



Presidents Leadership Class  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**



**BOULDER COUNTY**  
**arts alliance**

# Artist Drift in Boulder

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## Abstract

This paper investigates artist drift in the City of Boulder, specifically whether artist populations are changing relative to neighboring cities. Understanding the occurrence of artist drift is important in helping to influence art support and advocacy programming by both government offices and independent organizations. Artist drift could not be identified directly due to a lack of data, so an indirect assessment used tax and budget data from 2009 to 2013 as secondary tools to investigate trends in artist population, income, and cost of living. The number of total artists in Boulder has followed a positive trend, as has the median income of artists and the cost of living (estimated from housing costs). However, the data illustrates differences between the experiences of male and female artists, with female artists earning lower median salaries each year (compared to the increasing salaries of males). These results yield interesting implications for the Boulder arts community, and suggest demographics that are most at-risk for artist drift in the future. Finally, several idealized interventions are proposed based on the factors influencing artist drift, broken down by elements of feasibility, cost, risk and impact on the artist population.

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## Motivation

Boulder, Colorado is often considered one of the nation's best places to live, citing the city's recreation opportunities, health-conscious culture, intelligent population, and beautiful mountain backdrop. Boulder's residents view the city as a creative and culturally-engaged community, yet art advocacy groups worry that artists are leaving Boulder in favor of cities with more affordable living options and expanded creative opportunities. Anecdotal evidence observed by organizations like the Boulder County Arts Alliance and the Boulder Office of Arts and Culture suggests that nearby cities like Denver and Longmont are drawing Boulder's artists away from the city, and these organizations are seeking to confirm or deny the city-scale occurrence of this "artist drift." As various groups continue to support creative individuals in Boulder, understanding whether the artist populations are "drifting" will help influence their programs, funding, and even organizational goals.

## Defining Artist Drift

This investigation considers artist drift to be the movement of artists out of a geographic location. Significantly, artist drift [as a statistic] does not consider the reasons why an artist leaves a location; they may have either positive pressures attracting them to a new location, or negative pressures pushing them away from their current location.

Artist drift is relevant in understanding the cultural capacity of a city, as well as identifying how well the city is supporting residents who work in creative industries. Beyond identifying bulk numerical and population trends, examining artist drift can help identify where creative locales within the city exist, and how they are changing. Additionally, this analysis can help predict appropriate levels of funding or programmatic assistance required to maintain healthy artist populations. Finally, looking at artist drift can help reveal the community and cultural priorities of a city and suggest opportunities for improvement by the general community and advocacy organizations within and beyond city government.

## Research Methods

The best way to identify artist drift is to monitor how the population of artists in Boulder changes over time. Monitoring this population may be theoretically accomplished directly, using real-time population statistics, or indirectly, using indicative tools (such as tax registration) to infer information about the artist population. The following sections discuss the methods used to investigate artist drift both directly and indirectly.

## Direct Assessment Methods

As with any population assessment, the most precise way to study trends is to directly track individuals entering and leaving an area. In Boulder, no system presently exists for the city (or any independent office) to actively track artist populations, beyond census and tax data (discussed further in “Indirect Assessment Methods”). Therefore, a true “direct assessment” of artist drift is currently impossible to conduct. However, organizations working with Boulder’s creative residents do interact with artists frequently, and collect a significant amount of anecdotal information regarding the experiences of these artists in Boulder. Thus, the most direct form of getting artist data is through the surveys/conversations and anecdotal evidence collected by Boulder arts advocacy organizations (specifically the Boulder Office of Arts and Culture).

### Surveys

Within the scope of the CU-BCAA partnership, analyzing previously conducted surveys provides the central and anecdotal evidence present the findings of past surveys and recent field observations on the state of Artists drift in Boulder. Namely, the Arts and Economic and Prosperity national report has selected Boulder Colorado provided the raw data for this section. Additionally, the Boulder Community Cultural Plan (currently in the drafting phase, scheduled to be unveiled and implemented in January 2016) includes a significant amount of data collected from surveys and focused interactions with Boulder area artists and citizens.

### Anecdotal Evidence

Although qualitative data provides very clear evidence on the status of the artist population in boulder, often times this data is published 2-5 years late. Anecdotal evidence provides an indirect method to assess the status of the boulder artist community without waiting for the lag that’s inherent in the with census and survey posted results. Anecdotal evidence in the context of this report means information gathered from stories, people, arts events and word of mouth, qualitative information on the status of the artist population. As previously mentioned, the Boulder Community Cultural Plan heavily considers anecdotal accounts from local artists and art supporters, citing more than 2000 community members as contributors.

### Interpreting and Weighting Survey and Anecdotal Evidence

The data collected from surveys and anecdotes are valuable in gauging the feeling of many individuals within a population, especially those active with the organizations and support services which collect the data. In the context of studying population trends, however, this data can be misleading and unrepresentative of the true parent population. The most vocal individuals are often those on the extreme ends of a population, either experiencing difficulty or much success. Especially in the hardworking artist population, the struggling artists are more likely to seek support or council from the arts advocacy groups themselves, thus inherently biasing the incoming data. This bias does not in any way negate the experiences of many of these artists, however, and their stories are valuable for supporting individuals in Boulder who need help most. Yet in the context of artist drift, the anecdotal and survey evidence collected by art advocacy group is likely not a good indicator of trends on a city-wide level.

## Indirect Assessment Methods

Indirect assessment utilizes secondary tools to infer the extent of artist drift. While these tools aren't designed specifically to track artist groups, they can reveal trends about these populations, their demographics, and even their financial status/success. The resources considered in this analysis include tax records, city budgets, and metrics for the "ease of conducting business" for artist populations in Boulder.

### Tax Analysis

Analyzing public financial data has proven to be the central indirect method to analyze Boulder's artist population. American taxpayers are required to identify their profession when filing taxes using a North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code. Through the US census bureau, it is possible to extract demographic information based off the populations registered NAICS codes (for example - 47.1% of the 6379 registered artists in Boulder during 2013 were male). By appropriately filtering NAICS codes within public tax records, information about the target artist populations and their demographics can be obtained. Table 1 contains the classification titles and codes used for this analysis.<sup>1</sup>

*Table 1: Artist-related NAICS Tax Codes*

<b>NAICS Title</b>	<b>NAICS Code</b>	<b>Common Keywords</b>
Musical Groups and Artists	711130	Classical musical Artists, independent
Promoters of Performing Arts, Sports, and Similar Events with Facilities	711310	Arts event managers with facilities
Promoters of Performing Arts, Sports, and Similar Events without Facilities	711320	Arts event managers without facilities
Agents and Managers for Artists, Athletes, Entertainers, and Other Public Figures	711410	Agents, artists'
Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers	711510	Animated cartoon artists, independent, storytellers
Museums	712110	Art galleries (except retail)
All Other Amusement and Recreation Industries	713990	Go-kart raceways (i.e., amusement rides)

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<sup>1</sup> NAICS Association. "NAICS Keyword Search" Accessed: 10/22/2015. Found at: <http://www.naics.com/naics-search-results/>

Please note that the definition of “artist” for sorting tax data does not include: Art therapist offices, Art School, Martial Arts, commercial Graphic Design Services, Internet Art Publishers, Art Print, Art Auctions, Art Supply Stores, Art goods merchant merchant wholesalers, Artist’s paint manufacturing.

The US Census Bureau publishes generalized taxpayer data on their website, and sorting/filtering by NAICS code reveals the relevant information for the artist tracking analysis. Unfortunately, published US Census Bureau data is two years behind, and has only reported in the digital system for five years. This limits the amount of analysis that could be performed by this investigation, but does still provide valuable insight to recent artist population trends in Boulder and surrounding areas. Thus, by simply sorting the tax data correctly the number of artists working in Boulder (current as of two years ago) can be indirectly determined. The Findings section details the analysis of trends between 2009 and 2013 in this method.

### Budget Analysis

In theory, with more support for the arts from the Boulder community comes an increased number of artists that the city can financially support. Accordingly, the second financial tool used to indirectly assess artists drift is the City of Boulder’s budget plans from 2004-2015. The aim of this measure is to answer the questions: how much money is the City of Boulder allocating to the arts within the budget, and how has that amount changed over time?

Eleven years of City of Boulder budget plans are analyzed to help answer this question, in addition to where the money comes from. The two city departmental offices in Boulder which provide money directly to the arts are Parks and Recreation and the Library and Arts Department. The individual contribution from each department, as well as the net value, is analyzed in this report for trends.

### Ease of Conducting Business

Looking at how easily artists can do business in Boulder is a good indicator of the experiences that artists have in the city, and can provide insight to why they may stay or leave. Ease of conducting business can be characterized by a number of factors, including zoning restrictions, permitting, taxes, available infrastructure, and government support. In the context of this investigation, these factors were not fully researched or considered due to time and resource constraints.

## Findings

Evidence demonstrates that Boulder County, Colorado is providing a growing and flourishing art community that is attracting artists from neighboring communities. The total number of artists in Boulder is also growing, contrary to the initial concerns of Boulder's art advocacy groups. However, the City of Boulder is still faced with several threats to its artist community and distinct demographics of artists may be at risk. The following section details some statistical successes and challenges to artist demographics in Boulder.

## Quick Facts

### Successes

- The population of tax paying artists in Boulder County rose 12.2% between 2009 and 2013. The populaces of Boulder (+19.2%), Gunbarrel (+29%), Erie (+32%), and Superior (+104%) lead this increase.<sup>2</sup>
- The City of Boulder has seen a 121% increase in funds allocated to the Arts over the last 10 years - it is projected to be over \$1 million in 2016.<sup>3</sup>
- Although Boulder only has 30% of the total population of Boulder County, the city has more than 50% of the Artists.<sup>4</sup>

### Challenges<sup>5,6,7</sup>

- The cost of living in the City of Boulder is 55% higher than the national average (compared to 6% higher in Boulder County), while the median artist income is 20% lower.
- The median female artist income in Boulder is 55% of the median male income, and is 10% less than the corresponding countywide median.
  - While the cost of housing in Boulder increased by 11% from 2009-2013, the average income of female artists decreased by 18% during this time period. In 2012, the average cost of housing was ~\$15,000, and the median female artist income in Boulder was ~\$17,000.
  - As of 2013, the median income for female artists in Boulder was less than \$19,000 and following a decreasing trend
- The median income for independent artists in Boulder County is \$17,000 less than non-independent artists. The majority of artists in Boulder County are independent artists.

Note: all data presented in the following sections refer to the already cited resources.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey

<sup>3</sup> City of Boulder, Colorado. (2016). *2016 Recommended Budget*.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 Economic Census, 2012 Economic Census of Island Areas, and 2012 Nonemployer Statistics.

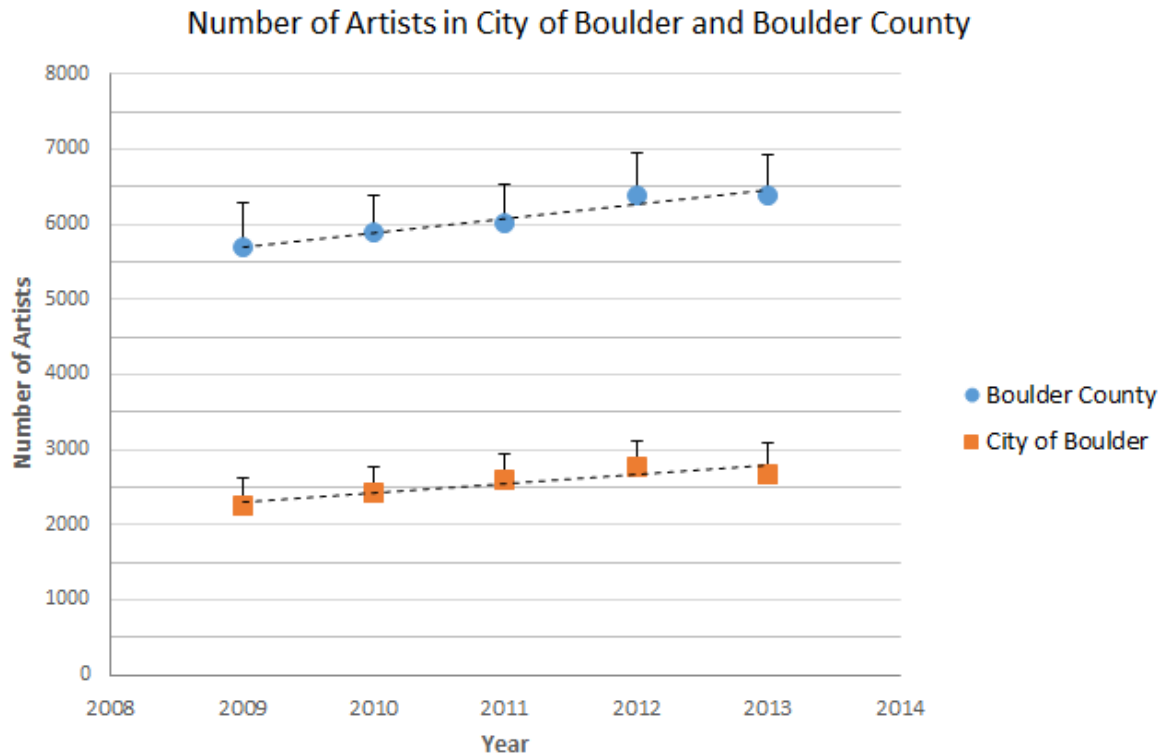
<sup>5</sup> 5-Year American Community Survey, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> *2016 Recommended Budget*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> 2012 Economic Census... op. cit.

### Assessing the Number of Registered Tax Paying Artists

As mentioned, the tax data can provide the number of registered tax-paying artists living in Boulder. The number of these artists in Boulder each year from 2009 through 2013 is presented in Figure 1, which demonstrates an average increase of 120 artists per year.



*Figure 1: Number of (NAICS) Tax Paying Artists in Boulder and Boulder County (2009-2013)*

While Figure 1 presents the total number of artists in Boulder and Boulder County, looking at the percentage of artists relative to the larger population helps filter out the effect of growing populations in general. Increasing percentages of artists represents artists being “attracted” to the area more than other workforces. Figure 2 provides the percent of artist of the total Boulder workforce each year from 2009-2013, while Figure 3 presents the data along with the percentages in Boulder County, Denver, and Westminster. A strong positive trend is present, indicating that the population of artists in Boulder is growing faster than the growth rate of the overall Boulder workforce, and generally faster than other local cities.



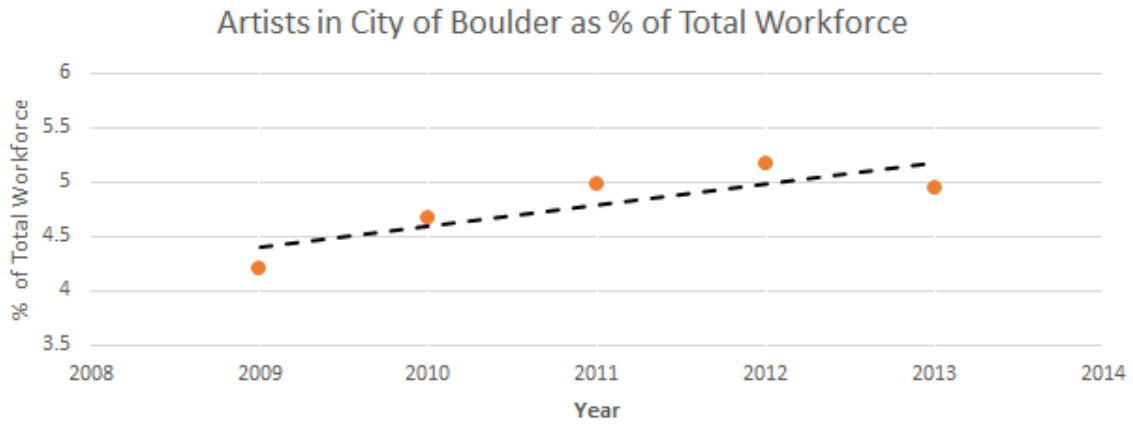


Figure 2: Number of Artists as a Percentage of Total Workforce (2009-2013)

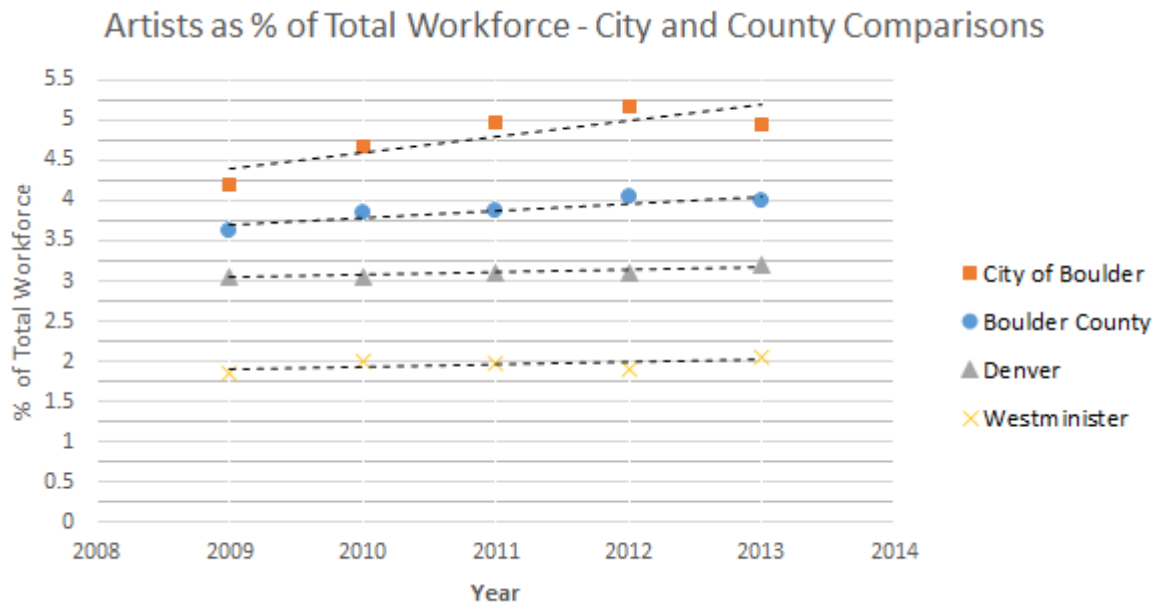


Figure 3: Number of Artists as a Percentage of Total Workforce in the Region (2009-2013)

### Assessing the Financial Environment for Artists

In addition to population counts, the available tax data includes information on the typical earnings of artists. The resources used provide medium income for artists in Boulder and the surrounding area, which is a key indicator of the financial well-being of this population (especially in comparison to the cost of living in the respective regions).

The following figures contain information on the median income of artists in Boulder, Boulder County, and Denver, in addition to a representative cost of living (housing costs) for each location.

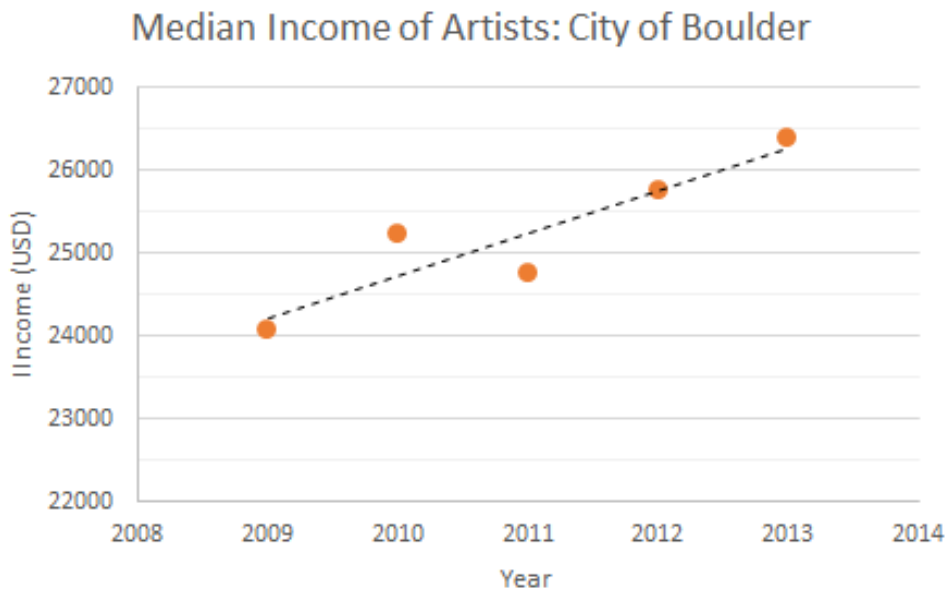


Figure 4: Median Income for Boulder Artists (2009-2013)

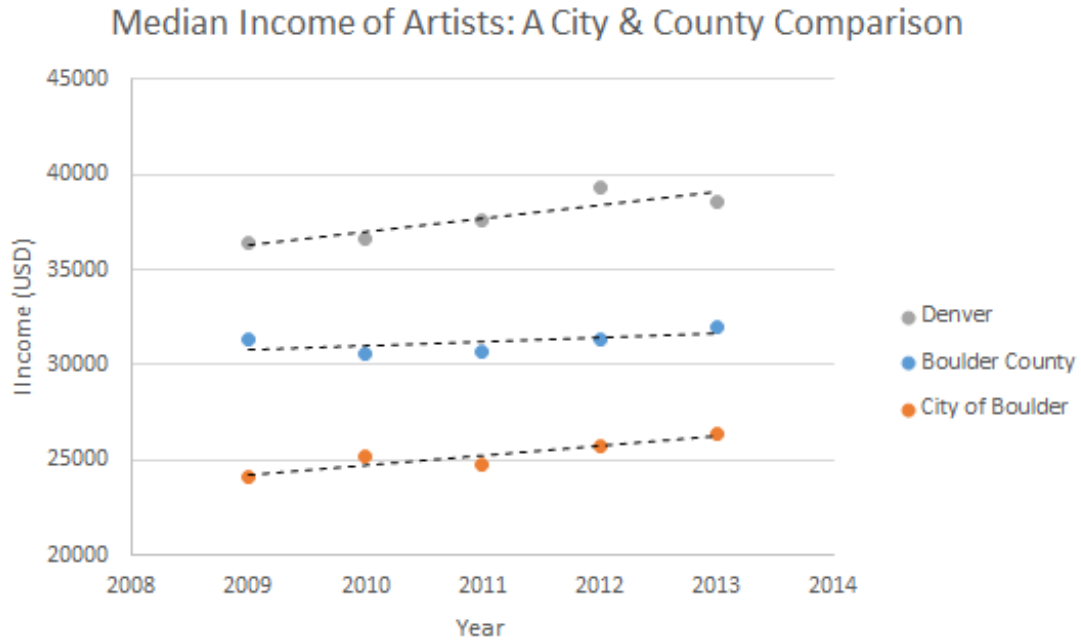


Figure 5: Median Income for Boulder, Denver, and Boulder County Artists (2009-2013)

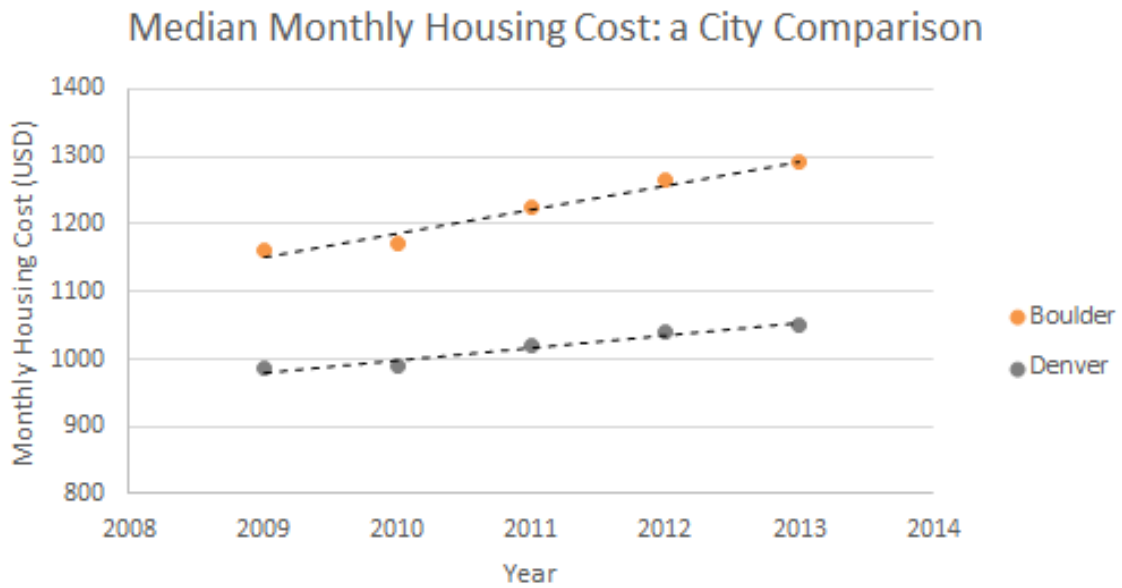


Figure 6: Median Housing Costs (2009-2013)

These figures demonstrate that, on average, Boulder artists are making more each year (as illustrated in Figure 4) but are making less than their geographic neighbors (Figure 5). As demonstrated in Figure 5, artists in the City of Boulder are earning on average 19% less than tax-paying artists in Boulder County. The uncertainty in this data from the most recent (2013) indicates the median income of artists varies by approximately \$6,000 per year.

Another significant conclusion is that Boulder housing costs are greater than those in Denver, which is a competitor for artist populations (Figure 6). Thus, artists in Boulder are not only making less, but also needing to spend more to stay in Boulder.

#### Artist Differences Between Gender Demographics

Another variation in the earnings of Boulder artists can be seen by demographic, and specifically by gender. This data, also retrieved from the tax census data, indicates that a definite difference exists between the income of male and female artists in both Boulder and Boulder County (Figure 7). Additionally, the data demonstrates that the gap between genders is increasing with time (Figure 8).

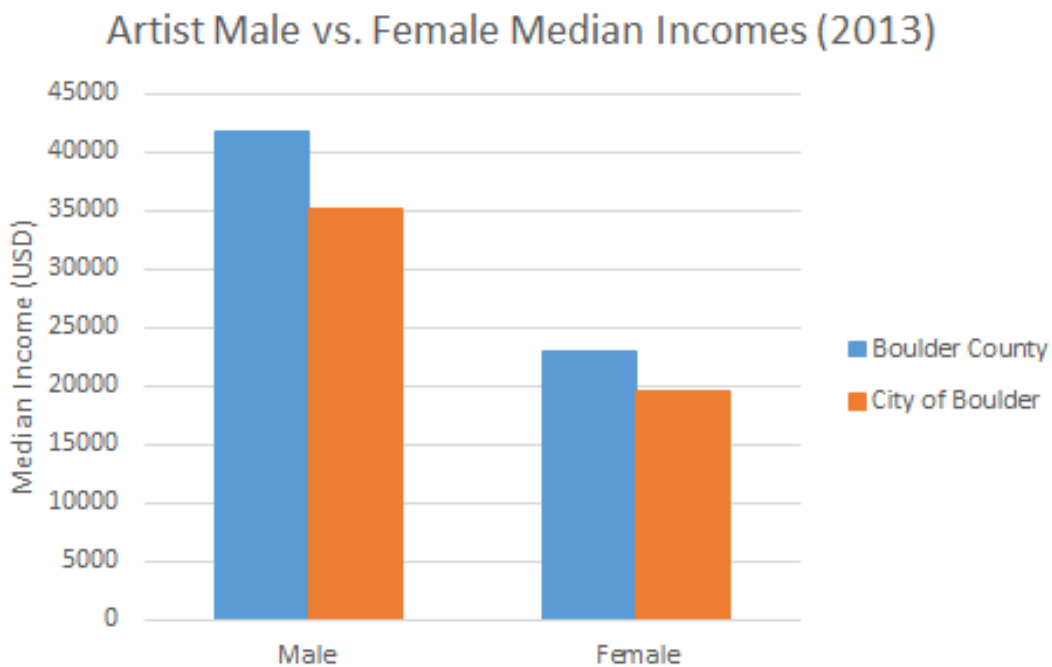


Figure 7: Median Artist Income by Gender

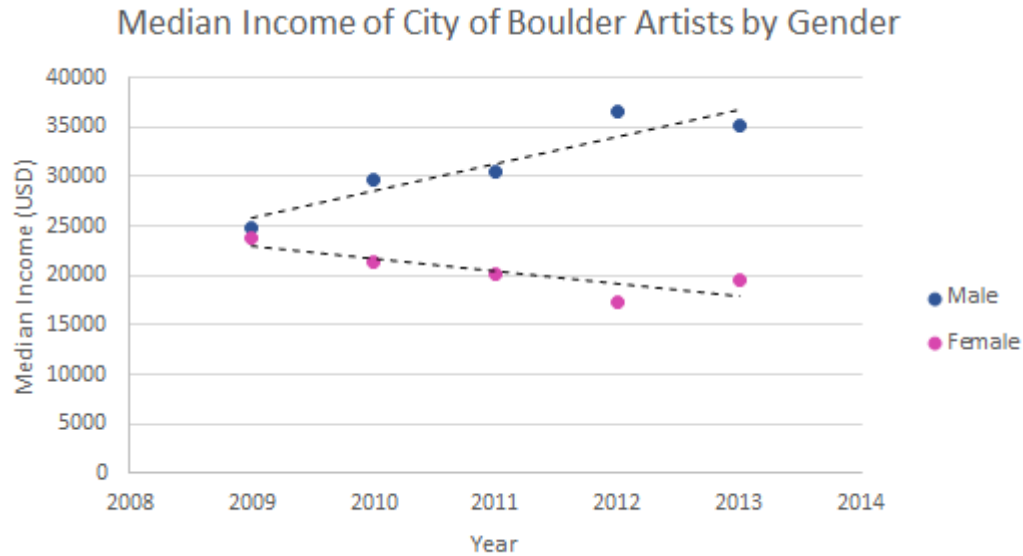


Figure 8: Median Artist Income by Gender (2009-2013)

Artist drift likely occurs when artists can no longer sustain residency in Boulder, as would occur when they make less than the cost of living. As previously illustrated in Figure 6, housing costs are rising in Boulder and the decreasing incomes of female artists puts them at risk of not being able to afford housing. Figure 9 presents the vast difference between male and female income in 2012, as well as the median yearly housing cost in Boulder for comparison. The female income is very close to the housing cost, as further demonstrated in Figure 10 which plots the trend lines for both female income and housing costs. While the data for 2014 and 2015 is not yet released, the trends of the data do suggest that female populations will (on average) not be able to afford Boulder housing.

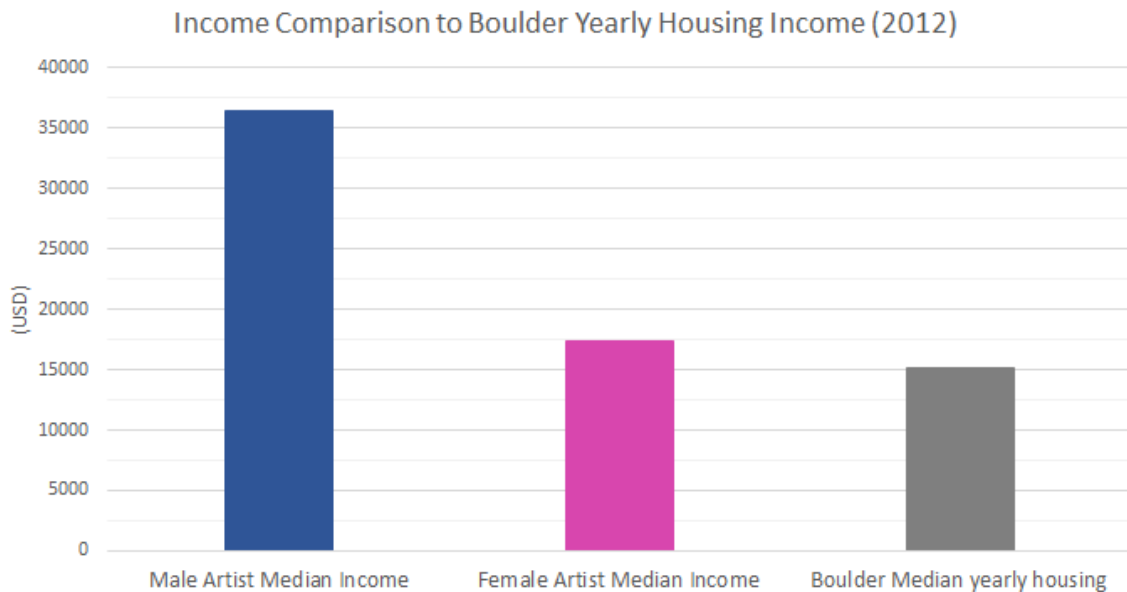


Figure 9: Median Income (by Gender) and Yearly Housing Cost (2012)

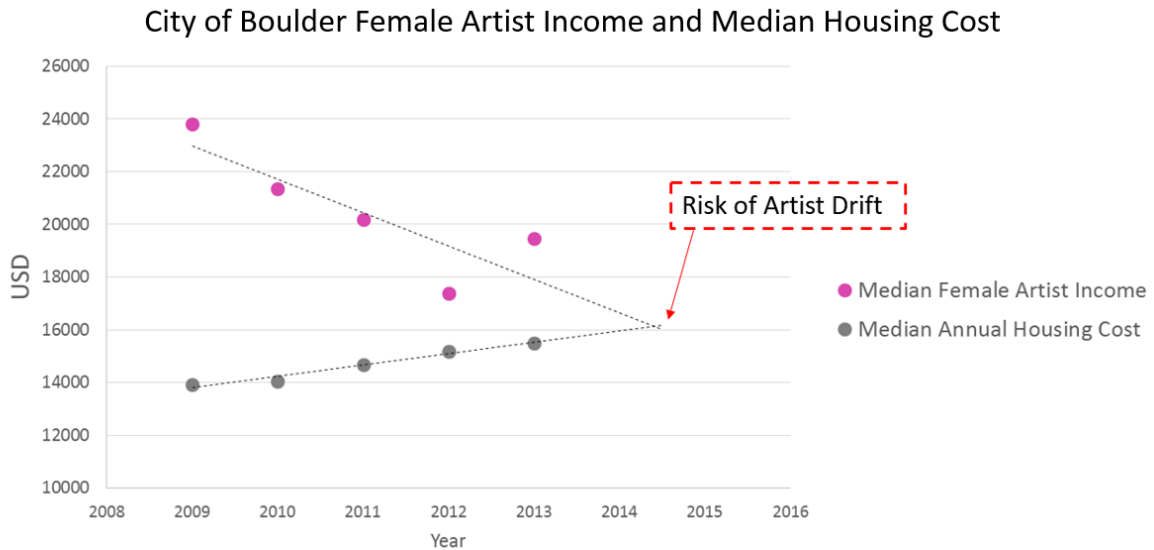


Figure 10: Female Median Income and Housing Cost Trends (2009-2013)

### Independent Artist Populations

Another significant demographic difference between artist populations in Boulder is independent vs. dependent employment. Independent artists generally don't work for companies and are thus more likely to be susceptible to artist drift (without an employer to keep them tied to a location).

Interestingly, Boulder has a high population of independent artists relative to its neighbors. Independent artists make up nearly 50% of the city's artist population, as illustrated in Figure 11. This helps represent the very creative community that Boulder is known for.

Artist Population (2012): Independent Artists

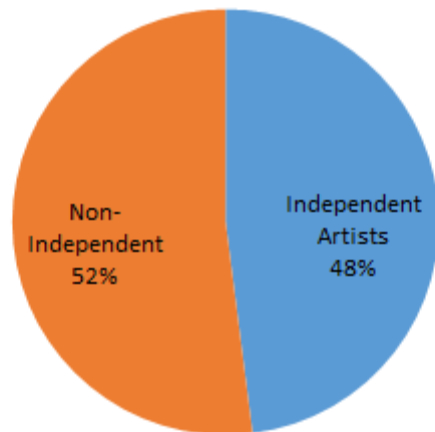


Figure 11: Independent Artist Population (2012)

Significantly, these independent artists also make less than dependent artists (see Figure 12). This is a significant finding in the context of Boulder, because it means that the large population of independent artists are generally making less than the dependent artists, which likely brings the median income of the entire population down (compared to cities with smaller percentages of independent artists).

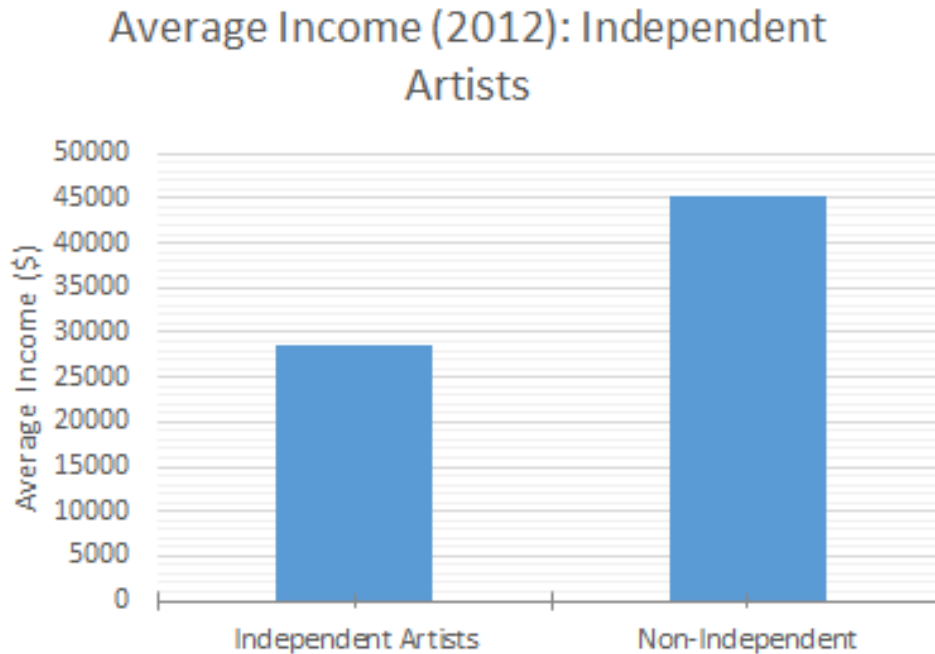


Figure 12: Independent Artist Income (2012)

#### City of Boulder's Responsibility Within Boulder County

The City of Boulder should continue to foster its artist populations because it is home to the most artists in the county, and can help to set the tone of the artist community. Figure 13 represents where the artists in Boulder County live, and half of them are in the City of Boulder. While this can represent a very active creative community, it also represents a challenge for the city to maintain this population when other cities may offer yet untapped creative spaces.

Looking at the county as a whole, creative arts are important to residents and the economy. The tax reported value of artist market size is reported to be over \$200 million during 2012, with half of that being within Boulder city limits. As long as the community continues to support these populations, these numbers will continue to grow and the most supportive environments will foster more artist populations.

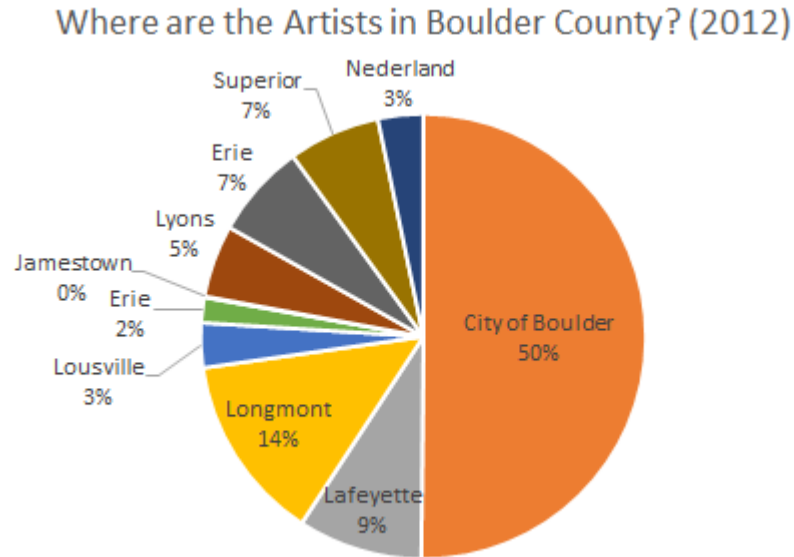


Figure 13: Artist Populations within Boulder County (2012)

#### City of Boulder Support for Artists

As previously mentioned, financial support of artists helps represent the supposed value of artists to the government and community. By looking at the City of Boulder's budgets (both past and predicted), the amount of funding dedicated to the arts can be determined and compared over time. Figure 14 illustrates that the total amount allocated to the arts has increased fairly steadily since 2004, even though its distribution has changed a bit between the Library and Arts Department and Parks and Recreation.



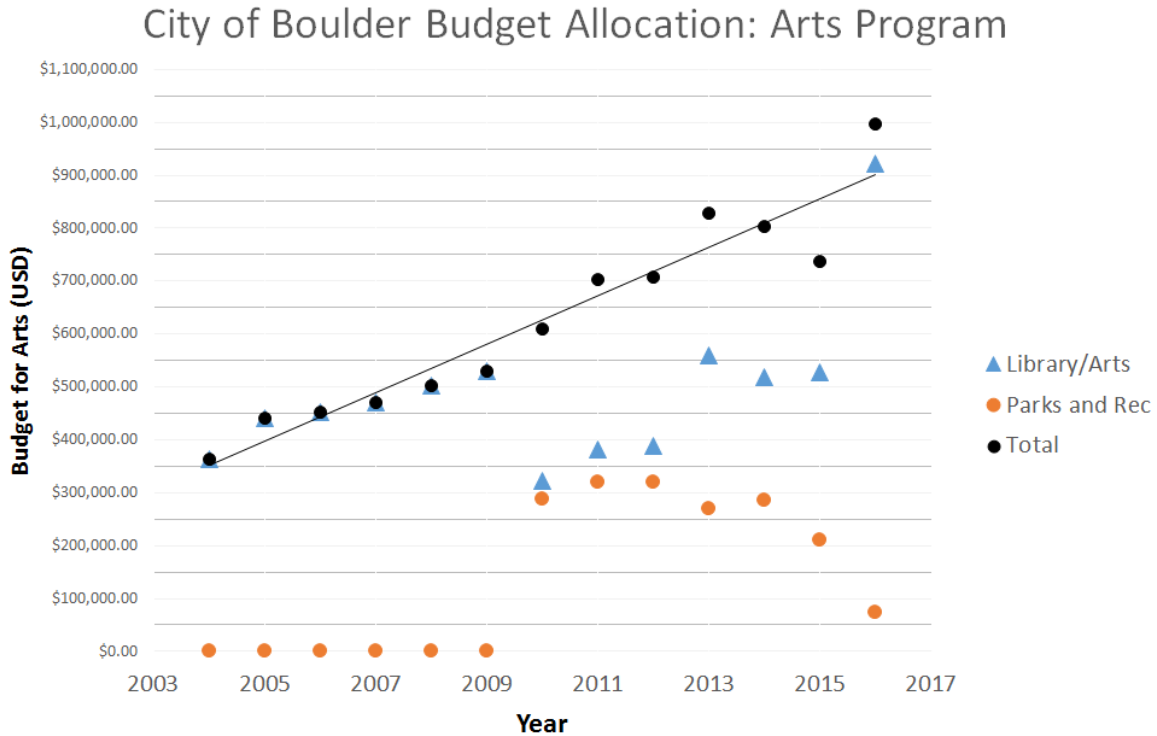


Figure 14: Boulder's Allocated Budget for the Arts (2004-2016)

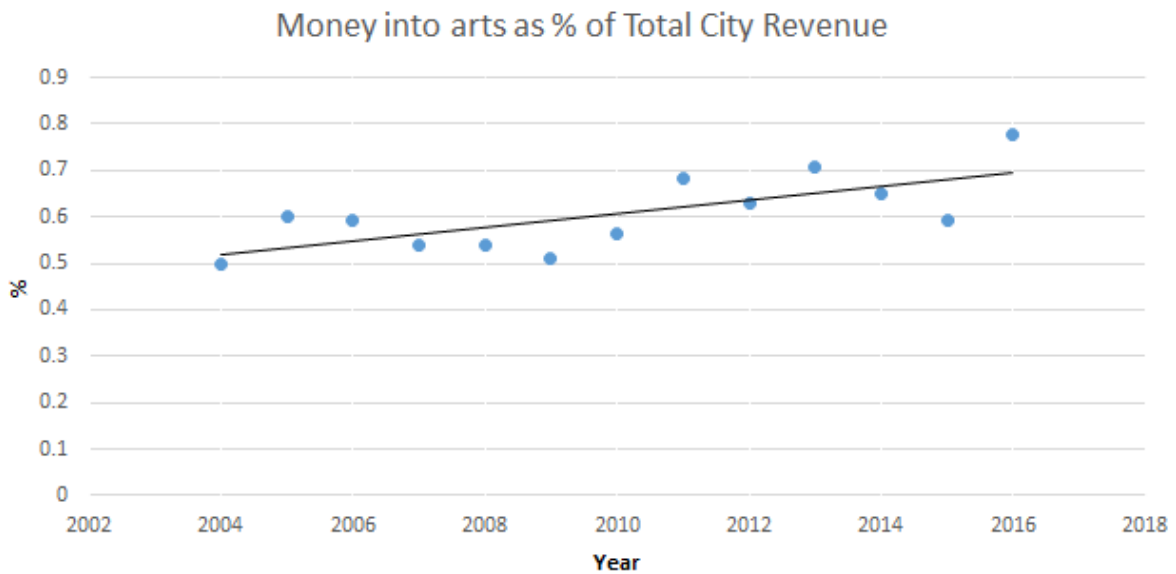


Figure 15: Money Allocated to the Arts as a Percentage of City Revenue (2004-2016)

Worth noting is that the funding relative to the entire budget is also increasing, as presented in Figure 15. This represents that the City of Boulder is funding the arts more and more each year relative to the rest of the budget.

## Understanding Factors for Artist Success

The success of artists can be largely predicted by their income, cost of living, and financial support by the city. The data presented above suggests that, on general, artists may not be drifting from Boulder at the rate feared by art advocacy groups, but there are still factors putting artists at greater risk.

One significant threat to creative retention lies in the cost of living, which is greater in Boulder than its neighboring cities and substantially higher than the national average. As previously discussed, when the cost of living rises above artist income, the threat of artist drift will increase drastically. While the data presented appears to indicate that this balance has not been overturned yet, it is important to consider that these statistics reflect median incomes and median housing costs. While the majority of artists may not be in an impossible financial situation, there are still many who fall below the median and are already at risk for artist drift. These are likely the artists that BCAA and other art advocacy groups in Boulder interface with most often, which helps to explain why the outlook on artist drift was so poor at the onset of this investigation.

Another important factor of artist success is opportunity. Independent artists particularly work and live relative to the creative opportunities available to them, which traditionally has attracted them to Boulder. Many of these opportunities are inherent to the city, such as the geographic location (proximity to the mountains), weather, and active population. However, as nearby cities like Denver and Longmont begin to increase the number of venues for artists to use (galleries, theaters, studio spaces, etc.) they become more attractive options with regards to artist opportunity. Moreover, these cities are also spending more on artists and supporting programs, which further increases the opportunities for creative individuals there. To retain artists in the future, Boulder will have to work to increase the number of opportunities available to artists so that they will stay in the city. This can look like increased funding (which is currently being implemented, as illustrated in Figure 14 and Figure 15) or more targeted support through creation of new venues or artist programming. The Boulder Community Cultural Plan is addressing this point, through documenting the number of “creative venues” in the city and working to develop creative districts in several different locations.

Finally, understanding the demographics of artists who are most at-risk is critical for government departments (predominantly the Office of Arts and Culture) and other advocacy groups (like the BCAA) to adequately provide support and intervention services. In all of the group’s review of anecdotal evidence and discussion with art advocates in Boulder, the income (and likely opportunity) discrepancies between genders was never mentioned even as advocates discussed at-risk artists. Looking at the growing differences between male and female artist incomes, however, identifies this as a potentially critical opportunity for intervention by one or more of Boulder’s advocacy organizations.

### Recognizing Limitations of the Data

While the presented data provides sound evidence of trends in artist populations and financial situations, there are limitations to the approach. Predominantly, relying on tax data means that any analysis will always be two years behind. Especially right now, the missing data from 2014-2015 would provide very significant insights regarding the effect of the 2013 flood and the recently booming marijuana industry. Unfortunately, by the time this data comes out, artists who were threatened or displaced by these events will likely have already moved on and the opportunity for strategic intervention is lost.

Additionally, it is important to understand how using tax brackets influences the data on artist populations. Significantly, not all artists are registered as “artists” for tax purposes, and the definition of an artist within these tax brackets is not comprehensive. While the tax bracket codes detailed in Table 1 do capture much of the artist population (enough to hopefully indicate trends), it is limited in that not every artist in Boulder is represented.

Finally, this indirect approach to artist drift assessment is limited as it uses financial data to infer trends and threats to artist populations. The group recognizes that the tax data, especially median income, does not fully capture the experiences and situations of many artists. Even so, the tax data is the only financial indicator available over several years and must be used prudently.

### Potential Interventions

While the role of the CU-BCAA partnership was not to develop interventions or programs to better engage artist populations, the team has identified several opportunities for arts advocacy groups to combat future artist drift. The following interventions are a few ideas evaluated and rated based on community risk, impact on artists, feasibility, and cost.

#### Directly Assess Artist Populations

Risk:	Low
Artist Impact:	Low
Feasibility:	Low
Cost:	Medium

Direct assessment of Boulder Artists involves monitoring the artist population with current data without having to rely on past data and trends. Direct artist tracking may be accomplished through a variety of means, including artist registration or an annual study of Boulder taxpayers by NAICS industry tax code (before waiting for the US census bureau to do so). To ensure the study is a direct study, it should be conducted “in house” by Boulder officials, rather than by secondary tools and extrapolation. A direct assessment of artist drift would provide current, high fidelity data on the artist population in Boulder, but would also require considerable city resources (time and personnel). A study of this form can provide accurate information on the Boulder artist population but may have a limited impact on artists when gauged against the amount of resources needed to conduct the study.

### Incentivize Artist Sponsorship

Risk:	Medium
Artist Impact:	High
Feasibility:	High
Cost:	Medium

Incentivizing artist sponsorship involves encouraging Boulder companies to sponsor and promote independent artists. Examples of sponsorship includes grants, employment, donations, and especially commissioned work. Incentivizing local artist sponsorship would foster a positive environment for conducting business within Boulder. The relationships developed by company sponsorships would aid in branding Boulder as an art friendly community. Motivation for companies to support local artists may be provided through tax breaks for donations related to artist sponsorship. Sponsorship could also be promoted as a requirement for businesses displacing artist creative venues (like the new marijuana facilities in would-be artist warehouses) in order to help mediate the displacement. Implementation would be directed by a government office, and would not require extensive resources to accomplish.

### Increase Public Art

Risk:	Low
Artist Impact:	Medium
Feasibility:	Medium
Cost:	Medium

Increasing public art involves displaying more art in the City of Boulder. Examples of how public art may be increased include city commissioned art or city-approved arts events. Increasing the amount of public art in Boulder, by local artists, also increases the quality of creative experiences within the Boulder community. There is an opportunity to highlight local artists publicly, enhancing the visual appeal of Boulder, and a local art community. A conversation between art and the overall community may magnify a sense of welcoming in Boulder. This intervention functions to improve the creative environment of Boulder through an achievable impact on the art community. It should be noted that the progress of public art is limited to the public space available for its longitudinal display.

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