
2015 Colorado Artists Needs Assessment Report

Colorado Artists - February 2016



Cliff Austin, *Generations*



Executive Summary

Colorado Artists (COA) is a 501(3)(c) nonprofit with a mission to cultivate Colorado's creative community by connecting artists with resources they need to development and sustain their art making careers. In September 2015, COA administered a statewide survey for creatives working in the visual arts, to collect information on the challenges they face and the resources that would help them achieve their career goals.

The survey was announced on Facebook and through the email lists of 60 art centers and agencies throughout the state, attracting 1,157 responses. While the survey was designed for artists of all adult ages and ethnicities, over half of the respondents were white women over the age of 45, which may have skewed the results slightly. Regardless, the results did align with outcomes from prior research identifying difficulties and needs that artists commonly face in pursuing their careers.

Artists who were in the early stages of their careers reported that many lacked supportive peer networking opportunities, especially in rural regions; had limited access to mentors; and had a difficult time setting career goals and maintaining consistent focus. As artists began to show professionally, their needs were more connected to business issues: securing affordable studio space and equipment, healthcare coverage and career management advice or training. Day to day financial challenges were a source of stress for four out of 10 artists. But the most common challenge for artists across all career stages, was in marketing themselves and their work. This was true whether they were aiming to sell locally, regionally or in the national market. Connecting with art curators, dealers, and gallerists was viewed as a significant hurdle to getting their work out into the world, even for established artists.

Artists had plenty of ideas about how to address these challenges. They wanted more events where they could meet and interact with peers. They wanted to talk about their work in public and meet collectors. They also wanted more access to mentors, coaches and business training at all career stages, and better access to professionals specializing in art services. In terms of financial support, they asked for more creative project grants, scholarships to gain training as teaching artists and to attend residencies, both in and out of Colorado. Of no surprise, nearly all were interested in lower cost art supplies.

In its plans to serve the creative community, COA is preparing to launch a website that will connect artists to the resources they need, primarily within the state. It is designing a statewide registry for artists, accessible to the public. It also intends to collaborate with local businesses, arts organizations and civic agencies to leverage dollars for resources, strengthen the culture of support for artists, and use technology to expand services in rural regions. COA is funded primarily through private donations.

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2015 Colorado Artists Needs Assessment Report

Introduction

In the summer of 2014, a group of artists living in the Roaring Fork Valley of Western Colorado established Colorado Artists (COA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization¹. Their dream was to create a mechanism that would provide career support and encouragement to artists living and working in the state, for generations to come. To make it affordable, they planned to leverage services already available through government agencies, arts organizations and guilds operating around the state. They also planned to create new programs and opportunities to fill gaps in existing resources for artists.

After clarifying program objectives and parameters during a 6-month strategic planning process, the organization conducted a statewide needs assessment of artists working primarily in the visual arts. A web-based survey was used to identify key challenges that artists face at different stages of an art career, and in turn, to determine which resources would be most helpful in supporting the realization of their career goals. The results are described in the following pages. The information was used to determine the first steps for the new organization: launch an information website and secure funding to provide artists with access to the resources they had identified as being most helpful.



Molly Hargarten, Lafayette

¹ Heartfelt gratitude is extended to members of the Founding Advisory Committee: Jan Brennan, Mary Dominick-Coomer, Marcia Fusaro, Sandra Kaplan, Linda Loeschen, Susan Obermeyer Strauss, Andrew Roberts-Gray, Jill Sabella, Jill Sher and Dr. Ellen Woods.

Survey Methods

The Colorado Artists Survey was designed after a similar instrument used by Artist Trust in Washington State. It included ten questions about an artist's career path, current challenges being faced, desired resources, and four demographic questions. The survey was launched in early September and remained open for two months. Three methods were used to notify artists and request their responses: (1) email blasts were sent to the newsletter listservs of more than 60 art organizations across the state; (2) the art organizations, and some artists,

were invited to share COA's Facebook post about the survey; and (3) artists who completed it were asked to send an email containing the survey link to colleagues and peers. A brief explanation of the survey's purpose, and an opportunity to enter a drawing for one hundred dollars in art supplies, were used as incentives to encourage participation.

In all, 1,375 responses were received from 75 percent of Colorado's counties. When the data was cleaned, 218 of those responses were deleted as incomplete, multiple entries, or from artists who did not work in the visual arts. As a result, a total of 1,157 unique responses were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were run, as well as a comparison of responses across artists at different stages in their careers.



Molly Hargarten, Bobolink Trail

Survey Results

Who Participated

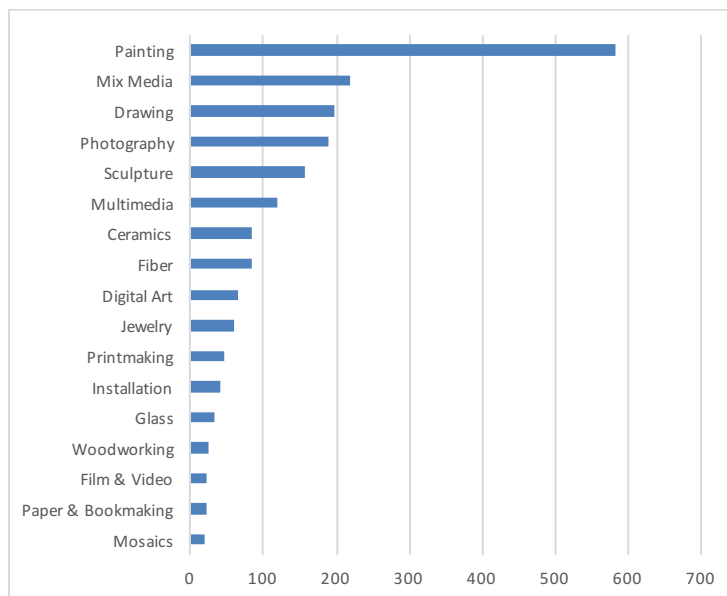
Demographics. In the survey, artists were asked to share information about their age, sex, ethnicity, and county of residence. The data indicated that the majority of participants were over the age of 45, although artists from each adult age group were represented: ages 60 and up (43.0% of responses); ages 45-59 (32.7%); ages 30-44 (19.4%); and ages 29 or less (4.9%). Three-quarters of the respondents were women, nearly a quarter were men,

and .3 percent were transgender, transsexual, or genderqueer. Most of the artists identified themselves as White/Non-Hispanic (88.0%). Another 3.7 percent were Hispanic, 2.2 percent multiracial, and a total of 6.1 percent were either Black/ African American; Asian American, American Indian, or “other”. Three percent chose not to respond to demographic questions.

Career Stages and Art Mediums. In the survey, artists were also asked to identify their current career stage and which mediums they typically worked with. The data showed that the survey was largely completed by artists who had moved beyond the foundational training stage (i.e., art school) and were working to establish a place for themselves in the art market, either as emerging (32.5% of respondents), mid-career (27.3%) or established artists (27.4%). The remaining respondents were either art students (1.1%) or still working to develop their unique style, or points of originality in their work (11.6%). Three-quarters identified themselves as visual artists, while 25 percent considered themselves multidisciplinary artists, with visual arts being one artistic discipline they work in.

Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the mediums most often used by the artists. Half of the survey respondents were painters ($n=583$ of 1,157). Also well represented were mixed media ($n=220$), drawing ($n=198$), photography ($n=188$), sculpture ($n=156$), and multimedia ($n=119$). Other art forms represented were ceramics ($n=85$), fiber ($n=85$), digital art ($n=65$), jewelry ($n=59$), printmaking ($n=46$), installation ($n=42$), glass ($n=33$), woodworking ($n=26$), filmmaking ($n=22$), paper/book making ($n=22$) and mosaics ($n=20$). Not included in the chart are a few responses from artists working in tribal arts, batik, calligraphy, beads, hand-painted furniture, reclaimed objects, food, and hobby crafts.

Figure 1. Art Mediums Most Commonly Used by Survey Respondents



(Answered: 1,1570 Skipped: 0)

Nearly half (45.2%) of the artists viewed their art practice as their main career pursuit, and these were spread fairly proportionately across the art mediums. Another 38.3 percent listed art making as one of their career pursuits, and 16.5 percent wished to make art their main pursuit, but for the present time considered it a hobby, or were working in a second job or career track.

Key Career Challenges

In the survey, the artists were asked to identify the main challenges they face in attempting to reach their career goals. They were given a list of 13 items to pick from, based on anecdotal evidence and previous research conducted on common needs of visual artists. An open-ended response box was included, allowing artists to add to the list or elaborate on their current needs. The data revealed three areas where Colorado’s visual artists are experiencing the greatest obstacles to



Gail Gerson, Grand Junction

achieving their career goals: (1) professional support; (2) business management; and (3) effective marketing of their work. The survey responses were then analyzed for each career stage, to determine whether artists’ challenges changed over time, as their work matured. The results are described in the following paragraphs.

Professional Support. While artists at all career stages reported some difficulty in accessing the degree of professional support they wanted, the greatest level of need in this area was reported by artists who were in the very early stages of developing their work and those who were just beginning to exhibit professionally (see highlighted boxes in Table 1). Realizing support from other artists, or from an appropriate mentor or teacher,

Table 1. Percentage of Artists with Professional Support Challenges

Professional Support Challenges	All (%)	Developing (%)	Emerging (%)	Mid-career (%)	Established (%)
Realizing support from artist community and peer network	26.8	31.9	31.8	26.5	18.8
Finding an appropriate mentor	17.7	33.3	24.2	13.6	7.2
Maintaining consistent focus	41.4	66.0	45.7	39.4	27.4
Determining clear career goals	18.7	27.0	24.7	17.1	9.8

(Answered: 1,130 Skipped: 27)

were obstacles for a considerable number of these artists (25-30%). Nearly as many reported difficulty with determining clear career goals. Both of these issues can impact an artist’s ability to maintain a consistent focus on their work, which was an acknowledged challenge for many of the respondents (41.4%).



Gail Gerson, *Self Portrait 66*

In the open-ended comments, artists wrote about the difficulty of working in isolation, of their struggle to sustain self-motivation, and of feeling misunderstood in their creative efforts and life choices. This appeared to be especially true for those living in rural areas, who felt cut off from meaningful networking and exhibition opportunities. Even when living in a community with an active art scene, some artists mentioned feeling alienated, or locked out, from what was perceived as a closed society, benefiting a few.

Business Management. An even bigger area of challenge was business management, which extended into personal finances. At every career stage, artists reported difficulties in balancing their desire to be working in their studio with the need to attend to business aspects of their career and other competing priorities in their personal lives: paying for a home, childcare, healthcare, or simply spending time with people they love. This was particularly true for emerging and mid-career artists, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage of Artists with Business Management Challenges

Business Challenges	All (%)	Developing (%)	Emerging (%)	Mid-career (%)	Established (%)
Access to equipment or facilities	21.2	23.4	26.6	21.3	13.7
Affordable health care	27.9	22.7	29.9	31.0	25.1
Affordable studio space	36.2	34.0	42.7	37.7	27.7
Day to day financial challenges	39.8	24.0	44.8	42.9	32.9
Career management	42.7	38.3	45.9	45.5	38.1

(Answered: 1,130 Skipped: 27)

An additional obstacle for over one-third of the artists was locating affordable studio space. There was a perception among some respondents that established artists, or at least those who could afford to work on their art careers full time, were more often given priority when space became available, leaving those who were still working to develop their careers with fewer options. Numerous comments referred to the need for affordable live/work spaces, as well as for access to community-run facilities for fabrication, framing and exhibiting large works, or for offering arts instruction to others.

Artists also wanted increased access to low-cost art supplies and equipment, and to service providers who could support them in their work. These included arts instructors, mentors, career coaches, business consultants, attorneys, and news reporters interested in covering local and regional arts. They also reported sensing a lack of encouragement from art-related businesses that readily supported other community-minded ventures, and from arts organizations that had the capacity to provide creative grants or career development scholarships for local artists, but for a variety of reasons, did not.

Marketing. The most commonly named challenge for artists, across all career stages, was marketing themselves and their work (see Table 3). Figuring out how to increase art sales locally was a big concern, particularly for those at the emerging and mid-career stages. Selling beyond their immediate region was another key challenge, and more so as artists’ careers developed. Making connections with curators, dealers, buyers and collectors was viewed as a significant roadblock by half the survey respondents.

Table 3. Percentage of Artists with Marketing Challenges

Marketing Challenges	All (%)	Developing (%)	Emerging (%)	Mid-career (%)	Established (%)
Marketing myself and my work	69.5	54.6	73.1	75.2	66.1
Connecting with curators and dealers	50.3	37.6	51.6	56.1	48.5
Connecting with buyers or collectors locally	56.2	44.0	61.7	60.0	51.1
Collecting with buyers beyond my region	56.5	36.9	57.6	61.9	58.3

(Answered: 1,130 Skipped: 27)

While the challenges identified by artists in each of the three key areas are significant, they are not considered insurmountable. The survey included a list of potential resources that could be made available to artists to address their main concerns, and they were asked to rate the usefulness of each, according to their career stage. Their responses are reported in the next section.

Michael Bonds, Aspen



Michael Bonds, *White Crackle with Red Underglaze*



Leading Solutions

The list of artist resources included in the survey had emerged through Colorado Artists’s strategic planning process. It was influenced by knowledge of opportunities being made available to artists in other states that were thought to be less available in Colorado. Through this process, four areas of resource development were identified: networking events, career development programs, business resources, and financial awards. Within these, 16 resources were then selected for inclusion in the survey. The artists were asked to rate them according to their degree of usefulness: (4) Very helpful; (3) Somewhat helpful; (2) Not sure; or (1) Not helpful. To simplify the analysis of data and clarify whether each resource was generally considered useful or not, those marked as *Very helpful* or *Somewhat helpful* were combined.

Networking Events. Regardless of where artists were on their career paths, the survey results indicated that opportunities to connect with other artists and with potential buyers and collectors were highly valued. As shown in Table 4, those artists in the early stages of their careers emphasized wanting better local networking options. As artists progressed further in their careers, their desire to network in broader circles was more evident, especially for emerging and mid-career artists. In addition, their interest in giving presentations about their work to art enthusiasts and collectors also increased, as their skills and talent matured. Well over half (58.66%) indicated interest in being included in a statewide registry for artists, although many were unsure how it would help their career.



Nancy Lovendahl, Old Snowmass, *Home Starts Here*

Table 4. Networking Events Rated as Helpful

Networking Opportunities	All (%)	Developing (%)	Emerging (%)	Mid-career (%)	Established (%)
Local networking opportunities with other artists	78.87	84.50	83.96	76.06	73.37
Regional networking events with other artists	79.13	77.86	81.74	79.61	76.53
Statewide gathering (conference) with other artists	67.79	66.91	70.77	67.53	65.26
COA statewide registry of artists	58.66	58.62	56.79	58.90	60.25
Opportunities to talk about my work via a lecture series, with art enthusiasts and collectors around the state	73.79	61.70	73.29	78.59	74.76

(Answered: 1,142 Skipped: 15)

While art organizations around the state host numerous events throughout the year that could be used for networking, the high percentages seen in Table 4 suggest that the type of gatherings offered are not necessarily conducive to the critical exchange of ideas and support that artists seek from each other. Given these survey results, it's not hard to understand the high interest expressed in a periodic statewide conference, focused specifically on artists' issues.

Career Development Programs. A high percentage of the survey respondents reported that increased access to various career development resources was also considered helpful, particularly for artists in early stages of their careers (see Table 5). The main need was for business training, including overall career planning and management. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents, regardless of the stage in their careers, were also interested in working with a mentor and/or career coach. These figures suggest there is a strong desire among artists to improve both the creative side and the business side of their art careers, if affordable services in these areas were readily available.

Table 5. Career Development Programs Rated as Helpful

Career Development	All (%)	Developing (%)	Emerging (%)	Mid-career (%)	Established (%)
Art career mentoring	63.45	79.17	76.34	58.20	45.82
Art career coaching	65.71	74.31	75.56	63.03	52.50
Business training	74.96	80.42	80.45	75.98	64.43

(Answered: 1,126 Skipped: 31)

Business Resources. At every career stage, the highest rated resources were requested of the state’s business community: low cost art supplies and access to affordable art services, from foundry work to legal aid (see Table 6). While these types of resources are available in Colorado, the data suggest that many artists do not know where to look for them, or perhaps, do not choose to spend time seeking them out. Overall, 84 percent of the respondents indicated that a one-stop-shop information and resource website would be useful for connecting them to resources and services, preserving both studio time and money.

Table 6. COA Business Resources Rated as Helpful

Business Resources	All (%)	Developing (%)	Emerging (%)	Mid-career (%)	Established (%)
Discounted art supplies	89.16	91.10	92.06	89.68	84.19
COA resource website	84.28	88.72	83.38	85.06	82.48
Professional services	83.91	78.32	86.10	87.34	80.26

(Answered: 1,154 Skipped: 3)

Financial Awards. The survey data indicated that while the percentages were high for all respondents, artists in the emerging and mid-career stages were the most interested in applying for and receiving creative grants and residency scholarships (see Table 7). Several artists commented on the lack of project grants currently available in the state. Additionally, more than 60 percent of the artists were interested in financial assistance to pay for business management training, and particularly, for learning how to market their work effectively. All around the state, artists indicated an interest in gaining or improving skills as teaching artists (48%). With increased training opportunities made available, these artists hold great potential for constructively supporting education efforts around the state, both in and out of the regular classroom setting.



Cliff Austin, Aurora

Table 7. Financial Awards Rated as Helpful

Financial Resources	All (%)	Developing (%)	Emerging (%)	Mid-career (%)	Established (%)
Creative project grant	78.64	69.85	78.79	84.69	75.99
Scholarship towards an artist residency in Colorado	64.3	63.51	70.55	64.82	56.91
Art career business training scholarship	61.31	60.45	67.43	66.56	49.15
Scholarship towards an artist residency outside Colorado	54.7	45.93	57.38	58.96	51.17
Teaching Artist training scholarship	47.79	50.37	51.42	53.29	36.43

(Answered: 1,126 Skipped: 31)

Communicating with Artists. At the end of the survey, the artists were asked about their preferred way of receiving news about Colorado Artists. Most preferred email notices (e-blasts) and e-newsletters (89%), and websites visits (77%). Others added word of mouth (50%), social media (43%), direct mail (40%), and local news & radio (34%). It's important to note that the majority of artists who completed the survey were initially reached through email and social media (primarily, Facebook), which may have influenced these results.

Discussion

The Colorado Artists Survey provided considerable clarity about the challenges confronting working artists around the state. Despite ongoing efforts by art organizations and local government agencies to provide services for artists, the results verify the existence of resource gaps, especially for those living in rural areas. It was clear from the findings that many artists struggle with isolation, long for authentic support from peers, colleagues and their community, lack skills in business development and generating sales, and don't know where to turn for assistance.

Fortunately, the survey results also provided Colorado Artists with ideas for developing creative solutions to these challenges. Working in coordination with the constellation of arts organizations across the state, it's possible to greatly increase the number and relevancy of networking opportunities for artists at various stages of their careers. In coordination with the business community, it's possible to provide better access to supplies, equipment and services that are tailored to the needs and budgets of artists. Through fundraising efforts and targeted programming, it's also possible to increase the number of grants and scholarships available for career support and advancement, region by region. And through the coordination of available, high quality, web-based professional development offerings, it's possible to improve the equity of access to career training, business coaches and creative mentors for artists living in all parts of the state.



Natalie Raffield, Denver

While the data has proved valuable in identifying challenges and potential solutions, it is important to note that these findings were likely influenced by the fact that the majority of respondents were white women, and primarily over the age of 45. Only 12 percent were minorities and only five percent under the age of 30, suggesting there may be other needs to be unearthed, and additional resources to be developed, to specifically serve those artists.

In addition, half the respondents were painters and their needs are not necessarily representative of the entire population of creatives working in the visual arts. As artists were contacted about the survey primarily through local art centers, it raises questions about the breadth of artists currently being served through the state's nonprofit arts network. Despite these shortcomings in the data, the challenges faced by Colorado's artists

reflect those faced by artists elsewhere in the country, and provide a strong starting point for developing plans to address the resource gaps.



Natalie Raffield, *Fishing Village on Cape Coast*

Moving Forward

With the completion of the 2015 needs assessment survey, Colorado Artists has been given a clear agenda to pursue in its effort to be of service to the state's visual artists². Plans are underway to develop a resource website where artists will be able to find information on networking opportunities, join a statewide artist registry, find specials on art supplies and services, locate art professionals, sign up for career trainings, apply for creative grants and scholarships for residencies or professional development, and learn new ways to meet potential buyers and collectors. Functioning as an information portal, the website will make it possible for the resources that artists requested in the survey to become more readily available.

Given the lack of representation in the survey by minorities and young artists, Colorado Artists will also be working to understand the needs of those groups and develop plans to increase their participation in the state's creative community, as well as extend its boundaries to be more inclusive.

² The organization intends to expand the scope of artists served as its capacity grows.

One of the creative community's finest assets is the high value placed on collaboration in facing challenges, thus creating win-win relationships that stretch the impact of charitable donations. In this spirit, Colorado Artists intends to stimulate the culture of direct support for artists across the state, through partnering with dozens of art and cultural centers; the state's Creative Districts; and relevant government agencies. A statewide conference for working artists is under consideration for 2020.

Colorado Artists received its 501(c)(3) determination in January 2016 and is raising funds primarily from individual donors to support its initiatives. Through these efforts, and by adhering to sustainable nonprofit business practices, the organization is well positioned to succeed in its work to aid, impact and ultimately transform the lives and creative careers of artists, thereby achieving its mission to assist in cultivating the state's creative community.