

Comparing the Annual Arts Basic Survey with the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts' Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) is a comprehensive and detailed survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau as part of that agency's household surveys, particularly the Current Population Survey (CPS), which has served as the host survey to the SPPA since 2002.ⁱ

Because the SPPA is conducted on a five-year basis, it is an effective data source for comparing arts participation patterns over relatively long intervals.ⁱⁱ Due to its timetable, however, the SPPA does not permit an understanding of incremental changes in U.S. arts participation trends. And yet, at a time of rapid new developments in demographic and technological variables in arts participation, this understanding is crucial to the ability of arts organizations, funders, and cultural policy-makers to diagnose national issues concerning arts engagement and to respond to them effectively.

The Annual Arts Basic Survey (AABS), also conducted by the Census Bureau as a supplement to the CPS, features selected summary questions drawn from the SPPA. Although less detailed than the larger survey, the AABS provides, for the first time, annual estimates of U.S. participation in the arts.

The annual AABS thus enables more frequent trend analysis than does the SPPA. To date, it has been fielded in 2013, 2014, and 2015. The AABS waves alternate between surveys capturing arts participation through attendance, and surveys denoting participation through personal performance and creation. (The AABS is not conducted in years when the SPPA occurs.)

The first wave of the survey, the 2013 AABS, features data on U.S. adults' reading of literature and their attendance at visual art exhibits, performing arts events, movies, and arts classes or lessons over the 12-month period. The second wave, the 2014 AABS, covers adults' performance or creation of artworks. **Because of space limitations, neither survey wave inquires specifically about arts consumption via electronic media**—undoubtedly an important way that Americans engage with art. Those questions appear instead in the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

The third AABS wave (2015), covered the same set of questions as did the first AABS wave (2013), while the fourth wave (2016) repeated the 2014 AABS questions about personal performance and creation of artworks (although the 2016 data are not yet available to researchers). Because the AABS will not be conducted in 2017—an SPPA year—the next version, in 2018, will mirror the 2014 and 2016 AABS survey instruments.

	Topics Covered by the Annual Arts Basic Survey, by Year				
	2013 AABS	2014 AABS	2015 AABS	2016 AABS (report forthcoming)	2018 AABS (planned)
Literary reading; attendance at visual and/or performing arts events; movie-going; learning through arts classes or lessons	X		X		X
Personal performance or creation of artworks		X		X	

Using the AABS to Conduct Trend Analysis

While corresponding waves of the AABS easily can be compared to obtain a trend analysis of arts participation, valid comparisons between the AABS and SPPA depend, at least in part, on how the questions were worded within the two surveys. For some questions related to arts participation, the AABS and the SPPA share the same wording. For others, the wording differed.

For example, questions featured in the 2015 AABS were worded identically to those from the first AABS. Therefore, the 2013 and 2015 waves can be used to estimate current trends in arts attendance, movie-going, literary reading, and arts classes taken.

The 2012 SPPA also featured questions covering those forms of arts participation. However, the SPPA asked respondents about attendance at detailed performing arts events (e.g., did the respondent attend a jazz concert, did the respondent attend a ballet, etc.), while the AABS asks a composite question about attendance (did the respondent attend a live music, theater, or dance performance).

The SPPA’s Core 2 module, on the other hand, contained a question about attendance at art exhibits that was worded identically to the question found in the AABS.ⁱⁱⁱ Questions about literary reading are worded similarly, but not identically, in the two surveys.

Additionally, questions found in the 2014 AABS, which query personal performance and creation of art, matched the wording of personal participation questions included in the 2012 SPPA.

For this Arts Data Profile, trend analysis is presented from the 2013 and 2015 AABS waves. Trends in personal performance and creation are calculated by comparing estimates from the 2014 AABS with those from the 2012 SPPA.

A word of caution, however: AABS and SPPA questions sharing the same wording, were, nonetheless, positioned differently in the survey. The AABS is a short survey, with a limited number of questions. The SPPA, alternatively, is a longer survey requiring respondents to answer questions contained in one of two core sections, as well as questions in two of the SPPA's four modules.

At the time, it is not known what effect, if any, different placement of questions within the AABS and the SPPA may have on valid trend analysis using the two different survey instruments. Investigation of future waves of both the AABS and SPPA will reveal that effect.

Arts Participation Surveys Used to Conduct Trend Analysis in the NEA's Arts Data Profile (ADP) #10				
Mode of Arts Participation	2012 SPPA	2013 AABS	2014 AABS	2015 AABS
Performing arts attendance		X		X
Visual arts attendance	X	X		X
Movie-Going	X	X		X
Visits to places for historical or design value		X		X
Learning through arts classes or lessons		X		X
Literary reading	X	X		X
Performing or creating artworks	X		X	

ⁱ The 1982, 1985, and 1992 waves of the SPPA were conducted by the Census Bureau as supplements to the National Crime Survey. The 1997 SPPA, alternatively, was done by Westat as a stand-alone telephone survey.

ⁱⁱ See, for example, *A Decade of Arts Engagement: Findings from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts: 2002-2012* [add hyperlink].

ⁱⁱⁱ All respondents to the 2012 SPPA were assigned to answer questions contained in either Core 1 or Core 2 of the survey. For more information, please see the technical documentation to the 2012 SPPA [add hyperlink].