

RETURN TO THE STAGE

July 2021 Survey
Published September 2021

What does it mean to return to the stage?

The Performing Arts are not returning as quickly as they disappeared in March 2020. It is not enough to put away the ghost light and reopen the doors. The pandemic has broken communication channels, supply chains, and the Performing Arts' most valuable resource: its workers.

This study, now in its third wave, was designed to provide a rapid-response illustration of how the Performing Arts workforce has fared during COVID. The field was wracked with work stoppages and uncertainty in spring 2020. While some businesses have reopened, not all regions and not all occupations have returned to work. There is still much uncertainty in the long recovery.

In producing this third and final report based on data collected at three points over the past year, our hope is to document resilience, opportunity, distress, and adaptation in the remarkable US Performing Arts workforce.

In the following slides, we track how the Performing Arts workforce has coped, where employment and unemployment have shifted, the emotional experience of respondents, and perceptions of employers and the future. There is much more to report than is possible in a few dozen pages. Our next priority is to continue analyzing what thousands of respondents have shared, knowing that it is only by casting a wide and deep net that we can fulfill our initial purpose.

Methodology

Timing: *Return to the Stage* consists of three surveys conducted over 18 months. The first survey was conducted July 1-14, 2020, after the initial wave of shutdowns and the cancellations of summer performances. The second survey was conducted January 1-14, 2021, and the final survey was conducted July 1-14, 2021. Questions about past employment, work experience, and pre-pandemic behaviors focused on the period of March 2019 to March 2020. Each survey contained several of the same questions about demographic, professional, and behavioral characteristics, as well as new questions meant to probe contemporaneous issues and opportunities facing performing arts workers.

Distribution through Volunteer Participants: The initial July 2020 survey was distributed through professional listservs and social media including paid social media. The subsequent surveys used these same channels as well as (1) an email invitation to those who joined a mailing list at www.returntothestage.com and (2) an email invitation to those who participated in the first two rounds of the survey and provided contact information to participate in future studies. The responses of the 669 returning participants who started the study in July 2020 and 346 participants who started in January 2021 can be isolated from the 327 new participants to track longitudinal changes. All participants were encouraged to further distribute the survey via their networks.

Participant and Comparison Groups: Participation was open to anyone who worked or volunteered in the Performing Arts in the United States from March 2019 through March 2020. Several questions were designed to help researchers compare the Performing Arts workforce with the general US population or with specific, relevant populations, such as arts audiences. The size of the participant pool for each question is represented by “n=___” to indicate the number of people who answered that question.

Independent and anonymous: *Return to the Stage* is not funded or sponsored by any agency or institution. The survey instrument was designed to be fully anonymous. All personal identifying information was removed from the data set prior to analysis. Prior to launch, the study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Elon University for review of research involving human subjects.

Definition of Occupation Categories in *Return to the Stage*

The Performing Arts field includes diverse workers, creative genres, and occupations. This voluntary study attempts to recognize that diversity while also exploring the data from a 20,000-foot view. Early in the study, we identified six “occupation categories” that seemed rational, based on both our combined lived experiences working with hundreds of performing arts organizations, and the feedback of people who agreed to review the questionnaires and reports. The occupation categories referred to throughout the report are below, in alphabetical order, with sample titles and functions to illustrate who is represented in which category. We recognize these categories do not reflect all job categories or descriptions..

Administration: Agent, Artist Manager, Box Office, Development, Executive Leadership, Facility Management/Maintenance, Financial Management, Fundraising, General Management, House Manager, Marketing, Patron Services, Press, Publicity.

Creative Team: Artistic Director, Board Member, Coach, Composer, Choreographer, Designer, Director, Dramaturg, Educator, Literary Manager, Musical Director, Producer, Promoter, Writer.

Performer: Actor/Actress, Acrobat, Dancer, Musician, Singer.

Other: Performing Arts Medical Provider, Transportation, Videographer.

Technical/Project Managers: Child Guardian, Costume Shop/Wardrobe Manager, Event Manager, Equipment Rentals Manager, Production Manager, Properties Director, Stage Manager, Technical Director, Technical Safety/Engineering Consultant, Tour Manager, Warehouse Manager.

Technicians/Engineers/Fabricators: Animator, Carpenter, Cutter, Draper, Electrician, Equipment/Instrument Repair Technician, Mixer, Programmer, Properties Crew, Rigger, Scenic Artist, Stitcher, Wardrobe Crew.

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Demographic characteristics have been stable throughout *Return to the Stage*.

Geography

July 2020 and January 2021 surveys include responses from **all 50 states**. In July 2021, we heard from all states **except** Wyoming.

Tenure

Over 50% of respondents have worked in the field 11+ years, in every wave of the survey.

Age

	Age (years)	July '20 n=2,550	Jan '21 n=1,871	July '21 n=1,222
The age distribution of respondents moved upward, but only slightly.	18-20	3%	1%	<1%
	21-30	30%	25%	25%
	31-40	26%	28%	26%
	41-50	19%	21%	23%
	51-60	13%	16%	15%
	61+	8%	9%	10%

Race

About 11% of respondents indicated that they are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) in July 2020 and January 2021. **In July 2021, 12% of respondents were BIPOC.**

Gender

Male-identifying respondents made up 34% of the sample in July 2020, 42% in January 2021, and 34% in July 2021. Female-identifying respondents follow a similar pattern, at 61% in July 2020, 53% in January 2021, and 60% in July 2021. Gender non-conforming participants remained steady at ~3% in each wave. The remaining ~2% of respondents did not report a gender identity.

Education

About 55% of respondents in each wave have a Bachelor's degree. A sixth of respondents reported having an Associates or having completed some college (14% in July '20, 18% in January '21, 16% in July 2021). About a quarter hold a professional degree, Master's, or PhD (29% in July '20, 22% in January, 28% in July '21).

Unions

Between 39%-43% of respondents indicated membership in one or more performing arts unions in each wave.

Are we back yet?

Unemployment, negotiation.

Performing Arts workers are beginning to find employment, but a quarter are still furloughed or unemployed – more than four times the national unemployment rate for July 2021 - and nearly half of those who have secured work have found it outside of the Performing Arts.

As the pandemic extends beyond the 18-month mark, the financial position of workers is also tenuous. More than a quarter have borrowed money, and many workers have shifted down on the income ladder.

Early efforts to preserve business entities may be giving way to a re-scaling of business operations that impacts some roles more than others. Unemployment continues to be highest among workers who would typically work on a contract or temporary basis, suggesting that the “[precarious employment](#)” challenges in the field still exist, and may worsen.

Even as total unemployment declines, it has become clear that working does not necessarily mean working in the Performing Arts. Jobs do not mean full-time employment, nor do they mean steady, long-term work.

Within this fragile context, we probed workers’ inclination to negotiate terms with employers. Although a benchmark for pre-pandemic behaviors does not exist, over a third of respondents who have been offered work said they have negotiated terms following an offer. Salary is the most commonly negotiated item. ‘Negotiators’ are more likely to be earlier in their career, with less than 10 years’ experience. And non-salary negotiations, like team diversity, are more evident among technical and project management professionals - possibly because these individuals exert some influence over hiring choices, while other workers (like performers) typically do not.

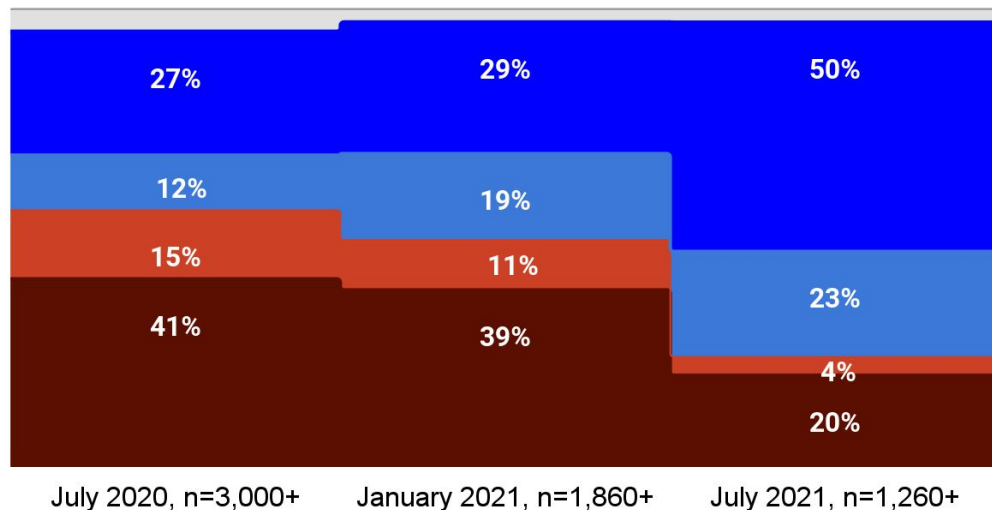
Employment has grown by over 50%, but almost a quarter of the PA workforce is still waiting in the wings.

More than 55% of PA workers were unemployed or furloughed in July 2020. As of July 2021, there remains an unemployment and furlough rate of 24%. The winter recovery was driven by part-time work, and only as summer engagements pick up steam have workers returned in significant numbers. The momentum of 'return' felt by employers and policymakers may take longer to reach the workforce, as people re-establish professional relationships, get (fully) vaccinated, and restore the personal and household resources that enable a return to work.

Of the 73% of PA workers who are working full- or part-time, a quarter reported working in other industries in July 2021. Among survey participants, all of whom had worked in the Performing Arts between March 2019 and March 2020, only 55% currently work in the Performing Arts. While many may return to the performing arts over time, the field remains far from pre-pandemic levels of worker engagement.

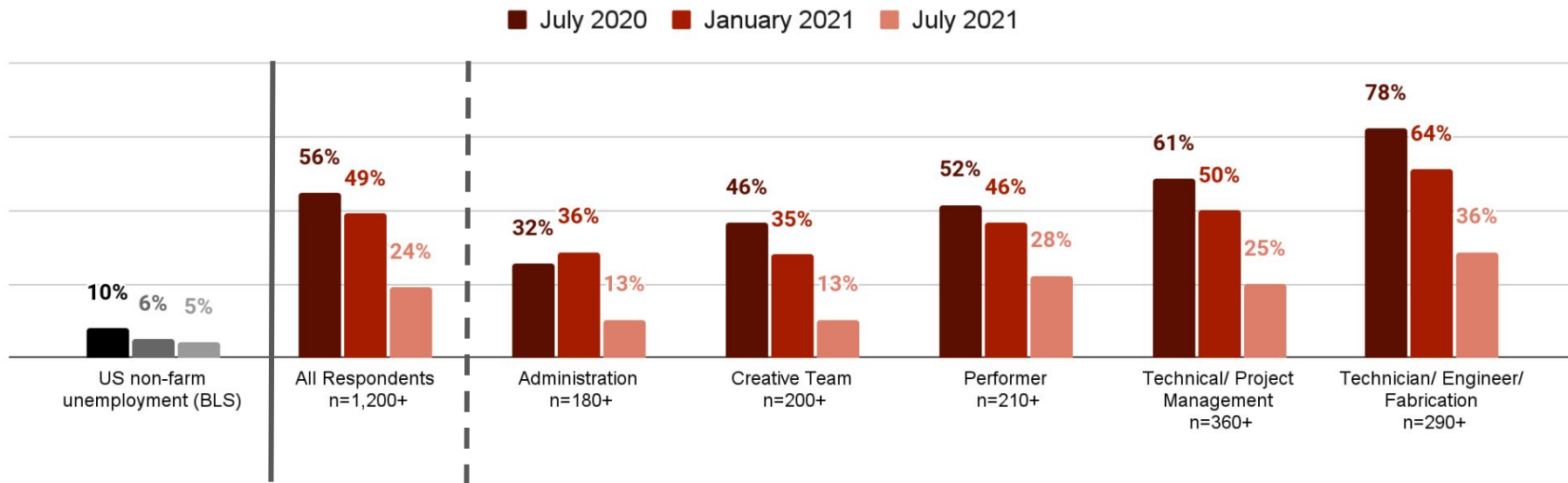
Employment status by survey wave

■ Retired, Student, or Unable to Work ■ Working Full-Time ■ Working Part-Time
■ Furloughed ■ Unemployed



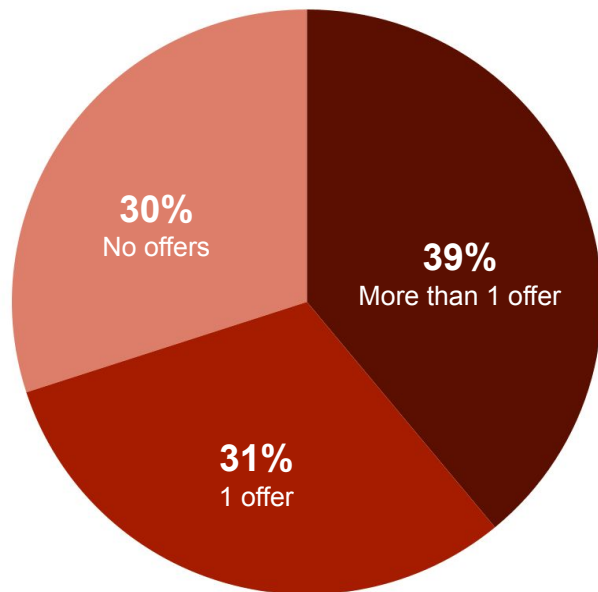
Unemployment remains uneven across Performing Arts occupation categories, and still far exceeds overall US unemployment.

Unemployment by primary occupation



Over two-thirds of the PA workforce has received offers of work in the field, and most have accepted at least one offer.

Job offers since January 1, 2021, n=1,284



As businesses reopen, workers are cautious in accepting contracts: 38% of individuals who have received offers indicate they have declined at least one.

Scheduling conflicts were the most-frequently cited reason for declining work, with **69% of decliners** noting this as a top reason they refused an offer (n=339). For BIPOC workers, scheduling is even more significant, although the sample is small, at 46 respondents.

The next most important factor is **compensation**. Among all respondents, **46% of decliners cited pay** as a reason they refused work. Compensation was even **more important for some subgroups**: Technicians/builders, creative team members, and people who indicated elevated levels of anxiety or hopelessness all prioritized compensation, with **over 50% of each group** identifying it as a top reason for declining work.

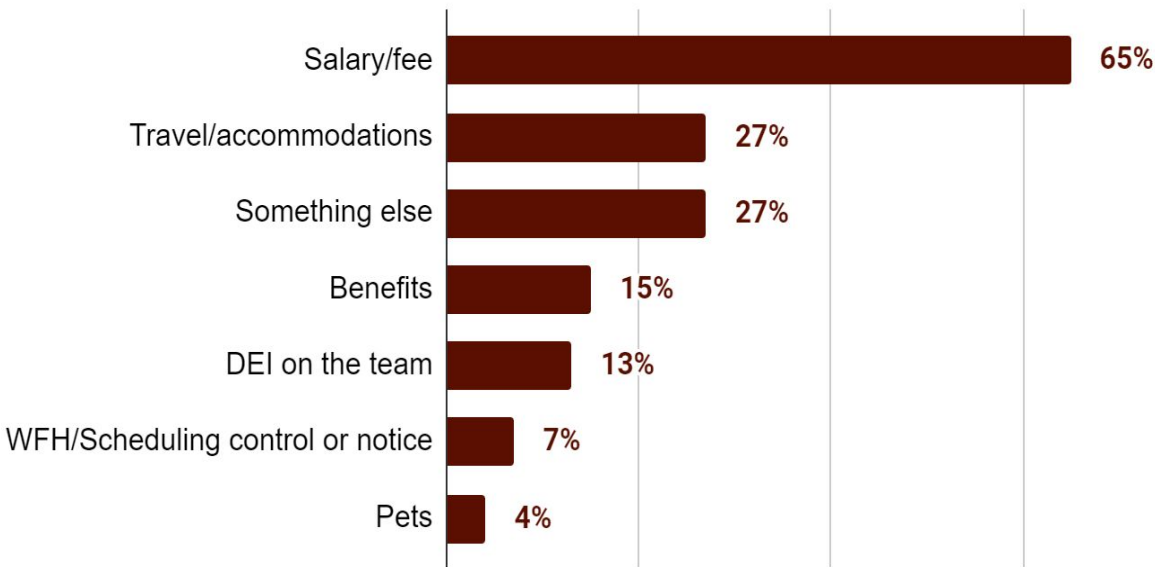
Feeling safe figured less prominently, but there are notable variances. Among all decliners only 12% indicated this is a factor. Among BIPOC respondents and people with elevated anxiety and hopelessness, safety is a factor for about 20%, suggesting a need for stronger communication and policy solutions.

Over a third of respondents who have received offers have negotiated terms (37%, n=889).

Salary or fee tops the list. There are variances, of course. Workers with 10 or fewer years' experience are *more* inclined to negotiate than longer-serving colleagues (43% of 234, and 36% of 620, respectively).

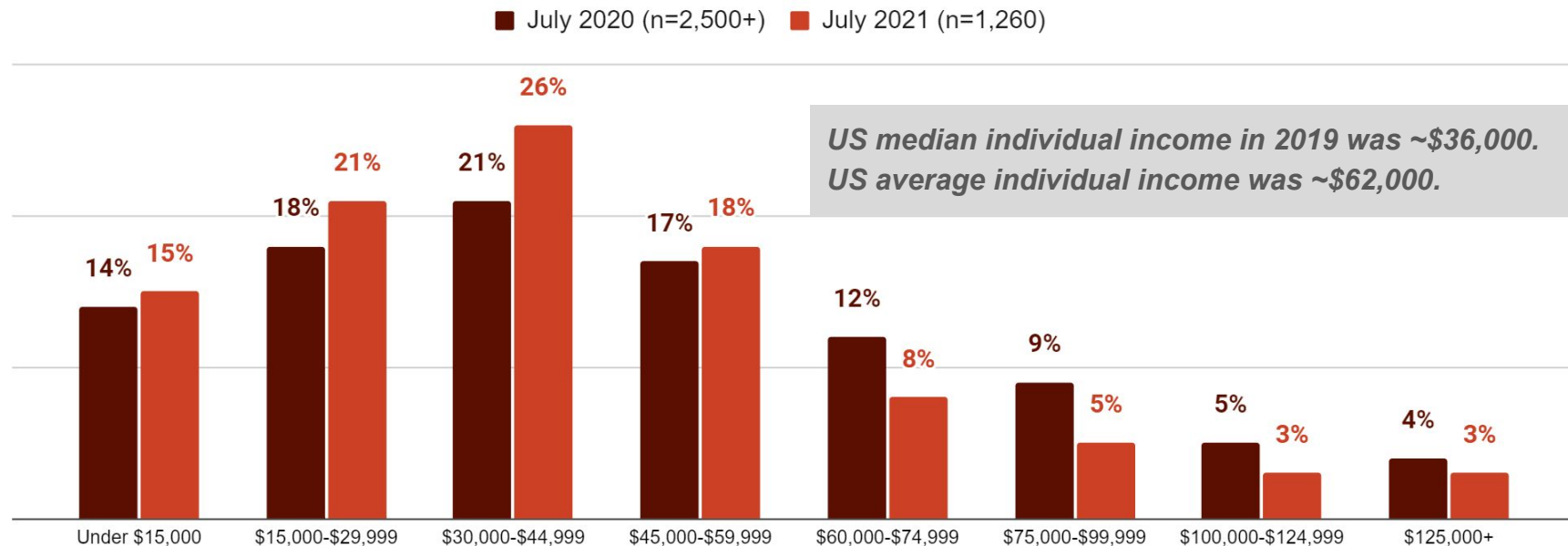
Negotiated items also vary between subgroups. While diversity on the team is considered by less than a sixth of all respondents, over 20% of Technical and Project Management workers say this is a negotiation priority (n=116).

All offerees who have negotiated terms, n=333



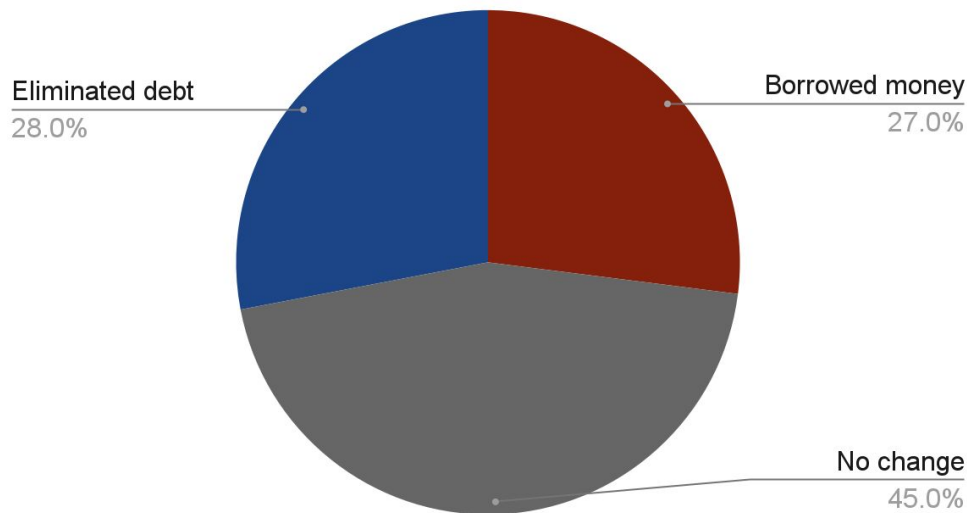
Pre-COVID, 70% of the PA workforce made less than \$60K annually. In 2020, 81% made less than \$60K.

Income distribution



Over a quarter of respondents borrowed money during COVID. Another quarter-plus eliminated debt.

Financial status changes during COVID, n=1,240



Respondents with the highest and the lowest incomes were more likely to borrow money.

Among the 60+ individuals with income \$100K or higher, over a third borrowed money. Among the 445+ individuals with incomes under \$30K in 2021, over a third borrowed money also. Groups in between those extremes were more reluctant to borrow, with about quarter or less of each income bracket indicating they borrowed money.

Technicians and fabricators were the occupation group most likely to have borrowed money, at 32% (n=288). **Performers** were the most likely to pay down debt, with 39% reporting they had done so (n=202).

Extended Intermission: The Emotional Toll of Pandemic Disruptions

The already significant stress caused by lost wages and contracts has been further compounded by changes in living arrangements, professional communications, and personal debt. Compared to data from a national study, Performing Arts Workers are experiencing higher levels of distress.

Return to the Stage has been using the US Census Bureau's Household Pulse survey to compare the experiences of Performing Arts workers to the general US population. By using the same questions as a national study, we can study the extent of the pandemic's impact on a field that was among the first to close and last to reopen. This impact can be measured on the Performing Arts as a sector, as well as by race, gender, and occupation categories.

In addition to this framework, respondents reported on other major "interruptions" they faced: moving house, taking on debt, or being out of communication with any employers. An astonishing 31% of July respondents have not heard from a single past employer since April 1, 2020. **Most respondents have experienced at least one disruptive event in the past year.** This implies to us that the field's fragmentation will only become more evident as the Performing Arts field re-starts over the coming months. It will be important for workers and employers alike to be patient as we discover new sensitivities, gaps, and needs - and for many, entirely new homes and career paths.

Two-thirds of respondents face a major life disruption.

66%

**Report a significant
interruption in their
economic or professional
lives** (n=1,305)

Over a third have moved. Since April 1, 2020, 36% of July 2021 respondents have moved house for any reason (n=1,214). Within that, about 58% of movers (or 21% of the total respondents) have moved specifically due to COVID-related factors, either the economic fallout or a desire to protect their own or another's health. By contrast, the 2015-19 [Census](#) data shows that less than 15% of Americans moved each year prior to the pandemic.

Employer communication remains fragmented. About 31% have not heard from any past employers since April 2020 (n=1,263). This is, however, an improvement over the 46% of January 2021 respondents who had received no communication (n=1,961).

Debt. Over a quarter of respondents have borrowed money, in amounts ranging from under \$1,000 to over \$100,000 (n=1,240).

When we consider these three “interruptions” together, **two-thirds of respondents have weathered significant interruptions.** This discontinuity may have implications for how rapidly, and how confidently, Performing Arts workers are able to take up their past roles and professional relationships.

How to read the Household Pulse analysis

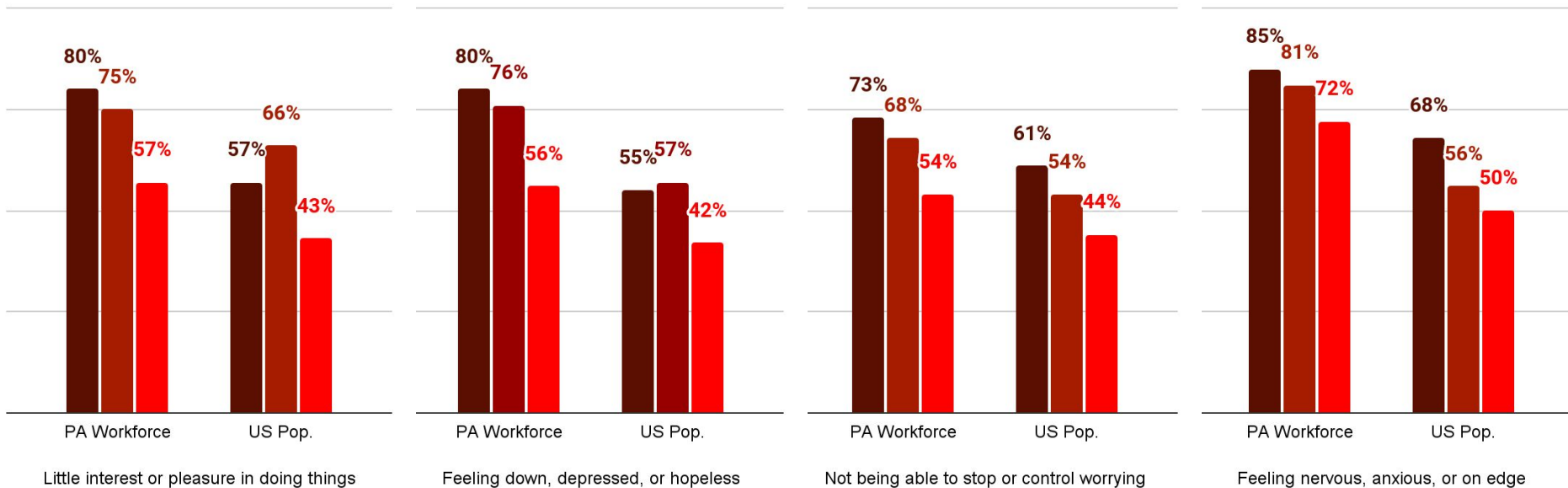
The Household Pulse, a program of the US Census Bureau, measures the frequency of despondency, hopelessness, anxiety, and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Return to the Stage* asked these same questions to study how the Performing Arts workforce compares to the general US population. We used weekly or biweekly datasets from the Census to ensure that current events, from holidays to a surge in the Delta variant, did not inappropriately tilt the analysis. In this analysis, we have compared the frequency of specific responses among *Return to the Stage* respondents (n=1,300+) 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=140+), understanding that in this moment - both the COVID-related shutdowns and the heightened focus on civil rights across the nation - has an outsized impact on BIPOC individuals.

In the charts which follow, we note where the data represents people who felt one or more symptoms “nearly every day” and where it represents people who felt specific symptoms with any frequency.

The Performing Arts workforce state of mind has improved since January 2021, but anxiety remains high.

These charts show the percentage of respondents reporting *any* frequency of the four items below, ranging from “several days” in the past week to “nearly every day.” All sample sizes are 1,200+.



For information about the Household Pulse, see
<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey.html>

● July 2020

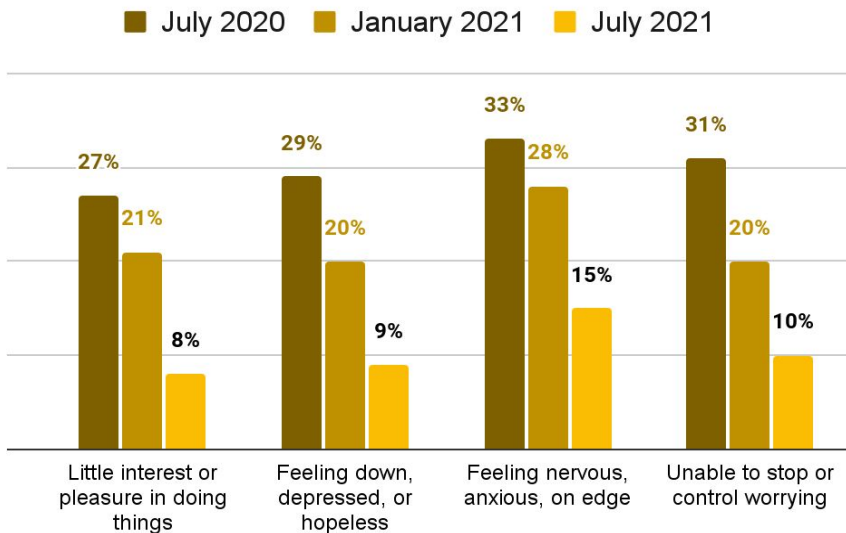
● January 2021

● July 2021

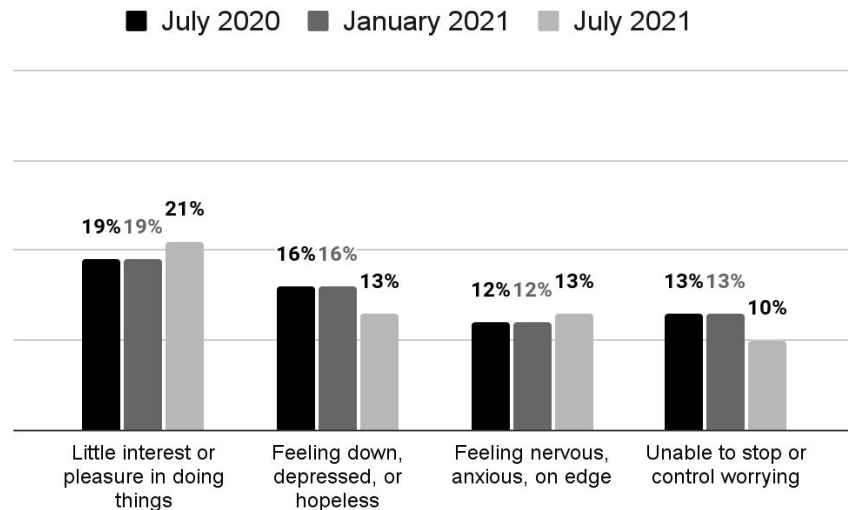
The BIPOC Performing Arts workforce experienced more distress at the start of the pandemic than both their white colleagues and the general BIPOC population in the US. Levels of anxiety have declined since January 2021, and are now more aligned with general US population levels.

These charts show the percentage reporting specific items “nearly every day.”

BIPOC Performing Arts Workers (n=140+)

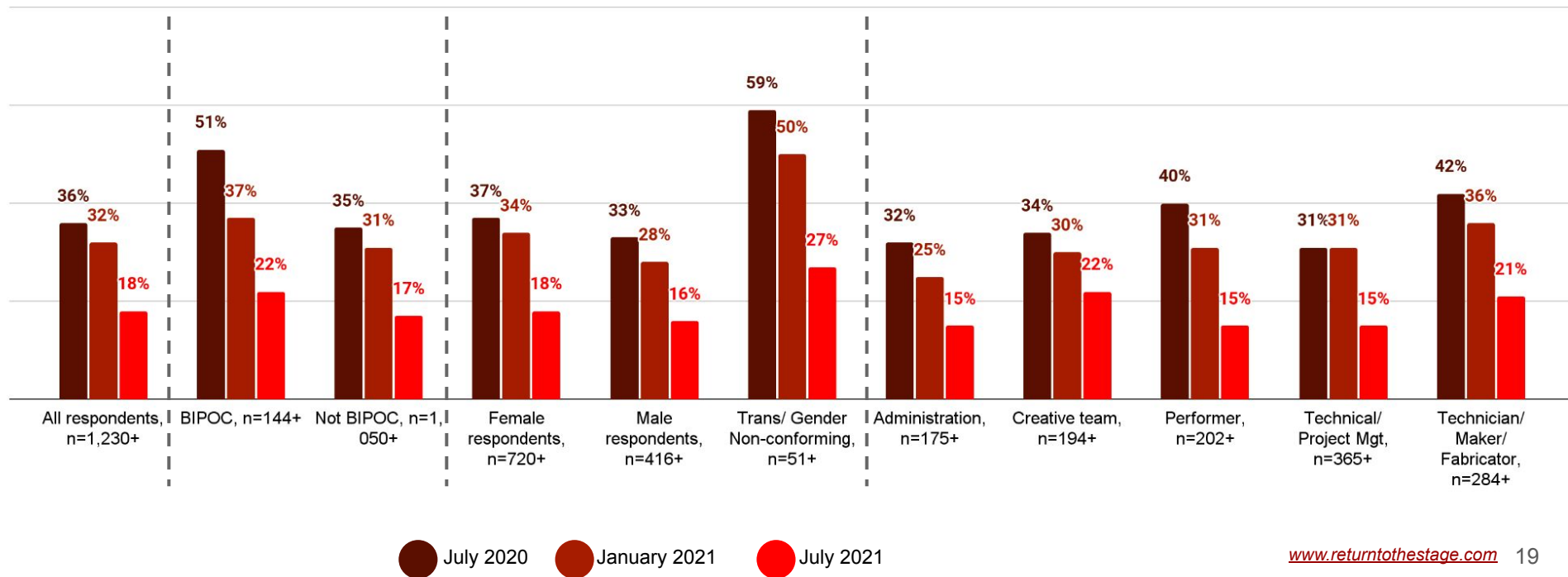


BIPOC US General Population (n=1M+)



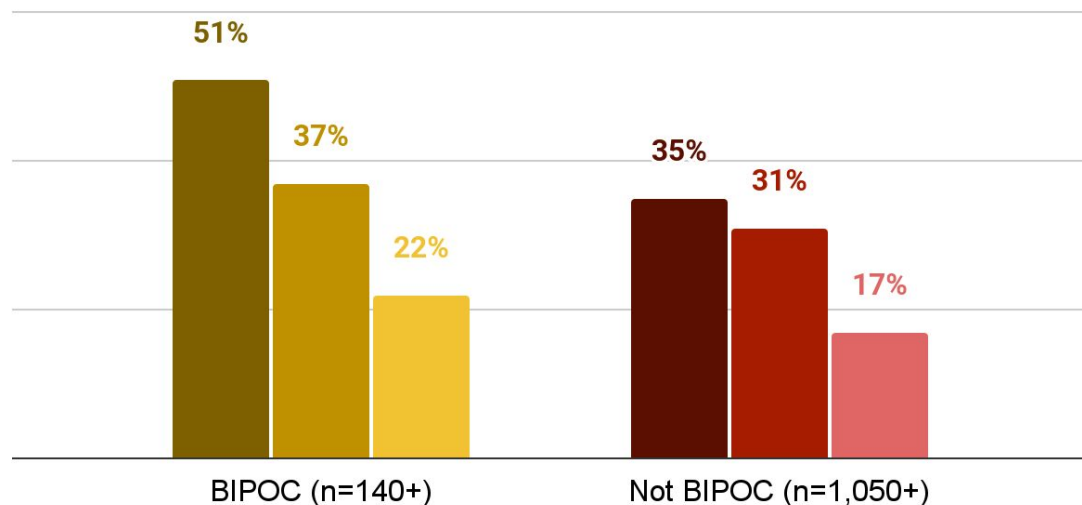
The emotional pressure has been uneven. Among respondents who reported any symptom “nearly every day,” certain characteristics correlate with elevated and enduring distress.

Respondents feeling any Pulse symptom “nearly every day,” by month and selected characteristics



BIPOC respondents report levels of worry and hopelessness that exceed non-BIPOC peers' in the Performing Arts.

BIPOC and not-BIPOC reporting anxiety or despair "nearly every day," by survey wave



BIPOC performing arts workers reported not only a greater frequency of any of the four distress symptoms, but also specifically the near-daily experience of anxiety or despair. While the percentage of BIPOC performing arts workers reporting this feeling has been declining since July 2020, it continues to be significantly higher than their non-BIPOC peers.

Attrition From the Performing Arts

Attitudes toward leaving the field have shifted since January. The Shuttered Venues Operators' Grant was hailed by industry leaders and workers, but the rollout and the spread of COVID variants may have weakened confidence. Workers have also experienced parallel interruptions that may have lasting consequences for their capacity to stay in the field and, more deeply, their sense of affiliation.

When COVID-19 first closed venues, Performing Arts workers expressed strong concerns about when it would be safe to return. While some safety risks have been addressed, other concerns remain. Over a quarter of respondents still report an inclination to leave the Performing Arts field in the next five years. This inclination is even more pronounced among respondents who self-identified as belonging to one or more historically marginalized groups, whether those identities are related to race, gender, or economic privilege. Respondents who have moved for any reason during the pandemic are also more likely to consider leaving the field.

Also concerning is uneven confidence across occupations. Administrators and performers have reported an *increase* in their likelihood to leave the field between January 2021 and July 2021. It is impossible for us to link these shifts to specific drivers; however, one plausible explanation is that the troubled rollout of the Shuttered Venues Operators Grant has weakened administrators' confidence in the long-term viability of their career paths. And performers may be reasonably anxious about their physical health and safety, given the emergence of new virus variants.

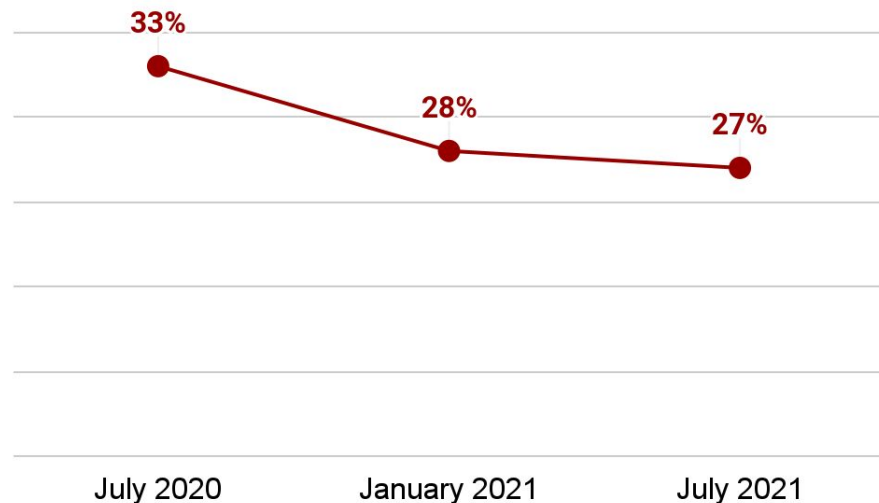
The rate of likely attrition is flat among all respondents, but certain subgroups feel more inclined to leave.

Confidence is static. Performing arts workers' plans to leave the field are similar to what we heard in January 2021. While the December 2020 passage of the Save Our Stages Act and rollout of the Shuttered Venues Operators' Grant funds has delivered needed resources to organizations, the program has not prompted a shift in long-term plans to remain in the field at the worker level.

Demographic, economic, and emotional factors all correlate with attrition plans. Likely attrition is higher among three categories of respondents:

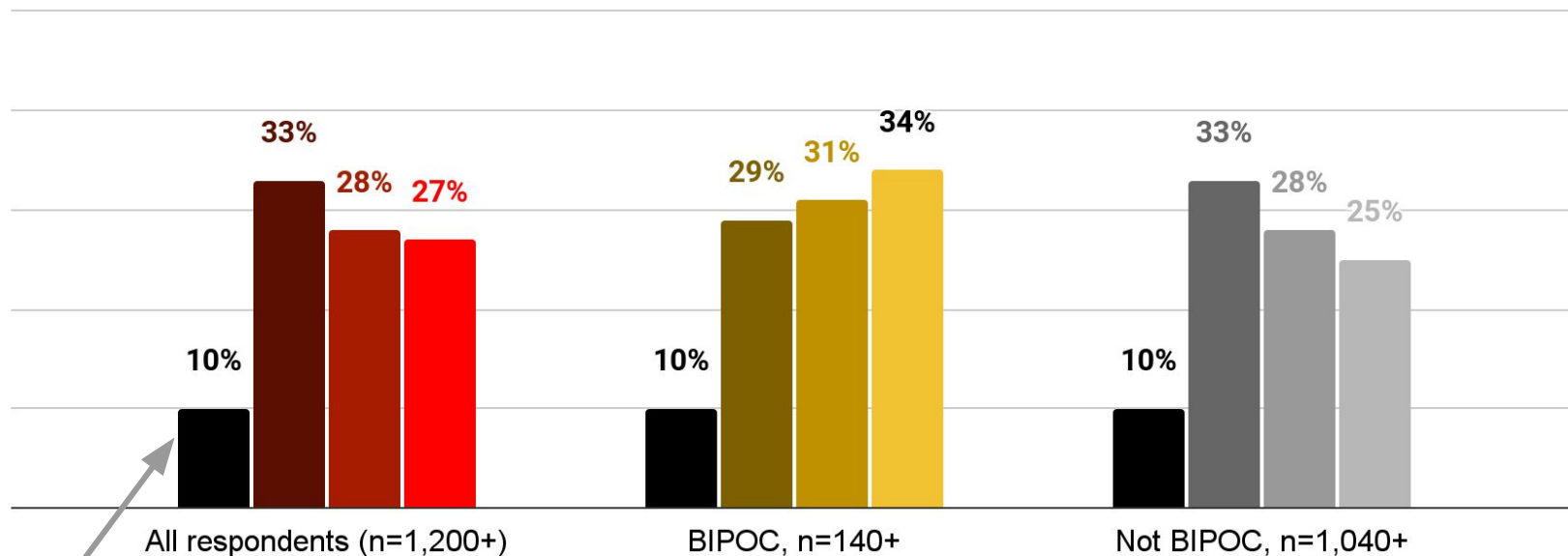
- A) Historically marginalized groups, specifically those defined by race or gender identity
- B) People who earned about 75% or more of their income from the Performing Arts, pre-COVID
- C) People who have reported higher levels of worry and despair over the past 12 months

Likelihood to leave the field (n=1,200+)



BIPOC respondents report an increase in likelihood to leave the Performing Arts in the next 5 years.

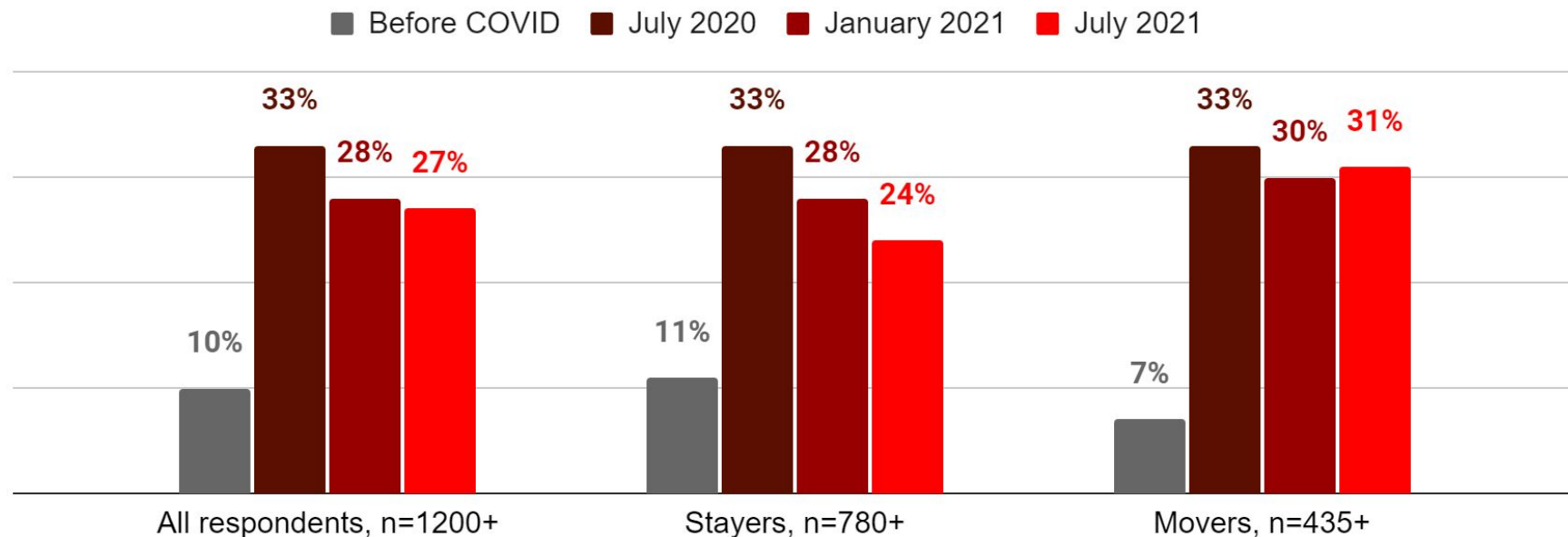
Likelihood to leave the Performing Arts, by BIPOC identification



Pre-COVID, about 10% of all subgroups on this chart indicated they were likely to leave the field in the next 5 years.

Performing arts workers who have moved during COVID are slightly more likely to leave the field than those who have not.

Likelihood to leave the Performing Arts, by whether respondents have moved during COVID

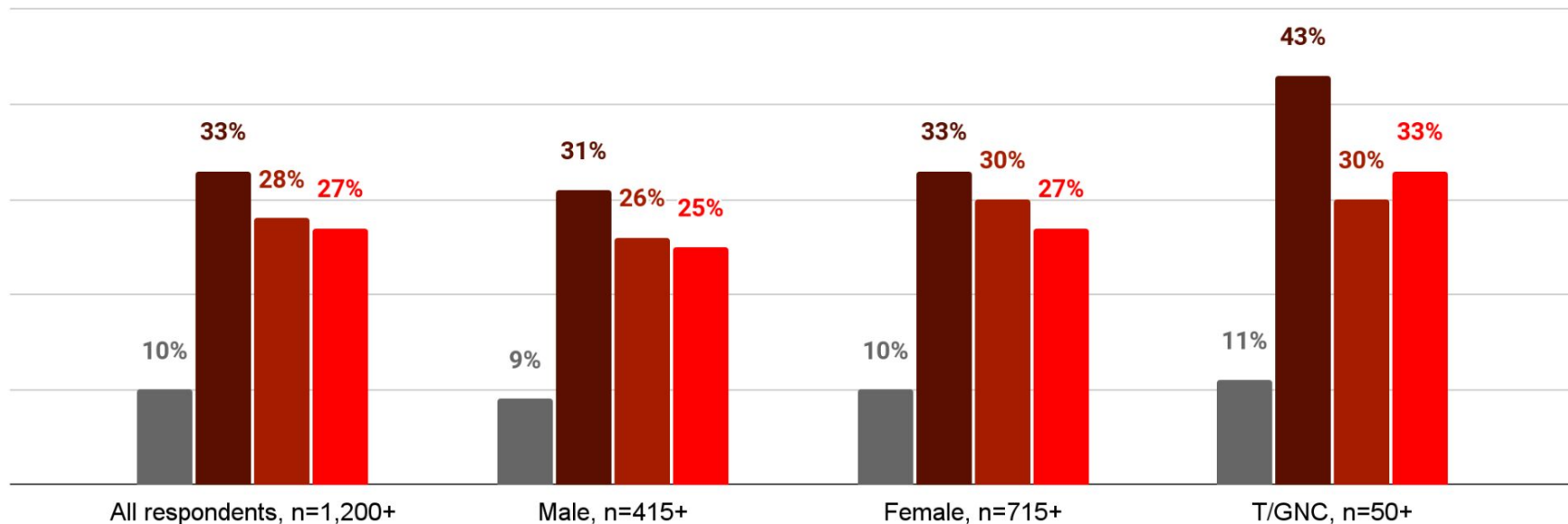


Pre-COVID estimates of potential attrition are based on respondents' feedback in July 2020.

Female- and nonbinary-identifying respondents are slightly more likely to leave the field than male respondents.

Likelihood to leave Performing Arts in next 5 years, by gender identity

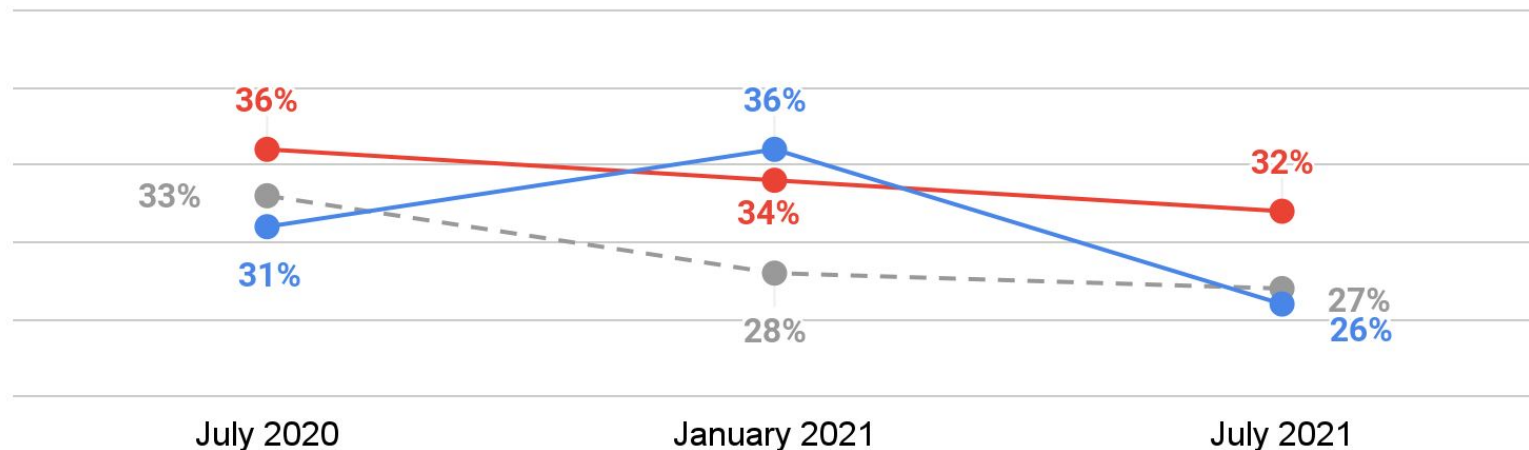
■ Pre-COVID ■ July 2020 ■ January 2021 ■ July 2021



Respondents who experienced worry or hopelessness “nearly every day” report persistently high intent to leave the field.

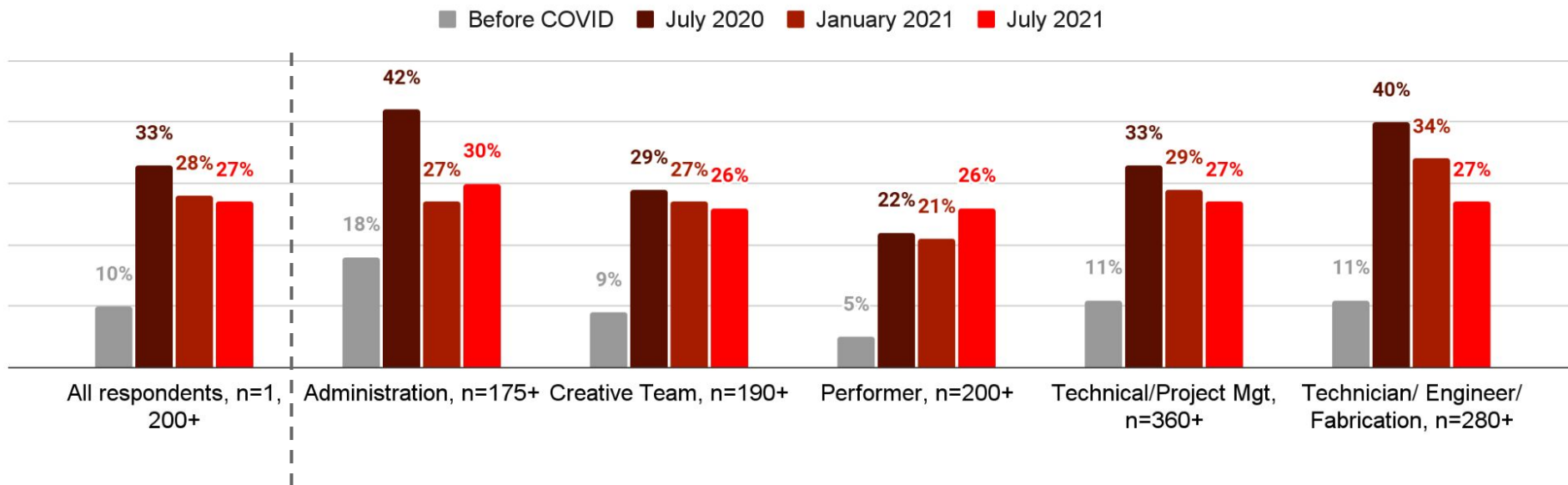
Likelihood to leave Performing Arts in the next 5 years, by reported frequency of feelings of anxiety/despair

- All respondents (n=1,200+)
- HH Pulse, "nearly every day," n=215+
- HH Pulse, no symptoms felt "nearly every day," n=1,000+



People in certain occupations are regaining confidence faster than others, while some have lost confidence since January.

Likelihood to leave the Performing Arts by primary occupation



Individual resilience, and confidence in the Performing Arts field can be strengthened by specific coping strategies. *Return to the Stage* identified eight unique strategies for participants to respond to.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
------------------------	---------------------------

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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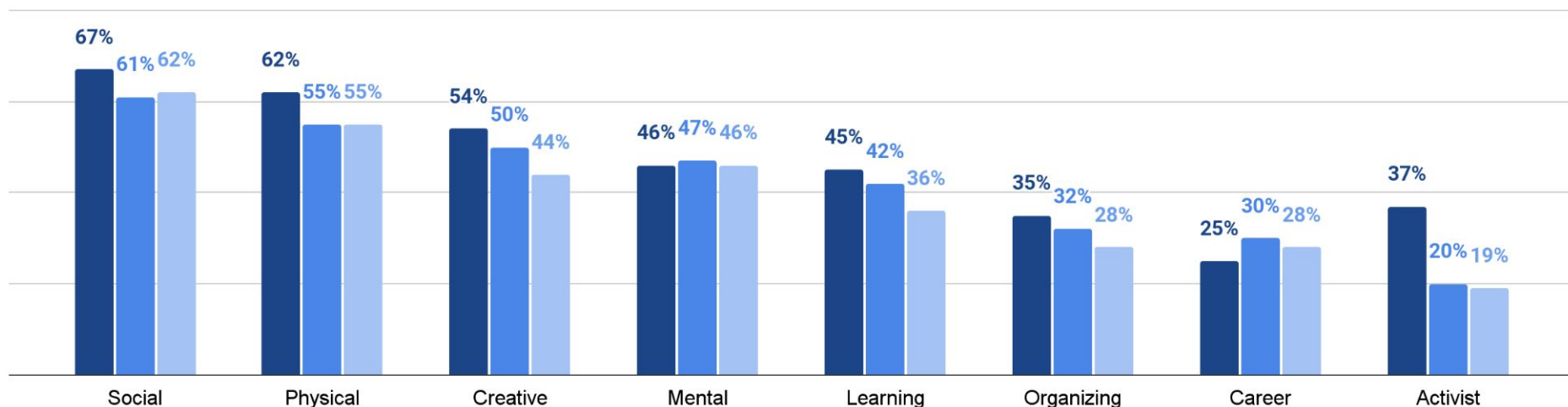
Physical strategies	Exercise, training
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Social strategies	Connecting with friends/colleagues, social experiences with people in my household
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The relative popularity of coping strategies has remained stable, with a few exceptions. The range of strategies workers use has narrowed.

Coping strategies, by survey wave

■ July 2020 (n=3,000+) ■ January 2021 (n=1,900+) ■ July 2021 (n=1,240)



62% → 45% → 40%

The number of strategies used continues to narrow. In July 2020, 62% of respondents indicated they were utilizing 4+ coping strategies, while in July 2021 just 40% are utilizing 4+ strategies.

Performing Arts workers use these coping strategies to protect their well-being, but more and more report using them to also improve their finances and to improve the Performing Arts community.

	It makes me feel better		It could improve my finances		Good for the Performing Arts	
	Jan. '21	July '21	Jan. '21	July '21	Jan. '21	July '21
Mental (n=570+)	98%	97%	5%	49%	11%	46%
Social (n=760+)	97%	98%	7%	46%	14%	44%
Physical (n=680+)	95%	97%	6%	47%	13%	42%
Creative (n=545+)	88%	97%	31%	52%	40%	51%
Organizing (n=345+)	88%	97%	14%	50%	22%	47%
Activist (n=235+)	76%	98%	14%	57%	57%	71%
Learning (n=445+)	59%	93%	62%	65%	42%	54%
Career (n=340+)	42%	93%	89%	84%	25%	46%

What the colors mean: The shading indicates an increase in the percentage of respondents to connect a specific coping strategy with a specific motivation. The lightest blue, for *Activist/It makes me feel better*, indicates an increase of at least 10% between January and July 2021. The darkest shade of blue, for *Career/It makes me feel better*, indicates an increase of over 50%.

Changing Priorities and Metrics of Success

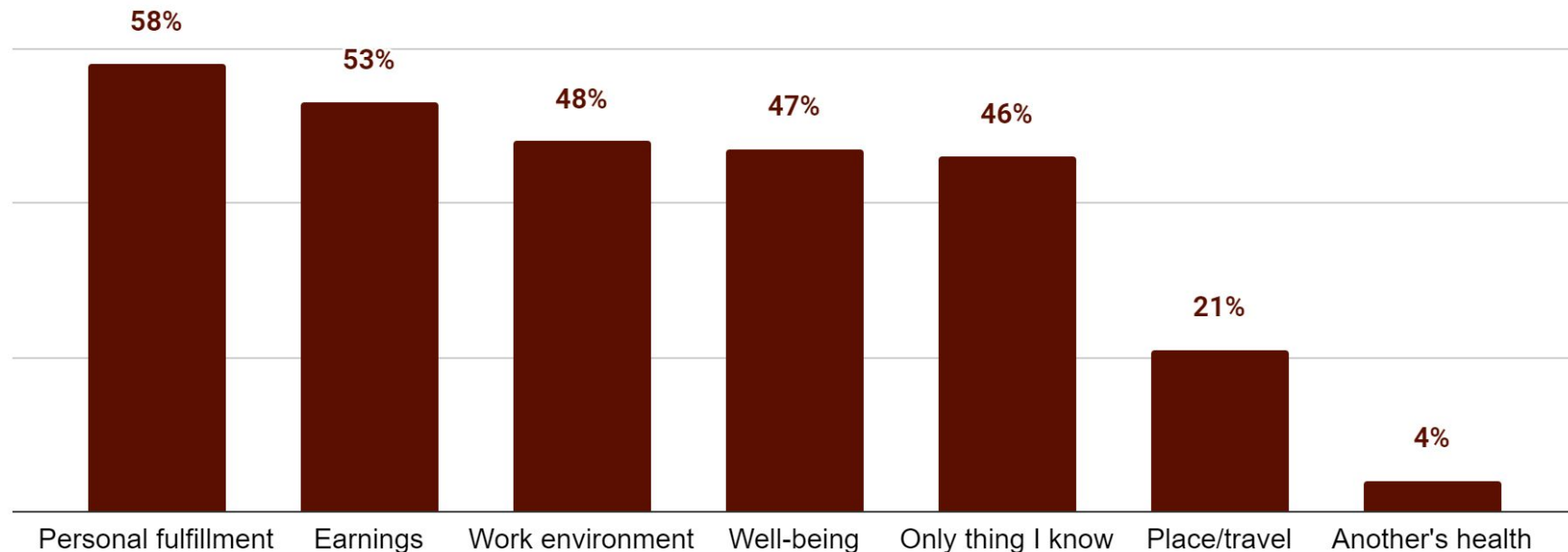
Being forced to pause or pivot their Performing Arts careers has provided people with a rare chance to separate their work from their personal sense of fulfillment. Prior to the pandemic there was little opportunity to stop and reflect, whereas workers have now had the opportunity to reconsider why they are staying in or leaving the Performing Arts.

The same factors that keep people in a job or industry can drive certain people to look for better opportunities - from salary or wages, to personal fulfillment, to the enjoyment of colleagues and the social network that comes with a particular role or affiliation. We felt it was appropriate to explore how *all* respondents prioritized the same set of motivating factors, whether they planned to stay in or leave the Performing Arts.

The order of priorities among those choosing to stay is consistent, regardless of race, gender, and years on the job. But among those likely to leave, a clear distinction emerges: **BIPOC respondents are much more likely to leave the field for their well-being. Among all other groups of 'leavers' earnings are the most commonly cited reason.** For BIPOC 'leavers' earnings come in third, after well-being and work environment.

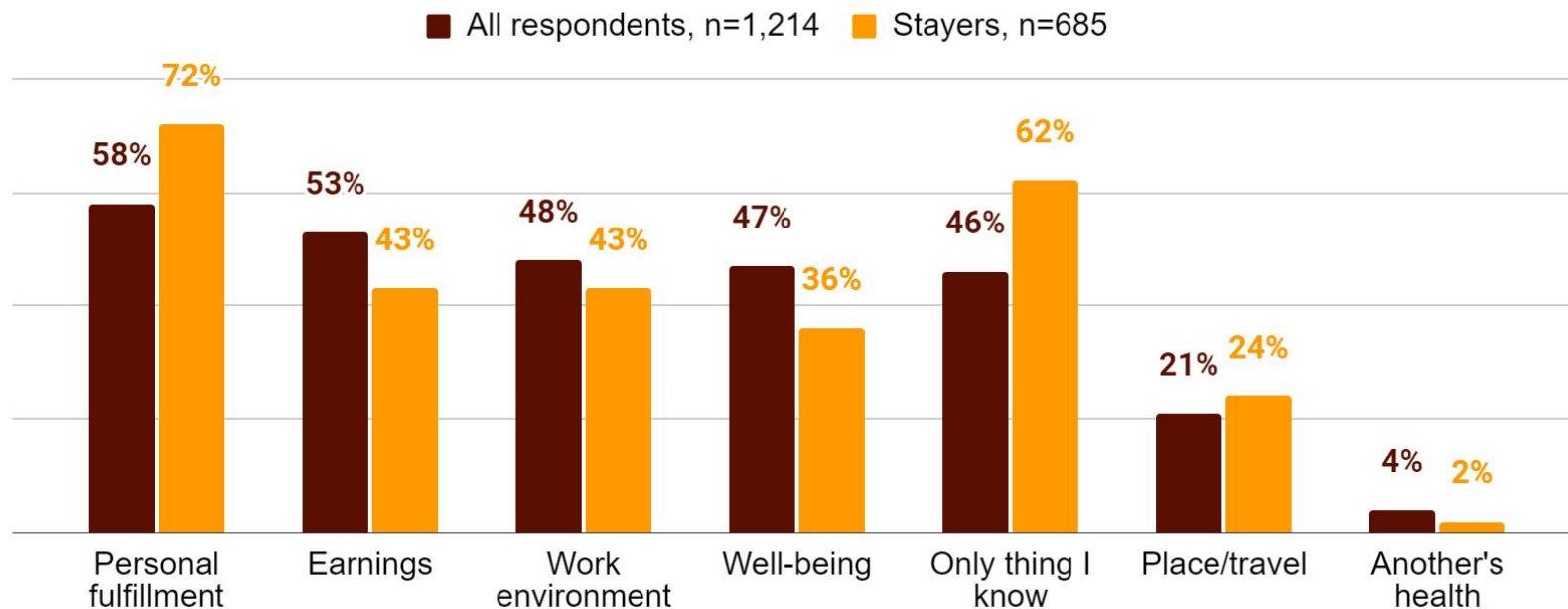
Earnings and personal fulfillment vie for highest priority in respondents' motivation to stay in or leave the field. This pattern remains is consistent across racial and gender subgroups.

Key factors informing decision to stay in or leave the Performing Arts, n=1,214



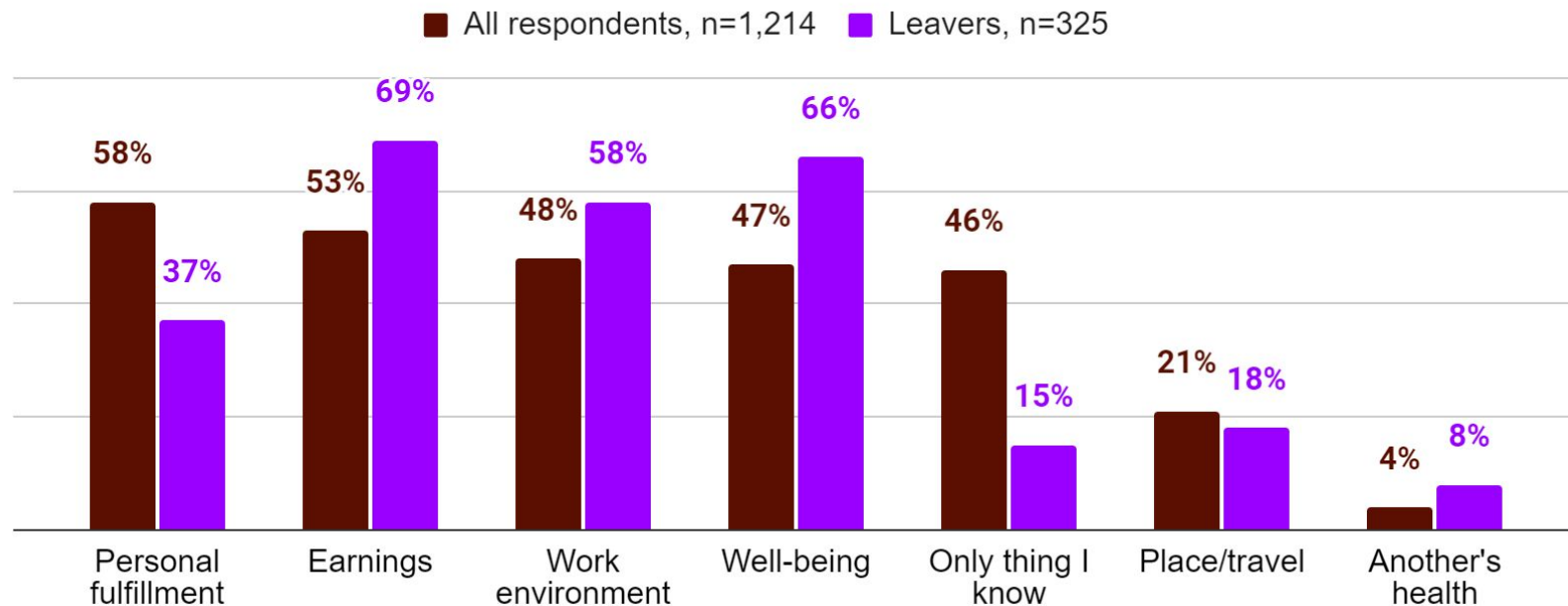
Motivation to *stay in* the Performing Arts is most often tied to fulfillment and a sense that the field is the only thing respondents know.

Motivation to stay in or leave the Performing Arts, by intention to stay in the field



Motivation to *leave* the Performing Arts is most directly tied to earnings, work environment, and well-being.

Motivation to stay in or leave the Performing Arts, by intent to leave



Well-being tops earnings and work environment for BIPOC respondents. This ordering of priorities is notably different from non-BIPOC and other subgroups.

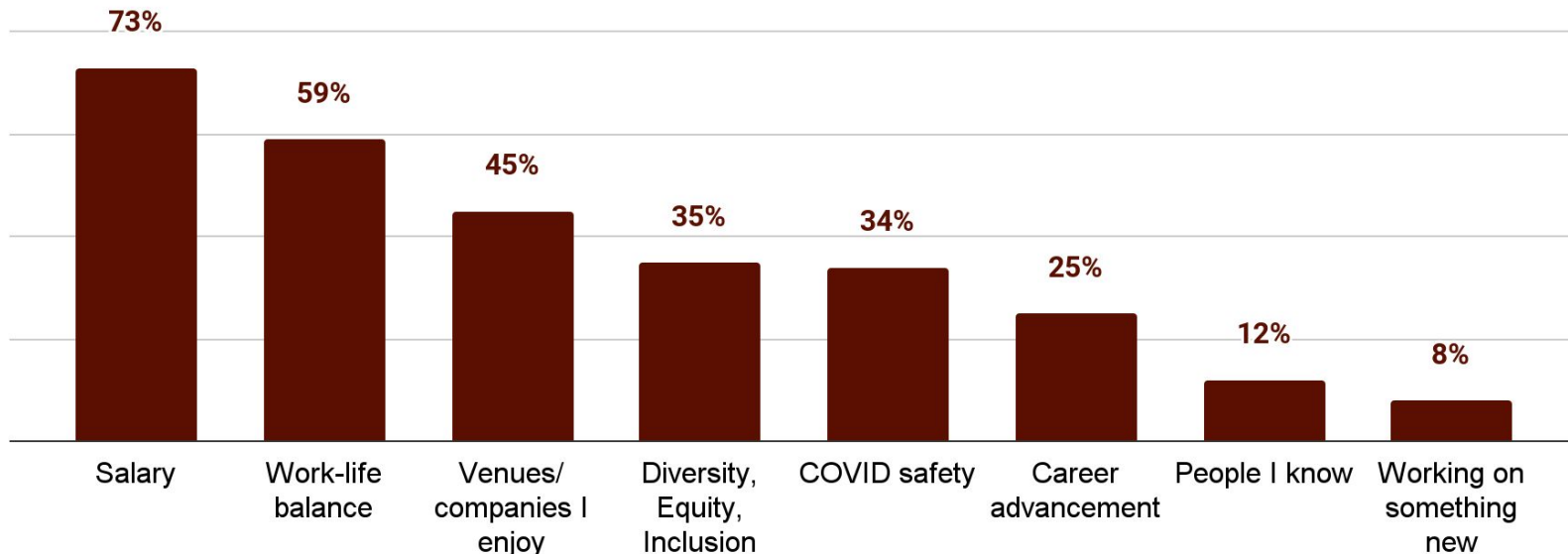
Across subgroups defined by gender identity and tenure, two-thirds of “leavers” cite earnings as a primary factor in their decision to exit the Performing Arts. **In contrast, the most common factor cited by BIPOC leavers is well-being.**

This single point exists in a complex environment. For example, proportionally more BIPOC respondents reported having moved house during COVID than non-BIPOC respondents. Given this and other factors that could reasonably impact well-being, it is important for future research using this data to explore the connections between attrition factors and lived experience.

	Earnings	Well-being	Work Environment
All respondents, n=325	69%	66%	58%
BIPOC, n=49	49%	57%	51%
Not BIPOC, n=262	72%	68%	58%
Female, n=196	66%	65%	59%
Male, n=103	71%	64%	52%
<10 YRS, n=88	76%	70%	64%
10+ YEARS, n=224	68%	66%	57%

Individual priorities highlight a desire for positive financial and workplace outcomes, across all respondents. Working with familiar collaborators and creating new content take a back seat.

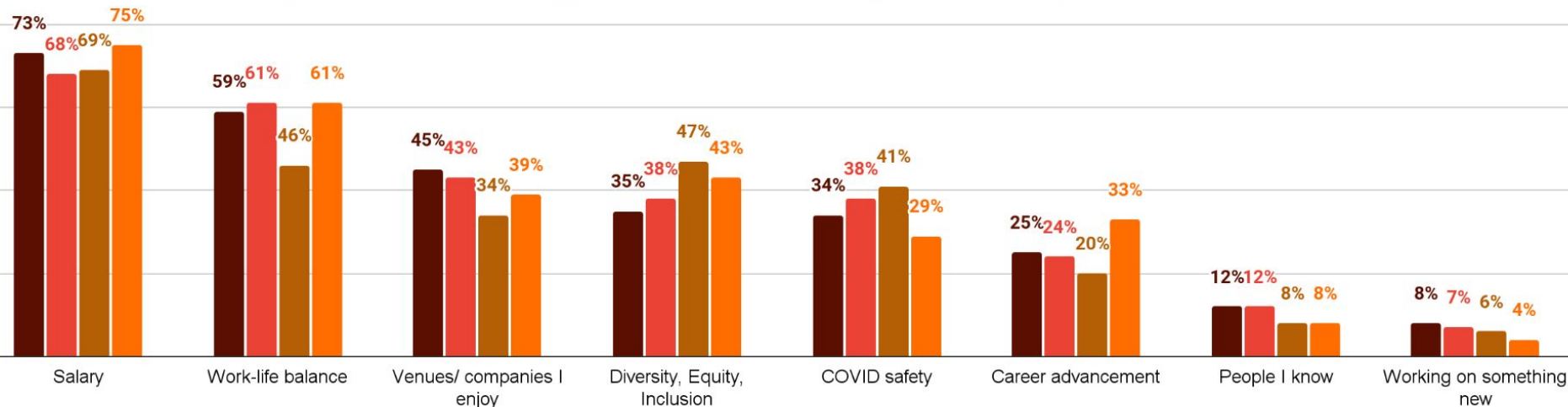
Priorities on returning to the Performing Arts, n=1,261



Compensation is the highest priority across several groups. DEI ranks higher for BIPOC, female, and younger respondents than for July 2021 respondents overall.

Priorities on return to the Performing Arts, by select characteristics

■ All respondents, n=1,261 ■ Female respondents, n=712 ■ BIPOC, n=143 ■ Under 40, n=623



Individual priorities and measures of success have shifted significantly.

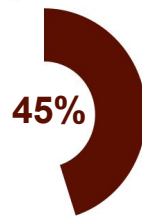
The July 2021 survey included several questions about previous measures of success and priorities for the near future. Our analysis reveals a striking shift.

Responses reinforce the perception that the Performing Arts is at an inflection point, at both the organizational and the individual levels. Pre-pandemic measures of success are being questioned as priorities realign and alternatives are being explored.

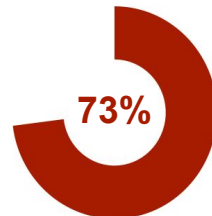
Our takeaway is that yesterday's values cannot - and should not - measure tomorrow's accomplishments.

(n=1,200+)

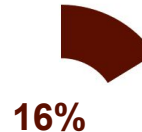
Salary, past success



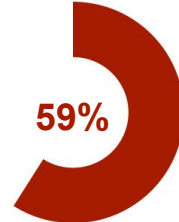
Salary, priority now



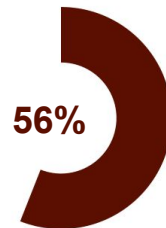
Work-life balance, past success



Work-life balance, priority now



People I'm with, past success



People I'm with, priority now



Worker Outlook on the Field

Optimism that the Performing Arts field will return is high. But how the March 2020 shutdowns were handled and whether respondents were hired back for their pre-pandemic job has had understandable impact on whether they see a bright future.

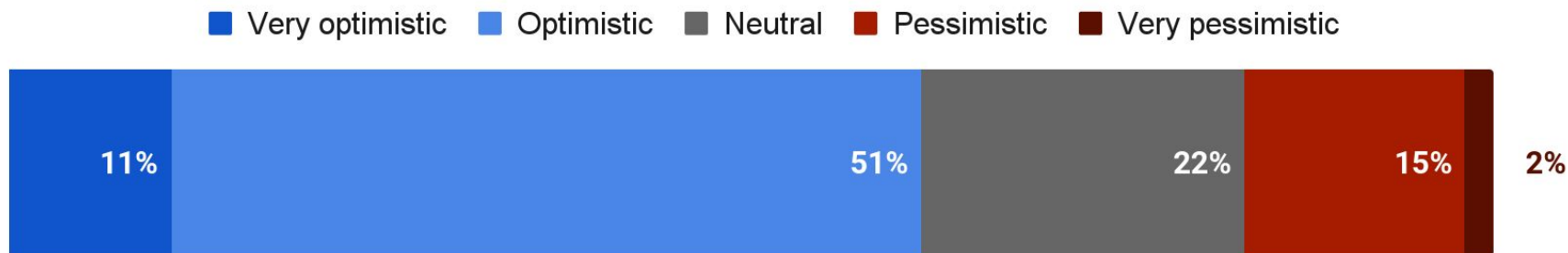
Also notable is how many workers express ambivalence about the future of the field.

In July 2020 and January 2021, respondents shared their hopes for the field. From expanded digital offerings, to a more welcoming and inclusive workplace, to simply having the opportunity to return to work, Performing Arts workers conveyed a wish to return - however was possible and safe. Even as early as January 2021, two-thirds of respondents were looking for work, whether in the Performing Arts or another field (n=1,902).

In practical terms, respondents also reported a strong inclination to get vaccinated in January 2021. As of July 2021, the data shows this group has mostly been able to make good on that promise, with over 98% reporting they are vaccinated or have an appointment to do so. In the July 2020 study, some questioned the scale of the pandemic response, but a year later nearly all participants had taken steps to protect their own health and the health of their community. This suggests to us that the Performing Arts workforce has retained its capacity to dream, and as importantly, its capacity to take concrete action to realize its dreams.

About two-thirds of respondents express optimism for the field. A fifth are neutral.

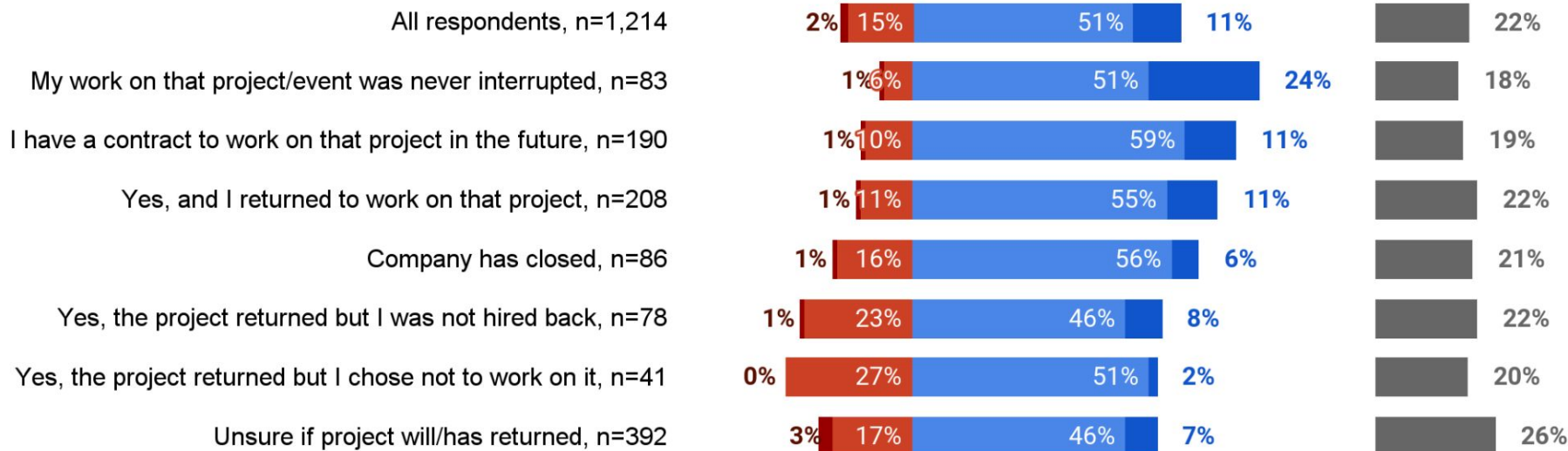
Outlook for the Performing Arts, n=1,214



The degree to which workers have, or have not, returned to their pre-pandemic jobs correlates with levels of optimism for the field overall.

Optimism for the field, by status of pre-COVID projects and work status

■ Very Pessimistic ■ Pessimistic ■ Optimistic ■ Very optimistic ■ Neutral



97%

In January 2021, 97% of respondents said they *wanted* to get the vaccine or had already received it

98%

In July 2021, 98% of respondents *have already gotten* the vaccine or have an appointment scheduled ($n=1,271$)

Key takeaways from the July 2021 survey

Performing Arts workers have experienced an emotional and economic roller coaster for well over a year. In light of this turmoil, it is somewhat surprising that likelihood of attrition has held steady at just over quarter of Return to the Stage respondents. There are many reasons underlying any individual's decision to leave the Performing Arts, but it's crucially important to note that BIPOC workers' exits are most strongly linked to well-being, while many other demographic subgroups cite earning potential as the most common motivator. **While pay transparency and higher compensation are high priorities for everyone, they will have to be combined with efforts to support, or create, well-being for BIPOC talent.**

A major values shift is underway. The desire to work with enjoyable colleagues and "important" employers has taken a back seat to work-life balance and compensation. As in other industries, particularly restaurants and hospitality, workers who may have been unaffiliated with any employer for a year's time are approaching re-entry from a position of empowerment. Workers appear ready to insist that employers (and middle managers) appreciate their full humanity, not just value added to the workplace or project. There is hope that this can happen. Many Performing Arts organizations have attempted to refashion themselves to be more flexible, welcoming, and supportive. Broadly, we see that **the Performing Arts workforce is serious about health** - both in terms of vaccinations and creating healthy, sustainable work environments.

The range and mix of coping techniques remains diverse. There is much more to be understood about how this workforce handles emotional, economic, and industry stress. We have preliminary evidence that level of education, income prior to COVID, and a sense that an individual's actions help the Performing Arts all tie to workers' emotional resilience.

What's next for *Return to the Stage*

This study has reached its initial conclusion, and we thank the thousands of participants, dozens of planning partners, and supportive colleagues, families and friends whose efforts have helped make this a success. We thank you for your candor and willingness to share your fears and concerns. If there is a singular message from this study, it is that the most essential part of the Performing Arts, its workers, remain incredibly vulnerable.

When we started this voluntary initiative in April 2020, there was no way we could have known that almost 18 months later, the pandemic would still be galloping through communities and we would be working through a tidal wave of civil rights activism. There is still so much to be learned from and about the Performing Arts workforce. Our hope is that this research can provide a springboard for further discovery, discussion, and change.

In the coming months, we will be working with several colleagues to identify ways to keep plumbing *Return to the Stage* for insights. Possible future work that uses this research can include:

- Peer-reviewed publication
- Presentations to industry professionals and funders ([contact](#) us if you'd like us to visit with your team or group)
- Support for additional research on the Performing Arts workforce
- Guidance for other rapid response studies

-- David McGraw and Meg Friedman