Artists in Greater Houston: Data for Advocacy

These findings come from ***The 2026 Greater Houston Artists Study: Vibrancy, Vulnerability, and Pathways to Sustainability***, conducted by Fresh Arts in partnership with SMU DataArts, with funding from Houston Endowment. Building on Fresh Arts' 2021 Houston-Region Artist Survey, the study gathered responses from **1,008 working artists across Greater Houston**, representing a wide range of artistic disciplines, backgrounds, and career experiences.

The research examines the economic realities, opportunities, and challenges facing artists in the nine-county Greater Houston region, including income, healthcare, financial security, access to creative space, and career sustainability. It also explores how artists perceive Houston as a place to build and sustain a creative career, highlighting both the strengths of the region's arts ecosystem and the structural barriers that persist.

The findings offer a foundation for data-informed advocacy, helping artists, arts organizations, funders, and policymakers identify opportunities for investment, collaboration, and meaningful action.

Artist income and economic security

- 57% of respondents reported less than $50,000 in annual personal income from all sources. The study compares this with an estimated $89,981 annual salary needed for a single adult to live comfortably in Houston.
- 47% of respondents answering the income-source question earned less than one-quarter of their personal income from artistic practice; 29% earned all of their personal income through art.
- 50% of artists did not believe organizations in their community fairly compensate the artists they work with; among Hispanic/LatinX artists, 55% held this view.

Healthcare and retirement

- 19% of surveyed artists lacked health insurance, compared with 11% in the 2021 Houston artist survey and 12% of adults nationally in the comparison cited by the study. Among Black or African American respondents, the rate was 30%.
- 28% could not access needed medical care, tests, or treatments during the prior year; the figure was 34% among Black or African American respondents.
- 40% said they had resources to save for retirement, compared with 65% in the 2021 survey.

Creative space

- 95% of surveyed artists reported challenges finding or maintaining creative space. Rising rents and costs are identified as important barriers to sustaining artistic practice.

Support and opportunity

- 71% of artists had accessed at least one form of career support, including grants, fellowships, or residencies. Yet the study finds these supports insufficient to resolve broader sustainability challenges.
- Only about half of respondents believed a long-term artistic career in Greater Houston was sustainable.

Perceptions of Houston

- 58% viewed Houston as supportive of the arts, an increase of 15 percentage points since 2021. Perceptions varied by neighborhood and among respondent groups.
- The study highlights geographic barriers for artists outside Loop 610, including transportation costs and residency-based grant restrictions.

What artists value

- 52% defined artistic success in terms of positive community or world impact, while 47% selected earning meaningful income from their art. The latter rose from 38% in 2021, though the question wording changed.
- 38% identified having the time, space, and resources to make art when they want as a measure of success.

FreshArts SMU DataArts Houston Endowment

Data Source: Angela Carranza, Jennifer Benoit-Bryan & Nicole Kim, *The 2026 Greater Houston Artists Study: Vibrancy, Vulnerability, and Pathways to Sustainability.* (Houston, TX: Fresh Arts and SMU DataArts, October 2026),

For more information: https://fresharts.org/greater-houston-artist-survey/