

Small and Mighty

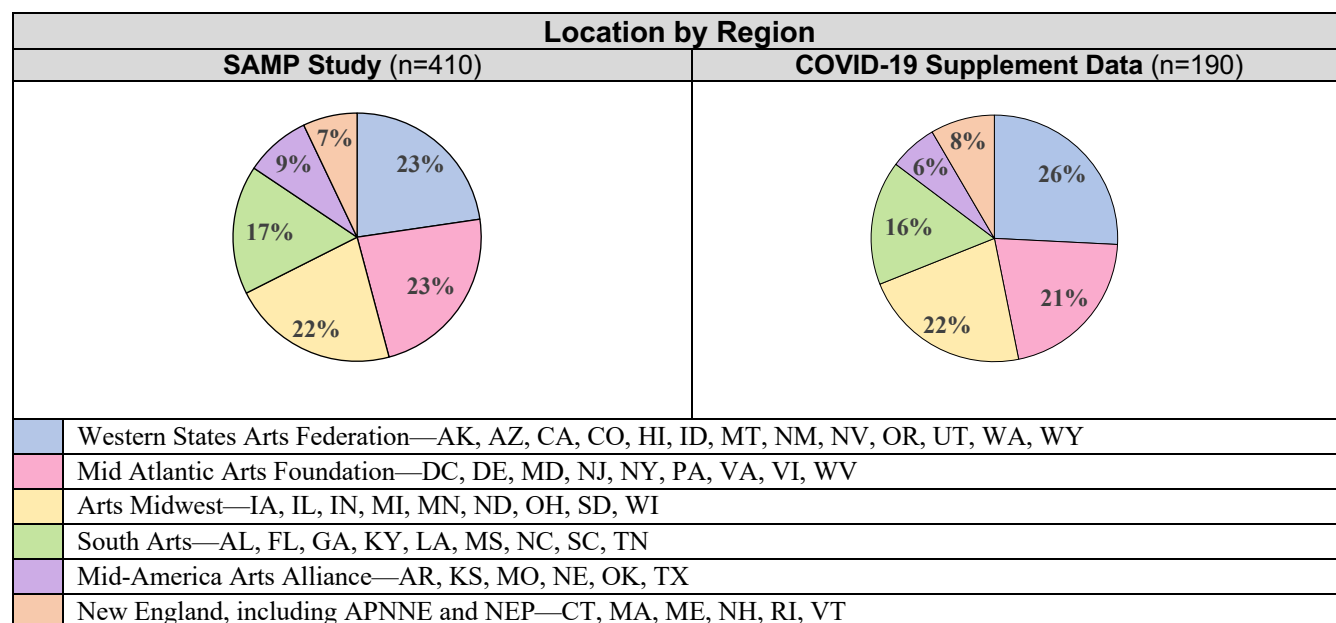
A Study of Small and Midsized Presenting Organizations in the United States COVID-19 Supplement, September 2020

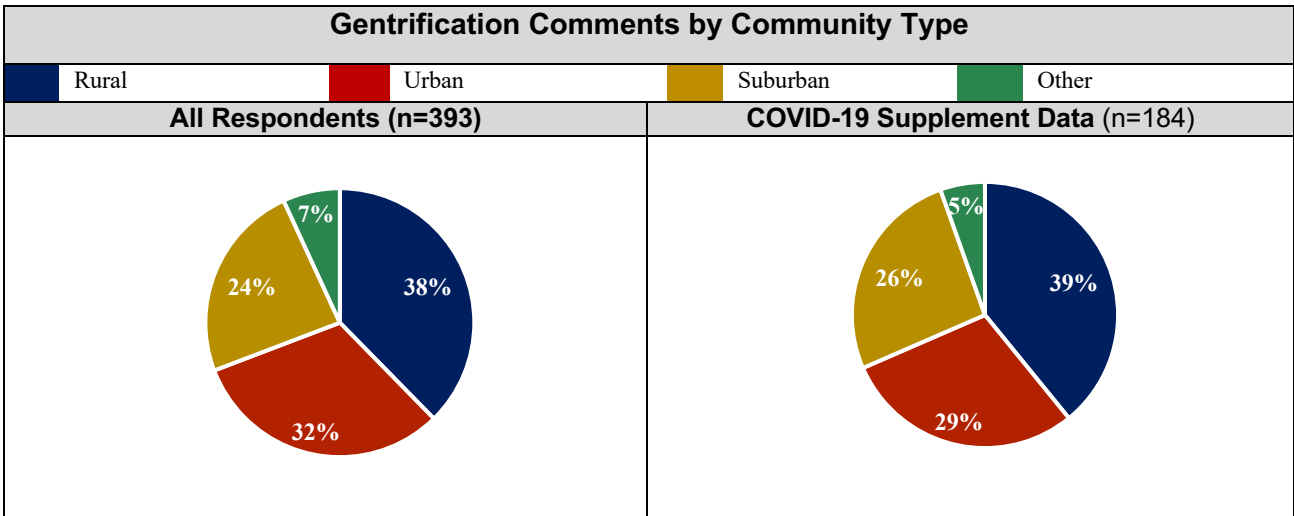
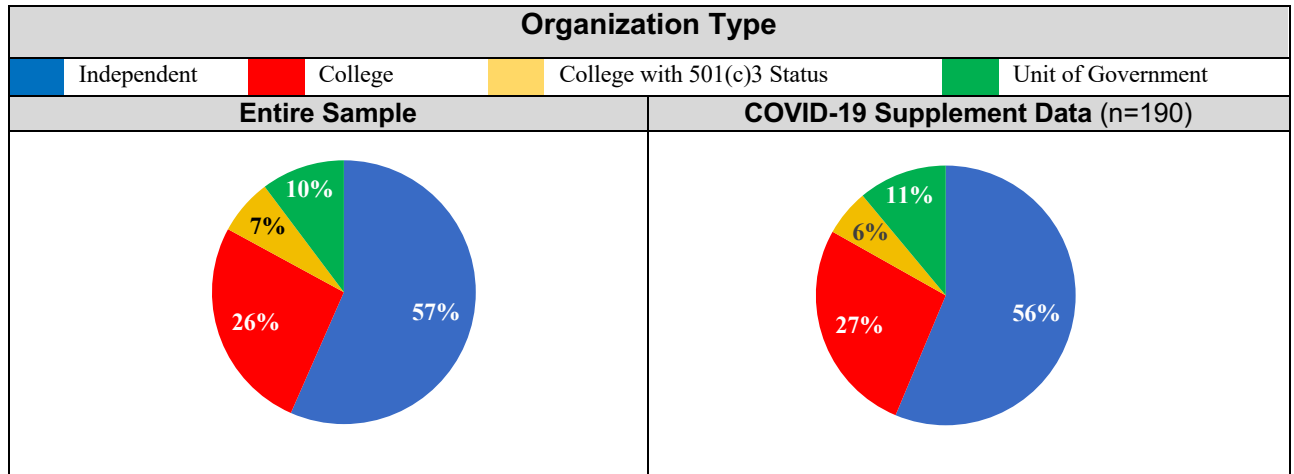
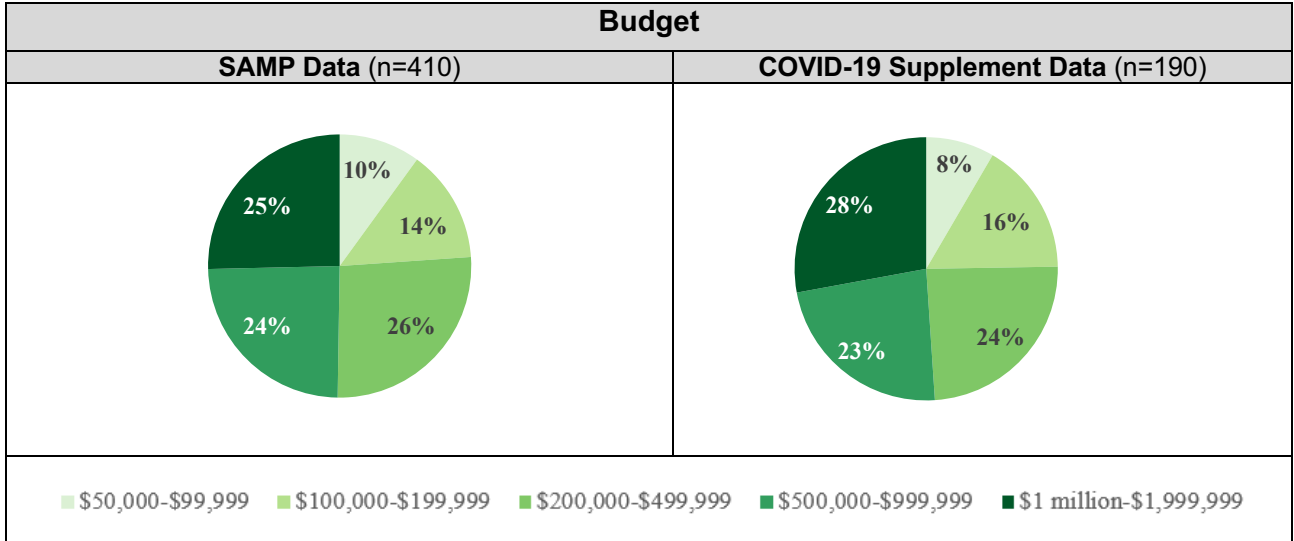
The SAMP study was designed and data were gathered before the COVID-19 pandemic overtook the country and the presenting field. As of May, when the original survey analysis was completed, widespread closures of many arts organizations were raising questions about how the presenting industry would do its work in 2020 and beyond. APAP and CCA felt obligated to recontact respondents and obtain feedback on how the pandemic was affecting them, so that their new perspectives could be included. This supplement reports on findings.

In June 2020, respondents were sent an eight-question survey. Respondents were advised that APAP and CCA assumed that their plans may have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that we strove to reflect a more up-to-date picture of their circumstances and tell their story as accurately as possible. The survey was deployed on June 5, 2020, resent on June 12 and 19, and closed on June 22.

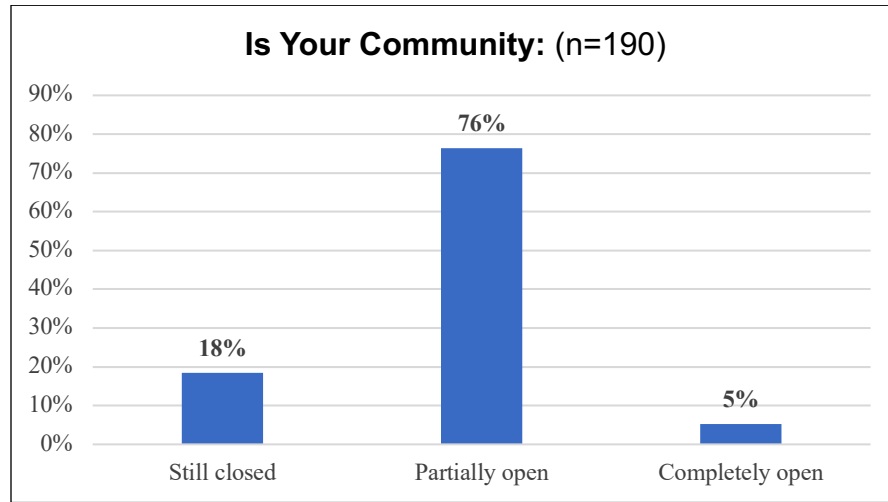
A total of 190 of the original 410 SAMPs completed it, for a response rate of 46%.

Representativeness. The overall survey pool of 410 respondents and the 190 who responded to this supplement are strikingly similar. The proportions by region, budget, organization type, and community type are nearly identical. The pie charts below display the similarity between the full pool and the supplement respondents on these four measures.





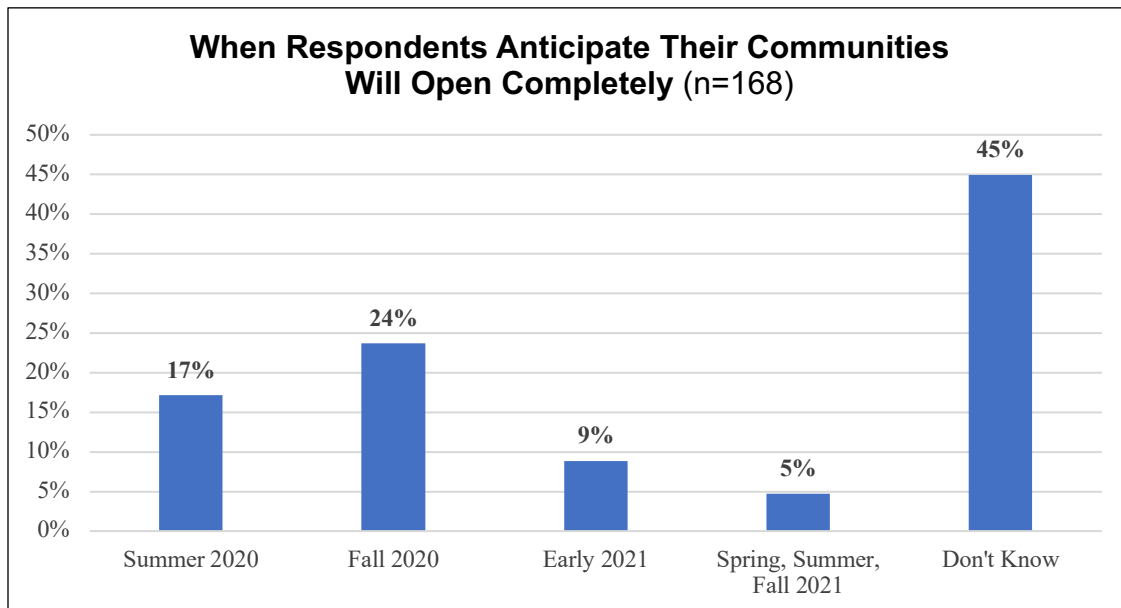
Community Closures. Respondents were asked to indicate if their community was still closed, partially open, or completely open.



Three-fourths (76%) of respondents' communities are partially open. Only 18% are still closed and just 5% are completely open.

Respondents whose communities were partially or fully closed were asked when they anticipate their communities will open completely. To allow for a variety of circumstances, including the degree of unknown under which they are operating, this question was left open-ended.

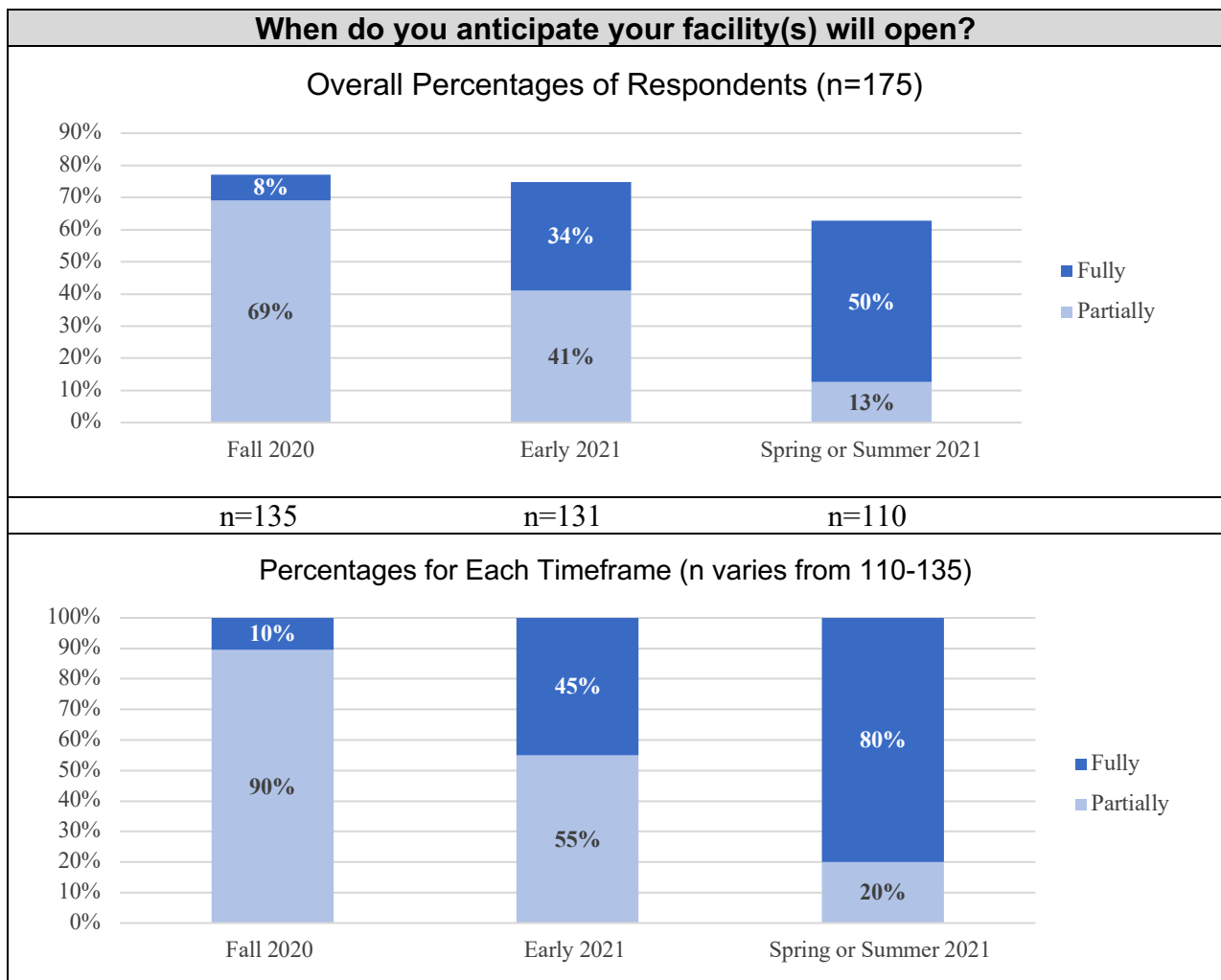
Responses fit into the categories displayed on the bar graph below.



Of the 168 who wrote a comment for this question, **76 respondents (45%) don't know when their community will open completely.** Another 29 (17%) indicated dates in Summer 2020; 40 (24%) in Fall 2020; 15 in early 2021; and 8 in either Spring, Summer or Fall of 2021.

Facility Closures. Respondents were then asked when they anticipate that their facility(s) will open. Knowing that respondents may have multiple facilities and might be opening facilities either partially or fully and on different timelines, they could check any choices and/or describe their circumstances.

The graphs below display the timeframe(s) by which respondents anticipate their venues will open, whether partially or fully. The first graph displays the overall percentages for all respondents who answered this question. The second graph displays percentages for the number of respondents who fall within each of the three timeframes (e.g., Fall 2020, Early 2021, and Spring/Summer 2021).

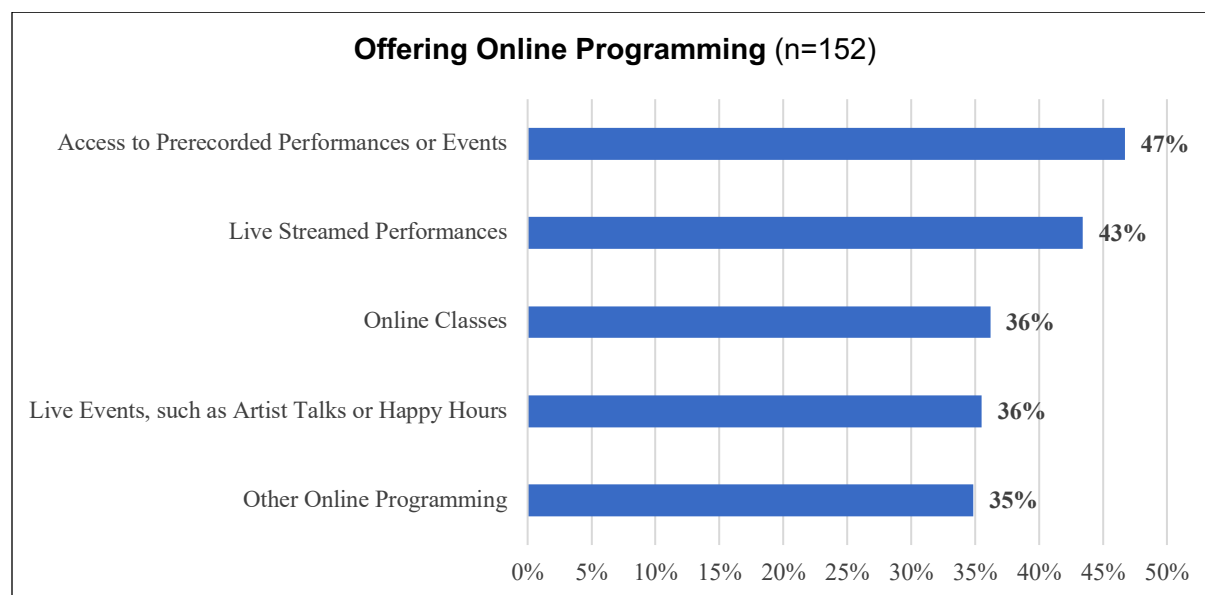


As both graphs show, of the 175 respondents who answered this question, **three-quarters anticipate opening to some degree in Fall 2020; however nearly all will only open partially at that time.** Nearly half anticipate opening fully by early 2021. Note that 30 of the 175 respondents checked “fully” for more than one-time frame, suggesting that perhaps they were fully opening different facilities at different times. (The 13 who provided other comments do not appear in the graphs.)

Other Comments (62). Comments were generally divided into 8 groups.

- Almost one-third (19) stated that their opening date depends on **decisions yet to be made by larger institutions**, including government agencies and college administrations that dictate their operations. One college presenter conveyed this **theme of contingency and the degree of unknown under which they are operating, and the subsequent need to cancel events**. As one wrote, “We will open when the college does and that has not been determined. I have canceled all plans for live events this fall. We remain hopeful for some live events in spring 2021.” Another independent presenter commented, “Opening will depend upon guidelines from our governor and local health department.”
- Fifteen respondents simply indicated they **do not know when their facilities will open**. A college presenter described constantly resetting expectations and open dates, which are: “just guesses at this point. COVID cases continue to occur, though we are a small community We take it week by week.” Similarly, an independent presenter wrote, “These are all educated guesses. We are hoping to have our first performance in December 2020. Other performances are planned for spring/summer 2021. Some or all might be restricted to partial. Or maybe we would be fully open. Unknown.”
- Some respondents (8) **hope to open with limited capacity and social distancing measures**, though most still do not know if or when that will be possible. As one wrote, “We hope to start presenting concerts with limited capacity in August 2020.” A college presenter wrote that they hope to open in the fall of 2020 but only, “if we hit the next benchmark -- only gatherings of 50 allowed.”
- A group of 6 reported **planning to open in early 2021**. One wrote, “We will stumble along between now and March 1, but are planning on a full schedule after that date.”
- A group of 5 either **use different venues or do not operate a facility**. Two of them mentioned using venues like schools, libraries, and museums. As one commented, “Churches and some outdoor spaces will be available by July 1.” Two mentioned **outdoor possibilities**, with one saying, “Outdoor events may be permitted earlier.”
- Only 5 wrote about **currently being open**: one with “social distancing and other guidelines in place,” one with studios open, another who opened galleries “with limited attendance,” and one with “very, very limited outside seating.”
- A few (3) mentioned opening in **Summer 2020** for “non-theatrical spaces,” movies, and live events.
- One respondent wrote of **not opening until there is a vaccine**: “I do not anticipate full capacity capabilities before vaccine, which I do not believe will be available to general public until winter 2022.”

Online Programming. Respondents were asked to indicate if they are offering any online programming. They could check all that apply.



80% of respondents are offering one or more forms of online programming. The chart below shows the number of online programs offered by respondents.

Offering Online Programming	
Respondents who checked:	
1 type*	46
2 types*	53
3 types*	5
All 4 types*	16
Only other programming	32

*38 of these also selected Other Online Programming.

In the open-ended comments, 53 respondents described other types of online programming that they are either offering or considering, or noted the barriers that are keeping them from moving forward with online programming. Responses generally fell within four groups.

- Researching online programs in a time of great unknown (16).** One is “exploring all possible virtual programming.” A few indicated they have not yet started online programming, such as one who said they “do not yet know how programming will be presented” and another who has “not done much” due to budget and other restrictions. One independent presenter is waiting for “budget requests to purchase equipment for live streaming.” Similarly, a college has not yet begun online programming and is “going through all the legal requirements to do so.”

- **Using standard online platforms (11).** These include YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, websites and video streaming services to create such programming as live venue tours, participatory sessions to learn arts and crafts, summer arts camps, webinars, performances and other content.
- **Other ways in which they are programming online (21).** Respondents mentioned teacher trainings, film screenings, artist lunches, community discussions, videotaped vignettes, streamed conversations, fundraisers, art contests, open mic nights, and virtual gatherings such as galas. One is investigating “music piped into people’s personal devices while hiking in a preserve or driving to a particular site.” Four are recording such events as readings, exhibit tours, craft demonstrations and performances.
- **Continuing existing online programs (5).** These respondents described programs they checked above.

Stories of the Effects of COVID-19. Respondents were then asked, knowing that this is an extremely difficult and uncertain time for the arts field, to share the ways in which COVID-19 is affecting their organizations and/or their broader community. They could write as little or as much as they wished. They were advised that they might speak to their program cancellations, overall budgets, staff cuts, stress levels, and/or any positive moments or promising solutions.

A total of 161 (83%) respondents chose to write open-ended comments describing their circumstances, including challenges and a few successes, in living and managing their facilities and staffs during this time of COVID-19. Many respondents wrote long, detailed accounts of their organizations’ struggles, and their professional lives as arts leaders. Most wrote long paragraphs of about 150 to 500 words; the longest was 994 words. This data is distinguished from the full survey because respondents could share whatever was on their mind.

Across the responses, seven themes were evident. Within each theme, strong commonality was expressed about the toll that the pandemic has taken on respondents’ organizations and on these arts leaders themselves. Some listed the details, such as names of programs that have been canceled, numbers of events postponed, exact budget figures and financial decreases, or the titles of staff who had been laid off. Others provided a more general story or reflections, opinions, and misgivings about how our country and/or their community is handling the crisis. *What is not evident from the numbers is the sense of overwhelm, and sometimes despair, that permeated a high portion of the responses.* While some were matter-of-fact in telling their stories, other respondents seemed to use this survey as an opportunity to unload about the degree of burden they are carrying on behalf of their communities, organizations, staffs, and even families. The selected quotes illustrate the visceral nature of many of their comments. Though presented separately below, within each comment themes were typically highly interrelated. To accurately portray respondents’ stories, those interrelationships are retained in the quotes selected.

Cancellations (103). Respondents commented on cancellations of their programs, seasons, or even whole years of programming. The following comment conveys the devastating fallout of

such cancellations, including planning and efforts to find solutions, that were present in most of respondents' stories:

We had to cancel four sold-out shows in March/April and return ticket money (although many donated it). ... Everything is up in the air. ... They won't green light us yet, (understandable) and we're sort of stringing along the hope of this. We're in a state that had very low numbers, which is why we were even contemplating this plan ... but we've had some large outbreaks recently, so things could really change. Our Uni is planning on in-person classes in the fall with big classes online and hybridized. Everyone masked/shielded socially distanced. Not going to be easy, and people are going to get sick. ... So much doubt and questioning — would be easier to just cancel, but then we will be forced into furloughs and our audience would be disappointed. ... This. Is. The. Worst.

Comments varied in the numbers of events, proportion of season cancelled, anticipated dates of reopening, or factors affecting closure. Of them:

- **Canceling for the foreseeable future (20).** An urban independent wrote: “Our community has no theatre right now. We don't know when that will change.”
- **Canceling this summer, fall or both (20).** A rural independent wrote: “All live performances have been pretty much cancelled for 2020.”
- **Canceling specific events or entire festivals (12).** A rural college presenter wrote of “prematurely ending our 100th anniversary season.” For a suburban independent, after “having just concluded the planning and contract work” for its summer arts festival with “47 concerts over 7 weeks,” their state “was shut down.”
- **Specifying the number of events being cancelled (7).** A rural college with its own 501(c)3 described its department, which manages a performing arts space and community meeting/banquet space: “We have postponed or cancelled around 100 events since March 13 and the cancellations are as far out as October right now. Those numbers and the date range do not include events that were never booked.” For an urban independent, “the pandemic has forced us to cancel 15 performances and has created a tremendous financial burden on the organization. With the ability to present in question, this fall the program is in a very tenuous situation.” Another respondent had cancelled more than 400 events, including classes, community gatherings and performances. Another cancelled 60 outdoor free performances.
- **Canceling into 2021 (6).** One college wrote that as a result of COVID-19, their state “has restricted the size of gatherings and restricted concerts completely. In addition, higher education is receiving such large budget cuts that our organization, and a museum on campus will be closed to the public through June of 2021.” Another college wrote, “We are likely to have little to no programming throughout the '20-'21 season, but are waiting for official academic and other institutional plans and guidelines, as well as state restrictions and guidelines.”

- **Closing their venues indefinitely (6).** For an urban presenter, “Our venue has been closed and with that all revenue to pay for our employees as well as the mortgage on the facility that we own” is lost.
- **Postponing or rescheduling events (5).** Four presenters wrote of cancelling some events.
- **Other (27).** Another 14 used words such as canceling “many” or “most” events, 4 wrote of canceling some events and 9 wrote of canceling in non-specific ways.

Unknown and Contingency (61). Respondents wrote about living and working with a high degree of unknown and the futility of trying to plan. As one exclaimed:

I am a sandcastle architect in the new COVID world. I make a plan or adjust the format for our season, for our renters, for our ballet school. By the next day, some new development or bad news has swept away everything our team worked so hard on the day before. We are just stuck idling. It's impossible to market anything and reassure audiences that things won't change again. We want to be safe, but each day is soul-sucking.

- More than half (35) described **a cycle of contingency: of trying to plan, move forward, or, as many said, “pivot,” when regulations about reopening were unknown or constantly changing**, whether local, city or institutional. Of them, 6 described, in detail, how their survival was contingent on decisions made by their colleges, and how they had no control over their own futures or that of their staff. An urban college wrote, “Everything is frozen — budgets, programming, hiring, staff raises. Everything in our organization is at a standstill, so until we get some direction from our university, we are unable to make any plans that relate to the 2020-2021 season.” Another 3 described their cities’ circumstances. For a suburban independent, “Using COVID-19 as a sorry excuse, our mayor has closed the venue.” Having run on a campaign promise to defund the arts, “Who would have ever dreamed that he would take action that would make our primary large venue difficult or impossible to use?” With most of the staff laid off or retired, the mayor plans to “out-source virtually every function. Security, ticket takers and ushers will be uniformed [police] officers — fully armed. Nice image, right? Policemen using ticket scanners.” Presenters, including the respondent, will have to rent the space, using city employees.
- A group of 11 described their **sense of being overwhelmed working as a presenter in the current times, when reaching decisions is nearly impossible**. As one wrote, “The ambiguity and uncertainty are making planning next to impossible.” For a rural independent, the “stress level is high. Finances are dire. Uncertainty as to when we can resume staging performances is debilitating. Audience apprehension is palpable. We’re completely in limbo.” Another rural independent that presents a summer festival season on a college campus wrote of continuously revising plans when: “Things are fragile.” The presenter had “pivoted my programming,” and gotten funders’ approval for an artist to teach workshops, leading up to a live-streamed event that would have covered payroll for

the respondent, who is “the only staff member still working — and at least temporarily, doing so as a volunteer.” But due to illness the program was put on hold, “so we’re pivoting again to a live online performance event on Juneteenth, with post-show civic dialogue discussion [where] 90 percent of the proceeds will go to the artists and crew. ... But these multiple pivots are exhausting.”

- Some (10) **did not know when their staff or programs would return.** They described the constant pattern of rescheduling and then canceling events again.
- Finally, 5 shared **misgivings about when their audiences would or should return.** Some were particularly concerned about elderly audience members, who they felt should not enter the theaters anytime soon.

An independent presenter described the vicious cycle of trying to plan when circumstances change daily:

The hardest part is the uncertainty about the future — not only the medium- to long-term future, but the short-term rules and regulations that seem to change daily. We could deal better with the cancellations, rescheduling, loss of income, and loss of opportunities, if we could see a light at the end of the tunnel OR if there was something constructive we could do to work our way out. Instead we make plans, and contingency plans, and contingency plans for our contingency plans — trying to imagine all the possible ways forward given the different scenarios.

Though the comments above capture the prevalent pattern among respondents of trying to solve the problems, a few recounted surprising stories about their institutions’ responses to the pandemic. The most egregious example:

The greatest stress is coming from our local government officials who are choosing “individual freedoms” over CDC guidelines, even though we are a site of one of the nation’s largest hotspots for the virus and we continue to have substantial community spread. The mayor told our ED that our focus needs to shift from “the virus to being a leader in support of our local economy.” He said, “People needed to go to your concerts and get sick in order to build immunity.” He is “strongly encouraging” our staff of 3 people to hold our free concerts in an outdoor venue that regularly exceeds capacity (5,000). When asked what resources he could offer to help manage the crowd, whom we know will not respect any messaging about masks and social distancing, he said he could offer no additional support.

Stress (30). Respondents wrote about, and others implied, the mounting stress associated with navigating all the uncertainty while managing the constantly shifting circumstances. Of them:

- **Poor working conditions (21).** Conditions were called “crippling,” “difficult,” and “heartbreaking,” which, for some respondents, has led to personal depression or despair. Others described the degree to which they are overworked, the pressures of working from

home and of feeling responsible for keeping the staff and the business afloat. All of this has taken a high emotional toll.

- **Specific reasons for their despair (9).** Respondents described staff layoffs, budget cuts, fears about their audience's safety, the transition from live to online programming as reason to despair. An independent presenter sums up what seemed to be on others' minds:

The stress is sometimes crippling, particularly as the leader of the organization. Personal responsibilities (kids at home because school is canceled, spouse also works fulltime) create a relentless feeling that the work is never done because it is having to be done in spurts. The desire to deliver on our mission but not feeling fully equipped or ready to adapt to social distancing protocol and procedures is daunting. ... The humanity of wanting to keep people employed is directly at odds with bottom-line projections, making those decisions fraught.

Budgets (85). Respondents described and sometimes vented about cuts to their budget, most of which were severe.

- **Dramatic budget cuts (27).** This group of nearly one-third used words like “depleted,” “dire,” “gone,” “plummet,” and “severe” to describe what happened to their budgets. For a suburban college, which reduced its budget by 25%, one respondent noted, “It has been extremely stressful and somewhat depressing as we try to adapt. While I recognize being on a college campus has protected us more than our peers working in independent arts centers, this is still very challenging.”
- **General cuts (20).** This group used general language about making cuts.
- **Specific cuts (8).** These respondents specified areas such as programs and venues.
- **Painful decisions (11).** This group described the **weight of making financial decisions, particularly if it meant laying off staff or canceling artists.** A college presenter grappled with the tradeoffs: “Of course in this climate, I don't want to crush the spirits of the agents — I feel that I'm on the hook to honor contracts when I'm pretty confident that whatever 2020-2021 looks like, if the cookies don't crumble correctly, it will be the death knell for the series.” This respondent detailed how the financials play out: “My bread and butter are bus in K-5 literature-theatre shows. I'm guessing that we are not having field trips in the fall — probably all year. ... Without the full houses at cheap prices in the morning, making the [financial] lift with just the evening shows ... will be an epic fiscal failure.”
- **Holding patterns (8).** This group of mostly colleges and units of government were doing okay financially, though some anticipated losses in 2021.
- **Mandates from above (5).** Yet again, these respondents described mandates from their boards or cities that affected their budgets. A midwestern rural independent's board directive was particularly severe. When the state shut down in March, the organization was forced to cancel its April performance:

Our board voted to refund all ticket purchases. ... It created a ton of work for me. I would have preferred that our patrons be contacted and given the option to either take a refund, donate that amount to our organization, or transfer that amount to a gift certificate to be used for a future performance. ... We lost all money we had taken in for this performance, which put us in a position where we needed to dip into our endowment fund earnings at a time when the market was less than stellar.

- **Positive glimmers (6).** These respondents seemed happy about being able to pay artists, receiving ticket donations from audience members, or starting programs that generated income for artists, even if the organization itself did not benefit financially. One seemed hopeful, yet measured:

At this juncture we cannot determined projected revenue with which to plan the coming season. ... We plan to watch other organizations and measure their success in presenting performances before we build our season. We will also be surveying our season's subscribers and community to get their input on how we can make them feel safe in the venue and what performances they're willing to come out to see.

Staffing (79). These respondents described cuts to their staff. As one independent presenter reflected:

What wakes me up in the middle of the night is the continued unknown and the thought that if we can't [manage] cash flow soon, there aren't ways to protect the staff and the building/venue from disaster and closure. We are a small, but dedicated staff — and losing anyone due to a lack of funding will be a huge blow to any hope of restarting and picking up the pieces.

- Close to half (30) outlined **furloughs and layoffs**.
- Others (26) describe **cutting some or most of their staff**. Many have cut part-time and seasonal employees and contractors. The result is a very high workload and looming fear of additional staff cuts. A few will cut staff in the near future.
- A few (3) described **hiring freezes**. As an independent wrote, “The humanity of wanting to keep people employed is directly at odds with bottom line projections making those decisions fraught, too.”
- Another 10 expressed **relief at obtaining support from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)**, which kept them afloat during the first two months of the pandemic. Yet the short-term nature of this temporary support leaves some respondents bracing for its end. As one independent wrote, “The PPP runs out Saturday and we are drastically reducing our hourly workers with benchmarks on new projects for bringing them back. Our ticket office manager is providing help applying for unemployment. We've stayed pretty positive I'd say, but the constant unknown is both stressful and demotivating.”
- Yet another 10 described for the moment, having **stable staff that is largely or solely volunteer**. As a rural independent wrote, “The last bit of good news is that we are all

virtual with no staff or capital investments so we're in much better shape financially than a lot of our regional sister arts organizations."

Programs (67). Respondents wrote about modifications to existing programs, or new programs. Most were online.

- **Innovating or scrambling to design socially distant programs and establish cleaning protocols (24).** An urban college was planning for the fall with "four socially distanced, one-hour shows with masks and other safety protocols if our university will allow it. Using only 20% of hall and trying to pay the artist their originally negotiated fees because they need it." A suburban unit of government was beginning daily small, 6-student classes: "In our year of being open, we grew to visitation of over 1,500 people a month; during the last three months we've had 3 people in the building on any given day. And now we are excited and apprehensive about having 6 people in the space. It's a new, new world." A few were considering outdoor programs.
- **Shifting existing programs to online formats (11).** These presenters hoped to work with or reach groups such as migrants, students and artists. An additional 3 described outdoor events, and several wrote about holding events in drive-ins or with restaurants. A unit of government had cancelled 30 events for the summer "but we have been able to offer all artists affected other work," either during the summer of 2021 or as part of new programs using "the drive-in model," live streaming and rebroadcast. An independent is reinstating small rehearsals for "artists who desire to be in the studio and will do so safely."
- **New possibilities for, or successfully implementing, online programs (27).** These presenters are offering live summer sessions, donation-based programs, children's camps, and Zoom school classes, and other education programs. In April, an independent presenter started helping students with their homework online and revamped a daily arts and academic child-care program for essential employees, serving 7 students — a big drop from the 70 that they had served previously. "It's more expensive to operate with the additional staff and reduced income but our community needs the service. And the children need screen-free, social experiences." Another independent is offering a range of "creative alternatives that can be enjoyed at home," including online swing dance lessons to vintage swing music, arts and craft kits for children, and roundtables for artists. One was happy to start a conversation series around "decarceration" with an artist dedicated to that issue.
- **Disinterest in online events (5).** These presenters believe their organizations exist to provide in-person experiences, that the quality of online performances was not high enough, or that online viewers would not want to pay for live content that they could get for free. One college had mixed opinions about its own online, recorded shared singing events for students: "It's awesome. It looked great. It sounded great. At the end of the day, [it's] pre-professional voices [that] practiced singing to a metronome in their bedrooms. All hats off the to the tech guys who make it work, but pedagogically, it's a one-off pony trick." One anomaly stands out among the entire data set: a Texas presenter

who believes that artists need to begin touring again. “These performances are critical to our local economy and without these shows, our entire community suffers on many levels. People are ready, willing and able to return to theaters. The real question is, are the artists?”

Positive Perspectives (31). Respondents commented on positive steps or outcomes.

- **Opening or refurbishing facilities (14).** Though facilities’ openings were being pushed back, respondents nonetheless looked forward to a time when audiences would enter their doors. Others were taking some time to improve facilities.
- **New collaborations with, or help offered to, local artists or community partners (9).** Several spoke of new social justice programs to address Black Lives Matter and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). One East Coast presenter wrote, “Every day I try to look for the opportunity in this situation.” Another East Coast urban presenter described the “project I am the proudest of so far” -- launching a call for artists to create new works about their response to COVID-19. “I believe this is helping us to carve out our future.” Other programs were described above.
- **Funding (14).** Some spoke of **donations**, including tickets, obtaining help from donors in other ways, or generally having supportive funders. One wrote, “We have received a tremendous amount of support from our local community and have also received some federal and state COVID funding. We feel like we will come out of this stronger and more creative!” Others described successful efforts with funders, who were sensitive to their needs. One from a tourist community exclaimed: “The outpouring of support for us has been heartwarming. Some have donated tickets or their show sponsorships back to us for the cancelled shows. Many have contributed to our online program in support of our musicians.” In response, “We are grateful that we are still here and will weather this storm with the support of many friends and patrons. Very grateful that [our location] has such an important place in so many people’s hearts.”
- **Establishing opening dates (3).** These presenters seemed excited to open on campus or open sooner because they are located in rural locations with lower COVID-19 cases.

Other (32). Other comments include a range of impressions.

- **Reservations and fear related to COVID-19 (21).** Some felt their audiences would not attend public events. As a college programmer said, “The facts are: Coronavirus is highly contagious. There is no cure. ... [the important questions are] how we can get to performance (safely, creatively) with restrictions we don’t understand. These very topics are the same as those that the performing arts industry is grappling with. May we figure it out quickly!” Another declared, “We have determined that for the safety of our patrons, crews, and artists, we cannot open until physical distancing is no longer required. This likely means that we will not be able to open until there is a cure or vaccine.”
- **Broader community challenges (10).** These challenges included political divisions, lost tourism and problems with local governments.

- **The importance of paying artists (1).** This respondent commented that: “In the spring, we paid artists 50 percent of their cancelled fee. We intend to try to pre-pay any artist that we must reschedule in the upcoming year. I think it is enormously important for the field that those of us who can do this (i.e., university presenters), step up and try to find a way to pay artists.”

Final Comments. A total of 60 respondents chose to share final comments.

Offering Thanks and Hope for the Future (28). Of them, 17 offered thanks. A few specifically mentioned **APAP’s support for the field**. Several wrote of APAP’s **role as convener**, including, one who said, “Thank you for keeping small and mid-sized organizations in the conversation,” and another who stated, “Thank you ... for being the glue to our presenting/artist/agency community.” Several mentioned **specific services that APAP had provided for the field**, including “your support with resources and conversations.” Another respondent mentioned webinars, which “have been helpful and uplifting.” One simply expressed gratitude for what is being done “to support the arts at this time.”

Positive or hopeful comments about adapting to change while creating new opportunities (7). Despite the grim situation facing our country, they and/or their organizations either remain optimistic or seek silver linings. One college presenter wrote, “As terrible as this is, the situation has forced us to get out of our complacent ways and discover new ways to engage our audiences.” Another agreed: “We are committed to soldiering on to meet our missions! We’ll have to be flexible, willing to adapt and open to changing things that have worked very well in the past, but we are going to be okay!” Others recognize **the need to support their communities and the arts industry**. For one rural presenter, “Dealing with this pandemic on a local level has brought our arts nonprofit community together.” A different rural presenter described the evolving sense of comradery in the field:

The thing that has buoyed spirits in all of this is the collective sharing across all arts organizations. The sense of helping each other out with plans, strategies, legalities and more has been, though overwhelming at times, incredibly heartwarming. The support is necessary to keep fueling hope for the future.

Yet others (4) **seem resolved to survive this challenging time and committed to the field’s future**. As one wrote, “More now than ever our audiences and members need the arts to heal. We will find a way and I encourage all the arts administrators and artists to dig deep and as an industry. We will emerge stronger and with new art forms.”

Reiterating Overlapping Challenges (25). Nearly half shared more details and stories, reiterating their current challenges. Ten talked about **the degree of stress and the unknown under which they are living**. One expressed the stress of “waiting to see how all of this unfolds. There are still far too many unanswered questions and decisions to make.” Another described the futility: “There’s nothing we can do ... except wait and hope. We are drowning.” Others talked about the

devastating impact of COVID-19 on performing arts institutions and artists, including a rural presenter who feels arts staff is more likely to be rehired in urban settings that “can rebuild and hire first,” and an urban who sees musicians and gig workers as unduly affected in an industry that “will be the last to reopen.” About one-quarter expressed an idea that was summed up by one respondent: the **exhaustion that comes from “pivoting, [or] adding new programs, reconstructing existing/ongoing programs, managing canceled programs and the enduring unknown of rescheduling.”** In facing these challenges, some (7) respondents felt **a deep, or heightened sense of responsibility for their staff and community.** One wrote of their commitment: “I will figure out a way ... I must ... people depend on me.” One independent presenter wrote of the isolation in carrying this burden: “I’ll be fundraising to keep myself employed and to cover basic fixed expenses This is an incredibly stressful time. While my board is being supportive ... I feel alone in carrying the weight of [my organization’s] survival and reinvention on my shoulders.” A few (5) wrote about the **impact of budget cuts** on staff, fundraising and professional development. A small number (3) highlighted the **importance of social distancing** wishing they could reduce artists fees given their limited house size.

Rallying Calls (7). These presenters commented on other topics. Of the 7, a few (4) mentioned **the need for national initiatives and/or collaborations** to address the challenges that COVID-19 presents. One respondent, who is “doing our best to try to collaborate with other arts organizations,” has found it complicated because each situation and timeline is different, yet “I think there should be some kind of industry support and collaboration.” Three others emphasized their **support for the current protests and the potential for positive change.** As one presenter stated, “We stand with Black Lives Matter and pray there is no second wave of the pandemic in the fall!” Another wrote of a better future: “As we partially reopen to a world on fire with passion and protests, I am encouraged that we will not ‘return to normal’ but there is a CHANCE we will actually use this moment to reassess and re-imagine a better set of systems that do not intentionally under-resource a majority of people in this country, and a majority of organizations and institutions that make life here worth living.”

A college presenter **rallies the field to move forward, face its challenges, and rededicate itself to communities:**

We have a stake in the survival of all elements of the APAP community — the presenters, the touring artists and their agents/managers. ... Presenters are going to have to deal with risk-adverse audiences that may not return out of concern for their safety; may not get the subsidies that they are used to, due to changes in the philanthropy community’s priorities; may not be able continue to get the support they have received for years or decades from host institutions. [They] will, undoubtedly, see their expenses go up as we all adjust to new safety concerns. All of us have to evaluate how long we can go on without adequate income to cover annual costs.... [But] our communities need us, all the more now than ever before, and we must re-think the models of how to use the arts to connect people and serve positive community agendas.

Finally, even in the midst of our global challenges, the small and mid-sized presenters who lent their voices to this supplement reiterated the theme of being “small and mighty” in their communities and within the arts industry. **Their might is expressed in their roles within their communities, gratitude for working in the arts field, and potential for the future.** As one said, “We are cautiously optimistic, exhausted by the need to be constantly changing and grateful to be in the business of presenting the arts.” As another added, “Small and mid-sized presenters, particularly in rural America, change lives in ways that are valuable and irreplaceable.”