THE IMPACT OF STABLE EMPLOYMENT IN THE ARTS

Lessons from the Artist Employment Program of Creatives Rebuild New York

Artist
Employment
Program

CREATIVES
REBUILD
NEW YORK

Rockefeller
Institute of Government

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Artist Employment Program, a project of Creative Rebuilds New York.

Creative Rebuilds New York (CRNY) launched the Artist Employment Program (AEP) in 2022 with three main goals. First, it aimed to mitigate negative economic impacts on artists of the COVID pandemic, during which many were unable to earn income due to mandatory closures of public in-person programs. Second, the AEP sought to address structural challenges that artists and organizations face in the arts and culture industry, including the contingent employment of artists, which leads to unstable income and health care coverage, as well as inadequate funding of non-profit organizations, particularly those operating in underserved communities.[1] These structural challenges undermine the sustainability of the work of artists (as artists) and of arts organizations.[2] Third, the AEP sought to promote stronger connections among artists, organizations, and communities, by providing funding for the recruitment of and collaborations with artists and organizations from underserved communities.

A total of 307 artists participated in the program and 126 community-based organizations partnered with the artists in 98 collaborations from July 2022 through July 2024. Under the AEP, participating artists received a salary of $65,000 per year, and organizations received between $25,000 and $100,000 per year to support their collaborations with the artists. The evaluation presented in this report aims to assess the extent to which the AEP achieved its goals. For this report, researchers conducted surveys and interviews of artists and organizations that participated in the AEP, building on the findings of a recent evaluation of the AEP by the Urban Institute, and on evaluations of guaranteed income programs for artists in Ireland and Finland, which all found positive impacts of financial stability on the overall wellbeing of program participants.[3, 4, 5]

Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Espinoza

Key Findings

Artists' Wellness and Practice

Funding received through the AEP provided artists with reported financial stability and ability to meet their basic needs, which were intended effects of the program as it aimed to address the unstable employment and incomes of artists. Most artist survey respondents (86 percent) indicated that the salary they received through the AEP — $65,000 per year for two years — enabled them to meet their basic needs, and 91 percent reported that this salary provided them with a sense of financial safety and security. Interviews reflected quality of life improvements, such as the ability to pay off debts, secure housing, and even make significant purchases like vehicles or home appliances. For many, the regular income also allowed them to take their first "true (paid) vacations" without financial loss. And, for most artists surveyed, the program improved access to healthcare, easing the burden of medical appointments and emergencies.

Of additional importance, financial stability enabled artists to focus on their practice, instead of taking on temporary projects (or gigs) that they considered undesirable but necessary as sources of income, and for many it supported individual transitions into more fulfilling professional lives (e.g., helping artists establish studios or businesses). The AEP improved reported work-life balance, with intentional time for personal life and artistic exploration, and provided a sense of stability and recognition as artists, boosting confidence and mental health. Financial stability provided AEP artists with the time, tools, and confidence to expand their practices, validate their identities, and improve their quality of life more broadly.

Organizations' Financial Wellness and Work Culture

For most community partner organizations that responded to the survey, the program provided adequate funding to sustain or expand operations and strengthened their ability to support better wages for artists. With the funding and support provided through periodic check-in meetings and conflict resolution resources, the AEP helped organizational leaders achieve better work-life balance for their staff and improve their workplace culture. It also strengthened the organizations' relationships with the communities they serve and enabled them to expand into new communities by empowering them to develop more public programs and by emphasizing a goal of recruiting artists from Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities.

Strengthening Community Connections

CRNY's emphasis on recruitment of AEP participant artists and partner organizations from underrepresented communities drove transformational changes, as these artists helped to expand the reach of their partner organizations into new communities and increase access to the arts for underserved populations.

Seventy-nine percent of participating artists in the AEP self-identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). By collaborating with these artists, organizations were able to deepen or expand their connections with BIPOC communities. Seventy-seven percent of organizations' surveyed reported greater visibility in their community, and 73 percent reported deeper engagement with

their communities. This not only helped elevate the organizations' profile, but also helped bridge cultural and social gaps.

Our interview data show that the engagement of AEP artists of color in collaborative projects with organizations that had not worked with communities of color in the past further helped raise awareness about issues of racism, equity, and representation. Artists helped their partner organizations build a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of those in marginalized communities, encouraging open dialogue about racial and other systemic inequities, incorporating inclusive practices, and fostering partnerships with diverse communities. By embedding themselves in these organizations, artists of color acted as agents of change, helping organizations to make diversity, equity, and inclusion central to their mission and practices.

Factors Aiding Successful Collaborations

A majority of AEP artists (57 percent) and organizations (60 percent) that participated in this evaluation research indicated that their working relationships as partners improved over the course of the program. Eighty-eight percent of artist survey participants and 85 percent of organization survey participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they did good and impactful work with their partners under the program. Key factors driving success in these areas were the alignment of expectations and clarity of roles at the start of the collaborations and the construction of mechanisms to purposefully integrate artists into the organization (e.g. frequent check-ins and artists' participation in staff meetings and retreats).

Video still courtesy of Nidal Q

Challenges and Reflections

The program's short-term nature leaves questions about the long-term sustainability of its impact on participating artists and organizations. Artists felt empowered by the one-time subsidies, but acknowledged ongoing systemic gaps in funding and support for freelance artists. Despite the benefits of the AEP, many artists who participated in this evaluation through surveys and interviews are either settling back into the typical form of artist employment — working as independent contractors — or are planning to pivot careers and seek more stable paths post-program. While many artists and organizations wanted to continue working together, most collaborations lacked the resources to continue as they were. The AEP served as a demonstration of a stable employment approach to support artists, leaving a lasting impression on the lives of participants and their communities while emphasizing the need for more permanent solutions to the challenges related to the contingent nature of artists' work and to the limited resources and funding that their organizations experience.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis and findings, this report advances the following recommendations:

- Future programs may benefit from longer timeframes, providing lengthier introductory or planning periods and more guidance for successful collaborative arrangements between artists and organizations.

- Emphasis should be placed on clarifying goals, roles and responsibilities at the start of the collaborations, and leadership training should be provided to organizations such that they are equipped to better understand and support artists' practices and worker rights.

- Collaborative efforts (or partnerships) should receive adequate levels of resources or a separate fund explicitly for the provision of space, equipment, and resources for artists' work.

- To effectively contribute to artists' overall wellness, a holistic wellness program is needed. Key elements of this program would include comprehensive and adequate health insurance, and financial support or advice to meet unforeseen circumstances (e.g. housing insecurity).

As this research found that the majority of AEP artists who participated in our evaluation returned to their pre-AEP typical employment pattern as independent contractors, policy recommendations also include labor regulations to address the contingent nature of artists' work, the resulting instability of their income, and the lack of labor and employment protections. As recommended in previous research on the AEP and on artists in New York State more broadly, advocates might consider the extension of wage and hour, anti-discrimination, and health and safety protections to independent contractors, as well as the establishment of portable benefits systems to avoid gaps in artists' coverage for health care and other benefits.[6, 7]

An important new state-level policy for providing protections for artists is the Freelance Isn't Free Act of 2024.[8] This law amended the New York State Business Code to protect the right of freelancers to be compensated fairly and in a timely manner for their work and for advocating for fair pay without fear of retaliation. Active dissemination and educational efforts about this new law would help its implementation and enforcement, as artists across the state are not yet widely aware of the new protections it provides, according to previous research.[9]

Photo by Tony Ramirez

Introduction and Background

Photo by Ellen M. Blalock

Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) was developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on artists, culture bearers, and community-based organizations across New York State. Originally, CRNY was proposed by the Reimagine New York Commission under Governor Andrew Cuomo's administration to "ensure that after the pandemic ends we do not revert back to the status quo, but instead build back a better and more resilient New York, with greater opportunity for all."[10] The main focus of the initiative was to support the most vulnerable segment of New York's arts and entertainment industry: the artists and cultural institutions in the non-profit sector, particularly those in underserved communities of the state.

According to data from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis for 2022, the arts and culture sector (including both for-profit and non-profit) represented 7.4 percent of New York State's GDP as a $151 billion industry and supported 461,000 jobs, which represents 4.8 percent of the state's total workforce.[11] Research by the Center for an Urban Future found that artists and arts-related events have helped revitalized local communities and their economies in upstate New York by driving tourism and promoting new businesses.[12] According to this previous research, artists have been fueling population growth in upstate communities, with the number of working artists increasing by 26.5 percent between 2011 and 2021, and employment in the arts and culture sector surging by 35 percent between 2009 and 2019 across upstate New York. Despite its contributions to local economies, the arts and culture sector faces structural challenges, including low and unstable incomes of artists, a characteristic they share with contingent workers, best known as gig-economy workers.

Data collected by CRNY as part of its "Portrait of New York State Artists" survey found that of the 13,000 artists surveyed across New York State, 85 percent had an annual household income of less than $50,000. Two-thirds of artists surveyed did not have a financial safety net, and 46 percent relied on temporary or contingent (gig) work, which often does not provide employment benefits such as health insurance.[13] Similarly, Museum Hue's studies of arts organizations founded and led by People of Color in New York City and across New York State found that these organizations, which often play a foundational role in the cultural life of their communities, face multiple overlapping challenges. In New York City, nearly one-third of organizations surveyed operated with a budget of less than $100,000, and 50 percent of organizations surveyed outside of the city had operating budgets of less than $50,000. Many of these organizations also reported staffing challenges and lacked access to stable, sustainable spaces for programming.[14, 15]

Photo courtesy of Lauren Jimerson

Other critical challenges that artists and organizations face in New York State include rising rents and property costs in areas that they help revitalize, and highly competitive operating grants that have not kept pace with inflation, increasing the strain of limited resources and under-staffed conditions of non-profits in the arts and culture sector.[16] These challenges were exacerbated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, reflecting national trends identified by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) that indicated that arts and cultural industries were among the hardest hit, experiencing slow recovery from the economic effects of the pandemic with sluggish rates of arts participation.[17]

Photo by Meg Goldman

This was the environment that led to the formation of CRNY. With $115 million in funding from the Mellon Foundation and an additional $5 million each from the Ford Foundation and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, CRNY launched in June of 2021, with the goal of creating transformative impacts that would help address the structural and systemic needs of the sector, starting with mitigating the challenges to artists brought on and exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. The Tides Center (the fiscal agent of the Tides Foundation) served as the fiscal sponsor for this three-year, $125 million investment.[18] CRNY was eager to release funds quickly to address the urgent needs of artists and organizations, but it also understood the importance of co-designing its programs with stakeholders to ensure that the efforts were equitable and inclusive. Between September 2021 and January 2022, CRNY convened a think tank of 28 artists, organizers, scholars, community leaders, and activists from across New York State to develop the Guaranteed Income Program (GI) and Artist Employment Program (AEP), using historical programs such as the federal Works Progress Administration and Comprehensive Employment and Training Act as models.[19, 20]

A core value of CRNY's programs, as with similar programs across the globe, is the principle that artists are workers, and as such are deserving of living standards, labor protections, and basic safety-net programs similar to those that regularly employed workers in the economy enjoy.[21, 22, 23] Equally important values of CRNY include the advancement of equity for structurally marginalized populations, and a holistic approach to support artists and their communities. This philosophy became the "north star" for the design of the Artist Employment Program.

The AEP Goals and Implementation Process

The goals of the AEP included the support of individual artists' lives and livelihoods, bolstering community-based organizations, and promoting social cohesion and cultural preservation in communities.[24] Key stakeholders in the program and process included individual artists, local arts organizations, and their communities. Instead of simply funding arts organizations, key objectives of the AEP centered on advancing the wellbeing of individual artists, disrupting societal hierarchies and power dynamics in the arts community, fostering artists' financial stability, providing professional development and emotional well-being supports, and promoting communities' economic development and social growth.

The process established for the design and implementation of the AEP required collaborations between individual artists and community-based organizations. Collaborations involving BIPOC, immigrant, LGBTQIAP+, and other historically marginalized communities were prioritized, and the design and implementation of the program centered artists in every step of the process.[25]

To initiate a request for AEP funding, artists and organizations were required to submit a joint application, and the collaborations were to consist of one or more community-based organizations and up to ten artists or culture bearers. Both artists and organizations voluntarily sought and chose their partners for the joint application. Of note is

that 80 percent of the artists that participated in this evaluation had had prior relationships with the organizations with which they partnered for the AEP, having worked for them as consultants or volunteers.

During the application process, an "Outreach Corps" comprised of ten artist-organizers ensured broad reach across various communities and geographies.[26] This outreach effort resulted in 2,700 applications, of which 1,800 were determined to be eligible according to the program's criteria, which required artists to be primary residents of New York State and organizations to be tax-exempt public charities or a government instrumentality, have their place of business in New York State, and serve specific communities such as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color, immigrants, LGBTQIAP+, or other historically marginalized communities. Only joint applications of artists and organizations were accepted by CRNY.[27] A team of 20 peer reviewers representing diverse identities and backgrounds reviewed these applications and advanced 167 collaborations to the second phase of the application process. In June of 2022, 98 collaborations involving more than 300 artists were selected to take part in the AEP, and the program officially began in July 2022 and ended two years later, in July 2024.[28, 29]

Over the course of the two-year program, the AEP funded a total of 307 artists in collaboration with

126 community-based organizations across New York State. Participating artists received a salary of $65,000 per year (the median household income in New York State), and participating organizations received between $25,000 and $100,000 per year to support their collaborations. Participating artists also received employment benefits such as healthcare, dental, vision, and other required employment benefits.[30] These benefits were provided by either the collaborating organization or by Tribeworks, a worker-owned and artist-run cooperative, which served as a professional employer organization (PEO) or employment intermediary.[31] The inclusion of Tribeworks as an employment intermediary allowed small community-based organizations to participate in the program even if they did not have the infrastructure to support employment and benefits for their collaborating artists.[32]

The program provided limited guidelines for structuring the partnerships between artists and organizations, and did not require a plan for the implementation of the collaborations.[33] CRNY realized that this flexibility led to some cases of conflict early in the program implementation, however, and so it began to require that participants create shared agreements specifying the structure and process for their collaborations.[34, 35] As discussed further below, while the AEP did not require any specific work schedule arrangement, survey responses revealed that a common arrangement was for artists to divide their workweek between arts-focused work for the organization, non-arts work for the organization, and time for their own personal artistic and cultural practices. Additionally, artists were free to switch to another organization during the two-year period.

Photo courtesy of Ma's House & BIPOC Art Studio

AEP at a glance

1,800 ELIGIBLE APPLICATIONS

307 FUNDED ARTISTS

126 COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

$65K ANNUAL SALARY PER ARTIST

$25K MINIMUM ORGANIZATION SUPPORT

Research Goals and Methods

CRNY commissioned this evaluation to assess the extent to which the goals of the AEP were achieved, particularly as they relate to impacts on artists' financial and overall wellbeing, community-based organizations financial stability and capacity, and the relationships and integration of artists with CBOs and local communities. It hoped to document the variety of impacts the AEP had from the perspective of artists and organizations that participated in the program. This effort was initially led by Hester Street, which was instrumental in incorporating a participatory approach to the design of the research project. As Hester Street sunsetted in 2023, however, CRNY partnered with SUNY's Rockefeller Institute of Government to conduct and finalize the evaluation of the AEP.

This evaluation adds to previous research commissioned by CRNY from the Urban Institute that focused on employment models under the AEP, and from the Congruence group that consisted of a process evaluation of the AEP.[36, 37] The Urban Institute's research examined the implementation, outcomes, and impact of the AEP through the lens of the program's two employment models: direct employment of artists by their partner organizations, and employment mediated by the worker cooperative Tribeworks, which provided salaries and benefits for artists who were employed by small organizations. Congruence's evaluation focused on the implementation process of the AEP during its first year of operations.

The research presented in this report builds on the findings of the Urban Institute's evaluation, and on evaluations of guaranteed income programs for artists in Ireland and Finland, which all found positive impacts of financial stability on the overall wellbeing of program participants.[38, 39] Our research questions were formulated and refined with the active engagement of AEP participant artists and organizations, and involved participatory research methods in the design phase of the evaluation.[40]

Questions Related to the AEP's Impact on Artists:

- To what extent were artists able to prioritize and grow their artistic practice under the AEP?

- Did the AEP funding enable artists to improve their livelihoods and scale up their work?

- Did artists develop new skills as a result of their collaboration with organizations?

- Were artists paid a sufficient and fair wage, comparable to an organization's staff, that fully accounted for their time and labor?

- Did the AEP allow artists to cultivate a community-based practice?

- What were the impacts of the AEP on artists' overall health and wellbeing?

Questions Related to the AEP Impact on Organizations:

• Did the AEP enable organizations to better advance their missions and expand their engagement with their communities?

• Did organizations expand their reach and capacity, including grants opportunities because of their collaborations with AEP artists?

• Did organizations perceive improvements in their financial stability?

• What impact did the program have on organizations' work culture?

Questions Related to the AEP Impact on Relationships Between Artists and Organizations:

• What factors helped to achieve successful collaborations between artists and organizations, leading to improved symbiotic working relationships?

• What type of challenges emerged and hindered success in AEP collaborations?

To answer these questions, the research team used a mixed methods approach, including quantitative and qualitative strategies for data collection and analysis. These methods included a survey and semi-structured interviews of AEP participant artists and organization representatives. There were two survey questionnaires, one for artists and another one for organizations. The surveys were administered online, with a link to the questionnaire emailed to all artists and organizations that participated in the AEP. The artist survey

obtained a 46 percent response rate, with 140 responses received from the pool of 307 potential respondents. The organization survey obtained a 44 percent response rate, with 56 responses from the pool of 126 potential respondents. Twenty-five individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 artists and six organizations. Interview transcriptions were analyzed using content analysis methods, including coding and identifying themes. The following sections of this report include the findings from the survey and interviews, as well as a discussion of the implications for policy and practice.

Photo by Douglas Shindler and Michael Davis

Impact of the AEP on Artists

Combining survey results and interview data, this section presents the reported impacts and outcomes of the AEP on artists' practice, their relationships with their partner organizations, and their wellness. The survey and interview results discussed find that, in general, the AEP facilitated artists' goals of prioritizing their practice, growing their reach, and developing professionally. Participants' responses highlighted that the impacts of the AEP related to artists' practice included: the ability to prioritize artistic practice, growth of practice and reach, and professional development.

Photo by Gus Geraci and Sarah Lynch

Practice

Prioritizing Artistic Practice

Overall, artists reported experiencing positive impacts on their ability to prioritize their practice. Many artists under the AEP had a hybrid work schedule and relationship with their partner organizations, and were able to divide their workweek between arts-focused work for the organization, non-arts work for the organization, and time for their own personal artistic and cultural practices. About 75 percent of artists who responded to the survey indicated that they had sufficient or more than enough time to spend on their personal artistic and cultural practices during the AEP (see Chart 1).

The survey also found that in 17 percent of the cases artists reported having very little or no time for their personal practice; at the same time, many of the organizational representatives interviewed expected their artists to spend more time working for their organization. While these different experiences and expectations existed in some cases, many other artists found synergy between their personal artistic practices and their work for their collaborating organization. Insights from interviews revealed that portioning time for individual artistic work and work for the partner organization was a delicate balancing act within each collaboration.

Chart 1. How would you characterize the amount of time you had to spend on your personal artistic and cultural practices during the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=136)

MORE THAN ENOUGH	SUFFICIENT	VERY LITTLE
23%	52%	14%

NONE 3%

OTHER 8%
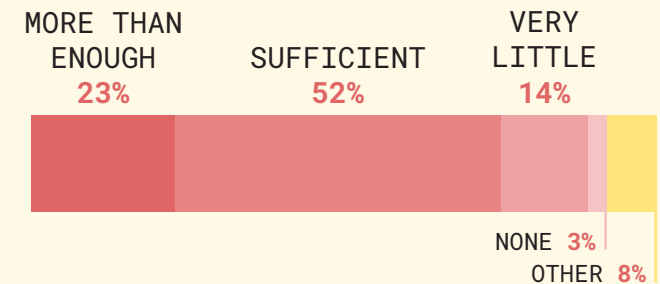
A plurality of survey respondents (32 percent) didn't report any challenges that prevented them from prioritizing their artistic practice. Some, however, cited a lack of staff and financial support from their collaborating organizations (25 percent), domestic responsibilities (22 percent), or a need to take on additional jobs to make money or ensure sustainability after the program ended (16 percent) (see Chart 2).

Artists who reported having a flexible working arrangement with their collaborating organization described the various ways this impacted
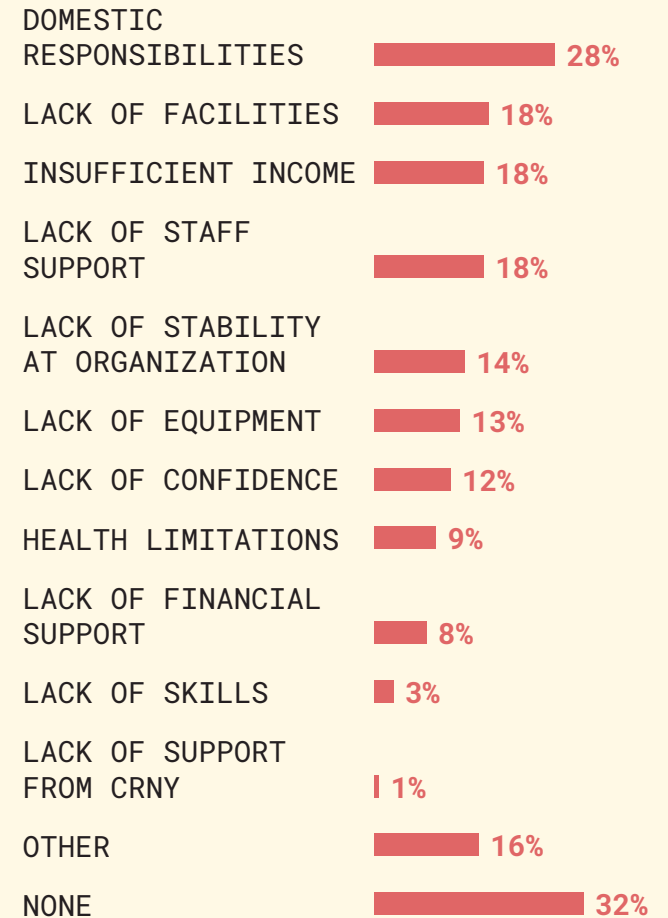
their practices. In interviews, many artists and organizations talked about the ability to travel to participate in shows or events that expanded their reach, to conduct research related to their practices with museums and academic institutions, to attend training sessions or classes, or to complete gig work on top of their AEP work (especially for musicians, performance artists, and actors). Travel was mentioned often in interviews, but less than 1-in-4 survey respondents reported that they had their travel paid for by the discretionary funding provided to organizations by CRNY. These discretionary funds were provided to support the collaborations with the artists, but the program guidelines did not specify how such funds should be allocated, leading to confusion or conflict about travel funding. In interviews, some artists mentioned some of the difficulties getting their travel approved by their organization.

Photo by Ellen M. Blalock

Chart 2. What were the top three reasons that prevented you from spending time on your artistic and cultural practices during the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=138)

Reason	Percentage
DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES	28%
LACK OF FACILITIES	18%
INSUFFICIENT INCOME	18%
LACK OF STAFF SUPPORT	18%
LACK OF STABILITY AT ORGANIZATION	14%
LACK OF EQUIPMENT	13%
LACK OF CONFIDENCE	12%
HEALTH LIMITATIONS	9%
LACK OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT	8%
LACK OF SKILLS	3%
LACK OF SUPPORT FROM CRNY	1%
OTHER	16%
NONE	32%

Time was an important factor concerning an artist's ability to prioritize their practice, as was the provision of resources like space, materials, and other support from their collaborating organizations. Survey results show that the main forms of support organizations provided to artists were relational (i.e. connecting artists with community members and other artists). Organizations played a big role promoting the work of the artists to audiences. The majority of the collaborations also provided artists with specialized equipment or materials to conduct their practices using funding provided by CRNY, as revealed by survey results and interviews. Although fewer than 50 percent of survey respondents had access to or were provided space to conduct their practices, interviewed artists reported that access to studio space was a valuable benefit of the AEP and an important resource that organizations could provide to support their artistic practices.

"I haven't always been able to afford a studio, so most of my career I've worked in that extra bedroom in my house, or I was renting a space in a house just before COVID… I didn't even really have a good look at my own full-size work. Some of my work is really big, so it was very exciting to have a studio [at my partner organization's site], and it became a place where I could invite artists, other artists from the community, and have talks, and talk about collaborations."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

Photo courtesy of Oxil Febles

Growth in Artistic Practice, Reach, and Networking

By all measures in the survey, a vast majority of artists were able to grow and expand their artistic practices, reporting improvements in the quality of their work, an increase in their visibility, and an improvement in their confidence as an artist or culture bearer (see Charts 3 and 4). These results are illustrated by this quote from an artist identifying as BIPOC:

"In a world where people of my skin color and background have been historically disenfranchised and underrepresented, the AEP gave me a chance to turn my artistic dreams into a reality. It even changed the relationships I have in my personal life for the better and helped me improve my self-confidence as a human."

ARTISTS SURVEY RESPONSE

Chart 3. Extent to which artists agree that the quality of their artistic and cultural practice improved during the AEP

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=140)

STRONGLY AGREE **60%** AGREE **22%**

SOMEWHAT AGREE **11%**
DISAGREE **3%**
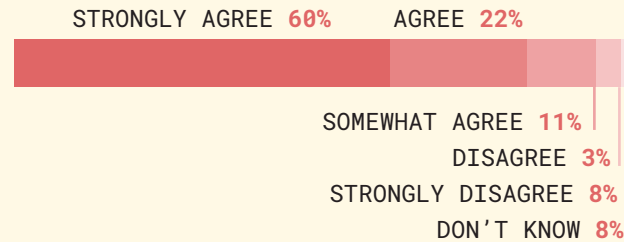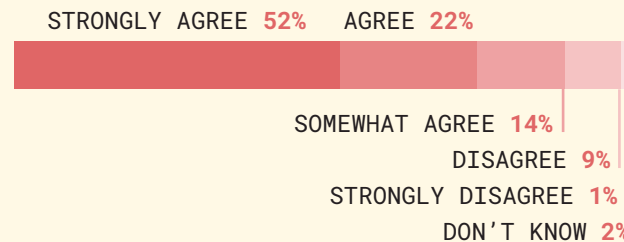STRONGLY DISAGREE **8%**
DON'T KNOW **8%**

Chart 4. Extent to which artists agree that they increased their visibility as an artist or culture bearer during the AEP

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=140)

STRONGLY AGREE **52%** AGREE **22%**

SOMEWHAT AGREE **14%**
DISAGREE **9%**
STRONGLY DISAGREE **1%**
DON'T KNOW **2%**

With dedicated time, resources, and drive to focus on their artistic craft, artists improved their work in many different ways. This included experimenting with new mediums and modes — 65 percent of artists who responded to the survey reported that they had experimented with their artistic and cultural practices. It also included deepening their craft by working independently or with their partner organization, reflecting on their artistic output, and engaging with their practice in new ways with community partners. Additionally, artists made connections with other artists and new communities that challenged them and changed the way they approached their artistic craft. Some artists used the flexibility and financial resources from the program to travel, learn from other artists or institutions, and take classes that otherwise wouldn't have been accessible to them. Other artists considered the work they did with their collaborating organizations challenging, pushing them to learn new skills or work in different ways than they were used to.

"I realized how much the work that I've always been doing, but really focused on through the AEP, was storytelling. I feel pretty confident in saying that whatever artistic output I will have for the rest of my life will be more in the storytelling vein."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"I did get pushed past my comfort zone... I'm happy for it because it really pushed me... Because of the newness of the project, I think being able to be flexible and agile is really important."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

In the same ways that the AEP allowed artists to build on and improve their personal practices, artists were also able to expand their reach and visibility, receiving more recognition for their work within the arts community and becoming more visible. This was partially attributed to the increased work artists were doing in their communities, but it was mainly attributed by artists to the ability to travel to show their work more widely, the connections and networking their collaborating organizations facilitated, and the prestige and recognition they were given for their acceptance into the AEP.

"There were many positive things, but I think for sure the most impactful outcome was that I had the financial sources and resources to put my artwork, my photography, out there. I had greater exposure because I was able to travel. I was able to enter more markets… It just really broadened my exposure nationally and within New York State. And then, of course, locally, too."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

Artist survey results indicate that around one-third of the respondents were connected to museums, galleries, performance spaces, or other venues (see Chart 5). In the case of indigenous artists who partnered with indigenous organizations, interviews revealed that artists were able to travel to visit museums, colleges, and cultural institutions to view archival materials, explore new materials and techniques, and build relationships that have lasted beyond the program. Additionally, some institutions purchased the indigenous artists' work for their collections.

"There were a lot of calls that said, 'Oh, I see that you won this creative arts grant, and I was reading about it. We'd love to have you come.' So that was a really positive thing that helped grow my business."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

The ability to network with other artists was a key positive outcome of the AEP: survey data showed that 64 percent of respondents reported making meaningful connections with peer artists and culture bearers at their partner organizations, 59 percent with artists outside of the AEP, and 42 percent with artists at other organizations (see Chart 5). Artists worked together to produce new, collaborative work, in some cases broadening or experimenting with their practices. CRNY and Tribeworks facilitated these connections among artists through so-called AEP Hangs, weekly online gatherings, and other convenings throughout the two-year program period. However, we heard many examples where connections among artists were fostered organically, both within collaborations of multiple artists and through serendipitous meetings between individual artists as they pursued their practices.

Chart 5. Which of the following people or groups did you collaborate with during the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=138)

COMMUNITY MEMBERS	91%
OTHER ARTISTS AT MY ORGANIZATION	64%
OTHER ORGANIZATIONS	63%
MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, OR OTHER VENUES	61%
OTHER ARTISTS OUTSIDE OF THE AEP	59%
AEP ARTISTS AT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS	42%
ELECTED OFFICIALS	25%

Artists formed bonds and friendships with their peers, learning from one another. In at least a couple of cases, artists formed groups or collectives during AEP that continued to work together after the end of the program.

The impact of networking for younger or early-career artists seems to have been more pronounced. Younger artists reported feeling validated because of their connections with other artists, noting that the AEP provided their first opportunity to connect with other artists professionally. While AEP was not designed to be a program that supports early-career artists, the connections artists made through the program appeared to be especially impactful for this population. In addition to younger artists, end-of-career artists interviewed expressed great satisfaction with the program for the recognition they gained and opportunities to continue developing their practice.

"Each of us would have a day where we would showcase something. There was a musician, so we would go to his studio and have a social get-together. And we would try to go to shows that other people booked… individually we supported each other as artists."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"I was able to learn so much from many of our elders and their most valuable knowledge and experience. I have been invited back to many of the communities I presented in for more workshops. I established some strong relationships with the youth… They taught me how to truly listen!… I really enjoyed working with artists who were part of the AEP [and in] other organizations. We have continued our friendships and collaborations."
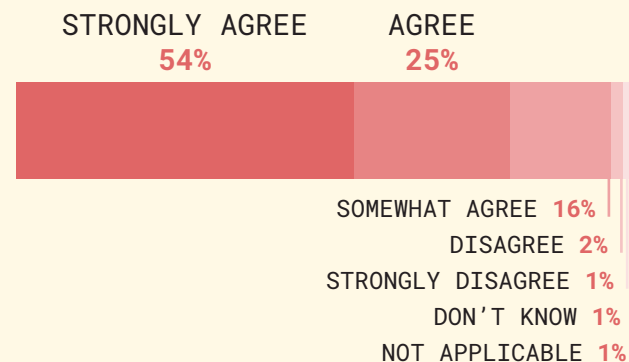
ARTIST SURVEY RESPONSE

Growing Confidence as Artists, Leaders, and Professionals

Beyond furthering their artistic practices, the AEP allowed artists to develop and cultivate skills that benefited them in their professional careers. Some artists described feeling like "legitimate" artists for the first time in their careers, or that they achieved their dream of becoming a full-time artist. About 80 percent of survey respondents indicated increased confidence as artists or culture bearers over the course of the AEP (see Chart 6). This sentiment was confirmed by perspectives shared in interviews (see the following quotes).

Chart 6. Extent to which artists agree that they gained confidence during the AEP

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=140)

STRONGLY AGREE **54%**
AGREE **25%**

SOMEWHAT AGREE **16%**
DISAGREE **2%**
STRONGLY DISAGREE **1%**
DON'T KNOW **1%**
NOT APPLICABLE **1%**

"I think it definitely changed what it means to be an artist for me. I had never called myself that until I became part of this program, because I guess I just had such a narrow view of what an artist was and what good art needed to look like. …I had never been surrounded by other visual artists, so it was really cool to talk to people and not feel like an imposter in the practice…And so I found myself being more validated in that identity."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"Previously, I felt like I didn't feel like I had agency or autonomy. I think this grant, being framed as it was, was a moment when I feel like as an artist you could just really advocate for what your work is and what you're trying to do. And I think that was also a healing element, too."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

Many artists interviewed in this study reported taking on leadership roles within their community, joining the boards of organizations related to their artistic craft or not-for-profits, and one artist even described becoming a business mentor and committee chair with support from their local chamber of commerce. They noted that they

were able to do this because of the flexibility of the program, and because of the increased confidence they felt as artists, culture bearers, and entrepreneurs.

"The…Chamber of Commerce asked me to start a committee that helps other businesses by giving them free education. So, I volunteer on this committee. I bring in speakers, including my mentor, and we offer free education to other business owners around the county, across all industries. So now I, free of charge, give my time to hopefully help others gain the same confidence that I got from being a part of this grant. I look at it like a domino effect or the butterfly effect."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"I have made more art, fostered more connections, and inspired more people in the community than I thought possible. I've brought free art classes to hundreds across Western New York and am chairing a local not-for-profit that deals with environmental issues, funds public art, and supports local gardens."

ARTIST SURVEY RESPONSE

In terms of non-artistic professional development, some artists already came into AEP with a strong set of skills such as proposal writing, financial management, project management, and public speaking, either from their work as artists or from their "day jobs."

It was incredibly validating to have CRNY just say, 'Yes, bring your skills to the table' and allow me to mature in my own strengths. This is the first time I was successfully able to merge my career in art with my 'day job' experiences in office management, bringing all my organizational strengths into my creative practice. I proved to myself what I'm able to accomplish when I lean into my diverse skill set which I can now see will support my creative career in the long haul."

ARTIST SURVEY RESPONSE

Photo by Tony Ramirez

But many artists reported through the survey and interviews that they developed or strengthened these skills as a result of their AEP engagement, either through training or on-the-job experience. Chart 7 shows the percentage of survey respondents that reported having acquired new skills during the AEP.

CRNY offered coaching, webinars, peer learning opportunities, and access to teaching artists programs that were moderately well-utilized (more than 50 percent of survey respondents used at least one of these resources). Some of the partner community organizations offered professional development training as well. By-and-large, however, it seems that artists mostly developed professional skills on-the-job as a result of their day-to-day work with their organizations, through their own artistic practices (organizing or managing large, complex projects), or through personal investments into professional development classes, trainings, or courses. In a couple of cases, the artists themselves conducted professional development workshops for their organization's staff on topics such as integrating art or creative thinking into their work. Chart 8 shows the resources and training available to the AEP artists and their reported rate of participation.

Photo courtesy of Ngozi Anyanwu

Chart 7. What new skills did you develop during the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=136)

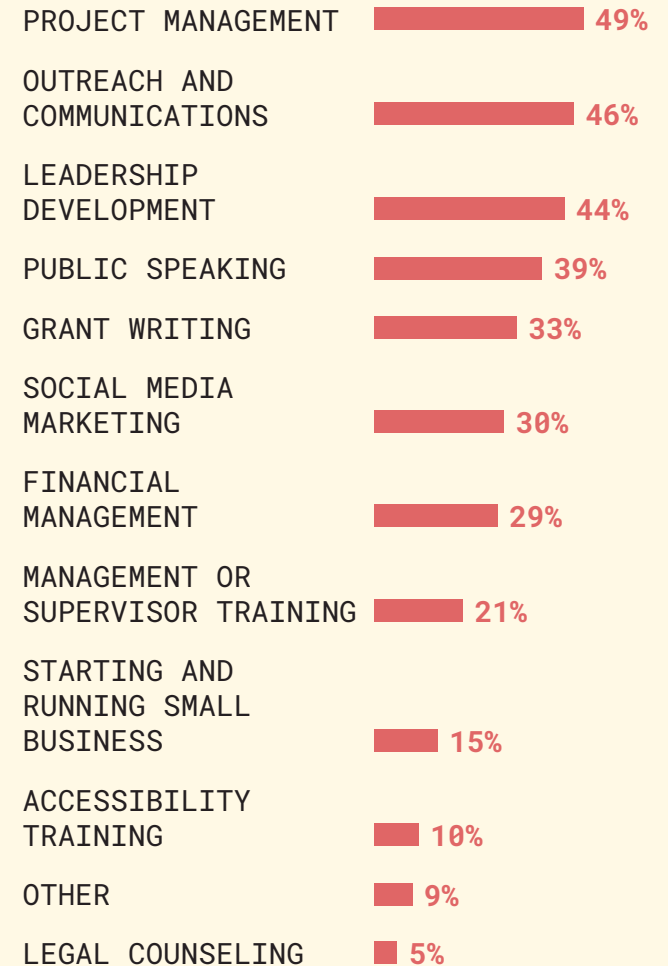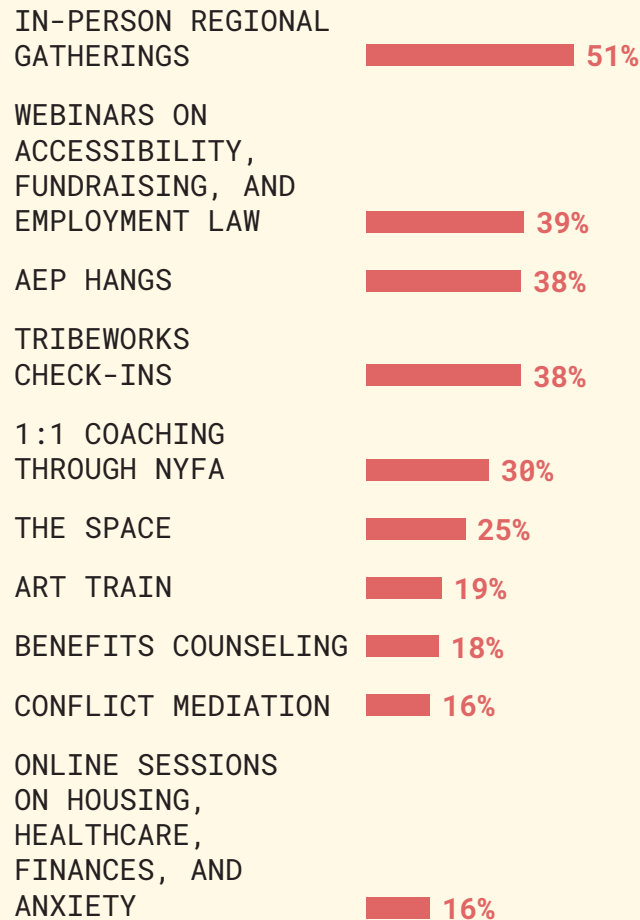| Skill	Percentage
PROJECT MANAGEMENT	49%
OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS	46%
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	44%
PUBLIC SPEAKING	39%
GRANT WRITING	33%
SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING	30%
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	29%
MANAGEMENT OR SUPERVISOR TRAINING	21%
STARTING AND RUNNING SMALL BUSINESS	15%
ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING	10%
OTHER	9%
LEGAL COUNSELING	5%

Chart 8. Which of the following optional tools, services, and resources did you utilize or attend?*
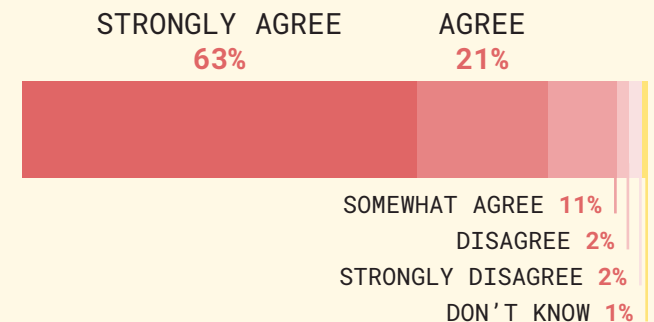
Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=138)

Resource	%
IN-PERSON REGIONAL GATHERINGS	51%
WEBINARS ON ACCESSIBILITY, FUNDRAISING, AND EMPLOYMENT LAW	39%
AEP HANGS	38%
TRIBEWORKS CHECK-INS	38%
1:1 COACHING THROUGH NYFA	30%
THE SPACE	25%
ART TRAIN	19%
BENEFITS COUNSELING	18%
CONFLICT MEDIATION	16%
ONLINE SESSIONS ON HOUSING, HEALTHCARE, FINANCES, AND ANXIETY	16%

*For descriptions of the resources and services listed on Chart 8, please see Appendix A.

Artists' Engagement with Communities

By pairing artists with community-based organizations, the AEP could add a focus on community-oriented program outputs. Whether or not artists had experience working directly with communities prior to participating in the AEP, a core objective for almost every collaboration was for artists to engage with communities directly. More than 80 percent of artists who responded to the survey either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement "I increased my experience engaging communities in my artistic and cultural practices" (see Chart 9), and more than 90 percent reported that they had collaborated with community members during AEP.

Chart 9. Extent to which artists agree that they increased their experience engaging communities in their artistic and cultural practice because of the AEP

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=140)

Response	%
STRONGLY AGREE	63%
AGREE	21%
SOMEWHAT AGREE	11%
DISAGREE	2%
STRONGLY DISAGREE	2%
DON'T KNOW	1%

In interviews, artists described their work with communities in several ways, spanning from co-creating community-led arts and culture projects to teaching classes, collaborating in the creation of performances, and creating documentaries or artwork with community input. In some cases, artists engaged with their partner organizations' communities. In other cases, the artists reached out to new communities and leveraged their personal connections to expand the reach of their partner organizations. And in still other cases, artists brought connections with communities in which they had been doing valuable work to their new organization. Many artists shared that they developed meaningful and deeply impactful relationships with community members through their work, and are continuing to work with these communities beyond the end of the AEP.

The interviews revealed a wide variety of engagement practices, including new models of collaboration between artists and community members that are likely to inspire future work and demonstrate the possibilities and promise of a community-engaged practice. Furthermore, the lack of reporting requirements or the need for a specific outcome were seen as allowing artists to engage in an open, evolving dialogue with their organizations and communities, responding to emergent needs without being beholden to pre-defined expectations and deliverables.

Interview data also revealed artists' engagements with marginalized communities and youth, including how they provided programming and access to art and culture to those who have been historically excluded or missing from programs and performances of their collaborating organizations.

"We have many in-person meetings with the storytellers who direct the project, and they would tell us what their needs as storytellers were. So, the budget also changes according to the participation, to the needs of the participants… We gave them a gift card if they came to the communal steering meetings. We also paid for their hotel and their travel, and we also thank them financially."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"I listened to what artists were saying about hope, all their hopes for launching their career through this program or continuing to promote what they were doing as artists. I just feel like this is not the same thing as in [a] New York State Council on the Arts grant. It's working in communities. It's not about building careers to me. I mean, I think it's more about building a greater understanding of what the impact of culture is on those communities and how we need to redefine what cultural work even is, and that artists can help us do that."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"You really have to work alongside organizations and community groups who are already embedded very deeply in the culture and life of the community, or who are working around issues that you are interested in exploring through art and culture."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"I was able to work with so many youth (including a lot of at risk) that had never been exposed to my kind of art & now some of them are leading their own demos utilizing the things I taught them! So rewarding!"

ARTIST SURVEY RESPONSE

In summary, artists reported that their work under the AEP served to amplify the voice of underrepresented communities through art, promoted inclusivity and access, and built self-esteem and pride in participants' contributions. Their projects emphasized finding commonalities between communities, encouraging solidarity and mutual aid, and their programs became a safe space for addressing personal and communal scars, facilitating healing through creative outlets. The AEP helped artists realize the power of their voices in shaping community identity.

Photos by Shani Mitchell (top) and Sarah Rutherford (bottom)

Wellness and Sustainability

Financial Stability

Artists in general experience financial instability, even when working full-time in art-related fields. Among the challenges they face is the lack of stable employment with comprehensive healthcare benefits. This vulnerability results from the fact that artists often engage in part-time or project-by-project contractor roles, which typically are temporary or sporadic.[41] The majority of AEP artists experienced these financial vulnerabilities, as their income levels shown on Chart 10 indicate: 55 percent of AEP artists responding to the survey had yearly income levels of less than $35,000 (at or below 71 percent of the median individual income in New York State in 2021) before joining the program.

The narratives shared by the artists through the interviews illustrate the profound but varied impacts of financial stability on personal and professional lives after two years of receiving a stable income. Some short-term impacts reported by artists included the ability to pay off debts, secure housing, and even make significant purchases like vehicles or home appliances. Chart 11 shows that 86 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the annual income received under the program was perceived as adequate to meet basic needs. Chart 12 shows that 91 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this annual income provided a sense of financial security.

This stable income also enabled AEP artists to engage in new ventures, including photography, clothing design, video work, teaching, and hosting art shows. Overall, financial stability allowed artists to focus on projects they were genuinely passionate about. In their own words (from the interviews), it provided them "the freedom" to explore more creative paths.

Chart 10. What was your pre-tax personal income in the year prior to the AEP?
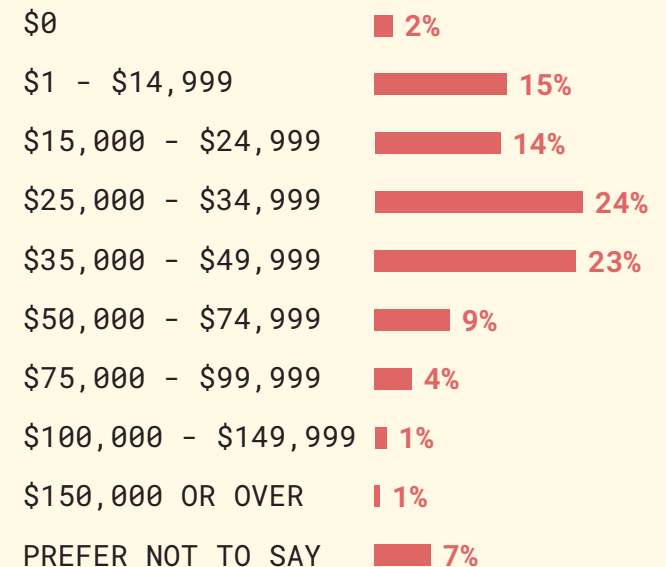
Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=139)

Income	Percent
$0	2%
$1 - $14,999	15%
$15,000 - $24,999	14%
$25,000 - $34,999	24%
$35,000 - $49,999	23%
$50,000 - $74,999	9%
$75,000 - $99,999	4%
$100,000 - $149,999	1%
$150,000 OR OVER	1%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	7%

Chart 11. Extent to which artists agree the $65,000 salary met their basic needs

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=139)

STRONGLY AGREE **61%**　　AGREE **25%**

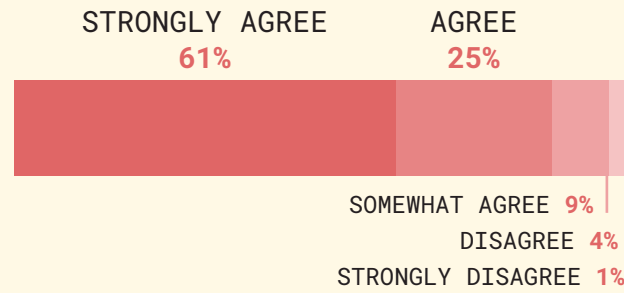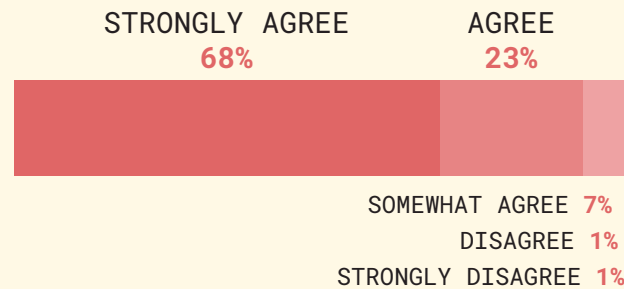SOMEWHAT AGREE **9%**
DISAGREE **4%**
STRONGLY DISAGREE **1%**

Chart 12. Extent to which artists agree that the $65,000 salary provided a sense of safety and financial security

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=139)

STRONGLY AGREE **68%**　　AGREE **23%**

SOMEWHAT AGREE **7%**
DISAGREE **1%**
STRONGLY DISAGREE **1%**

There were cases in which artists lost some income-qualifying safety-net benefits they were receiving as a result of joining the program. Thirty percent of survey respondents indicated

Photo courtesy of Dustin Tang-Chung and Yohance Bailey

that they lost their public health benefits (e.g., Medicaid). Other AEP artists expressed concerns in interviews that the AEP provided only temporary income assistance and long-term financial stability remained in question. Indeed, once the grant ended, some interview participants indicated that they reverted to pre-program instability, indicating that short-term financial aid may not resolve deeper financial challenges. While a few envisioned potential retirement security for the first time, many others felt that two years of income stability did not substantially alter their future economic outlook. These concerns indicate that the long-term transformation in the economic situation of artists remains elusive without addressing unstable employment and income scenarios and a lack of adequate safety-net benefits.

Impacts of Financial Stability on Practice and Wellbeing

Financial support enabled artists to undertake projects that previously were out of reach because of economic constraints. Examples include month-long residencies, national and international research trips, community-driven initiatives such as quilting projects celebrating women's rights, and the purchase of new tools such as a spinning wheel. This greater financial stability also encouraged greater risk-taking, exploration of new ventures, and the pursuit of additional funding opportunities. The following quote from an artist interview illustrates these positive effects of the financial stability provided by the AEP:

> "I think, most artists, there's a part of us that always questions our own legitimacy. Am I good at what I do? Am I a legitimate artist? Am I worthy? Getting this grant, it moved something within me... I think artists often get questioned about that, and so getting the grant really moved something within myself to take more risks, to be braver, to apply for other grants and throw my name in the hat for other opportunities."
>
> ARTIST INTERVIEW

Healthcare-Related Changes

Importantly, the stable income provided by the AEP also resulted in better quality of life through better work-life balance, health improvements, and strengthened personal relationships. It provided the means for leisure, self-care, and meaningful connections with others. By providing health insurance benefits tied to the employment relationship, the AEP improved access to health care and for participant artists, which in turn contributed to emotional wellbeing.

> "I got the shout out for the braces... [The healthcare coverage] didn't work for everyone, but it worked really well for me, and I maximized it as much as I could, because I knew that it was a golden opportunity to take care of myself. I had the freedom to make my own schedule where I could schedule my doctor's appointments and my dentist dental appointments, my vision appointments, and just took full advantage of it."
>
> ARTIST INTERVIEW

> "Thanks to the program I received much needed dental and eyecare. Crucial for continuing my artistic practice."
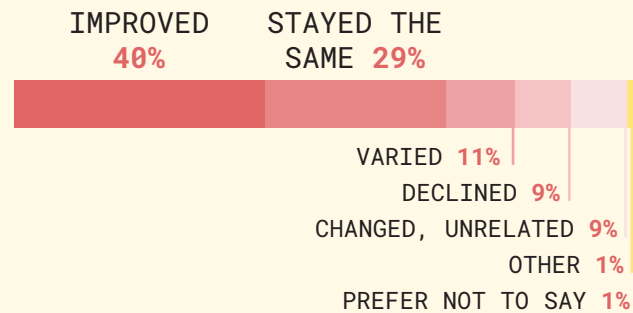>
> ARTIST SURVEY RESPONSE

While 40 percent of participant artists reported that their overall health and wellness improved as a result of the AEP, 29 percent reported that it stayed the same and 9 percent reported that it declined (see Chart 13).

Of important note is that the vast majority of AEP artists (more than 80 percent of survey respondents) had health insurance coverage prior to entering the program, which was a likely influence on their perceptions of the coverage they received under the AEP. Chart 14 shows the levels of satisfaction of artists with their AEP health insurance coverage, which seems to be related to the quality and cost of the coverage received, particularly through Tribeworks (see Chart 15 and quotes). Despite some dissatisfaction about coverage and costs, 62 percent of survey respondents indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the care received (Chart 16).

*Excludes data from artists who switched health insurance providers during the AEP.

Chart 14. Overall satisfaction with the health insurance coverage artists received through the AEP*
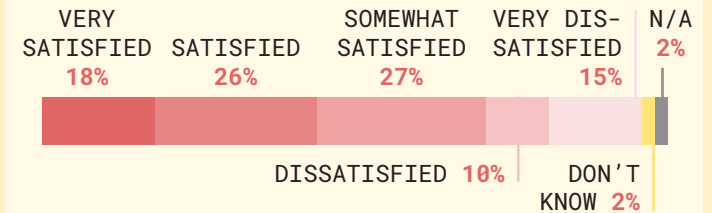
Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=75)

| VERY SATISFIED 18% | SATISFIED 26% | SOMEWHAT SATISFIED 27% | VERY DIS-SATISFIED 15% | N/A 2% |

DISSATISFIED 10%   DON'T KNOW 2%

Chart 15. Has your monthly healthcare spending increased during the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=81)

N/A 12%
DON'T KNOW 6%
YES 46%
NO 36%

Chart 13. How has your overall health and wellness changed as a result of the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=139)

IMPROVED 40%   STAYED THE SAME 29%

VARIED 11%
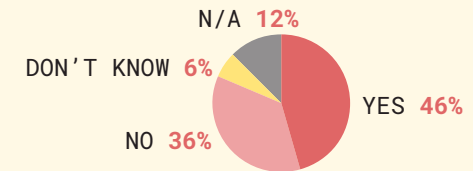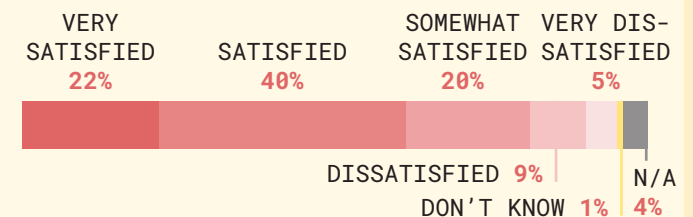DECLINED 9%
CHANGED, UNRELATED 9%
OTHER 1%
PREFER NOT TO SAY 1%

Chart 16. Artist satisfaction with the quality of health care received*

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=74)

| VERY SATISFIED 22% | SATISFIED 40% | SOMEWHAT SATISFIED 20% | VERY DIS-SATISFIED 5% |

DISSATISFIED 9%   N/A 4%
DON'T KNOW 1%

Practice Sustainability

In interviews, many artists described the ways that the AEP allowed artists to set themselves up for success after the program. For instance, some artists reported that they started, maintained, or grew businesses, collectives, or nonprofit organizations during the AEP, and were able to do so because of the flexibility afforded by the program structure. These artists also reported that they were actively fundraising or using leftover CRNY money as a runway while they continued to grow their organizations. The artists who sought additional grants and funding opportunities to continue their work beyond the program expressed mixed success in attaining additional funding.

Some artists grew their practice during the AEP by attending events and fairs, showing in competitions, organizing solo exhibitions, performing in new venues, or entering new markets and selling artwork, sometimes for the first time. When interviewed, many hoped that this growth in visibility and recognition could allow them to maintain their artistic practice and continue making a living wage off of sales of their art. Other artists, particularly younger artists, saved money during the grant period and used it to finance continued education (sometimes in the arts, and sometimes to pursue another career path). Others found new employment during or shortly after the program, sometimes related to skills they developed as a result of their collaborations during the AEP. While a substantial majority of survey respondents (79 percent) reported that they were likely or very likely to remain working as artists or culture bearers, some decided to change careers, while others realized that they wanted to pursue more

stable work as a result of this experience ("get a day job") rather than continue to pursue piecemeal grant funding (see Chart 17).

Overall, artists' perspectives indicate that while the program provided significant short-term benefits and opened doors, its long-term transformative impact remains highly dependent on broader systemic reforms in the arts funding environment.

Chart 17. Likelihood that artists will remain working as an artist or culture bearer in one year's time
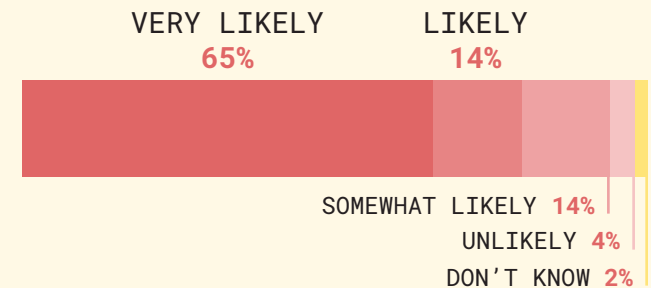
Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=140)

VERY LIKELY
65%

LIKELY
14%

SOMEWHAT LIKELY **14%**
UNLIKELY **4%**
DON'T KNOW **2%**

Photo courtesy of Joel Knopf

Impact of the AEP on Organizations

This evaluation also examined survey and interview findings about the impact and outcomes of the AEP on the organizations that collaborated and hosted artists under the program. The main areas of focus were the organizations' programs and capacity, their relationships with the artists and communities they serve, and their financial sustainability.

Photo by Tomie Arai

Programs and Capacity

Interviews and survey results show that the most pronounced benefits to organizations were improvements to the services and programs they provided, greater visibility through increased capacity for outreach and marketing, and increased engagement with their communities. Collaborating with artists through the AEP allowed organizations to expand their program offerings and provide services to a broader and more diverse range of constituents, leading to community benefits as well.

As shown in Chart 18, 77 percent of the organizations that responded to the survey became more visible in their communities, with 73 percent reporting deeper community engagement, and one in two organizations reporting that the AEP allowed them to better their program offerings. Organizations also reported increased outreach, marketing and promotion of their offerings, which led to increased program attendance for 41 percent of those responding to our survey.

As shown on Chart 18, slightly less than half (48 percent) of organizations participating in the survey reported more staff capacity." This is likely because artists were not required to use most of their working hours as non-arts work, leaving such tasks to the organizations' regular staff. While not as widespread, 11 percent of organizations reported better internal systems as a result of the AEP in addition to program o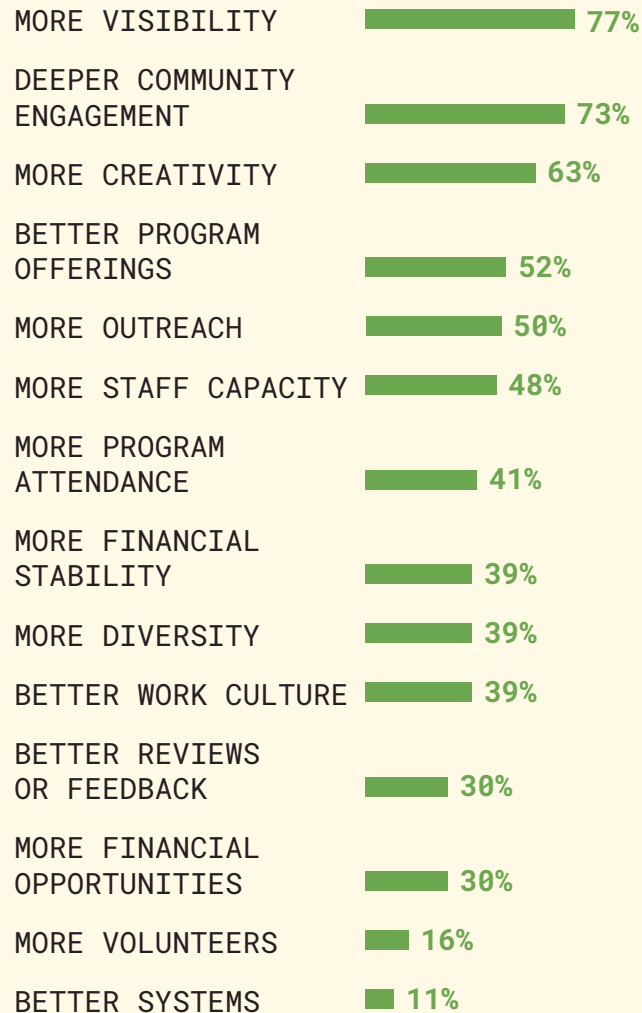r service benefits. A majority of organizations (63 percent) reported more creativity in the ways their organization thinks and operates. Some organizations committed to hiring artists as part of their teams going forward, but for most there seemed to be a return to the practice of engaging artists as independent contractors or volunteers once the AEP ended.

"Working with the four AEP artists has been an incredibly transformative experience for our organization. Their expertise and creativity allowed us to achieve things we couldn't have done on our own. They not only taught our staff how to create compelling videos, take professional-quality photos, and enhance our social media presence, but they also crafted stunning brochures and designs for many of our programs, including new logos."

ORGANIZATION SURVEY RESPONSE

Chart 18. How has your organization benefited from the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=56)

MORE VISIBILITY	77%
DEEPER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	73%
MORE CREATIVITY	63%
BETTER PROGRAM OFFERINGS	52%
MORE OUTREACH	50%
MORE STAFF CAPACITY	48%
MORE PROGRAM ATTENDANCE	41%
MORE FINANCIAL STABILITY	39%
MORE DIVERSITY	39%
BETTER WORK CULTURE	39%
BETTER REVIEWS OR FEEDBACK	30%
MORE FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES	30%
MORE VOLUNTEERS	16%
BETTER SYSTEMS	11%

"I am the only staff member at our organization. Throughout our AEP collaboration, I felt well accompanied by our artist partners. They became some of my primary go-to people for ideas, guidance, and support. They boosted my confidence and morale at critical moments over the last two years, impacting and improving our overall work and our reach."

ORGANIZATION SURVEY RESPONSE

Additional ways that AEP artists supported organizations were as consultants, confidants, or sounding boards for organizational leadership (25 percent of organizations described their artists as a creative consultant). Most of the AEP organizations responding to the survey (65 percent) had fewer than 10 employees, and many artists worked directly with their organization's executive director or another senior leadership member as a result. Three of seven organizational representatives interviewed recounted the close consultative relationships they had with their AEP artists, confiding in them on important programmatic and organizational decisions.

In these relationships, artists helped organizational leaders make decisions about the ways their organization pursues funding, sets internal staff policy, engages with their audiences and constituents, and how they might best advance their mission and vision through their

programming. In these instances, organizations benefitted from the knowledge and experiences of their AEP artists not just as artists, but as thought partners and leaders in their own right.

> "We're a one-person organization... There were times when my confidence in my own judgment about this program or that event or this person, whatever, was really flagging. On several occasions I would call [the artist], and talk through an issue, a problem, an uncertainty, and come out of it, often, in the same place that I went into it, but with certainty and confidence. So, the nature of the collaboration changed dramatically but in powerful and very helpful ways."
>
> ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW

Photo by Tony Vu

The AEP as an Opportunity for Organizational Growth

Interview data revealed that some organizations were able to take advantage of the AEP opportunity to expand their programs, hire staff, and more firmly establish themselves in their communities, while also expanding the ways they think about and use art within their organizations. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents indicated that they created new programs as a result of the AEP (see Chart 19). Others, however, felt they missed the opportunity to do so, either because they did not set clear expectations with their artists from the outset of the program, or because they were too ambitious with their plans and were not fully capable of supporting themselves and their artists to accomplish their shared goals.

> "We had funding to be able to relax and not have to think like, 'Oh, we got to write a grant for this. We got to do this for that and jump through this hoop and that hoop.' For us, there's only two of us here, and we do all that programming, and we do a lot here, so I just felt like it was important for us to relax a little bit and use some of that funding to do whatever we wanted with the arts."
>
> INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT 20

Chart 19. Did your organization create any new programs or service offerings as a result of the AEP?

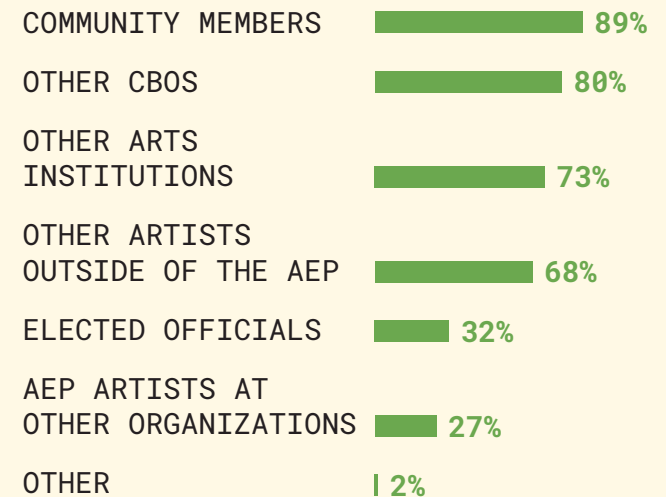Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey
(n=55)

DON'T KNOW 2%

NO 25%

YES 73%

Photo courtesy of Catherine LaPointe Vollmer

Expanding Connections with the Community

As shown in Chart 20, nearly 90 percent of organizations that responded to our survey reported collaborating with community members during the AEP. Although this evaluation did not have baseline data to determine whether this level of collaboration with community members resulted from participating in the AEP, 77 percent of organizations responding to our survey reported achieving greater visibility in their community, and 73 percent reported deeper engagement.

Chart 20. Which of the following people or groups did your organization collaborate with during the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey
(n=56)

COMMUNITY MEMBERS — 89%

OTHER CBOS — 80%

OTHER ARTS INSTITUTIONS — 73%

OTHER ARTISTS OUTSIDE OF THE AEP — 68%

ELECTED OFFICIALS — 32%

AEP ARTISTS AT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS — 27%

OTHER — 2%

In multiple instances in the interviews, organizations reported that the programming developed and facilitated by their artists was meaningful and engaging for their communities in new ways. Through their work, artists not only provided programs and services to community members, but provided communication services, outreach, and organizing support. Important in this process was the collaboration with artists, especially artists from underrepresented populations and communities, which enabled participant organizations from across the state to broaden and deepen their engagement with communities of color. Many organizations enlisted their artists to provide programs off-site and directly within their communities to help break down perceived barriers, and some organizations partnered directly with other community-based organizations to reach more community members. Other interviewed organizations reported that their AEP artists connected them with a broader and more diverse network of artists, a foundation upon which they planned to build future programs, exhibitions, and events.

"For us to be able to have a larger network of people that we can then pull them and their areas of specialty, whether it's Bollywood dance or whether it's steel drums or whether it's the language of dance, or some of those things. We've expanded what we know exists in our community."

ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW

"She did [connect] us up with a lot of African American artists that we had not heard of, and she had connections to other artists in the greater area that got more involved with us, which is great."

ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW

A key factor that CRNY introduced through the AEP was to emphasize recruitment of BIPOC artists. As mentioned earlier in this report, 79 percent of participating artists in the AEP self-identified as BIPOC. Through these artists, organizations were able to better connect with underrepresented groups. This outcome helped to strengthen the organizations' community outreach and increased participation in their events. Fifty percent of surveyed organizations reported increases in their marketing, promotion, and outreach, and 41 percent saw increased attendance in their programs. Artists' involvement elevated the organization's profile within communities, helping bridge cultural and social gaps.

Photo courtesy of Echoes of Incarceration

> "The artist gained a lot, and we gained a lot because she helped us out so much in reaching out to the African American community in a nearby town which we had not been able to reach and I think she has probably been the number one reason that they know who we are now. And to us it's very important. We're all about DEI."
>
> ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW

Findings from interviews revealed that artists of color under the AEP acted as catalysts for organizational change and community building, igniting dialogue on diversity and inclusion, influencing leadership and policy, embedding awareness into organizational culture, and advocating for representation and inclusion. Through their art and advocacy, artists of color raised awareness about issues of racism, equity, and representation, as well as encouraged organizations to engage in conversations about white supremacy, privilege, and systemic inequities, thus broadening institutional perspectives. These artists' work inspired leadership to reconsider existing structures and advocate for more inclusive practices. They also highlighted the value of a diverse workforce, encouraging organizations to actively recruit and support staff from underrepresented backgrounds.

Artists also played a role in organizations' efforts to facilitate community healing and dialogue. Interview data indicate that artists facilitated healing spaces during moments of geopolitical conflict (such as the conflict in Palestine), fostering dialogue on difficult issues. Artists also helped organizations put together poetry collections and healing circles to explore themes of solidarity, grief, and resilience.

> "Our work with the AEP artists was deeply rooted in community engagement and showcasing our events. They brought immense talent and dedication to our projects, making it possible for us to connect more effectively."
>
> ORGANIZATION SURVEY RESPONSE

> "Each time there were conversations that community members came and participated in, some expressed to me that they'd never had a chance to talk about racism before. They never felt comfortable being in a conversation, talking about white privilege or white supremacy. They've never really had an honest conversation with a person of color before. And that is immeasurable in terms of its impact on the community on the site and… our reputation as an organization as a trusted, safe place."
>
> ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW

> "[The artist] was really able to create some space for us to... explore, and hold humanity for one another, and be angry and be confused and be sad. There's a lot of grief."

ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW

> "It gave us a link to [our city's] Black community and, in at least my case, opened my eyes to a new way of thinking about art as it applies to people of color."

ORGANIZATION SURVEY RESPONSE

By embedding themselves in these organizations through the AEP, artists of color enriched the cultural fabric of the local community and acted as agents of change, encouraging organizations to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of their mission and practices.

Photos courtesy of Nelson Mateo Gonzalez (left) and by Rich Ramsundar (right top) and Kelly Adams (right bottom)

Sustainability and capacity

Surveys and interviews also captured perspectives about the impact of the AEP on partner organizations' financial health, capacity, sustainability, and work culture.

Financial Health and Growth

Financial support through the AEP expanded the operational budgets of participant organizations, reducing the pressure to chase funding and allowing for more focus on activities that are core to their mission. The AEP funding, which amounted to between $25,000 and $100,000 per year, served to both leverage additional grants and significantly boost financial capacity and thus programming potential. About half of organizations (49 percent) responding to the survey indicated that the funding had a significant impact on their financial stability, and that the infusion of funds helped address weaknesses in existing business models. For instance, in the case of some small under-resourced organizations, the AEP funding enabled them to formalize their structure and facilitate their incorporation into non-profits, which in turn provided them with potentially sustainable growth opportunities such as the ability to apply for the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) grants.

Data from surveys and interviews showed that many organizations developed new marketing and outreach efforts, including hosting community events that supported their fundraising efforts. Artists also created outputs such as promotional films and merchandise that were used to support the organizations' fundraising. Chart 21 shows that 55 percent of surveyed organizations were able to expand their capacity in marketing and communications.

Chart 21. Was your organization able to expand their capacity in any of the following areas because of the AEP?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=56)

Area	Percentage
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS	55%
GRANT WRITING	34%
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	32%
BUDGET MANAGEMENT	16%
ACCESSIBILITY TRAINING	9%
LEGAL COUNSELING	5%
OTHER	4%
NONE OF THE ABOVE	21%

The interview data also revealed that the AEP funding facilitated organizational growth through increased enrollment in existing and new programming. The ability to partner with talented and dedicated artists brought exceptional skill and passion to the organizational efforts, enriching events and projects.

"The artists produced lasting video content that beautifully showcases our premier events… which we can utilize for years to come. Most importantly, they created a powerful documentary highlighting the impactful work [we do] within the community, significantly boosting awareness and fundraising efforts."

ORGANIZATION SURVEY RESPONSE

Photo by Paul Daquan Massey

Work-Culture and Long-Term Vision

Forty-five percent of survey respondents reported that their work culture improved as a result of employing an artist through the AEP (see Chart 22).

Chart 22. How did the work culture at your organization change as a result of employing an AEP artist?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=55)

IMPROVED 45%	STAYED THE SAME 33%	GOT WORSE 5%

CHANGED, BUT UNRELATED TO THE AEP 9%
PREFER NOT TO SAY 4%
DON'T KNOW 4%
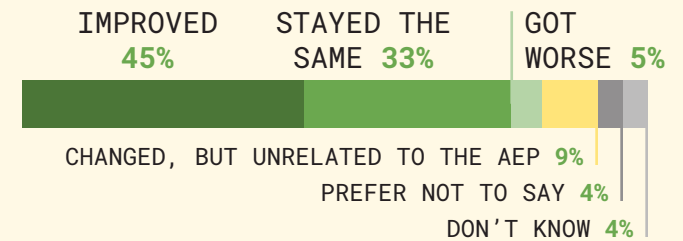
Organizations' interview responses showed that participating in the AEP helped forge a strategic vision, inspiring board members and leaders to "dream big," which in turn led to ambitious proposals and the development of long-term sustainability plans. This new approach positioned these organizations for continued success beyond AEP funding, as it supported long-term strategic planning, including such things as succession initiatives and the creation of dedicated artist spaces. For many organizations, the opportunity to work with exceptional artists enabled them to focus on the creation of sustained partnerships rather than one-off projects.

Challenges and Reflections

The experience of organizations with the AEP highlights the transformative potential of the program while underscoring the complexities of integrating artists into nonprofit structures. Some of the challenges that emerged included balancing artistic freedom with organizational needs, as 36 percent of surveyed organizations reported difficulty managing their AEP artist's time, including their artistic work, work for the organization, and their other arts work. Similarly, 39 percent of organizations said they experienced scheduling conflicts with their artists, and 36 percent experienced conflict with their artists over expectations about their work and job junctions. These tensions in the relationships between artists and organizations are discussed further in the next section of this report.

Photos by Christopher Duggan (left), Sullivan J. Harris (right top), and Marion Aguas (right bottom)

Working Relations Between Artists and Organizations

Photo by A. Oberstadt

Eighty percent of the artists and the organizations that responded to the survey indicated that they had a pre-existing relationship with their partners before the AEP's inception. Artists indicated that they had worked with their partner organizations in the past as contractors or volunteers in efforts that included advocacy work, cultural events, or professional temporary jobs. According to interview data, these prior engagements often established trust and familiarity, facilitating smoother transitions into more formal partnerships under the program. Artists highlighted the advantage of shared values, communication styles, or mutual understanding that were developed through previous projects, and for some artists their participation in the program felt like a natural extension of ongoing collaborative work. For example, years of volunteering or casual interactions with an organization often evolved into structured roles within the AEP framework.

Prior relationships between artists and local organizations were a mix of long-term engagements, organic collaborations, and more formal partnerships, each bringing unique dynamics to the table when transitioning into the AEP. Overall, survey results did not show that prior relationships had a meaningful effect on the program impacts for artists or organizations. What mattered, it seems, was the ability of the collaborators to productively navigate their new relationship. The AEP did not prescribe a structure for the partnership arrangements, which left artists and organizations to structure their collaborations as they thought might work best. Also, artists were free to switch to another organization during the 2-year period of the program.

Overall, artists and their organizations experienced good working relations during their AEP partnerships, and expressed satisfaction with the work they undertook. The majority of the artists and organizations that responded to the survey indicated that their relationships improved over the course of the AEP (see Charts 23 and 24).

"I just wanted to emphasize how I didn't just land in the program with this idea of being an artist with a paid salary for two years. I mean it. It did feel like it grew out of this sort of organic relationship that we had been building through the work we were doing together."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

"I had already done a project with [the organization] …we already had like a shared language and expectation which [were] super helpful versus like working with someone new."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

Chart 23. How did your relationship with your partner organization change during the AEP?*
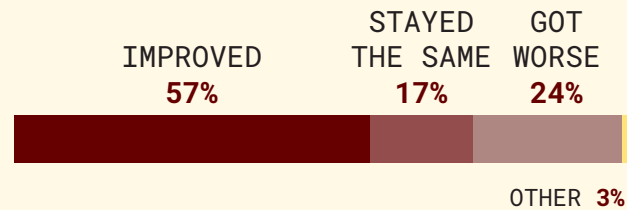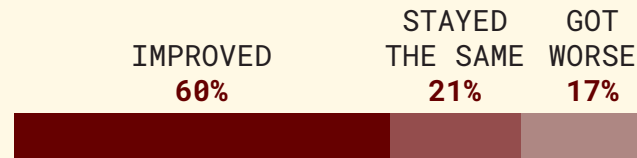
Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=139)

IMPROVED	STAYED THE SAME	GOT WORSE
57%	17%	24%

OTHER 3%

Chart 24. How did your relationship with your AEP artists change during the AEP?**

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=145)

IMPROVED	STAYED THE SAME	GOT WORSE
60%	21%	17%

Similarly to artists, most participant organizations (85 percent) that responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they did "good, impactful work" with their AEP artists (see Chart 26).

Chart 25. Extent to which artists agree that they did good, impactful work with their partner organization***

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=139)

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE
63%	20%

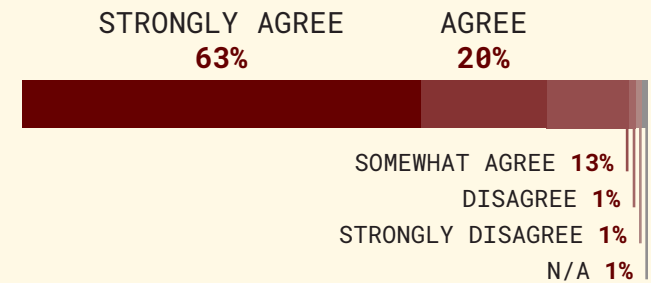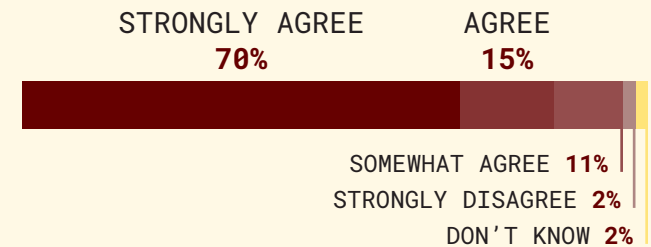SOMEWHAT AGREE 13%
DISAGREE 1%
STRONGLY DISAGREE 1%
N/A 1%

Chart 26. Extent to which organizations agree that they did good, impactful work with their AEP artists

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=54)

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE
70%	15%

SOMEWHAT AGREE 11%
STRONGLY DISAGREE 2%
DON'T KNOW 2%

*Only includes results from the initial AEP collaborations.

**Organizations responded to this question for each of their AEP artists.

***Only includes results from the initial AEP collaborations, does not include results from the artist's second organization (if they switched).

A vast majority (87 percent) of artists who responded to the survey either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I did good, impactful work with my partner organization" (see Chart 25). Interviews and responses to open-ended survey questions revealed how fulfilling and impactful the work was for many of the artists themselves, their organizations, and the communities they served.

Roles, Goals, and Expectations

A shared understanding of the roles of artists in their partner organizations and clarity about work schedules and job expectations were important factors for the success of the collaborations. The types of roles that artists reported through survey responses largely aligned with what the organizations reported (see Charts 27 and 28). For instance, 59 percent of artists described themselves as Artists-in-Residence, and 55 percent of organizations described their partner artists the same way. And 57 percent of artists described themselves as Teaching Artists, while 61 percent of organizations described their artists as such. Of note is that respondents could choose multiple roles (explaining why the percentages in the charts do not add up to one hundred); for instance, an Artist-in-Residence can also be a Teaching Artist or a Creative Consultant.

The types of roles that artists assumed at their partner organizations varied because of the open nature of the AEP, which produced nearly as many different kinds of projects, programs, performances, and other outputs as there were artists and collaborations. The role of the Artist-in-Residence, one of the largest reported categories, involved a wide variety of functions, which were determined mainly by the artist's discipline and the organization's needs. Such functions included community performances, co-designing murals, community storytelling in books and magazines, and musical pieces co-written with community members and other AEP artists. Teaching artists developed curriculum, and taught classes,

training, or arts-based programming to community members. Other roles included Community Organizer, Documentarian, Creative Consultant, and Curator. Some artists also described their role in providing administrative, marketing, social media, or project management support for their organization.

Chart 27. Which of the following best describe your role(s) at your partner organization?

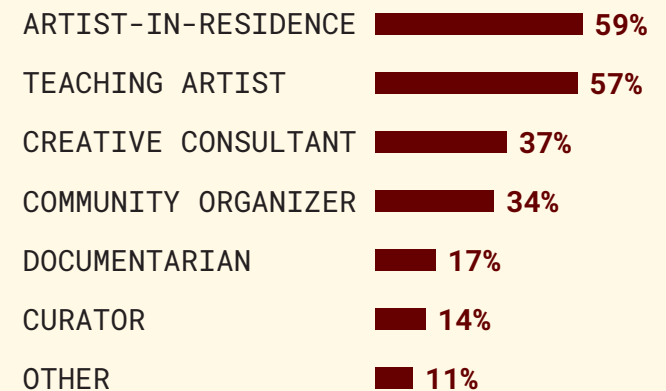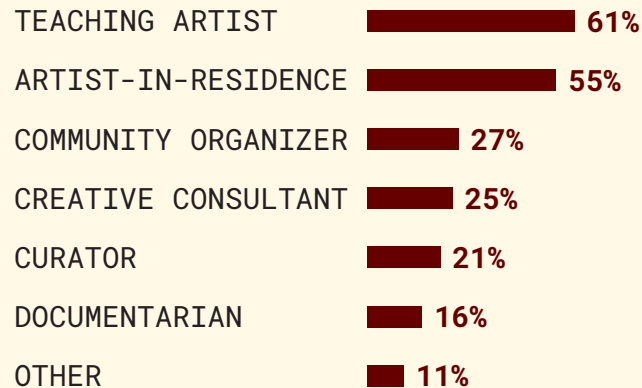Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=140)

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE **59%**
TEACHING ARTIST **57%**
CREATIVE CONSULTANT **37%**
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER **34%**
DOCUMENTARIAN **17%**
CURATOR **14%**
OTHER **11%**

Photo courtesy of Buffalo Arts Studio

Chart 28. Which of the following best describe the role(s) of your AEP artist(s)?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=56)

Role	Percentage
TEACHING ARTIST	61%
ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE	55%
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER	27%
CREATIVE CONSULTANT	25%
CURATOR	21%
DOCUMENTARIAN	16%
OTHER	11%

Most collaborations involved a hybrid working relationship between the artists and their partner organizations. Thus, artists typically spent approximately two to three days on artistic work for their organization, one day working on non-arts work for their organization, and the remaining days working on their own artistic craft.

Survey and interview data indicate that these hybrid work schedules varied greatly across collaborations. Some artists sporadically or never worked with their organizations, often to the frustration of their collaborating organizations and peer artists. Other artists reported spending all of their time, sometimes in excess of 40 hours a week, working for their collaborating organizations, leaving little time to work on their own artistic or cultural practice. In other cases, the work the artists were doing for the organization was wholly aligned with their own personal artistic practices, and no distinction was made between time spent on their personal practice and time spent working for or with their organization. Some collaborations focused almost entirely on enabling the artists to pursue their practice and only required them to sporadically conduct work for the organization, most typically for large events, gatherings, or showcases. Leaders at organizations who fostered these kinds of relationships spoke about trust and care. Finally, other collaborations developed unique working schedules — one, for instance, implemented a trimester arrangement with their three artists, with each artist working full-time for the organization to provide programming for four months out of the year and focusing on their personal artistic practice for the remaining eight months.

Although most survey responses indicated alignment and clarity in roles, goals, and expectations, this evaluation also revealed cases of relationship breakdowns due to the inability to achieve such alignment and clarity (see Charts 29 and 30 and the following quotes). These breakdowns seemed to have happened only a handful of times, and mainly due to misaligned expectations and/or disagreements about time allocation for the artists to work on their own artistic or cultural practice.

Photo courtesy of Bennie Guzman

Chart 29. Extent to which organizations agree that they created a set of clear expectations with their AEP artists

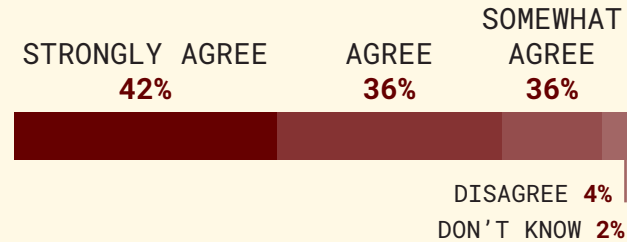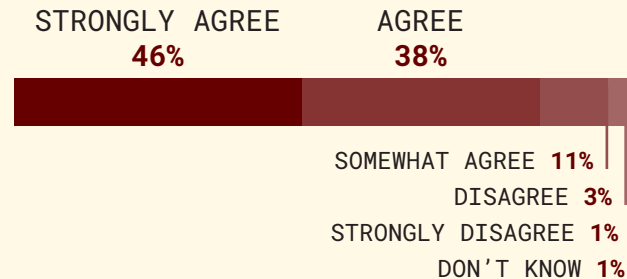Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=55)

```
STRONGLY AGREE        AGREE        SOMEWHAT AGREE
     42%               36%              36%

                              DISAGREE    4%
                              DON'T KNOW  2%
```

Chart 30. Extent to which artists agree that their personal values align with the mission of their partner organization*

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=138)

```
STRONGLY AGREE        AGREE
     46%               38%

                  SOMEWHAT AGREE     11%
                       DISAGREE       3%
                STRONGLY DISAGREE     1%
                     DON'T KNOW       1%
```

One organization expressed surprise that other organizations and artists referred to themselves as "Artists-in-Residence," believing instead that the program was more cleanly divided between "work for the organization" and "independent artistic work." In interviews with artists and organizations, this was not an uncommon belief about the structure of the program — that the relationship was to be more a traditional employee-employer relationship than a true collaboration. For small organizations, the management of the artists and additional programming they provided imposed additional duties that required more time and labor from their artists for which many artists felt not adequately compensated.

"I never saw this program as a residency. We were told the artists were staff. But the artists wanted to keep the freedom of their gig work without supervision. Soon they didn't want to take part in staff activities and integrate their work into our programming. I also heard other organizations calling their AEP artists, Artists in Residence. Instead of increasing our staff capacity, our already small staff had to work more because there were more programs (through the AEP artists) but no one to help with the overall institution building."

ORGANIZATION SURVEY RESPONSE

Interviewed artists and organizations described a relationship gestation period during the first year of the program, where working relationships and time allocations were negotiated and renegotiated. During this first year, some relationships broke down over a lack of clarity around roles, expectations, and time management.

"There was an understanding that we would work 40 hours a week. But the understanding of our artistic practices included in [those] 40 hours was not enforced. And ...that was a neglect on our parts for not realizing that. But I found myself working 40 hours, if not more, just strictly, on PR and marketing. I did not do my personal practice very much other than if it was for the business."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

Photo courtesy of Road Less Traveled Productions

Additionally, when there was ambiguity in defining roles, artists often were not clear about their responsibilities and some were expected to take on tasks they felt they were not equipped for, such as lesson planning or cultural programming. This lack of clarity sometimes led to frustration and unmet expectations.

"It was sort of expected for us as instructors to do the recruiting, and commit to the workshop, and then hold students accountable, and to showing up to the classes, and unfortunately, like, I only ended up recruiting about like eight or nine students, and then retaining about six of them, and slowly, as the weeks went on, dwindled down to about one to two."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

The program illuminated the importance of clearly defined roles, mutual flexibility, and adaptive structures to align artist and organizational expectations effectively. Chart 32 shows that the percentage of artists reporting that their relationship with their partner organization got worse over the course of the AEP is the largest for those who did not have clear expectations set at the start of the program: 25 percent of artists who did not have clear expectations reported that their relationship with their partner organization got worse, compared to 15 percent for those who had clear and somewhat clear expectations (Chart 33).

Chart 31. The change in artists' relationships with their partner organization disaggregated by the clarity of their expectations at the start of the AEP

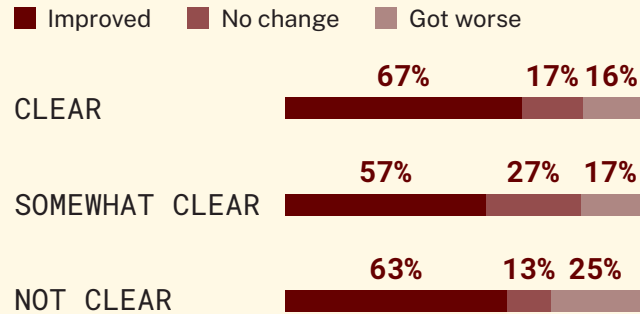Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=125)

■ Improved ■ No change ■ Got worse

CLEAR
67% **17% 16%**

SOMEWHAT CLEAR
57% **27% 17%**

NOT CLEAR
63% **13% 25%**

Chart 32. Artist satisfaction level with the output from their collaboration disaggregated by the clarity of their expectations at the start of the AEP

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=125)

■ Improved ■ No change ■ Got worse

CLEAR
91% **9%**

SOMEWHAT CLEAR
87% **7% 7%**

NOT CLEAR
63% **38%**
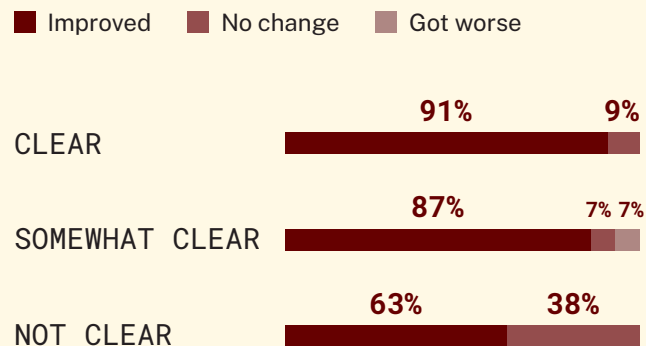
Despite these challenges, the majority of artists responding to the survey reported feeling integrated into their partner organizations' work by the end of the program (see Chart 33).

Chart 33. Extent to which artists agree that they felt incorporated into their partner organization's work*

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=138)

STRONGLY AGREE **35%**   AGREE **24%**   SOMEWHAT AGREE **19%**

DISAGREE **13%**
STRONGLY DISAGREE **7%**
DON'T KNOW **1%**
N/A **1%**
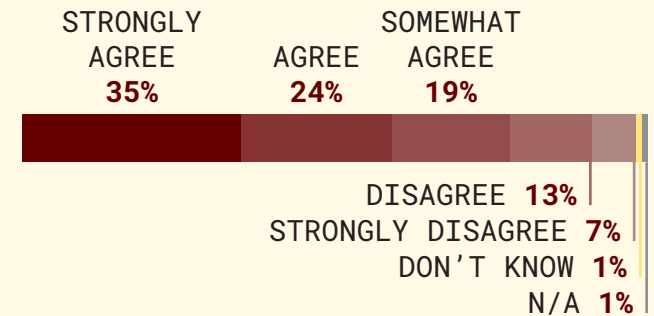
Structured opportunities for integration such as staff meetings, one-on-ones, and retreats, were crucial for artists to understand their roles and develop meaningful connections. Successful partnerships emphasized deep integration, including attending staff meetings, community organizing events, and purposeful retreats. Artists often had one-on-one meetings with staff to establish trust and mutual understanding.

Survey data presented in Charts 34 and 35 illustrate the impacts of relationship building measured by the frequency of meetings to check on the quality of the relationships and the satisfaction levels with the output

of the collaborations. Chart 34 shows that as the frequency of check-ins increased, the percentage of artists reporting improvement in their relationship with their partner organization increased. Chart 35 shows that frequency of check-ins did not have a significant impact on artists' perceptions about the quality of the work they did with their partner organization.

Chart 34. The change in artists' relationships with their partner organization disaggregated by the frequency of check-ins with their partner organization

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=126)

■ Improved ■ No change ■ Got worse

DAILY
63% **31%** 6%

2-4 TIMES/WEEK
74% 17% 9%

WEEKLY
68% 15% 17%

EVERY OTHER WEEK
63% **25%** 13%

MONTHLY
54% **25%** **21%**

1-2 TIMES/YEAR
38% **63%**

Chart 35. Artists' satisfaction level with the output from their collaboration disaggregated by the frequency of check-ins with their partner

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=126)

■ Improved ■ No change ■ Got worse

DAILY
100%

2-4 TIMES/WEEK
91% **9%**

WEEKLY
85% 13% 2%

EVERY OTHER WEEK
89% **11%**

MONTHLY
79% **17%** 4%

1-2 TIMES/YEAR
86% **14%**
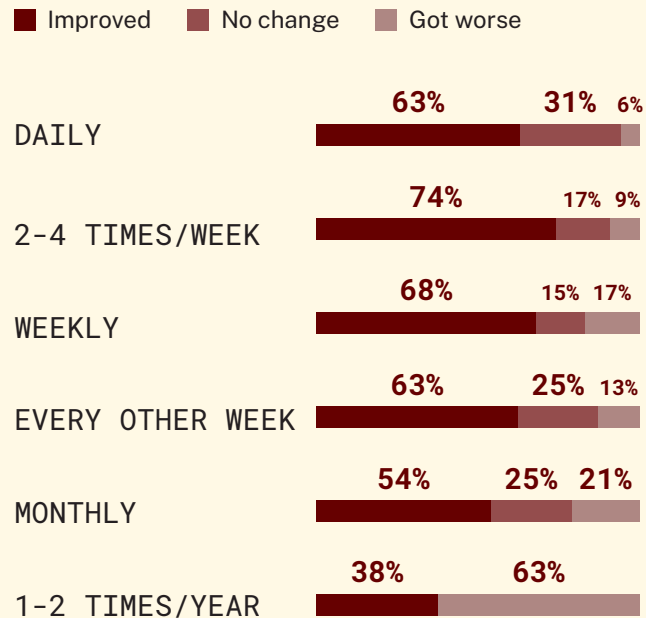
Photo courtesy of Darnell Benoit

*Only includes results from the final AEP collaborations. Excludes collaborations that ended early.
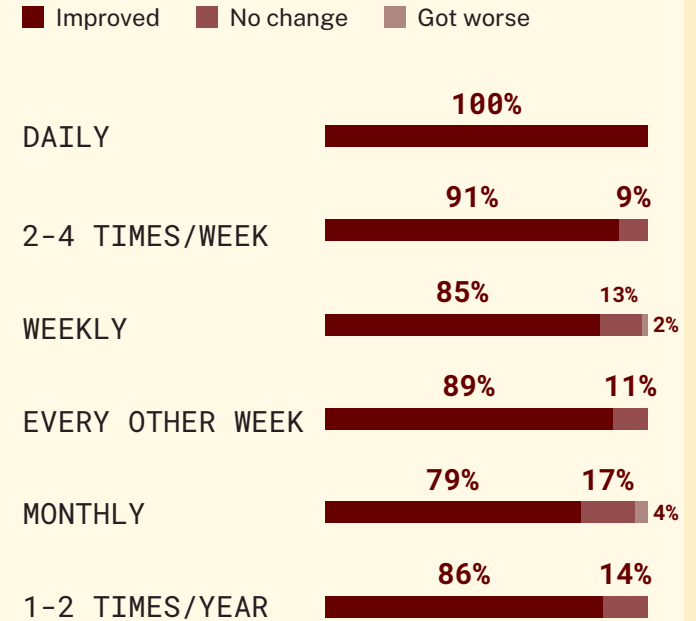
Challenges and Capacity Issues

Survey responses indicated that for both artists and organizations, misalignment of roles, goals, and expectations, as well as issues related to capacity and resources, were among the top sources of conflict in the collaborations.

The top five sources of conflict from the artist perspective included:

- Role misalignment
- Time management
- Disagreements about funding allocation
- Lack of communication
- Goals misalignment

From the organizations' perspectives, the top five issues were:

- Scheduling conflicts
- Artists' time management
- Role misalignment
- Lack of communication
- Goals misalignment

In interviews, organizations' representatives tended to describe role misalignment as occurring when artists prioritized personal projects over organizational goals, creating tension with supervisors and other staff.

Although AEP artists were able to add critical capacity to organizations in several areas, like teaching, web development, set design, performances, public relations and marketing, to name a few, some organizations expressed frustration with the AEP because they were hoping that artists would provide more institutional support or capacity than they ultimately did. This indicates that for some organizations, a primary reason for applying to the AEP was to use their collaborating artists to fill capacity gaps within their organizations, and that they did so only with mixed results. This expectation was not in alignment with the goals of the AEP, however, which prioritized artistic work. Other tensions emerged in relation to the salaries of AEP artists, which in many cases were higher than those of the organizations' staff, leading to resentment among other staff, particularly when artists were perceived as disconnected from organizational missions.

Results also were mixed in terms of the organization's capacity to support their collaborating artists. While many organizations used CRNY discretionary funds to provide materials and resources for artists or hire additional staff, many organizations felt that these funds were inadequate, and many artists shared their difficulties in accessing these funds to support their work.

> "…even though we had CRNY's money and backing, there was no other support from the organization, and the organization was a single person. So, I could understand why."
>
> ARTIST INTERVIEW

Photo courtesy of Gibril Ceesay

There also is evidence that many organizations were not equipped to take on the work of managing additional staff and programs. In interviews, multiple artists and organizations expressed frustration with their collaborators and pointed to a lack of capacity as a dampener of the impacts of the program. Organizations received limited support outside of artist contributions, which left them under-resourced and unable to meaningfully participate in the program. They also reported that navigating artist integration and balancing their wellness needs demanded significant additional time and effort from their leadership.

These findings indicate the importance of aligning artist roles with organizational goals, transparent communication, and providing adequate resources to support both parties in such initiatives.

Chart 36. In what capacity are you continuing to work with your partner organization?

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=89)

INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR	37%
VOLUNTEER	25%
PART-TIME EMPLOYEE	12%
FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE	9%
FISCALLY SPONSORED ARTIST	8%
OTHER	8%
TRIBEWORKS-EMPLOYED	1%

Chart 37. How much will you compensate the AEP artists you continue to work with after the AEP?
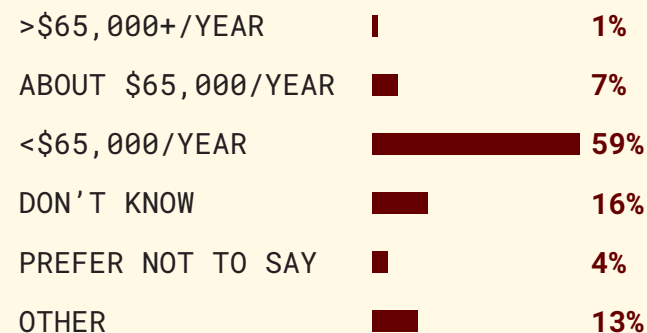
Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=70)

>$65,000+/YEAR	1%
ABOUT $65,000/YEAR	7%
<$65,000/YEAR	59%
DON'T KNOW	16%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	4%
OTHER	13%

Relationships Moving Forward

The majority of artists and almost all organizations that participated in the evaluation shared that they continued working with their partners after the AEP. The nature of the collaborative arrangement largely changed, however: 62 percent of artists who responded to the survey indicated that they were continuing their work as independent contractors or volunteers, and 59 percent of artist survey respondents reported that they were set to earn less than they did under the AEP (see Charts 36 and 37).

Survey data showed that when artists did not continue working with their partners, the main reason cited was lack of funding. The second-most common response was that they did not want to continue working with the organization, or that they had found other jobs or means to support themselves after the program ended. Overall, there was a sense that many artists and organizations wanted to continue working together, but once the financial support offered by the AEP ended there were not adequate resources for most collaborations to continue in the same way as they had been. Collaborations that did continue seem to have settled back into the status quo of artist employment, with artists working as independent contractors or volunteers.

Interviews of artists and organizations revealed that efforts were made to seek funding to continue the collaborations, with some acquiring funds to continue offering programs and engage artists on a short-term basis as independent contractors.

Others used unspent discretionary funds to prolong the collaboration or support their artists' post-program endeavors. Other organizations, could only offer office space or perhaps some staff time or materials, however, in support of the artists as they sought to finish projects started during the AEP.

"I keep the office...What is most important for me is that I maintain the relationship with the nonprofit, because the direct needs of the storytellers will continue for as long as I edit this project, and even beyond. So, I still very much need the organization and the organizers to help me to get the story out."

ARTIST INTERVIEW

Photo courtesy of Leeora White

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report examined the impact that CRNY's Artist Employment Program (AEP) had on artists and organizations that participated in the program, with a focus on personal and organizational well-being, artistic practice sustainability, and the nature and quality of the working relations between artists and arts organizations. Our findings support arguments for replicating and scaling interventions like the AEP to support artistic collaborations between artists and organizations. Such arguments also have been advanced in previous evaluations that showed positive impacts of income and employment programs on artists' practice and overall wellbeing.[42, 43, 44]

Photo by Belinda Gallegos

Findings

Impact on Artists

During its two-year term, the AEP successfully supported participant artists' lives and livelihoods, significantly improving their financial stability by providing regular employment and income. This financial stability enabled artists to prioritize their artistic practices while also meeting their work commitments with their partner organizations. For many artists, this financial stability represented a life-changing experience as it marked the first time they could consider making significant purchases, build savings, or consider homeownership. There were reported benefits on mental health from the relief of financial stress, too. However, the experience of some artists revealed that the financial stability they enjoyed under the program could not be sustained without addressing systemic issues in their industry and the economy, including the need for stable employment and income and an adequate safety net for artists.

Photo by Lia Chang

Impact on Organizations

The funding that organizations received under the AEP reportedly enabled them to focus on their mission without the need for "chasing grants," including sources of operational funding that may not align directly with their organizational priorities. The majority of organizations responding to our survey indicated that they were able to expand and strengthen their desired arts programming and their reach into local communities. Like the artists' experience, while most organizations reportedly improved their position in their field, their ability to sustain financial stability remains unclear and dependent on systemic changes in the arts and culture sector, including adequate funding for non-profit organizations, which would improve their ability to increase employment and pay for artists. Most artists reported that they will continue to work with their partner organizations as independent contractors or volunteers, rather than as employees, signaling a return to pre-AEP working conditions. Also indicative of this was that most surveyed artists and organizations reported that the artists' pay after the end of the program is lower than the annual $65,000 pay provided under the AEP.

Positive impacts for organizations from participating in the AEP included the opportunity to work with artists in ways that facilitated

improvements in the organizations' work culture, increased awareness about diversity, equity and inclusion issues, and making new and meaningful connections with local communities.

Community Engagement

CRNY's emphasis on recruitment of AEP participants from underrepresented communities drove reported transformational changes, as artist participants helped to expand the reach of their partner organizations into new communities, increasing access to the arts for underserved populations and promoting self-value and recognition of BIPOC artists and communities.

Relationships, Process, and Success Factors

Key factors for successful partnerships between artists and organizations included alignment of expectations and clarity of roles at the start of the collaboration, as well as mechanisms to integrate artists in the organization (e.g., frequent check-ins and artists' participation in staff meetings and retreats). The research reflected the need for clearer role definitions and administrative structures, more preparatory time for organizations and artists to align goals and expectations, greater emphasis on relationship-building to foster trust and integration, and flexible, adaptive approaches to accommodate the often-competing needs of organizations and communities.

Photos by Brianna Gonzalez (top), courtesy of Garth Johnson (middle), and by Tracey Dixon (bottom)

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Programs

Support and Resources
Future programs may benefit from the allocation of a separate fund explicitly for the provision of space, equipment, and other resources to artists, rather than simply providing organizations with discretionary funding. The facilitation of connections for participant artists and organizations with statewide and national arts and culture institutions and funders would likely be substantially helpful.

Program Timeframe and Timelines
Provide longer introductory or planning period and more guidance on successful collaborative arrangements (i.e. offer a range of options for working relationships, all of which have explicitly stated requirements for artists to devote a minimum amount of time to their personal practices, with clear enforcement mechanisms).

Clarity of Roles at Program Start
Defining the types of acceptable roles and duties for artists from the outset and defining a robust reporting and accountability structure to enforce the intentions of the program around the value of artists' work and their rights as workers will serve as a strong foundation for mutual trust and respect among program partners.

Leadership Training
Equip organizational leaders with tools to better understand and support artists' practices and worker rights. Provide opportunities for training in workplace and labor relations best practices. Create a framework for regular reviews and adaptations to address emerging challenges.

Photo courtesy of Abrons Arts Center by Andrew Federman

Recommendations

Recommendations Focused on Artists' Wellness

This program evaluation provides evidence that artists perceived comprehensive wellness programs as necessary to support both the physical and mental well-being of artists. A holistic approach could create an environment where artists thrive creatively and personally, using stable resources to build both their practice and their health. Some key components of such a program are outlined below.

Health Insurance and Coverage
Based on survey responses, this evaluation identified artists' needs for comprehensive, affordable health insurance that goes beyond federally mandated benefits. Flexibility is needed to allow artists to choose their trusted healthcare providers, as well as options for including family members in the plan. Surveyed artists also expressed the need for the choice to opt out of provided plans with the allocation of stipends directly to artists to secure alternative coverage.

Financial Stability
Offer additional support or information about resources to meet unforeseen circumstances (e.g., housing insecurity). And ensure financial literacy resources are available to help artists manage and save income during the program.

Support During Major Transitions
Provide more robust onboarding and offboarding support to ease shifts between employment types. Offer workshops or counseling to prepare for transitions back to self-employment.

Work-Life Balance
Promote organizational policies that allow a reasonable balance between work and life demands, and between organizational commitments and time for personal artistic exploration, rest, personal projects, and family care. Practices that help artists to better maintain a steady pace and avoid burnout could be further encouraged.

Transparency and Communication
Clearly communicate information on health insurance options and changes, ensuring artists fully understand available benefits and the associated costs. Engage artists in discussions about improving program structures, prioritizing their needs and feedback.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Policy and Future Research

This evaluation found that most AEP artists returned to their typical pre-program employment pattern as independent contractors. This emphasizes both the recommendations included here and formulated by previous research around the need for policy changes to address the contingent nature of artists' work and the resulting instability and precarity of their income.[45] Such new policies could include the extension of protections related to wages, hours, anti-discrimination, and workplace health and safety to independent contractors, as well as the establishment of portable benefits systems to avoid gaps in artists' coverage for health care and other benefits.[46]

The Freelance Isn't for Free Act was incorporated in New York's business code in August of 2024 to provide protections for freelance workers statewide.[47] The law requires a formal written contract for freelance work valued at $800 or more, and timely compensation which cannot fall below the amounts agreed on in the contract once the freelancer has started working on the project. The law also prohibits retaliation and discrimination by hiring parties against freelancers for exercising or attempting to exercise their

rights under this law.[48] Previous research indicates that artists generally are not aware of their rights under this new law, however, despite the law's call for outreach and education efforts to effectively implement and enforce this new policy.[49]

Topics for future research could include longitudinal studies of AEP participants, including a control group of applicants who did not receive awards; meta evaluation of income and employment support programs for artists, including evaluations of other programs in the US and abroad; and, research on the societal impacts of the arts in local communities and nationally.

Photo courtesy of Unai Reglero

In conclusion, the AEP was not only a program, but a social experiment that showed what regular employment and steady income can do for artists' work and lives, and for their organizations and local communities. The program's emphasis on the participation of artists and organizations from underrepresented communities was an important factor in creating connections that would not have occurred were it not for the AEP. During its two-year term, the AEP demonstrated the positive impacts of steady employment and income for artists, and of funding support for community-based organizations that engage in artistic collaborations. The short-term nature of the program served to highlight the need for more permanent solutions to persistent structural challenges facing artists and organizations in the arts and culture sector in New York State and nationally.

Photos by Chris Carr (left), Lente Studio Photography (right top), and Jennifer Young Studio (right bottom)

Appendix

Appendix A

Resources and Services Provided by CRNY to AEP Participants

Source: Interviews with CRNY representatives.

The Space: a private social media platform for all CRNY artists and organizations. It was developed by CRNY in response to a request from artists seeking to share work and resources.

1:1 coaching through NYFA: coaching and consultation services provided by the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA).

Art Train: a "virtual technical assistance program for artists, municipal agencies, and community-focused organizations" provided by Springboard for the Arts.[50]

AEP Hang: agenda-less monthly meetings for AEP participants to gather and converse.

Tribeworks Check-Ins: artists employed through Tribeworks could meet with Tribeworks staff to discuss employment issues or questions.

Benefits Counseling: CRNY offered benefits counseling services to artists in AEP.

Conflict Mediation: CRNY employed a third-party conflict management mediator to work through a conflict-mediation protocol with artists and organizations facing disagreements. This resource offered flexibility to adopt alternative forms of conflict resolution (for example, indigenous communities were empowered to utilize their own practices of mediation).

Appendix B

Artists' Profile

Chart 38. Artist survey respondents' ages compared to all AEP artists (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=136), AEP Application Data (n=298)
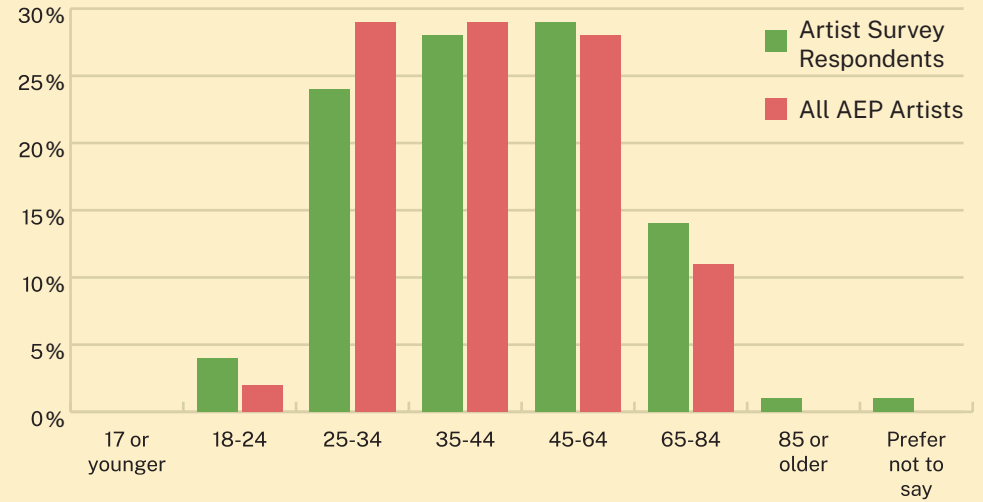
Chart 39. Artist survey respondents' locations compared to all AEP artists (based on application data)

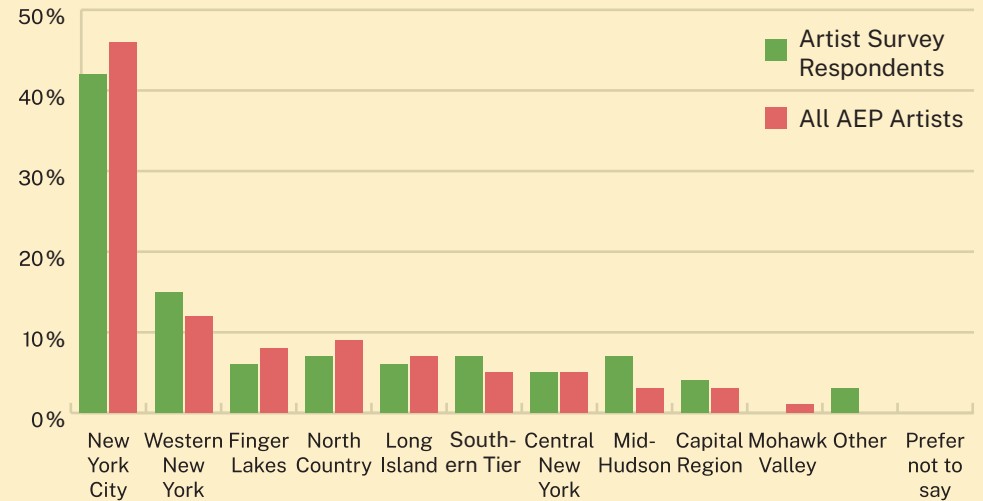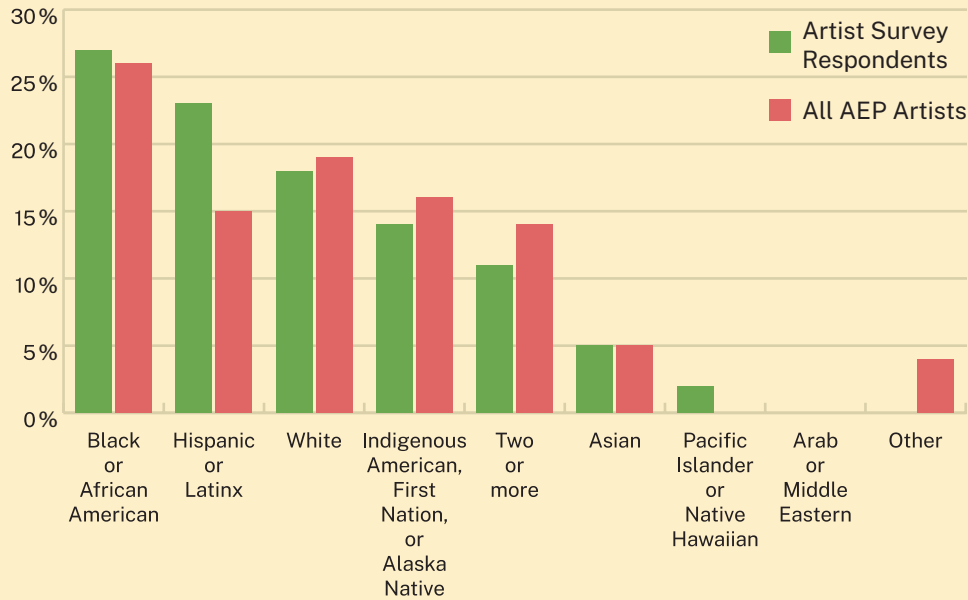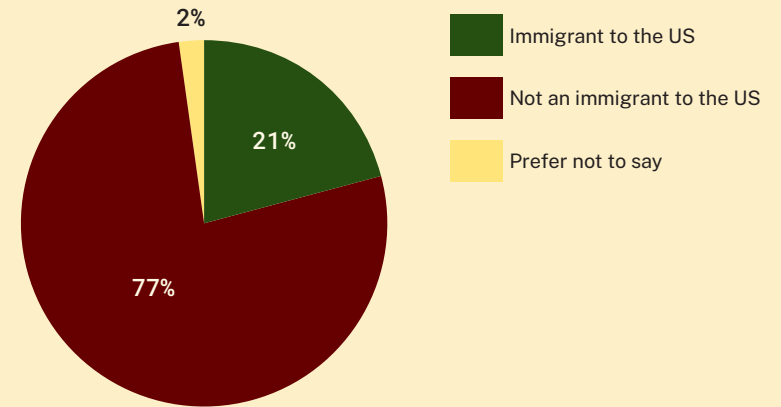Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=136), AEP Application Data (n=298)

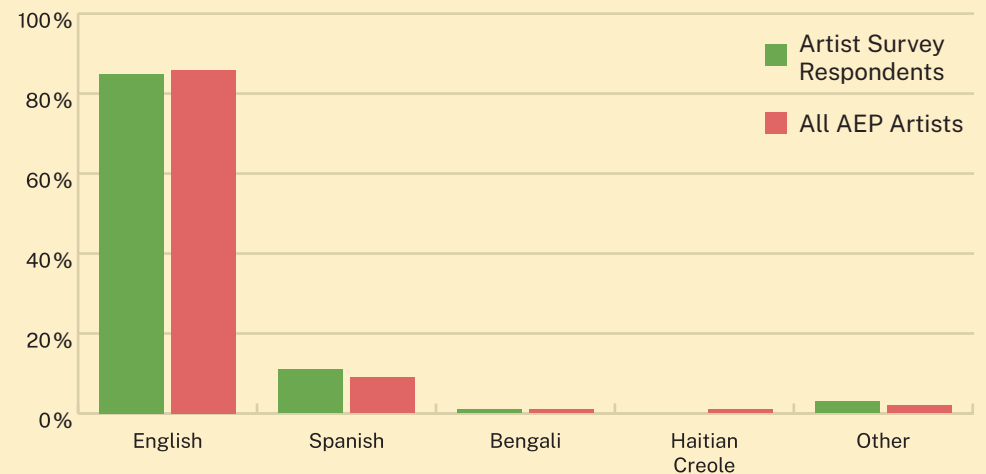## Chart 40. Artist survey respondents' race and/or ethnicity compared to all AEP artists (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=131), AEP Application Data (n=298)

Legend:
- Artist Survey Respondents
- All AEP Artists

Categories: Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, White, Indigenous American, First Nation, or Alaska Native, Two or more, Asian, Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian, Arab or Middle Eastern, Other

Chart 41. Artist survey respondents' immigration status

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=134)

- Immigrant to the US — 23%
- Not an immigrant to the US — 77%
- Prefer not to say
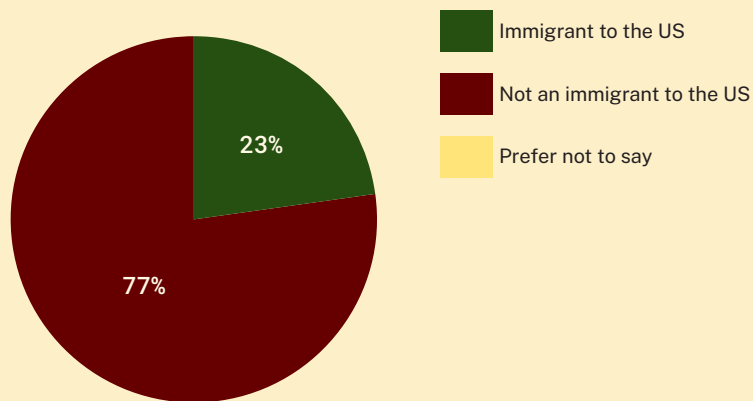
Chart 42. All AEP artists' immigration status (based on application data)

Source: AEP Application Data (n=298)

- Immigrant to the US — 21%
- Not an immigrant to the US — 77%
- Prefer not to say — 2%

Chart 43. Artist survey respondents' primary spoken language compared to all AEP artists (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=136), AEP Application Data (n=298)

Legend:
- Artist Survey Respondents
- All AEP Artists

Categories: English, Spanish, Bengali, Haitian Creole, Other

Chart 44. Artist survey respondents' gender identity compared to all AEP artists (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=134), AEP Application Data (n=298)
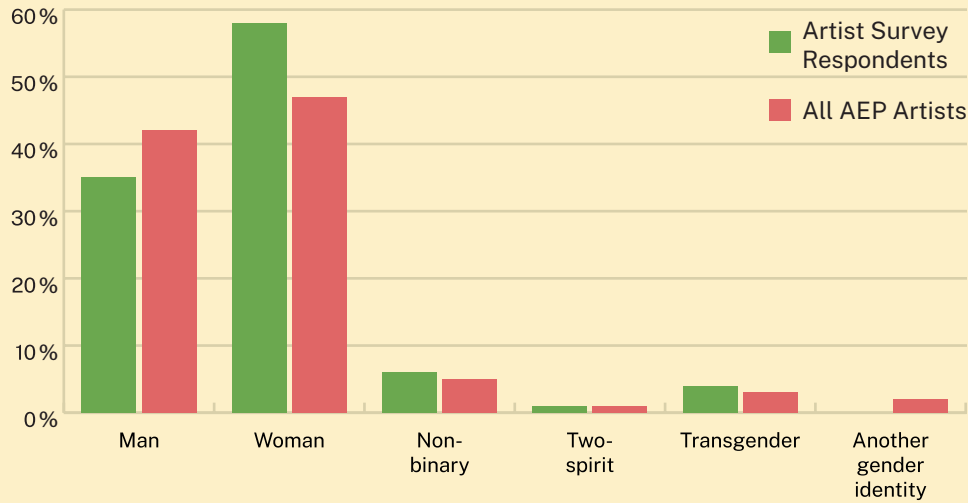

Legend:
- Artist Survey Respondents
- All AEP Artists

Categories: Man, Woman, Non-binary, Two-spirit, Transgender, Another gender identity

Chart 46. All AEP artists' sexual orientation (based on application data)
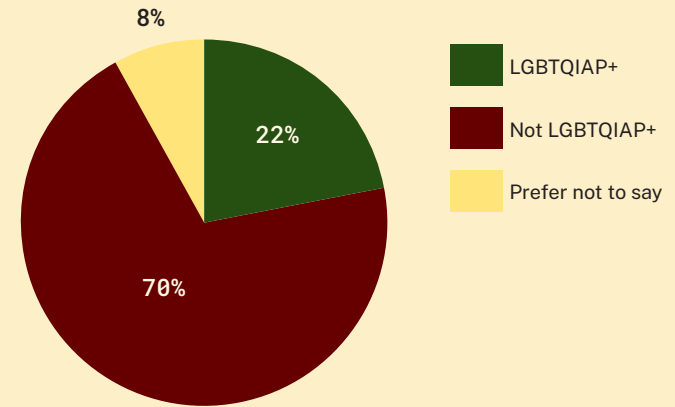
Source: AEP Application Data (n=298)

- LGBTQIAP+ — 22%
- Not LGBTQIAP+ — 70%
- Prefer not to say — 8%

Chart 45. Artist survey respondents' sexual orientation

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=135)

- LGBTQIAP+ — 22%
- Not LGBTQIAP+ — 76%
- Prefer not to say — 2%

Chart 47. Artist survey respondents' self-identification as deaf

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=133)

- Self-identify as deaf — 3%
- Do not self-identify as deaf — 95%
- Prefer not to say — 2%
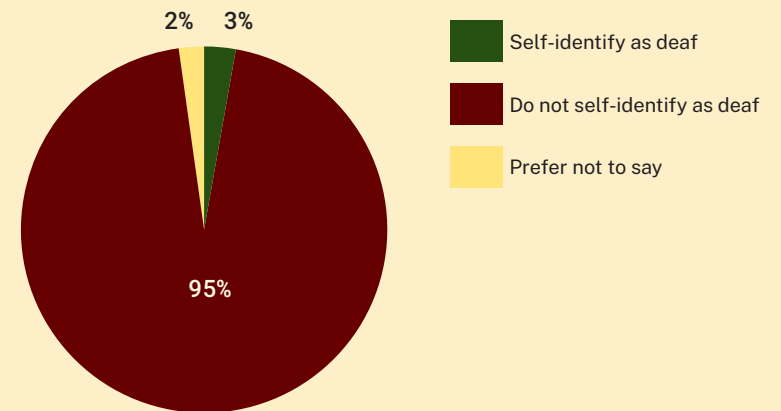
Chart 48. Artist survey respondents' self-identification as disabled

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=135)

- 8% — Self-identify as disabled
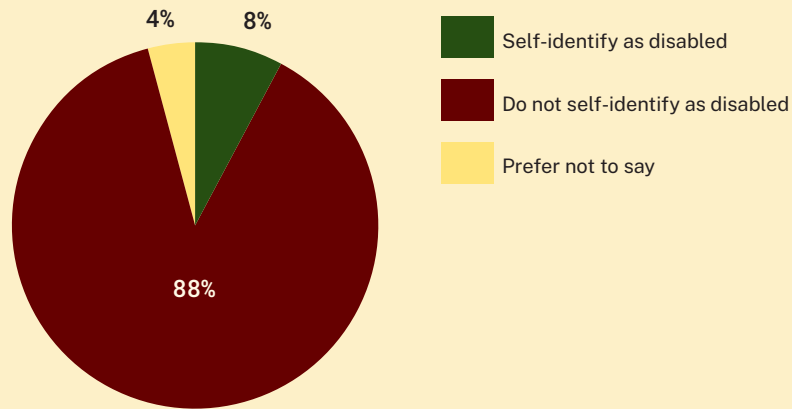- 88% — Do not self-identify as disabled
- 4% — Prefer not to say

Chart 50. Artist survey respondents' criminal legal system involvement

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=135)

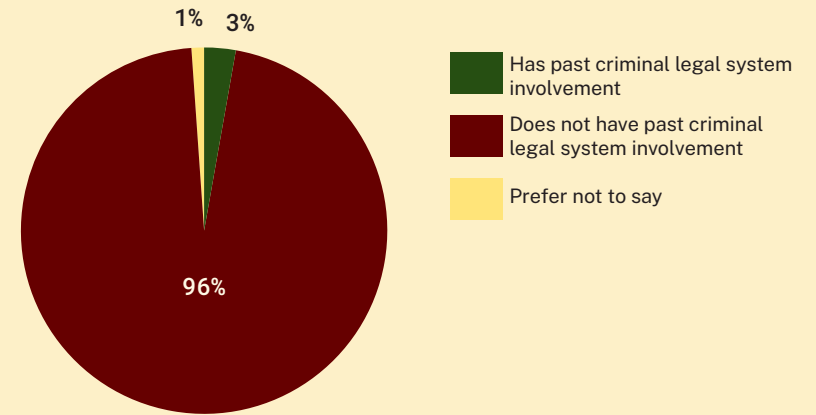- 3% — Has past criminal legal system involvement
- 96% — Does not have past criminal legal system involvement
- 1% — Prefer not to say

Chart 49. All AEP artists' self-identification as Deaf or disabled (based on application data)
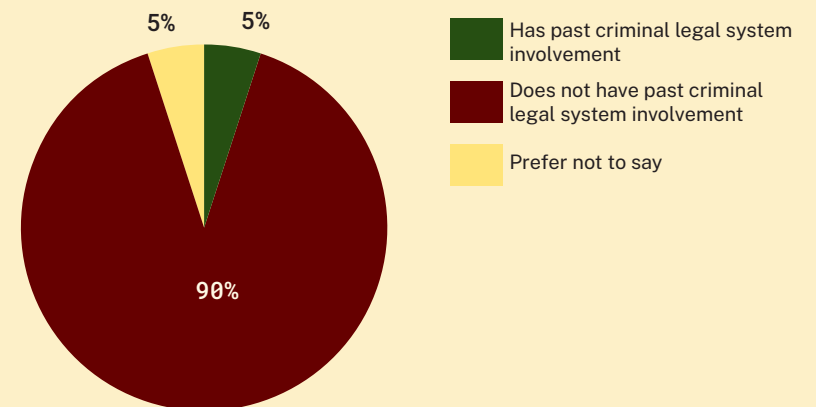
Source: AEP Application Data (n=298)

- 7% — Self-identify as Deaf or disabled
- 90% — Do not self-identify as Deaf or disabled
- 3% — Prefer not to say
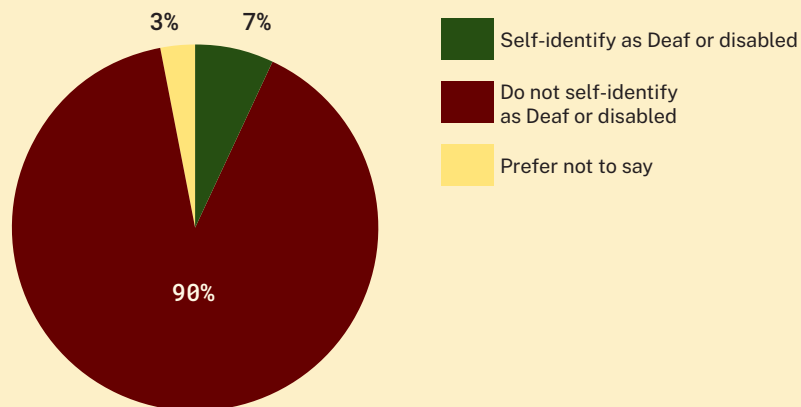
Chart 51. All AEP artists' criminal legal system involvement (based on application data)

Source: AEP Application Data (n=298)

- 5% — Has past criminal legal system involvement
- 90% — Does not have past criminal legal system involvement
- 5% — Prefer not to say
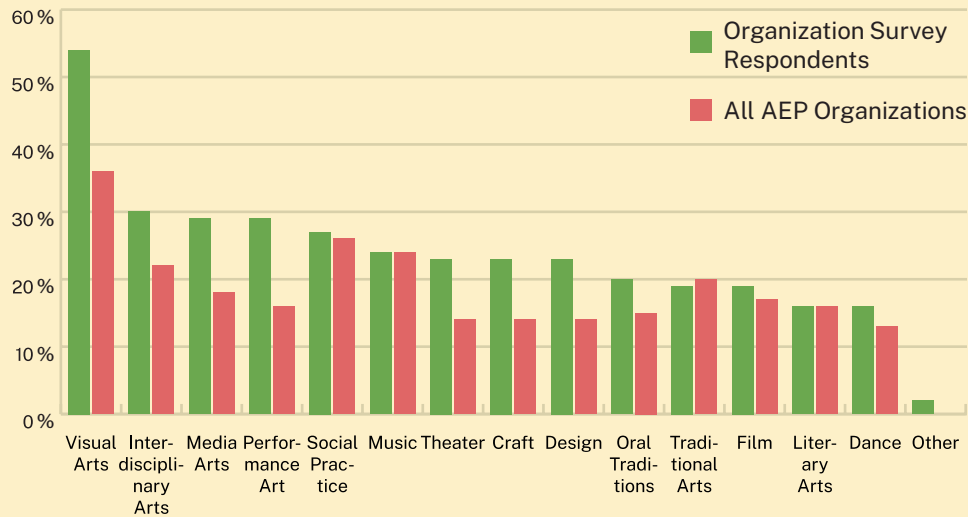
Organizations' Profile

Chart 53. Organization survey respondents' annual operating budget in FY2021 compared to all AEP organizations (based on application data)

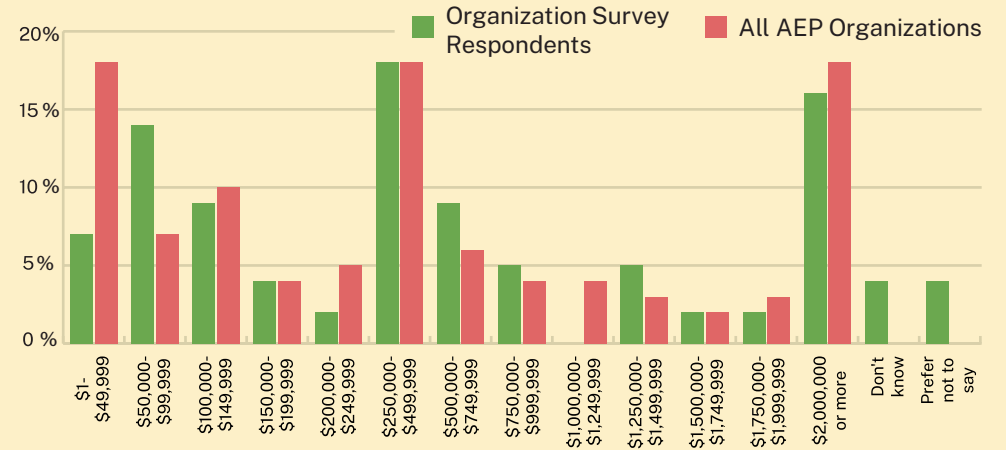Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=56), AEP Application Data (n=114

Chart 52. Artist survey respondents' artistic disciplines compared to all AEP artists (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Artist Survey (n=136), AEP Application Data (n=298)

Chart 54. Organization survey respondents' location compared to all AEP organizations (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=55), AEP Application Data (n=114)
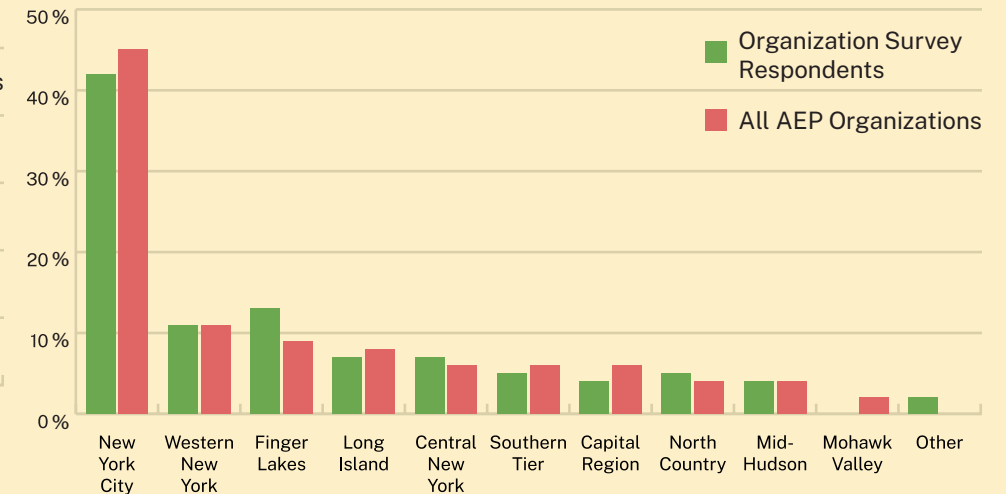
Chart 55. Organization survey respondents' community type compared to all AEP organizations (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=54), AEP Application Data (n=114)

Legend:
- Organization Survey Respondents
- All AEP Organizations

Chart 57. Identity of the leadership of organization survey respondents

Source: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=52)
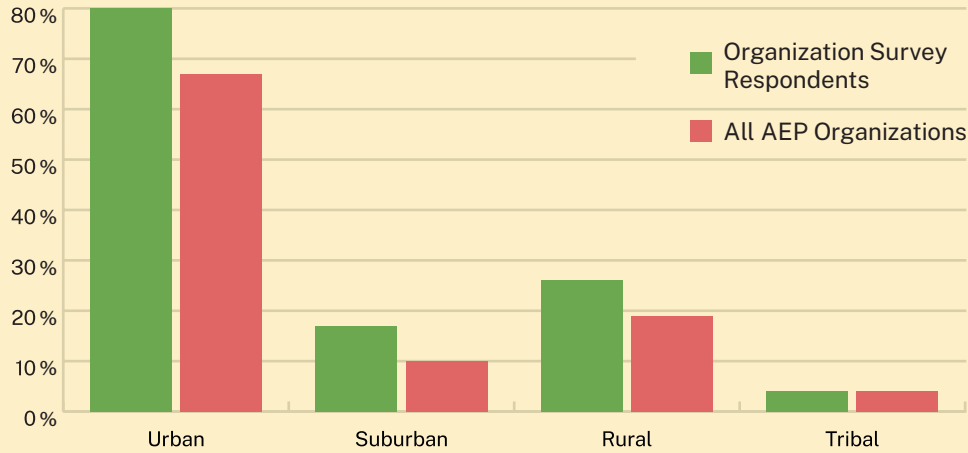

Chart 56. The communities organization survey respondents serve compared to all AEP organizations (based on application data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=56), AEP Application Data (n=114)
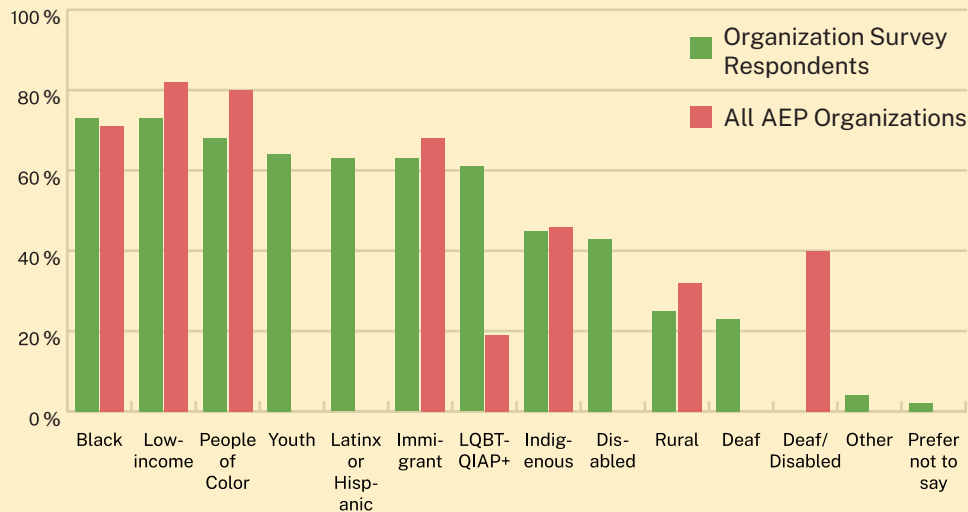

Legend:
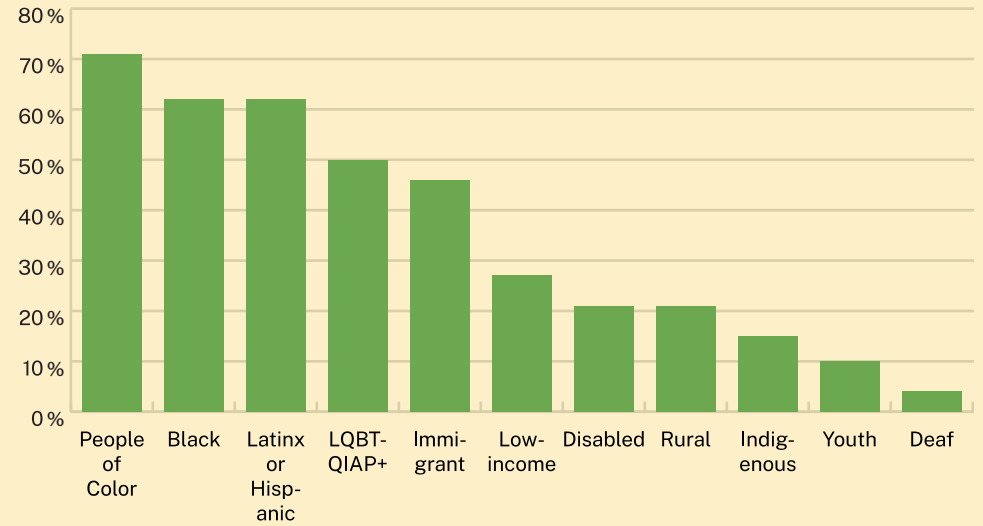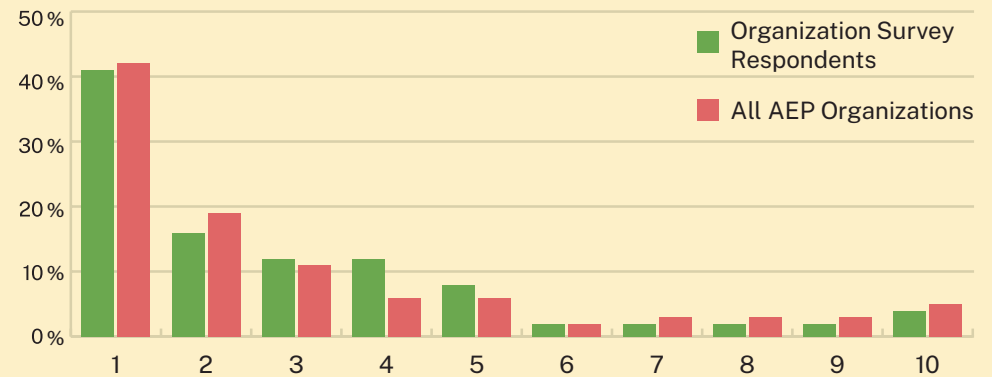- Organization Survey Respondents
- All AEP Organizations

Chart 58. Organization survey respondents' AEP collaboration size compared to all AEP organizations (based on internal CRNY participant outreach data)

Sources: SUNY-RIG CRNY AEP Organization Survey (n=51), CRNY Outreach Data (n=114)

Legend:
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- All AEP Organizations

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23.   Creatives Rebuild New York, "Advocacy Platform," Creatives Rebuild New York, https://www.creativesrebuildny.org/advocacy-platform/.

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36. Mark Treskon et al., Empowering Artists through Employment: Impacts of the Creatives Rebuild New York Artist Employment Program (2024).

37. Danya Sherman and Deidra Montgomery, Artist Employment Program Process Evaluation (2024).

38. Mark Treskon et al., Empowering Artists through Employment: Impacts of the Creatives Rebuild New York Artist Employment Program (2024).

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