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ARTS-BASED SOCIAL MOBILITY: EXPLORING CULTURAL CAPITAL IN CHARLOTTE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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In 2014, a study led by Harvard economics professor Raj Chetty on intergenerational economic mobility in the United States announced that of the 50 largest U.S. cities, Charlotte, North Carolina, had the lowest rates of upward intergenerational mobility.

A growing body of national and international research is demonstrating that arts and culture can have profound effects on the economic opportunity areas identified in the Chetty et al. (2014) report. In Charlotte, however, there has been very little effort to document and assess arts-based efforts to address social issues. Knowing that there were artists and arts organizations in Charlotte dedicated to promoting social and economic justice, youth development, public health, neighborhood vitality, and other civic imperatives, we launched the initiative Arts Impact Charlotte (artsimpactclt.org), beginning with an effort to identify and document the individuals and organizations engaged locally in arts-based programs with social impact.

In Charlotte, there has been very little effort to document and assess arts-based efforts to address social issues.

In the fall of 2019, we conducted a landscape scan that identified local artists and organizations working toward social impact through creative practice. From survey responses, we learned that the majority of artists and organizations seek to address multiple social issues with their work and that the three most common areas of impact were education, race and ethnicity, and health and wellness, with 75 percent of arts organizations offering educational programming. We then proposed to dig more deeply into the survey data through intensive, semi-structured interviews with providers and participants in relevant arts-based programs.

Many such programs aim to broaden access to the arts and increase the cultural capital of individuals and communities. **“Cultural capital” can be defined as cultural knowledge, tastes, and abilities that generate “profits” in the social sphere.** A growing body of sociological research demonstrates that cultural capital is positively associated with social mobility.

Studies indicate that the advantages of cultural capital include improved educational outcomes, enhanced social interaction and friendship networks (social capital), and success in the labor market.

Taken together, this line of research suggests cultural capital can promote educational success, college readiness, and social mobility under the right conditions.

The variety of relevant arts-based programs in Charlotte provided a ready opportunity for us to **explore the conditions under which cultural capital acquisition may enhance prospects for social mobility.**

Our primary research questions were:

- What are the beliefs, motivations, and experiences of those providers of social impact arts programs and of the individuals and families that participate in such programs?
- How do arts providers and participants conceptualize the social impact of the arts and what relationship do they perceive between arts participation and social mobility?

To address our exploratory research questions, we conducted 80 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a diverse set of artists/arts providers and participants in relevant programs. In addition, we included an arts-based research component: we conducted two focus group activities in which arts providers did a guided reflective collage and writing activity that explored the value of the arts within their own individual lives and that of their communities.

We found that the arts providers and participants we interviewed had wide-ranging beliefs about the benefits of the arts, were highly motivated to share those benefits with others, and had many personal experiences that reinforced their perspectives.

In fact, they collectively articulated **26 distinct benefits of arts participation!** In addition, we made several discoveries about how arts providers and participants conceive of cultural capital and arts-based social and economic mobility, barriers that they perceive and encounter, and differences in their experiences and attitudes based on race or ethnicity.

We grouped stated benefits into four broad categories that vary along two dimensions. The first dimension distinguishes benefits that focus on the *individual* and those that are *collective*. The second dimension distinguishes between benefits that are relatively *material* (or tangible) and benefits that are relatively *ideal* (or intangible).

Among arts providers in general, we found a strong emphasis on *individual* benefits relative to *collective* ones, as well as on *ideal* benefits relative to material ones. In particular, nearly half of the references we coded in the provider interviews were to *individual ideal* benefits (43.0%), such as exposure to new things, increased open-mindedness or empathy, building confidence, self-expression, and so on.

Among arts participants' interviews, *individual* benefits were even more pronounced, and in particular *individual material* benefits were most commonly mentioned.

The people we interviewed shared many ideas and experiences in common; however, some racial and ethnic differences emerged in the relative emphasis placed on certain types of benefits from and barriers to arts participation. For example, **arts providers of color – Asian, Black, and Latinx providers – more often emphasized collective or material benefits of the arts relative to individual ideal ones.**

In our view, this research has academic implications for theories of arts participation, cultural capital, and social inequality as well as practical implications for efforts underway in Charlotte to increase economic opportunity and promote racial justice. We particularly see value for Charlotte-based artists, arts educators, arts organizations, arts funders and policy-makers and for our local community at large. The body of research on the social impact of the arts in Charlotte is very small, if not nonexistent. This project is therefore a significant contribution and begins to lay a foundation for continued investigations. As one participant that we interviewed stated,

“ **Hopefully [this research] opens a lot of eyes and gets the ball rolling in the right direction for Charlotte as a city... to show that, you know, you focus on the arts, and I think they will see it on the back end, how the city benefits from it.**

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

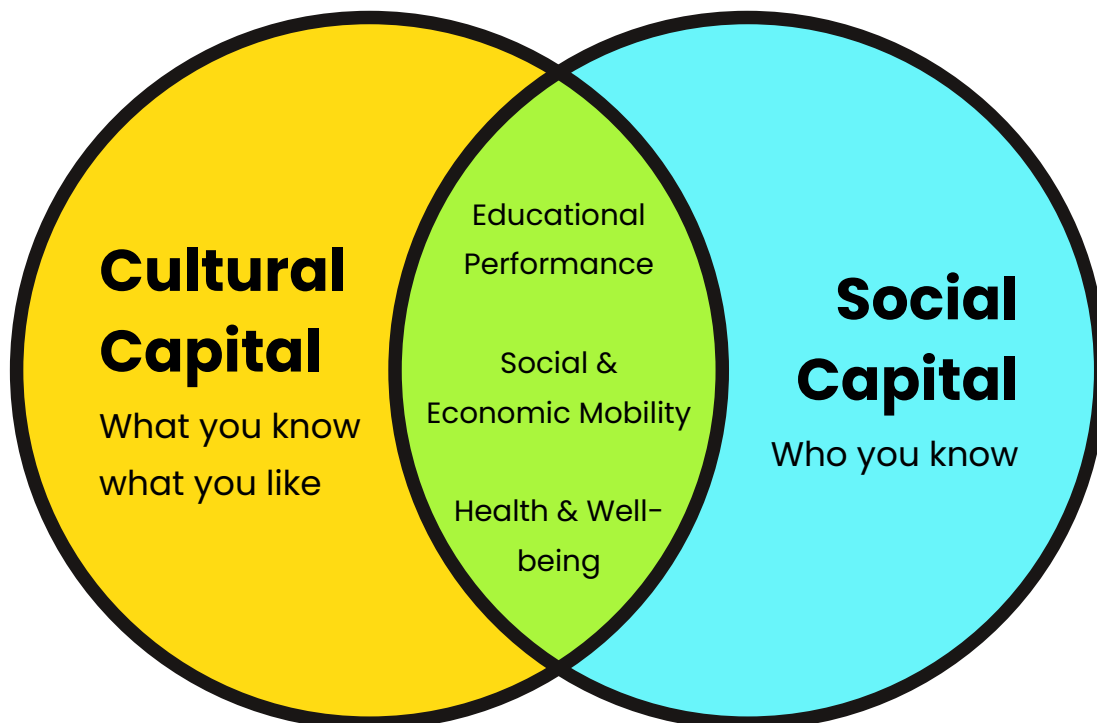
A growing body of sociological research demonstrates that cultural capital, including knowledge of and participation in a wide range of creative and artistic activities, is positively associated with social mobility. The advantages of cultural capital include improved educational outcomes (Dumais 2006, Kraaykamp and van Eijck 2010, Roksa and Potter 2011, Gaddis 2013, Weininger et al. 2015), enhanced social interaction and friendship networks (Lizardo, 2006, 2016), and success in the labor market (Rivera 2012, Koppman 2016, Thomas 2018). Likewise, arts education has specifically been linked to a range of benefits for children, such as increased interest in the arts later in life (Kisida et al. 2014, 2018), higher levels of school engagement and performance (Bowen and Kisida 2021), improved critical thinking skills (Kisida et al. 2016), and social-emotional learning (SEL) and development (Holochwost et al. 2021, Omasta et al. 2021). Several studies of cultural capital, in general, and of arts education, in particular, report that these wide-ranging benefits are even more pronounced among marginalized groups (Catterall et al. 2012, Gaddis 2013, Bowen et al. 2014, Crul et al. 2017, Jæger and Karlson 2018).

Despite its apparent benefits, access to school-based arts education -- an important source of cultural capital -- has been declining in the United States, particularly among historically underserved student populations (Kisida et al. 2018). Meanwhile, a recent and much-publicized study found that Charlotte, North Carolina (NC,) ranked last among 50 US cities in intergenerational mobility (Chetty et al. 2014), and the task force that was created in response largely overlooked the potential role of arts and culture in addressing the problem (see Leading on Opportunity 2017). At the same time, a variety of artists and arts organizations in the Charlotte area offer programs whose motivation and methods are focused on making a social impact. Many such programs aim to broaden access to the arts and increase the cultural capital of individuals and communities through performing arts training, visual arts lessons, community-based cultural events, and other types of arts education and experience.

In this project, **we explore the beliefs, motivations and experiences of individuals and organizations that provide arts-based programs in Charlotte and how they both conceptualize the social impact of the arts and aim to assess that impact.** We also seek to understand the beliefs, motivations and experiences of individuals and families that participate in such programs. In our view, the project has academic implications for theories of arts participation, cultural capital, and social inequality as well as practical implications for efforts underway in Charlotte to increase economic opportunity and promote racial justice.

WHAT IS CULTURAL CAPITAL AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Cultural capital generally refers to knowledge and familiarity with high-status cultural codes in a given society. In the French context, where Bourdieu (1977, 1984) developed the concept, cultural capital was often associated with understanding and appreciating “high culture” (e.g., classical music, literature, fine art), an approach that was adopted in early studies of cultural capital in American sociology (e.g., DiMaggio 1982, Cookson and Persell 1985). However, definitions of cultural capital quickly proliferated and expanded (see Lamont and Lareau 1988), and the concept is typically defined more broadly today to include knowledge of and participation in a wide range of artistic and cultural activities (Lizardo, 2016). Like economic or social capital, Bourdieu saw cultural capital as offering distinct advantages, particularly in educational settings, where demonstrating such knowledge is valued and rewarded. In a common application to the American context, research has consistently demonstrated that cultural capital is positively associated with a variety of educational outcomes even after controlling for socioeconomic status (SES) and other relevant factors (e.g., DiMaggio 1982, Kaufman and Gabler 2004, Dumais 2006, Kraaykamp and van Eijck 2010, Yaish and Katz-Gerro 2012). The advantages of cultural capital have also been shown to extend beyond the educational system and throughout the life course (Werner 2004), such as in mate selection (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985), in social interaction and friendship networks (Lizardo, 2006, 2016), and in labor market outcomes (Rivera 2012, Koppman 2016, Thomas 2018), to name a few.



Yet whereas Bourdieu saw cultural capital as a key mechanism in reproducing inequality and hindering social mobility to the benefit of the upper class, DiMaggio (1982) suggested that cultural capital could be a source of social mobility for any who acquire it, regardless of class background. In the United States, key longitudinal studies provide compelling evidence that cultural capital becomes less dependent on social class and family background as individuals move through the educational system (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997) and that returns to cultural capital are greater for students from low-SES backgrounds (Jæger and Karlson 2018), which supports the idea that cultural capital can be a source of upward social mobility and reduce inequalities at the macro level. Similarly, cultural capital accumulation has been shown to explain steep upward social mobility among some children of low-SES immigrants to Europe (Crul et al. 2017; see also Tatum and Browne 2018 for a parallel finding among middle-class Dominican immigrants to the United States).

At the same time, not all programs aimed at enhancing cultural capital prove successful in equalizing desired outcomes (Nagel et al. 2010). Indeed, research has shown that the distribution and effects of cultural capital are not determined by social class alone, but are shaped by other factors such as school characteristics, parental participation, and other contextual factors (Jæger 2011, Schmutz et al., 2016). Recent work has also highlighted the racialization of cultural capital (Cartwright 2022), which suggests that race and racism structure both the acquisition, evaluation of, and outcomes associated with cultural capital, alongside research on the social processes that devalue “Black cultural capital” (Carter 2003). **Taken together, this line of research suggests cultural capital can promote educational success, college readiness, and social mobility under the right conditions and perhaps for some more than others.**

The variety of relevant arts-based programs in Charlotte provide a ready opportunity to explore the range of beliefs about cultural capital as well as the conditions under which cultural capital acquisition may enhance prospects for social mobility.

Another implication of Bourdieu's theory is that low-SES individuals are much less likely to seek out and acquire cultural capital relative to those from more affluent family backgrounds where they are endowed with cultural capital from an early age. Some research on the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital, including Lareau's (2003) influential study of cultural orientations and parenting styles of low-SES versus high-SES parents, supports this view (see also Roska 2011, Gaddis 2013, Weininger et al. 2015). However, Charlotte is not unique among metropolitan areas with programs that aim to enhance cultural capital and that find ready participants among low-income or otherwise marginalized communities. This is a phenomenon that is difficult to explain with existing theories, and little research directly explores the beliefs and motivations of those that offer such programs or of those that participate. Therefore, we know relatively little about who takes advantage of such opportunities and to what effects. **By better understanding the beliefs and motivations of those who administer and those who participate in programs aimed at enhancing cultural capital, this project can help expand and refine theories of cultural capital.**

THE CHARLOTTE CONTEXT



“ I think we see collaboration as a form of social capital exchange. You know, collaboration becomes an opportunity to support each other, share with each other, work together and connect each other to other resources and people so you know one of the chief tenets of creativity. Being in collaboration is a way of accelerating social capital exchange as well. And Charlotte is a well-resourced city. You know it's a financial capital. It's a banking town. So, there are a lot of inequities that come along with that, but it also means that there's a lot of resources here, and so if we can work to sort of dismantle the machine and rebuild it in a way that's fair for everyone and that you know that, then all of a sudden creativity becomes a way of achieving equity as well.”



On a practical level, Charlotte (NC) provides a compelling context for our study. As noted above, a study led by Harvard economist Raj Chetty found that among the 50 largest US cities, Charlotte had the lowest rates of upward intergenerational mobility (Chetty et al., 2014). The national publicity that accompanied Charlotte's lowly ranking shocked and shamed the city's civic and corporate leadership. For many, Charlotte has long been seen as a progressive and prosperous model city of the "New South" and, as one of the fastest-growing cities in the country, its population has more than doubled in the last 30 years. For others, the study called overdue attention to longstanding problems in Charlotte associated with unequal access to educational and economic opportunities, segregation and structural racism, and other forms of inequality.

In response to the Chetty report, the city formed an Opportunity Task Force that sought input from community members across government, philanthropy, business, faith-based, nonprofit, and neighborhood groups. The Task Force focused on making recommendations to increase economic opportunity and mobility. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force Report, issued in 2017, identified 21 "community strategies for economic mobility," addressing five areas: Early Care and Education, College and Career Readiness, Child and Family Stability, and the two "cross-cutting factors" of Segregation and Social Capital. Among the 21 overarching strategies across the five areas, which included 91 recommendations, the role of the arts was limited to just one of the strategies – Social Capital (Strategy U/21) – with two relatively vague recommendations (Leading on Opportunity 2017). Likewise, when the report identified community and institutional partners in addressing each strategy, artists and arts organizations were absent from every list except this one.

At the same time, a growing body of research demonstrates that arts and culture can have profound effects on the economic opportunity areas identified in the Chetty et al. (2014) study and Opportunity Task Force reports. In Charlotte, however, there has been very little effort to document and assess arts-based efforts to address social issues even though we know that many artists and arts organizations in Charlotte were dedicated to promoting social and economic justice, youth development, public health, neighborhood vitality, and other civic imperatives. Therefore, with support from the Gambrell Foundation, two of the co-investigators on this project initiated a project to identify and document the individuals and organizations engaged locally in arts-based programs with social impact (see artsimpactlt.org).

In the fall of 2019, a landscape scan identified and surveyed 59 independent artists, 64 arts organizations, and 25 non-arts-based organizations in Charlotte working for social impact through creative practice. From survey responses, we learned that the majority of artists and organizations seek to address multiple social issues with their work, the most common among the sample being impacts on education, race and ethnicity, and health and wellness, and that **75 percent of the arts organizations that responded offer educational programming.** Building on the landscape scan, this project enabled us to explore in greater depth the beliefs, goals, motivations, and experiences of providers and participants in relevant arts-based programs, primarily through semi-structured interviews.

A local occurrence provides additional context for our research. In 2020, the Arts & Science Council (ASC), the united arts fund and at that time de facto Charlotte cultural affairs office, issued a cultural equity report (ASC 2020). The review of its funding practices since 1991 revealed that African, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Native American (ALAANA) artists had received just 3.43 percent of all ASC Operating Support, or just over \$8 million out of total investments of \$235 million. These findings were consistent with responses to the 2019 landscape survey, which demonstrated that individual artists and small organizations addressing social issues, many of which were led by racial or ethnic minorities, were substantially under-resourced.

A practical implication of this study is to better understand the barriers and potential benefits of investing in arts-based programs as a way to enhance cultural capital, creative opportunities, and social mobility in Charlotte.



Focus group , soul collage examples

METHODS



METHODS

To address our exploratory research questions, semi-structured interviews with providers and participants in the relevant programs are the primary method of data collection. We use the term “providers” to refer to artists, teaching artists, arts administrators, and others whose primary role in the interview is making an arts-based program or experience available to others. Interviews with **49 arts providers** covered several broad topics, including the individual’s personal background in the arts; the history of the program or organization; motivations for providing the program; goals of the program, particularly with regard to social mobility and other types of social impact; beliefs and experiences about cultural capital and social mobility; methods used to assess the impact of the program; and personal experiences or observations of arts-based social mobility.

Interviews with arts providers were conducted between July 2020 and September 2022. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, most interviews were conducted remotely (via Zoom or similar platform), though a few were conducted face-to-face.

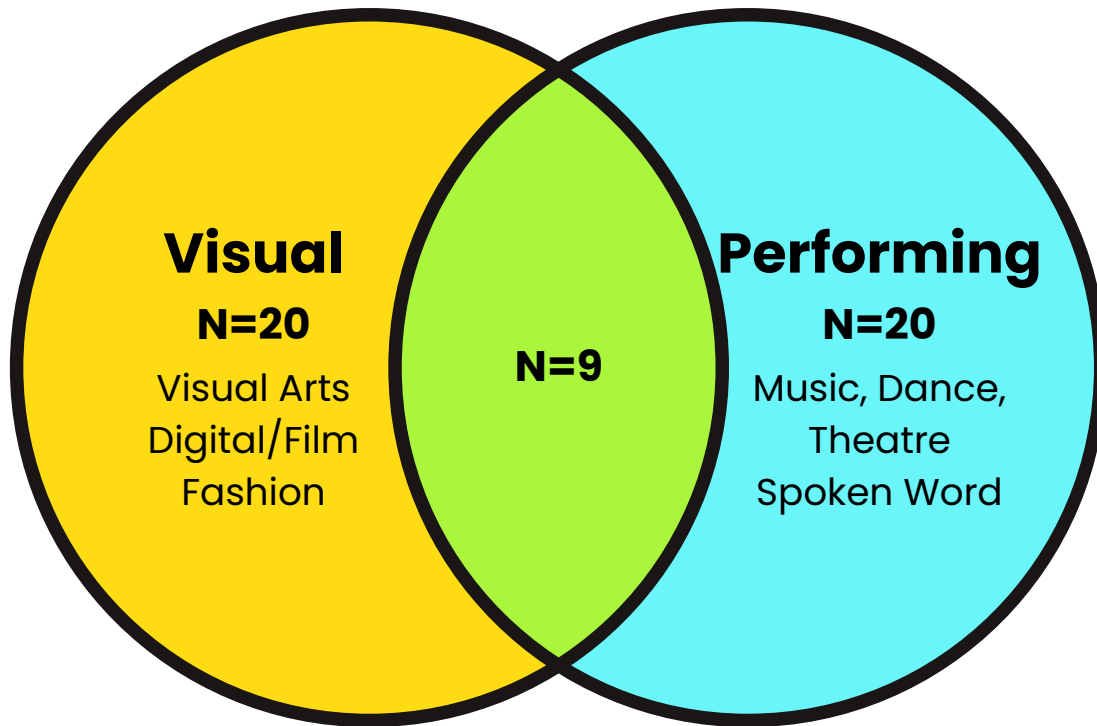
Interviews with providers lasted 37 to 100 minutes (68 minutes, on average).

Interviews with 31 participants were conducted between July 2021 and August 2022. We use the term “participants” to refer to individuals or family members of individuals who participated in one of the programs or experiences included in our sample of arts providers. Our initial plan was to conduct these interviews face-to-face at the locations where several arts programs are provided. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic we conducted most interviews remotely, except for the youth participants at a summer program for visual arts education that were interviewed face to face-to-face. Because the pandemic limited our ability to recruit on site, it was more challenging to complete interviews with arts participants than with arts providers. Still, we were able to include 31 participants in 21 different interview sessions that lasted between 20 and 66 minutes (on average, interviews with participants were about 43 minutes in length). In six interview sessions, multiple participants were included (i.e., parents, children, siblings, and/or spouses) that were eligible for the study.

For an additional, arts-based research component of the project, we conducted two focus group activities in which the focus group participants (12 in the first group, 9 in the second) did a guided reflective collage and writing activity that explored the value of the arts within their own individual lives and their communities (see Appendix A for more details).

SAMPLE OF ARTS PROVIDERS

Our sample of 80 interviewees represents a broad range of arts programs across the visual and performing arts disciplines.



The 49 arts providers, in particular, included practicing artists and teaching artists, arts educators in K-12 and higher education, and/or arts program administrators. Individual arts providers frequently served in multiple capacities. Arts educators in K-12 or higher education, for example, were often also founders of small arts organizations/programs or were also teaching artists in programs run by large arts institutions. Administrators of both large and small arts organizations were also practicing artists. It is interesting to note that individual arts providers rarely fit neatly into a single category, and those that did were most often executive directors of the city's largest arts organizations.

We intentionally focused on a wide spectrum of arts programs in Charlotte that seek to increase cultural capital and/or effect social change. These included many arts-based youth development programs, both at the city's largest arts institutions (for example, museums, ballet, symphony, children's theatre) and on a much smaller scale (an after-school arts program in an African American church, a photography program for teens, a mobile arts bus for children in underserved neighborhoods, and a ballet program that partners with Boys and Girls Club, to mention a few examples).

We also included social impact arts programming for adults that ranged from large, well-established arts organizations to grassroots initiatives. Examples include an African-based dance company, a jazz-based nonprofit that promotes the history and culture of the African Diaspora, a jail arts program in a major museum, a small African American theatre company, a Mexican artist who does projects in the Latinx community, a circus arts program that tackles immigration issues, an artist residency in a gentrifying neighborhood, a poetry and spoken word program that addresses trauma and promotes mental health, and more. Some independent practicing artists – muralists, musicians, poets, etc. – that focus on positive social change through their creative output were also included in our sample.

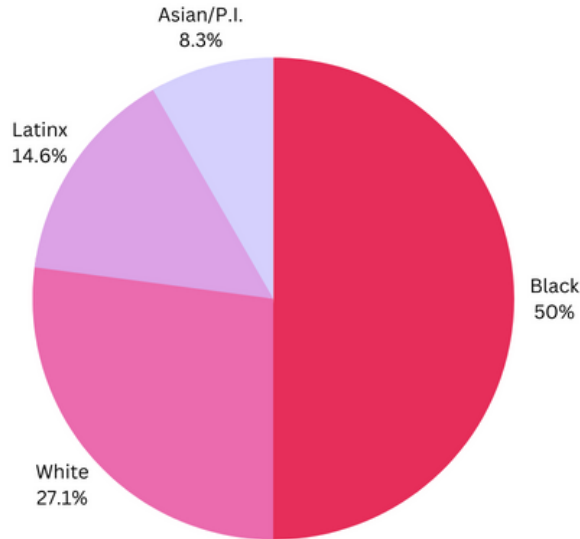
Including a wide range of arts programs helped ensure that we also achieved a demographically diverse sample. Although the larger institutional programs were usually not created by the communities they were designed to serve, the smaller programs were more often developed from within those communities. Table 1 presents demographic and other characteristics of our sample of 49 arts providers. Among the 49 arts providers we interviewed, 31 identify as women (63.3%), 17 as men (34.7%), and 1 as non-binary (2.0%). The age range of providers we interviewed is 24 to 67 with an average age of about 47 years old. In terms of racial or ethnic identity, 24 respondents identify as Black or African-American (49.0%), 14 identify as White (28.6%), 7 as Latinx (14.3%), and 4 as Asian or Pacific Islander (8.2%). Our sample of arts providers is highly educated – 18 hold a graduate degree of some type (36.7%) and 23 completed a bachelor's degree (47.0%) **(See page 18)**. Finally, we had equal representation between 20 performing arts providers, 20 visual arts providers, and 9 that work in both performing and visual arts programs.

SAMPLE OF ARTS PARTICIPANTS

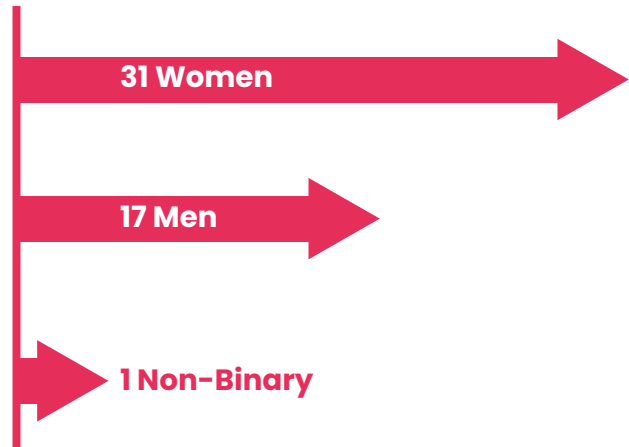
Our sample of arts participants included 31 people who were adult participants (N=7), youth participants (N=13), adults who participated in arts programs as youth (N=3), or parents of youth who currently participate or have recently participated in arts programs (N=8). The 31 arts participants were interviewed in 21 interview sessions. In five of those sessions, children who were participants were interviewed together with their parent(s). In one session, two adult participants (husband and wife) were interviewed together. Because our approach was to select participants from several of the programs associated with the arts providers, the range of disciplines is not quite as varied with 20 participants from performing arts programs (64.5%, mainly music and dance), 10 participants from visual arts programs (32.3%), and 1 participating in both (3.2%). Twenty of the participants interviewed identify as girls or women (64.5%) and 11 identify as boys or men (35.5%). The youth participants ranged in age from 9 to 16, the adults were in their late 20s to late 70s. **(See page 19)**.

49 ARTS PROVIDERS

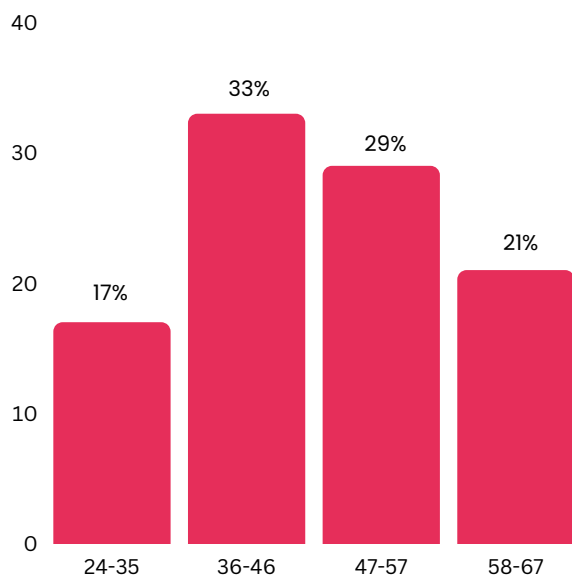
Racial Composition



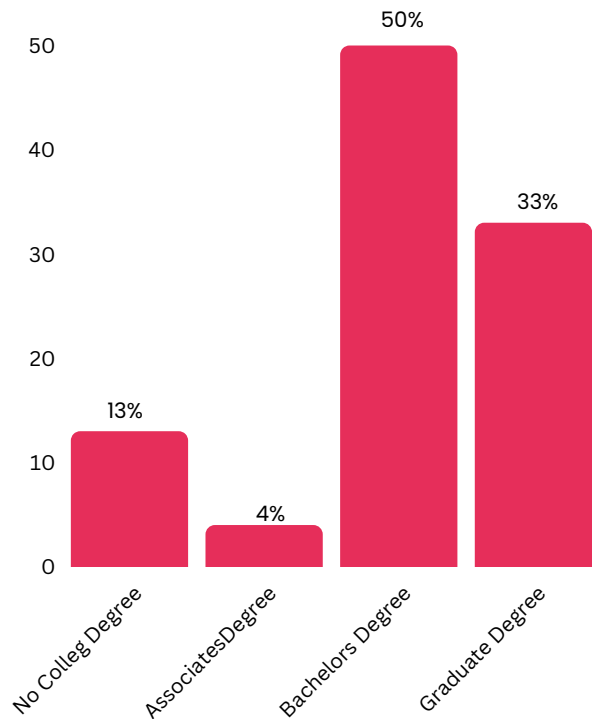
Gender Composition



Average Age (47)

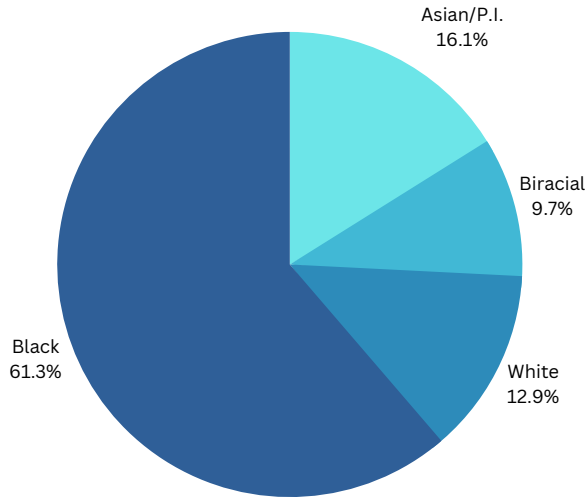


Educational Background

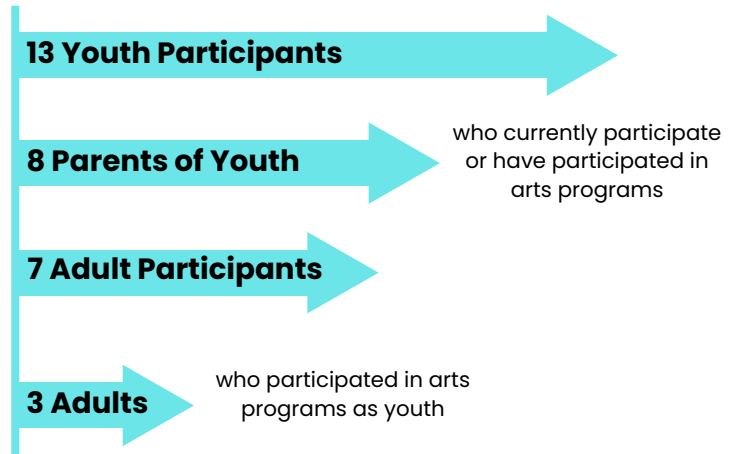


31 ARTS PARTICIPANTS

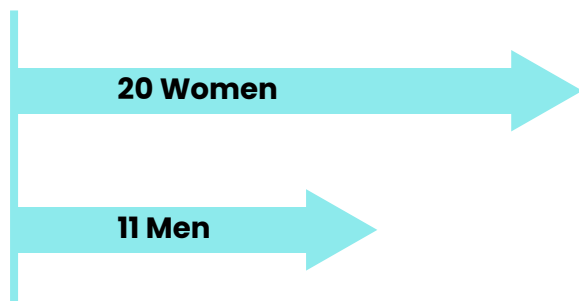
Racial Composition



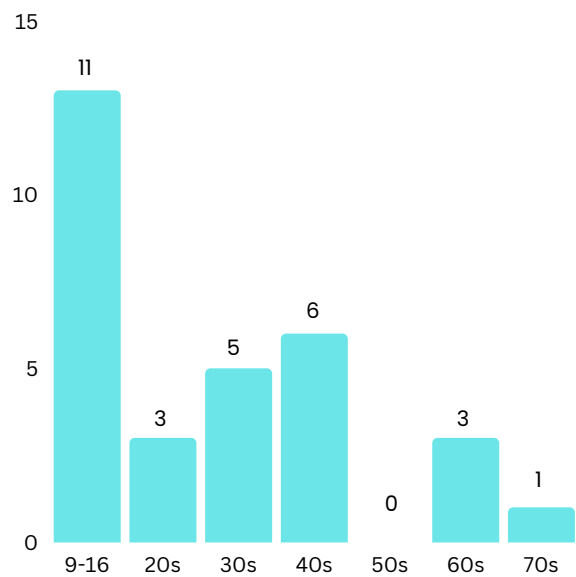
Participant Composition



Gender Composition



Age Composition



ANALYSIS

All interviews were transcribed and imported into a qualitative software program (NVivo) for analysis. Although we had specific questions about beliefs, motivations, and experiences of arts providers and participants, the interview guide was structured in a way to allow many opportunities for interviewees to describe the benefits of arts-based programs and any barriers to arts participation. Therefore, we developed a coding scheme inductively to identify the most salient themes to our respondents across main topic areas of the interview: personal background in the arts, perceived barriers and benefits of arts participation, and beliefs and experiences related to arts-based social mobility.

For example, we grouped the **26 distinct benefits of arts participation** mentioned in our interviews into 4 broad categories that vary along two dimensions (**See page 21**). The first dimension distinguishes benefits that focus on the *individual*, including internal states (e.g., emotions, feelings), expressions of one's self or individuality through the arts, personality characteristics and development (including confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline), individual skills and competencies, etc. By contrast, *collective* benefits are those that emphasize things that transcend the individual level to benefit a family, community, social group, organization, society at large, etc. The second dimension distinguishes between benefits that are relatively *material* (or tangible) in that they refer to things that are observable and identifiable as social outcomes like obtaining employment, doing better in school, etc. and benefits that are relatively *ideal* (or intangible) in that they are less directly tied to concrete social outcomes and often include more abstract, less observable benefits. As we developed the coding scheme, we tested for intercoder reliability on a subset of interviews and refined the categories until we achieved a high level of intercoder agreement. Finally, we coded all interviews again with the full coding scheme.

**We grouped the
26 distinct benefits
of arts participation
mentioned in our interviews into 4 broad
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CODING CATEGORIES FOR BENEFITS OF ARTS PARTICIPATION

INDIVIDUAL IDEAL BENEFITS	COLLECTIVE IDEAL BENEFITS
<p style="text-align: center;">ALTRUISM CONFIDENCE EMPATHY EXPOSURE OPEN-MINDEDNESS PASSION PERSONAL GROWTH PLEASURE SELF EXPRESSION THERAPEUTIC</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">COMMUNITY CULTURAL IDENTITY EXCHANGE INCLUSIVENESS</p>
INDIVIDUAL MATERIAL BENEFITS	COLLECTIVE MATERIAL BENEFITS
<p style="text-align: center;">ACCLAIM, individual CRITICAL THINKING/ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT/INCOME EXPERIENCE LEARNING SKILLS SOCIAL MOBILITY SOCIAL CAPITAL, individual</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ACCLAIM, collective EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT SOCIAL CAPITAL, collective SOCIAL CHANGE/JUSTICE</p>

FINDINGS



FINDINGS

EXPOSURE

Definition: Refers to new forms of art, new perspectives, etc. This is related to open-mindedness, but does not go that far – it simply sees the benefit of exposure to the arts as a benefit in itself. This is used broadly to capture providing access, raising awareness, presenting points of view, etc.

“We want to broaden horizons, give kids an arts community with kids, have opportunities to experience their broadened horizons, and build life skills and to change their trajectory of their life.

-Arts program provider

During our interviews, arts providers identified a wide range of benefits they associate with participating in the arts. In fact, on average they each mentioned about 11 distinct benefits that they see as a result of arts participation. As shown in Table 4, all 49 arts providers (100%) mentioned at least one *individual ideal* benefit with exposure being the most frequently mentioned (75.5% of respondents), followed by pleasure (59.2%), and confidence (57.1%).

Exposure broadly refers to the general value of being presented with something new as a benefit in itself as it provides access to new experiences or opportunities, raises awareness, introduces points of view, etc. For instance, the director of an arts nonprofit that places youth in visual and performing arts programs told us: “I think that one of the obvious sorts of low hanging, hard to measure benefits is the exposure. Getting them out of their comfort zone, letting them know what Charlotte has to offer as a city and all of our different programs....And whether they take those opportunities or not, these opportunities were presented to them.” This idea of exposure is particularly important to arts providers like the dance educator and program director that expands access to ballet in Charlotte; she said:

“The mission is really to just touch, you know, different communities with exposure to a different type of art form that maybe they wouldn’t see on a regular basis...So the first part is just exposure to something different. You know, if you try it when you’re younger and you may not see somebody that looks like you doing it, at least you can say, ‘oh, I’ve done it before.’”

Likewise, nearly all arts providers mentioned at least one *individual material* benefit (93.9%); employment/income was mentioned by the largest share of providers (67.3%) and more than half mentioned social mobility (53.1%) and social capital (51.0%) as tangible benefits of the arts.

In some cases, discussion of employment opportunities or increased income referred to direct outcomes either experienced or observed, such as a nonprofit arts founder that educates youth about creative industries; he told us: **“There’s several students who have been in the program who now own their own businesses, who are photographers, working photographers, working artists.”**

In other cases, respondents noted that involvement in the arts benefits youth no matter what they go on to do for a living; as the founder of a mobile arts program for youth told us about the importance of learning to be creative: “You don’t have to be a doctor to be successful or go to the military or any of that. But if you do, be creative about that because you can’t be the number one brain surgeon if you’re not creative. You can’t sell vacuum cleaners if you’re not creative.”

CONFIDENCE

Definition: Refers to discussion of the arts boosting confidence, self-esteem, or related concepts; includes feelings of empowerment and self-worth, increased belief in one’s potential, etc.

“It took away my stage fright. It took away being afraid to be in front of people, whether it be public speaking, singing or performing. And that was just really one of those experiences in my life that just grew me for where I am today. I don’t know where I would have been without things like that being a part of my youth, performing in dance or something that you’re uncomfortable with initially in front of your classmates at school, and then to go on and do it in front of a whole bunch of strangers in your city.

- Adult who was youth participant

In some cases, the arts providers we interviewed would explicitly link *ideal* benefits to *material* goals and outcomes. For example, *confidence* refers to the view that participating in the arts enhances confidence, boosts self-esteem, creates a sense of empowerment or self-worth, and related ideas. A professional actor and theater educator, with experience in the public school classroom and community-based youth theater programs, referred several times to the “confidence building” that comes from participation; in one instance, she connected increased confidence directly to a more tangible outcome: “you’re gonna walk into a job interview...I want you to be the boss. So you’re going to need to present, like, so having comfort when you walk into a room that you belong there...that’s what I feel like my job is.” Along with *confidence*, this provider also noted the *personal growth, empathy, open-mindedness, pleasure, and therapeutic* benefits that result from theater participation for her students; yet she also felt responsible for making sure those benefits translate into everyday success, such as feeling confident in a job interview.

Collective ideal benefits were also mentioned by nearly all arts providers (90% mentioned at least one), particularly *community* (67.3%) and *inclusiveness* (63.3%). The code for *community* refers to the role of arts in building or strengthening a sense of community, perhaps bridging differences and building relationships, or creating connections that benefit a group, neighborhood, city, or other collective. The director of a nonprofit visual arts organization described the role of their programs in building community this way: “So it’s pulling people together from all over, just elevates everybody’s game, and everybody wins. And so it’s our, it’s that sense of community that not only helps with art, but we learn from each other, and then we can take that learning and bring that out to the community.”

COMMUNITY

Refers to feelings of community; strengthening/building community; bridging differences; relationship-building; making connections that benefit a group, city, neighborhood, society, etc.

“

I think particularly in Western culture and in whiteness, there’s a lot of emphasis on individualism and we forget community. And one of the things that I think art does so beautifully, particularly theater, when you’re sitting in a room with strangers experiencing the same thing, is showing that you are part of something larger.

- Artist/Arts Program Provider

”

A similar number discussed *inclusiveness*, which was typically associated with the ability of the arts to either highlight marginalized voices and promote inclusiveness, acceptance, and understanding of marginalized groups or to expand access and equality. As the director of community programs at a major museum in Charlotte told us:

“ And so, it's because the museum is for everybody. But you have to help people to feel that they belong. Welcome them, invite them, have images on the wall that look like them, and you know when you don't have those things and it's just abstract or it's very Eurocentric that doesn't necessarily draw the broader audience until they see images that look like themselves and then they grow from that art, aesthetic that experience and go 'Oh, I also like this.'

Most of the arts providers (63.3%) mentioned at least one *collective material* benefit, but this category was much less commonly discussed in our interviews. Still, nearly half of the providers we interviewed (42.9%) mentioned the role of the arts in social change or social justice, such as the president of one of the city's prominent museums, who notes that the arts keep “those kinds of conversations going all the time...with our initiative for equity and innovation; we require one of our exhibitions always to be about social justice.”

SOCIAL CHANGE / JUSTICE

Definition: Refers to the arts as an agent of social change, promoter of justice, having effects on public opinion, influencing policy (makers), etc.

“

But I also think we have to have one of the strongest voices about social change, about what we do. So that's why you see the commitment to having at least one exhibition up all the time that speaks to social justice.

- Arts Program Provider

”

“

Anybody who was in that park that day has never forgotten it. They may have forgotten our name, but they never forgot seeing racism in a casket. So art was the vehicle for that, and that was a pretty strong statement.

- Artist/Arts Program Provider

”

Another third (34.7%) indicated that collective social capital was a benefit of the arts. Although arts providers more often brought up the benefits of social capital to individuals (for example, referred to making connections, making friends, creating a network, or having opportunities or abilities to collaborate and cooperate with others), they also noted how groups, communities, or other collectives gain social capital through the arts. The founder and director of a nonprofit that supports several creative programs and initiatives, for instance, focuses on building social capital through the arts across the city:



I think we see collaboration as a form of social capital exchange. You know, collaboration becomes an opportunity to support each other, share with each other, work together and connect each other to other resources and people so you know one of the chief tenets of creativity. Being in collaboration is a way of accelerating social capital exchange as well. And Charlotte is a well-resourced city. You know it's a financial capital. It's a banking town. So, there are a lot of inequities that come along with that, but it also means that there's a lot of resources here, and so if we can work to sort of dismantle the machine and rebuild it in a way that's fair for everyone and that you know that, then all of a sudden creativity becomes a way of achieving equity as well.

Up to this point, we presented the proportion of providers who mentioned a benefit at least once during the interview. However, we also considered how frequently each of these benefits was discussed throughout the interview. In total, we coded 1,259 references in the interview transcripts to one of the 26 benefits identified (i.e., about 25 per interview, on average). As shown in Figure 1, the largest category of references by a substantial margin is the *individual ideal* group of benefits (538 total references or 43.0%). With 363 references (27.7%), *individual material* benefits are the next largest category, followed by *collective ideal benefits* (262 references, 21.2%). *Collective material* benefits were the least mentioned with only 94 references (8.1% of all benefits referenced).

Figure 1.
Distribution of
benefits mentioned
by type
(Artists and Arts
Providers)

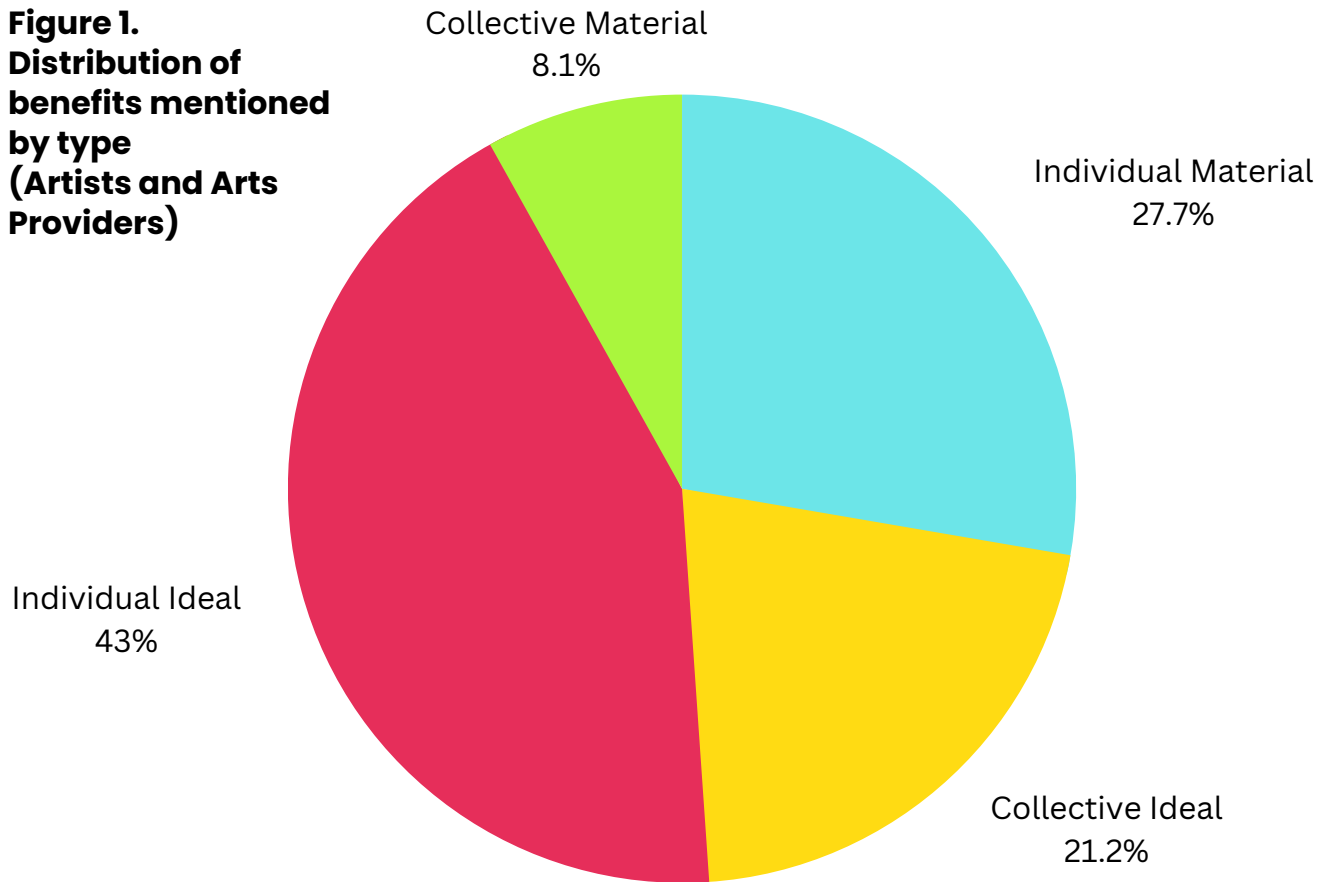
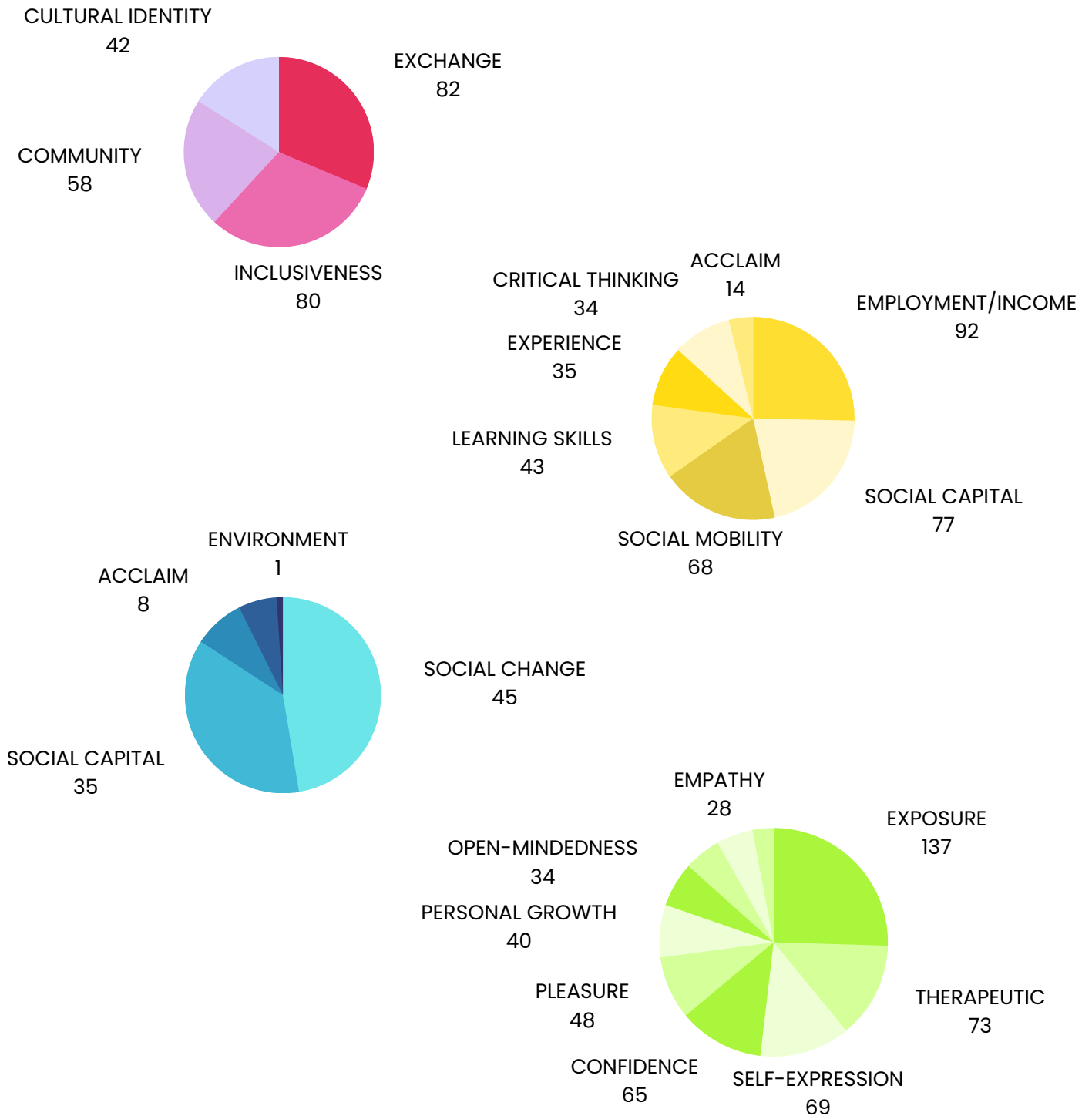


Figure 2 provides a visualization that illustrates the relative prominence of each benefit within the four categories, and Table 5 lists the total number of times each benefit was mentioned, ranging from exposure, with 137 mentions, to one reference to enhancing the environment. From this view, we can see that the *collective ideal* benefits of *exchange* and *inclusiveness* were nearly as common as references to *exposure* and *employment/income*. *Exchange* refers to the idea that the arts create dialogue, communication, and/or exchange between people, sparking conversation, including difficult ones across groups or sources of difference. As a young artist and recent college graduate explained:

“ I basically had the idea that mural panels needed to be installed on my campus to discuss different topics that affected our community and prevented it from being as inclusive as possible. And I saw the best way of doing that, and like facilitating that conversation would be through art, more specifically interactive art in which people would like to write and respond and really just kind of like a hosting space for dialogue. And those topics were racism, colorism, homophobia, and classism.

Figure 2: Distribution of benefits mentioned within each type (Artists and Arts Providers)



Likewise, an *individual ideal* topic that came up quite often is the *therapeutic* benefit of the arts, which included any reference to improved mental health, stress relief, anxiety reduction, healing from trauma or tragedy, calming or processing emotions, an enhanced mental state or other types of personal wellbeing. A visual artist and poet who provides arts-based mental health workshops described the arts as “the bridge between trauma and success.”

THERAPEUTIC

Definition: Reference to any form of mental or physical health benefits, stress relief, anxiety reduction, or other therapeutic, psychological benefits; response to trauma, tragedy; includes “healing,” calming, improved mental state and other types of personal wellbeing.



As artists we can tell some stories and help some people through some things that nobody else can. I mean we can lighten some loads, or at least let people know that you’re not alone in whatever it is you’re going through.

-Artist / Arts Program Provider



He was just, from memory, painting flowers and leaves. And he said, ‘You know, I’ve been a welder and a wrench turner my whole life. And this is the first time I’ve ever felt relaxed, and at peace.’

-Artist / Arts Program Provider



In sum, we found that the arts providers we interviewed had wide-ranging beliefs about the benefits of the arts, were highly motivated to share those benefits with others, and had many personal experiences that reinforced their perspectives. Indeed, they consistently articulated their views about the benefits and social impact of the arts in eloquent and compelling ways.

Yet the question remains, how do arts providers connect the benefits they associate with the arts to improved outcomes like social mobility?

Table 5. All coding references to benefits of arts participation by type and frequency (Artists and Arts Providers)

BENEFIT	TYPE	REFERENCES
EXPOSURE	Individual Ideal	137
EMPLOYMENT/INCOME	Individual Material	92
EXCHANGE	Collective Ideal	82
INCLUSIVENESS	Collective Ideal	80
SOCIAL CAPITAL	Individual Material	77
THERAPEUTIC	Individual Ideal	73
SELF-EXPRESSION	Individual Ideal	69
SOCIAL MOBILITY	Individual Material	68
CONFIDENCE	Individual Ideal	65
COMMUNITY	Collective Ideal	58
PLEASURE	Individual Ideal	48
SOCIAL CHANGE	Collective Material	45
LEARNING SKILLS	Individual Material	43
CULTURAL IDENTITY	Collective Ideal	42
PERSONAL GROWTH	Individual Ideal	40
EXPERIENCE	Individual Material	35
SOCIAL CAPITAL	Collective Material	35
OPEN-MINDEDNESS	Individual Ideal	34
CRITICAL THINKING	Individual Material	34
PASSION	Individual Ideal	28
EMPATHY	Individual Ideal	28
ALTRUISM	Individual Ideal	16
ACCLAIM	Individual Material	14
ACCLAIM	Collective Material	8
EDUCATION	Collective Material	6
ENVIRONMENT	Collective Material	1

Interviews with arts providers: social mobility

MOBILITY

Definition: Refers to social mobility, upward mobility, including stories of mobility (personally or about others); this includes answers to any direct questions about beliefs about mobility through the arts, but also stories that imply life conditions improving through participation in the arts.



So I auditioned, and I knew that it's either I needed to go on a full scholarship or I couldn't go— because I couldn't expect my parents to pay for college— So I ended up auditioning on my French horn and on my violin, and I ended up getting a full ride at a local college.

- Artist/Arts program provider



[Name] started off in our program, he was like 15-16 at the time and came from a very broken home, I won't get into the details. He is now a professional choreographer in Atlanta, an incredible artist.

- Artist/Arts program provider



In addition to interview questions that addressed a wide range of topics related to arts participation, we also asked arts providers direct questions about their beliefs and experiences regarding the effects of arts participation on social mobility. When asked directly, nearly all (96.0%) respondents expressed some agreement with the idea that the arts can play a role in facilitating social mobility, but some were equivocal (e.g., “Yeah, well, I see how it could”) and others had difficulty describing how or why (e.g., “Absolutely...OK, I’m hesitating because I don’t think I have the lexicon to use the proper terms”). Yet most providers (53.1%) gave a response that directly affirmed a relationship between arts participation and upward social mobility. Such responses fell into three categories: general, abstract responses about the positive relationship between arts participation and upward social mobility; examples from their own lives of arts-related upward mobility; examples from people they have known and worked with in the arts programs they operate.

In terms of general responses, a statement from a dancer who directs a community-based ballet program serves as a good example: “I truly believe that of course being exposed to the arts, all forms of the arts create social mobility.” Positive statements about the relationship between arts participation and social mobility were common among arts providers and were often among the motivations for their work, particularly those who offered programming for youth. As the founder of a nonprofit arts organization that provides free visual arts education to low-income youth in the summer explained: **“I wanted to do something in the community, focused on youth, where I was seeking to try to find some sort of programming that was demonstrating sustainable impact. Socially, economically, what we call upward mobility now.”**

In expressing these beliefs and motivations, the arts providers frequently referred to or alluded to the perceived benefits, both *ideal* and *material*, of arts participation as contributors to upward mobility.

Among the benefits that arts program providers most commonly mentioned were:

<p>Relationships and social capital</p>	<p>“Making these connections and knowing people and going to these events gives them bigger support systems.”</p>
<p>Structure and discipline</p>	<p>“But it’s the enacting of social change and an upward mobility by, you know, giving students predominantly from high poverty families structure and access.”</p>
<p>Exposure to the possibility of a better life</p>	<p>“So many kids don’t know what the possibilities are in their lives or are just sort of trapped in whatever it is that they feel is the only thing that’s attainable for them. Art is the vehicle... it’s really just a vehicle to get them to a different place, to change the trajectory in a positive way.”</p>
<p>Opportunities for travel</p>	<p>“So I think there’s a lot to the social mobility. It can come in a lot of different ways, but I think a lot of it is through travel and performing in different spaces that can really change individual students’ perspectives.”</p>
<p>Opportunities for employment/ income</p>	<p>“You know a lot of people are using their creative talent to create careers and businesses for themselves and to build generational wealth.”</p>

Particularly compelling were the stories the arts providers told that became concrete illustrations of these benefits and their contributions to upward social mobility. Some examples are given below.

Two Asian American female artists from immigrant families – one who became a music educator, the other a visual artist and co-director of a multi-arts program – spoke about the path that the arts provided for...

a college education: “So I auditioned, and I knew that it's either I needed to go on a full scholarship or I couldn't go– because I couldn't expect my parents to pay for it– so I ended up auditioning on my French horn and on my violin, and I ended up getting a full ride at a local college”;

opportunities for employment: “No one in my family and distant relatives have ever participated in professional art, and so being able to not only be an artist, but be a working artist...”;

access to different social circles: “I think being an artist has allowed me to kind of navigate between a lot of different types or what we consider different classes of people... people who are like interested in whatever you call the high art, you know, kind of collectors and real kind of cultural art goers and scholars, and then other populations of just folks who my work could represent, folks who have been marginalized and underserved”;

and intangible benefits like self-esteem and self-discipline: “I practiced all the time, skipping lunch. I didn't want to show my free/reduced lunch ticket anyway, so I did quite well and I moved up into the top group”.



A white female musician and college professor who grew up in a working-class single-parent household spoke of the role of the arts in...

building social capital: “I think those relationships in my life, definitely relationships with different musician friends that had more monetary capital or had different social capital, or had other – like it really opened up doors for me to being connected and be a part of something again, that is different;”

and providing access to higher education and advanced degrees: “So definitely, it definitely made it, I think, more possible for me to get advanced degrees because of the scholarships I received both in my undergrad and then for my additional degrees.”

Two Black male arts providers described growing up “in the projects:” a poet and spoken word artist who does workshops for youth and adults...

““I come from a city -- in my neighborhood, you know, seeing a 21-year-old is an amazing thing. Seeing 21 years of age and not being in jail. I didn't beat not getting shot because I was shot at 19 because they tried to rob me... so we can teach them that you can put your voice on a piece of paper and it will mean so much more”

and a photographer and banker who runs a photography and videography program for teenagers...

“I grew up in New York City Harlem, the projects, which are low-income neighborhoods in smack dab 125th St and Broadway in Harlem.”

An Indian American architect who founded a community arts festival described the role of creative practice in his own life and the life of one of his closest friends, a Black theatre artist. Both were born in small towns in families with modest means; both have since traveled widely and become successful professional practitioners...

“It has been our ticket, like you know, kind our passport to the world. You know it has really kind of freed ourselves from the constraints of our birth.”

A young Black female visual artist spoke of her newfound financial independence through her artmaking...

““Definitely social capital, economic, economically, I think for sure. Like the arts funded my apartment. So, had I not been an artist, or like, had I not actually dove in to be an artist? I'm not sure what I would be up to at this point. Like, maybe I'd still be living in my mom's house, like, I don't know. But the fact that I can say that this space is mine, in that I'm paying for it, is huge.”

In most cases, **the personal experiences of these and other artists led them to create similar opportunities for others**, and interviews contain numerous descriptions of participants in their programs who experienced upward social and economic mobility. A few examples are given below.

“I’m telling you this as an insider who has seen it work, maybe it’s one student at a time. But I think it’s definitely more than that. But you know, just from my own program that I was involved with, where there are students, there were students from that certain zip code. I mean, they went off to colleges, and a lot of their parents that I talked to have never, I mean, I think there are a couple who didn’t even have a high school background, right, because they came from another country” (director of an after-school music program).

“[He] started off in our program, he was like 15-16 at the time and came from a very broken home, I won’t get into the details. He is now a professional choreographer in Atlanta, an incredible artist” (co-director of multi-arts program).

“That same person has her own dance company now. And she is a middle school dance teacher. And she has her own apartment and she pays all the bills. She has shifted her economic status” (dance educator and program director).

“Because those are the students I feel like will oftentimes see the greatest impact. Because they’re coming from a place that, you know, if you look at the statistics, they’re coming from a place that is super, I mean, there’s oftentimes not a whole lot of light at the end of the tunnel, you know, based on, you know, looking at their family’s, you know, socioeconomic status... it has put them in a position to be band leaders, you know, and earn a living and in a way that they probably would not have if they hadn’t been able to participate in the program and, you know, see what those possibilities were” (director of a music education program).

The theme of creative/arts practice and entrepreneurship emerges frequently, particularly in interviews with African American artists – not only as a source of individual economic mobility, but as a way to seed economic growth on a community level.

One Black artist described working artists in her community as a model for the local youth:

“Most of the artists that are in our community definitely have an entrepreneurial spirit, that most of them, that is almost all they do. One of the things about bringing it to the younger kids was that they could see that these people have homes, they’re not extracted from, they have cars, they have clothes, they enjoy life, they travel. And it’s through them doing what they do, and what they love and enjoy. That’s how they get it.”

Another arts provider has developed an historic African American building into an incubator for Black-owned creative businesses and nonprofits:

“[We are] committed... to making sure... that all in our community are welcome in these walls, and that we’re able to contribute to the economic upward mobility, entrepreneurship, and a celebration of the arts within these walls...So we have we have two nonprofits that are here on property, and since they’ve been incubated, they’ve each had to get a second office here, here on property, so that again is showing growth and expansion as a result of the incubation.”

Yet another co-directs a creative agency that supports Black artists:

“So for us building a sustainable business allows us to continue to fight. It allows us to employ others. You know, upward mobility.”

On one hand then, we heard a general belief among most of our interviewees that the arts can contribute to upward social mobility as well as several firsthand accounts that illustrate how and why this happened to an arts provider or a participant in an arts program. On the other hand, some of our interviewees expressed some uncertainty about how to connect the benefits of arts participation to social mobility. As the last few examples suggest, **there are also some differences in how Black and other arts providers of color view the benefits of the arts and its potential contribution to social mobility.**

INTERVIEWS WITH ARTS PROVIDERS: RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Definition: Refers to expressions of cultural identity or background, pride in collective identity. This can be a collective counterpart to individual self-expression; it is used when a specific identity group (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.) is identified.

“ I think it helps shape the minds of our future leaders. So they have a more complete understanding of the communities in which they live. So when kids come through, they get a chance to kind of understand and interpret for themselves about the importance of institutions and the importance of themselves as Black people.

— Arts Provider ”

Although all the arts providers we interviewed shared many ideas and experiences in common, some racial and ethnic differences emerged in the relative emphasis placed on certain types of benefits from and barriers to arts participation. Given the limited number of interviewees, particularly among those who identify as Asian or Latinx, these differences should not be generalized beyond this sample; however, a few patterns are worth noting. First, as shown in Table 6, **arts providers of color – Asian, Black, and Latinx providers -- more often emphasized collective or material benefits of the arts relative to individual ideal ones.** For Asian, Black, and Latinx providers, for every *individual ideal* benefit they mentioned, they referenced more than two (2.1 – 2.4) *collective or material* benefits of the arts. By contrast, the same ratio of *collective or material* benefits to *individual ideal* benefits referenced was 1.4 for White arts providers.

Table 6

Racial or ethnic identity	TOTAL: References to benefits (average)	RATIO: Collective or Material to Individual Ideal
Asian / Pacific Islander	29.8	2.1
Black / African-American	23.0	2.3
Latinx	15.6	2.4
White	26.1	1.4

Table 7 provides additional details about the distribution of references to each benefit by the racial or ethnic identity of the providers. Note that bolded percentages indicate that providers from the corresponding racial or ethnic group are overrepresented among the total mentions of that benefit relative to the number from their group in the overall sample. Thus, for example, Black arts providers are overrepresented in every *collective ideal* benefit identified – community, cultural identity, exchange, and inclusiveness; Asian providers are overrepresented in the community benefit as well, while White providers are overrepresented in mentions of exchange. With regards to the role of the arts in building a sense of pride in cultural identity, the Black founder and artistic director of a production company explains:

“My mission, hands down period, is to provide a space for African American creatives to work year-round, to provide a space for actors, crew, directors. When we do performances and I always want for my people to walk away with an experience, with knowing the message, a positive message and to learn something about our people. So I carefully choose each production that we do, knowing that we’re going to learn something about our people.”

This also includes the importance of the arts as a place where expressions of cultural identity are welcome and valued. A Black creative who works in visual arts and fashion design told us: “We are a safe space for particularly Black creators. I have to be very clear, because we need safe spaces; we are first and foremost a safe space for Black and brown creators.”

Black arts providers are also relatively overrepresented in mentioning *individual material* benefits, with both Asian and Black providers especially likely to reference *social mobility*, while Black and Latinx providers more often mentioned *employment/income* benefits of the arts.

Table 7. Distribution of benefits referenced by race or ethnicity of arts providers

CODES	ASIAN	BLACK	WHITE	LATINX
Collective Ideal	6.98%	53.49%	27.91%	11.63%
COMMUNITY	9.09%	51.52%	27.27%	12.12%
CULTURAL IDENTITY	6.67%	60%	13.33%	20%
EXCHANGE	4.17%	54.17%	33.33%	8.33%
INCLUSIVENESS	10%	56.67%	26.67%	6.67%
Collective Material	10%	46.67%	30%	13.33%
ACCLAIM (collective)	16.67%	16.67%	50%	16.67%
EDUCATION	0%	75%	25%	0%
ENVIRONMENT	0%	100%	0%	0%
SOCIAL CAPITAL	12.50%	37.50%	37.50%	12.50%
SOCIAL CHANGE	15%	50%	25%	10%
Individual Ideal	8.33%	50%	27.08%	14.58%
ALTRUISM	9.09%	45.45%	36.36%	9.09%
CONFIDENCE	11.11%	48.15%	33.33%	7.41%
EMPATHY	6.67%	40%	40%	13.33%
EXPOSURE	5.56%	50%	33.33%	11.11%
OPEN-MINDEDNESS	9.52%	57.14%	19.05%	14.29%
PASSION	18.75%	50%	31.25%	0%
PERSONAL GROWTH	5%	55%	25%	15%
PLEASURE	10.71%	46.43%	28.57%	14.29%
SELF EXPRESSION	11.54%	46.15%	30.77%	11.54%
THERAPEUTIC	4.55%	45.45%	31.82%	18.18%
Individual Material	8.89%	51.11%	28.89%	11.11%
ACCLAIM (individual)	0%	66.67%	22.22%	11.11%
CRITICAL THINKING	20%	33.33%	33.33%	13.33%
EMPLOYMENT/INCOME	6.06%	54.55%	24.24%	15.15%
EXPERIENCE	10.53%	52.63%	36.84%	0%
LEARNING SKILLS	11.11%	44.44%	38.89%	5.56%
SOCIAL MOBILITY	16.0%	56.0%	20.0%	8.0%
SOCIAL CAPITAL	8.33%	37.50%	37.50%	16.67%
TOTAL	8.2%	49.0%	28.6%	14.3%

ARTS PARTICIPANTS

PERSONAL GROWTH

Definition: Refers to abstract/intangible forms of personal growth or learning; improving as a person; increased self-actualization; and similar forms of abstract personal growth. This can include mentions of discipline or other types of self-direction, self-control, focus, etc., from the arts.



That just instilled dedication because of course there are some Saturdays that you much rather be sleeping in late, watching Saturday morning cartoons, but no, you got to get up and go down here and practice. So you can put on an awesome performance. And it just instilled in me dedication, focus. And just basically a thing to where if you say you're going to do something and you're going to commit to something, do it.

- Adult who was youth participant



In our analysis of interviews with **arts participants**, we identified similar themes related to the perceived benefits of arts participation. As noted above, we interviewed current youth arts participants (ages 9-16) and their parents when possible, adults who participated in arts programs as youth, and adults who currently participate. **Like arts providers, many of our arts participants also noted that access to the arts can sometimes be limited.** In terms of economic resources, the mother of a teenage girl who participated in a free summer visual arts program shared with us:



"I think that there are economic hurdles associated with lots of art programs, unfortunately. And for myself, I'm a single mom, I wouldn't have been able to afford to send [her] to any of the bigger, well-known art programs in Charlotte. And I'm just grateful that there are opportunities for people who do have, I guess, less means. I mean it is cost-prohibitive. I wouldn't be able to afford some of the-- I mean, even just the supplies alone, that she had access to by attending [the program] would have been a challenge."

Another challenge with accessing the arts in Charlotte was shared by a 14-year-old participant in an afterschool photography program:

“Yeah I like acting, too. We actually had a drama elective that got canceled later on in the year. I was kind of sad about that...You know, people in my class, we actually do this thing in my class, we made like a protest, kind of, saying let's have art instead of another elective and so they replaced dance with art. I actually liked the dance class though, the dance class was very nice.”

Despite these and other barriers, we talked to arts participants who were seeking out ways to experience the benefits of the arts for themselves or their family members. Of the 26 benefits we identified in our interviews with arts providers, 25 were mentioned at least once by the participants we interviewed. As shown in Table 8, *collective acclaim* was the only benefit that went unmentioned in our interviews with participants; otherwise, the prevalence of the benefits was quite similar compared to arts providers, particularly with respect to *individual* benefits. Participants were much less likely to mention *collective* benefits (fewer than half of the interviews mentioned at least one) relative to arts providers, but this is at least partially explained by the fact that we were asking participants more directly about their own experiences as participants.

SELF EXPRESSION

Definition: Refers to opportunities to be creative, engage in self-expression, have a creative outlet, develop individual creativity, share personal ideas and feelings, etc.

“

We had a lot of feedback from kids who have never had a way to channel or exercise that muscle in channeling their thoughts and feelings into something that is outside of themselves. It's always inside. So you can put it outside and make it beautiful. You can put it on a canvas, it will provide.

- Arts Program Provider

”

In terms of *individual ideal* benefits, *pleasure* was mentioned in the most interviews (61.9%), followed by *exposure* and *personal growth* (52.4% each). *Self-expression* (47.6%) and *confidence* (42.9%) were also mentioned quite often in the participant interviews. A parent of a youth participant in an afterschool music program, for example, told us: "I think one of the main things that sticks out is her confidence. I think that it really teaches them, has taught her to have confidence. She's kind of a little shy or more reserved. But when she's playing violin, she's not at all. She's very confident." Another parent in a community-based afterschool arts program spoke of how her daughter became a team leader and would help younger students with their projects: "I would have to say definitely building confidence and leadership skills."

Youth participants were especially focused on *individual* benefits from their participation. Even remote music instruction was described as *therapeutic* by a young participant in an afterschool music program: "Yeah, I have loved it and I think it's a great benefit. Like if I had a rough day at school, I just come home, get onto the computer, start violin class and playing a piece. It would be awesome. It just makes me relax and forget about all that stuff at school." An adult participant also described therapeutic benefits of music this way: "If you've had a bad day and you're actually listening to whether it's classical music or jazz or what have you, it puts you in such a better head space that you cannot put a price tag on what that means to us as human beings."

In terms of *individual material* benefits, most interviews included some discussion of the potential for *employment/income* opportunities (81.0%), *social capital* (i.e., making friends, 76.2%), and *learning skills* (71.4%). For youth participants, *pleasure* and making friends (i.e., *social capital*) were clearly bonus perks as one told us:

“Well, it's not just the arts...that I've been enjoying. It's the opportunity to make new friends. I made one new friend. She's one of my best friends now...art and friendships and kindness is the main thing here that I'm enjoying.”

Table 8. Proportion of interviews with arts participants mentioning each type of benefit

<p>INDIVIDUAL IDEAL BENEFITS 100% mention 1 or more in this category</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PLEASURE (61.9%) EXPOSURE (52.4%) PERSONAL GROWTH (52.4%) SELF EXPRESSION (47.6%) CONFIDENCE (42.9%) THERAPEUTIC (38.1%) OPEN-MINDEDNESS (33.3%) PASSION (28.6%) EMPATHY (23.8%) ALTRUISM (14.3%) 	<p>COLLECTIVE IDEAL BENEFITS 38% mention 1 or more in this category</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COMMUNITY (33.3%) CULTURAL IDENTITY (33.3%) INCLUSIVENESS (23.8%) EXCHANGE (19.0%)
<p>INDIVIDUAL MATERIAL BENEFITS 95.2% mention 1 or more in this category</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EMPLOYMENT/INCOME (81.0%) SOCIAL CAPITAL, individual (76.2%) LEARNING SKILLS (71.4%) CRITICAL THINKING/ACADEMIC (47.6%) SOCIAL MOBILITY (42.9%) EXPERIENCE (42.9%) ACCLAIM, individual (19.0%) 	<p>COLLECTIVE MATERIAL BENEFITS 47.6% mention 1 or more in this category</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SOCIAL CHANGE/JUSTICE (33.3%) SOCIAL CAPITAL, collective (14.3%) ENVIRONMENT (14.3%) EDUCATION (9.5%) ACCLAIM, collective (0%)

Another young participant described how participating in the arts had helped them develop more *open-mindedness* and *empathy*: “And look at other people's point of view. You have to be able to look at the other person's point of view and be accepting of what they want.” An adult participant explained something similar: **“I think it helps me to be more adaptable, more open, and receptive to people, all different types of people in different places.”**

Adults who were reflecting on their arts experiences as youth realized the significance of the *exposure* to the arts they experienced at an early age: “Yeah, so my mom, she wasn't into the arts herself. I feel like she wanted us to see that there are different avenues that you could take in life. That's why she put us in art school.” Other adults who had participated in arts programs as children also pointed to *individual ideal* benefits that they gained, such as *confidence* and *personal growth*:

“It took away my stage fright. **It took away being afraid to be in front of people**, whether it be public speaking, singing or performing. And that was just really one of those experiences in my life that just grew me for where I am today and just being able to speak with you in this conversation. I don't know where I would have been without things like that being a part of my youth, performing in dance or something that you're uncomfortable with initially in front of your classmates at school, and then to go on and do it in front of a whole bunch of strangers in your city.”

“That just **instilled dedication** because, of course, there are some Saturdays that you much rather be sleeping in late, watching Saturday morning cartoons, but no, you got to get up and go down here and practice. So you can put on an awesome performance. And it just instilled in me dedication, focus, and just basically a thing to where if you say you're going to do something and you're going to commit to something, do it.”

From this retrospective vantage point, former youth participants also pointed to some highly tangible outcomes of their involvement in the arts. **Several examples discuss the opportunities for employment and income that can result from arts participation:**

“I mean, he doesn't teach only how to use a camera, but also **how to make a trade out of it as well**, if you need to. It's like, you can have fun with this, but you could also do this too...he was actually putting students in positions to get exposure for themselves and also get some type of experience in the field of professional photography.”

“I started shooting magazines at a young age. Started when I was probably...**I was, like, considered professional about 21**. I started traveling and doing my own photography tours all over the United States.”

“These kids are able to grow up and say, look, **I need to make some extra money today**, I need to do this and they can get out and do it without having to do something illegal. You know 'cause they have a skill no matter what, they can use that camera for rest of their life.”

Parents that we interviewed also saw tangible benefits that their children were receiving through arts-based programs, such as increased *social capital* (“The kids from so many other schools that participate together. So [my child] is getting to know other kids and then the best part is when they have the end of the session orchestra or performances, so they're looking forward to that”) and improved *critical thinking/academic* performance (“But what my observation was that since she started to learn the violin, which had a great impact on her math abilities”). Other parents commented on the academic benefits of the arts in this way:

“So for me to get these girls into, you know, something like that was important. And also, you know if you think about just academics, **I want them to be a whole person**...with music I think you know, music also helps with your study, so once your mind is calm then once you get into study, you can you know use the same technique to focus on your studies and then, you know, excel academically. That's why I wanted them to learn any music instrument or vocal singing whatever.”

“Certainly yes, it is definitely going to be good for these girls to show on their resume that what they have done in Fine Arts, they have done in music, and how they have grown in their personality and a lot of things... that is going to be **a plus on your resume** when you're going to apply for colleges.”

And kids also knew what their parents were thinking, including one who told us: “[My parents] just thought it would be a great thing for me to pursue in college as well, and that would also help me academically.” An adult who participated as a youth also saw music as enhancing *critical thinking/academic* ability: “How they link music to the creative parts of the brain and the synapses, to me, if that is the stuff that gets it going and the creativity kind of flows through everything else, whether it be math, science, social studies, whatever type of curriculum. To me, it starts there.”

INCLUSIVENESS

Definition: Refers to the ability of the arts to highlight marginalized voices; potential for arts to increase inclusiveness, acceptance, understanding of disadvantaged groups; this includes mentions of the arts program expanding access, equality; and can also include mentions of people interacting across difference through arts-based programs.

“

And you know, just the camaraderie that people seem to come together from any background, whether it's socioeconomic, ethnic or what have you. Music is something that seems to bring people together.

- Adult Participant

”

Adults, whether current or former arts participants or parents, were more likely to identify *collective* benefits of arts participation. One former youth participant expressed optimism about the potential role of the arts in creating *social change* in Charlotte:

“And hopefully this opens a lot of eyes and gets the ball rolling in the right direction for Charlotte as a city and surrounding to show that, you know, you focus on the arts and I think they will see it on the back end, how the city benefits from it, not just from economical, but more so from even a violence going down type perspective. Less, you know, people going in out of jail, because we're giving them outlets to express themselves, whether it be spoken word, music, performances and things along those lines.”

An adult participant also described how a music program that focused on educating people about the history and heritage of the African Diaspora had enhanced the *cultural identity* of their community:

“I think that that's something that is so important because it creates a pride in people that comes from the knowing. From where things come... I mean, there's, there is so much that people don't know. They don't know where things originated. They don't know where the blues originated. They don't know where the drumming came from and how that and, and they don't know association of, of Africa and the diaspora and all of this, and the richness of music, where it came from.”

Other adults we interviewed emphasized the possibility for creating a strong sense of *community* and *inclusiveness* across Charlotte through arts programming. For example:

“And you know, just the camaraderie that people seem to come together from any background, whether it's socioeconomic, ethnic or what have you. Music is something that seems to bring people together. And that's the thing that really resonates quite a lot with me is seeing the crowd. And you know, if you're a native Charlottean, it's people from different sides of the city. You know, you see people from different races. I mean, again, all sorts of ethnicities. And I think it just is something that provides a common ground.”

“I'm watching folks and everybody, you know, people, you could tell from different backgrounds. There was this bond because we were all there enjoying what was happening. And it provides a safe, a place where folks feel safe and comfortable. And some of the preconceptions you may have about a certain type of music or people, those boundaries seem to disappear around the music.”

“So earlier we were talking about the Festival of India...and you have, you know, people coming from all over Charlotte and performing there, not just music, but you know you have drama, you have other art forms like painting, you display your painting, you display your art and then you get to know other people, and it's just not the Indian people that come and see that, it's just everybody from Charlotte. I've seen everybody from Charlotte coming there and talking to other people and trying to get to know them, the culture and everything.”

Below, we present the overall distribution of all mentions of benefits from arts participation that came up in our interviews with participants. In total, we coded 319 references to benefits of arts participation, which is just over 15 per interview. This is considerably fewer per interview than the 25 mentioned, on average, in our interviews with providers. As shown in Figure 3, this is largely a result of few *collective* benefits being mentioned in our interview with participants. The other notable difference, however, is that *individual material* benefits are mentioned most often (44.2%), with *individual ideal* benefits mentioned only a little less frequently. So, the focus on *individual* benefits and particularly *individual material* ones is notable in the participant interviews relative to the provider interviews.

Figure 3. Distribution of benefits by type (interviews with participants)

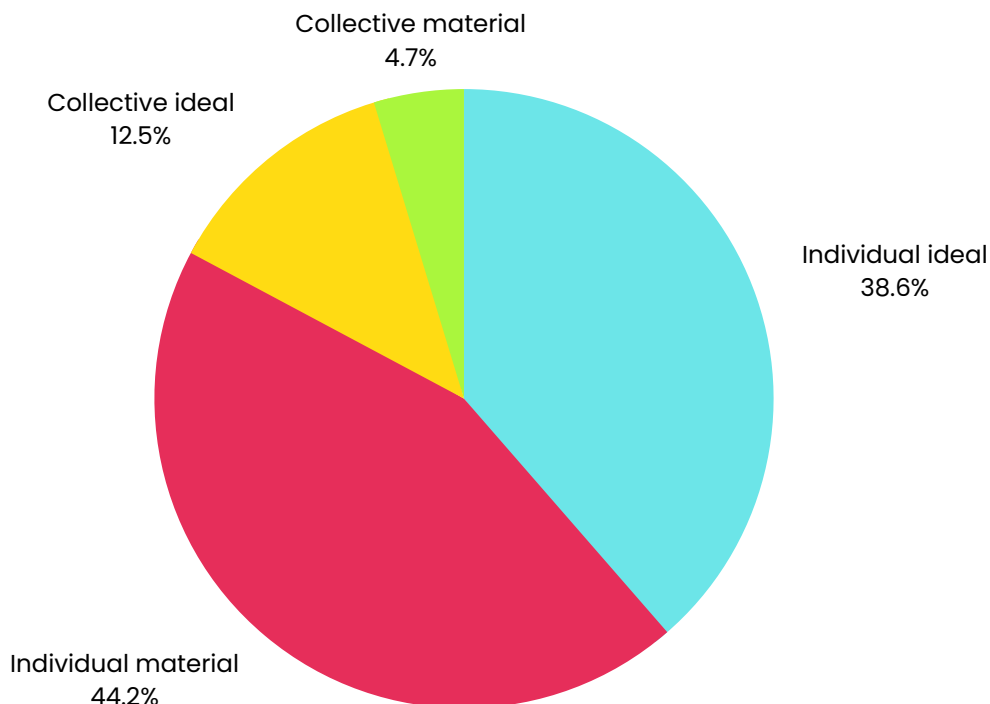


Figure 4 provides a visualization that further breaks each of the four categories into the *individual benefits* identified and Table 9 lists the total number of mentions for each benefit, ranging from *social capital* (35), *employment/income* (34), and *learning skills* (27) to *education* (2) and *collective acclaim* (0). This further highlights the greater prevalence of *individual material* benefits for participants relative to providers as all three of the most often mentioned benefits fall into that category. *Individual ideal benefits* are also prominent in the top half of Table 9, but the most commonly mentioned *collective* benefit – *community* (15 mentions) – barely makes the top 10.

Overall, our interviews with participants suggest that, despite obstacles to arts participation that confront many individuals and families in Charlotte, there is strong demand for those opportunities and a genuine appreciation for a range of benefits they associate with the arts. Some of the people we interviewed participate in community-based programs connected to large cultural institutions, but others are benefiting from very small nonprofit arts organizations that were founded in areas of the city that were historically underfunded (ASC 2020). Even some of the youngest arts participants we spoke with were able to describe ways they benefit from arts participation.

Figure 4. Distribution of benefits by type (interviews with participants)

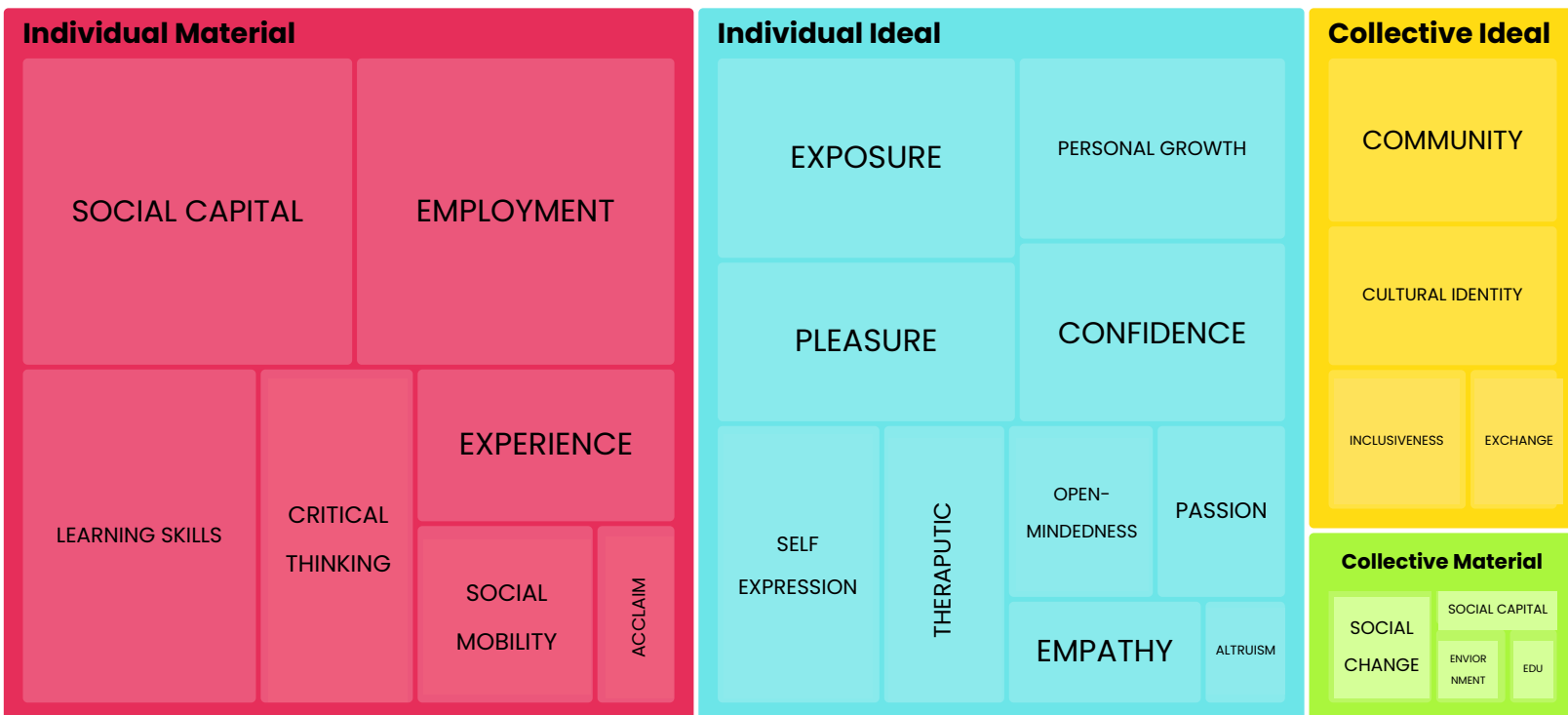


Table 9. All coding references to benefits of arts participation by type and frequency (interviews with participants).

BENEFIT	TYPE	REFERENCES
SOCIAL CAPITAL	Individual Material	35
EMPLOYMENT/INCOME	Individual Material	34
LEARNING SKILLS	Individual Material	27
EXPOSURE	Individual Ideal	21
CRITICAL THINKING	Individual Material	18
PLEASURE	Individual Ideal	17
PERSONAL GROWTH	Individual Ideal	17
CONFIDENCE	Individual Ideal	17
SELF-EXPRESSION	Individual Ideal	16
COMMUNITY	Collective Ideal	15
EXPERIENCE	Individual Material	14
CULTURAL IDENTITY	Collective Ideal	13
THERAPEUTIC	Individual Ideal	12
SOCIAL MOBILITY	Individual Material	11
OPEN-MINDEDNESS	Individual Ideal	9
INCLUSIVENESS	Collective Ideal	8
PASSION	Individual Ideal	8
SOCIAL CHANGE	Collective Material	7
EMPATHY	Individual Ideal	7
EXCHANGE	Collective Ideal	5
ACCLAIM	Individual Material	5
SOCIAL CAPITAL	Collective Material	3
ENVIRONMENT	Collective Material	3
ALTRUISM	Individual Ideal	3
EDUCATION	Collective Material	2
ACCLAIM	Collective Material	0

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

In this study, we explored the beliefs, motivations, and experiences of arts providers as well as the individuals and families that participate in such programs. We wanted to also better understand how artists and arts providers conceptualize the social impact of the arts, how they measure the impact of their work, and what relationship they perceive between arts participation and social mobility. Charlotte provides an interesting context in which to explore these questions due to its low rates of intergenerational mobility (Chetty et al. 2014) and longstanding racial disparities in arts funding and access (ASC 2020).

Over the course of our interviews with 49 arts providers and 31 arts participants in Charlotte, in addition to two focus groups (see appendix,) we learned how they view the benefits of arts participation and the potential role of the arts in social mobility and other types of social impact. Across a diverse sample of interviewees and a wide range of arts-based programs, we heard about strongly held beliefs and firsthand experiences with the benefits of arts participation.

EMPLOYMENT /INCOME

Definition: Refers to the arts as providing a job or career; employment opportunities or a source of additional income; or any type of career or income-related benefits; could include career exposure, learning about career options; it can also include other connections made between the arts and high-status careers or career achievement in arts or outside arts (e.g., doctors with a background in music training).

“

There's several students who have been in the program who now own their own businesses, who are photographers, working photographers, working artists.
- Artist/Arts program provider

”

“

Most of the artists that are in our community definitely have an entrepreneurial spirit, that most of them that is almost all they do...they now own production companies, and they're doing these huge murals and getting their own grants...And they're making a living doing it.
- Artist/Arts program provider

”

On one hand, we heard a general belief among most of our interviewees that the arts can contribute to upward social mobility as well as several accounts that illustrate how and why this happened to an arts provider or a participant in an arts program. On the other hand, many of our interviewees found it difficult to articulate the relationship between arts participation and social mobility. Below, we offer a few observations that may help to explain this apparent disconnect, which is also reflected in Charlotte's approach to promoting economic opportunity and social mobility.

First, in interviews with arts providers we found a strong emphasis on *individual* benefits (70.7%) from arts participation relative to *collective* ones (29.3%) as well as on *ideal* benefits (64.2%) relative to *material* ones (35.8%). In particular, nearly half of the references we coded in the interviews with providers were to *individual ideal* benefits (43.0%). Such benefits include things like *exposure* to new things, increased *open-mindedness* or *empathy*, building *confidence*, intrinsic rewards like *pleasure* and *self-expression*, and so on. While all these benefits are important motivations and consequences of arts participation, it may be less obvious how they lead to upward social mobility relative to material benefits like better grades in school, opportunities for travel, or employment and income. At the same time, we found that arts providers of color – Asian, Black, and Latinx – were relatively more likely than White providers to refer to collective or material benefits. In this respect, this suggests there is an opportunity to:

1. emphasize the full range of benefits, including collective and material ones, with arts providers and participants as well as policymakers and the public.
2. invest in artists and arts providers of color who are more likely to recognize the material benefits of the arts, including social mobility.

Second, the arts providers we spoke with rarely referred to academic research on the social impact of the arts and many were uncomfortable doing so. Only four of the arts providers we interviewed (8.2%) referred to research studies at all, one of which simply noted "there's definitely studies out there." The most notable exception is the founder of a nonprofit arts organization that provides free visual arts education to low-income youth who explained: "It kind of began for me as a very academic research-based pursuit..." and "in that research art kind of floated to the top as the most effective thing to provide to low-income youth to help equip them and empower them to kind of climb the social economic ladder." Similarly, very few arts providers were comfortable discussing the term cultural capital, though several had heard of it (and one knew that it was associated with Pierre Bourdieu). Again, this suggests there is an opportunity to:

1. better communicate social science research to arts providers in order to...
2. empower arts providers to link the benefits of their programs to outcomes like social mobility.

Our interviews and interactions with arts providers in Charlotte give us the sense that some are hesitant to make strong claims about the impact of the arts on social mobility. Despite their firsthand experiences and observations of tangible benefits of arts participation, including upward social mobility, they are concerned that their stories will be dismissed by arts funders, policymakers, and gatekeepers.

But the challenge of improving our measures and evidence base for economic and social mobility is not a problem exclusive to arts communities. As a recent interdisciplinary workshop convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM 2022) suggested, there is a widespread need for improving the evidence base to better understand drivers of economic and social mobility, including qualitative research. Our hope is that this study provides a first step towards valuing the perspectives of arts providers and participants that have experienced and witnessed the benefits of the arts and its role in promoting social mobility.

Our interviews with a wide range of individual and family participants in community-based arts programs provide additional insights about the potential social impact of the arts. For instance, we find it notable that our interviews with participants in community-based arts programs, the focus on *individual* benefits (82.7%) was even more pronounced than for providers, but it favored *individual material* benefits (44.2%) over *individual ideal* (38.6%) ones. Similarly, participants were more likely to describe material barriers to arts participation, such as the cost of quality supplies or of arts programs as well as transportation difficulties or concerns about how welcoming programs will be. Further research can help to shed light on how to reduce these barriers and broaden the perspectives of providers and participants about the potential impact of the arts for individuals, families, and the broader community.

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APPENDIX: SOUL COLLAGE ACTIVITY



Art is a powerful and humanizing way to communicate experiences amongst a wide range of people and social groups to build understanding through imagery and shared experience. In the collage activity adapted from SoulCollage® participants from a range of arts organizations in Charlotte engaged in a visual arts and reflective writing activity to deepen understanding of the value of the arts in their own life, while also providing insights into the reasons for working in non-profits in the Charlotte region. The method helps people access their own wisdom to answer their life questions and can be used in many contexts and applications.

For the arts-based research component of the project, we conducted two focus group activities (in November 2021 and July 2022), led by Dr. Jane Dalton, associate professor of art education at UNC Charlotte. In the first session, the participants (N=12; 8 Women, 4 Men; 5 White, 3 Black, 2 Latinx, 1 Asian/Pacific Islander, 1 Biracial) were members of the research team, the Arts Impact Charlotte advisory group, and student assistants. The second session group (N=9; 5 Women and 4 Men; 5 White, 2 Black, 1 Latinx, 1 Asian/Pacific Islander) included six artists and arts program providers who had been interviewed for the project and three students.

ARTS-BASED SOCIAL MOBILITY: EXPLORING CULTURAL CAPITAL IN CHARLOTTE

Participants created 5" x 7" collaged cards using self-selected magazine images, glue sticks, and cut or torn images that were meaningful to them; it is an intuitive process. The aim of SoulCollage® is to let images find you and allow these images, generally 3-5 in total, to provide insights through written reflection. Through this process participants learned to recognize their individual "local story" in their cards and discover how this weaves into the collective's "larger story" of the importance and value of the arts within their own lives and that of the organization in which they worked. (<https://soulcollage.com/>)

In each session, participants introduced themselves to the larger group. Instructions and goals for the project were shared with the group. Next, participants were led through a guided mindfulness meditation. Once the meditation ended, participants were instructed to look through the magazine images that were placed on tables in the room, selecting 3-5 that they found interesting. Once the images were selected, participants worked quietly cutting or tearing images and gluing them on a pre-cut 5"x7" matboard. This process took approximately 25 minutes. Once their collages were completed they were given a handout and invited to look at the image and answer the following reflection questions to reveal a deeper understanding of the value of the arts in their life:



ARTS-BASED SOCIAL MOBILITY: EXPLORING CULTURAL CAPITAL IN CHARLOTTE

1. Who are you? (Begin with "I am the one who...")
2. What message do you have for me today about my relationship with the arts?
3. What is your strongest belief about the role of the arts in my life?
4. When did your passion for the arts first appear in your life?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to say to me?

Upon completion of the written reflection, participants took time to view everyone's collage and then were invited to share any insights they gleaned from the process within the whole group. Participants were eager to share their experiences and to talk about their collages. They spoke about the power of the images to attract them and marveled at the diversity of the approaches to the collage activity, even though everyone started with the same instructions. They spoke openly about the meaning of the images that they used and asked questions of each other.

Photos were taken of each SoulCollage® and combined with their written reflection as data for the grants data collection (see example below and additional collages at end). The written statements addressed both the value of the arts to them personally and also as a social phenomenon, reinforcing the "ideal/intangible" benefits that emerged from the interviews. Among the statements:

"The arts allow us to be who we are and who we want to be."

"The arts give me life and provide me with a feeling of worth."

"The arts allow you to see the beautiful aspects of humanity."

"Empower all communities, disrupt the world, and fight injustices and wrong doings."

"El arte es indispensable. Es la ventana a cada alma y un puerta a un comunidad unida. (Art is indispensable. It is the window to each soul and a door to a united community)."

"You know what you want to speak to the world through the arts."

"Art will take you places still. It will take you from home, make you feel at home, make the world expand and reveal itself in full color."

