

Building the Creative Economy in Africa



# Building Creative Collaborations and Communities



## Learning Unit 4

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# Learning Unit 4: Building Creative Collaborations and Communities

## 1. Introduction

**Hello and welcome to Unit 4.**

In the first three units, you learnt how to identify your niche, your customer base and how to market your products.

In Unit 4, you will explore **how to collaborate with others** to bring your ideas to life and understand how collaboration can add value to your business.

Over the next three hours of study, you will cover key themes that can help you include collaboration in your business ideas and plans. In the first part of this Unit, you'll learn about what collaborations can look like and why they matter. You've already touched on this idea before. Remember Unit 1 and the example of South African Afro-soul artist Lira? Her success wasn't achieved alone—it depended on a network of connections in the creative industry, including songwriters, producers, and marketers. These connections were collaborations, with each part working together to help Lira's business succeed and benefit everyone involved.

Collaboration isn't just about making your business run smoothly. It's also about helping your community. This is especially important for cultural heritage and artistic businesses, which are based on the unique knowledge, values, and skills of your community—skills passed down through generations. By collaborating well, you will strengthen your business and keep the cultural heritage that inspires it alive.

## 2. Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand what a market is
- Understand how to reach or create a market
- Use methods for engaging in different markets
- Apply online marketing effectively
- Use storytelling for marketing
- Use public relations as part of your marketing strategy
- Write a business pitch to get funding

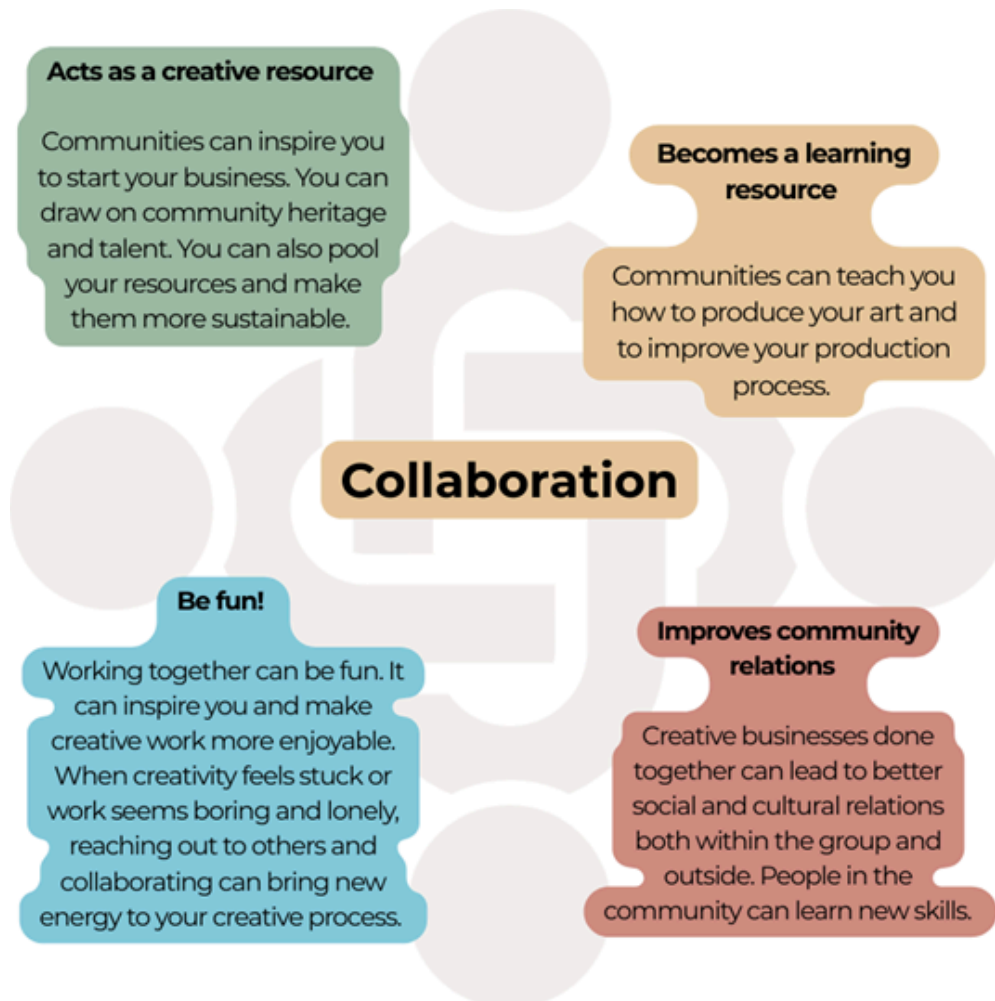
Please look out for **short activities** to complete throughout the Unit. They will help you achieve the learning objectives mentioned above.

### 3. Reasons to Collaborate

*"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together"*

*African Proverb*

**Collaborating** means **working together towards a common goal**. In this case, it is to create a creative product.



These photos were taken at a **basket-weaving workshop** with **Batonga women in Binga, Zimbabwe**. The artists use their **traditional culture** to create items they can sell. The designs are based on their culture, but they can also **adapt and improve their skills** to fit current styles and markets. Their **knowledge isn't fixed; it can evolve**.





## Activity 1 : Community-Based Arts Project

An excellent example of a community-based arts project is Kenya's Maasai beadwork enterprise, **BeadWORKS KENYA**.



[You can see their work here](#)

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About **BeadWORKS KENYA**:

- **Use Indigenous Knowledge**

The Maasai community's existing beadwork skills, use of colours to show specific meanings, and intricate designs are central resources. This group draws on such methods.

- **Work collaboratively**

Women work in collectives—locally known as "chamas"—to pool their skills, share tools, and divide responsibilities. Everyone owns the product.

- **Use storytelling and identity**

The beadwork tells stories of Maasai heritage. Artists have learned to use this cultural storytelling as a marketing resource that shows they are representative of the Maasai. This helps attract international buyers.

- **Capacity-building through Partnerships.**

Because they are a large group, they receive support from others. Community organisations and NGOs provide training to improve the designs while preserving traditions. Platforms like the Africa Creative Market support women in connecting with larger markets.

Now that you've seen one example of a creative group working together, let's explore another. This time, we'll look at the **Nafasi Art Space in Tanzania**.



## Activity 2: Understanding the Value of Communal Arts and Cultural Initiatives

The creative hub, **Nafasi Art Space is in Tanzania** was founded in 2008 by a small group of Tanzanian artists. This vibrant community includes artists, musicians, dancers, performers, and technicians. It is in the industrial area of Mikocheni B, Dar es Salaam.



[You can explore the Nafasi Art Space Website here](#)

Now watch the following video:

### [Nafasi Art Space Preview](#)

Once you have watched the video, reflect on these questions:

1. What is driving these creatives to come together?
2. Why do they need this kind of space, and what values underpin it?
3. What forms of collaboration are being created?
4. What are the benefits of these collaborations?

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### Our Reveal:

Here are some of the things that we thought:

1. It is a community-oriented creative hub.
2. Its core values include inclusivity, creativity, integrity, generosity, authenticity, and cooperation.
3. It promotes creativity, cross-cultural dialogue, and collaborative artistic endeavours.
4. They adhere to an artist-centred ethos that includes collective decision-making.

*Was there anything else you picked up that we may have missed?*

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Now think about a collaborative creative initiative in your neighbourhood community, city, region or country.

- Can you see what value this adds?
- If there is nothing similar in your neighbourhood, do you think this provides a creative opportunity?



## 4. How to Build a Collaborative Process

In art and creative processes, collaboration is very important. Some art forms are naturally shared, while others are created when **artists work together and combine their ideas**. This section focuses on how collaboration can work in the artistic process, using examples from South Africa and Zimbabwe.

As you go through this section, you will have the opportunity to **follow a step-by-step process** that helps you set up your collaborative process. You will also hear first-hand stories from 'H', who has collaborated extensively with local art communities. You will also hear from two other artists: a social sculptor and a visual artist. These artists share their experiences of collaborating with:

- **Musicians in Johannesburg, South Africa**, who play indigenous African instruments.
- **Local artists and weavers in Binga, Zimbabwe**, known for creating cultural heritage objects such as baskets and woodwork.

Successful collaboration in the creative economy begins long before the first idea is shared or the first meeting is held. It requires thoughtful preparation, intentional space-making, and a commitment to equity.

**Step 1 invites collaborators to reflect** on the dynamics that shape their working relationships—recognising inequalities, preparing with clarity, and embracing diversity as a strength.

**Step 2 emphasises the importance of creating collaborative spaces**, both physical and virtual, that nurture creativity and challenge routine thinking. These environments influence how people interact, shift roles, and spark innovation.

**Step 3 focuses on planning equitable collaborations**, ensuring that contributions are valued, expectations are clear, and resources—especially financial ones—are distributed fairly. Together, these steps offer a grounded framework for building partnerships that are not only productive but also just, inclusive, and creatively generative.

## Step 1: Before Collaboration Begins

Collaboration in creative projects is more than just working together—it involves bringing together **different skills, experiences, and resources** while being **aware of the differences and challenges** among participants. Here are some **key principles** you should think about before and during collaboration:

<b>1. Recognise Inequalities</b>	<p>Collaboration works best when everyone acknowledges the differences among team members, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different <b>types and levels of technical skills</b> (e.g., some may be great at design, while others are good at planning).</li> <li>• Differences in <b>personal communication skills</b> (e.g., some may be more confident in sharing ideas than others).</li> <li>• <b>Unequal access to resources</b> due to factors like social class, gender, or background.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Before Starting</b>	<p>Good collaboration starts before the creative work begins. It involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking about what each person brings to the group (e.g., skills, ideas, or tools).</li> <li>• Understanding everyone's strengths and limitations to create a fair and supportive environment.</li> <li>• Establishing good communication and mutual understanding.</li> <li>• Setting clear goals at pre-collaboration meetings.</li> </ul> <p>Organising pre-meetings can significantly enhance the collaboration process.</p> <p>These meetings might address questions such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What benefits will each participant gain through collaboration?</li> <li>2. How will the collaboration be organised and actually done?</li> <li>3. What are the expected outcomes of this collaboration?</li> <li>4. How should conflict be managed during the collaborative process?</li> </ol>
<b>3. Flexibility and Shared Understanding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A successful collaboration requires flexibility and a shared understanding of the rules of engagement.</li> <li>• Keeping records of decisions and agreements made during meetings can facilitate a smoother process.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Embracing Diversity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As artists coming together, it is crucial to embrace the different perspectives, skills, and approaches each participant brings.</li> <li>• Understand the shared vision.</li> </ul>



Understanding and preparing for the complexities of collaboration early on is key to successful creative partnerships. **By recognising inequalities, establishing good communication, and embracing and addressing differences, you are more likely to have a successful creative business.**

While all the points listed are important and you will need to consider them carefully as you develop your working relationships with others, there is a risk that a list like this can become a tick-box activity or be overwhelming, and so be put aside. Try not to let that happen!

Let us look at a real example provided by the artist 'H' Patten.



### Activity 3: Working with Artistic Differences

Watch the following video:

[Video H5 – Collaborations with Zimbabwe and South Africa](#)

As you listen to 'H's story, make notes on how he:

- Navigated differences
- Fostered respect
- Created a peaceful and productive collaborative environment

What key principles can we draw from H's collaboration with other artists?

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#### Our Reveal:

Here are some key principles we took from 'H's story:

- **Diversity in creativity:** Value the different perspectives and backgrounds of others as they can improve the creative process. Be open-minded and willing to learn from others. This leads to more vibrant and relatable work influenced by various experiences.
- **Sharing knowledge among artists:** Create a space for artists to share their skills and insights. This exchange can lead to new and innovative art. Organise regular brainstorming sessions, workshops, or informal discussions where artists from different fields can interact and learn from one another. This sharing of ideas can result in richer and more complex creative work.
- **Finding common ground for collaboration:** Begin each collaborative project by identifying shared interests, goals, and values. This common ground helps build a strong foundation for collaboration. Aligning on a shared vision or objective guides the decision-making process and keeps the collaboration focused. Celebrate diverse ideas while working towards a unified goal.
- **Fostering mutual respect:** Respect is key to successful collaboration. Acknowledge and honour each collaborator's artistic integrity and creative choices. Listen to their ideas, give constructive feedback, and value their contributions.

- A respectful environment makes artists feel valued and safe to express their creativity, leading to a more productive and harmonious working relationship.
- **Trusting each collaborator's expertise:** Recognise and trust that each member is an expert in their field. This trust forms the basis for a collaborative relationship where everyone feels confident in contributing their best work. Acknowledging each other's expertise encourages a balanced partnership where decisions are made collectively, and everyone's input is valued. Trusting in each person's abilities also means being open to their suggestions and willing to try different approaches.
- **Encouraging experimentation and risk-taking:** Promote a culture where trying new techniques and ideas is welcomed. Innovation often comes from stepping out of comfort zones and experimenting with new concepts. Be open to changes from the initial plan if they bring a fresh and exciting angle to the project. This openness to experimentation can lead to unexpected and remarkable creative breakthroughs, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in art.

Now that you understand the first step in developing a collaborative plan, let's move on to the next step.

## Step 2: Creating a Collaborative Space

For any collaboration to begin, people need a space where they can meet and work. Thanks to technology, it is now much easier to meet **online** and build global partnerships. You will likely need to collaborate online for their work or businesses, but you will also need physical spaces where you can meet face-to-face.

This need for **physical spaces** connects back to an earlier section, where you explored **local communities**. At this early stage, collaborations are often about building relationships in the places where you live, making in-person meetings more important.

It is also important you understand how to create or find spaces that **support and improve teamwork**. The way a space is set up can make a big difference to the success of their group work.

In the next section, we will reflect on **how space can influence creativity** and explore ways to use it intentionally to **foster innovation**.

### Exploring New Spaces for Creativity

Creativity often thrives when we explore new spaces and challenge our usual ways of thinking. **Stepping out of familiar environments** can inspire **fresh ideas and perspectives**, encouraging us to **break out of routine roles and behaviours**. The spaces we inhabit play a significant role in **shaping how we interact and collaborate**, with new settings often creating opportunities for **growth and innovation**.

1. **Stepping out of your comfort zone:** Being in a new or unfamiliar space can inspire creative thinking. It helps people break out of their usual roles and explore new ideas and perspectives.
2. **How the setting affects group roles:** Changing the environment can shift how people interact and work together. This can challenge established roles and routines but also create growth opportunities.
3. **Changing familiar spaces:** Small changes, like rearranging a room or adding new elements, can make a familiar space feel fresh and encourage creativity.
4. **Balancing comfort and novelty:** It is important to balance familiarity with the excitement of a new environment. Not everyone adjusts to change easily, so consider the needs of all participants.



## Activity 4: Engaging with the Community in Collaborative Spaces

In the following video H' Patten talks about how to engage with the community in collaborative spaces.

### Video H6 – Collaborative Engagement

As you listen to him, please make a note of the main points that he makes.

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#### Our Reveal:

Here is what we thought:

- **Active involvement:** Develop strategies that can actively involve your audience or community in the collaborative process and engage them in a way that does not create a burden but blends into their routines and workflows.
- **Encouraging participant collaboration:** Discover how to facilitate and encourage collaboration among your participants. This involves not only guiding them in their collaborative efforts but also creating an environment where such cooperation is natural and fruitful.
- **Listening and adapting:** Understand the importance of listening to your community and adapting your strategies to meet their needs and leverage their unique contributions. This involves knowing your audience, understanding what they need and want, and addressing their needs effectively.

*Was there anything else you picked up that we may have missed?*



## Step 3 : Planning Equitable Collaborations

The final step in planning collaborations for the creative economy offers exciting chances to boost creativity and innovation. However, making sure everyone gets a fair share of the rewards is important. Here are **five key topics to help you think about how to create fair and successful collaborations**:

**1. Have clear financial plans:** Decide in advance how any money earned will be shared. Set up an agreement that explains who gets what based on their contributions. Be clear about how profits or losses will be handled.

**2. Recognise everyone's contributions:** Each person brings something valuable, like skills, knowledge, or tools. It is important to acknowledge this and find a fair way to measure their input. Be ready to adjust as the project changes over time.

**3. Set clear expectations:** Make sure everyone agrees on the project's goals and what you are trying to achieve. Regularly check in with the team to keep everyone on the same page, especially if things shift.

**4. Be ready to adapt:** Projects often change, and so do people's roles. Be flexible and ready to update how rewards are shared if unexpected contributions or changes come up.

**5. Build mutual respect:** A good collaboration is based on respect for everyone's input. Treat the collaboration itself as a success and use it as a foundation for future projects. If there are disagreements, address them openly and fairly.

By following these steps, you can create collaborations that are fair for everyone involved and more rewarding. This approach will ensure fairness with money and can build an environment where creativity and innovation can thrive.

When preparation is mindful, spaces are designed for growth, and equity is built into the plan, **collaboration becomes a catalyst for deeper connection, shared innovation, and lasting impact**. Whether you're launching a small creative project or scaling a creative enterprise, these principles ensure that your **partnerships are not only effective but also rooted in respect, reciprocity, and creative integrity**.

In the next activity, you will hear from artist 'H' Patten, who will share how he makes his collaborations fair and beneficial for everyone he works with.





## Activity 4: Making Creative Collaboration Fair and Beneficial for All

Fair relationships are important for working well together. In the video, 'H' discusses the relationships formed while working with the community.

### [Video H7 – Collaborative Relationships](#)

As you listen, please think about the different techniques 'H' uses to create fair, open, and honest relationships with the people he works with.

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#### Our Reveal:

Here is what we thought:

- **Listening to others:** 'H' explains that it is important to really listen to community members. This means not just hearing their words, but understanding their ideas, needs, and perspectives. Good teamwork starts with being open to learning from others. By listening carefully, you can build stronger and more meaningful connections with the community. It's about valuing every voice, respecting different viewpoints, and seriously considering their input during the collaboration.
- **Mutual relationships:** 'H' also says that working together should be a two-way relationship. It is not just about what the community can give to the project or what the project can give to the community but about working together as equals. Mutual relationships mean sharing both benefits and responsibilities so that everyone contributes to and gains from the collaboration. This approach builds trust and ensures success for both sides.

*Anything else that came to mind?*



## 5. Conclusion

You have reached the end of the fourth unit. We hope you found it interesting! Throughout this unit, you have **explored the importance of working together in the creative economy**. We discussed how to build fair and respectful partnerships by recognising everyone's contributions, setting clear goals, and sharing rewards fairly. When collaboration is done well, it **creates a space where creativity can grow, and everyone benefits**.

### What We've Explored:

- The importance of collaborating with others.
- Steps to collaborate well with others.
- How to collaborate equitably.

### What Creative People Can Take Away:

This unit has provided you with key insights into collaborative processes. Almost all creative businesses need to work with other people to run their business. Learning to work well with others can help them make their business successful. The unit has also given you some steps you can follow to succeed while working collaboratively in the creative economy.

### Reflecting on Learning Objectives:

By the end of this unit, you should have:  
Recognised the benefits of the collaboration for individuals and communities.  
Understood some concrete ways in which to make collaborations successful.

### Applying What You've Learned:

You have been introduced to the importance of collaboration in the creative economy. You should now be able to:

- Work with others to run your creative business.
- Put into practice the steps that you have been given for how to work collaboratively.
- Use these steps to work in a way that you and the people you work with feel that they were treated equitably.

### Interested in Finding Out More?

Here are some additional resources you may find helpful when deepening your understanding of the creative economy:

- [Collaborating With Creative Peers](#)
- [Working Together: Co-Ops as a Creative Industry Business Model](#)
- [Top 6 Collaboration Ideas For Your Creative Business](#)



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## 6. Transcripts

### Collaborations with Zimbabwe and South African Artists

**H':** So as an artist, as I was saying, you have to know how to collaborate with people so that all of us have an equal opportunity to share our voice. When working on the Zimbabwe and South Africa project, I was able to work in a way with Brother Volley, for example, where he will get the participants to listen, and to concentrate on the environment and what is going on around them. Then he was able to pick out the instances where you might hear bird chirping and the pattern that that bird chirps, he started to make a rhythm out of that. And then he would then identify the wind and the different the different elements and layer them on top of each other so that we get the rhythm. The Social Sculptor she was able to also get the participants to listen, but he got them to start to visualise it and to see the colours that were coming through to them. So that meant that by the time the visual artist was working with them and starting to talk about colour, they already had an idea of the colours that would work for them because they they take that from what they visualise with the Social Sculptor. And then I know when I worked with them, I do the musical options but then get them to move that into dance. So if you were to imagine a rhythm like 'changa, changa' they could do with their hands so that the hands then reflected and then they could change them from out of the 'changa, changa'. It could become lines coming out in in a visual way so that the visual artist would actually be able to incorporate the ideas that came from out of the dance; the ideas that came from out of the music; the ideas that came from out of the Social Sculpture so that what you get is a visual representation.

## Collaborative Engagement

**'H':** The engagement with the community is very important and the Community becomes your audience and working back and forth between you in a kind of call and response is very important and crucial. For example, when working in Zimbabwe in Binga, we were working with a group of female weavers, and so therefore you become conscious of the way in which they engage. Sometimes they're sitting down and they have the cloth that is the lapper or the wrapper that they wrap around. And it looks like a skirt one moment. When they're dancing, then they'll use the next move and they'll be sitting down and they open out the wrapper and they use it almost like a blanket to cover to cover their laps. But also it means that whether they're wearing a short dress or they're wearing trousers or whatever, they're kind of covering their modesty.

So therefore you start to see those cultural traits coming through, but also it means that you know that they are conscious of how they move. And this is important because sometimes as an artist you have to take on board what the needs are within the audience that is engaging you. Sometimes when you do movements, there are some people that when you ask them to join in, they're resistant to joining in because they prefer to watch and they might sing along, but they're not going to join in if you ask them to get up and start to do a move.

But then also you have to be aware of who is in the audience. Sometimes they're people with disabilities. Now if I'm working with an audience and I see people with disabilities rather than doing a movement where everybody has to stand up and start moving around I know that they won't be able to do that, so I concentrate on movements where you might just use the arms, so it might be something like the SenaGambian movement where you can do up, down, up, down and you might get them to move the hands out in, out in, up, out and so everybody can do that. If you're in a wheelchair, you can join. Then it's fine to then say those who can stand can you stand, and you might do a leg movement or a movement using the feet that is in combination with the arms, so that those who are not able to actually move and use their legs, they can still feel as if they're dancing along with everybody else. So being able to assess what kind of audience you have is very important. If there's resistant to movement, then you concentrate more on the musical side as those resistance to music. Then you concentrate more on the storytelling side and you get them to be able to join in just by.

Repeating something after you and that way it means that you are still engaging them, but you don't make them feel uncomfortable or worse, and they might feel uncomfortable if they're forced to do a movement, so they might not do it, but they may feel left out if you continue to do things that they can't join in with, so it's about reading the audience and making sure you engage all elements of the audience.

## Collaborative Relationships

**'H':** When you're working with any community, you have to bear in mind that it's a two-way relationship. You're there working as an artist with them so that you're imparting skills to them, but also you learn a lot from them because they're sharing sometimes aspects of their life that might be quite personal, and then something that has been handed down to them. So it's almost like if they're giving you a jewel as well as you giving them a gift and for example, when we were working in Zimbabwe and Binga and the weavers themselves, once weaving, they would sing songs and they would teach us some of those songs and then we would then try to sing along and join them as they were weaving, but also when we taught them songs and things while they were weaving they would sing those songs as well. So it meant that it was a two-way process and then they would also listen to how we speak and they would pick certain phrases up that they repeated so it became a means to a two-way conversation.