

THE ARTS AND SOCIAL CONNECTION IN TORONTO SURVEY REPORT

Prepared by:

**Environics
Institute**

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ARTS_**

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THE ARTS AND SOCIAL CONNECTION IN TORONTO

Arts and cultural activities play a variety of roles in a community. They are a means of creative expression for artists and performers. They are entertaining and instructive for audiences. They are an important part of the economy. And they also play a role in bringing people together. These activities provide opportunities for family and friends to spend time with one another. They can also help build bridges between community members who may not know one another, yet find themselves sharing spaces, interests and experiences. The arts can contribute to people's sense of belonging and of connectedness to their community.

To explore the role of the arts in building social connection in the City of Toronto, the Toronto Arts and the Environics Institute for Survey Research conducted a survey of city residents in the summer of 2025. The Arts and Social Connection in Toronto Survey asked about engagement in various arts and cultural activities, about perceptions of the value of these activities, and about other attitudes and experiences relating to life in the city.

The survey confirms that Torontonians participate in the arts not only through attending concerts, performances, museums or galleries, but also as hobbies, as a means of staying connected to their cultural heritage, as part of their children's education, and as employees. Most Torontonians also agree that arts and culture activities in Toronto make the city a better place to live and are welcoming to people from all backgrounds (though, less encouraging, only a minority agree that these activities are affordable).

In addition, many Torontonians associate attendance at arts and culture events with several benefits, such as becoming more aware of perspectives and cultures that are different from their own, feeling more connected to other people and feeling more at home in the city. Perhaps most importantly, the survey reveals that Torontonians who attend arts and culture activities more regularly also tend to be more connected to their friends, family and community and more trusting of and interested in other people. Together, these findings underline the association between arts and cultural activities in the city and social connection in the City of Toronto.

ENGAGEMENT WITH ARTS AND CULTURE ACTIVITIES IN TORONTO

Attending arts and culture activities or events

Most Torontonians are engaged in arts and culture activities in the city, in one or more ways. Among the most common forms of engagement is attendance at arts and culture events or activities. Two in three Torontonians (67%) attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year.

Some of these activities are more popular than others, including attending live music or dance performances, and visiting a museum or art gallery. Close to one in five people in the city attended multiple arts and culture events or activities a few times in the past year, and over 40 percent have attended them at least once or twice (see Table 1).

Table 1: Attending arts and culture activities or events

Which of the following activities, if any, have you done as an adult, either recently (in the past year) or at any time before then?

Activity	A few times or more in the past year	Once or twice in the past year	Yes, but not past year	No (not as an adult)
Watched a movie at a movie theatre	33	26	31	9
Attended a live music concert or dance performance	21	25	33	20
Visited a museum or an art gallery	18	27	37	16
Attended an arts, music or cultural festival	14	23	34	27
Attended a live theatre performance	12	20	35	32
Attended a nightclub to listen or dance to music	12	15	36	35
Attended an arts and crafts show or sale	10	16	36	35
Watched or joined an arts or culture activities online	9	13	23	52
Took a lesson or a class in an area related to the arts	7	9	26	55
Attended a literary event (e.g. book launch / reading))	5	11	23	58

Arts and cultural heritage

A second common form of engagement with arts and culture is as a means of staying personally connected with one's own cultural heritage (see Table 2). For instance, seven in ten (69%) Torontonians frequently or occasionally use music or dance to learn more about or stay more in touch with the cultures of the places that their ancestors came from (including 30% who say they do this frequently). This figure is even higher for Torontonians who are immigrants (76%) or who are racialized (79%).

Table 2: Arts and cultural heritage

*Which of the following activities, if any, do you do from time to time to more learn about or stay more in touch with the cultures of the places that your ancestors came from?**

Activity	Yes, frequently	Yes, occasionally	Hardly ever	Never
Eating or cooking traditional foods	35	39	12	12
Singing, or playing or listening to music	27	37	13	20
Learning or speaking a language	21	30	18	28
Reading books	18	41	21	18
Participating in religious services, holidays or festivals	18	33	17	29
Telling traditional stories	11	30	28	29
Wearing traditional clothing or jewelry	11	27	22	38
Dancing	11	26	23	38
<i>Either music or dance</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>17</i>

** The question asked to Indigenous respondents was: how often, if at all, do you do the following activities to learn more about or stay more in touch with the cultures of your ancestors?*

Hobbies related to arts and culture

Many Torontonians also have hobbies that relate to arts and culture. For instance:

- 21% say their hobbies include doing or learning a craft, like sewing, knitting, pottery or making jewelry.
- 21% say their hobbies include artistic activities, like painting, drawing, photography or creative writing.
- 15% say their hobbies include making music (for example, singing or playing a musical instrument).

Taken together, 44 percent of Torontonians have a hobby related to art, music, dance, film, theatre or crafts (see Table 3).

Table 3: Hobbies related to arts and culture (selected responses)

Some people have hobbies or pastimes – things they like to do for their own enjoyment when they are not working, at school, or taking care of their home or family. Are any of the following things your hobbies or pastimes, that is, things you like to do from time to time for your own enjoyment?

Hobby	% of total population
Doing or learning a craft, like sewing, knitting, pottery or making jewelry	21
Artistic activities, like painting, drawing, photography or creative writing	18
Making music (for example, singing or playing a musical instrument)	15
Dancing or attending dance classes	11
Making films, videos or animations	6
Acting in or helping with the production of theatre performances	3
<i>Any of these (at least one arts hobby)</i>	<i>44</i>

Children's arts activities

Some residents of the city are parents whose children participate in arts and culture activities. A large majority of parents with children at home (83%) say that their children have participated in music, arts, crafts, writing, theatre or dance activities at school or outside of school in the past year. This represents 22 percent of adults living in the city. Participation is more

common at school or daycare, rather than outside of the education system (see Table 4).

Table 4: Children's arts activities

*In the past year, has your child or has at least one of your children participated in any of the following activities, whether at school (or daycare) or outside of school?**

	% of parents**			% of total population		
	Yes, my child has participated at school or daycare in the past year	Yes, my child has participated outside of school or daycare in the past year	No, my child has not (or my children have not) participated in the past year	Yes, my child has participated at school or daycare in the past year	Yes, my child has participated outside of school or daycare in the past year	No, my child has not (or my children have not) participated in the past year
Music lessons or playing in a band	46	22	38	12	6	10
Lessons in drawing, painting, photography or other visual arts	44	21	39	11	6	10
Arts and crafts activities	40	24	41	11	6	11
Creative writing clubs or classes, or book or reading clubs	35	25	43	9	7	11
Theatre activities	29	17	56	8	4	15
Dance class	28	23	51	7	6	13
<i>Any of these</i>	<i>83</i>			<i>22</i>		
<i>None of these</i>	<i>17</i>			<i>4</i>		

** This question was asked to those who answered "yes" to the following question: Are you the parent or guardian of any children under the age of 18 currently living with you in your home?*

*** Answers may add to more than 100% as some parents may have children who participate both at and outside of school or daycare.*

Finally, many Torontonians have a job connected to the arts. About one in ten (11%) of the population surveyed currently either work as an artist, performer or writer, or work for an arts and culture organization, or work as an arts teacher or instructor.

WHO ATTENDS ARTS AND CULTURE EVENTS IN TORONTO?

Two in three Torontonians (67%) say they attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year.

Those who are more likely than average to have attended one or more of these events in the past year include:

- those employed in the arts (96%) or who have a hobby related to the arts (78%);
- parents with a child at home under the age of 18 (80%);
- those with a university education (76%);
- those between the ages of 18 and 29 (75%) or between the ages of 30 to 44 (74%).

Older Torontonians and those without a post-secondary education are less likely than average to have attended one of these events in the past year.

There is little difference between Torontonians who are racialized (68%) and those who are not (64%), or between those who are first-generation immigrants (68%), second-generation (65%) or third-generation-plus (66%), in the likelihood of having attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year.

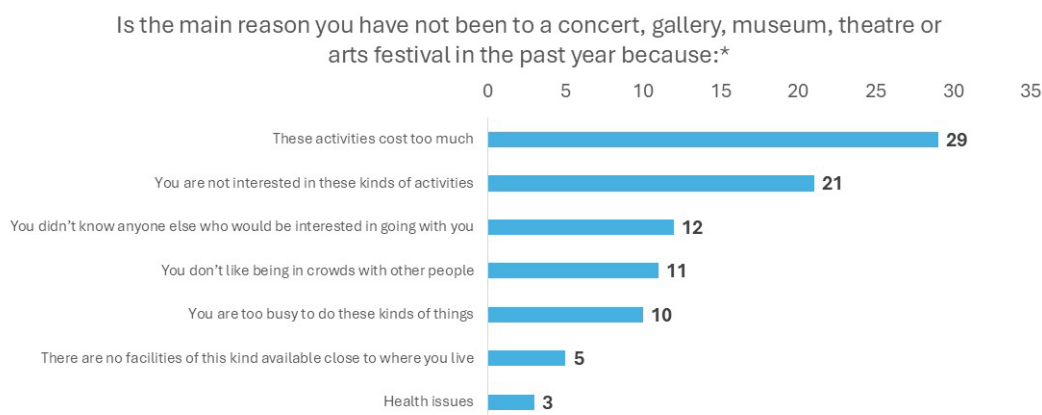
BARRIERS TO ATTENDING ARTS AND CULTURE EVENTS IN TORONTO

What reasons do people give for not having been to a concert, gallery, museum, theatre or arts festival in the past year?

Those who did not attend are most likely to say the main reason is the cost: 29 percent say that going to activities such as a concert, gallery, museum, theatre or arts festival costs too much.

Other reasons mentioned include lack of interest (21%), not having anyone else to go with (12%), avoiding being in crowds (11%), and being too busy (10%).

Reasons for not attending arts events



* This question was asked to those who have not been to a concert, gallery, museum, theatre or arts festival in the past year.

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Not surprisingly, among those who have not been to a concert, gallery, museum, theatre or arts festival in the past year, those facing income insecurity are much more likely than average to mention cost as the reason (47% compared to the average of 29%).

However, there are also differences between gender and age. Women (39%) are much more likely than men (19%) to mention cost as the reason for not attending these arts and culture activities in the past year; conversely, men (30%) are much more likely than women (13%) to say it is because they were not interested in these activities.

Older residents of the city (age 45 and older) (34%) are more likely than those under the age of 45 (20%) to mention cost; conversely, younger residents (26%) are more likely than older ones (15%) to mention lack of interest.

PERCEPTIONS OF ARTS AND CULTURE ACTIVITIES IN THE CITY OF TORONTO

Most Torontonians have positive views on the contribution that arts and culture activities make to the city, but only a minority agree that these activities are affordable.

Torontonians were asked for their opinions on a series of statements about arts and culture activities in the city, such as concerts, performances, museums, galleries and arts festivals. Most encouragingly:

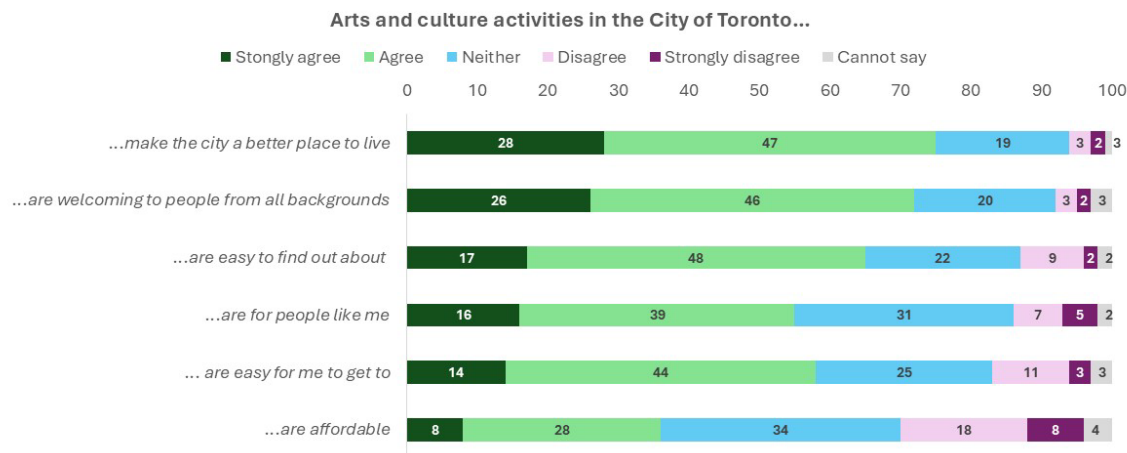
- 74% agree (strongly or somewhat) that these activities make the city a better place to live;
- 72% agree that these activities are welcoming to people from all backgrounds; and
- 55% agree that these activities “are for people like me”.

Majorities also agree that arts and culture activities in the city are relatively accessible. Specifically:

- 65% agree that these activities are easy to find out about; and
- 58% agree that these activities are easy for them to get to.

However, only 36 percent agree that arts and culture activities in the City of Toronto are affordable, including only eight percent who strongly agree that this is the case, and 24 percent who somewhat agree. One in three (34%) neither agree nor disagree, while 28 percent strongly or somewhat disagree with the notion that arts and culture activities in the city are affordable.

Perceptions of arts and culture activities in the City of Toronto



Here's some ways that people might describe arts and culture activities in the City of Toronto. By arts and culture activities, we mean things like concerts, performances, museums, galleries and arts festivals. Please indicate how much you personally agree or disagree with each one. Arts and culture activities in the City of Toronto...

Not surprisingly, those facing income insecurity (45%) are much more likely to disagree that arts and culture activities in the City of Toronto are affordable. Others who are more likely than average to express concerns about the affordability of arts and culture activities in the city include residents age 60 and older (33%), students (32%), and those living with a physical disability (35%) or a mental health disability (32%).

ARE ARTS AND CULTURE ACTIVITIES FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME?

Who in the City of Toronto is most likely to agree that arts and culture activities in the city “are for people like me”?

Not surprisingly, those who are more connected to or engaged with the arts are more likely than average to agree. This includes:

- people who are employed in the arts (83% agree that these activities “are for people like me”);
- people who have attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year (67%); and
- people who have a hobby related to the arts (63%).

Others who are more likely than average to agree include parents with a child under the age of 18 years in their household (67%) and those with a university education (65%).

There is little difference in the level of agreement between Torontonians who are racialized (56%) and those who are not (53%), or between those who are first-generation immigrants (55%), second-generation (54%) or third generation-plus (55%).

There is, however, a notable difference between women and men, with women (61%) being more likely than men (48%) to agree that arts and culture activities in the City of Toronto “are for people like me”?

FEELING MORE CONNECTED TO OTHER PEOPLE

Many Torontonians also associate in person attendance at arts and culture events with several benefits, such as feeling more connected to other people and more at home in the city.¹

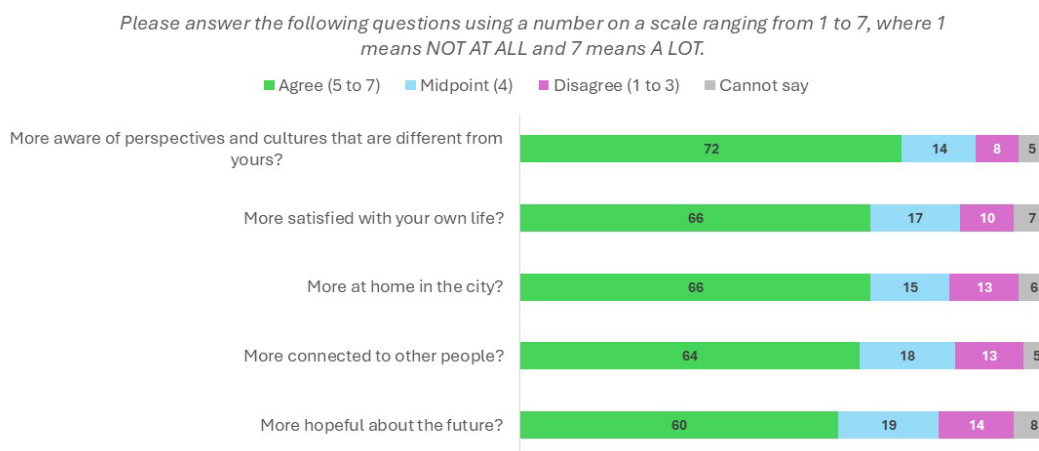
City residents are most likely to say that attending arts or cultural events in person made them feel more aware of perspectives and cultures that are different from their own. More than seven in ten agree (72%) that this is the case, including 43 percent who strongly agree.

Two in three Torontonians say that attending arts or cultural events in person made them feel more satisfied with their own life (66%), more at home in the city (66%), and more connected to other people (64%). Three in five (60%) agreed that attending these events made them feel more hopeful about the future.

Only about one in ten disagree that any of these benefits resulted from their attendance in person at arts or cultural events.

¹ This question was not asked to those who, as an adult, have never attended any of 10 types of activities mentioned in the survey; this represents 4% of the total survey sample.

Benefits of attending arts or cultural events



When you attend arts or cultural events in person, such as a performance, an arts festival, or an exhibition, to what extent do you feel...
 Subsample: excludes those who, as an adult, have never attended any of 10 types of activities mentioned in the survey (4% of the total).

The degree that attendance is associated with benefits is naturally higher among those who attend more regularly. For instance, 42 percent of people who have attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year *strongly agree* that attending such events in person makes them feel more connected to other people, compared to 24 percent of those who attended such events less recently.

THE ARTS AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

Arts and culture activities offer numerous benefits. They are enriching for those who participate, as artists and performers or as audience members. They also make an important contribution to the city's economy. But these types of activities are also important because they are associated with stronger connections between people.

In the first instance, cultural events bring people together – and not just in terms of sharing a common space such as a concert hall or a gallery space. Those who attend these types of events tend to do so as part of a group. Among those who say they attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, or a theatre performance at least once in the past year, 63 percent said they usually attend as part of a small group of people (5 or

fewer), compared to only 24 percent who usually attend on their own. An additional three percent usually attend as part of a larger group, and nine percent say the number of people they attend with varies depending on the activity.

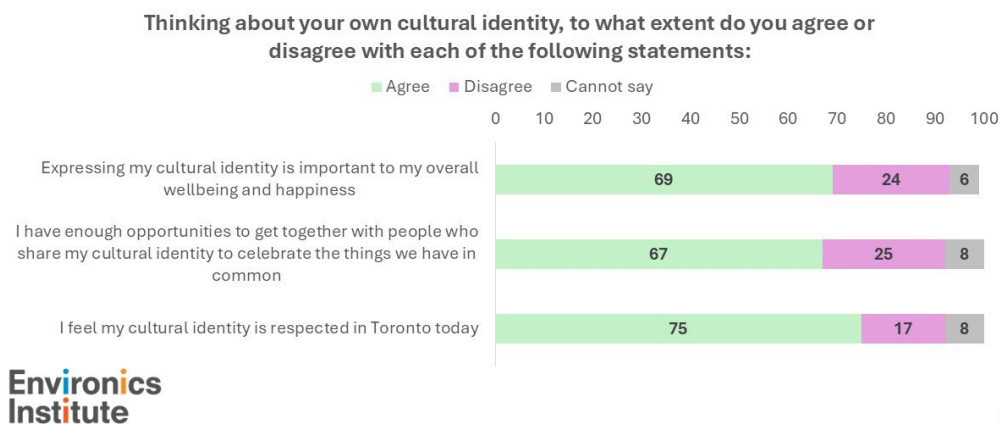
The other ways in which city residents engage with the arts and culture also suggest they help to strengthen connections with friends and family. As mentioned, seven in ten Torontonians use music or dance as a means of staying connected to their cultural heritage. Most families in the city encounter the arts through their children's activities during or after school.

EXPRESSING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN TORONTO

For many Torontonians, expressing and celebrating their cultural identity is an important aspect of their lives in the city.

- Seven in ten (69%) agree that expressing their cultural identity is important to their overall wellbeing and happiness.
- Almost as many (67%) agree that they have enough opportunities to get together with people who share their cultural identity to celebrate the things they have in common.
- 75% agree that they feel their cultural identity is respected in Toronto.

Cultural identity in Toronto



In each case, those who attend arts and cultural activities more regularly are more likely to agree. For instance, 72 percent of regular arts attenders agree that they have enough opportunities to get together with people who share their cultural identity to celebrate the things they have in common, compared to 56 percent of those who do not attend as regularly. Similarly, 75 percent of regular arts attenders agree that their cultural identity is respected in Toronto, compared to 66 percent of those who do not attend as regularly.

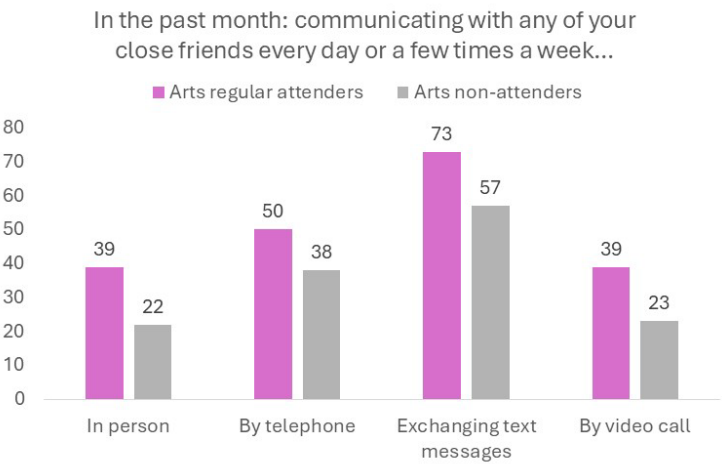
Within the city, those who are first generation immigrants (73%) are more likely than third generation plus Canadians (60%) to agree that expressing their cultural identity is important to their overall wellbeing and happiness; the same is true for those who are racialized (76%), compared to those who are white (60%). But both immigrant and racialized Torontonians are also a bit more likely to agree that they have enough opportunities to get together with people who share their cultural identity to celebrate the things they have in common, and that their cultural identity is respected in Toronto.

ARTS ATTENDANCE AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

Torontonians who attend arts and culture activities more regularly also tend to be more connected to their friends, family and community. Compared to those who attend these events less frequently or not at all, those who say they attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, or a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year:

- communicate with their friends and family more often, whether in person, by phone, text message or video call;
- are more likely to have been a member or participant in one or more group, organization or association in the past 12 months (this includes not only cultural organizations but also sports groups, professional associations and religious-affiliated groups);
- and are more likely to have been a volunteer or to have donated to a charity in the past 12 months.

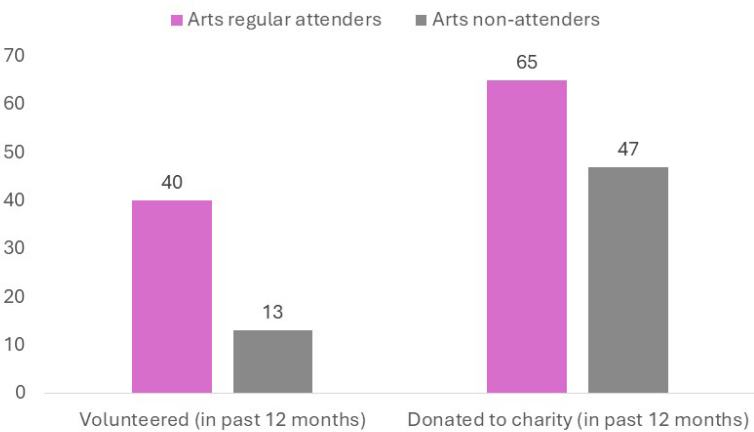
Arts attendance and social connection



Arts regular attenders are those who say they attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, or a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year; non-attenders are those who attended these events less frequently or not at all.

ARTS ATTENDANCE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Arts attendance and civic engagement



Arts regular attenders are those who say they attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, or a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year; non-attenders are those who attended these events less frequently or not at all.

These results do not imply that attending concerts, performances or galleries necessarily *causes* people to be in more regular contact with their friends, or to join clubs or to volunteer. It could be that attending arts and

culture events, as well as engaging in other group activities, are all *outcomes* of other traits. For instance, people with more interest in new experiences, or who are more at ease in group settings, or who have more leisure time, could be more likely to engage in all these activities.

What we can conclude is that these types of activities (attending arts and culture events, and other forms of social connection or engagement) tend to go together. In some cases, this could mean that participation in the arts sparks more interest in other forms of social connection. Alternatively, arts activities could simply provide opportunities for people to experience the social connections they are already looking for. Either way, the arts and culture sector plays a role in bringing people into the city together.

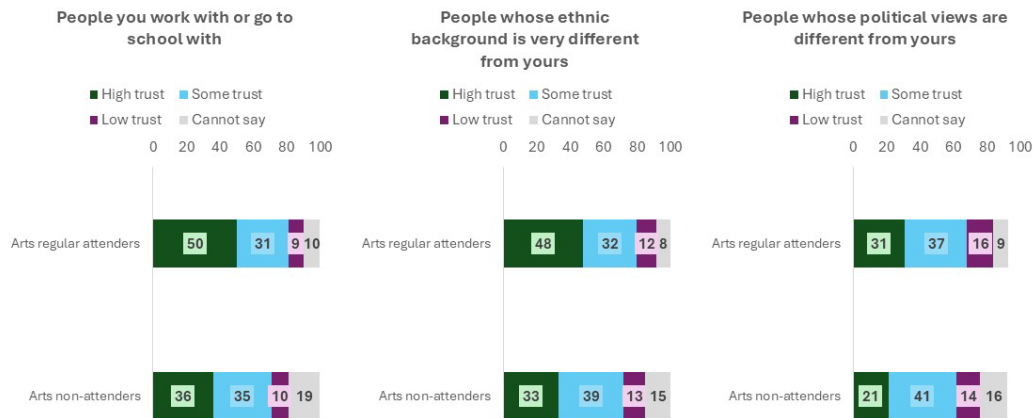
As well as behaviours such as joining groups or volunteering, more regular attendance at arts and cultural events is also associated with specific attitudes, including greater trust and more interest in or openness to other people.

Compared to those who attend these events less frequently or not at all, those who say they attended a concert, a museum or gallery, an arts or culture festival, or a theatre performance or a literary event at least once in the past year:

- Are more likely to express a lot of trust in other people in their community, including people who are different from them – for instance, those with different ethnic backgrounds, or with different political views.
- Are more likely to agree that they like to feel part of groups where people are very close.
- They are more likely to agree that they like to experience the customs and cultures of other peoples, that they learn a great deal from meeting people who are different from them, and that they like to put themselves in another person's shoes and to imagine how they would have felt in their place.

ARTS ATTENDANCE, SOCIAL TRUST, AND SOCIAL EMPATHY

Arts attendance and social trust



Using a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 means “cannot be trusted at all” and 5 means “can be trusted a lot”, how much do you trust each of the following groups of people?

Arts attendance and social empathy



How much do you personally agree or disagree with the following statements?

Once again, the relationship between these two attributes, attending arts events on the one hand, and trusting or being interested in learning from other people in the community, is not unidirectional. In some cases, experiencing the arts (both in the sense of contemplating art or a performance, and in the sense of sharing a common experience with others in attendance) can serve to build trust and empathy. In other cases, people who are already more trusting and empathetic may be drawn to participate in arts and cultural events, in which case, these events play a role in allowing this trust and empathy to be expressed and developed. Either scenario underlines the importance of arts and cultural activities in strengthening social connections in the city.

CONCLUSION

This survey highlights the important role that arts and cultural activities play in the social fabric of Toronto. Beyond their artistic and economic contributions, the arts provide meaningful opportunities for people to connect—with friends and family, with neighbours and community members, and with the diverse cultures that define the city. Across multiple forms of engagement, from attending events to participating as a hobby or through children’s activities, involvement in the arts is consistently associated with stronger social ties, greater trust in others, and a stronger sense of belonging in Toronto.

At the same time, the findings point to clear challenges, particularly around affordability and access, that limit participation for some residents. While the relationship between arts attendance and social connection is not necessarily causal, the strong and consistent associations observed in this survey underscore the value of arts and culture as shared spaces where social connection can emerge and grow. Taken together, these results suggest that supporting inclusive, accessible arts and cultural opportunities plays an important role in fostering a more connected, empathetic, and resilient city.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The Arts and Social Connection in Toronto Survey of 1,000 adults living in the City of Toronto was conducted online between July 24 and August 21, 2025. The survey sample was designed to meet quotas based on age, gender, education, racial identity, and neighbourhood within Toronto to ensure that it matched as closely as possible the characteristics of the city's population. The results are weighted by age, gender, education, racial identity and immigration background to be fully representative of the population of Toronto.

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