



***BUILDING AUSTIN'S CREATIVE CAPACITY:***  
**Creative Sector Needs Assessment**

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Report to the

City of Austin  
Economic Development Department  
Cultural Arts Division

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## Introduction

Austin has recognized that the lines between the creative output of nonprofit arts and culture organizations, individual creatives, and for-profit creative enterprises are becoming increasingly blurry – the economic and social values that derive from cultural engagement are not limited to a specific business model. Given that the City of Austin is already measuring the economic impact of the city’s creative sector,<sup>1</sup> has identified the importance of growing and investing in the creative economy across planning platforms, and won two ArtPlace America creative placemaking grants, there is an imperative to examine the support structures that reinforce creatives’ and arts/cultural organizations’ ability to work and thrive in Austin. By increasing its understanding of the support needs and the available resources, the City and community will be able to invest in the continued growth and long-term sustainability of the creative sector.

The recommendations from the Create Austin Cultural Master Plan, the Imagine Austin Plan, and the mission and goals of the Economic Development Department’s Cultural Arts Division (CAD) all highlight the importance of providing creatives and arts/cultural organizations with resources and services that will increase their creative capacity and improve their business development acumen. In the past, CAD has continually sought to improve its support programs, but given the rapid pace at which creative enterprises are changing and the need to deploy resources more strategically, the intersection of several planning efforts make this an ideal time to step back and complete a comprehensive analysis of the existing support services, service gaps, and overlaps.

The objectives of the Creative Sector Needs Assessment are to a) gather input from Austin’s nonprofit arts and culture organizations and individual creatives to identify their support structure needs, b) identify any service gaps between the support structure services needed and those provided by Austin nonprofit service providers, c) prepare a report of the findings and a set of recommendations for implementing support and capacity building services and structures to be delivered by the City, primarily through CAD. Early in the project it was also deemed important to provide information that other organizations can use as they develop programs for the creative sector.

Throughout this study, the term “creatives” is used to refer to individuals, who

- have received extensive training in a creative field or have otherwise acquired creative skills;
- are actively engaged in creative work and presenting it to the public;
- AND either derive income or attempt to derive income from their creative activity.

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<sup>1</sup> TXP, Inc., “The Economic Impact of the Creative Sector in Austin – 2012 Update,” 2012, available at [https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/creative\\_sector\\_impact2012.pdf](https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/creative_sector_impact2012.pdf)



The term “arts/cultural organizations” refers to nonprofit and public sector arts, culture, and heritage organizations, including 501(c)3 organizations, state and municipal institutions, and entities that are affiliated with universities.

A Steering Committee was formed to oversee this project. Committee members contributed their deep understanding the cultural landscape of Austin, provided input on the project strategy, assisted in developing the research approach, helped engage their community contacts in the research, and commented on a draft of the gap analysis. In addition, some Steering Committee members reviewed the survey protocols and beta-tested the online survey. A listing of all Steering Committee members is included in the final report. The project benefited greatly from their input.

The scope of work is divided into five segments: Strategy Process, Survey Development, Support Services Gap Analysis, Open Community Meeting, and Key Findings and Recommendations.<sup>2</sup> The research methodology is described below.

This document is the third of three reports being submitted to the City of Austin as part of the *Building Austin’s Creative Capacity* creative sector needs assessment. The first was an Interim Report, submitted to CAD on March 31, 2015, which includes the topline results of the survey data. The second was the Gap Analysis Report, submitted to CAD on June 15, 2015.

This third report, Conclusions and Recommendations, summarizes the research process and the assessment of creative sector service needs, and proposes recommendations. An overview of the research methodology is followed by a summary of key findings, which leads to as set of recommendations and suggested outcome measures.

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<sup>2</sup> Since completing the initial drafts of this report, the scope has been expanded to include three focus groups with minority groups (African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and Asian Americans) to ensure that their perspectives are accurately reflected in the research. These focus groups will be the subject of a separate report, *Building Austin’s Creative Capacity: Community Focus Groups*, and findings will be incorporated in the final analysis.



## **Research Methodology**

In order to identify gaps in the available support services for creatives in Austin one must examine the availability and effectiveness of existing services on the one hand, and the support needs of creatives on the other. In addition, the needs of creatives (individuals who are managing their own creative careers or small businesses) are likely to differ from those reported by arts/cultural organizations (nonprofits and publicly funded institutions), so that separate analyses of these two constituencies are necessary.

To this end, two online surveys were launched in January 2015. One survey was to be completed by representatives of arts, culture, and heritage organizations; the other was intended for individual creatives. The survey protocols were developed in close collaboration with CAD staff and tested by several members of the Steering Committee in December 2014. The surveys were opened to the public on January 14 and closed on March 14, 2015.

Participants were recruited through public announcements, emails, and social media. Flyers were distributed, the Steering Committee and targeted organizations reached out to their constituents, and broad networks of personal contacts were informed through various means. Two screening questions at the beginning of the survey were used to assess the respondents' eligibility to complete the survey. Individual creatives had to be over 18 and reside within the Austin-Round Rock MSA to participate in the survey. To complete the survey for organizations, respondents had to be qualified representatives of their organization (one per organization) and the organization had to be located within the Austin-Round Rock MSA.

Since there is no definitive data on the size and composition of the creative community in Austin and the survey sample was not generated randomly, the representativeness of the results cannot be determined via significance tests. Rather than providing generalizable conclusions about Austin's creative community as a whole, the results of the survey are best considered as the outcome of an extensive consultation process in which over 500 creatives have shared their opinions. Ideally, they should be considered in the context of a larger and ongoing conversation with the creative community that informs the development of effective support services for Austin's creatives.

In addition to the online survey, CAD hosted an open community meeting on May 20, 2015. CAD issued an open invitation to individual creatives and nonprofit arts organizations to attend this meeting, whether or not they had completed the survey. The purpose of this meeting was to receive feedback on the main findings of the survey and thereby 'ground truth' the survey results with practicing members of the creative community.

After a brief presentation that outlined the composition of the survey sample and major findings, attendees were divided into small roundtables, some of which were designated for individual creatives and other for representatives of arts/culture organizations. Within these groups, participants discussed “what rings true or and what doesn’t” in the findings and went on to prioritize the findings for further action.

While the 20 participants in the open community meeting cannot be considered representative of Austin’s creative sector, the open format of the session allowed participants to explain their positions in detail and provide contextual information, which helps illuminate (and in some cases question) the survey data. Comments from the open session have been incorporated throughout this report to add greater nuance to the analysis; however, it should be kept in mind that in some cases these comments express the views of a small number of individuals.



## **Key Findings**

This section summarizes major findings from the surveys of individual creatives and arts/cultural organizations individually, and then highlights themes that were consistently expressed in both surveys.

### **Summary of Findings of Individual Creatives**

#### **I1) Respondents appreciate the variety of support services available but also experience a number of challenges in pursuing their creative work in Austin.**

- a) There is not enough information about the available resources.
- b) The costs of living and working in Austin are a major concern, expressed throughout the survey. Participants in the community meeting unanimously agreed with this finding and consider it to be the primary challenge.
- c) There is insufficient publicity, marketing, and branding for creatives. One reason for this may be that the amount of activity in Austin makes it challenging to have desired publicity levels for all creatives and events.
- d) Research participants registered concern that demand for purchasing art is weak and not enough people are motivated to collect or buy art in this market.

#### **I2) Survey participants acknowledge and appreciate the supportive creative ecosystem in Austin.**

- a) There is an exciting creative ‘vibe’ and a strong creative community.
- b) There is a strong desire to connect with others creatives locally through networking and mentoring.
- c) Respondents want to connect with the creative industries rather than the small business community or nonprofit sector.

**I3) There are some strong recurring themes in the respondents' descriptions of the resources they need to take their creative work to the next professional level.**

- a) Respondents are most attracted to informal engagement opportunities, such as mentoring, networking, peer learning, and online resources.
- b) They are interested in self-directed learning and support services they can access on their own time via the internet or through centralized resource centers that provide drop-in services.
- c) Many creatives believe that continuing to hone their creative skills is more important for the development of their careers than acquiring business management skills.

**I4) Austin is considered to be a very good place for artists and creatives to live but it isn't as nurturing as it could be.**

- a) Respondents only tentatively agree with the statement "Austin is a great place for artists and creatives to live and work" (Mean score: 3.5 out of 5)
- b) Respondents were even more hesitant to agree that "I feel nurtured and supported by the community of artists and creatives" (Mean score: 3.3 out of 5)

Participants in the open community meeting were generally supportive of survey's findings but they did register valuable additional comments. They liked the high density of creatives in Austin and even though the crowded market makes it difficult for individuals to stand out, they did not see it as a hardship. Regarding the perceived weakness of the visual arts market in Austin, they argued that the issue of purchasing more art is a systemic one based on diminished arts education, community values and lacking awareness. Attendees at the open community meeting were suspicious of the high-level of interest in connecting with networks in the "creative industries" reported in the survey, because they believe that most people don't really know what the term means and whom it includes. Although it didn't emerge as a top priority in the survey, participants at the open community meeting had a strong interest in better access to space (studio, performance and work). They felt strongly that both creative and business skills were necessary, but they also acknowledged that many creatives don't know what they have to learn to be more successful. In general, attendees at the open community meeting had an even more bleak outlook on the state of support for Austin's creative sector. The discussants felt that the scores assigned in the overall assessments of Austin as a place for creatives to work were generous.





Overall, among the individuals who participated in this research there is a strong desire for resources that will help them build their creative practices themselves. They desire mentors, networks, centralized resources, self-directed learning opportunities, ongoing creative training, and not least of all recognition for what they do. Yes, they want more funding, access to affordable living and working space, and better pay, but they primarily seem to be looking for services and opportunities that will help them chart their own future.

### **Summary of Findings of Arts and Cultural Organizations**

#### **O1) Austin is considered a good place for artists and creatives to live, but support for the cultural sector as a whole is lacking.**

- a) Respondents only tentatively agree with the statement “Austin is a great place for artists and creatives to live and work” (Mean score: 3.5 out of 5).
- b) As with the individual creatives, respondents from organizations were more hesitant to agree with the statement “I feel nurtured and supported by the community of artists, creatives and cultural administrators” (Mean score: 3.3 out of 5).
- c) On average, respondents tend to disagree with the statement “In general, the arts and cultural sector is well supported in Austin” (Mean score: 2.7 out of 5).
- d) Overall, small organizations are less satisfied with overall support than larger organizations.

#### **O2) The organizations surveyed consider access to financial support and business development resources top priorities.**

- a) Organizations need ongoing financial support, which often goes to established institutions rather than newer organizations
- b) The topics that organizations most want to build expertise in are directly related to the generation of earned and contributed income: fundraising/donor cultivation, marketing/advertising, and communications/public relations.
- c) Finding affordable rehearsal space was considered an issue at the community meeting.



**O3) The responding arts/cultural organizations have a preference for self-directed learning opportunities, though they also take advantage of more formal professional development offerings.**

- a) The most frequently requested learning resources are an online information portal, mentorship programs, and centralized services.
- b) Like the individuals surveyed, the arts/cultural organizations are not interested in set starting and ending times for development activities.

**O4) Significant barriers to pursuing learning opportunities are a lack of internal resources and access to opportunities.**

- a) Staff of nonprofit arts organizations don't have the time to take advantage of opportunities.
- b) The costs of organizational staff development are often prohibitive. Smaller organizations are particularly concerned about this.
- c) Like the individual creatives surveyed, organizations often aren't aware of the available resources. Interest was expressed for access to a physical resource center.
- d) Respondents are ambivalent about the statement that "arts and cultural organizations have ready access to programs, information resources, and opportunities that build their administrative capacity and support their long-term financial stability."

As with the individual creative, the representatives of nonprofit arts organizations who participated in the open community meeting generally agreed with survey's findings, though there were a few notable exceptions. Like the individual creatives, the nonprofit arts organizations at the meeting felt that the arts and culture sector in Austin is less well supported than indicated by the survey results. Whereas the survey suggests that Austin's creative traditional forms of professional development, with fixed starting and end times, the participants at the open community meeting cautioned against overcorrecting in that direction. This particular group of nonprofit professionals stated that they like a mix of online and more traditional learning formats. Those at the open community meeting agreed with the individual creatives in thinking that the scores assigned in the overall assessments of Austin as a 'great place to live and work' were generous. Regarding the financial support of arts and cultural nonprofits in Austin, some voiced concern that the established, larger organizations receive funding ahead of the smaller and emerging organizations.



In sum, due to tight budgets and limited staff capacities, arts/cultural organizations often feel they are unable to access the development resources they need. Along with stronger financial support (public, philanthropic, and market-based), centralized information resources, flexible learning opportunities, and access to professional services are desired. Since many organizations expect their budgets for staff training to grow over the coming years, there may be an increased demand for such development opportunities in the future.



## Conclusions

While the needs of individual creatives and arts/cultural organizations are not necessarily linked to each other, comparing the results of the two surveys with each other reveals some striking similarities:

- *There is strong interest in self-directed learning.* Both individual creatives and staff members at arts/cultural organizations want to choose how, when and where they access information and learning resources. They like a mix of independent and face-to-face learning opportunities.
- *Accessing resources and learning opportunities is challenging.* Respondents in both surveys miss out on a lot of opportunities, either due to the costs or because they just don't know where to find out about them.
- *There is a desire for centralized services.* Both individuals and organizations expressed interest in a physical place where creatives can access information, resources, and networks, for a website which hosts information such as a directory of creative services, a data base of resources and services, and a calendar of professional development events.
- *Affordability is an issue in Austin.* Living and working in Austin is challenging for creatives, due to the costs of living, housing, and work/studio space.

While the similarities may outweigh the differences, individual creatives appear to be more concerned with networking (a top priority) and the ongoing development of their creative skills, whereas the representatives of Austin's arts/cultural organizations are more concerned with developing skills that are related to revenue generation.

In reviewing the list of service providers and their range of offerings for individual creatives and arts/culture organizations (see Gap Analysis Report, Appendix A), virtually all of the providers offer training and development programming, 82% offer community networking, 39% have funding availability, 30% offer space/equipment/materials, and only the Austin Creative Alliance offers health insurance. There are clearly a lot of providers offering programs within the same category of services and it will be useful to have further discussion with these providers to explore opportunities to collaborate and leverage resources more effectively.



## **Recommendations**

These recommendations are based on the results of the survey, the work of the Steering Committee, the open community meeting, and the consultants' collective experiences working with different communities. They reflect all that was learned from this process and are intended to inform the City of Austin's Cultural Arts Division on how it can strengthen its support for the creative sector it has been fostering for so many years. The city seems to be at a 'creative crossroads' with several large strategic creative projects underway at both CAD and the Music Division, increasing numbers of creatives moving to Austin, and a city that is growing rapidly. Additionally, CAD and many other service providers are offering a wide variety of support services and resources for the creative sector. This is an opportune time to optimize the effectiveness of those resources and leverage the available assets into an ecosystem that is highly efficient in serving not just the current needs, but the growth potential for a sustainable and vibrant creative economy.

Many of the shortcomings of Austin's support structures for creatives result from a lack of communication within the sector. There are lots of opportunities and resources, but they are not well coordinated with each other. As a result, both individual creatives and arts/cultural organizations find it difficult stay informed about the many programs offered by various service organizations and support networks. By establishing tighter relations and two-way dialogue with the creative community as a whole (in particular with underserved portions of the community), coordinating the available resource providers, and improving communications about the available resources, CAD has an opportunity to increase its impact on the creative field considerably with relatively modest levels of investment. Ideally, CAD would pursue these opportunities in conjunction with the Economic Development Department's Music and Entertainment Division, Small Business Program, and the Museums and Cultural Programs in the Parks and Recreation Department.

### **A. Establish Ongoing Creative Sector Dialogue**

By conducting the *Building Austin's Creative Capacity* creative sector needs assessment, CAD has already taken a significant step towards addressing some of the most pressing concerns in the field. In a general sense, the study has invited the creative community into a conversation about the support they need in order to continue growing Austin's creative vibrancy in the future. But it has also begun to galvanize the sector in more specific ways. This research builds on and expands CAD's previous assessments of the local services available to creatives, including work that fed into the CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan, CAD's earlier needs assessment study, a UT class that assessed creative centers, and CAD's work on a creative expo in 2013.

The comprehensive list of organizations that provide services to various segments of the creative community in Austin that was assembled for the current study marks another step towards greater communication and coordination among the service providers.



Further, CAD reached out to a number of organizations, hubs, and networks in the cultural community to assist with the dissemination of the survey. The value of these lists

of contacts and partners should not be underestimated. All efforts should be made to capitalize on the work that has been done in these areas, by facilitating communications, continuing to build these alliances, and by making these directories available to the sector. The first two recommendations relate directly to these findings.

**Recommendation A.1:** Convene all of the service providers listed in the survey on a regular basis (quarterly or semi-annually) to review program details, discuss opportunities for partnership, limit duplicative efforts, and to ensure that programs represent the needs of today's creative sector. (See Findings I1a, I1b, O2b, O3a, O4c)

- *Develop a taxonomy of support services* to uniformly classify the existing opportunities into categories such as “business management training,” “creative development,” “early stage career planning,” and “public relations training.” The categories used in the survey may serve as a starting point, but the taxonomy should be developed collectively to build a community of service providers coordinating and working together.
- *Assess the availability of development opportunities in areas identified as top priorities* in the Gap Analysis Report, such as creative skill development, publicity and recognition, and finding financial resources.
- In addition to the taxonomy described above, *a basic system of coding and filtering support programs* based on eligibility criteria, disciplinary focus, experience level (introductory, intermediate, advanced), and form of engagement (online video tutorial, hands-on workshop, panel discussion, etc.) would help users find the right program for their interests, stage of career, knowledge level, and learning style.
- *Establish a unified publicity campaign with common language* to increase the awareness of service opportunities within the creative sector.

**Recommendation A.2:** Continue to engage networks and build alliances across the creative sector. Given the breadth and diversity of the creative community in Austin, this must be an ongoing effort. The ties within the community that will help CAD achieve its objectives cannot be achieved with a single meeting or a series of events. They must be developed and maintained over time. The survey demonstrated that CAD is highly respected and that its support programs are greatly appreciated by practitioners in the field. However, the challenges faced in soliciting participation from the communities that were targeted for the Needs Assessment survey suggest that there are limitations to CAD's current networks. Both the survey and the community meeting that was held as part of this study suggest that there is demand for more ongoing dialogue between CAD and the creative sector at grassroots levels.



A useful model for this type of dialogue may be found in the meeting that was convened by one of the Steering Committee members during the review of the Gap Analysis Report, which allowed CAD staff to meet with a number of African American creatives to insure that their concerns received adequate attention.<sup>3</sup> The success of this meeting also highlights the need to engage with the creative community through multiple communications channels, since no single channel (e.g. online surveys, program evaluations, social media, town hall discussions) will reach all segments of Austin's creative sector.

Such convenings will engage networks and help build alliances across the sector. (See Findings I2b, I3a, O3a)

- Schedule regular creative sector dialogues on specific topics around the metro area to allow for increased communication and sense of inclusion.
- These conversations could be held in a variety of formats and might include a combination of events for which CAD goes out into the community and expanded “office hours” of the sort that CAD offers through the Cultural Funding Programs and the Arts and Public Places Program, at which creatives and arts/cultural administrators can drop-in to discuss their concerns.
- Some of these conversations should be open to the public, but others might target specific groups (such as major philanthropies that support arts and culture in Austin, small arts and cultural nonprofits, art collectors, etc.)
- Provide opportunities for cross-sector dialogue. For example, bringing nonprofit organizations, for profit creative businesses, and individual creatives together will foster understanding, support new partnerships, and build awareness of the breadth and needs of the entire creative sector.
- Explore how CAD's existing social media outlets can be leveraged to increase capacity and relevance. What connections can be made that aren't there now? Consider, for example, dedicated listserves for individual creatives and arts and cultural organizations.
- Such conversations will provide opportunities to collect contact information and build databases of creative community members. It is also anticipated that they will increase the sense of being supported and increase satisfaction level with Austin as a place to live and work. In order to track progress in these areas, it is recommended that the summative assessment questions (about Austin as a great place for creatives and feeling nurtured and supported) are included in future surveys of the creative community.

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<sup>3</sup> Since completing the initial drafts of this report, additional focus groups have been held with African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American creatives. Findings from these focus groups will be presented in the forthcoming report *Building Austin's Creative Capacity: Community Focus Groups*.

## **B. Refine Program Delivery Strategy**

In commissioning this Gap Analysis, CAD sought to identify how it could better serve the creative sector through its programming. The Support Service Matrix in Appendix A of the Gap Analysis shows that CAD's past programming has been very successful and that it is greatly valued by the creative community. CAD is among the most highly utilized service providers (only the Austin Public Library, which doesn't provide specialized services, was accessed by a greater number of creatives) and survey respondents ranked the significance of its services in advancing their careers and organizations quite highly. There is thus much to be said in favor of continuing CAD's professional development and support programs.

Greater gains seem possible by changing not what is offered, but by increasing awareness and accessibility. The research has shown that many of Austin's creatives generally feel that the development opportunities and support services that they need are out there, but that they don't know where to find them and/or lack the resources (time, money) to take advantage of them. The "gaps" in service provision are thus not actually gaps—the problem is one of access and delivery.

**Recommendation B.1:** Develop greater online program capacity. While online learning resources certainly won't be the answer to all development needs in the creative sector—and participants in the public meeting were quick to point out that traditional workshops and classes with face-to-face interaction are still highly valued—there is great potential to expand the reach of the services provided while simultaneously reducing the costs of participation (both money and time) by moving some development opportunities online (See Findings O3a, O3b).

Such online resources would not only meet the demand for low-cost information, they would also fulfill the desire for more self-directed learning and informal development opportunities (See Findings I3b, O3b). They could be presented in a variety of formats—articles about best practices, interviews with practitioners, instructional videos, webinars, full online courses, etc.—to suit the content and the needs of various audiences.





These resources would not necessarily have to be developed from scratch or provided exclusively by CAD. It may be possible to collaborate with other service organizations around the country for many content areas (see Recommendation C1 below), and resources that are specific to Austin could be developed in partnership with other local service providers. It would certainly be advisable to develop online content in coordination with Austin's other service providers, if these are convened as recommended above. In fact, some of the other service providers in Austin may have such online content developed that could be reviewed as part of an overall strategy. It would be in the best interest of all, if the online resources were designed to complement the other professional development workshops, seminars, and training programs that are available in town.

**Recommendation B.2:** In developing online resources, CAD should consider content areas that are highly sought after by individual creatives and arts/cultural organizations. Based on the Gap Analysis, this would include publicity and gaining critical recognition for individuals and fundraising/donor cultivation, marketing/advertising, and communications/public relations for organizations (See Finding O2b). CAD should also consider how, or whether it can collaborate with other service providers to address individual creatives' desire for ongoing artistic and creative development opportunities.

**Recommendation B.3:** Many participants in this study indicated a desire for mentoring in their professional and creative development (See Findings I2b, I3a, O3a). To meet the need for this type of peer-to-peer professional connection, CAD could consider sponsoring a guided mentoring program. Such a program could be developed in conjunction with other service providers as well as with individual creatives and the leadership of arts and cultural organizations. Mentoring could be one on one or small group coaching or some combination of approach. Providing learning and growing opportunities through connecting a less experienced professional with a more experienced professional could lead to improved skill development and increased professional connections across the creative sector with a resulting deeper commitment to the Austin community. This type of program may well lead to a greater sense of nurturing and support than the creative sector feels currently (See Findings I4b, O1b).



### **C. Develop Centralized Online Resource**

Both among individual creatives and arts/cultural organizations there is a strong desire for a central web-based resource that serves as a repository for all programs that offer support services for the creative sector. This is echoed in the findings about major barriers that prevent people from accessing the services they need: many individuals and arts/cultural organizations don't know what resources are available or where to find out about them (See Findings I1a, O3a).

**Recommendation C.1:** Build a centralized online resource database for services and programs available across all providers. In effect, create a 'knowledge hub' of services available for the creative economy. In order to maximize impact, adaptability, and responsiveness to changes in the field, this should be separate from any current website, easily branded, and regularly promoted. This resource could include the following:

Local Program Information (See Findings I1a, I3b O3a, O4c):

- Information on all of the training and development programming filtered by service provider, type of program, date, etc. as described above – with all of the offerings by all of the service providers.
- Programs themselves could be further filtered by beginning/intermediate/advanced, early/mid/late career stage, small vs large cultural organizations, 'how to' versus lecture style, low cost or free offerings, etc.
- A directory of support services, per the taxonomy mentioned in Recommendation A.1

A Designed Online Curriculum (See Findings I3b, O3a):

- A variety of on demand resources, such as videos, webinars, and lectures, on topics such as fundraising, marketing, financial planning, career development, etc. These can be collated and cataloged from a variety of sources. Rather than just relying on links, CAD may develop original content or negotiate agreements with other websites and organizations to republish their existing resources.

Resource Links:

- Reviewing searchable online space 'matchmaker' inventory programs to locate a suitable product for the City of Austin.
- Access to information and organizational links for financial resources – loans, grants, venture capital, crowdsourcing, etc.
- Information and links to resources about city permitting and coding as relevant to the creative sector

User-Generated Posts:

- A jobs board, and equivalent space for other forms of calls and announcements (e.g. audition information, calls for submission, space availability)



If users are required to create an account to access certain features of the site, it will be possible to collect contact information and user preferences/interests to target outgoing communications. Periodically reviewing usage metrics along with regular surveys with random users can provide an ongoing source of data regarding the needs and interests of the creative sector.

There are several different ways in which such a centralized source of information could be implemented, ranging from a simple directory of service providers to a complex, interactive website, with all of the features outlined above. (The examples provided below demonstrate some possible formats.) Many of the sub-points of this recommendation could be implemented in isolation and still achieve significant improvements over the status quo; however, CAD is encouraged to consider this as a significant investment in the capacity of the field, which should be capable of future expansion, if it is not implemented all at once.

It is recommended that CAD take the opportunity to start fresh and develop a new website, independent from the City's current site, which could be 'branded' in collaboration with other interested service partners. It may be possible to 'clone' or 'franchise' a website (both the architecture and portions of the content) from another community and adapt it to local needs. Building this resource will take staff time and web development expertise. With the convening of other service providers there is the real possibility that this resource could be co-managed and not necessarily have to be solely maintained by CAD.

Some useful examples of online database resources include:

- The Chicago Artist Resource ([www.chicagoartistsresource.org](http://www.chicagoartistsresource.org)) was launched by Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and is currently maintained by the Chicago Artists Coalition. Resources include a series of instructional videos on foundational business tools (the "survival guide"), professional development resources, calls for artists, jobs listings, a spacefinder, a calendar of events, artists stories, articles, and curated links to service providers and networks.
- NYFA Source ([Source.NYFA.org](http://Source.NYFA.org)) started as a hotline that sought to provide accurate information about resources for artists. It has since developed into a comprehensive website maintained by the New York Foundation for the Arts, listing resources that working artists and emerging arts organizations need to thrive. The website includes classifieds, a database of resources and opportunities, a library of interviews and articles on the "business of art", and professional development programming.
- The Georgia Council for the Arts' [ArtsLinks](#) page is a simple directory of national, state, and local service providers, grouped by category. This is by far the simplest of the web resources presented here. The Council's webpage also features a page of articles and a listing of "Arts Opportunities;" however, these are sparsely populated and don't appear to be updated very often, highlighting the need for ongoing maintenance that is required even for modest websites.



#### **D. Continue to Address Access to Space – performance, housing, studio**

This is a perplexing and longterm issue. Concerns about the affordability of living and working in Austin have been prevalent for some time, and is perceived as a major threat to the creative community in Austin. CAD understands the seriousness of this issue. The topic of affordability and cost of living was listed as a key challenge in the 2015 *Austin Music Census* and the findings from the Gap Analysis Report largely echo those of the *Survey of Artists' Space Needs and Preferences and Survey of Arts, Creative and Cultural Organizations and Businesses* conducted by Artspace Projects, Inc. and Swan Research and Consulting in 2013.

The 2013 surveys of artists' space needs demonstrated the deep need for affordable and diverse types of space. In particular, the report cited that the creative sector needed:

- Live/work space for individual artists;
- Studio and creative work spaces for artists to rent on either an ongoing or as needed basis;
- Permanent spaces for arts and culture organizations and creative and arts-friendly businesses;
- Event, performance, rehearsal and education spaces for organizations to rent on an occasional basis;
- And, that there was strong interest in renting space on an ongoing basis in a new, multi-use arts facility.

Recommendations for arts organizations and businesses included planning for a mixed-use facility in Austin as well as encouraging property owners and developers to make a variety of spaces available for the creative community. The study also suggests that the City could develop and target incentives for the creation of a new space, which could lead to the formation and retention of arts hubs and districts. Recommendations for individual artists and creatives include creating up to 111 new, affordable live/work space for artists.

Two years later, it remains that there is no easy solution that could alleviate the financial pressures that Austin's creatives experience on account of the ballooning costs of living in the area. To address this issue, CAD has contributed language to the Long-Range CIP Strategic Plan to set up potential public/private partnerships in the development of artist live/work spaces, incubators, and cultural districts for future bond elections. The Imagine Austin Creative Economy Priority Program is currently contributing thinking towards the Land Development Code Revision, reimagining city development tools for creative sector development, and generating a white paper on creative space development. CAD's partnership in the ArtPlace America grant-funded project, thinkEAST, is creating a template for future creative developments across the City.

In addition to these efforts, the following recommendations would be relatively low-cost steps that might keep moving the needle in the right direction.



**Recommendation D.1:** The City should review the available software options for a searchable online directory of spaces that are available for creative activities. Providing a centralized online inventory of available spaces would add value to a comprehensive online resource. While this recommendation will not do anything to reduce the costs of accessing space in Austin, development and promotion of such a site could help people on the margins of the creative community find out about available spaces and help maximize the utilization of the existing space resources. (See Findings I3e, O4c)

## **E. Develop an Integrated Vision and Physical Space to Unify Austin’s Creative Sector**

Austin has a thriving and growing creative sector. In fact, according to a recent report, *Creative New York*, published by the Center for an Urban Future in June 2015, Austin has experienced a 40% increase in its creative jobs since 2003, the highest creative sector growth rate of all US cities. This explosive growth has led to a vibrant, highly engaged creative community that has an enviable reputation around the globe for its creative vibe and signature events such as SXSW.

With this growth have come many challenges. With increasing rents and a highly competitive marketplace, Austin may have reached a tipping point within its creative sector ecosystem. While the density of people and the creative output may contribute to the 'vibe' of Austin, there is a very real possibility that the growth will drive out the creative types who helped put Austin on the map. This means that the ability to develop creative and business management skills and cultivate buyers for creative products and services is becoming ever more important to sustaining this well-reputed creative community. Austin may well be facing the choice in the near to medium term of either seeing its creative sector diminish from lack of support or flourish with increased investment in its continued success.

In addition to proposing the recommendations above, a holistic vision is offered that has the potential to catapult Austin’s creative sector to a new and unique position.

**Recommendation E1:** It is suggested that CAD consider developing a physical gathering space for the creative sector that would function as a real-world compliment to the online information hub described under Recommendation C1. Co-branding the physical and virtual resource centers is suggested to establish a unified presence within the creative sector. The development of this integrated resource center would constitute a strong, visible statement of the City’s commitment to its creative community.

Every creative sector planning effort since the 2003 Mayor’s Task Force Economy/Creative Economy Subcommittee has recommended an incubator-like space for creatives. However, this proposal goes far beyond a mere incubator space for a limited number of creative businesses or organizations. A physical space that is dedicated solely to supporting the creative community with knowledgeable staff members, classrooms, reference materials, free wifi, computers, printers, copiers, and perhaps performance and/or exhibition space and a café, would go above and beyond the support structures seen in other cities, and make a bold statement of support. Activities



that could be available in the physical space include: regular meeting hours with City of Austin (CAD, Small Business Development, etc.) and other service provider staff, computer access to the centralized online resource, professional development workshops and seminars, meeting rooms, and other services as developed by CAD and the community. This gathering space would make manifest the centralized online resource as well as provide opportunities for networking, mentoring and peer learning. It would be important for this space to be specialized and advanced enough to be useful to professional arts administrators, but also welcoming to emerging creatives and even engaged hobbyists.

This recommendation is similar to a suggestion articulated in *The Austin Music Census: A Data-Driven Assessment of Austin's Commercial Music Economy* (Titan Music Group, LLC, May, 2015). The report suggested a key policy consideration be the *creation of a commercial music industry hub with affordable co-working space*. This focus on one commercial industry along with co-working space is materially different from the recommendation for an integrated creative sector resource. However, if CAD pursues this idea, it would make sense for the city to discuss potential development of both facilities together.

The advantages to the creative sector of such a co-branded virtual and physical space are easily accessible and integrated resources, an opportunity for improved synergy and understanding across the creative sector, and the fostering of collaborations and new partnerships. The advantages to CAD and the other service providers are a centralized location for listing resources and services, the opportunity to connect with creatives first-hand on a regular basis, a place to present workshops, classes, webinars, and a place to connect and coordinate with other service providers.

The creative sector has made it very clear that it believes there is room for improvement in how nurtured and supported it feels by the greater Austin community. Co-branding the virtual and physical space would directly improve that perception and, more importantly, provide Austin's creative sector with access to each other and resources that potentially would be unparalleled around the country. This in turn will continue to build the excellent reputation of the creative sector in greater Austin and increase the sector's economic value.