

### Stone – Olafson

# Thank you to our generous partners

This initiative is being funded by arts funders who are keen to use data to drive engagement and growth strategies across Alberta.

We thank them for their generous support.















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### A collaborative and evolving resource

#### **Purpose and Objectives:**

As Alberta continues to recover from a pandemic five years ago that changed public life and reshaped the economy, market conditions continue to be volatile and unpredictable. This work was developed exclusively for the arts sector to help arts organizations understand the market and their audiences. It builds upon research that began in 2020 but is designed to provide specific, relevant, and reliable facts to support the leaders in the arts sector as they **build relevance and grow attendance.** 

#### **Key topic areas for Wave 6:**

- Capture an updated understanding of consumer mindset.
- Explore views of how the arts benefits the community.
- Assess how the surrounding experiences to the arts can be enhanced.
- Explore methods to inspire loyalty and repeat visitation.

### How to use this report:

- This work is designed to be shared and applied. We encourage our partners to distribute and actively apply the insights to their business.
- Incorporate your data to deepen the application of this information for your needs. Adding ticket sales data or audience profiling helps extend and customize the insights for your organization.



### Research Approach

### This report represents the fourth of six (6) waves of work.

The survey was delivered to a representative sample of arts receptive Albertans, ages 18+. In order to qualify for the survey, respondents had to indicate interest in at least one art form.

A total of n=1,160 surveys were collected across the following regions:

- Calgary + area (n=400)
- Edmonton + area (n=400)
- Northern AB (n=120)
- Southern AB (n=120)
- Central AB (n=120)

#### The survey was conducted between October 7 - 20, 2025.

An approximate margin error for a typical sample size of n=1,160 is +/-2.9% (which is not typically applicable for online non-probability samples).

For the purposes of this report, the focus is on the full market. Results are not weighted to population but are instead designed to provide a directional overview of province-wide trends. Breakouts by region are provided where relevant and regional reports for Edmonton, Calgary and other markets will be made available.





Learned So Far



## Arts audiences engage differently and have different requirements from the arts



**IMMERSED:** The **most active**, eager, and supportive.



**ENGAGED:** They are active but not as enthusiastic.



**PASSIVES:** They will need to be inspired to engage more.



**INFREQUENT:** They may be interested but **rarely** engage.

Because the **immersed** and **engaged** audiences are the most connected to the arts, they require the least amount of effort to engage.

**Passive** audiences represent the largest opportunity for new audiences but tend to think and behave differently and need a more practical approach.

Previous waves of research have indicated the passives tend to act as **passengers**, rather than the drivers in decision-making, and need to be invited, encouraged and reassured. They are rarely adventurous enough on their own to try art forms they don't know.



## And what audiences are looking for is different than in the past

Although the events of the pandemic are long past, this world-wide event has reshaped society and how we interact with organizations and experiences. Now several years post-COVID, it has become clearer what the state of world is and what organizations can expect from their audiences - both their trusted audiences and potential new ones.



**Time is money.** It is no longer enough to show value for money, but audiences need to be convinced an event or experience is worth their time (which is in short supply). They are looking for something that resonates emotionally and feels "worth it".



There is more to the arts than the show or event itself. Drawing in new audiences means considering all aspects of the experience, beyond the show or event. Education was explored as a valuable way to introduce more people to the arts, as long as the benefits beyond the learning are clear (enjoyment, social, etc.). For singular events though, this means considering all facets of the experience beyond the art itself.



**Convenience matters more than ever.** Planning behaviours have shifted, the consideration window might be long, but decision are often made last minute. Audiences also expect things to be easy and flexibility, they want to avoid a hassle at all costs.





## What Are We Seeing in Wave 6?



### The arts are impactful



- The mood in the community is still relatively sour: this was last measured in January 2025 (Wave 4) and despite some signs of improving, there are still challenging feelings around personal finances, the local economy, and the general public mood.
- **Despite a bleak public mood**, the arts and the experiences around them are still a source of positivity. In fact, 80% of arts-interested Albertans say the arts has a positive impact on the community within which they live in. This is important for arts organizations to keep in mind, both as you develop ideas to attract new audiences, but also as a reminder of the widespread benefits you provide.
- What are those benefits? Audiences are clear that the arts contributes to a vibrant community, enhances quality of life and creates welcoming spaces. They also believe the arts plays a role in strengthening cultural identities and attracting tourism to a community, although these benefits are slightly softer.
- **Earlier waves of work looked at the personal benefits of the arts** the chance to escape negativity, feel connected and experience joy. Those remain critically important to attracting audiences and combating negative feelings in the community, but it is equally important to recognize the community-level benefits of the arts.
- This is not just a matter of goodwill either: of the arts-interested audience in Alberta, a full 82% are participating in the arts, which means they can speak to the benefits of the arts with confidence because they have experienced these benefits first-hand.



### Practicality is the gateway to remarkable



Previous waves of work explored preferences for arts content but also ways to enhance the experience beyond the artistic offer. It was noted in earlier waves (and explored in more detail in Wave 5) that *passive* audiences may value more "enhancements" or practical tips than loyal audiences, for any given show or event. This wave of work explores more deeply what organizations can consider by breaking up the experience (show, event, or attraction) into specific parts of the journey.

- **Pre-event:** Audiences want you to help them with the lead-up to the event. Provide them with practical planning tools so they can get comfortable with what to expect and offer to help plan activities for before and after the event or show, so they can build out a broader experience. Enhancements about the art form or show will also be helpful but are more appealing to *immersed* audiences.
- **During event:** The needs and wants for this phase of the journey are very practical. Things like clear signage, helpful staff, and music or relaxing spaces to create ambiance are all mentioned. For the less arts-inclined audiences, this really helps them feel more at ease.
- **Post-event:** This is where the opportunity to build a relationship and inspire a return visit begins. All audiences will welcome incentives (such as discounts or recommendations) to return, as well as incentives to invite others. There is also an opportunity for organizations to reach out to guests afterwards and share extended content from the artists or creators. These tactics have especially great appeal to younger audiences, who are looking for a more holistic experience.



### Building retention comes first, followed by loyalty



Much of this work has focused on exploring new audiences and how to attract them. While that is an important part of the equation, equally important is understanding how to keep them (or, in the same vein, how to solidify loyalty further among *immersed* audiences).

The key to building loyalty is to provide tools and incentives to attract guests but also address the barriers that audiences have for attending more.

The things that audiences are looking for to return include emails or communications about upcoming shows or events, a variety of scheduling options for future events, and "rewards or incentives" to return.

The barriers that need to be addressed are primarily related to the overall experience, and not the art form itself. Cost, but also making sure an event is easy to attend (ticketing, transportation, managing lineups, etc.).

### What does this mean for arts organizations?

#### 1) Start thinking about your audiences differently.

While your loyal and most *immersed* audiences will still attend for the art itself, there are many who are in search of more. With the immense availability of leisure options, some audiences require a full experience that surrounds the art itself. As an example, younger audiences would welcome enhancements that older groups don't care as much about. *Passive* audiences will need more direct guidance than other audiences. Depending on who you are looking to attract, there are things you can do to appeal to them directly.

### 2) The art form + peripheral experiences = engagement

While the art itself is of course the focal point, there is more to the story, particularly when trying to reach new audiences and retain existing audiences. Walking through the arts-goer's experience at an event, from beginning to end, to both enhance the experience and to minimize pain points is important. This will have benefits for all types of audiences.

### 3) Easing friction remains key throughout the engagement journey

This research noted the importance of removing the hassle to get audiences to make the final decision to attend an arts event. Audiences also share how important it is to make it easy during the *planning* process. Ultimately, hassle remains one of the biggest hurdles to overall engagement and arts organizations that can capitalize on that and make it easier to immerse themselves in the experience are more likely to drive remarkable experiences.

### 4) Positive community impact is an opportunity to engage There is a persistent dour mood in the community and little

optimism that things will improve. At the same time, there is widespread acceptance of the impact of the arts on the quality of life and vibrancy of the community. Elevating the promise of experiences that can be an escape for audiences offers increased opportunities to engage with new groups.

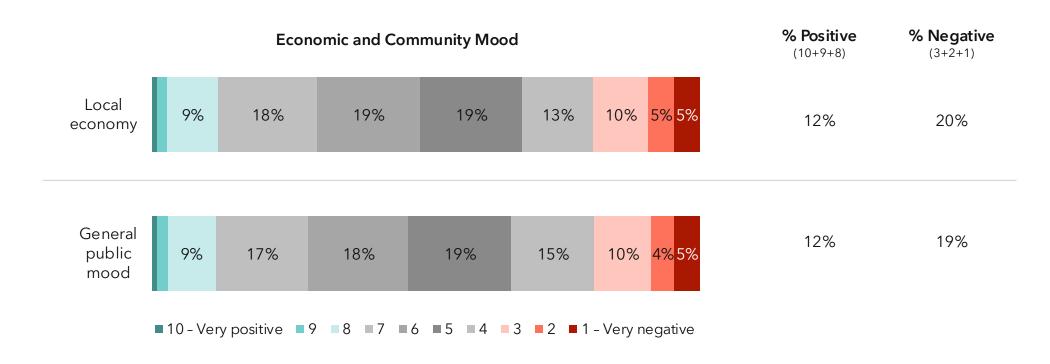


# **Impact**



## Perceptions regarding the local economy and public mood continue to be muted

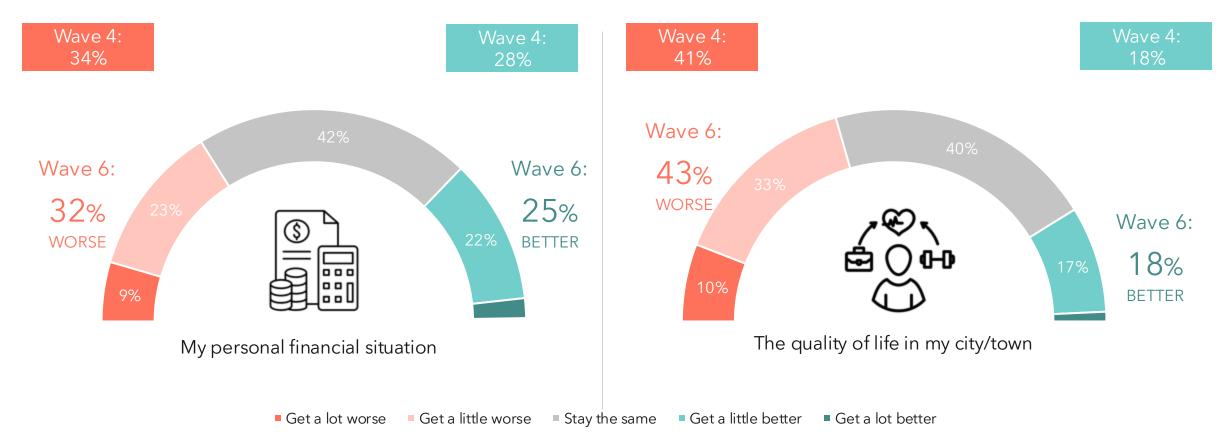
Though there are more negative perceptions overall about the local economy and general public mood than positive, near 70% of Albertans feel neutral about the current environment. Sentiment was last measured in Wave 4 (January 2025) and has edged more negative (+4%).





## Perspectives on personal finances and quality of life also have not changed dramatically since January

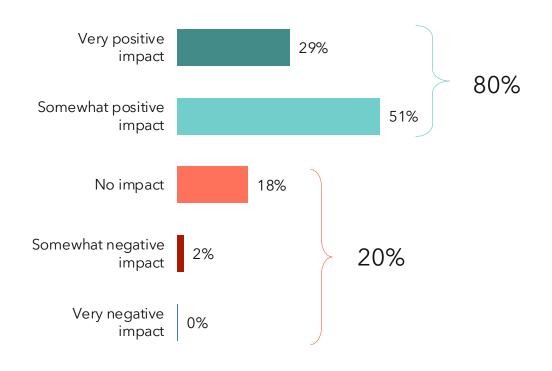
### Personal and Community Outlook





### Despite negative community sentiment, residents believe that arts experiences have a very positive impact on their community

#### Arts and Culture Experiences Impact on City or Community

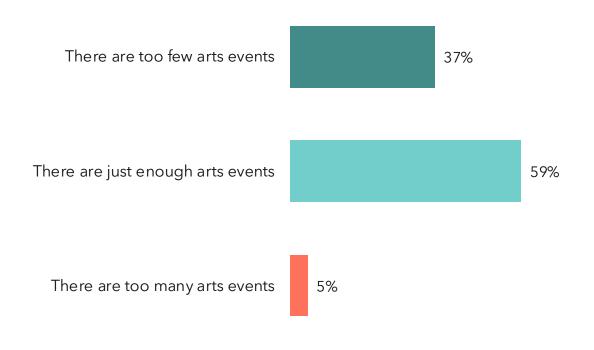




# And there is an appetite for more: more than a third of Albertans believe there are too few arts events in their community

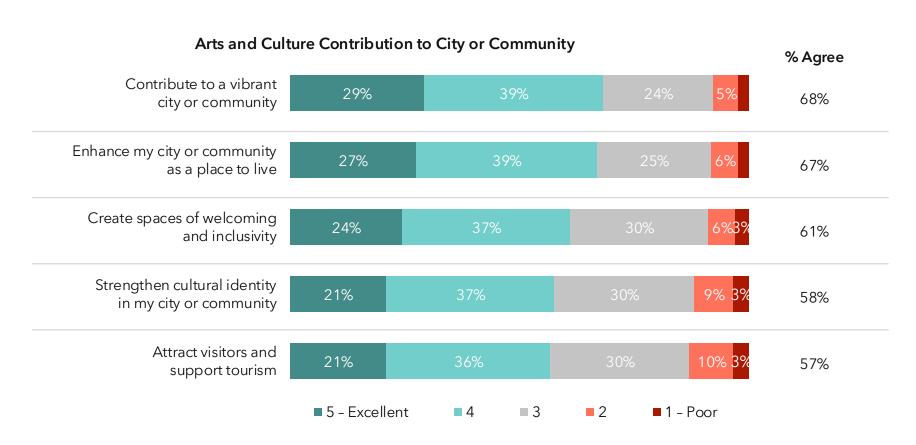
Nearly 60% are happy with the number of arts events within the community, while only 5% think there are too many.

#### **Availability of Arts Experiences in Community**



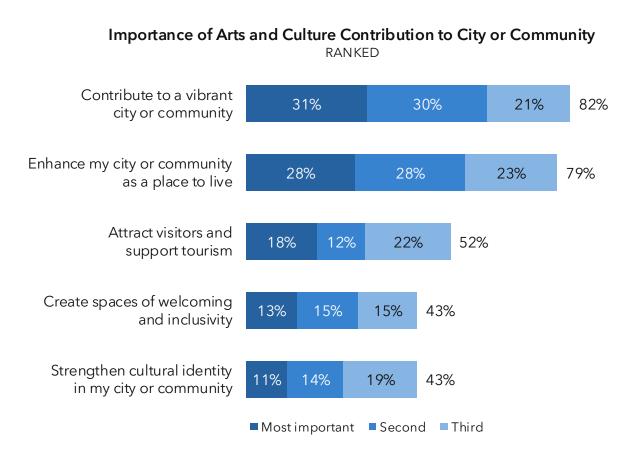


# The contributions of the arts is clear: community vibrancy, creating a better place to live, and welcoming spaces are all important benefits of the arts



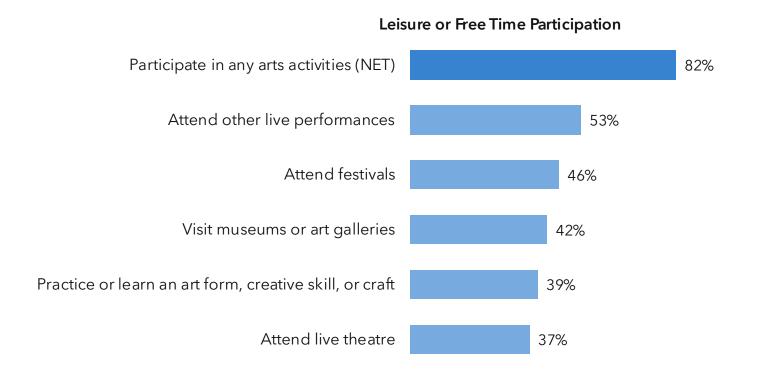


## But the general vibrancy and creating a better place to live are the clearest benefits overall





# Audiences don't just recognize the benefits of the arts from a distance: among arts-interested Albertans, almost all participate in some form



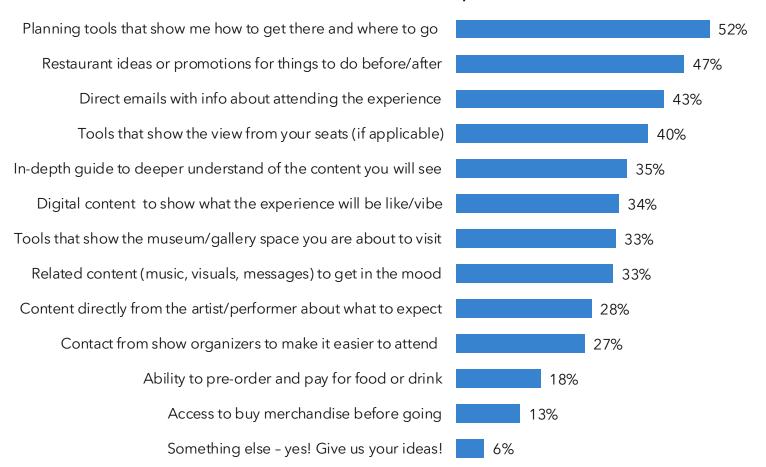


## Unpacking the Arts Experience



# Friction is a factor throughout the engagement - from consideration to planning - and audiences are looking for enhancements that make it easier

#### **Pre-experience Enhancements**



### What does this mean for organizations?

- Help audiences with the lead-up to the activity.
- Provide planning tools for before and after.
- Help with planning for activities for before or after.
- Offer direct and clear information on information about the event.



# Pre-experience enhancements are most important for younger audiences

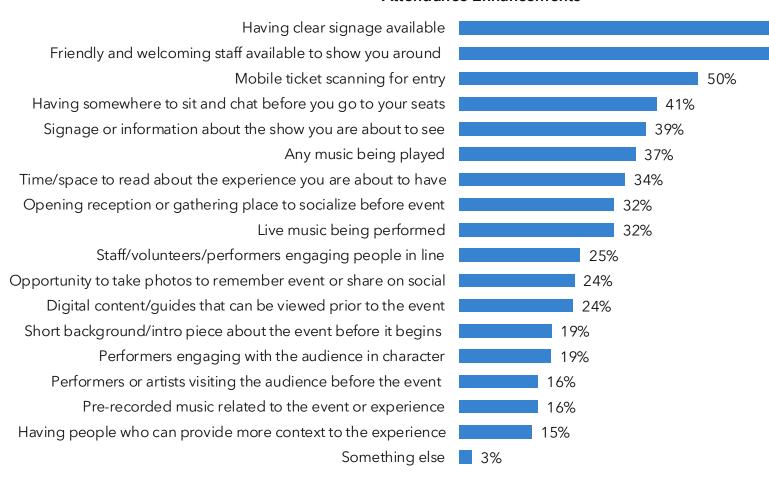
Passive audiences don't seem to require as many of these tools but they are likely still "passengers" in the experience - others will do the planning and "driving" on their behalf. *Immersed* audiences are more likely to prefer tools that are directly related to the arts content itself.

	AGE			ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
Pre-experience Enhancements	<b>18-34</b> (n=298)	<b>35-54</b> (n=432)	<b>55+</b> (n=431)	Immersed (n=113)	Active (n=263)	Passives (n=485)	
Planning tools that show me how to get there and where to go	61%↑	50%	49%	63%	60%	42%↓	
Restaurant ideas or promotions for things to do before/after	58%↑	46%	41%↓	51%	49%	44%	
Direct emails with info about attending the experience	52%↑	42%	38%	51%	54%↑	28%↓	
Tools that show the view from your seats (if applicable)	44%	38%	39%	45%	39%	34%	
In-depth guide to deeper understand of the content you will see	38%	37%	32%	55%↑	39%	28%↓	
Digital content to show what the experience will be like/vibe	47% ↑	29%	29%	55%↑	32%	32%	
Tools that show the museum/gallery space you are about to visit	30%	29%	39%↑	38%	30%	29%	
Related content (music, visuals, messages) to get in the mood	38%	32%	29%	50%↑	36%	25%↓	
Content directly from the artist/performer about what to expect	33%	28%	24%	45% ↑	35%	17%↓	
Contact from show organizers to make it easier to attend	31%	29%	22%↓	40%↑	29%	17%↓	
Ability to pre-order and pay for food or drink	19%	20%	15%	19%	16%	17%	
Access to buy merchandise before going	17%	16%	8%↓	23%↑	16%	10%	



## While guests are attending, clear signs and friendly staff go a long way

#### Attendance Enhancements



These are the **practical elements** that audiences are asking for to make their experience easier and more comfortable overall. For those who are less arts-inclined, these elements really help with a holistic experience by making guests feel more comfortable and at ease.

73%



# This is true for all audiences. However, younger groups are more likely to appreciate these additions during an experience

	AGE			ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS		
Attendance Enhancements	<b>18-34</b> (n=298)	<b>35-54</b> (n=432)	<b>55+</b> (n=431)	Immersed (n=113)	Active (n=263)	Passives (n=485)
Having clear signage available	74%	70%	74%	75%	76%	76%
Friendly and welcoming staff available to show you around	65%	65%	71%	73%	70%	71%
Mobile ticket scanning for entry	52%	50%	48%	58%	52%	49%
Having somewhere to sit and chat before you go to your seats	44%	44%	35%↓	55%↑	48%	40%
Signage or information about the show you are about to see	47% ↑	37%	35%	48%	43%	39%
Any music being played	50%↑	37%	26%↓	56%↑	40%	36%
Time/space to read about the experience you are about to have	38%	32%	34%	46%	43%	34%
Opening reception or gathering place to socialize before event	38%	33%	27%↓	42%	34%	35%
Live music being performed	42% ↑	32%	26%↓	50%↑	33%	31%
Staff/volunteers/performers engaging people in line	24%	22%	29%	35%	27%	24%
Opportunity to take photos to remember event or share on social	31%↑	27%	16%↓	32%	28%	24%
Digital content/guides that can be viewed prior to the event	26%	23%	23%	32%	29%	23%
Short background/intro piece about the event before it begins	20%	17%	20%	27%	19%	20%
Performers engaging with the audience in character	20%	20%	17%	27%	19%	20%
Performers or artists visiting the audience before the event	18%	17%	15%	28%↑	13%	19%
Pre-recorded music related to the event or experience	17%	15%	17%	21%	18%	16%
Having people who can provide more context to the experience	24%↑	15%	9%↓	27% ↑	16%	15%
Something else	1%	3%	4%	4%	4%	1%

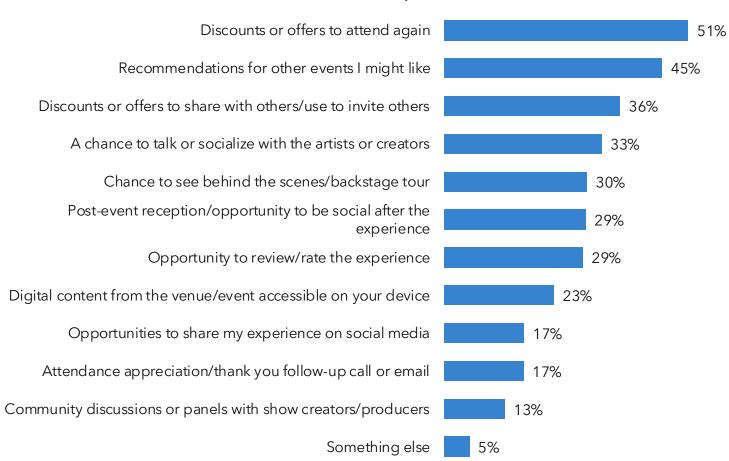
Base: All respondents (n=1,161)

Q14. Shifting to when you arrive and the time before the experience, what would be most important to ensure you have a great sense of arrival and sets up the rest of your experience? Please select all that apply from the following list.



## Post-experience enhancements provide an opportunity to inspire return visits





### This is where the **path to loyalty** and retention begins:

- Offer incentives to return
- Offer incentives to invite others (expanding audiences)
- Offer opportunities for similar events or to engage with content further



# These post experience enhancements are even more impactful for younger audiences, those who have the most opportunity to grow

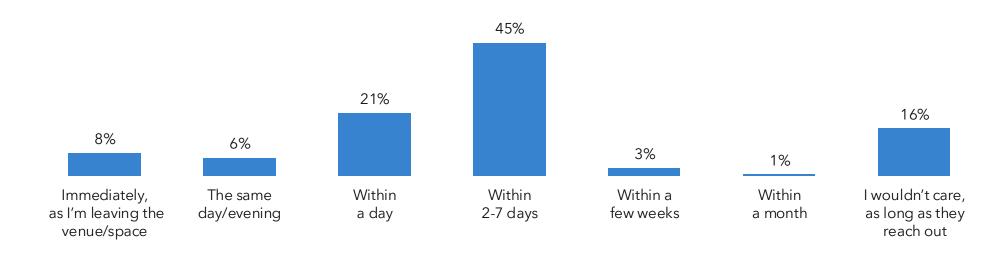
	AGE			ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS		
Post-experience Enhancements	<b>18-34</b> (n=298)	<b>35-54</b> (n=432)	<b>55+</b> (n=431)	Immersed (n=113)	Active (n=263)	Passives (n=485)
Discounts or offers to attend again	64%↑	50%	42%↓	52%	53%	52%
Recommendations for other events I might like	49%	43%	45%	47%	52%	47%
Discounts or offers to share with others/use to invite others	47%↑	36%	30%↓	41%	37%	38%
A chance to talk or socialize with the artists or creators	42%↑	33%	26%↓	57%↑	35%	33%
Chance to see behind the scenes/backstage tour	38%↑	31%	22%↓	54%↑	32%	27%
Post-event reception/opportunity to be social after the experience	36%↑	32%	22%↓	43%↑	32%	31%
Opportunity to review/rate the experience	30%	23%↓	34%↑	32%	27%	28%
Digital content from the venue/event accessible on your device	31%↑	23%	16%↓	30%	24%	25%
Opportunities to share my experience on social media	19%	17%	14%	27%↑	16%	17%
Attendance appreciation/thank you follow-up call or email	23%↑	15%	13%	19%	19%	15%
Community discussions or panels with show creators/producers	21%↑	12%	7%↓	34%↑	16%	10%
Something else	3%	6%	6%	2%	5%	6%



# Reconnecting with audiences: most would prefer to hear from arts organizations within a week after an event

Communication doesn't need to be immediate, but it should be within 7 days as the experience is still fresh. Timing appears to be less important for those with older kids at home.

#### **Attendance Appreciation Timeframe**



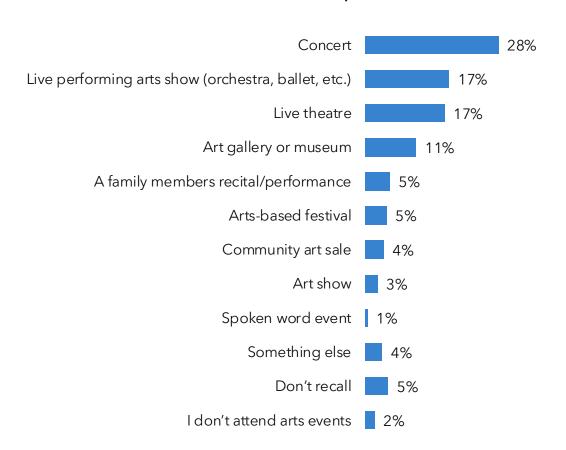




# The most recently attended arts events are concerts, live theatre and other performing arts shows

Given that these are the most commonly attended arts experience (or, most recent), it will likely be easier to inspire a return visit from audiences of these specific art forms.

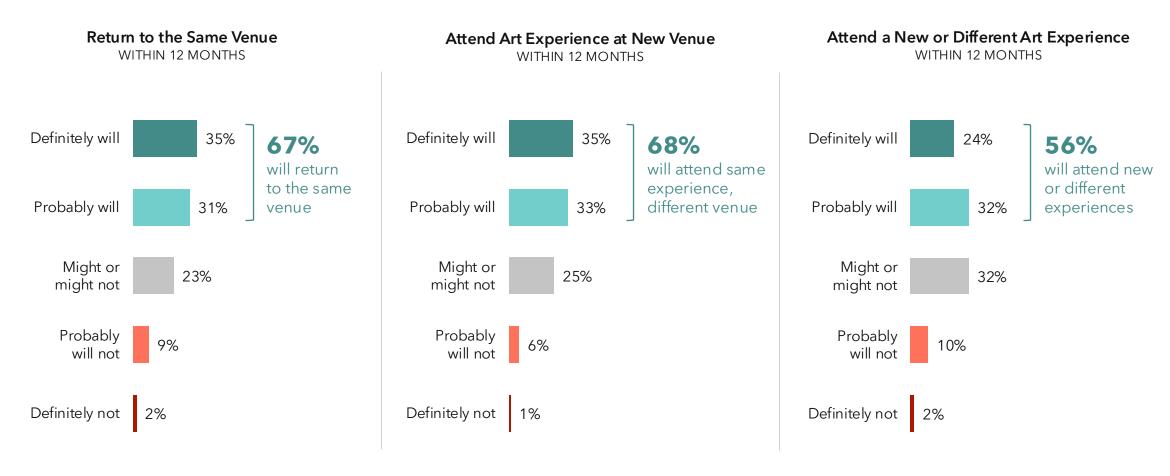
#### Last Experience Attended





## Two-thirds of arts-goers are likely to return to the same venue or experience a similar art form in the next year

There is slightly more apprehension to experience something completely different than what they have done previously. This speaks to the comfort there is within a venue. Encouraging "new" means also addressing comfort and ease, especially since *passives* are less likely to say they will try a new arts experience.

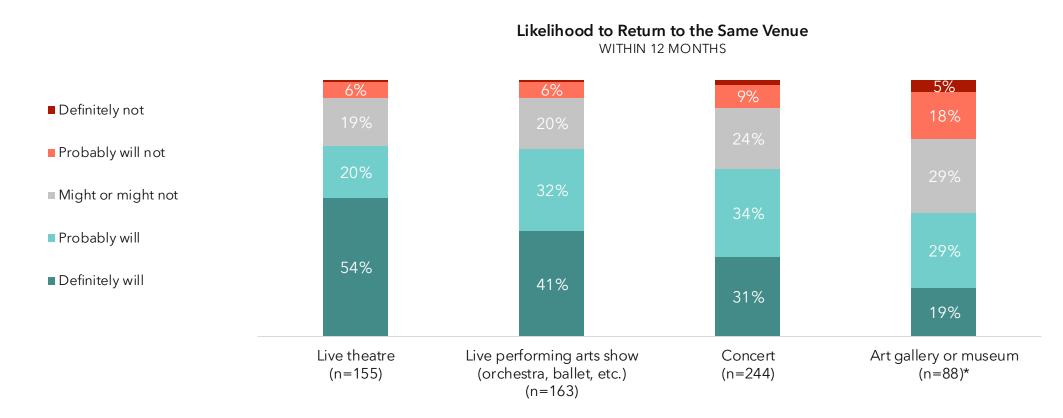


Q19. And, how likely are you to return to that same venue for another arts event in the next 12 months? Base: Attended an arts experience (n=1,080)
Q20. How likely are you to attend a(n) [Q18] experience in the next 12 months, but at a different venue or location if offered? Base: Attended an arts experience (n=1,080)
Q21. Still thinking about the arts, how likely is it that you would attend a new or different type of arts event (any art form) in the next 12 months, other than what you last attended? Base: All respondents (n=1,161)



## Live shows seem to have the highest likelihood of repeat visitation

Among attendees of any art form, those who visited live theatre or another live show, are the most likely to say they would return to the same venue within the year. Part of this is likely due to the changing nature of "live" events - audiences are more likely to expect something "new" than at a gallery or museum. This also hints at the added challenge that galleries, or similar venues, face in attracting repeat visitation at higher frequencies.

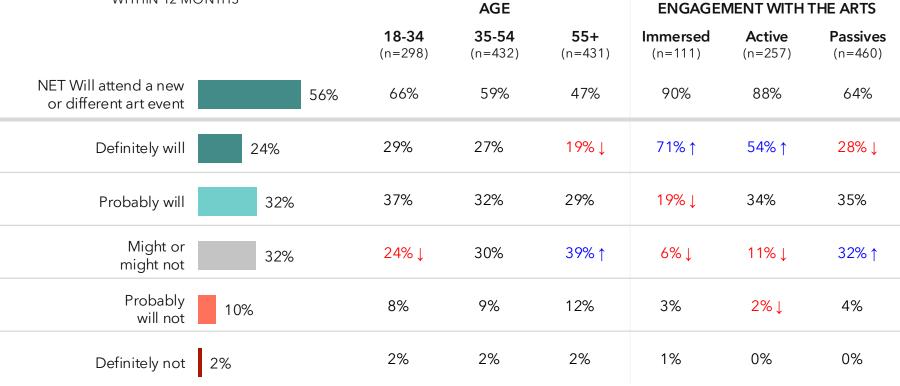




## Likelihood to try a new art form is higher with younger audiences

This speaks to the openness of younger groups to try something new. *Immersed* and *active* audiences are also more open but that would be expected given their affinity for the arts.

## **Likelihood to Attend a New or Different Art Event**WITHIN 12 MONTHS

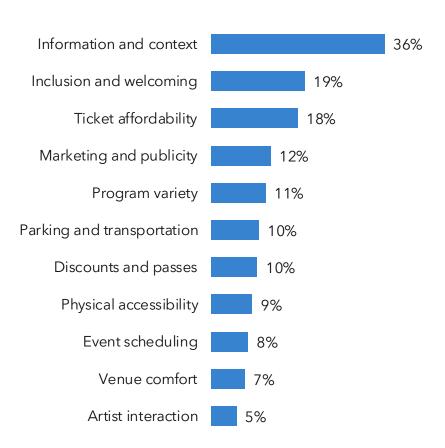




# Above all, clarity about the experience, and information and context about what audiences can expect will help with enhancing an experience

#### Suggestions to Enhance Experiences and Inspire More Visits

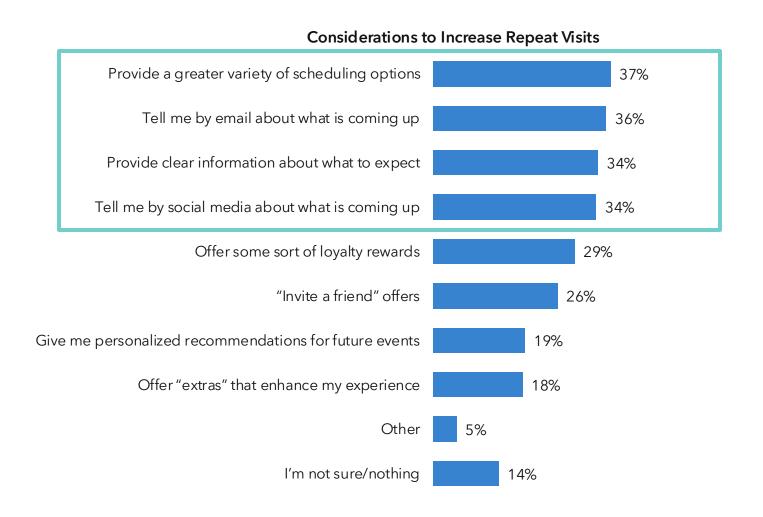
MENTIONS OF 5% OR MORE







# Audiences also want flexibility and more opportunities to plan in order to inspire more return visits





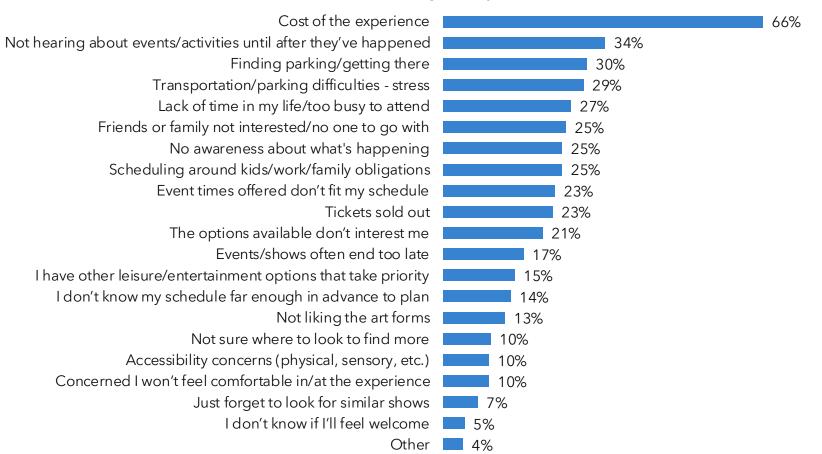
# Once again, younger demographics tend to be most interested in additional information and offers to help encourage return visits

	AGE			ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
Considerations to Increase Repeat Visits	<b>18-34</b> (n=298)	<b>35-54</b> (n=432)	<b>55+</b> (n=431)	Immersed (n=113)	Active (n=263)	Passives (n=485)	
Provide a greater variety of scheduling options	41%	34%	36%	44%	44%	40%	
Tell me by email about what is coming up	33%	33%	40%	42%	45% ↑	38%	
Provide clear information about what to expect	46%↑	28%↓	32%	38%	35%	36%	
Tell me by social media about what is coming up	40%	30%	33%	47%↑	40%	34%	
Offer some sort of loyalty rewards	39%↑	29%	23%↓	35%	35%	29%	
"Invite a friend" offers	28%	27%	23%	38%↑	30%	26%	
Give me personalized recommendations for future events	29%↑	19%	13%↓	24%	24%	19%	
Offer "extras" that enhance my experience	26%↑	16%	16%	26%	17%	19%	
Other	3%	6%	5%	7%	4%	5%	
I'm not sure/nothing	8%↓	15%	16%	8%	7%↓	10%↓	



# Outside of the cost, not having timely information and issues with transportation are key barriers to engaging more often





Any tool or tactics used to inspire greater attendance will need to address these barriers:

- Cost and value
- Timely information
- Ease of arrival
- Time availability

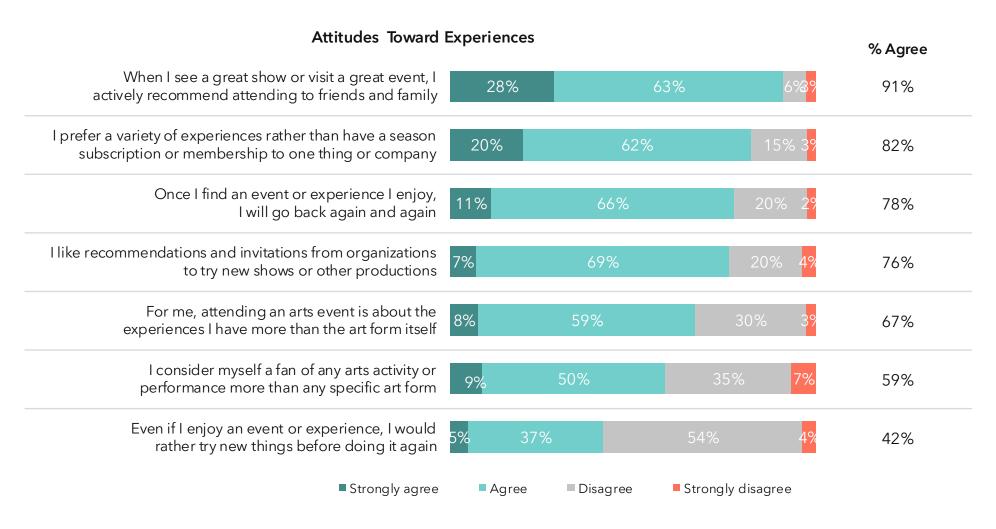


# Barriers differ by group: younger audiences express the biggest appetite to return or try something new but have the most stated barriers to address

	AGE			ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
Barriers to Attending Art Experiences More Often	18-34	35-54	55+	Immersed	Active	Passives	
	(n=298)	(n=432)	(n=431)	(n=113)	(n=263)	(n=485)	
Cost of the experience	71%	66%	62%	68%	70%	68%	
Not hearing about events/activities until after they've happened	41%↑	32%	30%	52%↑	42% ↑	32%	
Finding parking/getting there	25%	29%	34%	25%	29%	33%	
Transportation/parking difficulties - stress	28%	27%	32%	30%	30%	29%	
Lack of time in my life/too busy to attend	38%↑	34%↑	12%↓	26%	24%	32%↑	
Friends or family not interested/no one to go with	33%↑	23%	22%	32%	23%	25%	
No awareness about what's happening	32%↑	25%	19%↓	27%	29%	24%	
Scheduling around kids/work/family obligations	28%	38%↑	10%↓	23%	25%	28%	
Event times offered don't fit my schedule	34%↑	24%	15%↓	29%	25%	25%	
Tickets sold out	26%	23%	21%	33%	29%	23%	
The options available don't interest me	26%	19%	19%	16%	17%	19%	
Events/shows often end too late	14%	20%	16%	18%	19%	16%	
I have other leisure/entertainment options that take priority	15%	15%	15%	10%	12%	14%	
I don't know my schedule far enough in advance to plan	20%↑	14%	10%↓	18%	13%	15%	
Not liking the art forms	12%	15%	12%	5%	11%	12%	
Not sure where to look to find more	14%	8%	9%	14%	10%	10%	
Accessibility concerns (physical, sensory, etc.)	9%	8%	12%	16%	10%	8%	
Concerned I won't feel comfortable in/at the experience	13%	9%	7%	13%	10%	8%	
Just forget to look for similar shows	10%	8%	5%	10%	9%	7%	
I don't know if I'll feel welcome	9%↑	3%	3%	13%↑	5%	3%	
Other	4%	4%	4%	7%	5%	4%	



# Great experiences generate word of mouth and loyalty, but arts audiences don't want to be tied down by memberships





## Younger, more passive audiences are much more likely to look beyond the art itself for a great experience

	AGE			ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
Attitudes Toward Experiences	<b>18-34</b> (n=298)	<b>35-54</b> (n=432)	<b>55+</b> (n=431)	Immersed (n=113)	<b>Active</b> (n=263)	Passives (n=485)	
When I see a great show or visit a great event, I actively recommend attending to friends and family	93%	91%	90%	97%	94%	92%	
I prefer a variety of experiences rather than have a season subscription or membership to one thing or company	80%	84%	82%	83%	78%	86%↑	
Once I find an event or experience I enjoy, I will go back again and again	81%	79%	74%	89%↑	81%	78%	
I like recommendations and invitations from organizations to try new shows or other productions	83%↑	71%↓	77%	89%↑	83% ↑	78%	
For me, attending an arts event is about the experiences I have more than the art form itself	70%	67%	64%	63%	63%	72%↑	
I consider myself a fan of any arts activity or performance more than any specific art form	62%	59%	56%	79% ↑	70%↑	59%	
Even if I enjoy an event or experience, I would rather try new things before doing it again	45%	41%	41%	39%	38%	44%	

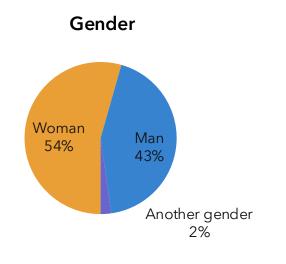


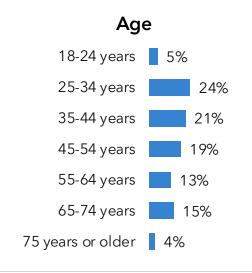
## Respondent Profile

### Who we heard from

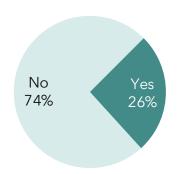
### Stone - Olafson

### **RESPONDENT PROFILE**

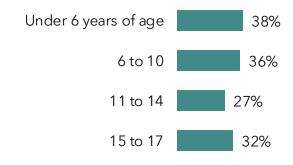




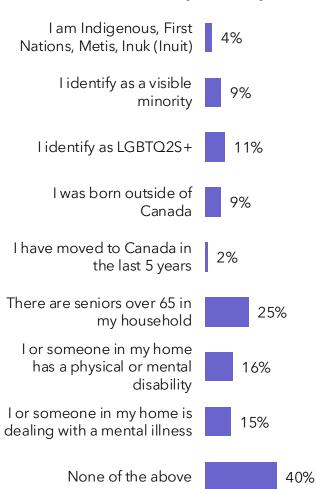
#### Children in Household



### Ages of Children



### **Diversity/Identity**

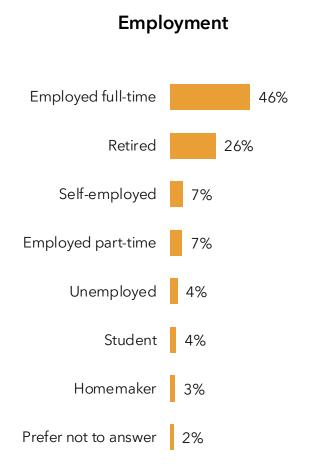


Base: All respondents (n=1,161)

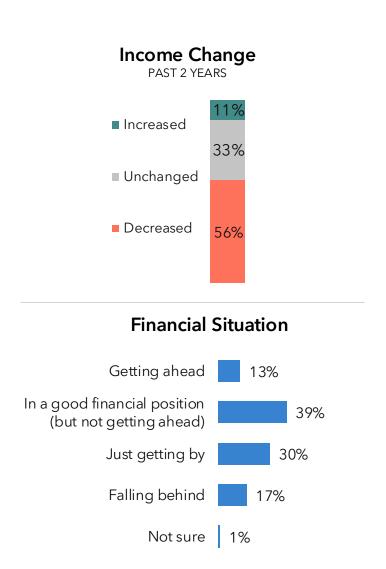
### Who we heard from

### Stone – Olafson

### **RESPONDENT PROFILE**







Base: All respondents (n=1,161)

# Understanding people. It's what we do.

## Stone — Olafson

### **Questions or Comments?**

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