findings were integrated into a club structure and weekly

² <https://ginsberg.umich.edu>

meeting format to establish a diverse and creative space that would benefit the community [8].

3 Field Work

Research started with a preliminary focus group conducted with students within the University's electronic music community. This initial meeting was advertised exclusively to Performing Arts Technology students to obtain a focused understanding of the perceived gaps within both the academic community and existing creative organizations, as well as to gather ideas for the potential contributions of CROSSFADE Collective.

Attendees participated in this preliminary meeting, which began with an overview of the organization's goals, followed by an open dialogue guided by the following questions:

- What are things that you look for in a student organization that could be implemented here?
- What are things that could be improved about the greater PAT program?
- What keeps you from joining other similar musicrelated organizations on campus?
- What would get you to join and come to meetings? What could excite you specifically about a collaborative community space like this?

Participants were encouraged to use these questions as a framework for discussing the collective's potential, rather than providing direct answers. Through this discussion, the following key factors were identified:

Participants were encouraged to use these questions as a framework for discussing the collective's potential, rather than providing direct answers. Key themes emerging from the focus group included a strong desire for structured peer guidance, opportunities for constructive feedback outside of formal academic settings, and a need for collaborative spaces that prioritize diverse voices and backgrounds.

Participants also emphasized the importance of facilitated performance opportunities and a community run by and for artists.

The subsequent research phase involved outreach to comparable, successful organizations at universities with similar music and technology programs. Contact was made with numerous organizations, resulting in two interviews with leaders from New York University (NYU) and Brown University. Both interviews utilized a structured list of questions addressing legacy, leadership practices, financial management, and general organizational procedures.

The first interview was conducted with Senaida Ng, Founder and President of NYU's Gender Equity in Music Club³ and New York-based electronic music collective WE ARE THE FUTURE! The most important takeaways from this interview were the emphasis on regular events to maintain member engagement, the importance of focusing on the joy and meaning of creative collaboration, the need for early consideration of legacy, and the value of including the broader group in decision-making and event planning.

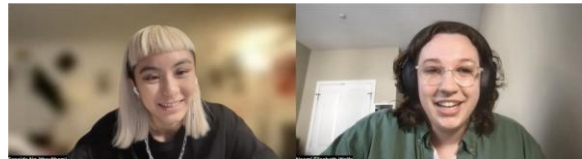


Fig. 2: Zoom meeting with Senaida Ng

The second interview was conducted with Xander Chen, Booking Chair of Brown University's student concert production organization Sounds@Brown. Chen's primary insights included the importance of event planning that reflects the interests of the broader community, the necessity of advanced planning, the value of working with and advocating for university resources, and the need for well-established executive roles and communication protocols.

³ <https://engage.nyu.edu/organization/womxninmusic>



Fig. 3: Zoom meeting with Xander Chen

Conversations with Senaida Ng from NYU Gender Equity in Music and Xander Chen from Sounds at Brown University yielded critical insights into effectively facilitating a constructive student space. These interactions connected us with talented musicians and leaders in other communities, while also providing a comprehensive understanding of the successes and challenges faced by comparable community and studentbased organizations. These discussions highlighted the importance of delegation, clear communication, and a democratic, artist-centered approach to the Collective to effectively integrate diversity and collaboration goals. This feedback was instrumental in developing actionable steps to achieve the organization's objectives, which included consistently soliciting community input and adapting to the needs of both the Collective's members and the broader community.

4 Organizational Structure and Guiding Principles

Drawing upon the information gathered from the focus group and interviews, a formal meeting structure and a set of organizational goals were established. Three core goals were identified: feedback, motivation, and collaboration. CROSSFADE Collective would provide a dedicated space for feedback, offering opportunities to present visual arts, music, and interactive media to an audience of fellow creators. Furthermore, creative motivation would be prioritized through structured deadlines, encouraging consistent artistic output. The third and central goal is fostering collaboration, creating a space for individuals with diverse creative backgrounds and shared priorities to connect. Integral to these creative objectives is the prioritization of marginalized voices and the facilitation of discussions concerning

identity and representation. Emphasizing inclusion and diversity is essential for cultivating a supportive creative environment, as the pursuit of a productive artistic landscape necessitates community and a commitment to equity.

These goals would inform a bi-monthly meeting structure, wherein participants would register in advance to present works in progress. Presentations would be limited to a maximum of 10 minutes each, beginning with a statement of intention and the articulation of specific feedback sought. These meetings would culminate in semester-long projects, with the fall semester focused on a compilation album and the winter semester on a concert or installation. These projects and meetings would be supplemented by fundraising initiatives, guest speaker presentations, and a monthly newsletter.

5 Conclusion

The development of this project has proven highly gratifying. The difficulty of managing self-imposed deadlines and balancing creative work within and outside of academic settings was a recurring theme. CROSSFADE Collective has provided a platform to address this, encouraging collaboration and facilitating connections among creators. The importance of focusing on community-identified needs when addressing issues was emphasized through both classroom discussions and the Ginsberg Center Community Engagement Workshop. Therefore, it was particularly rewarding to engage with peers and discuss their requirements for such a space. Many participants not only confirmed the initial concerns but also proposed valuable action items.

Throughout this process, the ambitions of the collective have evolved, and the team has grown. Our executive board, moving forward, consists of individuals filling roles for graphic design, business, and president positions. In the upcoming semesters, we aim to implement the intended meeting structure, drawing from the planning undertaken during the fieldwork process. We aspire to work with other student organizations to widen our community and reach. These initiatives will actively engage the

broader University community, showcasing the collective's hard work. We also hope to host events such as concerts, art fairs, lectures from working creatives, and publish a monthly newsletter. As we continue to grow and receive more input and ideas, CROSSFADE Collective hopes to further serve the creative spirit of the University of Michigan and promote diverse and empathetic collaboration and exploration.

collective creativity." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge & Management*, 7, 2012.

References

- [1] Rodgers, T., *Pink noises: Women on electronic music and sound*, Duke University Press, 2020.
- [2] Alvarado, L. and Cárdenas, A., *Switched on: The Dawn of Electronic Sound by Latin American Women*, Contingent Sounds, 2024.
- [3] Hinkle-Turner, E., *Women composers and music technology in the United States: Crossing the line*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006.
- [4] Gaston-Bird, L., *Women in Audio*, Focal Press, 2019.
- [5] Atlee, T., Buckley, S., Godec, J., Harris, R.-A., Heierbacher, S., Nurse, L., Pyser, S., and McCallum, S. R., "Core principles for public engagement," *National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD), International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), Co-Intelligence Institute*. Retrieved March, 15, p. 2021, 2009.
- [6] Dobbs, L. and Moore, C., "Engaging communities in area-based regeneration: the role of participatory evaluation," *Policy Studies*, 23(3), pp. 157–171, 2002.
- [7] Wollschleger, J., Killian, M., and Prewitt, K., "Rethinking service learning: Reciprocity and power dynamics in community engagement." *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*, 12(1), pp. 7–15, 2020.
- [8] Parjanen, S., "Experiencing creativity in the organization: From individual creativity to