

RESEARCH REPORT

# Empowering Artists through Employment

## Impacts of the Creatives Rebuild New York Artist Employment Program

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# Executive Summary

The arts play a significant role in supporting local economies—in New York alone, arts and culture add \$151 billion to the state.<sup>1</sup> Yet artists and cultural workers grapple with instability in their employment and benefits, which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) launched the Artist Employment Program (AEP)—a program involving 300 artists and 98 collaborations with community-based organizations, municipalities, and tribal governments in New York State—to demonstrate another approach to support artists and the communities they work in. Program funding supported artist salaries of \$65,000, offered medical benefits, and provided resources to organizations collaborating with artists. The AEP was intended to support artists in uncertain economic times and build stronger connections between artists and organizations and the communities where they work. The program ran for two years, concluding at the end of June 2024.

The AEP comprised two employment models. Artists were employed directly by their partner organization or were employed by Tribeworks, a worker cooperative that provided salaries and benefits for artists. Tribeworks made it possible for smaller organizations with less infrastructure to support employment and benefits for AEP artists. These two employment models are the basis for this study, which analyzes the implementation, outcomes, and impact of the AEP through these employment models. Our main research activities included a leadership council of 11 artists who helped refine research questions and informed the methodology, a survey and focus groups of artists who participated in the program, and a survey and interviews with representatives of organizations that partnered with artists.

## Findings

Overall, both artists and partnering organizations **viewed the AEP as a positive**, though some partnerships had significant challenges. For artists, involvement led to increased personal well-being and financial stability and helped them develop new artistic practices and technical skills. For organizations, the AEP expanded the scope of their work and engagement in the community, showing those with less experience working with artists the value of incorporating art into their approach.

We also found that positive impacts generally held whether artists were directly employed by the partnering organization or used Tribeworks. We highlight one caveat: in part due to Tribeworks being a smaller purchaser on the insurance market, some artists with more significant health care needs found the options available through Tribeworks did not meet their needs. This contrasts with partnerships where artists were employed directly; because these organizations were larger, they tended to have more offerings (although those varied by organization).

Although **outcomes for artists** were generally similar across employment model, there were distinctions by the number of AEP artists at partner organization, by race and ethnicity, and by the total number of employees employed at a given organization. Most respondents were **satisfied** with both CRNY and their partner organization, although some were not, and a few experienced significant difficulties. Satisfaction was lowest among artists who worked at a partner organization with more than three AEP artists. The share of artists reporting gaining **emotional well-being** did vary by employment model: about 75 percent who worked with Tribeworks compared with about 40 percent who were employed directly by a partner organization.

For **organizations**, our study focused on how the AEP affected their practices and capacities. Organizations reported that the AEP increased their capacity, influenced their community relationships, and had an impact on their organization's culture and practice. A higher share of organizations where artists were directly employed reported artists were more closely integrated in their activities than did those employed by Tribeworks.

The process by which artists and organizations came to agreement on collaboration ranged from smooth to very challenging. The AEP provided only limited guidelines to how to structure the partnerships: while many artists and organizations had previously worked together in some capacity, this presented implementation challenges in some cases to identify how best to work together.

## Practice and Policy Takeaways

The AEP's thoughtful design presents lessons for similar initiatives, both in the artist employment space, and in employment programs more generally:

- Having a partner like Tribeworks support smaller organizations opened the opportunity to a broader range of collaborations across the state and ensured that artists had benefits.

- The AEP's flexible model provided benefits and challenges: since artists and organizations set the terms of their relationships, partnerships developed in ways that made the most sense to participants. But this also created uncertainty, especially at the start of the collaboration, that not all collaborations were able to overcome. Building in supports (as CRNY did) to help work through issues in such an open-ended program is important.
- The AEP preserved the autonomy of artists in numerous ways, with the role of Tribeworks in particular being central, as it mediated the employer-employee relationship.
- Although experiences *within* employment models varied widely, patterns *across* models indicate that the relative autonomy each model provided influenced perceptions: Tribeworks had particular value in supporting the emotional well-being of artists who had their benefits needs met (artists in our survey who did not have employer-sponsored benefits had the highest rating of dissatisfaction of both their partner organization and CRNY), while organizations directly employing artists reported closer working relationships.

Several policy ramifications arose from the AEP: most generally it illustrates the importance of treating artists and cultural workers as *workers*. Such treatment means understanding artists within the larger context of workforce policy and specifically how to provide for nontraditional workers. It also illustrates the limits of our existing systems and the ways that benefits and protections are linked to *jobs* rather than *people*. This means extending wage and hour, antidiscrimination, and health and safety laws to independent contractors, including those in unemployment insurance and paid leave programs. It also shows the importance of identifying policy innovations, such as **portable benefits**, support for **cooperative models**, and efforts to **minimize benefit cliffs** that can better serve artists, other workers, and our communities.

# Errata

Page 32 of this report was corrected on June 23, 2025, to clarify the health insurance plans available to artists through Tribeworks.



# Empowering Artists through Employment

Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) launched the Artist Employment Program (AEP) on June 30, 2022. The program involved 300 artists and 98 collaborations with community-based organizations, municipalities, and tribal governments in New York State. Program funding supported artist salaries of \$65,000, provided medical benefits, and allocated funds to partnering organizations holding the employment. The program ran for two years, concluding at the end of June 2024. Implemented in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AEP came at a time of increased interest in programs that could support artists that were informed by, but distinct from, a history of aligned historical initiatives, such as the New Deal-era Works Progress Administration of the 1930s and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program of the 1970s. The AEP had a range of goals, from supporting artists to building stronger connections between artists and organizations and the communities where they work.

Program participants, made up of collaborations among organizations and one or more artists, were selected by a group of peer reviewers and CRNY staff, with final selection accounting for geographic reach, rural communities, Indigenous nations, a range of artistic practices, and organization types. A key AEP design element was the use of two employment models. Artists either were employed directly by their partner organization or were employed by Tribeworks, a worker cooperative that provided employment and benefits for artists. Tribeworks made it possible for smaller organizations with less infrastructure to support employment and benefits for AEP artists.

This report investigates the AEP through these employment models: analyzing implementation, outcomes, and impact of the AEP through this lens. As one of the largest current artist employment programs, the AEP has the potential to be a valuable case study for the field of arts employment and similar programs and to provide a framework to help others understand the impact of cooperative employment support structures that an organization such as Tribeworks represents.

Although our lens is through the two employment models, we also point to broader learnings and insights throughout. Artists have a long history of nontraditional employment (such as gig or contract work), and AEP artists were no exception. The intersection of traditional and nontraditional employment models also touches on broader issues of collaboration and employment, the nature of artistic work for community engagement, and even how we understand and classify artists as workers. CRNY has supported other research endeavors that touch on these issues (box 1).

The remainder of this section focuses on the study's history, research questions, and components. The subsequent background section provides an overview of the policy history and research learnings relevant to the AEP, as well as context for the status of artists in New York at the start of the program. After addressing the program's implementation history, we turn to the impact of the program on artists and organizations before concluding with takeaways for practice, policy, and research.

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## BOX 1

### Creatives Rebuild New York Study Initiatives

This study is one of several studies supported by CRNY on the AEP. Other studies have included the following:

- *Creatives Rebuild New York: Artist Employment Program Process Evaluation* (Sherman and Montgomery 2024), which examined the AEP from its conception through launch and first year of operations;
- “Advance Sustainable Livelihoods for Arts and Cultural Workers: Recommendations from Creatives Rebuild New York’s Artist Employment Working Group” (Creatives Rebuild New York 2024), which presented findings from a working group of artists, advocates, administrators, and researchers;
- A policy reference playbook for policymakers, *New York Isn’t New York Without Artists: Policy Playbook to Strengthen New Yorks’ Creative Workforce and Grow a Just, Creative Economy for All* (Serrano-McClain et al 2024);
- An ongoing participatory action research study initiated by Hester Street and implemented in collaboration with SUNY Rockefeller Institute; and
- A forthcoming report, *Deaf & Disabled Artist Employment: Research on Work from Creatives Rebuild New York*, by CRNY artist-organizer and AEP participant Kevin Gotkin involving interviews with Deaf and disabled artists to understand the program’s effect on their work and lives, with the aim of informing the design of future disability-affirmative programs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Kevin Gotkin Joins CRNY as Artist-Organizer,” Creatives Rebuild New York, October 17, 2022, <https://www.creativesrebuildny.org/2022/10/17/kevin-gotkin-joins-crny-as-artist-organizer/>.

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The nature of the AEP as well as our goals for research and engagement structured the approach of our work. Specifically, we aimed to achieve a modest level of engagement and reflection with program participants beyond standard data collection strategies. While this engagement was limited, it occurred through the structure of a leadership council of artists who were part of the AEP, which strengthened

and informed the project. Our evaluation work formally got underway in September 2023 with most data collection (discussed below) taking place in the first half of 2024. Research Questions

The research questions (table 1) focused on two main categories: one set of questions related to artists, and the other set related to partnering organizations. Questions were refined with input from the leadership council.

**TABLE 1**  
**Research Questions**

| Question type            | Question   |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>For Artists</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How does the relationship between your artistic identity (discipline, role, etc.) and your partnering organization’s employment model (direct/Tribeworks) affect the success of the program?</li> <li>▪ What is the relationship, if there is one, between your identity (e.g., race, gender, immigration status, disability, etc.) and the employment model?</li> <li>▪ How do these models interact with how you as an artist may participate in gig employment?</li> <li>▪ What, if any, effect has the employment model had on your artistic autonomy and practice?</li> <li>▪ How does local context (e.g., location) affect your artistic practice and opportunities and AEP impact?</li> </ul> |
| <b>For Organizations</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has the employment model itself had an effect on the organization’s mission and role in the community?</li> <li>▪ Is there a relationship between organizational capacity, the employment model, and AEP implementation successes/challenges?</li> <li>▪ How did the ways in which organizations implemented AEP vary, and how was that related to the employment model?</li> </ul>   |

Source: Authors’ notes.

## Study Components

The study consisted of several components: the leadership council of artists ; survey of artists in the program; focus groups of artists; partnering organization surveys ; and one-on-one interviews with organization representatives. We also hosted an all-AEP meeting in August 2024 to provide an overview of the status of the project to date and to share and discuss preliminary findings.

### Leadership Council

The purpose of the leadership council was to gather a group of artists in support of a collaborative research framework, and provide insights that help shape the research methods and analysis phase of the project. Leadership council members were asked to complete an application with demographic information, organization details, artistic practice, and participant availability and interest. The

participants were chosen by using a formula that prioritized having a varied group of artists who reflected different areas in New York and diverse artistic and cultural practices, identities, and life experiences. The goal was to create a group diverse in demographics, forms of creative practice, and understanding of artist employment programs. The 11 members were selected in December 2023 from the application process. Leadership council members signed an agreement indicating their roles in the study and were paid for their participation in the leadership council.

Members were asked to join virtual one- to two-hour Zoom meetings about once a month. We held four meetings with the council between February and June 2024. In the calls, participants were asked to review and provide feedback on the overall research questions guiding the study. Participants also reviewed draft data collection instruments (survey questions and focus group and interview protocols) during and between meetings to offer feedback. This was aimed to ensure the questions were appropriately structured to appropriately ascertain the impact of the two employment models and to provide space to identify additional areas of inquiry. The Urban team used the suggestions to modify the research questions and data collection instruments.

## Artist Survey

In May 2024 Urban launched a survey for artists. Urban received the names and contact information of current and former artists from the CRNY team and sent emails in both English and Spanish inviting participation. Urban let artists know the survey was anonymous and that their names, the names of the organizations they worked for, and IP addresses would not be collected. Artists could also skip most questions.

This survey included questions about the following components:

- artists' demographic identity (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender, disability) and geographic location (e.g., region of New York)
- skills and benefits gained from participating
- experiences in the program (e.g., onboarding, orientation, sense of belonging)
- financial/economic circumstances before and after participating in the program
- social insurance program participation before and after participating in the program
- asset and debt accumulation before and after participating in the program
- engagement with gig work and other employment before and after participating in the program

- time spent on art before and after participating in the program
- future artistic and career plans

The final survey sample consisted of 98 responses. Overall, respondents represented a near-equal mix of employment types: 48 percent of respondents were employed through Tribeworks and 52 percent through direct employment with the partner organization.<sup>2</sup> Overall, characteristics of survey respondents were similar to that of AEP participants, with some small differences in race and ethnicity, gender, and location (see appendix A).

## Artist Focus Groups

In June 2024, Urban hosted five focus groups with participating artists. Forty-five people participated, with 51 percent employed by Tribeworks and 49 percent directly employed by organizations. Of the four virtual sessions, two were conducted for artists directly employed by organizations and two for those employed by Tribeworks. An in-person focus group in Manhattan that was open to artists with either employment type attracted six participants employed by Tribeworks and six who were directly employed by organizations.

The focus groups were approximately 90 minutes in length and focused on the availability and quality of employer-sponsored benefits (such as health insurance), other benefits from participating in the AEP (e.g., networking), the impact of the AEP on financial well-being, the biggest successes of participating in the program, engagement with gig work and other employment before and after participating in the program, future plans, and recommendations for future pilot or permanent artist employment programs. After transcribing the focus group responses, the research team performed qualitative analysis using emergent coding to identify key themes.

## Organization Survey and Interviews

In May 2024 Urban fielded a survey of organizations that participated in the AEP. As with the survey of artists, Urban received the names and contact information of one main contact per organization from CRNY. Consent language highlighted the survey's voluntary nature and that respondents could skip questions or end the survey at any time.

We received 34 responses overall: 18 from organizations employing artists directly and 14 from organizations (two did not answer the question in which the artist or artists used Tribeworks). Nineteen organizations were in New York City (NYC). Nearly all (32 of 34) had previously worked with artists in

some capacity, but only 4 had worked with artists as W2 employees. While the breakdown of respondents aligned with that of overall participating organizations, the small number of potential and actual respondents meant we were unable to focus do not report on statistical significance when discussing observed patterns. We followed the survey with interviews with three additional organizational contacts in June and July 2024.

# Background

## Artists as Workers

As of 2022, just over 5 million workers were employed in arts and cultural industries. These industries, which include performing arts, museums, design services, and fine arts education, experienced strong recovery after initially contracting along with the broader economy in 2020.<sup>3</sup> Research from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis shows that arts and cultural economic activity increased 10.8 percent in 2021 and 4.8 percent in 2022, compared to 5.8 and 1.9 percent, respectively, for overall gross domestic product. Data from 2022 reveal New York as one of only four states (including the District of Columbia) where the arts and cultural industries contributed over 5 percent of the state's gross domestic product.<sup>4</sup>

Despite its significant contribution to our economic and personal lives, the artistic labor market tends to struggle with low wages, above-average unemployment, and underemployment. Nonetheless, research has found arts workers tend to feel higher levels of job satisfaction than nonartists (Steiner and Schneider 2013; Yang et al. 2021). Artists also tend to have more nontraditional job arrangements than nonartists. For example, artists are three-and-a-half times more likely than other workers to be self-employed, a dynamic that is amplified in cities with a high saturation of artists and creative occupations (Woronkowicz 2015). Artists also more frequently switch in and out of self-employment compared to all other professional workers (Woronkowicz and Noonan 2019). Freelance jobs provide artists opportunities for flexibility and independence but lack stability (Feder and Woronkowicz 2023). Even when arts and entertainment workers are covered by union contracts, intermittent work patterns may preclude them from accessing health and retirement benefits (Gray, Figueroa, and Barnes 2017) because in the US, benefits and supports flow through traditional employment relationships for employees who generally work full time.

The irregular working arrangements and complicated career trajectories of artists complicate efforts to understand their careers in the context of “traditional” employment studies (Menger 2001, 2002; Lingo and Tepper 2013). This also creates a challenge in obtaining accurate data on the size of the artistic workforce (Gray, Figueroa, and Barnes 2017). For the data that does exist, government classification systems (SOC and NAICS) can be so broad as to lose meaning. The NAICS category “Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation,” for example, includes everything from performing arts and museums to spectator sports and gambling.<sup>5</sup>

There are some long-standing, if limited in scope, examples of government interest in supporting artist employment pathways. Well-known examples include the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s and, more recently, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act in the 1970s, which supported artists throughout the country.<sup>6</sup> In NYC, 600 artists were hired through the program.<sup>7</sup> That said, setting aside these programs, per capita support for arts and artists in the US pales in comparison to that offered by peer countries.<sup>8</sup>

However, there has been a resurgence of interest in artist employment support models in recent years. Part of this interest among government agencies stems from a sense that communities may benefit from artists in many ways, from generating tourism revenue, to revitalizing neighborhoods, to placemaking and building community (Americans for the Arts 2016). This political self-interest can align with public perceptions: public opinion research shows that US adults are significantly more supportive of public funding for artists when they are seen as collaborators, problem-solvers, and raising awareness for community issues (Novak-Leonard and Skaggs 2021).

Local ecosystems of support vary, and the federal support landscape is limited. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is the largest single funder of the arts across the country (Woronkowicz, Nichols, and Iyengar 2012), but with the exception of some small programs,<sup>9</sup> it tends not to support artists directly. Although the NEA received additional funding in 2020 and 2021 from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act and the American Rescue Plan Act,<sup>10</sup> its current funding in general not kept up with inflation (Americans for the Arts 2016). Local and state public funding (such as arts councils) also provide individual grants, opportunities to showcase work and network, workshops, and access to online marketplace platforms.<sup>11</sup> However, local and state funding varies widely, and many artists feel unsupported by their local government. In New Orleans, artists named a lack of funding, permitting “red tape” for public performances and other activities, and exploitation for political messaging as major issues (Rich 2024).

Beyond government, private philanthropic donations remain a significant source of support for the arts in the US (Woronkowicz, Nichols, and Iyengar 2012). National foundations, such as the Ford Foundation and Mellon Foundation, also support artists' work and the arts sector at large; and local foundations throughout the US provide supports often targeted to their localities (Shekhtman and Barabási 2023); and local foundations throughout the US provide supports often targeted to their localities (Shekhtman and Barabási 2023).

Nonprofit organizations play a significant role in supporting artists, even beyond those entities that focus specifically on the “arts.” Many artists rely on nonprofits for help meeting their basic needs,

including housing, direct monetary support, and job search services (Rich 2024). However, the situation for many nonprofits is similar to that of artists: unstable and uncertain funding exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Americans for the Arts 2023).

Finally, there are other approaches that indicate more bottom-up ways of organizing work. These approaches include artist-led incubators and co-ops, which tend to limit their scale to protect a sense of identity. These approaches can lead to mutually beneficial resource sharing, connection to the larger community, and brand recognition. Artist co-ops with a large diversity of media and production cannot benefit from economies of scale, making them expensive to operate over time. However, members may benefit from the opportunities for artistic collaboration and innovation (Whitaker 2022).

## Artists in New York State during COVID-19

In March 2022, CRNY launched the Portrait of New York State Artists survey to understand the needs and experiences of artists across the state. This survey was launched simultaneously with the application process for the AEP, and many of the questions centered around experiences during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The snapshot below summarizes select findings from the survey, focused strictly on responses from the 1,047 AEP applicants who filled out the survey. Of these 1,047 survey respondents, 46 (4.4 percent) ultimately ended up in the program.

Survey findings illustrated the precarity of artists' financial status and stability. Household income was relatively low; 59 percent of AEP applicants had annual incomes of less than \$35,000; 23 percent had incomes between \$35,000 and \$74,999; and only 7 percent had incomes of \$75,000 or more (the remaining 11 percent did not answer). Forty-six percent of the survey respondents said their financial stability was extremely unstable or unstable; 41 percent stated it fluctuated; and 12 percent indicated it was stable or extremely stable.

Table 2 shows how AEP applicants described some aspects of their financial stability at the time of the survey. For example, 81 percent of the applicants had health insurance. Although 71 percent of respondents were carrying debt at the time of the survey, only 22 percent had access to other sources of income or financial stability aside from having a job.

TABLE 2

**Other Dimensions of Financial Stability**

| <b>Question</b>   | <b>Responding<br/>“Yes”</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Access to other sources of income or financial stability besides income from jobs | 22%                         |
| Respondent currently has health insurance   | 81%                         |
| Ability to pay unexpected \$400 with cash (equivalent) without using credit       | 46%                         |
| Currently carrying debt   | 71%                         |
| Manageability of debt among those currently carrying debt                         | 56%                         |

Source: Authors' tabulations of data from the Portrait of New York State Artists survey.

AEP applicants were asked how they earned money at the time of the survey (table 3). Participants could select multiple answers. For example, over a fifth of artists (21 percent) were unemployed; 49 percent of respondents said they had a series of gigs, contracts, and temporary jobs.

TABLE 3

**How Do You Currently Earn Money? (Select All That Apply.)**

| <b>Response statements</b>  | <b>Responding<br/>“Yes”</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|
| I am currently unemployed.  | 21%                         |
| I am primarily or entirely supported by family or by my spouse/partner. | 12%                         |
| I earn 100% of my living through my art practice.                       | 21%                         |
| I have a full-time job (more than 30 hours per week).                   | 14%                         |
| I have a series of gigs, contracts, and temporary jobs.                 | 49%                         |
| I have one or more part-time jobs (less than 30 hours per week).        | 32%                         |

Source: Authors' tabulations of data from the Portrait of New York State Artists survey.

The survey also asked several questions on what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, including receipt of emergency financial assistance, effects on employment and gig work, artistic practice, and well-being. COVID-19 had some obvious effects: 57 percent of AEP applicants stated their freelance work, gigs, or contracts had been canceled, and 59 percent stated that scheduled exhibitions, shows, and performances were canceled. Although some (27 percent) of the AEP applicants reported finding new work, the disruptions were profound. Forty-eight percent of applicants reported receiving unemployment benefits between March 2020 and February 2022; another 27 percent reported receiving relief from federal sources, such as the American Rescue Plan Act or the Paycheck Protection Program.<sup>12</sup>

The loss of work and income and other hardships associated with this period had significant ramifications for people, ranging from increased debt, to anxiety and depression, to housing insecurity, to sickness (table 4). Although some respondents noted improved mental or physical health and improved self-care, the deleterious effects of COVID-19 on well-being were clear.

**TABLE 4**

**How, If at All, Was Your Well-being Impacted between March 2020 and February 2022?**

| <b>Response statements</b>           | <b>Responding<br/>“Yes”</b> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I accumulated debt.                  | 36%                         |
| I experienced anxiety or depression. | 71%                         |
| I experienced housing insecurity.    | 26%                         |
| I experienced loneliness.            | 55%                         |
| I got sick.                          | 33%                         |
| My mental health improved.           | 16%                         |
| My physical health improved.         | 15%                         |
| My self-care improved.               | 24%                         |

**Source:** Authors’ tabulations of data from the Portrait of New York State Artists survey.

**Note:** Respondents could select more than one response.

The survey’s portrait of artists in New York State in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the range of challenges artists faced in managing their careers and their well-being during a period when many of the longer-term trends and challenges artists had already been facing were exacerbated.

# AEP Design and Implementation

This section provides an overview of the AEP's history, design, and implementation and is informed by review of program documents and interviews with program stakeholders. CRNY was first proposed as a part of the Reimagine New York Commission, which was intended to map out a plan for the state to move past COVID-19. In the Commission's report, one of the three economic objectives (along with "expand pathways to good careers" and "serve as a magnet and accelerator for small businesses") was to "lift up artists and cultural institutions." As stated in the report, "While arts organizations and workers have always faced economic challenges, their financial hardships worsened as a result of the COVID-19 crisis" (Reimagine New York Commission 2021). Although the effort did not end up being funded by state government, the Mellon Foundation stepped in to fund and launch CRNY and its two main programs: the Guaranteed Income for Artists program and the AEP.

CRNY was launched in June 2021, and a think tank of 28 members was convened between September of that year and January 2022 to advise on the design of both programs. As noted in the process evaluation, the think tank ensured close attention was paid to disrupting the traditional power dynamics between artists and employers by centering artists in every step of the process. The group had a central role in program design decisions, including application processes, geographic and demographic commitments, and funding patterns. For the AEP in particular, the program design was as follows:

- Collaborations involving Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), immigrant, LGBTQIAP+, and Deaf/disabled communities, as well as those involved with the criminal legal system, living at or near poverty, and living in rural areas, were prioritized.
- Artists would receive the same salary across the state (\$65,000 and benefits equivalent to 28 percent of salary), access to employer benefits and supports that came with W2 employment, and funding for two years.
- Organizations would receive funds for operational and programmatic support (ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000).
- The AEP would partner with Tribeworks, a worker-owned cooperative, to support human resources needs that smaller organizations interested in the programs may not have been able to fill. Tribeworks was chosen because of its ethos and its focus on artists as a class of workers.
- Artists would be guaranteed time to conduct their personal artistic practice.

## Application and Selection Process

To build awareness and interest in the initiative, CRNY hired 10 people to conduct outreach to artists and organizations. A key feature of the application process, specifically designed to balance power dynamics between organizations and artists, was the requirement of a joint application: only collaborative applications with shared engagement between organizations and named artists were accepted. The application process had two steps: an initial joint application followed by a 60- to 90-minute joint artist-organization interview.

Application guidelines were released early in 2022, and applications were due March 25, 2022. Of 2,700 applications received, 1,800 were deemed eligible. Twenty external peer reviewers worked with CRNY staff to select the collaborations. Partnerships selected were announced in June 2022, and the program began in July 2022. The main challenge, which is discussed in the process evaluation conducted by Sherman and Montgomery (2024), was how quickly the program came together: it went live only six months after the think tank's work ended in January 2022.

## Operations

Although the program was explicitly designed to provide a flexible framework for artists and organizations to work out collaboration details, this flexibility led in some cases to conflict. After one case early on, CRNY opened a channel for conflict resolution. It also identified some of the more common causes of disagreement, such as work schedules and locations and communication practices. Based on these observations, CRNY required participating collaborators to create shared agreements laying out the particularities of their partnerships. CRNY also checked in regularly with artists and organizations (in lieu of formal progress reports) and provided access to a technical assistance program (Art-Train) and other resources around professional development. In year two, CRNY started transition planning for artists and organizations in advance of the program's conclusion.

## Assessment

Subsequent sections of this report discuss many of the program features described above and how they related to employment outcomes across the direct employment- and Tribeworks-mediated models. For a more detailed overview, see the process evaluation conducted by Sherman and Montgomery (2024; box 1), which assesses the range of program design, selection, and implementation components.

## AEP Participant Artist Characteristics

Participating artists came from various disciplines (table 5); the highest shares were from visual arts and music. Patterns were similar across direct employment and Tribeworks engagements, and distinctions generally were not strong enough to indicate substantial differences between the two partnership types. We note primary disciplines here because certain types of artistic practice may have different engagement approaches with the potential to shape artist-organization relationships: performance-based disciplines could imply different working relationships than, say, literary or visual arts.

**TABLE 5**

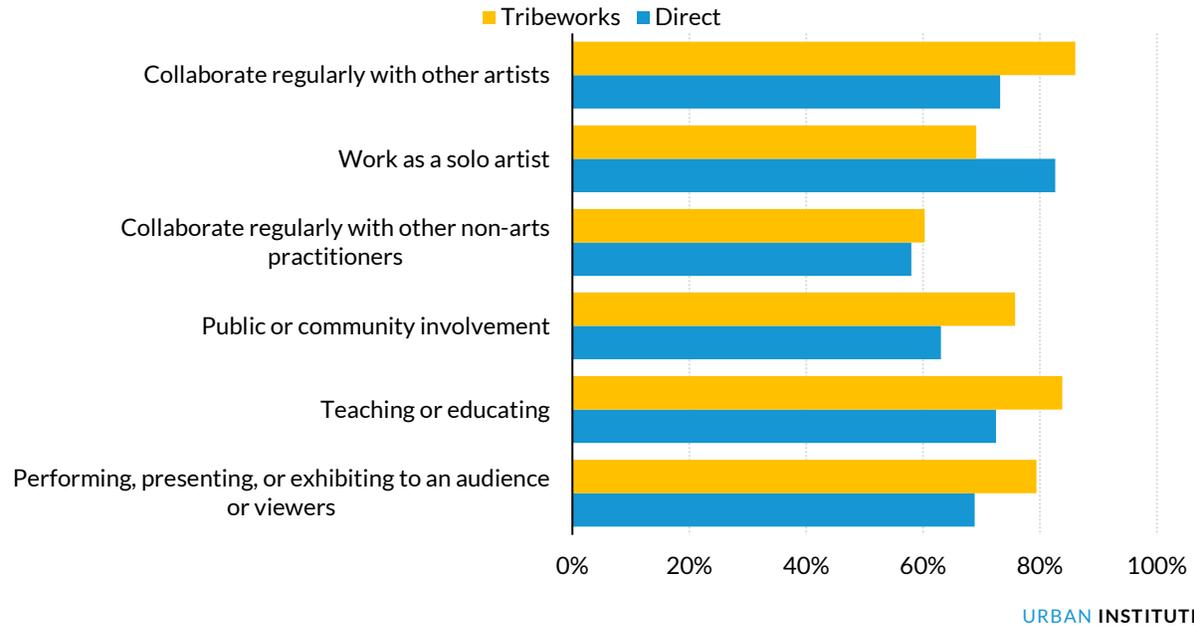
### Primary Discipline of Participating Artists

| Primary discipline of funded and active artists | Direct employment | Tribeworks |
|---|-------------------|------------|
| Visual arts                                     | 24%               | 20%        |
| Music   | 12%               | 20%        |
| Traditional arts                                | 10%               | 5%         |
| Theater   | 10%               | 5%         |
| Literary arts                                   | 7%                | 1%         |
| Social practice                                 | 7%                | 4%         |
| Dance   | 5%                | 14%        |
| Craft   | 5%                | 5%         |
| Media arts                                      | 4%                | 4%         |
| Film  | 4%                | 10%        |
| Interdisciplinary arts                          | 3%                | 5%         |
| Design  | 3%                | 2%         |
| Performance art                                 | 2%                | 1%         |
| Oral traditions                                 | 1%                | 2%         |

Source: CRNY application survey.

Most artists reported working with other artists and as solo artists, with slightly smaller shares—but still a majority—collaborating regularly with nonartist practitioners (figure 1). In general, patterns were similar for artists who would be employed directly and those who would use Tribeworks.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Artist Practice Types**



Source: CRNY application survey.

Artists who would join the AEP reported similar patterns in terms of providing care for members of their household or family, whether they would be directly employed or employed through Tribeworks. About half provided care to another family member (table 6).

**TABLE 6**  
**Provide Care on Your Own or with Someone Else?**

| Care provided  | Direct employment | Tribeworks | Total |
|--|-------------------|------------|-------|
| To adult, spouse, or partner or is elderly, ill, or disabled | 20.6%             | 15.9%      | 18.2% |
| I prefer not to answer                                       | 4.4%              | 6.5%       | 5.5%  |
| No   | 48.5%             | 55.1%      | 51.8% |
| To a child or children                                       | 31.6%             | 28.3%      | 29.9% |

Source: CRNY application survey.

## Organizational Characteristics

Because the employment model for a given partnership was tied to organizational capacity, organizations that employed artists directly were distinctly different from those where artists were employed by Tribeworks. Organizations that employed artists directly were considerably larger. Based

on the average of 2019 through 2022 budgets reported in CRNY application survey data, the median budget of those employing artists directly was about 10 times larger than organizations where artists were employed by Tribeworks (\$1,219,997 versus \$122,399) and the participation of several large organizations pulled the disparities in average budgets even further (\$7,169,023 versus \$193,415). This disparity was also reflected in the benefits packages available: 88 percent of organizations employing artists directly reported already having employee benefits packages at the time of application, but only 15 percent of those where artists used Tribeworks did.

Organizations also had a mix of experiences engaging with the arts or working with artists. Most organizations considered themselves to be an arts or cultural organization: this was the case for nearly all organizations where artists used Tribeworks (48 of 52) and about two-thirds of organizations that employed artists directly (35 of 57). Higher shares of organizations had worked with artists as volunteers and independent contractors than as employees (table 7). While a majority of organizations across both employment model types had used more than one approach, a higher share of those employing artists directly had already worked with artists as employees prior to the AEP.

**TABLE 7**  
**Organizational Experience Working with Artists**

| <b>Artist employment</b>   | <b>Direct</b> | <b>Tribeworks</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| As employees               | 62.5%         | 42.3%             | 52.8%        |
| As independent contractors | 85.7%         | 88.5%             | 87.0%        |
| As volunteers              | 76.8%         | 82.7%             | 79.6%        |
| Other                      | 33.9%         | 30.8%             | 32.4%        |

**Source:** CRNY application survey.

**Note:** Numbers add up to more than 100 percent because organizations could select multiple options.

# Impact on Artists

This section examines the possible impact of the AEP on artists from a number of angles. We start with an overview of respondents to our survey, and then examine artist outcomes in terms of personal and financial well-being based on the survey and focus group findings. To provide a full picture of artist well-being and status, we focus not only on differences between artists directly employed by organizations or employed by Tribeworks, but also examine other aspects of artist identity (e.g., race and ethnicity). We are not always able to disaggregate findings by identity, employment type, or other variables due to sample size. We tend to note larger distinctions between findings based on the two employment types and caution readers against focusing on smaller differences (for an overview of the artist survey respondent composition, see appendix A).

It is unclear whether outcomes by employment model are due to the employment model itself or other variables. Because organizations that worked with Tribeworks to employ artists tended to have small budgets and staff sizes, some findings could be due to the organization being underresourced (e.g., more burden put on artists). Additionally, artists who had relationships with larger organizations may have already entered the program with more of their own “human capital” (e.g., artistic engagements and resources, social networks).

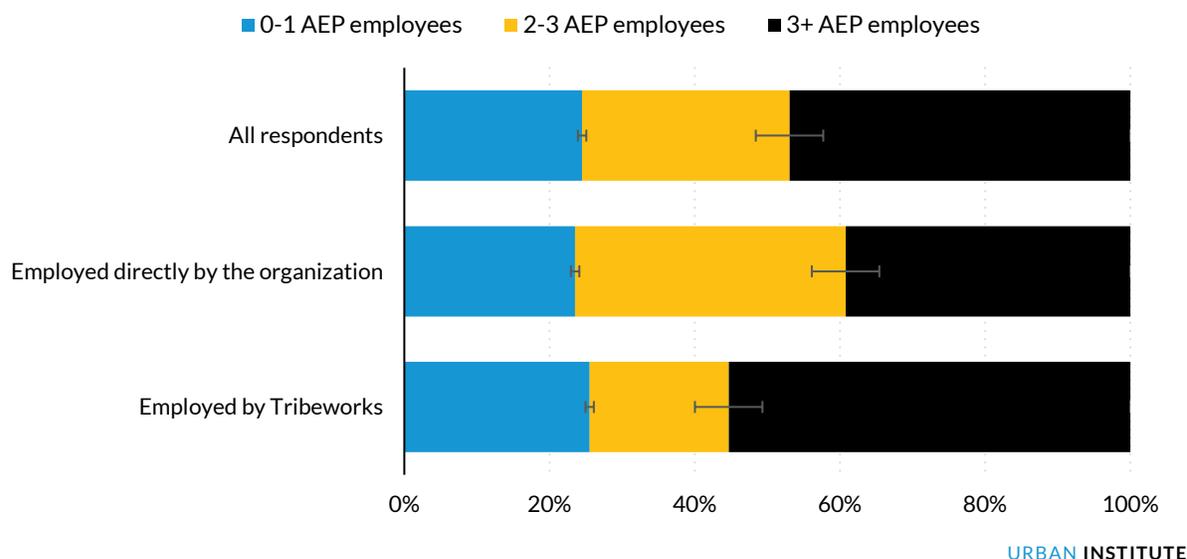
## Features of Artists’ Engagements with Organizations

We start by highlighting the features of the artists’ engagements—how many other AEP artists worked with the partner organizations and how many hours artists spent on organization work. These features show how organizations came to the AEP engagement with a range of experiences in working with artists. They also highlight that when examining the effect of the employment model itself, as we do below, that factors beyond the employment model, such as an organization’s overall size or focus or experience employing artists directly, could also have affected outcomes.

When artists were asked the total number of employees, including AEP artists, at the organizations where they worked, the most common response was smaller organizations with 1–10 employees; 51 respondents (52 percent) selected this response. Artists working in organizations with 11–49 employees were the second most common, with 27 respondents (28 percent) selecting this response, and organizations with 50 or more employees the least common, with 10 respondents (10 percent) selecting this response.

Just under one-half (47 percent) of the responding artists reported more than three AEP employees worked with their organizations; 29 percent reported being in partnerships with two or three AEP employees, and 24 percent were the sole AEP employee. A higher share of artists employed by Tribeworks reported being in partnerships with more than three AEP employees (figure 2).

**FIGURE 3**  
**Number of AEP Employees at Partner Organization by Employment Type**



Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

When asked about usual weekly hours worked for the organization in their AEP role, responses varied (table 8). Less than half (45 percent) of the respondents indicated working between 15–30 hours, and two small groups of seven (7 percent) respondents each selected the extremes of working less than 10 hours or more than 40 hours in a typical week.

**TABLE 8**  
**Usual Weekly Hours Spent in AEP Role**

| Hours Range        | Percentage of Respondents Selecting |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Less than 10 hours | 7%                                  |
| 10–15 hours        | 13%                                 |
| 15–20 hours        | 29%                                 |
| 20–30 hours        | 16%                                 |
| 30–40 hours        | 27%                                 |
| More than 40 hours | 7%                                  |

Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

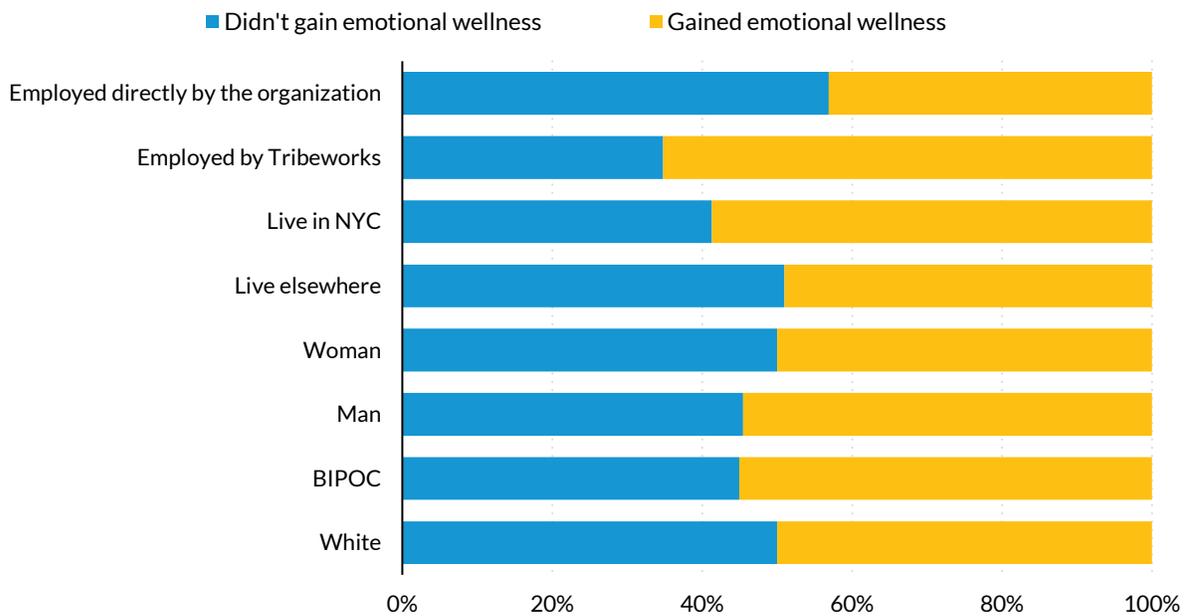
## Personal Well-being among Artists

In the survey and focus groups, we asked artists to select from a list of options what they gained from participating in the CRNY AEP, including “emotional well-being.” Across our survey respondents, 54 percent indicated gaining emotional well-being because of participating in the CRNY AEP. Participants elaborated on what this meant to them in write-in responses, with comments including experiencing “improvement in self-worth/self-confidence artistically speaking,” “artistic growth and personal growth,” and “relaxed working environment, time.” One artist wrote, “I learned about my rights as a worker and how to value my work in a way that is more sustainable.” A focus group participant shared that as a teaching artist, having a set salary, rather than worrying about how many clients attended a session, was helpful for them “spiritually, physically, [and] mentally.”

Findings on emotional well-being by race and ethnicity were similar, with 55 percent of respondents of color and 50 percent of white respondents indicating gaining emotional wellness.<sup>13</sup> However, a sharp difference emerged when artists employed through Tribeworks were compared with those employed directly by a partner organization. Sixty-five percent of respondents working through Tribeworks indicated gaining emotional wellness, compared to just 43 percent among those employed directly by a partner organization (figure 3). In fact, across the various disaggregation groupings shown (e.g., gender, geography), artists employed directly by a partner organization reported the lowest share in emotional wellness gains. We are unable to determine if artists employed directly by partner organizations may have started the program with higher levels of emotional wellness so there was less of an increase thanks to the program.

FIGURE 3

### Gaining of Emotional Wellness Disaggregated across Artist Characteristics



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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Note: BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

## Networks Gained among Artists

From our survey, artists indicated gaining nonfinancial benefits from the CRNY program. An overwhelming majority (76 percent) indicated gaining networking connections. The rate was somewhat higher among artists employed by Tribeworks and we are unable to determine if this was because these artists had fewer networks to begin with. In focus groups, artists echoed these findings, with several sharing that they made new connections with community, nonprofit organizations, and other artists.

---

*The networking with the community was really big for me. It was really nice to expand my network, to connect with dance studios, universities, and libraries. Through that networking I was able to connect with those individuals, and now I have programs scheduled for the fall after the program is over. I was able to create those relationships because of my partner org and time to reach out/connect. Plus, when CRNY hosted an event, I made some connections there. I taught at the university through another CRNY artist, and then she taught at my studio. It helped get my name out there and helped me establish a better position to present my work when I do.*

*—Artist focus group participant*

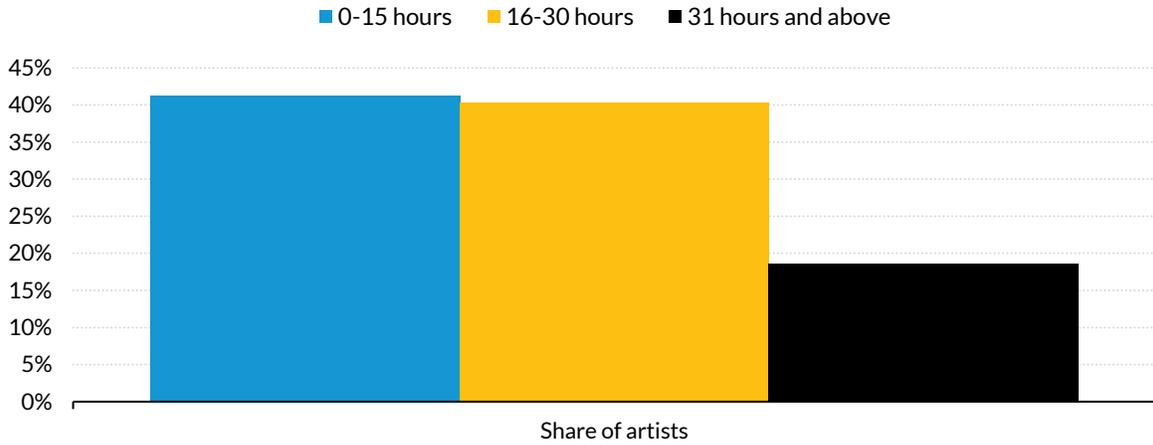
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## Artistic Practice and Professional Development

Artists shared how participating in the program impacted their technical and artistic skills and time spent on art. Many artists indicated **developing new artistic practices** (60 percent) and **technical skills** (49 percent). Responses were similar between artists employed by Tribeworks and through direct employment. In focus groups, some artists shared that they were able to go to professional development trainings and learn more about different artistic and technical practices, such as engaging more with “story telling” and “learn[ing] a lot about recording equipment.”

The number of hours per week artists indicated usually spending on their artistic practice varied. Forty-one percent of respondents indicated up to 15 hours, and another 40 percent indicated 16–30 hours (figure 4). A smaller though sizable share (19 percent) indicated spending over 30 hours per week on their artistic practice.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Weekly Hours Currently Spent on Artistic Practice**

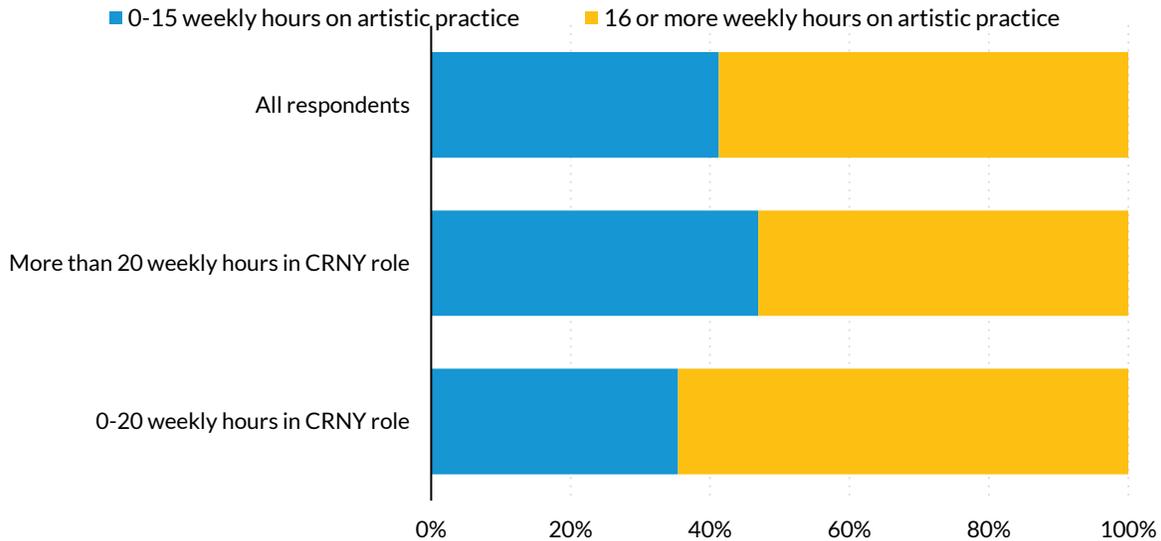


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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Artists who spent more hours on their CRNY role (more than 20 hours per week) spent less time on their artistic practice (figure 5) than those who spent less time in their CRNY role (0-20 hours per week).

**FIGURE 5**  
**Weekly Hours Currently Spent on CRNY Role and Artistic Practice**



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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

In focus groups, some artists mentioned that participating in the program boosted both the amount of art they produced and the quality of that art. Some artists attributed this to time—thanks to being in the program for two years, they were able to produce more art and have the time necessary to “be able to think more deeply into the craft that we engage with.” Another artist shared that going from gig work to something steadier meant “there was more time to think things through and do better quality [art].”

---

*Having that financial boost for the first time in my decades-long career [meant that] I feel really seen and more productive than any period before this. An incredible amount of growth in terms of artistic ability and the creative muse has been there much more.*

*—Artist focus group participant*

---

## Financial Stability and Well-being among Artists

Overall, the AEP had a sizable effect across a number of indicators for participating artists. Insights from our survey respondents paint an intricate picture of the program’s impact on their financial lives and sense of well-being.

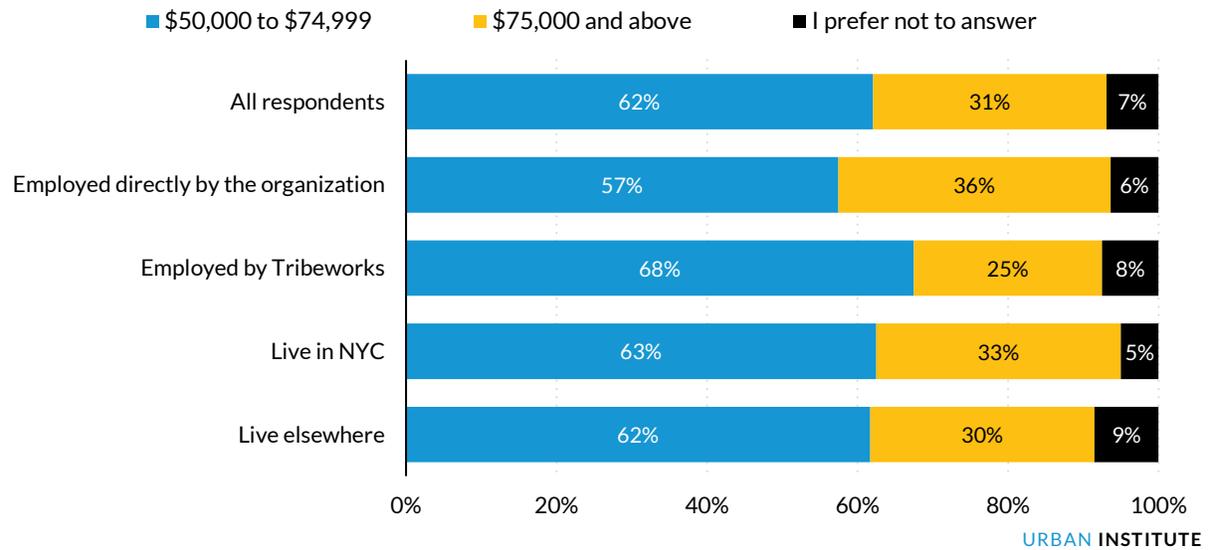
### Income

As expected, for most artists, AEP participation resulted in a drastic shift in income. We asked artists to indicate their annual wage income range in 2021 (prior to entering the program) and 2023 (while in the program).<sup>14</sup> Nearly half (49 percent) of all survey respondents had wage incomes below \$35,000 in 2021. In contrast, individual earnings were much higher in 2023, with 62 percent of artists reporting an income of between \$50,000 and \$75,000, and 31 percent reporting incomes above \$75,000 (figure 6).<sup>15</sup> As discussed below, some artists participated in gig or other employment aside from the AEP and its guaranteed annual salary of \$65,000. (See appendix A for more details on income.)

In focus groups, several artists shared that the income they received was sufficient for their needs. However, other artists, many of whom lived in NYC, shared that the income was not enough. For example, one person living in NYC said that a \$65,000 salary means “you can survive, but you’re not going to thrive.” Another artist commented, “I actually made less money with the taxes and health

insurance.” A few participants said they wished the salary differed by geography rather than a flat rate across a state with very different living costs.

**FIGURE 6**  
**Individual Wage Income during AEP in 2023, Disaggregated by Geography and Employment Type**



Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.  
 Notes: Sums of each category might not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

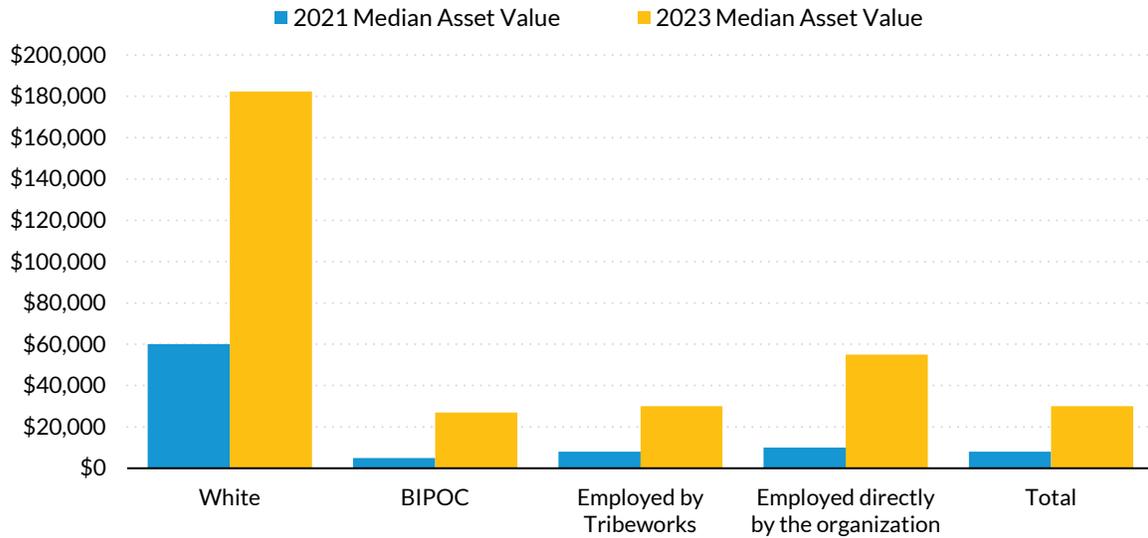
## Assets and Debt

Our survey asked artists several questions about their asset and debt holdings before and while participating in the AEP to get a fuller sense of their financial status.<sup>16</sup>

Across all respondents, the median total asset value in 2023 (when respondents were in the program) was approximately \$30,000, relative to \$8,000 in 2021 (before the AEP began). As shown in figure 7, overall asset values and changes in them varied by race. Extensive research has explored racial wealth inequities (including higher asset values and overall wealth for white people and less for Black people and other people of color) and documented the role of systemic racism in producing these results (Kijakazi et al. 2016). In our survey, white respondents had much higher asset values than respondents of color in both 2021 and 2023, with white respondents indicating significantly higher asset values in 2023. The median value of total assets among white respondents in 2021 was \$60,000, compared to \$182,350 in 2023. These high asset values were primarily driven by homeowners. In contrast, the median value of total assets in 2023 among white respondents who did not indicate

owning a home dropped to \$22,500. This value is still much higher than the median asset value of \$12,500 among their BIPOC counterparts. We also note that asset holdings reported by those employed directly by organizations were higher than among those working for Tribeworks.

**FIGURE 7**  
**Median Asset Values in 2021 and 2023 by Race and Employment Type**



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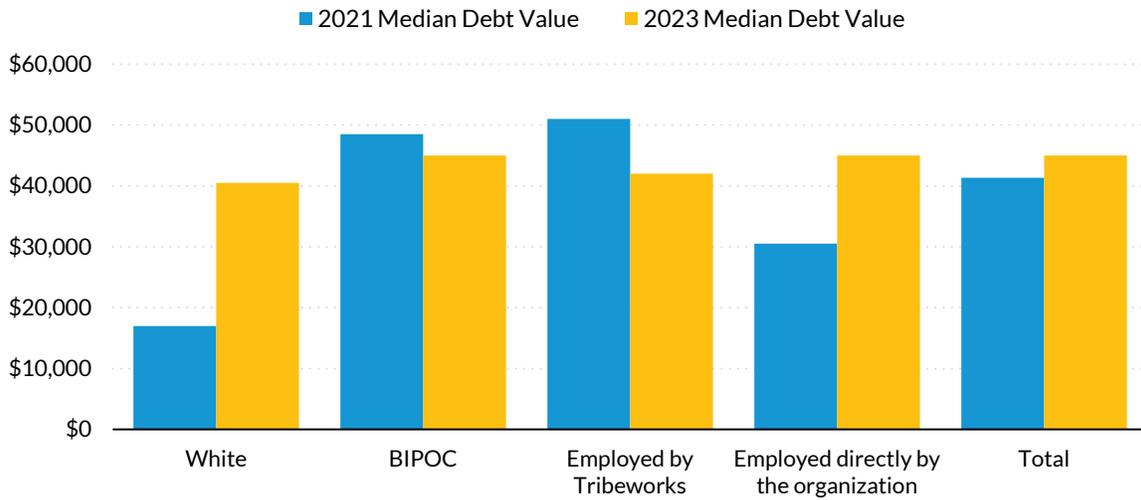
Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Note: BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

Debt levels were notably higher among BIPOC respondents in 2021, when their median debt value was \$48,500, compared to \$17,000 among white respondents, a near three-to-one ratio (figure 8). Artists employed by Tribeworks similarly held more debt in 2021 than artists employed directly by a partner organization (median \$51,000 and \$30,500, respectively). Lower asset values among those employed by Tribeworks, as we saw earlier, and more debt translated to lower net worth, which we detail in appendix A.

FIGURE 8

Median Debt Values in 2021 and 2023 by Race and Employment Type



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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Note: BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

### Financial Changes Because of AEP

Participation in the AEP brought positive, negative, and neutral changes in the financial lives of artists. In our survey, we asked whether artists felt participating in the AEP resulted in certain outcomes. Artists could select statements that applied to their experiences. Table 9 presents select results from these questions. About a third of respondents (35 percent) indicated they accumulated wealth from participating in the AEP. Specifically, 40 percent saved for retirement, and 10 percent saved money toward a down payment on a house. However, AEP participation resulted in the loss of eligibility for previously received social insurance program benefits for 13 percent of the artists. Of the individuals who reported losing access to social insurance programs, two-thirds indicated they lost access to programs related to health insurance, especially Medicaid.

TABLE 9

**Financial Outcomes**

| <b>Statement</b>                               | <b>Share of respondents selecting</b> |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Positive outcomes due to AEP</b>            |                                       |
| Accumulated wealth                             | 35%                                   |
| Saved money                                    | 35%                                   |
| Saved for retirement                           | 40%                                   |
| Saved toward a down payment on a house         | 10%                                   |
| Secured new housing                            | 15%                                   |
| <b>Negative or neutral outcomes due to AEP</b> |                                       |
| Spent more money (e.g., on transportation)     | 18%                                   |
| Lost social insurance programs                 | 13%                                   |
| Took on unanticipated debt                     | 9%                                    |
| Took on anticipated debt                       | 7%                                    |
| Lost affordable housing                        | 1%                                    |

**Source:** Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

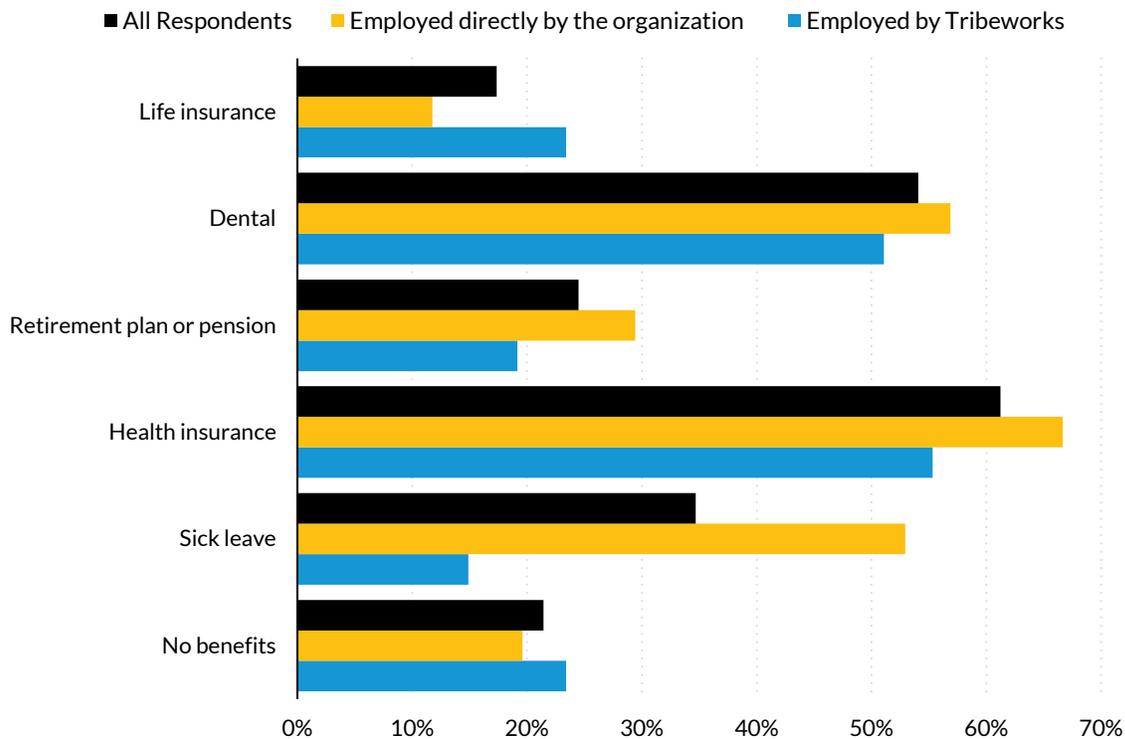
**Notes:** Participants could select more than one outcome with the exception of “none of the above.” Participants also could offer write-in responses.

## Benefit Take-Up

In our artist survey, we inquired about take-up of benefits, including health and dental insurance, life insurance, and retirement plans. Employer-related characteristics were the biggest drivers in outcome differences. Figure 9 depicts the share of respondents who indicated participating in various employer-sponsored benefit programs, disaggregated by employment type. Health insurance was offered to all artists although, as discussed below, not all artists participated. Many respondents had health insurance (61 percent) and dental insurance (54 percent). A slightly higher share of respondents who were employed directly by the organization participated in health and dental insurance plans (11 and 6 percentage point difference, respectively). Sick leave accounted for the largest difference between employment types: 53 percent of those employed directly by the organization indicated having sick leave compared to just 15 percent of those employed by Tribeworks, a 38 percentage point difference. Only about a quarter of respondents had a retirement plan, a benefit that was not guaranteed in the program.

FIGURE 9

Percentage of Artists Who Participated in Employer-Provided Benefits by Employment Type



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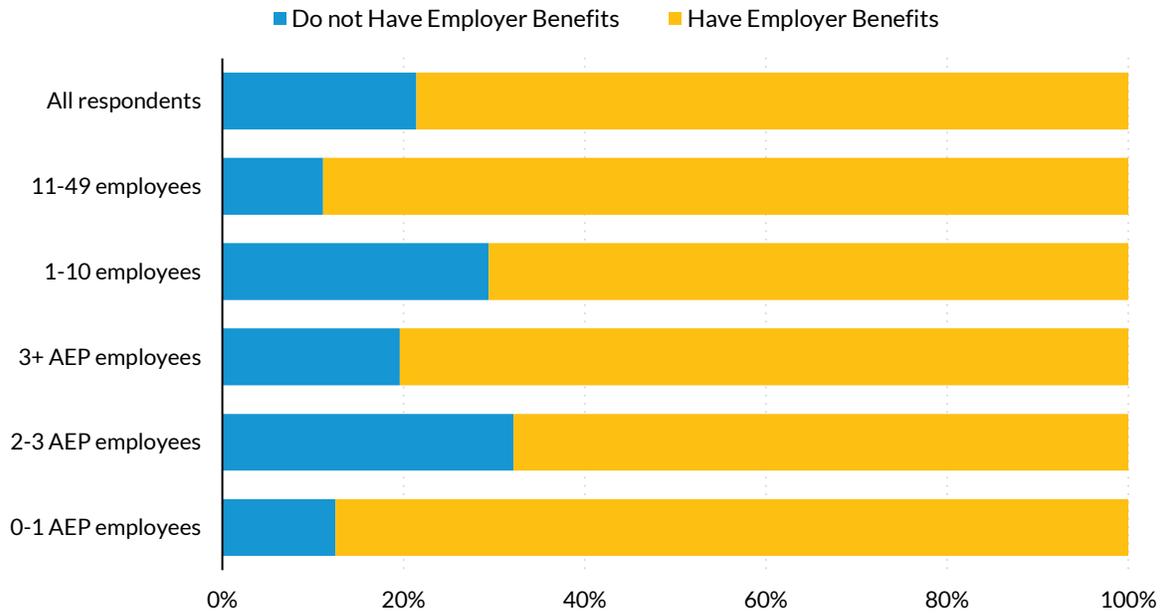
Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Next, we look at the share of respondents who indicated having *any* type of employer-sponsored benefit (life insurance, dental insurance, retirement or pension, health insurance, or sick leave) disaggregated by various employer characteristics (figure 10). The likelihood of having any employer-sponsored benefit did not vary much by employment model. Differences arose based on organization capacity, however. Artists surveyed who worked in organizations with more than 10 employees were more likely to indicate having at least one type of employer-sponsored benefit than those working in smaller organizations (18 percentage point difference between those in organizations with 11–49 employees and those with 10 or fewer employees). Keeping in mind that partnerships involving Tribeworks involved smaller organizations, these findings suggest that organizational size itself plays a role in the provision of benefits.

Additionally, artists working in organizations with only one AEP artist were also more likely to receive any type of employer-sponsored benefit. We are not able to fully explain this finding—it is unclear if it is linked to organization resources, as some large organizations had large collaborations.

FIGURE 10

Share of Artists Who Reported Having Employer-Sponsored Benefits, Disaggregated by Employer Characteristics



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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

### Reasons for Declining Health Insurance

Direct employment organizations and Tribeworks received money from CRNY to provide health insurance. Although most AEP participants accepted health insurance coverage from the program, in our survey 21 artists employed by Tribeworks and 17 artists employed directly by a partner organization indicated they did not have health insurance through CRNY. Thirty-seven respondents shared why they did not have health insurance: 27 opted out of health insurance because they had coverage from elsewhere—a spouse or partner (13 respondents), a parent (1 respondent), Medicaid or Medicare (3 respondents),<sup>17</sup> private health insurance coverage or another unnamed source (8 respondents), or in two instances, a combination of multiple sources like Medicare and a spouse’s coverage. Additionally, 10 respondents—8 of whom were employed by Tribeworks—indicated that the health insurance plan was not sufficient. Specifically, several respondents noted the coverage was “not as good” as their other health insurance options; it was too costly; or they felt “service” was bad. One respondent working directly for an organization did not accept the health insurance offered because it would only cover them and not their family. Similarly, a focus group participant employed directly by a

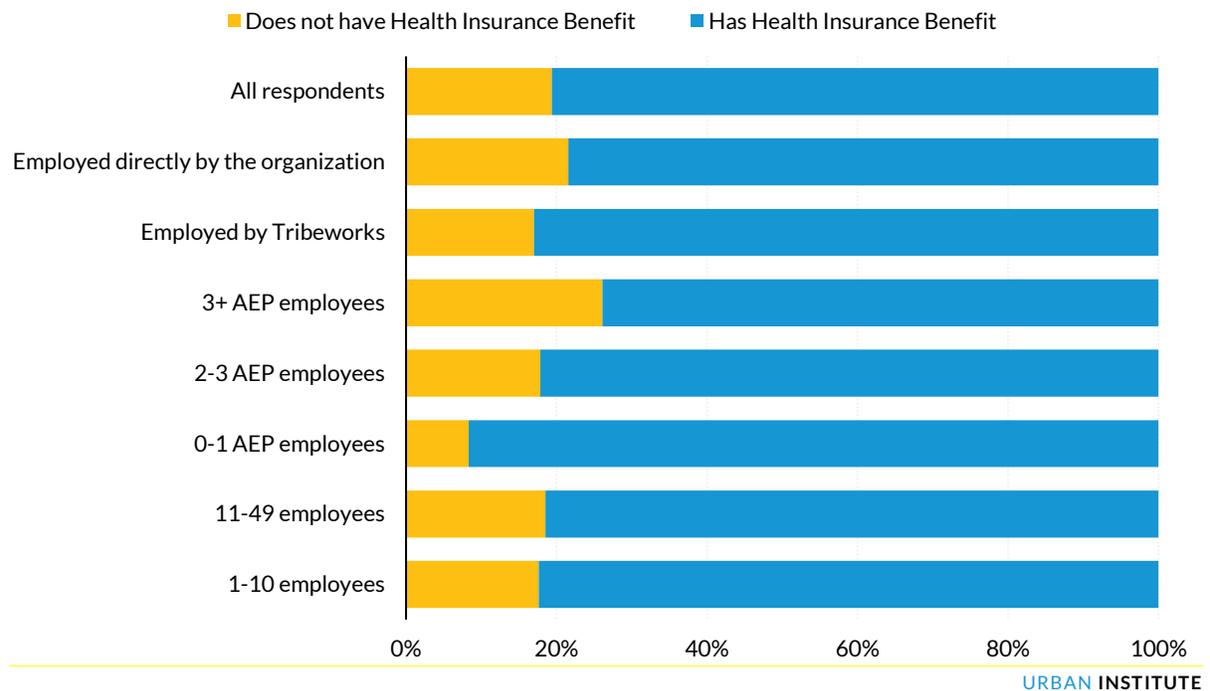
partner organization said, “I didn’t go on health insurance, direct, because it was so bad. Nobody at that org uses it because it’s so bad. It’s not better than the Marketplace.”

One survey respondent and a focus group participant directly employed by a partner organization said that because they declined the health insurance option, the employer compensated them directly. One survey participant shared, “Because I was pregnant, I didn’t want to switch doctors, so I stayed with my insurance.... They had money held for me that they didn’t use, in case I needed the insurance, and gave it back to me as a bonus.” Important to note is that organizations themselves may be limited in what they can do: several participating organizations stated that they could not provide these funds to artists directly because such payments could be construed as providing an illegal incentive to *not* take insurance.

Figure 11 depicts the share of artist survey respondents who indicated having employer-sponsored health insurance while in the CRNY program disaggregated by various employer characteristics.<sup>18</sup>

**FIGURE 11**

**Share of Artists with Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance, Disaggregated by Employer Characteristics**

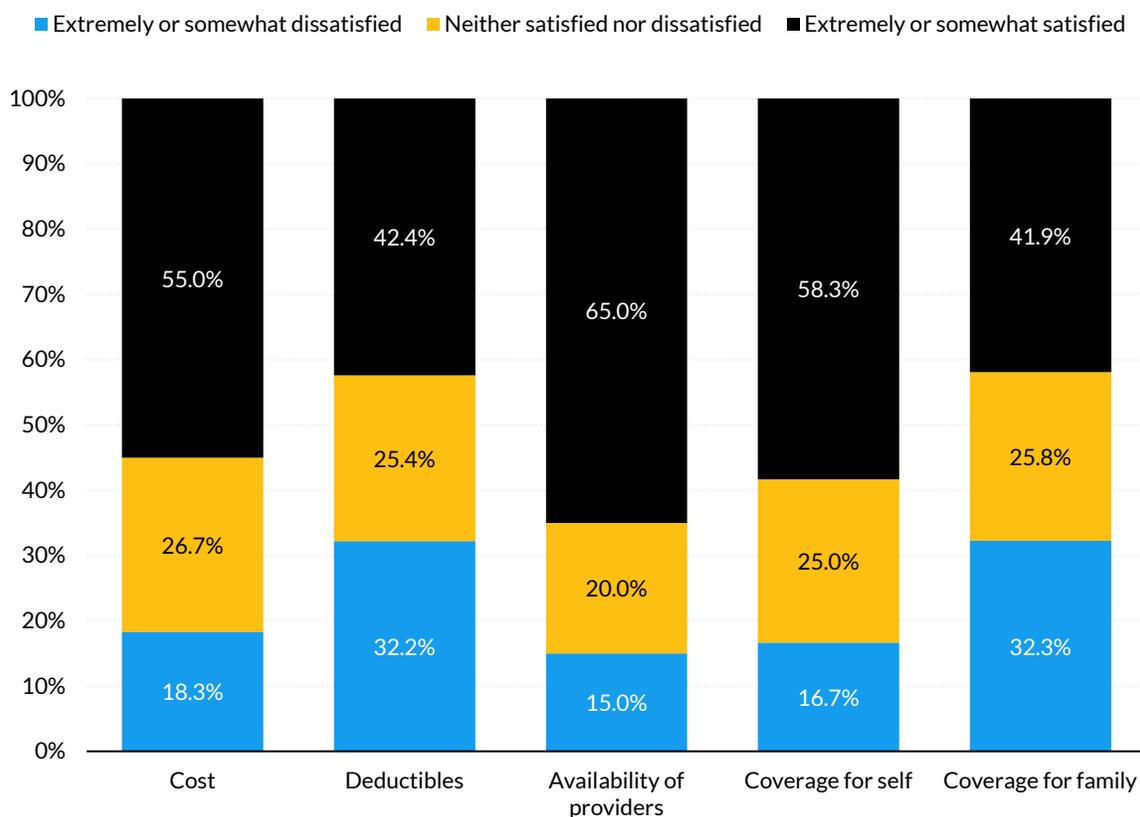


Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

## Health Insurance Satisfaction

Less than half the people in the US, according to a Gallup poll, rate health insurance quality in the US as “excellent” or “good.”<sup>19</sup> We asked artist survey respondents who selected having employer-sponsored health insurance about their level of satisfaction with various aspects of their health insurance plan. While at least 40 percent of the relevant respondents indicated being extremely or somewhat satisfied with each of the individual categories we asked about, a sizable share of AEP artists were extremely or somewhat dissatisfied, ranging from 15 percent with regard to availability of providers to a high of 32 percent with regard to deductibles (figure 12). Overall, deductibles received the lowest positive rating, with 42 percent rating it favorably, 24 percent being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 32 percent being extremely or somewhat dissatisfied. Availability of providers received the most favorable responses, with 65 percent indicating being extremely or somewhat satisfied with this aspect.

**FIGURE 12**  
**Percentage of Artists Satisfied with Various Aspects of Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance**



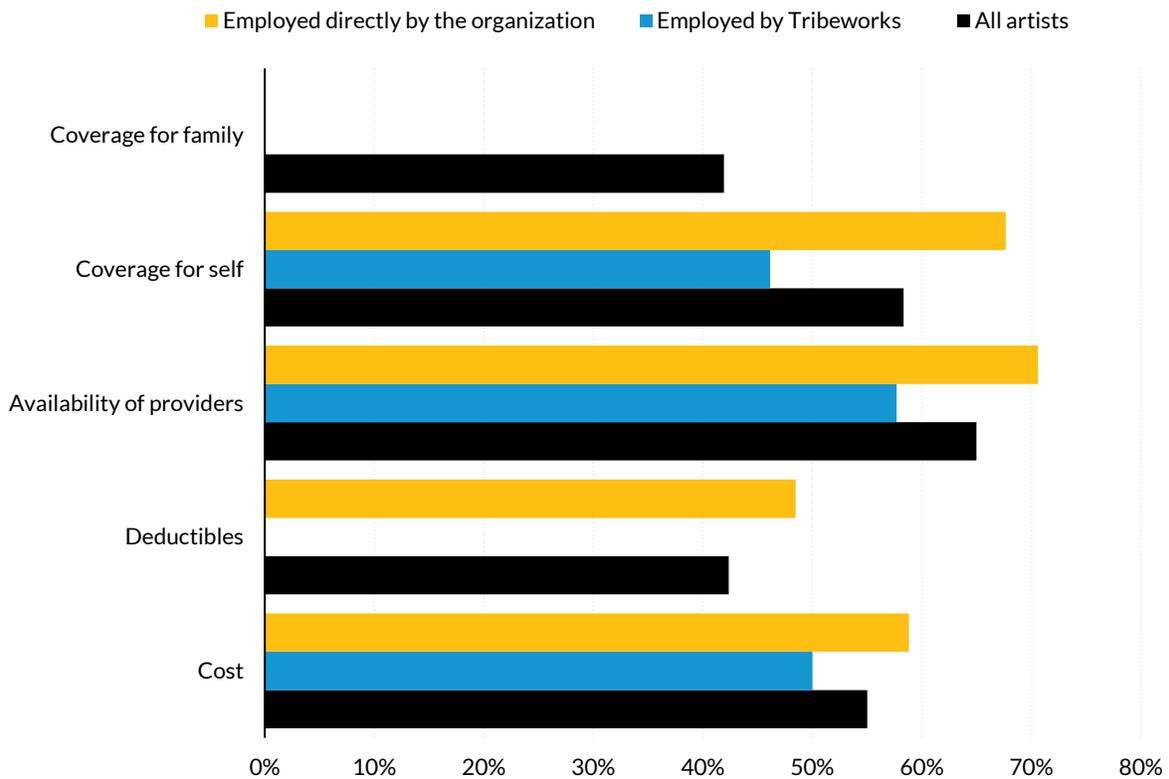
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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Notes: Sums of each category might not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

We noticed larger differences by employment type on the topic of coverage (figure 13). Tribeworks offered health insurance plans through one company while artists who worked directly for an organization could choose from different health insurance plans depending on where they worked. Artists who were employed directly (68 percent) were significantly more likely to be somewhat or very satisfied with coverage than artists employed by Tribeworks (46 percent). By comparison, a recent survey rating views of health care found that 66 percent of the population rated their healthcare coverage as excellent or good.<sup>20</sup> Overall, higher shares of artists employed directly reported being somewhat or very satisfied with coverage for themselves, with the availability of providers, and costs.

**FIGURE 13**  
**Percentage of Artists Somewhat or Very Satisfied with Various Aspects of Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance**



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**Source:** Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

**Notes:** Artists indicated if they felt neutral, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, or very satisfied with each area of health insurance. The figure depicts the percentage of artists who selected they were “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied.” Small sample sizes meant we are not able to display findings for the following topics and groups: “deductibles” among artists employed by Tribeworks and “coverage for family” among artists directly employed and employed by Tribeworks.

In focus groups, artists who took on health insurance shared how satisfied they were with the plans. For some artists, having health insurance made a significant difference in their lives. For instance, one artist who previously didn't have coverage was able to detect and address a major health issue and said the plan was "lifesaving." Another shared that the health plan helped them access care: "Medical bills before this were terrible. I just wouldn't go when I knew something was wrong.... I'm glad this [program] happened when it did; it helped me with a lot of things that could've been worse. It definitely helped out, compared to what the city offers."

But other respondents noted significant and, in some cases, troubling challenges, particularly for artists with disabilities and serious health concerns. One artist who was employed by and received benefits directly from a partner organization shared that they delayed medical treatment because of the cost of deductibles, ended up needing surgery because of the delay, couldn't cover the medical bills, and saw their credit score negatively impacted. Another shared that the organization "messed up" their coverage and had to delay a medical procedure for over a year. Some artists employed by Tribeworks recounted experiences with lack of coverage and disappointment with how the company helped them navigate. For instance, one shared, "A lot of treatments and prescriptions weren't covered. They apologized, washed their hands, didn't really help.... It was a really disappointing experience." Another shared that their insurer option was not "affordable" in terms of deductibles and copays offered and that the prescription drugs they needed were not covered. The artist said, "I didn't know until way after that I could've stayed on Medicaid for longer or navigated Marketplace options."

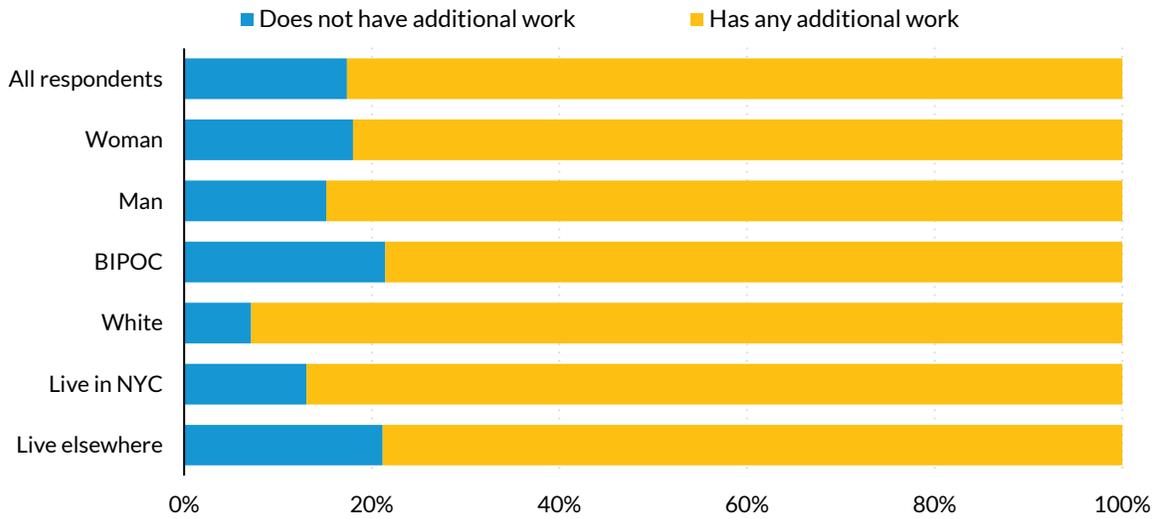
## Gig and Other Forms of Work

In 2021, prior to joining the AEP, over three-quarters of the artists filling out the survey were self-employed, had a gig job, worked in the informal economy, or had a mixture of different forms of employment. Less than a quarter worked full time only.

Having additional employment while in the CRNY program was prevalent among our survey respondents. Overall, 83 percent of respondents indicated having some form of additional employment, such as one or more part-time jobs, gigs, contracts, or temporary work, or an additional full-time job outside of the AEP. Gig, contract, or temporary work was the most common, with 63 percent of respondents indicating having this type of work additionally. Artists living in NYC were more likely to have additional work than those living outside the city, and white artists were more likely than their BIPOC counterparts to indicate having additional work (figure 14).

FIGURE 14

Share of Artists with Any Type of Additional Work, by Demographic Characteristics



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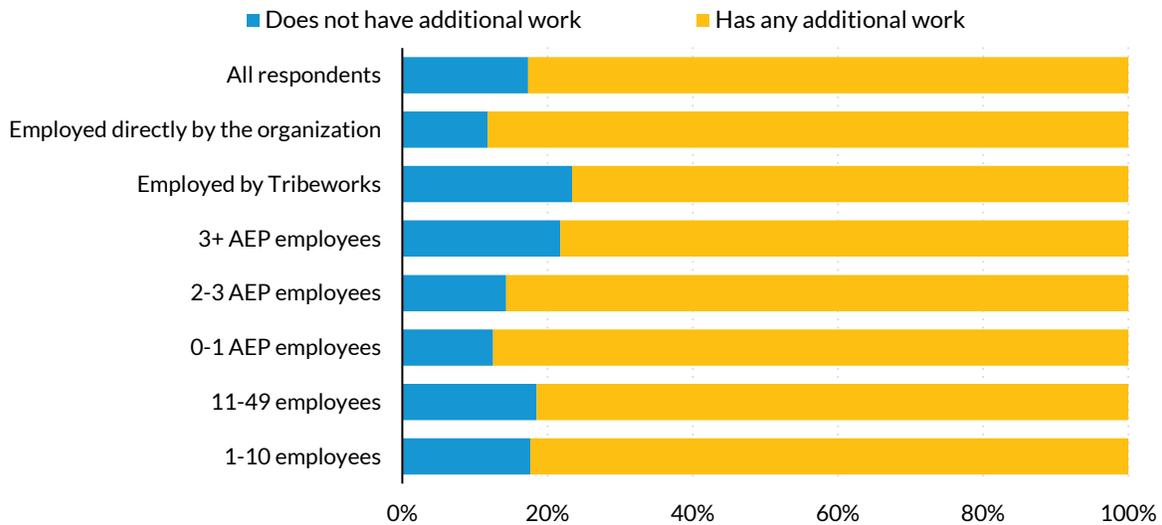
Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Note: BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

As shown in figure 15, artists employed directly by an organization were more likely to have additional work than those employed by Tribeworks (88 and 77 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 15

Share of Artists with Any Type of Additional Work, by Employer Characteristics

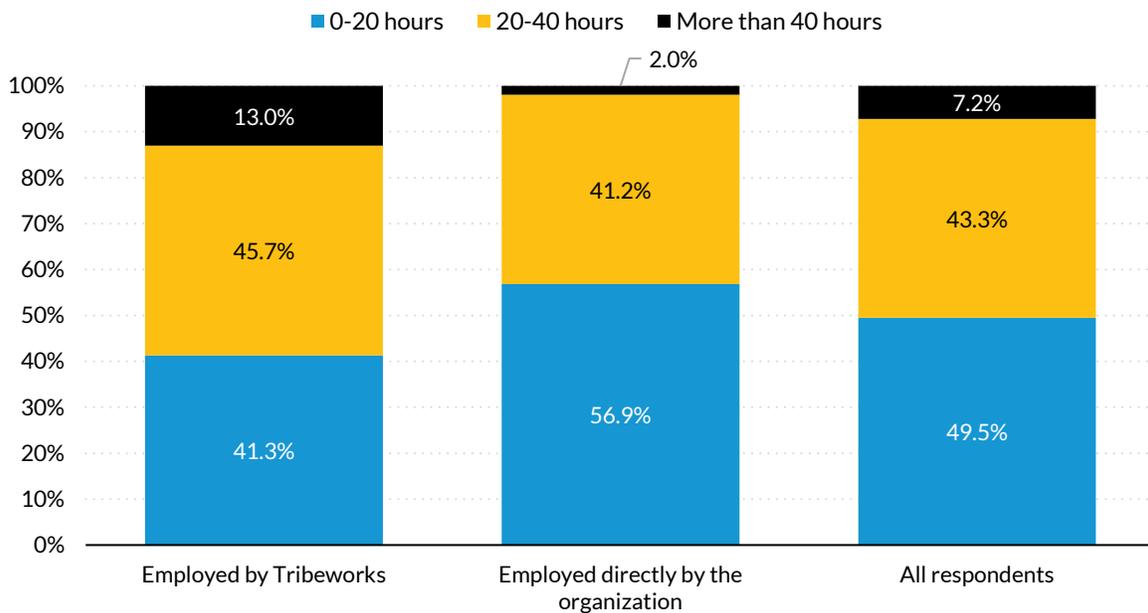


URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

A larger share of artists employed by Tribeworks indicated working 20–40 hours per week in additional work as well as more than 40 hours per week in their AEP role than artists employed directly by a partner organization (figure 16). This finding could imply a potential difference in available time to engage in additional employment.

**FIGURE 16**  
Usual Weekly Hours in AEP Role, Disaggregated by Employment Type



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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Notes: Sums of each category might not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Many artists participating in focus groups shared that they kept doing gig work. Some artists felt they needed the additional money, on top of the CRNY salary, to sustain their lives, particularly in NYC. Some artists also shared that they wanted to create or maintain networks and have something to return to once the program ended. As one artist said, “Side gigs help build on relationships for after the program is over so we’re not starting all over again.”

However, some artists stopped seeking additional work because of the time commitments required by CRNY and the availability of stable income. As one artist explained, “Having that stable income was very helpful because it gave [me an] opportunity to take more webinars and workshops to enhance my practice in addition to not having to worry about all the gigs I need to sustain [to be] able to teach. It took a little bit of that worry away to focus on myself and enhance myself so I’m better for my

community.” Another artist stopped their side gig work initially but resumed it later. Another found they had no time to do the gig work with AEP responsibilities but felt a sense of regret: “I was working the [AEP] job [and] I couldn’t reach out for more jobs. I didn’t have the time. It was great in some ways—having a stable income and reduc[ing] some debt. But the future is even more uncertain than it would’ve been before.... I’m not sure who this [program] is for, but I don’t think it was built for someone like me. There’s something about when the rhythm is cut, how you reestablish that rhythm, and in the meantime, it’s a big hole. I had to say no to jobs and now they’re not calling me back.”

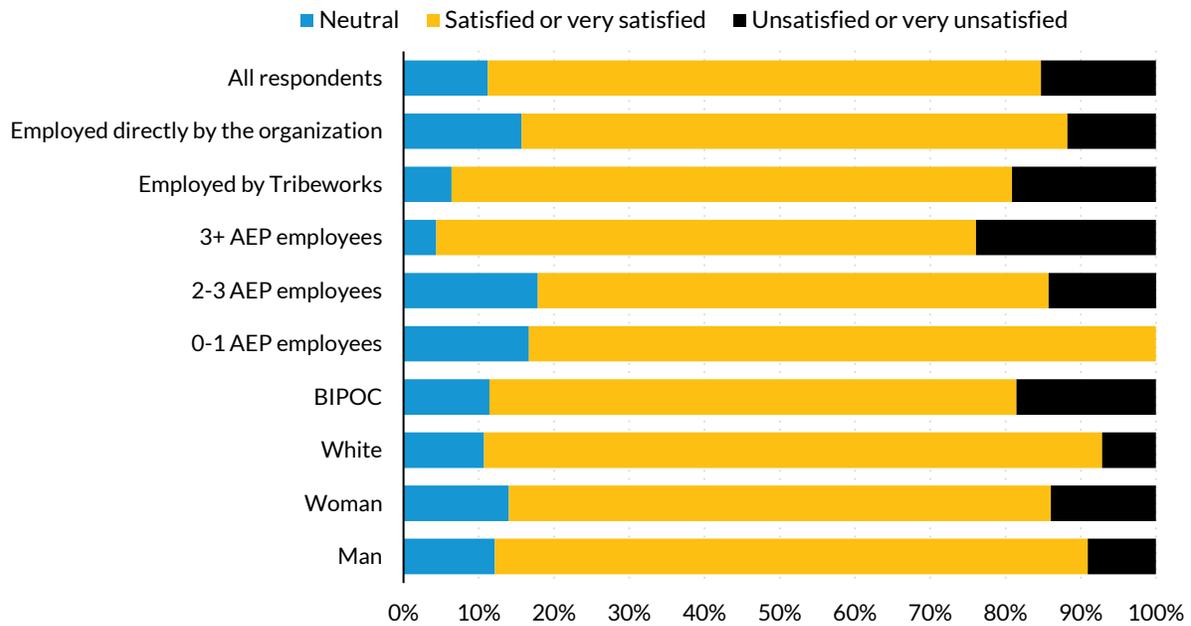
Three artists thought they were not allowed to continue doing gig work while in the AEP. One artist employed through Tribeworks thought they heard this policy in a CRNY meeting but could not recall. Two artists employed by an organization said this impression came from the organization and not CRNY. One of these artists noted that “in a staff meeting [with the organization], it was implied that people should not be doing side work. Eventually, I pushed back on that by stating that I was getting less money in the grant than I would’ve before this and I need to support myself. It’s NYC. The org was giving that impression, not CRNY. [CRNY staff] were confused about that when I talked to [them]. Sometimes I would relay something to [them], and [they] would say ‘we never said that.’ So more clear communication would be good.” Another artist thought they and their organization heard “through the grapevine” that gig work was not allowed.

## Artist Engagement Experiences and Satisfaction

With some variations, artists’ satisfaction with their partner organizations and CRNY was high among survey respondents, although a somewhat higher share of artists employed by Tribeworks (19 percent) indicated being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their partner organization compared to those hired directly by the partner organization (12 percent). Dissatisfaction was most common among artists who worked at organizations with more than three AEP employees, at 24 percent, compared to 14 percent among those working where there were two or three AEP artists. Ratings were positive or neutral among those who were the only AEP employee at their organization (figure 17).

FIGURE 17

Satisfaction with Partner Organization, Disaggregated across Various Characteristics



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Note: BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

A higher share of artists overall reported satisfaction with CRNY than with their partner organization, and there was less variation in responses about satisfaction in looking across various dimensions with regard to satisfaction with CRNY.

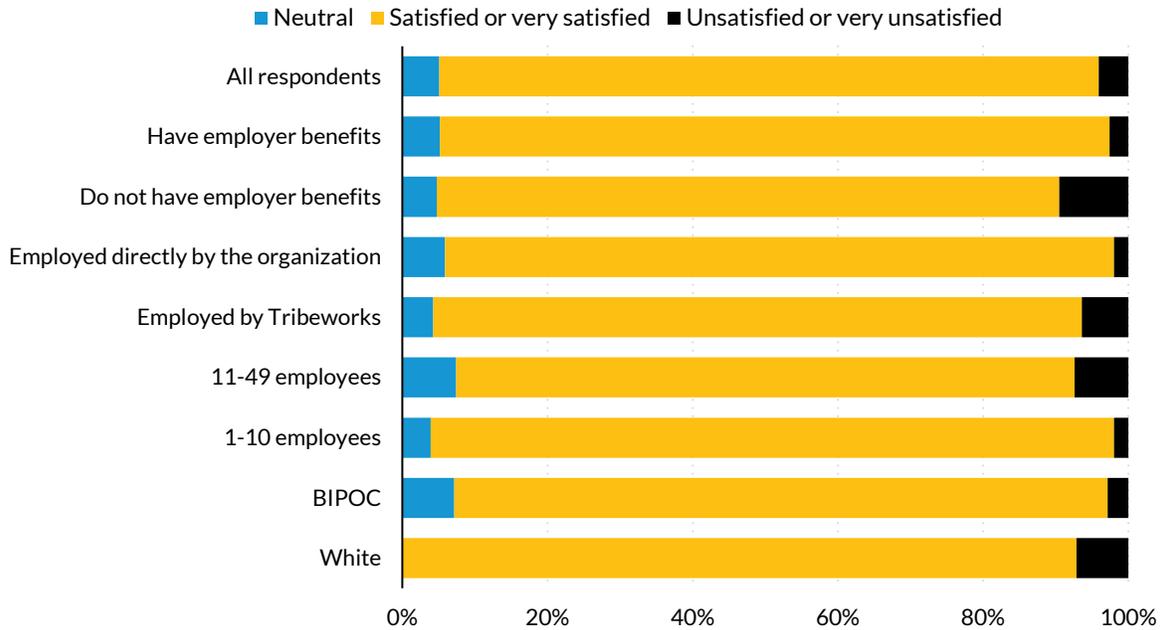
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*I would've appreciated more structure...it felt like the grant experience differed based on the individual and what was relayed to you. Even though I was told we should be doing 24 hours [a week], I can say that that wasn't everyone's experience. I don't know what accountability looked like. Some type of oversight on CRNY side to make sure orgs were being equitable in terms of how the grant was distributed would've been helpful. [Because] of the [large] number of [AEP] people, [some artists] ended up doing the majority of the work.*  
 —Artist focus group participant

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A larger share of artists working in organizations with more employees overall and with more AEP artists responded with dissatisfaction about CRNY, with the largest percentage (10 percent) of unsatisfied and very unsatisfied responses reported by those who did not have employer-sponsored benefits (figure 18).

**FIGURE 18**  
**Satisfaction with CRNY, by Organization Characteristics**



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Artists were asked to share anything that the partner organization did during their time in the program that was helpful. Most artists filling out the survey (89) wrote open-ended responses. The most common factor, shared by 39 artists, was a sense of “support” from their organizations. Twenty-three artists appreciated the resources (e.g., art materials and tools) and office and/or studio space offered. Another common theme was artists’ appreciation for the networking opportunities the organization offered and their ability to make connections with the community they worked in, other organizations, and artistic institutions. Eleven artists appreciated the freedom and independence that they had in the relationship. As one artist shared, “They trusted us as creatives to make our own creative decisions. We were not expected to create per the organization’s goals, rather, create based on goals we identified independently.” Similarly, 12 artists appreciated the flexibility they had in their role, which allowed them time to make art.

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*My partner organization paved the way for me to install an artwork...and engage with activists, students, and the public in many different ways. Through their support and network, I was able to draw courage and find the confidence to say truth to power in a way that people could relate to.*

*—Artist survey respondent*

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Of the 47 artists who were employed by Tribeworks, 34 also shared things Tribeworks did that were helpful. The most common things artists found helpful from Tribeworks were assistance with enrolling in health insurance (8 artists), support with payroll (6), and artist networking opportunities (9), including through a social media platform.

Artists were also asked to share anything that CRNY did during their time in the program that was helpful. Most artists (87) provided a response. The most common response, given by 24 artists, was that they appreciated the artist networking opportunities that CRNY offered online and in some cases in person. As one artist shared, “That sense of community was really important.” Another mentioned that having a space for artists based on “connection rather than competition” was not only helpful, but meant artists could “resource-share advice and offer support.”

Another common response among 24 artists was the learning opportunities, such as Artists U and New York Foundation for the Arts coaching. Many artists (31) also shared that they appreciated the check-ins from CRNY staff, both through monthly group meetings and individually. A few artists noted that CRNY staff mediated conflicts between themselves and their organizations and even helped the artists switch to another organization when the relationship dissolved early on. Many artists (11) also felt a sense of support from CRNY for both their artistic and personal growth. One artist shared they felt CRNY staff “show[ed] genuine interest in my development and growth.” And a dozen artists specified that CRNY’s financial support was helpful to them.

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*[What was helpful was] a salary for collaborating with a nonprofit that matters to me and for giving me the focus to continue to make my art in a thoughtful way over time. The recognition of the role artists can play by CRNY made us believe in ourselves and our contributions. Access and exposure to other artists in the program was uplifting and hopeful.... CRNY was humanizing.*

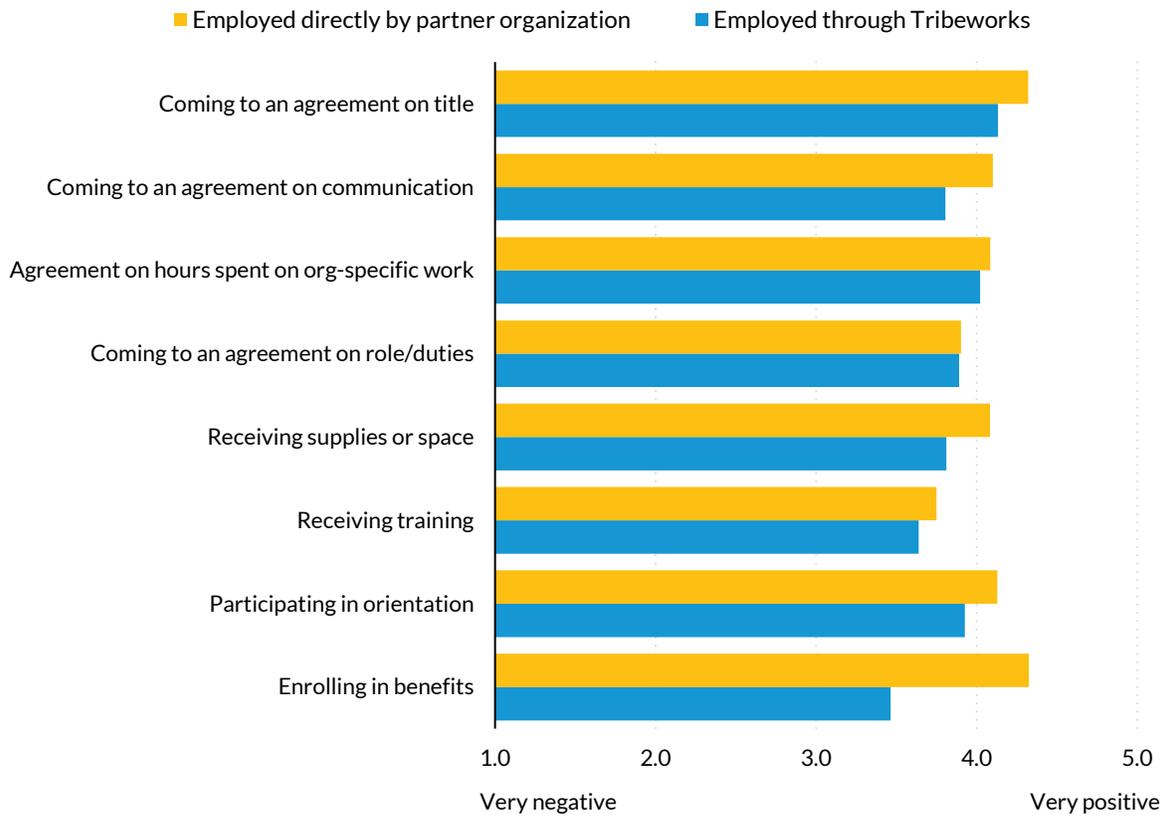
*—Artist survey respondent*

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Differences were minimal in how artists employed directly and those employed by Tribeworks reflected on their early program experiences with organizations. Using a five-point scale of satisfaction with 5 being “very positive,” the response average ranged between 3.5 and 4.5. The main exception was for benefits enrollment, where the 3.5 average for those using Tribeworks was below the 4.3 average for those employed directly (figure 19).

FIGURE 19

Mean Rating of Early Experiences in Program, by Employment Type



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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Note: Scale ranges from 1 = very negative to 5 = very positive.

The sense of belonging reported by artist survey respondents varied by employment type. A higher share of artists employed directly by organizations reported having an excellent sense of belonging compared to those employed by Tribeworks (table 10). Higher shares of those employed by Tribeworks reported a fair, poor, good, or very good sense of belonging.

TABLE 10

**Sense of Belonging, Disaggregated by Employment Type**

| <b>Rating</b>        | <b>Sense of belonging among respondents directly employed by partner organization</b> | <b>Sense of belonging among respondents employed by Tribeworks</b> |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Excellent            | 40%   | 23%  |
| Good or very good    | 37%   | 47%  |
| Fair or poor         | 21%   | 30%  |
| Prefer not to answer | 2%  | 0%   |

Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

## Artists' Future Plans

The survey asked artists about their future plans after the program ended. At the time of the survey and shortly before the program ended (May 24). Over half (56 percent) of the artists who responded to the survey planned to work short-term contracts or gig work once the program ended. Seeking to continue working at their current organization (32 percent), as well as seeking similar funding opportunities (45 percent), were also common responses. A sense of uncertainty prevailed, as half the respondents (49 percent) also indicated they were not sure about their plans.

Thoughts shared by artists in focus groups provided context for the survey results. A few artists said they planned to keep working with the partner organization, with one artist sharing that they and their fellow AEP artist colleagues would need to “fundraise to keep our jobs.” Several artists talked about applying for grants and fellowships, both individually and in some cases collectively with other artists. Some participants commented that they had never applied for a grant before and that being in the AEP encouraged them to seek out funding for their art. Another notable theme was that the artists saw new and more expansive possibilities for what their paid roles could be. As one artist shared, “This grant has ruined me for other jobs, and I’m at a loss/[in] denial.” Another commented that being in the program had impacted “the value I put on myself as an artist. I feel established and no sense of guilt for being able to add a dollar sign to what I do because of this program.” One artist described planning to apply for unemployment. Another artist, hearing that, expressed surprise about being eligible. Two artists said they planned to apply for “9–5” jobs.

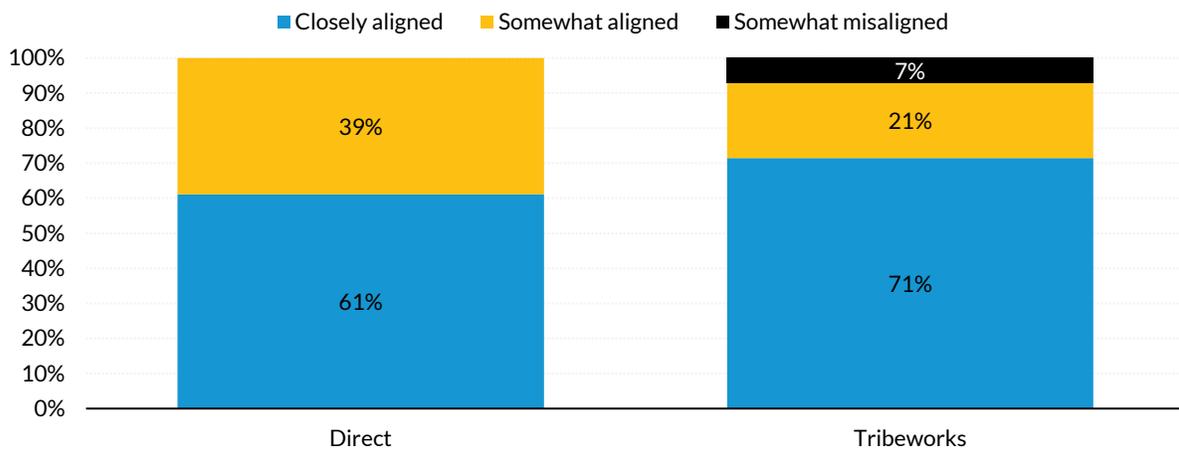
# Impact on Organizations

This section focuses on the AEP working relationships between organizations and artists from the organization’s perspective, from setting initial expectations, to managing relationships, to reflections on the AEP’s impact and thoughts on future plans. While response patterns differed somewhat based on the employment model, for the most part organizations reported being aligned with partnering artists. The clearest divergence was in integration, where a higher share of organizations employing artists directly reported being closely integrated with their artists than did organizations where the artist was employed by Tribeworks. This is in line with a finding from our artists survey, where a higher share of those hired directly by the partner organization rated their sense of belonging with their partner organization as excellent (see table 10 above and figure 22 discussed further in this section).

## Alignment and Expectations

Of the 34 responding organizations, 32 had worked with artists before the AEP. Only 4 of those instances were through W2 employment, meaning the rest were gig, contract, or volunteer work. Nevertheless, well over half organizations using direct employment and using Tribeworks reported close alignment on initial expectations (figure 20).

**FIGURE 20**  
**How Aligned Were Overall Expectations between the Artist(s) and Your Organization at the Start of the Engagement?**



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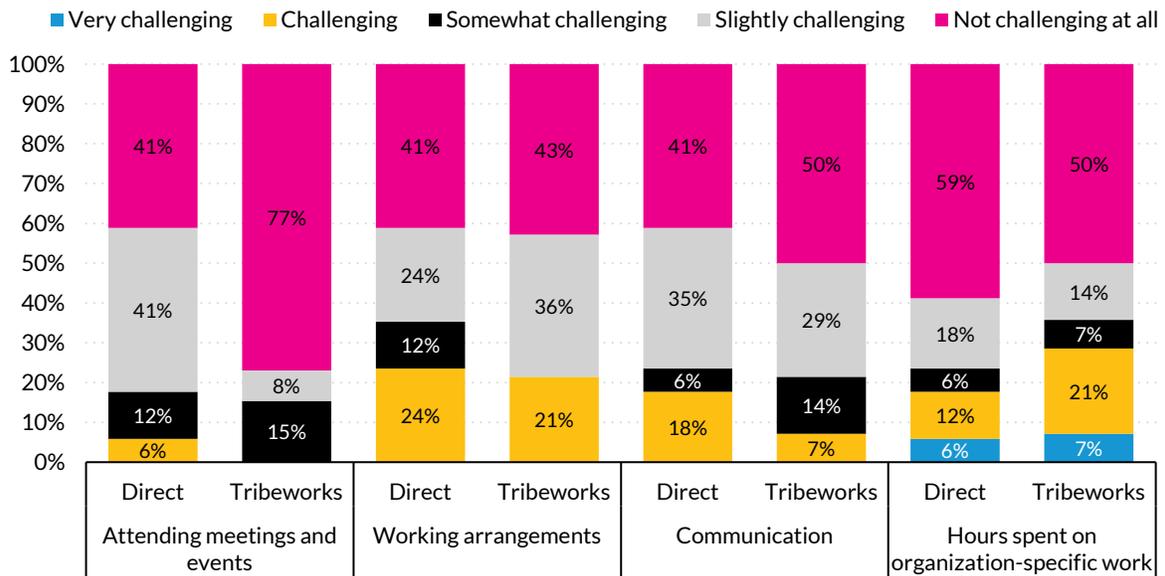
Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP organizational partner survey.

Notes: Sums of each category might not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Reaching an agreement with their artists on working arrangements and hours spent on organization versus personal work was sometimes difficult for organizations (figure 21). Almost half of the organizations reported that “hours spent on organization-specific work” was some amount of challenging, compared to not challenging at all.

**FIGURE 21**

**On a Scale of 1–5 with 1 Being *Not Challenging at All* to 5 Being *Very Challenging*, How Challenging Was Coming to Agreement with Artists on Organizational Expectations?**



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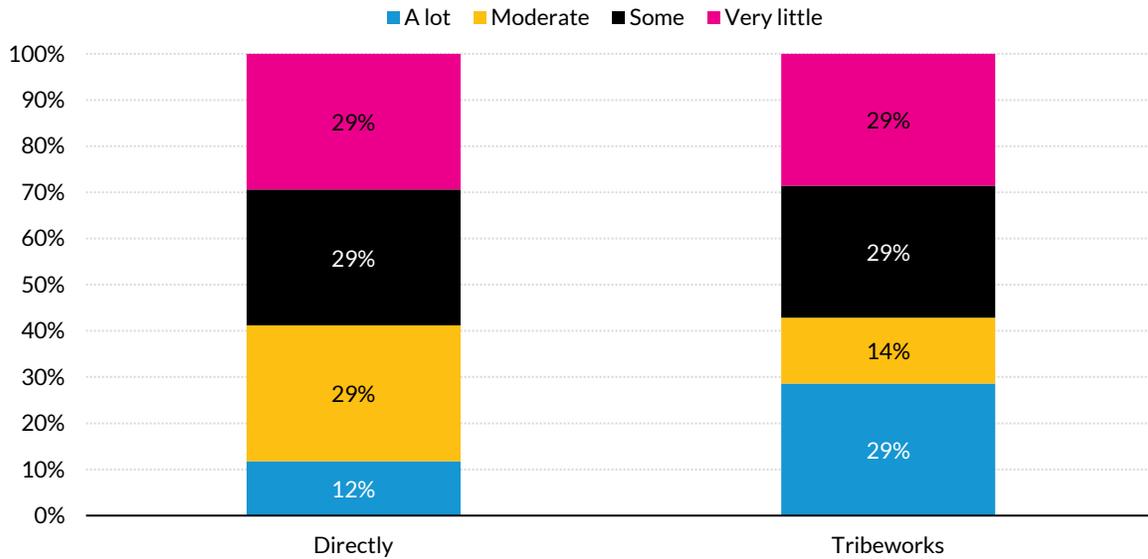
**Source:** Urban Institute CRNY AEP organizational partner survey.

**Notes:** Sums of each category might not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

A higher share of organizations using Tribeworks reported that managing administrative challenges during the program took a lot of effort than did organizations directly employing artists (figure 22). About two-thirds of organizations, both direct or Tribeworks, noted that these challenges took “some” or “very little” effort. In one case, a respondent noted that they would hire another manager or supervisor for any large grants they take up in the future given that supervision for artists in the program took “50 percent of a staff’s time weekly.” This points to the importance of organizational capacity: even with Tribeworks taking on benefits provision and other tasks related to human resources, the impact of managing the partnerships would naturally be larger on these organizations and their smaller staffs.

FIGURE 22

How Much Effort Was Required to Manage Administrative Challenges around the Program?



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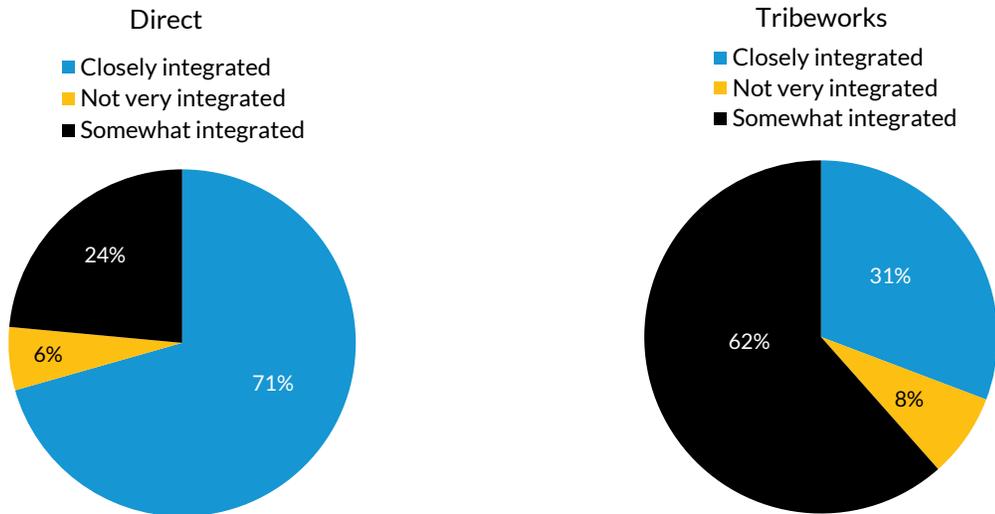
Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP organizational partner survey.

Notes: Sums of each category might not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

As seen in figure 23, organizations employing artists directly reported relatively closer integration into the organization's activities than those using Tribeworks. Organizations of both types, however, reported similar levels of close alignment on mission and culture, with direct employment leading by just 9 percent (data not shown).

FIGURE 23

Overall, How Closely Do You Feel the Artist(s) You Work with Have Been Integrated into Your Organization's Activities?



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP organizational partner survey.

## Impact on Organizations' Practices, Approaches, and Systems

Surveyed organizations described several ways in which the AEP impacted their practices, approaches, and systems. For example, one organization decided to keep the salary range, and equivalent hourly pay, for artists it continues to work with. Additionally, it is increasing the salary floor for all full-time staff to \$65,000 to match that of the program.

Other organizations improved their disability accommodations as a direct result of working with artists with disabilities. This experience, an employer explained, made them more aware of and sensitive to accessibility issues for their staff and community members.

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*The artists have had a vastly positive impact on the organization, bringing their own unique perspectives and skill sets to the table to advocate for improvement in the areas of artist compensation; disability accommodations for artists, audiences, and staff; and community engagement.*

*—Organization representative*

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Participating in the AEP raised issues for others. Issues with low morale and division among staff grew over time. Some organizations attributed this to the flexibility of the program's structure and the willingness of some artists to take advantage. As one organization representative related, "Unfortunately, there were also artists who took advantage of guaranteed employment in a negative way. It caused staff morale issues within the organization." Another stated that the "inability to fire artists created a culture of impunity and made organizations totally beholden to the artists." In such cases, organizations noted that will pay more attention to the planning phase when working with artists in the future and will implement clearer letters of agreement.

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*While we have always worked with artists, this changed the way the same artists were viewed and required the organization to reflect on how we support artist practices and the whole artist. Some of our CRNY artists saw their teaching and artistic practice as one whole, while others segmented, and this forced the administration, including program directors and HR, to rethink training, support, flexible schedules, etc.*

*—Organization representative*

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## Organizational Impact

We asked several questions on how the AEP affected organizational capacity and practice, including how using Tribeworks may have affected the organization's capacity. Forty-six percent of respondents reported that having Tribeworks-employed artists in their organization increased their organization's

capacity (23 percent were not sure; 23 percent reported capacity was unchanged; and 8 percent reported capacity decreased).

A key way the AEP engagement increased capacity was by allowing organizations to offer more programming to the community. As one respondent put it, “The program/projects grew our reach to more schools and libraries that had fiscal barriers to public art programs. This program showed the investment in these types of projects strengthens their communities and is worth the time and funds going forward.”

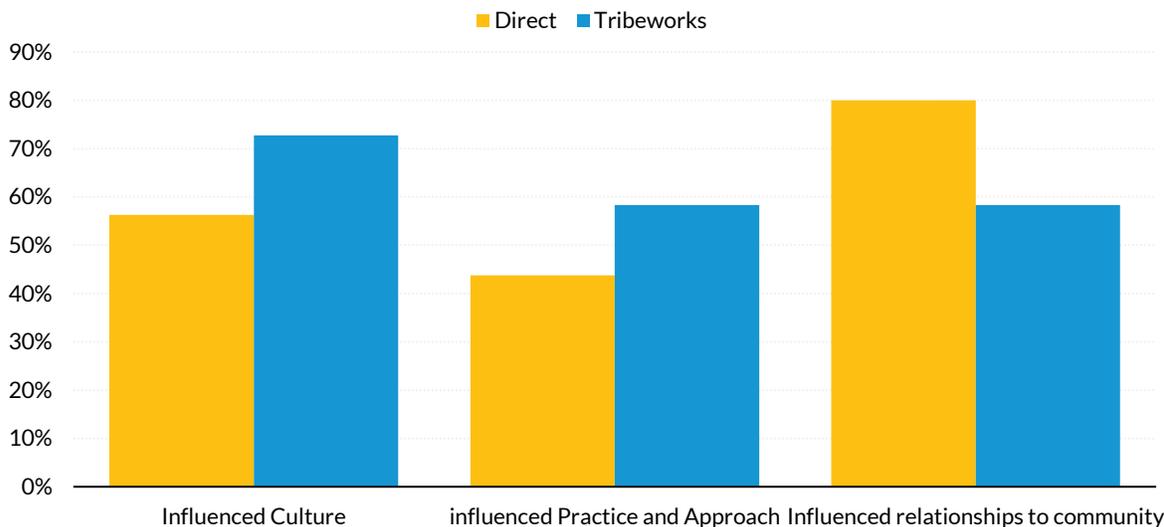
Another respondent noted the community focus of the AEP model could enhance capacity as one that “can support particularly frontline organizations in marginalized communities with tangible capacity-building resources to promote the integration of artists and the creative process in the critical work of healing, empowering, and creating transformative change.” Another noted how the AEP artists both built organizational capacity and influenced the culture: “Our...CRNY artists have been critical anchors in this moment of organizational transition and building post COVID. They have created and nurtured powerful spaces for community healing, creative processing as well as collective visioning. They have also helped to galvanize our arts for social justice model.”

We also examined how the engagement influenced organizations in other ways (figure 24). Organizations that partnered with artists employed by Tribeworks, compared with those that employed artists directly, reported the engagement influenced their culture (73 and 56 percent, respectively) and practice (58 and 44 percent, respectively). This finding does follow, because organizations employing artists directly tended to be larger, so the individual effects of AEP artists on an organization overall would be smaller. That said, significant shares of organizations employing artists directly also noted influence. Organizational culture could be affected in multiple ways; one organization responded that “our CRNY artists have modeled, amplified, and enhanced our creative justice approach and cultural organizing practices, which have been critical for the development of new and growing arts collective as well as for our community organizing initiatives.”

A higher share of organizations that employed artists directly, compared to organizations that hired through Tribeworks, noted the relationship influenced their relationships to communities (80 and 58 percent, respectively; figure 24). This finding may be because a higher share of these organizations used the AEP engagement to newly engage with communities or engage in communities in a new way. Although the survey data are not arranged in a way that lets us identify a specific cause, we have details from interviews.

FIGURE 24

Impact of the AEP Engagement on Culture, Practice and Approach, and Community Relationships



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP organizational partner survey.

Several survey respondents noted how the AEP engagement enhanced community relationships. One noted how an artist’s social work lens helped them “to navigate relationships building across demographic difference.” Another noted how the community-based work built stronger relationships: “The community events, gatherings, and health circles that they have facilitated have been critical in strengthening and galvanizing our community relationships and support network as well as broadening our network of...artists.”

## Organizations’ Future Plans

Thirty-one percent of organizational survey respondents who partnered with artists employed by Tribeworks indicated they would definitely use Tribeworks or a similar cooperative again, whereas only 15 percent would not (54 percent were not sure). This response indicates that for at least some organizations, the Tribeworks model, which was a novel model to most organizations, is clearly one they found useful to support their work. More generally, some organizational respondents noted how the AEP engagement encouraged them to look for other deeper engagements with artists going forward: “We would like to seek out more opportunities for artist engagement, particularly ‘artist in residence’ models and funding opportunities for long-term projects.”

# Conclusion

The AEP was conceived and implemented in a time of profound social and economic uncertainty. Although the COVID-19 pandemic represented a break in many ways from what had come before, it also sped up trends that were already happening in the broader employment world and affected artists and their practices in myriad ways: public performances and showings stopped cold, even if it opened up opportunities to work in virtual settings.

The AEP was valuable in testing distinct approaches for supporting artists and their partners, and for doing so in a time of economic uncertainty. Overall, the AEP showed promise in both realms. This report, focused on the employment model, found that the program benefited artists and organizations whether their employment relationship was direct or mediated through Tribeworks. The well-being of artists improved in several realms, and organizations reported various benefits from the relationship.

However, we found some distinctions in how artist-organization relationships developed in the two employment models. Both artists and organizational representatives reflected on the nature of the engagement as employment. By mediating the artist-organization relationship, Tribeworks created formal space between artists and the organizations. From the artist's perspective, this arrangement created autonomy and a more coequal partnership relationship; for organizations, it meant less influence through the loss of a hierarchical employer-employee relationship. While AEP engagements were all conceived as partnerships, an inherent tension existed because expectations persisted concerning what was supposed to happen. In partnerships that went smoothly, artist and organization expectations aligned whether or not there was a direct employment relationship. But in more fraught relationships, authority was muddled. Tribeworks could mediate to an extent, but CRNY's role, in particular, was important in these cases.

These differences are neither good nor bad: on average, the Tribeworks model could be seen as slightly more beneficial for artists and their autonomy, whereas direct employment might be more beneficial for organizations, especially in cases in which expectations were not fully aligned at the start. It also is important to stress that for smaller organizations, it was not a question of choosing between direct employment or using Tribeworks, but between using Tribeworks or not participating at all.

We also need to reiterate that organizations were not randomly assigned to Tribeworks or direct employment. Size, in particular, could affect a model's impact. To take one example, if larger organizations were more likely to have set processes and procedures, but also more likely to employ artists directly, tensions could arise because these organizations had more well-defined expectations

for how these relationships should work: in other words, they were more likely to expect artists to act like employees. In contrast, organizations that worked with Tribeworks artists were smaller and less likely to have the well-defined processes and expectations of a larger organization. As survey results showed, organizations that hired through Tribeworks nearly all had worked with artists before, and many considered themselves to be arts- or culture-based organizations. While this was also the case for most of the directly employing organizations, for a larger share of these, working with artists and doing arts-based work was more novel.

Beyond the employment model, we found some indication that the number of artist relationships may have had an effect. Partnerships with multiple artists had to manage more complicated relationships, and some reported a mix of success in getting everybody on the same page. In some ways, this result may simply reflect the law of averages (more relationships mean more opportunities for good—or challenging—relationships), but it also meant that programs with multiple artists had more complicated management needs: adding an additional artist required not just adding that artist in isolation, but in coordination with other artists.

## Takeaways for Practice

CRNY offers numerous programmatic lessons for future artist employment programs and for employment programs more generally. As discussed above, the CRNY model was carefully conceived and implemented in a very short time in the midst of ongoing disruptions to society and the economy caused by COVID-19. Most central to the focus of this study is the thought that went into the nature of the collaborative relationship between artists and organizations. For both artists directly employed by their partnering organizations and those employed by Tribeworks, the openness of this relationship as conceived has several ramifications.

### Time-limited Engagements

Resources are finite, so a time-limited pilot or emergency program model has a limited window to meet its goals. Consequently, it has profound impacts on participants. For the AEP, this limitation affected both artists and organizations. To soften the effects of a time-limited program, program developers can

- build expectations from the beginning,
- consider building in a clear onboarding period focused on relationship building and with lower expectations (for both artists and organizations) for activities, and

- support offboarding and access to post-program services (such as unemployment).

## Equity and Inclusion

Equity and inclusion were foundational to how CRNY conceived of and implemented the AEP, and the think tank process that informed the AEP's design was key for identifying priorities. Even the employment model itself was part of this conception, as it reflected a push for greater inclusion of smaller organizations with fewer resources. Program developers who wish to build equity and inclusion into their programs from the outset can consider these points:

- Employ a consultative process in the planning stages to identify and engage with key groups of interest.
- Track characteristics of successful and unsuccessful applicants, but also nonapplicants to the extent possible, to understand who the application process may benefit or miss entirely.
- Ensure quality of health insurance is consistent and that those with health conditions and/or families have quality care.
- Consider salary structure and how it reflects cost of living.

## Collaboration

Openness and flexibility were core to both employment models, and generally worked well, but when they did not work well, clearly defined pathways for mediation were critical. CRNY recognized this problem and implemented supports. Clearly mapping outlines and expectations was done eventually, but doing so from the outset would have helped artists and organizations get on the same page more quickly. There was also some indication that the number of people participating in the relationship was as important a factor in shaping artist-organization relationships: more people involved simply requires more capacity and relationship work. Several techniques will aid collaboration:

- Balance flexibility and openness with guidance. CRNY was conceived as open-ended, but it is not surprising that some elements of flexibility led to confusion in how to handle disagreements.
- Encourage organizations with multiple artist partners to establish how they will manage those relationships and ensure an equitable distribution of work.

- Allow as much cross-talk and information sharing as possible between artists and organizations. This communication will help establish and maintain a clear understanding on what is and is not allowed in the program. For example, CRNY allowed artists to continue to participate in gig work or outside employment, which helped artists grow and maintain professional relationships and networks and manage expenses. However, a few artists got the message that outside employment was not allowed. Clear communication and guidelines with artists, Tribeworks, and organizations would have helped prevent this misunderstanding.
- Recognize that organizations with the least experience working with artists have the most to potentially gain from the experience: a realization of how arts and cultural work could support their community work.

## Takeaways for Policy

As we highlight some key points related to policy, we acknowledge the report released by the CRNY artist employment working group, made up of program participants, researchers, and advocates to identify recommendations (Creatives Rebuild New York 2024). Their recommendations included supporting working cooperatives (such as Tribeworks) and encouraging portable benefits legislation that would allow independent workers insurance protections that are usually offered only through full-time employment. The working group also proposed an artist and cultural workers' bill of rights that would create a set of standards to guide artists and organizations in their collaborations and identified the value of supporting more career pathways for artists.

Perhaps the key policy-relevant theme of the entire AEP project is how to more fairly treat artists and cultural workers as workers. Such treatment means understanding artists within the larger context of workforce policy and specifically how to provide for nontraditional workers. In the US benefits and stability are reserved for people with traditional W2 employment. Identifying policies that can support nontraditional workers to receive those benefits would go a long way to improving their well-being and ability to continue in their work. An equitable distribution of employment benefits would require implementing policies like portable benefits, supporting organizations such as Tribeworks that can manage and provide portable benefits, and identifying how to mitigate cliff effects facing workers with variable incomes. It would also mean extending wage and hour, antidiscrimination, and health and safety laws to independent contractors, including those in unemployment insurance and paid leave programs (Yang et al. 2021).

As the AEP has shown, cooperative models are not just important for workers but can also help organizations that otherwise would not have the capacity to offer employment benefits to partner with artists. Although our research found that the limited nature of the health insurance plans offered by Tribeworks created issues for some participants, these issues reflect not problems with the model and with Tribeworks as an organization, but with the relative purchasing power on the insurance market from a small group. Strengthening cooperative models could allay some of these issues.

Another key policy theme is how to better treat artists as workers. The bill of rights advocated by the CRNY working group is one way to identify the issues, but it also means linking artists more clearly and broadly into discussions of workforce development.<sup>21</sup> Identifying the economic and social value of arts workers in communities and economies (and better defining and classifying artists as workers) has not been the focus of this study, but our research identified various ways that the AEP provided pathways to help organizations see the concrete value artists provided to their work and institutional goals. For artists, the AEP provided stability for two years, but its longer-term impact is still being decided.

Finally, there is the ongoing question about how to provide stability in unstable times. COVID-19 obviously created profound challenges for society, but it also led to a significant influx of resources and supports to help people and communities. As those supports have ebbed, uncertainty is again increasing.<sup>22</sup> Nonprofits are again struggling with the loss of funding, and many may not survive. Those that do need to be creative. The AEP, in that sense, helped organizations identify a tool for their toolkit, but more work must be done to ensure that tool is as easy to use as possible.

## Takeaways for Research

This project aligns with the recommendations by the CRNY working group, which highlight the value in building a research and policy center focusing on artists and cultural workers. Building a coherent center or clearinghouse for this work would help identify and assess challenges, opportunities, and innovations in the field more efficiently. It may also help identify linkages between programs like the AEP and the growing amount of research focused on guaranteed income programs. The AEP is obviously distinct, but it exists within a broader research engagement with new employment models that are intended to build a more equitable workforce. This evolving focus means the AEP can help inform learnings for the broader field, and the broader field can help inform how to think about these sorts of artist employment models more specifically.

An important takeaway of this study—and one stressed by participants—is the time horizon of the impact of this type of initiative. Many focus group participants wished the program had been longer, but there was also an appetite to understand its longer-term impact. As this report is released, it is only five months after the end of the AEP. A longer-term assessment of where artists and organizations are after one year, or five years and beyond, would be valuable for the field.

Additional research into cooperative models to identify successes, challenges, and opportunities to help make these sorts of models more effective and easier to use would also be extremely beneficial for the field.

## Looking Forward

The AEP had a range of effects on artists as employees and organizations as employers. As per CRNY's goal, it centered the role of the artist in these engagements. Our research found that this approach worked across a range of partnership types, regardless of whether artists were employed directly or via Tribeworks. There were challenges, particularly related to building sustainable working relationships and, for some, obtaining needed benefits. Overall, as a field-building exercise the AEP was a thoughtful intervention that highlighted how artists could work with organizations to support communities in a way that respected artistic autonomy and supported organizational capacity.

# Appendix A. Additional Findings on AEP Artists

## Artist Survey Respondent Composition

Table A.1 details the racial and ethnic composition of survey respondents by employment type. Compared to data reported by CRNY about overall initial AEP participation, the survey sample consists of a higher percentage of Asian, Latinx, and white respondents and a somewhat smaller share of Black respondents and multiracial respondents. Sixteen respondents (16 percent) indicated they were immigrants to the US.

**TABLE A.1**  
**Racial Breakdown of Survey Respondents by Employment Type**

| Race/ethnicity            | Employed by Tribeworks | Employed directly by an organization | All respondents |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| AAPI                      | 4                      | 4                                    | 8               |
| Black/African American    | 11                     | 10                                   | 21              |
| Latinx/Hispanic, any race | 12                     | 11                                   | 23              |
| Multiracial               | 1                      | 1                                    | 2               |
| Native American           | 3                      | 7                                    | 10              |
| White                     | 13                     | 15                                   | 28              |
| Total                     | 44                     | 48                                   | 92              |

**Source:** Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

**Notes:** AAPI = Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian. Multiracial refers to respondents who selected more than one racial category (excluding the Latinx/Hispanic category). Hispanic/Latinx refers to respondents who selected that category regardless of which racial group they selected. All other categories refer to people who only selected that category. Six respondents did not provide a response about their race/ethnicity.

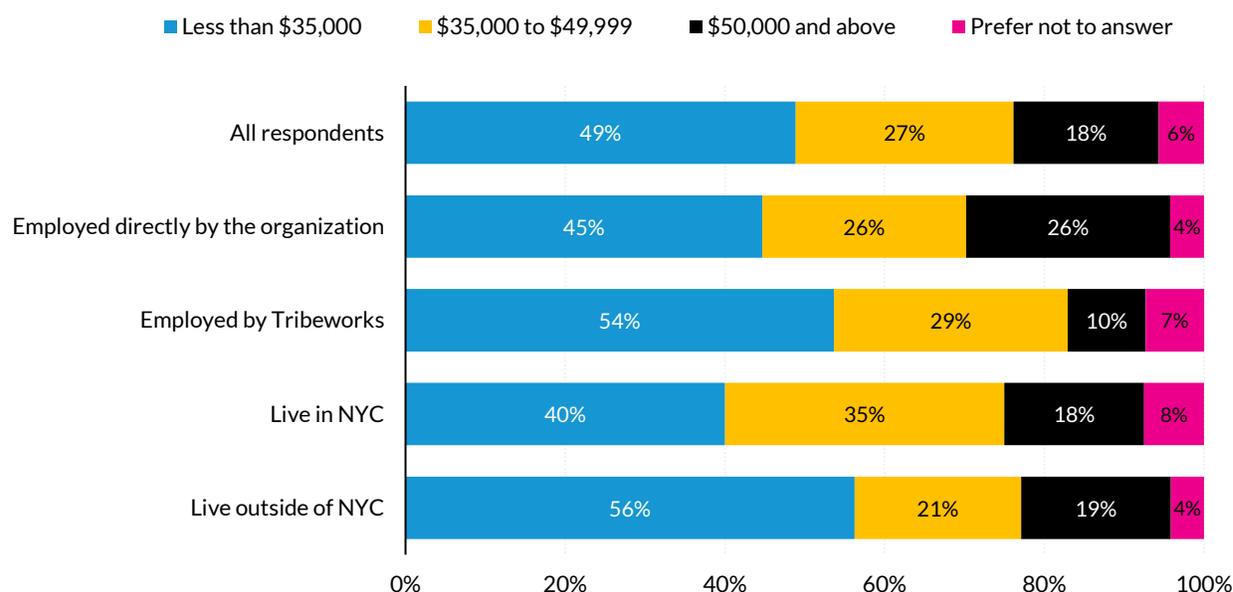
Thirty-three respondents (34 percent) identified as men, 50 (51 percent) identified as women, and 10 (11 percent) identified as nonbinary or two-spirit or made more than one selection.<sup>23</sup> Compared to CRNY data on initial participation in the program overall, there were fewer respondents who identified as men and somewhat more as women. In addition, 12 people (12 percent) responded affirmatively to having a disability or identifying as disabled. The two most common places where respondents lived were in NYC (47 percent) and western New York (17 percent), similar to initial program figures reported by CRNY (51 and 14 percent, respectively).

## Income in 2021 Prior to AEP

The share of artist survey respondents making wages in 2021 prior to the start of the AEP below \$35,000 was most pronounced among artists who lived outside of NYC and those who ended up being employed by Tribeworks. Furthermore, three-quarters of all respondents (76 percent) reported incomes below \$50,000 in 2021 (figure A.1).

FIGURE A.1

### Individual Wage Income before AEP in 2021, Disaggregated by Geography and Employment Type



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Source: Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.

Note: Sums might not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## Net Worth

As noted in this report, we asked artists who took the survey about their assets and net worth. We obtained net worth estimates by subtracting total debt values from total asset values.<sup>24</sup> Net worth values move in opposite directions for white respondents and respondents of color. Median net worth values for white respondents for both 2021 and 2023 were positive and high, at \$123,000 and \$108,750, respectively (table A.2). Among respondents of color, however, median net worth was negative, standing at -\$32,500 in 2021 and -\$13,500 in 2023. This trend of sharp gaps in net worth between white and BIPOC respondents was also evident at other points of their distributions, such as

at the mean and first and third quartiles. In disaggregating by employment type, median net worth hovered around \$0 for both groups in 2023, although the median value was negative for those employed by Tribeworks in 2023.

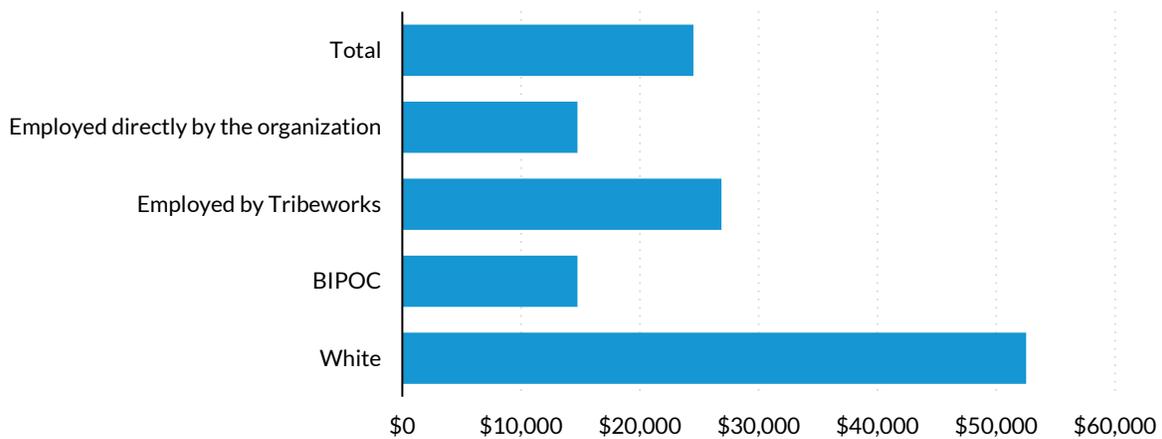
**TABLE A.2**  
**Median Net Worth of AEP Artists in 2021 and 2023**

| Year | White     | BIPOC     | Employed by Tribeworks | Employed directly by the organization | Total     |
|------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 2021 | \$123,000 | -\$32,500 | -\$16,350              | \$0                                   | -\$10,000 |
| 2023 | \$108,750 | -\$13,500 | -\$2,000               | \$4,000                               | \$0       |

**Source:** Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.  
**Note:** BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

The change in reported net worth between 2021 and 2023 suggests that many who responded had higher relative net worth in 2023 than in 2021, with a positive increase of \$24,500 at the median in looking across respondents who had debts and assets in both years. White respondents had the biggest increase in median net worth, at \$52,500, and for respondents of color, the increase was \$14,750 (figure A.2).

**FIGURE A.2**  
**Median Change in Net Worth**



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**Source:** Urban Institute CRNY AEP artist survey.  
**Note:** BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “Trends in Arts and Cultural Production: 2021–2022,” Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, accessed November 16, 2024, <https://apps.bea.gov/data/special-topics/arts-and-culture/summary-sheets/Arts%20-%20New%20York.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> We received 132 responses and eliminated responses in which the respondent did not consent to take the survey (17 responses) or did not finish the survey (17 responses). Based on the survey question at which they stopped responding, most of the respondents in the latter group did not see significant chunks of the survey. Most survey questions were optional. All respondents had been in the AEP. One respondent was no longer in the CRNY AEP program at the time of completing the survey, and 7 had switched partner organizations relative to when they started the program.
- <sup>3</sup> “Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022,” Bureau of Economic Analysis, March 25, 2024, <https://www.bea.gov/news/2024/arts-and-cultural-production-satellite-account-us-and-states-2022>.
- <sup>4</sup> “Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, U.S.,” Bureau of Economic Analysis.
- <sup>5</sup> North American Industry Classification System, [https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/naics2\\_71.htm](https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/naics2_71.htm).
- <sup>6</sup> “Art/Work: How the Government-Funded CETA Jobs Program Put Artists to Work,” City Lore and Artists Alliance, Inc., 2022, [https://citylore.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ArtWork\\_Publication\\_FINAL.pdf](https://citylore.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ArtWork_Publication_FINAL.pdf).
- <sup>7</sup> Extensive archival materials on the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act are available at “CCF CETA Artists Project: New York City 1978-80” (<https://ceta-arts.com/NYC.html>).
- <sup>8</sup> “International Data on Government Spending on the Arts,” National Endowment for the Arts, January 2000, <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/74.pdf>.
- <sup>9</sup> National Endowment for the Arts programs focused on individual artists include Literature Fellowships, Jazz Masters Fellowships, and National Heritage Fellowships.
- <sup>10</sup> “National Endowment for the Arts on COVID-19,” National Endowment for the Arts, accessed October 1, 2024, <https://www.arts.gov/about/nea-on-covid-19>.
- <sup>11</sup> “State Arts Agency Grant Making Facts: Individual Artists,” National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2024, [https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa\\_research/state-arts-agency-grant-making-facts-individual-artists/](https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/state-arts-agency-grant-making-facts-individual-artists/).
- <sup>12</sup> Other sources of income selected included 13 percent receiving an emergency grant, 11 percent receiving assistance from family or personal sources, and 4 percent receiving assistance from mutual aid or other grassroots contributions.
- <sup>13</sup> Throughout this report, we use the terms *people of color* and *BIPOC* interchangeably. We use these terms to refer to respondents who selected one of the following race/ethnicity categories: Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian; Black or African American; Latinx/Hispanic of any race; or Indigenous American, First Nation, or Alaska Native. According to CRNY data, there was just one artist who identified as Arab or Middle Eastern, and in our survey no respondents selected this identity. Due to data limitations from small sample sizes and to allow for disaggregation across more topic areas, we combined these racial categories into one.
- <sup>14</sup> We omitted from our calculations for both the 2021 and 2023 wage income numbers nine respondents who reported 2023 wage income below \$50,000. All nine respondents indicated still being a part of the AEP at the time of completing the survey, which meant their salary from CRNY was set at \$65,000.
- <sup>15</sup> Though we do not present those results here due to small sample sizes, a higher share of women reported lower incomes in 2021 and 2023 relative to men.

- <sup>16</sup> Respondents were asked whether they hold certain asset and debt classes individually, and for each that they selected, they were asked to provide the estimated value of the asset or debt. The statistics presented are restricted to respondents who provided a value in response to questions asking for the value of any assets or debts they had selected (such as checking and saving accounts or a home among assets, and student loans and mortgages among debts). Thus, when considering the results on assets, for example, we are only looking at median asset holdings among people who both indicated owning assets and provided values.
- <sup>17</sup> Two survey respondents, through write-in responses, said they declined CRNY health insurance coverage because they had Medicaid. It is unclear whether they were able to maintain Medicaid coverage. We noted above that some artists said they lost Medicaid coverage by participating in the program due to their increased income.
- <sup>18</sup> We omitted the results for artists who indicated working in organizations with 50 or more employers due to small sample sizes.
- <sup>19</sup> Lydia Saad, “Americans Sour on U.S. Healthcare Quality,” Gallup, January 19, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/468176/americans-sour-healthcare-quality.aspx>.
- <sup>20</sup> See Lydia Saad, “Americans Sour on U.S. Healthcare Quality,” Gallup, January 19, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/468176/americans-sour-healthcare-quality.aspx>.
- <sup>21</sup> For policy-relevant identifying themes in this space see, for example, Artplace 2020: 10 Years, “Workforce Development (<https://www.artplaceamerica.org/workforce-development>); and Grantmakers in the Arts, “The Arts and Workforce Development” (<https://www.giarts.org/article/arts-and-workforce-development>).
- <sup>22</sup> COVID-19 is just one example of this dynamic. The influx of resources into communities in the wake of disasters is another, when the linkage between short-term supports and longer-term capacity building is uncertain. See, for example, Treskon and Morales-Burnett (2023).
- <sup>23</sup> Four respondents (4 percent) selected not to provide a response to the question asking about their gender identity or skipped the question.
- <sup>24</sup> We restricted our calculations of change in net worth to respondents who reported at least one nonmissing value for all four categories of assets and debts in 2021 and 2023. Calculations for net worth values for 2021 or 2023 were based on respondents who provided at least one nonmissing value for both asset and debt categories for that year. Earlier figures presented separately for assets or debts were based on respondents who reported at least one nonmissing value for a debt or asset variable for the year in question.

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