Choral and Singing Groups Understanding and Uses of Digital Technology

Survey Results and Recommendations

Prepared by Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario

with Byron Hermann

May 23, 2023

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Cover photos credit: Nova Voce Nova Scotia Provincial Men's Choir (on the left) | The Canadian Chamber Choir (on the right)

1. Introduction

In the Spring of 2022, CPAMO was invited by Byron Hermann to work with him on a project to assess the digital capacities, strategies and interests of choirs/singing groups across Canada and their service organizations. With funding from Canada Council for the Arts "Strategic Funds and Initiatives: The Digital Greenhouse", CPAMO was invited to:

1. Connect with choral organizations, artists, composers and arts organizations from across Canada through a survey to ask questions in reference to Digital Offerings during COVID. This would include: What digital tactics have been used? How have they been monetized, if at all? What types of digital offerings have been created? How and with whom have these been shared? Changes in Audience connections? Financial and Human resource barriers encountered?

2. The second part was to design, develop and deliver a survey to collect information on digital uses from partner organizations and compile into a database to assist in the discoverability of these for possible use in outreach, education and organizational strategic planning;

3. The third part of this project is the presentation of the analyzed survey results in the form of a summary and key findings. This includes identification of digital offerings priorities, opportunities and possible role they might play in strategic decisions regarding the post pandemic role/balance of digital and in-person offerings.

These three elements have combined in this report on the survey findings to support that these be used to create some sort of "tools" to sustain and evolve the uses and sharing of digital offerings to help create new opportunities for the choral/singing group communities.

This report, therefore, is divided into several parts to address these issues as follows:

• the methodology and background of the respondents;
• challenges in and opportunities for using digital technology
• opportunities created to engage audiences and artists
• interest in sharing digital resources with others
• tools that can assist in better understanding and using digital resources
• impact on anti-racism, equity, inclusion and strategic planning

The report concludes with suggestions about possible next steps to build on what has been learned through this preliminary research.

"Nova Voce" Nova Scotia Provincial Men's Choir

2. Methodology and Respondent Background

With funding from the Canada Council for the Arts 'Digital Arts' program, Byron Hermann engaged CPAMO to design, deliver, report on and assess the results of an online survey sent to diverse choral/singing groups, choral organizations, artists, composers and arts organizations from across Canada. In this context, CPAMO:

- consulted with Byron Hermann and his colleagues, re., the purpose of the survey, the questions to be asked and the organizations it is to go to;
- designed the survey and assisted in constructing an email list and survey introduction;
- sent out the survey and reminders.
- With these activities now done, this document presents an analysis of the results received and how they can be used to support choral and singing groups in their efforts to better understand and use digital tools to enhance and advance their work.

The data for this report has been generated through an online survey developed by CPAMO and Byron Hermann. It was distributed by these two as well as various choral and arts organizations across Canada, including Choral Canada, Provincial Choral Organizations, Canadian Music Centre, SOCAN, Canadian league of Composers, and others. The survey was first released in November 2022 and then re-released in late February 2023.

All survey responses were submitted to CPAMO so that the identities of respondents would be held in confidence. The total number of responses received was 100 and respondents were allowed to check off more than one category, in some cases resulting in multiple responses.

This section provides an overview of the demographics of the respondents (See Appendix A for details).

- Most respondents identified themselves as singers (just over 60%) with conductors next (just over 40%) and administrators (over 30%);
- Over 60% of respondents are located in large urban centres as well as from Ontario;
- Over 60% identified as adults with 40% as seniors and 30% as middle-aged;
- 80% identified as belonging to a choir/singing group;
- Over 45% identified as women and approximately 40% identified as men and over 70% identifying as White;
- Close to 20% identified as LBBQT2+ and over 80% indicating their mother tongue is English or French.

Based on this data, it is evident that respondents represent:

- mostly singers and conductors and are located in large urban centres across Canada but mostly in Ontario;
- likely having multiple roles as administrators and/or singers, conductors; and
- an aging cohort with more women involved than men and most respondents identifying as White.

This information indicates a sparse response from some functions integral to choirs/singing groups, for example, composers, service organizatons, schools etc., and a sparse response from some locations in Canada.

3. Challenges and Opportunities

There were several questions that probed respondents' challenges and opportunities in using digital technology, including financial/funding supports to design, develop and employ. The charts below indicate the responses.
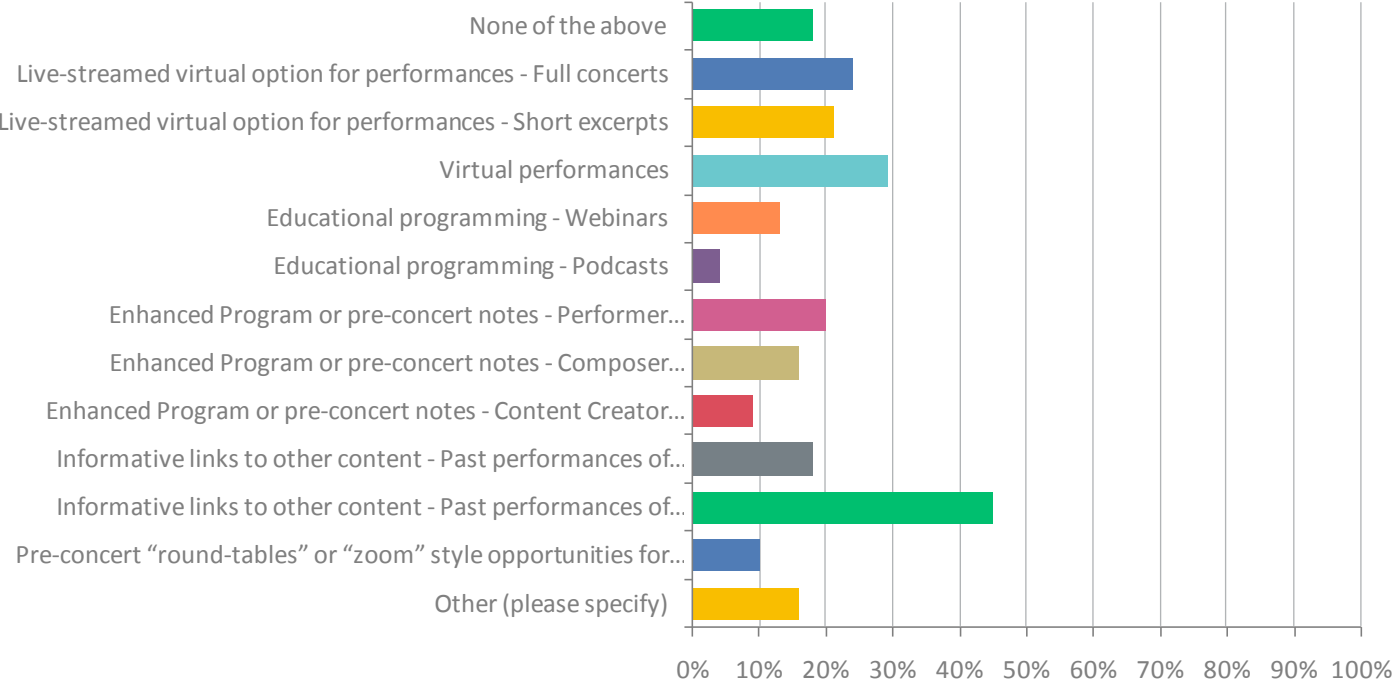
What major CHALLENGES is your choir or as a composer are you currently facing? (select all that apply)
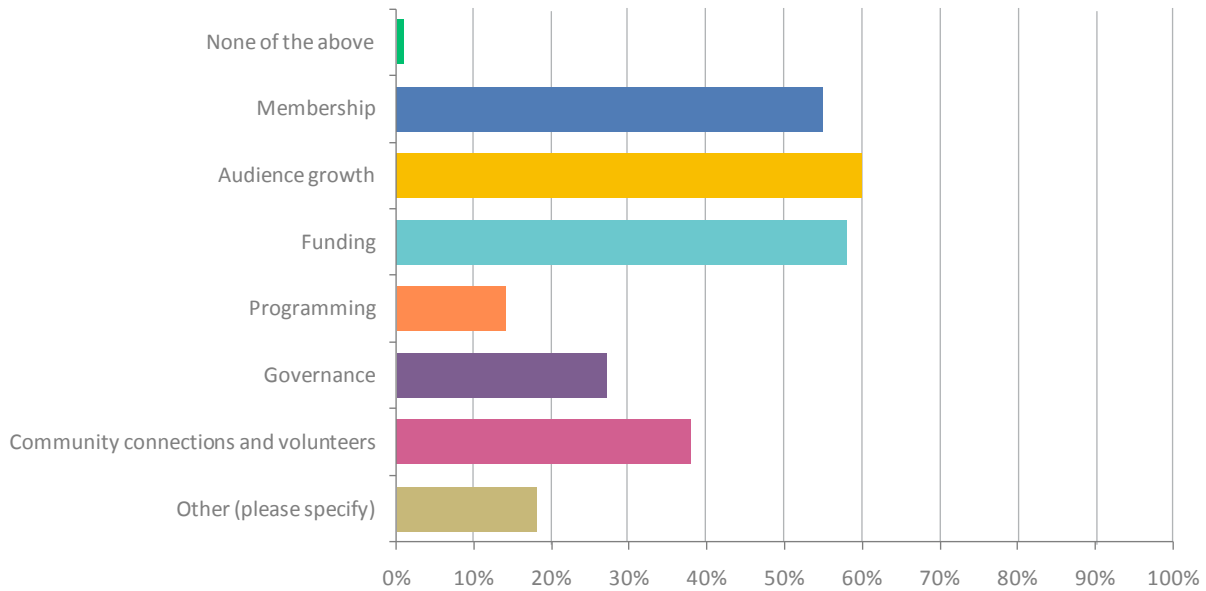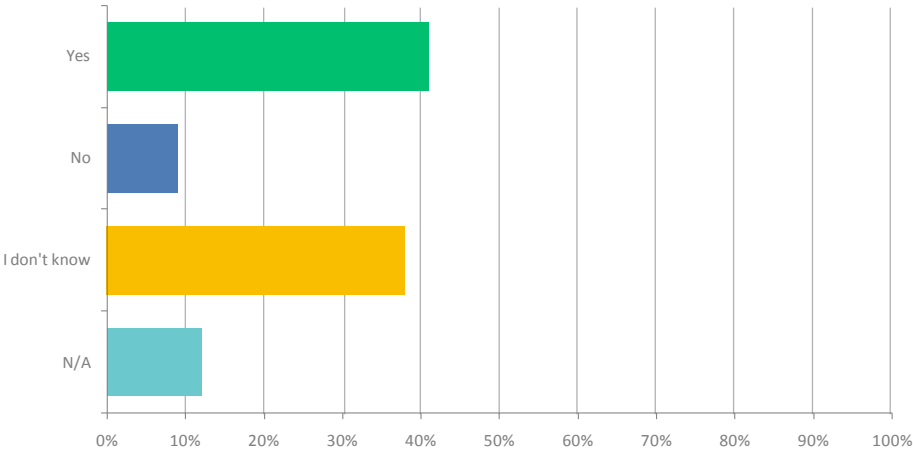

What opportunities in digital content do you see to help meet these challenges? (with 1 being the most important)
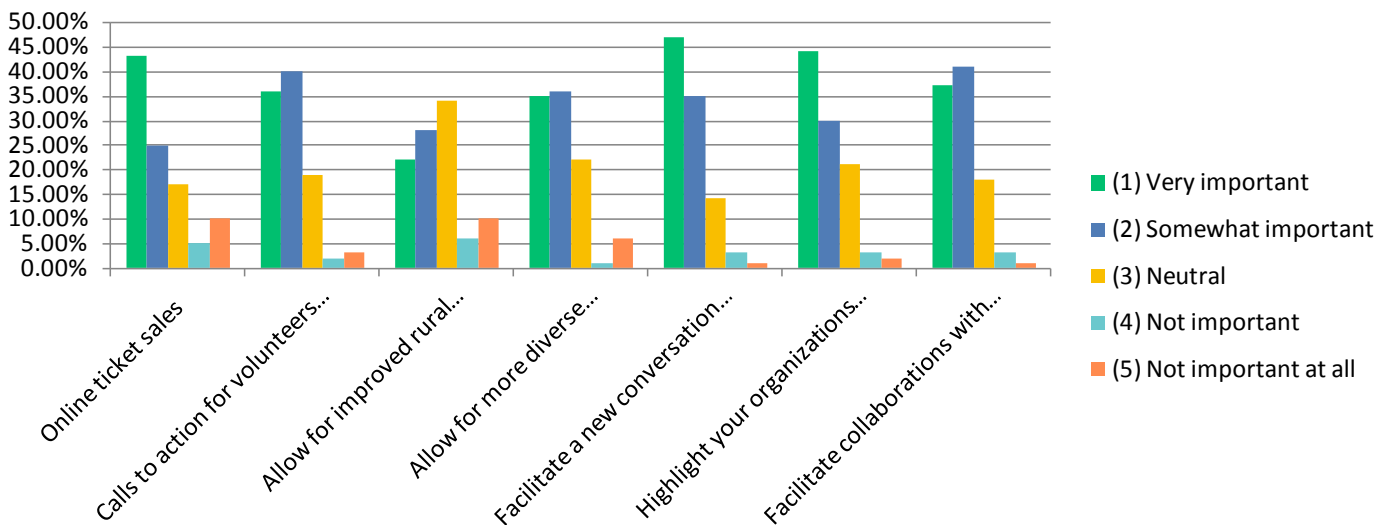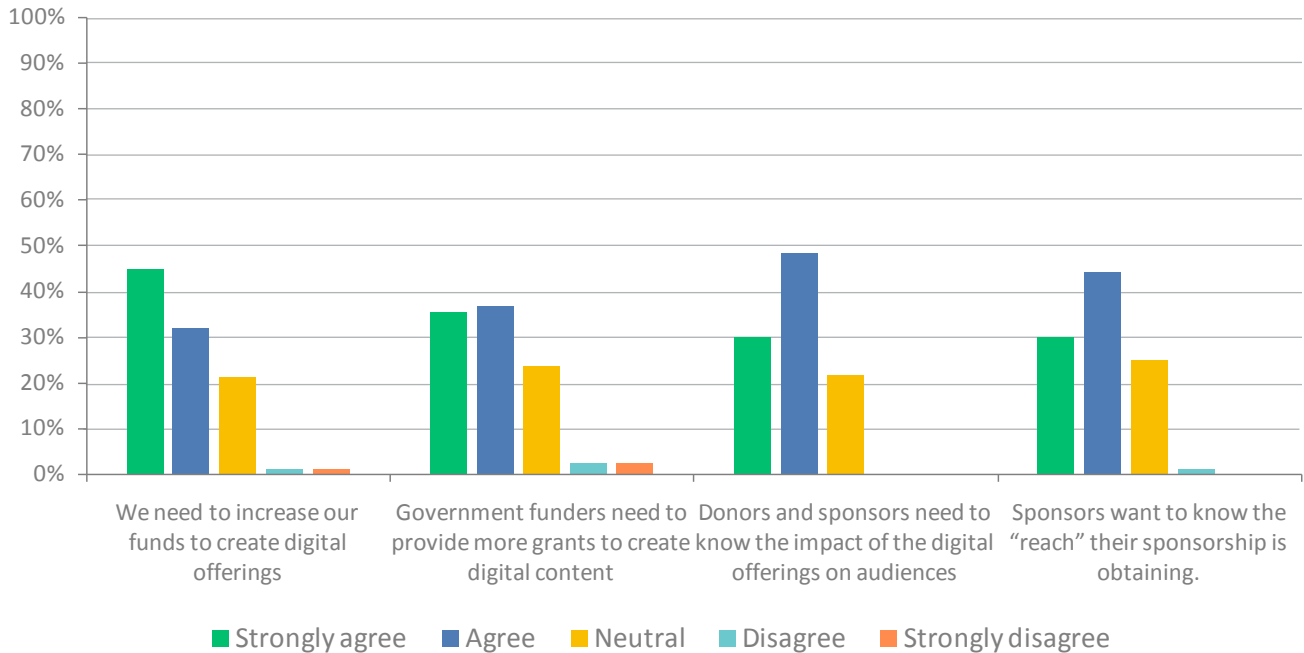
What current digital offerings (content) do you or your choir (organization) provide? (Choose all that apply)

Horizontal bar chart with the following categories and approximate values:

- None of the above — ~19%
- Live-streamed virtual option for performances - Full concerts — ~24%
- Live-streamed virtual option for performances - Short excerpts — ~21%
- Virtual performances — ~29%
- Educational programming - Webinars — ~14%
- Educational programming - Podcasts — ~5%
- Enhanced Program or pre-concert notes - Performer… — ~20%
- Enhanced Program or pre-concert notes - Composer… — ~16%
- Enhanced Program or pre-concert notes - Content Creator… — ~10%
- Informative links to other content - Past performances of… — ~18%
- Informative links to other content - Past performances of… — ~44%
- Pre-concert "round-tables" or "zoom" style opportunities for… — ~11%
- Other (please specify) — ~16%

(x-axis: 0% to 100%)

Do these digital offerings improve your audience connection and audience experience?

Horizontal bar chart with the following categories and approximate values:

- Yes — ~41%
- No — ~9%
- I don't know — ~38%
- N/A — ~12%

(x-axis: 0% to 100%)

Funding For Digital Technology

Based on these responses, it is evident that respondents:

- See their most significant challenges related to membership, audience growth, community relations and funding and that providing digital supports and services are very to somewhat important to addressing these challenges;

- Have varied approaches to using digital tools with some indicating using none while others used these tools more frequently for live-stream and information gathering;

- Although many see digital offerings as a way to improve audience connections and experiences, many do not know if this will be the case;

- Have several concerns about funding supports needed to develop useful digital tools.

Some respondents offered the following comments on this subject:

- Marketing, clarifying my why, and how to communicate that clearly. Scaling and developing online methods and strategies to teach collaborative music making that until now I have taught effectively in person.

- I think attention spans have shortened. Audiences seem to prefer shorter concerts with no intermission. They are also excited to hear a variety of music and to join in on sing-alongs. There is a desire for streamed content. Audiences are also very excited for a return to live-music.

- Those of us with health issues need to remain vigilant about going into crowds even though most people don't have to be. Digital content and contact allows us to continue being collaborators, creators, performers and audience members without having to worry about our risk factors.

- We usually have multiple cameras for the live streams, so audiences can see closeups of big moments in a way that they can't when they're present. I think there have also been dramatically fewer coughs during shows in the post-pandemic era.

"Canadian Chamber Choir" with Sheryl Sewepagahan

- Since the pandemic (2021) no access to digital offerings has been included. This, however, is an excellent list and I think should be implemented in the future. The cost of live-streaming was prohibitive, but some of the above ideas could create an impact and yet be cost effective.

- I currently work as a church choir conductor, along with my husband composer/arranger. Making these video/audio clips really helped when we were still mandated to use masks and shorten rehearsal times. Most of the members are seniors and using digital spaces is more difficult.

- Offering digital recordings has meant that members who have missed a rehearsal can catch up or practice. It also incentivizes members to stay home if they aren't feeling well because they won't miss anything and is part of our COVID risk mitigation plan; a small number of our members prefer to rehearse using a digital copy of music on a tablet device.

- Online offerings have helped us to host a members only site to help learn music from a distance or to create online community in between rehearsals.

- Our virtual concert in Feb 2022 was our first performance opportunity since the beginning of the pandemic. (We subsequently did a live concert in May.) The online viewership was much larger than our normal in-person audience, and we had people watching from the United States and Europe (that we know of). Producing the concert was also a significant learning opportunity for choir members and the organization both musically and technically, and the editing process produced a more polished product than our typical live performance. (It was also a huge drain on limited volunteer energy, so we are unlikely to do it again.)

4. Audience and Artist Opportunities

There were several questions that probed respondents' experiences in engaging audiences and artists. The charts below indicate the responses.

What ways have you solicited information from audiences about their audience experience? (Choose all that apply)
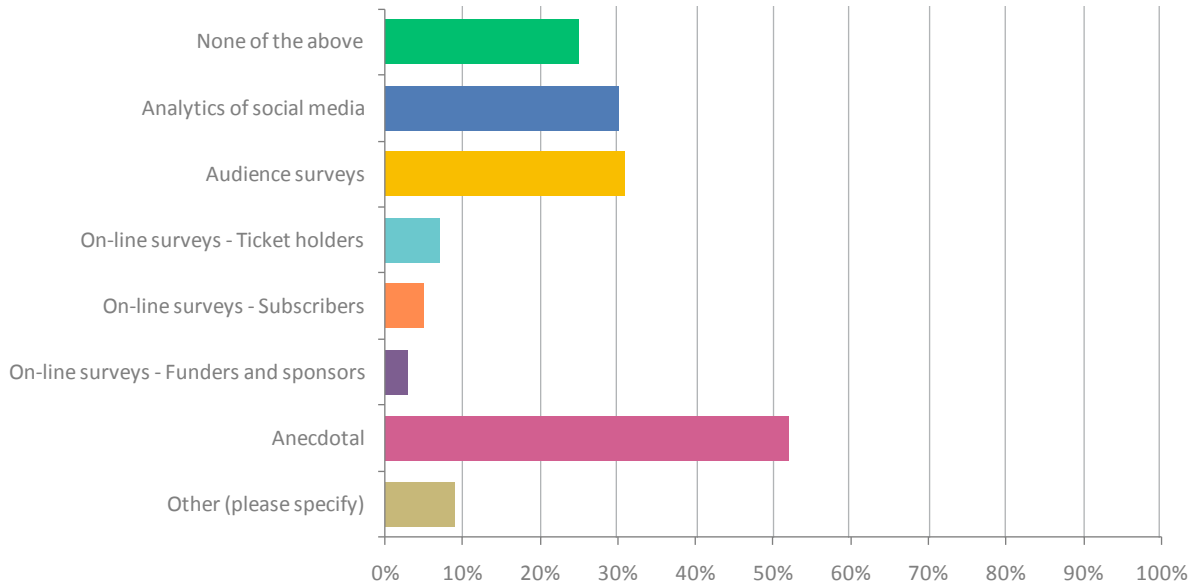

Do you envision the creation of NEW OPPORTUNITIES as a result of your use of new digital resources and digital offerings? (Choose all that apply)
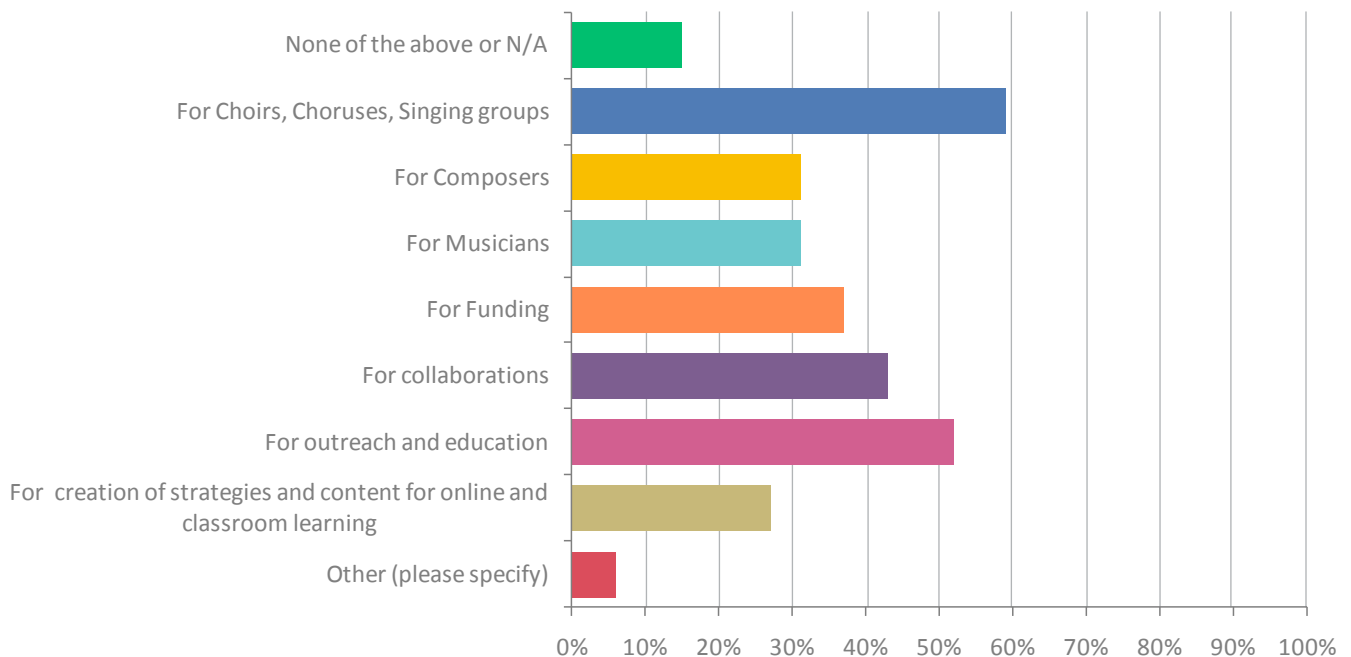
Going forward, how can you characterize the response of people involved in your organization or to you as a composer to the improved use of digital resources and digital offerings?
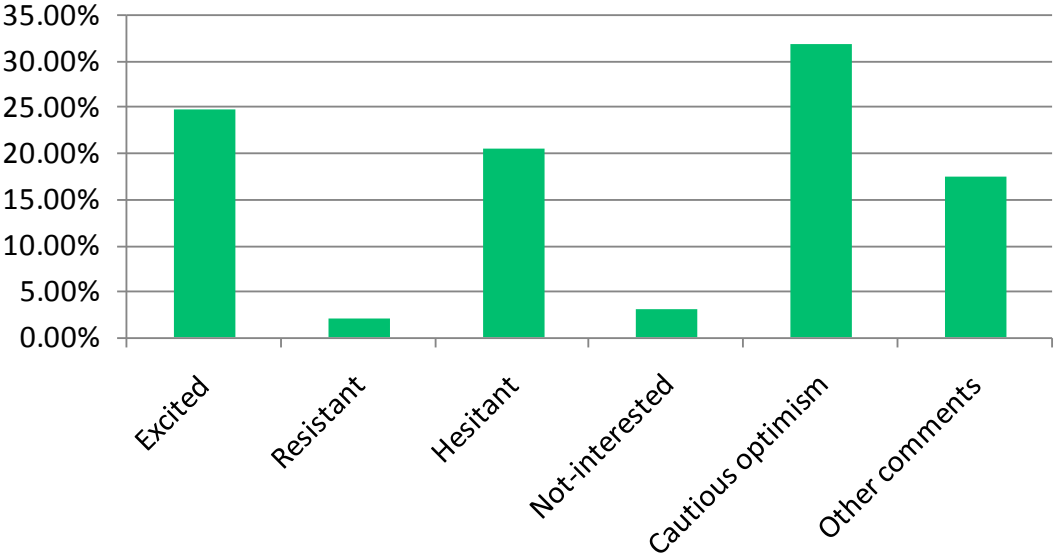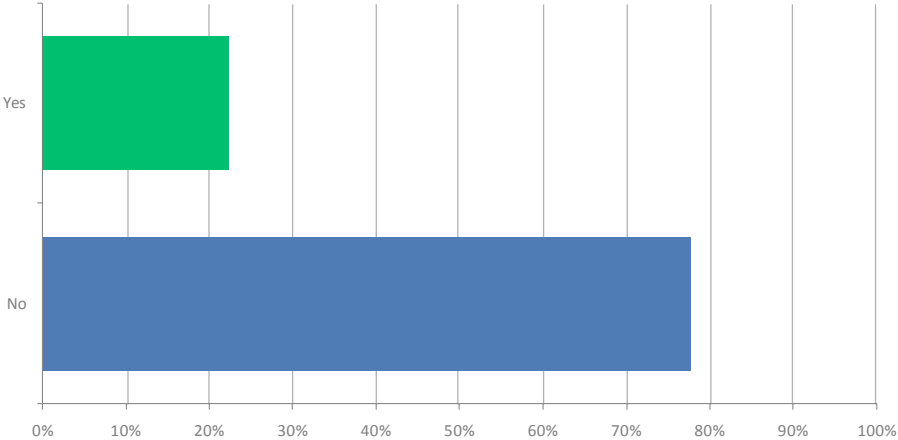

Is lack of access to high-speed internet or other infrastructure in your area an issue in the delivery of digital content or to the implementation of your digital or innovation strategy?
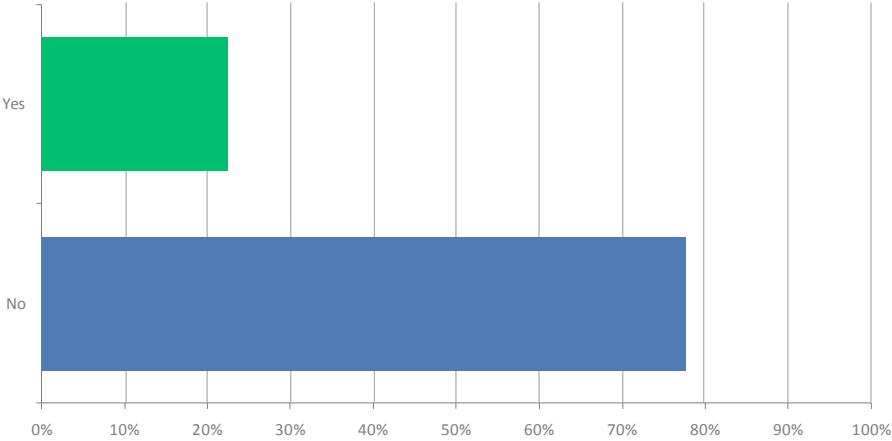
Has the use of digital resources (since March 2020) helped your relationship with your funders/sponsors?
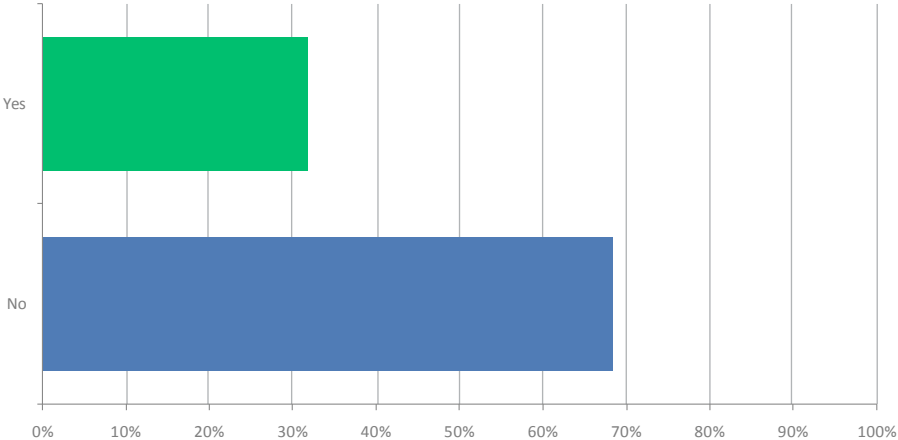
Have you tried to monetize your new digital offerings since March 2020?

Based on these responses, it appears that respondents:

- infrequently use digital tools to connect with their audiences but do see a possible future use of such tools for various purposes, i.e., for connections between choirs and singers, composers and musicians, fundraising, collaboration, outreach and creative processes;

- vary in regard to either their excitement, cautiousness, or hesitance in using digital tools even though very few experience challenges regarding access to high-speed internet; (probably due to fact that most respondents were from large urban areas.)

- feel that use of digital resources has not been very helpful in building their relationship and funders and sponsors; and

- very few have attempted to monetize their digital offerings since the impact of Covid 19.

5. Sharing Resources

Several questions probed respondents' experiences in sharing digital resources with others. The charts below indicate the responses.

How easy is it for others to discover and get access to your digital content?
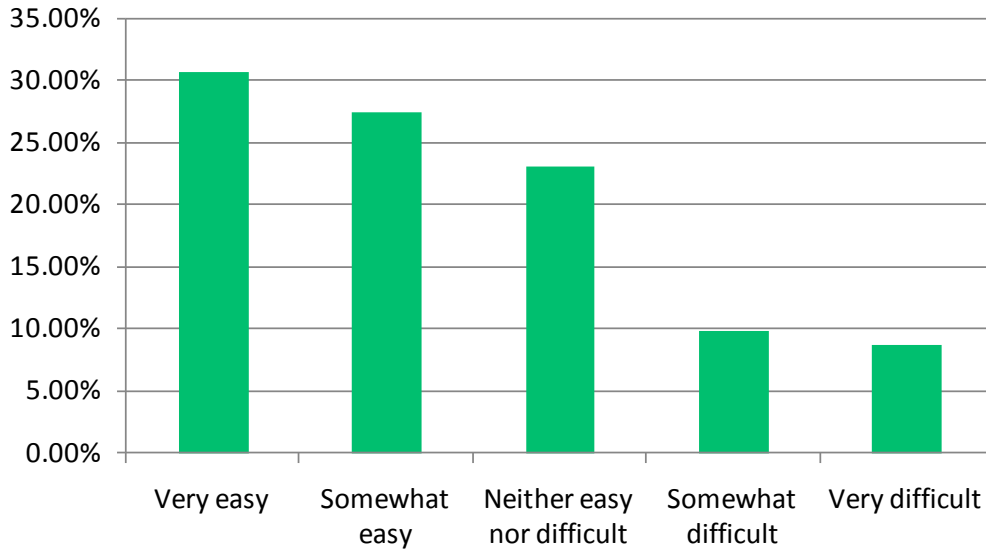

Is your choir or organization or are you willing to share these digital offerings in a national database to be used by other choirs, artists, composers, collaborators etc. in concert and strategic planning?
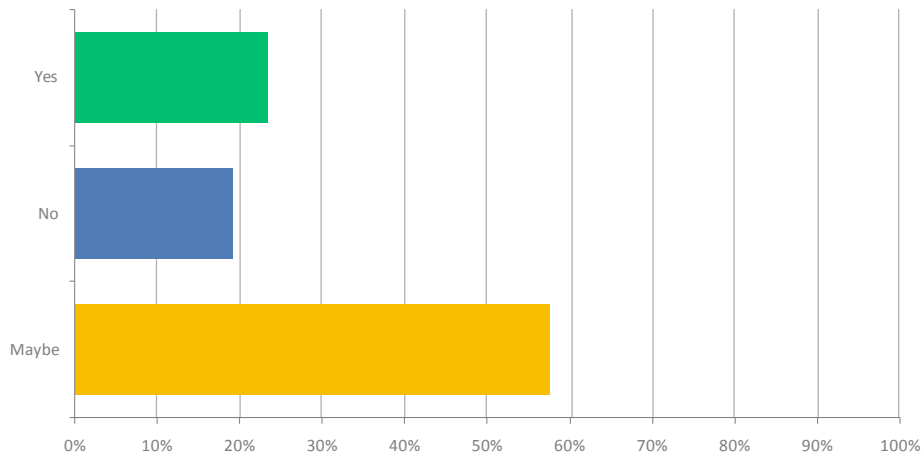
Do you wish it was easier to discover, utilize and share digital content from other choirs?

Yes — 70%
No — 30%

(Bar chart, x-axis: 0% to 100%)
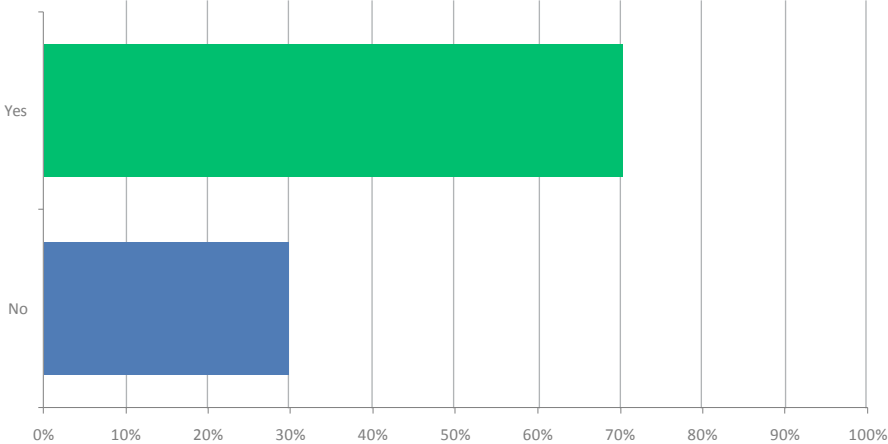
Is it important to create a national digital offerings archive related to choirs/choruses/ singing groups, composers, and other choral organizations?

Yes — 49%
No — 52%

(Bar chart, x-axis: 0% to 100%)
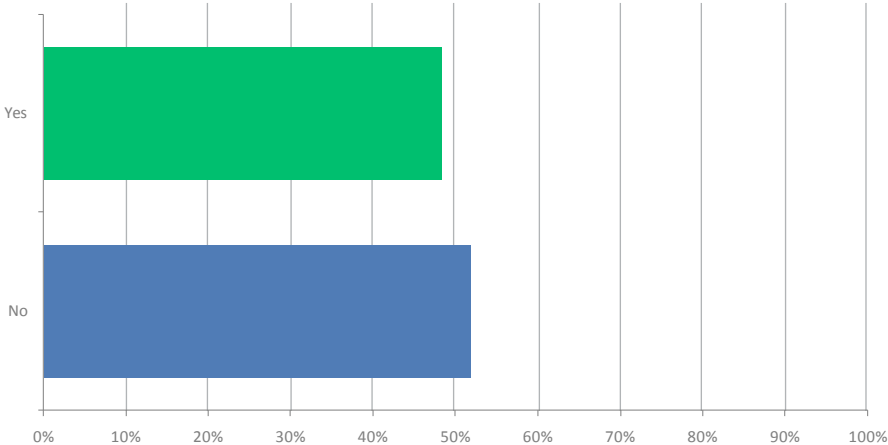
Based on these responses, it appears evident that:

• many respondents have used digital tools to create digital content, however, there is some anxiety about sharing this content; and

• many respondents saw benefit in finding it easier to discover, use and share digital content, however there was an almost equal opposite response to the idea of creating a digital archive that would be accessible to the choir/group singing communities.

Some respondents offered the following comments on this subject:

• It is very important to work together. As a retired music educator, I have seen duplication and 're-inventing' between organizations, provinces and countries. This is a waste. We all need to work more together!

• This is an excellent project. I would hope that in terms of monetizing for the composers, performers and conductors, that there would be standard AFM contractual agreements in place so as to not take financial advantage of people in the digital space.

• Biggest need is to have a national database of music scores owned by choirs across the country, which can be made available for loan to other choirs. Example: ocll.ca which although started for Ottawa-area includes other Ontario choirs.

• Funding is always a challenge and this development of digital opportunity is both technology and content driven and expensive.

• By offering resources that are not genre specific or focussed on performance of repertoire. Diverse communities like my Ismaili Muslim community needs sonic tools and resources they can use to help meet their cultural needs, connecting to traditions and revitalizing them in a contemporary Canadian pluralistic context. We need tools that we can use as artistic media to make art from our own perspectives and create new collaborative possibilities. A person like me already has repertoire from my traditions. I am looking for deepening my relationship with them and finding new expression that can open up their access and benefit to wider audiences.
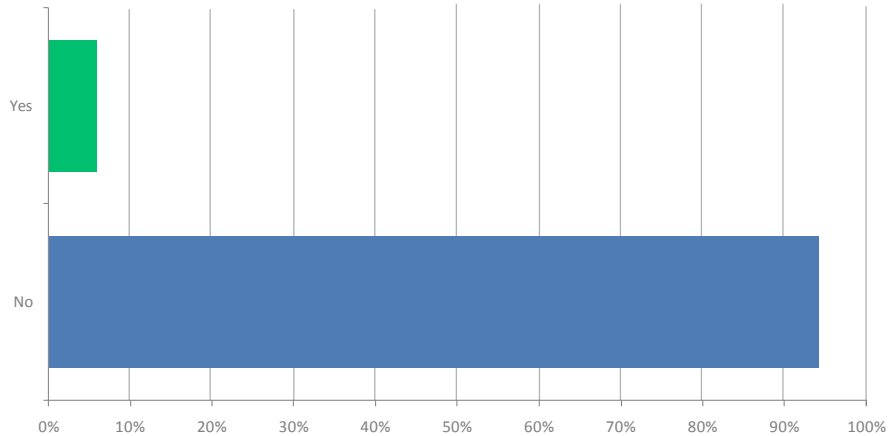

"Nova Voce" Nova Scotia Provincial Men's Choir "Bluenose"

6. Tools That Can Assist In Better Understanding And Using Digital Resources

Several questions probed respondents' interests in better understanding and using digital resources. The charts below indicate the responses.

Are you aware of any current research being done with regards to digital offerings?
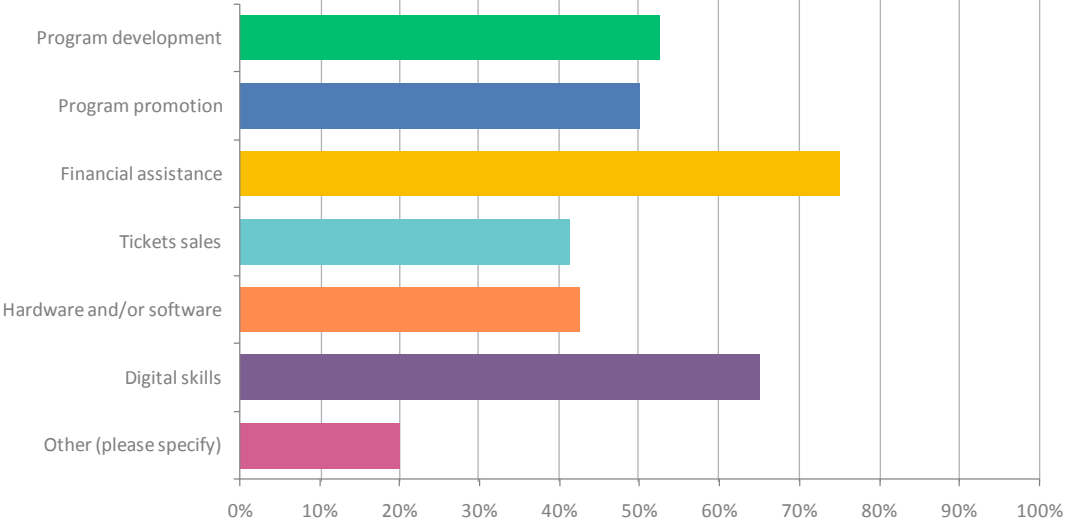

Some organizations and composers are currently struggling to create new post-pandemic strategic plans which include the balance of digital and in-person content. Would a "tool-kit" for assistance in creation of digital content specific to choirs and composers be helpful?
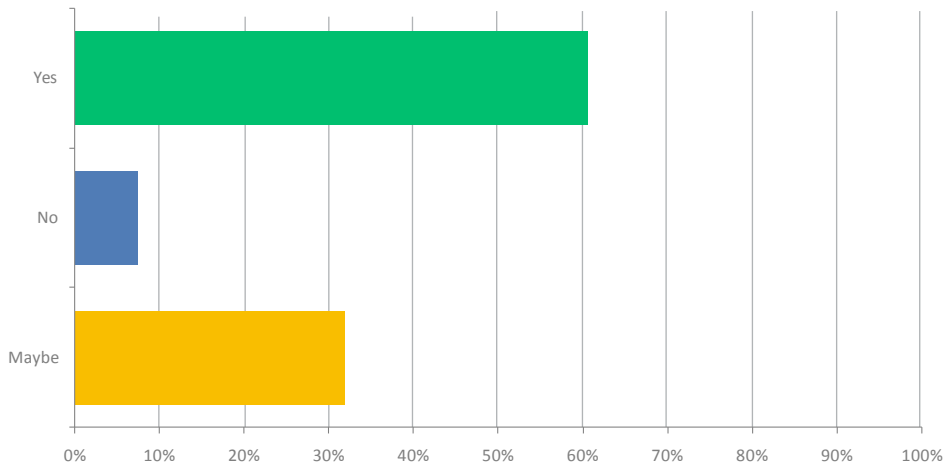
Do you or your choir/chorus/singing group/organization have the Human resources to create digital content?

Yes	
Somewhat	
No	
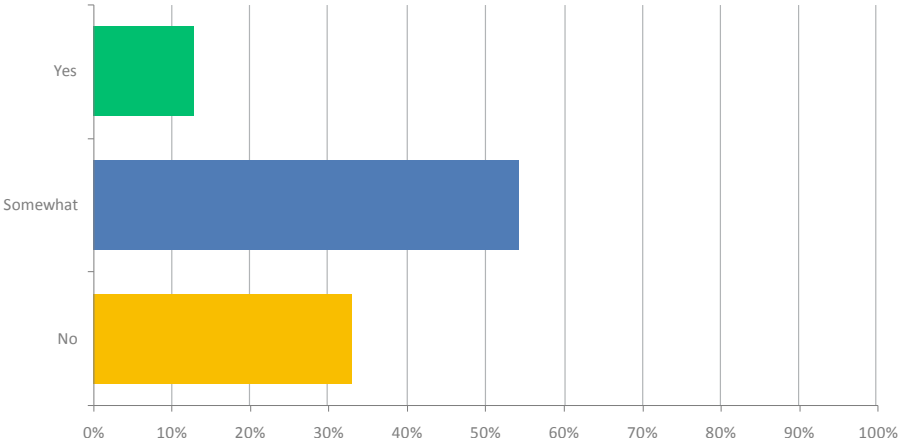
What tools, training and support will you or your organization need to do digital initiatives ? (Choose all that apply)

Program development	
Program promotion	
Financial assistance	
Tickets sales	
Hardware and/or software	
Digital skills	
Other (please specify)	

Do you envision the creation of NEW OPPORTUNITIES as a result of your use of new digital resources and digital offerings? (Choose all that apply)
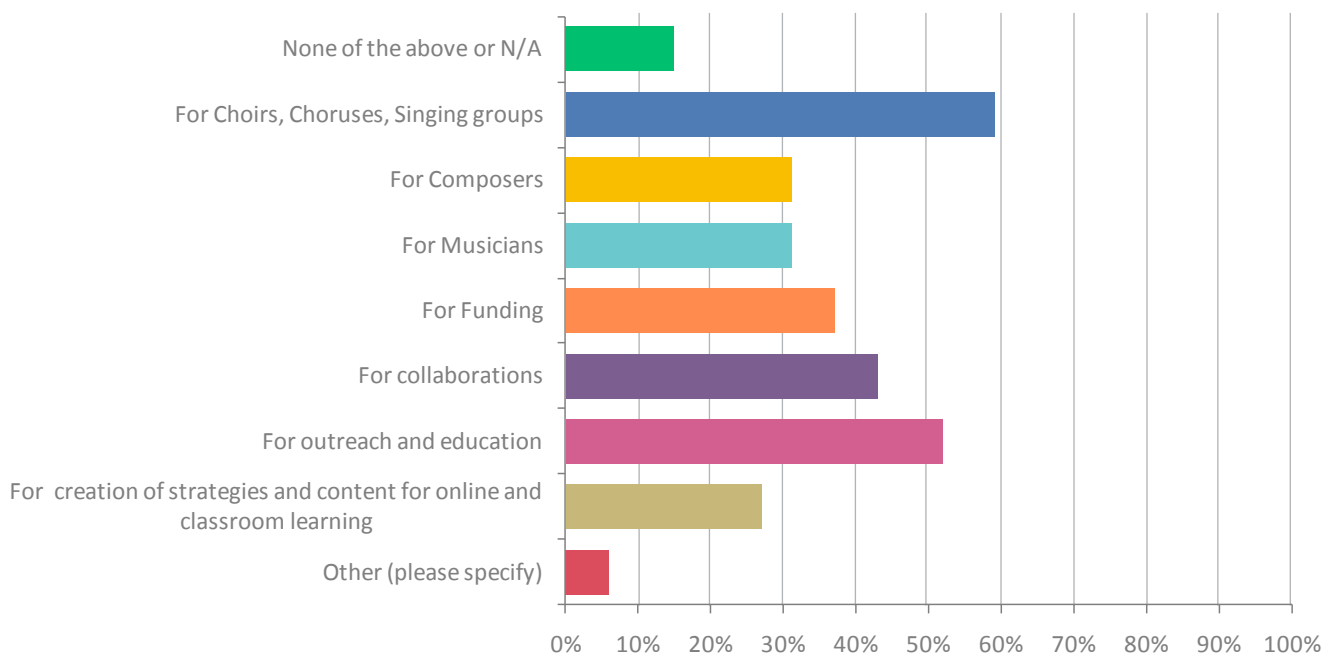
The survey responses in the section appear to indicate that:

- very few are aware of research on the uses of digital technology;

- most replied 'somewhat' to the question regarding having human resources to create digital content;

- there is significant interest in a 'tool-kit' that can assist users in digital initiatives development and expressed interest for some particular subjects to be addressed, i.e., program development and promotion, financial assistance, and digital skills; and

- many saw the potential use of digital tools for creating new opportunities for choirs/choruses, composers, musicians, collaborations, outreach and education as well as funding support.

Some respondents offered the following comments on this subject:

- BC Choral Federation offered an online series of workshops on Respect and Cultural Diversity in the choral community. These were excellent resources. BCCF also created Choral Shorts -brief documentary teaching videos with choral leaders in BC. I have been very impressed with the work of Zmir Chorale of Boston in highlighting choirs who are exploring diversity in various ways in their CHORAL RAINBOW series. inspiring interviews with choir directors and performances by their choirs. Reach Choirs from Victoria had a wonderful online program during Covid. Sing the North offered regular virtual choir offerings with virtual tours to locations around Canada. So many good efforts

- Generally the Europeans were ahead of us since their waves were ahead of us, and thus their restrictions were less rigid - the professional choirs in Europe have a very different funding model, and often are attached to Broadcasting groups, which then provides all the resources to stream etc - European groups have also worked in live-streaming of concerts and workshops etc for almost 2 decades, so essentially most of them have much more experience -Interestingly, their presentation has not necessarily gone through innovation, it still looks the same.

7. Impact On Anti-Racism, Equity, Inclusion And Strategic Planning

Several questions probed respondents' use of digital resources and its impact on their anti-racism, equity, inclusion and strategic plans. The charts below indicate the responses.

Do you or your choir/chorus/singing group/organization have an INNOVATION strategy as part of that strategic plan?
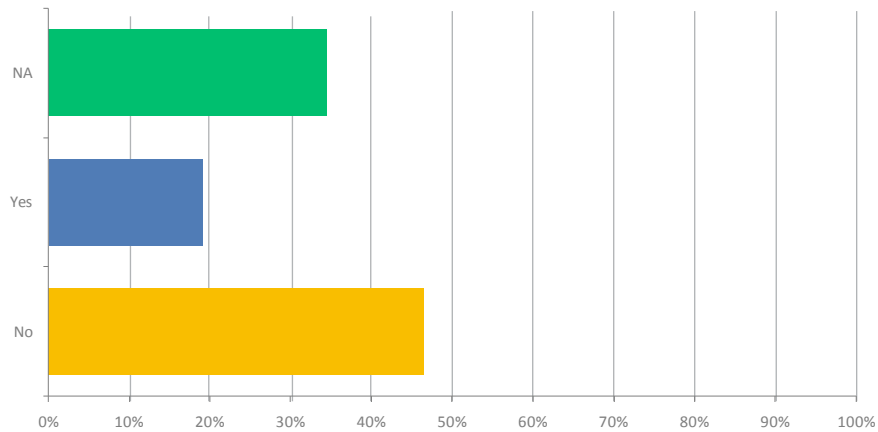
In what way can your digital resources and offerings or can your potential ones assist you in addressing your Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility concerns? Choose all that apply.
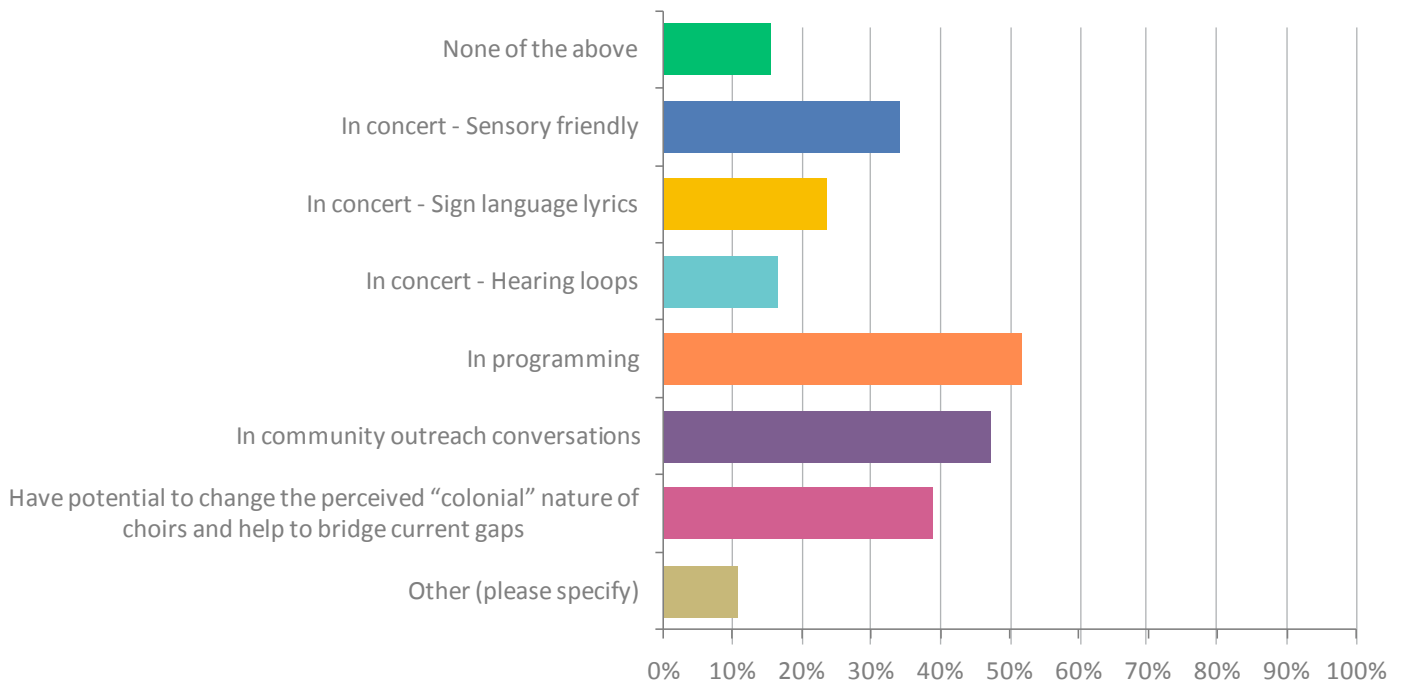
"Canadian Chamber Choir" at Wampum Learning Lodge Western University

The survey responses in this section appear to indicate that:

• Almost 50% do not have a strategy to address innovation, which would include digital technology, as part of their strategic plan; and

• There could be many uses of digital resources in engaging with equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility concerns, particularly as it relates to: in-concert sensory devices and hearing loops, in programming and community outreach.

8. Summary Analysis and Recommendations

There are numerous issues which appear evident based on the responses to the survey. Based on this data, it is evident that respondents:

- Are mostly singers and conductors located in large urban centres across Canada, in particular in Ontario;

- Seems to indicate sparse response from functions integral to choirs/singing groups and their location across Canada, e.g., musicians, service organizations, etc.

- Likely have multiple roles as administrators and/or singers, conductors;

- Are an aging cohort with more women involved than men and most respondents identifying as White;

- See their most significant challenges related to membership and funding and that providing digital supports and services are very to somewhat important to addressing these challenges;

- Have varied approaches to using digital tools with some indicating using none while others used these tools more frequently for live-stream and information gathering; and

- See digital offerings as critical to improving audience connections and experiences;

- Infrequently use digital tools to connect with their audiences but do use such tools for various purposes, i.e., for connections between choirs and singers, composers and musicians, fundraising, collaboration, outreach and creative processes;

- Vary in regard to either their excitement or hesitance in using digital tools even though very few experience challenges regarding access to high-speed internet;

- Feel that use of digital resources has not been very helpful in building their relationship and funders and sponsors; and

- Very few have attempted to monetize their digital offerings since the impact of Covid 19;

- While many have used digital tools, there was some anxiety about sharing these;

- Also, while many saw benefit in finding it easier to discover, use and share digital content, there was almost the opposite response to the idea of creating a digital archive that would be accessible to the choir/group singing communities;

- Very few are aware of research on the uses of digital technology and most replied 'somewhat' to the question regarding having human resources to create digital content;

- There is significant interest in a 'tool-kit' that can assist users in digital development and expressed interest for particular subjects to be addressed, i.e., program development and promotion, financial assistance, digital skills etc.

- Almost 50% do not have a strategy to address innovation, which would include digital technology, as part of their strategic plan;
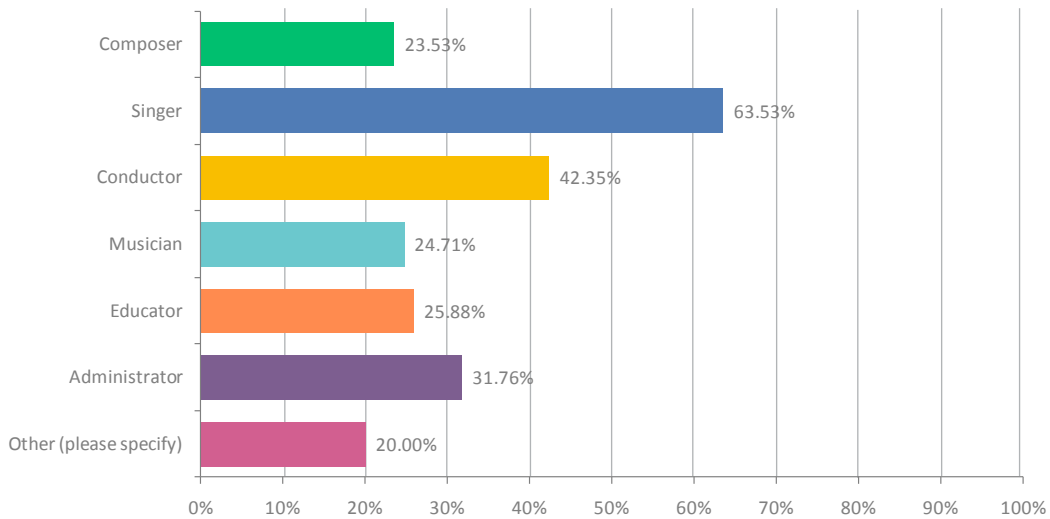
- There could be many uses in engaging with equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility, particularly as it relates to: in-concern sensory devices and hearing loops, in programming and community outreach, etc;

- Many saw the use of digital tools to creating new opportunities for choirs/choruses, composers, musicians, collaborations, outreach and education as well as funding support; and

- Have significant concerns about the need for funding and financial support for the development and use of digital technology. This is a pervasive concern across the arts and many respondents indicated the importance of such for various functions, administrative, archival and creative.

In this context and given these issues, it would be advisable to pursue further development on those areas where there are commonalities. This can begin the process of developing the use of digital tools and the capacities to manage and sustain their use. Those common areas are:
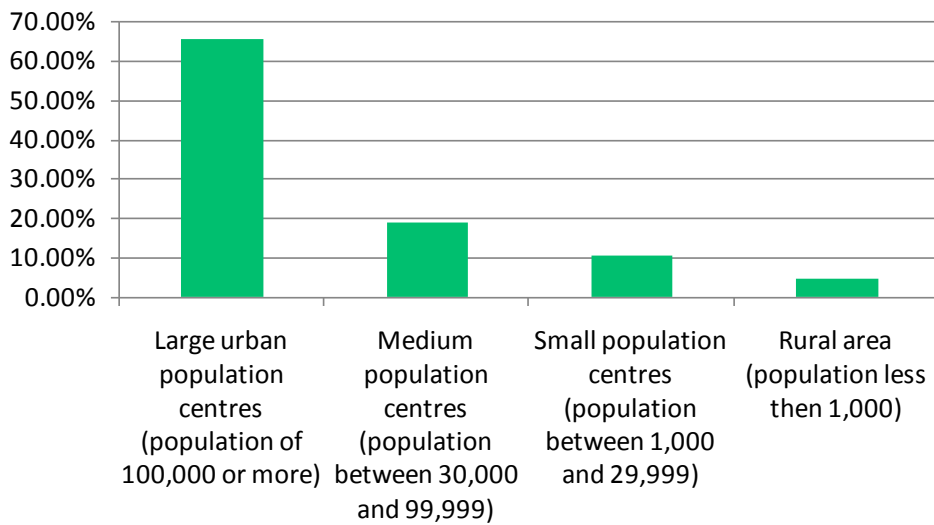
1. Coordinating with those who have responded to the survey to take further steps to build digital capacities of choirs/singing groups across Canada;

2. Working with respondents to engage choirs/singing groups in provinces and territories where there was low responses to the survey;

3. Developing digital knowledge, skill and capacities of interested users and sharing in such areas noted in the survey as important, e.g., online ticket sales, audience outreach and engagement, facilitating collaborations and conversations amongst choirs/singing groups, improving rural access and highlighting their own organizations;

4. Developing and delivering education/training on the uses of digital technology for programming, financial management, ticket sales, etc.

5. Engaging in equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism initiatives for programming as well as community outreach and engagement; and

6. Securing the funding needed to support the development of digital tools in the choir/group singing communities.
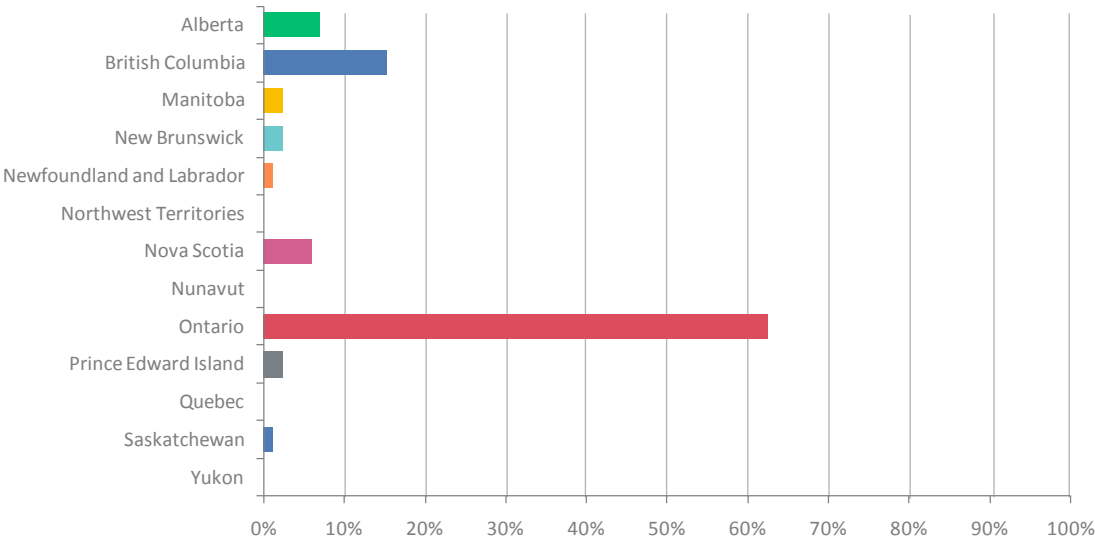
9. Appendix

Please identify your role(s) in the choral arts sector and community (paid or volunteer). Select all that apply.
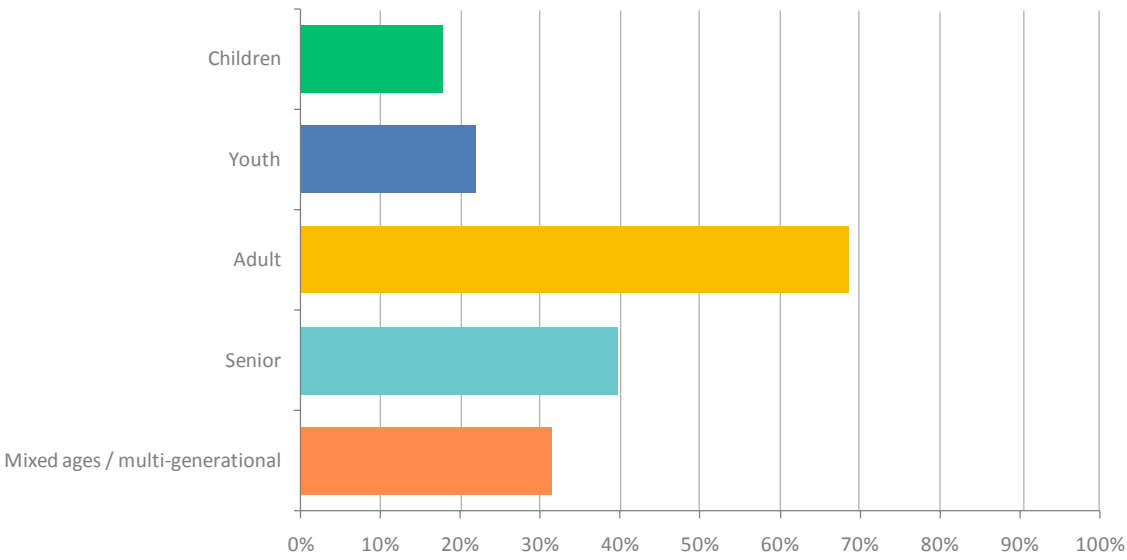
Role	Percentage
Composer	23.53%
Singer	63.53%
Conductor	42.35%
Musician	24.71%
Educator	25.88%
Administrator	31.76%
Other (please specify)	20.00%

Are you or your Choir/Chorus/Singing Group/organization located at

Location	Percentage
Large urban population centres (population of 100,000 or more)	~66%
Medium population centres (population between 30,000 and 99,999)	~19%
Small population centres (population between 1,000 and 29,999)	~11%
Rural area (population less then 1,000)	~4%

What province are you or your Choir/Chorus/Singing Group/organization located at

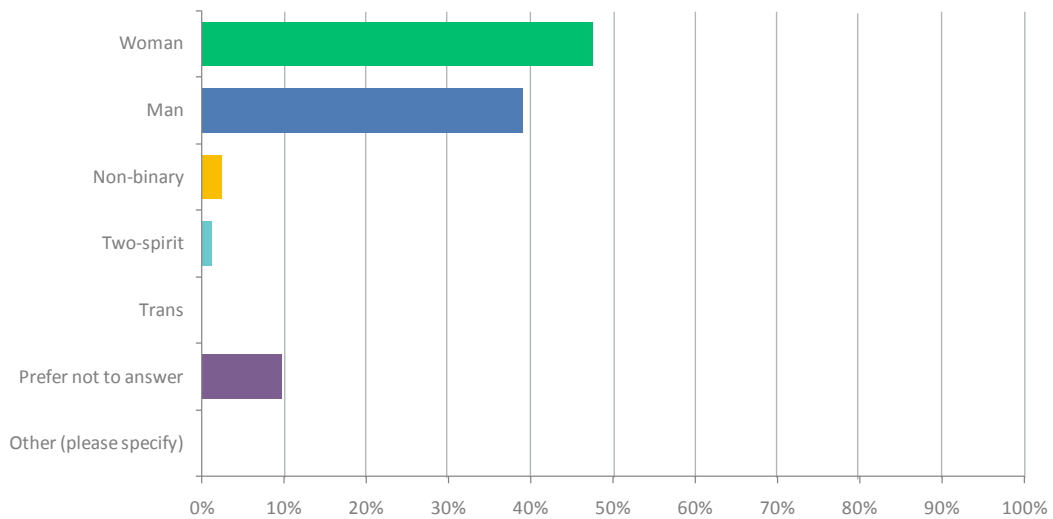| Province	Percentage
Alberta	~6%
British Columbia	~15%
Manitoba	~2%
New Brunswick	~2%
Newfoundland and Labrador	~1%
Northwest Territories	0%
Nova Scotia	~5%
Nunavut	0%
Ontario	~62%
Prince Edward Island	~2%
Quebec	0%
Saskatchewan	~1%
Yukon	0%

If you are responding on behalf of a Choir/Chorus/Singing Group, what is the age grouping for your choir(s) in your organization (Select all that apply)
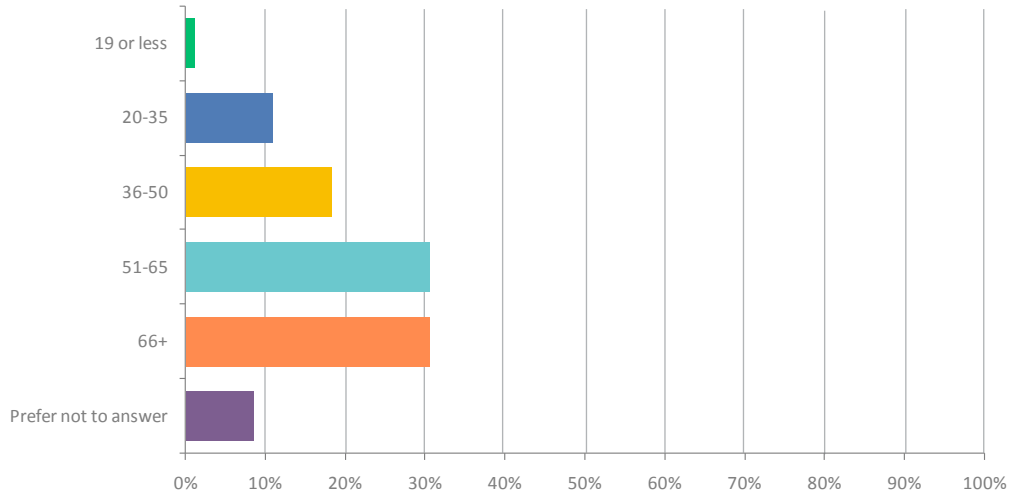
Age grouping	Percentage
Children	~18%
Youth	~22%
Adult	~69%
Senior	~40%
Mixed ages / multi-generational	~32%

Please identify your or your organization's role(s) in the choral arts sector and community

Category	Value
Academic institution	
A composer	
Arts service organization	
Place of Worship	
Choir/Chorus/Singing Group (single or multiple)	
Choral event organizer (ie….)	
Industry organization (ie. tour company, publisher, music…	
Foundation/Funder	
Library	
Non-Profit Organization (Not registered charity)	
Registered Charity	
Other (please specify)	
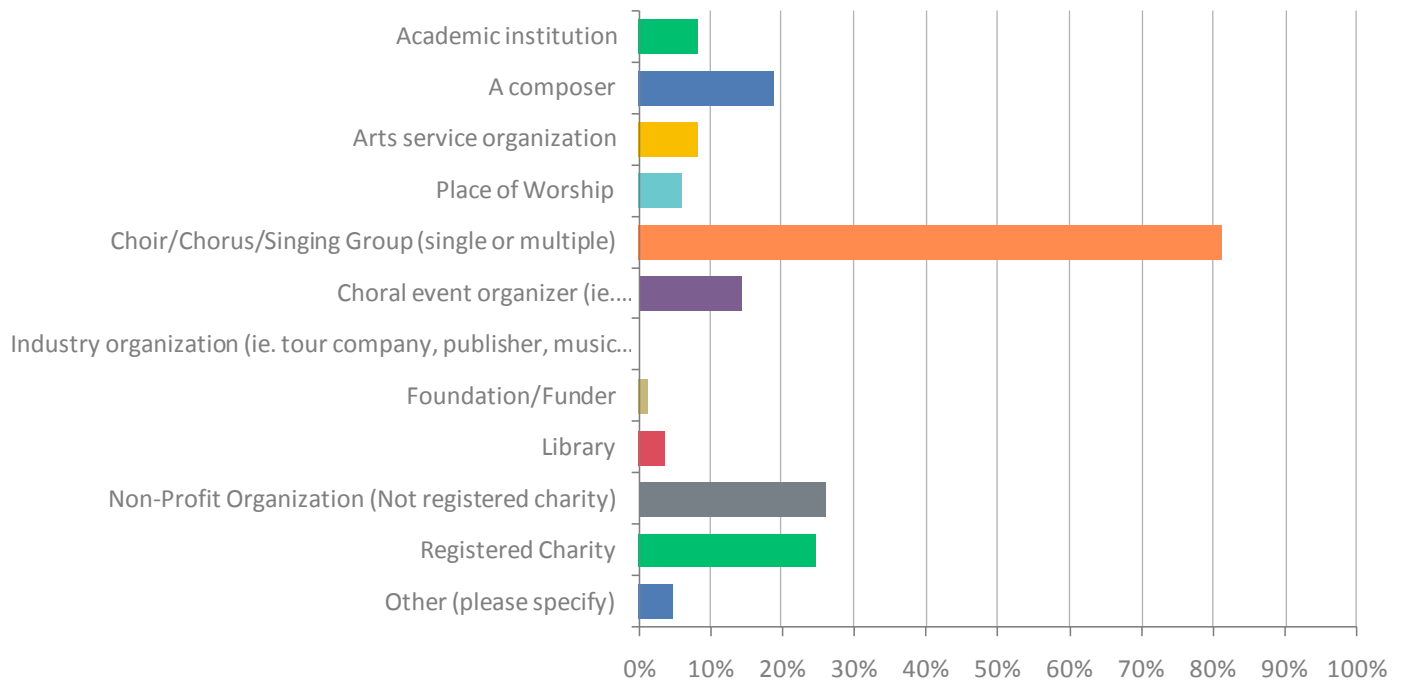
Please share your gender

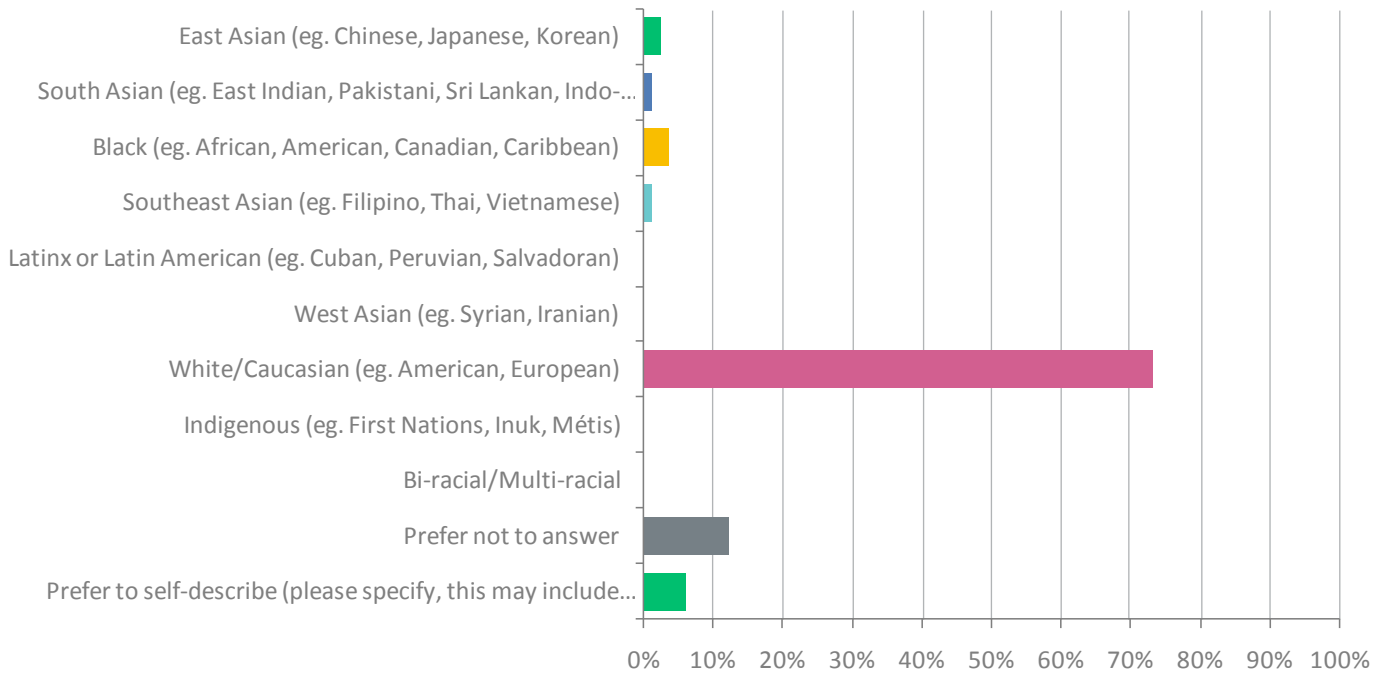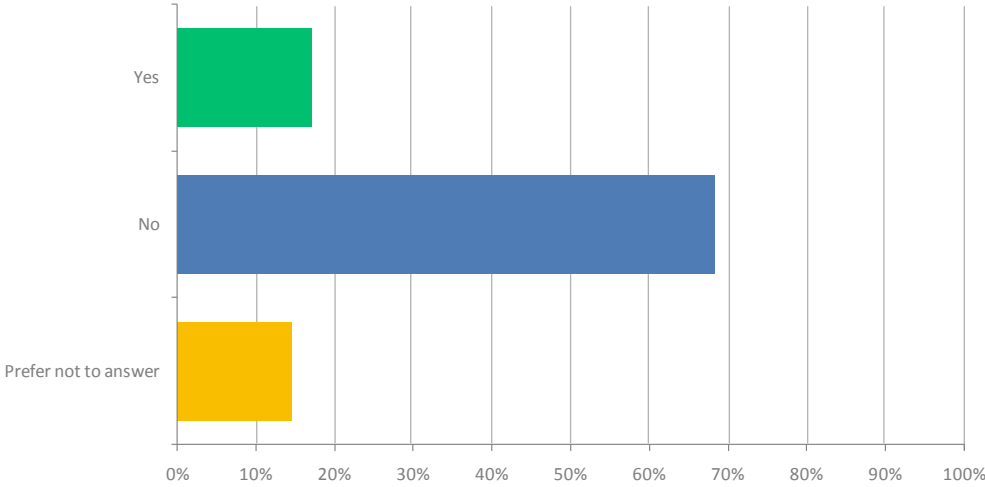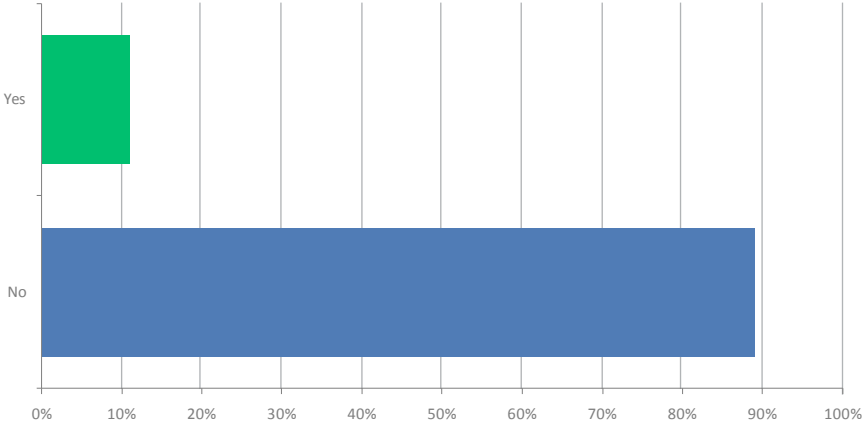| Category	Value
Woman	
Man	
Non-binary	
Two-spirit	
Trans	
Prefer not to answer	
Other (please specify)	

Please indicate your age group

Which of the following do you identify most with?

Do you identify as part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community?

Do you speak another language other than English and/or French in your home?

If yes, which language(s):