



Ontario Arts Engagement Study

Summary

Commissioned by
Ontario Arts Council

September 2011



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

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Overview of the Study

- The Ontario Arts Engagement Study is an assessment of patterns engagement in arts activities amongst Ontario residents, commissioned by the Ontario Arts Council (Ontario, Canada).
- Traditionally, measurement systems for arts participation have focused on attendance-based activities. As a result, informal and participatory forms of engagement have not been a priority. Other researchers have called for a broader and more inclusive definition of ‘culture’ which captures the interests and practices of a more diverse public. This study addresses both audience-based and participatory, or personal practice, activities.
- The objectives of the study are:
 - To produce an accurate, holistic picture of arts engagement in Ontario
 - To develop a measurement system and metric that can be used to track changes in engagement over time
 - To inform policy around efforts to increase engagement in arts activities
 - To inspire arts organizations in designing new programs and approaches to engaging existing and new audiences
- Data collection was completed by Ipsos Reid in May and June of 2011. A total of 1,594 telephone interviews were completed, including a general population sample of 1,300 and booster samples of certain sub-populations of interest, including visible minorities, Aboriginals and Francophones.
- The study builds on a body of arts and cultural participation research conducted by WolfBrown and other researchers. The two most prominent studies are a study of patterns of cultural engagement in California’s inland regions, commissioned by The James Irvine Foundation and available through www.irvine.org, and a study of cultural engagement in Greater Philadelphia which yielded the first construction of the Cultural Engagement Index. Further information on this study is available at www.philaculture.org.
- The report is organized in sections based on approach to analysis and specific topics as follows: 1) results by discipline; 2) results of arts engagement index; 3) additional findings related to setting, social bonding and bridging, and aboriginal activities; and 4) relationship between participatory and audience-based activities

Key Themes and Observations

- The 2011 Ontario Arts Engagement study reveals the multifaceted and pervasive nature of arts engagement throughout Ontario, from attending live arts events to downloading music to making crafts. Virtually all Ontarians take part in arts activities of some sort. For example, 99% of Ontarians engage at least once a year in any of the ten music activities included in the survey. The same is true for visual arts, crafts and film activities (98% prevalence) and also of reading and writing activities (99% prevalence). Over two-thirds of Ontarians engage at least once a year in any of the seven dance activities included in the survey, and 64% of Ontarians engage at least once a year in any of the five theatre activities included in the survey.
- With respect to individual activities, overall frequency of participation is highest for ‘reading articles in newspapers or magazines’ (94%), ‘watching movies on a computer, TV or DVD’ (94%), ‘listening to music on a local radio station’ (90%), ‘reading paperback or hard cover books for enjoyment’ (88%) and ‘listening to DVDs, records or tapes at home, in the car or anywhere else’ (83%).
 - When the definition of arts engagement is expanded to include participation via electronic, print and digital media, a different picture emerges. Media-based consumption reaches deeply into the Ontario population and plays a pivotal role in the overall landscape of arts engagement.
 - This raises important questions about how to strengthen connections between nonprofit arts organizations and various media channels. For example, how might music organizations reach more deeply into the population through radio and recordings?
- A strong correlation between age and participation via electronic media was found. Sixty-eight percent of Ontarians under age 35 listen to streaming radio online at least once a year, and 75% download music at least once a year.
 - Online media is a central aspect of the arts experience of younger adults, and, increasingly, many older adults. Programming efforts to increase arts engagement amongst younger adults should incorporate online tools and activities.
 - Conversely, how could arts organizations help older Ontarians’ become savvy consumers of online media navigate the overwhelming choices (e.g., online music services)?
- While media-based participation is widespread in comparison to other arts activities included in the survey, Ontarians attach a proportionately higher level of importance or “salience” to attending live events, such as visiting museums and attending plays or musicals with professional actors. For example, 51% of Ontarians reported visiting any art museum or art gallery at least once in the past year. Of those who did, 80% described this activity as being “very important” to them. Similarly, 55% of Ontarians reported attending a play or musical with professional actors at least once in the past year. Of those who did, 74% described this activity as being “very important” to them.
 - Despite the convenience and ubiquitous nature of media-based participation, results also point to the importance of live events to the arts ecology, and the high value that Ontarians attach to them.
 - Frequency is only one aspect of arts engagement, and should not be the sole basis of evaluation. Many Ontarians attach a high degree of importance to activities that they do infrequently. The importance or “salience” associated with different arts activities speaks to their value in the eyes of Ontarians, and tells a different story than frequency.

Key Themes and Observations

- Several participatory activities also garnered higher than average salience levels, especially ‘dancing socially at night clubs, parties or community dances.’ Forty-three percent of Ontarians reported dancing socially at least once in the past year. Of those who did, 61% described this activity as being “very important” to them.
 - These and other findings related to participatory arts activities raise questions about what arts organizations and policymakers might do to build bridges between participatory forms of engagement and professionally-produced performances and exhibits.
- Many regional differences in patterns of arts engagement were observed. Generally, City of Toronto residents are categorically more active than residents of other Ontario regions. Ontarians who live in the Central region are the next most highly engaged.
 - A number of factors might explain regional variations, including differences in the availability of arts and cultural programs and demographic and cultural differences (e.g., the City of Toronto and urban areas overall have younger and more diverse populations). How might access to arts programs of all types – participatory, attendance-based and media-based – be more equitably provided?
- Further analysis of regional differences focused on comparing urban and rural area residents and looking across communities by size of population. Urban area residents (predominantly City of Toronto) are generally more engaged. However, differences in engagement are primarily within audience-based activities such as attending live performing arts and visiting art museums, whereas engagement in inventive and interpretive activities, community-based arts events and media-consumption is relatively equivalent. A similar pattern is observed for smaller versus larger communities.
 - If we assume that audience-based engagement in rural and low population areas is hampered by lack of infrastructure (i.e., nonprofit arts organizations), does it make sense to simply build more infrastructure? Results suggest that concentrating on participatory activities and community-based arts events may prove a more effective strategy of increasing engagement in infrastructure-poor areas.
- Given the expanded view of arts activity covered in the study, important differences in engagement between different demographic cohorts were revealed. For example, visible minorities overall are more engaged in arts learning and skills acquisition activities (e.g., taking lessons or classes), especially dance; while Blacks are more likely to attend community-based arts events. Racial differences in arts engagement are partly driven by age, as respondents of colour are, on average, seven years younger than white respondents (41 vs. 48 years old, respectively).
 - Increasing arts engagement amongst minority communities will require an emphasis on participatory and educational programming.
- Aboriginal respondents reported significantly higher levels of engagement in inventive activities (e.g., write fiction), arts learning (e.g., take music classes) and community-based arts events (e.g., dance socially), compared to non-Aboriginals.
 - Generally, results point to the need for culturally-sensitive policies and programs.
- Age is highly correlated with arts engagement. Although levels of engagement in attendance-based activities like visiting art museums is relatively constant across age groups, Ontarians under 35 are twice as likely to be engaged in personal practice activities, such as playing an instrument, as those over 65.
 - Clearly, active forms of arts participation are an attractive entry point for younger Ontarians. What role should professional nonprofit arts groups play in this arena?

Key Themes and Observations

- Respondents who are more connected to their own cultural heritage are more likely to be engaged in arts activities overall. This is also the case with those who are interested in others' cultural traditions. Thus, one might infer that heightening awareness and sensitivity to diverse cultures is a strategy for increasing participation overall.
 - What kinds of cross-cultural opportunities could spark interest and further engage various cultural communities across Ontario?
- The study also investigated the settings in which Ontarians engage in the arts. Overall, the home is the most common setting for arts activities across three of the four disciplines. Informal spaces, like restaurants, parks and outdoor spaces are also frequently utilized spaces for music and dance activities. For example, 48% of Ontarians who reported any dance activity indicated that 'restaurants, bars and night clubs' are a setting for their dance activities.
 - While this is still an emerging area of research, results suggest further thinking about the important role that setting plays in arts experiences of all kinds, particularly if participation can be increased by varying the setting. For example, can certain types of arts programs be re-contextualized for a different audience by switching to a different type of setting?
 - How might more Ontarians be engaged in home-based arts activities, if the home is truly the cradle of creativity, as results suggest?
- A number of analyses were run to better understand the relationships between participatory forms of engagement and attendance. Overall, engagement in participatory arts activities is associated with higher levels of attendance at both community-based and professional performances, sometimes at a rate of two or three times higher than those who do not engage in participatory activities.
 - Although causality cannot be proven in one direction or another, a clear symbiosis is evident between participatory engagement and attendance. This only underscores the need for "ecological thinking" in both policy and practice.
- Media-based engagement also corresponds to higher levels of attendance at live events. For example, those who watch dance on TV at least once a week attend professional dance performances 3.5 times on average a year, compared with 1.5 times for those who never watch dance on TV. Additionally, those who listen to music on a local radio station at least once a month attend professional music concerts an average of 6 times per year in comparison to 4 times per year for those who don't listen at all.
 - The strong association between media-based consumption and attendance is further evidence of the important role that media plays in the overall arts ecology, both as a delivery channel and as a means of increasing awareness, encouraging attendance at live programs, and building and sustaining interest in the art forms.
- Overall, results point to the interdependencies of different types of arts activities within the landscape of arts engagement and challenge the arts community and its funders to consider the totality of engagement when looking to increase participation. There are many implications of this research for arts organizations, funders and policymakers (see page 89). Increasing arts engagement in Ontario will require making new connections between different parts of the ecosystem and tapping into deep veins of cultural value.

Implications for Arts Providers, Funders and Policymakers

- Arts engagement is multi-faceted and institution-based practices (e.g., attending live arts events) are considered part of a broader sphere of involvement in creative activities where one consumes, attends, participates, creates and learns about arts and culture. Artists, administrators, board members, funders and policymakers now must reach for a more holistic view of the arts ecology.
- Policy-makers and arts institutions should consider the variety of ways in which the people enjoy the arts, and think about new ways of building bridges between different parts of the ecology, particularly the media sphere.
 - How can popular media be leveraged to increase the range of outreach and audience development potential for arts organizations?
 - How will online activities, such as downloading music, change the way we deliver our artistic product? How can organizations get ahead of the curve and meet our audiences, especially the younger ones, where they are, and where they want to be?
- The question of “where” arts participation happens, and how much emphasis should be given to informal vs. formal settings is an essential conversation for arts organizations when considering programming and audience development.
 - How can arts groups reach people in their homes and in community-based settings? What can policy makers and funders do to address this issue?
- If demographic patterns influence engagement across different regions (e.g., regions with younger and more diverse populations exhibit higher levels of engagement), policymakers and funders should consider different approaches to encouraging arts engagement overall.
 - Engagement in participatory activities remains relatively constant or close to average across regions, suggesting that incorporating more of these types of activities, like singing or doing crafts, into regular programming, or utilizing alternative venues for audience-based activities (e.g., concerts in local libraries), is a viable method for increasing engagement in low population areas.
- Thinking about engaging diverse audiences means thinking broadly about arts activities in general.
 - Conceiving programs that harness interest in participatory activities, like dancing, playing music, acting and storytelling, could help build relationships with certain populations, such as Aboriginal people.
- Findings point to the key role that the arts can play in social bridging and bonding, which are both critical to a healthy arts ecology. Solidifying this message could help to connect the arts to larger community issues, such as the need for tolerance and dialogue amongst diverse communities.
- Overall, this study’s findings serve to underscore the interconnections between various types of activities and disciplines – attendance, media and arts creation. Increasing engagement will require innovative approaches and collaborations across disciplines and delivery channels (e.g., radio and classical music concerts, or reading plays and attending live theatre performances).

Sound Bytes

- 83% of Ontarians listen to music on a local radio station at least once a week.
- 45% listen to music through a website or other streaming radio
- 79% of Ontarians read articles in newspapers or magazine at least once a week.
- 60% attend professional music concerts at any frequency, another 55% attend professional stage plays or musicals and 51% visit art museums or art galleries
- Of the 43% of Ontarians who dance socially, 61% said it is “very important” to them
- 80% of respondents who visit art museums and galleries also reported it is “very important” to them
- The home is the predominant setting for engaging in music (89%), dance (51%) and visual arts (71%) activities.
- 45% and 48% of respondents do music and dance activities in restaurants, bars or night clubs, respectively
- Ontarians who engage in participatory music activities attend concerts by professional musicians at a rate that is two to three times higher than those who do not
- 95% of Ontarians said they would like to be doing more arts activities than they are doing now

Data Collection and Weighting

- Ipsos Reid, a Toronto-based market research company, administered data collection through random digit dialing of residents 18 years or over throughout Ontario.
- A total of 12,672 calls were made, with 10,194 refusals and 884 terminations, for an overall cooperation rate of 13%.
- Other barriers to participation included “soft appointments,” in which potential respondents requested a return call at a later time, and did comply; un-assigned or disconnected numbers, language barriers.
- An initial test of the survey by telephone yielded revisions to the protocol in order to facilitate ease of questioning and shorten time required to complete the survey. The average completion time was 15 minutes.
- To reduce bias and create a representative sample of Ontario, weights were applied for region, age, gender, gender by age (i.e., men 18 to 34 years old), language (i.e., Francophone population), ethnicity, and aboriginal status. In order to calculate weights, target percentages (see appendix) based on natural incidence of each analysis group were inputted in a Quantum, a statistical analysis software program, and compared to distribution of sample respondents. This is an iterative process in which each individual weight by region, age, etc. is applied and then re-adjusted in order to achieve target percentages within the general population.
- Confidence intervals for the overall main sample (n=1,300) is +/- 2.7%.

Questionnaire Design

- The questionnaire was based on a survey of cultural engagement in Greater Philadelphia. This survey is adapted for Ontario and for an arts-specific focus with significant input from Ontario Arts Council staff.
- Respondents were asked about their involvement in 45 different arts activities, including:
 - Music, dance, theatre and drama activities
 - Reading and writing activities
 - Visual art and craft activities
 - Other activities focusing on online engagement
- Within each discipline, a cross-section of activities was queried to capture the full range of engagement, including inventive, interpretive, curatorial and observational modes of participation (based on the “Five Modes of Participation” framework illustrated on the next page)
- The activity lists covered arts learning (e.g., taking lessons or classes).
- Several general questions explored respondents’ interest in exploring their own as well as others’ cultural heritage.
- A general indicator of latent demand was gleaned from a question of which, if any, of the activities mentioned in the survey the respondent would like to do more of in the future.
- To allow for comparison and to facilitate weighting (see page nine), respondent were asked to indicate their age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, occupational status and ethnicity.
- A copy of the questionnaire is included in the appendix.