



What We Heard Report

Civic Arts Policy, Phase 2: Create

March 18, 2025

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Introduction

Executive Summary

The City of Calgary began a project to update the Calgary Civic Arts Policy in late 2023. The updated Council policy will provide guidance for City Administration related to municipal investment in the arts sector. The current policy incorporated feedback from Calgarians in 2004. The process of drafting an updated Civic Arts Policy involves two phases of engagement. This report summarizes the feedback received during Phase 2: Create, which took place from January 30 – February 23, 2025.

The Goal

The goal of Phase 2 engagement was to validate the draft content proposed from Phase 1 by gathering feedback from artists, arts professionals, and arts organizations who have received municipal funding. This phase focused on assessing whether the draft content effectively reflects the values, priorities, and operational

realities of Calgary's arts community. Participants were invited to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and actionability of the proposed content, identify any gaps or barriers, and provide insights on how it can better support the long-term sustainability, equity, and growth of the arts sector. Their input will help refine the proposed content before it is finalized and presented to Council.

Feedback

Feedback gathered during Phase 2 engagement provided the project team with deeper insights into the current state of Calgary's arts sector, its priorities, and the changes that artists, arts professionals, and arts organizations believe are necessary to foster a vibrant and resilient arts sector. This feedback will serve as one input in refining the policy, alongside best practices, research, consultation with the Cultural Leadership Council for Calgary, and alignment with other Council-approved policies.



Equity

Equity was a key focus of this engagement, as the project team recognized that the original policy did not adequately address equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB), anti-racism, or Truth and Reconciliation. To address this gap, events were held with Indigenous and equity-deserving artists to understand their lived and living experiences, and whether they felt as though the proposed content would effectively address barriers in the arts sector. To further improve accessibility, a translation function was enabled on the portal, allowing information to be translated into up to 15 languages.

Tactics

Phase 2 engagement included: an online survey for targeted audiences on Engage the portal page, which received 194 views, 96 visitors and 10 contributions. An open house was held for artists and representatives from arts organizations and a paper version of the survey was made available for those who experience barriers to accessing the portal; Four workshops were held, including two in-person workshops with representatives of arts organizations, a virtual workshop with equity-deserving artists, and an in-person Sharing Circle with Indigenous artists from Treaty 7.

Guiding Principles

Participants rated the four proposed City commitments and 20 guiding principles online and at the open house. Most received an average rating of 4.0 or higher on a scale of 5.0, with a few exceptions

Themes

The feedback collected during this phase of engagement confirmed that the proposed content was comprehensive, and no major gaps were identified. However, participants recommended small refinements to improve support for Calgary's arts sector. The following themes emerged across all the platforms for feedback collection:

- Funding and resource challenges.
- Importance of equity, inclusion, and representation.
- Accessibility challenges relating to infrastructure.
- Need to strengthen collaborations and partnerships.
- Concerns about implementation and accountability.
- Need for stronger support and mentorship opportunities.

Out of scope feedback

Many of the responses we received focused on actions that fall outside the scope of the Civic Arts Policy. While this policy is intended to provide high-level guidance rather than outline specific programs or initiatives, the feedback gathered will still be valuable. These recommendations will be considered in the upcoming update to the Cultural Plan for Calgary. This ensures that while they may not be addressed within the Civic Arts Policy, they will help inform future planning and decision-making for Calgary's arts sector.

Project Background

The City of Calgary is updating the Calgary Civic Arts Policy for the first time since 2004 to better align with current practices and standards. The Civic Arts Policy provides a foundation that describes the value the arts bring to Calgary, how The City supports the arts, and best practices for the sector. The policy guides all groups and individuals receiving arts funding from The City of Calgary, including the Arts and Culture division at The City, Civic Partners, as well as arts organizations and individuals receiving municipal funding through Civic Partners. As part of the policy update process, conversations about equity were central to both the overall approach and recommendations for specific policy content. Discussions included broader equity frameworks, such as Truth and Reconciliation, anti-racism, and EDIB, as well as how these principles could be meaningfully reflected in the policy's commitments and guiding principles.

The 2004 version of the policy was the result of two years of consultation and research to improve leadership and communication structures, resourcing and accountability. One result of the 2004 policy was the creation of Calgary Arts Development as a Civic Partner, to deliver arts granting and programming on behalf of the municipality.

One of the key recommendations of the Civic Arts Policy update project is to build on the foundation of the existing policy by clarifying, simplifying, and streamlining the content to better align with current best practices. This includes an intentional effort to expand content related to Truth and Reconciliation, anti-racism, and equity, diversity,

inclusion, and belonging (EDIB) to better reflect current standards and expectations. While not all aspects of these principles may be captured in the policy itself, this engagement phase was designed to gather feedback on how to move the revised policy towards greater equity and accountability in meaningful and achievable ways. The updated Civic Arts Policy outlines two main areas that guide municipal investment in the arts sector:

- Commitment statements for The City of Calgary, outlining its proposed commitments to the arts sector.
- Guiding principles for those in the arts sector receiving municipal funding, providing best practices and recommendations.

The Civic Arts Policy includes reference to six thematic pillars: People, Community, Enable, Equity, Awareness and Data. These pillars help structure the policy's guiding principles, demonstrating how the updated policy will continue to support Calgary's evolving arts and culture landscape. The Civic Arts Policy is being updated for the first time since 2004 to better align best practices for supporting the arts community in Calgary.

Project Decision

The City of Calgary will analyze the Phase 2 feedback and finalize the Civic Arts Policy in 2025. The updated policy will be presented to City Council for approval in 2026. The Calgary Civic Arts Policy does not determine day-to-day funding decisions, operations for arts organizations or direct funding decisions.

Engagement Overview

The following section provides an overview of the project, and the objectives, strategy, and timeline for the engagement process.

Project Overview

At The City of Calgary, decisions are made that impact more than one million people. Input from Calgarians and other interested and impacted parties help The City better understand the perspectives, opinions, and concerns of people affected by City decisions. Public input is collected, where appropriate, and considered along with other factors (such as cost, environmental impact, technical limitations, and long-range plans/goals) before decisions are made.

Because of its open and accessible nature, engagement is virtually never positioned as the sole source of input into whether The City should do something but helps to ensure City decision-makers have access to a range of ideas and feedback. This feedback is not statistically representative of all Calgarians, and therefore in this report, participants will be referred to as participants or respondents and not Calgarians. All the input collected for this project should be considered through the lens of what will work best in the Calgary context.

Engagement Objectives

The intention for the following list of objectives is to create effective and publicly supported arts sector policies, strategies and plans that reflect community priorities, promote equity, and support Calgary's cultural and artistic identity. By engaging with diverse interested and impacted parties, we aim to develop policies, strategies and plans that address the varied needs of Calgarians while supporting the growth of dynamic and inclusive cultural spaces across the city.

- To gather feedback from artists, arts professionals, and arts organizations to ensure City policies, strategies and plans

accurately reflects their needs and priorities.

- To identify any gaps or barriers that may limit the effectiveness of City policies, strategies and plans, particularly in areas such as funding, accessibility, equity, and systemic challenges.
- To clarify expectations and responsibilities by assessing how City policies, strategies and plans will impact funding recipients, programming, and operational realities within the arts sector.
- To ensure accountability and long-term impact by exploring how City arts sector policies, strategies and plans can drive meaningful change and integrate with broader municipal initiatives, including the upcoming Cultural Plan for Calgary.

Objectives for Equity and Accessibility Focused Engagement

Equitable engagement was a priority for the project team to ensure that we heard from a wide variety of Calgarians, especially those who may experience limited access to arts funding, cultural representation, and opportunities for creative expression. The engagement process for this project was designed to:

- Assess how well proposed content addresses accessibility and inequity issues within Calgary's arts community and identify any remaining gaps.
- Understand the lived experiences of equity-deserving artists and communities to ensure City arts sector policies, strategies and plans reflect their priorities, challenges, and opportunities.
- Examine barriers to participation and determine whether City arts sector

policies, strategies and plans remove obstacles related to funding, representation, and inclusion.

- Ensure City arts sector policies, strategies and plans are actionable and impactful by gathering input on whether the commitments and guiding principles create meaningful change for underserved artists and communities.

Strategy

Phase 2 engagement focused on gathering targeted feedback from artists, arts professionals, and arts organizations to ensure the proposed content is clear, actionable, and responsive to the sector’s needs. This phase emphasized meaningful dialogue with those directly affected by City arts sector policies, strategies and plans,

providing opportunities for participants to share insights on potential impacts, feasibility, and effectiveness.

Engagement activities were designed to capture diverse viewpoints across different artistic disciplines, organizational structures, and levels of experience within the arts community. Participants were encouraged to assess how City arts sector policies, strategies and plans support the long-term sustainability of the sector, strengthen collaboration, and align with the evolving needs of Calgary’s creative ecosystem. By engaging with those working within and alongside the arts sector, this phase aimed to refine City arts sector policies, strategies and plans in a way that fosters resilience, innovation, and inclusivity.

Timeline	Milestone
October – November 2024	Phase 1 Engagement: public feedback on Guiding principles for Civic Arts Policy
December 2024	What We Heard Report for Phase 1 engagement published
January 2025	What We Did Report for Phase 1 engagement published
January – February 2025	Phase 2 engagement: Circulation and public feedback on draft policy
Summer 2025	What We Heard Report for Phase 2 engagement published
Fall 2025	What We Did Report for Phase 2 engagement published
Fall – Winter 2026	Civic Arts Policy to be presented to City Council for approval

Table 1 Project Timeline

Communication and advertising

The City worked in partnership with Calgary Arts Development (CADA) to communicate this engagement opportunity to artists, arts organizations, and arts professionals who have received municipal funding.

The engagement reached a broad range of arts organizations, individual artists, and equity-deserving groups. Invitations were sent to 303 arts organizations that received grants from CADA in 2023 and 2024, ranging from volunteer-run community groups to professional organizations with annual budgets of \$50,000 to \$16 million. These organizations represent all artistic disciplines, including community ethnocultural groups. Additionally, 1,276 individual artists and arts collectives were invited, all of whom received grants during the same period. Nearly half (48%) of these artists self-identified as belonging to an equity priority group, as defined by CADA's equity policies.

Outreach also included 130 Indigenous artists and arts collectives, identified based on eligibility as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit. Additionally, 81

equity-deserving artists and organizations were invited, including recipients of the ArtShare Program grants, members of the Community Working Group and Northeast Public Art project, Cultural Instigators, and other equity advisory groups. These participants self-identified as members of equity priority groups, though detailed demographic data is not collected for this group.

Audience and methodology

The project team utilized different platforms and tactics to encourage participation among all groups and have their voices heard. The questions asked in this engagement process, for all tactics, were customized for each group and the specific objectives of engaging with that group.

Engagement was conducted with a targeted audience of artists, arts professionals, and organizational representatives who have previously received municipal funding through CADA, as well as Indigenous and equity-deserving artists who had not received municipal funding, to understand barriers to accessing funding.



Audience and Tactic	Date	Participation number
Arts professionals and funding recipients		
Online portal page	January 30 – February 24, 2025	10
Online Information Session	February 3, 2025	1
Open house: Central Library	February 8, 2025	12
Virtual Coffee and Conversation	February 11, 2025	4
Workshops with key interest groups		
Workshop with arts organization representatives	February 10, 2025	5
Virtual workshop with equity-deserving artists	February 12, 2025	9
Sharing Circle with Indigenous artists	February 19, 2025	9
Workshop with arts organization representatives	February 22, 2025	12

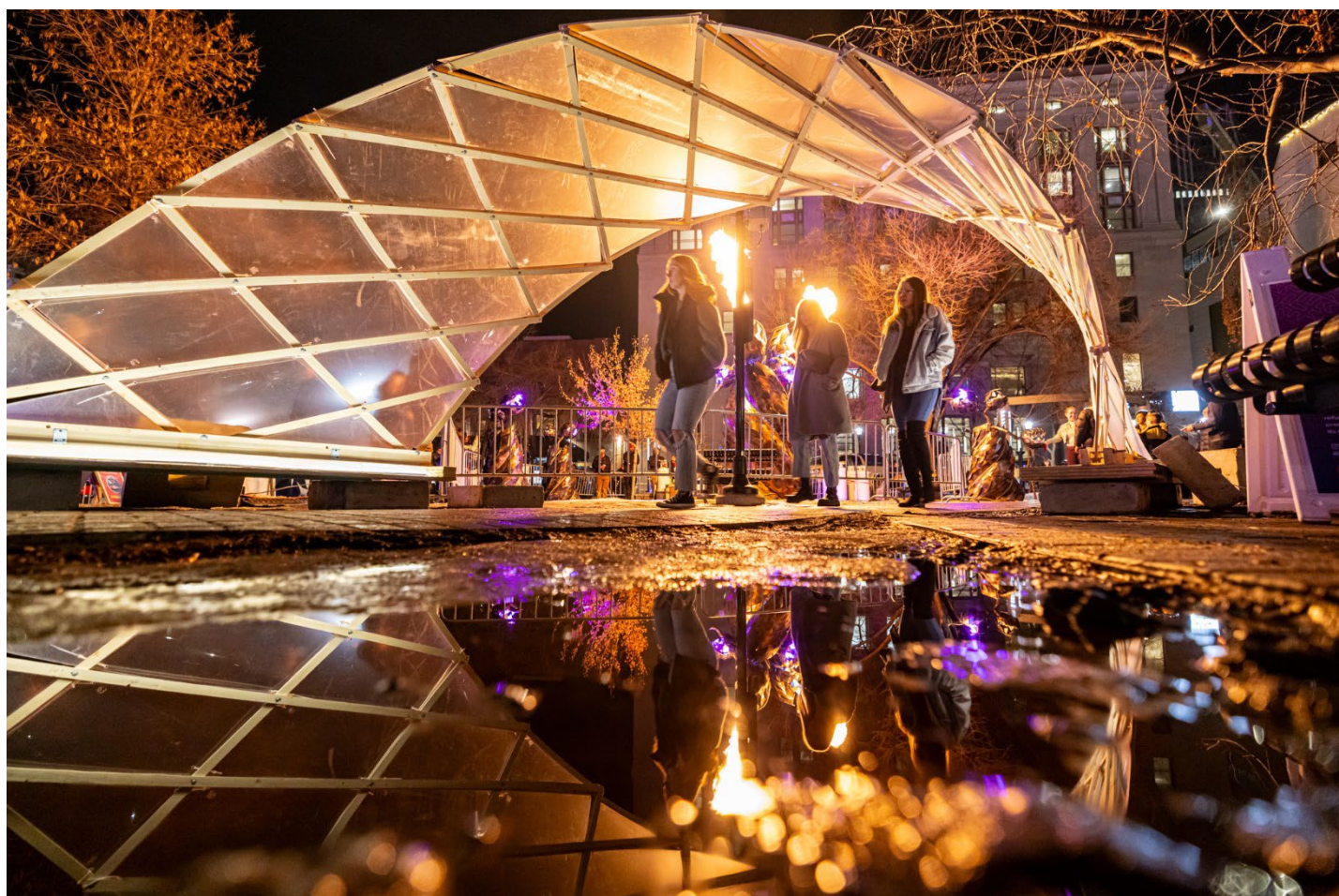
Table 2 Tactics and participation

What We Heard

Questions asked during Phase 2 engagement focused on the following key areas. The demographic information is summarized in [Appendix A](#).

- City of Calgary's Commitments
- Guiding principles
 - People
 - Community
 - Enable
 - Equity
 - Awareness
 - Data
- Tell us about yourself (optional)

The main engagement page with the complete list of questions asked is located at www.engage.calgary.ca/Civic-Arts-Policy.



Chinook Blast, Credit Neil Zeller

What We Asked

During Phase 2 engagement, participants were asked to provide feedback on the proposed content to ensure it reflects the needs, priorities, and lived experiences of Calgary's arts community. The proposed content, developed using insights from Phase 1 Engagement, aims to establish clear expectations for arts organizations receiving public funding.

Engagement focused on validating the proposed four City Commitments and 20 Guiding Principles, organized by pillar, assessing their impact on arts organizations and artists, identifying any gaps or barriers, and clarifying roles and responsibilities.

To ensure broad participation and meaningful input, multiple engagement opportunities were provided, including open houses, an online survey, a workshop focused on equity and anti-racism, and an Indigenous Sharing Circle led by an Indigenous Elder. These sessions encouraged discussions on accessibility, funding, representation, collaboration, and how City arts sector policies, strategies and plans can best support Calgary's diverse arts sector.

The City of Calgary's proposed commitments to the arts sector

- **Municipal funding for artists and arts organizations:** The City is committed to ongoing funding for artists and arts organizations to support long-term sector growth and sustainability.
- **Capital investment in arts infrastructure:** The City is committed to ongoing capital investment in arts infrastructure.
- **Collaborative planning:** The City is committed to working with the arts sector to ensure arts and culture are included in municipal urban planning.
- **Keeping artists in Calgary:** The City is committed to ensuring resources are secured that enable artists to remain in Calgary.

People: Individuals who create or participate in arts and culture.

- **Value and foster a wide range of art practices:** Support opportunities for artists to create, perform, exhibit, or learn with all forms of art, as well as art practices from a variety of cultures.
- **Support creators at all levels:** Help artists at every stage of their career. Support artists of all generations and seek out opportunities for intergenerational collaboration and mentorship.
- **Support variety in artistic expression:** Champion both familiar concepts and new, experimental ideas, fostering creativity and innovation.
- **Support regional, national and international artists:** Include artists from beyond Calgary. Ensure locally focused initiatives include representation from Indigenous artists throughout the Treaty 7 area.
- **Recognize the contributions of volunteers:** Include and celebrate the role that volunteers play in the success of many arts events and their role in supporting arts groups and the arts sector.

Community: Groups that create or participate in arts and culture

- **Advocate for resources to keep artists in Calgary:** Advocate for affordable housing, studios, galleries, performance spaces, helpful resources, and fair opportunities in the arts.
- **Advocate for engagement and partnerships:** Call for engagement to show how the arts benefit diverse Calgary communities. Explore resource-sharing, cross-promotion, and partnerships with local businesses, for-profit arts organizations, the private sector, and academic institutions.

Enable: Funders and advocates supporting arts and culture

- **Collaborate to build a unified vision:** Artists and arts organizations should work together on cultural planning to ensure municipal investments benefit Calgary, building networks and creating a shared strategy for growth.

Equity: Breaking down systemic barriers

- **Celebrate Calgary's diversity:** Encourage inclusivity and equity, addressing barriers so everyone feels welcome.
- **Prioritize investments in underserved areas:** Support balanced representations of equity-deserving groups and cultures. Address systemic barriers, promote equity, and align with The City's values of equity and Truth and Reconciliation.
- **Eliminate systemic issues creating barriers:** Engage impacted groups to identify barriers and understand where systems need improvement. Address exclusion, accessibility, and use inclusive language.
- **Collaborate to improve equitable access:** Improve processes with transparency and open communication. Focus on expanding opportunities for equity-deserving groups and educating arts workers about systemic inequity and barrier elimination.
- **Champion understanding of equity-deserving groups:** Encourage awareness and understanding of the histories and perspectives of equity-deserving groups and include this into arts programming and internal practices. Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

Awareness: Promotion and education

- **Celebrate contributions of the arts sector:** Promote and celebrate artists in Calgary to support talent retention and career growth.
- **Celebrate the arts' impact on resilience, inclusivity and Calgary's global reputation:** Show how the arts positively affect individuals and society, especially in areas like inclusion, health, and youth development.
- **Understand audience and participant preferences:** Learn what audiences need and want. Use this knowledge to engage, educate, communicate, and grow arts participation.

Portal and Open House

During Phase 2 engagement, participants were invited to provide feedback on the draft Civic Arts Policy through both an in-person open house and an online engagement portal. The objective of this phase was to assess whether the guiding principles align with the needs, priorities, and challenges of Calgary's arts community. Participants were asked to rate each guiding principle, which was a summary of the corresponding area of the policy, on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating their level of agreement with its relevance and positive impact on the arts sector. They were also encouraged to provide comments or concerns to highlight any gaps, barriers, or areas needing further refinement after reviewing the City Commitments and Guiding Principles. The open house provided an opportunity for face-to-face discussions, while the online portal allowed for broader accessibility, ensuring a diverse range of voices could contribute.

City Commitments

While there is enthusiasm for The City's commitments, participants highlighted concerns about funding equity, timely infrastructure support, and the need for collaboration beyond the arts sector. Additionally, there was a call to prioritize arts education and advocacy to strengthen long-term appreciation and investment in the arts. The overall average rating of each guiding principle is included at the end of each bar in the graph.

Verbatim Comments

Very selective groups [re: municipal funding for artists and arts organizations]

Maybe [re: capital investment in infrastructure]

On the music side, need more resources for producers, engineers [re: keeping artists in Calgary].

I feel the collaborative planning commitment should include language external to the arts sector (e.g., private or for profit sectors) to actually ensure productive collaboration as intended.

I belong to National accessArts Centre as an artist with intellectual disabilities. We are still waiting for the new location to be built. The city's timely, financial involvement is crucial.

It's exciting to see this level of commitment.

Work with school boards to raise the esteem of arts in schools, to advocate for arts programs and to change the hearts and minds of parents and other stakeholders who devalue essential arts education.

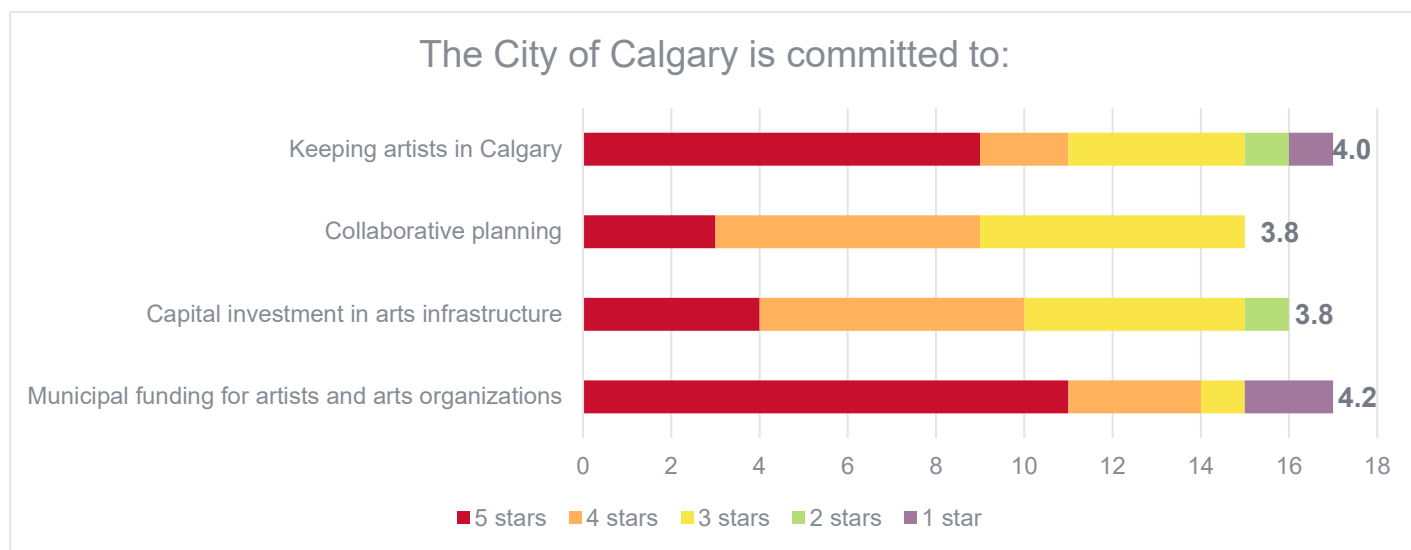


Figure 1 City Commitments

People: Individuals who create or participate in arts and culture.

Participants supported the policy's clearer artist definitions and focus on mentorship but emphasized the need for greater inclusivity and clarity. The distinctions between youth, emerging, and professional artists for funding and career growth were valued, as well as the need for intergenerational collaboration and support for regional artists outside Calgary. However, concerns were raised about the lack of explicit support for people with disabilities and one participant questioned which cultures are prioritized in Calgary's arts scene. The overall average rating of each guiding principle is included at the end of each bar in the graph.

Verbatim Comments

The new definitions of "Artists" (youth, emerging, and professional) allows for more of a clear understanding of stages in a career. This is vital when seeking funding. [re: support creators at all levels].

Which/what culture is most important to Calgary? [re: support national, regional, and international artists].

Who knows? [re: support creators at all levels].

Intergenerational collaboration and mentorship should be more highlighted. The arts have always been competitive so it's very important to build and build on a cross-generational community.

Disability communities are often forgotten. Please include the related words clearly and appropriately in the policies and mandates.

As an artist based in Airdrie but having been involved in Calgary's arts community for over 20 years, I appreciate the support of all artists in and around Calgary.

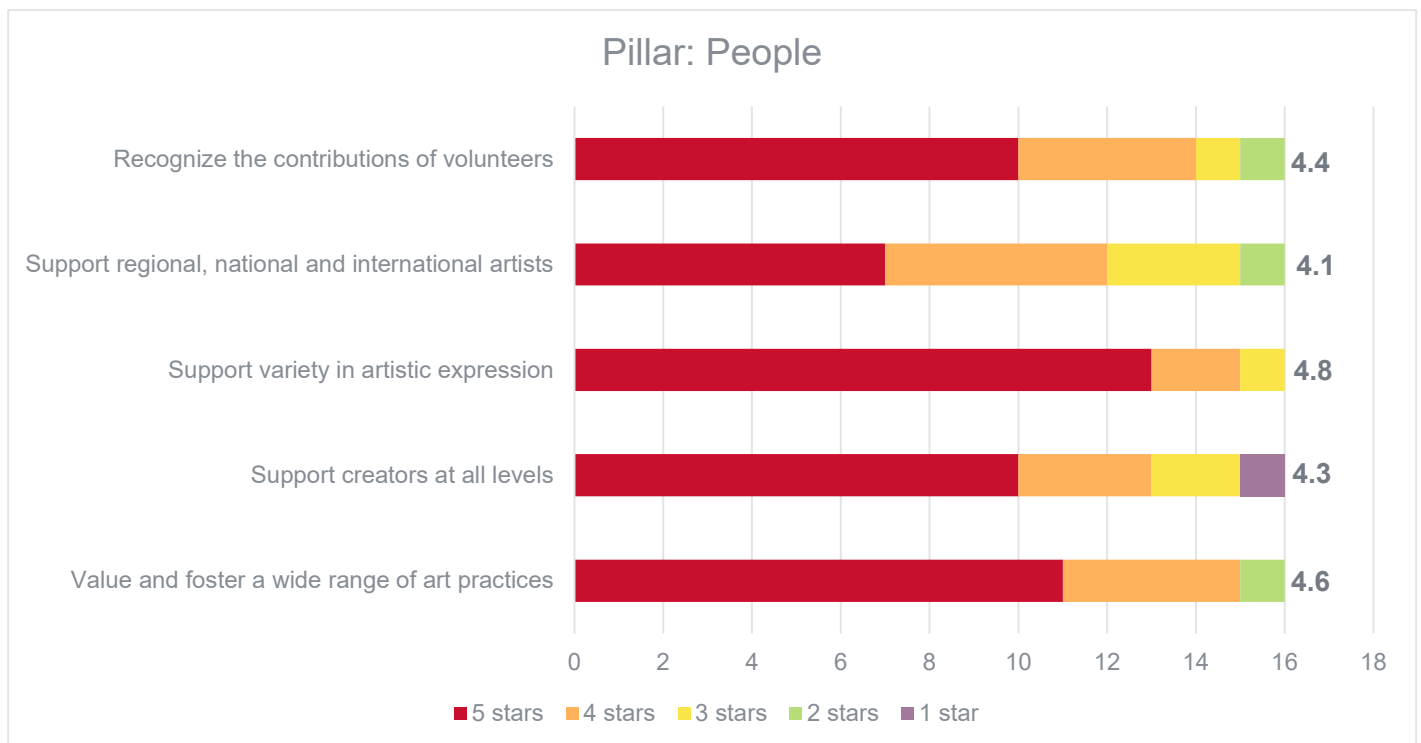


Figure 2 People

Community: Groups that create or participate in arts and culture.

Participants expressed strong support for the policy's focus on advocating for resources, particularly affordable studio and performance spaces. However, some felt that advocacy alone is not enough and that partnerships with other sectors would be more effective. Additionally, participants emphasized the arts' role in promoting Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) and improving community well-being, citing research linking arts education to better health outcomes. The overall average rating of each guiding principle is included at the end of each bar in the graph.

Verbatim Comments

YES!!! Thank You [re: advocating for resources].

Affordable studios and performance spaces are few and hard to come by. The new policy has a great focus on advocacy [re: advocating for resources].

Advocating for studios etc is not as strong as partnering with...

Collaboration is important and creativity is effective. Arts can champion DEI in diverse Calgary sectors.

According to UNICEF report on child wellness, Canada ranks 30th among the 38 wealthiest countries in child wellness. It is proven through rigorous research that arts education leads to better health.

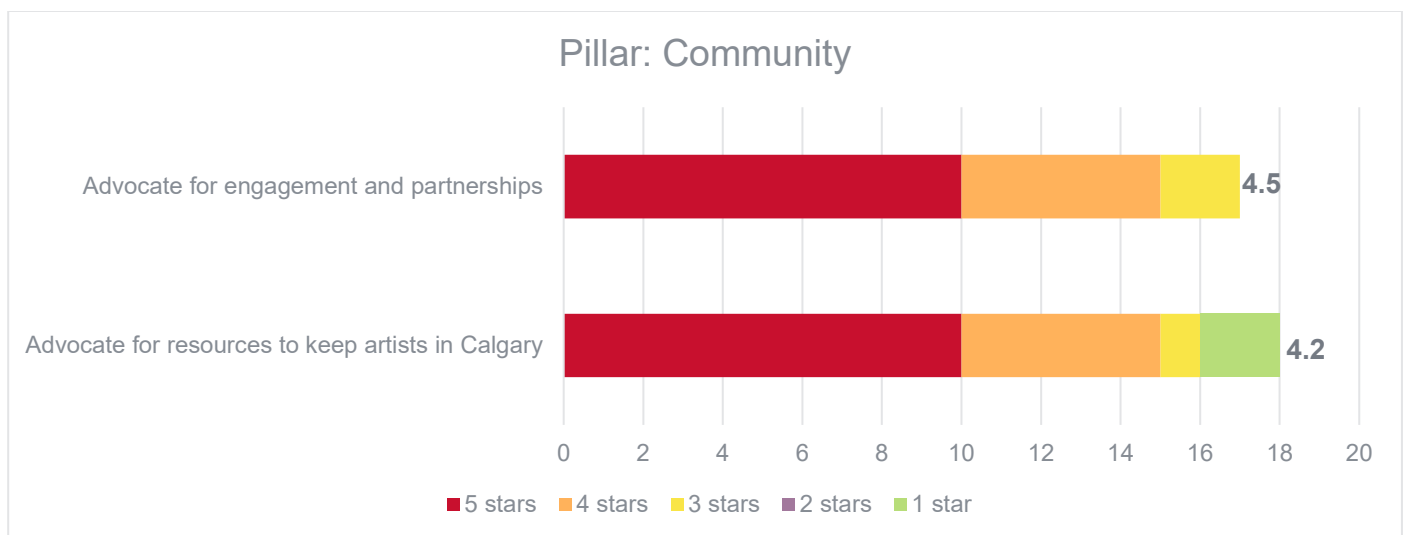


Figure 3 Community

Enable: Funders and advocates supporting arts and culture.

Participants agreed with the importance of enabling the arts sector but emphasized that greater policy support, stronger collaboration with private funders, and increased government investment are necessary to make this commitment more effective. The overall average rating of the guiding principle is included at the end of the bar in the graph.

Verbatim Comments

Good idea, in the policy, this could be supported even more.

Private funders and for profit organizations should be included to be truly collaborative.

For many years I've attempted to support and grow the arts and culture center in Airdrie but it is difficult without government support.

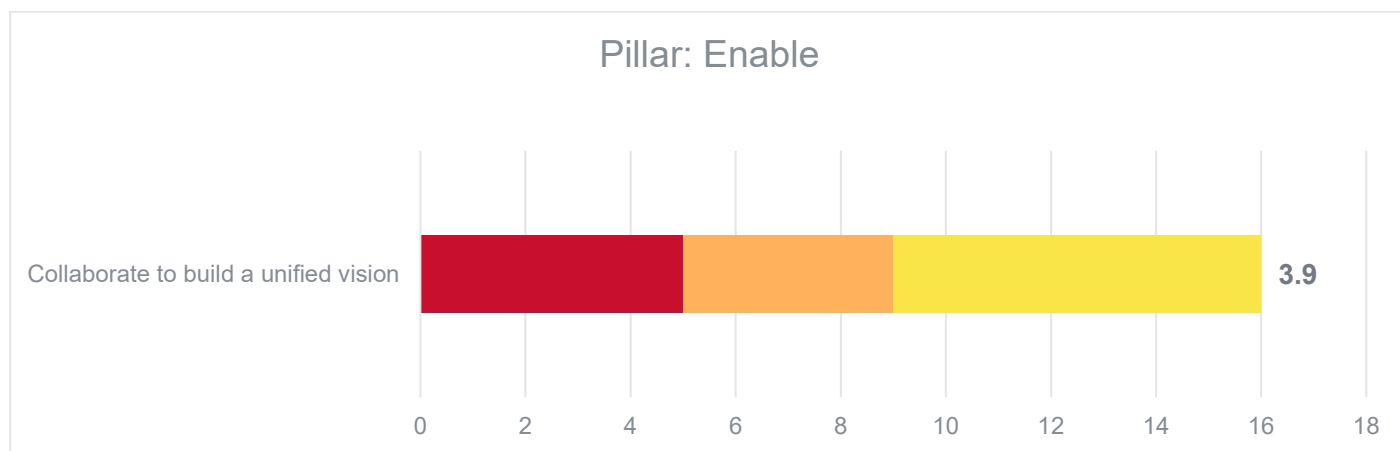


Figure 4 Enable



Equity: Breaking down systemic barriers.

While participants supported the focus on equity, they emphasized the need for clearer definitions, a balanced approach to investment, and a more inclusive framework that does not feel one-size-fits-all. Some also expressed a desire to see more concrete actions to back up these principles. The overall average rating of each guiding principle is included at the end of each bar in the graph.

Verbatim Comments

Very selective [re: celebrate diversity].

Definition of “impacted groups” is not well defined in the policy. By creating a new, detailed definition it would ensure discrimination does not occur towards certain groups [re: eliminate systemic barriers].

Yes, we should focus on not a “1 size fits all approach” but policy in itself feels very one sized by effecting only “impacted groups.” The words “Impacted groups” is an extremely broad term which does not have a clear definition in the policy [re: champion understanding].

“Prioritizing” investments is unnecessary language. “Balancing” is the way to go to avoid reverse resentment and continuously reinvent systemic issues.

Those principles are wonderful. I hope detailed actions are planned and carried out.

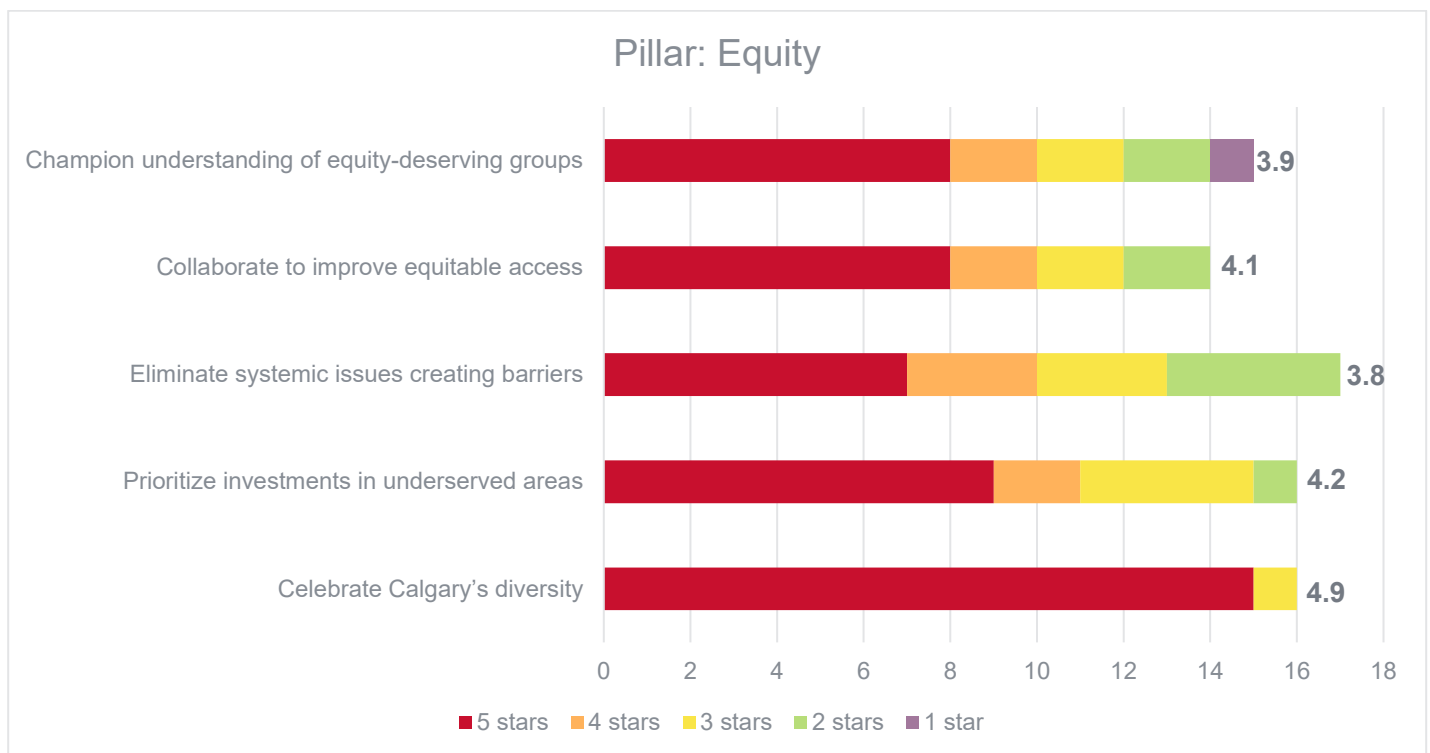


Figure 5 Equity

Awareness: Promotion and education

Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring broad and inclusive recognition of artists rather than focusing on a select few. They emphasized that City support in understanding audience preferences would strengthen other policy areas. Additionally, participants suggested exploring private sector incentives to boost investment in arts celebrations. Finally, engagement and education were seen as key tools for building public appreciation of the arts. The overall average rating of each guiding principle is included at the end of each bar in the graph.

Verbatim Comments

Very specific individuals [re: celebrate contributions of the arts sector].

This is an integral aspect of being an artist, and support from the City in this pillar would lead to successful outcomes of other pillars [re: understand audience preferences].

Can we provide incentives for the private sector to invest in these celebrations?

Engagement and education is invaluable. Those principles are wonderful. I hope detailed actions are planned and carried out.

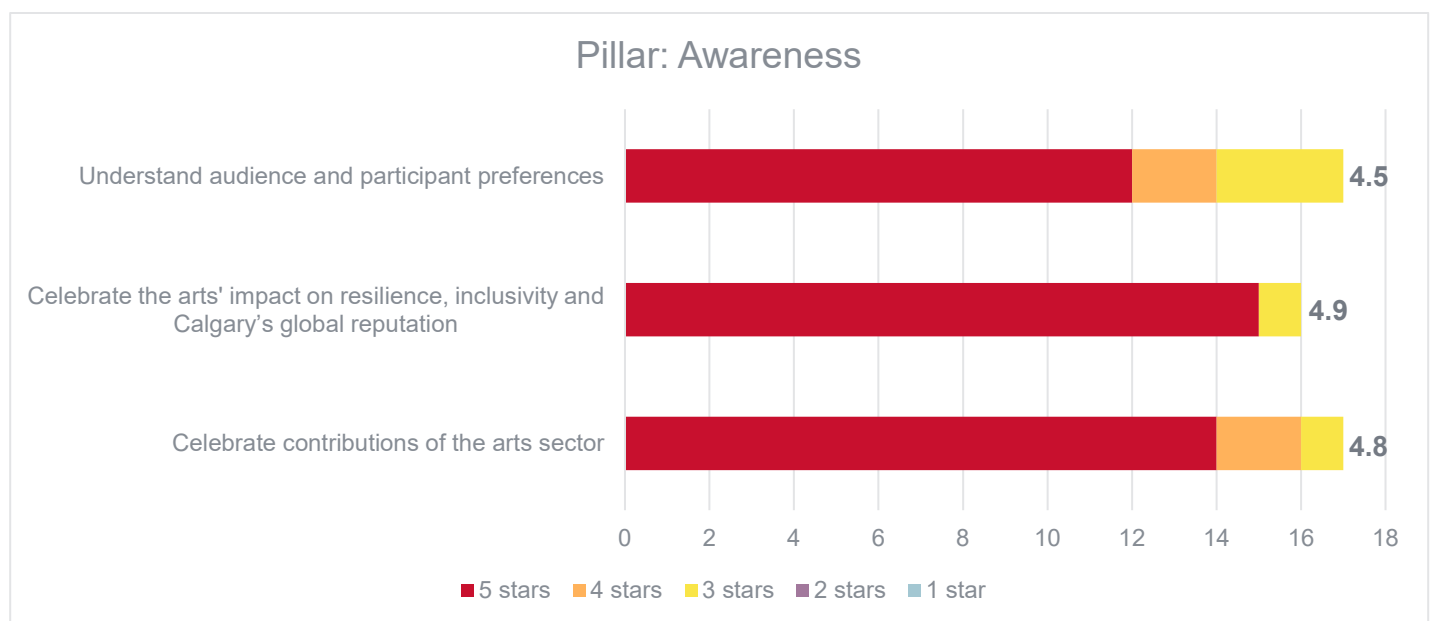


Figure 6 Awareness

Data: Continuous Improvement

Participants emphasized that having a greater understanding of best practices from past initiatives and clearer guidelines for how this will be implemented would be beneficial, while emphasizing their overall support for the policy. The overall average rating of each guiding principle is included at the end of each bar in the graph.

Verbatim Comments

We wish more clear plans of support were stated in new policy. We love this idea and want to see it supported in more clear details [re: championing sustainability].

Can we see historical data related to this policy? It would be helpful to see what worked and didn't in the past.

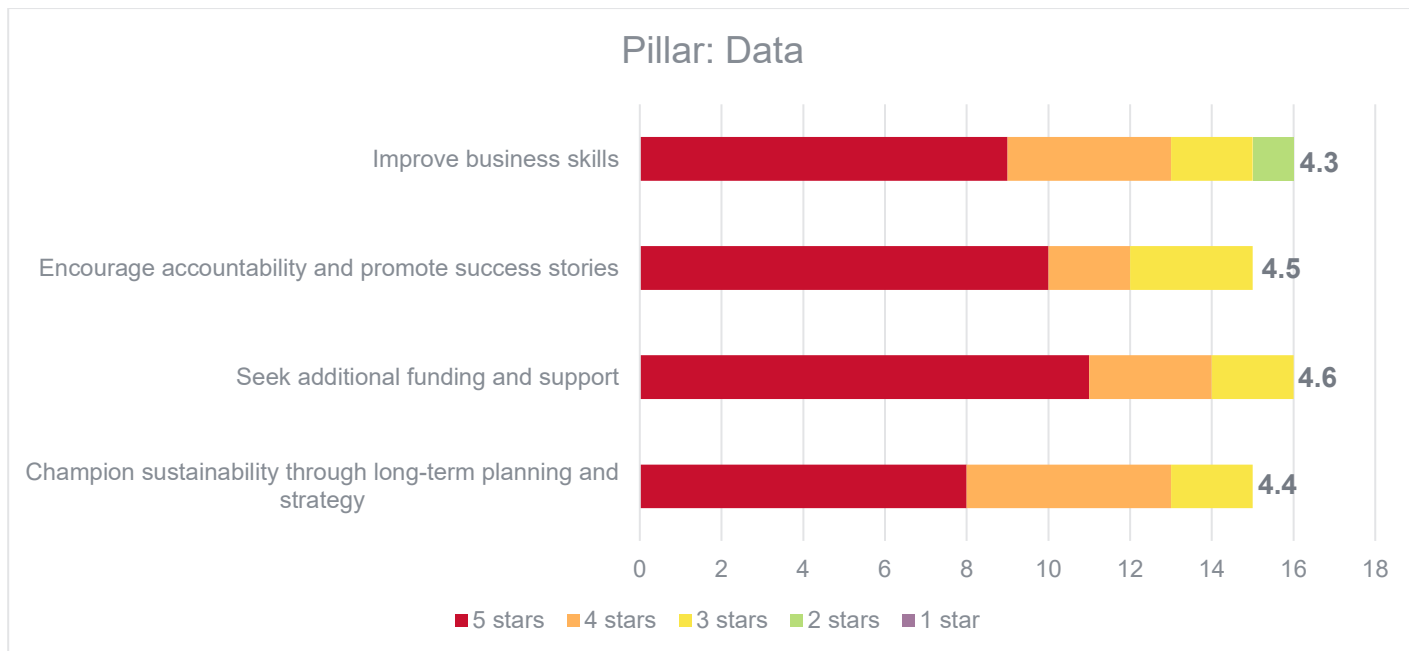


Figure 7 Data

Anything missing or unclear

Participants felt that the policy needed to include explicit mentions and clearer language around supports for artists with disabilities, emphasizing that it is often hard to connect with these artists. Other participants emphasized that supporting artists in their professional growth is needed and highlighted that one potential way to do this is through incentivizing the private sector to hire them.

Verbatim Comments

I'd like to see incentives for the private sector to acknowledge and hire artists for applied arts positions within their organizations (e.g., writers, graphic designers, video artists).

Please mention "disability" related words and phrases often. There are many different disabilities. The voices from intellectual and developmental disability communities are hard to be heard.

Artists do not earn much salary or income, and funding to assist their growth and motivation is definitely helpful.

Workshop with Arts Organization Representatives

During Phase 2 engagement, workshops were held with representatives of arts organizations to gather feedback. These workshops aimed to ensure the proposed content reflects the needs, priorities, and experiences of Calgary's arts sector, identify gaps and barriers, clarify expectations and responsibilities, and assess if the proposed content is clear, actionable, and relevant.

Participants were asked to reflect on whether the proposed guiding principles aligned with their organizations' missions, priorities, and operational realities. Discussions focused on how the proposed content would influence funding, sustainability, accessibility, and equity in the arts sector. Participants also explored their role in supporting Calgary's arts sector and provided feedback on areas needing further clarification.

Through small table discussions, participants engaged with the various content areas, shared insights, and identified opportunities for collaboration.

Strengthening Support for the Civic Arts Policy

Participants generally supported the proposed content and emphasized that they are in alignment with the current needs of the arts sector, especially the statements regarding Calgary's "global reputation" and the "unified vision" that is left undefined. They emphasized the need for clear definitions and stronger commitments to ensure the policy was actionable and widely supported. There was concern that broad language, such as "arts organizations," "cultural powerhouses," and "impacted groups," could lead to confusion or misinterpretation. Additionally, there was a desire for the policy to explicitly clarify and acknowledge the role of the arts in shaping Calgary's identity, making the city more livable, and fostering economic and cultural vibrancy.

Successful Practices to Adopt

Participants identified several best practices that could enhance the effectiveness of the Civic Arts Policy, including mentorship programs, collaborative initiatives, and public education on the value of the arts. Programs like Swallow-A-Bicycle and ArtsVest, which support capacity building in smaller arts organizations, were cited as examples of successful models. Some participants suggested utilizing a community ambassador program to create a more sustainable arts sector.

Funding and Resource Challenges

A recurring concern among participants was the ongoing challenges related to funding and resource accessibility, which significantly impact the time and capacity of those who work in the arts sector, whose focus is mainly on programs that align with the vision and mission of the organization they work for. Many smaller organizations and volunteer-run groups struggle to secure funding due to the competitive nature, complicated grant application processes, unclear eligibility criteria, or their niche areas of interest. Participants emphasized the need for more capacity-building initiatives and targeted support, as well as transparent and equitable funding distribution, with clear expectations on success rates and measurable outcomes. Greater information about procurement processes such as how arts organizations can access funding, contracts, or resources would be valuable for arts organizations and leaders. Sustainable, diverse funding was identified as critical, with an emphasis on accountability measures so that organizations that did not meet their target goals would not continue to receive the same amount of funding. Participants emphasized that there is a greater need for funding from the private sector and questioned what The City's roles should be in providing resources and programs to support arts organizations.

Strengthening Collaboration Efforts Within the Arts Sector

Many participants felt that collaboration is widely supported but expressed that while resource sharing is one way to support the arts community, it has not worked as successfully in the past as Calgary's arts sector remains siloed with few opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge sharing. Some organizations, particularly smaller ones, feel disconnected from larger institutions and municipal initiatives, and felt The City could help facilitate connections, where possible. There was a strong interest in the policy creating more networking and collaboration opportunities where funded and unfunded artists and organizations can connect, share data and resources, and develop joint projects for the betterment of the entire arts ecosystem.

Partnerships With the Private Sector

Participants emphasized the need to collaborate with the private sector in supporting the arts, whether through funding, sponsorships, or partnerships that align business and cultural interests. They recognize the importance of these partnerships, not only for financial support but also for building community credibility. Even small contributions, such as donations from local businesses, are beneficial. However, securing and maintaining these relationships requires significant effort, with organizations needing to continuously engage with businesses, follow up on potential sponsorships, and foster long-term partnerships. Many arts groups struggle with capacity, as maintaining these relationships adds to already heavy workloads, contributing to burnout.

Mid-sized sponsorships are more common, with large-scale corporate sponsorships becoming increasingly rare despite the value they bring to artists and organizations. Additionally, corporate sponsorship can sometimes limit artistic freedom, as businesses may avoid supporting projects that highlight controversial social issues. This raises broader concerns about aligning sponsorship opportunities with artistic integrity. Participants

also noted the importance of making arts sponsorships mutually beneficial, suggesting cross-promotion strategies to engage businesses in meaningful ways. There is a need for The City to play a more active role in helping arts organizations connect with potential private sector partners and secure sustainable investment in the arts.

Engagement, Awareness and Audience Participation

A key challenge identified was the difficulty in engaging diverse audiences and effectively communicating the value of the arts. Some participants noted that barriers to broader community participation include engagement efforts that feel disingenuous and misconceptions about the arts, such as the belief that they are only for a niche audience. Long term engagement, unified public awareness campaigns and social media were suggested ways to educate people about the arts and showcase how the arts contribute to economic development, mental health, and social cohesion. Participants also emphasized the need to help Calgarians understand the arts and address barriers to audience engagement, particularly for underserved communities who may not feel represented or included in Calgary's arts scene. They also emphasized that there needs to be greater effort to include diverse audiences in the arts sector. Others proposed that education is needed to shift public perception regarding the cost of arts experiences, and they felt that there needs to be a mindset shift where arts are valued similarly to other industries, rather than being seen as an afterthought or luxury.

Equity and Inclusion in the Arts

Participants highlighted that equity means different things depending on the artistic practice and it was important that the policy was inclusive and broad to ensure all artists and organizations feel included. There were concerns about the lack of accreditation for consultants to support this work and the financial burden of implementing equity measures, which is often not accounted for

in operating funding, particularly for smaller organizations with limited budgets. They emphasized that where an organization's mandate aligns with equity, it will be easier for them to reflect equity in their work. However, participants recognized the challenge of balancing equity-focused work with audience demand, emphasizing that larger, more stable organizations can take greater risks. While they recognize the importance of increasing representation and inclusion, they noted that programming must also align with audience interests to maintain engagement and attendance. They emphasized the need for strategies that support equity while also ensuring financial sustainability and broad audience appeal. Participants highlighted that this is an opportunity for larger organizations to partner with small or mid-sized organizations to hold shows and events, ensuring that more stories are told and artists are being given opportunities to grow and develop.

Accessibility

Infrastructure and accessibility remain a significant concern, with participants highlighting gaps between meeting accessibility standards and truly addressing community needs. There is a lack of accountability in ensuring accessibility commitments are upheld, and financial barriers often make inclusive practices difficult to sustain. Participants questioned who bears the financial burden of accessibility efforts and stressed that accessibility should be embedded in facility design from the outset rather than treated as an afterthought, as seen in challenges with newer venues. Additionally, many arts spaces are privately owned, making it difficult for municipally funded organizations to improve accessibility within these venues.

Infrastructure

Participants emphasized the need for more affordable and appropriately sized arts spaces to support a diverse range of artists and organizations. Many small companies struggle to afford large venues and require mid-sized

theaters (around 200 seats) to align with their audience size and artistic vision. However, most grants do not cover venue costs, creating additional financial barriers. Advocacy is needed for accessible and affordable housing, studios, galleries, and performance spaces. Additionally, parking and transportation remain major concerns, making it difficult for both artists and audiences to access downtown venues. High parking costs and limited transit options further impact participation, highlighting the need for creative solutions like pop-up programming in alternative locations.

The rising cost of renting accessible spaces also limits participation, and there are concerns about losing key arts venues, such as the Globe Theatre, without adequate replacements. Participants emphasized the need for The City to provide affordable, accessible spaces and ensure that accessibility is an intentional and well-supported aspect of Calgary's arts infrastructure.

Data Collection and Reporting Challenges

Participants raised concerns about data collection and reporting, particularly regarding language barriers, shifting terminology, and unclear expectations. Many felt that industry buzzwords like "inclusivity" are difficult for newcomers to understand and that reporting requirements should use plain language. There was discomfort with measuring concepts like equity and inclusion, as some organizations believe their role is simply to welcome everyone rather than categorize participation. Differences in reporting expectations between private and municipal funders were also noted, with private funders seeking simple, quantifiable data, while arts organizations prioritize storytelling and impact beyond numerical metrics. Participants emphasized the need for platforms to share these stories more effectively with the public.

Volunteers and Governance Challenges

Participants emphasized that many arts organizations rely on volunteers, particularly smaller ones. However, recruitment and retention have become increasingly difficult, especially after COVID, as volunteers face competing demands on their time. Different organizations use volunteers in varying capacities, but managing them requires staff time and resources, which can limit their impact. Additionally, the financial value of volunteer contributions is often overlooked in reporting, despite their significant role in

sustaining arts organizations. Recognizing volunteer labour in funding applications, such as through matching funds, could provide a more accurate reflection of their value. There is a need for greater incentives and recognition for volunteers, particularly in ways that acknowledge the skills they develop and contribute. Finally, many arts organizations are run by volunteer boards, but these boards can be hesitant to take risks, which may slow down innovation and equity-focused work. Training in governance, financial responsibilities, and decision-making could help board members feel more confident in leading change and supporting new ideas.



Equity and Anti-racism Workshop

A virtual workshop was held with equity-deserving artists to ensure the proposed content meaningfully reflects principles of equity, anti-racism, and Truth and Reconciliation. The objective of this session was to validate whether the proposed guiding principles address systemic barriers and create meaningful opportunities for historically marginalized artists. After listening to a presentation, participants were invited to share their lived experiences and provide feedback on whether the policy supports them by reflecting on the following questions:

Do the proposed guiding principles reflect your lived experiences and priorities as an artist? If not, what's missing or needs improvement?

Do you feel the policy effectively addresses barriers in the arts?

Discussions also explored gaps in the policy, challenges in accessing funding and opportunities, and the role of accountability in ensuring equity-driven commitments lead to real change. This session built on feedback from Phase 1 and was an essential step in refining the policy to better serve Calgary's diverse arts community before it moves forward for finalization and Council approval.

Inclusion and Representation in Policy

Participants emphasized the need for clear language in the policy to ensure that equity-deserving artists are not merely included but actively centered. Some were concerned the language used in some City policies can create an "us vs. them" dynamic, reinforcing systemic barriers rather than dismantling them. They also felt that language around intersectionality would be more specific and provide greater clarity. They called for policy wording that reflects shared leadership and community-driven decision-making rather than a top-down approach.

Sustainability of Equity Work

A few participants raised concerns about the political and social climate surrounding equity and anti-racism efforts. They pointed to instances where diversity programs have been defunded in other regions and questioned whether Calgary's commitments were strong enough to withstand external pressures. Some also expressed concerns that organizations feel pressure to balance equity work with financial sustainability, as some audiences or funders may not fully support it.

Accountability and Implementation

Participants expressed concern over how The City and other groups would be held accountable for implementing the policy's commitments. Participants wanted to know how progress would be tracked and how artists would be able to verify whether the policy was having a tangible impact and felt using stronger words like "should" would demonstrate stronger commitment. Some suggested that without clear accountability measures, there is a risk that commitments to equity and anti-racism will not be fully realized.

Indigenous Leadership and Truth & Reconciliation

Several participants stressed that Indigenous artists and communities must be prioritized in the policy as they are the original stewards of the land. Some questioned whether existing efforts are enough and whether Indigenous-led decision-making was being meaningfully integrated into the policy rather than just consulted on.

Language and Framing of Equity Work

There were concerns about how equity-related commitments will be framed in the policy. Some felt that equity-deserving communities have always existed and contributed, and that the policy should not position their inclusion as something new. Others pointed out that the wording in all City policies, not just the Civic Arts Policy, should avoid reinforcing outdated power structures that suggest marginalized communities are simply being "allowed in" rather than already having a rightful place in the arts sector.

Systemic Barriers and Funding Challenges

Discussions highlighted ongoing structural challenges that disproportionately impact equity-deserving artists. Participants raised concerns about access to funding and resources, noting that arts funding can often favour more established organizations rather than emerging or grassroots initiatives. Concerns were raised about sustainability as participants recognized that not everyone benefits immediately from Calgary's arts ecosystem. Suggested actions to reduce barriers included offering financial support to selected artists for a couple of years, such as \$1,000, while also providing open mic opportunities or supporting journalism to give back to the community and providing more small and mid-size spaces for artists to work and perform that are free or low cost, like Toronto's two-year spaces. Additionally, participants identified that artists need support in legal matters, networking, and sharing their success stories.

Equity and Diversity in Leadership

There was a strong call for greater representation of equity-deserving artists in leadership roles. Some participants expressed that decisions about equity and anti-racism are often made without the direct involvement of those most affected. They urged The City to ensure that leadership positions, advisory roles, and funding decision-making bodies reflect diverse perspectives.

The Role of Storytelling and Artistic Expression

Artists spoke about the need to recognize storytelling, particularly through the arts, as a powerful tool for truth-telling and social change. They stressed that supporting diverse narratives is critical, but also that artists from equity-deserving backgrounds should not be expected to only create work about their identities or struggles. Collaboration across sectors was identified as key to ensuring everyone benefits while respecting diversity and appreciating the cultural and artistic value.



Sharing Circle with Indigenous Artists

During Phase 2 Engagement, an Indigenous Sharing Circle was held to gather feedback from Indigenous artists on the proposed content. The session began with a smudge and blessing from an Indigenous Elder with an extensive background in the arts, setting the stage for a respectful and culturally grounded discussion. A representative from the Indigenous Relations Office was also present to support the conversation. The goal of this engagement was to ensure the policy reflects Indigenous perspectives, addresses barriers to participation, and acknowledges the role of cultural practices in the arts. During the conversation participants were asked to reflect on the following questions:

Do the proposed guiding principles reflect your lived experiences and priorities as an artist? If not, what's missing or needs improvement?

Do you feel the policy effectively addresses barriers in the arts?

Participants shared their lived experiences, highlighting challenges in accessing funding, the need for greater recognition of Indigenous art forms, and the importance of cultural and accessible spaces. Discussions also explored opportunities for mentorship, youth engagement, and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into arts funding and infrastructure. This session was an important step in ensuring the policy aligns with Truth and Reconciliation and supports the long-term success of Indigenous artists and communities in Calgary.

Barriers to Arts Funding

Participants highlighted significant challenges in accessing arts funding, particularly for organizations that do not explicitly define themselves as arts-based but still deliver arts programming. Many felt that arts funding bodies have restrictive policies that exclude cultural initiatives and social wellness programs that incorporate art. Additionally, grant application processes were seen as complex and difficult to navigate, discouraging many from applying. There was a strong desire to see clearer, more inclusive definitions that recognize cultural art and healing as legitimate forms of artistic practice.

Visibility and Promotion of Indigenous Artists

Participants expressed the need for increased visibility and promotion of the diversity of Treaty 7 Nations within Calgary's arts. They cited efforts such as the Calgary Foundation for Indigenous Arts (CFIA) Indigenousizing spaces as a positive step, recognizing that renaming traditional spaces with Indigenous names helps foster inclusion. However, they emphasized that beyond naming,

sustained visibility and active promotion of Indigenous arts are essential.

Recognition of Cultural Art

The discussion emphasized the importance of equity in arts funding and recognition, particularly in the face of broader societal trends where equity, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) efforts are being rolled back in other places. Participants expressed concerns that certain types of Indigenous artistic expression, such as traditional practices and cultural art, are often overlooked in favour of art forms like canvas painting. They felt that cultural craft workers are artists, and that Indigenous cultural art is deeply connected to healing and should be recognized as such. Recognizing lived experiences and the role of art in healing was also seen as essential, with participants noting that art is a gateway to culture and ceremony. They also noted that these art forms are not exclusive to Indigenous people but serve as a bridge for cross-cultural understanding.

Accessibility to Spaces and Resources

The lack of affordable and dedicated arts spaces was a key concern. Participants proposed transforming underutilized city spaces into arts hubs that could serve as both creative spaces and business centers. These spaces could provide mentorship opportunities, grant awareness, and career-launching platforms for Indigenous artists. A model similar to artist-run centers, but with City guidance and support, was suggested to better meet the needs of Indigenous and Racialized artists.

Mentorship and Support for Emerging Artists

There was a strong emphasis on the need for mentorship and programming tailored to Indigenous artists, particularly youth and emerging artists from Treaty 7 Nations. Participants stressed the importance of creating structured mentorship opportunities, on-site

programming in Treaty 7 communities, and more accessible information about potential funding opportunities for Indigenous artists exploring traditional practices. One participant emphasized that they appreciated the opportunity they were given to learn how to cedar weave and stressed the importance of making other Indigenous artists aware of these opportunities.

Cultural Integrity and Vetting Processes

Concerns were raised about cultural appropriation and the need for proper vetting of individuals claiming Indigenous identity for funding or artistic opportunities. Participants noted that the misrepresentation of Indigenous artists can harm the reputation and achievements of genuine Indigenous creators. While vetting processes are not directly addressed in the draft policy, participants emphasized that developing a transparent and respectful approach to verification is essential to protecting Indigenous arts and culture.



Next Steps

The Civic Arts Policy will now undergo internal reviews. Once this process is complete, the final draft of the Civic Arts Policy will be presented to the Community Development Committee for consideration, with the intention of taking it to City Council for approval in 2026.

The next step is turning this policy into action. How can we create meaningful change? What do we need to get there? That's where the [Cultural Plan for Calgary](#) comes in.

The Cultural Plan for Calgary is the 10-year action plan to support and grow arts and culture in the city. It sets a shared vision and outlines actions to ensure Calgary's arts and culture sectors are vibrant, inclusive and economically resilient.

Over the next two years, the Cultural Plan will be updated for the next decade. The project will include gathering input from Calgarians to help shape the vision, priorities and actions in the updated plan.

Appendices

Appendix A: Demographics

The graphs below reflect demographic data collected from 9 unique surveys on the portal page, if participants chose to complete the survey, all demographic questions were optional.

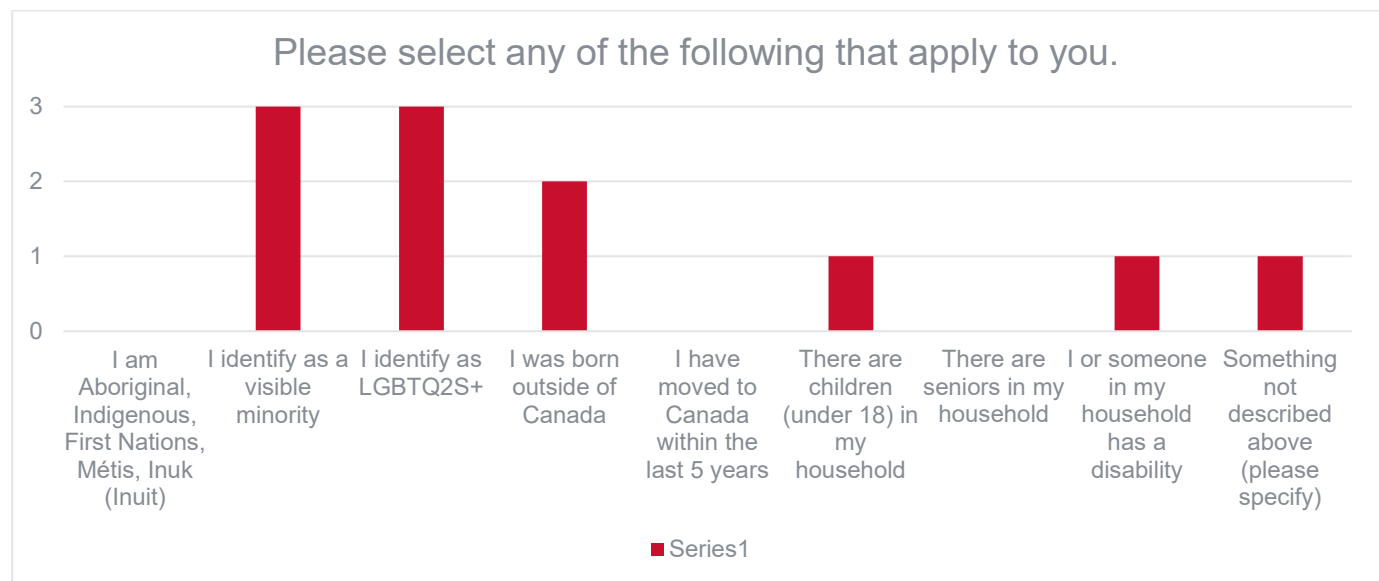


Figure 8 Demographics

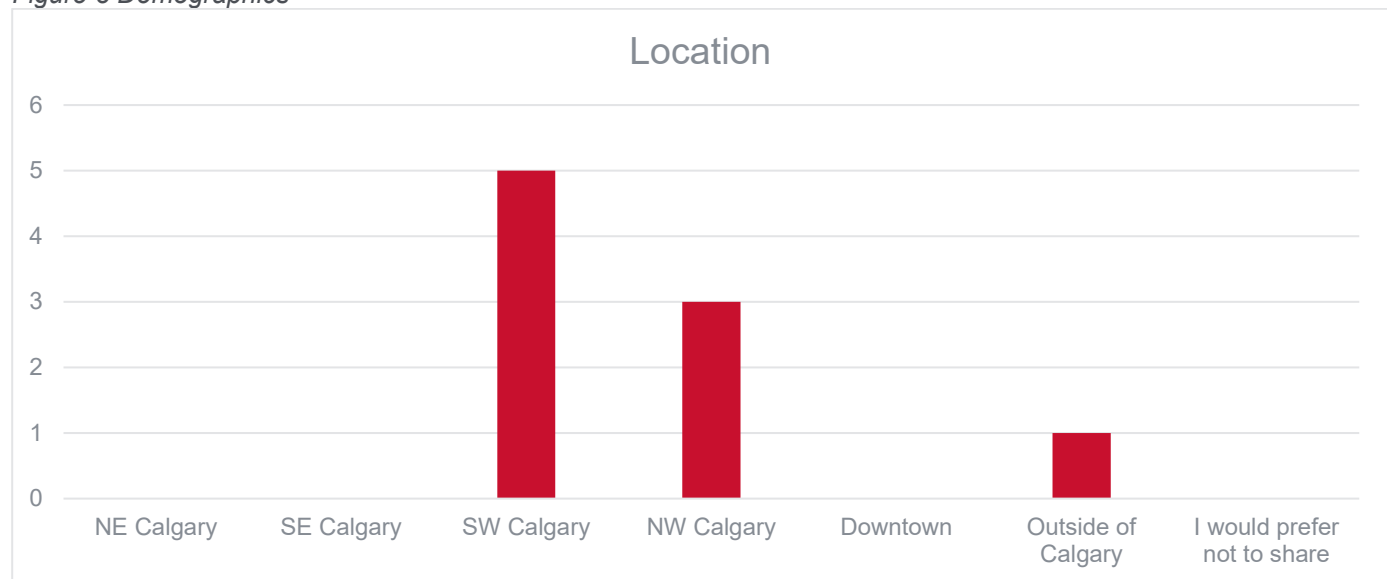


Figure 9 Location

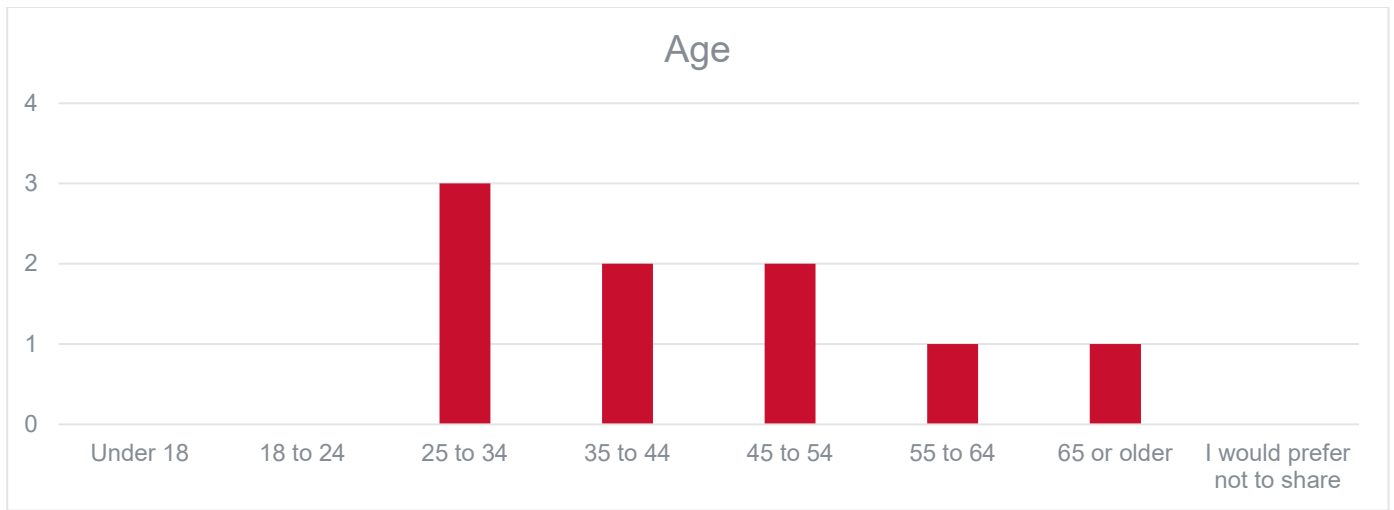


Figure 10 Age

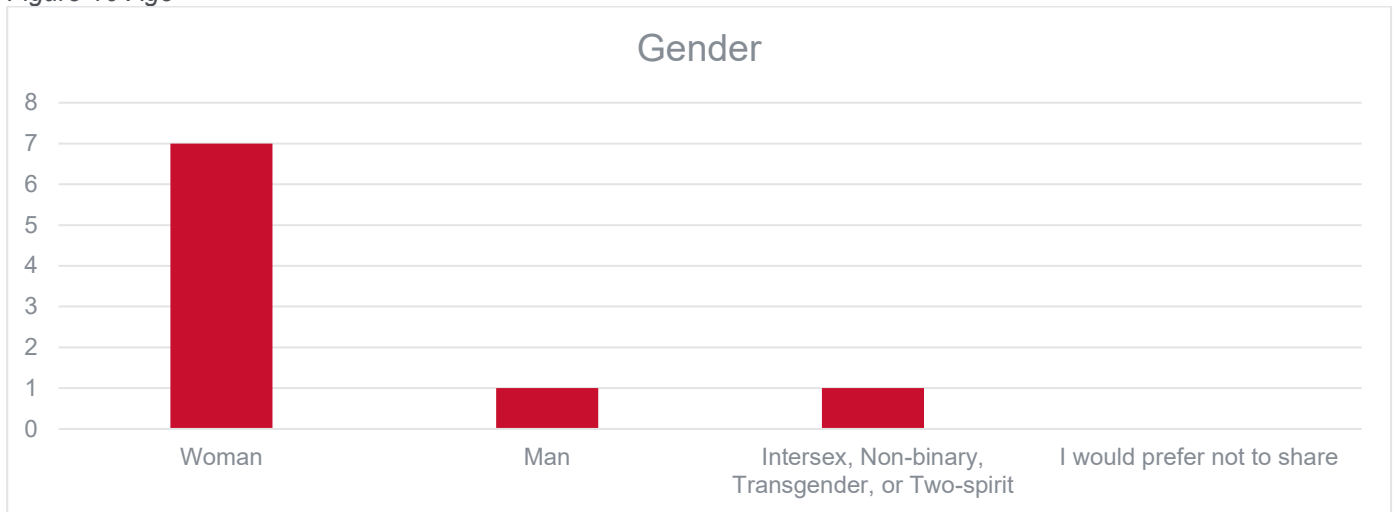


Figure 11 Gender

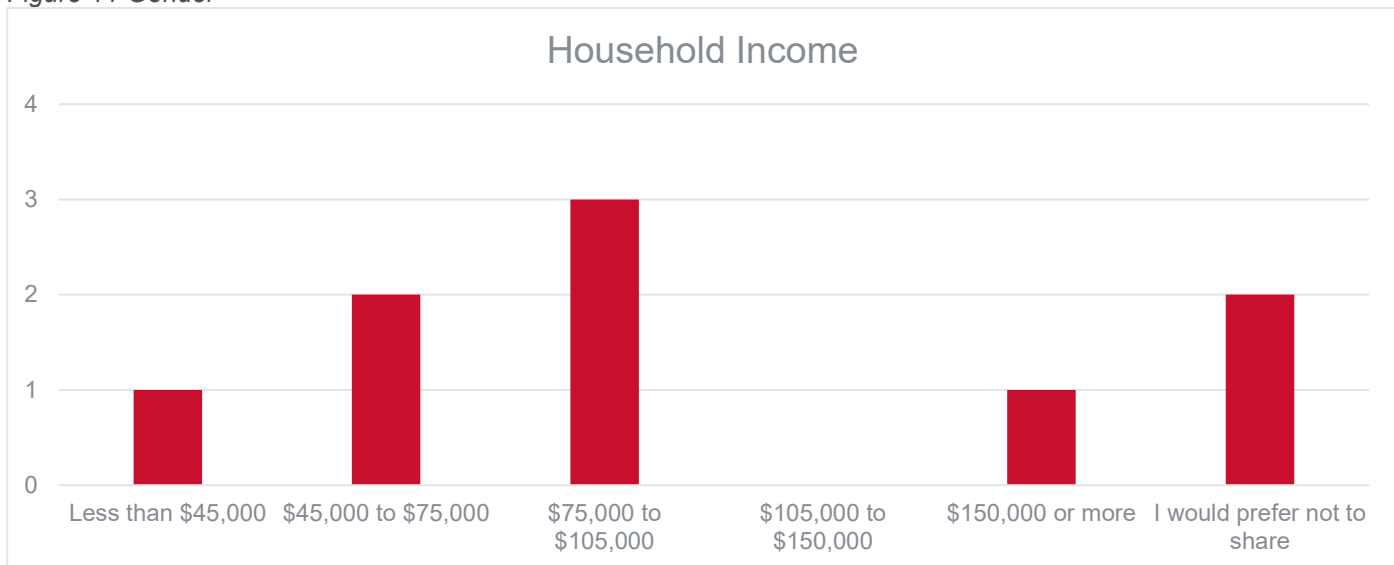


Figure 12 Household Income

Appendix B: Explanation - Verbatim comments and quotes

Verbatim comments and quotes, including all feedback, suggestions, comments and messages that were collected online and in-person through the engagement, were presented in their entirety in this report. All input has been reviewed and provided to Project Teams to be considered in decision making for the project.

Any personal identifying information has been removed from the verbatim comments presented here. Comments or portions of comments that contain profanity, or that are not in compliance with The [City's Respectful Workplace Policy](#) or [Online Tool Moderation Practice](#), have also been removed from participant submissions.

Wherever possible the remainder of the submissions remains. No other edits to the feedback have been made, and the verbatim comments are as received. As a result, some of the content in this verbatim record may still be considered offensive or distasteful to some readers.

Appendix C: Explanation – Engagement at The City

"Engagement" at The City of Calgary is defined as: Purposeful dialogue between The City and citizens and interest-holders to gather information to influence decision making.

Engagement is:

- **Citizen-centric** - focusing on hearing the needs and voices of both directly impacted and indirectly impacted Calgarians.
- **Accountable** - upholding the commitments that The City makes to Calgarians and other interested and impacted parties by demonstrating that the results and outcomes of the engagement processes are consistent with the approved plans for engagement.
- **Inclusive** - making best efforts to reach, involve and hear from those who are impacted directly or indirectly.
- **Committed** - allocating sufficient time and resources for effective engagement of citizens and interest-holders.
- **Responsive** - acknowledging Calgarian's and other interested and impacted parties' concerns; and
- **Transparent** - providing clear and complete information around decision processes, procedures, and constraints.

The City's commitment to transparent and inclusive engagement processes is outlined in the [Engage Policy \(CS009\)](#).

Appendix D: Explanation – Research versus Engagement

Engagement is a professional discipline that incorporates a variety of methodologies to gather people's opinions and views on specific issues or topics, to provide information for decision making. Engagement often involves two-way dialogues or conversations with the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the issues.

Unlike Research, Engagement opportunities are inclusive and usually open to all interested parties who would like to have a say about the issue or topic at hand. The outputs of Engagement activities are descriptive and provide a deeper understanding of the views and sentiments of the participants. The nature of these inclusive techniques mean that information collected is directional and, as with qualitative research, cannot be generalized to the larger population.

Engagement at The City of Calgary is defined as purposeful dialogue between The City and interest-holders to gather information to influence decision making. More specifically, the Engage Resource Unit works with project teams at The City to meet project needs and ensure citizens have their say about those projects.

The City has a six-step process for engagement with citizens:

1. Assess the need for engagement.
 2. Develop a plan – determine engagement roadmap and budget.
 3. Tell the story – create content to inform and educate interest-holders.
 4. Raise awareness – promote opportunities for interest-holders to participate.
 5. Connect – open opportunities for interest-holders to provide input.
 6. Report back and evaluate – loop back to share what was heard and what was done with stakeholder input.
-
- Unlike Research, Engagement opportunities are inclusive and usually open to all interested parties who would like to have a say about the issue or topic at hand. The outputs of Engagement activities are descriptive and provide a deeper understanding of the views and sentiments of the participants. The nature of these inclusive techniques mean that information collected is directional and, as with qualitative research, cannot be generalized to the larger population.
 - Engagement is not meant to be a representative sample of interest-holders while quantitative Research methodologies are designed so that the data collected from a randomly selected sample of individuals is considered to be statistically representative of the larger population.
 - Research seeks answers to questions that are important to The City and looks to represent the views of Calgary's population using analytical and statistical methods. Engagement seeks feedback on issues that are important to citizen groups and looks to reflect perspectives of those citizens that are most interested or impacted by City activities.