

WHAT ARTISTS GIVE TO COMMUNITIES AND WHAT ARTISTS NEED TO SUCCEED

This report takes a look at the structure, condition and needs of Minnesota's artist ecosystem.

To understand the cultural, social and economic impact artists have on the state, we need to examine:

- Where artists live and work
- The many ways artists contribute to our communities
- What Minnesota's artists need to thrive

Our report is informed by three core assumptions about the cultural ecosystem in Minnesota:

- The arts sector is a network of artists, formal and informal arts organizations, audiences, funders and others who depend upon each other to succeed
- The sector's creative fuel comes from the community of artists working within it
- The sector's overall health depends upon the health of the artist community

WHERE (AND WHO) ARE THE ARTISTS?

We have established that Minnesota is an artist-rich state. It's important to note, though, that the 104,000 artists and creative workers documented in Section I only represent those who show up on the economic radar screen as full- or part-time workers⁽¹⁾ or self-employed in the U.S. Census.

This brings up an often posed but never adequately answered question, namely, who is an artist? Section II of this report has taken a "yes, and" approach to that issue by asking artists to self-identify. There, we broadly define "artists" along a continuum from the hobbyist, to the part-time practitioner, to the full-time professional.



DENSITY

However you define them, Minnesota's artists and creative workers are not evenly distributed across the state.

Like most workers, artists tend to live in places that have the creative infrastructure they depend on to make and share their work. These include: fellow artist collaborators, audiences and customers, employment opportunities, access to training and facilities and much more. Naturally, these support systems are more likely to reach a critical mass in areas with greater population density. This is why the **Twin Cities is home to 71 percent of the state's artists and creative workers** that we've identified. It's important to note, though, that **over 30,000 artists have established themselves in communities outside of the metro area.** This is likely to be in part because the state's Regional Arts Council system has provided critical services and significant funding (from the Legacy Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund and other sources) to artists and arts organizations in small and midsized communities across the state for decades. Several other arts funders, such as the Mcknight, Bush and Jerome Foundations, have also supported artists across the state.

This has made it possible for even more artists to thrive in places like St. Cloud, Rochester and Bemidji, which have particularly high concentrations of artists and creative workers.

These high-density "artist clusters"⁽²⁾ can be a powerful stimulant for community development.⁽²⁾ The City of Minneapolis has compiled data on creative workers by location as a part of the *Minneapolis Creative Index*.⁽³⁾ That data shows that **the seven Minneapolis zip codes⁽⁴⁾ that hug the east and west banks of the Mississippi River are home to 50 percent of the total arts workers counted in the city.** Further west, 32 percent of the counted artists live in the seven zip codes that surround Minneapolis' Chain of Lakes. Locally dense artist communities like these can be a powerful asset. There are similar creative clusters throughout the state, such as Grand Marais on the North Shore of Lake Superior and Lanesboro in Southeastern Minnesota. These organic creator enclaves, a result of the work of many individuals, present municipal and regional planners and policy makers with even more opportunities for leveraging these creative resources in ways that can make a significant economic and social impact.



HOW DO ARTISTS CONTRIBUTE TO OUR COMMUNITIES?

Artists are often viewed through the lens of their work products—the painting, the book, the play and the song.

But when artists are asked to share what drives them they describe a practice driven by a passion to create with a much broader range of intentions.

THIS LIST OF WORDS CULLED FROM ARTISTS INTERVIEWS IS AN INTERESTING WAY TO BEGIN EXPLORING WHAT ARTISTS BRING TO OUR COMMUNITIES.

Some, like **entertain, decorate, educate and design**, likely fit many people's perception of the roles that artists can play in our society. Other words derived from the realms of medicine, politics and religion remind us that for most of human history (and pre-history) artists have had a much more expansive job description that included essential functions like, **healer, historian, mediator and spiritual leader.**

WHILE THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE CULTURAL ECONOMY IS CLEAR, THERE ARE MANY OTHER WAYS THAT ARTISTS HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR COMMUNITIES:

ARTISTS ARE ENTERPRISING

Much of the data in this report highlights the impact that artists and creative workers have on the state's economic life. It's significant that we can point to the \$644 million that artists contribute to the state's economy. It's also important to recognize that these artists produce the work that inspires and fuels the rest of the state's \$2 billion cultural ecosystem. As such, artists are the beating heart of a robust and growing creative Minnesota economy. This inventive spirit has also manifested in thousands of creative workers who are operating as arts entrepreneurs. Just like any small business they buy materials, hire workers, make and sell products and services and pay taxes. The numbers add up and are impressive, but there is more. Given the generative nature of the creative industries, these micro-enterprises also constitute a self-perpetuating incubator for future ventures—new enterprises that will ultimately manifest as locally developed, non-polluting, renewable community assets.

ARTISTS BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL

We all know that art can be inspirational and provocative. But, interestingly, new research also shows that the presence of artists and small arts organizations brings other benefits in less obvious ways. Earlier, creative clusters were described as a potentially potent community building resource. Research shows that neighborhoods with very dense, highly interactive networks of artists and arts organizations produce specific benefits for those communities.⁽⁵⁾ These benefits include poverty reduction, population retention and growth and increased civic participation. The power of creative clusters derives, in part, from the dynamic social networks they create, particularly among active cultural participants. In her article *How Art and Culture Happen In New York*, urban planning researcher Elizabeth Currid says these creative connections also stimulate art making, stating that “cultural producers ... tend to cross-fertilize, collaborating to create goods and services, review each other's productions, and establish new careers.”⁽⁶⁾ This cultural synergy effects public life as well, in that the presence of cultural resources produces high levels of “cross-participation” in neighborhoods that stimulates residents' involvement in other civic activities.

ARTISTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In addition to being creative entrepreneurs, Minnesota's artists are deeply involved in community building and placemaking.

In small urban neighborhoods and rural communities, it's not uncommon to find an actor on the local planning committee, a photographer documenting a neighborhood streetscape or a local composer leading the community choir. This happens because, contrary to the stereotype, artists, by and large, are not loners, and tend to be highly involved in civic life⁽⁷⁾. In recent years, artists in increasing numbers have been exploring new ways to apply their creative capacities as community leaders. This impulse is emerging at a time when investments in “creative placemaking” are on the rise across the country.

However, in Minnesota, this is not a new thing. Over the past two decades the state has established itself as a national leader in the growing, arts-based community development movement. The work of community-committed arts organizations such as Intermedia Arts, Juxtaposition Arts, Pangea World Theater, Pillsbury House + Theater, and Springboard for the Arts have established Minnesota as a center for professional development, program innovation and research in support of artists working to help build healthier, more productive and equitable communities. Along with partners like the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Hope Community, Pillsbury United Communities and the South West Minnesota Housing Partnership, these organizations have helped establish a network of cross-sector creative leaders that are tackling critical issues in education, community development, public safety, healthcare, housing, transportation, racial justice and human services across the state.

ARTISTS OPEN NEW DOORS

We live in an age of increasing uncertainty where the unforeseen and unpredictable have become the new status quo. Put another way, life is becoming less symphonic and a lot more like jazz. Many civic leaders have argued meeting the challenges of the “age of uncertainty” will require strengthening the creative thinking and adaptive learning capacities of our future citizens, our institutions and the systems that connect them.⁽⁸⁾

In Minnesota this way of thinking has found receptive partners in city governments and local nonprofits, where they are integrating artists into their everyday work with the aim of stimulating new ideas and innovation. It has also manifested through the thousands of artists who are teaching in the state's schools. Less conspicuous, but no less important, are the artists whose work bears witness to both the remarkable and the troubling aspects of everyday life. Some people think these are unusual roles for artists. But they are not. Artists have been helping us make sense and meaning in the world for thousands of years—listening and synthesizing, telling our stories, exploring the mysteries and articulating our dreams. As we take stock of artists' contributions, it's important to remember this has always been their number one job.

WHAT DO ARTISTS NEED TO THRIVE?

Artists, like everyone else, need to make a living wage, but we have found that they are often asked to, and often do, work as volunteers or for less than a living wage.

Small or large, successful businesses are defined by their ability to attract capital, produce products, grow markets and ultimately generate profits. Money both fuels the work and defines a successful outcome.

THE IMPETUS FOR ART MAKING

Research shows that artists have a very wide range of motivations for their art making.^{(9) (10)} Here are some key motivational forces that artists say sustain them in their creative endeavors.

Given that the artist ecosystem is not particularly lucrative for many artists, what drives them is clearly a more complicated matter. According to a recent Minnesota State Arts Board “*Artists Thrive*” survey, artists’ descriptions of what they need to make a living and a life in the arts include both material and social considerations.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS IS THE DRIVING FORCE OF ARTISTS’ WORK. WHILE ARTISTS’ DEFINITIONS OF “CREATIVE PROCESS” VARY WIDELY, MOST CONTAIN ASPECTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

INNOVATION

Developing something new from existing materials or patterns

TRANSLATION

Crafting creative ideas into something meaningful to others

SYNTHESIS

Putting unique ideas, concepts, sounds together

EXPLORATION

Discovery through experimentation and invention



AUDIENCES AS A CREATIVE STIMULUS

Not surprisingly, audiences were identified as an important creative spark but more in terms of relationship building (i.e. “engaging,” “making connection with,” “transforming”) than either reward or acclaim.



DISCOVERING NEW IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS

A number of artists cited the thrill of studying and learning about new areas of knowledge such as history, science, spiritual or community issues. Tangentially, freedom was also mentioned as a treasured state of mind associated with unfettered learning and the creative process.



WORKING WITH AND TEACHING OTHERS

Many artists pointed to their work with colleagues as a driving force for their work. Many cited interdisciplinary and cross-sector work as an exciting facet of their careers. Others described teaching and mentoring as an important part of their creative development.

THE ARTIST ECONOMY IN MINNESOTA

Another way to consider the dynamics of the artist ecosystem is to examine the economy that helps sustain it. Many artists correlate the amount and continuity of the time they are paid with the quality of the work they produce. Despite Minnesota’s reputation as a strong “arts community,” a minority of the artists surveyed by Creative Minnesota (24 percent) say they make their living primarily through their art. Thirty-four percent are retired, student or hobby artists, whose motivations are not monetary. From the data on artists’ livelihoods, we can see that most working artists function within a patchwork economy that may include multiple and overlapping elements of the following: *(continued on next page)*

EARNED ARTISTIC INCOME

Sixty-four percent of the artists surveyed say they derive some income from their art making. As a rule, visual artists derive their art-related revenue from sales and commissions, while performers generally receive payment for the time they spend in working on a performance. Many artists who are paid also work numerous unpaid hours and often donate additional time.

OTHER JOBS

One of the most significant parts of the artist economy are those “outside” jobs. Of these, teaching and arts administration are the most prevalent. Many artists describe their teaching as reasonably compatible with their creative efforts. While most indicate they would rather be making their own art, some saw their ancillary employment as a healthy and vital stimulant for their creative work.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING

Most of the state’s cultural funding goes to the state’s arts organizations. As such, their precise impact on artists is indirect and hard to discern, although obviously these organizations employ many artists. Nevertheless, as the principal delivery system for artists’ work and creative development these organizations are a critical part of the artist ecosystem. Creative worker and artist jobs increased across the state as a result of the investments from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. In addition to foundation-supported artist fellowships, direct funding for artists also comes from the State Arts Board and the Regional Arts Councils. Some artists also reflected on the “unique” and “generous” nature of Minnesota’s artist-support system.

The Jerome, Bush and McKnight Foundation’s Artist Fellowship programs have granted over \$60 million in fellowships over seven decades to thousands of individual artists in the state. Another historically significant support for Minnesota creators are the many artist service organizations in the state that have provided hundreds of thousands of hours of training and technical assistance in support of artists’ careers over the past four decades. These substantial investments have established Minnesota as a uniquely fertile place for artists to plant roots and build careers and a reputation as an artist magnet.

INFORMAL SUPPORT

A small but important source of support comes from the “creative family” within which there are people who not only share the artist’s passion and commitment but also contribute financially. These partners, spouses, parents, in-laws, collaborators and even investors constitute a hidden aspect of the artist economy.

AN ECOSYSTEM OUT OF BALANCE

This diversity of income sources also points to another theme that emerged from artists’ descriptions of their economic lives. A number of artists indicated that the “stitched-together” nature of their livelihoods made both their art-making and everyday lives fairly unpredictable. The tenuousness of the artist economy is further amplified for artists of color. The 2017 Creative MN survey shows that artists of color are making 18 percent less annually from their artistic pursuits and 22 percent less in total income than their white counterparts. Artists of color are also 43 percent less likely to have health insurance than white artists. Disturbing as these findings are, they are not surprising. These differences correspond with the patterns of inequity experienced by people of color in the overall workforce and by culturally specific arts organizations in the arts sector.⁽¹¹⁾ They also reinforce the perception from artists of color interviewed for the McKnight *Yes and No* report that felt that the infrastructure of white funders, leaders and their affiliations provided a support structure that was not as accessible to them. For many, “thriving” translates as simply having the capacity to produce and present their own work. One artist put it this way: “In order to thrive as an artist, space is an invaluable resource ... space that I have ownership stake in. Owning dirt. That is essential to me thriving right now.”

CREATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Arts institutions, service organizations and commercial venues, working interdependently within the cultural sector play multiple roles in artists’ lives. These organizations provide the resources artists depend on for producing and presenting their work. But they have many other functions as well, ranging from hiring and training many artists and testing new creative ideas, to raising funds and cultivating audiences.

WORKSPACE

Most artists need a workspace to invent and design, to fabricate and render, to rehearse and perform. There was agreement across all disciplines that the quality of their work is significantly influenced by the space in which it is created.

PRESENTING AND PRODUCING ORGANIZATIONS

These organizations facilitate the transfer of artwork from creators to interpreters. They also provide the exhibition and presenting spaces that serve as the bridge between artists and local audiences. These venues were also identified as incubators for artistic development.

ARTS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Minnesota’s discipline-specific arts service organizations constitute a unique and important subset of the artist ecosystem. They were not only valued because of their financial

and technical support, but also as an important hub in the creative social networks that artists depend on for feedback, advice, encouragement and referrals.

AUDIENCE

One artist said, “without an audience you are not in the game.” That said, for most of our respondents, arts participation was much more about building relationships than it was “butts in seats.” Many described the need for “dynamic,” “respectful,” even “collaborative” relationships with audiences often referencing their essential role in the completion of the creative process.

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Many artists say that this complex web of relationships, resources and conditions is the most stable and resilient part of their support system.

TIME TO WORK

If artists had one thing they could get more of, it is time—time for making work, for practice, for research and most precious of all, time for reflection. As in any profession, time is money, and the ability to have time to make art can be dependent upon financial resources.

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

Access to other artists, mentors and masters was described as an essential component of the lifelong learning that fuels artistic development. Learning from masters and critical input

from colleagues were both mentioned. Artist residencies and universities were often mentioned as offering valuable opportunities for intense learning and exploration.

CRITICAL RESPONSE

Artists want feedback from peers, audiences, mentors and critics so that they can learn and improve their practice.

BALANCE AND PREDICTABILITY

Given all the moving parts, artists’ lives are fairly unpredictable. As such, they place a high value on relationships, resources and time commitments that are regular and dependable.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Parents, spouses, partners, children, in-laws, brothers and sisters were recognized for providing everything from help with hanging art and learning lines to financial and moral support. Many artists described this intimate circle as a primary source of creative, financial and moral support.

COLLEAGUES AND PEERS

Beyond the circle of family and friends there is the professional network of colleagues, teachers, technicians and advisors that artists depend on to make and present their work. For each artistic discipline there is a critical mass of technical and creative expertise that defines scope and depth of an artistic discipline in a given place.

WHAT NEXT?

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT MINNESOTA'S ROBUST ARTIST COMMUNITY HAS MORE THAN NUMBERS GOING FOR IT.

The state's artists and creative workers are a potent and dynamic civic resource. They drive the creative economy and kindle discovery and invention in the community at large. They are not only an attraction for other creative people, their presence and activity also helps make Minnesota a place people want to call “home.” This report offers a valuable snapshot of this remarkable asset—an ecosystem comprised of creators working individually, and together, as entrepreneurs, as workers, as citizens and community leaders—a creative network with evident strengths, as well as vulnerabilities and inequities.

This study also tells an interesting story. Clearly, Minnesota did not become an artist hot spot by accident. Like its business and civic achievements, Minnesota's vigorous artist community is a product of the hard work of many people. In the middle of the last century community leaders recognized that for Minnesota to thrive, its creativity needed to be more than a source of entertainment and decoration. They understood that it was a natural resource that when combined with Minnesota's grit and persistence would create a necessary and powerful community asset. To accomplish this they knew they would have to make significant and sustained public and private investments.



The question now is whether the product of this historic commitment will be taken for granted going forward? Will the insights gained from this report give rise to new ideas for strengthening and sustaining the state's artist ecosystem in the 21st Century? Given the obvious benefits, that would seem to be both a practical and inspired path to follow.”

- Bill Cleveland
Center for the Arts and Community