

# IN THE CREATOR'S CORNER:

EXAMINING THEIR REALITIES TO BETTER  
SUPPORT THEIR FINANCIAL DREAMS.



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CONTEXT



# THE CREATOR ECONOMY IS CHANGING THE WORLD

If that sounds like an exaggeration, it's not. With the market currently valued at \$250B\*, and estimated to double over the next five years,\* creators are an increasingly influential and impactful force in our economy. And they're doing things differently. Working for themselves, rejecting corporate culture, utilizing their skills and passions to build a following and grow a business. Creators are fundamentally shifting our aspirations, our working practices, and the way(s) in which we make money.

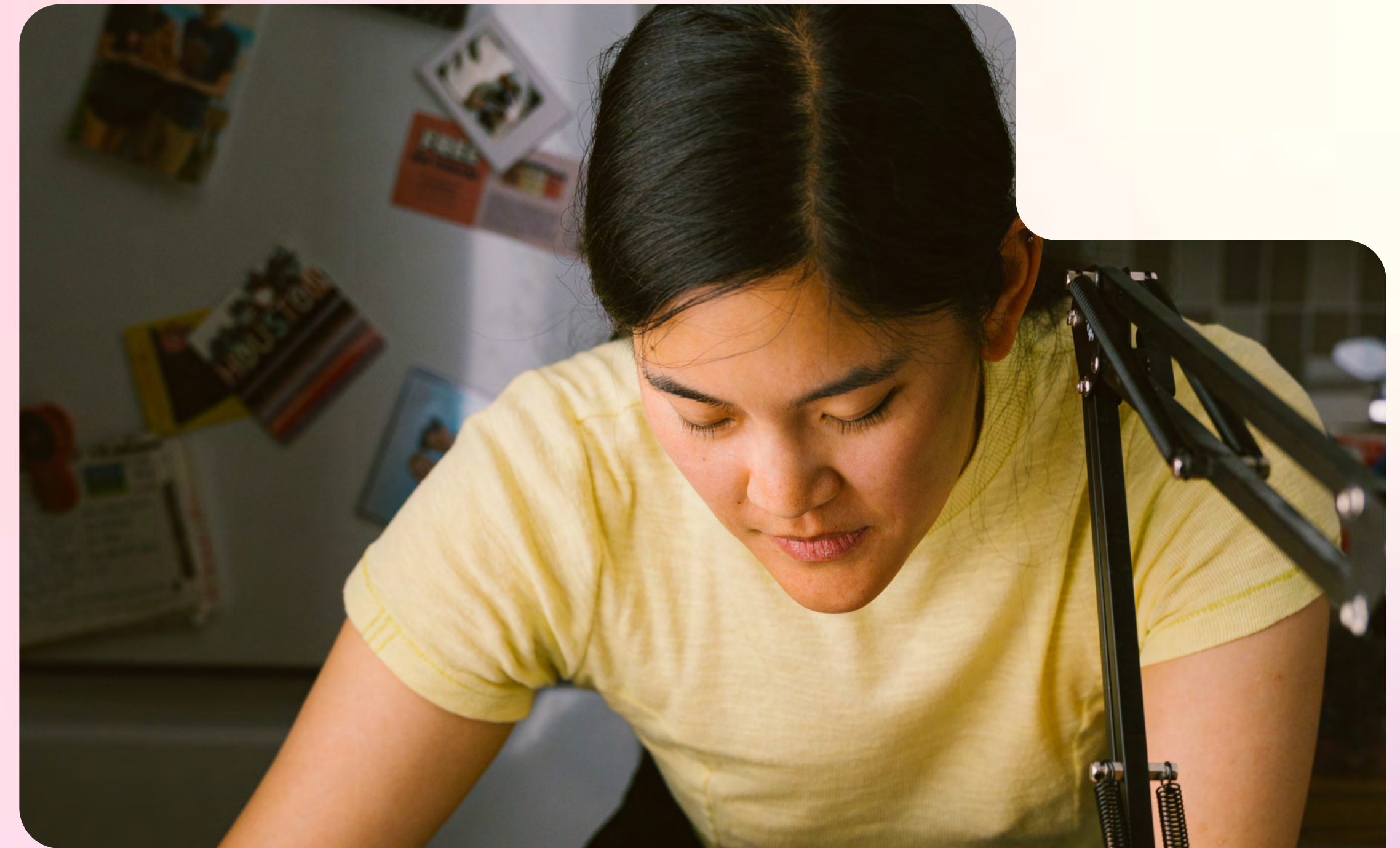
It's not just 20-something content creators. It's momfluencers, Twitch streamers, Etsy shop owners, crafters, musicians, retirees, entrepreneurs. In short, it's a vast and growing population that is making a living beyond the traditional 9-5. And with so many new revenue opportunities to take advantage of and financial complexities to navigate, these creators need financial institutions in their corner, helping them succeed.

\*Goldman Sachs Research, 2023

# A NON-NEGOTIABLE STEP 1: LEARN

Ally's goal is to become The Official Ally for Creators™. This won't happen overnight. It's a long-term ambition and a journey that Ally is just embarking on. But to become the official ally for creators, we first needed to ensure we understood creators, deeply.

While Ally currently doesn't offer small business products and services, it's important for us to understand creators' relationships with money, so we set out to learn about what drives them, what issues they face and what role a financial institution can realistically play in their journeys. From there, we can become better allies to the creator community, educating them on how to reach their financial goals.



# LET'S TALK ABOUT "CREATORS" FOR A SECOND

The term "creator" is used more than 193 times throughout this book/report. Given the word "creator" is used millions of times everyday around the world, in different ways, it's worth pausing for a moment to discuss how we approached it for this research. For us, a creator is anyone that is using their skills and craft to make a name for themselves, or simply to satisfy creative urges. What they create can exist across a broad spectrum: from content designs for digital platforms to real world products and services.

Equally important to the definition of creators is acknowledging that the definition is changing, especially in terms of age and geography. Covid expedited this proliferation and diversity of creators, with some being forced to pivot careers, and others doing so by choice. Whatever their reason for entering this brave new world, creators are from all walks of life—spanning decades and geographies, and bringing incredibly diverse backgrounds and skills to the table. Our goal was to learn as much as we can about these creators, taking into account their varied experiences, passions and needs in our research

# TIERS FOR OUR CREATOR PEERS

One of the most important criteria involved segmenting creators by how invested they were in their creative ventures. We broke it down to 3 tiers, and ensured we gathered insights and perspective from creators of all tiers.

No matter their differences in terms of experience level, area of focus, or tier, our participants were united when it came to one thing: the term “creator.” From a nomenclature perspective, this word was something that the large majority of creators either currently identify as or at least understand and can feel a part of.

**Only 7% of respondents did not understand the term or identify as a creator.**

## Tier 1 Creators

Those whose creative ventures have not been monetized and currently treat them as a hobby.



## Tier 2 Creators

Those whose creative ventures are bringing in revenue but are viewed as “side hustles”. They have another part-time or full-time job bringing in their main form of income.



## Tier 3 Creators

Those whose creative ventures are their main form of income.

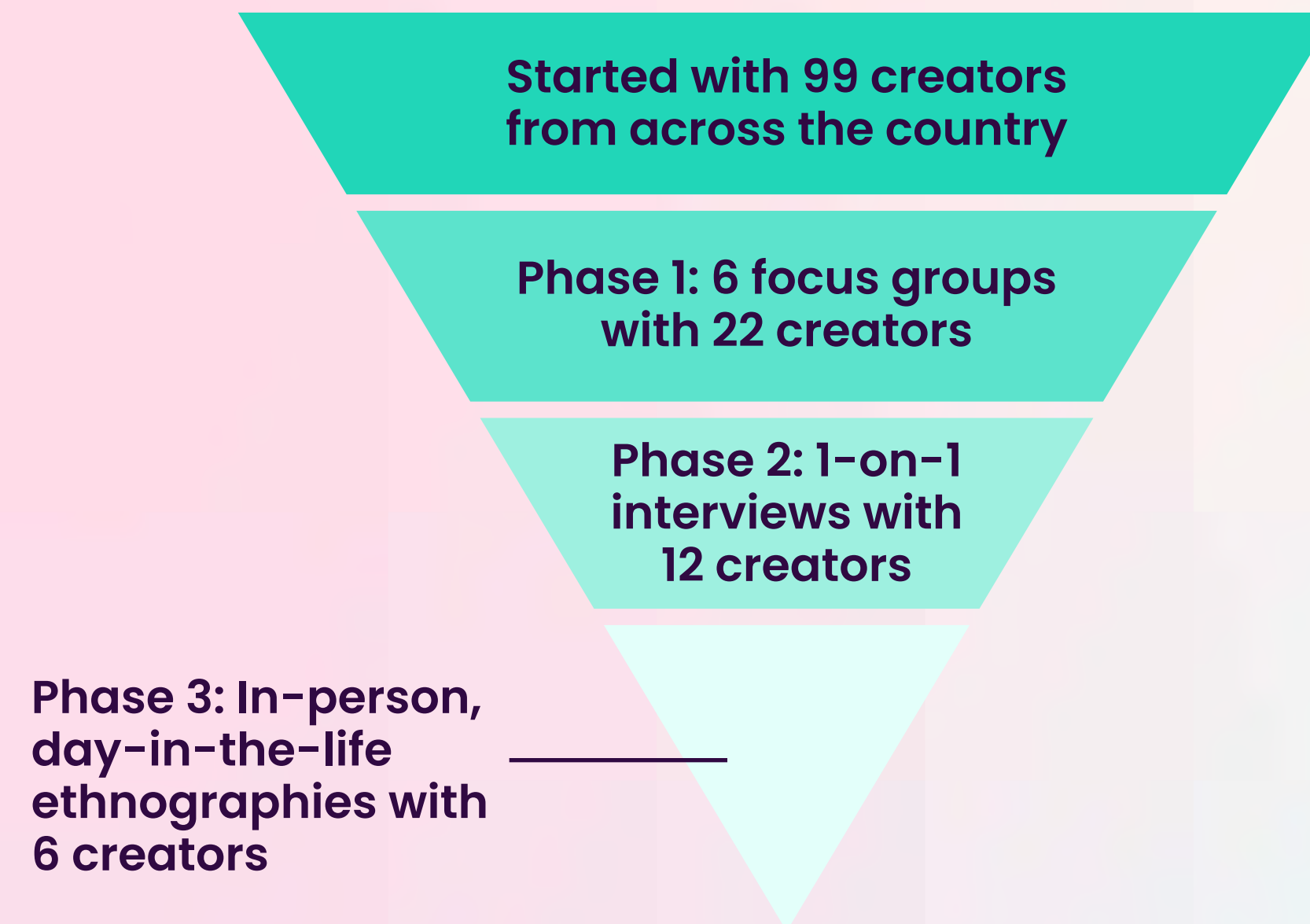
# Qual & Quant Approach



# QUAL ON QUAL ON QUAL

Research began by randomly selecting nearly 100 creators from across the country and very intentionally curating, to ensure we spoke with creators from each of the 3 tiers with different ventures, at different parts of their creator journeys, experiencing different levels of success, from all parts of the country, of different ages, with different backgrounds, and from different cultures.

From there we conducted 3 phases of qualitative research with creators from all 3 tiers:





**MOLLY MATHIAS**  
Small business owner & content creator



**MARCY HOHNER**  
Wedding & landscape photographer



**CARA WOLDER**  
Fitness influencer



**ALLISON WETIG**  
Podcaster & vintage clothing store owner



**ERIKA KWEE**  
Food content creator & recipe tester



**TOMMY SIEGEL**  
Musician & cartoonist



**MELISSA CORRALES**  
Cosmetics photographer



**DAVID MARCIANO**  
Cryptopunks creator



**LEAH ALLYANNAH**  
Curly hair content creator



**GRANT DENISON**  
Poker podcaster



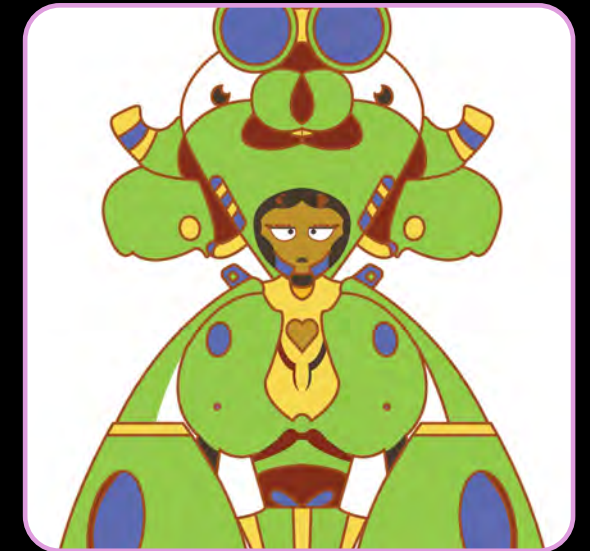
**DESTINY MABRY**  
Rapper & comedian



**SYDNEY PERRY**  
Home improvement influencer



**JONATHAN LEVY**  
Poker podcaster



**CHRISTOPHER DE LA GUARDIA**  
Background artist & 3D environment artist



**DJ NEFF**  
Muralist



**TIM SHEA**  
Filmmaker



**GIULLIAN YAO GIOIELLO**  
Actor & musician



**DENNIS WILLIAMS**  
Writer & director



**JESSE MARTIN**  
Rapper & comedian



**INGRID GOSPER**  
Mom content creator



**RAY DORCELY JR**  
Creative architect



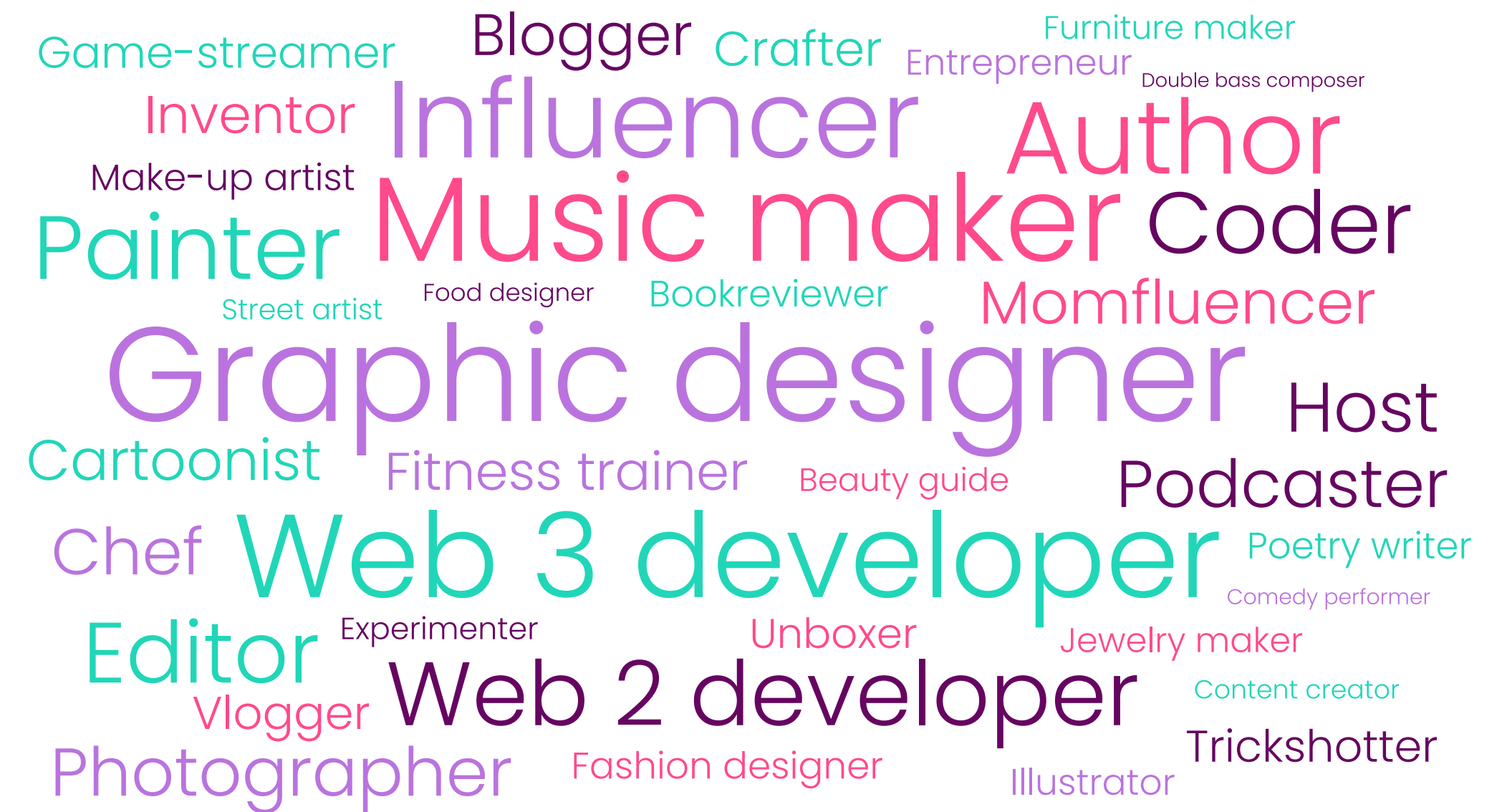
**MONIQUE GARMY**  
Writer

# QUAL CREATORS

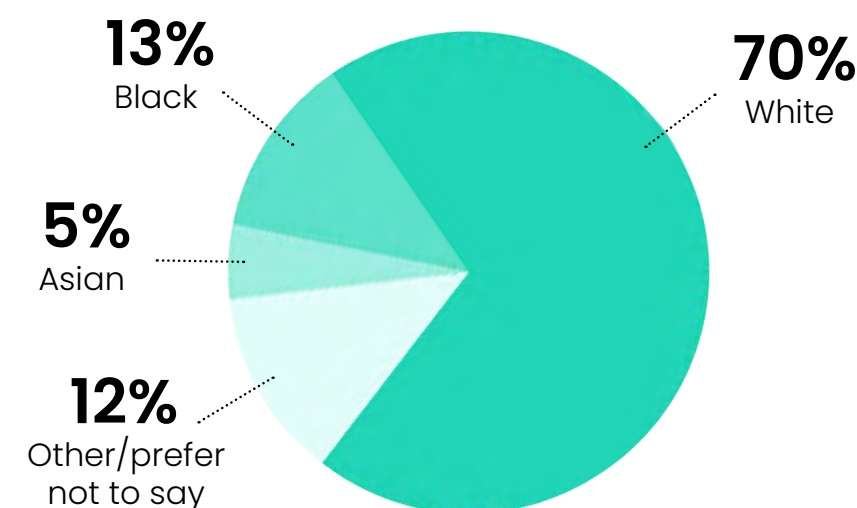
# DATA TO KEEP US HONEST

To balance all this important qualitative research, we also created a survey to ensure our findings rang true with the broader creator community.

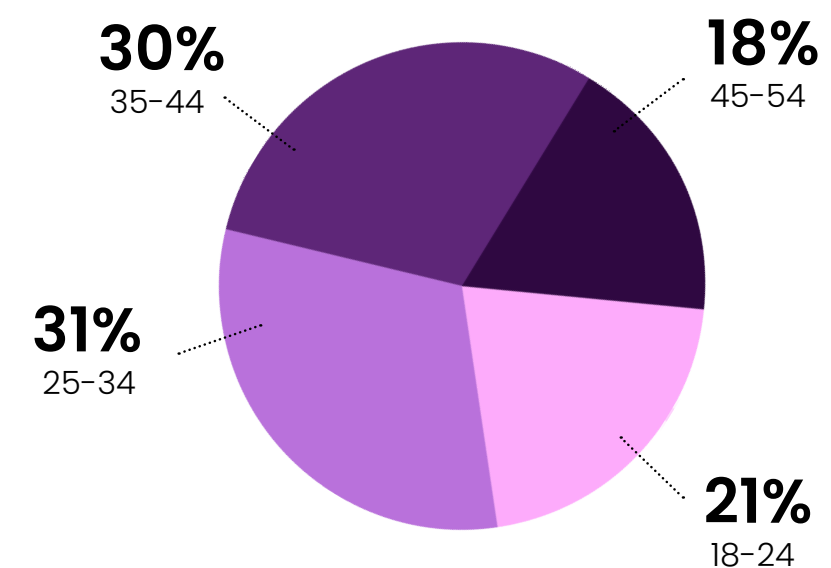
This survey involved over 1,000 creators across the 3 tiers, spanning in age from 18-59, from all around the U.S.



## ETHNICITY

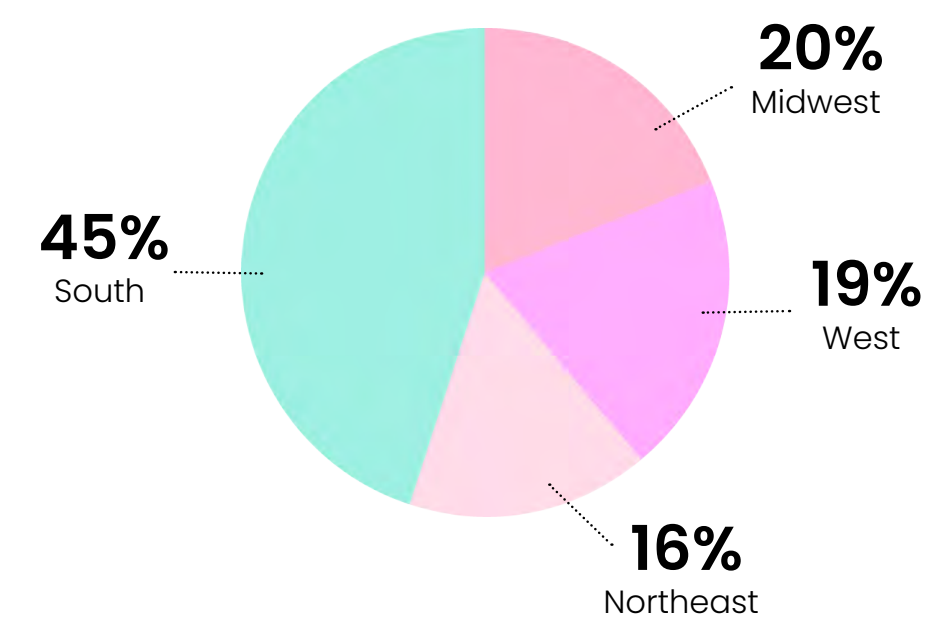


## AGE

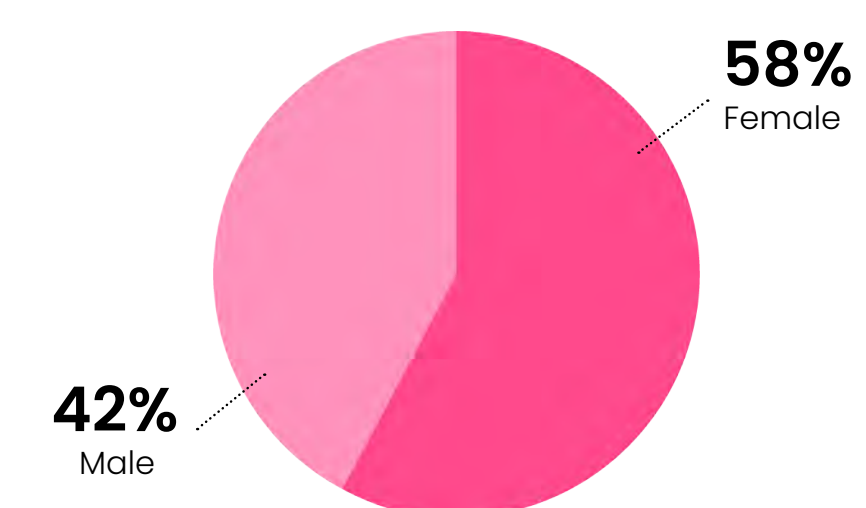


## GEOGRAPHY

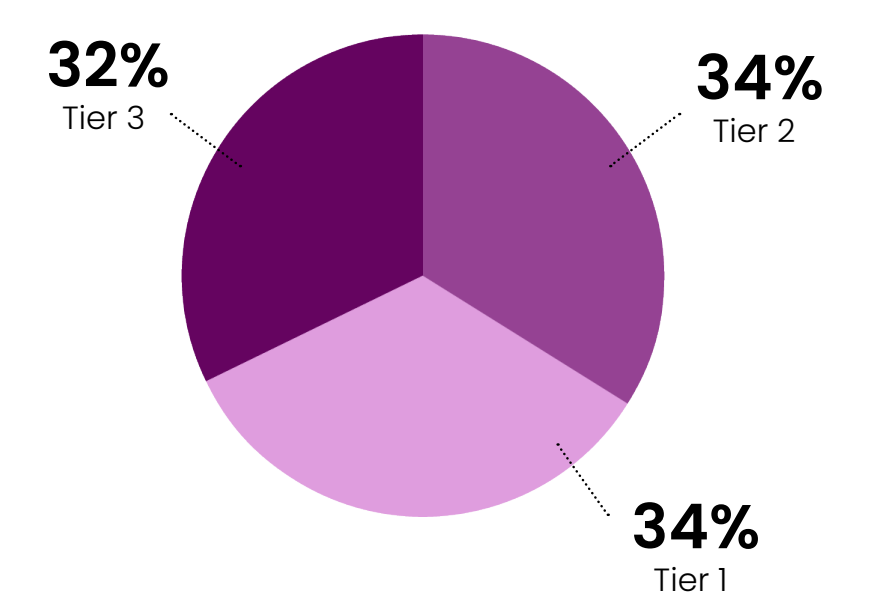
US Census Regions



## GENDER



## TIERS



PURPOSE

# A PORTRAIT TO GUIDE US

A portrait begins to paint a picture of creators— their needs, their wants and their potential relationship with financial institutions. But this report/book will not answer everything about creators. It will act as a foundation, beginning to bring clarity and guidance to initiatives in motion and initiatives in consideration. More than anything, it will help inform how to work with creators moving forward and how Ally can be an ally to creators.



# 6 KEY THEMES

While this research yielded hundreds of hours of interviews and hundreds of responses from surveys, we've distilled our findings into 6 themes of understanding creators: their realities, needs and ambitions.

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# AMBITION ON FULL FLEX

After months of research, meeting creators of all levels and crafts from every part of the country, it became clear there is a very strong culture amongst them.

There's a shared language, a shared way of engaging with people, a shared understanding of time, a shared M.O.— and it all seems to orbit around their most defining cultural value: ambition. And it makes sense. Creators have made a choice to run at their passion, and so they might as well do so with gusto.

**76%** of all creators view  
themselves as being driven

“If I want to do this,  
I need to be all  
about it. Not what  
I did in the past. I  
have to shift gears  
and be all in.”

– Giullian



# AN APPETITE TO GROW

Creators have an insatiable appetite, in particular, to learn, grow and adapt. Creators seem to live permanently on their toes, ready to pivot however they need to. Partly this seems to be an innate understanding that survival, or at least success, requires this. Partly it's a result of the creative world constantly changing—where new technology, platforms and competitors necessitate it.



**NAME: Melissa**



"Historically I shot cosmetics. Almost exclusively. Someone approached me about coffee. Did I know how to approach all the different bags? Beans vs. grinds? No idea. But you learn about the different materials. The best way to capture it. The best way to fake a full bag. The best way for everything. It's all about learning and trying it out."



# MORE OF WHAT I WANT

It might sound obvious, but what creators love most about being creators is the ability to, well, create (and to be creative). More specifically, it's about being creatively focused on something they're actually passionate about, versus something they have to do.

"What do you like most about being a creator?"

- #1 The creative expression
- #2 The opportunity to pursue my passion
- #3 The flexibility of work hours/location
- #4 Getting to work with products I love
- #5 Financial independence

A man with dark curly hair and a beard, wearing a light blue t-shirt, is looking down at his smartphone. He is standing in front of a green wall. The image is partially obscured by a large white circular graphic on the left side of the page.

"I used to work in finance. To be able to now express myself in so many different ways— a comedy bit, a short film, writing— it feels more like me."

— Jesse



# MASTER OF MY DOMAIN

Being a creator is often a conscious choice to not choose a “typical 9 to 5.” It’s a choice to instead go after that thing you’re passionate about, on your terms. Creators greatly value the autonomy and the flexibility that comes with their lifestyles, something they dreamt about at their previous jobs and/or can’t imagine returning to.

“It’s intimidating trying to learn how to work on cabinets and manage the finances and not know exactly how everything will work, but I’m making the calls. There’s power in that and it’s liberating as hell!”

– Sydney

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# IT'S NO CAKEWALK

Creators absolutely love what they do, but spend time with almost all of them and you'll realize things are far from perfect. Being a creator is no walk in the park. In fact, only 10% of creators find achieving success to be very easy.

When asked to describe their journey towards success as a creator:

**#1 response is "It's quite difficult but I find it rewarding"**

Interestingly, even though creators are incredibly ambitious, being ambitious is tiring. The need to be always-on, to be on hunt-mode and thinking about capitalizing and converting potential opportunities can be exhausting.

**46%** of creators say that one of their least favorite things about being a creator is **"constantly having to hustle"**

“I think what I love most about being a creator is the flexibility. I really value being able to spend my days how I want to, instead of being tied to my Outlook calendar of meetings.”

– Erika

# CONSTANT UNKNOWNNS

The unknowns for creators are many and this weighs heavily on them. Regardless of level of success, volatility is a constant reality.

“When there’s no guaranteed paycheck every 2 weeks, it’s a different ballgame.”

– Ray

## 46%

of creators say that one of their least favorite things about being a creator is **financial instability.**

## 28%

of creators say that one of their least favorite things about being a creator is **the volatility of their industry.**



# KEEPING MY GUARD UP

Another common gripe amongst creators is the messiness between collaboration, exploration and exploitation. For many creators, there's something fresh and exciting about exploring new opportunities with other creators, brands or individuals that seek them out. The promise of what can come of these opportunities is exactly what they love about being a creator.

Unfortunately, creators feel all too often that their time, energy, and/or mental and physical resources are being exploited. That yet another favor is being asked. That the request for a cameo, a quick video, a few free pictures is an easy ask. The reality is that these creators want to be valued for everything they contribute.

**39%** of creators have felt exploited by an individual\*.

\*Tiers 2&3 only



# DESTINY

Content creator, rapper,  
comedian, actress.



“A goal I have for myself this next year... no, a RULE I have for myself... is to not do free stuff. I’m not saying yes to everyone’s request, even when it seems small and simple. It never is. I can’t be successful if I’m always doing people’s favors for free.”

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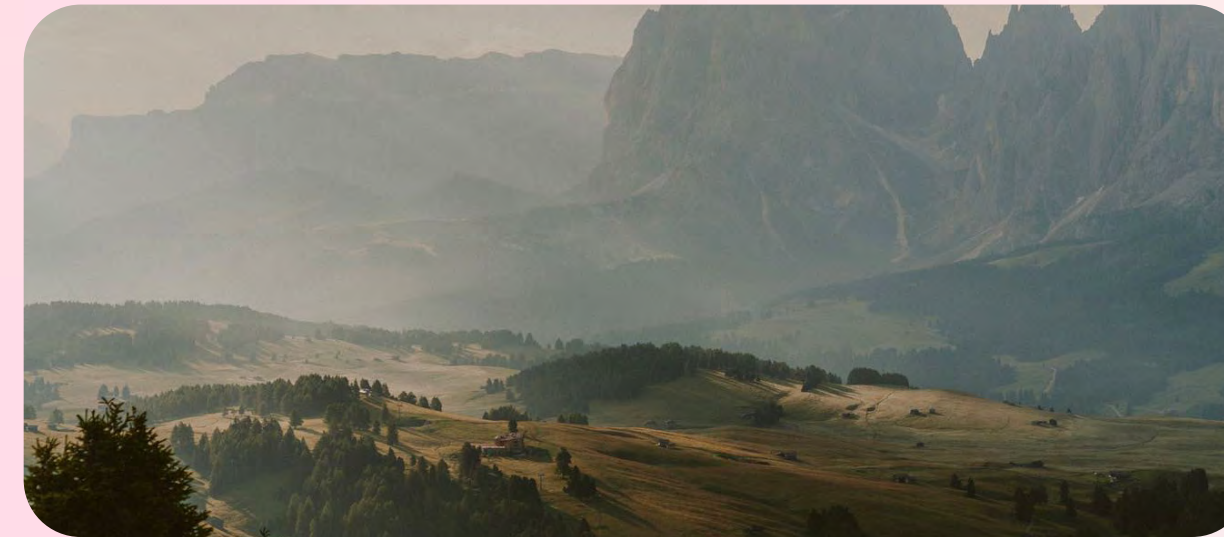
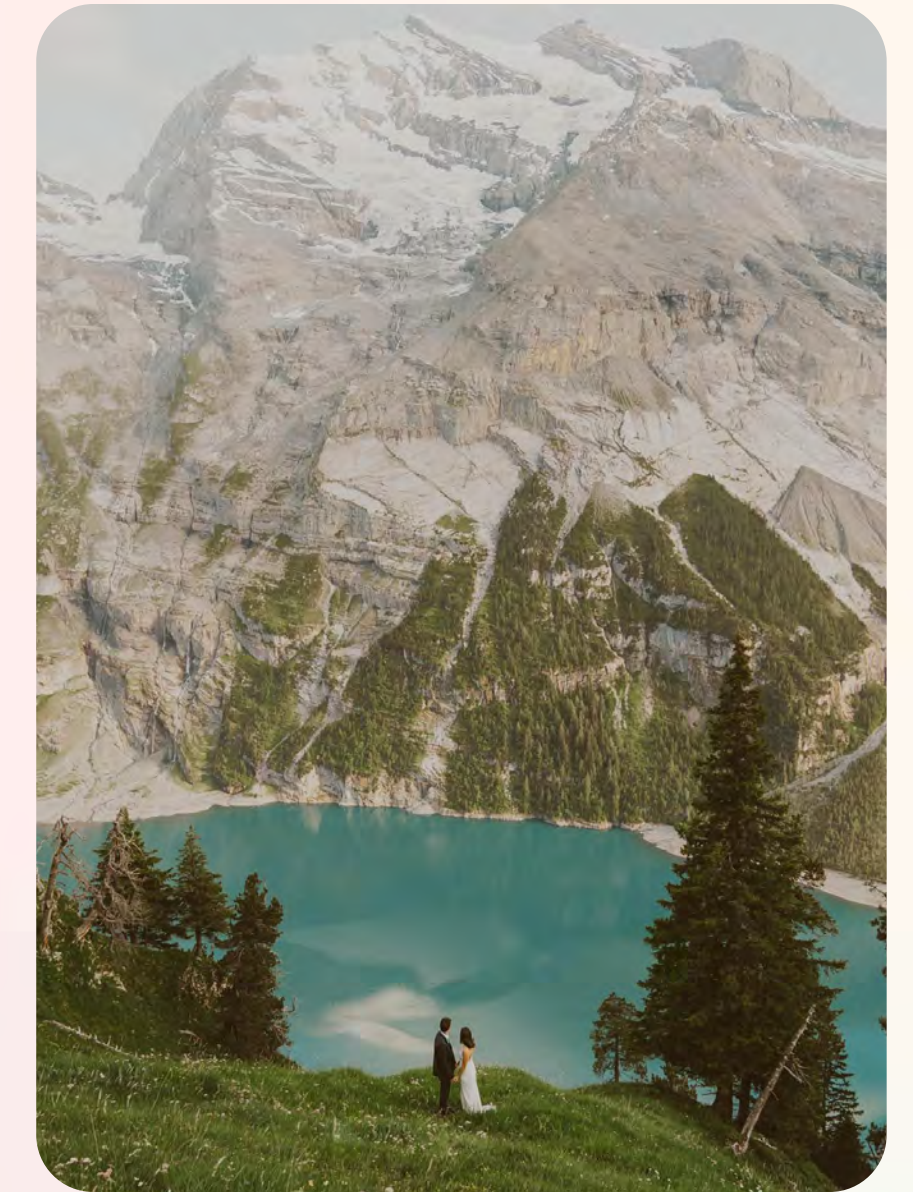
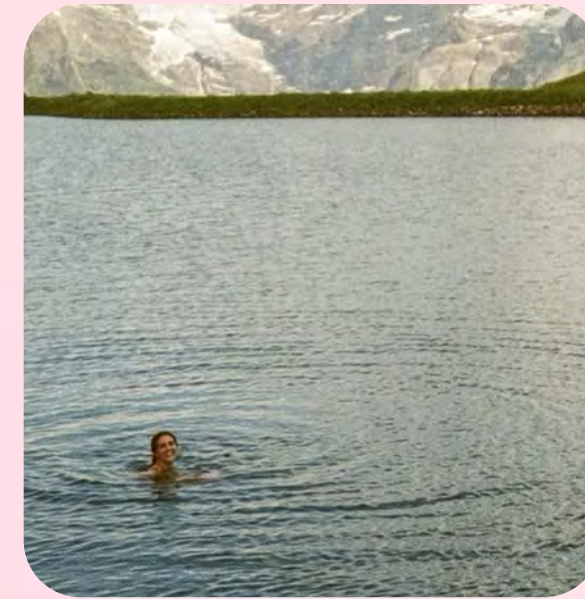
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# SETTING BOUNDARIES & GROUND RULES

In light of pressures to constantly create, constantly adapt, constantly navigate exploitative situations, creators are looking out for themselves.

Many are establishing ground rules for themselves to achieve the right work-life balance that works for them.



"I remember I used to book myself for shoots back to back, regardless of where and when they were. I'd have a shoot in LA. Fly in and do that and then land back in Seattle late at night and then have a 6am start time the next morning. And I'd think nothing of it. Now, I block out mandatory days between jobs. I need it for my sanity. It makes me better in the long run."

- Marcella



# PRESERVING MY MENTAL HEALTH

Hand-in-hand with awareness of work-life balance was another topic creators were forthright about: mental health. As the topic reached critical mass in broader culture, creator culture has embraced it as well.

**58%** of creators think about mental health often or very often.

**76%** are active or very active in taking care of their mental health.



“I think Covid forced us all to recognize it and think about it for ourselves. And now it’s more second nature to just draw boundaries for myself. I see when I need a break and I take it. No exceptions.”

– Molly

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# I COULD USE SOME (FINANCIAL) GUIDANCE

Something refreshing throughout the research process was creators' transparency about being relatively green when it comes to financial literacy. In focus-group settings, one creator's admission about their desire for financial education led to creator after creator opening up about feeling lost, feeling unsure of themselves, feeling overwhelmed, or feeling certain that they were doing something wrong.

This feeling was most felt by those who have experienced working in the non-creator world. Creators who came from a 9-5 often had many things automatically taken care of by companies, not to mention taxes were a much more straightforward concept. Now, the layers of complexities and unknowns are left in their hands.


# 81%

**of creators would like to or very much like to improve their financial understanding.**

**AND**

# 75%

**would be open or very open to financial education.**

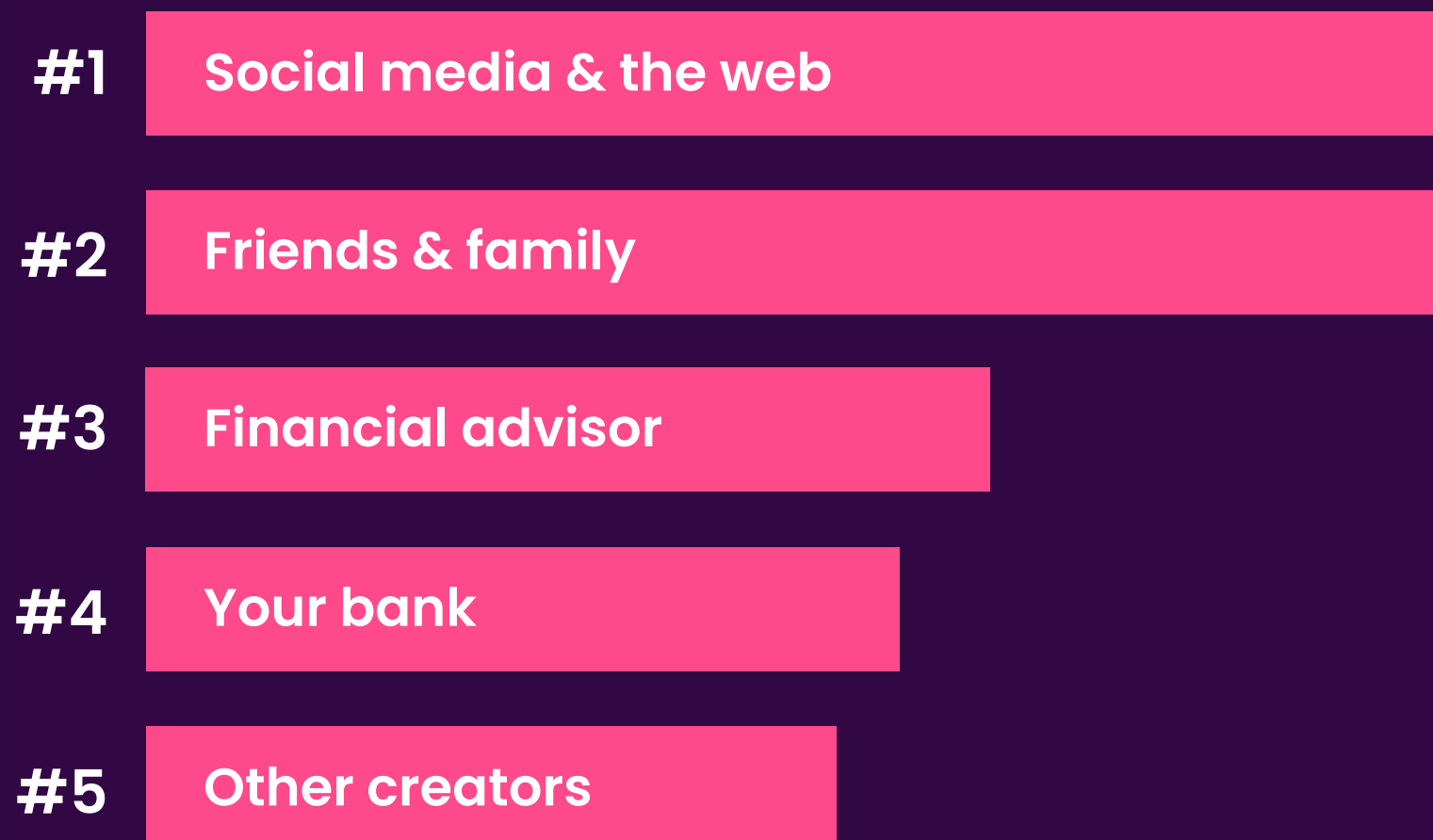
A woman with long dark hair, wearing a yellow t-shirt, is sitting at a table in what appears to be a cafe or restaurant. She is holding a dark-colored smartphone with both hands and looking at the screen. On the table in front of her is a pizza in a white paper container and a tall orange cup. The background is blurred, showing a white car and other people in a bright, indoor setting.

“It’s not that I feel like I have no idea what I’m doing, but there’s just this feeling that I could definitely be doing something slightly different and that would help me financially.”

– Erika

# WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

A big surprise came when we asked creators in focus groups and 1:1 interviews who they turn to for financial education. Many brought up a financial advisor, but many didn't have a relationship with one. Instead, most creators mentioned social media or the web as their go-to for such advice, followed by family and friends.



“I guess like so many other things in life I’m just asking Google. Or probably TikTok where someone will have a POV or give me steps on something to do.”

– Ingrid



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# I WOULDN'T BANK ON IT (RIGHT NOW)

Another surprise came when creators responded to a line of questioning around financial institutions, including banks being a place to go for financial guidance for their creative ventures. It turns out that currently, banks were not the obvious answer for these creators.

**"A bank is literally one of the last places I would consider going to get financial guidance as a creator."**

– Sydney

**"There are so many other places I would think of first before a bank."**

– Destiny

**"Yeah, no. A bank has no understanding of what I'm doing or want to be doing."**

– Jesse

# CREATORS FEEL A CULTURAL DISCONNECT

Digging deeper, we were able to get more details on the disconnect that exists between creators and financial institutions, including banks. Much of it boils down to a “cultural” disconnect. Creators commonly referred to financial institutions looking at them as aliens—not understanding what they do, not understanding what they need and, most importantly, feeling that banks have no interest in helping them.

Top characteristics missing from a bank when working with creators:

#1 **Understanding**

#2 **Flexibility**

#3 **Relatability**


#4 **Trust**

#5 **Empathy**

\*Tiers 2&3 only

# GRANT & JONATHAN

Poker Podcasters



"It's so foreign, the idea that a bank could be helpful to us. It's so hard for me to even think in that direction.

But I would love it if there were people who could actually give us some thoughts and advice and point us in a particular direction."

– Jonathan

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# YOU'RE SAYING THERE'S A CHANCE

Although creators aren't naturally looking to financial institutions and banks for education, there's good news. Like most relationships, there's room for growth. Despite the palpable cultural disconnect between creators and banks being in qualitative research, quantitative research proved that the door has clearly been left open. A surprising percentage of creators are ready for financial institutions to help show them the way.

**80%**  
**of creators would  
be open or very  
open to financial  
guidance coming  
from a financial  
institution.\***

\*Tiers 2&3 only

# I'LL BE READY TO SWITCH

Maybe most important is that creators can see the vision of a bank for creators. They like the idea of a bank that is focused on them.

# 78%

**of creators are interested or very interested in the idea of a bank that's committed to servicing creators, understands their creative ventures and knows how to service them.**

# 79%

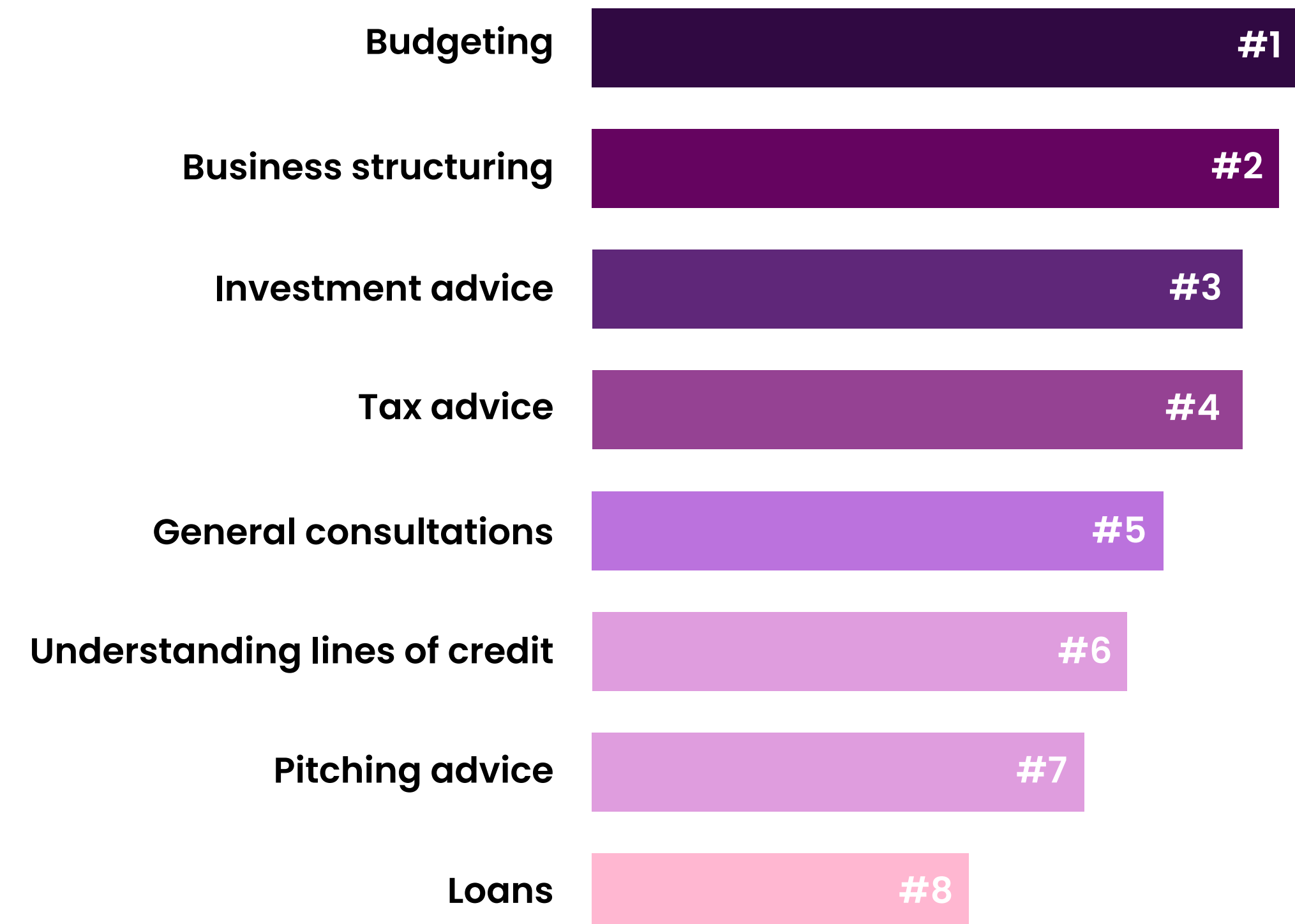
**would be likely or very likely to switch to such a bank\*.**

\*Tiers 2&3 only. Ally does not currently offer deposits products and services for businesses. This question is aimed at better understanding creatives' needs. Ally provides tools and resources for financial education but cannot provide financial advice.

# HELP ME WITH WHAT I NEED

If the core challenge is perceived apathy and disinterest by the financial institutions, the path to reconciliation should come from bringing creators the type of education they're most interested in. Creators helped to lay out what that looks like.

How interested would you be in receiving education for each of the following as it relates to your creative ventures?





A COMMITMENT  
TO IMPACT FOR  
CREATORS

# AN ONGOING COMMITMENT TO CREATORS

Our journey with creators is just beginning. This research was step one. While we feel we've learned tons and are much more informed in how to be The Official Ally for Creators™, there's still much more to do. We've already begun to rally around several clear opportunities that arose during our research:

- Investing in a program to provide personal financial education and resources to creators.
- Collaborating with creators via our social channels.
- Creating the right on-going learning plan, to ensure we can continue to play a useful role to creators as their landscape evolves.

We're excited about this research, we're excited about what we've learned, but most importantly, we're excited about everything to come.

**MELISSA CORRALES**

📷 millicreative

**SYDNEY PERRY**

📷 localsstay

**DENNIS WILLIAMS**

📷 menacetodennis

**ALLISON WETIG**

📷 allisonwetig

**RAY DORCELY JR**

📷 creativearchitect

**JONATHAN LEVY**

📺 handoftheweek

**MARCY HOHNER**

📷 marcellalaine

**GRANT DENISON**

📺 handoftheweek

**DESTINY MABRY**

📷 destiny.mabry

**TOMMY SIEGEL**

📷 tommysiegel

**TIM SHEA**

**ERIKA KWEE**

📷 thepancakeprincess

**MOLLY MATHIAS**

📷 mmmvintage59

**LEAH ALLYANNAH ALLY**

📺 leahallyannah

**JESSE MARTIN**

📷 jsmartinlive

**MONIQUE GARMY**

📷 awriterinnewyork

**CHRISTOPHER DE LA GUARDIA**

📷 dela.mp4

**INGRID GOSPER**

📷 ingridgospers

**CARA WOLDER**

📷 carawolder

**GIULLIAN YAO GIOIELLO**

📷 giulliang

**DJ NEFF**

📷 djn3ff

**DAVID MARCIANO**

ANOMALY  PORTRAIT

# RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The Creators Portrait process utilized multiple rounds of qualitative and quantitative research to ensure our learnings balanced a more thorough and nuanced understanding of creators with statistically significant findings. While Ally does not currently offer business products or services, the research was conducted to better understand creators' motivators, barriers, and personal finance journeys.

## QUALITATIVE

### APPROACH

A multi-round approach that began by looking for creators across the country, at different parts of their creator journeys, experiencing different levels of success, from all parts of the country, of different ages, with different backgrounds, and from different cultures.

### METHODOLOGY

**Round 1:**  
Virtual focus groups (N=22)

**Round 2:**  
1:1 virtual interviews (N=12)

**Round 3:**  
In-person ethnographies (N=6)

### TIMEFRAME

Rounds 1-3 were conducted between May - August 2023.

## QUANTITATIVE

The intent was to mirror the qualitative research approach as much as possible, but with a much larger, further-reaching sample. Representation consistent with national averages were sought for age, ethnicity, geography and gender.

Online survey (N=1000)

The survey fielded in July 2023 for 1 week.

These qualitative and quantitative studies were conducted by Anomaly Portrait Research on behalf of Ally Financial between May 2023 and July 2023, among a sample size of 22 (qualitative) and 1,000 (quantitative) U.S. adults.