
UNDERSTANDING ARTS ATTENDANCE IN SASKATCHEWAN

Saskatchewan Arts Alliance

February 2024



**Saskatchewan
Arts Alliance**

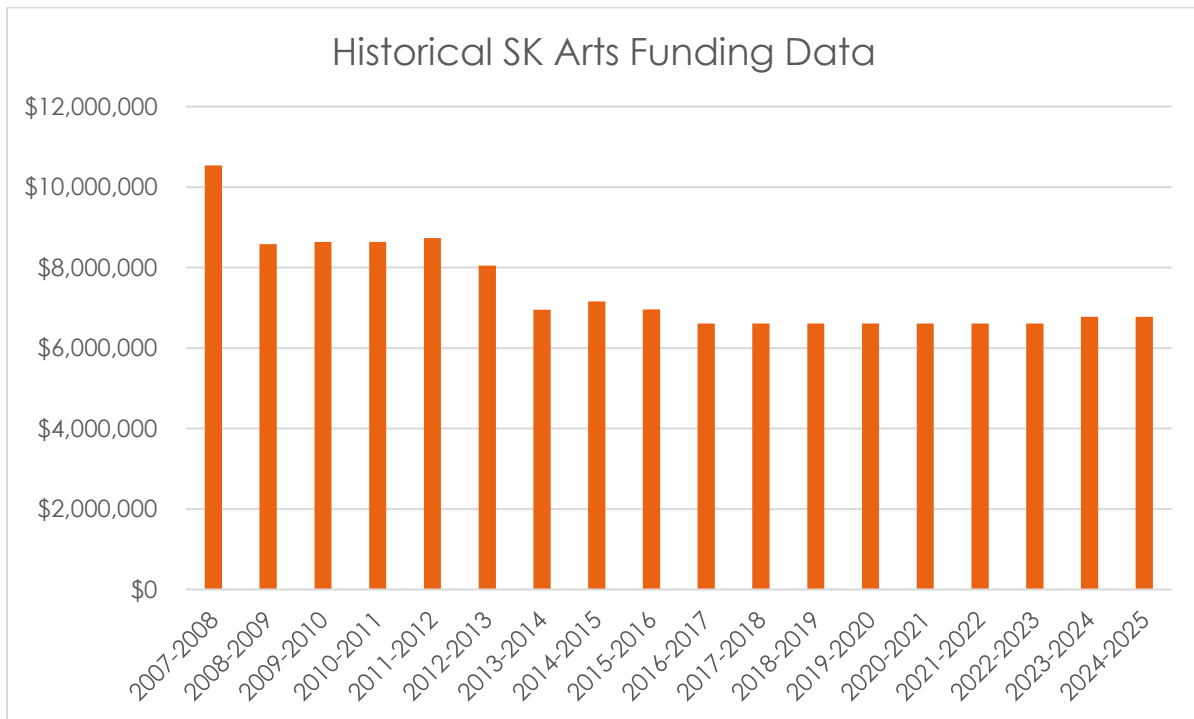
Introduction

For those working in the arts, audience development and engagement issues have been top of mind since the COVID-19 pandemic. The Saskatchewan Arts Alliance (SAA) has conducted community consultations and has been in regular contact with various performing arts organizations. We have heard the same thing repeatedly: audiences are not attending art events as much as they used to.

To analyze these issues and determine why audience attendance has dropped so low, the SAA was inspired by the [Spotlight on Arts Audiences](#) studies conducted by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and attempted to do something similar based in Saskatchewan.

For this study, we partnered with Insightrix, who distributed the survey, in late 2024, to 350 members of their SaskWatch panel across a broad spectrum of Saskatchewan residents. Respondents were asked several questions about their participation in arts events and the barriers to attending arts events. The results of that survey are presented here.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, considering the significantly higher cost of living and the ongoing inflationary impacts imposed by the pandemic, cost appears to be a significant barrier to audience attendance. While useful to know, this does pose a significant challenge for arts organizations to overcome because funding for the arts in Saskatchewan has been decreasing for the past fifteen years since 2008, when inflation is considered.



Many performing arts organizations are already in trouble,¹ and while lowering the cost of tickets for audiences may sound like a simple solution, it is not a reasonable one, as ticket sales already are falling short² of the required financing required to create and produce art in this province. Lowering ticket prices would only further endanger a number of arts organizations that are already struggling to make ends meet.

There is no simple solution to combating the cost of living crisis, in any context, and the SAA has been attempting to try and find ways to mitigate the impacts of increased costs on both audiences and arts organizations. One of our ideas has been the potential implementation of a ticket subsidy program, and to gauge potential interest in such a program, we included some questions about it in this survey.

At this stage, it is unlikely a single solution would resolve the audience attendance issue or entirely resolve the financial strains currently felt by arts organizations. However, the SAA is committed to finding solutions, supports, and ways to combat these problems and hopes that this report can be one of the first steps towards getting audiences engaged with the arts again.

Survey Results

One of the first questions asked participants how they generally hear about art events. Although this was only a sampling of the wider community, if one form of communication is shown to be much more effective than others, then arts organizations could rethink how they advertise.

According to respondents, word of mouth was the most common way to hear about art events, followed by targeted social media advertising and general social media promotion. Therefore, social media appears to be the most effective way for arts organizations to promote their events and performances.

Meanwhile, email communications (such as newsletters and bulletins) were the least common way people became aware of art events. Although email blasts may appear to be ineffective promotional tools at first glance, it is worth keeping in mind that not everyone subscribes to arts organizations' promotional materials, which may impact the results.

There were nine responses indicating that they hear about art events through 'Other' channels. Two of the responses indicated that they do not hear about art events:

"I don't hear about arts events."

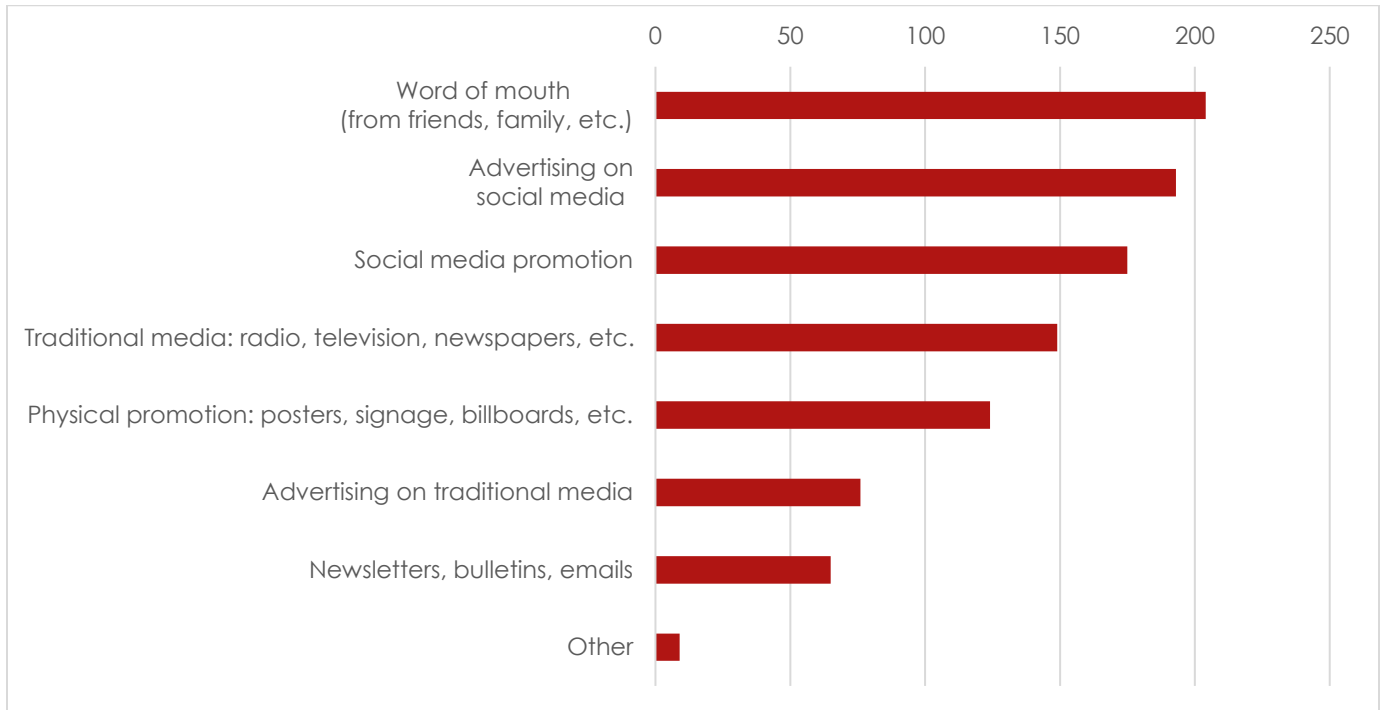
"Most times advertising is poorly done, and we miss out on events."

Other responses indicated that they hear about art events from other apps or websites, such as Ticketmaster or the Bands in Town apps, and others further indicated that they

¹ Reynoldson, Trillian. "[Regina Symphony Orchestra gets \\$200K bailout from province.](#)" February 15 2025. Regina Leader Post.

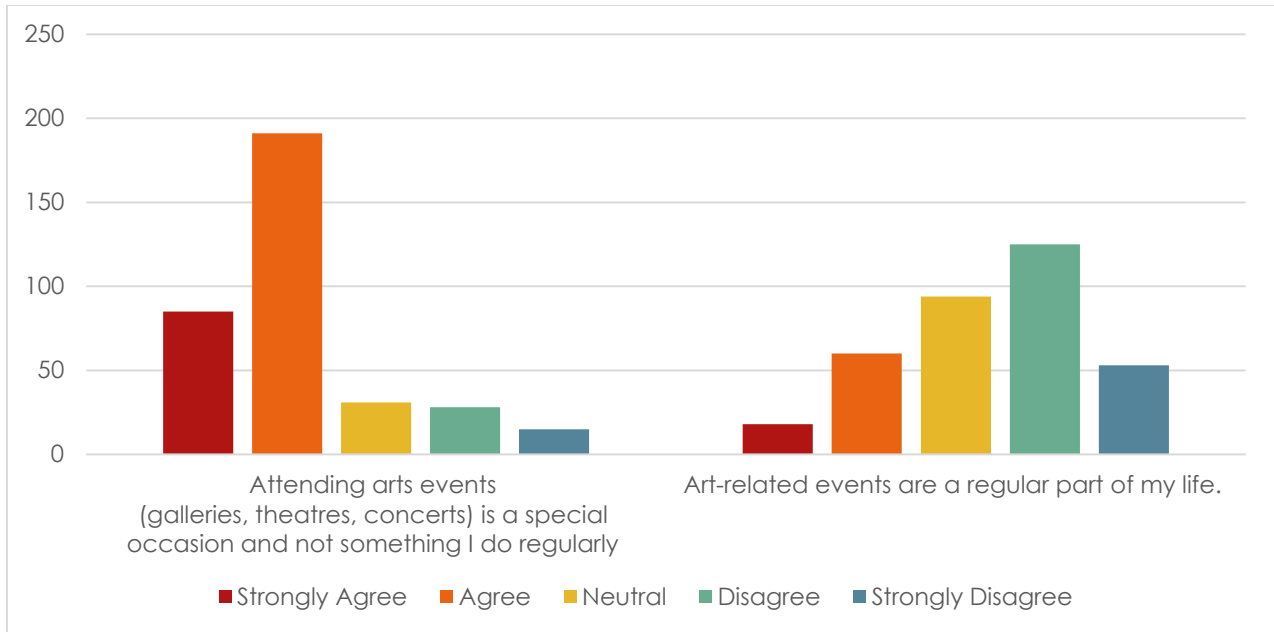
² Harder, Greg. "[Regina Folk Festival cancelled this year; focused on fresh start in 2025.](#)" March 6 2024. Regina Leader Post.

hear about events by either being involved in arts organizations or by generally having an idea of the events happening in their city.



Similar to the findings from Alberta,³ the majority of respondents indicated that art events are special occasions, and not something that they do regularly. In Alberta, 83% of respondents indicated that this was the case, while in Saskatchewan, 78% of respondents indicated art events are special; accordingly, 22% agreed that arts events are a regular part of their lives.

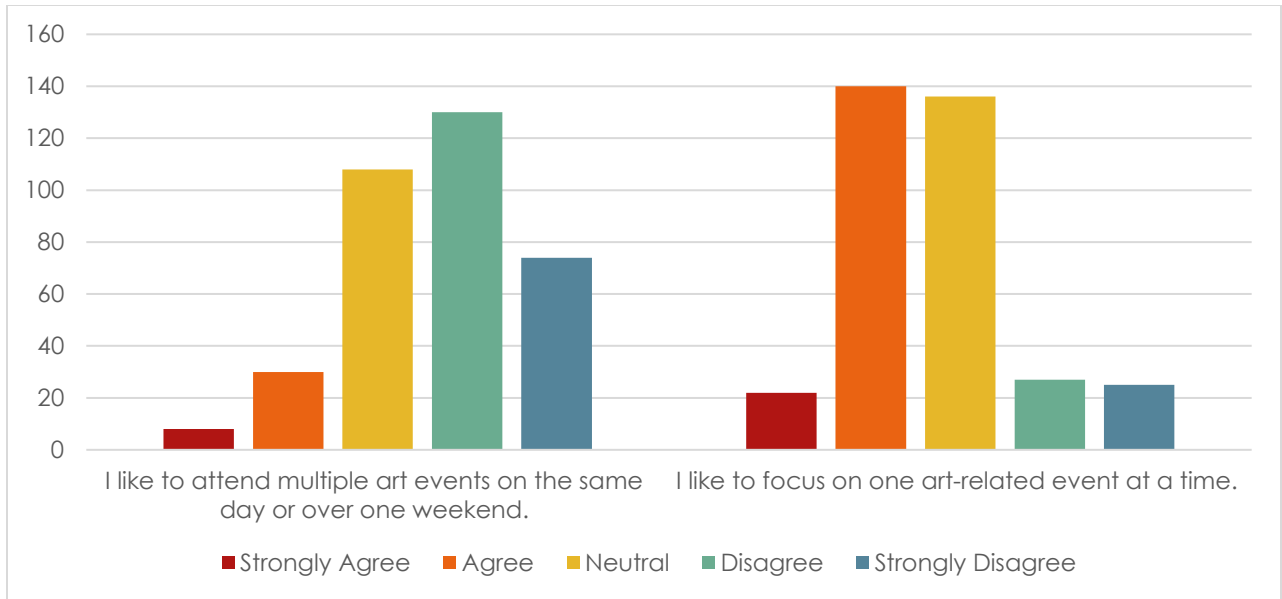
³ Alberta Foundation for the Arts. August 2024. "[Spotlight on Arts Audiences. Wave 2: Spring 2024. Alberta Results](#)," pg 16.



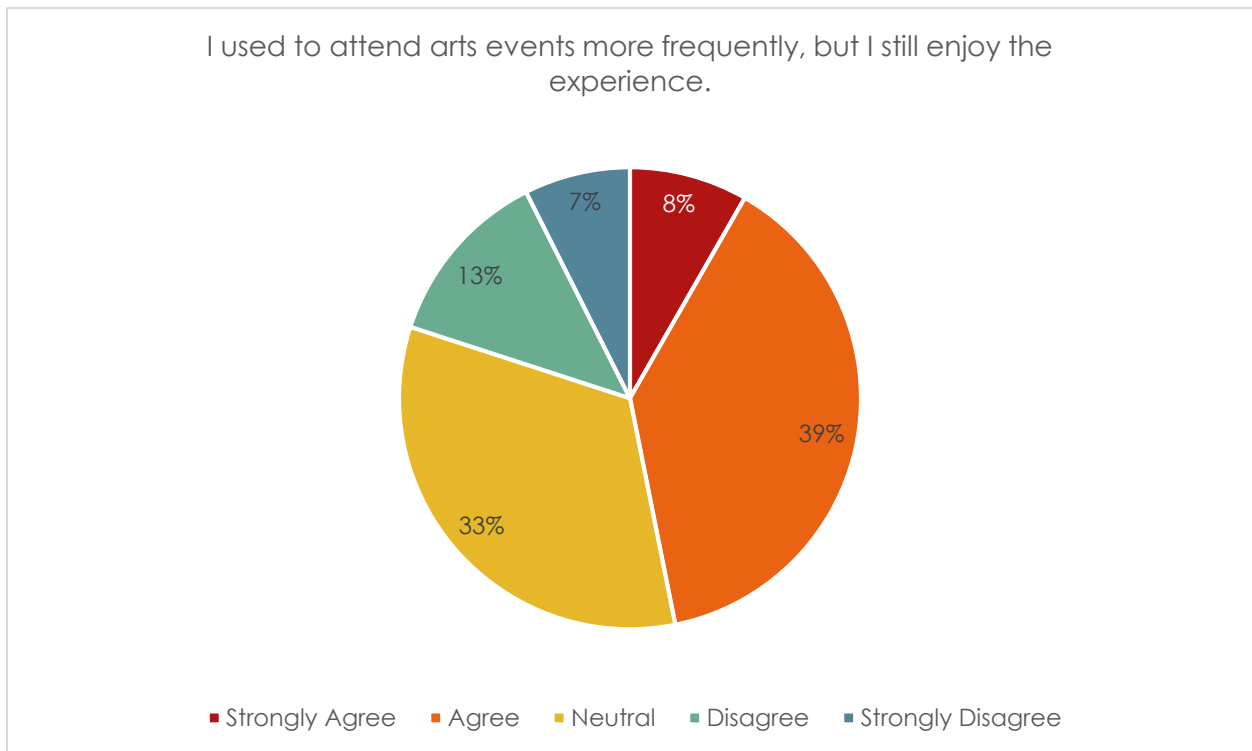
The SAA was curious as to whether there was much, or any, appetite among the general public to attend multiple art events in a short period: for example, if someone were to travel to a different city to attend an art event, would they want to attend other art events on that same trip, or if there was an art event in someone's home town if they would be motivated to attend multiple events in a single weekend.

If the findings had indicated that people were very motivated to attend multiple art events in a weekend, then it could have been suggested that arts organizations should potentially collaborate and attempt to offer their events around the same times, obviously without conflicting, to allow patrons to attend multiple events within a short timeframe.

However, the respondents indicated that, for the most part, people wanted to focus on one event at a time, with 45% agreeing with this, while 15% disagreed. At the same time, only 11% wanted to attend multiple art events in the same approximate timeframe, while 58% indicated that they were not interested in this.



Unlike Alberta,⁴ where 76% of respondents indicated that they used to attend art events more frequently, only 47% of Saskatchewan respondents indicated that they used to attend art events more frequently, but still enjoy the experience. Approximately 20% of Saskatchewan respondents disagreed with this statement, with 33% remaining neutral.



⁴ Alberta Foundation for the Arts. August 2024. "[Spotlight on Arts Audiences. Wave 2: Spring 2024. Alberta Results](#)," pg 16.

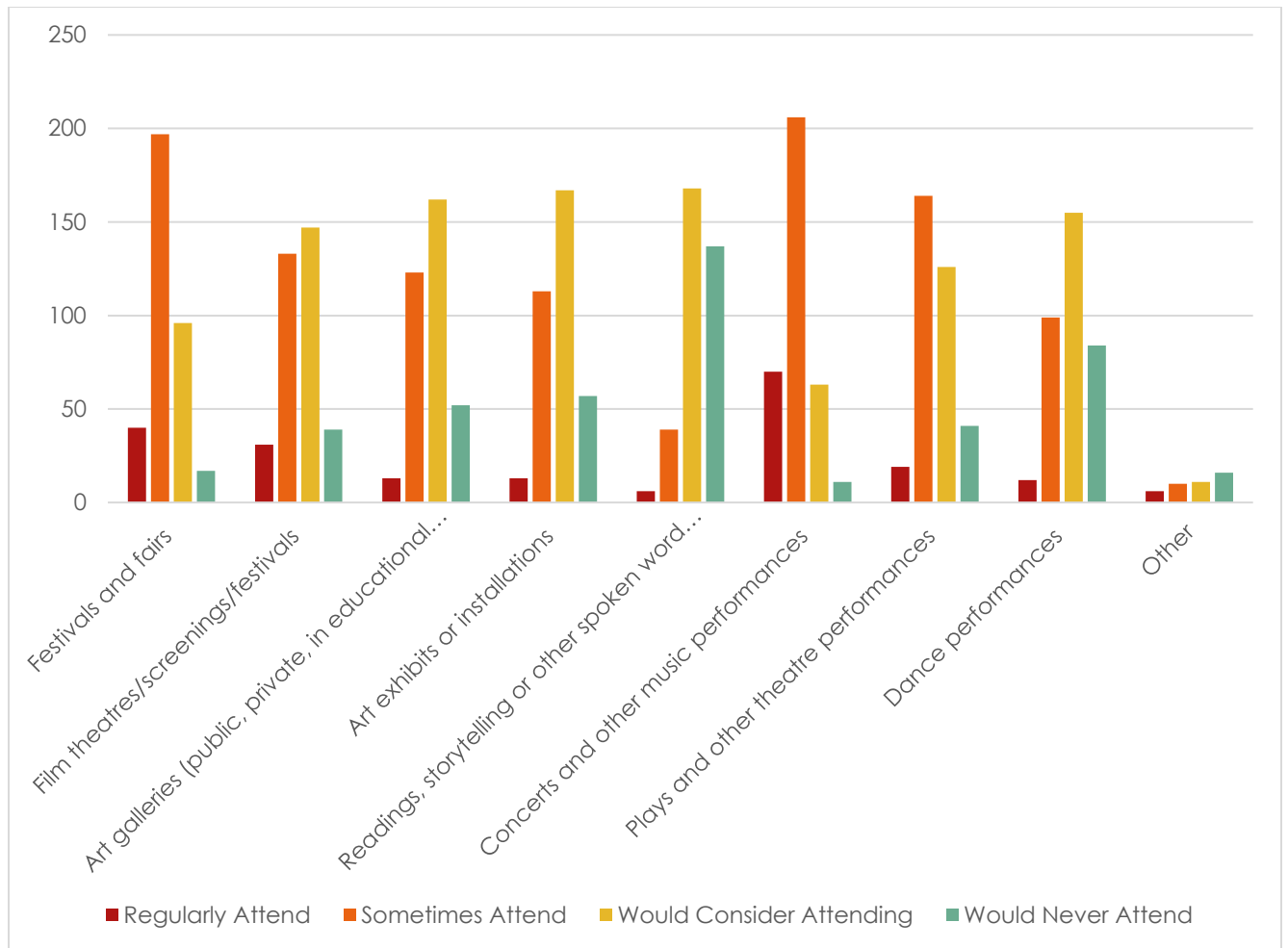
The most popular type of art event was Concerts and Other Music Performances, with 78% of respondents indicating that they either sometimes attend or regularly attend. Similarly, 68% indicated that they regularly or occasionally attend Festivals & Fairs. The third most popular was Plays & Other Theatre Performances with 52% indicating some level of attendance.

Readings, Storytelling or Other Spoken Word Performance had the lowest level of engagement, with only 13% indicating that they attend events. Although 39% of respondents indicated that they would never attend a Reading, Storytelling or Other Spoken Word Performance, the highest percentage of respondents, 48%, indicated that they would consider attending. This is tied with Arts Exhibits & Installations as having the highest level of response in the 'Would Consider Attending' category and is interesting as it identifies that there is a potential audience for these events, should the right circumstances (details of the event itself, advertising of the event, timing, cost etc.) arise.

Regarding Art Exhibits & Installations, only 36% of respondents indicated that they had attended an event, with 48% indicating they would attend and 16% indicating they would never attend. The second least popular event type was Dance Performances, with only 31% of respondents having attended an event, 44% indicating that they would attend, and 24% indicating they would never attend a dance performance.

Roughly 5% of participants responded to the Other category and were given the opportunity to specify any events that the presented options may not have captured. A number of the responses, however, were covered by the existing options (art galleries, concerts, plays, dance performances,) but other events like drag shows, figure skating performances, performances at charity events and children's performances were identified as other types of arts events that people attend.⁵

⁵ Some of the Other responses indicated that participants were not aware of what constitutes an arts event, indicating that, in future, a definition should be provided.



The participants were then asked what factors were important when deciding which arts events to attend. With the exception of two options, the largest proportion of respondents in all other categories indicated that the factor was Neither Important nor Unimportant to them: for the most part, respondents were fairly apathetic towards most factors that we had thought would determine which arts events they attended.

The only two responses in which Neither Important nor Unimportant was not the predominant answer were having the ability to explore performances, events and activities that were familiar to respondents, as well as the ability to explore performances, events and activities that were new to respondents.

In some ways, this is a disappointing result, as it does not help to pinpoint the types of programming that appeal to the general public, but, on the other hand, it demonstrates that further research is needed to identify what factors *are* important to the general public. We now know that the issues that we thought were important to people in determining whether or not they attend an event are not actually as important as we may have thought. This is a specific gap that we can now attempt to address.

Regardless, the most important factor (to 51% of respondents and unimportant to only 11%) was the ability to see and engage with the types of performances, events and activities they were familiar with and trust. The second most important factor was the ability to explore new types of performances, new events, and new activities, with 43% indicating this was important to them and 16% indicating it was unimportant. This speaks to a desire among the general public to have a mixture of arts events that are recognizable and traditional or 'classic,' as well as new and exciting events.

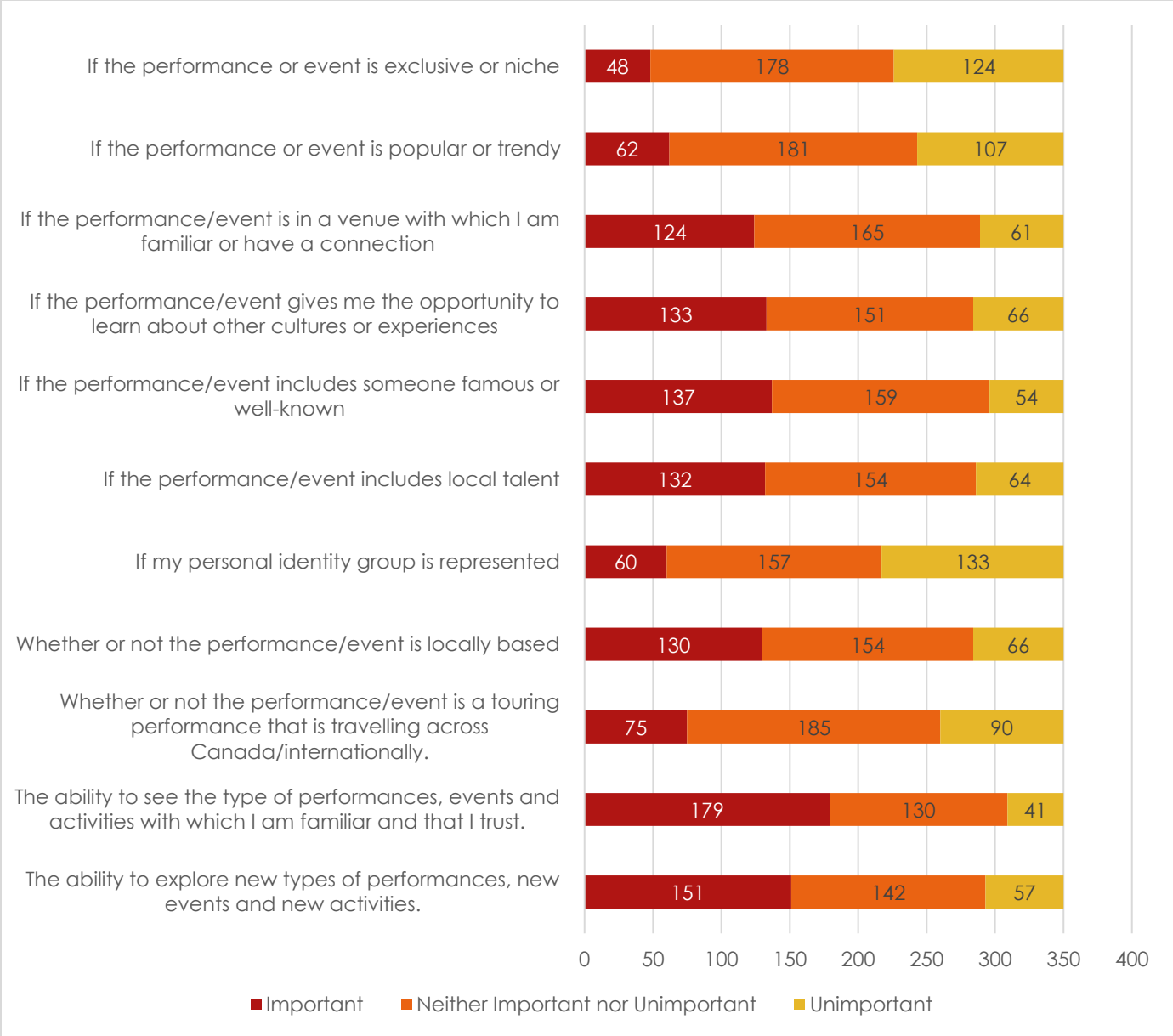
If the performance or event features a famous person, 38% of participants indicated this was important to them, while 19% said it was unimportant and did not matter to 45%.

Having their identity group represented was the least important to the largest proportion of people, with 38% indicating it was unimportant and only 17% indicating it was important to them.

An exclusive or niche event was the second least important factor, with 35% indicating it was unimportant and 14% indicating it was important. In this category, the majority (51%) of the respondents were apathetic.

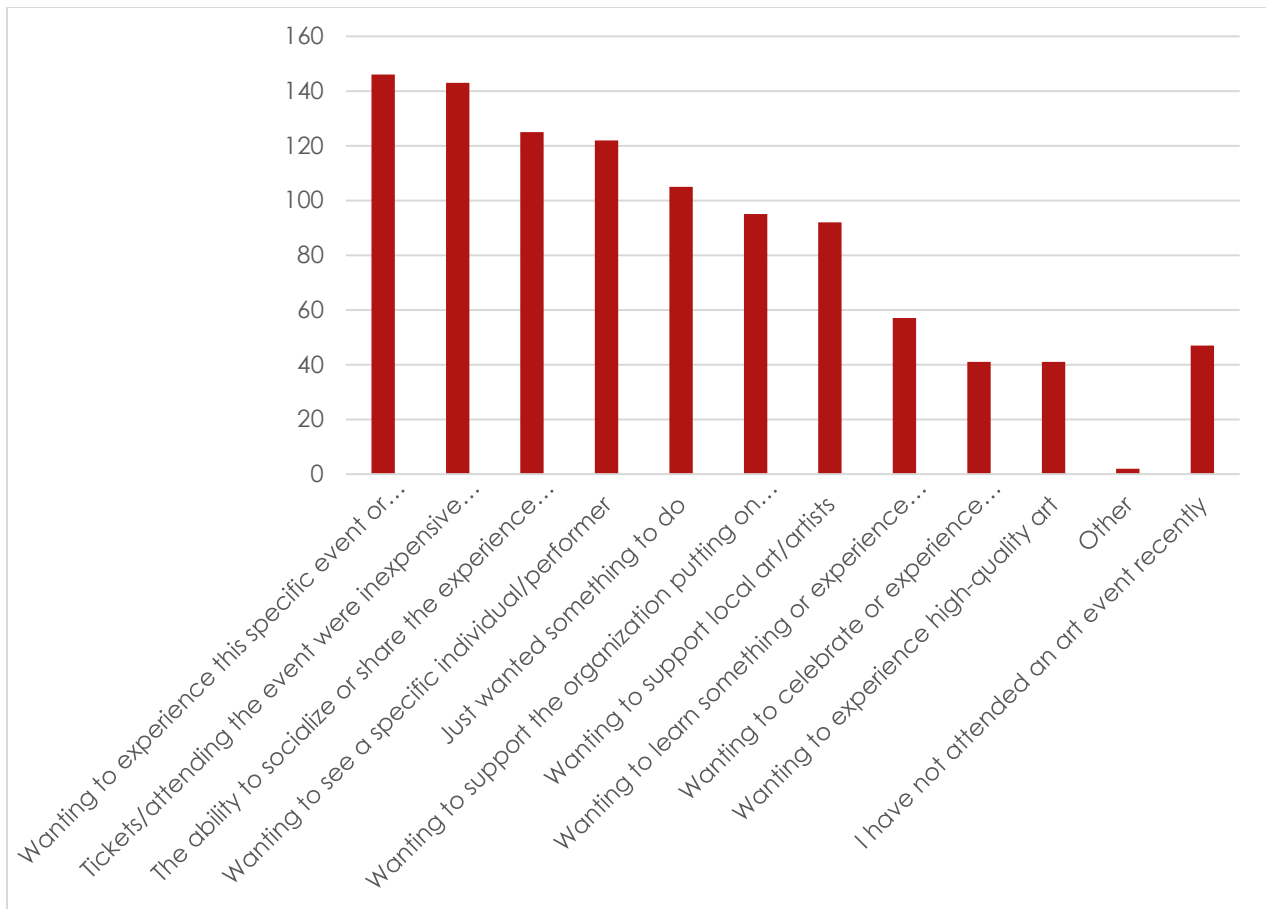
The third least important factor was whether an event was popular or trendy. Thirty-one percent indicated this was unimportant to them, and 18 percent indicated it was. Here, too, most respondents were apathetic, with 52% indicating that it was neither important nor unimportant.

The factor towards which most respondents were apathetic was whether or not the performance was touring across Canada or internationally, with 53% indicating that this was neither important nor unimportant to them.



We then asked participants to think about the most recent art event that they had attended and asked what factors contributed to this decision. 42% indicated that they attended the event because they wanted to experience it, 41% stated that they attended because the tickets were inexpensive, and 36% indicated that the ability to socialize or share the experience was a significant contributing factor in their decision to attend.

13% indicated that they had not attended an art event recently. Outside of that, the factors that were the least important to people were the ability to experience high-quality art and the ability to experience something familiar, to which only 12% each indicated this was a factor. Wanting to learn something was only a factor for 16% of respondents. The two responses to 'Other' indicated they were gifted the tickets.



We then asked participants about the most recent art event they did **not** attend and what factors impacted that decision. 47% of participants stated that tickets or attending the event generally would have been too expensive. 37% indicated that they did not have the time or opportunity to attend, and 30% indicated they didn't attend because they were not interested.

12% had not considered attending an art event recently. The other least popular responses were that 14% didn't have someone to go with, 10% did not attend because they didn't like the organization or a performer, and 4% were unsure.

5% of respondents indicated that they had other reasons. Almost all of these responses had to do with accessibility. Multiple respondents indicated that time and distance were an issue for them and that the event was not accessible for that reason:

"Distance is a factor in travelling."

"Event was a 2-hour drive away. If tickets had been lower priced then maybe."

"150km away from home one way."

"Location was far away and cost too much to travel."

"Timing conflicted with other events in my life."

“Work weekends, and they aren't in my town either.”

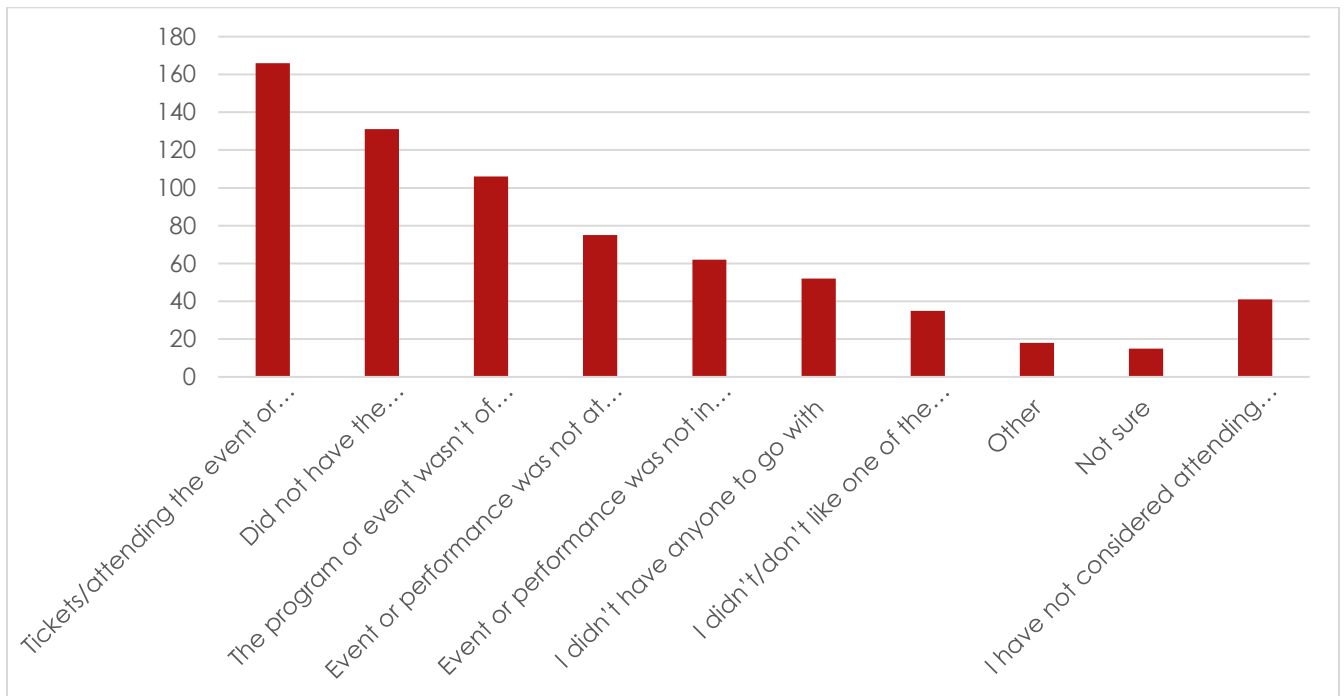
“Time conflict.”

Multiple people also identified health and childcare concerns, as well as a general concern over the lack of accessibility for those with disabilities:

“No special needs seating.”

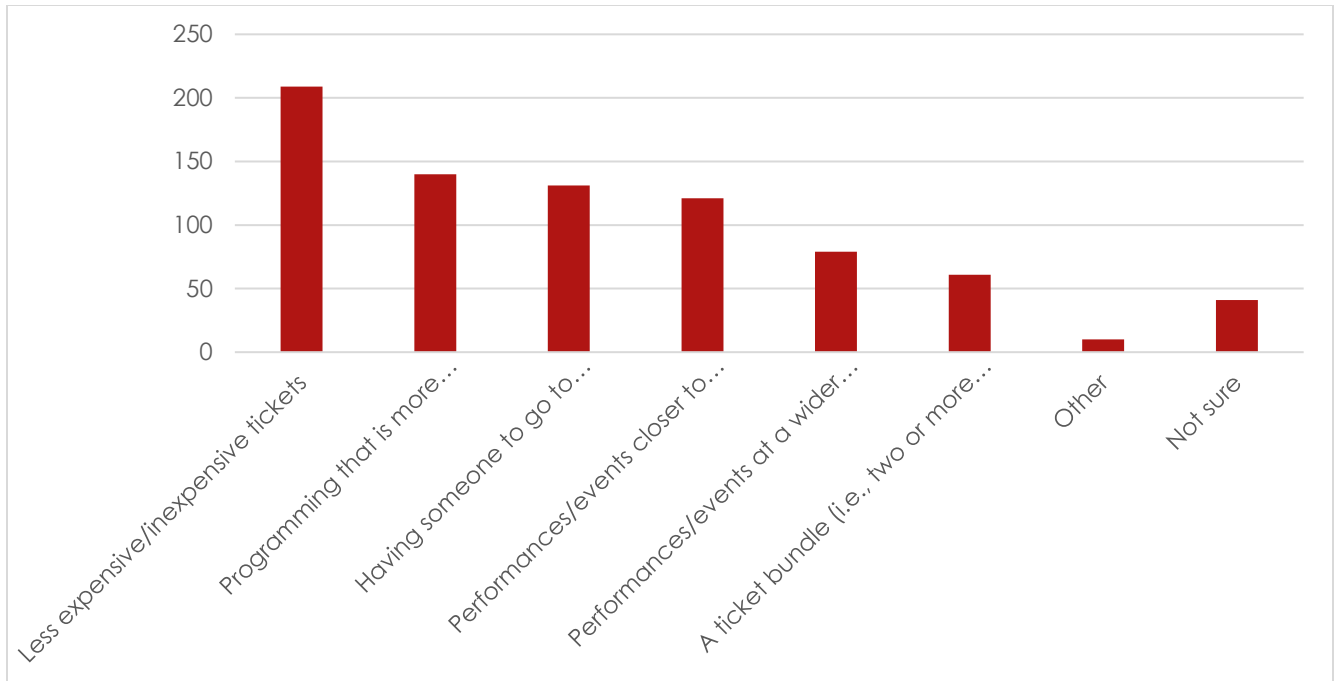
“Have a disability and don't want to try and attend something, and it is clear they cannot accommodate my disability.”

It would appear, from these results, that issues of cost and accessibility are just as important in determining whether or not someone will attend an event as the event itself. It is not simply about offering different programming or increasing advertising – though these are important factors – and that attendance is sometimes determined by factors outside the arts organizations' control.



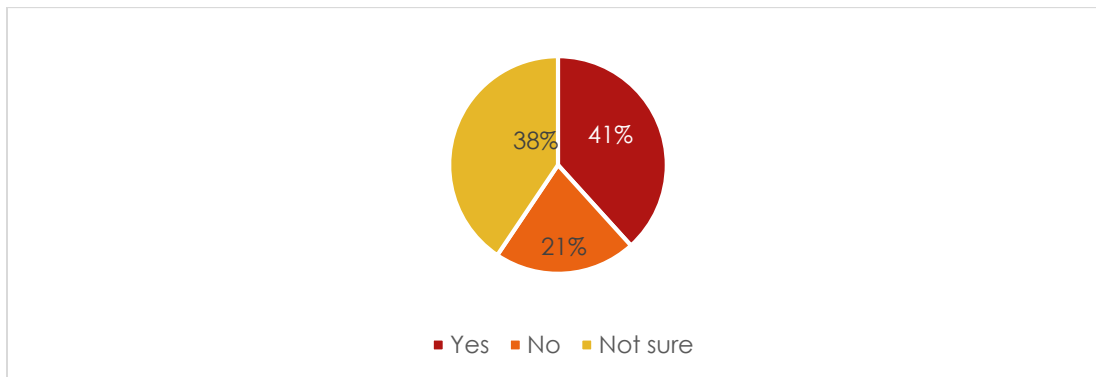
Respondents were then asked what would have inspired them to attend. In keeping with the other responses, 60% indicated they would have attended if the event had been cheaper. 40% would have attended if there had been more interesting programming, and 37% would have attended if they had someone with whom they could attend.

There were a number of 'Other' options. These spoke, again, to concerns around health and accessibility, more convenient timing of the event, and better promotion and advertising of the event.



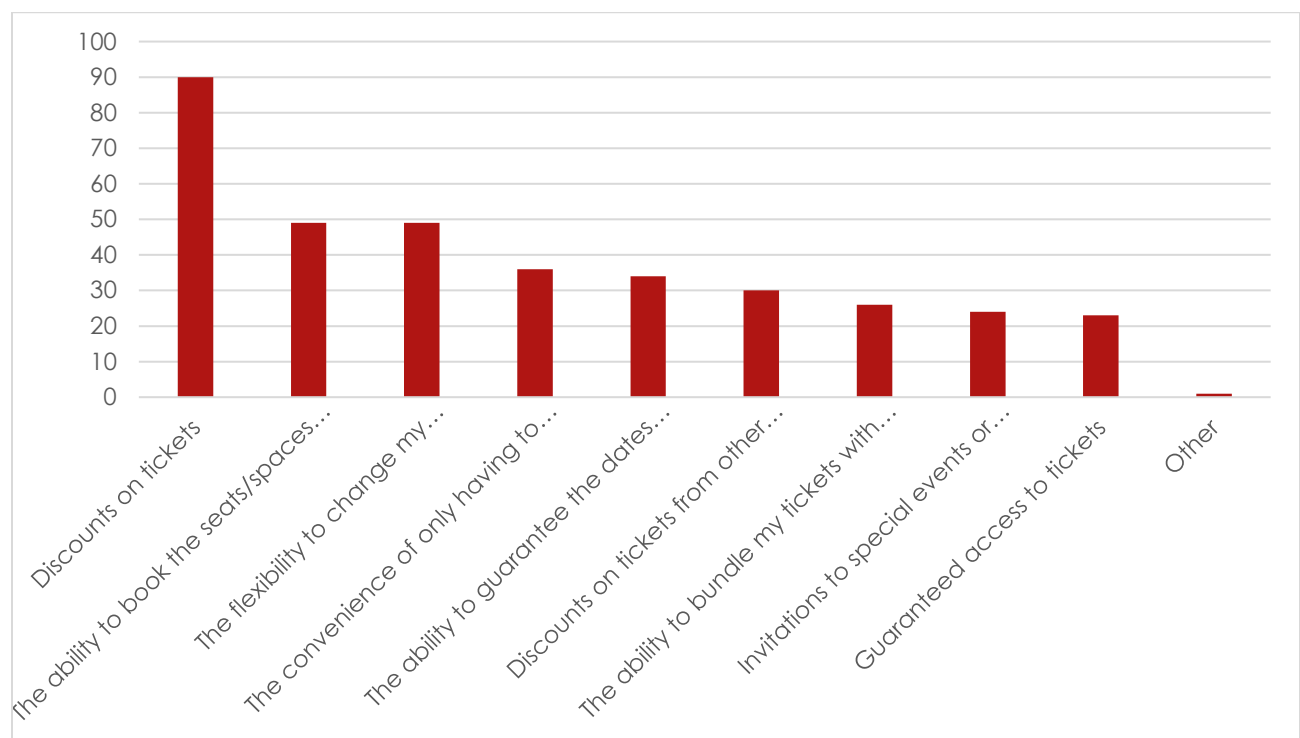
Ticket Bundles

As noted in the introduction to this report, the SAA asked respondents whether or not they would be interested in a ticket bundle. 41% of respondents indicated that they were not sure, and 38% indicated they would be interested. If we exclude those who were not sure, then of those who were, 64% of them indicated they would be interested in a ticket bundle.



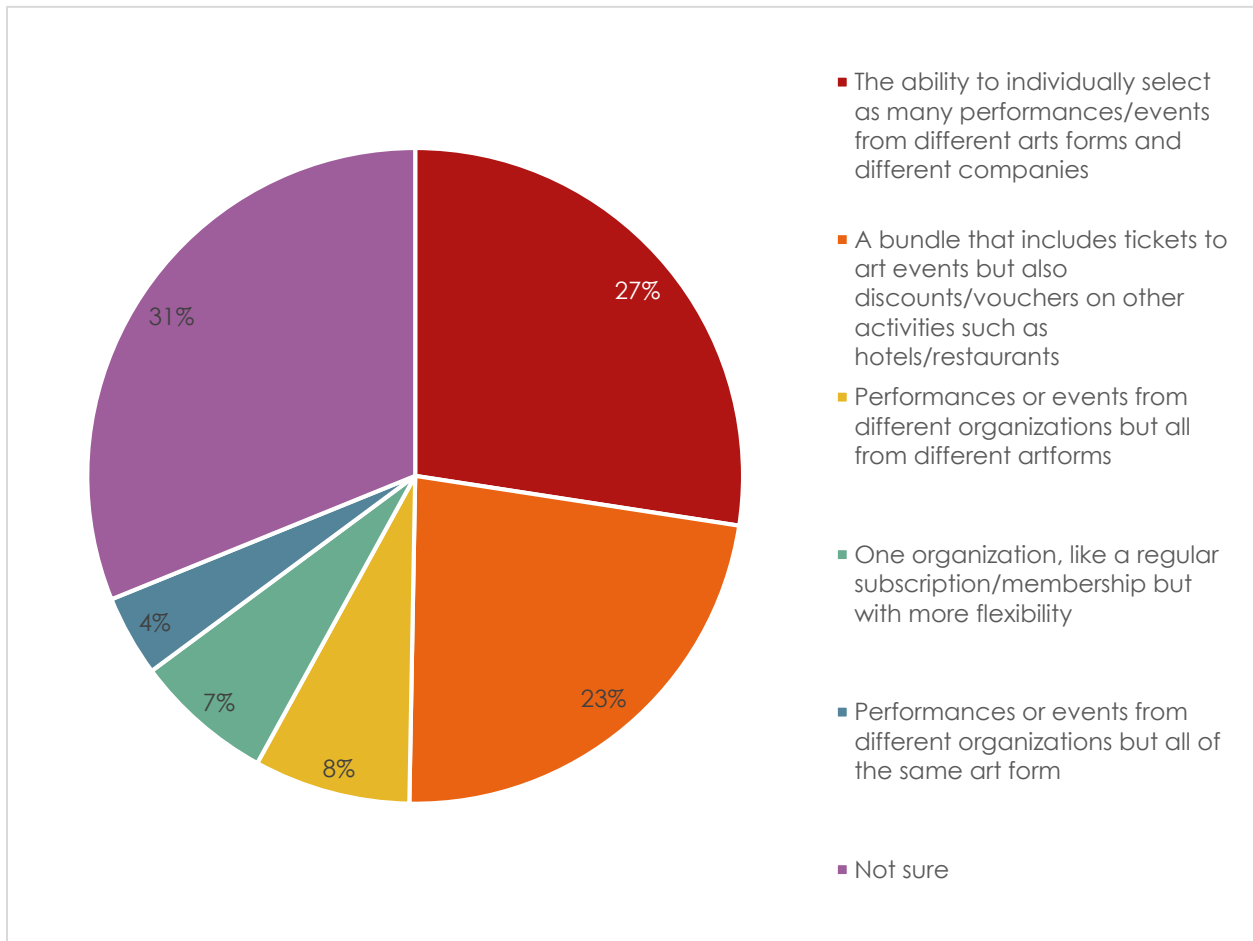
We then asked participants about what benefits of a ticket bundle would be the most important to them. In this question too, we see that cost is a significant factor, with 67% indicating this was important to them. The second most important was the ability to book seats in advance and the flexibility to change booked dates, which was important to 37% respectively.

The least important features were the ability to bundle tickets from multiple organizations (19%), invitations to special events and guaranteed access to tickets (18% respectively).



The next couple of questions asked about the potential functionality of a ticket bundle: would respondents prefer a bundle from multiple arts organizations across multiple disciplines, or would they prefer something more akin to a season pass; would they want the ability to choose tickets without committing to a performance or would they rather the same number of tickets for every event from a particular organization. The result was that participants wanted as much flexibility and choice as possible. That said, there was no overwhelming majority preference for any single option, indicating that there could be success with any style of ticket bundle.

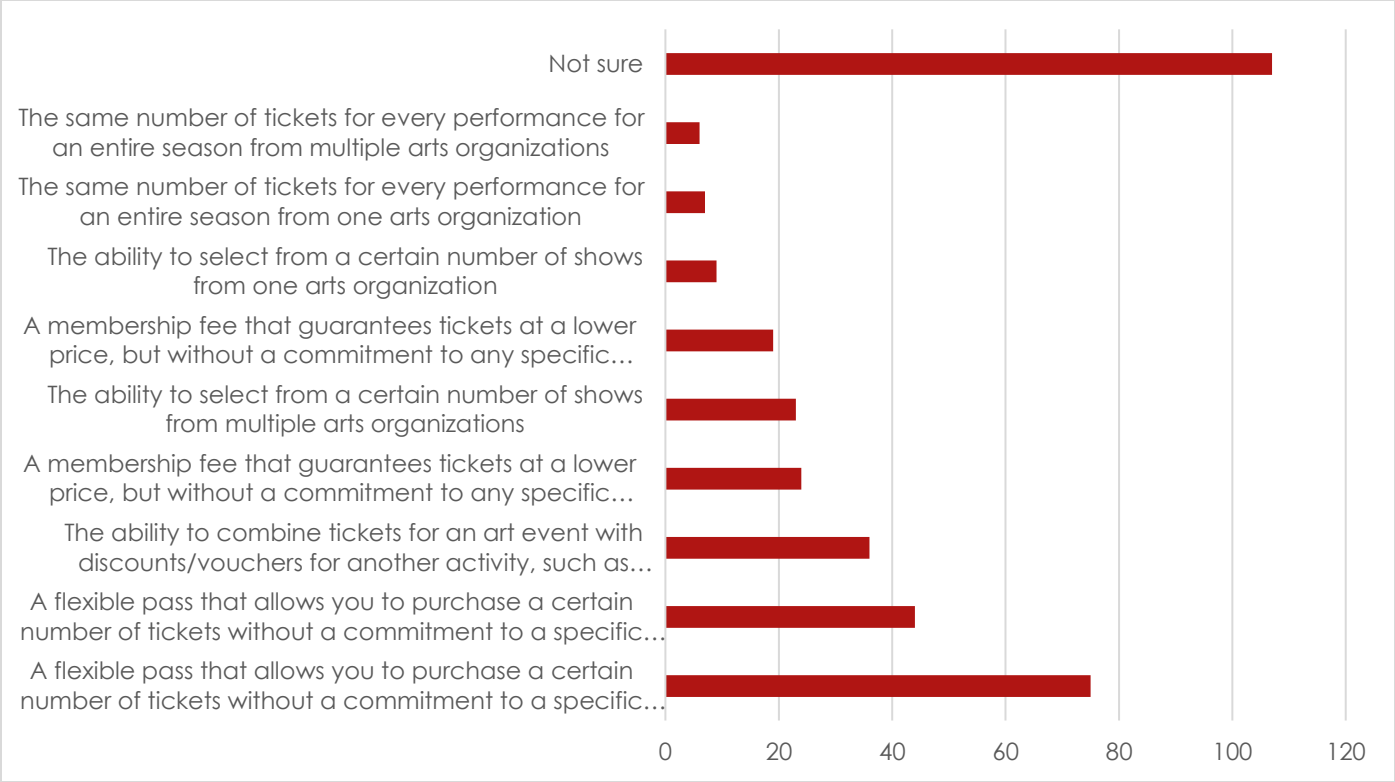
When asked about the types of experiences participants would prefer, 27% preferred the ability to select as many performances/events from different organizations and different artistic disciplines; 23% would choose a bundle that included art events as well as discounts or vouchers for other activities such as restaurants, hotels etc. 31% were not sure. The least popular option, with only 4% of respondents, was the ability to purchase tickets from multiple organizations, but all within the same art form.



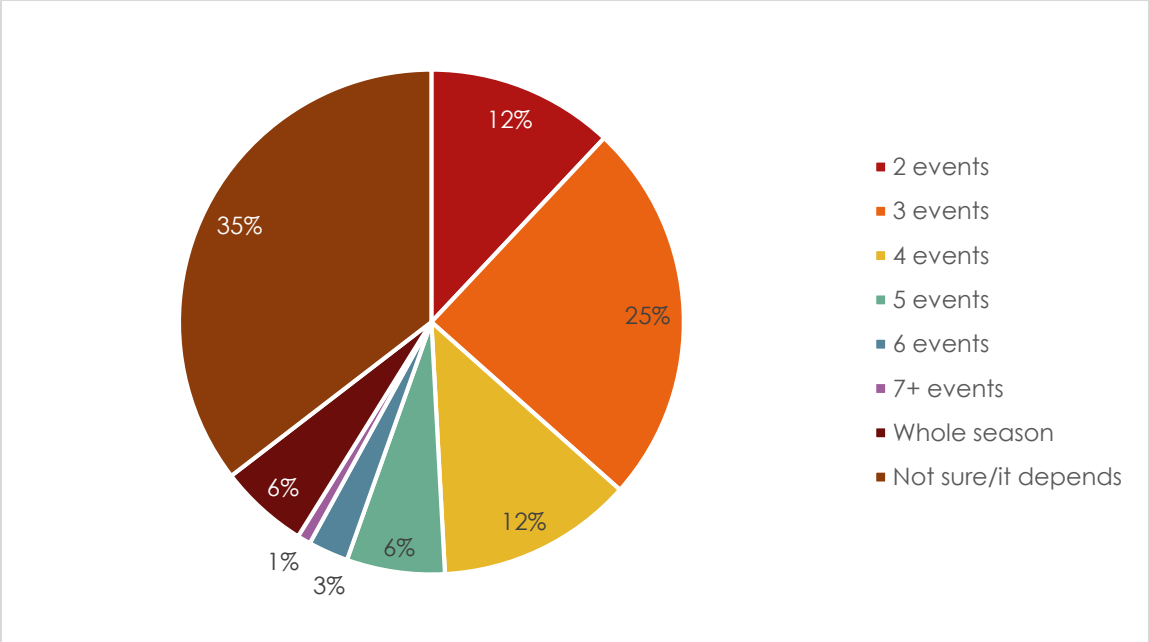
When asked how they would prefer a ticket bundle to function, most respondents (31%) indicated they were unsure. The second most popular response was for a flexible pass that allows you to purchase a certain number of tickets without a commitment to a specific performance or event from multiple arts organizations (22%), followed by a flexible pass that allows you to purchase a certain number of tickets without a commitment to a specific performance or event from one arts organization (12.5%).

The least popular options, both with 2% of respondents respectively, were the same number of tickets for every performance for an entire season from one arts organization and the same number of tickets for every performance for an entire season from multiple arts organizations.

Flexibility appears to be important to many people: having the ability to select as many or as few shows as they wanted from as many different organizations as they wanted while not being locked into a specific number of tickets seems to be the ideal option.



Participants were then asked how many events they would like access to with a ticket bundle, and the most significant proportion, 35%, indicated that they weren't sure. Based on previous responses that indicated flexibility was important, this is potentially the motivation behind not committing to a single number. 25% indicated they'd like access to 3 events, 12% indicated they would like both 2 and 4 events, and 6% indicated both 5 events and an entire season.



Flexibility was once again the top response when asked how people would prefer to pay for a ticket bundle: the majority (59%) of respondents indicated they would want to pay-as-you-go with some kind of ticket bundle, with 16% wanting a one-time payment and 14% being unsure.

