

Impacts and Challenges of Cultural Venues in New Brunswick: Summary of Survey Responses

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Prepared for the research project partners



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March 2024

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This is a “satellite report” of a larger research project into the impacts and challenges of cultural venues in New Brunswick. The project’s Steering Committee includes Julie Whitenect of ArtsLink NB, Laurence Dubuc of AAAPNB, Emily Falvey of the Owens Art Gallery, as well as visual artist, curator, and educator Emma Hassencahl-Perley.

The project, which will be completed in the spring of 2024, is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts and The Government of New Brunswick.

Introduction

This report provides a summary of important findings from a recent survey of operators of cultural venues in New Brunswick. The goals of this groundbreaking survey were to better understand venues' contributions to the cultural community and all New Brunswickers, as well as their financial health and human resources. These are topics that had not previously been thoroughly researched in the province.

This report is part of [a larger project that is investigating the impacts and post-pandemic challenges of the arts, culture, and heritage in New Brunswick](#). Other activities and reports in the project include:

- [A statistical profile of the 2,700 professional artists in New Brunswick in 2021](#).
- Interviews with operators of 13 cultural venues (a brief "satellite report" on the interview findings is planned for April).
- An analysis of other data on the arts and culture in the province.
- A fuller report on the entire project, which is planned for September of 2024.

The research project is intended to produce results that will inform the province's arts, culture, and heritage sector for the next decade. The project's partners will use these resources to further their information sharing, policy, and advocacy activities for the betterment of the sector as a whole.

The project partners are ArtsLink NB, Association acadienne des artistes professionnels du Nouveau-Brunswick (AAAPNB), and the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University. We want to thank the project's supporters: the Canada Council for the Arts and the Government of New Brunswick.

This report includes a summary of responses regarding the state of cultural venues, their community engagement activities, their human resources, and their financial situation.

Responses from 71 cultural venues

The survey received 71 responses that were complete enough to retain for analysis, including 38 in English (54% of the total) and 33 in French (46%). The survey was open from June 16 until July 31, 2023. Because the survey was not based on a random sample, it is not possible to estimate a margin of error.

A wide variety of venues responded to the survey. Responses were received from:

- Arts, culture, and heritage organizations of many sizes, types, and locations within New Brunswick, plus a few individuals with a venue.
- Renters or owners of one or more venues (i.e., physical spaces), as long as the respondent operates the venue.
- A senior staff or board member (only one response per organization was retained).

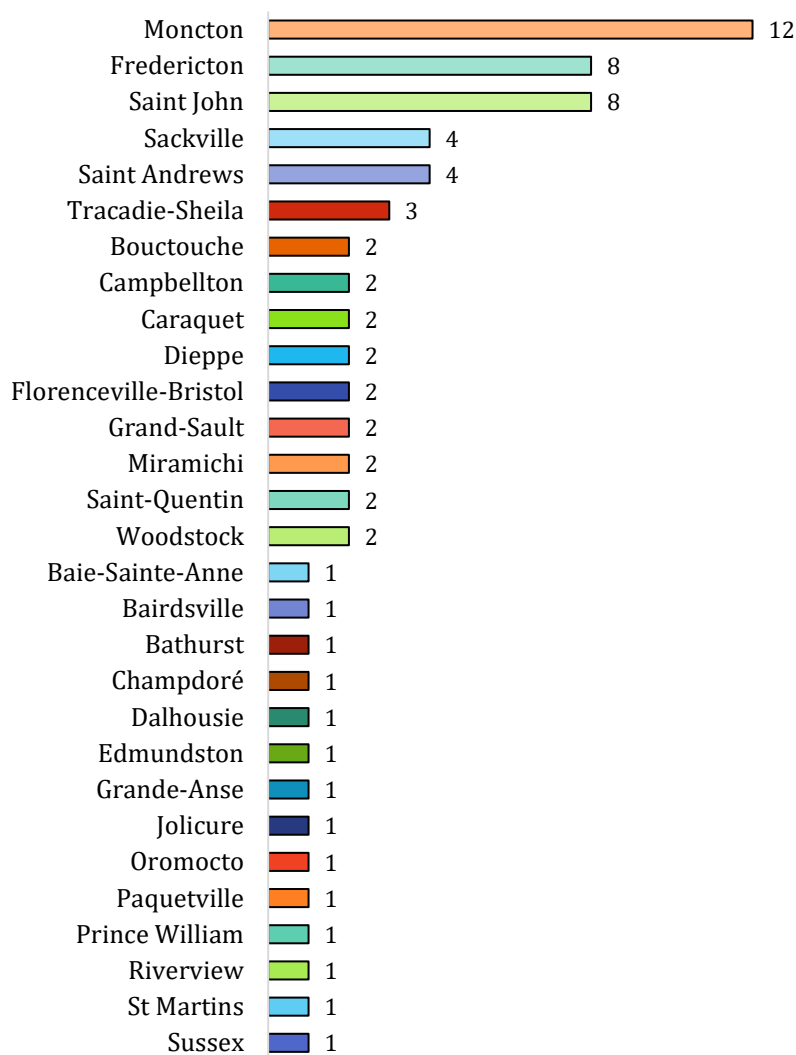
The survey was designed by Kelly Hill of Hill Strategies Research in collaboration with the project partners. The median time to complete the survey was 34 minutes.

Hill Strategies and the project partners wish to thank the respondents for taking the time and effort to complete the survey.

Beyond organization names, the survey responses are being kept confidential. Our reporting only provides overall statistics about the responses to each question. Respondents could skip most questions, and the percentages in this report represent the percent of people responding to that question (which is usually less than 71).

Respondents are based in 29 different cities and towns across New Brunswick, as shown in the accompanying graph.

Number of respondents by location



Source: Survey of N.B. cultural venues, 2023, Hill Strategies Research

Additional statistics about the types of venues that responded are at the end of the report.

Key findings

This report provides evidence regarding many aspects of the well-being of cultural venues in New Brunswick. Regarding their top strengths and concerns:

- Community engagement is perceived as a key area of strength for cultural venues.
- Funding is an area of significant concern (both government funding and earned revenues).

Details about venues' engagement in communities across the province include:

- Most venues have recently increased their community engagement activities. Common engagement activities include artist or author talks, professional development activities, and participatory creative experiences.
- Almost all cultural venues (94%) collaborate or are engaged with other groups or businesses. Many engage with schools, organizations that welcome newcomers, governments, and business associations.
- Venues see themselves as playing a major role in enhancing the arts, heritage, and creativity in their communities: 91% believe that they have a very important role in connecting people with the arts, culture, and heritage; 82% believe that they have a very important role in fostering individuals' creativity; and 71% believe that they have a very important role in developing and supporting artists.
- In addition, most venues believe that they have a very important role in enhancing community well-being (69%), fostering a sense of identity (69%), supporting intercultural exchange and dialogue (56%), contributing to economic development (55%), attracting and retaining residents (53%), as well as improving residents' health and well-being (52%).
- Over 500,000 attendees were reached by the 40 venues that responded to that survey question.

Cultural venues in New Brunswick tend to be small, and they have many challenges that may be related to their size:

- 4 is the median staff contingent for responding venues. Staff capacity is the third most common area of concern among venues. Venues struggle to offer competitive salaries and benefits. Roughly one-in-five venues (19%) said that they have no specific HR policies in place.
- In most venues, staff members do extra unpaid work: 78% of respondents (mostly senior staffers) reported that they or other staff members do unpaid work, in addition to their regular tasks.

Other important findings regarding human resources in N.B. cultural venues include:

- Most venues believe that they foster a culture of trust and belonging among staff (reported as a strength by 62%), but many struggle with human resource planning, including succession planning (reported as a concern by 44%).
- Volunteers are vital to the survival of many cultural venues. Overall, responding venues have 3 times more volunteers (1,537) than staff members (514).

Regarding their physical condition, the survey found that roughly one-quarter of responding cultural venues are not in good physical condition.

Concerning venues' support for artists:

- Venues predominantly support artists from New Brunswick: 2,160 of all 3,532 artists with which 45 responding venues worked hail from New Brunswick.
- Many venues struggle to adhere to minimum industry fee scales for artists (e.g., CARFAC, SOCAN): 29% of venues who work with professional artists do not adhere to minimum fee scales, and another 23% do so only sometimes. The remaining 48% always adhere to minimum fee scales. Of note, all 7 venues who work only with professional artists always pay minimum fees.

The survey probed a number of equity-related issues:

- Regarding who created the works that venues produced or presented, most venues produced and/or presented works that were created by women (71%), youth (68%), LGBTQ2SIA+ people (54%), and the Francophone minority in New Brunswick (54%).
- Relatively few venues produced and/or presented works created by disabled people (17%) or unhoused people (5%) during their most recent fiscal year.
- In terms of the subject matter of the works, two-thirds of venues said that they produced and/or presented works that were focused on youth, while exactly one-half produced and/or presented works focused on the province's Francophone minority in the past year.
- Few venues produced and/or presented works focused on low-income people (20%), disabled people (18%), responding or adapting to the climate emergency (15%), unhoused people (11%), or neurodivergent people (9%). Just over one-quarter of responding venues (28%) indicated that they do not focus on any of the equity-seeking groups listed in the question.

The full report contains many more details regarding the survey findings.

State of N.B. cultural venues

Physical condition

Roughly one-quarter of responding cultural venues are not in good physical condition. More specifically, particularly large proportions of venues are not in good shape regarding equipment, HVAC, and physical accessibility:

- Overall physical condition: 23% are in fair, poor, or very poor condition (19% fair, 4% poor, and 0% very poor).
- Equipment and HVAC: 39% are in fair, poor, or very poor condition (19% fair, 17% poor, and 3% very poor).
- Physical accessibility: 39% are in fair, poor, or very poor condition (22% fair, 13% poor, and 4% very poor).

The overall findings are reasonably close to those from a [national survey of publicly-owned cultural venues](#), which found that 24% of performance spaces are considered to be in fair, poor, or very poor condition, as are 33% of art galleries.

Funding is an area of significant concern

Venues were asked about 21 areas of importance for the province's cultural organizations, such as funding, community engagement, staff retention, diversity and inclusion activities, and the climate emergency. Respondents identified each area as either a strength or a concern (or somewhere in between / both at the same time).

Seven areas emerged as significant **current concerns** for cultural venues, with government funding near the top of the list, surpassed only by participants' lack of time:

- Competition for people's time (e.g., "I'm too busy to do that"): concern for 60% of respondents and strength for just 4%, with 37% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- Obtaining adequate government funding: concern for 59% of respondents and strength for 18%, with 23% somewhere in between (or both).
- Obtaining donations and/or sponsorships (from individuals and businesses): concern for 54% of respondents and strength for 21%, with 25% somewhere in between (or both).
- Attracting a diverse range of audience members / participants: concern for 48% of respondents and strength for 16%, with 36% somewhere in between (or both).
- Attracting attendees or participants (especially post-pandemic): concern for 46% of respondents and strength for 21%, with 33% somewhere in between (or both).
- Advancing truth and reconciliation: concern for 35% of respondents and strength for 19%, with 46% somewhere in between (or both).
- Generating earned revenues: concern for 42% of respondents and strength for 26%, with 32% somewhere in between (or both).
- Arts education / arts curriculum in New Brunswick: concern for 42% of respondents and strength for 27%, with 31% somewhere in between (or both).

Government funding was at the top of the list when cultural venues were asked about areas that are important in the **future development** of their organizations. (Respondents could select up to 5 of 21 areas that would be most important to them.)

Most common selections

- Obtaining adequate government funding: selected by 62% of respondents
- Generating earned revenues: 52%

Selected by about 1/3 of respondents

- Overall staff capacity: 34%
- Obtaining donations and/or sponsorships (from individuals and businesses): 33%
- Attracting attendees or participants (especially post-pandemic): 31%
- Attracting a diverse range of audience members / participants: 31%
- Developing and maintaining community partnerships: 31%

Selected by about 1/4 of respondents

- Staff retention: 26%
- Labour shortage(s) in specific areas: 25%
- Facilities / physical plant: 23%
- Community engagement or outreach: 21%
- Accessibility of your venue(s) and programs: 21%

Selected by less than 1/6 of respondents

- Attracting and retaining volunteers: 16%
- Staff development (including training and mentoring): 15%
- Governance / longer term planning: 10%
- Ensuring staff diversity and inclusion: 8%
- Digital capacity / integration of new technologies: 8%
- Arts education / arts curriculum in New Brunswick: 7%
- Advancing truth and reconciliation: 7%
- Responding or adapting to the climate emergency: 7%
- Competition for people's time (e.g., "I'm too busy to do that"): 2%

Community engagement is perceived as an area of strength for cultural venues

Three areas stood out as particular current strengths of N.B. cultural venues, including two that involve significant community connections:

- Developing and maintaining community partnerships: strength for 53% of respondents and concern for 13%, with 33% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- Community engagement or outreach: strength for 52% of respondents and concern for 16%, with 31% somewhere in between (or both).
- Governance / longer term planning: strength for 53% of respondents and concern for 26%, with 21% somewhere in between (or both).

Community partnerships and engagement

Delving into aspects of venues' community partnerships and engagement, the survey found that most venues (51%) have increased their community engagement activities over the past 5 years, and another 39% have seen no change in the level of their community engagement activities. The remaining 10% indicated that their community engagement activities have decreased over the past 5 years.

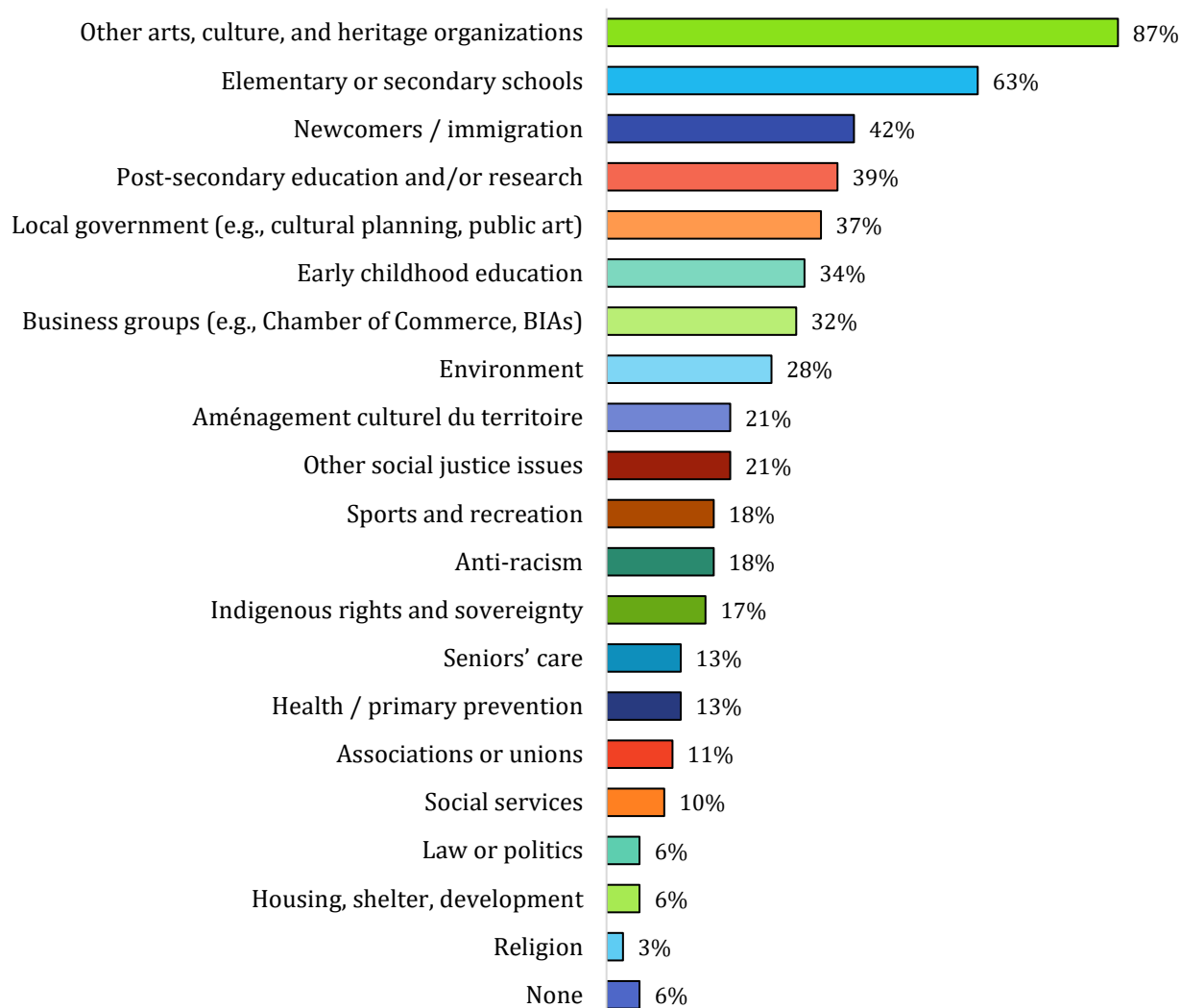
The integration of cultural venues into their communities is most commonly achieved through the following engagement activities:

- Talks / workshops (e.g., artist or author talks): selected by 86% of respondents
- Professional development: 60%
- Participatory creative experiences: 60%
- Residencies for artists or curators (with a community engagement component): 39%
- Community-engaged art (art as social practice): 33%
- Social wellness programs: 29%
- Digital initiatives to engage communities (beyond simply presenting works): 24%

Almost all cultural venues (94%) collaborate or are engaged with other groups or businesses. These collaborations and engagements involve organizations in many different areas of society, as shown in the accompanying graph. It is not surprising that other cultural organizations are their most common collaborators. Almost two-thirds engage with schools, and over 40% collaborate to welcome newcomers.

Respondents could select multiple areas of society. On average, respondents selected 5.5 types of organizations with which they collaborate or are active.

Engagement or collaborations in various areas of society by N.B. cultural venues



Source: Survey of N.B. cultural venues, 2023, Hill Strategies Research

Many (self-assessed) benefits and impacts

When asked ...

- The following are some areas in which the arts, culture, and heritage have been shown to contribute to society. How important of a role do you believe that your venue currently plays in each of these areas?

... it is not surprising that a large majority of respondents selected areas related to the arts and creativity:

- Connecting people (e.g., audiences, program participants) with the arts, culture, and heritage: 91% said that they play a very important role, and another 7% said somewhat important.
- Fostering individuals' creativity: 82% said very important, and another 7% said somewhat important.
- Developing and supporting artists: 71% said very important, and another 17% said somewhat important.

According to their self-assessments, venues' impacts include community well-being, economic development, and the attraction and retention of residents. These broader social and economic impacts are undoubtedly enhanced by the engagement activities and collaborations outlined in the previous section.

Venue operators believe that they have important impacts related to:

- Contributing to **community or neighbourhood well-being**: very important for 69% of respondents and somewhat important for another 25%.
- Fostering a **sense of identity**: very important for 69% of respondents and somewhat important for another 23%.
- Supporting **intercultural exchange and dialogue**: very important for 56% of respondents and somewhat important for another 32%.
- Contributing to **economic development**: very important for 55% of respondents and somewhat important for another 26%.
- Helping the community **attract and retain residents**: very important for 53% of respondents and somewhat important for another 34%.
- Improving **individuals' health and well-being**: very important for 52% of respondents and somewhat important for another 31%.
- Exposing people to **Indigenous arts and cultures**: very important for 44% of respondents and somewhat important for another 34%.
- Improving **educational outcomes**, literacy, and/or numeracy: very important for 44% of respondents and somewhat important for another 23%.
- Exposing people to the **arts and cultures of racialized people**: very important for 43% of respondents and somewhat important for another 32%.
- Fostering **social justice**: very important for 35% of respondents and somewhat important for another 31%.
- Supporting **Indigenous cultural sovereignty**: very important for 33% of respondents and somewhat important for another 29%.

- Raising awareness of **social, political, and/or environmental issues**: very important for 32% of respondents and somewhat important for another 43%.

Human resources

Venues typically have small staff contingents

Cultural venues in New Brunswick tend to be small. When asked about their human resources (as of the end of their most recent fiscal year):

- 2 was the most common number of staff members.
- The median number of staff members is 4, and the average is 8.
- 47 venues reported having at least 1 staff position, with a total of 514 positions. 4 responding venues have no staff members.

Volunteers are vital to the province's cultural venues. In fact, the venues reported 3 times more volunteers (1,537) than staff members (514). 44 venues reported having at least 1 volunteer, while another 10 reported none. The median number of volunteers per venue is 15, and the average is 28.

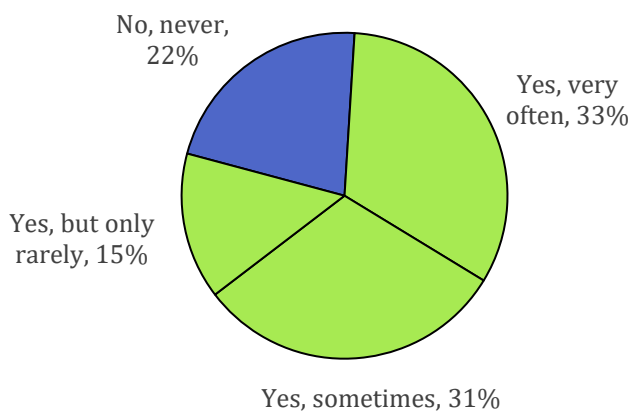
Working conditions of staff members

In most venues, staff members do extra unpaid work: 78% of respondents (mostly senior staffers) reported that they or other staff members do unpaid work, in addition to their regular tasks. One-third reported doing unpaid work "very often", as shown in the accompanying graph.

Regarding benefits and opportunities offered to staff members, a large majority of cultural venues offer paid vacation time (76%) and flexible work hours (73%) to their staff members. About two thirds offer professional development opportunities (66%), paid sick leave (64%), and time off in lieu of payment for overtime (63%). Roughly one-half offer a prescription drug plan (53%), dental care (51%), extended health coverage (51%), or vision plan (47%).

About one-in-eight venues (12%) offer no benefits or opportunities to their staff members.

Unpaid work by respondents or other staff members



Source: Survey of N.B. cultural venues, 2023, Hill Strategies Research

The accompanying graph shows all benefits and opportunities that venues could select.

The human resources section of the survey included a question about policies that respondents have in place, with some surprising results.

For example, [a national survey](#) found that 4% of organizations and businesses in the arts, culture, and recreation have a written environmental policy. In the New Brunswick survey, 31% of respondents indicated that they have an environmental policy.

It is possible that some respondents answered “yes” regarding their policies if they pay attention to a particular issue, rather than if they have a formal policy in place.

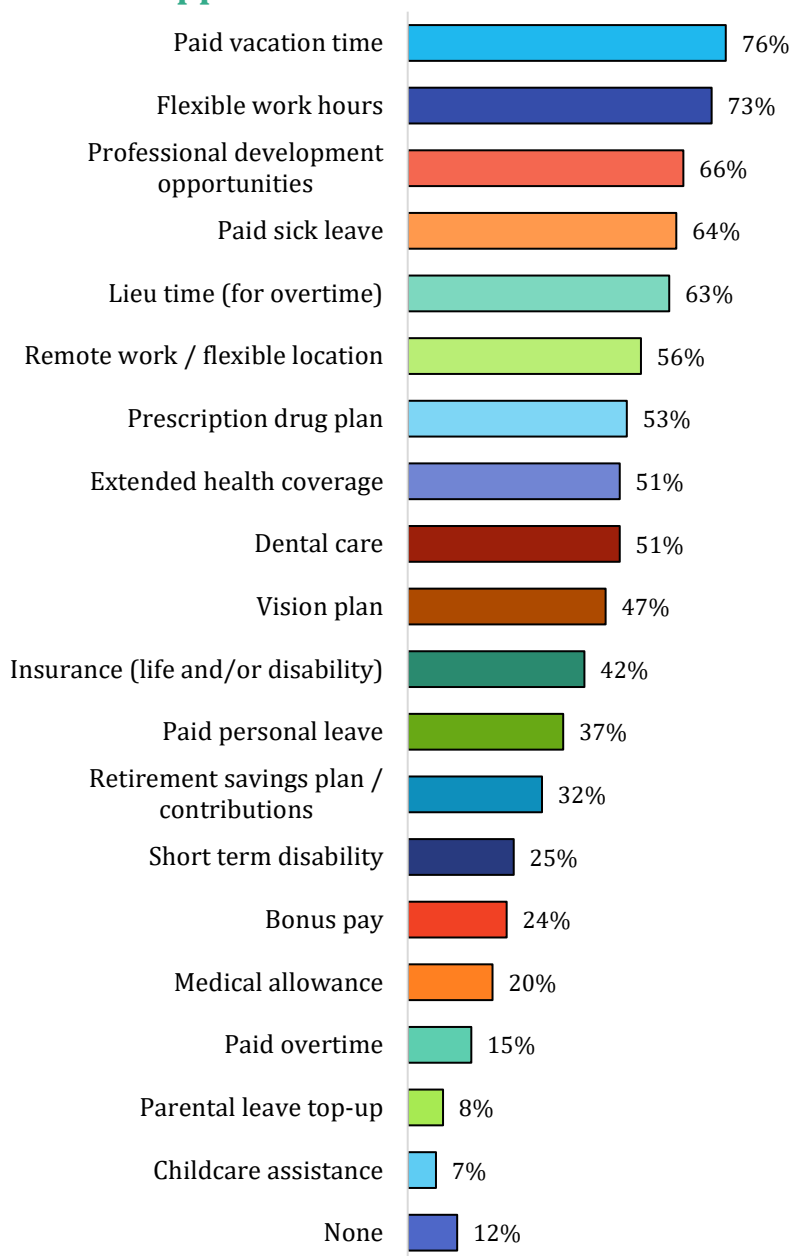
In the survey, about two-thirds of respondents indicated that they have:

- Anti-harassment / sexual violence policy (68%)
- Staff code of conduct (66%)
- Staff salary policy (63%)
- Performance appraisals / reviews (63%)
- Health, safety, and security policy (63%)

Somewhere around one-half of venues reported having in place the following policies:

- Conflict of interest (56%)
- Anti-violence (47%)

Percentage of N.B. cultural venues offering certain types of benefits or opportunities to staff members



Source: Survey of N.B. cultural venues, 2023, Hill Strategies Research

- Equity (47%)
- Anti-racism (44%)

Fewer organizations indicated that they have a dispute resolution or mediation policy (39%) or an environmental policy (31%).

Roughly one-in-five venues (19%) said that they have none of these HR policies in place.

Human resource strengths and concerns

Venues were asked about human resource areas that they might consider strengths or weaknesses within their organizations. The most common areas of HR strength are:

- **A culture of trust and belonging among staff:** strength for 62% of respondents and concern for just 8%, with 30% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- **Governance** (via Board or other governing body): strength for 56% and concern for 12%, with 33% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- **Staff leadership:** strength for 49% and strength for 15%, with 36% somewhere in between (or both).

Three areas emerged as significant HR concerns for cultural venues:

- **Human resource planning** (including succession planning) concern for 44% and strength for 17%, with 39% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- **Competitive salaries:** concern for 45% and strength for 24%, with 31% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- **Policies or standards regarding cost-of-living adjustments:** concern for 45% and strength for 26%, with 29% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).

A significant minority were “on the fence” about the remaining HR items. Many venues indicated that their organizations are “somewhere in between” regarding:

- Staff development, coaching, and/or training: strength for 38% and concern for 21%, with 42% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- Addressing barriers to diversity and inclusion: strength for 36% and concern for 20%, with 44% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- Leadership development, coaching, and/or training: strength for 35% and concern for 20%, with 45% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- Ensuring that equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts go beyond tokenism: strength for 35% and concern for 23%, with 42% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).
- Competitive working conditions: strength for 38% and concern for 27%, with 35% somewhere in between (or both a strength and a concern).

Working with artists

The survey probed venues' important work with professional and/or amateur artists. A large majority of responding venues work with artists (89%), including 74% who work with both professional and amateur artists, 11% who work exclusively with professional artists, and 3% who work only with amateur artists.

45 venues reported the number of artists with whom they worked in their most recent fiscal year. These venues worked with 3,532 artists, including 2,160 from New Brunswick, 594 from other Atlantic provinces, and 778 artists from elsewhere.

The medians per organization are 30 New Brunswick artists, 37 Atlantic artists (including those in N.B.), and 45 artists in total.

Many NB venues struggle to adhere to minimum industry fee scales for artists (e.g., CARFAC, SOCAN): 29% of venues who work with professional artists do not adhere to minimum fee scales, and another 23% do so only sometimes. The remaining 48% always adhere to minimum fee scales. Of note, all 7 venues who work *only* with professional artists always pay minimum fees.

Over 500,000 attendees

40 venues reported the number of attendees or program participants that they had in their most recent fiscal year. These venues welcomed 508,200 people into their venues. The median number of attendees per organization is 3,750, and the most common response was 500 attendees.

26 membership-based venues responded to the survey, reporting a total of 9,960 members in their most recent fiscal year. The median number of members per organization is 157, and the most common response was 75 members.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion in programming decisions

An important component of the survey investigated the types of works, events, and activities at cultural venues during their most recent fiscal year.

Regarding **who created the works** that venues produced or presented, most venues produced and/or presented works that were created by women (71%), youth (68%), LGBTQ2SIA+ people (54%), and the Francophone minority in New Brunswick (54%).

Nearly one-half of venues produced and/or presented works created by Indigenous Peoples (49%), non-binary, gender fluid, or gender diverse people (44%), seniors (44%), Black people (40%), and other racialized people (41%).

Fewer venues indicated that they produced and/or presented works created by newcomers / immigrants (37%), people who speak languages other than English and French (33%), neurodivergent people (24%), low-income people (24%), disabled people (17%), or unhoused people (5%).

In terms of the **subject matter of the works**, two-thirds of venues said that they produced and/or presented works that were focused on youth (67%) during their most recent fiscal year, while exactly one-half (50%) produced and/or presented works focused on the province's Francophone minority.

Approximately one-third of venues produced and/or presented works focused on newcomers / immigrants (38%), advancing the place of queer or transgender people (33%), seniors (33%), advancing the place of women in society (30%), and gender bias / sexism (29%).

Roughly one-quarter of responding venues produced and/or presented works focused on truth and reconciliation (26%), Indigenous cultural sovereignty (24%), and anti-racism (24%).

Fewer venues said that they produced and/or presented works focused on low-income people (20%), disabled people (18%), responding or adapting to the climate emergency (15%), unhoused people (11%), or neurodivergent people (9%).

More generally, venues were asked whether they "have a **substantial focus on serving people from any of the following equity-seeking groups**. In other words, do these groups figure into [their] planning in a substantial way?" For this question, just over one-quarter of responding venues (28%) indicated that they do not focus on any of the equity-seeking groups that were listed in the question.

Exactly one-half of venues said that they have a substantial focus on LGBTQ2SIA+ people or the province's Francophone minority (each 50%), with slightly smaller numbers of respondents having a substantial focus on Indigenous Peoples (46%), women (43%), non-binary, gender fluid, or gender diverse people (41%), or newcomers / immigrants (38%).

Smaller proportions of responding venues indicated that they have a substantial focus on seniors (32%), Black people (29%), other racialized people (also 29%), low-income people (28%), disabled people (24%), at-risk youth (22%), neurodivergent people (21%), people who speak languages other than English and French (16%), or unhoused people (4%).

Statistics about the types of venues that responded

A wide range of venues responded to the survey, with the most common being art galleries, performance spaces, and community centres. (Respondents could select multiple venue types, and the percentage add to much more than 100%.) From most to least common, the venues indicated that they are a / an:

- Art gallery / art museum: 32% (n=23)
- Performance / presentation space: 28% (n=20)
- Community centre or other multidisciplinary hub: 25% (n=18)
- Studio space: 18% (n=13)
- Museum (other than an art museum): 13% (n=9)
- Educational space (e.g., arts schools, primary or secondary schools): 13% (n=9)
- Archives: 10% (n=7)
- Artist-run centre: 10% (n=7)
- Library: 8% (n=6)
- Heritage / history site (e.g., zoo or aquarium animals, marine information, botanical garden): 8% (n=6)
- Cultural venue associated with an educational institution (e.g., campus radio): 7% (n=5)
- Municipality: 4% (n=3)
- Media arts centre: 3% (n=2)
- Publisher: 1% (n=1)
- Bookstore: 1% (n=1)

Responding venues engage in a wide range of arts and culture activities, with the most common being “education in the arts, culture, and/or heritage” (73% of respondents selected this option). More than half of respondents engage in visual arts, photography, and/or crafts (61%).

Other activities were selected by roughly one-third of respondents (between 30% and 39%):

- music or opera
- festivals, celebrations, or cultural fairs (including salons du livre)
- preservation of cultural history and heritage
- film / video / other media arts
- theatre
- books / periodicals / magazines / other published works.

28% of venues indicated that they engage in the digital presentation of the arts, culture, and/or heritage.

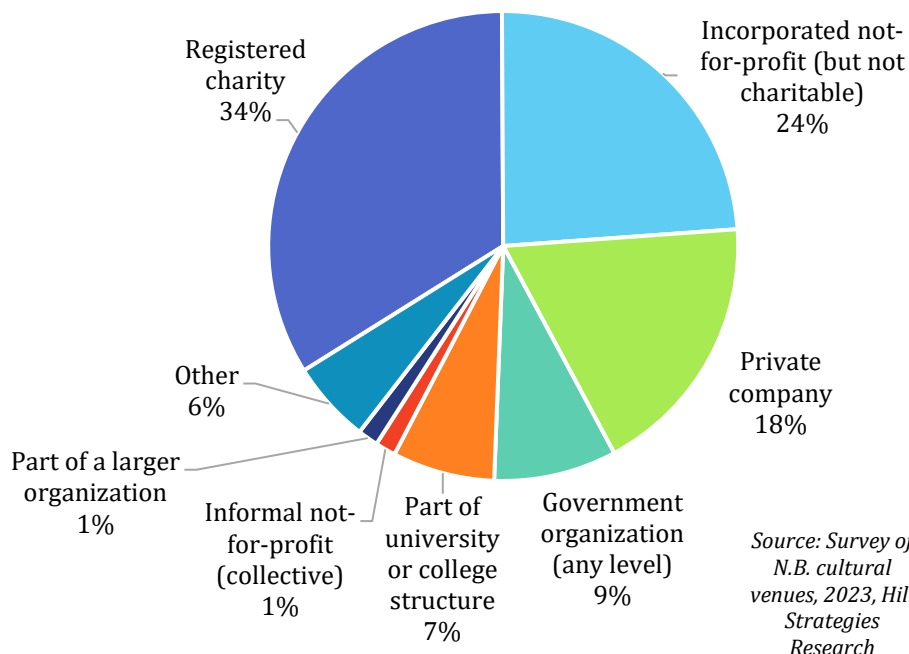
The average age of responding venues is 37 years (i.e., established in 1986), with the oldest organization having been established in 1836 (187 years old) and the newest having been established in 2023.

The organizational structures of responding venues varied. Registered charities were most common, but some privately-owned and government-owned venues completed the survey, alongside their not-for-profit counterparts. Full details are provided in the accompanying graph.

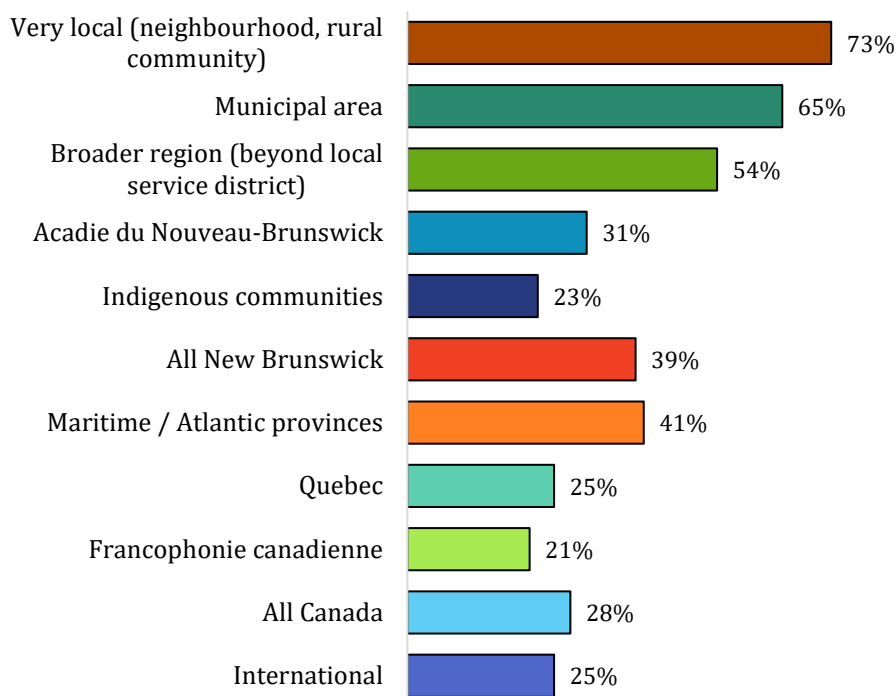
Cultural venues in New Brunswick are active in many geographic areas inside and outside the province, as shown in the accompanying graph. While most (73%) have a very local element to their activities, many also extend beyond the borders of the province: 41% cover the Atlantic provinces, 28% cover all of Canada, and 25% have an international element to their activities.

Respondents could select multiple geographic areas. In fact, respondents selected an average of 4 areas each.

Survey respondents by type



Geographic areas served by New Brunswick cultural venues



Source: Survey of N.B. cultural venues, 2023, Hill Strategies Research