Community Arts and Digital Practice During COVID-19 Needs Assessment

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Delivered to
Toronto Local Arts Service
Organizations (LASOs)

Prepared by

Nordicity

Nordicity

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Introduction

Project Purpose

The project purpose for this single-phase initiative is to investigate the dynamic shift to digital and virtual spaces for Community Arts (CA) organizations, practitioners, and Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs) in Toronto.

This project aims to assess the effectiveness of strategies and practices that these groups have used in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges/barriers that they have encountered in moving to virtual models.

The findings will be used to identify tools and supports that could help strengthen the abilities of CA organizations, practitioners and LASOs to serve their communities virtually, even as they return to in-person programming.

Research Methodology

The needs assessment was completed by a research team composed of Nordicity and the Research & Impact team at the Toronto Arts Foundation. The project team was supported by a Steering Committee composed of Executive Directors from the six Toronto LASOs and other participating organizations from the Community Arts Canopy (Canopy). The findings presented in this report were based on three lines of research:

- Desk research — to explore the benefits and challenges brought to the CA sector resulting from adoption of digital programming; to assess the changes in audience needs and preferences since the onset of COVID-19; and to develop the research framework to capture the needs from CA organizations, practitioners and community members.

- Interviews with 10 executive directors from the Toronto LASOs and selected Canopy members, conducted between July 9 – August 7, 2021. These interviews were designed to assess COVID-19's impact on the organizations' programming, audience engagement, and impact measurement.

- Focus groups – In total, 44 community arts practitioners were consulted through a total of 5 focus group interactions. Discussion were conducted via Zoom as part of a facilitated group session. Focus groups were designed to assess COVID-19's impact on the transformation of art practices and audience engagement for CA practitioners as well as assess the support gaps and needs of these practitioners regarding virtual program delivery.

- Survey — A survey was distributed by the Canopy members to CA participants in their networks. The survey yielded a total of 72 completed responses between July 12 to September 12th, 2021. The questions were developed to assess the audience's digital needs, preferences, impacts and challenges for participation in CA during COVID-19.

Context: Trends in Arts Digital Programming

Context: Trends in Arts Digital Programming

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the arts and culture sector experienced significant impacts on their activities and operations. While data specific to the impact of COVID-19 on Community Arts is lacking, there has been research on arts engagement and participation during the pandemic more broadly. This broader research shows that on the one hand, **non-profit arts in Toronto experienced a huge decrease of revenues from ticket sales** as public performances and programming were cancelled due to public health safety measures and travel restriction.[1] On the other hand, **demand from audiences for digital offerings and engagement increased**. For example, the *COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor - Ontario* released in March 2021 showed that Ontario audiences who watched and paid for/contributed to online cultural programming had increased on average by 11% since 2020.[2] As a result, arts organizations across the province had to shift to creating and delivering virtual or digital programming.

In a 2020 summary report from the inaugural Community Arts Canopy Town Hall Session, there was a collective consensus that digital programming enhances the arts and COVID-19 allows art organizations to rethink their strategies for programming, engagement and events to be more accessible to those with various needs. Possible methods to strengthen the sector in the long term included:

- Re-evaluation of programs as audience scope changes (e.g., expanded program reach);

- Hybrid programming (the continued delivery of virtual or digital programming alongside in-person programming) may continue as public health guidelines and restrictions persist or fluctuate;

- Tailoring online programming for specific audiences, etc.

Overall, the need for equipment and infrastructure, staff resources and funds has been a challenge for community arts organizations and practitioners even though many of them have pivoted from in-person programming to virtual programming during the pandemic.

1. Toronto Arts Council, Impact of COVID-19 on Toronto's Non-Profit Arts Sector https://torontoartscouncil.org/covid-19
2. WolfBorwn, Audience Outlook Monitor Ontario Phase 1, https://dashboard.intrinsicimpact.org/groupings/647/reports/3249
(participating organizations did not include Community Arts organizations)

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Context: Trends in Arts Digital Programming

The *COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor – Ontario* survey data also highlighted a number of digital audience engagement trends in Ontario resulting from the pandemic, namely:

- 70% of online cultural program participants indicated that they paid a one-time fee to engage with online cultural programs and 40% of cultural program participants made a voluntary donation.[3]

- 73% of online cultural program participants reported that there will be at least a minimal place for online programs in their cultural life once facilities reopen and it is possible to attend live programs as often as one likes.

- 26% of surveyed audiences felt at least somewhat uncomfortable navigating on their computers or mobile devices to stream a live performance.

- Only about half of the survey respondents said they give online programs offered by cultural organizations their full attention. Dependencies of attention level included:

  - How engaging the content was,

  - Personal interest level,

  - Duties with work, and

  - Mental status

3. WolfBrown, Audience Outlook Monitor Ontario Phase 1, https://dashboard.intrinsicimpact.org/groupings/647/reports/3249
(participating organizations did not include Community Arts organizations)

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Key Findings from Consultations with LASOs
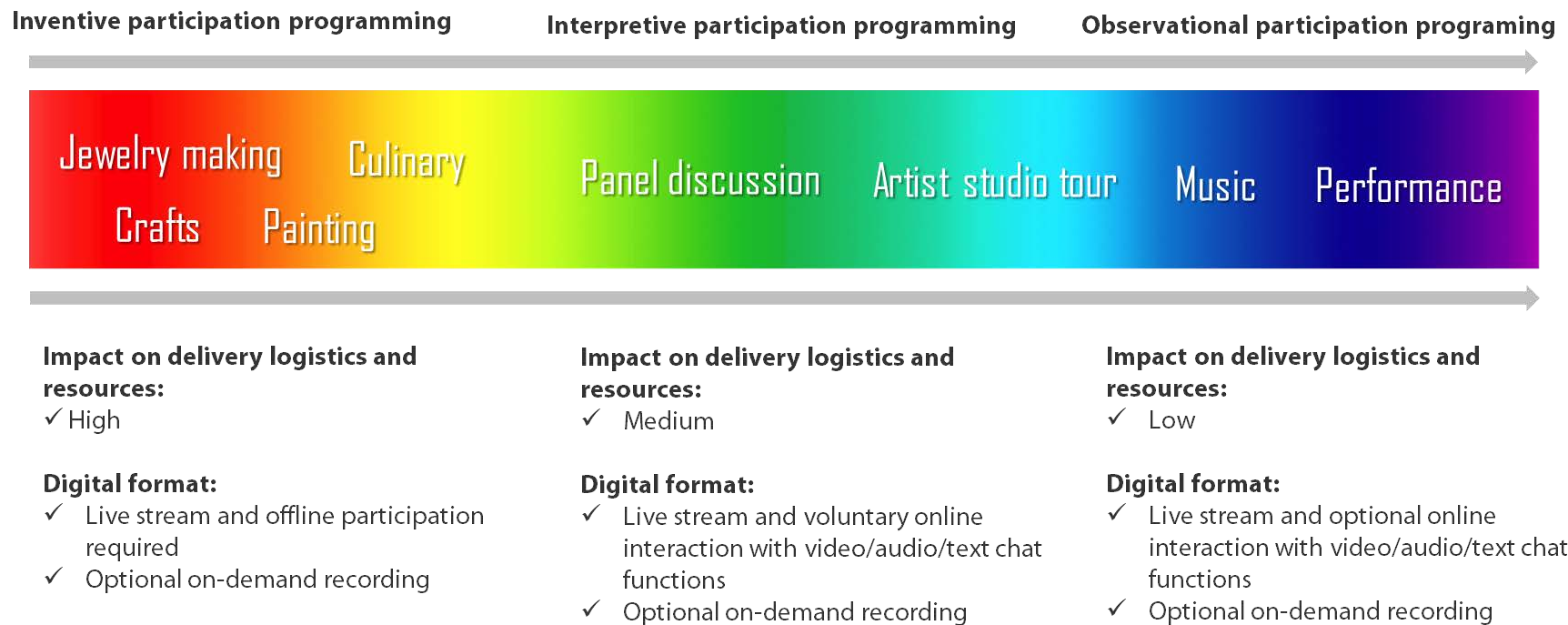
About the interviews

Nordicity conducted interviews with representatives from of each Canopy member organization. The findings of the interviews are summarized according to the following themes:

1. Impact of Digital Programming on Future Decision Making
2. Discoverability and Reach
3. Accessibility
4. Audience Engagement
5. Measuring Success and Impact
6. Funding and Support for Digital Engagement

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1. Impact of Digital Programming on future Decision Making (1)

Re-defined program formats — **The majority of the interviewees indicated that their organizations would adopt a hybrid model long-term**, continuing to offer some programs digitally even after resuming in-person programming. Organizations found that some formats and program types were easier to transform into virtual formats than others, although virtual programming presented challenges for all types of programming. For example, spectator programming was slightly easier to move to a virtual format whereas facilitated or interactive programming presented additional challenges and were more difficult to move to a virtual environment.

Three types of digital programming were observed during the consultations, which have been categorized according to WolfBrown's Five Modes of Participation. [4] The types of programming, their digital format adoption, and their impacts on delivery are summarized below.

Inventive participation programming | Interpretive participation programming | Observational participation programing

Jewelry making   Culinary   Crafts   Painting   Panel discussion   Artist studio tour   Music   Performance

Impact on delivery logistics and resources:
✓ High

Digital format:
✓ Live stream and offline participation required
✓ Optional on-demand recording

Impact on delivery logistics and resources:
✓ Medium

Digital format:
✓ Live stream and voluntary online interaction with video/audio/text chat functions
✓ Optional on-demand recording

Impact on delivery logistics and resources:
✓ Low

Digital format:
✓ Live stream and optional online interaction with video/audio/text chat functions
✓ Optional on-demand recording

4. WolfBrown, Ontario Arts Engagement Study (2011), https://www.arts.on.ca/oac/media/oac/Publications/Research%20Reports%20EN-FR/Arts%20Engagement%20Study/Arts-Engagement-Study-REPORT-ENGL.pdf

1. Impact of Digital Programming on future Decision Making (2)

Real-time interaction and facilitation for more interactive programming were challenging due to gaps in skills and experience with facilitating discussions in a virtual setting, as well as monitoring and managing text chat and live discussions simultaneously. **Additional training and guidance on facilitation in a digital setting is needed**.

Re-defined partnerships —Digital programming brought opportunities to collaborate with a wider range of artists and other partners than during the pre-pandemic period. Without the need to travel in a virtual setting, barriers related to time and cost were eliminated creating the conditions that allowed for partnerships and collaborations that would not have otherwise been possible.

2. Discoverability and Reach (1)

Digital relevance — Social media channels and email were the most common platforms that the majority of the Community Arts organizations used to promote programming during the pandemic. While many CA organizations ramped up social media engagement and relied on social media and e-newsletters to promote their programs, digital outreach was not the usual way of connecting with the community prior to the pandemic.

- It was also noted that social media sharing enabled the organization to reach some community members but not all of them. Limited access to stable internet and/or devices pose barriers for some community members to stay updated and to participate.

Extended audience reach for CA organizations— Digital program delivery and digital promotion/outreach increased CA organizations' capacity to reach and connect with a wider audience. In addition, the re-sharing of content on social media helped build more awareness and increase reach. This increased reach meant that CA organizations and LASOs were sometimes able to connect with new audiences and community members within their catchment area. However, the extended reach also sometimes resulted in participation from audiences outside their immediate target community or catchment area, which had implications related to access for target community members as well as resource and capacity issues for the organizations and practitioners delivering the programming.

- In response, some organizations focused on approaches that would allow them to prioritize participants in the local community / catchment area, such as requiring pre-registration and asking for a postal code.

2. Discoverability and Reach (2)

Extended audience reach among artists — Digital programming also increased CA organizations' reach and connection to local artists due to the increased social media activities and events. For example, an organization connected to more artists than pre-COVID via "Instagram tours" programming.

Re-defined audience groups— Digital programing brought opportunities for muti-generational family participation as members of one household could easily participate together from home. Interviewees noted that having family participation was hard to achieve with in-person programming.

![Nordicity logo]

3. Accessibility and Digital Support (1)

Re-defined accessibility — Digital programming forced community arts organizations to redefine "accessibility" considerations related to their programming. Virtual programming eliminated some barriers to access for certain audiences while creating new barriers for other audiences. Now more than ever, the importance of the role of community arts is highlighted as COVID-19 has increased the community's need for community connection and wellness/wellbeing support.

Some interviewees mentioned that the option to remain anonymous in a virtual context provided a better alternative to attendees who might experience social anxiety and similar barriers to in-person participation. Specifically, alternative engagement formats were encouraged during a digital program such as: using the chat function, participation with screens turned off, etc. As such, some organizations addressed participation and access challenges by offering different ways to engage and participate during programs. At the same time, participants, art practitioners and CA organizations experienced new barriers specific to attending and facilitating digital programs. The barriers and challenges are summarized in a table on the next page.

3. Accessibility and Digital Support (2)

Re-defined accessibility (Cont'd)

Participants	Art Practitioners	CA organizations
Lack of access to devices and/or internet.	Lack of access to devices, equipment and/or reliable internet.	Lack of access to devices to support participants who are in need. Lack of access to equipment for recording livestreamed or pre-recorded programming. Gaps in digital skills, knowledge and technology expertise/support.
Lack of time or space to participate due to family situations, changes to childcare or family member support situations, etc.	Lack of sustainable employment opportunities, in particular for artists with disabilities or who are chronically underemployed.	Staff experienced exhaustion and burn-out due to the additional effort required to shift to online programming (e.g., redesign programming, training, learning new tools and platforms, etc.).
Hesitancy to join virtual programs from home or turn on cameras to engage due to privacy concerns or social anxiety/discomfort, sometimes related to socio-economic disparity.	Lack of knowledge in digital facilitation and technology skills.	Lack of funding and support to plan, adapt and execute virtual programming.
Lack of comfort with the virtual programing format and platforms being used.	Virtual program delivery requires more energy and effort from artists, and they are being compensated at the same rate resulting in a lower compensation for the efforts overall.	Lack of digital skills internally, capacity and partnerships to innovate.

4. Audience Engagement

Re-defined engagement format — In consultations, CA organizations highlighted challenges related to the ability for practitioners to engage and interact with audiences, despite offering multiple methods (I.e., live interaction, chat box, etc.).

Furthermore, it was harder for staff and practitioners to be able to gauge whether participants were fully engaged in a virtual format due to a lack of real-time feedback in the form of visual and body language cues. In some cases, many participants would turn off their camera for various reasons or facilitators had a difficult time to see all participants and observe how engaged they are on a small screen with multiple participants.

In addition, certain types of programming were significantly hindered by the virtual format. Especially those where the interaction and connection between participants is central to the experience. For example, the inability to have in-person connections hindered the experience greatly for Indigenous participants at drumming circles.

5. Measuring Success and Impact

Collecting data — Evaluation surveys remained the common approach for CA organizations to gather feedback and measure qualitative impact. Prior to COVID-19, some CA organizations handed out surveys at the end of a session during in-person programming. During COVID-19, CA organizations used various approaches and tools to collect data, including live polls via Zoom, survey links in the chat, emails with questionnaires, and feedback forms

- However, the engagement with data collection was a significant challenge. For example, one organization had to call a list of senior citizens directly to get feedback since engagement with online polls and surveys was very low. In other cases, the program facilitator would give out surveys before the end of a session. Almost all CA organizations acknowledged that virtual programming made it harder to collect feedback.

Redefined impact measurement— Interviews revealed that participation numbers remain the most commonly used impact metric by Community Arts organizations. However, as noted in the previous slide, virtual participation made it difficult to gauge the audience's engagement level – hence in the virtual context it was more challenging to confidently equate participation with engagement, let alone measure the impact of that engagement.

It was also noted that evaluating the impact of CA solely by participation is an incomplete and insufficient measurement of the impact that a CA program has on an individual and a community.

What's more, real-time feedback through candid interactions with participants is also an important way that CA organizations understand and build a narrative around the impact of their programming. This more informal method of gathering qualitative evidence related to programming impact was practically eliminated in the context of virtual programming. Because candid interaction and real-time feedback from participants were less common and more challenging during virtual programming, **collecting qualitative and informal feedback became another challenge**.

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6. Funding and Support for Digital Engagement

Re-defined eligible activities — There were some relief/recovery funding (e.g., Ontario Trillium Fund) available to support non-profit and community service organizations during the pandemic. However, CA organizations noted that eligible expenses did not always meet their specific needs to support them in delivering critical CA programming to the community virtually.

- On the one hand, CA organizations need capital and operating support to invest in and maintain tools, platforms, software and equipment for virtual delivery.

- On the other hand, delivering digital programming or maintaining a hybrid programing model also requires additional human resources capacity.

- Finally, CA organizations and practitioners require training and skills development as well as tech support in order to be able to deliver and facilitate virtual programming effectively.

In addition to these funding and support needs, sector engagement also revealed that even though increased audience reach had the potential to increase revenue – either through additional funding or through registration fees - CA organizations were concerned with balancing this opportunity against their mandates to provide free or low-cost programming to community members in their catchment area.

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Emerging themes of organizations' needs

Digital programming Impact on Decision Making

- All CA organizations indicated that they would need a new strategy to maintain a hybrid programming model after pandemic.

- As a result of new program formats, CA organizations need to provide artists with additional training, guidance and support on facilitation in a digital setting.

Discoverability and Reach

- The extended reach of virtual programming means that CA organizations will need to balance the needs of the local community and the new audiences they are reaching, while continuing to prioritize their primary (local) target audience.

- Virtual programming also enabled more multi-generational family participation, presenting an opportunity for CA organizations to support ongoing community-building.

Accessibility

- Virtual programming eliminated some barriers to access for certain audiences while creating new barriers for other audiences. CA organizations will need to re-examine the accessibility issues in the digital space. For some participants, the digital format allows greater flexibility in view of certain participation barriers related to mobility, mental health and wellness, work or school commitments, or family and childcare needs. For other participants, the digital format creates different or additional barriers due lack of access to internet and devices, lack of time or space, and lack of comfort with the digital platform.

Audience Engagement

- Virtual programming can bring uneven cultural impacts on historically marginalized communities. It can alter the value and impact of certain activities and it might not be the best format for certain types of programming, experiences or audiences. It also changes the audience reach and engagement formats. As such, virtual programs need to be designed differently in order to achieve their intended outcomes.

Emerging themes of organizations' needs

Measuring Success and Impact

- CA organizations need better tools to effectively measure the impact of virtual or digital programming. For example, it is often difficult to gauge the engagement level in a virtual session. In addition, collection of both quantitative and qualitative information and feedback from participants appears to be more challenging in the virtual delivery context.

- There is also a gap between the digital skills and capacity at CA organizations and the available tools measuring virtual programming (i.e., polling and surveying features in Zoom).

Funding and Digital Support

- CA organizations will need new funding models and eligibility criteria to support additional capacity to design and deliver quality virtual programming; capital investment and maintenance of digital infrastructure, tools and equipment; skills development for CA staff and practitioners; and tech support during program delivery.

  - In the short-term, there are costs related to training and acquisition of equipment. In addition, virtual programming increases the preparation time and costs for both organizations and artists which needs to be considered in budgeting.

  - In the long-term, a hybrid model will require additional resources and capacity for CA organizations to be able to deliver both in-person and virtual programming. In hardware and software, etc.). There needs to be changes to funding models and criteria to support CA organizations in maintaining a sustainable hybrid model.

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Key Findings from Focus Group Consultations with CA Practitioners

About the focus groups

Toronto Arts Foundation conducted 5 focus groups with a total of 44 art practitioners. Discussions were conducted via Zoom as part of a facilitated group session. The findings of the focus groups are summarized according to the following themes:

1. Impact on the Creative Process and Engagement
2. Accessibility and Digital Support

Impact on Creative Process and Engagement

- **Digital engagement skills building** — Practitioners noted that there was a lack of guidelines or support for preparing and conducting digital programming.

  - For example, digital formats not only increased preparation time for the artist but also increased costs (e.g., for lighting and camera equipment) which the artist did not know how to charge/expense appropriately.

  - In some other cases, artists found there was a lack of universal guidelines/training on how to interact with participants in a virtual format. For example, when should a chat functionality be enabled and encouraged? How could a program avoid malice activities such as Zoom bombing? How should bullying/harassment be addressed and prevented effectively in a digital environment? Other challenges included gauging the time for audience to speak, properly adapting in-person workshop into digital programming (e.g., making tiny chainmail jewelry was very hard to show the audience even with an overhead camera), and limits in teaching finite skills virtually.

- **Adaptation of programming formats and creative practice** — Artists reported that they began to transform their practice and programming to be more "mobile." For example, some artists adopted new programming formats that were more self-directed. One participant mentioned mailing out a project where the public could add to the artwork by responding. The importance of adaptation in community arts practice was raised.

Impact on Creative Process and Engagement (Cont'd)

- **Digital offered more flexibility and reach** — Digital programming allowed the practitioner to reach people beyond the local footprint and allowed a more flexible teaching model for practitioners who have other family duties.

- **Difficulty in gauging engagement in a virtual context** — Similar to the difficulty mentioned in the interview findings, artists also found it particularly challenging to engage meaningfully with participants in a virtual context. Practitioners experienced varying levels of engagement, with some noting that participants readily engaged verbally or through the chat boxes during programming, while others noted that they would speak for an hour without receiving any interaction from the participants.

  - Some artists noted that the uneven or sometimes absent interaction from participants was particularly challenging because their process typically involves drawing from the participant reactions in order to adapt their delivery/facilitation to participants needs and they wanted feedback so that they could ensure meaningful engagement.

- **Increased knowledge gap in the digital realm** — Artists noted the breadth of new digital skills and knowledge they needed to acquaint themselves with, from compliance with web accessibility laws (AODA) and standards, to digital copyright considerations, to digital engagement best practices, to technology support (both for themselves as facilitators and for participants). There is an increasing need for technology training.

- **Missing in-person engagement among artists** — There is lack of digital creative environments for artists where they could inform each other's practices and brainstorm on shared skill sets. In addition, being in the community in-person represents the notion of meeting community where they are. Audiences online may already have access to the arts and arts community and those who are not online are often those who need the arts the most.

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Accessibility and Digital Support

- **More flexibility and means to present themselves** — Similar to findings from the community arts organizations, artists found that digital programming allowed people to work at their own pace and comfort level. For example, during a program that involved active participation, some participants turned the camera off because they were not confident in showing their works or they were more comfortable speaking that way. In addition, the digital format enabled people to step away and decompress immediately if needed.

- **Addressing the invisible digital gap** —While digital programming extended reach to wider audiences, it can also limit some people's participation due to a lack of technology, knowledge/skills and equipment. As noted by one interviewee, "those who needed it the most were the ones who weren't able to attend."

- **Additional new costs for accessibility** — During the delivery of the programming, digital format might create additional costs for artists, who might not think about adding it to the budget (e.g., lights other streaming equipment, live captioning software, etc.). Many artists also had to update some of their equipment (laptops, phones, etc.) in order to be able to deliver live or recorded programming, which added to the financial pressure. As such, artists expressed needs for grants/support to purchase equipment and digital subscriptions. In parallel, some artists also expressed the need to improve access to high-speed internet from their home or studio. Extra demands emerged in terms of time spent on tech facilitation, set up, etc., (focus group)

- **Platforms specifically designed for art** — Focus groups revealed that artists needed platforms that can better accommodate showcasing different formats of art (e.g. music or visual art) and were specifically geared towards sharing art among each other.

- **Collaboration between artists on developing skills for technology** — Resource/skill-sharing was expressed as a demand from artists.

Emerging themes related to practitioners' needs

Impact on Creative Process and Engagement

- Arts practitioners needed guidelines and support in order to properly prepare and deliver digital programming.

- As practitioners transformed their practice to accommodate remote teaching and digital interaction, they expressed a need for digital knowledge and skills training. Some of the specific skills areas where additional training was needed included accessibility standards (such as AODA compliance), digital copyright, and technology skills.

Accessibility and Digital Support

- Artists expressed a need for grants/support to invest in better high-speed internet connections, equipment and digital subscriptions. In addition, digital programming resulted in additional expenses in setting up the session. As such artists also need guidance on budgeting and expensing for costs associated specifically with digital program delivery.

- It was highlighted that digital programming required more work/effort for artists to prepare, set up and deliver, but they were getting paid the same or less (due to not having to commute).

- There is a need for digital or online creative collaboration spaces for artists where they could inform each other's practices, share digital resources and brainstorm on shared skill sets.

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# Key Findings from survey of CA participants

Survey Details

- The project team developed and administered a survey among community arts participants. The survey was distributed by the Canopy members and remained in the field from July 12 to September 12, 2021.

- The survey received a total of 72 completed responses.

- The following section provided a snapshot of the results based on responses from the survey sample. The results of the survey are intended to showcase the views of community arts participants on digital programming during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- In particular, the survey aimed to understand the needs, challenges and supports needed for audiences to be able to participate in and engage meaningfully with Community Arts during and beyond COVID as well as the the opportunities that may exist for ongoing hybrid programming models.

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Respondent profile | Age

- A large portion of survey respondents were retirement-aged with people aged 55+ accounting for 42% of the total respondents.

- About 29% of the respondents were aged at 25 to 44.

- Evidence suggests that the survey sample skews slightly older than the CA participant "universe" in Toronto. These results may hint at a need for better ways to engage younger participants in feedback and evaluation efforts.

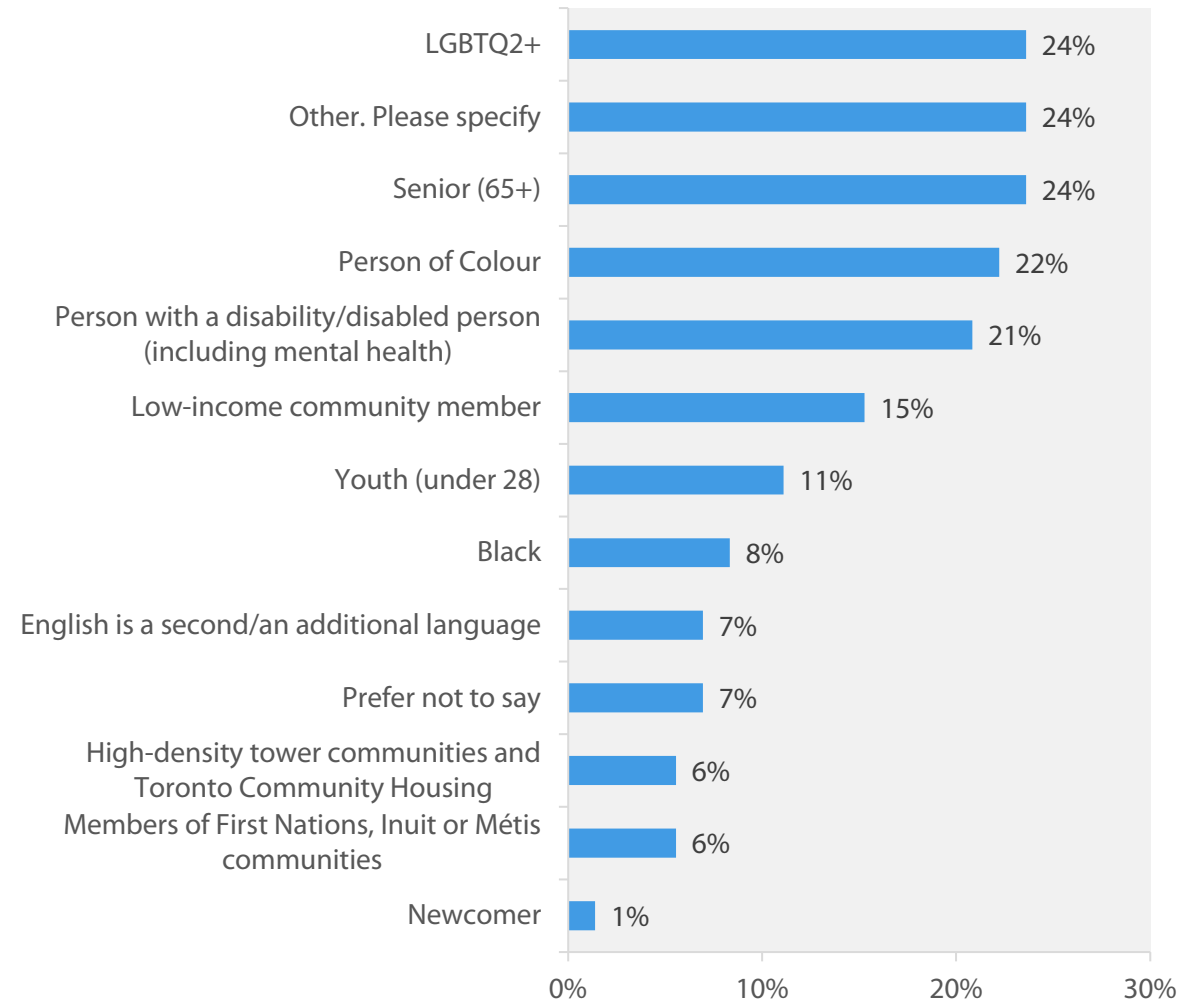Chart 1: Survey respondents by age (n=72)
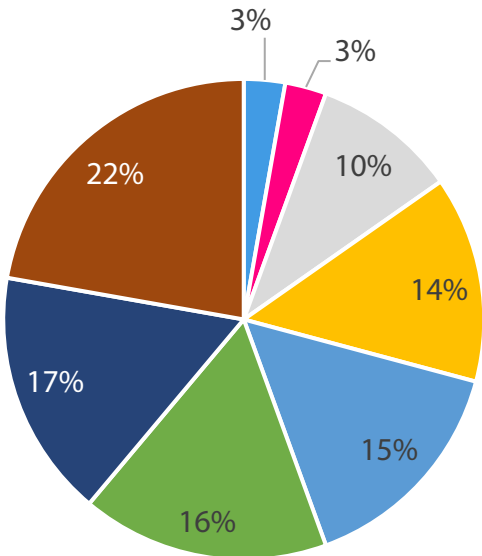
Legend: Prefer not to say | 75+ | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74

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Respondent profile | Priority Groups

- When asked about which priority groups that they identify with, 24% of the respondents identified themselves as LGBTQ2+

- 24% of them said seniors aged 65+

- 22% of the respondents identified as a person of colour

- 21% of the respondents identified as a person with a disability/disabled person.

- 15% of the respondents identified as a low-income community member.

- Responses in the *other* option varied from art workers to people who lived in remote areas.

- Respondents could select all options that apply; as such, results indicated that many respondents represented intersecting identities.

Chart 2: Survey respondents by priority groups (n=72)*

Priority Group	Percentage
LGBTQ2+	24%
Other. Please specify	24%
Senior (65+)	24%
Person of Colour	22%
Person with a disability/disabled person (including mental health)	21%
Low-income community member	15%
Youth (under 28)	11%
Black	8%
English is a second/an additional language	7%
Prefer not to say	7%
High-density tower communities and Toronto Community Housing	6%
Members of First Nations, Inuit or Métis communities	6%
Newcomer	1%

note: respondents could select more than one option.

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Digital Engagement Analysis | Participation

- When asked about the participation in virtual community arts programming, almost 1/3 of the respondents said the virtual format stopped them from participating in community arts programming completely.

- Half of the respondents indicated that they still participated in some programming, but fewer events than pre-COVID.

- About 1 in 5 respondents did not think the virtual format stopped them from participating in community arts programming at all.

- Among the respondents who participated in virtual community arts programming, 55% participated in virtual programming delivered by an organization that they **would not** normally engage with in-person.

Chart 3: Since COVID, has the virtual format stopped you from participating in community arts programming (e.g., virtual art workshop, virtual exhibition)? (n=72)
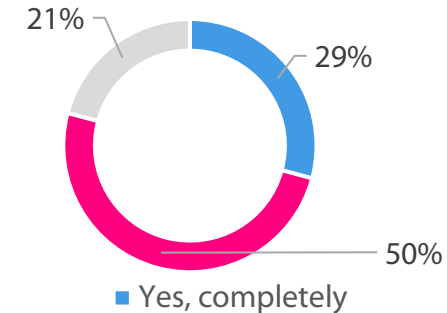
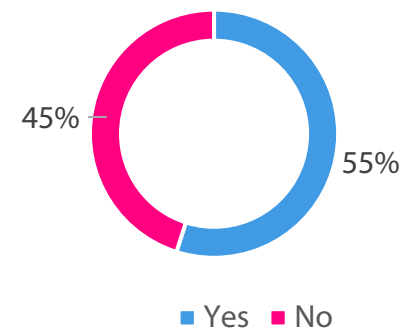21%   29%

50%

■ Yes, completely

Chart 4: Was any of the virtual community arts programming that you participated in virtually delivered by an organization that you would not normally engage with in person? (n=51)

45%   55%

■ Yes ■ No

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Digital Engagement Analysis | Value of Participation

- As shown in chart 5, when asked if the digital format altered the value that the respondents take from the experience, almost half (49%) of the respondents said that the digital format changed the experience completely. 42% of the respondents reported the digital format altered some of the value.

- Chart 6 illustrates that a vast majority (85%) of the respondents enjoyed the virtual programming at least somewhat. Only 13% of the respondents said they did not like the digital experience at all.

Chart 5: Does the digital format alter the value you take from the experience? (n=72)
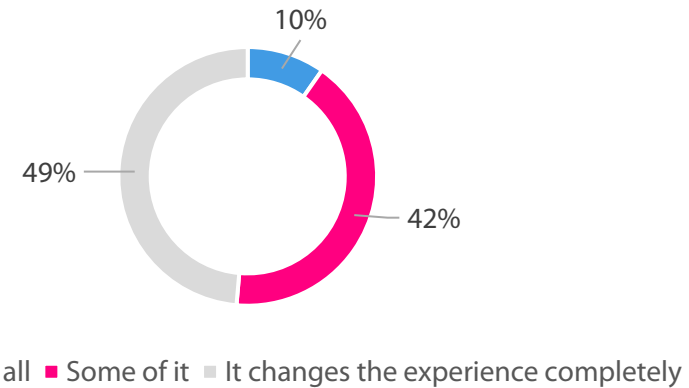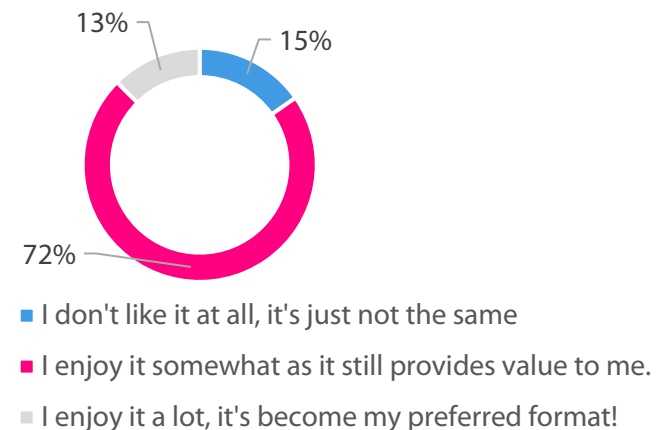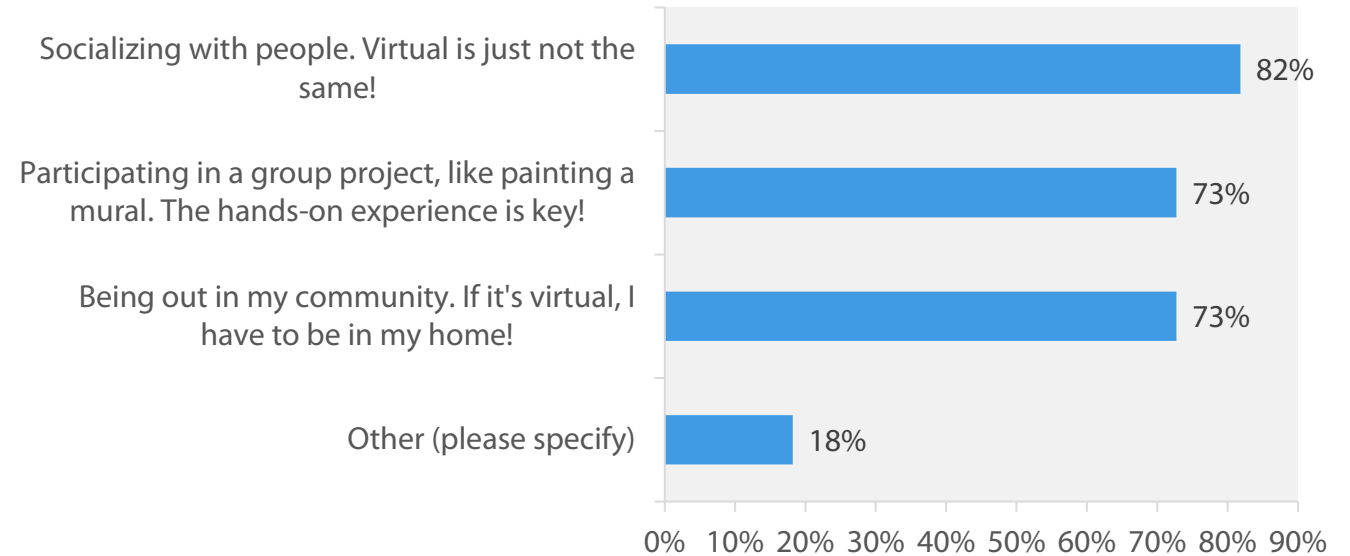
10%

49%

42%

■ Not at all ■ Some of it ■ It changes the experience completely

Chart 6: How would you rate the overall experience of participating in community arts digitally or virtually? (n=72)

13%   15%

72%

■ I don't like it at all, it's just not the same

■ I enjoy it somewhat as it still provides value to me.

■ I enjoy it a lot, it's become my preferred format!

Digital Engagement Analysis | Participation Experience (1)

- Among the respondents who did not like the digital experience, 82% of them said that the social aspect was missing from the digital experience and 72% of them said they missed participating in a group project and being out in the community, which was not possible in the digital experience.

- Other open-ended answers included the format lacking engagement, and having difficulties enjoying the experience due to home/familial obligations.

Chart 7: what's missing from the experience for you? Please select all that apply. (n=11)*

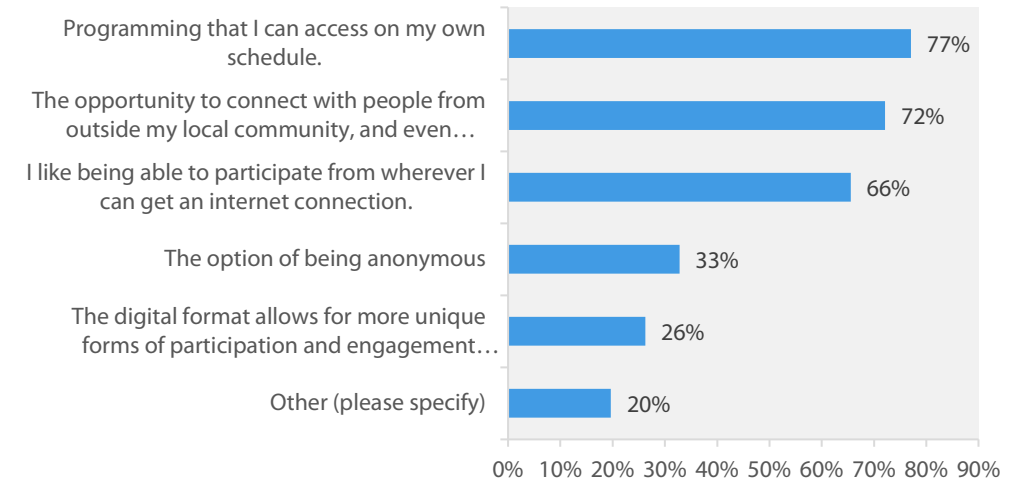|	
Socializing with people. Virtual is just not the same!	82%
Participating in a group project, like painting a mural. The hands-on experience is key!	73%
Being out in my community. If it's virtual, I have to be in my home!	73%
Other (please specify)	18%

*note: respondents could select all that apply.

Digital Engagement Analysis | Participation Experience (2)

- When asked about what aspects they found enjoyable in the digital experience, 77% of the respondents who enjoyed the digital experience selected "programming that I can access on my own schedule".

- 72% selected the option of "the opportunity to connect with people from outside my community and even possibly outside Toronto."

- And 66% of them selected "I like being able to participate from wherever I can get an internet connection".

Chart 8: Please tell us what aspects you find enjoyable? (n=61)*

Aspect	Percentage
Programming that I can access on my own schedule.	77%
The opportunity to connect with people from outside my local community, and even…	72%
I like being able to participate from wherever I can get an internet connection.	66%
The option of being anonymous	33%
The digital format allows for more unique forms of participation and engagement…	26%
Other (please specify)	20%

note: respondents could select all that apply.

"
For many periods of quarantine, it was the only way to be social.

Survey respondent A
Digital Experience • Benefits

"
More likely to be able to attend because I don't have to figure out how to travel there and account for travel time.

Survey respondent B
Digital Experience • Benefits

"
I am neurodivergent so sometimes in person group settings can be really difficult for me. The online format helps me so much - it is more accessible sometimes.

Survey respondent C
Digital Experience • Benefits

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Digital Engagement Analysis | Digital Fatigue

- Most survey respondents (65%) reported that in-person sessions and virtual sessions offer different value, but neither is better than the other.

- About 1/3 of the respondents said the virtual sessions provide less value when compared to the in-person events at the local organization.

- In addition, 78% of the survey respondents reported that they had experienced "digital fatigue" at the time of the survey.

Chart 9: How do you compare the value that you take from these (digital) sessions to those that you usually access in-person at your local organization? (n=72)

7%

28%

65%

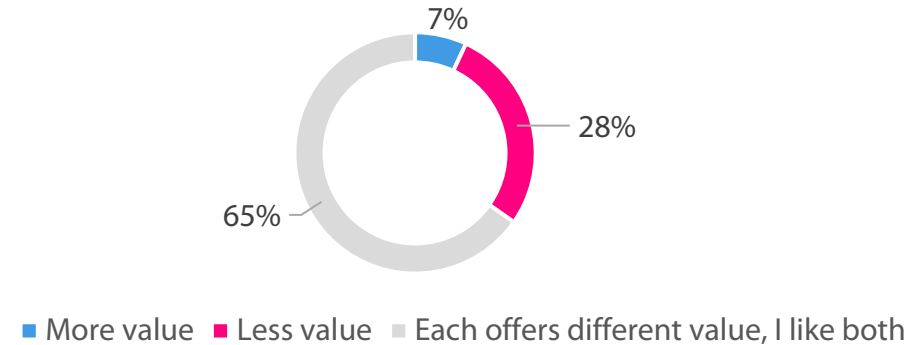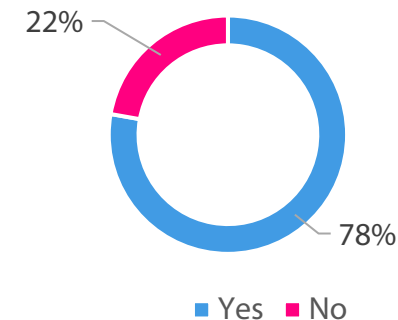■ More value ■ Less value ■ Each offers different value, I like both

Chart 10: Many people have been forced to spend more time in virtual spaces, be it for work, school, socializing or for accessing the arts. Have you experienced "digital fatigue?" (n=72)
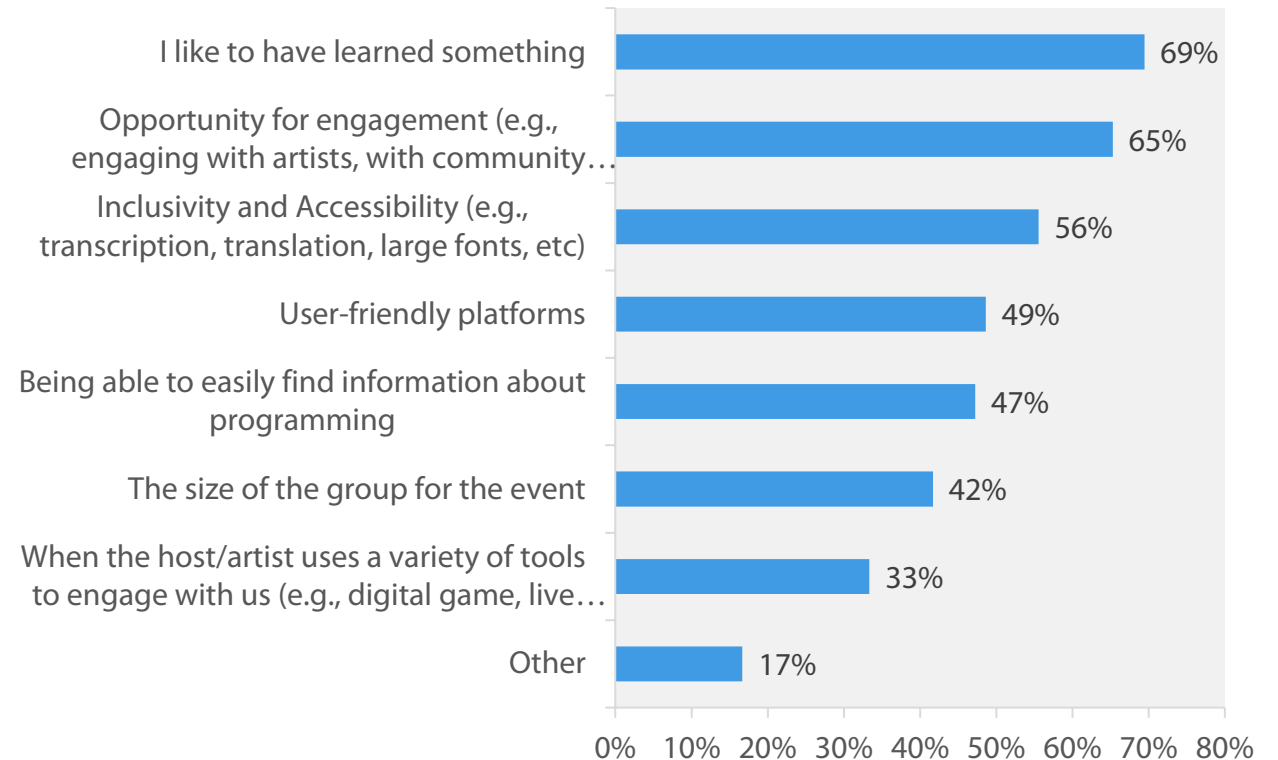
22%

78%

■ Yes ■ No

Nordicity

Digital Engagement Analysis | Successful Elements

The most frequently selected options that made virtual programming successful were:

- I like to have learned something
- opportunity for engagement(e.g., engaging with artists, with community members, etc.)
- inclusivity and accessibility (e.g., transcription, translation, large fonts, etc.).

Chart 11: What makes virtual programming successful for you? (n=72)*

I like to have learned something	69%
Opportunity for engagement (e.g., engaging with artists, with community…	65%
Inclusivity and Accessibility (e.g., transcription, translation, large fonts, etc)	56%
User-friendly platforms	49%
Being able to easily find information about programming	47%
The size of the group for the event	42%
When the host/artist uses a variety of tools to engage with us (e.g., digital game, live…	33%
Other	17%

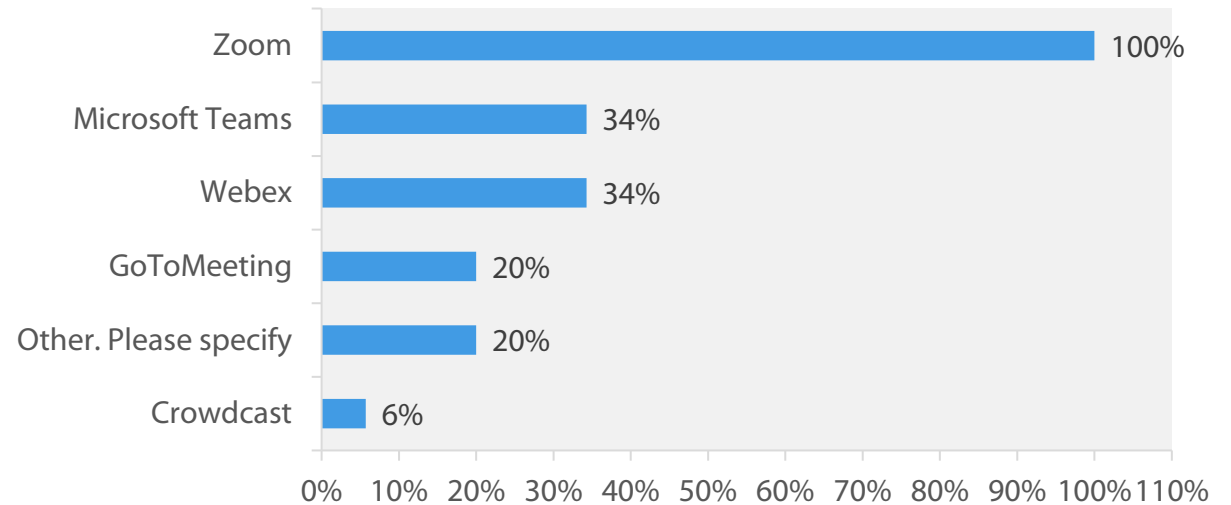0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

*note: respondents could select all that apply.

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Digital Platform (1)

- All survey respondents indicated that they had used Zoom when participating in virtual community arts programming. Microsoft Teams and Webex were the second most frequently used platforms (34%).

- Other platforms indicated included Google Meets, Gather, Bramble, FB Live, IG Live, Vimeo, and Discord.

Chart 12: Which of the following platforms did you use when participating in virtual community arts?. (n=72)*
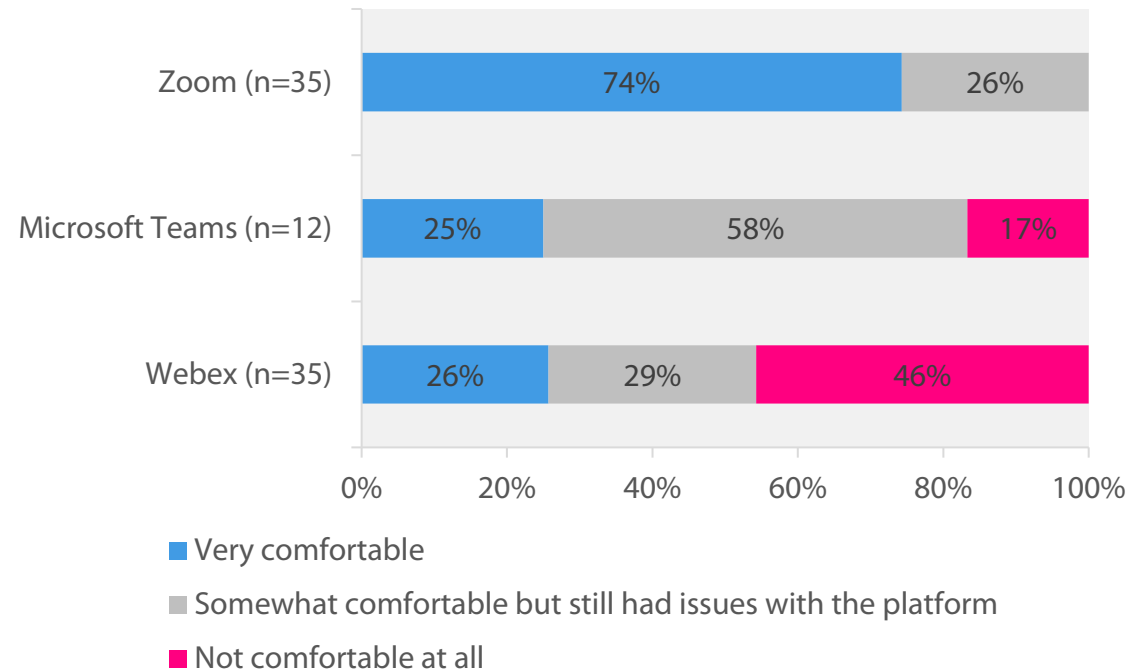
Platform	Percentage
Zoom	100%
Microsoft Teams	34%
Webex	34%
GoToMeeting	20%
Other. Please specify	20%
Crowdcast	6%

note: respondents could select all that apply.

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Digital Platform (2)

- Most participants noted that they found Zoom to be accessible and easy to use with 74% indicating they were very comfortable using that platform. One respondent noted that "Zoom was the best option for the community of seniors & immigrant families to use as it did not require any downloading and registration prior."

- Respondents who used Microsoft Teams indicated a lower comfort level than Zoom, with most respondents who used it indicating they were either only somewhat comfortable (58%) or not at all comfortable (17%).

- Webex seemed to be the platform with which respondents were the least comfortable. Of those who indicated they had participated in CA programming on Webex, 46% indicated not being comfortable at all with the platform.

Chart 13: Please rank the comfort level you had with the platforms you used for participating in community arts programming. (n=72)*

Platform	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable but still had issues with the platform	Not comfortable at all
Zoom (n=35)	74%	26%	
Microsoft Teams (n=12)	25%	58%	17%
Webex (n=35)	26%	29%	46%

- Very comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable but still had issues with the platform
- Not comfortable at all

note: this chart excluded some options that had low responses. In addition, please note that the comfort level may be influenced by the fact that many participants may have already used Zoom previously due to its ubiquity during the pandemic

Nordicity

Accessibility and Digital Support | Challenges (1)

- 32% of the survey respondents reported experiencing challenges/barriers accessing virtual community arts programming that were **outside** the scope of the program itself.
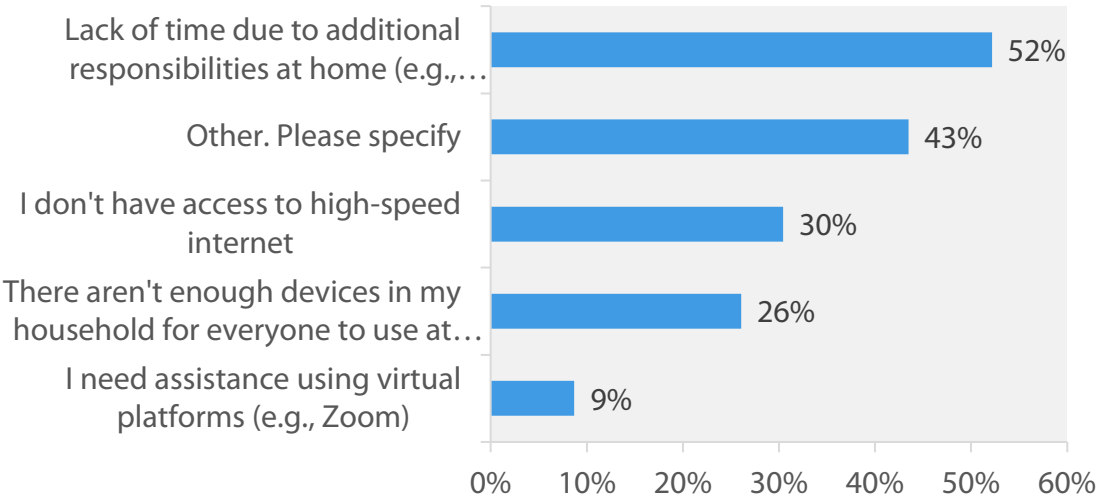
Chart 14: Have you experienced challenges or barriers accessing virtual community arts programming that are outside the scope of the programming itself (e.g., lack of internet access, too few devices for everyone in my household, etc.)? (n=72)

32%

68%

■ Yes ■ No
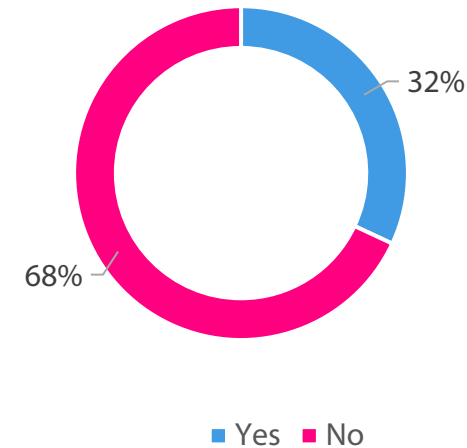
Accessibility and Digital Support | Challenges (2)

- Among the respondents who experienced challenges/barriers, 52% of them reported lack of time due to additional responsibilities at home, while 30% of them reported they did not have access to high-speed internet.

- Responses to the "other" option included camera and mic malfunctions, lack of interests, and unstable internet.

Chart 15: (If yes in chart 14) What are those challenges or barriers? Please select all that apply. (n=23)

Challenge	Percentage
Lack of time due to additional responsibilities at home (e.g.,…	52%
Other. Please specify	43%
I don't have access to high-speed internet	30%
There aren't enough devices in my household for everyone to use at…	26%
I need assistance using virtual platforms (e.g., Zoom)	9%

"
I'm in my seventies extremely interested in the Arts my whole life! My tech skills are low.

Survey respondent D
Digital Experience • Barriers

"
When the Rogers internet goes down as always.

Survey respondent E
Digital Experience • Barriers

"
Computer and internet issues

Survey respondent F
Digital Experience • Barriers

Nordicity

Accessibility and Digital Support | Challenges (3)

- 53% of the survey respondents reported that they were experiencing challenges/barriers accessing virtual community arts programming that were **within** the scope of the program itself.
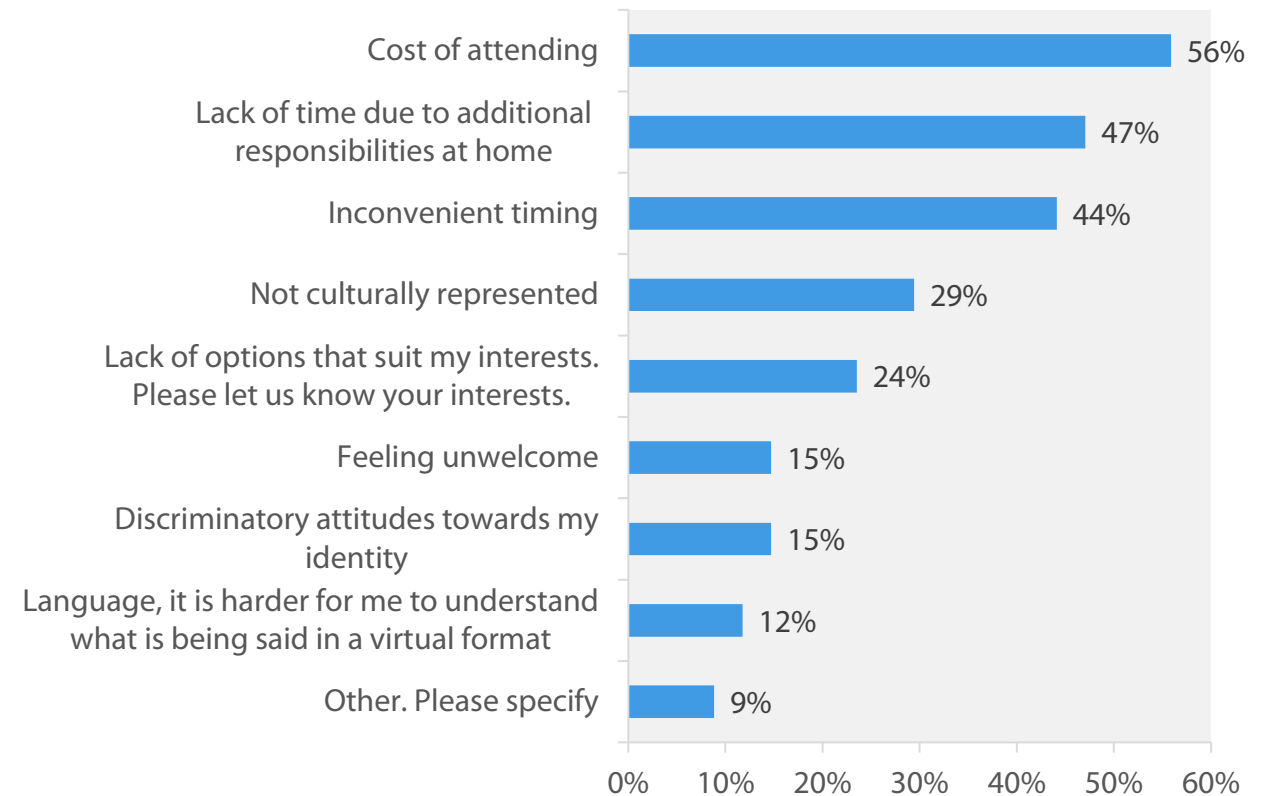
Chart 17: Have you experienced challenges or barriers accessing virtual community arts programming that are within the scope of the programming itself? (n=72)

53%   47%

■ Yes ■ No
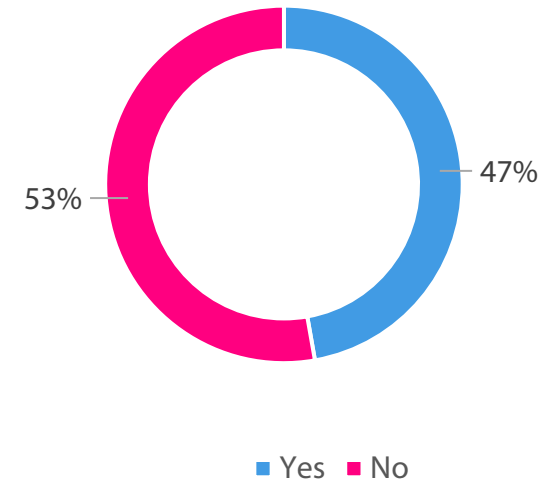
Accessibility and Digital Support | Challenges (4)

- Among the respondents who experienced challenges/barriers, "cost of attending" was the top selected option (56%), followed by "lack of time due to additional responsibilities at home" (47%).[5]

- "Inconvenient timing" was reported by 44% of the respondents.

- And about 1/3 of the respondents found they were not culturally represented in the programming.

- Other barriers mentioned in open text responses included senior people indicating having low technology skills and certain art formats that were hard to present via virtual format such as outdoors theater, ceramics, and crafts.

Chart 18: (If yes in chart 17) What are those challenges or barriers? Please select all that apply. (n=34)

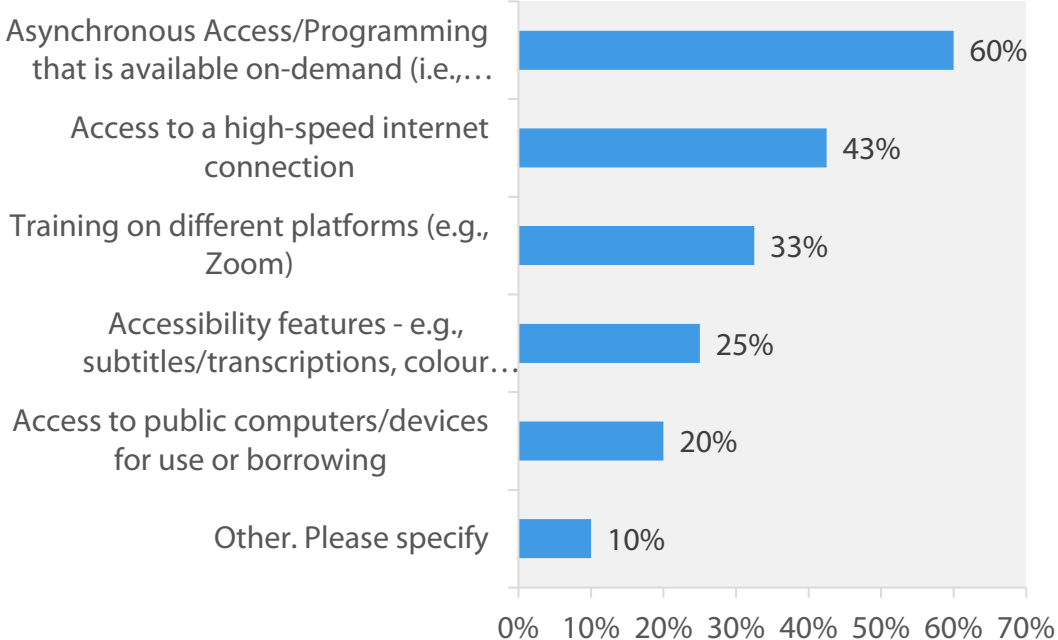|	
Cost of attending	56%
Lack of time due to additional responsibilities at home	47%
Inconvenient timing	44%
Not culturally represented	29%
Lack of options that suit my interests. Please let us know your interests.	24%
Feeling unwelcome	15%
Discriminatory attitudes towards my identity	15%
Language, it is harder for me to understand what is being said in a virtual format	12%
Other. Please specify	9%

5. It should be noted that most CA programs are free, although some require registration. These results could indicate that other costs such as equipment, internet connection, and/or materials posed a barrier to participation. It is also possible that respondents interpreted the question more broadly for all types of arts participation and not strictly for CA, although the question did specifically refer to CA. However, the survey did not provide further detail to help understand why cost was identified as a significant barrier or challenge.

Key Success Factors for Digital Programming | Technological Supports

- Among the respondents who experienced challenges and barriers, more than half indicated that they would like to have asynchronous access/programming that was available on-demand to help improve access to virtual community arts programming.

- 43% of the respondents needed access to a high-speed internet connection, followed by 33% of the respondents who indicated they needed training on different platforms.
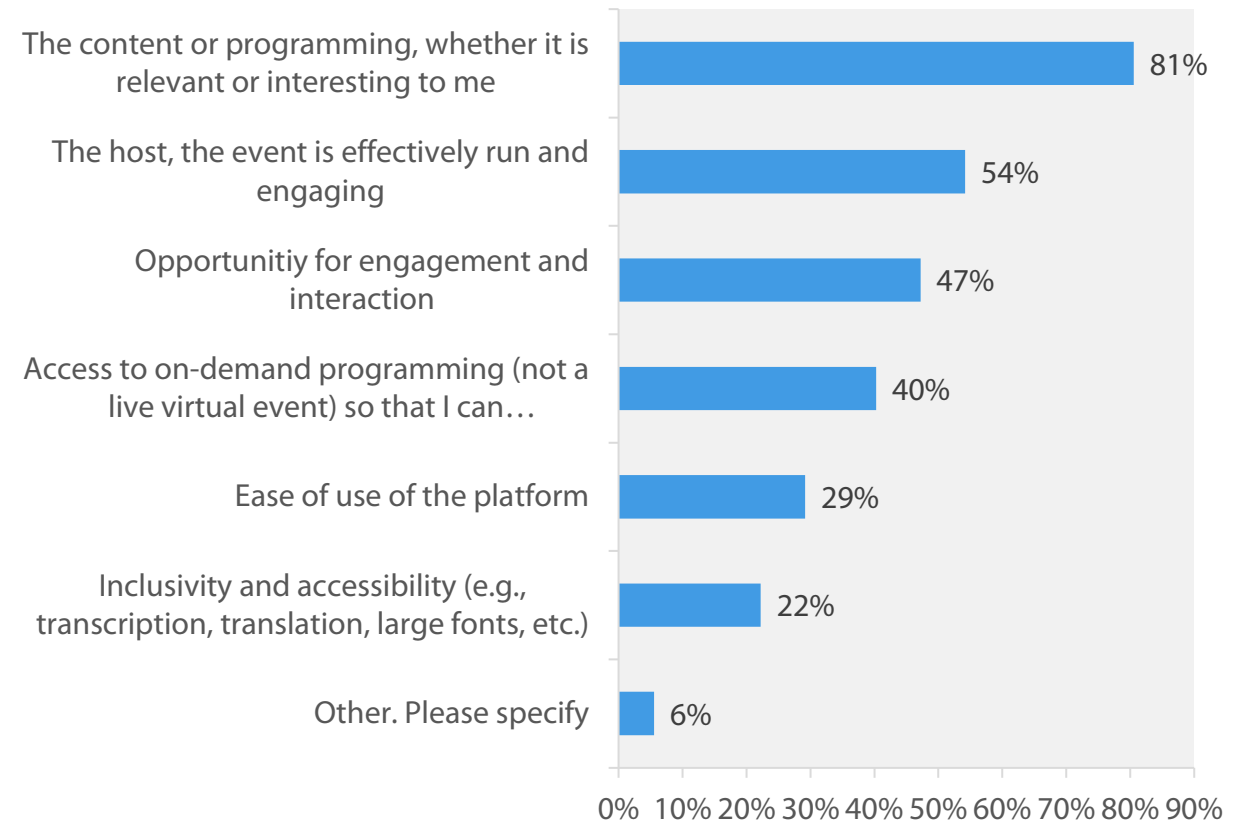
Chart 19: What are some technological supports that might help improve access to virtual community arts for you? Please select all that apply. (n=34)

Category	Percentage
Asynchronous Access/Programming that is available on-demand (i.e.,…	60%
Access to a high-speed internet connection	43%
Training on different platforms (e.g., Zoom)	33%
Accessibility features - e.g., subtitles/transcriptions, colour…	25%
Access to public computers/devices for use or borrowing	20%
Other. Please specify	10%

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Key Success Factors for Digital Programming | User Experience

- The most frequently selected aspects that make a digital program successful included:
  - Opportunity for engagement and interaction
  - The host, the event is effectively run and engaging, and
  - The content or programming, whether it is relevant or interesting to me.

Chart 19: What are the top three aspects you look at when thinking about whether a digital session/program is successful or not? Please select all that apply. (n=72)

The content or programming, whether it is relevant or interesting to me — 81%

The host, the event is effectively run and engaging — 54%

Opportunitiy for engagement and interaction — 47%

Access to on-demand programming (not a live virtual event) so that I can… — 40%

Ease of use of the platform — 29%

Inclusivity and accessibility (e.g., transcription, translation, large fonts, etc.) — 22%

Other. Please specify — 6%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

Final thoughts

"

My experience with community arts programming has impressed me. The quality of instructors and the format has made it easy for me to continue doing art. I do prefer to meet in person and have that contact but the art instructors have really made a great effort bringing the virtual art to members.

Survey respondent G

"

Yes, I really enjoyed the virtual programs of all kinds during the pandemic and I am worried later there won't be any virtual opportunities, and I definitely won't be able to participate. I hope in future the successful virtual programming continues. Thank you for this survey.

Survey respondent H

"

While online fatigue has been real, I'm grateful for it as an option, and I hope we don't lose this kind of access when COVID is "over". The increase of accessibility to events has been exponential, and while not perfect, I think more people have been able to attend events that had barriers as a result.

Survey respondent I

"

I enjoyed the community arts I participated in digitally though it would have been fun to do in person so I didn't have to stare at a screen all the time.

Survey respondent J

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Summary of survey findings

- The survey indicated that **digital programming provided access to more program options to participants, which provided value and enjoyable experiences to the majority of them**.

- In terms accessibility and support, **CA organizations will need to focus on barriers and challenges that might occur internally as well as externally**.

  - For example, "cost of attending", "inconvenient timing", and "not being culturally represented" were some of the barriers within the scope of the program itself that were most frequently selected.

  - In addition, respondents encountered other challenges (outside the scope of the program itself) such as technical issues, lack of reliable internet connect, and a lack of time or inability to join at scheduled times due to familial and other obligations.

  - The survey further revealed that flexibility in terms of schedule is key to the audience accessibility and that providing additional technical support might also help alleviate some of challenges to access and participation. The top selected aspect that survey respondents found enjoyable in the digital experience, is "**programming that I can access on my own schedule**". In addition, the most frequently selected forms of support to enable greater participation included **"asynchronous access/programming that is available on-demand",** "access to a high-speed internet connection", and "training on different platforms".

Summary of survey findings

- The survey also revealed that **CA organizations need to find ways to increase participants' interaction and engagement during a digital program.**
  - The survey revealed that "Learning new things", "engaging with people" and "inclusivity and accessibility" were the most important aspects of making virtual programming successful for participants. Indeed, "opportunity for engagement and interaction" was also one of the top selected success factors for virtual programming overall.
  - Furthermore, socializing and engagement were the top aspects that respondents found missing from digital experiences.
- A large portion of survey respondents were retirement-aged with people aged 55+ representing 42% of survey respondents, whereas only 10% of survey respondents were aged 18 to 24. These results appear to be different from the distribution of CA participants overall, which tend to have a higher representation of youth. This discrepancy could indicate a need to find better ways to engage younger participants in feedback and evaluation activities, particularly in a digital context where gathering feedback and data is generally more challenging.

![Nordicity]

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendations

The past 24 months invited the world to rethink work models: forced remote (or hybrid) work, more flexible hours to accommodate children's care or personal realignment, etc. By necessity, the world has become more digital, structured around messaging and video call apps. Some of these changes will likely persist in the near term and even into a post-pandemic world. Community arts is not exception to these broad, sweeping social changes.

Recommendation #1: Adopt effective hybrid programming models

Overall, the long-term success for community arts needs to be reinforced with the transition to a long-term hybrid working model. For community arts organizations, proactive implementation of a hybrid programming model may require **updating organization and program policies and protocols** to fit the needs of a more dispersed audience as well as help ensuring an equal and safe virtual environment. In addition, a long-term hybrid model also requires **training and guidelines on virtual programming delivery as well as investment in digital hardware and software infrastructure.**

Recommendation #2: Adapt the digital working environment

Continuous digital knowledge upskilling is needed for both practitioners and CA organization staff to design, develop and deliver CA programming effectively. CA organizations can provide training and guidelines to support practitioners' facilitation/delivery of virtual programming. Trainings and guidelines may include rules for digital engagement in different programs (e.g., active participation program or passive program), a check list of accessibility needs in a virtual environment, or a brochure for technology setting up for different types of art. In addition, staff may need additional training and upskilling to be able to support practitioners in producing virtual program content and provide technical support to CA practitioners as well as participants.

![Nordicity]

Recommendations

Recommendation #3: Identify the additional work required for digital programming

Based on our consultations, both CA organizations and artists/practitioners felt that extra work and efforts were required for delivery digital programming. Identifying the detailed steps that are required for CA organizations and practitioners will not only help form a more efficient workflow, but will also help clarify the areas that may need additional funding support (e.g., extra expenses for equipment for both practitioners and participants).

Recommendation #4: Advocate for additional funding support

Given the long-term transition that CA organizations have to prepare for the hybrid model of programming, CA organizations need more human resources, technology support and funding support to plan, adapt and execute. Since many artists/practitioners adopted new programming formats and practices to adapt to virtual program delivery, **grants that support the transition and transformation of hybrid programming** is needed for CA organizations and artists/practitioners to cover the additional costs incurred in preparing and delivering digital programing.

Recommendation #5: Develop effective evaluation and impact measurement for virtual programming

Research revealed that **assessing engagement and impact in CA is particularly challenging in a digital delivery setting**. In addition, the CA sector needs to build a better understanding of the costs and benefits of increased reach afforded by virtual programming. As such, there is a need to develop effective means of measuring engagement and impact in a virtual setting.

![Nordicity]

End of Report

Appendix

Appendix A: Project Team

The project team is outlined below:

Community Arts Canopy	Steering Committee Members	Consulting Team
East End Arts (Project lead)	Shana Hillman, Executive Director (East End Arts)	Nordicity (Mila Dechef-Tweddle, Associate Director, and Lola Zhang, Consultant)
Arts Etobicoke	Wendy Rading, Executive Director (Arts Etobicoke)	Toronto Arts Foundation (Dr. Shawn Newman, Research & Impact Manager, Erika Hennebury, Focus Group Facilitator and Matthew Gartner, Project coordinator)
Scarborough Arts	Derek Spooner, Executive Director (Scarborough Arts)	
Lakeshore Arts	Ashley Watson, Executive Director (Lakeshore Arts)	
North York Arts	Melissa Foster, Interim Executive Director (North York Arts)	
Arts Starts	Bruce Pitkin, Executive Director (ArtsArt Starts)	
Jumblies Theatre	Ruth Howard, Artistic Director (Jumblies Theatre)	
Sketch	Phyllis Novak, Executive Director (Sketch)	
UrbanArts	Marlene McKintosh, Executive Director (Urban Arts)	
Vibe Art	Katie Hutchinson, Executive Director (Vibe Art)	
Neighbourhood Arts Network		

Appendix B: Sources

- Toronto Arts Council, Impact of COVID-19 on Toronto's Non-Profit Arts Sector https://torontoartscouncil.org/covid-19

- WolfBrown, Audience Outlook Monitor Ontario Phase 1, https://dashboard.intrinsicimpact.org/groupings/647/reports/3249 (participating organizations did not include Community Arts organizations)

- WolfBrown, Ontario Arts Engagement Study (2011), https://www.arts.on.ca/oac/media/oac/Publications/Research%20Reports%20EN-FR/Arts%20Engagement%20Study/Arts-Engagement-Study-REPORT-ENGL.pdf