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Rwanda Creative Economy
Needs Assessment

Prepared by

Creative Visions and Green Horizon Ventures

With support from the Ministry of Youth and Arts

CREATIVE VISIONS

GREEN HORIZON VENTURES

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Rwanda National Youth Council
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Rwanda Creative Economy Needs Assessment

Introduction

Rwanda's creative economy represents a significant opportunity for sustainable development, youth employment, and economic diversification. The Government of Rwanda has recognized this potential, launching a landmark initiative in June 2025, supported by the EU and UNESCO, to restructure and strengthen the Rwanda Arts Council and develop a national strategy for the cultural and creative industries.[1] At the launch, Hon. Sandrine Umutoni, Minister of State for Youth and Arts, affirmed the government's vision to establish "a legitimate, inclusive, and active governance structure" focused on including the voices and experiences of artists in policymaking and enhancing legal protections for intellectual property.[2] Confidence in the sector is growing, with investments coming in from many places. For example, Afreximbank recently announced a significant increase in investments in pan-African creative economies from $500 million to $1 billion.[3]

Despite this momentum, the sector faces structural challenges. Rwanda's creative industries currently contribute approximately 5% to GDP, with informality hampering the ability to record economic activity and employment.[4] The International Trade Centre reported that as of 2014, creative exports reached $1.28 million, while imports grew more than eightfold between 2005 and 2014, from $9.51 million to $78.7 million.[5] While more recent Rwanda-specific creative trade data is limited, global creative goods exports from developing countries have tripled since 2002, reaching $265 billion by 2015, suggesting significant growth potential.[6] Further, while unemployment has recently decreased, labor market challenges persist, with youth unemployment at around 15.4%, similar to rates in rural (13.3%) and urban (13.7%) areas.[7]

This needs assessment explores the aspirations, skills gaps, and support needs of Rwanda's creative workers to inform the creation of programming. The findings reveal that Rwandan creatives aspire to build businesses that sustain their lives and livelihoods while also supporting their communities, including vulnerable populations like youth and women.

To achieve these goals, artists need integrated capacity building that combines technical skills with business fundamentals, along with access to equipment and financial capital, barriers that this needs assessment reveals are greater for rural artists. Training access is heavily concentrated in Kigali, with 56% of participants having never received any formal training. Across the findings, rural and urban differences are considered, and in some areas are significant, requiring a keen attention to detail in programming to serve the needs of a diverse population.

Executive Summary

This Needs Assessment was undertaken by Creative Visions and Green Horizon Ventures with support and assistance from the Ministry of Arts and Youth to provide a detailed account of artists' aspirations in Rwanda, as well as the skills, resources, and training they require to achieve their personal and professional goals. The results and findings are intended to inform the development of programs that support the growth and development of Rwanda's creative economy, with implications for East Africa more broadly.

Core Research Questions

The primary objective was to answer the following core questions for Rwandan creatives at various stages of their careers, across the range of creative fields, and in the five provinces. These key questions guided the Needs Assessment:

1. What are the creative aspirations and goals of Rwanda creatives?
2. What skills and resources are needed in order to reach those goals?
3. What training have Rwandan creatives previously accessed? What did they like about the training? What could be improved?
4. How would Rwandan creatives like to access training in the future?
5. What differences exist between rural and urban creatives in relation to the questions above?

Key Findings: Summary

Aspirations

Rwandan creatives aspire to build sustainable businesses that not only sustain their lives and livelihoods, but also support their communities, including youth, women, and marginalized groups. Social impact and community development emerged as the dominant aspiration (47%).

Skills

Key skill gaps include business and financial management and digital marketing. Rural artist prioritize digital marketing more (33% vs. 25% urban), while urban artists focus on business and financial management (38% vs. 27% rural). Needs evolve with career stage.

Resources

Access to equipment and financial capital are critical barriers, especially for rural artists. Equipment/materials are a top priority (55% overall). Financial support needs increase dramatically with experience, and institutional credit barriers are significant.

Training

Nearly 56% of participants had never received training, which is heavily concentrated in urban areas. NGO programs that combine training with funding were most impactful. Gaps include insufficient duration, infrequent scheduling and technological relevance. Urban and rural artist have distinct delivery perferences.

Key Findings: Detail

Aspirations: Rwandan creatives aspire to build businesses that sustain their lives and livelihoods, but also support their communities, particularly youth, women, and marginalized groups like individuals with disabilities. Artists consistently connect skill development and market access to income generation, viewing creativity and profit as complementary rather than conflicting goals. Indeed, survey data found that Social Impact and Community Development, which includes generating employment and supporting social goals, was the dominant aspiration, accounting for 47% of coded instances across 284 total codes assigned to 155 unique responses, ahead of Cultural Promotion and Global Recognition (28%) and Business Expansion (25%). However, qualitative interview and focus group data confirm that these themes are deeply intertwined. Focus group participants reinforced this duality, with one stating: ***"For me, my main goal, just with my team, is to empower this young generation and also make business."***

Skills: Data revealed a range of skills needed to help Rwandan creatives reach their goals. Across urban and rural areas, business and financial management skills and digital marketing were ranked highest. However, rural artists prioritize digital marketing more strongly (33% vs. 25% urban), seeing it as a tool to reach more audiences, while urban artists lean toward business and financial management (38% vs. 27% rural). Career stage also shapes priorities: newer artists (<1 year) overwhelmingly need business and financial fundamentals (56%), early-to-mid career artists (1-6 years) shift focus to digital marketing (31-39%),

and experienced artists (7+ years) show interest in international trade/export (21-23%). IP/legal literacy, while ranked low as a standalone skill, emerged in qualitative data as an important component of business management for protecting and monetizing creative work.

Resources: Equipment access and financial capital represent the most critical barriers, with rural artists facing greater challenges than their urban counterparts. Equipment/materials ranked as the top resource priority (55% overall), but rural artists prioritize it significantly more than urban artists (60% vs. 43%), potentially reflecting greater difficulty accessing production tools outside Kigali. Financial support needs increase dramatically with experience, from 41% among new artists to 77% among those with 10+ years, suggesting capital constraints evolve and grow as artists reach new levels of professionalism and development. Further, as emerged from the qualitative data, artists face a quality-revenue paradox; expensive imported materials are required to produce marketable work, but revenue cannot cover costs. Institutional credit barriers compound these challenges, with creatives struggling with the collateral requirements needed for loans. Mentorship emerged as more important to rural artists (29% vs. 21%), potentially reflecting isolation from other creatives and Kigali-centered creative networks, in particular.

Training: Nearly 56% of survey participants had never received training, and access is heavily concentrated in urban areas (60% trained) compared to rural areas (38% trained). Of the 24 districts where respondents reported having received prior training, only 6 had more than 5 trained participants. Of the respondents who had previously accessed training, more than half had done so through government sources, which accounted for roughly half of the listed training sites, and included Arts Connekt, district governments, and youth centers. International development agencies and non-governmental arts organizations were the second and third most encountered training providers. Despite this, government programs were least discussed in interviews and focus groups, whereas NGO programs (Inabel, LINC) that combine training with funding were cited as most impactful; and international exposure, almost exclusively accessed by Kigali-based creatives, was described as transformative. Critical gaps in existing training include insufficient duration, infrequent scheduling, and failure to keep pace with technological change. Urban and rural artists have distinctly different delivery preferences: urban artists prefer weekly training (62% vs. 34%), while rural artists favor monthly sessions (58% vs. 40%), potentially reflecting travel constraints. Rural artists report substantially higher support needs (57% 'high need' vs. 41% urban), the gap is especially pronounced among early-career artists (63% rural vs. 44% urban).

Critical Priorities for Program Design

The chart below shows, a range of priorities emerges from the data as central to program design to meet the needs of this diverse population.

Geographic Equity

Decentralize access beyond Kigali with delivery models adapted to rural contexts (monthly intensive sessions vs. weekly urban programming).

Career Stage Differentiation

Tier curricula from foundational business skills (emerging) to digital marketing (developing) to international market readiness (established).

Integrated Capacity Building

Bundle skills development and resource access together with funding.

Continuous Engagement

Sustained programming over 6-12 months with periodic refreshers, not one-time workshops.

Structural Financial Intervention

Partner with financial institutions to develop creative sector lending; create pathways for equipment rental or rent-to-own models; address material import cost barriers.

International Pathways

Create accessible routes to cross-border exposure for artists beyond Kigali, including regional (East African) connections.

2. Needs Assessment Design

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Introduction

A needs assessment can be defined as ***"a systematic process of analyzing gaps between what [clients] should know and do."*** A needs assessment is a foundational step in designing high-quality programs or interventions. Needs assessments provide the opportunity to gather the voices of the stakeholders on the ground that may directly or indirectly benefit from a planned program or initiative, which research has shown can improve program design and enhance cost-effectiveness, amongst other key benefits.

This needs assessment is intended to complement previous research undertaken and support the creation of programs or interventions that can support the growth and development of the Rwandan Creative Economy.

2.1 Needs Assessment Objectives

As stated in the introduction, the Government of Rwanda is investing in the growth and development of the creative economy and focused its efforts in 2024 in collaboration with AfDB (African Development Bank). It produced a sector-level report on the challenges and opportunities for the creative sector, citing a lack of formalization opportunities and access to finance as core issues. This needs assessment intends to add to the existing evidence, and, in particular, add qualitative insights to complement quantitative data. The objectives are as follows:

- Explore the creative aspirations and goals of Rwanda creatives.
- Identify the skills and resources needed to reach those goals.
- Assess the access to and self-reported quality of previous training efforts, while uncovering the training and support individuals would like to see going forward.
- Uncover differences between rural and urban creatives in relation to the questions above.

2.2 Needs Assessment Methodology

This needs assessment utilized an explanatory mixed-methods approach, meaning that the quantitative survey results were used to develop interview and focus group questions. A mixed methods approach is appropriate for several reasons. Firstly, "mixed methods research provides more evidence for studying a research problem than either quantitatively or qualitatively research alone" (Creswell et al., 2018, p. 13). Additionally, a mixed-methods design supports deeper stakeholder input and understanding, thereby helping to develop a program responsive to the needs of current and future participants.

Sampling

The needs assessment employed a purposive sampling strategy. The survey was sent to all previous Arts Connekt participants. From survey responses, the research team employed purposive sampling using the following criteria to select individuals for the focus groups and interviews. The criteria for selection included: 1) Geographic diversity across all five of Rwanda's provinces (North, East, South, West, and Kigali City), 2) A balance of artistic mediums, and 3) A balance of employment terms in the sector.

In total, 245 participants fully or partially completed the survey. Twenty-four of those participants engaged in focus groups and interviews. However, sample sizes vary across analyses due to item non-response. Each analysis includes only respondents who provided complete responses to all items in that question set. This complete-case approach ensures percentages reflect actual respondent choices.

The tables below outline this in more detail. See appendices for additional information.

Table 1: Survey Participant Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Geographic Location		
Urban (Kigali City)	67	27.3%
Rural (other districts)	178	72.7%
Experience Level		
<1 year	33	13.5%
1-3 year	128	52.2%
4-6 year	45	18.4%
7-10 year	24	9.8%
10+ year	15	6.1%
Primary Creative Medium		
Visual Arts & Craft Industries	71	29.0%
Performing Arts	67	27.3%
Audio-Visual & Interactive Media	43	17.6%
Design Industry	43	17.6%
Beauty Industry	10	4.1%
Literary Arts / Cultural Heritage	11	4.5%

Note: *Urban = Gasabo, Kicukiro, Nyarugenge districts (Kigali City). Literary Arts (n=8) and Cultural Heritage (n=3) combined.*

Table 2: Sample Size Reference Table

Analysis	Urban (Kigali)	Rural	Total	Inclusion Criteria
Full Sample (Demographics)	n=67	n=178	N=245	Valid district data
Training Status	n=57	n=147	N=204	Answered training question
Skills Rankings	n=56	n=146	N=202	Complete skill rankings
Resources	n=56	n=146	N=202	Complete selections
Frequency Preferences	n=45	n=136	N=181	Answered frequency question
Support Needs	n=56	n=146	N=202	Answered support question
Qualitative (FG + Interviews)	—	—	N=24	Purposive sample from survey

2.3 Data Collection & Instruments

Data was collected by members of the Green Horizon Venture team, who administered the survey, focus groups, and interviews using instruments designed by Sarah Fanslau, Director of Impact and Evaluation at Creative Visions.

Quantitative Data: Online Survey

The quantitative data were collected in March of 2025 using an online survey developed based on the findings from the Feasibility Study completed by Anniver Development Partners. Participants completed one survey each, estimated to take 15-20 minutes. Participants responded to questions regarding the duration of their involvement in the creative economy, the skills and resources required, training supports and gaps, and their creative aspirations and goals. Using this data, evaluators leveraged descriptive statistics to analyze data.

Qualitative Data: Structured interviews and focus groups

Phase two of this explanatory sequential design comprised semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a subset of primary subjects from the quantitative portion of the study (N=24). The qualitative interview guide was developed based on the quantitative results. The interview and focus group protocols both contained roughly 10 substantive questions. Interviews were conducted in person between July 28 and August 25th and were translated and transcribed by bilingual staff from Green Horizon Ventures.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative survey data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and the AI tool Claude Pro. Descriptive statistics were performed on each variable collected from the survey. After collecting the quantitative data, the research team used the AI tool Claude Pro to examine the data, identify discrepancies, and explore trends to inform the qualitative interviews and subsequent analysis.

Qualitative interview and focus group data were organized into themes in response to the key questions of the needs assessment, and rural and urban data were separated to perform a separate analysis. Once the data was cleaned and organized, it was uploaded into Ailyze, an online AI-driven analysis tool, for analysis and review. The research team reviewed and adjusted the analysis to ensure accuracy.

To integrate the data, the research team used the quantitative results to create the qualitative questions. All sources were analyzed separately and then together to identify patterns and combine findings. Claude Pro was used to assist in merging qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, the findings were compiled into the report below with help from Claude Pro.

2.5 Ethics

IRB approval is not needed for evaluative or needs assessment research that aims to support decision-making rather than advance a field of knowledge. Additionally, NISR oversight was not required in Rwanda, as the study was voluntary for a specific evaluation purpose and was not part of a national or government data-collection exercise. However, the research team ensured that consent was obtained through both the survey and the interview and focus group protocols. They also considered confidentiality and the risks for the participating population. Finally, the data were deidentified to protect participants' confidentiality.

2.6 Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings:

- **Sampling frame:** The survey was distributed to previous Arts Connekt participants, meaning findings may not fully represent creatives outside this network, particularly those with no prior exposure to formal creative economy programming. Findings should be generalized to creatives who have not participated in Arts Connekt with caution.
- **Geographic distribution:** Surveys were distributed to all 275 Arts Connekt Participants; 245 participated fully or partially. However, while the survey reached all 30 districts, response rates varied considerably. Twenty districts had 7 or fewer responses.

- **Self-reported data:** All data on skills, resources, training quality, and aspirations are self-reported. Participants' perceptions of their needs may differ from objectively assessed skill gaps, and assessments of past training quality may be influenced by recall bias or comparison with limited alternatives.

- **Social desirability:** Focus group settings may have influenced responses toward socially desirable answers, particularly the strong emphasis on social impact and community development aspirations.

While this theme was consistent across both survey and qualitative data, reducing this concern, individual interview responses may reflect more unfiltered perspectives.

- **Overlapping qualitative participants:** The same 24 participants engaged in both focus groups and individual interviews. While this design allowed for deeper exploration of themes surfaced in group settings, it also means the qualitative findings reflect a narrower range of voices than if separate samples had been used for each method. Perspectives that might have emerged from a broader interview pool may not be represented.

- **Translation effects:** Focus groups and interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda and subsequently translated and transcribed into English for analysis. Despite careful translation, some nuance, idiomatic expressions, or culturally specific meanings may have been lost or altered in this process. Certain concepts that resonate in Kinyarwanda may not translate directly, potentially affecting the accuracy of thematic coding and interpretation.

- **Demographic gaps:** The assessment did not collect detailed demographic data on the gender, age, or disability status of respondents. Given some participants' references to supporting women, youth, and marginalized groups, understanding the composition of the sample itself would strengthen the interpretation of findings and the identification of underrepresented voices.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods design, with qualitative data consistently corroborating and explaining quantitative patterns, strengthens confidence in the core findings. The consistent themes across urban and rural contexts, and across career stages, suggest robust patterns that can meaningfully inform program design.also considered confidentiality and the risks for the participating population. Finally, the data were deidentified to protect participants' confidentiality.

3. Findings: Creative Aspirations

In This Section

Introduction

When considering the needs of a group of individuals in relation to a subject or area, it is important to first consider what those people want to achieve for themselves. Across both quantitative and qualitative data, participants were asked about their goals and aspirations as creative individuals. Three major themes emerged from the analysis of qualitative survey responses combined with focus group and interview data.

3.0.1 Methodology

Qualitative survey responses (n=245) were thematically coded, with 155 unique responses receiving codes across nine sub-themes. Because many responses articulated multiple, interrelated aspirations, responses were coded to all applicable sub-themes, resulting in 284 coded instances. The analysis below is based on these coded instances; percentages reflect the proportion of coded instances within each category, and a single response may contribute to multiple themes. Sub-themes were then grouped into three overarching categories: Creative Business Expansion, Cultural Promotion & Global Recognition, and Social Impact and Community Development. In addition, qualitative data from focus groups and interviews were integrated to give meaning and depth to qualitative survey responses.

3.0.2 Overview of Aspirations by Theme

Social Impact and Community Development is the dominant aspiration category across all demographic groups, followed by Cultural Promotion & Global Recognition, and Creative Business Expansion:

47.2%	28.2%	24.6%
Social Impact & Community Development	Cultural Promotion & Global Recognition	Creative Business Expansion
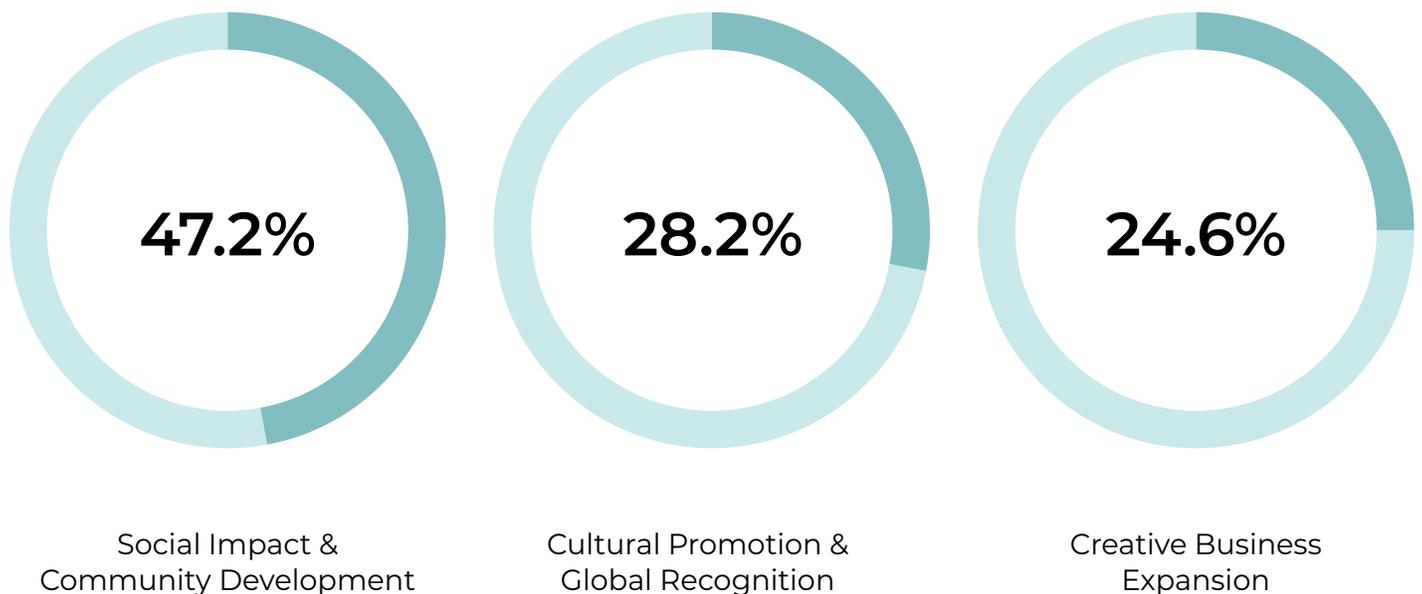
By Geography:

Theme	Rural (n=188)	Urban/Kigali (n=96)
Theme 1: Social Impact and Community Development	45.7%	**50.0%**
Theme 2: Cultural Promotion & Global Recognition	28.7%	27.1%
Theme 3: Creative Business Expansion	25.5%	22.9%

3.0.3 Patterns by Career Stage

Notably, these aspirations shift across career stages. Artists with less than one year of experience show a relatively balanced distribution across all three themes, while artists with more experience increasingly prioritize Social Impact and Community Development, peaking at 55% among those with 4-6 years of experience. This suggests that creatives are interested in social impact not merely as a late-career pivot but as a core motivator that begins early and continues over time.

Note: percentages are based on coded instances within each career-stage cohort; responses may be coded to multiple themes.

Career	Business Expansion	Cultural Promotion	Social Impact & Community Dev.
Less than 1 year (n=29)	34.5%	34.5%	31.0%
1-3 years (n=150)	24.0%	28.7%	**47.3%**
4-6 years (n=47)	21.3%	23.4%	**55.3%**
7-10 years (n=33)	24.2%	27.3%	**48.5%**
10+ years (n=25)	24.0%	28.0%	**48.0%**

3.0.4 Theme 1: Social Impact and Community Development

The most prevalent aspiration category, accounting for nearly half of all coded instances, centers on using creative success as a vehicle for broader social impact. This includes job creation, mentorship, empowerment of marginalized groups, and community transformation.

Job Creation and Economic Empowerment of Others

Many artists framed success explicitly in terms of employment generation for other groups. Qualitative survey responses highlight this interest. As one participant wrote, *"One of my dreams or long-term goals in relation to my art is to create job opportunities especially for young people within the next five to ten years." Another stated: "My dream is to become a role model in my profession and to be one of the people who create job opportunities for others through my craft."*

This aspiration was often framed around support of a particular population. As one urban artist shared: *"In five years, I would like to be a famous fashion designer with my brand Nkuru Design and generate jobs for large numbers of youths and single mothers in Rwanda." A rural artist echoed: "I want to scale up my activities to the other 10 districts by supporting youth, women, and people with disabilities from low-income families."* Focus group participants reinforced this pattern.

> *"For me, my main goal, just with my team, is to empower this young generation and also make business."*
>
> — *Urban Creative, Focus Group Participant*

Mentorship and Talent Development

Beyond employment, many artists aspired to share knowledge and nurture the next generation of creatives. As one respondent stated: *"I want to teach others the craft I do, so they can learn and apply it themselves." Another articulated a vision of changing perceptions: "I wish to change the narrative that youth pursue art because they are idle, but instead teach that it's a valuable path. I wish to have actually achieved something through it, both in terms of wealth and in creating job opportunities for others."*

Rural focus group participants emphasized building infrastructure for collaboration and development: *"I realized that in our community, there are many artists, but their work is limited and they have no common space to collaborate. That inspired me to start an initiative that brings artists together [...]. This will help artists overcome isolation and grow their talents."*
Urban participants similarly envisioned hubs for artist development: *"It would enable me to create a hub for others, a workshop or training program [...] because mostly artists here don't know other skills other than making art... So I would teach other artists and create a program for them to learn, and also support others."*

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A subset of artists articulated broader transformative goals, positioning their creative work as a tool for social change. One rural artist stated, *"My goal is to address and create awareness about social issues through my art."*

3.0.5 Theme 2: Cultural Promotion & Global Recognition

A substantial proportion of coded responses (28%) articulated aspirations centered on international visibility and cultural preservation. This reflects a desire not merely to export products, but to reposition Rwandan creative identity on the world stage.

Survey respondents expressed this aspiration clearly in qualitative responses: *"I want to expand the business of fashion and accessories beyond Rwanda's borders, with Made in Rwanda jewelry crafted from silver and gold." Another stated: "I want to impact the globe through storytelling while highlighting the value of culture and telling authentic Rwanda and African stories that resonate, [...] entertain and reshape to a positive Africa media perspective."*

The aspiration extends beyond personal recognition to national and cultural representation. One artist shared an aspiration to *"Represent Rwanda in fashion events internationally,"* while another hoped to *"bring art closer to Rwandans so they can appreciate it and see it as a profitable profession, rather than just something done for fun."*

Cultural preservation emerged as a small but distinct strand within this theme, particularly among rural artists. Several respondents expressed goals to establish institutions dedicated to traditional arts: *"I plan to have a school that teaches traditional Rwandan singing. I will have a music production house. I will also organize events and award those who excel in traditional singing."* Another stated: *"I want to have established a school that teaches Kinyarwanda and traditional culture to young children."*

3.0.6 Theme 3: Creative Business Expansion

The survey data show that 43% of respondents generate their income solely from arts-related income, while another 47% supplement their art-driven income with other sources, such as a job. Around 10% of respondents make no income from their art. Given this economic context, it is unsurprising that business growth, market access, and financial sustainability emerge as core aspirations.

Focus group and interview data from both urban and rural artists reveal a consistent focus on income generation and profitability, with creatives viewing their work through an entrepreneurial lens. As one rural artist stated: *"I want to develop my art into a sustainable and large-scale business." Another envisioned: "In ten years, I envision having expanded my tailoring business to the point where I can also sell my products internationally."*

Rural artists consistently linked skill development, brand awareness, and market access to increased earnings. One participant noted: *"If I have that experience, I will gain brand awareness and then an increase in financial capital. We want to expand and upgrade."* A shared theme across contexts is the intention to convert artistic abilities into sustainable livelihoods, with many explicitly connecting knowledge and creativity to profit.

> *"Once you gain that knowledge, you can apply it effectively, which leads to growth and profit from your creative work."*
>
> *— Rural Creative*

3.0.7 Aspirations Conclusion

Rwanda's creative workers conceptualize success expansively, not merely as personal financial gain, but as a vehicle for job creation, inclusive growth, and generational impact. As the section above indicates, Rwandan creatives are eager to support the growth and development of their communities and themselves through their artistic work. Patterns emerge based on geography and career stage, as outlined below.

Geographic Patterns

Urban and rural artists share similar aspirations, with Socal Impact leading in both contexts (50% urban, 46% rural). This suggests shared values across Rwand's creative community regardless of location.

Career Stage Patterns

New artists show balanced interest across all three themes, but Social Impact grows with experience, peaking at 55% among mid-career artists (4-6 years). Impact-orientation is a core motivator that deepens over time.

Universal Priorities

Artists view creativity and profit as complementary. Effective programs will recognize that creative seek sustainable businesses that also support their communities.

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### Skills Conclusion

Summary of key insights

Introduction

Creatives in Rwanda are looking to expand their businesses, secure their livelihoods, and, for some, make a difference in the broader community. It is no wonder, then, that the skills they prioritized in both the survey and the focus groups have to do with achieving those goals. This section presents quantitative findings on skill priorities, examines how these vary by geography and career stage, and then explores what specifically artists need within each priority area through qualitative data from focus groups, the survey, and interviews.

3.1.1 Overall Skill Priorities

Survey respondents were asked to rank six skill areas from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important). As Figure 4 reveals, digital marketing and promotion, business and financial management, and technical and artistic skills emerged as the top three priorities. The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who ranked each skill among their top two priorities for growth and development.

Figure 4: Skills needed to reach goals

% of respondents who ranked as top 2 skills
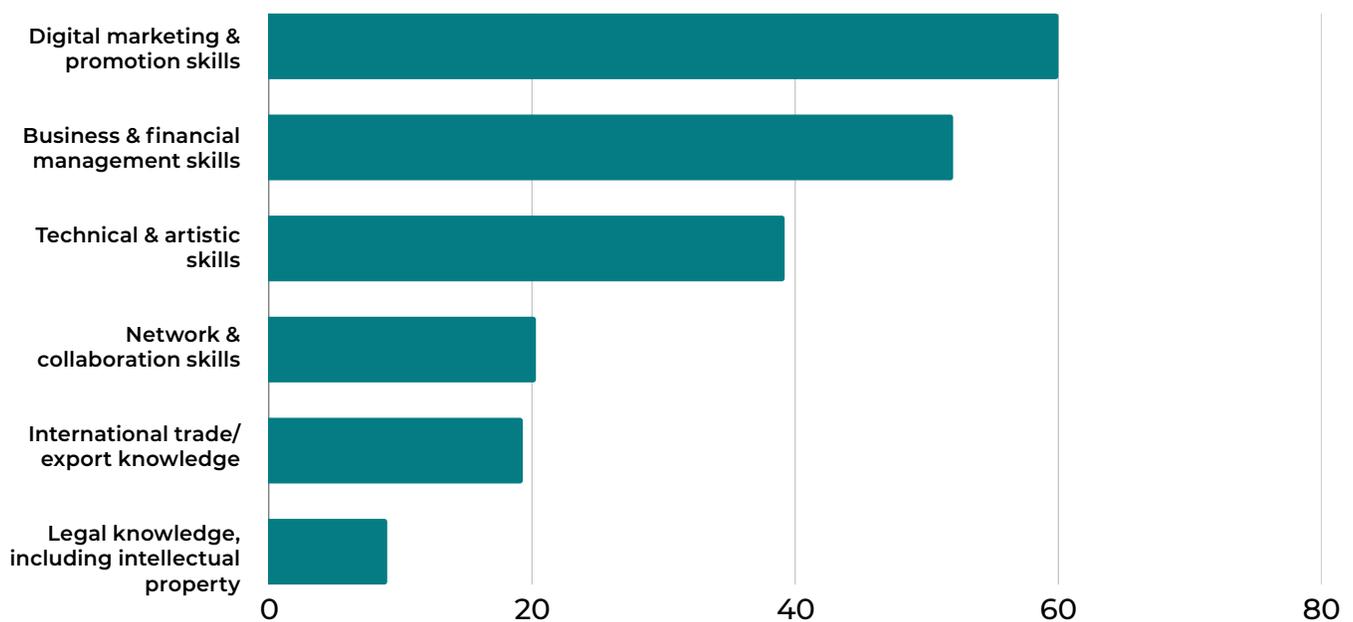
These overall patterns, however, mask important variations by geography and experience level. The following analysis disaggregates skill priorities to support a nuanced understanding and program design.

3.1.2 Skill Priorities by Geography

Both urban and rural artists prioritize Digital Marketing and Business & Financial Management as their top two skill needs, but with notable differences. Urban artists in Kigali lean more toward business skills (38% rank it #1 vs. 27% in rural areas), while rural artists show a stronger preference for digital marketing (33% vs. 25% in

urban areas). This pattern likely reflects urban artists' greater proximity to formal business networks and rural artists' recognition that digital skills can help bridge geographic barriers to markets.

Table: % Ranking Each Skill as #1 Priority by Location

Skill Area	Urban/Kigali (n=56)	Rural (n=147)
Key Skill 1: Business & Financial Management	**38%**	27%
Key Skill 2: Digital Marketing	25%	**33%**
Key Skill 3: Technical & Artistic	16%	18%
Networking & Collaboration	7%	13%
International Trade/Export	13%	5%
Legal/IP Knowledge	2%	3%

Highlight indicates the highest priority for that group

3.1.3 Skill Priorities by Experience Level

Skill priorities shift markedly across career stages, revealing a clear developmental pathway. Newer artists (<1 year) prioritize business and financial skills overwhelmingly (56%), likely reflecting the immediate challenge of sustaining creative work financially. As artists progress to 1-6 years of experience, digital marketing becomes the top priority (31-39%), suggesting a focus on audience building and promotion once basic operations are established. Notably, international trade/export interest surges among experienced artists (7+ years), reaching 21-23% vs. only 3-6% among newer artists, indicating readiness to expand beyond domestic markets.

Table: Top Skill Priority by Experience Level

Experience	n	#1 Skill	%	Emerging Interest	n
<1 year	27	Business/Financial	56%	Digital Marketing	22%
1-3 years	103	Digital Marketing	31%	Business/Financial	28%
4-6 years	41	Digital Marketing	39%	Technical/Artistic	20%
7-10 years	19	Digital Marketing	32%	Intl Trade/Export	21%
10+ years	13	Business/Financial	39%	Intl Trade/Export	23%

The following sections explore these priority skill areas in depth, drawing on focus group and interview data to understand why these patterns emerge and what artists need within each skill area.

3.1.4 Key Skill 1: Digital Marketing and Promotion Skills

Digital marketing emerged as the top overall skill priority, with rural artists ranking it #1 more frequently than urban artists (33% vs. 25%). The qualitative data helps explain this gap: rural creatives recognize that digital skills can bridge geographic barriers to markets that otherwise limit their reach.

Current State: Basic Social Media Use

Rural and urban creatives alike rely on social media for basic marketing, yet recognize these tools are insufficient for broader market reach. In rural areas, participants acknowledge that their marketing is limited due to dependence on basic social media platforms. As one rural artist shared, *"Our marketing is still weak because we mostly rely on simple platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, which don't reach a large audience."* Similarly, in urban settings, a creative explained, *"The way I use social media for digital marketing is by showcasing my products on social media, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok."* While these platforms serve as accessible entry points for promotion, both groups recognize that a more nuanced approach is needed to reach new audiences, particularly outside Rwanda.

Aspiration: Advanced Digital Marketing Skills

This awareness drives a strong desire across both settings to acquire advanced digital marketing skills. Rural participants explicitly articulate the need for training, with one noting, *"What I meant about finding markets abroad is that I want foreigners to also know about my products and buy them. I would especially like support in learning how to use my phone and online platforms for advertising, since that helps reach many people."*

> *"Marketing is important, especially now that social media helps reach more people. It's hard to earn money while working in a rural area without promotion. I want to learn how to market my work online to reach more people and grow my career."*
>
> — *Rural Creative*

Urban creatives echo this sentiment, with one participant observing that others are using social media more effectively: *"I also need to learn that way they use them to get more clients, to let people know my products all over the country, all over the world."* Another urban creative emphasized that digital marketing enables "huge growth" and is critical for visibility: *"I need experience in digital marketing because [...] if you [need] that skill to advertise so that people know what we do."*

Context-Specific Challenges

Despite shared aspirations, rural and urban creatives face distinct challenges shaped by their contexts. Rural

participants are constrained by infrastructure and financial barriers, limiting their ability to move beyond basic platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook; they express a need for foundational tools such as websites and content creation training. Urban creatives, though also seeking skill enhancement, focus more on strategic marketing challenges like brand positioning and differentiation in a saturated market. Despite these differences, there is unified recognition that marketing is not merely about promotion, but about creating economic opportunity through expanded market access, from local to national to international audiences.

3.1.5 Key Skill 2: Business and Financial Management Skills

Business and financial management skills ranked second overall, but urban artists prioritize this skill area significantly more than rural artists (38% vs. 27%). This gap likely reflects urban artists' greater exposure to formal business networks and the specific challenges of operating in Kigali's more structured economic environment. While intellectual property and legal knowledge were listed as separate skills in the survey, qualitative data suggests they are a subset of business skills more generally.

The Financial Management Challenge

Survey data reveal that more than half of Rwandan creatives either supplement their income or earn none from their creative work, creating a complex financial picture that requires strong financial management skills.

There is a widespread need for basic financial management training among creative individuals in both settings. Many participants report difficulty distinguishing between personal and business finances, which undermines their ability to accurately track financial performance. One rural creative stated, *"I need more knowledge in managing money and assets. Right now, when we sell products, we mix up personal and business finances. I want to learn how to track expenses and income properly so I can know whether the business is making a profit or a loss."* Similarly, an urban creative admitted, *"Sometimes it's hard for me to differentiate money that I have to keep for my business and what to use... So I've learned, but still I need help."* Even creatives with profitable businesses shared the need for improved skills.

> *"For business, our artworks often make a profit, but without financial management knowledge, the money can easily be wasted."*
>
> — *Rural Creative*

Financial Skills for Business Growth

Participants across both rural and urban areas view financial management as essential for long-term business sustainability and growth. Many recognize that artistic work is inherently entrepreneurial and requires strategic financial oversight to scale effectively. One rural participant emphasized, *"In art, you are already in business, so it's important to learn how to identify your target market, set prices, make profits, and manage them wisely. The reason I want to gain more knowledge in this area is because, as someone who owns a company, it's important to understand how to grow and develop it."* Meanwhile, an urban creative described a cycle of earning and spending without reinvestment: *"We get and spend. So we need to learn more about*

how to grow bigger." This shared sentiment reveals that creatives understand the limitations of living hand-to-mouth and desire financial skills to transition from survival to a scalable enterprise.

Intellectual Property as a Business Skill

Understanding intellectual property and legal rights is identified as a crucial business management skill, rather than a standalone one, necessary for protecting creative work and ensuring professional legitimacy. Rural artists express clear concerns about the vulnerability of their creations. One stated, ***"As artists, we still don't fully understand legal matters. Sometimes, you create a piece of work and someone else claims it as their own."*** Another explicitly said, ***"As for intellectual property, I want to understand the laws that protect my creations and learn how to safeguard my artistic rights."*** A third participant linked intellectual property to broader business opportunities: "***Regarding intellectual property, sometimes you draw inspiration from others and create your own art, but without protection, someone else can claim it. Gaining these skills would help me protect my work and also teach others to do the same."*** These statements collectively reveal that legal awareness, particularly around copyright and ownership, is perceived not as a separate legal issue but as an integral component of managing a creative enterprise.

3.1.6 Key Skill 3: Technical and Artistic Skills

Technical and artistic skills ranked similarly across urban and rural contexts (16% vs. 18%), suggesting this is a universal need regardless of geography. Participants from both settings emphasize the inseparability of technical and artistic skills, viewing them as mutually reinforcing elements of creative development.

Discipline-Specific Training Needs

Artists in both rural and urban contexts expressed a need for more advanced training in their area of artistic expertise. For example, several musicians noted the need for enhanced skills around making music and playing instruments. One rural participant stated, ***"I'm a singer and songwriter, but I don't have the skills to make beats or play instruments. I'd like to learn how to produce my own music."*** Similarly, another musician emphasized that ***"getting training on how to use musical instruments would greatly improve my skills and performance,"*** directly linking technical proficiency with artistic growth. An urban creative echoed this, stating that, despite her experience, she needs to learn more about design, especially because she intends to teach others, a goal that demands greater mastery.

Keeping Pace with Technology

These sentiments extend across creative fields, linked to both the acquisition of foundational skills and the need to keep pace with technological advances. One rural creative expressed a proactive interest in learning modern methods: ***"There are new technologies coming up in this field, so I want to keep learning and stay updated with modern methods."*** Another participant emphasized the need to master camera settings and editing software, as well as to use social media for promotion, showing how digital tools are now essential components of visual artistry. Meanwhile, an urban creative highlighted storytelling as a critical skill in video production, noting that many creators struggle with narrative organization despite having technical access to cameras and editing tools.

Access to Advanced Materials and Tools

There is a widespread aspiration among artisans and creatives to access advanced materials and tools. One rural artisan expressed a desire to shift from using old tires to high-quality materials, such as those used in Italy, to improve footwear production, demonstrating awareness of international standards. Another rural creative echoed this: *"I want to learn how to use modern art tools and materials like other international artists,"* highlighting the role of equipment in elevating artistic practice. In the urban setting, a fashion designer noted the importance of fabric knowledge for both safety and quality: *"Some fabrics damage skins, so I need to learn more about fabrics so that I can make quality products that can't harm the skins of people."* This convergence of concerns shows that technical skill is not only about technique but also about informed decision-making in material selection.

3.1.7 International Trade and Export Knowledge

While international trade ranked lower in overall skill priorities, the data reveals an important pattern: interest surges among experienced artists, from just 3-6% among those with under 6 years of experience to 21-23% among those with 7+ years. This suggests a cohort of established artists who have a handle on the fundamentals of the domestic market and are ready to expand internationally. This interest in international markets aligns with program design priorities, suggesting that advanced programming for experienced artists should include export readiness training, international market navigation, and cross-border networking opportunities.

3.1.8 Networking and Collaboration

While networking ranked lower overall, rural artists prioritize it nearly twice as much as urban artists (13% vs. 7%). This likely reflects rural artists' geographic isolation from Kigali-concentrated creative networks and resources. This need is explored further in the Resources section, where participants describe their desire for peer-to-peer connections, collaborative spaces, and cross-border relationships.

3.1.9 Skills Conclusion

Overall, the data suggests that Rwanda's creatives need to grow skills in a number of areas, with a focus on financial skills and business fundamentals, and digital marketing and promotion. However, the data indicate that there are important differences based on geography and career stage, as outlined below.

Career Stage Progression

New artist (<1 year) need business fundamentals to survive: early-to-mid career artist (1-6 years) shift focus to digital marketing for audience building; and experienced artist (7+ year)s increasingly seek international trade knowledge for market expansion.

Geographic Differences

Urban artists in Kigali prioritize business formalization and advanced financial skills, reflecting their proximity to formal economy structures. Rural artists prioritize digital marketing as a tool to overcome geographic isolation and reach broader markets.

Universal Priorities

Throughtout all stages and locations, the core triad of marketing + financial management + technical skills remains consistent—but the emphasis and sophistication level shifts based on context.

3. Findings: Resources Needed

In This Section

Introduction

Beyond skills, survey participants were asked to identify the top three resources needed to achieve their creative aspirations. As the table below shows, equipment/materials (55%) and financial support (53%) emerged as clear priorities, each selected by roughly half of all respondents. Access to international markets ranked third (39%), followed by mentorship (27%) and space to create/sell/perform (21%). Training and education ranked relatively low (18%), which, as explored in the Training section, may reflect past experiences that have fallen short of expectations rather than a lack of interest in development opportunities.

Table: % identified as top 3 resources
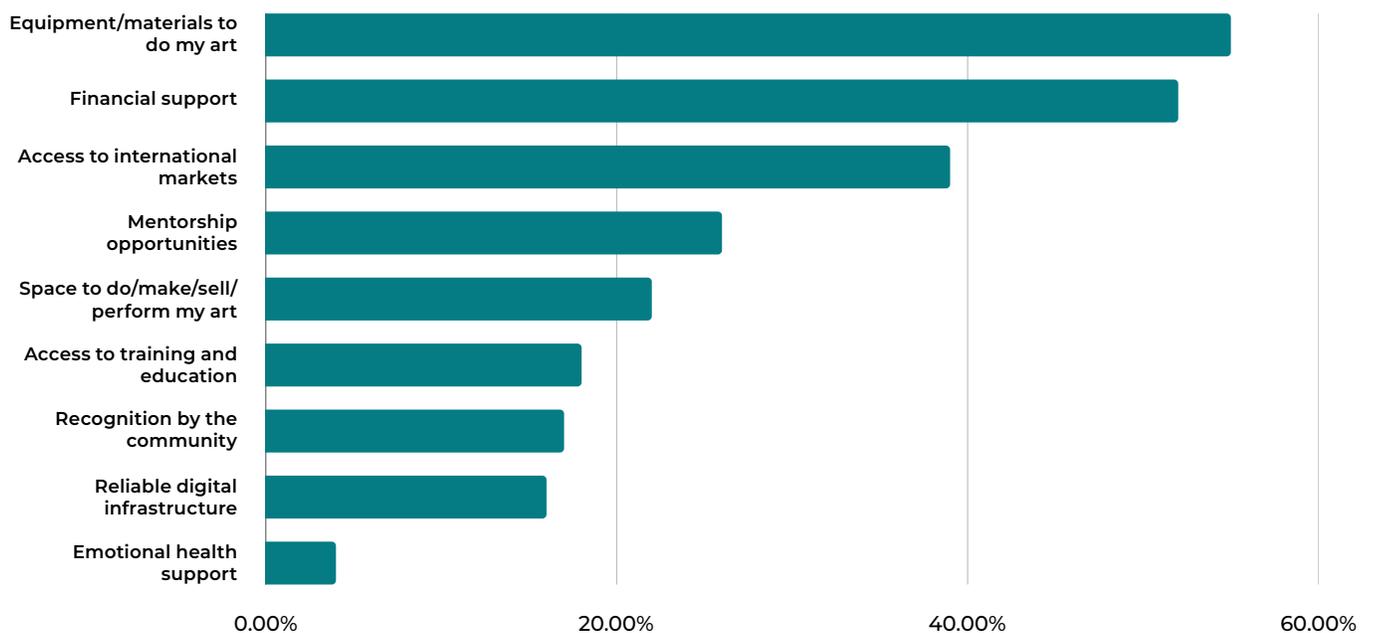
These overall patterns, however, mask important variations by geography and experience level. The following analysis first disaggregates resource priorities to inform targeted program design, then explores each priority area in depth through qualitative data from focus groups and interviews.

3.2.1 Resource Priorities by Geography

The data reveals important differences between urban and rural artists. Rural artists prioritize equipment and materials significantly more than their urban counterparts (60% vs. 43%), likely reflecting the greater difficulty of accessing production tools outside of Kigali. Mentorship also emerges as a higher priority for rural artists (29% vs. 21%), suggesting that geographic isolation from Kigali-centered creative networks creates a stronger need for guided connections.

Table: % Selecting Each Resource by Location

Resource	Urban/Kigali (n=56)	Rural (n=146)
Equipment/Materials	43%	**60%**
Financial Support	**59%**	51%
Access to Intl Markets	38%	40%
Mentorship Connections	21%	**29%**
Space to Create/Sell/Perform	16%	23%
Community Recognition	14%	18%
Training & Education	16%	18%
Digital Infrastructure	18%	16%

Note: *Bold text with highlighting indicates notable difference between groups (8 or more percentage points).*

3.2.2 Resource Priorities by Experience Level

Resource priorities shift notably across career stages. Equipment and materials remain consistently important across all experience levels (52-60%), but financial support shows a dramatic trajectory: rising from 41% among new artists to 77% among those with 10+ years of experience. This may reflect that experienced artists, having established their craft and market presence, face scaling challenges that require capital investment.

Interestingly, newer artists (<1 year) show the highest interest in international markets (48%), perhaps reflecting ambitious global aspirations before encountering the practical challenges of local market development. Additionally, mentorship interest peaks during the early-to-mid career transition (31% at 1-3 years, 30% at 4-6 years) before declining among more established artists, suggesting a critical window when guidance is most valued.

Table: Top Resources by Experience Level

Experience	Top Resource	Key Pattern
<1 year (n=27)	Equipment (52%)	Highest intl market interest (48%)
1-3 years (n=103)	Equipment (58%)	Mentorship peaks (31%); financial at 54%
4-6 years (n=40)	Equipment (60%)	Mentorship remains strong (30%)
7-10 years (n=19)	Financial (63%)	Financial needs rising; equipment drops to 37%
10+ years (n=13)	Financial (77%)	Capital needs peak for scaling

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups largely corroborate these findings while providing depth on why these patterns emerge. A comprehensive analysis of qualitative data reveals three core dimensions of need: access to production equipment and technology, sustainable financial and operational support, and professional development through mentorship. These needs are not isolated but deeply interconnected: a lack of equipment reduces output, which limits income; insufficient financial literacy undermines capital use; and the absence of mentorship perpetuates isolation from opportunities.

3.2.3 Key Resource 1: Equipment and Materials

Equipment and materials emerged as the top resource priority overall (55%), with rural artists prioritizing it significantly more than urban artists (60% vs. 43%). The qualitative data help explain both the universal importance of equipment and the urban-rural gap.

Equipment as Foundation for Creative Work

Artists across rural and urban settings uniformly emphasize a critical need for creative production equipment as foundational to their work. As one rural artist stated, *"I need [to] get more equipment and materials related to my artistic work,"* highlighting the essential nature of tangible tools in artistic creation. This is echoed by another rural creative, who noted, *"I need support to access a studio and a laptop to record and store my music, as well as other musical equipment. This would help me not only improve my own work but also support others who have talent,"* underscoring the dual role of equipment in personal development and community upliftment. Similarly, a rural musician emphasized that *"It's challenging to write and release a song because it requires equipment like instruments, microphones, and access to a studio,"* reinforcing the idea that these tools are not optional but prerequisites for professional output.

Structural Barriers: Cost, Imports, and Outdated Technology

Artists consistently identify high costs, import dependency, and outdated technology as key structural barriers to accessing advanced, functional equipment. One urban speaker stated, **"We face the challenge**

in equipment. In our work, we don't have what we use on the market here in Rwanda, so we need them from Europe. And they are very expensive," highlighting a reliance on costly international imports due to local market shortages. This financial burden is further illustrated by another urban creative, who noted, *"a good modern camera costs around 5 million Rwandan francs, which is too much for an artist who's still growing,"* quantifying the prohibitive pricing that excludes emerging creators. Additionally, a rural participant observed, *"The editing machines we have are not powerful enough to handle large film projects, no updated cameras and audio capturing devices, making it hard to deliver high-quality work,"* pointing to challenges faced with outdated technology. Together, these quotes demonstrate that while artists recognize the need for modern tools, economic and logistical constraints prevent them from acquiring or using up-to-date technology.

Urban Artists: The Ownership Gap

Urban artists express frustration with a lack of personal ownership of equipment, which undermines their creative independence and workflow efficiency. A Kigali-based creative stated, *"Most of the time I'm using some materials from an organization I'm working for, which means I'm limited,"* illustrating how institutional ownership restricts personal creative exploration. This dependence forces artists into conditional access that limit scheduling, spontaneity, and professional flexibility. A focus group participant echoed this sentiment, saying, *"So I would love to have my [own camera] so that I don't need to go to lengths [to get the] camera or use cameras for the other company I work for,"* emphasizing the logistical and psychological benefits of equipment ownership. The repeated emphasis on wanting tools 'for myself' reflects a deeper desire for autonomy, enabling consistent, self-directed creative production free from external gatekeeping.

3.2.4 Key Resource 2: Financial Support

Financial support ranked second overall (53%), with consistent demand across urban and rural settings. However, the experience-level analysis reveals a striking pattern: financial support needs increase dramatically from 41% among new artists to 77% among those with 10+ years of experience. This suggests that capital constraints evolve but do not disappear: newer artists need startup capital, while experienced artists need growth capital for scaling. However, the sample of established artists was relatively small, so the results may not be representative of the larger population of established artists.

Overall, financial constraints in Rwanda's creative sector create a complex web of interrelated challenges that trap artists in sustainability paradoxes. The evidence shows that material import dependency, quality-revenue contradictions, recurring operational costs, and credit barriers prevent artists from achieving professional viability.

Import Dependency and the Quality-Revenue Paradox

Artists face multi-layered financial burdens due to the need to import specialized materials, resulting in costs that extend beyond the purchase price. While the costs of materials are often high, the ability to recoup the costs via sales may not match. One rural artist shares this tension: *"The reason financial resources are such a priority is because the materials used in art are very expensive, from sourcing to the final product. When materials are expensive, it becomes hard to maintain quality, and low-quality art doesn't sell."* This paradox, requiring expensive materials to produce marketable work, yet unable to generate sufficient

revenue to cover costs, fundamentally challenges business sustainability regardless of artistic talent.

Recurring Operational Costs

In addition to challenges with material quality and cost, artists noted the challenge of affording recurring operational costs. One Kigali-based creative shared: ***"The software I use requires a monthly subscription. So it is always a challenge to buy a monthly subscription like Adobe to access their apps."*** Similarly, a rural creative shared their experience with studio recording expenses: ***"Sometimes I write songs but can't afford to record them in a studio, so they remain only as written lyrics."*** These statements reveal a pattern in which certain operational costs are not one-time investments but ongoing financial obligations that persist regardless of revenue levels or artistic output.

Institutional Credit Barriers

Finally, institutional barriers prevent artists from accessing traditional credit mechanisms, creating a structural financing gap for creative sector ventures. Data from rural interviews and focus groups show evidence of this institutional constraint, as illustrated by one participant: ***"Limited financial resources, as banks rarely offer loans for art-related projects."*** This systemic limitation is further contextualized by another rural creative who shared, ***"Another challenge is that without investors or financial support, it's difficult to sell art or have people in Rwanda fully appreciate its value. That's why we often have to target international buyers, who expect high-quality products."*** The repeated theme of banks' reluctance to finance art projects indicates this is not an individual experience but a structural feature of Rwanda's financial system, limiting the creative economy's potential for sustainable development.

3.2.5 Key Resource 3: Mentorship Connections

While mentorship ranked fourth overall (27%), the geographic analysis reveals it is more important to rural artists (29%) than urban artists (21%). This gap likely reflects rural artists' isolation from the creative networks and guidance structures that urban artists can more easily access through proximity to Kigali's creative ecosystem. Notably, interest in mentorship peaks during the early-to-mid career transition (31% at 1-3 years, 30% at 4-6 years) before declining among more established artists, suggesting a critical window when guidance is most valued.

Overall, Rwandan artists across rural and urban settings view business-oriented mentorship as critical infrastructure for sustainable creative careers, with particular emphasis on continuous rather than one-time interventions. While participants were universally interested in business mentorship, they diverged in preferred delivery methods, with some advocating formal institutional structures and others valuing organic learning through peer collaboration.

Continuous Business Mentorship

Multiple artists across rural Rwanda explicitly identify continuous business mentorship as essential for career sustainability. As one rural focus group participant stated, they would like ***"continuous business mentorship to help us grow and sustain our creative work,"*** highlighting both developmental and sustainability dimensions of required support. Artists consistently framed mentorship not as artistic training but specifically

as business guidance necessary to transform creative work into viable, long-term careers. This consensus reveals that artists recognize a fundamental gap in business knowledge that cannot be addressed through one-time workshops but requires ongoing, structured support systems.

Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Sharing

Urban artists emphasize the need for structured peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing platforms as a form of mutual mentorship. In the Kigali-based focus group, one participant explained, *"maybe if we have something [...] where people can meet and share ideas, experience, it can be something really important here for artists... maybe if it can be something that every artist can access, not even meeting or maybe just a website where they can [...] learn and get ideas."* This perspective is amplified by another Kigali focus group participant who elaborated on the need for physical knowledge exchange: *"we all really need to have a center where we can meet to share ideas."* The recurring emphasis on both digital accessibility and physical meeting spaces highlights a dual approach to peer-based mentorship systems.

Cross-Border Connections

Cross-border mentorship connections emerge as a shared priority for artists seeking international market expansion and professional growth. A Kigali focus group participant captures this sentiment explicitly: *"So I think connection is really important. If this training is going to happen, it's better that we get connected to people in our field who are excelling outside the borders so that we can learn from them. You share the experience, they guide you."* This international perspective is further validated by a rural participant who shared that they would like to *"get collaboration opportunities with artists from Rwanda, Kenya, or Nigeria. This would help me raise Rwanda's flag high and inspire other young artists by showing them that success is possible."* Artists consistently connect these international relationships to concrete outcomes: market expansion, professional validation, and inspiration for the next generation of creatives.

3.2.6 Key Resource 4: Space to Create/Sell/Perform

Space to create, sell, or perform ranked fifth overall (21%), with rural artists showing somewhat higher interest (23%) than urban artists (16%). Space needs rise among the most experienced artists (31% at 10+ years), suggesting that as artists scale their operations, dedicated workspace becomes more critical. Overall, the evidence suggests a need for formal creative spaces and infrastructure, particularly outside of Kigali.

Geographic Concentration in Kigali

Formal creative hubs are heavily concentrated in Kigali, creating access disparities for rural artists. This geographical imbalance emerges as a challenge throughout the interviews and focus groups, with one rural creative explicitly stating, *"Most studios and art spaces are located in Kigali, leaving artists in other provinces with limited access to such facilities."* This concentration creates 'creative hub deserts' outside the capital, where artists face compounded challenges, including transportation costs, time constraints, and limited networking opportunities.

For rural creatives, the hubs that do exist operate informally. As one rural artist shared, *"Many recording studios today operate informally and in hidden spaces. If we had standardized, well-equipped, and*

recognized studios, it would bring more professionalism and structure to the industry.” Artists outside Kigali don't just face reduced access to facilities but, as a result, can face exclusion from the professional networks, collaborative opportunities, and cultural exchanges that occur naturally in concentrated creative ecosystems.

3.2.7 Resources Conclusion

The data reveal a clear picture of need, with overlapping resource needs focused on equipment and materials, financing and capital, and mentorship/space to connect with other artists. However, as in previous sections, variations by geography and career stage exist, as outlined below.

Geographic Patterns

Rural artists face systematically greater barriers to accessing production tools (60% vs. 43%) and are more isolated from mentorship networks (29% vs. 21%). Programs should prioritize decentralized resource access beyond Kigali.

Career Stage Patterns

Equipment needs remain consistent across experience levels (52-60%), but financial support needs surge dramatically with experience, from 41% among new artists to 77% among veterans. This argues for tiered financial support mechanisms rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

Universal Priorities

Equipment/materials and financial support emerge as top priorities across all groups. Access to international markets ranked third in the survey, but emerged less strongly in focus groups. However, engaging with international experts and artists featured prominently in mentorship discussions.

While training and education ranked relatively low on the list of needed resources (18%), this may reflect past training experiences that fell short of expectations rather than a lack of interest in development, as explored in the following section.

3. Findings: Training

In This Section

01

Training Picture & Strengths

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02

Training Gaps

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03

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How creative prefer to learn and receive support

04

Implications for Programming

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Introduction

The data gathered in this needs assessment suggest a range of opportunities to strengthen training access, duration, and content for creatives in Rwanda. As shown in Figure 6 below, nearly 56% of survey participants report never having received training. Focus groups and interviews similarly suggest a picture in which urban creatives have much more access to formal training than their rural counterparts. However, access is only one of the challenges faced, as the data below suggests.

Figure 6. Percent of survey respondents who have had previous training

Training Status	Count	Percentage
Has training	90	44%
No training	114	**56%**
Total	**204**	

Location	n	Has Training	No Training
Urban	57	**60% (n=34)**	40% (n=23)
Rural	147	38% (n=56)	**62% (n=91)**

3.3.1 Training Picture and Strengths

Just over 40% of participants, representing 24 districts, had previously accessed training, and this access is highly concentrated. Only 6 of 24 districts had more than five previously trained participants, and three of those districts are in Kigali. Qualitative data reinforces this pattern: only participants from Kigali and Muhanga province described previous training experiences in detail.

The landscape of training providers is fragmented. Survey participants who had received training listed 95 different organizations, centers, or opportunities, nearly one unique source per respondent. The majority accessed government-supported programs through local youth centers, Arts Connekt, and similar initiatives. However, these programs received little attention in focus groups and interviews.

Theme	Organization Type	Mentions	Key Organizations
1	Government & Ministry	**49**	Ministry of Youth & Arts (10), District Governments (14), District Youth Centers (6), RDB (4), Government Boards/RSB (4), Arts Connekt (3), RCHA (3), Youth Connect (2)
2	International Development Organizations	16	Enabel (4), UNDP/UNDEF (2), Swiss Contact/SDC (2), GIZ, Caritas, Heifer International, APEFE, Africalia, MindLeaps
3	Arts Organizations (Non-Govt)	11	Imbuto Foundation/ArtRwanda Ubuhanzi (5), L'espace+ (2), Mashirika, Kwetu Art Center, MADS Gallery, RAI
4	Cultural Institutes (Kigali-based)	10	Institut Français du Rwanda (5), Goethe-Institut Kigali (4), Yunus Emre Institute (1)
5	Business & Professional Networks	9	PSF (3), BPN (2), ICT Chamber, Hanga Project, AMI Rwanda, ESP

NGO and institutional programs occupy a middle ground, less accessible than government programs but more practically oriented. Creatives in Kigali and Muhanga described experiences with Inabel and LINC, which combined skills training in marketing and business with tangible financial support. As one Kigali creative noted, *"They [Inabel] train us, and they fund us."* This dual-value model, capacity building paired with economic resources, enables participants to translate skills into real ventures.

University education, while valued by those who have it, reaches few creatives and often misses the mark. Less than 5%8 of Rwandans hold university degrees, and several urban creatives described a mismatch between available programs and industry needs. One Kigali-based creative explained: *"We don't have a University that teaches fashion school. [...] Everything they teach us is not what we really want. We always feel like we know what they are teaching us."* For those with formal credentials, the training remains foundational, as one rural participant noted, *"I hold both a high school diploma and an A0 diploma in this field, it's my career, and that's where I gained my training,"* but advanced specialization remains elusive.

The most transformative training experiences described by participants were those gained through international exposure and were accessed almost exclusively by Kigali-based creatives. Participants described short courses in business and management in Denmark, capacity-building programs in Sweden and Germany, e-learning certifications through UK institutions, and AI training from a German company that *"really opened my eyes and helped me understand new possibilities in my field."* These experiences share common features: structured curricula, formal certification, and alignment with global trends in digital transformation. But the geographic concentration of such opportunities in Northern and Central Europe, accessed primarily through partnerships available to urban creatives, underscores a widening gap between those with international exposure and those without.

3.3.2 Training Gaps

Overall, participants across both rural and urban contexts identify significant gaps in existing training, particularly around short duration, infrequent scheduling, and failure to keep pace with technological change. While rural participants emphasize logistical constraints, such as insufficient time and overreliance on a single provider, urban respondents highlight curricular deficiencies, including outdated content and a lack of advanced, specialized education. A shared awareness of AI and digital transformation underscores the need for continuous, adaptive training. Yet, disparities in digital literacy, especially in urban areas, reveal a deeper skills gap between access and practical use. These findings suggest that effective training reform must address both structural issues, such as provider diversity and curriculum updating, and pedagogical needs, including more extended engagement and periodic refreshers. Without systemic improvements that reflect regional differences and technological realities, training programs risk remaining fragmented, superficial, and insufficient for fostering long-term professional growth.

Training duration and follow-up

Participants across both rural and urban contexts perceive the brevity and irregular scheduling of training programs as critical barriers to effective learning. In rural areas, the insufficiency of training duration directly prevented full curriculum delivery, with one participant noting, *"The training period was too short, so we didn't finish the topics on financial management and record keeping."* Other creatives shared similar sentiments, as outlined below.

> *"The time given to access and complete them was too short compared to the amount of content and skills included in the training package."*
>
> — *Rural creative*

This mismatch between content volume and time allocation undermines skill acquisition and limits practical application. In urban areas, while the duration may not have been the primary complaint, the long gaps between training sessions were highlighted as detrimental, as expressed by one urban creative: **"If it happens like in one year and then you spend like more than seven years without doing any training, so it's like...a gap between."** The recommendation to train every six months or annually to maintain professional relevance reflects a shared understanding that both the initial session length and recurring engagement are essential for sustained knowledge retention and skill development.

Curricula Updating and Technology

There is a strong consensus across rural and urban participants that training curricula must be continuously updated to reflect rapid technological advances, especially in artificial intelligence and digital platforms. A rural participant praised AI training, stating it *"really opened my eyes and helped me understand new possibilities in my field,"* underscoring the transformative potential of exposure to new technologies. However, even recent training is seen as quickly outdated, as one urban creative noted: *"The training I did two years ago, I think many things have taken place now,"* emphasizing the accelerating pace of change. This awareness leads to an

apparent demand for adaptive training systems; he stressed, *"what has to be improved is to see those changes that took place and then be integrated in those trainings so that people who are taking those training now can stay ahead."* The recognition that digital tools are crucial for self-promotion and entrepreneurship further reinforces the need for curricula that evolve in real time with industry developments. Without such responsiveness, training risks becoming obsolete before it is even delivered.

3.3.3 Training and Support Delivery Preferences

In addition to the content of a potential program, participants were asked to indicate how they would prefer training delivered, how often they would like it, and how much training they need.

Training Frequency by Location

Urban and rural artists show distinctly different preferences for training frequency. Urban artists in Kigali strongly prefer more intensive engagement; 62% selected weekly training as a top choice, compared to just 34% of rural artists. Conversely, rural artists favor a monthly cadence, with 58% choosing it, compared with only 40% among urban artists.

Location	Top Preference	Training Status
Urban (Kigali)	**Weekly (62%)**	Strongest desire for frequent, intensive engagement
Rural	**Monthly (58%)**	Prefer less frequent touchpoints; travel constraints likely factor

These patterns align with qualitative findings: rural participants who emphasized that *"the time given to access and complete them was too short"* may prefer consolidated monthly sessions that justify travel. In contrast, urban artists with easier access can engage more frequently.

Support Amount by Location

Rural artists report substantially higher support needs than their urban counterparts. More than half of rural artists (57%) indicate they need "a great deal" or "a lot" of support, compared to 41% of urban artists, a 16-point gap.

Location	Top Response	High Need (Great deal + A lot)
Urban (Kigali)	Moderate (53%)	41%
Rural	Great deal (36%)	**57%**

This disparity reinforces the qualitative finding that urban creatives have greater access to existing training infrastructure; their more moderate support needs may reflect partial fulfillment through existing training programs mentioned above.

Patterns by Experience Level and Location

The urban-rural gap is especially pronounced among early-career artists (1-3 years). 63% of rural artists in this cohort report high support needs, compared with 44% of their urban peers. This suggests that geographic isolation may compound the challenges of launching a creative career.

Table: Percentage reporting high support need ('A great deal' or 'A lot') by experience and location

Experience	Urban (Kigali)	Rural
1-3 years	44%	**63%**
4-6 years	45%	52%
7-10 years	30%	**56%**

Frequency preferences also diverge by career stage: urban early-career artists prefer weekly or biweekly training, whereas rural early-career artists strongly prefer monthly sessions, likely reflecting the logistical constraints described by rural participants in focus groups.

Table: Top frequency preferences by experience and location

Experience	Urban (Kigali)	Rural
1-3 years	Bi-weekly (52%), Weekly (48%)	Monthly (60%), Weekly/Bi-weekly (40%)
4-6 years	Weekly (55%), Bi-weekly (55%)	Monthly (57%), Quarterly (50%)
7-10 years	Weekly (50%), Quarterly (40%)	Bi-weekly/Bi-monthly/Quarterly (44%)

3.3.4 Training Conclusion

Overall, there are significant opportunities to increase training and support for Rwandan creatives. However, training needs are differentiated by experience level and geography, as outlined below.

Geographic Patterns

Rural artists report substantially higher support needs (57% vs. 41% urban), with the gap especially pronouned among early-career artists (63% rural vs. 44% urban). Programs should adapt delivery models accordingly.

Career Stage Patterns

Early-career rural artists face compounded challenges. Frequency preferences diverge: urban ealy-career artist prefer weekly training while training rural counterparts favor monthly sessions reflecting travel constraints.

Universal Priorities

Critical gaps include insufficient duration, infrequent scheduling, and outdated curricula. The most impactful programs (Inabel, LINC) combined skills training with financial support—a dual-value model worth replicating.

4. Recommendations

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Introduction

The findings from this needs assessment point to a set of interconnected priorities for program design. Rather than addressing skills, resources, and training in isolation, effective programming must recognize how these elements interact and how needs vary systematically by geography and career stage. The following recommendations are organized around six strategic priorities that emerged from the data.

4.1 Design for Geographic Equity

The data reveals systematic disparities between urban and rural creatives that require intentional program design to address.

The Evidence:

- Training access is heavily concentrated in Kigali: only 6 of 24 districts had more than 5 previously-trained participants.

- Rural artists report higher support needs across nearly every measure: equipment (60% vs. 43%), mentorship (29% vs. 21%), and overall training intensity (57% "high need" vs. 41%).

- The most transformative training experiences (international exposure) were accessed almost exclusively by Kigali-based creatives.

- Creative infrastructure, studios, art spaces, and formal hubs tend to be geographically concentrated in the capital.

Recommendations:

- Decentralize program delivery beyond Kigali, with dedicated rural cohorts rather than expecting rural artists to travel to the capital

- Adapt delivery models by location: Rural programming should emphasize monthly, intensive sessions that justify travel; urban programming can offer more frequent weekly or bi-weekly touchpoints

- Prioritize rural artists for equipment access programs, given their significantly higher barriers to production tools

- Establish regional creative hubs or mobile programming that brings resources to provinces currently operating as "creative hub deserts."

4.2 Create Tiered Programming by Career Stage

Skill and resource priorities shift markedly as artists progress through their careers, suggesting that one-size-fits-all programming will miss critical needs.

The Evidence:

- Newer artists (<1 year) overwhelming prioritize business and financial skills (56%), the immediate challenge of sustaining creative work.

- Early-to-mid career artists (1-6 years) shift focus to digital marketing (31-40%), building audience and market presence.

- Mentorship interest peaks during the early-to-mid career transition (31% at 1-3 years, 30% at 4-6 years) before declining among more established artists (21-23% at 7+ years), suggesting a critical window when guidance is most valued.

- Experienced artists (7+ years) show surging interest in international trade/export (21-23% vs. 3-6% among newer artists).

- Financial support needs increase dramatically with experience: from 41% among new artists to 77% among those with 10+ years, suggesting capital constraints evolve but don't disappear.

- Space needs rise among the most experienced artists (31% at10+ years vs. 19-22% at earlier stages), suggesting that as artists scale their operations, dedicated workspace becomes more critical.

Recommendations:

- **Early Career (0–3 years):** Foundational business training, separating personal and business finances, basic financial tracking, pricing strategies, and introductory digital presence. This is also the critical window for mentorship connections (31% prioritize mentorship at 1-3 years).

- **Mid-Career (4–6 years):** Digital marketing intensity, advanced social media strategy, content creation, brand positioning, and audience targeting. Continue mentorship support through this transition period (30% still prioritize mentorship).

- **Experienced (7+ years):** International market readiness, export procedures, cross-border networking, international partnership development, and scaling capital access. Include workspace/studio access support (31% at 10+ years) and growth capital (77% at 10+ years).

- Allow artists to self-select into tiers based on their assessed needs rather than strictly by years of experience, while using experience as a general guide

4.3 Integrate Skills, Resources, and Training

The data consistently shows that skills, resources, and training needs are deeply interconnected; addressing them in silos will limit impact.

The Evidence:

- Artists frame creative work as entrepreneurship, pursuing economic sustainability, social impact, and professional fulfillment simultaneously.

- The core triad of marketing + finanial management + technical skills remains consistent across all career stages and locations.

- Equipment access without training limits impact; training without equipment access.

- The most impactful programs cited by participants (Inabel, LINC) combined skills training with tangible financial support: ***"They train us, and they fund us."***

Recommendations:

- Bundle interventions: Pair equipment access programs with training on how to use tools effectively; pair financial literacy training with access to capital

- Design curricula that integrate digital marketing + financial management + technical skills rather than treating them as separate tracks

- Include IP/legal literacy as a component of business training rather than a standalone module; participants view it as essential to protecting and monetizing creative work

- Model programming on the dual-value approach (capacity building + economic resources) that participants identified as most impactful

4.4 Prioritize Continuous Engagement Over One-Time Interventions

Participants consistently described the limitations of short, infrequent training and the need for sustained support.

The Evidence:

- Training gaps centered on short duration and infrequent scheduling: *"The training period was too short, so we didn't finish the topics."*

- Long gaps between sessions were highlighted as detrimental: *"If it happens like in one year and then you spend like more than seven years without doing any training, so it's like...a gap between."*

- Participants explicitly requested *"continuous business mentorship to help us grow and sustain our creative work."*

- Technology-focused training becomes outdated quickly: *"The training I did two years ago, I think many things have taken place now."*

Recommendations:

- Design programs with sustained engagement over 6-12 months minimum, not one-off workshops.

- Build in periodic refreshers to address the rapid pace of technological change, particularly in AI and digital tools.

- Establish ongoing mentorship relationships rather than time-limited advising.

- Create alumni networks and peer learning platforms that continue after formal programming ends, both digital (accessible to rural artists) and physical (for urban artists seeking in-person connection).

4.5 Address Structural Financial Barriers

Financial constraints emerged as a complex, multi-layered challenge that individual training cannot solve, requiring institutional partnerships and systemic interventions.

The Evidence:

- Artists face a quality-revenue paradox: expensive materials are required to produce marketable work, but revenue cannot cover costs.

- Import dependency creates compounding costs: *"Some of the materials I use are locally available, but other must be imported from Uganda. That requires money for transport, labor, and other costs."*

- Recurring operational costs (software subscriptions, studio fees) persist regardless of revenue.

- Institutional credit barriers exclude creatives: *"banks rarely offer loans for art-related projects."*

Recommendations:

- Partner with financial institutions to develop creative sector lending products, potentially with program participants as a pilot cohort with demonstrated business training.

- Explore equipment lending libraries or cooperative ownership models to address the prohibitive cost of production tools.

- Advocate for policy interventions on import duties for creative production equipment.

- Include financial planning for recurring costs (subscriptions, studio access, materials) in business training curricula, not just startup costs.

- Connect experienced artists (7+ years) with growth capital opportunities, given their dramatically higher financial support needs for scaling.

4.6 Build Pathways to International Exposure

International connections emerged as both a high aspiration and a significant equity gap, currently accessible almost exclusively to urban artists.

The Evidence:

- Interest in international trade/export surges among experienced artists (21-23%).

- The most transformative training experiences came through international programs in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and the UK.

- Artists explicitly requested cross-border mentorship: *"get connected to people in our field who are excelling outside the borders so that we can learn from them."*

- Rural artist expressed similar aspirations but lack access pathways: *"I would like to get collaboration oppprtunities with artists from Rwanda, Kenya, or Nigeria."*

Recommendations:

- Develop international exchange or virtual mentorship programs accessible to artists outside Kigali, not only those with existing urban networks.

- Create regional (East African) connections as an intermediate step; artists mentioned Kenya and Nigeria as aspirational markets.

- Include export readiness training for experienced artist cohorts: international market navigation, shipping logistics, pricing for international buyers, and cross-cultural marketing.

- Partner with international institutions to bring programming to Rwanda rather than requiring artists to travel abroad.

4.7 Summary: Critical Design Principles

Based on the totality of findings, effective programming for Rwanda's creative economy should be designed with the following principles in mind.

Experience	Urban (Kigali)
Geographic equity	Decentralize beyond Kigali; adapt delivery models for rural contexts
Career stage differentiation	Tier curricula from foundational (emerging) to international (established)
Integrated support	Bundle skills + resources + training; don't silo interventions
Continuous engagement	Sustained programming over months, not one-off workshops
Structural intervention	Partner with institutions to address financial system barriers
International pathways	Create accessible routes to cross-border exposure for all artists

The consistent thread across all findings is that Rwandan creatives view themselves as entrepreneurs building sustainable businesses, not hobbyists seeking occasional inspiration. Programming that matches this self-conception, with practical business orientation, sustained engagement, and equitable access regardless of geography, will be positioned to meaningfully support the growth of Rwanda's creative economy.

Appendix: Detailed Participant Demographics

Appendix Table A: Survey Respondents by District

Geographic distribution of participants

District	n	%	Province
Kigali City (Urban)			
Kicukiro	27	11.0%	Kigali City
Gasabo	21	8.6%	Kigali City
Nyarugenge	19	7.8%	Kigali City
Kigali City Subtotal	**67**	**27.3%**	**—**
Rural Districts			
Bugesera	34	13.9%	East
Rulindo	30	12.2%	North
Ngoma	15	6.1%	East
Karongi	9	3.7%	West
Musanze	8	3.3%	North
Rubavu	8	3.3%	West
Kayonza	7	2.9%	East
Other districts (20)	67	27.3%	Various
Rural Subtotal	178	72.7%	—
TOTAL	**245**	**100%**	**—**

Note: *"Other districts" includes 20 districts with fewer than 7 respondents each: Gisagara (6), Nyamasheke (6), Kirehe (6), Nyabihu (6), Rwamagana (5), Kamonyi (5), Huye (4), Gakenke (4), Ngororero (4), Gicumbi (3), Rusizi (2), Ruhango (2), Nyamagabe (2), Nyanza (2), Rutsiro (2), Nyaruguru (2), Nyagatare (2), Burera (2), Gatsibo (1), Muhanga (1).*

Appendix Table B: Experience Level by Geographic Location

Career stage breakdown across regions

Career Stage	Urban (n=67)	Rural (n=178)	Total
Early Career (0–3 years)	52.2% (n=35)	**70.8% (n=126)**	**65.7%**
Mid-Career (4–6 years)	19.4% (n=13)	18.0% (n=32)	**65.7%**
Experienced (7+ years)	**28.4% (n=19)**	11.2% (n=20)	**15.9%**

Note: *Urban = Gasabo, Kicukiro, Nyarugenge districts (Kigali City). Percentages calculated within each location column. Urban creatives are more than twice as likely to have 7+ years of experience (28.4% vs. 11.2%), while rural creatives are more concentrated in the early career stage (70.8% vs. 52.2%).*

Appendix Table C: Primary Creative Medium by Geographic Location

Creative disciplines by area

Creative Medium	Urban (n=67)	Rural (n=178)	Total
Visual Arts & Craft Industries	23.9% (n=16)	**30.9% (n=55)**	**29.0%**
Performing Arts	20.9% (n=14)	**29.8% (n=53)**	**27.3%**
Audio-Visual & Interactive Media	**32.8% (n=22)**	11.8% (n=21)	**17.6%**
Design Industry	14.9% (n=10)	18.5% (n=33)	**17.6%**
Beauty Industry	1.5% (n=1)	5.1% (n=9)	**4.1%**
Literary Arts / Cultural Heritage	6.0% (n=4)	3.9% (n=7)	**4.5%**

Note: *Urban = Gasabo, Kicukiro, Nyarugenge districts (Kigali City). Percentages calculated within each location column. Audio-Visual & Interactive Media is notably concentrated in urban areas (32.8% vs. 11.8%), while Visual Arts/Crafts and Performing Arts are more prevalent among rural creatives.*

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Note: Additional data sources include survey responses collected in March 2025 (N=245) and qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted July-August 2025 (N=24) by Creative Visions and Green Horizon Ventures research team.