

INNOVATOR Q&A

# ‘Bringing joy back to making art’: New workforce development program launches at Brown

By [Alexa Couloff](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated July 8, 2024, 6:00 a.m.



Providence-area residents Ryn Caddick, left, Carolyn van Artsdalen, and Mya Stern, recently hired through Brown's ArtsCrew program, collaborate to catalog and archive student artworks. NICK DENTAMARO/BROWN UNIVERSITY

PROVIDENCE — The [Lindemann Performing Arts Center](#) opened at Brown University in October, bringing new performance spaces, classes, and research to the

arts scene on College Hill. But the venue's opening also inspired Avery Willis Hoffman to look into how she could revitalize joy in art making.

Hoffman, artistic director of the [Brown Arts Institute](#), began thinking about the [hit the arts industry took](#) during the pandemic and how she could get people excited again. The idea of [ArtsCrew](#), a robust workforce development program, was sparked by her desire to bring back a support network for people in the arts.

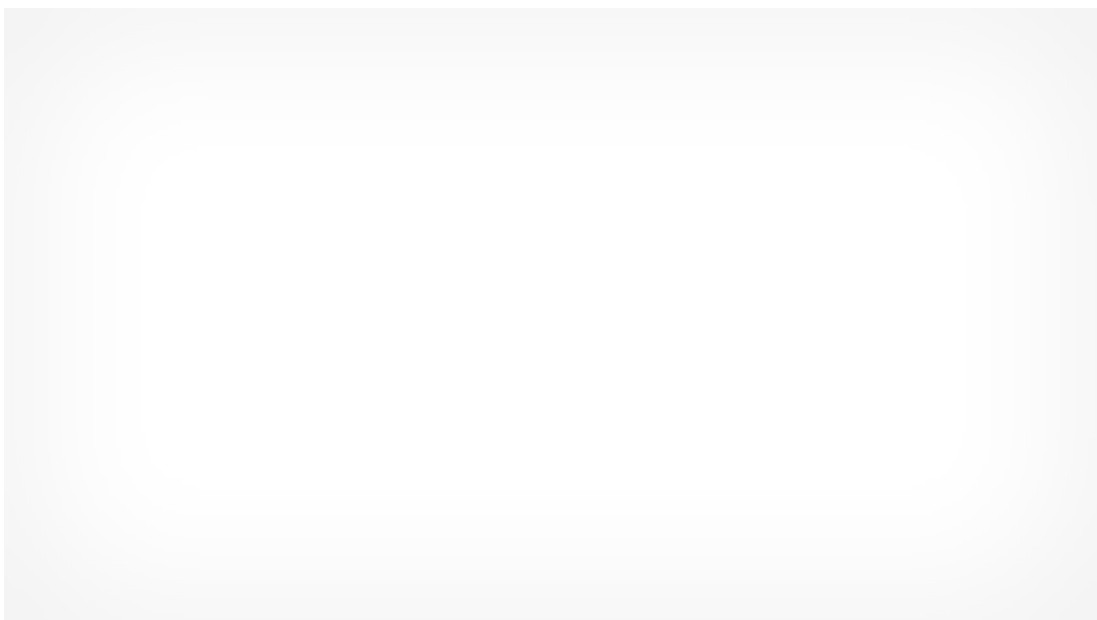
Currently, there are 100 members in the program — 50 Brown students and 50 freelance artists and workers from the Providence area.

**Q: What is Brown ArtsCrew?**

**A:** It is essentially a workforce development and placement program, which we launched here at the Brown Arts Institute in October. We're looking to create a pipeline for local and student professionals — folks who may be artistic or have technical skills — to learn about a whole host of opportunities in the arts, which range from admin producing roles, installation of visual art, technical production and more.

**Q: Why was it important to develop the program now?**

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**A:** ArtsCrew was developed as a way to meet a kind of crisis in the arts industry, trying to encourage folks with skills to come back to the arts, to come back to campus, to support this range of art making.

The [arts industry makes up about 2.5 percent of the state's workforce — nearly 17,000 jobs](#) — and generates \$2.2 billion in annual economic impact, which is about 3.4 percent of Rhode Island's total GDP.

It's really a needs-based program. And the wonderful thing about it is that we're really building community through the arts. So as folks take on these roles as they cross-train and expand their own skills, we're creating a really positive and supportive community. It's not just about the labor, it's also about the community. I think that's fairly unique across university campuses where there might be work study and other kinds of employment opportunities, but not a community building space.

**Q: How does the cross training work?**

**A:** We made a commitment to offer training across disciplines for our ArtsCrew members. For example, if someone was interested in being front-of-house manager, they might also be really excited about maybe learning some marketing skills or learning about painting sets. They might have some interest in other realms, and they might already have a little bit of experience. The program will be offering paid training for that. It's really thinking about the worker as a holistic person. To allow fluidity for folks to come in under a certain job title and be able to move through this training program into other possible jobs.

**Q: What sets ArtsCrew apart from other workforce development programs?**

**A:** For me, the most important thing is the community building aspect. It's not just a job placement agency, it's truly a community that we're building. I've been teaching a

course here at Brown and it's been very focused on the development of ArtsCrew. So with the students, we are shaping the values, the goals, the sort of mission of ArtsCrew and thinking through what this point in time can give us. This opportunity to really give back to the arts industry. We're excited to demonstrate how art can lead the way in terms of engagement with the community.

**Q: How can people apply to join?**

**A:** Applications are temporarily closed because we received so many. We're going to open applications again in the fall. The application can be found on our website [arts.brown.edu](https://arts.brown.edu). As part of ArtsCrew, you become a Brown employee.

**Q: Where do you see the program heading as it evolves?**

**A:** Our hope is to build a model that will be really helpful for arts organizations here in Providence. We've been talking to folks like [FirstWorks](#) and [Trinity Repertory Company](#). Many arts organizations are looking for freelance labor and are also really interested in arts education and feeding that pipeline to more permanent positions. Our hope is to expand into Providence and offer ArtsCrew members opportunities all across Providence. Our ultimate goal is that it might be a kind of licensed model that other universities across the country could use. We have lots of ambitions and I'm sure that it will take several years to evolve, but we're excited. We're well on our way.

*Material from prior Globe stories was used in this report.*

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