



Halifax Performing & Visual Arts Venues Study

Appendix C. Public Survey What we Heard Report

July 2024

HALIFAX  **Happy Cities**

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Executive Summary

Background

The Halifax Regional Municipality engaged Happy Cities to conduct the Performing and Visual Arts Venues Study. The Study is intended to:

- Improve the municipality's understanding of professional art venue operations
- Identify the challenges that existing art venues experience
- Identify the venue needs of the local arts and culture community
- Inform the municipality's long-term approach to supporting, renewing, and investing in arts venues

The Performing & Visual Arts Venues Study aims to assess the adequacy of venues in HRM for professional exhibits and live events. A central goal of the study is to identify whether there are gaps or challenges in venues currently available for the arts in HRM to guide the municipality's decisions and priorities.

HRM engaged Happy Cities in 2023 to lead the study. This What We Heard Report relays the findings of the second round of engagement for the project, a public online survey conducted between November 9 and December 15, 2023. This survey followed a first round of engagement with stakeholders, completed between June 2023 and January 2024.



Executive summary

What We Did

The project team conducted a public, online survey through HRM's Shape Your City page. The survey sought to identify what kinds of venues residents prioritize, whether current venues meet their needs, and what gaps exist, among other issues. The online survey received 480 responses from people living across rural, suburban, and urban areas of HRM.

What We Heard

Overall, respondents expressed strong support for the arts: 92% agreed or strongly agreed that HRM should invest in performing arts venues, and 62% agreed it should invest in visual art venues (i.e., galleries and studios). The vast majority (91%) of respondents want more performing arts events in the region, and 66% wish there were more visual arts events. Only one in nine respondents feel there are sufficient visual arts venues in the region, and fewer than one in five say there are sufficient performing arts venues.

Respondents expressed that they most want to see more performing arts venues for live music and theatre, followed by dance and independent film. We asked which music genres residents would like to see more often in venues, and the most common answers were jazz, chamber music, rock, pop, and hip hop.

Respondents expressed a preference for a wide variety of visual arts. Many request contemporary, challenging artwork, while others request works that feel more accessible for people who are not steeped in the arts.

Sixty per cent of respondents report going to galleries at least once a month. Nearly half, 48%, or respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "Thriving visual arts venues would encourage me to live here long-term." The number one reason

respondents cited for why they do not go to visual arts events more often is a "lack of preferred visual arts events." Respondents also expressed that the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia's current building is inadequate. No respondent described it as sufficient in its present form.

Participants were divided on where venues should be located. The majority of respondents requested venues in the urban core, in part because a central location makes them easier to reach by foot and transit. Others expressed that venues will have a greater impact on the arts if they are located close together, so that they can create a hub of artistic activity. However, many respondents also expressed frustration with the difficulty of driving downtown and finding parking, and requested venues in suburban or rural areas. Parking was one of the most common issues mentioned.

The survey results emphasize that the arts play a central role in the quality of life of residents. Three quarters of respondents (76%) agreed with the statement that "thriving performing arts venues would encourage me to live here long term," and roughly half reported that visual art venues play an important role in them staying here.

The survey helps to clarify the importance of the arts to residents, and provides guidance on priority areas of investment for HRM. The results will be used to develop the final Halifax Cultural Facilities Needs Assessment Study, which is expected in July 2024.

91%

of survey respondents want more performing arts events in HRM.

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1. Introduction

In 2023, The Halifax Regional Municipality engaged Happy Cities to lead the Performing and Visual Arts Venues Study, which aims to reveal gaps and needs in HRM’s ecosystem of venues. An important goal of the study is to help the municipality understand how it can support the arts, so that the region’s arts scene can grow and flourish as its population grows. The Study seeks to identify the challenges that art venues currently experience, and how venues can better meet the needs of artists and performers.

This report focuses on the results of a public survey that Happy Cities conducted as part of the Venues Study. The survey is the third phase of work in the Performing & Visual Arts Venues Study.

The study focuses both on performing arts — such as theatre, dance, and circus — and visual arts — including sculpture, paintings, multimedia arts, or anything that would be shown in a gallery. The public engagement phases of the project included:

1. Stakeholder engagement, including interviews, focus groups, and surveys with venue operators and a wide variety of artists and arts organizations.
2. A public, online survey of HRM residents to hear about their priorities for performing and visual arts venues.
3. A second round of engagement for stakeholders, in which they can give feedback on the draft needs assessment, once it is complete.



Stakeholder engagement

July to January
2023

Public engagement

November to December
2023

2nd Stakeholder engagement

April to June
2024

2. What We Did

2.1. Public Survey

Online Surveys

The project team conducted two concurrent, public, online surveys to hear residents' priorities for arts venues in HRM, and to understand how current venues do or do not meet their needs. One survey was aimed at the broader public, while a second survey was designed specifically for Indigenous residents.

The surveys were launched on HRM's Shape Your City web page on November 9, 2023 and were open until December 15, 2023. HRM's communications team used a variety of methods to promote the surveys, including: an ad in *The Coast*; a number of provincial arts email lists; and social media promotion, including on Facebook and Instagram, which reached 16,400 people. Happy Cities also posted the survey in local social media groups. The survey had two parts. The first focused on performing arts while the second focused on visual arts.

Underrepresented Groups

We also posted a survey for Indigenous residents, and promoted it through Indigenous organizations, social media groups, and stakeholders. However, the survey did not receive sufficient responses to produce statistically valid results, and we are switching to an alternative engagement strategy focused on one-on-one interviews with knowledgeable stakeholders.

We will also conduct additional interviews with the Francophone community, and have conducted focus groups and interviews with stakeholders in the African Nova Scotian community. We will include the results of these engagements in a future What We Heard Report.

Calculations

All percentages in the document are calculated in terms of the number of people who answered each question — which is noted in the caption — not the total survey responses.



3. Who We Heard From

3.1. Demographics and Participation

Age

The public survey reached 480 people. Seventeen per cent of respondents were 34 years old or younger, and only 2% were 24 or younger. For ages 35 and up, respondents were evenly distributed amongst the remaining brackets. This survey therefore provides insights primarily on the preferences and perspectives of middle aged and older residents.

Gender

More than half of respondents are cis women (53%), while roughly a quarter (26%) are cis men. Six per cent are non-binary, gender-fluid, gender non-conforming, genderqueer, or Two-spirit, while 15% prefer not to say.

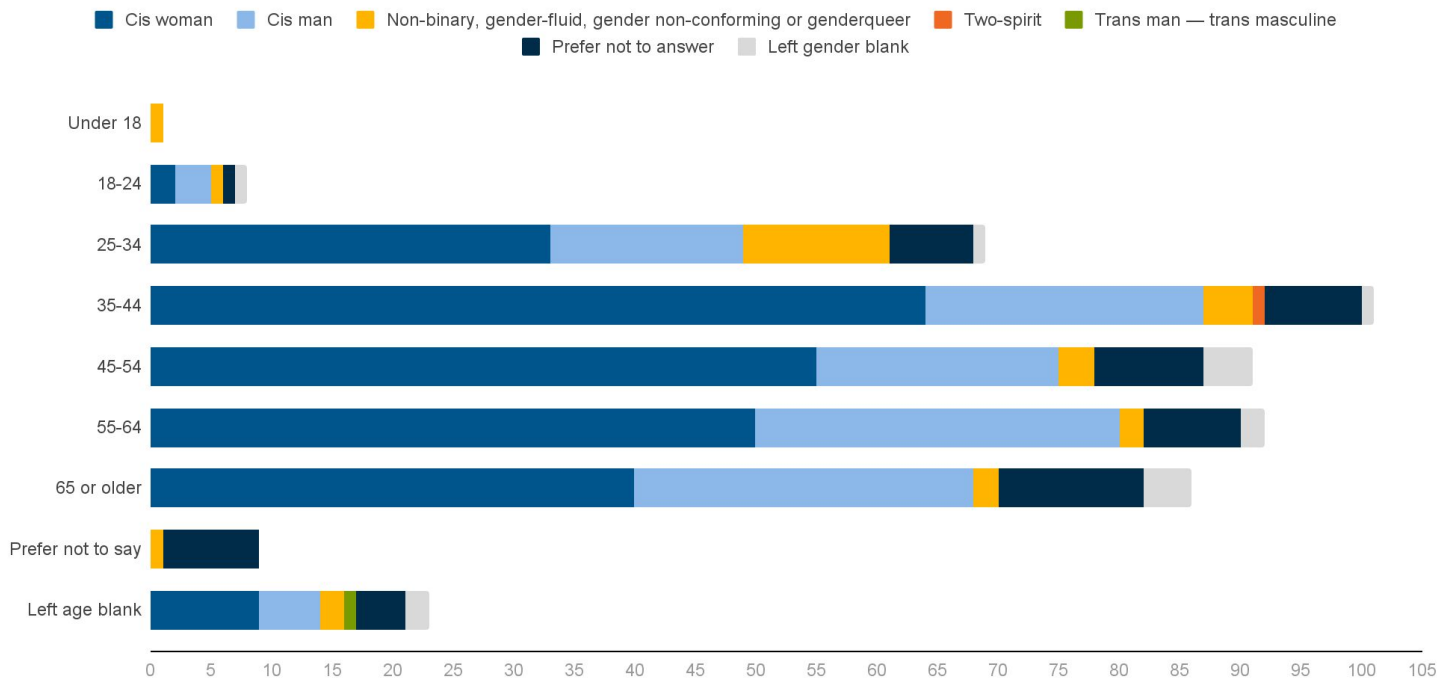


Figure 1. Ages and genders of respondents 457 gave their age (23 skipped) and 474 gave their gender identity (6 skipped).

3. Who we heard from

Geographic Location

Respondents included urban, suburban, and rural residents. Of the 288 respondents who gave their postal code, 41% live in the regional centre, including 28% from the Halifax peninsula, and 13% from Dartmouth inside the circumferential highway. Fifty nine per cent of respondents were from suburban or rural areas of HRM.

Figure 2a. Location of respondents, by postal code. Detail view of the HRM urban core.

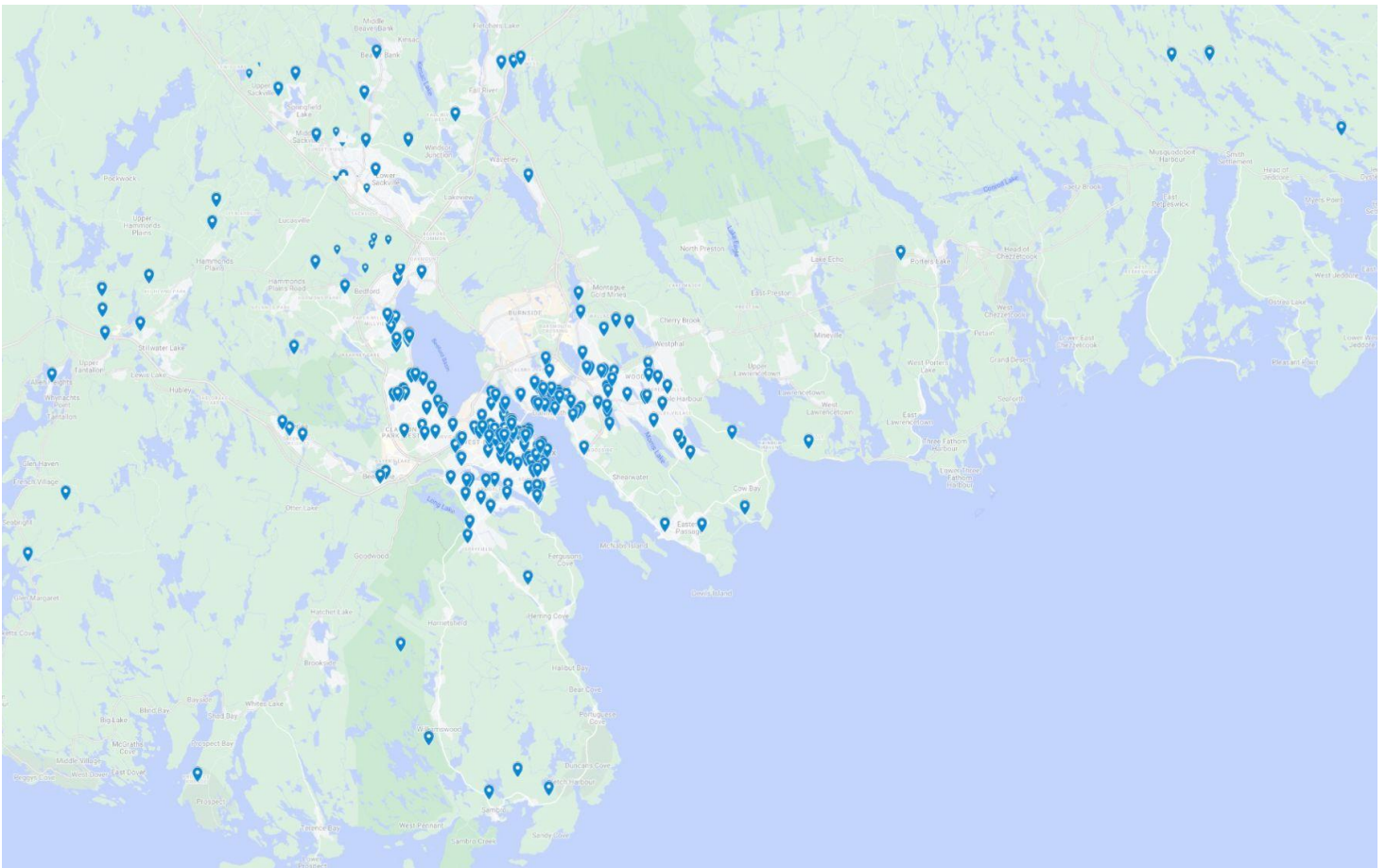
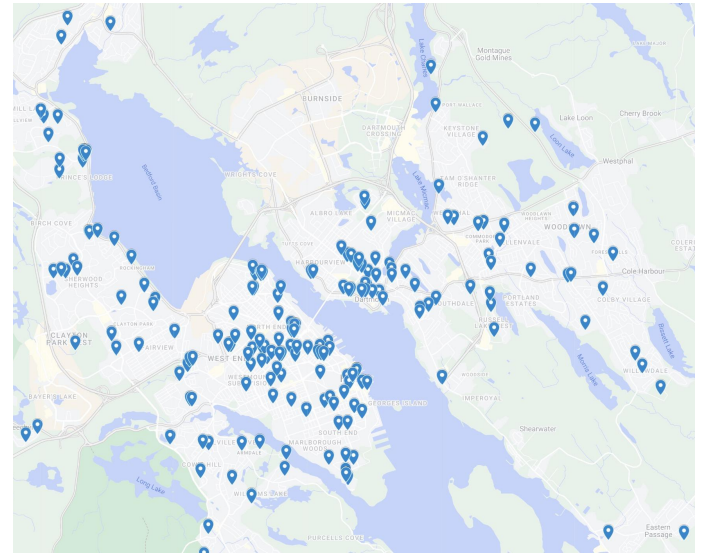


Figure 2b. Location of respondents, by postal code, in the Halifax Region. Markers indicate only the neighbourhood of the respondent, not the exact location.

4. What We Heard

4.1. Performing Arts

The first section of the survey focused on performing arts. Survey questions focused especially on live performance, such as music, theatre, dance, circus, and similar. The survey also included literary events, in which people read poetry or books on stage; and film, in which non-commercial organizations present independently produced films.

The Need for Venues

A central goal of this survey was to understand whether residents feel satisfied with current venues, and to what extent HRM should invest in venues. We therefore asked residents whether they agree with a series of statements on the adequacy of current venues, and the value of those venues to why they live here.

Responses indicated a strong desire for more venues in HRM: 92% agree or strongly agree that HRM should invest more in venues. Similarly, 91% agree or strongly agree that they “wish there were more performing arts events in the region,” and 66% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that “there is a good supply of performing arts venues in the region.”

92%

of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that HRM should invest more in venues.

66%

of survey respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that “there is a good supply of performing arts venues in the region”.

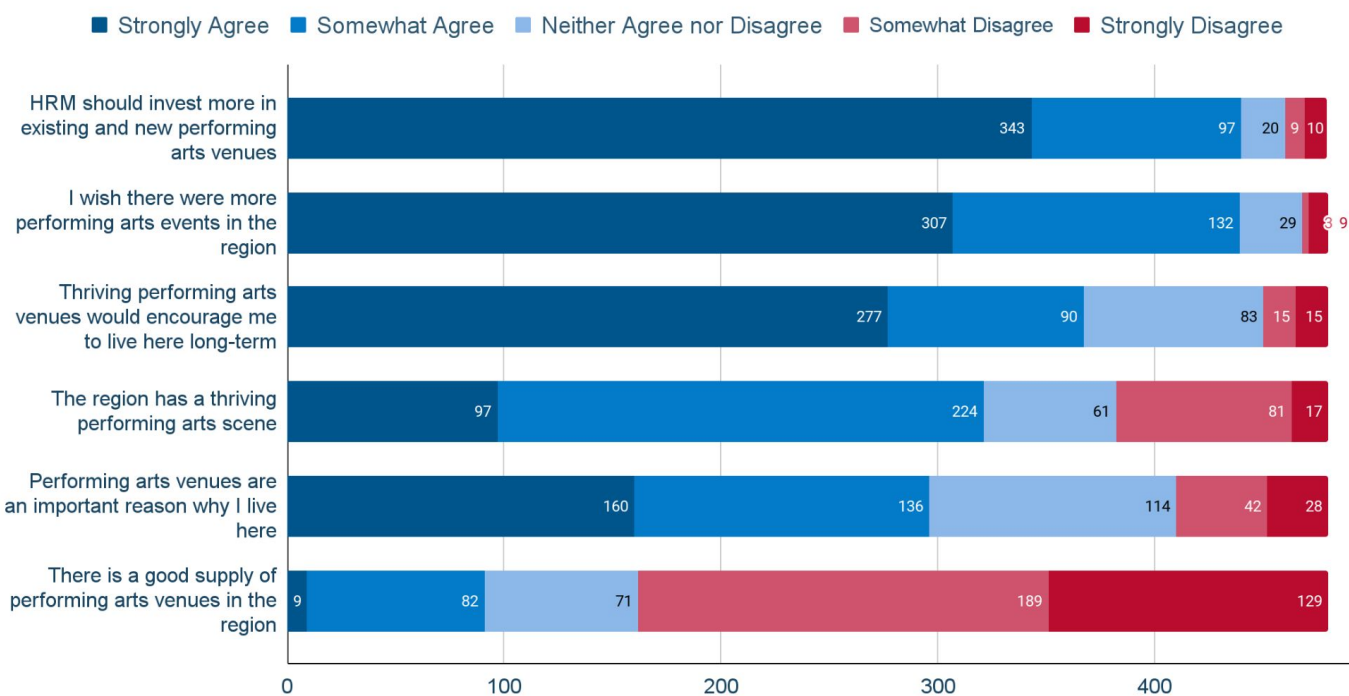


Figure 3. “How much do you agree with the following statements?” 480 responses.

4. What we heard

The responses also underline the value of venues in quality of life and for attracting residents: 62% agree or strongly agree that performing arts venues play an important role in why they live here. Despite the perceived lack of venues, 67% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the region has a thriving arts scene, though only 20% strongly agree.

Art Genre Preferences

We asked residents what types of performing arts they most enjoy, with the goal of better understanding what types of venues HRM should invest in. Live music was the most popular, followed closely by theatre. Dance and film were in third and fourth place, with similar levels of popularity. Circus was the least popular of the options we provided.

The most commonly written answers in the “other” category were Burlesque (11 responses), drag shows (4), choral music (2), musical theatre (2), and improv (2). Other individual responses included opera, ballet, buskers, sports, and “hands-on community-based activities.”

“We have the talent, creativity and expertise here in [HRM] to build an amazing cultural sector. But we are not given the financial support and venue infrastructure to thrive..”

— Survey respondent

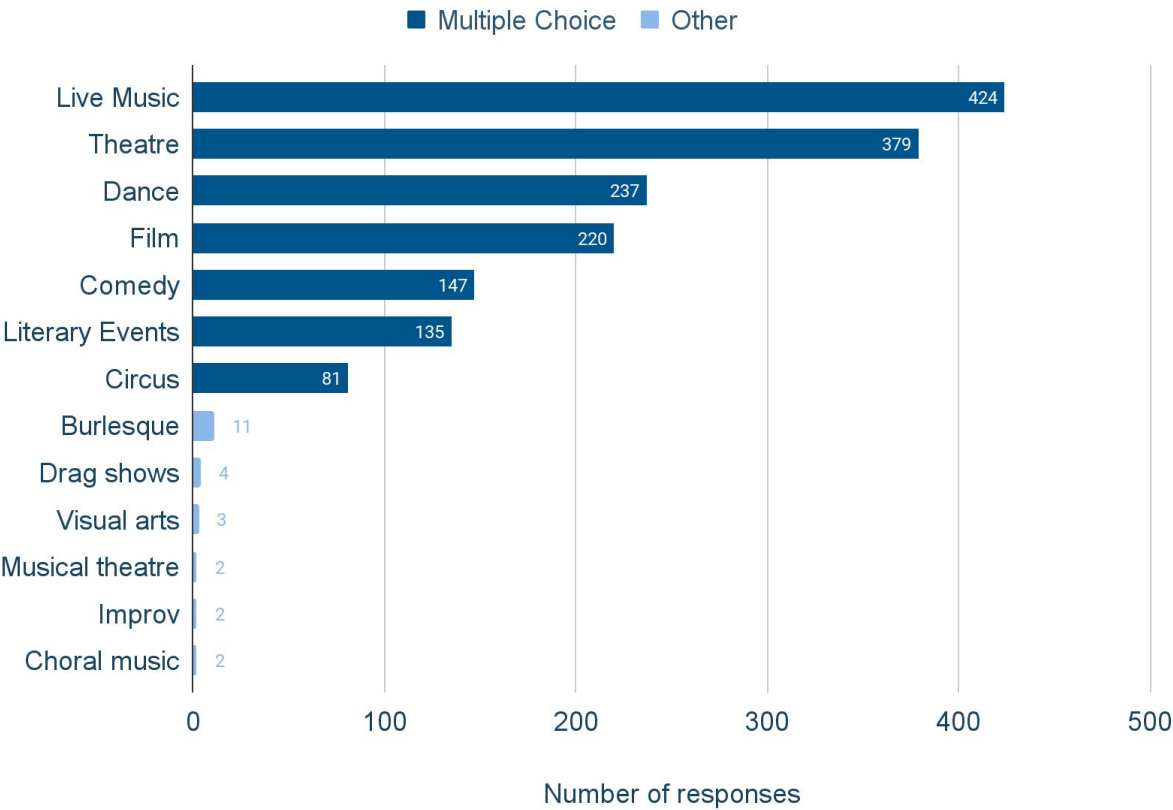


Figure 4. “What type of performing arts do you most enjoy?” Multiple answers allowed. 480 responses. Other responses were only included if mentioned by at least two people.

4. What we heard

When asked what types of events residents want to see more of, the most common answer was theatre, selected by 78% of respondents, followed closely by live music (77%), and independent film (62%). DJ nights were the least popular response, selected by only 11% of respondents, suggesting the audiences draw a clear distinction between musicians and DJs. Dance is also quite popular, with 53% of respondents requesting more.

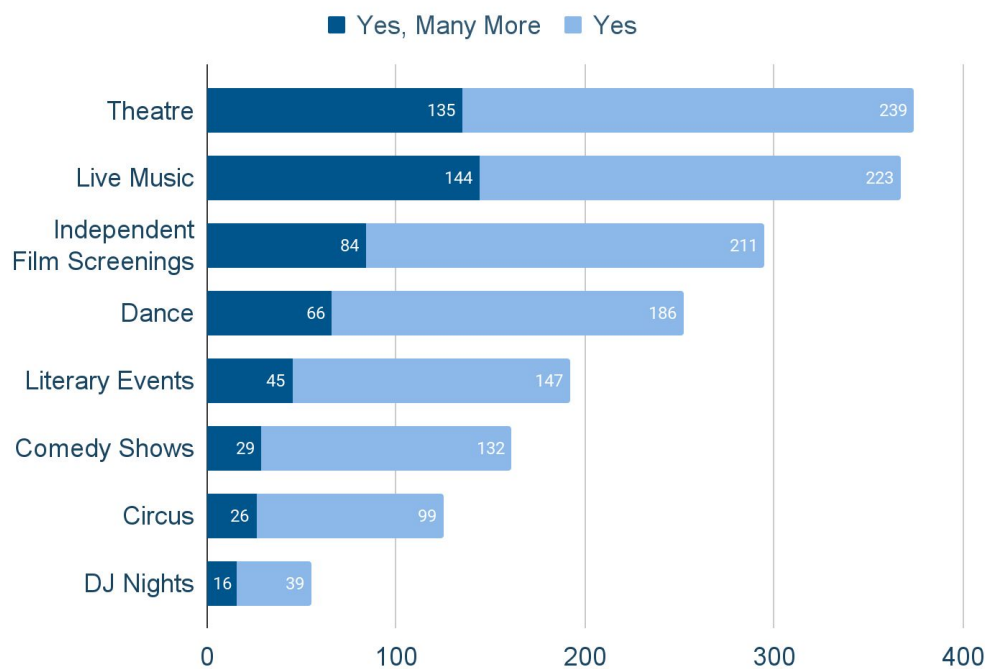


Figure 5. “Do you wish there were more of the following performing arts events?” 479 responses.

78%

of survey respondents reported that want to see more theatre.

30%

of survey respondents asked for “many more” live music shows.

“A vibrant cultural scene truly makes a city a place worth living.”

— Survey respondent

Music Subgenre Preferences

We asked residents which music genres they want to see performed more often. The motivation for this question is that some stakeholders in an earlier round of engagement expressed a concern that some music genres are not well served by HRM’s current venues, including jazz and hip hop.

Jazz and classical music were the most common answers selected in the survey, each chosen by 53% of respondents. Rock and pop were also popular, selected by 47% and 40% respectively. Hip hop was selected by 19% of respondents.

Respondents could also type their own responses in the “other” category; 134 chose to do so. The most common response was folk, mentioned by 12%. Metal and punk was among the least common responses, mentioned by 2% of respondents.

53%

of survey respondents reported that would like to see jazz and classical music more often.

12%

of survey respondents mentioned “Folk” as other musical subgenre they would like to see more in performing arts venues.

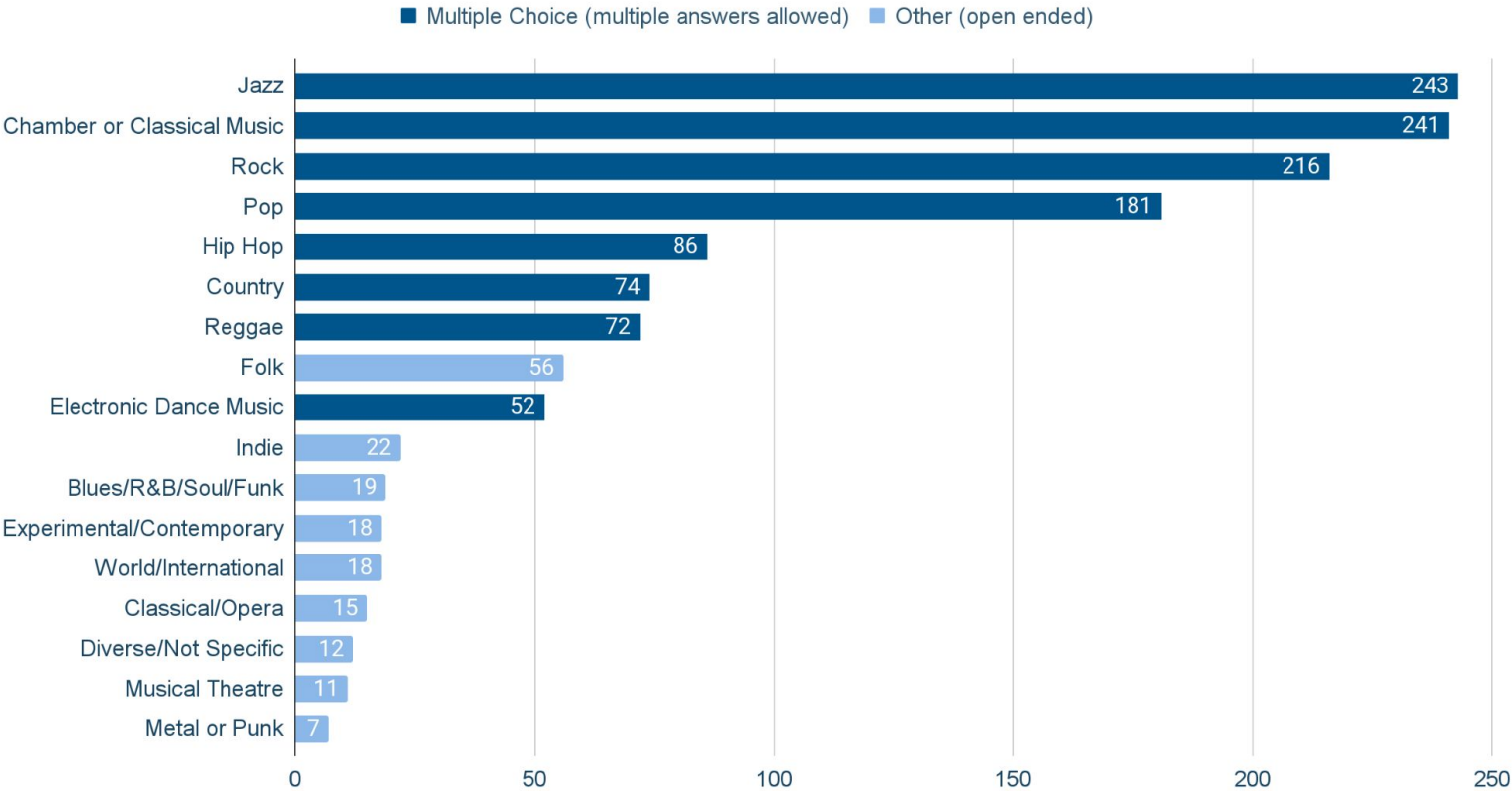


Figure 6. “Which musical subgenre(s) would you like to see more often in performing arts venues?” Multiple answers allowed. 458 responses.

Other Disciplines’ Subgenres

We also included an open-ended question about whether residents would like to see more performing arts shows in any other discipline's subgenres, so that respondents could highlight any gaps that may exist.

The most common request was musical theatre, mentioned 27 times, out of 198 respondents. The next most common was film (including “foreign films,” “independent films,” and “short films”) mentioned by 24. Ballet was requested by 23, and opera and burlesque were both mentioned by 13. Five requested improv comedy. Other responses were mentioned less than five times each.

Respondents expressed a desire for more performances that better reflect the diversity of the community, including Latin culture and Indigenous performances. Many want more shows by small, independent artists, and expressed concern that smaller artists struggle to access HRM’s venues. Some respondents requested less emphasis on “high brow” performances. Another common request was for more all-ages events and youth-led productions.

“We need more spaces in North End Halifax. We've lost the North Street Church, the Waiting Room, the Living Room, and the Company House.”

— Survey respondent

“I don’t care where the venue is but it has to have parking!”

— Survey respondent

Location Preferences

We asked residents where they would like there to be a greater number of performing arts venues. The most common responses were Downtown Halifax (61%) and Dartmouth (52%). That said, many respondents also expressed a desire for venues in suburban areas (40%), rural areas (25%), and their own neighbourhoods (33%). Respondents were allowed to choose multiple options.

In the open-ended “other” category, many respondents expressed a desire for more venues located in areas with more convenient parking. (The word “parking” was used in 14 out of 38 comments). Locations mentioned include Dartmouth Crossing, Main Street Dartmouth, Clayton Park, the Woodlawn area, and Sackville.

Two respondents mentioned putting venues in scenic locations, such as Sullivan’s Pond and Sir Sandford Fleming Park. One also highlighted the need to put venues in transit-accessible locations, noting that The Music Room is a beautiful space, but somewhat difficult to reach by transit.

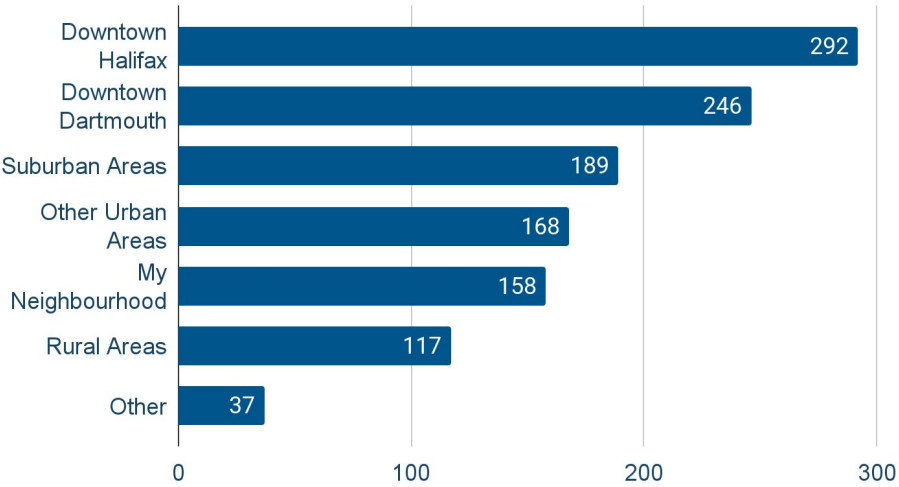


Figure 7. “Where in HRM would you like there to be more venues for performing arts?” Multiple answers allowed. 475 responses.

Venue Priorities

We asked what qualities respondents most value in performing arts venues. Here too respondents expressed a desire for more local venues. The most common response was a “small venue, close to home” (28%). The second most common, however, was “a large venue that can attract international shows” (19%). (Respondents could only choose one answer for this question). This suggests residents, like stakeholders, recognize that there is a need both for small community venues in one’s neighbourhood and for professional venues.

Twelve percent of respondents said venues should feel “new and modern,” while 8% said they should feel like they have “history.” This suggests there is a desire both for new venues and for older, historic venues.

The second most common answer that respondents selected was “Other.” Ten mentioned the need for affordability, both for residents and for performers. Six mentioned the need for a well-designed facility that does not “cut corners,” but that fully meets the needs of the arts. Three emphasized the need for physical accessibility. Three people mentioned the need for high-quality acoustics.

Many wrote that they desire versatile venues, including ones where people can sit or stand, or that can accommodate large and small events, and a wide range of artistic disciplines. Three respondents also mentioned the need to have a variety of separate venues—some large and small, some located downtown, and some in suburban and rural areas. Two people requested medium-size venues, while another person requested a large, 1,000 seat auditorium.

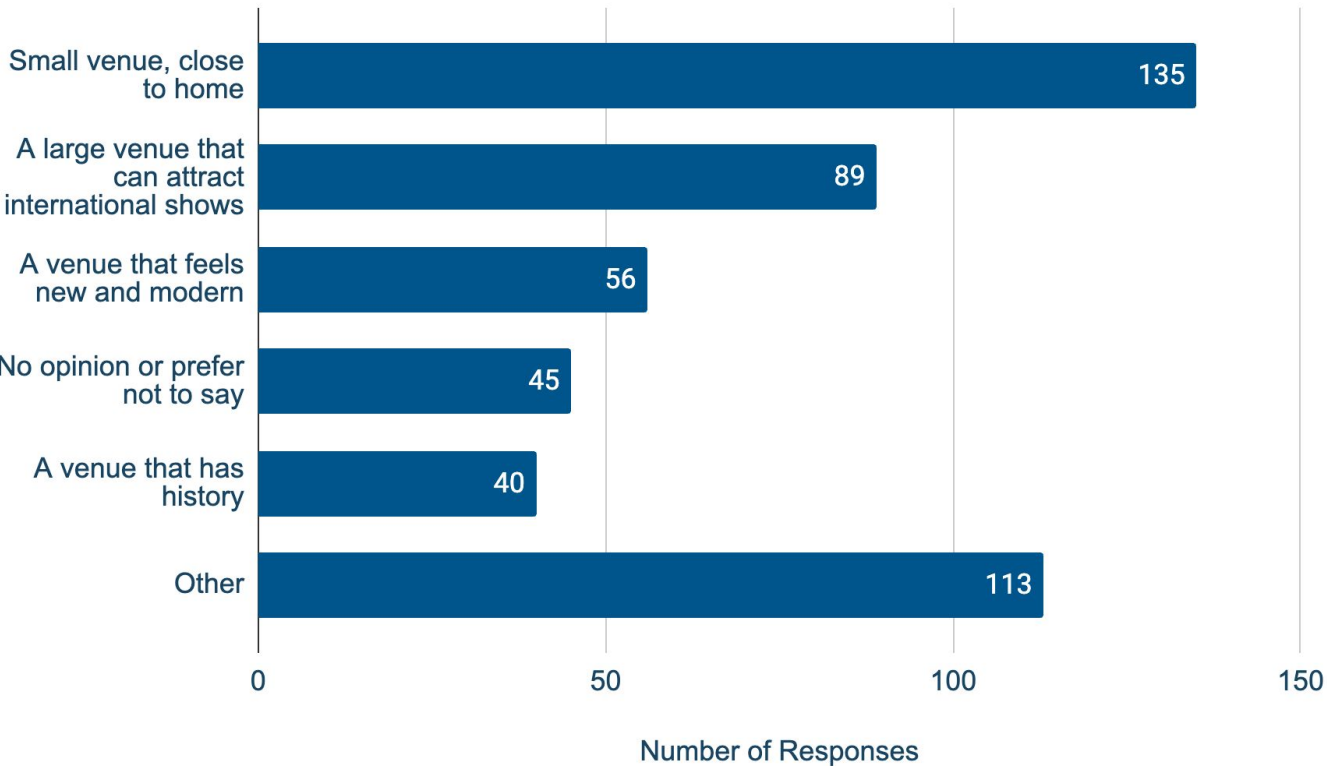


Figure 8. “What do you value most in a performing arts venue?” 477 responses.

Venue Attendance and Barriers

We asked residents how often they go to shows and whether there are barriers to them going out more often. Roughly half (51%) of residents say they go to events one to two times per month, and 28% report going three to five times (figure 9). Only 7% report attending zero shows per month. These numbers suggest that a large majority of residents attend venues regularly.

When asked why they do not attend shows more often, 45% of respondents cite the lack of venues, and 37% report there are too few events they want to see. These results suggest that new venues, hosting new shows, could attract a larger audience. However, the cost of tickets needs to be affordable: The most common reason given for not attending more shows was cost, cited by 57% of respondents. The location of events and transportation was selected by 38% and 21% of respondents respectively. This underlines the need venues located in a larger number of neighbourhoods, or the need to invest in higher quality transit options to reach venues.

Eighty-five residents also chose “Other” and expressed further barriers. The most common comments were related to personal issues, including time constraints (5%), family and childcare (3%), or individual circumstances (2%). Three per cent cited health and safety concerns, especially COVID-19.

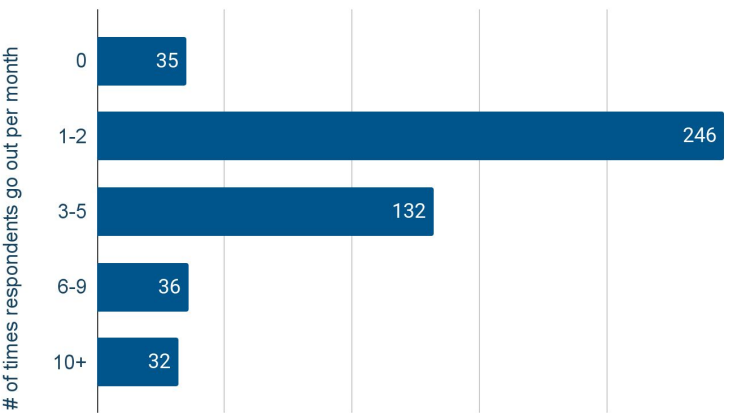


Figure 9. “Roughly how many times per month do you go to venues for performing arts events?” 480 responses.

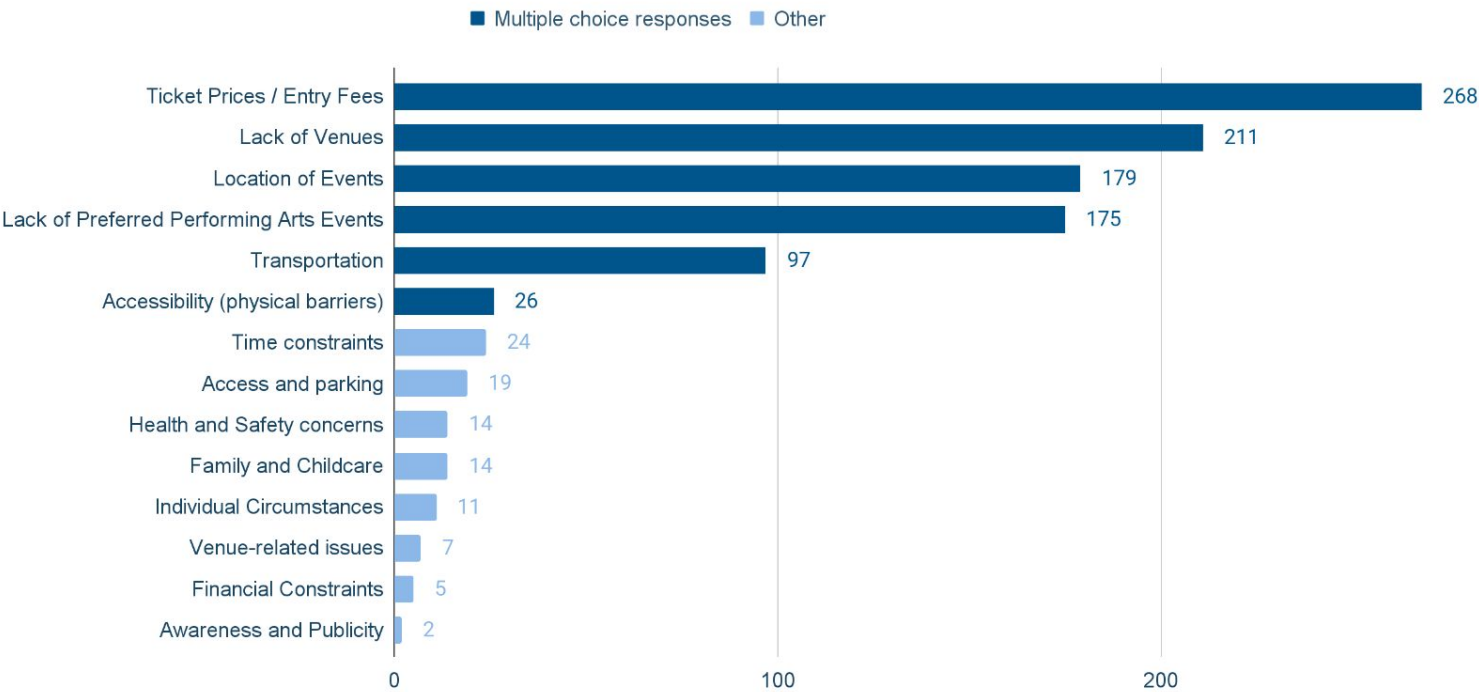


Figure 10. “Are there any reasons why you don’t go to performing arts venues more often?” 468 responses.

4. What we heard

Table 1. We asked residents to finish the sentence, “I would go to local performing arts venues more often if...” The following is a summary of the most common themes in how people responded:

Theme	Count	“I would go to local performing arts venues more often if...”
Cost and affordability	106	“They were ‘pay what you can’.” “Tickets were cheaper.” “Prices were reasonable.” “I could afford to, financially.”
Transportation	98	“If the buses ran better in the evenings.” “They were easier to access on foot or by public transit” “The performance was of interest to me and easy to get to.” “Good options to get there and back (parking, public transit, low congestion)”
Venue related and the number of venues	98	“There was a nice hall in town.” “We had a large quality venue for Broadway style performances.” “They were not in the ScotiaBank Centre. It’s a hockey rink. It is NOT a performing arts centre.” “More cooperative spaces such as Radstorm or what the Khyber used to be.” “There were more venues.” “THERE WERE ANY TO GO TO.”
Event variety	92	“There was more variety in the type of artist and experience, and more options in terms of times and venues.” “There were more opportunities to see large scale dance performances, opera, and regular screenings of Canadian film productions and shorts.” “A wider variety of artists were attracted to coming to perform in Halifax, and our own artists had more places to perform.”
Location	66	“they were in the Clayton Park (generally) area.” “if there were support for such events in rural areas.” “They were closer to home.” “They were outside of the downtown core at different times of the day.”
Parking	54	“If there was more parking or better transit” “HRM did a better job of parking. The downtown core is ridiculous and in particular for performers.” “Parking wasn’t such a fiasco - probably the worst in the world.”
Time related	41	“I had the time.” “I had more time and money.”
Artist quality and recognition	41	“The performance was of a good caliber and not some local or other talent with no talent.”
Inclusiveness	20	“There were queer safe spaces to go to.” “If we had a designated queer bar.” “More non alcoholic drink options.”

4. What we heard

We asked respondents to finish the sentence, ““I would go to local performing arts venues more often if...”, and summarize the responses in Table 1 (page 16). The most common responses cited the difficulty accessing venues due to ticket prices, venue location, inadequate transit, and the inconvenience of finding parking. The combined cost of transportation, parking, and tickets discourages people from attending shows.

Respondents also commented on the characteristics of performing arts shows they desire. Some requested a greater variety of events, including international performers, “world class dance,” or “big name rock bands.” And they requested venues that they would be excited to attend, with high quality acoustics (not a stadium), and that “felt like a special night out at a professional venue.”

Event Promotion

One challenge identified by stakeholders in a previous round of engagement is that it can be difficult to promote shows because there is no longer a single platform where all artists post events, and where residents can reliably go to find out about events. Stakeholders told us that The Coast, a local newspaper, once served this role, and later Facebook did. However, The Coast is no longer distributed in print, which has reduced its centrality, and Facebook has become less popular. We therefore asked residents about how difficult or easy it is to find out about shows, and what platforms they use to find out about them.

Seventy per cent of respondents say it is easy, somewhat easy, or very easy to find out about performing arts events. However, 30% find it difficult or very difficult to hear about shows.

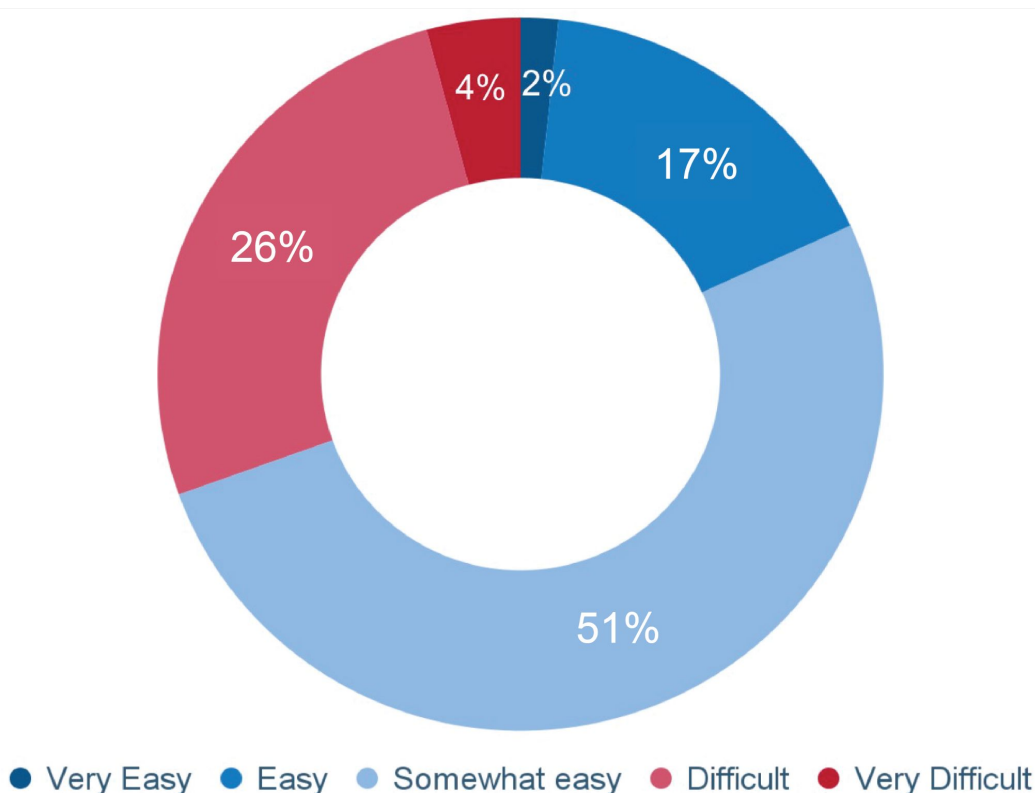


Figure 11. “How easy is it to find out about performing arts events?” 478 responses.

4. What we heard

The most common way respondents say they find out about shows is social media, specifically Facebook (73%) and Instagram (50%). This finding suggests Facebook remains an important tool for promoting events and should remain a priority for artists and promoters. However, it is important to note we promoted this survey, in part, through Facebook and Instagram.

Word of mouth (“my social network”) was the next most popular method, selected by 54%, followed by posters (48%). The primary news media platform respondents say they use is The Coast (39%). Only 12% of respondents selected Discover Halifax, HRM’s tourism website, which the municipality also uses to promote its events.

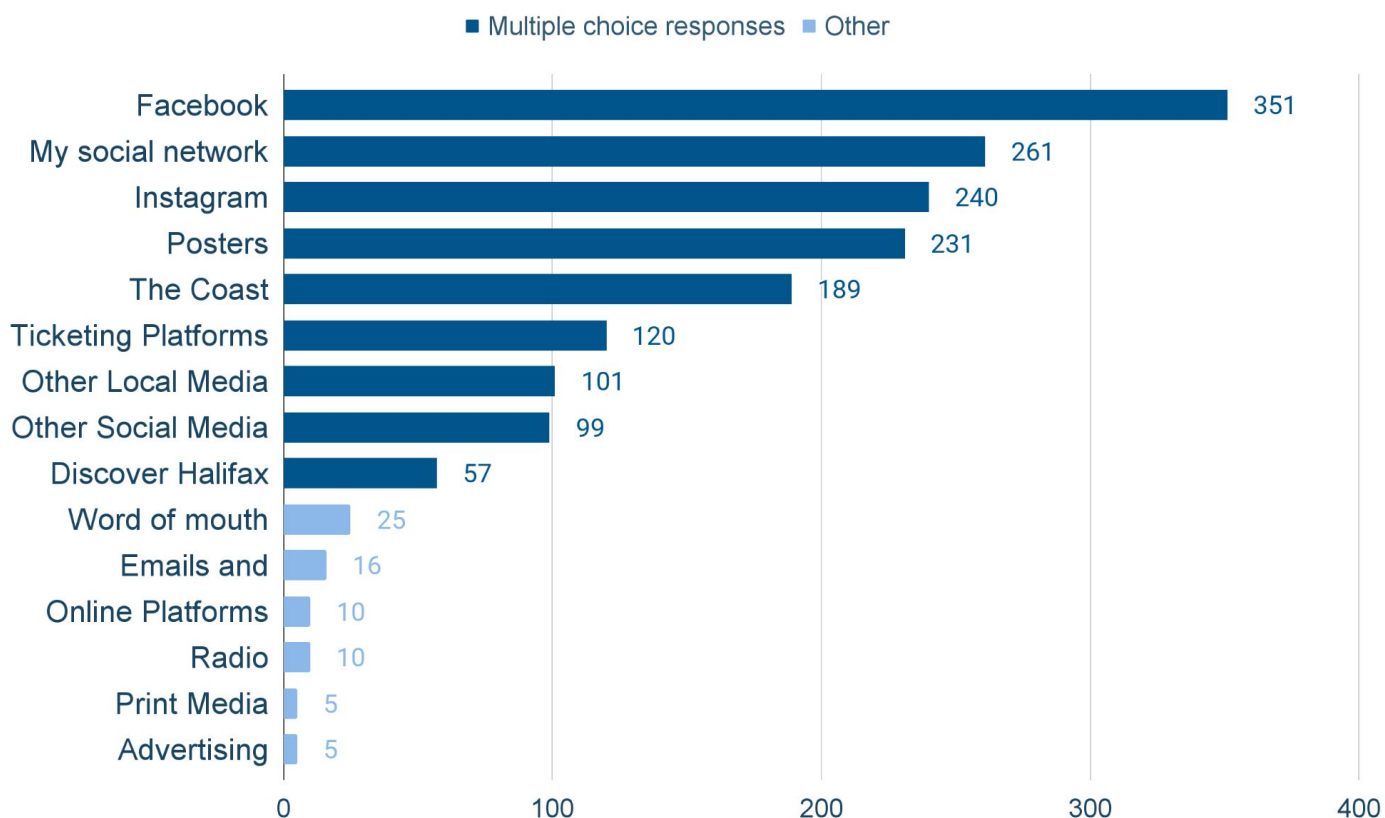


Figure 12. “How do find out about performing arts events?” Multiple answers allowed. 480 responses.

4.2. Visual Arts

The second part of the survey focused on venues for visual arts, including sculpture, painting, performance art, and more.

The Need for Visual Art Venues

Roughly half (51%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that “I would go see visual arts more often if there were more visual arts events or galleries.” This suggests that there is an unmet demand for art in the region. Only 10% of respondents disagree with this statement, while 34% are uncertain.

Sixty six per cent of respondents express a desire for more visual art events, and 63% agree or strongly agree that HRM should invest in galleries and other venues for visual arts. (See Figure 14). Only 11% agree there are already sufficient galleries in the region.

51%

Agree or strongly agree with the statement: “I would go see visual arts more often if there were more visual arts events or galleries.”

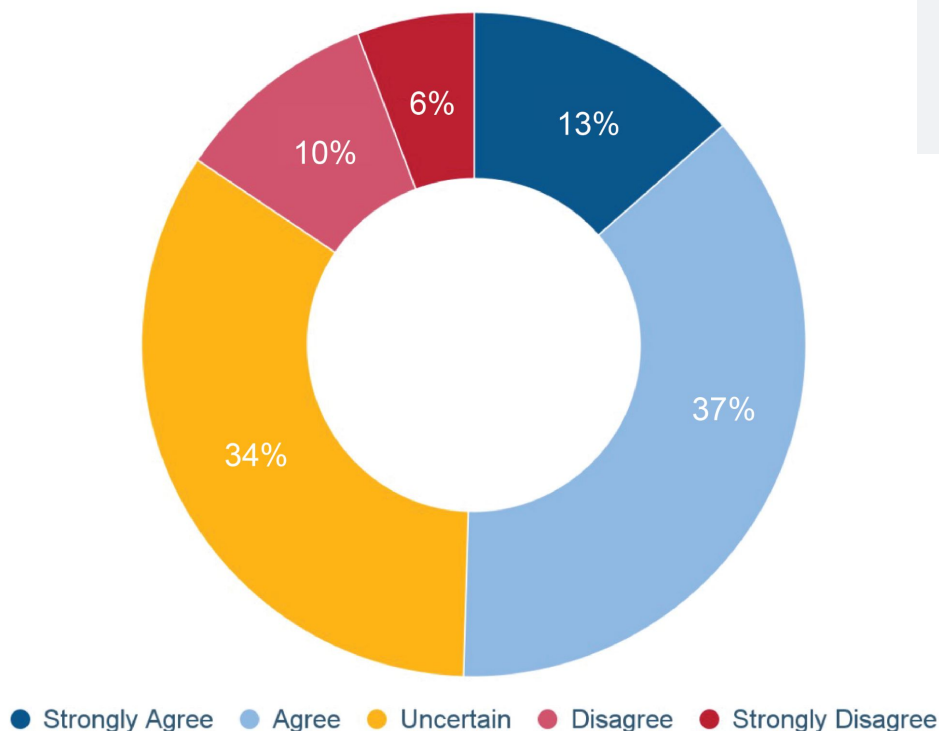


Figure 13. “Do you agree with the following statement: ‘I would go see visual arts more often if there were more visual arts events or galleries?’” 471 responses.

4. What we heard

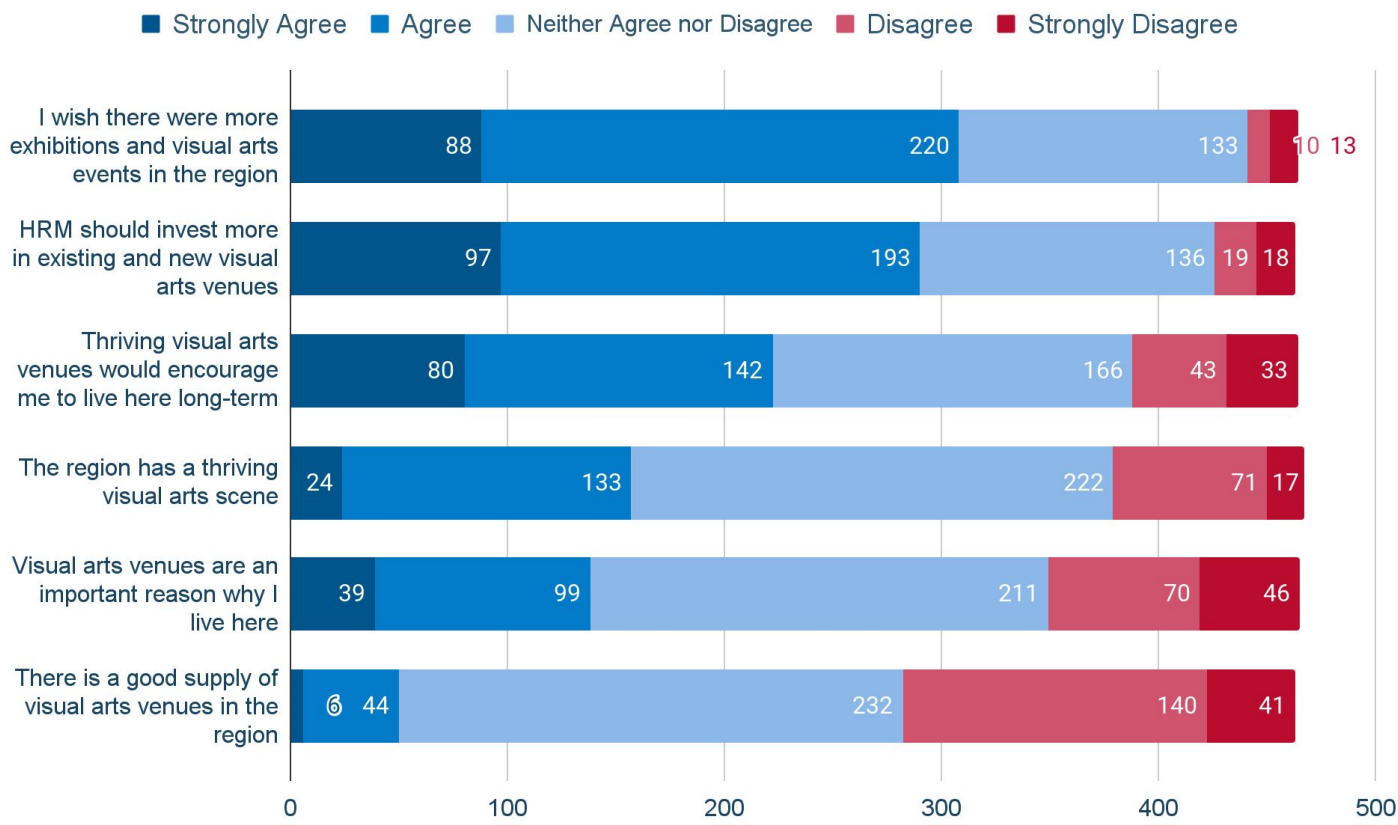


Figure 14. “Do you agree with the following statements?” 467 responses.

The survey findings suggest that visual arts play an important role in why people live in the Halifax region. Nearly half of respondents (48%) agree or strongly agree that: “Thriving visual arts venues would encourage me to live here long-term,” while 30% say visual arts play an important role in why they live here.

66%

Agree or strongly agree that: “I wish there were more exhibitions and visual arts events in the region.”

48%

of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that: “Thriving visual arts venues would encourage me to live here long-term.”

Location Preferences

Respondents would most like to see more visual arts events in the downtown areas, either in Halifax (57%) or Dartmouth (49%). Many also selected suburban areas (36%) or rural areas (26%), or their own neighbourhood (29%) as places where they would like to see more visual arts exhibits or events. (Respondents could choose more than one answer). This suggests that people most prioritize having arts events in the urban core, but also value art showings in suburban and rural areas.

In the comments section, eight respondents mentioned specific places where they would like galleries to be located. Three mentioned “places that aren’t stressful to get to” by car, including Bedford, Larry Uteck, Clayton Park, Lower Sackville, and Bayers Lake. Two identified the peninsula’s north end, and another suggested a travelling exhibit that could visit neighbourhoods.

Six suggested having more art, statues, and murals in public spaces, such as Sir Sandford Fleming Park. Others suggest showing art in public buildings, such as schools, recreation centres, hospitals, and libraries.

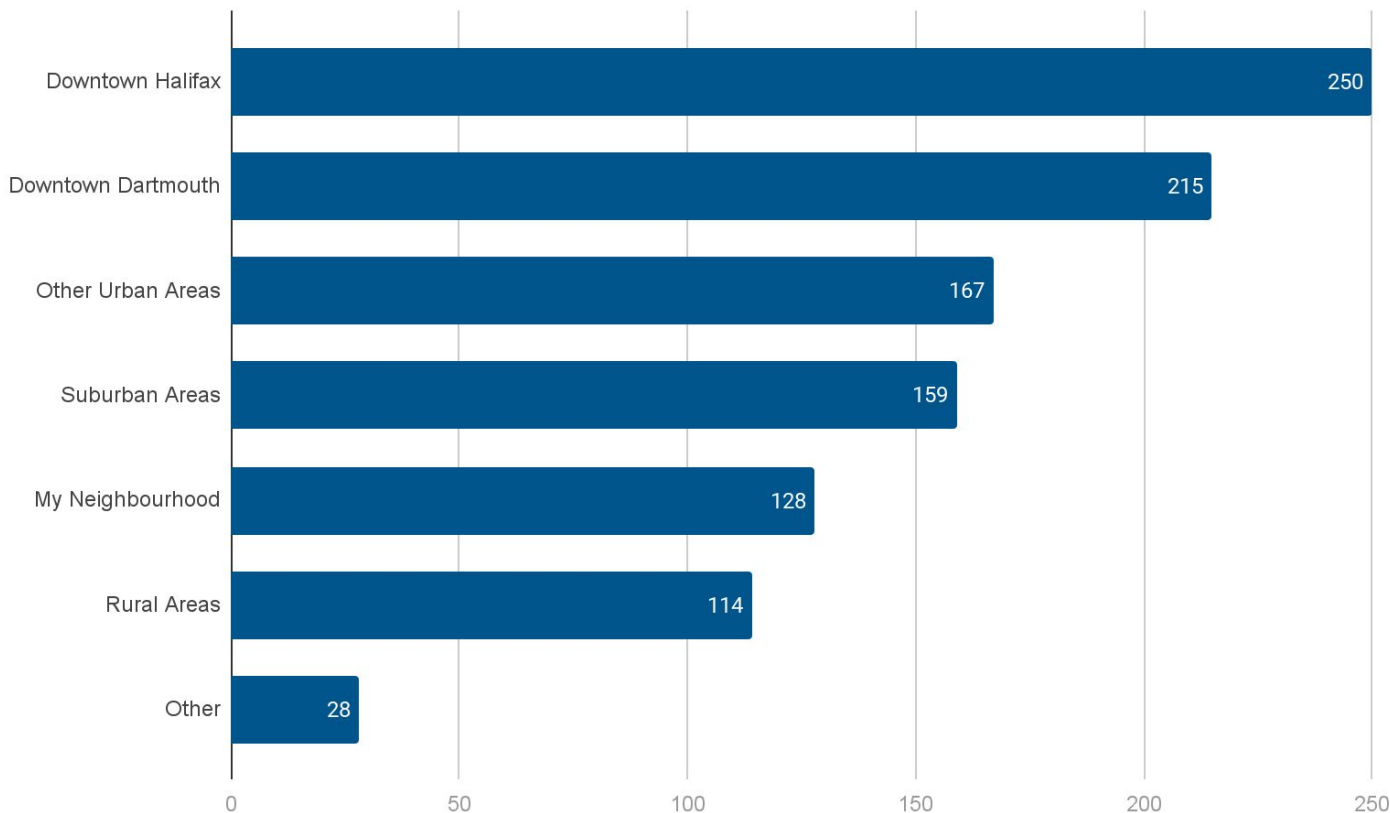


Figure 15. “Where in HRM would you like to see more visual arts exhibitions and events?” Multiple answers allowed. 442 responses.

4. What we heard

Attendance and Barriers to Attendance

Sixty per cent of respondents report going to see visual arts events at least once a month. Forty per cent say they go to these events zero times per month (Figure 16). The most common reason respondents cite for not going to galleries more often is a lack of the kinds of visual arts events they prefer (40%) (Figure 17). The location and lack of galleries were selected by 30% and 25% of respondents respectively.

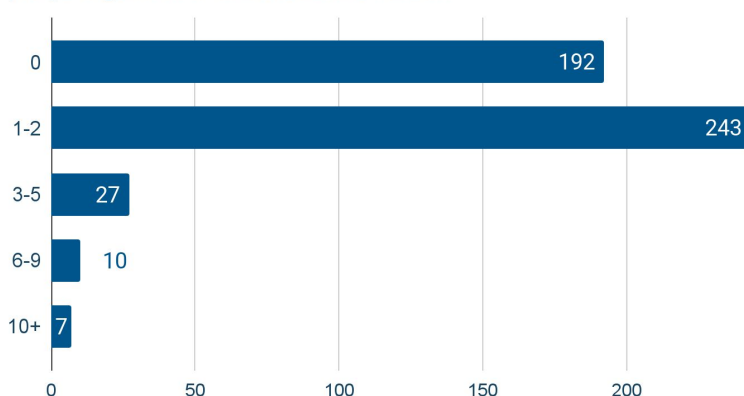


Figure 16. “Roughly how many times per month do you go to galleries or other visual art events?” 478 responses.

The cost of entry plays is also a barrier, selected by 23% of respondents. (Note that this only applies to The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia as other galleries do not charge admission). Accessibility is a barrier for 4% of respondents.

Additionally, 126 respondents selected “other” and provided further explanation. The most common explanations were that people prefer performing arts or are not interested in visual arts. Others expressed dissatisfaction with the art shown locally. For example, one respondent wrote, “arts in Halifax cater to tourists only.” Some wrote that new shows are “infrequent,” while others emphasized that: “The big shows and artists simply are not to be found in Halifax.”

Another common theme was the lack of publicity for events. As one person wrote, “you can’t go to shows you don’t know about!” Another highlighted the end of The Coast’s print edition as a problem, because “nothing has filled the gap for awareness of arts events.”

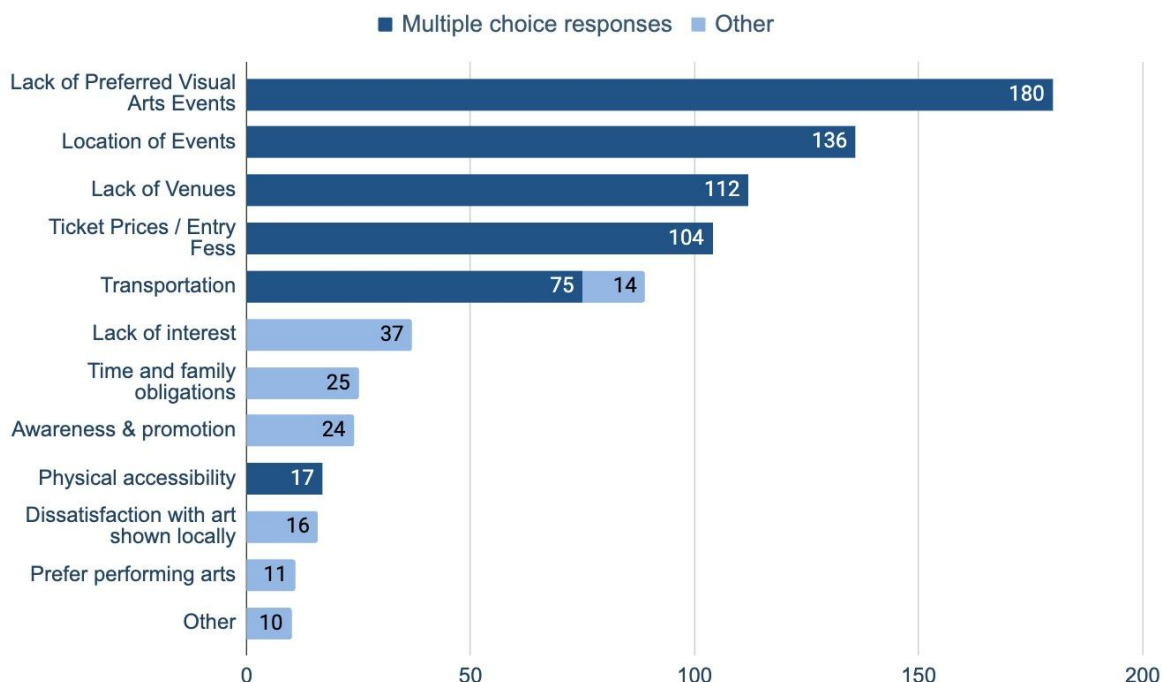


Figure 17. “Are there reasons why you don’t go to visual arts venues more often? Multiple Answers allowed. 452 responses.”

4. What we heard

In a separate question, we asked residents to finish the statement, “I would go see visual arts more often in the Halifax region if...” The most common topic in these open-ended responses related to the type of art people preferred, though there was substantial diversity in what they requested. Some asked for more contemporary, multimedia, and immersive work, while others asked for more traditional work. Respondents requested both international and local artists, and challenging and accessible work. These results suggest that it is important for galleries — either individually or collectively — to cater to a wide variety of tastes to reach the greatest number of people.

The second most common theme related to publicity. Respondents complained that local newspapers rarely highlight new exhibitions, and in general it can be difficult to learn what shows are coming. Respondents also emphasized the attributes of the galleries themselves, with many requesting more up-to-date facilities that could better showcase artwork, and more artist-run centres that could help local artists develop their career. Many emphasized that the region needs more galleries.

The following page provides a summary of the most common themes in how people responded.



Mentorship Program Group Show at the Craig Gallery in Dartmouth, both from 2023. Photo by Visual Arts Nova Scotia.

Table 2. We asked residents to finish the sentence, “I would go see visual arts more often if...” The following is a summary of the most common themes in how people responded.

Topic	Count	“I would go see visual arts more often in the Halifax region if...”
Art types/variety	105	“More international art.” “There was more contemporary art.” “They featured more emerging and up and coming artists.” “More multimedia/projection art exhibits were offered.” “...it was appropriate for the whole family. Nothing weird like displays of a green tennis shoe or a bottle of ketchup.”
Publicity	61	“The Herald would renew the arts notices.” “I knew about them and they were widely advertised and publicized!” “There were an accessible, comprehensive monthly listing of art/live arts events.”
Location	51	“If there were more venues for visual art in rural HRM.” “I didn't live an hour away.” “They were on my route when I walk about the city.” “I would love to see more visual art out in the community. Bus terminals, Spring Garden, places where people are. Galleries are important but art should be out in the community too.”
Transportation and parking	44	“There was more parking.” “Again parking.” “My area had public transportation.” “Access-a-bus was a better option and had more flexibility.” “Bus service at night were more accessible.”
Venue-related	42	“There was a better gallery to showcase the art.” “There were galleries that could show more modern art properly.” “They were paired with live music.” “There was a respected artist collective space that was showing work from contemporary visiting artists and local members” “The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is great but more than a yearly trip there feels excessive due to the amount of permanent collections. Having another venue of comparable size that has new collections every few months would be great.”
Affordability	36	“Reasonable ticket price.” “They were free.”
Time-related	18	“...I had more time.” “Events happen during the day.”
Accessibility and feeling welcome	17	“They were more inclusive and easier to get to than downtown Halifax.” “There were more easy to access public venues.”
Interest	15	“I cared.”

Visual Art Event Promotion

Respondents report using similar methods for finding out about visual arts events as for performing arts events. Facebook is the most popular method for finding out about visual arts

events (60%). Instagram is in third place (40%), while 48% rely on word of mouth (“my social network” and “Word of Mouth”). About one third (29%) rely on posters, and 29% also find out about events in The Coast.

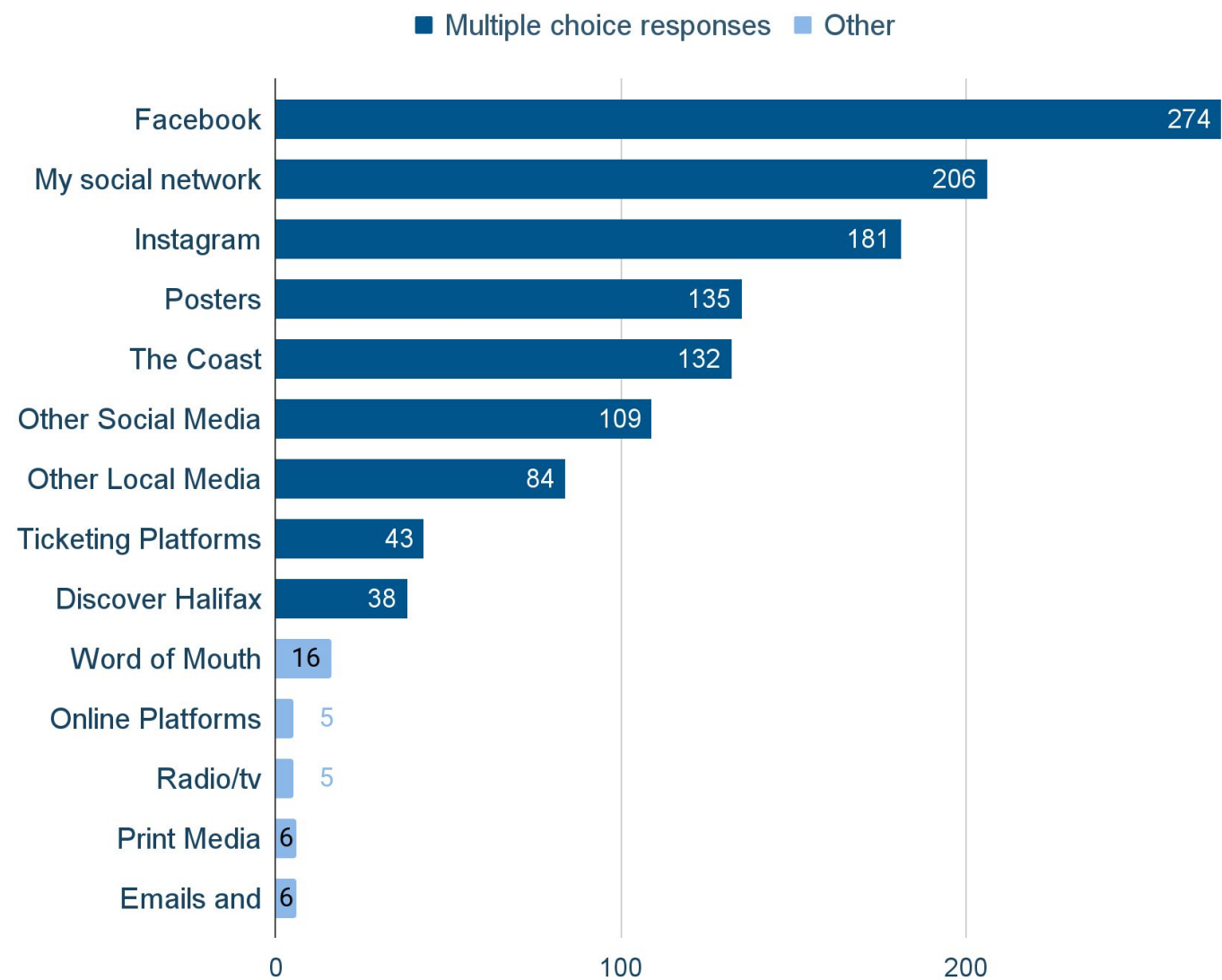


Figure 18. “How do you find out about visual arts exhibitions and events?” Multiple responses allowed. 458 responses.

4. What we heard

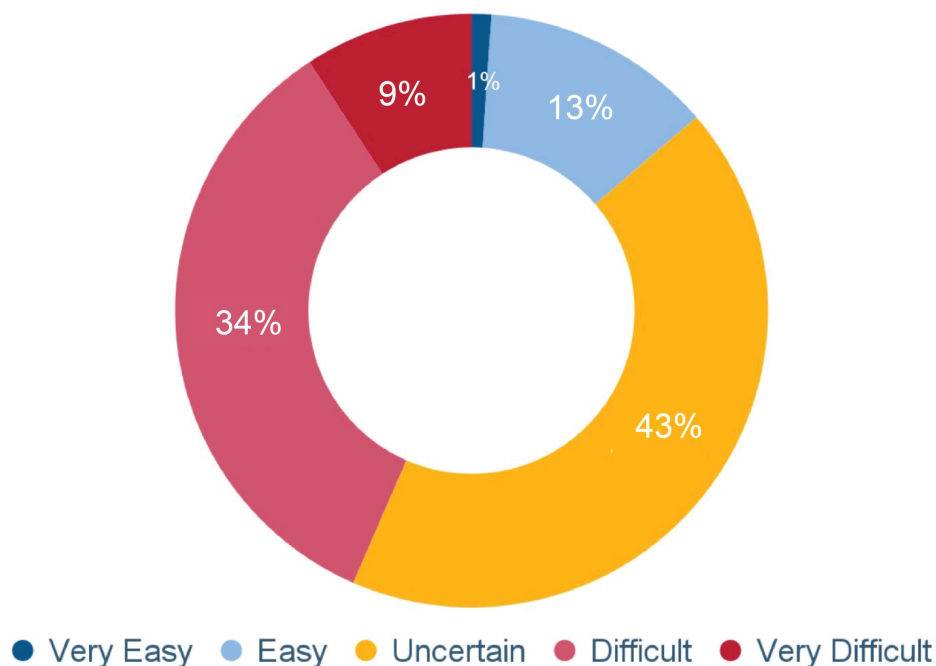
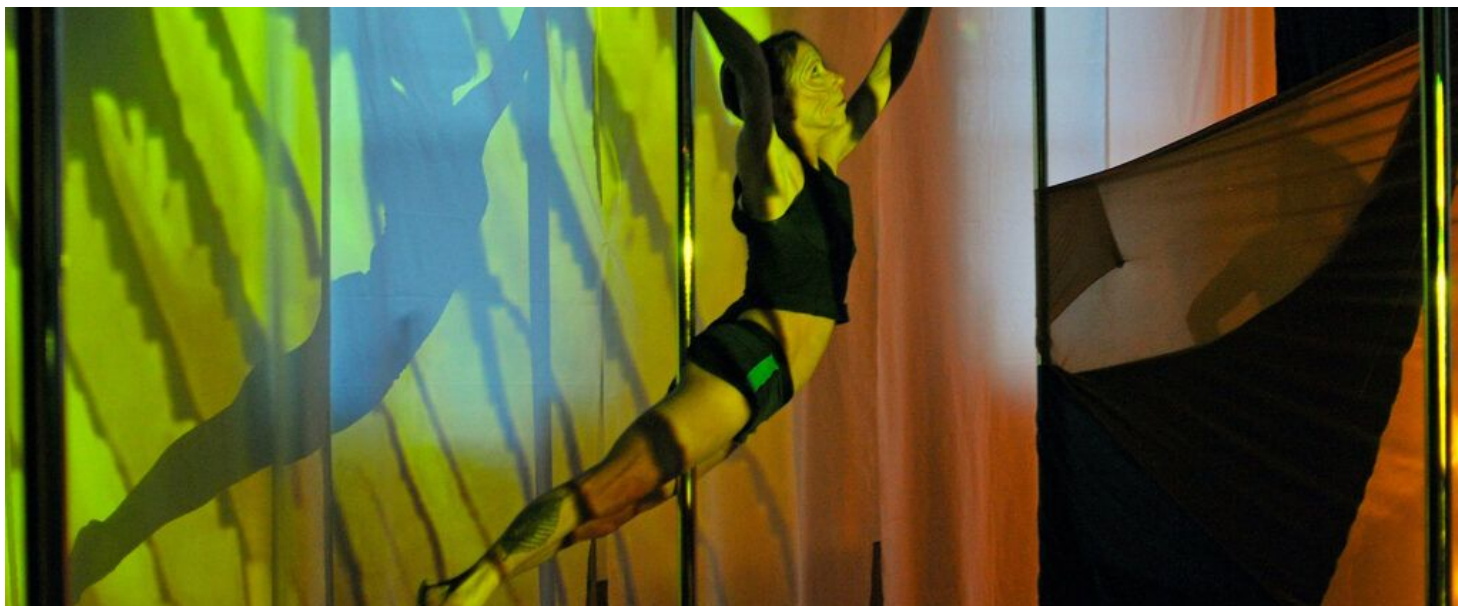


Figure 19. “How easy is it to find out about visual arts events or exhibits?” 466 responses.

Close to half (44%) of respondents said it is difficult or very difficult to find out about visual arts events or exhibits, while only 14% of respondents find it easy or very easy. In

comparison, only 30% of respondents find it difficult or very difficult to find out about performing arts events. This suggests more can be done to promote visual arts in the region.



A ‘living’ art gallery featuring pole dancers and lighting, created by Studio in Essence, Halifax, 2013. ([Jason Michael](#) / Flickr)

What Residents Value

The survey asked an open-ended question, “What do you value most in a visual arts venue?”

Common themes in the responses include:

Accessibility. The most common word used in responses was “access” or “accessible,” mentioned 74 times out of 317 responses. These responses highlighted the need for convenient transportation, a location near homes, and physical accessibility.

Parking and transportation. Ease of parking and efficient public transit are significant concerns for several respondents. Some mention that the current downtown locations pose challenges for those without cars, while others requested more galleries downtown to make other forms of transportation easier. The word “parking” was the second most common word in responses, used 27 times.

Variety. The third most common word was “variety,” mentioned 21 times. Respondents emphasized their desire for “openness to various cultures,” and “a regularly changing display of artists and styles.” One wrote, “I love the art gallery, but it doesn’t change very much.”

Community involvement. Several respondents emphasize the importance of the venue being a community space, open to everyone. Three respondents noted that galleries feel “elitist or exclusive,” and that people do not feel welcoming to people who are not “artsy” enough.

Contemporary programming. Some express a preference for venues that host innovative and contemporary exhibitions, staying current with artistic trends and movements.

Local artist support. Supporting local artists was a common theme. Respondents appreciate venues that showcase emerging and local talents.

Comfort and atmosphere. A comfortable, inviting environment, with good lighting, seating, and approachable staff, was mentioned by many. One person requests, “An open, beautiful, airy and accessible space.”

Affordability. Many would prefer if the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia was free, and if transportation cost less to reach galleries.

Interactive and multi-disciplinary spaces. Many respondents like venues that go beyond traditional art displays, incorporating interactive elements and hosting events beyond visual arts.

Distinct preferences

There were also some disagreement between certain comments.

Heritage vs. modernism. Some respondents emphasized the value of keeping galleries, like the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, in heritage buildings. Others, however, emphasized the need for “Truly modern spaces afford every type of artist to show or perform their works [...] The building itself should be a work of art.”

Art in public buildings vs. specialized spaces. Some respondents suggested putting art in schools or libraries (in a previous question). However, others argue against “visual arts in a space that was not built or designed for it.”

More galleries vs. investment in existing galleries. Some respondents noted gaps in the gallery ecosystem: “There is one big gallery, lots of tiny ones, and a few medium-sized, but the medium-sized ones are mostly university galleries and don’t feel accessible to the public.” Others, however, argued that there are sufficient galleries in HRM, but they need more funding: “You do not need MORE venues. You need a venue with vision and budget.”

4.3. Open Comments

Our final question offered participants an opportunity to write any additional comments of their choosing. Topics ranged widely. The most common theme was on whether HRM should invest more in arts venues, or whether other social issues should take precedence, mentioned by 45. The majority who commented on this subject supported greater funding. The second most common topic was the gaps in existing venues, mentioned by 42. Many requested more flexible, black-box theatres; better venues for dance; larger mid-sized venues for theatre; a large-scale performing arts centre, and more spaces for visual arts.

Thirty two respondents highlighted specific problems that can be fixed, such as Nova Scotia's restrictive liquor laws, which participants say make it difficult for young people to attend shows, and for new music venues to open.

Thirty three offered other practical suggestions, such as using available advertising space on transit to promote local arts events, and promoting art on Quinpool to strengthen that street's identity. Comments covered many other topics that cannot be easily summarized, but that will inform the final study.

The most common topics were related to Funding, venues needs or suggestions, the importance of the arts, problems with venues, and the quality of programming. To see the comments categorized by topic and number of times they appeared, refer to Page 30, A Selection of Open Comments.



The Soul Rebels perform at the Halifax Jazz Festival. ([A Disappearing Act](#) / Flickr)

5. Conclusion

The survey revealed strong public support for the arts, with 92% agreeing that HRM should invest in performing arts venues, and 62% agreeing it should invest in visual art venues. The vast majority (91%) of respondents want more performing arts events in the region, and 66% wish there were more visual arts events. (Note that these preferences are not necessarily in tension: The National Arts Centre in Ottawa includes both galleries and performing arts venues). Only 19% and 11% of respondents feel there are sufficient performing arts and visual arts venues, respectively.

Those who supported investments in the arts emphasized its role in maintaining quality of life, ensuring talented people stay here, and in growing the economy. Those who were against spending on arts venues expressed concern about rising taxes, and some asked that the municipality first prioritize finding homes for residents living in tents.

Performing Arts Priorities

The survey revealed that the highest priority performing arts for residents are live music, theatre, dance, and film. These findings are valuable because in previous rounds of engagement, stakeholders revealed that live music venues are struggling, that the region has very few adequate venues for theatre and almost no venues with proper flooring for dance, and that there is no cinema for showing independent films. The findings also reveal that jazz is highly popular, despite the lack of a venue focused on jazz in the region.

Visual Arts Priorities

For the visual arts, the findings suggest that there is substantial diversity in what residents want. Many request contemporary, challenging artwork, while others request works that feel more accessible for kids and people who are not “artsy.” Some want big, international artists, while others want a greater focus on local artists. This suggests there is a need for a diversity of gallery types, and a gallery large enough to host a diversity of artwork. In open comments, there was also a strong sense that the current Art Gallery of Nova Scotia building is inadequate: no one described it as sufficient in its present form.

Location of Venues

Participants were divided on where venues should be located. The majority of respondents requested venues in Downtown Halifax and Dartmouth, in part so that it is easier to reach them by foot and transit, and in part because they can have a greater impact on the arts if located near other art facilities. However, other respondents expressed frustration with the difficulty of driving downtown and finding parking, and requested venues in suburban or rural areas. Parking was one of the most common issues mentioned.

Overall, the survey underlines the central importance of the arts in quality of life. Roughly three quarters of respondents say that thriving performing arts venues would encourage them to live here long term, while half say the same of visual arts venues.

A Selection of Open Comments

Topic	Count	Do you have any final comments or thoughts to share with us?
Funding	45	“The cost of renting a venue is often a barrier to small performing arts groups, especially community groups.” “Would love to see more investments in venues for music and theatre in particular. Halifax has a vibrant arts community and I think it could attract more visitors as well.” “It's so critically important to help the local arts scene survive (arts sector is suffering since lockdown): ensure Bus Stop, Wonder'neath, Khyber, etc [...] have the operating support they need!!!” “In addition to nonprofit venues, the Halifax region should also support local bars and restaurants Who support live music.” “While important, arts venues are not a necessity in current economic and social times.” “I don't understand why the city is considering the use of public funds to maybe build a new place for pictures to hang or a piano player to play. People are dying in tents.” “For the love of god, we are a real city with artists trying desperately to stay here. We need to foster the arts or not only will we lose all the artists who currently live here. [...] I have had dozens of friends move to other cities because of the abysmal arts support here.” “I travel to other places, like Ontario, for access to performing arts. I would like to see Halifax be a destination for the same.” “Halifax has become a surprisingly expensive city, and getting smaller affordable venues for performers is essential. Having larger visual arts spaces with more turnover would benefit our communities as well.” “This city is at a crucial tipping point culturally. There are no places for young local bands to play (and you just knocked down the Pavilion!) or go to. The liquor laws remain ridiculous and keep kids from seeing their favourite artists. There are no more arts reporters. Artists are being priced out of the city. [...] If you don't invest in this asap, this will be a condo town full of finance dorks and martini bars.”

Topic	Count	Do you have any final comments or thoughts to share with us?
Venues Needs or Suggestions	42	“Halifax lacks a real hall, downtown, that seats 1000-1500 to house Symphony Nova Scotia and to host bigger visiting acts.” “The province is trying to double its population by 2030 [...] If we invite this many people to come and to LIVE here, we must create new affordable spaces for the arts... which makes urban life worth living.” “Arts has been squeezed out for so long - venues closed - renovicted, NIMBYism, priced out of thriving neighbourhoods.” “Halifax has grown tremendously in the last decade. Yet from a performing arts perspective it might as well be 1973.” “There needs to be a two-pronged Theatre Venues initiative: More small theatres (like Bus Stop) to encourage emerging and marginalized artist; and a 2400 Seat Road House on the peninsula (Don't even think about Bedford or Sackville).” “I'd love to see a performing arts hall similar to the Cohn, but not attached to Dalhousie.” “We need more black box options in the mid-range size especially.”
Importance of the arts	41	“A vibrant cultural scene truly makes a city a place worth living.” “Visual arts and music are central to my mental health.” “Performing arts creates a vibrant community and economic opportunities for HRM” “More support for the arts creates stronger communities and better citizens!” “We have the talent, creativity and expertise here in Halifax to build an amazing cultural sector. But we are not given the financial support and venue infrastructure to thrive.” “More arts is good.
Problems	32	“The 24 hour noise bylaw is needlessly punitive to local bands who need to practice [...] There are many bands who have simply stopped playing due to a lack of place to practice regularly.” “Nova Scotia's antiquated liquor laws are a barrier. [...] Allow parents to bring their kids to licensed events and more young parents would attend while also providing an incubator to the arts for their kids...” “The outdated provincial liquor laws have made it nearly impossible to open sustainable small music venues. It's totally insane that you need a kitchen in order to serve beer” [for all-ages licenses]. “Too many venues in this city are watered-down or affected by cost-cutting in the design phase (Spatz Theatre, Light House Arts Centre).”

Topic	Count	Do you have any final comments or thoughts to share with us?
Problems (continued)		"I'm skeptical about this. We've been engaged in consultations about space for 15 years with really nothing but the abject misfire of Culture Link." "HRM's Discover Halifax is a decent site but when I submitted my June show 2023 at Bella Rose, it was never posted (that I saw)." "Venues punish and charge artists to play, there is no respect for loading/unloading gear, and the 'noise bylaw' gives police far too much power to shut down a band practice." "Please do not make it so difficult to host live events in this city. The amount of red tape for a festival is crazy." "The visual arts are often neglected compared to music."
Suggestions	33	"Now that transit ads are almost a thing of the past, the previous ad space could be given to local artists." "Given the probability that many of the city's downtown churches are likely to close in the next decade, a survey should be done to decide whether one or more of them should be supported in their role as concert venues." "I strongly believe HRM should adopt an arts and crafts purchasing policy, [...] and adopt an artist-in-residence program." "HRM should establish an advisory board on the Arts." "I'd also love there to be affordable office spaces for artists." "I'd love to see a focus on improving the Quinpool area as a hub for arts and culture - it is lacking an identity and there is a need."
Programming	14	"More burlesque and more funding for underrepresented organizers self-funding shows!!" "More free outdoor music shows like the parade square." "I would also like to see more indigenous work included in visual arts shows and theatre." "I like Indigenous and...other cultures and countries' events and festivals."

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