



# Strategic Cultural Plan



**City of  
Courtenay**

March 12, 2025

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### **Land Acknowledgement**

The City of Courtenay respectfully acknowledges that the lands to which this Strategic Cultural Plan applies are on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

The City is committed to a long-term collaboration with the K'ómoks First Nation to ensure the Strategic Cultural Plan supports Truth and Reconciliation and reflects K'ómoks First Nation values, objectives, and priorities. The City acknowledges that the Strategic Cultural Plan will need to be a living document to allow time for relationship building and meaningful engagement with K'ómoks First Nation that considers Indigenous values, practices, and priorities.

## Executive Summary

Located in the Comox Valley and on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, Courtenay offers a vibrant arts and culture scene with a variety of offerings to residents and visitors. **The city is the heart of arts and culture in the Comox Valley, connecting residents and communities through diverse arts and cultural experiences.** There is also significant community and City support for the cultural sector, with numerous local arts and cultural organizations, and cultural facilities that serve residents of the city and region, as well as visitors.

The Strategic Cultural Plan creates **a framework and roadmap** to continue supporting arts and culture in Courtenay over the next 10 years. The Plan includes specific objectives and actions, informed **by extensive research and consultations**, including with diverse community members, arts and culture patrons, and local arts and culture organizations. The Plan was developed using a **5-phase approach**, involving desk research, community engagement, analysis, followed by the development of a draft strategy and recommendations for community feedback and review, and lastly, the creation of the final Strategic Cultural Plan.

**Community engagement for the Strategic Cultural Plan included:** an online survey which received approximately 700 responses overall, feedback from 120 community members via qualitative engagements, an arts and culture sector focus group attended by 38 participants from local arts and culture organizations, and a public drop-in engagement event in July 2023. The team also held 24 interviews, which engaged 54 participants in total. These interviews included consultations with four core cultural services providers (i.e., the Sid Williams Theatre, the Comox Valley Arts Gallery, the Comox Valley Community Arts Council, and the Courtenay and District Museum). In addition, 28 participants were engaged as part of four group conversations with equity priority communities (i.e., representatives of / persons with lived experience of disabilities, being unhoused, being a newcomer, and being part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community). Before the Strategic Cultural Plan was finalized, feedback from the final check-in survey which received 149 responses and the conversations from four Indigenous serving community organizations and the four core cultural service providers were incorporated into the draft Strategic Cultural Plan to formulate the final Strategic Cultural Plan.

**Community engagement identified priority needs** based on collective findings from engagement activities and across all individual and community group consultations for the Strategic Cultural Plan. Findings indicate there is a need for:

- Engaging K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples with cultural humility and safety.
- More cultural spaces, and better availability and affordability
- Developing more diverse and affordable cultural programming
- Further promotion of community partnerships and collaboration
- Increased support – financial and non-financial, local, and regional
- Further development of cultural tourism

- Attraction and training of technical cultural workers
- Development of a Public Art Policy
- Building relationships with community members including Elders

To support the development of Courtenay's Strategic Cultural Plan, in addition to community engagement activities, the following work was also completed to inform the key findings and recommendations:

- Cultural Facility Options Analysis
- Benchmarking of Comparative Jurisdictions
- Economic and Social Impact Analysis.

### Community-informed vision for arts and culture in Courtenay:

*“Courtenay is a thriving cultural hub of creative opportunities, dedicated to cultivating vibrant and inclusive arts and culture for residents and visitors alike. Culture and history of Indigenous peoples are interwoven into a diverse community where connection and resiliency are celebrated through artistic expression and cultural exchange.”*

### Strategic Goals and Objectives

The Strategic Cultural Plan is structured around **five strategic goals** to enable arts and culture to thrive in Courtenay. Each strategic goal is supported by key objectives, as outlined below. Each objective has specific actions, to guide the City of Courtenay in achieving the objectives. Prioritized actions are detailed in section 4.4 of this Strategic Cultural Plan.

#### **Goal 1: Advance truth and reconciliation through arts and culture**

- Objective 1.1: Recognize the role and rights of K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples as it relates to arts and culture
- Objective 1.2: Respectfully acknowledge K'ómoks territory through arts and culture
- Objective 1.3: Increase support and investment in Indigenous arts and culture

#### **Goal 2: Build community resilience through arts and culture**

- Objective 2.1: Use arts and culture to support community belonging and inclusion, where differences and similarities are celebrated

- Objective 2.2: Leverage arts and culture as a medium to engage with community on complex social challenges and to support healing
- Objective 2.3: Develop cultural programming that appeals to a more diverse community

### **Goal 3: Develop more accessible and affordable cultural spaces**

- Objective 3.1: Increase the availability of accessible and affordable spaces for arts and culture
- Objective 3.2: Prioritize initiatives/upgrades that provide enhanced and additional space for arts and culture

### **Goal 4: Bolster community arts**

- Objective 4.1: Support the capacity building of community-led arts and culture organizations
- Objective 4.2: Break down silos and increase collaboration across the cultural sector
- Objective 4.3: Increase the awareness of community-led arts and culture events

### **Goal 5: Support the strategic development of the cultural sector**

- Objective 5.1: Build and sustain existing social and economic impact by strengthening Courtenay's professional arts and culture sector
- Objective 5.2: Embed culture more firmly in tourism initiatives in Courtenay and the Comox Valley
- Objective 5.3: Create new and or updated policies to support the cultural sector
- Objective 5.4: Explore strategic ways to meet sector labour needs

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Arts and Culture in Courtenay

Courtenay, nestled in the Comox Valley and on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, boasts a **vibrant arts and culture scene** that reflects the city's rich heritage and natural beauty. With a blend of traditional Indigenous influences and modern artistic expressions, Courtenay is **home to a significant number of artists, performers, cultural workers, curators, volunteers, skilled individuals, and numerous cultural institutions** that celebrate creativity in all its forms: such as the Sid Williams Theatre, Comox Valley Centre for the Arts, including the Comox Valley Art Gallery, and the Courtenay and District Museum. The downtown area is a hub of arts and culture activity and lends itself towards the cultivation of a public art program. Throughout the year, various **festivals and events** such as the Vancouver Island Music Festival attract artists and visitors from across the region. Whether exploring the vibrant arts scene, attending a cultural event, or strolling through the streets, Courtenay offers a dynamic and inspiring cultural experience for residents and visitors.

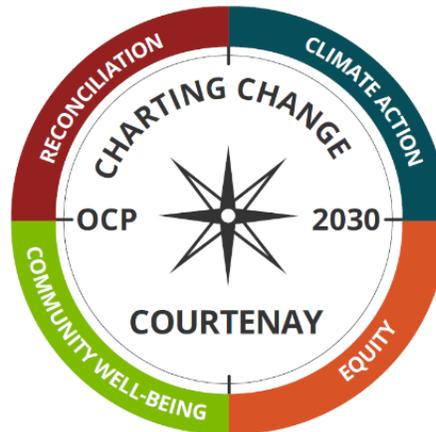
It is impossible to talk about arts and culture without recognizing **that Indigenous peoples have lived on these lands** since time immemorial. The intrinsic link between place and culture is fundamental to Indigenous perspectives and must be acknowledged as the City progresses in this Strategic Cultural Plan endeavor. **Courtenay is dedicated to fostering relationships in a respectful manner and engaging in continuous dialogue with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples.** The City views the Strategic Cultural Plan as a dynamic document, open to evolving into the future with guidance from and partnerships with Indigenous peoples and communities.

Courtenay envisions itself as **a dynamic cultural hub within the Comox Valley**, fostering creativity and innovation in arts and culture. With a steadfast commitment to nurturing local talent and embracing diverse perspectives, Courtenay aims to be a beacon for artistic expression and cultural exchange in the valley. Through strategic investments in cultural facilities, collaborative partnerships with artists, support for community organizations, and the promotion of diverse programming, the City of Courtenay is dedicated to delivering a vibrant and accessible arts scene for all its residents and visitors. By celebrating the unique heritage of the region while embracing contemporary artistic movements, Courtenay aspires to cultivate an environment where creativity flourishes, enriching the lives of its residents and contributing to the cultural fabric of Courtenay and the Comox Valley.

To that end, the City embarked on the development of a **Strategic Cultural Plan** to provide a framework and roadmap to continue supporting arts and culture in Courtenay over the next 10 years. The City of Courtenay's Strategic Cultural Plan aims to:

- Mirror the values of Reconciliation, Community Wellbeing, Equity and Climate Action – as identified in the cardinal directions of the Official Community Plan (OCP) 2022 Figure 1.

Figure 1.: Official Community Plan, 2022 Cardinal Directions



- Engage in inclusive community dialogue.
- Build on and action existing policy recommendations, e.g., OCP (2022), Parks and Recreation Plan (2019), Downtown Courtenay Playbook (2016) – currently being revisited through the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan, and Cultural Service Review (2019).
- Consider both the social and economic impact of arts and culture.

The report summarizes the work that has taken place so far, and what the community has shared about the strengths, challenges, and priority needs relating to arts and culture in Courtenay. The findings have been used to develop goals and objectives including recommendations on how the City can improve support to artists, arts and culture organizations, and creatives, as well as support wider community priorities related to arts and culture. Actions are recommended to implement the Strategic Cultural Plan which will ensure that arts and culture become integrated into the community, as well as representative of all residents.

Furthermore, Courtenay's location in the Comox Valley highlights the interconnectedness of arts and culture within the region. To that end, recommendations include regional approaches and needs, recognizing that Courtenay is not isolated, but rather part of a broader regional arts and cultural ecosystem. Additionally, Courtenay's central position in the valley underscores its significance as a hub for arts and culture in the Comox Valley.

## 2. The Context for the Strategic Cultural Plan

The Strategic Cultural Plan was developed considering Courtenay's cultural profile including its current assets and resources, the City of Courtenay's strategic priorities, and existing cultural sector priorities.

### 2.1 Community Profile

With a natural and beautiful landscape, Courtenay's vibrant arts and culture scene presents a variety of opportunities for residents and visitors from within and beyond the region. The city is situated on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of the land, whose arts and culture informs the artistic inspiration of the city. Courtenay's cultural sector has a strong creative community supported by multiple local arts organizations and many volunteers passionate about arts and culture in the community. The city is home to many artists, cultural practitioners, and curators who add depth to the cultural community.

Courtenay has multiple arts and culture assets including cultural spaces and facilities, community arts and cultural organizations, creative cultural enterprises, festivals and events, cultural heritage, public art, and diverse art forms including visual and performing arts. Specifically, there are over 150 cultural assets<sup>1</sup> in Courtenay, including over 30 community cultural organizations, some 28 cultural facilities<sup>2</sup>, and spaces used for cultural events and programming, and 10 arts-related educational institutions among other resources in the community. Notably, Courtenay is home to three core cultural facilities that anchor the City's cultural district located in downtown Courtenay i.e., Centre For the Arts which houses the Comox Valley Art Gallery and the Comox Valley Community Art Council, Courtenay & District Museum and Paleontology Centre, and Sid Williams Civic Theatre that serve residents and visitors to the city and the Comox Valley.

Various strategic planning documents in Courtenay highlight the need for a plan to guide the City's support of arts and culture. Thus, the Strategic Cultural Plan aims to guide the City in its relationships with the cultural sector, residents (including equity priority groups such as Indigenous communities, newcomers and immigrants, unhoused people, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community), and neighbours from the Comox Valley in relation to arts and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural assets identified through Nordicity asset mapping research. 'Cultural assets' include festivals and events (including arts and culture festivals and events and other events with culture component), creative cultural enterprises, arts education, spaces and facilities (including formal arts and culture venues, and occasional venues), community and cultural organizations (including non-profits, associations/societies, Indigenous organizations and community arts organizations), cultural heritage, multimedia (including radio & television, publishing and printing, film and media), and arts (i.e., performing arts, visual arts and public art).

<sup>2</sup> See Annex D for the list of existing facilities and spaces. Note, these assets will evolve over the lifetime of the Strategic Cultural Plan.

## 2.2 The Role of the City

Courtenay stands as a vibrant nucleus of arts and culture within the Comox Valley and beyond, showcasing a dynamic scene that echoes throughout Vancouver Island. Courtenay also serves as a cultural beacon, drawing talent and enthusiasts from neighboring communities and beyond through the provision of cultural spaces and programs. The City's commitment to cultural institutions has paved the way for a flourishing creative ecosystem, while contributing to the region's tourism appeal and economic vitality. At the heart of the Comox Valley, Courtenay plays a pivotal role in fostering collaboration and cultural exchange among neighboring municipalities, amplifying the collective impact of the region's artistic endeavors.

The City defines its arts and culture role as:

- **Policy and Planner:** Guiding and managing the City arts operations and activities through documents such as the Official Community Plan (2022), Cultural Services Review (2019), Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2019), and Strategic Cultural Plan (2025).
- **Advocate:** Promoting and raising awareness of arts and cultural initiatives in the community to encourage wider participation in and support for the sector.
- **Funder:** Providing funding including fee-for-service grants, operating grants, and cultural event grants, as well as in kind support and direct investment through staff and programming, to organizations such as the Comox Valley Community Arts Council, Courtenay and District Historical Society, Comox Valley Art Gallery Society, Sid Williams Theatre Society, and Courtenay Downtown BIA, as well as the Comox Valley Community Foundation.
- **Cultural Facilities Owner:** Providing key creative spaces in the community such as the Comox Valley Community Art Council - administrative and digital creation hub, Comox Valley Centre for the Arts (operated by the Comox Valley Art Gallery Society), Courtenay & District Museum (operated by the Courtenay and District Historical Society), Sid Williams Theatre (operated by the Sid Williams Theatre Society), and other small office administrative spaces that are complementary to the arts and culture facilities.

Looking ahead, Courtenay aims to continue its ascent as a premier cultural destination, fostering innovation, diversity, and accessibility in arts and culture. With this strong foundation in place, the city is poised to chart a course towards the future, while cementing its status as a cultural hub of the Comox Valley and on Vancouver Island.

## 2.3 City of Courtenay & Cultural Sector Priorities

As per Courtenay’s Official Community Plan (OCP) (see objectives in the grey box below), the Strategic Cultural Plan supports numerous existing community priorities in Courtenay.

**Official Community Plan: Arts, Culture, and Heritage**

Arts, Culture, and Heritage are one of the 11 thematic policy priority areas for the City of Courtenay’s Official Community Plan.

**Objectives:**

1. Residents and visitors know they are in K’ómoks First Nation territory by the prominent tangible and intangible celebration of their culture and heritage
2. Local art, culture and heritage, including natural heritage, are showcased throughout Courtenay
3. Courtenay has a reputation as the regional centre for arts and culture
4. Community cultural and heritage assets are identified, preserved, and celebrated
5. Identities expressed in the public realm and cultural programming are representative of Courtenay and the region
6. Community access and participation in arts and culture is strong and widespread

References:

The following table outlines key priorities identified from a review of existing municipal plans and strategies and notes existing priorities for Courtenay. The relevance to the direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan is highlighted.

**Table 1. Existing community priorities in Courtenay**

Priority	Relevance and Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan	City Municipal Plans
<b>Advance reconciliation efforts</b>	<p><b>Reconciliation is a guiding cardinal direction</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize engagement with Indigenous peoples</li> <li>▪ Support actions identified in the OCP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> <li>▪ Engagement Framework (in development 2024)</li> </ul>
<b>Reduce social inequalities</b>	<p><b>Equity is a guiding cardinal direction</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> <li>▪ Engagement Framework (in development 2024)</li> </ul>

Priority	Relevance and Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan	City Municipal Plans
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize engagement with equity-priority communities</li> <li>▪ Focus on links between arts and culture and wider community issues</li> <li>▪ Support actions identified in the OCP</li> </ul>	
<b>Address funding challenges</b>	<p><b>Funding is an ongoing challenge identified throughout policy documents</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evaluate outstanding Cultural Services Report recommendations including financial support and City staff capacity</li> <li>▪ Review Comox Valley Regional District's Principle-Based Framework for Allocating Recreation Grants (Wilson, 2011)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> </ul>
<b>Enhance downtown and continue to support downtown as Courtenay's cultural district.</b>	<p><b>Downtown vision remains relevant and desired</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support steps to advance the Downtown Playbook vision of a cultural district and activate 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets.</li> <li>▪ Conduct cultural mapping, facilities needs assessments, and address ageing infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Policies are needed to support arts and culture (i.e. Public Art Policy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Downtown Playbook, 2016</li> <li>▪ Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan, 2025</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> <li>▪ Parks and Recreation Master Plan, 2019</li> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> </ul>
<b>Support regional interconnectivity</b>	<p><b>Arts and culture in Courtenay serves the region</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build on Cultural Services Report to identify ongoing gaps in funding, service provision, etc.</li> <li>▪ Revisit Wilson's frameworks</li> <li>▪ Recognize the regional role that cultural services play.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> <li>▪ For additional reference: CVRD 'A Principle-based Framework for Funding Regional Recreation and Cultural Facilities', J. Wilson, 2011</li> </ul>
<b>Encourage active community engagement</b>	<p><b>Courtenay prioritizes community participation</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public Engagement Strategy &amp; Toolkit, 2020</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> </ul>

Priority	Relevance and Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan	City Municipal Plans
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage the community throughout the research</li> <li>▪ Apply processes identified in the Public Engagement Strategy &amp; Toolkit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Plan Scoping Workshop, 2022</li> <li>▪ Engagement Framework (in development 2024)</li> </ul>
<b>Celebrate cultural offerings</b>	<p><b>Courtenay is home to a vibrant cultural scene</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Map cultural assets identified in the Community Profile section</li> <li>▪ Document strengths of Courtenay’s cultural scene</li> <li>▪ Need for a special events and hosting policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> <li>▪ Cultural Inventory Report, 2017</li> <li>▪ Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2019</li> <li>▪ Parks, Rec. &amp; Culture Analysis document, 2017</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> </ul>
<b>Recognize community impact</b>	<p><b>There is a desire to capture the social and economic impacts</b></p> <p><i>Direction for the Strategic Cultural Plan:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct economic and social impact assessments</li> <li>▪ Recognize the role of arts and culture in tourism development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> <li>▪ Cultural Plan Scoping Workshop, 2022</li> </ul>

### 3. The Planning Process and Key Insights

#### 3.1 Cultural Planning Process

##### What is Cultural Planning?

Cultural planning is a process of community consultation that aims to help towns, cities, and regions support arts and cultural development, to benefit the community. The planning process highlights a community's unique strengths, gaps, and needs in relation to arts and culture. The aim is to strategically integrate arts and culture with wider municipal planning and strategies. Essentially, it means asking, "Where are we now? Where do we want to be?" – and considers strategies to get there. Cultural plans strive to elevate arts and culture as an essential component of sustainability, aiming to integrate seamlessly into the overall framework of urban planning. By doing so, such plans ensure that arts and cultural considerations are intrinsic to the processes, practices, and decisions that shape cities, ultimately enriching the overall health, well-being, and vitality of communities.

##### Municipal Plan Linkages

The illustration below depicts the municipal plan linkages and how the recommendations from each plan should align and are interconnected in the hierarchy of municipal plans.

Figure 2.: Municipal Plan Linkages<sup>3</sup>




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<sup>3</sup> Patricia Huntsmann Culture and Communications

With the upcoming Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan in development and other local area plans to be updated or created, the Strategic Cultural Plan provides direction on how these municipal plans could support arts and cultural initiatives, programs and infrastructure investment.

As per the recommendations in the Strategic Cultural Plan, the downtown is envisioned as the City's cultural district – a recommendation supported by initial engagement conducted in the first phase of the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan project which sought feedback from key cultural organizations impacted by this work. Initial engagement reaffirmed the importance of recognizing Courtenay's Downtown Cultural District as a central hub and gateway to downtown, emphasizing its role in arts, heritage, tourism, and economic growth. Considerations coming out of the first phase of the LAP include enhancing downtown vibrancy through investments in event programming, transit access, historic signage, public art, wayfinding, and public realm improvements. Community groups and partnerships, including the Sid Williams Theatre Society, Comox Valley Art Gallery Society, Comox Valley Community Arts Council, and Courtenay and District Historical Society are key to implementation, and alignment with existing city strategies will ensure a cohesive planning approach.

### **Defining Arts and Culture in Courtenay – What's Included?**

Arts and culture can be difficult to define because they mean many things to different people. First, in this report, it should be made clear that arts and culture includes heritage. Second, this Plan defines arts and culture broadly – including tangible assets (like artworks and buildings), organized groups (such as performance and dance troupes), and intangible things (like stories and cultural traditions). These cultural assets contribute to the vitality and resilience of arts and culture by providing the foundation for artistic expression, community building and collaboration, and the transmission of cultural heritage from generation to generation.

The City of Courtenay acknowledges that the definition of 'culture' and its impacts may be different from K'ómoks First Nation's view and that of the Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples in the community. As such, part of the ongoing relationship building with K'ómoks First Nations and MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples in the community will be identifying and defining what 'culture' means in Courtenay.

The 'Cultural Resources Framework' below maps different types of arts and culture resources or assets.

Figure 3. Cultural Resources Framework

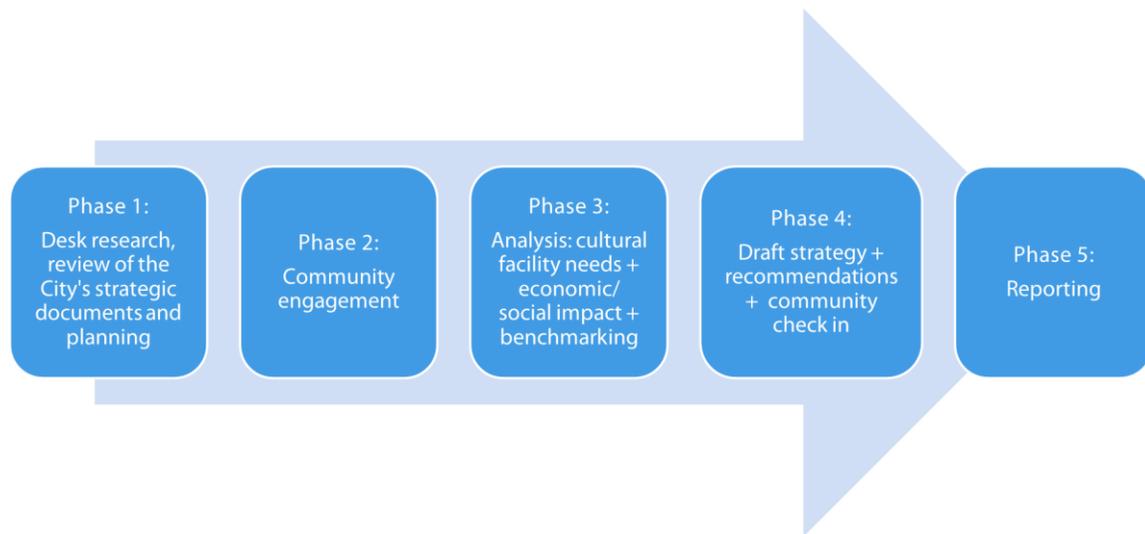


Source: Adapted from Municipal Cultural Planning Incorporated's Cultural Resources Mapping: Guide for Municipalities (2010), Statistics Canada Canadian Framework for Cultural Statistics (2011), and North Shore Culture Compass

### Our Five-Phased Approach

The Strategic Cultural Plan followed a **five-phase process**, involving desk research (including reviewing existing City strategies and policies), community engagement, analysis (including facility options, economic and social impact analysis, and municipal benchmarking via a comparative review), followed by the development of a draft strategy and recommendations for community feedback and review, and lastly, the creation of the final Strategic Cultural Plan.

Figure 4. Five-phase planning process



The community engagement work was led by the City of Courtenay's Recreation, Culture, and Community Services Department, in collaboration with [Nordicity](#), with input from artists, arts and culture organizations, interested community parties, arts and culture facility user groups, and the wider public.

## 3.2 Research Insights

### 3.2.1 The Impact of Arts and Culture

Arts and culture are everywhere in our lives. Whether listening to music on the radio, viewing art on the walls of a coffee shop, or simply telling children a story, arts and culture touch everything. However, one defines arts and culture, its true value is hard to measure, and the full impact is often overlooked. Nonetheless, we know arts and culture bestow important social and community benefits.<sup>4</sup> There are economic benefits in terms of employment, income, tourism, and spillovers to other businesses. For example, in British Columbia, the creative sector contributed \$6.8 billion to total Gross Domestic Product.<sup>5</sup> As well, arts participation is also linked with greater life satisfaction, quality of life, and happiness.<sup>6</sup>

This section provides a basic assessment of the economic impact of cultural organizations in Courtenay, as well as the social and community impacts of arts and culture initiatives. Finally, potential cultural tourism opportunities are noted.

#### **Economic impact**

Arts and culture create economic impact in the community by creating jobs, supporting businesses, and driving tourism, but also by catalyzing long-term investment into the community. Cultural organizations drive impact through their spending on staff wages, and procurement of goods and services. Additionally, individuals who engage with the sector further contribute to economic growth by spending their money and time at local businesses, such as restaurants, cafes, and shops, thereby stimulating economic activity and supporting entrepreneurship. This combined impact underscores the significant role of arts and culture in making communities vibrant places, attracting investment, and fostering community development. It highlights the interconnectedness of cultural vitality with broader economic prosperity, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing and investing in arts and culture as essential components of vibrant and resilient communities. Nordicity's economic impact analysis<sup>7</sup> estimated that cultural organizations in Courtenay:

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<sup>4</sup> OECD (2021). Economic and social impact of cultural and creative sectors: Note for Italy G20 Presidency Culture Work Group, 2021 <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/OECD-G20-Culture-July-2021.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Creative BC (2022). Creative Industries Economic Results Assessment. <https://creativebc.com/sector/research-reports/ciera/ciera-2022>

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada (2016). Social Impacts and Benefits of Arts and Culture: A Literature Review. Department of Canadian Heritage, February 2016 [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2018/pch/CH4-187-2016-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/pch/CH4-187-2016-eng.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Findings from Nordicity's Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan Social and Economic Impact Assessment analysis, which drew on findings from the Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan survey (separate annex document).

- Generated a direct<sup>8</sup> \$3.6 million in labour income from 101 full time employees (FTEs), and \$4 million in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022.
- Including indirect<sup>9</sup> and induced<sup>10</sup> impact, cultural organizations in Courtenay contributed an estimated \$6.8 million in labour income, 158 in FTEs of employment, and \$11 million in GDP.

To put the economic impacts in perspective, participants in the Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan survey reported that they **spend an average of \$105 within the community before or after attending/participating in cultural events** (such as at local restaurants, bars, etc.). This observation suggests that there is a strong economic impact from cultural events.

A more wholistic economic impact assessment of the local arts and culture sector would include the incomes of artists, not just arts organizations as done for this report. Furthermore, these impact numbers do not include the wider Comox Valley region. Estimates of economic impact of the arts in the region would certainly be larger, and further assessments are warranted to capture the full impact.

Through the City's multi-year grant funding, the core cultural service providers (Sid Williams Theatre Society, Comox Valley Art Gallery Society, Courtenay and District Historical Society and the Comox Valley Community Art Council) are able to leverage the City's arts and culture funding contribution to obtain additional grant funding. In 2024 this total amount was approximately \$1,600,000.<sup>11</sup>

### Social and community impacts

Arts and culture create social and community impacts in various ways. In Courtenay, [Walk With Me](#), a project of Comox Valley Art Gallery, addresses the toxic drug poisoning crisis through deep sharing and close listening. Meanwhile, Comox Valley Community Arts Council's [Art + Land](#) project promotes environmental stewardship via arts events and experiences that inspire collaboration, reflection, and learning. Arts and culture can also play a profound role in truth and reconciliation initiatives. For example, sculptures and

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<sup>8</sup> Direct Impact refers to the increase in GDP, FTEs, and labour-driven income directly associated with arts and culture organizations.

<sup>9</sup> Indirect impacts estimate the employment, GDP and labour income supported by purchases from suppliers. For instance, a cultural organization might stimulate employment in the marketing industry through purchases of communications services from local suppliers, or an artist may enlist light manufacturers to fabricate sculptures.

<sup>10</sup> Induced impacts use modelling techniques to estimate how labour income affects the economy through household purchases. For example, a cultural organization employee will spend their employment income to purchase household goods from local businesses.

<sup>11</sup> The amount is based on 2024 estimated figures. Leveraged funds are mostly project or program based and may vary year to year.

murals can increase awareness that Courtenay is on K'ómoks First Nation territory, while cultural programming can create chances to learn and understand.

Participants in the Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan survey identified the 'top three' social impacts of arts and culture locally as:

- Encouraging social participation and a sense of belonging;
- Enhancing Courtenay as an attractive place to live; and
- Building empathy, awareness, and understanding between different and distinct cultural backgrounds.

#### **Findings from Arts and Culture Impact Study for Creative Coast**

Findings from Courtenay echo an all-Island study conducted by Nordicity for the Digital Innovation Group (now Creative Coast) in 2021,\* where:

- 97% (of 1,371 survey respondents) agreed that the regional arts sector in their community improves personal wellbeing (mental and/or physical);
- 96% agreed that the sector attracts visitors to the region as a tourist destination; and,
- 94% agreed that the sector helps to create a distinct local identity.

\*Nordicity (2021). Arts and Culture Impact Assessment: Vancouver Island & Gulf Islands Super Region.

#### **Cultural tourism – a growing opportunity**

Courtenay and the Comox Valley boast a rich array of cultural attractions. The [Vancouver Island Music Festival](#), [Filberg Festival](#), and performances at the [Sid Williams Theatre](#) draw visitors from across the Island and beyond. In addition, [Courtenay and District Museum and Palaeontology Centre](#)'s 80-million-year-old Elasmosaur is now the fossil emblem of B.C.. Arts and culture in Courtenay and the region makes a significant positive impact, and with strategic focus and support, this impact can grow – for the benefit of all.

As stated earlier, survey participants reported **spending an average of \$105 within the community before or after attending/participating in cultural events**. This finding further points to how attending arts and cultural activities benefits not just the arts and culture sector, but also the broader community in terms of the ripple effects of such spending, which can be increased when derived from tourism and bringing spending in from outside the community.

There is an opportunity to capitalize further on cultural tourism, considering that:

- Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing tourism markets;<sup>12</sup>
- ‘Cultural Explorers’ make up the second largest group for global tourists, according to Destination Canada;<sup>13</sup> and,
- Research conducted by Americans for the Arts found that arts and culture travelers spend more than other travelers, are more likely to stay in a hotel or bed and breakfast, are more likely to spend \$1,000 or more during their stay, and stay longer than other visitors.<sup>14</sup>
- Experience Comox Valley tourism strategy recognizes the Comox Valley as the premier, year-round Vancouver Island destination for outdoor, culinary, and cultural activities<sup>15</sup>.

Courtenay’s Strategic Cultural Plan serves as a catalyst for enhancing the economic, social, and tourism impacts of arts and culture, driving forward the city’s overall development. By investing in arts and culture, Courtenay not only fosters economic growth through tourism revenue and job creation within the creative sector, but also cultivates a vibrant and inclusive community that attracts residents and businesses alike. The social benefits of a thriving arts scene are immeasurable, fostering civic pride, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging among residents.

Additionally, by showcasing its unique cultural identity and offerings, Courtenay elevates its profile as a must-visit destination in the Comox Valley, drawing visitors and stimulating further economic activity for the region. As Courtenay continues to prioritize arts and culture in its strategic planning, it paves the way for sustainable and holistic development, where creativity and community thrive.

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<sup>12</sup> OECD. The Impact of Culture on Tourism. [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/the-impact-of-culture-on-tourism\\_9789264040731-en#page11](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/the-impact-of-culture-on-tourism_9789264040731-en#page11)

<sup>13</sup> ‘Cultural Explorer’ visitors pursue opportunities to embrace, discover and immerse themselves in the culture, people, and settings of the places they visit. Source: Destination Canada, EQ Profile. [https://www.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/archive/2013-01-01/Tools\\_ExplorerQuotient\\_Profiles\\_2015\\_EN.pdf](https://www.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/archive/2013-01-01/Tools_ExplorerQuotient_Profiles_2015_EN.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Americans for the Arts (2017). Arts and Economic Prosperity 5. [https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/aep5/PDF\\_Files/ARTS\\_AEPsummary\\_loRes.pdf](https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/aep5/PDF_Files/ARTS_AEPsummary_loRes.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [4VI – Experience Comox Valley City of Courtenay MRDT presentation to Courtenay Council: May 8, 2024.](#)

### 3.2.2 Benchmarking Analysis (Comparative Review)

A comparative review was conducted to benchmark Courtenay against four other municipalities of comparable size and demographics. Unique approaches and practices in arts and culture planning were also considered in this selection of comparable municipalities. **The District of Squamish, City of Campbell River, City of Langley, and City of Nelson** were selected for review in relation to Courtenay.

The research included a review of municipal delivery models and core service and cultural provision budgets, with consideration of areas such as funding both financial and in-kind support and investment. The review also sought to include indicators such as number of cultural facilities, arts and culture investment per capita, staffing levels (in FTEs), and identification of other supporting policies or plans available. Key takeaways identified included:

- 3 out of 4 municipalities operate with in-house departments, typically maintaining around 1-2 FTEs of dedicated arts and culture staff.
- All comparators have significantly different arts and culture budgets, ranging between \$200k to \$940k annually.
- Langley and Campbell River provide the largest amount of other funding of arts and culture (e.g., grants, public art, in-kind support). They spend approximately \$700k to \$400k respectively. Notably, while Courtenay provides regular operating support to major arts and culture facilities in the community, it does not provide any significant culture grants for which community groups or members can apply.
- Municipalities are guided in their arts and culture endeavors by a variety of strategic and master planning documents (i.e., Culture Plan or Parks, Recreation, and Culture Master Plans), as well as supporting documents (i.e., service and facility reviews/studies).

The full Benchmarking of Comparative Jurisdictions document [Appendix B] is a valuable reference to assess the effectiveness of different approaches, reveal best practices, and support informed decision-making related to investment into arts and culture facilities in Courtenay.

### 3.2.3 Cultural Facilities Options

A **Cultural Facilities Options Analysis** was conducted for this project. The process included site visits to core cultural partners and organizations and feedback received from interviews and community check-ins about cultural spaces and facilities in Courtenay. **Specific needs identified include space for live performances, multi-disciplinary programming, rehearsal and creation, and spaces particularly for diverse community groups.** Findings were used to develop a **working document which outlines short-term, medium-term, and longer-term priorities for consideration**, as well as future vision for cultural facilities and spaces that would meet the needs of individuals and community groups in Courtenay.

The next step is for the City to consider conducting a Cultural Facility Needs Assessment or Study for City-owned facilities to further understand how existing needs can be met, building on the Cultural Facilities Options work conducted in the strategic planning process. There is also an opportunity for the City to prioritize investment in existing facilities in the downtown area to actively work towards the vision of a downtown cultural district, as well as advocate for a regional effort toward the community aspiration of an Arts and Cultural Centre, which should be considered in the future based on population growth, cultural engagement, and business case analysis. The Cultural Facilities Options working document [Appendix C] will become a foundational document for conducting any future in-depth cultural facility needs assessments.

### **Alignment of Cultural Facility Needs with City of Courtenay Official Community Plan (OCP)**

The City of Courtenay Official Community Plan (OCP) articulates some existing facility needs that align with cultural facility needs identified through the Courtenay Strategic Cultural Planning process. These include:

- The Arts, Culture and Heritage Chapter [p. 155-162] describes the need “for a larger outdoor performance venue than currently available at Simms Park, the downtown Commons outdoor performing space and public plaza.”
- the Arts, Culture and Heritage (ACH) Chapter describes the need “for a community arts and culture centre.”
- the ACH Action 3: “Work towards the downtown Public Commons public plaza concept identified in the Downtown Courtenay Playbook.”
- the ACH Action 6: “Create a Courtenay Cultural Plan, including consideration of a dedicated community arts and culture space.”
- the ACH Action 7: “Continue to support the downtown as the region’s arts, culture, and heritage hub by ensuring key cultural partners such as the Comox Valley Art Gallery, the Courtenay and District Museum, the Sid Williams Civic Theatre, and the Comox Valley Community Arts Council continue to be located downtown, and promoting and investing in public art and cultural opportunities downtown.”
- the ACH Action 11: “Consider the establishment of a dedicated community arts and culture space.”

### 3.3 Community Engagement Insights

This section presents the engagement approach and activities and a summary of what we heard from the community and cultural sector findings. A detailed What We Heard report can be found in the appendices providing further information on the results of the community engagement.

Figure 5. Live graphic recording by Jill Banting from the May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024 focus group with arts and culture sector participants



#### 3.3.1 Engagement Approach and Activities

Aligning with the City's Official Community Plan, 2022, the Strategic Cultural Plan was developed through a process of inclusive community consultation. The key engagement principles employed were: (i) taking a **human-centred** approach; (ii) having **respect for First Nations and Indigenous Peoples** – especially K'ómoks First Nation, on whose Unceded territory Courtenay is located; (iii) **trust and privacy**; and (iv) taking an **intersectional approach**. The latter means taking into consideration the perspectives of diverse community members, including equity priority groups who are often not included in engagement activities due to barriers that limit their participation.<sup>16</sup> This approach included:

<sup>16</sup> "Intersectionality brings attention to how people are defined by differing positionalities in a society based on their gender, ethnicity or race, sexual orientation, ability, and class, etc. These are identities and positionalities that form overlapping positions of inequality and privilege. They are in hierarchical relations to one another according to which some people have more power in societies than others." Source: Salla Sariola (2020) Intersectionality and Community Engagement: Can Solidarity Alone Solve Power Differences in Global Health Research?, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 20:5, 57-59, DOI: [10.1080/15265161.2020.1745951](https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1745951)

- Respectfully seeking input from equity priority groups including Indigenous, Black and People of Colour, youth, 2SLGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, and unhoused community members.
- Leveraging established relationships with existing community organizations advocating for equity priority groups to ensure that all community members, especially historically underrepresented communities, have a voice.
- Recognizing the need for long-term commitments to relationship building with Indigenous communities.

### **Engagement with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples**

The City of Courtenay's Strategic Cultural Plan project team is committed to working with K'ómoks First Nation to ensure that the Strategic Cultural Plan aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and is guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Findings and Calls to Actions.

The City recognizes the colonial aspects of having a specific and limited timeframe, which creates barriers to meaningful engagement. As such, the City is committed to working together with K'ómoks First Nation to define a path forward recognizing that true relationship building takes time. The ambition is for the Strategic Cultural Plan to become a living document rather than a static, one-time report – one that is open to adjustment to ensure K'ómoks First Nation's priorities are included in the process. This iterative approach should allow time for true relationship building and community engagement with K'ómoks First Nation and could include a regular review of the Plan and implementation progress.

Furthermore, to ensure this project also includes the Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous communities who live within the community, the engagement approach aligned with the [distinction-based approach](#) adopted by the Province of British Columbia. The engagement approach respects and acknowledges the unique cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. To that end, the City will continue to work with K'ómoks First Nation to ensure that their land rights are met. In addition, the City is committed to working with the K'ómoks First Nation, the MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit and Urban Indigenous-serving organizations to respect the distinct rights and interests of each individual Indigenous community.

City staff and elected officials met with K'ómoks First Nation Elected Chief and Council and will continue to engage with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, and Urban Indigenous serving organizations throughout the Strategic Plan development and implementation.

Engagement with Indigenous groups included feedback from MIKI'SIW Métis Association, an Indigenous Elder involved in the Walk with Me project, and a member of the Wachiay Friendship Centre Society. Staff endeavor to continue building relationships and seeking feedback on the Strategic Cultural Plan from Indigenous groups and community members. It is significant to note that 17% of the survey responses were from respondents who identified as Indigenous peoples.

## Community Engagement Activities

The project sought to ensure that a diverse and representative range of voices were heard. A detailed report on engagement activities and findings can be found in the What We Heard Report attached in Appendix A.

Community engagement research for the Strategic Cultural Plan was extensive and sought to engage in a variety of ways and to reach a diverse group of residents. To summarize, the figure below graphically presents the various community engagement activities.

Figure 5. Engagement activities at a glance



### 3.3.2 Key Insights from What We Heard

The engagement process gathered the community's participation and perception regarding arts and culture in Courtenay, identifying needs and gaps relating to cultural services and facilities. A detailed "What We Heard" report was completed providing further information on the results of the community engagement (Appendix A).

The engagement process generated key findings highlighted below.

### 3.3.3 Survey Highlights

The survey was completed by ~700 participants – a sample size of approximately 2.8% of Courtenay’s population of approximately 28,420 residents.<sup>17</sup> See Appendix A for full survey findings in the What We Heard Report.

- The overall survey results show that a very **high number of respondents are culturally engaged (94%)**. Performing arts (such as theatre, dance, and music) are the most popular way to engage.
- Arts and culture in Courtenay encourage **social participation** and a sense of belonging.
- **The main barriers to accessing culture** in Courtenay are limited options nearby (29%), limited options of interest (21%), and not having enough time (20%). However, nearly a quarter of all participants stated that they do not experience any barriers.
- **Critical needs**, according to culture sector respondents (artists and cultural sector workers), are more space for performance/exhibitions (identified as a challenge by 45% of sector respondents), more rehearsal and creation space (36%), and supportive bylaws and policies for arts and culture (32%).
- **The future arts and culture offerings respondents would most like to see** more include live performances (selected by 44% of total participants), more education, programming, and workshops (29%), and more Indigenous arts and culture (28%).
- **The main cultural themes that the City should prioritize in the Culture Plan**, according to all survey participants, are enhancing space for arts and culture (35% of participants selected this option) and using arts and culture to enhance community wellbeing (26%).
- **Expenditure:** The average amount spent in the community before and after a cultural event is \$105 per individual.

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<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada. City of Courtenay Census Profile 2021. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=courtenay&DGUIDlist=2021A00055926010&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>

### 3.4 Cultural Sector Findings

These findings draw on discussions at a cultural sector roundtable event hosted on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, one-to-one interviews with artists and members of Courtenay's cultural community, and discussions at a public event on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Courtenay's cultural sector has a collaborative spirit and is supported by numerous arts and culture organizations, volunteers, and cultural facilities. While the cultural sector offers rich and vibrant arts and cultural offerings, certain needs have been identified by the sector, including:

- **More equipped and accessible cultural spaces and performance venues** (e.g., with different sizes for different audiences and art forms). Specific types of space needs identified include a studio theatre, multi-use or adaptive spaces, and outdoor venues equipped for performances. Other space needs identified include:
  - **Greater access to City-owned spaces for rentals with discounted pricing for small community groups** – i.e., the cost of spaces was identified as a barrier for small and medium-sized local arts organizations.
  - **To conduct an accessibility audit of City-owned facilities and upgrade facilities where accessibility is an issue** for groups such as seniors (e.g., provide grab bars in washrooms, stage upgrades for performances).
  - For the **City to provide support** in setting up spaces (including outdoor) for events.
- **More funding (i.e., community grants) to help subsidize cultural events and programs.** The cost of some events/programs remains too high for sections of the population including seniors, newcomers, youth, and the unhoused. Cultural organizations are also under financial pressure and unable to meet all participation costs, hindering the sector from offering more inclusive programming.
- **A need for regional support through the development of cultural facilities/spaces, and funding programs** to support arts and cultural organizations within the region including those based in Courtenay (e.g., it was noted that other residents in the region benefit from Courtenay's cultural offerings).
- **To review transportation options to cultural events.** Transit is often a barrier for seniors, newcomers, youth, and unhoused community members.
- **The need for the City to play a coordinating role** in facilitating event schedules across cultural service providers and to maintain an event calendar.
- **To foster relationships between the cultural sector and the community** including the school district.
- **Succession planning protocols for local arts and cultural organizations.** For example, internships and mentorships for youth could enhance their interest in working within the arts and culture sector.

- **More technical and professional cultural workers** to support programming and events in Courtenay. Partnerships with educational providers including the school district and North Island College (NIC) could be beneficial, for example, to encourage more young people to work in the sector and to offer technical courses in sound and lighting, crowd control & management, arts administration and event management among others.

It must be noted that throughout Canada, and across most forms, insufficient funding remains a consistent challenge for the arts and culture sector. Particularly, art forms for which there is some form of admission charges, the financial challenges are severe. A combination of “pandemic hesitancy”, costs rising faster than inflation, and flatline government budgets amid increased demands to support new voices, remain a critical part of the context in funding of arts and culture today. Courtenay’s cultural organizations are facing similar challenges with funding flatlining despite inflation pressures and increasing demands (usage and population). It is important to note that new sources of revenue (such as some form of arts tax credits or social finance), and new forms of collaboration to support important cost saving or revenue enhancing initiatives, will be required to trigger new initiatives towards resolving this problem and continuing to support the positive economic and social impact of arts and culture in our communities.

### 3.4.1 Community-Identified Priority Needs

The following priority needs were identified based on collective findings from all engagement activities across all individual and community group consultations.



#### *Engaging K’ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis , Inuit, and Urban Indigenous communities*

- Many participants want to see **more Indigenous arts and culture in public spaces** – e.g., for storytelling and educational opportunities, especially to raise awareness of K’ómoks’ ongoing culture and heritage.
- The City of Courtenay is committed to **engaging with K’ómoks First Nation** Chief and Council regarding the development of the Strategic Cultural Plan. The City is committed to working collaboratively with K’ómoks First Nation to ensure the plan is representative of Indigenous values and supportive of work towards reconciliation.
- Part of the engagement with K’ómoks First Nation will be identifying and defining what ‘culture’ means in Courtenay, given that it is situated on the traditional Unceded territory of K’ómoks First Nation.
- The City is also committed to also engaging with the MIKI'SIW Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous communities to build long term relationships and provide opportunities for engagement on the Strategic Cultural Plan.



## *More cultural spaces, and better availability and affordability*

- Participants expressed the **need for more equipped and accessible cultural spaces and performance venues** to meet various sector needs, including the need for rental space. The types of spaces needed include small, medium, and larger venues, including live performance and rehearsal venues, creation venues and spaces for multi-disciplinary programming.



## *Developing more diverse and affordable cultural programming*

- There is a desire for more **diverse and affordable cultural programming**, both in terms of services delivered by the City and by local arts and cultural groups.



## *Further promotion of community partnerships and collaboration*

- There is a need for more community collaborations and partnerships. There is also a need to have **avenues for knowledge sharing** across the sector, for example through regular gatherings.



## *Increased support – financial and non-financial, local, and regional*

- There is a desire for increased City financial support for arts and culture, especially community grants.
- Participants further expressed the **need for regional funding support for arts and culture in Courtenay**, given cultural offerings are beneficial or serve the wider population in the Comox Valley or region.



## *Further development of cultural tourism*

- Participants expressed the need to leverage events such as gallery exhibitions and festivals to help make Courtenay the **cultural hub of the region** and to **promote cultural tourism**.



## *Attraction and training of technical cultural workers*

- There is a need for more **technical expertise on how to host live performances and events** – i.e., more sound and lighting technicians, stage management and crowd control specialists are in high demand.



## *Development of a Public Art Policy*

- There is a desire for Courtenay to develop a **Public Art Policy** that is reviewed periodically to support public arts in the city. Individuals noted such a policy could

leverage the talent of young artists and other Equity Priority artists while involving them in community public art initiatives.

### 3.4.2 Community-check in on Strategic Goals and Objectives

A short community check-in survey was deployed from November 10<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, receiving 78 responses. The purpose of the survey was to share findings from the “What We Heard Report” and gain feedback from community members on the draft strategic directions for the Plan. The survey also sought to gain feedback on developing a vision statement. A variety of quantitative and qualitative feedback was received. **Overall, there was community support for the strategic goals and objectives presented at the check-in.** Key takeaways from the results include:

- 71% of survey respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the proposed vision statement.
- 71% of survey respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the direction to ‘Advance truth and reconciliation through arts and culture.’
  - Respondents acknowledge with this direction that arts and culture initiatives encompass diverse cultures within the community and recognize that collaboration with Indigenous peoples is key to supporting and integrating Indigenous cultures as desired by Indigenous communities.
- 71% of survey respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the direction to ‘Build community resilience by strengthening arts and culture’s innate value.’
  - Respondents see arts and culture at the heart of Courtenay’s identity, and with appropriate investment there can be increased capacity for the community to pursue opportunities.
- 85% of survey respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the direction to ‘Develop more accessible cultural spaces.’
  - Respondents highlighted with this direction that cost and affordability are significant barriers for both community arts groups and the public to access cultural spaces. It was also noted that the community has outgrown existing cultural spaces such as the Sid William Theatre and Filberg Centre and that the need for a larger cultural facility in the community should be explored in this direction.
- 81% of survey respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the direction to further ‘Boster community arts.’
  - In this direction, respondents spoke to the specific need for the sector to build stronger relationships in the community, and that such relationships could help to further raise awareness to community arts and help alleviate space demands within the community.

- 74% of survey respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the direction to ‘support the strategic development of the cultural sector.’
  - It was noted by respondents for this direction that there is a need for the City to foster closer alignment with local, regional, and national economic development initiatives that relate to arts and culture, and for the City to better support arts groups seeking funding from external sources.

The high level of agreement from survey respondents to the draft strategic directions points to how the strategic directions are well aligned to the wide range of community needs and aspirations. The feedback received guided the development of the final strategic goals, objectives, and actions and draft Strategic Cultural Plan.

The draft Strategic Cultural Plan along with the Strategic Cultural Plan Summary were posted on the website project as the final step in Phase 5 of the project. A short questionnaire seeking feedback from the public on the level of support for the vision statement, goals, and objectives and any further feedback was made available from October 8th to November 6th, 2024. Approximately 80-91% strongly agreed, agreed, or were neutral in their support for the five goals and corresponding objectives.

Staff held in-person conversations with representatives from the MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Wachiay Friendship Centre and Indigenous Women's Sharing Society, the Comox Valley Regional District Reconciliation Advisory Table and the core culture service providers: the Sid Williams Theatre Society, Comox Valley Community Arts Council, the Courtenay and District Historical Society and the Comox Valley Art Gallery Society.

Feedback from the final check-in survey and the conversations were incorporated into the draft Strategic Cultural Plan to formulate the final Strategic Cultural Plan.

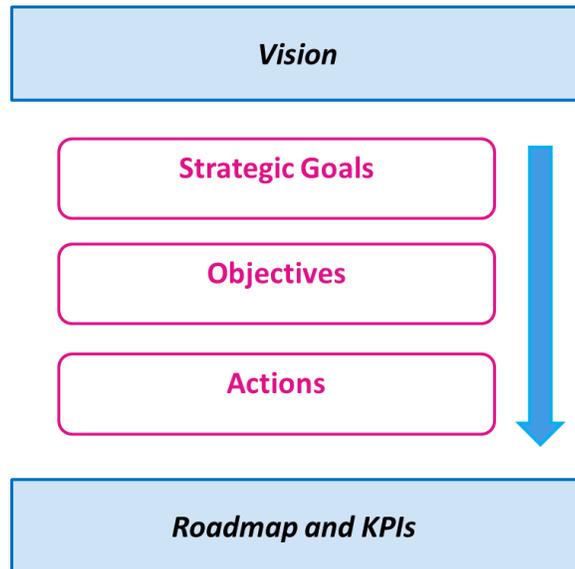
## 4. Strategic Cultural Plan

### 4.1 Introduction

The Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan has several components: a vision for arts and culture, strategic goals; objectives linked to each goal; and specific actions linked to each objective (Figure 6). The implementation plan – or ‘roadmap’ – will follow completion of the Cultural Strategic Plan. The purpose of the roadmap is to outline which actions need to happen and when, with key performance indicators so the City can monitor progress towards the goals.

The strategic goals are at the heart of the Strategic Cultural plan. They are the key ingredients that will guide the City on where to focus efforts to support arts and culture across the next 10 years.

Figure 6. Components of the Cultural Strategic Plan



## 4.2 At A Glance – Goals and Objectives

### The Courtenay Vision

This Strategic Cultural Plan is inspired and guided by the Vision for Courtenay drawn from municipal strategic priorities and community consultation.

*“Courtenay is a thriving cultural hub of creative opportunities, dedicated to cultivating vibrant and inclusive arts and culture for residents and visitors alike. Culture and history of Indigenous peoples are interwoven into a diverse community where connection and resiliency are celebrated through artistic expression and cultural exchange.”*

### Goals and Objectives

#### Goal 1: Advance truth and reconciliation through arts and culture

- Objective 1.1: Recognize the role and rights of K’ómoks First Nation MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples as it relates to arts and culture
- Objective 1.2: Respectfully acknowledge K’ómoks territory through arts and culture
- Objective 1.3: Increase support and investment in Indigenous arts and culture

**Goal 2: Build community resilience through arts and culture**

- Objective 2.1: Use arts and culture to support community belonging and inclusion, where differences and similarities are celebrated
- Objective 2.2: Leverage arts and culture as a medium to engage with community on complex social challenges and to support healing
- Objective 2.3: Develop cultural programming that appeals to a more diverse community

**Goal 3: Develop more accessible and affordable cultural spaces**

- Objective 3.1: Increase the availability of accessible and affordable spaces for arts and culture
- Objective 3.2: Prioritize initiatives/upgrades that provide enhanced and additional space for arts and culture

**Goal 4: Bolster community arts**

- Objective 4.1: Support the capacity building of community-led arts and culture organizations
- Objective 4.2: Break down silos and increase collaboration across the cultural sector
- Objective 4.3: Increase the awareness of community-led arts and culture events

**Goal 5: Support the strategic development of the cultural sector**

- Objective 5.1: Build and sustain existing social and economic impact by strengthening Courtenay's professional arts and culture sector
- Objective 5.2: Embed culture more firmly in tourism initiatives in Courtenay and the Comox Valley
- Objective 5.3: Create new and or updated policies to support the cultural sector
- Objective 5.4: Explore strategic ways to meet sector labour needs

### 4.3 Foundational Elements

The strategic vision for Courtenay's cultural landscape sets the stage for a dynamic and inclusive future where arts and culture play a pivotal role in community identity and resilience. To translate this vision into actionable goals, it is essential to establish the

foundational elements that will guide the City's efforts in responding to the strategic plan's goals, objectives, and actions. These elements represent the core priorities that must be integrated across all cultural initiatives, ensuring that our strategy is both comprehensive and sustainable.



### **Advance Reconciliation Across All Initiatives**

A key action for Courtenay is to weave the principles of truth and reconciliation into the fabric of every cultural effort. This means ensuring that the history, culture, and contributions of K'ómoks First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples are not only acknowledged but celebrated throughout the city. This commitment to reconciliation must guide the City's actions, policies, and the way it engages with the community, making it a cornerstone of Courtenay's cultural identity.



### **Build the Team to Drive Cultural Change**

To lead Courtenay's cultural transformation, the City must invest in building a strong, dedicated team. This involves reflecting on the findings of the benchmarking analysis and determining Courtenay's approach to resource creation that is required to drive this ambitious cultural agenda. New cultural resources will be required either internally, externally, or a blend of both and with the right people in place, Courtenay can effectively deliver on its cultural promises, ensuring that arts and culture are accessible and thriving for all.



### **Elevate Investment in Arts and Culture**

One of the most impactful actions the City can take is to increase its financial commitment to arts and culture. By prioritizing funding and investment, Courtenay will enable its cultural sector to grow and innovate and continue to deliver on the exceptional social, economic, and tourism impacts of the sector. This move is about more than just funding projects—it's about creating a sustainable environment where funding can be leveraged to so that arts and culture can reach its full potential.



### **Transform and Expand Cultural Spaces**

Courtenay's cultural spaces located in the downtown are at the heart of community life, and enhancing these facilities is a critical move to achieving the vision of a cultural district. Whether it's upgrading existing venues, creating new multi-purpose spaces, or improving accessibility, these investments will ensure that the City's cultural infrastructure meets the

needs of a growing and diverse population. This move is essential for fostering a sense of place and ensuring that all residents and visitors can participate in the City's cultural life.



### **Lead Regional Cultural Advocacy**

Courtenay must take a leadership role in advocating for arts and culture not just within its own boundaries, but across the Comox Valley. By championing regional collaboration and investment, and positioning Courtenay as a cultural leader, the City can attract new opportunities, enhance tourism, and strengthen its cultural sector. This move will require building strong partnerships and advocating for policies and investments that benefit the entire region and reflect the regional impact of Courtenay's arts and culture assets.

## 4.4 Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan Goals, Objectives and Actions

### Goal 1. Advance truth and reconciliation through arts and culture

This goal recognizes the role of arts and culture as a powerful medium in advancing truth and reconciliation in Courtenay and surrounding communities in the region. It emphasizes collaboration with K'ómoks First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples in acknowledging and celebrating Indigenous history and culture of the community. It was noted that there is a lack of visibility of Indigenous arts, culture, and heritage, thus a desire to see more Indigenous arts and culture in public spaces.

This goal aligns with key objectives of Courtenay's Official Community Plan. Reconciliation is a cardinal direction of the OCP: The City commits to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into its work and decision-making process, and to providing equitable and inclusive services that benefit Indigenous peoples. The City will seek guidance from Indigenous partners in how to make this commitment a reality.

#### **OCP, 2022 - Arts, Culture, Heritage (ACH 1):**

*"Incorporate art, culture and heritage, including K'ómoks First Nation heritage, into place-making efforts throughout the city, including in the design of new private and public buildings and spaces."*

#### **Objective 1.1: Recognize the role and rights of K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples as it relates to arts and culture**

**Action 1.1.1:** Commit to **ongoing relationship building** with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples to allow for the **continuous shaping of the Strategic Cultural Plan** as a living document reflective of the Indigenous history of Courtenay and the region.

**Action 1.1.2:** Engage with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples to **seek input, guidance, and consent** in cultural planning processes and co-designing protocols through **decolonized practices**.

**Action 1.1.3:** Include Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders in **cultural planning processes** to ensure the incorporation of traditional wisdom.

#### **Objective 1.2: Respectfully acknowledge K'ómoks territory through arts and culture**

**Action 1.2.1:** Continue to **respectfully acknowledge the land**, recognizing the Unceded traditional territories of the K'ómoks First Nation, in all City-led engagement and activities. Further this through the development of the City's Reconciliation Framework, and include corporate policy to ensure K'ómoks

First Nation land acknowledgment is carried out consistently across City operations.

**Action 1.2.2:** Support the creation of **public art installations that celebrate K'ómoks First Nation and Indigenous cultures** and reinforce the City's commitment through development of a **Public Art Policy**. These installations can serve as a visible and lasting representation of the respect and acknowledgment of the territory and should be commissioned from Indigenous artists.

**Action 1.2.3:** Consider **renaming the Native Sons Hall** following an appropriate process that acknowledges the harms caused by the Native Sons of Canada to a number of equity deserving groups. The process should be conducted with consent from K'ómoks First Nation as part of acknowledging the Indigenous history of Courtenay.

### **Objective 1.3: Increase support and investment in Indigenous arts and culture**

**Action 1.3.1:** Consider establishing **dedicated funding and grants for Indigenous artists, cultural projects, and public art** through a City-funded Arts and Culture Grant Program.

**Action 1.3.2:** Investigate **financial investment** opportunities to support K'ómoks First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples to bolster their capacity for meaningful engagement in City Arts and Culture initiatives such as the Strategic Cultural Plan. Further this through the development of the City's Reconciliation Framework and potential Arts and Culture Grant Program.

**Action 1.3.3:** Support and encourage participation in **Indigenous-led cultural events and ceremonies** and explore ways to decolonize existing arts and cultural activities by integrating Indigenous arts and culture into events like Canada Day.

**Action 1.3.4:** Foster **collaboration with Indigenous artists and creators** by commissioning or showcasing their work and exploring facilitation of networking opportunities to connect with peers, collaborators, mentors, and buyers

**Action 1.3.5:** Advocate for **sustainable tourism initiatives and tourism investments** that respectfully highlight and celebrate Indigenous arts and culture in collaboration with K'ómoks First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples.

**Action 1.3.6:** Explore partnerships with Indigenous communities to co-develop arts and culture-related **policies, learning opportunities, programs, events, and workshops** that foster understanding of Indigenous histories, traditions, and values.

## Goal 2. Build community resilience through arts and culture

Located in a beautiful geographic location, Courtenay offers a variety of cultural activities that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. The city is also home to strong cultural anchors who work collaboratively to support cultural activities and there is strong community support and interest in arts and culture. In addition, feedback gathered from equity priority groups (including Indigenous, Black and people of colour community members, youth, immigrants, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and unhoused people), indicated that arts and culture fosters a sense of belonging and identity, community connections and healing, while offering an outlet of expression for community members. Nonetheless, it was also identified that more cultural programming and activities are needed for diverse groups, particularly for youth and other equity priority groups hence the need to specifically address the needs of these communities.

This goal supports the desire for more inclusive community programs and aligns with key objectives of Courtenay's Official Community Plan, specifically with prioritization of equity as a cardinal direction of the OCP.

### **OCP, 2022 - Arts, Culture, Heritage (ACH 4 & 25):**

*"Regularly monitor and update arts and culture programs to keep pace with the needs of a range of users as the community grows", and*

*"Seek new partnership models that support providing more arts and cultural opportunities throughout the city. "*

### **Objective 2.1: Use arts and culture to support community belonging and inclusion, where differences and similarities are celebrated**

**Action 2.1.1:** Explore establishing a Cultural Coordinator position at the City as a dedicated resource for arts and culture. This role will be responsible for connecting with communities, building relationships, and ensuring that arts and culture initiatives are effectively integrated and supported throughout the City.

**Action 2.1.2:** Review the City's current event and festival support, as well as community activities, with a lens to enhance diverse cultural representation and celebrations (i.e. Complete a Special Events and Hosting Policy for the City of Courtenay).

**Action 2.1.3:** Explore ways to make arts and cultural events, as well as heritage offerings **more inclusive, accessible, and representative** in collaboration with community arts groups.

**Action 2.1.4:** Explore **collaborations with community arts groups** that serve distinct community members in creating cultural spaces and developing activities that are accessible and welcoming to everyone.

### **Objective 2.2: Leverage arts and culture as a medium to engage community on complex social challenges and to support healing**

**Action 2.2.1:** Support ongoing **collaborative arts and culture projects** with local organizations that encourage dialogue, collective problem-solving, and storytelling through diverse media to address social challenges like isolation, while promoting relevant grant funding streams to support this work.

**Action 2.2.2:** Develop **partnerships with organizations that provide arts and culture-based wellness activities to support healing and well-being**, especially for community members affected by trauma or social disparities.

### **Objective 2.3: Develop cultural programming that appeals to a more diverse community**

**Action 2.3.1: Strengthen partnerships with equity priority groups** (Indigenous, Black and people of colour, immigrants, 2SLGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, and unhoused community members) to support or co-create inclusive programs and events, provide space for feedback on cultural sensitivity, and identify diverse programming opportunities that reflect the needs and interests of all community members

**Action 2.3.2: Showcase the contributions of diverse individuals and local organizations** in the cultural sector through an awards program or by integrating recognition into existing community events.

**Action 2.3.3:** Explore **partnerships with local groups and institutions**, such as North Island College and School District 71, to develop **youth arts and culture** programming both in schools and community, focusing on reducing barriers to participation.

## **Goal 3. Develop more accessible and affordable cultural spaces**

Courtenay is home to several cultural facilities i.e., 29 facilities and spaces used for arts and cultural events, programming and activities that not only serve Courtenay residents, but residents from neighboring cities in the Comox Valley and visitors to the region. However, community consultations revealed that there is limited availability and affordability of suitable cultural facilities that meet the needs of individuals and local community groups i.e., there is not enough spaces to meet the growing cultural needs. Specific space needs identified include space for live performances, multi-disciplinary programming space, rehearsals, and creation spaces. Limited accessibility and awareness of existing space were also mentioned.

A Cultural Facilities Options analysis was conducted to identify specific space needs, as well as existing spaces that could potentially meet these needs (including short-term,

medium-term, longer-term priorities and consideration for a future vision to build new facilities).

This goal supports the desire for more cultural spaces and aligns with key objectives of Courtenay's Official Community Plan including the goal of supporting the downtown as a Cultural District. Prioritizing facility investment in cultural facilities downtown is a key strategic action to achieve this vision.

**OCP, 2022 - Arts, Culture, Heritage (ACH 6, ACH9, ACH 11, ACH 23 and ACH 24):**

*"Consider the establishment of a dedicated community arts and culture space."*

*"Create a Courtenay Cultural Plan that provides a foundation for partnership models, cultural development, asset investment, and management."*

*"Recognize local cultural, arts, and heritage assets as foundational to Courtenay's community identity"*

*"Examine opportunities for art installations in public spaces as a routine part of public realm and parks, trails and greenway upgrades, open space design, and infrastructure projects"*

*"Explore opportunities within public buildings such as community centres and schools to display local arts, culture, and heritage."*

**Objective 3.1: Increase the availability of accessible and affordable spaces for arts and culture**

**Action 3.1.1:** Conduct a **facility needs assessment and accessibility audit** of City-owned arts and culture spaces as the first step in developing a Cultural Facilities Plan. This assessment will consider factors like location, transportation, and potential upgrades, with the findings directly informing the plan to guide future development of cultural spaces.

**Action 3.1.2:** **Encourage other arts and cultural spaces (non City-owned) to conduct accessibility audits of their spaces.** The City can support this by communicating and promoting external grant opportunities that support facility retrofits.

**Action 3.1.3:** **Advocate to the region for transit** providers to include consideration for events and programming relating to arts and culture (i.e., car and bike usage, shuttle usage, walking and parking) in service planning.

**Action 3.1.4:** Consider exploring **digital platforms to host a Cultural Asset and Resource map** that communicates the inventory, availability, and pricing of cultural facilities, in partnership with a community lead agency.

### **Objective 3.2: Prioritize initiatives/upgrades that provide enhanced and additional space for arts and culture**

**Action 3.2.1:** Complete **Facility Feasibility / Needs Assessments** to look at how existing City-owned arts and culture facilities can be modified to meet emerging community needs and support the cultural district in the downtown area where existing cultural assets are located (including spaces for live performance, multi-disciplinary, rehearsal, and creation spaces). These efforts should be integrated into a Cultural Facilities Plan to align with the City's long-term cultural infrastructure strategy.

**Action 3.2.2:** Develop a **Cultural Facilities Plan** with short, medium and long term priorities, leveraging relevant feedback collected and analysis undertaken in the Strategic Cultural Plan project including the Cultural Facilities Options Analysis.

**Action 3.2.3:** Work with partners to **promote grant opportunities**, such as the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, for both City and non-City-owned cultural organizations to fund renovations, specialized equipment, and feasibility studies.

**Action 3.2.4:** Advocate to **the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD)** regarding regional funding to support future capital arts and culture projects that demonstrate regional impact.

**Action 3.2.5:** Develop policy to include **arts and cultural facilities and amenities as eligible to receive development related funding** including but not limited to Amenity Cost Charges. These funds could be directed toward projects identified in the Cultural Facilities Plan. These tools provide a funding mechanism to ensure that the increased demand on community amenities such as arts and cultural services is accommodated as the community grows, as well as provides for street improvement amenity features that can assist in the unique feeling and community practice of place-making at the neighbourhood scale.

## **Goal 4. Bolster community arts**

Courtenay is home to several community-led arts and cultural organizations, who prioritize participation, collaboration, and engagement within the community itself. Through community partnerships, and cultural programming, local organizations are committed to empowering local artists, enriching community spaces, and fostering meaningful connections through the arts. By amplifying the voices and talents of community members, local arts groups strive to create a dynamic cultural hub where everyone can participate, express themselves, and find inspiration. However, there is a need to further build the capacity of local organizations, increase local collaborations, and create awareness of existing arts, culture and heritage offerings in the community.

**OCP, 2022 - Arts, Culture, Heritage (ACH 25):**

*“Seek new partnership models that support providing more arts and cultural opportunities throughout the city.”*

**Objective 4.1: Support the capacity building of community-led arts and culture organizations**

**Action 4.1.1: Continue supporting core cultural service providers** (i.e., Comox Valley Art Gallery, the Courtenay and District Museum, the Sid Williams Civic Theatre, and the Comox Valley Community Arts Council) to ensure continuity and ability to meet their full potential as cultural anchors in the community.

**Action 4.1.2:** Leverage the City’s relationship with Comox Valley Community Arts Council to support organizational capacity building in the sector through its **training and professional development initiatives**.

**Action 4.1.3:** Consider establishing a **City-funded Arts and Culture Grant Program** to support community-led events, initiatives, and organizational capacity building. This grant program would be the primary mechanism for providing financial resources to local arts organizations, community groups, and Indigenous artists.

**Action 4.1.4:** Explore establishing a **dedicated Cultural Coordinator role in the City** to act as a liaison for the cultural community, support capacity building, identify and act on arts and culture opportunities, lead coordination activities, and implement the Cultural Strategic Plan.

**Objective 4.2: Break down silos and increase collaboration across the cultural sector**

**Action 4.2.1:** Work with one of the core cultural service providers to organize **regular networking events, conferences, and forums that connect organizations**, facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration, and exchange resources to strengthen community capacity throughout the region.

**Action 4.2.2:** Consider **fostering a relationship between the cultural sector and other local institutions** – e.g. North Island College and SD71. Such a relationship can support youth engagement in arts and culture as well as access to the use of school spaces.

**Action 4.2.3:** Investigate opportunities to **develop policies or incentives to encourage partnerships between local businesses** (i.e. Downtown Courtenay BIA), and local artists, groups, and organizations.

### **Objective 4.3: Increase the awareness of community-led arts and culture events**

***Action 4.3.1:*** Introduce an **annual Arts and Culture report to Council from core cultural service providers** that includes insights from community on their programs and services, as well as performance metrics, and reports on implementation of Strategic Cultural Plan.

***Action 4.3.2:*** Consider **partnering with existing non-profit organizations who are curating event calendars** locally and on Vancouver Island to support promotion and increased awareness of local events.

***Action 4.3.3:*** Consider **support for development of an awareness and marketing strategy to promote arts and culture events and offerings**, with a focus on reaching diverse groups. This strategy will also consider event promotion and collaboration with partners like the Comox Valley Community Arts Council.

***Action 4.3.4:*** Promote and raise awareness of arts and culture by **supporting community-based arts projects supported by public art policy**.

***Action 4.3.5:*** Consider creating an **annual or bi-annual process of updating Courtenay's Cultural Asset Map** in collaboration with Creative Coast to highlight Courtenay's cultural offerings and encourage regional collaboration.

## **Goal 5. Support the strategic development of the cultural sector**

Courtenay is home to several arts and cultural organizations with demonstrated social and economic value of arts and culture to the community. There is also strong municipal support for core cultural partners, who provide cultural offerings to residents of the city and region, as well as visitors. However, there is a need for more support particularly for community arts and culture and at the regional level to support the city as a cultural hub in the region. Planning for and investment in the downtown as a cultural district can capitalize on tourism and economic impacts that contribute to the vitalization of this important part of the City.

This goal prioritizes the robust support and strategic development of Courtenay's cultural sector, recognizing its profound impact on the city and region's identity and economy. Through targeted initiatives and investments, Courtenay can cultivate an environment where the arts flourish, fostering creativity, diversity, and innovation. By nurturing partnerships, creating cultural tourism opportunities and policy frameworks, Courtenay can unlock the full potential of its cultural sector, enriching the lives of residents and visitors alike while positioning the city as a vibrant cultural destination in the Comox Valley and on Vancouver Island. To achieve this strategic development goal, regional collaboration and funding support are essential.

**OCP, 2022 - Arts, Culture, Heritage (ACH 8 and ACH 10):**

*"Work regionally and in partnership to coordinate arts and cultural services and invest and raise the Comox Valley's profile as a centre for contemporary artistic creation."*

*"Advocate for investment in arts, culture, and heritage as a local tourism economic development driver."*

**Objective 5.1: Build and sustain existing social and economic impact by strengthening Courtenay's professional arts and culture sector**

**Action 5.1.1: Integrate arts and culture into City's Community Economic Development Analysis and economic strategies**, including fostering closer alignment with local, regional, and national economic development initiatives by collaborating with entities like the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) and Canadian Heritage.

**Action 5.1.2: Review and enhance existing funding structures to support core cultural service providers** (Comox Valley Community Arts Council (CVAC), Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG), Sid William Theatre, and Courtenay and District Museum) by considering integrating existing funding into a dedicated stream within a City-Funded Arts and Culture Grant Program. This will ensure that these providers continue to meet the evolving needs of the community.

**Action 5.1.3: Cultivate diverse collaborations with interest groups**, including educational systems (e.g., North Island College, School District 71), private studios, individual arts educators, and music organizations, to build a robust network that amplifies the sector's influence and supports arts education and Indigenous collaborations.

**Action 5.1.4: Explore a regional funding and coordination approach with Comox Valley local governments and the Comox Valley Regional District** to support arts and culture. This includes establishing regional funding for core cultural partners who provide regional services, as well as community grants and capital funding for arts and culture.

**Objective 5.2: Embed arts and culture more firmly in tourism initiatives in Courtenay and the Comox Valley**

**Action 5.2.1: Collaborate with the Comox Valley Regional District and Experience Comox Valley** to highlight cultural tourism opportunities in Courtenay, aligning with their Tourism Strategy Plan.

**Action 5.2.2: Work with local organizations** (e.g., Comox Valley Community Arts Council, Experience Comox Valley) to develop a **marketing and outreach strategy** for events and programs and to promote the City and Comox Valley

as a cultural tourism destination. Leverage Experience Comox Valley's annual Destination Plan.

**Action 5.2.3:** Create a Working Group to **develop a sustainable vision and action plan for nightlife** in Courtenay and advocate for the nighttime economy, potentially leveraging the existing Comox Valley Tourism Advisory Committee or Economic Development Strategy.

**Action 5.2.4:** Work with Experience Comox Valley to **establish signature tourism events** during the shoulder months (outside of summer) to draw year-round visitors to Courtenay and the Comox Valley.

### **Objective 5.3: Create new and or updated policies to support the cultural sector**

**Action 5.3.1:** Develop a **Special Events and Hosting Policy or Guidelines** that support arts and cultural events including those that serve as a tourism draw for Courtenay. The policy could also outline how to create accessible materials for hosting events that would be useful to community-led and grassroots event organizers. The policy should further clarify guidelines for when the City is being a host, a facilitator or a location for special events. Note, this policy should align with cultural tourism and economic development plans.

**Action 5.3.2:** Develop a **Public Art Policy** that supports public art and mural projects in the community. The policy would outline how to prioritize commissions for local artists, as well as support the representation of Indigenous arts and culture in the community. The policy could also help foster youth engagement in community public art initiatives.

**Action 5.3.3:** Consider reviewing the **City's Street Entertainer Program and the associated regulation bylaw**. Explore opportunities for leveraging the program for nightlife and community placemaking activities via collaboration with local businesses.

**Action 5.3.4:** Consider establishing an **arts and culture committee** for the City to advise Council and staff on priorities, activities, and initiatives related to arts and culture in Courtenay, including the implementation of the Strategic Cultural Plan and alignment with local tourism and economic development activities.

**Action 5.3.5:** Include arts and culture in local area planning initiatives, with specific consideration for **identifying Downtown as an arts, culture, and heritage district** in line with the OCP.

### **Objective 5.4: Explore strategic ways to meet sector labour needs**

**Action 5.4.1:** Consider opportunities of **working with School District 71 and local organizations to integrate arts and culture into school curricula** to foster the interest of children and youth in the arts and cultural sector.

**Action 5.4.2:** Support **collaborations between local organizations and educational institutions** (such as North Island College and Excel Career College) to **develop and fast-track technical and short courses related to arts and culture** including sound and lighting, stage management and crowd control related courses.

**Action 5.4.3:** Investigate ways the City can support local arts and culture organizations to offer **volunteer, mentorship, and co-op educational opportunities** for youth and community members who are interested in developing a career in the cultural sector.

**Action 5.4.4:** Support the approval of developments that provide **housing and workspaces for artisans and the cultural sector** in the community (similar to Tin Town) in the community. Advance land use planning in Town Centres where this type of use is allowed as per the OCP, and consider other tools such as pre-zoning specific areas (i.e. through the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan) to enable the development of artist housing and workspace. This initiative can draw inspiration from successful models like Montreal and Vancouver, where affordable housing contributes to vibrant artistic communities and can also attract talent to support the cultural sector.

## 5. Conclusion

Courtenay's Strategic Cultural Plan lays a strong foundation for fostering a vibrant and inclusive cultural landscape that reflects the community's unique identity and aspirations. The Plan is the result of extensive community engagement with individuals and arts and cultural organizations, and it sets the stage for the next decade of work and investments in the sector. By focusing on five key areas or foundational elements - advancing truth and reconciliation, building community resilience, developing more accessible and affordable cultural spaces, bolstering community arts, and supporting strategic cultural sector growth - the plan lays a strong foundation for success.

The benefits of investing in arts and culture go far beyond the costs, with significant economic, social, and tourism development spinoffs that will enhance the community. When municipalities commit funding, arts and culture groups can leverage those investments to secure additional financial resources, amplifying the impact. The economic and social benefits are quantifiable and should be considered in long term capital investment decisions required to anchor and support arts and culture activities as demonstrated in Courtenay's downtown cultural district.

Regional collaboration will also be essential to realizing the full potential of this plan. The arts and culture sector's growth and sustainability cannot be fully realized without support that extends beyond municipal boundaries. Many of the initiatives—such as the development of affordable cultural spaces, bolstering community arts, and advancing truth and reconciliation—require a coordinated effort from neighboring municipalities and regional bodies. Regional funding will play a critical role in ensuring that the broader Comox Valley continues to benefit from arts and cultural offerings located in Courtenay, and it will provide the necessary resources to elevate the sector in the entire region. Working together at the regional level can amplify impact, create more inclusive and accessible arts experiences, and unlock the full potential of arts and culture as drivers of economic, social, and cultural development throughout the area.

The next step will be the completion of an Implementation Plan following Council's adoption of the final Strategic Cultural Plan, to bring these ideas to life. The Implementation Plan will ensure that the strategic goals are effectively integrated into the City's broader strategic agenda, solidifying Courtenay's commitment to cultural growth, enhancing the quality of life for residents and positioning the city as a hub of creativity and innovation.

Courtenay is dedicated to fostering relationships in a respectful manner and engaging in continuous dialogue with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples. The City views the Strategic Cultural Plan as a living document, open to evolving into the future with guidance from Indigenous peoples and communities developed over time through long-term meaningful relationships.

## 6. Appendices

Appendix A. What We Heard Report

Appendix B. Comparative Review

Appendix C. Cultural Facilities Options

Appendix D. List of Existing Facilities and Spaces

# **Courtenay**

# **Strategic 10-Year Cultural Plan**

## **What We Heard Report**

September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Prepared for**

**City of Courtenay**

**Prepared by**

**Nordicity**



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## Executive Summary

### Background

This 'What We Heard' report shares **community engagement research findings for the Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan**. The purpose of the Plan is to provide a framework and roadmap to support arts and culture in Courtenay over the next 10 years. This document summarizes findings from the community engagement research, highlighting community-identified needs relating to arts and culture in Courtenay.

### Methodology and Engagement Approach

The Strategic Cultural Plan is following a **5-phase process**, involving desk research, community engagement, analysis (including facility options and economic and social impact analysis), followed by the development of a draft strategy and recommendations for community feedback and review, and lastly, the creation of the final plan.

The planning process has involved inclusive community consultation with an equity lens. This engagement approach has included:

- Respectfully seeking input from across the community, including from equity priority groups such as Indigenous and Black community members and People of Colour, LGBTQ2S+ individuals, and unhoused people.
- Leveraging established relationships with existing community organizations advocating for equity priority groups to ensure that all community members, especially historically underrepresented groups, have a voice.
- Recognizing the need for long term commitments to relationship building with Indigenous communities.

### Community engagement activities

Community engagement research for the Strategic Cultural Plan has included an **online survey** (live from June 14<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup> 2023) which received ~700 responses, an **arts and culture sector focus group consultation event** attended by 38 participants from local arts and culture organizations in May 2023, and a **public drop-in engagement event** in July 2023.

The planning process has also involved **1:1 interviews** with community members, and **targeted group conversations** with four equity priority communities (i.e., representatives of/people with lived experience of disabilities, homelessness, being a newcomer, and being part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community).

### Key Findings

#### Survey Highlights

- The overall survey results show that a very **high number of respondents are culturally engaged (94%)**. Performing arts (such as theatre, dance, and music) are the most popular way to engage.
- Arts and culture in Courtenay encourage **social participation** and a sense of belonging.

- **Main barriers to accessing culture** in Courtenay are limited options nearby (29%), limited options of interest (21%), and not having enough time (20%). However, nearly a quarter of all participants stated that they do not experience any barriers.
- **Critical needs**, according to culture sector respondents (artists and cultural sector workers), are more space for performance/exhibitions (identified as a challenge by 45% of sector respondents), more rehearsal and creation space (36%), and supportive bylaws and policies for arts and culture (32%).
- **The future arts and culture offerings respondents would most like to see** more of include live performances (selected by 44% of total participants), more education, programming and workshops (29%) and more Indigenous arts and culture (28%).
- **The main culture themes that the City should prioritize in the Culture Plan**, according to all survey participants, are enhancing space for arts and culture (35% of participants selected this option) and using arts and culture to enhance community wellbeing (26%).
- **Expenditure:** The average amount spent in the community before and after a cultural event is \$105 per individual.

For more on specific findings relating to the community-identified needs of the cultural sector and equity priority groups in Courtenay, see pages 30-33 of the full What We Heard report. Detailed survey results can be found in Appendix A.

## Strengths, Challenges and Gaps

Courtenay's current strengths, challenges and gaps when it comes to culture, based on analysis of all engagement findings, include the following:

### + Strengths

- Courtenay has a beautiful geographic location that provides artistic inspiration.
- Strong cultural anchors, collaborative spirit, and cultural capital.
- Established City municipality support for core arts and culture organizations.
- Community support for and interest in arts and culture is notable in Courtenay.
- Variety of cultural offerings to attract people year-round to the city.
- Demonstrated social and economic impact of arts and culture in Courtenay.

### - Challenges and Gaps

- Lack of visibility of Indigenous arts, culture, and heritage in Courtenay.
- Inadequate municipal support for arts and culture, including at the City and regional level.
- Limited human resources, including technical professionals, in some areas of the arts and culture sector.
- Lack of accessibility to cultural spaces and events.
- Limited arts and culture programming opportunities for youth, and lack of awareness of what is available.

## Community-Identified Priority Needs

### *Engaging K'ómoks First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and other Urban Indigenous communities*

- Many participants want to see **more Indigenous arts and culture in public spaces** – e.g., for storytelling and educational opportunities, especially to raise awareness of K'ómoks' ongoing culture and heritage.
- The City of Courtenay is currently in the process of **engaging with K'ómoks First Nation** Chief and Council regarding the development of the Strategic Cultural Plan. The City is committed to working collaboratively with K'ómoks First Nation to ensure the plan is representative of Indigenous values and supportive of our work towards reconciliation.
- Part of the engagement with KFN will be identifying and defining what 'culture' means in Courtenay, given that it is situated on the traditional unceded territory of K'ómoks First Nation.

### *More cultural spaces/facilities, and better availability and affordability*

- Participants expressed the **need for more equipped and accessible cultural spaces and performance venues** to meet various sector needs, including the need for rental space. The types of spaces needed include small, medium, and larger venues, including performance and rehearsals venues.

### *Developing more diverse and affordable cultural programming*

- There is a desire for more **diverse and affordable cultural programming**, both in terms of services delivered by the City and by local arts and cultural groups.

### *Further promotion of community partnerships and collaboration*

- There is a need for more community collaborations and partnerships. There is also a need to have **avenues for knowledge sharing** across the sector, for example through regular gatherings.

### *Increased municipal support – financial and in-kind, local, and regional*

- There is a desire **for increased City financial support** for arts and culture, especially in the form of community grants.
- Participants further expressed the **need for regional funding support for arts and culture in Courtenay**, given cultural offerings are beneficial or serve the wider population in the Comox valley or region.

### *Further development of cultural tourism*

- Participants expressed the need to leverage events such as gallery exhibitions and festivals to help make Courtenay the **cultural hub of the region**, and to **promote cultural tourism**.

### ***Attraction and training of technical cultural workers***

- There is a need for more **technical expertise in relation to hosting live performances and events** – i.e., more sound and lighting technicians, stage management and crowd control specialists are in high demand.

### ***Development of a Public Arts Policy***

- There is a desire for Courtenay to develop a **Public Arts Policy** that is reviewed periodically to support public arts in the city. Individuals noted such a policy could **leverage the talent of young artists** and involve them in community public arts initiatives.

### **Next Steps**

- **Ongoing and open dialogue with K'ómoks First Nation** Chief and Council to discuss meaningful engagement;
- **Municipal benchmarking** and comparative review;
- Assessing the **economic impact** of Courtenay's arts and culture sector;
- Analyzing **cultural facilities options**, drawing on the survey and other research engagement findings shared in this report;
- **Drafting recommendations**, and seeking community check-in via a public event and online feedback
- Developing the final **Strategic Cultural Plan**

## Courtenay 10-year Strategic Cultural Plan: What We Heard

### Background

This What We Heard report shares community engagement research findings for the Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan. The purpose of the Plan is to provide a framework and roadmap to support arts and culture in Courtenay over the next 10 years.

Through the Strategic Cultural Plan, the City of Courtenay aims to:

- Mirror the City of Courtenay’s values of Reconciliation, Community Wellbeing, Equity and Climate Action – as identified in the Official Community Plan.
- Engage in inclusive community dialogue.
- Build on and action policy recommendations, e.g., OCP (2022), Parks and Recreation Plan (2019), Cultural Service Review (2019).
- Consider both the social and economic impact of arts and culture.



**“Cardinal Directions” from the City of Courtenay Official Community Plan Update, 2022**

This document summarizes the work that has taken place so far, and what the community has told us about the strengths, challenges and priority needs relating to arts and culture in Courtenay. The findings will be used to develop recommendations on how the City of Courtenay can support artists, arts and culture organizations and creatives, as well as support wider community priorities through arts and culture. Through these actions, the Strategic Cultural Plan will seek to ensure that arts and culture is integrated into the community, and representative of all residents.

### What is Cultural Planning?

Cultural planning is a process of community consultation which aims to help towns and cities to support arts and culture development, to benefit the community. The planning process highlights a community’s unique strengths, gaps, and needs in relation to arts and culture. The aim is to strategically integrate arts and culture with wider municipal planning and strategies. Essentially, it means asking, “where are we now? Where do we want to be?” – and considers strategies to get there.<sup>1</sup>

### Defining Arts and Culture – What’s Included?

Arts and culture can be difficult to define because they mean many things to different people. This Plan defines arts and culture broadly – including tangible assets (like artworks and

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing from Cultural Planning (2022), Government of Ontario <https://www.ontario.ca/page/cultural-planning>

buildings), organized groups (such as performance and dance troupes), and intangible things (like stories and cultural traditions). The ‘Cultural Resources Framework’ below maps different types of arts and culture resources or assets.

The City of Courtenay is currently in the process of **engaging with K’ómoks First Nation** Chief and Council regarding the development of the Strategic Cultural Plan. The City of Courtenay acknowledges that the definition of ‘culture’ and its impacts may be different from K’ómoks First Nation’s view. As such, part of the engagement with KFN will be identifying and defining what ‘culture’ means in Courtenay, given that it is situated on the traditional unceded territory of K’ómoks First Nation.

**Figure 1. Cultural Resources Framework**



Source: Adapted from Municipal Cultural Planning Incorporated’s Cultural Resources Mapping: Guide for Municipalities (2010), Statistics Canada Canadian Framework for Cultural Statistics (2011), and North Shore Culture Compass.

## Planning Process

Figure 2. Five-phase planning process



The Strategic Cultural Plan is following a **5-phase process**, involving desk research, community engagement, analysis (including facility options, economic and social impact analysis, and municipal benchmarking via a comparative review), followed by the development of a draft strategy and recommendations for community feedback and review, and lastly, the creation of the final plan.

The community engagement work has been led by the Business Administration section of the City of Courtenay’s Recreation, Culture and Community Services Department, in collaboration with [Nordicity](#), with input from artists, arts and culture organizations, interested community parties, and the wider public.

## Planning Context

### Community Context

Located in the Comox Valley, Courtenay offers a natural and beautiful landscape that supports artistic inspiration. The city’s vibrant arts and culture scene presents a variety of opportunities for residents and visitors from within and beyond the region. Courtenay’s cultural sector has a strong creative community who are supported by multiple local arts organizations, and a high number of volunteers who are passionate about arts and culture in the community. The city is also home to many artists who add depth to the artistic community.

Courtenay has multiple arts and culture assets including cultural spaces and facilities, community arts and cultural organizations, creative cultural enterprises, festivals and events, cultural heritage, public arts, diverse art forms including visual and performing and public arts.

Specifically, there are over 150 cultural assets<sup>2</sup> in Courtenay, including over 30 community cultural organizations, 29 facilities and spaces used for cultural events and programming, 10 arts-related educational institutions among other resources in the community.

Furthermore, arts and culture in Courtenay contribute to community wellbeing and economic development (through events such as the [Downtown Courtenay Summer Street Markets](#) and [Vancouver Island Music Festival](#), which draws visitors to the city, and initiatives such as the [Youth Media Project](#) which provides skilled training to youth in the community). Arts and culture can further play a profound role in addressing important issues like reconciliation (e.g., by increasing awareness that Courtenay is on K'ómoks First Nation territory through public arts such as murals and sculptures), and addressing mental health and the toxic drug poisoning crisis (through programs such as [Walk With Me](#), a project of the Comox Valley Art Gallery).

Various strategic planning in Courtenay highlighted the need for a plan to guide the City's support of arts and culture. The Strategic Cultural Plan will therefore guide the City in its relationships with the cultural sector, residents (including equity priority groups such as Indigenous communities, newcomers and immigrants, people who are unhoused, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community), and neighbours from the Comox Valley in relation to arts and culture.

## City of Courtenay Priorities

The Strategic Cultural Plan can support a number of existing community priorities in Courtenay. The following table outlines key priorities identified from a review of existing plans and strategies and indicates how the Strategic Cultural Plan can support them.

**Table 1. Existing community priorities in Courtenay**

Priority	Relevance and Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy	City Municipal Plans
<b>Advance reconciliation efforts</b>	<p><b>Reconciliation is a guiding cardinal direction</b></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize engagement with Indigenous partners</li> <li>▪ Support actions identified in the OCP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public Engagement Strategy &amp; Toolkit, 2020</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> </ul>

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<sup>2</sup> Cultural assets identified through Nordicity asset mapping research. 'Cultural assets' include festivals and events (including arts and culture festivals and events and other events with culture component), creative cultural enterprises, arts education, spaces and facilities (including formal arts and culture venues, and occasional venues), community and cultural organizations (including non-profits, associations/societies, Indigenous organizations and community arts organizations), cultural heritage, multimedia (including radio & television, publishing and printing, film and media), and arts (i.e., performing arts, visual arts and public arts).

Priority	Relevance and Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy	City Municipal Plans
<b>Reduce social inequalities</b>	<p><b>Equity is a guiding cardinal direction</b></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize engagement with equity-priority communities</li> <li>▪ Support actions identified in the OCP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public Engagement Strategy &amp; Toolkit, 2020</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> </ul>
<b>Address funding challenges</b>	<p><b>Funding is an ongoing challenge throughout policy documents</b></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evaluate outstanding Cultural Services Report recommendations</li> <li>▪ Review Comox Valley Regional District's Principle-Based Framework for Allocating Recreation Grants (Wilson, 2011)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> </ul>
<b>Enhance downtown</b>	<p><b>Downtown vision remains relevant and desired</b></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support steps to advance Duncan Commons vision and activate 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Downtown Playbook, 2016</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> <li>▪ Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2019</li> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report 2019</li> </ul>
<b>Support regional interconnectivity</b>	<p><b>Arts and culture in Courtenay serves the region</b></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build on Cultural Services Report to identify ongoing gaps in funding, service provision, etc.</li> <li>▪ Revisit Wilson's frameworks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CVRD 'A Principle-based Framework for Funding Regional Recreation and Cultural Facilities', J. Wilson, 2011</li> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> </ul>
<b>Encourage active community engagement</b>	<p><b>Courtenay prioritizes community participation</b></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage the community throughout the research</li> <li>▪ Apply processes identified in the Public Engagement Strategy &amp; Toolkit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public Engagement Strategy &amp; Toolkit, 2020</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> <li>▪ Cultural Plan Scoping Workshop, 2022</li> </ul>

Priority	Relevance and Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy	City Municipal Plans
<b>Celebrate cultural offerings</b>	<p><i>Courtenay is home to a vibrant cultural scene</i></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Map cultural assets</li> <li>▪ Document strengths of Courtenay’s cultural scene</li> <li>▪ Need for a special events and hosting policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> <li>▪ Cultural Inventory Report, 2017</li> <li>▪ Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2019</li> <li>▪ Parks, Rec. &amp; Culture Analysis document, 2017</li> <li>▪ OCP, 2022</li> </ul>
<b>Recognize community impact</b>	<p><i>There is a desire to capture social and economic impacts</i></p> <p><b>Direction for the Cultural Planning Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct economic and social impact assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural Services Report, 2019</li> <li>▪ Cultural Plan Scoping Workshop, 2022</li> </ul>

### Existing Cultural Sector Priorities

Previous consultation with Courtenay’s arts and culture sector highlighted the following points as important considerations for the Strategic Cultural Plan:<sup>3</sup>

- **Developing sector capacity**
  - Ensuring sustainable levels of core services
  - Adequate financial support and staff capacity
- **Engaging with local First Nations**
  - There is a need to engage meaningfully with K’ómoks First Nation, in recognition that the lands Courtenay is situated on are on unceded, traditional K’ómoks territory.
- **Maintaining cultural capital assets**
  - There is a need for Cultural Mapping, a Facilities Needs Assessment, and support for aging infrastructure.
- **The City of Courtenay playing an enhanced role**
  - The City needs a cultural plan and a review of how the City funds and supports arts and culture.

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<sup>3</sup> Sources: Culture Services Report (2019) and consultative scoping for the Cultural Plan with the core cultural service providers (i.e., those that receive operational funding from the City of Courtenay).

- New policies are required to support arts and culture (e.g., Public Art Policy, Special Events Policy).
- **Recognizing the role of arts and culture in economic development and tourism**
  - There is a need for increased marketing investment to support the valuable role that arts, culture, and heritage drive in attracting visitors and spending to the region.
  - There is a need to recognize the regional role that cultural services play.
  - Demonstrating this role will help the sector to make the case for increased financial support.
- **Serving all of Courtenay**
  - Arts and culture in Courtenay need to reach under-represented groups.
  - There's a need for a greater focus on the links between arts and culture and wider community issues (such as housing and affordability).

## Community Engagement Approach

Aligning with the City's Official Community Plan and the 2022 action policies, the Strategic Cultural Plan is being developed through a process of inclusive community consultation. The key engagement principles are taking a **human-centred** approach; having **respect for Indigenous Nations and People** – especially K'ómoks First Nation, on whose unceded territory Courtenay is located; **trust; privacy**; and taking an **intersectional approach**. Taking an intersectional approach to engagement means taking into consideration the perspectives of diverse community members, including equity priority groups who are often not included in engagement activities due to barriers that limit their participation.<sup>4</sup> This approach has included:

- Respectfully seeking input from equity priority groups including Indigenous and Black community members and People of Colour, youth, LGBTQ2S+ individuals, and unhoused people.
- Leveraging established relationships with existing community organizations advocating for equity priority groups to ensure that all community members, especially historically underrepresented communities, have a voice.
- Recognizing the need for long term commitments to relationship building with Indigenous communities.

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<sup>4</sup> "Intersectionality brings attention to how people are defined by differing positionalities in a society based on their gender, ethnicity or race, sexual orientation, ability, and class, etc. These are identities and positionalities that form overlapping positions of inequality and privilege. They are in hierarchical relations to one another according to which some people have more power in societies than others." Source: Salla Sariola (2020) Intersectionality and Community Engagement: Can Solidarity Alone Solve Power Differences in Global Health Research?, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 20:5, 57-59, DOI: [10.1080/15265161.2020.1745951](https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1745951)

See the figure below for details of how these principles informed the engagement approach.

**Figure 3. Community engagement principles**

Principles				
Human-centred	Respect for Indigenous Nations and People	Trust-based	Privacy	Intersectional
				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People-focused</li> <li>Respectful sharing environment</li> <li>Community based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respect stature</li> <li>Respect time considerations</li> <li>Respect a mutually-defined process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear communication</li> <li>Transparent processes</li> <li>Incorporate feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consent-based</li> <li>Secure storage and disposal of data</li> <li>Aggregate data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following an equity lens</li> <li>Cultural competency</li> <li>Foster safe</li> </ul>
Processes				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowing people space to speak</li> <li>Engaging with under-represented communities</li> <li>Providing materials so representative organizations could facilitate sessions with people with lived experience in their community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeking to consult with K'ómoks First Nation Council to develop protocols for engagement around arts and culture</li> <li>Connecting with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to incorporate their perspectives for the plan via interviews and small group discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly explaining the purpose of interviews, focus groups, and the survey and how findings will be used</li> <li>Updating the approach in response to feedback</li> <li>Reporting back to the community for input and iteration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not recording online engagements (typed notes only)</li> <li>Anonymizing participant responses</li> <li>Sharing notes with participants who want to see them</li> <li>Saving data securely and deleting when no longer needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeking perspectives from people from equity priority communities, including BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+</li> <li>Engaging groups who may not regularly engage in arts and culture activities (e.g., newcomers, unhoused people, people with disabilities)</li> </ul>

### Engagement with K'ómoks First Nation

The Strategic Cultural Plan project team looks forward to working with K'ómoks First Nation (KFN) to ensure that the Strategic Cultural Plan is developed in a meaningful way, aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Findings and Calls to Actions.

The City recognizes the colonial aspects of having a specific and limited timeframe, which creates barriers to meaningful engagement. The City hopes to work together with KFN to define a path forward recognizing that true relations building takes time. The ambition is for the Strategic Cultural Plan will become a living document rather than a static, one-time report – one that is open to adjustment to ensure KFN priorities are included in the process. This iterative approach should allow time for true relations building and community engagement with KFN members, and could include a regular review of the Plan and implementation progress with KFN Chief and Council.

### Engagement Methodology

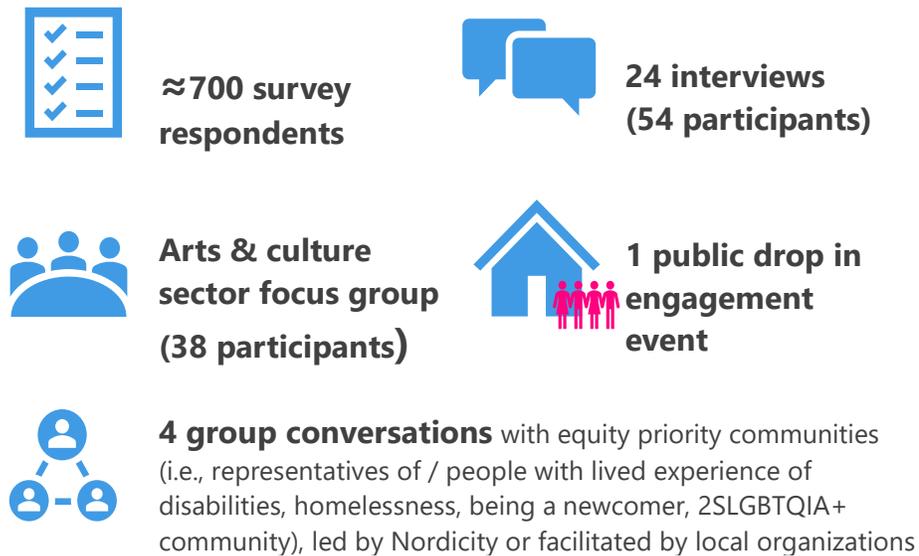
Figure 4 presents the engagement activities at a glance. The project has sought to ensure that a diverse and representative range of voices are heard. As such, community engagement research for the Strategic Cultural Plan has included an **online survey**, which was live from June 14<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and received **~700 responses** overall. In addition, the Project Team heard from **over 120 community members via qualitative engagements**.

The qualitative research engagements included an **arts and culture sector focus group** consultation event in May 2023 which was attended by 38 participants from local arts and culture organizations, and a **public drop-in engagement event** in July 2023. The team also

held **24 interviews, which engaged 54 participants** in total. These interviews included consultations with four core cultural services providers (i.e., the Sid Williams Theatre, the Comox Valley Arts Gallery, the Comox Valley Community Arts Council, and the Courtenay and District Museum). In addition, 28 participants were engaged as part of **four group conversations with equity priority communities** (i.e., representatives of / people with lived experience of disabilities, being unhoused, being a newcomer, and being part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community). These conversations were led by Nordicity or facilitated by local organizations (including the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness and the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee) which work specifically with these communities. See Appendix B for a list of participating organizations.

Furthermore, to ensure this project also includes other Indigenous peoples who live within the community, the City aligns with the [distinction-based approach](#) adopted by the Province of British Columbia. The engagement process respects and acknowledges the unique cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. To this end, the City will continue to work with KFN to ensure that K'ómoks First Nation's land rights are met and that KFN culture is represented and celebrated, while also ensuring that newcomers, settlers, and members of other Indigenous groups feel welcome and can celebrate their unique cultures.

**Figure 4. Engagement activities at a glance**



## What We Heard

Note, the City of Courtenay will continue to receive feedback until the draft Strategic Cultural Plan is created. The survey participant numbers reported in this section vary because some participants opted to only answer some questions rather than the whole survey.

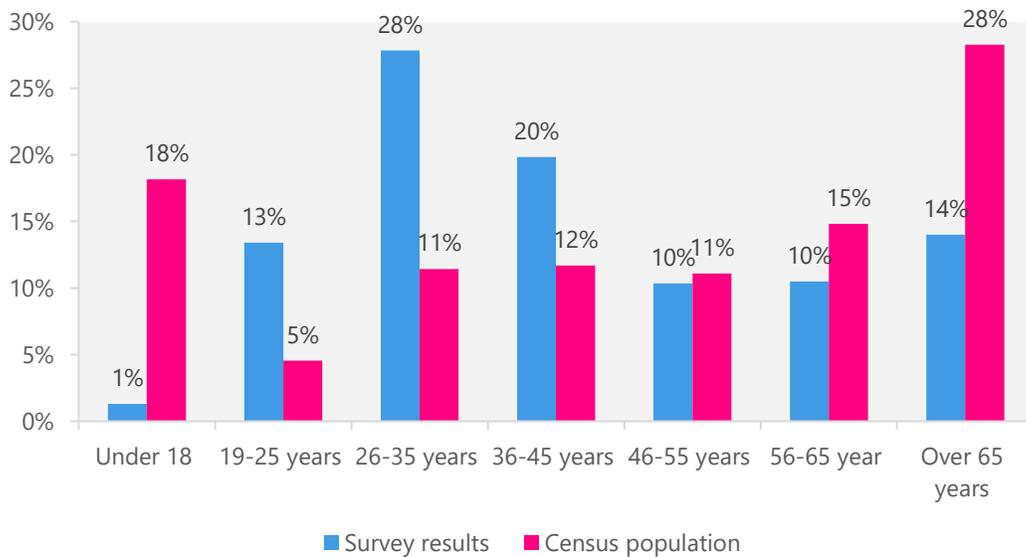
### Key Survey Findings

#### Survey participant profile

63% of respondents provided stated they are from a Courtenay postal code, while 37% identified as living outside of Courtenay. When participants were asked how they engage with culture in Courtenay, 67% said that they engage as members of the public, 35% as a practicing artist or cultural worker, and 14% as an owner/manager/operator of an arts and culture organization or facility. Survey results include all survey participant responses unless stated otherwise. (Note, some information from organizations will also be used to complete economic impact analysis which will be completed in the later phases of Strategic Cultural Plan development work).

In comparison with the Statistics Canada City of Courtenay Census population age breakdown, the survey garnered a higher portion of those between the ages of 26-35 years, and a lower portion of those over 65 years.

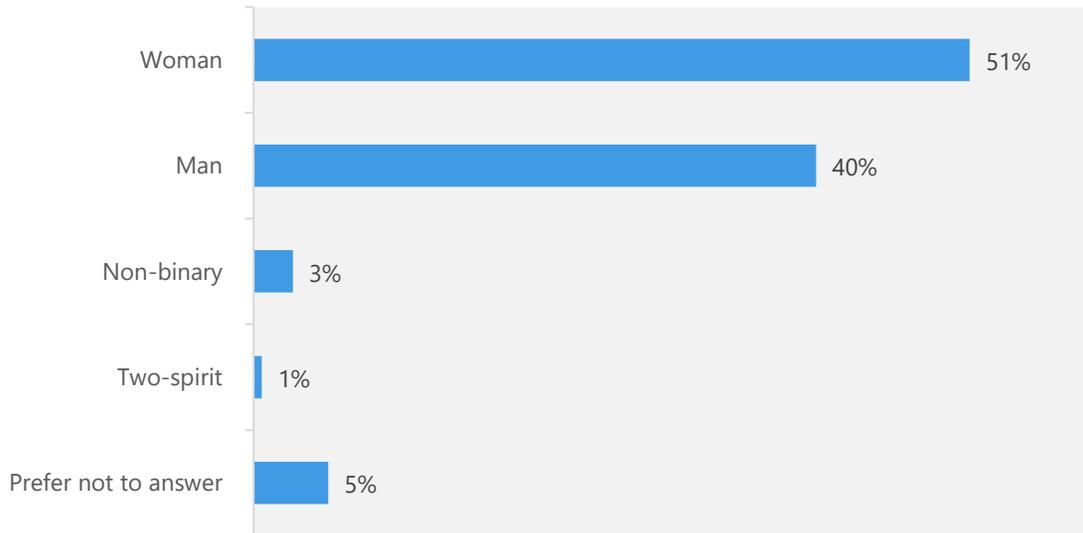
**Figure 5. Population age characteristics (all responses, n=686)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023 and Statistics Canada Census Profile for the City of Courtenay 2021

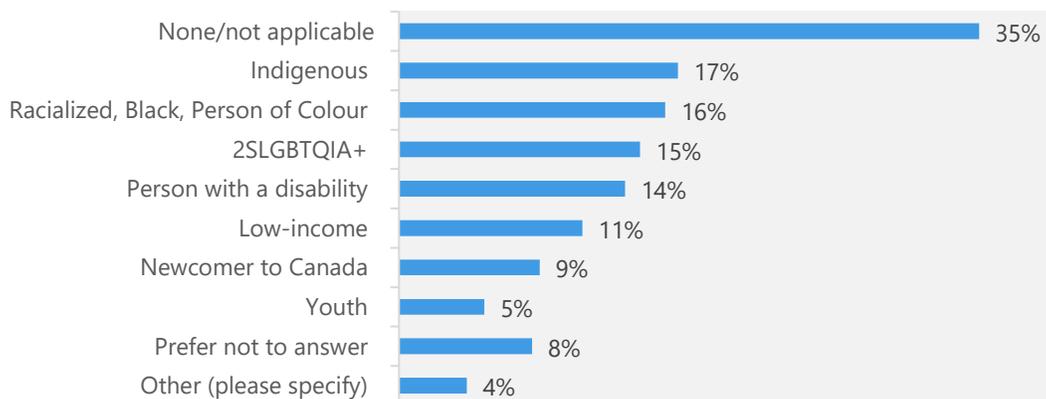
Survey participants were asked to self-identify their gender (Figure 6). The majority of participants identified as female (51%) and male (40%). Of the remaining respondents, 3% identified as non-binary, 1% two-spirit, and 5% preferred not to answer.

**Figure 6. What is your gender? (all responses, n=675)**



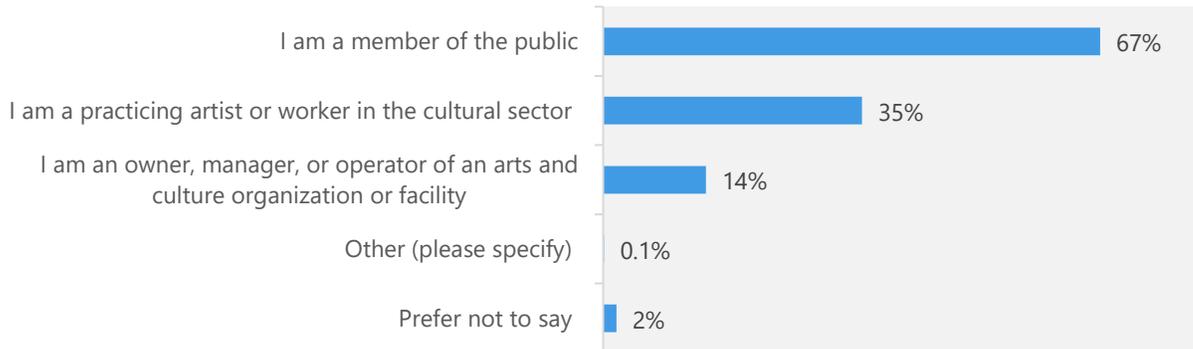
The survey was able to reach a wide range of identities (Figure 7). While 35% did not identify with any visible group, 17% identified as Indigenous, 16% identified as racialized (Black or person of colour), and 14% 2SLGBTQIA+. The Statistics Canada Census Profile for the City of Courtenay shows that 8% of the population identify as a visible minority, and 8% of the population are of Indigenous ancestry. Therefore, the survey garnered a higher proportion of those who identified from these identities. Moreover, 21 individuals identified with more than one category. This finding shows that the survey was able to reach a diverse representation of Courtenay’s ethnographic makeup, while also showing that there is diverse participation in arts and culture in Courtenay.

**Figure 7. Do you identify with any of the following? Select all that apply (all responses, n=655)**



When participants were asked how they engage with culture in Courtenay (Figure 8), 67% said that they engage as members of the public, 35% as a practicing artist or cultural worker, and 14% as an owner/manager/operator of an arts and culture organization or facility.

**Figure 8. How do you engage with culture in Courtenay? Please select the statement(s) that best describe you (all responses, n=779)**

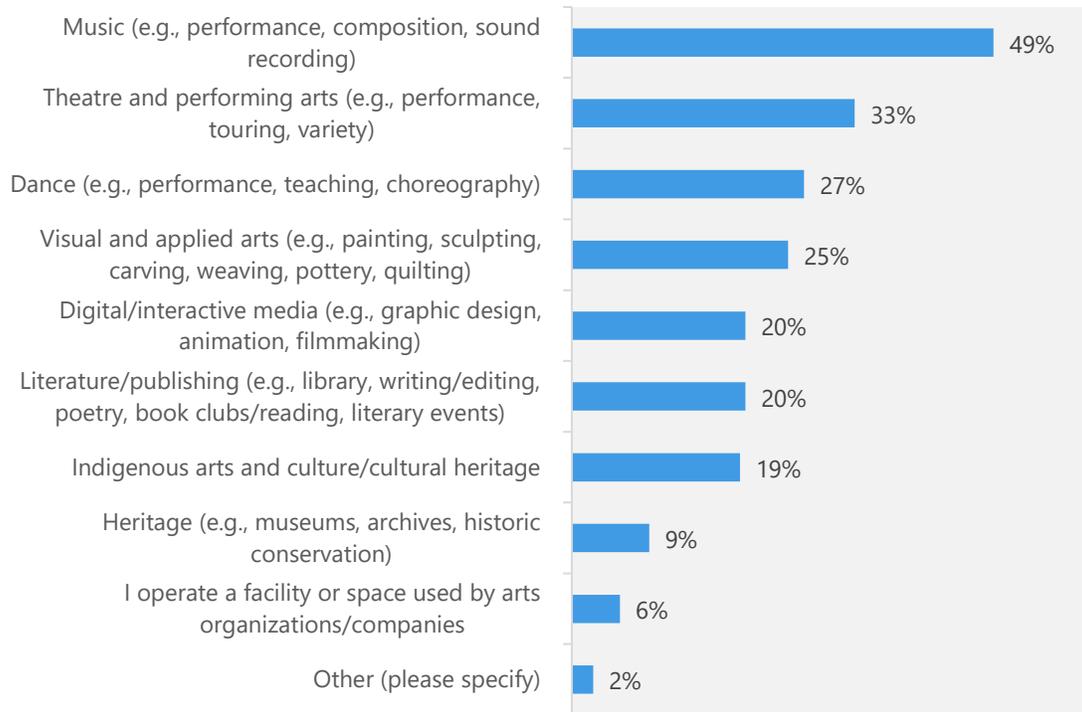


Artists and owners/managers of arts and culture organizations/facilities were asked which sub-domain of arts and culture they work within (Figure 9). The top three areas of work included music (49%), theatre and performing arts (33%), and dance (27%). These responses were followed by visual and applied arts (25%).<sup>5</sup> Notably, the performing arts sector encompassed the top three identified areas of work. Although the survey was not designed to be statistically representative, the findings suggest that performing arts are a particularly strong aspect of the arts and culture sector in Courtenay.

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<sup>5</sup> The responses do not add up to 100% as participants could select more than one sub-domain, reflecting that artists and organizations often work across more than one artistic discipline.

**Figure 9. In which area(s) of arts and culture do you or your organization/company work? Select all that apply (culture sector responses, n=324)**



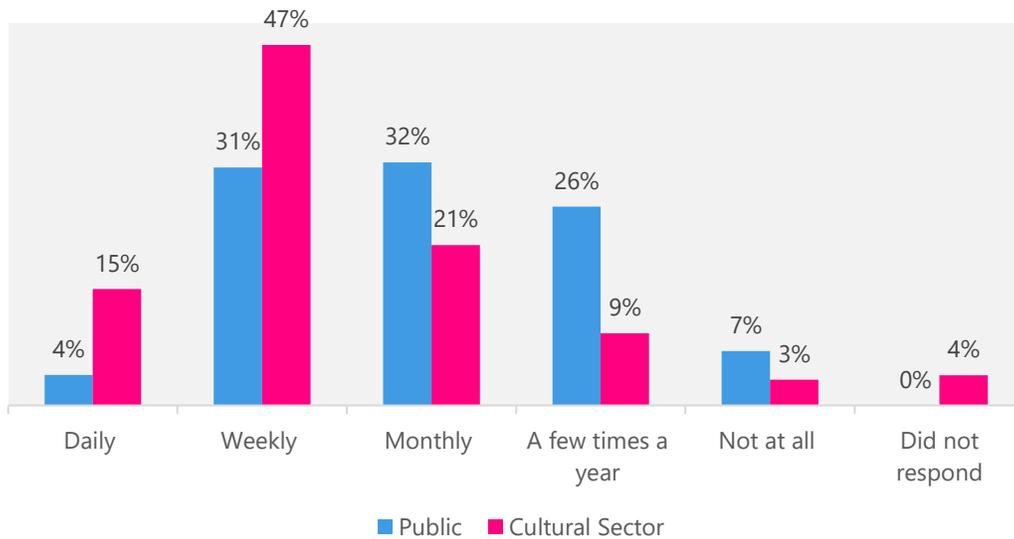
Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

## Survey Highlights



**The survey results show that a very high number of respondents are culturally engaged.** Approximately 450 members of the public responded to this question while 329 creators and culture sector respondents (creators and organizations) responded. 62% of culture sector respondents identified that they engage with arts and culture in Courtenay weekly or more, with 47% identifying they participate in arts and culture weekly. Comparatively, 63% of the public participate in arts and culture events or activities weekly to monthly (Figure 10).

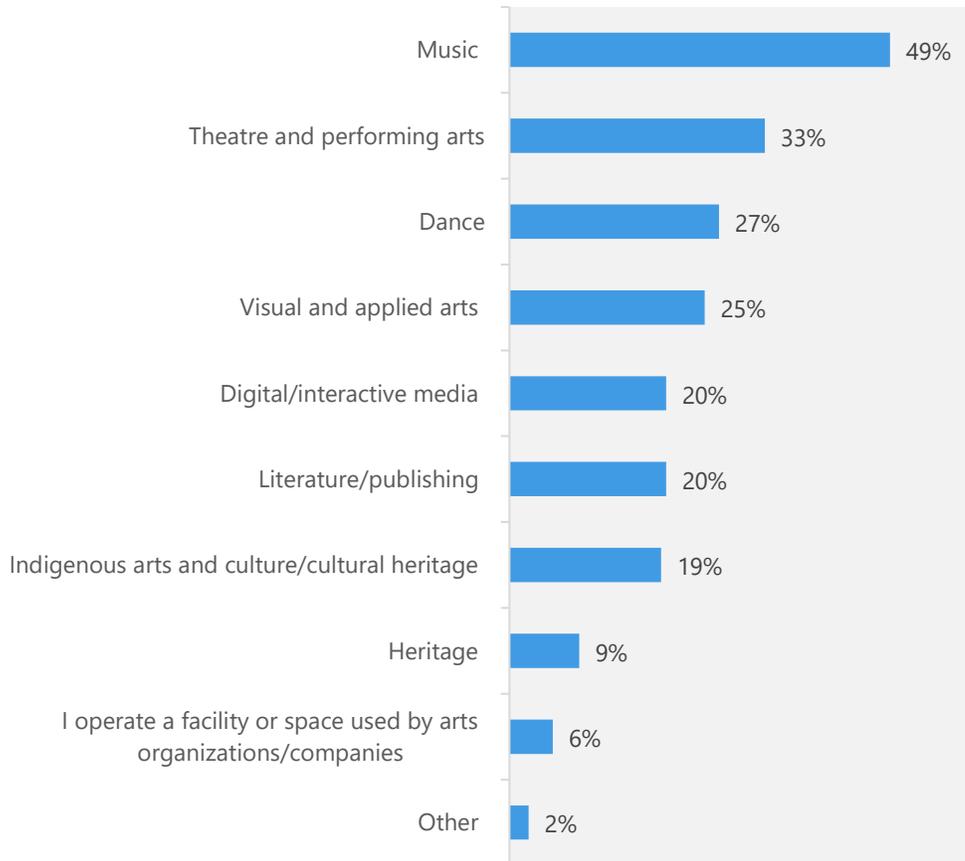
**Figure 10. How often do you participate in arts and culture events or activities in Courtenay? (all responses, n=779)**





**Performing arts (such as theatre, dance, and music) are the most popular way to engage** with arts and culture in Courtenay according to survey participants (Figure 11). Also, performing arts is the sub-sector that artists and cultural organizations in Courtenay are most likely to work in.

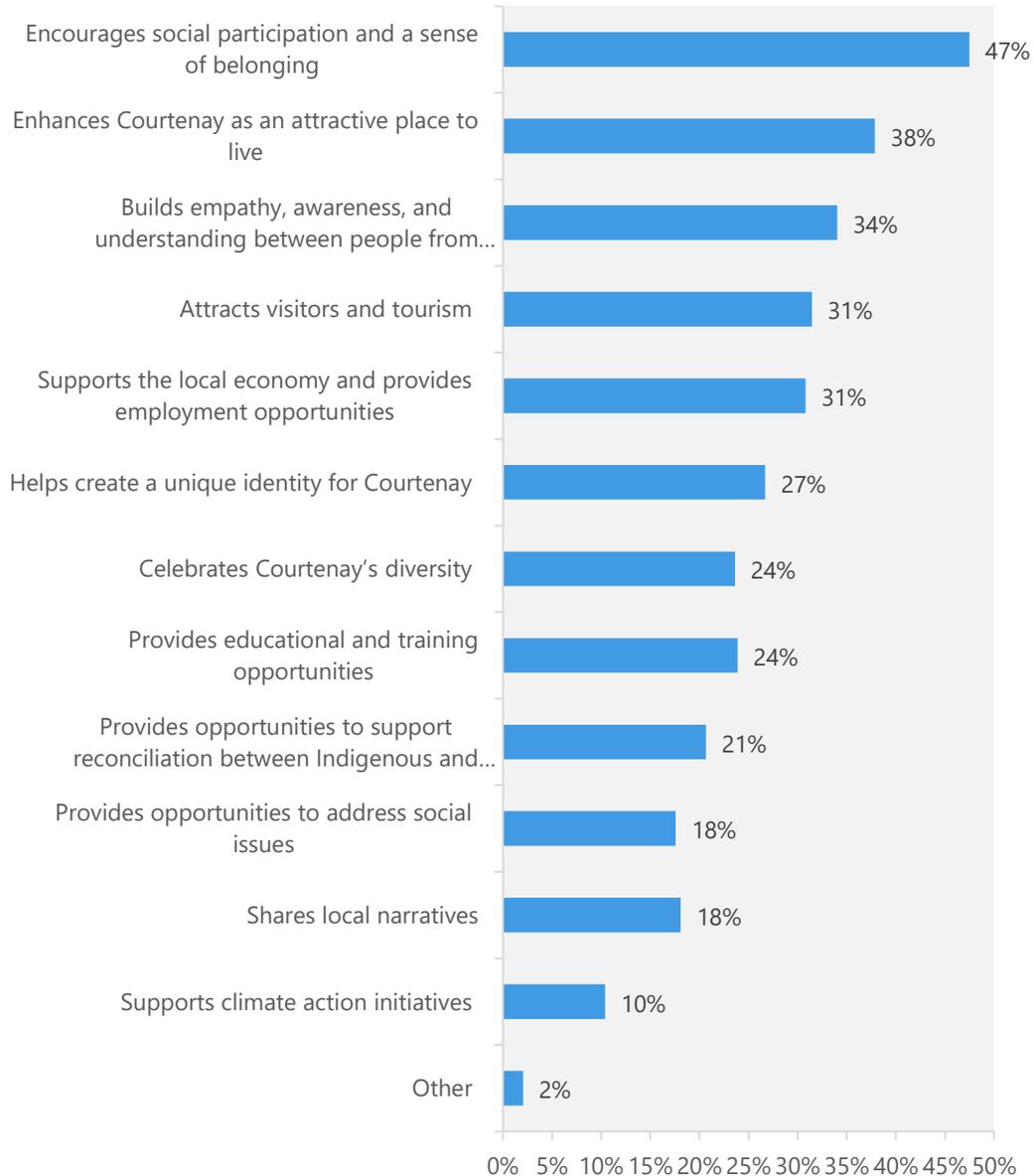
**Figure 11. In which area(s) of arts and culture do you or your organization/company work? Select all that apply (culture sector responses, n=324)**





When asked about how the local arts and culture sector impacts the community (Figure 12), 47% said that **arts and culture in Courtenay encourage social participation and a sense of belonging**. 38% said arts and culture enhance Courtenay as an attractive place to live, and 34% said the arts help build empathy, awareness, and understanding between different and distinct cultural backgrounds (Figure 12).

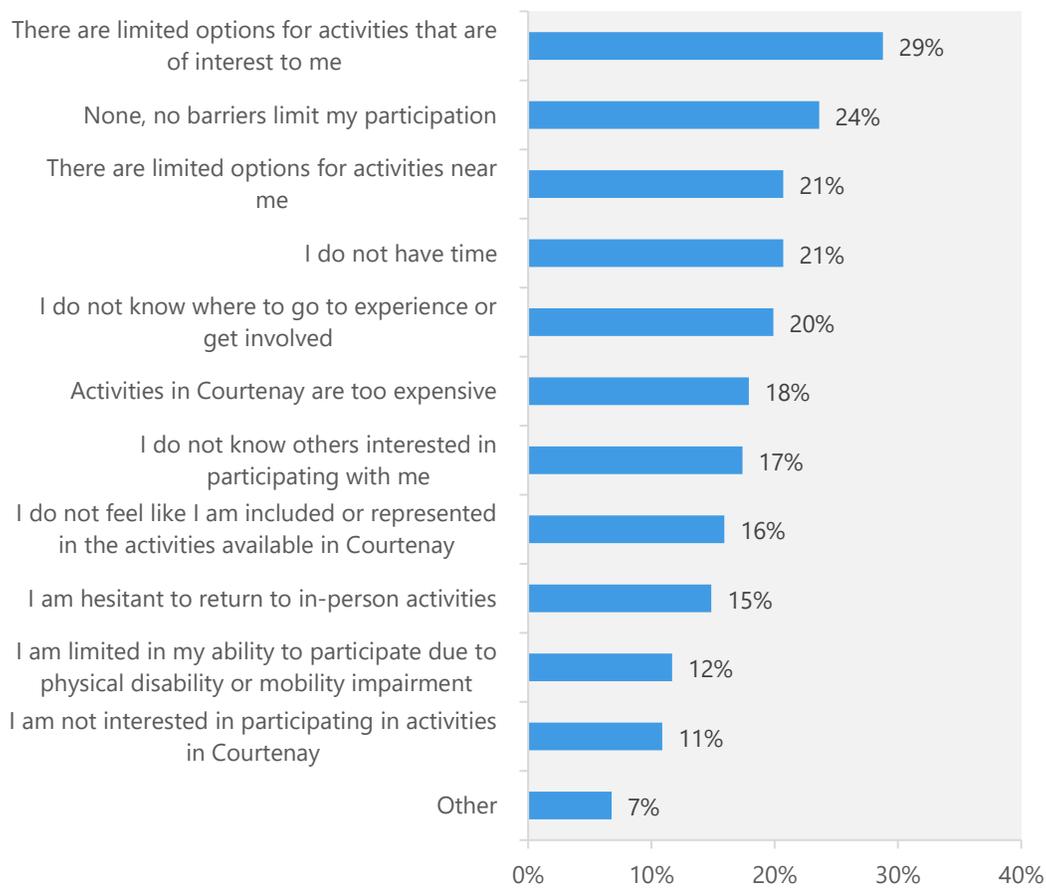
**Figure 12. What social impact does arts and culture have on Courtenay and the wider community? Select your top 3 (all responses, n=779)**





**Barriers to accessing culture in Courtenay** (Figure 13) according to survey participants, are 'limited options near me' (29%), 'limited options that interested me' (21%), 'not having enough time' (21%), and 'not knowing where to go to find out about arts and culture in Courtenay' (20%). However, nearly a quarter of survey participants stated that they do not experience any challenges to accessing culture in Courtenay (24%). Other, please specify examples included, 'transportation and carpooling, as I live in Campbell River,' 'I do not feel safe getting to and from arts and culture locations,' and, 'I do not know where to find out about activities near me.'

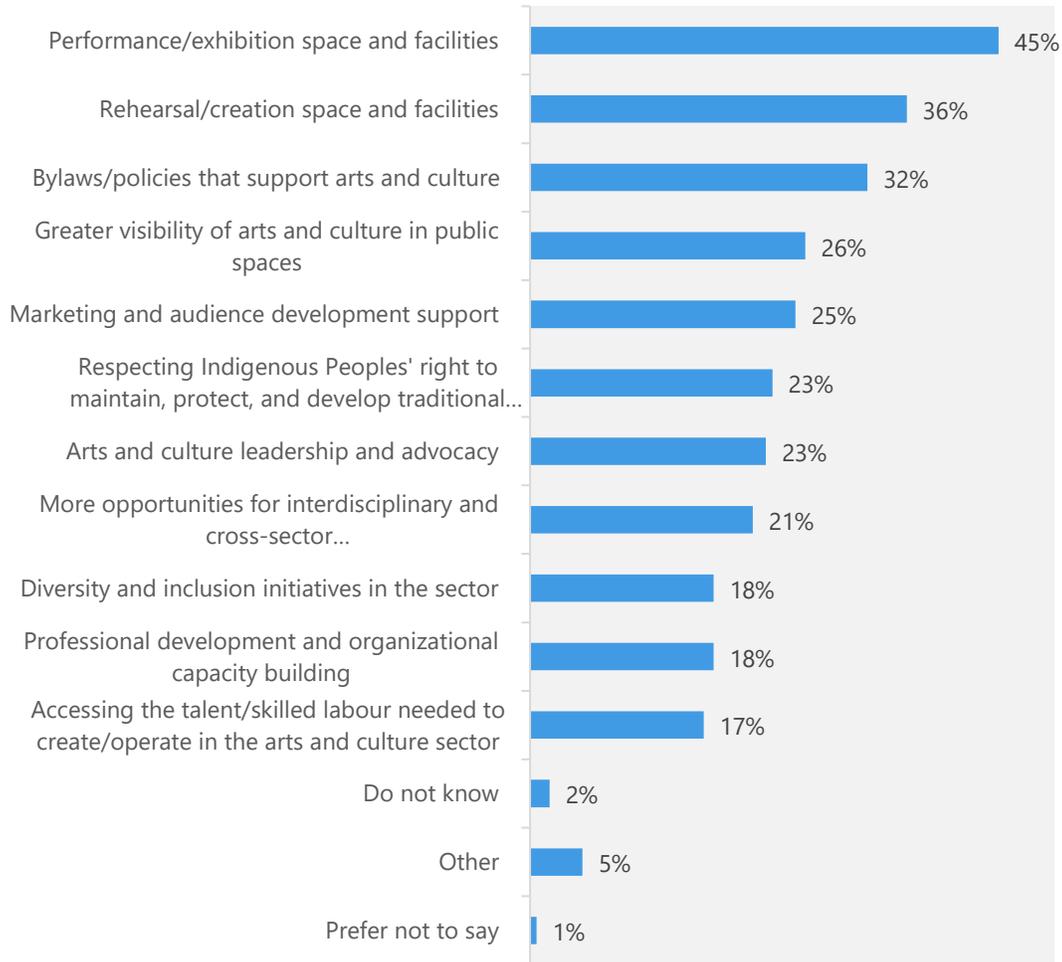
**Figure 13. What factors, if any, might limit you from accessing and/or participating in arts and culture in Courtenay? Select up to 3 (all responses, n=754)**





**Critical needs in the local arts and culture sector**, according to survey participants who identified as artists and workers in the sector, relate to the need for space (Figure 14). More specifically, the top needs highlighted were performance/exhibition space (45%), rehearsal and creation space (36%), and bylaws and policies that support arts and culture (32%).

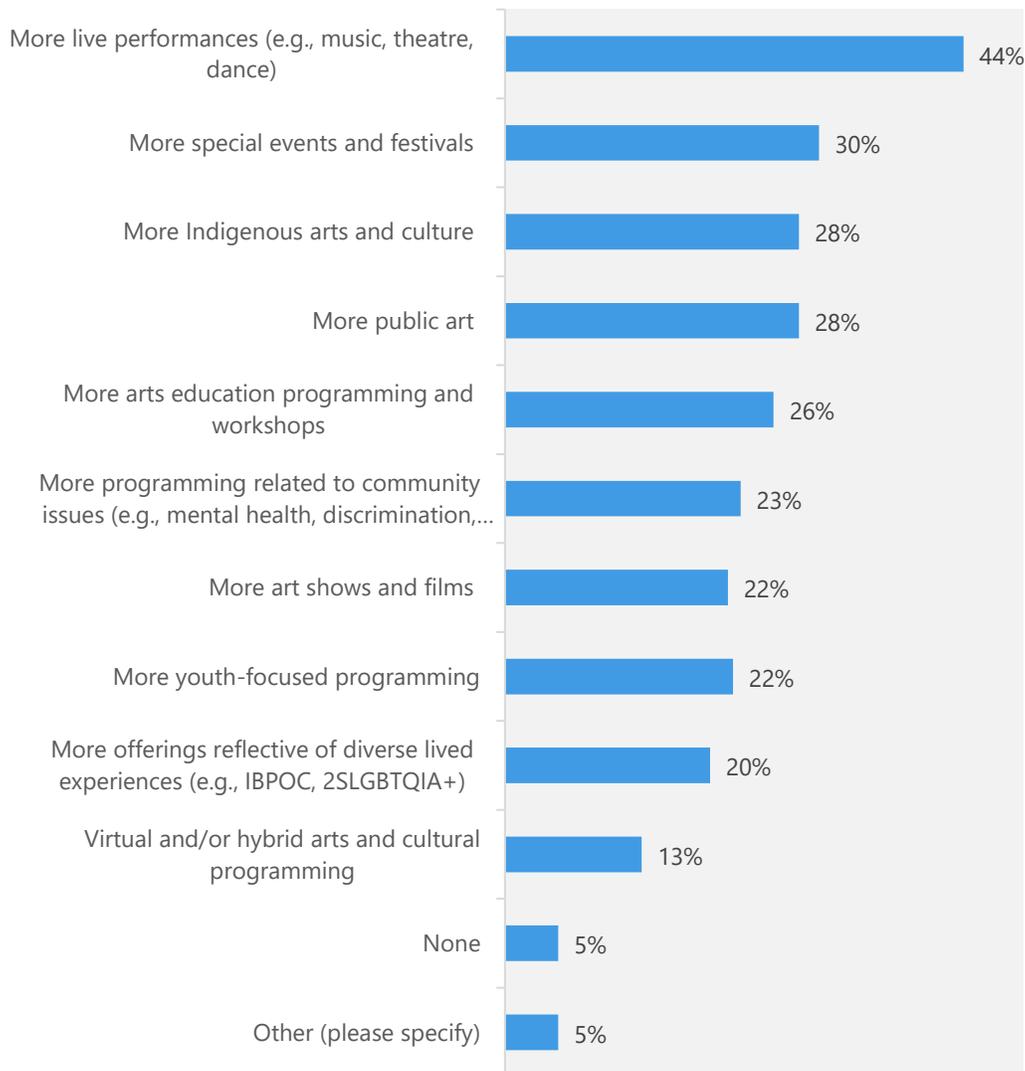
**Figure 14. What do you think are the most critical needs for arts and culture to thrive in Courtenay? Select your top 3 (culture sector responses, n=320)**



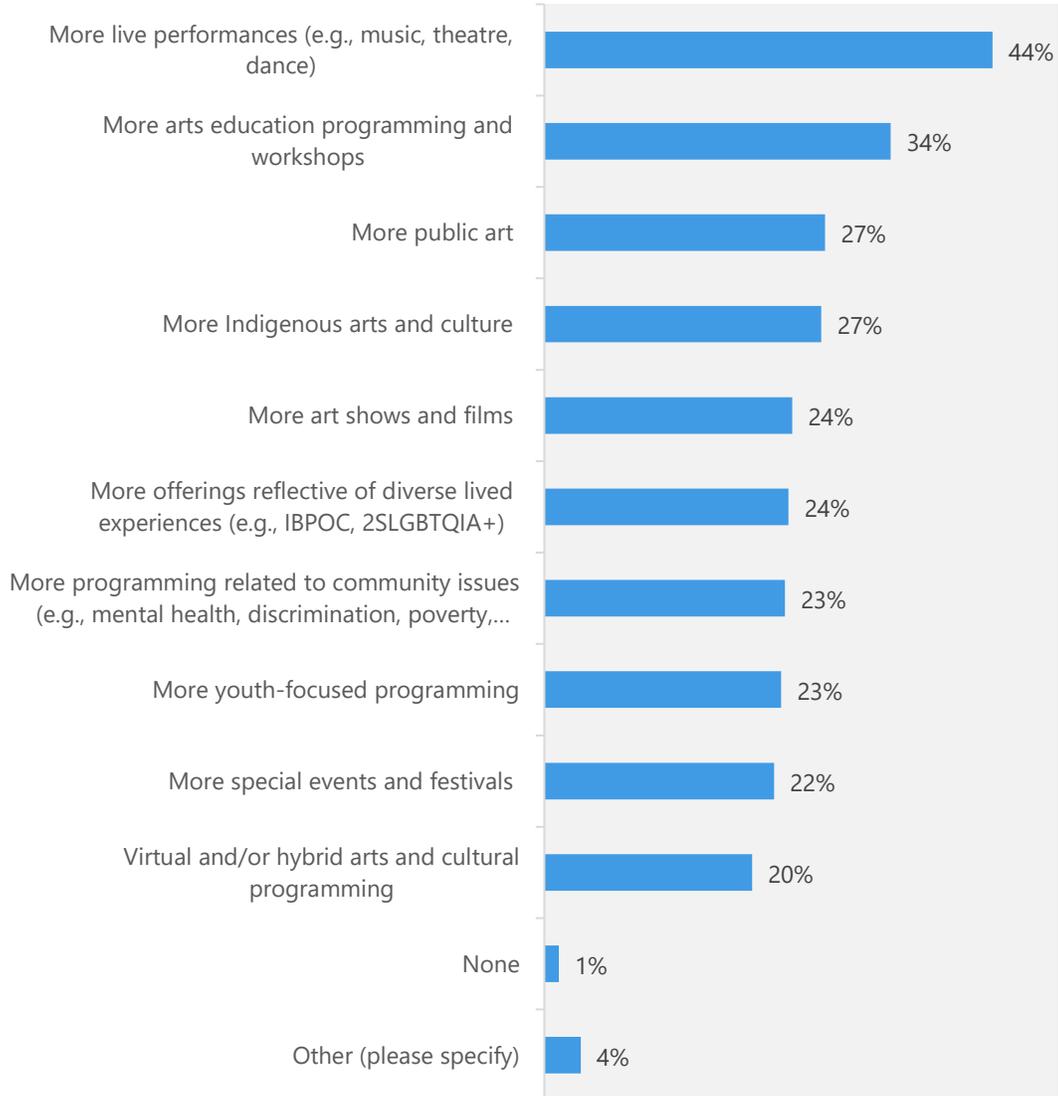


**When asked what future arts and culture offerings people would like to see more of in Courtenay** (Figure 15) the top response from members of the public was more live performances (44% selected that option). The second most popular response was more special events and festivals (30%), followed by more Indigenous arts and culture (28%), and more public art (28%). Responses from artists and those who work in the cultural sector were very close to these total participant responses, also highlighting the need for more live performances (44%). However, the second most popular response was more arts education programming and workshops (34%) rather than more special events and festivals (Figure 16).

**Figure 15. Looking to the future, what arts and culture offerings would you like to see more of in Courtenay? Select your top 3 (public responses, n=409)**



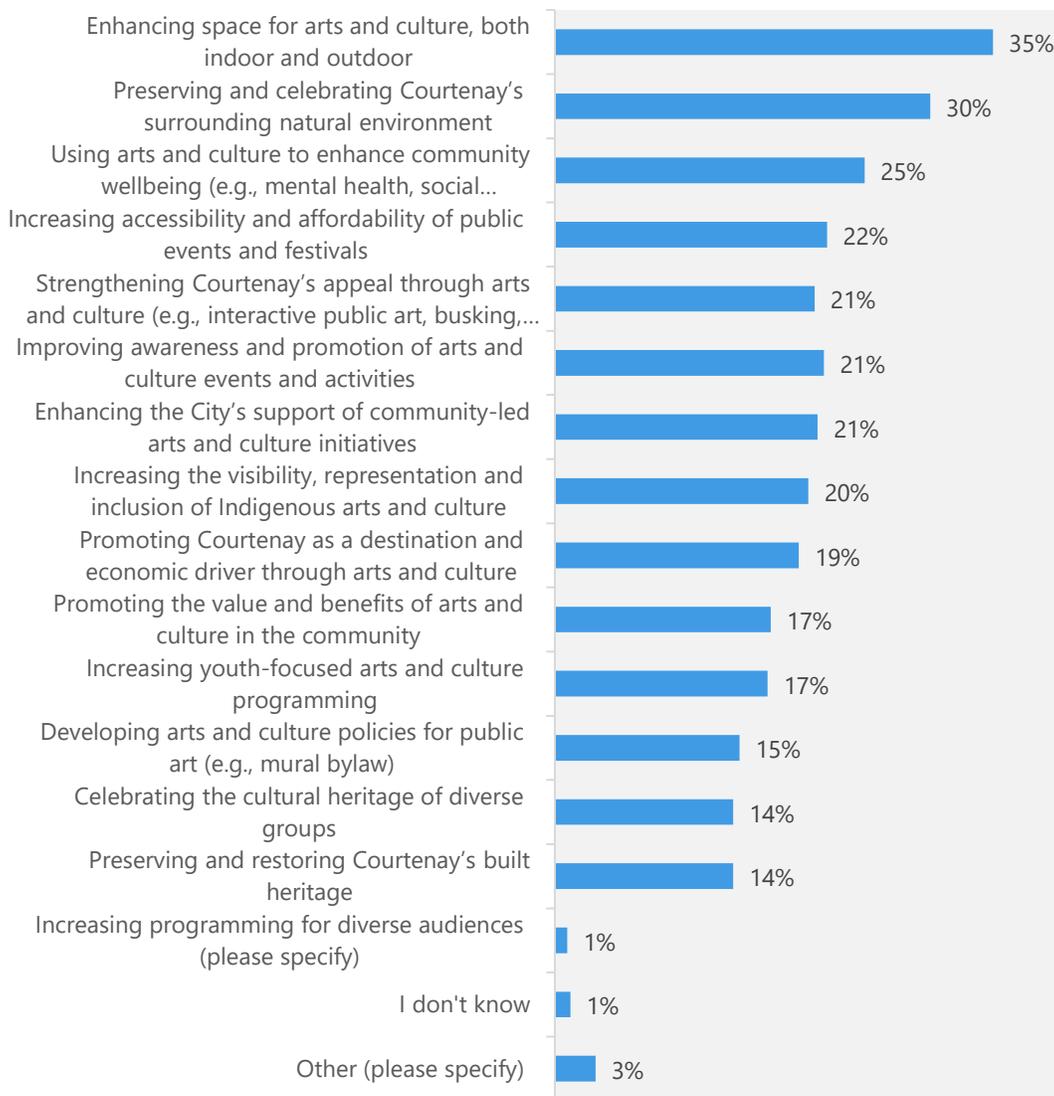
**Figure 16. Looking to the future, what arts and culture offerings would you like to see more of in Courtenay? Select your top 3 (culture sector responses, n=282)**



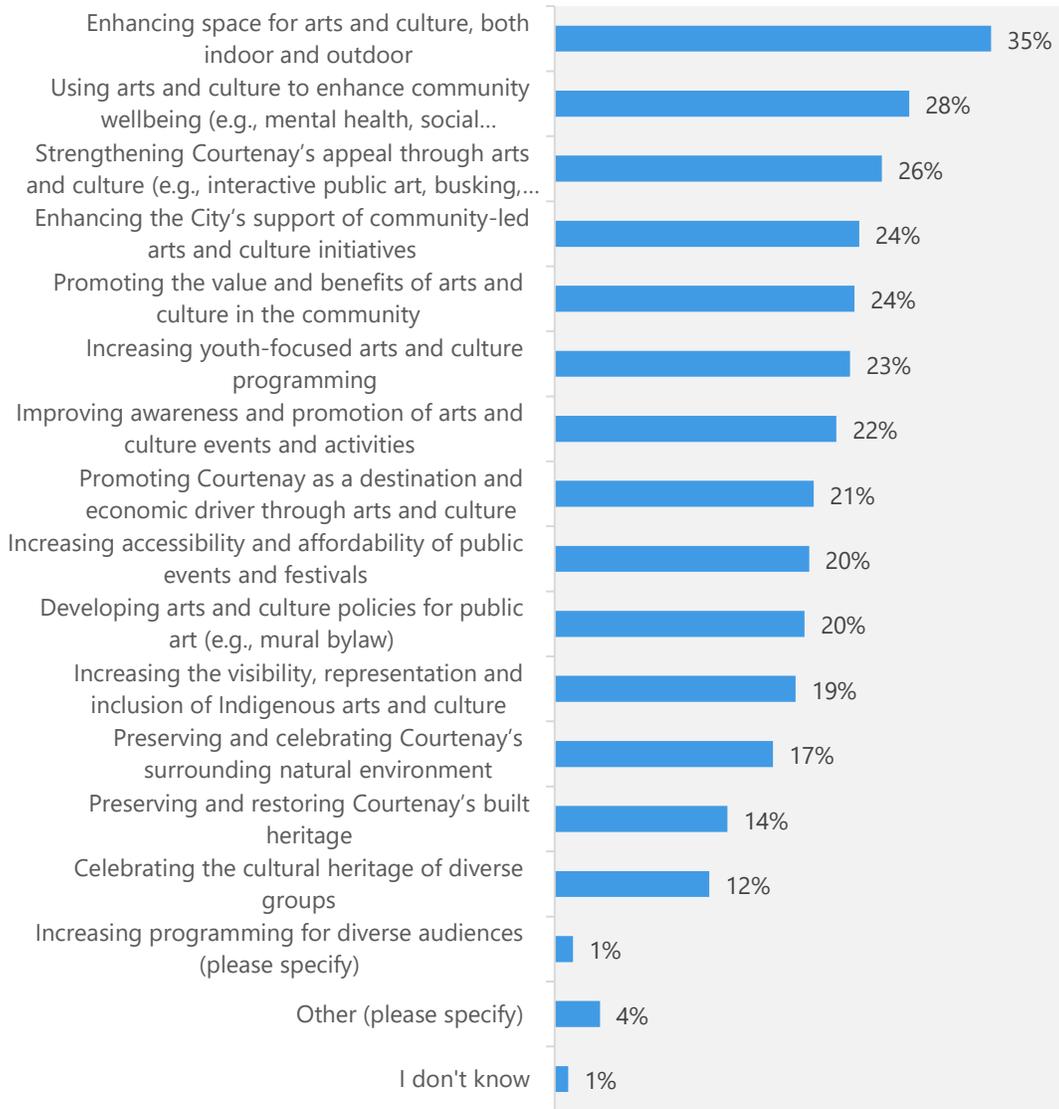


**The main culture themes that the City should prioritize in the Culture Plan**, according to public survey participants (Figure 17), are enhancing space for arts and culture (35% of participants selected this option). Culture sector participants also identified enhancing space for arts and culture as the top need (35%). Overall, however, there was a lack of consensus about what the priorities should be. The wide range of opinions could indicate participants' uncertainty regarding what the focal points for the Culture Plan should be, as well as the profound influence of arts and culture throughout so many areas of the community's fabric.

**Figure 17. What do you think the City of Courtenay should prioritize in the new Strategic Cultural Plan? Select your top 3 (public responses, n=404)**



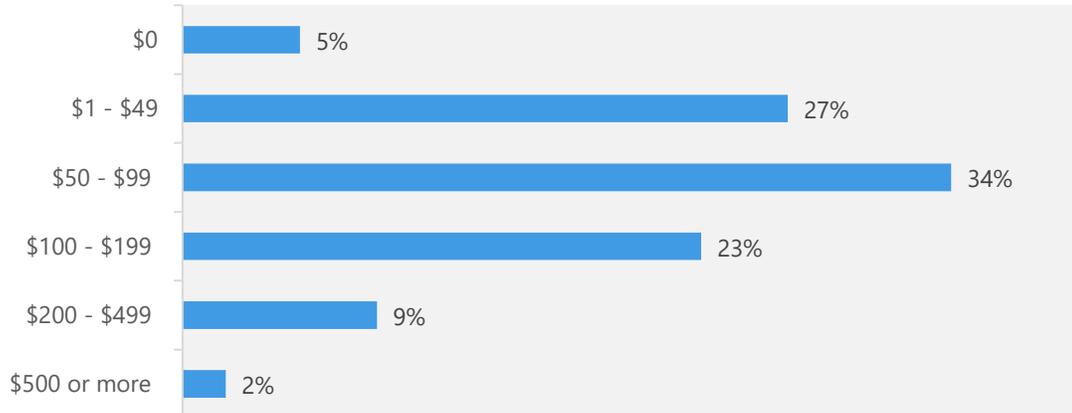
**Figure 18. What do you think the City of Courtenay should prioritize in the new Strategic Cultural Plan? Select your top 3 (culture sector responses, n=278)**





When respondents were asked how much money they spend in the community before and after a cultural event, the total average was **\$105 per individual** (Figure 19).

**Figure 19. As an individual, how much do you typically spend before or after attending/participating in cultural events? (all responses, n=728)**



Full survey results can be found in Appendix A.

### Cultural Sector Findings

These findings draw on discussions at a cultural sector roundtable event hosted on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, one-to-one interviews with artists and members of Courtenay’s cultural community, and discussions at a public event on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

**Figure 20. Live graphic recording by Jill Banting from the May 9th focus group with arts and culture sector participants**



## Key Findings

Courtenay's cultural sector has a collaborative spirit and is supported by numerous arts and culture organizations and cultural facilities. The sector is further supported by volunteers who have a passion for arts and culture.

While the cultural sector offers rich and vibrant arts and cultural offerings, certain needs have been identified by the sector, including:

- **More equipped and accessible cultural spaces and performance venues** (e.g., with different sizes for different audiences and art forms). Specific types of space needs identified include a black box theatre, multi-use or adaptive spaces and outdoor venues equipped for performances. Other space needs identified include:
  - **Greater access to City-owned spaces for rentals with discounted pricing for small community groups** – i.e., cost of spaces was identified as a barrier for small and medium sized local arts organizations.
  - **To conduct an accessibility audit of City-owned facilities and upgrade facilities where accessibility is an issue** for groups such as seniors (e.g., provide grab bars in washrooms, stage upgrades for performances).
  - For the **City to provide support** setting up spaces (including outdoor) for events.
- **More funding (i.e., community grants) to help subsidize cultural events and programs.** The cost of some events/programs remains too high for sections of the population including seniors, newcomers, youth and the unhoused. Cultural organizations are also under financial pressure and unable to meet all participation costs, hindering the sector from offering more inclusive programming.
- **A need for regional support through development of cultural facilities/spaces, and funding programs** to support arts and cultural organizations within the region including those based in Courtenay (e.g., it was noted that other residents in the region benefit from Courtenay's cultural offerings).
- **To review transportation options to cultural events.** Transit is often a barrier for seniors, newcomers, youth, and unhoused community members.
- **The need for the City to play a coordinating role** in facilitating event schedules across cultural service providers and to maintain an event calendar (e.g., the City of Courtenay could play this role by appointing an Events Coordinator and also hosting an events calendar on City website).
- **To foster relationships between the cultural sector and the community** including the school district.
- **Succession planning protocols for local arts and cultural organizations.** For example, internships and mentorships for youth could enhance their interest in working within the arts and culture sector.
- **More technical and professional cultural workers** to support programming and events in Courtenay. Partnerships with educational providers including the school district and North Island College (NIC) could be beneficial, for example to encourage more young

people to work in the sector and to offer technical courses in sound and lighting, crowd control & management, arts administration and event management among others.

## Specific Community Findings

The interviews and group conversations highlighted specific needs pertaining to different types of community members, which are important to highlight in their own right. Table 2 presents specific needs pertaining to Indigenous community members (including Indigenous organizations),<sup>6</sup> newcomers and immigrants, unhoused community members, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members. These findings emerged from 1:1 interviews and group conversations.

**Table 2. Specific community needs identified**

Community/Group	Identified Needs
<b>Indigenous community members<sup>7</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is a need to provide opportunities to include Indigenous voices and presence in community activities. Having an Indigenous Liaison staff member at the City could help meet this need.</li> <li>▪ It is important to ease bureaucratic barriers and decolonize practices in the City so that it is able to fully respond to requests from Indigenous communities.</li> <li>▪ There is a need to provide support to create Indigenous cultural spaces such as an urban cultural wellness centre, campgrounds (with firepits that are open to community gatherings including outdoor cultural events) and outdoor spaces for Indigenous gatherings.</li> <li>▪ There is a desire for partnerships with the City to host Indigenous cultural events (e.g., ‘Spirit Walk’ held on September 30<sup>th</sup>).</li> <li>▪ There is a need to create more awareness of Indigenous culture through cultural events and public art.</li> <li>▪ Participants noted that there should be more opportunities for Indigenous cultural education for City staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Newcomers and immigrants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is a need for more arts and culture programming that welcomes newcomers to the community to help address social isolation.</li> <li>▪ Another need is to provide more information on arts and cultural services or programs that newcomers can access or participate in, e.g., art galleries, theatres.</li> <li>▪ Newcomer and immigrant participants would like to see more opportunities for more representation of different cultures in cultural programming. This could include programming that celebrates different cultures and providing language options other than English.</li> <li>▪ There is a need to foster collaboration among immigrant groups (such as CV Immigration Welcome Centre and CV Multicultural Society) –</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Note, the City’s engagement with K’omoks First Nation is in the early stages and will be ongoing throughout the Strategic Cultural Plan development and beyond. These findings are from conversations with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous-led organizations in Courtenay.

Community/Group	Identified Needs
	<p>connecting them, for example through facilitated introductions and multi-cultural events.</p>
<b>Unhoused community members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is a need for a gathering space that provides opportunities for free drop-in arts and cultural classes/activities for the unhoused population. Such spaces could be developed in partnership with community organizations.</li> <li>▪ A wellness centre could respond to individuals’ needs, both tangible and intangible. Basic facilities for unhoused community members are lacking in Courtenay, as there is no 24/7 water source, nowhere to do laundry and nowhere for people to store their belongings. A centre could offer opportunities to participate in the arts, and a place to connect to Indigenous learning and culture.</li> <li>▪ Although the majority of participants with lived experience of homelessness said they felt welcome at the City’s cultural facilities, more critical thinking is needed in the arts and culture sector (and more broadly) about how to respond to the needs of people engaged in public spaces (including access to washrooms, a chance to charge phones, etc.). There is a need for more listening to people with lived experience, deeper engagement, and critical imagining of new possibilities/solutions – including innovative housing options.</li> <li>▪ There is a need to create a more welcoming atmosphere at events and programs for people experiencing homelessness, overcoming stigma and discrimination from substance use. Having cultural and recreation staff (with appropriate training) or social workers present would help people feel comfortable.</li> <li>▪ Arts participation and therapy can be an important part of healing. For example, many participants from across community groups highlighted the Comox Valley Art Gallery’s Walk With Me project as exceptional, because the project addresses critical issues relating to homelessness and the toxic drug poisoning crisis through culture and storytelling – building empathy and understanding.</li> </ul>
<b>People with disabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People with accessibility needs of all types need to be included in creating solutions.</li> <li>▪ There is a need to ensure that cultural activities and events are truly accessible, with venues that follow universal design principles and meet Accessibility Standards Canada. For example, there should be a review of whether bathrooms are genuinely accessible, if lighting is sensory-friendly, and so forth – with people with lived experience carrying out the accessibility testing.</li> <li>▪ There is a need for clear information on the accessibility of venues and activities to help community members to plan. E.g., is the venue wheelchair accessible, are parking/bathrooms accessible, and will loop systems or captioning be available? Advertising for events and programming should include symbols relating to accessibility, so people know what they can expect (e.g., wheelchairs, sign language, assistive listening, accessible print, braille - see <a href="#">example</a>).</li> </ul>

Community/Group	Identified Needs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is a need to adapt facilities so that accessible seats are not for only one person with one companion but a whole group. This change would enable people with physical disabilities to participate with their friends and families.</li> <li>▪ Transit to get to arts and culture needs further improvement. Although buses are accessible, schedules are not in sync with the timing of events, creating a real barrier to participation.</li> <li>▪ Hybrid programming has largely stopped since the pandemic, but there remains a need for hybrid options for some people with disabilities, including those with invisible disabilities.</li> </ul>
<b>2SLGBTQIA+ community members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Overall, there is a lack of visibility of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Courtenay. Although there are various queer artists and creatives in the city, they are scattered and there are limited opportunities for them to meet.</li> <li>▪ There is a need for a central place for the 2SLGBTQIA+ to gather. Although there are some great organizers in the city (Queer Culture, Pride) no one has a brick-and-mortar space. Additionally, although allies are important and welcome, some participants noted a need for some events or programming to be for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community only, as the dynamic and level of understanding is different.</li> <li>▪ Although overall there has been an outpouring of support for Pride events in Courtenay, phobia and incidents of violence or intimidation continue. Some people are deterred from attending 2SLGBTQIA+ events as they fear attracting attention to themselves. Real effort is needed to ensure 2SLGBTQIA+ people are not only welcome, but safe.</li> <li>▪ With some more focus, there is an opportunity to launch more 2SLGBTQIA+ activities and art shows in Courtenay – both virtually and in person. Such events/activities should be developed with accessibility in mind, including considering ways to address time/financial barriers. Potential opportunities include arts exhibitions during Pride month and other key 2SLGBTQIA+ dates.</li> </ul>

## Summary Findings

This section summarizes Courtenay’s current strengths, challenges and gaps when it comes to culture, based on analysis of the engagement findings.

<b>+ Strengths</b>	<b>- Challenges and Gaps</b>
Courtenay has a beautiful geographic location that provides artistic inspiration.	Lack of visibility of Indigenous arts, culture, and heritage in Courtenay.
Strong cultural anchors, collaborative spirit, and cultural capital.	Inadequate municipal support for arts and culture, including at the City and regional level.
Established City municipality support for core arts and culture organizations.	Limited human resources, including technical professionals, in some areas of the cultural sector.
Community support for and interest in arts and culture is notable in Courtenay.	Lack of accessibility to cultural spaces and events.
Variety of cultural offerings to attract people year-round to the city.	Limited arts and culture programming opportunities for youth, and lack of awareness of what is available.
Demonstrated social and economic impact of arts and culture in Courtenay.	

### Strengths

- **Courtenay has a beautiful geographic location that provides artistic inspiration.**
  - Courtenay’s geography and location in the Comox Valley contribute to its overall appeal.
  - Courtenay’s natural beauty, with picturesque landscapes and proximity to water bodies, provides residents with recreational opportunities and rich inspiration for arts and culture.
  - Although the community is small, numerous participants highlighted its substantial, and vibrant arts scene.

*“The location and landscape of Courtenay is the Comox Valley is a point attraction to most people who move here, for example for retirement or visit.”*

- **Strong cultural anchors, collaborative spirit, and cultural capital.**

- Courtenay hosts numerous arts and culture organizations, including cultural anchor institutions such as the Sid Williams Theatre, the Comox Valley Arts Gallery, the Comox Valley Community Arts Council, and the Courtenay and District Museum.
- These facilities are in proximity to the downtown core and offer a variety of cultural offerings. These cultural anchors are a draw for the region, and support other communities in the Comox Valley, as well as Courtenay.
- Other key cultural organizations include, but are not limited to, the Old Church Theatre Society, HMCS Alberni Memorial Museum, as well as cultural events such as Simms Summer Series and Vancouver Island Music Festival.
- The city is home to people with a background in a variety of art forms and cultures whose creativity feeds the cultural growth in the community. Many participants mentioned a strong collaborative spirit across the sector.
- In addition, North Island College supports arts and culture through related courses and draws students from the valley and beyond.

***"A strong creative community and variety of activities are offered locally."***  
- Survey participant

- **Established City municipality support for core arts and culture organizations.**

- The City of Courtenay provides funding support to the core cultural partner organizations (i.e., the Sid Williams Theatre, the Courtenay and District Museum, the Comox Valley Art Gallery and the Comox Valley Community Arts Council).
- The City also maintains and invests in other facilities such as the Florence Filberg Centre, Native Sons Hall, and the LINC Youth Centre, each of which host arts and culture-related activities alongside other community uses.
- The City works with the Heritage Advisory Commission to support heritage conservation and celebration of heritage assets.
- The City developed a Downtown Playbook (in consultation with the public and businesses) to support the revitalization of downtown Courtenay – a strategy with strong links to culture.

***"The structured delivery of arts and culture is a key thing –i.e., the City municipality support to four core partners."***  
- Focus group participant

- **Community support for and interest in arts and culture is notable in Courtenay.**

- Courtenay boasts many individuals and organizations with a high level of interest in promoting arts and culture in the community.
- Many artists live in the community, and there are numerous cultural groups, and volunteers who run cultural events.
- Almost all survey participants (94%) participate in arts and culture in Courtenay at least a few times a year. Nearly half (47%) participate weekly or more.

*"... there are a lot of arts consumers; people who go out and support local filmmaking, and local theatre. There's just a tremendous tradition here of supporting music of all kinds, local music, music from all over the world, it's particularly more sophisticated than many other communities of its size."*

- **Variety of cultural offerings to attract people year-round to the city.**

- The city has both summertime and winter activities that promote cultural tourism and draw visitors to the community year-round.
- Courtenay and the region offers a variety of cultural events including festivals such as the Canada Day and Vancouver Island Music Festival, which appeal to locals and visitors alike.

*"...so many choices in terms of the number of things hosted in the city."*

- Focus group participant

- **Demonstrated social and economic impact of arts and culture in Courtenay.**

- There is an awareness of the social and economic impact of arts and culture in Courtenay. Note, economic impact analysis is currently in progress.
- Social impacts cited by participants include contribution to mental and emotional well-being, quality of life, bringing the community together in a positive way, and creating a sense of belonging.
- The survey findings showed participants think arts and culture in Courtenay encourage social participation and a sense of belonging (47% of participants highlighted this impact); enhance Courtenay as an attractive place to live (38%); and build empathy, awareness, and understanding between different and distinct cultural backgrounds (34%).
- Economic contributions come from arts and culture across the board, from events/festivals, employment, consumer spending and cultural tourism - e.g., Music Festival was noted as an event that brings economic value to the city and region.

*"Art is a mental and emotional thing. I think it's therapeutic for humans to make things."*

- Focus group participant

## Challenges and Gaps

- **Lack of visibility of Indigenous arts, culture, and heritage in Courtenay.**

- Courtenay is located on the lands of the K'ómoks First Nation, but there is currently limited visibility of K'ómoks arts and culture. Elements that participants suggested could be incorporated include signage, murals, and sculptures, or changing/rotating installations that tell the history and stories of K'ómoks territory to residents and visitors.
- There is also a lack of awareness, recognition, and representation of distinct Indigenous cultures, including Métis and Urban Indigenous people's cultures.
- Although several cultural groups collaborate with Indigenous Elders and artists, including K'ómoks, there is not yet formal collaboration between the City and K'ómoks First Nation in relation to arts and culture.
- There remains a need to educate the community on Indigenous cultures and reconciliation and to celebrate Indigenous cultural heritage in Courtenay, to increase understanding and eradicate racism.

***"How can we support learning about Indigenous cultures, & truth and then moving towards reconciliation together as a community?"***  
- Interview participant

- **Limited availability and affordability of suitable cultural spaces/facilities.**

- When the survey asked sector participants about the top three critical needs to help arts and culture thrive in Courtenay, the top responses all pointed to space. 45% selected 'Performance/exhibition space and facilities', followed by 'rehearsal/creation space and facilities' (selected by 36%).
- Outdoor performance spaces (e.g., an amphitheatre) and multi-purpose spaces were also noted by participants as lacking in Courtenay.
- Existing facility rentals are too costly for many community arts groups, or often have conflict in scheduling. These challenges can make it difficult for cultural groups – especially performing arts groups – to find space.
- Although there are some multipurpose facilities in the city which are used for cultural purposes, they are not adequately equipped for performing arts. For example, Native Son's Hall has no

***"...we [a cultural organization] cannot fill the Filberg, so we need small type intimate spaces for shows. Affordable rentals will also help with overhead cost and in turn pricing for shows so everyone would then be able to afford to attend."***

***"We desperately need a big theatre for performances. The Sid William's Theatre is far too small a venue."***

stages for performing arts groups to use the venue, and the Florence Filberg Centre does not have suitable acoustics for some types of shows.

- **Inadequate municipal support, including at the City and regional level.**

- City municipality support in terms of funding is currently considered inadequate, especially when it comes to funding beyond that offered to the Comox Valley Art Gallery, Courtenay and District Museum, Sid Williams Theatre, and Comox Valley Community Arts Council.

*Municipalities surrounding Courtenay use the city's cultural amenities, but do not equitably pay to maintain or sustain (and vice versa). Any capital plans are affected by this (in all communities)"*

- There is a desire for more arts and culture-specific grants. Several participants expressed that there is a challenge in balancing community or local groups needs with the needs of professional institutions and felt that smaller organization are not as valued as larger organizations – e.g., as they lack access to funding and resources.
- There is no dedicated staff for arts and culture only at the City of Courtenay. Having dedicated cultural services staff could provide a useful liaison point between different groups in the community.
- Participants expressed there is limited coordinated investment in arts and culture from surrounding municipalities. Given that it is not only Courtenay residents who benefit from Courtenay's cultural offerings, this is considered a gap.
- Survey respondents (32%) identified bylaws and policies that support arts and culture as the third most critical need in the cultural sector.

- **Limited human resources, including technical professionals, in some areas of the cultural sector.**

- Technical professionals in lighting and sound who can work on events/festivals are in particularly high in demand and lacking in Courtenay.
- The capacity of local arts and culture organizations is limited by a lack of paid staff. Most local arts groups are supported by volunteers only, and as such, have limited human capacity to offer more programming as they would like to.
- One survey respondent suggested that there is growing demand for experiences that include interactive technology, materials, and design. This often requires more specialty training and skills, which can be difficult to find in Courtenay at present.

*"There are more things that could be done but we just don't have the people to do it."*  
- Survey participant

- **Lack of accessibility to cultural spaces and events.**

- Accessibility barriers – including structural accessibility for people with physical disabilities, ease of access via transit, awareness of offerings and financial costs – limit arts and culture participation. These barriers are prevalent for some groups, including newcomers, seniors, youth and unhoused people.
- Other accessibility concerns include the opening hours of some cultural spaces (i.e., 10am to 4pm). Daytime opening hours only mean some community members cannot attend, including those who work full time and families who want to bring their children outside of school hours.
- In open-ended comments, survey respondents identified a need for increased availability and awareness of what arts and culture activities are occurring in the community.

*"I wish there was more information on the website or in the media. We as newcomers are very willing to participate in community activities."*

- **Limited arts and culture programming opportunities for youth, and lack of awareness of what is available.**

- There are limited arts and culture programming opportunities, as well as awareness of existing programs, for youth in Courtenay at present. This includes programming for Indigenous youth to connect to their culture, e.g., through language, crafting, or drumming.
- For example, in the survey, one participant commented that they would like to see greater diversity of exhibits as well as range of content for programs offered in the community for youth and children, as the existing offer is quite static.
- Participants described how there are almost no evening cultural activities in Courtenay, i.e., limited live music events in the evening, and no nightclubs.
- There is a need for more funding dedicated to supporting young and emerging artists.

*"...there are currently no music or dance programs in middle school; there were some changes a few years back that led to the cutting of several middle school programs. The kids do have something in elementary school and high school but there is a gap in between."*  
- Survey participant

## Community-Identified Priority Needs



### *Engaging K'ómoks First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous communities<sup>7</sup>*

Many participants want to see **more Indigenous arts and culture in public spaces** – e.g., for storytelling and educational opportunities, to raise awareness of K'ómoks' ongoing culture and heritage. Indigenous survey participants (n=111) were most likely to say that Courtenay can further reconciliation and support Indigenous artists through more Indigenous naming, signage, and visibility, more opportunities to learn about Indigenous cultural protocols, and more opportunities to learn about Indigenous arts, culture, and language.

Other priority needs relating to Indigenous engagement and reconciliation include the need for proper land acknowledgements during public events, as well as continuous engagement with Indigenous communities in strategic planning initiatives. Interview and group conversation participants suggested programming such as Call for Indigenous Artists, an Indigenous arts residency, festivals or events to engage Indigenous communities, as well as create learning opportunities for residents and visitors.



### *More cultural spaces/facilities, and better availability and affordability*

Participants expressed the **need for more equipped and accessible cultural spaces and performance venues**, to meet various sector needs, including the need for rental space. The types of spaces identified include small, medium, and larger venues, including performance and rehearsals venues. Specific types of spaces include a **black box theatre, multi-use spaces** that can be adapted for different uses, and **outdoor venues** equipped with stages for performances.

There is also a need for spaces to be **affordable** for local community groups. In addition, existing **facilities require upgrades** to meet requirements for events particularly in terms of sound system and stage set-ups for live performances. The **core cultural facilities** funded by the City also require various upgrades to meet their needs.



### *Developing more diverse and affordable cultural programming*

There is a desire for more **diverse and affordable cultural programming**, both in terms of services delivered by the City and by local arts and cultural groups. Programming needs noted by participants include an Artists in

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<sup>7</sup> Needs identified from engagement with Indigenous organizations and community members, as well as broader community members. Note, K'ómoks First Nation feedback will be included in later stages of Strategic Cultural Plan development.

Residence program facilitated by the City in collaboration with arts organizations; more youth programming, and multi-cultural programming to bring diverse groups together in the community.

Developing programming in partnership with organizations that serve **diverse groups** including newcomers, people who are unhoused, Indigenous (including Métis, Urban Indigenous), 2SLGBTQIA+ communities was described as a priority need in group conversations and interviews.

There is a desire for support in develop cultural opportunities that **support nightlife** – e.g., live music events to offer residents a chance to participate and enjoy such events.



### *Further promotion of community partnerships and collaboration*

There is a need for more community collaborations and partnerships. For example, several participants highlighted the need to foster a better relationship between the arts and cultural sector and the school district. Greater collaboration could potentially lead to programming in the school and use of school facilities/spaces for cultural events outside school hours.

There is a need to have **avenues for knowledge sharing** across the sector, for example through regular gatherings.

Other partnerships of interest include **building relationships with diverse groups** including Indigenous communities, newcomer/immigrant groups, people who are unhoused, people who use substances, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.



### *Increased municipal support – financial and in-kind, local, and regional*

There is a desire **for increased municipal financial support** for arts and culture, especially in the form of community grants.

There is a desire for the City to offer **operational funding to more local arts organizations to support the hiring of full-time staff** – which would build capacity as well as succession planning needs. Additionally, many participants identified a need for **dedicated staff for arts and culture** services at the City of Courtenay.

Other forms of support required from the City noted by participants include: **facilitating corporate support** for arts and culture, e.g., through sponsorships; providing more support (i.e., operating and project grants, City space rental discounts, capacity building e.g., grant writing) to **smaller and medium-sized groups or organizations**; developing a **one stop place to access information on events** and programs, i.e., a community events calendar facilitated or hosted by the City; and **capacity building** for local organizations.

Participants further expressed the **need for regional funding support for arts and culture in Courtenay**, given cultural offerings are beneficial or serve the wider population in the Comox valley or region.



### ***Further development of cultural tourism***

Participants expressed the need to leverage events such as gallery exhibitions and festivals to help make Courtenay the **cultural hub of the region**, and to **promote cultural tourism**. Additionally, community members would like to see more representation of **public arts** in the downtown core, e.g., more murals and sculptures.

There is a need for **coordination among cultural groups on summer events schedules** to ensure that this opportunity is maximized. Individuals noted that the City could create a role that coordinates such collaborations and support promotion of events, while others suggested this could be a role led by the Comox Valley Arts Council.



### ***Attraction and training of technical cultural workers***

There is a need for more **technical expertise in relation to hosting live performances and events** – i.e., more sound and lighting technicians, stage management and crowd control specialists are in high demand. These needs could potentially be met through collaborations with educational bodies such as North Island College to develop **professional courses/micro-credentials**. Additionally, **mentorship and internship programs** could help the youth to learn useful skills that are in demand in the local arts and culture sector.

Individuals noted that there is a need to make Courtenay a vibrant cultural community in the Comox Valley, in order to attract such skilled cultural workers (and others who value a vibrant cultural scene).



### ***Development of a Public Arts Policy***

There is a desire for Courtenay to develop a **Public Arts Policy** that is reviewed periodically to support public arts in the city. Individuals noted such a policy could **leverage the talent of young artists** and involve them in community public arts initiatives.

## **Next Steps**

The research analysis, and engagement with K'ómoks First Nation is still in progress. The future stages of the Strategic Cultural Plan development are as follows:

### ***Further engagement and analysis activities:***

- Ongoing and open dialogue with K'ómoks First Nation Chief and Council to discuss meaningful engagement;
- Municipal benchmarking and comparative review;

- Assessing the economic impact of Courtenay’s arts and culture sector;
- Analyzing cultural facilities options, drawing on the survey, municipal benchmarking, and other research engagement findings shared in this report

**Strategy development:**

- Drafting strategic goals for the Strategic Cultural Plan
- Developing strategic recommendations and an implementation plan
- Sharing draft recommendations with the community, and seeking feedback via an in-person community check-in event and online feedback
- Revising the draft Strategic Cultural Plan in line with feedback received

**Reporting:**

- Drafting the final Strategic Cultural Plan
- Presenting the draft Plan to City Council
- Finalizing the Strategic Cultural Plan

The final Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan will have several components: a **vision** for arts and culture, informed by the community; **strategic goals**; **objectives** linked to each goal; and specific **actions** linked to each objective (Figure 18). Lastly, it will include an **implementation plan** – or ‘roadmap’. The purpose of the roadmap is to outline which actions need to happen when, with key performance indicators, so the City of Courtenay can monitor progress towards the goals.

**Figure 21. Components of a strategic arts and culture plan**



## Appendix A. Full Survey Results

To gain valuable, broad engagement input from the community for the Strategic Cultural Plan, a survey questionnaire was deployed from June 14<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The survey collected a total of 779 useable responses and, of that number, 697 complete survey responses. Survey results include all survey participant responses unless stated otherwise. The following tables and figures collate all survey results.

### 1. Key Survey Findings

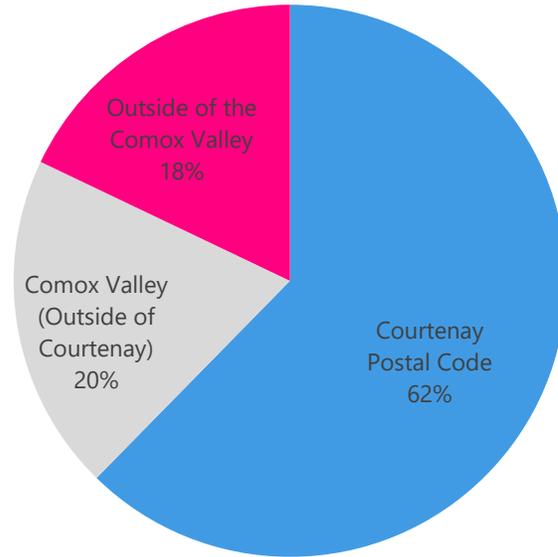
- The overall survey results show that a very **high number of respondents are culturally engaged (94%)**. Performing arts (such as theatre, dance, and music) are the most popular way to engage.
- Arts and culture in Courtenay encourage **social participation** and a sense of belonging.
- **Main barriers to accessing culture** in Courtenay are limited options nearby (29%), limited options of interest (21%), and not having enough time (20%). However, nearly a quarter of all participants stated that they do not experience any barriers.
- **Critical needs**, according to culture sector respondents (artists and cultural sector workers), are more space for performance/exhibitions (identified as a challenge by 45% of sector respondents), more rehearsal and creation space (36%), and supportive bylaws and policies for arts and culture (32%).
- **The future arts and culture offerings respondents would most like to see** more of include live performances (selected by 44% of total participants), more education, programming and workshops (29%) and more Indigenous arts and culture (28%).
- **The main culture themes that the City should prioritize in the Culture Plan**, according to all survey participants, are enhancing space for arts and culture (35% of participants selected this option) and 'using arts and culture to enhance community wellbeing (26%).
- **Expenditure:** The average amount spent in the community before and after a cultural event is \$105 per individual.

### 2. Survey Participant Profile

The following section provides a profile of survey participants. All questions were optional. While the survey did not seek to be statistically representative of the community, there were a higher number of responses from those aged 26-35 and over 65, as well as visible minority groups (i.e., IBPOC).

Survey respondents were asked to share the first three digits of their postal codes. Of the 257 respondents who opted to share these details, 62% identified that they live in Courtenay, 20% identified they live outside of Courtenay but within the Comox Valley, while 18% stated that they live outside of the Comox Valley.

**Figure 22 Residence (all responses, n=257)**

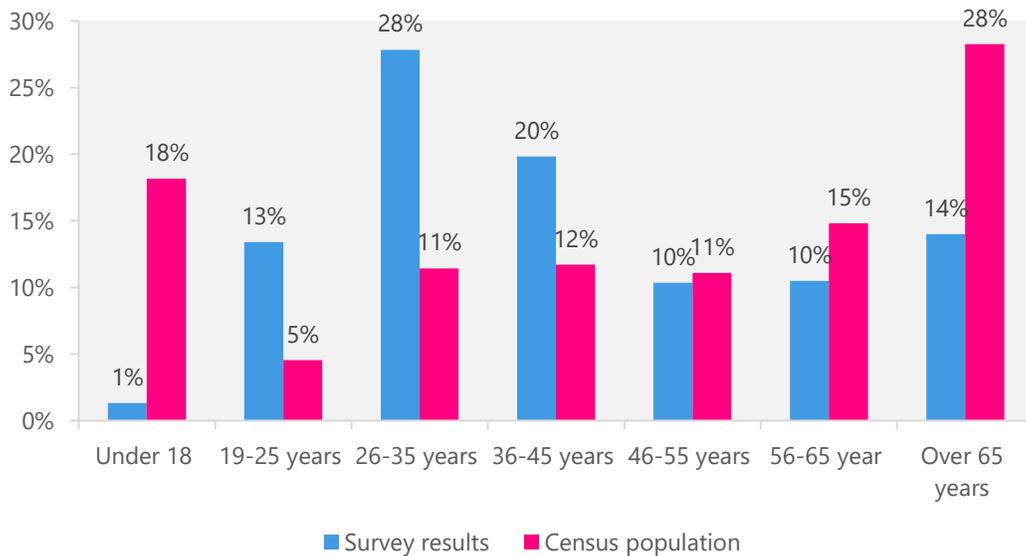


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Figure 23 indicates the age range of survey participants compared to Stats Canada 2021 Courtenay Profile findings. The largest share of participants was between the ages of 26-35 (28%) and 36-45 (20%). This is followed by those aged 65 and over (14%). At only 1%, participants aged under 18 years are underrepresented in the survey data.

In comparing the survey age breakdown with the Statistics Canada Census 2021 Courtenay Profile,<sup>8</sup> the survey was able to garner a much higher representation of adults between the ages of 26-45. This is significant, as it is quite common that online survey results are skewed towards an older demographic (65 years and above).

**Figure 23. Survey and population age characteristics (all responses, n=686)**



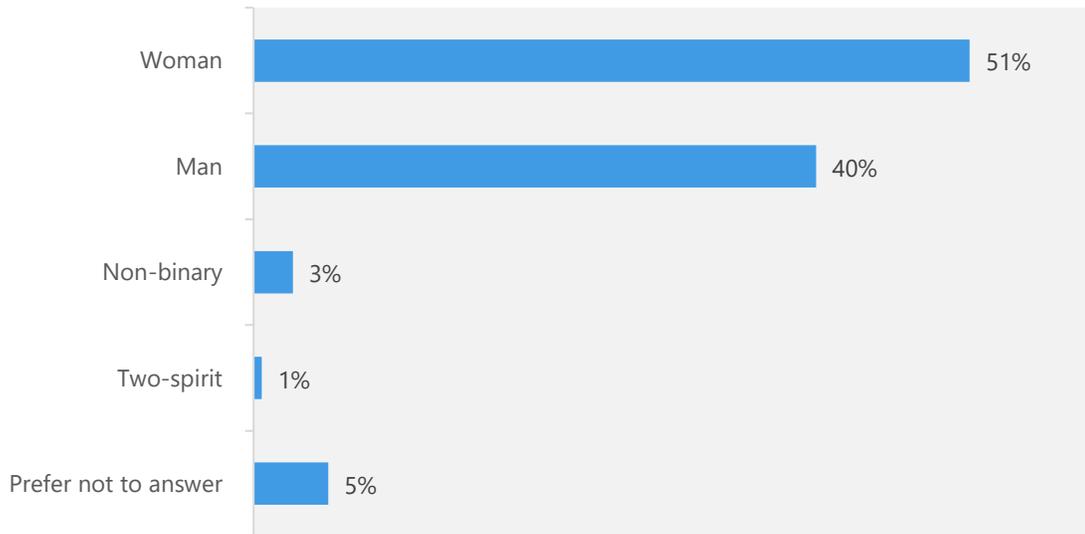
Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023 and Statistics Canada – City of Courtenay Census Profile 2021

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada 2021. City of Courtenay Census Profile 2021 – Census of Population.  
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=courtenay&DGUIDlist=2021A00055926010&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>

Survey participants were asked to self-identify their gender. The majority of participants identified as female (51%) and male (40%). Of the remaining respondents, 3% identified as non-binary, 1% two-spirit, and 5% preferred not to answer.

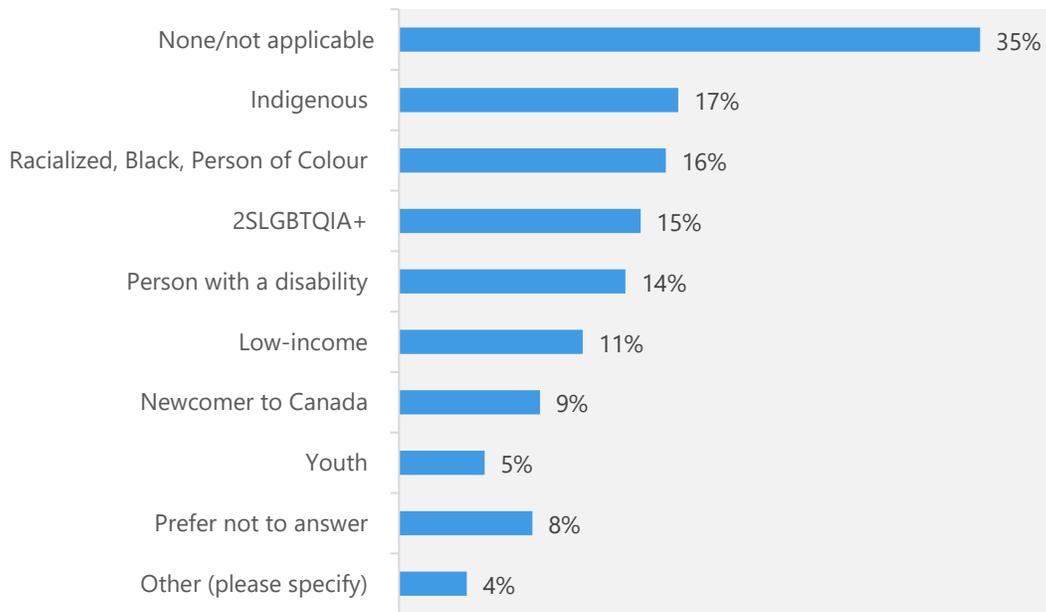
**Figure 24. What is your gender? (all responses, n=675)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

The survey was able to reach a wide range of identities. While 35% did not identify with any visible group, 17% identified as Indigenous, 16% identified as racialized (Black or person of colour), and 14% 2SLGBTQIA+. Moreover, 21 individuals identified falling in more than one category. These findings indicate that the survey was able to reach a diverse range of Courtenay residents.

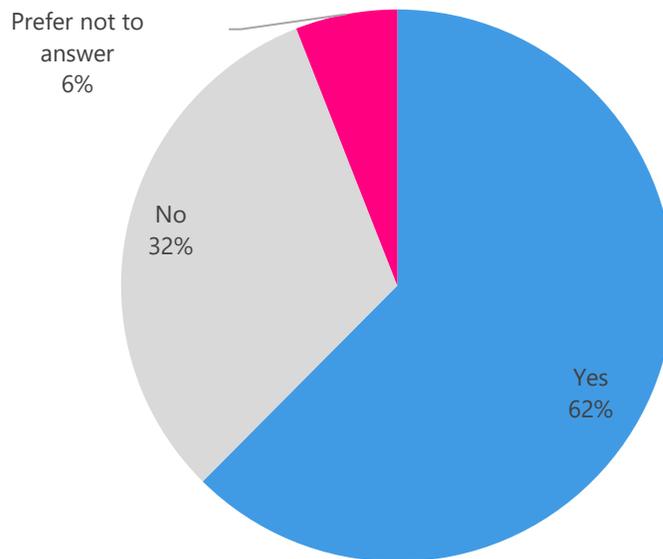
**Figure 25. Do you identify with any of the following? Select all that apply (all responses, n=655)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

As illustrated in Figure 26 below, the majority of households had two or more wage earners (62%). Additionally, 32% had one or no wage earner (or were retired), while 6% preferred not to answer.

**Figure 26. Does your household have two or more wage earners? (all responses, n=671)**

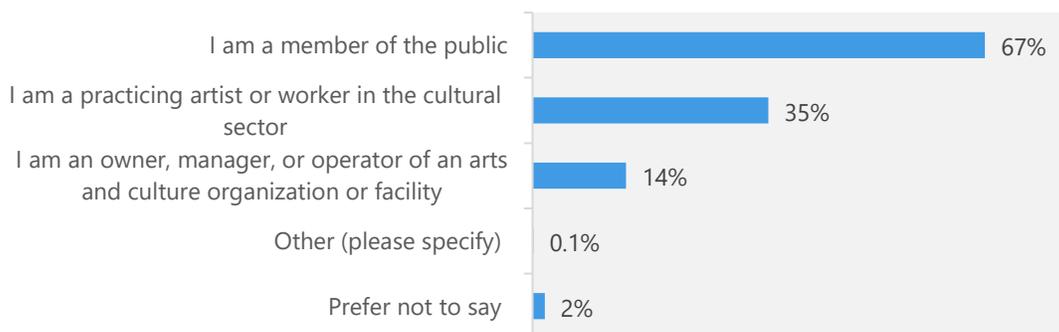


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

### 3. Engaging with Culture in Courtenay

When participants were asked how they engage with culture in Courtenay, 67% said that they engage as members of the public, 35% as a practicing artist or cultural worker, and 14% as an owner/manager/operator of an arts and culture organization or facility.

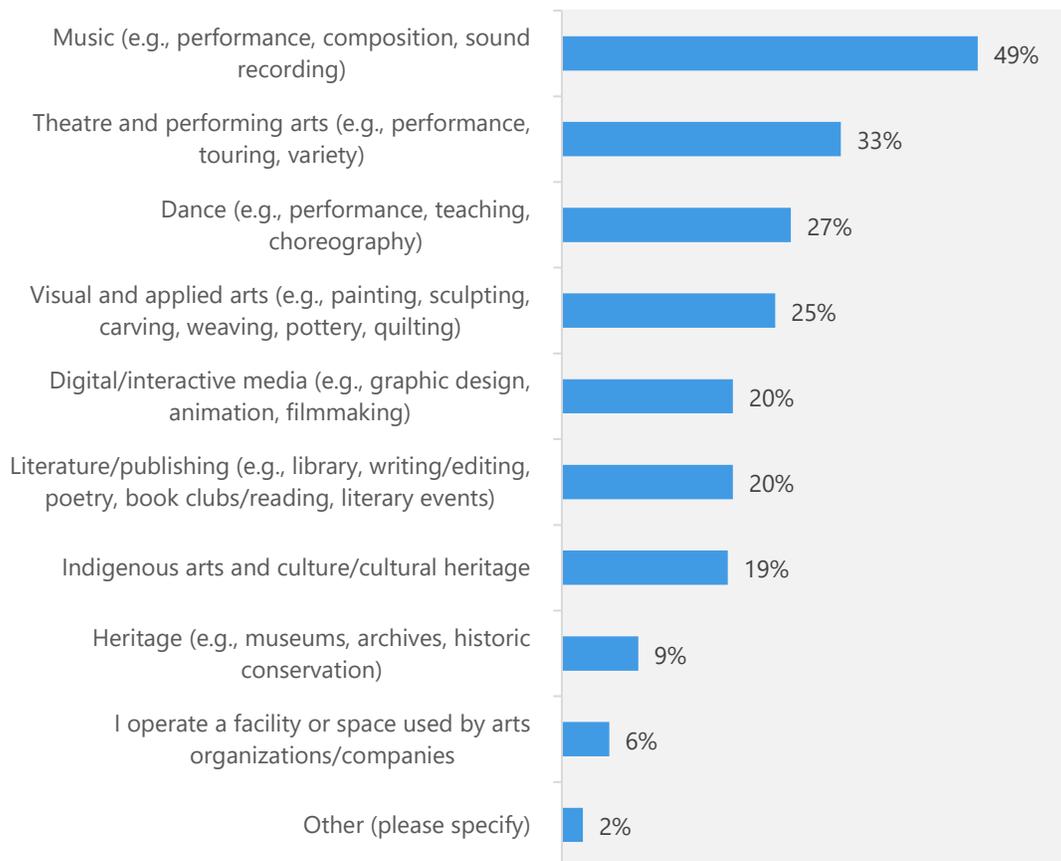
**Figure 27. How do you engage with culture in Courtenay? Please select the statement(s) that best describe you (all responses, n=779)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Artists and owners/managers of arts and culture organizations/facilities were asked which sub-domain of arts and culture they work within. The top three areas of work included music (49%), theatre and performing arts (33%), and dance (27%). These responses were followed by visual and applied arts (25%).<sup>9</sup> Notably, the performing arts sector encompassed the top three identified areas of work. Although the survey was not designed to be statistically representative, the findings suggest that performing arts are a particularly strong aspect of the arts and culture sector in Courtenay.

**Figure 28. In which area(s) of arts and culture do you or your organization/company work? Select all that apply (culture sector responses, n=324)**

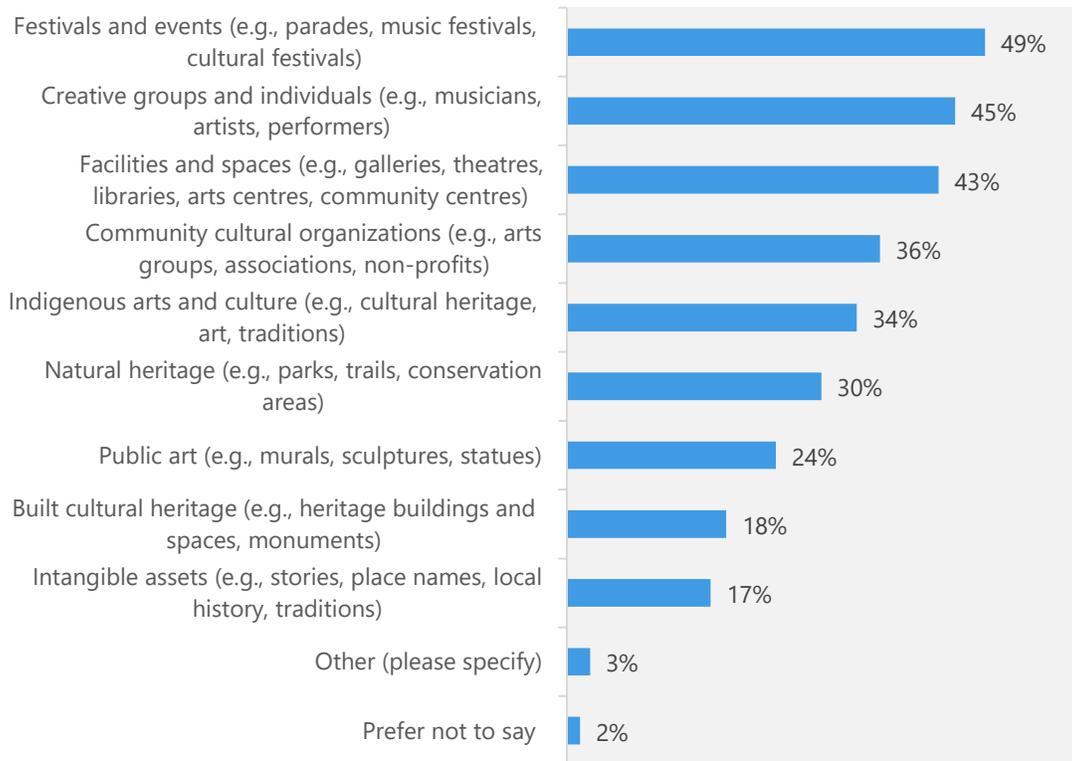


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

<sup>9</sup> The responses do not add up to 100% as participants could select more than one sub-domain, reflecting that artists and organizations often work across more than one artistic discipline.

All survey participants were asked what comes to mind when they think of arts and culture in Courtenay. The most widely cited responses by survey participants included festivals and events (49%), creative groups and individuals (45%), and facilities and spaces (43%). Other examples specified included arts in education and research-based arts practices.

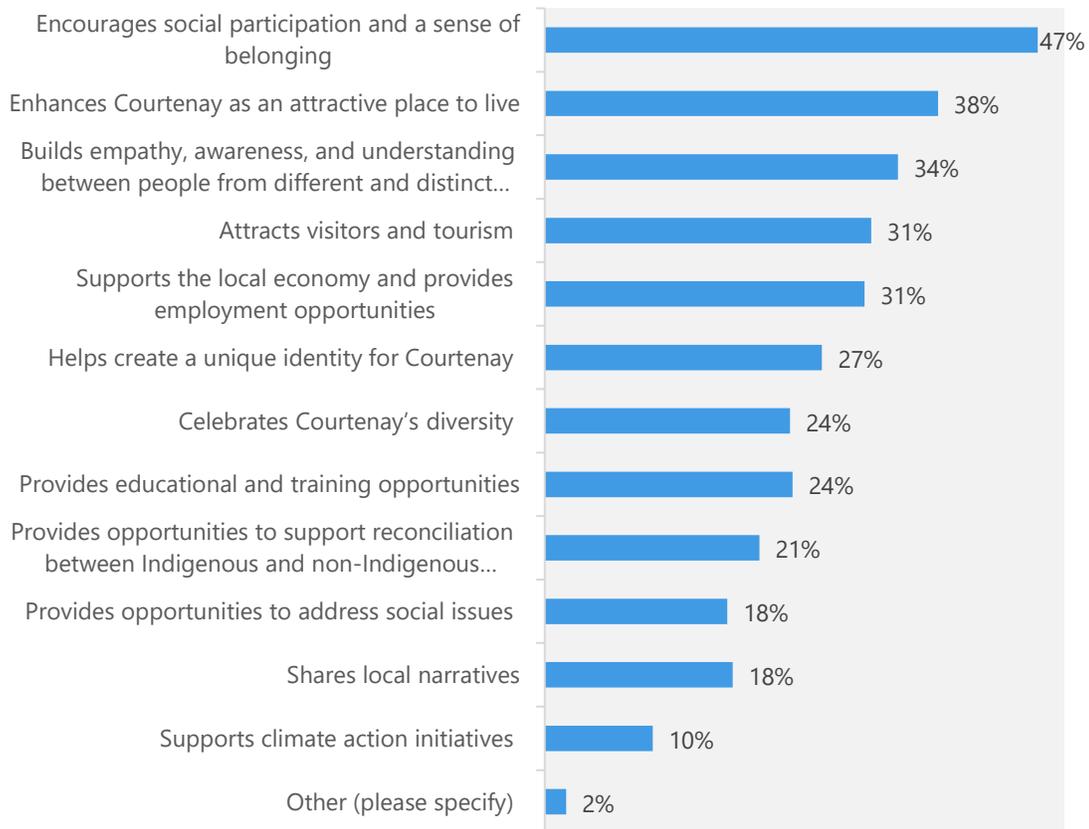
**Figure 29. When you think of arts and culture in Courtenay, what comes to mind? Select your top 3 (all responses, n=779)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

It is widely recognized that arts and culture provide significant benefits to communities, creating lasting impact. When participants were asked to select the top three social impacts of arts and culture in Courtenay, participants were mostly likely to choose 'encourages social participation and a sense of belonging' (47% of respondents selected this option); 'enhances Courtenay as an attractive place to live' (38%); and 'builds empathy, awareness, and understanding between different and distinct cultural backgrounds' (34%).

**Figure 30. What impact does arts and culture have on Courtenay and the wider community? Select your top 3 (all responses, n=779)**



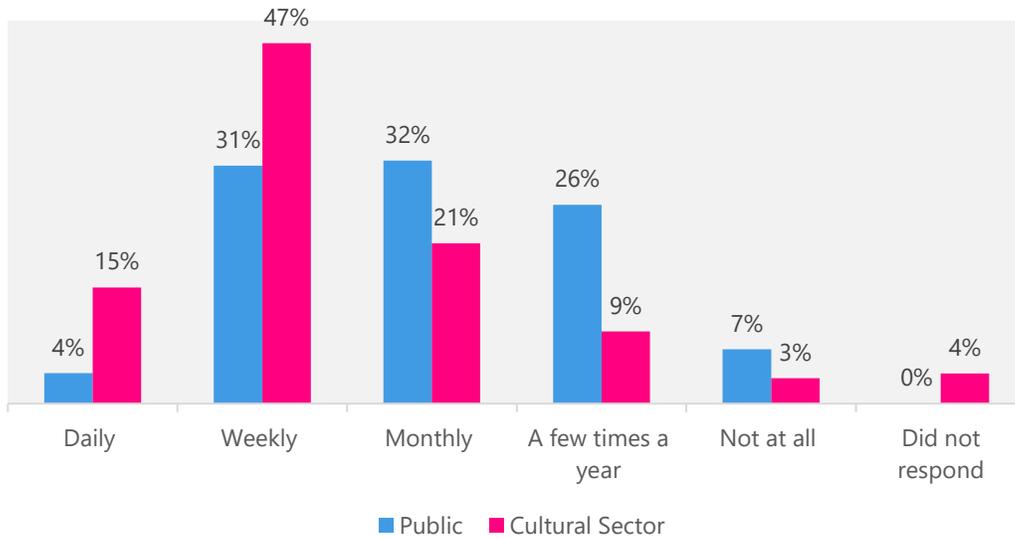
Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

#### 4. Cultural Programming

Survey respondents participate in arts and culture activities in Courtenay on a regular basis. The figure below compares public responses with culture sector responses. 62% of culture sector respondents said that they participate weekly or more, while 35% of the public identified participating weekly or more. Most culture sector participants participate weekly (47%), while most members of the public participate monthly (32%) and weekly (31%). Only 10% of all survey participants said they do not participate in arts and culture in Courtenay at all. The greatest number of survey respondents identified participating weekly to a few times a year.

While the overall distribution is consistent with regional culture research findings,<sup>10</sup> it is skewed slightly higher towards weekly participation.

**Figure 31. How often do you participate in arts and culture events or activities in Courtenay? (all responses, n=779)**



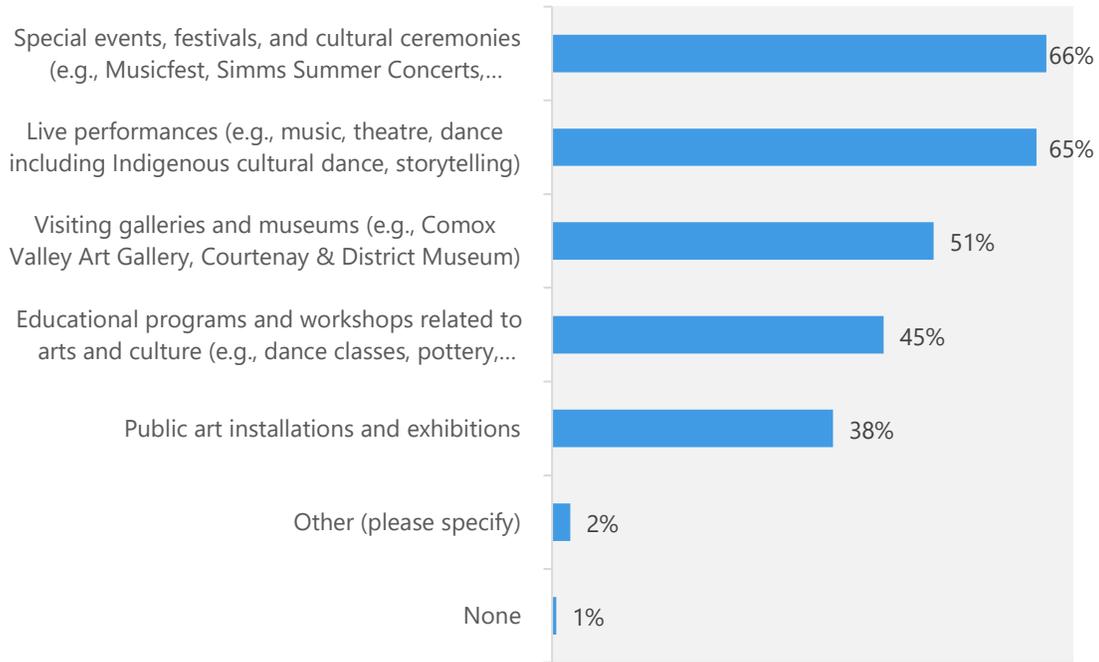
Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

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<sup>10</sup> Comparing these survey responses with findings from the 2021 *Arts and Culture Impact Assessment: Vancouver Island & Gulf Islands Super Region* that Nordicity conducted for the Digital Innovation Group (now Creative Coast).

The **top three arts and culture activities** that survey participants have experienced in Courtenay include special events, festivals, and cultural ceremonies (66%); other types of live performances (65%); and visiting galleries and museums (51%).

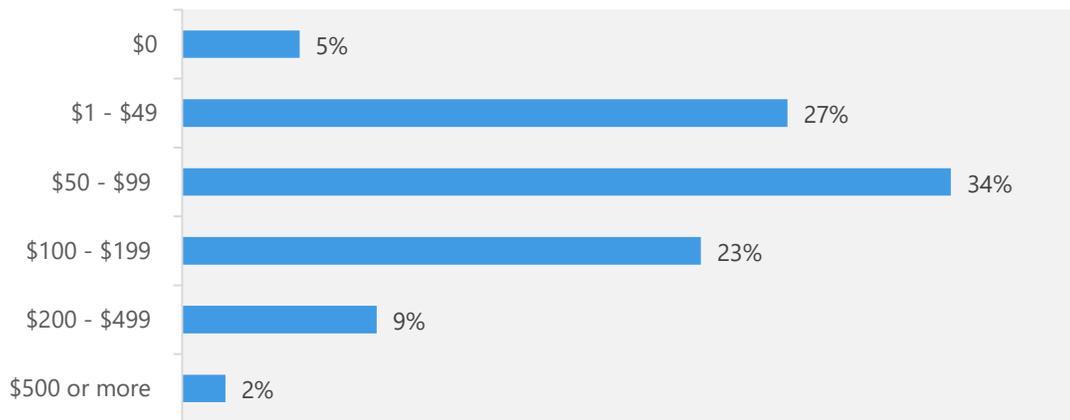
**Figure 32. Which of the following arts and culture activities have you experienced (within Courtenay)? Select all that apply (all responses, n=731)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Interaction or participation in arts and culture in Courtenay contributes to the local community's economy through additional spending in other areas. Significantly, **survey participants spend an average of \$105 in the community before or after attending/participating in cultural events** (such as at local restaurants, bars, etc.). To put this in perspective, if every adult in Courtenay were to attend one cultural event in Courtenay, this could contribute to an additional \$2.4 million of spending in the community.<sup>11</sup> Illustrated below, the largest cohort of survey respondents indicated spending between \$50 and \$100 (34%). A smaller group of participants (11%) spend above \$200.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 33. As an individual, how much do you typically spend before or after attending/participating in cultural events? (all responses, n=728)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

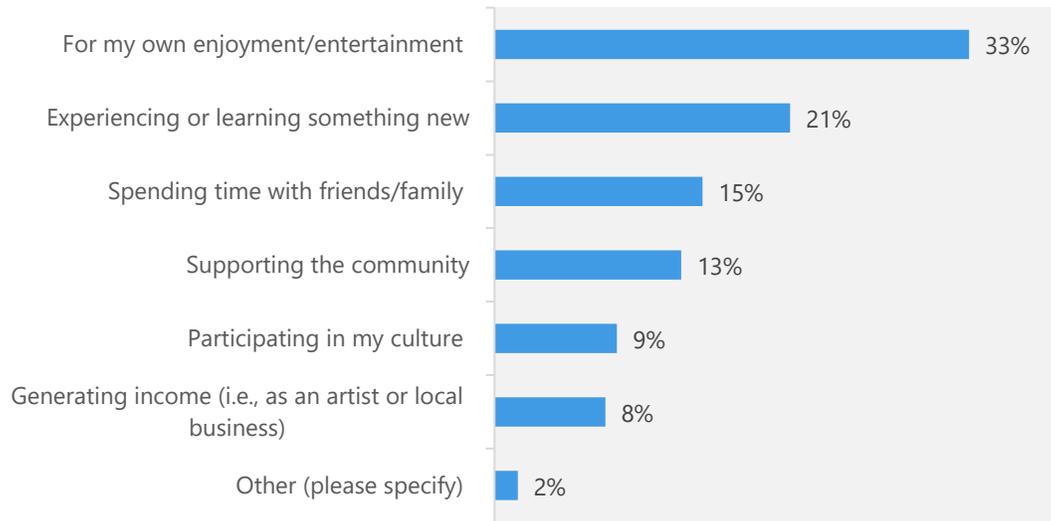
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<sup>11</sup> This finding uses the population figure from the Statistics Canada - City of Courtenay Census Profile population of approximately 28k. Note, it does not include children and youth.

<sup>12</sup> Further information will be included in the economic analysis work.

The main reason survey respondents participate in arts and cultural events in Courtenay is 'for my own enjoyment/entertainment' (33%). This response was followed by 'experiencing or learning something new' (21%) or 'spending time with friends/family' (21%). These findings reflect how participants value arts and culture events for social and not only personal reasons.

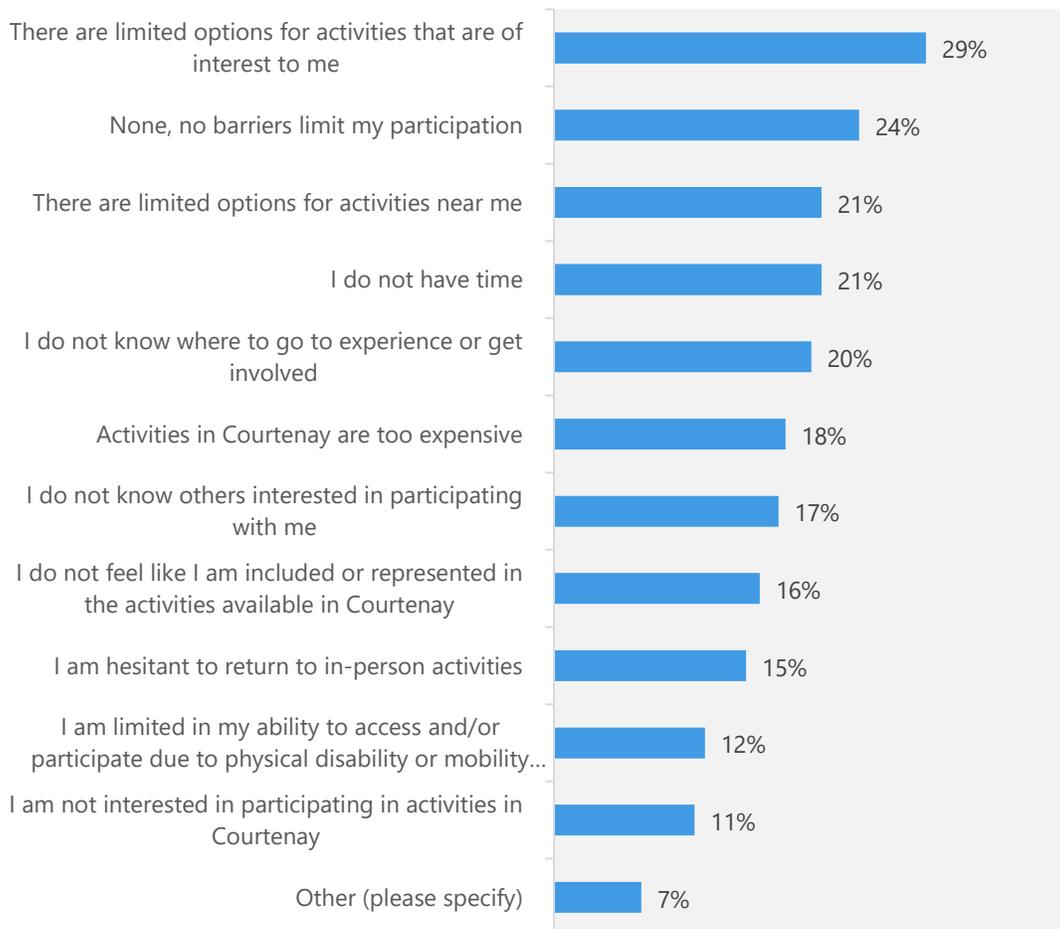
**Figure 34. What is your main reason for participating in arts and cultural events or activities in Courtenay? (all responses, n=731)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

When asked if any factors might limit them from accessing and/or participating in arts and culture in Courtenay, the top three survey responses included 'there are limited options for activities that are of interest to me' (29%); 'none, no barriers limit my participation' (24%); and 'there are limited options for activities near me' (21%). Two of the top responses relate to the diversity of arts and culture activities offered. Notably, and positively, many survey respondents do not experience any barriers to participating in arts and culture in Courtenay. Other, please specify examples included, 'transportation and carpooling, as I live in Campbell River,' 'I do not feel safe getting to and from arts and culture locations,' and, 'I do not know where to find out about activities near me.' This final response could point to the need for further communications and marketing to let the community know what is available in Courtenay.

**Figure 35. What factors, if any, might limit you from accessing and/or participating in arts and culture in Courtenay? Select up to 3 (all responses, n=754)**



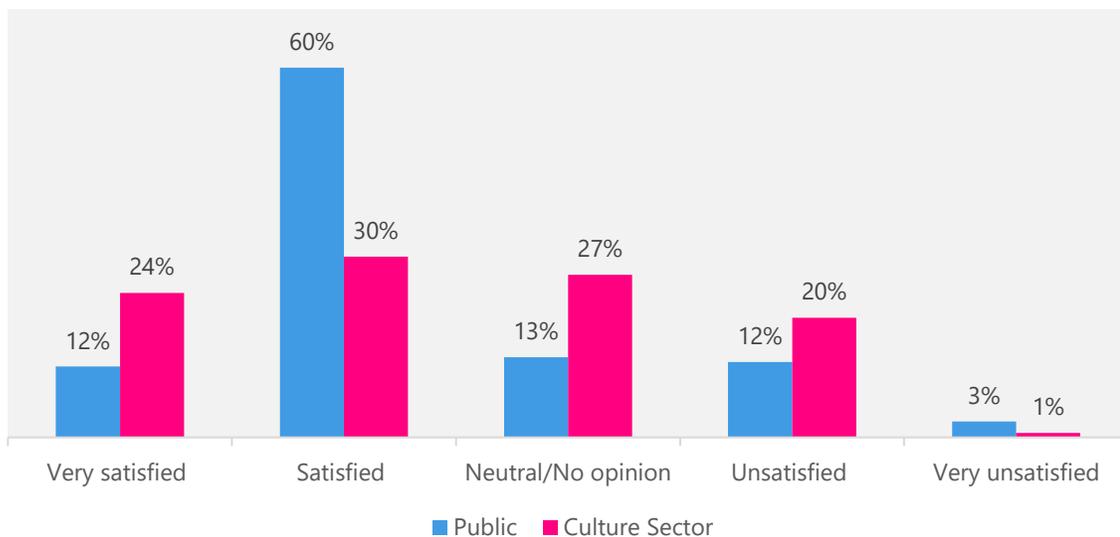
Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

The public and culture sector participants were asked to rate their overall experience with arts and culture activities in Courtenay. Significantly, **72% of public respondents said they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with arts and culture activities, while only 54% of the culture sector said they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied.'** Generally, the culture sector was more

'unsatisfied' to 'very unsatisfied' (21%), than the public (15%). When asked to explain this rating, some interesting comments to highlight include:

- *"The Courtenay area has a rich history and cultural traditions that go back hundreds of years. These traditions are highly valued and protected by the local people and can be reflected and displayed through museums, art festivals and cultural events."*
- *"Could be so much better than it already is. Unfortunately, I don't think we've collectively prioritized arts and culture enough over the years as a community so it can feel underwhelming. Also, not always a fan of the arts presented in the city."*
- *"I am both a participant and observer. I think local cultural organizations are doing a pretty good job of both showcasing local artists and bring provocative and/or inspiring artists from away. However, I would say our performance and gallery spaces limit the opportunities. In summary, we are doing well however there can always be improvements."*

**Figure 36. How would you rate your experience with arts and culture activities in Courtenay? (all responses, n=715)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

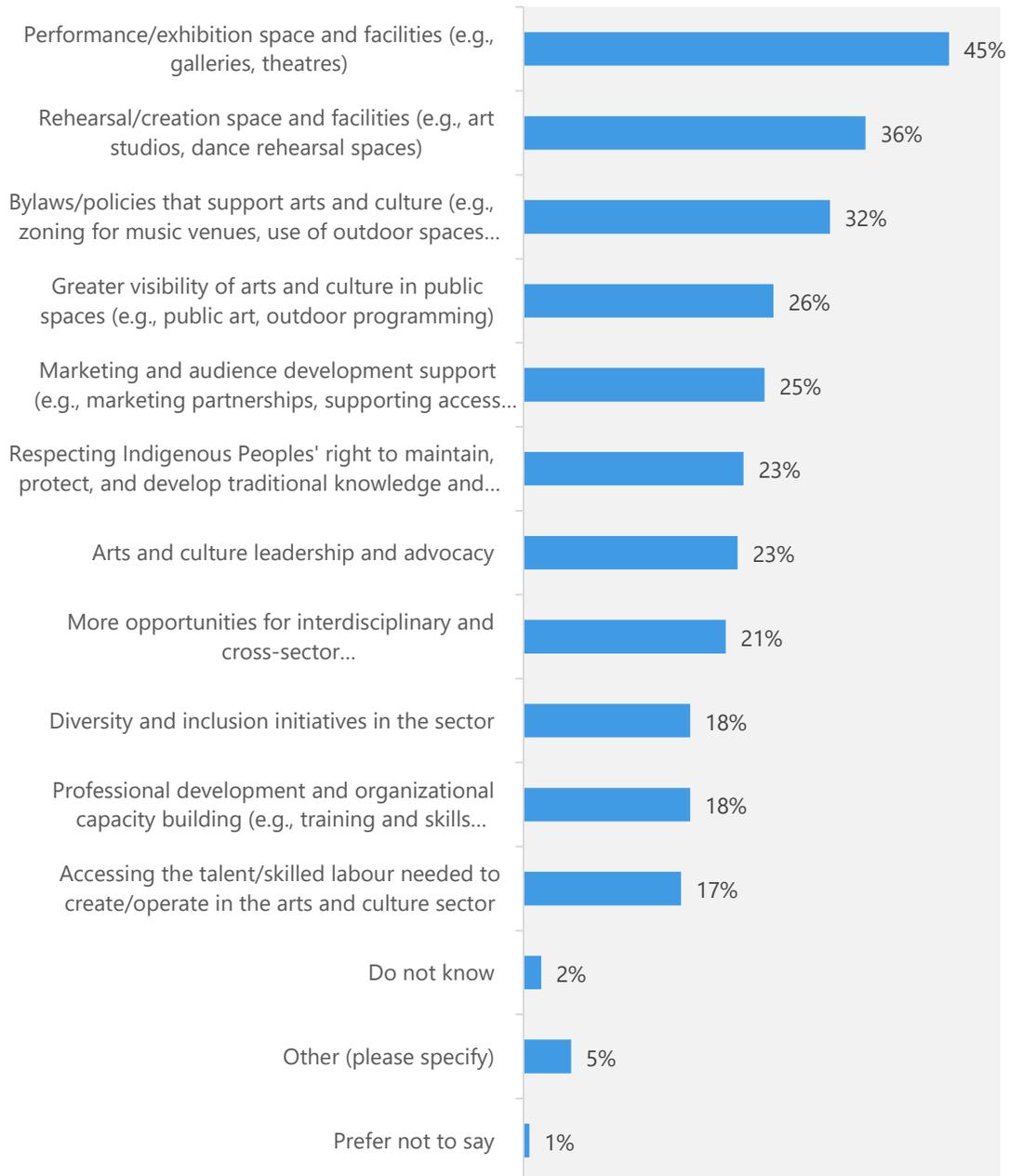
## 5. Facilities and Spaces

Facilities and spaces are essential for community-based arts and culture. In the following section, all survey participants were asked to identify the types of facilities and spaces they have visited or used in the past two years, as well as identify their level of satisfaction regarding those existing arts and culture spaces in Courtenay.

Artists and culture organizations were asked an additional question on what they see as the most critical needs for arts and culture to thrive in Courtenay. The following figure, **the most critical needs identified for arts and culture in Courtenay relates to space and facilities**. 'Performance/exhibition space' was identified by artists and cultural sector survey participants as the top need (45%), followed by 'rehearsal and creation space' (36%). The third most critical

need identified was 'bylaws and policies that support arts and culture' (32%), such as zoning for venues – a need that is also related to cultural space. Other examples provided included a need for greater access to funding and finding financial patrons for the arts and culture sector.

**Figure 37. What do you think are the most critical needs for arts and culture to thrive in Courtenay? Select your top 3 (culture sector responses, n=320)**

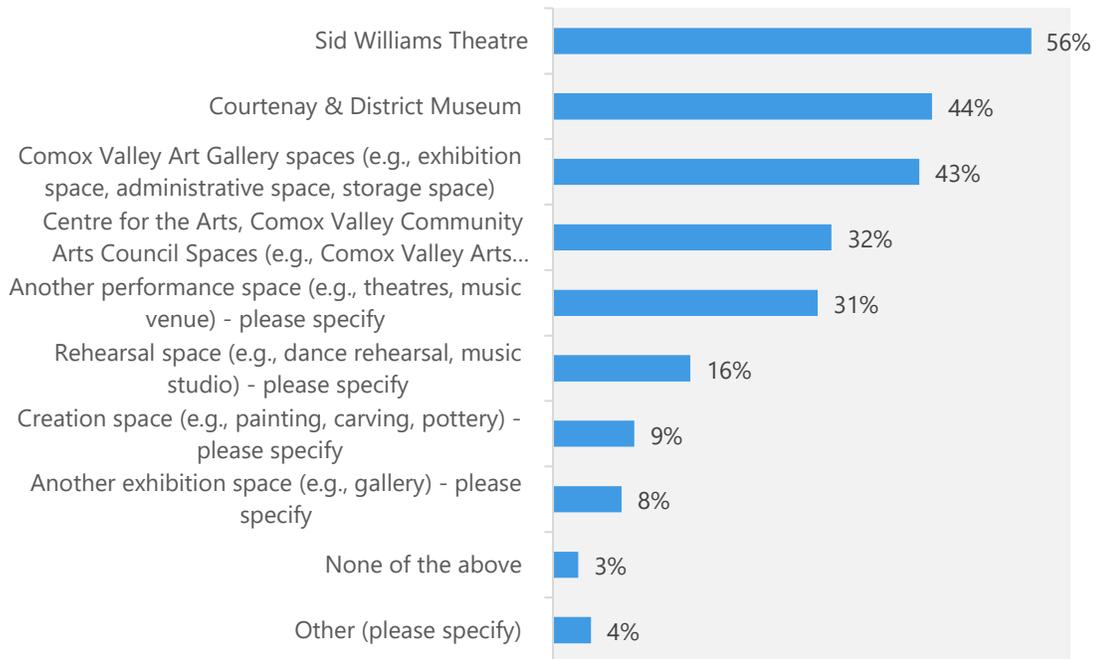


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

The following illustrates which Courtenay facilities survey participants visited in the past two years. The top three facilities included the Sid Williams Theatre (56%), Courtenay & District Museum (44%), and Comox Valley Art Gallery spaces (43%).

Survey participants also identified other types of spaces they visit in the community in terms of performance spaces, rehearsal spaces and creation spaces. Performance spaces included Native Sons Hall, Filberg Centre, Little Red Church, Old Church Theatre, Simms Park, St. Georges United Church, Stan Hagen, and Vanier Secondary School Theatre. Examples of additional exhibition spaces identified include Artful the Gallery, ArtWrx studio, Pearl Ellis Gallery, and Potters Place. Rehearsal spaces identified include Courtenay Little Theatre, a variety of churches, as well as high school theatre spaces. Finally, creation spaces identified include Lupine Art Studio, Make it Zone, Scrapbook Central, Spool Sewing Studio, Tin Town, and North Island College.

**Figure 38. In the past two years, which Courtenay facilities have you visited for an arts and cultural activity? Select all that apply (all responses, n=677)**

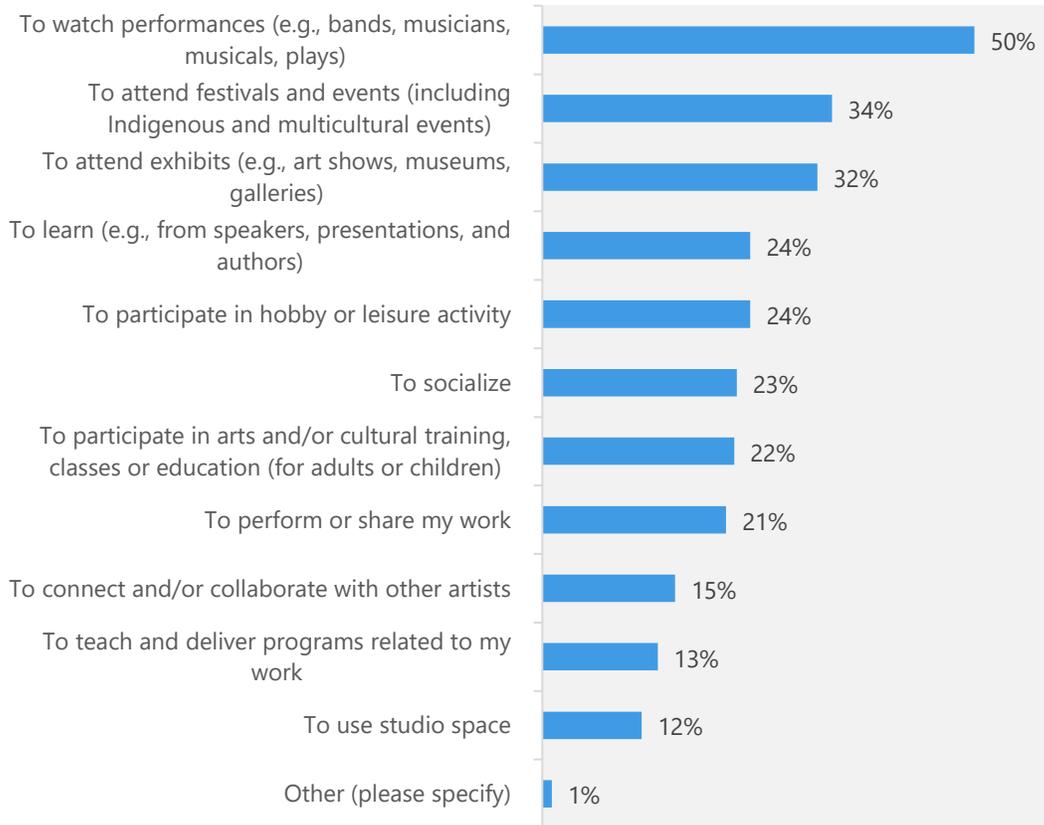


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

## 5.1 Cultural facility needs

All survey participants were asked to identify their top three reasons they usually visit arts and culture facilities in Courtenay. 'To watch performances' (50%), 'attend festivals and events' (34%), and 'attend exhibits' (32%), were the statements that most resonated with survey participants.

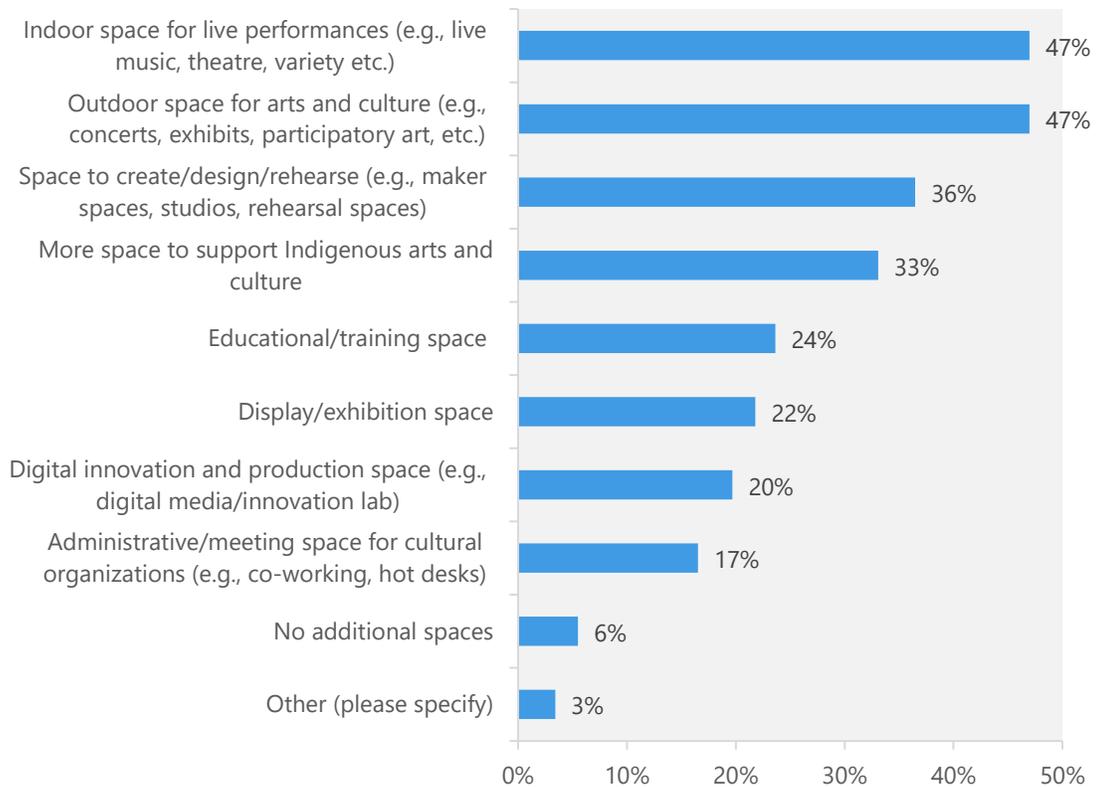
**Figure 39. What are the main reasons you usually visit arts or culture facilities in Courtenay? Select your top 3 (all responses, n=639)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Looking to the future, public survey participants were asked to identify **the top three future types of facilities** they would like to see in the community. Survey participants identified that they would like to see **'more indoor space for live performances'** (44%), and **'more special events and festivals'** (30%). These findings illustrate that arts and culture space and events are needed in Courtenay, especially live performances.

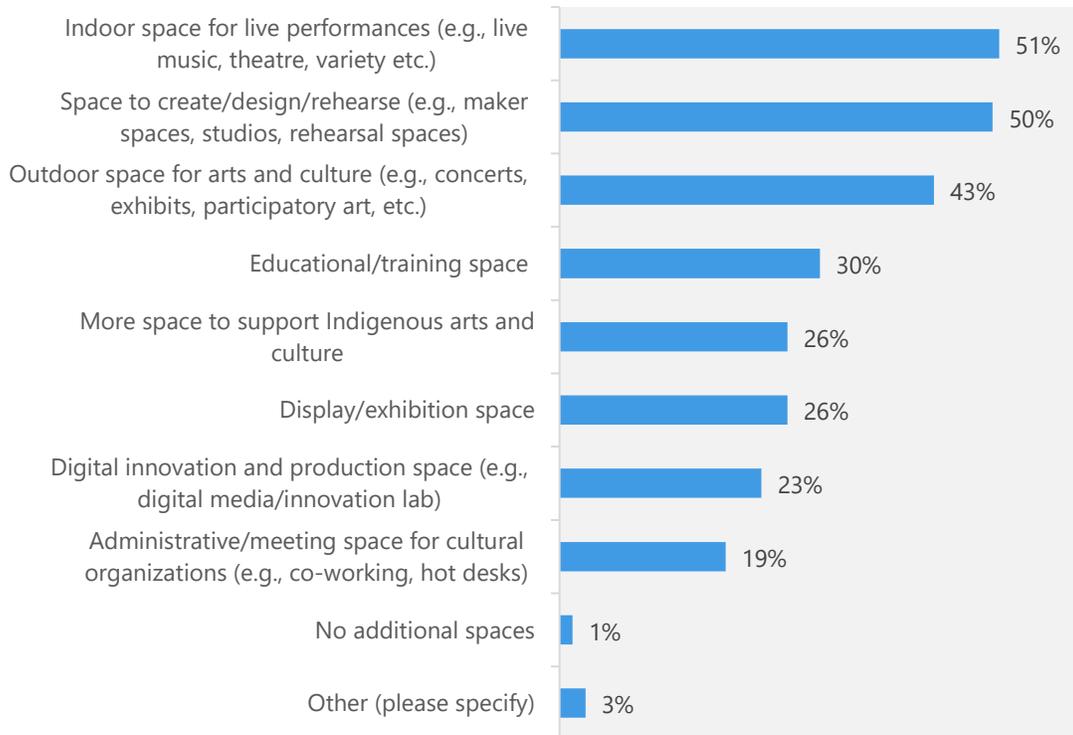
**Figure 40. What kinds of facilities would you like to see more of in the future (if any)? Select your top 3 (public responses, n=381)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Future facilities, according to survey participants who identified as artists and workers in the sector, include 'indoor space for live performance' (51%), 'space to create/design/rehearse' (50%), and 'outdoor space' (43%). Compared to the overall results for this question, the top three responses are the same but in different order, however, 'indoor space' was highlighted in both cases as the top need.

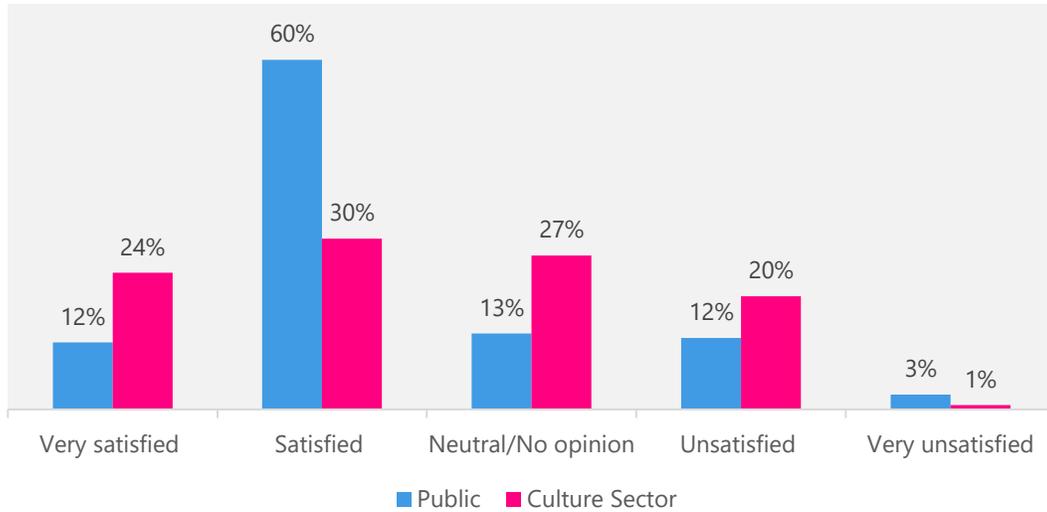
**Figure 41. What kinds of facilities would you like to see more of in the future (if any)? Select your top 3 (culture sector responses, n=267)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Participants were also asked about their overall satisfaction with the **availability of live performance/cultural entertainment options**. The following figure illustrates responses for the public versus culture sector. It was found that 72% of the public is 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied,' while only 54% of the culture sector is 'satisfied' to 'very satisfied.' 21% of the culture sector is 'unsatisfied' to 'very unsatisfied,' while 15% of the public is 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied.'

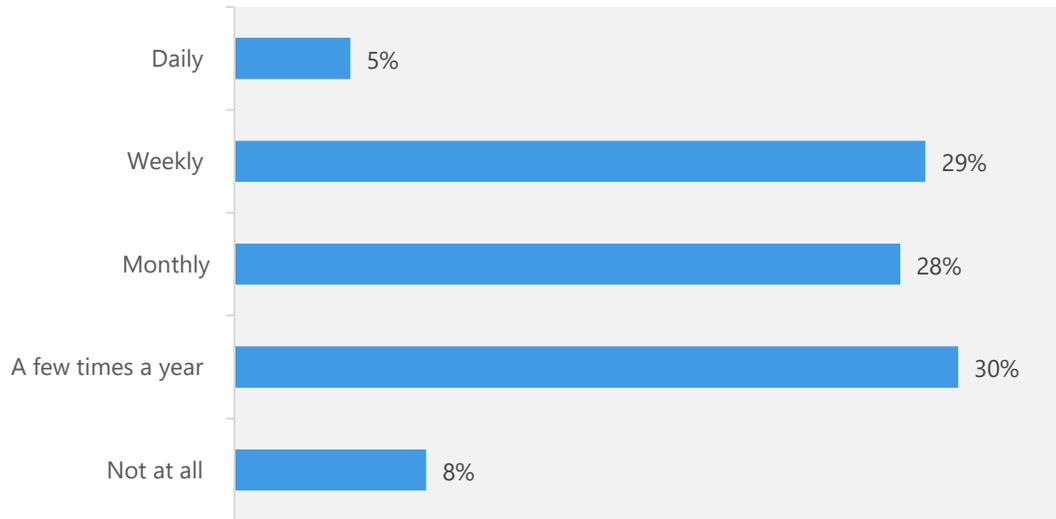
**Figure 42. How satisfied are you with the availability of live performance/cultural entertainment options in Courtenay (not including the surrounding region)? (all responses, n=660)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Considering facilities outside of Courtenay, survey participants were also asked how often they visit facilities outside of the city, but within the Comox Valley region. Weekly (29%), monthly (28%), and a few times a year (30%), garnered very similar levels of response. These findings indicate that nearly 60% of participants frequently travel outside of the immediate community to experience or participate in arts and culture.

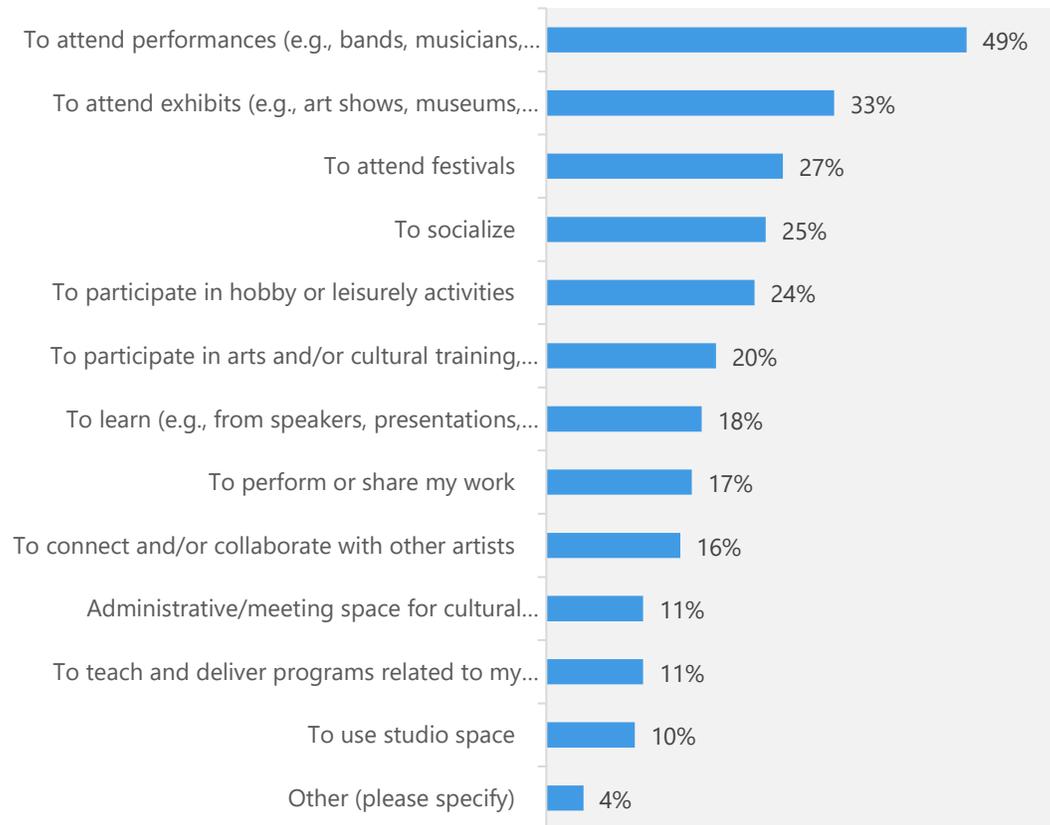
**Figure 43. How often do you visit facilities outside of Courtenay but within the Comox Valley region for arts and culture activities? (all responses, n=660)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

When asked what for the **primary reason for visiting cultural facilities outside of Courtenay**, the top responses included 'to attend performances' (49%), 'to attend exhibits' (33%), and 'to attend festivals' (27%). This finding could point to opportunities that Courtenay could pursue in terms of expanding the current community offer, such as more live performances, shows, festivals, and exhibits. Further investigation would be needed to identify whether these trips are taking place because the participants' needs are unmet within Courtenay.

**Figure 44. What is your primary reason for visiting cultural facilities outside of Courtenay but within the Comox Valley region? Select your top 3 (all responses, n=605)**

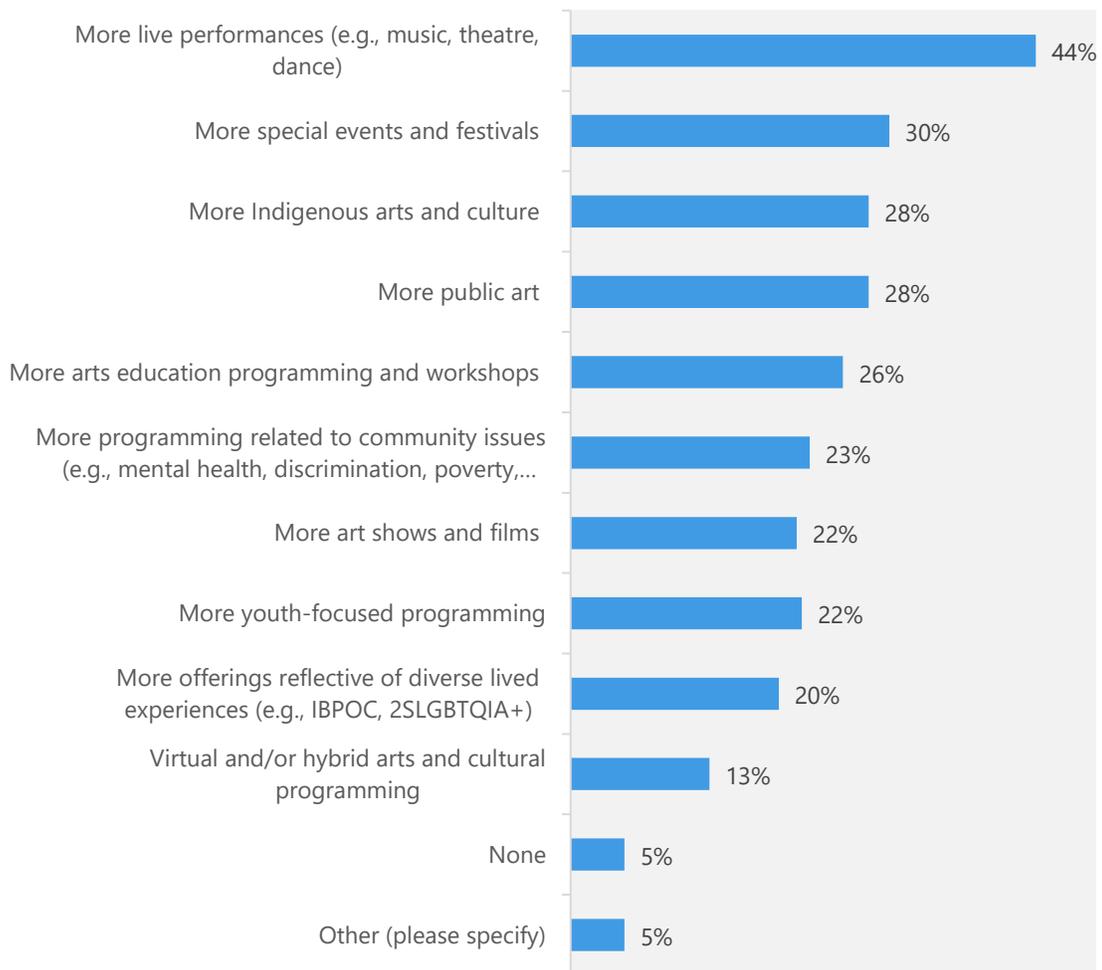


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

## 6. The Future of Arts and Culture

Finally, survey participants were asked questions regarding the future of arts and culture in Courtenay. When asked what types of arts and culture offerings they would like to see more of in Courtenay, the top response was ‘more live performances’ (44%). Other popular responses included ‘more special events and festivals’ (30%), ‘more Indigenous arts and culture’ (28%), and ‘more public art’ (28%).

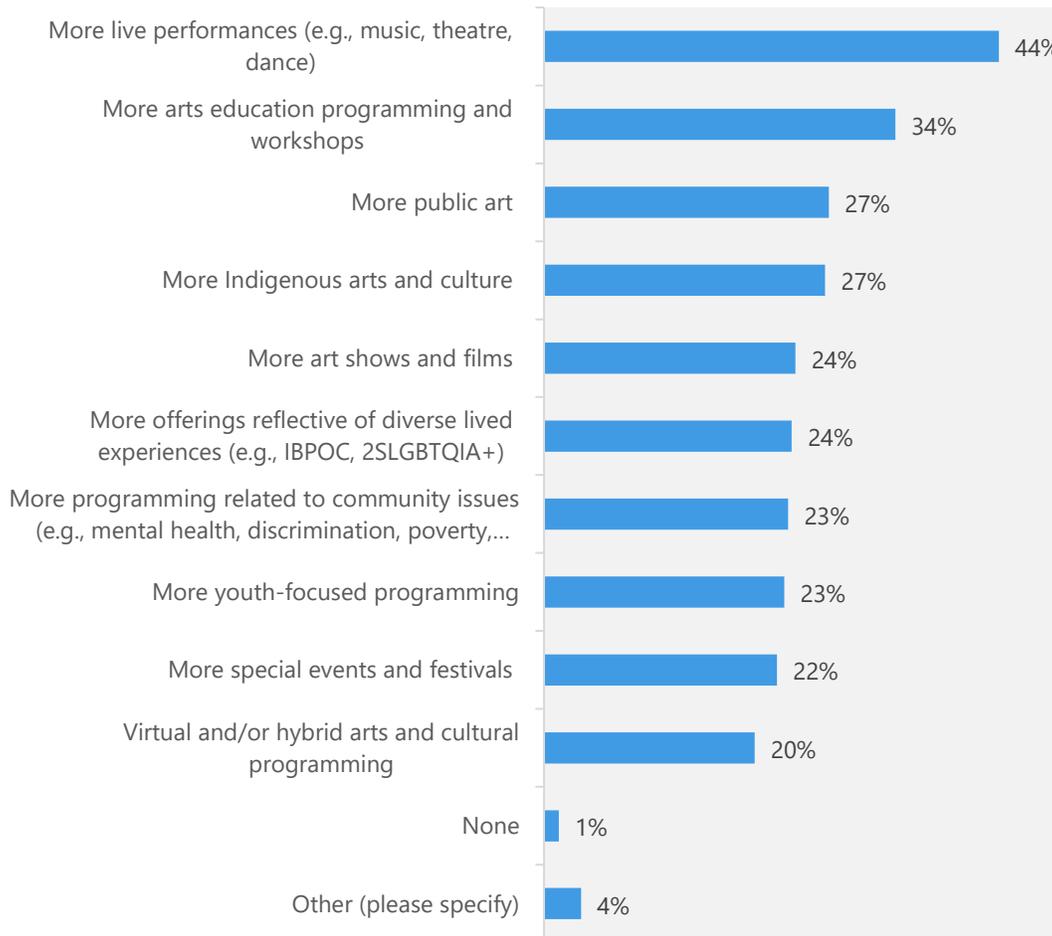
**Figure 45. Looking to the future, what types of arts and culture offerings would you like to see more of in Courtenay? Select your top 3 (public responses, n=409)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Culture offerings, according to survey participants who identified as artists and workers in the sector, the top response was also 'more live performances' (44%), 'more arts education and programming' (34%), 'public art' (27%), and 'Indigenous arts' (27%).

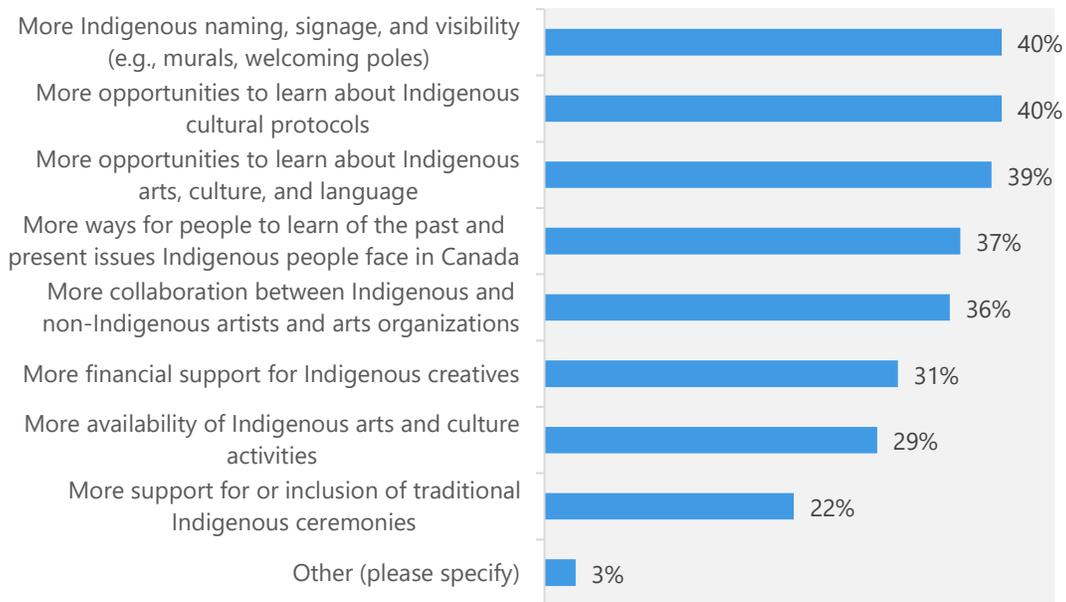
**Figure 46. Looking to the future, what types of arts and culture offerings would you like to see more of in Courtenay? Select your top 3 (culture sector responses, n=282)**



Source: City of Courtenay Culture Plan Public Survey

The City of Courtenay is home to a diverse Indigenous community with a rich cultural heritage. Survey participants were asked how Courtenay can further reconciliation and support Indigenous arts and culture. Indigenous survey participants were most likely to say that Courtenay can further reconciliation and support Indigenous artists through 'more Indigenous naming, signage, and visibility' (40% of Indigenous respondents selected this option); 'more opportunities to learn about Indigenous cultural protocols' (40%); and 'more opportunities to learn about Indigenous arts, culture, and language' (39%). Other open-ended responses included the need for fiscal stewardship, environmental protection, and group events and activities to bridge differences.

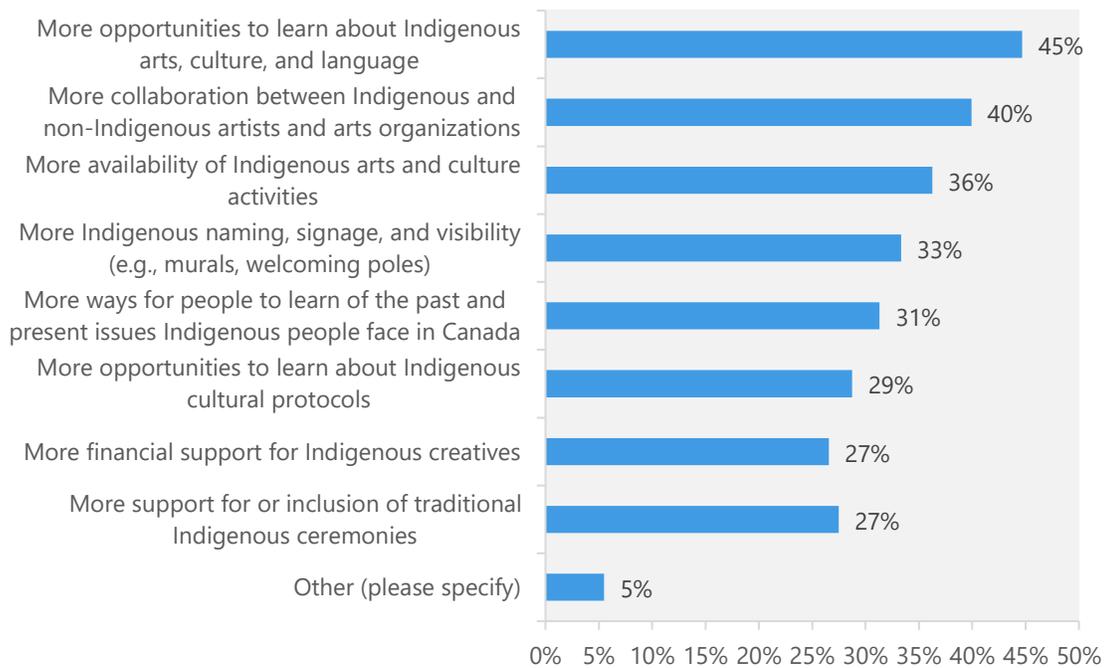
**Figure 47. How do you think Courtenay can further reconciliation and support Indigenous arts and culture? Select your top 3 (Indigenous responses, n=109)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

In comparison to overall results for this question, survey respondents (including results from non-Indigenous and Indigenous participants combined) were mostly likely to say 'more opportunities to learn about Indigenous arts, culture, and language' (with 45% of respondents choosing this option); and 'greater collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and arts organizations' (40%). These responses were closely followed by 'more availability of Indigenous arts and culture activities' (36%) and 'more Indigenous naming, signage, and visibility' (33%).

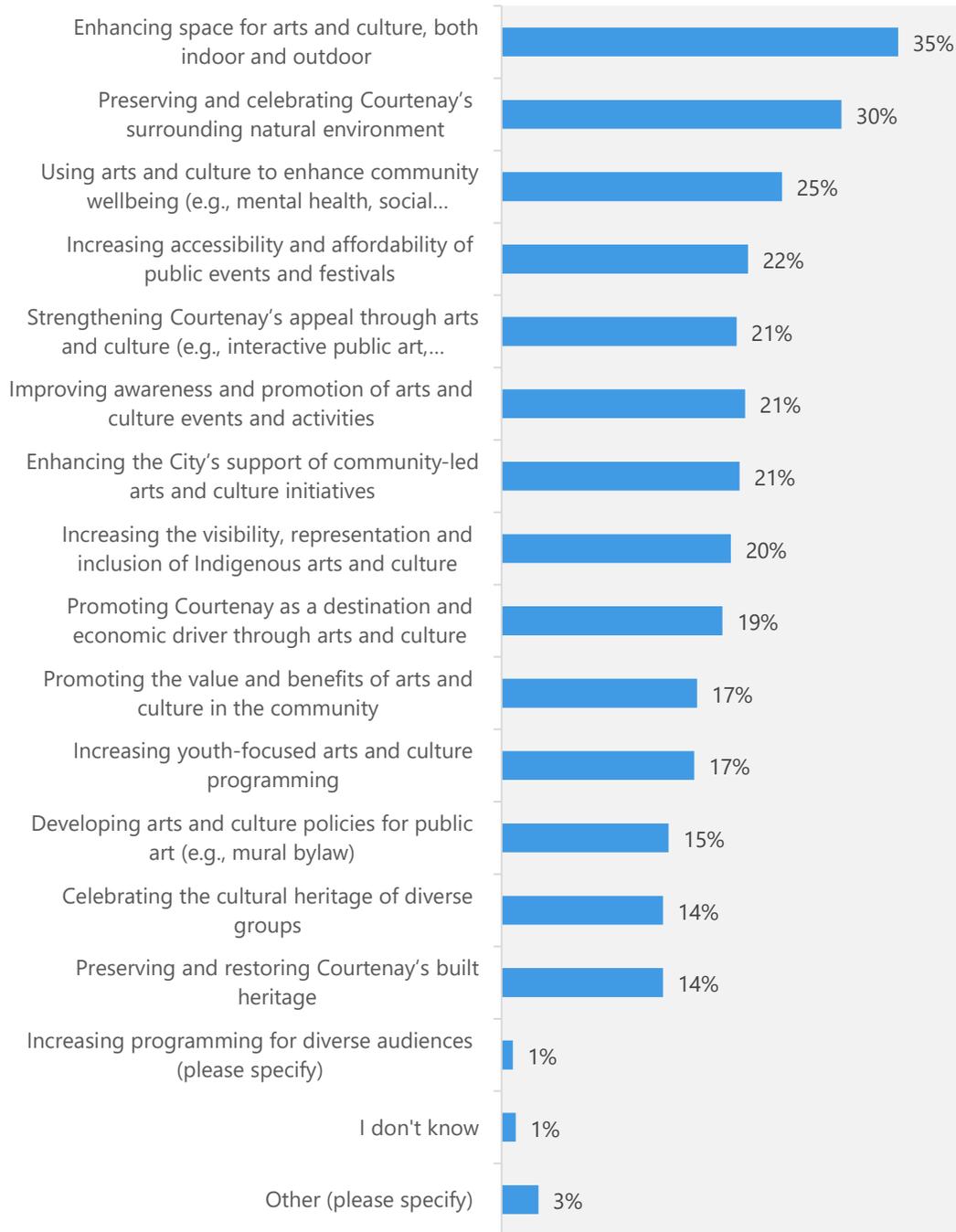
**Figure 48. How do you think Courtenay can further reconciliation and support Indigenous arts and culture? Select your top 3 (public and culture sector responses, n=546)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

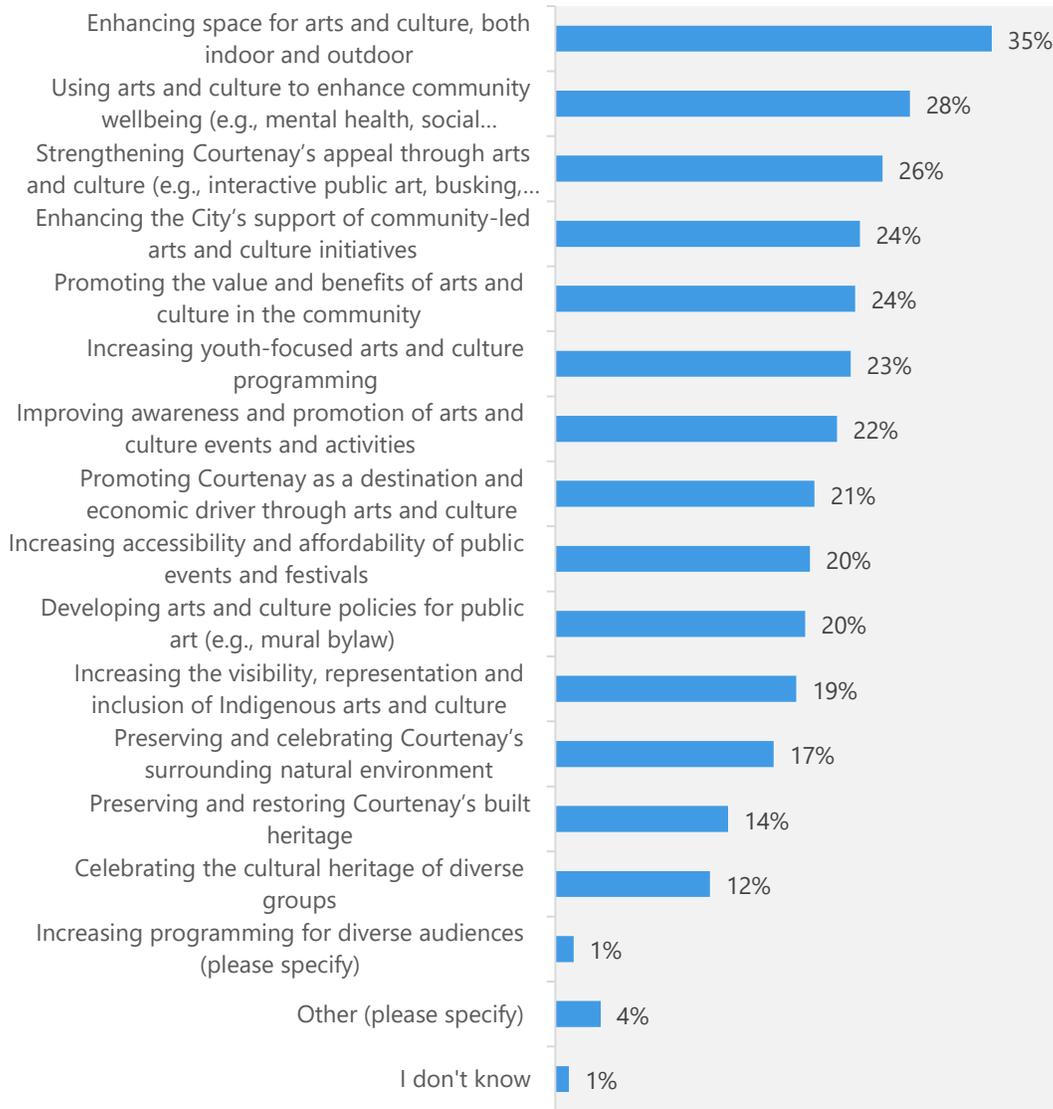
Survey participants were also asked more broadly **what should be prioritized within the Strategic Culture Plan** (see Figure 49 on following page). 'Enhancing space for arts and culture both indoors and outdoors' was the most popular response overall by both the culture sector and public (with 35% of respondents choosing this option). Overall, however, there was a lack of consensus about what the priorities should be. The wide range of opinions could indicate participants' uncertainty regarding what the focal points for the Culture Plan should be or the profound influence of arts and culture throughout so many areas the community's fabric.

**Figure 49. What do you think the City of Courtenay should prioritize in the new Strategic Cultural Plan? Select your top 3 (public responses, n=404)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

**Figure 50. What do you think the City of Courtenay should prioritize in the new Strategic Cultural Plan? Select your top 3 (culture sector responses, n=278)**



Source: City of Courtenay Culture Plan Public Survey

## Appendix B. Participants

Table 4 presents a list of organizations consulted through interviews and roundtables.

**Table 4. Community Engagement Participants**

Organization	Date	Number of participants
<b>Interviews</b>		
Courtenay and District Museum and Paleontology Centre	May 2023	24 Interviews with 54 participants in total
Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG)	May 2023	
Sid Williams Civic Theatre	May 2023	
Comox Valley Community Arts Council (CVCAC)	May 2023	
SD 71	May 2023	
CRA Evergreen Club and Building Friendships Program (at the Lewis Centre)	May 2023	
CV Social Planning Committee/CV Accessibility Committee	May 2023	
City of Courtenay - Senior Leadership	May 2023	
Comox Valley Regional District	May 2023	
City of Comox	May 2023	
Town of Cumberland	May 2023	
Comox Valley Folk Society (MUSICFEST) and NI Festival of Performing Arts	May 2023	
Elevate the Arts	May 2023	
City of Courtenay Heritage Committee (Nordicity facilitated group interview with 7 members)	May 2023	
City of Courtenay - Department of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services, Development Services (Nordicity facilitated group interview with 4 participants)	May 2023	
KFN Elder	June 2023	
Wachiay Friendship Centre Society	June 2023	
Comox Valley Metis Association (Nordicity facilitated group conversation with 6 members)	June 2023	

Organization	Date	Number of participants
Indigenous Women's Sharing Society	June 2023	
Walk With Me (a project of Comox Valley Art Gallery)	June 2023	
Homeless Response Team (Nordicity facilitated group interview with 12 members)	June 2023	
Comox Valley Chamber of Commerce	July 2023	
AVI Health and Community Services	July 2023	
Theatre Works Centre for Performing Arts	July 2023	
Performing arts sector leader	July 2023	
<b>Roundtables/Group Conversations</b>		
Arts and culture sector focus group	May 9, 2023	38 participants
CV Coalition to End Homelessness (intermediary-facilitated group conversation with 11 participants with lived experience)	June 30, 2023	5 group conversations with 28 participants in total
CV Accessibility Committee (intermediary-facilitated group conversation with 12 participants)	June 26, 2023	
CV Immigration Welcome Centre (Nordicity facilitated group conversation with 3 participants)	July 14, 2023	
CV Pride Society (Nordicity group conversation with 2 members)	July 20, 2023	
<b>Community Event</b>		
Public drop in engagement event	July 12, 2023	



# Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan

**Benchmarking of Comparative  
Jurisdictions**

Delivered to



**City of  
Courtenay**

# Benchmarking of Comparative Jurisdictions

A comparative review is a valuable way to benchmark a municipality against other comparable communities considering aspects such as funding, policies, staffing, service delivery, and best practices. Four municipalities/districts known for their arts and culture were included for the following reasons:

Municipality	Rationale for Selection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diverse age and ethnicity demographics (including similar growing young adult population)</li> <li>▪ Strong emphasis on healthy communities through outdoor recreation, culture, and adventure</li> <li>▪ Small to medium sized community</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Location (e.g., small urban centre within a more rural region)</li> <li>▪ Strong emphasis on healthy communities through outdoor recreation, culture, and adventure</li> <li>▪ Unique Cultural Development administrative approach to delivery of arts and culture</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diverse age and ethnicity demographics</li> <li>▪ Location (e.g., smaller city on the outskirts of a larger metropolitan area)</li> <li>▪ Growth as an arts and culture hub with increasing recognition of Indigenous heritage</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Proximity to Courtenay</li> <li>▪ Small urban centre in a more rural region</li> <li>▪ Support for arts and culture through programs, grants, and facilities (e.g., City supports local the museum and theatre)</li> </ul>

# Benchmarking of Comparative Jurisdictions

Overview of benchmarking of comparable jurisdiction findings:

*Note, as each municipality delivers cultural services and reports spending differently, figures should be understood as indicative only.*

	City of Courtenay	District of Squamish	City of Campbell River	City of Langley	City of Nelson
<b>Population*</b>	28,420	23,820	35,520	28,960	11,110
<b>Type of Municipal Development Model</b>	Municipal department – Recreation, Culture, and Community Services	Municipal Fund/Partner or Service Agency – Squamish Arts Council	Municipal Department – Parks, Recreation and Culture	Municipal Department – Recreation, Culture, and Community Services	City Cultural Development Committee and Cultural Office
<b>Arts &amp; Culture Operating Budget* (\$/yr, excluding libraries)</b> <i>Grants covered in next section.</i>  <b>**budget figures are for 2022 for all municipalities</b>	~\$500k (includes in-kind facility maintenance & repairs support for Centre For the Arts, Museum and Theatre, \$129k for City special events, and \$5.1k to the Heritage Society and Commission)	~\$200k	~\$275k	Not available (requested and followed up)	Not available (requested and followed up)

\*Population figures from Statistics Canada 2021 Census Profiles

# Benchmarking of Comparative Jurisdictions

Overview of benchmarking of comparable jurisdiction findings:

*Note, as each municipality delivers cultural services and reports spending differently, figures should be understood as indicative only.*

	City of Courtenay	District of Squamish	City of Campbell River	City of Langley	City of Nelson
<b>Other funding of arts and culture (e.g., operating grants, gaming grants, grants community members apply for, public art)</b>	\$666.6k core cultural service providers of which \$56k is for the Arts Council \$5k to Courtenay BIA for arts and culture events	\$47.5k Arts and Culture Grant	\$643k is for the core cultural service providers including \$29k for the Arts Council \$40k Beautification Grants \$31k Public Art \$9.8K Grant-in-aids	\$435.5k Community Grants (no breakdown provided)	CTB ReDi Grants – amount not available  Last of COVID-19 Grants \$122k
<b>Dedicated Arts &amp; Culture Staff (FTEs)</b>	0.4 FTE (of which .2 FTE Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services; .2 FTE Manager of Business Administration)	2.5 FTEs (of which 1 FTE Manager of Arts and Culture, 1 FTE worker, and 1 PTE)	4.5 FTEs (of which .5 FTE Senior Recreation and Culture Manager, 1 FTE two frontline Managers of Programs and Operations, and 3 FTEs of dedicated culture staff)	1 FTE (of which .5 FTE Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services; .5 FTE cultural support staff)	2 FTEs (of which 1 FTE Cultural Development officer, ~1FTE for Cultural Development Committee Board Members)
<b>Guiding Documents (not including OCPs)</b>	2019 Cultural Services Review  2019 Parks and Recreation Master Plan	2022-2025 SAC Strategic Plan	2007 Culture and Heritage Plan	Parks, Recreation, and Culture Master Plan (drafted)	Recreation Master Plan (includes culture)  2022 Heritage Master Plan

# Benchmarking of Comparative Jurisdictions

Overview of benchmarking of comparable jurisdiction findings:

*Note, as each municipality delivers cultural services and reports spending differently, figures should be understood as indicative only.*

	City of Courtenay	District of Squamish	City of Campbell River	City of Langley	City of Nelson
<b>Municipality-funded Cultural Facilities (not including libraries)</b> Grant funding amounts are also included in the operating budget	3 facilities	1 facility	3 facilities	Not available (requested and followed up)	3 facilities
<b>Gallery</b>	Comox Valley Art Gallery ~4,400 sq. ft., ~20,000 visitors a year, \$109.2k in grant funding	N/A	Campbell River & District Public Art Gallery ~10,000 visitors a year, \$80k in funding		Capitol Theatre – 426 seats, ~30,000 visitors a year
<b>Museum</b>	Courtenay & District Museum ~21,000 sq. ft., ~24,000 visitors a year, \$190.8k in grant funding	N/A	Museum at Campbell River ~21,000 sq. ft., ~20,000 visitors a year, \$246.5k in funding		Touchstones Nelson Museum ~2,000 sq. ft., ~7,000 visitors a year
<b>Theatre</b>	Sid Williams Civic Theatre – 500 seat theatre, ~45,000 visitors a year, \$305.5k in grant funding	Eagle Eye Theatre – 180 seats, \$10k in funding	Tidemark Theatre – 434 seats, ~20,000 visitors a year, \$207.5 in funding		Nelson Civic Theatre – 306 seats ~10,000 sq ft

# Key Findings | Benchmarking Comparative Jurisdictions

- 3 city municipalities – Courtenay, Campbell River, and Langley – operate with an in-house department (not an external or arms-length organization ) with staff working in **cultural administration**. However, it is notable that **Courtenay is also working with CVCAC to provide cultural planning functions**. Meanwhile, the District of **Squamish maintains an arms-length relationship** with an additional body mandated to deliver cultural administration functions (an Arts Council). The City of **Nelson** has a Cultural **Development Office with a Cultural Development Officer and City Cultural Development Committee** to lead culture.
- Three of the comparators have very different **arts and culture operating budgets**, ranging between \$200k - \$500k annually.
- **Langley and Campbell River** provide the largest amount of **other funding of arts and culture** (e.g., grants, public art, in-kind support). However, Langley did not provide a further breakdown of their culture funding. Notably, while Courtenay provides regular operating support to major arts and culture facilities in the community, it does not provide any significant culture grants that community members can apply for.
- On average, comparators typically maintain around **1-2 FTEs of dedicated staff for arts and culture**. However, the City of Campbell River stands out with a considerably larger number of dedicated FTEs, totaling 4.5, due to having 2 positions as Frontline Managers (1 FTE of arts and culture work) focused on programs and operations, and 3 dedicated culture staff. The District of Squamish currently has 1 part-time worker (.5 FTEs) that may become a full-time position in 2024.
- **Courtenay and Campbell River** each provide **major funding support to three cultural facilities** within their communities, Nelson allocates funding to two facilities, and Squamish contributes to one major facility. Notably, the Eagle Eye Theatre is mainly owned and operated by the Squamish School District, as it is located in the Howe Sound Secondary School.

# Comparator| District of Squamish

## Third-party Arts and Culture Delivery Guided by a Strategic Plan

- [The Squamish Arts Council \(SAC\)](#), also known as Squamish Arts, is the umbrella arts organization representing more than 25 arts, culture, and heritage groups in the community.
- SAC has a third-party agreement to deliver arts and culture on behalf of the District of Squamish. This agreement includes the primary delivery of cultural development activities, core community service provision, and grant distribution.
- Additionally in 2020, SAC took on the role of the Public Art Advisor for the District. This role is guided by the District's [Public Art Policy](#).
- Following an arts-based community development mandate, SAC has undergone its most extensive strategic planning process to date. The strategic priorities to guide SAC for the next three years include building capacity, expanding EDIA practices, strengthening branding, and increasing awareness.
- Key events and programs led by SAC include the Squamish Arts Festival, Squamish ArtWalk, Amped in the Park, and Artist Speaks Series.
- SAC is found operating out of the Arts Council Building in Pavilion Park



Source: Squamish Arts Council

# Comparator| City of Campbell River

## Arts and Culture Grant Delivery

- The City of Campbell River offers a variety of grants, including grants-in-aid, to support arts and culture organizations. The City of Campbell River recognizes that *“Grants sponsor several important community functions that the City may be expected to offer if these were not provided by community organizations.”*
- 2022 witnessed a new funding request and approval in the amount of \$306,000, bringing the overall grant amount to over \$730,000 (including operating grants).
- Recommendations from the **Community Partnership Committee** guide Campbell River City Council in making decisions about granting operations. The Committee comprises a mixture of community members with representatives from various organizations, artists, and the general public. Open callouts are often issued to attract and enlist new members. Members serve on the committee for three-year terms.
- Annual Community Partnerships Grants are approved by Campbell River City Council to be included in the annual Financial Plan before being managed and distributed by the Community Partnership Committee.
- A tiered system comprising four categories of grants is provided for arts and culture. These categories include 1) Core Operating Assistance, 2) Ongoing event and/or service, 3) Discretionary, and 4) One-off special event and/or service travel grants. This range ensures that a diverse grants are available in the community, including for core operating organizations but also for smaller groups and individual applicants.

# Comparator | City of Langley

## Open Callouts to Artists

- The City of Langley regularly extends open callouts to artists to participate in a variety of City-led projects, programs, and events.
- Recent examples include In Remembrance, In Thanksgiving, Fall Street Banner Program, Seniors Week Art Gallery, Youth Week Art Gallery, Celebrating Arts and Culture in Langley City, and the Summer Street Banner Program.
- Regular open callouts for artists to participate in city events and projects are helpful for fostering engagement, promoting advocacy, and cultivating a vibrant community, while creating economic opportunities for local artists.
- Such regular callouts not only encourage active participation and collaboration among artists but also amplify their voices, enrich the community's cultural fabric, and contribute to the economic growth and sustainability of the city.



Source: Langleycity.ca

# Comparator | City of Nelson

## Distinct Operating Model for Arts and Culture

- Arts and culture in the City of Nelson is guided by a [Cultural Development Committee](#) (CDC). Its work is guided by the [City of Nelson Comprehensive Cultural Sector Policy](#).
- The CDC is composed of up to 13 members including 1 Cultural Development Officer, 1 Secretary (a City staff liaison), and 1 Nelson City Council member.
- CDC has three different working groups including a cultural policy working group, a heritage working group, and a public art working group.
- Notable programs led by the CDC include the [Art Rental Program](#), [Art in Public Places Program](#), and [Cultural Ambassador Program](#).
- Most events and festivals held in the City of Nelson are led by community groups such as the [Nelson District Arts Council](#) (i.e., ArtWalk, Appetite for Art, and Mural Festival) but are supported by the City of Nelson.



Source: Super, Natural BC

# **City of Courtenay**

## **Strategic Cultural Plan**

### **Cultural Facilities Options – Working Document**

March 12, 2025



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## 1. General Space Needs and Considerations

Several considerations were articulated by community members and local arts and culture organizations. Community engagements consistently highlighted a **need for more cultural spaces/facilities** in Courtenay – including better affordability and availability. In addition to the specific types of cultural spaces (discussed in Section 3), general points mentioned by participants included the need for:

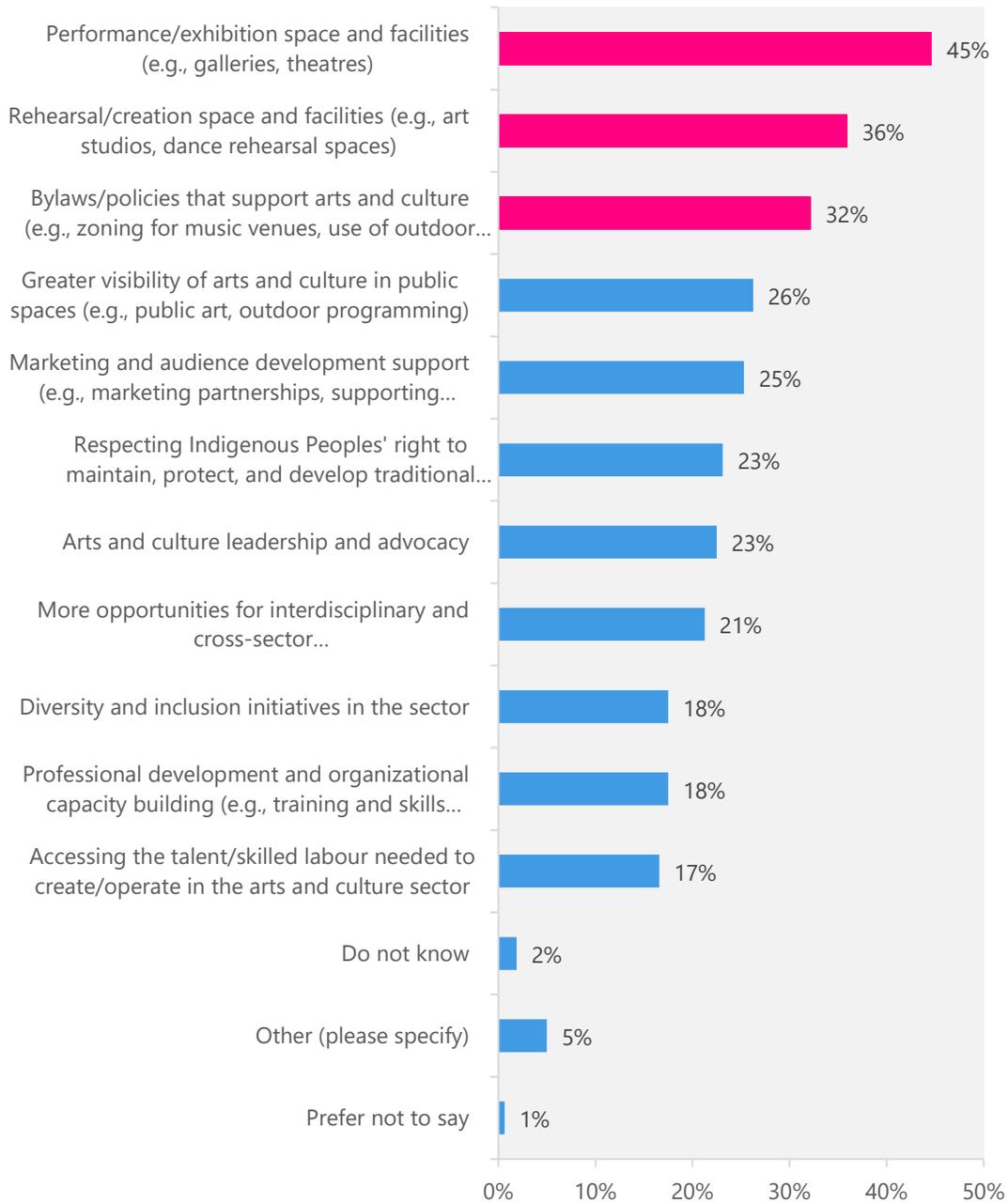
- **Adequate equipment in existing spaces for performing arts** (i.e., sound systems and stage set-ups for live performances) – e.g., the Native Sons Hall has no stages, and the Florence Filberg Centre does not have suitable acoustics for all types of shows.
- **More affordable rental spaces** for community art groups and organizations.
- **Overcoming accessibility barriers in existing spaces** – including structural accessibility for people with physical disabilities and opening hours of some cultural spaces.
- **Dedicated spaces for community gatherings for underserved groups** including Indigenous communities, people who are unhoused and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

Note, these needs emerged from community engagement including from interviews, focus group, conversations and public survey.

### **Critical needs related to cultural spaces identified in community Survey**

The top three most critical needs for arts and culture in Courtenay, identified in the community survey were all related to space, with performance/exhibition space identified by survey participants as the top need (45%), followed by rehearsal and creation space (36%) (Figure 1). The third most critical need identified was bylaws and policies that support arts and culture (32%), such as zoning for venues, still related to space.

**Figure 1: What do you think are the most critical needs for arts and culture to thrive in Courtenay? (n=320)**

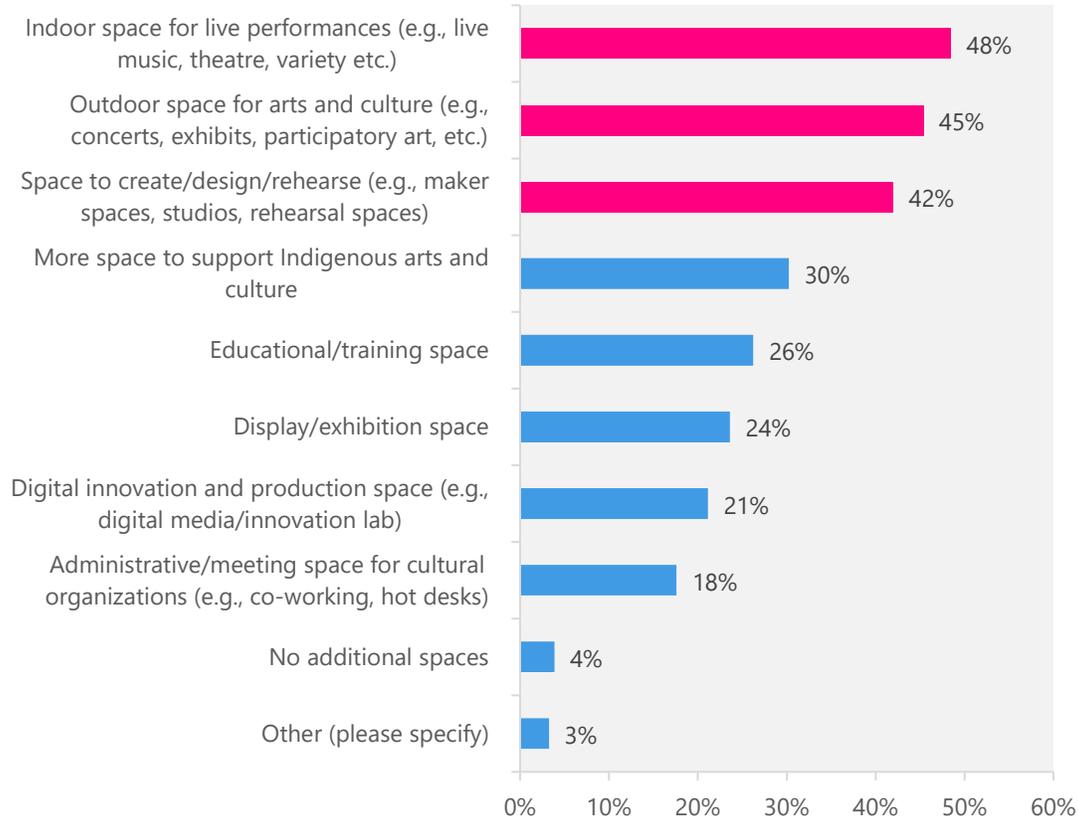


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

### **Future facility needs identified in community survey**

The top three types of facilities survey participants identified that they would like to see more of include indoor space for live performances (48%), outdoor space for arts and culture (45%), and space to create/design/rehearse (42%) (Figure 2). These findings illustrate that arts and culture spaces are needed in Courtenay for all stages of the creative process.

**Figure 2 What kinds of facilities would you like to see more of in the future (if any)? (n=648)**

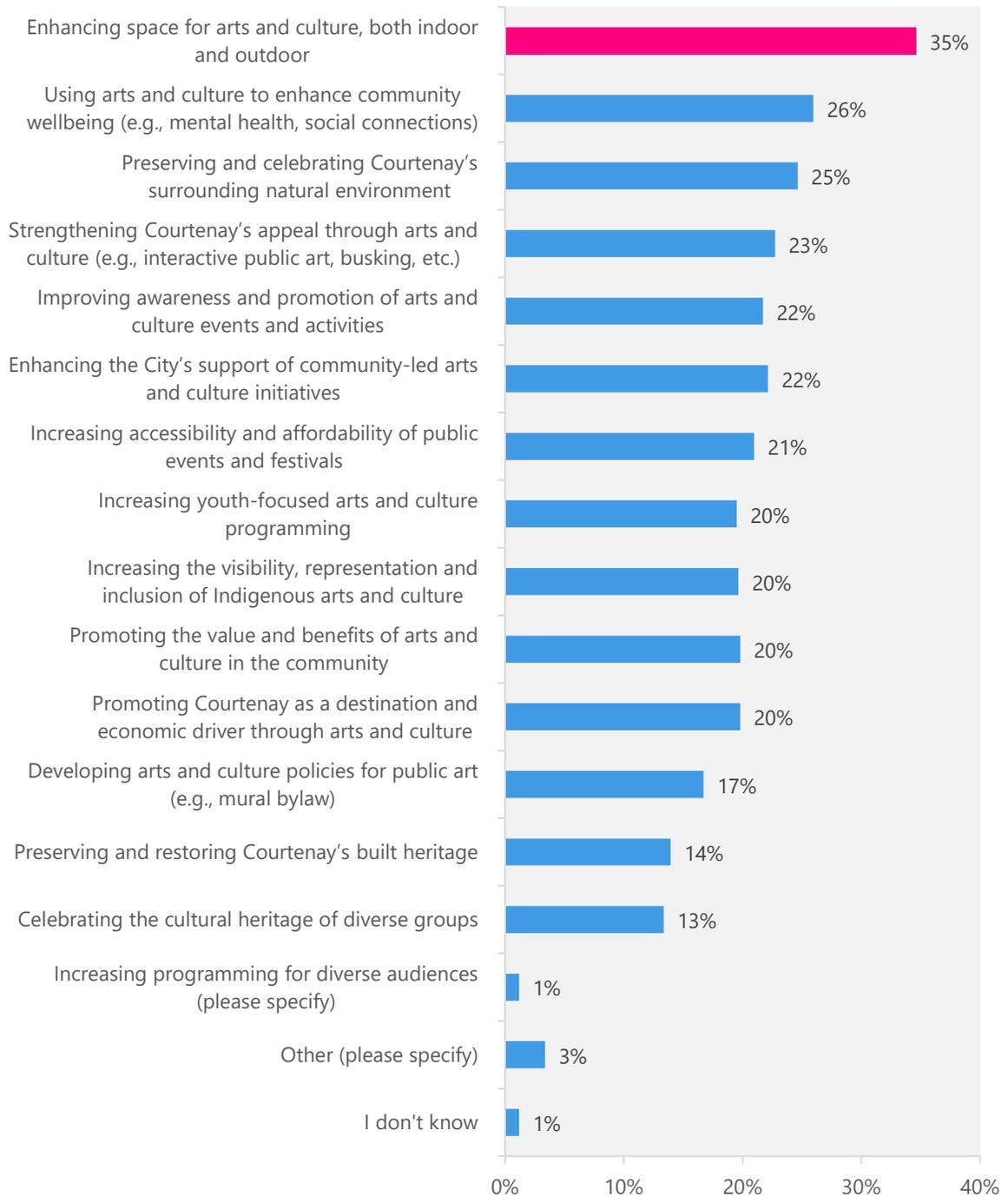


Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

### **Priorities of the Strategic Cultural Plan**

Survey participants identified “enhancing space for arts and culture both indoors and outdoors (35%)” as a top priority for the Strategic Cultural Plan (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 What do you think the City of Courtenay should prioritize in the new Strategic Cultural Plan? (n=682)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

Note, qualitative research i.e., interviews, focus groups and pop-up events identified other space needs such as affordability, accessibility, and safety of cultural spaces.

## 2. Core Cultural Facility Needs

Specific needs shared by the core cultural service providers:

- **The Sid Williams Theatre** requires a replacement stage elevator<sup>1</sup> (for which partial City funding is needed), which includes stage resurfacing and a gala lift/spiral lift system<sup>2</sup>. The Sid has already secured grant funding from other sources for upgrades to its audio system, hearing assist system, lighting bay improvements, and various other upgrades.
- **Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG)**: The City is aiming, in collaboration with CVAG, to implement new HVAC infrastructure in 2026 which is crucial for the appropriate exhibition and preservation of artworks. Storage space is currently a challenge at the gallery. CVAG has undertaken renovations to improve accessibility in the exhibition space, for example by widening the doorways in the exhibition space; however, there remains a need to improve accessibility in the areas outside the Gallery. For example, the plaza is uneven and CVAG would like to have automatic sliding entry doors. CVAG has applied for funding and is waiting for confirmation. In addition, the administrative space in CVAG is at or over capacity. The Gallery would like to explore more efficient uses of space to better accommodate the staff team. Currently, CVAG rents additional space elsewhere in Courtenay to house the Walk With Me team, as there is no space available within the Centre for the Arts building.
- **Courtenay and District Museum** needs more exhibition and storage space for collections. The Museum is proposing an expansion to extend the building into the adjacent south lot to create the extra square footage required. The Museum also requires a new lift for patron accessibility to the 2nd floor which could be considered as part of the future expansion.
- **Comox Valley Community Arts Council (CVCAC)** lacks programming space. The organization would like space to organize community programs to fulfill its mission of providing opportunities for the community to engage in the arts.

Note, further assessment or research is required (building on findings from the strategic cultural planning process) to uncover specific details on facility upgrade and expansion for City-owned cultural facilities – e.g., what is driving such upgrade requests, whether the existing cultural assets are able to meet the future service level considerations identified in the Strategic Cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Stage elevator means a **permanent powered hoisting and lowering mechanism** that has a platform which serves as a part of a permanent stage.

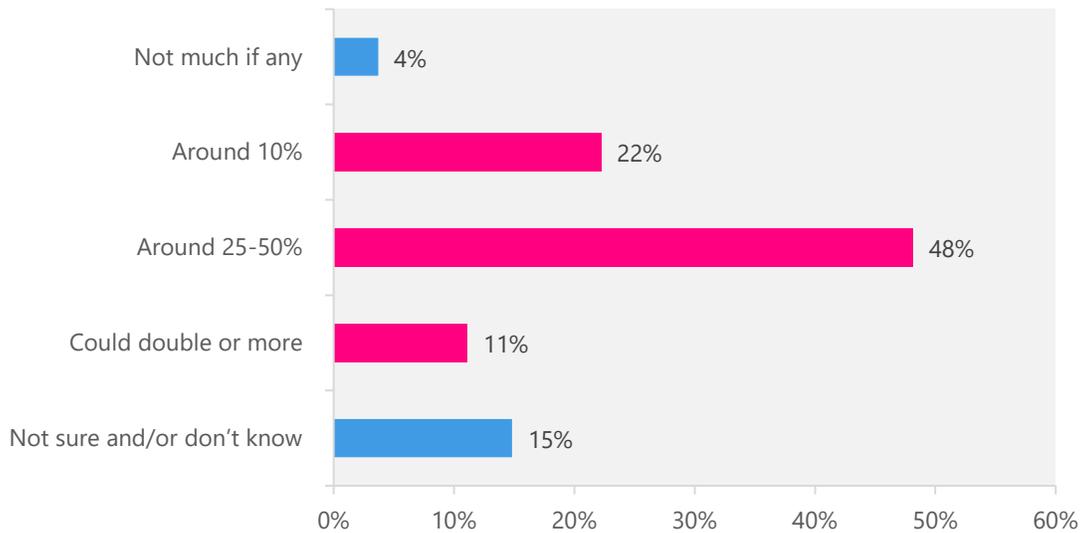
<sup>2</sup> Stage Lift (Gala has a [Spiralift technology](#)) systems allow for **gentle and quiet movement of stages**, orchestras, equipment, and seating platforms.

Plan, and what are the long term cultural facilities requirements to address the needs identified in the community engagement process.

**Benefits of improved cultural facilities**

Cultural organizations were asked to identify what incremental revenue increases they think their organization could earn with improved facilities. Significantly, 81% of survey respondents felt that their revenue could increase (Figure 4). More specifically, 22% identified their revenue could increase by around 10%, while 48% believed their revenue could increase around 25-50%.

**Figure 4 What incremental revenue increase do you think your organization could earn with improved facilities? (n=27)**



Source: Courtenay Strategic Culture Plan Survey 2023

### 3. Priority Cultural Facilities Needs

#### Alignment with City of Courtenay [Official Community Plan \(OCP\)](#)

The City of Courtenay Official Community Plan (OCP) articulates some existing facility needs that align with cultural facility options identified through the Courtenay Strategic Cultural Planning process. These are articulated in the Arts, Culture, and Heritage (ACH) chapter and include:

- [p. 155-162] the need “for a larger outdoor performance venue than currently available at Simms Park, the downtown Commons outdoor performing space and public plaza.”
- the need “for a community arts and culture centre.”
- ACH Action 3: “Work towards the downtown Public Commons public plaza concept identified in the Downtown Courtenay Playbook.”
- ACH Action 6: “Create a Courtenay Cultural Plan, including consideration of a dedicated community arts and culture space.”
- ACH Action 7: “Continue to support the downtown as the region’s arts, culture, and heritage hub by ensuring key cultural partners such as the Comox Valley Art Gallery, the Courtenay and District Museum, the Sid Williams Civic Theatre, and the Comox Valley Community Arts Council continue to be located downtown, and promoting and investing in public art and cultural opportunities downtown.”
- ACH Action 11: “Consider the establishment of a dedicated community arts and culture space.”

Based on community engagement findings, the highest priority needs relating to cultural spaces in Courtenay are as follows:

### 3.1 Spaces for Live Performance

#### Studio Theatre



#### Definition & Description:

*A versatile space for theatre, dance, and music performances. A studio theater is a simple performance space, typically a square room with black walls and a flat floor. The space's simplicity allows it to create a variety of configurations of stage and audience interaction.*

#### Existing spaces that could meet this need:

- No existing facilities have a studio theatre currently.
- The Regier Theatre (former Old Church Theatre) is available for rent (180 seats) – and needs air conditioning and heat pump upgrades ([currently fundraising](#)). However, it has fixed seating which makes it restrictive for some types of performances.
- Little Red Church (Comox) - can meet some of the live performance needs, with better acoustics and accessibility.
- The City could discuss with School District 71 if Vanier Theatre can potentially meet this need.

#### Other potential ways to meet this need:

- Extension to Sid Williams Theatre
  - The Sid Williams Theatre is assessing options for facility expansion that could include a studio theatre.

- Building a new facility / arts centre equipped with a studio theatre, in partnership with others such as SD71 and North Island College.

## Outdoor Performance Space



### Definition & Description:

*Large outdoor performance space – such as an Amphitheatre – for concerts and shows in a natural setting.*

### Existing spaces that could meet this need:

- Simms Park Rotary Centennial Pavilion – while community engagement findings suggest that the pavilion is not seen as an answer to this need, further review could include questions of whether improvements could be made to render it more of a solution.
- Outdoor stage at Lewis Park (between tennis courts and outdoor pool) – further investigation is required to identify what improvements would be needed to make this space useful.
- Randy Wiwchar Civic Plaza – space is visually pleasing and can potentially meet this need. However, it may not be viable due to loud traffic.

### Other potential ways to meet this need:

- Investing in a mobile stage and bleachers for quick setup at various locations may prove to be very helpful. However, this would require additional administrative duties for the City or the establishment of a fee-for-service agreement with another organization to coordinate it.
  - Establishing and identifying spaces in partnership with SD71 and Comox Valley Exhibition Grounds

## Large Capacity Performance Venue



### **Definition & Description:**

*Suitable for large events, shows, and concerts that can seat up to 1000+ people and accommodate a 70+ member orchestra.*

Note that such an indoor venue may be disproportional to the size of Courtenay and the Comox Valley's market. In other smaller cities (population under 50,000 of a city and surrounding area), performance venues are typically smaller in seating capacity, say around 250-500. It is not that they cannot be built and operated successfully, but theatres of this size can incur annual million-dollar subsidies even in cities of several hundred thousand population. Consideration of any performance venue, particularly of this size would require a substantial feasibility study.

### **Existing spaces that could meet this need:**

- There are no existing spaces that can fulfil this need as the maximum seating capacity of Sid Williams Theatre is 500.
- Florence Filberg Conference Hall – there would be a need to investigate what could be done to enhance this space to meet this need partially or completely as it relates to community group performance space needs. Look at extending stage onto balcony and taking over Soroptomist Lounge area, improve acoustics, etc.

### **Other potential ways to meet this need:**

- New build facility for future vision, likely pursued as part of a regional effort with Comox Valley Regional District and other local municipalities. It would likely need to be outside of downtown Courtenay to find a suitable site.
- As noted above, a full feasibility study would be needed to determine what is feasible for the region.

## 3.2 Multi-disciplinary programming space

### Smaller spaces (50-100 seats)



#### **Definition & Description:**

*For hosting group workshops and smaller events.*

#### **Existing spaces that could meet this need if they are currently not being fully utilized:**

- The Native Sons Hall Lodge Room (1500 sq ft) and Dining Room (900 sq ft) could meet this need .
- Florence Filberg Centre Rotary Hall could fit this need (2900 sq ft).
- Lawn Bowling Club (1468 sq ft) – available in fall / winter months into early spring for rentals when lawn bowling is not in session or season.
- Lewis Centre Multipurpose Hall could be used for a non-performance type workshop and events.
- Chamber of Commerce board room can accommodate small groups for meetings and workshops.
- Further study of utilization is required that factors in current utilization use and whether available space is during the times that workshops and smaller events are needed.

### Medium spaces (100 to <500 seats)



#### **Definition & Description:**

*For medium-sized events for a range of disciplines.*

#### **Existing spaces that could meet this need:**

- Native Sons Grand Hall (4350 sq ft) which can accommodate 400 people could meet this need, but has a high annual utilization which signals that it may be difficult to rent out the space consistently.
- Florence Filberg Centre Conference Hall could fit this need (5,940 sq ft)
- Little Red Church in Comox (267 capacity in the main hall standing; generally, only 1-2 bookings a day, except Tuesdays which are busier – see calendar. Cost of \$60 per hr. to rent the main hall).
- Old Church Theatre may potentially meet this need.
- Vanier Theatre may meet this need with 200 seats, however, SD71 uses are a priority during the school year.
- Stan Hagan Theatre may meet this need with 208 seats, but utilization rate was not available. However, the North Island College uses take precedent.
- Lewis Centre Multipurpose Hall can hold up to 500 people with 3500 square feet (about the area of a tennis court).
- There are other community hall spaces that may help with this need including Elks Hall, Union Bay Community Hall, Fallen Alders Community Hall, and Dove Creek Hall.

Further study of utilization is required that factors in current utilization use and whether available space is during the times that there is a need for medium sized space.

**Other potential ways to meet this need:**

- Building a new facility or transforming existing spaces in partnership with SD71, North Island College, or an arts based organization.

**Holistic Wellbeing Space**



**Definition & Description:**

*Small spaces suitable for Arts & Crafts, Meditation, Yoga. For hosting drop-in arts and cultural events that contribute to wellbeing.*

**Existing spaces that could meet this need:**

- Tsolum Building is a wheelchair-accessible facility next to Lewis Park.
- Salish Building (in Lewis Park)
- Lewis Centre Craft room A.
- Lewis Centre Craft Room B.
- Further study of utilization is required that factors in current utilization use and whether available space is during the times that spaces are needed.

**Other potential ways to meet this need:**

- Via partnerships with community organizations, VIRL, etc.
- Via review of Centre for the Arts facility needs including CVAG and CVA.

### 3.3 Rehearsal and creation spaces

#### Creation Spaces and Studios for Artmaking



#### Definition & Description:

*Studios and creative spaces for creating various forms of art. There appears to be demand for both professional artist studios and creative making spaces/programming spaces for community arts.*

#### Existing spaces that could meet this need:

- Tsolum Building is a wheelchair-accessible facility next to Lewis Park.
- Salish Building (in Lewis Park) could meet this need and could accommodate storage required for arts programming.
- Lewis Centre Craft room A and B.
- Lawn Bowling Building - Bill Moore Park – non-cultural space but underutilized and has a natural setting; available late fall, winter, and early spring.
- Further study of utilization is required that factors in current utilization use and whether available space is during the times that creative making spaces are needed.

#### Other potential ways to meet this need:

- Live-work subsidized housing with studio space.
- Building a new facility or transforming existing spaces in partnership with SD71 or North Island College or an arts based organization.

## Rehearsal Spaces for Larger Groups



### **Definition & Description:**

*Facilities for rehearsals and practice, accommodating larger groups, dance troupes, and choirs (60+ capacity).*

### **Existing spaces that could meet this need:**

- Lewis Centre Multipurpose Hall can hold up to 500 people with 3500 square feet (about the area of a tennis court).
- Little Red Church in Comox (267 capacity in the main hall standing; generally, only 1-2 bookings a day, except Tuesdays which are busier – see [calendar](#). Cost of \$60 p/h to rent the main hall).

These spaces present options for rehearsal spaces with some modifications – e.g., lack of boundaries, or any kind of rehearsal hall needs, like mirrors, sprung floor, sound proofing, bars for ballet, etc. If pressed, they could be made available with certain modifications - at least part time, but it would require a feasibility analysis to determine improvements required to address arts and culture specific needs.

### 3.4 Other Key Facility Needs

#### Community Art Exhibition Spaces



**Definition & Description:**

*Spaces designed for showcasing local arts and promoting arts education. There is a need for more exhibition space for local artists.. Other spaces available include Artful the Gallery and ARTWRX (which accommodates nine artists).*

**Existing spaces that could meet this need:**

- While the Grand Lodge Room (4350 sq ft) at the Native Sons Hall is operating at a high utilization, the Lodge Room (1500 sq ft) is not fully utilized. This space could be used if deemed a possible exhibition space.
- Further study of utilization is required that factors in current utilization use and whether available space is during the times that showcasing art and exhibition space is needed.

**Other potential ways to meet this need:**

- Courtenay and District Museum’s proposed expansion could potentially meet this need.
- Providing rent subsidies for private spaces that could be repurposed as temporary galleries. Supporting “pop up” style galleries.
- Partnerships with Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association / Chamber, North Island College, SD71, other businesses to showcase local artwork in businesses or vacant store fronts. Comox Valley Arts currently partners with Downtown BIA and the Comox Valley Airport to showcase local artwork.
- Lobbies (i.e .community centre, Florence Filberg Centre, library, airport, city hall etc)

## 4. Cultural Facilities Options

Community engagement for Courtenay's Strategic Cultural Plan revealed significant cultural space needs within the city, highlighting a demand for accessible venues for arts, performances, and community gatherings. Residents expressed a desire for more inclusive and diverse spaces that reflect the cultural richness of the community.

This section propose short, medium and longer term recommendations, as well as a future vision to address cultural space needs. The rationale for these recommendations came from community identified needs in Courtenay's strategic cultural planning process (as illustrated by survey results in section 1). While residents of Courtenay recognize existing cultural facilities and the role they play in the community (as demonstrated by the social and economic impact of arts and culture in Courtenay's Strategic Cultural Plan), they also highlighted the gaps identified in this report and the need for more cultural spaces for diverse cultural needs of residents that continue to evolve with the growth of the community.

### 4.1 Short-term (1-2 years)

#### 4.1.1 Online 'Space Finder' Platform

**Description:** Digital platform that inventories existing spaces in Courtenay that could be utilized/better utilized by cultural groups. The platform could potentially:

- Include a search function so that users can easily find spaces of suitable size/specification that would be available on the dates required
- Either book directly via the system or find contact details to book the spaces

**Considerations:**

- Need to determine the best organization to provide this service, or for the City of Courtenay to fund another organization to run the platform.
- The SWTS operates a venue booking software that could be explored to expand to include multiple venues, including box office services. SWT is currently applying for funding to increase the capacity of the box office to service events external to the SWT. The City could explore ways to support SWTS to provide this service.
- Project funding is likely to be available via the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) towards a digital project like this. CCA's criteria would require the signing on of a group of arts organizations agreeing to participate in providing "space finder" reservations.

- The query log (i.e., record or user searches) would help highlight which types of space needs remain unmet in Courtenay, to help with future prioritization of investment into cultural spaces.

**Case Study – 3<sup>rd</sup> party online space finder platforms**

- “Peerspace” is a third party online space finder platform that allows users to list their space for free. Typically, 3<sup>rd</sup> party space finders are catered for business meetings and company events, however Peerspace has a separate section for galleries and studio space. The search function of Peerspace can also filter for different cities, a list Courtenay spaces can potentially explore to be added.
- Peerspace takes a a service fee after a successful booking is completed. The benefits of a 3<sup>rd</sup> party service is that it removes the need to maintain and operate internally. This is a viable option to showcase the availability of underutilized facilities.

#### 4.1.2 Downtown Cultural District Planning

**Description:** Incorporate the goal of establishing a cultural district in Courtenay’s downtown in the downtown local area plan as per the OCP and Cultural Strategic Plan recommendations. Alongside capital planning and facility needs assessments consider the opportunities available downtown and within current facilities to support, enhance, and expand arts and cultural spaces for performance, exhibition, rehearsal, and creation downtown. Integrate planning for the downtown cultural district with facility needs assessments and cultural facilities plans to support bringing the-downtown Cultural District to life over the next 10 years.

**Considerations:**

Collaboration with community groups and organizations—such as the Sid Williams Theatre Society, Comox Valley Art Gallery Society, Comox Valley Community Arts Council, and Courtenay and District Historical Society—will be essential to achieve the downtown cultural district through the implementation of the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan and the integration of cultural facilities plans.

#### 4.1.3 Using Native Sons Hall as Flexible Arts Programming Space

**Description:** The Native Sons Hall is a beautiful facility in the heart of Downtown Courtenay that has had long associations with arts and culture. The space has been used over the decades for dances and concerts and was previously home to the Courtenay and District Historical Society. The space is already wheelchair accessible, and there are commercial kitchens available for events.

- The space could potentially be used for visual arts programming (e.g., drawing and painting activities) hosted by Comox Valley Community Arts Council and others in the rooms with natural light – e.g., lodge room.
  - Need to review the space with CVCAC to determine what upgrades are required for the space to be programmable.

- Sinks may need to be installed or could use sinks in adjoining kitchens (for the cleaning of paintbrushes, etc.).
- Mobile stage and sound dampening would be required for live performances (e.g., live performances could be hosted in the grand hall).

**Considerations:**

- Recreational programming that currently takes place at the facility would most likely need to move or readjusted.
- Many in the community are uncomfortable with the facility's name. As such, the City should work with community partners to investigate its renaming.
- Comox Valley Community Arts Council needs storage space – need to investigate if some of the storage needs could be met at Native Sons Hall.

#### **4.1.4 Feasibility Study or Needs Assessment for Existing Facilities**

A feasibility study could be conducted for Filberg and Native Sons Hall to determine potential of one or both meeting the identified cultural facility needs. The City has identified that funding for facility needs assessments or feasibility studies is available in 2025 to look at the Filberg, Sid Williams Theatre, Courtenay and District Museum, and Comox Valley Art Gallery to assess specific facility needs, consider how upgrades could meet community needs, and prioritize facility improvements. A similar assessment could be done for the Native Sons Hall. The Sid Williams Theatre Society is already carrying out some planning work in this area.

#### **4.1.5 Cultural Facilities Plan**

Following the completion of needs assessments and or feasibility studies, complete the development of a cultural facilities capital plan. This capital plan will provide recommendations to the City to guide infrastructure investment over the next 10 years. It will also enable the City to support advocacy and fundraising efforts of the core cultural partners as they seek third party funding to support critical cultural facility investment in line with the City's Cultural Strategic Plan and in support of developing the cultural district in Courtenay's downtown.

### **4.2 Medium-term (3-5 years)**

#### **4.2.1 Targeted Funding for Upgrades to Existing Facilities**

**Description:** Some existing cultural spaces in Courtenay need upgrades to help them meet the needs of the cultural community. For example, some venues remain inaccessible for people with physical disabilities or do not have suitable sound equipment for professional performances.

The City of Courtenay could consider creating a dedicated funding stream to encourage such upgrades of community cultural spaces – e.g., an operational funding stream for core cultural partners (City-owned) and a capital grant stream for community facilities (non-City owned). Another option is identifying a City staff member as a liaison with the cultural community to share relevant provincial/federal grants available. For example, the Department of Canadian Heritage's [Canada Cultural Spaces Fund](#) offers a specialized equipment funding stream that

organizations may qualify for. Local non-profits may need some support in accessing funding like this that is available to them.

Example required upgrades:

- The The Regier Theatre (former Old Church Theatre) does not have full lighting and audio equipment of the standard needed for some professional shows; also needs a new HVAC system as there is currently no climate control ([currently fundraising](#)).
- The Sid Williams Theatre needs a replacement stage elevator (City funding required), stage resurfacing and a gala lift/spiral lift stage elevator system. Note, the Sid has already secured grant funding for upgrades to its audio system, and hearing assist system. The Society is effective at securing funding from other sources but will need City finance to fund some of these items. The Society upgraded its lighting grid system in 2024 with an investment of \$600,000.
- The Courtenay and District Museum is proposing an expansion to extend the building into the adjacent lot to create the extra square footage required for storage and exhibitions. The Museum also requires new lift for patron accessibility to the 2nd floor and could be considered as part of the future expansion.
- The Sid Williams Theatre is envisioning expanding the theatre lobby through expansion into the Randy Wicher Plaza that could meet both studio theatre needs and potential arts exhibition space.

**Considerations:**

- City team to support mapping and needs analysis to determine feasibility and need for certain improvements for existing facilities.
- The City needs to look at its overall granting functions to determine if and how to fund arts and culture groups and facilities, and whether it is one-time, operating, and or capital grants.

#### **4.2.2 Studio Theatre Extension to Sid Williams Theatre**

**Description:** A recurring theme in engagements was the need for flexible, affordable space for live community performances. Many needs could potentially be met by a studio theatre, as it could be used for rehearsals across a range of disciplines, as well as performances.

The Sid William Theatre has engaged an architectural firm to design a facility expansion, which could potentially include a studio theatre. This expansion would extend the lobby outwards and upwards, also addressing the need for larger lobby space at the Sid and space for volunteers.

Currently, the Sid Williams Theatre is oversubscribed (it was shared via site visit that the theatre turns away 60 to 100 bookings each year), and some community groups consider its rates unaffordable although they are subsidized. Not all groups require full theatre space.

**Considerations:**

The studio theatre could potentially also meet the need for rehearsal space for groups of 60+, i.e., choirs.

### 4.2.3 Centre for the Arts (580 Duncan Ave.) Review and Plan

**Description:** Currently, Comox Valley Community Arts Council and Comox Valley Art Gallery are both housed within the 'Centre for the Arts' building at 580 Duncan Ave. However, the Comox Valley Art Gallery currently does not have enough administrative space, and needs more storage space for its collection. There is a need to determine if the vision of the space remains a "centre for the arts" or otherwise.

- There are other tenants currently in the space, i.e., art and non-art tenants, and it could be worth investigating such arrangements to determine their suitability for the space.
- Moving Comox Valley Community Arts Council's administrative location from the 'Centre for the Arts' could potentially provide enough administrative space for Comox Valley Art Gallery.
- Comox Valley Arts Gallery's Walk With Me team already has to rent space elsewhere in Courtenay as there is not enough space in the current location.
- Investigate potential office locations for the organizations upon determining the vision of the Centre for Arts.

**Considerations:**

- In the short term, this option does not include finding programming space for Comox Valley Community Arts Council in the same location as its offices. However, the proposed repurposing of portions of Native Sons Hall for arts and culture could potentially answer the need for programming space. However, further discussion and study is required through the cultural facility needs assessment.
- In the future, it would make sense for Comox Valley Community Arts Council's administration and programming to take place in the same location – for example, within a community arts centre (as mentioned in the Official Community Plan).

### 4.2.4 Public Plaza (for Outdoor Performing Arts)

**Description:** Community engagement has indicated the need for medium to larger spaces for outdoor performing arts.

The creation of a new downtown Public Commons public plaza concept was identified in the Downtown Courtenay Playbook (2016). It is also mentioned in policy ACH 3 of the [Courtenay Official Community Plan](#) as well as OCP Action 55: "Work towards the vision of the Downtown Commons and Mews public plaza."

**Considerations:**

- The scope and scale of public plaza spaces in the Downtown will be informed by the Downtown Vitalization Local Area Plan (DVLAP) process that is anticipated to be completed by Fall 2025. The DVLAP would focus cultural planning effort, including capital facility and infrastructure investment in the downtown cultural district to amplify the significant economic, social, and tourism development benefits that extends to the entire region.

- a “commons” for medium to large scale performance / community based arts and culture (small concerts, art shows, community engaged arts, etc.)
- a large public performance place (focus on Simms park or other options) for large scale performances / events / gatherings.

#### **Case Study – Municipal-operated mobile performance platform**

- Within Canada, there are two successful government-run mobile stage services in Windsor, Ontario and Hinton, Alberta. Both services offer the same amenities that can accommodate 200 adults with portable bleachers, and an adaptable stage that can operate in two different sizes. (16'x24' and 24'x30 feet)
- Stage setup and pick-up of the Showmobile is done by the town staff. Additional amenities are available upon request and affect the overall pricing. The standard daily rental rate is \$682.50 with an additional day costing \$525 for Hinton. Mileage isn't accounted for unless the rental is out-of-town. In this case it is an additional \$2.10 per kilometer.
- Websites: [Windsor](#), [Hinton](#)

### **4.3 Longer-term (6 years+)**

#### **4.3.1 Holistic Well-being Space**

**Description: Modeling the Walk With Me program**, the City of Courtenay could work with local and regional partners to create a space for cultural programming targeted towards Indigenous peoples, unhoused and unsheltered community members, and people affected by substance use and addiction. If possible, it would be beneficial for the space to be co-located or supported by facilities or programs that also offer services such as hot meals and showers.

Such an initiative would require working with partners to see if any existing spaces could be repurposed to become such a centre. A short-term option could be a programmatic approach in the community centres / recreation centres, VIRL, – i.e. drop in arts and culture programming during set hours each day / week or a dedicated space.

**Potential partners:** Regional District; K'omoks First Nation; Comox Valley Transition Society; Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness; Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society; BC Housing; and Comox Valley Art Gallery Society.

### 4.3.2 Indoor/Outdoor Mobile Stage

**Description:** City of Courtenay to consider purchasing a mobile stage that local presenters can use for live performances. The City can also investigate partnership options with other local organizations to acquire a mobile stage such as the Vancouver Island Music Festival who already owns a mobile stage.

- Size required is likely to be around 32 Square feet
- Could be used to equip both outdoor spaces and indoors (such as the Native Sons Hall and parks in Courtenay)

**Considerations:**

- Potential funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage's [Canada Cultural Spaces Fund](#) specialized equipment funding stream.
- Administrative time/staff to manage bookings and payments
- Team to transport and set up/take down stage (risk management)
- Storage space for the mobile stage should be considered.
- Partner with a local cultural organization to be facilitator of the mobile stage. Decide if to be used for non-City events or only for City facility use.

## 4.4 Future Vision (10 years +)

### 4.4.1 Downtown Cultural District

Courtenay has the opportunity to address its cultural facility needs by investing in existing spaces in the downtown core, transforming the area into a vibrant **cultural district**. By enhancing and repurposing current facilities, the City can create a centralized space where arts and culture thrive, fostering creativity, community engagement, and economic growth. This investment would not only continue to activate the downtown core but also provide accessible venues for cultural organizations, artists, and the public to gather, collaborate, and showcase their work. A downtown cultural district would serve as a focal point for the community, drawing visitors and residents alike, and positioning Courtenay as a cultural hub for arts and culture in the region. The investment and upgrades to the core cultural facilities in the downtown core carried out in early phases will lead to the establishment of the downtown cultural district over the 10 year horizon.

#### 4.4.2 Regional Performance Arts Centre

**Description:** A purpose-built arts and culture facility that can accommodate large arts and culture performances. Such a facility has been mentioned in the Official Community Plan and related policy documents, albeit without much detail (as noted in section 3).

Based on the needs we heard, this centre would potentially comprise:

- 1000+ seat theatre with space for a full orchestra and appropriate acoustics
- Flexible rehearsal spaces (for music, dance, and drama) that could also be rented by community groups for events
- Storage (e.g., of mobile stage, seating, tables, sound equipment)
- The centre could potentially also include:
  - ‘Messy space’ programming rooms for visual arts programming and creation
  - Exhibition space for visual artists in the community to exhibit their artwork
  - Café/restaurant – potentially run by a third party.

**Considerations:**

- Such a facility would need a relevant user base, regional funding models, and a business case to support a facility of such magnitude and as such is positioned as a visionary goal to consider based on population growth, engagement in the arts and cultural sector, and a strong business analysis in the future.
- Needs to be a regional initiative (with Comox Valley Regional District, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, and the City of Courtenay) supported by a regional cultural plan.
- Likely to require a fundraising campaign targeting major donors – in which case, a non-profit organization would need to take the lead to fundraise.
- Consider a business case or feasibility study taking into account the size of the community (potential funding from the Canada cultural Spaces Fund’s feasibility study stream).

## 5. Governance Model Options for Cultural Facilities

The City of Courtenay and its partners can consider a number of governance models for any future cultural facility e.g., Regional Arts Centre. It is of note that no specific model is recommended, as governance decisions are an iterative process.

This section presents basic governance models that may be combined or adapted as conditions change. For example, the model may begin as City owned and operated and plan to transition to a non-profit model. Or it may begin as a not-profit within strict financial authorities retained by the City until the external board and operating management meet a certain performance level.

Governance Model	Description
<b>City-Owned and Operated</b>	<p>In a city-owned and operated model, the City would own and operate the Cultural Facility. Consideration will be given to bylaws, policies, and procedures that allow for more flexibility and ease of access for potential Cultural Facility users.</p> <p>The model allows the City to retain full control of the facility and ensure operations are aligned with municipal priorities.</p>
<b>City Established and Owned, Non-profit Operated</b>	<p>In this model, the City continues to own the property but also establish a non-profit (or delegate to an existing one), which would have operational responsibilities in managing the Cultural Facility.</p> <p>The facility should have a board composed of City employees, arts, cultural and creative sector and community representatives.</p> <p>The City would need to create an agreement to stipulate funding and other support arrangements, while also establishing other governing policies. This non-profit would be more at arms-length and be governed under the terms of a “contribution agreement” type of arrangement between the City and the not-for-profit organization.</p>
<b>City External Agency</b>	<p>In this model, the City may consider establishing an external agency of the City to manage the facility and manage programming and partnerships.</p> <p>The agency should have its own Board of Directors and an established service agreement with the City.</p>
<b>Existing Non-Profit Model</b>	<p>This model bestows day-to-day operations and management to an existing cultural organizations/non-profit. The City would retain ownership of the building and is responsible for capital improvements. The operating non-profit would be considered the “anchor tenant”, and would contribute significantly to the programming, services, and events at the Cultural Facility.</p> <p>The non-profit would be governed by its own independent board. The City would need to establish an agreement, clarify funding, and support terms. The agreement should also lay out policies that allow for the facility to be used by other organizations and community members to ensure that the space remains accessible.</p>

Governance Model	Description
<b>For-Profit or Public/Private Partnership Model</b>	<p>In this model, the facility would be owned and/or managed by a developer, a management group, or another third party. This governance model is commonly used for large performing/entertainment complexes that serve a wider community of presenters and performers.</p> <p>In this case, the City would either sell the property to a for-profit company or, more commonly, lease the space to any of these groups and have them fully manage operations. A public/private partnership can also take the form of a private company coming in as a funding partner and sharing operational and management responsibilities with the City.</p>
<b>Community/Artists Run or Land Trust Model</b>	<p>A “land trust” model has been adopted in many cities across the world for arts and culture. This model may involve an organization or entity acquiring properties and would allow for artists and cultural organizations to have collective stewardship and ownership. The goal would be to ensure community governance and protection of spaces that are dedicated to arts and culture, through equity ownership or long-term leases. Funds would emerge from government sources, grants, investments, fundraising, and philanthropy.</p>

## Appendix D. List of Existing Facilities and Spaces

1. Comox Valley Art Gallery
2. Comox Valley Exhibition Grounds
3. Courtenay & District Museum & Paleontology Centre
4. Sid Williams Theatre
5. Centre for the Arts
6. Florence Filberg Centre
7. Lawn Bowling Building - Bill Moore Park
8. Lewis Centre
9. Native Sons Hall
10. Salish Building
11. The LINC Youth Centre
12. Tsolum Building
13. Valley Park Clubhouse
14. Comox Valley Presbyterian Church (Comox)
15. Silver Bowerbird Gallery and Studio
16. Vanier Theatre
17. Artful: The Gallery
18. Courtenay Library
19. HMCS ALBERNI Museum and Memorial
20. I-Hos Gallery
21. Little Red Church Community Arts Centre (Comox)
22. The Regier Theatre (former Old Church Theatre)
23. St. John The Divine Anglican Church
24. Stan Hagen Theatre
25. Courtenay Legion
26. Rotary Centennial Pavilion
27. St. George's United Church
28. The Spool Sewing Studio