

Pave Program in Arts Entrepreneurship



Artist Professional Development Needs

Findings and Recommendations from a
Survey of Artists and Organizations

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Introduction

The Emily Hall Tremain Foundation charged the Pave Program in Arts Entrepreneurship to research the professional development training needs of individual artists and current and potential offerings of artist support organizations as a foundation for development of a “framework” for an all-inclusive artist professional development website. In doing so, we uncovered trends in professional development training needs that may have implications beyond the mere design of a website. Our research seeks to uncover 1) what artists feel they need in professional development services; 2) what professional development training is provided by artist services organizations and 3) what respondents believe needs to be offered but is not.

Methodology

We employed two research instruments: an online survey of representatives of artist service organizations and state and local arts councils; and 30 minute semi-structured phone interviews with individual artists. The online survey was sent to every organization identified in *How It’s Being Done*¹, including the September 2015 updates to the inventory, as well as all state arts agencies and Tremain Foundation grantees. A total of 136 of surveys were distributed via direct email. Thirty-seven organizations responded, a respectable 27% response rate. Three respondents declined to identify their organization, and all but three respondent organizations had been previously identified in the *How It’s Being Done* report.

Type of Organization	Frequency
For Profit Entity	1
Independent Network	1
Local Arts and Business Council	2
Local Arts Council	6
Local Arts Service NPO	9
National Arts Service NPO	3
National Professional Organization	2
Partnership of Nonprofits	1
State Arts Agency	3
Statewide Arts Service Network	1

¹ Essig, L. and Flanagan, M. (2015/2016) *How It’s Being Done: Arts Business Training across the U.S.* downloadable from https://entrepreneur.herbergerinstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/hibd_february_revision_final.pdf

² Based on artist interviews, we define environmental analysis as being able to accurately assess the current

University Affiliate	2
Website	2

Table 1. Frequency of organizational responses by type

These organizations are located around the country, with the largest frequency serving the Mideast (8), seven (7) serving nationally, and the lowest frequency in the Rocky Mountain and Great Plains regions (1 each). Unsurprisingly, this trend closely mirrors the regional frequency identified in *How It's Being Done*.

Our online survey asked six questions about both provision of and need for arts-specific business training: 1) My organization provides web-based resources to individual artists in the following topic areas; 2) My organization provides face-to-face training to individual artists in the following topic areas; 3) How many individual artists have you served in these programs in FY 2015, FY2014, and FY2013; 4) In the topic areas in which your organizations provides training, which have been in highest demand over the past three years; 5) In your opinion, which of the following topic areas are more important to artist professional development in your community; 6) In your opinion, which of the following topic areas are most important to artist career sustainability in your community. For questions 2, 4, 5, and 6 respondents were asked to choose from the following topics: accounting for artists; asset building; entrepreneurial skills; insurance; legal considerations; marketing and communications; networking; social impact; strategic planning; and other (please specify).

In addition to the online survey, we asked the 136 organizations we contacted to help us recruit individual artists for phone interviews. Many of them did so, either via social media, direct email, or as part of their regularly scheduled e-newsletter. In addition, Pave Program for Arts Entrepreneurship posted the call for artist participation to their facebook page, and posted in an online forum for Arizona artists. Thirty-eight artists responded to the call for participants. Working from a script, Tremaine fellow Mollie Flanagan interviewed the artists over the phone, recording each call as well as taking notes during the interview. She asked nine questions, three with subquestions: 1) How do you define your creative practice; 2) How long have you been working as a professional artist; 3) Do you have a degree in the field? Please specify; 4) What are the components of your professional practice, for example, if you do several different things, such as teaching artist, arts administrator and studio artist, please tell me about each of these things; 5) Have you taken any professional development training in the last three years, and if so, in what topics? If yes, was this training effective?; 6) What hard skills do you need to learn to sustain your creative practice in the future?; 7) What soft skills do you feel you need to learn to sustain your creative practice in the future?; 8) Would you consider yourself an entrepreneurial artist? What does being an entrepreneurial artist mean to you? 9) What do you wish you had learned earlier in your career about the business side of your creative practice?.

We also gathered some basic demographic information: zip code, gender identification, and age.

The 38 artists range in age from 27 to 66 (with one person not identifying their age), the average age is 46, median age is 43. Twenty-nine self-identify as female, 6 male, 1 queer, 1 trans-male, and 1 no identification. 42% of the artists live in the Mideast region (n=16), 18% in Great Lakes and New England (n=7), 13% in Far West (n=5), and 2.6% each in Southwest, Southeast, and Canada (n=1). There were no responses from artists living in the Plains or Rocky Mountain regions. We suggest that the regional concentration of artists echoes the participation of organizations in the survey as well as the concentration of artists living in each of the regions. Lower Manhattan Cultural Council sent the call as a separate email to each artist that had attended any of the professional development programs over the past few years. Two other local organizations (based in Cleveland and Connecticut) also recruited artists in effective ways. Nearly two thirds of the artists (25 of 38) identify as visual artists, the next highest frequency being theater and musical theater (7), with literature at 4, media arts with 2, and music and arts education with 1 participant each. One cause for higher participation by visual artists may be due to the high level of participation by Tremaine Foundation grantees in the organizational survey responses and subsequent artist recruitment efforts. We note that Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and the Cleveland-based Community Partnership for Arts in Culture, which both resulted in high numbers of artist responses, serve artists of all disciplines, but the Connecticut based program, Make.Art.Work, is specifically for visual artists. Among the other participating organizations, 21 serve artists of all disciplines, 8 serve visual artists, and musicians or performing artists are served by 1 each. We do not know definitively which other organizations shared our call with their artist communities, nor can we discern the level of participation by artists associated with each organization.

We acknowledge that the sampling methodology has limitations. Using an opt-in strategy meant that only those artists who already had relationships with the surveyed arts services organizations knew of the study, leading to a sample of only 38 artists. Nevertheless, given the geographic, genre, and age diversity of the respondents, we feel it offers a reasonable range of artists' viewpoints. Further, the findings from the interviews align with observations of our own artist professional development interactions.

Survey results: Organizations

The organizations that responded to our survey vary widely in the ways in which they deliver services to artists. Most of the organizations provide web-based training in more than one topic, while one organization does not provide any web-based training and another only provides lists of other resources. See Table 2.

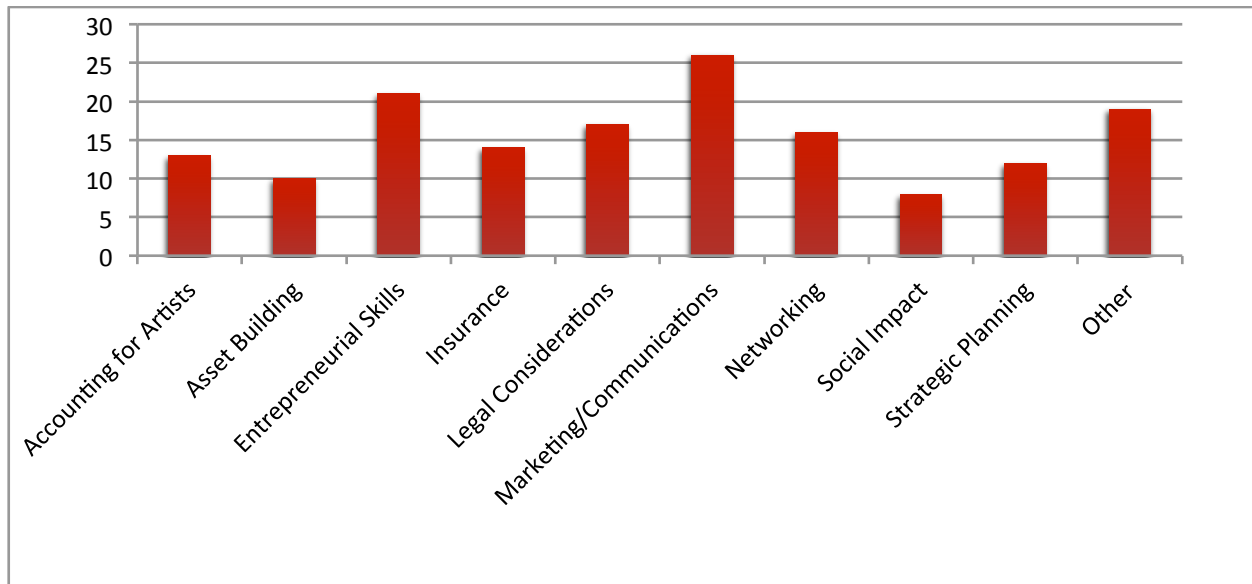


Table 2. Frequency of Web-based Training Offered in Specific Topics

Some of the topics specified as “other” include: grant research and writing (n=5); resume writing (n=2); emergency preparedness (n=1); creative placemaking (n=1); estate and legacy planning (which we consider to be asset building; n=1); and pricing (n=2).

As is true of the web-based training, many organizations provide face-to-face training in multiple topics.

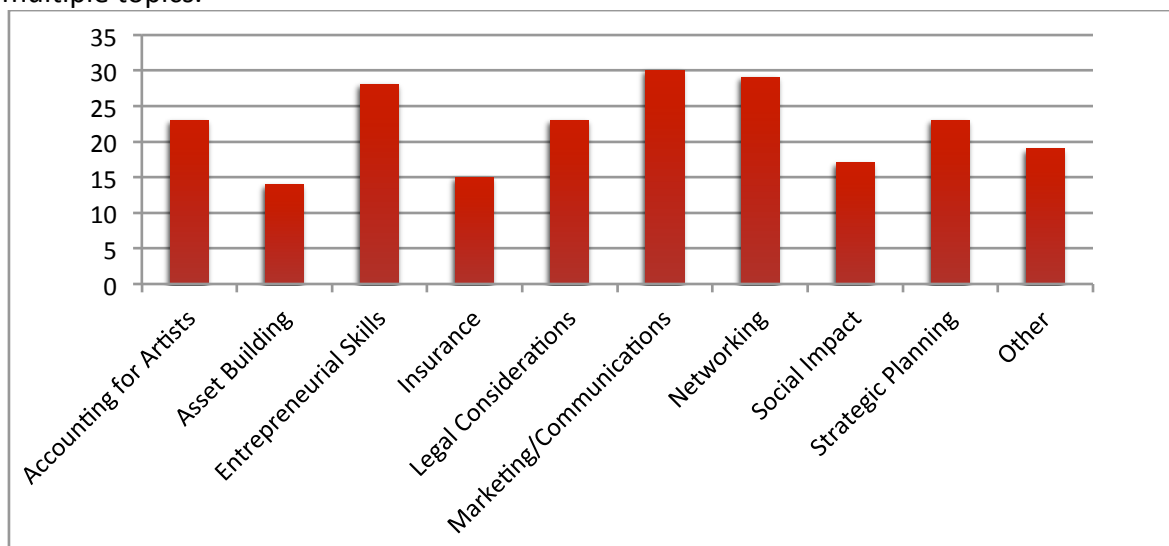


Table 3. Frequency of Face-to-face Training Offered in Specific Topics

There is a greater frequency of offerings in the face-to-face format than online; networking and strategic planning are almost twice as likely to be offered in face-to-face formats than on the web. This may be a reflection of the inherently personal nature of networking and artist strategic planning. “Other” topics in face-to-face offerings are, for the most part, similar to those specified for the web-based training.

The number of artists served by each organization ranges from 8 in a single fiscal year (for a small, university affiliated workshop series) to over 15,000 (a magazine with both online and print versions). While the on-line magazine serves thousands, it does so only in the following topics: accounting for artists; entrepreneurial skills; marketing and communications; networking; and strategic planning. Its online only platform does not enable interaction with its readership aside from comment sections in the digital articles. The majority of the content is print articles with occasional featured videos.

Organization representatives were asked which topic areas have been in the highest demand over the past three years. While the results are informative, they do not include the topics identified under the “other” categories above, and only measure demand for the topics in which the organization provides training.

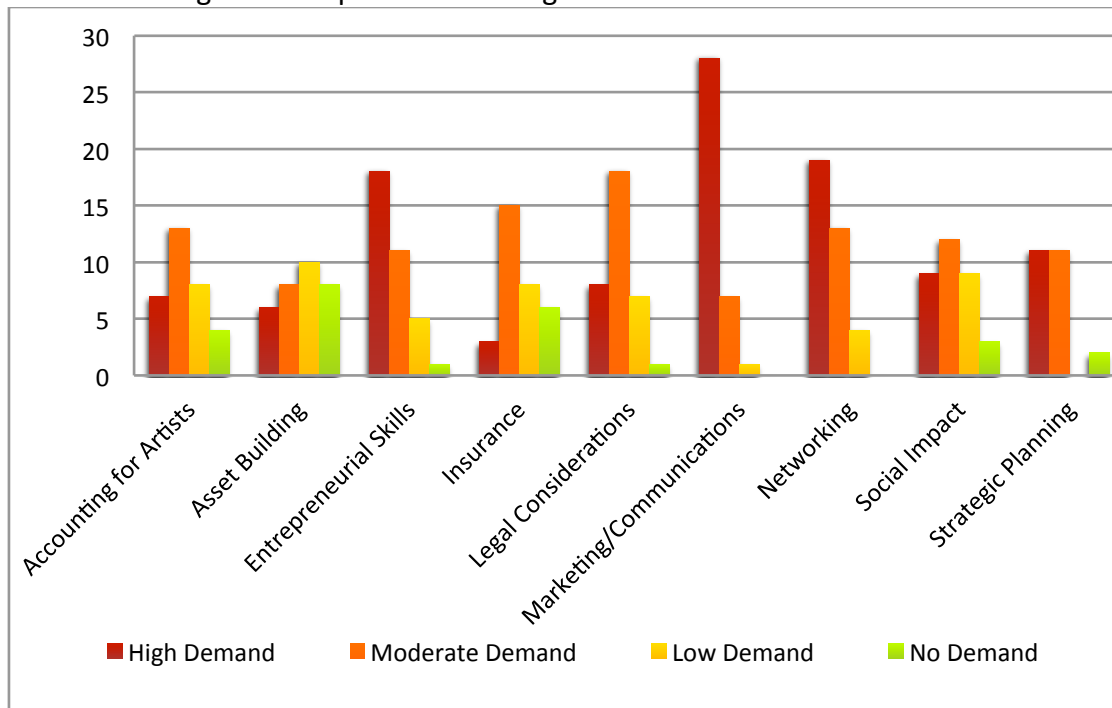


Table 4. Demand for Training Topics

While marketing and communications is clearly identified as in highest demand, followed by networking and entrepreneurial skills, the cluster at the bottom is more difficult to discern from one another. Insurance and asset building seem to have the lowest demand. We think that may be due in part to artists, especially early in their careers, not being aware that these are important issues, or not prioritizing these issues at the early career stage. Four of the respondents commented that fundraising/grant writing training was in high demand for their organizations, although our survey did not specifically address that topic.

The last two questions call on the organization representative’s expertise and experience in artist services, asking their opinion about professional development training. Question five asked: “In your opinion, which of the following topic areas are most important to professional development in your community?”

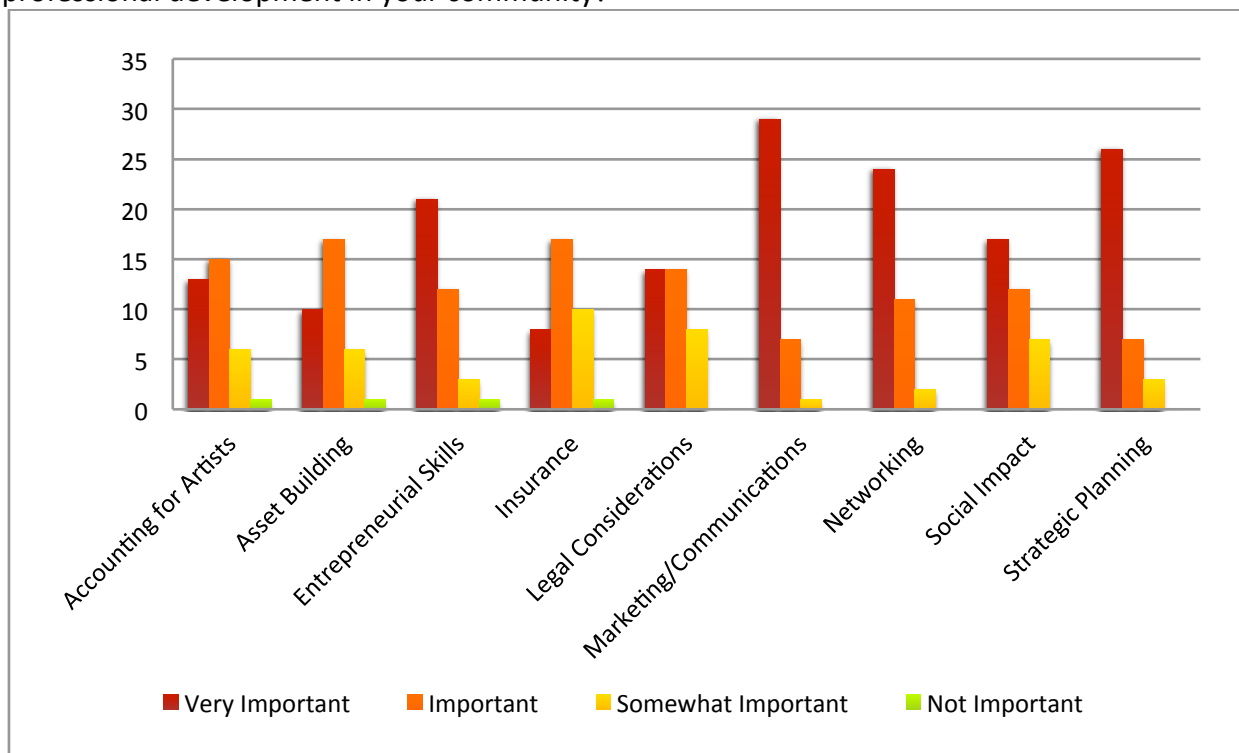


Table 5. Training Topics Most Important to Professional Development

As in the demand for training, marketing and communications were identified as the most important topic area of professional development need. However, strategic planning is also deemed to be very important by most organizational respondents, as is networking. Like the previous question, the lowest importance is placed on insurance. It is interesting to note that some topics that the organizational representatives deemed to be very important (e.g.,

strategic planning) were not in particularly high demand. However, as noted in our discussion of interview results following, artists seem to recognize that strategic planning is important to sustaining their creative practice.

Question six asked: “In your opinion, which of the following topic areas are most important to artist career sustainability in your community?”

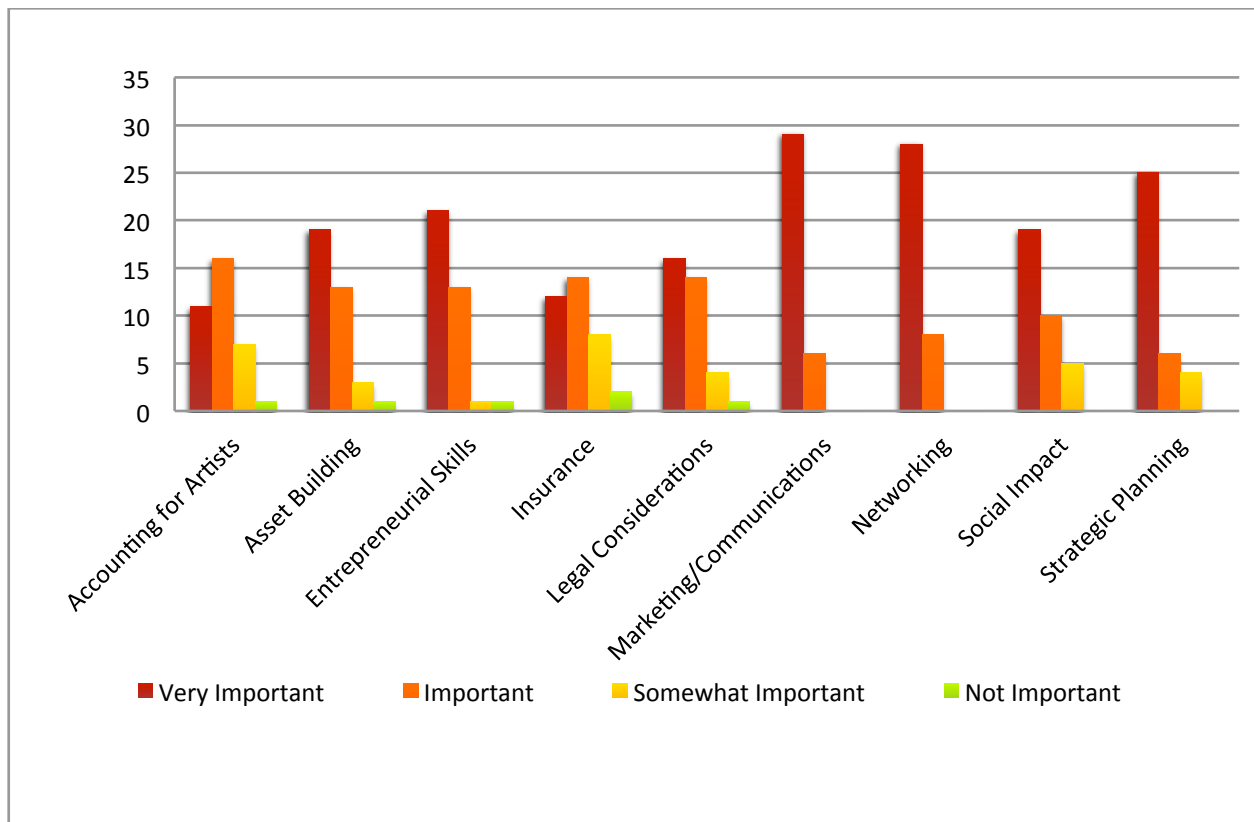


Table 6. Training Topics Most Important to Career Sustainability

In this question, again, marketing and communications was selected as the most important, followed by networking and strategic planning. Entrepreneurial skills is highly rated as well, although it is in the middle third along with asset building and social impact, which are rated much higher here than in the other questions. This difference is, perhaps, an indication that organizational leaders are identifying an unmet need for training in asset building and social impact, both areas we identified in the *How It’s Being Done* report as lacking in current arts business training programs. Again, we see insurance at the bottom, along with accounting for artists and legal considerations.

Survey results: Individual artists

We interviewed 38 artists over a 2 week period via phone. These artist subjects answered 9 scripted but open-ended questions. Unlike the online survey for organizational leaders, interview subjects were not limited to pre-selected topics or categories as responses. We noted their verbatim responses and developed in vivo codes from them. We then grouped these in vivo codes into categories as appropriate. Responses to three of the nine questions are discussed following, the remaining six were demographic in nature: career longevity; education; gender; nature of creative practice; previous business training (2 questions). The three questions of interest are: What hard skills do you need to learn to sustain your creative practice in the future?; What soft skills do you need to learn to sustain your creative practice in the future?; What do you wish you had learned earlier in your career about the business side of your creative practice?.

Hard skills are specific knowledges and skills that are tangible and teachable. The 38 artists identified 25 hard skills they felt they need to learn to sustain their creative practice in the future. Table 7 following exhibits the frequency with which artists identified the hard skills needed to sustain their creative practice in the future.

Hard Skill Needed	Frequency
Finances	18
Marketing	14
Social media	6
Disciplinary	6
Professional communications	5
Networking	5
Software	4
Taxes	4
Grant writing	4
Branding	3
Contact management	3
Business management	3
Fundraising	3
Writing about work	2
Public speaking	2
Business planning	2

Web development and coding	2
Creating online content	2
Legal	1
Managing cash flow	1
Grant research	1
Leadership	1
Portfolio Creation	1
Distribution	1
Web design	1

Table 7. Frequency of Hard Skills Needed

While financial management had the single highest frequency, skills relating to communications had the most overall responses, with finance-related skills following closely behind. Hard skills based in specific artistic disciplines were identified 6 times, with needs including: developing and expanding workshop practice; carpentry; puppetry; devising theatrical performance; musical theater; field recording; and how to make stretcher bars and frame paintings. Networking shows up repeatedly across all three questions and it is interesting that, while the majority of respondents that identified networking as a skill they needed did so as a soft skill, it was also cited here by several artists among the hard skills.

Soft skills focus on behavior and personality, and are less tangible than hard skills. The 38 artists interviewed identified 14 soft skills they felt they need to learn to sustain their creative practices in the future.

Soft Skills Needed	Frequency
Networking	16
People skills	10
Public speaking	7
Recognizing opportunity	6
Self-efficacy	6
Self-assessment	5
Environmental analysis ²	5
Goal articulation	4

² Based on artist interviews, we define environmental analysis as being able to accurately assess the current ecosystem, including the needs of the community as well as opportunities for and threats to productivity that are external to the artist such as identifying potential investors or evaluating gallery and craft show exhibition opportunities.

Resilience	4
Organizational skills	4
Time management	3
How to delegate	3
Risk assessment	1
Mentoring	1

Table 8. Frequency of Soft Skills Needed

As with the hard skills, soft skills relating to communications were identified with the highest frequency. One could arguably consider “Networking” and “People skills” to be indistinguishable from one another. Meanwhile, strategic planning skills were mentioned infrequently, while entrepreneurial skills were identified as important, but not clearly defined.

The third question, “What do you wish you had learned earlier in your career about the business side of your creative practice?” is of particular interest. There were 31 skills or traits identified by the 38 artists in response to this question.

Skills to be Learned Earlier	Frequency
Business in general	10
Accounting and taxes	6
Networking	6
Social media	5
How to sell self	4
Marketing	4
Archiving and preservation	3
Basic bookkeeping	3
Teaching skills	3
How to sell work	3
Strategic practice	3
Dedication	3
Contracts	2
Business math	2
Fundraising	2
Opportunity recognition	2
Accepting reality	2
Importance of community	2

Working with agents	1
Focus on the art making	1
Survival skills	1
Time management	1
Working with galleries	1
Inventory management	1
Curatorial process	1
Building a portfolio	1
Carpentry	1
Pricing work	1
Computer stuff	1
Grant writing	1
How to freelance	1

Table 9. Frequency of Skills Needed Earlier in Career

The highest frequency of response was simply business in general, identified by 10 artists. When added to accounting, which immediately follows in the frequency table, and bookkeeping, almost half of the artists surveyed wish they had learned these hard skills earlier. Communications topics also had a high frequency with 15 total responses as a group. Behavioral traits and awarenesses (e.g., “accepting reality”) had a high frequency across topics, however each individual topic had a low frequency. One important skill identified in the survey is teaching skills. It seems that many artists are working as teaching artists or teachers, and lack training in how to teach. Though our artist sample skewed heavily in favor of visual artists, responses related to gallery sales were relatively infrequent.

Trend Analysis

The most clear trend across both the organizational survey responses and the artist phone interviews was the frequency and importance placed on marketing and communications. In answer to nearly every question, marketing and communications were identified as the most important or the most frequently occurring. It is also clear that for artists, marketing and communications consists of a number of smaller, more specific skills that fall within the broader topic of communications such as: writing about their work; public speaking; and networking, although this last is not merely a subset of communications.

Networking was isolated from marketing and communications in the organizational survey, and occurred frequently across all three questions in the artist interviews. Networking is identified by artist service organizations as both being in high demand and being a very

important aspect of professional development and career sustainability. While the artists described their need for networking both as in-person networking opportunities and techniques for successful networking, it is unclear what aspect of networking is being provided or identified by organizations. In follow up questions, artists specifically identified the need to network both with other artists and with potential buyers and patrons. While the artists did see online networking as valuable, every responding artist highlighted the need for in-person networking as a way to create lasting personal relationships, ensure that the artist and art are understood, and convert interest into sales. Discerning the nature of “networking” and its importance will require additional research; we are currently conducting a literature review on the relationship between networking and entrepreneurial success.

The organizational representatives identified finances as not being in high demand and relatively unimportant for artists in their professional development training. However, artists deemed it very important in their interviews. Again, terminology is important. In the organization survey, it was called accounting for artists. In the phone interviews with artists, this broad topic came up variously as accounting, taxes, finances, and bookkeeping. While these are all discrete topics within the broader topic of accounting, the organizational survey may or may not have captured “taxes” and “finances” in the “accounting for artists” choice.

Entrepreneurial skills were also identified as highly important in both the organization surveys and artist phone interviews. While the phone interview also asked if the artists considered themselves entrepreneurial and what that meant to them, those definitions have not been analyzed here. However, we note that the majority of interviewees (26 out of 38) did consider themselves to be entrepreneurial artists. When asked what being an entrepreneurial artist means to them, the highest frequency answer was connecting art to other people. This correlation between being an entrepreneurial artist and the frequently identified need for communications skills is notable. In addition to this idea of connecting art to others, artists identify other skills more traditionally linked to entrepreneurship: innovation; willing to lead; taking risks; opportunity recognition; and keeping the buyer in mind. These skills were also identified as soft skills the artists need to learn, though not as highly in skills they wish they had learned earlier.

Skills related to gallery sales were identified in both the artist interviews and organizational survey, though with relatively low frequency. In the organizational survey, one respondent identified pricing as important, while four gallery-related skills were identified by artists as things they wish they had learned earlier.

Recommended framework for knowledge dissemination

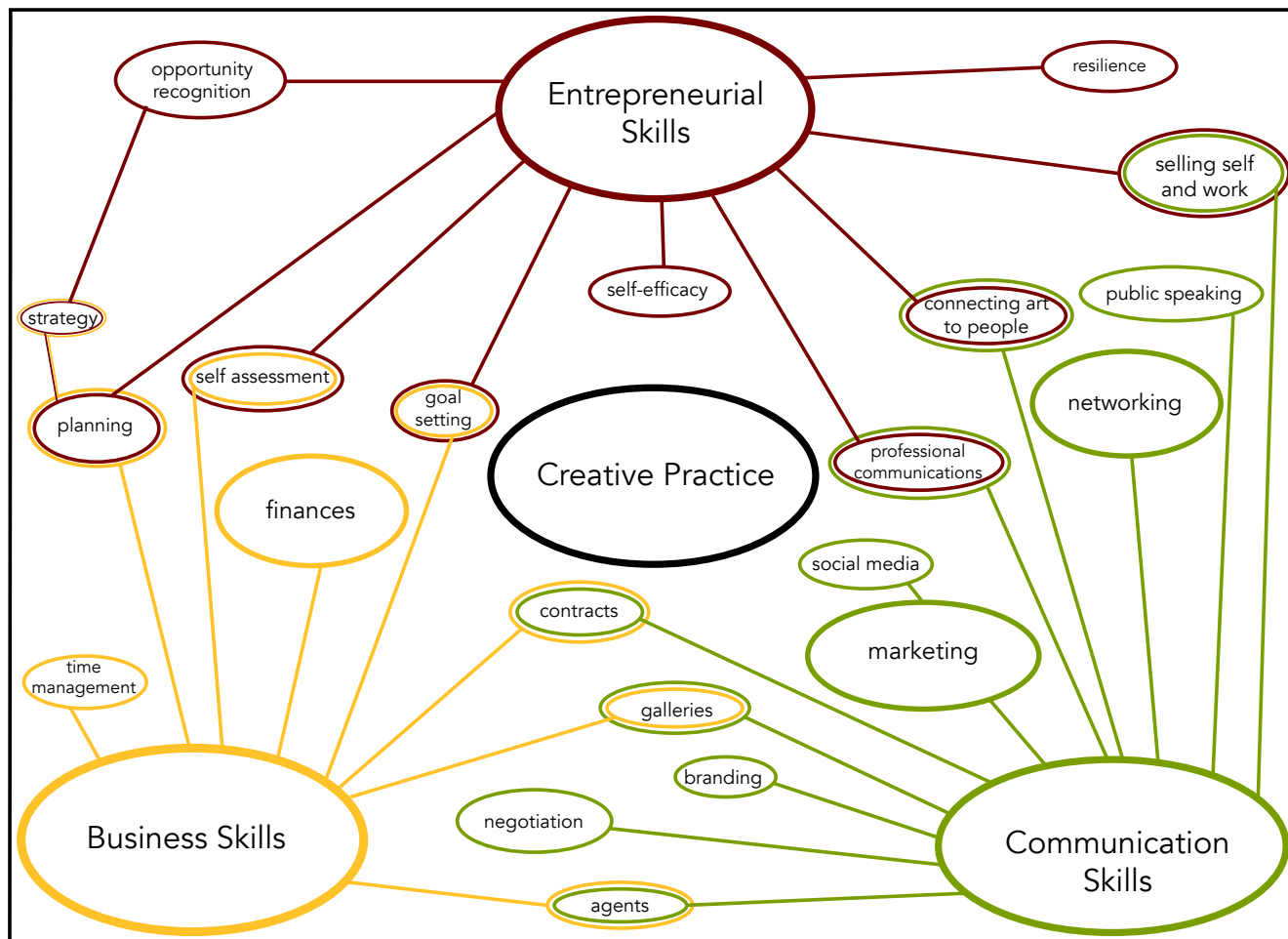
It is clear from the artist surveys that, while we can identify some discrete arts business topics, many are interrelated. We propose a website (or other knowledge dissemination)

structure that highlights this interconnectedness and the interdependency of each skill area. See Figure 1. The “home page” would be a visual organization of topics that stem from larger, overarching ideas and connect to each other. We suggest grouping the interrelated topics into three networked “hubs”: Business Skills, Communication Skills, and Entrepreneurial Skills. For online delivery, each hub should have spokes of narrower, more specialized topics. Each topic listing could be clickable and take the viewer to a list of resources. We suggest a fourth hub, Creative Practice, at the center. Creative Practice would include social impact, as well as specific arts disciplinary practices as appropriate, and graphically represents that the arts business skills in the other hubs are in support of the creative practice. This hub was not specifically identified by this research, but by the observations and interests of the researchers.

Our research here as well as anecdotal observation suggests that networking and the people skills identified in the artist interviews are best taught in a face-to-face format. This conclusion is echoed in the organizational survey responses as well, which seem to indicate that these soft skills are far more frequently taught in person than online. Follow-up responses from artists confirm these observations, with the majority of responding artists preferring face-to-face training based on their past experiences (most had participated in both formats). Two thirds of the artists preferred face-to-face training over online training; only one person specifically preferred online training; the remaining respondents did not indicate a preference. We are currently considering how networking and people skills can be taught effectively online. One suggestion for supplementing (not replacing) face-to-face training in this area is to include an interactive element to a website. We recommend a message board or boards that are both searchable and sortable. This would allow artists to ask questions and help each other, creating a mutually beneficial online community of artists, something many artists identified as vital but frequently lacking from their current practice. We also recommend that the hosting organization moderate this board, checking for open questions and attempting to assist. Doing so effectively would require dedicated staff time.

While online resources are beneficial, especially due to ease of access and availability, we stress that a website will not be a sector-wide panacea. We recommend adding local resources that can be accessed in person to each topic sub-site, organized by region. These will need to be updated regularly by the host organization. We also acknowledge the limitations of web-only resources due to the passive nature of information delivery. Given the strong interest in networking, web resources are not a substitute for face-to-face communication, even if facilitated by online tools.

Suggested Website Framework for Artist Professional Development Resources



Prepared by Mollie Flanagan for the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation

Figure 1. Framework for artist professional development resources