

DEAR PRODUCER,

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How to Start Your Own Producers' Group

By Rachel Nederveld

From the outside, 2018 was an excellent year for my career: I had projects premiere at prestigious festivals and took part in several competitive programs and fellowships. But in reality, these successes weren't translating into any kind of sustainability. In fact, it was just the opposite. All the travel that is essential to our work, such as participating in industry fellowships and festivals, had severely disrupted my usual side hustle of commercial line producing while the related expenses were coming out-of-pocket. Being unpartnered both professionally and personally also meant that I didn't have someone else to pick up the slack in one area while another was taking off.

When setting goals for myself in 2019, I knew that what I really needed was to build a strong community around myself professionally. To accomplish this, I decided to host a monthly meeting of producers where a small group would come together to talk shop and support each other in the struggles we face. So just in time for your New Year's resolutions, here is my very easy five step process to starting your own Producers' Group.



- 1. Decide what you want to get out of it.** I wanted a group where we could get feedback and thoughts on any questions or issues that came up, pass jobs on to each other, and trust to keep our discussions private. I also wanted to make sure the energy and the group's focus was positive and constructive and comprised of people who would all add value to each other. You may have different goals, but spend a bit of time thinking about them so you get the most out of your group.
- 2. Find these people.** I have a lot of friends who are producers but not too many who I felt fit all the set criteria, so I started reaching out to friends, mentors, and anyone who I thought may know producers I should meet. I looked up lists of producers who had attended fellowships and programs with me the year prior and were located in Los Angeles and I began having general meetings with all of them. Every one of these meetings was fruitful and I was slowly building my community.
- 3. Patience.** Steps 1 & 2 took me so long. I'm a producer, so of course I put everyone else's needs above my own. But I just kept putting it on my to do list and looping back when I had the space for it and didn't get upset at myself for taking six months to get my first meeting going.
- 4. You + 2.** The first meeting was tiny and also did not happen until the summer despite setting the goal at the beginning of the year. I still didn't really know what format the get together would be, I just wanted to get it going, so I invited a couple people and asked them to also invite someone. I wasn't clear enough ahead of time that I had specific things for us to discuss, so we ended up just talking about what we had going on, what we wanted to be working on, and how we could help each other. It was a good start! If you are also getting hung up on perfectionism/overthinking, my recommendation for this step is "You + 2" - just do a first meeting with yourself and a couple other people to get yourself started. It doesn't have to be your final group or even that productive, but just getting together as a group with a goal will help motivate and inspire you for the next one.
- 5. Hold a Producers' Group.** In September I finally put together something a little more formal. I had a solid list of people I wanted to invite and a better idea of what I wanted out of the time spent together. Below is the email I sent out, please feel free to copy and paste to save you time when you start your group!

Hi peer indie producers!

I am hosting a small get together the evening of Mon Sept 30th!

The idea is we will talk about issues we are having and PROACTIVE ways to solve them. This isn't a bitching session, but a way to look to peers to help move us forward in various ways.

I'd like to make the theme for this one sustainability, and I'd love for us all to have an ASK around that theme. i.e. someone you want to meet, the kind of jobs you want passed on to you, skills you want to learn to put into paid work, etc.

Please let me know if you can come or not. If you want to bring a guest producer respond privately with who you want to bring, and if I feel like there is room based on who ends up being able to come I'll let you know!

I gathered snacks and blankets and seven of us cuddled up in my backyard for hours as we went in a circle talking about where we are with sustainability or just an issue in general we wanted group feedback on. Others would chime in with thoughts, advice, or encouragement. At the end, we went around the circle one last time and said something we are looking for and the asks ranged from looking for a producing partner to recommendations for a CPA. When the meeting concluded, everyone asked for more get togethers.

Afterwards I felt energized. I was ready to tackle the things on my long to-do list I had been feeling weighed down by and I had new ideas to implement in my own work based off of other people's shares. Meeting in a small, intimate group gave us time to be vulnerable and honest, which resulted in a group that I knew I would feel comfortable emailing any question to and that would very likely generate a real, honest answer in response.

Another month passed. I was drowning in grants then prepping a shoot and was bummed at myself for falling behind on scheduling the next meeting. Then in my inbox came an invite to a Producers' Group from one of the previous attendees who had asked about hosting her own. I was ecstatic because building our own community of support is something we all need and I didn't want to be the bearer of this for everyone! I love the idea of offshoots happening, of people finding their peers that are most aligned with them and starting their own. And this is really important right now, because as we want more "diverse" films being made, it means that we also need to be encouraging more diversity in our producers - the people who get these films made. Yet because we end up spending all our extra time, money, and every other resource to keep pushing our projects up the hill, it's currently not a sustainable career for most of us. Something has to change and the only way that can happen is by producers banding together.

I'm excited for us to grow as a community and a hope of mine for 2020 is that this extends outside of my reach. So here's to a year of independent producers banding together to figure out more sustainable, supportive ways to forward our careers and lives.

Rachel Nederveld is an independent producer based in Los Angeles and Louisiana who cut her teeth in film working on documentaries about Cajun and Creole culture. She is a current Sundance Creative Producing Fellow whose films have premiered at Sundance, TIFF, Tribeca, SXSW, and more. Current projects include the hybrid feature THE TUBA THIEVES about the experience of being Deaf or Hard of Hearing, from FREEZE, a documentary about the origin of a pop culture phenomenon from her childhood, and DUMB WORLD, a sci-fi film that explores how technology has changed our concepts of intimacy, existence, and communication.

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