



Impact of the Digital Now Initiative 2021-25
August 2025
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Summary

Summary

Objectives

In 2021, the Canada Council launched a one-time digital innovation initiative, Digital Now, to support artists, arts groups, and organizations to adapt existing works or create new ones to be shared virtually with audiences. Key program objectives included facilitating the arts sector's digital transition, boosting its recovery, and stimulating job creation. Analysis focused on activities funded, benefits for the sector and diverse communities, and strategies for dissemination, monetization and ensuring safe workspaces.

Methodology

Responses for 903 Digital Now final reports received from 2021-2025 were analyzed.

Projects created

The Digital Now initiative funded the creation of 5,036 new works and the adaptation of 9,440 existing ones, with 29% being co-productions.

Sustaining the arts sector's recovery and stimulating job creation

Over 53,000 artists and arts workers were engaged, receiving \$48.6 million in professional fees and salaries.

Executive Summary

Digitization of artistic works and expansion of artistic practice

Recipients reported significant advancements in their artistic practice, including reaching new audiences (95%), expanding professional networks (94%), enhancing artistic skills (91%), and adding new dimensions to their art (90%). Additionally, 77% stated the funding supported the digitization of their art, with 47% making their work available online for the first time.

Distribution of digital works and “discoverability” strategies


Digital works were widely disseminated, predominantly via online video releases (73%), enabling artists to reach both current and new audiences. A wide range of diverse communities were engaged, including seniors (75%), 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities (73%), children and youth (73%), and racialized communities (71%).

Monetization strategies

Monetization strategies varied, with grants and subsidies being the primary revenue source (73%), supplemented by donations and sponsorships. Many artists also offered free content to build awareness and a following.

Ensuring safe workspaces

Artists demonstrated strong adherence to COVID-19 protocols, reporting following government guidelines and adhering to best practices.



Objectives & Methodology

Objectives and Methodology

The COVID-19 pandemic forced society to embrace a more digital way of working. In response, the Canada Council for the Arts (the Council) launched a one-time digital innovation initiative in 2021 called Digital Now. The aim of the program was to support artists, arts groups, and organizations to adapt existing works or create new ones to be shared virtually with audiences. Key program objectives included facilitating the arts sector's digital transition, boosting its recovery, and stimulating job creation.

Funding totaling \$75.3M was awarded for 1,111 projects across all artistic fields nationwide.

Analysis focused on activities funded, benefits for the sector and diverse communities, and strategies for dissemination, monetization and ensuring safe workspaces.

While a previous report* was based on the application data, the analysis presented in this report is based on the 903 final reports that the Council received from 2021-2025. Comparisons are not drawn to previous results due to the differences in the sample.

**Digital Now - Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Grant Application Data, 2021*

Objectives and Methodology

After receiving the Digital Now grant and undertaking their project(s), Digital Now recipients were asked to complete reports describing their projects and highlighting the impact that it had on their group/organization and the arts sector as a whole. These reports include three types of data:

1. Amounts, such as number of new or adapted existing works to be produced, professional fees and salaries to be paid, and number of people involved in a project.
2. Quantitative responses to questions describing their projects, including dissemination methods and audiences reached (Questions 1-5).
3. Qualitative feedback describing the benefits they experienced from receiving the Digital Now grant (Question 6).

For some questions, where the proportion of “Other” responses is relatively high, an analysis of these comments showed that in most cases, grant recipients were reiterating their responses to the close-ended questions.

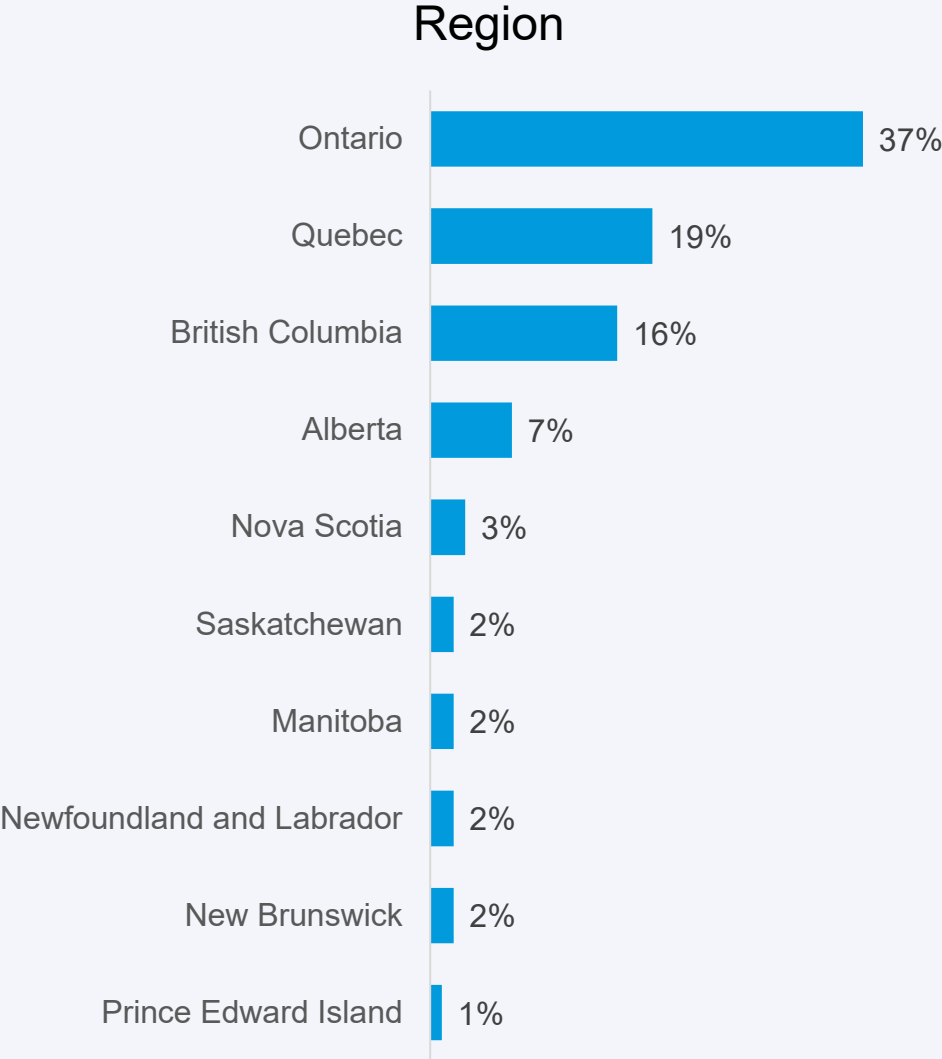
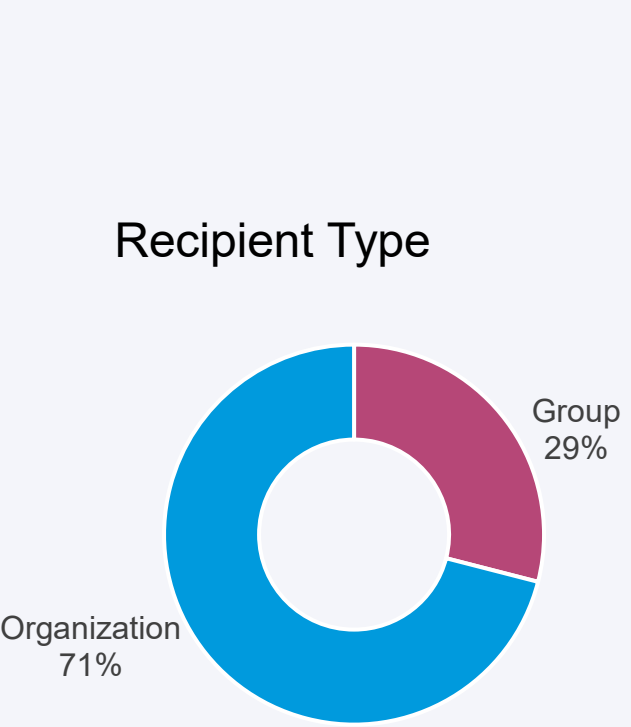
Objectives and Methodology

Below are the six questions included in this analysis:

1. Select the options that best describe how your project allowed you, your group, or organization to develop and extend your artistic practice(s) and/or digital knowledge.
2. How did you share your project in a digital environment? Which audience(s) did you reach with this project? What marketing or communications strategies did you undertake to ensure your work could reach audiences?
3. What strategies did you use to generate direct or indirect revenue and value from your digital content (e.g., pay-per-view, subscriptions, pay what you choose, donations, product sales, advertising, sponsorships)?
4. We are interested in how projects reflect the diversity of their geographic community or region, particularly with respect to the engagement and inclusion of youth, official language minority communities, and historically underserved and marginalized communities, including Indigenous, Black, racialized, Deaf and disability, and 2SLGBTQ+ and gender-diverse communities, women, and those at intersections of these groups. Please indicate if your project had a focus on engagement and inclusion of these groups.
5. How did you ensure safe working environments for those involved in your activities?
6. In your opinion, what was the most significant benefit to you or your organization from receiving the Digital Now grant?

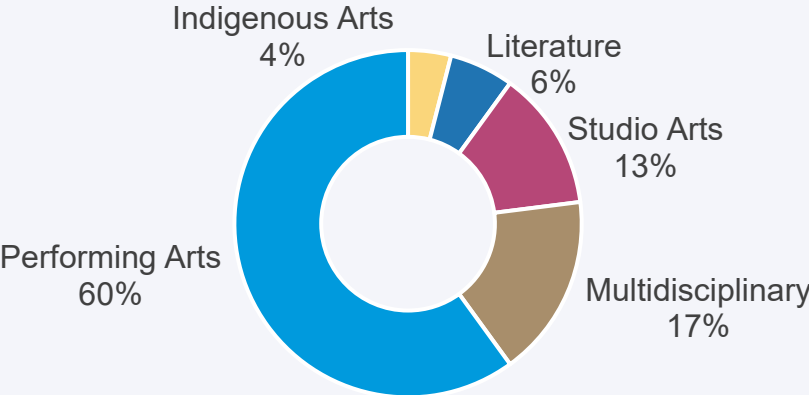
Results

Respondent Profile



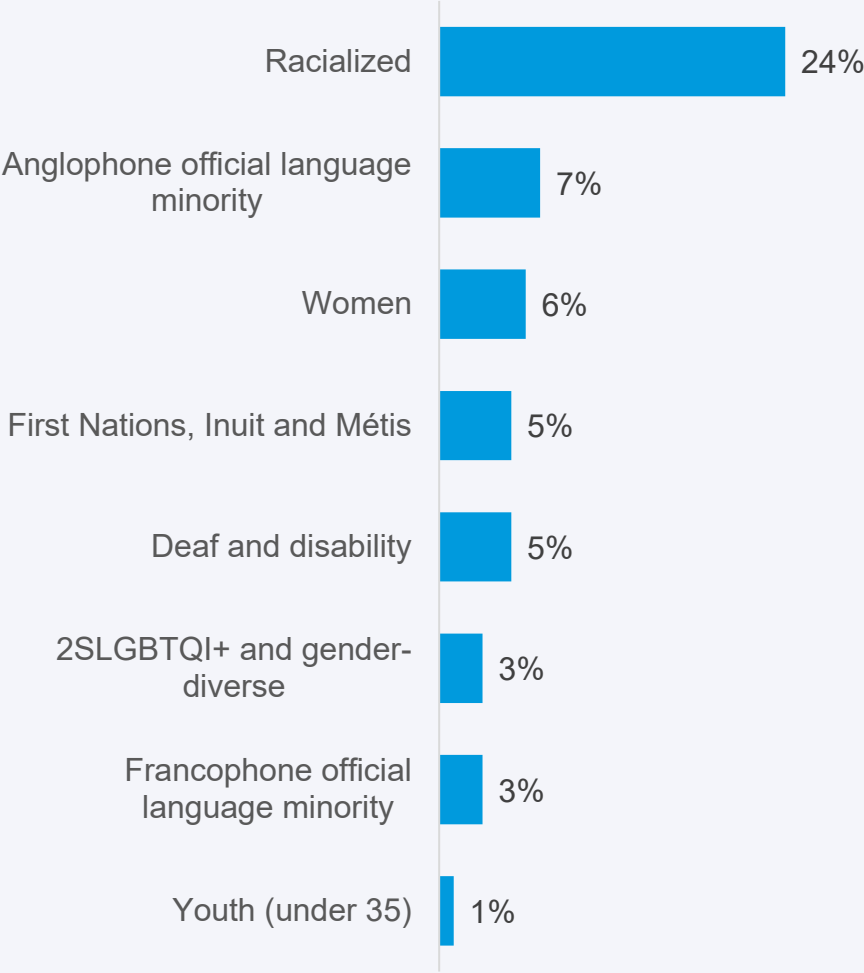
Respondent Profile

Field of Practice



Circus Arts	Performing Arts
Dance	
Music and sound	
Theatre	
Media Arts	Studio Arts
Visual Arts	
Inter-Arts	Multidisciplinary Arts
Multidisciplinary activities	
Deaf and disability Arts	
Digital Arts	

Strategic Group

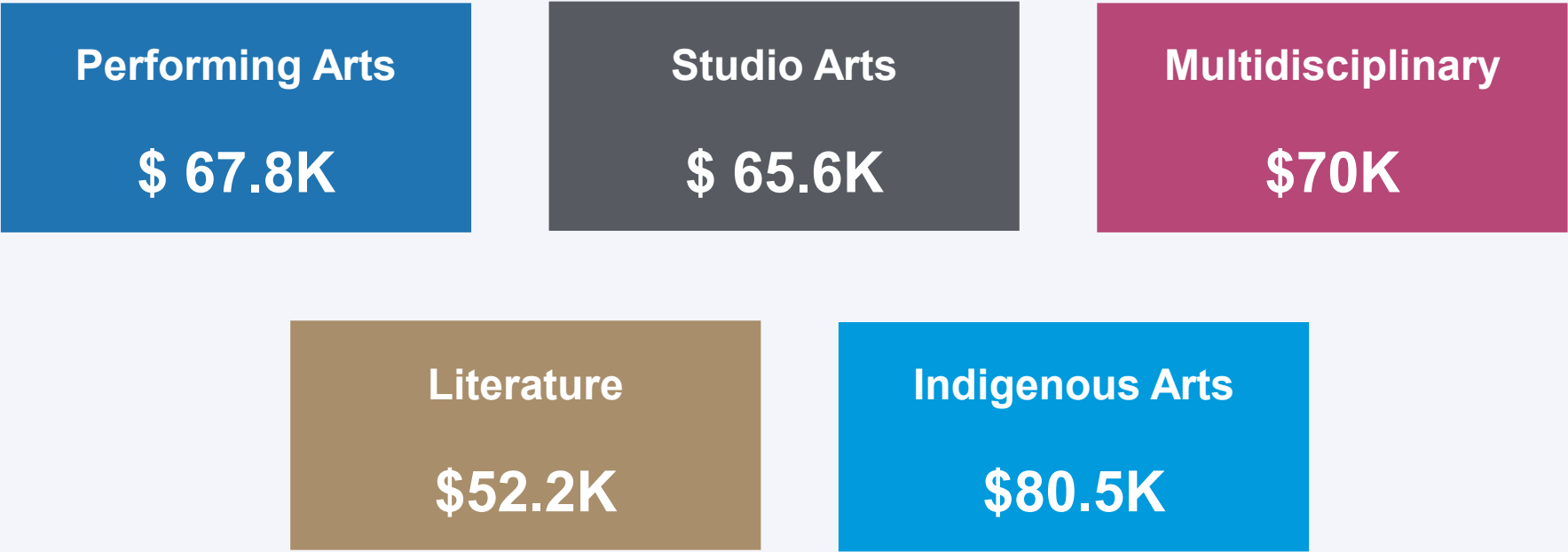


Average Grant

By Recipient Type



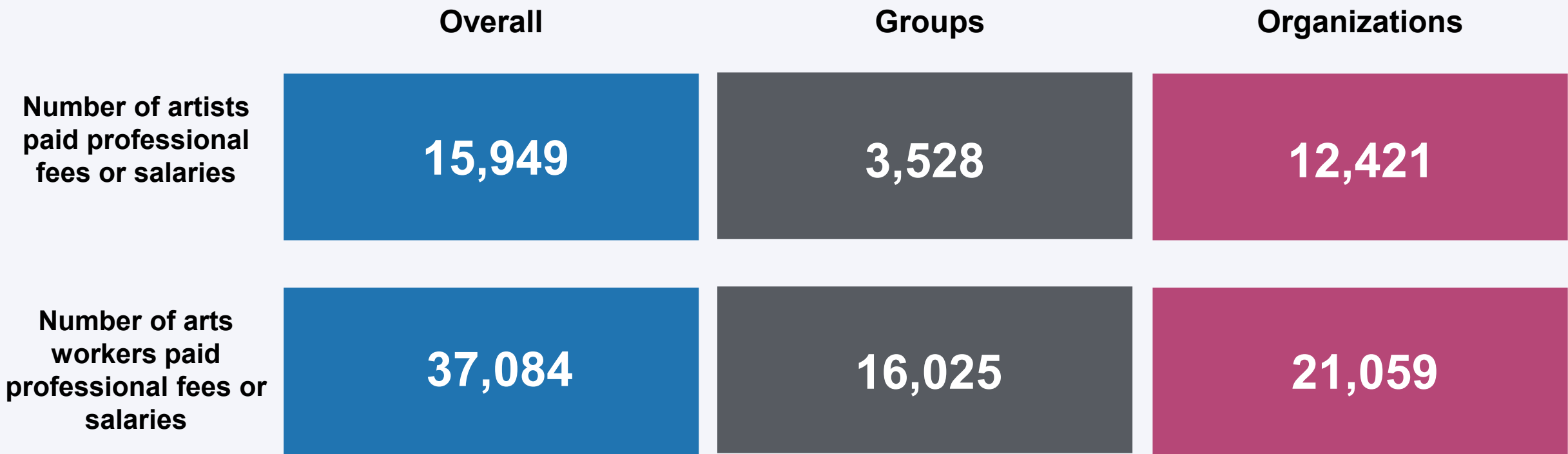
By Field of Practice



Number of Funded Works

	Overall	Groups	Organizations
Number of Adapted Existing Works	5,036	1,941	3,395
Number of New Works	9,440	3,205	6,235
Number of Co-productions	4,187	2,159	2,028

Number of Artists and Arts Workers Receiving Financial Compensation



Fees and Salaries Paid to Artists and Arts Workers

	Overall	Groups	Organizations
Total professional fees paid to artists	\$25.5M	\$6.7M	\$18.8M
Total salaries paid to artists	\$2.4M	\$744.4K	\$1.6M
Total professional fees paid to arts workers	\$16.3M	\$3.7M	\$12.6M
Total salaries paid to arts workers	\$4.4M	\$616K	\$3.8M

In your opinion, what was the most significant benefit to you or your organization from receiving the Digital Now grant?

Artists described many benefits they experienced from receiving the Digital Now grant. A third of artists (34%) shared how the funding supported artistic creation, adaptation and innovation, allowing for the creation of new digital works, adapting their works for virtual mediums and providing an opportunity for experimentation with new technologies.

Artists also stated how the funding allowed them to improve their digital literacy (29%), expand their audiences, increase their visibility and reach (25%) and improve their partnerships and collaborations, which allowed them to forge new or strengthened relationships with other artists, organizations, and community partners, nationally and internationally (23%).

Benefits: Results



Benefits: Examples

“We employed well over 50 artists and technicians in order to produce and film our rehearsals and the event.”

-Animals of Distinction

“The most significant benefit to our organization from the Digital Now grant was the ability to make our authors’ work accessible to a broader audience of blind, visually impaired, and literacy challenged people, which helps move us toward our goal of better serving invisibly disabled communities.

-Gordon Hill Press

“With both shows being celebrations of Black voices and experiences, Digital Now allowed us to amplify those voices, and the gift of going digital was that we were able to reach audiences outside of Ontario and Canada.”

-Up From The Roots

“Our aim with this grant was to create a hybrid festival during COVID and reverting... to a standard in-person festival after the pandemic. However, our community members expressed... how grateful they were for the option to view our livestreamed programming, and we have adopted it on a permanent basis.”

-Victoria Festival of Authors Society

“This was major recognition for us to get the grant, work with partners successfully, and go into new technology territory. It attracted younger artists to the organization which was very important, and we grew our audiences.

-Xchanges Artists' Gallery and Studios

Furthering Artistic Practice(s) and Digital Knowledge

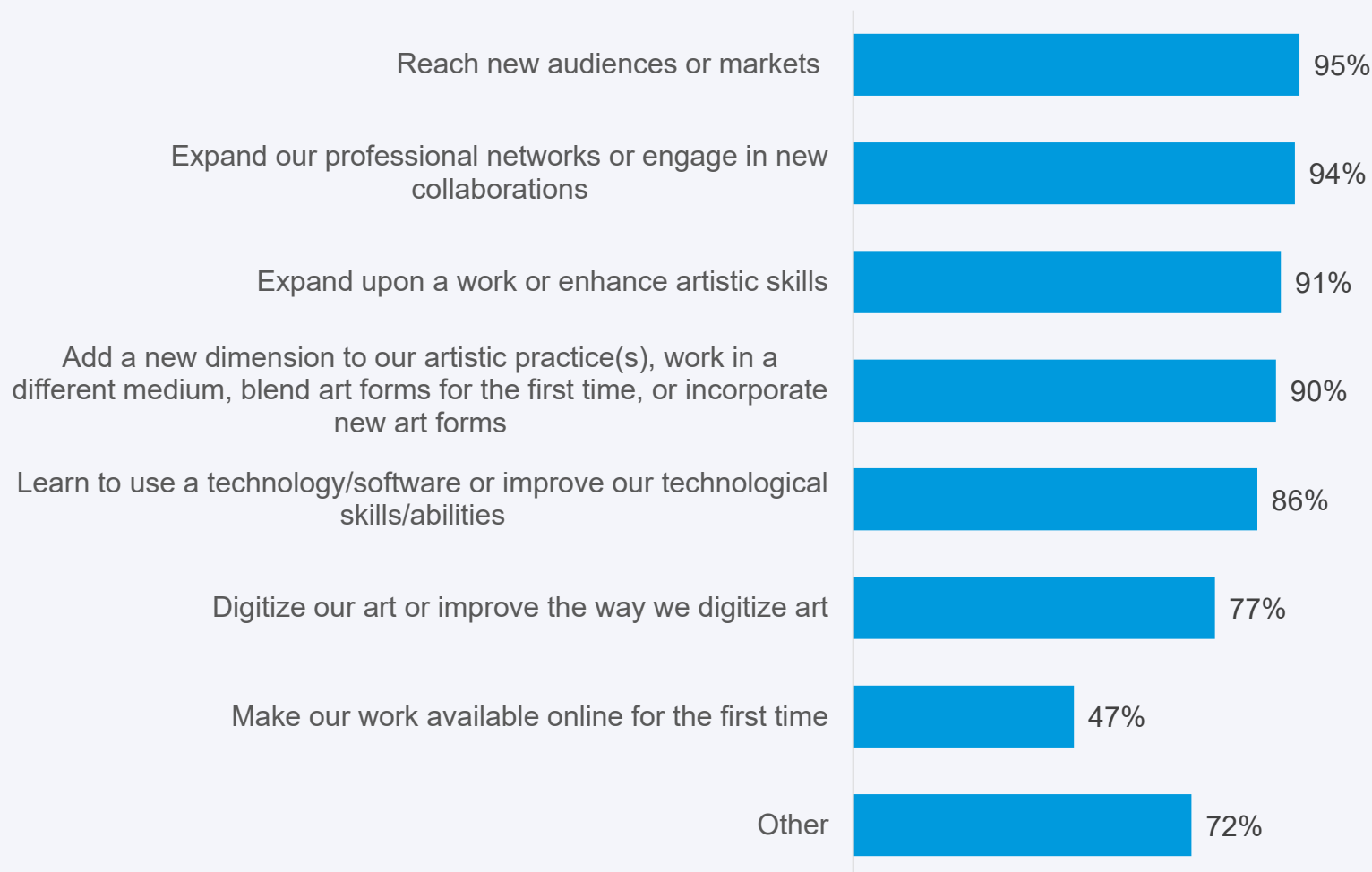
Select the options that best describe how your project allowed you, your group, or organization to develop and extend your artistic practice(s) and/or digital knowledge.

The results of this question suggest that Digital Now had a significant impact on artists, arts groups, and organizations. Almost all recipients shared how this funding allowed them to reach new audiences or markets (95%) and expand their professional networks (94%). Nearly all recipients also described how they expanded upon a work or enhanced their artistic skills (91%) and added a new dimension to their artistic practice (e.g., work in a new medium or blend artforms) (90%).

Additionally, nearly half of the recipients (47%) shared that this funding enabled them to make their work available online for the first time.

This initiative allowed artists to work on all stages of the artistic process, including production (75%), creation (71%) and dissemination/distribution (70%).

Furthering Artistic Practice(s) and Digital Knowledge: Results

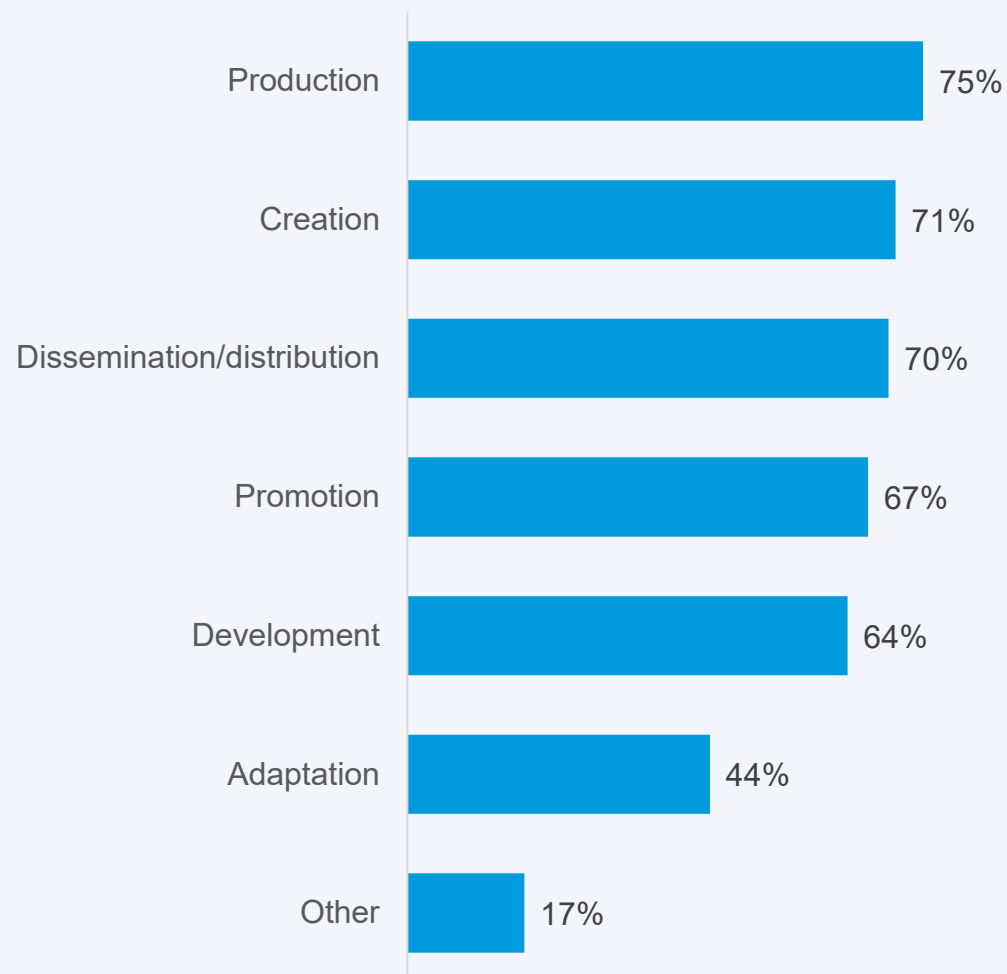


Other Category

The “other” category for this question was largely used by respondents to share further detail of their works. Artists used the space to share all the ways in which they were able to use the grant.

Other responses included mention of learning experiences (e.g., enhancing artists’ marketing skills).

Furthering Artistic Practice(s) and Digital Knowledge: Results



Other Category

Responses in the “other” category included the following themes:

- Website launch or update (e.g., improved web accessibility)
- Research and skill development (e.g., learned about collaborations with tech experts).

Note: Some responses in the “other” category are artists providing a more detailed description of one of the listed categories or offering broader information about the work.

Presentation

This question is broken out into three components of presentation:

- How did you share your project in a digital environment?
- Which audience(s) did you reach with this project?
- Which marketing or communication strategies did you undertake to ensure that your work could reach audiences?

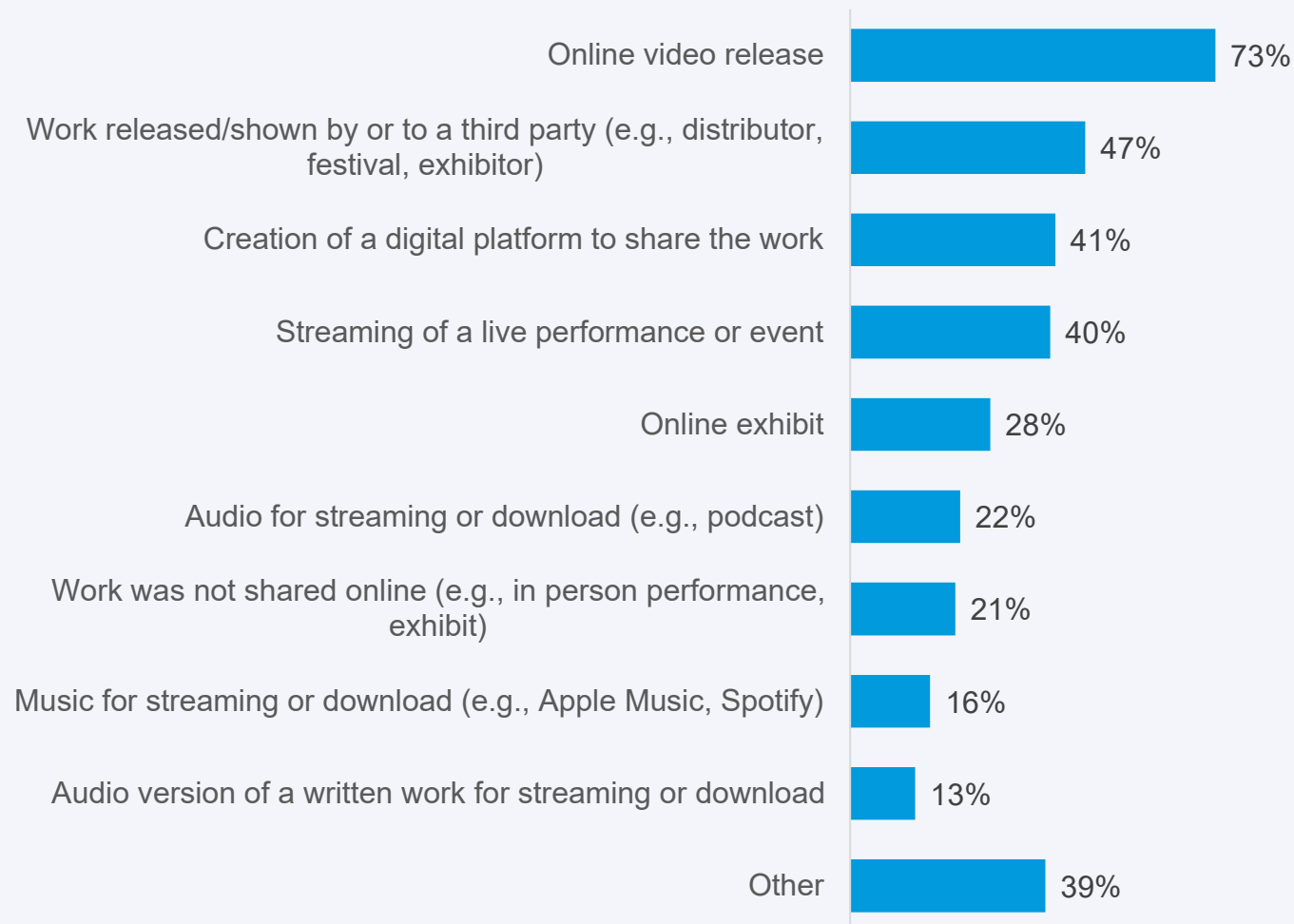
To share their work in a digital environment, three in four artists utilized online video releases (73%), while half had their work shown by a third party, such as a distributor, at a festival or exhibit (47%).

Artists shared that they were able to reach a diverse range of people and communities. Artists reached their current audience base (94%) and expanded their reach into new audiences (95%).

Project audiences included adults (88%), arts professionals and other artists (86%), seniors (75%), 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities (73%), children and youth (73%), racialized communities (71%) and teachers and educators (66%).

Artists employed different promotional strategies to reach these audiences. Almost everyone used social media (93%) and cross-promotion with other artists and organizations (84%). Artists spread the word using newsletters and targeted email blasts (79%). Consistent with the Fund's objective, two-thirds of artists (66%) shared how they used some form of search engine optimization (SEO) to promote their work.

Presentation: Dissemination Method Results



Other Category

Responses in the “other” category included the following themes:

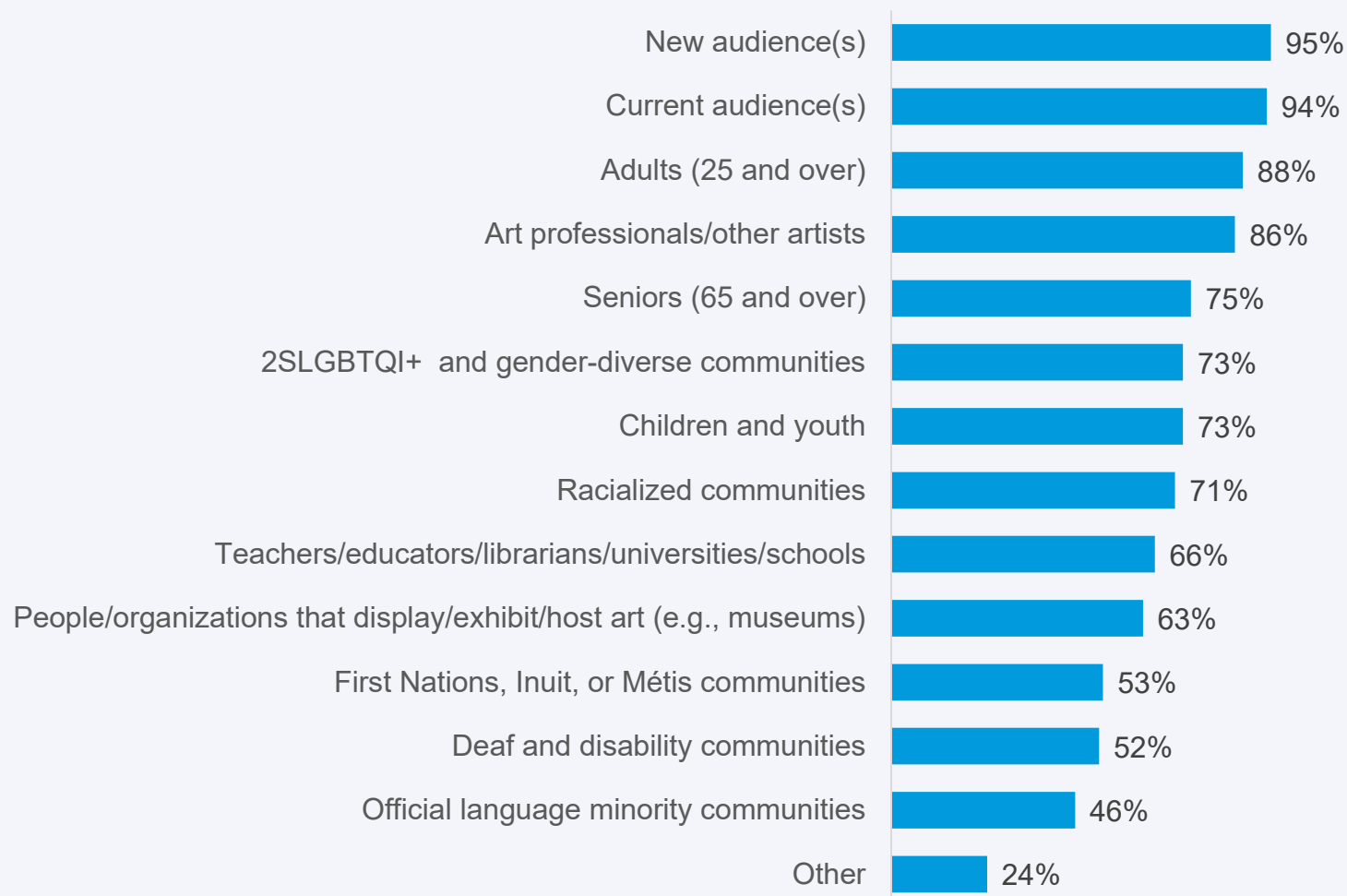
- Apps
- Virtual reality experiences
- Video games
- Websites

Note: Some responses in the “other” category were from artists providing a more detailed description of one of the listed categories or offering broader information about the work.

Subgroup Analysis

- Groups were the most likely to have their work shown by a third party (55%) or to have music made available for streaming or download (24%).
- Organizations were the most likely to have live-streamed a performance or event (44%).
- Those in literature were the most likely to have shared audio for streaming or download (e.g., a podcast) (39%) or to have made an audio version of a written work available for streaming or download (29%).
- Those in studio arts and multidisciplinary arts were the most likely to have created a digital platform (62% and 58% respectively) or an online exhibit (49% and 40% respectively).
- First Nations, Inuit, or Métis artists were the most likely to have had work shown by a third party (68%).
- Artists from Francophone official language minority communities were the most likely to have made an audio version of a written work available for streaming or download (32%).
- Those in Quebec were the most likely to not have shared their work online (28%).

Presentation: Audience Results



Other Category

Responses in the “other” category included the following themes:

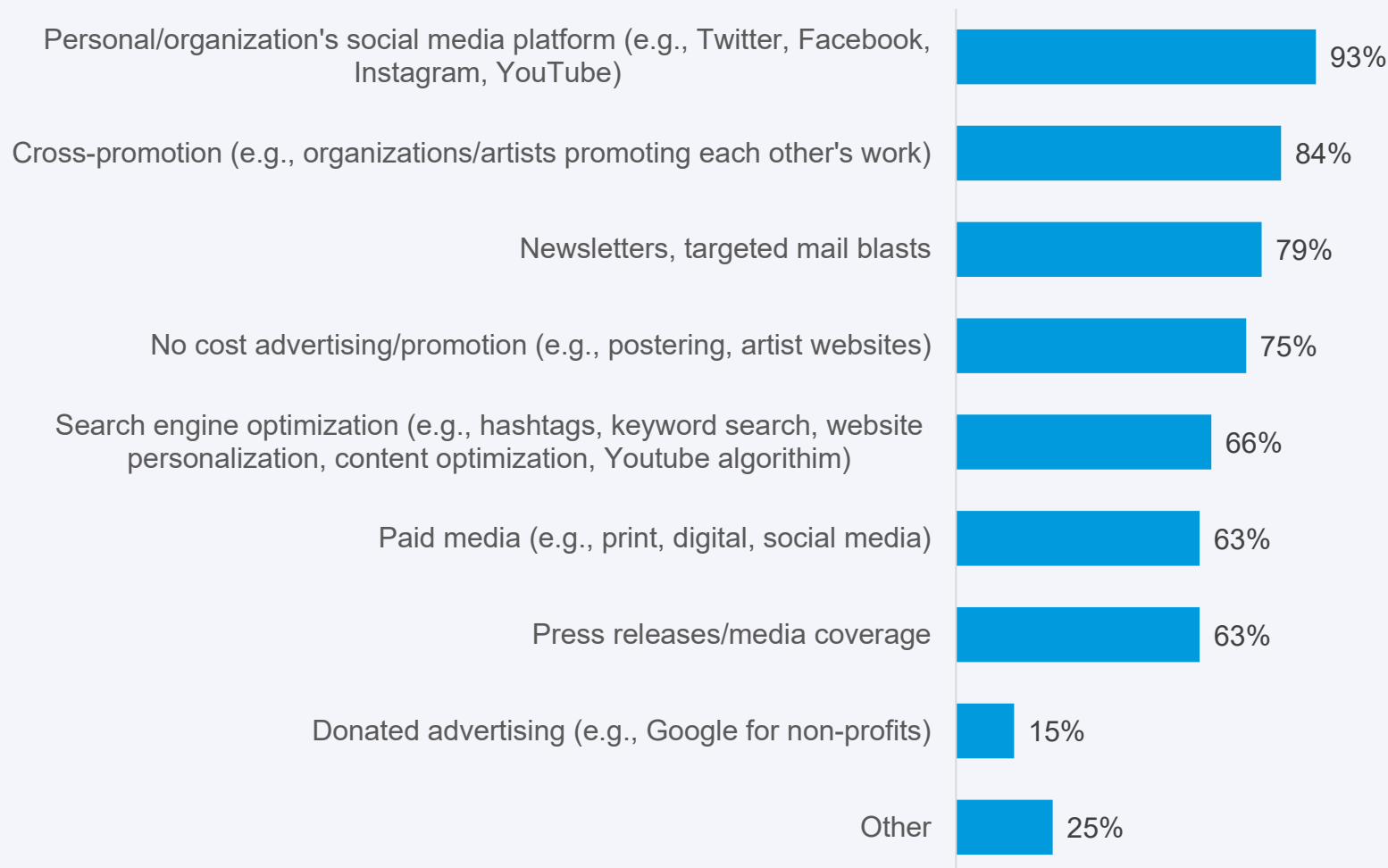
- Their intended audience was general; there was no particular target.
- Recent immigrants.
- Specific regions.
- They had yet to identify their target audience.
- The target audience was not applicable.

Note: Some responses in the “other” category were from artists providing a more detailed description of one of the listed categories or offering broader information about the work.

Subgroup Analysis

- Organizations were the most likely to have reached seniors (79%) and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities (58%).
- Those working in studio arts were the most likely to have reached racialized communities (83%), people who display, exhibit or host art (81%), and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities (68%).
- Residents of New Brunswick were the most likely to have reached official language minority communities (93%).
- Those in Saskatchewan were the most likely to have reached people who display, exhibit or host art (90%).
- Those residing in British Columbia were the most likely to have reached Deaf and disability communities (63%).
- Those in Ontario were the most likely to have reached racialized communities (77%).
- Those living in Quebec were the most likely to have reached teachers and educators (82%) and official language minority communities (78%).
- Those recipients in strategic groups were likely to reach audiences in their respective strategic groups:
 - First Nations, Inuit, or Métis: (96%)
 - Racialized (90%)
 - Deaf and disability (91%)
 - Anglophone official language minority (95%)
 - Francophone official language minority (76%).

Presentation: Promotion Results



Subgroup Analysis

Organizations were the most likely to have utilized newsletters and targeted mail blasts (84%), paid media (66%), press releases and media coverage (66%) and donated advertising (19%).

Other Category

Responses in the “other” category included the following themes:

- Word of mouth
- Publicists or other marketing professionals
- Community outreach
- Local publications or community notice boards

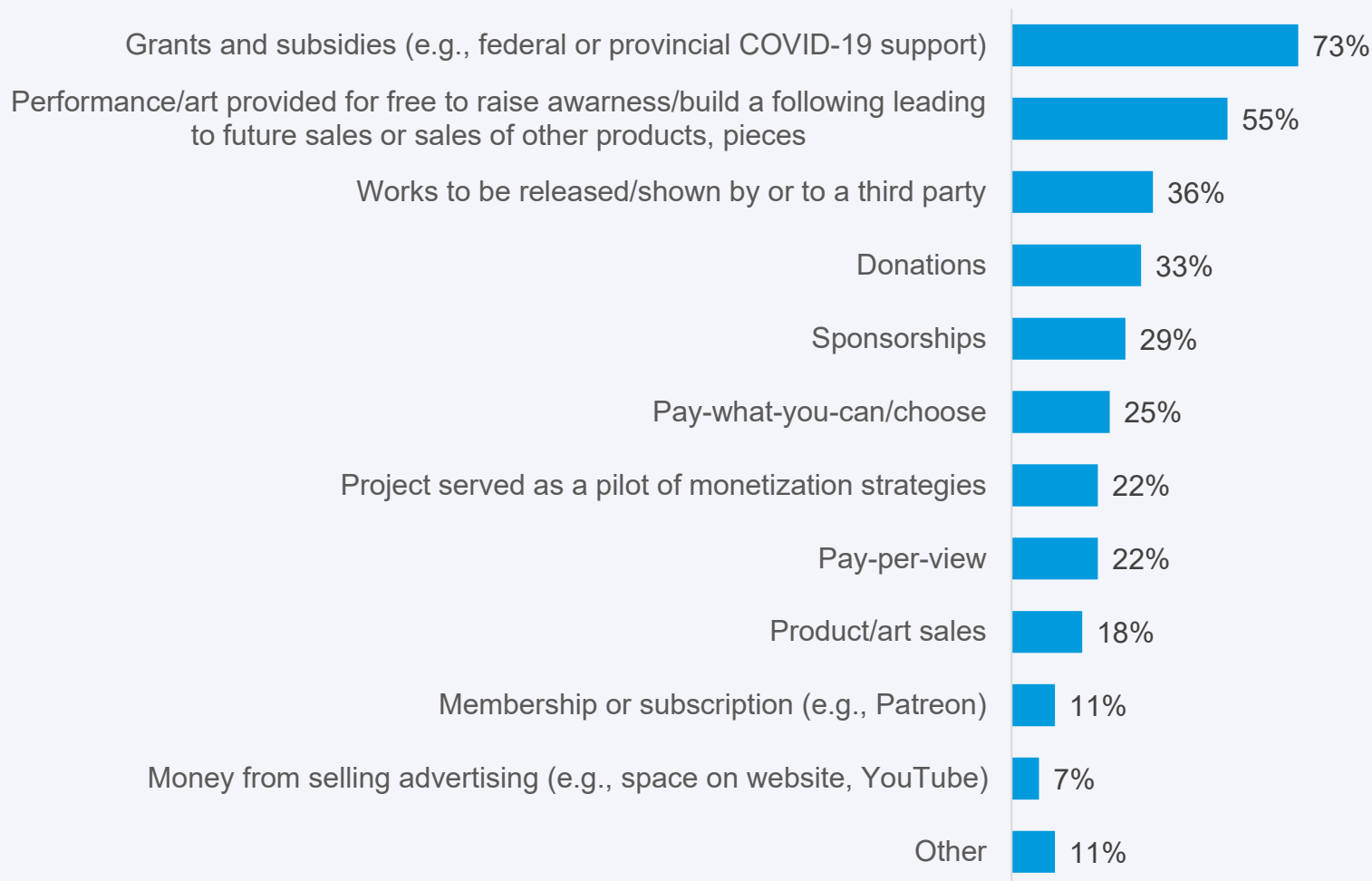
Note: Some responses in the “other” category were from artists providing a more detailed description of one of the listed categories or offering broader information about the work.

Which strategies did you use to generate direct or indirect revenue and value from your digital content (e.g., pay per view, subscription, pay what you choose, donations, product sales, advertising, sponsorships)?

Artists were largely supported through grants and funding (73%). Other ways that artists generated revenue were through donations (33%), sponsorships (29%) or implementing a pay-what-you-can/choose payment model for their work (25%).

Additionally, just over half (55%) made their work available for free in order to grow their audience base and build a following, which would lead to future revenue. Another one-in-five (22%) indicated that this project served as a pilot for their monetization strategies.

Revenues: Results



Other Category

Responses in the “other” category included the following themes:

- Partnerships
- This was not intended to generate revenue

Note: Some responses in the “other” category were from artists providing a more detailed description of one of the listed categories or offering broader information about the work.

Subgroup Analysis

- Groups were the most likely to have generated revenue through product and art sales (25%), whereas organizations were the most likely to have generated revenue through donations (37%) and sponsorships (33%).
- Those in literature were the most likely to have received revenue through product or art sales (38%).
- Those who work in studio arts were the most likely to have generated revenue through memberships or subscriptions (21%) while those in the performing arts sector were the most likely to have earned revenue through a pay-per-view method (25%).
- Those from Francophone official language minority communities were the most likely to earn money through product or art sales (52%).
- Women were the most likely to have had their work shown or released to or by a third party (57%).
- Recipients in Manitoba were the most likely to have received sponsorships (63%).
- Those in Quebec were the most likely to have shown/released their work to a third party (47%) or generated revenue through product or art sales (26%).
- Ontario artists were the most likely to have used this project as a pilot for their monetization strategy (29%).

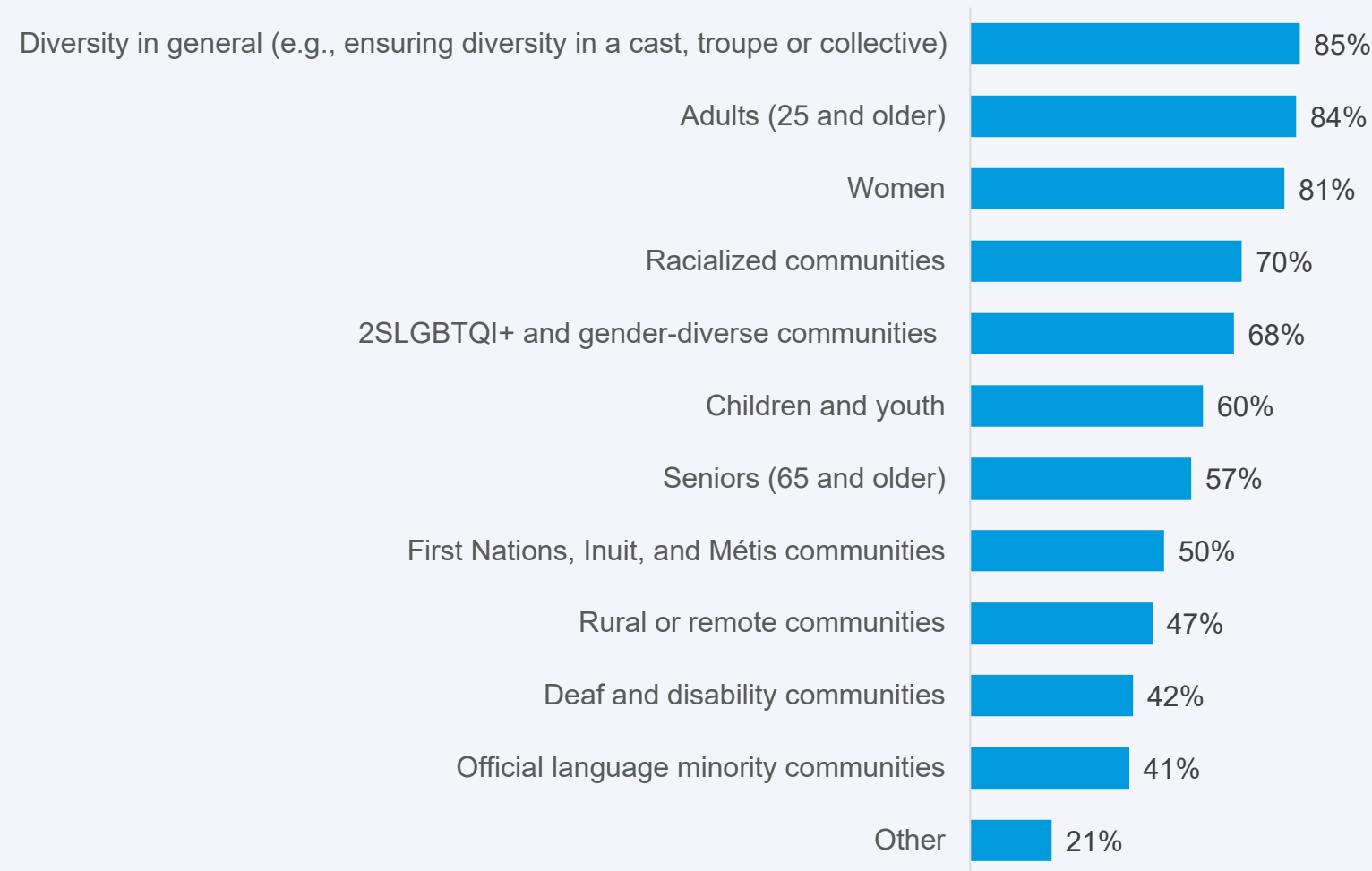
Please indicate if your project had a focus on engagement and inclusion of the following groups.

As previously noted, recipients engaged a wide range of communities, particularly:

- Adults (84%)
- Women (81%)
- Racialized communities (70%)
- 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities (68%)
- Children and youth (60%)

Additionally, the majority (85%) indicated that they were trying to ensure diversity in general, for example, by ensuring diversity in their cast, troupe, or collective.

Diversity: Results



Other Category

Responses in the “other” category included the following themes:

- Religious audiences
- Recent immigrants
- Residents of specific regions or municipalities
- No specific communities highlighted

Note: Some responses in the “other” category were from artists providing a more detailed description of one of the listed categories or offering broader information about the work.

Subgroup Analysis

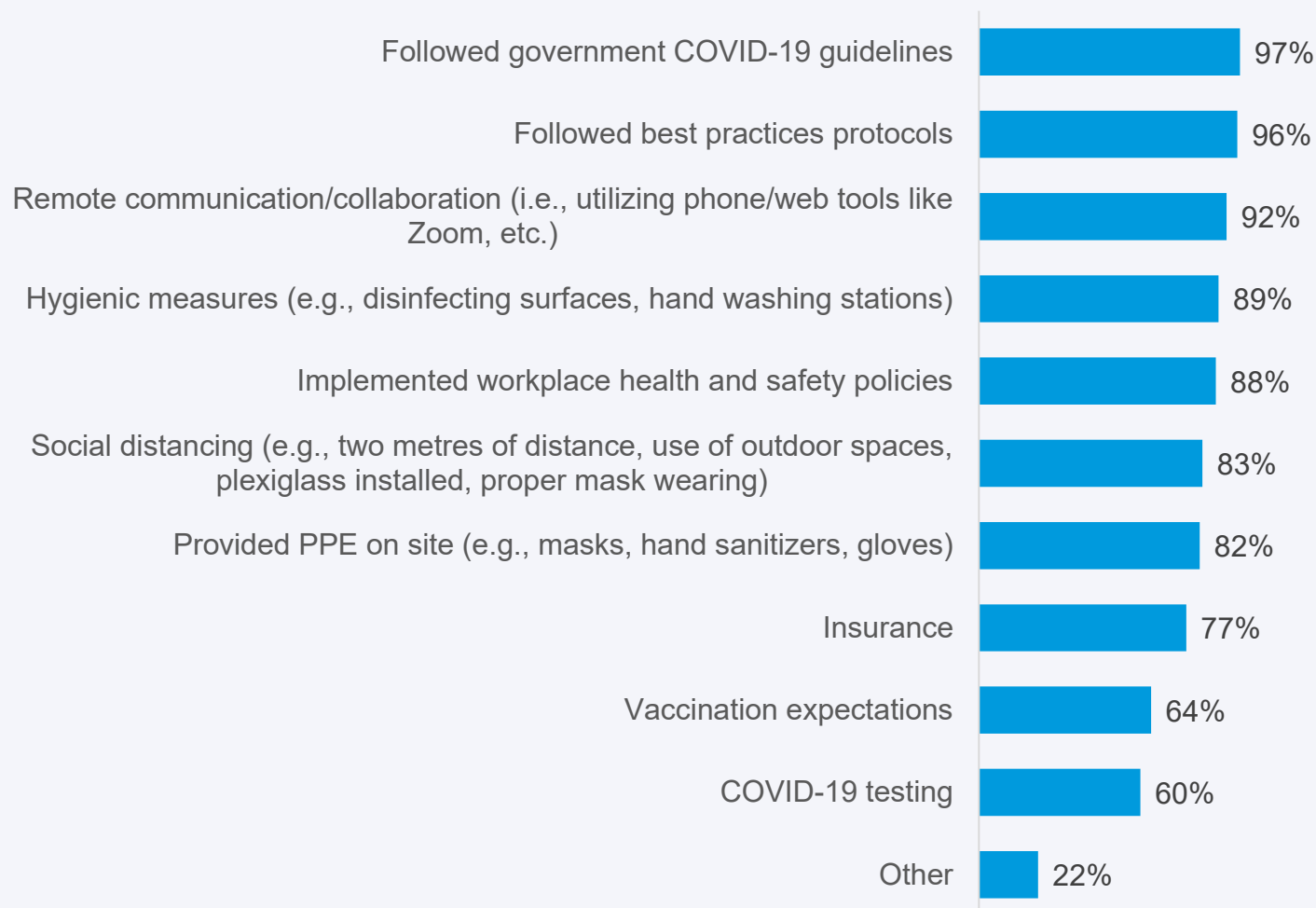
- Organizations were most likely to report engaging seniors (61%), First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities (54%) and rural or remote communities (52%).
- Those working in studio arts were most likely to report engaging First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities (64%).
- Those in multidisciplinary practices were most likely to report engaging 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities (78%).
- First Nations, Inuit, or Métis artists were most likely to report engaging First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities (96%) and rural and remote communities (74%).
- Those in 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities were the most likely to report engaging 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities (100%) and Deaf and disability communities (68%).
- Other recipients from strategic groups were most likely to report engaging their respective communities:
 - Racialized (91%).
 - Deaf and disability communities (87%).
 - Anglophone official language minority (98%)
 - Francophone official language minority (84%).
- Those in Newfoundland and Labrador as well as, Nova Scotia were most likely to report engaging rural and remote communities (87% and 74% respectively).
- Residents of Ontario were most likely to report reaching racialized communities (76%).
- Those living in Quebec were most likely to report engaging women (89%) and official language minority communities (76%).
- Those in New Brunswick were most likely to report engaging official language minority communities (93%), First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities (86%) and rural and remote communities (86%).

How did you ensure safe working environments for those involved in your activities?

Based on the responses that artists provided in their reports, it's clear that they emphasized ensuring safe work environments. Nearly everyone shared that they followed government COVID-19 guidelines (97%) and recommended best practices (96%).

Artists adapted the ways in which they worked, with some working remotely, connecting virtually using phone calls and online tools (92%) and those working in person took hygienic measures such as sanitizing high-touch surfaces and providing handwashing stations (89%).

Safe Working Conditions: Results



Subgroup Analysis

- Organizations were the most likely to have reported providing PPE (85%) and insurance (84%).
- Those in performing arts were the most likely to have reported taking hygienic measures (92%), implementing workplace safety policies (92%), having expectations around vaccinations (70%) and COVID-19 testing (66%).

Other Category

Responses in the “other” category included the following themes:

- The project was created completely virtually/remote
- Regular check-ins with artists and arts workers.
- Hybrid work options

Note: Some responses in the “other” category were from artists providing a more detailed description of one of the listed categories or offering broader information about the work.

Conclusions

Conclusions

Economic Impact at a Critical Time

The Digital Now program directly benefited over 53,000 artists and arts workers at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was posing an existential threat to Canada's arts sector.

Furthering Artistic Practice and Digital Knowledge

The program was highly effective in helping recipients develop or extend their artistic practice, notably by facilitating the reaching of new audiences/markets, the development of networks and collaborations, and enhancing skills, including digital knowledge.

Canadian Artists Reaching Diverse Communities

Grant recipients indicated that the funding helped them reach new audiences, including seniors, 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities, and racialized communities. The program provided access to the arts for a broad range of communities, including those who face barriers to inclusion in the arts, during a time of social isolation.

Conclusions

Providing a Wide Range of Benefits, From Fostering Creativity to Enhancing Digital Skills

According to grant recipients, the funding they received allowed them to obtain a wide range of benefits. The most cited benefits squarely aligned with Digital Now's core objectives: 1) fostering artistic creation, adaptation, and innovation, and 2) improving digital literacy, and skills 3) expanding audiences, visibility and reach.

Promotion: Capitalizing on Social Media and Cross-promotion

Recipients demonstrated a strong engagement with digital promotion, with almost all grant recipients opting to work through social media to promote their work to various audiences, thereby giving them the opportunity to hone their digital communications skills through practical application. The funding also allowed artists (84%) to cross-promote each other's works.

Evidence of Diverse Revenues

Artists' digital content supported through the Digital Now grants contributed to diversified revenues, with substantial proportions of recipients indicating that they were able to generate revenue through strategies such as pay-per-view, sponsorships, memberships and subscriptions, and donations. Recipients also noted being able to grow their audience base and pilot monetization strategies.

Adherence to COVID-19 Protocols

Artists adhered to COVID-19 protocols during their projects, including government COVID-19 guidelines and recommended best practices.



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