

CREATIVE JOBS COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVE
THE STATE OF CREATIVE WORK

NOVEMBER 2025



**Creative Jobs Collective
Impact Initiative**

THE STATE OF CREATIVE WORK

PREFACE



The Creative Jobs Collective Impact Initiative (CJCII), launched by Arts for LA in 2021, is a cross-sectoral partnership working to unlock pathways to 10,000 quality jobs in the arts and culture sector by 2030. Rather than functioning as a direct employer, CJCII builds the conditions for sustainable job growth by expanding benefits and stability services, accelerating creative businesses, strengthening quality job placement, advancing upskilling and apprenticeships, and fostering mentorship networks. Through coordinated efforts, CJCII ensures that Los Angeles' creative economy delivers inclusive and lasting opportunities.

This work builds on previous CJCII research and reporting, including:

- Phase I and II CJCII Steering Committee work, including charter development, programmatic scoping, and logic model development;
- Creative Occupational Profile and Forecast Report (2023, updated 2024);
- World Cafés in 2023 and 2025.

THE STATE OF CREATIVE WORK

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THE STATE OF CREATIVE WORK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report presents findings from a comprehensive survey of 2,000 creative workers across the United States, revealing a workforce that defies simple categorization. Creative workers are highly educated, professionally experienced, and deeply committed to their craft—yet they navigate extraordinary economic complexity. The typical creative worker in our survey juggles nearly 15 freelance engagements per year, earns just over half their income from artistic work, and purchases their own health insurance independently. They work evenings and weekends, find opportunities through social media, and prioritize creative freedom even when it comes at significant financial cost.

Three overarching findings emerge from this research. First, the creative workforce operates through hybrid livelihood strategies, blending artistic practice with non-creative employment and multiple income streams. Second, this workforce prizes autonomy and flexibility but pays a steep price in precarity, lacking access to benefits, stable income, and traditional employment protections. Third, structural barriers—from competitive grant processes to network-dependent job access—systematically advantage those with existing resources while excluding emerging and marginalized workers.

These patterns demand policy responses that go beyond arts-specific interventions. Supporting creative workers requires cross-sectoral approaches that address the realities of contingent labor, portable benefits, equitable access to professional networks, and the economic insecurity that defines this vital sector of the American economy.

THE STATE OF CREATIVE WORK

INTRODUCTION



A thriving creative economy cannot be achieved without a robust creative workforce. Policies that promote access to education, training, and job placement can strengthen the creative workforce and create opportunities nationwide. Governments and philanthropic organizations should invest in the creative worker pipeline, put artists to work, and support sustained artistic careers. Yet policies are too often developed without sufficient understanding of how creative workers actually operate in the economy.

The creative workforce is not monolithic. It consists of people engaged in vastly different creative practices—from graphic designers to performance artists, from writers to craft producers—experiencing vastly different economic circumstances. Some maintain stable careers with institutional support; others piece together livelihoods from dozens of short-term gigs. Some earn primarily from their art; others rely heavily on non-creative work to subsidize their creative practice.

Despite this diversity, available data reveals critical needs that many creative workers share with each other and with other low-income and contingent workers. These include basic economic security, affordable communities, good working conditions and benefits, opportunities for skill development, and pathways for creative growth and wealth-building. Understanding these shared challenges—and the structural factors that create them—is essential for designing effective interventions.

This report draws on survey data collected in early 2025 to illuminate the professional practices, income patterns, and lived realities of artists and creative workers in the United States. It captures both the diversity of the workforce and the ways in which creative practice intersects with broader labor market dynamics, offering insights that can inform more responsive and equitable policy.

THE STATE OF CREATIVE WORK

METHODOLOGY



The survey was conducted between February 28, 2025, and March 21, 2025. Fielding was managed by CVL Economics in partnership with research collaborators. Respondents were recruited through targeted outreach to professional associations, creative worker networks, and digital advertising channels.

A total of 2,000 qualified respondents completed the survey, meeting all screening criteria. Field quotas were applied to ensure geographic and occupational diversity within the creative workforce. Interim progress was monitored against quotas, and data collection closed upon achieving target sample counts across major categories.

To be eligible, respondents were required to:

- Be age 18 or older
- Reside in the United States
- Work in or self-identify with an artistic or creative field (e.g., artist, designer, writer, performer, producer, educator)

Screening for creative workforce participation occurred through a series of qualifying questions. Respondents were first asked whether they work in an artistic or creative field; those who answered “no” were terminated from the survey. Qualified respondents then identified their professional role(s) from a list including artist, performer, writer/author, designer, technician, producer, educator, creative entrepreneur, administrator, and other categories. Multiple selections were permitted to capture the reality that many creative workers occupy several professional roles simultaneously.

Finally, respondents described the role of their creative practice in their professional lives. Eligible respondents indicated that creative practice functioned as their primary profession, a side income source, a hobby or passion project, or something they hoped to develop into a future career. Those who selected “I don't really consider myself as having a creative practice” were screened out.

This multi-step screening approach ensured that the sample captured individuals actively engaged in creative work across a spectrum of career stages and commitment levels, while excluding those with no connection to artistic or creative practice. This survey was designed to generate timely, representative insights into the professional practices and income patterns of artists and creative workers in the United States. The study captures both the diversity of the workforce and the ways in which creative practice intersects with broader labor market dynamics.

THE STATE OF CREATIVE WORK

SAMPLE OVERVIEW

The final sample reflects a broad cross-section of creative workers across regions, professions, and demographics. The sample reveals a workforce that is both diverse and highly educated, with 55 percent male and 45 percent female respondents, and meaningful representation from Black or African American (25 percent), Hispanic or Latino (18 percent), and Asian (7 percent) communities. Educational attainment is notably high, with more than half of respondents (55 percent) holding at least a bachelor's degree.

Geographically, respondents were distributed across the Midwest (16 percent), Northeast (17 percent), South (30 percent), and West (36 percent), including a dedicated California subsample of 500 workers. Occupationally, the sample spans multiple creative roles, with many respondents identifying across several categories: artists (39 percent), designers (35 percent), creative entrepreneurs (28 percent), writers/authors (20 percent), and performers (14 percent).

This diversity reflects the reality that creative work does not fit neatly into single job categories. Many individuals move fluidly between roles, combining performance with teaching, design with entrepreneurship, or writing with visual arts production.

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

FIGURE 1: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS
2025



Gender	n=2,000
Male	1,093
Female	890
Non-binary	8
Transgender	6
Other	0
Prefer not to say	2
Unsure	1

Creative Practice Multiple Responses	n=2,000
It's my primary profession	1,321
It's a side hustle to support my income	635
It's a hobby or passion project	563
It's something I hope to make a career in the future	320

Region	n=2,000
Midwest	324
Northeast	344
South	604
West	728

Ethnicity Multiple Responses	n=2,000
White	1,158
Hispanic or Latino	359
Black or African American	494
Asian	138
Native American or Alaska Native	58
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	16
Other	15
Prefer not to say	11

Generated income in 2024 through artistic or non-artistic work	n=1,944
Less than \$25,000	164
\$25,000 - \$49,999	330
\$50,000 - \$74,999	399
\$75,000 - \$99,999	355
\$100,000 - \$149,999	486
\$150,000 or more	198
Prefer not to answer	12

Work in an Artistic/Creative Field	n=2,000
Yes	2,000

Highest Level of Education	n=2,000
Less than High School	8
High School Graduate or Equivalent	256
Some college or Associate Degree	583
Bachelor's Degree	754
Master's Degree	345
Doctoral or Professional Degree	54

Profession Multiple Responses	n=2,000
Artist	779
Designer	709
Creative Entrepreneur	551
Writer/Author	398
Performer	280
Producer	244
Technician	226
Educator	191
Administrator	179
Other	144

US States	n=2,000
California	500
Other States	1,500

SECTION 1

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND THE BOUNDARIES OF CREATIVE WORK



KEY TAKEAWAY: While most creative workers center their professional identity in artistic practice, a significant minority occupy more ambiguous positions—balancing creative pursuits with other employment or regarding artistic work as secondary to another profession. This aligns with broader labor market research showing many Americans pursue ‘portfolio careers’ – combining multiple jobs or gigs by necessity. In creative fields especially, sustained practice often requires juggling freelance projects, day jobs, and gig work, a reality noted by scholars of cultural labor. This fluidity has critical implications for policy design.

Figure 2 illustrates that while creative work is a central professional identity for most respondents, for many others it functions as one of several income streams or occupational anchors. A majority (57 percent) strongly agree that their primary professional identity aligns with their creative or artistic practice. However, one-third simply “agree,” and 11 percent express neutrality or disagreement.

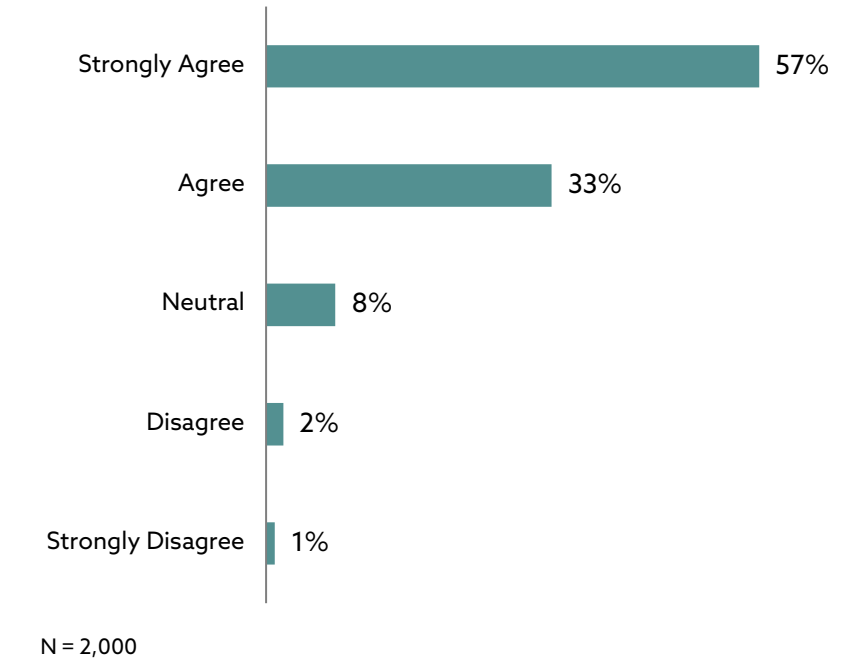
Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

This distribution reveals an important nuance: although most creative workers center their professional self-concept in their artistic work, a sizable share remain in more ambiguous positions. This aligns with longstanding findings from the field emphasizing the blurred boundaries between artistic work, secondary employment, and informal or project-based labor in creative economies.

POLICY IMPLICATION: Interventions that treat creative work as a singular, stable profession risk missing the hybrid, often precarious ways that workers navigate between creative practice, secondary jobs, and broader labor market participation. Effective support systems must account for this fluidity rather than assuming fixed occupational categories. Programs that rigidly measure success through traditional job placements risk overlooking other critical pathways to economic mobility—including entrepreneurship, freelance work, self-employment, and new business creation—and may ultimately set themselves up for failure by misaligning metrics with the actual working realities of creative professionals.

FIGURE 2: DEGREE OF CREATIVE IDENTITY

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “My primary professional identity aligns with my creative or artistic practice.”



SECTION 2

INCOME SOURCES AND THE PORTFOLIO LIVELIHOOD MODEL



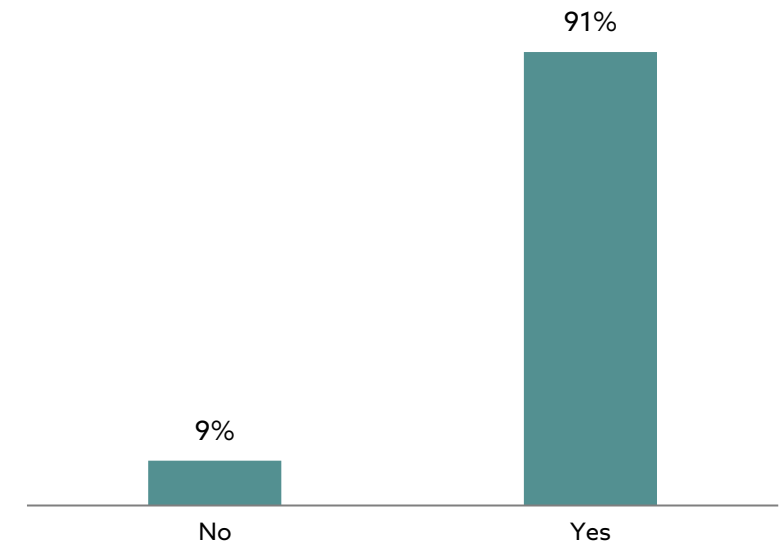
KEY TAKEAWAY: The creative workforce relies on a complex portfolio of income sources, blending artistic earnings with non-creative work and outside resources. This hybrid model reflects both the dynamism of creative labor markets and the precarity of artistic income alone.

Creative Income is Widespread but Diversified

The data in Figure 3 show that an overwhelming majority of surveyed creative workers—91 percent—generated income from artistic or creative work in 2024. This figure is particularly striking given that the sample includes individuals who characterized their creative practice in diverse ways during screening: as a primary profession, a side income source, a hobby or passion project, or an aspirational future career. Despite this range of professional orientations, nearly all respondents successfully monetized their creative work to some degree in 2024, indicating that creative practice functions as an active income-generating activity across the full spectrum of engagement levels.

FIGURE 3: CREATIVE INCOME

Did you generate income through artistic or creative work in 2024?



N = 2,000

SECTION 2

INCOME SOURCES AND THE PORTFOLIO LIVELIHOOD MODEL

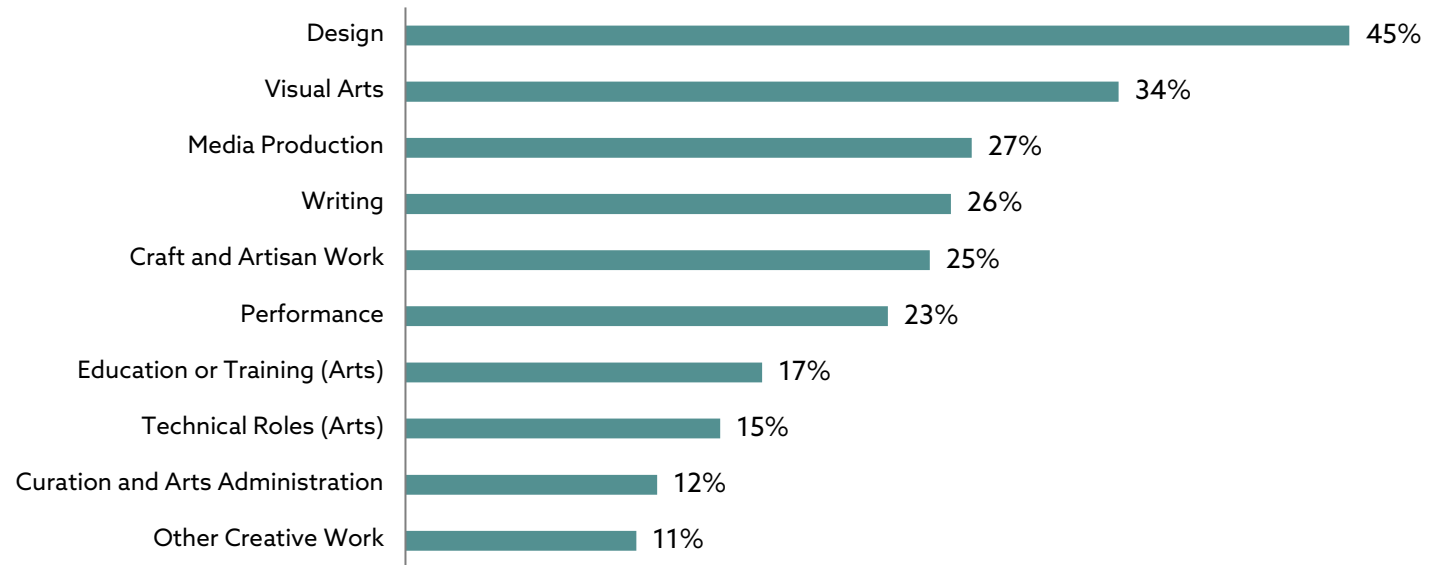


Among those generating income from creative work, the most common sources were design (45 percent), visual arts (34 percent), media production (27 percent), writing (26 percent), and craft or artisan work (25 percent). Other categories such as performance (23 percent), arts education and training (17 percent), technical roles (15 percent), and arts administration (12 percent) were also important, reflecting the heterogeneity of the creative economy.

The distribution suggests that income opportunities are not concentrated in a single domain but spread across a diverse range of practices, with many respondents likely drawing from multiple categories. The literature reinforces the significance of these patterns, emphasizing multiple job holding and "portfolio careers" as defining features of creative labor markets, with artists combining various forms of work to sustain livelihoods.

FIGURE 4: CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Which of the following best describes artistic or creative work that provided income in 2024?



n = 1,823

SECTION 2

INCOME SOURCES AND THE PORTFOLIO LIVELIHOOD MODEL



Non-Creative Work Provides Essential Income Stability

Figure 5 shows that nearly two-thirds of surveyed creative workers (65 percent) generated income through non-artistic, non-creative work in 2024. This finding highlights the extent to which many individuals in the creative workforce rely on earnings outside their artistic practice to sustain their livelihoods.

The types of non-creative work that contributed to income were wide-ranging. As shown in Figure 6, the most common were administrative or management roles (23 percent), sales and marketing (22 percent), and technical roles outside of the arts (22 percent). Substantial shares also reported income from skilled trades (20 percent), the service industry (17 percent), and non-arts education or training (14 percent), with smaller but notable participation in transportation, healthcare, and public service.

The distribution suggests that creative workers are not confined to arts-adjacent occupations but instead engage broadly across the economy, often in roles that provide stability, regular hours, or benefits not typically available in artistic employment.

Income Composition Reflects Hybrid Economic Strategies

On average, just over half of total income (51.7 percent) came from artistic or creative work such as design, performance, or production. The remaining income was split between non-artistic or non-creative work (32.7 percent), including administrative or service roles, and other sources (15.6 percent), such as real estate, family support, investments, or inheritances.

POLICY IMPLICATION: While artistic work accounts for the majority of income for the average creative worker, the reliance on non-creative and "other" sources reveals how precarious artistic earnings can be, often fluctuating with market demand or project-based cycles. The typical creative worker depends on a blended livelihood model—roughly half rooted in creative practice and half supported by non-creative work or outside resources. This finding reinforces the need for policies that strengthen income stability in the arts, such as portable benefits, expanded grant opportunities, and mechanisms to recognize and support the hybrid employment realities of creative professionals.

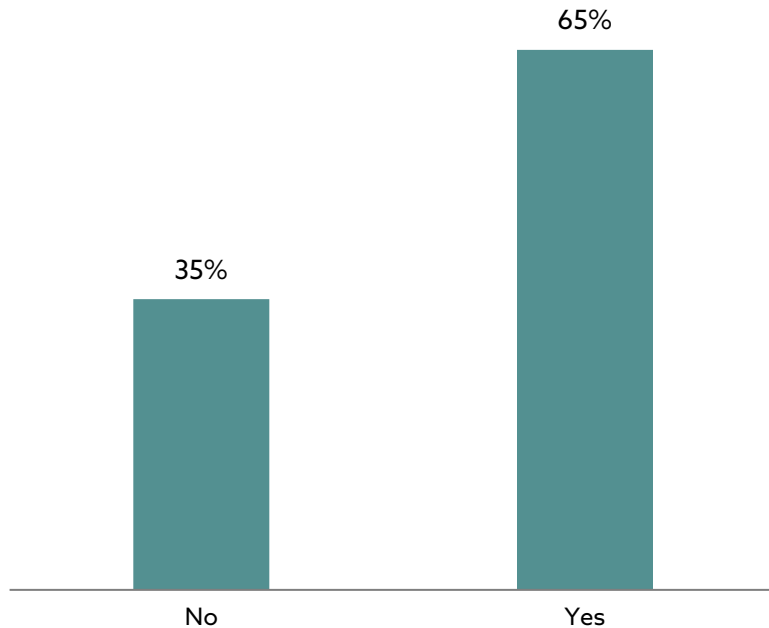
SECTION 2

INCOME SOURCES AND THE PORTFOLIO LIVELIHOOD MODEL



FIGURE 5: NON-CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Did you generate income through non-artistic, non-creative work in 2024?

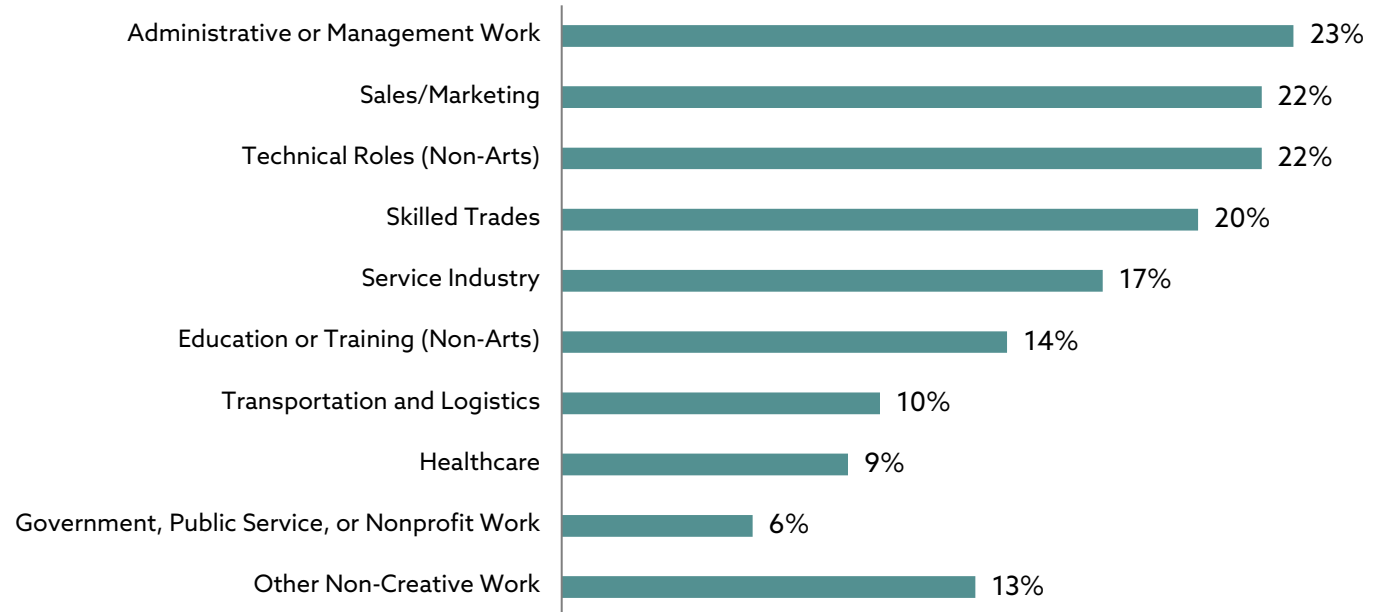


N = 2,000

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

FIGURE 6: NON-CREATIVE INCOME

Which of the following best describes non-artistic, non-creative work that provided income in 2024?



n = 1,306

SECTION 3

WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND THE FREELANCE-FIRST ECONOMY



KEY TAKEAWAY: Creative workers braid together livelihoods through fragmented, project-based arrangements. The typical respondent juggles nearly 15 freelance contracts per year while working full-time hours—a reality that produces both flexibility and profound economic insecurity. This high churn is corroborated by national freelance surveys, which show freelancers increasingly ‘piece together income in diverse ways’ across many projects. Traditional labor statistics, focused on one main job, often miss these multiple gigs, masking just how many contracts creative freelancers undertake.

Creative Work is Dominated by Freelancing

Figure 7 shows the varied forms through which creative workers generated artistic or creative income in 2024. The most common arrangement, reported by half of respondents (50 percent), was freelance or independent contractor work, typically tied to specific projects or engagements and often paid via IRS Form 1099. This reinforces a well-documented characteristic of creative labor markets: project-based contracting is a backbone of economic activity for artists, designers, performers, and other creative professionals.

Beyond contracting, 40 percent reported working in full-time payroll positions (W-2), while 32 percent regularly used digital platforms to find work, pointing to the increasing integration of platform-mediated gig opportunities into creative careers. Smaller but significant shares reported being business owners (22 percent), part-time payroll employees (17 percent), recipients of royalties or licensing income from past work (16 percent), or participants in grant-funded or commissioned projects such as fellowships (13 percent).

This distribution reflects both the diversity and precarity of work arrangements in the creative economy. As the National Academies underscores, independent and contingent work often falls outside the protections of standard employment, leaving workers without access to employer-provided benefits, social insurance, or collective bargaining rights.

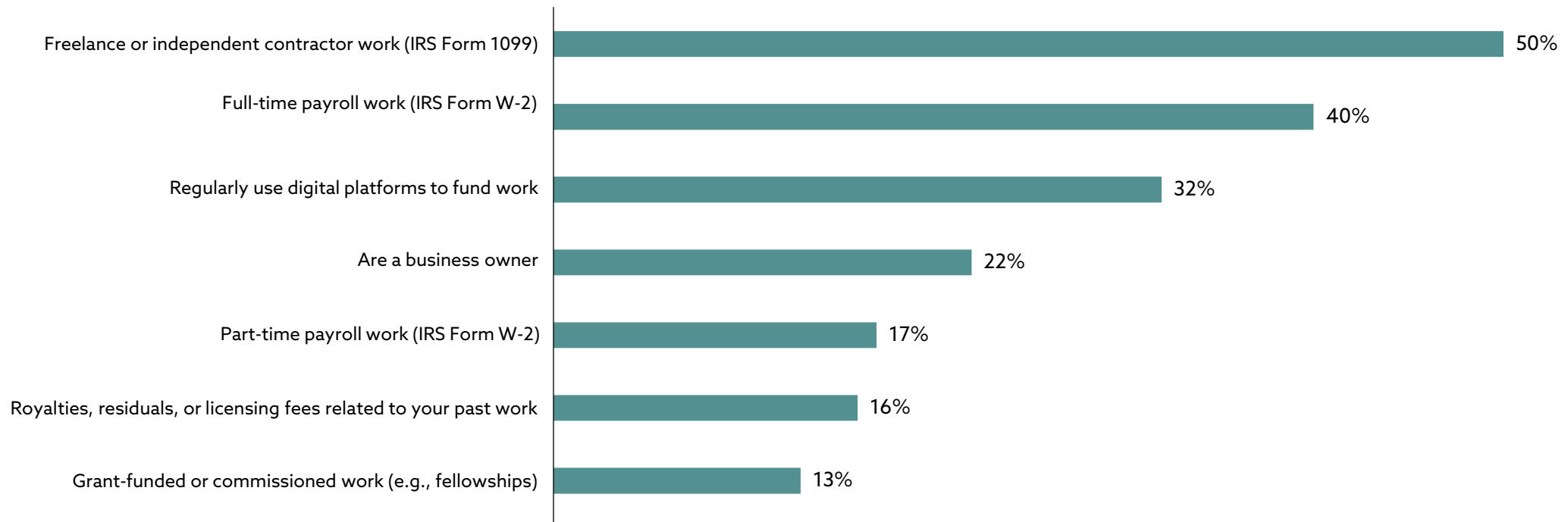
SECTION 3

WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND THE FREELANCE-FIRST ECONOMY



FIGURE 7: CREATIVE FORM OF WORK

Select from the following to describe the form of your income-generating creative work in 2024.



n = 1,823

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 3

WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND THE FREELANCE-FIRST ECONOMY

Non-Creative Work Leans Toward Traditional Employment

Figure 8 provides a parallel view of non-artistic, non-creative income sources. In contrast to creative work, the majority of respondents engaged in traditional payroll arrangements: 44 percent reported earning through full-time W-2 employment and 28 percent through part-time W-2 work. Yet non-standard arrangements were also significant: 27 percent reported freelance or independent contracting, 18 percent reported using digital platforms to secure paid tasks, and 18 percent identified as business owners.

The reliance on payroll employment in non-creative work suggests that many creative workers pursue such jobs to obtain stability, benefits, or predictable income that artistic work often cannot provide. This pattern aligns with existing literature emphasizing that artists disproportionately supplement creative income with more stable non-creative work.

The Duality of Creative Employment: The contrast between Figures 7 and 8 reinforces a defining feature of the creative workforce: creative income is rooted in freelance and project-based work, while non-creative income leans toward standard employment.

For policy and practice, this duality suggests that supporting creative workers cannot stop at arts-specific interventions alone—it requires cross-sectoral approaches that address the insecurities of freelance creative work while recognizing the stabilizing role of non-creative payroll employment.

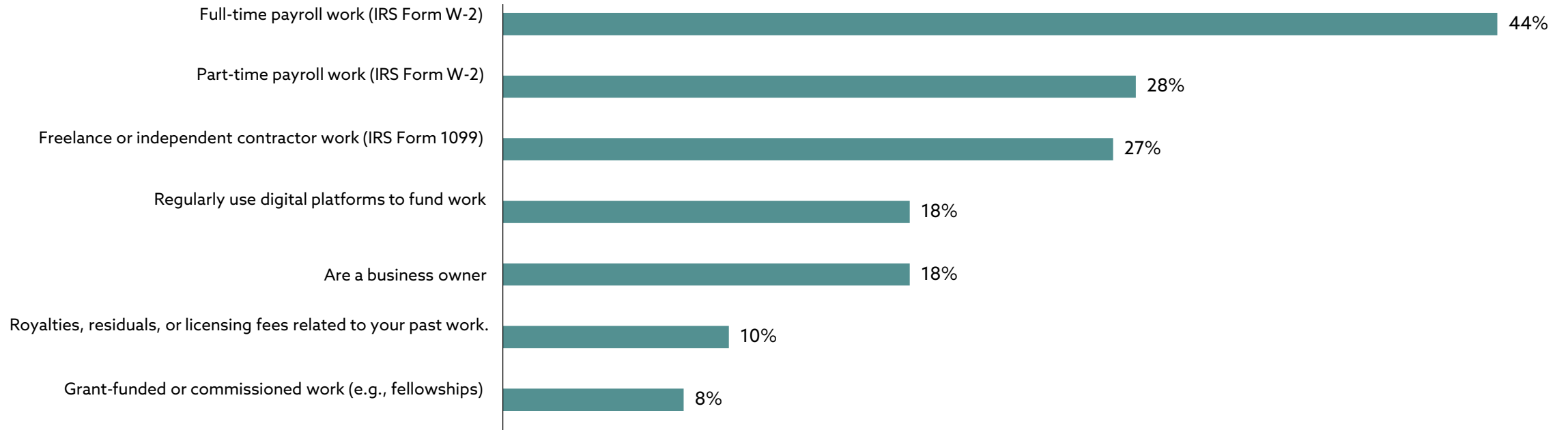
SECTION 3

WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND THE FREELANCE-FIRST ECONOMY



FIGURE 8: NON-CREATIVE FORM OF WORK

Select from the following to describe the form of your income-generating non-creative work in 2024.



n = 1,306

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 3

WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND THE FREELANCE-FIRST ECONOMY



The Hidden Volume of Freelance Churn

Figure 9 highlights the sheer frequency with which creative workers cycle through work arrangements over the course of a year. On average, respondents who generated income in 2024 reported participating in 14.9 freelance or independent contract jobs—a striking figure that underscores how central contingent work is to sustaining livelihoods in this sector. By contrast, the average number of unique full-time employers was just 1.0, while part-time employers averaged less than one (0.8). Other forms of engagement fell in between: respondents worked with 8.4 unique clients through their own enterprises, secured 7.8 gigs via digital platforms, received roughly one grant or commission, and cycled through fewer than one part-time employer on average.

This volume of freelance work is extraordinary and has been historically undercounted in labor statistics. Prior research from the National Academies notes that alternative work arrangements are particularly hard to capture in standard surveys because of their episodic and high-frequency nature. Recent literature on independent contractors likewise emphasizes that misclassification and undercounting of short-term work obscure the true scale of contingent labor, with many workers—especially in creative fields—appearing to hold just one job when, in reality, they juggle dozens across a year.

POLICY IMPLICATION: The volume of freelance work suggests that creative workers are deeply embedded in dynamic, project-based economies, often valued for flexibility and responsiveness. Yet such fragmentation poses challenges for income stability, access to benefits, and eligibility for programs tied to traditional employer-employee relationships. Policies that recognize and protect high-frequency contingent work—such as portable benefits tied to workers rather than employers, or income-smoothing mechanisms for project-based earners—are essential to supporting this workforce.

SECTION 3

WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND THE FREELANCE-FIRST ECONOMY



FIGURE 9: AVERAGE NUMBER OF INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES BY FORM OF WORK

How many times did each of the following occur in 2024?



n = 1,944

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

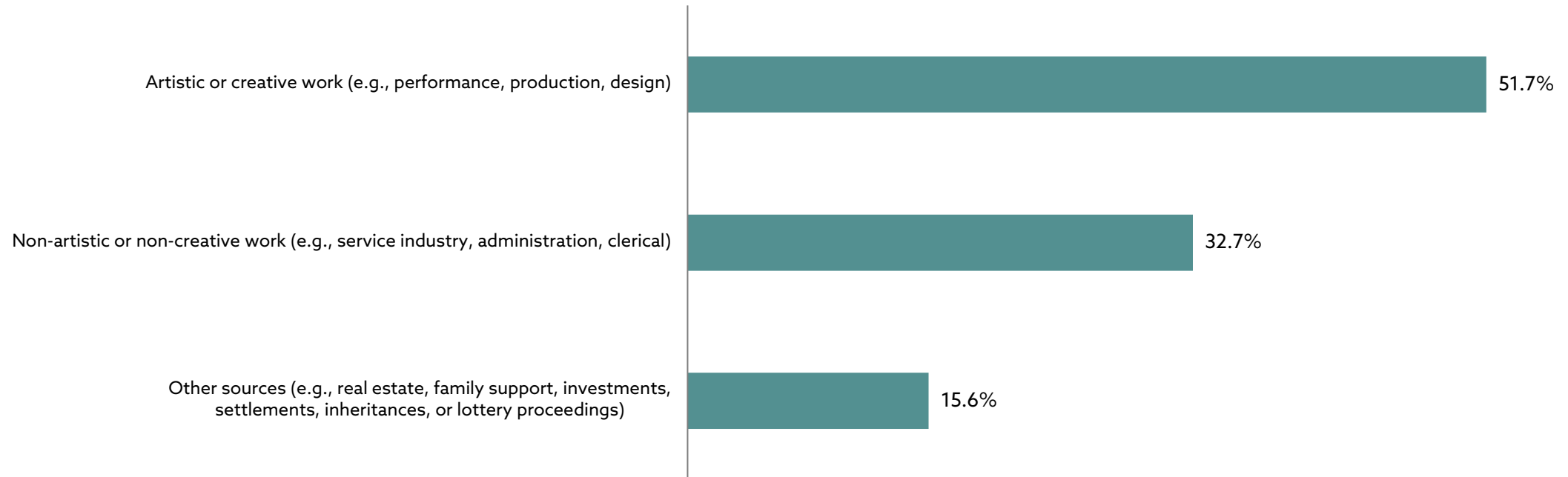
SECTION 3

WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND THE FREELANCE-FIRST ECONOMY



FIGURE 10: AVERAGE PERCENT OF TOTAL 2024 INCOME

Estimate the percentage of your total 2024 income from each of the following categories.



n = 1,944

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 4

HOURS, SCHEDULES, AND THE TIME STRUCTURE OF CREATIVE WORK



KEY TAKEAWAY: Creative workers maintain full-time workloads but on nontraditional schedules that extend into evenings, nights, and weekends. This temporal flexibility enables creative autonomy but also creates barriers to accessing services structured around standard work hours.

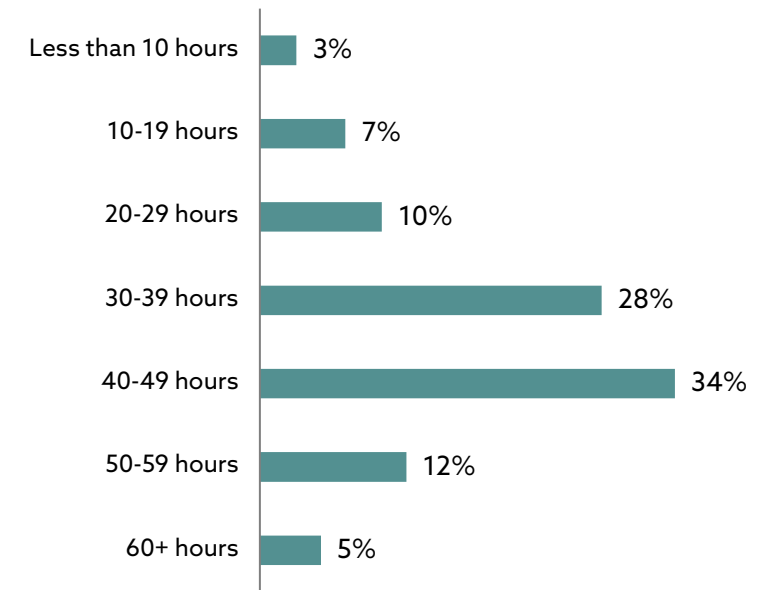
Figure 11 captures the workload intensity of creative workers by examining how many hours they typically spend across all paid engagements in a week. The largest share—34 percent—reported working 40–49 hours per week, aligning with the traditional "full-time" threshold. Another 28 percent worked 30–39 hours, while 12 percent worked 50–59 hours and 5 percent reported 60+ hours. At the lower end, 10 percent reported working 20–29 hours, 7 percent worked 10–19 hours, and just 3 percent fell below 10 hours per week.

On average, most creative workers appear to maintain a standard full-time workload. However, unlike in traditional jobs where such hours are typically spent in a single role with one employer, prior findings show that creative workers often piece together these hours across numerous freelance, contract, and part-time engagements.

The result is that "full-time" in the creative economy does not necessarily translate into stability, predictability, or benefits. The National Academies report stresses that multiple job holding and variable scheduling are key dimensions of modern labor markets, especially in contingent and independent contractor arrangements. The creative workforce is not underemployed in terms of hours; rather, the challenge lies in the quality and structure of that work. Many individuals put in full-time or more-than-full-time hours but do so across a mosaic of gigs, contracts, and side roles.

FIGURE 11: HOURS OF WORK

How many hours per week do you typically work across all your paid engagements?



n = 1,944

SECTION 4

HOURS, SCHEDULES, AND THE TIME STRUCTURE OF CREATIVE WORK



Work Happens Around the Clock

Figure 12 reveals when creative workers typically perform their paid engagements, highlighting the irregular and extended schedules that characterize this labor force. The vast majority reported working during the afternoon (81 percent) and morning (73 percent) hours, reflecting alignment with standard daytime schedules. However, large shares also reported working into the evening (63 percent), with a substantial proportion engaging in late-night work (32 percent) and even overnight work (10 percent). Early morning hours (34 percent) were less common but still notable.

This spread of work hours demonstrates how creative workers navigate a nontraditional temporal structure that often extends well beyond the conventional "9-to-5." Unconventional hours accommodate flexibility and creative autonomy but also contribute to precarity and difficulty accessing childcare, healthcare, or training programs that are structured around standard work schedules. This pattern reflects broader trends in contingent work: unpredictable hours are increasingly common and often result in conflicts with standard service hours (e.g., daycare, medical appointments). Creative workers gain flexibility in when they work, but at the cost of routine and stability – a trade-off noted in studies of gig economy labor.

POLICY IMPLICATION: These findings reinforce calls for policies that better recognize nonstandard working times. Creative workers do not just work differently in terms of job structure—they also work differently in time, with labor rhythms extending into evenings and nights. Support services, professional development programs, and even healthcare access must be designed with this temporal reality in mind.

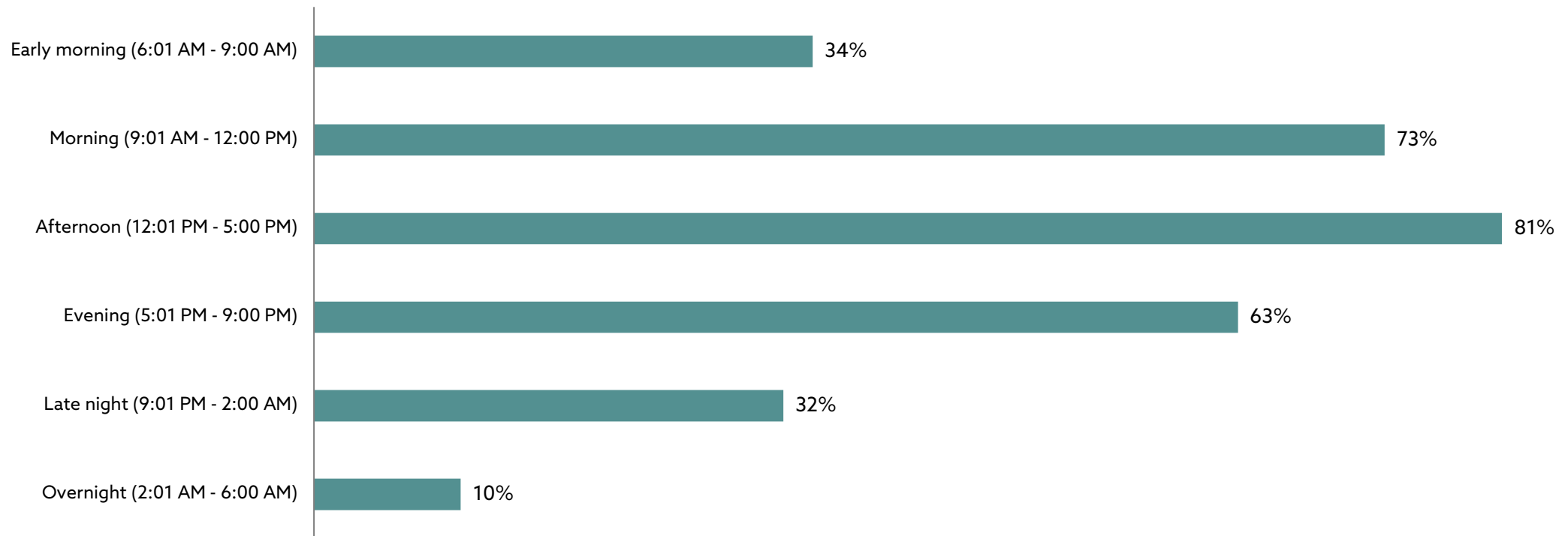
SECTION 4

HOURS, SCHEDULES, AND THE TIME STRUCTURE OF CREATIVE WORK



FIGURE 12: TIME OF WORK

At what times of day do you typically perform work across all your paid engagements?



n = 1,944

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 5

EXPERIENCE, STABILITY, AND THE CAREER ARC OF CREATIVE WORKERS



KEY TAKEAWAY: The creative workforce is mature and highly skilled, with most workers at mid- or senior-level experience. However, limited representation of early-career workers raises concerns about barriers to entry and generational renewal.

Figure 13 highlights the distribution of experience levels among creative workers in their primary field of practice. A plurality of respondents (40 percent) identified as senior-level, meaning they possess significant experience and a recognized skill set. Another 32 percent reported being mid-level, reflecting steady competence and ongoing participation in the field. At the higher end, 15 percent characterized themselves as expert or mastery level, suggesting a smaller group with extensive experience and strong reputational standing. Meanwhile, 9 percent identified as junior-level and 4 percent as entry-level, underscoring the relatively small share of newcomers in the sample.

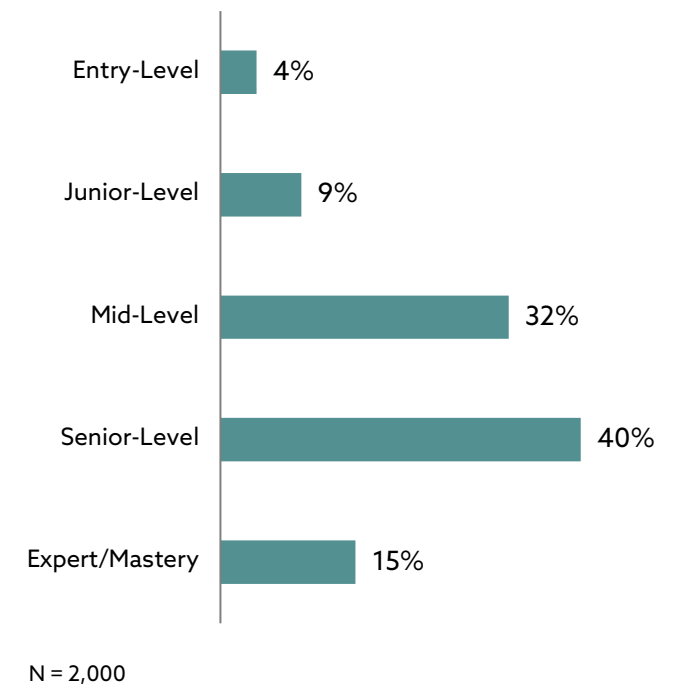
The prominence of senior- and mid-level workers suggests that many creative professionals have sustained careers over time, despite the well-documented precarity of artistic labor markets. This aligns with recent literature noting that while creative work is often unstable, many individuals persist in the field through hybrid employment strategies and long-term skill accumulation.

The relatively smaller share of entry-level participants may reflect barriers to entry—such as unpaid internships, high educational costs, and reliance on family support—that limit who can access creative careers in the first place. Research from the National Academies further emphasizes that such barriers disproportionately affect workers from underrepresented backgrounds, reducing diversity in higher-experience tiers.

POLICY IMPLICATION: The high proportion of experienced creative workers indicates that the sector holds substantial human capital and expertise, yet the limited representation of entry-level and junior workers raises concerns about generational renewal and equitable access to creative fields. Supporting early-career creative workers while sustaining the livelihoods of experienced practitioners will be critical for ensuring the resilience and inclusivity of the sector moving forward.

FIGURE 13: EXPERIENCE LEVEL

How would you rate your level of experience in your primary creative practice?



SECTION 5

EXPERIENCE, STABILITY, AND THE CAREER ARC OF CREATIVE WORKERS



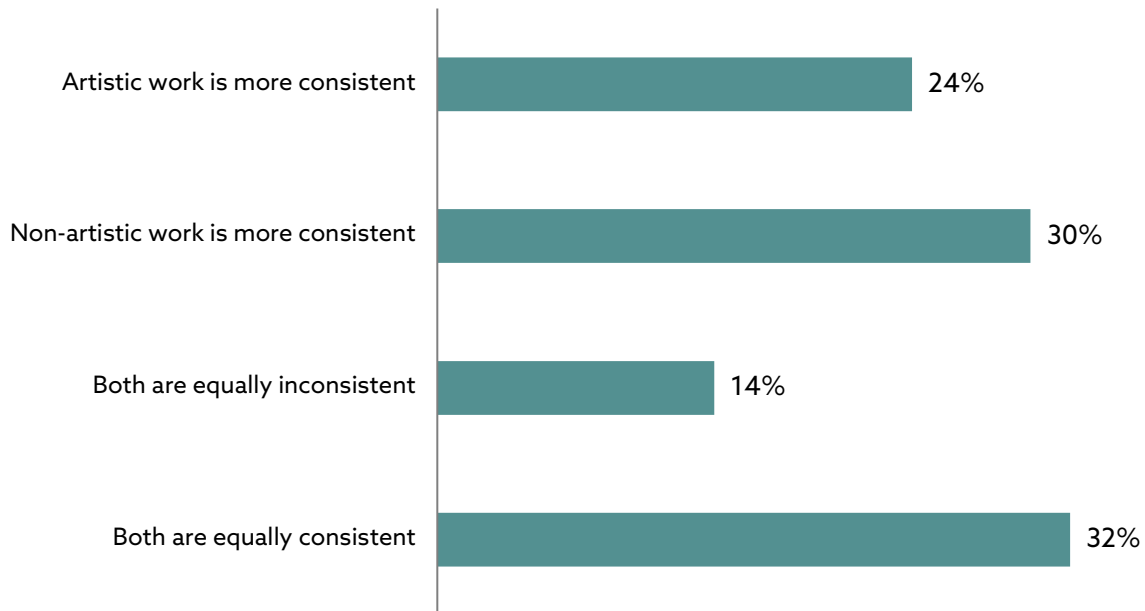
Income Stability Varies Widely

Figure 14 sheds light on the relative stability of different income sources for creative workers who earned from both artistic and non-artistic activities in 2024. The responses reflect a highly uneven picture: 30 percent reported that non-artistic work provided more consistent income, while 24 percent said artistic work was the more reliable stream. Another 32 percent viewed both streams as equally consistent, while 14 percent felt both were equally inconsistent.

The fact that nearly one-quarter of respondents found their artistic income to be more consistent than their non-artistic income challenges the stereotype that creative work is universally unstable. This may reflect the presence of established professionals with steady client bases, union protections, or residual/royalty income streams. However, for the majority, non-creative work still provides the more predictable foundation.

FIGURE 14: CONSISTENCY OF CREATIVE VS. NON-CREATIVE WORK

How consistent are your income streams from artistic work compared to non-artistic work?



n = 1,185

SECTION 6

FINDING WORK IN DECENTRALIZED MARKETS



KEY TAKEAWAY: Creative workers rely heavily on social media and personal networks to find opportunities, with digital platforms playing an increasingly central role. This dependence creates both opportunity and exclusion, favoring those with visibility and connections while leaving others marginalized. For instance, a study of New York’s cultural workforce found that opportunities often flow through alumni networks and exclusive circles, disadvantaging those without such connections.

Figure 15 highlights how creative workers locate opportunities for paid work, showing a strong reliance on informal and digital channels. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) reported that they primarily find creative or artistic work through social media, while 69 percent cited their personal networks. A smaller but still substantial share (60 percent) use digital platforms such as Upwork or Fiverr, while only 30 percent rely on agencies or recruiters. Just 3 percent reported using other methods.

This reliance on social and digital networks reflects the highly decentralized and often informal nature of creative labor markets. As documented in the literature, many creative occupations depend on word-of-mouth, referrals, and reputation-based hiring rather than standardized recruitment practices. The prominence of social media underscores how platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn have become critical infrastructure for creative workers, enabling them to showcase portfolios, build audiences, and directly connect with clients or employers.

However, this heavy dependence on social networks and platforms also raises concerns about precarity and access. The National Academies’ report on alternative work arrangements stresses that platform-based labor introduces challenges around fee transparency, algorithmic visibility, and downward pressure on wages. Reliance on personal networks can perpetuate inequities, as workers without access to well-connected social circles may struggle to secure the same opportunities.

However, this heavy dependence on social networks and platforms also raises concerns about precarity and access. The National Academies’ report on alternative work arrangements stresses that platform-based labor introduces challenges around fee transparency, algorithmic visibility, and downward pressure on wages. Reliance on personal networks can perpetuate inequities, as workers without access to well-connected social circles may struggle to secure the same opportunities.

POLICY IMPLICATION: While digital platforms and social media lower barriers to entry and create new pathways for visibility, they also shift risks onto workers, who must constantly market themselves, navigate unpredictable algorithms, and absorb transaction costs. Strengthening labor protections for platform-based workers, supporting community-based professional networks, and ensuring equitable access to digital tools are critical steps to ensure that opportunity in creative labor markets is not limited to those already advantaged by networks or visibility.

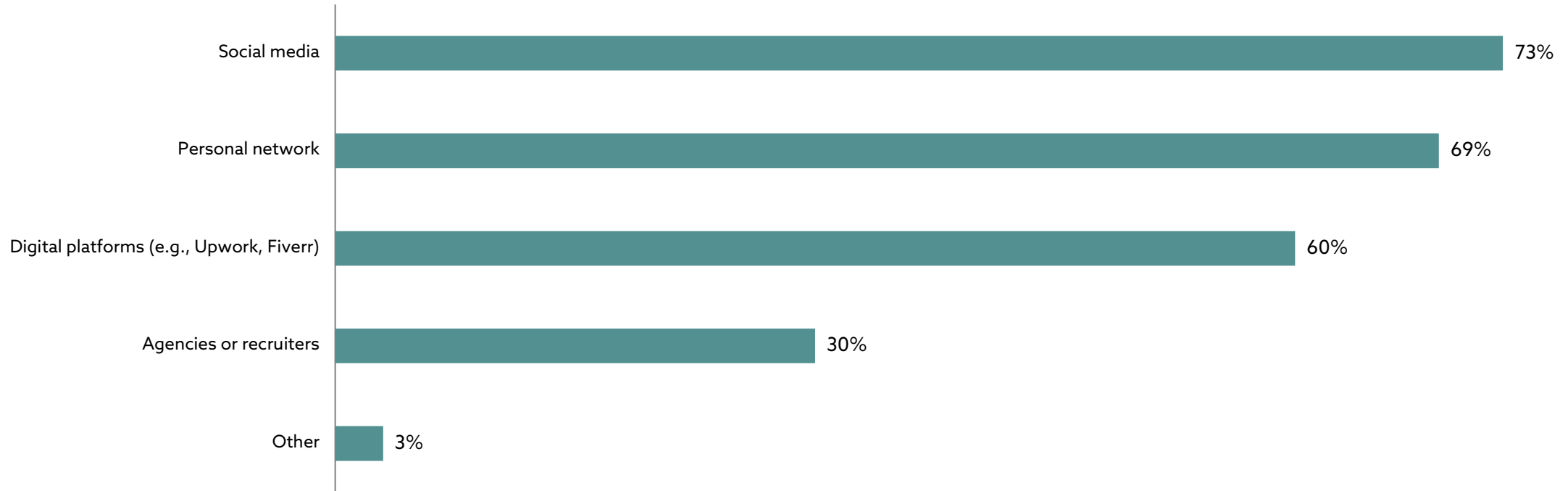
SECTION 6

FINDING WORK IN DECENTRALIZED MARKETS



FIGURE 15: WAYS OF FINDING CREATIVE WORK

How do you primarily find creative or artistic work or other income generating opportunities?



N = 2,000

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 6

FINDING WORK IN DECENTRALIZED MARKETS

What Matters When Choosing Work

Figure 16 explores the criteria that shape creative workers' decisions about whether to accept artistic or creative jobs. The results show that financial compensation dominates, with 80 percent of respondents rating it as either very or extremely important. Other highly ranked factors include alignment with artistic or creative goals (79 percent combined very/extremely important), opportunities for building a professional network (77 percent), and the potential for ongoing work (76 percent). Flexibility in schedule or location (75 percent) and opportunities for skill development or portfolio building (75 percent) also ranked nearly as high, reflecting the multidimensional ways creative workers weigh both financial and non-financial considerations. Comparatively fewer respondents placed strong emphasis on the client's profile or status (61 percent).

These findings underscore that compensation cannot be disentangled from artistic motivation. While creative workers often accept lower wages to pursue meaningful projects, the data show that most cannot afford to undervalue financial considerations. This reinforces arguments for policies that establish fair minimums for freelance pay, strengthen contract enforcement, and provide portable benefits.

At the same time, the importance placed on networking, ongoing work, and skill development highlights the role of professional associations, unions, and workforce programs in supporting career sustainability beyond immediate earnings. Creative workers approach job decisions as both artists and economic actors, weighing compensation against artistic goals and long-term career development.

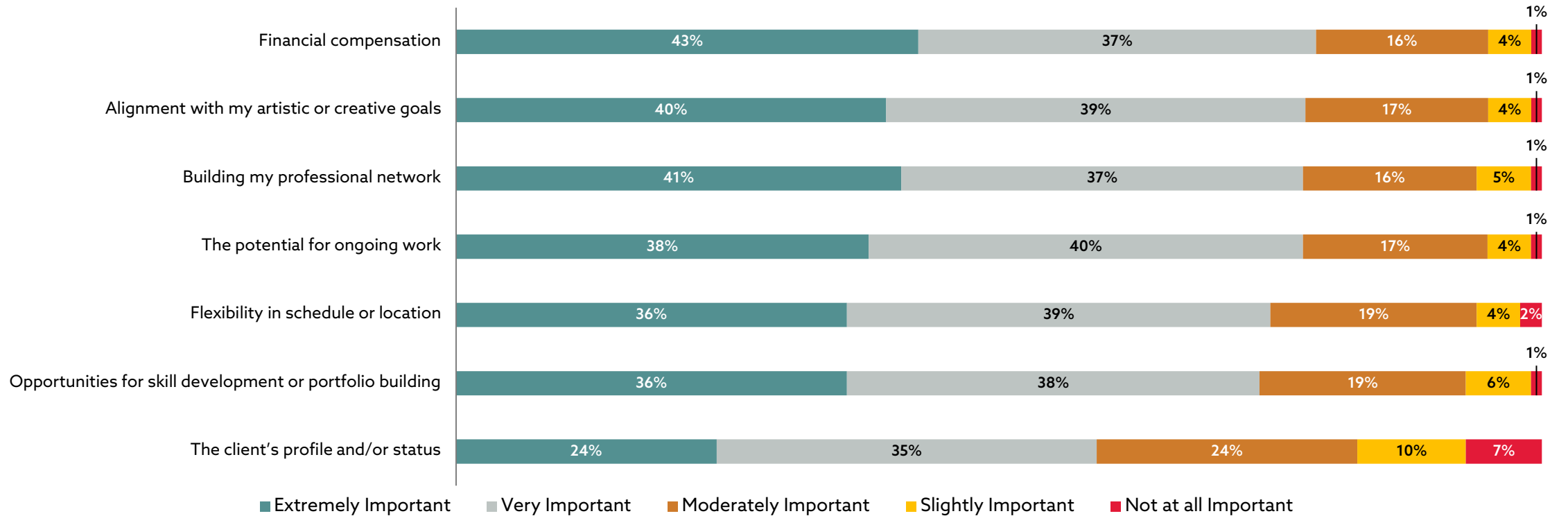
SECTION 6

FINDING WORK IN DECENTRALIZED MARKETS



FIGURE 16: REASONS FOR CHOOSING WORK

When deciding whether to take on a creative or artistic job, how important are the following factors to you?



N = 2,000

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 6

FINDING WORK IN DECENTRALIZED MARKETS



Why Workers Choose Freelance Arrangements

Figure 17 illustrates the motivations that drive creative workers to pursue non-payroll arrangements such as freelancing or independent contracting. The strongest motivator, reported by nearly all respondents, is creative freedom, with 91 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is central to their decision. Flexibility also ranks highly: 89 percent cited scheduling flexibility, and 86 percent valued the ability to work from varied locations. Other prominent factors include enjoyment of diverse project types (85 percent) and the belief that freelancing provides higher earning potential (81 percent). A somewhat smaller but still significant share (57 percent) indicated that they prefer independent work, while 40 percent said they are in non-payroll arrangements because they lack access to full-time employment opportunities.

These findings mirror long-standing themes in the literature on artistic labor markets, emphasizing that intrinsic motivations—particularly autonomy, self-expression, and project diversity—help explain why many artists accept financial precarity to remain in creative fields. This mirrors national trends: about 3 in 5 U.S. freelancers say they freelance by choice, not necessity – a share that has grown in recent years. Surveys of artists likewise find that an overwhelming majority value independence over traditional employment, even though many acknowledge the trade-offs in income stability. However, the fact that 40 percent cite lack of access to full-time employment reveals that freelancing is not always a choice. For many, it is the only available option.

POLICY IMPLICATION: Effective policy must preserve the valued aspects of freelance work—autonomy, flexibility, creative freedom—while mitigating its risks. Approaches such as portable benefits, fair contract standards, and inclusive workforce development programs can help ensure that creative workers are not forced to trade basic economic security for the independence they value.

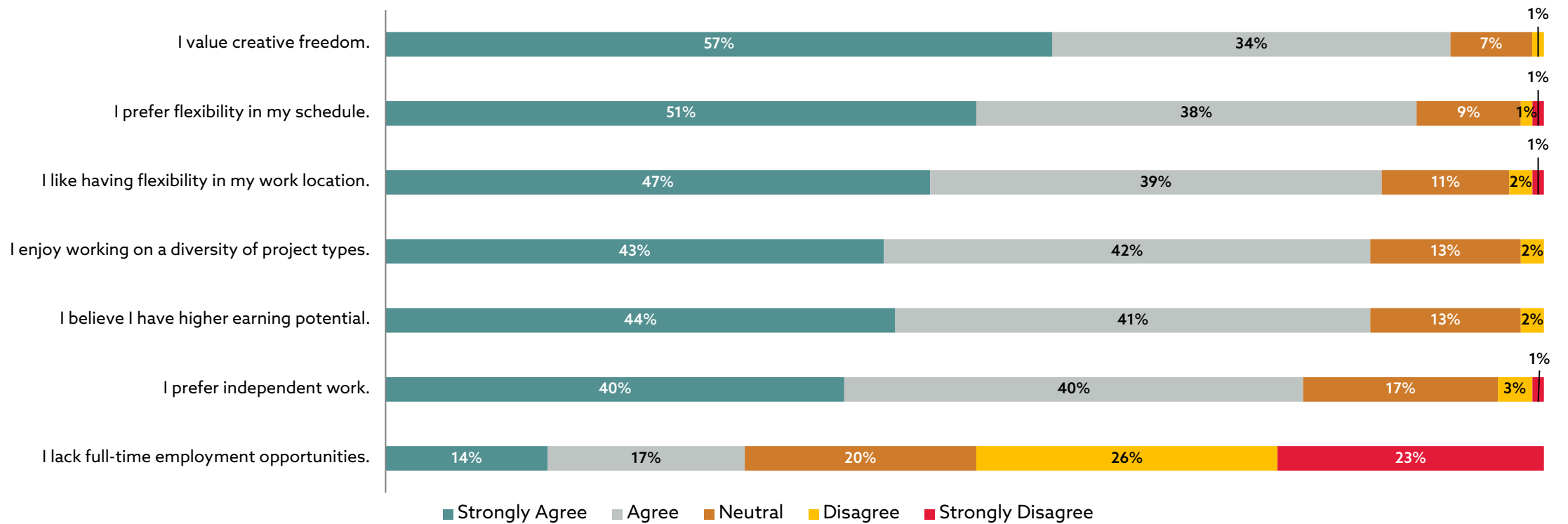
SECTION 6

FINDING WORK IN DECENTRALIZED MARKETS



FIGURE 17: REASONS FOR CHOOSING WORK

To what extent do the following factors motivate you to work in a non-payroll capacity in your creative or artistic field (i.e., as a freelancer or independent contractor)?



N = 2,000

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 7

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY STABILITY



KEY TAKEAWAY: While most creative workers report stable housing, significant shares face affordability challenges and lack access to artist-friendly spaces. Housing insecurity and high costs remain persistent barriers to sustainable creative practice.

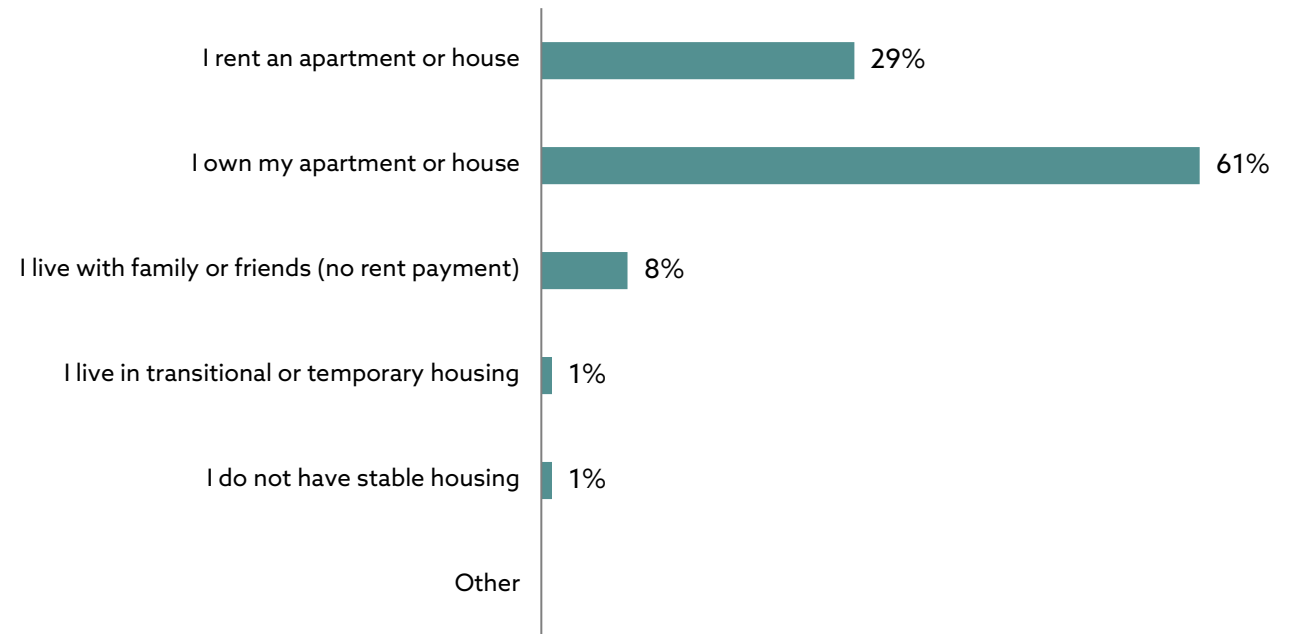
Figure 18 provides insight into the housing situations of creative workers. A majority of respondents (61 percent) reported owning their home, while nearly one-third (29 percent) rented an apartment or house. Smaller shares reflected less stable arrangements: 8 percent lived with family or friends without paying rent, and 1 percent each reported living in transitional or temporary housing or lacking stable housing altogether.

The high rate of homeownership may seem encouraging, but it must be contextualized within the broader challenges creative workers face. Many who own homes may have purchased before recent housing cost escalations, benefited from family wealth transfers, or live in lower-cost regions. Those renting or in unstable arrangements face mounting pressures.

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

FIGURE 18: HOUSING SITUATION

What is your current housing situation?



N = 2,000

SECTION 7

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY STABILITY



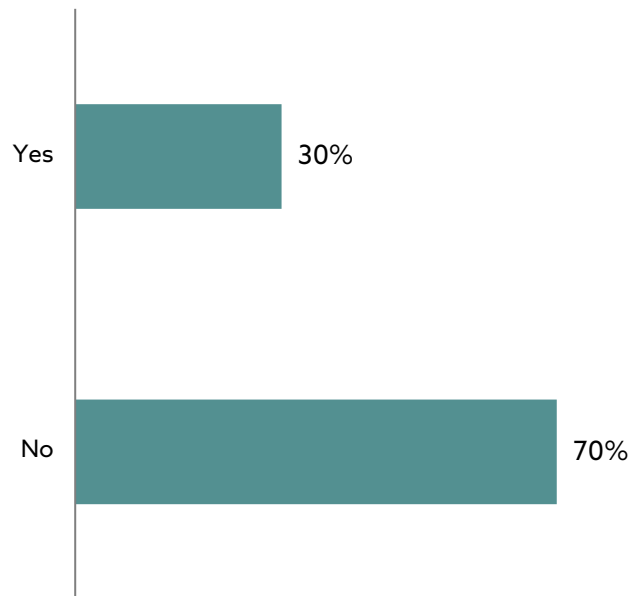
Many Share Housing Costs

Figure 19 examines how creative workers manage housing costs. Among respondents who rent or own their housing, the majority (70 percent) reported that they do not split housing expenses with others, while 30 percent indicated that they do share these costs. For those who split costs, Figure 20 shows that the most common arrangement is with a spouse or partner (69 percent), followed by family members (23 percent) and roommates (18 percent).

These findings illustrate the intersection between individual financial responsibility and household-level strategies for managing economic insecurity. While many creative workers navigate housing costs independently, those who share expenses—especially with spouses or family—benefit from financial pooling that helps mitigate the volatility of creative earnings.

FIGURE 19: SHARED HOUSING COSTS

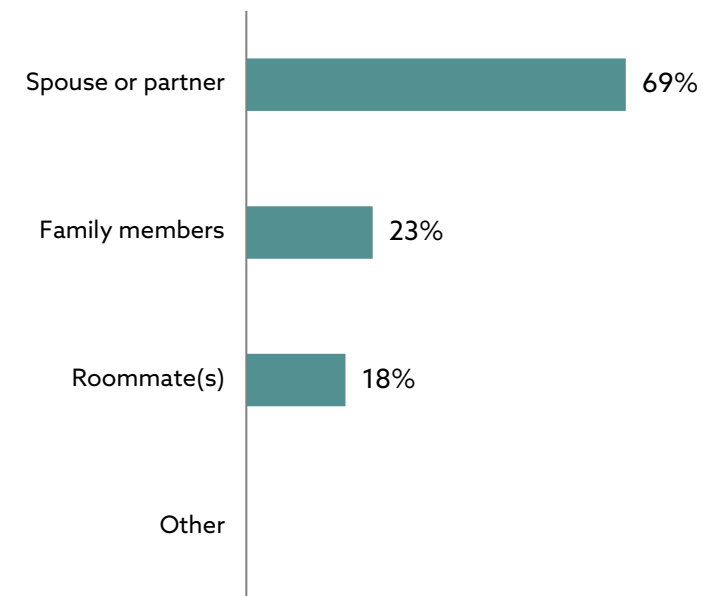
Do you split housing costs (e.g., rent, mortgage, utilities) with others?



n = 1,795

FIGURE 20: WHO COSTS ARE SHARED WITH

Whom do you split housing costs with?



n = 535

SECTION 7

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY STABILITY

Residential Stability Varies

Figure 21 shows that residential stability among creative workers varies considerably, though many maintain long-term housing arrangements. Nearly half of respondents (45 percent) reported living at their current residence for more than five years, while another 29 percent have lived in their homes for three to five years. Shorter-term residence was less common: 18 percent had lived in their current home for one to two years, 6 percent for six months to one year, and just 3 percent for less than six months.

Figure 22 highlights the reasons for mobility among those who did move in the past two years. The most common motivations included seeking a larger or better-quality living space (44 percent), gaining better access to work opportunities (37 percent), and reducing housing costs (29 percent). Smaller shares cited being closer to family and support networks (28 percent), household changes such as marriage or divorce (18 percent), or experiencing eviction or foreclosure (9 percent).

Research on artists' labor markets has shown that mobility often reflects a tension between seeking opportunity in creative hubs and the displacement pressures that accompany those same regions.

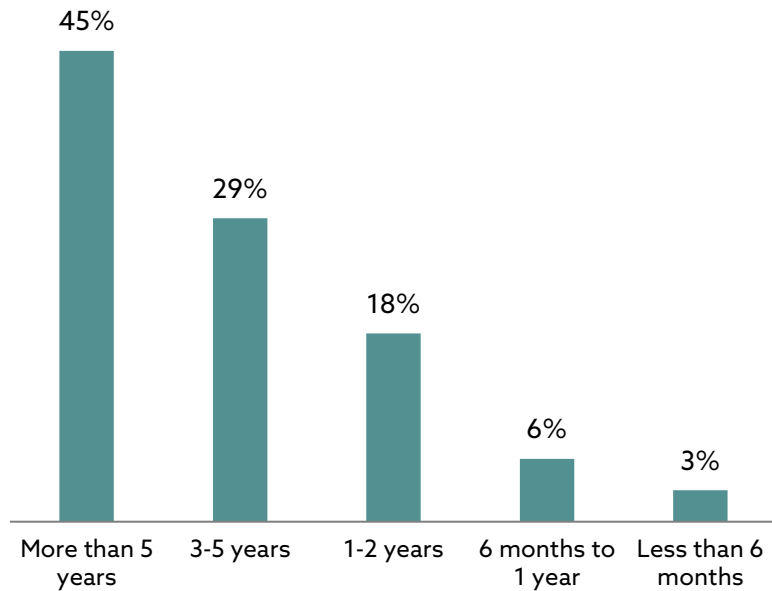
SECTION 7

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY STABILITY



FIGURE 21: HOUSING TENURE

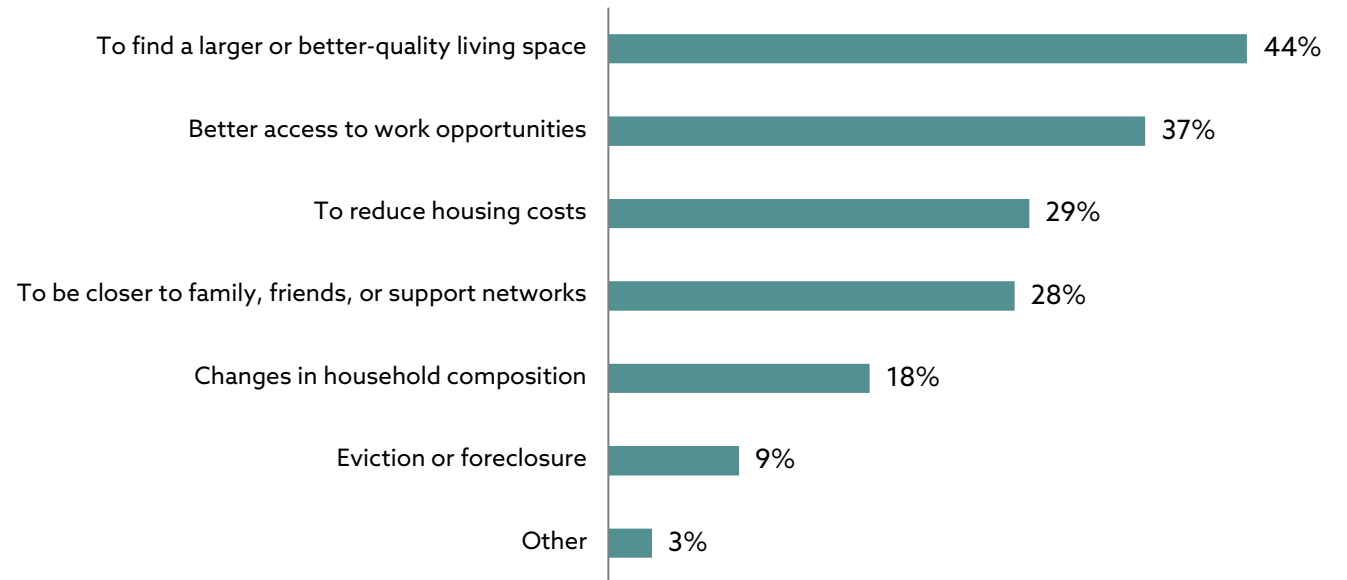
Do how long have you lived at your current residence?



N = 2,000

FIGURE 22: REASON FOR MOVE

What were the reasons for your move?



n = 527

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 7

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY STABILITY



Housing Adequacy and Challenges

Figure 23 shows that most creative workers feel relatively satisfied with their housing: 69 percent reported that their current housing situation meets their needs completely, while 27 percent said it only somewhat meets their needs, and 4 percent indicated it does not meet their needs at all. This headline number suggests a baseline of stability and adequacy for many in the creative workforce.

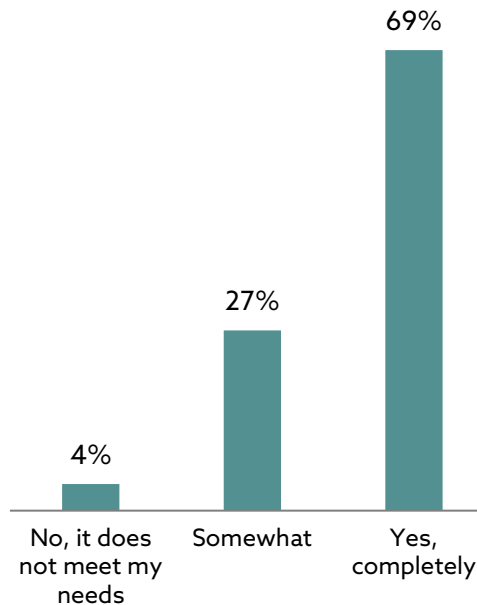
However, Figure 24 complicates this picture. Among those whose housing does not completely meet their needs, high housing costs were the most common challenge (51 percent), followed by a lack of affordable artist-friendly housing such as live/work spaces (32 percent), limited availability of housing (32 percent), and concerns about neighborhood amenities (28 percent). Other issues included inadequate housing quality (27 percent) and neighborhood safety (21 percent).

Policy Implication: While baseline housing stability appears relatively strong, affordability and access to artist-friendly spaces remain critical barriers. Policies supporting affordable live/work spaces, artist housing cooperatives, and zoning flexibility for creative uses could significantly improve conditions for creative workers navigating high-cost urban markets.

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

FIGURE 23: HOUSING NEEDS

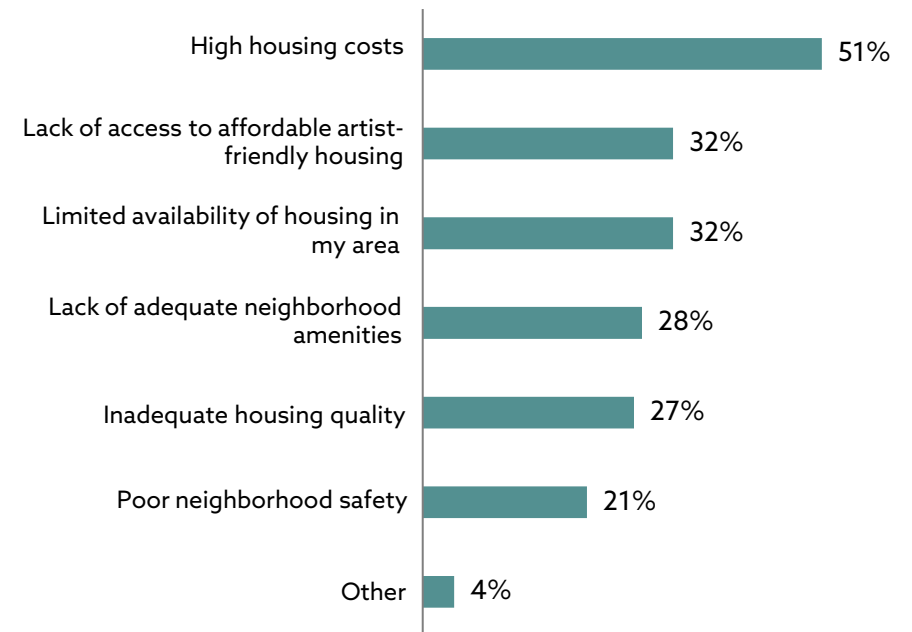
Do you feel your current housing situation meets your needs?



N = 2,000

FIGURE 24: HOUSING CHALLENGES

What challenges have you faced related to your current housing?



n = 629

SECTION 8

BENEFITS ACCESS AND ECONOMIC SECURITY



KEY TAKEAWAY: Most creative workers lack access to traditional employment benefits and must self-provision for health insurance, retirement, and paid leave. This burden of self-provisioning reflects the structural gaps in safety nets for contingent workers.

Figure 25 provides insight into the benefits landscape for creative workers, revealing limited access to traditional employment protections. While 79 percent of respondents reported having health insurance, access to other benefits was far lower: 53 percent had life insurance, 40 percent participated in a retirement plan, 38 percent had access to professional development opportunities, and 37 percent received paid time off. Only small shares reported tuition reimbursement or student debt relief (9 percent), while another 9 percent said they had none of the above.

Figure 26 illustrates how creative workers access benefits, revealing that nearly half must secure them independently rather than through an employer or institutional arrangement. Among respondents with access to one or more benefits, 49 percent reported purchasing them independently, while 38 percent obtained benefits through an employer for artistic or creative work, and 26 percent through an employer for non-artistic work. A smaller share relied on a spouse, partner, or family (16 percent), and only 9 percent accessed benefits through a union, with 4 percent citing other means.

This is consistent with the broader independent workforce: most lack employer-provided benefits. For example, only ~14% of professional actors earn enough to qualify for their union's health insurance, leaving the rest to self-provision or go without. Such gaps have spurred policy proposals for portable benefits that 'travel' with workers across gigs. States like Utah and Washington have begun allowing portable benefit accounts for gig workers.

These findings align with prior research showing that many creative workers rely on public programs (such as the Affordable Care Act marketplace or Medicaid), spousal coverage, or union plans rather than employer-sponsored insurance. The burden of self-provisioning for basic benefits such as health insurance, retirement savings, and paid leave is a defining feature of the creative workforce.

POLICY IMPLICATION: The lack of employer-provided benefits underscores the need for portable benefits systems that follow workers across multiple engagements rather than being tied to individual employers. Models such as benefits funds, multi-employer plans, or public options could provide critical safety nets for creative workers navigating contingent labor markets.

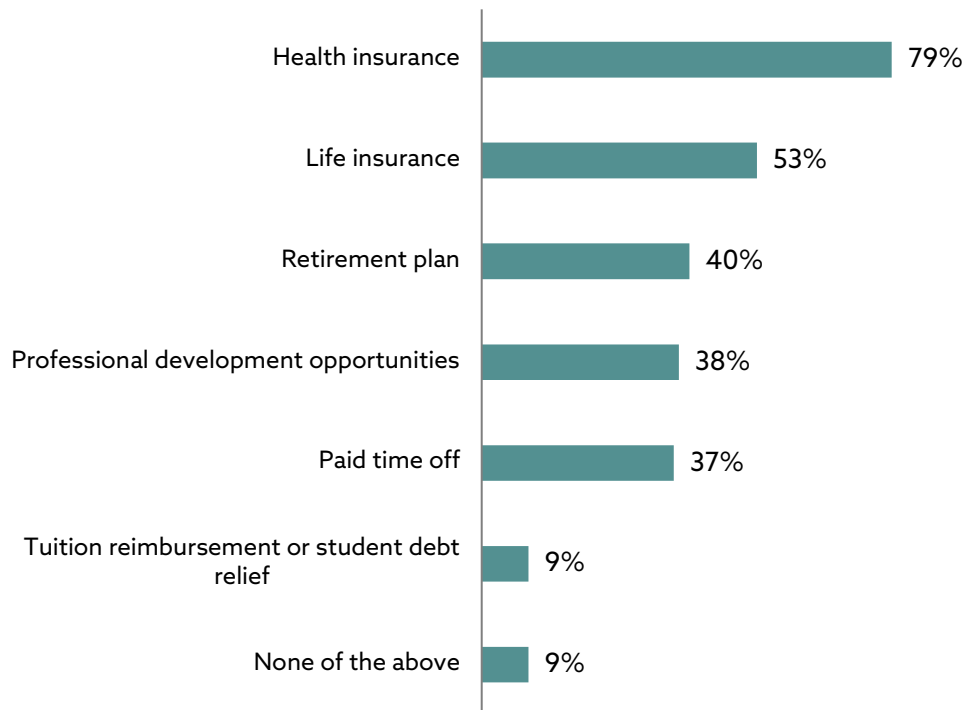
SECTION 8

BENEFITS ACCESS AND ECONOMIC SECURITY



FIGURE 25: BENEFITS

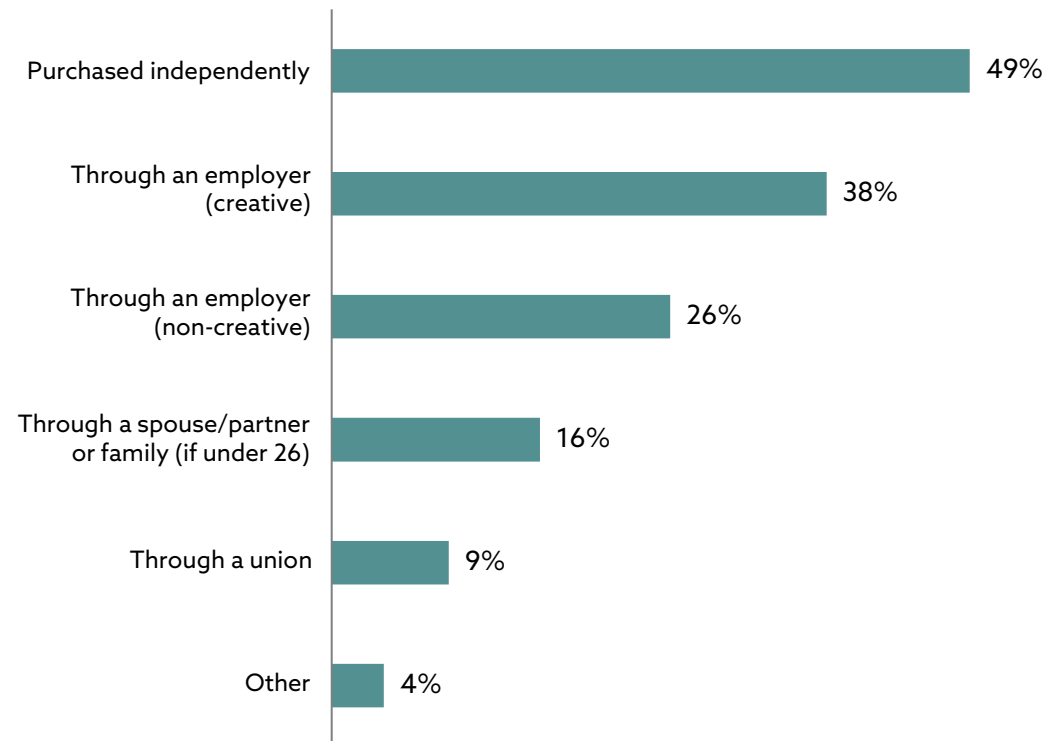
Do you have access to any of the following benefits?



N = 2,000

FIGURE 26: HOW BENEFITS ARE OBTAINED

How do you obtain these benefits?



n = 1,825

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 9

WORK-RELATED CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS



KEY TAKEAWAY: Creative workers face a constellation of challenges centered on income volatility, limited access to funding, and lack of professional support systems. Addressing these barriers requires both economic interventions and structural reforms to how opportunities are distributed.

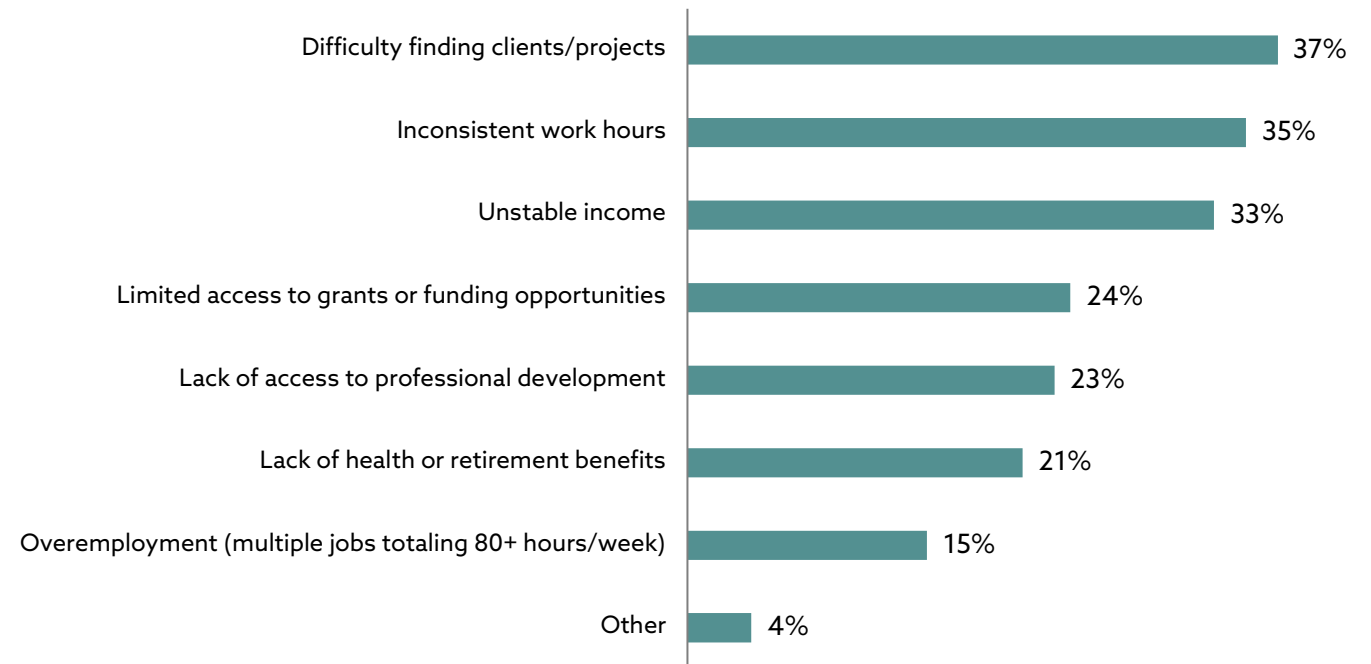
Figure 27 highlights the most pressing work-related challenges facing creative workers, revealing a labor market marked by volatility and limited institutional support. The most frequently cited difficulties were finding clients or projects (37 percent), inconsistent work hours (35 percent), and unstable income (33 percent). Other common issues included limited access to grants or funding opportunities (24 percent), lack of access to professional development (23 percent), and lack of health or retirement benefits (21 percent). A smaller share (15 percent) reported overemployment, defined as holding multiple jobs that together total 80 or more hours per week.

These findings paint a picture of a workforce struggling with fundamental economic insecurity. The top challenges—finding work, managing irregular hours, and coping with unstable income—are all symptoms of the same underlying condition: the absence of stable, long-term employment relationships that provide predictable earnings and built-in support systems.

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

FIGURE 27: WORK-RELATED CHALLENGES

What are the biggest work-related challenges you face?.



N = 2,000

SECTION 9

WORK-RELATED CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS



Grant Access is Hampered by Structural Barriers

Figure 28 examines the specific barriers creative workers face when trying to access grants or funding opportunities. Among those who reported limited access to such resources, the most common challenge was highly competitive application processes (50 percent), followed by lack of information about available grants or commissions (43 percent) and limited networking opportunities with funding organizations (42 percent). Additionally, complex or time-consuming application requirements (38 percent) and eligibility restrictions (38 percent) were cited frequently, while 26 percent pointed to inadequate grant-writing or application skills as a key obstacle.

These findings reveal that the problem of funding access is not simply a matter of scarcity but of structural barriers built into how grant systems operate. Creative workers often face high transaction costs when applying for grants—requiring unpaid labor, specialized administrative skills, and professional networks that many independent workers lack. Furthermore, funding programs frequently prioritize established organizations or mid-career professionals, excluding early-career artists, freelancers, and those working outside major cultural institutions.

POLICY IMPLICATION: Grant-making reforms that lower administrative barriers and increase equity in access are essential. Streamlined application processes, transparent eligibility criteria, and proactive outreach to underrepresented creative workers could significantly improve participation. Additionally, investments in grant-writing training, mentorship, and technical assistance could help address skill-related barriers. The current structure of grant funding often reproduces exclusion and precarity—expanding access to equitable, low-barrier funding opportunities is critical for ensuring that creative innovation is not limited to those with existing institutional privilege.

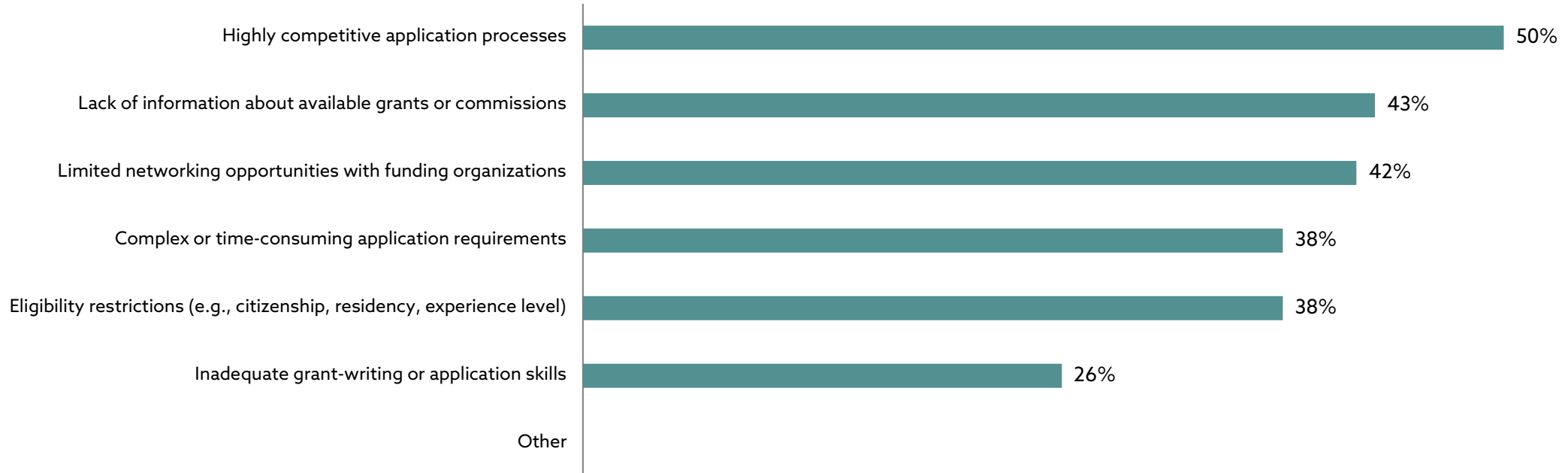
SECTION 9

WORK-RELATED CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS



FIGURE 28: BARRIERS TO FUNDING

What are the main obstacles you encounter when seeking grants or funding?



n = 476

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 10

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



KEY TAKEAWAY: Professional networks are critical infrastructure for creative careers, yet access is uneven. Social media has democratized some forms of connection, but significant gaps in mentorship, training, and peer support persist—especially for early-career and underrepresented workers.

Figure 29 captures how creative workers build and sustain their professional networks—one of the key determinants of opportunity and career progression in the creative economy. More than half of respondents (54 percent) reported having a strong professional network, while 40 percent said their networks were somewhat limited, and 6 percent indicated that they lack a professional network entirely.

Complementing this, Figure 30 shows that social media platforms are the dominant mode of connection, used by 74 percent of respondents. Other common methods include collaborations with peers (53 percent), networking events or conferences (49 percent), and local community groups or organizations (42 percent). Smaller shares engage through professional associations or unions (32 percent) or educational or training programs (29 percent). Only 2 percent said they do not actively connect with others in their field.

The reliance on social media reflects both democratization and inequality. On one hand, platforms enable broader access to professional visibility and connection-building, particularly for workers outside traditional institutional structures. On the other hand, algorithmic visibility, digital literacy, and existing follower bases create new barriers, often reproducing existing hierarchies of access and opportunity.

POLICY IMPLICATION: Strengthening inclusive networking infrastructure for creative workers is essential. Expanding access to mentorship programs, peer learning cohorts, and union or association membership can help level the playing field for those without existing networks. Creative work is sustained as much through social connection as through artistic output. Networks function as both a source of opportunity and a structural gatekeeper—offering support for some while leaving others on the margins of the creative economy.

SECTION 10

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



FIGURE 29: PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Do you feel you have a strong professional network to support your creative or artistic career progression?

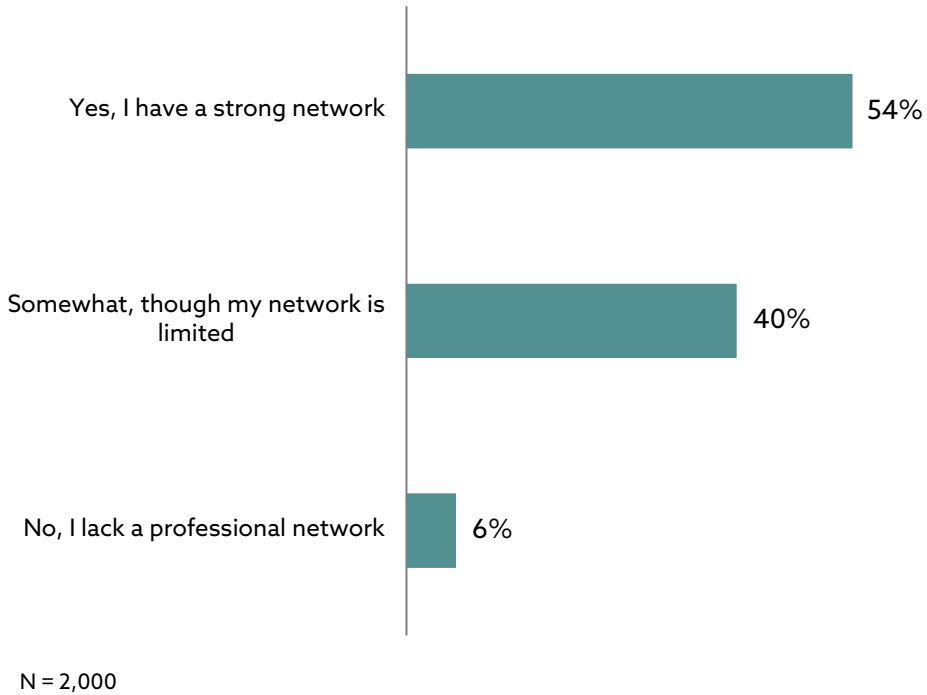
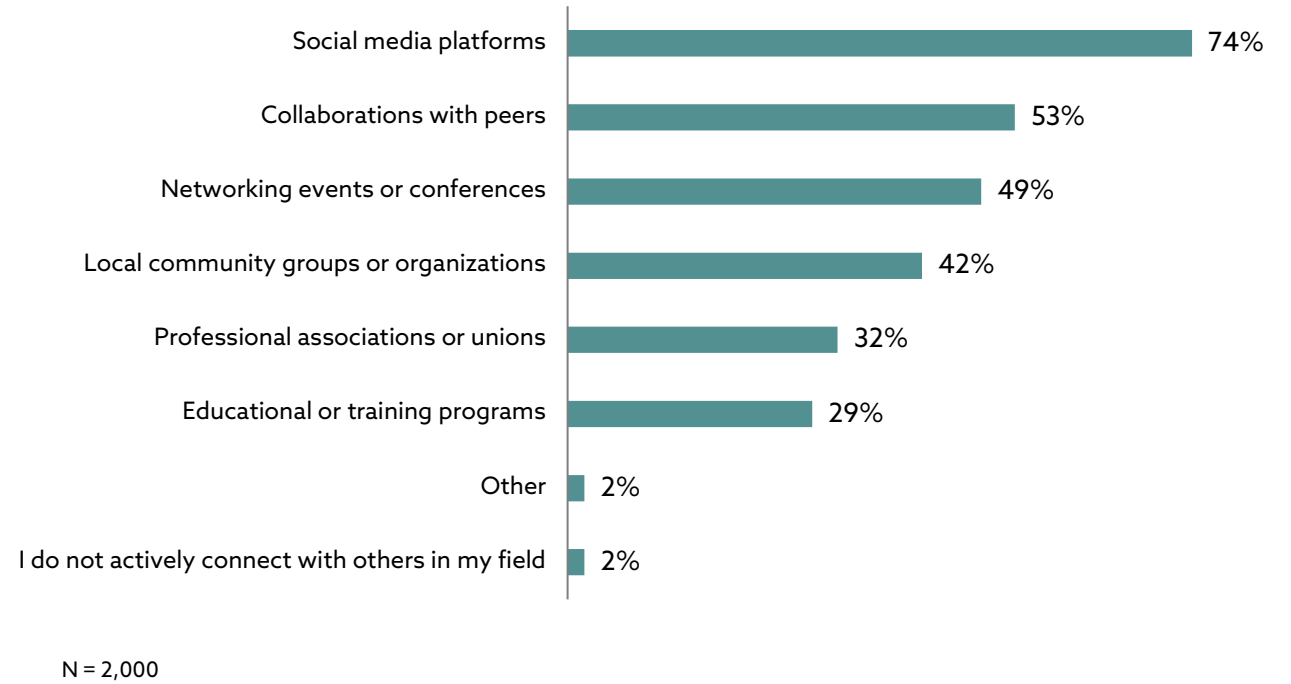


FIGURE 30: NETWORKING METHODS

How do you typically connect with others in your creative or artistic field?



Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 10

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



Professional Development is Valued but Unevenly Accessible

Figure 31 shows that a majority of creative workers actively pursue professional development, though opportunities are unevenly distributed. Over half (53 percent) reported attending workshops or training sessions in the past year, and 50 percent completed online courses or certifications. Participation dropped for more specialized or intensive forms of learning: 36 percent attended industry conferences or seminars, 27 percent engaged in mentorship programs, and 17 percent participated in apprenticeships. However, 15 percent reported not taking part in any professional development over the past year, suggesting that access gaps persist even among those working in skill-intensive creative fields.

Figure 32 explores the barriers that prevent creative workers from participating in professional development, revealing a mix of financial, structural, and temporal constraints. The most common obstacles were high cost (42 percent), limited local opportunities (38 percent), and lack of time (38 percent). Additional barriers included lack of awareness about available opportunities (31 percent) and no clear pathways for advancement (18 percent), while only 13 percent said they faced no significant barriers.

These findings underscore that access to skill development is not evenly distributed. Workers in high-cost regions, those juggling multiple jobs, and those outside established professional networks face compounding disadvantages in accessing training and career advancement opportunities.

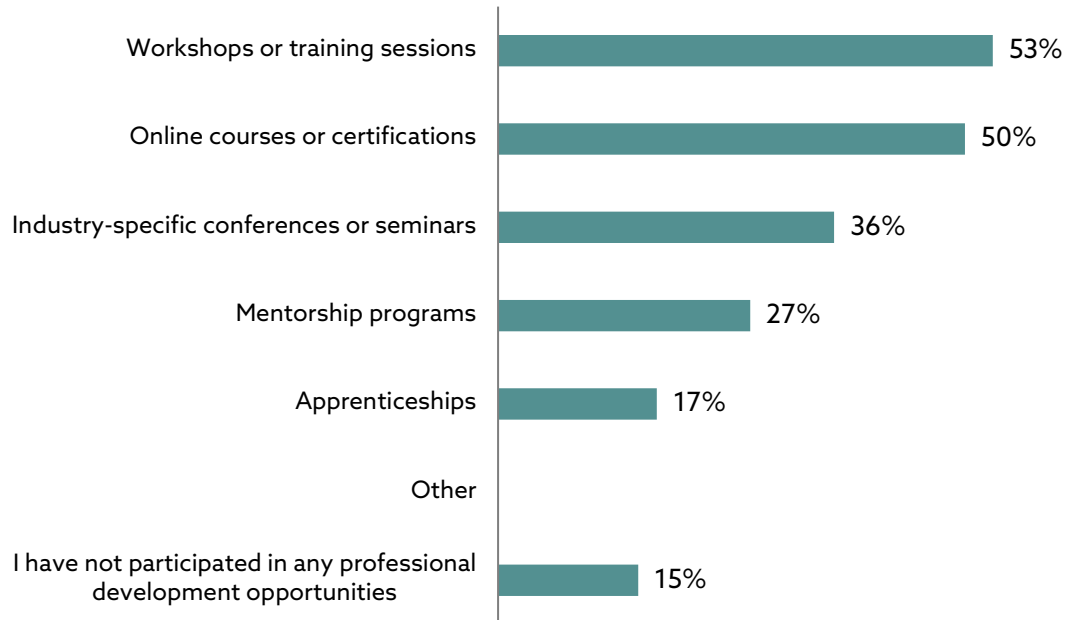
SECTION 10

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



FIGURE 31: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

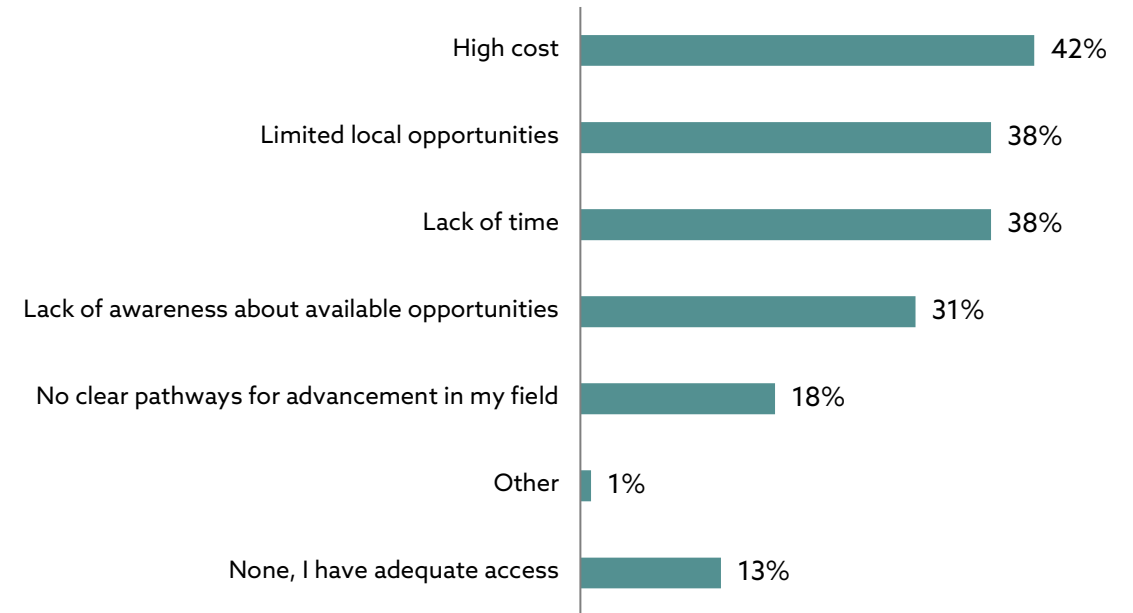
Have you participated in any of the following professional development opportunities in your creative or artistic field in the past year?



N = 2,000

FIGURE 32: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BARRIERS

What barriers prevent you from accessing professional development opportunities in your creative or artistic field?



N = 2,000

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

SECTION 10

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



Mentorship Needs Emphasize Networking and Business Skills

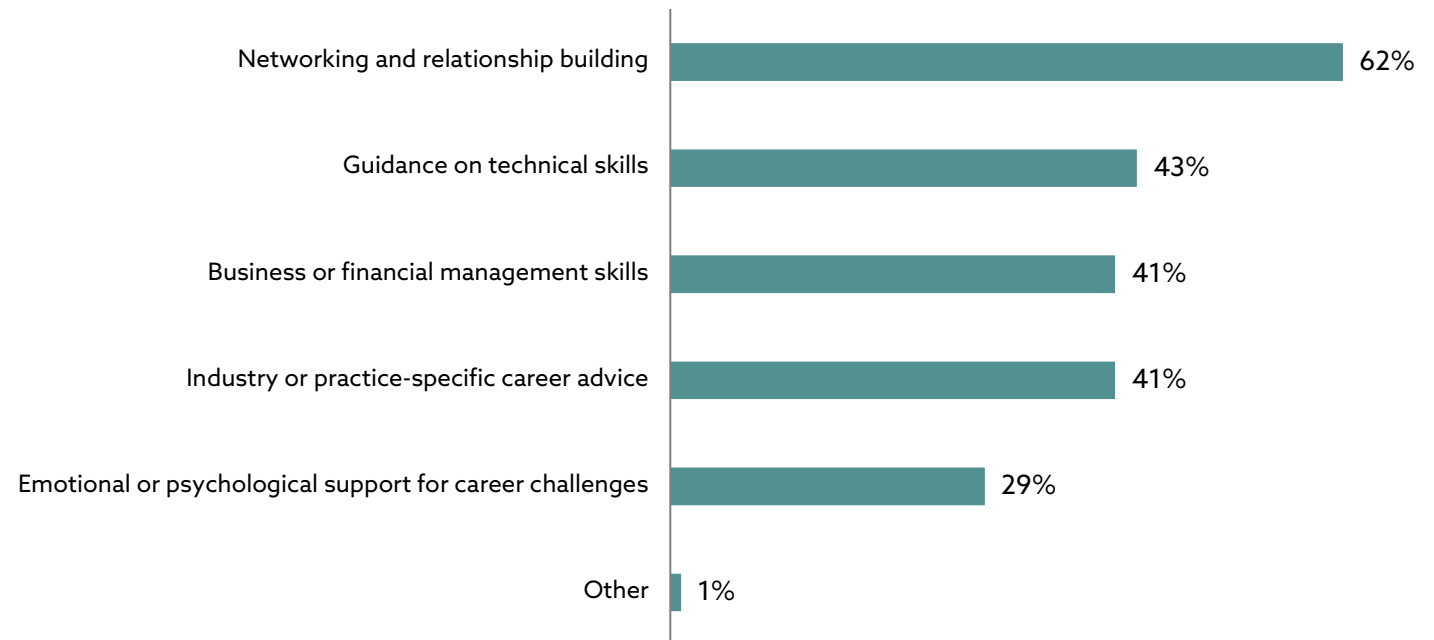
Figure 33 highlights the types of mentorship and apprenticeship support that creative workers find most valuable. Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) prioritized networking and relationship building, underscoring the central role of social capital in creative career advancement. Substantial shares also cited the need for guidance on technical skills (43 percent), business or financial management training (41 percent), and industry-specific career advice (41 percent). Meanwhile, 29 percent emphasized emotional or psychological support for navigating career challenges—an acknowledgment of the mental and emotional demands of creative work.

POLICY IMPLICATION: Formal mentorship programs, incubators, and peer learning networks could significantly strengthen the creative workforce. Targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups—such as emerging artists of color, women, and low-income creatives—could address persistent equity gaps in access to industry networks. Supporting these efforts through grants or public-private partnerships would not only bolster individual careers but also enhance the diversity and resilience of the creative sector overall.

Source: CVL Economics 2025 Creative Worker Survey.

FIGURE 32: MOST NEEDED PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

What type of mentorship or apprenticeship support would be most valuable to you in your creative or artistic field?



N = 2,000

CONCLUSION

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD



This survey reveals a creative workforce that is skilled, resilient, and deeply committed to their craft—yet operating within economic structures that systematically undervalue their labor and deny them basic security. The typical creative worker in this study juggles nearly 15 freelance contracts per year, earns just over half their income from artistic work, purchases their own health insurance, and relies on personal networks and social media to find opportunities. They work full-time hours but across fragmented engagements. They value creative freedom but pay for it with income volatility and lack of benefits.

Three cross-cutting themes emerge from this research, each with clear policy implications:

First, creative workers operate through hybrid livelihood strategies that blend artistic practice, non-creative employment, and multiple income streams. This complexity defies traditional policy categories. Interventions that treat creative work as a singular, stable profession—or that assume artists can be supported through arts-specific programs alone—will fail to reach the majority of this workforce. Effective policy must account for hybrid employment, recognize the stabilizing role of non-creative work, and design safety nets that work across sectors and job types.

Second, the creative workforce prizes autonomy and flexibility but pays a steep price in precarity. Ninety-one percent of respondents cited creative freedom as central to their decision to freelance, yet they face unstable income, inconsistent hours, and limited access to benefits. This is not a trade-off that workers should be forced to make. Policies such as portable benefits, fair pay standards for freelance work, income-smoothing mechanisms, and expanded union coverage could preserve the valued aspects of creative autonomy while mitigating economic insecurity.

Third, structural barriers systematically advantage those with existing resources while excluding emerging and marginalized workers. Access to grants, professional networks, and even job opportunities depends heavily on social capital, digital visibility, and administrative capacity—resources that are unevenly distributed. Competitive grant processes, opaque eligibility criteria, reliance on personal networks for hiring, and platform algorithms all create gatekeeping mechanisms that reproduce inequality. Addressing these barriers requires intentional equity-focused interventions: streamlined grant applications, proactive outreach to underrepresented workers, mentorship programs, and labor protections for platform-based work.

CONCLUSION

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD



Priorities for Supporting Creative Workers

Based on these findings, policymakers, funders, and workforce development organizations should consider the following priorities:

- Develop portable benefits systems that follow workers across multiple engagements, including health insurance, retirement savings, and paid leave that are not tied to individual employers.
- Establish fair pay standards and contract protections for freelance creative work, including minimum rates, timely payment requirements, and accessible dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Reform grant-making processes to lower administrative barriers, simplify applications, expand eligibility, and provide technical assistance for underrepresented applicants.
- Invest in inclusive networking and mentorship infrastructure, particularly for early-career workers, artists of color, women, and those outside major creative hubs.
- Support artist-friendly housing initiatives and workspaces, including affordable live/work spaces, artist housing cooperatives, and zoning flexibility for creative uses.
- Recognize the temporal realities of creative work by designing support services, training programs, and public benefits systems that accommodate nonstandard schedules.
- Strengthen data collection and labor protections for platform-based creative work, ensuring transparency around fees, algorithmic visibility, and wage standards.
- A thriving creative economy requires a supported creative workforce. Survey respondents identified needs common to workers across sectors: economic security, benefits access, and professional support systems. Meeting this need requires moving beyond rhetoric about the value of the arts and implementing concrete, cross-sectoral policies that recognize the realities of creative labor in the 21st century economy.

CONCLUSION

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD



Charting the Path Forward: A Two-Sided Strategy for Creative Workforce Development

The next phases of the CJCII must address both sides of the labor market equation simultaneously: strengthening demand by ensuring continued growth in Los Angeles County's creative economy, while expanding supply-side pathways that enable new and diverse entry-level creatives to access the opportunities generated by a robust and expanding sector. Neither strategy can succeed in isolation—workforce development programs falter without jobs to place candidates into, while industry growth initiatives struggle without talent pipelines to fuel expansion.

Confronting the Demand Crisis

The greater Los Angeles region confronts formidable economic headwinds that threaten the creative sector's foundation. CVL Economics forecasts anemic employment growth of just 0.2% in 2026 and 0.1% in 2027 across the metro area—figures that reflect deeper structural challenges within the southern Californian economy. Film and television production, theater, performing arts, and live music venues face acute strain, with closures of ecosystem players—from independent production companies to historic performance spaces—now occurring with alarming regularity.

The tourism downturn compounds these pressures. International visitor arrivals fell approximately 8% in summer 2025, undermining demand for the locally serving arts and cultural activities that employ thousands of creatives in hospitality-adjacent roles. This decline reverberates through the ecosystem: fewer tourists mean reduced ticket sales, restaurant performances, hotel entertainment bookings, and cultural institution attendance.

These realities demand that CJCII program leadership expand beyond traditional workforce development advocacy. The initiative must build coalitions with cross-sector organizations—including the Independent Hospitality Association, National Independent Venues Association, and regional tourism boards—to advance policy interventions that promote ecosystem recovery and sustainable growth. Without addressing the demand crisis, even the most sophisticated talent development programs will struggle to generate meaningful employment outcomes.

The Supply-Side Imperative: Equity in Times of Contraction

Economic stagnation doesn't affect all creative workers equally. As survey results indicate, incumbent players with established networks and years of field experience remain relatively well-positioned to weather downturns. They possess the relationships, reputations, and resources to compete for scarce opportunities. In contrast, early-career creatives and candidates from underrepresented backgrounds face compounding barriers—they're entering a field with fewer openings precisely when their lack of professional networks makes access most difficult.

This dynamic creates a troubling paradox: the moments when diverse talent development becomes most critical are precisely when market conditions make it most challenging. The CJCII must therefore design interventions specifically calibrated to create pathways during periods of constraint, rather than relying on a rising tide to lift all boats.

CONCLUSION

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND THE PATH FORWARD



The fieldwide recommendations outlined in this report converge into five interconnected pillars that can guide CJCI's work in Los Angeles. Each pillar represents not merely a programmatic category, but a strategic intervention point where targeted investment can catalyze systemic change.

FIVE PILLARS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION



**QUALITY JOB PLACEMENT:
BUILDING SUSTAINABLE
CAREER FOUNDATIONS**



**UPSKILLING AND
APPRENTICESHIP:
EARNING WHILE LEARNING**



**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND
SERVICE NAVIGATION:
DEMYSTIFYING OPPORTUNITY**



**CLIENT AND MARKET
ACCELERATION: BUILDING
SUSTAINABLE CREATIVE
BUSINESSES**



**NETWORKING AND
MENTORSHIP: BUILDING
SOCIAL CAPITAL AT SCALE**

Source: CVL Economics.

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Quality Job Placement: Building Sustainable Career Foundations

Effective placement begins with occupational intelligence. The Creative Occupational Profile and Forecast Reports identify roles that combine strong wage floors with genuine growth trajectories—opportunities that can sustain creative careers rather than merely providing temporary gigs. CJCII should prioritize placement in these high-opportunity occupations while simultaneously advocating for structural wage improvements in sectors where creative work remains economically precarious despite strong demand.

This advocacy could manifest through innovative models like benefit cooperatives—such as those pioneered by the Freelancers Union, which provides health insurance and retirement planning to independent workers—or pilot wage support programs. Seattle's Office of Film + Music, for instance, has experimented with subsidizing health benefits for freelance crew members on local productions, recognizing that inconsistent benefits represent a major barrier to career sustainability. Los Angeles could adapt such models to sectors like live events production or digital content creation, where wages often fail to match the cost of living despite the presence of viable work.

Upskilling and Apprenticeship: Earning While Learning

The apprenticeship model's power lies in its dual function: participants develop skills while earning income and building professional networks. Union-aligned paid apprenticeships prove particularly valuable in creative industries, where both technical competence and relationship-building determine career trajectory. The UK's Creative Industries Apprenticeship program, which places emerging talent in film, television, and digital media companies while they complete structured training, demonstrates how formal apprenticeship frameworks can create sanctioned entry points into historically insular industries.

Micro-credentials offer complementary value by allowing workers to stack discrete skills certifications that signal competence to employers without requiring years-long degree programs. Organizations like Interlochen Arts Academy have developed micro-credential pathways in arts administration and cultural programming that enable career pivoters and returning workers to demonstrate relevant expertise. CJCII could partner with local community colleges and industry associations to develop LA-specific micro-credentials aligned with regional creative sector needs—from entertainment production management to cultural event coordination—while ensuring these credentials connect to concrete job opportunities and advancement pathways.

Technical Assistance and Service Navigation: Demystifying Opportunity

Creative workers often lack awareness of available support resources or struggle to navigate complex application processes for grants, contracts, and public programs. Technical assistance can dramatically improve access to these opportunities. Organizations like United States Artists provide extensive application support for their fellowship programs, recognizing that administrative barriers often exclude the artists who would benefit most.

Public sector procurement represents a particularly underutilized opportunity. Many municipalities have requirements for creative services—from graphic design to public art installation—but procurement processes remain opaque to individual creatives and small studios. The City of Austin's "How to Do Business with the City" program provides training specifically for creative service providers on procurement processes, proposal development, and contract compliance. Los Angeles could develop similar initiatives while advocating for procurement reforms that make municipal contracts more accessible to small creative businesses and individual practitioners.

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Client and Market Acceleration: Building Sustainable Creative Businesses

Many creative workers pursue economic mobility through entrepreneurship, freelancing, or business ownership rather than traditional employment. These pathways require distinct support infrastructure focused on client acquisition, market positioning, and business fundamentals. Social commerce bootcamps can teach creatives how to leverage platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Patreon to build audiences and monetize their work—skills increasingly essential in a digital-first creative economy.

Physical and virtual marketplaces provide crucial visibility for emerging creative entrepreneurs. Brooklyn's Etsy Made Local events have demonstrated how curated markets can connect makers with customers while fostering community among creative business owners. Los Angeles could develop similar initiatives—perhaps themed around specific neighborhoods, cultural communities, or creative disciplines—while ensuring these events connect to ongoing business development resources rather than functioning as isolated sales opportunities.

Creative services exchanges and business matchmaking programs address a persistent challenge: many organizations need creative services (graphic design, video production, event curation) but lack awareness of local providers, while creative freelancers struggle to find clients. Programs like Austin's Creative Industries Division business matchmaking platform actively connect creative service providers with commercial, nonprofit, and municipal clients seeking their capabilities. CJCII could develop similar infrastructure in Los Angeles, potentially with sector-specific variants for film production services, digital content creation, or cultural programming.

Networking and Mentorship: Building Social Capital at Scale

Creative careers depend heavily on social capital—the networks that surface opportunities, provide guidance, and facilitate collaboration. For individuals from underrepresented backgrounds or those new to Los Angeles, accessing these networks presents a formidable challenge. Structured networking and mentorship programs can democratize access to social capital that incumbent workers accumulate organically.

Association development initiatives create institutional containers for relationship-building. The Black Public Media association, for example, has cultivated a national network of filmmakers, producers, and distributors that facilitates project collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective advocacy. At a local level, CJCII could support the formation or strengthening of affinity-based creative associations—perhaps focused on specific disciplines (documentary producers, stage designers), identities (LGBTQ+ theater artists, immigrant creative entrepreneurs), or career stages (emerging arts administrators).

Formal mentor matching programs, when thoughtfully designed, can accelerate skill development and opportunity access. The Ghetto Film School model pairs emerging filmmakers with industry professionals for intensive, project-based mentorship that yields both skill development and industry connections. CJCII could implement similar matching frameworks across multiple creative disciplines while building in accountability measures that ensure mentor relationships translate into tangible career advancement.

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Measuring Success Beyond Traditional Employment

These five pillars share a crucial characteristic: they recognize the occupational fluidity inherent to creative work. Creative careers rarely follow linear trajectories of permanent employment. Instead, they weave together periods of traditional employment, freelance projects, entrepreneurship, and self-directed creative practice. Effective support systems must account for this fluidity rather than optimizing exclusively for full-time job placement.

Success metrics should therefore extend beyond traditional employment outcomes to encompass critical pathways to economic mobility: freelance income growth, successful business launches, access to health benefits and retirement planning, project-based employment in well-paying roles, and sustained creative practice that generates livelihood. By engaging both individual creatives and creative businesses and organizations across all five pillars, CJCII can build backbone infrastructure that supports creative workers throughout the nonlinear trajectories of their careers—ultimately strengthening both the creative workforce and the broader Los Angeles creative economy that depends on their talent and innovation.

CVL Economics is an economic consulting firm that takes a data-driven, human-centric approach to equitable development and sustainable growth, with a focus on the creative economy. Founded in 2021, CVL Economics partners with communities, municipalities, organizations, and institutions to address today's most complex challenges and foster bold action. Coupling our robust economic models with innovative research methodologies, we provide decisionmakers with the actionable insights needed to effect change, expand opportunity, and improve economic well-being.

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