

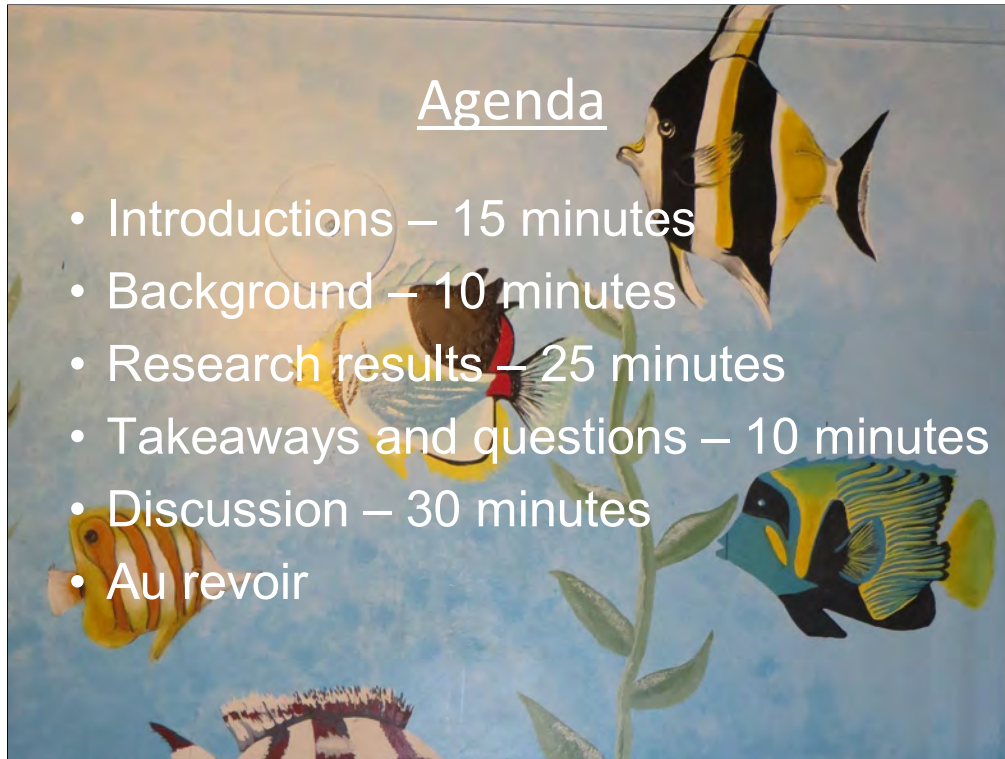


*The Art of Localism* is both a book in the making and an action research project with the intent of connecting community arts organizations with localist initiatives and groups, which work to create a more locally self-reliant economy by encouraging local production of the necessities of daily life such as food, energy, and building materials. This exploration includes interviews with national leaders in both the community arts and localist movements, in-depth case studies of Durango, Colorado and Philadelphia, PA, and descriptions of specific projects where these two streams of community-based work flow together.

## Welcome Instructions!

1. Take a note card
2. On one side write your name
  - 2a. New to project? Write your email to stay in the loop.
  - 2b. Give an affiliation (e.g. painter, business owner, planner)
3. List three assets that you or your organization brings to task of helping our community thrive
4. On the other side list as many artistic and cultural assets you can think of in our community or region
5. Put a star, check mark, happy face next to your favorite three assets on either side.

This presentation, given in person to roughly twenty people, on March 24, 2016 at the Durango Public Library, summarizes the findings on the arts and culture sector in Durango, Colorado. A separate presentation in July will review the research on localism in Southwest Colorado. In order to bolster research on the arts, I asked participants to fill out note cards on the arts and cultural assets in Durango and Southwest Colorado. In course of more than 40 interviews with artists, artisans, and arts advocates, many arts and cultural assets came to light. But I didn't ask this question directly. I have been reading a great deal on asset-based community development recently and this convinced me to ask this question directly of my captive (yet invested) audience. After compiling the assets listed on these cards, they confirm the breadth of cultural resources available to the region. I have put together a separate sheet listing the cultural assets of the region based on people's responses and sent it Durango participants in my study.



The intention with the presentation was to present for roughly 45 minutes after introductions. The presentation, however, stretched to an hour and combined with introductions, we ended at 4:30, leaving no time for discussion. Many people did, however, fill out the feedback sheets that I passed around the room. I've compiled these into a separate document and also sent this to participants so everyone can see reactions to the information. A primary purpose for the presentation was to confirm, refute, or point to areas in need of more explanation or depth. The goal is to provide information that advocates can use to support the arts and cultural sector in Southwest Colorado.



## Research Question

*Question:* What partnerships are possible between community-based artists and localist organizations and initiatives?

This question is the basis for the project. But it requires some definition. Who are community-based artists? And what is localism?



“Localism” is the push to create a more locally self-reliant economy. This includes promotion of local food production, distributed renewable energy generation, the re-purposing of local waste streams, the sourcing of local materials for buildings and clothing and other common items. While there is a large focus on shortening supply chains, there is also an emphasis on supporting locally-owned, independent business as a way to keep money circulating within our local economy. Purchases outside our county and online, reduce tax revenue, shrink the margins our local businesses can expect, and cede control of our economy to entities with which we have little or no relationship.

Localism represents one part of the broader conversation about sustainability. It also represents a response to climate change. The more local you produce your goods, the fewer tons of CO2 go into the atmosphere due to transportation. Localism is also an answer to the more recent push for “resilience.” If we produce our food and energy more locally, we will be better able to weather shocks to our economy occurring elsewhere in the world. BALLE stands for the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies and is a national group advancing the “localist movement.” I am interviewing several individuals affiliated with BALLE for this project. Local First is our county’s BALLE affiliate.



Community arts sits on side of the spectrum of arts activity occurring in every community. To the left are individual artists using their training and own imagination and questions to create artistic work. This is very much art for art's sake. As a writer, I practice art in this way. Many of these individual artists also work as teaching artists in their community teaching their craft to others. This teaching can occur in schools or other organizations, but the focus in this part of the spectrum is on the development of artistic skill.

Community artists use the arts to achieve outcomes that lie outside of "the arts." The arts in this case are first and foremost a vehicle for social, economic, and developmental outcomes. This is art for community's sake. Community does not necessarily sacrifice quality in the final product. In fact, the close ties between the artistic process and the life of the community can add layers of meaning and knowledge that enhance the final product in ways context-free art cannot achieve. The emphasis in community arts is, however, clearly on process over product.

# Community Arts Organizations



Community Cultural Development, Arts & Social Practice, Community-engaged arts, Arts and Social Justice, Cultural Organizing, Cultural Animation

The roots of the community arts movement reach back almost 150 years to Jane Addams and the Settlement House movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Addams, arguably the founder of modern social work, made the arts an integral part of her programming as a way to help immigrants both integrate into American society and preserve cultural traditions from their home country. It's possible to trace a direct line from performances in the settlement houses to modern American theater. Nevertheless, many did not consider arts taking place in the settlement houses and other community settings to be "true art." Community arts found a home, however, in various social movements associated with civil and workers rights with trailblazing groups such as Free Southern Theater and *Teatro Campesino* defining the cultural battle against exploitive relationships. Today, some community arts practitioners use art for advocacy while other use art to raise questions and support the expressive capacities of marginalized groups.

Community arts as a practice is now gaining currency as many philanthropists have started to say "art for art's sake" is no longer enough. The issues facing the world are too urgent for the arts organizations ignore. For better or worse, funders are looking for the arts organization they fund to demonstrate social impact. This slide shows a number of the leading organizations in the community arts movement. "Community arts" as I define it goes by many other names and I've listed these here at the bottom of the slide.

# The Creative City



This trend to look beyond “art for art’s sake” has had three tangible manifestations that currently inform all discussion of arts, culture, and community. The first is linkage between the arts and what many call “the creative economy.” *The Creative City* by Charles Landry was one of the first books that argued that the economic future of urban areas depended on their ability to support their creative industries, such as design and software development. The equation is Arts = Creativity = Innovation = Economic Success.

Richard Florida’s argument in *The Rise of the Creative Class* complements the creative city argument. Florida says that cities should not focus on attracting companies but on attracting what he calls “the creative class,” the young, highly educated, mobile professionals who work in creative industries. Florida argues that companies will locate in areas like Austin, Texas and the Bay Area where there are large populations of these cultural creatives. Cities, therefore, should create amenities that appeal to this group. Florida has received a lot of criticism for his approach. Many say that this economic development strategy results in gentrification, pushing out long-time residents in favor of young, hip professionals with money. Still, Florida’s argument has made a deep imprint on planning and development agencies around the country.

There is also a lively debate in the literature about the wisdom of applying these ideas and strategies about how to revitalize big cities to small cities like Durango. There is a separate class of literature on art in rural places and its relationship to economic development that is perhaps more useful. The Art of the Rural (<http://artoftherural.org/>) and the Creative City Network in Canada ([http://www.creativecity.ca/database/files/library/SE\\_News\\_6\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.creativecity.ca/database/files/library/SE_News_6_ENGLISH.pdf)) are places to start exploring this literature





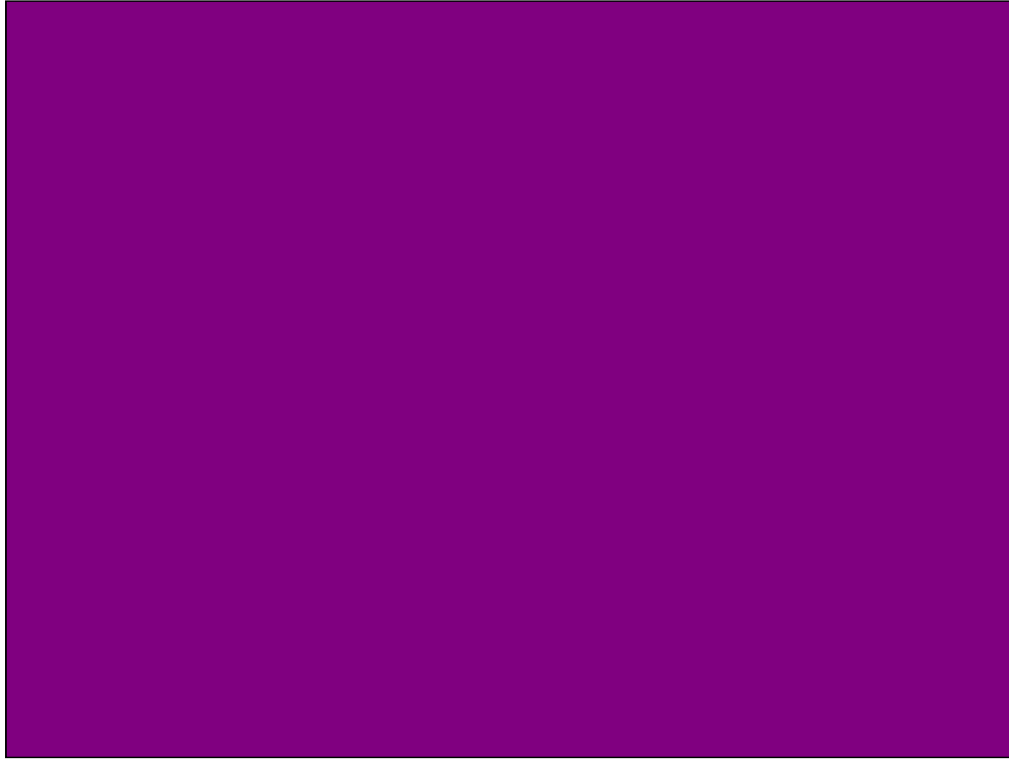
There are many different definitions of Creative Placemaking, but the general idea is to make strategic changes in physical and social character of a location in order to generate foot traffic and economic activity. Artplace is an organization created by a consortium of foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions. They give large grants to promote creative placemaking. In many ways, creative placemaking is the manifestation of Florida's idea of creating venues that attract the "creative class."

There is a lively and often contentious debate about the pros and cons of this approach. Many feel the idea of "placemaking" implies that these locations were meaningless before and that existing residents aren't as important or valuable as newcomers that creative placemakers try to attract. Another debate is whether creative placemaking is primarily a matter of physical infrastructure and design or whether it depends on the ability of arts organizations to "animate" places with inclusive programming that promotes social interaction and cultural diversity.

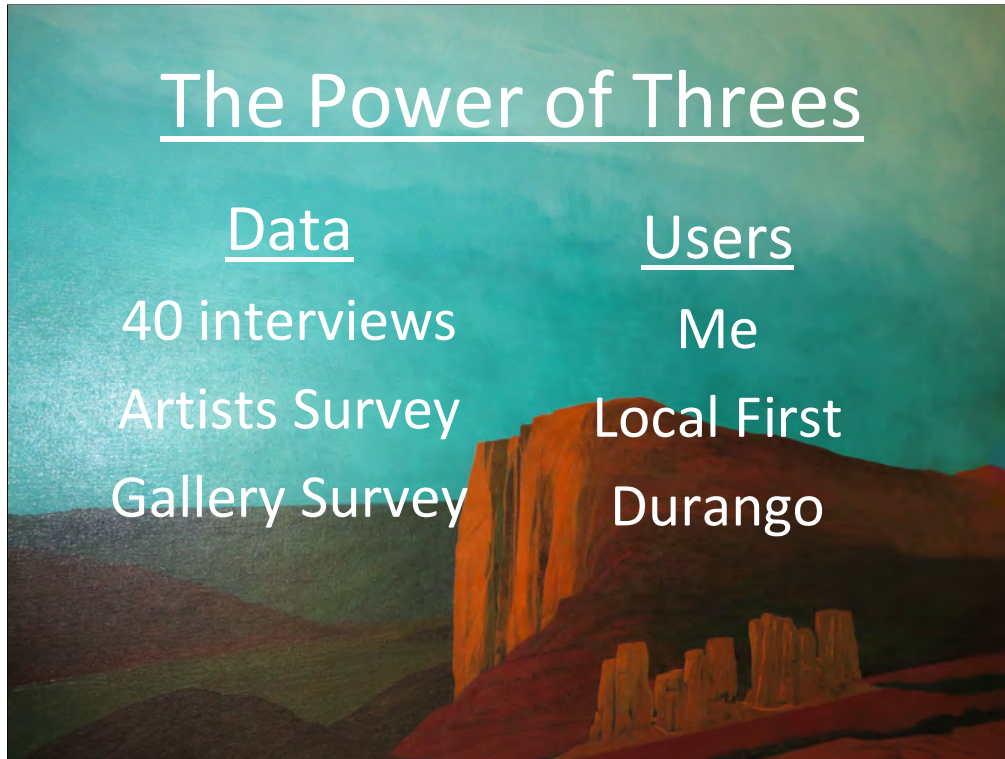
## Cross Sector Partnerships



The third trend to understand is “cross-sector partnerships”: the idea of artists working side by side with planners, transit agencies, housing developers, social workers, health professionals, and environmental organizations. This is the practical impact of funders telling artists and arts organizations that they want more than simply a great theater production or a well-attended art show. Americans for the Arts, Artplace, and national funders like The Kresge Foundation are exploring how cross-sector arts partnerships work and what kind of support they need to succeed. The Art of Localism is an exploration of a very specific type of cross sector partnership.



As a way to organize all the information that I'm presenting today, it is important to understand the "conceptual framework" I am using. The premise of the project is that partnerships can form between community arts and localist organizations around common interests and complementary assets. Where there are common interests partnerships are possible. Where assets of two organizations complement one another partnering can provide value to both groups. An organization's values and organizational practices combine with a specific "community context" to shape the "Interests" and "Assets" for each organization. Partnerships that take place then shape the definition of success for both types of organizations and influence what people think about as "best practice" in both fields. This presentation will focus on the left side of this picture. The localist half I will present in July. The rest of this presentation will highlight findings in each part of this framework.



There are three streams of data behind these findings.

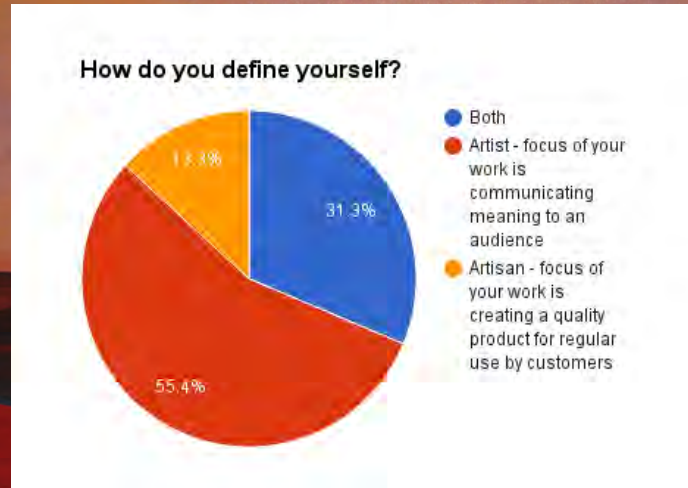
- 1) 40 semi-structured interviews with artists, artisans, arts administrators and advocates. Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes. Relevant portions of each interview received descriptive keywords related to the conceptual framework (e.g. values-collaboration or interests-financial support). I then organized these keywords into clusters and then named these groupings and counted their frequency across the 40 interviews.
- 2) Local First worked with the Durango Arts Center and Studio & to put out a survey for artists and artisans in January 2016. 83 artists and artisans responded to questions about housing, work space, business and networking.
- 3) This same group then worked with the Durango Gallery Association to sponsor a survey of local art galleries. Of the 16 galleries in La Plata County, ten responded and this became another source of data for the project.

There will be three primary users of the findings listed below. These findings are important for my book project. The data will help Local First understand the needs of our local arts and culture sector. Finally, the City of Durango is for the first time including an arts and culture section in its comprehensive plan. This data will support those planning efforts.



Here are a few more details about the artist and artisan survey. The survey was sent out to Local First's list of artisan businesses developed for the artisan economy events that took place in spring of 2015. It was also sent out to the Durango Arts Center and Studio & artist mailing list. A separate, detailed breakdown of this survey is available from Local First, DAC, and Studio &.

# What type of artist are you?



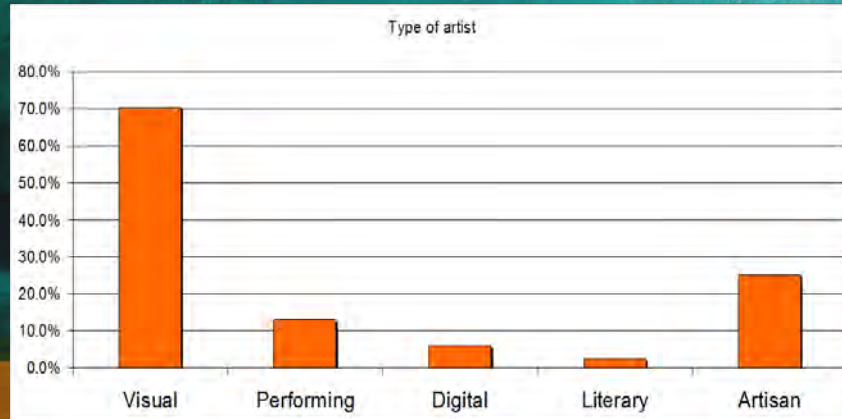
We asked respondents to the survey to self-define themselves as “artists,” “artisans,” or “both.”

## What age group do you belong to?



It's important to note the dominance of artists over 40 years of age in the sample. This result led me to break out "artists under 40" as a separate group to analyze apart from the overall results.

## What type of art do you do?

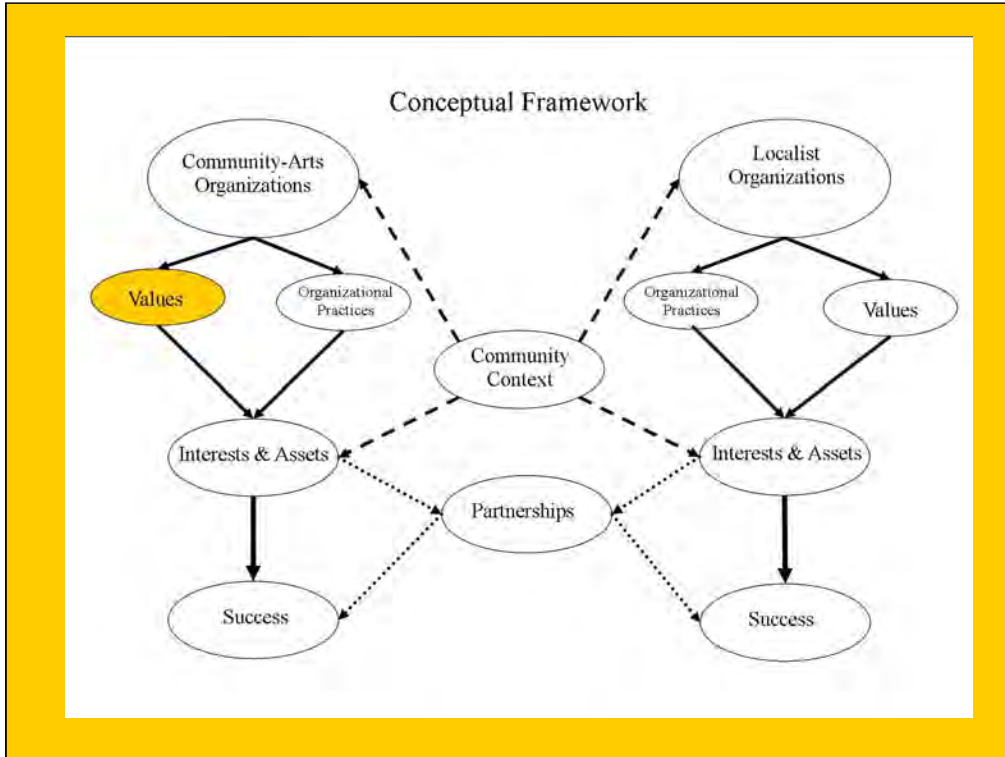


**45% of performing artists are under 40**

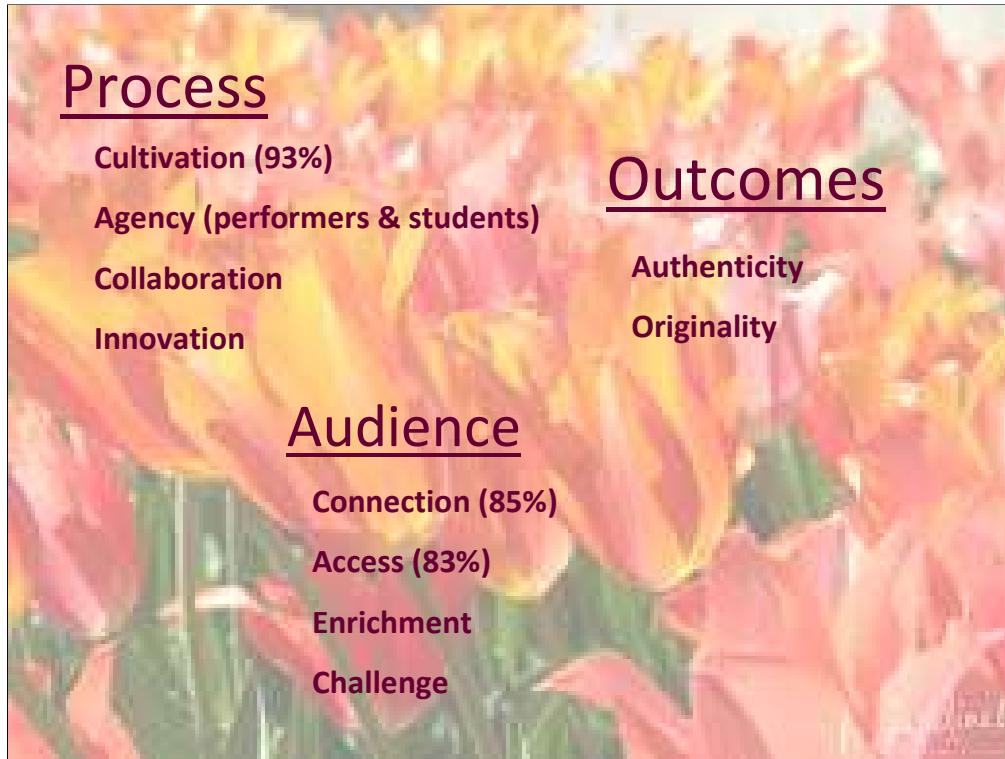
**Artisan = Food, clothing/fabric, jewelry/accessories, household, books/paper, gear/equipment**

We asked respondents to describe their art or craft. Based on those answers I classified as a visual, performing, digital, literary artist or artisan. Many people ended up in more than one category. It's important to note the dominance of visual artists in the survey. This led me to separate out "performing artists" as a small, but specific, sub-group in the results. One of the primary takeaways from the survey is that performers are having a very different experience than visual artists in the community. In general, performing artists are younger and their results tend to track with the "Artists under 40" subgroup.

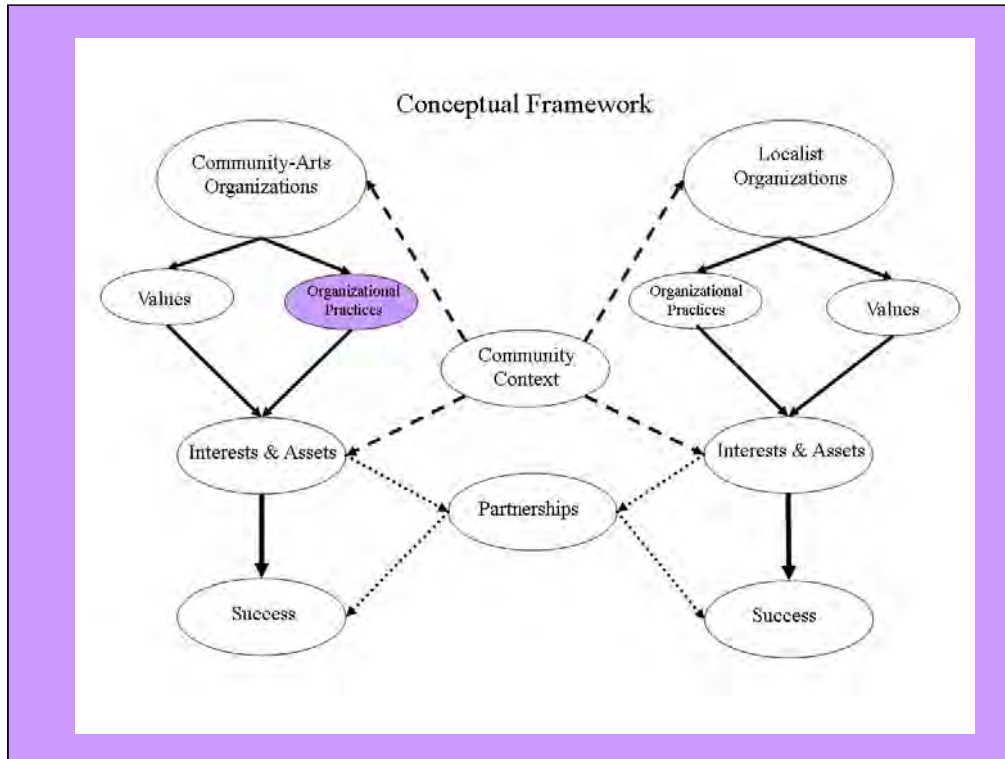




The first set of results looks at values important to arts and culture sector in Durango and Southwest Colorado. These results come from the 40 interviews.



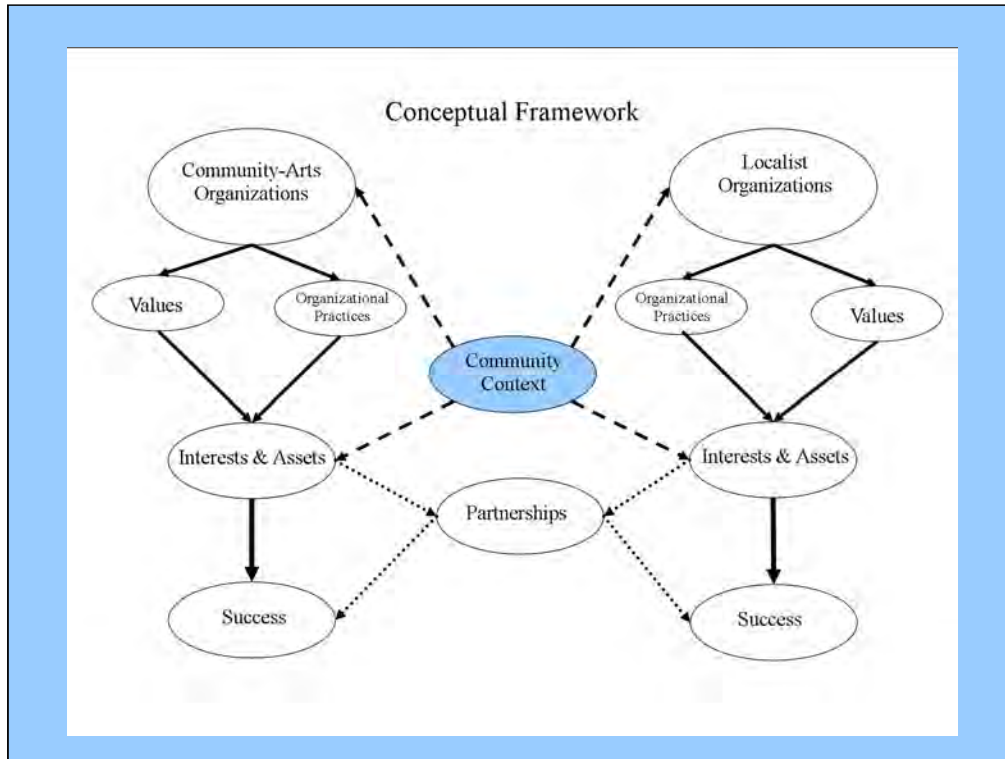
This slide shows the values identified by respondents relative to “artistic process,” “artistic outcomes,” and “relating to the audience.” During the presentation, the term “cultivation” caused confusion. Cultivation is the name for a concept focused on nurturing and encouraging both one’s own imagination as an artist and the creative capacity of others when in a teaching role. This nurturing approach to the artistic process showed up in 37 of the 40 interviews. There is a question in my mind about whether making art “accessible” to audiences is related to diverse audiences or to the general accessibility of content. There is a contrast between the twin values of access and connection and the value of “challenging audiences” and wanting art to leave them transformed.



The second batch of findings relate to common organizational or personal practices withing artists and arts organization.

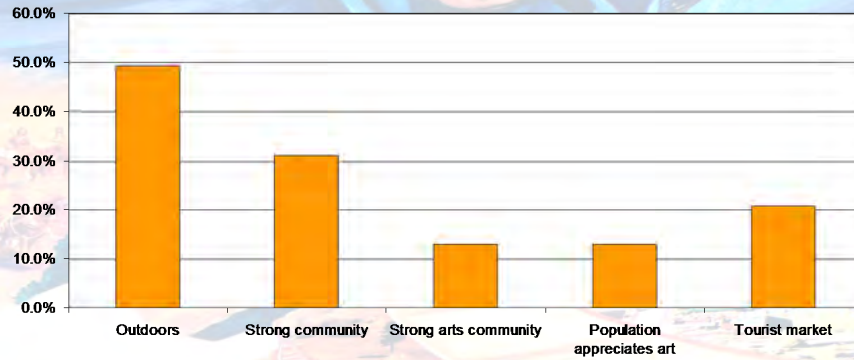


These were the common artistic and organizational practices that emerged from the interviews. When asked what they or their organization was particularly good at: 95% said that they are good at doing a lot with a little. Cooperation and mentorship were also practices that respondents said local artists and arts organizations were particularly good at.



In describing aspects of the community context relevant to arts and culture programming, I will draw on both the interviews and the survey data.

## Survey - Assets



It's hard to know if the 13% who named a "population that appreciates art" is significant. Interviews showed some ambivalence in artists' relationship to local audiences.

In the artist and artisan survey, we asked people to name the greatest asset that Southwest Colorado has for producing their art or artisan product. This graph shows the results. It's hard to know to interpret the responses that received lower percentages. The assets listed from the survey, the interviews, and the notecards submitted at the presentation present a composite map of the arts and cultural assets in the region.

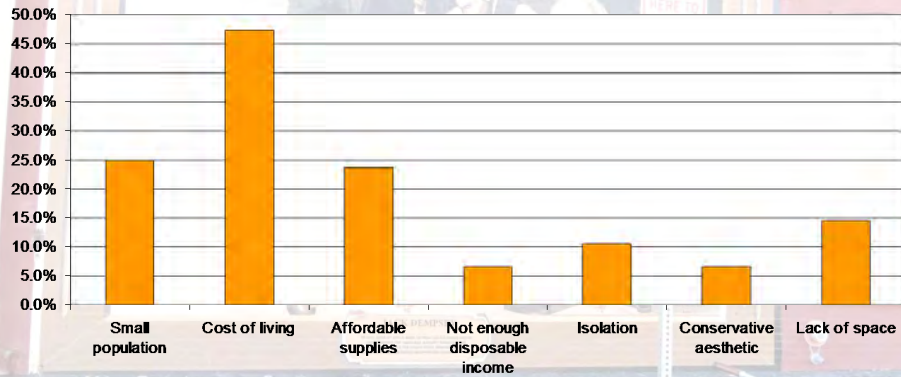
## Interviews - Assets

- Strong arts education programs
- Pathways for incubating creative activities
- Landscape and access to wild nature
- Supportive and strong community
- Diversity and eclecticism
- Cultural heritage and history
- An organic creative culture
- DAC, Studio &, and other arts institutions

In interviews many said that the eclectic diversity of Durango arts is its defining characteristic.

These are additional assets emerging from the interviews.

## Survey - Challenges



Of 11 responses on space, 5 involved exhibition, 3 performance venues, 3 work space

We also asked within the survey about the greatest challenge artists experience in practicing their craft. There are few surprises here with cost of living mentioned by almost 50% of the sample. It's not clear if "small population" means "small market" for artistic products or if there is some other aspect of smallness that poses a challenge to artists. Other challenges mentioned in the survey included the following: Insular art community (4 mentions), Lack of education opportunities (3), lack of public funding (3), access to professional talent (2), focus on experiences/sports (2), lack of fairs for selling (2).



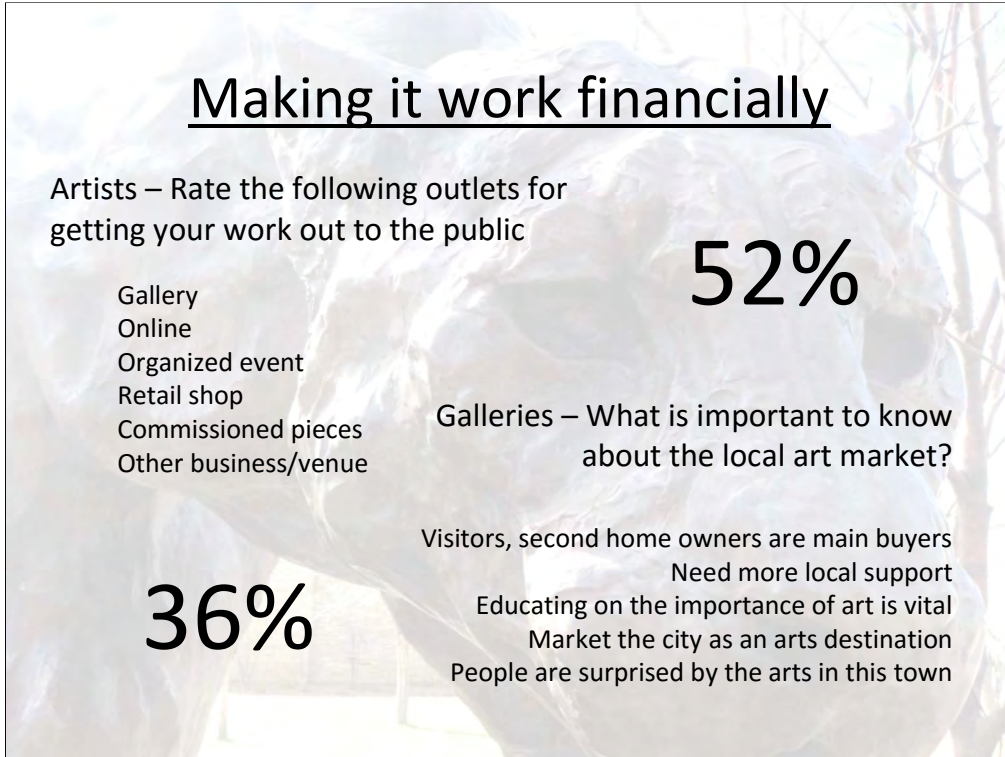


## Interviews

## Challenges

Making it work financially  
Lack of affordable space  
Sense of scarcity

What challenges came up in the interviews? Here were the top three. We can dig further into each of these.



Part of making things work financially is earning potential. We asked artists to rate the outlets for getting their work out to the public. Galleries and online sales were the top two answers for the survey sample. For performers, however, the order changes. Organized events and other business/venues were then the two most important outlets. We asked galleries what percentage of their art comes from local artists. Answers varied widely but the average across the ten responding galleries was 52%.

The average amount of sales revenue coming from the local population for the galleries was 36%. Gallery owners said that most of their revenue comes from visitors and second home owners. Owners said they needed more local support, especially during the first part of the year, which is their leanest time. This raises the question of whether that 36% of local sales is coming primarily from second home owners.

## Creating Interactive Spaces

Most gallery owners say they'd like to host events

Gallery interactions are their favorite part of the job

BUT

Only 2 of 10 galleries selected events as one of their top three marketing tools.

Within the gallery survey, it was notable that most gallery owners said they enjoyed hosting events and that interactions with visitors was their favorite part of running their business. However, when asked to name their top three marketing strategies, only two galleries names "events." Is there something in how those two galleries are using events that make them more effective at marketing the galleries. This suggests that there might room for galleries to collaborate on how to make our gallery spaces more dynamic and interactive.

# Affordable Space – The Final Frontier

**Living Space**  
Important or extremely important to deciding whether to stay – 70%  
Satisfied or very satisfied with living situation – 57%  
Cost and distance to population center are most important qualities

**Working/Rehearsal Space**  
Satisfied or very satisfied with work space – 46%  
Cost and size, and characteristics are top two qualities  
Natural light, running water, and storage are top three needs

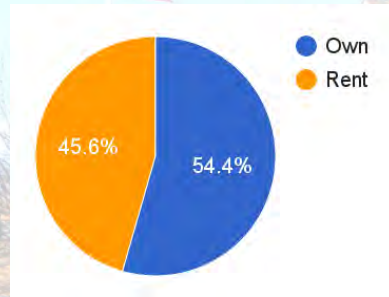
**Exhibition/Performance Space**  
“Durango is in dire need of a quality, flexible theatre performance space. things are very critical right now.”  
More places to hang work needed.

**Retail Space**  
Commercial rents for studios and artisans are forcing creativity  
Related to absentee landowners with an inflated idea of what businesses can pay

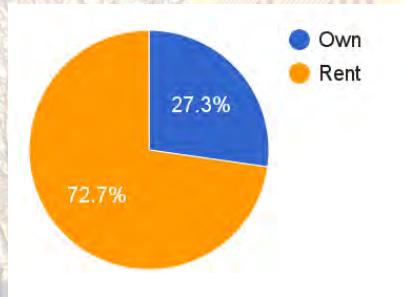
The second primary challenge identified in the interviews was “affordable space.” This came up in some form in 70% or 28 of 40 interviews. This slide makes the point that “space” is a many varied thing. The artist and artisan survey asked specifically about living space and working space. Artisans had more to say about the challenge of finding effective affordable storefronts. Performers stressed the need for a low-cost, flexible, rehearsal and performance space, that all groups could have equal access to.

## Different Spaces for Different Artists

All Respondents



Performers



Only a third of performers and artists under 40 are satisfied with living situation

Visual and performing artists have different experiences in terms of their living situations. Performers are younger and so are much more likely to rent. They are much less satisfied with their living situation than the older visual artists responding to the survey. These are some trends that require more data to confirm.

## Distinct production needs

### Performing Artists

2/3 need 600 square feet or more

High ceilings, sound proofing, ventilation

Only 10% of performers are satisfied with work space

### Non-Performers

Most need 300 square feet or less

More unlikely than likely to share a space

This changes if they can have their own reserved space in a shared facility

In general, greater need for studio space than housing. Performers & artists under 40 have a strong need for both

Performers, visual artists, and artisans have different needs in terms of their work space. Performers need much more space than visual artists and artisans. But they are much more willing to share space than artists that want a place they can keep their tools and materials. The majority of non-performers are willing to participate in a shared space if they can have a reserve a portion of a shared floor plan that is specifically theirs. In general, there is a greater need for studio/work space than there is for housing – 57% are satisfied or very satisfied with their current living situation but only 46% say the same about their work space. Performers and artists under 40 have a strong need for both housing and work space.

## Sense of Scarcity



Two-thirds touched on this

- Can create competition and turfiness
- Erodes trust
- Cuts to the core of one's confidence as an artist
- Can prevent bringing in outside artists that could enrich artistic community

The third challenge identified within the interviews is something I'm calling a "sense of scarcity" related to funding, audiences, performers, customers. Two-thirds of interviewees touched on this. Some mentioned how this sense of scarcity can create a feeling of competition within the artistic community that creates a downward spiral. This wasn't necessarily the norm within the artistic community, but has occurred in the past. One question is what can be done to at least neutralize this mindset so that it doesn't defeat the positive collaborative efforts happening within the arts community.

## Other Challenges

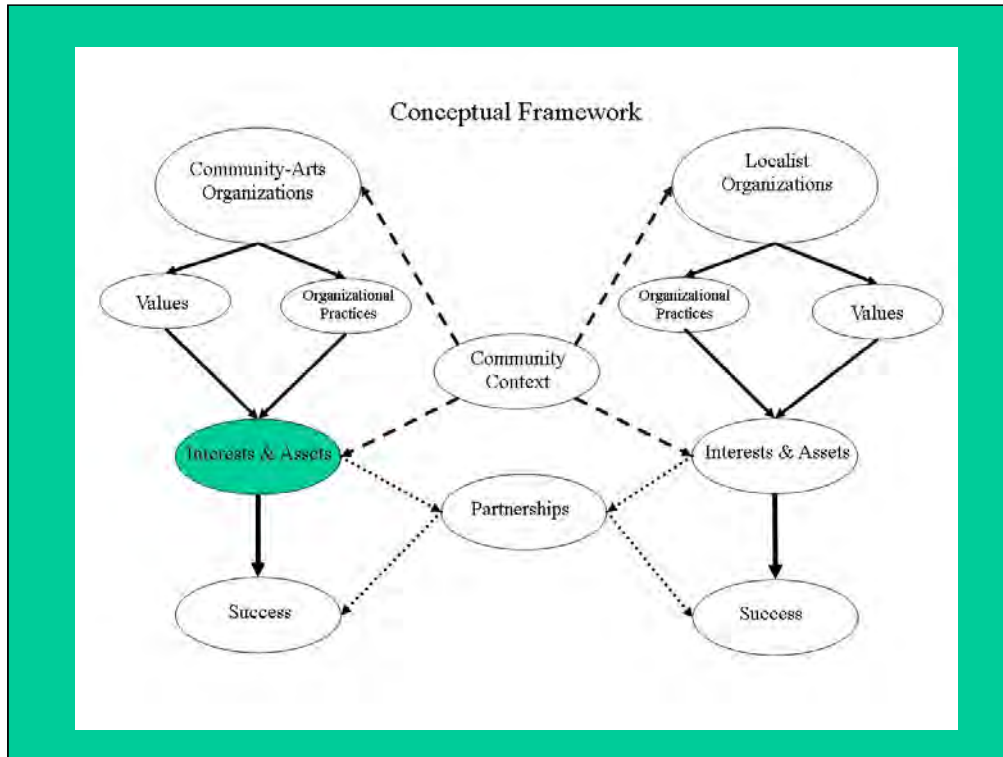


Personal balance	55%
Resistance to risk	45%
Geographic isolation	45%
Cultural differences	38%
Getting the word out	38%
Transient population	33%
Inflexible policies	28%
Corporate competition	25%

Here are other challenges coming from the interviews. Personal balance refers to living a healthy and balanced life as an artist. The need to work multiple jobs and scrape by can make this challenging. “Resistance to risk” refers to a question among artists about how far they can push into unfamiliar aesthetic territory or deal with difficult or controversial themes without turning off an audience. The debate over and subsequent vandalism of the Arc of History sculpture epitomizes this. Many advocated the classic “bronze elk” as more representative of the community. This response to non-representational art is deeply frustrating for many in the art community.

This same dynamic occurs in the performing arts and has resulted in artists consciously choosing not to follow their artistic desires for fear of not gaining an audience. For artisans, this was less of an issue, though there artisans did express a need to challenge customers pre-conceived beliefs about their products, be it a chocolate bar or a mountain bike. Only 17% of artisans mentioned this an issue, which means if you take out this population, the percentage citing “resistance to risk” as a challenge would be even higher.

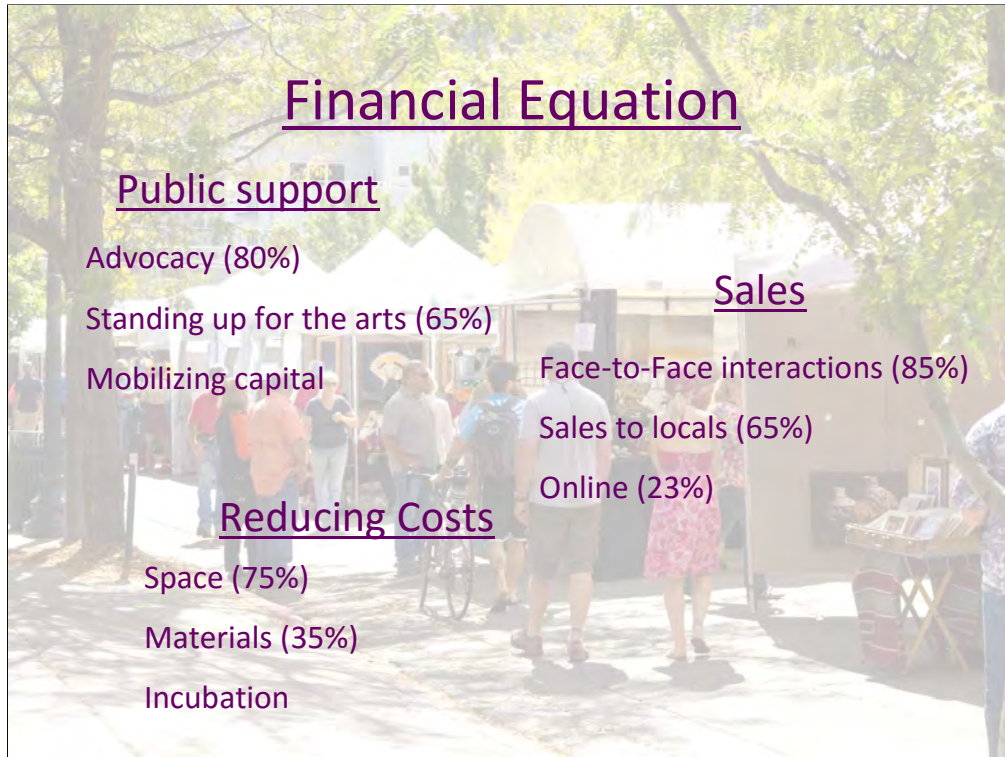




That was all part of community context. Now how do those things add up to define the “interests” of artists and artisans in our community that can form the basis for partnerships with localist organizations?



There are two sets of related concepts when looking at what's in the interest of artists and arts organizations. The first includes "personal and organizational resilience" and "improving the financial bottom line." This relates directly to financial challenges cited earlier. The second set of paired interest is "supporting personal creativity" and wanting an "artistic dialogue with the community."



Tapping into the first two interests mean looking closely at the financial equation for the arts in the community. To get a positive result for this equation you have to look at public support, sales, and ways to reduce costs. Eighty percent of people in the interviews cited the need for more advocacy for the arts to policymakers.

In terms of sales, it's interesting that galleries said only an average 36% of their sales were coming from locals. But artists answered this question differently. For them, 65% of their sales are coming from locals. Almost all of the artists said face-to-face interactions were important for sales. This again suggests the importance of interactive events. The most common price for artwork from the survey was \$250-\$500. For performing artists and artisans, however, the most common price was under \$50.

Space, of course, is the primary area where artists wanted savings. But 35% also mentioned supplies, which are expensive for visual artists. Finally, there were several stories with artisans of being given inexpensive space by other businesses while they were getting off the ground and understanding their craft. Incubation was mentioned by 58% of all respondents. But if you look at just artisans, this jumps to 92%.



## Supporting Personal Creativity

Artistic dialogue with other artists

Bringing in outside artists

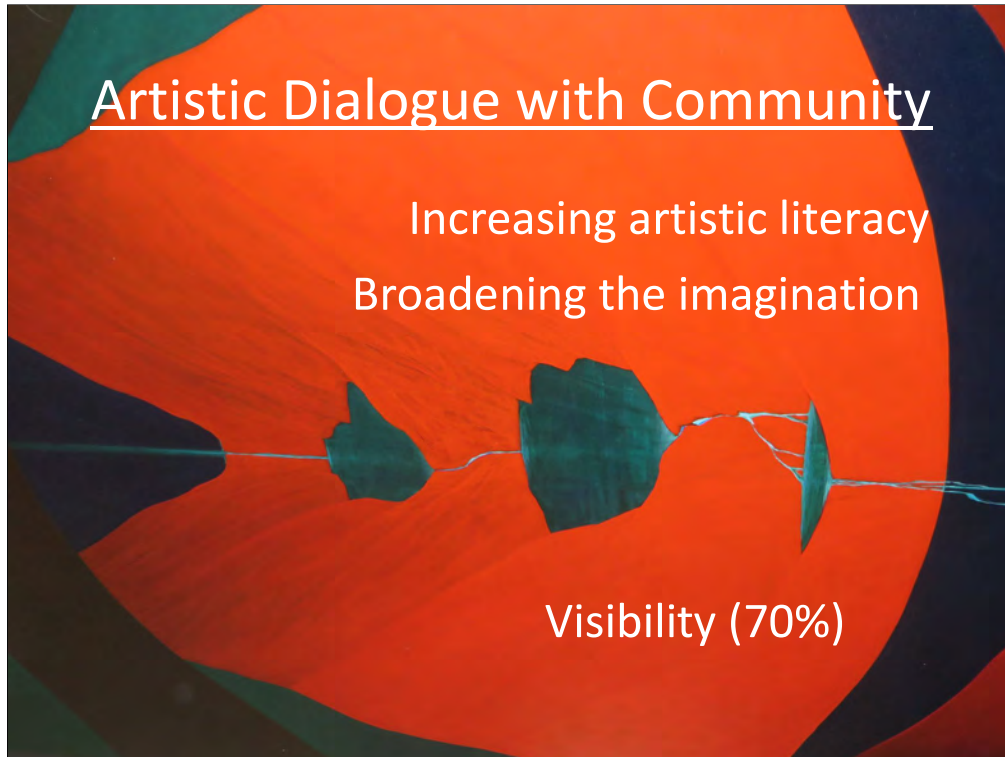
What do you want to talk about?

Marketing (30%), space, survival strategies, advocacy, events, general support

Need to get better at collaboration (28%)

When we look at the interest of “supporting personal creativity,” this involves other sub-interests mentioned by artists – having artistic dialogue with other artists and bringing in outside artists. I was told stories about outside artists coming and contributing a great deal to the arts scene. Others said, however, that this doesn’t happen enough and is something the community needs to get better at. This perhaps relates to the “sense of scarcity” in that outside artists might take audiences or attention away from local artists.

When asked, however, what artists and artisans would want to talk about if we were able to bring them together, the top choice was marketing. Having an “artistic dialogue” at such a session did not come up, but this might have been due to the wording of the question and that it came in the section on networking.



The two interests related to this idea of having an “artistic dialogue with the community” were increasing artistic literacy of local audiences and broadening the imagination of the local community. These tie back to the “resistance to risk” cited earlier. “Broadening the imagination” related to things such as site specific work, thinking about social issues, new classical music compositions, or even what a chocolate bar is and how much it worth. Most interesting in this regard was the reaction of audiences to breaking out of the proscenium for performing arts. In one case, having performers coming from all directions versus being “up there” on the stage created some discomfort among audience members.

This more interactive form of engagement for the audience is a particular strength of community arts. Practically, this is where a flexible black box performance space would be a great help. Groups such as 4C and Salt Fire Circus articulated their explicit desire to take audiences into a different world. The positive response these groups received shows that there is an appetite for this kind of broadening work.

Greater visibility for the arts and artisanship was cited in 70% of the interviews as a specific need. This relates to having an artistic dialogue with the community but also to making the bottom line.



## Place & Diversity

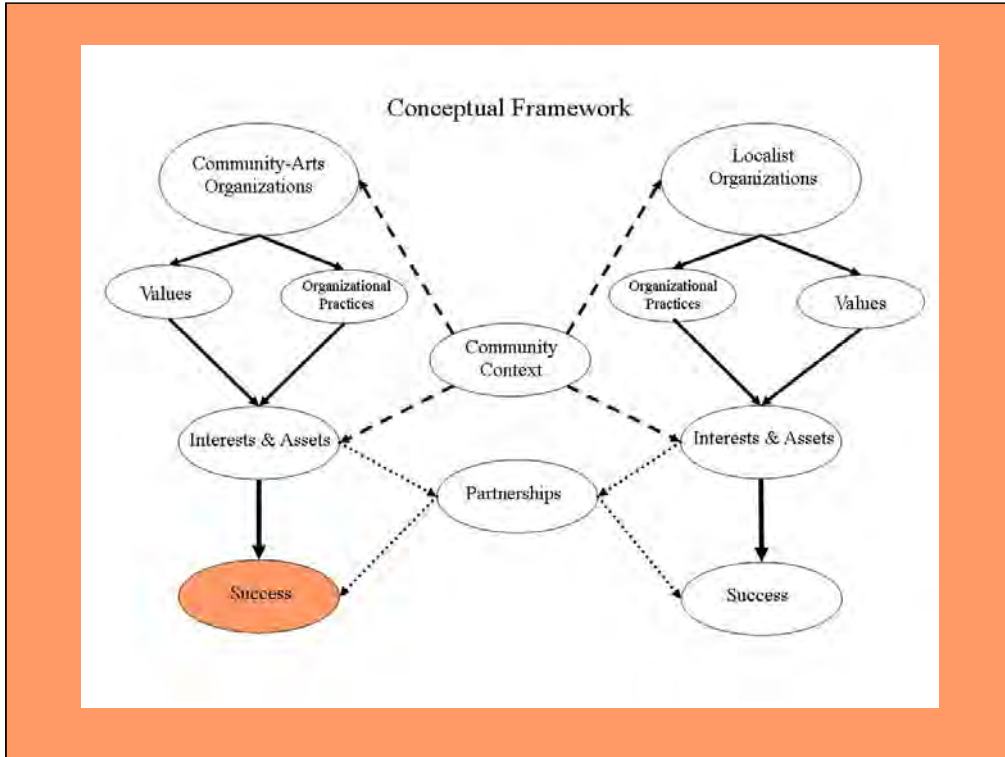
Artistic dialogue  
with place: past,  
culture, nature

Engaging other  
cultures (33%)

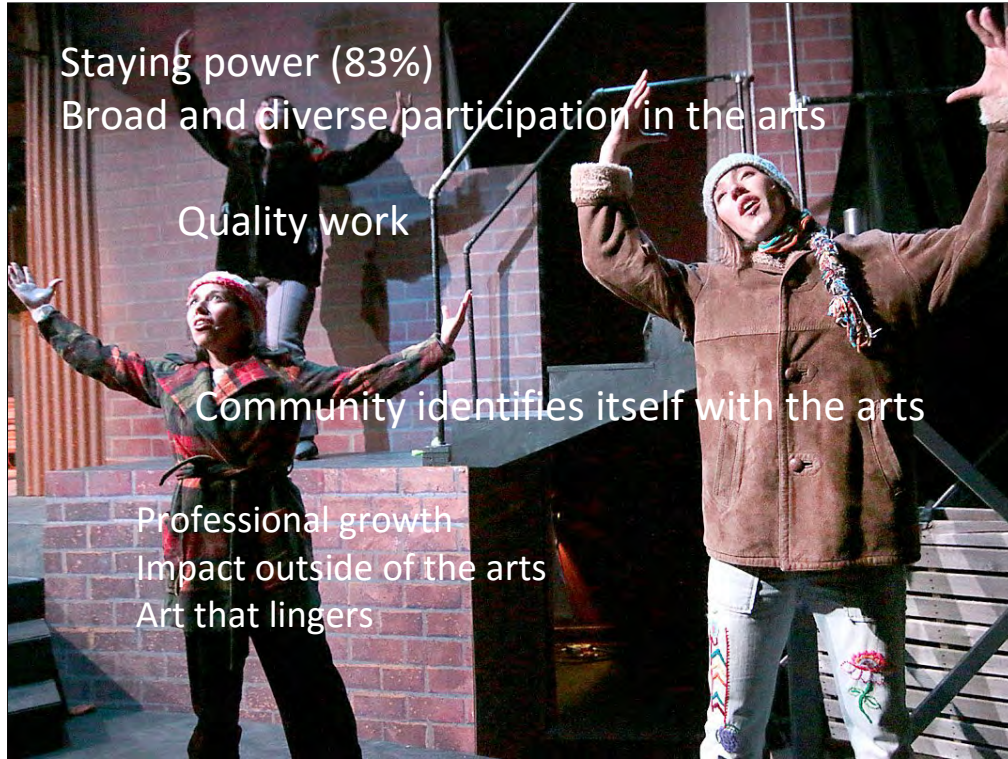
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Is this a potential  
blind spot?

Other interests cited in the interviews included having an artistic dialogue with our geography in terms of the past, cultural traditions, and nature. Only a third of people in the interviews mentioned an interest in engaging other cultures. This was the lowest of all the stated interests and suggests that this might be a blind spot within the arts community. Percentages for both these interests go up if you just look at the community-based artists in the sample.



Finally, looking at the definitions of success within the arts community you have some clear themes.



The greatest definition of success is the concept of “staying power.” This means more local artists, longevity of organizations and institutions, having good organizational systems in place, and being financially stable. “Broad and diverse participation” is important but it’s not clear what “diverse” means in the context of Durango and how this relates to race, class, and ethnicity. “Quality work” and “art that lingers” are related ideas but slightly different. Art that lingers is art that stay with you and gets you thinking. This relates back to the idea of challenging audience and pushing into riskier territory for audiences.

When we identify that the community identifies itself with the arts a sign of success, the question remains what kind of arts community to we mean to be? This is an important point of future discussion. What can set Durango galleries apart from those in Taos or Santa Fe? Is the arts community here more experimental or more traditional? Is it more participatory or designed for spectators? Does it cater to tourists or to locals? There are many sides to this question worth considering.

“Having an impact outside of the arts” was cited by 45% of interviewees, but this percentage was much higher among those who have done community arts work.



## Artisans

Would pick studio space  
over housing

Face-to-face is especially  
important

Incubation and mentorship  
has really helped

### Top three priorities

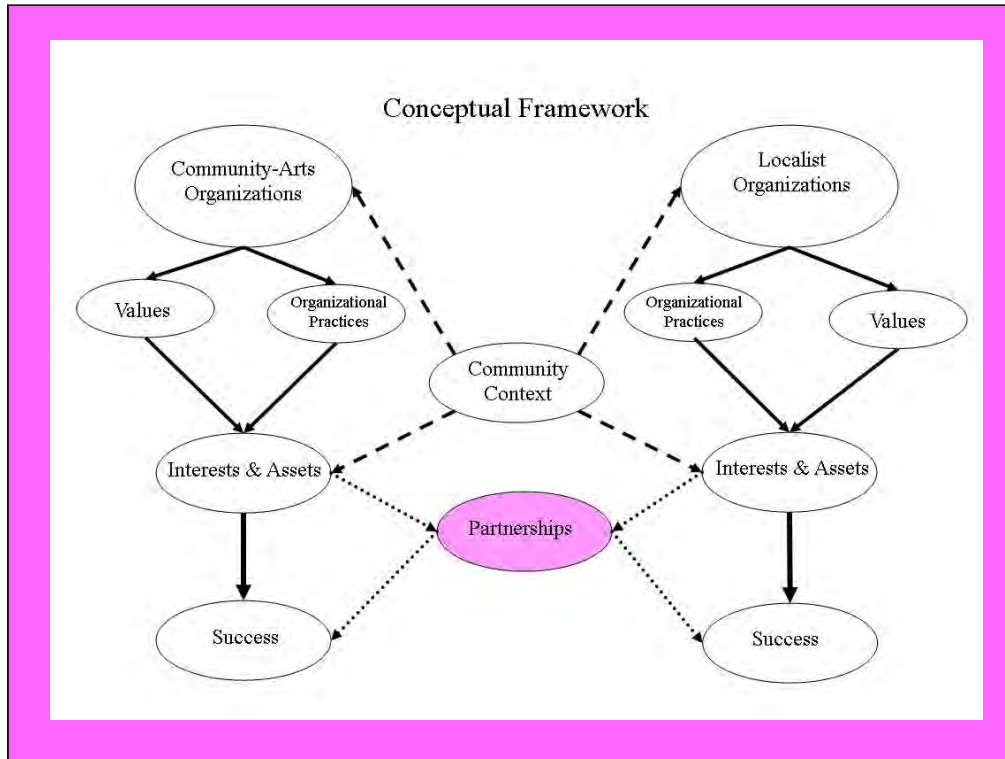
- Marketing
- Work space
- Advocacy
- Business training (4<sup>th</sup>)



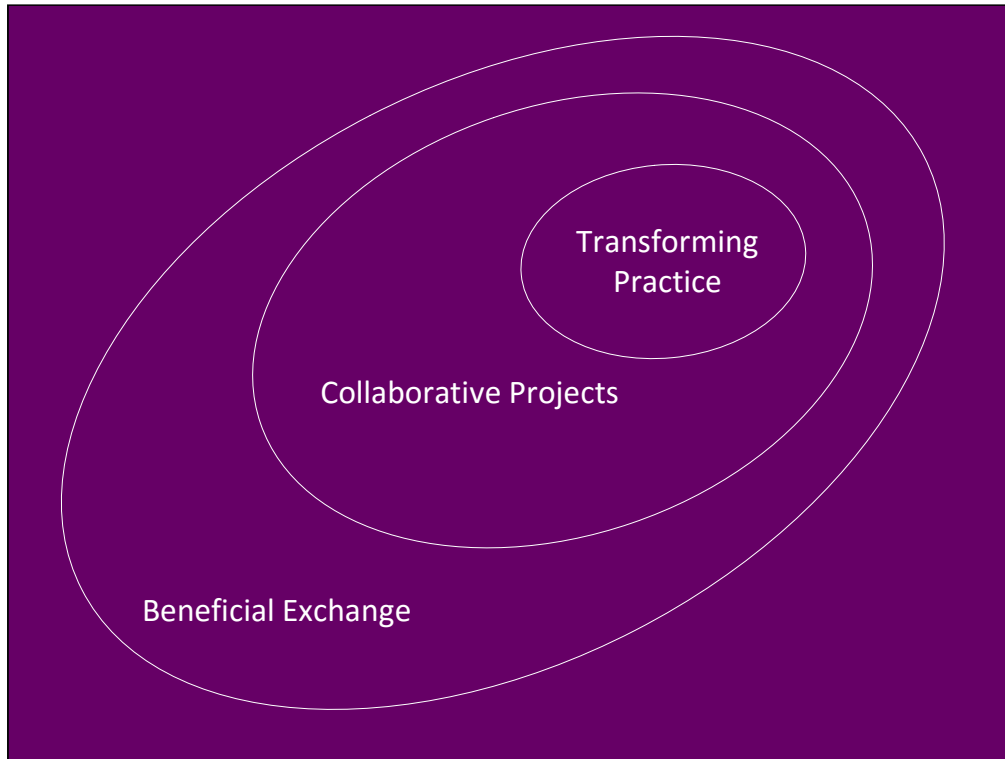
This slide show a bit of the unique needs of artisans within our community. Business training was cited by artisans as one of the priorities 41% of the time. This was up from 25% of the sample as a whole.



With community artists you a jump in almost all the values cited earlier. Specifically “healing” was cited by 50% of community artists as a value versus only 20% for all of the interviewees. But all the values cited earlier jumped higher: access, agency, place, collaboration, innovation and authenticity. Geographic isolation is less important for community artists because they are often focused on dealing with the people right in front of them. Similarly, sophisticated audiences and Durango identifying as an arts community were also less important. Community art is based on process and so “objective” evaluation of content isn’t as relevant. Community artists focus on the internal workings of a community. They are less concerned with the presentation of the community to the outside world. They aren’t oposed to thin, but just see it as secondary.



Finally, we arrive at some thoughts on partnerships with localism. These thoughts at this point are just exploratory to give you a taste of the many ideas and interesting tangents that came up in the interviews. Recommendations for partnerships between the arts and localism in Durango will get more specific over the next few months as I start to synthesize all the findings.



One of the ideas that's taken root in my mind is that there are three potential levels of partnerships with localist groups. The first is a simple exchange that benefits both parties. This could be hanging art on a coffeehouse wall. The second is longer term collaborative projects that are created and conceptualized together. The third is an infusion or synthesis of arts and localism to the point where the practice of each is transformed, where practitioners learn something fundamentally new about making art or advancing localism.



## Beneficial Exchange

One example of beneficial exchange within the community is the role that art has played for Ska Brewing. The inception of Ska's company was tied to a grand narrative of the upstart craft brewers challenging the giant brewing companies that came out in the form of a comic book. Ska has worked with different artists over the years to tell this story on the packaging of their beer. Dave Thibodeau said that the art is part of communicating that their product has come from a very specific place. It has added to the authenticity of the product for customers and has been essential to their marketing plan.



As an example of a collaborative project, this photo comes from a group called PlaceBase Productions, which is based in the Twin Cities. The small town of Granite Falls, Minnesota contracted with this theater company to produce two different shows about the town based on local stories and oral histories. The second one was about memorable Saturday nights in the town back in the 40s and 50s. The production was sponsored by 40 different Main Street businesses and was a moving theatrical procession at locations all the way down Main Street.

This spring Local First is partnering with iAM MUSIC on their Music Walk on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. This event will have iAM MUSIC musicians stationed at businesses along Main Street. The event will be the first Localist Rendezvous for Local First, a new program Local First is developing to help supporters appreciate local business, local history, and local arts and culture. This program holds great potential for all kinds of collaborative projects with local artists.



Moving into the third circle having to do with transformative practice, here are some discoveries from the interviews to consider. The photo on the left is from a project called Behold! New Lebanon. New Lebanon is a small town near the Hudson River Valley. This organization is trying to capitalize on the wealth of artisan knowledge and experience by connecting visitor with locals who can teach them about artisan skills such as handling draft horses, making candles, or foraging for wild foods. Visitors can pay \$15 for an afternoon workshop. This type of programming holds the potential to bring culture and heritage alive in a more dynamic way than a static exhibit or even the classic “living history” approach. It provides a truly unique and interactive experience.

Similarly in the interviews, one question that came up was what the impact would be of using only locally-sourced materials to make art. How would it change artistic practice to use a canvas made from industrial hemp versus one purchased online and shipped to Durango in plastic? The photo on the right shows yarn from Tierra Wools in Tierra Amarilla, NM on the way to Santa Fe. They make the yarn from Heritage Churro Sheep and make dyes from plants they gather in the local forest.

Artisanship itself represents a different paradigm of work. Artisan work is about generating meaning first and profit second. Creative work is main motivation rather than profit and is perhaps the clearest example of how the arts can transform the process of manufacturing and retail.



Bringing localism into arts is already happening in the development of homegrown talent that occurs through the strong arts education programs in the community. The long tradition of excellence in high school theater program has helped nurture a generation of performers that are now performing in productions by Merely Players. Similarly, the Durango Arts Center theater program provides an outlet for local adults to perform and develop their skills. There is cadre of several dancers who grew up in Durango, developed their skills, left to receive additional training, and have now returned to create original work for their home community. The promise of a fully functional Makers Space promises the same kind of nurturing of our homegrown creative talent. This is a case of bringing a “localist” ethic into who is creating the art.



## Global-Local Links

Can visiting artists connect us to local economies around a world?



But there is a role for outside artists as well. Part of the vision for localism is the linking of local economies around the world in more equitable relationships that aren't reliant on multinational corporations. Can visiting artists, such as those that come for festivals like Music in the Mountains, create linkages to other communities. iAM MUSIC, in addition to teaching music to youth, manages a network of independent musicians across the southwest with developing branches in the Northwest and Northeast. Research shows that artists, are by their very nature connectors and pollinators. Is there a way to enlist our visiting artists in building these kinds of relationships with their home community?

## Bread and Roses

Our lives shall not  
be sweetened  
From birth until life closes  
Hearts starve  
as well as bodies  
Give us bread  
but give us roses

Can the arts be the  
new measure of  
sustainability?



This lyric is from “Bread and Roses” an old labor song. With climate change, rising inequality, and population growth, sustainability advocates struggles with the question of whether the goal for society should be bare bone survival. Is survival enough? Or is something more required for a community to be sustainable? One thing that these interviews suggested is that the arts could be this something else. Bread is survival. Roses are the arts. Bringing the arts into sustainability work could create a new bottom line for what counts as sustainable.



## Wild Nature & Localism

“To me, the fork is that you're right in this hub of deep nature. You're in the middle of this mountain range and this river. Whereas there there's a lot of farming and there's a lot of natural environments, but they are all controlled and manipulated in a way to serve a specific goal that is not paying attention to the inherent being-ness of the land. And to me that's where the disconnect is.

It's like, "Okay, that farmland was just bought by this person and this person." Do you know that? Do you care? And now that farmland is actually just parking lots. Do you care? And it's like, "Well, now there's this place to shop?" "Now we have Walmart and Target." ~ Ashley Edwards

This quote from Ashley Edwards of iAM MUSIC suggests the essential role that local nature has played in making Durango a particularly strong creative community. Ashley told me about growing up in Woodland, a small town in the Central Valley of California. She related how conventional and captive the town was to corporate consumption. I asked her why Woodland developed that type of culture whereas Durango has a much stronger sense of community and greater support for locally-owned, independent businesses. Ashley suggests the answer is related to contact with wild nature. If the source of our creative economy is ultimately our local landscape, does that change how we view the land and its importance to our well-being as a community?



Finally, this idea of broadening the imagination applies not only to the art world but to larger vision of the localist movement, which conceives of a radically decentralized economy grounded in close relationships between producers, retailers, and customers. In a globalized world, this vision can be dismissed as quaint and irrelevant to the modern world. But to localists, this represents a limited imagination. Can the arts help localists crack open people's imagination to a new suite of ideas about work, community, and wealth?

In my interview Isaac Murphy of 4C, he was able to articulate how their events were able to do this for participants. He related the story of their harvest festival and the now discontinued La Boca Center for Sustainability south of Ignacio.

"And it was at La Boca and so people had driven way down there and they were expecting a kind of pastoral farm scene and there was this local hip-hop group up and she was just saying, "We're at a farm and there's hip-hop, and I just don't even know what's going on." And that was beautiful and that was the quote....at La Boca, you could easily survive many families down there. And then with the music and the creativity, just like a whole culture in itself I guess. Like a Burning Man but on a farm that could potentially sustain you. So, I guess the cool part was that it was a glimpse into..., the synthesis of those two things, is really a glimpse into a whole different culture."

There was an example of what Isaac termed a "micro-moment," a moments when the people catch that glimpse into a new world. He went on to articulate how those moments happened in his work with 4C.

"I think those micro-moments came along when something was good on many different levels. There was good intention. We were doing something good for the world, like in your head you could get behind it. But then in a really visceral way, in the moment you could get behind some art and get behind some music, like on an emotional level, it felt really good. And on a physical level, it was exciting. And there's that creative spirituality element, that outpouring of heart and soul. So, I think if you can put all those things together: really good intention but also something that's truly physically real and then emotionally good with that creativity, that's the kind of context when those moments occur."

Are there lessons in this for how localists try to advance their movement? This photo is from a performance at Double Edge Theater (<http://doubleedgetheatre.org/>) in Ashfield, MA. Started in 1982, Double Edge is a cutting edge physical theater school and performance venue located on a working farm. Similar to Isaac's story about La Boca, Double Edge fuses performance and food production to sustain a more holistic creative vision of the future. This is a group I hope to meet with in the next three months.

## Arts Infusion



Another example in this vein is the Pillsbury House + Theater (<http://www.pillsburyhouseandtheatre.org/>) in Minneapolis, which is a settlement house that has taken on a project to infuse the arts into all of their human service and community development work, building new competencies and perspectives among their youth, health, and human services staff that has both transformed how they provide services to their neighborhood and deepened the relevance of the art emerging from their doors. I'll be visiting with the directors of Pillsbury House next week to talk about lessons learned from their almost ten years of arts infusion.



A final example is a partnership between Intermedia Arts and the City of Minneapolis called Creative Citymaking (<http://www.intermediaarts.org/Creative-CityMaking-Pre-Pilot-2013>) in which four local artists have been embedded within the city's planning department to help find innovative approaches to issues involved with transportation, land use, and economic development. The pilot in 2013 was so successful that the program has continued with artists tackling intractable problems of equitable development across the city.



## Key Takeaways for Me

- 1. Can interactive gallery events set Durango apart?**
- 2. Different artists have different space needs**
- 3. Follow-up needed with performers.**
- 3. Missed opportunity around cultural diversity?**
- 4. Can community arts bridge the aesthetic divide within the town**
- 5. Pay attention to the invisible infrastructure**

My tally of the takeaways from this research is still growing but here are five issues and questions for further consideration. The final one I feel is the most important. What is the “invisible infrastructure?” It’s the relationships and networks that support creativity across the community. The research shows that there are very real needs for artistic spaces within the community. But in order to make those spaces come alive, artists and arts organizations need support.

## Invisible Infrastructure

*“Is there enough money to support the arts in Durango or is it under-resourced because of its isolation?”*

“Yes, there is enough money to support the arts. I think there is a danger in thinking that buildings are more important than they are. Infrastructure is hard to maintain and sustain. More important I think is that broad community engagement and that doesn't always exist.” ~ Brian Wagner

In my interview with Brian Wagner, longtime director of the Durango Arts Center who is now working for the Oregon Arts Commission, concurs with the importance helping people be creative. His answer goes back to combating that “sense of scarcity” referenced earlier. This slide shows a portion of his statement when I asked if there is enough money to support robust arts and cultural offerings in Durango and Southwest Colorado. His full quote is below.

*“Is there enough money to support the arts in Durango or is it under-resourced because of its isolation?”*

“Yes, there is enough money to support the arts. I think there is a danger in thinking that buildings are more important than they are. Infrastructure is hard to maintain and sustain. More important I think is that broad community engagement and that doesn't always exist.

He continues...

“The Oregon Arts Commission is active in an initiative called, Building Public Will for the Arts. The effort has helped our field better understand that people don't always see themselves as being part of an Arts and Culture community and find the term off-putting. Instead, people feel better represented when talking about being active in creative expression. Someone who knits, participates in folk dance, sings in a choir or plays music with friends etc... may not see themselves as an artist but values being creative through those activities. Doug Borwick in his book *Building Community, Not Audiences* talks about how the arts are more resilient than we think. You don't always need big institutions. Communities may be better served by supporting broad participation by giving people opportunities to be creative: Find ways to bring citizens in to participate in creating work. It has to be about more than sitting down and listening to music or going to a gallery and looking. There is perhaps more of the maker aesthetic present now where people engage more.”



## Cultivation

“It's definitely not about the bottom line...we have bottom-lines we have to meet, but what's best for the plants, for the organization, for the audience, for the actors involved, and pretty much anyone in any of those scenes is this sense of are we growing? Are the plants growing and being nurtured? Are the actors growing and being nurtured? Is the writer? Is the audience growing and being nurtured? And is there some sense of leading with more of an upliftment, an opening up.” ~ Sarah Syverson

What ethic then should guide the future of arts and culture in Durango and the arts and cultural element in the city's master plan? The research would suggest the top value for artists and artisans emerging from the interviews...that of cultivation. Until just recently Sarah Syverson headed the Montezuma County Farm-to-School program. She is also a writer and performer. She expressed this sentiment in a way that encapsulates how the arts and local food can illuminate one another and help us understand the work of each in a new way. This slide shows just a portion of her quote. The full quote is below.

*“What values guide your work and you can answer that relative to theater or agriculture or maybe those are the same. But values kind of motivate you?”*

“When I'm creating writing pieces, whether it's for Edible San Juan or theater pieces and performing, and this is true for my work with school-to-farm as well, how we create systems and organizations with school-to-farm, is this sense of like growth and upliftment. It's definitely not about the bottom line...we have bottom-lines we have to meet, but what's best for the plants, for the organization, for the audience, for the actors involved, and pretty much anyone in any of those scenes is this sense of are we growing? Are the plants growing and being nurtured? Are the actors growing and being nurtured? Is the writer? Is the audience growing and being nurtured? And is there some sense of leading with more of an upliftment, an opening up. And that doesn't have to be a conscious, “Oh, I feel better.” I just did a staff review, we have a staff of 11 right now and when we started five years ago we were a staff of three. So, we've really grown. And we were doing an annual review and we haven't had a lot of staff turnover. And why is that? And to me, it's this sense of cultivating...when people come into the organization, we look for their skills and talents. We ask what their interests are. And then we capitalize on that for the organization and in the interview we say, “Are you a musician? Do you like to write? Do you like to draw? Do you like to tear down bikes and put them back together?” Because we can use all of that in a school garden setting and it will be better because you'll love to do it. Instead of asking me to break down a bike and put it back together. That would not happen for a long time. That would be very difficult. So, that value of cultivating...The metaphor of the garden is really great, what you put into the soil that you cannot see but man does it make such a difference in what grows out of that soil if you pay attention to the micronutrients and all the other aspects. But at first you might not be able to tell the difference between the soil that's sterile and the soil that's deeply fertile.”



Thank you!

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Thank you to these folks for the wonderful photos to support this presentation.