



**Lower
Manhattan
Cultural
Council**

EMPOWERING ARTISTS,
INVESTED IN COMMUNITY

ARTISTS SUMMER INSTITUTE

ARTIST AS ENTREPRENEUR

ARTISTS AS ENTREPRENEUR PROFILES QUESTIONS FOR STEPHANIE DIAMOND (2010)

LMCC: Did you set out to begin an organization or a company or endeavor like the one(s) you are operating now? Can you briefly characterize the motivations and beginnings that, directly or indirectly, led you to where you are now?

Stephanie Diamond (SD): Listings Project is a free weekly email of real estate and opportunities listings focused on our creative community. I create Listings Project every week by reading, curating and personally emailing each lister. There is a sliding scale fee each time you post on Listings Project. There is no cost to receive Listings Project.

In 2003 I was in graduate school looking for a place to live close to campus. I emailed my personal email list to inquire about apartments for rent within our arts community. I found a place, but emails continued to be sent to me about available apartments. I could not resist forwarding them. Many people took notice of this and began to send me specific listings for me to forward. I did, and have continued ever since. After some years my email provider thought I was spamming. This prompted me to register for a newsletter service and Listings Project was named. To this day, I personally email all listers and read all listings before they go into Listings Project. I do not post brokers or listings with fees.

What started as a relatively small communication amongst my friends has become a staple of the arts community, growing with the people who are a part of it. As Listings Project has expanded, I've sought out advice from people outside of the arts, which has helped me explore how I think about my practice and how to continue building Listings Project as an art project and tech business. Beginning with just 50 subscribers and a handful of listings in 2003, my list of subscribers has grown to include more than 100,000 people from 70 countries --with more than 1,000 new subscribers every week. From a lot of the feedback I've gotten over the years, much of the growth of Listings Project can be attributed to my close connections to listers; and a dedication to selecting appropriate and interesting content ensures a close-knit community experience.

Growing up in New York City and studying under the John Dewey Educational System, I have thrived on community engagement all my life. I have worked with communities throughout the United States and abroad. I employ art as a vehicle to

Questions for Stephanie Diamond

bridge gaps and provide access to places and people that would otherwise never come together. I believe an emphasis on the individual intentions and motivations of the artist are equally important as the community's motivations and intentions when working together. Self-care, personal practice, and the desire for individual awareness are crucial to my work with communities.

LMCC: What is one of the most important things you learned along the way -- a key moment of seeking advice? And how did you find that advice or help?

SD: One of the most important things has been learning to trust that my personal interests can also be important to others. Recognizing that if I believe in myself and the importance of my ideas, they can potentially be important for others as well. By paying attention to my needs I have been able to find community. The key moment of seeking advice was when I realized I needed advice and asked for it. I spoke to people who personally knew, and asked them direct questions about my needs. These people ranged from my lawyer cousin, my intern, my seven-year-old niece, to artists and business people. Knowing that we are already connected to people who can help us is key, we do not need to go outside of our network to find the answers, they are often already there, and if not our network will help us find what we need.

LMCC: Are there any "mistakes" you made along the way you think other artists could learn from?

SD: I should have started charging to post listings earlier! Believe that we deserve to be paid. Working with communities does not mean our work is charity. The work can't happen unless we make it-- if we are struggling to make ends meet it will reflect in the work. We need to take care of ourselves in addition to the communities we work with. One of those ways is by making sure we are paid, and believing we can be successful and have opportunities in the art world while simultaneously being paid. Even if we are given a modest fee of \$20 that can go a long way depending on what projects we are making and how we think about it.

LMCC: What is your current business structure, e.g. unincorporated, sole proprietor, LLC, 501(c)3. How and when did you decide on that structure and why?

SD: Listings Project is an LLC. I decided on the business structure way before I became an LLC. Part of my way of discovering what route to take was by asking my list through focus groups, phone conversations, personal conversations and a survey, what they needed and what they envisioned for the list, which in turn it helped me to envision what my business could be like. This process took over two years because I wanted to make sure that I was thorough in including as many people as possible and speaking to as many experts as possible.

LMCC: What is a key area of business advice you wish you could ask someone about now?

SD: At this moment I need to call my accountant and talk to him about the accounting for Listings Project. The reason I say this now is because now is the time I realize I need to ask this. With each moment and stage of the project there is a new question, a new need and I seek it out when the time calls for it.

Questions for Stephanie Diamond

LMCC: If you could ask other artists or arts organizations one thing about their financials what would it be?

SD: For an art organization: Where's my money? When is my show? How can we work together to make it happen?

For an artist: Do you get paid and do you know the routes to take to get paid?

LMCC: If money were no object, how would you spend your time? How would this be similar to and different from what you are doing now?

SD: I would work less and I would hire people to help me. There are days when I wake up working and work till I go to bed. This often happens because of many exciting projects on my plate, and also because I am doing some things that other people could do if I could hire them. I currently have an assistant who has transformed my practice, and look forward to more.

LMCC: In your experience, what do you think is a key thing artists can learn from the practice of business? What do you think business can learn from the practice of artists?

SD: We need to talk to each other and realize that we have a lot to offer each other in ways we will never know unless we communicate.

Stephanie Diamond is an artist whose work is based in Social Practice. Her process for creating is not simply making, but to employ art as a vehicle to bridge gaps and provide access to places and people that would otherwise never converge or be seen. Stephanie's project, the Listings Project, a free weekly email of real estate, needs, wants and opportunities listings focused on our arts community has become a staple within the art world.
stephaniediamond.com