ARTIST CAREER RESEARCH METHODS

A comparative analysis of research methods for understanding artists' career paths, work conditions, and incomes

Executive summary

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This report summarizes an in-depth Canadian and international literature search into methods used to understand artists' work conditions, incomes, and career paths. The research team also conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with arts researchers, research commissioning organizations, and representatives of Indigenous and equity-seeking groups.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Obtain a synthesis and analysis of the different approaches and methodologies in research focused on artists' careers, practices and livelihoods undertaken in jurisdictions across Canada and internationally.
- Gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations behind the common and varied findings.
- Identify best practices and lessons learned in methodologies and approaches.

Hill Strategies Research conducted the study and is indebted all those who contributed to this project by sharing their information, time, and expertise. Miigwetch! Merci! Thanks!

Summary of findings, best practices, and research gaps

A key finding of this study is that there is no single method that is objectively a "best practice" compared with the other options. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses. Researchers should select the research method that best matches their study goals.

Research objectives and scope

The main research objective of the studies found in the literature review is to provide insights about the incomes and working lives of artists that are not available through any other means.

Outside of census data, there have been no systematic efforts in Canada aimed at understanding the situation of **all** the country's artists. Many Canadian studies have covered certain types of artists only.

Most studies have not defined "artists" per se but have relied on an identification of the types of artists that fall within their scope of inquiry.

Research into artists in Australia and Ireland, unlike most other national studies, examined the situation of all types of artists at once. Some sub-national studies in Canada have looked at all types of artists, including the Saskatchewan project *Understanding the Arts Ecology* (2014), Calgary's *Arts Professionals Survey* (2014 and 2017), and a survey of local artists in Fort McMurray and area (part of the *Arts Impact Measurement Project*, 2016).

Most of the studies examined in the literature review targeted specific types of artists, including three studies from Quebec's cultural observatory, studies using respondent-driven sampling, and those that have analyzed "big data".

Most of the studies in the literature review were targeted specifically at professional artists. Those surveys aimed at both professional and amateur artists included a question to separate professional and amateur artists, usually based on self-identification as a professional.

In three recent Quebec studies, respondents were considered professional based their professional experience, including specific experience in the artform under study. Canadian studies of visual artists used the definition of professional from the Canada Council for the Arts, including specialized training, peer recognition, devoting time to artistic activities, and/or having a history of public presentation or publication.

Some unions and artist associations have conducted research to gain insight into the situations of their members. In parallel, some academics have pursued studies of artists in order to better understand situations and work patterns that might become more common in the emerging "gig economy".

Best practices
- Researchers and research funders should carefully consider research objectives, scope, the inclusion of "amateur" and "professional" artists, definitions of professionalism, and the inclusion of all artists (or, alternatively, a focus on certain occupations).
- Survey questions should probe where respondents fit with regard to the research objectives, scope, and definitions.
- Arts unions and professional organizations could be key partners and the source of significant issues and questions to address in different sub-sectors of the arts.

Research methods

Given the limitations of official national statistics, researchers have conducted special studies of artists, including three main methods: 1) compilation of lists of artists, then survey sampling; 2) respondent-driven sampling; 3) analysis of big data.

Table 1 highlights the researchers' understanding of some key strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and risks of these research methods, which have rarely been applied to Canadian artists.

There are other research methods that have rarely been used to examine the situation of artists. A study using one or more of these rarely-used methods – longitudinal research, quasi-experimental methods, intensive qualitative research, and arts-based research – could fill a gap in the research literature.

Table 1: Summary of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and risks of novel research methods into artists' careers

List compilation (then survey sampling)

Strengths and opportunities	Weaknesses and risks
Builds on existing lists of arts associations and unions	Not all artists are members of associations or unions.
Considered reliable, if well done (including sample randomization)	Sharing of lists by arts associations and unions due to privacy legislation / concerns. Method has become more difficult over time with increasingly stringent privacy laws.
	List compilation takes significant time and can be costly

Respondent-driven sampling

Strengths and opportunities	Weaknesses and risks
Allows for surveys to be conducted of hard-to-find populations in a systematic way	Methods are not well understood by many researchers, let alone the public
Provides estimates of the total number of artists	Relies upon algorithms within the model (not transparent)
Simple to start the seeding process	Cannot generate a specific response rate or margin of error
Most efficient when sampling clustered populations (e.g., specific types of artists)	Basis in network theory might make it a less viable fit for a study of different types of artists
At a time when response rates to telephone and internet surveys tend to be quite low, RDS methods provide a working alternative.	More computationally demanding than traditional methods
	Intensive process: time, labour, cost
	Less commonly-used method: adjustments to methods in a specific study may have unknown results.

Administrative ("big") data

Note: The analysis below is relatively limited and speculative due to the few examples found in the literature review.

Strengths and opportunities	Weaknesses and risks
Mines existing datasets	Not likely to be used to examine the situation of all artists in any jurisdiction (lack of existing datasets)
Can be used to provide insights into the situation of certain types of artists in certain sub-sectors of the arts	Data may not be available for specific topics of interest. Analysis only of variables that can be captured from existing sources.
Can provide faster results (no need to wait for survey results)	Specific (programming) skills needed

In Canada, the vast majority of custom surveys into the situation of artists have used "convenience samples", i.e., non-random samples with the largest possible number of responses, given the size of the group being studied. Table 2 compares key attributes of random and non-random sampling methods.

Table 2: Brief summary of random and non-random sampling methods	
Random sampling	**Non-random sampling**
Relatively expensive	Lower cost
Provides assurances that the responses offer a representative sample of all artists being studied	Uncertainty whether the sample fully represents all artists being studied
Additional time usually needed to compile and create a random sample	Faster turnaround time
Historically telephone-based, but online sampling has become more common and better accepted	Usually online

Best practices and research gaps
- Researchers should match the research method to the study goals and consider using one of the above research methods.
- Research funders should ensure that adequate finances and time are made available.
- Wherever feasible, studies should be conducted using random samples to ensure a higher degree of statistical reliability.
- Gaps in current research include the limited use of longitudinal research, quasi-experimental methods, intensive qualitative research, and arts-based research.

Variables and questions

The research identified four key studies that delved much further than conventional national statistics into two important issues: time use and incomes. As shown in Table 3, questions about time use and income contained breakdowns related to time spent and income earned related to creative activities, other arts-related activities (such as teaching), and non-arts work. Of note, all of the studies focussed on artists' personal incomes; none reported on household income levels.

Some studies asked about receipt of grants and supports from other sources, such as spouses. Select studies contained questions related to other facets of artists' working lives, such as years of experience, supplementary health benefits, retirement funds, recognition within the arts community, networking activities, self-assessment of their career achievements, international artistic engagements, and the use of creative skills in non-arts work.

A study of artists in Saskatchewan included questions concerning artists' collaborations and informal networking within and outside of the arts as well as key organizations in their work.

Table 3: Variables used to examine artists' time use and income levels in four key studies		
Study[1]	**Time use**	**Income levels**
Australia	Percentage of time spent on creative activities; arts-related activities; non-arts activities; broken down by type of artist	Creative income; other arts-related income; non-arts income. Also: sources of any grants or other forms of financial assistance that they received during the previous five years
Waging Culture 2007	Weekly hours of work; studio time; art-related work; non-art related work; art-related volunteering	Median and average income statistics for: net personal income; gross and net practice income; net arts-related income; net other income. Also: sources of average gross practice income; average hourly wages; incidence of spousal support for basic living expenses, luxuries, and arts practice expenses
Saskatchewan	Weekly hours of work; creative practice; teaching or mentorship in a creative discipline; work outside of creative practice	Gross income from art practice (average, incidence, ranges); gross personal income (average, ranges); income from employment outside the arts and culture (average). Also incidence of grant receipt over previous 2 years; perception of the importance of various funding sources as a direct source of income during their career as an artist
Quebec (visual artists)	Weekly paid hours: overall; in the creation of works of visual art and career development activities; other activities related to the visual arts, such as teaching; creative work in another discipline; non-arts related work	Total personal income; creative income; other income. Also: principal source of income; sale or rental of works; receipt of grants or cash prizes; net creative income

Best practices and research gaps
- Researchers should include important questions on artists' working lives and incomes, such as artists' time use, income details, and other characteristics of artists' working

lives.

- Researchers should consider including questions about receipt of grants, other supports, years of experience, supplementary health benefits, retirement funds, recognition within the arts community, networking activities, self-assessment of their career achievements, international artistic engagements, and the use of creative skills in non-arts work.
- Gaps in existing research include the lack of questions about artists' household incomes (not just their personal incomes).

Sub-national statistics

The literature review found only one provincial attempt to capture data on all artists (Saskatchewan). Many other provincial and territorial studies have examined certain aspects of artists careers (Prince Edward Island, Nunavut, Ontario) or certain types of artists (Quebec). A few special municipal surveys and studies have been conducted (Calgary, Wood Buffalo, Montreal, Quebec City). Nation-wide studies of specific types of artists (visual artists, dancers, women in film) have provided detailed provincial or regional data.

All of the local and provincial studies used non-random samples to examine the situation of artists, with the exception of Quebec reports by the province's Cultural Observatory (random sample of compiled lists) and local and provincial data provided in national studies of visual artists (respondent-driven sampling).

Research gaps

- There is no "best practice" regarding the collection of and reporting on local, provincial, or territorial data on artists in Canada. This is a distinct gap in existing research: the lack of a systematic attempt, outside of census-based data, to collect statistics on many (or all) types of artists in all provinces and territories (let alone municipalities).

Inclusion of Indigenous people and equity-seeking groups

The literature review examined a number of reports with an Indigenous or equity-related focus that contain insights into the measurement of the situation of artists. Many of these reports were qualitative, unlike the statistical focus of most other reports reviewed for this project. Among the 12 research interviews conducted, six were focussed on the perceptions and situations of Indigenous artists and equity-seeking groups of artists.

A number of resources were found related to Indigenous artists, female artists, racialized artists, and disability / deaf / mad arts. Significantly fewer reports specifically addressed immigrant, refugee, or LGBTQ2S (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans, queer, and two-spirited) artists.

Best practices and research gaps

- Some overarching themes emerged in the analysis of research methods used in reports on Indigenous artists and artists from equity-seeking groups, including: the need for close consultation with these groups when designing research studies; the need to decolonize research methods and address difficult topics such as the impacts of racism, sexism and discrimination; the need to build trust with communities who have a complicated history with research; and the need for careful consideration of language, terminology, and accessibility.
- Analyzing how the cultural sector (or even each discipline) views its diversity and its overall inclusiveness would be an interesting starting point for research. Research on attitudes and assumptions can reveal disparities that are important to illuminate before progress can be made.
- Researchers should carefully and clearly note why certain demographic data is being collected and for what purposes it is being used. Researchers should give reassurances and proof that the information is being collected for improvements and real change.
- There is a research gap in terms of the discrepancy between the various possible definitions of artists and official, European-centric definitions of professional artists.

Presentation and distribution of research findings

Best practices
The literature review discovered a number of interesting ways to present statistical findings that could be considered by Canadian researchers and research funders, including:

- Interactive online dashboards, allowing users to filter key findings by type of artist, age, gender, and location.
- Data visualizations.
- Infographics (either distributed separately or integrated as charts in main reports).
- Typologies of artists (e.g., recent Quebec reports grouped artists into clusters based on net personal income and time spent on the arts).
- Unusual text elements such as artist profiles, artists' reactions to the data, funders' responses to the data, accessible summaries, and easy English versions.

Interesting ideas regarding report distribution include:

- Public debates, podcast discussions, and presentations to/with artists.
- The "throwback" idea of distributing paper reports as a way of reaching some Indigenous or marginalized artists.