



Student at the School of Music,
photo credit: Justine Bursoni

ISSUE BRIEF

The Artist Labor Force: a statistical look at Illinois in context of the U.S.

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The vital and varied nature of the artist labor force has been shone under a new spotlight during the last few years. The vital nature of artists as workers and members of the labor force has been shown through efforts focused on economic relief and recovery due to the impact of the pandemic on artists' livelihoods, both at the national level¹ and more local levels, as exemplified by the recent approval of \$50 million in Illinois' state budget through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.² The vital nature of the artist labor force has also been shown through policy changes, such as modifications made to Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Mixed Earners Unemployment Compensation to mitigate differential negative effects on artists who are 3.6 times as likely to be self-employed compared to other workers,³ and possible policy changes like those included in renewed efforts for the PLACE Act.⁴ The varied nature of the artist labor force has been made clear by the differential effects of the pandemic, including the impacts on self-employed artists and mixed-earners.⁵ Additionally, new analysis from the the National Endowment for the Arts finds that over 600,000 jobs were lost in the arts economy between 2019 and 2020, with the bulk of losses occurring within just three industries — motion picture and video production, performing arts presenters, and performing arts companies; while during the same period, salaried employment in web publishing and streaming industries grew.⁶

To provide further insights on the varied nature of the artist labor force, this brief examines the size, density, composition, and earnings of the artist labor force within the state of Illinois in context of the national artist labor force.





Scene Shop at the Krannert Center for Performing Arts, photo credit: Vanessa Burgett

Data

In this brief, we use the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) newly released Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data ⁷ spanning 2016-2020 that enables analyses of the artist labor force ⁸ based on socio-demographic and employment characteristics. The data we use spans the pandemic and does not examine changes occurring within the five year period that it encompasses. The ACS collects data each month during the year and releases data on an annual basis; first released in 2010, the ACS 5-year data enables more granular analyses focused on smaller populations and smaller geographic regions, both of which are foci in these analyses and are the reason we use the ACS 5-year data. We use the following to define the population of interest—the artist labor force—and geographies examined:

- 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. ⁹
- To define regions within Illinois, we use Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) that are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau based on a minimum population of 100,000 and are updated following the decennial census. Hence, the PUMAs used for our analyses are based on definitions stemming from the 2010 Census. ¹⁰ The PUMAs used to comprise each region within Illinois in our analysis are detailed in the Technical Appendix.

Illinois' artist labor force Size and Density

An estimated 89,280 individuals make up the Illinois artist labor force. These workers comprise about 1.35% of the state's total civilian labor force, which approximates the national statistic: the U.S. artist labor force comprises 1.48% of the nation's total civilian labor force. The Illinois artist labor force comprises about 3.7% of the nation's total artist labor force.

Figure 1 provides a more granular look at the size of the Illinois artist labor force by region within the state. In general, the number of workers in the artist labor force is higher in more populous regions within Illinois. The artist labor force comprises the largest portion of a region's civilian labor force in Cook County at 1.9%, which is a larger portion of the labor force than for Illinois or for the U.S. on the whole, and Cook County is also home to the largest number of artists from the Illinois artist labor force. The Northeast region surrounding Cook County is home to the second largest number of artists, which comprise 1.1% of its regional civilian labor force. The majority of Illinois' total artist labor force resides in these northeastern parts of the state, with over half residing in Cook County (57.6%) and almost a third in the Northeast region (27.9%). Both the Central and Eastern regions of the state are home to smaller numbers of artists, yet in each region these artists comprise approximately 1% of the regional labor force. About 5.4% of Illinois' total artist labor force resides in the Central region of Illinois.

The relative density of the artist labor force is conveyed in Figure 2, which illustrates the location quotient for the state's and each region's artist labor force as a percent of the geography's total civilian labor force relative to the percent of artists in the total U.S. civilian labor force. Therefore, a location quotient greater than 1.0 indicates a greater density of artists in the labor force than in the U.S. labor force, and less than 1.0 indicates a relatively lower density of artists. Cook County has the greatest concentration of artists within Illinois (location quotient 1.26) and is home to a greater concentration of artists compared to the U.S. as a whole. Whereas, Illinois has a relatively lower concentration of artists compared to the U.S. as a whole (location quotient 0.91).

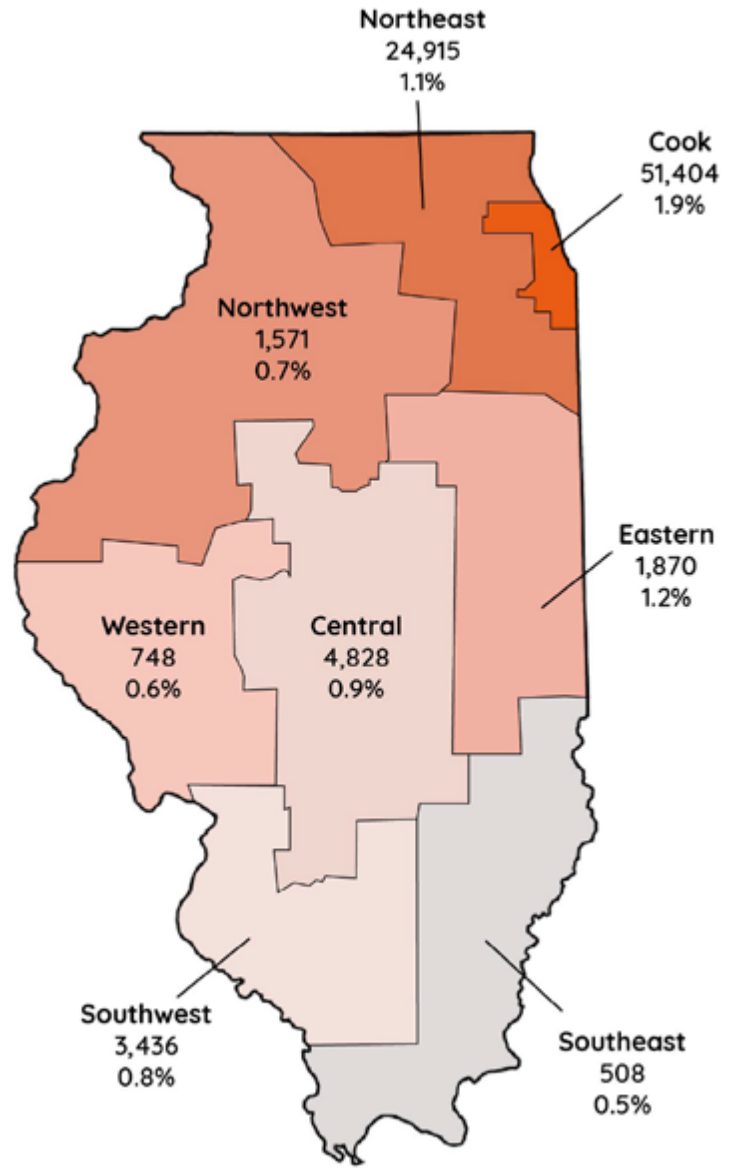


Figure 1. Estimated size of the artist labor force & its portion of the total civilian labor force, by IL region

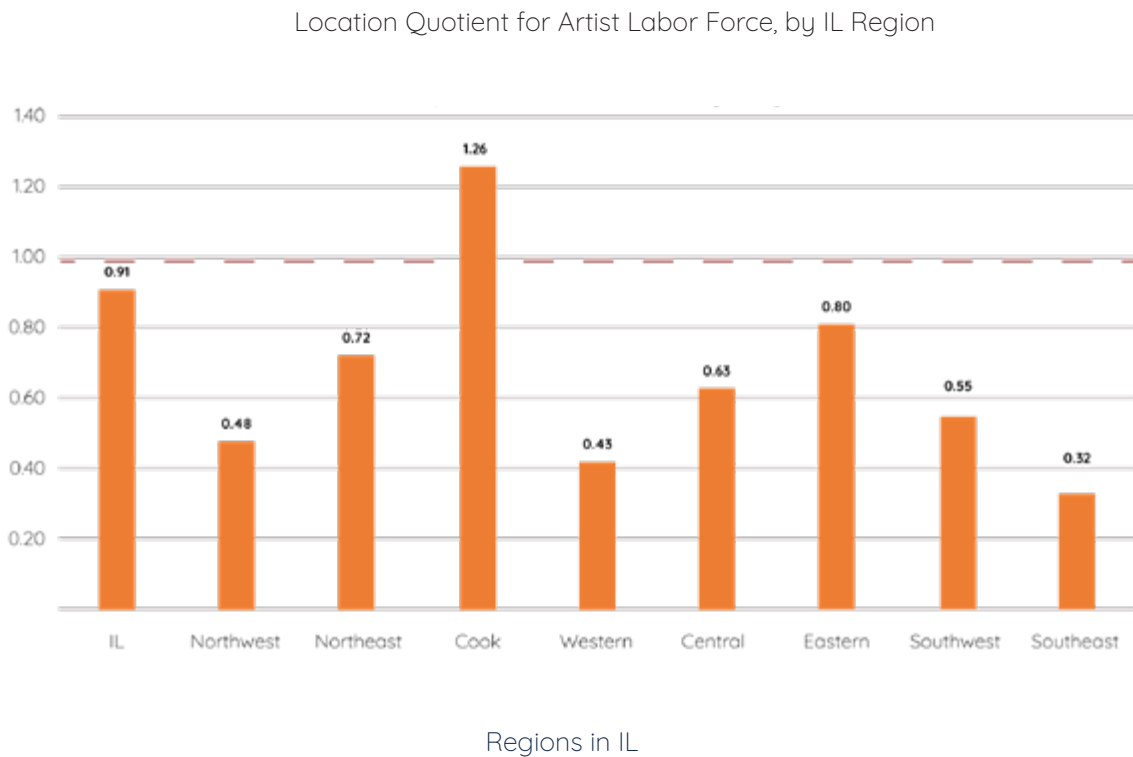


Figure 2. Location Quotient for the Artist Labor Force, Illinois and by IL region

Composition

To understand the composition of the artist labor force in Illinois, we examine employment characteristics and the demographics of the individuals in this labor force in comparison to the U.S. artist labor force. Figure 3 illustrates the artist labor force for the U.S., in Illinois, and in the three regions within the state with the largest count of workers in the artist labor force: Cook County, Northeast, and Central regions.¹²

Designers comprise the largest portion of the artist labor force in the U.S., at the state level, and in the Illinois regions. At the national level, designers comprise about 39% of the artist labor force; writers and authors, special effects artists and animators, architects, musicians, photographers, and producers and directors each comprise 8-10% of the artist labor force; and actors, announcers, dancers and choreographers, and other entertainers each comprise 2% or less of the artist labor force.

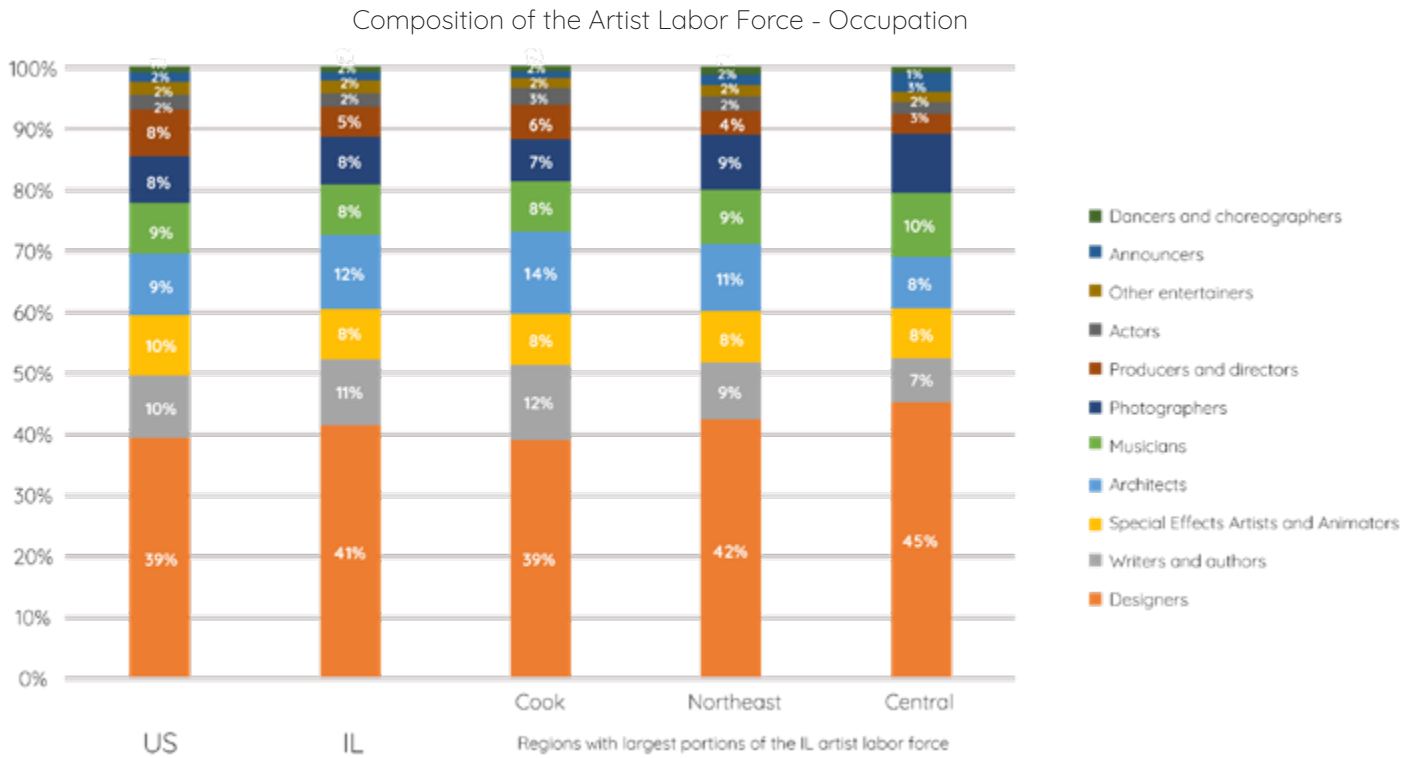


Figure 3. Composition of the Artist Labor Force - Occupation

Illinois is home to a relatively high portion of architects compared to the U.S. artist labor force, and we see that this portion of the artist labor force is particularly high in Cook County. Both the Northeast and Central regions are home to relatively large portions of designers in their artist labor forces.



Photo: Faezeh Ashtiani, Landscape Architecture graduate student, 2015

Fifty-four percent of the U.S. artist labor force is employed in the for-profit sector, 34% are self-employed, and 8% is employed in the non-profit sector (see Figure 4). In Illinois, a relatively larger portion of the artist labor force is employed in the for-profit sector and a relatively smaller portion is self-employed. In the Central region of Illinois, a relatively larger portion of the artist labor force is employed in the non-profit sector.

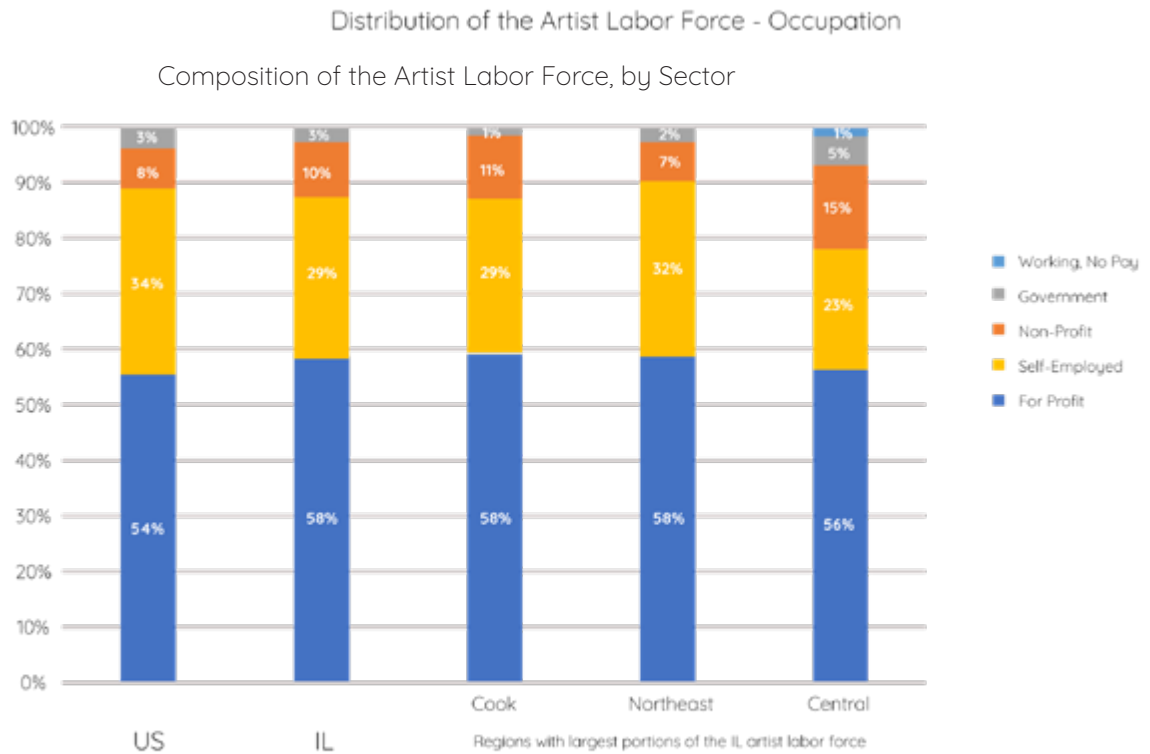


Figure 4. Composition of the Artist Labor Force - Sector

Table 1 provides the estimates for the demographic composition of the artist labor force at the national, state, and regional levels, along with estimates for the total U.S. civilian labor force. The artist labor force at each level examined is disproportionately White. An estimated 72.7% of the U.S. artist labor force is White, Non-Hispanic, whereas an estimated 61.4% of the total U.S. civilian labor force is White, Non-Hispanic. Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native, and other artists who are not White, Non-Hispanic comprise a significantly larger portion of the artist labor force in Cook County (29.6%) than at the national or state-level, yet this percent is much lower than the portion of Cook County’s total civilian labor force, which is 54.6%. In the Central region, approximately 84% of the artist labor force and of the total civilian labor force is White, Non-Hispanic.

Overall, the artist labor force is highly educated in each region examined — 62.8% of the U.S. artist labor force holds at least a college degree, and almost 70% of the Illinois, and almost 78% of the Cook County artist labor forces hold at least a college degree. In each geography examined, the artist labor force is more highly educated, on average, than the commensurate civilian labor force.

The artist labor force in Illinois and in Cook County are significantly younger on average in comparison to the U.S. artist labor force; the artist labor force in the Northeast region of Illinois is significantly older. We do not find significant differences between regions or between the artist and civilian labor forces by gender.

Table 1. Demographic Composition of the Artist Labor force

	Total Civilian US Labor Force	US	IL	Cook	Northeast	Central
Race and Ethnicity						
White	61.4%	72.7%	75.3%	70.4%	80.3%	84.2%
Black or African American	11.9%	6.2%	6.5%	8.2%	2.9%	7.5%
Hispanic	17.5%	10.8%	9.1%	10.9%	8.3%	3.7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.5%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%		0.6%
Asian	5.9%	6.8%	6.5%	7.2%	7.0%	3.7%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%			
Other race	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	
Two or more races	2.3%	2.7%	2.4%	3.0%	1.5%	0.4%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Gender						
Male	52.9%	52%	51%	53%	49%	46%
Female	47.5%	48%	49%	47%	51%	54%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Educational Attainment						
High school or less	34.1%	11.8%	9.3%	7.2%	11.2%	11.1%
Associates degree or some college	31.2%	25.4%	21.0%	15.0%	26.7%	40.8%
Bachelor degree	21.9%	45.7%	49.5%	54.3%	46.0%	30.5%
Graduate or professional degree	12.8%	17.1%	20.3%	23.6%	16.2%	17.7%
	100%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Age						
Average age	41.7	42.4	41.4	40.2	43.6	40.9

Earnings

On average, workers in the U.S. artist labor force annually earn an estimated \$58,047. The average earnings for the Illinois artist labor force (\$54,189) are lower than that of the national labor force.

There are significant differences in earnings that are dependent on one’s occupation, gender, and race and ethnicity, these differences persist even after controlling for additional influences on earnings, including: usual hours worked per week, sector of work, and educational attainment.¹⁵ Figure 5 shows average annual earnings by gender; there are significant differences between earnings for male and female artists at the national, state, and regional levels with males earning significantly more than females in each of these artist labor forces.

Artist Labor Force Average Annual Earnings, by gender

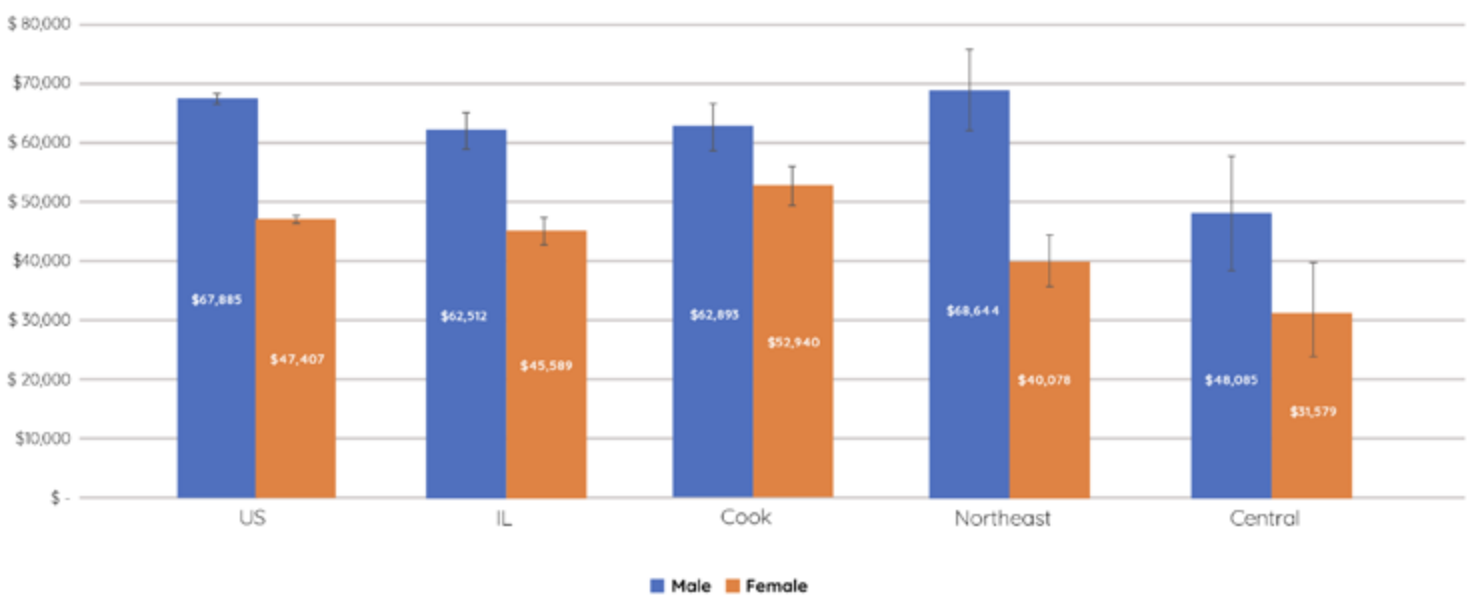


Figure 5. Artist Labor Force Average Annual Earnings, by gender

Figure 6 shows average annual earnings by race and ethnicity, and significant differences persist even after controlling for the additional factors that influence earnings listed above. Within the U.S. artist labor force, Asian artists report higher average earnings compared to White, Non-Hispanic artists, while Black and Hispanic artists report lower average earnings. In Illinois, Hispanic artists earn less on average than White, Non-Hispanic artists; in Cook County, Hispanic artists and American Indian and Alaskan Native artists earn less than White, Non-Hispanic artists.

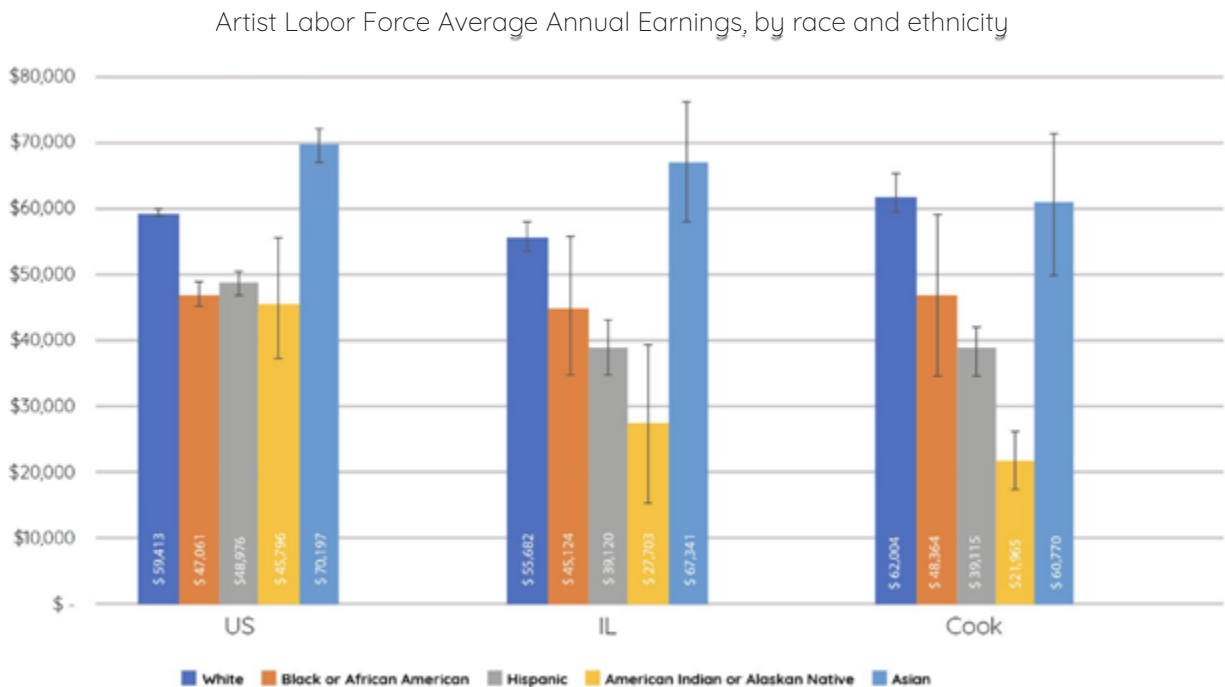


Figure 6. Artist Labor Force Average Annual Earnings, by race and ethnicity

Conclusion

This brief provides statistics about the artist labor force in Illinois and across the U.S. We drew upon the 2016-2020 American Community Survey PUMS data just released in March 2022 in effort to provide current and detailed statistics on this vital labor force. Within Illinois, the artist labor force is concentrated in Cook County, which encompasses the City of Chicago, yet the artist labor force is present throughout the state and there are notable concentrations of these workers in several regions. Average earnings for workers in the artist labor force vary across the state, but so too does the cost-of-living; amid evolving understandings of gig-based work and as new work configurations evolve in light of the pandemic, a closer look at how artists are structuring their work, where they are residing within Illinois, and their cost of living and quality of life would help inform state and local workforce and development policies.

Importantly, this brief looks at demographic differences within the artist labor force and at gaps in earnings for artists of different racial, ethnic, and gender identities. The statistics show stark inequities by race and ethnicity within the composition of the artist labor force and in earnings, and they reflect broader, concerning dynamics and systems that privilege some in the pursuit and sustainability of working as an artist, and severely limit many. Of additional concern is the significant gender pay-gap within the artist labor force that persists after controlling for the influences of occupation, hours worked, and additional factors known to impact earnings. Ultimately, this brief highlights the need for a continuing examination of statistics and for deeper insights on the artist labor force in order to address inequities within it.

Acknowledgements

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The Arts Impact Initiative (All) fosters understanding of the roles of art and artists in community development and promoting social well-being in order to guide arts practice and policy. All is a three-year pilot program supported by the Investment for Growth Program out of the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Technical Appendix

Occupation Codes used to define the artist labor force:

2018 Census Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Presented in Charts as
2700	Actors	Actors
2805	Broadcast Announcers and radio disk jockeys	Announcers
1305	Architects, Except Landscape and Naval	Architects
1306	Landscape Architects	
2600	Artists and related Workers	Artists and related Workers
2740	Dancers and Choreographers	Dancers and Choreographers
2631	Commercial and Industrial Designers	Designers
2632	Fashion Designers	
2633	Floral Designers	
2634	Graphic Designers	
2635	Interior Designers	
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 and Directors
2850	Writers and Authors	Writers and Authors
2770	Entertainers and Performers, Sports and related Workers, all Others	Other entertainers and performers, etc.

For more about the NEA's selected artist occupations, see: <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/arts-data-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/data-tables>.

PUMAs used to define geographic regions within Illinois: ¹⁴

IL Regions	PUMAs				
Northwest	105	202	2501		
Northeast	104	2901	3106	3207	3310
	2200	3005	3107	3208	3601
	2300	3007	3108	3209	3602
	2400	3008	3202	3306	3700
	2601	3009	3203	3307	
	2700	3102	3204	3308	
	2801	3105	3205	3309	
Cook	3401	3413	3420	3520	3527
	3407	3414	3421	3521	3528
	3408	3415	3422	3522	3529
	3409	3416	3501	3523	3530
	3410	3417	3502	3524	3531
	3411	3418	3503	3525	3532
	3412	3419	3504	3526	
Western	300	401			
Central	501	1602	2000		
	1300	1701			
	1500	1900			
Eastern	600	2100			
Southwest	900	1105			
	1001	1204			
	1104	1205			
Southeast	700	800			

Endnotes

1. Examples of national initiatives include “Put Creative Workers to Work” (<https://www.creativeworkers.net/>) and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ “Art is Work: Policies to Support Creative Workers” report (<https://www.amacad.org/publication/art-is-work>)
2. <https://www.illinois.gov/news/press-release.24784.html>
3. https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Artists_and_Other_Cultural_Workers.pdf
4. <https://pingree.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3962>
5. https://web.faa.illinois.edu/app/uploads/sites/10/2022/02/Issue-Brief-02_11_2022.pdf
6. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/NationalReportCompliantMarch11.pdf>
7. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about.html>
8. The ACS measures labor force as those who reside in the geographic area of interest.
9. For more about NEA’s selected artist occupations, see: <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/arts-data-profile-series/adp-1/artists-occupations> & https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Artists_and_Other_Cultural_Workers.pdf
10. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/pumas.html>; <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-maps/2010/geo/2010-pumas.html>
11. In this brief, we report the point estimates and apply 95%-confidence intervals to determine statistical significance. The complete analytical results, inclusive of estimated standard errors, are available upon request.
12. The smaller sample sizes for the artist labor forces within the other Illinois regions result in wide margins of error.
13. Complete regression results are available upon request. Error bars in Figures 5 and 6 represent the estimated 95%-confidence interval for the point estimate.
14. Further details for PUMAs within Illinois are available at: <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-maps/2010/geo/2010-pumas/illinois.html>