



COVID-19 AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY IMPACT STUDY

PHASE II: DETERMINING CONDITIONS BEFORE & AFTER COVID
& IDENTIFYING KEY COMMUNITY STRATEGIES FOR CRISIS
MANAGEMENT

COVID-19 and the Creative Economy Impact Study

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COVID-19 AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY IMPACT STUDY



Executive Summary

The future of the creative economy, and the manner in which it articulates with other industries and social sectors, is undergoing a deep transformation. As the American economy slowly adapts to the endemic presence of COVID-19, in an attempt to strategize for future stability and success, individuals and businesses laboring in the creative economy as artists, administrators and supporting staff, must wrestle with a variety of pre-existing conditions alongside new complexities that call into question norms in operational models, finance models, inter-industry relations, community development strategies and hierarchies of labor.

Within this transformation, Black, Latinx and Indigenous artists and arts business leaders face significant challenges in rebuilding and strategizing for future success as COVID-19 exacted the largest loss of life amongst these communities, which exacerbated the pre-existing wealth gap, and subsequent future access to capital. The profound and monumental losses and the correlating future implications faced by these communities is rooted at the intersection of the country's pandemic management strategies and its unbroken history of systemic racism, which has shaped American economic, public health and civic engagement models since the founding of the country.

As part of Rising Tides Research Institute's (RTRI) critical examination of socioeconomic and sociopolitical conditions contributing to barriers that negatively impact Black, Latinx and Indigenous artists and arts entrepreneurs, a ten-month study, funded by The Endeavor Foundation, M&T Bank, and The William Talbot Hillman Foundation, was executed in partnership with artists and arts business leaders of color. The mixed-method study culminating in 120+ hours of ethnographic interviews, a three day strategy impact lab and in-person creative economy strategy workshops, focused on the intersection of business conditions, social conditions and crisis management. Interviews took place with artists, grantmakers, administrators, technical

assistance providers, teachers, and scholars. Specifically, researchers examined the intersection of systemic racism, the pandemic, and sociopolitical upheavals of 2020 with access to emergency aid, operating models, financial strategies, labor conditions, and crisis management approaches of artists and arts business leaders of color. The study was centered in the New York City metropolitan area as Kings, Queens and Bronx counties account for a substantial amount of total national receipts produced by businesses owned by people of color, and communities of color here suffered some of the highest COVID mortality rates in the country at the height of the pandemic. By focusing on the most vulnerable communities within the creative economy, researchers hoped to offer insight supporting community-centered strategies for success as well as advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels calling for the incorporation of racial equity practices into a variety of policy platforms.

The necessity and timeliness of this study cannot be overestimated. Since the creative economy articulates with, supplies labor to, and drives the stability and growth of a variety of other industries and markets, its attempts to disrupt and redesign norms in business frameworks and practices through the lens of racial equity indexes the potential paths of multiple other industries and markets simultaneously. However, the drive to adequately address equity in the creative economy is already losing steam on the national stage amidst other political and socioeconomic concerns facing the country.

Therefore, with urgency to capture the moment before it is lost, the insights presented below substantiate demands to incorporate racial equity into legislation for broad post-COVID recovery plans at local, state, and federal levels. As demonstrated by our research participants, whose work bridges the nonprofit and for profit worlds and spans multiple industries, art genres, communities, audiences and goals, protecting the labor and value produced by artswomen of color, and implementing changes that ensure their

quality of life and their business's viability is critical to achieving economic revitalization post-COVID. In order to effectively revitalize the creative economy, it is imperative that consideration be given to necessary reforms, education, and aid that might reshape inter-industry relations, labor protection, philanthropic giving, business planning, and financial literacy, specifically for artists and arts business leaders of color.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction: From Surveying Emergency Aid to an Ethnographic Exploration of the Arts Business Economy | 4 |
| Identifying and Asserting the Researcher's Standpoint and Method Choices | 9 |
| Research Design | 12 |
| Phase Two Survey and Interview Design and Questions | 15 |
| Discussion and Recommendations | 18 |
| Conclusion | 38 |
| Appendix | 40 |

A person with short, curly hair is holding a large bouquet of flowers in front of their face. They are looking upwards and to the left. The background shows a building with a corrugated metal roof and a wall with large numbers. The entire image has a teal color overlay.

INTRODUCTION

FROM SURVEYING EMERGENCY AID TO AN ETHNOGRAPHIC
EXPLORATION OF THE ARTS BUSINESS ECONOMY

Introduction: From Surveying Emergency Aid to an Ethnographic Exploration of the Arts Business Economy

The future of the creative economy, and the manner in which it articulates with other industries and social sectors, is undergoing a deep transformation. As the American economy slowly adapts to the endemic presence of COVID-19, in an attempt to strategize for future stability and success, individuals and businesses laboring in the creative economy as artists, administrators and supporting staff, must wrestle with a variety of pre-existing conditions alongside new complexities that call into question norms in operational models, finance models, inter-industry relations, community development strategies, and hierarchies of labor. Indeed, the precarity of laboring in the creative economy, known for its “gig” employment structure that supplies labor to other industries, has deepened since the start of 2020 as independent contractors were offered fewer safety nets compared to standard employees during the height of the pandemic. Furthermore, across the country the public education sector, the largest direct employer of full time and contract arts labor, decreased budgets for the arts, in some cases up to 70%.¹

Within this transformation, Black, Latinx and Indigenous artists and arts business leaders face significant challenges in rebuilding and strategizing for future success as COVID-19 exacted the largest loss of life amongst these communities, which exacerbated the pre-existing wealth gap, and subsequent future access to capital. The profound and monumental losses and the correlating future implications faced by these communities is rooted at the intersection of the country’s pandemic management strategies and its unbroken history of systemic racism, which has shaped American economic, public health, and civic engagement models since the founding of the country. Thus, led by voices from arts institutions

led by people of color, problematic norms in business frameworks and practices are undergoing a critical examination through the lens of racial equity, alongside discussions concerning the need to collaboratively strategize for future success. Since June of 2020 Arts Business Collaborative, a research and technical assistance 501c3, has been in partnership with these leaders concerning the critical examination of the intersections of the following: pre-existing power dynamics within the philanthropy/government/nonprofit landscape; conditions within operations, finance, and community development faced by Black, Latinx and Indigenous artists and arts businesses prior to COVID-19; crisis management strategies employed during COVID-19; and the sociopolitical upheavals that took place through 2020. The goal of reexamining norms in business frameworks and practices has been to analyze and advise on alternatives in practice and policy that create more equitable and sustainable futures for artists and arts business owners of color.

As part of this critical examination, the Rising Tides Research Institute (RTRI), a department of Arts Business Collaborative (ABC), executed a ten-month study, funded by The Endeavor Foundation, M&T Bank, and The William Talbot Hillman Foundation.

The study focused on the intersection of business conditions, social conditions, and crisis management. Specifically, researchers examined the intersection of systemic racism, the pandemic, and sociopolitical upheavals of 2020 with access to emergency aid, operating models, financial strategies, labor conditions, and crisis management approaches of artists and arts business leaders of color. The decision

¹ Cascone, Sarah (2020). “New York City 2021 Budget Slashes Already Modest Funding for Public School Arts Education by 70%”. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/nyc-slashes-art-education-budget-1891325>

to undertake this study was directly informed by RTRI's departmental vision for impact, which involves contributing to progressive public policies and community-centered methods for advocacy by addressing enduring systems of inequalities that have impacted people of color, with a focus on key stakeholders in the arts ecosystem.

Operating with the foundational understanding that artists and arts business leaders of color face systemic barriers to raising capital for financing business operations, and that the arts and arts education often occupy a marginalized space in the American economic hierarchy, ABC researchers divided the study into three phases. Initially, researchers conducted a six-week landscape analysis survey assessing access to emergency aid and other conditions impacting business performance. From this, four key areas were identified that would inform later research. These included:

1. Precarity in the dance and theater employment, capital, and income ecosystems
2. Obfuscation of knowledge and associated qualifications of emergency aid types
3. A need for the comparison of business conditions prior to and during COVID-19
4. Calls for wider increased opportunities for operational training, leadership development, and education

Based on the information gathered, researchers executed phase two, involving virtual ethnographic interviews and quantitative data collection with individual artists, nonprofit leaders, and for profit business owners. These interviews focused on business conditions that artists and arts businesses leaders of color faced before and since COVID; the core strategies employed for stability and growth; the impact of sociopolitical conditions on business performance; and whether or not these

conditions and strategies served as barriers for successful crisis management. Finally, the study culminated in a three-day impact lab that convened research participants, industry experts, community leaders, and the ABC staff to reflect upon findings and collaboratively strategize for future success in a changing creative economy.

The study was centered in the New York City metropolitan area as Kings, Queens and Bronx counties account for a substantial amount of total national receipts produced by businesses owned by people of color, and communities of color here suffered some of the highest COVID mortality rates in the country at the height of the pandemic.² Furthermore, the study's initial design centered on the dance and theater fields as their reliance on embodied craft in terms of process and product was severely inhibited, making already precarious employment more vulnerable to shifting economic, social, and political conditions. By focusing on the most vulnerable communities within the creative economy, researchers hoped to offer insight supporting community-centered strategies for success as well as advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels calling for the incorporation of racial equity practices into a variety of policy platforms.

The necessity and timeliness of this study cannot be overestimated. Closely examining the creative economy from a parallax view that considers how existing power dynamics intersected with COVID-19 at different points in the arts and culture sector, from the individual to the small business, is imperative as strategic shifts in business frameworks and practices have long term practical and existential implications for individuals and society. Since the creative economy articulates with, supplies labor to, and drives the stability and growth of a variety of other industries and markets, its attempts to disrupt and redesign norms in business frameworks and practices through the lens of racial

² Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2020, "N Fed Releases Brief on Covid-19's Effects on Black-owned Businesses". https://www.newyorkfed.org/newsevents/news/regional_outreach/2020/20200804

equity indexes the potential paths of multiple other industries and markets simultaneously. Hence, shifts in accepted business frameworks and practices within the creative economy will certainly shape the trajectory of labor and small business legislation as well as economic, cultural, and political agendas. However, the drive to adequately address equity in the creative economy is already losing steam on the national stage amidst other political and socioeconomic concerns facing the country.

Therefore, with urgency to capture the moment before it is lost, the insights presented below substantiate demands to incorporate racial equity into legislation for broad post-COVID recovery plans at local, state, and federal levels. RTRI asserts that racial equity is both a method for data collection and analysis, as well as a political position. As a method, it is a pool of approaches engaged to combat and eliminate enduring cultural messages, policies and practices that either reinforce differential outcomes of thriving based on race or do nothing to interrupt such an outcome. As a political position, racial equity argues that in order to restore the soundness and health of society at large, addressing and solving the underlying causes of intractable harm committed against communities of color is paramount. Economic recovery plans that fail to address the needs of Black, Latinx and Indigenous business owners and/or do not directly improve the quality of life for people of color will both perpetuate what amounts to human rights abuses in communities of color and hamper U.S. economic and social stability.

COVID-19 exacerbated historical inequities and exposed the manner in which all industries in the American economy have continued to replicate systemic practices of white supremacy, with its interwoven hierarchies of race, gender, labor, and class. During the height of the pandemic, on average each week more than 60% of Black-

owned businesses were forced to remain closed. Between July of 2020 and December 2021, on average each week 1-2% of Black-owned businesses in New York City permanently closed due to conditions related to COVID.³ Despite communities of color being hardest hit during the pandemic, PPP loans reached only 20% of businesses in states with the highest number of Black-owned businesses.⁴ However, it cannot be overlooked that these systemic practices remain undergirded by legislation across a variety of other political platforms beyond economics. Thus, in order for industries to be compelled to adopt new norms that do not perpetuate historical inequities, it is imperative that post-COVID recovery plans include legislation that addresses the micro- and macro-socioeconomic conditions that uphold systemic racism and anti-labor movement sentiment.

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1222202/us-covid-19-closings-small-businesses/>

⁴ House Small Business Committee (2021), "The State of Black-owned Small Businesses in America", https://smallbusiness.house.gov/uploadedfiles/bob_report_final.pdf

Literature published since the advent of COVID-19 from peer organizations, including Art.coop and Urban Institute, also supports RTRI's examination of the intersection of business conditions, social conditions, and overall individual business crisis management. Nati Linares and Caroline Woolard (2021) of Art.coop poetically capture the manner in which the arts and culture sector has replicated systemic racism.⁵ They document both the cavernous disparity in pandemic response funds and general grants made by foundations with 95% of monies going to white-led arts organizations (49); and the systemic exploitative labor conditions that undergird and exacerbate these practices. The authors argue that many in the arts and culture sector have been actively seeking alternatives to current economic and labor practices and offer astute, actionable recommendations for organizations to support a solidarity economy. In particular, they recommend conducting power analyses; collecting data that leads to reparative practices; engaging in regular DEI training led by artists and culture bearers; and networking across peer organizations in a manner that supports giving circles and collective action.


Urban Institute (2021) has also conducted in-depth analysis on the necessity of actively involving and planning for arts workers in order to rebuild the U.S. workforce.⁶ Identifying the precarious position of freelance arts workers, particularly those of color, the authors point to two areas that must be amended in order to foster a stable and prosperous workforce. First, they note the manner in which businesses find themselves increasingly reliant on contract labor when, in fact, those workers are legally entitled to be employees. Second, the authors highlight policy gaps that inhibit collective action where unions cannot be formed.

These particular roadblocks to formal employment and worker protection directly contributed to the peak unemployment rate of 21.7% and the \$13 billion dollar loss to the arts and culture sector during the pandemic (VI). Ultimately, researchers at the Urban Institute recommend social contracts and policy interventions that provide freelance arts workers with fundamental social insurance programs and formal workers' protection rights.

The COVID-19 and the Creative Economy Study, conducted by RTRI, is in concert with the above research. Additionally, it contributes original information critical to understanding and supporting small arts organizations as employers. As part of the project design, researchers positioned the creative economy as an ecosystem of circular needs involving individuals, small arts businesses as employers, and larger arts institutions, both nonprofit and for-profit. This study does so by revealing the day-to-day realities that simultaneously informed business strategy and decision making for independent artists and arts organization leaders prior to and during COVID, and captures the manner in which entrenched systemic racism shaped quality of life, business stability, and community health throughout the pandemic. Most importantly, the culminating analysis of this study links the individual and small business to the total health of a community and provides: key data for policy-makers concerning the equitable distribution of funds and necessary interventions in labor policy; evidence to support the advancement of coop structures; communal strategies for equitably sharing resources; and programmatic recommendations for small-business skill-building and support.

⁵ Linares, Nati and Caroline Woolard (2021), "Solidarity Not Charity: Arts and Culture Grant Making in the Solidarity Economy". Grant Makers in the Arts.

⁶ Yang, Jenny R., et al (2021), "Arts Workers in California: Creating a More Inclusive Social Contract to Meet Arts Workers' and Other Independent Contractors' Needs". Urban Institute.

A mechanical sculpture of a human head, constructed from brass and gears, is displayed on a white pedestal. The sculpture features a complex arrangement of gears, wires, and mechanical components, giving it a steampunk or industrial aesthetic. The background is a warm, yellowish-orange wall with a blurred blue and white abstract painting to the left.

IDENTIFYING AND ASSERTING THE RESEARCHER'S STANDPOINT AND METHOD CHOICES

Identifying and Asserting the Researcher's Standpoint and Method Choices

Scientific inquiry is fundamental in explaining the relationship between human beings and society. However, its systems, structures, and methods still bear the mark of logocentrism, which has historically emphasized that researchers ought to detach themselves from aspects of their humanity in order to engage the inquiry process. The assumption is that the distance set between the researcher and the “researched” offers added value to any given study through the guise of objectivity projected onto its own principles, tools, and protocols. This has been interrogated over the past several decades by scholars engaged in ethnography, such as Talal Asad, Amiri Baraka, James Clifford, and Deidre Sklar (to only name a few).

However, scientific inquiry is at another crossroads. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, being critically engaged in scientific research requires an unprecedented level of awareness of the implications of the concept of critical distance. Everyone’s “new normal” and the subsequent blurred lines between researcher and subject are complex. Even ethnography, which serves as a critical research method through which researchers can account for and respond to the reality of blurred lines, are challenged to engage more deeply in reflexive and reflective practice.

The intersecting conditions related to pandemic and other key topics in this research study are a shared lived experience. Researchers, partners, participants, and funders involved in this study are all facing the dynamic effects of a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon that is reshaping what is considered acceptable critical distance in scientific inquiry. For the RTRI research team, every member overlapped with multiple communities centered in our examination, whether that be as a dance artist, a theater artist, a person of color, a resident of a community hit hard by the pandemic or an arts business owner. This may raise questions of neutrality in interpreting data sets. Or, it may be understood as a strength because the proximity to the qualitative information, in particular, enables researchers to attend to nuanced data that might be overlooked by someone external to the communities mentioned.

As part of the design and execution, researchers designed a rigorous ethnographic process in conjunction with surveys, partner dialogue and other methods for data collection. This was done as a means to center lived experiences and embodied knowledge, while allowing us to acknowledge and assert our own prior understandings, expertise and experiences as creatives in the arts economy, consumers of collaborative art-making, beneficiaries of philanthropic arts funding, and casualties in the daily onslaught of systemic inequities.

We assert that our research method design was both a moral obligation and social responsibility; and engaged research participants as partners, instead of as subjects. The ethical framework that we applied is rooted in defining the extent to which we rely on our identification as members of the communities we describe to facilitate our analyses. Key principles of this framework include:

1. We execute our work from a racial equity lens and engage communities and subjects as partners-in-process as opposed to objects of inquiry.
2. We intentionally prioritize and safeguard the spaces, identities, and needs of our partners and their communities.
3. We value deep listening and exchange, and practice respect, accountability, and integrity as we aim to generate bottom-up contributions.
4. We center lived experiences and embodied knowledge to voice the complexity of partner experiences, and build and implement sustainable business practices informed by their lived experiences.
5. We are committed to anti-racist and anti-white supremacist thought that also challenges the tenets of laissez faire capitalism in theory and in practice.



RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Design

In June 2020, ABC researchers executed an artist and arts business landscape analysis survey which included 150 artists and arts administrators, of which the majority were people of color, to determine their access to emergency aid and to establish a preliminary understanding of barriers to aid and other conditions impacting business performance and artistic practice. The goal was to gain insight into whether aid was reaching artists of color, to facilitate more focused technical assistance and direct delivery to people of color in the arts. However, the complexity of the information suggested that many of the businesses were not operationally or strategically well-positioned to endure a long term economic upheaval, even with free technical assistance. This prompted researchers at ABC to design and conduct an ethnographic study, phase two of the COVID-19 & the Creative Economy Study, with the hopes of understanding, describing, and positioning the pre-existing conditions faced by BIPOC artists and arts business leaders within the context of their crisis management strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During phase two, researchers completed 126 hours of dialogue which included thirty-five intake questionnaires, and twenty-nine ethnographic interviews with artists, arts nonprofit leaders, and small business owners, in the fields of dance, theater, curation, arts advocacy, and philanthropy. Conversations with participants focused on their operational models, crisis management strategies prior to and during COVID, and approaches to capacity building. Ethnographic interviews were structured as two deep talks. The first of which focused primarily on business structure, funding models, and relevant social conditions impacting business operations, while the second focused on capacity, crisis-management, mission, vision, and strategy building. In addition, the talks included a uniform set of questions about financial literacy; business structure; operational knowledge; organizational mission and values; the impact of death; grief and social protests on business performance; and the impact of the closure of spaces on personal and professional activities.

With the intention of collecting as much contextual information as possible, deep talks were conducted as free-flowing discussion whereby researchers were at liberty to ask follow up questions based on the responses they received and participants were also able to ask questions of the researchers as well. What emerged were stories that highlighted the interconnectedness of the arts to the lived experiences of individuals and communities as they engaged with issues of systemic and structural racism, public health, loss and death, economics, and politics. The stories shared reached inward to touch on the most mundane and personal aspects of culture and life, while also reaching outward to speak back to regional, national, and global issues.

During interviews and conversations, participants were meant to feel that the deep talks were a safe space within which to share the reasons, or lack thereof, for business decisions made. In order to ensure that researchers remained unbiased during the process two critical truths were foregrounded allowing researchers to appropriately collect and analyze data:

1. That individual artists are businesses themselves.
2. The types of structures that an artist might engage to support themselves are business structures regardless of scale or formal classification.

Applying this thinking ensured that all participants were treated and coded equally.



PHASE TWO SURVEY AND INTERVIEW DESIGN AND QUESTIONS



Phase Two Survey and Interview Design and Questions

Intake Questionnaire

The intake questionnaire collected information about demographics, quality of life and business and organizational structures. The questionnaire helped researchers to better understand how research partners relate to and operate within the arts nonprofit and for-profit business landscapes before diving into the more pointed questions during the Deep Talks.

Demographics: The intake questionnaire offered research partners the opportunity to self-identify concerning race, gender and pronoun identification. Measuring demographic information in this way is paramount to the value of the research goals and to the reflexive quality of the study as it supports evaluating whether this research can offer insight on the experience of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx artists, nonprofits and businesses. Furthermore, this can illuminate potential gaps in outreach.

Quality of Life: The intake questionnaire identified participant health insurance status prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as whether they identify as differently-abled, are recipients of social security benefits from the state, and how many hours are spent working in their art business. From this, researchers were able to understand whether the research partners were receiving adequate and necessary services from the state prior to and during COVID; and how their relationship to care could reflect historical inequities in under-resourced populations that impacted their current conditions during COVID.

General Business/Organizational structure: A set of questions on business and organizational structure focused on how various artists, business owners and administrators do their work and manage their resources. Researchers collected information about the number of employees (i.e., part time, full time employees and independent contractors) to understand operational and programmatic capacity, hiring practices, and resource distribution. This data was critical to creating a baseline assessment of the level of knowledge and awareness of correlating factors necessary for financial and operational health.

In general, the intake questionnaire lacked information about how participants define direct services, educational workshops and classes. These are significant classifications to note given the importance of these categories when seeking public and/or philanthropic funding and technical assistance necessary to manage the various types of services and programming research partners propose to offer.

Ethnographic Interviews: 1st Deep Talk on Structures and Conditions

Business Structure: The research partners were asked to describe their business structure and how

they justify the operational value of their decisions. From these questions, the researchers determined the level of knowledge and access to information essential to planning for viability and sustainability.

Funding Your Business: A set of questions focused on how research partners understand their financial and funding history, funding strategies and financial literacy prior to and since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This helped researchers map the various experiences that partners had when applying for emergency aid opportunities. In addition, researchers captured how injections of emergency funding, in the form of grants, PPP, PUA, disaster loans, unemployment assistance, and crowdfunding were allocated.

Conditions Impacting Structural Performance: These questions measured the effects of the socio-political and socio-cultural issues during 2020, and how the partners processed and explored these personally and in their professional work. This was critical for the researchers to appreciate the scope of impact across social, political and economic arenas. Indoor space closure, loss of life, and social protests during 2020 are collectively positioned as conditions impacting the research partners' ability to operate, perform and create.

Ethnographic Interviews: 2nd Deep Talk on Prior Assumptions, Knowledge, Crisis Management and Strategies

Capacity and Crisis Management: These questions examined challenges and opportunities faced by leadership and staff in executing their responsibilities before and since COVID-19. These questions also examined how finances were prioritized before and since COVID-19 in order to advance the overall goals of the organization/business. Additionally these questions explored how the operating structure of the organization/business affected the ability to respond to pandemic-related vulnerabilities and strategize for future crisis management.

Mission, Vision, and Strategy-Building: Researchers asked: What is the ultimate goal of the organization and how well-positioned was the organization in order to achieve this goal? Building from related information in the intake questionnaire, researchers probed further to determine how the history and practice of the research partner's organization or arts practice described an articulated or implicit mission, vision, and value statement.

Open Ended Reflections: The final prompt provided research partners the space and time to reflect openly on the discussions thus far, sharing thoughts and considerations that emerged and are useful in approaching their work moving forward.



DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Discussion and Recommendations

The collected responses were robust in nature and offered a wealth of material for analysis. From these responses, and in conjunction with the phase one survey, Rising Tides researchers delineated four thematic areas for analysis. These areas are listed as follows:

1. Dance and theater employment, capital, and income ecosystems
2. Knowledge of emergency aid types and associated qualifications
3. Comparison of business conditions prior to and during COVID-19
4. Potential opportunities for training and education

The discussion points below uncover how people prioritize mission and vision; how impact is measured; changes in ideology since COVID-19; and visions for future business and sector practices. Based on the calls to action made by our research partners, our recommendations frame a desire to shift away from structures and practices that perpetuate instability, and instead move toward structures that are intended to facilitate strategy, equitable resource building, sustainability and comprehensive mission, vision, and values design.


Dance and theater employment, capital and income ecosystems

Discussion

Broadly, the collapse of the creative economy during COVID-19 put a spotlight on the lack of labor rights afforded to contract workers and the unidirectional movement of capital produced from artistic labor. As noted by Americans for the Arts, 60% of arts workers were fully unemployed by July of 2020.⁷ Furthermore, during our phase one survey, we found that 92% of our participants pulled multiple sources of income in the creative economy and 44% applied for pandemic unemployment assistance (PUA) which suggests they lost at least one source of income from independent contract labor within education or arts nonprofits.⁸ This gestures to the fact that many artswokers lost employment in two or often three spaces. If we factor in the pre-existing disparities in pay for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people, we are looking at levels of precarity for individuals and families that account for more than 25% of our arts labor force here in New York City. Overlapping with this is a general issue rooted in neoliberal labor trends where large arts businesses are just as likely to rely on contract artswokers as small arts businesses. However, there is a threshold in profit, as well as a series of tactical reinvestment maneuvers, that actually allow large businesses with a higher profit to pay less

⁷ Americans for the Arts (2020), <https://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/americans-for-the-arts-news/covid-19-impact-on-the-arts-research-update-may-4-2020>

⁸ Pautz, Carolyn & Veroneque Ignace (2020), "COVID-19 and the Creative Economy: Phase 1 Emergency Aid Report," pg. 9



in taxes than small businesses. Thus, during COVID-19, unlike industries composed of businesses that have larger numbers of traditional employees, the Arts and Culture sector was prime for an unemployment crisis.

As we put forward in the Phase One Emergency Aid Report, the relationship of other industries (including hospitality, tourism and education) to the arts, particularly dance and theater, is predominantly extractive in terms of both capital and labor, which has undermined the ability of arts businesses to cultivate sustainable management practices.⁹ While dance and theater arts intersect with and produce revenue for other industries via artsworkers' labor, the reinvestment from other industries into the arts, in terms of capital and labor, is not in kind. For example, Broadway talent management and production companies do not invest in dance education businesses or programs, though without them, there would not be a labor force to staff one of the largest economic drivers in New York City entertainment and tourism industries.

At a more granular level, roles in small arts businesses spanning education, administration, operations, and performance almost always articulate with and produce “value” from creative capital for another sector, such as public education or hospitality. As evidenced, while eighteen (51%) of those we interviewed situated their primary or secondary source of income within an arts business, the labor associated with that income was actually in service of one or more other sectors, including secondary education (6), higher education (3), DEI consulting (2), talent management (3), philanthropy (1), hospitality (2), and tourism (3). Additionally, of the eighteen participants whose labor produced capital that was utilized for revenue in another industry, fifteen (42%) conducted that work as an independent contractor, which affords them little to no social benefits protection, such as unemployment insurance. The problematic nature of gig employment is present within the arts Arts and Culture sector as well. Fifteen (42%) of those participants we interviewed worked for or ran arts businesses that contracted the majority of its staff. The decision to employ artists and arts administrators as contract labor most often stemmed from the need to save on payroll and benefits costs.

Additionally, three participants (8%) who own or run small dance education programs or businesses described the loss of students to larger institutions in terms of loss of capital.

⁹ Ibid. pg. 8

I'm the pipeline. When these kids can't get to Manhattan [where more well-known dance education programs are located] because they aren't commuters yet or their parents don't want them on the train and can't drop them [...] they come to me. When the parents don't have the money [for a well-known dance education program] they come to me. So I am the pipeline [for talent for larger institutions].

This respondent went on to note that her students with professional aspirations have a high admissions rate to high schools in New York City with pre-professional programs. The respondent commented that the talent of her former students at pre-professional high schools is used in fundraising campaigns and contributes greatly to the image of these institutions, giving them higher social and cultural capital than her local studio. However, these larger institutions rarely participate in collaborative fundraising or other cooperative models. This means that when a student, who the respondent has cultivated as an artist since early childhood, leaves a program, multiple forms of capital leave with that student and rarely circulate back to the original source.

Furthermore, one participant working in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) consulting commented that DEI services are often a one-way flow of intellectual capital. Additionally, they noted that they are not optimistic that DEI training programs are here to stay, which has been reported elsewhere by other experts in DEI consulting.¹⁰ Thus, even with the sudden expansion of DEI consulting businesses, which often hire artists when serving philanthropic and municipal clients, the services offered do not necessarily translate into reciprocal investments in the arts practices that produced the knowledge that grounds their DEI trainings.

Recommendations

With these issues of labor and capital in mind, we offer three recommendations to create more sustainable labor practices and capital reinvestment. First, we recommend shifting categorization of arts work, labor sourcing, and income generation from reactionary to proactive. It is imperative to acknowledge the imbalances in the creative labor supply chain and build in failsafes to impede future structural collapses impacting large organizations, small businesses, and individuals alike. This can be achieved through broader labor protection that includes social welfare access for independent contract workers; changing legislation on labor rights by making it more difficult for businesses to classify workers as non-traditional employees; and through small business tax reform that prevents already-strapped small business owners from having to foot the proverbial bill for these labor protections.

Second, we need to cultivate economic practices of reciprocity across industries, in a manner that acknowledges the importance and tangible value of arts labor and related capital in cultural supply chains. This includes actively creating new spaces and new opportunities for value retention of professional experience and proprietary work. In particular, K-12 education and higher education/academia, both major employers of artists, could support this in two ways. In terms of retaining value of professional experience, public school reciprocity beyond teaching certifications should be expanded to also include, towards the application of tenureship, years of teaching artist experience. Accredited universities should be required to recognize years of labor for the purposes of rank and tenureship if

¹⁰ Dong, Sarah. June 2021. "The Hlstory of Growth of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Profesion". <https://insights.grcglobalgroup.com/the-history-and-growth-of-the-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-profession/> Accessed December 2020.

a faculty member changes their university employer. (As of now, adjunct employment does not count towards tenureship and should a full time educator move to a new institution, their years of service rarely transfer between universities for tenureship requirement.)

Third, in conjunction with practices of reciprocity across industries, within the Arts and Culture sector, we recommend an increase in development of mutual aid infrastructures, including but not limited to cooperatives, unions, etc., that include both financial and non-financial resources and tools. Unionization has been shown to decrease wage and benefits gaps.¹¹ Mutual aid circles that involve both small and large arts businesses could be used to cultivate a range of strategies that may help address concerns about labor protection, income stability, and movement of capital, including but not limited to: collaborative hiring and employment strategies; strengthening interorganizational communication; stabilization funding for staffing and administration; collaborative fundraising; creating and deploying response tools, such as legal support, media and public relations services; legislative lobbying; and the formation of community land trusts.

Knowledge of emergency aid types and associated qualifications

Discussion

In addition to the arts, most participants in the study expressed additional professional backgrounds in economics, management, arts administration, software engineering, therapy, spirituality, and social work, among others. Attempting to classify these backgrounds into their similar attributes, we identified two groups: those with an understanding of business management in the tactical sense and those working as wellness agents and concerned with sustainability of their arts practice.

In general we found several key characteristics that require attention when crafting recommendations to revitalize and increase equity in the creative economy.

Characteristics of the Business Management Training

- Ability to visualize and implement creative solutions for operating the business and developing business structure (e.g. running a nonprofit organization alongside 2-3 other for-profit LLC-registered organizations).
- Creative understanding of managing funding for the company (e.g having a concurrently run for-profit LLC-register organization 'donate' to the main nonprofit organization).

Characteristics of Wellness Agents and Arts Practice Sustainability-Focused

- Critical thinking and consciousness about whether as providers they too can benefit from services they offer.
- Creating business services based on what best supports the arts and wellness practice for the business owners themselves on a day-to-day basis, regardless of whether or not these services demonstrate long term financial profitability.

¹¹ Beyer, Don. (2020), https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/ccf4dbe2-810a-44f8-b3e7-14f7e5143ba6/economic-state-of-black-america-2020.pdf, Joint Economic Committee.

- A range of lack of administrative and technical knowledge about which business model or structure is best suited for the future success of the business.
- Reactionary model of doing business inherently tied to the prioritization of wellness in society (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for wellness and therefore supported the proliferation of business activities).


For either group, considering the relationship between business structure and the larger economic system through a racial equity lens, there is serious tension between wanting to thrive as business owners in today's economy and recognizing that this very economy is built on exploitative and exclusionary supply-and-demand practices that present obstacles to business sustainability and personal wellness. This is exemplary of a critical theme: the desire to disrupt Western, white patriarchal systems while needing to thrive within them.

Those with prior business administration or management training fared best in terms of navigating finance and emergency aid opportunities. However, most participants were untrained in business administration and the impact of business models on operational and funding mechanisms and therefore selected models based on previously established standards. For those without training, it is important to note that the challenges to applying for aid often paralleled lack of knowledge about a business structure's mechanisms (i.e. 501c3, LLC, S-corp) selected upon founding an organization. Thus, awareness, capacity and technical knowledge required for identifying and accessing emergency funds opportunities were a substantial hurdle. As noted in the phase one report, lack of clarity around eligibility was identified as a significant issue, whereby respondents describe it as either a barrier to applying for emergency aid or a drain on valuable resources as they spent time applying for opportunities for which they do not qualify. Unsurprisingly, larger organizations, equipped with either finance teams or consulting resources had higher levels of support to research information about various types of emergency aid and pandemic support funding. Smaller organizations and independent artists relied on individual capacity to seek out, apply for, and stay abreast of aid opportunities while also managing all other logistics of running their business. Unfortunately, during the pandemic this meant many artists either did not have knowledge of what their financial options were according to the business's IRS classification, the necessary information to troubleshoot based on their operational models or the support to implement troubleshooting strategies.

In summary, the complex and sometimes ambivalent approach towards business structures related to the educational and professional backgrounds of our respondents. This then informed the creation of operational business models, to which we provide recommendations in the following section, as well as their capacity to critically engage in the emergency aid application process.

Recommendations

We urgently call for widely available, real-time assistance from government agencies, foundations, corporations, and other funding entities aimed at helping artists and arts business



owners of color navigate business and financial development for post-COVID recovery. It is critical that we identify new and existing structures to increase more equitable access to technical support and education on post-COVID business development, sustainable financial planning, and long-term preemptive crisis-management. Additionally, the experience of our research partners, from the time their businesses were created through the time they needed emergency aid, demonstrated that, for most, access to and/or awareness of technical assistance and emergency aid support was

often mediated by a general lack of clarity around what was available from the government and from nonprofits conducting education and support in the aforementioned areas. For example, one respondent commenting on their strategy for securing emergency aid stated, “We had the approach of let’s apply and see what happens. We were not totally clear what we qualified for.” However, this approach proved to be a drain on resources that did not necessarily yield a return. Unfortunately, by not effectively reaching out to and engaging with organizations led by and serving people of color, providers of emergency aid missed critical opportunities to help small arts businesses.

Hence, we also recommend that the city and state develop a community outreach plan that builds a network of communication pathways through existing, trusted arts organizations led by people of color. This would improve the likelihood that information about financial aid and other resources might reach the large pool of artists of color and small arts organizations led by and serving people of color. As part of this outreach, assistance needs to include expert services able to match artists and administrators with appropriate funding opportunities. Employing targeted outreach to connect artists and cultural producers or color to appropriate organizations and financial opportunities, such as was done in the Creatives Rebuild New York grant, fosters long-term sustainability and an improved quality of life, particularly because if one does not have a stable income in this society, it is difficult to care for oneself and community. In the words of poet Audre Lourde, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare”. Hence, recognizing that one’s work overlaps with one’s well-being is an engagement in artists’ and art business owners’ self-preservation, which, then, is an engagement in disruption.

Finally, financial aid and technical assistance support needs to be designed and executed in such a way that does not harm artists who must engage in a variety of employment structures. As noted in our Phase One Report, in the process of applying for unemployment through an employer, several artists were denied PUA and/or grant writing support for their independent projects even though they lost substantial income from independent contract labor. This sort of structural bias in favor of traditional employment structures is neglectful of the reality of most artists.

Comparison of business conditions prior to and during COVID-19

Discussion Point

When comparing conditions prior to and since COVID-19, our respondents highlighted how the pandemic exacerbated existing conditions, and offered critical reflections of the dominant systems organizing the creative economy, including philanthropic-centric giving, government service contracts, corporatization and unregulated labor. Additionally, respondents noted that financial literacy training was critical before and since the pandemic, but noted that navigating the best learning process was and continues to be a challenge. All of these pre-existing conditions were magnified by new conditions, including the inability to operate in-person due to the health restrictions imposed by government officials, the uncertainty and rapidly changing public health information, the shift to a fully virtual space, and the reliance on that technology reducing or upending funding and income sources significantly. The sum total of these conditions drastically affected the total ecosystem, including expenditures and heightened levels of mental, emotional, and physical stress that cannot be understated in impact.

As noted in appendix A, when responding to our survey question: “Were the challenges you faced during the COVID-19 pandemic same or similar to what you faced before?,” 64% of participants answered ‘Yes,’ 18% answered ‘No,’ and 18% answered ‘Maybe’ or ‘Not Sure.’ For those respondents who answered ‘Yes,’ the macro issues of systemic racism, the devaluation of artists in society, and the lack of labor protection were always already shaping the viability and sustainability of both their arts practices and business endeavors. Additionally, interviews demonstrated that prior to the pandemic, many small business owners were not well-versed in financial literacy, crisis management and/or operational strategy. Thus, the core flaws in financial, operational, and capacity systems within which businesses were designed and operating were magnified by new conditions brought on by the pandemic.

A minority of participants, particularly wellness agents and those centering sustainability in their arts practice, expressed that regardless of their knowledge of business administration and management, they choose to operate as a part-time or secondary business because of the contentious relationship between maintaining one’s own personal artistic practice while also working in the larger, profit-driven arts and culture sector. In this case, prior to the pandemic, business structures and operational designs were selected to negotiate a balance between these two factors rather than based on economic sustainability and available financial support. Respondents shared the following:

Part of the reason I wanted to create a project-based organization is I didn't like I was indebted to the creative process as a means of making money.

The way it is structured now is that I work a [fulltime] job and then the time I have otherwise I am producing choreography and working in the studio. I am also teaching as well and that feeds into it. The income I make in my job floats a lot of what I do in dance right now... I could keep being dormant and wait for public money or I can just say thank goodness I'm making money at my job. I can afford to take the hit for a few thousand dollars if it comes to that. I am self-subsidizing whatever I can't fundraise at this point.

For the respondents who answered 'No' or 'Not Sure' to the aforementioned survey question, new challenges, such as hybrid programming, loss of in-person venues, and loss of life, materialized since the onset of the pandemic. Below are several quotations that illustrate the specters of pre-COVID conditions and their connection to new challenges.

Comparing nonprofit fundraising and for profit corporate revenue generating norms, Kevin McEwen, Executive Director of Kofago Dance, who also runs a for profit arts business, reflected on the noticeable decrease in individual giving since COVID and the potential turn to corporatization as a strategy for crisis management. He continued by saying that,

Before I had people giving just to support the work, but during COVID that time of giving didn't exist. Now that we are coming on the other side of this, I don't know that we will have that again...The way moving forward [requires] you definitely...have a corporate approach because [those already with one] were able to withstand not being able to have their doors open for a longer amount of [time].

Catherine, an arts administrator working in arts education, connects the lack of sustained giving to the ongoing issue of convincing individuals and the general public that the arts is a valuable investment across all demographics and sectors of society. She captures the tension between the low prioritization of the arts when crises arise alongside the actual cost of providing accessible arts programs to all people. She comments,

Money is being shifted away from the arts to "more important endeavors", so how do we get people to see the arts as a valuable investment? How do you educate the general public on the cost of providing art while also creating a sustainable and accessible model for all families?

Speaking about foundation giving, Amy Andrieux, Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA), referenced learning how to navigate 'guilt funding' from funders - a response to the momentum in social justice work during the convergence of the BLM protests and COVID's disproportionate effect on communities of color. Additionally, she noted that due to the uncertainty produced by COVID, funders were temporarily more flexible and shifted from earmarked funding to accessible and useful general operating support. Initially, she hoped this would

be the norm going forward. However, she no longer believes these practices will be sustained or produce long-term systemic change within the capitalistic, competitive nature of the nonprofit industrial complex.

[I] spoke with the DCLA, because of the things they have required to be done during the pandemic and [I] need leeway on timing, but DCLA said they are back on normal terms and cannot give extensions on programming. [This is] unrealistic when the DOE isn't back on track fully yet, when teaching artists cannot do complete work...compliance needs to be rethought, fiscal year to fiscal year compliance is basically like living check to check.

Illustrating this, Amy describes her organization's experience working with city and state agencies and the frustration of operating in a disconnected system that results in piecemeal support and untenable expectations. Shayna Sholsberg, Director of Strategy and Operations at Women of Color in the Arts (WOCA), similarly addresses the disjointed relationship between nonprofits and funders. She expressed the difficulty finding funding prior to and during COVID that is contributed in partnership and with deep care for the mission, vision, expertise, needs and wants of the funds-seeking organization and its community.

WOCA faces funding challenges. This is a primary challenge. By that I mean funding that is from supporters that are aligned with our mission, from foundations that see us as full partners, that are not trying to force us to fit their needs. Funding is out there, but it is a challenge to find funding from an equitable space.

Simultaneous to the lack of business administration knowledge and educational resources mentioned in the previous section is this existent lack of adequate and equitable funding and meaningful change to grantmaking and service contract practices. Both of these conditions lead to an unsustainable distribution of labor amongst limited staff. Analysis of business conditions prior to and during COVID-19 center the historically exploitative positionalities and structures that sustain capitalism in conjunction with eurocentric, patriarchal narratives. Responses below exemplify how this period of deep global crisis was managed and reconciled from the understanding that respondents' organizations pre-COVID were already operating on the edge of crisis.

...nonprofits administrators are always overworked and underpaid, but being in a developing crisis took a mental toll on staff, members...The pandemic added a layer of stress and trauma that compounded an already difficult situation in an already challenging environment.
– Shayna Schlosberg, Director at WOCA

¹² "Arts Funders Forum's Research: A Look at What We Learned," Art Funders Forum (September 2019).

I think a big challenge is that on the admin side there is just me and I can't possibly manage 6 departments and all their unique needs, and throughout COVID we saw the leadership gap in Finance, HR, and Facilities, and our staff felt that... During COVID our finance consultants were not people we could approach daily for guidance even though they are great. We are actively trying to hire a managing director to fill that void that came about during COVID.

– Jenny Thompson, arts administrator

Artists and arts leaders can feel further ambivalence about the effectiveness of financial literacy education within the context of being part of, or proximate to, the nonprofit sector. Of 500 cultural leaders surveyed by the Arts Funders Forum in 2019, 78% of respondents indicated that they were either “somewhat concerned” or “very concerned” about funding trends in the arts.¹² Shayna Schlosberg, Director of Operations & Strategy at Women of Color in the Arts (WOCA), centers the dynamics of nonprofit philanthropy as a complicating factor in achieving financial health. She asserts, “Funding agencies have made it very difficult to stay financially healthy. That’s not necessarily a reflection of financial literacy on the organization’s part.” Clara Takarabe’s lecture entitled, “‘The Way it Works’: Abuse, Alienation, and Our Current Condition as Arts & Culture Workers,” provides compelling context for and extrapolation on Shayna’s assertion. Contending that “artists often live at the mercy of the nonprofit sector and live by its rules,” Takarabe counters the common notion that this sector is a “neutral” space separate from commercial activity, describing it as the runoff from extractive profit making.¹³ In this sense, we can understand the nonprofit sector as serving to reinforce the exploitation of arts labor. The reality that artists and arts leaders face in being subject to the whims of funding entities and donors makes the limitations of financial planning even more transparent.

As it concerns common grant-making practices, capitalist norms, and labor conditions, one participant gestured towards both the need and the challenges of establishing collaborative development and fundraising practices.

When asked how participants define and envision collaboration, Judy, a dancer and arts administrator, and Mary, an arts administrator, conceive of collaboration as a redistribution of labor and an antidote to competition. Judy called for more cooperative structures, noting she “would love a common space for artists and arts programming to set oneself up with other arts organizations instead of being a solo entity doing everything themselves.” Additionally, referencing a strategic management technique, Mary highlights the distrust in peers in their field noting that “SWOT analysis frames peers as competitors...What’s the potential problem there? This mentality has to change, we’re fighting that within our community. How do we make space for each even if we’re doing similar work?”

Necessarily, two respondents, Amy Andrieux and Rebecca Fitton, complicate ideals of collaboration by questioning what the practice and operationalization of inter-organizational and intra-creative economy collaborations would actually look like to reimagine narratives of power within an economy that currently reifies disparity. Amy observes that,

The way capitalism functions means that everyone is struggling to work on their own...the funding structure is that everyone is in competition with each other...it takes time, resources and headspace to consider what a cross-organization collab would look like. A smaller arts organization will have 12-14 hour days, which does not leave you time to think about how to work with others.

– Lisa M., dancer

...it would be cool if mainstream organizations like MOMA or Brooklyn Museum would focus on medium or small organizations that do focused programming to do the work for them. It would ensure circulation within the arts economy and longevity for smaller and medium organizations... but at the same time, is the work of small and medium groups to build up even larger organizations? What would inter-organizational collabs look like, so it isn't you eating/using me to do the work and to legitimize you, but that there is an exchange that levels the playing field for both of us.

Rebecca additionally offers that,

Before the pandemic, my definition would be different. Now, I have more questions: how are we making more equitable collaboration happen between administration and artists, between presenters and artists? I think we have been having to make collaboration happen without addressing the intrinsic hierarchy behind our economy. It is clear that there are more people that have more power.

Adjacent to concerns about how to effectively collaborate, eight out of the twenty-three individuals who completed our second Deep Talk interviews stated that financial literacy was the individual skill they needed the most support in order to prepare for the future. As explained by Jenny Thompson and Sabine Blaizin, financial literacy training enables a person or team to plan for 'what if' and 'what might happen.' Jenny explains,

[Financial literacy] is absolutely essential in prepping for crises because we were not taught what if. Of course we had a cash reserve, but we needed to think ahead and think bigger about that.

Sabine further elucidates on the multitude of complexities shaping her finances sharing that she "would have liked to have a reserve and have more knowledge about grants and monetary opportunities." She felt like she did not take advantage of emergency funding programs while also struggling to support her parents and extended family. She

continues by saying how she "would've liked an investor, a reserve, and/or a second aligned creative strategy to be able to predict what might happen in the years to come."

Both Jenny and Sabine highlight the common lack of strategic planning that looks beyond immediate needs and is critical for preparedness. In the next thematic discussion section, we further discuss participant experiences or lack thereof with financial literacy and recommendations to increase accessibility and equity in financial literacy training.

Recommendations

Based on the pre-existing conditions described above, we underscore that artists and organizations need sustainable approaches that address the full creative economy and prioritize the agency and wellbeing of BIPOC artists and entrepreneurs. These recommendations include extensive financial literacy training, collaborative grantmaking, business administration training, and tools and practices rooted in mutual aid approaches to minimize the effects of future crises.

For smaller budgeted and smaller staffed organizations, we emphasize that mutual aid approaches to resource sharing, including learning how to set up cooperatives, would help business owners and administrators to operate less from constant crisis mode, and with increased agility and capacity to plan and pivot.

First, In conjunction with financial literacy training, there is an increased need for business coaching for artists and arts business owners on the appropriate business structures and failsafes (i.e. liability insurance, disaster planning, financial planning, equity) to implement prior to and in the face of crisis.

Secondly, in order to address the significant disparities in power and resulting friction between arts organizations and philanthropy and government agencies within the creative economy, we recommend a comprehensive shift to general operations grants, multi-year funding, and more flexible grant compliance. We also recommend that grantmakers and government agencies provide education on pre-established reporting structures intended to monitor how the money is used. This would have two positive effects. First, it would decrease the all too common issue faced by grant-seeking organizations whereby all available resources are earmarked for programming, resulting in the financial neglect of overall operational and strategic needs that undergird an organization's viability. Second, it would decrease the codependent relationship between philanthropy and nonprofits by improving the operational efficiency of service providers.

Thirdly, we recommend shifting grantmaking practices to support grant collaboration between peer organizations. Collaboration predicates sharing, reciprocity, and redistribution of funds, labor and other resources amongst creative economy stakeholders. This shift would disrupt the existing "winner takes all" approach which is depriving small nonprofits and nonprofits led by people of color of significant opportunities for growth. Furthermore, collaborative grantmaking would leverage the innovation that is possible when different ontologies and epistemologies are given space to co-exist. Although collaboration can be attributed to a democratic value, it is a practice that is not inherently equitable, so these are all important and critical questions to consistently examine in the interest of centering equity and anti-oppression.

And finally, introducing the exercise of reflexivity and operationalizing collaborative practices internally within an organization by shifting authority and accountability towards being more democratically held. Similar to how Hope Mohr is active in decolonizing her dance company by reshaping leadership (e.g. replacing her title of Executive Director) and pay, one participant, Sulu LeoNimm, the Executive Director of Theater of the Oppressed NYC (TONYC), is also in the midst of interrogating how TONYC can embody its mission and values through its internal structures and operations. They describe how they are currently “reexamining internal organizational structure of power and authority to function collaboratively e.g. possibly eliminating the Executive Director role.” They continue by explaining that, “What I am interested in and other folks have identified...the titles and roles are not so much what matter...but how the accountability flows between co-workers really.”

Potential opportunities for training and education

Discussion

Our quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate a gulf between favorable attitudes toward financial literacy and concerted action to secure this knowledge amongst the artists and arts leaders we interviewed, as well as ambivalence about quantifying the value of one’s labor. While a small majority – 62% – of participants reported having taken financial literacy classes before the pandemic, only 31% took financial literacy classes during this global crisis. At the same time, 95% of all respondents expressed valuing financial literacy in the wake of COVID-19. What accounts for this discrepancy in attitudes and action? One clear obstacle in the way of pursuing financial literacy education for many research partners was limited funds, time and capacity. This is unsurprising given the fact that respondents consistently articulated concerns regarding the need for increased monetary resources and related issues around undercompensated labor and inadequate staffing.

Amy Andrieux, Executive Director and Chief Curator at MoCADA, expressed time and capacity barriers to financial literacy education not only in terms of personal bandwidth, but also in regards to the larger issue of efficacy at the organizational level:

I have to do so much multitasking, so finding the time to do financial literacy training is difficult to fit in. I have so little time outside of work. Finding ways to embed financial literacy in the fabric of what an organization does is key, because with understaffing and lack of immediate resources to allow people to step away for training, it becomes so difficult to do a full financial literacy training beyond just a couple hours. How much impact does a 1-2 hour course have versus a long-term rebuilding and education of multiple hours spread out over time?

Amy’s comments bring to bare considerations around quantifying the time, labor, and resources required for both comprehensive financial literacy training and effective implementation of secured knowledge and skills. An anonymous respondent similarly problematized the practicality of financial literacy education when stating, “You can take all the financial literacy [instruction] in the world, but if you don’t act on that knowledge you’re going to make the same mistakes.” Sabine Blaizin, artist and founder of Oyasound, echoed these concerns within the context of the consistency needed for applying financial literacy in practice and the necessity of ongoing support from professionals with expertise in this subject area:

I need a [financial literacy] refresher. I've started and stopped. Haven't had time and capacity to do it. I feel overwhelmed because I'd want to apply it right away and in the moment and really want someone with the skillset so I can learn in a hands-on way with a professional. I need to be consistent with putting financial literacy into practice and feel I need professional support to do that.

Here, Sabine conveys that implementing financial literacy knowledge is not something she feels she can do without sustained guidance. Her concerns converge with another theme that arose in conversations with arts practitioners in particular: the sense that creativity and financial savvy are competing skill sets. Multidisciplinary artist Lauren Oliver expressed this tension when she shared:

My arts practice is a bit more intuitive and spontaneous. The business practice has to be more premeditated and planned. That's why it's difficult for the artist to be a business person... Difficult because it feels like we're wearing two different hats, and you can't wear both at the same time.

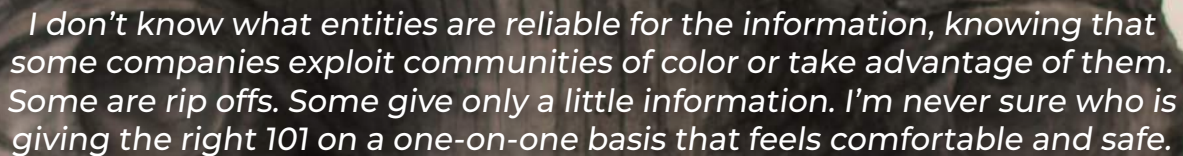
Another respondent going by the fictional name Shelly Campbell expanded on this perceived friction between artistic practice and business practice in a manner that once again centers concerns about time and capacity:

I recognize I could be more financially literate. I also recognize that part of my approach to being more financially literate would require me to slow the pace of what I can actually get done because I would need time to understand what I am learning. As a person/creative I am very fast - creating, empathizing, with genuine answers, but when it comes to learning something that is not natural to me, I would need to slow down and have the literacy portion pared down and given in bite sizes so I can fully understand what is going on... I know there are other areas I can be more informed, but I need the bandwidth and that would take away from where I need time to create.

Shelly's comments are important to consider within the context that over 70% of participants in this study reported working in roles with responsibilities that fall into at least three distinct job functions, including administrative, operational, pedagogical, creative, technical, and financial duties. Additionally, her insights on the time required to switch gears to engage in labor outside one's fully-honed skill sets sheds further light on the fact that 43% of study participants reported working over 40 hours per week, including 26% who work over 60 hours per week. Many of the practicing artists in the study express that they are doing "everything," largely as a function of not having the financial means to hire others. A respondent going by the fictional name Lisa M. stated, "I don't ask for things if I can't pay [for] something, even if it's small." This sentiment is repeated by an anonymous respondent who says, "I have a hard time asking people to do things for free." For many arts workers, especially artists supporting their own creative work, the prospect of making financial literacy actionable for their businesses presents prohibitive time and labor demands on individuals and teams who are already

overextended and overburdened. As a result, it appears that many arts workers understandably question the return on investment for pursuing financial literacy education within the existing capacity constraints of their businesses. Thus, while the vast majority of respondents acknowledge the value of financial literacy in theory, serious reservations arise in the face of envisioning how to put this education into practice.

Some respondents' concerns rose above and beyond capacity concerns, revealing deeper distrust and cynicism when diving into the mechanics of securing financial literacy education. Lisa M. shared her misgivings about soliciting guidance:



I don't know what entities are reliable for the information, knowing that some companies exploit communities of color or take advantage of them. Some are rip offs. Some give only a little information. I'm never sure who is giving the right 101 on a one-on-one basis that feels comfortable and safe.

Lisa's comments are representative of the attitudes of many other business owners of color who have developed skepticism towards institutions based on personal experiences with racial bias along with knowledge of our nation's pervasive history of systemic racism. Scholarship on entrepreneurs of color has supported the validity of these concerns, documenting lower lines of credit, more frequent loan application rejections, and host of other disadvantages at the starting stage of building a business.¹⁴ Furthermore, a 2016 US Census survey of entrepreneurs found that only 58% of Black business owners solicited financial and/or legal advice compared to 70% of white business owners.¹⁵ These numbers suggest that distrust of financial institutions resulting from experiences of racial discrimination can lessen the likelihood that entrepreneurs of color seek crucial services and support, such as financial literacy training and guidance.

Other research participants felt ambivalence towards the incongruity between finances and arts practice. Writer and filmmaker Jeffery U. Darrensborg puts it plainly, "I like doing things that don't make money." A subsequent comment sheds light on the root of their uneasiness: "Running a production company really made me hate the combination of art and money and needing money to do art." These perspectives fall in line with what sociologist Katja Praznik terms "the paradox of art" in Western culture. She describes the core feature of this condition as "the idea that art is not labour but an essentialised expression of individual creativity or an individual need for self-expression." This ideology, Praznik explains, converges with larger issues around the invisibility and privatization of labor in Western society, rendering art and its products as distinct from economic activity.¹⁶ As such, it is not only artists and arts leaders who struggle to reconcile the relationship between their own work and compensation that suffer from the effects of this pervasive paradox. Even artists who have clearly quantified the economic value of their own work must contend with the undervaluing of arts labor created by the conditions of capitalism.

Sabine Blaizin's experiences securing work opportunities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate arts labor bias in action. Here, Sabine describes a process of price negotiation wherein

¹⁴ David Baboolall, Kelemwork Cook, Nick Noel, Shelley Stewart, and Nina Yancy, "Building Supportive Ecosystems for Black-owned U.S. Businesses". *McKinsey & Company* (October 2020).

¹⁵ 2016 Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs, "Providers of Business Advice or Mentoring," US Census Bureau, [census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

¹⁶ Katja Praznik, "Wages for and against Art Work: On Economy, Autonomy, and the Future of Artistic Labour," *Reshape* (December 2020).

artists feel the pressure to take what they can get and compromise on the rates they feel they deserve:

Things are opening up. I've been accepting any gigs that come my way. Not being paid at my highest rate, but hopefully that'll start coming back... Because folks haven't been in business since places are just reopening and restrategizing, they can't offer the same rates...

A lot of new venues are figuring out their budgets. Some offers I turn down, but I've had to reconfigure what my base rate is.

Extractive labor practices in the arts sector and the perpetuation of the starving artist trope in Western culture undergird this sense of a lack of control over compensation, especially for BIPOC artists and BIPOC-led arts organizations whose financial struggles are compounded by the inequities of systemic racism. Ultimately, arts workers participating in our study are keenly aware that arts labor is treated differently from other kinds of labor. They understand that

artistic work is generally exploited within current economic conditions, causing added reservations about the actual relevance and value of pursuing financial literacy training.

As explored in our discussion of emergency aid, participants' considerations around business structures and funding strategies sit within a friction between the desire to thrive within existing economic conditions and the knowledge that the exploitation of creative labor is endemic to these very conditions. Exceedingly aware of this tension, many of our research participants position their business practices as both working with and against capitalist structures. This leaves some uncertain of their place within existing business frameworks. For example, multidisciplinary artist Dominic Bradley expressed, "Conditions are precarious so it is difficult to assess where [my business model] can fit into the creative economy." They further explained that they don't see others in the Black, queer, disability community succeeding, citing a lack of mentorship specific to this particular group working within the arts sector. However, others are consciously working to carve out a space for themselves and their communities outside of prevailing business structures that participate in and uphold capitalism. Oludaré Bernard, founder of Kiire Wellness, shared:

I'm thinking about the Western ways of putting businesses together versus putting a business together via a natural construction of community... Black folks have been doing this work forever, but there hasn't been a space to do it in the way that markets allow white people [to succeed].

Similarly, Amy Andrieux communicated a drive toward positioning MoCADA as a truly global platform, asking, "How do we bring the rest of the world in—not just Brooklyn—to connect the dots to what it means to be an artist in the diaspora?" She explicitly ties this goal to exploring shared values and shared systems that create a consistent network of cross-cultural exchange as "a practice of diaspora, to create a cultural landscape, to create pipelines for artists." The ways in which artists and arts leaders are challenging existing business practices put into question the relevance of traditional iterations of financial literacy education that simply provide guidelines for surviving within an economic system that maintains and advances racial and labor bias.

Recommendations

Delving into our interviews with research participants unveils the fact that attitudes toward financial literacy are not as clear cut as our quantitative data initially suggests. The overwhelming majority of

artists and arts leaders in our study report that they value financial literacy education, but closer consideration reveals ambivalence around putting this kind of knowledge into practice. Limited capacity amongst artists, administrators, and business owners alike presents itself as a primary barrier to pursuing financial literacy education. Research participants express cogent concerns regarding the time, funds, and labor required not only to gain financial literacy knowledge and skill sets, but also to make this education and proficiency actionable. On top of these doubts regarding the ultimate practicality of financial literacy, many of the artists and arts leaders we interviewed expressed significant cynicism about financial literacy in the face of larger economic systems and structures that perpetuate racial and labor bias.

With the understanding that BIPOC arts workers want to achieve more than bare survival within oppressive conditions, we recognize that artists, administrators, and business owners seek to both better navigate existing circumstances and to change them. As such, we ground our recommendations on financial literacy training and education within the context of Pablo Picasso's maxim: "Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." From this perspective, we offer insights on potential improvements to the accessibility and applicability of financial literacy offerings along with suggestions regarding supplemental education, resources, and strategies that can aid arts workers in creating conditions in which they can thrive.

At minimum, entities providing financial literacy offerings must address arts workers' understandable qualms regarding the return on investment for pursuing financial literacy education within the existing capacity constraints of their businesses. Meeting artists and arts leaders where they are at requires transparency and guidance around the time, labor, and resources necessary to both secure financial literacy knowledge and skills as well as to effectively implement them. For training, counseling, and other services to better appeal to and serve arts workers, care must be taken to advertise and plan in ways that clearly articulate how time committed to the offerings can translate into clear deliverables for attaining financial health. This can look like following the lead of financial professionals who are newly turning to the principles of Scaffolding Learning Theory, which are oriented toward both enhancing the quality of financial literacy education and the feasibility of its implementation.¹⁷ The scaffolding approach would encourage: (1) intersubjectivity, wherein financial professionals and arts workers arrive at a mutual understanding of and investment in goals; (2) an ongoing diagnosis, characterized by financial professionals continually adapting to arts workers learning processes via appropriate scaffolds or aids; (3) a two-way sociocultural process, promoting dialogue and exchange of information between financial professionals and arts workers; and (4) fading, wherein financial professionals gradually withdraw scaffolds so that arts workers can independently move forward with new knowledge and skill sets.

Furthermore, financial literacy educators must endeavor to craft instruction, curricula, and advisement

¹⁷ Elizabeth Sternbenz, Dylan L. Ross, Raylee Melton, Jed Smith, Megan McCoy, Blain Pearson, "Using Scaffolding Learning Theory as a Framework to Enhance Financial Education with Financial Planning Clients," *Journal of Financial Planning* (December 2021).

in ways that meet the particular needs of BIPOC artists and arts leaders. One important step is to recognize arts entrepreneurship as a unique realm of business and to more fully theorize its processes and practices. As arts administration scholar Jason C. White explains, arts entrepreneurship theories can help to contextualize the distinct needs of arts workers in entrepreneurial spaces in addition to providing new pedagogical pathways in and around business education.¹⁸ Another key measure would entail efforts to help arts workers, and artists in particular, build confidence in the translatability of their creative talents and skills. Stephen Rueff, Chair of Arts Entrepreneurship at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, points to attributes and abilities such as “self-awareness, acute observation, empathy, critical thinking, creative problem-solving and comfort with critique and iteration” that are core aspects of artistic processes as also being essential components of business acumen and success.¹⁹ Making connections between creative processes and traditional business practices can help arts workers develop confidence in their capacities to achieve financial health for their businesses.

Discussions on financial health at our “COVID-19 & The Creative Economy” Impact Lab disclosed additional considerations around updating traditional financial literacy frameworks and assumptions to address various dimensions of financial health, such as effective budgeting, building emergency savings, lowering debt, and increasing credit. Advisors acknowledged stark realities, emphasizing that half of business fail within their first five years, noting if you’re starting with minimal resources, you may need to work a day job while establishing your enterprise, and that even with the best financial planning, a global crisis like the pandemic can set things in disarray. Financial literacy offerings must be transparent about the difficulties that BIPOC arts workers can and will face in their efforts to pursue financial health.

Financial literacy education must also recognize and address various tensions between traditional financial literacy perspectives and the motivations, values, and goals that BIPOC arts workers root themselves in. A prime example of the importance of this practice is the dialogue sparked by inviting Daniel Aguirre, the founder of Pueblo Engage, to contribute to our discussion of financial health. He shared his perspectives on what he called “financial liberation,” which he described as the ability to earn money in ways that feel personally purposeful and also support collective opportunities for financial gain. Expanding on this definition, he stated, “For me, financial liberation is being able to hold the door open for my people.” These sentiments presented a friction with some of the conventional wisdom offered during this conversation, such as Rahsaan’s statement that the “foundational purpose of your business is to grow the income.” Exploring seemingly contrary standpoints within the financial literacy space can open up crucial dialectics. In this case, asking a question such as, “How do financial health and financial liberation interplay with each other, in theory and practice?” offers generative possibilities for BIPOC arts workers to envision themselves both thriving in current socio-economic conditions while also striving to realize systems and structures that uplift their entire communities.

¹⁸ Jason C. White, “A Theory of Why Arts Entrepreneurship Matters,” *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 3, no. 2 (2021): 4 - 16.

¹⁹ Stephen Rueff, “Creative Freedom: Arts Entrepreneurship as a Mindset,” *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 2, no.1 (2020): 48 - 52.

Ultimately, financial literacy education should not sit in a silo. Training, advisement, and other services should be folded into a suite of additional capacity building resources. This includes guidance on existing support systems for achieving financial health, running the gamut from cooperative models for bookkeeping and financial management, such as ArtsPool and Open Collective, to more exhaustive fiscal sponsorship options at Arts Business Collaborative and additional entities. Artists in particular should be connected to groups endeavoring to achieve fair compensation for creatives, such as Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E) and Arts Union. Furthermore, peer mentorship is especially crucial for BIPOC arts workers who have difficulty identifying figures who represent how they can achieve both financial sustainability and community accountability. Finally, financial literacy offerings should interconnect with larger movement-building activities by promoting awareness of advocacy efforts that can improve the financial health of BIPOC arts workers and integrating tools for supporting these causes. These recommendations present pathways for both engaging disillusioned BIPOC arts workers with financial literacy education and leveraging acquired knowledge in service of efforts to address racial and labor bias in the United States.

A person with dark hair is seen from the back, holding a large bouquet of orange flowers. The person is wearing a dark top and has a ring on their finger. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with some architectural elements visible. The word "CONCLUSION" is written in white capital letters across the middle of the image.

CONCLUSION



Conclusion

In conclusion, in conjunction with areas of reform, education and aid, local governments, funders and service providers have substantial work to do in order to repair relationships with disinvested and disenfranchised communities of color who are wary of promises and unphased by reports that document disparities. The skepticism of our respondents has both historical precedent and current supporting evidence. As has already been seen, the shift that occurred in 2020 of resources towards artists and arts nonprofits led by people of color has slowed to pre-pandemic rates as pressure for diversity, equity, inclusion and reparative action is overpowered by pre-existing systemic socioeconomic norms and new sociopolitical concerns. From Broadway to universities to commercial industries, the pledge to equity has grown faint. However, we offer a well-founded warning that a critical opportunity is being missed by local governments, funders and service providers should they follow industry trends. Post-COVID recovery efforts will only be successful to the degree in which they address the conditions impacting the most disadvantaged communities. Much like technology, transportation and other essential services, the arts touch every aspect of private industry and the public sector. Just as we saw the impact of the digital divide and supply chain obstacles overwhelmingly negatively impact communities of color, a lack of earnest participatory planning for the recovery of the arts and culture sector, and more specifically, of reforms benefiting marginalized communities will only prolong and enlarge the barriers that BIPOC artists and arts businesses face, thereby deepening socioeconomic disparities and obstructing the stability and growth of BIPOC-owned businesses.

As demonstrated by our research participants, whose work bridges the nonprofit and for profit world and spans multiple industries, art genres, communities, audiences and goals, protecting the labor and value produced by artworkers of color, and implementing changes that ensure their quality of life and their business's viability is critical to achieving economic revitalization post-COVID. In order to effectively revitalize the creative economy, it is imperative that consideration be given to necessary reforms, education, and aid that might reshape inter-industry relations, labor protection, philanthropic giving, business planning and financial literacy specifically for artists and arts business leaders of color. The intersection of inter-industry relations reforms and labor protection specifically for artists working as non-traditional employees would help to decrease the loss of income and, indeed, tax revenue that exploitative conditions currently produce. Likewise, reforms to philanthropic grantmaking practices that give preference to general operating funds and collaborative programming would reduce the issue of scarcity plaguing most nonprofits. Finally, additional education and technical assistance in business administration and financial literacy, rooted in the lived experiences and correlating needs of artists and arts business owners of color, would help to ensure viable capacity and financial longevity, thereby supporting the post-COVID recovery and creation of wealth in communities of color.



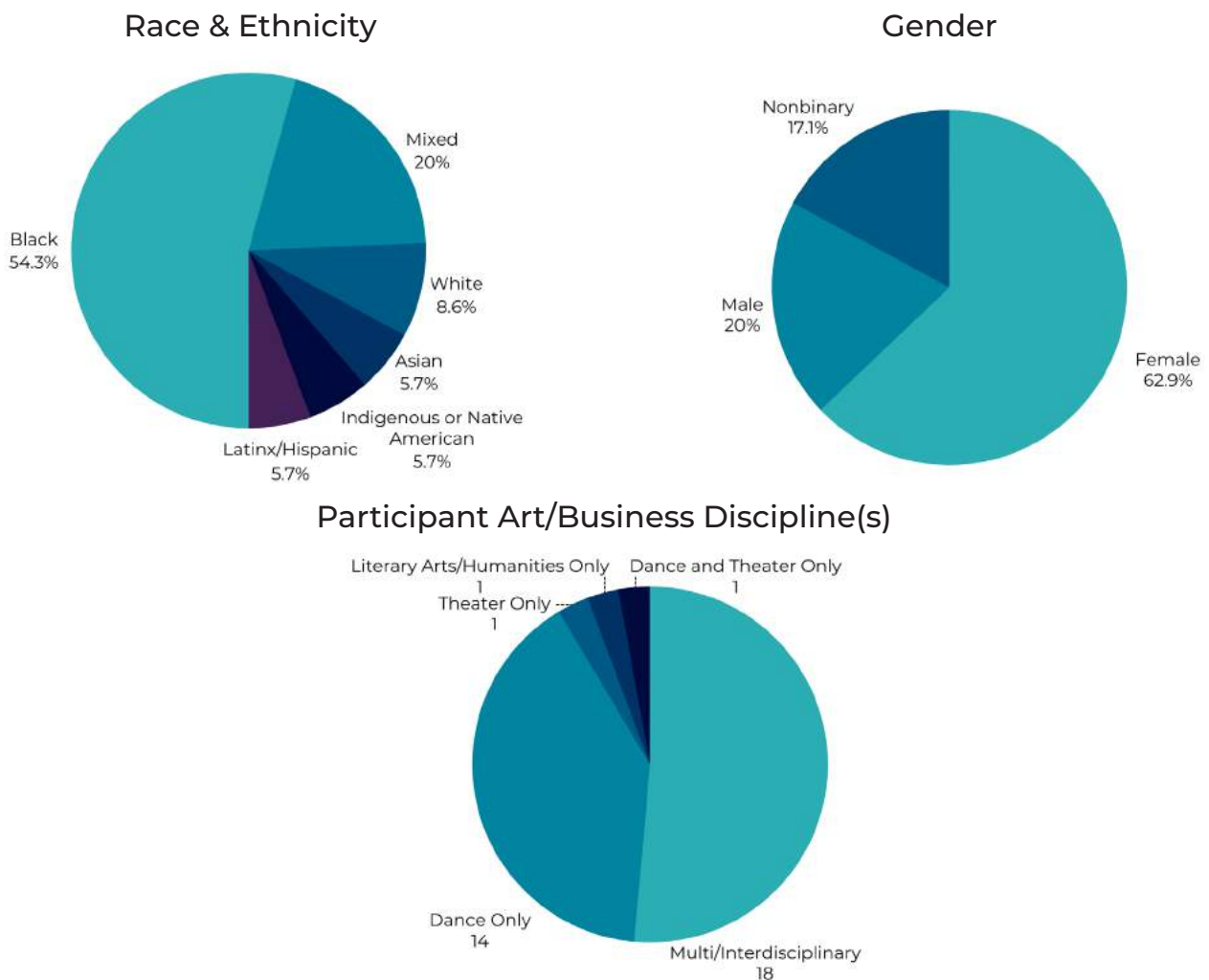
APPENDIX

Appendix A. | Results

A. Intake Questionnaire

Intake sessions prior to deep talks collected demographic data along with basic information about business structures and operations. A total of 35 artists and arts leaders participated in these virtual interviews, which consisted of 23 questions and a final prompt to volunteer any additional notes or feedback. Just over half of those interviewed (19) identified themselves as Black, 21% (7) identified as Mixed or Biracial, 9% (3) identified as white, 6% (2) identified as Latinx or Hispanic, 6% (2) identified as Asian, and 6% (2) identified as Indigenous or Native American. When asked to self-identify their gender, 63% (22) responded as Female, 20% (7) as Male, and 17% (6) as Nonbinary. Two individuals considered themselves to be disabled, but neither received disability or social security benefits. The majority of respondents (29) lived and/or worked in the New York metropolitan area. Of the remaining four, two individuals had moved from New York City to another area of the US during the pandemic.

Participant Demographics

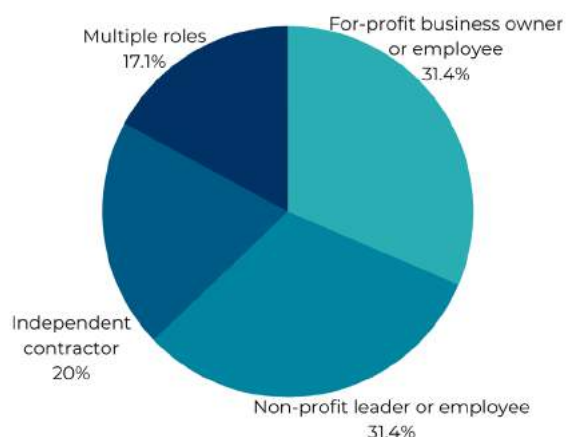


Participants included arts administrators, small business owners, and practicing artists. Sixteen participants reported practicing or supporting a single arts discipline, including fourteen focusing on dance, one dedicated to theater, and one specializing in literary arts. Just over half of participants (19) practiced or supported two or more disciplines, including dance, theater, photography, filmmaking, and digital media. Eleven represented non-profit organizations and eleven represented for-profit entities.

Seven were independent contractors and six indicated that they were speaking from their experiences in multiple roles. Four in the latter category were artists working as independent contractors as well as founders of their own organizations. The other two earned from their artistic practice as independent contractors while employed in leadership roles at arts organizations that they did not found. Of all participants representing organizations, twenty-two were in leadership positions, including a total of ten founders. Respondents spoke from a wide range of time and experiences in the field: ten had been in their line of work for less than two years, nine for between two and five years, six for between five and ten years, and nine for a decade or longer.

Participants were asked to select from the following job categories: Administrative, Operations, Teaching, Creative, Technical Support, or Finance. Over 70% of respondents (25) selected at least three of these categories. Twenty-four respondents described at least a portion of their role to be administrative, six of which expressed that administration was their sole responsibility. Twenty-three described their work as creative, including performance and curation. When asked how many hours per week they work in their business, 17% answered less than 20, 40% answered between 20 and 40, 17% answered between 40 and 60, and 26% answered more than 60 hours per week. Three respondents reported they did not have health insurance prior to and/or during the pandemic. At the time of their interviews, twenty-five participants were providing direct services, educational workshops and/or classes.

Participant Affiliation(s)



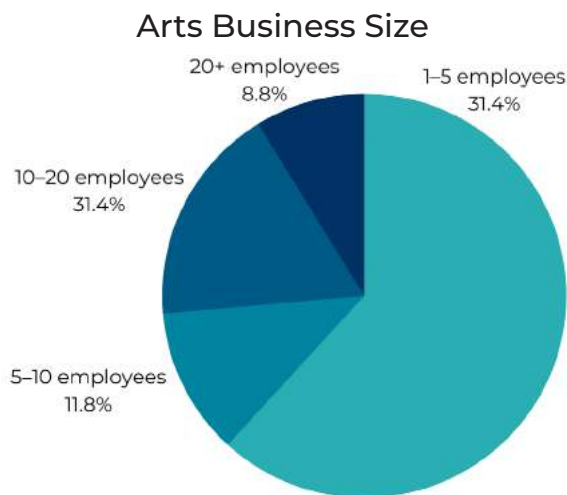
Including independent contractors, twenty-one participants indicated that their business employed between one and five people. Four worked in businesses with 5 - 10 employees, six with 10 - 20 employees, and three with 20+ employees. Of twenty-size respondents with officially registered businesses, twelve were 501c3s, nine were LLCs, two were sole proprietorships, two were fiscally sponsored, one was an S-Corp, and one had multiple registrations. Thirteen businesses reported having insurance prior to COVID-19, while only eight reported having insurance during the time of the interviews in spring and summer of 2021.

The Rising Tides Research Institute did not set out to recruit a group of research partners that reflect existing demographics and conditions within the New York City Arts and Culture workforce. Instead, we intentionally amplify marginalized experiences and perspectives of people of color, nonbinary people and women in a sector that is far less diverse than the city's overall population. A 2019 study by SMU Data Arts found that people identifying as Black only made up 10% of the local arts workforce when they account for 22% of the city's population; people of Latinx descent only made up 11% of the city's arts workforce while accounting for 29% of all city residents; and people of Asian descent only made up 6% of the arts workforce while making up 14% of the local population.²⁰ Our efforts to magnify the obstacles faced by cultural producers of color are evidenced by the data collected over the course of our intake interviews. Our group of research partners was overwhelmingly composed of people of color, with an especially outsized number of Black participants.

²⁰ SMU Data Arts, <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dcla/downloads/pdf/NYC%20DCLA%20Full%202018%20WfID%20Report%207-24-19.pdf>, pg. 3

Similarly, while 3% of arts organization staff identified as nonbinary, only 1% of executives leadership roles were held by individuals from this demographic group.²¹ Our intake data also demonstrates our efforts to prioritize the voices of women and nonbinary arts workers who are underrepresented in positions of power and influence.

Working to elevate insights from people of color, women and nonbinary artsworkers, we cultivated a group of partners speaking from diverse experiences and positions within the Arts and Culture field. The majority of participants, 91%, worked in or led organizations with less than twenty traditional employees (non-contractor roles), making this a common denominator amongst research partners. Additionally, most participants, 70%, occupied multiple roles within the same organization. Seventeen, 48%, had multiple forms of independent contractor employment as creatives, educators, administrators, and technicians. However, in many other regards, individuals taking part in the study spoke from an array of contexts, shedding light on a wide range of conditions and challenges within the sector prior to and during COVID-19.



B. Deep Talks

Intake interview participants were asked to take part in two deep talks, one hour and fifteen minutes each. We experienced some loss to follow up, resulting in twenty-nine individuals participating in the first deep talk and twenty-three participating in the second. During these talks, we asked participants to share their experiences with and perspectives on financial management, funding, emergency aid, financial literacy, and mission, vision and strategy. The following is a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative findings from both sets of deep talks.

Arts Business Income and Support Streams Prior to and During COVID-19

Over the course of our first deep talk sessions, 93% of study participants (27) reported receiving multiple streams of income for their arts businesses prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most common form of income, reported by 79% of respondents (23), was revenue from business activities. Personal or secondary income was a close second, with 69% of respondents (20) indicating that income they received outside of their business's activities supplemented their work. Just over half of respondents (15) reported receiving grants from foundations and/or corporations, 24% (7) credited the use of a co-op structure as a key form of support, 10% (3) reported using profit from another or previous business, 10% (3) indicated that family loans supported their business, and 7% (2) indicated access to institutional loans. Furthermore, 45% (13) of respondents specified support outside of these funding categories, including personal savings, small stipends, government grants, private donations, and sub-grants and fellowships offered by nonprofits. One respondent donated a portion of their budgeted salary in order to offset costs, and another participant expressed that "faith" fueled their work.

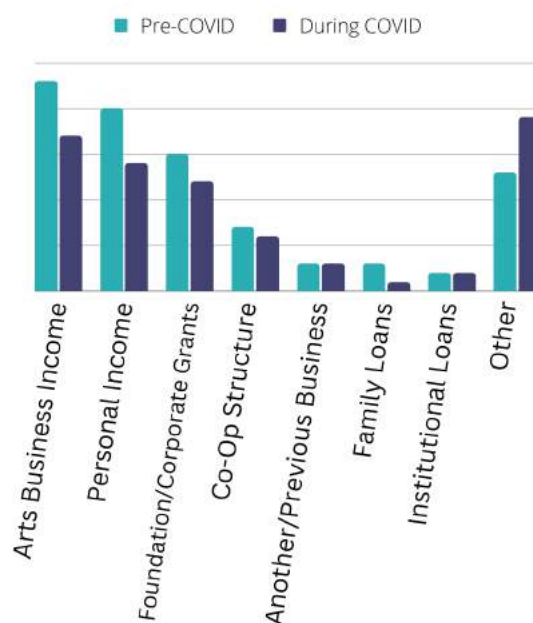
²¹ SMU Data Arts, pg. 17

We also asked these same study participants about funding at the time of their interviews during spring and summer of 2021. A majority of respondents, 86% (25), still received multiple streams of income. The number of respondents receiving a single stream of income remained the same at 7% (2), but the number of those receiving no income at all rose from 0% to 7% (2). Additionally, there were significant decreases in the number of respondents receiving support in the top categories of funding. Only 59% of participants (17) reported receiving revenue from their businesses, 48% (14) indicated use of personal/secondary income, and 41% (12) said they received grants. Support via a co-op structure and family loans dropped slightly to 21% (6) and 3% (1) respectively. Income from another or previous business kept steady at 10% (3), as did institutional loans at 7% (2). On the other hand, respondents reporting other kinds of support rose to 66% (19). Alternative sources of income included residencies, small stipends, consortiums, individual giving and crowdfunding, board fundraising, past income and savings, unemployment insurance, and “sweat equity.”

Decreases in the number of respondents who received support in most income categories, along with an increase in “other” sources of income is credited to interruptions in typical income streams during the pandemic and the subsequent need for artists and arts organizations to employ new approaches for generating revenue and sources of funds. For example, board fundraising was not mentioned by any respondents regarding fundraising prior to COVID, but was mentioned by two individuals when asked about income streams during the pandemic.

While the pressures of COVID-19 in particular pushed participants in our study to be more creative in their pursuit of funds, certain pre-existing trends endured. Most notably, many respondents continued to self-fund via personal or secondary income. It is critical to note that although secondary income dropped twenty-one percentage points during the pandemic, it remained the second most prevalent form of support. As stated in our Phase One Emergency Aid Report, the fact that artists and arts organizations rely on personal income to support their work not only conveys that these enterprises struggle with long term profitability, but also underscores that they lack the means to scale and strategize for the future.²² Moreover, the precipitous drop in this funding category over the course of the pandemic demonstrates the precarity of relying on individual secondary income streams that may need to be directed elsewhere, or cease altogether, during moments of crisis.

Arts Business Income Streams



The primacy of secondary income for some participants was further evinced by responses to our inquiries into the financial forecasts of arts businesses. Almost half of participants (16) stated that their business could not survive six more months without new sources of funding and 17% (5) were unsure if survival without funding was feasible. At the same time, 86% of participants in our second deep talks (19) expressed they were in need of continuous financial aid while only 14% (3) did not. Those ten participants (28%) who expressed the ability to weather a sustained drought in revenue were either

²² Pautz, Carolyn & Veroneque Ignace (2020), “COVID-19 and the Creative Economy: Phase 1 Emergency Aid Report,” pg. 12

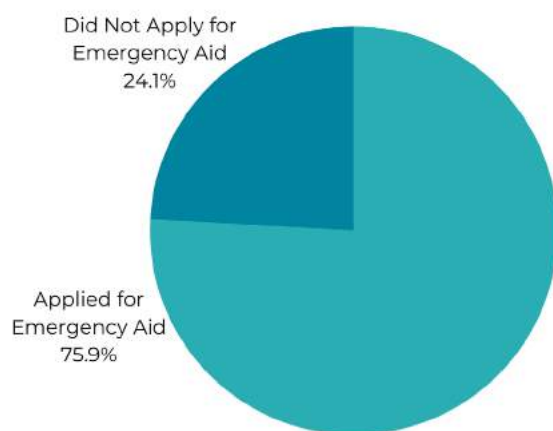
explicitly using secondary employment as a means for continuing their work in the absence of other funding, which included profits from an additional or previous business, or representatives from larger institutions of budgets of 1.5M or more with multi-year philanthropic funding and robust programmatic revenue. This phenomenon demonstrates that certain participants had the ability to generate profits from non-arts businesses, yet their arts businesses relied on these profits to survive. In any case, all of the respondents utilizing secondary income eliminated debt or loss in one space but incurred it in another.

Co-op structures also proved to be fairly stable, with the number of participants reporting this form of support dropping only three percentage points during the pandemic. Some respondents did not credit co-op structures as an avenue of support, but reported mutual aid and other shared labor practices under the “other” umbrella. Moreover, twenty participants indicated that they collaborated with other businesses and independent contractors since the start of COVID-19 pandemic. Although not all collaborations are necessarily based in cooperative models, it is likely that we did not fully capture the prevalence and durability of cooperative strategies in our data due to lack of consensus on vocabulary for solidarity economy practices. Further inquiry into the ways in which cooperation manifests within arts businesses should delve into the nature of these reciprocal relationships.

Emergency Aid During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Just over three-quarters of participants (22) applied for emergency aid during the pandemic. However, only 24% (7) of respondents were sure of forms of aid for which they qualified. Nearly one third (9) did not know what aid they qualified for and 45% (13) were unsure whether they understood qualifications for emergency aid opportunities. Many of those in the latter category utilized an approach of applying to everything in order to compensate for lack of available guidance about qualifications. Just over half of participants (15) applied for grants from foundations and/or corporations, 45% (13) applied to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), 24% (7) applied for general unemployment assistance, 24% (7) engaged with mutual aid or crowdfunding, 21% (6) applied for Pandemic Unemployment Insurance, and 7% (2) applied for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan. Eleven respondents turned to other sources of emergency aid, including individual donors from within and without the community being served, sub-grants from nonprofits, the Employee Retention Tax Credit, and U.S. Small Business Administration disaster relief, including the Shuttered Venues Operators Grant.

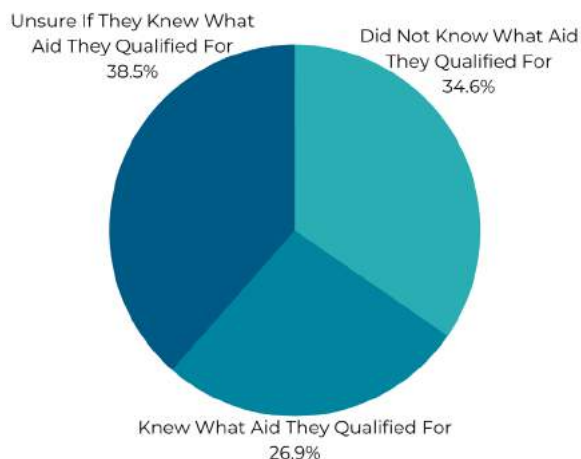
Participant Emergency Aid Applications



Out of the twenty-two who applied, nineteen succeeded in securing some form of emergency aid. Ten of the thirteen respondents who applied for PPP told us that they qualified for loan forgiveness or other similar programs. These are fairly high rates of success and point to the fact that awareness of opportunities may be the biggest hurdle to accessing emergency funds.

Out of the nineteen respondents who received emergency aid of some kind, 47% (9) spent funds on keeping other employees, 37% (7) used funds to maintain their own self-employment, 32% (6) spent

Comprehension of Emergency Aid Eligibility Guidelines



funds on supplies, and 16% (3) put funds toward long term stability planning. The vast majority of these respondents (18) reported uses of emergency funding falling outside of these categories. Some funds went to additional means of upkeeping pre-existing business needs, including maintaining contractors and paying occupancy costs. Participants also allocated funds to specific basic survival needs, including groceries and home rent and utilities. One respondent reported using aid funds on an emergency dental procedure. Other participants put emergency funds toward emerging needs, such as new hires and consultants as well as new software and remote work technologies. One respondent put his funds toward establishing a new

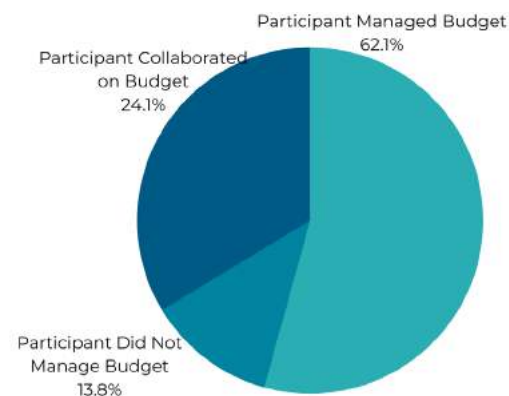
nonprofit organization. The wide array of emergency aid uses points to the overlapping nature of business and non-business challenges faced by artists and arts administrators during the pandemic. Some were struggling to simply stay afloat while others were leaning into evolving circumstances.

Arts Business Management Practices, Financial Literacy, and Strategy

The majority of respondents (20) indicated that they manage their business's finances, while five said they did not. The remaining three respondents did not give an affirmative or negative response, but rather emphasized that their financial management was a shared process with accountants or colleagues. Additional respondents who answered either "Yes" or "No" also elaborated on shared processes. As such, 24% (7) noted some form of shared labor in their financial management processes. When asked if they were responsible for an operating budget, revenue, and/or capital budgets, 62% of respondents (18) said "Yes," 14% (4) said "No," and 24% (7) described a collaborative approach to managing budgets and revenue, including two respondents who each noted contracting a support services organization. One worked with Arts Pool and the other with Fractured Atlas. This seems to account for the discrepancy between there being 73% who indicated that they manage their business's finances and only 62% who said they were responsible for budgets and revenue. Just over half of respondents identified with the statement "I/We manage all the financials, but to be honest I am not sure if I am doing everything correctly." Only one respondent identified with the statement, "Someone else manages it all for me/us." This indexes the need for greater financial literacy training for artists and arts business leaders.

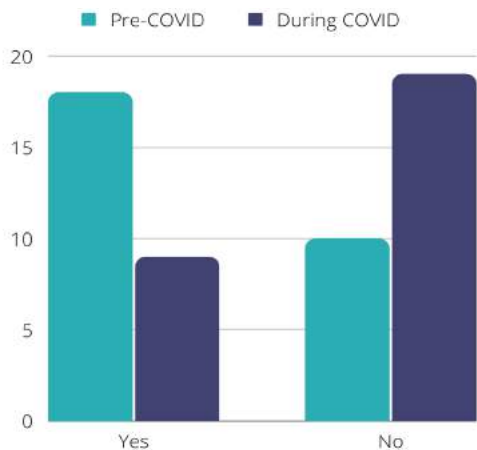
Asked if the executive director has a plan to protect assets such as intellectual property and general funds, 34% (10) said "Yes," 38% (11) said "No," and 28% (8) expressed being in the process of exploring ways to protect assets. Of thirteen respondents who indicated that they have liability insurance, seven were aware of what it covers, two stated that they don't know what it covers, and four had some familiarity with what it covered but didn't feel completely clear on the entire policy. None were aware of disaster insurance options that may have supported them during

Arts Business Budget Management



the pandemic. Most respondents (20), said that COVID changed the way they budgeted for their businesses and/or self, while 14% (4) said it did not and 17% (5) were not sure. Access to PPE also impacted just under half of respondents (12). Ten respondents in our second deep talks indicated that the number of employees in their business had changed since March 2020.

Participant Engagement with Financial Literacy Offerings



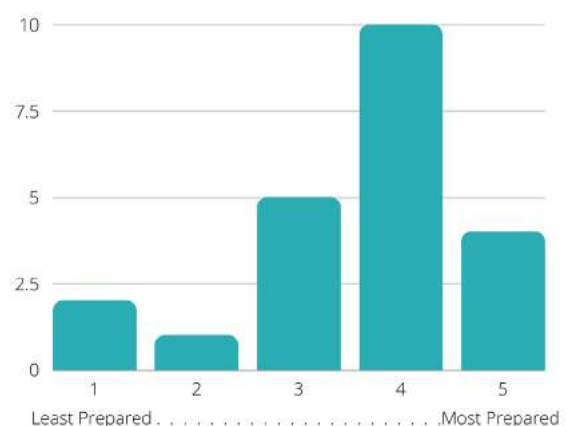
Just under two-thirds of participants (18) reported that they had taken financial literacy classes prior to COVID-19, while 35% (10) had not and one respondent was not sure. About a third (9) had taken financial literacy classes since COVID-19, while 66% (19) had not, and one respondent was not sure. Seven out of the nine total respondents who indicated that they took financial literacy classes since the start of the pandemic had also taken financial literacy classes prior to the pandemic. As such, only two respondents who hadn't taken financial literacy classes before COVID-19 took classes after the pandemic began. When asked, "Considering the toll that COVID-19 took on

the creative economy overall, do you value financial literacy as a business skill set?," twenty-one of the twenty-two respondents in our second deep talk said "Yes." In response to the follow-up question, "Do you consider financial literacy key to managing your business currently and in preparation for future crises?," nineteen participants said "Yes."

While the majority of respondents agreed on the fact that financial literacy is an important business skill that is crucial for current and future success, approximately a third of study participants (8) have not engaged in any financial literacy education. Furthermore, eleven participants who had taken financial literacy classes in the past did not opt to update their knowledge during a time of social and financial crisis.

Two-thirds of respondents (19) answered "Yes" when asked whether they have a mission, vision, and/or strategy statement. Nonprofits and fiscal sponsorees were most likely to have at least one of these statements. Fourteen out of a total of fifteen answered "Yes." Only two out of six total non-sponsored independent contractors and three out of eight LLCs answered "Yes." Of those who answered "Yes," 58% (11) expressed that their mission/vision/strategy statements changed over the course of the pandemic, 26% (5) said "No" and 11% (2) weren't sure. Five of the ten participants who do not have mission/vision/strategy statements said they have or are working on an artist statement. Participants in the second deep talk were asked to assess on a scale of 1 - 5 how prepared their business is to execute its--formal or informal--mission as of today. The top response was "4," the answer from 10 of respondents, followed by "3" (5), 5 (4), 1 (2) and 2 (1).

Participant Self-Assessment on Arts Business Preparedness to Execute Mission



Despite the many challenges that participants describe facing, the majority felt optimistic about the

impact of their work. In light of the financial precarity that the overwhelming majority of artists and arts organizations in this study describe, the fact that 63% of respondents assessed their preparedness at four or five suggests that many participants understand their ability to effect their mission as distinct from their capacity to manage and sustain their business' finances.

The data presented above offers an entry point into understanding the conditions faced by arts practitioners and administrators of color prior to and during COVID-19, and the various manners by which they navigated evolving socio-political and economic circumstances. Findings speak to the financial precarity of arts business led by and serving people of color and the barriers to their thriving created by extractive arts labor practices and white patriarchal power structures, which have been compounded by the public health and economic crises brought forth by a global pandemic. Though these numbers may speak to larger trends in the Arts and Culture sector, the research team has used them as a guide to dive deeply into the specific experiences of our study participants. The thematic analysis that follows explores important and/or repetitive concerns that presented themselves during the qualitative interviews as well as recommendations based on those answers.

Appendix B. | Survey Questions

INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you representing an organization or are you representing yourself as an individual artist? (Organization, Individual, Both)
2. Have you read, answered, and signed a RTRI informed consent form?
3. Name
4. Pronouns
5. Email
6. Primary arts discipline
 - a. Dance, Theater, Other
7. How do you self-identify your race/ethnicity? (Write-In)
8. How do you self-identify your gender? (Write-In)
9. Do you identify as differently-abled? If so, are you receiving disability and social security benefits? (Y, N, Other)
10. Did you have personal health insurance prior to and/or during COVID? (Y, N, Maybe, Other)
11. How do you do your art business as of March 2021? (Independent Contractor, For-profit, Non-profit, Other)
12. Is your business officially registered in the above capacity from question 6? (Y, N)
13. In what capacity? (S-Corp, LLC, 501c3, Other)
14. In which state?
15. If you're an independent contractor or Sole Proprietor LLC, did you have liability insurance? If yes, do you know what it covers? (Y, N, Maybe, Other)
16. Did your business have insurance prior to COVID?
17. Does your business have insurance now? Are you aware of the details of what this insurance covers?
18. On average, how many hours per week do you work in your business?
19. In what capacity do you work in your business? (I.e. job title)
20. Job category? (Administrative, Operations, Teaching, Creative (performance, curation, visual), Technical Support (AV), Finance, Other)
21. How many people does your business employ? (Include part time and full time employees and independent contractors). (1-5, 5-10, 10-20, 20+)
22. Length of time working as above (Less than 2 years, 2-5 years, 5-10 years, 10+ years, Business has closed since March 2020)
23. Were you providing direct services, educational workshops and classes? If yes, can you please elaborate on what those were?
24. What's your understanding of the research project so far? Is there anything you would like clarified now or during your intake call?
25. Moving forward there will be ~1.25 hour deep talk with our lead researchers. Do you have any questions? What would be your general availability?

Business Structure

1. Why did you decide to enter this particular business/field?
2. How much did you know about business operations, marketing, crisis management, finance, etc prior to entering this business/field?
3. What made you choose this operating structure over others?
4. Where do you think your organization/business fits in the creative economy?
5. How is your business currently structured? For example, do you break into departments? Do you have a CEO, accountant, administrative assistant, etc? How many of these roles do you fill?
6. What would you or have you changed about the structure of your business since the start of COVID?
7. Does your organization or business have a mission, vision and strategy statement? If so, how has it changed over the past year?

Funding Your Business

8. How did you fund your arts business before the current COVID-19 pandemic? Please check all that apply.
 - a. Grants from foundations and corporations
 - b. Personal income/Secondary employment
 - c. Family loans
 - d. Profit
 - e. A previous/other business
 - f. Co-op structure (artists pool money)
 - g. Other
9. Did you apply for emergency aid?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. What emergency aid did you apply for? (check all that apply)
 - a. Grants from foundations and corporations
 - b. Paycheck Protection Program
 - c. Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (specific to sole proprietor and independent contractors)
 - d. Economic Injury Disaster Loan
 - e. General Unemployment Assistance
 - f. Mutual Aid Circles/CrowdFunding

- g. Other
- 11. Were you aware of which forms of aid your business qualified for? If so, which ones were you certain you qualified for?
- 12. Were you able to secure any of the above forms of aid?
- 13. How was the funding used?
 - a. Keeping other employees
 - b. Maintaining self-employment
 - c. Supplies
 - d. Long Term stability planning
- 14. Do you qualify for any form of loan forgiveness (for PPP, etc)?
- 15. How are you funding your arts business now? (during the current COVID-19 pandemic)
 - a. Grants from foundations and corporations
 - b. Personal income/Secondary employment
 - c. Institutional loans
 - d. Family loans
 - e. Profit
 - f. A previous/other business
 - g. Co-op structure (artists pool money)
 - h. Revenue from the arts business
 - i. Other
- 16. Do you manage the business finances?
- 17. Are you responsible for an operating budget, revenue, and/or capital budgets? If no, how are these tracked by you or your organization?
- 18. Could your nonprofit survive 6 more months if no new sources of revenue were acquired for the rest of the year?
- 19. Did COVID change the way you budgeted for your organization/self? If so, how? What conditions in your own life shaped your capacity to do your job and/or impact your budgeting?
- 20. How would you describe your financial management for your particular form of business?
 - a. Someone else manages it all for me/us.
 - b. I manage all the financials, but to be honest I am not sure if I am doing everything correctly.
 - c. I have a basic understanding of how I/my organization should be structured financially and taxed, but I'd rather not deal with the spreadsheets.
 - d. I have had an accountant explain to me how to organize a budget spreadsheet and how to incorporate general operating funds, board restricted funds, and foundation funds, which allows me to manage it throughout the year, but someone else still organizes my taxes at the end of the year.
 - e. I/We have an in-house accountant.
 - f. I manage all the financials and have taken courses or had extensive training in managing business/nonprofit financial policy.
 - g. I/We have clear financial guidelines regarding operating budgets, capital, the disbursement of

money and the reporting of each of these areas.

21. Does your executive director have a plan on how to protect assets such as intellectual property, general funds, etc?
22. Have you taken financial literacy classes prior to COVID? (Y/N)
23. Have you taken financial literacy classes since COVID? (Y/N)

Conditions Impacting Structural Performance

24. Did access to PPE impact your business?
25. How did the closure of indoor spaces affect your business?
26. In general, reflecting over the last year, how has loss of life related to COVID impacting business management and performance?
 - a. Has survivor's guilt, death of loved ones, loss of neighbors impacted your work at all?
27. In general, reflecting over the last year, how did the events around George Floyd and the social protest related to this, impact the way you think about doing business in the arts? How did it impact your business operations directly?
28. In general, reflecting over the last few months, how did the events around AAPI hate crimes, and the social protest related to this, impact the way you think about doing business in the arts? How did it impact your business operations directly?

2ND DEEP TALK QUESTIONS | PRIOR ASSUMPTIONS, KNOWLEDGE, CRISIS MANAGEMENT & STRATEGIES

Capacity & Crisis Management

1. Has the number of employees changed since March 2020? And subsequently?
 - a. How did the emergency aid you receive facilitate your ability to maintain these employees?
2. What crisis management strategies did you employ from March 2020 - September of 2020 to maintain your business? Did those strategies change from September onward?
3. Are you in continuous need of financial aid?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Does your business have liability insurance? Are you aware of what the policy covers?
5. Considering the toll that COVID-19 took on the creative economy overall, do you value financial literacy as a business skill set? If so, do you consider it key to managing your business currently and in preparation for future crises?
6. If you have not ever taken a financial literacy course, why? Are you intimidated by the idea of this?
7. Were the challenges you faced during the COVID-19 pandemic same or similar to what you faced before? How so or how were they different?
8. What challenges do you face now?

Mission, Vision, and Strategy Building

9. Does your arts practice mirror your business structure? Would you consume your business offerings?
10. Do you have a plan for growth, development, or other business-building activities?
11. How do you define collaboration within the arts economy?
12. Have you worked in a collaborative capacity with other businesses or independent contractors since the start of COVID?
13. How do you define your key values?
14. How do you self-evaluate your work in relation to your mission?
15. Based on your current mission statement (*pull it up and read it), what are the values that you hear embedded there?
16. How do you measure the impact of your business in theory and in practice?
17. How prepared is your business to execute its mission as of today?
18. In your own words, as an artist/arts business, where do you need the most support in skill development?
19. How hopeful do you feel about the future of your arts business? What drives those sentiments?

Open-Ended Reflections

20. Based on our last conversation together, what were some things you noticed about your business overall that you had not considered before? How will you work to address this moving forward?

Appendix C. | Glossary

1. **Arts and Culture sector:** Arts and cultural production from 35 industries, both commercial and nonprofit. Those 35 industries range from architectural services to sound recording and in whole or in varying percentages are considered to be a distinct sector of the nation's economy. (Sources: [National Endowment for the Arts](#); [Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account](#))
2. **Co-operative:** It is a people-centered, enterprise owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realize their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations. They are democratically managed, driven by values, are sustainable enterprises, and are not owned by shareholders. (Source: [International Cooperative Alliance](#))
3. **Creative economy:** Defined not singularly, but an amalgamation of four definitions –
 1. *Economic ecosystem:* The creative economy is an economic ecosystem of for-profit and nonprofit creative industries, artists and artist workforce, educators, entrepreneurs, vendors, policy makers and funders that produce and distribute creativity- and artistic-based goods and services.
 2. *Economic Activity:* The creative economy consists of economic activity that depends on individuals and organizations using their creativity to drive jobs, revenue, community resources, and cultural engagement.
 3. *Inclusive Creative Economy:* We define an inclusive creative economy as one that centers marginalized individuals in the pursuit of economic and restorative justice using creativity and the arts as the vehicle to reach individual and community potential.
 4. *Creative Economy Practices:* Creative economy practices are activities or methods used in policy, research, programmatic, academic, or funding spaces that are designed to amplify and advance the inclusive creative economy in local communities, as is applicable to the uniqueness of each community. (Source: [Americans for the Arts | Creative Economy](#))
4. **Crisis management:** Reacting to negative events during and after they occurred by having a business continuity plan put in place in case of unforeseen contingencies. (Source: [Investopedia](#))
5. **Embodiment:** A way of describing porous, visceral, felt, enlivened bodily experiences, in and with inhabited worlds. It speaks to the historical and embodied character of experience that defies a predetermined world and dualism of mind and body. (Sources: [Oxford Bibliographies](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy | Maurice Merleau-Ponty](#))
6. **Financial literacy:** The ability to use knowledge and skills to manage financial resources effectively for a lifetime of financial well-being. More than just balancing a checkbook and comparing prices, it includes long-term vision and planning for the future, and the discipline to use those skills every day. (Sources: [PBS](#); [President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy](#))
7. **Lived experience:** Expertise of people who know the reality of economic security, education, health, equity & justice, and other societal issues by living them on a daily basis – whether young people, working adults, parents, students, older adults. Phenomenologically and hermeneutically, it is not only something that is experienced, its being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance. (Sources: [Root Cause](#); [“Capturing Lived Experience: Methodological Considerations for Interpretive Phenomenological Inquiry”](#))

8. **Mixed Methods Research:** Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (Source: [“How to Construct a Mixed Methods Research Design”](#))
9. **Racial equity:** It is the process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color. (Source: [Race Forward](#))
10. **Reflexivity:** Researchers’ methodological analysis of own positioning and judgment-making. Generally refers to the examination of one’s own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research process and how these may have influenced the research. (Source: [Warwick University](#))
11. **Solidarity economy:** The solidarity economy is a global movement to build a just and sustainable economy where we prioritize people and the planet over endless profit and growth. Growing out of social movements in Latin America and the Global South, the solidarity economy provides real alternatives to capitalism, where communities govern themselves through participatory democracy, cooperative and public ownership, and a culture of solidarity and respect for the earth. (Sources: [RIPESS](#); [New Economy Coalition](#))
12. **Technical assistance:** The process of providing targeted support to an organization with a development need or problem. It is an effective method for building the capacity of an organization. (Source: [CDC](#))





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