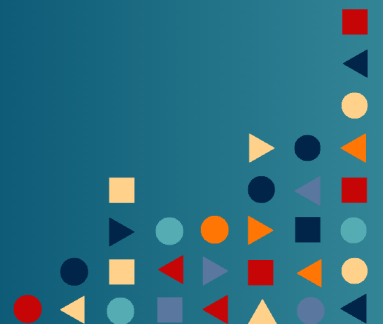


CREATIVE ECONOMY FINANCE NETWORK

REFERENCE GUIDE:

A STANDARDIZED NAICS
FRAMEWORK FOR THE CREATIVE
ECONOMY





CLASSIFYING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

THE PROBLEM

The creative economy is made up of the industries that refine intellectual capital from artistic and cultural expressions to solve community needs and meet market desires. Value in the creative economy derives from the production and circulation of intellectual property.

But even with this clear definition, the creative economy is difficult to measure. As an emerging and evolving sector, the boundaries of the creative economy are dynamic. The U.S. Census has yet to assign the creative economy its own set of codes that would allow economists to single it out the way we can measure "manufacturing" or "transportation." This has produced a fragmented measurement landscape.

For example, a 2013 NEA-funded study by the Creative Economy Coalition examined 27 state and regional reports on the creative economy and found 264 distinct North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes in use, with only 4 codes appearing in every report. One can forgive a financial institution for opening the door, taking a peek at this crosstalk, and quietly backing away.

In the United States, the biggest attempt to calm the storm is the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (BEA ACPSA), which provides one framework commonly respected among public sector economic developers. This framework distinguishes "core" creative industries from "supporting" industries in the production chain.

But this framework offers only a modest accounting of the creative economy's scope, and it provides an unsatisfactory kludging of the creative economy's true nature of value generation and circulation. In the shadow of this dissatisfaction, more frameworks emerge anew, riding in for the rescue.

However, these rescues still fall short. Sometimes this is due to excessive localization; often the problem is the rescue's bureaucratic genesis. Another pattern: habits of scarcity-minded thinking in the creative economy can exclude legitimate codes ("what if we end up including something that isn't creative?") or swoop up codes of ambiguous legitimacy ("this will make us look bigger").

The result is that cross-jurisdictional comparison remains difficult, and financial institutions seeking to understand creative economy exposure in their portfolios have lacked a standardized reference point.



To solve this NAICS code problem with a focus toward assisting financial institutions in their ability to see the constellations in the creative economy, we are trying our own rescue, constructing **a framework based on 15 years of researching the creative economy and up-to-date best practices.**

A BEST PRACTICES FOUNDATION

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has essentially a four bullet definition of the creative industries, which we drew on to construct our fundamental definition:

- “the cycles of creation, production, and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs;
- constituting a set of knowledge-based activities focused on, but not limited to, culture and heritage,
- potentially generating revenues from trade and intellectual property rights;
- comprising tangible products and intangible intellectual or artistic services with creative content, economic value, and market objectives; [and]
- standing at the crossroads of the artisan, services, and industrial sectors”

With this definition, UNCTAD released a 2024 white paper: “Advancing the measurement of the creative economy: A revised framework for creative industries and trade.” In an effort to help governments devise rigorous creative industry strategies, this report reviews existing measurement frameworks and proposes a new “statistical framework for measuring the economic impact of creative industries and international trade in creative goods and services.” It provides a standardized list of creative activities and products that are relevant across the world, with the acknowledgment that every regional creative economy is going to look a little different depending on that region’s cultural heritage and competitive strengths.

One of the key problems UNCTAD’s framework attempts to solve is classifying creative industries with industry code systems (such as NAICS), while acknowledging the deficiencies in those classification systems, such as the general inability of these systems to account for companies that belong to multiple industries.

OUR SOLUTION

From UNCTAD’s suggested list of international industry codes, we launched our own NAICS framework definition. In this framework, we have attempted to incorporate the lineage of existing frameworks and respect the need for flexibility and evolution.

After UNCTAD, we integrated the BEA ACPSA—the most authoritative federal baseline—and synthesized over 50 global and U.S. creative economy reports to identify patterns of consensus and divergence.

We focused especially on three mature state-level frameworks: the 2007 - 2024 Otis College Report on the Creative Economy (California), the 2024 Washington State Department of Commerce Creative Economy Strategic Plan, and the 2024 New Mexico Creative Industries Division Study. These states have some of the largest and most policy-engaged creative economies in the western U.S., and their frameworks reflect years of refinement through stakeholder consultation and practical application.

To validate which codes merit inclusion, we apply a proprietary Creative Industry Resolution Method against commercial business-directory data covering millions of establishments. This method evaluates individual businesses on factors like franchise status, local ownership structure, firm size, and brand characteristics to estimate the probability that a given business is actually engaged in creative IP production. By running this analysis across thousands of businesses within each candidate NAICS code, we can determine whether a code contains sufficient creative activity to justify inclusion—or whether a nominally "creative" code is dominated by non-creative operators (large chains, franchises, generic service providers). This empirical validation layer distinguishes our framework from lists based solely on code descriptions.

All told, after this synthesis, we currently include **97 code six-digit 2022 NAICS codes** organized into **4 segments** with **14 subgroups**:

<p>Creative goods, fashion & objects</p> <p>Subgroups: Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care; craft and artisan manufacturing; jewelry, toys & musical instruments</p> <p>Examples: independent apparel & footwear makers; cosmetics brands; ceramics and furniture studios; musical instrument makers; art dealers.</p> <p>NAICS families: selected 31–33, 42, 45, 81</p>	<p>Media, publishing & digital content</p> <p>Subgroups: Print & publishing; film, audio & moving-image storytelling; broadcast & digital platforms</p> <p>Examples: comic book publishers; film/video producers and post houses; video games; sound studios; music publishers; broadcasters; streaming and media platforms.</p> <p>NAICS families: selected 32, 42, 51, 51-adjacent IT</p>	<p>Design, architecture & creative services</p> <p>Subgroups: Spatial & visual design; creative tech & problem-solving services; branding, marketing & media services; photography & imaging</p> <p>Examples: architecture and landscape firms; interior and graphic design; creative software/dev shops; marketing research; photography studios.</p> <p>NAICS families: selected 54</p>	<p>Live arts, venues & cultural institutions</p> <p>Subgroups: Events, gatherings, & festivals; creative education; live performing arts & promoters; cultural institutions</p> <p>Examples: theaters, dance and music companies; zine fairs; independent artists; concert and festival promoters; museums; historical sites; fine arts schools; convention organizers; movie theaters.</p> <p>NAICS families: selected 51, 56, 61, 71, 72-adjacent</p>
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FINAL NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

- To accompany our codes, we have crosswalks for 2017 and 2012 codes, as well as Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes.
- Beyond code selection, our Creative Industry Resolution Method can also help financial institutions working with their own portfolio data. Many NAICS codes contain a mix of creative and non-creative businesses: a code might include both independent design studios and generic office services, or both entrepreneurial manufacturers dealing in original IP and industrial producers dealing in replication. When institutions have access to business-level information, our methodology can score individual businesses within ambiguous codes to estimate creative concentration more precisely than industry classification alone.
- To this point, we treat culinary arts as an optional module rather than part of the core framework. In larger datasets that lack business-level detail, culinary codes introduce significant noise: the same NAICS code covers both an artisanal ice cream maker producing original recipes and a fast-food franchise. As with other instances of ambiguity, our resolution method can help here—by scoring businesses on independence, local control, and creative behavior—but only when sufficiently rich directory data is available. For institutions operating in regions with strong culinary creative traditions, or those with access to business-level information, we can provide additional guidance on incorporating culinary codes using this methodology.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

OVERVIEW

The accompanying reference table lists all 97 2022 NAICS codes in our core creative economy framework. Each row represents a single six-digit NAICS code and includes four columns:

- **Code:** The six-digit 2022 NAICS code as assigned by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- **Description:** The official NAICS code title (e.g., "Graphic Design Services," "Musical Groups and Artists").
- **Segment:** One of four broad categories: Creative Goods, Fashion & Objects; Media, Publishing & Digital Content; Design, Architecture & Creative Services; or Live Arts, Venues & Cultural Institutions.
- **Subgroup:** A more granular classification within each segment (14 subgroups total), such as "Craft and artisan manufacturing," "Film, audio & moving-image storytelling," or "Live performing arts & promoters."

Segments provide a high-level view useful for portfolio-level analysis or reporting. Subgroups allow for finer distinctions—for example, separating print publishing from broadcast media within the broader Media, Publishing & Digital Content segment, or distinguishing fashion and apparel from craft manufacturing within Creative Goods, Fashion & Objects. Institutions can aggregate at whichever level suits their analytical needs.





HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

FAQ

- **“What do we do with 4- or 5-digit NAICS codes?”**: Some systems store truncated codes. A 4-digit code (e.g., 5414) will match multiple 6-digit codes in our framework. You can either: (a) use the first matching 6-digit code as a proxy, understanding this introduces some error, (b) count as partial creative exposure and flag for manual review. We have a proprietary Creative Industry Resolution Method available upon request to solve for partial codes and ensure accurate measurement.
- **“What if a business has no NAICS code?”**: Sole proprietors and informal businesses often lack NAICS assignments entirely. These represent a known gap in any NAICS-based analysis. For institutions seeking higher precision, our CIRM can score individual businesses using fields commonly found in most business directories—contact us for details.
- **“How do I benchmark our findings?”**: Our analysis using this framework suggests that the national creative economy share of total establishments is ~12%. If your portfolio shows significantly higher concentration, you may be serving a creative-heavy market or have developed expertise worth building on. Significantly lower concentration may indicate an underserved opportunity, particularly in metros with strong creative sectors. CEFN can provide regional benchmarks on request.



THE CODES

Code	Description	Segment	Subgroup
238150	Glass and glazing contractors	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
238340	Tile and terrazzo contractors	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
313210	Broadwoven Fabric Mills	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
313220	Narrow Fabric Mills and Schiffli Machine Embroidery	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
313310	Textile and Fabric Finishing Mills	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
314120	Curtain and Linen Mills	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
314910	Textile Bag and Canvas Mills	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
315120	Apparel Knitting Mills	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
315210	Cut and Sew Apparel Contractors	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
315250	Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing (except Contractors)	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
315990	Apparel Accessories and Other Apparel Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
316210	Footwear Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
323111	Commercial Gravure Printing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
323113	Commercial Screen Printing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care



Code	Description	Segment	Subgroup
323117	Books Printing	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
323120	Support activities for printing	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
325620	Toilet Preparation Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
327110	Pottery, Ceramics, and Plumbing Fixture Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
327212	Other Pressed and Blown Glass and Glassware Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
332215	Metal Kitchen Cookware, Utensil, Cutlery, and Flatware (except Precious) Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
332323	Ornamental and architectural metal work manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
337121	Upholstered Household Furniture Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
337122	Nonupholstered Wood Household Furniture Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
337126	Household Furniture (except Wood and Upholstered) Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
337211	Wood Office Furniture Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
337212	Custom Architectural Woodwork and Millwork Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
337214	Office Furniture (except Wood) Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
339910	Jewelry and Silverware Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments



Code	Description	Segment	Subgroup
339930	Doll, Toy, and Game Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
339992	Musical Instrument Manufacturing	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
423920	Toy and Hobby Goods and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
423940	Jewelry, Watch, Precious Stone, and Precious Metal Merchant Wholesalers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
424920	Book, Periodical, and Newspaper Merchant Wholesalers	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
458110	Clothing and Clothing Accessories Retailers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care
458310	Jewelry Retailers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
459120	Hobby, Toy, and Game Retailers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
459130	Sewing, Needlework, and Piece Goods Retailers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
459140	Musical Instrument and Supplies Retailers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
459210	Book Retailers and News Dealers	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
459420	Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Retailers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
459920	Art Dealers	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Jewelry, toys & musical instruments
512110	Motion Picture and Video Production	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling



Code	Description	Segment	Subgroup
512120	Motion Picture and Video Distribution	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling
512131	Motion Picture Theaters (except Drive-Ins)	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Cultural institutions
512132	Drive-In Motion Picture Theaters	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Cultural institutions
512191	Teleproduction and Other Postproduction Services	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling
512199	Other Motion Picture and Video Industries	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling
512230	Music Publishers	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling
512240	Sound Recording Studios	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling
512250	Record Production and Distribution	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling
512290	Other sound recording industries	Media, publishing & digital content	Film, audio & moving-image storytelling
513110	Newspaper Publishers	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
513120	Periodical Publishers	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
513130	Book Publishers	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
513191	Greeting Card Publishers	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing
513199	All Other Publishers	Media, publishing & digital content	Print & publishing



Code	Description	Segment	Subgroup
513210	Software Publishers	Media, publishing & digital content	Broadcast & digital platforms
516110	Radio Broadcasting Stations	Media, publishing & digital content	Broadcast & digital platforms
516120	Television Broadcasting Stations	Media, publishing & digital content	Broadcast & digital platforms
516210	Media Streaming Distribution Services, Social Networks, and Other Media Networks and Content Providers	Media, publishing & digital content	Broadcast & digital platforms
519210	Libraries and Archives	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Cultural institutions
541310	Architectural Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Spatial & visual design
541320	Landscape Architectural Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Spatial & visual design
541340	Drafting services	Design, architecture & creative services	Spatial & visual design
541410	Interior Design Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Spatial & visual design
541420	Industrial design services	Design, architecture & creative services	Spatial & visual design
541430	Graphic Design Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Spatial & visual design
541490	Other Specialized Design Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Spatial & visual design
541511	Custom Computer Programming Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Creative tech & problem-solving services
541512	Computer Systems Design Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Creative tech & problem-solving services



Code	Description	Segment	Subgroup
541613	Marketing Consulting Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Creative tech & problem-solving services
541620	Environmental Consulting Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Creative tech & problem-solving services
541690	Other Scientific and Technical Consulting Services	Design, architecture & creative services	Creative tech & problem-solving services
541720	Research and Development in the Social Sciences and Humanities	Design, architecture & creative services	Creative tech & problem-solving services
541810	Advertising Agencies	Design, architecture & creative services	Branding, marketing & media services
541820	Public Relations Agencies	Design, architecture & creative services	Branding, marketing & media services
541830	Media Buying Agencies	Design, architecture & creative services	Branding, marketing & media services
541840	Media Representatives	Design, architecture & creative services	Branding, marketing & media services
541850	Indoor and Outdoor Display Advertising	Design, architecture & creative services	Branding, marketing & media services
541890	Other Services Related to Advertising	Design, architecture & creative services	Branding, marketing & media services
541910	Marketing Research and Public Opinion Polling	Design, architecture & creative services	Branding, marketing & media services
541921	Photography Studios, Portrait	Design, architecture & creative services	Photography & imaging
541922	Commercial Photography	Design, architecture & creative services	Photography & imaging
561920	Convention and Trade Show Organizers	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Events, gatherings, & festivals



Code	Description	Segment	Subgroup
611610	Fine Arts Schools	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Creative education
711110	Theater Companies and Dinner Theaters	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
711120	Dance Companies	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
711130	Musical Groups and Artists	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
711190	Other Performing Arts Companies	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
711310	Promoters of Performing Arts, Sports, and Similar Events with Facilities	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
711320	Promoters of Performing Arts, Sports, and Similar Events without Facilities	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
711410	Agents and Managers for Artists, Athletes, Entertainers, and Other Public Figures	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
711510	Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Live performing arts & promoters
712110	Museums	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Cultural institutions
712120	Historical Sites	Live arts, venues & cultural institutions	Cultural institutions
811420	Reupholstery and furniture repair	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Craft and artisan manufacturing
811430	Footwear and Leather Goods Repair	Creative goods, fashion & objects	Fashion, fiber arts, & personal care



FOLLOW UP

DATA FORMATS AND RESOURCES

This reference guide is designed for human reading. For portfolio matching and automated analysis, we provide:

- CSV / Excel version of all 97 codes with Segment and Subgroup columns
- Crosswalk files mapping 2022 codes to 2017 and 2012 NAICS vintages
- Culinary arts module (optional) with guidance on when and how to include food/beverage codes

CONTACT US

This framework gives you a starting point for understanding creative economy exposure. CEFN offers additional support including:

- Portfolio scoring using our Creative Industry Resolution Method for business-level precision
- Regional benchmarking comparing your portfolio to local and national creative economy baselines
- Custom analysis for CRA planning, impact reporting, or strategic lending initiatives
- Training for loan officers and business bankers on creative economy sectors

For these and any other questions, please contact CEFN co-founder Mike Young at [**mike@creativefinancenetwork.com**](mailto:mike@creativefinancenetwork.com).

