

STARTING A COLLECTIVE

Artist collectives are successful when they ensure everyone is contributing equally, while also respecting the varying schedules of members. [EyeSplice Collective](#) has managed to create some guidelines that have helped us to maintain an active and self-selecting membership. Transparency at all levels is a major key to success, and shared online documents have helped us on this issue.

STEP 1:

Think of a list of 7-10 members for the collective, and try to select people from vastly different locations (both nationally and internationally). This will provide the most opportunity for the group. Each member can focus on applying to opportunities in the area they live in (taking advantage of in-person connections), as well as opportunities unique to their network (people they meet at residencies, conferences, group exhibits, educational institutions, etc.). Also, it may be helpful to try to select artists with diverse practices in terms of media and subject matter in order to make curating more interesting. However, some collectives may be specifically comprised of people working in a particular medium, so this is a case-by-case decision.

STEP 2:

Create a shared Google Document to track the opportunities each member has applied to. The main rule for the collective is that everyone must apply to at least 1 opportunity on behalf of the group each year. The opportunities do not have to include all members, but at least a few. Everyone logs their applications on the shared document so we can keep track of not only who has completed their obligation, but also, where have we applied, and what has been successful or not. This history helps with future planning for the group.

STEP 3:

Invite members. Here is a sample invitation:

Hello ____,

[Reference to how we are connected]. I am creating an artist collective, [name of collective TBA if the group will be generating it, or the founder could select it], which consists of a variety of artists who work together to create exhibitions and supplemental programming across the country and internationally.

I am happy to inform you that you have been nominated for membership by [who nominated them]. After a careful review of your work, we have unanimously agreed to invite you to join our collective! We're especially excited about your approach to [reference specific element of their work].

A bit more about us:

____ Collective, founded in [year], is a group of [description] artists who develop work from [backgrounds, motivations and geographical locations]. Membership is completely voluntary and on a member-nominated basis. Our mission is to sustain a network of artists who challenge and support each other through exhibitions, lectures, critique, and professional development opportunities.

Members of ____ Collective benefit from other members curating and organizing exhibits, which include their work. Our group exhibition schedule is an extension of our individual practices, and keeps us making and showing work, while allowing us to gain exposure in regions we might not otherwise have access to. Our goal is to expand our networking and professional development opportunities across the country.

What we expect from our members:

Members should be active in the group, including becoming familiar with each member's body of work, contributing to conversations, making new work, and seeking out opportunities for the group. Each member must apply to at least 1 opportunity on behalf of ____ Collective per year (does not have to include all members, but must include a few). Traditionally this has focused on proposing thematic group exhibitions and screenings at various venues, but this can also include writing grants, organizing a panel discussion or lecture, or otherwise providing an opportunity that benefits other members of the group.

We look forward to the ideas and programming potential that is opened up by our new membership and their bodies of work. I hope you'll consider joining us! We welcome any questions you may have, and look forward to hearing from you soon.

STEP 4:

Create an online presence (blog, website/page, etc.) for reference in your application materials. The online presence should include a list of all members and links to their individual websites, and a short description/history of the collective. As the collective starts to exhibit, include a chronological list of the exhibitions.

STEP 5:

Apply for opportunities and organize exhibitions. It can be helpful to maintain a shared Google Folder and sub-folders where all exhibition application materials can be easily uploaded/downloaded/accessed. This way participants can deposit images, image lists, CVs, artist statements, etc. and also track what others have submitted.

STEP 6:

Have a group Skype/Google chat at least once a year. At that time, check in with people to talk about accomplishments from the past year and upcoming opportunities. This is also a time to check in with members to ensure everyone has applied for an opportunity on behalf of the group. Obviously, there can be flexibility if there are extenuating circumstances. This online talk may also be a time of transition when members leave the group if it looks like it will be too difficult for them to continue fully participating. New members may also be nominated at this time.

It is helpful to have an shared agenda document in the Google folder before the meeting so everyone can add agenda items. Ask someone to record minutes at the Skype meeting, which will also be stored in the Google folder. These documents will act as a type of on-going record of the Collective's activities.

If you have questions, feel free to contact us via Ellen Mueller at ellen@ellenmueller.com