

SoundCommons proposal for Creative Capital

We're seeking funding to develop and implement soundCommons, a catalyst for the Los Angeles experimental sound community to create projects for the world wide web.

Part of our art production is creating spaces that activate social interaction. We make experimental visual and sound projects for the web as well as facilitate interactions between artists and new communities with the sound. concert series. soundCommons resides at the intersection of those activities.

Put roughly, soundCommons is Live365 meets MP3.com meets Napster meets IUMA meets Rocket but with a co-op structure.

The concept for soundCommons was developed in August while attending the 2001 AFI Digital Arts Workshop on Streaming Media. We were among 20 artists invited by AFI to participate in a series of conferences and workshops geared towards utilizing streaming media in art practice. The workshop was great for generating ideas, but was not designed to assist in implementation.

Creative Capital funding will be used to "buy the time" and initial resources needed to get soundCommons off the ground. We are requesting 9 months of support to set up the server, design the web site, organize a sustainable structure and implement the collaborative workspace. Additionally we are requesting financial support for the first 3 months that soundCommons is online as a fully implemented project.

soundCommons places a site for creation and distribution in the hands of sound artists and experimental musicians. Most current US based streaming internet radio and independent web distribution sites exist on servers controlled by commercial entities not necessarily sympathetic to less accessible forms. With soundCommons, by building a self owned method of creating and disseminating experimental sound production free of geographic constraints, we create a new venue for our own practice as well as facilitate collaborations with the community of artists in which we reside.

soundCommons is structured as a co-op in order that it may be self sustaining.

To this end, we see it as having several components:

- 1 - a web based work space for collaborative experimental art/sound projects
- 2 - a web based distribution system for the collaborative works produced
- 3 - a web based distribution system for the individual production of co-op members
- 4 - a discussion forum on experimental art/sound practices
- 5 - workshops to assist experimental musicians in learning web skills and facilitate their participation in the co-op and collaborative web workspace.

In addition to seed money, we seek the counsel of Creative Capital in strategizing a sustainable model for soundCommons. We envision tiered access to soundCommons based on a sliding scale as well as royalties from the web distribution system as providing a funding base once soundCommons is established.

Experimental music and sound art are marginalized and underfunded forms, relegated to off hours on radio and off nights in clubs. Inadequate distribution for recordings makes audiences difficult to reach. The sound. concert series increases the visibility and accessibility of experimental art and sound practices to new communities through events in inventive locations that encourage new audiences as well as promoting collaborations which draw on different constituencies.

Building on the community developed through sound.,soundCommons serves as a catalyzing/coalescing force for the diverse production of sound artists in Los Angeles. As participants in the co-op we will have the opportunity to experiment with the net as acoustic space as well expand our own practice through the collaborations it enables.

How would John Cage have utilized streaming media technologies? What would be the web equivalent of David Tudor's Rainforest? Does Pauline Oliveros's concept of "deep listening" translate to the acoustic space of the web? These are the questions that motivate soundCommons as a collaborative workspace.

Cindy Bernard and Joseph Hammer, 3/2002

Addendum to soundCommons proposal, 12/02

Since initially writing the soundCommons proposal in March 2002, I've continued to work on the theoretical underpinnings of the project. What does it mean to create a catalyst for collaboration at a moment when the public domain of ideas on which creativity depends is threatened?

Over time, I've come to view soundCommons as playing a role in the argument for an unfettered public domain through building into it's structure a system for the community exchange of files and information. The "collaborative space" referred to in our previous project description is currently conceived as a decentralized system that supports the ability to locate potential collaborators through a free exchange of files licensed for reuse in a specific community. This system of exchange becomes the fulcrum on which the other aspects of the project reside.

The components are:

- 1 - a directory of soundCommons members and an e-commerce system for the distribution of work
- 2 - a decentralized system of file exchange with a license system for encoding files and a search mechanism for locating files (perhaps an implementation of the Creative Commons licensing and search system)
- 3 - streaming radio served by a spider locating files based on licensing data
- 4 - a discussion forum
- 5 - workshops to assist experimental musicians in learning the skills needed to facilitate their participation in the system

I've split the soundCommons project into two periods for granting purposes: development and implementation/deployment. The decision was prompted by the realization that a realistic budget for implementation and deployment could not be determined until fully researched functional and user specifications had been completed.

Work during the development period will include:

1. Further research on peer to peer vs. server based solutions
2. Community building and consultation
 - a. implement soundCommons discussion list (started as of 10/25/02)
 - b. discuss soundCommons model with potential co-op invitees and get feedback
 - c. log research in public blog (started as of 8/1/02)
3. Research of economic models for structuring long term sustainability
 - a. further research existing co-op models
 - b. research similar sites (if they exist)
4. Training in databases and programming
5. Application development
 - a. user specification
 - b. functional specification (database strategy, platform, software modules)
6. Research of legal and financial issues
 - a. develop user agreement
 - b. develop accounting structure

At the conclusion of the development period, a revised budget will be submitted inclusive of the grant balance, the development expenses and the implementation/deployment budget.