

West Virginia
**CREATIVE
ENTREPRENEUR
STUDY 2016**

TAMARACK
FOUNDATION FOR THE
ARTS

Artists, Policymakers, Economic Developers, and Allies,

In the fall of 2015, the Tamarack Foundation for the Arts conducted a study of 500 artist-owned businesses in West Virginia. I am pleased to present to you this report, the first foundation white paper examining the assets and challenges of running a creative business in the state.

Forty-eight out of 55 West Virginia counties are represented in this study. The data we uncovered is both encouraging and thought-provoking. It reflects nationwide business trends and also showcases West Virginia's unique economic challenges. This white paper reflects a rich artistic culture rooted in abundant heritage, while highlighting our pressing need to pass down the honed skills of Baby Boomers to following generations.

In this report, you'll find examples of our creative business strengths, in networks and natural inspiration, and you'll find examples of weaknesses, in the ability to access new markets and the lack of access to high-speed internet. Most importantly, you will see the impact that creative place-making through artist businesses has on our communities and quality of life.

This report illuminates that increasing our support for artists and arts-based businesses has never been more needed in West Virginia. As we define our new economic framework, we know that capitalizing on the potential found in creative enterprise must be at the core of what we do, working alongside other developing economic sectors. We must learn and replicate the successes of places like Detroit—a city that used art as a key driver to reimagine and redefine itself after bankruptcy.

The team at the Tamarack Foundation for the Arts will use these results to hone our programs to increase our impact toward this end. We hope that you will find use for this data in your work, as well.

To a more vibrant West Virginia,

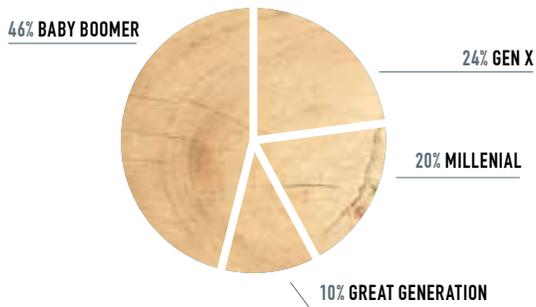
Alissa Novoselick

Alissa Novoselick
Executive Director
Tamarack Foundation for the Arts

SNAPSHOT:

WEST VIRGINIA CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS TODAY

Demographic Information



Top Business Categories*



Business Statistics

1 OUT OF 3 entrepreneurs make their living primarily from their creative business

10% of entrepreneurs employ part or full-time employees

20% of entrepreneurs make more than \$15,000 annually through their business

Benefits

80% of entrepreneurs have healthcare coverage

51% of entrepreneurs have a retirement savings plan

80% of entrepreneurs are somewhat or very concerned that they will not have enough money to cover living expenses as they age or retire

Sales Channels*

55% Fairs and Festivals

51% Galleries

50% Online, through own site

39% Online, through outside retailer

26% Wholesale Buyers

23% Retail Buyers

*If applicable, respondents encouraged to select more than one category



WORKING IN WEST VIRGINIA:

CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS SOUND OFF ON THE GOOD AND BAD

Three-hundred-seventeen entrepreneurs responded to open-ended questions about their experiences doing business in the state. Here, we identify the most prominent themes and the number of times each idea was cited.

People + Place

PROS

- 165** State residents support creative entrepreneurs and cultural heritage.
- 91** The state's natural beauty serves as inspiration—and even a resource for supplies—for the artistic product.
- 256** Total Citations

CONS

- 27** State residents lack understanding about the processes used to create artistic products, resulting in misconceptions about the product's value.
- 20** The state's low population counts and the rural nature of our landscape engender feelings of isolation for the creative entrepreneurs.
- 10** Pervasive stereotypes about the state impact the reputations of creative businesses based here.
- 57** Total Citations





Economic Climate + Opportunity

PROS

- 66** The low cost of living and doing business in the state helps to offset the costs of running a creative enterprise.
- 56** Major state retail and service providers, such as government and the Tamarack system, create opportunities and offset financial risks for entrepreneurs.
- 122** Total Citations

CONS

- 207** The state's rural landscape, low population, and poorly performing economy lead to difficulties in accessing viable markets plus a lack of both venues to sell work and buyers who can afford work.
- 80** Plainly stated: "West Virginia is not a good place to be an entrepreneur."
- 10** Access to reliable Internet stifles business growth.
- 297** Total Citations

81% of responses cited the people and aesthetics of West Virginia as positive assets to their creative enterprise, while 94% of responses included reasons why the economic climate is discouraging.

Most Requested Services

1 MARKETING + OUTREACH

- Market Opportunities
- Public Relations
- Promoting the Value of Art
- Connecting to Other Artist Businesses

2 FUNDING

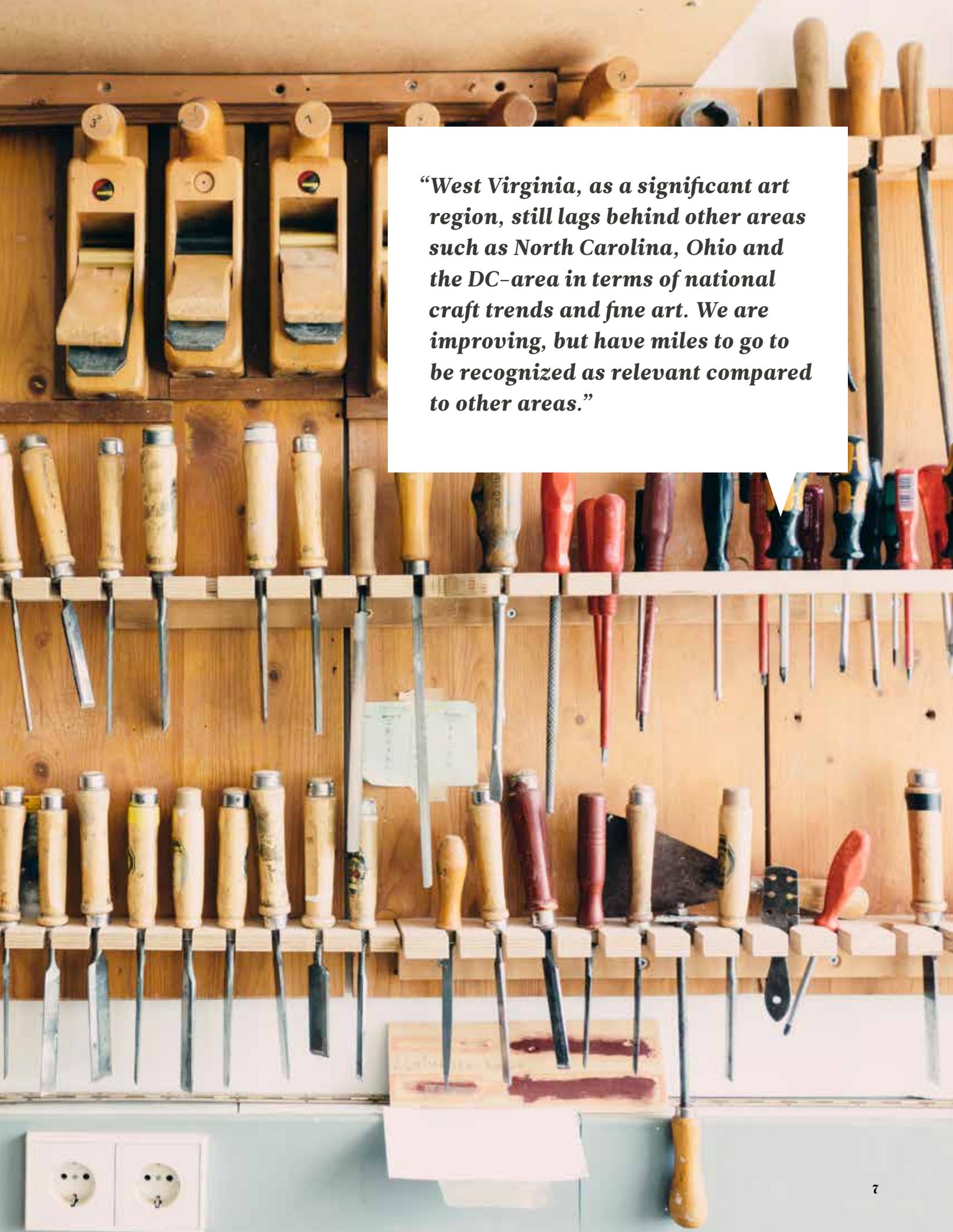
- Education
- Projects
- Supplies
- Show Fees

3 TRAINING

- Marketing (Emphasis on Website + Social Media)
- Technology Integration
- Business Strategy
- Financial Tracking and Reporting



“This state is so full of natural beauty and inspiration—that is the main reason to be an artist in WV. The cost of living is low and people are genuine. I only wish it were easier to do business in WV.”



“West Virginia, as a significant art region, still lags behind other areas such as North Carolina, Ohio and the DC-area in terms of national craft trends and fine art. We are improving, but have miles to go to be recognized as relevant compared to other areas.”

“The creative roots of Appalachia are deep. We are a people who have creatively evolved from necessity. Many families have been sustained by the creative use of materials available.”

“People here love art, but the economic challenges are very noticeable.”

“This state is in prime position to be an arts Mecca.”

“You do not have the major population markets at your front door. However, it is also the reason it is the best place to live. Nothing comes without a price. Audience development can be achieved with work and creative spirit.”

“West Virginia is full of small towns with people who still care about supporting small business.”

THE TAMARACK FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS IS A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION BASED IN CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA. THE FOUNDATION BUILDS THE CREATIVE ECONOMY OF WEST VIRGINIA BY ENCOURAGING ARTIST ENTREPRENEURSHIP. JOIN THEIR WORK BY VISITING WWW.TAMARACKFOUNDATION.ORG.