

## **Spotlight on Arts Audiences**

## Wave 2: Spring 2024 Alberta results

#### Stone – Olafson

## Table of contents

- 4 Purpose and Objectives
- 5 Research Approach
- 6 The Story on One Page
- 7-13 Detailed Findings and Implications
- 14-20 Engaging in Arts Experiences
- 21-26 Content Preferences and Informing Programming
- 27-32 Membership and Ticket Bundling Options
- 33-43 Understanding Support for the Arts
- 44 Respondent Profile



### Thank you to our generous partners

This initiative is being funded by arts funders who are keen to use data to drive engagement and growth strategies across Alberta.

We thank them for their generous support.







## A collaborative and evolving resource:

#### **Purpose & Objectives:**

Alberta continues to be at a crossroads brought by a pandemic that has changed public life and re-shaped our economy. This is especially true in the arts sector which continues to experience a decline in engagement with events and activities. This work was developed for this sector exclusively. It builds upon research that began in 2020 but is designed to provide specific, relevant and reliable facts to support the leaders in the arts sector as they **build relevance and grow attendance**.

#### Key topic areas for Wave 2:

- Exploring arts engagement and general perceptions
- Understand audiences' preferences for content, programming and ticket purchasing
- Understanding opportunities for increasing support and engagement

#### How to use this report:

This work is designed to be shared. We encourage our partners to distribute and actively apply the insights to their business. The ultimate goal is to build on collaboration by sharing resources that can drive smart and focused engagement strategies.



### **Research Approach:**

#### This report represents the second of six (6) waves of work.

The survey was delivered to a representative sample of arts receptive Albertans, ages 18+. In order to qualify for the survey, respondents had to indicate interest in at least one art form.

A total of n=1,160 surveys were collected across the following regions:

- Calgary + area (n=400)
- Edmonton + area (n=400)
- Northern AB (n=120)
- Southern AB (n=120)
- Central AB (n=120)

#### The survey was conducted between Match 13<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

An approximate margin error for a typical sample size of n=1,160 is +/- 2.9% (which is not typically applicable for online non-probability samples).

For the purposes of this report, the focus is on the full market. Results are not weighted to population but are instead designed to provide a directional overview of province-wide trends. Breakouts by region are provided where relevant and regional reports for Edmonton, Calgary and other markets will be made available.



### The Story on One Page

1

**The importance of live experiences.** Dedicated arts-related online content is readily available, and most audiences are seeing arts experiences as a special outing. Reminding audiences what emotional benefits are derived from live performances is going to be key to driving in-person engagement and ensuring cannibalization by online is minimal.



**Online content can be the start of a journey instead of the competition.** Digital arts content is not going away so understanding digital preferences can kickstart programming decisions or be an opportunity to begin engagement close to home (that leads to an in-person experience).



Balancing familiar and new (or, avoiding the empty and boring). Arts audiences are diverse and so are their preferences for content. Arts experiences will not satisfy everyone at once but there is an appetite for variety.



**Reaching new audiences through diverse programming.** While the sentiment is strong for all arts audiences, visible minorities are even more keen to support arts experiences that showcase their own cultural groups. This is one opportunity to expand into new audiences.



**The market craves flexibility.** The age of subscription models has shifted, and most audiences are looking for smaller packages, with less commitment and more variety of experiences.



**Philanthropic support will be a challenge.** Right now, the arts is is seen as needing less support than other causes. You cannot supplant other causes, but it is a reminder to appeal to the community importance of the arts (or, the impact of NOT having the arts) as you seek support.



## Detailed Findings and Implications



# The importance of live experiences to driving engagement with the arts

Through four years of experience economy research, it remains clear Albertans are keen pursuers of live experiences. When it comes to the arts, the last wave of research found an engaged market but also a large segment of audiences who only passively engage with arts experiences. We have delved into understanding what deeper engagement can look like.

Large numbers (83%) see live arts experiences as a special outing. Three-quarters (76%) also admit to not engaging frequently, but they do love the experiences they have. At the same time, 78% are consuming dedicated arts-related content online (in this work, we are referring to specific types of art content outside of more mainstream offerings on Spotify or Netflix, as an example). As noted in other phases of work, there is no shortage of interest in arts content. But there is a clear risk that online content can quickly cannibalize in-person attendance.

While online content can convey art and artistic performances, they cannot satisfy the benefits of live experiences. Nor can online content effectively match expectations for emotive experiences, social and shareable moments or exclusive and unique encounters. These are unique to live arts experiences.

**Engaging more audiences** is likely to hinge on elevating the promise of live experiences over content or the specific artistic endeavor. Those artistic features are important, but the promise of live experiences that match their experiential, social and exclusive motivations are critical to avoiding cannibalization.



# Online content can be the start of a journey instead of the competition

There is no avoiding digital and mainstream media. Fully 78% are already consuming specific arts content online and another 70% reveal their home entertainment inspires choices for live experiences. While there is the risk that passively engaged audiences could use these media replacements to get their fill of arts content, these outlets are unlikely to compete fully. As we learned previously, high proportions agree live arts experiences make lives richer (78%) and offer something unique (79%).

**How can online content support engagement?** Recognizing inspiration to connect with live experiences begins close to home, there is significant potential to view online content as the start of a consumer journey to live experiences. These media outlets can showcase the art and artistic performance in ways traditional marketing cannot. Furthermore, leaders can use the consumption preferences to inspire their own programming choices as the best indicator of future behaviours is past actions. Knowing what audiences are consuming can provide insights into future interest.



# Balancing familiar and new (or, avoiding the empty and boring)

As much as audiences in Alberta avidly pursue experiences, they appear to balance what is new with what is familiar in their choices. While 71% want to explore new shows or new works, only 10% strongly share this sentiment. For many (66%), being more selective is leading to a preference for experiences that are familiar or trusted. There is a balance to be struck.

In defining preferences, audiences are split on things like experiences being dramatic vs humourous, serious vs lighthearted, topical vs escapist, new vs known, challenging vs easy. They are less divided on whether an experience should be mindless or thoughtprovoking (in short, they do not want mindless). While emotional and experiential types will vary, it will be important to not be empty or boring.

**The balance between new and familiar in the arts experience sector is not new, nor is it settled**. Audiences will want both. Perhaps it is more instructive to acknowledge what the promise cannot be - completely new, foreign or unrelatable, it cannot be overly familiar or known, it cannot be empty or mindless. This is not just a programming consideration either - to fully engage audiences the marketing strategy has to engage using the same approach.



## Embracing diverse works helps reach new communities

Personal relevance is key to decisions about spending, whether that is ticket sales or donations. Audiences simply want to see themselves in the works or experiences they invest in. For the wider population, 41% agree they are more likely to attend a performance or event if their own cultural group is represented. This jumps to 60% among visible minorities. And while in the wider community, 23% still feel it's important for arts activities to reflect their culture or heritage, this jumps to 46% among visible minorities. As the province becomes increasingly diverse and continues to welcome new people, tapping into these under-served communities will provide access to new audiences.

**Engagement is likely to grow** as arts organizations continue to develop more diverse and culturally relevant programming. Just as important, however, is to design deep engagement strategies that help arts organizations reach communities who may be able to see themselves in an event, performance or show.



### The market does crave flexibility

Consumer trends around subscriptions, memberships, passes and similar products have been shifting for some time. All experience sectors have been grappling with a change in consumer preference. Consumers want more flexibility. Right now, about 60% of respondents hold a membership of any kind (24% have current subscriptions or passes to arts or culture organizations).

So what will motivate audiences to commit to more than one show?

- The ability to define their experience with seats/spaces they want and getting the dates they want.
- There is a limit to how many experiences they will commit to most only want to commit to three to four performances.
- Less than 1/3 are ready to commit funds up front most want to spread the payments out over the season.
- Major flexibility to decide on what they see and when most prefer a flex pass or picka-show option over the course of a season.
- Ability to diversify what they see ideally a majority would prefer different experiences from different organizations.

**Getting a commitment** will require even more flexibility for patrons. As younger, artsengaged audiences spend, they clearly avoid those options that tie them down.



## Philanthropic support will be a challenge

When it comes to philanthropic giving Albertans are among the most generous in the country. Even in challenging economic times residents are giving on average, over \$3,000 per year to causes in their community. Yet, when it comes to causes or sectors they support, the arts tend to trail social issues like food security, health care, homelessness and addictions. Only 14% report supporting an arts organization, artist or related causes. For most, they see other areas of greater need. Looking ahead, only about 1/3 would consider giving to an arts organization, artist or related cause. While there are clear challenges to driving support, **there are also opportunities to drive increased support** – but not necessarily a 'one-size-fits-all' solution:

- *Personal relevance is key*: audiences have been inspired to give because of a show or artist they saw, to support an artist they know or because of a personal connection. This is consistent with all giving. Creating personal relevance or tapping into emotional connections created at performances will be important.
- *Remind them of the impact you have*: audiences do not always connect the dots between the arts and the quality of life in the community. Reminding them of that impact elevates the cause past a discretionary item. Adding urgency (survival of the organization or support for the artist) enhances consideration.
- *Aim younger*: Arts-immersed audiences tend to be younger and skew slightly female. These are also audiences who are also giving to causes in increasing numbers.
- Show them how and make it easy: Younger audiences likely need to be shown how to give fully 43% agree they would give but simply don't know how. Make it easier for them. Another 43% would prefer to have the option to round up on ticket purchases.

# Engaging in Arts Experiences

## A reminder on engagement levels

Not everyone will connect with the arts in the same way. Understanding the degree to which people connect is a useful lens to understand how to reach different audiences.

### **IMMERSED**

This is a group that is eager to connect with the arts. They take in a variety of arts content and are active supporters of artists and art organizations.

### ENGAGED

They like arts experiences and **frequently** attend events or activities, consume arts content, make art or support the arts.

### **PASSIVES**

This group makes up the largest proportion of Albertans. Their engagement with the arts is **occasional** and they attend arts events, watch arts content or pursue arts experiences.

### **INFREQUENT**

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They have an interest in the arts but **rarely** attend arts events, consume arts content, make any type of art or take any classes.

## For most Albertans, arts experiences are considered a special outing

In addition, over half of Albertans are indicated they don't attend as much as they used to. Because of this, considering how to connect other experiences they participate in will be key to fostering greater (and more regular) engagement.



Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q12. Here are some statements that some people make about what types of performances or events they like to experience. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement

## Arts-immersed Albertans are more likely to take in experiences on a regular basis but even they indicate attending shows *less often*

Age also shows some distinct differences on how arts experiences are enjoyed. Younger age groups express high interest in attending but find barriers (like companions).

		AGE		ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
% Agree(Top2box)	<b>18-34</b> (n=343)	<b>35-54</b> (n=423)	<b>55+</b> (n=394)	Immersed (n=124)	<b>Active</b> (n=267)	<b>Passives</b> (n=527)	
I consider arts experiences (galleries, theatre, etc.) as a special outing, rather than something I do regularly	85%	81%	84%	71%↓	76%↓	92% ↑	
I don't attend shows as much as I used to, but I still love the experience	76%	74%	79%	69%	76%	84% ↑	
I'm interested in arts experiences, but I don't always have someone to go with	73% ↑	61%	47%↓	60%	60%↓	72% ↑	
I love to plan a few arts events together to make a full day or weekend of it	51% ↑	39%	21%↓	69%	64%	61%	

### Is digital participation in the arts still prevalent?



**In short, yes**. Nearly 80% of arts-interested Albertans participate in some form of digital arts experience, most commonly watching or streaming performances. This has become a way for Albertans to participate in the arts in a very easy manner (none of the in-person barriers are present) and while it doesn't represent a shift from preferring in-person experiences, it is likely that organizations are feeling the impact of digital experiences being so readily available.



#### **Digital Arts Related Activities - % Participation**

Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q10. Thinking about arts-related activities specifically, which of the following do you participate in digitally? This might be via your computer, a streaming service, TV, mobile phone or tablet.

### Digital arts engagement is higher among younger groups and artsimmersed audiences

		AGE		ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
% Participate	<b>18-34</b> (n=343)	<b>35-54</b> (n=423)	<b>55+</b> (n=394)	Immersed (n=124)	<b>Active</b> (n=267)	Passives (n=527)	
Watching an artist/maker/musician create/perform on social media	57% ↑	41%	35%↓	60% ↑	54% ↑	44%	
Streamed (live or recorded) performances, cultural events, or festivals (arts-based, music, film, or cultural)	45%	37%	40%	54% ↑	49% ↑	43%	
Listening to podcasts (arts specific)	43% ↑	39%	23%↓	56% ↑	46% ↑	31%↓	
Online classes, courses, or workshops (art class, music history course, etc.)	29% ↑	25%	18%↓	42% ↑	33% ↑	21%	
Q & A interview with an artist, performer, scientist, historian, etc.	19%	22% ↑	11%↓	38% ↑	25% ↑	12%↓	
Virtual tours or virtual reality (VR) experiences (a museum tour, science experience, zoo visit, etc.)	16%	17%	16%	25% ↑	23% ↑	14%	
Live interactive events or performances online where you can participate via chat, audio, or video	22% ↑	16%	7%↓	37% ↑	20% ↑	10%↓	
Online exhibitions or galleries	15%	15%	12%	25% ↑	22% ↑	12%	
Online community meetings or discussions (hosted or presented by artists, museums, libraries, community arts groups, etc.)	17% ↑	16%	7%↓	37% ↑	19% ↑	9%↓	
Online materials or activities for kids	14%	17% ↑	4%↓	23% ↑	14%	9%	
Virtual book club	10%	9%	4%↓	19% ↑	12%↑	5%↓	
None of the above - I was aware but don't participate/have interest	11%↓	16%	24% ↑	1%↓	8%↓	15%	
None of the above - I wasn't aware of any of these things	3%	5%	8%	2%	2%↓	6%	

Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q10. Thinking about arts-related activities specifically, which of the following do you participate in digitally? This might be via your computer, a streaming service, TV, mobile phone or tablet.

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## And Albertan's digital behaviour at home influences their preferences for live events.

Understanding their home entertainment preferences is important because Albertans may be inspired to attend live events based on what they enjoy at home.



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## Content preferences (at home) can help shape programming decisions

Most preferred genres for athome entertainment are comedy, documentary, mystery and drama. These are very broad categories that may help shape events based on what Albertans are interested in.









## Content Preferences and Informing Programming

### Both new works and familiar programming are of interest

While on this surface, this may seem to provide limited guidance to arts organizations, the passive levels of agreement for both suggests audiences have a willingness to experience both types of works. In short, a mix of the familiar and new is probably ideal.



Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q12. Here are some statements that some people make about what types of performances or events they like to experience. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement

### Preferences do differ by age group and engagement level: younger and immersed audiences are more likely to prefer new works

			AGE		ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
	% Agree(Top2box)	<b>18-34</b> (n=343)	<b>35-54</b> (n=423)	<b>55+</b> (n=394)	<b>Immersed</b> (n=124)	<b>Active</b> (n=267)	<b>Passives</b> (n=527)	
	When I attend performance or events, I want to explore new shows or new works	78% ↑	74%	63%↓	88% ↑	84% ↑	72%	
-	Because I only get to see a few things a year I want to try those types of performances or events that are familiar to me and I trust	70%	62%	67%	60%	60%↓	72% ↑	
	I am more likely to attend touring performances (i.e. Broadway Across Canada) than local productions in my hometown	50% ↑	45%	30%↓	48%	39%	42%	
	I am more likely to attend a performance or event if my own cultural group is represented	55% ↑	40%	29%↓	49%	43%	37%	

Regional Albertans are slightly less likely to want to explore new works (but otherwise, there are few regional differences).

## Generally, audiences like challenging and thought-provoking but want balance with lighthearted content

This suggests emotive is key; audiences are clearly open to thought-provoking content still want an element of humour, whether that is in the same performance or separate works. In short, **variety** may be something audiences are looking for.



Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q13. Thinking about what types of performances you consider attending, what are you more likely to want to see? Move the slider along the scale to the type of performance you would want to see. -

Stone –

Key differences:

Olafson

## In terms of show elements, local talent and cultural representation are most important

The local component may be a differentiator for organizations. Audiences love to know they are supporting artists in community and while this may not drive ticket sales in isolation, it can be a useful messaging tactic.



Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q14. Thinking about different kinds of arts activities and how you decide what to attend, how important are the following qualities?

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Olafson

## Younger and immersed audiences are much more likely to say local, community, and cultural experiences are important them

Stone –
Olafson

		AGE		ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
% Important (Top2box)	<b>18-34</b> (n=343)	<b>35-54</b> (n=423)	<b>55+</b> (n=394)	Immersed (n=124)	<b>Active</b> (n=267)	Passives (n=527)	
Gives me the opportunity to learn about other cultures	50% ↑	45%	38%↓	66% ↑	51%↑	42%	
Includes local talent (even if I don't know who they are)	42% ↑	39%	29%↓	55% ↑	48% ↑	30%↓	
Put on by organizations from my community (town, city, or region)	43% ↑	35%	31%↓	61% ↑	43%↑	28%↓	
Put on by organizations or venues I've attended myself or have a personal connection with	42% ↑	38%	25%↓	54% ↑	42% ↑	30%↓	
Includes famous or big-name artists	32%	33%	23%↓	45% ↑	27%	28%	
A show that has a lot "buzz"	33%↑	30%	19%↓	40% ↑	27%	25%	
A show I can't see anywhere else, so I know it's exclusive	30%	30% ↑	18%↓	50% ↑	32% ↑	20%↓	
Reflects my culture or heritage	31%↑	26%	14%↓	44% ↑	21%	20%↓	

Stone – Olafson

## Memberships and Ticket Bundling Options

## While a majority of Albertans hold memberships, they are most common at fitness or recreation facilities

Engagement in these types of activities is often quite regular. Arts memberships or season tickets are much less common overall (Wave 1 research indicated this is also on the decline).

#### % Selected - Type of membership



### But there is opportunity for a bundling ticket options for arts experiences A more flexible configuration may be more palatable than a full subscription because

A more flexible configuration may be more palatable than a full subscription because it offers inherent **value** and **flexibility**.

**Consider an Arts Ticket Bundle** 





#### Invitations to special events/experiences 20%

#### % Selected Benefits - Top 3

### What are the benefits of a ticket bundle?

Access and planning are key benefits which allow audiences the flexibility they have already indicated is a need.





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### What makes up the ideal ticket bundle?

An economic climate that is still challenging for audiences reflects split preferences on payment and the need for flexibility (those with higher income are more willing to pay upfront).

#### Number of experiences Most are looking for 3-4 events

#### Preference for payment Payment preferences are split



Q17. If you did commit to more than one performance, how many shows would you like to have access to?



### The ability to have choice is most preferred

Choice also reflects flexibility. And when arts experiences are a special outing, the ability to have a flexible array of options to choose from might be more appealing to audiences.



Q18.Below are some options that offer different flexibility in the number of shows you might attend. Which of these do you prefer most?

Q19. Now, below are a few options for types of experiences you can build with this type of multi-show option. Which of these would you prefer?

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# Understanding support for the arts

### Albertans are charitable but the arts are just not a priority

86% of arts-interested Albertans report supporting charitable causes but are most likely to support social services, health, or animal-related organizations.



Alberta remains one of the most charitable provinces in Canada, donating an average of \$3,180 per donor (second on average annual amount).

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Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q22. Shifting topics, do you or anyone in your household make donations to causes in any of the following areas?

### Supporting the arts is not the preferred cause; majority see greater needs elsewhere

Arts organizations have reported challenges in garnering ongoing support and Albertans appear to be supporting other charities and organizations over the arts, based on their perception of needs elsewhere.

29%

13%

6%

There are other charities or organizations that need my support more than the arts right now

The arts are already well-funded, there are other places that need more support

Supporting the arts is my preferred cause

■ Strongly agree Disagree Agree

19%



It will remain a challenge to position the arts are worthy over other causes (particularly social causes), so efforts likely need to focus on smaller ways to support in conjunction with other causes.

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52%



14%

21%

% Agree

(STRONGLY+AGREE)

82%

47%

25%

### Among those who do support the arts, they typically have a history of doing so OR see the current need

**Personal relevancy** is key to encouraging support: those who personally know an artist, have a personal connection or have seen a compelling performance are more likely to support.

#### **Reasons for supporting arts organizations**



Base: Have supported arts organization (n=166)

Q25. You mentioned you have donated to an arts-based organization. Tell us what prompts you to support an arts-based organization. You can select as many reasons as you need.

## A third of Albertans indicate a willingness to support the arts but conversion will be a challenge

33% of the non-donors represent a significant opportunity but conversion to support will likely hinge on leveraging personal motivations.



#### Arts Support Consideration

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# But there are some simple solutions to encourage support

Rounding up ticket purchases is an easy option that may have a significant impact on organizations (with minimal impact to audiences). However, there remains a significant proportion that do not have the means to donate.



#### **Preferred Method of Donation**

Base: Would consider supporting arts organizations or unsure (n=703)

Q24. There are many ways to donate to an arts-based organization, some are listed below. How would you be willing to donate?

## Supporting the community and artists within it have the greatest impact on donations

Messaging that will have the greatest impact on donation support should focus on community and personal relevancy.



Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

26. Below are ways arts organizations utilize support they receive. What impact, if any, does knowing each have on your decision to support an arts organization?

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## But there remains a general lack of knowledge about how or where to give to the arts

When audiences attend events or performances, a direct link can be made. But in the absence of regular attendance, this direct link is lost and how to provide general support of the arts is less clear.



### Younger and arts-immersed audiences are more likely to indicate they would support the arts if they had more knowledge about where to give

% Agree (Top2box)		AGE		ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
	<b>18-34</b> (n=343)	<b>35-54</b> (n=423)	<b>55+</b> (n=394)	Immersed (n=124)	<b>Active</b> (n=267)	Passives (n=527)	
I would give to the arts, but I don't know enough about where to give	57% ↑	46%	28%↓	56% ↑	41%	45%	
I prefer to give to the "arts" in general rather than a specific organization or company	45% ↑	36%	29%↓	55% ↑	39%	32%↓	

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### For many, the donation itself is reason enough to support

Most people that support do so because they see a need and half of respondents indicate that would be sufficient for them. Still, perks and VIP services may tip the balance for some potential donors by creating a sense of exclusivity.



#### **Perceived Benefits to Donating**

50%

Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q27. And, suppose you made a donation to a specific arts organization. Aside from small monetary donations, what types of benefits would you expect to receive in return?

### This sentiment is stronger with younger arts goers, who may have lower income levels and need other reasons to be encouraged

		AGE		ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARTS			
% Important (Top2box)	<b>18-34</b> (n=343)	<b>35-54</b> (n=423)	<b>55+</b> (n=394)	Immersed (n=124)	<b>Active</b> (n=267)	Passives (n=527)	
Just knowing I was able to support is good enough for me	40%↓	41%↓	68% ↑	35%↓	51%	52%	
Perks such as free tickets, etc.	35% ↑	32%	20%↓	26%	28%	32%	
VIP service at the event (seating, extra perks, etc.)	30% ↑	25%	12%↓	31% ↑	24%	22%	
Meet and greets with stars/performers/artists	20%	22% ↑	11%↓	26% ↑	16%	18%	
Donors-only lounge (before or after the performance)	17%	16%	7%↓	19%	13%	12%	
Exclusive events just for donors	15%	15%	6%↓	17%	13%	12%	
Be recognized for my contribution	15%↑	15% ↑	4% ↓	21%↑	10%	8%↓	
Networking opportunities with fellow donors	11%	14% ↑	2%↓	23% ↑	11%	6%↓	

Base: All respondents (n=1,160)

Q27. And, suppose you made a donation to a specific arts organization. Aside from small monetary donations, what types of benefits would you expect to receive in return?



### **Respondent Profile:** Who We Heard From

6%

18-24

years



## Understanding people. It's what we do.

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### **Questions or Comments?**

Please contact: kim@stone-olafson.com megan@stone-olafson.com