



Halifax Performing & Visual Arts Venues Study

Appendix A: Stakeholder What We Heard Report

July 2024

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Appendix A

This appendix summarizes stakeholder feedback. As we discuss in Section 1.2 of the main study, we identified 128 core stakeholder groups who work in visual and performing arts. We conducted 18 interviews and seven focus group sessions with these stakeholders. We also sent them three surveys: one for gallery owners and operators (16 responses), one for performing arts venue owners and operators (15 responses), and one for users of these facilities (24 responses).

In addition, we identified 61 additional stakeholders in the African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, and Francophone communities who work in the arts. We conducted two focus groups with African Nova Scotian residents, six interviews with Indigenous stakeholders, and three interviews with Francophone stakeholders.

We spoke to stakeholders on a wide range of topics, including but not limited to: gaps in current venues, their venue needs, challenges managing an arts group or venue in the region, and much more.



Photo of HRM band, Krasnogorsk. Used with permission.
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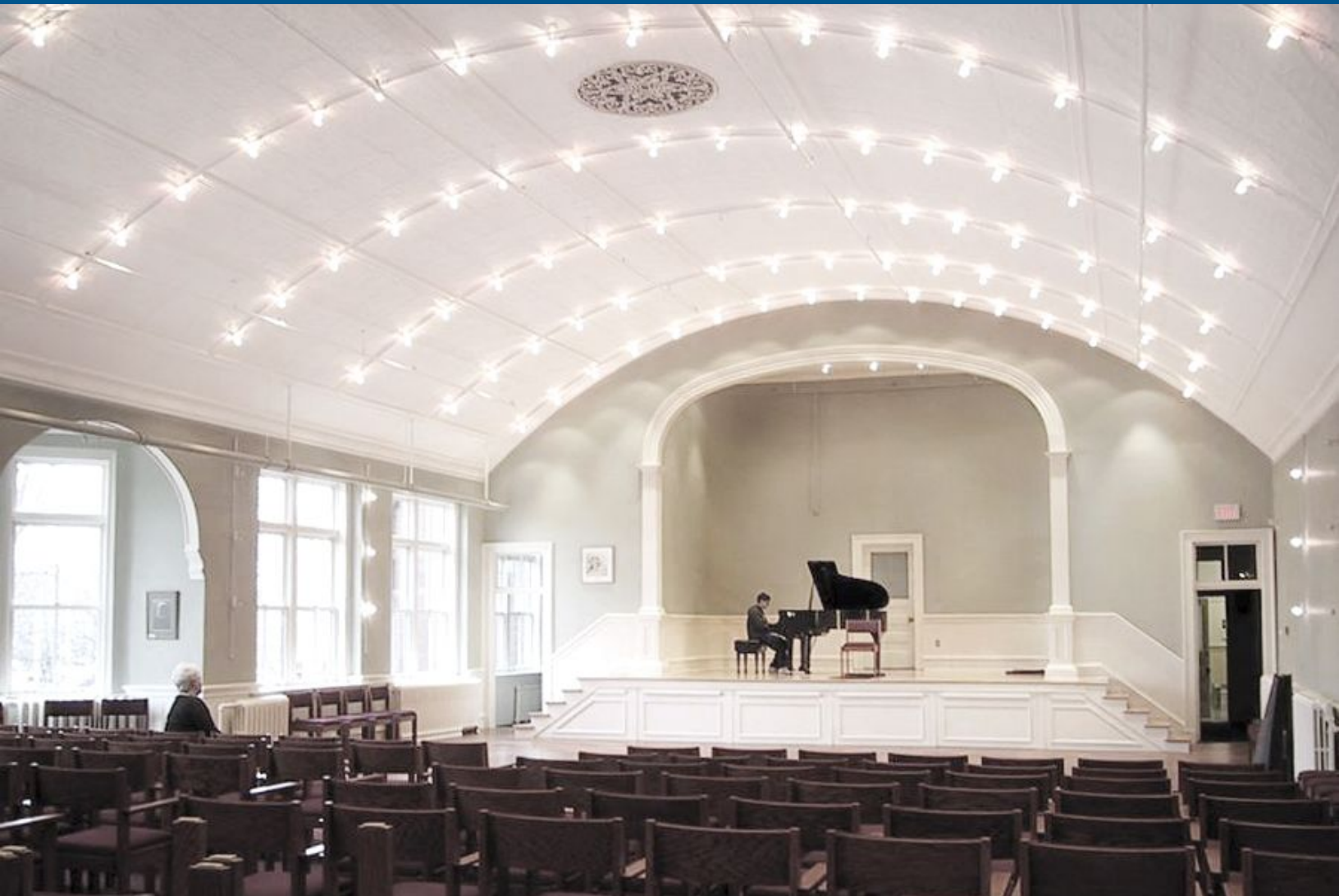
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Part 1. Performing arts venues



1. Scale of Need for Performing Arts Venues

One of the most common messages we heard is that the lack of venues in the Halifax region has reached a crisis level.

“That's the number one thing I hear is: we have no venues.”

— Festival organizer

“There's a void.”

— Association representative

“We need to start booking places a year and two years and three years in advance. Because if we're not fast enough, we can't get the spaces.”

— Performance group representative

Seventy six per cent of stakeholder survey respondents indicated that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the statement that “HRM venues meet all of our needs for most of our events.” Only 4% selected “agree,” and no respondents selected “strongly agree.”

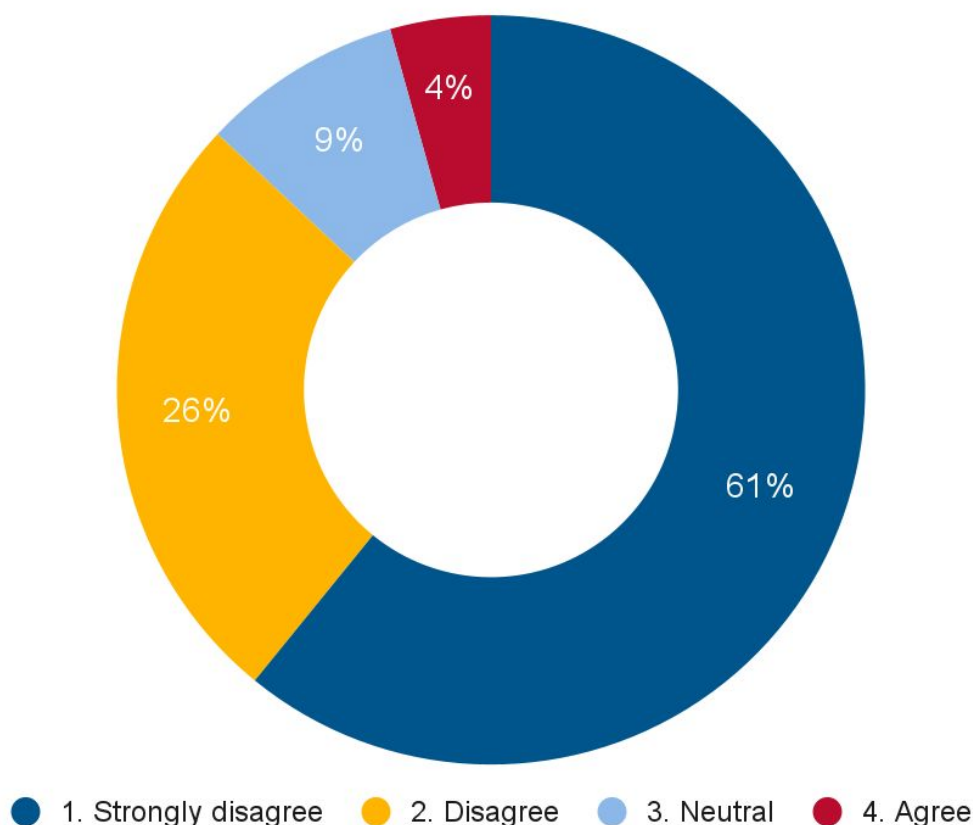


Figure 1. Responses to the statement: “HRM venues meet all of our needs for most of our events.” (From the stakeholder survey, 22 respondents)

1. Scale of need for performing arts venues

A number of interview and focus group participants expressed that the regional centre of Halifax used to have a vibrant arts scene with many venues; however, many venues have closed due to rising rents, the pandemic, and redevelopment. HRM has closed some of its own venues due to excessive retrofitting costs or other issues, such as the Turret Arts Centre and the Pavillion. Meanwhile, proposals for new venues have largely not materialized, in part due to a lack of government support, including a proposal to transform the former Bloomfield High School into an arts and culture space, and The Legacy Arts Centre, an effort by a group of local arts organizations to create a large venue that could meet their diverse needs.

Participants expressed the perception that there is less of a night life in the regional centre than there used to be: “15 years ago, all of us wouldn't even be available for this call, because we'd be at an art opening or an art party or a film release or whatever.”

The Light House Arts Centre is one new venue that has been built in recent years. Participants expressed it did not address many of the most urgent needs of the arts community. (See Appendix B, Section 5). The municipality's population has grown substantially over the last decade, but the number of venues has decreased. A number of stakeholders expressed worry that if the city does not, in the words of one, “put some venues downtown... people will have nowhere to go, and they won't stay here.”

The disconnect between population growth and venue decline is evidenced in the amount of competition there is for venue rentals. The 2009 Legacy Centre Feasibility Study describes the Bus Stop Theatre as easy to book within a few weeks, because it was not heavily used.¹ In 2023, the Bus Stop Theatre was so in demand, it had refused 200 booking requests by July. According to a Bus Stop Theatre representative, many more people would also like to book the space, but have stopped trying.

A consequence of this “venue void”—in the words of one stakeholder—is that the city struggles to maintain an ecosystem of technicians, specialists, and artists. It is difficult for young people to start new bands because there is no youth venue. Some genres—such as dance and theatre—often have access to no adequate venue for their needs.

Participants expressed that HRM will need to act decisively to reverse these trends, and to ensure the region has the physical spaces it needs to support a vibrant arts and culture scene. We discuss the specific requested actions in Section 3: Venue Gaps.

1.1 Economic Justifications for Venues

Participants underlined the economic value of the arts:

“Any international study shows there’s economic ROI on culture... It’s worked in other places... If you actually put a substantial amount of money into culture, it will grow itself in perpetuity. It really does create a feedback loop where the city becomes more and more fruitful.”

— Performance group representative

“Nova Scotia and Halifax are known for our life music. It’s a big draw... They come and see authentic, different music than what you are going to see in Toronto or wherever. And that’s disappearing. Because there’s nowhere to perform, there’s nowhere.”

— Presenter

“People might come here because of a job, but they stay because of the arts and culture.”

— Performance group representative

Similarly, some participants expressed concern that government sometimes expects venues to become financially self-sufficient. While this may be laudable from an investment perspective, it makes it difficult for venues to be affordable for nonprofit groups, and can limit spaces to only the most lucrative performances—often visiting shows. In particular, the Light House Performing Arts Centre promised to make itself financially self-sustaining, which makes it more difficult for the venue to provide affordable rates for nonprofit arts groups.

However, a number of stakeholders also emphasized that venues should not be justified based on their economic impact alone. Culture brings value to the Halifax region for reasons that go beyond the financial impact.

2. Venue Gaps

Figure 2 summarizes feedback from the stakeholder survey on the sizes of venues the region most needs, and the following sections describe what stakeholders told us in interviews and focus groups. Note that the exact size of any particular venue will require more detailed study.

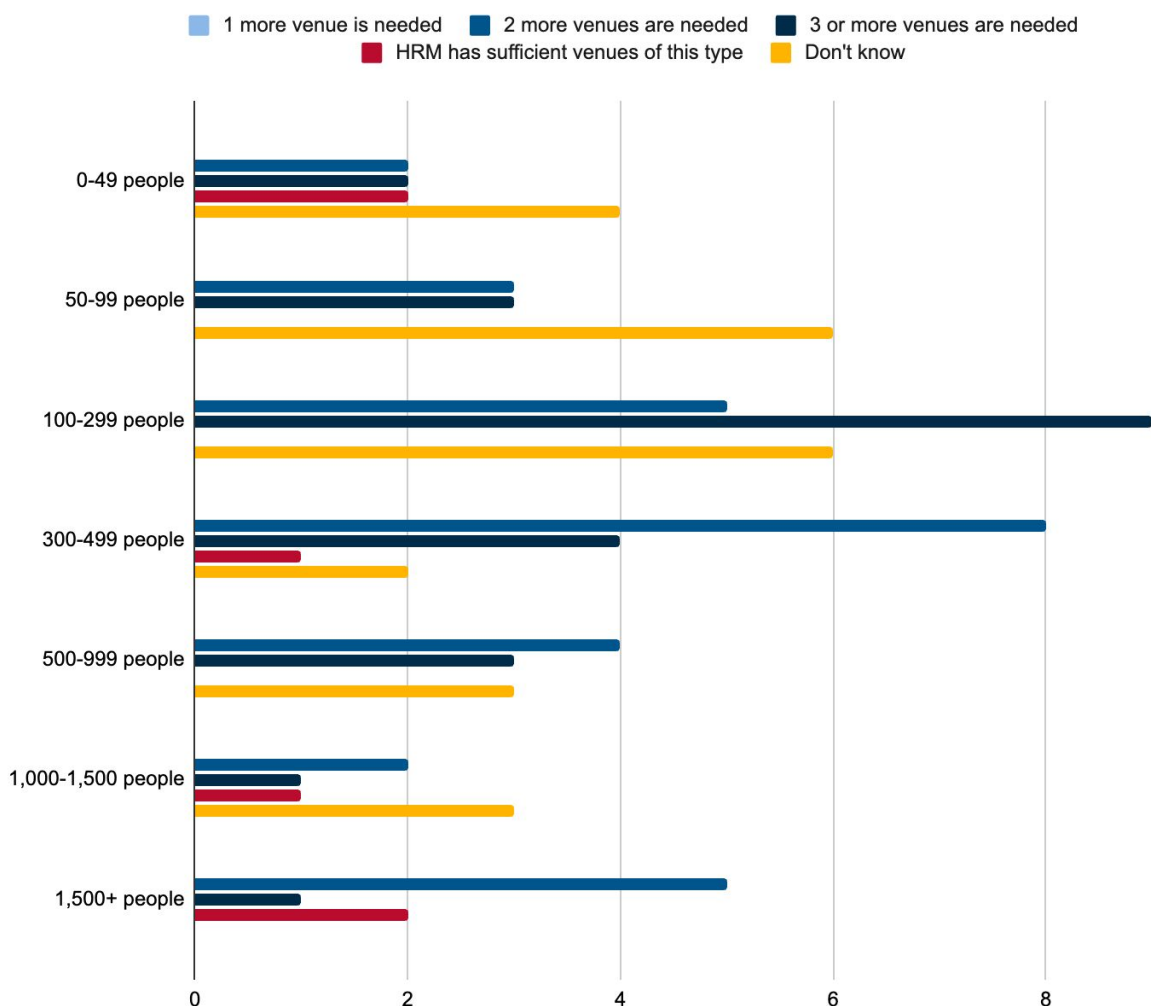


Figure 2. Respondents placed greatest priority on building small- to medium-size venues. (Stakeholder survey, 23 responses).

The stakeholder survey found there is strongest support for building new venues in the small-to-medium size range. Respondents represent a range of groups with direct knowledge of the need for space, including four representatives of theatre groups, five of dance groups, four of arts associations,

two of arts festival organizers, and four of classical music and choir groups. (The number of seats for each venue category vary slightly from the ranges listed below because the latter are based on feedback from focus group participants).

2.1 Very Small Incubator Venues: 50-99 Seats

There is a lack of small, affordable venues in the city where emerging artists can experiment at low financial risk, or for niche artistic events that appeal to a small audience. Many of the venues that have closed in recent years are in this smaller bracket, including The Waiting Room, The Living Room, The Turret, and The Pavillion. The Bus Stop Theatre (75 seats) is one of the only remaining small venues, and there is heavy competition to book the space.

The lack of small venues is particularly concerning because it risks cutting off the pipeline of new art and music. Festivals also struggle because it is difficult to find multiple small spaces for events. One association representative warned that, “Without venues for emerging artists [...] the culture will die.” Another stakeholder said, “A new band might have a fanbase of 25, 50, to 100 people. Not having any spaces to play to develop that audience, it just makes it impossible to develop any sort of scene.” Stakeholders emphasize that when shows are in venues that are too large, they can feel like failures, and can pose financial risks to organizers.

2.2 Small, Stepping-Stone Venues: 100-180 Seats

Stakeholders express that in general, more venues are needed between The Bus Stop (75 seats) and the next largest venues, which tend to be in the (200-300 seats). Multiple stakeholders underlined that the city lacks stepping stones for new artists: There is too great a jump from small-to-medium-sized venues, which can lead to artists losing money on a show, or feeling like they “failed,” because they were forced to take a gamble on a venue that was too large for their career stage. A stakeholder described the lack of “stepping stones” as a “dangerous situation” for the future of the music scene in particular. Other stakeholders from other artistic disciplines agreed that the city needs more venues in the 100-150 capacity range.

One of the most common requests was for more black box theatres. Black boxes are useful because their space can be configured in a variety of ways and can be used for a broad range of arts, including music, theatre, dance, and cinema. Many stakeholders believe that the city could add three or more black box theatres, and they would be consistently booked year-round.

“Some artists came from Montreal, and they said, ‘Oh, yeah, this is really a simple show. It can work in any black box theatre.’ And I just laughed and said, ‘Oh, yeah, that’s not a thing. There’s just one, and it needed to be booked a year ago.”

— Performing group member

Several interviewees and focus group participants recommended adding two or three black boxes to complement those that already exist. Some participants recommended building more black boxes roughly the same size as the Bus Stop (75 seats) — which one stakeholder calls “incubator spaces” — while other stakeholders recommended creating a range of sizes between that of the Bus Stop and Alderney Landing Theatre (285 seats). In the latter approach, the region could provide a progression of four to five black box theatres from small to large, which would help address the distinct space needs of various shows. Participants agreed The Bus Stop should be the smallest black box in this sequence.

“If we had two or three black box theatres of different sizes, a small, a medium, and large, I think those would be utilized.”

— Presenter

“The city needs, I don't know, five black boxes of different sizes.”

— Performing group member

“Build a slightly bigger, better equipped version of the bus stop that had, you know, a little bit more studio space and a little more gathering space.”

— Performing group member

“We found Halifax could have four black box theatres at 250 seat capacity and they would be used 100% of the time.”

— Presenter and subject-matter expert

More black box theatres would be useful for smaller dance productions in particular, if they had sprung or marley flooring, although most need larger stage area than the Bus Stop to give dancers room to move. Several participants stated that there are limited black box theatre options for small dance productions within the region (i.e., 75-200 seats). Those familiar with dance production also noted that these spaces would also have larger stages and backstage areas (when compared to Bus Stop Theatre) to create better conditions for performers.

One stakeholder who works in the literary arts argued the region could use more mid-sized black box theatres, between 40-180 attendees, to support a range of festival events.

2.3 Mid-size Venues: 180-500 Seats

Some stakeholders argued the city needs more mid-size venues, while others feel the city has sufficient venues in this range.

“It is always difficult to find spaces that are not tiny for a very small audience, but that are not really big, for international touring artists. We have a situation where if you go from an audience of 60 and then you're going to an audience of like 600, 1,000. There's nowhere in between.”

— Performing group member

“I feel like the idea of doing more small halls does not make any economic sense. We've got lots of them.”

— Presenter

2. Venue gaps

One explanation for this disagreement is that while the municipality does have venues in the mid-size range, including the Scotiabank Stage (195 seats), The Lilian Piercey Concert Hall (200 seats), The Sir James Dunn Theatre (198 seats), and the Strug Concert Hall (300 seats). However, these venues are owned by institutions that only occasionally make them available for outside use. (See section 2.8: “Ownership”). As one stakeholder put it: “All the 300 seaters are busy being a university, or busy being a library, or busy being a church. They’re not a dedicated space [for the arts community].”

In other cases, the design of venues in this range limits their utility for some genres. Alderney Theatre’s small wings make it unsuitable for many dance shows, and Paul O’Regan Hall has limited value for theatre due to its wide, shallow stage; fixed lighting; and lack of a proper greenroom, backstage, or wings. These venues therefore cannot fully meet the needs of the arts community. Paul O’Regan Hall also only rents its space six months in advance, which limits its utility to many organizations that need to plan events, book artists, or coordinate festivals further in advance.

One solution to the gaps in this size range would be for HRM to renovate existing publicly-owned venues, or to help other organizations renovate opportunity sites. (See “Venue Opportunities”). There would remain, however, a need for a roadhouse theatre in this size range, meaning one that is consistently available for outside groups to rent. If the municipality does invest in such a theatre, one stakeholder recommended designing it to accommodate audiences of different sizes: “Ideally, you could reformat the space for: 100, 300, 500. You could accomplish this with curtains, or with a balcony that you can close for some shows.”

2.4 Larger Mid-Size Venues: 500-1,000 Seats

The region does not have any venue in this scale that fully meets the needs of drama and theatre. The Spatz Theatre sits 780 people, but has a number of design shortcomings that limit its utility for arts clusters (see Appendix B, Section 3.1). Stakeholders request a roadhouse venue in this scale that has a balcony that can be closed to reduce the audience size for smaller shows. In the stakeholder survey, this was the fourth most popular size category requested by respondents.

For amplified music, The Marquee (roughly 700 people standing) and the Light House Performance Hall (750, seated, 1,150 standing) meet the need for venues at this scale.

2.5 A regional venue: 1,800+ Seats

Many participants emphasized that the city needs a regional, large-scale roadhouse theatre for major performances. Stakeholders mentioned a range of preferred sizes, but most were 1,800 seats or larger (with the ability to close off sections of the audience for smaller performances). There is no venue of this scale in the Halifax region. A music promoter with decades of experience reports that the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium (1,023 seats) was too small when it opened in 1971, and the problem has grown worse since. The Rebecca Cohn is also too small for its anchor tenant, Symphony Nova Scotia.

2. Venue gaps

The Light House Performance Hall holds 1,150 people standing (with the bleachers retracted), but this is inappropriate for most performance types outside live music. The Scotiabank Centre, meanwhile, is too large for most shows, with 11,093 seats, and stadiums are not appropriate for most types of arts.

“A large concert hall is critical to the future of what we could accomplish here even by attracting other kinds of artists to the city, because you go from a Cohn at 1,000 seats to an arena.”

— Performing group member

Others expressed concern about the cost of a regional venue, and whether it might deprive other much-needed projects or funding, or pose financial risks for any organization that takes responsibility for managing it. Another stakeholder was concerned, however, that if HRM does not invest in a major arts venue, it “will put the money towards a stadium instead.”

“There is a risk it will suck all the air and money out [...] Only a specific type of audience will predominantly go to the symphony [...] It can become a funnel for how the city can express itself. Audience members and artists alike will feel the gap.”

— Performing group member

Some who supported building a regional venue emphasized its role in developing local talent. One promoter who has experience exporting local musicians argued that it would be easier to export artists in the future if the city had a more appropriate venue for large bands, because it could provide local artists with the opportunity to open for touring bands and to meet international promoters and curators. Another stakeholder said that having a space to bring in national-level productions has a “percolation effect” on local artists, encouraging them “to reach higher in terms of what they can stage.” It is, furthermore, difficult to grow the local arts scene if performers do not have venues to grow into:

“It's hard to know how much [major arts programming] could expand. The city does not have a major ballet company, does not have an opera company, does not have a major circus company. We'll have the artists, but zero facilities are available.”

— Performing group member

One arts administrator explained a mechanism by which large venues can help export local talent. Governments around the world provide funding to pay artists to show work at their festivals and events. Such events have curators who travel the world looking for talent to invite. It is difficult to attract these curators to the Halifax region if the city does not first attract international artists, which is difficult to do without an adequate major venue. This stakeholder explained:

2. Venue gaps

“People think that supporting the local community means having a hyper localized focus. And I think that does a disservice to the local community [...] Local artists also need connections outside of the local community, and outside of Canada. And the way that that happens is if you're creating a venue that can actually host cultural exchanges with artists from other places. And so what that would mean would be a professional level venue [...] My experience is, for artists to be recognized, to be commissioned to perform and travel elsewhere, the only way that that happens is if the curators come here, and curators aren't going to come here, unless artists from elsewhere are here.”

— Arts administrator, consultant

Some participants expressed frustration with the fact that Halifax does not have a dedicated, large-scale venue: “It’s ridiculous we don’t have a proper arts centre.” A well-designed venue can also act as a local cultural landmark, can help shows feel like an event, and can build the confidence of local artists who perform there:

“When people talk about Carnegie Hall, it's not just because it's in New York. It's because it's Carnegie Hall. We need some venues that artists will be proud of saying, ‘I performed there.’ There's that level of professionalism, but also the quality of the space, the quality of the acoustics. Halifax is an amazing city, it's growing fast, we need to catch up.”

— Performing group member

“If you go to Koerner Hall or if you go to the Maison Symphonique, you feel like you're going out, it's a special thing. You bought that ticket, you're excited. It's a destination. We don't have any destinations. The Cohn is the closest thing to that, but [...] it's only a destination by default.”

— Performing group member

2.6 New vs. Old Buildings: Consider Prioritizing Existing Venues

Many stakeholders expressed concern that if HRM invests in new venues, less funding will be available for renovating existing venues. Some argued that existing venues should be prioritized over new venues, because they offer a greater sense of history and character, and because groups have worked for many years to make these venues a success.

“For us, vibe is really important. The stage [at the Bus Stop] maybe isn't perfect, but it has a lot of built-in intimacy and character, which is hard to come by.”

— Festival organizer

“What I think is great about the Bus Stop is that it began as just a couple of people who said, ‘let's take this space, and let's make a theatre space out of it.’ And then a kind of locus and an energy develops around it and people get used to it as a performance space, and it's in the community, and it's — it's a real place. It's not something that parachuted in.”

— Performing group member

A number of stakeholders also argued that HRM should prioritize supporting the efforts of organizations that have worked for many years to maintain and invest in their existing buildings. One participant emphasized the value of investing in The Turret Arts Space, for example:

“With a fraction of what some of these purpose-built spaces require—not just to be built, but to be maintained—there could be a really thriving space in downtown Halifax, with a great location. A building with an interesting history. But instead, it's struggling.”

— Performing group member

Multiple stakeholders also noted that a few strategic investments could make existing venues useful to a much wider set of artists. One stakeholder highlighted the Spatz and Paul O'Regan Hall as examples: A retrofit could make them much more valuable for theatre, such as adding dressing rooms.

2.7 Multi-Venue Performing Arts Centre: Benefits and Risks

Often, cities combine multiple venues in one large complex called a performing arts centre, which could reduce the cost of construction per venue. Another advantage is that it could create a place where a diversity of professionals in the arts community spend time, creating opportunities for stronger community and unplanned interactions.

2. Venue gaps

“We don’t have a place where we all just run into each other. Whether that’s in one building or in a central location, that would be really wonderful.”

— Performing group member

“I’ve been to a lot of theatres around the world and most of the most successful ones have had more than one theatre within them.”

— Performing group member

Some participants also cited downsides to combining multiple venues in one. For example, it could increase the risk that a single point of failure, such as a fire alarm or electrical outage, could affect multiple venues at once. There is a risk designers will not put as much attention into specific needs of each venue. It could also increase the challenge of providing sufficient parking, if multiple shows occur simultaneously inside a single block.

2.8 Ownership: More Venues are Needed that are Publicly Available

Participants emphasized that the Halifax region needs publicly-available arts facilities. Most of HRM’s performing arts venues that 300 seats or larger are owned by organizations that prioritize their own utilization of these spaces, including Neptune, schools (the Spatz Theatre, the Bella Rose Arts Centre), the library (Paul O’Regan

Hall), and Dalhousie University’s School of Performing Arts (Joseph Strug Concert Hall and the Dunn Theatre). This means that all arts organizations that are not part of these institutions are generally given second priority when seeking space. Presenters expressed that it is therefore harder to organize shows in the Halifax region compared to other communities.

“The first priority always goes to the university, which makes sense because it’s their venue. But it leaves us independent organizations on the wayside.”

— Performing group member

Theatre presenters in particular emphasized that the Halifax region has no roadhouse theatre (meaning one that is not primarily used by its owner):

“Halifax has zero municipal performing arts centre on any scale. All of the other communities in the Maritimes—Fredericton, St. John, Charlottetown—they have it, but not Halifax.”

— Performing group member

Interestingly, no participant in any focus group or interview mentioned that Dalhousie has a 80-seat black box studio, even during discussions of the dire need for more black boxes. This suggests that these groups do not perceive this studio to be among the ecosystem of venues available to them.

3. Gaps by Type of Venue

Participants warned against trying to serve the needs of all genres within a single venue without fully meeting the needs of everyone. There is a history of venue projects in Halifax that were intended to address the needs of all artists that were lacking space, and that instead failed to meet many of their needs adequately, including Paul O'Regan Hall, the Spatz Theatre, and the Light House Performance Hall. "Sweat the small stuff," one presenter recommended.

3.1 All-Ages Music Venue: An Urgent Need

Participants expressed that replacing the Pavillion, and creating a new all-ages music venue, is an imperative for the survival of Halifax's music scene, both to develop new musicians, and to attract new audiences. One venue owner argued that if young people do not have a venue, they will not develop the habit of going to shows, which puts the music scene at risk: "How would we ever expect that a kid, as soon as they turn 19, are instantly just going to be like, 'Oh, I can't wait to go see live music.'"

Private venues could partially serve this need by hosting earlier, alcohol-free shows on weekends. However, many liquor licenses do not allow this. A presenter reports that these regulatory barriers have grown over time:

"If I was doing Joel Plaskett on a Saturday night, I would do an all-ages show on a Saturday afternoon, making it more viable for me financially as a buyer, making it more viable for Joel as the artist, making it accessible to people under 19. And that gets them in the habit of going to live music and interested in seeing those kinds of shows. That's changed, and that has had a negative impact."

— Presenter, former venue owner

3.2 Dance Venues: There are no adequate public venues

There is no venue in HRM that fully meets the needs of dance performers. This is one of the most acute areas of need in the municipality. Dancers require special flooring to protect their legs from injury. They need wide, deep stages; high ceilings; and large wings where large numbers of dancers can congregate. (The Arts Firm recommends stages at least 40' by 40', with at least an extra 6 feet of space for wings and backstage, and a 30' tall ceiling). Dance organizations also request the ability to incorporate projections, video, and technology. And they need fly systems for shows involving aerial acts or moveable sets.

3. Gaps by type of venue

“My one-sentence dream would be a small scale, full, professional level, affordable theatre that can accommodate dance.”

— Dance performing group member

According to one dance presenter, local dancers have to plan their performances around the limitations of the space, rather than what would be ideal for their shows. As a consequence, they reported that they struggle to “keep up with international trends.”

The Rebecca Cohn is the closest venue to meeting dance needs. It has wooden floors (though not sprung floors) and portable marley flooring that can be added or removed. It has a relatively large stage, a high ceiling, and fixed rigging, but no fly tower. One presenter notes, however, that it is still “not adequate for a company like the National Ballet of Canada,” in part because the stage is too small for such shows. The Dunn Theatre, meanwhile, does have a fly tower, but it has an even smaller stage. Both venues have the above-noted issues with being owned by a private institution with its own educational priorities.

“Our theatres do not have the capacity to support [national shows]. Our stages are too small, our technical capacity is too limited, our fly systems are inadequate..”

— Dance performing group member

“Performers won't come, because to come here, they have to compromise their art.”

— Dance performing group member

Without adequate venues, dance shows are forced to use facilities that do not have proper floors, putting dancers at risk, including the Bus Stop Theatre and the Spatz Theatre. One presenter paid to have a stage built outdoors for one event, to provide a stage with safe flooring, but this is too expensive to do regularly.

Dancers requested a range of venue types for dance. Participants asked for at least one medium-sized black box theatre with adequate flooring, with space for roughly 200 attendees, and which would allow for diverse audience configurations, such as “dance in the round.” One presenter said that “there are zero black box theatres capable of doing dance.”

The lack of venues makes it difficult to book shows. Smaller presenters report having to book shows two to three years in advance. (Larger groups, with more institutional connections, do not report having this difficulty). This poses a challenge for smaller groups, because often dancers may find out they have funding to put on a show only months before the date of the show.

3.3 Theatre Venues: There are major gaps

Participants emphasized that current venues do not meet the needs of the theatre community. The Neptune Theatre and the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium come closest, but the Neptune has a relatively small stage (“a postage stamp,” one presenter called it), and the Rebecca Cohn does not have a fly system. Neither is regularly available for outside rentals.

“When I say there are zero places capable, that's exactly what it is [...] The Dunn is borderline, but that is Dalhousie's teaching facility. It's only available a couple of weeks a year.”

— Theatre performing group member

“[The lack of a theatre] is massively embarrassing. And it's not about buying more lights for a theatre. It's about new builds.”

— Theatre performing group member

Theatre stakeholders underlined that there is, in particular, a need for adequate venues for major, professional shows. More than one stakeholder argued that this cannot be created by renovating existing facilities.

“What we need most is purpose-built performing arts spaces that are a professional grade, that can receive performances locally, as well as international performances, because [we should] work toward exporting our arts as well.”

— Performing group member, arts consultant

“The starting point is, in all of Nova Scotia, there is not one real theatre, not one anywhere in the whole province.”

— Theatre performing group member

3.4 Concert Halls: HRM needs venues that are “acoustically profound”

Classical music and choral stakeholders identify a tension between their needs and that of dancers and theatres: it is difficult to design a concert hall that is “acoustically profound,” in the words of one presenter, while also providing the fly tower, rigging, and catwalks needed by these other groups. These stakeholders requested at least one rentable concert hall optimized for acoustics, similar to the Lilian Piercey Concert Hall in the Maritime Conservatory (which is generally not available during prime performance hours because of the needs of the building as a school).

Classical music performers also request a large-scale performance hall for major symphonic productions. Symphony Nova Scotia is developing a feasibility study for such a venue. Representatives believe that new technology should make it possible to build such a venue that has the necessary rigging for theatre and dance without sacrificing acoustics.

Community choral groups have recently grown in size, some to over 80 singers. At that scale, they do not fit in most churches. The Paul O'Regan Hall stage can accommodate them, but groups reported having issues with the tech system there. The backstage is also small, leading singers to feel “cramped.” Choral groups often have to bring risers or other equipment to address the lack of large stages, and no venue is currently big enough to accommodate two large choral groups performing together.

3.5 Music Venues: Private Venues Need Support

Private venues play a greater role in supporting the music scene than other arts, and they have a central role in nurturing a local music scene:

“If you look at music scenes across the country, I don't think there's any robust scene that's robust because of a publicly funded venue that has helped develop the scene, anywhere in North America.”

— Presenter, former venue owner

Some stakeholders warned that public venues can pose a risk to the success of the music scene if they compete with private venues, rather than filling niches that private venues cannot fill. Public venues are, however, valuable for certain niches in the music scene that are difficult for private venues to fill, such as a youth venue, and a large-scale performance hall for international shows.

The Halifax region has recently lost non-governmental venues, including the Living Room and the Waiting Room, and participants fear that it will lose more. Gus's Pub's building was recently purchased by a developer, and will likely eventually be demolished. The Carleton almost went bankrupt in 2016 before being sold.

Stakeholders emphasized the unique value of venues focused specifically on promoting new music (rather than hosting cover bands). The Halifax region used to have a large number of these kinds of venues, according to participants, but now has only a handful, including the

Carleton, the Seahorse, The Marquee Ballroom, and Gus's Pub. Stakeholders argued that such venues have struggled due to rising land costs, taxes, and the pandemic, and because it is inherently a difficult business model: Shows are held only within specific hours, a few days a week, and owners need to pay staff during hours when fewer people are there. More than one participant expressed that the remaining venues only survive due to the commitment of the owners to the music scene:

“That doesn't make money. [The Carleton] works because there is one passionate, passionate woman who loves music.”

— Promoter

Participants argue that HRM and the province can intervene to alleviate some of the difficulties in this business model. One solution would be to charge lower taxes, if this were institutionally possible. Participants emphasized that private venues that focus on presenting new music are often less profitable than other downtown businesses, and serve an important function in the cultural sphere. One participant notes that some cities set lower taxes in designated “creative zones.” Participants also argue that regulations could make it easier to run private music venues. “There's an incredible amount of red tape,” one owner said. Government could perhaps also play a role in helping such businesses secure financing, because, according to participants, banks are reluctant to lend to private venues. Participants did not elaborate on how this would be implemented in practice.

3. Gaps by type of venue

Recently, some private venues started charging bands an up-front fee to play shows, which means bands will only break even if they can attract a large crowd. Participants explain that venues made this shift because sometimes artists made little effort to promote shows, and venues lost money as a consequence. The intention, therefore, is to give artists “skin in the game,” and encourage them to promote their music. However, this up-front fee poses a challenge for new bands that have not yet attracted an audience and may discourage new musicians from joining the industry.

HRM is not authorized to give grants to private businesses, which restricts its ability to support the industry. One participant suggested that HRM give grants to an organization that can subsidize artists to help cover venue fees. A representative of one music association expressed reservations, however, that this might restrict shows to only those musicians who know how to navigate bureaucracy, or who have the right connections. Nonetheless, participants support the idea of exploring methods to direct funds to musicians, perhaps through intermediaries, such as Music Nova Scotia.

3.6 Cinema: There is no art house cinema

When the Oxford Theatre closed in 2017, the city lost its primary venue for showing independent, local, and art house film. Cinema organizations have since had to use inadequate facilities. Carbon Arc utilizes a space in the Natural History Museum, and must set up its equipment at each event.

The Atlantic International Film Festival has sometimes used the Rebecca Cohn, which requires elaborate setup. The space is too large for the Film Festival’s needs, and can make successful events feel unsuccessful due to empty seats. Other times the organization rents Cineplex theatres, but these theatres are expensive and do not have a stage or space for speakers before or after films.

Participants outlined a few basic needs for a cinema: tiered seating, a projector booth, surround sound, and no external light. One solution would be to create a venue designed both for theatre and cinema, but this can be challenging because theatre and cinema groups generally want to hold their events at the same times. Nonetheless, one film festival representative suggested that it would make sense to design a 500-seat theatre to double as a cinema, because the film festival only needs to show films at that scale occasionally. The participant recommended creating a separate 100- to 200-seat venue specifically for cinema, which could prioritize nonprofit film screenings. One opportunity identified by an arts consultant is to design a cinema venue that can also act as a rehearsal space for theatre, since the timing of rehearsals and cinema showings need not overlap.

3. Gaps by type of venue

Several participants expressed it is strange that Halifax's regional centre does not have a permanent outdoor venue, such as a bandshell or amphitheatre. A festival organizer said they have put on shows at Grand Parade, but were only able to afford it because HRM covered the costs. Halifax Jazz Festival puts on outdoor shows yearly and has to invest substantially to build the stage each year. The stage's capacity is 4,000 people, but a representative says they would use of a 1,500 stage, if one was available, for smaller acts, especially jazz. A number of other presenters also underlined the need for a permanent, outdoor venue:

3.7 Outdoor Venues: None are fully equipped

"We are desperately starved for summer venues, outdoor venues. Think of the big festivals. [Other cities] have an outdoor amphitheatre [...] We need a way to have 5,000 people come down on the waterfront and hear a concert."

— Performing group member

"Halifax has an absolute paucity of outdoor performance spaces."

— Presenter

"It's crazy to me that we don't have a band shell."

— Performing group member

Alderney Landing's outdoor space does have a roof, but it does not have a permanent stage. One festival organizer said the cost of hosting a show there is similar to Grand Parade (where there is no permanent equipment except outlets).

Some presenters expressed skepticism about the need for an outdoor stage, given Nova Scotia's unreliable weather, and that it is cold for much of the year. A festival representative noted, however, that they do put on outdoor programming in the winter, and that these events can be successful, so long as the stage and audience are protected from the wind. Classical music presenters also reported they would use an amphitheatre if one was available, but it would need to have a proper roof to protect their instruments from the sun and rain:

"Orchestras are very particular about temperature. We had a tent set up on wanderers ground during Pride. That was good, but you're in a tent. You're at risk that the sun's too hot, the winds too cold, and all these things. [We need] an amphitheatre where the orchestra is completely covered."

— Classical music performing group member

Stakeholder survey respondents identified electricity and public washrooms as their highest priority for outdoor venues, followed by a covered stage.

3. Gaps by type of venue

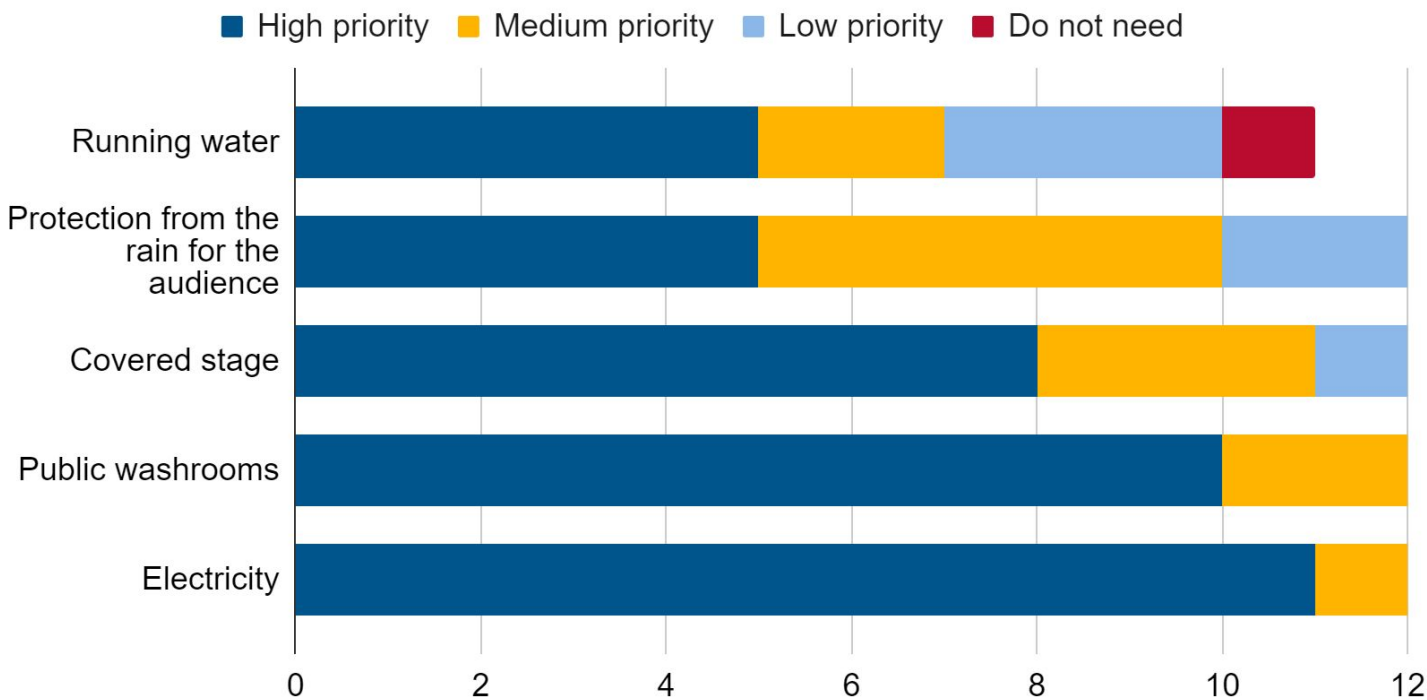


Figure 3. Responses to the question: “What features do you need from an outdoor venue?” (Stakeholder survey, 12 responses)

Twelve stakeholder survey respondents stated they sometimes organize shows in outdoor venues. Only one of these twelve agreed with the statement that “Existing outdoor venues in HRM meet all of our needs for most of our events.” Seven disagree or strongly disagree, whereas four were neutral on this question.

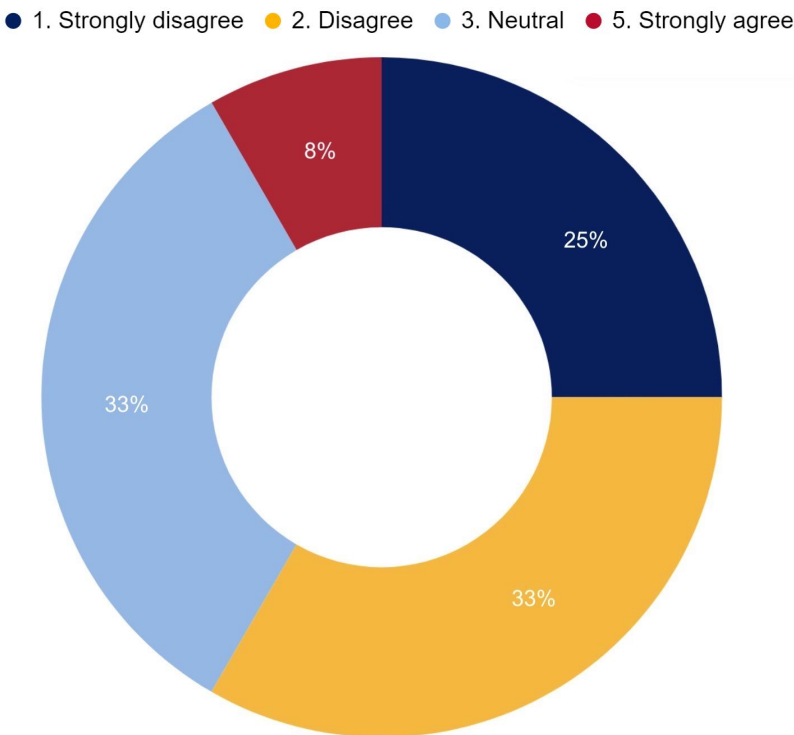


Figure 4. Responses to the question: “On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you agree with this statement? “Existing outdoor venues in HRM meet all of our needs for most of our events.” (Stakeholder survey, 20 responses).

3.8 Category Alignment: It is difficult for venues to serve all needs

Participants underlined that HRM should not try to meet the needs of all types of art in a way that fails to meet anyone's needs adequately. They proposed that HRM should instead identify which types of arts have complementary needs, and build separate venues that meet these distinct sets of overlapping needs. Participants expressed frustration with the friction between their needs and how some local venues have been designed:

"The venues that we use, there's always some accommodation that we have to make, rather than it being made for us."

— Performing group member

"Looking at you Dalhousie, the amplification is installed entirely wrong, so there's no way for it to work very well. Or the public library where you have to bring in [sound equipment], which is a hassle [...] This is really easy everywhere else in the province, but not in Halifax. You can easily put on shows in Truro, Tatamagouche, Annapolis, Wolfville, Lunenburg."

— Performing group member

"Things get cut, things get left out. Now, when we ask for a theatre, we're told, 'but you have the Spatz Theatre,' but none of these venues actually meet the needs."

— Performing group member

Participants outlined important tensions between various types of art. Theatre companies like "to drill into the floor and beat up their floor," or drag heavy equipment across it, whereas dance venues have a "very expensive sprung floor that they don't want to be abused in that way." It is similarly difficult to optimize a hall for acoustics while also having adequate rigging for theatre and dance in the ceiling, which interferes with how sound travels. We outline other tensions in section 2.1 of the main study (). Stakeholders requested that HRM not attempt to meet everyone's needs in ways that fail to meet anyone's needs.

Some stakeholders believe technology has reduced some of these tensions. Many venues put covering over sprung floors to allow theatre groups to position their sets without damaging the floor, and/or provide specific anchoring points on the floor that can be covered during dance performances. Dance and theatre stakeholders who have performed nationally believe these tensions are surmountable through modern design. It is, similarly, possible to place a removable cover over a venue's rigging to enable high-quality acoustics for non-amplified music (such as orchestras), though this is likely an expensive solution appropriate for larger venues. Others note that internationally, artists increasingly mix genres, and it is therefore important to create venues that can meet multiple needs.

3. Gaps by type of venue

“The multidisciplinary nature of the way art is being created nationally and globally, we are not seeing that [in Halifax-area venues], and we’re falling further and further behind what is considered cutting edge art.”

— Performing group member

“Having such a genred view is not going to do anyone any favours. It’s not how it works elsewhere.”

— Performing group member, arts administrator

“As a contemporary group, we do a lot of multidisciplinary work. I think having something that can support a variety of different media would be good.”

— Performing group member

Stakeholders emphasize that while solutions to these tensions exist, they require expert design. While it may be possible to meet the needs of multiple genres in a single venue, it requires a commitment to high standards of design, and a willingness to hire experts in the field.

“How to build a theatre or a music hall is not a mystery. If you were to build a pool, you would hire a pool consultant. If you’re going to build a theatre, you hire a theatre consultant. And they sit with the architectural team.”

— Performing group member, arts administrator

4. Location

4.1 Priority: Downtown Venues

Most of the stakeholder discussions focused on venues in Downtown Halifax and Dartmouth. Stakeholders emphasized that venues need to be located close together to create a critical mass of arts activity to support a thriving sector, and to enable festivals that require multiple venues. Cities with thriving arts scenes tend to have a cluster of venues located in their core.

African Nova Scotian participants said it would be valuable to have more venues in Downtown Dartmouth, because some stakeholders from North Dartmouth, Preston, and elsewhere prefer not to go to Downtown Halifax.

“It’d be nice if we can find some places in Dartmouth because everything happens in Halifax currently.”

— African Nova Scotian performing group member

Note, however, that most stakeholders we spoke to are located in the regional centre, in part because this most professional arts organizations are located in the urban core. It would be desirable for follow-up studies to conduct more stakeholder engagement with groups located in rural and suburban areas.

4.2 Community Venues: An important resource for areas outside the core

A few stakeholders underlined the distinct and valuable role of community-oriented venues for areas outside the urban core, such as for holding neighbourhood events, promoting social ties, and for showcasing amateur and professional performances. Participants noted that venues located in schools and libraries serve the need for such community venues reasonably well, unlike professional venues, which ideally need dedicated spaces. African Nova Scotian stakeholders especially emphasized the value of local venues for celebrating and connecting with their culture (see Section 10.1).

Local venues are also crucial for Indigenous communities, providing spaces for them to perform and participate in cultural events near home. The Prismatic Festival—which hosts events with Indigenous performers—holds events both in local Indigenous communities as well as downtown, to provide easy access for Indigenous people, while also reaching the greatest number of potential spectators.

“A lot [of Indigenous people] aren’t based downtown. That’s a big issue for fulfilling their needs. They ask, “Why don’t you come to us?” [Our festival] therefore does shows at Neptune and then in a school gym.”

— Festival organizer

4.3 Ecosystem of Venues: New venues can help existing venues succeed

Venue owners tended to support the idea of the municipality funding new venues, even though this could create more competition. They argued that the city needs more venues to maintain a creative workforce, including artists, writers, and technicians. Venues can, in this way, make each other more successful. As one theatre owner explained, “It sounds like it would be great to have less competition, but we need the community to be strong.” He went on to describe the difficulty the theatre community faces due to a lack of venues: “You can say it is an ecosystem problem [...] the problem we face is that members of the theatre community, the people that you employ, have left the industry,” due to the lack of places to work at. Others echoed this sentiment.

“What happens is that [artists move] here, but the cultural resources are so scrawny that they have to vacate and they just can't make it work.”

— Presenter

“I think Halifax could have the most vibrant cultural scene of any city of its size in the country, but it certainly won't do it with zero [new] spaces.”

— Performing group member

The lack of venues also puts excessive pressure on existing venues to accommodate shows. This is particularly a problem for the Bus Stop Theatre. A representative of the venue tells us they hold shows 340 days a year in an attempt to meet needs:

“[We want more venues] so that we're not always running full steam, always go, go, go, go, go. We'd like to have a bit more of a relaxed pace for our staff, but also this ability to be flexible with our own in-house programming.”

— Bus Stop Theatre representative

Participants did caution against building public venues that fill the same niche as an existing venue, as noted in section 3.5.

5. Venue Projects that Groups have Considered

The following is a list of projects that groups have independently proposed and explored. Our team has not evaluated the feasibility or desirability of any of these proposals, nor reviewed their feasibility with HRM. We include these projects for context, and their inclusion should not be interpreted as an endorsement by HRM.

5.1 Potential and Future New Builds

Participants mentioned concepts for building new venues that have been considered, ranging from concepts to projects that will soon be built:

Bus Stop Theatre second building. The Bus Stop Theatre Co-Operative initially planned to build a second black box theatre in its parking lot, which could accommodate 80-100 seats. However, it was unable to secure sufficient funding for the proposal in time, and currently has no intention to pursue the idea in the foreseeable future.

Symphony Nova Scotia proposal. Symphony Nova Scotia is working on a feasibility study to build a performing arts centre in Downtown Halifax. It would include an approximately 1,500-seat main performance theatre, plus smaller theatres and rehearsal spaces.

Cobequid Centre for the Visual and Performing Arts. The Cobequid Cultural Society is working on a proposal to build a multi-purpose venue in Sackville to help serve the needs of the region outside the downtown core. HRM Council has approved a letter of intent to sell land to the society for one dollar for the new facility. The facility would contain a 700-seat black box performance space, a 232-seat multipurpose space, a gallery, a dance studio, a rehearsal space, a recording studio, and a radio station. The project has encountered several obstacles in the planning process and it is unclear whether it will proceed.

Charles Taylor Theatre. The Union of Black Artists Society, partnered with The Charles Taylor Theatre and Media Association, has proposed to build a venue with over 300 seats in Westphal. Stakeholders expressed that they want it to be used for something “that will hold us together.” Its location and size could be appropriate for a community venue. (See Section 4.2: Community Venues).

New Native Friendship Centre. The new Native Friendship Centre will include a large event space, larger than a hockey rink, where bleacher seating can be added. It will also include an outdoor space where events can be held. (See section 10.2)

5.2 Potential Venues in Existing Buildings

Participants suggested a number of potential venue opportunities within existing buildings that may be possible through renovation projects. Happy Cities and HRM have not evaluated or endorsed these ideas:

The Turret Arts Space. The Turret Arts Space Society has recently developed a business plan, secured new funding, and hired an architect to refurbish and reopen its building (formerly known as The Khyber), which was closed due to the costs of the needed renovations. Many participants emphasized the urgency of reopening The Turret.

“The Khyber Centre for the Arts was a very important cultural space in Halifax for decades, and is really critical for music, visual art, queer culture, film, all these things.”

— Performing group member

“Arts not for profits have been forced out of the downtown core because they can't afford to pay rent. So the downtown core is mostly restaurants and financial businesses and banks and that sort of thing. [The Turret] will be a cultural hub downtown. It's meant to bring artists and artists' livelihoods back into the downtown and in an accessible and affordable way.”

— Presenter, consultant

Spatz Theatre upstairs space. Participants mentioned that a space above the Spatz Theatre could be turned into a small all-ages music venue. This would require the addition of an elevator and major renovations. The feasibility of this idea has not been studied in detail.

Light House Arts Centre Atrium. The Light House has an unused space next to its atrium that the organization initially intended to turn into a small black box cinema for film screenings in the space, which could also be used for other small shows or theatre rehearsals. However, to achieve this, it would be necessary to remove one or more structural pillars and replace them with steel supports, which will be expensive. The cinema would seat roughly 70 people if one pillar is removed, or more if additional pillars are removed, which would be expensive (due to the cost of needing to add steel framing). The organization is open to using the space as another type of venue, but this may require putting up an extra wall to buffer sound between their existing performance hall and this space. There are no immediate plans to renovate the space.

Centre de l'Acadie et de la Francophonie de Halifax. The Conseil Communautaire du Grande Havre has recently secured funding to build a black box theatre in the North End of Halifax that can host up to 220 people. It will prioritize Francophone shows, but will also be available for other groups roughly 30 to 40 per cent of the time. The venue is expected to open September 2025.

6. Other Space Needs

6.1 Office Space: More is needed for cultural organizations

Multiple participants reported there is a dire lack of office space or the creative industry:

“Offices are like zero availability. Often we’re working in our homes.”

— Performing group member

“Dance organizations struggle to find office space.”

— Performing group member

“We definitely need some sort of office space.”

— Festival organizer

One participant emphasized that creative workers want “to be in an environment where there are more artistic ventures,” a sentiment echoed by others we spoke to.

“We need rehearsal space that is not connected to dance schools like professional art centers.”

— Performing group member

6.2 Rehearsal Space: More public rehearsal space is needed

The city has a substantial amount of rehearsal spaces for dance and theatre, but most are located inside schools, such as Dalhousie University or the Maritime Conservatory. This means they are often not available for outside groups. (See Section 2.8, “Ownership”.) It is particularly challenging for musicians to find rehearsal space currently.

I have rehearsed with six-plus person casts in my studio apartment, in Sobeys’ community kitchens, in freezing church basements, and blazing hot tiny offices of all sorts. All of which have been physically inaccessible, and almost all of which have been on professional contracts

— Theatre group member

“[We need] specific spaces that aren’t connected to a dance school to allow people to keep their set, and they’re lights up. Otherwise, everything has to be cut down at 4:00 p.m., before those dance students or the theatre students come in and do their classes.”

— Performing group member

“The city is in dire need of rehearsal spaces for many disciplines, but particularly music. As of right now, there is only one per-hour rehearsal space on the peninsula (Rockopolis) and perhaps one monthly space rental in Spryfield (Canvasland). [. . .] We are essentially being evicted from our current rehearsal space.”

— Musician

One participant highlighted the Theatre Centre in Toronto and The Dance Centre in Vancouver as useful examples of government-funded buildings that provide rehearsal space for the arts, and recommends something similar for the Halifax region. 2BTheatre is working on a project to add two rehearsal spaces.

6.3 Music Studios: Lack of equal access

Stakeholders reported differing views on the availability of music studios. One well-connected person in the music industry felt that the supply of recording studios met demand. However, participants of a focus group with African Nova Scotian artists expressed that it is difficult for them to gain access to these recording studios. These participants expressed a desire for a recording studio managed by the African Nova Scotian community, which would also be available to other artists. (See Section 10.)

6.4 Grand Pianos: Needed in more venues

Venues that have grand pianos are “few and far between,” in the words of one presenter. If musicians need to bring a grand piano to a show, it can add substantial costs. “At a certain point you stop doing shows unless there's a grand,” one festival organizer said. Grand pianos are available in Joseph Strug Concert Hall, the Music Room, and the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium.

6.5 Parking: Difficult to provide

Public survey respondents listed parking as one of the leading issues that current venues lack (See Section 6.7: “Needs Identified in the Survey.”) One classical music stakeholder explained that at least five per cent of their audience comes from outside the Halifax region and requires parking. In some cases, parking is available in parkades, but some people do not want to use this type of parking.

“We have two parkades available to us. You don't even need to step outside [...] But everybody over the age of 50 seems to fixate on the idea that there's no parking in downtown. It's really frustrating.”

— Venue representative

6.6 Cultural Inclusiveness: Churches not suitable for all shows

Participants emphasized that venues should be fully open to all kinds of performers of all backgrounds, and a wide range of content. In the words of one literary events organizer: “[Venues] have to not want to vet what we’re going to produce.” This can be a challenge with churches, whose leadership may feel uncomfortable with certain ideas or language being presented in their sacred spaces. A number of stakeholders also expressed concerns that not all audience members feel comfortable entering churches.

“If you want [events] to be accessible for all, ‘sacred spaces’ aren’t great for everyone.”

— Performing group member

“Churches are a cultural barrier for many.”

— Performing group member

One presenter worries Halifax-region artists have become over-reliant on churches due to the lack of alternatives.



6.7 Needs Identified in the Survey: The lack of parking, greenrooms, and rehearsal spaces are leading challenges

The stakeholder survey asked participants which “front-of-house” attributes are hardest to find in venues in the Halifax region. Parking (95%) was the most common response, followed by accessibility features (91%), community use spaces (91%), and reception areas (82%). The question also asked which of these issues pose small, medium, or major problems. Posed in this way, participants indicated slightly different priorities: The lack of community use spaces (64%), and employee and performer parking (64%) were the leading issues identified as “major problems.”

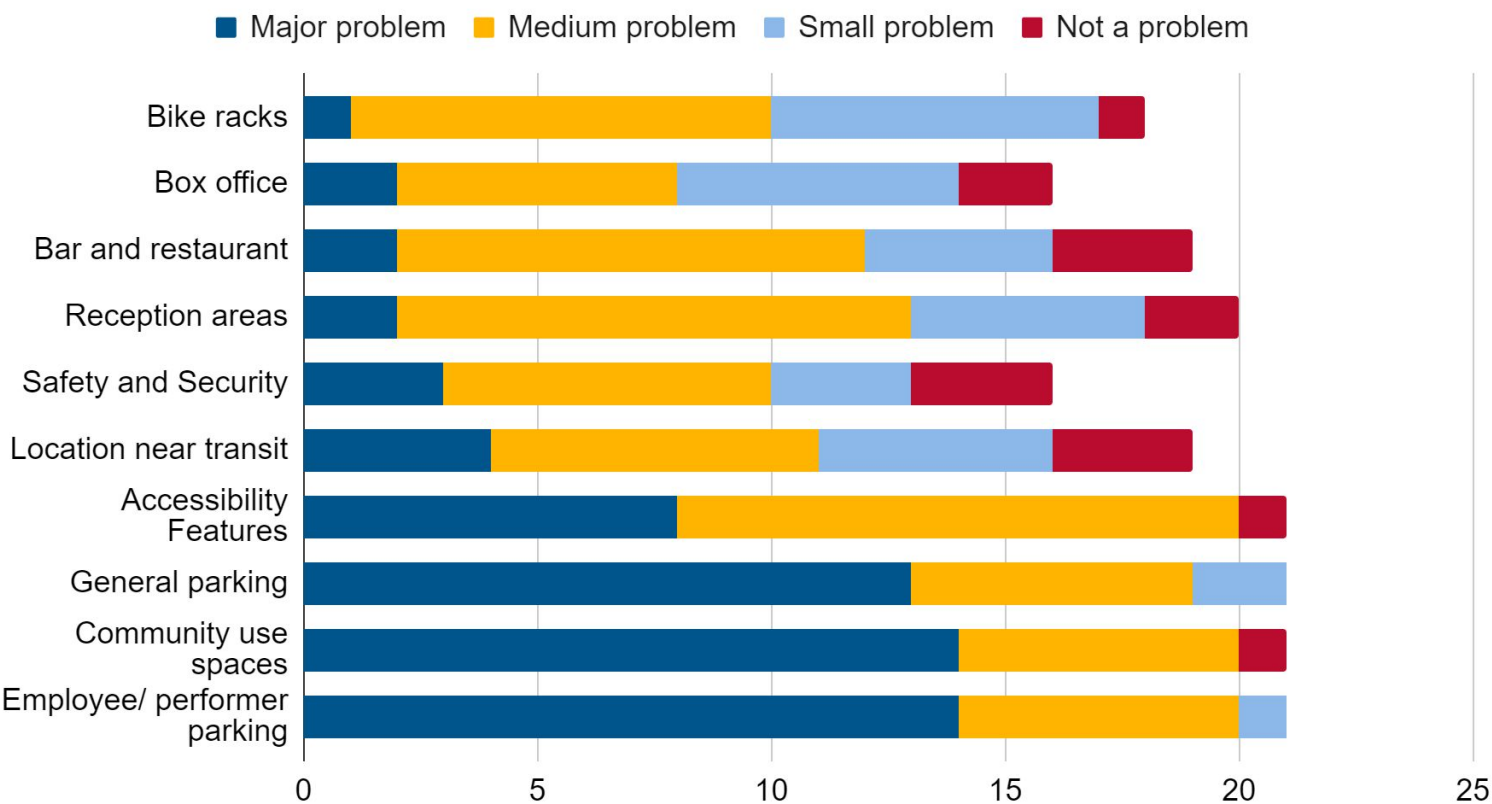


Figure 5. Responses to the question: “Is it difficult to find the following front-of-house attributes in venues in HRM? For those that are difficult to find, how big of a problem is this?” (Stakeholder survey, 23 responses).

6. Other space needs

According to stakeholder survey respondents, the back-of-house feature that is most difficult to find is proper green rooms (86%). Several other issues received a similar level of concern: the lack of large back stages (77%), dedicated rehearsal spaces (77%), kitchen (77%), dressing rooms (73%), storage (73%), and a loading bay (73%). The issue that respondents most identified as a “major problem,” meanwhile, is rehearsal spaces (64%).

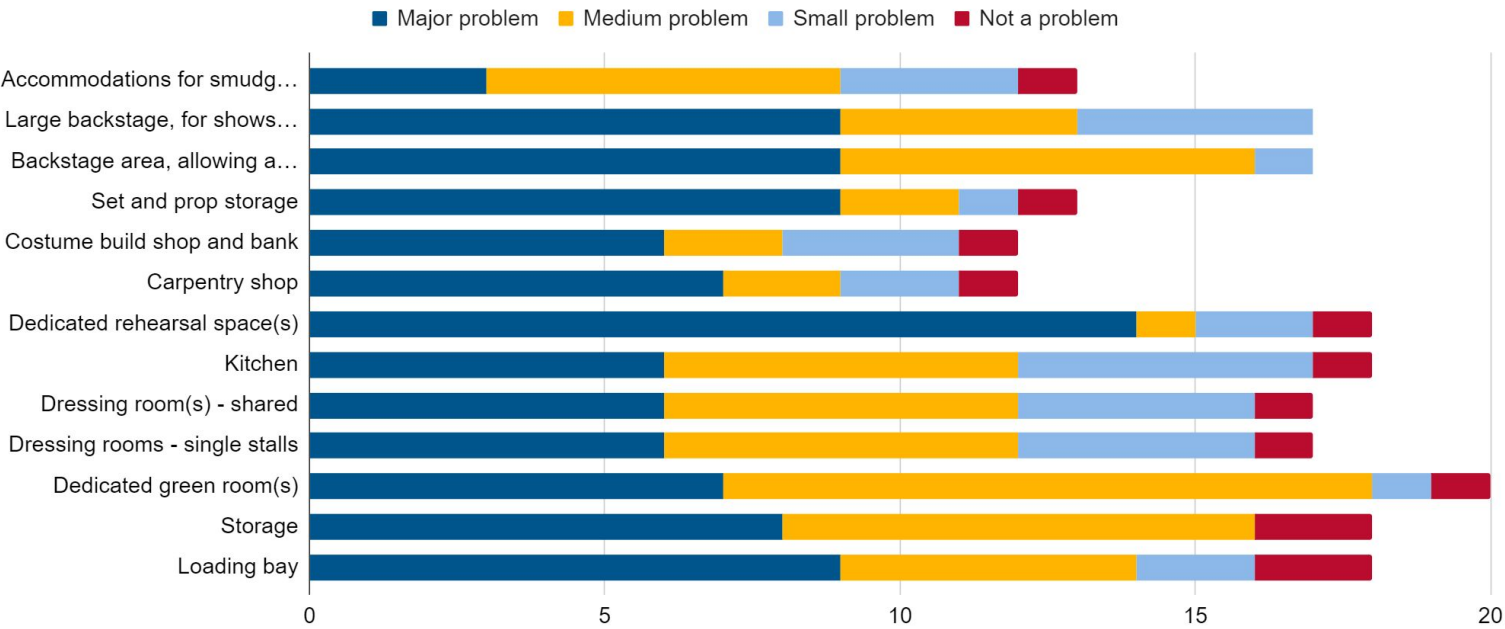


Figure 6. Is it difficult to find the following back-of-house attributes in venues in HRM? For those that are difficult to find, how big of a problem is this? (Stakeholder survey, 22 responses).

7. Regulations and Institutions

7.1 Regulatory Barriers: A small factor in the lack of venues

Relatively few participants mentioned HRM noise or zoning regulations as an obstacle. A festival organizer also mentioned that noise regulations force them to end shows early when they hold events in unconventional locations, such as stores, which they are often forced to do due to the lack of venues. It is possible to apply for noise exemptions, but this is a long process requiring a Regional Council vote.

7.2 Liquor Laws: A barrier especially to youth shows

As noted above, current liquor regulations make it difficult to hold an early youth show on the weekends in bars. The regulations also make it difficult for young artists to perform. A private venue owner explained that youth must arrive with a chaperone, and they are only allowed to enter the facility at the start of their set, and they must leave immediately afterwards, eliminating the opportunity to meet other performers. Venues must also file paperwork each time they host a minor, and the provincial regulators do not always respond in time.

7.3 HRM Institutions: Not optimized for supporting venues or programming

Many participants expressed that the municipality is not institutionally structured, or does not have adequate funding, to effectively support the arts. One consequence is that in recent decades, community proposals to create new venues have often achieved little, which has led to fatigue and distrust in the arts community.

7. Regulations and Institutions

“There's only so much people can sustain in terms of advocacy and volunteer hours, when the city always says no. And [the motivation] really, it really has collapsed.”

— Visual Arts Association representative

“We just moved into a church community space and there's a lot of potential there. But how do we make progress when there's no one who would champion this situation, except a bunch of artists coming together, doing a study, and going to the city? Why is it difficult every single time? [...] I've already written 100 letters [for venue projects] that have yet to be funded. There's a problem somewhere and it's not on the vision side.”

— Performing group member

One 12-year-long effort to create a new multi-use venue—The Legacy Centre Project—similarly disbanded due to a sense of fatigue after not seeing substantial progress on its proposals.

Multiple stakeholders expressed that the municipality also often refuses creative programming ideas. Often municipal departments are risk averse when responding to proposals, in part because they do not have an explicit mandate to support the arts.

“The [HRM Parks and Recreation Department] will not let us do a concert series on the tennis courts. I was going to have an improv [music] tournament, and I thought it would be really fun. But the Department was like, ‘No, you can't use our sports facilities for your performing arts.’

— Presenter

“Those bureaucratic challenges, they stifle creativity, they stifle artists, they stifle people from collaborating with each other. A lot of people that I've tried to collaborate with in the last few years are extremely jaded, and they just say no to me right away. And it's not because they're not interesting artists who want to do interesting work. It's because they're tired. And they're extremely burnt out from fighting — fighting the fight all the time.

— Performing group member

“There's ripple effects limiting the creativity of the projects [because of] all of the bureaucracy that artists actually have to go through to get funding. You need to prove you have a certain amount of revenue coming in, and check other boxes. And it's just so limiting.”

— Performing group member

7. Regulations and Institutions

“We wanted to do something on the St. Pat's high school site with a giant circus tent. But the city responded ‘no, we don't have the insurance for that, and you won't get enough revenue for it.’ And of course, we responded, ‘The circus people have insurance [...] This isn't even a barrier that has come up before’ [...] I had a lot of funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage ready to go into this. The bureaucratic hurdles we've encountered from [HRM] outpaced the bureaucratic hurdles of the federal government or the provincial government.”

— Presenter

Participants said they felt HRM staff want to support the arts, but lack the authority to do so. As one participant said, “the vision exists, the needs exist, but the mechanisms aren't there at all.” Participants recognized this is difficult for municipal staff.

“We hear a lot of frustration from staff, a lot of frustration from councillors as well. There's something internal that's not making sense.”

— Performing group member

“The people who are working within [HRM] are not empowered to make decisions.”

— Performing group member

“I don't see how within the current structure of municipal government, how it's ever going to change.”

— Performing group member

A few stakeholders separately proposed creating a position with a mandate to take actions on problems and ideas raised by the arts community, such as a “cultural liaison” or a “Night Life Mayor.”

“There is an absence of an advocate within the municipality [...] someone who sees the value.”

— Performing group member

“Somebody at City Hall needs to be speaking for artists and waving that flag.”

— Performing group member

“It would be incredible just if there was somebody trying to champion the arts in City Hall, so it doesn't feel like such a struggle all the time.”

— Arts association representative

7. Regulations and Institutions

Others go further and propose that the municipality should create an arm's length body focused specifically on the arts. Participants pointed to the Waterfront Development Corporation (before it was reorganized into Build Nova Scotia) as an example of an institution that was responsive and proactive with artists, in part because it was a small organization with a clear mandate to support vibrancy on the Waterfront.

“The Waterfront Development Corporation was a beacon. And they are responsible for a lot of us putting up great projects around the [municipality], or all over the province. They proactively came to artists to say, ‘what do you got for us? Let's brainstorm how can we do this differently.’

— Performing group member

“We've been fighting for a long time for an arm's length council or some other structure that gives some freedom and resources, so their staff are able to do the things they know needs to get done. [Today], they're completely hand-tied, is my impression.

— Performing group member

“The [municipality] lost some really important small performance spaces that it had, specifically because it did not have anybody [at HRM] whose responsibility was to manage them.”

— Performing group member

The idea of creating an arm's length arts organization is not new: The 2018 ArtsHalifax Advisory Committee Recommendations proposed to create an arm's length body to act as a granting agency for the arts in HRM. Two stakeholders expressed that such an organization would be valuable to them.

8. Funding

8.1 Taxes: It is difficult for nonprofits to access property tax relief

HRM offers a tax break for nonprofit cultural groups who own their buildings. Bus Stop Theatre receives this tax break, and its representatives said that this is one reason they are able to provide access to their space at an affordable rate. This tax relief is also the principal subsidy that the municipality provides for Neptune.

However, it is difficult for nonprofits to access tax relief if they do not own their buildings. Light House Arts Centre staff reported they have not yet secured tax relief, which contributes to their inability to provide affordable rental rates. Another non-profit performing arts venue similarly said that such tax relief would be instrumental in enabling the venue to become financially stable, but it will be difficult, because they lease the property from a private landlord.

8.2 Funding Amounts and Types: Increasing funding could unlock other grants

Multiple stakeholders emphasized the need for HRM to invest substantially more in arts organizations.

“[There is] individual enthusiasm from councillors [...] But does the council, or the city as a whole, backup that enthusiasm with adequate funding? No.

— Venue representative

“I think if HRM wants to be a creative music city, they've got to put skin in the game.”

— Performing group member

There is a perception among non-profit stakeholders that the municipal and provincial government offers more operational funding than they used to, which has made it easier for these organizations to survive. However, representatives request more operational funding. One described the municipality's current funding as a “pittance.” Stakeholders described many financial challenges associated with running an arts organization in the city. Arts administration wages are not keeping up with inflation, and the size of grants often do not enable administrators to pay themselves a living wage.

8. Funding

A venue operator highlighted one opportunity: The Federal Canada Cultural Spaces Fund provides up to 60 per cent of funding for projects that have already secured the remaining funding (though usually less). If HRM could provide grants for a portion of a given project, this could unlock substantial federal capital funds. Another stakeholder underlined that well-designed grants can facilitate grants from other funders:

“That money from the city can trigger money from private developers and from the Feds and the province. Then you're helping to just create a critical mass of funding that will benefit your city.”

— Venue representative

8.3 Grants: Grant programs preferable to ad hoc grants

There was some disagreement among stakeholders on whether HRM's grant program reporting requirements are onerous or not. Stakeholders that accessed *ad hoc* grants — meaning those approved by Regional Council that did not fit into an existing grant program — say they required substantial administrative workload. One venue representative said that they have not been able to access \$200,000 in funding that was approved by Council many years ago because they needed to file paperwork demonstrating the progress they have made so far. It would be beneficial if the municipality can rely less on *ad hoc* grants for large venue projects in the future.

“The city offered the least amount of money, and yet it had the most stringent [reporting] requirements.”

— Venue representative

“This year we got [roughly ten thousand dollars] for operational money. And I had to fill out reams of stuff: what we did, and every single event we did for years and years, and you know, it was kind of a crazy application process. And then you get the money. And I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do with [ten thousand dollars].

— Association representative

Multiple stakeholders emphasized that grants should be as simple as possible, so that organizations do not spend a substantial amount of those funds on the administrative time to apply for the grant.

One participant identified Music Nova Scotia's accessibility grant as a good model. An organization can apply for it by filling out an extra page on other grants, avoiding the need to submit a separate application.

8.4 Venue Financial Challenges and Goals

In our survey of venue owners and operators, we asked whether they consider their space affordable in terms of “rent, mortgage, and/or property taxes.” No respondent stated their space is “highly unaffordable,” but two of fourteen respondents said their space is “unaffordable.” The majority of respondents find their space at least “somewhat affordable.”

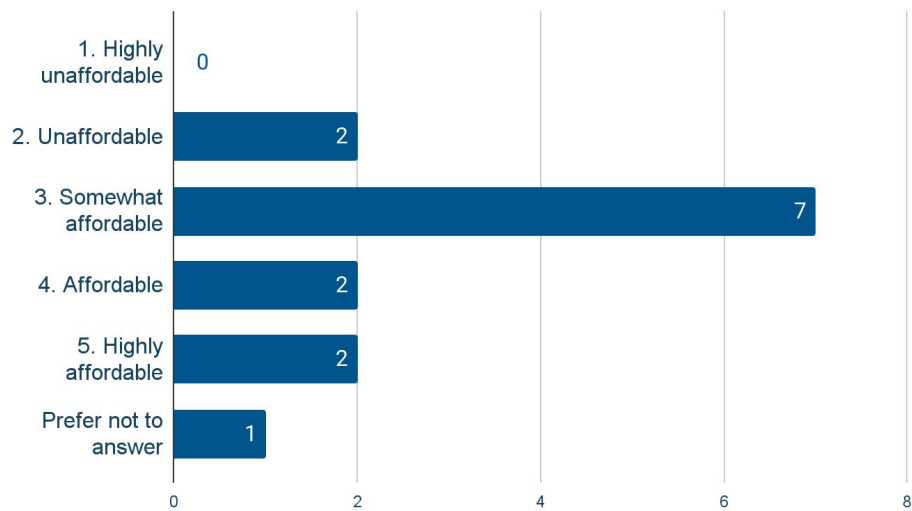


Figure 7. Responses to the question: “How affordable is your space — accounting for rent, mortgage, and/or property taxes — on a scale of 1 to 5?” (Venue owners and operators survey, 14 Responses.)

In another question, we asked venue owners and operators about the financial sustainability of their operation. None responded that they are at risk of closing, and only one of fourteen responses stated their venue faces “some financial hardship.” Two stated their finances are “generally sustainable with difficult periods.”

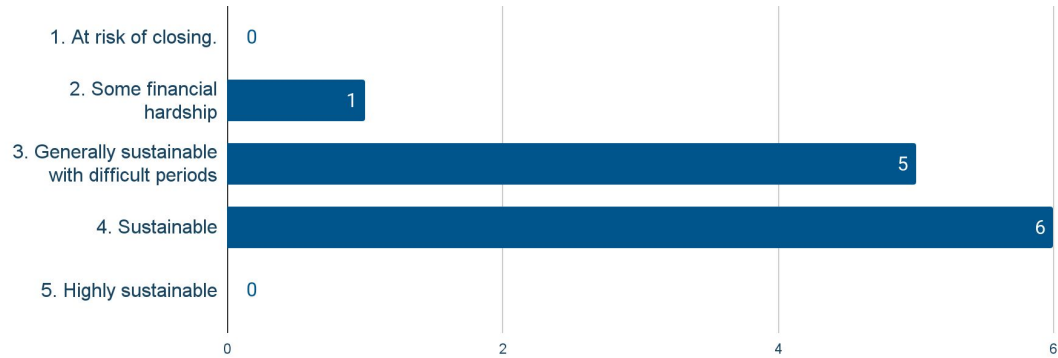


Figure 8. “How would you rate your current level of financial sustainability?” (Venue owners and operators survey, 14 responses).

8. Funding

We asked respondents to identify which challenges they experience in their venue from a list (figure 9). The most common challenge was “maintenance and repairs,” selected by all fourteen respondents. The issues most often selected as “major challenges” were related to finances: staff benefits, grant application paperwork, paying professional artist fees, and maintenance and repairs.

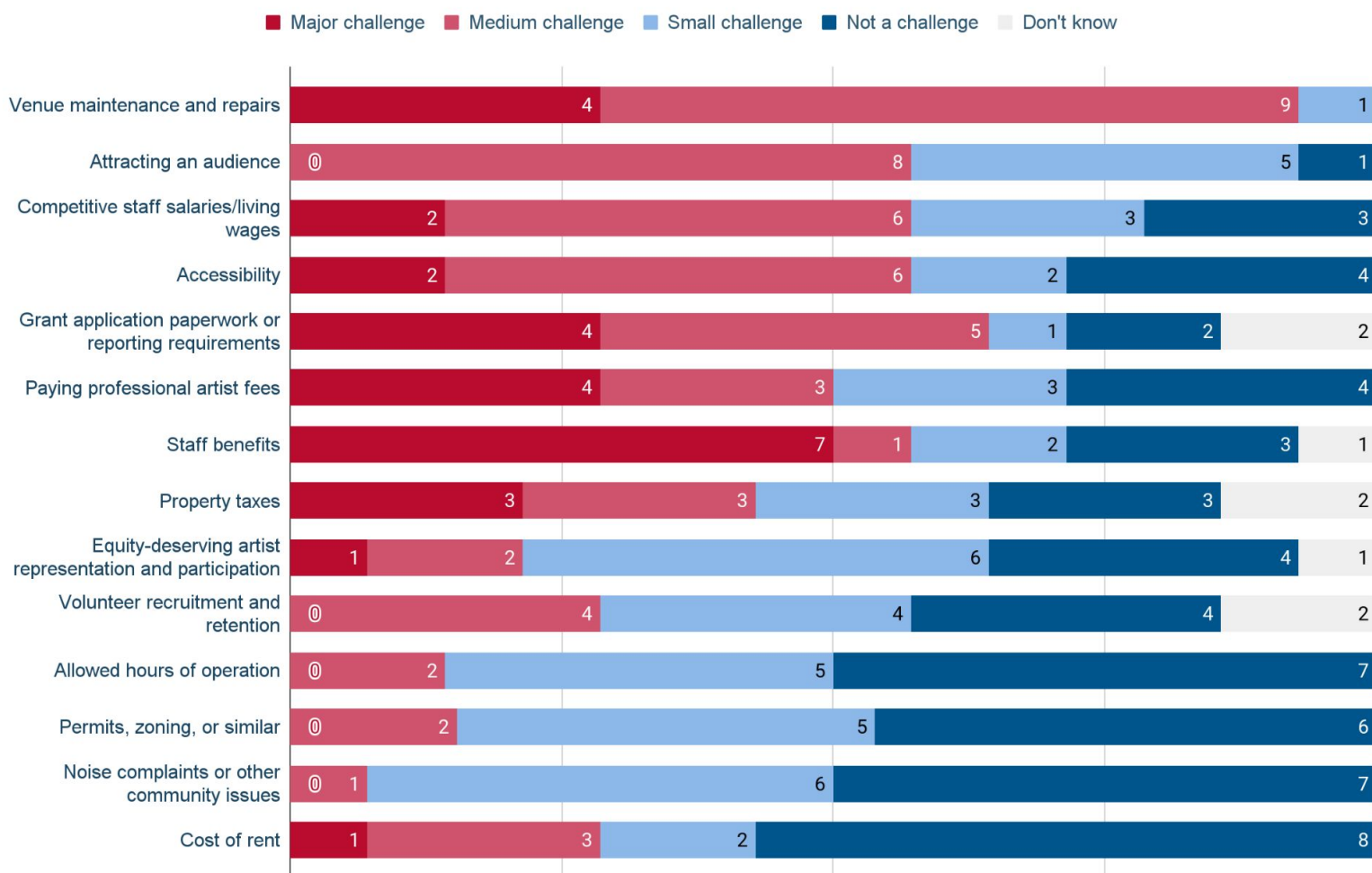


Figure 9. Responses to the question: “Which of the following are challenges for your facility?” (Venue owners and operators survey, 14 responses).

8. Funding

We asked respondents what investments they intend to make in their venues, as this can help to inform the municipality's future grants programs (figure 10). The most common responses were "Major building repairs or maintenance," and "equipment upgrades." Figure 10 suggest that maintenance is an important target for HRM funding.

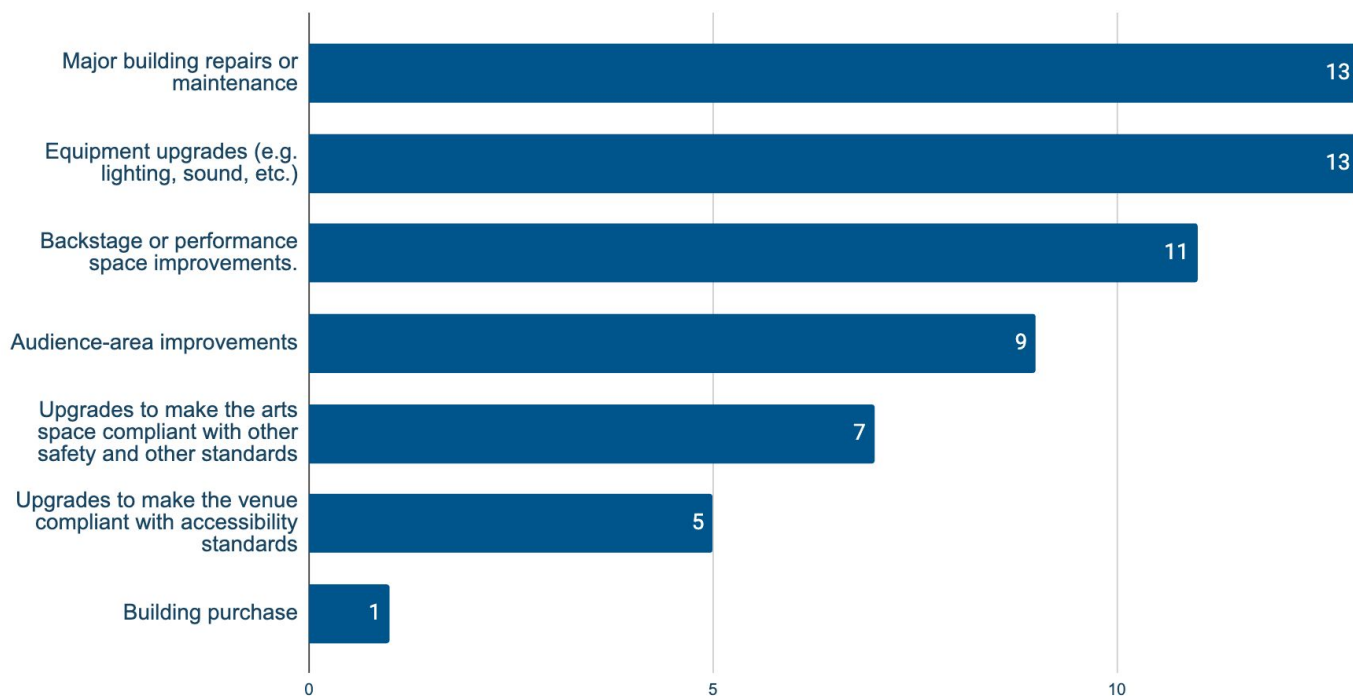


Figure 10. Responses to the question: "Do you plan to make any of the following major investments in your venue? Rank each that applies in their level of priority." (Venue owners and operators survey, 13 responses).

9. Hiring and Logistical Barriers

9.1 Access to Talent and Technicians is Lacking

Participants reported that there is a lack of arts administrators and technicians in the region, especially lighting and audio technicians. Organizations like the Bus Stop Theatre Co-Operative and Neptune Theatre are faring better because they have their own full-time staff, but when these staff are unavailable, they sometimes struggle to find crew. Smaller venues like the Spatz Theatre and the Carleton sometimes struggle to bring in crew as well. In the venue owners and operators survey, we asked which employees are most difficult to find, and the most common answers were: lighting technician (selected by four of thirteen responses), audio technician (selected by two), and stage managers (selected by two).

“There's a deficit of technicians. [Regionally, there were] not enough technicians to handle the Indigenous games, a festival in PEI, and Jazz Fest at once. It was stretched.”

— Festival organizer

One reason for this lack of crew is that the arts scene has contracted with the disappearance of venues. Many people also left the arts sector during the pandemic and have not returned. If more venues were created in the Halifax region, it may help address this issue.

“We're short. We don't have venues and we don't have crew. But I also think there's no crew because there's no venues. It's part and parcel.”

— Festival organizer

“The arts were the first to shut down and the last to come back [after the pandemic]. So people left the industry. So if we're going to try and revamp this industry and bring it back to life, we need to create opportunities for people. Right now, [finding] crew is very scary.”

— Venue representative

“You can put all the money into building these venues. But if you don't have people to run them, then there's no point having them.”

— Arts administrator, consultant

9.2 Loading on Argyle is Difficult

The new Argyle streetscape design reduces traffic access to the street, which likely benefits local venues. However, HRM currently does not allow Neptune Theatre and the Carleton staff to open the street to vehicles to offload equipment and sets for shows. This causes considerable frustration.

“You can't park anywhere near the Carleton for loading your equipment, and it's a major pain.”

— Presenter

“They literally refuse to give us a key or set up a system for a regular opening [...] We could set up a system where there's a certain hour of the day when it's unlocked, from 8 to 9, or whatever [...] We had an ambulance arrive and it had to reverse into the street, right from the other end to get up here. As opposed to just us being able to hit a code to have the bollards go down.”

— Venue representative

“We love the street closure. I mean, it's a great idea, but totally underutilized. Totally pointless at this point, except for the bars to be able to push patios out a few extra feet.”

— Presenter

10. Underrepresented Communities

10.1 African Nova Scotian Stakeholders

The following summarizes the key themes we heard from engagement with African Nova Scotian community members. We held two focus groups with African Nova Scotian stakeholders, including artists who work in theatre, music, dance, video production, and more. We reached out to 52 stakeholders, and 18 participated in the focus groups.

Lack of venues for R&B and Hip Hop

Focus group attendees and interviewees said it is often difficult to find venues to put on shows of traditionally Black music, including R&B, Hip Hop, Afrobeat, and Dancehall. Hip Hop is among the most popular music genres in the region, according to participants, but venues remain reluctant to host these shows, with the exception of Seahorse Tavern and the Light House Arts Centre. Some artists and promoters feel reluctant to raise the idea of hosting these genres with venue managers. They also expressed that they often feel like they are not fully welcome in venues.

“Venues stick to what they know.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

“It doesn't seem like venue managers are very interested [...] They're working with these clients that are giving them lots of money. And we're coming to them with not lots of money. And so we're not getting into these spaces.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

“You experience a lot of uncooperative staff, and you can feel like you don't feel fully welcome.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

African Nova Scotian Artists struggle to find studio space

Focus group participants said that they struggle to gain access to the recording and video studios that exist in the region. Many must produce audio-visual projects at home with inadequate software or equipment. This impacts their ability to record and edit their art. They struggle to test how their art will look or sound due to the lack of access to performance-grade speakers and projectors. Participants also emphasized the value of having a dedicated space to work on projects outside of one's home.

“When you have an actual space that's just dedicated to work, you can leave, decompress, and be like, ‘Okay, I'm done for the day.’ When you work at home, work never stops.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

African Nova Scotian artists want a space they feel at home in

Participants expressed a desire for a multi-use arts space that is managed by the African Nova Scotian community but available to everyone. They envisioned a space where they feel fully welcome to create, promote, and perform their art, and to gather as a community. Ideally, it could include:

- **Audio studio space.** Participants requested a full suite of audio and visual software and equipment.
- **A performing arts venue.** Participants recommended that the venue be highly versatile to support a wide range of arts. One participant suggested retractable bleachers, so that it could serve the needs of both seated and standing shows. Another envisioned “a club” where artists could try new work and host album releases. Ideally, the facility would have a liquor license that would allow it to be an all-ages music venue part of the time.
- **A gallery.** Participants proposed that a portion of the space should be devoted to showing visual arts from the African Nova Scotian community and other people of colour.

- **Office and meeting space.** Participants noted that African Nova Scotian groups struggle to find office and meeting space.
- **Space to convey culture.** Multiple participants underlined the importance of having a space to preserve the cultural heritage of their community through visual storytelling, music, and art.
- **History museum.** One participant suggested that if a mixed-use facility could also act as a museum for African Nova Scotian art and culture, this could help justify a major government investment in such a building.

Combining multiple facilities in one space would help to foster a sense of community, by ensuring that people in the African Nova Scotian arts community frequently cross paths. Participants shared that a common space like this would strengthen the African Nova Scotian community's sense of identity and belonging.

Participants emphasized that such a facility should be affordable and accessible, so that it can serve the needs of emerging artists. There was also agreement that if such a facility were built, it should be located in Downtown Dartmouth, because it is easier for many members of the African Nova Scotian community to access Dartmouth than Halifax.

“There's a difference between being a guest in someone else's home, and having one's own space.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

“Anybody who is Indigenous or Black, African Nova Scotian, or any type of person of colour would have a space where they can go, that was home, that would have everything available to them that they need.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

“We have the ability. We just need the opportunity.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

If the facility could be used as an all-ages music venue part or all of the time, it would be especially valuable for developing the African Nova Scotian cultural scene, by offering young artists a place to start. One participant also noted that it could have a positive impact on how young people spend their time.

“I remember being a teen and not having anywhere to go, and it probably would have kept me out of a lot of trouble. We have a lot of teenage artists who want to break through and who want to have a chance at the industry before their adulthood. There's no venues that allow that.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

Funding opportunities need to be better communicated

Participants express that African Nova Scotian groups are underrepresented in the recipients of grant programs from HRM and other levels of government. One reason for this is that African Nova Scotian groups may have fewer personal ties with funding agencies and other well-connected people in the arts world, and they therefore often learn about grant opportunities when it is too late to apply. They recommended that the municipality's diversity and inclusion efforts should include a commitment to timely and effective communication. In particular, they expressed that the municipality should directly notify African Nova Scotian arts groups, and post opportunities in social media groups frequented by members of these organizations.

Participants also expressed that the granting system should acknowledge and aim to compensate for the history of discrimination in the region.

“We're not all at the same place, because we never started at the same place”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

“There needs to be a recognition and acknowledgement of the anti-Black racism that has been a part of our history with HRM.”

— African Nova Scotian arts stakeholder

10. Underrepresented Communities

Participants shared that grants would be more impactful if they offered sustained funding over a two- to three-year timeline, so that groups would not have to reapply each year. (Coincidentally, this issue was addressed shortly after the Focus Group was held. On December 12, 2023, HRM Council voted unanimously to support a proposal to enable arts grants that are two to three years in length.)

Frustrations with inaction on consultation

Participants expressed frustration that when HRM and other governments consult the African Nova Scotian community, it too rarely leads to action. It is important to stakeholders that HRM take action on the recommendations put forward by the African Nova Scotian stakeholders.

Some participants expressed disappointment with consultant on facilities like the Light House Arts Centre, because they say they were told it would be established for their benefit, but it is less accessible to them than they hoped. The Light House has put on events and programs with a variety of African Nova Scotian arts organizations, but stakeholders would like to see continued work to expand their access.

10.2 Indigenous Stakeholders

We interviewed six Indigenous artists, performers, and event organizers to understand any unique needs or challenges they may face in the Halifax region.

The Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre can fill multiple gaps

Every year, the Friendship Centre holds a powwow, which attracts over 300 Indigenous performers and 20,000 spectators from across the region. The event needs a very large space—roughly 1,500 square feet—for dancing, drumming, singing, and much more.

The buildings in the region that meet these specifications are mostly hockey arenas and convention centres, and all have flaws, including moisture, a lack of bleacher seating, and/or cost. The proposed new Friendship Centre will have a large performing hall that will be designed to address this gap. The new space will be larger than a hockey arena, according to participants, and will have large loading doors that will make it relatively easy to add bleacher seating.

Multiple Indigenous stakeholders expressed hope that the proposed new Friendship Centre will become a popular venue for the broader community. In this way, it would create a place where Indigenous artists feel at home, but that would attract people of all backgrounds.

“There has to be one place in the heart of Halifax where multiple multicultural events can take place. Because as much as people want to experience Indigenous culture, Indigenous people want to experience other cultures as well.”

— Indigenous arts event organizer, performer

10. Underrepresented Communities

Two Indigenous musicians expressed hope that the Friendship Centre can help fill the need for a large venue for popular, touring bands to perform — for all performers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. If the venue became popular, it would help bring exposure to Indigenous artists, who often feel more comfortable playing in Indigenous spaces. One musician told us, “I one hundred per cent guarantee you’d have a way better chance of getting people from reserves to come play at the Friendship Centre.” One stakeholder suggested including an all-ages music venue in the building, if possible, for roughly 200 people, as this would be especially valuable for giving young Indigenous artists a platform.

Another Indigenous musician emphasized that it will be important for the new event space “to be set up like a proper live music venue,” with an excellent sound system, inviting atmosphere, and a greenroom. These features can help the organization turn the performance space into a “cool” venue that can attract the wider community. To achieve this, it will also be important to invest in promoting events to ensure outside audiences know they are welcome there and that they develop a habit of going.

One stakeholder echoed a request identified by African Nova Scotian stakeholders for professional rehearsal space, recording studios, and support for recording music and other art. This stakeholder felt that having such facilities in an African Nova Scotian community facility would also meet this need, if it were explicitly made available to Indigenous artists as well.

Young Indigenous artists on reserves need help connecting with HRM venues

An Indigenous musician emphasized that it is difficult for young people to start a career in the

arts, because to get booked, “you have to network, to get to know people, and squeeze your way in.” This is difficult for young people living on reserves far from downtown Halifax and Dartmouth. Many lack the funds and transportation necessary to reach downtown venues, and if they were able to travel there, most would not know who to talk to. The lack of all-ages music venues in the Halifax region compounds this problem, as it means there are fewer places for Indigenous youth to see shows or perform in the city. This stakeholder shared that many talented Indigenous musicians who live on reserves are not able to realize their potential because they have never played live shows outside the reserve.

This stakeholder recommended creating an outreach program to provide transportation for young Indigenous musicians to come to Halifax, meet promoters and other musicians in the city, and potentially play shows. They cautioned that it would be difficult to attract participants to such a program at first, but if one or two people take part and find it valuable, it would become easy to find other participants, because “word spreads like crazy in the community.”

Ensuring Indigenous-artists feel welcome

One performing artist underlined a number of actions venues and event organizers can take to create an inviting environment for Indigenous artists. These actions include:

- Offer a space for smudging.
- Enable artists to bring an Elder or friend.
- Provide options for transportation, especially for Indigenous women, because many do not feel comfortable leaving events alone at night, given the high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

10. Underrepresented Communities

- Learn the basics of treaty rights, local Indigenous history, and basic greetings in the Mi'kmaq/ L'nu language. As one stakeholder shared, “Language is the heart of everything that we are.”

Increase Indigenous representation using effective methods

Multiple Indigenous stakeholders shared that attempts to increase Indigenous representation in the arts are often ineffective. They mentioned the following two problems in particular:

- **Segregation.** Artists sometimes feel “segregated,” because they are only invited to perform or show work at events that are designated specifically for Indigenous artists, but are not invited to larger arts events where their work is well-suited. This is especially a problem for traditional artists.
- **Tokenism.** One stakeholder articulated a distinction between “representation” and “tokenism.” Representation means offering talented Indigenous artists opportunities to perform at shows where they are a good match with other artists and the audience, so that they have the opportunity to succeed. “Tokenism” means inviting artists to perform only because they are Indigenous, which does not give them the kind of opportunity they need to grow their audience and become successful. In some cases, performers are asked to give a land acknowledgement, and are only given five minutes to perform at the start of an event.

One traditional Mi'kmaq/ L'nu musician shared that he has been invited to perform at folk festivals in Newfoundland, but not in Nova Scotia. He expressed that there is untapped potential to grow interest in Indigenous music among the folk music community in the Halifax region.

Participants identified two organizations in particular that have been doing an effective job at Indigenous representation: Symphony Nova Scotia and Neptune, in partnership with Prismatic Festival. Symphony Nova Scotia has partnered with traditional performers and visual artists to put on multiple shows, bringing artists to new audiences. Prismatic Festival, meanwhile, is an organization that holds shows for Black and Indigenous artists, and it is “in residence” at Neptune, which means the group has access to Neptune’s stages, marketing, and other resources. One traditional Indigenous performer noted that Neptune promoted their work well in advance and with a large poster outside the venue.

Opportunities for Indigenous visual art

A prominent Mi'kmaq/ L'nu visual artist said there is unmet potential to grow the market for Indigenous artwork in the Halifax region, given that there is a substantial market for it elsewhere, such as in British Columbia and Australia. He struggled to find galleries or promoters that would represent his work until recently. He reported that galleries sometimes said, “We don’t know what to do with you,” in part because they thought they would need to show his work alongside other Indigenous artists, and there were few of them at the time. The artist became successful largely without the support of local galleries and promoters, and instead had to rely on social media to reach distant buyers.

The stakeholder reported that the situation has improved for Indigenous artists recently, although the Halifax region is still “catching up.” There are now more Indigenous artists, and there is somewhat more interest from promoters and galleries. NSCAD has opened a “Treaty Space Gallery” that focuses on Indigenous artwork. There is also more Indigenous public art in the region—whereas there used to be almost none— which makes the work of Indigenous artists more “visible.”

However, the artist shared that the majority of his audience remains outside Nova Scotia. More can be done to develop a local market and culture of appreciation for Indigenous artwork in the Halifax region. The artist recommended several strategies for HRM to grow this market:

- Fund more public Indigenous art
- Actively promote Indigenous artwork.
- Hold interdisciplinary festivals and events that feature Indigenous artwork alongside other attractions, such as music

He also encouraged private galleries to recognize the potential of the Indigenous art market, and to invest more in growing it.

This artist echoed the concerns of others that there is insufficient space for mid-career Indigenous artists to show work in the Halifax region. If HRM offers support for artist-run centres and community galleries, it could help reduce the barriers for Indigenous artists in the region as well.

10.3 Francophone Community Needs

We interviewed four francophone stakeholders who work in theatre, music, and hosting other French-language arts events.

Roughly 2.5% of residents speak French as their mother tongue in the Halifax region, whereas 12% speak French as a second language, and 20% claim Francophone origins. There is a 350-seat, Italian-style theatre that focuses on francophone shows in suburban Dartmouth, called Salle George-Cottreau. The venue is managed by the Conseil Communautaire du Grande Havre, an organization that promotes Acadian and francophone culture. The organization also has agreements with three other francophone schools to host shows, though their venues are less formal.

There is a need for smaller, more central venues for francophone events

Salle George-Cottreau is too large for many francophone shows, which often need only 50 seats. Salle George-Cottreau is also difficult to access for many, as it is located on the edge of suburban Dartmouth. One Francophone musician said he has not been to shows at Salle George-Cottreau because it is too distant for him.

Francophone stakeholders find it is difficult to rent suitable venues in the urban core, echoing difficulties experienced by other stakeholders: the Bus Stop Theatre and Alderney Landing Theatre are overbooked, they perceive the Light House Performance Hall and Seahorse Tavern as unaffordable, and the Seahorse Tavern is not all ages.

10. Underrepresented Communities

It is often necessary to book venues over a year in advance, but this can be difficult, because some Francophone promoters bring artists to the Maritimes as a group, and only announce who they are bringing less than a year in advance. Many of the difficulties Francophone groups are experiencing are a symptom of the general lack of venues in the Halifax region.

The Francophone community is building a new black box theatre

The *Conseil Communautaire du Grande Havre* has recently secured funding to build a new cultural centre called the *Centre de l'Acadie et de la Francophonie de Halifax*. It will include a black box theatre that can host up to 220 people that will prioritize Francophone shows, and that will be available for other shows within the wider arts community roughly 30 to 40 per cent of the time. The venue is expected to open late 2025 or early 2026. Francophone stakeholders assess that this venue has the appropriate size and location to meet their primary needs. Organizers are hopeful the new building will help to build a stronger local sense of Francophone community. As one person shared, “people are often more attached to a space than an organization. And now we're going to have more of a centralized space to get attached to.”

Challenges in promoting francophone events

Francophone residents are not concentrated anywhere in the municipality, which can make it difficult to reach them to promote French-language programming.

Francophone residents often find out about cultural events through their local schools, but they often do not hear about shows being organized in other parts of the city. HRM can play a more active role in promoting French-language events, such as through Discover Halifax.

“It's hard sometimes to be included in the bigger picture of what's happening in Halifax and in Nova Scotia. There's actually a ton of people that live here that don't know that [the Conseil Communautaire du Grande Havre] exists.”

— Francophone event organizer

A Francophone musician and event organizer echoed major difficulties faced by other musicians: the lack of all-ages music venues and the gaps in venue sizes, which make it difficult for a musician to grow their audience incrementally. Additionally, it is difficult to promote French-language bands among non-French speakers. This stakeholder therefore sometimes purposely mixes French and English bands in a single event, to expose audiences to local French bands they might enjoy.

Another stakeholder shared, “we feel that we are stuck in our little Francophone bubble.” They perceived that governments often do more work to promote Francophone history than the community’s contemporary artwork, saying, “we talk about the history of Acadians, the history of Mi’kmaq, the history of African Nova Scotians, but we don't really talk about what it is here now.”

Challenges in finding French-speaking tech people

It is valuable to have tech people who speak French so that they can communicate with artists in their first language, especially because some artists, and their teams, do not speak English. However, it is challenging to find tech people in general, and more difficult yet to find those who speak French. The Conseil Communautaire du Grand Havre has trained students in how to act as technicians, but they often move away once they finish university. The existence of a French-language venue may help alleviate this problem by potentially providing more secure employment for French-speaking tech people.

Challenges in booking Hip Hop shows

Francophone stakeholders echoed something we heard from African Nova Scotian stakeholders: It is often difficult to find venues that will book Hip Hop shows—a problem which affects both Francophone and other artists. These artists would benefit from the existence of a Hip Hop-focused venue.

“We’re seeing a rising hip hop community come out of the east coast [...] There is a bit of generalization about the kind of crowds that are going to bring in, and [venue owners do not] want to take the risk. So there is something systemic to address there.”

— Francophone musician, event organizer

Funding focused on francophone events

Stakeholders express it would be helpful to have funding focused on supporting and promoting francophone events. Stakeholders also request more operational funding so that they can better focus on growing their audience.



Part 2. Visual arts venues



11. Lack of Space: Rising prices have contributed to the loss of galleries and studios

It is increasingly difficult to retain galleries and studios in the urban core due to rising property values. Eye Level Gallery, an artist-run collective, was forced to move several times, and eventually, the organization gave up on having a physical space. The collective now organizes pop-up exhibitions in other spaces, such as cafes.

A few participants reported that galleries and art studios used to be more centralized, but that these spaces are increasingly being forced out of the urban core by high costs. The Centre for Art Tapes and the Manual Training Collective are examples of artist-run organizations that have had to move into more distant or meagre spaces in recent years due to rising costs. Some have

considered moving to low-cost locations in industrial parks, but this would come at a considerable sacrifice for transportation and for the vibrancy of the arts scene. One participant commented, “There's just not as much going on, and people are really noticing.”

Stakeholder survey respondents made clear that there is an insufficient amount of studio space and gallery space. Of six respondents who identified as working in the field of visual arts, five disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements that studio space is affordable or easy to find, and that there is sufficient gallery space for artists. (The sixth was unsure).

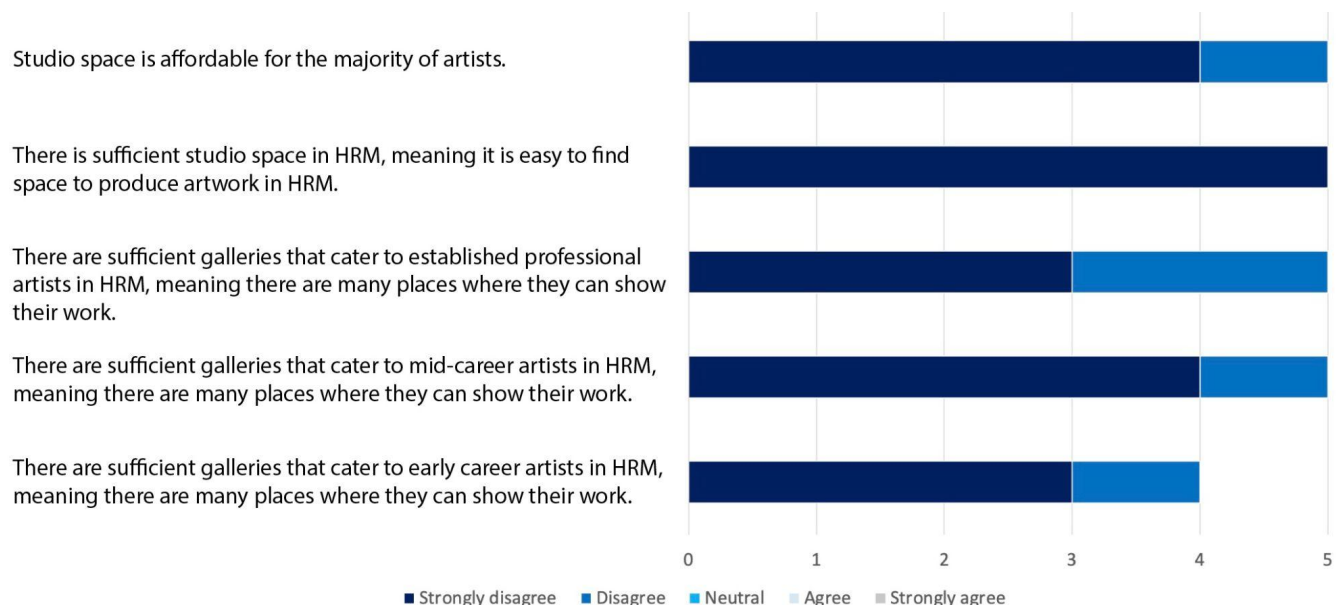


Figure 11. Responses to the question: “How much do you agree with the following statements?” (Stakeholder survey, 5 responses).

12. Gallery Space: More artist-run centres are needed for early and mid-career artists

There is a healthy ecosystem of commercial galleries in the Halifax region, selling artwork of an often ornamental character. However, stakeholder report that there are far fewer galleries for selling contemporary artwork, of a kind that would be valued by art collectors and granting agencies, and that could boost the artistic reputation of the municipality.

There are a few commercial galleries that sell contemporary art — including The Blue Building, Secord Gallery, Katzman Art Projects (formerly Studio 21), The Prow Gallery, and Viewpoint Gallery — and there is heavy competition to show work in these places. There are, in contrast, very few nonprofit or institutional galleries, and those that exist have limited budget for paying artists to put on exhibitions.

“If you're an art professor, or a really established artist, you might be able to exhibit in the [university] galleries once every six or eight years, depending on your relationships with those galleries. And you'll probably only get one solo show in your lifetime.”

— Association representative

The need is so great there is heavy competition for even inadequate spaces. Visual Arts Nova Scotia used to show work in a hallway they called the Corridor Gallery, and this was in high demand with emerging artists. An interview reports that, “It was literally just a hallway with a set of track lights, and that was one of the most popular spaces to exhibit in the city. And that's the state of brick and mortar art spaces in the city.” The organization would later close the Corridor Gallery, however, because they did not have funding to pay artist fees, and considered it unethical to show artwork without paying fees.

The Eye Level Gallery saw a similar level of interest when they received funding to show 10 artists in a local café, Alter Egos, each for one month. They received roughly 60 applications, even though Alter Egos is a cafe, not a proper gallery.

12.1 Lack of Space for Early Career Artists

The lack of gallery space impacts the ability of artists to advance in their careers. To receive grants and show work in more prestigious galleries, artists need to establish a “gallery

12. Gallery space: More artist-run centres are needed for early and mid-career artists

record” that lists where they have shown in the past. Granting agencies generally do not count exhibitions at cafes or restaurants towards this record. It is therefore important that artists have access to a range of public, nonprofit, commercial, and artist-run galleries. Halifax has very few of these early-career and mid-career stepping stones, which may cut off Halifax-area artists from establishing a career in the arts.

“There's a void of exhibition opportunities.”

— Visual arts organization
representative

“Mid career is a real gap in the province. In Ontario, and Quebec, if you're a mid-career artist, you can show at lots of different places all across the province. There's lots of commercial galleries.”

— Visual arts organization
representative

Similarly, while some grants are designed to support early-career artists, there is a funding gap for mid-career artists.

“There's a lot of support for emerging artists to get people into the field. And then nothing. And then you're expected to have had a great career and then put on shows.”

— Arts group representative

“A lot of things are geared towards young artists. And it cuts out people. I've been cut out of so many things. But I haven't made it yet. My money goes to my studio.”

— Artist

In the stakeholder survey, five of six respondents propose that the Halifax region needs more small galleries (with a single room) and medium-sized galleries (multiple rooms), and of these, all think the region needs two-or-more small galleries. Four also felt the region needs at least one large gallery (sufficient to enable multiple collections and exhibits).

12. Gallery space: More artist-run centres are needed for early and mid-career artists

Stakeholder survey respondents also reported on which attributes are most difficult to find in galleries in the Halifax region (figure 12). Respondents find it most difficult to find a presentation space with seating, an event space, a community use space, a location near transit, and parking. The issues that most respondents labeled as “major problems” were event space, presentation space, and a loading bay.

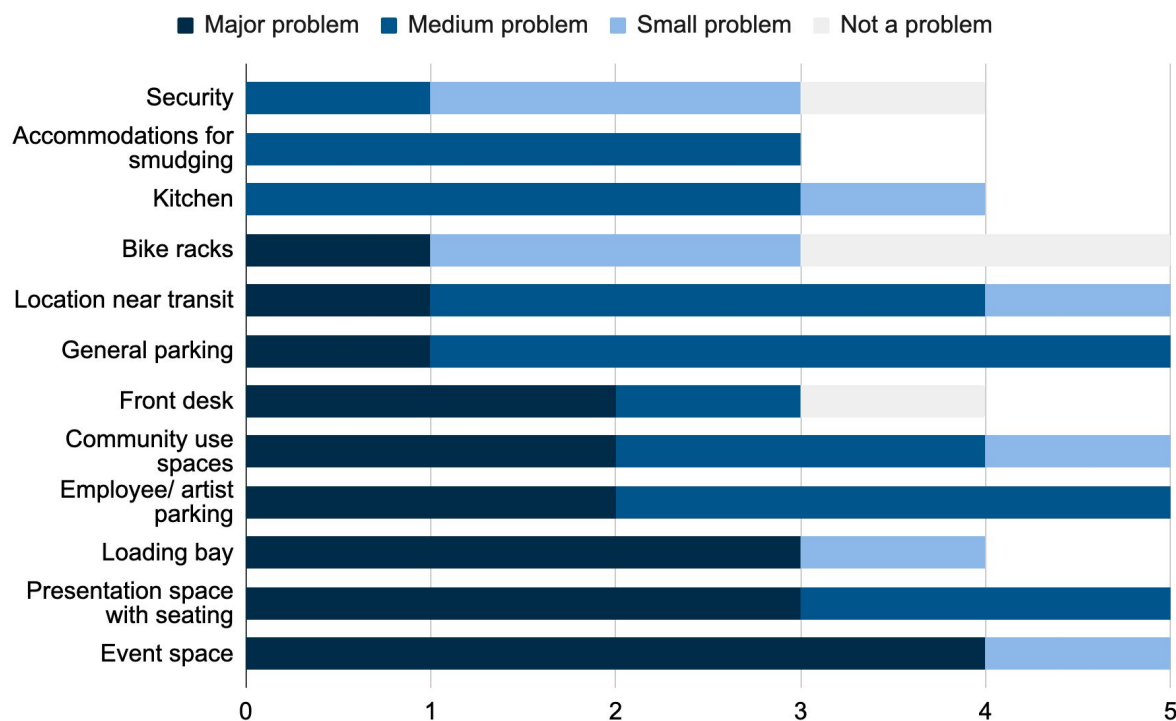


Figure 12. Responses to the question: “Is it difficult to find the following attributes in galleries in HRM? For those that are difficult to find, how big of a problem is this?” (Stakeholder survey, 5 responses).

12.2 Flexible Gallery Space: More is needed

Participants expressed concern that the municipality lacks “short-term pop-up spaces” for art. Institutional galleries—such as in universities—tend to have a rigid, long-term planning process for deciding how they use their space. It is difficult to use these galleries for arts festivals and other events. One reason artist-run centres are valuable for the development of an arts scene is that they can be more flexible and responsive. Nocturne organizers said it has become “nearly impossible” to find gallery space for their events.

13. Studio Space: An acute problem for the arts community

Interview participants described the lack of studio space in the Halifax region as a “crisis.” Most artists must produce art at home, which limits their ability to do many kinds of art that require industrial ventilation, or other tools inappropriate for a home context. The lack of separation between work and home can also hamper creativity for many artists.

“It's bleak [...] The biggest hole right now is there's not enough affordable studio space.”

— Artist

“We run the [crappiest], most punk rock studio. We have one availability coming up and already have eight applications.”

— Gallery/ studio representative

“When you provide space for artists, we do things, we make things, we start messing around. And we start coming up with new ideas.”

— Gallery representative

Outside of the universities, there are only a handful of studio spaces in the city:

- **The Blue Building.** Stakeholders consider these studio spaces to be high quality and relatively affordable. The space is also well-equipped, with a dark room and a room with an industrial fan for working with toxic chemicals.
- **Wonder'neath.** This studio rents space from the Blue Building and offers a large, affordable studio space. The space is regularly free to use during community drop-in sessions, which some professional artists take advantage of. Wonder'neath is experiencing financial stress due to lack of funding.
- **Collaborative Studios North.** This is an artist-run centre in a warehouse. The space is very basic, with dividers and a leaking roof, according to stakeholders. The studio has some equipment, including a kiln.
- **Army Navy Collective.** This is an affordable space in an old building in the core of the North End. Participants described it as highly valuable, because it is affordable, but noted that the building is not in excellent condition.

13. Studio space: An acute problem for the arts community

“It is really precious, because it's one of the only accessibly priced studios in the whole of HRM. [But it is also] genuinely terrifying. There were bedbugs. There are rodents. It's not a healthy building. It's illustrative of what we will tolerate in order to have a place to work.”

— Artist, association representative

- **The Centre for Art Tapes.** The organization offers a very limited amount of studio space, which is only accessible to professional artists through their residency program. They also rent equipment for multimedia arts.

While some artists expressed concern about the physical conditions of some of these studios, others noted that there is value in having access to old, inexpensive buildings where one “can make a mess [...] especially for larger installations.” New, purpose-built studios are valuable, but there is also value in ensuring

artists can access old buildings with fewer restrictions on what they can do with the space.

The most-requested types of studio space among stakeholder survey respondents were “Full-time rented studio space” and “Studio space for artist collectives and groups,” both selected by five of six respondents. There was some disagreement among respondents on whether there is sufficient “Studio space for education and community events,” and “Drop-in community space.”

The stakeholder survey asked whether it is difficult to find studios with specific attributes. While respondents confirmed that many are difficult to find, they identified nearly all of them as only a “small problem.” This suggests that artists place higher priority on having any access to studio space, and less priority on the precise features offered in those studios. The only issue the respondents identified as a “medium” or “major problem” was “Windows that open and close,” selected by four of six respondents. Otherwise, the most common gap identified by respondents (five of six) was “A place where one can work alongside other artists or peers.”

14. Artist Space and Financial Challenges: Costs are causing artists to leave

Participants warn that there is a large “outmigration” of artists due to their low earning potential in the Halifax region and the high cost of housing and studio space.

“I was an executive director and I still was like, ‘I hope my rent doesn’t double because then I will be in my tent.’ Most artists don’t have a pension plan or any kind of retirement savings.”

— Art association representative

“If Halifax wants to have the arts in the future, it needs to solve this. I’m surrounded by people who are 20 who have deep, deep, deep anxiety. To be an artist you need time and you need space. So you need to be able to rent studio space.”

— Gallery representative

Participants note that policies that help everyone would help artists, such as stronger affordable housing policy. They also recommended greater investment in affordable housing specifically for artists or artist live-work spaces, suggesting incentives such as through bonus zoning. One participant explained that creating such affordable spaces would “change the fabric of the city,” and “make the city a more interesting place to live, and a more sustainable place for artists to live long term.”

14.1 Grants: Prioritize acquiring permanent spaces

Participants emphasized that a high-priority goal for municipal grants should be to enable arts organizations to acquire permanent space to establish galleries or studios, so that they face less risk from rising rental prices, and can better plan their future. When organizations risk losing their spaces, they also risk losing any capital investments they made in improving those spaces. Recently, The Centre for Art Tapes secured large grants to make a major investment in its space, including “a five-point surround sound studio that was built specifically for us in a floating room.” Soon after, the landlord increased their rent, and they were forced to move. A representative said it felt like “whiplash” to their members, because they had put so much work into installing this valuable

14. Artist space and financial challenges: Costs are causing artists to leave

equipment, and already they needed to move to a new space.

One participant offered the example of Western Front Society, an artist-run centre in Vancouver which was able to purchase its building in 2016. This has provided a sense of security for the space, “which means they can focus all their programming money on supporting artists. They are not always in emergency mode.” Visual Arts Nova Scotia, similarly, has moved into a provincially owned space called the Cultural Federations of Nova Scotia, which provides office space to eight organizations in the cultural sector. This security enables these organizations to better focus on their mandate. Sharing a space also strengthens their ability to collaborate.

One representative of an arts organization said they are “very wary” of projects in which arts groups rent space from private land owners, which leads to “more money going into the pockets of developers who are going to provide us with no ownership [...] It doesn’t work out very well.”

“The spaces should have some funding backing them up so that artists don’t end up renting [...] the [crappiest] spaces that exist for the cheapest rent in the most garbage buildings in Halifax.”

— Arts group representative

A few stakeholders expressed that the private and nonprofit sectors are putting more work and funding into the arts than the municipality. One

participant stated, “The only reason we even have a hope of buying a building on the peninsula is because there’s somebody who’s worried about what’s happening to the peninsula, and who will sell it to us for significantly lower than market rate.” They expressed frustration that the municipality is not matching the amount of effort others are contributing.

“The [Municipality] does not understand the social and intellectual and cultural and economic capital that we put into these places.”

— Arts organization representative

“Nobody’s being paid a living wage. [Municipal leadership does not realize] how many of us are sacrificing wages or positions to pay our landlords.”

— Arts organization representative

14.2 Grant Types: Provide more funding directly to artists and artist-run festivals

A few stakeholders recommended that HRM follow the example of other cities and provide some funding directly to artists. One said they felt there was more municipal funding available in smaller, rural municipalities than in HRM. An

association representative highlighted Toronto's approach as effective: The City funds artists based on their record, rather than individual projects, which provides a baseline income for these artists, and gives them the flexibility and time to produce new work.

Participants also recommended providing greater funding for arts festivals, as noted above. A participant reports that Nocturne survives on \$40,000 a year, which means it depends principally on volunteer labor. As a result, the success of the festival in any given year depends on the number of people willing to offer volunteer time.

“The city holds [Nocturne] up as its crown jewel [...] It's damaging because it sets this precedent that \$40,000 is what it takes to put on a festival like that. And then you can't pull it off again.”

— Festival representative

14.3 Taxes: It is difficult for nonprofits to access property tax breaks

As with performing arts venues, a major concern for participants is that it is difficult for nonprofits to access tax relief if their building is owned by a private landowner, because the municipality does not offer tax relief to organizations that do not own their buildings. A Centre for Art Tapes representative reported they were unable to

secure tax relief even though they had a space that was custom-built for them. Participants reported that Eye Level Gallery lost its space for similar reasons. The tax issue is particularly pressing because commercial property values are increasing quickly. Some organizations are worried they will need to move or close when they next need to negotiate their five-year lease, because landowners will need to factor in these rising tax costs.

“Commercial tax is like murder for a lot of the organizations.”

— Association representative

One participant recommended providing tax rebates directly to nonprofit organizations, so that there is no risk it will benefit the landowner. Another stakeholder notes that if landowners do enjoy tax benefits, this too could benefit arts organizations. Often, landlords are reluctant to rent to arts organizations because their income may be less stable than a commercial business. Participants felt that tax relief would shift these incentives in favour of arts organizations.

“We'd really like to see as a recognition that if a private building owner is making this kind of an investment in culture, that they should be eligible to apply for some tax relief.”

— Arts group representative

14.4 Gallery Financial Challenges and Goals

In the gallery owner and operators survey, we asked respondents how affordable their space is, “accounting for rent, mortgage, and/or property taxes” (figure 13). The majority — six out of ten — report that their space is affordable or highly affordable. However, two galleries report that their space is “unaffordable” or “highly unaffordable.” One of these galleries is a nonprofit while the other is private.

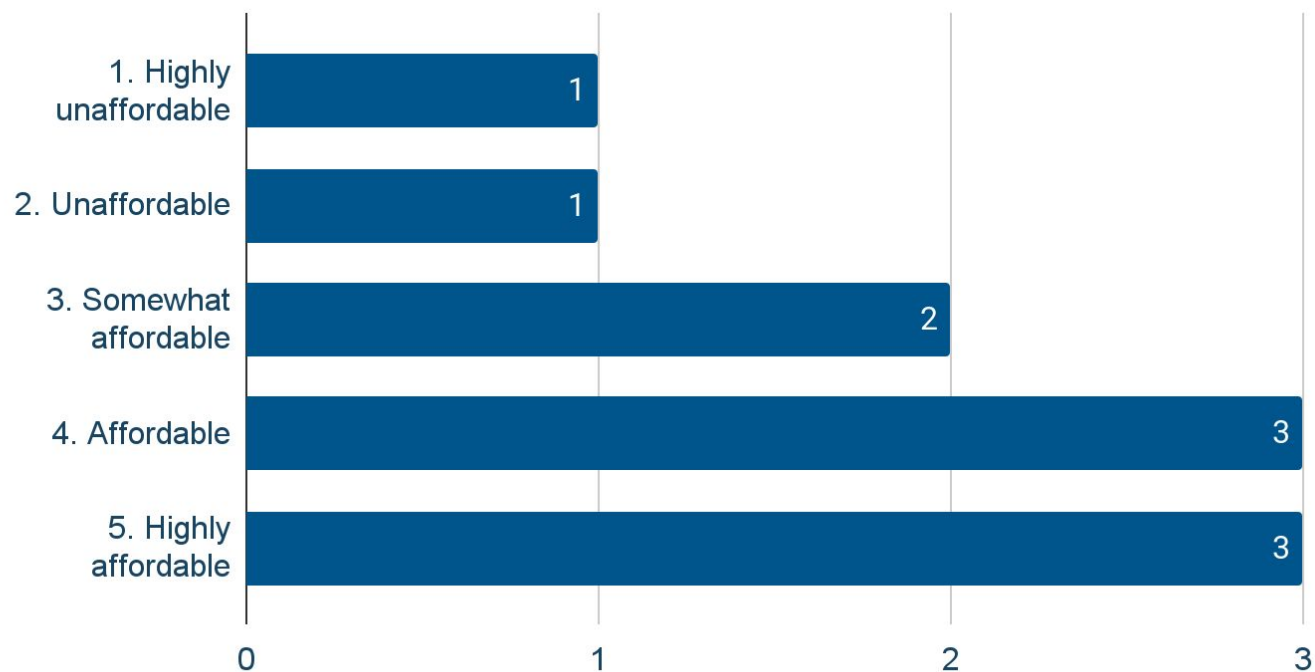


Figure 13. “How affordable is your space — accounting for rent, mortgage, and/or property taxes — on a scale of 1 to 5?” (Gallery owner and operators survey, 10 responses).

We also asked them to identify their current level of financial sustainability. No respondent said their gallery is at risk of closing. However, seven of ten respondents report they face some financial hardship or face some difficult periods. Three report having sustainable or highly sustainable finances.

We asked respondents to identify which challenges they face from a list. The leading challenge was “Equity-deserving artist representation and participation,” selected by all nine respondents. The topics most often identified as “major challenges,” meanwhile, were all related to finances, including venue maintenance and repairs, staff benefits, and property taxes, competitive staff salaries/ living wages.

14. Artist space and financial challenges: Costs are causing artists to leave

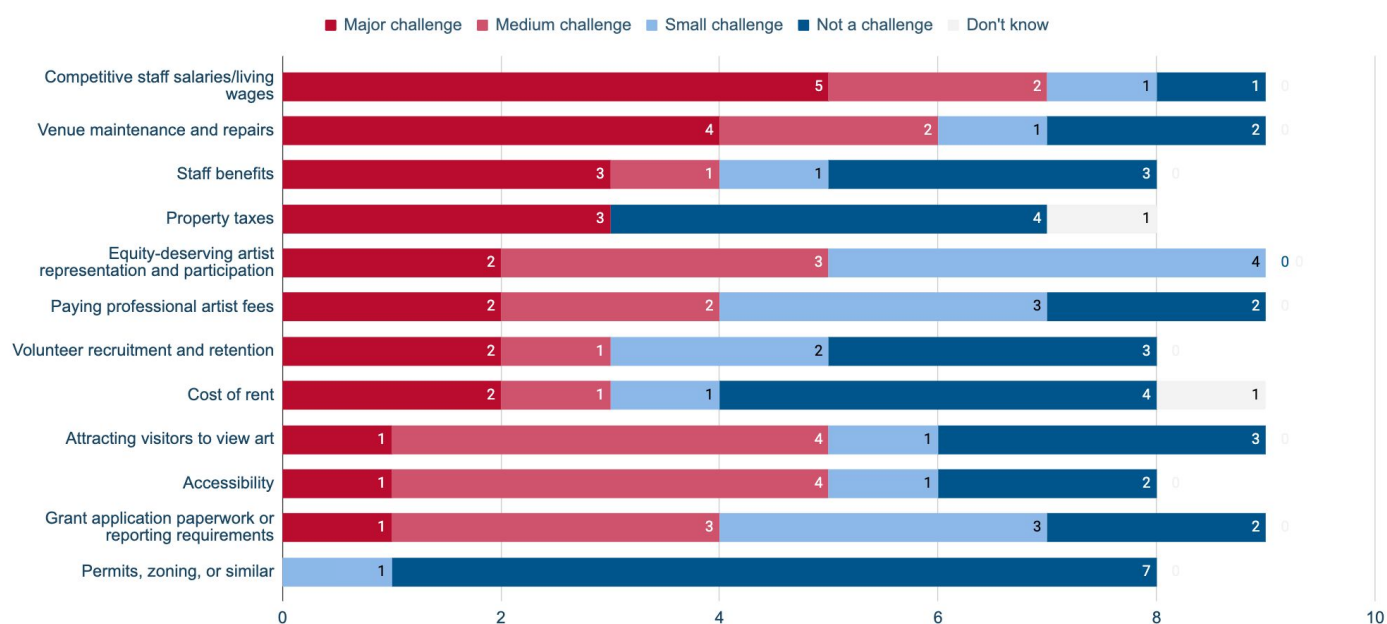


Figure 14. Responses to the question: “Which of the following are challenges for your facility?” (Gallery owner and operators survey, 9 responses).

To inform future HRM grants, we presented respondents with a list of investments they might make in their facility, and asked which they intend to make. All nine respondents selected “equipment upgrades” (figure 15).

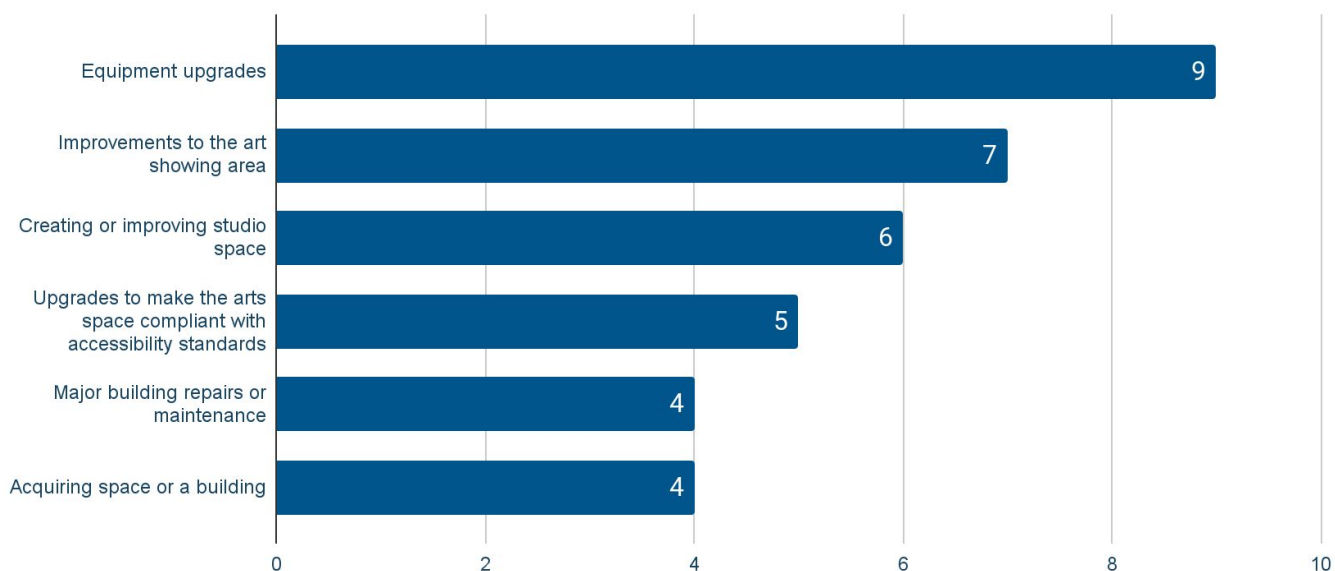


Figure 15. Responses to the question: “Do you plan to make any of the following major investments in your facility?” (Gallery owner and operators survey, 9 responses).

We asked gallery owners and operators whether there are any types of staff or volunteers that they struggle to find. The most common gaps were board members and fundraisers, each selected by three of nine respondents.

15. HRM Institutions: Not optimized for supporting visual arts

Visual arts groups offered similar perspectives as other groups on the disconnect between institutions and the goal of promoting the arts. In recent years, volunteer-led efforts to create more arts space in the Halifax region have yielded few results, leading many groups to feel burnt out in the arts sector. Participants highlighted the following projects as examples: the Imagine Bloomfield project, the St. Patrick's Alexandra School Site community hub proposal, the Performing Arts Lodge Halifax proposal, and efforts to renovate the Turret building.

Participants proposed creating an organization that could lead the planning and development of such projects, rather than relying on small volunteer groups.

Participants say the municipality is not structured to say “yes” to their ideas. They note that municipal institutions are structured to value and invest in green spaces, but they struggle to do the same for the arts. Groups have had to learn how to analyze how “the current situation is lacking with regard to existing HRM policy... and position [the proposal] as a solution to that analysis.” It would help if organizations could work with a municipal body that had the explicit mandate to prioritize the arts.

“If there were someone that the government could hire to develop spaces like that, then it becomes their job, and it doesn't become the job of the poor, sad, overtaxed arts community, trying to do more with less.”

— Arts group representative

16. Arts Exposure and Promotion: More is needed

Some participants expressed that more needs to be done to attract the public to existing galleries. One gallery owner said they were frustrated that Discover Halifax only references art in a page called, “Halifax’s underground arts scene.” The gallery owner commented:

“What do you mean ‘underground?’ It’s only underground because [HRM] does very little to acknowledge, promote and exploit all of these wonderful art-related possibilities that exist in the city.”

— Gallery owner

Participants suggested the municipality can do more to support the sector’s existing promotion strategies, such as the Halifax Art Map or the Starry Night gallery hop. Nocturne is likely the city’s most successful event for attracting people to art in the city, but it is underfunded and relies heavily on volunteer hours (as noted in the section on Grants).

Urban design can also play a role in promoting art. One reason the Craig Gallery is a popular place for artists to exhibit is that it is located in Alderney Landing, next to the ferry terminal and farmer’s market. It therefore attracts some of the highest foot traffic of any gallery in the city. The Blue Building, in contrast, is located one block away from Argyle Street on a street with little foot traffic. Promotion, placemaking, or other

interventions would be necessary to create more random walk-ins for such galleries.

A few stakeholders also said it would be valuable to hold a wider variety of events at galleries, such as music shows, to give the public more reasons to visit. Liquor laws pose a challenge for this (similar to challenges experienced by performing arts venues, noted above). A representative of the Blue Building said that they have not been able to secure a liquor license to serve wine at exhibitions.

16.1 Creating a Local Market for the Arts:

Multiple stakeholders reported that the Halifax region does not have a strong culture of contemporary art appreciation and collection. An artist noted he needs to sell his work to international buyers, due to the absence of a local market.

A representative of one for-profit gallery says the region needs more opportunities for artists to exhibit contemporary art, and more public discussion of these exhibitions, including through art publications, awards, and talks. Atlantic Canadian visual arts publications, such as Billie and Visual Arts News, help, as do awards, such as the Sobey Award. There may be opportunities for the municipality to support nonprofits conducting this work to elevate the stature of the arts.

17. Space Investment Priorities: Support Nonprofits and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

All interview and focus group participants who we asked agreed that HRM should use its limited resources to support nonprofit and non-governmental galleries, rather than spending this money on a public municipal gallery. A participant requested that the municipality “invest in the people that have been already doing this for the last 30 years.”

However, these stakeholders agreed on an exception: HRM should support the proposed new Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Participants explained that having a large-scale, professional gallery in the city supports the success of smaller organizations in a variety of ways.

- **Inviting talent.** Small organizations cannot afford to fund a trip for an international “star” artist to come to the Halifax region. If, however, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia funds such a trip, it then becomes affordable for smaller groups to invite that artist to do studio visits or give talks.
- **International curators.** It is difficult for small galleries in the Halifax region to attract curators from major international galleries, which makes it challenging to export local work. The provincial gallery is much better positioned to attract such curators to its exhibitions, which creates opportunities for local artists.

- **Art promotion.** The provincial gallery raises the profile of the arts and helps build appreciation.

Participants say the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has outgrown its current space, and that it is no longer a “class A gallery,” meaning one that meets the expectations of international artists and curators. The recent decision to put the new gallery project on indefinite hold was disappointing for the arts community.

“It’s a huge loss for everybody.”

— Arts group representative.

“It was actually devastating. I think it would have been wonderful to have that optimism back for our whole community.”

— Arts group representative

“In a town our size, we should have a gallery that is able to bring in the big exhibitions to show us what’s happening internationally and across Canada [...] University galleries do not have the budget to do that.”

— Arts group representative

17.1 New Gallery and Studio Ideas Raised by Stakeholders

Participants identified the following possibilities for adding gallery and studio space in the Halifax region. The project team has not evaluated these ideas, and this list should not be interpreted as an endorsement by HRM.

- **Reopen the Turret.** The Turret Arts Space Society has recently developed a business plan and hired an architect for the building. Multiple stakeholders cited this project as a high priority for HRM investment.
- **Create a public gallery in a prominent public building.** One participant noted that other municipalities have galleries within their City Halls that pay artists fees. This would be relatively easy to accomplish because no new space is needed, though staff time and a budget would be needed.”
- **Utilize the old library.** This building would be expensive to renovate. However, a stakeholder mentioned that at least one arts organization would like to renovate it, if they can find funding, because its central location and large rooms make it attractive as an arts space.
- **The Light House Arts Centre Atrium.** Arts groups have spoken with the Light House Arts Centre staff about using its atrium or other spaces for a gallery, studio, or offices. No such action has yet been agreed to.
- **Work with developers.** Some developers are open to providing space for artists. Starfish Properties was mentioned by more than one stakeholder. The developer is considering a project to renovate a motel in highfield park into artist live-work space, according to one stakeholder.
- **Warehouses in Dartmouth.** A participant noted that Dartmouth Cove is one of the last areas of the urban centre that has large warehouse-style buildings. However, Build Nova Scotia’s plan for the area allows high-density growth, which will make it difficult to retain these structures.
- **Find a permanent home for dispersed organizations.** The Centre For Craft Nova Scotia has studio spaces and a gallery, but they are in two different locations. Eye Level Gallery currently does not have a space. The region would gain more value from these existing groups if government could help them find space.

Part 3. Second stakeholder engagement



18. Second Stakeholder Engagement

In May 2024, we sent excerpts of a draft of this study, and the full appendices, to 105 stakeholders who had participated in earlier rounds of consultation to ask for their feedback. The excerpts focused on the main conclusions of the study and proposed next steps. We received 33 survey responses from a wide variety of stakeholders, as shown in figure 16. We made adjustments throughout the report based on their feedback.

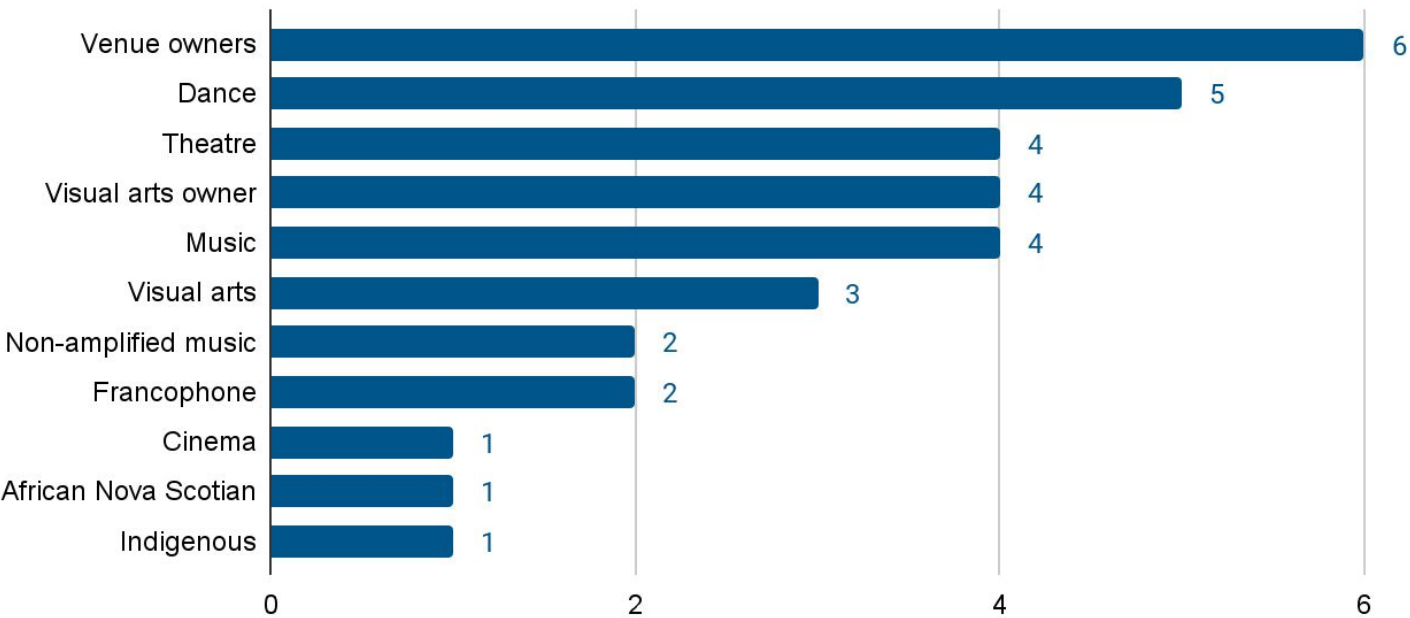


Figure 16. Number of responses from each of these categories of stakeholder in the second stage of stakeholder engagement.



Drone photograph of the Scotiabank Centre. Photo from HRM Corporate Communications.

Stakeholder feedback on priorities

We showed stakeholders the the priorities we identified for new performing arts venues (table 5 in the main report), and asked how they would prioritize each type of venue. Their responses are summarized in figure 17. In each case, the most common answer agreed with our assessment. There was, however, some disagreement on the level of priority to assign a “small cinema.” Roughly a third (37%) agree with our assessment of “high priority,” whereas 27% would increase its priority to “urgent,” and 33% would reduce it to “low priority.” We recommend maintaining the current assessment of “high priority,” as it received the most support, and is the middle point of the three options.

Overall, stakeholder feedback supports our initial assessments: there is an urgent need for a dedicated all-ages music venue and multiple black box theatres, and there is a high-priority need for a large roadhouse theatre and a medium-size roadhouse theatre.

Stakeholder assessments of priority for venue gaps

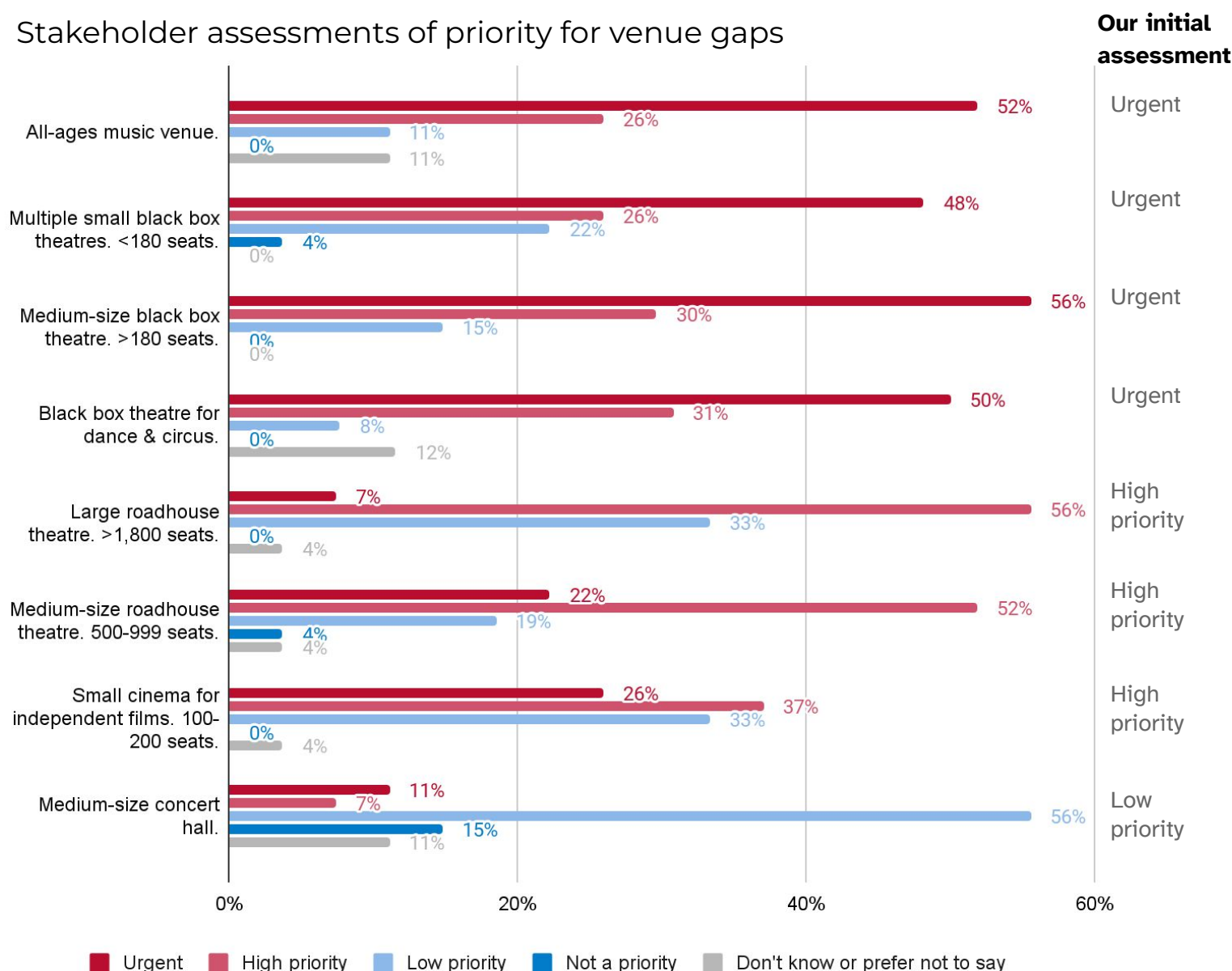


Figure 17. How stakeholders say they would prioritize each venue category. Our initial priority assessments (before stakeholders gave us their feedback) are identified in the right column. (27 responses).

Stakeholder feedback on priorities

We similarly showed stakeholders the priorities we identified for addressing the needs of the visual arts sector (table 13 in the main study), and asked how they would prioritize each action. Their responses are summarized in figure 18. The most common response for each agreed with our assessments: all received twice as much support or more than any other level of priority. The second leading answer in all cases was “Don’t know or prefer not to say.”

Note that figure 12 uses our original wording for these priorities. We have since updated the wording in table 13 based on stakeholder feedback. We also moved “Provide funding for new artist-run centres and community galleries” lower in the list, because stakeholders expressed that it is more important to enable existing organizations to better do their work (such as by acquiring or improving spaces, and providing funding for shows), rather than creating new organizations.

Stakeholder assessments of priority for visual arts investments

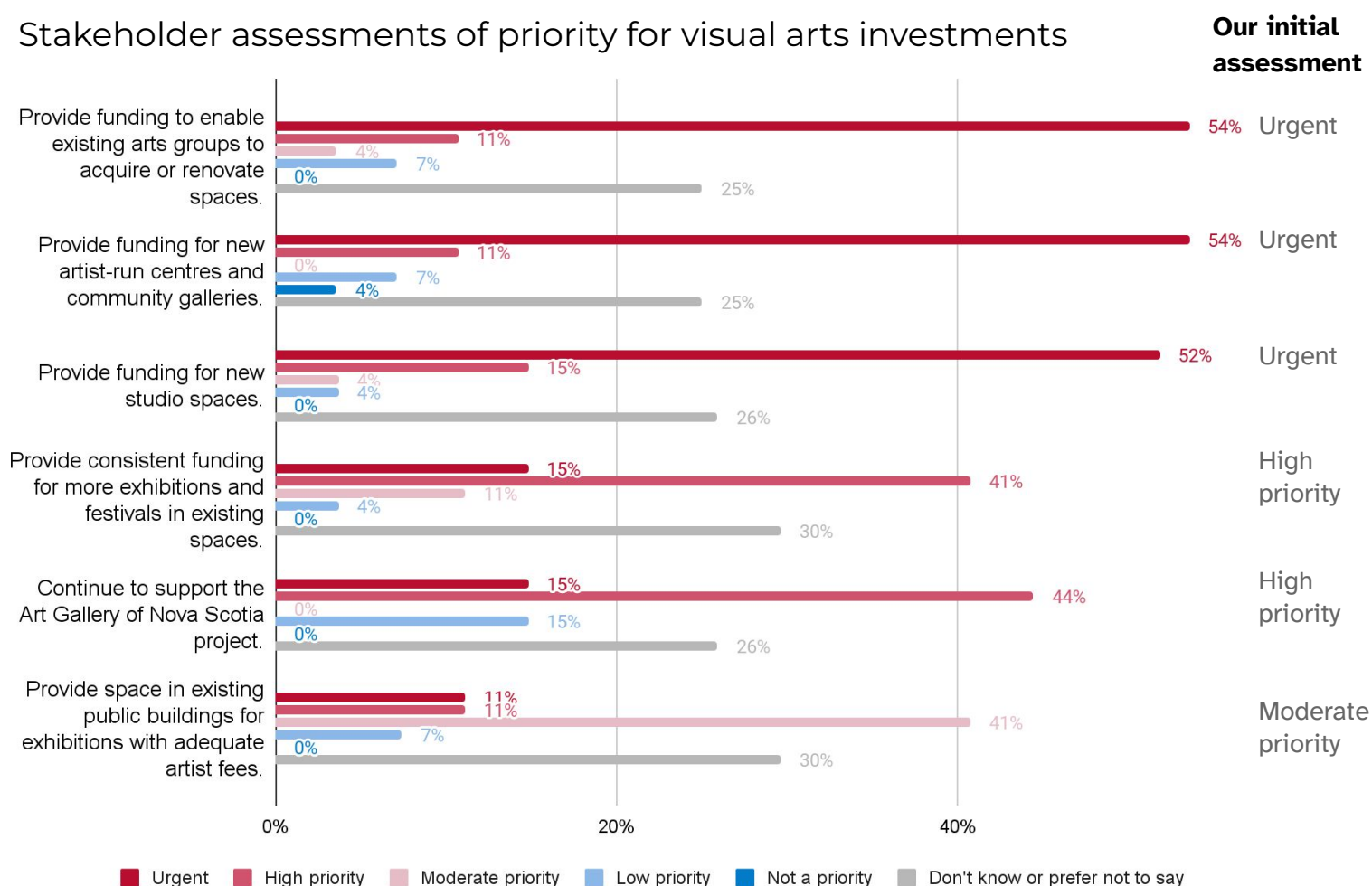


Figure 18. How stakeholders say they would prioritize each venue category. Our initial priority assessments (before stakeholders gave us their feedback) are identified in the right column. (28 responses on the first two items, 27 responses on the rest).

Conclusion

Stakeholders expressed urgent concern that the number of venues in the region has declined in recent years while the population has grown. Major investments will be needed to reverse these trends, and to create an ecosystem of venues that can serve the professional arts community in its full variety. If current trends continue unabated, stakeholders worry it may stifle the arts, and could limit the city's long-term vibrancy and prosperity.



Reeny Smith performing. Photo from HRM Corporate Communications.

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