KINGSTON ARTS COUNCIL

ARTIST PROSPERITY PROJECT

SURVEY REPORT

2025

CONTENTS


Holly Gilmour
Price List

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

240 participants Top 2 questions

GREATEST BENEFIT TO PRACTICING THE ARTS IN KINGSTON

54% Strong community support

46% Access to local arts organizations or events

103 Emerging artists

73 Professional artists

81 Have a Bachelor's degree

45 Have a College diploma

42%
20+ years practicing, working, or involved in the arts/culture sector

23%
1–5 years practicing, working, or involved in the arts/culture sector

57%
Under $40,000 annual income before tax from all sources

81%
Under $40,000 annual income from artistic & cultural work

107
Are self-employed or freelance in the arts/culture sector

51
Are employed full time outside of the arts/culture sector

58
Spent/invested under $1,000 annually on artistic practice

121
Spent/invested $1,000–$5,000 annually on artistic practice

57%
Have not applied for grants

24%
Have applied & received grant funding

66%
Struggle with financial instability / high cost of living when pursing artistic/cultural work

65%
Struggle with a lack of paid opportunities when pursing artistic/cultural work

INTRODUCTION

The Kingston Arts Council (KAC) created The Artist Prosperity Project (APP) as a research initiative aimed at better understanding the economic realities, demographics, and creative practices of artists in Katarokwi/Kingston and the surrounding region. This report also provided insight into some of the systemic barriers and challenges that artists encountered during 2024.

The survey explored three major disciplines: visual art, music, and performing arts. In a post-pandemic environment, this information is essential for determining the attitudes of artists living in the area.

The project had three primary outcomes:

- To collect wage data about the financial needs of artists in the Kingston region
- To report on the market realities, working conditions, and creative processes of artists in the region.
- To provide a financial reference document for arts organizations as they adjust their programming focuses.

KEY TERMS

KAC The Kingston Arts Council
APP The Artist Prosperity Project
OAC The Ontario Arts Council
CKAF City of Kingston Arts Fund

METHODOLOGY

The Artist Prosperity Project was funded by the Community Foundation for Kingston & Area, and executed by the Kingston Arts Council, with support from community partners including Kingston Music Office, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston Theatre Alliance, SpiderWebShow, and Modern Fuel. These community partners were asked to assist the KAC in a preliminary review of Artist Prosperity Survey questions before they were given to the public, and promote the resulting survey to local artists working in their respective fields. The Artist Prosperity Survey was distributed both virtually and in person over a six-week period between June and August 2025. The survey was promoted by KAC via social media marketing, paid advertisements, printed posters and promotional cards, newsletter promotion, and direct outreach to 87 organizations via email and 505 artists via direct messages on social media. Community partners additionally circulated the survey to their networks via social media. In total, 240 individual responses were collected.

The survey consisted of 140 total interview questions that were a combination of multiple choice and open response options. All participants were asked 52 general questions that included demographic, financial, and market-related prompts. Once the general section had been completed, respondents were given the option to answer additional questions about their artistic practice. Those that did were asked to disclose whether they participated in visual art, music, or performing arts. There were 26 corresponding performing arts questions, 35 music-oriented questions, and 27 visual art related questions. If an artist self-identified as multidisciplinary, they were provided with all questions related to their practices. Overall, 36 multidisciplinary artists filled out the survey. These artists were asked to clarify which of the three disciplines they practiced (Table 1). Although the total number of participants was 240, multidisciplinary artists raised the response count due to multiple entries in different fields (Table 2).

While wide reaching, one limitation of the survey was its sample size. A higher volume of responses would have resulted in a more comprehensive data set and provided a more accurate assessment of the state of the industry. To supplement and contextualize the information collected, the APP considered additional research, such as the *Concentration Of Artists In Canada*, a collaborative project between the Canada Council for the Arts, the Toronto Arts Council, and municipal leaders in Vancouver, Calgary, and Montreal. A second limitation of the APP was that the survey only accounted for three artistic disciplines. Future iterations of the survey will include assessment of other fields such as literary arts, arts administration, and film.

RESPONSE COUNT OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTISTS

Multidisciplinary Categories	Visual Arts	Music	Performing
Visual arts, Performing arts	11	0	11
Music, Performing arts	0	10	10
Visual arts, Music	9	9	0
Visual arts, Performing arts, Music	6	6	6
Total Response Count	26	25	27

Table 1. Response count of multidisciplinary artists

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Categories	Visual Arts	Music	Performing
Total participants	97	66	41
Total multidisciplinary responses	26	25	27
Total Response Count	123	91	68

Table 2. The total response count of survey participants according to discipline

DETAILED FINDINGS

Over the past few years, Eastern Ontario has enjoyed a thriving arts and culture scene.[1] Cities such as Katarokwi/Kingston carry historical and cultural significance, especially since the region houses 37.8% of the Franco-Ontarian community.[2] In a recently published report, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) estimated that Katarokwi/Kingston contributed 37 million in GDP to Eastern Ontario's culture sector.[3]

Across Canada, the cost of living crisis is affecting artists. While government grants do a lot to support the artistic industry, they often fail to keep up with inflation.[4] One APP respondent listed socio-economic issues like stronger rent control and affordable housing as a necessity, given that these two areas were the most impactful to their practice. This sentiment is echoed by artists in Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto, and Calgary; nationally, artists are concerned about their access to housing and creative spaces since the work that they do is mediated by economic and social forces.[5] Thus, resources and financial support benefit artists and the work they share with their communities.

DETAILED FINDINGS

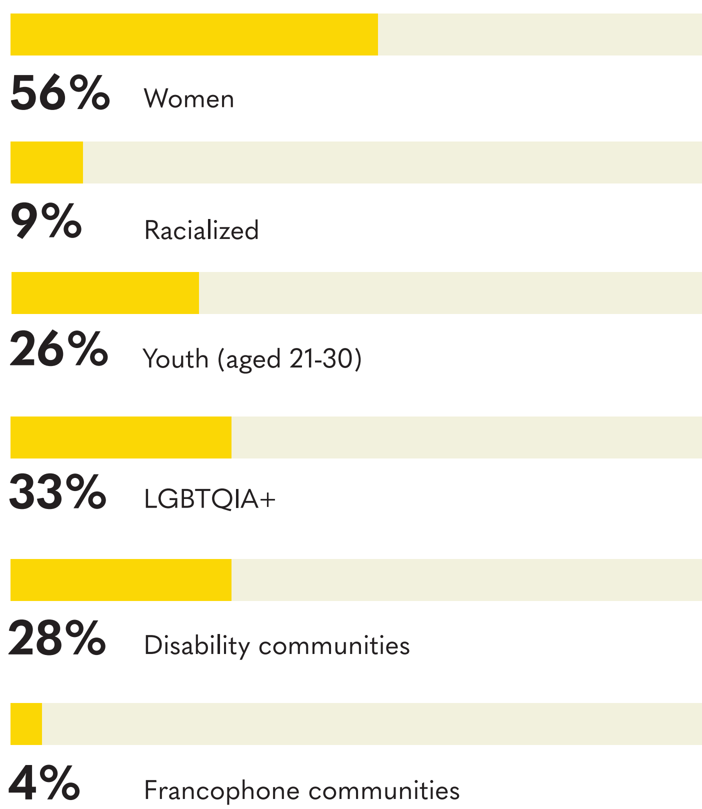
DEMOGRAPHIC

The arts and culture sector is critical to promoting strong quality of life and bolstering civic pride. However, demographic barriers can intersect with other economic factors to disadvantage a portion of the population. After the pandemic, many who freelanced or had “portfolio careers” faced tough conditions, with worsened inequalities affecting marginalized groups, such as racialized artists, women, younger professionals, and those with disabilities or chronic illness.[6] Studies show that systemic racism and other forms of discrimination persist in Canada’s art scene,[7] emphasizing the need for funders and arts organizations to adopt a more nuanced approach when considering how best to support marginalized or underserved populations. Funders must pay particular attention to an organization’s equity practices and its project’s impact in order to prevent discriminatory programming.

The Artist Prosperity Survey strived to collect demographic data from those in Central Frontenac, South Frontenac, North Frontenac, and Kingston; of the responses collected, 56% were women, 9% were racialized, 26% were youth (aged 21-30), 33% were LGBTQIA+, 28% were from disability communities, 3% from Indigenous communities, and 4% were from Francophone communities.

Demographic data is useful for determining the financial health of the sector as artists and arts organizations advocate to municipal and provincial governments for increased funding. This section provides insight into the demographic patterns observed among Katarokwi/Kingston artists, while acknowledging that the needs from those in underserved communities may differ. For additional information about what obstacles artists in the region face, the barriers & support section goes into greater depth about what assistance the broader community has requested.

RESPONDENT COMMUNITIES



RESPONDENT AGES

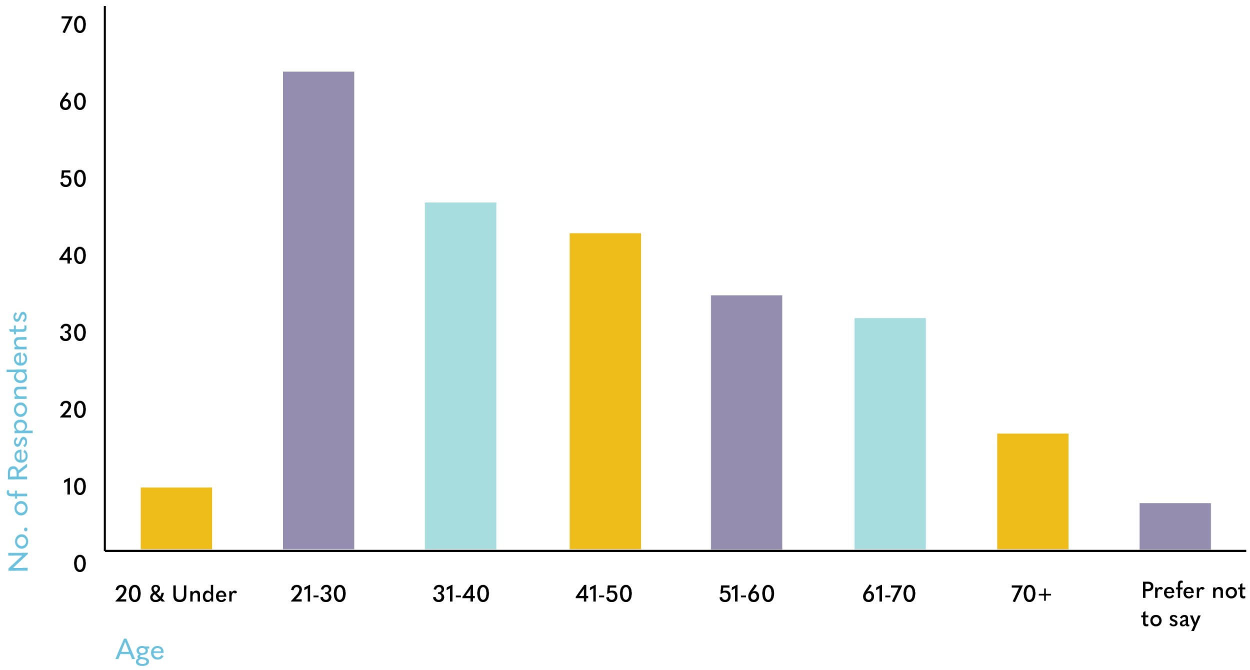


Fig. 1 Age of the APP responders

DETAILED FINDINGS

AGE

The age group with the highest response rate in the Artist Prosperity Survey was ages 21-30. While Katarokwi/ Kingston is home to a significant population of post-secondary students, access – or lack thereof – to paid opportunities in the arts may limit the city's ability to retain or grow the artistic workforce. The Canada Council for the Arts included youth as one of the designated priority groups in their 2021-2026 Strategic Plan,[8] and the Ontario Arts Council similarly added New Generation Artists (those aged 18-30) as a priority group, recognizing the challenges commonly faced by younger artists when breaking into established arts environments.[9]
In considering ways to expand and strengthen Kingston's arts sector, instilling confidence in youth artists as they advocate for better wages is an important priority. Yet, challenges in negotiating wages exist across the sector, and equitable practices must exist for all artists – in particular, those from underserved communities – in and around Kingston.

LEVEL OF TRAINING OR EDUCATION

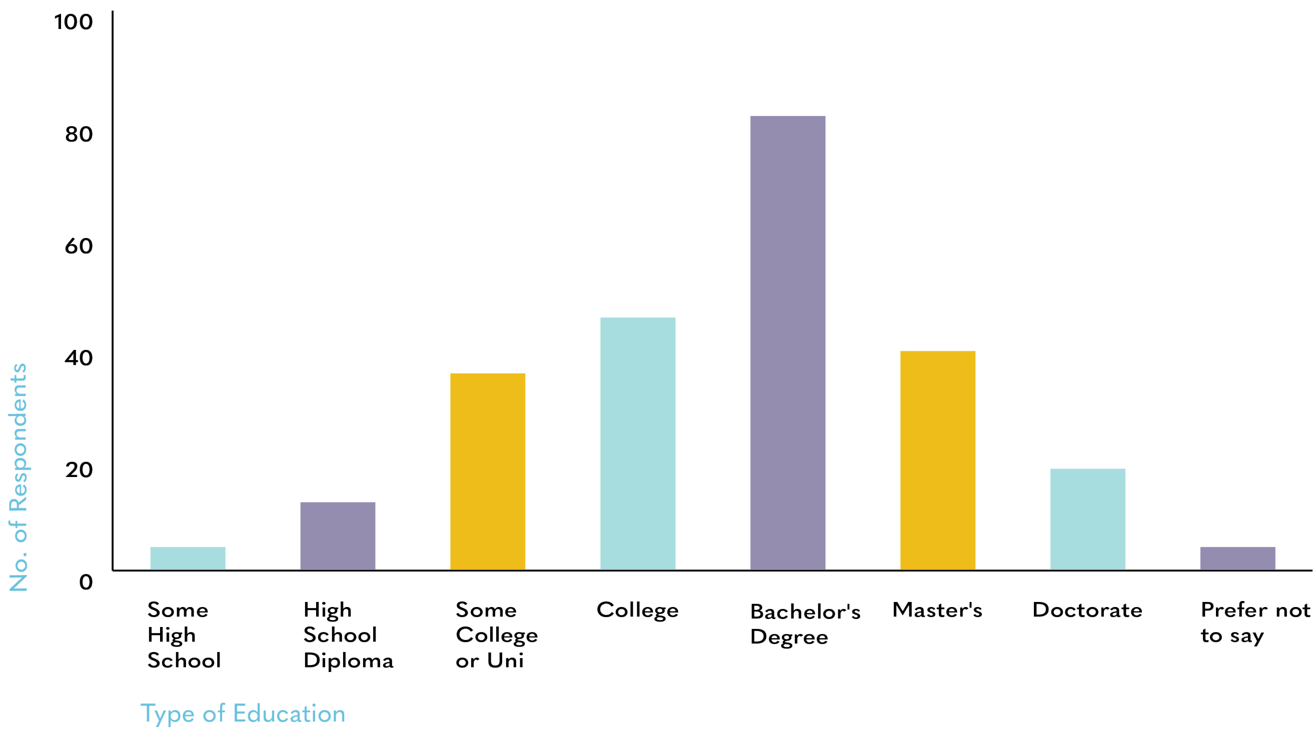


Fig. 2 Education levels of APP responders

DETAILED FINDINGS

EDUCATION

Another notable feature in respondents was education level. APP respondents were highly educated, as 76% received a post-secondary degree, diploma, or certificate. Education is a useful metric when considering the rates of underemployment in the arts sector. Nationally, arts and communication graduates were less likely to hold a job closely related to their field of study than other graduates, despite their qualifications.[10] According to the Government of Canada's *2011 National Household Survey*, the percentage of people 25 or older with a bachelor's degree (or higher) was greater in the arts sector than in the overall workforce.[11] Education also appears to play a role in arts participation; a 2016 survey from Hills Strategies showed that respondents with higher education were more likely to regularly attend arts events.[12] While this could be chalked up to other factors, this trend indicates that education may play a role in arts participation.

The CKAF investment was $612,790 in 2024 and 2025; up from $597,844 in 2023. The CKAF Review Report outlines several recommendations including increased investment into the CKAF, with an ideal target of $870,000.

DETAILED FINDINGS

INCOME

Two factors significantly affecting the artistic workforce in the Katarokwi/Kingston region are low wages and a lack of full-time employment opportunities in the arts. These challenges were, unsurprisingly, consistently noted by APP survey respondents, with 57% reporting total personal incomes below $40,000. Comparatively, a national survey from 2024 reported 51% of artists earning personal incomes below $40,000.[13]

When looking at artistic income in isolation, 50% of APP survey respondents made less than $5,000 before taxes. Conversely, 50% invested between $1,000–$5,000 annually in their practice. As such, many artists need to work additional part-time or full-time jobs outside of their creative practice. Working multiple jobs can prevent them from allocating time to their practice, ultimately leading to burnout.[14] Despite financial limitations, Katarokwi/Kingston's arts scene is vibrant – between 2022-2023, 693 new works were created by the City of Kingston Arts Fund (CKAF) recipients.[15]

DETAILED FINDINGS

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Another influence that contributed to low income was employment status. Nearly half (45%) of APP survey respondents were self-employed or freelanced in the arts and culture sector. In a Hill Strategies' Inc. employment analysis, 51% of responding artists were self-employed; however, of the self-employed, 44% had no business or career management training.[16] The artists reported a lack of stable earnings and increased stress levels as a drawback – yet, many enjoyed the flexible hours and control they had over their work.[17]

A second relevant data point was about full-time employment. More APP survey takers were employed full-time outside of the arts and culture sector than in the sector (21% vs 15%). In Kingston between 2022 and 2023, there were 182 staff positions at CKAF operating grant organizations – a 15% increase from the previous year.[18] Meanwhile, there were 61 full-time equivalent positions – an 11% increase from the previous year.[19] While these organizations continuously employed artists or art administrators, they were unable to maintain as many full-time positions, likely due to financial constrictions.

RESPONDENTS WHO APPLIED FOR GRANTS IN 2024

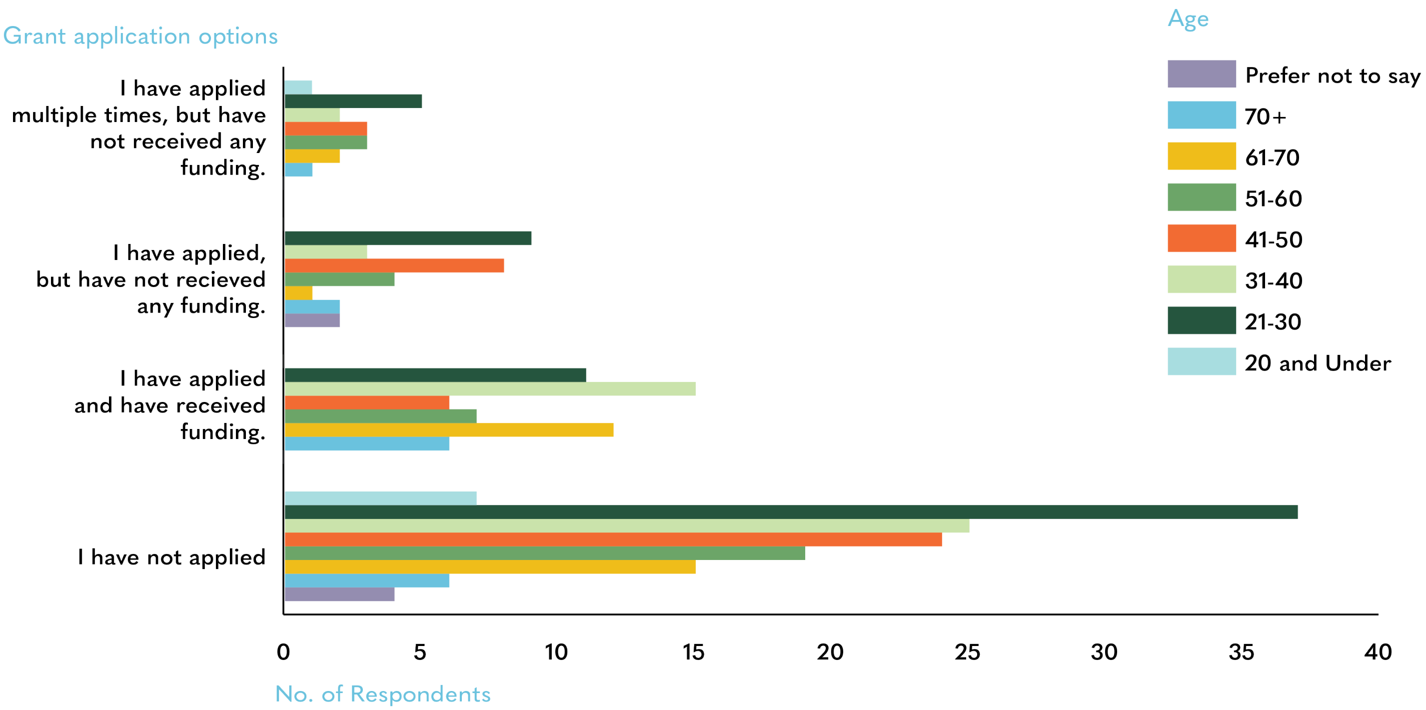


Fig. 3 Respondents who applied for a grant in 2024

$7,591,519

Revenue from CKAF recipients between 2022-2023

DETAILED FINDINGS

GRANT FUNDING & APPLICATIONS

Grant funding is a critical financial resource for artists. Municipal, provincial, and federal grants exist to offer financial support to individuals, projects, and organizations. The City of Kingston Arts Fund (CKAF), facilitated by the KAC on behalf of the City of Kingston, issues over $600,000 in grant funding annually with increased investment targeted for 2026 and beyond through the CKAF Review.[20] This amount returned more than twelve times its investment—$7,591,519 was generated in revenue from CKAF recipients between 2022-2023.[21] Despite efforts to expand the reach and impact of the CKAF program and education on granting practices, 57% of APP survey respondents stated they had never applied for a grant before. When one considers that the largest age group in this percentage was from those aged 21-30 (Figure 3), age and inexperience with grant writing practices are most likely an influence. Of those who applied for grants, over half received funding (55%). Participants were invited to fill out a textbox explaining why they hadn't applied before. Many respondents said they felt overwhelmed, or that they had experienced symptoms of Imposter syndrome. Others said that they were still building their portfolio in order to meet the criteria. The most commonly repeated response was that participants didn't know how or where to start.

DETAILED FINDINGS

EMERGING, ESTABLISHED, AND PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS

The APP survey also asked artists how long they had been practicing their art, and which descriptors they used to self-identify. Participants were allowed to select multiple descriptors, and 43% considered themselves to be emerging artists. The second and third most common descriptors were community-based artists (35%) and professional artists (30%). The distinction between emerging, mid-career, and professional, as well as each label's perceived value may be another factor that prevents artists from seeking higher pay or career support. When working to remove systemic barriers, it's important to identify what value artists place on their skill.

DETAILED FINDINGS

BARRIERS & SUPPORT

Financial stress can occur when pay is unpredictable or sporadic. In addition to low annual income and self-employment status, the KAC identified a lack of paid artistic opportunities as a systemic barrier. APP participants in each of the three disciplines reported that profits from their artwork or performances primarily went towards overhead costs – a trend that left individual artists with little to no pay. As such, it's important to support local arts organizations as they advocate for increased funding. This is one way to contribute to the success of artists, **all while eliminating barriers.** When individuals were asked which support options would be the most beneficial, the top response was market coverage or publicity (55%).

The following responses all fell within a 1-2% range of one another:

- Gaining access to grants or funding
- Gaining access to venues rehearsal/creation space, or residencies
- Gaining better access to education, classes, and workshops
- Gaining performance gigs and opportunities

Some respondents wrote down specific concerns; a few requested increased access to interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing artists, while others requested childcare support or workshops targeted to parents of young kids. The two most widely reported challenges were financial instability (66%) and a lack of paid artistic opportunities (65%). These responses were consistent across all disciplines. The two following concerns were limited access to financial resources (52%) and mental health challenges (50%).

DETAILED FINDINGS

MARKET

Market information reveals the working conditions of artists in the area. The APP offers its audience a look at how artists in the city share or sell their work. This information is difficult to gather independently, so data about market prices, work spaces, and selling opportunities is useful for determining what practical steps artists should take next in their careers. For vendors, local market knowledge such as consumer behaviour and industry trends offers valuable insight about their clientele.

The creative processes of artists vary, so data about their work environments offers policy-makers and funders information about where or how different artists develop their craft. In Kingston, many artists base their work out of their home. 43% work from a home studio, while another 32% work from home in a non-dedicated space. When transitioning their work from the private sphere to the public, 89% of the APP artists used social media to promote their practice and 83% gained opportunities through word of mouth.

Despite its financial challenges, the county has strong community support. 72% of participants agreed that Kingston was a good place to live and work as an artist. Two additional benefits were the access to local arts organizations or events (46%) and the city's opportunities for collaboration (37%). Whether working independently or as a part of an arts organization, 46% of respondents agreed that Kingston offers sufficient opportunities to network with other artists.

ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES

VISUAL ARTS

CRITERIA USED TO DETERMINE ART-RELATED SERVICE COST

- **61%** The materials, time, and preparation required to create the art
- **22%** Market demand and buyer expectations
- **24%** Advice or mentorship from other artists
- **25%** What I feel the work is worth or my emotional investment
- **17%** Fee structures proposed by artistic organizations (i.e. CARFAC)
- **15%** I use consistent rates for all pieces (i.e. per square inch)
- **37%** I find pricing challenging and often adjust it on a case by case basis
- **15%** I do not currently sell my work
- **8%** Other

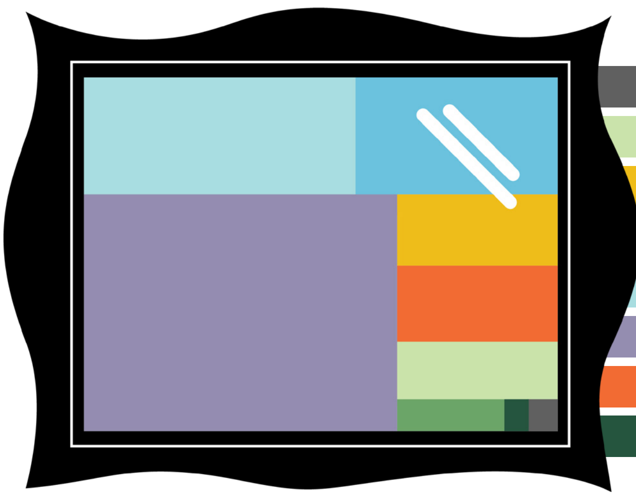
PAY STRUCTURES FOR EXHIBITED WORKS IN 2024

123 participants

- **33%** Exhibitions where artist payment is based on sales
- **16%** Exhibitions with artist fees (CARFAC rates or higher)
- **9%** Exhibitions with an honorarium (below CARFAC rates)
- **19%** Unpaid opportunities (i.e. volunteer, exposure, fundraiser)
- **40%** Did not exhibit work in 2024
- **4%** Other

WHERE ARTWORK IS TYPICALLY DISPLAYED OR SOLD

123 participants



- **9%** Commissioned spaces (i.e. public art installations)
- **10%** Do not currently sell or display artwork
- **19%** Galleries outside of the Kingston region
- **29%** Galleries in Kingston and the surrounding region
- **39%** Art markets or festivals
- **52%** Online platforms (i.e. Etsy, personal website)
- **19%** Local businesses (i.e. cafés, boutiques)
- **7%** Other

FINDING EXHIBITION OPPORTUNITIES

- **85** Social media or online platform
- **60** Word of mouth
- **64** Personal network or referrals
- **1** Agents or manager
- **42** Open calls promoted via physical promo
- **35** KAC resources
- **32** Self-produced exhibitions
- **24** Approached directly by galleries, event organizers, or collaborators
- **15** Cold calls or email outreach to venues, etc
- **40** Other arts-based organizations resources and newsletters
- **7** Other

VISUAL ARTS

DATA

There are a number of visual arts organizations and activities in Katarokwi/Kingston and its surrounding areas. The region is home to a variety of visual artists, as well as arts organizations, festivals, and projects focused on or including visual arts.
This aligns with research published in the 2025 OAC regional report, where visual and applied arts contributed to the largest portion of culture sector work in the Eastern region.[22] By far, the largest number of responses in the APP were from visual artists!

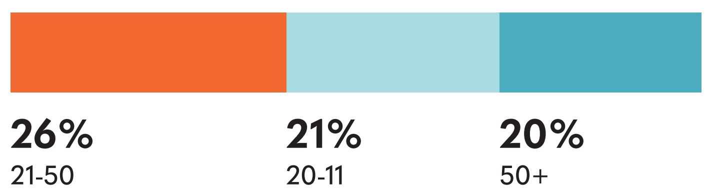
VISUAL ARTS

FINANCES: ORIGINAL & COMMISSIONED WORKS

Visual artists made the highest volume of original works of all three disciplines. In the last year, 26% made between 21-50 new works, 21% made 11-20, and 20% of the respondents made more than 50 new and original works.

Time allocated towards developing their artistic practice is measured in Table 3, with the highest proportion of respondents engaging part-time (30%), followed by occasional practice (26%) and full-time (24%). Still, 51% of visual artists participated in fewer than five exhibitions during the same time period. This could be due to external or internal factors – while some visual artists may be deterred by the market or selling, others may simply engage in their practice for more personal reasons.

NEW WORKS MADE



ENGAGEMENT IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE

Engagement in Arts Practice	123 Participants	Percentage of Participants
Full-time (35+ hrs/week)		24%
Part-time (20-34 hrs/week)		30%
Occasionally (1-19 hrs/week)		26%
Sporadically, as time allows		17%
Seasonally (i.e. Holiday markets, festivals, etc)		3%

Table 3. Frequency visual artists engage in their artistic practice

REVENUE STREAMS

Revenue Streams	Percentage of Participants
Selling Original Works	56%
Commissions	33%
I Don't Currently Generate Income from my Practice	30%
Teaching Classes / Workshops	28%
Exhibitions	27%
Selling Prints	24%

Revenue Streams	Percentage of Participants
Selling Merchandise	11%
Grants or Fellowships	10%
Other	8%
Promoting / Creating Content for Socials	4%
Paid Residencies	3%
Art Licensing / Rental	1%

Table 4. Responses to: "Do you typically profit from art sales?"

ART SALES PROFITS

27 I typically earn a profit from my art sales

33 Profits from my art sales typically support overhead costs or other businesse expenses, with little to no profits earned

27 I typically invest personal money into my art, losing money as a result

26 I do not typically profit from or sell my art

9 Unsure / Prefer not to answer

PRICE OF WORKS

30% of visual artists did not generate any revenue from their practice (Table 4) in the same time period. Of those that did, original and commissioned works were the most successful revenue streams. With a range of sale prices and market success, profits from art sales varied across visual art respondents, with 27% of respondents noting that the majority of their artistic earnings went towards overhead costs, 22% reporting profits earned, and 22% reporting losses. Pricing for artworks, outlined in Fig. 4, are developed according to material costs, time, and preparation required to create the work.

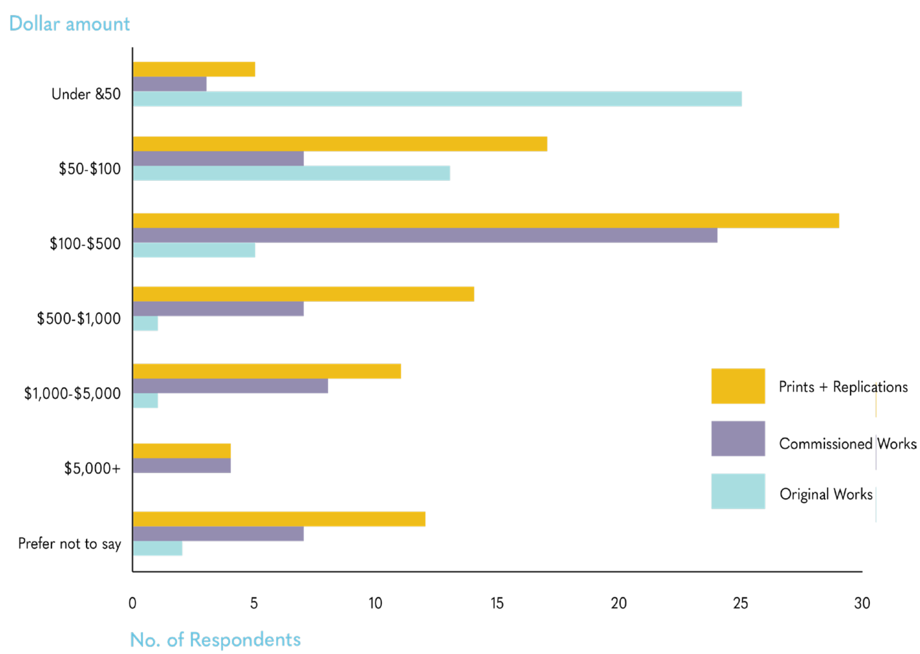


Fig. 4 Price ranges for original artworks, commissions, prints + replications

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

123 participants

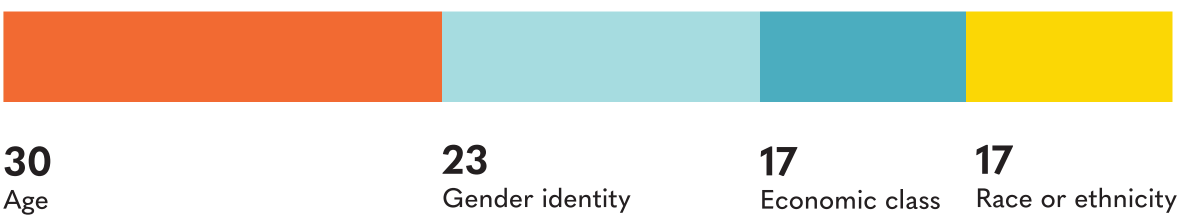


Fig. 5 The systemic barriers of visual artists in Katarokwi/Kingston

VISUAL ARTS

BARRIERS & SUPPORT

As with any discipline, systemic barriers create differently. When compared to the general questions, more visual artists reported encountering systemic barriers based on their race & ethnicity and economic class (Fig. 5) it is also important to note that 67% of visual artists respondents in the survey were women. One respondent, aware of these inequities, pointed to an interesting paradox, stating that it was hard to know what barriers directly affected them since they were not privy to the lost opportunities. Another participant acknowledged that others' preconceived notions were a barrier to their practice. They noted that because their practice was interdisciplinary, they felt that the public devalued their credibility in any given discipline, which contributed to how hard it was to find work.

ADDITIONAL EXHIBITION OPPORTUNITIES & GALLERY SPACES

From the responses provided, it would seem that Katarokwi/Kingston's visual artists feel disconnected from their potential clientele, with 40% of visual artists responding that they did not exhibit work in the last year. There are a variety of reasons why this is the case. 52% of artists were concerned with the inability to find an audience and market, which not only affects their personal income, but the region's cultural and economic impact as a whole. Meanwhile, 45% said that a lack of access to gallery spaces or exhibition opportunities limited their practice. Two respondents voiced concerns about the cost of exhibition booths at festivals, as it prevented low-income artists from selling their work. One respondent chose not to monetize their work, while another raised a concern about the limited hours at local galleries. Exhibitions offer exposure to a larger audience, and they give visual artists a chance to meet other future collaborators. This holds value considering that 52% gained additional opportunities to exhibit from personal referrals, and 49% received exhibition opportunities from word of mouth. Increasing the amount of exhibition opportunities and gallery spaces is one way to support the professional development of those in this discipline. Even so, visual artists in the region describe pricing challenges.

PRICING & AFFORDABILITY

Exhibitions and art sales are important since they have a twofold effect. In addition to being a sales opportunity, these events give artists a chance to prove their product's reliability. One thing that can threaten this is inconsistent service or pay structures. APP visual artist respondents who reported sales were asked about prices. For those who participated in an exhibition during 2024, payment primarily came from their sales (33%). 61% took into account the materials, time, and preparation required when setting payment rates. Still, setting prices was challenging. More than half (55%) admitted that they found appropriately pricing their work or expertise difficult. When asked to set their own payment rates, 37% said that they adjusted the cost of their services on a case by case basis. Lastly, market demand and buyer expectations were another criteria that visual artists took into account (22%). APP visual artists make a lot of work but have limited places to sell it. For those who do sell their work, barriers such as demographics, exhibition opportunities, and pricing limit artists from connecting with a larger audience.



ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES

MUSIC

METHOD USED TO FIND PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

91 participants

- **75%** Personal network or referrals
- **58%** Social media or online platforms
- **2%** Manager or booking agent
- **7%** Directly through producers / companies
- **40%** Approached directly by venues, event, organizers, or collaborators
- **37%** Self-organized
- **36%** Cold calls or email outreach to venues, promoters, organizers, and collaborators
- **13%** Open calls or auditions promoted via physical promotion (i.e. posters, radio, ads, billboards)
- **2%** KAC resources (newsletter, Arts Events Calendar, Opportunities Board, Arts Job Board, social media)
- **2%** Other

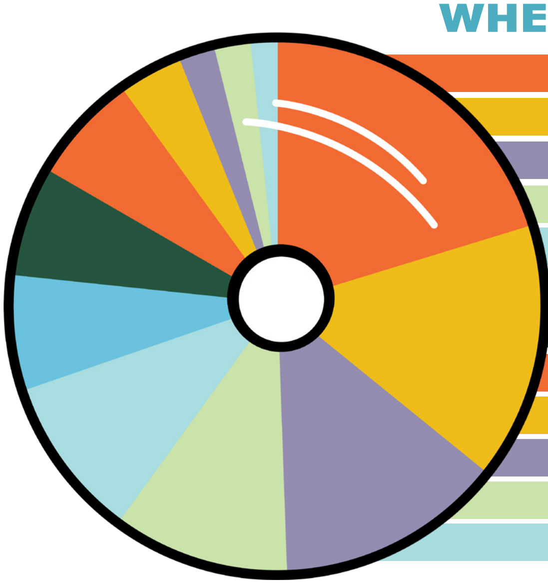
CRITERIA USED TO SET PAYMENT RATES

- **43** Find pricing challenging
- **38** The equipment, software, time, and effort to create or perform
- **25** Market demand and audience expectations
- **20** Audience expectations
- **20** Advice or guidance from other musicians or mentors
- **10** Fee guidelines from industry organizations (i.e. union rates)
- **9** I use consistent rates for all services (i.e. hourly, per performance, per composition)
- **3** Other

DESCRIPTION OF PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES IN 2024

- **59%** Most were paid opportunities
- **14%** An even mix of paid and unpaid
- **11%** Most were unpaid opportunities
- **9%** Most were unpaid with some opportunity for profit
- **7%** Did not perform in 2024

WHERE MUSICIANS TYPICALLY PERFORM



- **71%** Local businesses with dedicated performance spaces
- **56%** Traditional stage venues (i.e. The Grand Theatre)
- **47%** Festivals
- **36%** Municipal events and/or public programming
- **34%** Local businesses, without dedicated performance spaces
- **24%** Corporate or private event
- **24%** Touring across Ontario
- **23%** Pop-up or temporary locations (i.e. busking, markets)
- **13%** Touring across Canada
- **7%** Touring internationally
- **9%** Online (i.e. virtual concerts, live streaming)
- **4%** Other

MUSIC

DATA

The music industry in Katarokwi/Kingston and its surrounding areas is lively. Online and local resources such as Kingston Live or the Union of Professional Musicians Local 518 serves musicians of all proficiencies. Additionally, music festivals such as Homegrown and Spring Reverb provide a large number of local artists with live performance opportunities. One APP participant wrote that Kingston's reputation as a music city was a factor that motivated them to create here. Moreover, the impact of music on the city extends beyond reputation.

The Canadian Live Music Association recognized live music's influence on tourism, noting that it brings people together to foster a sense of local pride. Musicians in Katarokwi/Kingston play a number of different genres and at varying locations. The most common genre that KAC respondents performed was folk/country (46%). This was followed by rock (43%), and then indie/original songs/acoustic music (42%) (Figure. 6). Meanwhile, the three main activities that local musicians participated in were concerts, festivals, and recordings (Figure 7).

MUSIC GENRES PERFORMED BY RESPONDENTS

91 participants

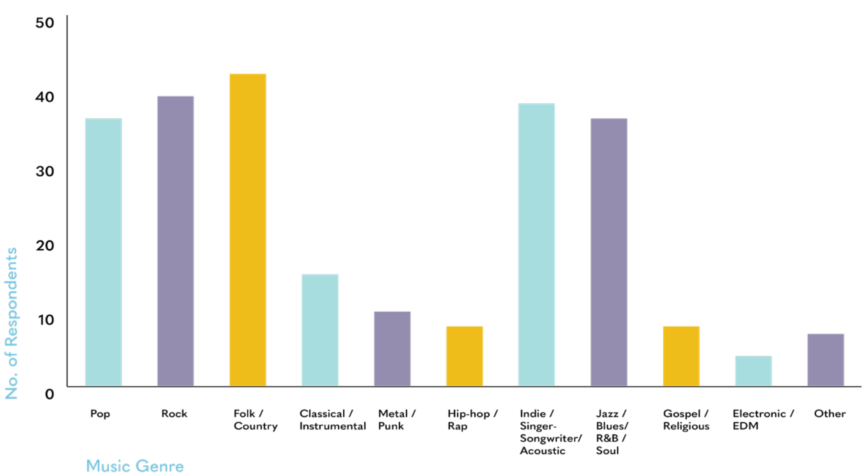


Fig. 6 The musical activities of APP respondents during 2024

MUSIC ACTIVITIES IN 2024

91 participants

72 Concerts

52 Festivals

49 Recording an EP, LP, and/or singles

17 Music videos

Fig. 7 The musical activities of APP respondents during 2024

MUSIC

FINANCES: INCREASING MUSICIAN PAY

According to APP research, musicians in Katarokwi/Kingston and the surrounding area are not making much money from their performances. 34% reported that payment from a gig went to supporting overhead costs or other business expenses, meaning that little to no profits were earned. After splits, expenses, and deductions, 74% of respondents reported that they make $250 or less from a performance, and the largest reported section took home under $100 per performance (Table 5). Given that 78% reported their main revenue stream as performance fees, this amount does little to cover the rising costs of a musician's expenses. When asked, APP musicians answered that their largest expenses were instruments or equipment (62%), transportation (46%), and performance/gig-related costs (38%). One musician who had been playing for over 20 years stated that musicians had not seen a nominal increase in pay for work for nearly forty years. As was observed by his colleague, a notable local venue has only upped the max they pay by twenty five dollars since 1990.

34% of the respondents who received under $100 per gig were youth (Table 6). While some believe that new generation artists should be paid less due to their experience, a little more than half (51%) of the seasoned musicians (who had over 20 years of experience) also made under $100 per performance. In thinking about how to support and retain musicians in the city – increasing musician pay is one area that the data supports.

LARGEST EXPENSES

62% Instruments or equipment

46% Transportation

38% Performance / gig-related costs

INDIVIDUAL PAY PER PERFORMANCE

Typical individual take-home pay per performance	91 Participants	Percentage of Participants
Under $100 / performance		38%
$100–$250 / performance		35%
$250–$500 / performance		9%
$2,000–$5,000 / performance		1%
I am typically not paid for live performances		14%
Unsure / Prefer not to answer		2%

Table 5. Frequency visual artists engage in their artistic practice

YOUTH PAY PER PERFORMANCE

Typical individual take-home pay per performance	91 Participants	Percentage of Participants
Under $100 / performance		34%
$100–$200 / performance		41%
$250–$500 / performance		25%
$2,000–$5,000 / performance		0%
I am typically not paid for live performances		23%
Unsure / Prefer not to answer		50%

Table 6. Typical pay of youth musicians in Kingston and the surrounding region

MUSIC

BARRIERS & SUPPORT: PRICING CHALLENGES

When APP musicians were asked what barriers they faced during 2024, limited paid performance opportunities (52%), a lack of media interest or support (47%), and limited performance venues (45%) were the top contenders. Respondents were unsure about how to negotiate or price their work and services. 46% found negotiating with local business owners, promoters, and venues challenging, while a little more than half adjusted their pricing on a case-by-case basis (51%). Price setting can be tough for emerging artists, but market changes can also impact those who have long-established their careers. According to the *Kingston Music Strategy*, one way to offset pricing concerns is to develop policies and incentives that ensure fair compensation for performers.[24] Ideally, this will benefit musicians, venues, and promoters who are willing to offer (at the very least) union rates.

PRICING CHALLENGES

91 participants

Types of Barriers	91 Participants	# of Participants
High costs of promotion or distribution		35
High costs of travel for performances		35
Limited paid performance opportunities		47
Limited performance venues		41
Lack of media interest or support		43
Limited access to funding or grants		31
Lack of funds for marketing, branding, or promo		25
Low ticket sales		22
Low streaming royalties		40
Saturation or competition in local or national music markets		27
Difficulty covering studio or rehearsal space costs		26
Confusion or difficult to navigate platforms and mediums to share music		13
Lack of business knowledge to manage finances effectively		7
Inability to afford quality instruments or gear		5
Other		4

Table 7. The musical activities of APP respondents during 2024

MEDIA SUPPORT

APP respondents requested assistance in securing performance and gig opportunities (71%), while 54% requested assistance with marketing, promotion and branding. In a field that relies on audience engagement, media attention is the difference between one job and the next. 75% of APP musicians learned about performance opportunities through their personal network and referrals, while 58% learned through social media and online platforms. It's apparent then that although traditional media and online support doesn't provide musicians with much income, it plays an important role in notifying them of opportunities and expanding their audience/network. The City of Kingston's music strategy also acknowledged increased media support as a need. In their report, more opportunities/channels to display music-related news and events is one step towards a stronger music sector.[25]

AFFORDABLE VENUES & LOCAL BUSINESSES

In terms of music venues, 45% reported that there were limited performance venues in Katarokwi/Kingston and the surrounding area. According to APP data, musicians played at more local businesses than at traditional stage venues in 2024. 71% of musicians identified local businesses with dedicated performance spaces as the primary locations for their acts. However, 56% of APP respondents did still play at locations such as The Broom Factory, The Grand Theatre, Slush Puppy Place, or other concert/performance halls. One reason for this difference may be affordability. The Canadian Live Music Association in their 2025 Economic Impact Assessment, listed venue concerns (specifically, the growing need to protect existing venues and to support risk-taking among venues/promoters) as an issue that needs to be prioritized.[26] Doing so means that Canada's live music industry can continue to support artists, all while making a significant economic impact.[27]

MUSICIAN ADVOCACY

Career assistance looks different for Katarokwi/Kingston musicians. Whether through municipal or community engagement, APP respondents listed a few different types of support: one respondent requested stronger infrastructure for independent artists, such as an organization for Black and other marginalized musicians in the city; another suggested a local radio station/series for musicians who don't produce rock, grassroots, or indie folk music; two additional ideas were having a point of contact for booking gigs at campgrounds, or introducing a new grant funding stream allocated towards musical acts. One can better understand the working conditions of artists in the region by examining their market realities.

To recap, Musicians reported three systemic barriers as the most crippling: 52% reported limited paid performance opportunities, 47% reported a lack of media interest or support, and 45% reported that there were limited performance venues in Kingston. While 59% of the respondents said that most of their performances over the past year were paid, the largest majority took home under $100 per performance (Table 5). Each of these barriers contributes to the cycle of financial instability. APP Musicians are forced into a gig economy, since there are few full-time career positions or consistent well-paid opportunities in the music industry. As a result, a feeling of oversaturation or competition may pit artists against one another. When local organizations pay musicians low amounts, or artists are hesitant to negotiate for better pay – low wages become the norm in the industry. All in all, limited venues can lead to limited opportunities, limited opportunities can lead to high rates of competition for gigs, and high rates of competition can lead to low wages.

ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES

PERFORMANCE

68 participants

METHOD USED TO FIND PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

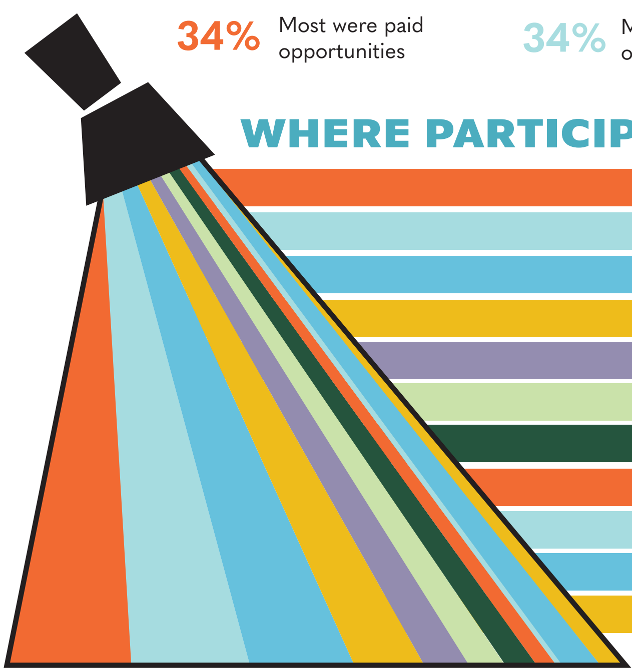
- **60%** Personal network or referrals
- **54%** Social media or online platforms
- **1%** Manager or booking agent
- **50%** Approached directly by venues, event, organizers, or collaborators
- **40%** Self-organized
- **13%** Cold calls or email outreach to venues, promoters, organizers, and collaborators
- **43%** Open calls or auditions promoted via physical promotion (i.e. posters, radio, ads, billboards)
- **10%** KAC resources (newsletter, Arts Events Calendar, Opportunities Board, Arts Job Board, social media)
- **18%** Other performance-based organizations resources and newsletters (e.g., Kingston Theatre Alliance)
- **7%** Other

CRITERIA USED TO SET PAYMENT RATES

- **41** Time and preparation required for performance
- **17** Market demand and audience expectations
- **20** Advice or guidance from peers or mentors
- **17** What I feel the work is worth or my emotional investment
- **21** Fee guidelines from industry organizations (i.e. union rates)
- **14** I use consistent rates for all services (i.e. hourly, per performance, per composition)
- **24** I find pricing challenging and often adjust it on a case-by-case basis
- **8** Other

DESCRIPTION OF PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES IN 2024

- **34%** Most were paid opportunities
- **34%** Most were unpaid opportunities
- **21%** An even mix of paid and unpaid
- **15%** I did not perform in 2024



WHERE PARTICIPANTS TYPICALLY PERFORM

- **43** Traditional theatre / stage venues (i.e. The Grand Theatre)
- **41** Non-traditional theatre / stage venues (i.e. site specific, outdoor)
- **34** Festivals
- **20** Local businesses (i.e. restaurants, bars, cafés)
- **12** Municipal events and/or public programming
- **7** Corporate or private events
- **6** Touring across Ontario
- **4** Touring across Canada
- **1** Touring internationally
- **9** Online (i.e. virtual concerts, live streaming)
- **5** Other

Fig. 8. The performance environments of Kingston artists in 2024

PERFORMING ARTS

DATA

In the Kingston region, the performing arts industry is as diverse as it is creative. Every year, dancers, actors, comedians, and more perform all over the region. Kingston has an influx of trained/educated performing artists who are supported by programs at Queens, St Lawrence, the Royal Military College, and the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) pathway at Limestone District high schools. Each of these courses encourage artists to develop their creative processes as they build their careers. When thinking about the market conditions of performing artists in the region, more than half of the APP performing artists were thespians (51%), while the next highest response were from dancers (18%) (Fig. 9). 46% of respondents were in at least 1-5 performances in the last year. Despite this, these artists only engaged in their practice occasionally (31%). Performing artists received income from a variety of revenue streams, but 28% reported not being paid at all for their work (Table 8).

DISCIPLINE(S) RESPONDENTS PRIMARILY WORK IN

68 participants

35 Theatre (i.e. dancer, director)

12 Dance (i.e. dancer, choreographer)

9 Literary performing arts (i.e. storyteller)

9 Drag / Burlesque

8 Comedy (i.e. stand-up, sketch)

6 New media

1 Multidisciplinary or experimental performance

1 Circus arts or acrobatics (i.e. aerialist, juggler)

11 Other

Fig. 9 The disciplines of respondents

REVENUE STREAMS

Revenue Streams 68 Participants	Percentage of Participants
Performance fees (i.e. shows, gigs, live events)	53%
Choreographing, directing, or stage performances	19%
Tips from live performances	19%
Teaching Classes / Workshops	35%
Residuals or royalties	6%
Touring or guest appearances	7%

Revenue Streams 123 Participants	Percentage of Participants
Selling Merchandise	12%
Grants or Fellowships	16%
Other	8%
Promoting / Creating Content for Socials	1%
I do not receive income from my performance work	28%
Other	1%

Table 8. Responses to: "What revenue streams do you receive income from?"

> **When performers were asked how much the take-home pay was per performance (after splits, expenses, and deductions), the highest reported answer was that they weren't paid (25%).**

PERFORMING ARTS

FINANCES: LOW TO NO PERFORMING ARTIST PAY

46% of performing artists reported that income from their performances typically supported overhead costs or other business expenses, with little to no profits earned. Among all three disciplines who selected this answer, this group held the highest percentage of responses. For those who were paid, APP data does not indicate much income. When performers were asked how much the take-home pay was per performance (after splits, expenses, and deductions), the highest reported answer was that they weren't paid (25%).

Of those who did receive income, the following response was that individuals received under $50 per performance (22%). Almost half of the paid performers received a flat fee (Table 9). Flat fees rarely take into account rehearsal pay, and are often lower than the minimum set fees outlined by union agreements. Next, respondents selected profit-split/box office sharing as an alternative payment method (Table 9). Once again, this is not without issue. Both of these options rely on audience attendance (and ultimately their ticket sales), making the pay unpredictable.

HOW RESPONDENTS PRIMARILY GET PAID

Payment Methods 68 Participants	Percentage of Participants
Flat fee	47%
Profit-split / Box office sharing	35%
Hourly rate	18%
Busking / Tips	16%
Residuals or royalties	4%
I do not typically get paid for my performance work	29%
Other	4%

Table 9. The payment methods of the APP's performance artists

PERFORMING ARTS

BARRIERS & SUPPORT

Almost half of the performing artists who participated in 5-10 performances in the last year were youth (47%). Still, they made up 67% of the occupants who earned under $50 per performance (Table 10). Low pay prevents youth and emerging performers from further developing their careers in the Kingston region. One respondent even requested additional pay for teens, since they are often excluded from honorariums despite putting in the same amount of work as their counterparts.

PAY PER PERFORMANCE

Typical individual take-home pay per performance	Percentage of Participants
Under $50 per performance	22%
$50-$100	15%
$100-$250	12%
$250-$500	12%
$500-$1,000	1%
Over $1,000	3%
I am not typically paid for live performances	25%
Unsure / Prefer not to answer	10%

Table 10. Profit retention of performing artists

LIMITED PERFORMANCE VENUES & HIGH VENUE FEES

APP performers were asked which systemic barriers they faced when sharing their work. Two major concerns were limited performance venues (50%) and high venue fees (44%). Performing artists were then asked which venues they most frequently performed in (Fig. 8). The majority of APP's performing artists were in a traditional theatre setting, however, just as many performed in non-traditional venues (Fig. 8). Again, this could be due to a number of reasons. However, Kingston has four publicly accessible professional theatre venues: The Grand Theatre, The Domino, the Isabel Bader, and Le Sésame. Aside from these, community spaces like The Spire are available for multipurpose use.

Traditional performing arts venues can be costly. Prices often change from one year to the next, and in the last few years they have steadily increased.[28] A few examples of these expenses include the venue's rate per hour/day, the cost of technicians on site, security fees, ticketing fees, and more. Even production needs like lighting and sound boards may come at an additional cost. In some cases, having a limited number of venues contributes to high venue fees since the increased demand drives up booking costs for artists/arts organizations. In general, rising operating costs affect venues, artists, and arts organizations. Another disadvantage of climbing fees is that it reduces the amount of available funding that arts organizations have to pay artists. While there may be no quick and easy way to offset these costs, APP respondents have suggested a few solutions. One respondent requested additional performing art residencies at local theatres in and around the city. Another requested low or subsidized cost access to rehearsal spaces as a way to support their ability to create, direct, and produce live theatre.

BARRIERS WITH SHARING OR SELLING PERFORMANCES

68 participants

Types of Barriers	91 Participants	# of Participants
High costs of promotion or distribution		14
High costs of travel for performances		18
Limited paid performance opportunities		41
Limited performance venues		34
Lack of media interest or support		29
Limited access to funding or grants		17
Lack of online presence or e-commerce skills		6
Difficulty covering rehearsal space costs		19
High venue fees		30
Saturation or competition in local or national music markets		13
Difficulty reaching potential casting directors or audiences		13
Lack of business knowledge to manage finances effectively		7
I do not currently share or sell my performances		7
Other		4

Table 11. The musical activities of APP respondents during 2024

LIMITED PAID PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

Kingston's performing artists were most concerned about the lack of paid performance opportunities (60%). While live performance attendance numbers are only now climbing to pre-pandemic levels, the income for artists has not increased. When APP's performing artists were asked what support would be most helpful to their practice, the respondents overwhelmingly found that financial grants or funding opportunities (63%) had the most significant positive impact.

THE MYTH OF TICKET SALES

In 2022, The Professional Association of Canadian Theatre interviewed thirty-one theatre companies from small, midsize, and large organizations for their advocacy survey about ticket trends. Only two companies reached 80% of their pre-pandemic ticket sales revenue, while nearly every theatre reported slow ticket sales for the 2022 summer season or for the upcoming 2022-23 season.[29] At the time, only 10% reported being alright indefinitely at their current ticket levels.[30] Statistics Canada's official release bulletin, The Daily, also noted this trend in a report published Jan 2024. They wrote, "In 2022, the number of performances (+21.4%) and attendance levels (+5.8%) for non-profit companies were up from 2020; however, both remained significantly below pre-pandemic levels."[31] While it's too soon to review statistical data and performing arts reports for 2023-2024, it's important to acknowledge how these broader trends are mimicked on a municipal level. For those who had sold tickets or booked paid performances in Katarokwi/Kingston during 2024, 46% admitted low ticket sales and audience engagement. With time, these numbers may recover. But a dependence on ticket sales for sufficient payment is not a stable method to retain performers or support Kingston's performing arts sector.

Declining ticket sales, high operating costs, and poorly paid artists undercut the work that these artists produce. Thus, increased financial grants and funding opportunities are essential for developing the performing arts scene in Katarokwi/Kingston and the surrounding region.

CONCLUSION

The Artist Prosperity Project gave readers a look at the demographics, economic realities, and creative practices of artists in Katarokwi/Kingston and the surrounding region. To do so, the survey asked for feedback from those affiliated with three artistic disciplines: visual art, music, and performing arts. The report also looked at some of the systemic barriers and challenges that artists faced in 2024. The APP strived to collect demographic data for artists in the Kingston region; of the responses collected, 56% were women, 9% were racialized, 26% were youth (aged 21-30), 33% were LGBTQIA+, 28% were from disability communities, 3% from Indigenous communities, and 4% were from Francophone communities. The two groups with the highest responses were from highly educated artists and youth (those aged 21-30).

Demographic challenges can be compounded with systemic barriers, preventing those from underserved populations from feeling adequately represented or welcomed. To mitigate this, funders and arts organizations must be more intentional when considering how best to service their diverse populations. Another important demographic was career stage. The KAC asked artists how long they had been practicing their art and which descriptors they used to self-identify. An artist's professional development can be challenging to observe since many report self-employment, unpredictable income, or inconsistent hours. As a result, self-identification is necessary. Close to half of all APP respondents self-identified as emerging artists, although participants also selected community-based and professional artists as descriptors. Whilst there isn't a strict barrier preventing artists from aligning with one distinction over the other, insight into an artist's career offers the public a deeper understanding of the demographics and attitudes of arts workers in the region.

In addition to demographics, Kingston artists were asked about their economic realities. Katarokwi/Kingston's artistic workforce lacked full-time art positions and had low artist wages. As a result, many artists worked secondary jobs or in other positions outside of the arts and culture industry. Almost half of the APP respondents were self-employed or freelanced in the arts and culture sector, and about 60% of APP respondents made less than $40,000 in the past year. For all three disciplines, artists primarily had little-to-no profits, since overhead costs took away from their income. Still, performing artists were paid the least.

Financial instability, a lack of paid artistic opportunities, and the limited access to financial resources were systemic barriers and challenges that affected the artistic practices of Katarokwi/Kingston artists. Individual disciplines reported different barriers – for visual artists, a limited audience or market most impacted them. Meanwhile, musicians and performing artists wrote that limited paid performance opportunities were their biggest obstacles. To mitigate this, APP respondents requested three main methods of support: increased media coverage and publicity, access to grants and funding, and better access to venues, rehearsal/creation space, and residencies.

Despite the financial circumstances, Kingston artists continue to create and share their work with the public. There are many benefits to practicing in Kingston and the surrounding region: strong community support, access to local arts organizations or events, and opportunities for collaboration were all highlighted as strengths. As is, the report serves as a snapshot of the artistic workforce in Kingston during 2024. When creating actionable steps for the future, insight from artists is crucial for determining which aspects of the sector need to evolve. Although not every concern can be resolved quickly, this data provides artists and arts organizations with evidence to strengthen their advocacy efforts. The Artist Prosperity Project is one step towards building and strengthening the arts economy in Katarokwi/Kingston and the surrounding region.

SUPPORTERS

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Community Partners

Thank you to our community partners who assisted in the development and promotion of the Artist Prosperity Survey:

- Agnes Etherington Arts Centre
- Kingston Theatre Alliance
- Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre
- SpiderWebShow
- Tourism Kingston – Music Office

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Photos included in the APP Report were provided courtesy of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Blue Canoe Theatrical Productions, Calliope Collective, Ground UP Dance Festival, Kingston Symphony Association, Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre, and Skeleton Park Arts Festival. Individual credits can be found on page 42.

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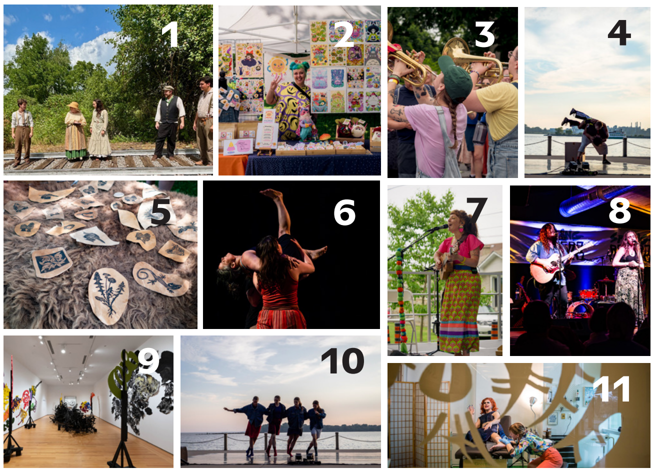

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1. Performance of *Providence* by Eye of the Dawn Collective, 2025. Photo by Tim Fort.

2. Holly Gilmour Vendor Booth – Skeleton Park Arts Festival, 2025. Photo by Josh Lyon.

3. Trash Panda Brass Band – Skeleton Park Arts Festival, 2025. Photo by Josh Lyon.

4. Ground UP Dance Festival, 2025. Photo by Shanique Peart.

5. Natural Tannery Vendor Booth – Skeleton Park Arts Festival, 2025. Photo by Josh Lyon.

6. Ground UP Dance Festival, 2025. Photo by Shanique Peart.

7. Mimi O'Bonsawin – Skeleton Park Arts Festival, 2025. Photo by Josh Lyon.

8. Bad Fortune performing at Spring Reverb, 2025. Photo by Wayne Turcotte

9. Installation view, Joan Scaglione: *Shifting Realities*, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2023. Photo by Paul Litherland.

10. Choreography by Kiara Flavin – Ground UP Dance Festival, 2025. Photo by Shanique Peart.

11. Rowena Whey being tattooed by Abby Nowakowski as part of *we are magic: a love letter to our tattoos*, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 2023. Photo: Garrett Elliott.

12. Sketch Artist Fils –Skeleton Park Arts Festival, 2025. Photo by Josh Lyon.

13. *Mashkawizii Miinikaanan: Strong Seeds* Display, 2025. Photography by Niki Boytchuk-Hale

14. Kingston Arts Council - Culture Days Event, 2019. Photo by Garrett Elliott.

15. Kent Monkman speaking at Agnes Etherington Art Centre's Winter Season Launch, 2018. Photo credit: Garrett Elliott.

16. *Aqua Nova* by Aqua Nova Collective, 2022. Photo by Nicole Daniels.

17. Kingston Symphony Association, 2025. Photo courtesy of Kingston Symphony Association.

18. Brass Over Teakettle –Skeleton Park Arts Festival, 2025. Photo by Josh Lyon.

19. KaKaow performing at Spring Reverb, 2025. Photo by Virginia Maria Meeks.

20. Kay Kenny –Ground UP Dance Festival, 2025. Photo by Shanique Peart.

21. Aiden Robert Bruce and Jake Henderson in *Providence* by Eye of the Dawn Collective, 2025. Photo by Tim Fort.

22. Savannah Shea in AFTER/ALWAYS – Ground UP Dance Festival, 2025. Photo by Shanique Peart.

23. Choreography by Kiara Flavin – Ground UP Dance Festival, 2025. Photo by Shanique Peart.

24. Trash Panda Brass Band – Skeleton Park Arts Festival, 2025. Photo by Josh Lyon.

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