

ONLINE AUDIENCES FOR ARTS PROGRAMMING: A SURVEY OF VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION AMID COVID-19

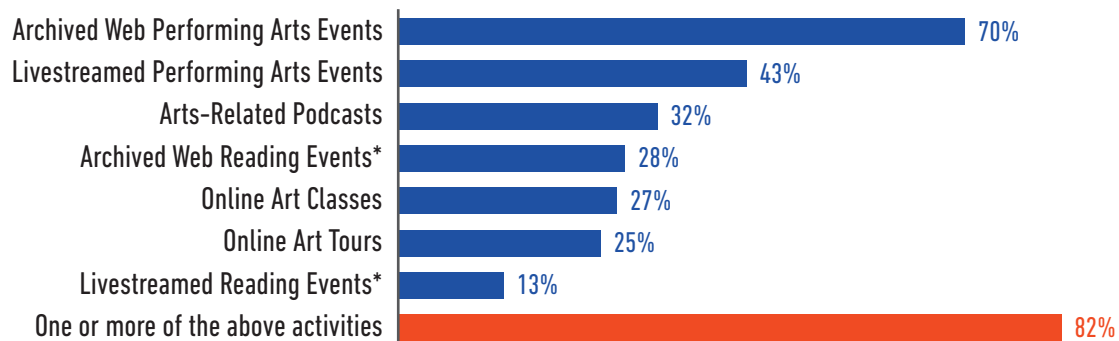
A NEA RESEARCH BRIEF

This research brief can be read as a companion to *Arts Participation Patterns in 2022*. That report is based on the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), which the NEA conducts regularly with the U.S. Census Bureau. Unlike *Arts Participation Patterns in 2022*, the present brief discusses data from the 2022 General Social Survey (GSS), administered by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The two national surveys have some essential differences, but both instruments afford an understanding of whether and how different demographic subgroups participated in the arts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supported by the NEA in partnership with the U.S. National Science Foundation, the 2022 GSS Arts Module explicitly references the COVID-19 pandemic by asking respondents to reflect on their arts experiences during the first year of the pandemic (from March 2020 to March 2021) and to report whether, in the most recent 12-month period, they participated at a higher, lower, or identical rate. The GSS Arts Module also asked respondents to report whether they observed livestreamed arts events and/or archived online arts events.

Because most of the technology questions are unique to the GSS Arts Module, they form the focus for this brief. In addition to reporting results for the entire GSS Arts Module survey population, the brief considers how responses varied by demographic subgroup. But first, directly below are the **percentages of respondents (U.S. adults aged 18 and older) who reported using technology in various ways to participate in arts events in 2022.**

Figure 1: Percentage of Survey Respondents Who Participated in Arts Events on Digital Platforms: 2022



*Reading events captured in this question-item included poetry, book-reading, or storytelling events.

As shown above, the share of 2022 GSS Arts Module respondents who engaged with the performing arts through an archived web event (70 percent) is considerably larger than the share who watched or listened to a livestreamed performance (43 percent). This pattern is also observed in the difference between the share of adults who engaged in a web-archived literary or storytelling event (28 percent), versus those who engaged in such events via livestream (13 percent). Nearly a third of survey respondents (32 percent) listened to an arts-related podcast, while roughly a quarter (27 percent and 25 percent, respectively) took an online arts class or lesson (which may have included watching instructional videos) or toured an online art museum, gallery, or exhibit.

Discussion of Demographic Differences¹

Gender

Overall, women² reported a slightly higher percentage (85 percent) of engaging with any type of digital arts activity, compared to men (80 percent). However, this trend was not consistent across all activities. While women reported a higher rate of attending in-person performing arts events (52 percent, compared to 46 percent of men), men reported a higher rate of viewing archived livestreamed performances: 73 percent, versus 68 percent of women. For reading activities, both digital and non-digital, women reported higher rates than men. Sixty-eight percent of female respondents reported reading fiction or poetry, compared to 48 percent of men; more women also reported engaging with archived livestream reading events (33 percent, compared to 22 percent). Finally, women attended online classes at a higher rate, 32 percent—compared to 21 percent of men—and 38 percent of women listened to arts podcasts, versus 26 percent of men.

Age

Most respondents across all age groups reported doing one or more digital arts activity in the last year. However, younger adults tended to report higher rates of engaging with digital arts activities—95 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds, compared to 68 percent of people aged 75 and older.

For the most part, individual arts activities followed the same trend. For instance, younger adults had higher rates of watching or listening to archived livestreamed performing arts events compared to older adults. Seventy-eight percent of younger adults (18- to 24-year-olds) reported watching archived events, while just under 60 percent of adults aged 65 or older reported doing this activity. The rate of respondents who listened to arts podcasts diminished with age—fewer older respondents engaged with the arts through this type of media.

Virtual art exhibits and tours were an exception to this trend. Ten percent of 18- to 24-year-olds reported attending online art exhibits or visual arts tours, while 36 percent of 45- to 54-year-olds reported doing so.

¹ Demographic differences for this survey population should be viewed with caution. See “About the GSS and the Arts Module,” p. 9.

² The 2022 GSS has two questions on sex—one asks for respondents’ sex at birth (sexbirth) and one asks for the respondents’ current sex (sexnow). This brief references the “sexnow” variable. For more information, please review the GSS 2022 Codebook: [https://gss.norc.org/Documents/codebook/GSS%202022%20Codebook.pdf](https://gss.norc.ohio-state.edu/documents/codebook/GSS%202022%20Codebook.pdf).

Table 1: During the last 12 months, did you listen to podcasts about music, theater, or dance, or about visual arts or film, or about books or literature?

Age	Yes	No
18-24	41%	59%
25-34	46%	54%
35-44	39%	61%
45-54	28%	72%
55-64	22%	78%
65-74	23%	77%
75+	17%	83%
Total	32%	68%

Race/Ethnicity

Ninety-one percent of non-Hispanic Black/African American³ and other non-Hispanic and non-White respondents, as well as 86 percent of Hispanic respondents, reported engaging with digital arts content at least once in the last year, while 79 percent of non-Hispanic White⁴ respondents reported doing so. This trend was consistent across many digital arts activities. Of the 43 percent of total respondents who viewed livestreamed performing arts events, 65 percent were Black/African American and 45 percent were Hispanic. Only 39 percent of White respondents reported watching livestreamed events.

This trend was mirrored by the different shares of racial/ethnic groups who watched or listened to *archived* livestreamed performing-arts events. Seventy percent of all respondents watched or listened to an *archived* event in the last year. Again, Black/African American respondents viewed these events at a much higher rate (82 percent) than did White respondents (65 percent). Additionally, 74 percent of Hispanic respondents reported viewing archived performing arts events. In contrast, the trend was reversed for in-person events: 52 percent of White respondents reported attending in-person performing arts events, versus 33 percent of Black/African American respondents.

Engagement with livestreamed reading events, archived or not, followed a similar pattern to virtual performing arts events, in terms of racial/ethnic group participation. Black/African American respondents had a comparably higher rate (30 percent, versus 13 percent of all respondents) of viewing livestreamed reading events. Fifty-nine percent of Black/African American respondents watched or listened to an *archived* livestreamed reading event, compared to 28 percent of all respondents.

The same trend emerged for listening to arts-related podcasts—about 32 percent of all respondents reported doing this activity, including 52 percent of Black/African American respondents. Also, while just over one-quarter (27 percent) of respondents attended online classes that involved creating or performing art, Black/African American respondents had a higher rate of attending online classes than did White respondents: 49 percent, compared to 25 percent.

³ All references to Black/African American respondents in this brief exclude Hispanic populations.

⁴ All references to White respondents in this brief exclude Hispanic populations.

Table 2: During the last 12 months, did you watch or listen to an archived web event featuring a music, theater, or dance performance? This may have included video or audio clips on, for example, YouTube, an organization’s website, or a social media account.

Race/Ethnicity	Yes	No
Black/African American, non-Hispanic	82%	18%
Hispanic	74%	27%
Other Race/Ethnicity, non-Hispanic	90%	10%
White, non-Hispanic	65%	35%
Total	70%	30%

Education Level

While respondents from all educational backgrounds reported strong engagement with digital arts activities, those with graduate degrees reported the highest rate (90 percent), and those with less than a high school diploma reported the lowest (77 percent). This trend also held for some individual activities. For instance, respondents with graduate degrees had a higher rate of attending online virtual art tours (44 percent), compared to 25 percent of all respondents.

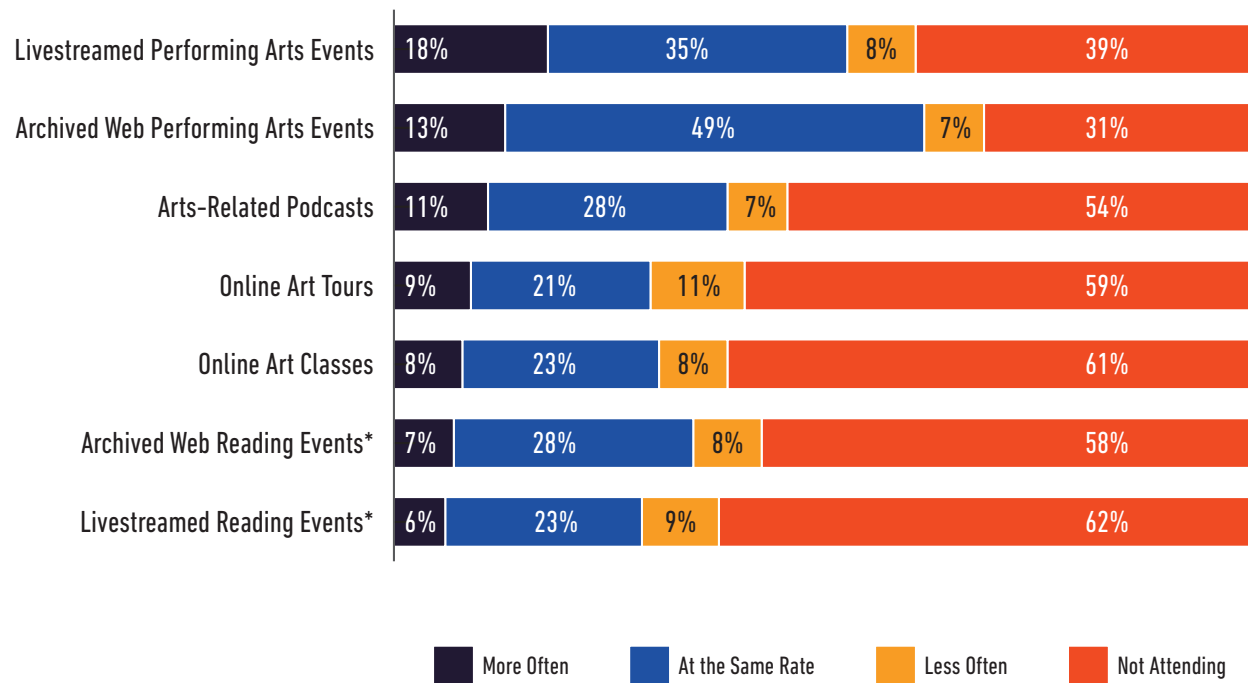
Viewing/listening rates for online performing arts events (archived or livestreamed) or livestreamed reading events showed less variance by education level. However, 48 percent of respondents without a high school diploma reported watching/listening to archived livestreamed reading events, compared to an all-respondent total of 28 percent. Respondents with associate degrees reported a higher rate (46 percent) of attending an online arts class, compared to all other levels of educational attainment. Additionally, 49 percent of respondents without a high school diploma listened to arts podcasts—a higher percentage than reported by those with higher educational attainment.

Perceived Changes in Virtual Arts Participation During the Pandemic

As explained above, the 2022 GSS Arts Module also asked adults whether, in 2022, they participated in virtual arts activities at the same level as in the first year of the pandemic (from March 2020 to March 2021), whether they did so to a greater or lesser degree, or whether they did not participate.

Directly below are the **percentages of respondents who reported doing virtual arts activities, in 2022, at a higher or lower rate than in the first year of the pandemic, at the same rate, or not at all.**

Figure 2: Percentages of Survey Respondents Who Reported Changes in Attending, Viewing, and/or Listening to Virtual Arts Activities Since the COVID-19 Pandemic Began



*Reading events captured in this question-item included poetry, book-reading, or storytelling events.

When asked to consider their present-day activities in relation to the first year of the pandemic, higher shares of respondents reported watching or listening to livestreamed or archived performing arts events more often than they reported participating in other virtual arts activities.

Further, although 29 percent of respondents reported attending in-person performing arts events more often than in the first year of the pandemic, digital consumption of performing arts also did not diminish—53 percent of all respondents reported watching or listening to livestreamed performing arts events either more often or at the same rate, and 62 percent reported watching or listening to archived livestreamed events more often or at the same rate. For many digital activities, roughly equal rates of respondents reported doing activities more often or less often than in the first year of COVID-19.

Discussion of Demographic Differences⁵

Gender

Across all digital activities, a higher share of women than men reported doing one or more activities *more often* than in the first year of COVID-19 (35 percent versus 26 percent). Women also reported, slightly more often than men, doing one or more activities at the same rate as in the first year of COVID-19 (69 percent of women, compared to 65 percent of men). Yet no single activity showed substantial differences between genders.

Age

Higher shares of 18- to 24-year-olds reported engaging in one or more digital activities *more often* than in the first year of the pandemic, compared to older age groups. Also, in comparison to other age groups, 18- to 24-year-olds reported a higher rate (82 percent) of doing one or more arts activities *at the same rate* as in the first year of the pandemic. At the same time, more young adults reported watching or listening to livestreamed performing arts events *less often* than in year one of COVID-19—14 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds and 11 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds—compared to 8 percent of all respondents.

This difference, relative to all respondents, did not apply to consumption of archived livestreamed events. Eight percent of 18- to 24-year-olds and 9 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds reported doing this activity less often, versus 7 percent of all respondents. By contrast, 21 percent of 45- to 54-year-olds reported engaging with livestreamed performing arts events *more often* (versus 13 percent of all respondents).

Another activity that did not mirror the overall trend was participation in online arts classes. Twenty-six percent of 18- to 24-year-olds reported attending such classes *less often* than in year one of the pandemic (compared to 8 percent of all respondents)—a pattern that may have begun when many colleges and universities started returning to in-person courses. Of this same age group, 25 percent said their online arts class attendance remained the same, and 7 percent said they attended online arts classes more often.

Table 3: Compared to the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic [March 2020 to March 2021], are you now taking any online classes or lessons (including watching instructional videos) on creating or performing art—more often, at the same rate, less often, or are you not taking online arts classes at all?⁶

Age	More often	At the same rate	Less often	Not attending
18-24	7%	25%	26%	41%
25-34	13%	25%	5%	57%
35-44	11%	15%	10%	64%
45-54	8%	30%	6%	56%
55-64	5%	19%	4%	72%
65-74	6%	25%	3%	65%
75+	3%	27%	5%	65%
Total	8%	23%	8%	61%

⁵ For limitations regarding demographic subgroup comparisons, see “About the GSS Survey and the Arts Module,” p. 9.

⁶ This may have included music, theater, or dance; creative writing; crafts or visual arts; digital art; or filmmaking or photography done for artistic purposes.

35- to 44-year-olds had divergent responses as to the frequency of viewing online visual arts exhibits or tours. Thirteen percent reported attending those events *more often* than in the first year of the pandemic, and 26 percent reported viewing them *less often*, with only 8 percent viewing at the same rate.

A relatively small share of respondents 55 years or older reported listening to arts podcasts within the last 12 months, and very few respondents in the same age bracket reported listening to podcasts *more often* than in the first year of the pandemic (between 3 and 9 percent). Younger age groups, particularly 18- to 24-year-olds, had a much higher rate (20 percent) of listening to podcasts *more often*.

Race/Ethnicity

Fifty percent of Black/African American, 44 percent of other non-Hispanic and non-White respondents, and 36 percent of Hispanic respondents, reported doing one or more digital activity *more often* than in the first year of the pandemic—compared to 24 percent of White respondents. This trend was consistent for many types of virtual arts activities referenced in the survey.

For example, 38 percent of Black/African American and 24 percent of Hispanic respondents reported consuming more livestreamed performing arts than in the first year of COVID-19 (compared to 14 percent of White respondents). Similarly, 21 percent of Black/African American respondents reported *more often* viewing archived livestreamed performing arts events (compared to 11 percent of White respondents).

Table 4: Compared to the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic [March 2020 to March 2021], are you now going online to watch or listen to live-streamed events featuring music, theater, or dance performances—more often, at the same rate, less often, or do you not watch or listen to live-streamed events at all?

Race/Ethnicity	More often	At the same rate	Less often	Not attending
Black/African American, non-Hispanic	38%	22%	16%	25%
Hispanic	24%	40%	6%	30%
Other Race/Ethnicity, non-Hispanic	8%	47%	3%	41%
White, non-Hispanic	14%	35%	8%	44%
Total	18%	35%	8%	39%

Six percent of White respondents and 25 percent of Black/African American respondents reported attending livestreamed reading events *less often* than in the first year of COVID-19 (versus 9 percent of all respondents). Fifteen percent of Black/African American respondents reported attending archived livestreamed reading events *more often*, while 20 percent reported attending *less often*. By contrast, 5 percent of White respondents reported engaging with archived reading events more often, 5 percent less often. Seven percent of Whites and 27 percent of Black/African American respondents reported viewing online art exhibits or tours *less often* than in year one of the pandemic.

Twenty-three percent of all respondents reported attending online arts classes at the same rate as before, with 8 percent attending more and another 8 percent less often. Eighteen percent of Black/African American respondents attended online classes *more often*, compared to only 6 percent of White respondents. Eleven percent of Black/African Americans and 24 percent of White respondents said their online arts class attendance remained at the same level as in the first year of COVID-19.

Education Level

Those with less than a high school diploma reported more change from the first year of the pandemic—42 percent said they engaged with one or more digital arts activities *more often*, which was the highest for any level of educational attainment (31 percent of all respondents). Twenty-eight percent of respondents with high school diplomas and 28 percent with bachelor's degrees reported engaging in one or more digital arts activities *more often* than in year one of the pandemic. Eighty-two percent of respondents with graduate degrees reported doing one or more digital arts activities *at the same rate*—higher than for any other level of educational attainment.

Conclusions

The 2022 GSS arts module allows a glimpse into virtual arts participation in the U.S., and how behaviors changed over the course of the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. As more and more people were confined to their homes, or chose to stay there, an array of digital arts opportunities—ranging from online museum tours, livestreamed and archived events, and podcasts or online classes—helped to keep U.S. adults engaged with arts and culture.

Indeed, the survey finds that 82 percent of respondents participated in some type of digital arts activity between 2021 and 2022. This figure is roughly comparable to the 75 percent of adults reporting engagement with digital arts activities in the NEA's 2022 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, which admittedly used different question-items and survey methodology. (See *Arts Participation Patterns in 2022*.)

The GSS survey results suggest, moreover, that even as the world started to return to in-person activities, digital engagement remained high. Thirty-one percent of respondents reported doing one or more digital arts activities *more often* than in the first year of the pandemic. Although caution must be applied when reporting subgroup results from the survey (see "About the 2022 GSS and the Arts Module," p. 9), there appears to have been demographic differences in digital arts participation over this time period:

- Over the most recent 12-month period, a slightly larger share of women than men reported engaging with any type of digital arts activity. This trend was consistent across many digital activity types, except for watching or listening to livestreamed performing arts events.
- More women than men reported participating in one or more digital arts activity more often than in the first year of COVID-19.
- 18- to 24-year-olds reported higher rates of engagement with digital arts activities than did older age groups. Higher shares of younger adults than other age groups also reported engaging in one or more digital activities *more often* than in the first year of the pandemic.
- Almost all Black/African American and other non-Hispanic and non-White respondents, and the vast majority of Hispanic respondents, reported engaging with at least one type of digital arts content

over the most recent 12-month period. The same pattern, of non-White and non-Hispanic groups participating at higher rates than Whites, was fairly consistent across many digital arts activity types.

- Roughly half of all Black/African American and other non-Hispanic and non-White respondents, and over a third of Hispanic respondents, reported doing one or more digital activity *more often* than in the first year of the pandemic—compared to about a quarter of White respondents. This trend was consistent across many individual activities in the survey.
- While respondents from all educational backgrounds reported strong engagement with digital arts activities, those with graduate degrees reported the highest rate and those with less than a high school diploma reported the lowest. Nevertheless, adults who had not earned a high school diploma reported more change from the first year of the pandemic: 42 percent said they now engaged with one or more digital arts activities *more often*, which was the highest rate for any education group.

About the 2022 GSS and the Arts Module

Since 1972, the [General Social Survey](#) (GSS) has provided publicly available data regarding adults' behaviors and attitudes, and their opinions on current issues in American society. The GSS is administered by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, with support from the U.S. National Science Foundation. Currently produced biannually, the GSS aims to make high-quality, nationally representative survey data accessible to researchers, students, and policy-makers. Historically, the survey has been administered via in-person interviews. The 2022 main GSS was the first GSS questionnaire administered both online and in-person, in an attempt to bridge the in-person methods used prior to COVID-19 with the online version administered in 2020 (at the height of the pandemic). The 2022 survey was fielded between May 4 and December 20, 2022.

The GSS survey includes a core set of demographic-related questions that have remained consistent over time (main GSS). In addition to the core questions, topical modules are included each survey year, to collect timely information related to social issues and events. Periodically, the National Endowment for the Arts has included a topical module designed to capture information about arts-related attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. While previous arts-and-culture modules were administered via the GSS in 1993, 1998, and 2002, the NEA partnered with NORC to administer arts modules in 2012, 2016, and 2022. The 2022 NEA module was administered through a web-only questionnaire between July and September 2022, as a follow-on study, to 843 people from 1,998 eligible GSS respondents. The statistics reported in this brief are based on a relatively small sample size; results for demographic subgroups, in particular, should be taken with caution. As such, the sample was too small to be able to report values for racial/ethnic groups other than Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black/African American, and non-Hispanic White.

To access the 2022 GSS arts module, visit the [GSS website](#) to view the codebook, download the entire 2022 dataset, or select individual variables using the [Data Explorer](#). In the coming months, instructions and tips on how to work with the arts module specifically will be available as a User's Guide at the NEA's [National Archive of Data on Arts & Culture \(NADAC\)](#).

Questions?

Please contact research@arts.gov