



# Canada Council for the Arts

## Explore and Create

Qualitative Analysis of  
Grant Application Data, 2021

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# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Explore and Create is Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) grant program that funds Canadian artists, artistic groups and organizations. Under this program, CCA conducted the competition in October 2020, wherein 1,665 applicants won grants to support them in researching, creating and disseminating their artwork.

The purpose of this report is to analyze the grant application data and help CCA to understand how the funds were utilized, the nature and inspiration behind the projects, the projects' contribution to artistic development and practice, and project timing and method of dissemination.

## Methodology

The application data was analyzed using a thematic coding methodology. An initial random sample was reviewed to create the codes based on the common themes. The codes were then refined in consultation with CCA officials. Based on the final coding scheme, each response was assigned one or more codes. After coding, tabulations were produced. These tabulations form the basis of this report.

One of the questions was analyzed qualitatively because of the complexity and the subtlety of the responses (i.e., application data).

# Executive Summary

## Grant Recipient Profile

Grants were split fairly evenly between the Research and Creation (57%) and the Concept to Realization (43%) components of the program. We also found that in 80% of cases, grants went to individuals as compared to organizations (11%) and groups (9%). Across artistic fields of practice, a slim plurality of grants (25%) were awarded to those working in Music and Sound, followed by the Visual Arts (18%) and Literature (18%).

The average grant size was \$28,213 overall. Among the two components average grants were \$19,082 for the Research and Creation, and about double that (\$40,256) for Concept to Realization.

## Nature of Artistic Work and Sources of Inspiration

The analysis suggests that the program has been a **catalyst for the production of new works** (i.e., according to 67% of grant applications).

In terms of the inspiration for their art, **personal experiences** were mentioned by most (54%). This was followed by a desire to illuminate/share with Canadians **the perspective of racialized or culturally diverse communities** (33%). Other artists also served as a major source of inspiration (24%).

# Executive Summary

## Expected Contributions to Artistic Development and Artistic Practice

Analysis suggests that **the program has contributed to the artistic development of grant recipients in many different ways**, such as by allowing them to complete an unfinished work, developing a larger/more ambitious work or developing their ability to digitize their work.

The following two main themes emerged from our analysis of responses on how projects could have **contributed to the advancement of their artistic practice**:

- The **expansion of professional networks or engagement in artistic collaborations to benefit the artistic practice/wider community of artists** (e.g., through artists with different skills, experiences and cultural background work together to create something new, and possibly unprecedented).
- **Innovating or developing a new creative approach or technique, often through "artistic experimentation"** (e.g., sign language stop-motion animation).

## Timing and Methods of Dissemination

The analysis suggests that **about half of the projects (48%) were expected to be disseminated no sooner than September 1, 2021**.

Among potential dissemination methods, live performances (e.g., concert, dance, theatre) and musical album launches were the most often mentioned.

Among the 432 applicants who indicated whether their work would be shared online, in-person or both, fully **70% expected to do this in person**.

# Objectives and Methodology



# Background and Objectives

“Explore and Create” is Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) grant program that funded Canadian artists, artistic groups and organizations, who were committed to the creation and dissemination of innovative, vibrant and diverse art.

Project funding in this program is delivered through two components: 1) “Research and Creation”, and 2) “Concept to Realization”. The latter offers support for all stages of an artistic project, whereas the former focuses on the initial stages.

The results of the October 2020 awarded 1,665 grants totaling over \$46 million to recipients in every province and territory and across all fields of artistic practice.

The analysis presented in this report is aimed at helping the Canada Council better understanding how the funds were used, including, the nature of and inspiration for projects, the projects’ contribution to artistic development and practice, and project timing and method of dissemination.

# Methodology

The results of this report are based on an analysis of information contained in 1,665 "Explore and Create" grant application forms of successful applications of October 2020 competition. Specifically, the responses to the following three grant application questions were analyzed:

1. Describe your project. Explain the inspiration for your project or why you wish to undertake it at this time. (approximately 750 words, 5,000 characters)
2. How will this project contribute to - your, or your group's, artistic development? - advance artistic practice? (approximately 500 words, 3,500 characters)
3. Provide a one-sentence summary of your project. If possible, use the format ACTIVITY, EVENT (if relevant) and DATES. (approximately 25 words, 150 characters)

# Methodology

The analysis consisted of the following 4-step process:

1. An initial random sample of responses from the grant application data set was reviewed to create coding categories.
2. The draft coding scheme was refined in consultation with CCA officials.
3. Based on the coding scheme, each response was assigned one or more categories/codes. Multiple codes could be used to analyze responses to grant application questions.
4. As responses were coded, categories were refined, added or grouped as needed based on the responses.

The recipient profiling information contained in the applications (i.e., program component, type of contact and field of practice) were linked to the analyzed responses to allow crosstabulations.

One of the questions was analyzed qualitatively because of the complexity and the subtlety of the responses (i.e., application data).

# Detailed Findings

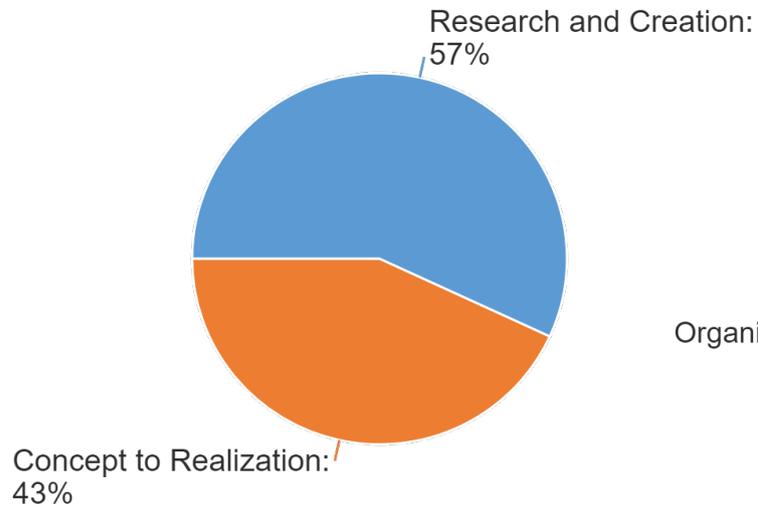


# Respondent Profile

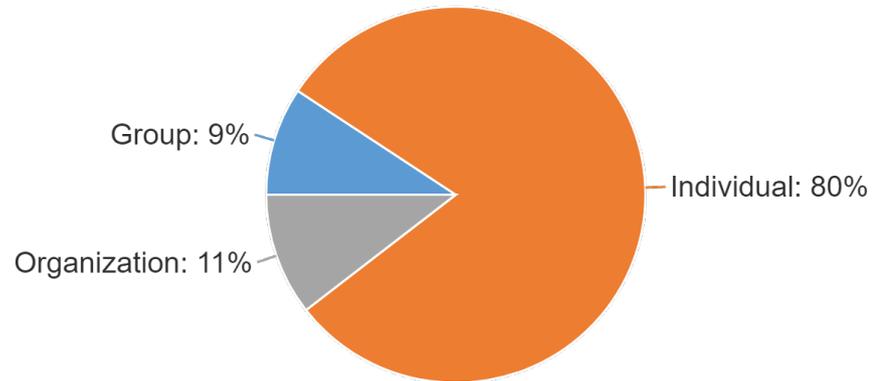
(based on all 1,665 grant applications)



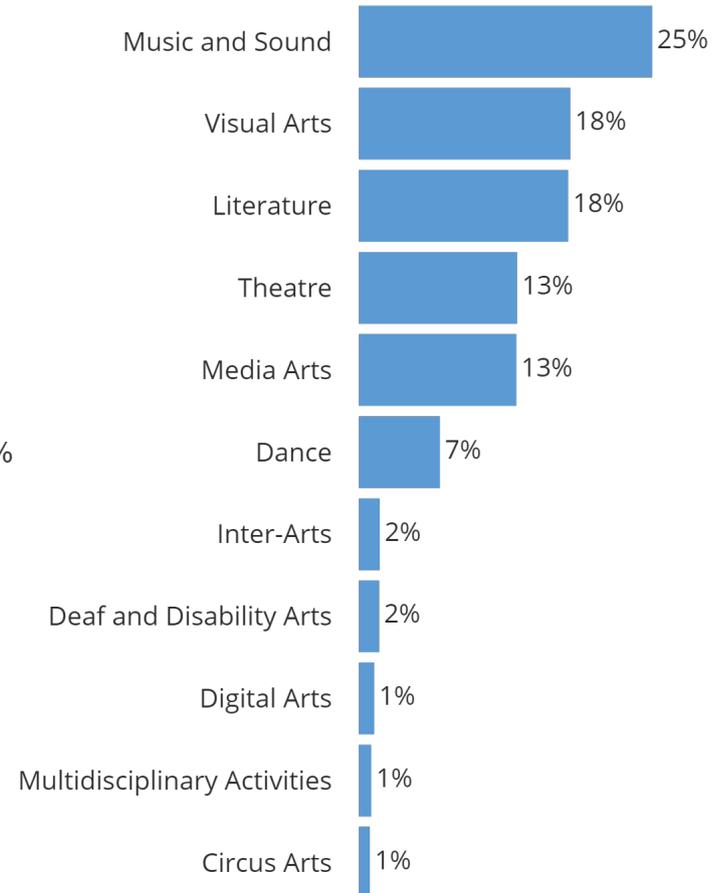
## Component



## Contact Type



## Field of Practice



# Average Grant

(in CAD \$)



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**By  
Component**

Both Components

**\$28,213**

Research and  
Creation

**\$19,082**

Concept to  
Realization

**\$40,256**

**By Contact  
Type**

Individuals

**\$25,650**

Groups

**\$34,663**

Organizations

**\$42,052**



# Project Description and Inspiration

## Application Question



Describe your project. Explain the inspiration for your project or why you wish to undertake it at this time.

For analyses, this question was divided into two parts:

1. Project description
2. Project inspiration

# Project Description and Inspiration

## Key Findings

The analysis reveals that **two-thirds** (67%) of 1,665 grants were to be used **to create a new work, or new work within an existing series** (e.g., second volume or part). Another **19%** used the funding to **develop a work they had started** before applying for the grant.

Collectively, the artists who received funding through the program were **inspired by a broad range of sources.**

The most common (mentioned by 54%) was their **personal story or experience** (e.g., autobiographical character, drawing on lived experiences or people they know or knew).

In many instances (33%) artists were inspired by or wanted to speak from the **perspective of a racialized person or culturally diverse community**. About one-quarter (24%) pointed to **other artists or personal heroes**, including living and dead, as a source of inspiration.

# Project Description and Inspiration



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## Selected Examples

### Personal Experience

*“...In my native Syria, I had published poetry and short stories, including a collection of short fiction called *The Sun’s Crazy Girl*. The publisher in this case was Syria’s own Ministry of Culture, but my words did not sit well with the regime’s most powerful men. My words landed me, on three occasions and over the course of twelve years, inside the crowded cells of some of Syria’s most notorious political prisons. Places where a sideways glance at a guard or talking back to an officer could lead to torture or death – with no recourse to any judiciary. My words literally got me into extremely hot water; freezing cold water, too....My hope now is that **my words will both convey my experience and allow the reader to make sense of it all**. How did I survive that ordeal? What price do I pay for reliving it to write this memoir? What **role did art play** as I struggled to endure my four thousand-plus days in those terrible jails? I am a visual artist as well as a writer, and for many years in prison I collected the colorful stones that came in our bowls of lentil soup...With my fellow prisoners, some of us well read, we reimagined the plays and books that had moved us. In one four-month span (November 2015 to February 2016), some 26,000 men, women and children from my war-torn country were welcomed – some by the Canadian government and some by community and church groups all across the country. **My family and I form just one background to this story, an important world story in which Canada has played a major part.**”*

*“The project for which I seek funding is a **memoir-style book of personal essays** called *Hello Google Am I Real?*. It will include 12-14 essays about **my journeys as a non-binary trans person recovering from alcoholism and trauma in my hometown of St. John’s, New Brunswick**. The pieces will explore how chosen families are formed, how young queer atheists reconcile their discomfort with a traditional god to make AA work for them, how love changes the game for socially ousted queers, and so many other themes familiar to the queer community but often completely absent from mainstream understanding of queerness, trauma, relationships, and addiction. It will also explore themes of coming out, rebirth, sexual freedom and homecoming. I returned home from Toronto after seven years with a deep sense that I would get well here, and the book will explore some of that journey.”*

*“**As a child of immigrants from India**, it was my only introduction to the violent and heroic past from the country of my ancestors. Indian history is not taught in Canadian schools, nor was information about monumental events in India easily accessible. ...I am aware that there are thousands of Indian-Canadians that are just as curious and unaware as I was growing up as both a Canadian and Indian girl...**The Canada Council (CC) grant will provide me with an opportunity to not only research and create a story that represents South Asians on the big screen**, but also educates audiences with accurate information about India’s colonial past.”*



# Project Description and Inspiration



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## Selected Examples

### Racialized, Culturally Diverse and Gender Diverse

*“The Long Walk Home’ is a work of speculative fiction born at the intersection of several longstanding **issues affecting marginalized groups – the obstacles and erasure faced by women and people-of-colour in science and academia, the disproportionate rates of murder and suicide among racialized LGBTQ+ individuals, and the recurrent scapegoating and persecution of the Jewish people and other minorities.** TLWH addresses each of these issues through the eyes of three main protagonists (alternating perspectives from one chapter to the next) who attempt to defy their apparent fates and bend the arc of history itself toward greater justice...Each of these three stories is rooted in the question of how the well-worn trope of time travel can be approached from a perspective of **communally-driven change rather than individualist adventure-seeking.** In mapping narratives across the difficult subjects of cyclical and historical trauma, and the hidden lives that endured beneath them, I have chosen something more concrete and objective to tie them together – math, or more specifically theoretical physics, which in its most ambitious applications provides interpretations as profound and magical as any human experience.”*

*“Set entirely in contemporary Prince Edward Island, the stories of Summer People explore issues of class, power, migration, and resistance. In particular, through stories that explore the tensions between long-term Islanders, “newcomers”, and summer residents, I unpack and complicate issues of home and identity, asking who belongs on and to the Island, and who has the power to decide. In this way, PEI becomes an intensely local microcosm through which to consider some of the most urgent issues of our time—**migration, xenophobia, urban/rural divides, and the intense political polarization we are witnessing around the world.**”*

*“This project aims to create a body of work in the visual arts that adds the perspective of an Asian artist to the discourse around the notion of identity in Canada as a dialectic between culture, nature and the process of transformation. This project challenges preconceptions of what ‘ethnic’ art can be by merging abstraction and figuration, and aiming for an idiosyncratic aesthetic that straddles Eastern and Western thinking, art and science. **I wish to undertake this project now because of the pandemic, which has revealed the urgent need for a conversation around what one’s identity is in relation to racism, inequality, injustice, marginalization, and stoicism towards the climate crisis—all of which are caused by a disconnection of the being from its environment.**”*



# Project Description and Inspiration



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## Selected Examples

### Struggle Against COVID-19

*“COVID has made an unforgettable impact to the world, and within our community. Art is often a lineage to society's mirror of emotional, spiritually, economical, social and even, political climax. **I plan to create a series of paintings that convey significant moments, thoughts and themes that express what it means to be a Canadian nurse in the time of COVID.** The aim is to identify key aspects that we all, whether we are involved in healthcare or not, can relate to. COVID will continue touch every aspect of our lives for an unknown period of time, hence, **this inquiry and dialogue is more relevant now**, and perhaps more so in the future when we come to reflect on this unique time...”*

*“... Co-produced with Louis-Jean Cormier, my next album, which is entitled Live Slow Die Wise, has been on my mind for a few months now, because of the pandemic...”*

### Climate Change

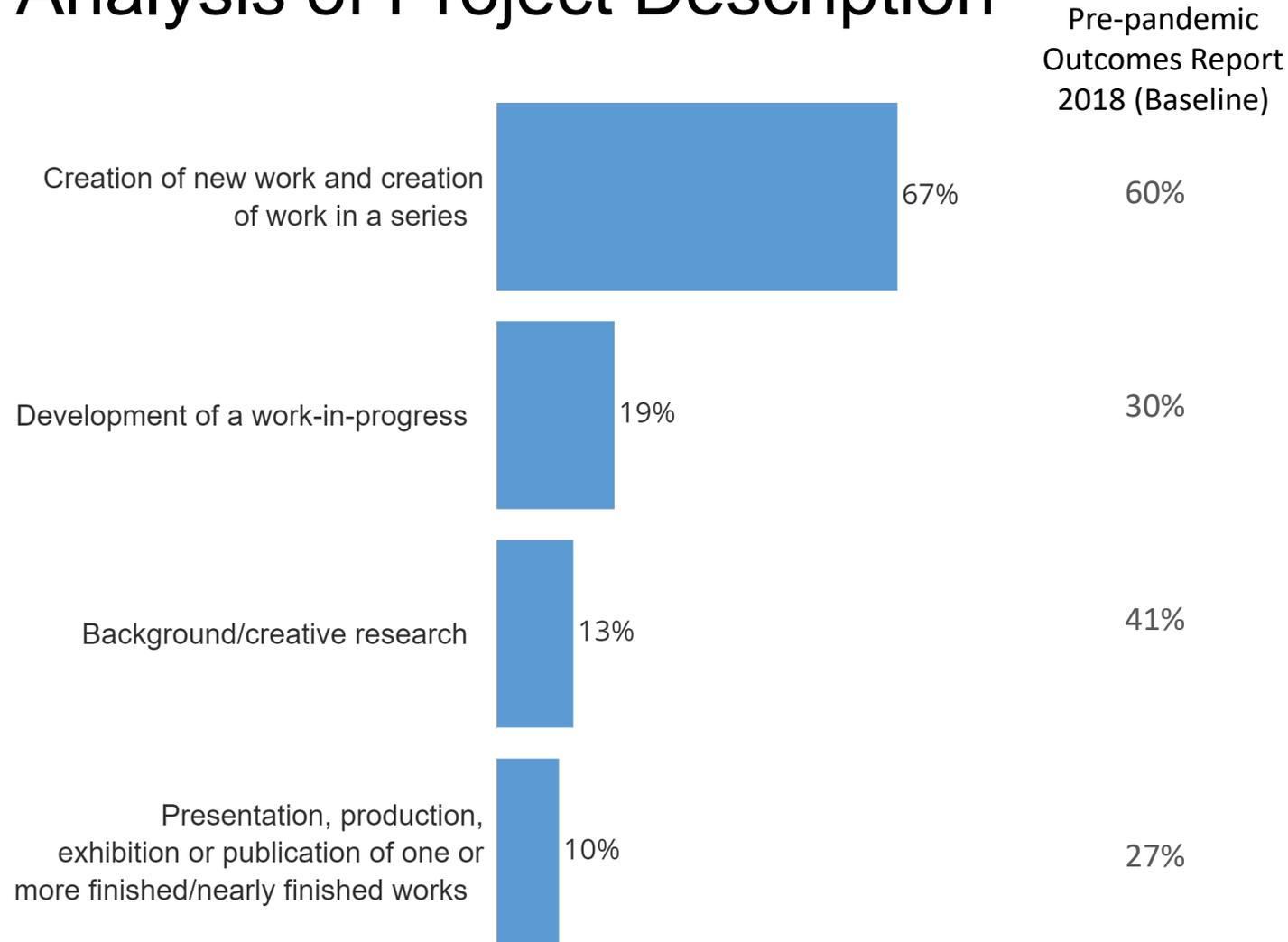
*“...My proposed body of work Stages of Healing is a material exploration of plastics' worth and waste, a reflection of anthropogenic **climate change, and a representation of recovery and transformation...**I anticipate creating 4-6 wall installations along with 4-6 wearable brooches within the scope of this project. The wall installation will combine groups of millefiori-inspired discs 4-8” in diameter, to create wall-mounted “jewellery” on a large scale. Grouped into forms 3-4 feet wide by way of subtle bronze connections, the discs will resemble cellular structures, and will be tinted to suggest the various stages of bruising. **This structure symbolizes the interconnection of climate change to all life forms as a traumatic event and the cry for change to heal from it...**”*

*“...Motivation: For the past two years, I have been creating large temporary public and community artworks from **plastic waste to address global environmental issues including climate change.** My message has been received across Alberta through public exhibitions and media reviews, and I want to create further **climate resilience** dialogue through eco-public art...”*



# Project Description and Inspiration

## Analysis of Project Description



## Sub-group analysis

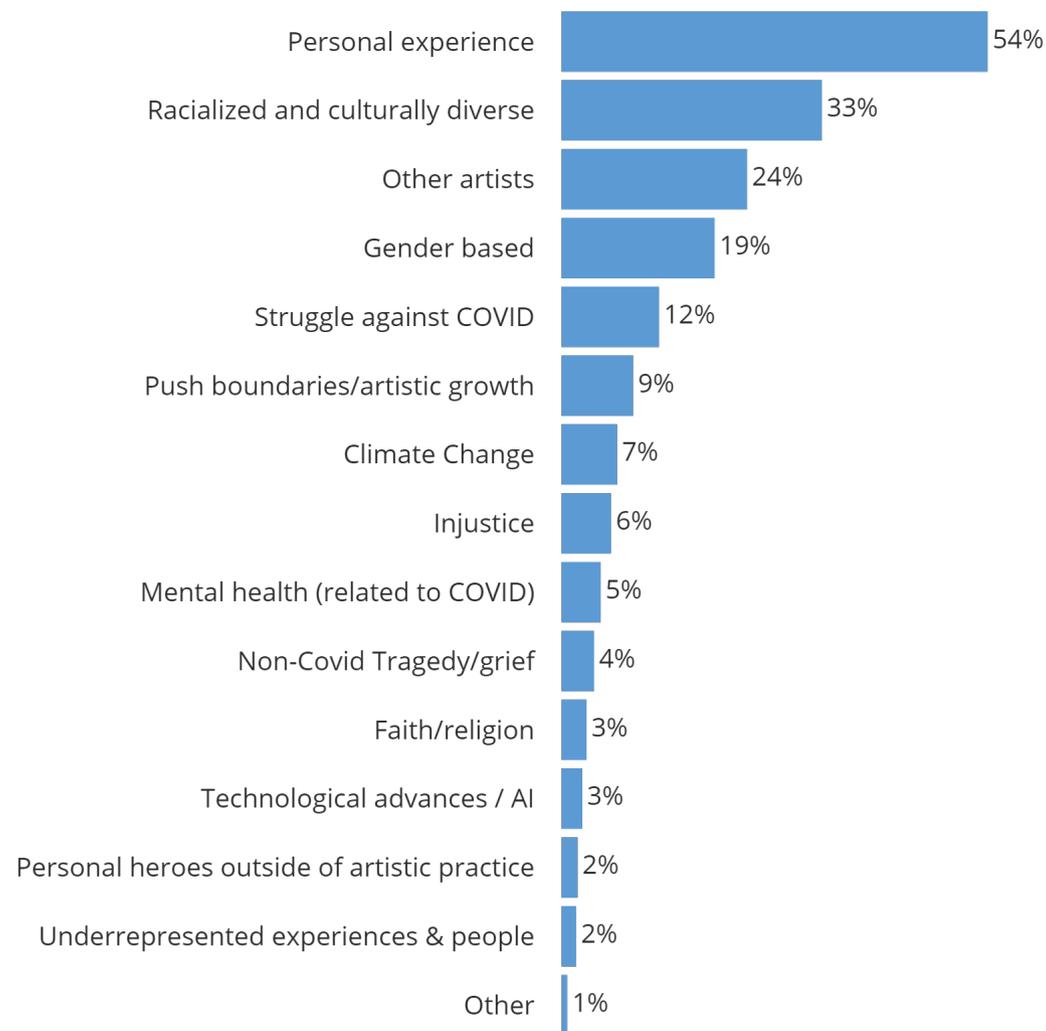
- "Research and Creation" applicants are more likely to **create new work** or **create a work in a series** when compared to the "Concept to Realization" component applicants (70% vs. 63%).
- Those in the **"music and sound"** field of practice are more likely to create new work (77% in comparison to the overall average of 67%).
- Applicants in the **"theatre"** field of practice are more likely to develop a work-in-progress (29% in comparison to the overall average of 19%).
- Applicants in the **"visual arts"** field of practice are more likely to describe their project as background/creative research (23% in comparison to the overall average of 13%).



# Project Description and Inspiration

## Analysis of Project Inspiration

### Sub-group analysis



- **Individuals** are more likely to get inspiration from **personal experience** compared to groups and organizations (58% vs. 42% and 34%).
- **"Concept to Realization"** recipients are more likely to be inspired by the **"struggle against COVID"** when compared to the "Research and Creation" component applicants. (15% vs. 10%). Organizations are also more likely to say so when compared to the overall average (22% vs. 12%).
- Those in the **"music and sound"** field of practice are more likely to get inspiration from **personal experiences** (65% in comparison to the overall average of 55%).
- Applicants in the **"literature"** field of practice are more likely to get inspiration from the **"gender-based"** category (33% in comparison to the overall average of 19%).



# Artistic Development and Practice

## Application Question



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How will this project:

- contribute to your, or your group's, artistic development
- advance artistic practice?

For analyses, this question was divided into two parts:

1. How will this project: contribute to your, or your group's, artistic development.

For the analysis, "artistic development" was defined as: **The artistic development of the artists/Specific to the project /Related to the skills and knowledge of the recipient for the project and for themselves**

2. How will this project: advance artistic practice?

For the analysis, "artistic practice" was defined as: **Benefitting the wider community/artistic field of practice (e.g., by bringing something new to practice, pushing boundaries, benefiting other artists)**



## Key Findings – Artistic Development

### Expected Contribution to Artistic Development

Overall, and collectively, the analysis reveals that artists expected the grant to help with their artistic development in many ways. The most common of these was to help them **complete a work they had outlined/conceived of or started** (34% of recipients). Almost as many wrote that the **financial support would allow them to devote more of their time to their art** (thereby helping them develop as artists in a “practice makes perfect” way) (29% of recipients).

- For about **1 in 4 applicants**, the funding was expected to be used to undertake a **larger or more ambitious work**.
- There were also many other ways in which the grants were expected to contribute to one’s artistic development (e.g., reaching new markets, improvement of digitization skills).

# Artistic Development and Practice

## Analysis of Artistic Development



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### Sub-group analysis



- **"Research and creation"** applicants are more likely to say indicate that the project will help them complete their unfinished work and will it will give them the financial support to carry out a project compared to the "concept to realization" component applicants (44% vs. 22%) and (36% vs. 19%) respectively.
- **Groups and organizations** are more likely to **expand their professional network** or engage in collaborations when compared to the overall average (33% and 30% vs. 20%) respectively.
- Applicants in the **"literature"** field of practice are more likely to indicate that this project will help them **complete an unfinished work and it will contribute to the development of a larger, more ambitious work** when compared to the overall average (56% vs. 34%) and (35% vs. 24%) respectively.



# Artistic Development and Practice

## Key Findings – Artistic Practice

### Expected Contributions to Artistic Development

Recipients wrote about how their project could potentially advance their artistic practice. That is, the field of practice in general, and/or other artists.

A review of these applications found that the most popular theme revolved around the **expansion of professional networks or engagement in artistic collaborations to benefit the artistic practice/wider community of artists**. For example, the synergistic results that could come from having artists with different skills, experiences and cultural background work together to create something new, and possibly unprecedented.

Another popular theme was the creation of a project that will allow the artist to **innovate or develop a new creative approach or technique, often through "artistic experimentation"** (e.g., sign language stop-motion animation, experimentation using augmented reality tools, research and development using 360-degree video technology etc.).

## Selected Quotations – Artistic Practice

*".. I am excited to carrying out similar process design experiments with my collaborators. Through examining the collaborative process at a practical level, I look forward to contributing to the discourse of 'what next, and how?' For theater and performing arts in this new reality..."*

*"...committed to offering the highest quality live professional theater in Yukon and surrounding communities and believes that the production of this play will:*

- Facilitate building the arts community and create employment opportunities for residents interested in practicing and extending their skills in the arts*
- Provide paid work for professional theater practitioners both on stage and off*
- Create access to professional mentorship and work experience for volunteers*
- Give the residents of the Yukon an amazing experience at the theater*
- Maintain a loyal and supportive membership by continuing to satisfy the community's high expectations by programming relevant, intelligent, engaging live professional entertainment."*

# Artistic Development and Practice

## Selected Quotations – Artistic Practice

*"...this project is the first time the Orchestra ... will be collaborating with a Canadian composer. This will also be the first time they will be presenting an intercultural concert. This is a considerable new artistic direction for the orchestra, particularly in a concert designed to celebrate their most historically significant poet Dante. Management and musicians of the orchestra are fascinated with Canadian multiculturalism, and they are looking forward to this new experience. I believe this project will be a significant new contribution to the orchestral repertoire."*

# Project Summary

## Application Question

*(Concept to Realization Component Only)*

Provide a one-sentence summary of your project. If possible, use the format **ACTIVITY, EVENT** (if relevant) and **DATES**

For analyses, this question was divided into three parts:

1. Expected period of dissemination
2. Dissemination method
3. Analysis of online vs in-person dissemination

# Project Summary

## Key Findings

The analysis suggests that about half of the projects (48%) will be disseminated no sooner than September 1, 2021.

Among potential dissemination methods, live performances (e.g., concert, dance, theatre) and musical album launch are the most common. It is important to note, however, that live performances can take place online as well as in-person.

Among the 432 applicants who indicate whether their work would be shared online, in-person or both, fully 70% expected to do this in person, while **16% anticipated online dissemination**, while the **14% expected to disseminate their work using both online and in-person approaches**.

# Project Summary

## Examples of Online Platforms

A review of application data reveals that applicants did not provide details about the technical nature of online platforms (e.g., YouTube). Rather, they talked about this aspect in more general way, as indicated below:

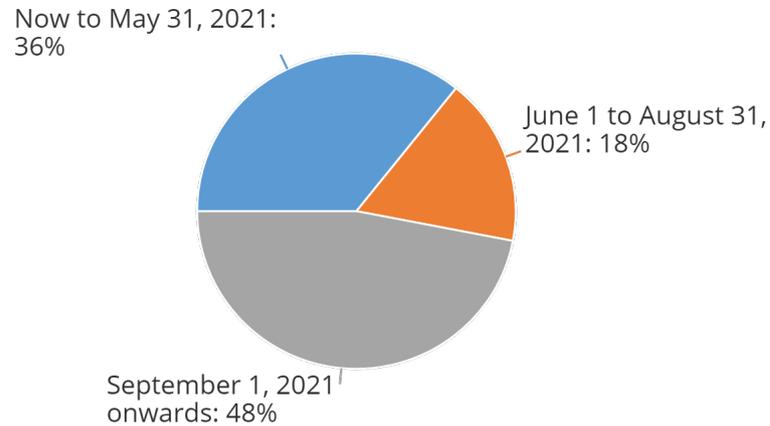
- *To create and record **The Fire Waltz** a podcast miniseries and 18 song album for **digital release** on December 12, 2020.*
- *To create **SISTER**, an interactive mystery play, for **presentation online** from Edmonton, planned for October 2020.*
- *Creation of a literary concept composed of a children's novel and a **mobile application** which will be submitted to a publisher at the end of 2021.*
- *To build an **online transdisciplinary platform** and curatorial space around economic futurisms to be launched at April 2020.*
- *To create **new media art online from intergenerational dialogue** and works of Jackson Chien, exhibiting worldwide in July 2021.*
- *To create media arts presentations of New North Collective's music for **digital release** as a series in fall and winter 2021/2022.*
- *To create and present a streaming audiovisual performance premiere and generative **online audiovisual installation** during spring 2021.*

# Project Summary



## Dissemination Time and Method

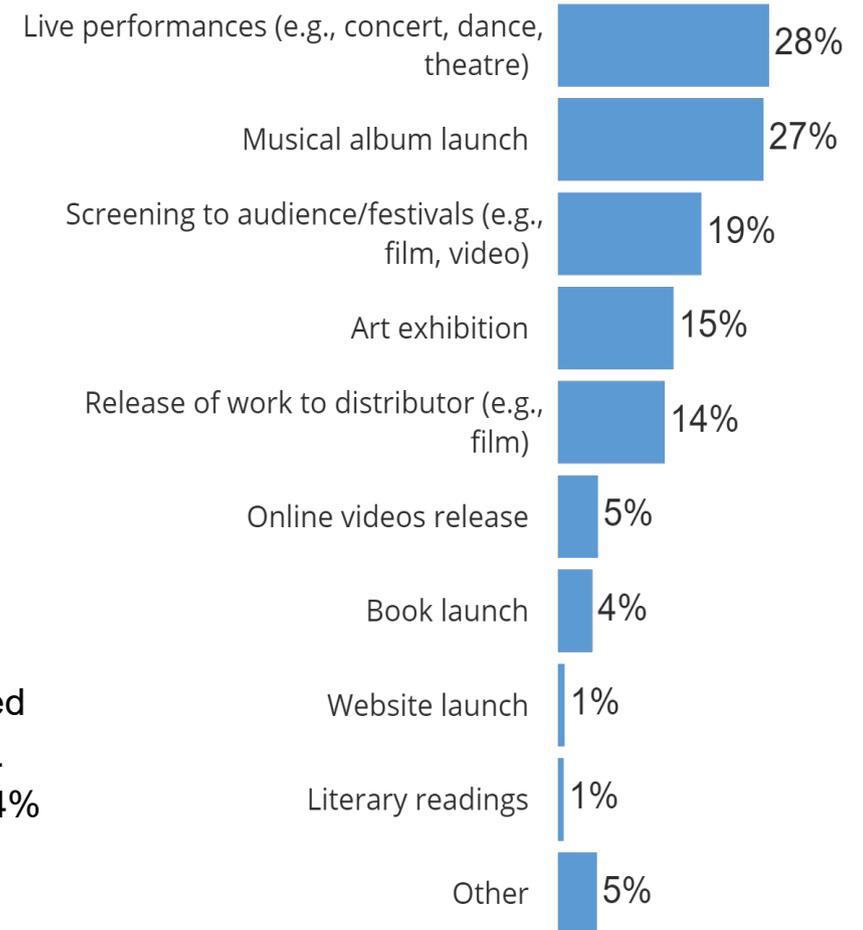
### Expected Period of Dissemination



### Analysis of Online Vs. In-Person Dissemination

Out of 710 applicants who mentioned some form of dissemination, 432 provided information that allowed us to tell whether it would be online, in-person or both. 16% expected to disseminate online, 70% expected it to be in-person, while 14% expected to disseminate their work using both online and in-person methods.

### Dissemination Method





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