

Investing in the artist entrepreneur

An exploratory study of resources and strategies for supporting innovation amongst artists

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DEFINITIONS

- **artist:** Anyone who identifies as such and takes a visionary/leadership role in the generation of creative output.
- **entrepreneur:** One who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business enterprise.

What is an artist entrepreneur? What kinds of resources do they need?

Conceptual Framework:

- **Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002)** links together arguments from across the sectors, along with economic data, to establish that the "creative class" is a powerful economic force. At the heart of the "creative class" is the "super-creative core," which is made up of people who work in directly creative activity. Florida's work demonstrates that creativity is an integral component of many professions and is not just a silo within the arts and cultural sector
- The **changing landscape** in which artists must operate has forced them to devise solutions to manage scarce resources, including: lack of financial capital, new patterns of work, and the prominence of multidisciplinary work.

Assumptions:

1. The **case for support** of the arts has already been made and is valid.
2. The arts and cultural sector is an **economic development driver**.
3. The use of grants and other traditional funding mechanisms are **insufficient sources of financial capital** for artist projects.

METHODOLOGY

Online Survey:

- Created and administered via Survey Monkey
- Survey URL accessed 73 times (134 direct invitations sent; participants allowed/encouraged to forward invitation)
- 34 responses (46.6% response rate based on URL access)

Interviews:

- 4 artist entrepreneurs
- 1 arts administrator
- 2 financial professionals

Research Findings:

Defining "artist entrepreneur"

Three defining traits of the artist entrepreneur are:

- They are **innovative thinkers** who thrive in the grey area between art and commerce
- Know how to **manage scarce resources**
- Not afraid of **taking risks**

Other themes that emerged include the inherent quality of entrepreneurship amongst all artists, generating income through one's art, and market diversification and opportunity creation.

(Continued)

Resource Needs

Artist entrepreneurs need a combination of tangible and intangible to create and distribute their work.

- **Social resources** include community, collaborations, and partnerships
- **Material resources** include time, space, and money

Often they do not have access to the proper combination of these resources; their entrepreneurial traits emerge in their quest to correct this scarcity.

Finance and investment

While access to financial capital needs to be improved for artists, reducing scarcity will only solve part of the problem. **Money needs to be paired with training** on how to manage financial resources in order for it to be fully effective. Along with training, financing entities need to develop a fuller picture of **how the artistic community perceives money**; this will help to ensure that new financing models are designed to capture the unique characteristics of artists.

Training and development

There is a strong interest amongst artists for entrepreneurial and business skills. The most demanded topics include: **communications, branding, marketing, and alternative financing solutions**. In order to best match the existing traits of artists, a

training program should be designed to be **experiential, interdisciplinary, and self-selecting** (artists who are ready to help themselves.)

Fostering innovation

The artistic community is capable of generating its own solutions to mitigate scarce resources. **Artist entrepreneurs are leading this movement and demonstrating the effectiveness of grassroots solutions**.

However, they must be provided with space in which they can experiment with new ideas. **Artist entrepreneurs must also be provided with a means of disseminating their experiences to the broader community as part of a larger movement of sustainable change**.

Recommendations:

➤ **Expanded research efforts**

An **interdisciplinary approach** is required in order to capture the complexities of the artist entrepreneur and their communities. Research should occur at many levels; along with formal academic research, artists must be encouraged to practice “action research” in search of grassroots solutions.

➤ **Explore adaptation of financial models**

The failure of traditional funding mechanisms has left artists insufficient access to financial capital. **New, appropriate models** must be developed in order to provide artists with monetary resources. These

models must be sensitive to the unique needs of artists and account for the intangible value of artistic creations.

➤ **Develop training program**

To support the recommended actions, **training programs should be developed to support current and potential artist entrepreneurs**. These programs should be administered through existing arts service organizations and adapted to the specific populations the organizations serve. The programs should be designed as a series of sequential components that incorporate experiential learning and incorporate a **holistic approach** to addressing the needs of artist entrepreneurs.

Next Steps:

- **Map existing organizational and community support structures** and determine community needs gaps
- Continue to **review existing literature** pertaining to how artists work and their resource needs; determine gaps in existing research
- **Expand research focus** to include adaptation of financial models, including a survey of best practices both within and outside the arts
- **Continue and broaden primary data collection (interviews and online survey)** to identify community needs and best practices