NOVEMBER 22, 2021

POLIS |
OUTCOMES REPORT
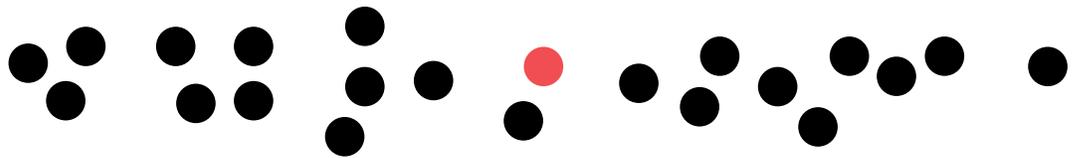
"I can't afford to invest in digital technology."

creative coast

ARTS BC EST.1979

CVAC
COWICHAN VALLEY ARTS COUNCIL
COMMUNITY ARTS PORTAL

CASE STUDY:

Where does it hurt? Artists and arts sector workers: how are you navigating the digital landscape?

PROJECT TEAM:

Digital Innovation Group (digarts.ca), Cowichan Valley Regional District Arts and Culture Division, and ArtsBC.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

The aim of the project was to identify the technology speed bumps artists and arts administrators are experiencing, and what kind of learning tools and supports they need to overcome these speedbumps.

KEY MESSAGING:

Your feedback will influence the development of custom learning tools and various supports for the arts, such as a tech help desk (fall 2021), and a multi-year digital literacy program.

PROCESS:

Using the online polling platform Pol.is, the Project Team created an initial 'brain dump' list of statements, which were reduced to 50 pre-seeds (including 10 metadata statements) with guidance from our Pol.is advisor. After the poll was running for a week, the team consulted with our Pol.is advisor and reconfigured a few questions (a few more metadata questions were added, several submitted questions were simplified, several pre-seed questions were simplified or deleted).

TIMELINE:

The poll was launched in early September and ran to mid October, 2021.

DISTRIBUTION:

After reviewing demographic profiles for all social media platforms, the Project Team decided to focus on Facebook and Instagram ads. Ads were run each weekend for the duration of the poll, at a total cost of ~$350.

In addition, allied organizations (Island arts councils) were actively encouraged to share the poll with their members, and a press release was distributed to all Island news outlets. Further, a targeted email contact list (e.g. Indigenous organizations, fine arts programs at colleges and universities) was created aimed at reaching underrepresented groups/communities (e.g. Indigeous artists, emerging artists). Communication was sent through this list two times during the poll.

Initially the poll was embedded in a custom website (creativecoast.ca), but didn't integrate well with the website platform (there were some technical issues that we were unable to resolve), so was moved to a page on the Pol.is platform. People seeing the FB and IG ads were first directed to the CreativeCoast (CC) site in order to not miss the opportunity to provide context for the poll. This meant two clicks, which may have resulted in lost participation (people had to click from the social media ad to the CC website and then to the Pol.is page).

OUTCOMES:

Responses received = 248
Final number of statements = 129 (participants submitted 128, of which 86 were accepted, and 42 were rejected as duplicates). See Process, above, to explain why there are 129 vs 136 statements.

INSIGHTS:

Overall we gained insight into some high level trends regarding digital access, notably that barriers to access are compounded by other factors. For example some people have trouble learning new digital skills, some people are maxed out (no interest in learning more), and some people are so overwhelmed they don't know where to start.

Respondent-submitted statements did not reveal specifics about the toolsets that people are using or would like to use. Further polling/surveying would be required to determine the precise needs and interests of each group.

Respondents organized into two groups (A and B), according to shared responses, and these two groups had remarkably minor demographic differences. Instead, the main differentiator between these groups appears to be ability to access digital supports and comfort within the digital environment.

Group A is well-resourced and readily able to find the supports they need, while Group B is overwhelmed and doesn't know where to start.

Group A: 72 participants

Statements which make this group unique, by their votes:

	STATEMENT	OVERALL 204	A 72	B 132
10	I can efficiently find information online	79% 14% 5% (169)	95% 1% 2% (67)	69% 23% 6% (102)
35	I feel ill-equipped to undertake the mammoth job required to catch up to the rest of the world digitally.	43% 45% 11% (175)	8% 82% 8% (68)	65% 21% 13% (107)
22	I need help choosing and using the right equipment.	56% 35% 7% (173)	23% 73% 2% (67)	77% 12% 10% (106)
63	Education. Navigating the digital landscape without non-commercial peer guidance is a problem for me.	41% 37% 20% (129)	15% 74% 9% (51)	57% 14% 28% (78)
7	Even after someone teaches me how to use a new digital tool, I don't always feel confident	47% 42% 10% (167)	18% 74% 7% (66)	66% 21% 11% (101)

Group B: 132 participants

Statements which make this group unique, by their votes:

STATEMENT		OVERALL 204	A 72	B 132
29	It feels like I am not keeping up with what others are doing with digital technology.	71% 23% 5% (177)	38% 54% 7% (68)	92% 3% 3% (109)
2	I want a stronger digital presence but don't know where to start.	56% 32% 10% (173)	20% 66% 13% (65)	77% 12% 9% (108)
35	I feel ill-equipped to undertake the mammoth job required to catch up to the rest of the world digitally.	43% 45% 11% (175)	8% 82% 8% (68)	65% 21% 13% (107)
22	I need help choosing and using the right equipment.	56% 35% 7% (173)	23% 73% 2% (67)	77% 12% 10% (106)
118	Finding the best digital solution for our needs is a time consuming problem	60% 24% 15% (33)	14% 57% 28% (14)	94% 0% 5% (19)
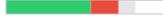
Some interesting perspectives unrelated to digital supports were revealed during the course of the poll:
- Statement 59 - "There should be more support and funding opportunities for smaller independent artists locally and province-wide." [93% overall; Group A = 92% and Group B = 94%]
- Statement 112 - "Local arts councils should provide more practical support to local artists: small grants, help with website development, tax preparation, etc." [80% overall; Group A = 66% and Group B = 88%]
- Statement 87 - "Artists with disabilities need a lot more help and support than is currently available." [66% overall; Group A = 75% and Group B = 61%]

Full report here: https://pol.is/report/r5czd5camtw7dfjsarf76.

LESSONS LEARNED:

All people across all our demographics need digital help - we originally surmised that older artists with perhaps less access to urban centers might have different digital inclinations, but that is not the case, it seems to be a real mix of needs of support.

Future polling will have to be more specific in what we ask to get the very direct information we need - specifically how people like receiving and learning, what tools they already use and whether they would be willing to pay for support services and if so, how much.

Social and cultural information that will be important moving forward in providing support to creatives:

- Arts councils are not representative of the overall creative population on Vancouver Island and we cannot solely rely on this network in order to access and provide for the needs of artists in the island super region.
- Art service organizations and arts councils can also be seen as closed off or inaccessible and there is important work to be done in welcoming/breaking down the barriers to access.

The Project Team learned at the end of the process that Pol.is had only been used for policy development until this point, not project design. This may help explain the non-specificity of our findings. Pol.is may be a better tool for much more divisive/polarizing issues involving stronger opinions and perspectives. The most potent statements submitted during our poll had to do with non-digital issues, so perhaps digital is not an issue people get too worked up about. Perhaps digital is, rather, an issue that wears people out!

LESSONS LEARNED CONT'D:

Two additional factors that may have led to lower participant numbers are:

1) Timing: the Digital Innovation Group ran another questionnaire-based research project immediately before the Pol.is poll; therefore, local news agencies may have been reluctant to publish the news release announcing the poll, which sounded similar to the other project, and art-based organizations may have been less invested in promoting the poll so shortly after promoting the participation and outcome of the previous project.

2) Platform: while looking to find out about digital stumbling blocks that arts workers are facing, we used digital methods of promoting and distributing the poll, and an unfamiliar platform for conducting the poll; thus those who are digital technology averse may have been less inclined to participate.

ISSUES:

Some of the more compelling interactive features of the Pol.is platform didn't work for this exercise: participants were not notified of new statements and participants who voluntarily returned to the Pol.is page were not able to respond to solely new statements - instead they were prompted to answer all questions again.

NEXT STEPS:

The Project Team has decided to forego additional polling and instead implement a hybrid helpdesk/resource hub with a well-structured information database and issues tracking system.