

Meeting of the Freelance Musicians Association

Via Videoconference
September 3, 2025

Nate Omdal, President, Local 76-493, Seattle, WA, called the meeting to order at 6:08 PM, EDT.

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Omdal welcomed all in attendance on behalf of the Freelance Musicians Association Steering Committee.

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Gabe Kristal, Director of Organizing, AFM, and member, Local 238-291, Poughkeepsie, NY, spoke to introduce himself and AFM Field Organizers Leni Kreienberg, Local 802, New York, NY, and Jacob Nardone. Kristal announced that the Organizing Department would be providing logistic and administrative support to the FMA while it develops its organizing capacity. Kristal added that the Organizing Department is also available to help locals develop freelance organizing programs which are key to organizing independent musicians across the US and Canada. Kristal suggested that the FMA develop a diverse and representative board to best guide the actions of the FMA. Kristal also suggested choosing issues to organize around that are deeply and widely felt amongst the vast experiences of working independent musicians. Kristal emphasized the importance that the FMA is informed and driven by members.

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Nate Omdal led a discussion of the recent history of freelance player conference development, describing how it has been difficult to find the space and time to organize independent musicians within the AFM and without. Omdal mentioned the struggle to create a space where freelancers can express themselves on their own issues.

Omdal described the early success of the Fair Trade Music movement. Omdal noted the Portland, OR, chapter created a proposed wage scale book and put together some agreements, while Seattle, WA, had experienced success securing load in and load out standards.

Omdal further discussed The Independent Gigging Musicians (IGM) campaign which began as a way to meet the immediate needs of gigging musicians. Omdal added that a packet of

information on musicians' rights had been developed. Omdal informed the attendees that over the past few weeks, the IGM had held conversations about Labor in the Pulpits, a national campaign led by the AFL-CIO to establish partnerships between labor organizations and religious communities. Omdal read the letter the IGM drafted to Labor in the Pulpits director Michael Spzak, noting it was ready to be sent.

Omdal described what a players conference means within the structure of the AFM as a program within the union. Omdal explained that the FMA ensures freelance musicians feel empowered and connected. Omdal added that the FMA can advocate for workplace protections, better wages, political advocacy, and, most importantly for the purposes of a players' conference, changes within the AFM.

Omdal emphasized promotion of the FMA. Omdal suggested developing promotional materials like stickers and buttons, noting that having strong branding will help both the cause and that musicians see that this is an organization beyond AFM Locals.

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Omdal opened the meeting to general discussion.

Marjorie Goldberg, Vice President, Local 77, Philadelphia, PA, invited Hiruy Tirfe, a Local 77 member, to discuss the organizing initiatives he has led. Tirfe spoke on the Philadelphia Musicians Coalition, which empowers and creates coalition among freelance musicians. Tirfe discussed an active organizing drive with a new jazz club in Philadelphia and the challenges they have faced. Tirfe noted that the Philadelphia Musicians Coalition meets weekly and has created labor standards for musicians in their area. Tirfe added that the PMC would be presenting a town hall event to raise public awareness and had disseminated a survey to gather information on over 130 local musicians' experiences.

Dave Klinger, Board Member-at-Large, Local 237, Victoria, BC, inquired if there was any other representation at the meeting from Canada. None were present.

Hunter Buen, Staff Organizer, Local 99, Portland, OR, highlighted that Portland possessed an active organizing spirit, and that musicians are excited to unite. Buen added that Local 99 is hosting the Portland Music Resiliency Expo to bring together communities around causes and policies that help musicians. Buen asked if there are any materials available to hand out at this expo.

Cas Weinbren, a musician from New York, NY, described their thoughts around streaming and copyright issues. Weinbren proposed advocating for the Living Wage for Musicians Act, partnering with city departments, and advocating for streaming changes.

Joe Beribak, a new member of Local 10-208, Chicago, IL, described the difficulty of getting gigs. Beribak added they would appreciate getting connected and more educated to grow opportunities.

Jane Conners, member of Locals 47, Los Angeles, CA, and 325, San Diego, CA, expressed interest in protecting musicians' digital assets. Conners, a lawyer who works in cybersecurity and tech, highlighted how education is important for emerging gig musicians. Conners noted how AFM musicians could band together to acquire a health plan. Conners agreed that education and community are key items to pitch to potential members.

Edmund Velasco, President, Local 7, Orange County, CA, highlighted the importance of legislation, and proposed a legislative committee.

Ken Hatfield, member, Local 802, New York, NY, discussed Local 802's Jazz Advisory Committee, comprised of working jazz musicians. Hatfield added that they produce a podcast series and also make presentations to higher education institutions. Hatfield described the Justice for Jazz campaign and his interest in educational campaigns for music consumers around issues like streaming.

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Wages Argott, Director of Freelance Services, AFM, and member of Local 802, New York, NY, introduced himself and his role at the Federation. Argott discussed the Freelance Co-funding Program, a \$100,000 allocation from the AFM's General Fund distributed to locals to benefit freelance musicians on an application basis. Argott explored how the fund might be used to aid the players conference's initiatives. Argott further underscored the importance of a freelance players conference within the structure of the AFM and explained the value of such a body as an instrument of representation and change. Argott also highlighted the value of the Federation's fully staffed Organizing Department to support locals' organizing initiatives and the Federation's administrative commitment to independent musicians. Argott emphasized the need for member involvement and the development of freelance committee meetings on the local level.

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Omdal adjourned the meeting at 7:23 PM.