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**COLORADO
MEDIA
PROJECT**



Arts & Culture Community Listening Insights Report

Hearken | Colorado Media Project
September 27, 2019

Purpose:

We know there are gaps in how arts and culture is covered throughout Colorado, which is why we're working to build better solutions for how relevant information is shared with local residents.

But before we can figure out the best way to overcome this challenge, we need to first listen to the community members we're seeking to serve and understand their needs. We not only want to foster collaboration among news and arts organizations, but among members of the public, as well.

With support from the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, Colorado Media Project has joined with Colorado Public Radio/Denverite and Rocky Mountain PBS to explore arts and culture coverage in the state.

Through Hearken, Colorado Media Project launched a statewide collaborative community listening project with the goal of talking to dozens of Colorado residents over the summer about how they engage with arts and culture in our state — and how media outlets and art organizations can best serve those needs. The goal of the collaborative project was to involve as many individuals as possible to increase the diversity of lived experiences and information gaps we could collectively understand.

By taking 30 minutes to learn about a community member's experience with arts and culture in Colorado, participating individuals and organizations:

- Learned more about the audience they're serving
- Built new relationships with individuals who could participate in another area of their work — like joining a community advisory board or becoming a member or volunteer
- Identified challenges their audience is facing and brainstorm solutions to better serve their needs

Process:

Hearken developed the project guidelines, community listening session template and interview tracking framework for Colorado Media Project's Collaborative Arts & Culture Community Listening Project.

We launched the project by training about 40 participants at the Arts and Culture Project Kickoff Workshop on June 25, 2019, on how to conduct empathy interviews. Hearken provided follow-up framework and documentation.

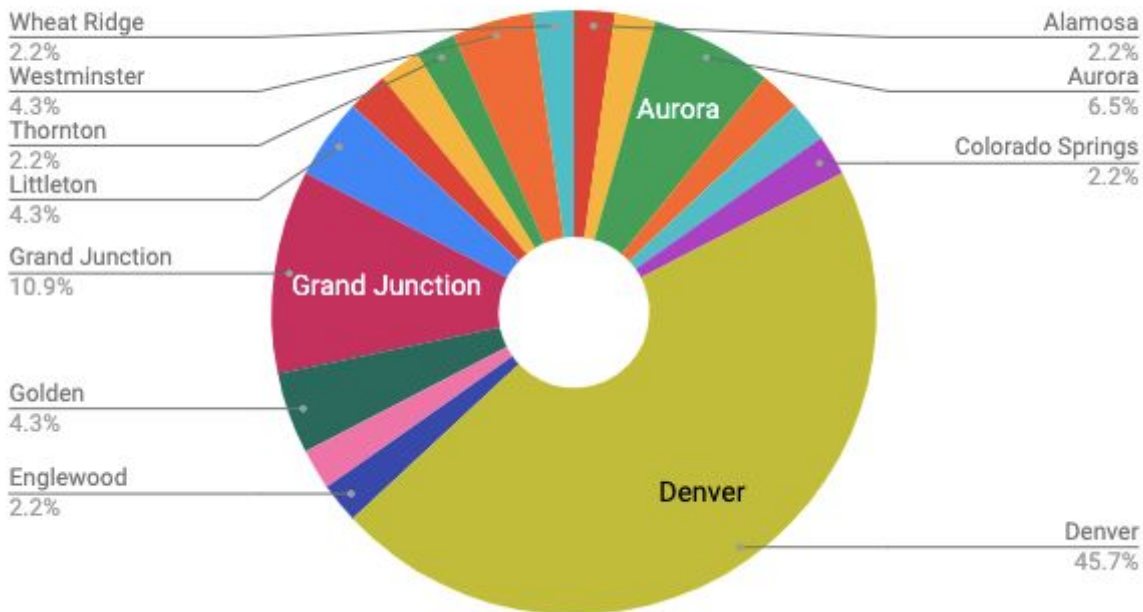
The project guidelines included a step-by-step guide for participant outreach, preparing for the interview, conducting the community listening session and tracking key data points. We set the goal of conducting 50 percent of the community listening sessions with people who identified as members of marginalized or underrepresented communities.

Who we talked to:

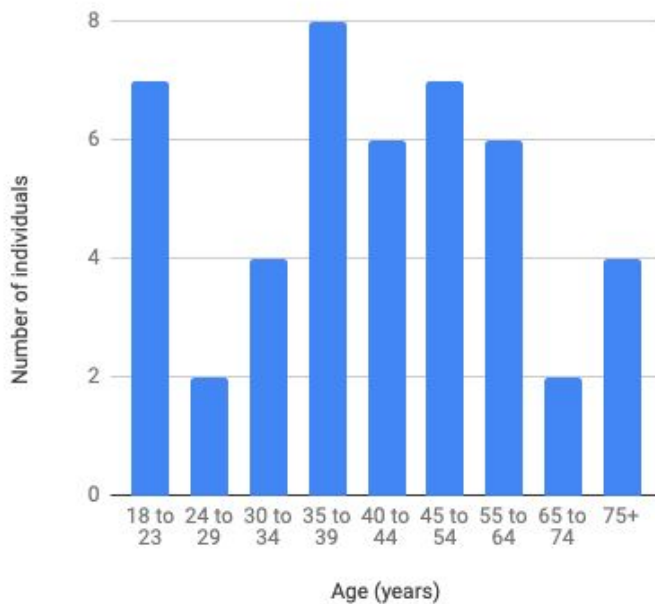
Over the course of three months, 19 interviewers (including representatives from RMPBS, CPR, Colorado Media Project and Hearken) logged interviews with 46 individuals from across Colorado.

Of the 46 individuals we spoke with, 27 people (59 percent) said that they identify as a member of a marginalized or underrepresented community. Self-identified communities included: black, Latinx, LGBTQ, living with a disability, Japanese-American and more.

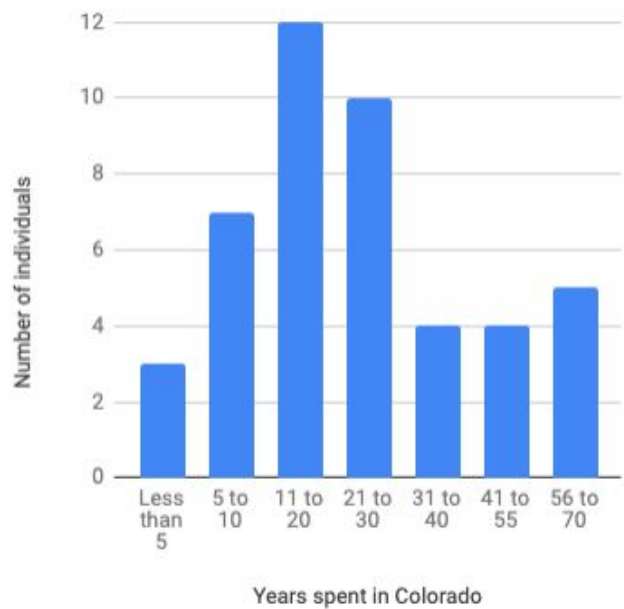
City of Residence



Age of interviewees



Years spent in Colorado



Community Personas Interviewed:

Arts and Culture Funder/Convener: These individuals work with high-level arts funding in Colorado. They also create and maintain gathering and workspaces for the arts community.

- **Motivators:** They are concerned with bringing Colorado arts and culture to a national stage, in terms of funding, exposure and critical conversation.
- **Blockers:** There is an expressed lack of funding for arts and culture in Colorado compared to other similar-sized cities. They feel that that the arts and culture community is growing across Denver and the state, but without the critical journalistic coverage required to demonstrate the local scene’s impact in a national context.
 - *“I can’t tell you what a difference it makes for [our] programming **when CPR accidentally sneezes our name. It’s out of control how much it is meaningful, as far as the foot traffic we’ll receive. We have two fully-funded, consistently-funded — but not well-funded — arts writers, but they are overloaded with the growing nonprofit arts and cultural sector in Denver, which is a natural repercussion of a growing city with a growing population of arts and culture offerings. Our communication outlets are not matching the demand, and, at the same time, there is a disconnect between why it’s important to support those outlets, and create those positions and create that ecosystem for communication.**”*
 - *Examples of arts & culture media outlets cited: Art F City, Hyperallergic*
- **Core need:** They are looking for ways to learn about smaller or unknown artists, collaborative opportunities, and ways to share resources.

Arts and Culture Entrepreneur: These are individuals who make a living from working in collaboration with the arts and culture community. These individuals tend to work with smaller artists and be the touchpoint for collaborative projects. Some of these individuals are artists themselves.

- **Motivators:** To build strong networks of collaborative partners, and build safety nets for the art community. These entrepreneurs tend to be involved in the shaping of the arts community, and are heavily invested in its health because of their work.
- **Blockers:** Lack of time to distribute networks and collaborations, and a lack of trust in larger institutions because of an absence of attention on small artists and people working hard to make a living as artists in Colorado.
- **Core need:** These individuals are looking for ways to be a part of collaborations, find ways to make a living as an artist and support other artists, build build safety in the ecosystem, and raise the critical status of art in Denver and Colorado.

Artist: These individuals are making a living and working full-time as an artist.

- **Motivators:** They wanted to find ways to connect with an artist community, to share resources and find funding.
- **Blockers:** Lack of time to pursue new opportunities, fear of taking new risks because that involves money and time.
- **Core need:** These individuals are looking for ways to be connected socially and with resources to do their art. They want to make sure their art is a life-sustaining career.

Arts Patron: These individuals are active patrons of the arts, particularly around a subject of interest.

- **Motivators:** They wanted to learn more and be entertained more, feel more connected to art and culture in their community.
- **Blockers:** Time, information overload. There is a sense that many things are not accessible because of expense, lack of programming or being shared in a meaningful way.
- **Core need:** These individuals are looking for ways to find out about more unknown artists. They are curious to uncover deeper storytelling and be educated and entertained. They do not think there are huge information gaps, and generally take responsibility for not knowing about topics. They see a lack of exciting coverage of the arts.

Insights and common themes:

Based on the conversations with 46 individuals, 26 of the interviews included useable transcripts or detailed documentation that could be further analyzed and coded to reveal common themes and key insights.

The common themes that emerged were related to community-building, cultural conversation, local artist representation, accessibility, lack of support, information overload, and a wealth of arts and culture opportunities.

Collaboration to raise local artist representation, awareness and accessibility

Colorado's small arts community is generally very collaborative based out of necessity because of an inherent lack of resources. However, this need for collaboration has created a strong sense of community to mutually lift each other up, which has resulted in a positive, cross-promotional ecosystem that exposes participants to a wide range of experiences and perspectives.

While lesser-known local artists collaborate for a chance to be represented on wider platforms, there is a scarcity of deeper storytelling and information-sharing with a critical lens about what is happening locally on a national context. Organizers of the arts and culture community do not think local journalism coverage has caught up with the growth of the arts and culture community.

- **Core needs:**
 - Support from larger institutions to expand collaborations beyond small organizations on a sustained basis to scale reach
 - More resources for smaller artist networks
 - Deeper storytelling around what local artists are doing and why
 - Accessibility for lower-income communities that aren't just free events for families
- **Successes:**
 - Cross-sector collaborations expose participants to different communities, perspectives and life experiences
 - Larger institutions and gatherings are starting to feature more local artists, but there's much left uncovered that members of those communities are aware of through their networks and word of mouth

Community Listening:

*"I always want to **create stronger ties or more ways for people to connect directly with individual artists in different communities...** I would love for people in our community to know more about the many brilliant, smaller artist studio collectives around the community, for them to just be able to connect with those artists and support their practices, because they're doing really exciting work."*

- Arts and Culture Funder/Convener

*"Anchor institutions take way too much share of SCFD, which is our main revenue...They are nice for families, but they take too much money. I think **it's unfair that so much of our tax dollars go to these huge institutions...** When you invest in large things you get the lowest common denominator, like Star Wars costumes at the art museum. **It's not landing Denver on the map for anything. It's popular, but it's not adding value or depth.**"*

- Arts and Culture Entrepreneur

*"I wish that all artists had a clear way to establish safety nets and establish more supportive structures and to thrive all the way in their careers, and not have to drop out of a career for a health crisis. **You can have an excellent arts scene when artists have the time and affordability to create. I wish there was more reporting on ways around that.** The housing crisis affects that. I would love to see more reviews of smaller plays. I would love to see features of RMCAD (Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design) and other students and young talent. They are being educated here and they are really talented. It's hard to justify emerging talent."*

- Arts and Culture Entrepreneur

*“I recognize that there is so much going on, but I want people to understand that **regular folks like me have a small part in shaping that culture...** Keep small names in mind. While they’re doing big and awesome work, the little guys are also making an impact.”*

- Artist

*“The more we all can highlight the different art scenes that are happening in Colorado, the more we can **expose everyday people to what's happening around them.** They may not realize the murals were intentional. Maybe they thought they were just kind of popping up randomly. The more we can share those stories, I think it's helpful.”*

- Arts Patron

*“There are some **issues with the representation of arts and culture events in lower-income areas.** It also seems like events are geared towards upper middle class families. I haven’t heard of many **events that are low-cost or free that aren’t for kids...** There is a disconnect between arts and culture in Colorado with underrepresented groups, namely Hispanics.”*

- Arts Patron

*“The rap scene also covers parts of Denver that aren't necessarily covered — like certain parts of Five Points, the little parts that aren't identified, or even little parts of Aurora. **It just covers something that isn't covered in the media.** When people think about Denver, they don't think about those parts. But the rap community covers that.”*

- Arts Patron

Shifting from “information overload” to inclusive “cultural conversation”

There is a general consensus that there is a wealth of arts and culture opportunities that exist in Colorado. However, the number of possible activities to participate in and multiple sources covering mainstream events has left those who are actually interested in going deeper with a sense of “information overload.”

While there is a clearly-documented Internet-caused “information overload” across many coverage areas that are causing people to become less engaged with news, local arts and culture supporters and enthusiasts are looking for a curated connection to help them create and maintain a deeper sense of belonging to this community. This holds true for both those who are working as artists, arts and culture entrepreneurs, funders and conveners, as well as patrons of local arts across Colorado.

Along with a desire for more community-building around this topic, there is also an expressed interest in a curated, central, quality information source for how to engage with, support and be supported through arts and culture in Colorado.

- **Core needs:**

- Deeper storytelling and thematic coverage to provide context
- Opportunities and infrastructure to connect around arts and culture with both like-minded individuals and those who will challenge current mindsets
- Conversation in place of consumerism

- Central source to find information and resources to lift up the arts and culture community
- **Successes:**
 - Opportunities to connect exist within networks and are being shepherded by arts and culture community leaders and entrepreneurs

Community Listening:

*“We need to work **vigorously on infrastructure that helps unite** and make the new and the old, or the new and the existing, or the new and historic, meaningful to each other and connected. **Find ways to connect to each other.**”*

- Arts and Culture Funder/Convener

*“**Bringing people together that would otherwise not be brought together and engaging in discussion** — whether it be about the arts or anything else, you're expanding your network of people. And you're sharing ideas... it's a vehicle for actually bringing people together. **It makes us a more civil, a civilized society.**”*

- Arts and Culture Funder/Convener

*“I have this barrage of stuff... **There's so much happening, there's so much good, and there's 1,000 things to do every night in the city** now.. So many of them, for me, are just wasted time. **But if I can go a little farther down that rabbit hole, and I can care about an individual and what they're doing — then I start to think about what's the downstream collaborative effect?** How might this community of 65 to 70 people journey together and support that? Then how does that ripple effect grow? And then, some years hence, we're living in a more mature, caring, generous, loving society.”*

- Arts and Culture Entrepreneur

*“You've got every brewery now that wants a wall for artists — and maybe it's helpful, and maybe not. **But having places where creative people come together for the nurturing, relationship of community... that's kind of a rare thing.**”*

- Arts and Culture Entrepreneur

*“I wish there was a **one-stop-shop online to search arts and culture information — not just social media.** Is there anything like that out there? Or a cool magazine? Like the Westword, but all arts.”*

- Artist

*“**Sharing resources is always a thing that we can all benefit from.** {There are} many different ways that people could access [something arts and culture-related]. Sharing resources and having more visibility within different worlds in arts and culture is helpful.”*

- Artist

*“The arts and attending different shows have a lot of different ways to connect with people, but for it to be sustainable that **conversation has to happen all the time... I want deeper meaning in all of the things that I’m consuming.**”*

- Arts Patron

Opportunities and Recommendations

Based on the insights gathered around 1) collaboration to raise local artist representation, awareness and accessibility; and 2) shifting from “information overload” to inclusive “cultural conversation,” there is significant overlap in core needs of the interviewed personas.

The learnings from dozens of community listening sessions will directly inform the upcoming Oct. 28, 2019 community design workshop, during which we will work with Denver-area residents to develop co-created solutions around the three general core needs and five potential pathways to address those needs.

- **Core needs and potential opportunities to address them:**

- Deeper storytelling and thematic coverage to provide context around what local artists are doing and their impact on a national scale
 - **Inform:** Fill the information gap that exists around potential resources for small artists and a deeper meaning in what local artists are doing.
 - **Consult:** Regularly consult with this community of engaged Colorado residents (those who were interviewed during this process, and beyond) around arts and culture to workshop story ideas and gather feedback.
- Opportunities and infrastructure to connect around arts and culture with both like-minded individuals and those who will challenge current mindsets
 - **Involve:** News organizations and larger arts and culture institutions can act as the host / convener / community manager of these ongoing conversations to grow a loyal base that is both supportive of *and* connected to local arts and culture beyond being passive consumers.
 - **Partner:** Galvanize the networks of local artists that exist within smaller communities and give them a larger platform to share what they’re doing and expose lesser-known local artists to larger networks (audiences of news organizations and larger arts institutions).
- Central source to access information and shared resources that lift up the arts and culture community and make it easier for residents to learn what’s going on in their communities on a less superficial level. Support from larger institutions will broaden the reach of lesser-known artists so residents have increased access and connection.
 - **Inform / Consult / Involve / Partner:** Create a shared information and resource hub that is co-owned by the local arts and culture community. It will be critical to not only make the co-created information source an accessible platform, but a hub that builds and maintains a digital and offline community with potential for growth. Establishing key community ambassadors and managers will be a crucial step to ensure its sustainability.