

# **Creative PEI Arts, Accessibility and Barriers Survey Report**



**January 12, 2025**

**This report was prepared by Alexis Bulman**

**To all the survey, and focus group participants**

Thank you, your input was invaluable.

**To the staff of Creative PEI:**

**Jane Ledwell, Mark Sandiford, Rachel Matheson, Connor McCardle,  
Devon Strang, Becca Griffin, and Molly Leeco**

Thank you for your guidance, support, and contributions.

**To our community partners,**

**Holland College Applied Research:  
Junaid Maqsood, Nagma Nagma, and Greg McKenna  
ResourceAbilities: Kerry Duggan  
Accessible Surveys: Jerry Nicholson and  
Christophe Geiser**

Thank you for your expertise and generosity.

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# Overview

The Creative PEI Arts, Accessibility & Barriers Survey was conducted to better understand the experiences of artists and arts workers on Prince Edward Island, with a focus on identifying accessibility gaps, participation barriers, and systemic challenges within the local arts sector. The findings are intended to inform more inclusive policies, programs, funding models, and venue best-practices.

Respondents represented a range of ages, artistic disciplines, and identities, with strong participation from visual artists, craft practitioners, writers, musicians, and multidisciplinary artists. Many respondents identified as members of equity-deserving groups, including 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous, racialized, and first-generation communities.

## **Key findings include:**

- Accessibility needs are not being met consistently at arts events and venues.
- Past experiences with accessibility and barriers strongly influence future participation.
- The vast majority of artists do not earn a sustainable income from their practice, due to persistent barriers.
- While artists engage with arts organizations and events, significant barriers remain.

## **Headline recommendations include:**

- Embed accessibility into planning through an “accessibility by design” approach.
- Provide dedicated funding for access-related costs.
- Offer disability-informed training for arts staff and leadership.
- Centre artists with lived experience in decision-making processes.

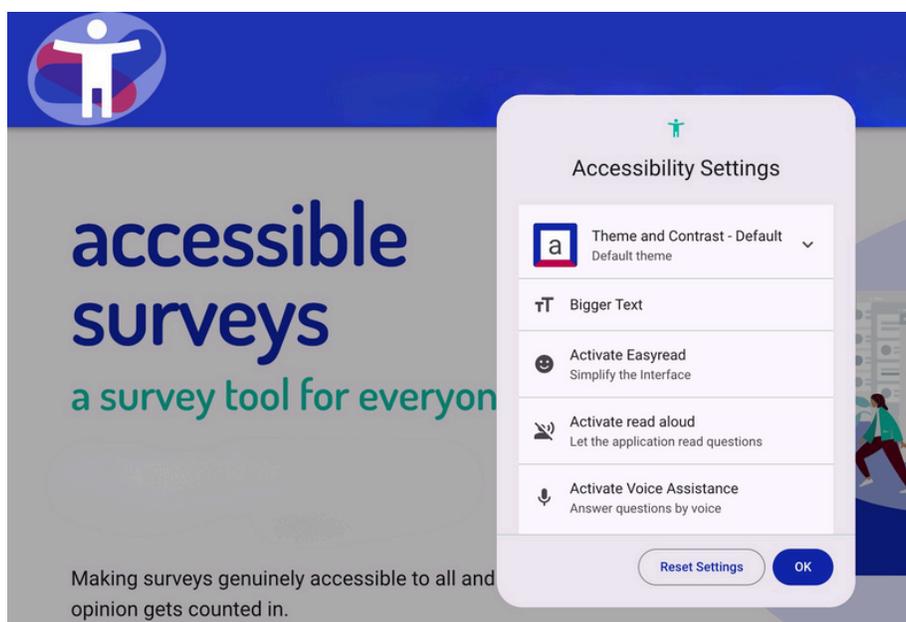
This survey identifies urgent, systemic barriers and also reveals a clear and achievable path forward. Many of the most requested access tools are low-cost and rooted in best practices, training, and intentional leadership rather than large-scale infrastructure. By prioritizing accessibility by design and disability-informed decision-making, the PEI arts sector has a unique opportunity to expand who gets to create, participate, thrive, and feel at home in this island’s vibrant arts sector. With targeted investment and sustained collaboration, meaningful change is within immediate reach, positioning PEI as a leader in equitable, inclusive, and resilient cultural practice.

# Methodology

In 2025, Creative PEI conducted the Arts, Accessibility and Barriers Survey to better understand the lived experiences of artists across Prince Edward Island. The survey was open to the public from March 1, 2025, to October 3, 2025, and sought to identify both systemic and individual barriers to participation in the arts, with a particular focus on accessibility, disability, neurodivergence, mental health, geography, and economic status.

The survey was created by Alexis Bulman, Accessibility and Inclusion Researcher, and Rachel Matheson, Accessibility and Inclusion Outreach Coordinator, both of whom are Creative PEI staff members with lived experience in physical disability and neurodivergence.

The survey was developed with guidance and support from ResourceAbilities, Holland College Applied Research, the Alliance for Mental Wellbeing, and Skills PEI. This collaborative, community-informed approach helped ensure the survey was grounded in lived experience, sector knowledge, and accessibility best practices.



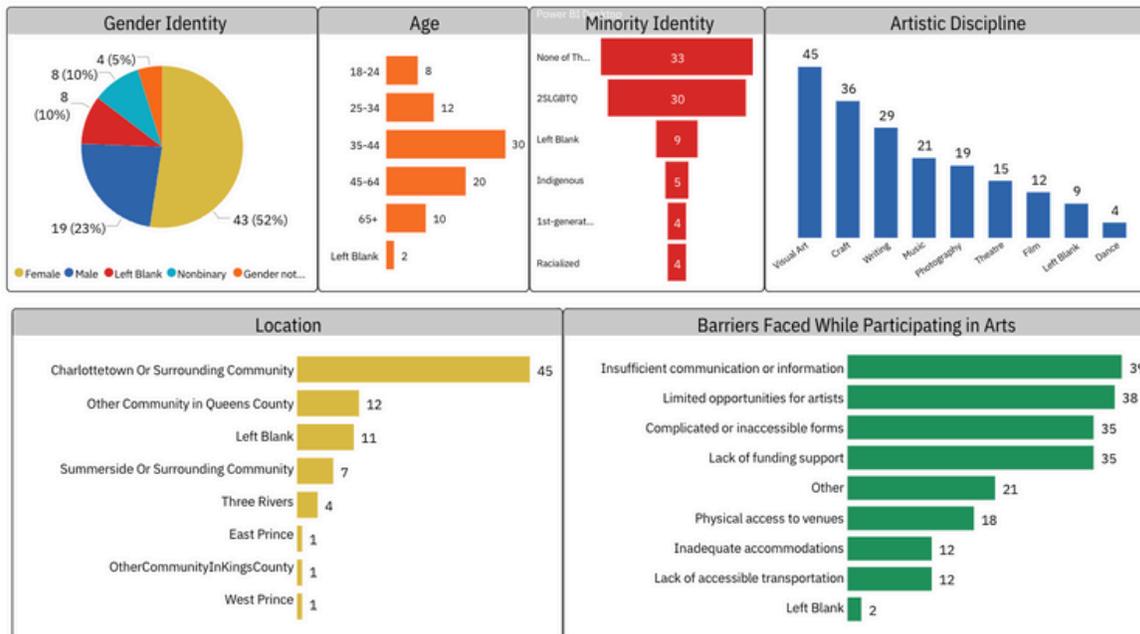
A website screenshot of the Accessible Surveys platform showing an “Accessibility Settings” panel with options such as theme and contrast, bigger text, easy read, read-aloud, and voice assistance, alongside the text “accessible surveys – a survey tool for everyone.”

The survey was hosted on Accessible Surveys, a platform selected for its inclusive design features. These included adjustable font size, high-contrast colour options, voice assistance (read-aloud / respond-aloud), plain-language formatting, the ability to save responses and return later, and compatibility with a range of assistive technologies such as screen-readers and language translation tools.

All survey questions were optional, and for multiple-choice questions, respondents were permitted to select more than one answer if they wished. This was an intentional design choice to acknowledge intersectionality and capture the complex scenarios surrounding accessibility, barriers, and the lived experiences of artists.

The survey was developed with a Social Lens for Disability, rather than a Medical Lens. This perspective understands disability not as an individual deficit or medical condition, but as the outcome of societal, environmental, and systemic barriers that limit participation. It shifts the focus from “fixing” the individual to identifying and removing obstacles within programs, policies, and cultural spaces, emphasizing inclusion, equity, and access for all. In practice, this approach meant that the survey did not ask questions about specific disabilities or medical diagnoses.

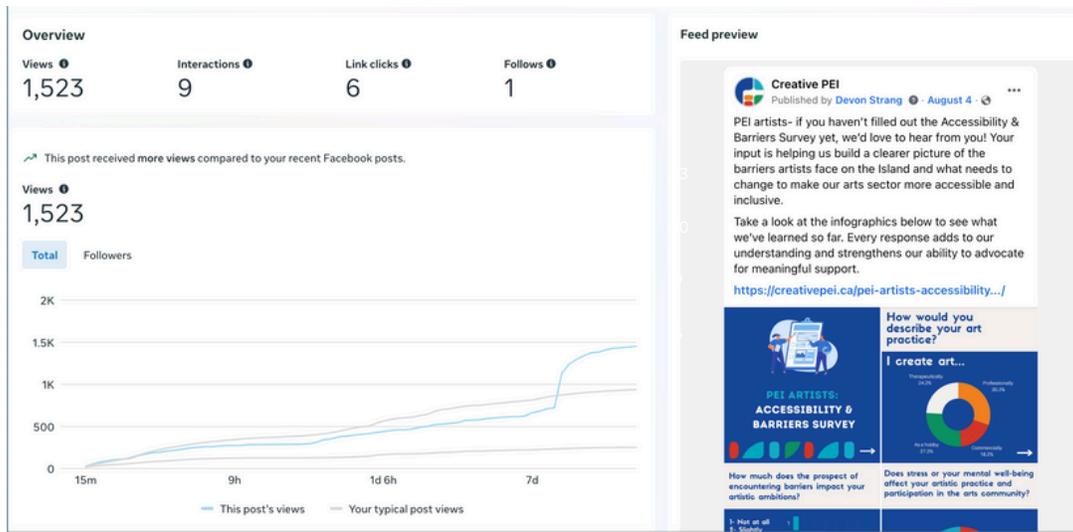
Importantly, all survey respondents remain completely anonymous.



An interactive Power BI dashboard of colourful bar and pie charts presenting survey data from PEI artists, including demographics, locations, accessibility barriers, access tools used, and how past experiences affect participation in the arts.

# Outreach & Engagement

The survey was marketed widely through Creative PEI's monthly newsletters, quarterly pamphlet, and website, as well as across a range of social media platforms. To support offline access, physical posters advertising the survey, including clear participation instructions and a QR code, were distributed to public libraries across PEI.



Analytics for a Creative PEI post promoting the Accessibility & Barriers Survey. At the top, the post title appears along with metrics. Below is a line graph showing the steady rise in views. On the right side is the Facebook post, and beneath the text are several brightly coloured infographic tiles related to the survey results.

Outreach was further strengthened through Creative PEI's community-based initiatives, including the Summerside Peer Support Group for artists and creators and the Charlottetown Peer Support Group for artists with lived experience of disabilities and/or neurodivergence, where the survey was directly shared and discussed. In addition, local arts and culture organizations supported dissemination by sharing the survey through their own newsletters, networks, and communication channels.

[cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-30-island-morning/clip/16161994-survey-reviews-accessibility-barriers-island-artists](https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-30-island-morning/clip/16161994-survey-reviews-accessibility-barriers-island-artists)

To deepen qualitative insight and encourage participation, Creative PEI also hosted two in-person focus groups and participated in radio interviews with CBC Island Morning, helping to expand reach and ensure that a diverse range of voices was invited into the process.

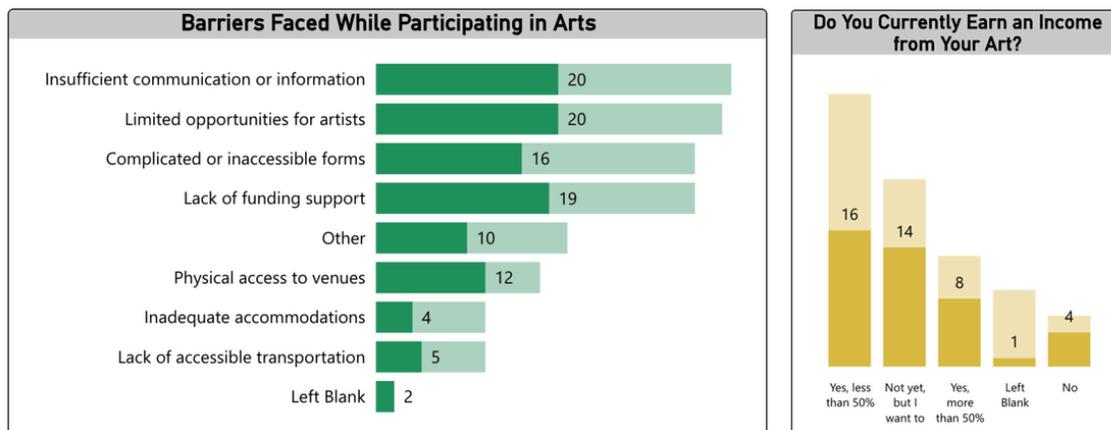
A total of 82 respondents completed the survey. Participants represented a broad range of locations across Prince Edward Island, and disciplines, including visual arts, craft, writing, music, photography, theatre, film, and dance. Respondents varied in gender identity, age groups, experience, and artistic status, including emerging, mid-career, and established artists, as well as hobbyists and those who create for therapeutic purposes. Many participants identified with intersecting identities, including IBPOC and 2SLGBTQ+, in addition to their disability and/or neurodivergence.

# Survey Results: Barriers

The survey results suggest that barriers to full participation in the arts sector are widespread and deeply interconnected.

The most frequently reported barriers included insufficient communication or information regarding accessibility (39), limited opportunities for artists with disabilities and/or neurodivergence (38), complicated or inaccessible forms (35), lack of funding support (35), other (21), physical access to barriers (18), inadequate accommodations (12), and lack of accessible transportation (12).

Respondents' feedback suggests funding structures, application processes, and reporting requirements often rest on able-bodied assumptions about time, energy, and capacity. These assumptions may not align with the lived realities of disabled and/or neurodivergent artists, and can contribute to patterns of structural exclusion by prioritizing speed, clarity, and cognitive endurance, effectively shifting the responsibility of accessibility onto individuals rather than embedding it into the systems meant to support their artistic pursuits.



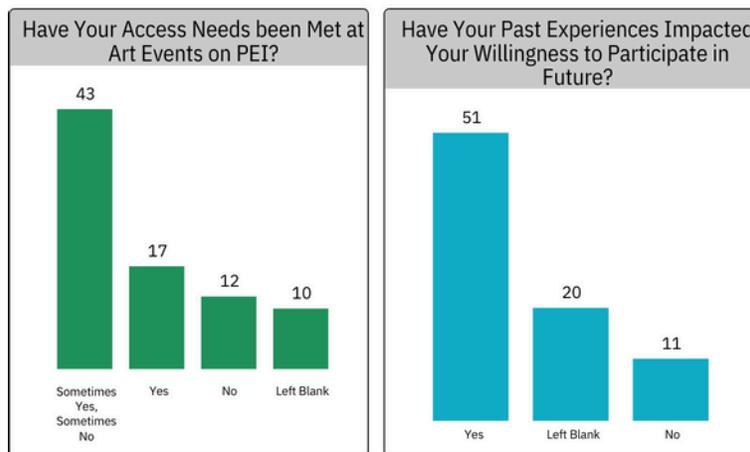
A green “barriers” bar chart on the left, and a yellow “income” bar income chart on the right, both filtered to highlight female survey respondents.

Women make up 52% of survey respondents, closely aligning with the 2021 Census, where 55% of PEI cultural workers and 54% of Canadian cultural workers are women. Nearly half of the women surveyed (21 of 43) identify with at least one equity-deserving identity such as 2SLGBTQ+, IBPOC, or first-generation newcomer status.

Despite strong artistic engagement, most women are not earning sustainable incomes: 32 earn some but less than half of their income from art, 13 earn most of their income from art, and 22 want to earn income from art but have not yet. While physical, structural, and systemic barriers affect all demographics, the dataset shows these barriers are compounding for women with intersecting marginalized identities which directly contributes to financial instability and limits capacity to pursue or sustain creative work.

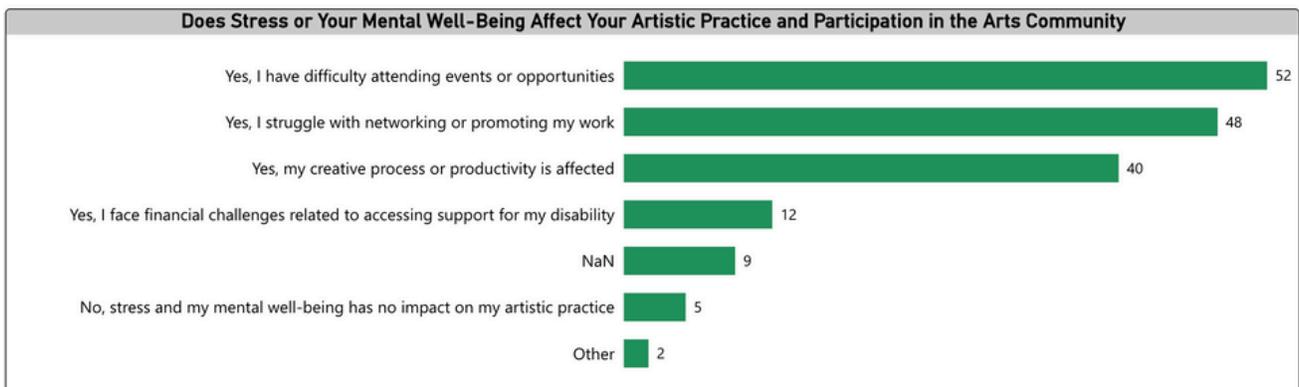
When asked, “Have your access needs been met at arts events on PEI?”, 43 respondents said “sometimes,” 17 said “yes,” and 12 said “no.” This shows a clear pattern of inconsistent accessibility. For artists with disabilities and/or neurodivergence, reliable access tools and accommodations are essential; without them, participation in the arts becomes unpredictable and difficult to navigate.

The impact of these experiences on future participation is even more pronounced. When asked, “Have your past experiences impacted your willingness to participate in future?” A strong majority of 51 respondents indicated that their previous experiences with accessibility do affect their willingness to engage with future arts events, compared with only 11 who said they do not. These findings make it clear: accessibility barriers are not isolated inconveniences; they directly shape whether individuals feel welcome and included to participate in the arts community.



Two side-by-side bar graphs: the green chart shows whether access needs have been met at art events on PEI, while the blue chart shows the impact of past experiences on future participation.

When asked, “Does stress or mental wellbeing affect your artistic practice or participation?”, 52 respondents reported difficulty attending events, 48 struggled with networking, 40 said their creative process was affected, and 12 faced financial challenges relating to disability, while only 5 reported no impact. These numbers underscore the strain of navigating arts spaces not designed for disabled and/or neurodivergent artists, where constant adaptation and coping take a toll. They also show that core expectations in the arts sector, such as networking, often clash with the realities of anxiety, stress, and neurodivergence, placing these artists at a systemic disadvantage.



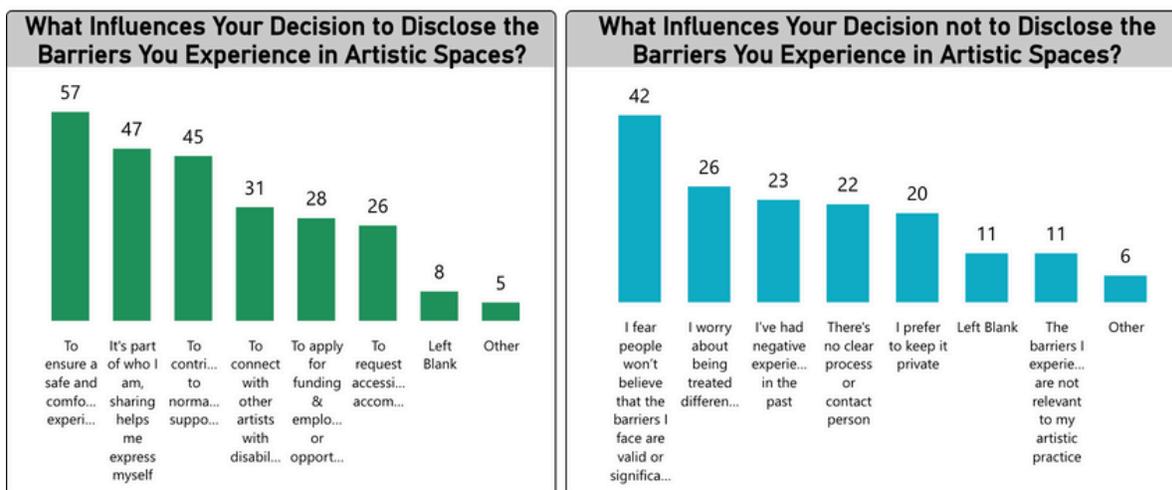
A green bar chart titled “Does stress or mental wellbeing affect your artistic practice or participation?”

The data highlights factors influencing decisions to disclose or withhold barriers faced in artistic spaces, revealing a clear tension between the desire for beneficial accessibility supports and the fear of stigma and discrimination.

For those who choose to disclose, the most common reason was ensuring a safe and comfortable experience (57). Sharing barriers was also seen as part of identity and self-expression (47), and as a way to normalize support for artists with disabilities (45). Other reasons included connecting with other disabled artists (31), applying for funding or employment (28), and requesting accessibility accommodations (26). These responses suggest that disclosure is primarily driven by the need for safety, belonging, and advocacy.

In contrast, those who chose not to disclose expressed strong concerns about stigma and discrimination. The most cited reason was the fear of not being believed (42), followed by worries about being treated differently (26). Previous negative experiences with disclosure (23) and the lack of a clear process or contact person (22) also contributed to reluctance. Some preferred to keep their barriers private (20), while a smaller group felt their barriers were irrelevant to their artistic practice (11).

Overall, the data shows that while many artists are willing to disclose barriers to improve safety, access, and representation, fear of stigma, disbelief, and unclear systems remain significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges will require clearer processes, cultural shifts that validate lived experiences, and a more trusting environment within artistic spaces. The findings also underscore the need for sector-wide improvements to reduce the burden of self-advocacy on individuals.



Two side-by-side bar graphs. The first (in green) highlights reasons for disclosing barriers experienced in artistic spaces. The second (in blue) shows reasons for non-disclosure of barriers experiences in artistic spaces.

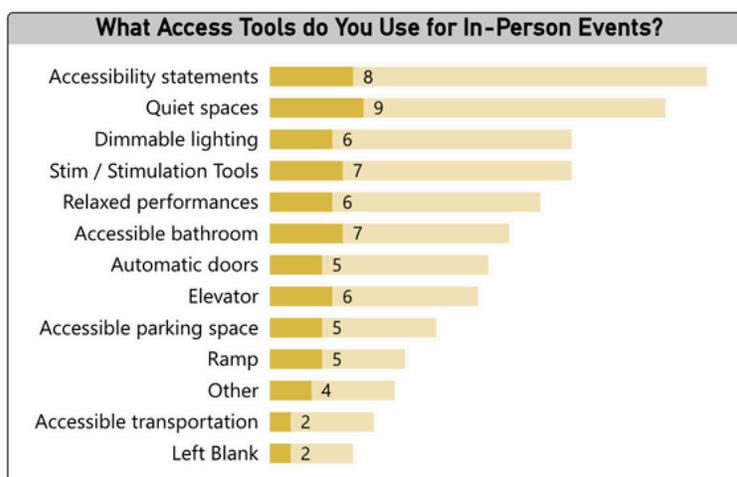
# Survey Results:

## Accessibility

When asked about access tools most utilized for in-person and online events, respondents overwhelmingly highlighted low-cost tools that support the widest spectrum of disabilities and neurodivergence. For in-person experiences, the most frequently requested supports were accessibility statements (42), quiet spaces (38), dimmable lighting (29), stimulation tools (29), and relaxed performances (26), followed by physical infrastructure such as automatic doors (21), elevators (20), accessible parking (16), ramps (13), and accessible transportation (10).

This presents an encouraging opportunity for under-resourced arts organizations and venues. With sector-wide training and consistent implementation, the bar of accessibility can be raised significantly, shifting from an afterthought to a proactive lens through which programming and events are designed from the outset, fostering a more genuine culture of inclusion and equity.

Many of the most popular tools, such as accessibility statements and sensory adjustments, are relatively recent within the long history of ableist societies. Their strong uptake among younger respondents may reflect greater awareness and familiarity, but the benefits of these tools extend across all ages. This, again, underscores the need for deliberate outreach and re-engagement strategies as accessibility initiatives grow.



A yellow bar chart, filtered for artists aged 45–64, shows usage of in-person access tools.

When the dataset is filtered by age (45–64 and 65+), the importance of physical infrastructure increases. Accessibility tools are foundational to ensuring artists, creatives, and cultural workers age with dignity and sustained participation in creative life. The cultural sector relies on the skills, stories, and knowledge honed over decades; when older artists remain active and included, the arts sector benefits. Failing to prioritize access across all age groups is a disservice to everyone, and this is felt most profoundly in relation to Indigenous Elders, whose guidance and lived experience are central to cultural continuity.

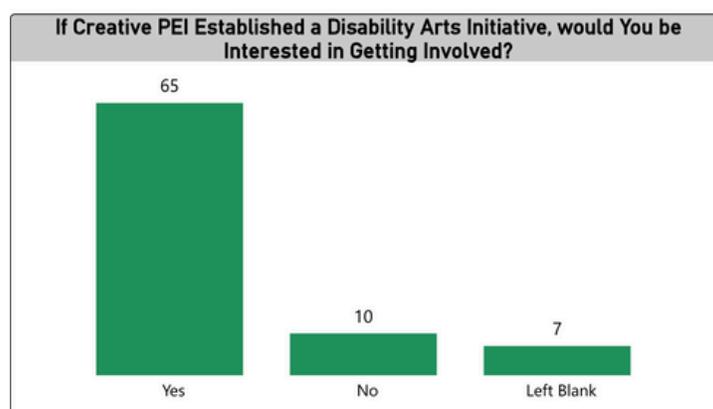
# Conclusion

The Creative PEI Arts, Accessibility and Barriers Survey reveals a strong desire among artists for collective change, mutual support, and inclusive practices across the arts sector. Respondents highlighted the need for disability-informed leadership, meaningful consultation, and sustained collaboration. Proposed solutions include dedicated funding for accessibility costs; cross-sector accessibility training; improved physical access to venues, online programs and events; and peer support grounded in care and solidarity.

A key theme is the shift from accommodation to accessibility by design. Accessibility should be a foundational principle shaping spaces, programs, policies, and relationships. Widely administered accessibility training could drive this change by establishing clear processes for requesting support, fostering safe and understanding spaces, and encouraging artists to disclose barriers without fear. Establishing Status of the Artist legislation in PEI would complement these efforts by formally recognizing artists as workers and setting consistent professional standards, supporting accountability for accessibility, equity, and inclusion across the sector.

## Recommendations:

- Embed accessibility by design across all programs, events, and policies.
- Provide dedicated funding for accessibility costs and upgrades.
- Deliver disability-informed training for staff and leadership.
- Centre lived experience by including disabled and/or neurodivergent artists in decision-making.
- Ensure venues meet core physical accessibility standards.
- Support peer networks that build community care and shared learning.
- Implement outreach to re-engage artists impacted by access barriers.
- Develop Status of the Artist legislation to set professional standards and strengthen accountability.
- Support a Basic Income Guarantee to provide financial stability and enable full participation for artists.



A green horizontal bar chart shows majority of survey respondents are interested in the establishment of a Disability Arts Initiative.

The survey demonstrates strong support for a dedicated disability arts initiative. When asked if they would be interested in getting involved with such an initiative led by Creative PEI, 65 of 82 respondents said yes.

Overall, the findings show that meaningful change in PEI's arts sector requires both structural and cultural transformation. Institutions, funders, and organizations are called to move beyond symbolic gestures and inconsistent accessibility practices and commit to long-term, resourced, community-led approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion that place disability justice at their core, supporting a sustainable arts ecosystem for all.