

FAQs Group Studios

Arts Habitat

Establishing a Group Studio

Often, several artists decide to join together to rent a space that will allow them to share equipment and/or jointly pay for exhibition space. An individual may take the responsibility of signing a master lease and subletting space or use of space to other artists. A more formal entity may be formed to sign the lease, such as a legally formed leasing cooperative, corporation or nonprofit. Once signed, the lease is a legal contract binding you and the other party to its contents. A standard commercial lease is a triple net lease in which the tenant is responsible for all expenses including insurance, taxes and operations/maintenance of the tenant's share of the property. A long-term lease includes an escalator clause to reflect changing market values, inflation and so forth. Read your lease carefully and understand your obligations and rights.

A group of artists will want to spend some time deciding the organizational structure that will work best for their space needs and discipline. Take some time to meet and explore options. Establish a written mission that states the goals and purpose of the group. Is there one person who wants to take charge of and responsibility for operating and maintaining the space and equipment or will the group share responsibilities? Early on the group should establish operating procedures or guidelines that will be used to handle business and the decision-making process. It would be beneficial to establish a regular schedule of meetings to deal with activities and decisions. Committees may be established to advise the whole on options and courses of action.

“An unincorporated tenants association essentially involves a written contract providing a structure through which all parties agree on how they will operate. The parties cover the expenses of the group, but remain individually liable. In contrast, in an incorporated tenants association such as a cooperative or nonprofit organization, the corporation is liable and not the individual members. In most projects, incorporation occurs closer to the time of project occupancy; the agreements made while the group was unincorporated provide the framework for the corporation.”

(Creating Space, A Guide to Real Estate Development for Artists, Cheryl Kartes)

A group interested in leasing space may want to address some of the following issues:

- Membership criteria/application process
- Tenant improvements
- Sweat equity
- Acquisition of shared equipment
- Equipment maintenance
- Space maintenance
- Exhibition space and visiting hours

- Teaching in the space
- Time and space allotted for production/rehearsal
- Management structure
- Dispute resolution

Please contact Arts habitat for examples of group studio agreements.