

# TOWARDS A CULTURE OF ACCESS

FINDINGS FROM THE MASSACHUSETTS  
ARTS & CULTURE ACCESS SURVEY

2022



An Affiliate of Seven Hills Foundation

In Partnership with





**Open Door Arts** (formerly VSA Massachusetts), an affiliate of Seven Hills Foundation, increases access, participation, and representation of people with disabilities in the arts. We believe our shared cultural community is strengthened when it represents, includes, and engages all people. We work with students, teaching artists, educators, and leaders of cultural organizations through innovative and inclusive programming, training, events, and exhibits designed to improve access, expand participation, challenge the status quo, and share practices to ensure equitable representation by people with disabilities in the arts. [www.OpenDoorArtsMA.org](http://www.OpenDoorArtsMA.org)

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This report, including a screen reader friendly version, can be accessed by visiting: [OpenDoorArtsMA.org/TCAReport22](http://OpenDoorArtsMA.org/TCAReport22)

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# Context

Despite representing 1 in 4 adults, and 1 in 2 adults ages 65+ (CDC, 2018), people with disabilities continue to experience significant attitudinal, physical, and programmatic barriers to fully participate in the rich opportunities offered by arts and culture organizations in Massachusetts. Considering the wealth of cultures, backgrounds, and creative potential of this community, this results in the sector missing out on the valuable contributions and participation of people with disabilities. Even when seen purely from an economic perspective, by excluding people with disabilities from their audiences, organizations are excluding the third largest market segment (AIR, 2018) in the US.

In late 2021 Open Door Arts designed and distributed the "MA Arts & Culture Access Survey" with the goal of acquiring comprehensive data on how arts & culture organizations in Massachusetts are thinking about access, and how that work is being actualized through policies, practices, programs, relationships, and organizational culture. We also wanted to learn more about what's getting in the way of moving this work forward, and what resources and supports the sector might benefit from in order to do so.

An 11-question survey was created and sent electronically to arts and culture organizations across Massachusetts. Questions captured a combination of factual data about current access practices and perceptions or opinions about current access work as reported by the individual that completed the survey. Following a 5-week open response period the survey data was summarized and synthesized. An independent Evaluation Advisor, Research Fellow and team of five Advisors contributed their diverse and representative personal and professional perspectives, voices, and lived experiences to review the survey findings, provide insights and recommendations, and identify key takeaways and action steps.

# Context

This report will share that critical analysis in tandem with the survey questions and response summaries with the goal of providing helpful insights to better understand where the sector currently is and what can help it move forward. While we acknowledge that there are limitations in the scope of the data and some subjectivity in responses, we are thrilled to share what is the most comprehensive assessment of this work available at this time and hope it can lead to additional research, increased understanding, and expanded opportunities. In the words of disability activist Alice Wong, "Access is a practice of love". As you read this report and consider the information shared, we invite you to ask yourself what radical love might look like in your space and in the sector. With deep care, we hope this data helps us move forward in collective action to reframe our access work from a practice of compliance into a practice of radical love and solidarity.

Our team can be reached at [admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org](mailto:admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org) and will gladly share additional data and results, and provide information in an alternative format upon request.

# Acknowledgements

The Open Door Arts team is grateful to all the people who came together to make this report possible.

First, we're grateful to our many wonderful partner organizations, **The Mass Cultural Council**, and the **City of Boston's Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture** for supporting and distributing this survey, as well as to the 94 people who generously gave their time to share responses.

Thank you to **Charles G. Baldwin**, Access and Inclusion Officer at the Mass Cultural Council and leader of its Universal Participation (UP) Program for his thoughtful contributions to the survey design and content. Massachusetts is fortunate to have this program under its cultural council addressing access which has made a significant impact in furthering this work across the state over the past few years.

We are deeply grateful to our Arts Access Advisors, including **Heather Watkins, Saki Iwamoto, Christopher Robinson, Jenna Gabriel, and Gary Alpert**, who were hired to ensure multiple voices and perspectives informed this process. Their wisdom, combined with their personal and professional experience, significantly enhanced and deepened our understanding of the data. We greatly appreciate the contributions of **Julia Gittleman**, of Mendelsohn, Gittleman & Associates, who served as Evaluation Advisor to the project, and **Carl Richardson** for reviewing the screen reader-friendly version of this report for accessibility.

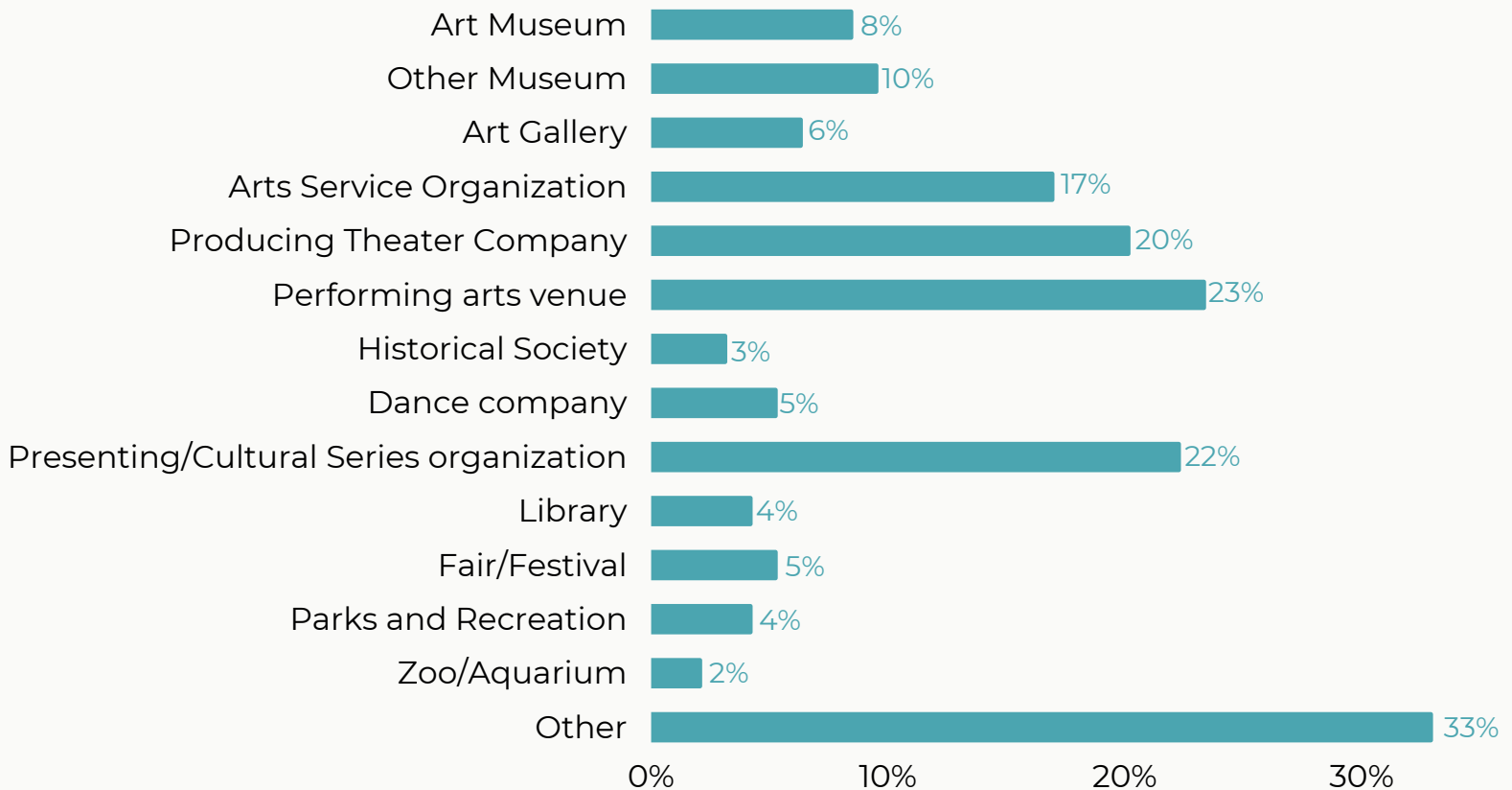
We are grateful for the enormous contributions of **Elisabeth Staal** during this entire process, evident in this report. Serving as a Research Fellow, Elisabeth's tireless work, keen insights, and careful analysis were invaluable to this project.

Lastly, we honor and celebrate the collective work the sector has done to become more accessible and inclusive, and all the leaders, artists, activists, and organizations that have worked tirelessly to make this happen. Through our collective work thus far, we have built a foundation. In connection, we know from the disability community that we have much more work to do, which is also evident in this data. We hope this report serves as a call to action to hold ourselves and each other accountable to do better.

# Respondents

**We received 94 survey responses representing at least 88 arts and culture organizations across Massachusetts\***

Respondents selected all categories that applied.  
32% of organizations identified with more than one category



"Other" responses included write-in responses such as "orchestra," "choir," and "historic house"

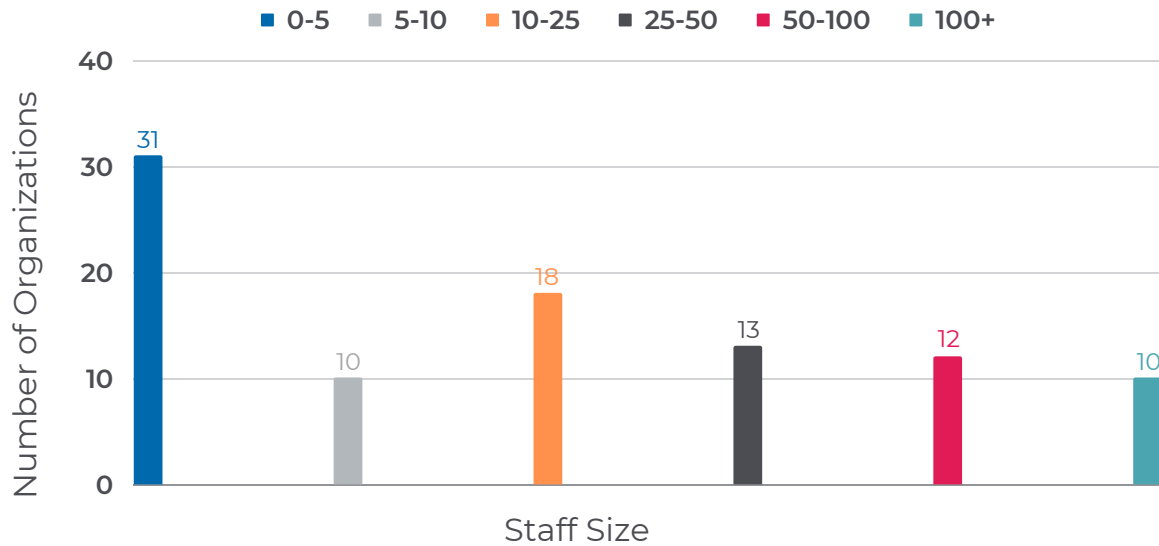
86% of organizations are located in Boston or Greater Boston

14% of organizations are located in Central, Western, Northeast, and Southeast MA

51 respondents hold roles equivalent to Executive Director or Artistic Director

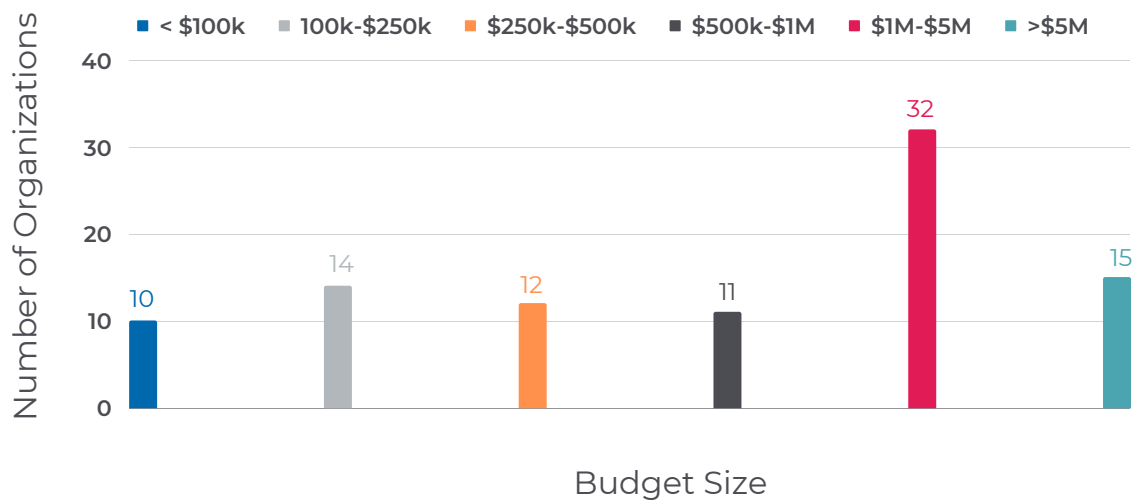
# Respondents

## Staff size of known organizations represented in responses



63%  
had a staff size  
under 25

## Budget size of known organizations represented in responses



50%  
had  
budgets  
over \$1M



# Survey Content & Results

## Q1 **Organization Name**

Organizations were invited to share their name for tracking purposes.

### RESULTS

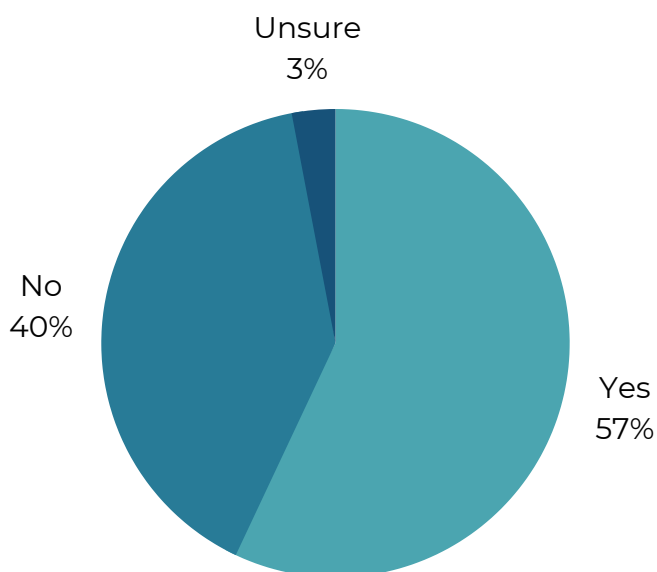
88 organization names were shared out of 94 total survey responses.

### ANALYSIS

There were four duplicate responses and four anonymous responses, meaning there may be more than 88 organizations represented. Duplicate responses were included in analysis because they are added insight into perceptions of respondents.

## Q2 **Does your organization have a designated staff person or team that is/are responsible for access and inclusion?**

### RESULTS



### ANALYSIS

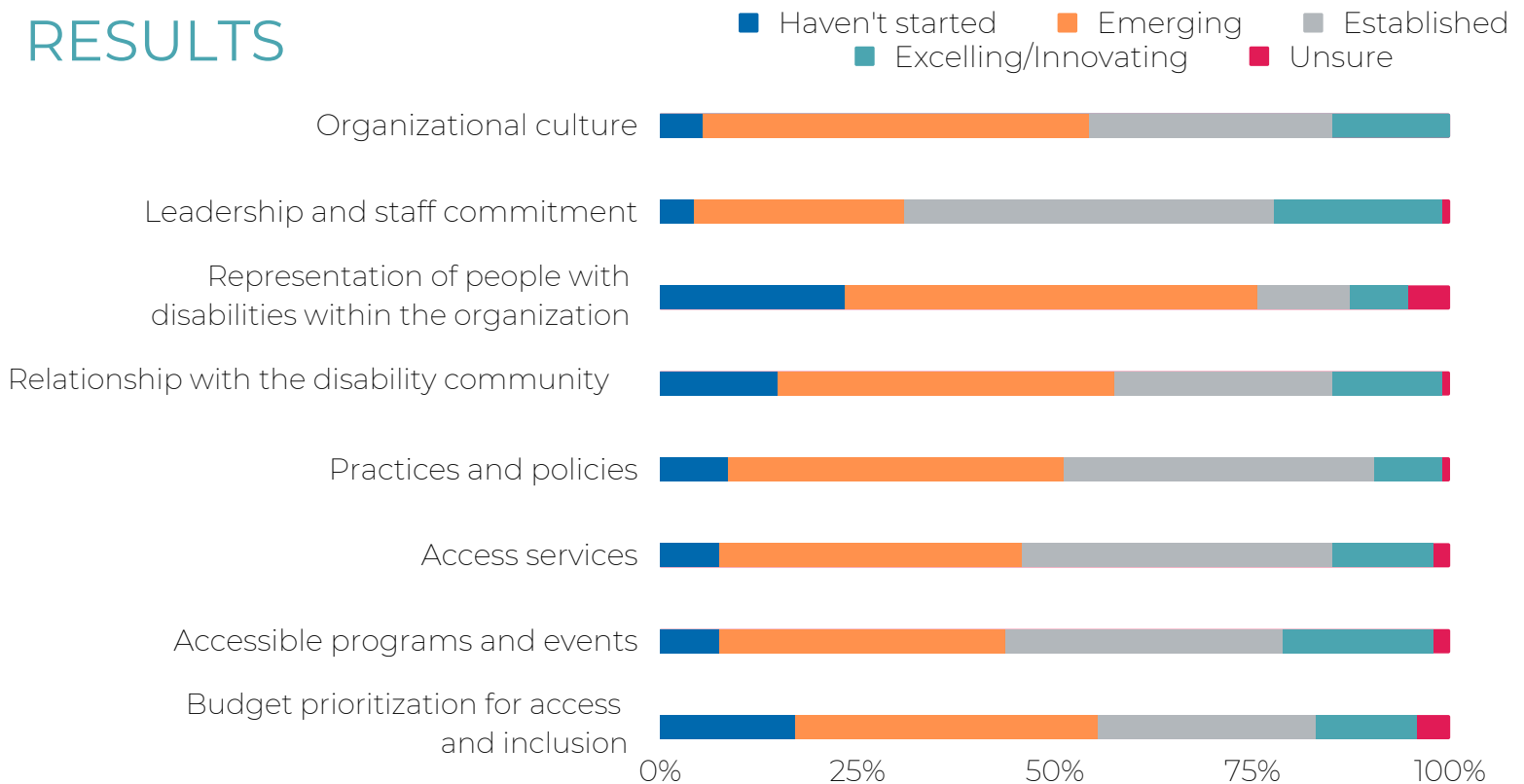
When asked this question, a substantial 40% of respondents answered "no" and 3% said "unsure". This is a significant finding because the ADA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require organizations that receive federal funds to appoint an accessibility coordinator to manage the organization's ADA/504 obligations. This includes organizations that receive federal funds indirectly (i.e. through their cultural council) which is the case for most, if not all, survey respondents.

This highlights the need to further explore the gaps in understanding around this requirement, and factors contributing to so many organizations being out of compliance.

# Survey Content & Results

## Q3 How would you rank your organization's current work around access and inclusion for the disability community?

### RESULTS



### ANALYSIS

This question asked organizations to self-assess their current access work, which provided valuable insight into how the sector understands and prioritizes access work. The great variety in responses is expected due to various organization types and individual bias.

The categories showing most progress, "leadership and staff commitment", "access programs", and "access services" show a base level of compliance and commitment to access. When honing on what's being done the LEAST (see box to the right) a disconnect was identified between the practices and services provided and the people they are for, which indicates the need for culture shifts within organizations.

#### Highest rated as Haven't Started & Emerging:

76% Representation of people with disabilities within the organization

57% Relationship with the disability community

55% Budget prioritization for access

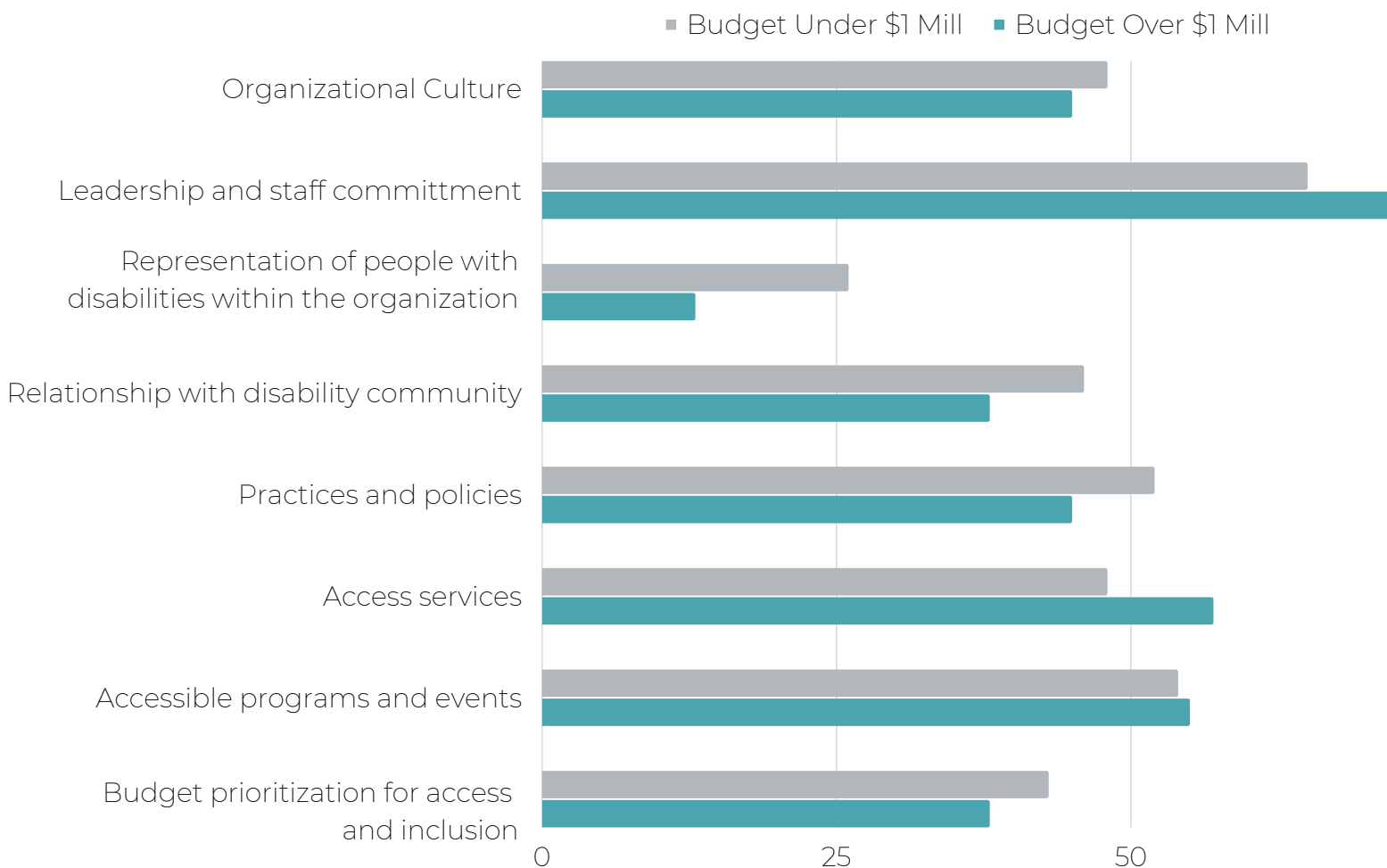
52% Organizational culture

# Survey Content & Results

## Q3 Cont.

Additionally, further analysis was conducted to explore the potential influence of organizational characteristics on responses. Interestingly, this analysis revealed that larger budgets do not equate to larger impact. As shown in the chart below, individuals from organizations with budgets below \$1 Million were more likely to choose "established" or "excelling/innovating" than individuals from organizations with budgets over \$1 Million.

**Respondents that selected "Established" or "Excelling/Innovating"  
in each Q3 category, by budget size:**

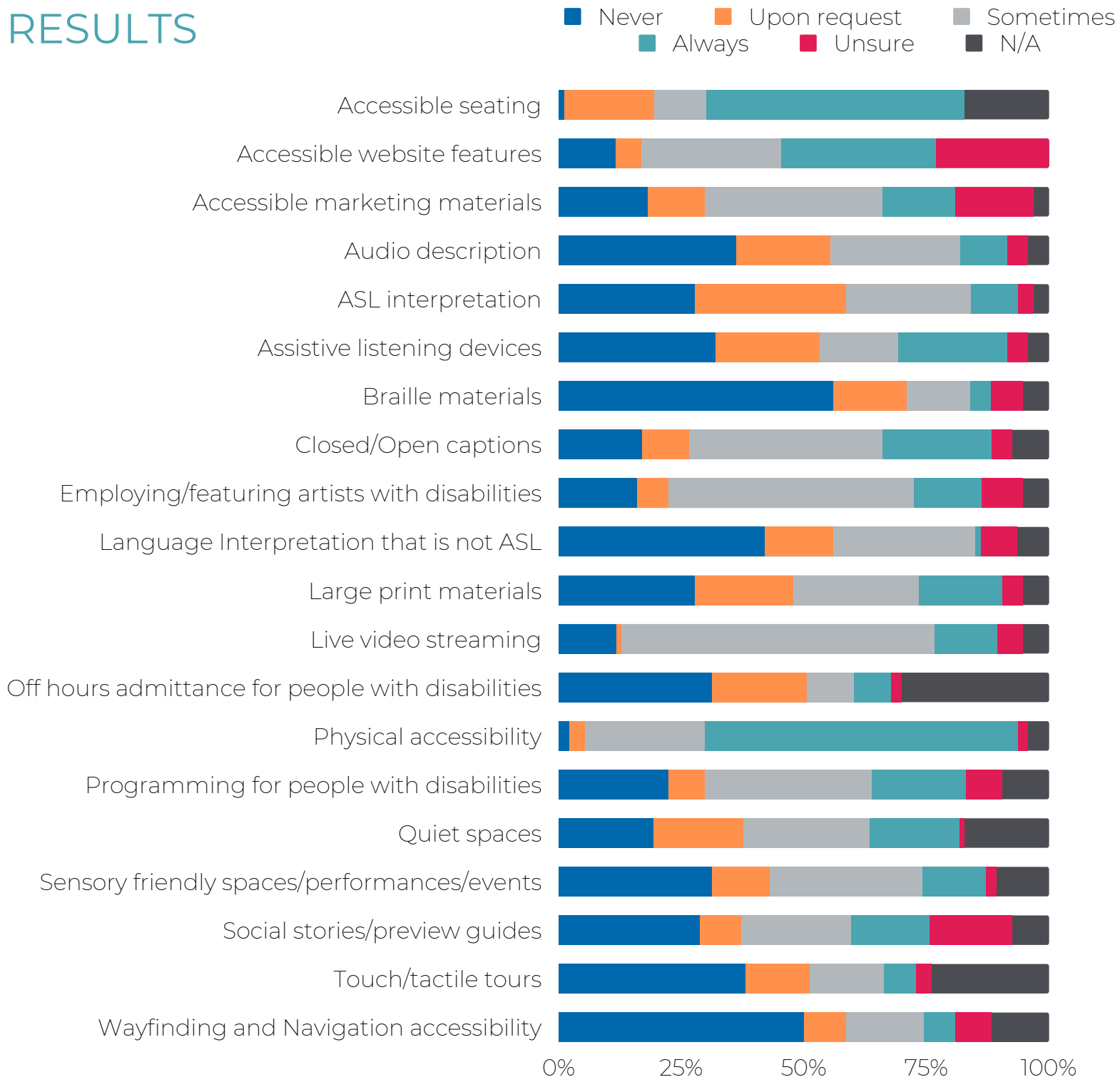


# Survey Content & Results

## Q4

**Which access programs and services does your organization currently provide, and how often?**

### RESULTS

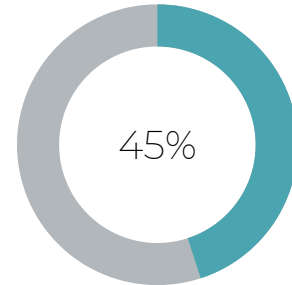


# Survey Content & Results

Q4  
Cont.

## Highest rated as “never”

- 56% Braille materials
- 50% Wayfinding and Navigation
- 42% Language Interpretation (not ASL)
- 38% Touch/tactile tours
- 36% Audio description



of categories saw 'never' as the most chosen response.

## ANALYSIS

As with Q3, there was anticipated variation and nuance in responses in part due to the range of organization characteristics. Honing in on what's being done the least led to identifying potential barriers and trends. It is impactful to note that 45% of categories saw "never" as the most chosen response. As respondents had the options of "N/A to our work" and "unsure," it is significant to see such an over-representation of "never" as the service is not being provided, even upon request. The categories highest rated as “never” show the greatest gaps in services, as seen above.

Noticing the representation of "N/A to our work," individual responses were more closely examined. Doing so confirmed that some services and programs ranked "N/A" are services and programs being implemented by peer organizations, implying those services may be applicable to the respondents work after all. This confirms the need for support and training to understand what these services are and how they can be feasibly implemented.

Q5 **Please feel free to share more detail or context to your previous selections.**

## RESULTS

In this open response format, respondents gave more context to their Q4 answers including barriers to providing certain services and why some services may not be applicable to their work. In addition, individuals expressed the desire to incorporate more accessible programs and services into their organization and further education about inclusive practices. This demonstrates momentum towards learning and growth opportunities.



# Survey

## Content & Results

### Q6 **To the extent of your knowledge, what are your organization's goals and priorities around access and inclusion at this time?**

#### RESULTS

In this open response format, respondents shared their current priorities and work, as well as goals around access for their organization. After analyzing and coding individual responses, **three key trends** were revealed:

- Organizations want to further align their accessibility work with their strategic plan, organizational mission, and organizational values.
- Organizations expressed a strong desire to continue learning and improve their access practices.
- Organizations aspire to connect their access strategy and goals to their greater DEI work.

#### ANALYSIS

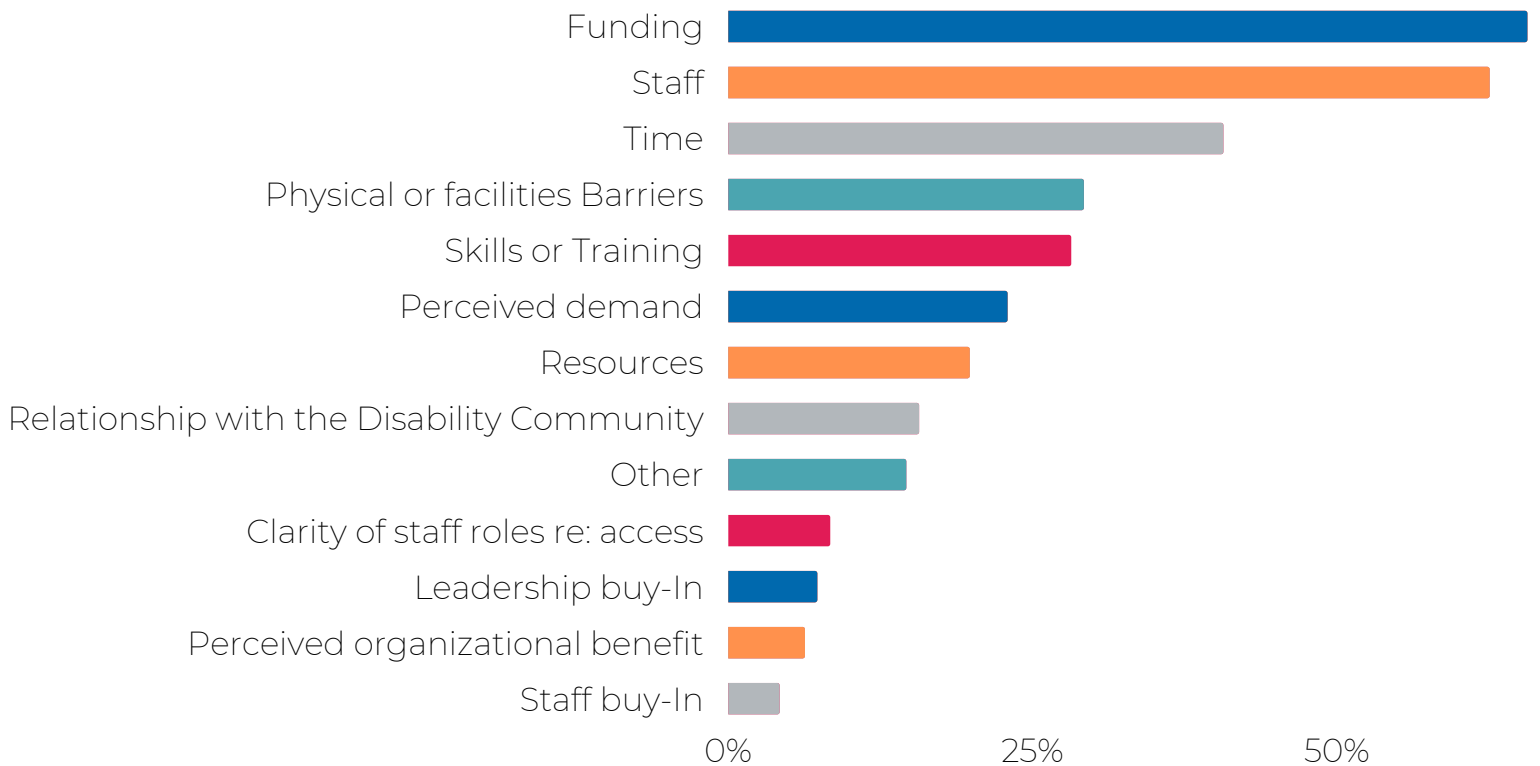
The three key trends seen in these responses connect back to organizational culture, which is among the highest rated as "haven't started" or "emerging" in Q3. When read in contrast with previous question responses we see a disconnect between perceived commitment and current action. For example, while we see positive ratings for leadership commitment, we simultaneously see gaps in services and budget prioritization for access.

Overall, these write-in responses, at this point in the survey, confirm the good intention and motivation for organizations to do this work throughout the field. This question provides valuable insight into organizational aspirations, and guidance on where supports may be most needed and desired by the sector.

# Survey Content & Results

**Q7 What are the THREE greatest barriers that inhibit your organization from being more accessible and inclusive to the disability community? Please check only 3.**

## RESULTS



## ANALYSIS

### The 5 Most Selected Barriers:

- 66% Lack of or limited funding
- 63% Lack of or limited staff
- 41% Lack of or limited time
- 29% Physical or facilities barriers
- 28% Lack of or limited skills or training

It is unsurprising that capacity is represented in 4 out of the 5 most selected barriers, especially within the context of pandemic recovery.

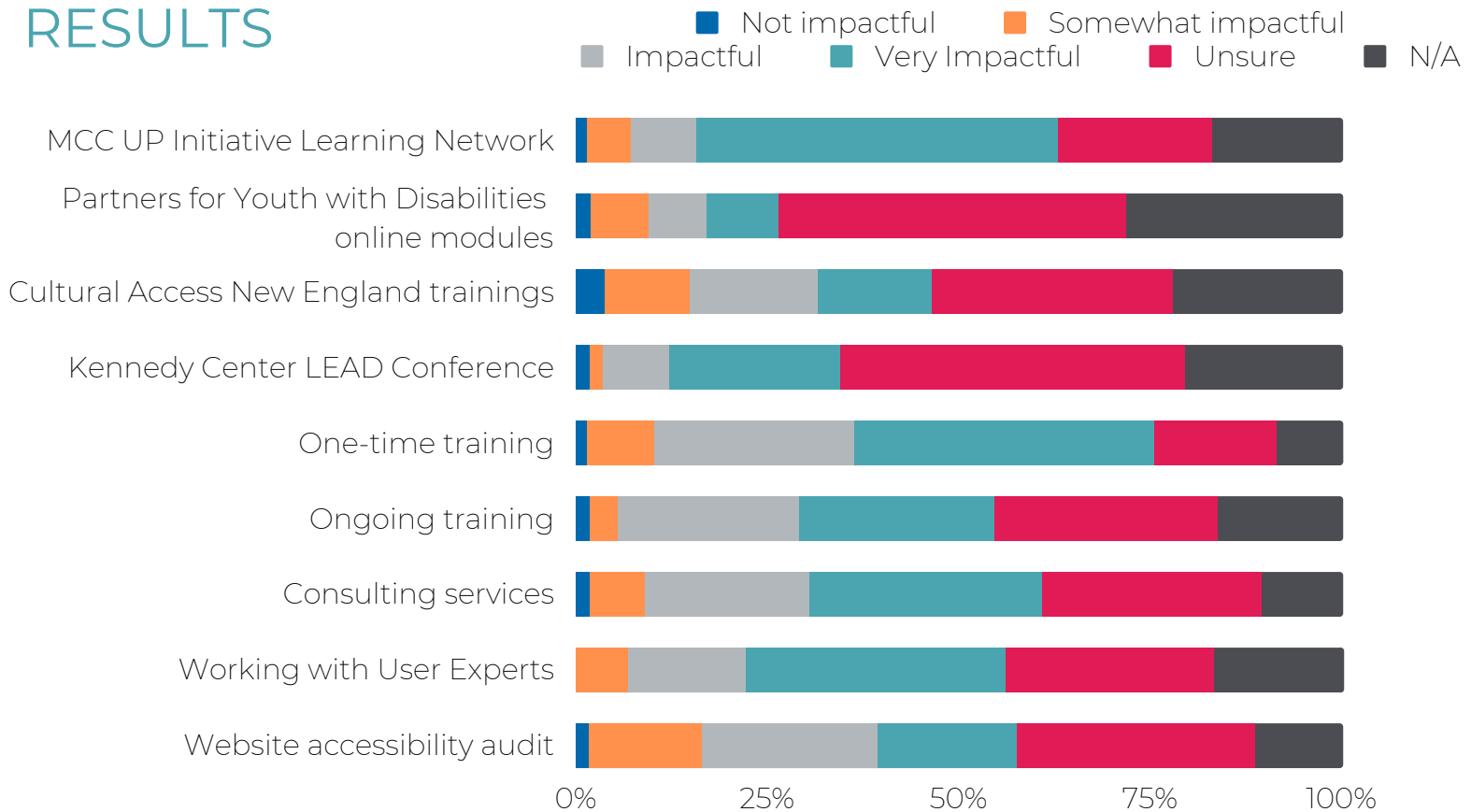
This prompts curiosity about reality versus perception in terms of barriers. Funding, for example, may be seen as a barrier more frequently by organizations who operate with the belief that specific access grants are needed rather than including access work within existing budgets and all other operations.

# Survey Content & Results

## Q8

**Has your organization participated in any of the opportunities listed below? If so, please rate how impactful they were to your organization's access work.**

### RESULTS



#### **Highest rated as "Impactful" or "Very Impactful":**

- 66% One-time training/professional development
- 55% MCC UP Initiative Learning Network
- 52% Consulting services
- 49% Working with User Experts
- 49% Ongoing training/professional development

This question provides insights into which resources and opportunities organizations have already participated in, and how impactful they found them to be. Variability in responses was expected partly because not all respondents have participated in all the opportunities named, which is also evidenced in a high response rate for "unsure". The box to the left shows which opportunities were rated the highest.

# Survey Content & Results

## Q8 Cont.

### ANALYSIS

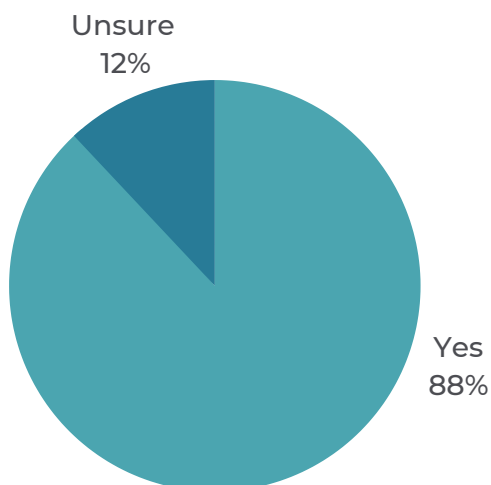
Responses indicated that participants have found various types of supports and trainings to be helpful to their organization in the past. There were no clear trends revealing that one type of opportunity is significantly more valuable than another, but rather that various types of supports are needed by different organizations at different times. A relatively high response rate under "N/A to our work" also reveals a potential lack of understanding of current opportunities available and how those may support organizations in moving their access work forward.

Additionally, the high rate of "unsure" may reinforce that access work is being held by an individual, or a small group of individuals rather than institutionalized throughout organizations, leading the individual filling out the survey to be unaware of past training engagement.

## Q9 **Would your organization utilize a hub of centralized resources related to accessibility and inclusion for arts and culture organizations in Massachusetts?**

Answer Choices: Yes, No, or Unsure

### RESULTS



### ANALYSIS

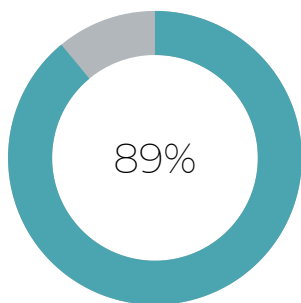
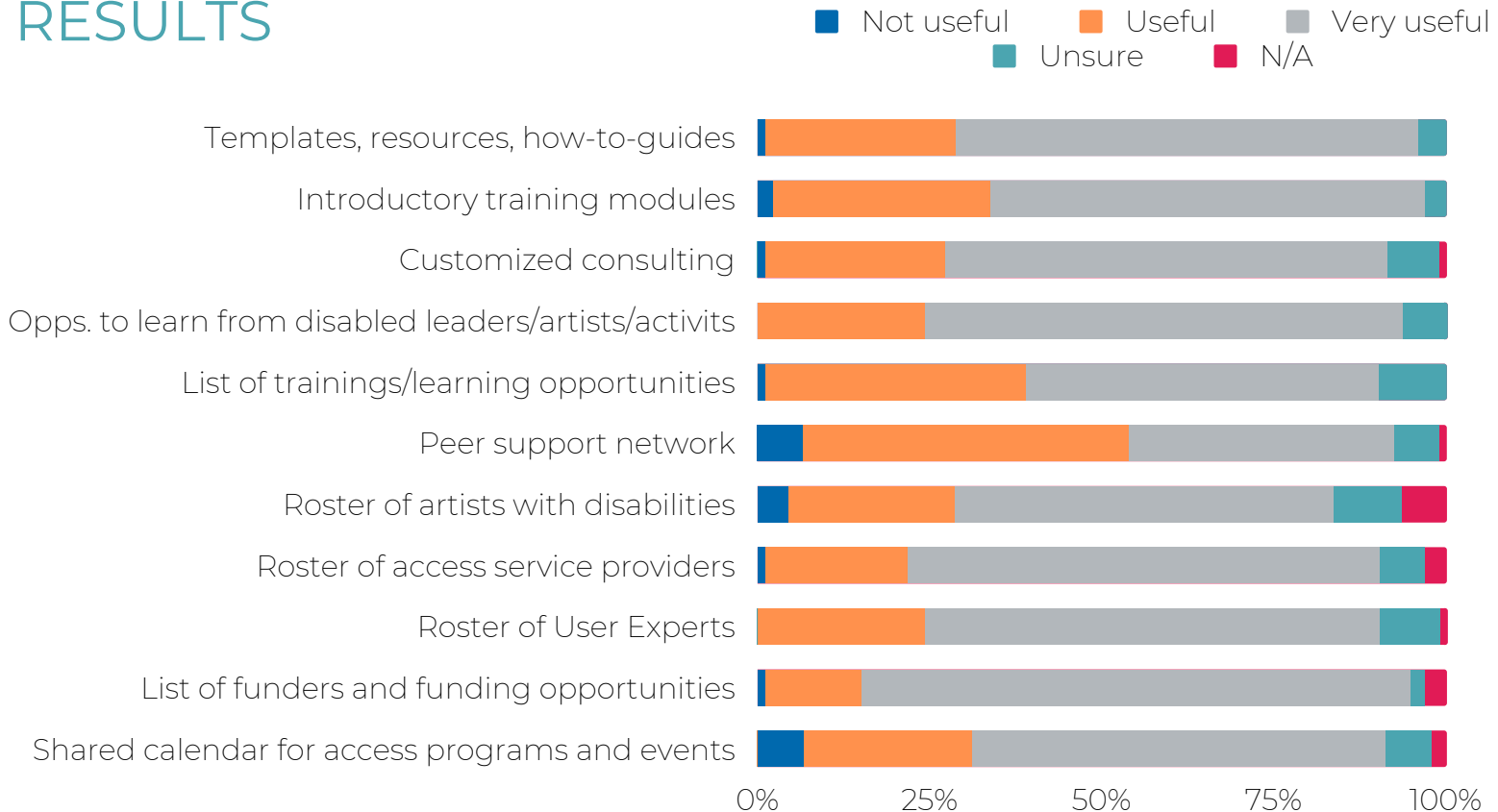
The high "yes" response and lack of "no" response reveals an overwhelming need and desire for additional supports and centralized resources.

Respondents who said "unsure" were mostly emerging in this work and expressed disconnect with leadership. However, they also said resources would be "useful" or "very useful" in the following question.

# Survey Content & Results

## Q10 If so, how useful would the following resources be?

### RESULTS



Is the average percent each category was rated "Useful" or "Very Useful"

#### The 3 categories most rated as Very Useful:

- 80% List of funders and funding opportunities for access
- 69% Opportunities to connect with and learn from disabled leaders, activists and artists
- 68% Roster of access service providers

### ANALYSIS

Paired with previous questions, this is indisputable evidence that organizations are seeking a wide range of supports, expertise, and resources to improve their access work. This illustrates that there is motivation to match intentions and goals to actualize tangible services and programs.



# Survey Content & Results

## Q11 Is there anything else you would like to share?

### RESULTS

In this open response format, respondents had the opportunity to share more about their answers and context. Many shared gratitude for the opportunity to share and consider this information, and that they looked forward to hearing results and subsequent calls to action.

While data from this response does not arrive at any clear trends, it does provide some additional context for analysis throughout this report. The quotes shared below exemplify this, with the acknowledgement that they are not representative of the entire data set.

*"Without leadership and accountability, we have failed spectacularly in the past."*

*"A repository of resources that are always accessible, as opposed to scheduled events, would be helpful. Also smaller targeted peer groups to assist in problem solving would be helpful. For example, historic houses have a different set of issues than a large theater."*

*"We need help to build a staff to continue the innovative programming we have. Man power is our biggest hurdle."*

# Survey Key Findings

Analysis of survey data revealed three key findings:

## 1. Arts & culture organizations in Massachusetts vary widely in how they understand and prioritize access work, resulting in critical gaps

Survey data revealed gaps in organizations' understanding about the relevance and applicability of access services and practices, as well as misconceptions about what is needed to improve their access work. For example, while respondents selected limited funding as the greatest barrier inhibiting their access work, data analysis reveals that organizations with budgets under \$1 million are further along in their access work in multiple areas than their counterparts with budgets above \$1 million. This prompts the need for the sector to reexamine what is holding us back, make decisions and commitments, and hold ourselves accountable to further this work.

## 2. There is a disconnect between stated values around inclusion and organizational action that promotes meaningful access

Survey data largely reveals a basic understanding and compliance with access laws, but also shows a disconnect between organizations and the disability community, a lack of representation of disabled leaders and artists in the sector, and a dearth of disability culture within organizations. This finding emphasizes the need for a sector-wide mindset shift from one of compliance to one of solidarity and radical love for this work to really move forward authentically and sustainably.

## 3. The arts and culture sector wants and needs comprehensive, resources, support, and training to further access work

Throughout the survey, we saw irrefutable evidence that organizations are craving and need comprehensive supports to move their access work forward. The sector needs to work together to provide systemic and comprehensive resources, information, training, and individualized consulting services that are created and led by disabled people to improve this work at scale.

# Call to Action

***"[...]When we reach for each other and make the most access possible, it is a radical act of love. When access is centralized at the beginning dream of every action or event, that is radical love."***

— Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha,  
"Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice"

Disabled people matter as visitors and audiences, and also as creators, decision makers, and leaders in all aspects of our organizations. We don't need a survey to tell us that disabled people matter, but we hope this report will challenge us to embrace and pursue collective accountability and action to build an arts and cultural sector that truly reflects the full range of our human experience.

We call on our colleagues to join us in embracing the understanding that if we are not actively including people with disabilities, then we are, by definition, excluding, and we need to do better. If the arts are about building community and sharing that which make us human, then disabled people must be central to our organizations and work.

## LET'S REFLECT

As you reflect on the data shared in this report, ask yourself:

Where do you see yourself and your organization in this data? What are you already doing that should be celebrated? Where can you learn and grow? Who might help along the way? See the next page for considerations and recommendations.

## LET'S WORK TOGETHER

You're not alone! There are many individuals and organizations that can support your work through training, consulting, auditing/assessment, physical access improvements, and more. Need recommendations? Contact [admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org](mailto:admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org)

## LET'S CREATE SOLUTIONS

Acknowledging how much work is ahead for our sector, Open Door Arts is working with partners to develop a comprehensive centralized Hub of access resources, information, services, and training for arts and culture organizations in Massachusetts. By working together, sharing resources, listening to and learning from each other we can maximize our impact and grow as a sector. If you're interested in learning more or getting involved, please email [admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org](mailto:admin@OpenDoorArtsMA.org)

# Call to Action

## LET'S GET STARTED

In the spirit of collective action and accountability, we hope you and your organization find the recommendations and best practices shared below to be helpful wherever you are in this process. We remind our colleagues that these recommendations and the resources we share on the following page are by no means a comprehensive list. As access advocates remind us time and time again, access work is not, nor can it be fully captured in, a checklist. This work is ongoing and ever evolving.

- **Build relationships with disabled people, artists, and communities.**
- Conduct an **access self-assessment and audit** to better understand where your organization is and create an **improvement plan**. Engage **consultants and User Experts** in the process.
- Familiarize yourself with how **ADA/504 regulations** apply to your organization. Legal compliance is not the end goal, but it is an important step to ensure inclusion.
- Appoint an **Accessibility Coordinator** within your team. Ensure they are clear about their responsibilities and receive ongoing training, support, and resources. Share their contact information publicly.
- **Provide clear and detailed information** about your organization's physical and programmatic accessibility, and **ways to request accommodations** or access services.
- Develop an **access grievance procedure**.
- Engage an **Access Advisory Board** that primarily includes people with disabilities, for your organization and compensate them for their work and expertise.
- Ensure your entire team receives **regular training** on access best practices.
- Create a **budget line item for access** for your organization, as well as for every program, event, and service you provide.
- Conduct a **web accessibility audit** for your website.
- Ensure you're **following best practices for accessibility in your communications and marketing practices**, including social media use.

# Resources

## BOOKS

[Disability Visibility by Alice Wong](#)

[Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha](#)

[Demystifying Disability by Emily Ladau](#)

[Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People by Sins Invalid](#)

## ACCESS PLANNING

[NEA Brief Accessibility Checklist](#)

[Metro Regional Arts Council DIY Access Planning Workbook](#)

[NEA 504 Workbook](#)

[PA Museums Accessibility Excellence: A Tool for Cultural Organizations](#)

## TRAINING & SUPPORT

[Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability \(LEAD\) Conference](#)

[Cultural Access New England \(CANE\)](#)

[MCC Universal Participation Initiative](#)

[National Center for Accessible Media at WGBH](#)

## MISCELLANEOUS

[Access is Love Resource List & Recommended Actions](#)

[Smithsonian Access Resources for Museum Professionals](#)

[NEA 2010 ADA Tip sheet](#)

## BLOGS

[Disability Visibility Project by Alice Wong](#)

[Blog by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha](#)

[Leaving Evidence by Mia Mingus](#)

[Krip-Hop Nation by Leroy Moore](#)

[Blog by Sins Invalid](#)

[Slow Walkers See More by Heather Watkins](#)

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