



**Summary of
Creator Survey: How Has COVID-19 Impacted You,
Your Career and Your Livelihood**

June 2020

Table of Contents

<i>Survey Background and Methodology</i>	3
<i>Summary</i>	3-4
<i>Detailed Results</i>	4-5
• Creators’ Situations Versus National Average	
• Challenges Faced by Creators	
• Relief Programs	
• Key Quotes & Anecdotes	5-7
<i>References</i>	8

Survey Background and Methodology

COVID-19 has seriously impacted the U.S. economy. Not only has the GDP annual rate turned negative for the first time in six years due to the economic impact of the pandemic (The White House), but jobless claims for the three months prior to the survey have also risen to more than 36 million (New York Times). Under these unsettling circumstances, the Copyright Alliance designed and disseminated a Creator COVID-19 Survey to better understand the professional and economic conditions of our creator members and creators at large across the country. Using a tool called Survey Monkey, we received 649 responses across a span of 25 days. During this period, the survey was amplified via email and social media channels and included both multiple choice and open-ended questions.

Summary

The Creator COVID-19 Survey garnered 649 responses from participants across the United States. It was conducted from May 19 to June 12, 2020 and consisted of 24 questions regarding how COVID-19 has impacted creator careers and livelihoods. The majority of survey participants were **photographers (33%), recording artists/performers (20%), authors (4.31%), illustrators/graphic designers (4.16%), music producers/audio engineers (4.16%), and songwriters/composers (4.01%)**. The survey results reveal four key trends regarding creators as a result of the pandemic, illustrating just how severely impacted this group has been from a career and financial perspective (both now and in the future).

- 1. Creators are losing income.** 88% of the respondents' work income had declined, which is considerably higher than the national average of 43%. The highest share of respondents, approximately one third, had lost all of their income. 21% had lost 90% of their income. Overall, 83% of creators had lost more than half of their income. Because creators often have multiple jobs, many lost incomes in various areas. The top three areas where creators lost income were physical/digital work or copies of their work (44%), photoshoots (39%), and live performances (35%).
- 2. The majority of creators are facing challenges and difficulties.** 483 responses for open-ended questions suggested that one of the challenges is to secure jobs. Most of them expressed their difficulties and frustration by stating that their ability to earn an income or to secure work is being heavily impacted. Due to social distancing requirements during the pandemic, creators do not have access to studios, exhibitions, galleries, concerts, and theaters where they usually create and sell their works. Limited access to working places has resulted in losing jobs and income. Approximately half (46%) of creators have applied, or attempted to apply, for regular unemployment.

- 3. Creators feel uncertain about the future.** 45% of respondents felt unsure about how soon they expected to return to a normal work schedule once states begin to reopen and social distancing restrictions are loosened. Creators also have no idea when clients will have new products to shoot, what budget clients will have to hire them with, when postponed assignments will be rescheduled, when music gigs will be rescheduled, or if the virus will still be threatening at that point. 20% of creators do not expect to immediately return to normal career schedules. Some creators want to wait until a vaccine or cure is available because they think that whether or not they can restart their work depends on how comfortable and safe the public feels.
- 4. Creators seek more information about financial support.** Approximately 40% of the creators surveyed have applied, or attempted to apply, for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) for independent contractors and freelancers. Among them, 48% were approved for the application, but some creators were confused and found conflicting information during the application process. Many creators are not familiar with relief programs besides PUA, such as the Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP), an Emergency Disaster Loan, or Emergency grants or loans from a private foundation or fund. Many creators are looking forward to receiving more help and information about any or all programs mentioned above.

Detailed Results

Creators' Situations Versus National Average: According to the survey, 44% of creators typically submit the 1099 tax form (typically used to report payments made to independent contractors). 15% of creators submit W2 form (typically used for employees). 40% of creators submit both. This group of data suggests that most of the creators are self-employed. Many creators are business owners and independent contractors while also serving as employees of other companies or organizations. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, American small businesses are encountering an unprecedented economic decline due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Creators, especially those who are running their own small business, are facing more difficulties than people working in other areas.

It is inevitable that people's lives would be affected because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the vast difference between the national average income loss and creators' income loss suggests that creators have been especially affected. According to the data from *Statista*, as of May 31, roughly 13% of those surveyed in the United States had lost all of their income over the four weeks following the start of the pandemic, while 33% of creators reported a total loss of income, which is a nearly 20% difference. 32% of people in the United States lost more than half of their income, whereas 88% of creators reported the same. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national unemployment rate prior to May 2020 was 13.3%, while 46% of creators have applied, or attempted to apply, for regular unemployment, and only 45% of those applications have been approved. In sum, creators face an unemployment rate much higher than the national average.

Challenges Faced by Creators: While major sources of income for creators before the pandemic involved selling their own work or art, many revealed that they have lost their income due to restriction policies during COVID-19. Those impacted include creators with jobs involving in-person contact. Among survey comments received was the following from an event photographer: “With weddings and concerts/large events being canceled, I no longer have the ability to work.”

Answers from respondents also showed that the situation is equally uncertain for art performers, teachers, and tour guides. Although many creators had multiple jobs before the pandemic, COVID-19 restrictions often forced all of their jobs to shut down. Another creator revealed that “As an architectural photographer, clients are reluctant to allow my company into their residence or business; as a teacher, students are reluctant to attend workshops or seminars; as a photographic artist, the studio and wet lab I use to create fine art and to create analog prints has closed down.” In addition to the job crises, many found having a family to support made the situation worse: “I was in the beginning stage of pushing my brand and what little money I did have to start my projects went [toward] the children in my household.”

Relief Programs: Creators also need relief programs to ease their financial difficulties. Although many creators have already received benefits from one or more relief programs provided by the government or private funds, a number of creators suggested they did not get the amount of money promised or anticipated. According to one creator: “I was approved for the special PAU extra \$600 per week as an independent contractor/gig performer, but I have only received 6 of those payments and the past 6 weeks of payments have NOT included my PAU \$600/week as required.” Other creators gave up applying to relief programs due to eligibility issues and other considerations, such as “I found a lot of conflicting eligibility”; “I could not get through to my bank”; “I could not get through to my accountant”; “I could not get through or get cohesive answers to any of my questions”; and “I gave up.” Many more creators were not familiar with relief programs and desired to receive more reliable information.

Key Quotes & Anecdotes

Q7: Please explain how social distancing/shelter at home restrictions have impacted your ability to earn an income/secure work as a creator:

“We mainly work in licensing original works for entertainment marketing. As our clients’ projects [became] frozen [or] were canceled, our business as we know it dried up. As of the end of May, we are 35% down for the year. We employ composers and a sound designer, as well as musicians... throughout the year, so our lack of work has impacted their ability to earn, too. It’s been really tough.”

“In addition to not being able to shoot commissioned work due to social distancing requirements, I am unable to shoot travel images (my primary focus). Even shooting nature images has been impacted since local state parks where I shot regularly are crowded, parking lots full and since I am at additional risk due to preexisting health issues, the risks inherent in being unable to maintain a 6-foot distance throughout a hike and the fact that I can’t remain in

one location (along with hiking for any length of time) makes photography more difficult and risky.”

“Social distancing has decimated my business entirely. I’m a professional musician, composer, music instructor, recording session artist, and sideman, as well as a touring road musician. Every one of my teaching opportunities at music camps I teach regularly, all of my concert dates with the different bands I perform with, as well as several already scheduled master recording sessions, have been totally canceled. I haven’t been able to even have any rehearsals with other musicians to create new songs and arrangements. I attribute all of these negative impacts on my career and ability to make a living to the COVID-19 related cancellations and the lockdowns and social distancing.”

“We haven’t been able to go into the studio to record music for almost 3 months. It’s too high risk of an environment given that many of the rooms are tightly sealed to prevent sound leakage. The closure of independent retailers, canceling of all live in-person music, and closure of restaurants/bars caused the independent music scene to be economically gutted. Without much income, independent musicians’ budgets for recording and mixing albums were depleted greatly, and therefore work for us dried up significantly. For artists on labels, the loss of income from both music and merchandise sales meant that they slashed all of their recording budgets as well.”

Q9: Once states reopen and social distancing restrictions are loosened, how soon do you expect to return to a normal work schedule (and why)? Please elaborate below.

“A lot of my income comes from close interaction with students and the public. I don't know when various institutions will have policies in place to reopen these types of activities. Additionally, I help care for several elders, have family in high risk categories, and have some underlying health risks myself. It's not just if and when the institutions with whom I work will reopen, it's also the risk assessment for myself and my loved ones.”

“Most of my work is within the events industry. The biggest sector outside of that is healthcare, almost all of it in the spring. Large conferences of 5K – 35K attendees such as I normally work may well not return until spring of 2021... I don't know that I can make it until next spring on Pandemic Unemployment. I’ve applied for all of the local artist relief programs I could find... but the need was so overwhelming here the money ran out. All of the small business emergency relief [government] stuff I applied for was initially pending, then shut down as well... frankly, I’m overwhelmed and begging for help can turn into a full-time job that doesn’t look like a sustainable option going forward. Honestly, in this climate I feel screwed and like the best thing for me to do is build a better vehicle and learn how to drive it or go under. Changes in our industry... have created an environment where artists are even more at risk than ever... I fear this will be the end of my photography business and life as a professional photographer.”

Q22: What would you like others to know about your employment experience and challenges during the COVID-19 crisis?

“I’m 62 this year and considering early social security as well as looking for a remote job in another field and giving up my career due to the uncertainty about when I can return to work. I don’t want to take PPE away from medical professionals so I can work and being at risk due to preexisting health conditions means even taking images for fine art and potential licensing is tricky and risky...Fees from licensing my work have dropped precipitously since the crisis began, agencies have gone under and the largest one has dropped commissions by close to 75%, making non-assignment work most likely unsustainable even when/if I’m able to go back to travel photography (my bread and butter). I need career guidance and support to find a way to succeed in this new reality.”

Q23: What resources / services / assistance would you find to be most valuable at this time?

“Federal support for artists is necessary. We are hustlers by nature. We have to be, to make it in this business during the best of times. But, not being able to leave the house (never mind get on a plane and fly which is a HUGE part of our livelihood) is making it impossible to make ends meet. The fact that our industry will likely not be able to get back to normal for years or until there is a vaccine means that we will likely lose many important voices and artists because we will not be able to continue to feed ourselves and our children.”

References

“An In-Depth Look at COVID-19's Early Effects on Consumer Spending and GDP.” *The White House, The United States Government*, April 29, 2020; www.whitehouse.gov/articles/depth-look-covid-19s-early-effects-consumer-spending-gdp/.

“Poll: 43 percent of Americans have lost jobs or wages due to coronavirus outbreak.” *The Hill*, April 21, 2020; <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/493913-poll-43-percent-of-americans-have-lost-jobs-or-wages-due-to-coronavirus>.

“Bureau of Labor Statistics Data.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, June 18, 2020; <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000>.

“Coronavirus (COVID-19): Small Business Guidance & Loan Resources.” *U.S. Small Business Administration*; www.sba.gov/page/coronavirus-covid-19-small-business-guidance-loan-resources.

“'Rolling Shock' as Job Losses Mount Even with Re-openings.” *The New York Times*, May 14, 2020; www.nytimes.com/2020/05/14/business/economy/coronavirus-unemployment-claims.html.

“COVID-19 Pandemic - Percentage of Income Lost 2020.” *Statista*, May 31, 2020; www.statista.com/statistics/1108072/percentage-of-income-loss-due-to-the-covid-19-corona-pandemic/.