



Fairfax Regional Artist Survey FINAL REPORT

October 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fairfax Regional Artist Survey was designed by ArtsFairfax, with assistance from AMS Analytics, to discover more information about the individual artist population in the Fairfax region. ArtsFairfax received 1,019 qualified responses from artists who live or work in Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or the City of Falls Church.

Key Takeaways

Fairfax is home to a flourishing creative community.

86% of survey respondents are professional artists with a career practicing their art.

Individual artists need financial support.

51% of survey respondents have an annual household income under \$100,000—well below the median household income in Fairfax County.

Fairfax residents are missing out on available art because it is challenging to present work locally.

Of the survey respondents who regularly perform or present their art to the public, half of them present 75% or more of their work outside of the Fairfax region.

Weak local networks and a lack of appropriate and affordable spaces are cited as challenges.

56% of individual artists said that the things they need most to share their work in the Fairfax area are more affordable facilities and help with networking and connecting to organizations.

The need for stronger networks was more important for some segments of the individual artist community.

63% of artists of color and 62% of artists under 45 said it was one of the things they needed the most.

INTRODUCTION

“ArtsFairfax is committed to serving our entire arts landscape. We want to ensure our local, individual artists have access to the professional and promotional resources we offer to arts nonprofits.”

Stuart Holt, ArtsFairfax President & CEO

At ArtsFairfax, our mission is to amplify and invest in the arts in Fairfax County. We do this by offering grant funding, promotional services, and professional development opportunities. But despite a long history of offering opportunities to individual artists, we have traditionally served arts organizations.

The impetus for this project was to deepen ArtsFairfax's understanding of the region's arts ecosystem and improve our ability to support and advocate for individual artists.

Meeting the Moment

In 2023, according to “Measuring the Arts,” the National Endowment for the Arts' National Arts Statistics and Evidence-based Reporting Center, there were 2.8M artists in the total U.S. labor force—a 36% increase from 2010.

At the local level, ArtsFairfax was curious to learn more about the individual artist workforce that enlivens Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, and the City of Falls Church.

With assistance from AMS Analytics, we designed the Fairfax Regional Artist Survey. The next several pages detail the development, distribution, and methodology behind the study, the first of its kind in Fairfax County.

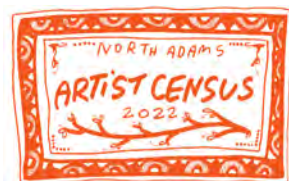
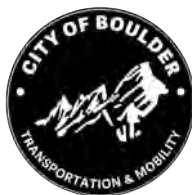
Through this work, made possible with grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and a private foundation, along with additional support from Virginia Commission for the Arts and Fairfax County, ArtsFairfax is committed to serving the whole arts community.



INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

Initial Investigation

Having recently conducted the Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 study in partnership with Americans for the Arts, ArtsFairfax was particularly sensitive to the general public's reticence around census tools. To understand the successes and challenges of similar artist census projects across the nation, ArtsFairfax held informational interviews with the teams behind the following projects:



Key Questions

Based on these conversations, ArtsFairfax identified the following key questions:

- Where are the practicing artists who live and/or work in the Fairfax County area concentrated? How do their demographics compare to the general population of Fairfax County?
- What types of art are they predominantly practicing?
- Do practicing artists have the resources they need to present their artwork within the Fairfax County region? What challenges do they face?
- How can ArtsFairfax strengthen Fairfax County's arts and culture ecosystem and help keep the creative and economic impacts of the region's artists within its community?

Because answering these questions requires hearing directly from artists themselves, a survey was selected as the most appropriate tool.

METHODOLOGY

Artist Advisory Group

First and foremost, the Fairfax Regional Artist Survey was developed in collaboration with artists.



Ken Avis
Music & Songwriting



Sarah Berry
Public Art & Curation



Shu-Chen Cuff
Dance & Choreography



Brunilda Herring
Theater & Arts Education



Mike Maggio
Poetry & Literary Arts



Nancy Sausser
Fine Art & Arts Administration



Caroline Weinroth
Music & Songwriting



Barbara Zamora
Artisan

ArtsFairfax developed an Artist Advisory Group who were selected for the variety of their professional experiences and art forms, and for where they have lived and worked throughout the study region. They were compensated for their time and directly informed the survey design and questions through a series of four workshops:

- **November 2023:** Defining “artists”
- **December 2023:** Choosing topic areas and designing structure
- **January 2024:** Workshopping content
- **January 2024:** Finalizing content and brainstorming outreach

Design

During this workshopping process, the decision was made to prioritize reaching as many artists as possible over collecting more detailed or wide-ranging information. The design goals of the workshop were to create a survey that was short, accessible, and easy to take, while still providing actionable results. To encourage survey participation, the Advisory Group and project team decided to make the survey anonymous.

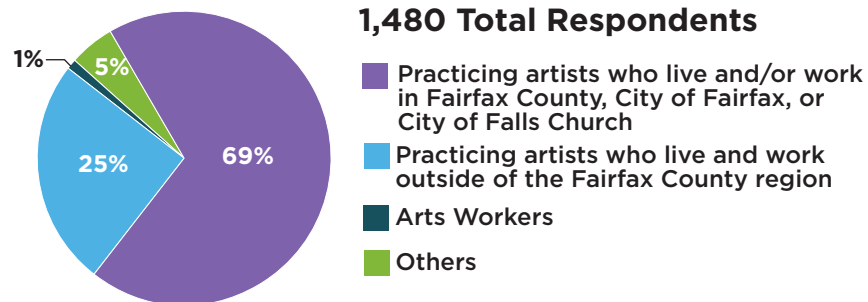
As a result, the survey began with a short series of “screening” questions to identify the population of artists that ArtsFairfax wanted to reach. Respondents who identified as practicing artists and who lived or worked in the Fairfax County region were then asked a short series of questions about their artistic practices, the challenges they faced, and their needs. The survey concluded with optional demographic questions.

METHODOLOGY CONTINUED

Distribution

The survey was made available online for six months, between the end of May through the end of December 2024. The survey received 1,480 responses, 1,019 of which were from the target group of practicing artists living or working in the Fairfax County area (Figure 1). The respondents took an average of five minutes to complete the full survey, meeting the design goal for brevity and ease of use.

FIGURE 1



To increase accessibility, the survey was available in five languages: English, Farsi, Hindi, Korean, and Spanish.

Ultimately, 8% of responding artists from the target group took the survey in a language other than English (4% Spanish, 2% Farsi, 2% Korean).



METHODOLOGY CONTINUED

Outreach

ArtsFairfax promoted the Fairfax Regional Artist Survey and provided marketing materials to the public through three strategies:

- **Grassroots efforts**

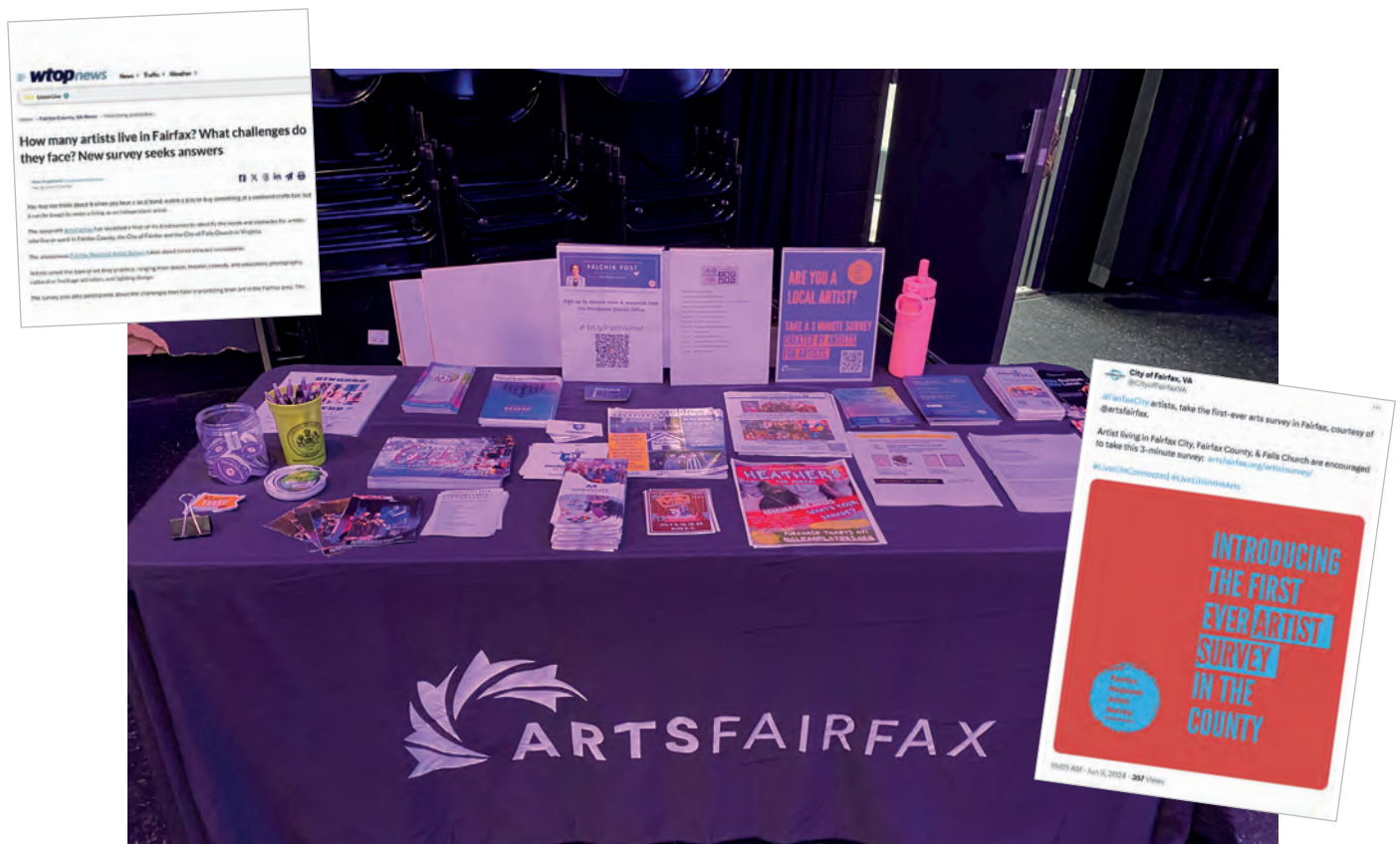
Flyers at coffee shops, artist spaces, and community festivals

- **Media**

Public service announcements, paid social media ads, and press outreach

- **Partnerships**

Distribution from Fairfax County District offices, County agencies, and civic partners



Additionally, ArtsFairfax worked with a cohort from the Emerging Leaders Institute (ELI), a program of Leadership Fairfax, to recommend and refine outreach strategies. ArtsFairfax gratefully acknowledges ELI cohort members Karen Bigelow, Michael Dykes, Agata Fallon, Grace Lee, Victor Morales, Roconia Price, and Tsega Netsanet.

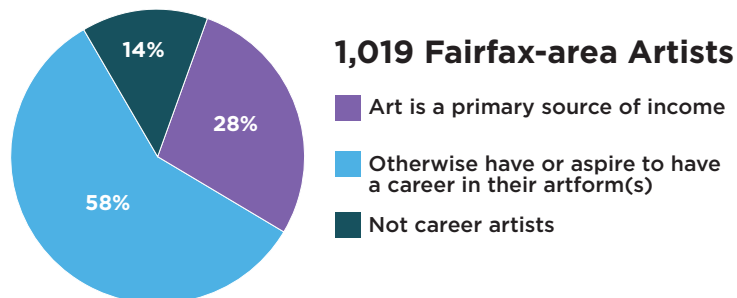
OUR ARTISTS: WHO THEY ARE

Careers

A large majority of the respondents were career artists, although most of them did not report deriving their primary income from their art (Figure 2).

Practicing artists were asked about having or aspiring to “a career in your artform” rather than about professional status or paid work in order to include pre-professional students and those following a professional path but not yet receiving consistent income from it.

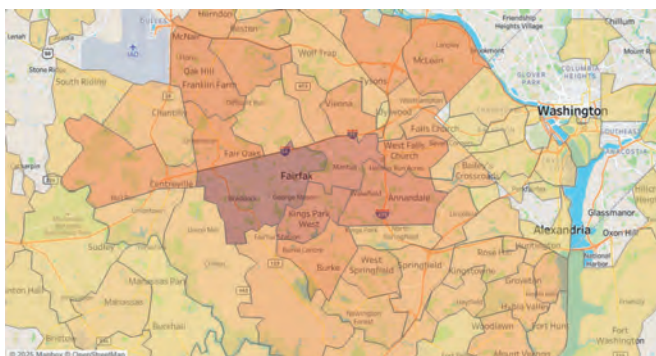
FIGURE 2



Demographics

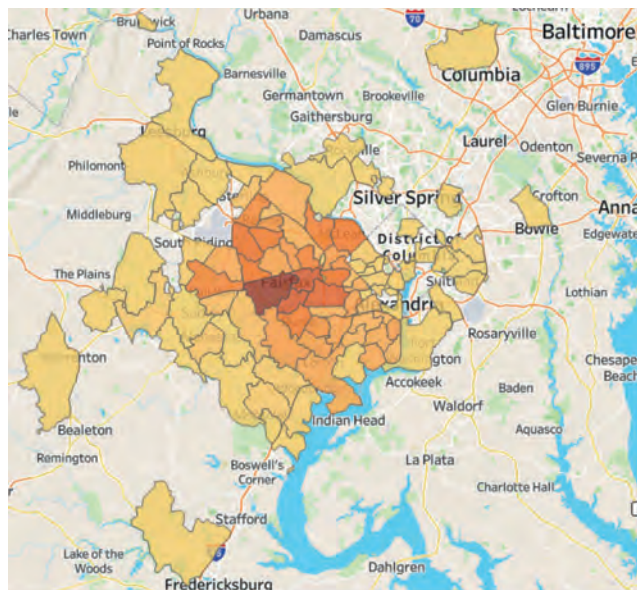
Responding artists were concentrated near the City of Fairfax, with other hotspots around Annandale, Herndon, and McLean (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3



Artists who live in zip codes outside the County indicated that they work within the region (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

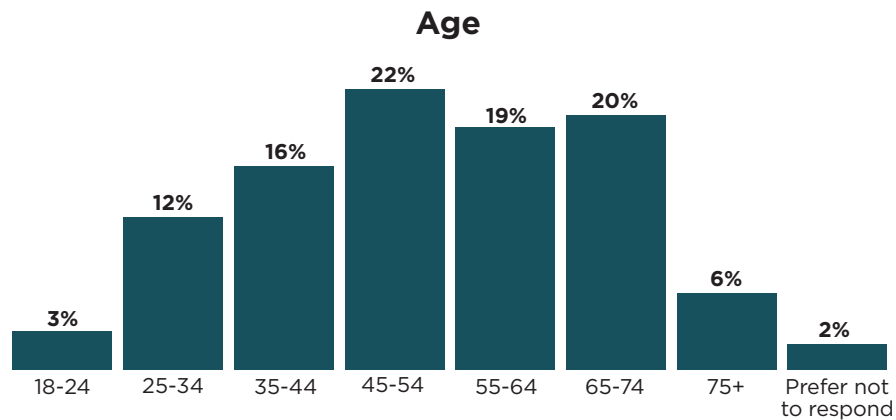


OUR ARTISTS: WHO THEY ARE CONTINUED

The responding artists were older than Fairfax County's general population, suggesting the sample likely reflects more mid- and late-career than emerging artists: 69% were 45 or older, while only 48% of the County is over 40 (Figure 5).

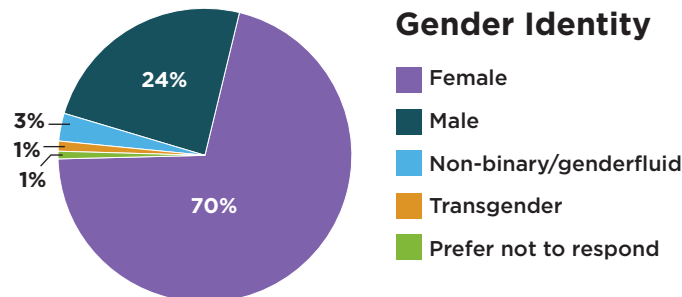
They were also more likely to identify as female (70%, compared to 50% of the County) and as White (65% identified only as White, compared to 46% of the County) (Figures 6 and 7).¹

FIGURE 5



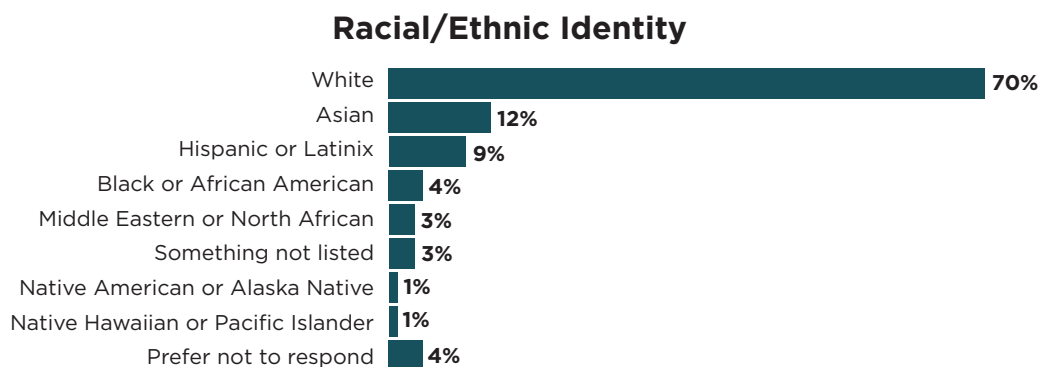
Based on the **796** Fairfax region artists who chose to complete the optional demographic questions

FIGURE 6



Based on the **796** Fairfax region artists who chose to complete the optional demographic questions

FIGURE 7



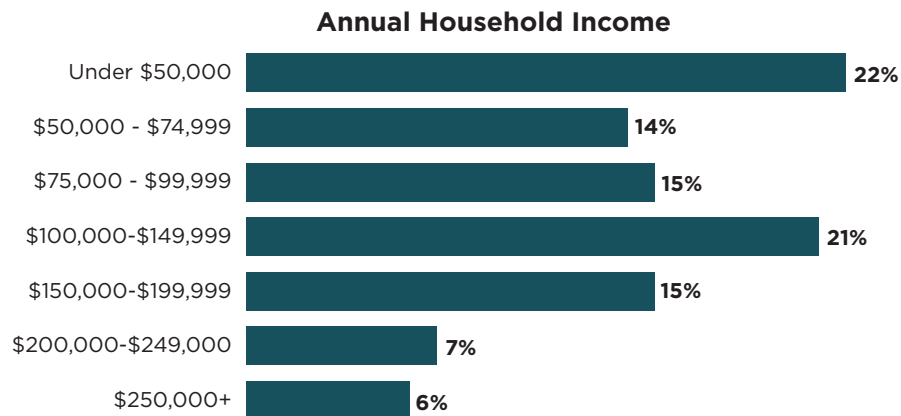
Based on the **796** Fairfax region artists who chose to complete the optional demographic questions. Chart totals more than 100% because respondents could select more than one option.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2023). *American Community Survey 1-year estimates*. Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Fairfax County, VA <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US51059-fairfax-county-va/>

OUR ARTISTS: WHO THEY ARE CONTINUED

The survey data also suggests that artists in the Fairfax County region are financially more strained than the general population. While the median household income in Fairfax County in 2023 was \$142,000, 51% of responding artists reported an annual household income under \$100,000 (Figure 8).² Additionally, that number jumped to 62% for those artists who named their art as their primary source of income (Figure 9).

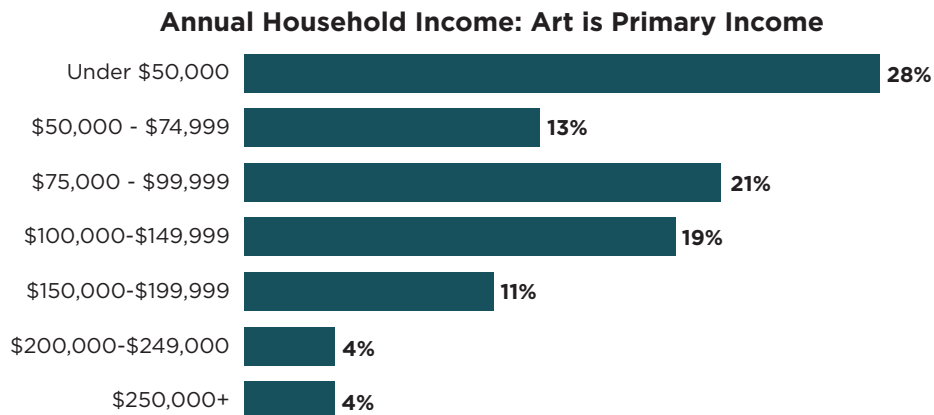
FIGURE 8



Includes the **622** Fairfax region artists who chose to complete the optional income question

2 U.S. Census Bureau (2023). *American Community Survey 1-year estimates*. Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Fairfax County, VA <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US51059-fairfax-county-va/>

FIGURE 9



Includes the **197** Fairfax region artists whose art is their primary source of income who chose to complete the optional income question

OUR ARTISTS: WHO THEY ARE CONTINUED

To allow for further analysis by segment, the represented fields were aggregated into three broad categories: visual arts, performing arts, and other arts (Figure 12). These segments revealed that within the target group artists across all three categories were equally likely to have a career as an artist, but performing artists were somewhat more likely to receive their primary income from it (Figures 13 and 14). Additionally, visual artists were less likely than other artists to work in the arts industry in another capacity (Figure 15).

FIGURE 12

Artistic Practice Categories

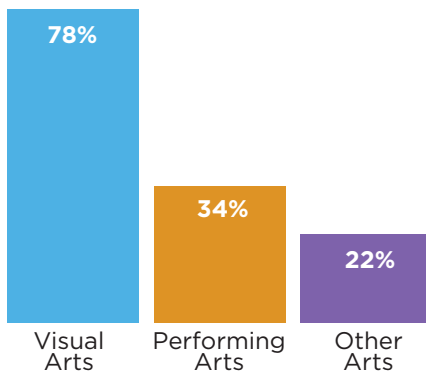


Chart totals more than 100% because respondents could select more than one option

FIGURE 13

% Responding "Yes" to "Do you have or aspire to have a career as an artist in the artform(s) you practice?"

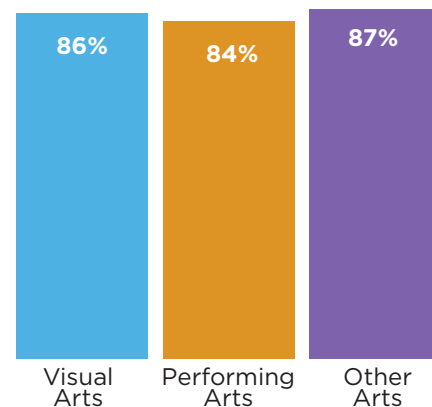


FIGURE 14

% Responding "Yes" to "Is your artistic practice your primary source of income?"

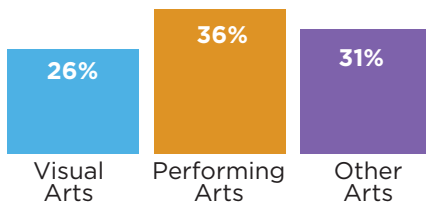
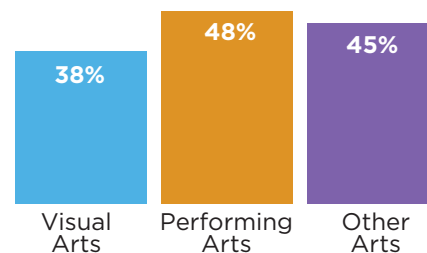


FIGURE 15

% Responding "Yes" to "Do you earn a portion of your income from employment in the arts industry outside your career as an artist, for work other than practicing or teaching your art?"



ARTISTS' CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

In addition to gaining more insight into the work and demographic make-up of artists living and working in the Fairfax County region, a primary goal of the project was to learn what prevents them from producing or presenting work within the County as well as what they need in order for the County to more fully benefit from the cultural and economic impacts of their work.

Across all three categories of artistic practice, over 60% of responding artists reported regularly presenting their work in public, with performing artists being the most likely to do so (Figure 16). However, over 50% of them reported that a quarter or less of their public presentations occur in the Fairfax County region. (Figure 17).

FIGURE 16

% who regularly exhibit, perform, or produce art publicly, for live audiences/participants

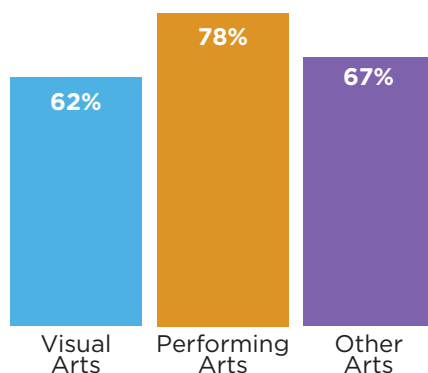
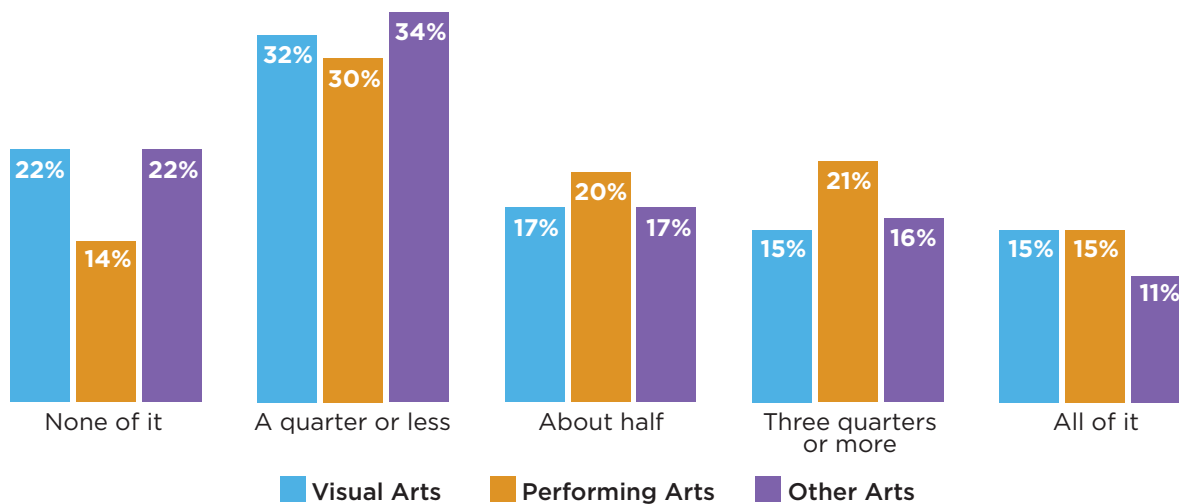


FIGURE 17

Roughly what percentage of the in-person, public presentation of your work occurs in Fairfax County, City of Fairfax, or City of Falls Church each year?



ARTISTS' CHALLENGES AND NEEDS CONTINUED

Challenges

Responding artists named weak local networks, lack of appropriate spaces, and lack of affordable space rentals as the primary challenges to producing/presenting more work in Fairfax County (Figure 18). While artists in all three artistic practice categories were equally likely to cite lack of appropriate spaces, performing artists were slightly more likely to indicate the cost of space as a challenge (Figure 19).

FIGURE 18

What are the biggest challenges to presenting your work in the Fairfax County area?

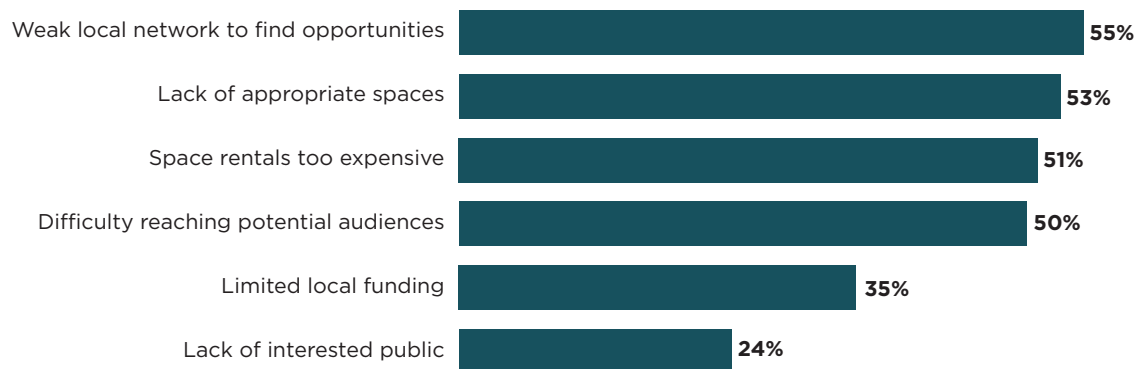


FIGURE 19

Space Challenges by Artistic Practice Category



ARTISTS' CHALLENGES AND NEEDS CONTINUED

Needs

The needs that responding artists named surfaced the same themes as their challenges: space, and stronger local connections were tied at the top of the list (Figure 20).

Exploring demographic segments, however, revealed that some groups of artists are in more need of networking support. While 56% said that help networking and connecting to organizations was one of the things they needed most, the number went up to 62% for artists under 45, 62% for artists in disciplines outside the visual or performing arts, and 63% for artists of color (Figure 21).

FIGURE 20

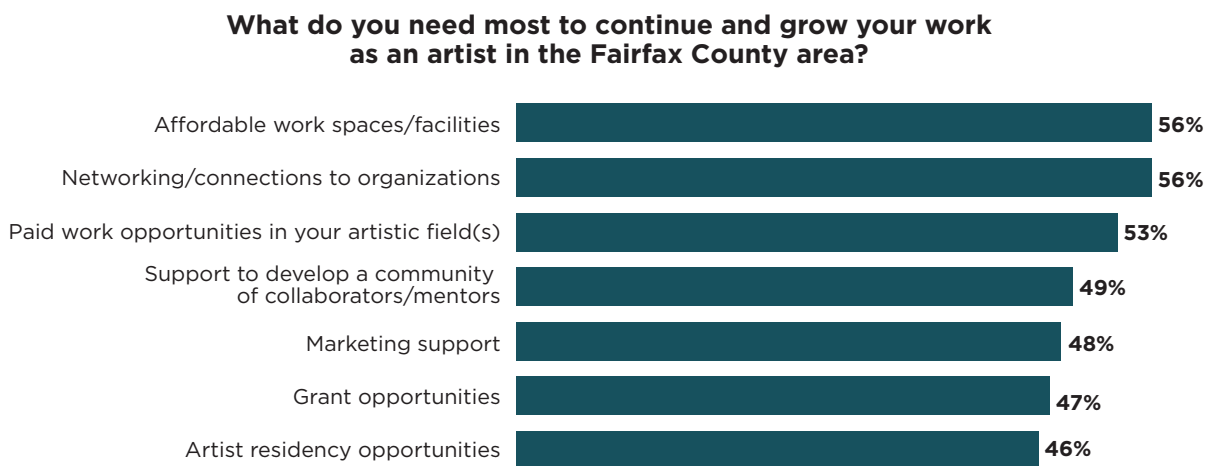
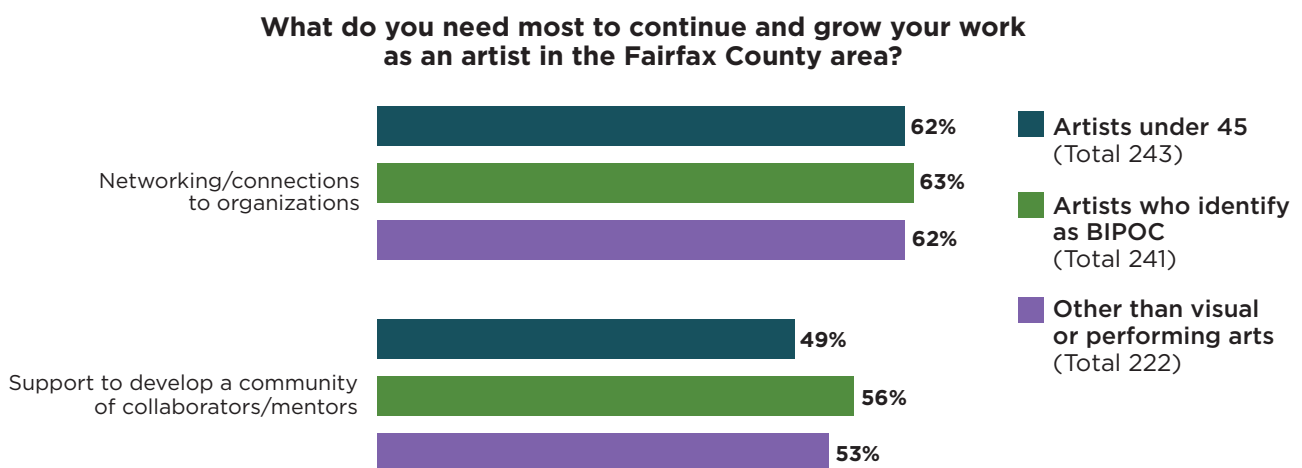


FIGURE 21



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The completion of the Fairfax Regional Artist Survey marks the beginning of a renewed effort to engage the individual artists who live and work in Fairfax. Based on the primary needs that were identified in the survey findings, here are just some of the ways ArtsFairfax is helping individual artists:

ARTISTS + SPACE

Reimagine Spaces

ArtsFairfax partners with Neighborhood & Community Services, Celebrate Fairfax, Fairfax County Public Libraries, and private sector property owners to reimagine existing spaces, such as community centers or retail spaces, as lower-cost opportunities to display visual art or host arts programming. By serving as presenting partners, ArtsFairfax absorbs the administrative burden to artists for the presentation of their work.

Advocate for Artists' Needs

For the creation of new spaces or the retrofitting of existing spaces, ArtsFairfax works with County Planning & Development and property developers to advocate for artists' space needs for both visual and performing artists. ArtsFairfax is able to audit properties and make recommendations on facility improvements or design considerations to better accommodate maker space, rehearsal space, or presenting space.

Promote Artists & Venues

ArtsFairfax continues to promote artists in its Arts Directory and provide ongoing review of Fairfax County's Venues Map application, a product developed with Fairfax County's GIS & Information Technology office to detail venues for both visual and performing arts.

ARTISTS + NETWORKS

Free Professional Development

ArtsFairfax regularly hosts free workshops for artists at all stages of their career as part of the Northern Virginia Local Arts Agencies alliance, a partnership with the City of Alexandria's Office of the Arts and Arlington Cultural Affairs.

Arts Roundtables and District Engagement

By hosting district-specific gatherings of artists and arts professionals, ArtsFairfax is creating smaller networks for artists to connect with one another, share resources, and address the needs specific to their neighborhoods.

Arts Social Hours

ArtsFairfax hosts networking events for artists and arts enthusiasts to meet in a social setting or support one another at arts events.

THANK YOU TO OUR PROMOTIONAL PARTNERS



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