

How can the Massachusetts cultural sector more deeply connect with audiences and communities? How have residents engaged with arts and culture during the pandemic, and as America reckons with racism? What changes in the sector do communities want to see?

Slover Linett, with funding from the Barr Foundation, sought to inform these questions via a 2021 survey involving more than 8,000 residents across Massachusetts. These findings are compared with national benchmark data drawn from 75,000 respondents.

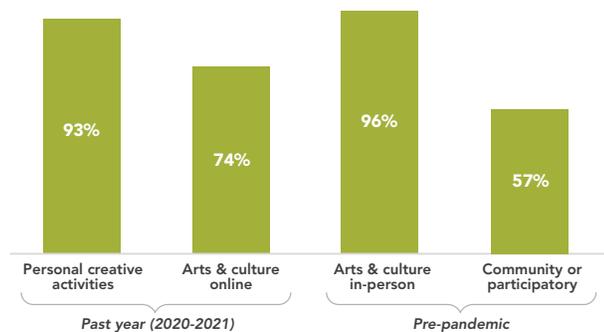


Learning from Commonwealth residents

Study findings carry broad significance for artists, arts organizations, funders, policymakers, arts advocates, and others interested in advancing a relevant and resilient arts and culture sector.

Arts and culture organizations are vital to Massachusetts communities. A majority of the state's residents (65%) rated arts and culture organizations as highly important, well above the national rating of 56%.

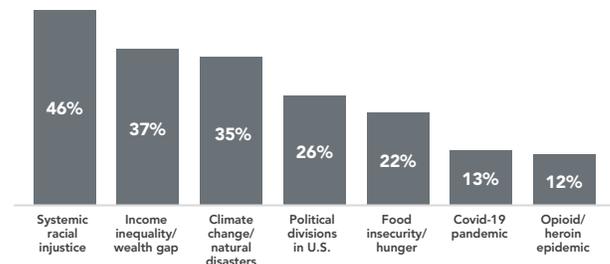
Arts & culture are deeply integrated into people's lives. During the pandemic, 93% of state residents have done personal creative activities; 74% have engaged arts and culture online. In the past few years, 96% have done in-person arts and culture activities; 57% have engaged in community-based or participatory ways.



Residents want to see the sector become even more relevant to, and reflective of, their communities. A large percentage of Massachusetts residents (92%) identified future change they'd like to see in organizations. Most often cited: becoming more welcoming, accelerating practices of equity and inclusion, removing barriers to access, deepening community rootedness.

Most want to see arts and culture organizations address social issues that matter to communities.

Across the Commonwealth, 77% of residents want vital topics addressed. Top issue areas cited by percentage of residents are shown below.



Many Massachusetts residents – a greater percentage than Americans overall – believe systemic racism is present in each genre of arts and culture organizations. For example, 47% of respondents think systemic racism is present in history museums, and 42% think it exists in art museums. These percentages increase significantly, to 83% and 78%, respectively, for Massachusetts residents who identify as Black or African American. And these figures greatly exceed the national benchmark levels: 30% of Americans overall think systemic racism is present in history museums, and in art museums.

Speaking to the future of the sector

As stated on the prior page, desire for change in arts and culture organizations was nearly universal in Massachusetts. This sentiment was expressed by 92% of residents, with several interest areas cited.



Access & new works

- More digital offerings
- Less formal
- Affordable
- More new works/exhibits
- Better operating hours



Equity & inclusion

- More diverse staff, audiences, programming
- Focus on social change, community topics
- Treat employees equitably
- Bring new perspectives



Belonging & welcome

- Friendlier to all kinds of people
- Engaging more young adults
- More child-friendly



Community rootedness

- Working with local nonprofits
- Supporting local artists
- Stories from my community

In addition, two-thirds (66%) of residents want organizations to collaborate with their communities on program creation.

Actionable opportunities for arts and culture organizations

Research findings directly point to steps that can be taken by organizations across the sector.

- Consider how to actively support all participants in **feeling welcomed** into your space—including experiences at *and* beyond the point of entry as well as feedback mechanisms.
- Discuss how you could increase support of **social issues** that matter to community—including exploring internal, programmatic, and partnership opportunities to engage with these issues.
- Examine how you are pursuing the journey to become an **anti-racist organization**—including ways of knowing if systemic racism is perceived by those involved with your work.
- Reflect on your existing **community partnerships** and explore ways to strengthen or extend collaborations—including being intentional in activating co-creation opportunities.
- Envision how **digital offerings** could broaden and diversify participation—including asking how greater digital access aligns with your organizational values and intent to serve community.

LEARN MORE

Access the full report, *Culture + Community in a Time of Transformation: Focus on Massachusetts*, published December 2021, as well as findings specific to multiple Massachusetts regions and population groups, national results, and regional briefing recordings at bit.ly/CCTTBarr.

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