



# The Handwork Landscape: Chicago, Illinois

Nest's Makers United Project  
Issued December 2022





# Contents

---

Introduction .....	3
Meet Our Local Team .....	4
Approach and Methodology .....	5
Chicago's Maker Landscape .....	7
Survey Respondent Demographics .....	8
Who is a Maker? .....	9
Wide Variety of Crafts .....	11
Existing Resources for Chicago Creatives & Entrepreneurs .....	12
Accessing Resources .....	13
Biggest Challenges to Growing Maker Businesses .....	14
Key Findings .....	15
Grow Your Craft Business Workshop .....	29
Where We Go From Here .....	30
Acknowledgments .....	32

Front Cover Photos

(Top Left) Photo Courtesy of Bird Trouble | Photographer: Ryan Segedi

(Middle) Photo Courtesy of Limba Gal Jewelry | Photographer: Meagan Shuptar

(Top Right) Photo Courtesy of Lin Bader Design

(Bottom) Photo Courtesy of A'nysha Aileen of Hola Adios Studio Photo Credit: Kambua Chema Photography

# Introduction

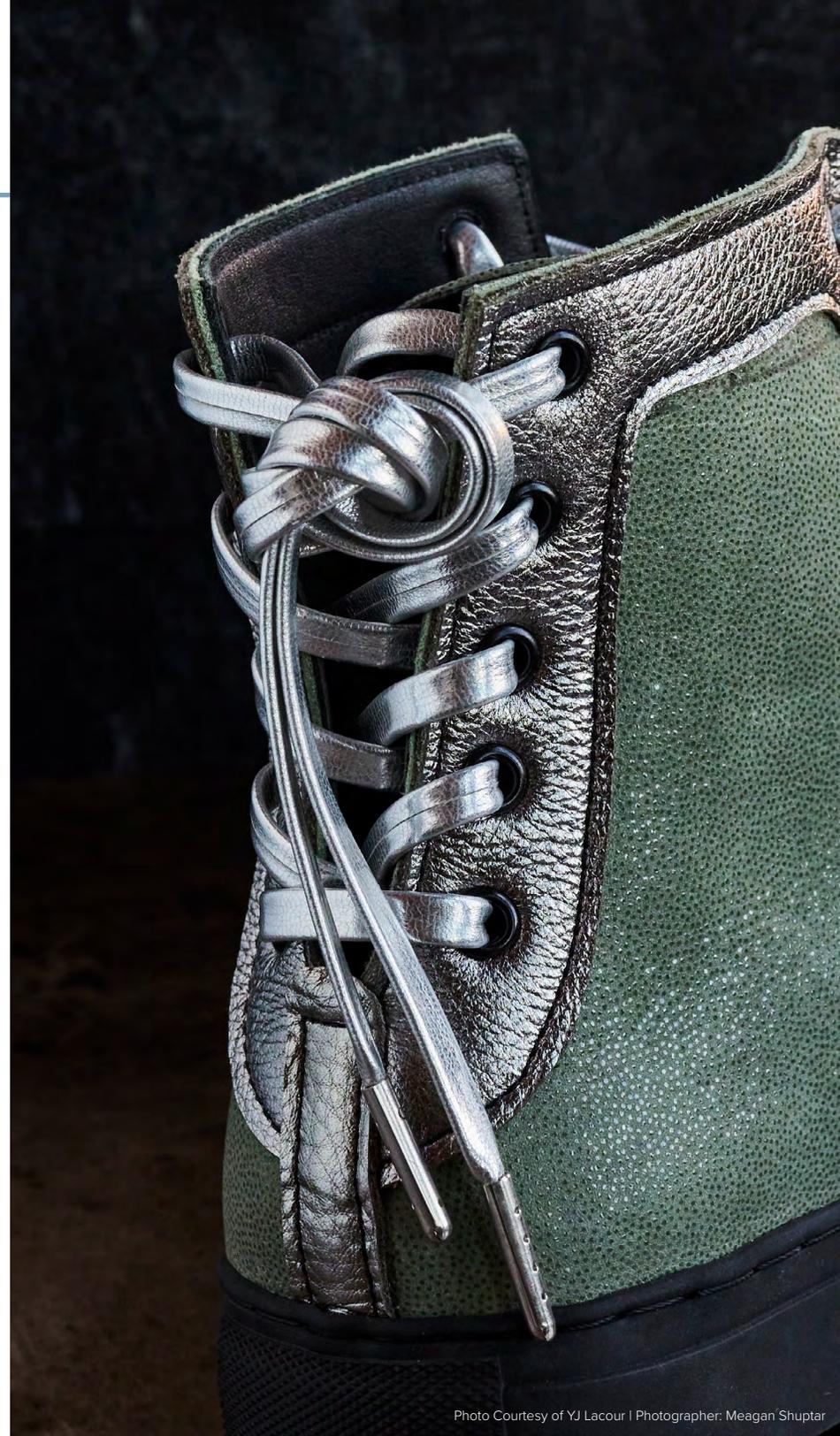
---

By prioritizing support for historically under-resourced groups and strengthening their local ecosystem, Makers United is building an inclusive community of US-based maker-entrepreneurs and craftspeople. We do this by equipping makers with free business resources, educational programming, local partnerships, and market access opportunities to scale, grow, and thrive.

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.

To conduct this landscape review, Nest collaborated with Daylight, a small Chicago-based systemic design studio that works with changemakers to amplify their power for systems change. Daylight connected with people across Chicago's maker ecosystem, including artists, creative entrepreneurs, community leaders, and business support organizations, to identify ways Nest can leverage their resources to unlock opportunities for makers throughout the city to grow their businesses and create sustainable livelihoods.

The following report outlines our findings, and offers a foundation for strategic interventions to expand opportunities for maker entrepreneurs in Chicago.



# Meet Our Local Team

---



**Rae Perez** (she/her), design strategist, applies her architecture training through design research and participatory design. At Daylight, Rae leads co-design processes that gather diverse stakeholders to shape new processes, programs, frameworks, and strategies together. She has designed and facilitated strategy sessions with Design Trust Chicago, the Forest Preserves of Cook County, Shared Use Mobility Center, and CityFi. She currently serves on the board of the Chicago Tool Library.



**Ketzel Feasley** (they/he), impact researcher, Ketzel uses their background in mixed methods research, community-centered program design, implementation, and evaluation to empower communities and help their clients get the fullest possible understanding of complex systems. At Daylight, Ketzel leads robust input gathering, capacity building, and strategic efforts with the Regional Transportation Authority, The Nature Conservancy, and Illinois' Water Justice Coalition, among others.



**Lyndon Valicenti** (she/her), founding principal, has nearly 20 years of cross-sector experience leading strategy, policy, and research initiatives on social and environmental issues from climate resilience to equitable community development. At Daylight, Lyndon has led inclusive design and strategy processes for numerous partners during critical moments of transformation, including The Chicago Community Trust, national nonprofit KABOOM!, and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. She is a proud board member of PODER, a Chicago United for Equity (CUE) Fellow, and a New Leaders Council (Chicago) Fellow.



**Stef Skills** (she/her) is an artist, educator, and activist with a passion for public art. In her nearly 30-year career, she has established herself as a prominent female voice and leader in the local and international graffiti arts community. Stef's public art and commissioned works can be found throughout Chicago as well as in New York, Pittsburgh, London, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Miami, Visalia (CA), Barcelona, Mexico City, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, where she has also held residencies and been a featured artist in gallery shows, panels, exhibitions, and festivals. Stef partnered with Daylight to facilitate a focus group and assist with outreach to Chicago artists.

# Approach and Methodology

---

The Daylight team used several channels to unearth a variety of perspectives on the current state of Chicago’s maker ecosystem. The goal was to understand what challenges makers face in growing their businesses, what barriers they face in accessing resources, and what kinds of resources that would be most transformative for them. To make this report, data was collected through the following channels:

CHANNEL	TARGET AUDIENCE	DESCRIPTION
Survey	Makers	Nest’s Makers United Landscape Survey (N=112) was an in-depth online questionnaire asking makers about themselves, their business, the barriers they face, and how they use resources.
Community Discussions*	Makers	Each of 4 community discussions had 4-6 participants (N=20) was designed to reveal makers’ needs, challenges in the industry, availability of resources and the limitations of those resources, and uncovering opportunities for additional support.
Interviews	Ecosystem Partners	Semi-structured interviews (N=8) were conducted with people either representing organizations that support makers or highly connected in an artist community—including government agencies and business support organizations—to understand their perspective on offering support to makers and systemic barriers.
Resource Mapping	N/A	The resulting database includes 93 organizations and resources for Chicago makers to create a more complete picture of available resources in Chicago. Nest published this as a resource for Chicago makers to discover and access existing local resources.
External Sources	N/A	<a href="#">U.S. Census Bureau</a> <a href="#">SMU DataArts 2019 Arts Vibrancy Index Report</a> <a href="#">NextStreet’s 2019 Report: Assessing Chicago’s Small Business Ecosystem</a>

\* All community discussion participants also filled out the landscape survey

# Approach and Methodology: Outreach, Design and Analysis

---

To ensure that our review centered a diverse range of makers and reflected the diversity of Chicago's maker landscape, the outreach, facilitation, and interviews were designed to be as equitable as possible.

## **OUTREACH**

In-person outreach for the survey, interviews, and community discussions was done at markets and community hubs. The team specifically targeted community hubs that served diverse populations or that served marginalized populations who may face unique and/or additional barriers to thriving compared to other populations. Virtual outreach and further communication was done through a variety of modalities (email, social media, etc.), depending on the maker's preference.

## **COMMUNITY DISCUSSION DESIGN**

Community discussions were conducted online and offered at a variety of times to be accessible to as many makers as possible. All participants were compensated for their time at the same rate as the research team. Each community discussion had participants who were at different business stages, used different mediums, and had a diversity of identities.

## **SYNTHESIS**

All community discussions and interviews were documented with detailed notes. To synthesize the feedback received from ecosystem partners and makers into key themes, all notes were manually coded and uploaded to a virtual whiteboard where inputs were grouped using inductive reasoning. Groups were then sorted into larger themes. This synthesis was done concurrently with survey data analysis, but the two datasets were not compared until completion to prevent any data skew. Once both analyses were complete, the team compared the findings which were overwhelmingly complementary.

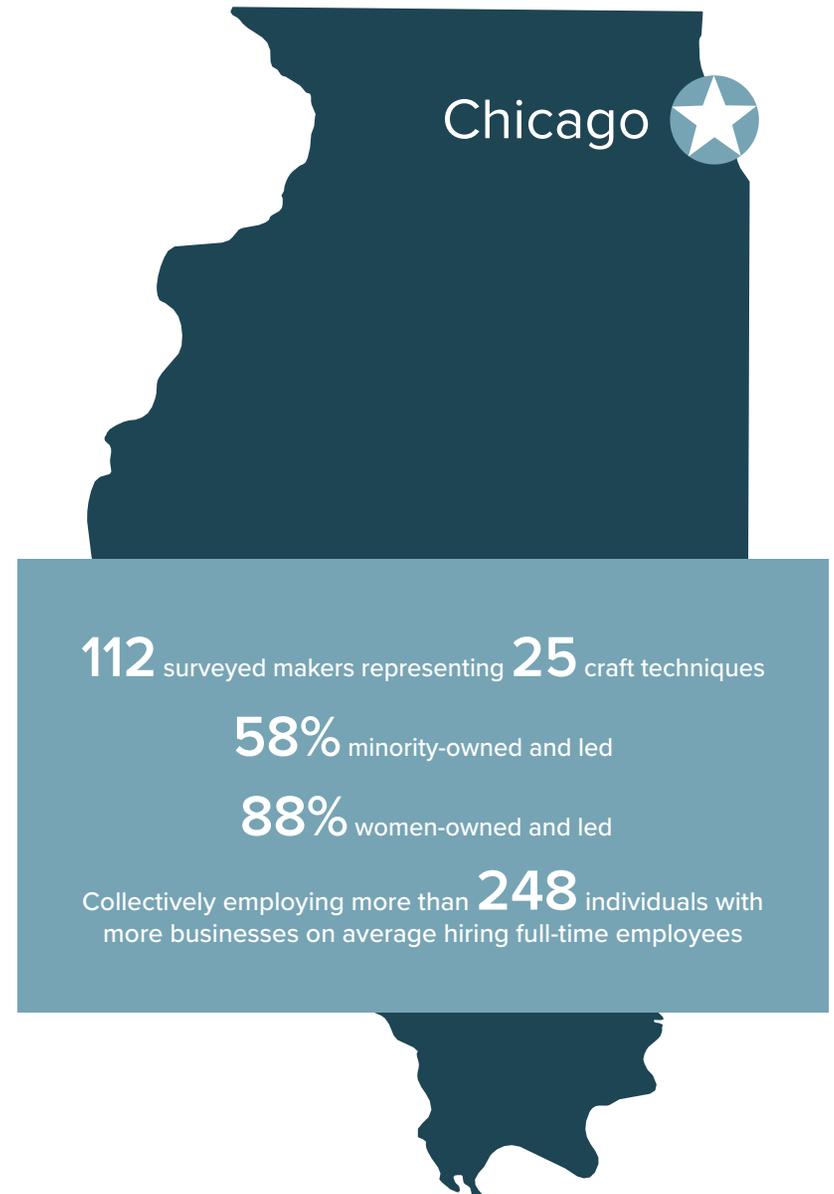


# Chicago's Maker Landscape

In Chicago, a robust arts and culture scene meets a thriving entrepreneurship community, with a host of resources for small businesses and community connections that run deep and ranked in the top 20 Arts-Vibrant Large Communities in the US by [SMU DataArts](#). Chicago is home to deeply embedded arts institutions and has strong public and foundation arts support. The city's entrepreneurial history has transformed it from an agricultural and transportation hub to a city known for its manufacturing, finance, and tech industries.

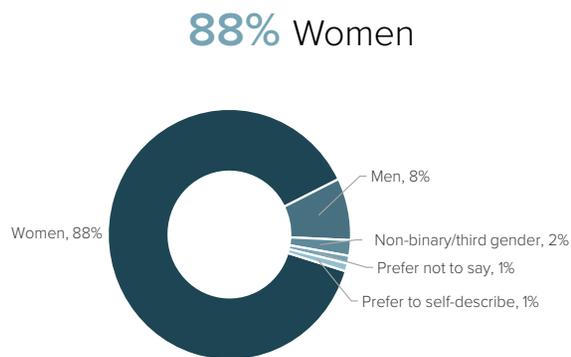
While Chicago's assets make it a city ripe for a maker revolution, makers still face significant barriers to growing their businesses. A [2019 report](#) by Community Reinvestment Fund and Next Street conducted a comprehensive analysis of Chicago's small business ecosystem and found "significant disparities in the number of business establishments, relative performance and growth of Small to Medium-Sized Businesses, access to critical support services and capital resources, and employment opportunities along racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic lines."

While 82% of makers we surveyed would describe Chicago as a great place to start a creative business, there is a significant resource gap for creatives hoping to make a living off their work. While fine artists will find no shortage of support through residencies, grants and galleries and small business owners have access to all kinds of resources through their neighborhood chamber of commerce or Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), there are very few places where maker entrepreneurs can find support that is tailored to their unique needs.

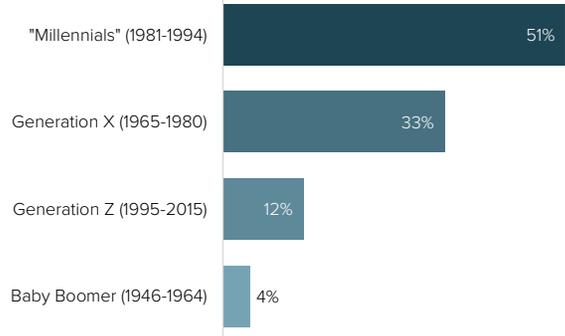


# Survey Respondent Demographics

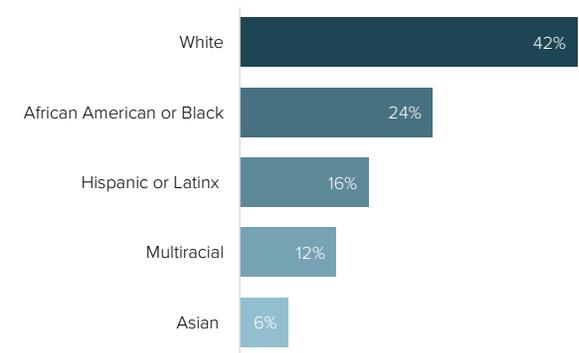
Overall respondents were slightly more likely to be Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and slightly older than Chicago overall. They were substantially more likely to have a college degree, be women, or have a disability when compared to the general population. [\(source\)](#)



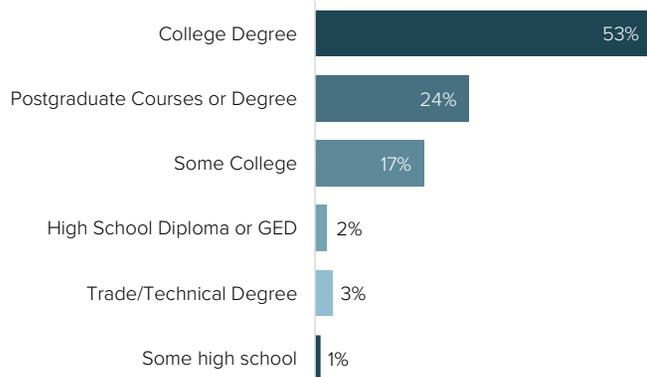
Average age: 38 years  
with **33%** supporting dependents



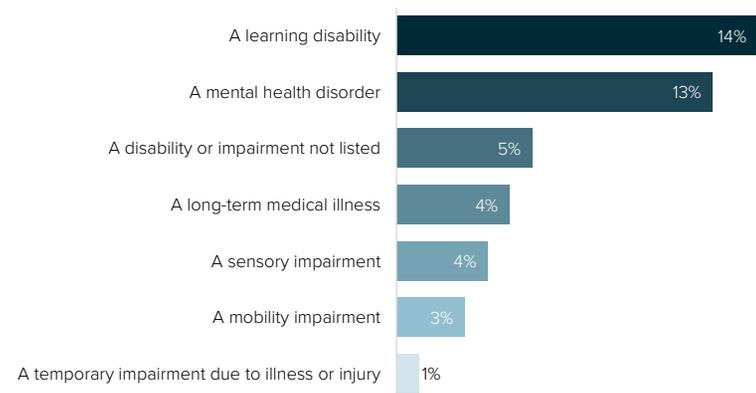
**58% BIPOC**



**77%** have a college degree



**32%** identify with a disability or impairment



# Who is a Maker?

---

Nest defines a maker as anyone who makes and sells creative, handcrafted goods—from soaps to handwoven textiles. Through our conversations with makers and ecosystem partners, we developed a nuanced perspective on makers as people who sit at the intersection of art and entrepreneurship, and navigate the tension between fine art and craft businesses. For many makers, their work is deeply personal, an expression of their creativity and artistry. The personal often bleeds into the professional when they discuss the branding, pricing, and production of their work.

- ▶ Makers identifying as fine artists have different goals and challenges than makers identifying as artisans and craftspeople
- ▶ The resource landscape in Chicago tends to focus on fine artists or small business entrepreneurs, with a lack of resources for makers who fall somewhere in between
- ▶ Many makers want to stay close to their work and only seek to outsource the administrative elements of their businesses which makes it challenging to scale



Its multilayered, it doesn't always feel artistically considerate or focused, it isn't catering to or relevant to artists because artists needs are different from other businesses.—Ecosystem Partner and Maker

A word cloud of professional labels in various shades of blue and teal. The words are: Creative, Entrepreneur, Maker, Crafter, Artist, Founder, and Activist. 'Maker' and 'Artist' are the largest and most prominent words.

There was no consensus on the most preferred professional label in the survey. White respondents were more likely than BIPOC respondents to prefer the label artist (41% and 27% respectively), although it was ranked highly by all groups.

# Maker Profile: Lin Bader Design

---

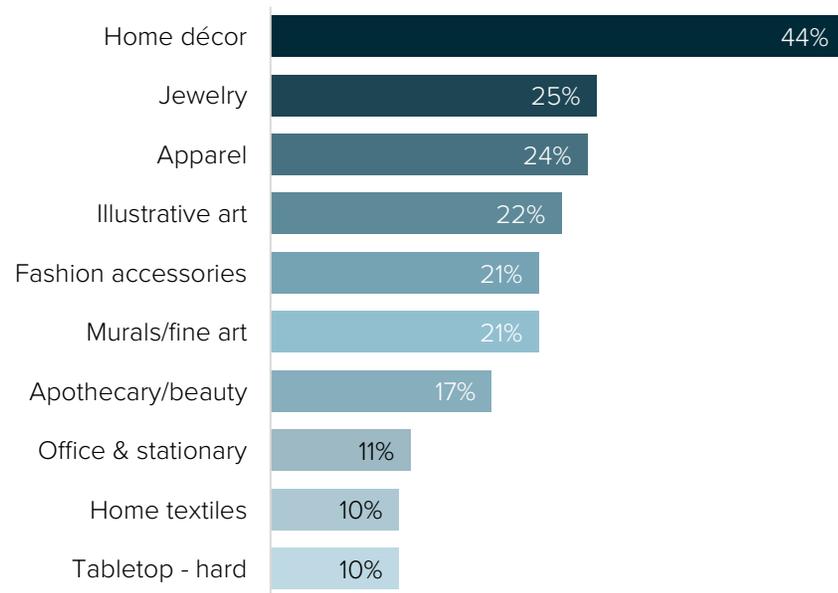
“ *Inspired by natural movements: the flowing of all things dynamic, the growing of all things alive, gathering and spreading of the elements, my designs aim to regain our connection to all the beauty around us. It has been an empowering journey sketching and capturing the extraordinary splendor of nature on paper, and channeling that energy into a jewelry line that’s organic, naturally imperfect and alive.*—Lin Bader

Lin Bader Design is a woman-owned and AAPI-owned fine jewelry studio based in Chicago. Utilizing ancient jewelry making techniques, each piece is handmade from solid 22k, 18k, 14k gold, fine silver and 935 silver.

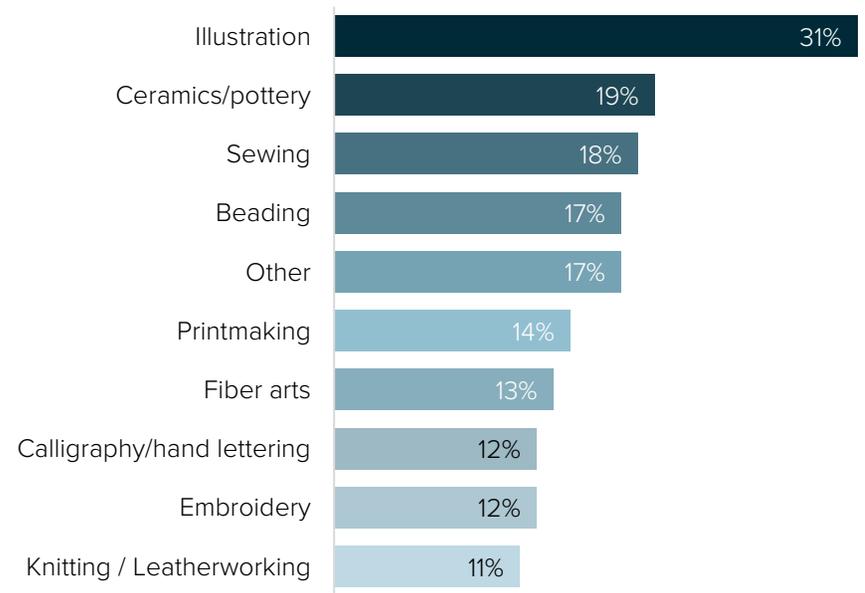


# Wide Variety of Crafts

## Top Ten Product Categories



## Top Ten Craft Techniques



# Existing Resources for Chicago Creatives & Entrepreneurs

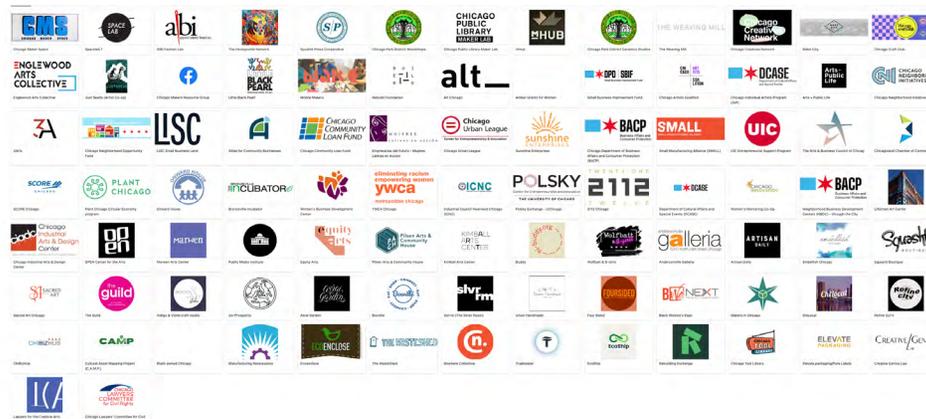
Chicago has a robust landscape of resources to support artists and small business owners. Nest's Chicago resource directory includes 93 organizations offering resources and opportunities relevant to makers (pictured below). It is important to note that there are many incubators across the city for startups and small businesses, though none that specifically serve makers in an early stage of business. Make City is an excellent and unique resource for maker businesses in their growth stage.

## FEATURED RESOURCE

"ICNC's 416,000 square-foot manufacturing incubator, Make City, located in four buildings on Chicago's Near West Side, is one of the oldest and largest business incubators in the world. It houses over 110 new and growing companies across a diverse set of industries including food/beverage, light manufacturing, professional services, and apparel. Our goal remains to assist companies move toward long-term success."

There are business support organizations offering generalized business resources, including mentorship, advising, cohort models, workshops, and accelerator programs; however, any resources targeted towards makers specifically are sporadic and hard to find. There is no central hub for makers to gather and find out about resources. Several directories exist, including lists of BIPOC owned businesses (Refine Collective), cultural assets (C.A.M.P), business development resources (Chi Biz Hub), but many are out of date or not widely recognized or used.

While there are maker spaces across the city, many are youth-focused, and of those geared towards adults, very few are on the South and West sides. Other resources for artists, creatives and entrepreneurs include community and network organizations, residencies and small business grants from private and public funds. Arts Centers are also critical hubs for community, learning, and information.



To view our Resource Directory, click [here](#)

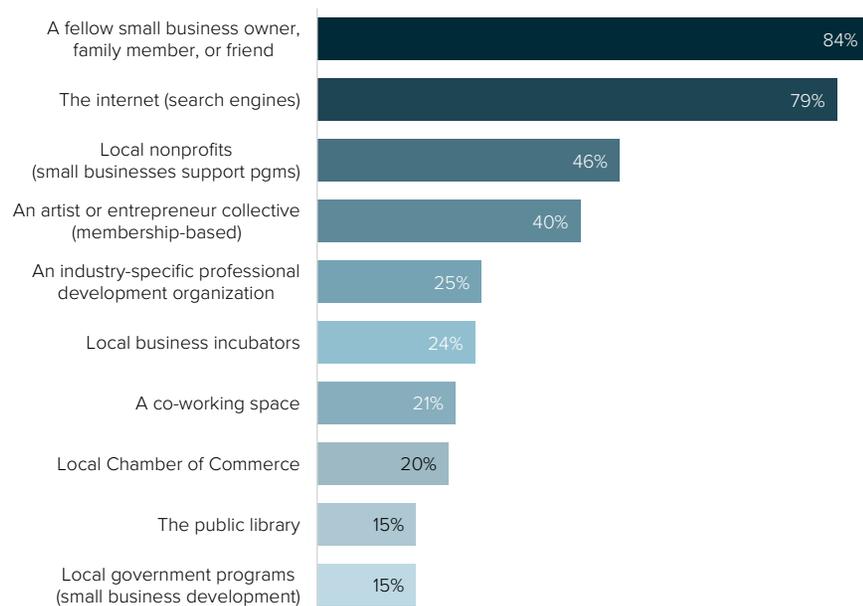
# Accessing Resources

While there is a wide array of resources available to Chicago makers, the majority rely on their own networks for questions and needs.



There’s no clearing house, it’s like a tower of babel.—Maker

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

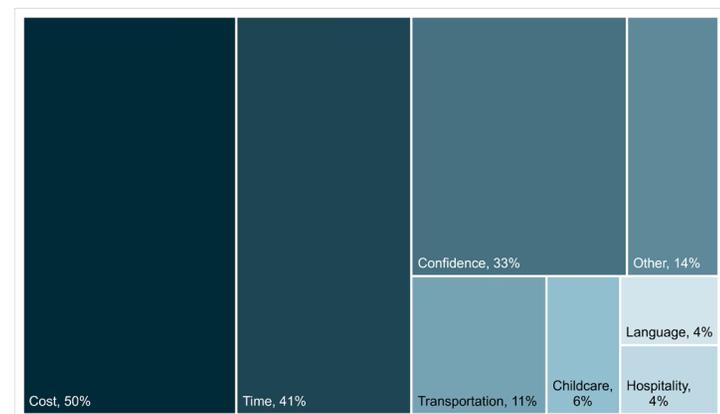


## BARRIERS TO ACCESSING RESOURCES

For existing resources, some of the general barriers makers described include:

- ▶ Many resources for makers are only available to students or young people. The average maker who responded to our survey was 38
- ▶ Many makers described existing resources to be unhelpful and inefficient to use, especially those that are geared towards generalized small business support
- ▶ A lack of respect for a maker’s work
- ▶ Language that is too business-oriented and unresponsive to the unique elements of creative products
- ▶ Makers described resources as often being stodgy or having “multi-level marketing vibes” making the resource unappealing
- ▶ The most impactful resources are often cost-prohibitive
- ▶ There are so many resources, it can be hard to sift through which ones will be most relevant

## When you’ve wanted to reach out to one of the resources for support, what has stopped you?

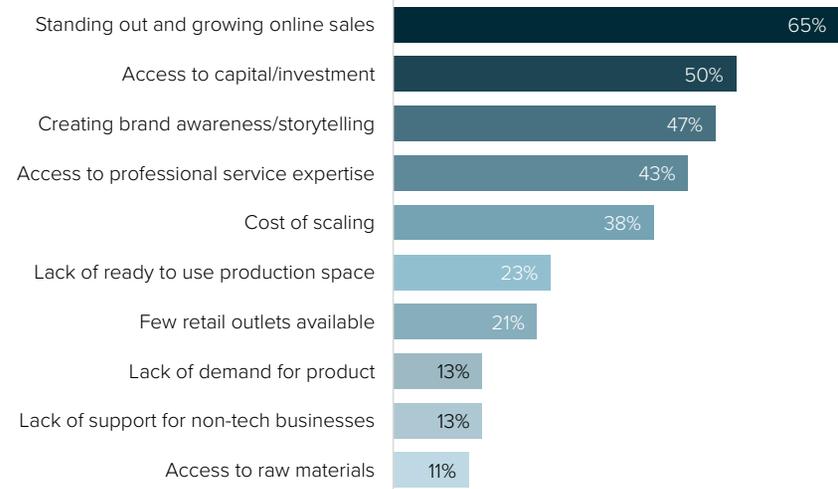


# Biggest Challenges to Growing Maker Businesses

The business needs that emerged from community discussions and interviews largely mirrored those makers described as top of mind in our Chicago landscape survey. While makers described a wide array of needs related to building their own business acumen, it was clear throughout our research that the most effective resources offer access to capital and sales opportunities in addition to business services.

The [2019 report on Chicago's small business ecosystem](#) also highlighted that “For all businesses, top reported needs were generally consistent and included access to funding, access to contract opportunities, access to high-performing employees, managing cash flow, and access to affordable commercial space. However, businesses owned by people of color tended to prioritize categories related to revenue generation and cost containment (e.g., access to funding, contract opportunities, and affordable commercial space), more than other respondents.”

## What are the biggest challenges you experience related to growing your small business?



# Key Findings

---

Based on our research, we identified these as Chicago makers' top five needs:

- 1 | Market access:** Makers have a hard time being strategic about their participation in markets and are seeking more wholesale opportunities.
- 2 | Access to capital:** Makers want to build their businesses to become their primary source of income, but face challenges in accessing capital for their businesses and managing cash flow.
- 3 | Space and tools:** Access to affordable spaces to experiment, produce, and store work is limited, especially on the South and West sides of Chicago.
- 4 | Business development support:** Many makers, especially those who are artists first and entrepreneurs second, lack the time and/or skills to manage the business side of things.
- 5 | Network expansion:** Makers have a strong sense of community, but sometimes struggle to break into new networks and effectively leverage their connections.

In the following pages we explain the challenges associated with each of these key findings, as well as the respective resource gaps and barriers.

**Resource gaps** outline specific resources that do not yet exist in Chicago that makers and ecosystem partners identified as having high impact potential and **barriers** are challenges faced by makers that make existing resources ineffective.



# 1

## MARKET ACCESS

Makers have a hard time being strategic about their participation in markets and are seeking more wholesale opportunities.

- ▶ More than half of respondents said that they were most excited about finding out about markets and sales opportunities through Nest
- ▶ BIPOC respondents were more likely to sell their goods through informal networks like social media or through friends and family than white respondents and had more interest in growing their market and storefront sales
- ▶ Many makers expressed interest in wholesale opportunities to provide more steady cash flow, but had difficulty breaking into wholesale



Markets just take so much time and energy and are so unreliable. I want more reliability and cashflow, less month to month.—Maker

### What aspects of Nest’s programming are you most interested in?

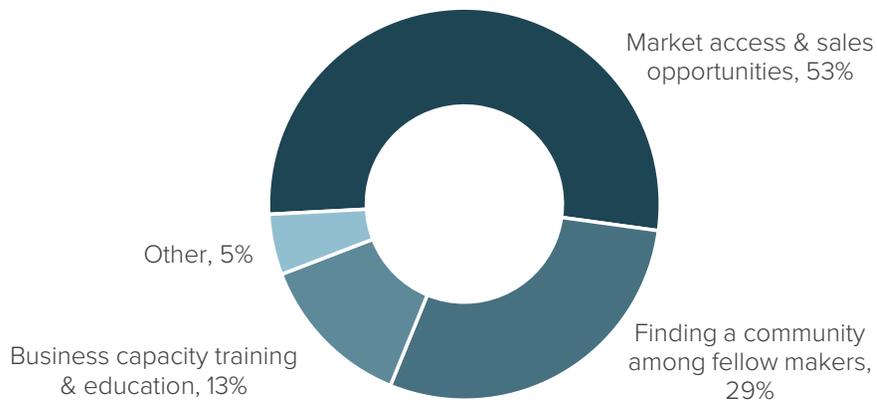


Photo Courtesy of Depart with Art | Photographer: Meagan Shuptar

## MARKET ACCESS: RESOURCE GAPS AND BARRIERS

### RESOURCE GAPS

- ▶ Regularly updated directory of markets with easily accessible applications
- ▶ A consistent popup site like Seattle's [Pike Place Market](#) with lockers to store your goods and equipment
- ▶ A place for makers to affordably borrow equipment like tables, tents, and displays for markets
- ▶ The Hatchery, a food and beverage incubator in Chicago, holds an event that gathers 30-50 buyers from all the grocery stores in Chicagoland to expand access for select business owners selling consumer packaged goods. A similar resource for maker businesses could expand wholesale access

### BARRIERS

- ▶ Many markets have predatory practices like high application fees and opaque criteria
- ▶ It can be hard for makers to identify if a market will be worth it to attend ahead of time or even for months after attending
- ▶ Some markets are driven by more conventional businesses as opposed to maker or artist driven
- ▶ Some markets have many sellers in one product category, leading to unpredictably high competition



I struggle sifting through the noise, there appear to be so many directions to go, and in reality there aren't so many options.—Maker



Photo Courtesy of DaniV Art | Photographer: Ryan Segedi

## 2

## ACCESS TO CAPITAL

**80%** want their craft to become their primary income

**21%** of household income comes from their craft

Makers want to build their businesses to become their primary source of income, but face challenges in accessing capital for their businesses and managing cash flow.

- ▶ Half of makers noted access to capital as one of the largest barriers they face to growing their business
- ▶ Makers and ecosystem partners alike noted that grants often require more work than is feasible for small businesses to utilize effectively
- ▶ Makers often face a tension between needing to produce a good in advance and facing cash flow challenges
- ▶ Many makers voiced uncertainty in deciding how to address capital challenges
- ▶ Cost was the most commonly noted barrier to accessing resources for makers
- ▶ Some makers noted that access to capital had prevented them from meeting demand for their product
- ▶ Marginalized makers have decreased access to capital compared to non-marginalized makers



Makers don't have time, many of them don't have money and they need access to capital to grow.—Ecosystem Partner



Photo Courtesy of Hola Adios Studio | Photographer: Ryan Segedi

## ACCESS TO CAPITAL: RESOURCE GAPS AND BARRIERS

### RESOURCE GAPS

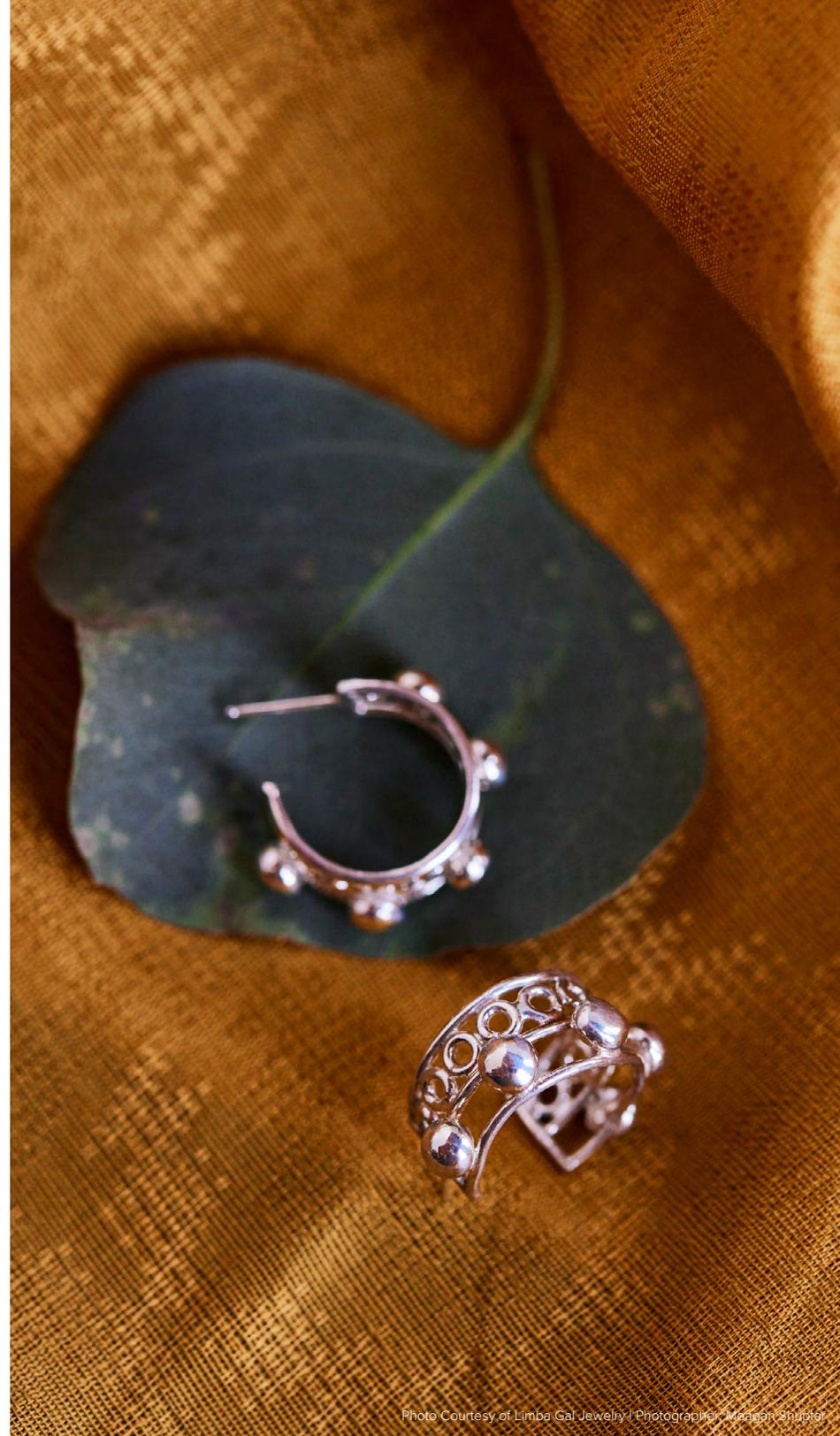
- ▶ Bulk buying consortium to get materials at a better price
- ▶ Micro-lending programs to alleviate cash flow challenges
- ▶ Grants specifically for makers
- ▶ Workshops for applying to grants

### BARRIERS

- ▶ Long grant applications
- ▶ Grant applications with unrealistic criteria
- ▶ Applications that aren't translated into multiple languages



If I could buy in larger quantities, all of my costs would go down.—Maker



# Maker Profile: Jean Williams Studio

---

“ *During the 2022 holiday season, I called on friends—other jewelry makers; candlemakers; painters; small business friends, including some of the Makers United Chicago bunch and a traveling bookstore; and more—to join me in an impromptu holiday pop-up shop. The epitome of what it means to be connected to a creative community is how quickly and efficiently we collaborated to organize and successfully carry out the event, including sponsored hosting from the venue, Urbanspace Chicago, a local food hall.—Jean Williams*

Jean Williams Studio produces hand-crafted, eclectic goods encompassing jewelry and homewares, using precious and non-precious materials that can include repurposed or found objects.



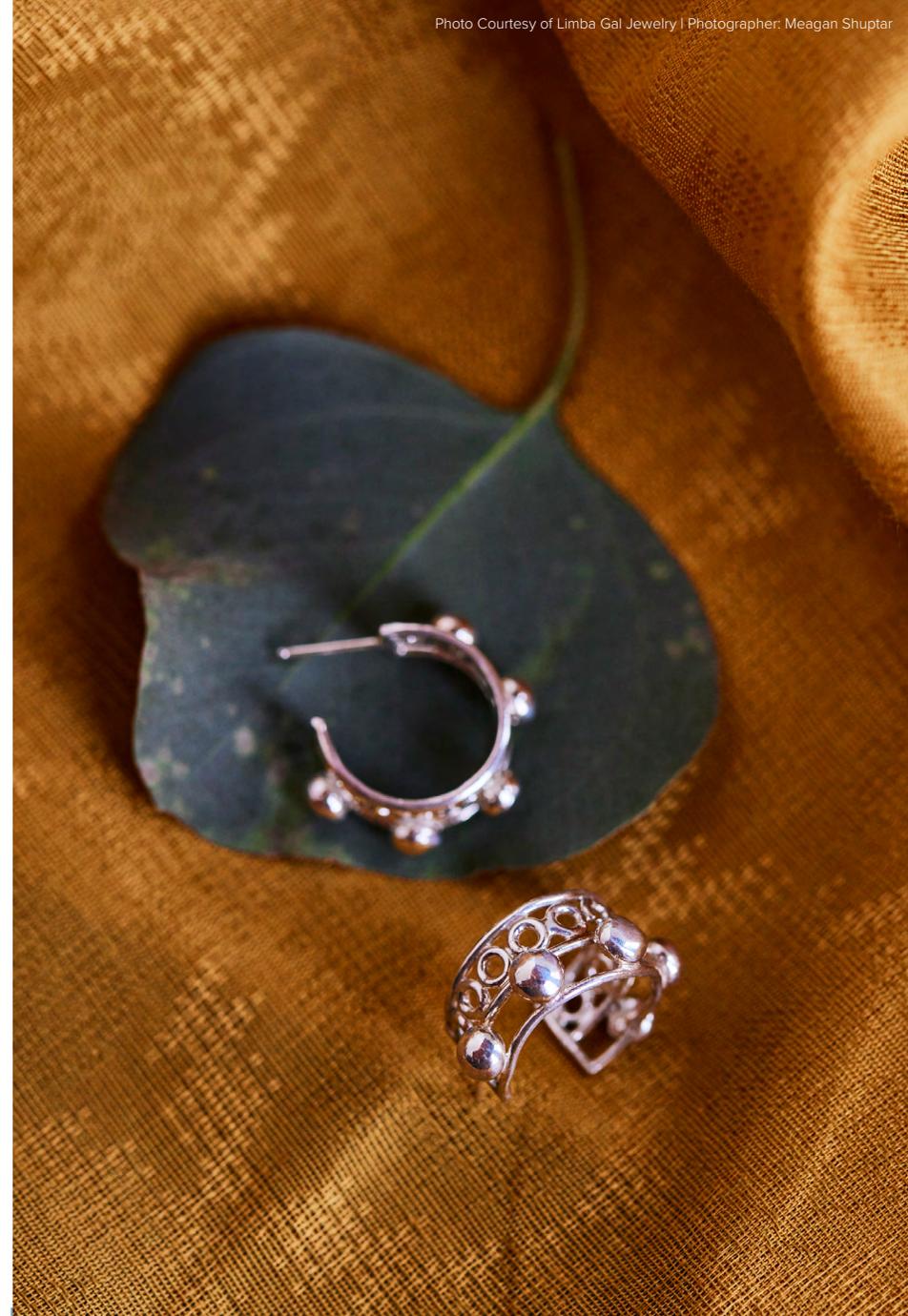
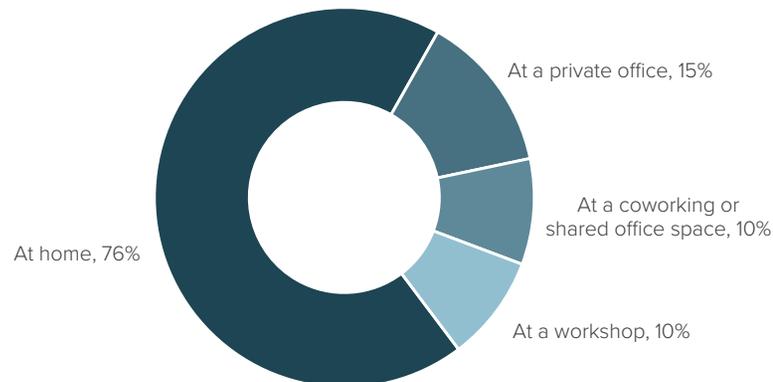
## 3

## SPACE AND TOOLS

Access to affordable spaces to experiment, produce, and store work is limited, especially on the South and West sides of Chicago.

- ▶ 1 in 4 of the makers we surveyed moved their workspaces back into their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic
- ▶ Makers described wanting space to make their craft, to build community, and to host events like pop-ups and classes
- ▶ Moving into a studio/dedicated space was a financial stressor for many makers who work outside of their home
- ▶ Limitations on space, tools, and materials limit what makers can make and how their businesses can grow
- ▶ Working from home can lead to isolation and a diminished sense of community for makers
- ▶ Because Chicago is a geographically large city, factoring in travel to resources or events can be an additional burden to makers
- ▶ 91% of makers surveyed make their products locally

## Where Makers Work



I would like to be able to go from making a small piece of jewelry to doing installation size things. Just want to do self exploration which is hard in such a small space.—Maker

# MAKERSPACES IN CHICAGOLAND

Chicagoland Makerspaces

Map covers a wide variety of "makerspaces" from hackerspaces to digital media labs located in everything from K-12 schools to 36,532 views  
Published on March 10  
[SHARE](#) [EDIT](#)

## Makerspaces

- Bit Space
- Chicago Industrial Arts & Design Center
- Fox.Build: Makerspace, Hackerspace, Cowor...
- MAKE! Chicago
- ... 4 more

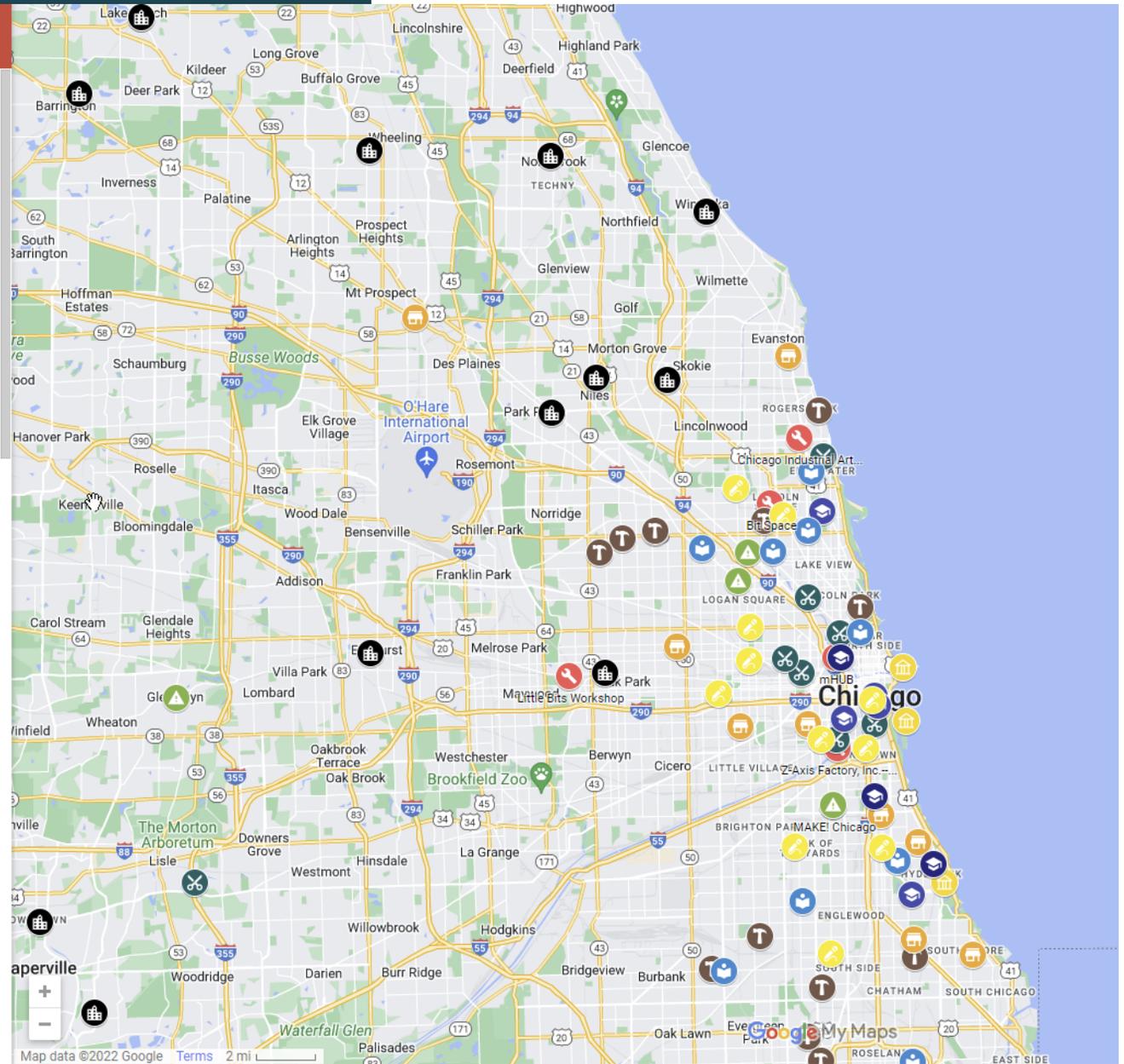
## Hackerspaces

- Pumping Station: One
- South Side Hackerspace - Chicago
- Workshop 88
- SpaceLab1
- FreeGeek Chicago, NFP

## Library Makerspaces

- Harold Washington Library Center—Maker L...
- Ela Area Public Library—Digital Media Lab
- New Lenox Public Library—Digital Media Lab
- Ela Area Public Library—The Forge
- ... 16 more

## Chicago Park District Woodshops



## SPACE AND TOOLS: RESOURCE GAPS AND BARRIERS

### RESOURCE GAPS

- ▶ Affordable makers spaces specifically on the South and West sides of Chicago
- ▶ Spaces with access to specialized tools like laser cutters, CNC machines, screen printing materials, spray booth, kiln, among others
- ▶ Spaces for hosting events
- ▶ Centralized storage space for large/bulky materials and materials for markets

### BARRIERS

- ▶ Some specialized tools require certification to operate
- ▶ Location is critical



Chicago is so big. When we think about organizing our time to fit stuff, I have to factor in the drive. I'm only available in the evenings and it's difficult to be flexible with time. Where resources are is hugely important to can we even access them.—Maker

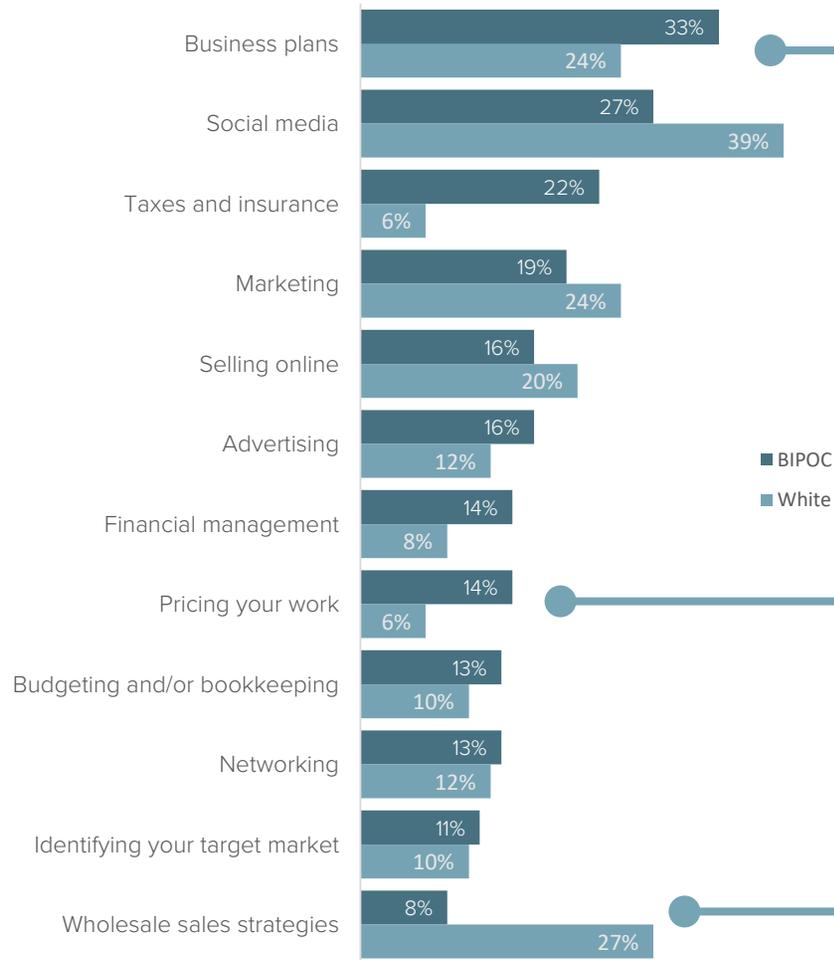


# 4

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

Many makers, especially those who are artists first and entrepreneurs second, lack the time and/or skills to manage the business side of things.

### Business Topics Makers Want to Develop



“ I’m just juggling a lot maintaining the business. If I had the education to write a business plan that would make a big difference.—Maker

“ For me it’s about the process, which makes it hard to make money. Because I just enjoy it so much and it doesn’t always equal to, you know, per hour, like satisfying amounts of money.—Maker

“ It’s hard to pivot to wholesale since I’m so focused on fairs. I’ve been cold calling which takes a long time and doesn’t work that well.—Maker

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: RESOURCE GAPS AND BARRIERS

### RESOURCE GAPS

- ▶ Because of the severe constraints on their time, many makers voiced a desire for more tangible and directed business development support
- ▶ Access to mentors at a more advanced stage
- ▶ Grant writing workshop
- ▶ Tax support
- ▶ “Restarter kit” to ecommerce sites already up and running
- ▶ Access to interns, especially for social media
- ▶ More or better pathways to licensing in Chicago
- ▶ Cohort models with other makers at a similar business stage to focus on the unique elements of maker businesses
- ▶ Partnerships with brands like Nooworks that can help artists build product lines that strategically elevate and enhance the visibility of their artwork

### BARRIERS

- ▶ Hard to navigate all the resources and find the ones most suitable for you.
- ▶ Making the time to focus on building the business
- ▶ Working around schedule, specially for caregivers and people with a full time job
- ▶ Gatekeeping of resources
- ▶ Lack of translations in multiple languages
- ▶ Variation in learning styles
- ▶ Cost and complexity of licensing in Chicago



I think it's really hard for [makers] to get out of the day-to-day tactical things and take the time to take a step away and think big picture.  
—Ecosystem Partner

## Maker Profile: HIRMIE

---

“ *The creative community allows me to connect with fellow makers of different medium and help me to understand their creative processes and challenges which are sometimes similar to mine. As a maker in Chicago, I come to realize that the maker community is supportive and welcoming. It is evident in the new friendship bonded over different markets and craft shows that sometimes lead to creative collaboration.*—Hirman Ahmad

Hirman Ahmad launched HIRMIE in 2020 creating unique, handmade concrete objects for the home.



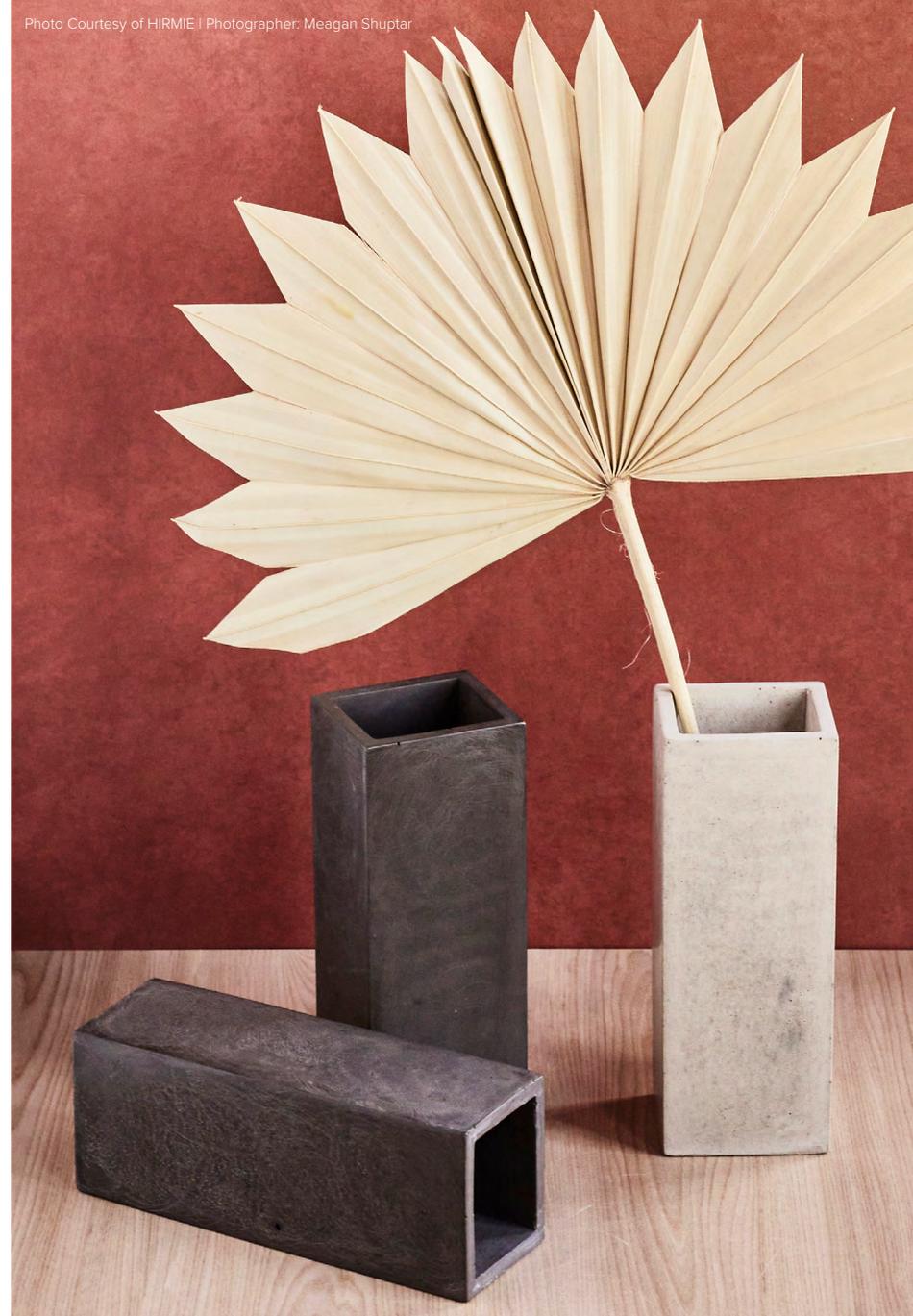
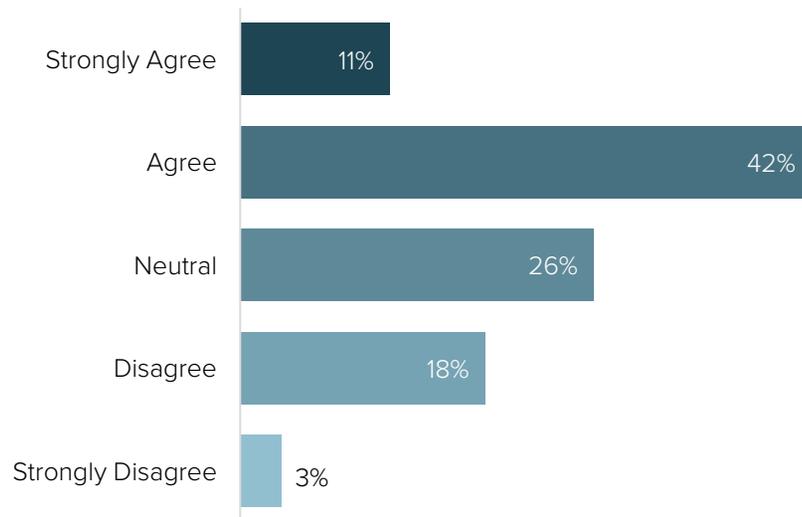
# 5

## NETWORK EXPANSION

Makers in Chicago have a strong sense of community, but sometimes struggle to break into new networks and effectively leverage their connections.

- ▶ Many makers said that Chicago has a collaborative maker network, but some noted feelings of competition with fellow makers, especially those that made similar goods to them
- ▶ Makers noted that they have strong connections, but aren't always sure how to leverage those networks to grow their business or craft. In fact, no respondents strongly agreed with the statement "I am closely connected to the people and resources I need to grow"
- ▶ Makers said it was easy to form connections with people in similar positions to themselves, but it was hard to meet people who are more established

### I feel connected to a creative community where I live



How valuable your network is depends on what you need and how you use it. It's easy to strike up a conversation with someone but not necessarily easy to know how to leverage those relationships.—Maker

## NETWORK EXPANSION: RESOURCE GAPS AND BARRIERS

### RESOURCE GAPS\*

- ▶ Opportunities to network with buyers and other non-makers in the eco-system
- ▶ Time at markets or dedicated markets for makers to network and get to know each other
- ▶ More mentorship opportunities
- ▶ Access to networks of professional/business services

*\*Makers noted community and network building as a benefit or byproduct of resources rather than a resource in itself.*



I would love to see shows turned on their heads sometimes, like more focused on connection-making where artists and makers can connect with each other, brands, galleries, shops, etc, to spark collaborations that could be mutually beneficial.—Maker

### BARRIERS

- ▶ One-off events that don't foster long-term relationships
- ▶ Makers voiced uncertainty with how to leverage their existing relationships
- ▶ Being in a niche industry means being in direct competition with people you also want to network with
- ▶ Fear of bothering other makers at markets or when they are working
- ▶ Trouble finding makers in similar positions to themselves
- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic diminished in person communities and networking opportunities which are still rebuilding



Photo Courtesy of Anjoli Candle Company | Photo Credit: Meagan Shuptar



When doing the markets, it would be nice if they could build in time for people to actually network. I know when things are slow or if you have an extra person sometimes you can step away and meet other people. What if they had a special event where we could just leave and mix and mingle.—Maker

# Grow Your Craft Business Workshop

In September 2022, Nest hosted an exclusive day-long workshop event in partnership with Hermès of Paris. Twelve makers were selected to participate and learn about different facets of brand storytelling, tips for driving online sales, and nurturing strong customer relationships. The team at Hermès skillfully guided makers through small group discussions and exercises on how to apply those topics to their business strategy to yield results. It was a meaningful and impactful professional development opportunity with 100% of participants rating their experience as excellent and agreeing that the content was helpful.

Additionally, each participant received a hands-on professional photography session to learn about product styling, photo retouching, and what makes for a strong brand identity—and received a portfolio of new digital product images.



“ After this workshop session with Nest x Hermès, I feel incredibly inspired to continue moving my business forward and applying some of the best practices we discussed to impact my business positively! The women-led Hermès team empowers me to build a strong and diverse team of leaders as I continue to grow my business.

“ I’m still processing how wonderful the photography session and workshop were! I learned so much in two days about branding, sales and customer relations and can’t wait to use these techniques in my business. The Hermès team was absolutely amazing and I loved that the workshop was to the point, packed with valuable information, and so interactive. I got so many questions answered and am so grateful for their time, expertise and contribution to the craft community!



# Where We Go From Here

---

## **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES & PROGRAMMING**

Based on the learnings outlined in this report, we will design educational and capacity building content for makers in Chicago that address their most significant needs and challenges. To develop the additional programming, we will incorporate the feedback we have gathered from makers and stakeholders in the landscape mapping phase by utilizing a participatory design process that enhances collaboration and engagement. We will seek guidance and support from experts in participatory design on the most effective and impactful ways to center makers' input in the development of resources and programming.

Similarly to the Hermès-led workshop, Nest will leverage its growing network of brand and retail partners and industry experts to help develop and facilitate high-quality trainings and interactive workshops. Based on our initial findings (but will be further informed by co-designing with makers), some topics could include:

- ▶ Business & Financial Planning
- ▶ Pricing, Sales & Merchandising
- ▶ Access to Capital
- ▶ Marketing and Sales Strategies
- ▶ Community & Network Building

## **LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS**

To truly harness the power of the maker economy, Makers United understands that communities need a sustained commitment to growing a supportive ecosystem of businesses and service providers, as partners. To accomplish this, Nest will seek to develop collaborative partnerships with community stakeholders and city government in continued program design, implementation and outreach. A primary goal is to support existing efforts to remove barriers for small and micro craft businesses in order to create a more accessible and inclusive sector and a sense of place for makers.

Nest will continue to update and share the digital resource directory that outlines available programs, funding opportunities, and training support available to maker businesses with all Chicago Makers United members.

## AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

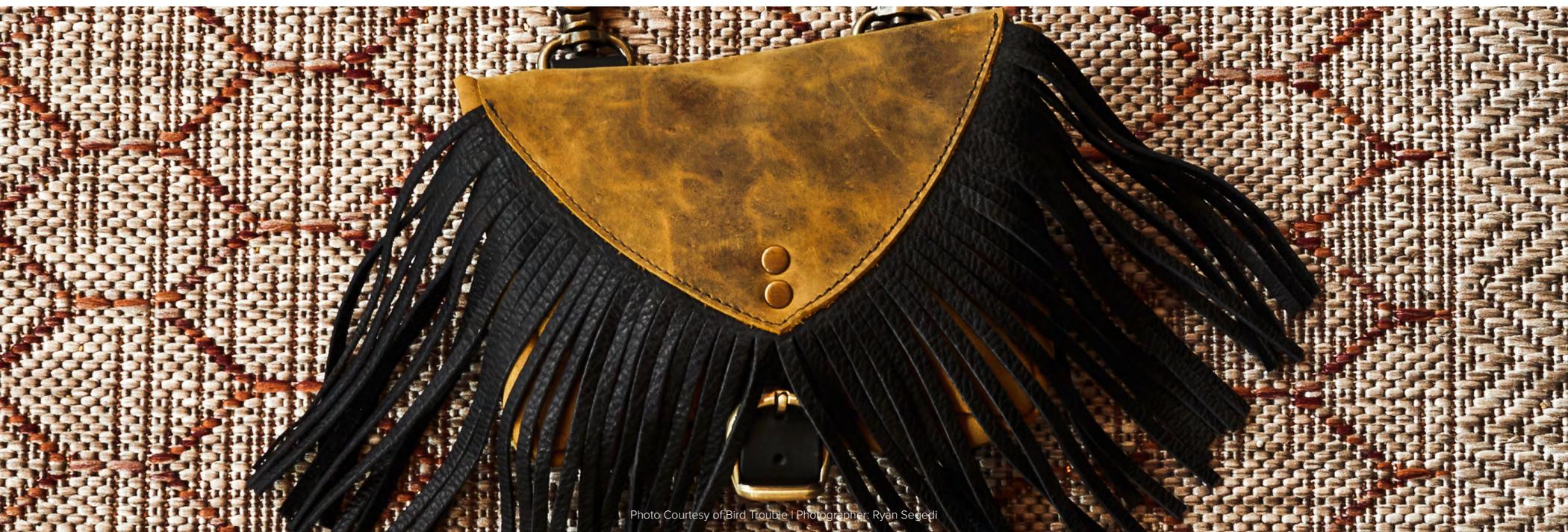
In an effort to increase community-building and connectivity within the creative Makers United communities, Nest is eager to launch a nation-wide Ambassador Program. The goal of the program is to leverage highly engaged makers within each city to build local networks of handcraft creatives that support one another through their shared goals and entrepreneurial spirit. This group would work on concerted recruitment efforts, raising engagement and awareness of Makers United programming, and building a more inclusive, connected maker economy that emphasizes a community-led and designed programming approach. Ambassadors would specifically seek to connect with underserved and/or underrepresented makers who often lack access to small business resources that lay the foundation for business acumen and allow for income generation. Nest will launch this national ambassador model in Detroit, Chicago, and St. Louis in 2023 and scale nationally based on learnings from there.

## MARKET ACCESS & SOURCING SUPPORT

Nest will explore market opportunities that increase maker businesses' exposure to customers via direct-to-consumer sales and/or wholesale opportunities. Many Chicago makers voiced an interest in more strategic participation in existing local craft markets and fairs, as well as markets or showcases implemented by Nest. Nest will explore ways to effectively support their inclusion and success through these events.

Beyond markets and showcases, program participants are considered for exclusive sourcing opportunities with Nest's growing network of brands and retailers which have the potential to generate large product orders for program participants and expose them to new national and multinational audiences.

Additionally, Nest will create a comprehensive digital sourcing guide which features each program participant's products that will be shared with our full network of brand, retail, and designer partners. The sourcing guide will also be shared with relevant local stakeholders to promote interest in products made by Chicago makers.



# Acknowledgments

---

MAKERS UNITED CHICAGO WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE  
WITHOUT THE GENEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR FUNDERS:



S O U C I E H O R N E R, L T D.  
ARCHITECTURAL INTERIORS • DESIGN

We would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our local implementing partners at Daylight for their crucial role in helping to launch this initial phase of Makers United in Chicago. Their commitment, resourcefulness, and expertise have been invaluable in understanding the depth and breadth of creative entrepreneurship in this city.

And last but not least, we are deeply grateful to the makers who have shared their time, insights, and experiences to shape and drive this program. You inspire and guide our work every day.



**NEST**  
buildanest.org

@BUIL DANEST  
#MAKERSUNITED



To learn more about Nest's Maker United Project,  
please visit [buildanest.org](http://buildanest.org)