The Handwork Landscape:
St. Louis, Missouri

Nest’s Makers United Project
Issued January 2021
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Photo Credit: Sara Pastrich Jewelry
Introduction

Nest’s Makers United program is a multi-stakeholder initiative that connects and strengthens the wide diversity of makers across the United States, building a vibrant and inclusive maker community. The program identifies and supports makers who face greater barriers to expanding their market reach and accessing business development services that support growth. Leveraging the maker movement’s potential to generate opportunity for all makers, regardless of sex, race, economic means, or physical ability, Makers United is committed to helping build an inclusive creative economy. As a nonprofit organization, Nest’s mission is to increase global workforce inclusivity, improve women’s wellbeing beyond factories, and preserve important cultural craft traditions around the world. Makers United is Nest’s flagship US program.

**Rung for Women** is a collaborating partner with us on this project. Rung for Women empowers women to grow and achieve sustained independence through co-located and coordinated educational, professional, and economic resources. Together with Nest, Rung for Women worked to understand and elevate the vast community of small craft business owners and St. Louis maker entrepreneurs who design and sell creative goods—from soap to handwoven textiles—in order to unlock opportunities for women throughout the city to grow their businesses and create sustainable livelihoods.

Leading much of this effort was Nest’s local team of consultants based in St. Louis who provided data-driven insights from conversations with community stakeholders and maker entrepreneurs, illuminating barriers that are preventing these individuals from successfully growing their businesses. The following report outlines our findings and we hope it will aid in bridging the economic inequalities within the St. Louis community by connecting and developing resources specifically designed for small and micro maker entrepreneurs.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges it presented, we saw evidence of a strong maker community in St. Louis and were energized by what is already a diverse entrepreneurial landscape. Our conversations revealed the unique challenges entrepreneurs faced in 2020 as the shift to ecommerce and direct-to-consumer sales accelerated rapidly, and a maker community that is eager to learn, connect, and grow.
Meet Our Local Team

The St. Louis local team consists of women who make up all the intersections of what the Makers United program is seeking to accomplish.

With an extensive background as an educator and quilt maker, Angela Turner has spent the first 10 years of her career as a classroom teacher. She now serves as a library media specialist for the Hazelwood School District. Angela led our virtual discussions with groups of diverse entrepreneurs in order to connect and build relationships in the maker community as well as to learn what resources they need to be taken to expand their businesses.

Over the past nine years Danielle Wallis has run a successful consulting practice focusing on strategic planning, research, effective grantmaking, and building cross-organizational systems to improve the social sector. While cultivating relationships in the philanthropic spaces, Danielle has supported organizations like United Way of Greater St. Louis, the Ferguson Commission, and the St. Louis Public Schools to become better equipped with innovative programs designed to establish great community relationships. Danielle has helped ensure that the Makers United program provides inclusive data that showcases the needs and resources needed for all makers in the community in order to advance their careers and grow their businesses.

Monti Hill rounds out the team and believes that community engagement and community-led initiatives are the best pathways toward driving positive and sustained change. Over the years Monti has consulted for small businesses and nonprofits with community engagement strategies, political organizing, and brand consulting. She is the founder of Black and Brown Leadership in Politics, a political space used to amplify the voices of local leaders, and she serves on the State Board for the Missouri Women’s Political Caucus as the VP of Communications. Monti conducted 13 stakeholder interviews and managed our program survey administration for Makers United. She has and will continue to create tangible ways to bridge the gaps for makers in the community through comprehensive resource mapping, which we hope will guide all makers throughout the region towards economic growth.
Approach and Methodology

Although Nest has foundational roots in the St. Louis community, we are no longer local and therefore lean on our team of implementing partners to catalog existing efforts, identify barriers, and highlight opportunities to support and connect makers to new and existing resources. We were able to reach many makers and stakeholders throughout our research efforts, but know that we did not reach everyone; therefore, the data we share here represents our best approximation of the demographics, experiences, and goals of the maker community in St. Louis based on the various samples. The following 6 primary data sources were used to create this report:

- Nest’s Makers United Landscape Survey (N=90) aimed at understanding who the makers of St. Louis are, what they make, how they sell their products, and the resources they currently utilize
- Semi-structured stakeholder interviews (N=13) aimed at understanding how the community is connected and the variety of perspectives, needs, and opportunities represented; participants were selected based on their professional expertise, connection to diverse communities of makers, and proximity to the small-batch manufacturing industry in St. Louis
- 4 community discussions (N=4) aimed at revealing the makers’ needs, challenges in the industry, the available resources and the limitations of those resources, and uncovering opportunities
- American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the US Census Bureau for local population and housing comparisons
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for local employee and salary comparisons and unemployment rates

To engage non-English speakers, the survey was also translated into Arabic, Spanish, and Bosnian with support from the International Institute. The Landscape Survey was administered digitally using Qualtrics survey software. The data collected was aggregated to analyze trends in demographics and production practices among the makers. Public datasets from the United States Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics were used to establish comparisons to the local community generally.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already existing digital divide within the micro and small business community and while we acknowledge a difficulty in gathering data from communities that were already isolated we made a concerted effort to reach makers in socially disenfranchised communities in and around St. Louis. Specifically, we sought to reach entrepreneurs representative of different zip codes, race & ethnicities, and age, recognizing both the rich diversity of St. Louis, and also the deep divides and disparities that exist with regards to access to resources.
Maker Landscape

St. Louis is a mid-size metropolitan area that includes St. Louis City and surrounding municipalities. With a population that is 76% white\(^1\) it supports the largest Bosnian population both within the US and outside of Europe. Significant racial segregation and socio-economic disparities have been long-standing problems in the St. Louis region. Despite multiple efforts in the past half-century to pass anti-discrimination laws, St. Louis remains one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the U.S. and has created meaningfully different life outcomes based on where a person lives within the region.\(^2\)

In spite of these challenges, St. Louis is a vibrant community with world-class museums, restaurants, a significant biotech innovation community, and more. There have also been efforts that align more closely with the maker movement, around revitalizing the fashion industry in St. Louis, other small business development incubators and programs, and maker or craft-specific efforts many of which are catalogued in our St. Louis Resource Guide. Yet there is still an opportunity to continue to nurture and dramatically expand the maker community, which is a vital part of the St. Louis cultural and economic landscape as well as ensure these efforts reach diverse entrepreneurs with greater equity.

90 surveyed makers representing 20 craft techniques
64% minority-owned and led & 90% female-owned and led
Collectively employing 257 individuals
with more businesses on average hiring full-time employees

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2. Washington University in St. Louis and St. Louis University, 2015, For the Sake of All, cpb-us-w2.wpmuchn.com/sites/wustl.edu/dist/3/454/files/2018/06/FSOA_report_2.17z0km.pdf.
Maker Profile: Shine in All Shades

“Keep learning, applying your magic day-to-day, and most definitely—keep shining!”
—Valeria Rodriguez

Shine in All Shades celebrates women of color in all their beautiful shades with adult coloring books, buttons, stickers, and affirmation pillows.
Who are St. Louis Makers?

The majority (90%) of maker businesses surveyed in St. Louis are owned by women compared to just 36% nationally.1

Average age is 37 years old with 37% of responding makers supporting dependents.

64% of surveyed craft businesses are minority owned and led.

Education Level Completed
55% have a college degree.

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Economic Stability

Average household income for a maker in St. Louis was reported as $64,131, which is 34% lower than the average across the St. Louis metro area. 8.5% of respondents are below the Federal Poverty Line for an average household size of 2 (average household size in Makers United survey was 2.38). For those who sell their work, sales create about 45% of their household income.

Average Household Income

- <$15,000: 8%
- $15,000-$24,999: 3%
- $25,000-$34,999: 10%
- $35,000-$49,999: 14%
- $50,000-$74,999: 25%
- $75,000-$99,999: 17%
- $100,000-$149,999: 17%
- $150,000-$199,999: 2%
- >$200,000: 3%
Where the Work Happens

Small-scale, decentralized manufacturing like that we see in maker communities across the US often operates out of a home. This continues to be true in the modern cottage industry both before and after COVID-19. During the stakeholder conversations makers voiced a desire to have a formal work space outside the home where they could work on their business, something 32% of respondents had prior to the pandemic. For those who sell their work, sales create about 45% of their household income.
Wide Variety of Crafts

**Top 10 Product Categories**
Percent of Makers Producing within each Category

- Home Décor: 31%
- Jewelry: 28%
- Murals/Fine Art: 24%
- Other: 24%
- Apparel: 22%
- Fashion Accessories: 20%
- Illustrative Art: 20%
- Apothecary/Beauty: 14%
- Children's Products: 11%
- Home Textiles: 11%

**Top 10 Craft Techniques**
Percent of Makers Practicing each Technique

- Other: 46%
- Illustration: 23%
- Beading: 16%
- Ceramics/Pottery: 11%
- Metalworking: 10%
- Embroidery: 7%
- Knitting/Crocheting: 7%
- Leatherworking: 7%
- Woodworking: 7%
- Calligraphy/Hand Lettering: 6%
Key Findings

While the Makers United Landscape Survey provided quantitative data, important qualitative insights came out of our focus groups or “community discussions” and interviews. To understand the unique needs and challenges of makers of different ethnicities, the focus groups were designed to create safe spaces for makers of color to feel comfortable sharing their insights. These community discussions were facilitated in the evenings over Zoom, in compliance with social distancing practices amid COVID-19. Key findings from these discussions are highlighted alongside the quantitative insights in this section of the report.
Strong community is deeply valued by St. Louis makers as a supportive factor for successful maker businesses, but perhaps even more so for the personal wellbeing and connectedness of the entrepreneurs themselves. The organic connections and lasting relationships that come from a close knit community provide opportunities for collaboration, peer-to-peer support, and mentorship. Makers shared they often first turn to a fellow small business owner, family member, or friend with business-related question yet still feel disconnected to the larger creative community in St. Louis that can help their business grow. Specifically, 31% of surveyed makers do not experience the type of community they feel will help them generate organic business relationships and connect with clients. We heard a desire for the ideal maker community to:

- Provide a sense of welcome and safety, particularly for people of color
- Provide a safe space to give and receive honest (and sometimes challenging) feedback about their businesses
- Serve as a hub of people and resources that can support small creative businesses as they grow

Makers cited both a lack of confidence and a lack of awareness of how to gain access to resources as key barriers to their growth. These responses stemmed from either feeling unwelcome in certain spaces or a perceived communications challenge whereby existing local business support programs, municipal programs, marketplace opportunities, and low interest funding or networking events are not reaching the full audience of makers who would best benefit from them.
While some local resources cater specifically to small businesses led by entrepreneurs whose first language is not English or to entrepreneurs of color, there remains a strong sense that the St. Louis region can do more to welcome and support makers in these categories. As makers work to grow their businesses, they are facing several key challenges related to marketing/visibility, financial resources, and back-office service expertise.

### Top Business Challenges

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<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of demand for product</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Few retail outlets available</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of ready to use production space</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support for non-tech businesses</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to raw materials</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to talent/skilled workers</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare as a barrier for employees</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation as a barrier for employees or customers</td>
<td>1%</td>
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### Barriers to Support

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<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>4%</td>
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Makers reach out to a wide variety of resources when they are seeking help with their business, and tend to focus most on those resources that are free—namely, people in their network or the internet.

Makers also reported that they are sometimes wary of the resources available. Programs and resources sometimes are not a fit for the needs of makers and are instead geared towards start-ups oriented towards the tech space, rather than handmade crafts. Additionally, programs are not always transparent about what will be required or expected of maker participants at the outset. In order for a program to be worth spending a maker’s scarce resources and time, they need to know that it will be valuable to them at the outset.

Who do you typically turn to for business-related questions or needs?

- Internet Search Engines: 60%
- An artist or entrepreneur collective (membership-based): 40%
- Local nonprofits who have programs that support small...: 39%
- Local business incubators: 29%
- An industry-specific professional development organization: 23%
- A co-working space: 19%
- Local government programs for small business development: 17%
- Local college programs and/or alumni networks: 13%
- The public library: 12%
- National Business League: 8%
- Local Chamber of Commerce: 3%
- Other: 2%
St. Louis has a long history of racial and economic divides. A particular theme among stakeholders were the systemic barriers faced by Black and Brown business owners, that prevent access to capital, knowledge of different resources, and the physical availability of resources and vendor opportunities in their own neighborhoods. Historically, community improvement efforts have not always engaged the people that would be most impacted by those efforts. This history has eroded trust between those with decision-making power and those beneficiaries at the grassroots level.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of deep engagement of local entrepreneurs in any effort to support or strengthen the maker community, whether by hiring participants to be a part of the program design, or proactively and deliberately asking them what they need. Follow through with meaningful action that benefits the makers is also important to sustain trust. Specifically, we heard:

- A lack of digital access, which can fall along racial and economic lines, prevents some makers from connecting to online resources or engaging in the increasingly important digital marketplace
- Language and cultural barriers prevent makers of color or non-English speaker makers from utilizing resources and/or feeling welcome
- Makers also observe that many resources have a lot of steps or requirements to participate in a given program, which can be a deterrent and, for non-English speakers, can prevent engagement entirely if forms and materials are not translated

“Makers, specifically Black and Brown or other makers of color, have always had to be innovative in their community. This is the same for how they run their businesses. Many makers don’t have the tools and resources to survive so they do what they can with what’s available within their space. If gatekeepers want to be more supportive they have to understand what the community of makers have created so far and support them in those spaces.”
Key statistics from the survey regarding business classification and growth stages suggest that there are three distinct profiles of makers. These conclusions were further supported by conversations with makers and stakeholders, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, The St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, and the Business Resource Association for Networking & Development (B.R.A.N.D.) of St. Louis.

Both production and sales are more often local to the St. Louis market. 28% identified their target market as being outside of St. Louis, whereas 38% are specifically targeting St. Louisans for their customer base.

The established business owner owns a craft business, either a few years old or several years mature. 37% of survey respondents self-identified as being in the mid-stage/growth phase with 6% identified as owning a mature business. These individuals have developed a business plan, can talk about who their typical customer is, and are preparing to scale their businesses with possible new hires, long-term business financing, or similar.

The start-up entrepreneur is either in the early phases of product development and business launch. They know what they want to sell, have a tentative target market, and may know of resources available to help them advance their business plans. However, they don’t feel like they qualify for entrepreneurship resources, and don’t know where to turn for help.

The hobbyist has a love for their craft and skill, and may have discovered that their craft could be an opportunity for a side hustle but the business concept is still in the “idea phase.” These individuals are not necessarily looking to create a formalized business model, and are not looking for this to become a sole source of income, but instead are looking to become part of the creative community, find resources to grow their skill, and to find ways to sell their product for supplemental income.
The makers represented by these three business profiles are creating jobs and supporting families:

- **257** Total Jobs Created
- **2.38** Average Household Size
- **37%** Support Dependents
- **45%** of Household Income from Craft Businesses (on average)

### Total Jobs by Type
- Full-time 92
- Part-time 85
- Contract Workers 80

(1.15 average full time jobs per business, 1.09 average part-time jobs per business, and 1.08 average contract positions filled per business)

Although this does not mean that what they earn is enough to adequately support their families.
SHIFT TO DIGITAL SALES IS A STEEP LEARNING CURVE

St. Louis makers are looking to expand the ways in which they market and sell online with COVID playing a vital role in accelerating the shift for many maker entrepreneurs. Survey results point to a desire to dramatically expand on their ecommerce presence with the most notable shift in thinking represented by a **21%** increase in desire to sell through an owned website and a **200%** increase in interest in using email marketing to grow their businesses. This trend is underscored by the fact that **92%** of sales are made directly to consumers with only **16%** of businesses selling wholesale to retailers.

**Marketing Channels**

![Marketing Channels Diagram]
Makers want to **expand** their sales through channels they are already using heavily for both marketing and sales—social media and their websites. Despite existing efforts to market through these channels, makers cite a difficulty “standing out” in the digital marketplace as a key challenge to growing their businesses. Makers are also seeking to have a larger presence at informal, periodic in-person sales opportunities like cultural events and festivals, weekly markets, pop-ups or trunk shows. Very few currently utilize a physical storefront (standalone or shared), though **26%** would like to have a standalone physical storefront one day.

Understandably, many makers are asking for support related to online sales **(33%)**, and marketing **(30%)**. But, non-digital connections are still important. Interviews and focus groups revealed that:

- While makers value social media as an important tool for gaining exposure, they found it insufficient without personal referrals, word-of-mouth, and community connections made through networking or attending community events.
- Makers also noted the power of sharing their personal story as a key strategy for setting their product apart, giving meaning behind it, and shining light on the skill and time that goes into handmade products.
Makers expressed a desire for resources related to financial literacy, marketing, support for working families (e.g., child care, adequate public transportation), and legal support (e.g. intellectual property protections, contracting), and survey respondents noted a particular desire to learn more about online sales and effective marketing.

As makers reflected on the resources that are currently available to them, some felt that programs often focus on basic/elementary skills and neglect to train makers on the more advanced ins-and-outs of running a business. Makers expressed a desire for a roadmap for early stages of product-based businesses, and to be provided with a realistic picture of what it means to be a small business owner. Given that nearly half of our survey responses identify as being “early start-ups,” this may be an area where local support efforts will want to focus.

### Top 10 Business Skills Gap

- Selling online: 33%
- Marketing: 20%
- Grant opportunities: 17%
- Business plans: 16%
- Identifying your target market: 14%
- Financial management: 14%
- Taxes and insurance: 12%
- Social media: 12%
- Advertising: 12%
- Time management: 10%

### I know where to go when I need help with my business

- Strongly Agree: 7%
- Agree: 35%
- Neutral: 25%
- Disagree: 19%
- Strongly Disagree: 15%
GRASSROOTS AND GRASS-TOPS: COLLABORATION, AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT & TRANSPARENCY ARE KEY

Whether among makers themselves or among the infrastructure organizations that support economic development in the region, stakeholders want to see collaboration and transparency. A chief critique of regional efforts tended to be a lack of trusted community engagement early in the process.

In some of our conversations with makers, frustration emerged that collaboration was sometimes seen as optional in the region, and that it was time to work together and ensure that economic development efforts truly supports the people on the ground.

This theme and need to rebuild trust emerged consistently throughout our conversations, who emphasized the importance of deep engagement of local makers in any effort to support or strengthen the maker community.
Although most maker businesses in St. Louis prioritize a direct to consumer (D2C) sales strategy, expansion to wholesale was a clear goal. Conversations with makers highlighted the feelings of both excitement and caution at the prospect of working with a major retailer to reach a broader customer base, primarily related to being able to keep pace with a sudden increase in demand for their products. In fact, five of the top ten business challenges noted by survey participants relate directly to operational scale including a focus on raw material, production space, and workforce.

Makers report both exciting and challenging relationships with large vendors. These relationships are seen as a great opportunity to increase visibility and sales, but makers also shared that they need more support and transparency from these major retailers. Large retailers don’t necessarily demonstrate an understanding of the realities of small maker businesses, and tend not to make accommodations for makers when setting up a business relationship, particularly related to a maker’s ability to quickly meet increased demand for their product.
"We really look forward to meeting other creatives and makers, learning from them, and being a resource to others. We want the world to know that Pure Vibes was created with the community in mind. We are a worker-owned cooperative taking charge of being socially responsible for the people, community, and planet by creating essential wellness products designed so you live and feel well.
—Tiffany Welsey

Tiffany Snow Wesley created Pure Vibes in 2013 to create natural products that were gluten-free.
Where We Go From Here

SYSTEM COORDINATION
Stakeholders described a desire for greater systems coordination when seeking to support the maker business landscape, specifically developing a strong awareness of existing efforts through ecosystem mapping, avoiding duplication of efforts, seeing collaboration as a "must," engaging multiple sectors, and always checking efforts to ensure that they ultimately benefit makers. Ultimately, the authentic engagement of makers themselves is of key importance.

One opportunity Nest has pursued in other Makers United cities and would consider along side local St. Louis support organizations is a local branding initiative which is a pioneering approach to economic development that the Urban Manufacturing Alliance developed and has been piloting alongside Nest with our Makers United Birmingham community. A local branding initiative creates an interconnected ecosystem of manufacturers, consumers, government agencies, and community organizations, in order to lift up urban manufacturing—including maker solo-entrepreneurs, artisans and craftspeople, and small-batch manufacturers. This approach both expands and complements the Resource Guide and the ecosystem mapping done to date through Makers United.

As part of our next steps in St. Louis, we will explore the applicability and fit of a solution like this.

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS & PROVIDING CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT
A particular theme among stakeholders were the systemic barriers faced by Black and Brown business owners, that prevent access to capital, knowledge of different resources, and the physical availability of resources and vendor opportunities in their communities. Stakeholders described Black and Brown makers as feeling unwelcome or excluded from some opportunities, and generally facing more challenges than their more privileged counterparts. Stakeholders further cited several key barriers faced by maker businesses, including:

- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of time to manage the various aspects of their businesses
- High cost of business support

The next phases of Nest's Makers United program are designed to address these needs and include:

COVID-19 SUPPORT
In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating effects on unemployment in cities like St. Louis, Nest has adapted our core programming to support makers and their businesses as they continue to weather this storm. Our discrete COVID-19 Artisan Impact Fund helps makers sustain their businesses by reducing the financial burden and thread of unemployment for small businesses and individual workers in two specific ways.
The first facet of the COVID-19 Artisan Impact Fund is the opportunity to equip makers to produce high-quality and/or medical-grade personal protective equipment (PPE) which Nest “purchases” but that the artisan business donates to front line workers or high risk community members. This directly places high-quality PPE into the hands of those who need it most, while simultaneously equipping maker businesses with the capital they need for materials and labor which allow for stable operational flow.

The second facet of the COVID-19 Artisan Impact Fund is product financing for canceled or indefinitely delayed orders. As retailers and stores shuttered and slowed operations, many canceled or delayed orders that were already in production by makers strapping micro and small businesses with excess inventory, threatening their financial health and positive cash flow. Nest is providing one-time product financing for these orders and products are then donated to important local essential workers from teachers to grocery store employees.

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOPS
In response to what we have heard from St. Louis makers, Nest will co-design and lead a series of capacity building workshops focused on a core set of the identified needs. As we have done in other Makers United cities, Nest will prioritize a collaborative and constituent-first approach to workshop design and lean on its multilateral partnerships (e.g., Parsons School of Design and the CFDA, our expert network of industry fellows,) as well as brand and retail partners (West Elm, Swarovski, Hermès and others) to ensure the effort is drawing the strongest expertise while also maximizing engagement and overall support.

These are namely business financing & access to capital and digital media support. We will also partner with local partners such as Rung for Women, local chambers of commerce, and the International Institute.

These will largely be conducted via Zoom as the COVID pandemic continues to pose health concerns for in-person gathering. However, small groups may be assembled with masks and appropriate social distancing for those where technology support will be necessary. A transportation plan will be created with all participants to ensure that this is not a barrier to access and translators will be available upon request.

LOCAL RESOURCE CONNECTION
Makers United reveals the missing links between makers and local business development resources and seeks to bridge those gaps by engaging community stakeholders and city government in the program design and implementation. By bringing all parties to the same table, Makers United ensures makers have visibility of—and access to—the economic resources they need to grow, strengthen, and sustain their businesses. In addition to including local resources and stakeholders in the capacity building workshop design, Nest will provide all makers in the program with a resource index that outlines available programs, funding opportunities, and training support available to maker businesses.

SOURCING SUPPORT
Opportunities for marketing and increased visibility are important for maker businesses. While the makers in St. Louis value social media as an important tool for gaining exposure, they found it insufficient without personal referrals, word-of-mouth, and community connections made through networking or attending community events. Makers also noted the power of sharing their personal story as a key strategy for setting their product apart, giving meaning behind it, and shining light on the skill and time that goes into handmade products.
Makers United programming concludes by helping to elevate market access opportunities to showcase participating makers’ products and goods. The opportunity invites the community to connect and celebrate the unique crafts being created in St. Louis’s own backyard. Additionally, Nest creates a local sourcing guide which features each program participant, samples of their products, and contact information. These guides are distributed to local stores, hotels, and tourism departments to promote interest in locally made goods. In the wake of COVID-19, Nest is considering ways to host these opportunities virtually in cities with limitations on in-person gatherings.

Beyond the local market access support, program participants are considered for exclusive sourcing opportunities with Nest’s growing network of national brands and retailers. These opportunities have the potential to generate large product orders for program participants and expose them to new national and multinational consumers. These include (but are not limited to): West Elm, Madewell, Etsy and Amazon.
Acknowledgments

To conduct an immersive landscape scan of St. Louis’s maker economy, Nest partnered with our on-the-ground, local implementation team who live and work in St. Louis and without whom this report would not be possible. And finally, we are grateful for the St. Louis makers and artists participating themselves. We are in awe of your passion, resilience, and creativity in the way you have adapted to the changing economic environment and are grateful to be partnering with you through this program.
To learn more about Nest’s Maker United Program, please visit buildanest.org