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A NEW SURVEY SHOWS COVID VACCINATIONS ARE KEY TO AUDIENCES' RETURN TO PERFORMING ARTS

Results suggest cautious optimism for a return to indoor performances this year.

ArtsBoston's Catherine Peterson says arts sector will have endured "one of the longest stretches of fiscal freefall" due to the pandemic.

BOSTON -- February 18, 2021 -- Ninety-six percent (96%) of respondents to a new survey of Boston-area arts goers say they "definitely" or "probably" will be vaccinated against the coronavirus, injecting significant hope into the local arts community that a return to live performances is on the horizon. The results, released today, come from the latest [Audience Outlook Monitor \(AOM\)](#) survey conducted by national arts consulting firm WolfBrown and led locally by the non-profit arts marketing organization ArtsBoston.

Among survey respondents who had not yet been vaccinated but said they would be, 77% indicated they will take the vaccine "right away, or as soon as my doctor recommends it." Nine percent (9%) will wait until it is "in wide use and showing minimal side effects." The rest (14%) want to see significant progress toward lower infections or until other unspecified conditions are met.

After getting vaccinated, a majority of arts goers will monitor behavioral and environmental changes as they contemplate returning. Continued mask-wearing (65%), socially distanced interactions and seating (60%), and upgraded ventilation systems (52%) in cultural facilities are the three most-cited issues important to respondents.

Performing arts organizations, whose business is to gather large groups of people in close proximity and offer them communal cultural experiences, were among the first to close at the start of the pandemic last spring and will be among the last to re-open. ArtsBoston Executive Director Catherine Peterson says the performing arts sector will endure one of the longest stretches of fiscal freefall during the course of the pandemic.

"The significant positive response to the vaccine in this new survey is encouraging to an important economic sector which, in pre-COVID days, contributed \$2 billion annually to the regional economy and employed more than 30,000 people," Peterson says. "The arts are a key factor in the recovery of the regional economy because they draw people into the

community, give them hope, and encourage them to engage with other economic drivers, including restaurants, hotels, retail and more.”

Eagerness to attend post-pandemic cultural events remains high for Boston-area audiences, with 69% of respondents saying they expect to attend as much as before, and 19% saying they plan to attend more frequently. Twelve percent (12%) indicated they will attend fewer events -- a drop in hesitancy compared to results from surveys last spring and summer. Skittish respondents remain concerned about the lingering risks of COVID infection: they cited concerns of being “packed in tightly” with others, and enforcement policies that ensure other attendees adhere to health protocols.

Responses about expected return dates to indoor performances reflects a continued uncertainty about when it may be safe to come back. Twenty percent (20%) anticipate returning to live performances by June -- assuming venues are open and following health safety guidelines -- and 62% anticipate returning by September. Nineteen percent (19%) of responders don't see themselves returning until January 2022 or later.

In light of the continued uncertainty about reopening, AOM continues to track trends in demand for digital arts programming. Interest in watching online productions increased nearly 10 percentage points since last fall: 59% of respondents in January said they watched online content offered by performing arts organizations. The percentage who watched and paid for online content rose to 31% in January versus 18% in November 2020. The proportion of Boston-area arts goers reporting no online arts consumption in the two weeks prior dropped from 50% in November to 41% in January.

The post-COVID appetite for digital programs remains unclear, according to the survey. Once live performances are back and running, just 19% of arts-goers said online options will have a prominent place in their cultural lives, and 58% said online options will have a minimal place in their cultural mix. Twenty-three percent (23%) said online options would have no place in their lives; this number has remained consistent since last summer.

The longitudinal Audience Outlook Monitor (AOM) survey is conducted by national arts consulting firm WolfBrown and led locally by non-profit arts marketing organization ArtsBoston. The AOM Survey will continue through fall 2021, supporting arts and cultural organizations in their plans for reopening. In addition to ArtsBoston, other AOM study partners include TDF in New York, the League of Chicago Theaters and Theater Bay Area in San Francisco. The local survey was conducted January 14-18, 2021 among arts goers in Greater Boston.

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MEDIA INFORMATION: More details and findings from the [Audience Outlook Monitor](#) are available. To speak with representatives from ArtsBoston, WolfBrown, or the arts organizations using AOM results to plan for future programming, contact John Michael Kennedy at jmk@jmkpr.com or 781-620-1761.