

# The Artists and the Economic Recession Survey: Selected Findings

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Study commissioned by Leveraging Investments in Creativity, in collaboration with Helicon Collaborative and Princeton Survey Research Associates International

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## Background

The recession has impacted all professions, and artists are no exception. As of 2001, there were more than 2.5 million working artists in the United States, representing a critical part of the entrepreneurial, independent workforce. In the summer of 2009, Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), in partnership with Helicon Collaborative and Princeton Survey Research Associates International, developed the Artists and the Economic Recession Survey to provide high-quality and timely information to funders and artist service organizations. The survey sought to understand artists' financial circumstances more than a year into the recession, their strategies for adaptation, and their needs and concerns at this time. This research is part of LINC's efforts to improve conditions for artists nationwide.

[www.LINCnet.net](http://www.LINCnet.net)

LINC partnered with 35 arts service organizations across the U.S. who invited their members to take the electronic survey in either English or Spanish. The response was phenomenal: 5,380 artists nationwide completed the survey between July 20 and August 17, 2009. The sample was weighted, so the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the national population of artists. Responses are sufficient to allow comparisons by age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, arts discipline, percent of income from art work and other important characteristics.

A snowball survey, identical to the main survey, was launched on August 17, 2009 and will be available online until November 18, 2009. The snowball survey is being distributed via artists' personal networks, and has generated over 1,200 responses so far. It will be analyzed in a separate report.

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## History

A brief report is unable to capture the richness of the data contained in the survey (for example, differences in experience by discipline or demographic characteristics) but it intends to highlight some of the most important findings such as:

Two-thirds of artists hold at least one job in addition to making art.

Artists' incomes are relatively low (two-thirds made less than \$40,000 in 2008), and half (51%) reported a decrease in their art-related income from 2008 to 2009.

Forty percent of artists do not have adequate health insurance and more than 50% are worried about losing what they do have.

Despite the challenges, artists are optimistic about the future—89% think artists have a special role in helping strengthen communities in these times, and 75% believe this is an inspiring time to be an artist.

Some opportunities have emerged as a result of the recession—40% report they have been able to spend more time on their art work, and one-third have seized the opportunity to experiment and collaborate more.

While direct financial support would be most helpful to artists, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and supplies are also high on the list.

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## Profile of Survey Respondents

Artists in the Artists and the Economic Recession Survey represent a wide range of disciplines and are at varying stages in their artistic careers. They are a diverse group in terms of age, levels of formal education, race/ethnicity, income and geographical location. Fully half of the artists

identified their primary art form as visual art, and 49% of artists spend substantial time on at least two different art forms. The majority of respondents (69%) have been practicing their art form for more than 10 years.

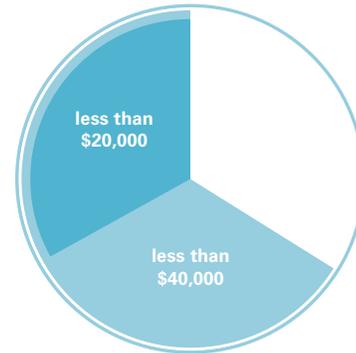
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## Income

Most artists have relatively low incomes, even though the majority (62%) are college graduates and hold at least one additional paying job. Two-thirds reported their total 2008 income was less than \$40,000, including nearly one-third who earned less than \$20,000. Artists tend to earn very little of their income from their art work or almost all of it. Unexpectedly, artists who spend more than 80% of their time on their art work have the highest income levels, while artists who rely on cobbling together an income from a mix of sources are most likely to earn under \$20,000 a year. Years as an artist and time spent working on art each week also positively influence the percentage of income earned from art.

Half (51%) of artists reported a decrease in their art-related income from 2008 to 2009, including 18% who saw it decrease by 50% or more.

Artists who spend more than 40 hours a week on their art work and depend on it for a higher percentage of their income are most likely to have experienced a decline in their art-related income.



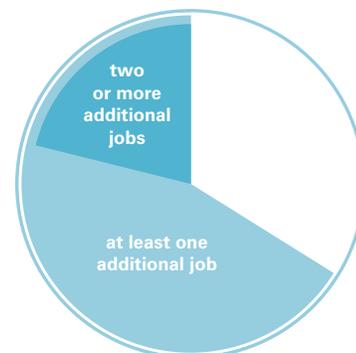
66% of surveyed artists reported 2008 earnings below \$40,000; 33% reported 2008 earnings below \$20,000.

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## “Day Jobs”

Artists often have to hold multiple jobs to make ends meet – 66% hold at least one job in addition to their artistic practice, while 21% hold two or more additional jobs. Designers and architects (54%) and musicians (42%) are most likely to earn their living solely through their artistic practice, while literary artists are most likely to supplement their artistic work with other employment (59% have at least one additional job). The majority (59%) of artists with other jobs are employed in arts-related fields. Half of artists who work in arts related fields work in academics, and the commercial arts (43%) and nonprofit arts (42%) also employ significant percentages of these artists.

A third of artists who work in non-arts related jobs have also seen their incomes decrease over the last year.



66% of surveyed artists hold at least one job in addition to their artistic practice; 21% hold two or more.

# Recession's Impact on Resources

The most commonly experienced negative change is a decrease in sales of work (48%) or a need to lower fees/rates charged for work (44%), both of which suggest the arts are experiencing the contraction in consumer spending as much as many other industries. Grantmaking has been affected in a number of ways, with more than a third of artists reporting a decrease in the monetary amount of grants (37%), the number of awards granted (36%), and the number of grant opportunities available (35%). Those

organizations and venues that often serve to link artists up with audiences have also been affected by the recession, and this is having an impact on artists in turn. More than a third of artists report that compared with last year they have fewer bookings scheduled (38%) and fewer opportunities to exhibit/perform/present their work (35%). About three in 10 say there are fewer services available by nonprofits (31%) and fewer teaching (30%) and artist residency (27%) opportunities.

## Artists and Their Work

Total width represents 100% of each category

Reported decreased sales

48%

Reported lower fees or rates

44%

## Artists on the Funding Environment

Reported decreased grant amounts

37%

Reported fewer awards granted

36%

Reported fewer grant opportunities

35%

## Artists on Organizations and Venues

Reported fewer scheduled bookings

38%

Reported fewer opportunities to exhibit/perform/present

35%

Reported fewer nonprofit services

31%

Reported fewer teaching opportunities

30%

Reported fewer residency opportunities

29%

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## Positive Attitudes and Opportunities

For many artists, the recession has reduced the financial support for their art work and their incomes in general, but for many it also brought a freedom to concentrate on their art in new ways. Nearly four in 10 artists say the ability to spend more time on their art work is a positive outcome of the recession. One third of artists note that they are able to experiment more (32%) and are experiencing more openness to collaboration (32%). Some artists say that community has a greater need for their services in these tough times (14%). On a practical note, a tenth say they are able to get cheaper work space. Another 13 percent describe opportunities that have emerged that were not listed explicitly in the

survey, many of which involve exploring new markets, being more open to new ideas and perspectives, and creating a better work/life balance.

In general, artists' outlooks are positive with 75% saying this is an inspiring time to be an artist. Artists are already very involved in their communities, with 80% having volunteered or done community work in the past two years, and 89% believe that artists have a special role in helping to strengthen their communities in these times. Understandably, artists whose incomes decreased by 50% or more in the last year are less likely than others to feel optimistic.

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## Artists' Concerns about Effects of the Recession

Many of artists' top worries are those concerning the rest of the population as well, such as health care, debt, income and retirement plans. Artists' chief worry is loss of income (77%), followed by fewer sales (70% worried or very worried), difficulty finding funding for future projects (67%), rising amounts of debt (61%), fewer exhibition/presentation opportunities (59%), fewer grants (59%) and low morale for themselves and others they know (59%). Other major concerns are loss of health insurance and derailed retirement plans. Although 61% of

surveyed artists report they have adequate health insurance, 50% indicated concern about losing it.

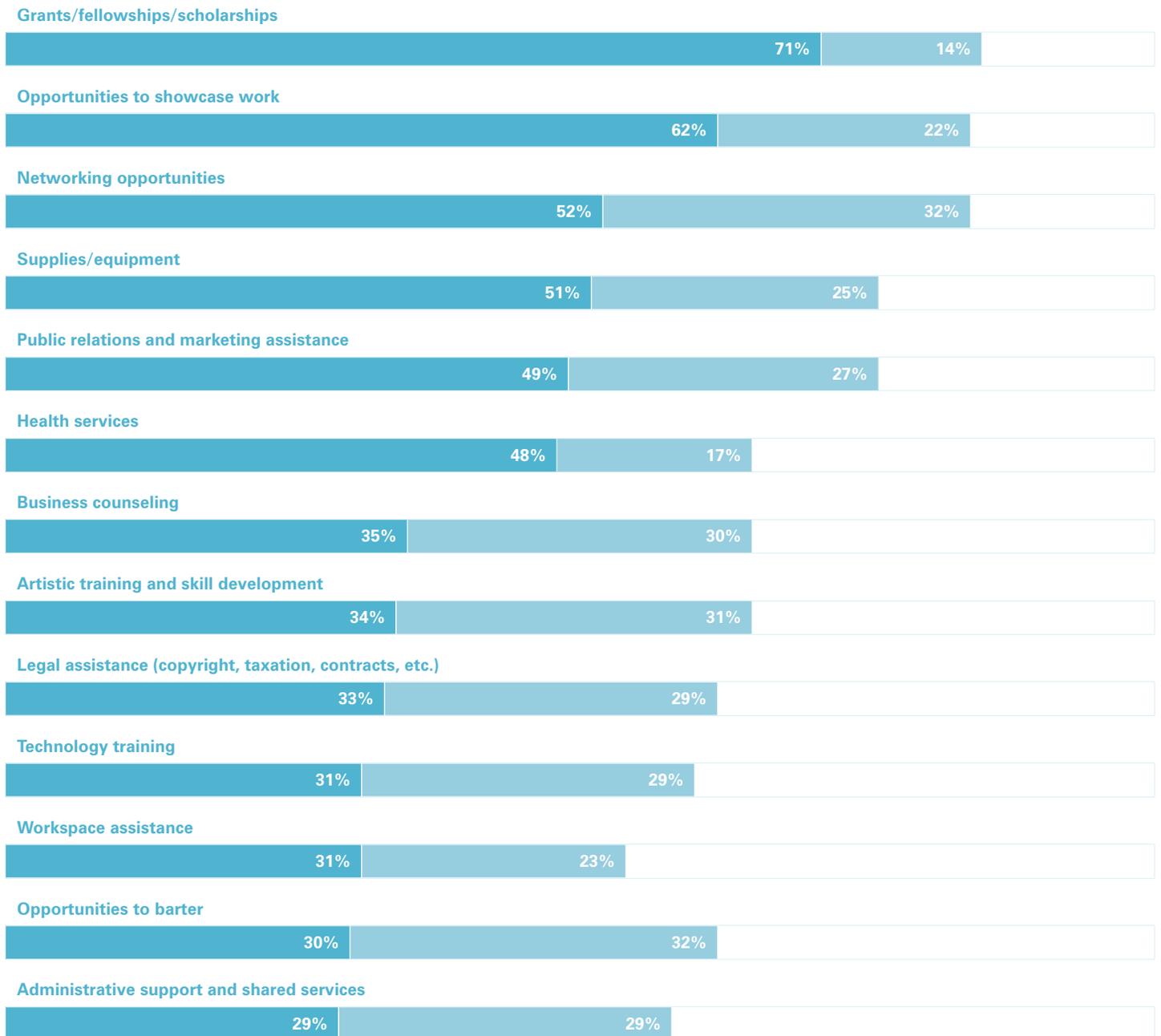
Those artists who have already experienced financial fallout from the recession are more likely to be worried in general than those who have not. Artists who earn most of their income from art are more likely to be worried than those who earn almost none of their income from art, which may indicate perceptions of the volatility of the art market relative to other industries in which artists work.

# Resources that Help

## Resources Artists Would Find Most Helpful

Total width represents 100% of each category

Very helpful   
Somewhat helpful 



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## Marketing

The methods that artists use most frequently to promote their art are relatively inexpensive to acquire and maintain (although, they do take an investment of time, which can be precious). The promotion methods that might be considered part of the formal arts infrastructure, such as PR companies (2%), agents (10%), reviews (18%) and venues (18%), are less frequently used by artists to promote their work than more informal, and more personal, methods such

as word of mouth (67%), personal websites (55%), online social networking sites (43%); and email lists (42%). In general, artists show that they are comfortable with using electronic communications tools to promote their work. Discipline, education, age and geographic region influence which tools artists are most likely to use (more detail in full report). For example, artists with college experience are more likely to use personal websites or social networking tools.

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## Internet Usage Patterns among Artists

Information gathering activities emerge as the top uses for the Internet among artists. More than three in four artists surveyed say they use the Internet often to locate information/services, and seven in 10 say they use it often to conduct research for their work and learn about other artists' work. The next most common way artists use the Internet is to connect, either with other artists or audiences/customers. Some artists also use the Internet frequently for activities more directly related to earning money, such as finding job opportunities (47%), expanding their training/skills (33%) or selling work (23%). Using

the Internet to actually create work is the least common way artists use the Internet, with nearly half reporting these are things they hardly ever or never do online.

While practically all artists use the Internet often for at least one arts-related activity, those with high usage patterns (23%) have some significant distinguishing characteristics. These artists are more likely to be younger (less than 44 years of age), more involved in community activities offline, and more optimistic about the future than artists who use the Internet less frequently.

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## Conclusion

*"In some ways, the recession only exacerbates the ongoing conditions for artists. We always have to improvise and put our livings together creatively. But this time is different – we're struggling as a nation with some fundamental issues and values and change is in the air. Such times feed the imaginations of artists, and enhance their contributions to people and communities."*

Andrew Simonet – Founder, Artists U

Artists are significant contributors to our communities, providing insight, spirit and imagination as well as economic value. In addition, artists' work experiences may foreshadow what is coming for millions more who increasingly put their work lives together in entrepreneurial and improvised ways. Stay tuned for the full report.

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