



**MEDIA ARTS NETWORK
OF ONTARIO
RÉSEAU DES ARTS
MÉDIATIQUES DE L'ONTARIO**

EXPANDING REACH, NETWORKS, AND COMMUNITY IN ONTARIO MEDIA ARTS FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITORS

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Research and Facilitation by Ananya Ohri

Media Arts Network of Ontario

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Director's Remarks on Context

This research project was launched late January 2020 to investigate the development of new tools and programs for festivals and exhibitors that could be moved into pilot projects in the following year. Over the two-months of the research period not only did the arts sector change but the global context and all elements of society have entered a period of accelerated change and uncertainty with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis illuminates the imperative for a transformation of economic, political, and social relations towards a sustainable and equitable world. As MANO works to develop new tools for festivals and exhibitors, we will continually ask how they help transform our sector and society.

Thank you to Ananya Ohri and all study participants for sharing their time and attention during this period of crisis.

-Ben Donoghue

Introduction

Touring (presenting a program/programs of work at multiple venues in various communities) allows for greater exposure to artists, enables festivals/organizations to engage new audiences, and if streamlined, can address capacity issues by sharing workload across organizations, while expanding the reach of independent media artists.

Travel (attending industry and sector events outside of one's local region) enables media arts organizations to build networks, develop collaborations, gain exposure to new artists, and build markets for their own works and the artists they engage.

Yet, both touring and travel have been challenging for some presenting organizations to pursue.

Many media arts organizations have not historically received public sector support to tour or travel, this has begun to change with the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts expanding programs to better include media arts groups. Limited human resource capacity has made it difficult for organizations to apply for funding or find time, over and above their core tasks, to travel, to tour their programs, or host programs originating at other organizations. Finally, some organizations lack the organizational networks that enable them to tour, as well as the know-how around building relationships and negotiating fruitful, fulfilling and symbiotic partnerships. This challenge of building networks is reinforced by the inability to travel to sector events.

MANO undertook this research to test ideas around building sectoral collaboration that facilitates greater exchange of programs, audience development, and relationship building for and among the media arts sector in Ontario.

The following outline key findings and analysis from this inquiry:

KEY FINDINGS

Touring

Practices/Needs:

60% of the 31 respondents have toured their programs.

- Touring can be a packaged program made available for other organizations to rent for public exhibition.
- Touring can be a program taken to one or more stops as part of a collaboration between the organizations.
- Touring can include non-arts, community organizations as well as arts venues.
 - From these, 41% have toured regionally, and 38% provincial.
- Many organizations currently touring are situated in the big cities (Toronto and Ottawa).
- Touring in most of these organizations is sustained through partnerships with established collaborators, and in circumstances where project funding allows for new relationships to be built.
- Included in these percentages are touring to non-arts groups, such as schools.

38% of the 31 respondents have hosted programs originating at another organization.

- Hosting can mean renting a packaged program from an independent curator or peer organization.
- Hosting can mean bringing a portion of an existing program, and combining it with other works for exhibition.
- Hosting can mean one organization inviting artists, or collaboration of multiple organizations.

From these, 14% have hosted programs originating regionally, and 23% have hosted programs originating provincially.

- Organizations operating in smaller cities find it challenging to find a host in Toronto and Ottawa, and other major cities across Canada.
- It is difficult for organizations lacking a year-round venue to host programs.
- Fees to host (venue, curatorial fees, artist fees, equipment rental, technical fees, marketing) are more cumbersome on core organizational budgets, than sending programs to tour as touring can be more easily supported through project grants.
- Appreciation for the amount of labour it takes to ensure a program speaks to the context of the host organization, does not come across as 'lazy programming' or results in 'tokenizing' the community/ies it emerges from or is hosted by.

What is missing:

- Opportunities to encounter new groups and audiences.
- Festivals and organizations who have not toured or hosted yet are not sure where to begin.
- Organizations have difficulty sharing program plans due to fear of losing a programming idea to another group, competition for funding can create distrust.
- Resource to facilitate the negotiation of resources, cost and labour sharing, reciprocal benefits, which can be challenging due to power imbalances within the sector.
- Resource on how to broach and negotiate collaborations where both the originating organization and the host feel meaningfully engaged and benefit mutually from the collaboration.

Ontario Touring Network - Initial Program Design Notes

The Ontario Touring Network project of MANO will provide a central online resource for sharing information that facilitates touring/presentation of programs of screen based media art and related work. With this we aim to facilitate greater collaborations across Ontario, reducing the duplication of labour and developing expanded audiences for artists, cultural workers, and organizations. As this project is in development during the suspension of in-person public programming worldwide it will also serve as a tool for developing collaborations in the online presentation of media art. The facilitation of presentation collaborations online will help to build more resilient organizations and help to maintain relationships with artists and audiences.

Kinds of information to host on central resource:

- Venues (specs, rates, availability).
- Festival/Org contact info, website.
- Who has a program for touring.
- Who is looking for work to program, what types of works, and what seasons are they looking for.
- Framework and discussion on sharing labour and costs based on funding models touring and hosting.
- A breakdown of the kind of work and resources required when planning a tour or to host with sample critical path templates.
- Access to commonly used resources: agreement templates for collaborations, presentation standards, artist fee schedules, contract templates, etc.

Other Takeaways:

Human resource supports of one part-time position would strengthen the impact of the central digital resource as it would allow the initiative to:

- Support/guide organizations addressing concerns around capacity, how to make the most of the resource.
- Be responsive to the emerging needs of the various stakeholders to tailor the resource in its first year.
- Serve as a community connector to facilitate relationships and introduce new organizations/groups onto the platform.
- To provide guidance and mentorship to emerging organizations and those new to touring and/or seasonal presentation.

Expanding Reach - Travel and Market Development

Practices/Needs:

- Festivals and exhibitors have diverse means of prospecting new work and developing relationships with artists.
- A large number rely on complimentary passes to other festivals, but also on travel personally paid for by staff.
- Online methods of viewing new work are the most used.
- Growing interest in finding ways to travel that also respond to environmental crisis and climate change, and unknown ways travel may change post-COVID-19.
- Access to funding for travel varies widely with festivals outside Toronto and Ottawa, with smaller festivals identifying more challenges and barriers.
- Travel is currently concentrated in a small pool of major industry events in the United States and Western Europe limiting potential collaborations and markets.
- The organizations where artistic staff had the most access to travel were the most likely to tour their programs.

Expanding Reach - Initial Program Design Notes

MANO is looking towards designing an initiative to support delegations of Ontario cultural workers from media arts festivals and non-profit exhibitors to international sector events. The objective of this program is to build new opportunities for international collaborations and networks with a diverse range of presenters from across the province. While initially conceived as launching in winter 2021 this program is currently being paused until timelines for returning to public events and travel are clearly identified in the COVID-19 recovery. The development of these new networks will be even more important as the media arts sector internationally works to adapt to a new economic and social context.

Methodology

1. **An online survey** was circulated among MANO member organizations, as well as a varied group of other media festivals and organizations who show independent media arts. The goal was to establish a sampling of needs and practices and gauge interest in the solutions MANO is developing.

31 organizations responded, reflecting a 60% response rate.

99% indicated an interest in being part of a network supporting touring.

100% indicated an interest in being part of delegations to support international network building.

2. **One-on-one phone interviews** were conducted with 6 media arts organizations outside Toronto, who would otherwise not be able to take part in our survey follow up, in person meeting, taking place in Toronto. These encouraged greater survey participation, and allowed for the collection of more detailed data around the needs and practices of groups in a number of regions, as well as their responses and feedback for the initiatives MANO is shaping.
3. **A group meeting** with 15 respondents was held to test the ideas MANO is shaping in response to the survey data and gain a deeper understanding of the needs and practices of the organizations in attendance.

Originally, this meeting was planned as an in-person event for Toronto organizations. Due to social distancing measures responding to the global COVID19 pandemic, the meeting was held online. This enabled organizations outside Toronto to attend including two who also participated in telephone interviews.

Appendix - Survey Responses February 2020

Touring/Hosting:

- Organizations are curious about developing knowledge and capacity to tour and host programs for many reasons, ranging from audience development, resource redistribution and generating greater exposure for artists:

“We program only Canadian racially diverse (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) Artists - so touring our works would be really beneficial, especially to communities that see little to no diverse Canadian content. It’s also important for BIPOC artists to connect with each other and build a stronger network of support. Also finding affordable venue to screen works is getting harder and harder”

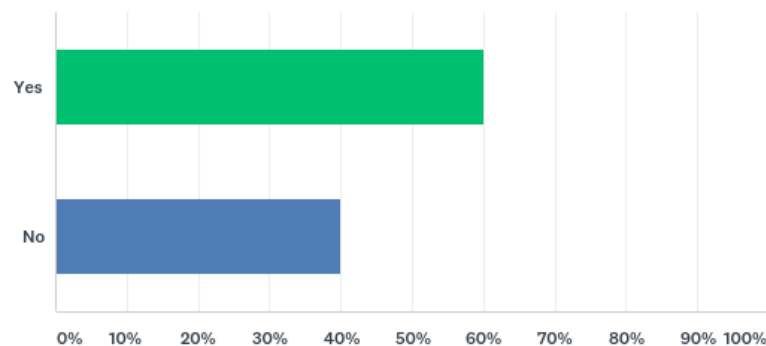
“We have limited staff capacity, but we have always been interested in touring. Right now, touring is something we are interested in exploring as one way to respond to rapid gentrification in our area, that will allow us to exhibit works but not bear the brunt of heavy monthly rentals of a long term venue.”

- 60 % of surveyed organizations toured, and 38% have hosted. The reality of touring/hosting looks very different between more mainstream organizations and those focusing on independent media arts:

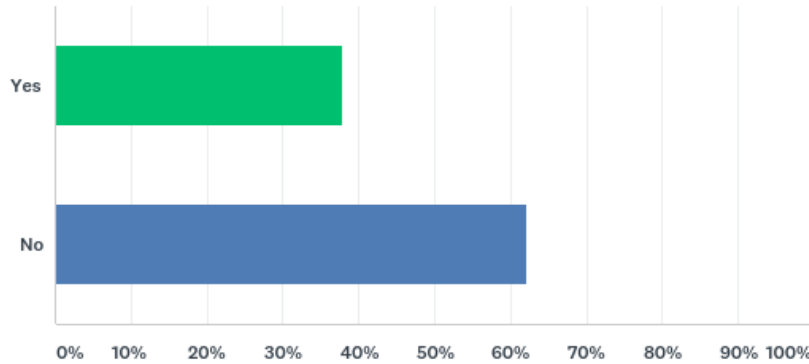
“We package a tour from our previous festival and there is a designated person to do the marketing for the touring program. We don’t organize the tour, but rent out the package to different places, and can sometimes subsidize the rental through a project grant.”

“We are staffed by one part-time administrator, and run by a volunteer board of directors. Our capacity to support visiting artists/curators and host programs is limited simply due to the lack of energy required to plan travel, accommodations, entertainment, etc.”

Q9 Have you toured programs, exhibitions, or performances to other organizations or locations?



Q13 Have you hosted touring programs other organizations have originated?

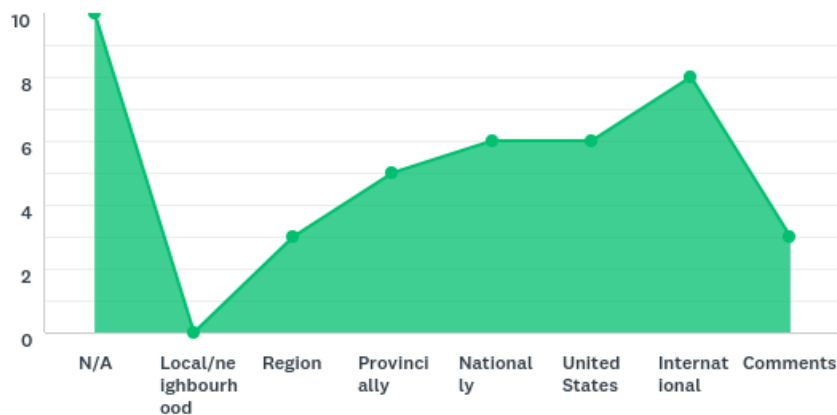


- Capacity is identified as one of the biggest challenges to touring and hosting, beginning with the work of applying for funds and cultivating networks, preventing programs from reaching a larger potential audience:

“We have often thought about applying for grants to tour, but havent gotten to it. We are not sure how to begin, and have been focusing on developing new programming.”

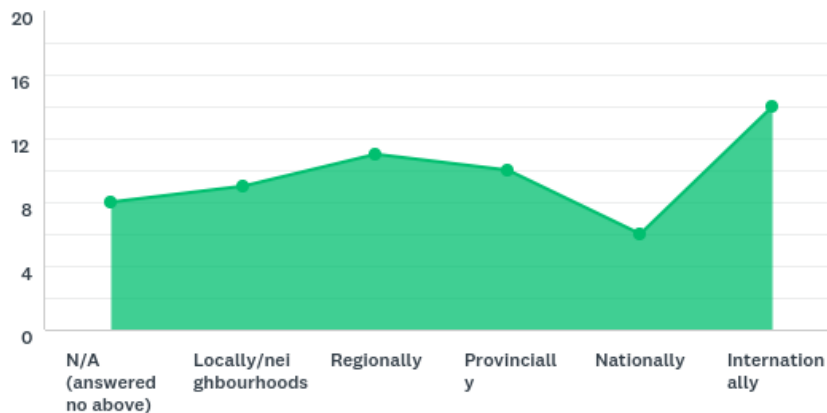
“We seem to have a lack of awareness of opportunities. Only certain events pop up on our radar for a multitude of reasons (located in smaller urban centre, invites lost in a flurry of emails etc)”

Q14 If yes, Indicate how far the programs you have hosted have come from:



- When touring works, organizations are able to take their works to non-arts groups, like schools. Fees to host (venue, curatorial fees, artist fees, equipment rental, technical fees, marketing) are more cumbersome on core organizational budgets, than sending programs to tour as touring can be more easily supported through project grants

Q10 Where have you toured your programs (select all that apply)?

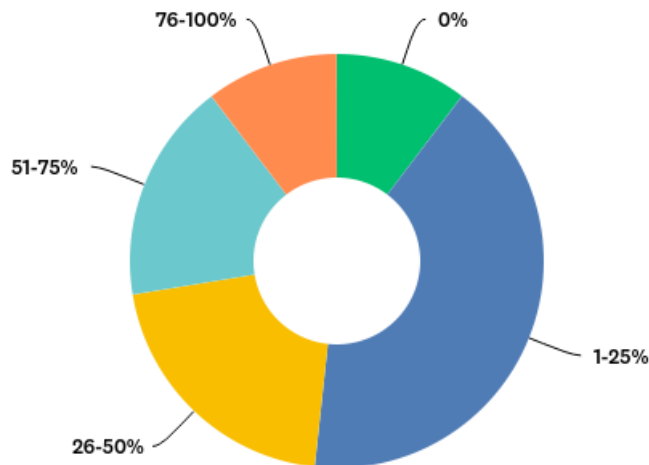


- Smaller organizations that are able to navigate these challenges are able to do so because of relationships they have fostered and networks they belong to:

“We are often able to bring in artists already traveling here, or a city nearby. And we do this with our regular collaborators, who share resources and labour - including chipping in for shipping”

Travel:

Q7 What percentage of work you present is selected from open calls for submissions?

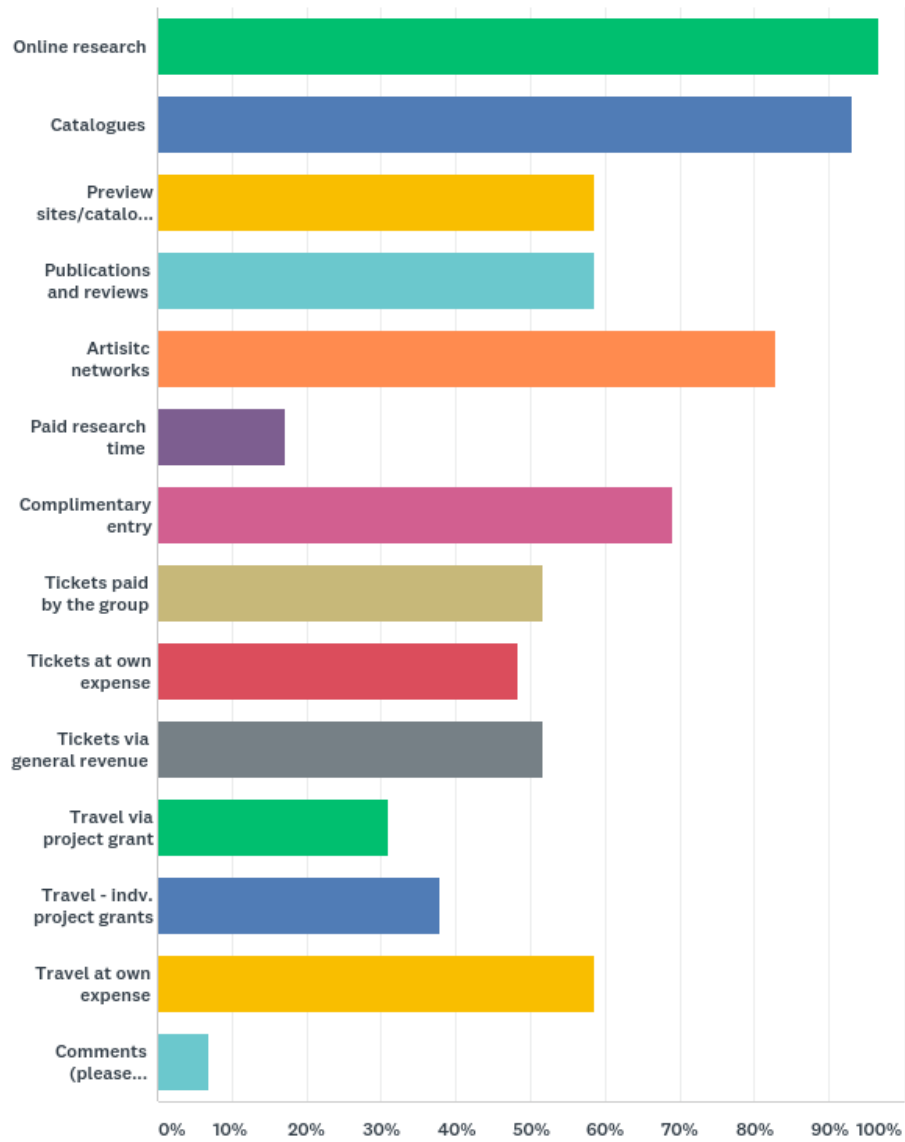


- 42% of respondents program 1-25% of works they receive through open calls. This demonstrates that the vast majority of their programming is scouted/invited. Scouting works requires being part of networks that allow you to access to new works, artists and developing programming opportunities. The broader and more diverse these networks the stronger the resulting programming work will be.

“We have started advertising on facebook and Akimbo, and would like to start seeing submissions from beyond our locality.”

- Organizations rely heavily on online and print media for research on prospecting works and artists. Almost 60% of organizations have programmers pay for their own travel to events.

Q17 How do your staff, board, or collective members conduct research, prospecting, or networking activities (select all that apply)?



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