



ISSUE BRIEF

The Artist Labor Force: a statistical look at Ohio

By the 2024-2025 Barnett Field School

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

The last five years have been a difficult time for many arts and creative workers in the United States. Technological changes and the emergence of AI, labor disputes and strikes across a number of arts and creative occupational communities, and the immediate and ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related venue closures have posed challenges to many arts and creative workers.^{1,2} Uniquely, however, despite the initial loss of jobs and opportunities for artists at the onset of the pandemic, the arts labor force was identified and touted as a potential means for addressing pandemic-related challenges,³ and the outlook for the arts labor force has shown signs of improvement.⁴

Within Ohio, the creative sector⁵ had an economic impact of \$32.9 billion and supported over 132,000 jobs in Ohio in 2022.⁶ Further, Ohio's Department of Education predicts job growth from 2021 to 2031 in several arts and communications jobs, with the highest areas for projected growth in areas like jobs for dancers, costume attendants, agents and business managers for artists and others in similar roles, actors, and others.⁷ Overall, Ohio has had a tight labor market in the mid-2020s, with unemployment sitting at an all-time low of 3.3% in the Spring of 2023.^{8,9}

To shed further light on the artist labor force within the state of Ohio, this brief examines the composition and earnings of the artist labor force within the state, with comparative perspective to the national U.S. artist labor force.

DATA

This brief uses the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) most recently released 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data, across years 2019-2023.¹⁰ It is important to note that this data spans the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States and its impacts on the artist labor force, and its particularly detrimental impacts on the performing arts sector.^{11,12} The data are pooled across the 5-year time span of 2019-2023 and analyses do not examine year over year variations within this timespan. The pooled data enable a closer examination of the artist labor force based on socio-demographic and employment characteristics. The ACS 5% data enable more granular analyses focused on smaller populations and smaller geographic regions, both of which are foci of this issue brief and make the ACS 5% data appropriate for these analyses.

- To define the artist labor force, we use the 2018 Standard Occupation Codes designated by the National Endowment for the Arts for the study of artists' employment and list them in the Technical Appendix.¹³
- To define regions within Ohio, we use Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) that were defined by the U.S. Census Bureau for the 2020 Census. The PUMAs used to comprise each region within Ohio in the analyses are detailed in the Technical Appendix.

The Barnett Field School is a credit-bearing course that engages students directly with timely matters and challenges affecting arts and artists across the state of Ohio, and with cultural leaders working to address those challenges. A key tool needed and used by such cultural leaders is research and evidence; hence, in addition to being exposed to current matters affecting the arts ecosystem across the state, students engage with and work toward producing data and evidence that can help inform the work of cultural leaders.

The Barnett Field School course brings together interdisciplinary expertise in arts, culture, and creativity and its intersections with planning and policy; applied research; the role of arts and artists in community development; and deep, on-the-pulse knowledge of the arts and culture sector in Ohio and in its communities. This course seeks to run as a workshop that is focused on students' shaping, informing, producing for distribution, and disseminating applied research of timely relevance to stakeholders of the artistic and cultural ecosystem in Columbus and other areas of Ohio with the guidance, support, and direction of the team-led workshop's faculty.

The Lawrence and Isabel Barnett Fellowship Fund provides tuition, fees, and an annual stipend for promising students in the graduate program. Learn more about our donors and programs at: <https://aaep.osu.edu/research/barnett-fellows/barnett-field-school>

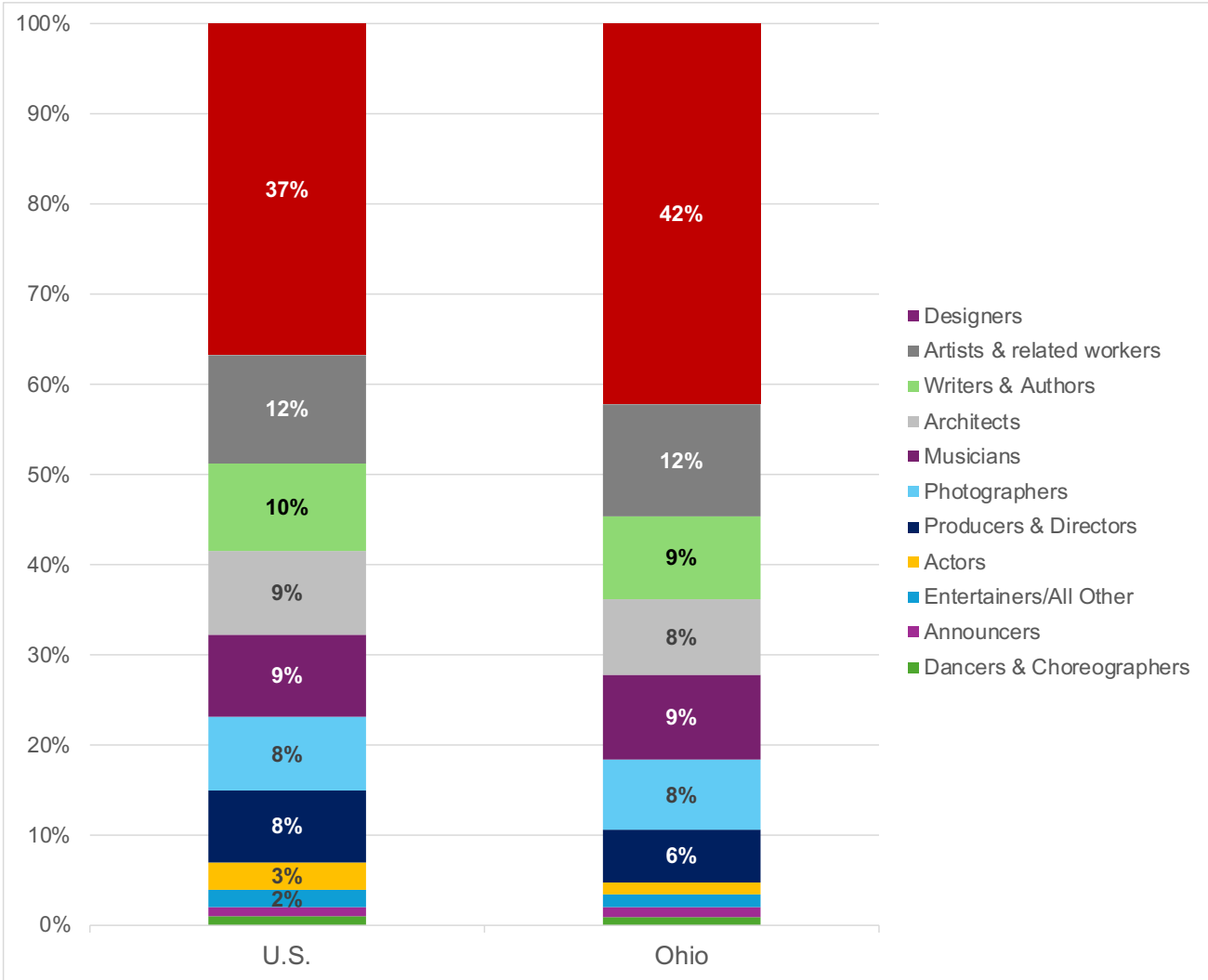
ARTISTS AS PART OF THE LABOR FORCE

Approximately 0.7% of Ohio’s total civilian labor force is comprised of the artist labor force, which is significantly less than the portion of the national total civilian labor force comprised of the artist labor force (0.95%). Within Ohio, statistically¹⁴ larger portions of the labor force are comprised on the artist labor force in Columbus (1.0%), Cleveland (0.83%), and Cincinnati (1.26%).¹⁵

COMPOSITION

To understand the composition of the Ohio labor force, we examine employment characteristics of the artist labor force and the demographic characteristics of the people within the artist labor force. Figure 1 shows the composition of each the U.S. and Ohio artist labor forces by occupation. Overall, the Ohio artist labor force is statistically alike to the U.S. artist labor force in terms of its composition of artist occupations, with designer occupations continuing to comprise¹⁶ the largest portions of both the U.S. and Ohio artist labor forces. Artists and related workers, writers and authors, architects, musicians and singers, photographers, and producers and director occupations each comprise more than 5% of the respective artist labor forces.

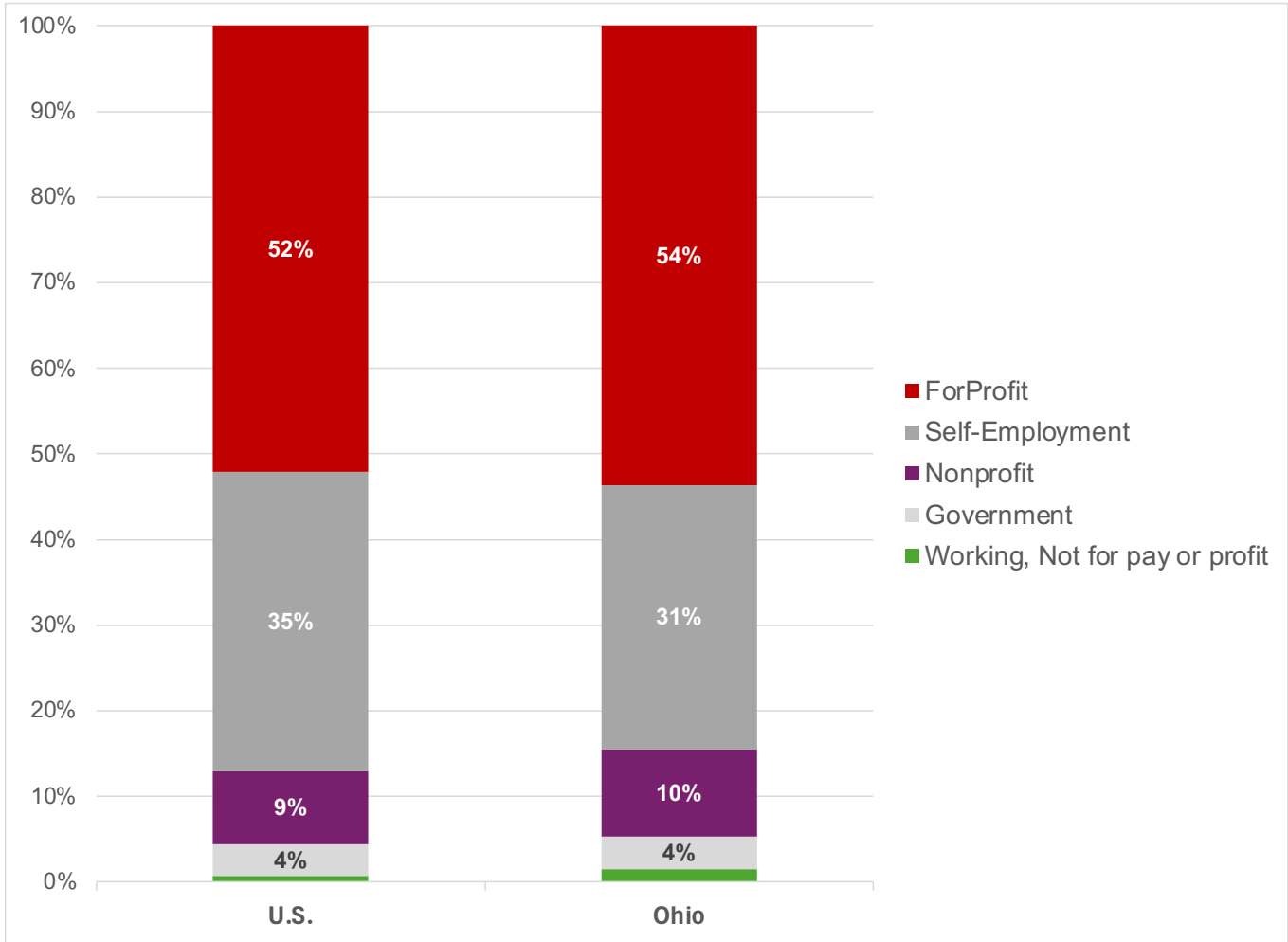
Figure 1. Artist Labor Force, by occupation



Note: occupations within the U.S. and Ohio columns without percentage-labels each approximate 1%

Over half (54%) of the Ohio artist labor force works in the for-profit sector, while almost one-third (31%) are self-employed (Figure 2). Across the U.S. for some years, the artist labor force has been self-employed at almost three times the rate of workers in other occupations.¹⁷ However, Ohio's overall rate of self-employment within the artist labor force is statistically lower than the rate for the U.S. on average (31% in Ohio vs. 35% in the U.S.); notably, the self-employment rate for the artist labor force that resides in Dayton and the surrounding Montgomery County is significantly lower (21%) than that for Ohio's artist labor force overall.

Figure 2. Artist Labor Force, by sector



Note: Working, not for pay or profit in the U.S., on average, and in the Ohio artists labor forces approximate 1%

Table 1 lists the demographic composition of both the U.S. and Ohio artist labor forces. Overall, the composition of these artist labor forces is on par in terms of males and females and the average age of the labor forces. The artist labor forces differ from each other in terms of their racial composition and their levels of educational attainment.

The Ohio artistic labor force is comprised of a larger portion of White artists (85%) than the U.S. artist labor force (74%), on average. Additionally, the Ohio artist labor force is comprised of a slightly larger portion of individuals with a high school level educational attainment, whereas the U.S. artist labor force, on average, is comprised of a slightly greater portion of individuals who have attained a graduate or professional degree than is the Ohio artist labor force.

Table 1. Demographic Composition of the Artist Labor Force

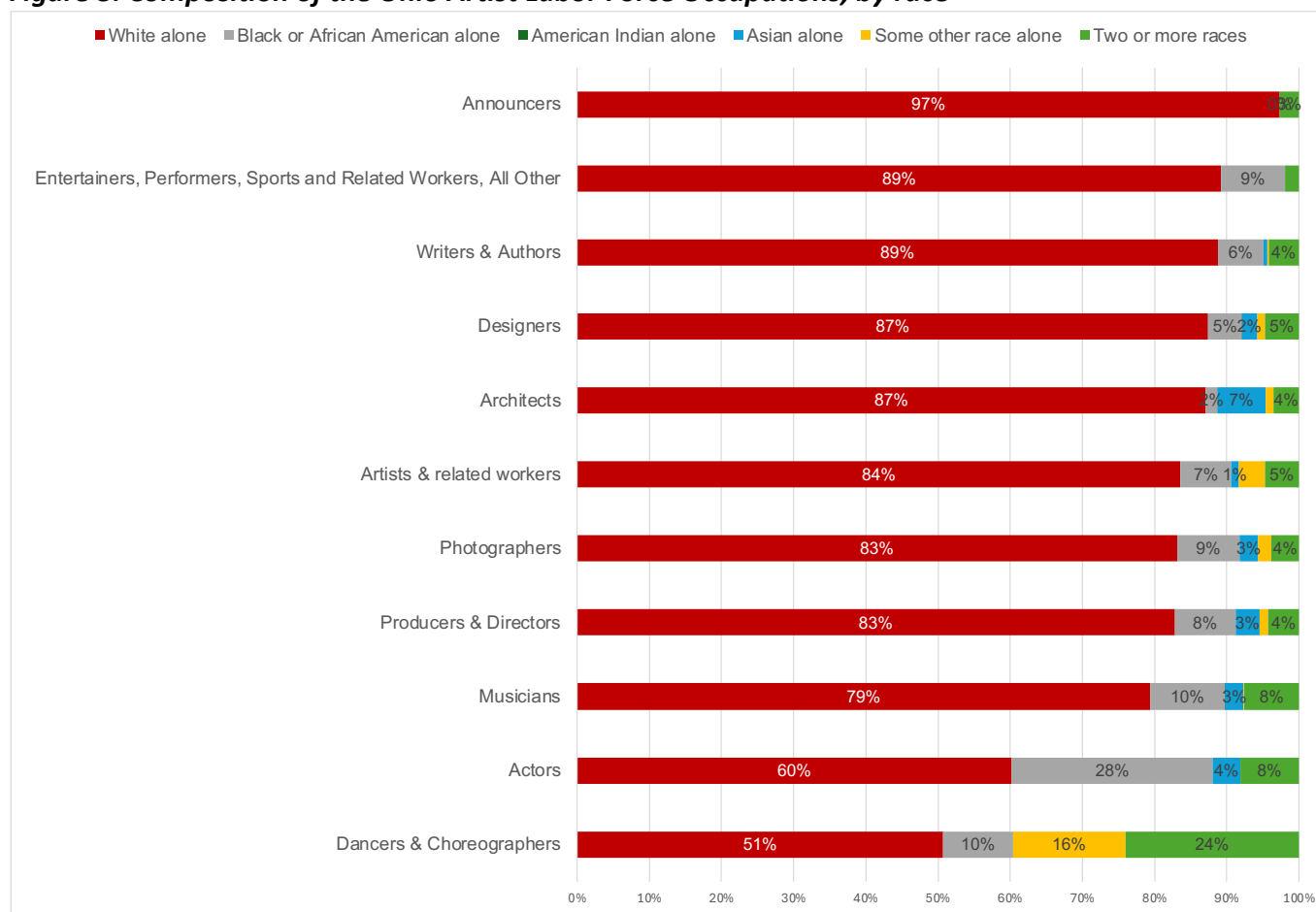
	U.S. Artist Labor Force	Ohio Artist Labor Force
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	50%	49%
<i>Female</i>	50%	51%
Race		
<i>White</i>	74%	85%
<i>Black or African American</i>	7%	6%
<i>American Indian</i>	<1%	<1%
<i>Asian</i>	7%	2%
<i>Other</i>	3%	1%
<i>Two or more</i>	9%	5%
Educational Attainment		
<i>High school or less</i>	3%	3%
<i>High school</i>	35%	39%
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	44%	44%
<i>Graduate or professional degree</i>	18%	14%
Age		
<i>Average age</i>	44.0	44.5

Looking more closely at age, we see that the largest portion of the Ohio artist labor force, 22%, is composed of people aged between 16 to 29. Overall, the portions of ages comprising the Ohio artist labor force are not significantly different from those in the national artist labor force and are not significantly different between regions within the state. The only exception is that

the national artist labor force is composed of a slightly smaller portion of artist laborers aged 70 and older (6.7%) when compared to Ohio's artist labor force overall (8.1%).

Figure 3 illustrates the racial composition of each occupation within the artist labor force in Ohio, wherein the most diverse (lowest portions of the occupation comprised of White individuals) occupations are: dancers and choreographers; actors; and musicians. The least diverse occupations are: announcers; entertainers, performers, sports and related workers, and all others; and writers and authors.

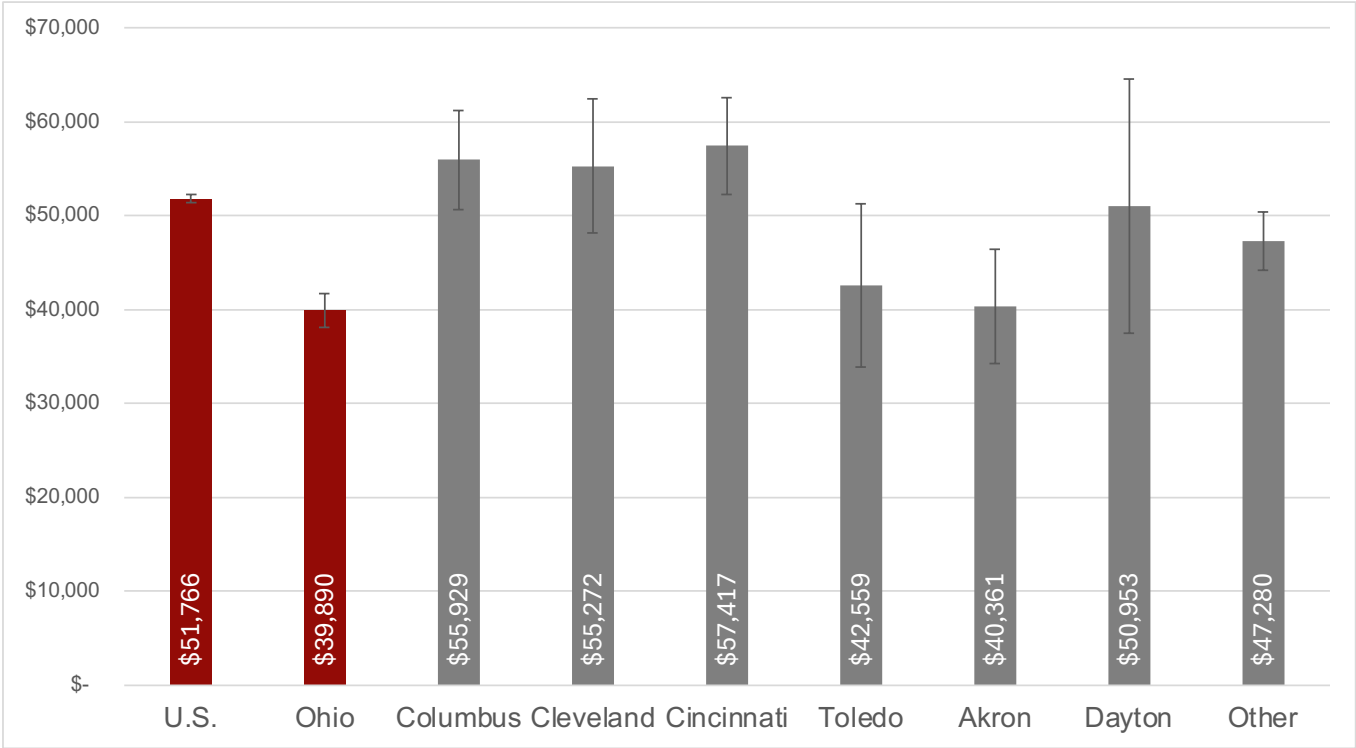
Figure 3. Composition of the Ohio Artist Labor Force Occupations, by race



EARNINGS

The overall average earnings¹⁸ for the Ohio artistic labor force is almost \$40,000. Figure 4 illustrates that this average amount is statistically lower than the average for the artistic labor force within the U.S., averaging almost \$52,000. Within Ohio, there is some significant variation in average earnings between regions — the average earnings for artists residing in Columbus/Franklin County (\$55,929), Cleveland/Cuyahoga County (\$55,272), and Cincinnati/Hamilton County (\$57,417) is significantly higher than those residing in Akron/Summit County (\$40,361). Additionally, artists residing in Cincinnati/Hamilton County are earning, on average, more than artists residing in Toledo/Lucas County (\$42,559).

Figure 4. Average Earnings for the Artist Labor Force, by geographic residence



Note: the errors bars represent the 95% confidence interval around the predicted average salary for each geographic area.

Figure 5 shows the average earnings for those in the Ohio artist labor force by occupation. Those occupations with average earnings above the Ohio average earnings for the artist labor force overall (\$39,890) are: architects; announcers; producers and directors; and designers. All other occupations have average earnings below the state average, with three occupations' average earnings being under half of the state average (other entertainers and performers; dancers and choreographers; and actors).

Figure 5. Average Earnings for the Ohio Artist Labor Force, by occupation

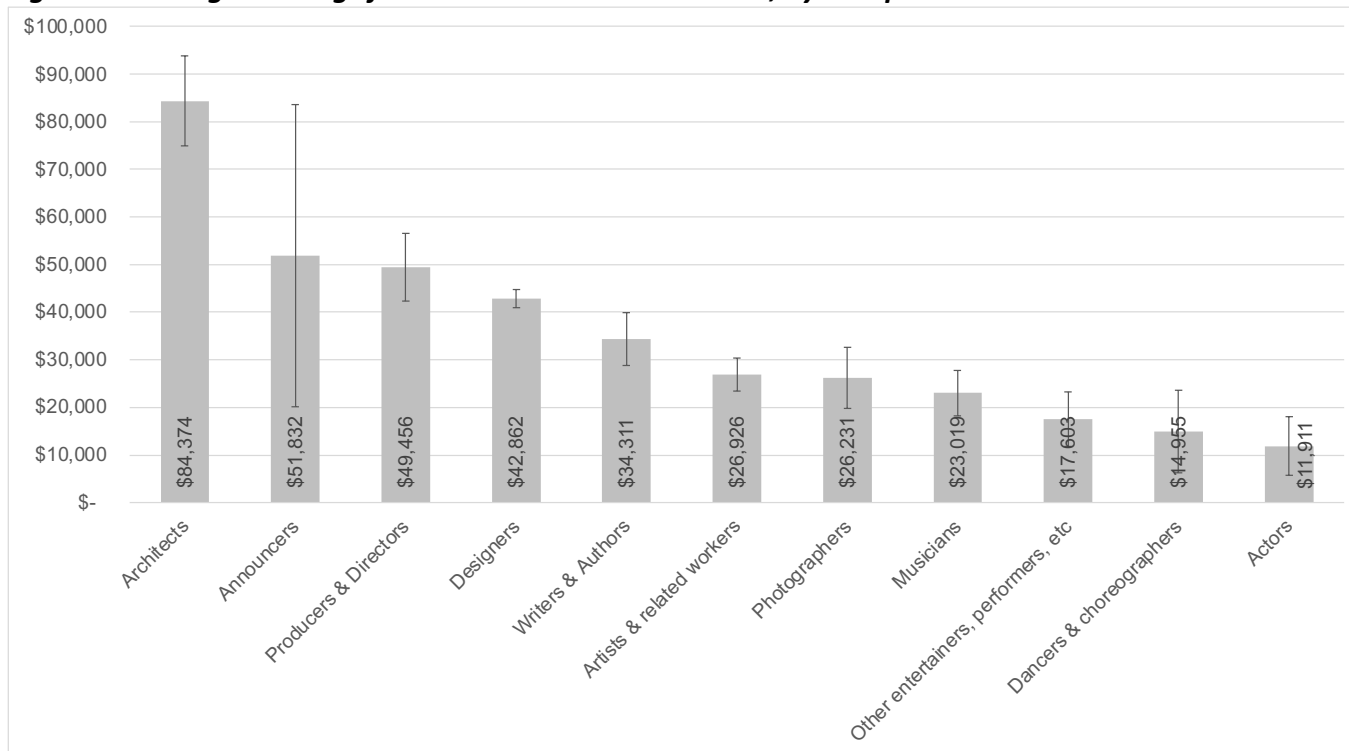
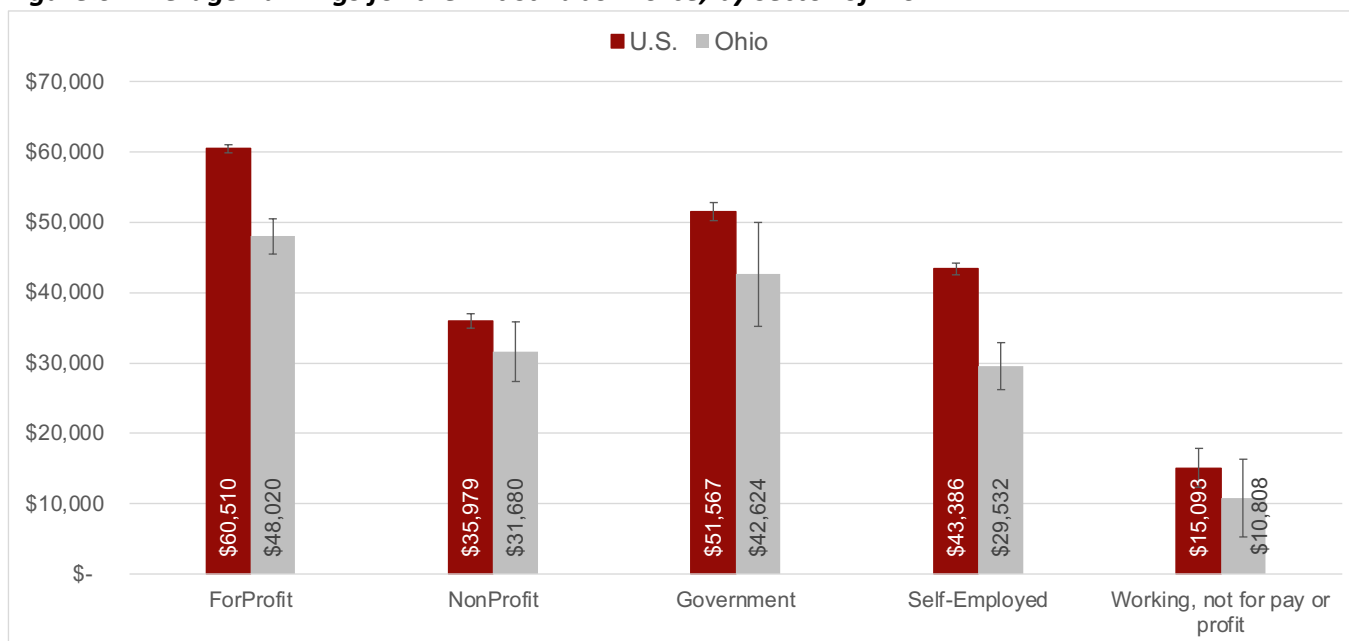


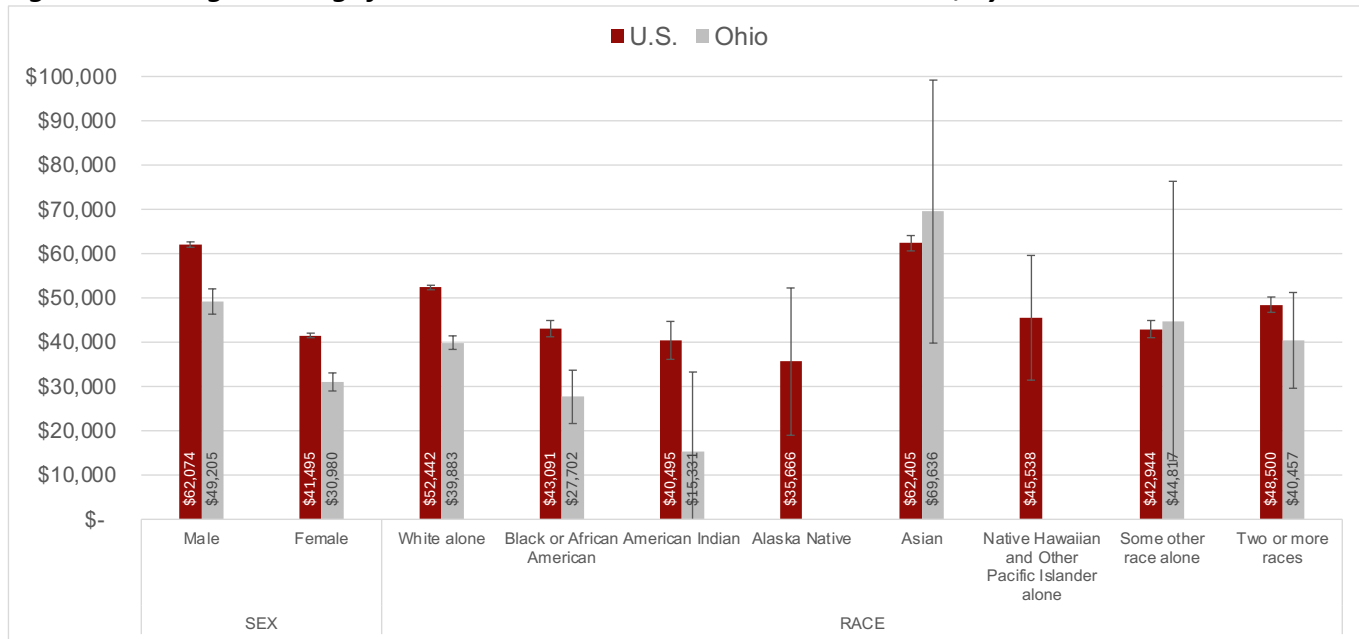
Figure 6 shows the average earnings for artists in the Ohio artist labor force by the sector within which they hold their primary job. In the for-profit sector and for artists in the labor force who are self-employed, we see significantly lower earnings for artists in Ohio compared to the national U.S. artist labor force, on average.

Figure 6. Average Earnings for the Artist Labor Force, by sector of work



Women have historically faced significant wage disparities, earning approximately \$0.80–\$0.84 for every dollar earned by men, and this pattern persists when analyzing the artist labor force in the U.S. and the state of Ohio.¹⁹ Figure 7 illustrates an approximate \$20,000 difference between average earnings between male and females in the U.S. and in the Ohio artist labor forces. Figure 7 also illustrates that Asian and White workers have the highest incomes within the artist labor force nationally and in Ohio.

Figure 7. Average Earnings for the Artist Labor Forces in the U.S. & Ohio, by sex and race



REFLECTION

This brief provides insights about the composition of the artist labor forces within Ohio and across the U.S. in terms of employment characteristics, demographics, and the disparities within them, as well as about gaps in pay for artists. To inform these analytical insights, we used the 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5% PUMS data, just released in December 2024.

As recently as 2022, the National Endowment for the Arts released reports and messaged to cultural stakeholders and advocates for equitable access to arts labor force opportunities.²⁰ Addressing barriers to opportunities and ongoing support for artists to address disparities in who becomes part of, and can stay in, the artist labor force will require challenging conversations and investment. Addressing earnings disparities will require more than continued investment in the arts. It will require a systemic reevaluation of financial support mechanisms, with targeted strategies to reduce earnings inequality driven by sex, race, and sector of employment.

In addition to making contributions to this brief, Barnett Fellows developed and executed qualitative and creative projects to explore further nuances around the composition of the artist labor force and disparities within it. To learn more about these projects and the fellows' collective product, please visit: <https://aaep.osu.edu/research/barnett-fellows>

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Technical Table A: Artist Labor Force Occupations

2018 Census Occupational Code	Occupational Title	Presented in Charts as
2700	Actors	Actors
2805	Broadcast Announcers And Radio Disc Jockeys	Announcers
1305	Architects, Except Landscape And Naval	Architects
1306	Landscape Architects	
2600	Artists And Related Workers	Artists & related workers
2740	Dancers and Choreographers	Dancers & Choreographers
2631	Commercial And Industrial Designers	Designers
2632	Fashion Designers	
2633	Floral Designers	
2634	Graphic Designers	
2635	Interior Designs	
2636	Merchandise Displayers and Window Trimmers	
2640	Other Designers	
2751	Music Directors and Composers	Musicians
2752	Musicians and Singers	
2910	Photographers	Photographers
2710	Producers and Directors	Producers & Directors
2850	Writers and Authors	Writers & Authors
2770	Entertainers And Performers, Sports and Related Workers, All Other	Entertainers/All Other

Technical Table B: Regional Geographies analyzed within Ohio, defined by 2020 PUMAs²¹

Area within Ohio	Entity Code	Entity Name
Columbus & Franklin County	3903401	Columbus (Far Northeast), Gahanna & New Albany Cities
	3903402	Columbus (North) & Westerville Cities
	3903403	Columbus (North) & Worthington Cities
	3903404	Columbus (Far Northwest) & Dublin Cities
	3903405	Columbus (Far West), Hilliard & Upper Arlington Cities
	3903406	Columbus (Central) & Grandview Heights Cities
	3903407	Columbus City (Northeast)
	3903408	Columbus (East), Reynoldsburg, Whitehall & Bexley Cities
	3903409	Columbus (Southeast), Canal Winchester & Groveport Cities
	3903410	Columbus City (West)
	3903411	Columbus (Southwest) & Grove City Cities
Cleveland & Cuyahoga County	3900701	Cuyahoga County--Westlake, North Olmsted Cities & Bay Village
	3900702	Cuyahoga County (West)--Lakewood, Rocky River, Brook Park & Berea Cities
	3900703	Cleveland City (West)
	3900704	Cuyahoga County (South Central)--Parma, Parma Heights & Seven Hills Cities
	3900705	Cuyahoga County (South)--Strongsville, North Royalton & Broadview Heights Cities
	3900706	Cuyahoga County (Southeast)--Garfield Heights, Maple Heights & Bedford Cities
	3900707	Cleveland City (Central)
	3900708	Cleveland City (East) & Bratenahl Village
	3900709	Cuyahoga County (Northeast)--Euclid, Cleveland Heights & South Euclid Cities
	3900710	Cuyahoga County (East)--Shaker Heights, Solon, Mayfield Heights & Lyndhurst Cities

Cincinnati & Hamilton County	3904701	Hamilton County (East)--Loveland, Montgomery Cities & Forestville
	3904702	Hamilton County (North Central)--Sharonville, Blue Ash, Springdale & Reading Cities
	3904703	Hamilton County (Central)--Forest Park, White Oak & Finneytown
	3904704	Hamilton County (West)--Mack & Dent
	3904705	Cincinnati City (West)
	3904706	Cincinnati City (Central)
	3904707	Cincinnati (East) & Norwood Cities
Toledo & Lucas County	3900301	Lucas County (West)--Sylvania & Maumee Cities
	3900302	Toledo City (West)
	3900303	Toledo City (Central)
	3900401	Sandusky, Ottawa & Lucas (East) Counties--Oregon City
Akron & Summit County	3901201	Summit County (North & Northwest)--Hudson, Twinsburg & Macedonia Cities
	3901202	Summit County (East Central)--Cuyahoga Falls, Stow & Tallmadge Cities
	3901203	Summit County (Central)--Akron City
	3901204	Summit County (South)--Green, Barberton & New Franklin Cities
Dayton & Montgomery County	3903701	Montgomery County (Northeast)--Huber Heights, Trotwood, Vandalia & Englewood Cities
	3903702	Montgomery County (West)--Miamisburg & West Carrollton Cities
	3903703	Montgomery County (East Central)--Dayton & Riverside Cities
	3903704	Montgomery County (Southeast)--Kettering & Centerville Cities

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/lost-art-measuring-covid-19s-devastating-impact-on-americas-creative-economy/>
- ² <https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2022/new-data-show-economic-impact-covid-19-arts-culture-sector#:~:text=The%20overall%20unemployment%20rate%20for,%24834%20million%20to%20%241.7%20billion>
- ³ <https://www.amacad.org/news/how-artists-can-lead-pandemic-recovery>
- ⁴ <https://snaaparts.org/findings/reports/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-arts-and-design-alumni>
- ⁵ The creative sector here refers to Creative Ohio's definition of the creative sector, which includes nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, creative for-profit industries, and individual artists and craftsmen (<https://creativeoh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CO-EconomicImpact-FINAL-v2.pdf>, page 3).
- ⁶ <https://creativeoh.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CO-EconomicImpact-FINAL-v2.pdf>
- ⁷ <https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Career-Tech/Career-Fields/Arts-and-Communication-Career-Field/Arts-and-Communications-Career-Field-Job-Data-Report-8-31-24.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>
- ⁸ https://ohiolmi.com/docs/ResearchPublications/publications/Newsletters/LaborMarketMatters_Issue1.pdf
- ⁹ Additionally, Ohio is ranked #10 in the nation for Arts Spending by the National Assembly for Arts Agencies (NASAA) (Arts Midwest, 2024), and #15 for Arts Vibrancy by Southern Methodist University (SMU) DataArts (2024). Ohio also has one of the largest budgets allocated to the arts, with \$25.5 million of the \$27.3 million total arts budget coming from the Ohio State Legislature (NASAA, 2024, p. 13). Additionally, the arts industry is increasing, projecting over 87,000 jobs in the state by 2030 (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, 2024).
- ¹⁰ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases.html> (released December 2024)
- ¹¹ <https://culturaldata.org/pages/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-employment-arts-culture-sector/>
- ¹² https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/20200810_Brookingsmetro_Covid19-and-creative-economy_Final.pdf
- ¹³ For more about the NEA's selected artist occupations, see: <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/artsdata-profile-series/adp-1/artists-occupations>; https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Artists_and_Other_Cultural_Workers.pdf; and <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/arts-data-profile-series/adp-31/datatables>.
- ¹⁴ Confidence intervals of 95% are used throughout this Issue Brief to determine statistically significant differences.
- ¹⁵ Geographies referenced within the issue brief are defined by Public Use Micro Areas (PUMAs) used in the 2020 U.S. Census, and are specified in the Technical Appendix.
- ¹⁶ For example, see <https://web.faa.illinois.edu/app/uploads/sites/10/2023/03/Issue-Brief-2-Revised-March23.pdf> & https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Artists_and_Other_Cultural_Workers.pdf
- ¹⁷ https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Artists_and_Other_Cultural_Workers.pdf
- ¹⁸ For the analyses within this brief, we utilize ACS variable *pernp*, the total person's earnings.
- ¹⁹ For example, see <https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2022/tracking-demographic-differences-among-us-artists-and-arts-managers>
- ²⁰ <https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2022/tracking-demographic-differences-among-us-artists-and-arts-managers#:~:text=The%20wage%20gap%20between%20men,whites%20or%20Hispanics%20earned%20%240.84> (Accessed March 23, 2025)
- ²¹ https://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/DC2020/PUMA/st39_oh/Catalog_PUMAmaps_st39.pdf

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