

Guaranteed Income for Artists: Preliminary Findings

Economic precarity has become the norm for millions of Americans, including artists.

Data from the 13,377 artists who participated in the [Portrait of New York State Artists Survey](#) between February and May of 2022 show that:

Artists are earning significantly less than the average New Yorker. 85% of respondents had a household income of less than \$50,000. The median for New York State households is \$81,000.

Nearly two-thirds of artists don't have a financial safety net. 62% of respondents have no emergency savings, putting them on the brink of financial catastrophe.

Almost half of artists are gig workers. 46% of respondents relied on gig work to earn an income. Gig work often comes without the labor protections of typical full-time jobs which often include access to health insurance and unemployment insurance.

As a direct response to the economic issues faced by New York artists, from 2022-2024, Creatives Rebuild New Yorks' Guaranteed Income for Artists Program supported 2,400 artists across New York State with \$1,000 monthly no strings attached payments for 18 consecutive months.



"I felt like the chains of economic instability were preventing me from focusing on my art."

—Anonymous

Our program [prioritized artists who face structural barriers to financial security](#), specifically those who lack a financial safety net, are Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, LGBTQIA+, Deaf/Disabled, caregivers, immigrants, those who are or were legal system-involved, and those living in rural parts of the state.

A robust set of formal findings will be released in December 2024. Early findings on the impact of Guaranteed Income on these artists — based on preliminary analysis of spending data, survey insights, and qualitative data — illustrate that:

Guaranteed Income works for artists across the domains of financial stability, professional growth, and personal wellbeing.

When they receive a Guaranteed Income:

- Artists prioritize debt and savings payments
- Artists pay their bills
- Artists choose work that works for them
- Artists' well-being improves
- Artists have more time and space for caregiving

Findings

1. Artists prioritize debt and savings payments

At the onset of the Guaranteed Income (GI) program, 62% of participating artists reported that they had no financial safety net, 56% were unsure when they would make income again, and 55% carried unmanageable debt.”

By analyzing the account balances in response to the monthly inflow of \$1,000, we found that artists’ financial positions showed sustained improvement over the course of the program.

One of the major ways in which artists’ financial conditions improved was in their ability to manage debt and build savings.

17% of GI expenditures were used for debt payment.

Of this debt payment, 54% went toward credit card debt and 15% went toward loans and mortgages.

“Not to be hyperbolic, but Guaranteed Income literally saved my life. In 2022, I was behind on rent and bills (despite working a full time 9-5). With the added boost to my income, I was able to get ahead of my finances, build up savings, and thrive instead of merely survive. Now I am inspired once more instead of my mind worrying about finances.”

16% of GI expenditures were used for savings and investments.

On average, artists saved approximately \$150 more per month while enrolled in the program than they did prior to the program.

2. Artists pay their bills

On average, artists receiving Guaranteed Income were able to contribute almost \$140 per month to their expense obligations.

15% of the GI payments were used by artists to cover expense obligations such as rent, utilities, and telecommunications services.

“I was able to support myself and have a peace of mind that didn’t involve worrying about missing payments on bills. It allowed me to create the way I did when I first started; free from constraint that had to take economics into account instead of doing what’s best for the art regardless of cost.”





“In this painting, I am expressing my inner world and sentiments. This painting was a direct benefit from the year of receiving the Guaranteed Income. The year of rest, and a bit less of financial worry, allowed me to get deeper in touch with my heart.”


–Athesia Benjamin, Painter


“The guaranteed income had greatly impacted my life by allowing me to develop my design business without having to worry if the bills would be paid, or whether or not food would be on the table for my family. The funds were used to provide food for my family and to pay the bills while the funds brought in through my business were put back into developing the business which in turn, freed my worries and fueled my creativity.”

Survey responses suggest that by the end of the program, artists were:

 Less likely to have difficulties paying bills

 More likely to have savings

 More likely to have set aside a rainy day fund

 More likely to be able to handle a \$400 shock without credit

3. Artists choose work that works for them

Spending data as well as survey insights show that there were no significant changes in artists' income streams outside of the GI payments, indicating that program participants are likely not reducing their work in any substantial way. GI offered an opportunity for artists to make choices about the kind of work they pursued, often leading to more opportunities to get paid for their artistic work.

Overall, artists' ability to sustain themselves financially from their artistic work increased.

"GI has allowed me to dedicate myself full time to my art, giving me not only the material help but also the most precious gifts, which are time and active listening. I have felt very recognized and acknowledged as an artist and my career has significantly improved because of that, landing roles in feature films, commercials, gaining SAG-AFTRA eligibility, and being accepted into new musical theatre shows workshops."

"Thanks to this program, as a mama in my late 30s, I am experiencing a series of 'firsts' — my first residency, received my first art grant, installed my first ever public art piece while weaving baskets and transforming my own healing into shared inspiration, bringing to life the visions of my dreams."

Early survey analysis indicates that artists who received GI were more likely to receive grants or prizes to support or pursue their artistic work. We also found that artists were able to experiment with new techniques, mediums, and projects; they experienced heightened professional development, resulting in broader networks and enhanced collaborative projects post-program; and they felt empowered by the recognition of their work leading to increased visibility and success in their fields.

"[This artwork is] symbolic of the freedom I found to experiment with new approaches and mediums. I use airbrush technique in the piece which I was [able] to purchase with my CRNY grant money. It also incorporates some of my earlier techniques of dried acrylic slabs which was a paint-saving/resourceful way I would apply thin batches of paint onto canvas. The blue is representative of the calm introspection I was able to engage in within my process due to not having to work so much in a non arts job."

—Chango4, Trans-disciplinary Artist



4. Artists' well-being improves

The research on the impact of Guaranteed Income shows that GI bolsters health and well-being across diverse populations, including artists.

Survey results indicate a 17% increase in the likelihood of reporting “I am in good mental and emotional health” among artists receiving Guaranteed Income. Responses also indicate significantly lower frequencies of mental health challenges:

- Participants reported feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge nearly every day at a 28% lower rate than those who did not receive guaranteed income payments
- Participants reported feeling down, depressed, or hopeless nearly every day at a 39% lower rate than those who did not receive guaranteed income payments

We found that the program significantly improved personal well-being, allowing artists to focus on their craft without financial anxieties. Many artists described personal growth, healing, and increased self-confidence due to the support from the program. They highlighted how the time and resources provided allowed them to reflect, heal from past traumas, and prioritize their well-being.

“Going through a breast cancer diagnosis during a pandemic was the most difficult experience of my life. I went from performing and traveling the world to the whole world shutting down and later finding out I had cancer. When theaters began to open back up, I was still at a standstill in my career because of my nearly two year battle. Guaranteed Income gave me the support I needed to slowly build my life back, become strong and healthy again, and has truly led me back to this industry feeling safe, valued and supported.”

“The GIA program allowed me much more studio time and supported my journey in psychoanalysis. The inspiration for this painting came from many insights gained in my psychoanalytic sessions; it is about generational trauma and connections between my grandmother, mother, and myself. Creating this work was reflective and healing.”

—Anonymous



5. Artists have more time and space for caregiving

The connection between caregiving and artistic practice — labor that we know is essential, but far too often goes undervalued and uncompensated — is very present in our program with over 30% of artists identifying as caregivers. As the canon of research shows, [supporting caregivers has impacts on the health of families, communities, and our society](#).

Initial survey results show that compared to the treatment group,

... artists receiving GI were significantly more likely to provide care to kids or to adults who were elderly, ill, and/or disabled.

Artists who were caregiving while receiving GI reported that they were able to do so with less stress, and at times, even find more space for joy in their role as caregivers.

“I am low income and a full-time caregiver to my 18-year-old disabled daughter. Worry about money fuses with worry about her life and becomes a super worry, like those super particles of pollen bonding with diesel to create the super asthma in cities. Having this income dramatically affected my money worry. It allowed me a margin of relaxed mental state. The most amazing and surprising impact of this was that it allowed me to enjoy my daughter more. All the time distracted by survival is time I can’t love and enjoy my children, my family.”

Sources

This report is based on the extraordinary work of Creatives Rebuild New York’s many research partners, specifically: Leah Hamilton, Appalachian State University Family Economic Policy Lab; Joanna Woronkiewicz and Doug Noonan, Indiana University’s Center for Cultural Affairs; Sarah Cowan and Erica Hobby, New York University Cash Transfer Lab; and Stephen Roll and Guangli Zhang, Washington University in St. Louis’ Social Policy Institute.

What is presented here is a preliminary reflection from the CRNY team based on the research teams’ preliminary findings using the following data sources. A robust set of formal findings will be released in December 2024.

SURVEYS:

- [Baseline survey](#) collected by CRNY at the time of application
- Comprehensive survey for enrolled artists upon completion of the program (18 months) and three months after the program ended (21 months)
- Comprehensive survey for a control group of artists who applied but did not receive GI payments

STEADYAPP SPENDING DATA:

- Payment usage
- Bank transactions and account balances covering the period of 20 weeks prior to and throughout the 18 months of CRNY payments

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION SUBMISSIONS:

- Participating artists were invited to submit a work of art (image, video, or writing) that represented their experiences with the program, with accompanying written descriptions of their submission

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