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The Working Artist: Boise's Hidden Economy of Creators, Makers, and Doers

Artists enrich the Boise Valley. Cities can prosper by helping them thrive.

Artists often labor in an economy largely hidden and misunderstood. In Boise and the Boise Valley, where artists tend to be self-employed, basic questions remain unanswered. Where and how artists work and for what compensation is largely unknown. Labor economists, nevertheless, have heralded the importance of artists as sources of innovation. Artists collaborate and help build new cultural enterprises and organizations. They lure “idea workers” or what labor economists call the creative class. These literal and physical place-makers also create vibrant communities.

This *Urban Research* paper profiles artists in the Boise Valley. Based on interviews and survey data, it excerpts and capsulizes the work of Dr. Amanda Ashley and Dr. Leslie Durham of Boise State University. For the full

academic paper with documentation and additional tables, see [Ashley and Durham, “Creativity, Innovation, and Labor: Understanding the Artistic Workforce in the Boise Valley,” Center for Idaho History and Politics, Boise State University, 2015.](#)

but to other sectors as central to a robust arts ecology. Few Boiseans, the authors conclude, have found lasting work as artists in mid-sized businesses or organizations. Earning money is a pervasive concern. Most need to supplement their income. Most are self employed. Yet there are skilled artists of most every kind who



This paper presents key findings from the larger report. It details types of art occupations, the employers, the compensation, and the potential for public investment. Most have started businesses and are highly entrepreneurial. They cobble together careers and opportunities in unique ways regardless of career stage. Many point not just to the cultural sector

Anna Webb installs a mosaic of colored ceramic and glass tiles — a traffic circle creation co-designed with fellow artist Reham Pearson Aarti.

prefer to live and work in the Boise Valley. With resources common in other places, cities can match the skills of creative workers to sectors of creative growth.

PHOTO: BOISE CITY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & HISTORY

Artists and the livable city

75 percent of survey respondents indicated they plan to stay in the Boise Valley.

75% surveyed

ABOUT THIS ISSUE:

The Working Artist is the sixth paper in a Boise State University Series of policy reports. We gratefully acknowledge vital support from the Boise State University School of Public Service, College of Arts and Sciences, Division of Research and Economic Development, and Public Policy Center.

Authors

Amanda J. Ashley, Ph.D.
Community and Regional Planning
Boise State University

Leslie Durham, Ph.D.
Theatre Arts
Boise State University

Editor

Todd Shallat
Center for Idaho History and Politics

Graphic Designer

Toni Rome
[Guy, Rome and Associates, Inc.](#)

Contributors

Seth Ashley
Karen Bubb
Aaron Mondada
Terri Schorzman



**BOISE STATE
UNIVERSITY**

CENTER FOR IDAHO HISTORY AND POLITICS
TSHALLA@BOISESTATE.EDU
208.761.0485
[HTTP://SSPA.BOISESTATE.EDU/IDAHO](http://SSPA.BOISESTATE.EDU/IDAHO)



In 2013, *Forbes* ranked Boise fifteenth on its list of the nation's fastest growing cities. Boise also ranked twelfth on *Livability* magazine's 2014 list of 100 livable places. Last year *Time Magazine* reported that "a thriving cultural scene" was one of the reasons the city was "getting it right."

Artists hope to contribute. But who are they, how do they work, and what do they need? Large cities fund labor surveys while midsize cities particularly those in the West, lacking reliable data, mostly grope in the dark.

This investigation is based on survey data that allowed recipients to define their creative work and self-label their occupations. The survey

shows how artists regard their work. Respondents mostly said that earning money was essential. Many had advanced formal training. Most felt appreciated by the Boise community. Yet, as a class of workers, they were low-paid and underemployed. Respondents reported little financial support from public programs like art endowments. Nevertheless, 75 percent of survey respondents indicated they plan to stay in the Boise Valley. A logical policy question follows: should the Boise Valley do more to make the region a more hospitable place for these dedicated workers both for the benefit of the workers and the benefit of the region in which they reside? If so, how?

Research approach

53%
survey response rate

SURVEY



To develop the research instrument, the researchers first interviewed a combination of thirty artists and arts organization executives from a variety of fields to gather qualitative data about the Boise and Boise Valley arts ecosystem to zero in on key questions for a comprehensive survey of the regional artistic labor force. These interviews took place from April-July 2014. Artists were asked about their artistic background and current practice, their perspective on the unique features of Boise and its creative sector, and the challenges of earning a living from art.

Thirty-four art organizations helped locate the valley-wide survey pool of 1,342 artists. Boise City's Department

of Arts and History provided vital assistance. Participant groups included Alley Repertory Theatre; Ballet Idaho; Boise Contemporary Theater; Boise Philharmonic; Boise Rock School; Boise State University Departments of Art, English, Music, and Theatre Arts; Discovery Center of Idaho; Ghosts and Projectors; Idaho Statesman; Modern Art; Homegrown Theatre; Idaho Commission on the Arts; Global Lounge; The Cabin; Idaho Dance Theatre; Idaho Historical Society; Idaho Shakespeare Festival; Boise Open Studios; Idaho Writers Guild; the Morrison Center; Off Center Dance; Preservation Idaho; Red Light Variety Show; Treefort Music Festival; i48 Film Festival; Idaho Flute Society; and several architectural and graphic design firms.

On July 10, 2014, the project team distributed the survey to 1,342 artists, 1,051 of which actually opened the email. By the time the survey closed on August 11, 2014, more than 556 artists responded to the survey giving a return rate of 53 percent. However, this number is conservative as some of the survey partners sent the survey rather than using the Qualtrics software system, which means the research team cannot track those who did not open the email. Such a high response rate combined with the number of recipients suggests that the respondents likely represent the views of those affiliated with arts organizations.



i48

ghosts & projectors



BALLET IDAHO

IDAHO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL



modern art

IDAHO DANCE THEATRE



THE CABIN
WORDS WORK WONDERS



DISCOVERY CENTER OF IDAHO



Idaho Statesman



Survey results

The research team began with an overview of art-related occupations. Multidimensional artists were asked to indicate primary and secondary modes of artist work. Twenty percent had a single practice, while 80 percent identified a second area of specialization.

Many respondents described their motivation as a need to create, to express personal feelings, to diversity local art, and to find personal enjoyment. Earning money was another driving factor. Financial success appeared more likely for multidimensional artists. About four of ten respondents made art to make a living. Another 26 percent hoped to earn supplemental income. More than half considered art their primary occupation. Artists, clearly, were more than the stereotype of hobbyists and flighty eccentrics. Art, for most, was income and a career.

Another important feature of the local artist profile is the place in their career trajectory where artists find themselves. The survey asked artists to identify themselves as emerging, mid-career, or established. Within the survey question, the terms were defined as follows:

Emerging: Artists in the early stages of their careers, who are starting to build a body of work, develop audiences and followers, and/or are establishing their reputation.

Mid-career: Artists in the middle of their careers, who have created a body of work, developed audiences and followers, and/or have established their reputation over a number of years with recognition through publication and presentation.

Primary artistic practice:

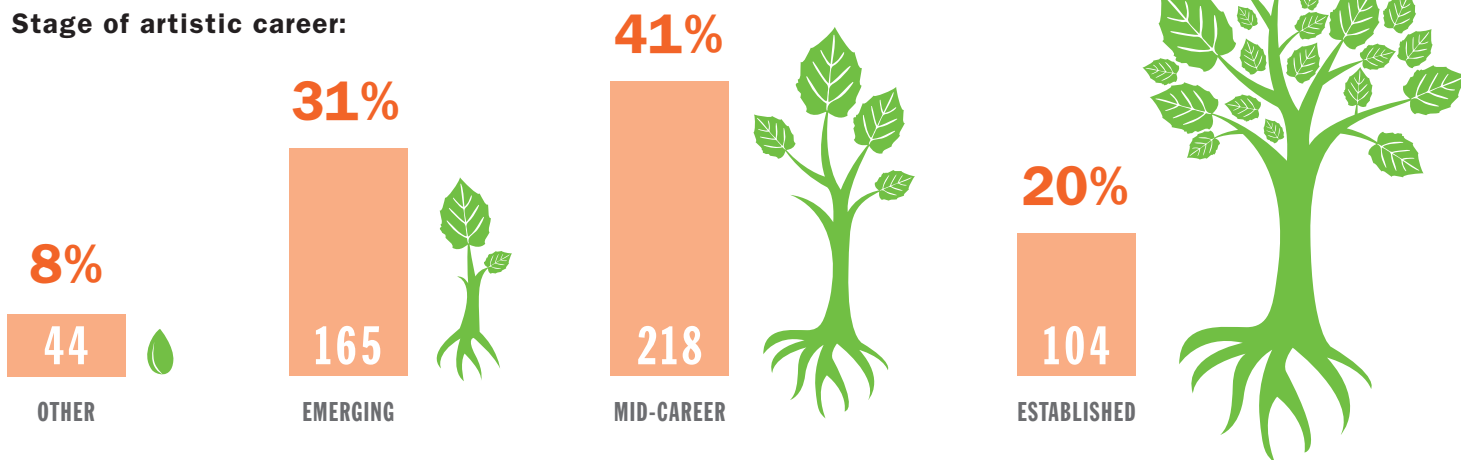
VISUAL ARTISTS		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	160	30
DESIGNERS		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	65	12
MUSICAL ARTISTS		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	135	25
DANCE ARTISTS		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	22	4
WRITERS/LITERARY ARTISTS		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	42	8
FILM AND THEATRE ARTISTS		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	95	18
ARTS EDUCATION		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	11	2
OTHER		
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
	4	1

PHOTOS: BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY (VISUAL ARTISTS, ARTS EDUCATION & WRITERS/LITERARY); IDAHO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL (FILM AND THEATRE ARTS); DEANNA THAM (MUSICAL ARTISTS); MIKE REID, IDAHO DANCE THEATER (DANCE ARTISTS); BOISE CITY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & HISTORY (OTHER)

“ One great thing about being here is you can start anything new here, and you can do it and people will support it. It’s easy to introduce something that’s a small idea and let it grow. ”

— Local Playwright

Stage of artistic career:



Established: Artists at mature stages in their careers, who have created an extensive body of work, developed a national or international audience and following, and/or are recognized for an advanced level of achievement.

The region’s large percentage of emerging artists suggests that barriers to marketplace entry are relatively low, as does later information about the number of arts entrepreneurs who have sought to start arts businesses. The Boise region appears to be a good place to launch an artistic career, and this finding was echoed in the study interviews. One playwright commented, “One great thing about being here is you can start anything new here, and you can do it and people will support it. It’s easy to introduce something that’s a small idea and let it grow.” A local visual artist offered a related perspective: “It’s not so horribly competitive here that you can never get anything. [There are] enough artists to feel like a community here but few enough that you apply for a grant or another opportunity that you have a reasonable chance of getting it. Enough opportunities open up ... if you’re doing the right things.”

Meanwhile the prevalence of mid-career artists suggests that longevity is possible, and that market tastes are at least moderately stable. But the dearth of established artists suggests that there is some issue locally for retaining the most experienced workers. The artistic pipeline appears to be abbreviated in the region, and exploring this issue in hopes of finding mitigating solutions is desirable for multiple policy and research audiences.

These findings can be usefully paired with the age of artists who responded to the survey. Six percent of the respondents were 18-24, 25 percent were between 25-34, 22 percent were between 35-44, 18 percent were between 45-54, 15 percent were between 55-64, and 22 percent were 65 and older.

Age of respondent:

AGE	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT (%)
18-24	26	6
25-34	109	25
35-44	99	22
45-54	81	18
55-64	68	15
65 or older	45	10
None given	17	4

While age and career phase need not be linked in artistic practice (in fields such as dance, careers begin in dancers’ teens and typically end in their thirties, while visual and literary artists may seek artistic employment after spending several years working in other industries and are thus still emerging well into middle age), the two correlate closely in the reports of the study’s respondents. In robust creative ecosystems, there are clear markers for the career phases beyond longevity such as variety and prestige of venues for showcasing or selling work; a range of price points expected by artists and consumers for selling and buying work; an enhanced scale of support in terms of grants and awards; and an active critical discourse around art in journalistic publications. Such forms of artistic recognition important for gauging and planning career progression are limited or still emerging in Boise. This is another important line of inquiry for future research.

Other important demographic characteristics of the Boise artistic labor force reflected in survey findings include

Survey results

48% of those surveyed have undergraduate training in the arts.

30% of those surveyed have graduate training in the arts.

31% of those surveyed participated in public workshops or seminars.

an even balance between artists identifying as male and female (49 percent and 49 percent respectively; 11 respondents preferred not to answer the question) and a vast majority (81 percent) of white artists. This information is similar to Census information for the general regional population but not necessarily what is seen in artist profiles in other cities and regions.

Understanding artist training and education

Many of the Valley’s artists have significant career trajectories spanning intensive education attainment and training that is often on-going. Forty-eight percent of respondents have undergraduate training in the arts while 30 percent have graduate training in the arts. This is typical of artist profiles in other regions and is much higher than general regional trends in Boise. And yet, despite their education, they are not well-paid as discussed below, which is in line with other research. For Boise Valley artists, training also comes through a variety of less formalized or academic channels. More than half the respondents, 55 percent, are at least partially self-taught while 52 percent identified peer interaction as part of their artistic training. Roughly a third of respondents have participated in private studio lessons or classes (33 percent) or public workshops or seminars (31 percent). This information underscores the importance of understanding how different artist training and education is from other occupations particularly those deemed creative.

Productivity and career cross-over

Boise artists are highly productive as evidenced by the number of hours they report spending on artistic work during an average week even with such deviations. This work includes preparation to create, distribute, and market their artistic product. Such data shows the skills needed for an artistic career and how those skills are delivered or learned particularly in a field known for high levels of self-employment and entrepreneurial activity.

The average number of hours that artists spend on some arts-related work totals 49 hours each week. However, Boise Valley artists did not report that most of their income came from the arts, thereby revealing the very high number of hours they spend working overall, as a significant portion of their income is coming from outside the creative sector. Most of the artists spend more than half of their time, not on practicing, creating or sharing work, but on business development including training, marketing, and networking.

Average hours per week spent on different elements of art practice:

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	AVE. WEEKLY	STANDARD DEVIATION
Practicing/training	424	9.79	9.50
Making/creating/rehearsing	511	17.74	12.69
Performing/exhibiting/sharing	399	6.57	7.60
Networking/collaborating	427	7.65	9.02
Marketing/selling/publicizing	379	7.59	8.86
Total	2140		



Dancers train at the Esther Simplot Performing Arts Academy.

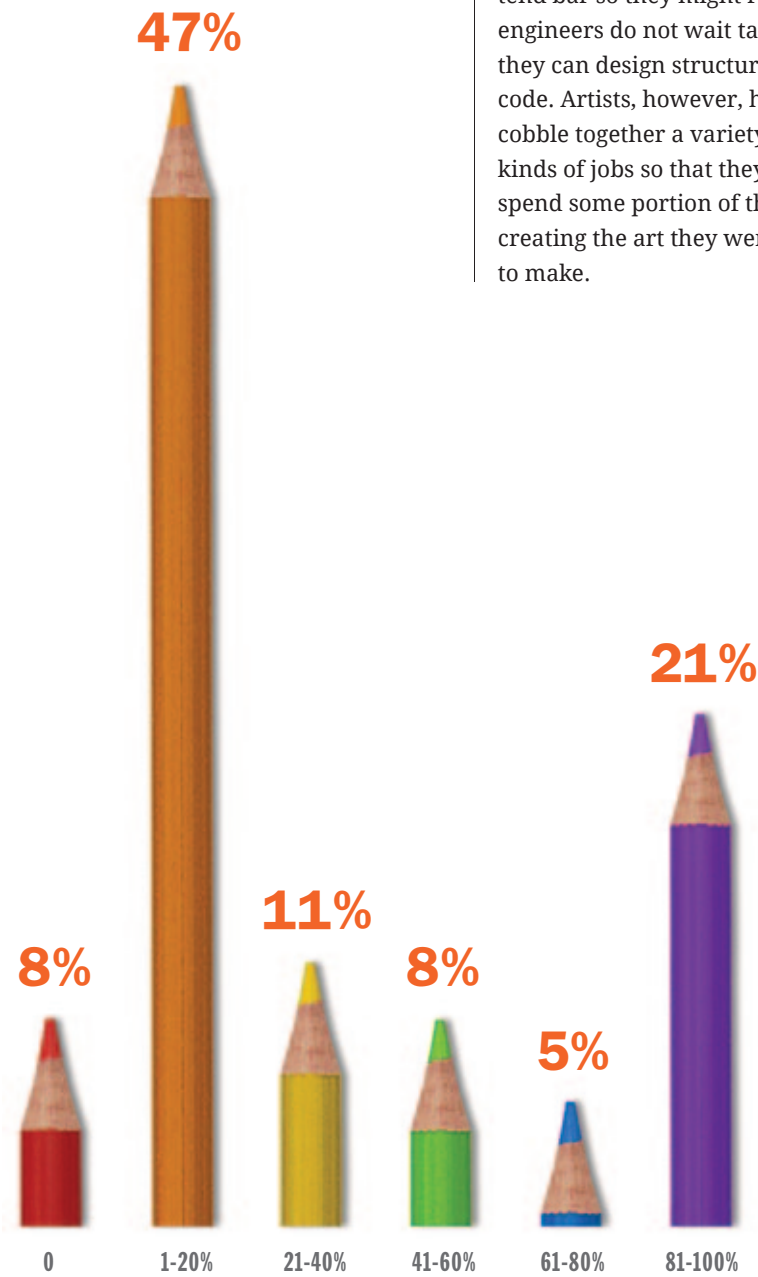
PHOTO: HARRISON BERRY, BOISE WEEKLY



Artists, however, hold or cobble together a variety of other kinds of jobs so that they can spend some portion of their time creating the art they were trained to make.

The average percentage of an artists' total annual income attributed to the art they created was in fact, in the majority of cases, well under 50 percent.

Percent of income:



Artists also reported financing their art by holding an additional job. The need to do so is less common to other parts of the professional world. Doctors do not teach outside the hospital so that they can heal patients; lawyers do not tend bar so they might represent clients; engineers do not wait tables so that they can design structures or write code. Artists, however, hold or cobble together a variety of other kinds of jobs so that they can spend some portion of their time creating the art they were trained to make.



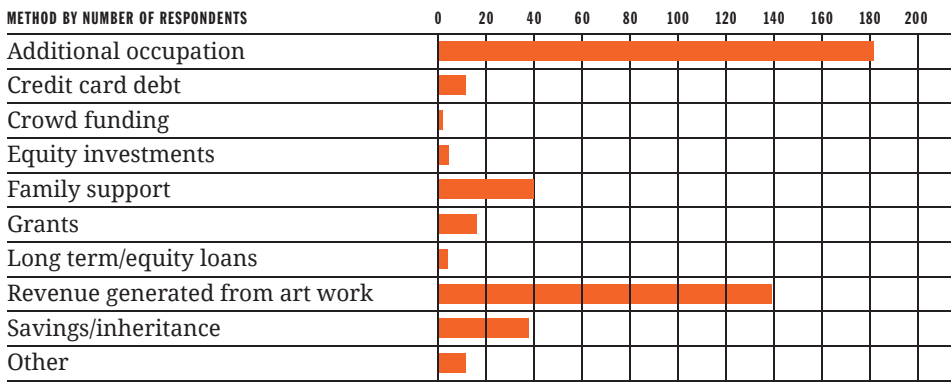
PHOTO: BOISE CITY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & HISTORY

Survey results



Many artists reported reinvesting the revenue they gained from selling their work back into their artistic practice, a business practice that is commonly seen across many entrepreneurial fields like business start-ups and angel investing. The responses show the range of ways Boise-based artists fund their work.

Financing art practice and career development:



PHOTOS: BOISE CITY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & HISTORY (SESQUI-SHOP), KATHERINE JONES, IDAHO STATESMAN (MODERN ART)



Many artists have a variety of opportunities to generate revenue through venues such as the Boise City Department of Arts & History Sesqui-Shop event and the annual Modern Art show.

39% of those surveyed are self employed.

12% of those surveyed who hold multiple jobs with multiple arts organizations.

11% of those surveyed who work full-time by a single artistic organization, all year.

In order to add nuance to these numbers, it is important to understand the patterns of annual employment for artists. While a variety of professions in fields like medicine, law, and engineering typically find workers employed by a single company or agency throughout the year, artistic labor is considerably more variable. Artists may cobble together employment from multiple sources, and this employment may not add up to full-time employment, nor does it necessarily occur throughout the year. Boise Valley artists reported a wide range of annual employment patterns, while the largest category for artists here was self-employment.

Yearly pattern of your artistic employment:

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Full-time by a single artistic organization, all year	56	11
Full-time by a single artistic organization, seasonally or part of the year	20	4
Full-time by a single artistic organization and have additional arts jobs	22	4
Full-time at a non-arts job, and have additional arts jobs	27	5
Part-time, by a single artistic organization, all year	14	3
Part-time, by a single artistic organization, seasonally or part of the year	21	4
Part-time, by a single artistic organization. And have additional arts jobs	21	4
I hold multiple jobs with multiple arts organizations	61	12
I am a self employed artist	205	39
I don't hold any arts jobs	71	13
Other	12	2
Total	530	100



PHOTO: IDAHO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL



PHOTO: RACHEL TEANNALACH

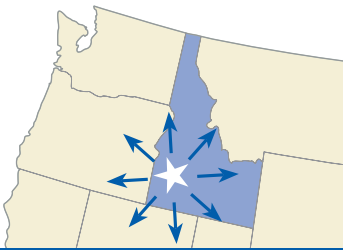
Many actors work seasonally for an arts organization, while artists like Rachel Teannalach are self-employed and create art year-round. Likewise many musicians have multiple outlets for their art, such as performing and recording or in running arts businesses, like Eric Gilbert who directs Treefort Music Festival and is part of the band Finn Riggins.



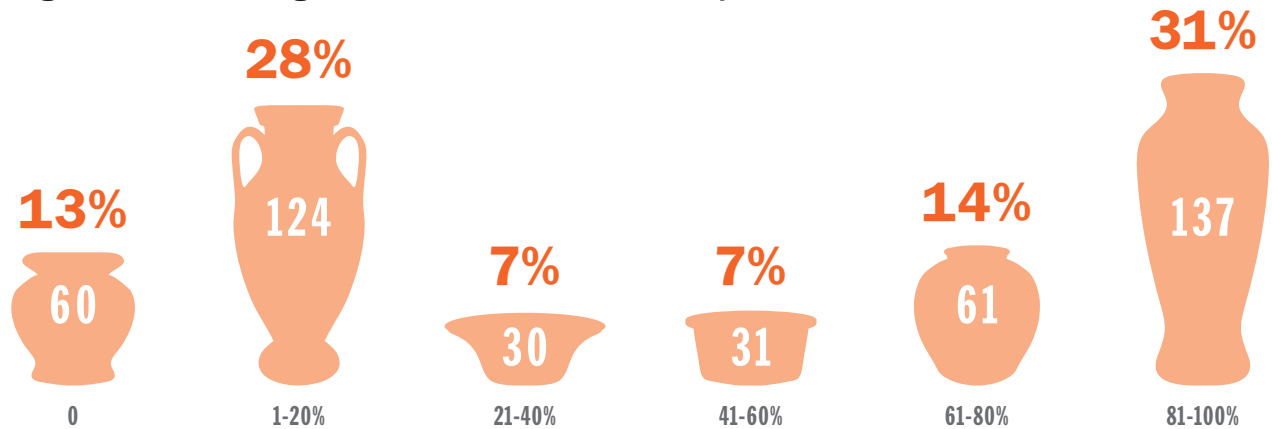
PHOTO: INSPIRED-DESIGNER.NET

Survey results

Many Boise-area artists find paid work beyond the Boise Valley. The export of the art fuels the Valley economy when artists shop and pay taxes at home.



Percentage of arts income generated from the Boise Valley:



Many Boise-area artists find paid work beyond the Boise Valley. The export of the art fuels the Valley economy when artists shop and pay taxes at home.

However, in a valley with a per capita income of less than \$27,000, many artists struggle near the poverty line. Sixty-two percent make less than \$40,000 annually from any and all kinds of work, artistic or not. Thirty-four percent make less than \$20,000.



PHOTO: BOISE OPEN STUDIOS

Individual annual gross income from both art and non-art work:

INCOME RANGE (FREQUENCY/PERCENTAGE)	0	10%	20%	30%
\$0-1,000	14 / 3%			
\$1,001-5,000	17 / 4%			
\$5,001-10,000	37 / 9%			
\$10,001-20,000	80 / 18%			
\$20,001-40,000	122 / 28%			
\$40,001-60,000	72 / 17%			
\$60,001-80,000	49 / 11%			
\$80,001-100,000	25 / 6%			
\$100,001-150,000	16 / 4%			
\$150,001-200,000	2 / 1%			
Above \$200,000	0			
Total	434 / 100%			

53% of those surveyed started, or helped to start, and arts organization or arts-related business.

7% of the arts organizations or businesses started by survey respondents no longer exist.

“I think of every piece of art as a problem to solve, and they’re all different. ... I get excited by the problem.”

— Boise Sculptor

Enterprise and Innovation

More than half of the artists surveyed (53 percent) reported starting or helping to start an arts organization or arts-related business. The vast majority of these (86 percent) are Boise Valley-based, and 48 percent of these are less than five years old, which suggests the need to consider the barriers of entry to the marketplace and ways that these arts entrepreneurs have overcome them or have not.

As the interviews show, artistic entrepreneurs often innovate by solving problems some of which are inside the artistic frame, while some are beyond. As one Boise sculptor put it, “I think of every piece of art as a problem to solve, and they’re all different. ... I get excited by the problem.”

Entrepreneurial Boise artists employ new techniques and practice within new forms, thereby expanding the content of the Boise art market and solving the problem of how it can grow despite its relatively small size.

For example, when Anne McDonald founded the Red Light Variety Show in 2009, her burlesque performers extended the kind of performance offered in Boise beyond the dance and theatre options currently in existence. She imported a method and type of performance from larger markets that has attracted a younger and more diverse audience to Boise’s live performance scene and that has provided Boise dancers, directors, designers, stage managers, and technicians another opportunity to



PHOTO: EMILY RYAN (RED LIGHT VARIETY SHOW)

produce work for a paying audience.

Jamie Nebeker, managing director and associate artist with HomeGrown Theatre, has a similar perspective. She says that her company’s alternative theatre productions provide her and her collaborators with the “opportunity to stand at the front of something in our area to get to be the first for a lot of people.” Meanwhile Mark Lisk and Jerri Lisk, well known in Boise for their photography and painting, have opened Gallery Five18. Eschewing the traditional gallery model in which artists turn half their proceeds from a sale over to the gallery owner, artists pay the Lisks rent but then keep all the money from a sale.

Buffie Main, artistic director, Alley Repertory Theatre, innovates by providing emerging artists with a bridge from the academic world to the professional. She recognizes that in the theatre sector, there is a “hole in Boise—how are we going to get artists to be professional when they can’t get professional experience?” She aims to provide that opportunity to emerging actors (those studying at or recently graduated from locally-based higher education institutions like Boise State and College of Idaho) by giving



PHOTO: MARK LISK (GALLERY FIVE18)

them the chance to take on substantial roles in contemporary plays produced by her company. Amy Nack also spurs innovation. Her downtown print-making studio, called Wingtip Press, gives other printmakers access to large-scale, professional grade equipment. Wingtip also promotes social events and professional forms.

With artists come arts business, but many are hard to sustain. Only 14 percent of businesses and organizations have survived 11-20 years; 13 percent have survived more than 20 years. Seven percent of the arts organizations or businesses started by survey respondents no longer exist.



KATHERINE JONES, IDAHO STATESMAN (WINGTIP PRESS)

Survey results

73% of those surveyed worked at home or some non-designated space.

23% of those surveyed worked at a performance venue.

18% of those surveyed worked at a university, college, or school.



Places of Creation

Affordable places to work and exhibit are essential to homegrown art. Fully 73 percent of respondents worked at home or some non-designated space. The second most popular choice at 23 percent was a performance venue, and there are a range of possibilities (in terms of setting, technical capacity, size of house, and ambience) within this category from the Idaho Shakespeare Festival’s amphitheater in east Boise, to the Neurolux in downtown Boise, to the Special Events Center on Boise State’s campus. When asked to identify the zip code in which artists created their work, the most frequent answer at 50 percent was 83702, the zip code for the North End and downtown Boise.

Type of space where art is made:

TYPE BY NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	0	50	100	150	200	250	300	350	400
Arts organization space									
Co-operative space									
General commercial space									
Home studio and non-designated									
Performance venue									
Private out-of-home studio									
Public space									
Subsidized work space									
University, college, or school									
Mobile or transient space									
Job site installations									
Faith-based facilities									
Other									



Clockwise from left: Artist Stella Strickland in her home office, Idaho Dance Theater dancers Yurek Hansen and Sayoko Knode create their art at a performance venue, and Boise Creative Center’s out-of-home private work space.

PHOTO: KATHERINE JONES, IDAHO STATESMAN



PHOTO: BOISE CREATIVE CENTER



PHOTO: JOHN KELLY

50% of those surveyed selected performance venues as the place where they share/exhibit/present/perform most of their work.

43% of those surveyed selected online options as places where they share/exhibit/present/perform most of their work.

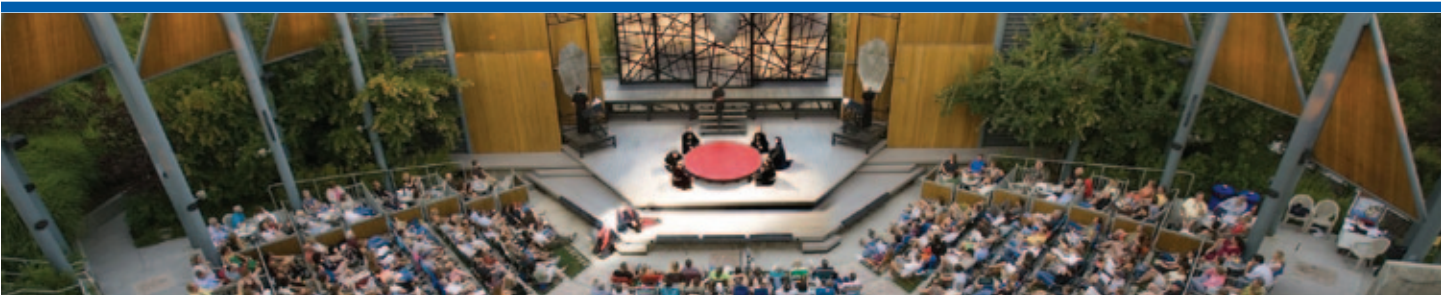


PHOTO: IDAHO SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Given the prevalence of performance venues in the creation of work, it is not surprising that artistic distribution or consumption happens in this type of space at a high rate, too. Fifty percent of artists selected performance venues as the place where they share/exhibit/present/perform most of their work. But the second most frequently selected answer with 43 percent of survey participants was online, suggesting the consumption of locally produced products need not also be local.

People also included, in the “other” section, several other examples particularly for those who are mobile and work from different places on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Another common example was faith-based organizations.

Place where art is shared, practiced, presented, exhibited and performed:

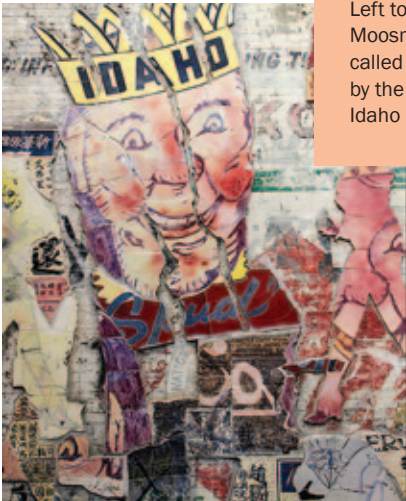
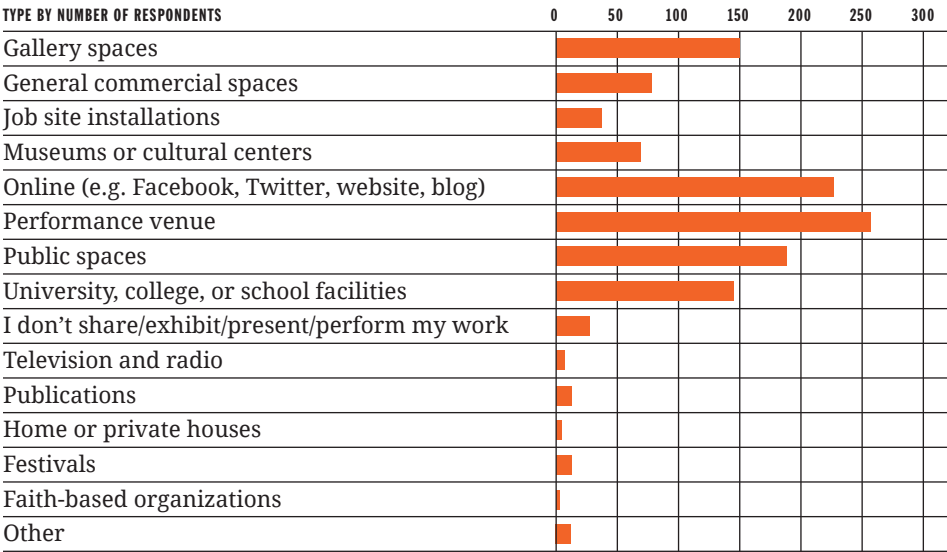


PHOTO: WWW.FOR91DAYS.COM

Left to right: A mural by Kerry Moosman located in a public space called Freak Alley, and performances by the Boise Philharmonic and Ballet Idaho at the Morrison Center.



PHOTO: DARRIN OSWALD, IDAHO STATESMAN



PHOTO: BALLET IDAHO

Survey results

65% of responses state that arts and cultural sector organizations support their career development.

44% of responses state that for-profit sector organizations support their career development.



PHOTO: NORTH BY NORTHWEST

Places for creating and sharing work are in some cases tied to local organizations, and survey respondents identified a significant range of organizations that support their work.

While arts organizations play many important roles, so do the educational, community, commercial, and other sectors.

Organizations and institutions supportive of career development:

CATEGORY (FREQUENCY/PERCENTAGE)	0	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%
Public sector organizations	176 / 39%							
For-profit sector organizations	196 / 44%							
Arts and cultural sector organizations	291 / 65%							
Educational sector organizations	186 / 41%							
Community sector organizations	136 / 30%							
Personal sales to Boise Valley organizations	14 / 3%							
Other	20 / 4%							
Total	1019 / 226%							

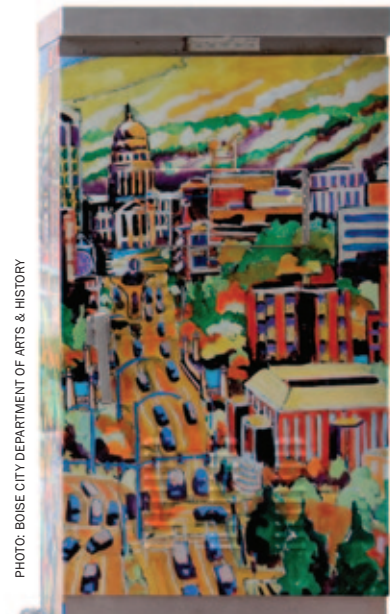


PHOTO: BOISE CITY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & HISTORY

The Mayor's Neighborhood Reinvestment Program, Capital City Development Corporation, and Boise City provide funding in partnership with the Downtown Boise Association and Neighborhood Associations to commission Idaho artists to design murals for Ada County Highway District traffic control boxes in Boise.



PHOTO: ADAM ESCHBACK / IDAHO PRESS TRIBUNE

Boise Rock School ignites a passion for music to young and old, offering them real-world performance training and experience.

52% of responses state that the Boise Valley supports artists most by showcasing and exhibiting their work.

36% of responses state that the Boise Valley supports artists by providing jobs.



PHOTO: BOISE CREATIVE CENTER

Artists were also asked to identify the multiple ways that nonprofit, for profit, and community organizations based in the Boise Valley support them. While showcasing and exhibiting local work was the most frequent response (52 percent), other top choices were raising the level of exposure to artists (48 percent), offering networking and collaboration activities (45 percent), bringing in outside artists (38 percent), and providing jobs (36 percent).

Once again the survey shows that art and arts-based organizations offer the people who produce it multiple advantages, but a key benefit is jobs. The larger point here is to better understand the relationships between occupations, organizations, and institutions, which creates a more complex picture of the region's arts infrastructure.

Perceptions about whether Boise and the Boise Valley have arts economic development attributes (1 being strongly disagree, 5 being strongly agree):

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
Financing from bank	456	2.63	1.006
Abundance of arts jobs	461	2.19	1.044
An educated arts audience that supports local work	466	3.3	1.146
A large population to support market	467	2.96	1.114
Affordable artist workspace	457	2.91	1.061
Cluster of arts and creative innovators	462	3.77	0.977
Collaborative artistic environment	466	3.67	0.935



PHOTO: BOISE CITY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS & HISTORY

The Boise City Department of Arts & History Sesqui-Shop event gives local artists a venue to display their work and network.



PHOTO: BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Student Union Fine Art Exhibitions Program showcases the work of student and community artists.

Survey results

Bands, such as Boise-based “Search Lights”, perform at local venues like The District Coffee House as part of the annual Treefort Music Festival. Unlike other festivals, Treefort’s innovative model focuses on emerging local, regional and national artists and giving back to the community in a sustainable way. They consider themselves a curated festival for discovery.



PHOTO: DEVIN FERRELL, THE ARBITER

Regional Attraction and Retention

While many artistic businesses may be new in the region, the artists themselves have deep roots in the community. Sixty-nine percent of artists have lived in the area for more than a decade, and 43 percent have lived in the area for more than twenty years. There are also a small handful of who only live in the Boise Valley part-time or not at all. These numbers are best understood when they are compared to the ages of the respondents. As noted previously, almost a third of the artists responding to the survey (30 percent) are under 35.



PHOTO: CHAD ESTES, STARRY NIGHT MEDIA

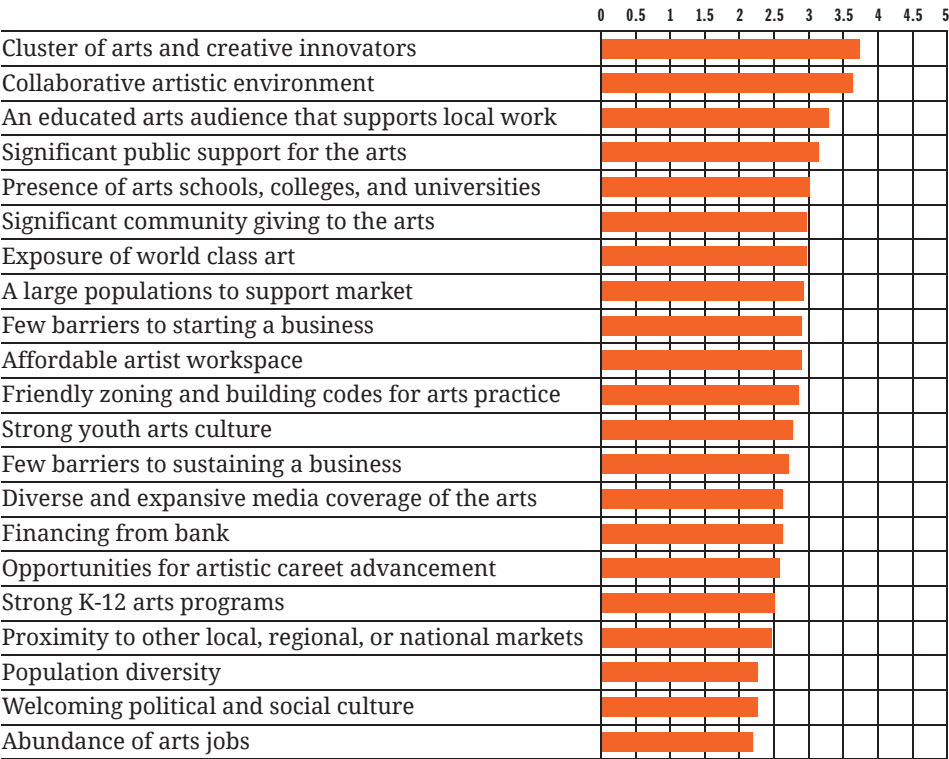
Artists collaborate together through live performances with the company Marten Evergreen.

Art economists study the community characteristics cites that nourish the arts. Boise Valley artists were asked to identify what their communities did the best. The two attributes that got the highest response were “cluster of arts and creative innovators” and “collaborative artistic environment.” The third most popular response was “an educated arts audience that supports local work.” The lowest scoring answer was “abundance of arts jobs.” “Welcoming political and social culture” and “population diversity” followed close behind in qualities artists perceive to be lacking in the community. Even if one perceives these latter factors

to be intrinsic to Idaho—Idaho has a national reputation as a conservative and demographically homogenous state—these responses should nevertheless be of concern to those well versed in the literature of arts economic development. One of the field’s most popular advocates, “Rise of the Creative Class” author Richard Florida, names diversity as one of the key attributes for attracting and retaining the creative class in any given community.

Ultimately, the scores in all the categories are middling, which is surprising as you would expect to see some features jump out more than

Perceptions about whether Boise and the Boise Valley have the following arts economic development attributes (n=431):



55% of those surveyed said they rely on training, resources and development beyond the Boise Valley.

others. Artists did not enthusiastically endorse the region's creative economy attributes, so there may be ample room for discussion about whether policymakers should consider ways to improve a growing arts ecology primed for innovation.

Since only 20 percent of artists self-identified as established, it seems reasonable to think that emerging and mid-career artists might have a better chance of progressing through the phases of their careers and ultimately thriving if they had adequate access to training, resources, and development opportunities locally. Can artists, native or transplanted, grow here? Only 27 percent of respondents said that artists, native or transplanted, do have what they need.

Even in a valley already deep with artistic talent, new ideas from other places are also important. A healthy ecosystem can benefit from cross-fertilization. Fifty-five percent said they rely on training, resources and development beyond the Boise Valley.

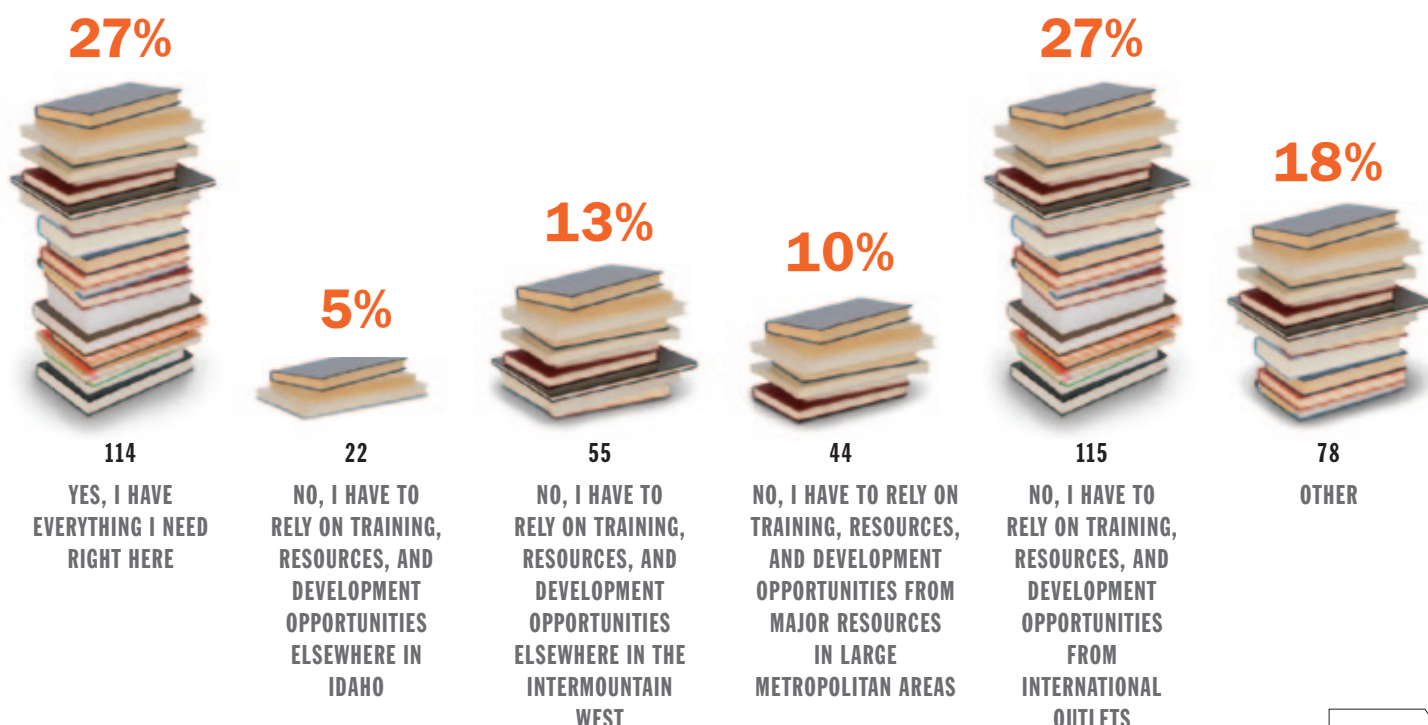
There is of course much to be said for connecting to other artists and opportunities extra-regionally, since ideas can flow among the regions. But the challenges provided by this situation are also significant. Artists are not well paid, so expecting them to invest precious resources in travel as well as educational or networking costs adds to their burden. The locales richer in development resources also have an automatic recruiting mechanism for the ambitious Boise artists needing to travel to them.



PHOTO: IDAHO WRITERS GUILD

Idaho Writers Guild annual conference "Idaho Writers Rendezvous" brings together authors, editors, agents, educators, publishers, and other industry professionals.

Perception of whether the Boise Valley provided all artistic resources:



Survey results

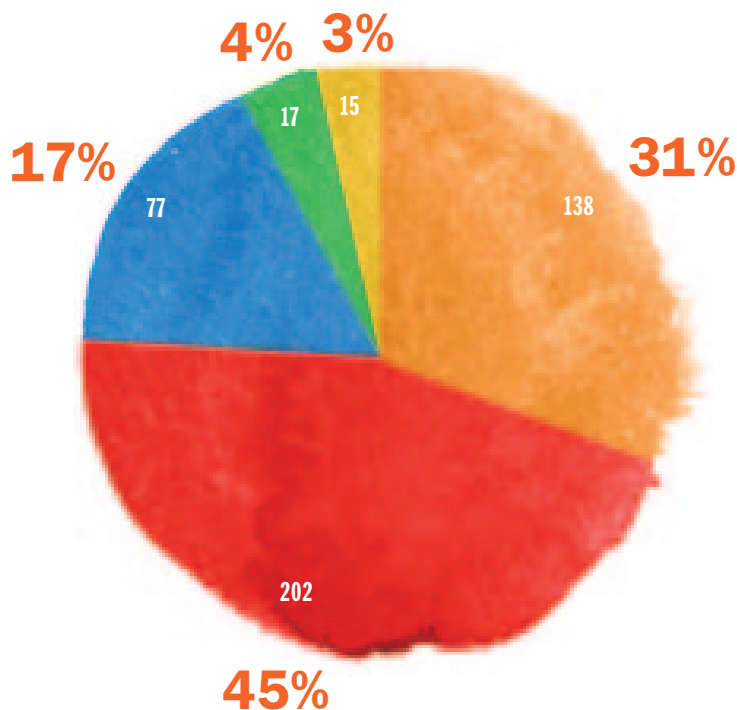


One of the simplest questions the research team asked, but perhaps one of the most telling for evaluating the viability of sustaining an artistic career in the Boise Valley was, “Can you make a living as an artist?” Overall, 31 percent of respondents answered in the affirmative, but 45 percent answered in the negative (and another 17 percent haven’t decided).

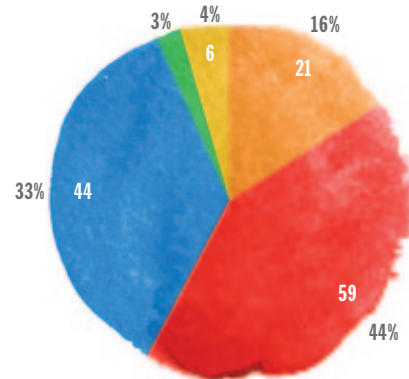
These numbers can be refined by looking at the ways artists at different points in their career trajectory answered this question. As artists

progress through the career cycle, they become more confident about being able to make a living in the target region, but it should be of significant concern to policymakers and arts supporters that more than one-third of established artists, those with the best connections, most established audiences, and most prominent reputations are still struggling to make a living in the area. This makes sense as to why two-thirds of emerging artists question their ability to make a living in their chosen field locally.

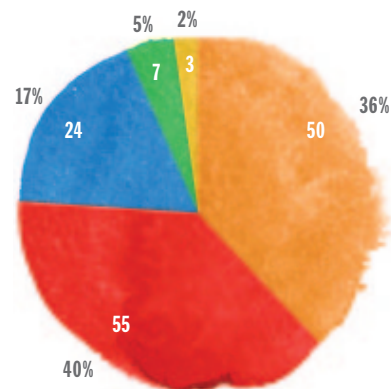
Perceptions about ability to make a living as an artist in the Boise Valley:



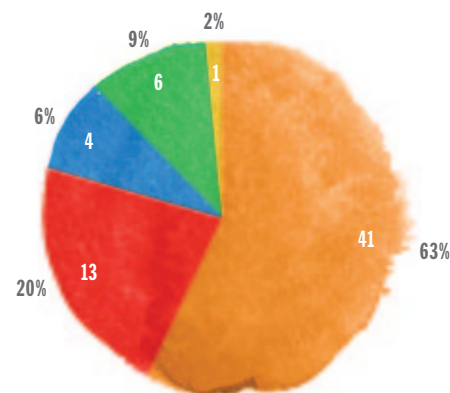
Emerging:



Mid-career:



Established:





“ You can’t have this capitalist, laissez faire approach and [think] it will work itself out and there will be fantastic art. It won’t. You need holding hands, larger nonprofits, the city, commercial arts, developers, etc. Everyone hinges on everyone. Art deserves public support. Do we want it? Then you have to throw a bit of money at it, or get a massive ground shift.”

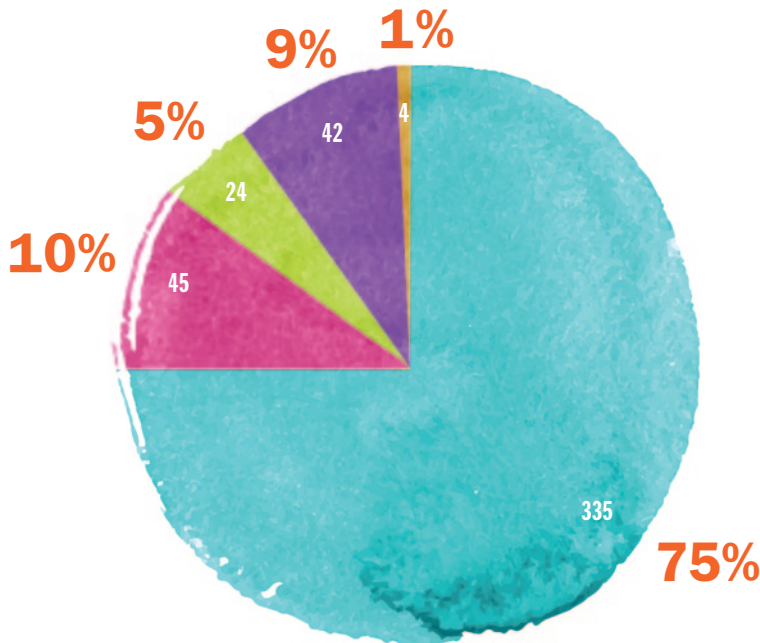
— Ryan Peck, Boise Rock School

Researchers also wanted to know if the artists surveyed planned to stay in the Boise Valley. While there appear to be significant challenges to building and sustaining artistic careers here, artists very enthusiastically expressed their desire to stay in the area. Overall, 75 percent of respondents answered in the affirmative but 10 percent answered in the negative and another nine percent haven’t decided.

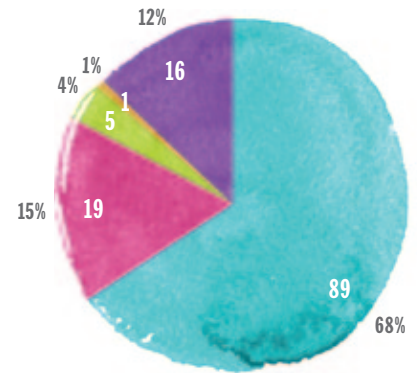
Again, some variation exists in this answer some variation in this answer if sorted by career stage. Once artists are rooted in Idaho—whether they start here or come here later—the majority of them want to stay. If civic leaders

want to improve an already positive culture of creativity and innovation, particularly for the emerging artists who are most prone to consider taking their talents, civic potential, and economic contribution to another market, there are myriad opportunities to do so. Said Ryan Peck of Boise Rock School: “You can’t have this capitalist, laissez faire approach and [think] it will work itself out and there will be fantastic art. It won’t. You need holding hands, larger nonprofits, the city, commercial arts, developers, etc. Everyone hinges on everyone. Art deserves public support. Do we want it? Then you have to throw a bit of money at it, or get a massive ground shift.”

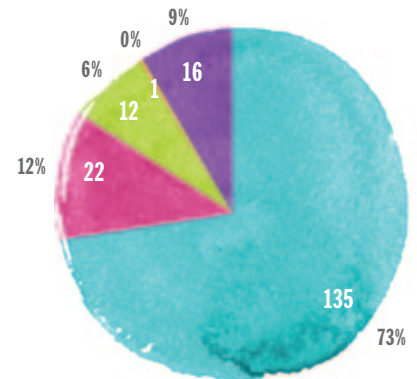
Intention to stay in the Boise Valley:



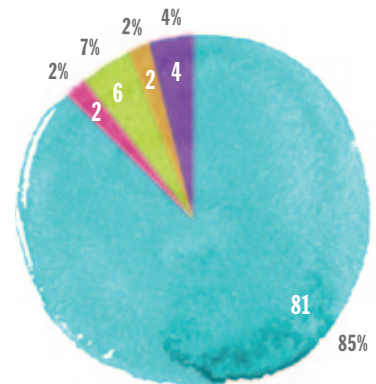
Emerging:



Mid-career:



Established:



Artists enrich the valley

Several patterns emerged from the survey that are rich with potential for researchers, policymakers, and artists and the organizations that support them.

- Boise and the Boise Valley are home to artists employed in every field of artistic labor, thus indicating a diverse array of talent resources that could be leveraged across multiple civic and artistic sectors. Boise doesn't so much need to grow a creative class, as it needs to create structures that permit this class to thrive.
- Artists are not merely passing through this place; they are rooted here and have decades of experience in the community. Retention may come easily despite a lack of well-paying artistic jobs, but attracting a larger portion of the creative class from outside the area may be difficult due to the challenges posed by a conservative political culture and lack of diversity. Meaningful incentives could stimulate recruitment and aid retention of native artists.
- Artists here are underserved in a number of important ways, but perhaps most notably they are under-employed and they lack local professional development opportunities. Facilitating artist progression from emerging and mid-career stages into being established artists is beneficial for them, but it is also beneficial for the economy if tenure in the field and sustained achievement are rewarded financially. Because these artists are rooted in Boise, the fruits of their labor are too. In addition, as emerging artists watch established artists build careers and

craft, they have models that they can aim for and exceed.

- Artists are collaborative and well-connected to each other while also largely appreciated by the community. There is a positive culture here that if infused with resources could likely spread in novel and exciting ways, but it is wishful thinking to imagine that this will happen without planning and investment.



PHOTO: ALBERT DICKSON, OFF CENTER DANCE