

RETURN TO THE STAGE

July 2020 Survey
Published September 2020

Purpose of *Return to the Stage*: Create a snapshot of the Performing Arts workforce in the United States, during COVID-related shutdowns.

Return to the Stage started with a conversation between two colleagues. With shared backgrounds in arts administration and stage management, we connected in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic to discuss a question we feared was not being asked: **How are performing arts workers doing?** We wanted to look beyond the clearly devastating economic impact of cancelled performances, contracts, and seasons, and understand the human realities our colleagues, friends, students, and partners are facing. We shared a hunch that in addition to being **affected more severely than many other industries, the Performing Arts is made possible by a resilient and creative workforce.** These individuals commit to a field full of uncertainty because they believe in the work, sometimes despite profound systemic and personal barriers.

Well into the process of developing the initial survey instrument, the horrifying murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, following the murders of many other Black men and women, brought into unflinching focus for the United States and the Performing Arts the unresolved racism embedded across systems and industries. **After conversations with respected colleagues, we made the decision to proceed. It seemed even more important to document *this* time.** In the analysis of survey results that follows, we observe a commitment among respondents to continuing the anti-racist and anti-oppressive work that is so critical to the field and the nation, both in the creation of work and in how that work is shared.

This work is for the Performing Arts field. Workers, volunteers, organizational leaders, board members, funders, supporters, fans, students and more are encouraged to explore the report, share it widely, and send us questions about future concerns and opportunities.

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Methodology

Independent and anonymous: *Return to the Stage* is not funded, sponsored, or supported by any agency or institution. The survey instrument was designed to be fully anonymous for all respondents. All personal identifying information has been removed from the data set; even the researchers cannot trace identifying data back to individuals.

Broadly distributed: *Return to the Stage* was distributed through professional listservs and on social media. According to metrics collected in July 2020, the survey link was shared over 325 times on Facebook alone, as well as on Twitter and LinkedIn.

Design: *Return to the Stage* questions drew from David McGraw's long-running [Stage Manager Survey](#), as well as the Census Bureau's Household Pulse questionnaire and contemporary best practice in questions pertaining to demographic characteristics. The instrument was designed with input from researchers, scholars, consultants, and Performing Arts workers. The study designers intentionally cast a wide net in vetting and testing the survey instrument.

Timing: The survey through which we collected data for this report was fielded from July 1-14, 2020. Where we sought to test a typical year in the working lives of respondents, we asked them to report data for the twelve months from February 28, 2019-March 1, 2020.

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How to read this report

Return to the Stage is a voluntary survey to better understand the impact of COVID-19 and related issues on American Performing Arts workers. This online survey was conducted July 1 - 14, 2020. Anyone who worked or volunteered in the Performing Arts in the United States in the 12 months prior to the survey was eligible to participate. The survey received 3,326 responses, though not all respondents answered every question. In this report, we will primarily use response percentages and will state (n=__) where “n” is the number of responses for each question..

For some questions, we report on both total responses as well as specific cohort groups:

- **Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).** This cohort group was not just obviously a particular point of interest, but an imperative in light of *We See You, White American Theatre* and related, urgent discussions in the Performing Arts about justice, transparency, and action.
- **Tenure in the field.** This characteristic, more than age alone, correlates with career expectations and other variables.
- **Reliance on a spouse, partner, or family member for cost-of-living expenses.** While not closely correlated to individual income (meaning both some high and low earners reported financial reliance on another person), the degree of financial dependence correlated with certain variables and we felt it important to shine a light on these particular patterns.

The Big Picture: The Performing Arts workforce is adaptable and resilient, but experiencing profound stress - which may lead to attrition from the field.

Survey respondents reported **high levels of career adaptability, coupled with loyalty to the field**. At the same time, we found proportionally **greater stress and uncertainty** from BIPOC individuals as well as those who are earlier in their careers and/or financially dependent on a spouse, partner, or family member.

In thinking about the future, **Performing Arts workers envision a more accessible, intentional field**, where a reimagined business model and funding infrastructure make performances more broadly accessible, while the financial rewards and public recognition of work are more widely distributed. Embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and practices is a recurrent theme.

Bearing in mind that this study is a snapshot of July 1-14, 2020, respondents indicated that pre-COVID, their overall likelihood to leave the field in the next five years was about 9%. Recognizing that we do not have survey data *collected* before COVID, this is the best available benchmark to understand how likely Performing Arts workers were to leave the field in “normal” times. Over 28% of the same respondents report that they are “somewhat” or “extremely” likely to leave the field in the next five years *since* COVID - more than a three-fold increase.

THE PERFORMING ARTS WORKFORCE

Respondents reflect input from 50 states and diverse lived experiences.

The Performing Arts (PA) workforce is diverse in age and professional tenure, with most respondents reporting 10+ years' experience working, volunteering, or both. Slightly over 10% of respondents who provided racial demographic data (n=2,552) identify as BIPOC, which is consistent with past studies of the racial makeup of certain performing arts disciplines¹ and occupations².

While the notion of side work, survival jobs, and parallel careers is prevalent, nearly 60% of respondents (n=2,423) report earning all of their income from Performing Arts work - suggesting that despite the inherent (and well-known) precarity of the field, it is possible to make a living solely in the Performing Arts and, for some, to make quite an attractive income.

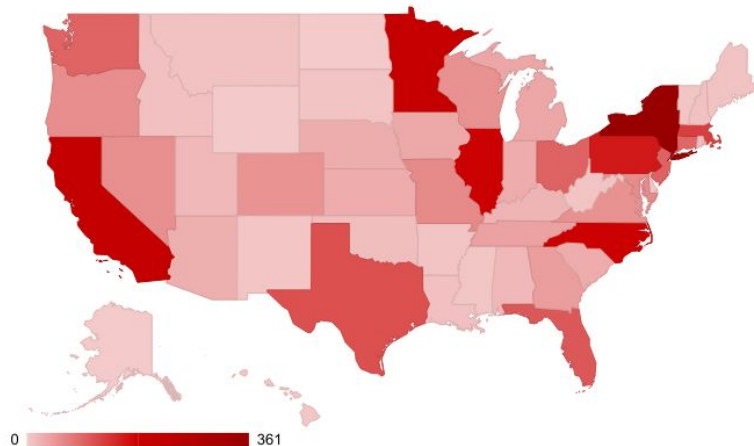
We also found evidence of the PA workforce's versatility. A majority of respondents across age groups, levels of experience, and geographic areas report they work in multiple occupations. This behavior shines a light on how accustomed the PA workforce is to pivoting, even in pre-COVID times.

¹ Census data indicates that in 2018, 78% of dancers and choreographers are white, for example.

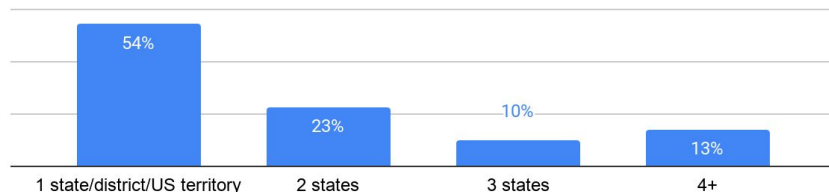
² *An Exploratory Study of Demographic Diversity in the Arts Management Workforce*, Antonio C. Cuyler. Grantmakers in the Arts. 2015.

Respondents were a highly mobile workforce in pre-COVID times.

Every state was represented in this survey with strong representation from states with high concentrations of performing arts institutions: California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. But even the state with the most respondents, New York, only accounts for 12.6% of responses (n=2,858).



States worked in year ending March 2020 (n=2,851)



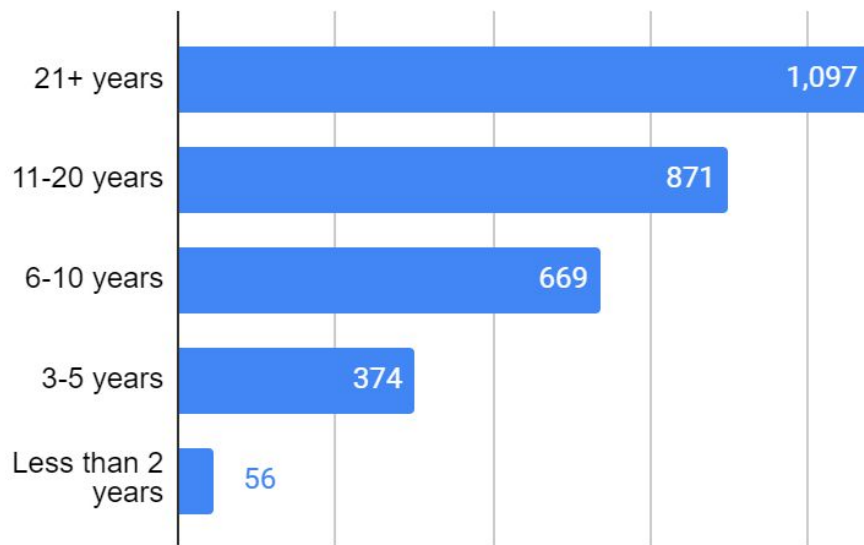
A mobile workforce

46% Worked in multiple states in the past year

13% Worked in four or more states in the past year

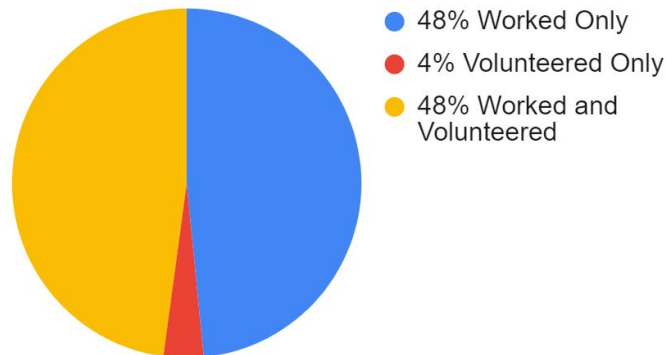
Many respondents are seasoned veterans of the field.

Tenure in the Performing Arts (n=3,067)



Over 50% of respondents have worked in the field 11+ years. Nearly half (48%) do both paid work *and* volunteer work.

Paid and Volunteer Engagement (n=3,067)



Demographic summary of respondents

Race (n=2,552)

10.3% Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

89.7% Not BIPOC (White/Caucasian)

Children (n=2,526)

15% Have Children Ages ≤ 14 at Home

85% No Children Ages ≤ 14 at Home

Age (n=2,550)

3% 18-20 years

30% 21-30

26% 31-40

19% 41-50

13% 51-60

8% 61+

Gender (n=2,551)

61.4% Female

34.1% Male

3.2% Gender Non-Conforming

1.3% Prefer Not to Answer

Education (n=2,552)

29% Professional/Graduate Degree

55% Bachelor's Degree

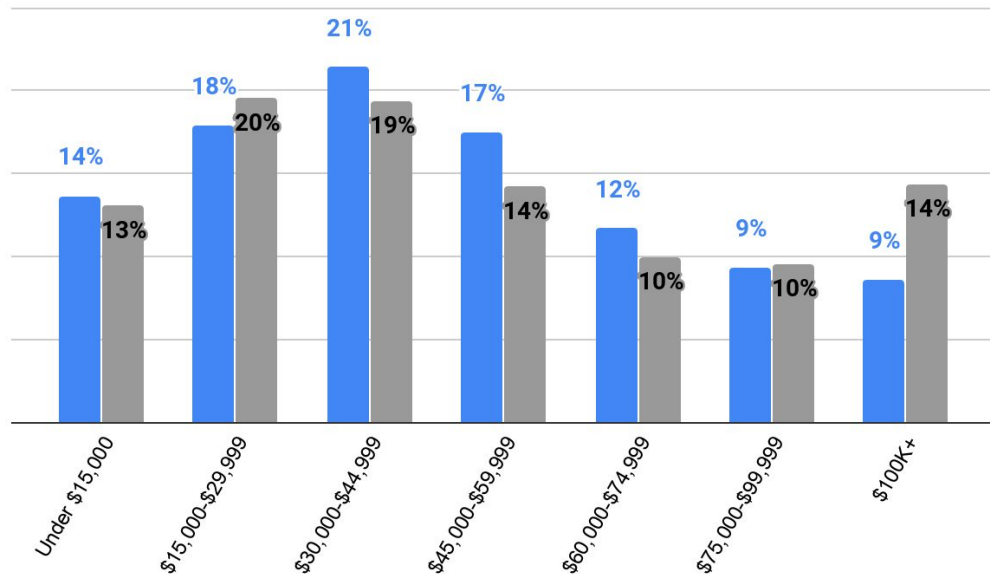
14% Associate's Degree/Some College

2% High School/GED

Income distribution aligns with the US general population, except for the highest income levels (over \$100K annual income). Most respondents make 100% of their income from PA.

Income Distribution of PA Workforce vs. Census

■ PA Workforce ■ US Population (Current Population Survey, 2018)



Income from PA (n=2,432)

59% Make 100% of income from PA

19% Make 75%-99% of income from PA

22% Less than 75% of individual income from PA

Unions (n=2,245)

57% Not members of any union

43% Members of at least one union

A majority of respondents are **generalists**, holding multiple occupations within the Performing Arts. This is consistent across age groups, tenure in the field, and categories of primary occupation. (n=3,062)

73%

Generalists, reporting multiple occupations within the Performing Arts field

Shorter career tenure is associated with higher specialization

47% Specialists with tenure of ≤ 2 years

33% Specialists with tenure of 3-5 years

27% Specialists with tenure of 6-10 years

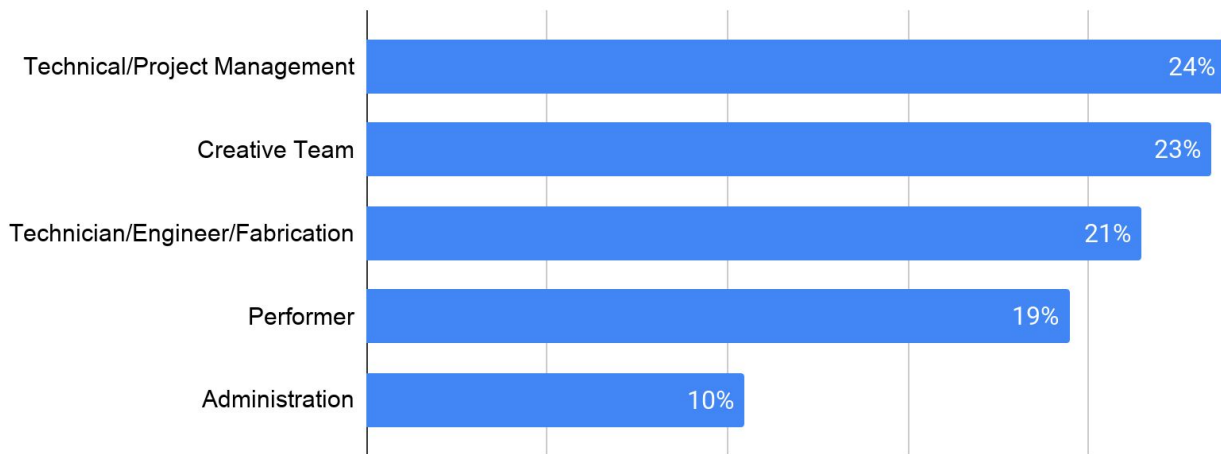
28% Specialists with tenure of 11-20 years

24% Specialists with tenure of 21+ years

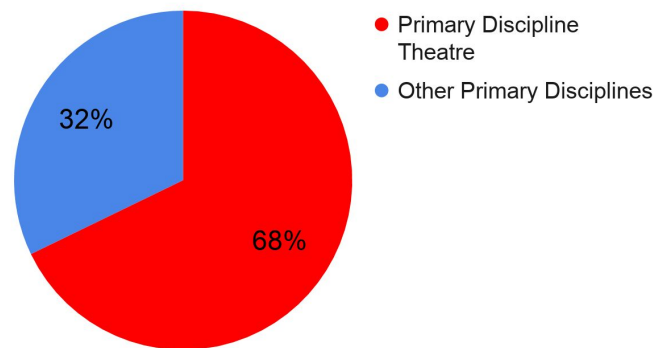
68-76% of all age groups report Generalist careers - age is *not* a likely driver for specialization

The Performing Arts workforce reports broad diversity of occupation within large categories. Most respondents for *Return to the Stage* reported their primary discipline is theatre.

Primary Occupation in Performing Arts (n=3,062)



Primary Discipline in the Performing Arts (n=3,064)



Administration: Executive/Managing Director, Financial Management, Fundraising, Marketing, House and Box Office Management, etc.

Creative Team: Directors (including Artistic Directors), Choreographers, Musical Directors, Designers, Coaches and Instructors, etc.

Performer: Actors, Musicians, Dancers, Puppeteers, Acrobats, Spoken Word Artists, etc.

Technical/Project Management: Stage and Production Managers, Technical Directors and Project Managers, etc.

Technician/Engineer/Fabrication: Stagehands, Crew, Technicians, Mixers, Engineers, Carpenters, Cutters & Drapers, Draftspersons, etc.

An additional 1% of respondents reported other occupations that do not align with these definitions.

Over half of the Performing Arts workforce is out of work.

56%

**Unemployed, furloughed, unable to work
due to illness, in July 2020** (n=3,005)

39% working FT or PT **5%** Students or retired

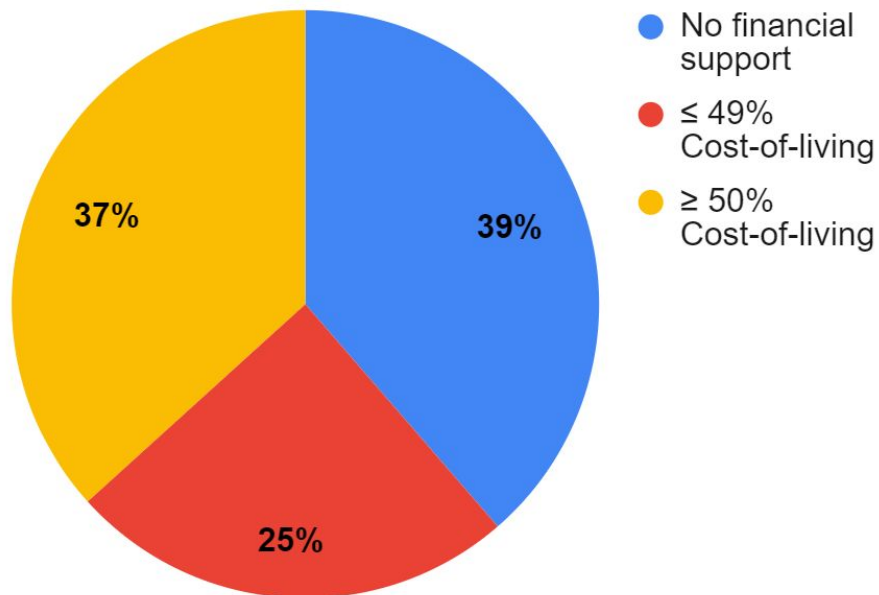
85% First impacted by COVID shutdowns
in March 2020 (n=3,008)

57% Applied for unemployment insurance benefits
since March 2020 (n=2,550)

12% Applied for unemployment insurance benefits in
the year prior to March 1, 2020 (n=2,550)

Nearly 40% of respondents receive no financial support from a spouse, partner, or family member. Many who receive support are in their 20s or 30s.

Financial support from spouse, partner, or family member (n=2,803)



Age

Of those who receive **50% or more** cost-of-living expenses, 35% are 30 years-old or younger, and an additional 25% are ages 31-40 (n=1,029)

Of participants who **up to 49%** of cost-of-living expenses, 32% are 30 years-old or younger, and an additional 23% are ages 31-40.

Of participants who receive **no financial support**, 24% are 30 years-old or younger, and an additional 23% are ages 31-40. (n=1,083)

Key Takeaways: Composition of the Performing Arts Workforce

The Performing Arts workforce is peopled by **generalists**, who work in multiple occupations within the field. This underlines the ability of many Performing Arts workers to transition between multiple job titles. Importantly, a majority of workers are generalists across both **age and tenure in the field**, suggesting that generalization is not an early career strategy but a way of life, where the frequency of holding multiple occupations correlates positively with professional tenure. Traditionally “creative” occupations within the Performing Arts tend to see more frequent generalization - for instance, individuals whose primary occupation was “Performer” or “Director/Choreographer” were more likely to report multiple occupations overall, while individuals who report primary occupations in administrative fields were less likely to indicate multiple occupations in the year ending March 2020.

The workforce that participated in this study is **highly mobile, majority women, and highly educated**. And as of the period when this survey was fielded, over **56% of workers are unemployed, furloughed, or unable to work due to illness**.

A majority (59%) make all of their income from Performing Arts work; and over one-third (37%) receive a majority of their cost-of-living expenses from a spouse, partner, or family member. While most respondents are not members of a union, 43% report that they are members of at least one labor union, guild, or association.

EMOTIONAL STATE AND COPING STRATEGIES

Respondents report elevated mental distress, particularly among historically marginalized populations. Nevertheless, respondents are using multiple coping strategies and report being motivated by the opportunity to improve not just personal wellbeing, but also to provide more value to the workplace, colleagues, and communities.

In the interest of testing a perception that people in the Performing Arts are more vulnerable to emotional and mental stress than the general population, we used four questions created by the Census Bureau (in the [Household Pulse](#) tool) to gauge how respondents are feeling. Many respondents found the Household Pulse response options were too limited, lacking the nuance that some respondents wished they could share. These concerns will be taken into consideration in future waves of *Return to the Stage*.

The PA workforce often copes with changes in employment and levels of income, while also devoting personal resources into professional development. But this time is different. We set out to understand not just what coping strategies respondents were using, but when and whether they had taken up certain strategies relative to their career path and COVID, and why.

What we found is that there is an inspiring level of commitment to continuing education, and a wide array of coping skills that were acquired as a result of working in the Performing Arts.

How to read the Household Pulse analysis

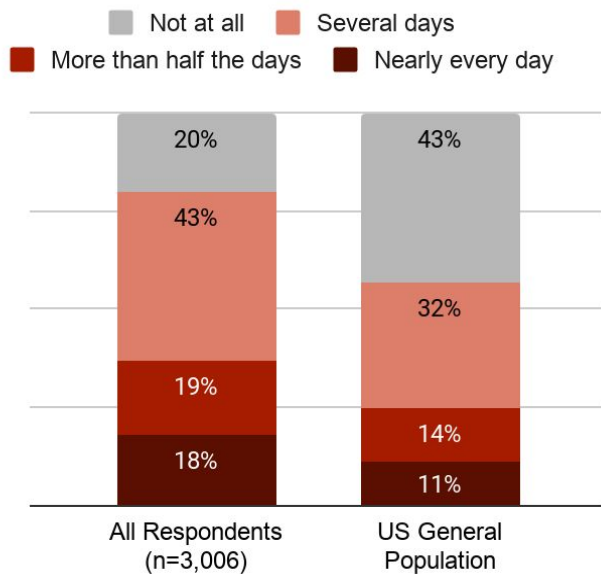
The [Household Pulse](#), a program of the US Census Bureau, measures the frequency of despondency, hopelessness, anxiety, and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Return to the Stage* asked these same questions to study how the Performing Arts workforce compares to the general US population at the same moment in time (July 1-14, 2020). In this analysis, we have compared the frequency of specific responses among survey respondents (n=3,000+) with the frequency of the same responses in the US population (n=400 million+).

We also studied the responses of the BIPOC cohort group (n=260), understanding this this moment - both the COVID-related shutdowns and the heightened focus on civil rights across the nation - has outsize impacts on BIPOC individuals.

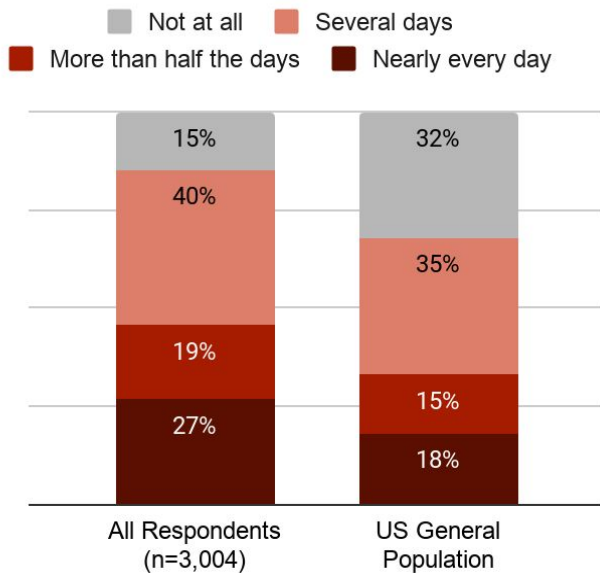
Loss of interest or pleasure and feelings of hopelessness are more frequent among respondents than among the US general population, based on Census data collected over the same two weeks as this study (July 1-14, 2020).

Over the past 7 days, have you been bothered by...

Having little interest or pleasure in doing things?



Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?



FYI...

The frequency of hopelessness is even more pronounced among respondents who are financially dependent on partners or family, or are early in their Performing Arts career.

Feelings of nervousness, anxiety, and worry are more frequent among respondents than among the US general population, based on Census data collected over the same two weeks as this study (July 1-14, 2020).

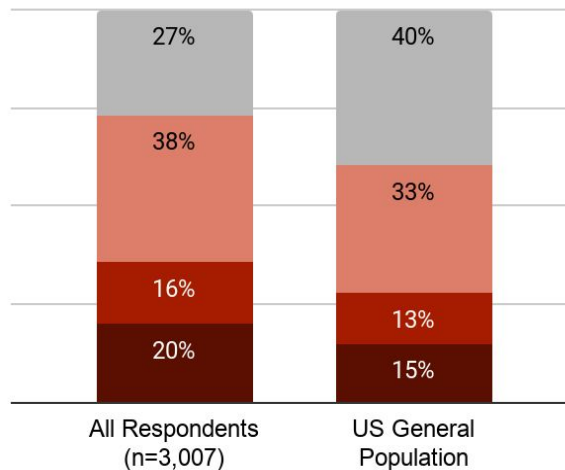
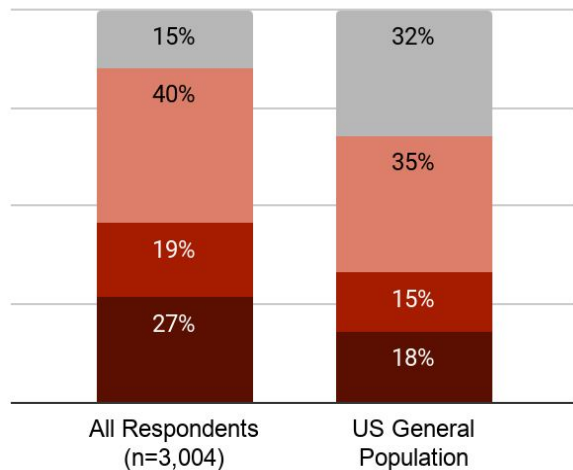
Over the past 7 days, have you been bothered by...

Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge?

Not being able to stop or control worrying?

■ Not at all ■ Several days
■ More than half the days ■ Nearly every day

■ Not at all ■ Several days
■ More than half the days ■ Nearly every day



FYI...

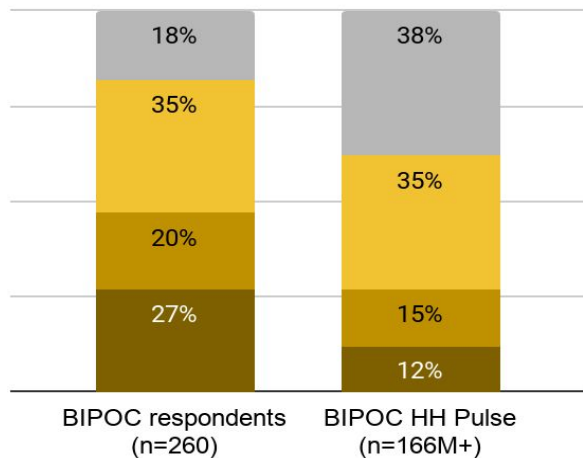
The frequency of anxiety is even more pronounced among respondents who are financially dependent on partners or family, or are early in their Performing Arts career.

BIPOC respondents report more frequent feelings of hopelessness than BIPOC respondents to the Census tool.

Over the past 7 days, have you been bothered by...

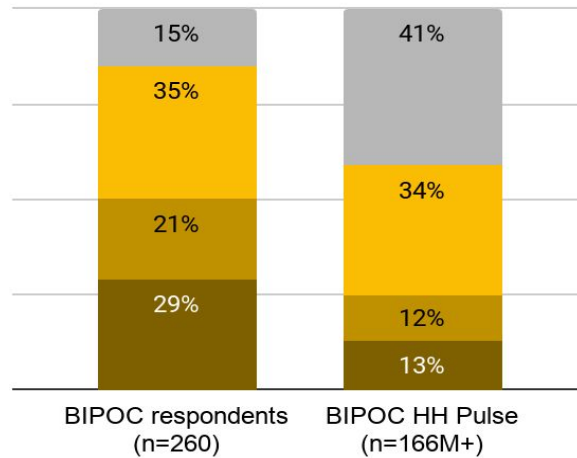
Having little interest or pleasure in doing things?

■ Not at all ■ Several days
■ More than half the days ■ Nearly every day



Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

■ Not at all ■ Several days
■ More than half the days ■ Nearly every day

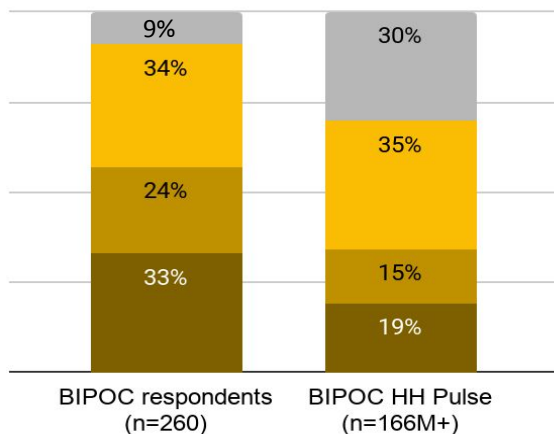


BIPOC respondents report more frequent feelings of anxiety than BIPOC respondents to the Census tool.

Over the past 7 days, have you been bothered by...

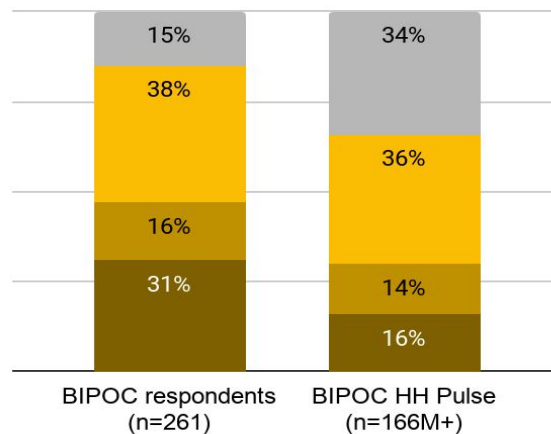
Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge?

Not at all Several days
More than half the days Nearly every day



Not being able to stop or control worrying?

Not at all Several days
More than half the days Nearly every day



Return to the Stage identifies eight specific strategies to understand how the Performing Arts workforce is coping with stress during this time.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
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Activist strategies	Creating/participating in collective action to change policies/practices that are harmful
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Career Development strategies	Training for a different job, already employed in a new field
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Creative strategies	Writing/composing, design, performance, building/fabrication projects
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Learning strategies	Enrolling in online courses, learning new communication platforms
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Mental strategies	Meditation, mindfulness, guided relaxation, self-affirmation
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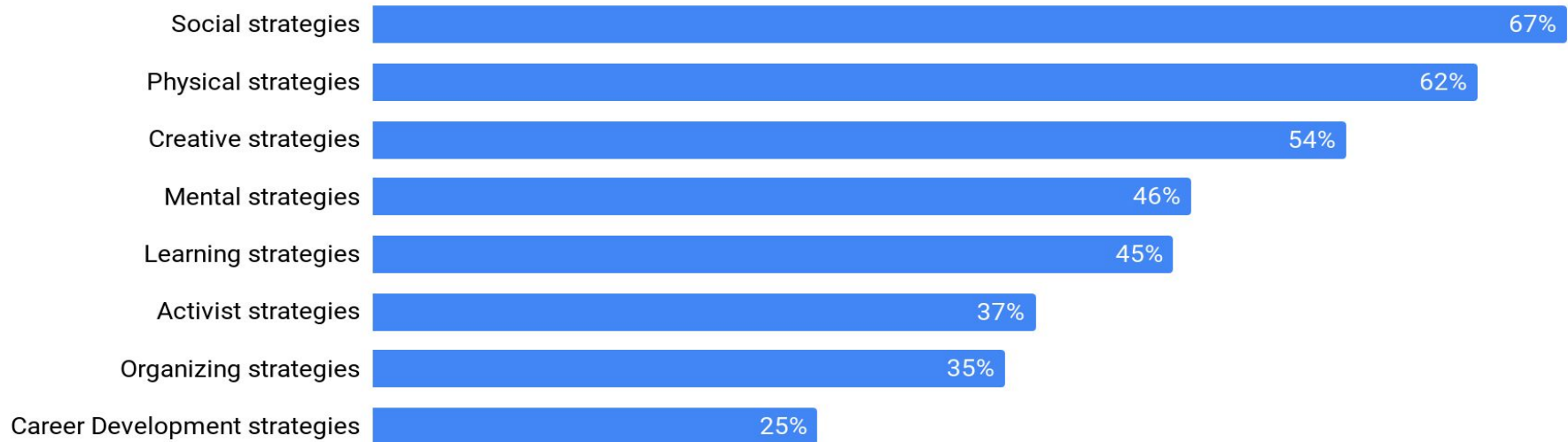
Organizing strategies	Coordinating projects at home or in my community
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Physical strategies	Exercise, training
----------------------------	--------------------

Social strategies	Connecting with friends/colleagues, social experiences with people in my household
--------------------------	--

A majority of respondents use social, physical, and creative coping strategies; over a third are using activist strategies, while nearly a quarter indicate career development is a coping strategy.

Coping strategies respondents are currently using (n=2,896)



Good to know: While many professional fields and associations have continuing education requirements (often connected to licensure), in the Performing Arts CEUs are not a convention except in isolated occupations, such as rigging, venue planning, architecture, and as related to university appointments or tenure.

Most respondents report using social coping strategies. This cuts across tenure, gender identity, income level, and race.

67%

Respondents using social
coping strategies
(n=2,896)

Tenure

- 66%** 21+ years (n=1,017)
- 68%** 11-20 years (n=828)
- 68%** 6-10 years (n=641)
- 66%** 3-5 years (n=356)

Race

- 69%** BIPOC (n=256)
- 67%** Not BIPOC (n=2,640)

Gender

- 72%** Female (n=1,531)
- 60%** Male (n=833)
- 70%** Gender Non-Conforming (n=80)

Individual Income

Across income brackets, 60%-75% of respondents indicated using social strategies.

The adoption of **learning and career development strategies** has increased following the onset of COVID impacts; mental coping strategies are broadly developed in the course of a Performing Arts career.

Learning and career development strategies

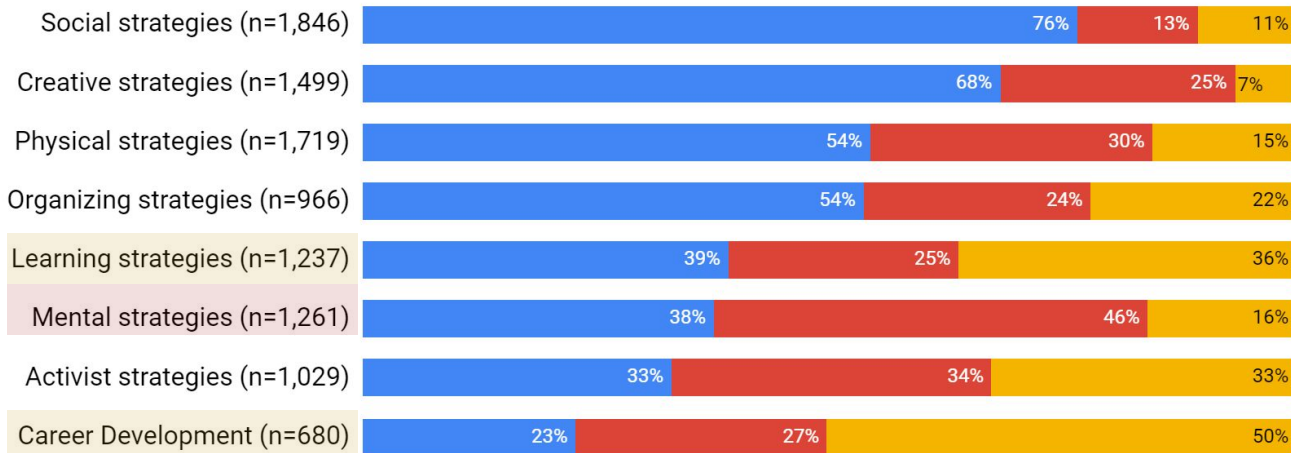
Increasingly adopted as the Performing Arts workforce faces an extended gap in job availability and income.

Mental coping strategies

A plurality of respondents began using them *after* commencing careers in the field, but do not tie these strategies to the onset of COVID impacts.

When respondents began using specific coping strategies

■ I started before I did any work in the Performing Arts/I have always done this
■ I started after I began working in the Performing Arts ■ I started after COVID-19



A majority of respondents are using learning and/or career development strategies. Use of these strategies is more frequent among generalists and younger respondents.

54%

Respondents using
learning and/or career
development coping
strategies
(n=2,896)

Learning and/or career strategy use by Generalists

56% Generalists (multiple occupations) (n=2,108)

48% Specialists (single occupation) (n=780)

Age

65% 18-20 years (n=79)

60% 21-30 (n=751)

57% 31-40 (n=653)

53% 41-50 (n=475)

50% 51-60 (n=323)

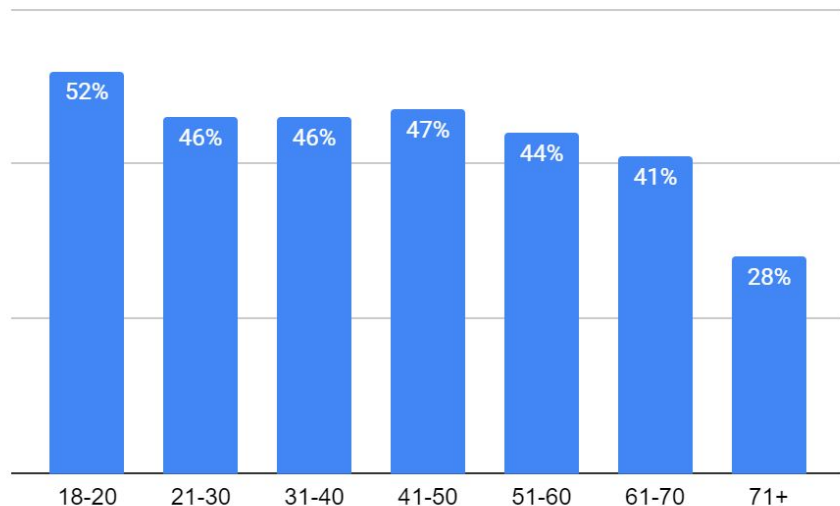
35% 61+ (n=195)

Primary occupation

Across occupational categories, 45%-58% of respondents indicated using learning and/or career development strategies, with **Administrative** occupations at the lowest end of the range and **Technical/Project Management** occupations at the highest end.

Mental coping strategies like meditation and mindfulness are used more by younger workers, workers with generalist careers, and workers who identify as BIPOC.

Use of Mental Coping Strategies by Age Group



Generalists

47% of Generalists are using mental strategies (n=2,108)

42% of Specialists are using mental strategies (n=780)

BIPOC

51% of BIPOC respondents (n=256)

45% of all other respondents (n=2,640)

Performing Arts workers are motivated to use specific coping strategies to benefit to **their own wellbeing as well as the **wellbeing of their colleagues and community**.**

Why do you use the coping strategies you report? (n=2,761)

81%

Beneficial to
personal/community
wellbeing

49%

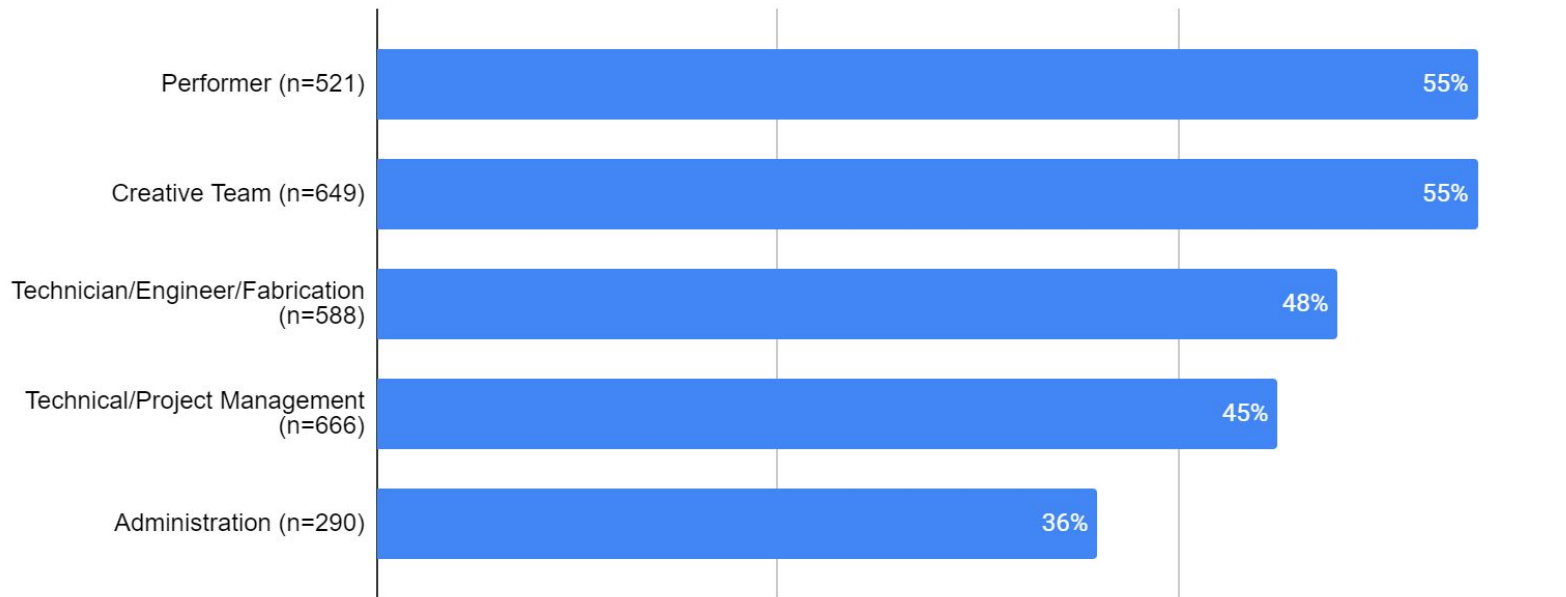
Beneficial to
work/colleagues

27%

Because of COVID

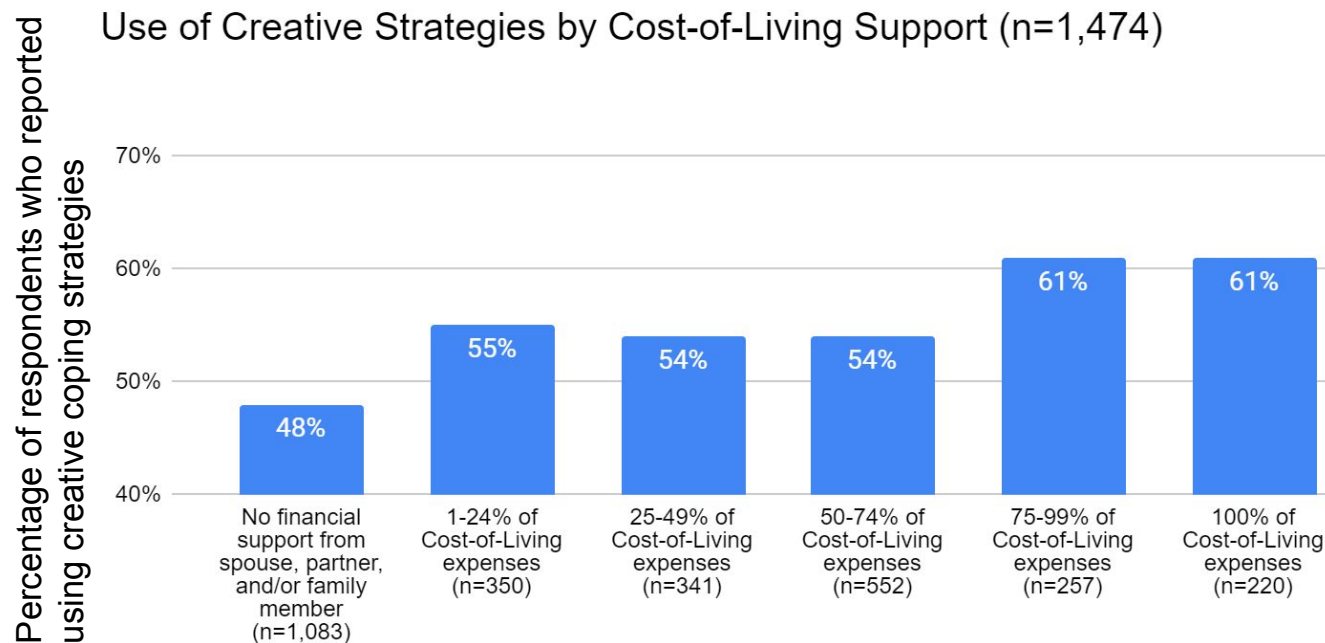
Use of any coping strategy for its benefits to an individual's work/colleagues is most frequently cited by respondents who primarily work as performers or members of the creative team in any discipline.

Using any coping strategy because it benefits my work/colleagues



Primary Occupation

Financial support from a spouse, partner, or family member correlates positively with use of **creative coping strategies**.



Among all respondents, 54% use creative coping strategies, such as writing, composing, design, performance, building/fabrication projects.

Key Takeaways: Emotional state and coping strategies

Performing Arts workers are **facing the same stresses as the general population** in 2020, but they are **reporting more frequent mental health impacts** than the general public. Fortunately, they are already equipped with physical, social, and creative coping strategies; many have also recently adopted strategies to support career development and learning in COVID times.

Social engagement is the most widely-adopted coping strategy, and most respondents report that this has been true since before COVID and independently of a Performing Arts career. A plurality (46%) of respondents indicated that they took up mental coping strategies, such as mindfulness or meditation, *since* starting their Performing Arts career, indicating a **possible connection between engagement in the field and cultivated mental resilience**.

In the context of a highly active, continuing shift in civil rights discourse and action, **over a third of respondents report using activist strategies**. This willingness to get involved in social change is further reflected in the next section, where we find both material interest in future (or alternate) careers in service-focused “public benefit” fields, and in addressing the inequities faced by workers and audiences in the Performing Arts.

Nevertheless, the long-term effects of depression, hopelessness, and anxiety on this workforce reflect the fragile support system for workers.

THE NEXT ACT: CAREERS

Looking ahead, there is a material risk of attrition of early and mid-career workers and individuals with lower annual income. Potential career-changers report a strong preference for work in the arts, entertainment, and leisure sector, followed closely by “public benefit” work in education, health and human services, and advocacy.

While the future is far from certain, *Return to the Stage* respondents express a broad and sincere desire to stay in the Performing Arts. Individuals who are firmly past their training years but still in the first upswing of their career express the most doubt about their expectations to stay in the field over the next five years.

Among all respondents, there is a strong inclination to work in industries typically associated with public benefit - social services, healthcare, advocacy, and education all rank high. It is possible that the “COVID essential” nature of these fields renders them particularly attractive, although we did not test for this precise reason in the study.

This service-mindedness is reinforced by the feedback we received about hopes and expectations for the Performing Arts in the ‘next normal’ after COVID-related shutdowns are rolled back, in the final section of this report.

A service-minded workforce envisions future opportunities in “public benefit” fields.

55%

If they choose to leave the Performing Arts, a majority of respondents would consider future careers in “public benefit” fields, which include Education, Health and Human Services, Public Administration, and Disaster Response. (n=2,581)

Public Benefit Field

42% Education

12% Human Services

12% Public Administration (Non-Education)

5% Health Services

5% Disaster Response

10%

Pre-COVID

“Extremely” or “Somewhat” likely to leave Performing Arts in the next 5 years (n=2,590)

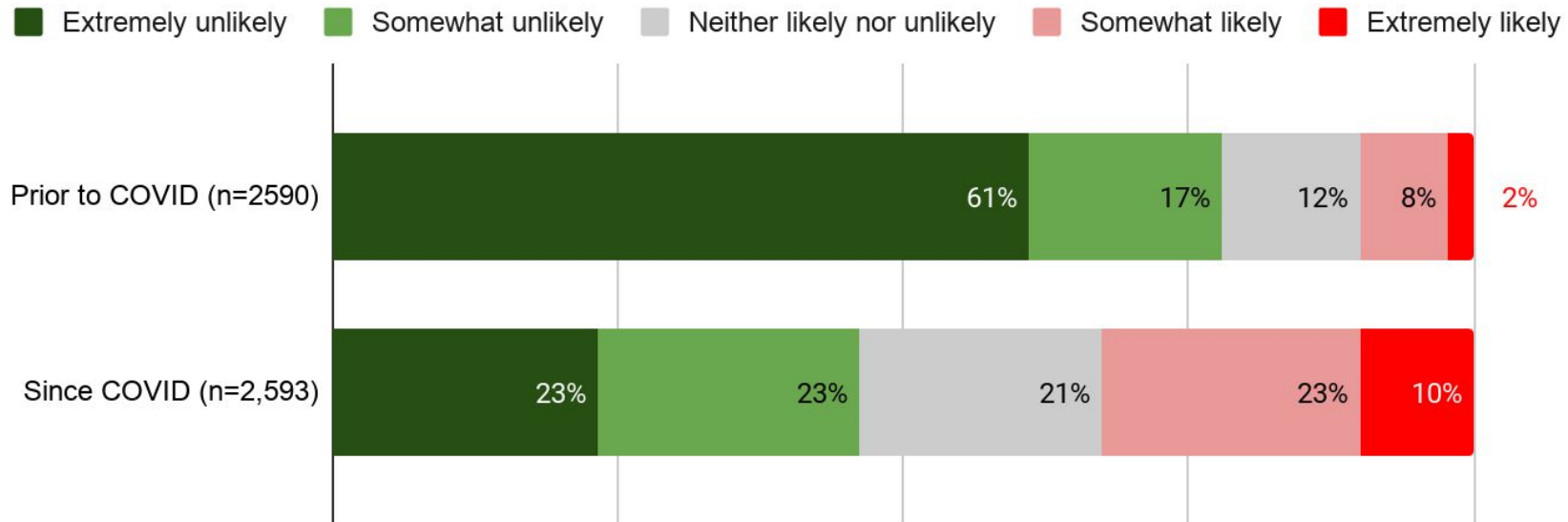
33%

Post-COVID

“Extremely” or “Somewhat” likely to leave the Performing Arts in the next 5 years (n=2,593)

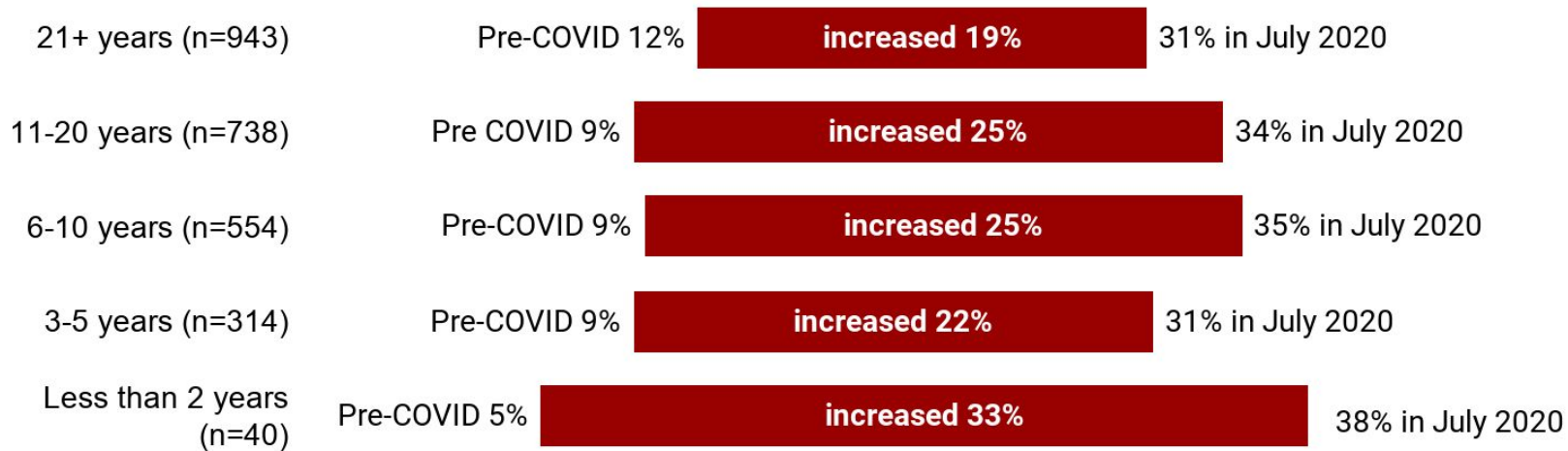
The percentage of respondents who are “**extremely likely**” to leave the field has **increased five-fold** since **COVID impacts began**.

Likelihood to leave the Performing Arts in the next 5 years



The **likelihood that respondents will leave the field has increased across all levels of tenure**, but is most pronounced among the **newest entrants and mid-career respondents**.

Respondents who are "somewhat" or "extremely" likely to leave the Performing Arts in the next 5 years, by tenure in the field



BIPOC respondents, as well as respondents who are financially dependent or earn <\$45K annually, report that the likelihood they will leave the field has increased up to four-fold since COVID impacts began.

10%

Pre-COVID

***BIPOC** respondents who said they were “extremely” or “somewhat” likely to leave Performing Arts in the next 5 years (n=262)*

29%

Since COVID

7%

Pre-COVID

*Respondents who receive **75% or more of their cost-of-living expenses** from a partner or family member (n=443)*

29%

Since COVID

9%

Pre-COVID

*Respondents with annual **individual income of \$45,000 or less** (n=1,337)*

31%

Since COVID

THE NEXT ACT: THE BUSINESS

Aspirations for a more just *and* nimble industry suggest changes in how Performing Arts work is made, shared, and rewarded.

Aspirations are strong for a more economically just and inclusive field, humane workplace practices, and more innovation in business models. Respondents call for changes in values, reflected in how projects are selected for production, shifts in workplace culture, and shifts in the skills and technological capacity of both leaders and the full workforce.

Respondents wish to see the values of the field change. Some connected this explicitly to an evolution of business models.

A change in *values*...

“Transparency and openness.”

“More inclusivity for everyone.”

“I hope that more respect will be paid to everyone.”

“Higher diversity and accountability!”

...drives changes in *business models*.

“More mindfulness for behind the scenes workers’ wellbeing.”

“One of the thing COVID has taught us is... what we’re doing is more inclusive for all people.”

“I hope... we will build a new model that protects the employees and the company from ruin should something like this happen again.”

“Greater remote collaboration... better accountability on the part of Performing Arts leadership globally.”

Respondents describe using this time to reset and re-prioritize resources. Many spoke of a 'boom or bust' mentality that undercuts both the workforce and the art.

A change in resource allocation...

"I hope we see a large shift toward equality."

"Reduce the amount of people in the field for the wrong reasons.."

"I hope that we use this time as a reset to evaluate what has been serving us as a community and what is simply left over from the past."

...informs changes in workplace culture and goals

"I hope to see a better financial model in which people are being paid a fair rate. I hope that we not only do "the classics" or the "cash cows" but that we do shows that are important stories to tell in this day and age.."

"More work for those who remain."

"More effort towards putting forward new work and breaking even rather than having only huge successes or huge failures. This 'gold or bust' mentality has cost us a lot of truly wonderful art."

Respondents imagine **a future where a broad, inclusive definition of “access” leads to more intentional use of technology, venues, and the artists’ voices** to welcome attendees of all abilities.

Re-framing access...

“It would be so wonderful if digital work were seen as a complementary part of the artistic offerings.”

“Reach a more diverse audience.”

“Bringing art to the people rather than luring people to the art.”

“Live performance is different than virtual. [...] We should improve accessibility to people in both spaces.”

...demands *new tools, skills, and ways of creating.*

“More digitally literate artistic leaders.”

“I hope we use more digital platforms and create [Performing Arts work] specifically for them.”

“Getting out of exclusive theater spaces, engagement with contemporary issues.”

“Captioning, ASL, audio description, touch walk-throughs [...] To present works in both mediums is probably ideal.”

The shift to virtual programming has made accessibility more tangible and a more urgent future priority.

33%

Imagine a more *physically, financially, and virtually accessible* way of sharing work (n=1,748)

25%

Hope specifically for more *digital* ways of sharing work with audiences (n=1,748)

Accessibility engages the business model on multiple levels

13% described more inclusive practices around performances

12% described changes to safety procedures for the public and workers around performances

9% described more diversity in audiences, onstage, and backstage during performances

9% imagine changes in the business model, inclusive of new or larger streams public funding, higher wages, more positive/sustainable working conditions, and greater tolerance for creative risk in performances

Most respondents continue to participate in the Performing Arts, with 44% attending virtual or in-person performances. Engagement is strongest among long-tenured respondents, generalists, and administrators.

69%

Respondents participating
in the Performing Arts
field in any way, including
volunteering and/or
attending performances
(n=2,795)

Tenure

73%	21+ years (n=999)
73%	11-20 years (n=803)
65%	6-10 years (n=613)
57%	3-5 years (n=336)
58%	≤2 years (n=43)

Gender

70%	Female (n=1,563)
70%	Male (n=863)
57%	Gender Non-Conforming (n=81)

Career Specialization

73%	Generalists (n=2,043)
59%	Specialists (n=746)

Primary Occupation

82%	Administrative (n=291)
78%	Creative Team (n=653)
78%	Performer (n=519)
67%	Technical/Project Management (n=680)
49%	Technician/Engineer/Fabrication (n=606)

Key Takeaways: The Next Act

Careers

Over 70% of respondents report pursuing generalist careers, working in multiple occupations. This cohort group also reported longer tenure in the field, more frequent use of learning and career development coping strategies, and higher rates of continuing participation in the Performing Arts during COVID times than specialists (people who reported having a single occupation). **This versatility, appetite for learning, and commitment to the field is an asset that we believe should be celebrated.**

The Performing Arts workforce is also strongly oriented to “public benefit” fields, which span both arts and culture as well as education, health and human services, and disaster response. Although **over a quarter of respondents reported they may exit the field in the next five years, many wish to remain connected to the Performing Arts.** Individuals who are BIPOC, dependent on others for 75% or more of their living expenses, or are less than 10 years into their career are even less confident than the total pool of participants about staying in the field.

The Business

Despite the risk of attrition, there is optimism that the field can and will adapt. Making the workplace culture and performances themselves more accessible financially, technologically, and otherwise is a notable aspiration. Connected to increased accessibility is sincere hope for more, and more risk-friendly, financial support for the Performing Arts.

Next Steps for *Return to the Stage*

Gratitude: We wish to express our heartfelt appreciation for the efforts of the Performing Arts community who broadcast this research far and wide. As of this report, over 2,000 individuals have signed up to take the next survey in January 2021.

Learning: We hypothesized early in the process that this workforce was suffering profound economic and career impacts due to COVID, and that many respondents would be in the early stages of considering new ways to use their learned skills, natural talents, and other resources to survive and thrive. We also suspected that the workforce remains loyal to the field - and the fact that, even with 56% of respondents unemployed, 69% are still engaged with the field suggests that this loyalty is strong and enduring.

We also found that respondents are committed to learning during this time for the benefit of their professional lives and colleagues; participating in activism to render a more just, kind, and productive society; and - as called for by personal circumstances and necessity - entering other parallel or wholly different professional fields, bearing the creative zest and adaptability learned in the Performing Arts.

Looking forward: As of this report, we intend to field the next wave of *Return to the Stage* in January 2021. About half of the questions from the initial survey will be retired, and new questions will be included that speak to the current moment. Certainly, much of what has transpired in 2020 would have been unthinkable in January 2020; we will do our best to surface the most relevant and important considerations.

Thoughts, questions, concerns? Write to us at returntothestage@gmail.com.