

# SALT LICK

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## INCUBATOR

### Thoughts about Philosophy, Purpose, and Process

Our aim is to help talented musicians who are attempting to build sustainable careers as artists. We know this path is a complicated and often difficult one. We believe that a number of factors can contribute to the success and overall well-being of the artist and hope to find many ways to support our musicians.

### Why?

We believe in the power of music to inspire, transform, soothe, provoke, and give expression to our deepest aspirations and hopes. We also honor the artists who are committed to join the tradition of the griots and troubadours who give us these musical gifts. Particularly in light of the racism and dehumanization we see unleashed in the world, music is one of the most powerful tools we have to help people understand, hear, and embrace one another.

### Whom do we Support?

We will not have unlimited resources, so we need to select artists who are a good fit for us. In general, we are looking for people with deep reserves of musical talent (voices, playing, performance, writing) in genres outside of pop and other mainstream music (think R&B, neo-soul, singer-songwriter, Americana, bluegrass, folk, and their Latin and African analogues). We will not discourage an artist from seeking pop-music success; that is just not our sweet spot.

We also want to select artists with a “fire in the belly” to pursue a career in music (as writer, performer, producer, etc). Many talented people logically choose not to pursue such a career, are comfortable having a good day job or teaching, and their music becomes an avocation. We support and understand this, but our artists will be those who have made the choice to go after a career with all they’ve got.

We also want people who want what we offer. Some artists prefer to chart their own path and bristle at guidance/advice/support. That is fine as well, but we are looking for people who are open to having a plan, working the plan, using data and best practices to tune the plan, sharing with and supporting other artists, and being part of a larger collective.

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Of course, we cannot and will not be able to do it all. In fact, our involvement should be seen as a boost along the way, not the solution. When an artist joins us, they have not “made it,” in fact that journey is just beginning. We need the artist to continue to take full responsibility for their own career, albeit with some advice and support from us. We need to make sure that we do not allow our involvement to diminish the artist’s sense of drive and ownership of their career.

### Our Activities

The first thing we will do is offer **micro-grants** (\$5–\$15k per artist) for projects that might include a recording session, making a music video, pressing vinyl, producing merch, hiring a producer, or other similar activities. The artists will propose their plans to us; we will not dictate the plan, but we will determine whether we believe the plan makes sense in order to decide whether we invest or not.

Micro-grant recipients will agree to participate in the creation of a dashboard of **analytics** that track key measures to help guide marketing, social media, touring, and other elements of the individual artist’s strategy. This will help us fine-tune our approaches and allow a community-wide sharing of good ideas.

The next activity will be **song-writer and artist retreats**. These will aim to elevate the group’s aspirations for the quality of their writing and simultaneously create relationships/partnerships that can serve our artists in many ways. We envision the majority of the group will be early-stage artists coupled with a few experienced writers. In addition, we will host periodic **performances and house parties** to create more performance experience and allow us, our supporters, and new audiences to experience artists in action.

We will also facilitate **small group meetings**, virtual or in-person, for 8–10 artists that will offer them a community of like-minded people, some tools for sharing ideas and information, and give them a forum for coping with the uncertainty and struggle as well as the success the participants experience. The groups will be self-directed by the artists, but with encouragement to focus on well-being and the personal issues they face in addition to the career challenges. We will also

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compile a pool of lawyers, managers, agents, indie labels, videographers, PR people, producers, etc., who have been recommended by our other artists and our artists' advisory board to attempt to create a pool of competent, trusted, exploitation-free career partners.

We will create a **YouTube Channel** and likely a parallel TikTok outlet to share the music of emerging artists with a larger audience. We hope to do 40–50 episodes/year, so not all of the channel's shows will feature an artist from the micro-grant pool. We will explore a few different formats, but the end goal is to attract an audience that allows us to introduce new talent to people who have yet to hear them. Of course, as these media evolve so will our approaches to them.

We have a few other possibilities: We may offer **larger grants** to artists, which would come with contractual commitments whereby SLI could benefit economically and allow us to pass forward the investments we are making in artists. We might create a **festival or showcases** that feature our musicians. We might **partner** with labels, publishers, and others to help our artists navigate the early stages of their careers. We might offer introductory services with standard fees for those who can't yet attract independent resources like **booking or management** for a limited time frame to help artists launch.

Finally, all these ideas are in service of the larger mission of helping launch emerging artists. So we will evolve and change rapidly as we experiment and learn.

### Genre

We are not limited by genre and are more focused on the needs and aspirations of the artist. Of course, our advice will be formulated based on the realities of the music industry and a reasonable strategy to achieve sustainability, which often must consider the guardrails imposed by radio, labels, streaming services, venues, and the like.

### Success

We will define success by the strength of the collaborative quality of the community we build and the incremental steps artists take to advance their

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musical skills and their career options. We would expect that a handful of our artists will sign indie-label deals, get publishing deals, increase touring and streaming revenues, and see improvements in the analytics we track. The overarching goal is for our artists to create sustainable careers in music and to be healthier and happier as a result of the mutual support they find from one another.

Our institutional success will be largely linked to that of our artists. We will, like them, hope to generate revenue through means other than fundraising. We will hope to give our donor-partners enjoyable and unique experiences that involve our artists so that they continue to support us.

### And in the End

We will endeavor to help our artists stay in love with music-making even as they navigate the uncertainties and vicissitudes of their journeys. We will attempt to bring this joy to audiences, our donor-partners, and the ecosystem that surrounds these artists. We will try to keep joy in every part of what we do.

