CREATIVES COUNT

A survey of creatives in St. Louis, Missouri




REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION OF ST. LOUIS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This study wouldn't have been possible without the collaborative efforts of many who are deeply committed to understanding and supporting St. Louis creatives. To begin, I would like to thank the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis for the opportunity to delve deeply into the region's creative community and learn how local creatives get by and contribute to the cultural richness of the region. Vanessa Cooksey and MK Stallings provided valuable guidance throughout the project, and I'm particularly indebted to Liz Deichmann, who has been deeply involved in every aspect of the research and has been an exceptionally generous and thoughtful collaborator. I would also like to recognize Sue Greenberg, Jay Scherder, Jason Schipkowski, Ann Haubrich, and Angie Peters who also made important contributions to Creatives Count.

Over the course of the study, our research team relied heavily on four inspiring local creatives who served as "Community Connectors": Muhammad "Mvstermind" Austin, Sheila Suderwalla, Cami Thomas and Brandin Vaughn. They greatly enriched the project with their deep knowledge of their creative fields and their love of the community, providing informed guidance and helpful feedback at many points. I'd also like to thank Artists First for opening its doors to us, making staff available to support our research, and helping to ensure that our process was inclusive.

Many other local creatives contributed to this project, whether by helping to define research questions, testing the survey protocol, or participating in focus groups. The names of all contributors and focus group participants are listed in the appendix. Then, of course, there are the 1,522 individuals who took our survey. I greatly appreciate the time and thoughtfulness that each of them devoted to the project.

I'm thrilled that our research will also be shared through two videos that are being created by Dynamite Candle Studios. Many thanks to Rob Smart, Grant Essig and Nate Hershey for helping us share the stories of St. Louis creatives!

Last but not least, I'd like to thank my colleague Kacie Willis for embarking on this journey with me and helping the project grow.

It is truly a privilege to be trusted with sharing the stories of St. Louis creatives, and I sincerely hope this report lives up to the expectations of those who have contributed to it.

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EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

We use the term ‘creatives’ to refer collectively to all artists, craftspeople, culture bearers, designers, makers, musicians, performers, and other people who are creatively active. We use “creative practice” to describe the activities they do, whether paid or unpaid.

In 2012, the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC) conducted its first survey of artists living and working in the St. Louis region. RAC has relied on data from that study to inform its artist support grants and programs for the past decade. The creative sector was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, making this a particularly opportune moment to reassess how creatives are faring in St. Louis.

We focus on “creatives” rather than “artists” to gain a wider understanding of the sector. This allowed us to engage people working in fields of practice that haven’t historically been closely affiliated with RAC.

The study combines a large-scale online survey that received 1,522 responses and a series of online and in-person focus groups with local creatives. With 30% of the completed surveys coming from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) respondents, Creatives Count is more racially diverse than previous studies of regional artists and creatives led by RAC.

This study of creatives in the region will be a critical source of information and data for governments, businesses, nonprofits and individuals who want to better understand the creative heart of St. Louis.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The Creative Sector is broad and diverse.

Creative fields: The survey respondents represent creative practices ranging from the Visual, Performing and Literary Arts, to Design, Media Production, Folk Arts and Social Practice. Seventy-two percent of respondents are active in multiple fields, with 45% selecting three or more fields of practice.

Creative roles: Seventy-eight percent of survey respondents identify as artists, but many also occupy other roles in the sector. Thirty-three percent chose “Maker” to refer to their role in the creative sector, 30% selected “Teacher” and 28% “Performer.” “Entrepreneur,” “Designer” and “Crafter” were each selected by about one quarter of the respondents, while more administrative roles (“Administrator,” “Community Liaison,” “Manager,” “Producer”) ranged from 10% to 20%.

Earning objectives: Forty-one percent of respondents view their creative practice as their main career. (We refer to these respondents as “career creatives” throughout the report.) Another 18% consider earning income an important motivation for doing their creative work, although it’s not their primary career. For the rest of the respondents, earning income from their creative practice is less important. Thirty percent say they earn or would like to earn some income from their creative practice, but don’t consider that a major motivation. Eleven percent of respondents have no intention of generating revenue from their practice.

Location of audiences: Sixty-one percent of the creatives responding to the survey primarily share their creative work within the St. Louis Metropolitan Area. Twenty-one percent consider their primary audience to be a wider Midwestern or national audience; 5% primarily share their work internationally. While most respondents have an online presence, only 12% consider their primary audience to be online.

Goals: Reaching a wider audience with their creative work is most frequently selected by respondents as the most urgent goal for their professional lives and creative practices (21%). Increasing their total income ranks second among their goals (18%), closely followed by improving the quality or technique of their primary creative practice (17%) and earning more from their primary creative practice to reduce hours worked in other jobs (16%).

2. Most creatives responding to the survey are self-employed.

Forty-eight percent of the respondents pursue their creative practice as the owner or co-owner of a business. Forty-seven percent describe their practice as freelance work, gig work, or contract-based work. That means most respondents pursue their creative practices through their own entrepreneurial efforts and at their own financial risk, rather than as employees with a regular paycheck and (potentially) benefits. Fifteen percent report being employed by a nonprofit, and 13% by a for-profit business.

Our focus groups with local creatives reinforce this point. Participants frequently noted the constant hustle that's required to make a living as a creative in St. Louis. While that can be exhausting, the people we spoke with aren't disheartened but rather embrace the challenge of creating their own opportunities:

> *That's just how I was raised here. We've got to hustle; we've got to figure it out. That mentality starts fostering all these different opportunities. And now I'm at a point where I can create opportunities for other people.*
> *- Choreographer*

Figure A: Employment/Business Model for Creative Practices

What best describes how you pursue your primary creative practice? (n=1300)
Note: Values do not sum to 100% because multiple selections were possible.
n=1300

48%
"I pursue my creative practice as the owner or co-owner of my creative business"

47%
"I do freelance work/I pursue my creative practice on a contract-by-contract or gig-by-gig basis"

15%
"I pursue my creative practice as a full or part-time employee of a nonprofit"

13%
"I pursue my creative practice as a full or part-time employee of a business"

3. More than one-third of survey respondents are "just getting by" or "finding it difficult to get by" financially.

Thirty-six percent of the creatives we surveyed are either "just getting by" or "finding it difficult to get by" — well above the national average of 27%.[1] The sense of economic insecurity increases among respondents who rely more heavily on income from their creative practice. Forty-two percent of career creatives say they're either just getting by or struggling financially.

Separately, 35% of all respondents said they would not be able to cover their expenses for three months if they were to lose their primary source of income (compared to 30% nationally.)[2] Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents have retirement savings. Among the respondents aged 55 to 74, 20% report having no retirement savings at all and another 17% have less than $50,000.

Comparing survey respondents' annual household incomes to U.S. Census data for St. Louis and St. Louis County reveals that there are fewer respondents in the highest and lowest income ranges than in the general population; however, it's difficult to know whether that reflects limitations of our survey's reach or an actual difference in household incomes between creatives and other residents.

1 Federal Reserve Board, Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2022 (2023), 5. https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2022-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202305.pdf
2 Federal Reserve Board (2023), 34.

Figure B: Perceived Financial Well-being

Overall, which one of the following best describes how well you are managing financially these days?
n=1513

12%
"Finding it difficult to get by"

24%
"Just getting by"

38%
"Doing okay"

27%
"Living comfortably"

4. Respondents piece together their incomes from multiple sources within and outside of the creative sector.

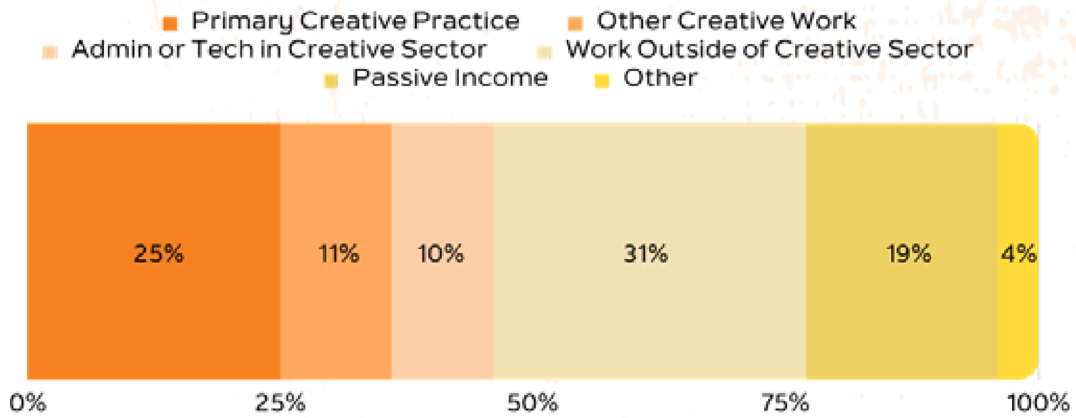
On average, 31% of respondents' income comes from work they do outside of the sector, whereas a quarter comes from their primary creative practice. Taken together, work in the creative sector (including creative work outside their primary field as well as administrative and technical work) accounts for 46% of respondents' income.

There are considerable differences depending on the creatives' earning objectives. Career creatives derive 49% of their income from their primary creative practice and another 23% from other work in the creative sector. In total, income from the creative sector accounts for 72% of the career creatives' income.

The role of "passive income" (including Social Security, disability insurance, investments, rental income, etc.) is particularly important for creatives who aren't seeking income from their creative practice. This is at least in part due to the fact that those respondents tend to be older. Thirty-six percent of respondents who aren't seeking income from their creative practice are over 65 and therefore more likely to receive Social Security benefits and draw on retirement savings.

Figure C: Source of Personal Income

Approximately, what percentage of your personal income comes from...
(Average percent of total income)
n=1495



5. The greatest barrier respondents experience is the lack of resources to invest in their creative practice.

Respondents most frequently selected the lack of financial resources to invest in their creative practice as the most significant barrier to advancing their practice (25%). The second most common barrier is the lack of time to focus on their practice (19%), where time may also be understood as a form of investment.

Options addressing the need for financial assistance in the form of grants landed in the bottom half of the ranking of barriers, in sixth and eighth place. The focus on investment rather than grants is consistent with the high rate of self-employment and the entrepreneurial spirit that many of the research participants bring to their practice.

Figure D: Barriers to Advancing Creative Practice to Desired Level

What is the most significant barrier keeping you from advancing your creative practice to the level you would desire?
n=1331

6. Grants, fellowships and monetary awards have limited reach.

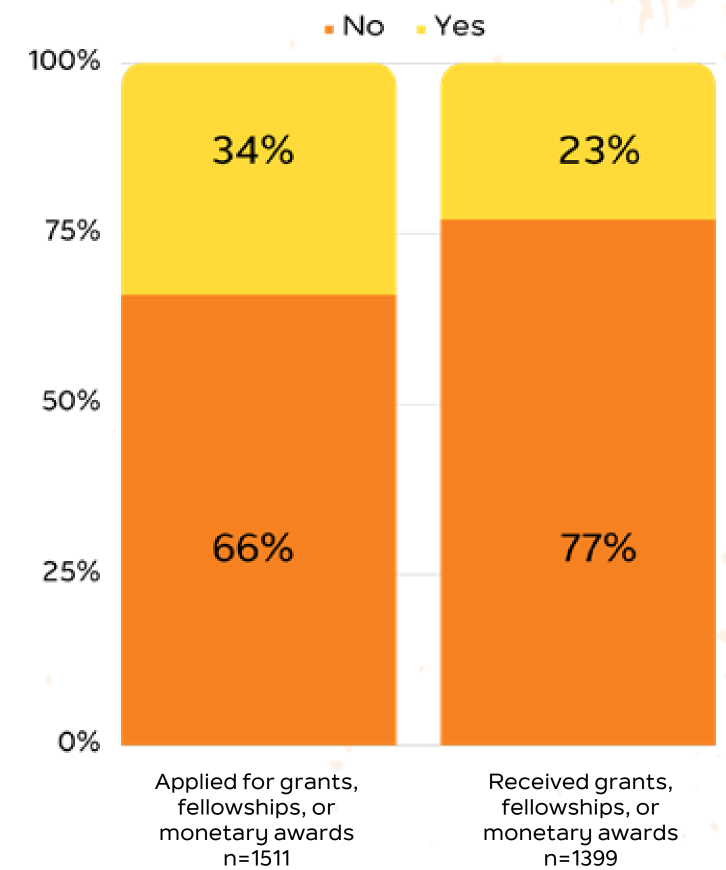
Despite the hardships of the pandemic and the increased availability of grants through COVID-19 relief funds, only 34% of the respondents applied for grants, fellowships or monetary awards over that past three years; 23% were successful.

The proportion of respondents who submitted applications for monetary support and the proportion of those who received awards is greater for respondents who are more focused on earning income from their creative practice. Forty-four percent of all career creatives applied for funding over the past three years; 30% were successful. However, even among the career creatives, the majority of respondents did not apply for grants and fellowships.

The uptake on other forms of support is somewhat greater. Fifty-seven percent of all respondents participated in virtual or in-person networking events over the past three years. Over the same period, 49% took advantage of workshops, seminars, mentorships or similar programs to advance their creative practices. Write-in responses indicate there is demand both for opportunities focused on developing creative skills and business/administrative skills.

"[Considering] the time it takes to apply for grants, there isn't usually much of a reward [in terms of] the payout."
- Photographer

Figure E: Applicants and Awardees for Monetary Support



7. Respondents tend to agree that St. Louis is a great place for artists and creatives to live and work.

Forty-eight percent of respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement “St. Louis is a great place for artists and creatives to live and work”; 19% disagree or strongly disagree.

The relatively affordable costs of living in St. Louis are a particular draw for creatives. This was expressed most clearly by participants in the focus groups who had spent time in cities like Los Angeles, Atlanta and San Francisco. On average, survey respondents also positively assess the availability of resources they need for their creative practice in St. Louis.

Generally, there is a favorable opinion about the sense of community among creatives in St. Louis. In the focus groups we also heard from some individuals who moved to St. Louis later in life that the creative sector can initially feel cliquish and difficult to break into.

While they may not be representative of all creatives in St. Louis, many of the focus group participants expressed their willingness to invest not only in developing their own creative practice in St. Louis, but to invest in their communities and support their peers.

The research participants’ commitment to St. Louis is also evident in other ways: Forty-four percent either agree or strongly agree that they are “very involved in the civic life of [their] community,” 73% voted in this year’s local elections, and of the respondents aged 35 to 54, 45% are raising families in St. Louis.

Particularly in the focus groups, creatives expressed optimism about the future of St. Louis’ creative sector and enthusiasm about being a part of that future, for example:

> *“We all feel like the ground is fertile. Something is going to pop off here pretty soon, so that’s why I’m putting down roots.” -Sound Engineer*

**“I think the art scene is definitely growing. It’s expanding faster than any of us probably expected. ... I believe we’re definitely going to see the new Spike Lees and Spielbergs come out of this.”
- Filmmaker**

IMPLICATIONS

1. Understanding Racial Inequities in the Creative Sector

While it was not a focus of this study, the survey data clearly reflects widespread racial inequities in our society. One might see the disparities between White and BIPOC survey respondents simply as an outgrowth of larger socio-economic factors, but our survey data suggests there are differences in the ways that BIPOC and White creatives approach and support their creative practices that warrant further exploration. Gaining a better understanding of the creative practices that different racial and ethnic groups pursue and the ways in which they engage in those practices is essential to ensure that support services can equitably serve all creatives.

2. Investing in Creatives

Grants (both project grants and unrestricted funds) are critical sources of revenue for many creatives and nonprofit arts organizations. Several respondents expressed their appreciation for past grant awards in write-in comments; however, our research shows that only 34% of respondents have applied for a grant, fellowship or monetary award over the past three years and fewer still were successful (23%). At the same time, the lack of financial resources to invest in themselves and their creative practices is the issue survey respondents most frequently cited as an impediment to their work.

This study was not designed to explore creatives' feelings about grants in detail, but it's clear that grant programs, as they're currently designed and implemented, don't meet the needs of many creatives.[3] Those seeking more time and money to invest in their practice are looking for support that empowers them and builds financial equity.

Going forward it will be valuable to gain a deeper understanding of how creatives perceive and interact with grant programs, and to consider alternative funding models. It may also be fruitful to explore ways of encouraging private investment in local projects, creative enterprises and infrastructure, and to create opportunities that connect local creatives with potential investors.

3. Investing in Networks

Networks are critical assets in the creative sector, and our focus group conversations suggest that some of the most impactful networks develop organically. While the process of funding organizations that support the creative ecosystem through educational and networking opportunities is relatively straightforward, how to support naturally occurring networks is a question that needs further exploration. Who are the individuals at the center of those networks, and how could they be supported in convening and uplifting their networks of peers?

4. Cross-Sector Collaboration

Many of the challenges that creatives face are not unique to the creative sector, and it is unlikely that the creative sector will be able to resolve major societal challenges on its own. One might try to address issues like access to health care and retirement savings by advancing solutions that are tailored to the creative sector. However, those are challenges that many people face who are self-employed or doing gig work. Because there is strength in numbers, there may be value in seeking opportunities to partner and collaborate outside of the sector, rather than emphasizing the creative sector's uniqueness.

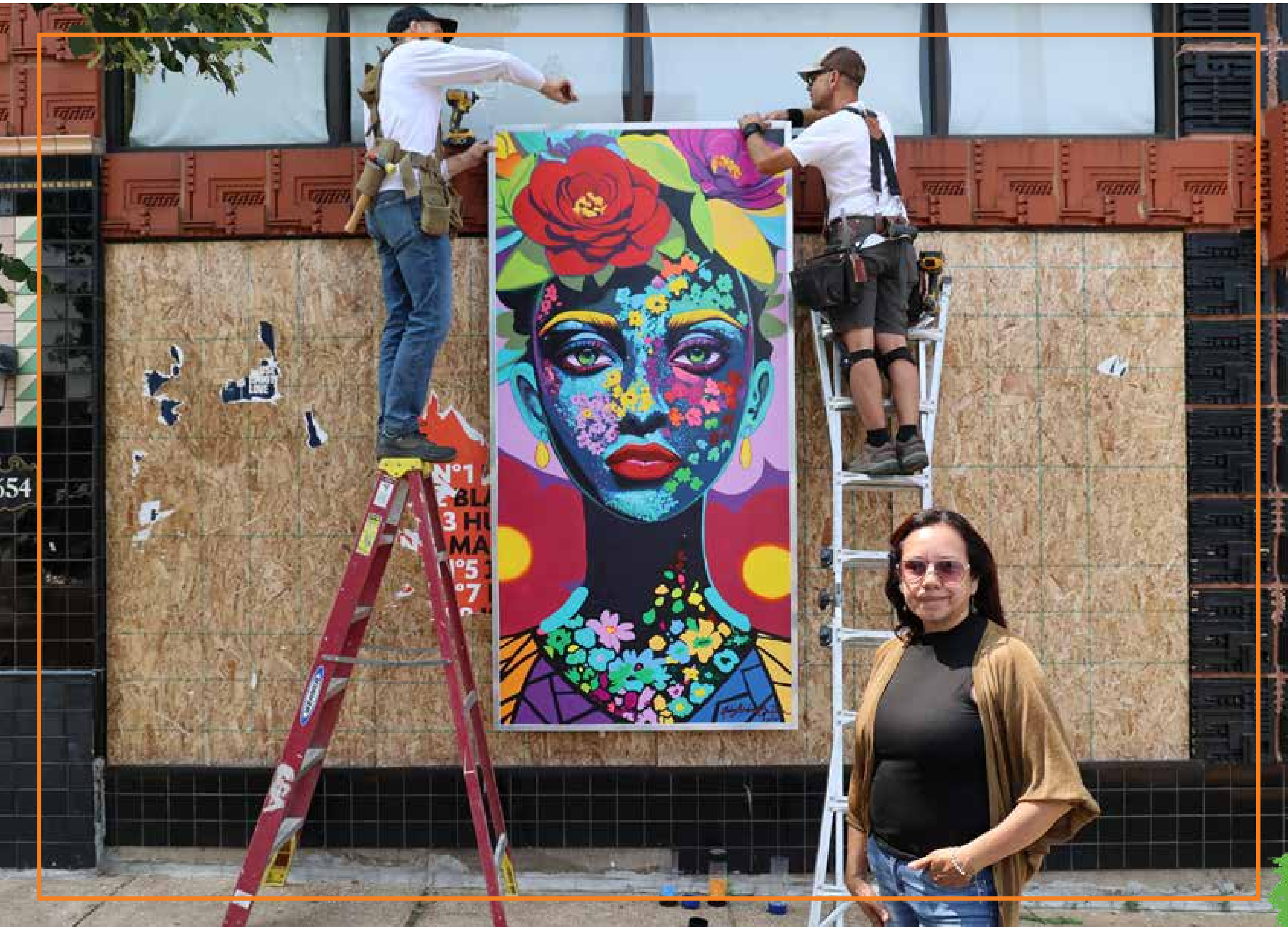
Conclusion

Overall, Creatives Count paints a picture of a diverse, vibrant creative sector in St. Louis and St. Louis County, which has proved remarkably resilient despite the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The range of creatives participating in the study and the different ways in which they approach their practice — as a business, community service, a nine-to-five job, a hobby, or a side hustle — illustrates how creatives working at all levels and in all fields can meaningfully contribute to the cultural lives of their communities.

While many of the creatives we consulted express optimism about the future of St. Louis' creative sector, 36% of the survey respondents are struggling financially. Grants (both project grants and unrestricted funds) are critical sources of revenue for many creatives and nonprofit arts organizations; but even more than grants, survey respondents express a need for investment in their creative practices. Both on the funders' and the creatives' side, there's a need to better understand how to deploy capital in a way that builds equity and supports the long-term sustainability of creative practices.

3 See also Nati Linares and Caroline Wood, Solidarity Not Charity: Arts & Culture Grantmaking in the Solidarity Economy (Grantmakers in the Arts, 2021), https://art.coop/#report.

INTRODUCTION



In 2012, the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC) conducted its first survey of artists living and working in the St. Louis region. The study, Artists Count, coincided with the development of RAC's 2012 Strategic Plan, which identified support for individual artists as a major priority.[4] It examined the regional arts ecosystem from the artists' perspective and captured the motivations, opportunities and challenges that shape local artists' work. The research initiative was instrumental in informing RAC's artist support grants and programs for the past decade.

The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have had a profound impact on the ways artists create work, exchange ideas and engage with the public, making this a particularly opportune moment to reassess the state of the arts ecosystem in St. Louis. While the impact of the pandemic cannot be overstated, we want to be clear that this study is not a retrospective assessment of how creatives fared during the pandemic and how they got by. Rather, the focus is squarely on the present moment in 2023 and understanding the support local creatives need to continue to grow and flourish in the future.

4 Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis, *Artists Count in St. Louis* (2013).

The past decade has also seen a series of police killings of unarmed Black people, locally and nationally, which has brought increased attention to the pervasive and systemic racism that persists in this country. Within the arts and culture sector, this has led to extensive critical examination of the ways in which long-held norms and institutional practices perpetuate racial discrimination and social hierarchies.[5] In the context of this study, these considerations led us to ask fundamental questions, such as "Who gets to be an 'artist'?" and "What forms of creative expression are valued?"

Artists Count was open to "anybody who considers himself or herself an artist," regardless of whether they earn income from their artwork or not.[6] In the present study, we maintained the inclusiveness of all levels of professionalism but sought to address the complex history and associations of the term "artist." We settled on the term "creatives," which we defined as follows in the survey and in promotional materials:

We use the term 'creatives' to refer collectively to all artists, craftspeople, culture bearers, designers, makers, musicians, performers, and other people who are creatively active. We use "creative practice" to describe the activities they do, whether paid or unpaid.

With this more inclusive definition of creative practices, which is consistent with RAC's belief that St. Louis should be a place where "every resident has the freedom, resources, and opportunities to enjoy a full creative life," we sought to engage people in the study who weren't already connected with RAC.[7] Through in-person outreach at events, social media, creative collaborators who introduced us to their networks and local influencers, RAC sought to broaden the pool of survey respondents. In particular, RAC addressed the underrepresentation of people of color in past research studies.[8] We are pleased to say that *Creatives Count* is more racially diverse than previous studies, though with 30% respondents of color there is room for improvement.

In addition to the survey, we engaged 34 local creatives in a series of online and in-person focus groups. These conversations allowed us to discuss personal stories and experiences at a level of detail that a survey cannot capture. Our conversations with creatives working in fashion, music, film and community-based arts, including artists of all abilities, were documented by Dynamite Candle Studios, and are featured in a video available on RAC's website. A second, shorter video summarizing key takeaways from the *Creatives Count* research is also available.

The design and implementation of this project are the result of the collaborative efforts of RAC's staff and independent researchers from WolfBrown. We would like to thank the 1,522 individuals who took the time to complete the *Creatives Count* survey and those who joined our conversations. Together, the data paints a compelling picture of the ways in which creatives in St. Louis approach and sustain their work, the barriers they face, and the support they need to flourish. This report will be a critical source of information and data for governments, businesses, nonprofits and individuals who want to better understand the creative heart of St. Louis.

5 See Mike Scutari, "'A Moment of Reckoning.' How Can Funders Support an Equitable and Inclusive Arts Sector?," *Inside Philanthropy*, July 16, 2020, https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2020/7/16/a-moment-of-reckoning-how-can-funders-support-an-equitable-and-inclusive-arts-sector; Kim Zeuli, Maria Rosario Jackson, and Seth Beattie, "Reckoning with a Reckoning: How Cultural Institutions Can Advance Equity," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, February 23, 2021, https://nonprofitquarterly.org/reckoning-with-a-reckoning-how-cultural-institutions-can-advance-equity; Mike Scutari, "How Arts Philanthropy Has Responded to Calls for Racial Justice—And What Comes Next," *Inside Philanthropy*, May 13, 2021, https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2021/5/13/how-arts-philanthropy-has-responded-to-calls-for-racial-justiceand-what-comes-next
6 *Artists Count*, 1.
7 Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis, "Our Vision," https://racstl.org/about-rac.
8 1.4% of the respondents to the Artists Count survey identified as White. *Artists Count*, 3.

METHODOLOGY

The study consists of two parts: a large-scale online survey, and a series of online and in-person focus groups with local creatives.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey protocol was developed with input from RAC staff and key stakeholders, and subsequently tested for face validity in a focus group with local creatives. The survey launched on June 9, 2023, and remained open through August 13, 2023. It was open to the public, but four screening questions were included at the beginning of the survey to ensure that respondents meet basic eligibility requirements (see page 8 for details).

To increase accessibility, respondents had the option to complete the survey by phone, which a small number of respondents did. Respondents could also receive phone assistance in languages other than English, but no one requested assistance.

The link to the online survey was distributed through RAC's e-mail list, posters and handbills, local arts organizations' e-mail lists, advertisements, sponsored social media posts by local creatives, and in-person outreach at more than 20 local events.

The median completion time was 17 minutes. In recognition of the time commitment we requested of survey participants, respondents were able to enter a raffle for one of three $300 gift cards to a local creative business (or, if preferred, a VISA gift card). We received 928 entries for the raffle. Participants were also guaranteed access to the survey findings. Immediately upon completing the survey, respondents were able to view preliminary results for select survey questions on an online dashboard. They also had the option to sign up to receive follow-up communications about the study, including the final report.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To complement the survey, we invited four groups of creatives to participate in a series of two focus group conversations. The initial conversation, conducted online, allowed the researchers to become familiar with the focus group participants and their creative practices. A longer in-person meeting allowed for a deeper exploration of challenges and opportunities within the St. Louis creative sector. In a small number of instances this sequence was modified due to participants' availability.

The focus groups were designed specifically to engage creatives who may not have deep connections with RAC, work in disciplines that RAC is particularly interested in learning about, and reflect perspectives that have historically been underrepresented in studies of local creatives. The selection of participants was therefore key. To identify participants, we invited four creatives to join the study as Community Connectors, each representing a different discipline or community. The Connectors were charged with inviting seven other creatives to the focus groups. The focus group participants offered a good cross-section of views of their respective creative milieu.

Rather than being representative of the entire creative community of St. Louis, the focus groups should be thought of as a window into the creative worlds of the four Community Connectors. We were introduced to a cross-section of the people they interact with in their creative careers: collaborators, respected colleagues, mentors and up-and-coming talent. Some support themselves entirely through their creative work, while others rely on income from jobs in other fields.

RAC identified four creative fields — fashion, music, film and community-based art — as focal points for the qualitative research, and selected the following Connectors within those fields due to their depth of experience and extensive networks:

- Muhammad "Mvstermind" Austin (music)
- Brandin Vaughn (fashion)
- Cami Thomas (film)
- Sheila Suderwalla (community-based arts)

In total, 34 local creatives participated in the focus group research. All focus group participants received a stipend in recognition of their time.

The focus groups were documented by a film crew, and key themes from the conversations are shared via a video that's available on RAC's website. Insights from the focus groups and quotes from individual participants are also integrated throughout this report to add context to the interpretation of the survey data.

In addition to recruiting the focus group participants, the Community Connectors were charged with several other tasks in conjunction with this research project and were compensated for their services. The Connectors vetted the survey questions in advance of the deployment, helped refine outreach strategies, encouraged survey participation within their networks, and commented on drafts of the final research deliverables.

SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES

The survey data clearly reflects racial inequities that are wide-spread in our society.[9] Whether one looks at perceived financial well-being (Figure 1), household income (Figure 2), retirement savings, access to health care, or homeownership, comparisons between Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and White survey respondents consistently tell the same story: as a group, White respondents are faring considerably better financially than their BIPOC peers.

The racial disparities in the survey data resemble those found in the combined population of St. Louis City and St. Louis County. For comparison, Figure 2 includes U.S. Census Bureau data on the household incomes of White and Black or African American households.[10]

The wider social inequities between Black or African American and White residents in St. Louis have a long history that is well documented. [11] One might, therefore, see the racial inequities among survey respondents simply as an outgrowth of larger social, economic and political factors that lie beyond the creative sector. However, our survey data suggests there are differences in the ways that BIPOC and White respondents approach and support their creative practices that may have implications for their needs and well-being. For instance, BIPOC respondents are more likely to own their own business and refer to themselves as entrepreneurs than their White counterparts. The reasons for this and the effects on the BIPOC respondents' ability to support themselves and sustain their creative practices warrant further investigation.

Figure 1: Perceived Financial Wellbeing by White and BIPOC Respondents

Overall, which one of the following best describes how you are doing financially these days?

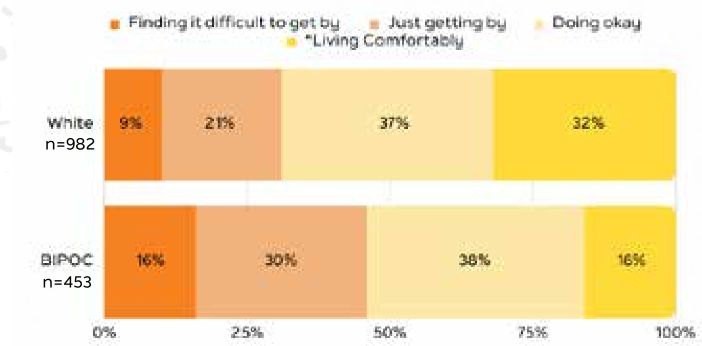
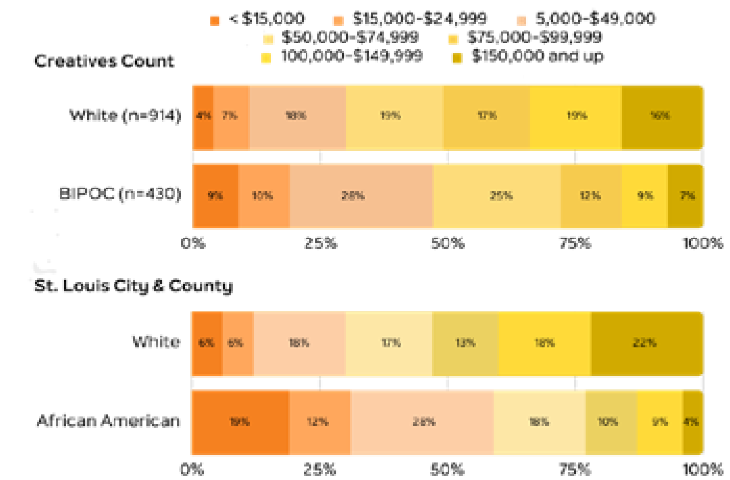


Figure 2: Household Income, Comparison of Creatives Count and General Population by White and BIPOC

What is your total annual household income from all sources?



9 Washington University in St. Louis and Saint Louis University, *For the Sake of All: A multidisciplinary study on the health and well-being of African Americans in St. Louis* (2014), 16 – 25, https://forthesakeofall.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/for-the-sake-of-all-report.pdf

10 Calculated from US Census Bureaus' American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates. https://data.census.gov/

11 For the Sake of All, 16 – 25.

The data also reveals another significant point of distinction. The BIPOC creatives in our sample are more likely to have applied for and received grants, fellowships or monetary awards in the past three years than White respondents. Due to the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 had on communities of color and the national conversation on racial justice that followed the murder of George Floyd, several national foundations and agencies that support artists and creatives took steps to more proactively address historical biases in their funding distribution. In some instances, this led to the creation of emergency funds and grant opportunities specifically for BIPOC artists and organizations, which may contribute to higher rates at which BIPOC survey respondents received funding.[12] However, the data also makes clear that those initiatives, while important, have by no means closed the gap in economic prosperity between BIPOC and White creatives. Despite having received more grants over the past three years, the BIPOC survey respondents are still at a considerable disadvantage. In fact, the higher level of financial need may in part be driving the higher application rates among BIPOC survey respondents.

While it is important to acknowledge and name the pervasiveness of racial inequities at the outset of this report, a full exploration of these issues is beyond the scope of the study, which is intended as an overview of the whole creative sector. A more thorough exploration of the factors that contribute to and perpetuate racial inequities within the creative sector is, however, among the top recommendations to come out of this study.

12 For example, *America's Cultural Treasures* (https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/news-and-press/news/faqs-americas-cultural-treasures/); United States Regional Arts Resilience Fund (https://www.maaa.org/united-states-regional-arts-resilience-fund/); Latinx Artist Fellowship (https://uslaf.org/latinx-artist-fellowship-2023/); *A Road Together* (https://fieldfoundation.org/generalguidelines/art); Constellation Culture Change Fund (https://www.culturalpower.org/stories/creating-constellations/); *Fund for BIPOC Artists* (https://www.westaf.org/westaf-announces-the-bipoc-artist-fund/).

SURVEY SAMPLE **OVERVIEW**

Given that there is no definitive registry of creatives living in St. Louis and St. Louis County, it is impossible to draw a random sample of local creatives for surveying purposes. A survey that seeks to reflect the entire creative sector must extend an open invitation to the entire population of creatives and rely on the respondents' willingness to complete the survey. This invariably leads to some degree of sampling bias, though RAC went to great lengths to counteract biases observed in past survey research with targeted outreach to Black or African American communities, which have historically been underrepresented.

One must be careful not to generalize about the entire population of creatives of St. Louis due to the limitations of the sampling methodology; however, the 1,522 survey responses we received nonetheless represent the experiences of a large and diverse cross-section of the region's creative community and can usefully inform planning, policy and programming decisions.

The survey was open to anyone who is:

- Creatively involved in the production or presentation of creative cultural products, including music, fine or folk arts, creative writing, fashion, film/media, social practice, makers, and other creative works, whether for financial gain or personal satisfaction;
- 18 or older; and
- Currently lives in St. Louis City or County or does creative work or present creative work to the public within the City of St. Louis or in St. Louis County.

Arts administrators, box office personnel, marketing staff, maintenance workers, ushers, and many others who play important administrative and technical roles in the creative sector were not eligible for the *Creatives Count* survey (unless they also have a creative practice of their own).

Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 (AEP 6), another research study supported by RAC, takes a larger view of the cultural workforce in assessing the economic impact of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations in St. Louis.[13] AEP 6 includes all people employed in the nonprofit arts and culture sector as well as the contributions of ticket buyers, volunteers and donors.

13 https://racstl.org/aep6/

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

We received a total of 1,522 valid survey responses, representing a diverse range of identities and backgrounds (see Table 1). [14] As in almost all surveys conducted in the arts and cultural sector, men are underrepresented in the sample, with approximately 62% of the respondents identifying as female. Age ranges from 25 to 74 are roughly equally represented in the sample.

14 Survey participants were able to skip over questions that they preferred not to answer, as reflected in the variable "n" that shows the number of responses received for each specific question in tables and on charts throughout this report.

Table 1: Overview of Survey Sample Demographics

Demographic Summary	Number of Respondants	Percent of Sample
Gender (n=1503)		
Female	934	62%
Male	497	33%
Non-Binary	77	5%
Other	15	1%
Age Cohorts (n=1472)		
18-24	49	3%
25-34	277	19%
35-44	335	23%
45-54	255	17%
55-64	248	17%
65-74	238	16%
75+	70	5%

Table 1: Overview of Survey Sample Demographics (cont'd)

Demographic Summary	Number of Respondants	Percent of Sample
Race/Ethnicity (multiple select, does not add to 100%) (n=1499)		
American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous or First Nations	50	3%
Arab or Middle Eastern or North African	4	0%
Asian or Asian American	39	3%
Black or African American	351	23%
Hispanic or Latino(a) or Latinx or Spanish origin	50	3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3	0%
White/Caucasian	1048	70%
Prefer to Self-Identify	63	4%
Total BIPOC or Multi-Racial (at least one option other than White)	*454*	*30%*
White/Caucasian Only	*989*	*66%*
Education (n=1513)		
Less than 9th grade	1	0%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	6	0%
High School graduate or G.E.E.	52	3%
Some college, no degree	210	14%
Non-degree art or technical school	26	2%
Associate degree	92	6%
Bachelor's degree	559	37%
Graduate or professional degree	567	37%
Other Demographics		
Respondents with disabilities	262	17%
Children in household	313	23%
LGBTQ+	292	21%

Thirty percent of survey respondents identify as one or more races or ethnicities other than White (together, referred to as "BIPOC or Multi-Racial" in Table 1). While Black or African American creatives are underrepresented compared to the general population of St. Louis and St. Louis County (23% vs. 29% in the general population) and the non-Hispanic White population is overrepresented (70% vs. 62% in the general population), the representation of Black or African American creatives is considerably better than in past surveys led by RAC. Eight percent of the responses to the 2012 *Artists Count* survey were from Black or African American artists; the sample for a more recent study responding to the COVID-19 pandemic included 17% African Americans. [15]

As is frequently observed in studies of artists and creatives, survey respondents are more highly educated than the general population, with 37% holding an advanced degree, and another 37% holding a bachelor's degree (compared to 43% holding bachelor's or higher degree in the general population of St. Louis County, and 38% within the city).[16]

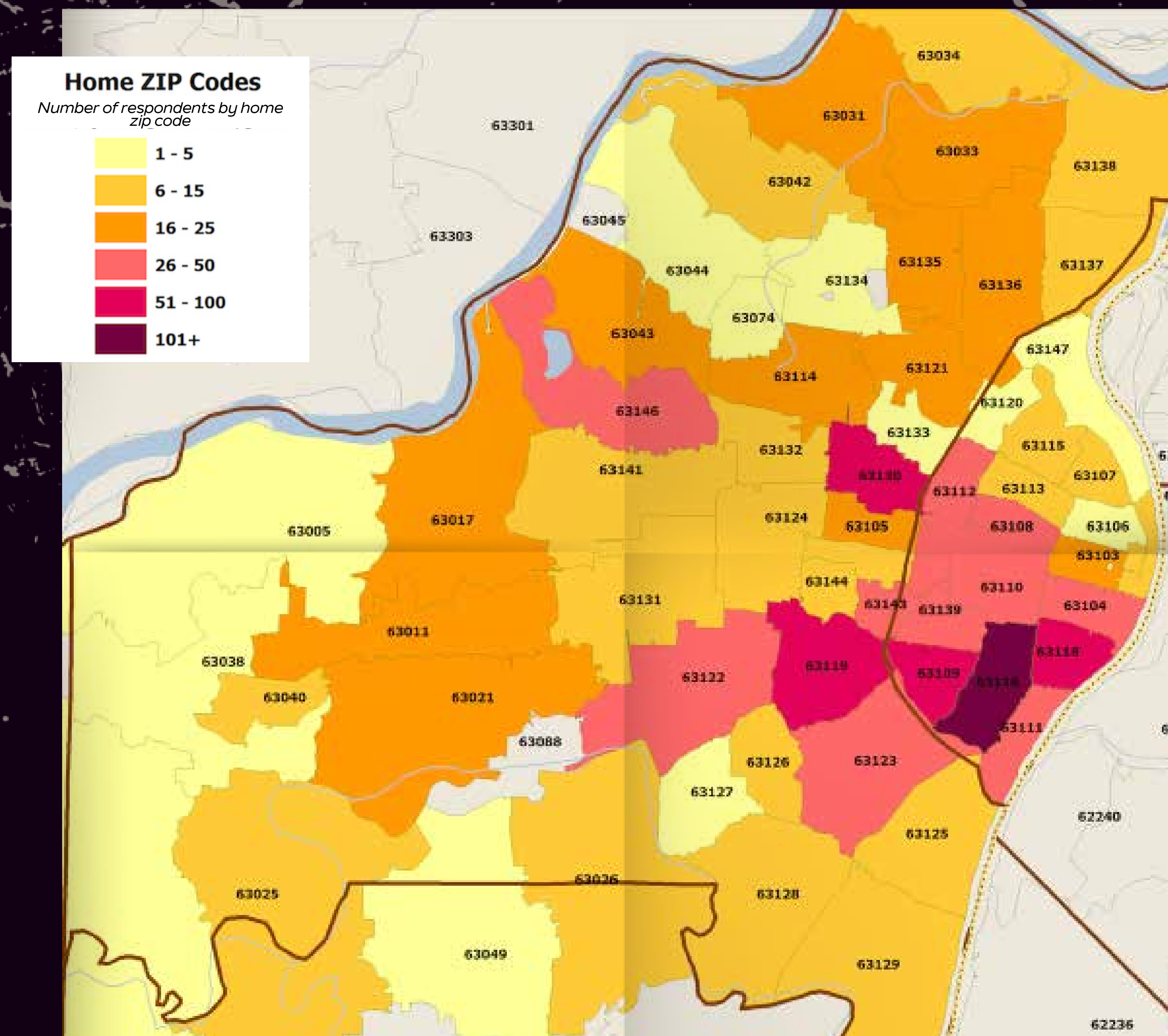
Seventeen percent of the survey respondents identify as having a disability, and 21% identify as LGBTQ+. Twenty-three percent of respondents report having children under age 18 who regularly live with them.

Except for two ZIP codes (63088 and 63140), all populated areas of the city and county of St. Louis are represented in the sample. Forty-two percent of the respondents who entered their home ZIP code live in the city of St. Louis; fifty-five percent live in St. Louis County. The central and southern ZIP codes within the city, along with ZIP codes immediately southwest of the city and University City, have a particularly high number of responses (Figure 3).

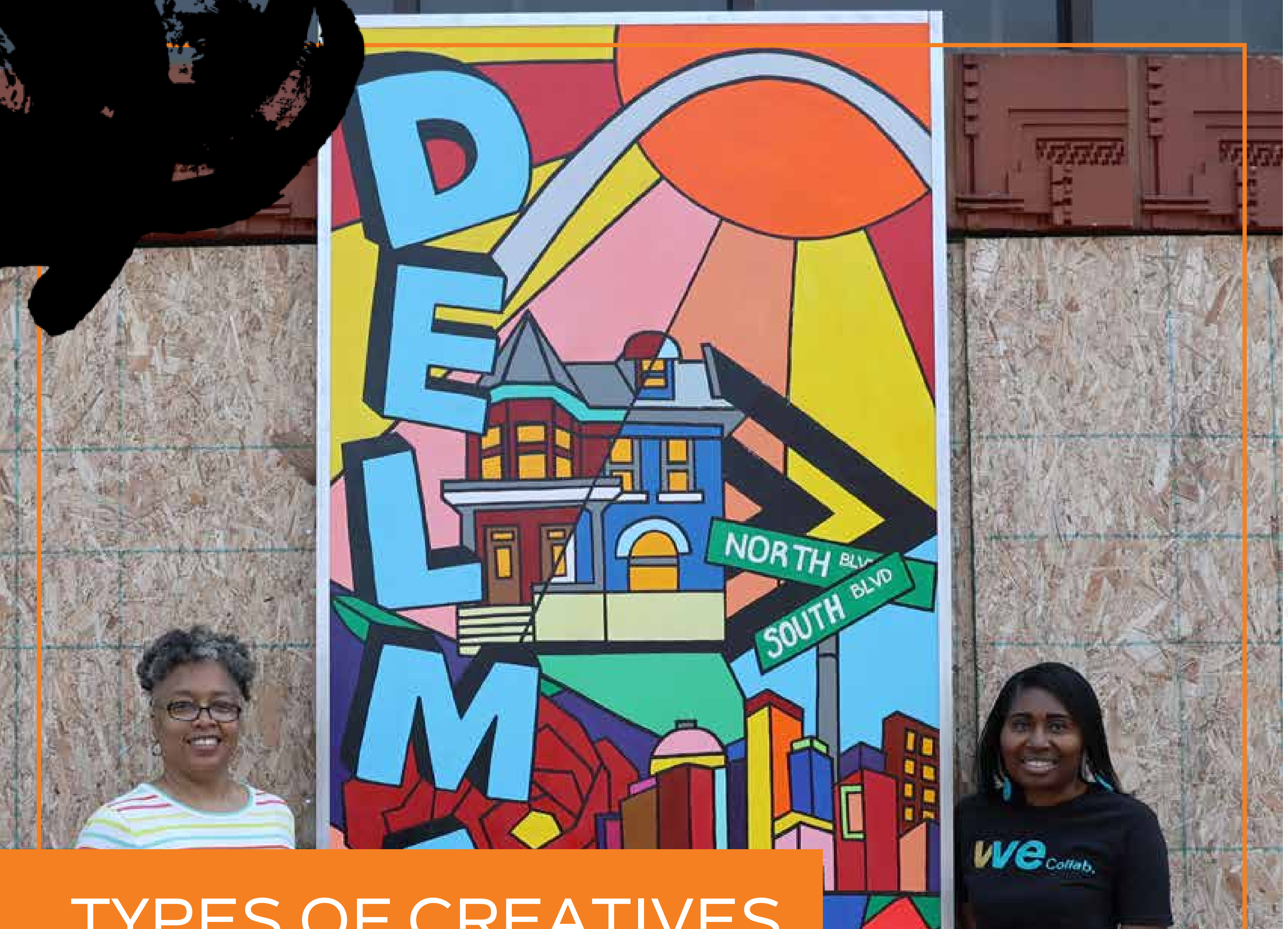
15 *Artists Count*, 3; Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis, *COVID-19 Impact Survey* (unpublished manuscript).
16 US Census Bureau, *Quick Facts*. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stlouiscitymissouri,stlouiscountymissouri/EDU685221.

Creatives living outside of the study area (not shown in Figure 3) were still able to take the survey if they produce or publicly share their creative work within the city or county of St. Louis. While creatives living in Illinois and around the outskirts of St. Louis County significantly contribute to the region's cultural richness, they were not a focus of our outreach efforts. Forty-two responses (3%) were received from ZIP codes outside of St. Louis City and St. Louis County.

Figure 3: Map of Survey Respondents by Home ZIP Code



FINDINGS



TYPES OF CREATIVES

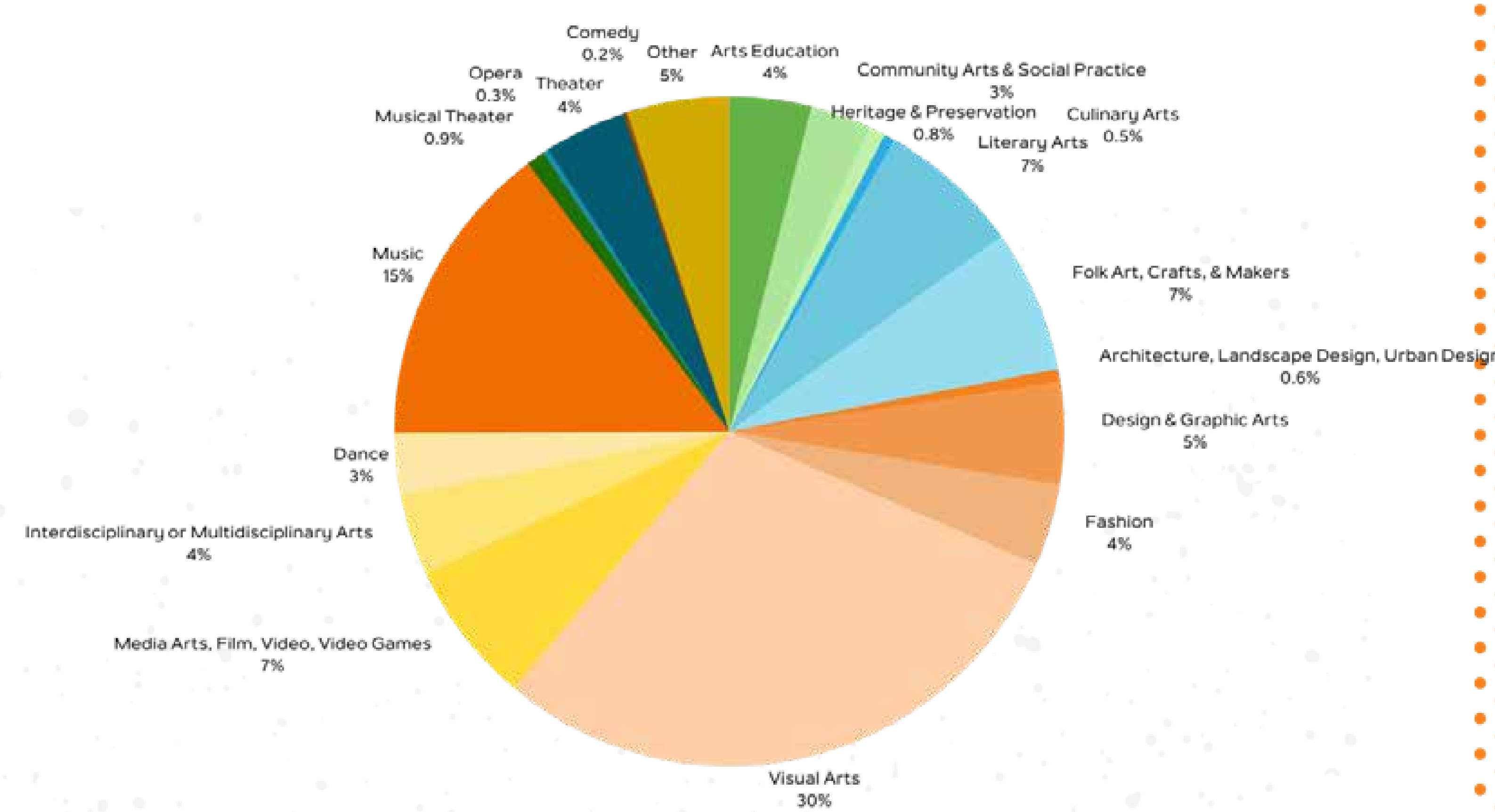
The survey respondents represent a range of creative practices. Asked which creative fields they are active in, respondents selected 2.7 options on average. Twenty-eight percent selected a single field, 23% selected two, 18% selected three, and 27% selected four or more creative fields.

A follow-up question in the survey asked respondents to identify their primary field of practice (Figure 4). The visual arts are the most strongly represented field (30%) followed by music (15%). In *Artists Count,* these two disciplines featured even more prominently, together accounting for 58% of the respondents (40% visual arts and 18% music).[17]

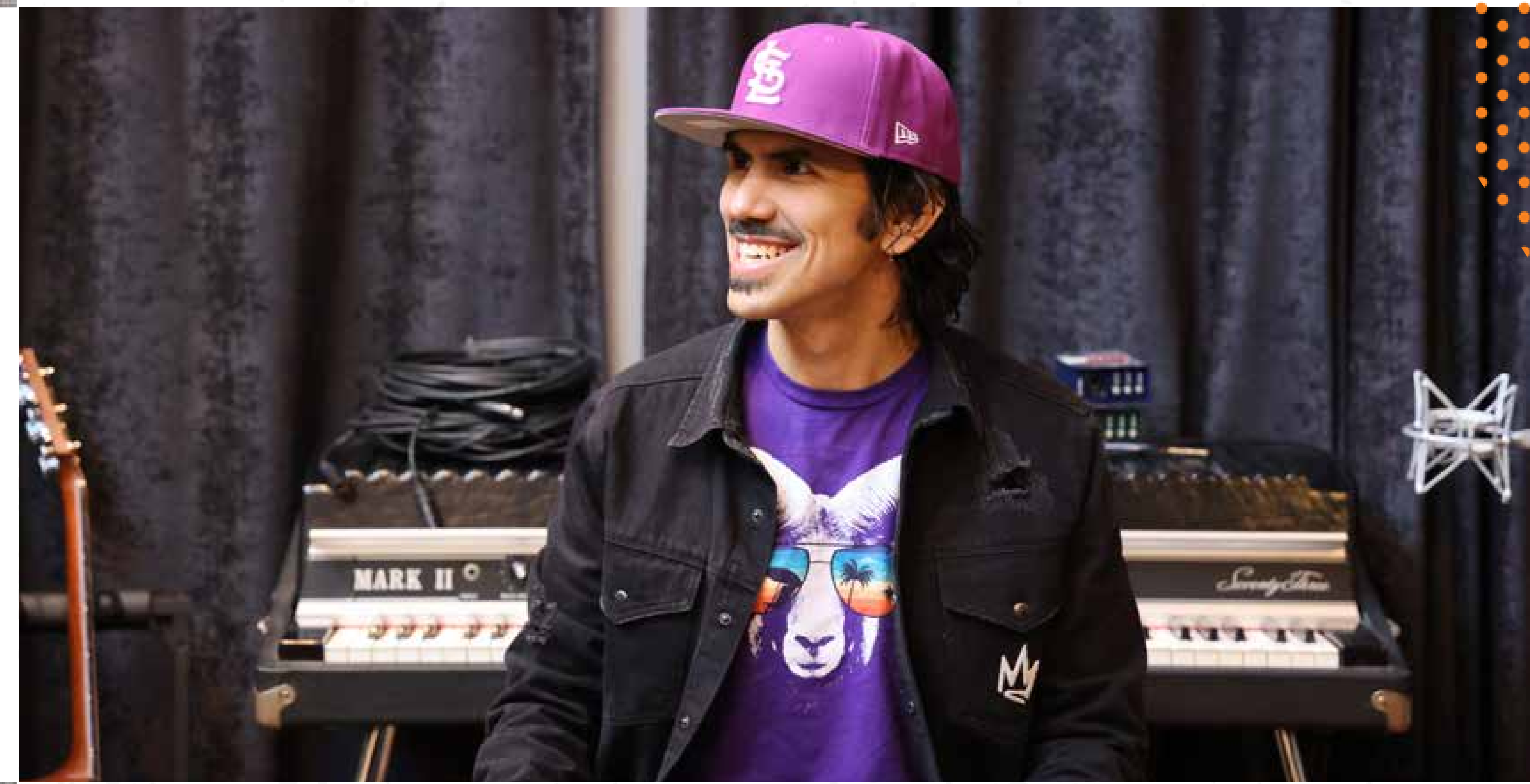
Because the list of creative fields offered in the 2012 survey was less extensive than in the present study, direct comparisons aren't always possible. For instance, there was no equivalent of "Arts Education," "Community Arts & Social Practice," "Heritage & Preservation," and "Culinary Arts" categories in the 2012 study, which together represent 8% of the current sample. The current sample also includes a larger proportion of respondents choosing "Folk Arts, Crafts, and Makers" (7%) compared to *Artists Count*, where 2% of the respondents selected "Craft" as their primary discipline. Other differences between the two samples are seen in slight increases in the representation of design fields, literary arts, media, and inter-/multi-disciplinary arts, and slight decreases in the number of responses from the theater and dance fields.

Figure 4: Respondents by Primary Creative Field

Which of the following do you consider your primary creative practice?
n=1499



17 *Artists Count*, 6.



Within these creative fields, respondents occupy a variety of different roles. The survey asked respondents to select all roles they fill within the creative sector, rather than limiting them to a single selection. "Artist" was the most frequently selected category (78%). This was followed by "Maker," (33%) "Teacher" (30%) and "Performer" (28%). "Crafter," "Designer" and "Entrepreneur" were each selected by about one quarter of the respondents, while more administrative roles ("Administrator," "Community Liaison," "Manager," "Producer") ranged from 10% to 20%. While full-time administrators and support staff (those who aren't directly involved with the creative process or development of creative products) weren't eligible to take the survey, this shows that many creatives take on technical and managerial roles within the sector in addition to their creative work. This echoes findings from *Artists Count*, where it was observed that more than a quarter of the respondents identified both as "Artists" and "Arts workers" (defined as "teachers and those who provide support for arts enterprises, such as administrators, owners/managers of venues, technical workers, stagehands, etc.").[18]

Among the 10% of respondents who selected the "Other" category, almost a third wrote in "Writer" or a closely related occupation as their role in their creative sector.

While most respondents share their creative work online, their audiences are predominantly local. Sixty-seven percent reported sharing their work with the public through social media, 45% through websites, 23% through streaming services, and 18% through online stores. However, Figure 6 indicates 61% of the creatives responding to the survey primarily share their creative work within the St. Louis Metropolitan Area. The primary audiences of about one-fifth of respondents (21%) are located in the Midwest and nationally, while 5% primarily share their work internationally. Twelve percent consider their online viewers, visitors or followers to be their primary audience.

18 Artists Count, 7.

Figure 5: Respondents by Creative Role

Note: Values do not sum to 100% because multiple selections were possible.
Which of the following describe your role(s) in the Creative Sector?
n=1512

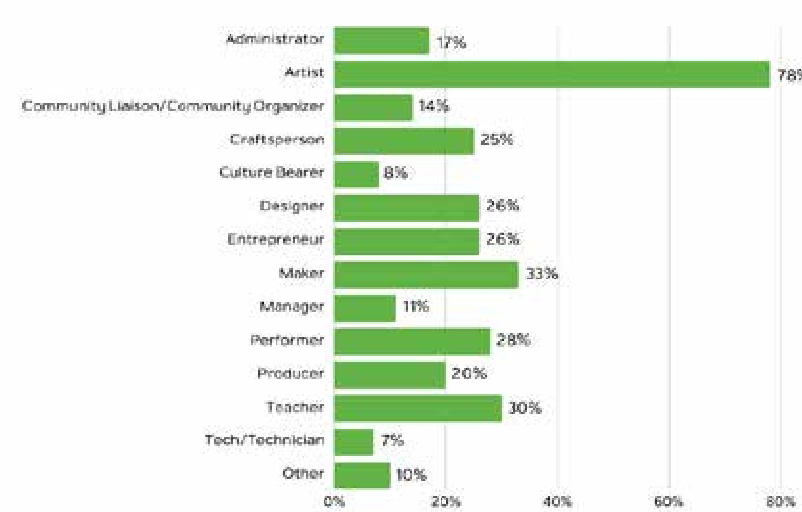
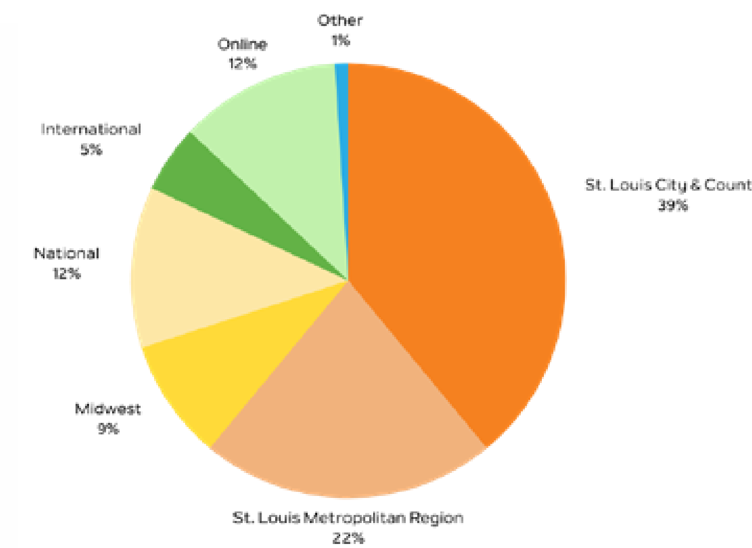
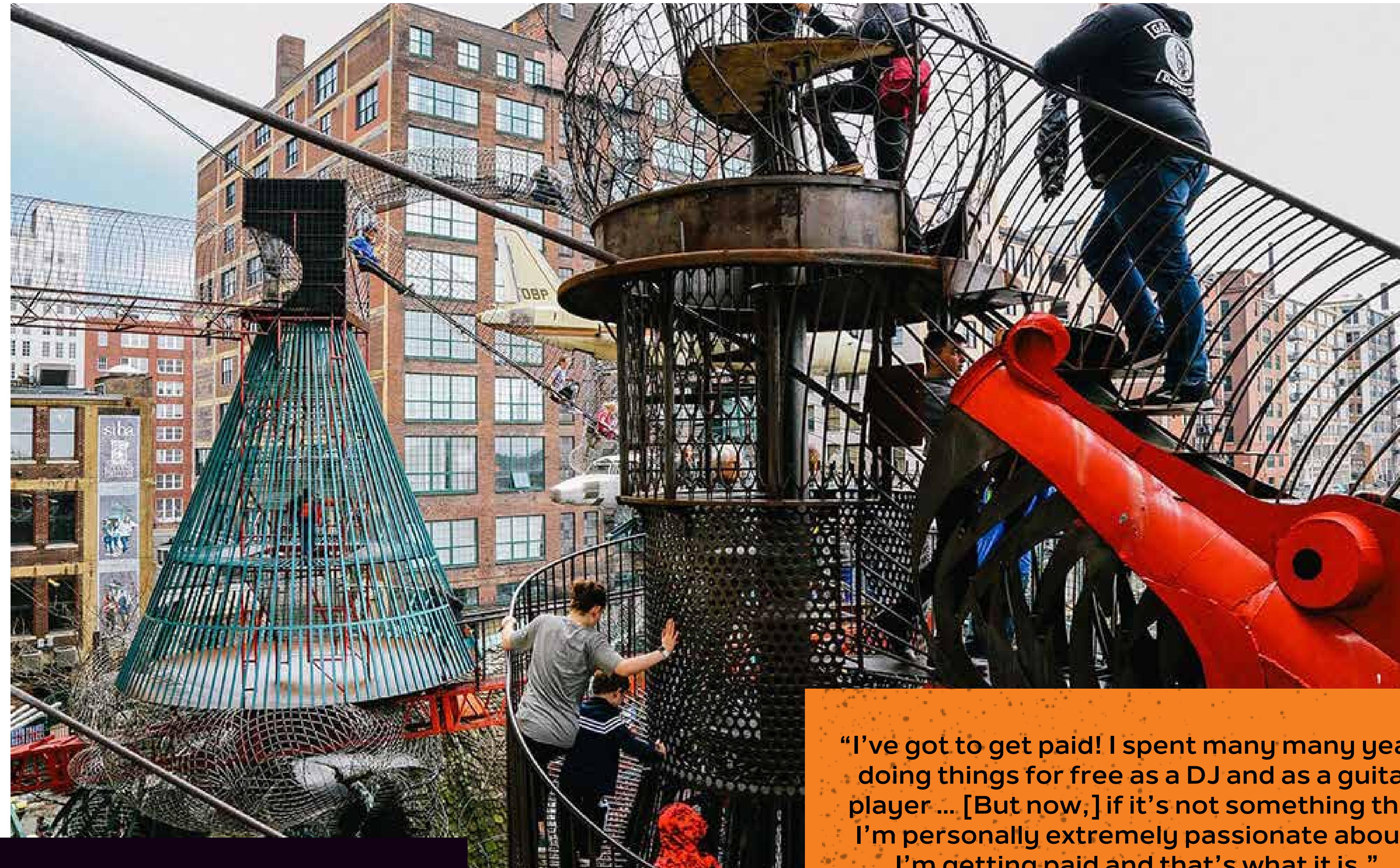


Figure 6: Location of Creatives' Primary Audiences

Currently, where are the primary audience(s) or consumer(s) for your creative work?



"I was adjuncting here, teaching there, I was doing residencies all over the country. I liked the residencies and the teaching ... but it was also a financial necessity. And one has to ask where your juice is, and how much energy you have."
- Theater Director



GOALS OF CREATIVES

> "I've got to get paid! I spent many many years doing things for free as a DJ and as a guitar player ... [But now,] if it's not something that I'm personally extremely passionate about, I'm getting paid and that's what it is."
> *- Music Producer*

The creatives in our sample display a wide range of motivations and aspirations for pursuing their creative practice. As Figure 7 shows, 41% of respondents consider their creative practice to be their main career. Their creative work either is, or they would like to be, their primary source of income. We refer to these individuals as "career creatives" throughout this report.

For 18% of respondents, earning income is an important motivation for doing their creative work, but they don't view their creative practice as their main job or career.

For the rest, earning income from their creative practice is less important. Thirty percent earn or would like to earn some income from their creative practice, but don't consider that a major motivation. Eleven percent of respondents have no intention to generate revenue from their practice.

The earning objectives of survey respondents are strongly related to their economic situation and support needs and are therefore frequently referenced throughout this report.

When survey respondents were asked to select the most urgent goal for their professional lives and creative practice, 21% chose "reaching a wider audience with my primary creative practice" (Figure 8). "Earning more money (from all sources" ranked second (18%), followed by "improving the quality/technique in my primary creative practice" (17%) and "increasing my income from my primary creative practice, so I can reduce my hours in other jobs" (16%). Two of the top four goals have to do with earning more money. In one instance, respondents are expressing a need for more money overall; in the other, they are comfortable with their level of income, but aspire to shift the focus of their careers towards their creative work and away from jobs in other fields.

Earning Objectives for Creative Practice

How do you feel about earning income from your primary creative practice?
n=1458

11% I do not try to earn income from my primary creative practice.

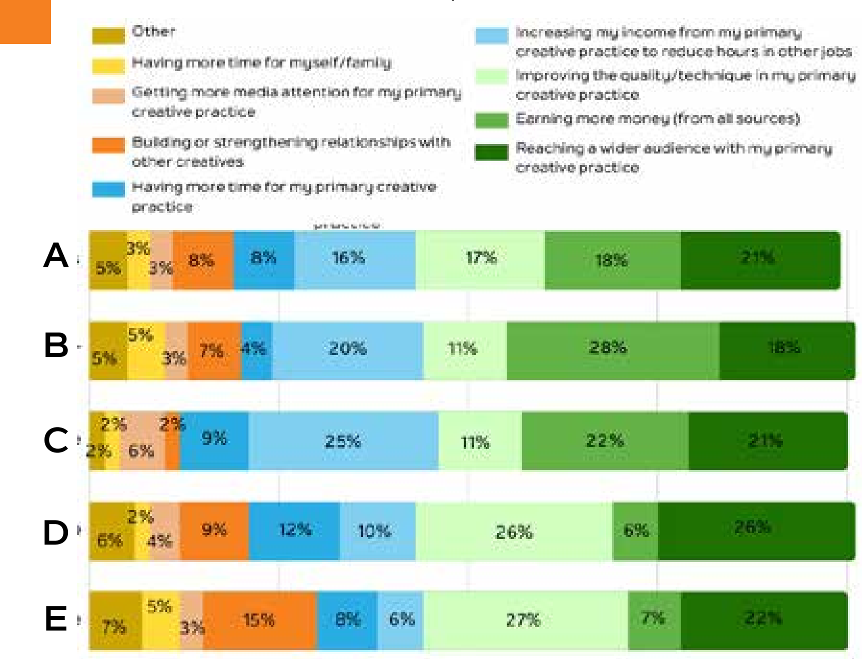
30% I earn (or would like to earn) some income, but that's not a major motivation.

18% Earning income is an important part of why I do my primary creative practice, but it's not my main job or career.

41% My primary creative practice is my main career. It is (or I'd like it to be) the main way I support myself.

Figure 8: Most Urgent Goals of Creatives, Overall and by Earning Objective.

How do you feel about earning income from your primary creative practice?



A: All respondents (n=1395)
B: Creative Practice is Main Career (n=560)
C: Income is a Major Motivation for Creative Practice (n=237)
D: Income is Not a Major Motivation for Creative Practice (n=394)
E: Not Seeking Income for Their Creative Practice (n=150)

"There are some community arts projects that pay … but there are [many] that say, 'We want you to do this, but we really don't have money.' If it resonates with me, I have often done projects for free. I shouldn't, [but I have.]"
- Visual Artist

Prioritization of goals varies greatly based on respondents' earning objectives. Among career creatives, the most common goal is to earn more money overall (28%). Fewer career creatives (20%) focus on increasing their earnings from their primary creative practice to reduce the number of hours they spend working in other occupations. However, among the respondents who don't view their creative practice as their primary career, but nonetheless consider earning income from their creative work a major motivation, that relationship is reversed. Their most common goal is to reduce the time they spend working in other jobs to focus more on creative work (25%), whereas increasing total income is a less prevalent concern (22%).

"My goal [at fashion shows] is to sell product because that's how we really make our money. … Fans and fashion shows don't necessarily equate to more buying."
- Fashion Designer

Those who don't see income as a primary motivation for their creative work have greater interest in improving their creative technique and the quality of their work. For them, the satisfaction of improving their skills may be an intrinsic motivation.

"I think it's just knowing that the work is out there for people to see … I don't need an award or anything like that."
- Photographer

Among the goals that were assessed in the survey, reaching a larger audience with their creative practice is the top priority for a sizable portion of respondents across all earning objectives. Twenty-six percent of respondents who would like to earn some income from their creative work, but don't see income as a major motivation selected the option, as did 18% of the career creatives.

WORK & INCOME

The earning objectives are clearly reflected in the way creatives spend their time. Figures 9, a-d, show how creatives with different earning objectives for their primary practice divide their time between their primary creative practice, other creative work, administrative and technical work in the creative sector, and work outside of the creative sector.

Respondents who are career creatives tend to spend more time working on their primary creative practice. Thirty-three percent report spending more than 40 hours a week on their creative practice; 40% spend 21 to 40 hours a week (Figure 9a).

In terms of the amount of time they spend on their primary creative practice, respondents who consider earning income a major motivation (Figure 9b) are similar to those for whom income is not a major concern (Figure 9c). A more noticeable difference between these two groups lies in the amount of time they spend doing "other" creative work as well as administrative and technical work in the creative sector. Those who seek to earn income from their creative practice appear more intent on working in creative fields, even if that work isn't within their primary practice. The time these respondents spend on "other" work in the creative sector is almost on par with career creatives.

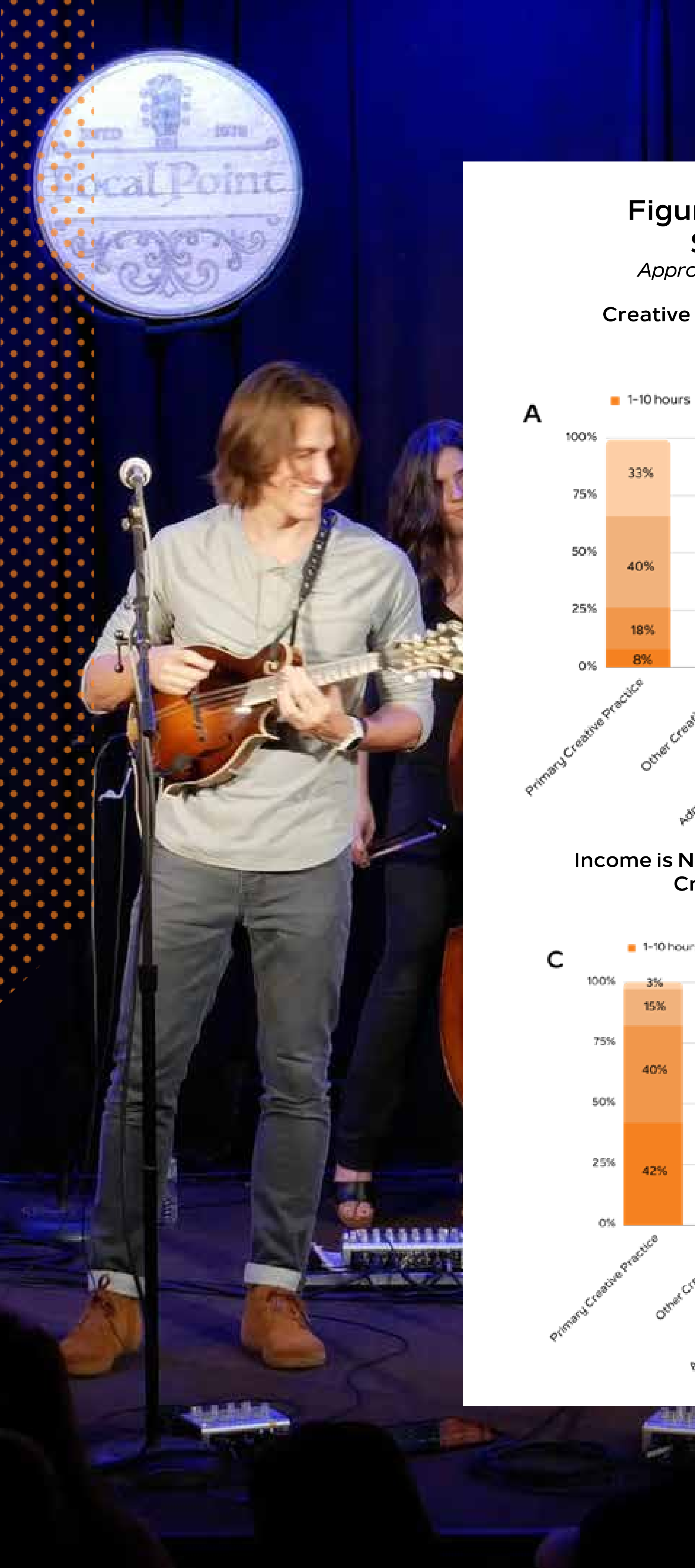
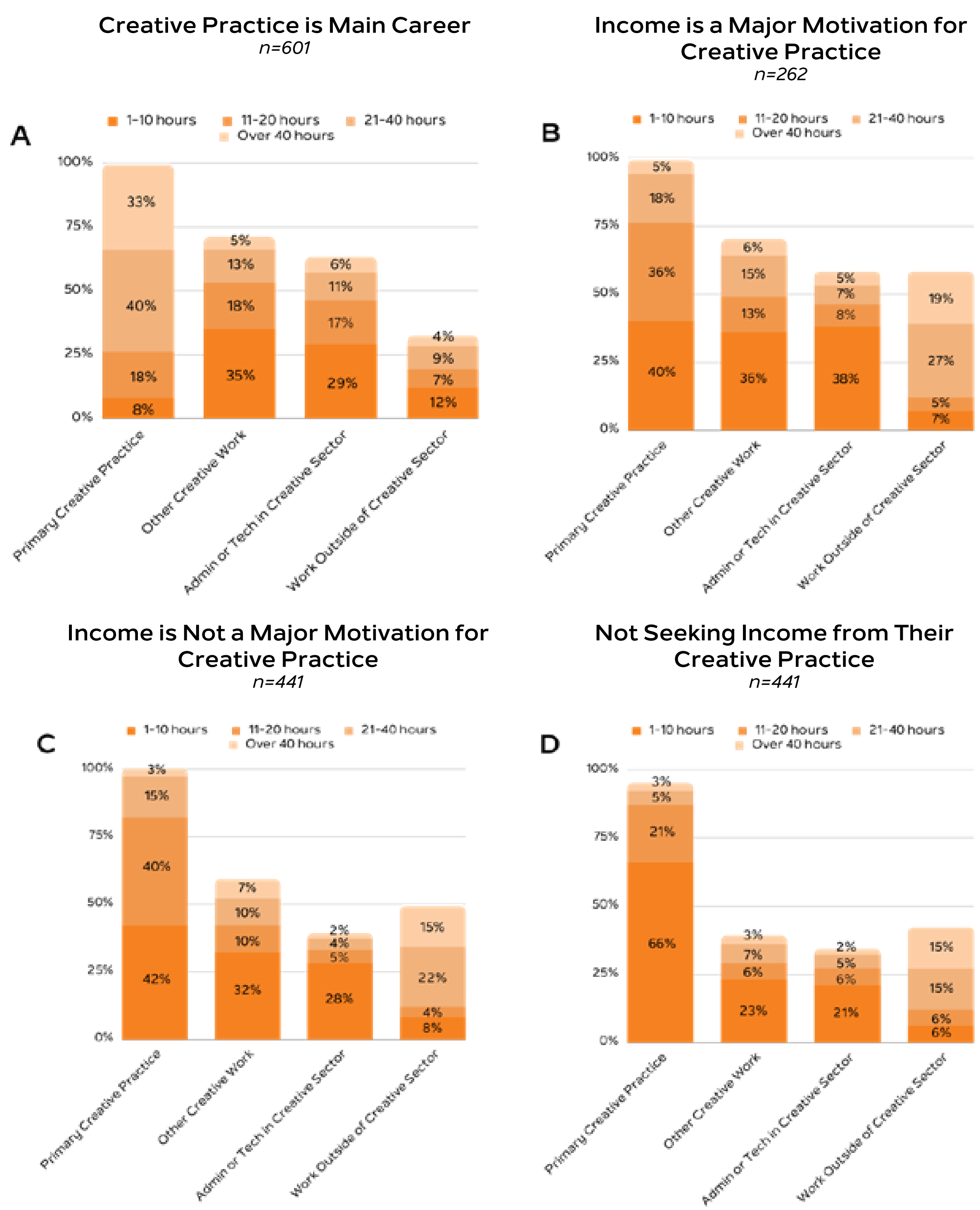


Figure 9, a - d: Division of Working Hours Across Sectors and Jobs, by Earning Objective

Approxiamately how many hours per week do you usually spend on...



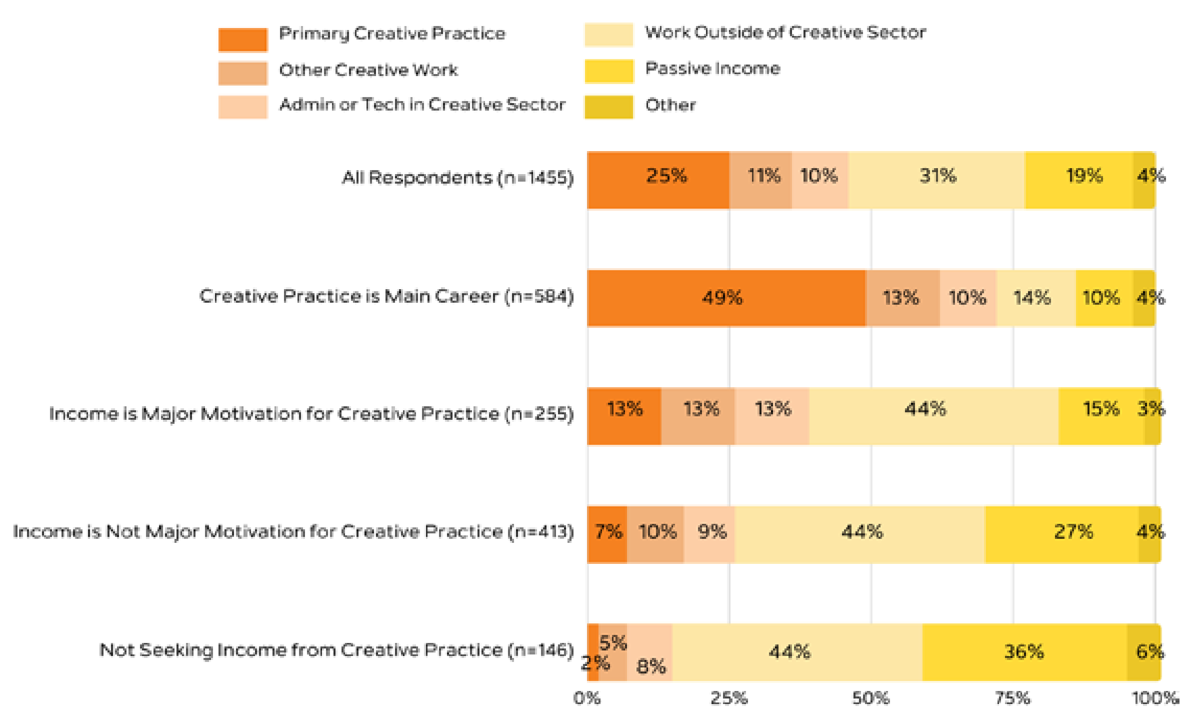
On average, survey respondents generate a greater share of their income from work they do outside the creative sector than from their primary creative practice (Figure 10). Thirty-one percent of their income comes from outside of the sector, whereas a quarter comes from their primary creative practice. However, taken together, work in the creative sector (including creative work outside their primary field as well as administrative and technical work) accounts for 46% of respondents' income.

Figure 10 also shows differences that emerge when respondents are divided according to their earning objectives. Career creatives derive 49% of their income from their primary creative practice, and another 23% from other work in the creative sector. In total, income from the creative sector accounts for almost three-quarters (72%) of career creatives' income.

The role of "passive income" (including Social Security, disability insurance, investments, rental income, etc.) is particularly important for creatives who don't seek to earn income from their creative practice. This is at least in part due to the fact that respondents who don't seek income from their creative practice tend to be older. Thirty-six percent of the respondents in that category are older than 65 and thus more likely to receive Social Security and draw on retirement savings. By contrast, 12% of the career creatives and 16% of those for whom earning income is a major motivation for their creative practice are older than 65.

Figure 10: Sources of Income, Overall and by Earning Objective

Approximately, what percentage of your personal income comes from...



Overall, 48% of the respondents pursue their creative practice as the owner or co-owner of a business (Figure 11). Forty-seven percent describe their practice as freelance work, gig work, or contract-based work. The survey didn't specifically inquire about the form of business entities creatives use to pursue their practice (e.g., sole proprietorship, LLC, S Corporation, etc.), so the distinction between owning a business and freelancing may have as much to do with the respondents' mindset about their work as it does with their legal or tax status. In either case, these findings indicate that most respondents pursue their creative practices through their own entrepreneurial efforts and at their own financial risk, rather than as employees with a regular paycheck and (potentially) benefits. Fifteen percent reported being employed by a nonprofit, and 13% by for-profit businesses.

Figure 11: Employment/Business Model for Creative Practices

Note: Values do not sum to 100% because multiple selections were possible

What best describes how you pursue your creative practice?

n=1300

48% I pursue my creative practice as the owner of co-owner of a business

I do freelance work / I pursue my creative practice on a gig-by-gig or contract-by-contract basis **47%**

15% "I pursue my creative practice as a full or part-time employee of a nonprofit"

"I pursue my creative practice as a full or part-time employee of a nonprofit" **13%**

Our focus groups with local creatives reinforce this point. We frequently heard about the constant hustle required to make a living as a creative in St. Louis. While it can be exhausting, the people we spoke with aren't disheartened. Some participants noted that working in St. Louis requires them to create their own opportunities to sustain themselves and their work:

> *That's just how I was raised here, right? We've got to hustle, we've got to figure it out. Through that mentality, that starts fostering all these different opportunities. And now I'm at a point where I can create opportunities for other people.*
>
> \- Choreographer

"With this film, I'm probably out of pocket about $7,000. Some of [the funding came from] my pop, some of it was my investment money. … I feel like I can bet on myself at this point, even though maybe I shouldn't. But who else is gonna believe in me?"
- Filmmaker

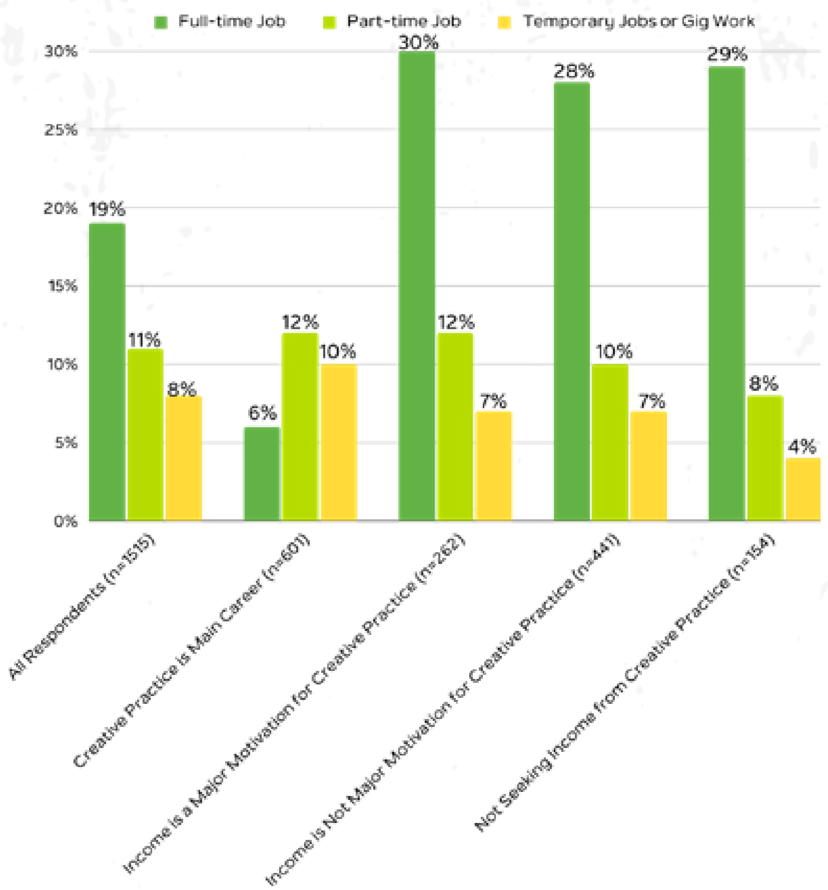
The largest share of administrative and technical work that creatives do (43%) is in support of their primary creative practice and is not compensated. This may include time creatives spend on accounting, scheduling rehearsals, negotiating contracts, ordering materials, etc. For those who don't see their creative practice as a source of income, a large portion of the administrative and technical work (37% - 52%) is done on a volunteer basis in support of other creatives and organizations.

Nineteen percent of all survey respondents hold a full-time job outside the creative sector; but among the respondents who consider their creative work their main career, only 6% hold a full-time job in another sector (Figure 12). Twelve percent of career creatives hold part-time jobs outside the creative sector, and 10% take on temporary jobs or gig work, which is slightly higher than observed among other respondents in the sample.

Figure 12: Employment Outside the Creative Sector, Overall and by Earning Objective

Note: Multiple selections possible

Which of the following best characterize your paid work outside of the arts or creative sectors?



"I work forty hours a week for a company that has nothing to do with my interests in life, and I fund some of my own creative projects through working as a musician for hire. So [for instance, I might] do some big shows with other groups, get paid for those, then take that money and spend it on getting my own music mixed."
- Musician

ECONOMIC SITUATION

Twenty-seven percent of respondents report that they are "living comfortably," and another 38% say they're "doing okay" (Figure 13); however, at a combined 65% that's still below the national average. According to the Federal Reserve Board, which uses the same question on its *Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking*, 73% of U.S. households were at least "doing okay" in 2022.[19]

Overall, 36% of the creatives we surveyed are "just getting by" or "finding it difficult to get by" and the sense of economic insecurity increases among respondents who rely on income from their creative practice more heavily. Forty-two percent of career creatives say they're either just getting by or struggling financially.

19 Federal Reserve Board (2003), *Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2022*, p.5. https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2022-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202305.pdf

In response to a separate question, 35% of respondents said they would not be able to cover their expenses for three months if they were to lose their primary source of income (compared to 30% nationally).[20] Sixty-seven percent of respondents have retirement savings. Among the respondents aged 55 to 74, 20% report having no retirement savings at all and another 17% have less than $50,000. Across all age cohorts, the career creatives in our sample are less likely to have accumulated savings than their peers. Part of the challenge creatives face in accumulating savings is that they frequently rely on their personal income to fund their creative work. As one local filmmaker noted in a focus group:

"We don't do the responsible thing and put aside money. We say, "No, I'm putting it on my dream." ... We spend all of our energy, all our money to make it happen."

20 Federal Reserve Board, 34.

Figure 13: Perceived Financial Wellbeing, Overall and by Earning Objective

Overall, which one of the following best describes how you are doing financially these days?

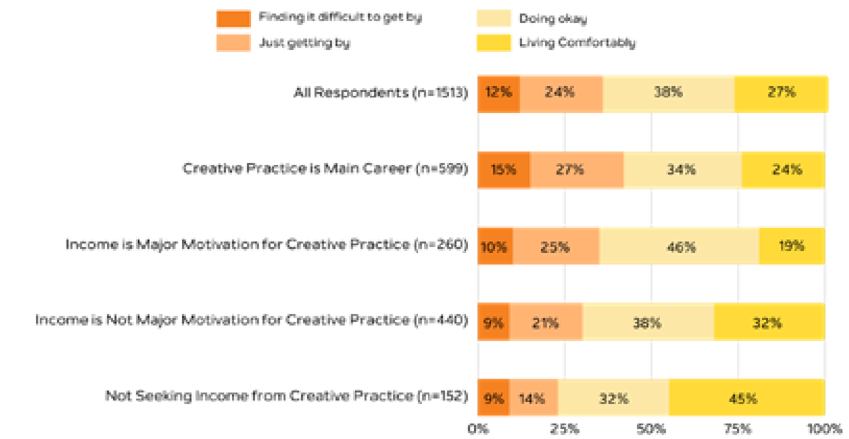
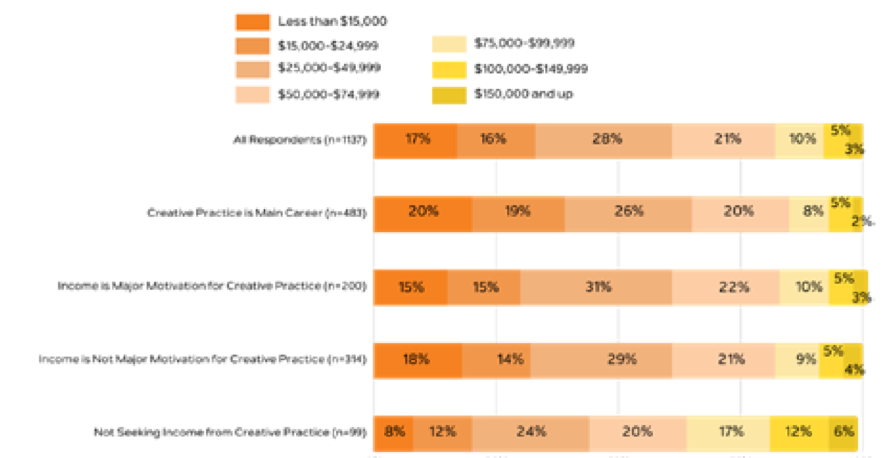


Figure 14: Annual Personal Income, Overall and by Earning Objective

What is your total annual personal income from all sources?



"[Often] it's like, man, for this little amount of money, is it worth it? ... And I hate to say it, but I need that little bit of money, right? So I wish I could have more control over the gigs... so I can say no to this and say yes to that, but now it's like: I need all my coins."
- Musician

The annual personal income reported by respondents is rather consistent across creatives with various earning objectives for the top income categories, particularly among those with some earnings from their creative practice. There's more notable differentiation in the lower income levels, with 39% of the career creatives reporting an annual personal income less than $25,000 (Figure 14).

While career creatives report lower annual personal income levels (Figure 14), their household income reveals a slightly different picture (Figure 15). In terms of household income, there are still more career creatives in the lowest income categories than other creatives; however, there are also more career creatives reporting household incomes in the top two ranges than among their peers for whom earning income is a major motivation for their creative practice, but who don't consider it their main career. That is, for some career creatives, the sacrifice in personal income that we see in Figure 14 is offset by higher levels of income from other members of their household.

Comparing the survey respondents to the general population of St. Louis and St. Louis County reveals that the creatives represented in our survey are more heavily clustered in the middle-income ranges, with fewer respondents in the lowest and highest categories than in the general population (Figure 16). However, this may result from creatives in the highest and lowest income categories being less likely to take the survey, rather than an actual difference in household incomes between creatives and other residents.[21]

21 Based on the US Census Bureaus' American Community Survey 2021 5-Year Estimates. https://data.census.gov/

Figure 15: Annual Household Income, Overall and by Earning Objective

What is your total annual household income from all sources?

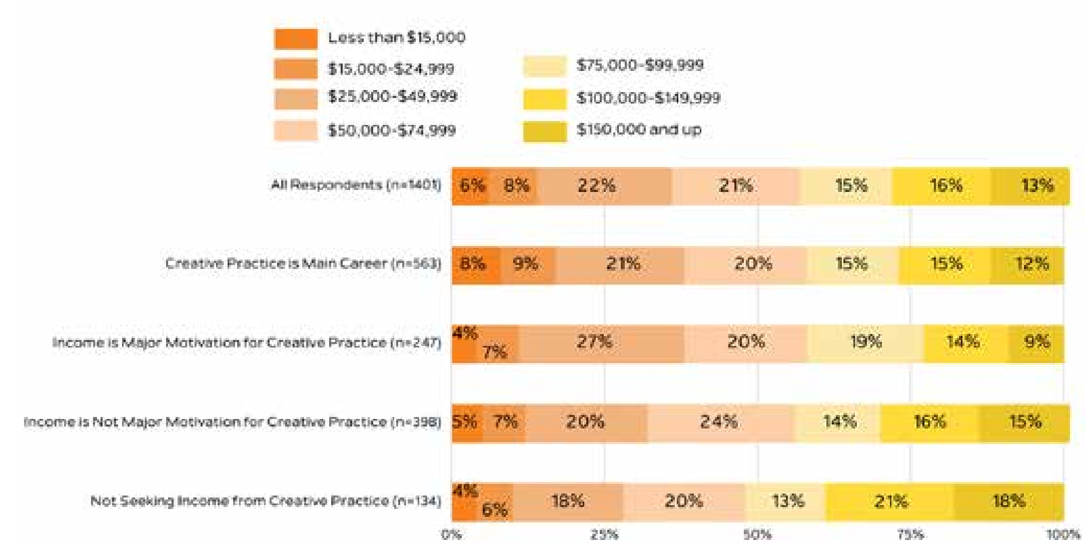
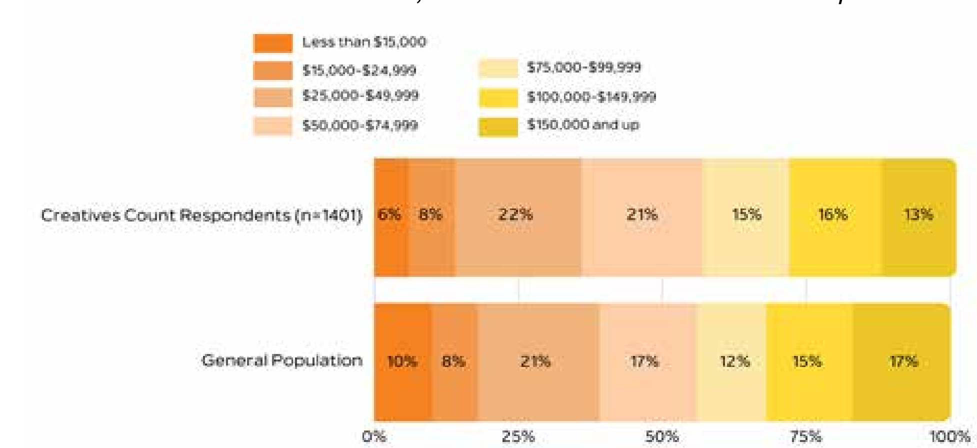


Figure 16: Annual Household Income, Creatives Count vs. General Population

Annual Household Income, Creatives Count vs. General Population



IMPACT OF COVID

Although the survey primarily focused on creatives' current situation, there were two questions that addressed the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on respondents' work. While one must acknowledge that creatives who gave up their practice during the pandemic are less likely to have taken our survey, 43% of all respondents reported that they currently spend more time each week on their creative practice than before the pandemic (Figure 17). The increase is particularly large among career creatives. Among those who consider their creative practice their main career, 49% say they are spending more time on their creative work than in 2019; 15% are spending less time.

> "I was struggling to just make ends meet, but always doing film and photo as a side thing, never thinking that I could do it seriously – until Covid hit. I started branching into commercial work and doing drone work, side freelancing ... Eventually, I branched off into full time freelance ... and now I'm fully specialized as a lighting guy."
> *- Gaffer*

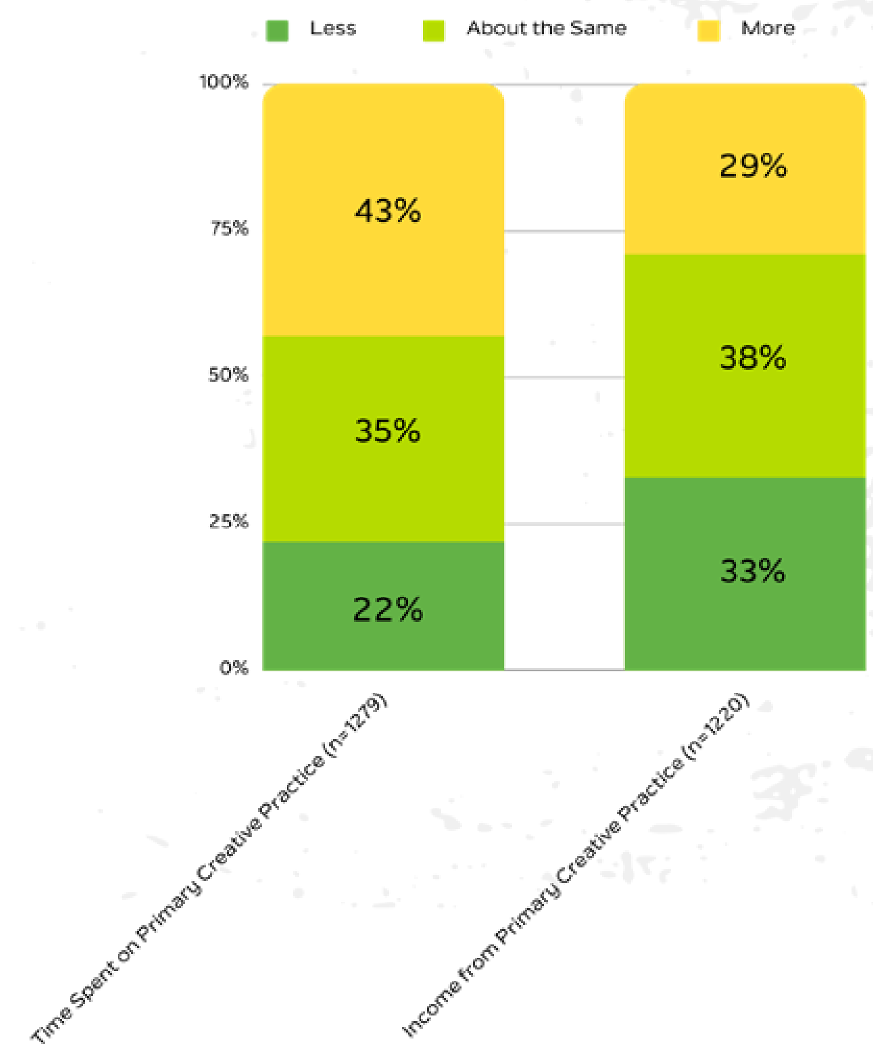
Some creatives we spoke with in focus groups described seeing an opportunity during the shutdown to refocus their lives on the work that they are most passionate about.

> "I've actually received some small business grants... so that helped me get through the pandemic."
> *- Fashion Designer*

The additional time respondents are spending on their primary creative practice is not necessarily resulting in additional income. Overall, 33% of respondents said their income from their creative practice decreased, while 29% experienced an increase since 2019.

In the focus groups, some participants shared that grants and relief funds helped to sustain them during the pandemic. In the survey, several of the grants that respondents listed as being among the most significant financial support they received over the past three years were COVID-relief funds. Those relief grants may be part of the reason 36% of the career creatives responding to the survey increased their earnings since 2019, compared to 30% who say they now earn less than before the pandemic.

Figure 17: Pre- / Post-Covid Comparison of Time Spent and Income from Primary Creative Practice



BARRIERS

The survey asked respondents to select the top three barriers that prevent them from advancing their creative practice. Eleven percent of respondents indicated that they don't face any barriers and are content with their creative practice as it is. Those who entered more than one barrier were subsequently asked, which of their selections they consider their single most significant barrier. Figure 18 combines the responses to both questions.

In both questions, the lack of financial resources to invest in one's creative practice was the most frequently selected response. The second most common barrier was the lack of time to focus on one's creative practice, where time may also be understood as a form of investment. Other options in the survey addressed the need for financial assistance in the form of grants, but those landed in the bottom half of the selections, in sixth and eighth place. In a write-in comment, one survey respondent noted the challenge with grants:

> *"If an artist in St. Louis gets a grant from the Luminary, a grant from RAC, AND manages to get the GRB [Contemporary Art Museum's Great Rivers Biennial] stipend, we still make under $40k — and that's just for one year! ... We need so much more."*
> *—Survey Respondent*

The barriers that ranked third to fifth are concerned with lack of access to information about support and opportunities, lack of access to networks, and lack of business management expertise, all of which were selected by roughly the same number of respondents (Figure 18).

Among the barriers reported as "Other," entries that broadly address health and disability, including the need to maintain a job outside of their creative practice to access health care, are most common. Several respondents also wrote about psychological barriers, such as lack of confidence and lack of motivation to advance their creative practices. Others noted the challenge of competing priorities in their lives, especially those related to family obligations, lack of child care, and the lack of energy to work on their creative practice on top of other responsibilities.

Figure 18: Barriers to Advancing Creative Practice to Desired Level

> "As a family man, the decision to fund a [creative] project can feel irresponsible. When you have a family, when you have to take care of yourself, when you have real things [like that, you have to ask,] 'Where do I put my money?'"
> - *Music Producer*

> "[Considering] the time it takes to apply for grants, there isn't usually much of a reward [in terms of] the payout."
> *- Photographer*

SUPPORT RESOURCES

On average, survey respondents' assessment of the availability of resources they need for their creative practice is positive (Figure 19). Among the resources that we asked about, access to support opportunities such as grants, classes and residencies received the lowest average score, falling just above the midway mark on the scale from 1 to 5. Access to people and networks received the second lowest score. The availability of equipment and supplies, workspace and opportunities to present work in St. Louis were all assessed more favorably.

The survey included a series of questions about the support services that respondents took advantage of in the past three years. Despite the hardships of the pandemic and the increased availability of grants through COVID-19 relief funds, only 34% of the respondents applied for grants, fellowships or monetary awards over that past three years; 23% received funding of that sort.

The proportion of respondents who submitted applications for monetary support and the proportion of those receiving awards is greater for respondents who are more focused on earning income from their creative practice. Forty-four percent of career creatives applied for funding over the past three years; 30% were successful. However, even among the career creatives, the majority of respondents are not applying for grants and fellowships.

The uptake on other forms of support is somewhat greater. Fifty-seven percent of all respondents have participated in virtual or in-person networking events over the past three years. Over the same period, 49% have taken advantage of workshops, seminars, mentorships, or similar programs to advance their creative practices. Write-in responses indicate there is demand both for opportunities focused on developing creative skills and business/administrative skills.

Among those who have received financial support, RAC is by far the most frequently cited source of funding, followed by the Missouri Arts Council (Table 2). Although we made efforts to encourage survey participation among creatives who aren't already familiar with RAC, the proportion of RAC grants may be inflated due to its prominent role in promoting the survey. The universities in the region, particularly Washington University, also play a noteworthy role in supporting the local creative community through student awards, grants for faculty and staff, fellowships for artists in residence, or other forms of financial support.

While the majority of the funding opportunities cited by respondents are specifically dedicated to the arts and humanities, several respondents received funding through programs that support small businesses and entrepreneurship. Funding from organizations that are committed to health, education, social services, racial justice and other philanthropic causes are also sources of financial resources for creatives. Together, organizations that aren't specifically focused on the arts and humanities account for more than 15% of the funding sources mentioned by respondents.

Most of the funding received by respondents comes from local sources, but about 10% of the grants, awards and fellowships mentioned by respondents are statewide or regional opportunities, and more than 15% are national or international.

Figure 19: Assessment of Resource Availability

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Average score on a scale from 1 to 5)

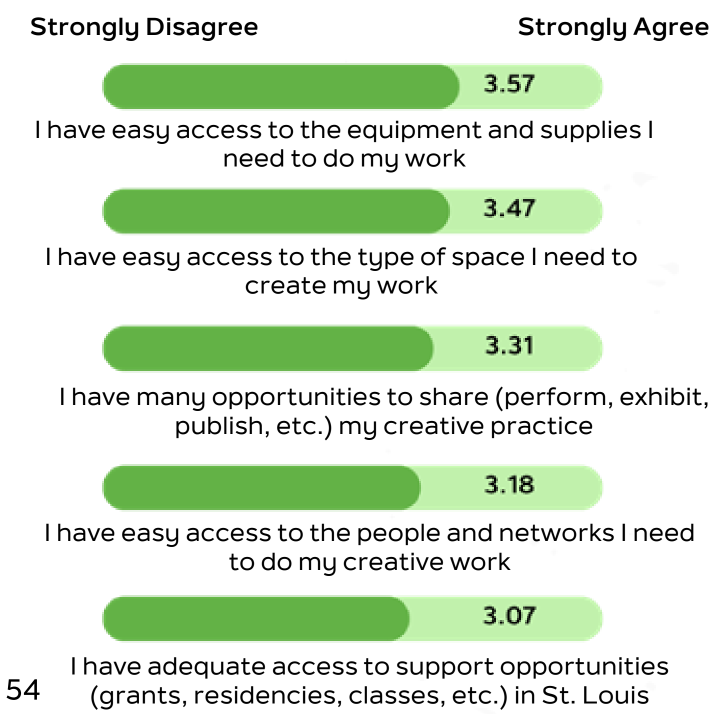
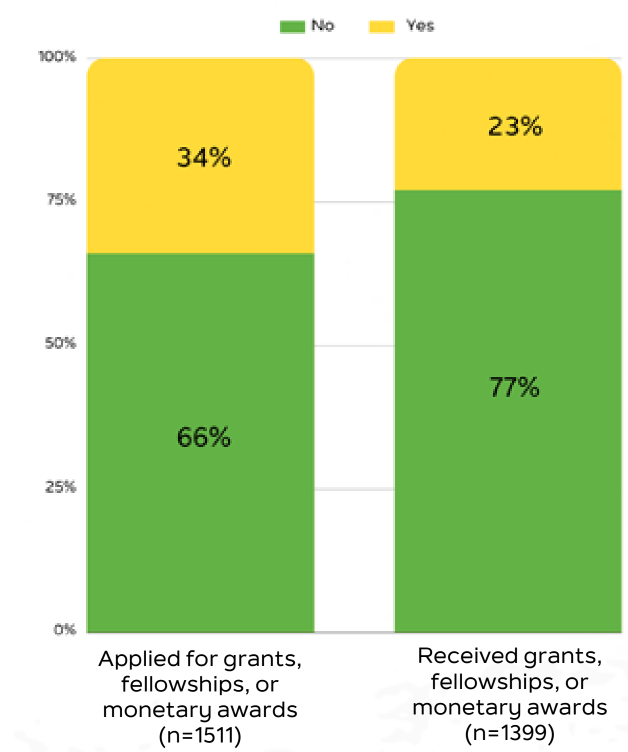


Figure 20: Applicants and Awardees for Monetary Support



ASSESSMENT OF ST. LOUIS

Overall, the creatives who contributed to this study, whether by the survey or the focus groups, are more likely to hold a favorable opinion of St. Louis than not. In the survey, 48% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "St. Louis is a great place for artists and creatives to live and work"; 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed. As Figure 20 shows, the average score on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) is 3.5.

The relatively affordable costs of living in St. Louis are a particular draw for creatives, as reflected in the average score of 3.64 in Figure 21. This was expressed most clearly by focus group participants who had spent time in cities such as Los Angeles, Atlanta and San Francisco. While there may be more opportunities for creatives in those cities, there is also more competition, more gatekeeping, and a higher cost of living that make it difficult to sustain oneself as a creative.

There is generally also a favorable opinion about the sense of community among creatives in St. Louis. The average score on the five-point scale is 3.57. However, in the focus groups we also heard from some individuals who moved to St. Louis later in life that the creative sector can initially feel cliquish and difficult to break into.

Fewer survey respondents were willing to go so far as to say that they feel nurtured and supported by the community of artists and creatives in St. Louis (average score: 3.25).

Of the aspects of living and working in St. Louis that were assessed in the survey, the statement that received the lowest score was, "Demand for arts, culture, and other creative work is sufficient to sustain creatives in St. Louis." At 3.07 the average score is close to the midpoint of the scale.

While they may not be representative of all creatives in St. Louis, many of the focus group participants expressed their willingness to invest not only in developing their own creative practice in St. Louis, but to invest in their communities and support their peers. As one participant noted:

> *"Artists are literally the No. 1 supporter of other artists!"*
> *— Dancer*

Several focus group participants expressed optimism about the future of St. Louis' creative sector and enthusiasm about being a part of that future:

> *"We all feel like the ground is fertile. Something is going to pop off here pretty soon, so that's why I'm putting down roots."*
> *— Sound Engineer*

Table 2: Funding Sources Mentioned by 3 or More Respondents

Rank	Source	Number of Mentions	%
1	Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis	162	36%
2	Missouri Arts Council	29	6%
3	Washington University	23	5%
4	Kranzberg Arts Foundation	8	2%
5	Arts & Education Council of St. Louis	6	1%
6	National Endowment for the Arts	6	1%
7	The Luminary	6	1%
8	Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)	5	1%
9	Artica	4	1%
10	Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL)	4	1%
11	Pell Grants	4	1%
12	University of Missouri-St. Louis	4	1%
13	Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+)	3	1%
14	Small Business Administration	3	1%
15	St. Louis Community Foundation	3	1%

> *"I think the art scene is definitely growing. It's expanding faster than any of us probably expected. ... I believe we're definitely going to see the new Spike Lees and Spielbergs come out of this."*
> *— Filmmaker*

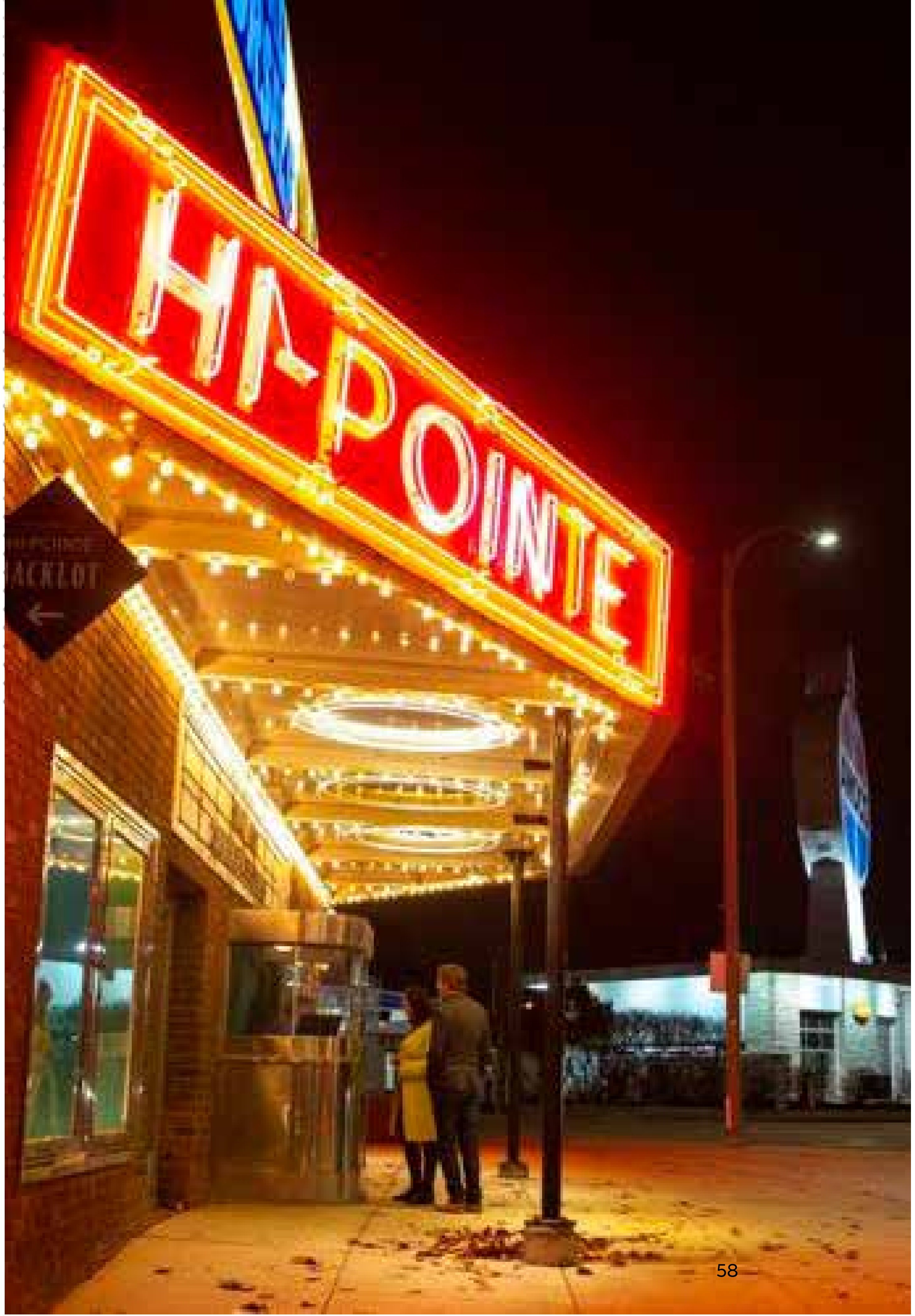
The participants' commitment to St. Louis is also evident in other ways. Seventy-three percent of all survey respondents voted in this year's local elections. (Ninety-three percent voted in the most recent federal election.) Forty-four percent either agree or strongly agree that they are "very involved in the civic life of [their] community," and of the respondents aged 35 to 54, 45% are raising families in St. Louis.

Figure 21: Assessment of St. Louis as Location of Creative Practice

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Average score on a scale from 1 to 5)

IMPLICATIONS

The Creatives Count survey and accompanying focus groups paint a vivid picture of the creative landscape of St. Louis. One takeaway, which in retrospect seems obvious, is that creatives aren't a monolithic group. People in St. Louis are doing all kinds of creative work, with different motivations, cultural backgrounds, lifestyles goals. In light of the great diversity, it is difficult to generalize about the needs and opportunities in the creative sector; however, some key themes have emerged that may have broad implications.



UNDERSTANDING RACIAL INEQUITIES IN THE CREATIVE SECTOR

While it was not a focus of this study, the survey data clearly reflects widespread racial inequities in our society, as mentioned at the outset of this report. While one might see the disparities between White and BIPOC survey respondents simply as an outgrowth of larger socio-economic factors, our survey data suggests there are differences in the ways that BIPOC and White creatives approach and support their creative practices that warrant further exploration.

For instance, the observation that BIPOC respondents are more likely to pursue their creative practices as owners or co-owners of businesses may impact their ability to access grant funding that is only available to nonprofits. The data also shows that BIPOC respondents are more likely to maintain a full-time job outside of the creative sector than their White peers (53% vs 49%), raising questions about who is at liberty to pursue a full-time creative career, and who may be forced, by financial necessity, to take a more reliable job as their main source of income. Gaining a better understanding of the creative practices that different racial and ethnic groups pursue and the ways in which they engage in those practices is essential to ensure that support services can equitably serve all creatives.

INVESTING IN CREATIVES

Grants (both project grants and unrestricted funds) are critical sources of revenue for many creatives and nonprofit arts organizations. Several respondents expressed their appreciation for past grant awards in write-in comments. However, it appears that grant programs, as they're designed and implemented, don't meet the needs of many creatives.

Our research shows that a small proportion of creatives (34% of the survey respondents) applied for a grant, fellowship or monetary award over the past three years. In their comments, research participants noted several reasons for that, including lack of awareness, lack of self-confidence, not being able to adequately express themselves in a written application, and the perception that grants require too much effort for an uncertain return. This study was not designed to explore creatives' feelings about grants in detail, but it's clear that traditional (competitive, application-based, juried) grantmaking is not serving all creatives well.[22]

22 See also Nati Linares and Caroline Wood, Solidarity Not Charity: Arts & Culture Grantmaking in the Solidarity Economy (Grantmakers in the Arts, 2021), https://art.coop/#report.

The apparent contradiction between the need for financial resources to invest in themselves and their creative practices (the No. 1 barrier respondents cited to advancing their practices) and the relative lack of interest in grants (34% apply for grants and 5% say the lack of grants is their biggest barrier to advancement) is perhaps the most intriguing and consequential finding of this study. One might assume that grants would provide the financial resources that creatives need to invest in their practices, but the survey respondents don't see it that way, raising the question *why*?

An investment is typically understood to hold the potential for a future financial return, whereas a grant, once spent, leaves the recipient hunting for another grant. Creatives seeking more time and money to invest in their practice are looking for support that empowers them and builds financial equity and independence.

Fortunately, there are some alternative funding models from which one can draw inspiration to reach a wider cross-section of creatives. For instance, the Artist2Artist program at Art Matters selects grantees who both receive a grant and are able to award a grant to another artist, which allows artists to uplift their peers instead of pitting them against each other in a competition for resources.[23] The burgeoning field of participatory grantmaking has spawned various models — some more applicable than others — that revolve around the idea that potential beneficiaries should be able to determine how funding is distributed.[24] In this model, funding decisions could be made at the neighborhood level or by a specific cultural community. Other funders, such as the Center for Cultural Innovation have begun exploring alternatives to grants such as loans and loan guarantees to provide access to capital, debt reduction and wealth building.[25]

Going forward it will be valuable to gain a deeper understanding of how creatives perceive and interact with grant programs, and to consider alternative funding models. Encouraging private investment in local projects, creative enterprises and infrastructure, and connecting local creatives with potential investors could also be fruitful avenues to explore.

"I ended up going to see the owner of a coffee shop around the corner from here. At the time, all I wanted was advice… but I was like, 'I want to do a short film,' and … he got on the phone right there in front of me and started calling everybody that he knew. And within a month we had all the locations, we had the food, we had everything that we needed to get it done."
- Filmmaker

INVESTING IN **NETWORKS**

Networks are critical assets in the creative sector: who you know can have a significant impact on your success. Access to networks was simultaneously one of the more frequently cited barriers in the survey and one of the forms of artist support that respondents say they have least access to. At the same time, 57% of the survey respondents have participated in networking events in the past three years, suggesting that creatives show up when such opportunities are offered.

There are different ways in which one might foster networking among creatives. Arts service organizations host networking events and provide opportunities for creatives to connect through their programs. In some cases, networks have been established from scratch, for instance by creating incubators where creatives can work side-by-side and inspire and support one another. However, based on our focus group conversations, it seems that some of the most impactful networks develop organically. While the process of funding organizations that support the creative ecosystem through educational and networking opportunities is relatively straightforward, how to support naturally occurring networks is a question that needs further exploration.

Based on our research, there are often key individuals at the center of those networks, who are of critical value to the creative ecosystem. These people provide valuable services mentoring other creatives, connecting their peers with each other, and sharing advice and information. That work is uncompensated and usually not even acknowledged. Who are those individuals and how could they be supported in convening and uplifting their networks?

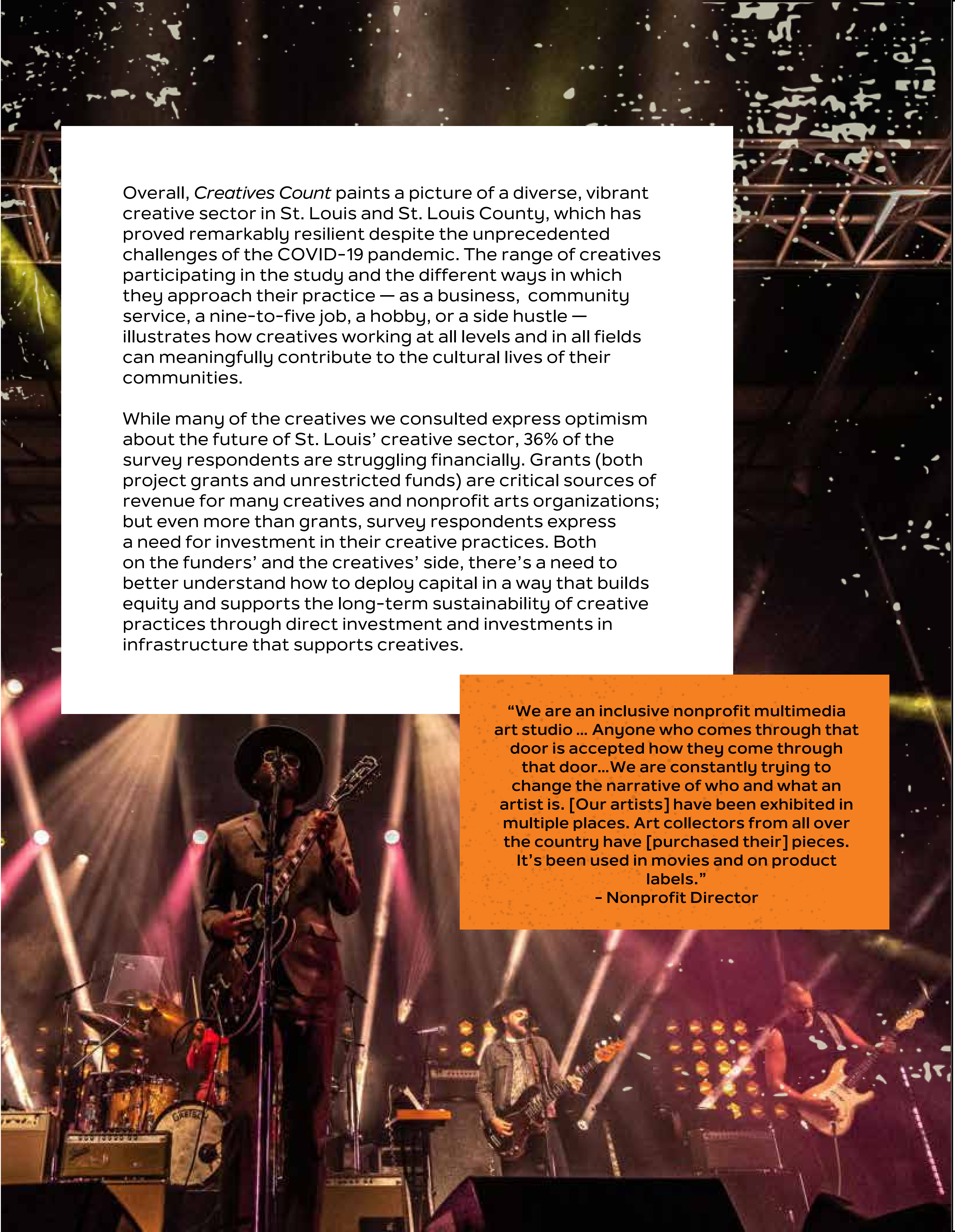
23 https://www.artmattersfoundation.org/announcements/2022-artist2artist-fellows
24 A collection of resources on participatory grantmaking is available at https://participatorygrantmaking.issuelab.org/?publisher=&wikitopic_categories=&keywords=&pubdate_start_year=1&pubdate_end_year=1&sort=&categories=&offset=0&pageSize=12
25 Mike Scutari, "'The System Has Never Worked Well.' An Arts Grantmaker Seeks New Funding Models," *Inside Philanthropy*, January 5, 2021, https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2021/1/4/ambitious-angie-kim; Mike Scutari, "How Arts Philanthropy Has Responded to Calls for Racial Justice—And What Comes Next," *Inside Philanthropy*, May 13, 2021, https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2021/5/13/how-arts-philanthropy-has-responded-to-calls-for-racial-justiceand-what-comes-next

CROSS-SECTOR **COLLABORATION**

Many of the challenges that creatives face are not unique to the creative sector, and it is unlikely that the creative sector will be able to resolve major societal challenges on its own. Prime examples of this are the racial disparities in income and wealth observed in the introduction to this report. Tackling issues of that magnitude may seem daunting, but it is difficult to imagine how creatives in St. Louis can truly flourish while those larger social ills persist.

One might try to resolve issues like access to health care and retirement savings by advancing solutions that are tailored to the creative sector, but ultimately those are challenges facing many people who are self-employed or doing gig work. In certain areas, such as questions of copyright, the concerns of creatives may be so specific that they can't adequately be addressed through programs that are geared for a general audience of, say, small business owners. But in general, there is strength in numbers, so there may be value in seeking opportunities to partner and collaborate outside of the sector, rather than emphasizing the creative sector's uniqueness.

CONCLUSION



Overall, *Creatives Count* paints a picture of a diverse, vibrant creative sector in St. Louis and St. Louis County, which has proved remarkably resilient despite the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The range of creatives participating in the study and the different ways in which they approach their practice — as a business, community service, a nine-to-five job, a hobby, or a side hustle — illustrates how creatives working at all levels and in all fields can meaningfully contribute to the cultural lives of their communities.

While many of the creatives we consulted express optimism about the future of St. Louis' creative sector, 36% of the survey respondents are struggling financially. Grants (both project grants and unrestricted funds) are critical sources of revenue for many creatives and nonprofit arts organizations; but even more than grants, survey respondents express a need for investment in their creative practices. Both on the funders' and the creatives' side, there's a need to better understand how to deploy capital in a way that builds equity and supports the long-term sustainability of creative practices through direct investment and investments in infrastructure that supports creatives.

"We are an inclusive nonprofit multimedia art studio ... Anyone who comes through that door is accepted how they come through that door...We are constantly trying to change the narrative of who and what an artist is. [Our artists] have been exhibited in multiple places. Art collectors from all over the country have [purchased their] pieces. It's been used in movies and on product labels."
- Nonprofit Director

APPENDIX

Contributors and Participants

Adrian Gomez
Afton Johnson
AK Brown
Bobby "Phree" Williams, Jr.
Brandin Vaughn
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MJ Imani
Muhammad "Mvstermind" Austin
Pacia Anderson
Pajmon "Umami" Porshahidy
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Richard Douglas
Sheila Suderwalla
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