

SUMMARY REPORT

ARTS DISCIPLINES OR ARTS INDUSTRIES: THE BUSINESS REALITIES OF THE NONPROFIT ARTS SECTOR

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COMMISSION
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Gig work is central to the St. Louis creative sector, characterizing the workforce and job prospects of St. Louis-based artists.

The Census Bureau released their most recent annual Nonemployer Statistics (NES) and reported there are 5,275 artists living in St. Louis City and County who filed taxes on earnings of at least \$1,000 in 2023. On average, these artists received \$19,678 in annual pay.

In that same year, 664 nonprofit organizations in the same geographic area reported employing at least 5,340 people in their 990 tax returns, which likely includes contract and part-time work. Additionally, at least 386 of those exempt entities were volunteer staffed without any paid employees.

To explore how pervasive gig work is in the St. Louis creative sector, let us use one of the 664 nonprofits as a case study. One of the mid-sized arts organizations reported \$1.77 million in expenses that fiscal year and 110 employees. While expenses include much more than salaries, for our purposes let's divide it by the number of employees, which would be \$16,347 per staffer on average. The organization also reported paying \$120,000 to an executive director. The ED was paid 734% more than the hypothetical average worker on that organization's staff. After adjusting total staff expenditures for the ED salary, that leaves roughly \$15,137 on average for the remaining staff. To further the point, this organization has other expenses like utilities, venue maintenance, and other overhead costs that would lower staff pay considerably.



Comparing the \$15,000 in possible wages from an organization with the \$19,678 on average from the NES, clarifies the wage prospects for the region and benchmarks the gig work pay scale for St. Louis. As a thought experiment, let us assume that the mid-sized arts organization employee from the case study is real and locate their work in the fine arts industry. We know that \$15,000 is inadequate for a living wage, as the MIT Living Wage calculator estimates that a person needs to earn \$44,948 before taxes to live in St. Louis. Dividing their salary by full-time hours (2,080) reveals that the fine arts worker would receive \$7.38 per hour. Minimum wage in Missouri in 2023 was \$12.00.

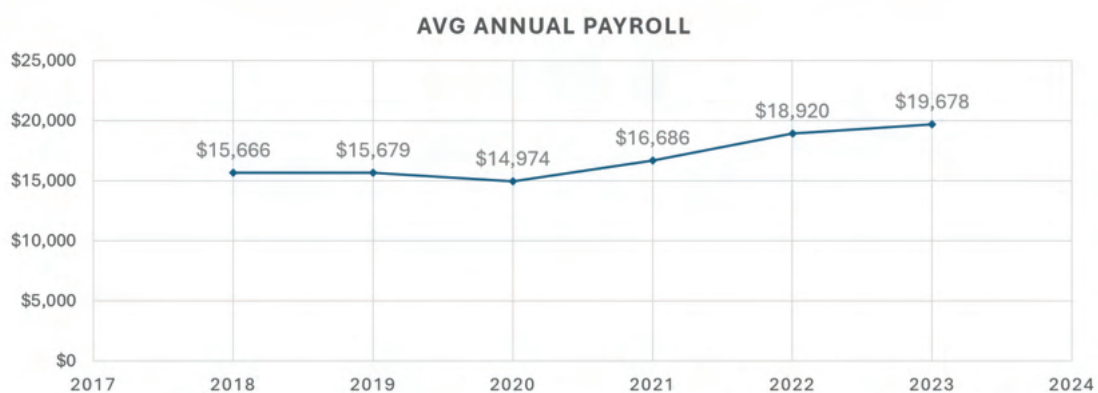
Furthermore, we know from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the St. Louis area, that wages for workers in the fine arts industry earned an average of \$16.72 per hour. Adjusting accordingly, this would mean our hypothetical staffer would work 18 hours per week for the mid-sized arts organization and would need to find a second job that would pay \$26 per hour for 22 hours per week to earn a living wage. In such a scenario, the fine arts worker would need to prioritize the higher paying job to maintain their artistic practice.



The case study and thought experiment allows us to see the marginal wages available for job seekers hoping to find work in the fine arts. In St. Louis, they would need at least two jobs, working 40 hours per week, to earn nearly \$45,000 annually to sustain a household of one person. Given the benchmark of \$19,678, this hypothetical fine arts worker is a part of the gig economy. This means that a part-time employee job at a million-dollar nonprofit organization is gig work, too.

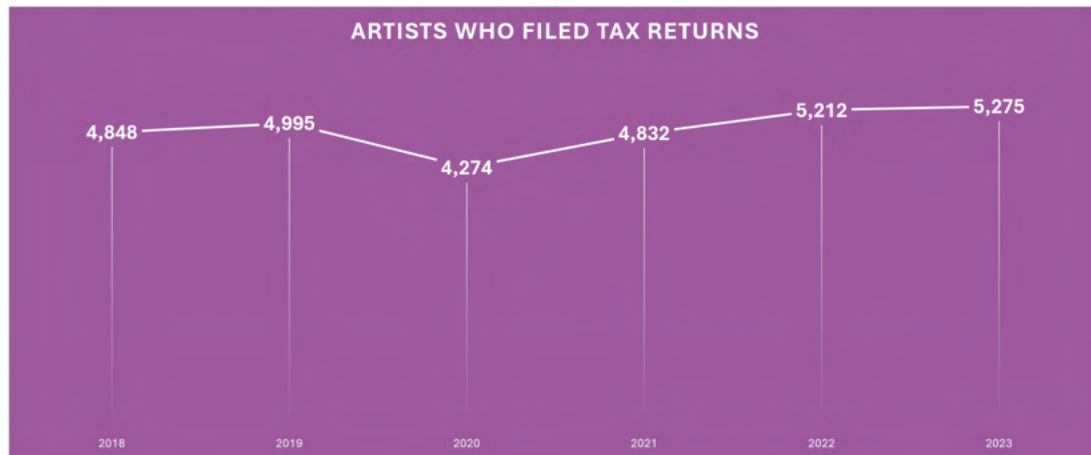
CHART 1

STL Trends: How Much Artists Earned on Average



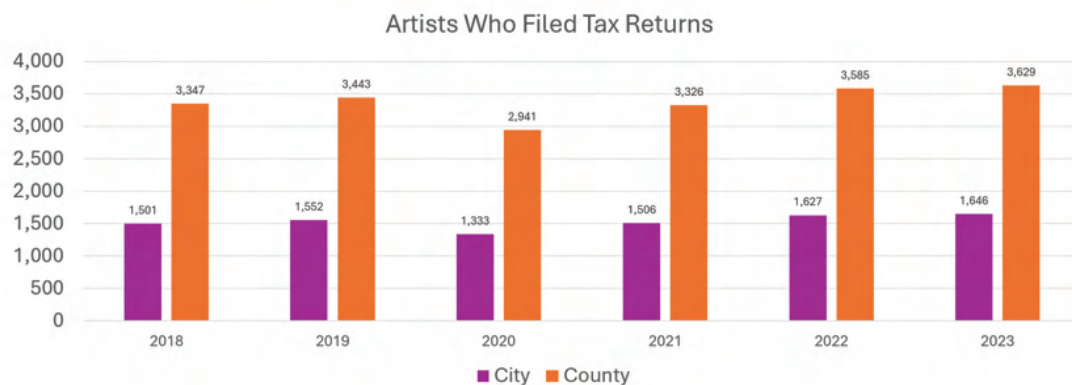
Compiled & Analyzed by Mk Sadiq. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics, Census.gov, accessed June 23, 2025.

STL Trends: Number of Artists



Compiled & Analyzed by Mk Sadiq. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics, Census.gov, accessed June 23, 2025.

City & County Divide: Filed Taxes



Compiled & Analyzed by Mk Sadiq. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics, Census.gov, accessed June 23, 2025.

References:

United States. Department of Treasury. Internal Revenue Service. 2022 Returns of Organizations Exempt from Income Tax
 Living wage data sourced from the Living Wage Institute <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/29510>. Accessed on June 23, 2025