

Performing arts, 2020

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Cancelled performances and restrictions dampen performing arts revenues in 2020

In 2020, the performing arts industry was directly affected by federal and provincial government measures put in place to control the spread of COVID-19. From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada in March 2020, government restrictions led to the cancellation or postponement of shows across all provinces, greatly limiting most business operations. Even with growing digital sales and government grants and subsidies aimed at helping businesses through the pandemic, industry revenues declined by a record \$783.8 million from 2018 to \$1.8 billion in 2020, falling to their lowest level since comparable data became available in 2014. With losses in operating revenues outpacing those of operating expenses (-\$635.4 million), the operating profit margin for the industry fell 2.6 percentage points to 10.4% in 2020.

For businesses that could operate, reduced audience capacity or alternatives to in-person shows required constant adjustment, resulting in 31.0% of respondents adopting or expanding contactless business models and 14.6% investing in e-commerce platforms. To help mitigate falling revenues amid the pandemic, many businesses worked to find substitutes for regular in-person performances, such as live-streamed digital performances or online viewing passes for pre-recorded shows. As a result, e-commerce sales expanded as a share of total sales, accounting for 23.9% of all sales revenues in 2020.

With the help of grants (such as federal employment subsidies), many businesses continued to pay employees throughout the pandemic, resulting in salaries, wages, commissions and benefits (-25.0%) declining at a slower rate than many other operating expenses and increasing their share of total operating expenses by 1.2 percentage points to 26.7% in 2020. With restrictions across the country, the subcontract fees proportion of total operating expenses declined slightly to 15.1% in 2020, since the use of contract or casual labour dwindled amid the pandemic.

Among the performing arts industries in 2020, musical groups and artists earned an increasing share of industry revenue, reaching 44.5% in 2020, up 5.8 percentage points from 2018. The next largest industry group was theatre (except musical) companies (24.1%), followed by other performing arts companies (13.0%), musical theatre and opera companies (9.3%), and dance companies (9.1%).

Increased grant and subsidy funding softens the decline in revenues of non-profit businesses

Because of pandemic-related restrictions, non-profit performing arts companies saw their number of performances and attendees decline by approximately half from 2018 to 2020. Cancellations and audience-related restrictions amid lockdowns led to large drops in performance revenues (-\$166.3 million), with 87.3% of the decline concentrated in single ticket sales (-\$113.7 million) and subscription sales (-\$31.0 million).

To help mitigate adverse pandemic effects and decreasing sales revenues, non-profit businesses were able to access more grants and subsidies. In 2020, the majority of total operating revenue came from grants, subsidies, donations, corporate sponsorship and fundraising (62.0%), up from 46.1% in 2018. With the addition of new funding programs to help businesses during the pandemic and traditional targeted support for the arts, public sector grants in the non-profit sector increased \$77.0 million from 2018. However, as many performing arts businesses were unable to hold annual fundraising events or collect sponsorships for cancelled performances, private sector donations declined by 9.2%.

Though it was a year of great change and adaptation, volunteers continued to provide integral support for the industry. With many volunteers trying to do their part throughout the year, the drop in the number of hours provided (-37.6%) outpaced the reduction in the total number of volunteers (-26.6%).



Revenues among for-profit businesses decrease amid pandemic restrictions

In 2020, government-mandated closures and restrictions also severely impacted the for-profit performing arts industry, leading to massive declines in operating revenues (-39.7%). A [decline in international travellers to Canada](#) (-84.4%) and limited domestic travel across the country contributed to the drop in revenues. Operators in Quebec experienced the largest losses (-\$352.1 million), followed by Ontario (-\$192.6 million), Alberta (-\$28.3 million) and British Columbia (-\$18.5 million). The same four provinces made up 94.9% of industry revenues in 2020.

The decline in operating expenses (-38.5%) led to a 1.6 percentage point drop in the operating profit margin, down to 18.7% in 2020.

Mixed conditions continue to affect performing arts industries in 2021

With rolling restrictions throughout much of the year, industry operators continued to face changing conditions in 2021. The extent of the bounce back will vary across the performing arts industries, as evolving conditions during critical operating dates and limited opportunity for in-person events for most of 2021 will likely push any appreciable recovery to a later time.

Note to readers

Data for 2018 have been revised.

Data are collected for the 12-month fiscal period that ends on or between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2021. This means that some businesses have reported for a year in which the majority of their operations were before the pandemic. As a result, the effects of the pandemic are not fully reflected in this reference year.

These and other data related to the arts, culture, heritage and sport sectors can be found on the [Culture statistics](#) portal.

Available tables: [21-10-0007-01](#), [21-10-0182-01](#) to [21-10-0190-01](#) and [21-10-0245-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3108](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).