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# Recommendations & executive summary

As a thought leader, convener, and researcher of the creative economy, WESTAF often brings together leading experts to thoughtfully survey the state of this important sector. Spawned from WESTAF's popular tool, Creative Vitality Suite™ and its proprietary Creative Vitality Index™ (CVI), and a convening of creative economy experts back in 2008, the 2021 Creative Vitality Summit aimed to build on this initial work and chart new ways to reimagine the future of the creative economy. Over two days from September 20-21, the 2021 Creative Vitality Summit, hosted by WESTAF in partnership with Grantmakers in the Arts, the Association of Latino Arts and Cultures, ASU Herberger Institute on Design and the Arts, the National Creative Economy Coalition, and others, presented a number of panels, conversations, and presentations by leading practitioners that encouraged a genuine and careful examination of the most pressing challenges and inequities confronting creative economies in the United States alongside new pathways.

Topics addressed ranged from threats to, and opportunities for, creative workers and entrepreneurs to cooperative economics, impact investing, and trust-based philanthropy in the creative economy, to building creative economy infrastructure through networks and policy. The resources and recommendations presented below summarize and build upon the rich dialogues generated during the inaugural Creative Vitality Summit. Chief among the insights offered by speakers and panelists is the imperative that recovery include the rebuilding of the creative economy in ways that are more equitable, fair, and accessible to artists and creators.

## Recommendation set for public sector arts agencies

- **Focus on workforce development:** While some speakers questioned a focus on economic development, favoring a focus on community, many stressed the importance of promoting the ability of the creative economy to generate jobs, and the need to improve worker conditions in the creative economy in ways that can benefit the economy as a whole. At both a state and local level, innovative public sector arts agencies have built creative workforce programs that engage creative workers in public works and public information projects and tested progressive policy interventions like guaranteed basic income.
- **Invest in artists as agents of civic imagination and belonging:** Some speakers stressed the need for public agencies investing in artists to not take an overly economic approach but rather to engage with artists who are changemakers, storytellers, and committed to equity. To some, public investment, particularly at the local level, can support artist activists, artists in residence, and artists interested in the public realm and community-based, participatory processes. These artists are developing cooperative models and modeling “with-ness,” or togetherness.
- **Develop more ambitious, cross-sector strategies for advancing the creative economy:** At the local, state, and international level, speakers presented case studies of ways in which cross-sector creative economy policies are being shaped that include ambitious plans to seed creative economy clusters and alternative downtowns, invest in high-tech subsectors of the creative economy, and increase participation in the creative economy by those communities currently underrepresented within it.

## Recommendation set for private philanthropy

- **Engage in investment models outside of traditional grantmaking and broaden support for individual artists, creative businesses, and collectives:** The limitations of current grantmaking models were discussed by a number of the panels, and impact investing, investment in individual creators and in collectives and cooperatives were advanced as alternatives that private foundations and other grantmakers should explore.
- **Invest in policy and systems change efforts that can advance a more inclusive creative economy:** Most arts and cultural philanthropy tends to be focused on the production and presentation of arts programs. With additional investment in strategic policy efforts, funders could have a significant impact and see their investments leveraged substantially by the public sector.

## Recommendation set for service organizations and industry/professional networks

- **Build more inclusive networks that broaden engagement and participation in the creative economy:** Speakers and panelists identified the need to develop more inclusive networks for shaping creative economy policymaking, directing philanthropic and commercial investments, and supporting innovation and creative entrepreneurship. For them, new networks are needed that include a range of sectors and better reflect the pluralism of U.S. society and so-called emerging economies.
- **Center artists and creative workers in programming and policymaking in support of the creative economy:** Many that engaged in these discussions critiqued the current system with privileging the needs of organizations and institutions over the needs of individual creators. The pandemic affected creative workers profoundly in adverse ways and many see recovery as an opportunity to build a creative economy that invests in and protects individual creators in a more robust way.

## Broader policy recommendations

- **Generate new community-centered methods of measuring the activity and impact of the creative economy that are not solely quantitative and financial:** The notion of the creative economy has been shaped by research and data analysis, which has created a basis for engaging policymakers in investing in the creative economy as an industry sector. As the sector works toward equity and systems change, speakers argue that more participatory, qualitative, culturally responsive, community-driven, indigenous approaches to research, analysis, communication, and knowledge sharing are needed. They desire to see an approach to researching the creative economy and evidencing its value that isn't reductive or one-dimensional.





# Introduction

For nearly 50 years, the Western States Art Federation (WESTAF) has worked for and with art advocates and organizations to encourage the creative advancement and preservation of the arts regionally and through a national network of customers and alliances. WESTAF has bolstered creative economies, organizational systems, and creative communities across the West and nationally. Building on its early work researching the economic impact of the arts, WESTAF has evolved to convene and connect practitioners in support of creative vitality, a take on the creative economy concept that bridges for-profit and nonprofit models and economic and community based approaches to developing this critical sector.

The 2021 Creative Vitality Summit gathered more than 40 thought leaders, decision makers, and innovators who are on the ground battling to ensure the rights and self-determination of artists and arts practitioners. The two-day, peer-to-peer event assisted in mapping a pathway into the future for this new era of the creative economy and helped to formulate a more concrete vision of equitable realities for nearly 500 registrants. The sessions presented at the Summit addressed the idea that the creative sector has the unparalleled opportunity to build a new and bolder economic system that is inclusive, just and restorative.





# Making creative work work:

Opportunities and challenges  
for creative workers and  
creative entrepreneurs



One thing is clear about the current state of the creative economy: things have to change. The inequities within the U.S. creative sector have always been present, but the global pandemic has clearly shown the steep depths and pervasiveness of inequitable practices. As the world opens back up, and the creative economy seeks to re-engage audiences and communities, it is time to call for systems level change. Systems change requires people in and adjacent to positions of power to evaluate how they account for (not accommodate) artists and creatives, particularly BIPOC artists and creatives, and support the artistic and cultural dynamism of all communities. Now, more than ever, art funders and organizations must invest in equitable pathways to creative work, markets and cultural participation. There are many major and valid critiques of the current state of the creative economy. The most obvious challenge is the legacy of underinvesting critical resources in artists, more specifically BIPOC creatives, which leads to continued inequitable practices and unstable labor systems. By design, artists and creative practitioners have become hyper vulnerable to poverty and deprivation due to governmental policies and a lack of adequate safety nets. These challenges and inequities have been magnified by the pandemic and individual artists and creatives continue to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 fallout.

While there is much pain to emerge from, the creative community must not be discouraged by the devastation left behind by the pandemic and the ongoing injustices that continue to plague our political and economic systems. As the author and professor Ruha Benjamin reminds us as artists and practitioners within this work, “remember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within.”<sup>1</sup> In summary, to build and usher in a new era for artists and creators we must liberate our minds to envision a wholly new system, wherein critical capital and resources are invested into advancing equity and justice. The creative economy now has unprecedented opportunities to enact an entirely new approach and conditions for creatives, and set a precedent for labor markets everywhere.

Today, there are movements happening across local, state and regional levels calling for artists and creative workers to be treated as self-determined humans with the working rights and labor protections other industries are afforded. It is time to shift focus to people and center equitable rights. As some speakers in the Creative Vitality Summit suggest, arts funders have the opportunity to focus on supporting creative ecosystems, rather than creating competition among artists. A focus on providing a livable wage can lead to systemic change. Future strategies and economic models can support self-determined artists with supportive systems, while reassessing the relationship between policy and investment. This can create more regenerative funding systems, reframing and redefining arts funders roles and responsibilities, and moving toward long term commitments to power sharing.

On the cusp of a transformative time for the creative sector, some broader trends indicate that this is a moment in which new economic models are possible. One such model being utilized is the [Mayors for Guaranteed Income Program](#), which aims to seed guaranteed income programs throughout the country to enhance economic security and establish an income floor in ways that support low-income families in particular. Guaranteed income pilots for artists and creative workers are also being piloted in communities and are part of wider efforts to shift narratives about the contribution of artists to local economies and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ruha Benjamin, AfricanAmerican Studies at Princeton University; <https://www.ruhabenjamin.com/>

# Creative economies of belonging:

**Building a creative economy that supports community leadership, social capital, and social impact**

Leaders that participated in the Summit also presented strategies that seek to support the grassroots work of enabling “creative economies of belonging,” which support community leadership, social capital, and social impact. These speakers also advanced the notion of grassroots powerbuilding, which has the potential to formulate a new arts and culture ecosystem that includes support of organizational formations beyond nonprofits, including enterprises, and the building of systems that better support artistic creators’ and cultural bearers’ needs.

The creative economies of belonging also calls for comprehensive investment in the cultural assets of local communities, both traditional and nontraditional. An approach to supporting the creative economy that centers belonging also includes better understanding of social outcomes and social impact of investments on a community level. Speakers called on the sector to normalize and demand that all outcomes of research must be (re)invested back in the neighborhoods and communities in a continued effort to decolonize our thought processes and practices.

Creating the kind of equitable economy we envision will require arts funders to prioritize the self-determination of individuals and communities. This poses a steep learning curve for many institutions because of power imbalances and a lack of lived experience in many of the communities they seek to serve. Many communities have historically possessed ways of supporting thriving creative ecosystems and investing in community anchors and cultural assets. Leveraging policy and philanthropy to support self-determination and the long-term viability of these assets will better address community needs.



# Resourcing creative

## vitality: Cooperative economics, impact investing, and trust-based philanthropy in the creative economy

Speakers in the Summit acknowledged that philanthropic and governmental systems are inequitable. In that context, leaders throughout the Summit focused on the need to radically rethink the way the public sector and organized philanthropy can create more generative systems and decolonize practices. Successful models are being developed that utilize investment while maintaining community control. One astounding model offered during the Summit is the cooperative structure of [East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative](#) (EBPREC), which is a BIPOC led cooperative approach to democratize the process of (and decolonize relationships to) capital based in Oakland, CA. EBPREC builds its program on community investment to create more channels from which capital can flow to the local priorities and property. With no shortage of vision, EBPREC is cognizant of the low interest and non-extractive investments within their own community. EBPREC stands as just one example of how communities across the nation are disrupting systems to generate new creative ecosystems built with radically different structures.

The new era of the creative economy discussed at the Creative Vitality Summit will take people who can (re)imagine investing that creates a culture of “social justice underwriting” where institutions truly embody trust and openness to recognize creativity as valuable assets. Trends indicate that creative industries, and the people who make them possible, are leading the charge in dreaming, creating, and scaling the change necessary for this new world. In summary, if social justice is the goal, cooperative economics and impact investing, or the act of investing with the intent to generate positive, measurable social or environmental impact alongside financial return<sup>2</sup>, represents a significant vehicle to get there.

Importantly, activities and case studies in the United States represent only a small sample of the innovation happening across the world as these challenges are not unique to this country. Across the globe, creative communities are redefining the economies of entire regions, contributing to the development of alternative city and town centers that enable small creative businesses to thrive. The Republic of Colombia’s national creative economy strategy was discussed because of its heavy investment in “next generation” creative districts and in arts education throughout schools, making classes for arts and culture activities more available, and pushing to recognize craft making as a career.

Speakers discussed the gap in policy makers’ understanding of the creative economy, which produces experiences (attaching a feeling to an exchange) and the difficulty of arts and cultural leaders to understand economic policy. It can be more difficult to describe the value of culture, identity, and feeling than it is to describe the value of a consumer good or commodity, but the two sides can come together in sharing ideas to solve problems. International speakers also spoke about the potential to evolve current private and public financing systems beyond grants to other forms of investment and resourcing that offer more independence and bolster innovation and diversity.

Lastly, when thinking about the creative economy, the most important thing to take away is that this is not an ideological conversation; it’s a reality. Governments with different ideological and political positions can equally support the advancement of the creative economy and may, in fact, use similar tools to do so.

<sup>2</sup> Global Impact Investing Network. “What You Need to Know About Impact Investing.” accessed September, 2021, [www.thegiin.org/impact-investing/need-to-know/#what-is-impact-investing](http://www.thegiin.org/impact-investing/need-to-know/#what-is-impact-investing)



A creative workspace featuring a laptop, a white mouse, and several color swatch books and sticky notes. The scene is set on a dark desk, with a white mouse and a laptop keyboard visible. The color swatches are arranged in a fan-like pattern, showing a variety of colors including blues, yellows, oranges, and purples. The sticky notes are also in various colors and are scattered around the workspace. The overall atmosphere is one of creative collaboration and design.

# Conclusions

While this gathering did not offer a silver bullet to solving the global challenges posed to the creative economy by a pandemic and social change, the 2021 Creative Vitality Summit did outline clear pathways to viable solutions. To achieve a new era of our creative economy, presenters and experts alike agreed that time, energy and resources have to be invested in: strategies led by creative entrepreneurs and practitioners; building a more community-centered creative economy; investing in the cultural assets of our communities and multigenerational leadership; utilizing cooperative economics, impact investing, and trust based philanthropy; and constructing more inclusive creative economy networks to build an equitable future. It was clear from the Summit that moving towards collaborative models of ownership and governance that center shared values and community voices holds great promise for a more inclusive creative economy. Finally, there is an emerging practice exploring policy as materiality and the public sector as a medium that is inviting a more creative approach to addressing civic needs.

## Conference speaker bios

Forty speakers, moderators and panelists participated in the Creative Vitality Summit as outlined below. Speaker bios can be found in a [separate document linked to this report](#).

**Jen Cole**, Executive Director, Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at Arizona State University

**Hollis Wong-Wear**, Founder and Principal, hww.work

**Mallory Rukhsana**, FORWARD Curator of Partnerships and Programming, Forecast Public Art

**Allentza Michel**, Program Officer for Arts & Humanities, American Academy of Arts & Sciences

**Lauren Ruffin**, Co-Founder, crux.black

**Laura Callanan**, Founding Partner, Upstart CoLab

**Laura Zabel**, Executive Director, Springboard for the Arts

**Nadia Elokdah**, Vice President, Grantmakers in the Arts

**Tariana Navas-Nieves**, Director, Cultural Affairs and City's Equity Leadership Team, Arts and Venues, City and County of Denver

**Abdiel Lopez**, Independent Curator

**Naaima Khan**, Principal/Owner, Create Good

**Mytoan Nguyen-Akbar**, Impact & Assessment Manager, Seattle Government

**Dee Schneidman**, Senior Program Director, Research and Creative Economy, New England Foundation for the Arts

**Zannie Voss**, Professor; Director, SMU Data Arts

**Cezanne Charles**, Co-Founder, Rooftwo

**Sunil Iyengar**, Director, Research and Analysis, National Endowment for the Arts

**Susan Soroko**, Director, Creative Economy Arlington Economic Development

**Althea Erickson**, Former Vice President, Global Public Policy and Impact, Etsy

**Jessica Stern**, Senior Manager, Americans for the Arts

**Tom Cahill-Jones**, Partnerships Manager, Nesta

**Patton Hindle**, Head of Arts, Kickstarter Arts

**Rasmus Tscherning**, Founder and Managing Director, Creative Business Cup

**Jonathon Glus**, Director, San Diego Arts & Culture

**Julie Baker**, Executive Director, Californians for the Arts

**Kim Tignor**, Executive Director, Intellectual Property and Social Justice

**Edna Dos Santos-Duisenberg**, International Policy Advisor, Creative Economy and Economic Development

**Karen Hoffman**, Provost, Art Center College of Design

**Srini Srinivasan**, CEO, Lumium

**Hakim Bellamy**, Deputy Director of Cultural Services, City of Albuquerque

**Alberto Mejia**, Deputy Director, NALAC (The National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures)

**Adriana Gallego**, Executive Director, Arts Foundation for Tucson and Southern Arizona

**Javier Torres-Campos**, Director, Thriving Cultures, Surdna Foundation

**Carlton Turner**, Lead Artist/Director, SIPP Culture

**Roberto Bedoya**, Cultural Affairs Manager, City of Oakland

**Lulani Arquette**, President and CEO, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation

**Felipe Buitrago**, Former Minister of Culture, Republic of Colombia

**Ted Russell**, Director, Arts Strategy and Ventures, Kenneth Rainin Foundation

**Noni Session**, Executive Director, East Bay Permanent Real Estate Collaborative

**Randy Engstrom**, Consultant, Third Way Creative

**David Holland**, Deputy Director, WESTAF

**Moana Palelei HoChing**, Principal, Crazy Horse Consulting; Senior Policy Analyst, WESTAF





# Creative Vitality:

## **The Creative Economy in a New Era, Pre-conference Paper**

Event organizers prepared a pre-conference paper presented below that set out a range of the issue sets to be covered in the Creative Vitality Summit. The paper reviews relevant literature on the creative economy in relation to these issue sets.



## Background

WESTAF has a long history of conducting research on the economic impact of the arts and the creative economy. Our Creative Vitality Suite has become a distinctive tool for measuring the creative economy using a range of official statistics and a pioneering approach to comparing regional creative vitality, the Creative Vitality Index (CVI). WESTAF last brought together field leaders for a major convening to discuss the creative economy and state economic development in 2008. Over a decade later, in partnership with the National Creative Economy Coalition, NALAC, ASU Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, Grantmakers in the Arts, and others, the Creative Vitality Summit brings together creative economy experts, economic development professionals, arts and culture leaders, solidarity economy advocates, and equity champions to share knowledge and practice in six interrelated areas:

- **New Economic Models and a More Just Economy:** An exploration of models and movements that seek to address economic inequality, while building community power and self-determination through the creative industries.
- **Mapping Creative Vitality:** A panel looking at how data and research can inform storytelling and how we might decolonize their application in assessing the impact of the creative economy.
- **Creative Vitality and Social Cohesion:** A discussion of how the creative economy can connect communities and interrupt displacement both locally and nationally.
- **Networks and Practice in the Creative Economy:** Once a more inclusive creative economy is framed, what communities of practice and cross-sector partnerships will be required to meet the evolving needs of the field?
- **The Future of Creative Work:** An exploration of the role that the creative worker can and should play in a 21st-century economy, and what policies, systems and supports are necessary for them to thrive in their practice.
- **Creative Economy Policymaking & the Future:** In the most urgent economic and environmental moment in history, how can the creative economy help to advance an equitable vision that can translate to policy and systems change?

## The Creative Vitality Summit aims to:

- Develop diverse perspectives on the realities and potentials of the creative economy as an advocacy agenda, a policy area, and economic development strategy
- Catalyze cross-sector networks that can advance this work together as a more coordinated coalition
- Share insights and case studies that reimagine the creative economy as a force for positive change
- Consider the ways that creative economy data can support evidence-based policymaking
- Examine creative economy development as part of larger economic development and community development programs

This pre-conference paper is being offered as a provocation and a point of entry into a number of conversations happening within the WESTAF network, across the field, and in wider spaces. The following sections explore the ways in which the creative sector intersects with the solidarity economy and other alternative models. The paper also considers the paradox and potential presented by the creative economy as an agenda and a construct and invites debate on the future of this work.

The unique and unprecedented challenges brought on by COVID-19 both exposed and exacerbated an already inequitable creative economy, particularly for BIPOC creatives in the United States. Although this nation and the wider world is still in the grips of the economic fallout due to the pandemic, the creative economy – and the economy more broadly – now has an unparalleled opportunity to build a new and bolder system that is inclusive, just and restorative. As part of a movement to push public policy and institutional strategies that confront unjust and extractive systems, this work seeks to fundamentally lead the creative economy into a new era that vigorously advances economic and racial justice and centers equity. This paper outlines the ways that cultural organizations, creative workers, and artists can begin to address causes, not just symptoms, of cultural inequity within the creative sector. While the sector looks to bravely build and radically reimagine the future, the following sections consider ways that it can contribute to civic prosperity and self-determination.

## Precarity, inequity and the creative economy

Two major critiques of the current economic system are that it is (i) perpetuating increasing economic inequity locally and globally while (ii) creating social and economic instability for individuals and communities. Individuals face these challenges across societies and socio-economic conditions, and for many, the term precarity has come to define their economic realities and the conditions in which they work. As media studies researchers Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson assert, “No longer can individual workers expect a single career; instead they must ready themselves for iterative change and persistent contingency as standard employment and its associated entitlements become artifacts of a bygone industrial era. Precarious livelihoods are indicative of a new world order of social and economic instability.”<sup>3</sup> These trends that Curtin and Sanson identified in the media industry are also features of the structure of many artistic and creative careers.<sup>4</sup> Researchers have noted what many artists know through observation, “Artists are very likely to be self-employed, many of them working on contract or funded on a project-by-project basis.”<sup>5</sup> Some have described growing precarity as an increasing casualness in the creative labor market, while others have noted that this style of working became truly normative in creative fields in the 1990s, particularly within the media industry.<sup>6</sup> Precarity means more to people than simply managing a “permanently transitional” working life.<sup>7</sup> For many, it means funding their own essential benefits and safety net; organizing their own professional development; creating project ideas on their own time; and maintaining relationships with gatekeepers (editors, producers, etc.) in order to secure work.<sup>8</sup> So-called “creative freelancers” find themselves navigating these “project-based production systems” and building what were once called portfolio careers.<sup>9</sup>

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3 Curtin, Michael, and Kevin Sanson. “Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor.” In *Precarious Creativity*, 1-18: University of California Press, 2016.

4 Curtin, Michael, and Kevin Sanson. “Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor.” In *Precarious Creativity*, 1-18: University of California Press, 2016.

5 Markusen, Ann, Sam Gilmore, Amanda Johnson, Titus Levi, and Andrea Martinez. *Crossover: How Artists Build Careers across Commercial, Nonprofit and Community Work*. (2006).

6 Lee, David. “Creative Labour in the Cultural Industries.” *Sociopedia.isa* (2013).

7 Lee, David. “Creative Labour in the Cultural Industries.” *Sociopedia.isa* (2013).

8 Ibid.

9 Easton, Eliza, and Billy Beckett. *Freelancers in the Creative Industries: Insights for Policy Makers*. Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Center Led by Nesta (May 2021).

These types of labor market and working conditions have necessitated what many have come to call creative entrepreneurship, in which creative workers build enterprise structures (often microenterprises) that enable themselves individually and collectively to take ownership of their cultural production. Creative entrepreneurship, while a useful and sometimes empowering context, often valorizes the ability to manage precarity through strong networks, high levels of talent, education, and skills, and an entrepreneurial approach that are not necessarily as readily available to workers in other industries—migrant workers, domestic labor, service industry workers, grey economy labor—who face high levels of precarity as well.<sup>10</sup> Holding up the figure of the artist and beyond that, the creative entrepreneur, as “pioneers of the new economy,” can obscure the power dynamics and economic structures, which create precarity and depress wages for a large cross-section of people.<sup>11</sup> Today, many call for artists and “creative workers” to become more aligned with independent, gig economy, and disenfranchised worker movements to build interest and political will to change public policy and industry practices in ways that better protect what has become the majority of the workforce.

The labor market is not, however, the only part of the creative economy (and wider economy) that many would like to transform. The creative economy has become an increasingly viable strategy and agenda within the domain of regional economic development, with one aspect of this agenda, creative placemaking, gaining significant traction in communities across the United States (and beyond). Both theorists and practitioners have touted creativity as a panacea to a range of economic and social challenges being experienced by communities across the country, leading to the implementation of public policy and other practices. But, as Mark Stern and Susan Seifert assert, “Public policy promoting the creative economy has two serious flaws: one, a misperception of culture and creativity as a product of individual genius rather than collective activity; and, two, a willingness to tolerate social dislocation in exchange for urban vitality or competitive advantage.”<sup>12</sup> While gentrification is often the major critique of the creative economy in the context of “creative placemaking” and wider economic development strategies, some argue that the expansion of inequality is actually a more proven feature of the way that the creative economy interacts with communities. Researchers contend that this is in part caused by the high educational requirements of many, though certainly not all, creative occupations.<sup>13</sup>

## Creative vitality in the new economy

The critique of the creative economy has understandably grown both stronger and louder. At the same time, others rightly speak of “cultural vitality,” “arts vibrancy,” and creative vitality as the measurable or observable impact of arts and culture as a dimension of the everyday life of communities. This notion has been at the heart of community arts, social practice art, local arts strategies, and creative placemaking for some time. A new movement to integrate equity and social justice practice and values into the arts and culture field has emerged that takes this notion further and can be called a new cultural economy. This new movement seeks to build on and reimagine existing, and, in some cases longstanding, community models like mutual aid groups, credit unions, permanent real estate cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, arts collectives and cooperatives, time banks, investment cooperatives, worker-managed nonprofits, community wealth cooperatives, community development financial institutions, community currencies, and others in shaping a new creative economy. The solidarity economy and creative vitality are relatively new terminologies for practices that aim to rebuild a sense of interdependence and self-determination that on one level enables individuals and communities to mitigate precarity and inequality and on another encourages them to build new economic models and realities that are rooted in the local, collective, and just.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, David. “Creative Labour in the Cultural Industries.” *Sociopedia.isa* (2013).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Stern, Mark J., and Susan C. Seifert. “From Creative Economy to Creative Society.” In *Culture and Community Revitalization: A Siap/Reinvestment Fund Collaboration -2007-2009*, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Lee, David. “Creative Labour in the Cultural Industries.” *Sociopedia.isa* (2013).



To support the evolution of the creative economy agenda toward creative vitality, we need new tools to measure, evaluate, design, build awareness, and influence decision making. Creative economy researchers are currently involved in discussions about improving the quality of economic impact analysis; utilizing official economic data and descriptive statistics; expanding the use of data visualization techniques; and delivering actionable data to authorizers and decision makers. While laudable endeavors, these developments do not fully provide the information that those leading progressive reform seek. In recent years, efforts to measure and compare arts vibrancy and creative vitality have emerged, building on earlier models and indices produced by Richard Florida and other theorists. For those working in the solidarity economy and on hyperlocal strategies, new ways of using information and developing knowledge are needed that do not rely primarily on quantitative, particularly economic and financial, data. Cultural mapping, creative economy mapping, heat mapping, and culturally responsive Indigenous evaluation are all approaches that hold some promise as more holistic methodologies for considering the impact and value of the creative economy and various types of arts and cultural programming. While these forms of research will help to develop a richer narrative, a focus on equity supports a broader commitment to decolonizing research, evaluation, and impact in ways that decenter dominant systems. A decolonized approach both utilizes indigenous, non-Western, and vernacular strategies for interpreting and communicating information<sup>14</sup> and disrupts a colonized worldview that focuses on growth and expansion by encouraging a focus on justice, wellbeing, and balance.<sup>15</sup> Rather than representing a lofty abstract approach, applying a decolonization lens practically might mean, for example, shorter form reports, greater use of formats other than reports and the written word to convey knowledge, and using cultural and community practices, including art, to share information with non-specialists.

Cultural mapping, defined as “a systematic approach to identifying, recording, classifying and analyzing a community’s cultural resources,”<sup>16</sup> has become a more common approach and one that is valuable because it takes an asset-based perspective and considers tangible and intangible assets ranging from landmarks and community sites to the traditions and stories in and of a community. The value of artistic knowledge and research needs to be acknowledged, for as Interarts asserts, “we shall only truly be able to mainstream artistic languages and knowledge as a key to sustainability in the dynamics of urban planning if we accept that such languages allow us to see reality through a different lens than scientific language, which they can complement and even question.”<sup>17</sup> New ways of seeing and knowing support a different understanding of the value of the creative economy.

As people imagine what new economic models will emerge from the reordering of the environment precipitated by the pandemic and a racial reckoning in the United States, the very notion of the creative economy is also being reshaped. While some argue that “different forms of creativity deliver social values as they help increase human resilience,”<sup>18</sup> a whole new model for describing the contours of the creative economy has emerged that focuses specifically on its contributions to social cohesion in four areas: Place attachment, Social capital, Civic engagement, and Mindset (We-making).<sup>19</sup> This model of the creative economy stands in contrast to the emphasis on jobs, earnings, industries, demographics, and direct and indirect economic impact as captured by many of our existing models. For those who prefer to think of this work in terms of social impact, culture can, as the OECD argues, “help mitigate factors leading to social and economic marginalization” and stands as a “precondition” for more cohesive and inclusive societies.”<sup>20</sup> While this entire reconceptualization of the creative economy holds promise in our current transformational moment, there are even more practical models that help those who are shaping investments in the creative economy to do

<sup>14</sup> Evergreen, Stephanie. “Decolonizing Data Viz.” (2021-01-06).

<https://stephanieevergreen.com/decolonizing-data-viz/>.

<sup>15</sup> Beriont, Lauren, “Decolonizing Evaluation,” emergence collective, June 8, 2020,

<https://www.emergencecollective.org/post/decolonizing-evaluation>

<sup>16</sup> Millier Dickinson Blais. *Creative Vitality in Detroit: The Detroit Cultural Mapping Project*. (October 2012).

<https://kresge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Creative-Vitality-in-Detroit-2012-revised071713.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Interarts. *Culture and Arts in Support of Social Cohesion in Latin American Cities -Latin American Arts for Inclusive Cities*. (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Engh, Rachel, Ben Martin, Susannah Laramee Kidd, and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus. *We-Making: How Arts & Culture Unite People to Work toward Community Well-Being*. Easton, PA (Metris Arts Consulting, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *Culture, Tourism and Local Development: New Strategies for Italian Heritage Cities in the Post-Pandemic Scenario: Workshop #1 Cultural Heritage and Social Cohesion: How to Make the Local Community More Cohesive and Inclusive*. OECD (26 May 2021).

so through a values-based approach. For example, Upstart Co-Lab has redefined the creative economy for impact investors by focusing on aspects that support ethical fashion, sustainable food, social impact media, and creative places.<sup>21</sup> This focused interest on the alignment of investments with pro-social and pro-community aspects of the creative economy is very different from a focus on creative jobs, creative industry sectors, and innovation viewed from a purely business-oriented lens. For those looking to influence larger systemic and structural change, “a cultural strategy for belonging” as described by the Haas Institute at UC Berkeley holds great potential as a framework for imagining a more inclusive creative economy, particularly in “align(ing) with efforts for material, political, and social change.”<sup>22</sup> Belonging has become a critical concept for the moment that incorporates and in many ways moves beyond the frame of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As the United States moves toward a post-pandemic world, states and regions across the country are dealing with economic and social dislocation caused by unprecedented unemployment rates, record-breaking business closures, and system disruptions on a global scale. A recent study found that in 2020, 7.8 million Americans were thrust into poverty because of the recession induced by the pandemic, raising poverty rates by 2.8%.<sup>23</sup> A growing body of research has made it clear that the creative sector has been, and continues to be, one of the hardest hit sectors as a result of COVID-19. While creative organizations and businesses begin to open back up and the public returns to in-person events again, trends indicate that the creative sector is recovering much more slowly than peer industries. An impact study conducted by American for the Arts in August 2021 summarized the toll the pandemic took on the creative economy, and the numbers are bleak. Since the beginning of the pandemic, arts jobs have decreased by 16% (2.5 million to 2.1 million); 95% of the arts workforce lost revenue during the pandemic, with 63% eventually suffering unemployment; arts and culture nonprofits across America experienced approximately \$17.97 billion in financial losses.<sup>24</sup> Prior to COVID-19, the creative sector was responsible for \$919.7 billion, or 4.3%, of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States according to [U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis \(BEA\)](#).<sup>25</sup> As a country, we are confronting one of the worst economic crises since the Great Depression and the outcomes disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. These communities make up nearly a third of the creative economy workforce and 24 to 40% of the U.S. population. According to [Creative Vitality Suite™](#) demographic data, in 2019, 0.1% of creative occupations were held by Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders, 0.3% by American Indian or Alaska Natives, 2% by two or more races, 5.9% by Asians, 7% by Black or African Americans, 11.8% by Hispanics or Latinos, and 72.8% by Whites. BIPOC people make up less than a third of creative occupations.

Because creative industries are vital to state economies across the country and support economic recovery, it is imperative that creative workers get back to work as soon as possible to reduce further harm. Amid such large deficits plaguing the arts and culture sector, solutions must prioritize sustained and multidisciplinary recovery strategies over short term, band-aid solutions. As mentioned earlier, recovery should center creative workers who are purposefully excluded by structural barriers of racism or discrimination, and those most affected by the economic downturn should be permitted to equitably contribute to the reimagining and fundamental restructuring of the new and expanded creative economy.

There are multiple paths forward for policy making in the creative economy, both in the United States and internationally. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a set of broad

<sup>21</sup> Wolff, Ward, and Callanan, Laura. *A Creativity Lens: Impact Investing in the Creative Economy*. Upstart Co-Lab (2020). <https://upstartcolab.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Deep-Dive-Full-Series-Upstart-Co-Lab.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Bissell, Evan. *Notes on a Cultural Strategy for Belonging*. Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society (2019). <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/notesonaculturalstrategy/why>.

<sup>23</sup> Han, Jeehoon, Bruce Meyer, and James Sullivan. *Real-Time Poverty Estimates During the Covid-19 Pandemic through October 2020\**. (University of Notre Dame University of Chicago Harris Public Policy, and Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities, 2020). [https://harris.uchicago.edu/files/monthly\\_poverty\\_rates\\_updated\\_thru\\_november\\_2020\\_final.pdf](https://harris.uchicago.edu/files/monthly_poverty_rates_updated_thru_november_2020_final.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, Randy. *Covid-19's Pandemic's Impact on the Arts: Research Update*. (Americans for the Arts, August 312021). <https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/103614>.

<sup>25</sup> “Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, U.S. And States | U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).” news release., 2021. <https://www.bea.gov/news/2021/arts-and-cultural-production-satellite-account-us-and-states>.

## Co-designing a new vision of the creative economy

policy recommendations that can leverage “the social and economic impacts of culture” in the context of economic recovery; they recommend that nations:

- Upscale the innovation capacity within CCS (the cultural and creative sector) and support innovation crossovers with other sectors
- Address digital gaps to help emerge new business opportunities
- Improve CCS access to finance
- Integrate cultural and creative sectors into broader regional and local recovery strategies.<sup>26</sup>

All of these recommendations are reasonable paths forward in a broad sense, especially for those who work in the context of supporting creative businesses to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation. There are, however, other arguably more radical and transformative policy actions that are being advanced. Offering universal basic income; extending worker protections and social insurance programs to freelance arts workers and others working as independent contractors; and supporting forms of collective action for independent workers are some of the many policy proposals being offered by those who see the need and opportunity to use this political moment to drive fundamental reforms that would improve the “social contract” for artists and creative workers.<sup>27</sup> For those with a focus on equity and belonging, increasing the minimum wage; expanding tax credits; using policy to encourage racial and economic integration within neighborhoods; and a range of other policies are being advanced. This spectrum of policy options offers strategies for those of varying political orientations and positionalities within and

outside of the creative sector; it allows them to identify and advocate on behalf of a set of issues that resonate with their outlook and values. Many of these policies also represent opportunities for change at the state and federal level and utilize the mechanisms and processes of government. The solidarity economy movement offers a set of strategies that can indeed utilize public policy as a mechanism but are often much more about community-based organizing and systems of ownership that center the agency of individuals and communities more than politics and policymaking. The legal and regulatory environment (for example new types of enterprise formation or investment and financial rules) can also be important to the new (and old) types of structures being built that place ownership in the hands of artists and communities. The political system needn't be the only tool used in pursuing systems change, for even at its most participatory, it largely still upholds a top down approach to decision making. The environment can certainly be made to be more supportive of the working lives of artists and creatives; greater small business support could be offered to creative businesses and nonprofit organizations; and working conditions can be improved for self-employed, contract, part-time, and gig economy workers through policy change. But, artist-led, community-based solutions and structures (supported by the public sector, private philanthropy, and in some cases private investment where appropriate) hold particular promise in generating new economic models that are more just by design.

It is the hope of this convening to explore these concepts and their intersections over the two days together. If successful, this can inform an ongoing community of practice that can offer ongoing support, collaboration and thought leadership for the field in reshaping how we approach the advancement of the creative economy to be more equitable, community-centered, and just.

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<sup>26</sup> "Back in Business: Sme Support Ecosystems for Cultural and Creative Sectors -OECD." OECD, 2021.

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<sup>27</sup> Yang, Jenny, Amanda Briggs, Jessica Shakesprere, Natalie Spievack, Shayne Spaulding, and Steven Brown. *Arts Workers in California*. Urban Institute (2021-01-15). <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/arts-workers-california>.



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## About WESTAF

WESTAF is dedicated to strengthening the financial, organizational, and policy infrastructure of the arts in the West. Through innovative programming, advocacy, research, technology, and grantmaking, WESTAF encourages the creative advancement and preservation of the arts regionally and through a national network of customers and alliances. WESTAF serves the largest constituent territory of the [six U.S. regional arts organizations](#) and includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The Creative Vitality™ Suite, a creative economy data and reporting tool, was designed and developed by the Western StatesArts Federation (WESTAF) as a regional nonprofit arts service organization, experienced research organization, and developer of technology solutions for the arts.

# Resources

A number of documents and web links to relevant resources were shared prior to and during the Creative Summit as presented below.

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