

Analytical Report – September 2020

# COVID-19: Impact Survey on the Arts Residencies Field

*Survey I of III*

A collaboration between  
Res Artis and UCL



## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has unquestionably affected the creative and cultural sectors worldwide, and arts residencies are no exception. These experiences, which are deeply intertwined with values of international exchange and in-person collaboration, are life-changing experiences for artists. Travel restrictions, financial hits to arts organisations, and necessary public health measures have threatened the state of this field for months and years to come – and yet, arts residencies will be even more important as the global creative community recovers from the pandemic.

As the world's foremost professional body for arts residencies, Res Artis aims to ensure sustainability and development of the field, even through unprecedented challenges such as those posed by COVID-19. The survey responses clearly demonstrate that Res Artis is a key source of information for artists and residency providers seeking resources about the field. The vast majority of artist **(85%)** and arts organisation **(72%)** respondents said they use the Res Artis website to find residency opportunities, though **60%** of respondents said they are not Res Artis members.

*“Arts residencies reflect the world around us, they engage diverse communities more so than any other arts sector, they bridge intercultural understanding and peace-keeping. When the COVID-19 pandemic is over, arts residencies will play a critical role in the re-emergence of national and international exchange. Arts residencies are our future.”*

*–Res Artis*

In collaboration with UCL, Res Artis has distributed the first of three planned surveys of artists and arts organisations to assess the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the arts residencies field. The survey was conducted between **7 May and 1 June 2020**, and collected information about how the COVID-19 outbreak has affected in-progress and upcoming arts residencies, as well as how changes to such programs have impacted artists and organisations. This report highlights some of the key findings of the first survey, and proposes approaches for the second iteration, to be conducted in November 2020 to assess medium-term impact. A third and final survey will follow to examine the ongoing effect of COVID-19 on the international arts residencies landscape.

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## PROJECT AIMS AND RES ARTIS SUPPORT OF ARTISTS DURING COVID-19

The primary aim of this partnership is to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on artist mobility, articulating the challenges and opportunities for the sector during this difficult time. Ultimately, we hope the collaboration will lead to positive change for the sector as a whole by providing information, support, and policy recommendations for artists and host organisations.

In addition to this project with UCL, Res Artis is continuing to support artists and arts organisations during COVID-19 in a number of ways. The organisation has released several statements and guidance on best practices for artists and arts residencies in the event of cancelled or modified residencies.

Res Artis has also built a digital library of tools and resources for remote working, [hosted on their website](#), as well as a section on Digital Learning, which provides information about virtual residencies and other digital opportunities.

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## SURVEY RESPONSE

The first online survey received **1,132 responses** – **774 from artists and 358 from arts organisations**, representing Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, North and South America, and Australia and New Zealand. Most artist respondents (**over 80%**) were from the visual arts sector, though other sectors, including dance, music, live arts, literature, craft, media, architecture, and education were represented. About **43%** of artist respondents consider their practice to be “interdisciplinary” or “multidisciplinary.” With regards to career stage, **36%** of respondents are “emerging,” **41%** are “mid-career,” and **23%** are “established” artists.

Arts organisation respondents were primarily not-for-profit and artist-run organisations.

## Current landscape: State of the arts residencies sector during COVID-19

As they have done throughout all dark periods of history, artists around the world have provided a source of inspiration and hope to communities coping with COVID-19. Art also serves a political need during a divisive time. As UCL’s Rafael Schacter [told Smithsonian magazine](#), street art emerging from the pandemic is a necessary recontextualization of public space for ‘scrutiny of public policy, discourse and debate.

Paradoxically, the creative industries are one of the most overlooked in economic recovery efforts, with countless artist jobs drastically threatened by the extended closures of museums, theatres, universities, and other cultural institutions. Arts residencies, which typically provide stability, opportunity, and financial support in an international cultural exchange context, have been cut short or cancelled at many institutions of all levels.

Artist mobility is primarily affected by economic and political factors. The residency landscape has also been shaped by humanitarian crises, climate change, and technological advances. COVID-19 will have such an effect – Res Artis anticipates a surge in local exchange and virtual residency activity. The effect of the pandemic on artists varies between, and within, countries, due to differences in governmental approaches to the crisis. It is our hope that this collaboration will allow us to paint a clear picture of the true impact on a global scale.

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## **GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL HELP FOR ARTISTS**

With the extended closure of museums, theatres, universities, and other arts and humanities institutions, artists are warning that their home countries may become ‘cultural wastelands’ in the wake of the pandemic.

Governments have taken steps to provide financial support for artists and creative industries, but artists and residency hosts have not fully benefited from this aid for a number of reasons. The available support is also drastically varied between countries and regions, suggesting a need for a more centralised source of aid that can be facilitated by an organisation like Res Artis.

## **I-PORTUNUS**

One project that may provide a framework or inspiration for possible solutions is i-Portunus, a pilot project by the European Union’s Creative Europe programme to fund artist mobility on a European macro-level. A report on the programme’s success provides an example of some current policies and thinking about the field of artist mobility, though it should be noted that the project took place before the COVID-19 pandemic.

*“We can definitely state that [artists and culture professionals] need support for artistic and cultural mobility.”*

*– i-Portunus Final Report*

The i-Portunus pilot was unique in that it provided financial support directly to artists and culture professionals, rather than to organisations. It was launched partly as a response to uneven offerings of mobility schemes across Europe, finding that most opportunities available were concentrated within a small handful of countries. By providing financial support directly to artists, i-Portunus supported more demand-led opportunities for artist residencies and exchanges.

The programme received applications from over 3,000 individuals, requesting over **€6 million** of support. Most of these applicants sought international collaboration opportunities. Ultimately, i-Portunus supported over 300 applicants with grants of **€1,500-3,400**. Nearly all recipients reported success in acquiring new skills, developing new audiences, and new productions and creations. Half received job offers as a result of their mobility projects. **This demonstrates that even a low financial contribution can be highly impactful for the career of an artist.**

Other advantages of a centralised funding structure as demonstrated by i-Portunus included lower overhead costs, a broader network of artists and opportunities, a centralised database of host organisations and opportunities, a strong network of partners, and a mechanism to provide better overall support to the sector based on feedback.

## Key findings: May 2020 Res Artis survey

The results of the May 2020 survey reveal that COVID-19 has greatly impacted the arts residencies landscape, with more than half **(54%)** of respondents' planned residencies cancelled or otherwise modified due to the pandemic.

There is a strong sentiment of uncertainty shared by both artists and arts organisations, particularly when it comes to specificities of future financial implications. While there is agreement that some aspects of residencies could take place virtually, it is clear that artists and residency providers will have to have serious conversations about the changing future of the field.

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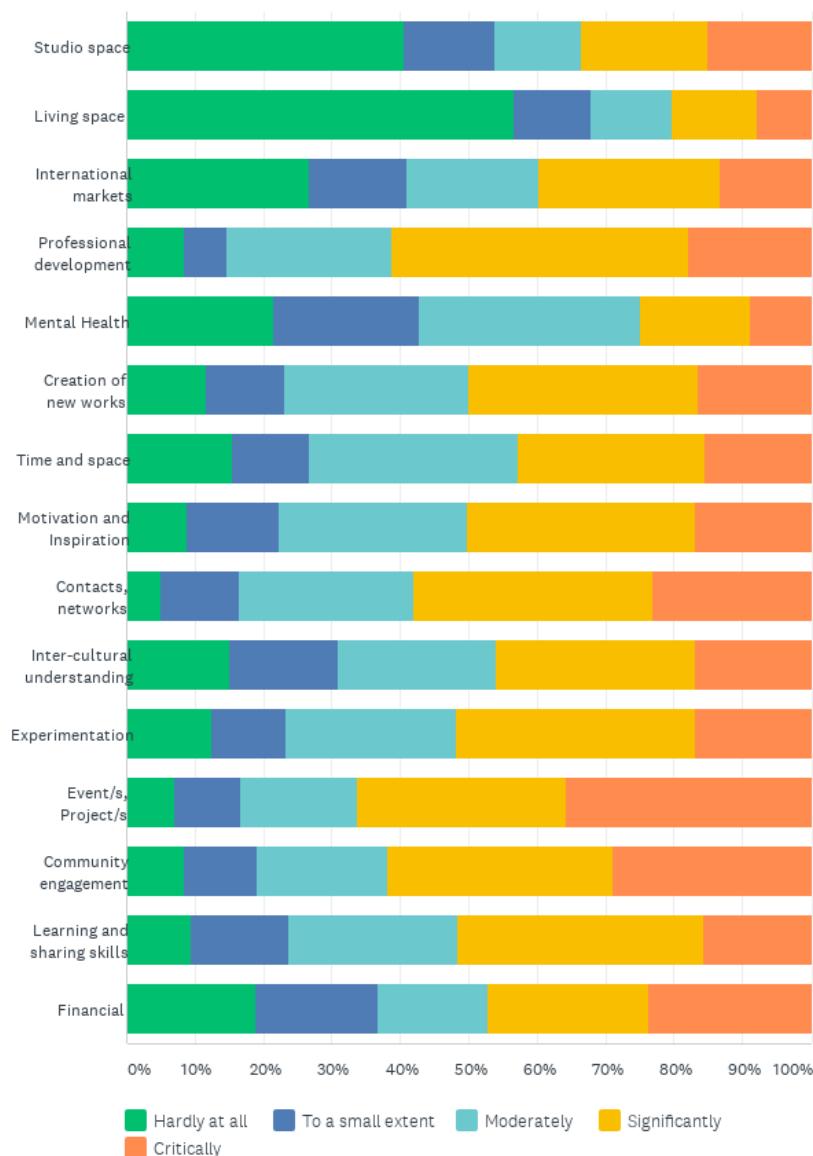
### OVERALL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ARTS RESIDENCIES

The pandemic has had a significant effect on planned residencies. Artist and arts organisation responses reveal that **more than half (54%)** of planned residencies have been modified, cut short, or postponed due to COVID-19, including about **20% that**

**have been cancelled.** This is true for residencies at both the national and international levels.

For **emerging artists**, who are most likely to have participated in fewer than five residencies, **40%** of national residencies and **47%** of international residencies were cancelled, cut short, or postponed. These numbers were slightly higher for mid-career and established artists, with **42%** of national and **57%** of international residencies cancelled, cut short, or postponed.

### Q8 To what extent has the cancellation or modification of your residency impacted the following areas?



## Key concerns and anticipations: Artists

The impact of COVID-19 on arts residencies is expected to affect some aspects of arts residencies more than others. Respondents anticipate a significant or critical impact to events and projects (**66%**), professional development (**61%**), and motivation and inspiration (**50%**).

Other areas that artists are concerned about include access to contacts and networking, community engagement, international markets, learning, and projects.

These concern areas were varied for artists in different fields. For example, architects and dancers were more likely to be affected by loss of studio space, while filmmakers were more likely to suffer from lack of access to international markets and festivals. Dancers were also more likely than other artists to report being significantly or critically affected financially (**87.5%**, compared to **47%** for visual artists).

At every career level (emerging, mid-career, established), about **30%** of artists said they are concerned about the ongoing personal financial implications of COVID-19. However, **emerging** artists were more likely to report being “too scared or anxious” to travel in the future, and also to report that their professional development opportunities are significantly or critically impacted by residency cancellations. This indicates a possible space for more remote professional development opportunities, especially for early-career artists, while the industry recovers from COVID-19.

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### FINANCIAL IMPACT

While respondents listed finances as an affected area, most say it is too early to tell the financial implications. **12.6%** of respondents have been affected by non-refundable residency fees and airfares, and many drew attention to the postponement or cancellation of artist fees or stipends.

Nearly half (**47%**) said that the cancellation of residencies has significantly or critically impacted their finances. In written comments, artists listed a range of lost financial opportunities, including:

- Cancelled speaking engagements, exhibitions, and workshops
- Cancelled or delayed payments
- Missing out on opportunities to sell artwork
- Cancellation fees for deciding not to pursue residency due to COVID-19

- Increased expenses to remain in residencies when returning home was not safe
- Non-refundable residency-related travel expenses

Several respondents indicated that they decided not to apply to residencies they would otherwise have pursued, due to COVID-19.

*“As an artist who runs residencies in various places, I am financially destroyed by the current situation.”*

*– Survey respondent*

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## **EMERGENCY GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**

As far as government aid is concerned, just **17%** of artist respondents said they have been able to access emergency funding support in their region. **Thirty-two percent** have not been able to access it, and a further **13%** say they are ineligible for such funding. Of those who have received funding, **97%** have received national aid, and **37%** have received international support.

**Responses to this question indicate that more international aid opportunities are needed for artists, in addition to more transparency and publicity about existing opportunities – a service that Res Artis may be able to provide.**

Many respondents alluded to their residency or migratory status as making them ineligible for government aid in the countries where they are working. Other freelancers and self-employed artists indicated that they are also ineligible for government support in some locations.

*“Self-employed artists are not yet receiving anything from the government, only from a few grants if you get lucky. Millions of applications for only a few spots.”*

*– Survey respondent (USA)*

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## **POSSIBILITIES FOR VIRTUAL RESIDENCIES**

The majority of artist respondents agree that some logistical and interpersonal aspects of arts residents could take place online, such as **networking, professional development, and community engagement**. Just over **30%** of respondents say fully-virtual residences could take place; however, **40%** say that residencies are all about in-person exchange, and that virtual options would not be possible. Just **25%** say that the creation of new artworks could happen virtually. The contradiction in these



responses suggests that virtual residencies and digital residency activity cannot replace in-person exchange, but can be complementary.

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### HOW CAN ARTS ORGANISATIONS HELP ARTISTS?

While artist respondents recognise the unfortunate necessity of cancellations and changes to residencies, many offered suggestions as to how residency providers can best support them during this time. Many asked that residencies be **delayed** rather than **cancelled** unless absolutely necessary, and expressed a desire for financial support to still be provided in the event of a necessary cancellation.

The theme of **communication** was especially prevalent – artists are desperate for residency providers to be transparent and communicate regularly about their plans for residencies, resuming activity, and other relevant information. Responses indicate that clear communication would help artists feel supported and inspired, enthusiastic and secure about future opportunities, and involved in discussions about the future of residencies post-COVID.

*“As someone who has a full-time non-arts job, I’m very grateful for the items in my email and social media that treat me as an artist at this time.”*

*– Survey respondent*

Another popular suggestion was for organisations to provide more **online opportunities** for artists, including collaborative projects, networking opportunities with other artists and collectors, digital residencies, and virtual exhibitions of artist work.

### Key concerns and anticipations: Arts Organisations

A majority of arts organisations who responded to the survey have postponed all of their activities (**53%**) or modified their programs in some way due to COVID-19. These organisations are mostly private not-for-profit or artist-run, and may not be eligible for emergency government support funds. Most offer **1-10 residencies** annually, and **28%** offer between **10-30 residencies**.

Nearly one in ten (**9%**) of responding organisations said they have been forced to close indefinitely as a result of COVID-19.

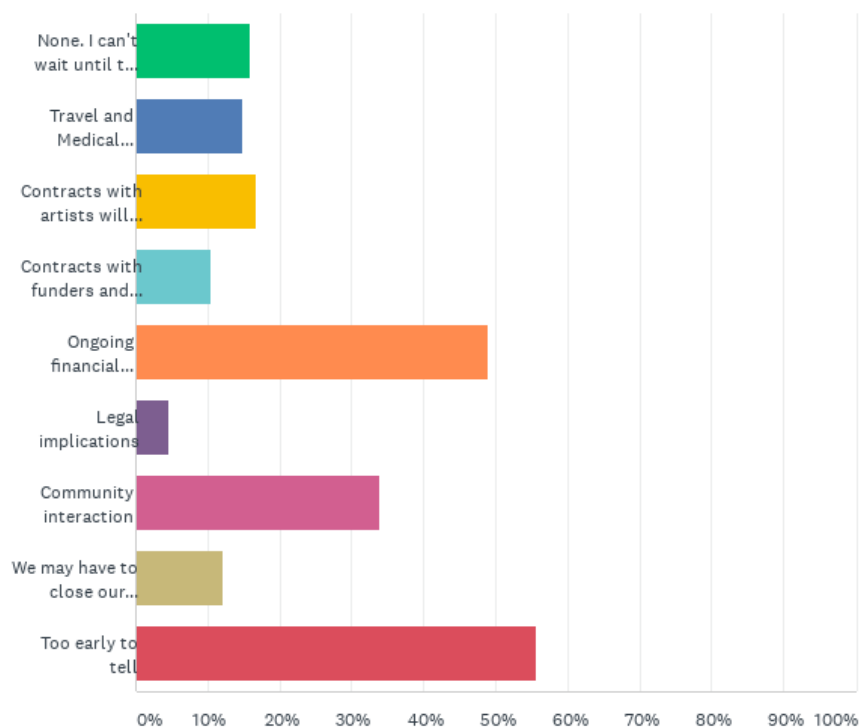
While most (**56%**) said it is too early to tell the ultimate consequences of the pandemic on their operations, **70%** said they have already been significantly or critically impacted financially by modifications to their programs. **One-third** say it is too early to tell if they will plan any future residences. As far as impacts to specific aspects of residencies,

**88%** listed ‘events and projects’ as being significantly or critically affected, and **59%** noted a similar impact to international markets. Of the responding organisations who have been financially impacted by COVID-19, a majority (**71%**) say they have lost income from residency artist fees.

Some **financial** impacts include:

- Fundraising events cancelled
- Fear of losing future government funding
- Cost of investing in digitalisation and ‘smart-working’ infrastructure
- Loss of income from tourism, visitors, renting studio or residential space

**Q38 What ongoing consequences will COVID-19 have on your organisation? (Please select one or multiple options)**



*“It remains to be seen whether we will have to return the grants we received from donors if Autumn residencies do not actualize.”*

*– Survey respondent (Arts organisation)*

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## ONGOING CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19

About half (**49%**) of responding organisations anticipate long-term financial consequences from COVID-19, with **12%** saying they may have to close permanently. A further **one-third** say their community interaction will be affected.

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## EMERGENCY GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Just over **20%** of responding organisations have been able to access emergency funding support from their governments – however, **nearly 30%** said that they are ineligible for such funding, or that there are no relevant funding opportunities available to them. Listed reasons for ineligibility are varied, and include a **lack of salaried employees**, status as a **private foundation**, or their physical **location in a residential, rather than commercial, property**. Again, there is a role that Res Artis could play if they were to receive international funding support for distribution to arts residency operators.

*“As a private enterprise, funded by fees, we have seen no resources other than individual generosity, which will consider funding us.”*

*– Survey respondent (Arts organisation)*

## Going forward: Recommendations for future surveys

The first survey has provided a broad picture of the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on artist residencies, focusing primarily on the cancellations and modifications of programmes already in-progress. While there is clearly the notable immediate impact of residency cancellations and loss of income and opportunities for both artists and organisations, the findings reveal a significant amount of uncertainty among both groups about their future operations.

As the aim of this Res Artis survey project is to form policy recommendations for supporting artists and residency providers following the pandemic, the next surveys, which will assess the medium- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on artist mobility, should seek more information about the following:

- The financial situations of respondents, including whether artists have pursued new sources of income during COVID-19;

- Whether organisations will offer in-person or digital residencies in 2021, and whether artists plan to apply;
- The effect of government aid on these programmes, including regionally-specific questions about how much money artists and organisations have received, and how they have used it;
- Updated information about whether arts organisations have been able to resume activity, or if more have been forced to close;
- Whether residency providers are experimenting with new models of operation;
- Potential benefits and pitfalls of digital residency opportunities, including information about artist access to sufficient internet connection and related technological resources.

Wider distribution of future surveys would also be beneficial to establish a broader picture of the state of the sector.



## References

[Res Artis website – COVID-19 Statement](#)

[How Street Artists Around the world are Reacting to Life with COVID-19 \(Smithsonian Mag\)](#)

[UK could become 'cultural wasteland' due to coronavirus, say leading artists \(The Guardian\)](#)

[UK and Germany launch emergency funds for the arts as US museums call for aid \(Artforum\)](#)

[i-Portunus Final Report \(EU Publications Office\)](#)

## Steering Committee

### *Res Artis:*

Eliza Roberts, Executive Director

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### *UCL:*

Florian Mussnug, Faculty of Arts & Humanities

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Bryan Taylor, Global Engagement Office

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Cover image: [RhondaK on Unsplash](#)

Survey data will be made public upon completion of the full project in 2021, or available upon request. **For enquiries and feedback on this report, please contact [office@resartis.org](mailto:office@resartis.org)**

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