

Analytical Report – March 2021

COVID-19: Impact Survey on the Arts Residencies Field

Survey II of III

**A collaboration between
Res Artis and UCL**

Introduction

More than a year since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, creative sectors around the world are still struggling. By our nature of facilitating arts and cultural exchange across national and international borders, the field of arts residencies is one of the hardest-hit. This continuing partnership between [Res Artis](#) and [University College London \(UCL\)](#) aims to document the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector in the short, medium, and long term.

Our first survey of artists and arts organisations found that by September 2020, a majority (54%) of planned residencies had been cancelled, modified, cut short, or postponed. One in 10 arts residency operators reported being forced to close indefinitely, and just 17% of respondents were able to access emergency funding support. [The Survey I report, published in November 2020, explains these and other findings in more detail.](#)

This, the second of three survey reports addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the arts residency sector, reveals further troubling statistics and anecdotes from artists and residency operators about the medium-term impact of the pandemic. The following sections will address the financial state of the sector one year into COVID-19, what funding support has been available to the sector, the mental health impact on artists, and anticipations for the future of the sector in the coming year.

By illustrating the changing situation of the artist mobility sector through quantitative and qualitative data, we hope to inform artists, sector funders, and researchers, and make policy recommendations to encourage a strong recovery for the sector world-wide.

Survey I Findings

Survey I provided insights into the short-term impact of the pandemic on arts residencies, including the financial and professional implications for both artists and arts organisations. We were struck by the large proportion of respondents who reported being unable to access emergency funding to stay afloat, and the 9% of organisations who said they had been forced to close permanently.

Unsurprisingly, there was widespread uncertainty about the future of the sector, including when residencies would be viable again. Respondents also expressed hesitancy about virtual residencies and other digital opportunities, a theme requiring further exploration in Survey II.

Following the response to Survey I, Res Artis has endeavoured to provide support, information, and resources to artists and residency providers struggling during this time. The [Res Artis website](#) provides information about these resources in a dedicated COVID-19 section.

Aims for Survey II

One key aim of Survey II was to glean more detailed information about the support that artists and residency operators have (not) been able to access from their governments and other organisations. We therefore asked respondents to provide more details about their ineligibility for emergency support, and for those who did access support, how much money they were granted.

As 47% of Survey I respondents said their finances would be critically or significantly impacted by residency cancellations, it was also important to ask questions about how they supported themselves financially without access to residencies. Finally, we hoped respondents would share with us how the pandemic has affected their mental health, including their creativity and motivation to continue producing art.

We received 611 complete responses to Survey II, including 441 from artists and 170 from arts organisations and residency providers. Artist responses came from 52 different countries, while arts organisations responded from 45 countries.¹ While 42% of respondents are Res Artis members, 87% of artists use the Res Artis website for free to find residency opportunities. While this is a good response rate, it isn't as high as Survey I and reflects a sense of "survey

¹ Highest-responding countries (Artists)

1. USA (156)
2. UK (42)
3. Australia (38)
4. Canada (35)
5. Germany (26)

Highest-responding countries (Arts organisations)

1. USA (18)
2. Italy (16)
3. Finland (11)
4. Spain (10)
5. Canada (9)

fatigue” during the pandemic. We also extended this survey to sector funders, but disappointingly did not receive any complete responses.

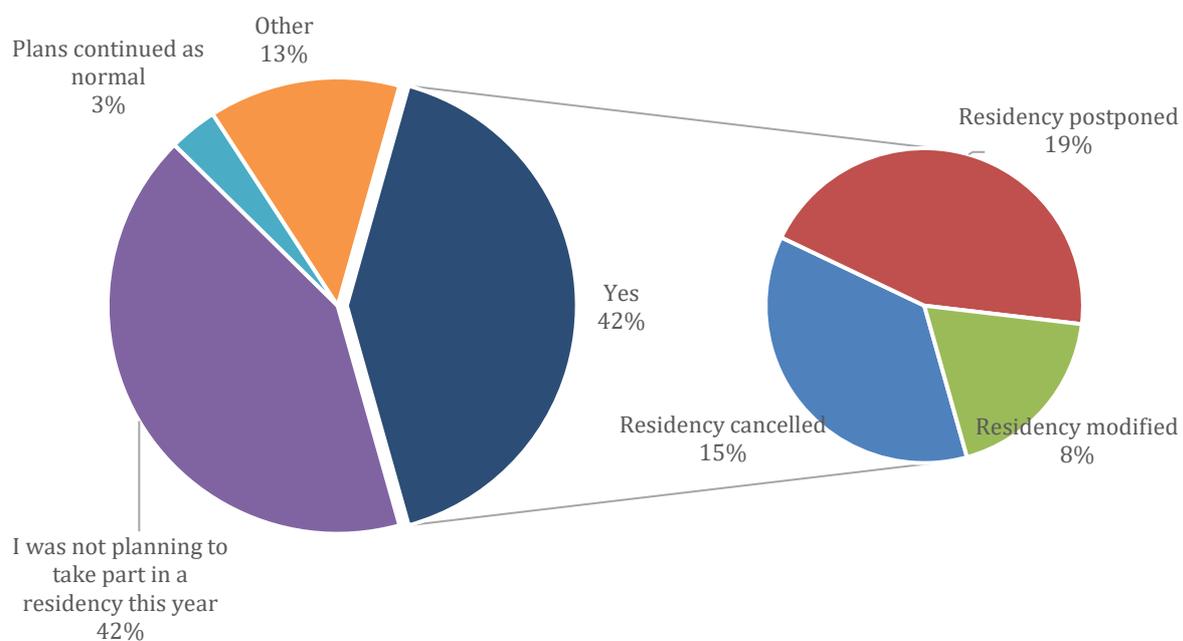
Survey II findings: Artists

Among artists respondents, 27% considered themselves emerging artists, 47% were mid-career, and 25% were established artists. Similarly to Survey I, visual artists made up the majority of responses (79%). Respondents completed the survey between 24 November 2020 and 25 January 2021.

Changes to residencies

In the first survey, we found that 54% of residencies had been cancelled, postponed, or modified due to the pandemic. Months later, the outlook is not much different: Nearly half of respondents said they had planned to go on a residency that was then cancelled (15%), postponed (19%), or modified (8%). Another 42% of respondents had not planned to go on a residency this year, and just 3% said their plans continued as normal.²

Were you planning to participate in a residency program that was cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19?



² Other responses (13%) included artists who applied to residencies but were unsuccessful, those who decided not to apply due to COVID-19, and those who had multiple residencies cancelled or postponed.

Respondents commented that travel restrictions and the state of the pandemic deterred them from applying, or forced them to cancel their own trips. Some reported applying to multiple residencies, only to have them cancelled or postponed partway through.

“The cancellations are so prevalent I didn’t even apply.”

Financial impact of the pandemic

Nearly 28% of respondents to Survey II said that changes or cancellations to residencies have impacted them financially. Of those, 48% cited their loss of income from lost projects or collaborative opportunities, and 32% pointed to loss of income from the sale of art works.

Mid-career and established artists were more likely than emerging artists to have had planned residencies cancelled, and therefore more financially impacted by cancellations. However, emerging artists were more than twice as likely to pursue full-time work outside of the arts sector, suggesting that this experience could derail their career plans more permanently, leading to a longer effect on the sector.

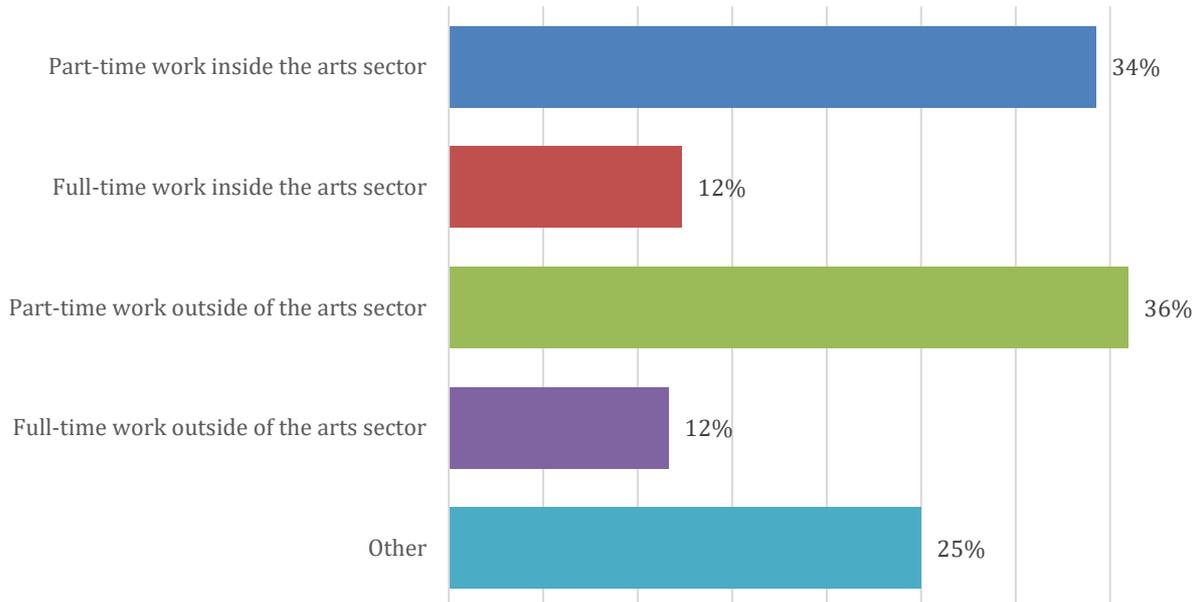
“I have been able to work enough gigs to make enough money. My frustration comes from having less time to make art than before.”

Other sources of income

The majority of artist respondents (65%) said they had to pursue other sources of income to support themselves during the past year. Out of those, nearly half found work outside of the arts sector, including as caretakers, educators, and selling personal belongings online. Nearly 12% said they found full-time work outside of the arts sector.³

³ Examples of “Other” sources of income included teaching, seeking out grants, unemployment insurance, freelance work, and selling artworks or personal belongings online.

What sources of income have you pursued during COVID-19?



Emergency support

Lack of access to emergency funding support

As the impact of COVID-19 continued and government support did not increase proportionally in many areas, the proportion of respondents who have been unable to access emergency funding support has drastically increased from Surveys I to II.

When surveyed in September, 45% said they were unable to access or were ineligible for emergency government aid. In Survey II, 68% reported being unable to access emergency funding support of any kind, an increase of 23%. Of those respondents:

31%

Said there were no relevant funding opportunities

13%

Said they applied for support but had their applications rejected

12%

Were ineligible for support

For a number of reasons, a significant majority of artist respondents have been unable to access emergency funding support, which is ostensibly designed to support people out of work. Respondents listed many reasons why they are ineligible or were rejected for funding:

Immigration status, lack of consistent income, no opportunities for artists in their age group, a large amount of competition for grants, and lack of opportunities in rural areas, just to name a few.

Some respondents blamed cultural factors:

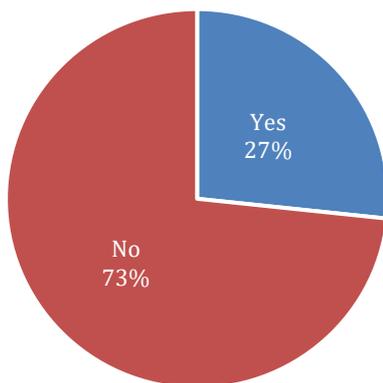
"It is not customary in our country to help artists, even those who are members of professional communities and have great services to the national and world culture."

Others pointed to discrimination based on age or experience:

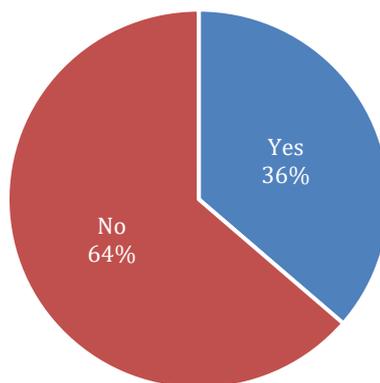
"I'm a senior artist. Nobody gives a sh-t about us."

Have you been able to access emergency funding support in your country or region?

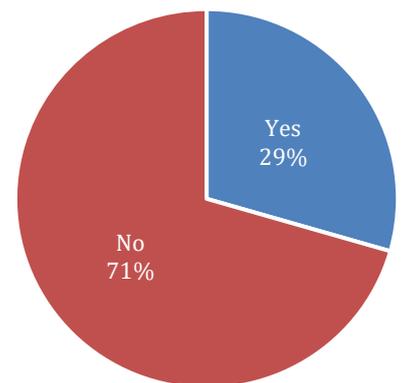
Emerging artists



Mid-career artists



Established artists



Funding received

For the 32% who were able to access funding, it did not always come from COVID-specific emergency funds. Many respondents, particularly in the U.S., received unemployment insurance from their state, or relied on an emergency withdrawal of retirement funds.

Most respondents reported being dissatisfied with the amount of funding support available to them, no matter the source:

- Government emergency funding – 56% extremely or somewhat unsatisfied
- Arts council grant – 57% extremely or somewhat unsatisfied
- Philanthropy – 56% extremely or somewhat unsatisfied
- Private foundation – 50% extremely or somewhat unsatisfied
- Corporate sponsorship – 55% extremely or somewhat unsatisfied

“The government funding is a third of what my salary was. All other grants I applied for denied my application.”

For the minority who have received emergency funding, it is clear that the assistance has been necessary to individuals’ survival during this time. 80% of respondents who reported receiving emergency support said they have used it to pay for daily living expenses, and just 34% used it to fund creation of new works.

Respondents were asked to report the average amount of funding they received from each of the following sources. Most respondents did not complete this section, and 39 reported that they had not received funding from any sources. For those who did, the numbers were drastically inconsistent⁴, ranging from less than 100 GBP to Arts Council Grants worth up to more than 18,000 GBP. The average award amounts are listed in the table below.

⁴ The format of this question allowed respondents to report any funding they received, in any form or currency. Therefore, many listed their total unemployment insurance or salary for the year, which may have skewed the Government Emergency Funding average higher. All currencies were converted into GBP using the exchange rate on 17 March, 2021.

Source	# of respondents	Average award
Government Emergency Funding	90	3,112 GBP
Arts Council Grant	39	2,963 GBP
Philanthropy	10	1,627 GBP
Private foundation	12	659 GBP
Corporate sponsorship	0	-

Mental health

The mental health impact of COVID-19 on artists has been significant. A majority (88%) of artists respondents said their mental health has been at least somewhat impacted by the pandemic, with 25% saying it has had a significant impact. One respondent reported using their grant funds to pay for therapy and anxiety medication for the first time in their life.

"I'm exhausted and worried all the time about my family and how to make it all work. It's left little room for creating new pieces."

More than half (57%) said the mental health impact has affected their ability to produce new works. This is more than we anticipated – in Survey I, just 50% anticipated that COVID-19 would have a significant or critical impact on their motivation and inspiration. This is even higher among emerging artists, who were the group most likely to say the pandemic has significantly impacted their mental health, and that it has affected their ability to produce new works.

"My ability to go out and be inspired by life and the living of it has been literally shut down and has isolated me from the world that inspires me."

Survey II findings: Arts organisations

Nearly 6% of arts organisations who responded to Survey II said they have been forced to close indefinitely. This is a slight improvement from the 9% who said they had been forced to close in Survey I.

16% of organisations said they have not had to make any changes since the start of the pandemic, and a plurality of 37% said they have recently resumed partial operations after a temporary closure – indicating that the sector is beginning to re-open, albeit slowly.

Funding

Like artists, providers of residencies have also struggled to get financial aid from their governments or other benefactors. 61% of organization respondents said they have been unable to access emergency funding support, and of those, 66% said no relevant funding opportunities are available or they are ineligible.

For the organisations who have been able to access aid, most (91%) of that support has come from national sources. This finding is consistent with Survey I – more international support for arts organisations would be a welcome lifeline for the sector.

Organisations who have been able to obtain emergency funding have largely used the funds to pay staff (63%) and to cover operational costs such as rent and other payments (38.5%). About 25% of organisations say they have used the money for digital innovations, a necessary cost for many sectors in the time of COVID-19.

Organisations reported the average amount of funding they received from varying sources. 56 organisation respondents listed receiving funds from at least one of these sources. The average amounts are listed in the table below.⁵

⁵ It is not entirely clear from each respondent how long the funding is expected to run for – where totals could be calculated, they were. The amounts were all converted to GBP using the exchange rate on 18 March 2021.

Source	# of respondents	Average award
Government emergency funding	45	39,692 GBP
Arts Council Grant	17	18,045 GBP
Philanthropy	13	62,777 GBP
Private foundation	10	38,242 GBP
Corporate sponsorship	2	18,605 GBP

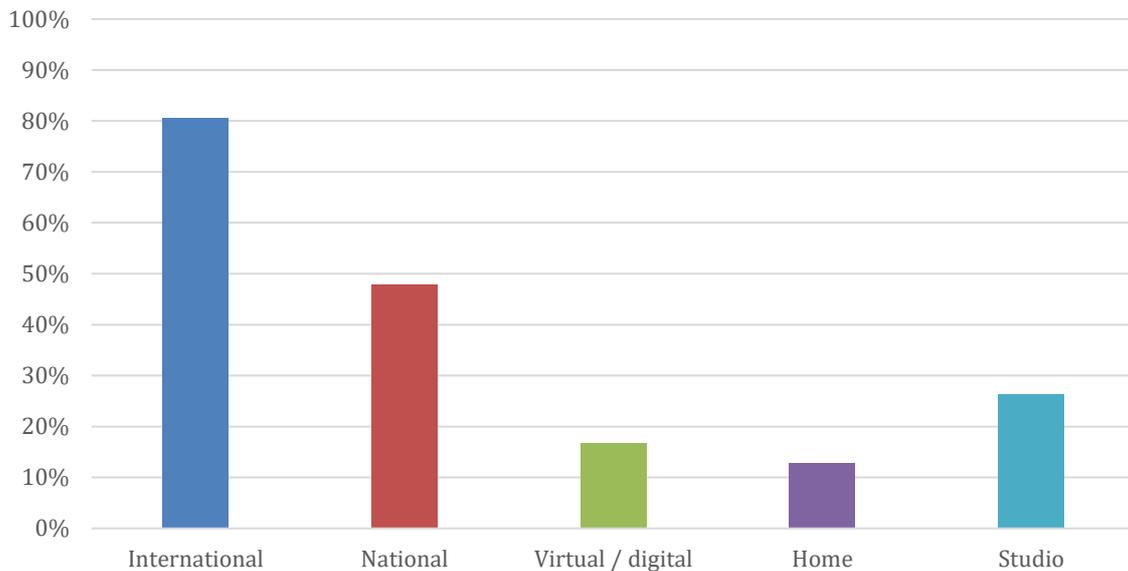
The average amount gained through philanthropy, based on the self-reported numbers, is about 1.58 times the average amount provided by governments. This is an unsustainable funding model for the sector, particularly given the financial situations of potential donors. One Canadian organisation reported that in the past year, they received one-fifth of their usual philanthropic support.

The future of the sector

Despite the critical hit the sector has taken, there is a sense of optimism about the coming year. The current state of the pandemic around the world has not deterred artists from applying to residencies, nor has it stopped organisations from offering them. The success of vaccination programmes in several countries likely contributes to this optimism.

61% of artist respondents are planning to attend, or have applied to residencies in 2021, though a majority say it is still too early to tell exactly when they will go on their next residency. Some of these are residencies that were postponed from 2020, and several respondents say they may still cancel their own plans.

What types of residencies are you interested in applying for or attending in 2021?



Most say it is too early to tell when they will go on their next residency, for several reasons. The health and safety impacts of COVID, in addition to family and financial constraints have further discouraged some artists from applying to residencies at this point.

Many arts organisations are still offering, or planning to offer, residencies in 2021. Some noted that applications have increased from local artists, suggesting that mobility is becoming more localised in response to COVID-19.

Future residencies

Residency providers are hopeful that successful vaccination programmes and relaxation of international travel restrictions will allow residencies to go ahead this year. 71% of arts organisation respondents are planning to operate in-person residencies in 2021 which are open to international applicants.

Many of these residencies are “COVID-safe” by nature, either due to their solitary, remote locations, or have a limited number of participants living together:

“New residents have to be in ‘quarantine’ for two weeks - social distancing and masks in public spaces. But, each room is open to the outdoors with access to plenty of private studio space.”

Still, 25% of residency providers said it is too early to tell what their programme of offerings will look like in the remainder of 2021. Just over 2% said they do not plan to operate any residencies this year.

“While it is, truly, a bit too early to tell, we are looking forward to resuming activities and we're doing everything in our power to make it happen.”

Virtual residencies

Though many sectors – and indeed some in the creative arts – have been easily able to transition to virtual or remote work (i.e. streaming of live performances), this is not the case for artist mobility.

Artists and residency providers both made it clear that the artist mobility sector is not one that can easily adapt to a virtual, remote world. Among artists, there was an equal split over whether they would be interested in participating in virtual residencies. And just 23% of residency providers are preparing for the possibility of virtual residencies, with only 7% actively offering virtual residency opportunities currently. It should also be noted that 6% of respondents said they do not have stable, reliable internet connection in their home workspace.

Artists expressed that the spontaneous in-person interactions which occur at residencies would not translate to a virtual experience:

“The camaraderie of being in a space with other artists is the best reason to go. The energy would not travel over the internet, and would dissipate when the laptop is closed. The spontaneous conversations are not likely to happen, and meeting new people at meals definitely would not.”

Many also desire an experience that takes them away from a screen:

“I believe, for my own creativity/health, that I need to have less screen time and more in-person interactions.”

“I already spend 12 hours a day on Zoom or online - teaching, admin meetings, book launches, readings, socializing, writing sessions, trainings, movie watch parties.”

Leaving the sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on arts residencies, and the creative sectors more generally. The lack of consistent government support for artists and organisations has further exacerbated this fragility and uncertainty.

“It has driven home the precarity of artists’ livelihoods, and how wider inequalities are both reflected and perpetuated in the make-up of our sector, and made me consider why we choose to work in the arts, what kind of art world we want to see, how we can better support artists in need, what an art practice can or needs to look like and what kind of future is out there for artists.”

As a result, we are left with an uncertain picture of the future of the sector. Perhaps the most discouraging statistic is this:

12.2% of artist respondents have considered leaving the arts sector permanently. This is even higher among emerging artists – 18% said they have considered leaving the sector.

Without more support and guidance from national and international bodies, the future of artist mobility is at risk.

“The incredible hardship is too heavy. It’s too consuming. I make the best work when safe and secure within the support of arts organizations, and this has been stripped, the pandemic revealing deep-seated problems. It’s embarrassing and heart-wrenching to experience this and not [be] supported with compassion.”

Recommendations for Survey III

Though many of the findings in this survey are discouraging, there are glimmers of hope for the sector. The aim of Survey III should be to focus on post-COVID recovery and how respondents view both the long-term impact of the pandemic, and the future resiliency of the sector.

Topics to cover in the questionnaire include:

- Arts organisation plans for recovery action
- Permanent changes to residency programmes to make the sector more resilient
- Artist attitudes toward international travel and residency participation
- Concrete plans to offer or engage in residencies
- Closer artist and arts residency engagement and collaboration to strengthen sector
- Gain input from arts funders
- Broaden the arts disciplines represented

The next survey could also be used to gauge opinion about potential new policies or policy recommendations related to COVID-19 recovery for the arts residency sector.

I feel more committed to the art sector than ever before because I believe the arts and creation are the way forward to putting together a broken world and having visions of a possible future.

References

[Survey I Report](#)

[Res Artis COVID-19 information](#)

[University College London \(UCL\)](#)

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Cover image: [Hulki Okan Tabak on Unsplash](#)

Survey data will be made public upon completion of the full project in 2021, or available upon request. **For enquiries and feedback on this report, please contact office@resartis.org.**

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