

Arts Council of Johnson County SLFRF Program Reports

July 10, 2025



From June through November 2021, 15 Johnson County based artists, arts administrators, Arts Council board members and staff came together, as the Arts Council of Johnson County's American Rescue Plan (ARP) Advisory Committee to articulate COVID's impact on the Johnson County creative sector and identify where ARP funds could support arts and creativity-based community rebuilding and recovery solutions.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, also called the COVID-19 Stimulus Package or American Rescue Plan (ARP), is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill passed by Congress and signed into law on March 11, 2021, to speed up the United States' recovery from the economic and health effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the ongoing recession.

The Arts & Recovery

ARP funds could respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality.

Economy, Relief, Jobs and Health

Arts & Creativity:

- Provide people with the foundation for creative skills; equipping an innovative workforce.
- Promote connection and cohesion within and between communities, creates opportunities for community participation and increases civic engagement and volunteerism.
- Foster the entrepreneurial spirit communities need to survive and thrive.
- Improve health and wellbeing; being one of the most effective treatments for trauma, depression, and anxiety.

The beauty we experience through the ideas and creativity of people in every town, city and rural community is part of what strengthens our county. The public art and local music festivals, the museums and theaters, the makers and choirs and many other forms of expression help us find inspiration, meaning, connection and joy.

After an intensive engagement process in which the impacts were articulated, solutions and resources were identified and draft proposals were developed, the ARP Advisory Committee recommended a proposal that could be carried out over two years (2023, and 2024).

ACJC ARP Advisory Committee Recovery and Rebuilding Recommendations

Arts and creativity make us stronger—as individuals, families, communities, and as a county. They are the backbone of innovation, prosperity, and thriving people and places. Arts and creativity also have the extraordinary ability to support our wellbeing and cultivate a sense of connectedness. **Investing American Rescue Plan funding into arts and creativity would provide a high return investment that benefits residents in every city, town, and rural community in Johnson County.**

Opportunities for the Arts to Support Recovery and Rebuilding

Almost \$2 million was appropriated to support community rebuilding and recovery through arts based services and recovery programs. Programs were carried out through proposal partners: JCPRD Culture Division, Emporia State University, InterUrban ArtHouse and the Arts Council of Johnson County – each entity receiving funding from Johnson County government.

Program focuses included:

- Rebuild arts business infrastructure through small business development – InterUrban ArtHouse
- Rebuilding arts business infrastructure through grants for small businesses and nonprofit arts organizations – Arts Council of Johnson County
- Building community connection and support for community wellbeing – JCPRD Culture Division
- Strengthening support systems for physical/mental health needs – Emporia State University & Arts Council of Johnson County

Process and Considerations

The ARP Advisory Committee was created to help identify COVID impacts on the Johnson County arts sector and brainstorm arts-based solutions to address those impacts and support community recovery and rebuilding.

ARP Advisory Committee members include:

- Emily Behrmann, Midwest Trust Center at Johnson County Community College
- Diane Botwin, Botwin Commercial Development
- Allison Bowman, Arts Council of Johnson County (formerly) and visual artist
- Enrique Chi, Art as Mentorship and musician
- Lonita Cook, Theater and Film Critic and Johnson County Museum Foundation
- Debbie Froelich, Johnson County Latino Leadership Network
- Angi Hejduk, InterUrban ArtHouse
- Susan Mong, Johnson County Parks & Recreation Culture Division
- Sarah VanLanduyt, Arts Council of Johnson County
- Gary Walker, Monkey Brain Art and military veteran

- Joe Waters, Arts Council of Johnson County
- Jennifer Wampler, Lenexa Arts Council and Arts Council of Johnson County
- Hannes Zacharias, Arts Council of Johnson County and KU School of Public Administration

Throughout the series of meetings and during discussions, the ARP Advisory Committee was asked to consider:

1. How the impacts and solutions address a need in relation to COVID-19?
2. How the impacts and solutions related to community rebuilding and recovery from COVID-19?
3. Will the proposed solutions be a short-term investment for long-term gain?
4. Do the impacts and solutions support and serve traditionally marginalized populations?
5. What community resources are available to help implement proposed solutions

The following program reports detail the impact of the programs carried out by the Arts Council of Johnson County.

The Johnson County Coronavirus Recovery Fund for Non-Employer Creative Small Businesses and Nonprofit Arts Organizations Program Report



Executive Summary

The mission of the Arts Council of Johnson County is to enhance the quality of life for Johnson County by strengthening the arts.

Amid COVID-19, artists, musicians, and arts organizations have adapted their programming and held communities together while helping people cope and heal. The creative industries were second only to travel and hospitality industries in the scale of economic losses they sustained due to COVID-19. According to data from Americans for the Arts, there are an above average number of arts-related businesses in Johnson County, with more than 1,600 arts-related businesses employing nearly 8,000 people. According to Americans for the Arts' COVID Impact Dashboard, since the pandemic began in March, 2020, Johnson County's nonprofit art sector reported a median loss of \$20,000 with 65% of respondents experiencing severe financial impact. Additionally, according to our 2021 Artist COVID Impact survey 51% of respondents lost \$10,000 or more in wages over the past year with 41% of participants receiving half of more of their individual income from their creative practices. A similar Mid-America Arts Alliance artist impact survey indicates 75% of respondents lost 15.6% of their total individual income since March 2020.

The Johnson County Coronavirus Recovery Fund for Non-Employer Creative Small Businesses and Nonprofit Arts Organizations was created to provide financial assistance to non-employer creative small businesses (artists) and arts nonprofit organizations still recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic in 2022. Direct grants of up to \$7,500 were awarded to non-employer creative small businesses or artists and direct grants of up to \$10,000 were awarded to arts nonprofit organizations. Grants were made through an application process. To be eligible, applicants had to demonstrate a hardship that is still negatively impacting their business health.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the non-employer small business grant, applicants must answer “True” to the questions listed below:

- I am a practicing artist able to demonstrate a sustained commitment to my artistic career.
- I can demonstrate loss of revenue when comparing 2019 to 2021 creative practice gross revenue.
- I am 21 years of age or older.
- I can provide a W9 and Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).
- I reside in a studio/business in Johnson County, Kansas.

To be eligible for the nonprofit arts organization grant, applicants must answer “True” to the questions listed below:

- My organization is a 501c3 located in Johnson County, Kansas
- My non-profit organization has less than 50 employees
- My non-profit organization has a mission focused on the arts
- My non-profit organization can show a documented loss of at least 20% when comparing 2019 revenue to 2021 revenue.



Both grant programs utilized a rating system that was weighted to prioritize applications based on financial need. In recognition of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on LGBTQIAP+, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and Female artists, the non-employer small business application included demographic information to prioritize artists who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, as LGBTQIAP+, and as Female.

ACJC received 107 artist grant applications. They were reviewed by a panel of 19 people. Seventy-nine applications were successful. Non-employer creative small business grant awards ranged from \$2000 to the maximum award of \$7500. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of applicants identified as persons of color and thirty-six percent (36%) of recipients indicated they are living at or below the low-income threshold. Major areas where grant assistance provided support included restoring lost income, replacing supplies and equipment, expanding innovation, customer engagement, and mental health support.

Twenty-one nonprofit arts organization applications were submitted. They were reviewed by a panel of 9 people. Seventeen applications were successful. Over 80% of grantees serve BIPOC, LGBTQIAP+, populations who live at or below the poverty line, address multiple intersecting identities or are led by women, many also share leadership identities with those communities. Though grant sizes varied, most received \$10,000 to stabilize operations, retain staff, and restore programming disrupted by the pandemic.

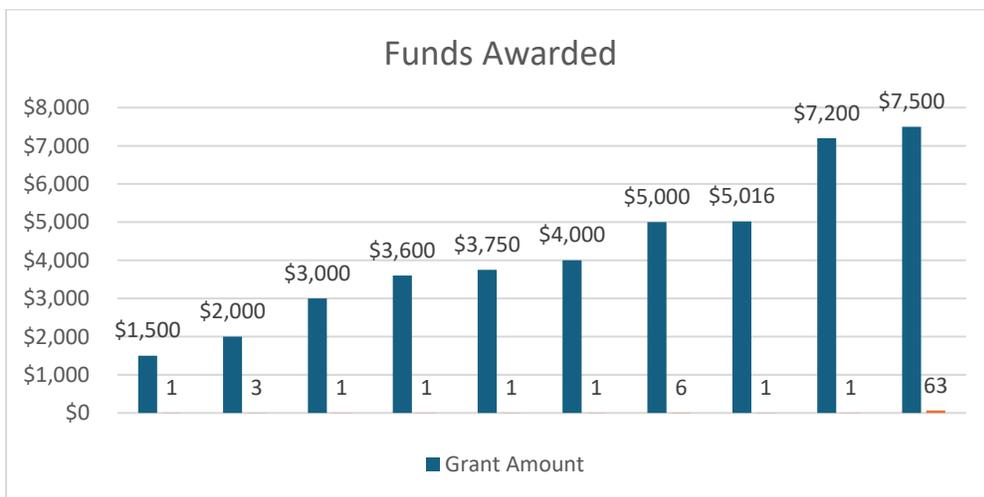
Non-employer Creative Small Business Grants

“With this support, I hired collaborators, applied for national shows, and gained business mentors.” – Grant recipient

“The grant removed so much stress and anxiety. I finally had breathing room to make music again.” – Grant recipient

“This allowed me to reconnect, collaborate, and give back to my community in ways that felt meaningful.” – Grant recipient

Number of Non-employer Creative Small Business Grant Awards Funded by Amount



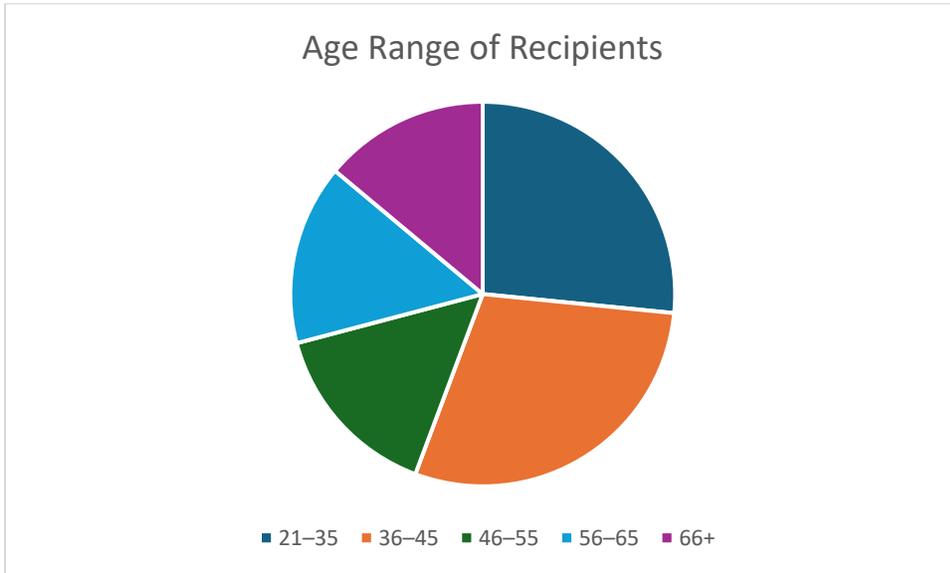
Total Number of Grants Awarded by Amount

Grant Amount	Number of Awards
\$1500	1
\$2,000	3
\$3,000	1
\$3,600	1
\$3,750	1
\$4,000	1
\$5,000	6
\$5,016	1
\$7,200	1
\$7,500	63

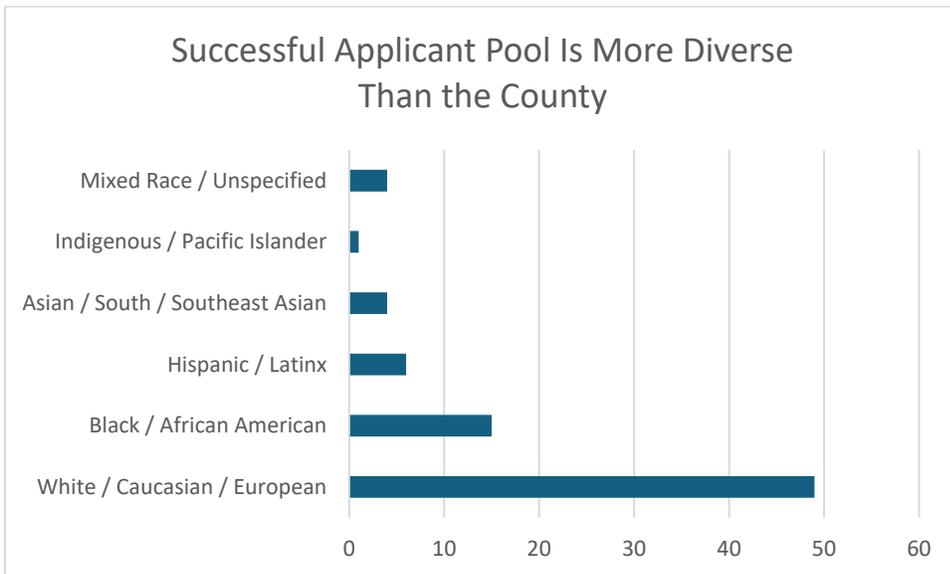
79% of recipients received the full \$7500 award.
 Total Awards: 79
 Total Funds Awarded: \$539,066



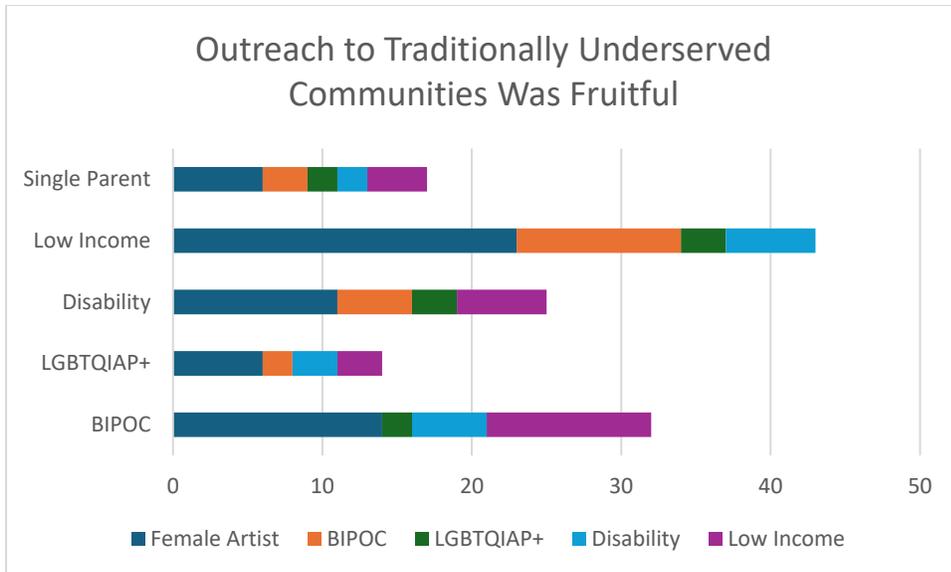
Successful Applicant Demographics



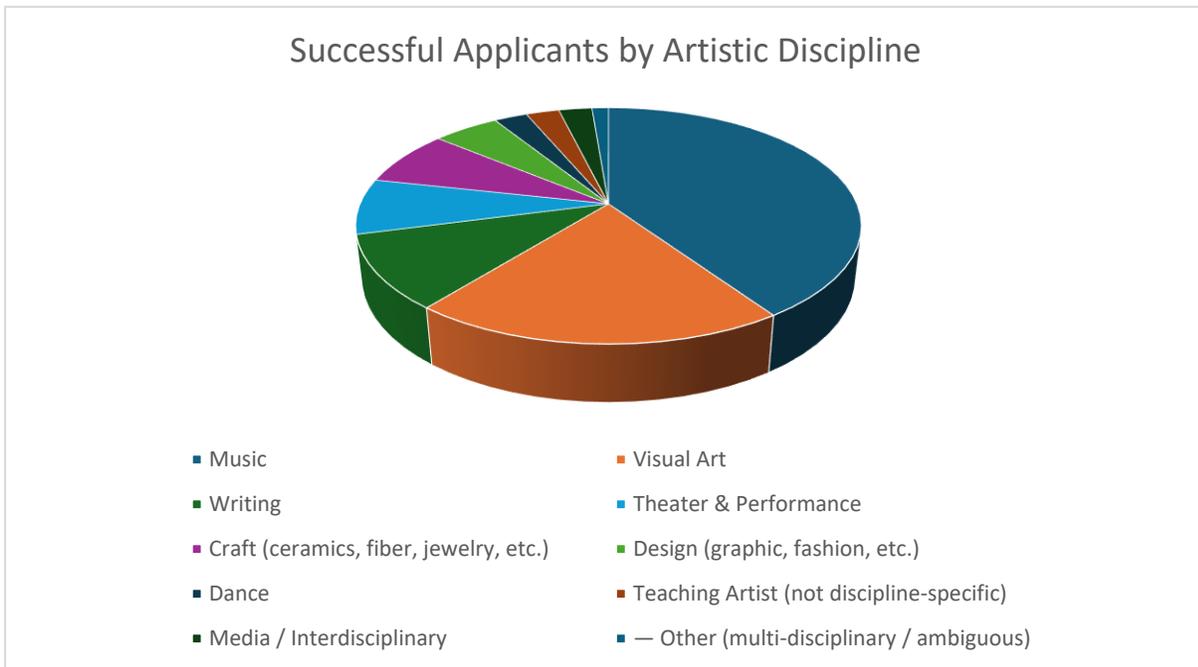
Over half of the awardees are between ages 21–45, suggesting strong participation among early- to mid-career artists.



Roughly 27% of recipients identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC).



At least 36% of artists reported economic disadvantages, and roughly 21% are single parents.



- Music accounts for over 40% of all grants, ranging from jazz and folk to composing and teaching.
- Visual art and writing are also highly represented, with several artists blending studio practice with entrepreneurship or teaching.
- Disciplines like dance and interdisciplinary work were less common among awardees—potentially reflecting broader workforce disruptions.
- Craft and design had a meaningful presence, often with ties to small business ownership, cultural entrepreneurship, or wellness.



Grant Awards by Amount and Artistic Discipline

Discipline	\$7,500	\$7,200	\$5,000	\$4,000	\$3,750	\$3,600	\$3,000	\$2,000	\$1,500	Total Recipients
Music	18		3				1	2	1	33
Visual Art	18	1	2			—	—	—	—	16
Writing	2		—	—	1		—	—	—	8
Theater & Performance	5		—	—	—	1	—	—	—	6
Craft (fiber, ceramics)	5		2			—	—	—	—	6
Design	3		—	—	—	—	—	1	—	4
Dance	3		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Teaching Artist	8		—	1	—	—	—	—	—	2
Media / Interdisciplinary	1		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
TOTAL	63	1	7	1	1	1	1	3	1	79

79% of grant recipients received the full amount of \$7500.

Grant Amounts by BOCC District

District	\$7,500	\$7,200	\$5,000	\$4,000	\$3,600	\$3,000	\$2,000	\$1,500	Total Awards	Total Awarded
1st	21		2		1		1	1	26	\$174,766
2nd	8		2		—	—	1		11	\$72,000
3rd	4		—		—	—	1		5	\$32,000
4th	18	1	1	1	1	—			22	\$154,800
5th	9		1			1	—		11	\$75,500
6th	4				—	—	—		4	\$30,000
Total	64	1	6	1	2	1	3	1	79	\$539,066

“This grant gave me room to refocus on my craft, not just survival.” – Grant recipient



Impact of the Johnson County COVID Recovery Grant for Artists

Grant recipients most commonly applied funding for direct recovery needs that stabilized their businesses. Approximately 76% used funds for rent or mortgage relief, helping to sustain or reopen dedicated studio spaces and address pandemic-related housing strain. 70% of artists invested in equipment and supplies, including kilns, instruments, cameras, computers, easels, and other specialized tools critical to rebuilding their creative work.

Operational expenses were also a top priority—64% of recipients covered business overhead, such as utilities, insurance, website/domain hosting, and essential digital platforms. More than half (51%) applied funds toward payroll or stipends, paying themselves or collaborators to recover lost income or fulfill new projects.

To support renewed artistic production, 44% allocated funds to projects and creative output, including exhibitions, performances, recordings, and design costs. Visibility and audience engagement were key as well, with 32% investing in marketing efforts, from printed collateral to social media campaigns. Another 25% pursued professional development, enrolling in workshops, certifications, or technical training to retool post-pandemic. Additional uses included transportation (18%), restocking inventory or merchandise (16%), and delivering community-based programs and teaching (14%) that were paused or impacted during the shutdown.

In addition to stabilizing their businesses, many successful grant recipients shared that COVID-related financial hardships negatively impacted their mental health, making creative practice more difficult. Grant funding relieved stress, allowing artists to focus on artistic expression as a tool for healing and resilience.

Overall, artists deployed funds to reestablish stable foundations, resume creative careers, and reconnect with their audiences and communities—helping catalyze a broader cultural recovery across Johnson County.

Key Takeaways

- **Funding eliminated financial barriers**, allowing artists to rebuild stability and sustain their craft.
- **Artists invested in essential materials, creative spaces, and technology**, ensuring long-term growth and innovation.
- **Grants revitalized the local arts scene**, encouraging greater collaboration and accessibility for diverse artistic voices.
- **Financial relief empowered artists to reconnect with their practice**, fostering inspiration and emotional well-being.



“Receiving the grant gave me a sense of purpose—someone believed in my art.” – Grant recipient

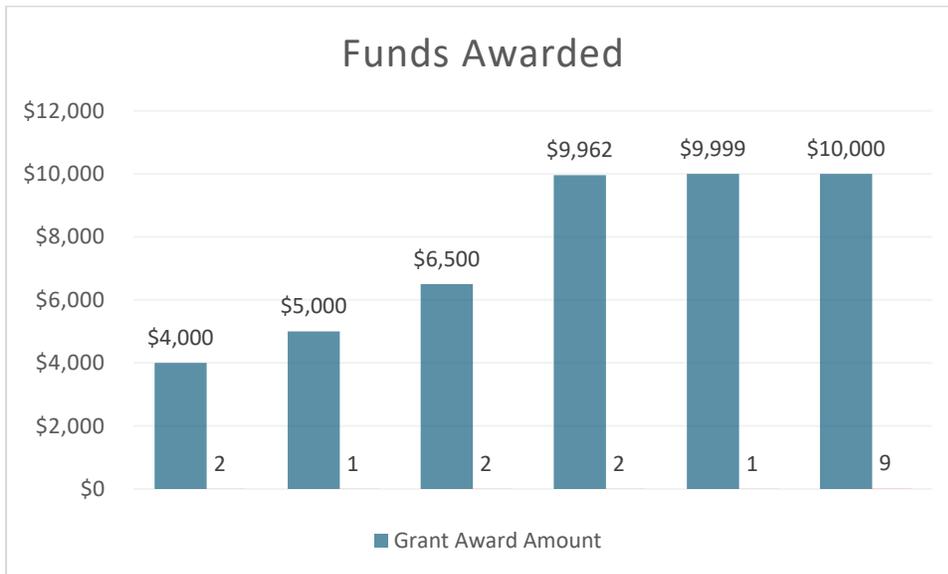
Conclusion

The Johnson County COVID Recovery Grant for Non-employer Creative Small Businesses presents a critical opportunity to restore creative careers, rebuild artistic momentum, and strengthen the community. For many recipients, the grant functioned as a true lifeline. Artists consistently described the support as a vital financial cushion that eased burdens such as rent, studio costs, medical bills, and utilities—restoring not only their ability to make art, but also their ability to breathe, rest, and refocus. This stability catalyzed a powerful creative resurgence. Dozens shared that the grant helped them recover from pandemic burnout and reignited their sense of purpose. It allowed them to return to previously stalled work, re-engage with audiences, and feel a renewed connection to their practice. Artists used the funds to launch new albums, exhibitions, books, and studio renovations. Some returned to school, others completed long-delayed projects or experimented with new directions—each story reflecting investment in long-term growth, sustainability, and reestablished professional momentum. Grant funds supported the hiring of collaborators, mentorships for students, the launch of community festivals, and expansion of teaching programs—underscoring the role of artists not just as creators, but as catalysts for community connection and cultural vitality. Above all, artists expressed a profound emotional impact. Recipients said the grant validated their creative identity and reminded them their work mattered—that even after years of disruption, their voices were seen, supported, and essential to the future of Johnson County.



Nonprofit Arts Organization Grants

Grants for Nonprofit Arts Organizations



Grant Award Amount Number of Recipients

\$4,000	1
\$5,000	1
\$6,500	1
\$9,962	2
\$9,999	1
\$10,000	12

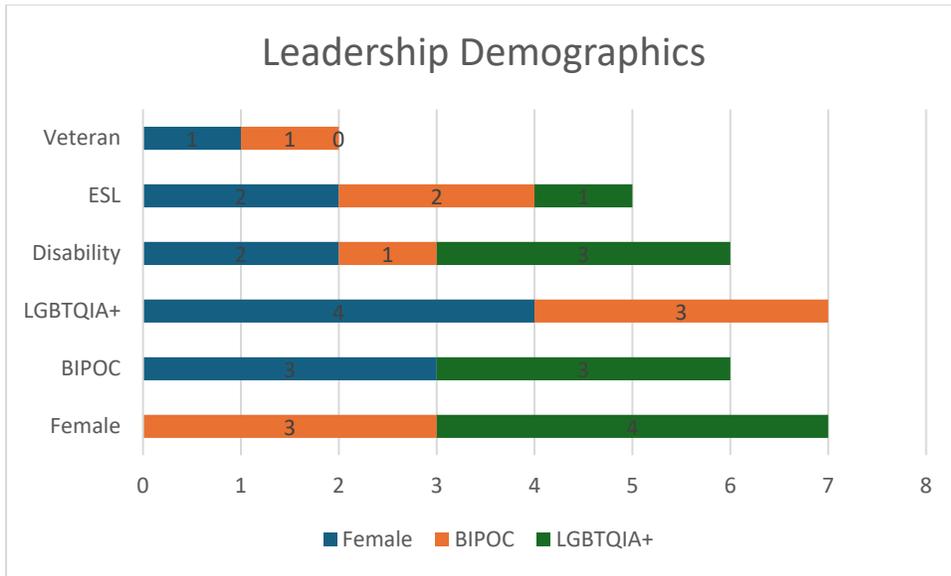
Total successful recipients: 17

Total awarded: \$155,461

Grant Awards by Amount and District

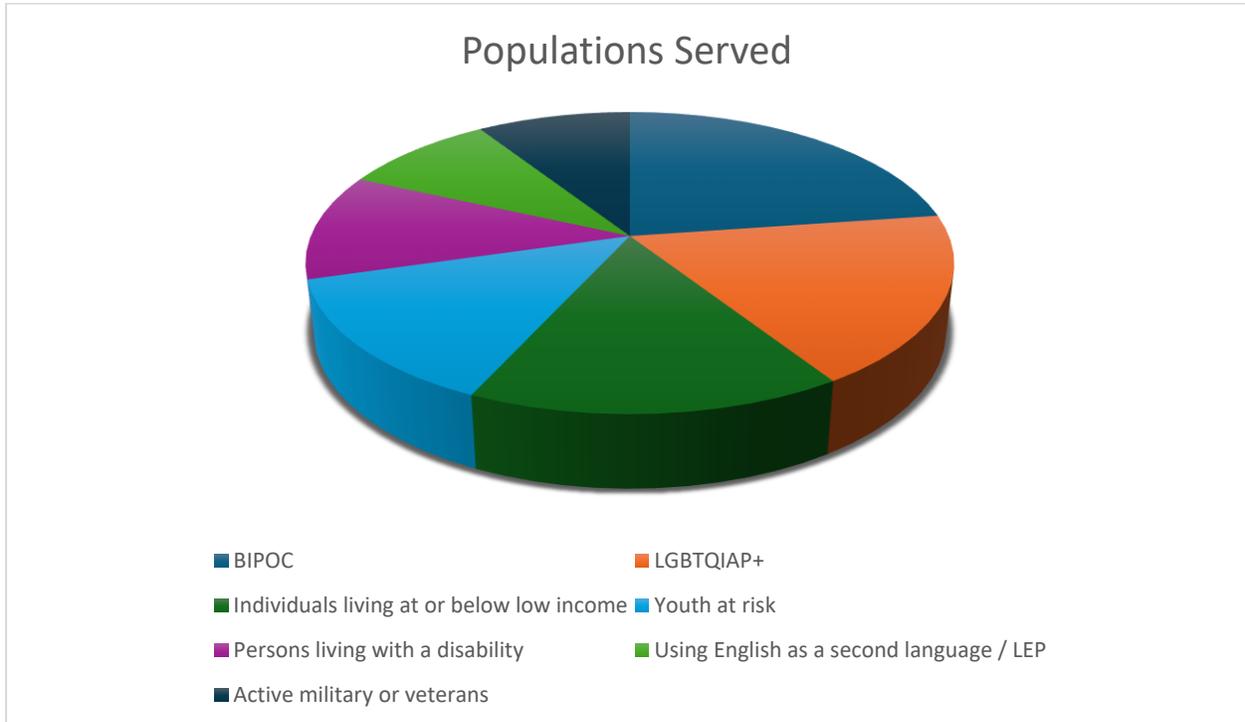
BOCC District	\$4,000	\$5,000	\$6,500	\$9,962	\$9,999	\$10,000	Total Awarded
1st District	—	1	—	1	—	2	\$34,962
2nd District	—	—	—	—	—	3	\$30,000
3rd District	—	—	—	—	1	—	\$9,999
4th District	—	—	—	—	—	3	\$30,000
5th District	1	—	1	—	—	2	\$30,500
6th District	—	—	—	—	—	2	\$20,000

Leadership Demographics

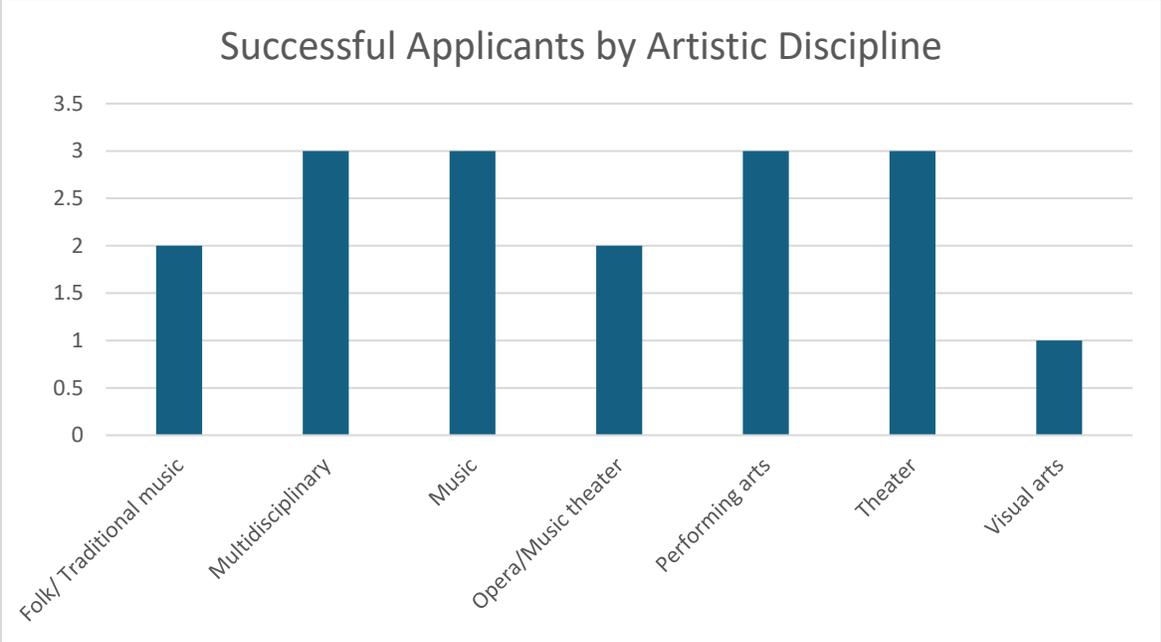


Populations Served

Several organizations served multiple at-risk communities—particularly those combining youth outreach, income-sensitive programming, and BIPOC audiences.



The grant program demonstrated a strong commitment to equity by investing in organizations that are both led by and serving underrepresented communities. Most successful applicants support BIPOC, LGBTQIAP+ community members and populations who live at or below the low income threshold, with many organizations addressing multiple intersecting identities. Notably, women-led nonprofits make up the majority of grantees, and there is significant alignment between leadership demographics and the communities they serve.



- Theater and multidisciplinary arts were the most commonly funded genres.
- Music-based practices (including traditional, classical, and opera/musical theater) account for nearly half of all funded work.
- Broad diversity of disciplines reflects the range of creative ecosystems supported in Johnson County.

COVID Impact on Johnson County Arts Organizations

Organizations pivoted to new platforms—offering livestream concerts, virtual workshops, and socially distanced programming—to stay connected. Many leaned into creative resilience, developing outdoor performances, creating online content, or offering "art to-go" kits. These efforts underscored the adaptability and essential role of the arts even in crisis.

“The arts became a lifeline during lockdown—not only for our community, but for us as practitioners. We found new ways to reach isolated audiences while trying to keep our own heads above water.”



Multiple responses expressed that while organizations found ways to stay open, the loss of ticket revenue, facility closures, and grant uncertainty strained finances and morale. Some noted they are still operating with significant deficits or downsized staff.

“We did everything we could—pulled in volunteers, worked double-time—but we’re still digging out of the hole.” – Grant recipient

Arts workers—many of whom already rely on contract or part-time pay—were hit especially hard. Organizations spoke of the heartbreak of having to cancel performances, release staff, or watch artists leave the sector entirely.

“The emotional toll of not being able to serve our mission—or pay the people who make it possible—was overwhelming.” – Grant recipient

Several respondents voiced concern over losing hard-won progress in community engagement, youth access, and equity-focused programming. Rebuilding momentum—particularly for youth and audiences hesitant to return—remains a top priority.

“We lost not only revenue, but a whole generation of young artists who missed years of formative experiences.” – Grant recipient

Over and over, the testimonies made the case that the **arts weren’t a luxury—they were essential**. Organizations helped audiences and artists alike process trauma, stay connected, and rebuild community identity.

“The pandemic reaffirmed that the arts are not extras. They’re what sustain us through grief, isolation, and change.” – Grant recipient

Impact of Recovery Grant

The Johnson County COVID Recovery Grant provided critical support to nonprofit arts organizations navigating the long effects of pandemic disruption. Grantees used funds to stabilize core operations—covering payroll, rent, insurance, and essential equipment—ensuring that creative infrastructure remained intact. The grant also empowered organizations to rebuild lost momentum: resuming programming, reengaging audiences, and reinvesting in outreach, particularly to underrepresented and income-sensitive communities. Many recipients emphasized the emotional and social importance of the arts in healing and connection, with staff and leadership working tirelessly to keep community-centered programming alive despite economic and logistical hardship. Ultimately, the grant sustained not just artistic output, but the resilience and vitality of the sector itself.

Stabilizing Operations Amid Long-Term Revenue Disruption

Nearly every organization cited the grant as vital to maintaining day-to-day operations disrupted by the pandemic's lingering effects. Common themes included:

- Covering rent, utilities, insurance, and recurring administrative costs
- Paying key staff (especially executive and artistic leadership)
- Offsetting continued loss of ticket revenue and facility income
- Addressing rising costs (insurance, advertising, venue rental, supplies)

For many, the grant represented a backstop against ongoing instability even in 2023–24.

Rebuilding Staff Capacity & Artist Pay

Several applicants noted that:

- Staff positions were cut or reduced during COVID, and the grant would enable them to rebuild capacity
- Cost-of-living increases were overdue, and these funds could help sustain or increase pay
- Investing in competitive pay for contracted artists and teaching staff remains critical, especially with inflation and labor shortages

“The funds would allow us to keep paying our Executive Director—without whom the organization couldn’t exist.” – Grant recipient

Restoring and Expanding Program Delivery

Many organizations used grant support to:

- Resume paused programming or expand offerings to meet renewed community demand
- Fund new productions, concerts, or exhibitions lost to earlier cancellations
- Provide need-based financial assistance for youth programming and reengage families still facing financial barriers
- Rebuild equipment lost or outdated during shutdowns (microphones, sound equipment, rehearsal space)

Reaching Underserved Communities

Grant funds were frequently linked to efforts to:

- Continue or grow programs in Title I schools
- Provide low-cost or free access to arts engagement for traditionally marginalized communities
- Support marketing or outreach campaigns in underserved ZIP codes or populations

Strategic Planning & Fundraising Capacity

Several applicants expressed a need to use funds for:

- Hiring development staff or grant writers to secure sustainable income
- Building long-term fundraising infrastructure
- Launching rebranding and audience engagement efforts post-COVID

“This would give us breathing room—and hope—as we continue to serve, teach, and rebuild.” – Grant recipient

Conclusion

The grant was not treated as a stopgap—it was seen as an investment in resilience. Organizations used their responses to demonstrate that with small, targeted support, they could unlock expanded access, rebuild community trust, and make real progress toward stability and equity-driven growth.

The Johnson County COVID Recovery Grant for Arts Organizations provided timely, targeted support to help stabilize and strengthen the nonprofit arts sector in the wake of prolonged pandemic disruption. By investing in organizations that are deeply rooted in the community—many of which serve BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, low-income, and historically underrepresented populations—the County helped preserve cultural assets, sustain local jobs, and foster equitable access to the arts. Grantees leveraged these funds to retain staff, resume critical programming, and reconnect with audiences, all while advancing strategic goals aligned with community well-being and economic recovery. The success of the grant program reflects a responsive and values-driven approach to cultural investment that will yield lasting public benefit



2024 Financial Literacy Workshops for Independent Artists Program Report: A program of the COVID Recovery Fund Entrepreneurial Development for JOCO Creative Industry Professionals



Executive Summary

Creative Industries Professionals (CIPs) and non-employer creative small businesses constitute a variety of creative fields, from visual and performance artists to designers, crafts persons, film/television workers, writers, etc. These individuals, and the arts organizations that support them, were the direct beneficiaries of this project, and have been among those most deeply impacted by the COVID pandemic since the start of its spread in late 2019.

One year after the pandemic's initial peak (mid-2021), the overall unemployment rate for artists was 7.2 %, down from 10.3% in 2020. However, this is still almost double the pre-pandemic rate of unemployment for artists in 2019, (3.7 %), according to the National Endowment for the Arts.

According to the “2021 COVID Artists Impact Survey Report” published in May 2021 by the Arts Council of Johnson County, the creative sector continued to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. 51% of CIPs lost \$10,000 or more in wages over the last year, and financial need is still identified as the primary needs to be addressed. Jobs in the arts and Creative Industries are vital and are an important contributor to community vibrancy and the local economy. Through InterUrban ArtHouse's ArtWorks program, artists and Creative Industries Professionals operating small businesses received professional development training, consultations, workshops, resources, and opportunities to start, develop, or reinforce arts-based small business practices, directly leading to increased income opportunities and an increase in entrepreneurial skills that enable these workers to run their businesses.

As part of these efforts, the Arts Council of Johnson County (ACJC) partnered with InterUrban ArtHouse (IUAH) to present a series of Financial Literacy Workshops for Independent Artists. The workshops took place from April – June 2024 and were offered in person as well as virtually. They were designed to increase financial and business knowledge while also reducing stress about the workshop topics. Local lawyers, tax experts and accountants led the classes which were offered both in person and by zoom.

Financial Literacy Class Topics

- Budgeting 101
- Business Registration and Bookkeeping Basics
- Business vs. Hobby Income & Common Tax Deductions
- Contracts for Independent Artists
- Grant Writing 101
- Intellectual Property for Artists
- Know Your Worth: A panel discussion by Artists
- Pathways to Property Ownership
- Repairing your Credit/Debt Management
- Understanding your Filing Requirements



To participate artists were required to live or work or live in Johnson County, register for the classes online and then completed a pre-workshop and post workshop survey that measured their level of stress around the topic and their knowledge level. As part of the program, creative industry professionals were awarded a \$1000 stipend upon completion of 8 of the 10 workshops. Seventy-seven artists completed the workshop series.

About the Arts Council of Johnson County and InterUrban ArtHouse

The Arts Council of Johnson County enhances the quality of life in Johnson County by strengthening the arts. InterUrban ArtHouse enriches the cultural and economic vibrancy of the community by creating a place where artists and creative industries can work and prosper in an affordable, sustainable and inclusive environment.

The following report includes findings from participant survey responses. Each class participant participated in a pre and post class survey that asked them about their stress level; knowledge level about the subject; if they would take additional more intermediate courses and additional comments.

Overview of Program Impact

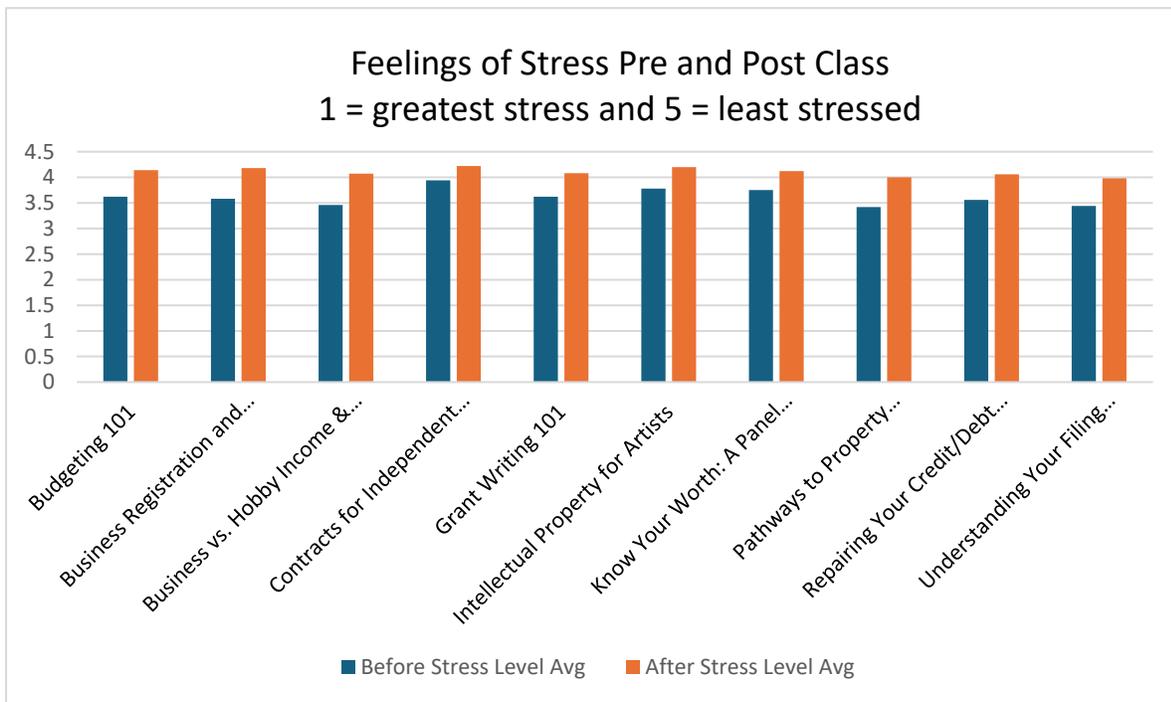
The program demonstrated a strong positive impact, with the majority of respondents rating the class 4 or 5 out of 5, reflecting high satisfaction. Post-class assessments also indicated improved confidence in the subject matter. Additionally, there was notable interest in further education, as many participants expressed a desire to attend intermediate or expert-level sessions, highlighting demand for advanced financial literacy programs. Feedback was largely constructive, with praise for the instructor's ability to simplify complex concepts. Requests for deeper dives into specific topics suggest areas for enhancement in future iterations. Furthermore, several respondents reported lingering negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their businesses, reinforcing the ongoing need for financial literacy support.

"I gleaned enough information to motivate me into building a sustainable business budget. I came home excited to draft out and plan a monthly business budget rather than just continue to document income and expenses." – Budgeting 101 Workshop participant



Stress Reduction: Based on the pre-class and post-class survey results, there is a general trend of **reduced stress** among participants after taking financial literacy classes:

- **Pre-Class Stress Levels:** Many participants rated their initial knowledge of the subject **low** (scores of 1-3), and their comments indicate feelings of uncertainty or concern about financial topics.
- **Post-Class Confidence & Stress Reduction:** After attending classes, participants generally rated their understanding **higher**, suggesting that learning the material helped ease some anxieties. Those who previously expressed confusion about financial topics mentioned feeling more informed and prepared.
- **Areas Where Stress Remained:** A few respondents still reported feeling overwhelmed, particularly around topics like taxes and business filings. Some commented that the complexity of financial topics will take time to absorb, indicating lingering concerns but improved clarity.

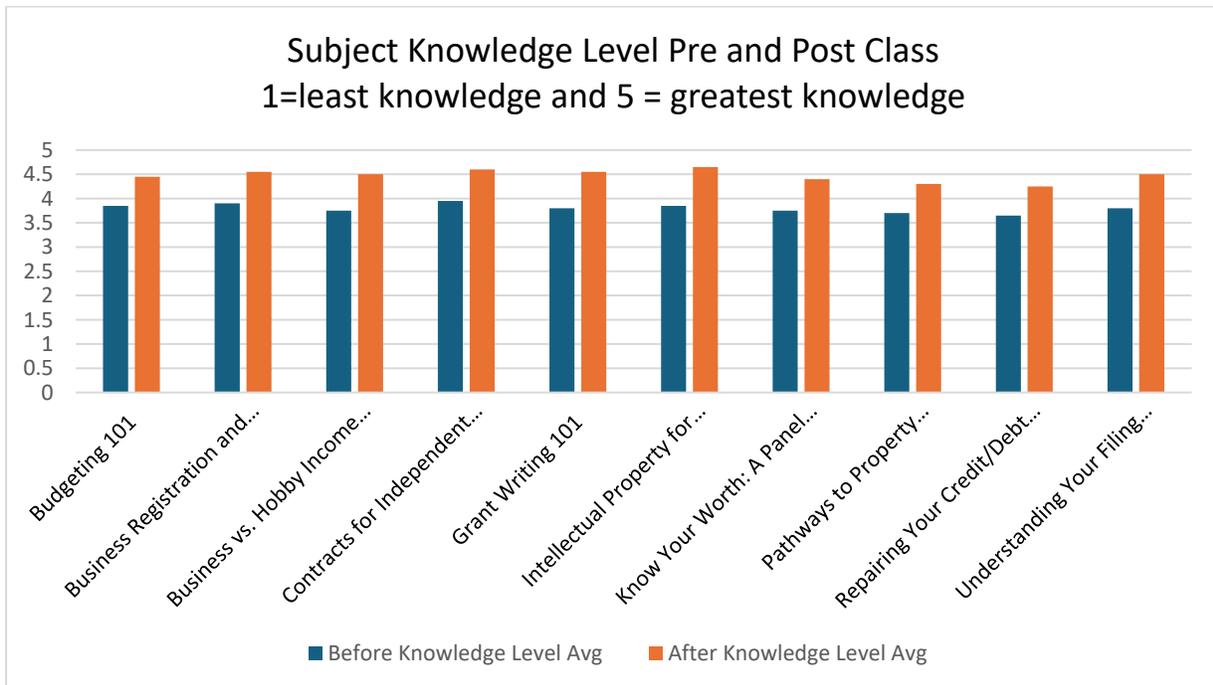


Benefits of Taking the Classes: Based on the post-class survey results, most participants felt they benefited from taking the financial literacy classes. Here's what the data suggests:

- **Overall Satisfaction:** The vast majority rated their experience 4 or 5 out of 5, indicating they found the sessions helpful and informative.
- **Confidence Growth:** Many participants reported feeling more confident about financial topics compared to their pre-class ratings.
- **Instructor Impact:** Several praised the instructors, particularly highlighting their ability to simplify complex concepts.
- **Interest in Future Learning:** A significant number expressed interest in attending intermediate or expert-level sessions, showing they valued the lessons enough to continue learning.

“Thank you for providing this series! Even though I don’t feel confident about taxes after this class, I do feel confident that I have the support I need to help me manage it well. I will be calling Jasmine soon to get her professional support, relieving me of the stress of not knowing how to handle this aspect of business.” - Business Registration and Bookkeeping Basics Participant

While most participants had positive experiences, a few indicated challenges in fully grasping certain subjects, suggesting opportunities to provide more in-depth support on specific financial topics.



Trend analysis for the pre-class and post-class surveys for the financial literacy courses:

1. Improvement in Subject Knowledge

- Before the classes, many participants rated their knowledge low (1-3 on a 5-point scale).
- After completing the course, most reported higher confidence (ratings of 4-5), indicating significant improvement in understanding financial topics.

2. Stress Reduction Over Time

- In pre-class surveys, several respondents felt uncertainty or stress about financial matters.
- Post-class responses suggest a general decrease in stress, with some participants mentioning they feel more prepared to tackle financial challenges.

3. Interest in Future Learning

- Many attendees expressed strong interest in intermediate and advanced courses, demonstrating a continued demand for more in-depth financial literacy training.
- Courses related to taxes and business filings sparked particular interest for follow-up sessions.

4. Instructor Feedback & Course Experience

- Participants appreciated instructors who could explain complex topics in simple terms.
- While most comments were positive, a few respondents noted areas that could be structured better, including session pacing.

5. Opportunities for Growth

- While confidence improved post-class, some topics still left participants feeling overwhelmed, particularly around tax laws and bookkeeping.
- Those struggling before the class still had some uncertainties, but most felt better informed.

Individual Class trend analysis based on participant survey responses.

Budgeting 101

- **Knowledge Growth:** +0.95 (Strong improvement in budgeting confidence)
- **Stress Reduction:** -1.1 (Significant reduction in financial anxiety)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Moderate (Some interest in more advanced budgeting)

Business Registration & Bookkeeping Basics

- **Knowledge Growth:** +0.90 (Solid understanding of business structures and bookkeeping)
- **Stress Reduction:** -0.85 (Moderate decrease in concerns over tax and registration)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** High (Strong demand for deeper discussions)

Business vs. Hobby Income & Common Tax Deductions

- **Knowledge Growth:** +0.75 (Improved understanding of IRS distinctions)

- **Stress Reduction:** -0.80 (Less stress about tax compliance)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Moderate (Some interest in case studies)

Contracts for Independent Artists

- **Knowledge Growth:** +1.10 (Strongest improvement in contractual knowledge)
- **Stress Reduction:** -0.85 (Moderate reduction in anxiety over legal agreements)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** High (Strong demand for deeper contract law)

Grant Writing 101

- **Knowledge Growth:** +1.00 (Strong improvement in grant application strategies)
- **Stress Reduction:** -0.75 (Some anxiety reduction about funding applications)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Very High (Many want an advanced workshop)

Intellectual Property for Artists

- **Knowledge Growth:** +1.05 (One of the most significant increases)
- **Stress Reduction:** -0.80 (Greater confidence in legal protections)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Very High (Interest in deeper copyright/trademark topics)

Know Your Worth: A Panel Discussion

- **Knowledge Growth:** +0.80 (Improved awareness of pricing strategies)
- **Stress Reduction:** -0.75 (More confidence in valuing artistic work)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Moderate (Some want follow-ups on pricing)

Pathways to Property Ownership

- **Knowledge Growth:** +0.70 (Increased awareness of property financing)
- **Stress Reduction:** -0.50 (Some participants still felt uncertain)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Moderate (Interest in detailed mortgage strategies)

Repairing Your Credit & Debt Management

- **Knowledge Growth:** +0.85 (Good grasp of credit repair techniques)
- **Stress Reduction:** -1.20 (Largest drop in financial stress)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Moderate (Mixed feedback due to instructor tone)

Understanding Your Filing Requirements

- **Knowledge Growth:** +0.90 (Improved understanding of tax obligations)
- **Stress Reduction:** -1.10 (Significant anxiety reduction)
- **Interest in Future Classes:** Moderate (Interest in advanced tax strategies)

Final Takeaways and Comments

- The classes with the greatest knowledge growth were Contracts for Independent Artists, Intellectual Property for Artists, and Grant Writing 101.
- The sessions with the most stress reduction were Budgeting 101, Repairing Credit & Debt Management, and Understanding Your Filing Requirements.
- Grant Writing 101 and Intellectual Property for Artists had the strongest demand for intermediate or follow-up courses.
- Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

“Great practical advice, inspired me to rethink my budget.” – Budgeting 101 Participant

“I learned about the ‘Snowball vs. Avalanche’ strategy for debt payments—eye-opening!” – Budgeting 101 Participant

“I finally understand what legal protections apply to my work.” – Intellectual Property for Artists Participant

“This class should be required for all artists.” - Intellectual Property for Artists Participant

“I finally feel more prepared for filing taxes as an artist.” – Understanding Your Filing Requirements Participant

2024 Canvas Collective Report: A State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund program



Executive Summary

Art is a powerful force for connection, healing, and transformation. Following the success of our STASH 3 Project, ACJC met with local artist and STASH founder Justin Border and art therapists Melanie Arroyo and Kaley Wajcman to explore how we could continue building community and connection through creativity. The result was an evolution of STASH called Canvas Collective.

Canvas Collective is a community development project that harnesses the power of collective artmaking to inspire strength, connection, and well-being within our community. The project was funded by Johnson County State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and aims to strengthen our community and empower individuals to express themselves creatively. With a capacity of 40 people, Canvas Collective was free to participate and included 4 monthly workshops led by Justin Border, Melanie Arroyo and Kaley Wajcman. The workshops were presented at Merriam Community Center on the fourth Thursday of the month between September and December 2024. Each workshop included a conversation prompt and focused on a specific art medium including wet media, textiles, printmaking and collage. Culminating the workshops was a self-curated exhibition of participant artworks at the Merriam Community Center in January 2025.

About the Arts Council of Johnson County

The Arts Council of Johnson County enhances the quality of life in Johnson County by strengthening the arts. One of ACJC's core values is the belief that the arts are essential to the health and wellbeing of our community, strengthen our economy, and ensure an equitable quality of life. As arts and creativity provide opportunities for connection and continue to help (re)build our community after the last several years, we see Canvas Collective helping to achieve 5 goals:

1. Promote Healing and Resilience: Utilize art therapy techniques to provide individuals with a safe and supportive space to explore and process their emotions, trauma, and challenges.
2. Foster Social Connection: Facilitate collaborative art-making sessions that encourage community members to come together, share experiences, and build meaningful connections.
3. Empower Creative Expression: Provide opportunities for participants to express themselves authentically through various artistic mediums, fostering a sense of agency and self-efficacy.
4. Strengthen Community Integrity: Use collective art-making as a tool to address social issues, celebrate diversity, and promote understanding and acceptance within the community.
5. Promote Mental Health and Well-being: Offer art therapy interventions that promote stress reduction, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, contributing to overall mental health and well-being.

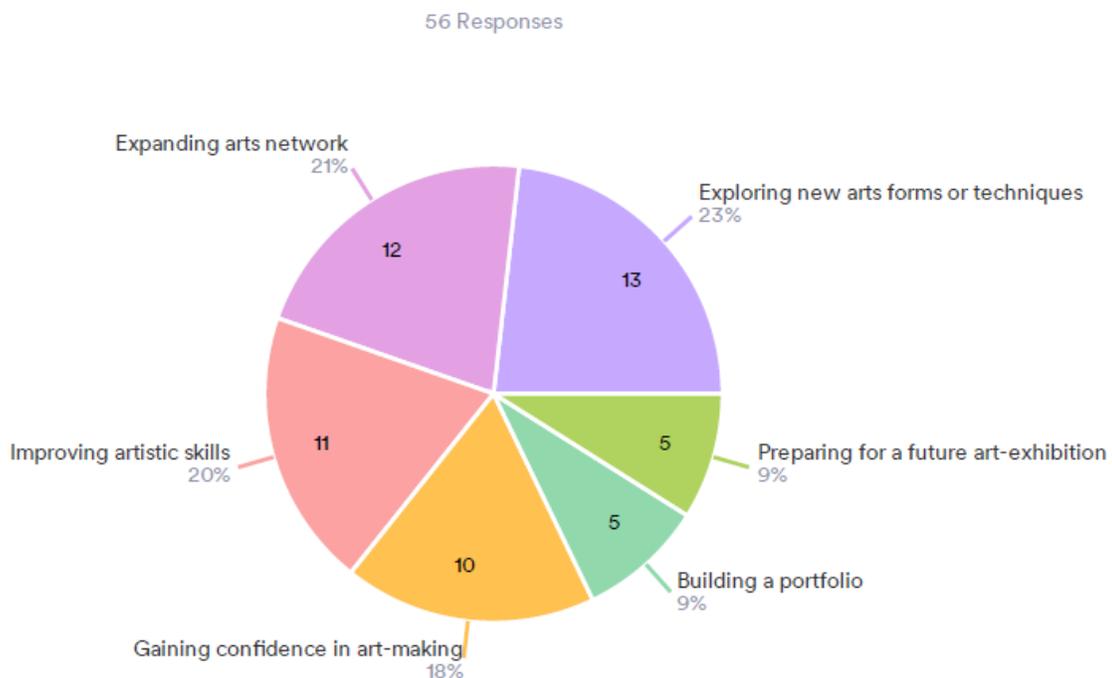


Summary of Pre-Workshops Survey

Before the first workshop, participants were asked to complete a pre-workshop survey. Questions focused on well-being, expectations and goals, barriers and motivation, and community and artistic engagement.

The findings reveal key themes related to engagement, personal growth, and the broader impact of artistic participation. Participants expressed a strong interest in workshops as a means to enhance their skills, build connections, and advance their creative journeys. Many respondents are eager to refine their artistic techniques, boost their confidence, and explore new forms of creativity. Additionally, the opportunity to engage with other artists and foster meaningful connections emerged as a significant motivation. Workshops also serve as a structured outlet for inspiration and emotional expression, allowing individuals to immerse themselves in creative exploration. Some participants view workshops as a steppingstone for future aspirations, including preparation for exhibitions and professional growth.

What are your personal goals for participating in these workshops? (Select all that apply)



Survey responses also highlighted various factors influencing participants' sense of belonging within the arts community. Those who feel welcomed and involved attribute their connection to engaging projects and supportive networks. Conversely, some respondents noted a sense of disconnection, either due to their newness in the arts scene or a lack of clear entry points. Existing arts networks and arts publications, play a significant role in fostering engagement. Several participants also emphasized the need for more structured pathways to encourage deeper involvement in the arts community.

Participants shared their experiences regarding the emotional and professional benefits of engagement with the arts. Many described art as a therapeutic outlet that fosters emotional well-being and healing. For some, involvement in the arts community has helped them overcome barriers to creative expression, building confidence and motivation along the way. In addition to personal growth, connecting with fellow artists and taking part in public art initiatives has strengthened their sense of purpose. Observing art in public spaces has also served as a source of inspiration, further enhancing personal creativity.

Participant Workshop Expectations & Goals

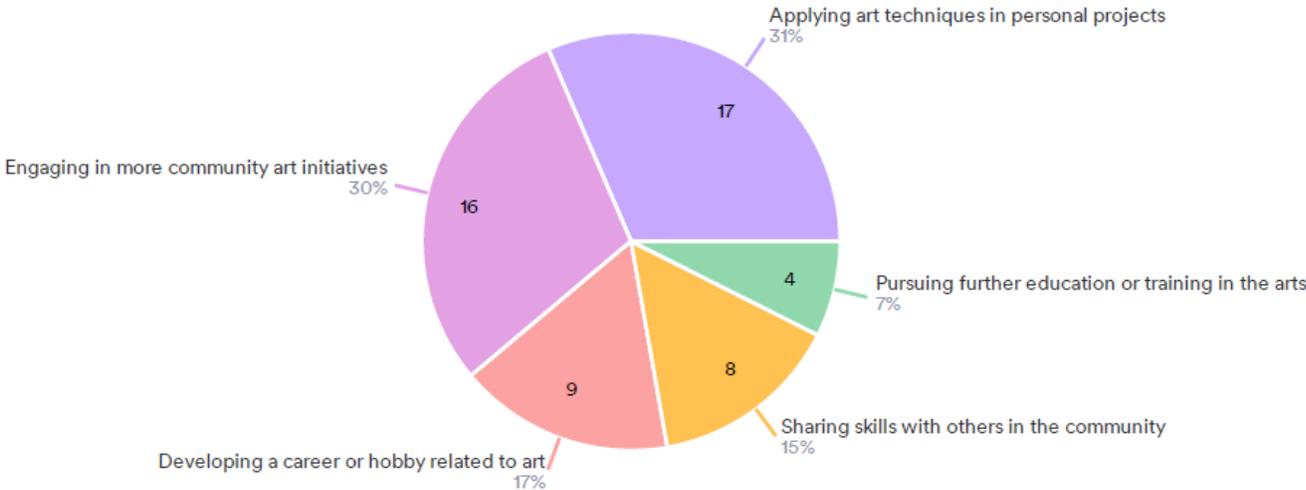
- **Participants have varied goals, including:**
 - Improving skills and gaining confidence
 - Expanding social and arts networks
 - Preparing for exhibitions and developing a career in art
 - Seeking inspiration and motivation

- **Preferred workshop features include:**
 - Hands-on guidance and structured workshops
 - Group discussions and mentorship
 - Opportunities for collaboration and collective art-making

- **A major theme is the desire for an inclusive, supportive environment, where participants feel encouraged and free to express themselves.**

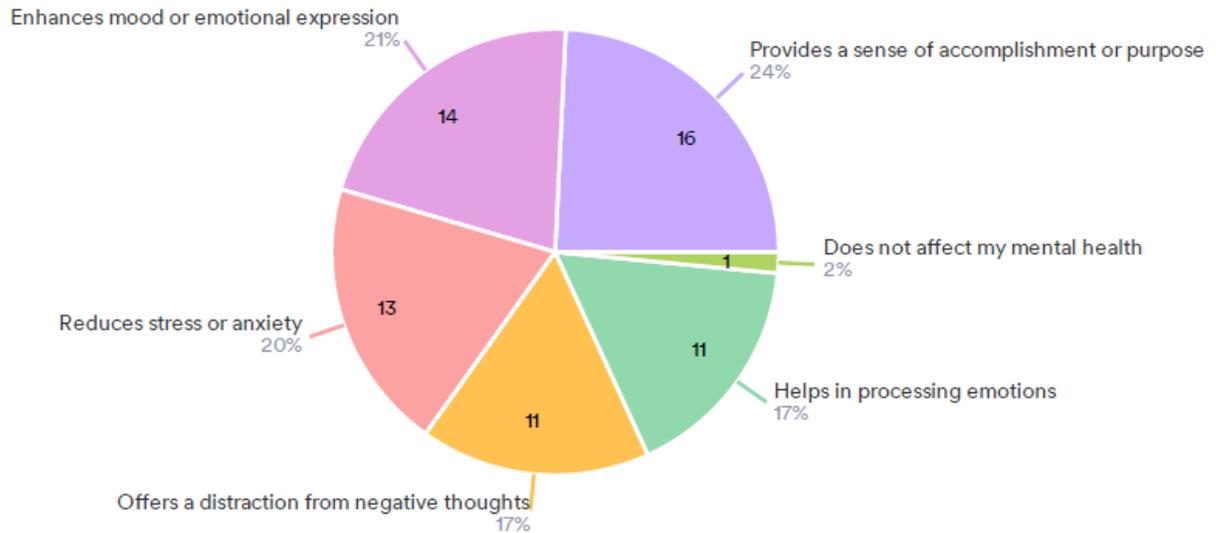
How do you envision using the skills and experiences gained from these workshops in the future? (Select all that apply)

54 Responses



How do you feel that engaging in art or creative activities affects your mental health? (Select all that apply)

66 Responses



Themes of Community, Collaboration, and Inclusivity in Survey Responses

Participants expressed a strong desire to foster meaningful connections within the arts community. Many respondents already engage with existing support networks, often through local workshops, galleries, or creative spaces like InterUrban Art House. However, others noted feelings of disconnection, citing logistical challenges such as geographic barriers and scheduling conflicts, or personal circumstances like being new to the area. Across responses, participants emphasized that clear communication and a welcoming environment are essential for creating a lasting sense of belonging.

Collaboration is a highly valued aspect of artistic engagement, with participants highlighting the importance of working alongside others in creative spaces. There is considerable enthusiasm for group discussions, mentorship opportunities, and shared learning experiences, demonstrating a collective interest in growing both artistic skills and community ties. Many respondents view collaborative arts projects as a meaningful way to uplift local arts initiatives, contribute to broader community efforts, and establish deeper connections with fellow artists. Public art installations also emerged as a preferred avenue for making art more accessible while fostering a sense of unity.

Inclusivity remains a priority for participants, with many emphasizing the need for a safe, judgment-free space where individuals can freely express themselves. There is a strong interest in supporting diverse voices, including artists from marginalized backgrounds, individuals with disabilities, and those facing financial constraints. Some respondents acknowledged that self-



doubt and fear of judgment could hinder full engagement, underscoring the importance of creating an environment that nurtures confidence. Ensuring that artists of all experience levels feel comfortable participating is key to fostering a truly inclusive community.

Participant Demographics

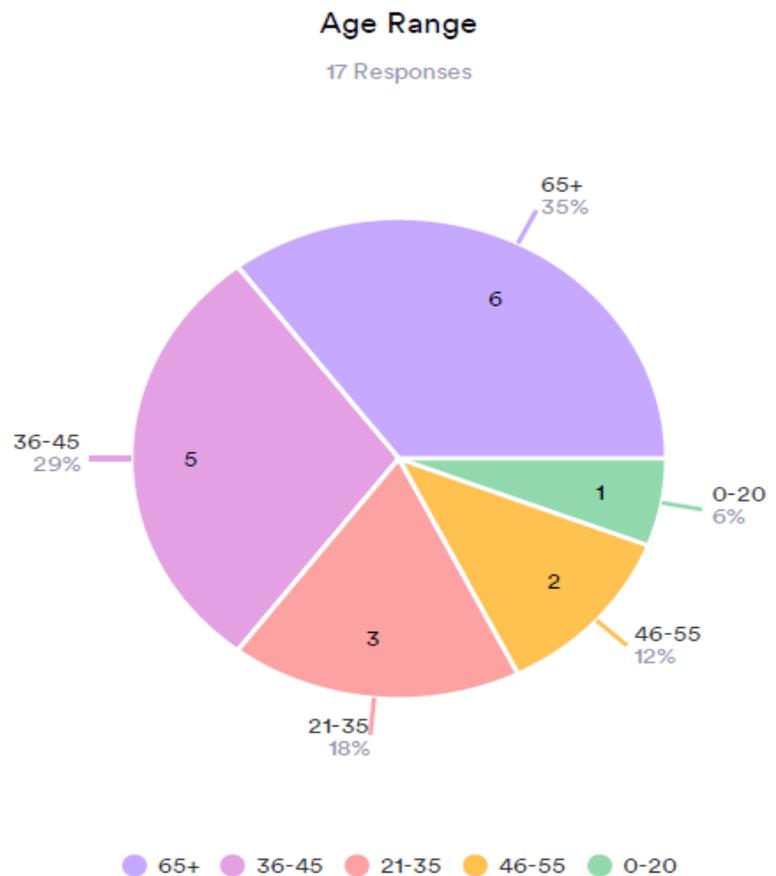
The survey responses indicate a broad age range, with participants spanning from young artists (0-20 years old) to retirees (65+ years old):

Young Artists (0-20)

- While this group is relatively small, those who participated show **strong enthusiasm** for artistic exploration.
- Many are motivated by opportunities to **build portfolios, prepare for exhibitions, and expand their networks**.
- They value **structured workshops, hands-on guidance, and group discussions**, highlighting a desire for mentorship and skill-building.

Emerging & Mid-Career Artists (21-45)

- This category sees **high engagement**, with artists actively seeking **networking, exhibition opportunities, and creative freedom**.
- Participants in their **20s and 30s** often highlight **mental health benefits, self-expression, and community-building** as key motivations.
- Many mention **art therapy, emotional resilience, and creative outlets** as critical components of their engagement.
- There's a noticeable **desire for connection**, particularly among those who have recently joined the arts scene or relocated.



Established Artists & Retirees (46+)

- Artists in their **40s, 50s, and 60s** often emphasize **lifelong learning, personal fulfillment, and community contribution.**
- **Retirees (65+)** frequently express how art **provides mental stimulation, stress relief, and a sense of purpose.**
- This group often appreciates **structured workshops and collaborative projects**, but also enjoys **flexible, informal mentorship and networking opportunities.**

Art as Therapy: Comfort, Benefits, and Barriers

Survey responses indicate that participants generally feel comfortable using art as a therapeutic tool, with comfort levels ranging from moderate to extreme. Only a small number expressed uncertainty, suggesting that most individuals see value in creative expression as a means of personal growth and emotional processing. The benefits of art as therapy were widely acknowledged, with respondents highlighting its role in processing emotions, building confidence, and reducing anxiety. Many participants emphasized how engaging with creative activities provides a valuable outlet for self-expression, offering both mental relief and a sense of accomplishment. Responses suggest that creating a welcoming, judgment-free environment is crucial to ensuring artists feel safe and supported in their creative exploration. Additionally, many participants noted that experimenting with new techniques and materials is one of the most therapeutic aspects of artistic engagement. The ability to explore freely without pressure to produce a perfect final product reinforces emotional growth and encourages deeper artistic discovery.

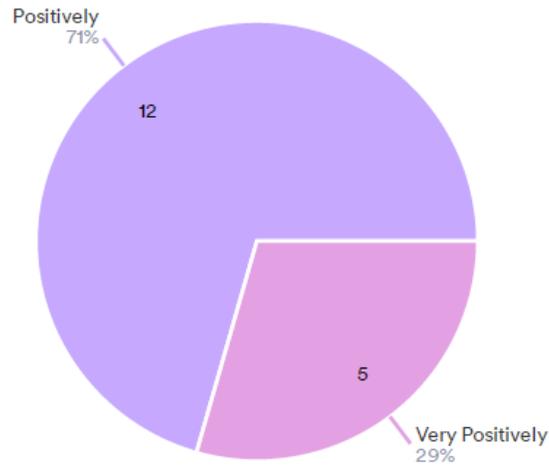
Impact of Arts Engagement

- Nearly all respondents reported that arts engagement **positively impacts their personal well-being**, with themes like:
 - Stress relief and emotional expression
 - A sense of accomplishment and purpose
 - Distraction from negative thoughts
 - Processing emotions and building resilience
- Many mentioned the **value of community art spaces**, such as local workshops and exhibitions, in fostering artistic and emotional growth.



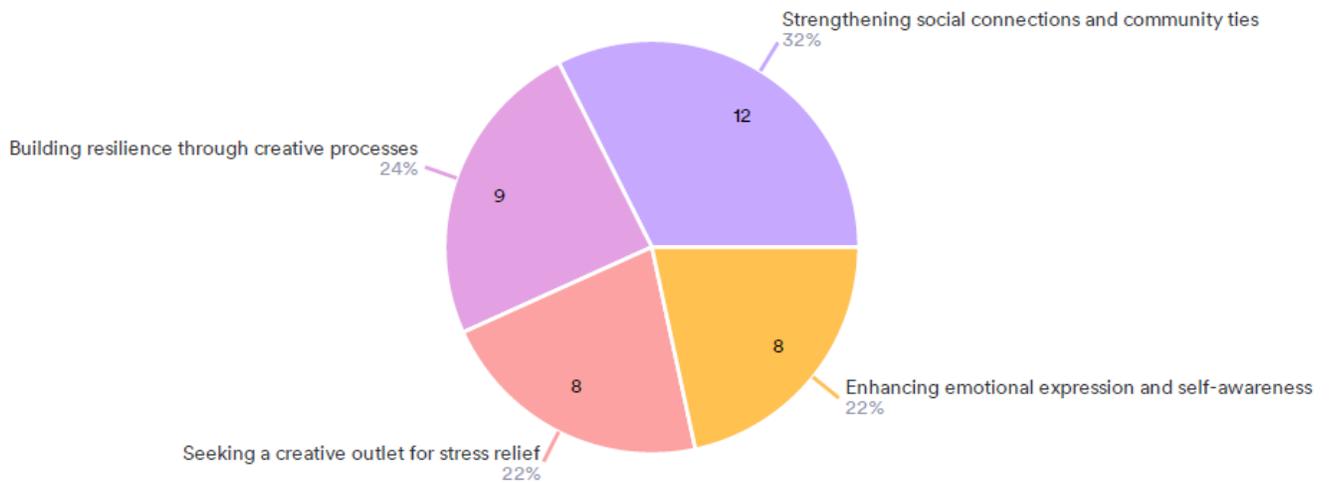
How has your level of engagement in the arts community impacted your personal well-being?

17 Responses



How does participating in these workshops align with your personal growth or well-being goals? (Select all that apply)

37 Responses- 1 Empty



Post Workshop Survey Findings

The Canvas Collective workshops sparked creativity and encouraged participants to experiment with new techniques. Many participants expressed that these sessions provided a fresh opportunity to explore artistic growth, allowing them to expand their skills and discover new mediums that they plan to integrate into their work. Structured, hands-on experiences inspired continued artistic exploration, with several participants noting that the creative momentum carried over even after the workshops concluded.

Beyond artistic development, the workshops fostered a strong sense of connection and community among participants. Many felt more engaged with fellow artists through shared conversations and collaborative art-making. Several respondents mentioned that their personal art practice is often solitary, making these workshops a refreshing way to interact with a supportive network. Themes of mutual encouragement, openness, and inclusivity emerged throughout the responses, with attendees pleasantly surprised by the warmth and willingness of the group to collaborate.

Participants also acknowledged challenges and opportunities for growth within the workshops. While learning new techniques was rewarding, some found certain mediums, such as printmaking, unexpectedly difficult. Despite these challenges, many embraced the learning process and appreciated the opportunity to refine their skills. A few artists felt constrained by limited time, suggesting that longer work sessions could allow for deeper engagement. Others shared that initial fears—such as judgment or lack of control over certain artistic processes—gradually transformed into valuable lessons in creative experimentation.

Unexpected discoveries played a significant role in the experience. Many artists were surprised by their own adaptability when working with unfamiliar materials, leading to shifts in their creative perspective. Several respondents highlighted how the workshops encouraged them to trust their intuition and process in new ways. One particularly inspiring moment came from a participant who found an abandoned torn canvas and transformed it into a collaborative piece, demonstrating the power of art as a tool for restoration and resilience.

Inclusivity and accessibility remained central to the Canvas Collective experience. Many participants emphasized the importance of an open, space where they felt safe to explore artistic expression. The opportunity to meet participants from diverse backgrounds and skill levels reinforced the project's impact, fostering meaningful interactions within the creative community. Looking ahead, responses suggest that future workshops could benefit from structured networking opportunities, extended sessions, and continued efforts to strengthen engagement.

Successfully Meeting Expectations

By comparing pre-workshop and post-workshop responses, we can see how participants' expectations evolved and whether the Canvas Collective project met their needs. Here are some key areas where the feedback aligns:

1. Artistic Growth & Experimentation

- **Pre-workshop:** Many participants hoped to explore new artistic techniques and materials, with strong interest in structured guidance and creative freedom.
- **Post-workshop:** Artists expressed enthusiasm for discovering new mediums, such as printmaking and collage, and shared how they plan to integrate these techniques into their personal practice.

2. Community & Connection

- **Pre-workshop:** A recurring theme was the desire for a judgment-free, inclusive space where participants could connect with others.
- **Post-workshop:** Many artists noted how welcoming, collaborative, and supportive the sessions were, with some pleasantly surprised by how quickly they bonded with fellow participants.

3. Art as Therapy & Emotional Expression

- **Pre-workshop:** Many saw art as a therapeutic tool, expressing interest in its ability to process emotions and relieve stress.
- **Post-workshop:** Artists confirmed that the workshops inspired creativity, reduced anxiety, and strengthened emotional resilience, reinforcing the transformative power of art.

4. Challenges & Growth Opportunities

- **Pre-workshop:** Some participants expressed concern about confidence, fear of criticism, or accessibility.
- **Post-workshop:** While a few found certain techniques difficult (like printmaking), many reported that trusting the process and embracing experimentation helped them overcome self-doubt.

5. Inclusivity & Accessibility

- **Pre-workshop:** Several artists highlighted the importance of supporting diverse voices and reducing barriers.
- **Post-workshop:** Responses showed appreciation for structured learning, networking opportunities, and the safe environment.

Overall, the post-workshop responses show that the project successfully met many of the expectations set in the pre-workshop surveys, from fostering creativity to building community. In fact, the post-workshop survey responses indicate that many participants felt a stronger sense of community and greater connection after engaging in the Canvas Collective project.

Stronger Sense of Belonging

- Several respondents explicitly stated that participating in the workshops made them feel more connected.
- Many artists mentioned the joy of meeting new people and strengthening existing friendships, reinforcing the idea that these sessions helped build relationships.

Collaborative Atmosphere

- Participants appreciated the chance to work alongside others, emphasizing that shared creative experiences made them feel part of a larger artistic network.
- Some described their experience as refreshing, particularly those who usually create art in isolation and welcomed the opportunity to engage with others.

Community Building Through Conversation

- Many respondents were pleasantly surprised by how quickly meaningful conversations developed.
- Artists expressed that discussions about creativity, inspiration, and artistic challenges fostered deeper connections.
- One participant even highlighted the importance of supportive dialogue as a key factor in feeling a sense of belonging.

Inclusivity & Safe Spaces

- The workshops provided an inclusive, judgment-free environment, which helped artists feel comfortable expressing themselves.
- Several respondents noted that meeting artists of different backgrounds and skill levels enriched their experience.

Key Take Aways from Canvas Collective

Overall, the data suggests that the workshops successfully fostered a strong sense of community, aligning with participants' pre-workshop expectations.

1. Increased Creativity and Artistic Growth: Before the workshops, many participants were seeking opportunities to expand their artistic practice and experiment with new techniques. The post-workshop feedback indicates that structured, hands-on sessions successfully sparked creativity, encouraged exploration, and introduced participants to mediums they plan to incorporate into their work.

2. Strengthened Sense of Community: Initially, many artists expressed a desire for deeper engagement with fellow creatives. After the workshops, responses highlight a strengthened

sense of connection, with participants feeling more supported, encouraged, and inspired by collective art-making. The workshops provided an inclusive space where collaboration and shared experiences fostered lasting relationships.

3. Overcoming Challenges and Embracing Growth: Pre-workshop concerns included fears about judgment, difficulty with certain artistic techniques, and limited time for deeper engagement. Post-workshop reflections suggest that, while some challenges remained—such as the complexity of certain mediums—many participants embraced these obstacles as valuable learning opportunities. Several artists reported newfound confidence in tackling unfamiliar materials and processes.

4. The Therapeutic Impact of Art: Many respondents entered the workshops with an interest in creative expression as a form of emotional and personal growth. After participating, artists frequently highlighted how the workshops provided a meaningful space for healing, self-discovery, and artistic intuition. Some even described how working in a collaborative environment reshaped their perspective on creativity, helping them trust their instincts.

5. The Importance of Inclusivity and Accessibility: Both pre- and post-survey results emphasize the value of a welcoming and judgment-free space. The workshops successfully provided an environment where individuals of varying skill levels and backgrounds felt comfortable exploring artistic expression. However, post-workshop feedback suggests that future sessions could further enhance accessibility through structured networking opportunities, extended work sessions, and continued efforts to foster engagement.

These findings underscore the positive impact of the Canvas Collective workshops, reinforcing their role in artistic development, community-building, and personal transformation.

Conclusion

The Canvas Collective has demonstrated the profound impact of art on community-building, emotional resilience, and personal growth. Through structured workshops, collaborative experiences, and inclusive spaces, participants embraced creativity as a means of connection, healing, and self-expression. The program successfully met its intended goals, fostering artistic exploration and strengthening social bonds among diverse groups of artists.

