WorkInCulture

SKILLS CHECK-IN:

A Report from WorkInCulture
on
Artists' Business Skill Needs

FEBRUARY 2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WorkInCulture continues its work on business skills issues for artists and cultural workers which it began with *Enriching Our Work In Culture: Professional Development in Ontario's Cultural Sector* in 2008. The current report is the first of a series of skills check-in. This one polled more than 500 artists from various disciplines around the province.

Survey questions were organized into four brief sections, covering general employment issues and career goals, perceived challenges to career, professional development needs, and WorkInCulture programs and services.

Survey summary results showed a number of trends which will affect training and development around the province:
- slightly **more than one out of three artists work in two or more media**
- despite the challenges of creating a living, **artists are highly motivated, entrepreneurial and resilient,** continuing to practise art in lifelong careers which will require lifelong training
- artists see their **top challenges as finding sources of funds, making sales, marketing and promotion**
- although artists rely on word of mouth and networking to further their careers, increasingly they **take advantage of online sources** to network, market and to learn
- acquiring business skills to manage an entrepreneurial life is extremely important to them; **more than half of respondents have taken some kind of business skill training**
- artists prefer face-to-face learning but increasingly they are **taking advantage of online learning (41%)** and one in four recognize the value of business skill learning that blends styles and technologies.

There are only **minor differences between artistic disciplines or regions** on the issues, suggesting that more generic training is possible and that training opportunities can be rolled out regionally and provincially. But survey results showed the variety of training providers in communities, suggesting that **there are many potential partners and collaborators** to deliver more systematic business skills training across the province.

The report will be shared with WorkInCulture's professional training partners – its members, other arts discipline associations, community arts councils and others, as well as with its funders.

BACKGROUND

In 2008 Cultural Careers Council Ontario (as WorkInCulture was then publicly known) issued a report from market research firm Ipsos Reid with comprehensive data about attitudes, spending and practices in professional development in Ontario's cultural sector.

Enriching Our Work in Culture: Professional Development in Ontario's Cultural Sector, a Qualitative and Quantitative Study examined the practices of organizations (from the non-profit and commercial ends of the spectrum) as well as those of individual cultural workers, especially artists, in Ontario and compared them to world-wide trends.

This study's findings set the parameters for WorkInCulture's continued examination of business skills training issues in subsequent reports, activities and strategic planning.

Most recently in 2010/11, WIC undertook a strategic planning process which confirmed four goals around its capacity to improve the business skills of the cultural sector:
- Be a strategic leader
- Be a provincial coordinator
- Be the partner of choice
- Build organizational capacity

Although financial resources to replicate the original Ipsos Reid study are not yet available, WorkInCulture felt that as part of strategic planning in the future, it was important to begin a more regular survey of artists and others on attitudes, skill needs, learning preferences and other training-related issues. This report is the first of those 'check-ins'.

Using Survey Monkey technology, WorkInCulture polled artists across the province. The technology allows for a broad reach and reasonably quick turnaround and analysis. The survey was available online at the WorkInCulture website. As well, WorkInCulture sent notices to its newsletter list, its members (professional associations such as arts service organizations and trade associations) and to local community-based arts councils, many of whom passed it on to individual artists. The Ontario Arts Council was helpful in distributing the survey to community-based local arts councils and also had an online link at its website.

The survey was 'live' for only two weeks – October 20 to November 4 2011. **More than 500 artists around the entire province completed it.**

Although the survey identified six typical discipline areas (visual artists, craftspersons, performing artists, writers, filmmakers and digital media artists), respondents from filmmakers and digital media artists were not substantial enough to confirm results for those areas. Also, a number of artists identified themselves as working in multiple disciplines, a trend which should be tracked for the future.

In addition to WorkInCulture's own staff analysis, Dr. Adam Lodzinski (Adam Lodzkinski and Associates) undertook supplementary analyses which broke down some data further and helped to confirm other results.

Top-line results were presented November 18th at the Ontario Arts Council's conference of local arts councils, called Convening for Learning.

This report presents the full summary results. Results have also been tabulated by region (identified through postal codes) and discipline, and will be shared with appropriate regional arts councils and discipline-specific arts service organizations.

SURVEY CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Participation was entirely voluntary, so WIC kept the number of survey questions to a minimum, ensuring that it could be completed in less than 15 minutes. Questions were developed by WorkInCulture staff. Then a small group of local arts councils, convened by Ontario Arts Council to help plan its November conference, provided feedback on wording and survey organization.

The survey questions are attached in Appendix A. The 16 questions were organized into four sections:
- general questions (discipline, length of practice, employment status, region and career goals)
- perceived challenges to careers (including current resources for furthering careers)
- professional development needs (including confidence levels, skill needs, current training, important skill topics for the future, learning style preferences)
- WorkInCulture programs and services
Questions also had both closed and open ended items to allow for amplification by respondents if they chose.

WIC took its most recent strategic planning goals into account in the survey design. For example, the organization wanted to assess regional, generational and discipline differences, the results of which could be provided to partners to inform their own professional development in these areas. Some of the questions could also help identify new potential partners in regions while others very clearly outlined shared skill areas to be addressed in future programming.

In addition, the final section allowed WorkInCulture to assess awareness of its services and programs throughout Ontario and determine some new opportunities.

RESULTS - Section One (The Artists' Career)

The first section gave us a look at individual career goals and regional, generational and employment status questions.

☑Rising Trend - Working in Multiple Disciplines

Although a substantial proportion (17% – almost one out of five) directly identified themselves as multidisciplinary artists (i.e. working in two or more media), on more in-depth analysis that percentage rose even higher –   **37% of artists, one out of three, work that way**.

This trend is especially important, affecting, as it does, possible training as well as how traditional arts service organizations recruit their members.

Although they picked specific discipline categories for themselves, 20% of artists took the opportunity to be more specific about their art practice, feeling that the category they chose really did not represent them accurately. Some examples from that list of 'other' categories: artistic directors of companies, artist-run centres, festivals or reading series; cartoon voiceover artist; community artist; curator; make-up artist; spoken word performer; dramaturge; stand-up comic, among many others. The list shows the complexity and depth of the sector and the range of jobs and professional opportunities.

☑Importance of Local Community to Long-Term Goals

When asked about their long-term goals, the results show just **how important local community is** to an artist's vision of their future and their practice.

In fact, no matter the discipline, individual artists saw themselves as rooted in their communities. Only 12.5% of all respondents said their goal was to move to another city to further their artistic practice.

For some disciplines such as crafts and writing, the importance of the community was absolutely overwhelming: 96.3% of craftspeople and 89% of writers saw themselves staying in their community.
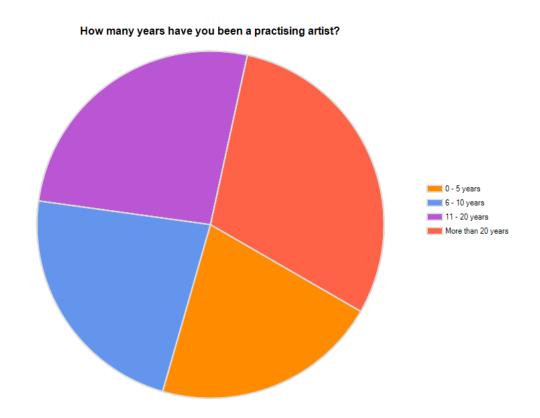
Not surprisingly, performing artists – who depend more on density of population for their ensembles and their audiences – were more likely (17.9%) to want to move to another city to further their artistic practice.

There were some small regional differences that should be noted. For example, there are relatively higher proportions of performing artists in Eastern Ontario (postal code K), the Greater Toronto Area (M) and Central Ontario (postal code L) while Southwestern Ontario (N) and Northern Ontario (P) show higher percentages of visual artists.

☑ <u>Resilience of the Artist - Life-long Careers Demand Life-long Training</u>

Despite the challenges of creating a living, artists are extremely resilient, as can be seen in the pie chart below. They continue to work consistently throughout their career and **life-long careers will require life-long training.** For organizations concerned with training and development, that notion poses a lot of challenges around the diversity of skills needed, delivery to different populations, consistency of delivery, etc.

Regional differences are a factor here. The greater Toronto region (Postal Code - M) has a slightly higher percentage of artists relatively "new" to the field (33%) and a slightly smaller proportion of artists with 20 or more years of practice (18%).

How many years have you been a practising artist?

- 0 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 20 years
- More than 20 years

☑ <u>Self-Employment is the Norm</u>

Consistent with previous studies, the survey showed that more than 50% of artists work on their own (self-employed)or work part-time as an artist (35.5%), while only 23.9% described themselves as working full-time as an artist.

The challenges of the artist's career choices were explored a little more in the next section, but what this statistic does show is that artists are responsible for managing themselves – leading to **an entrepreneurial lifestyle** in which seeing yourself as a

small business with a range of skills needed to manage yourself may be the key to sustaining your career.
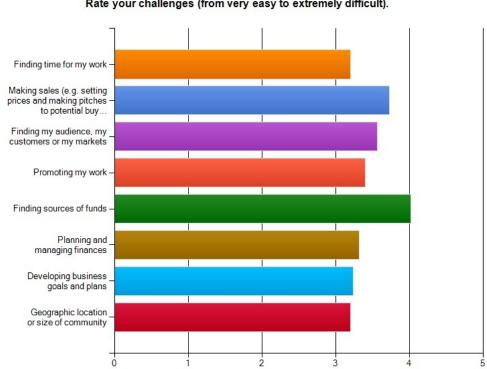
RESULTS - Section Two (Perceived Challenges to and Resources for Furthering Careers)

In this section, WorkInCulture sought to identify the most important business challenges to sustaining an artistic career as well as the resources available or needed to support that.

☑️ Career Challenges Trump Region and Discipline

Expectations about variations by discipline and region in the career challenges, resources and preferences were up-ended in the survey. Instead, surprisingly, artists proved to be quite consistent in their responses throughout the survey.

The bar chart below summarizes the business challenges they see. Many artists also took the opportunity to elaborate and to note other issues – affordable live/work space, challenging public attitudes, lack of support through local media and in tourism, burnout and health issues, social and financial marginalization, senior and mid-career artists feeling disenfranchised by an emphasis on youth, etc.

Rate your challenges (from very easy to extremely difficult).

Further analysis found that regional differences were a factor in only one respect: geographic location. Not surprisingly, artists in Toronto rate the challenge of geographic

location or size of community as particularly low while artists in the north saw it as particularly high.

☑️ Funding, Sales and Markets Challenge Everybody

All disciplines and generations consider **'finding sources of funds' their greatest challenge** –75.8% reported it as either difficult or extremely difficult with a few responses talking specifically about start-up funding.

Following closely behind are marketing and sales questions – 67.7% believe that making sales is difficult or extremely difficult, and 59.6% rated 'finding my audience, customers or markets' the same way.

In fact, the challenge of **making sales, marketing and promotion** were the key themes running through the survey responses. In elaboration, artists were even more specific:
- "How can we stand out in saturated art markets?"
- "We all know how to make our stuff. What we do not know is how to sell it. That applies from manufacturing widgets to oil paintings."
- How do we turn "Facebook into real sales and revenues?"

☑️ Online Sources Add to the Networks Used to Further Careers

No matter the discipline, **word of mouth and personal networks were the most important ways to find markets (96.5% considered them important or very important)**.

But increasingly, social media is changing how artists create connections. Respondents considered their own social media vehicles as important or very important (83%), exhibitions or showings (80%), and other websites and social media (75.6%).

When asked about furthering their career, the importance of personal connections is clear – 56.4% belong to professional associations or unions (artists with more than 20 years of experience are somewhat more likely to belong), 63% attend workshops, 68% described themselves as using peer groups or other personal networks to further their career. But increasingly individuals **use social media and online resources** to further their career: 77.5% check websites and 41.5% use online learning resources. These will be important statistics to bear in mind when looking at learning opportunities.

☑️ How Important Is It To Get Outside Your Peer Group?

Buried in these statistics is a question about **how much do artists get outside their traditional peer groups to expand their connections**. Fewer than one out of three use non-artistic programs to further their career:
- 27.9% reported having business networks
- 21.8% have volunteer mentors

- 16.2% use college or university classes
- and just 5.6% actually have a business coach

These statistics raise some questions for the cultural sector:

  - **Why are artists more likely to stay within their own peer groups?**
  - **What impact does this have on building connections in the broader society or between sectors, and on building patrons, customers, markets and audiences?**

Should training and development be designed to impact on the relations between sectors, furthering the knowledge, skills and resources that help to break down these barriers between groups? Could programs that formalize mentoring help to create introductions and links between sectors?

RESULTS - Section Three (Professional Development Needs)

These questions were designed to review confidence levels in different skills, learning partners and preferences.

☑Confidence in Promoting, Marketing and Selling Affect Everyone

Promoting, marketing and selling surfaced again, as it has in other studies, as the most important and consistent issues for skills and training.

More than half of respondents rated themselves as 'less confident or not at all confident' in three key areas:
- developing and making sales (e.g. negotiations, pitching to customers) – 64.5%
- promoting and marketing my work – 53.2%
- Technical skills required for business or sales – 50.8%

Numbers did not differ markedly by region, discipline or years of experience.

The lack of confidence showed up when artists were asked to rate the most important skills for developing their career over the next 3 - 5 years:
- Marketing and promoting my work (69.3% actually considered this very important)
- Developing and making sales (63.7% rated this very important)

When looking at other skills the numbers fell:
- 54.3% rated 'expanding my peer network' as very important
- 53% rated 'Financial skills' and 'Managing my Career' the same way
- 41.3% saw 'Technical skills for business and marketing' as very important
- 39% viewed 'Social media and Networking' as very important
- 28.4% rated 'Leadership skills (e.g. building a team and managing people) as very important

The low rating given to leadership skills may be a reflection of the individual creative focus of disciplines, but it does also show that artists may not know how to 'read' skills in the context of their careers. Leadership is substantially more than an organizational skill – it's also about influencing and creating loyalty, important features to sustaining markets, support and careers.

☑Artists - Self-Motivated with Changing Attitudes to Business Skills Training

When it comes to accessing training, artists are extremely self-motivated – more than half (53.3%) have taken some kind of training in business skills (although among performing artists only 46% have taken business skills training).
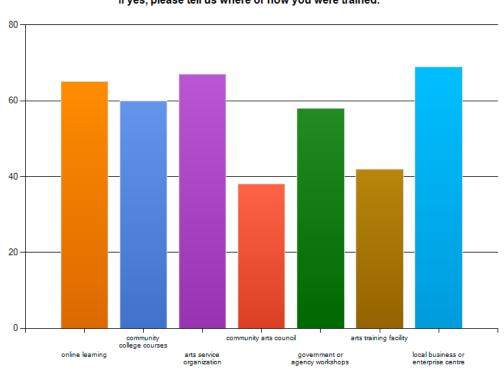
Northern artists are more likely (61%) to have taken training than artists in other regions; in contrast, only 47% of artists in Central Ontario said they had taken business skills training.

But when asked to list the skills they were trained in, it becomes clear that **business skills training is all over the map – usually short-term and neither systematic nor consistent.**

Those who answered this question talked about sales, marketing and promotion (20) ; small business management, budgeting and finances (14) ; leadership and other personal skills such as conflict resolution, coaching and team-building (10), computer training and social media (9). Only a few people mentioned proposal and grant writing, fundraising, communications, exporting, project management, legal training, goal-setting and planning.

Unlike in previous exercises, this survey showed **very little resistance to the notion of business skills training for artists**. Instead respondents talked about the lack of affordable sources for business training, the difficult of understanding how to market 'quality' as opposed to product, or the difficulty of juggling business functions with the time 'to do art'.

☑Surprising Training Partners - Widening the Network

If yes, please tell us where or how you were trained.

Among the half of respondents who have taken business skills training, about one in three identified expected sources – online learning, community colleges and arts service organizations. Arts training facilities and community arts councils were much smaller players in the training area.

But some regional differences were apparent:
- Artists in Toronto were more likely to have taken training through their arts service organization (51% of respondents to this question; not surprising given where ASOs are located);
- In Eastern Ontario (including Ottawa), respondents were more likely (56.5%) to have received some training through government or agency workshops.

What was unexpected, however, was the importance of the local business or enterprise centre in the training landscape – **35.2% of respondents said they had received training through their local business centre, and in Northern Ontario (56.7%) and Southwestern Ontario (40.9) those proportions were even higher.**

☑Learning Preferences - Face to Face Makes a Difference

Asked to rate learning delivery formats, respondents clearly **preferred face-to-face** formats:
- face to face in small groups (preferred by far - 51.3%)
- one-to-one through mentoring (45.1%)

Lecture-style ((14.2%) and web-only (13.0%) training delivery formats were much further down the list, although **26.9% preferred blended styles** (combinations of learning styles and technologies).

Given that in an earlier section, 41% indicate that they are actually using online learning resources, it is clearly desirable to complement online with other learning formats that have face-to-face elements and suggests that there is greater opportunity for online learning than it seems on first blush. Working with relevant regional, local and provincial associations to reach the arts community with blended learning formats will be an important future strategy in making business skills learning accessible to artists around the province.

RESULTS - Section Four (WorkInCulture Programs and Services)

Given WorkInCulture's small staff and limited resources, the results of the final questions about familiarity with its programs were in no way surprising.

The job board is far and away the best known of its programs and services (used by more than half - 56.8% - of respondents to this question) and suggests that it would be possible and desirable to expand the regional audience. . However, three-quarters to almost 90% of respondents had had no other contact with the organization's programs, services or resources.

The survey did prove helpful in making people more aware of what WIC provides and getting them to explore the web site.

Quite a few respondents remarked on the website and the organization: 'Make your existence known" was a really common theme as was "Your job board is extremely important." And a number of respondents echoed this quote from one artist: "Please keep up the hard work. Your services are valued and needed now more than ever."

But perhaps the most useful result was that one out of five respondents actually took the time to outline their interests in future training:
- sales, marketing, promotion, financial planning and specific skills (such as setting prices, how to sell services rather than products) around those issues were high on the list
- development of community networking sessions about business issues and skills
- more and better regular information about available resources from WIC
- greater roll-out of successful WorkInCulture programs such as the Income Managers Program, Creating a Living conference and The Business of Art
- workshops on change, specifically in the regulatory landscape, the evolving marketplace and electronic communication tools
- support for mentoring relationships and internships
- advice and information about cultural career options beyond the creative career
- more and better research into ratings, statistics and examples of national benchmarks
- work with banks, Revenue Canada and others to help them understand the needs of artists; more tip sheets such as a quick facts checklist for tax-preparation for the self-employed
- managing start-ups

A very strong demand for more and better communication from WorkInCulture on a regular basis came from quite a number and supports WIC's current work on re-examining its website, communication strategies and development of e-learning modules.

Connections with local bodies such as community arts councils can also be strengthened through communicating the results of the survey, as WIC acts on its

provincial mandate in a more strategic and methodical way. Survey results will be given to local organizations and professional associations of artists seeking information to shape future professional development and looking for appropriate partners.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS FOR WORKINCULTURE AND ITS PARTNERS

- The importance of artists identifying as multidisciplinary (i.e. working in two or more disciplines) impacts planning of training (i.e. cross-discipline, more generic skills) and soliciting future membership in discipline-specific arts service organizations; the number of artists identifying as multidisciplinary is an intriguing trend, to be watched in the future.

- Mentoring is a preferred method of training, but the number of individuals who develop their own mentoring relationships is relatively small even though it is one of the most cost-effective and individualized types of training possible. WorkInCulture has online tools to support mentoring and has developed and is enhancing programs to facilitate mentoring relationships. This is an area which deserves much greater attention in future programming and roll-out to regions.

- Given the role of the local community in an artist's practice and the multidisciplinary trend, local cross-sectoral organizations such as community arts councils could play an important role in developing and/or delivering business skills training.

- Regional variations are not actually substantial, suggesting training opportunities could be created which are both pan-regional and cross-disciplinary.

- Although people prefer 'live' learning to online, it is significant that 40% of respondents are already learning online, leaving lots of room to create a wider variety of appealing online learning opportunities that could fill training gaps.

- As WorkInCulture considers future strategies around e-learning or ace-to-face regional training initiatives, blending learning that combines in-class and online training will be crucial.

- Responses suggested that generic learning needs to be complemented by more specific learning related to the features of specific disciplines.

- Marketing, sales and promotion are the most important skill issues for artists no matter the discipline, region or experience; the skills needed are not just theoretical but practical (such as how to pitch, negotiate or set prices).

- The important role of business and enterprise centres in business skills training means that they are an important link in the training landscape. But in thinking about them, we should consider not just the local centre, but how to create meaningful links with enterprise centre networks in the province.

Appendix A - Artists Skills Need Survey

INTRODUCTION:
Artists and those working in the cultural sector face special hurdles in creating a living. WorkInCulture (www.workinculture.ca) helps to develop a resilient cultural sector by supporting the people who work in the sector through lifelong career development and business skills training.
WorkInCulture services and programs – including the most active cultural job board in Canada, training opportunities of various kinds around the province, resources and information – are all developed from the viewpoint of people working in the sector, whether they are performers, workers backstage or in the front office, visual artists or craftspeople, writing books and magazines online or in print, or creating films, designing games and online graphics.
By completing this short survey (15 minutes or less), you can help us improve our training, resources and reach over the next few years. Tell us about the challenges you face and what will help you transfer your creative skills to a business planning context. Then we can help you take your practice to the next level to sustain your creative living.

1. I am a:
visual artist/ craftsperson/ performing artist (dance, theatre or music)/ writer/ filmmaker/ digital media artist/ multidisciplinary artist (working in several fields)
Other (please specify):

2. I work:
full-time as an artist/ part-time as an artist/ for an arts organization/ on my own (self-employed)/ for a non-arts organization/ manage my own career/ manage others

3. How many years have you been a practising artist?
0-5years/ 6-10years/ 11 - 20 years/ More than 20 years

4. To help us group answers regionally, please tell us the first letter of your postal code:
K/ L/ M/ N/ P
Tell us the name of your municipality or town

5. Long term goals. (Please select the comment that best describes your personal goal.)
I can live in my home community and develop my artistic practice/ I can live in my home community but also work in other communities/ I will move to another city to further my artistic practice

Challenges to furthering your career
The next set of questions will help us understand the challenges to sustaining your creative living.

6. Rate your challenges (from very easy to extremely difficult).
Finding time for my work
Making sales (e.g. setting prices and making pitches to potential buyers)
Finding my audience, my customers or my markets
Promoting my work
Finding sources of funds
Planning and managing finances
Developing business goals and plans
Geographic location or size of community
Comments?

7. Rate the importance of the following ways of finding your audience/ customers/markets (from very important to not at all important:

Word of mouth (business and personal networks)
Advertising
Social media (my own website, newsletter or blog, Twitter or Facebook)
Other websites (including social media, blogs, e-lists, Twitter and Facebook)
Exhibitions, showings or showcases
Other publications (newsletters, e-bulletins, etc.)

8. What resources do you use now to further your career? (Check all that apply.)

belong to a professional association or union/ check newsletters or e-bulletins from associations or unions/ check websites/ attend workshops/ attend college or university classes/ use online learning resources/ have a volunteer mentor(s) for advice/ have a business coach for advice/ have peer groups or other personal networks/ have business networks

Professional Development Needs

9. How confident do you feel about your own skills to manage your career in the following areas (from very confident to not at all confident):

Leading and managing people
Planning and managing finances
Managing my career (e.g. setting goals, planning ahead)
Promoting and marketing my work
Developing and making sales (e.g. negotiating, pitching to customers)
Social media and social networking
Technical skills required for business or sales

10. Rate the skills you feel you will need to develop your career over the next three to five years.

Leadership skills (e.g. building a team, managing people)
Financial Skills (e.g. planning and managing budgets and cash flow, raising funds, making proposals)
Managing my career (e.g. setting goals)
Marketing and promoting my work
Expanding my peer network
Developing and making sales
Social media and networking
Technical skills for business and marketing

11. Have you taken any training in any of the career skills listed previously?

Yes/No
If yes, which skills were you trained in?

12. If yes, please tell us where or how you were trained.

online learning/ community college courses/ arts service organization/ community arts council/ government or agency workshops/ arts training facility/ local business or enterprise centre

13. Please rate the following skill development topics from most important to not at all important:

Business planning and development
Promotion and marketing

Raising funds
Human resources (e.g. managing people)
Leadership skills Using technology better
Budgeting and managing finances
Managing my career
Managing my small business
Developing and making sales

14. Tell us how you prefer to receive training. Please order your choices from 1 (first choice) to 5 (least favourite).

Face-to-face in small groups
Lecture-style
One-to-one (i.e. through mentoring)
Through the web (webinars, e-tools, online courses, etc.)
Blended learning (combination of learning styles and technologies)

WorkInCulture Services and Programs

In this final section, help us understand what programs you have benefitted from and what you'd like to see us deliver in the future.

15. Please indicate which, if any, WorkInCulture programs or services you've benefitted from and rate them.

Research on cultural workforce
Youth Internship program Income Managers Program
GetMentored (online publication)
HR Tools (online publications)
HR Swap Meets
The Art of Managing People Workshop
The Business of Art Course
Mentoring programs
WorkInCulture Job Board
Creating a Living Conference

16. In order to plan better, we would like to know if there a specific program or service you would like to see us deliver in the future. Please describe. (If you are not familiar with our website, the address is www.workinculture.ca)