

# ARTSBOSTON

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## LATEST SURVEY SHOWS AUDIENCES ARE READY TO RETURN TO PERFORMANCES EARLIER THAN BEFORE

**While vaccinations are nearly universal among survey respondents, eagerness mixes with caution for audiences.**

**Organizations find relief, and some anxiety in meeting audience expectations.**

BOSTON -- June 29, 2021 -- In the latest results from its longitudinal Audience Outlook Monitor (AOM) project -- which has tracked regional audience concerns, expectations and habits about arts consumption during the pandemic and beyond -- ArtsBoston found that **audience comfort levels about attending indoor events has increased significantly over the last two months**, showing hopeful signs for the fall arts season. But a related survey of regional and national arts organizations also found that arts groups have concerns about their own ability to meet audiences' expectations due to ramp up challenges and nearly a year and a half without earned income.

### AUDIENCE OUTLOOK MONITOR

Deployed by ArtsBoston and consulting firm WolfBrown, the mid-June survey showed **97% of overall audiences reported being fully vaccinated (95%) or partially vaccinated (2%), a jump from 87% in April**. Vaccination rates among Black and Latino respondents differed up to 11%, with 88% of Black arts goers and 86% of Latino arts goers reporting full or partial vaccination. Of respondents not yet vaccinated, most say they plan to, or will likely do so.

[Survey response charts for data items in this release are available here.](#)

The overall vaccination rate has advanced the timeline by which the majority of audience members say they will be ready to sit in theaters with other people; **54% of theater-, dance- and music-goers indicate they'd be comfortable returning to live indoor events in late July and August of this year, versus September in the previous study**. Ninety-six percent (96%) of respondents expressed confidence in full resumption of regular arts activities within the year.

Ongoing caution from audience members remained prominent in the survey results, however, even among those eager to attend performances. Fifty-five percent (55%) of vaccinated audience members described themselves as ready to go out right now; but 45% say they're waiting for lower infection rates or until masking and social distancing isn't required indoors.

Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents say mask requirements is a prerequisite for their attendance at indoor events, and 31% say they would return only to performance spaces where proof of vaccination is required for entry.

ArtsBoston Executive Director Catherine Peterson says the latest AOM survey indicates that “the moment we all were waiting for” is here -- specifically, the time when audience vaccination rates meet the pent-up audience demand. “One year ago, we couldn’t imagine this level of vaccination success,” Peterson says. “The public health success comes with a strong desire to return to public activities, especially the live arts, at levels we’ve not seen since the start of the pandemic. But it’s important to note a significant portion of audience members will wait before returning. It’s overall good news, but arts organizations are juggling a lot of factors in planning for a full return.”

## **CHALLENGES FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

A component of the AOM survey collected data in May from arts organizations in Boston and around the country about their plans to return to live performances. The results reflect some anxiety as the reality of indoor performances gets closer, and organizations work to understand and meet audience expectations. Peterson says ArtsBoston’s ongoing survey work “keeps a finger on the pulse of how audience expectations evolve,” and will help regional organizations refine their planning.

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of organizations in that survey expect to enforce mask wearing for their staff. Eighty-one percent (81%) will implement refund policies for audience members who feel ill, or change their minds about attending. Nearly three-quarters (73%) said they have made -- or will make -- improvements to ventilation systems and plan to implement contact-free ticketing procedures. Other protocols that the majority of groups are looking to implement include: verbal confirmation of vaccination/COVID status; social distancing through staggered entrance times; contact tracing information collection; and incentives for artists and staff members to be vaccinated.

“What we’re seeing is that arts organizations around Greater Boston have grappled with issues of returning to indoor performances behind the scenes for quite a while now,” Peterson says. “They are stepping up to the plate to acknowledge, protect and be sensitive to the diverse needs of the audience members who helped them through the pandemic,” she says. “The Audience Outlook Monitor has helped organizations create and update audience-centric strategies and new policies that build a sense of trust and belonging with their supporters.”

Mara Sidmore, Interim Managing Director of Actors’ Shakespeare Project (ASP), which is part of the AOM survey project, says her organization is looking to meet the needs of multiple constituents -- audiences who expect certain precautions, venue partners whose policies differ from place to place, and unions who represent theater artists. “The news about audience eagerness is very positive,” Sidmore says, “but we realize there is a big gap between folks who

want assurances about vaccinations and indoor masking, and others who feel strongly that those issues should not be a barrier. These are questions of access and equity at play, in addition to safety.” Of the union requirements, Sidmore says “many don’t realize that while we plan as much as we want for audiences and venues, we are required by union agreements to protect the artists. It’s a complex set of dynamics.”

## **ARTS SECTOR AND THE REGIONAL ECONOMY**

Peterson says a full return of the arts will enhance the ongoing return of restaurant, hotel and retail industries, because the non-profit arts and business sectors of the regional economy are intertwined -- and rely heavily on each other.

“Economic data showed that in pre-pandemic times, the arts pumped over \$2 billion dollars into the regional Greater Boston economy each year,” Peterson says. She says culturally inclined visitors to Boston enjoy restaurants and shopping at rates higher than other kinds of travelers. According to ArtsBoston’s 2019 report, The Arts Factor, arts audiences in Greater Boston outnumber the combined number of sports ticket holders by 4-to-1.

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**MEDIA NOTE:** For more details about the Audience Outlook Monitor, to reach ArtsBoston survey leaders, or to talk with organizations using this data to plan their returns, contact John Michael Kennedy at [jmk@jmkpr.com](mailto:jmk@jmkpr.com), 781-620-1761 (office) or 212-842-1752 (cell)