

➤ THIS IS HOW WE DO IT

TNA's Report on the Working Trends of Independent Artists and Creatives in the Performing Arts in Australia

“If the general public knew how little most artists, even well-known and popular ones, had to live on, they would be shocked beyond belief!”
- Independent Artist, 2020

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TNA
welcomes
your thoughts
& feedback
to this
research

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THE 2020 SURVEY

How

This report analyses results from 283 valid responses from independent artists and creatives to an online survey conducted in July and August 2020.

Independent artists and creatives from across Australia were invited to take part via call outs on social media, via direct email, and via communication through TNA's membership and network across the country. To acknowledge the ongoing unpaid work that comes with being an independent artist, as well as the increase in data collection due to COVID-19, TNA offered a \$50 payment and a complimentary three-month membership for time taken to complete the survey.

The survey asked questions about working conditions, financial arrangements, personal and business management, and individually set working rates. Conducted on Survey

283
Valid
responses

Monkey, it is the second survey by TNA with a focus on independent artists in the performing arts. The 2020 survey asked many of the same questions and so provides some comparison to the results from 2017, available to [read here](#).

249 respondents answered the majority of the 53 questions and relevant data was used from the remaining partial survey responses. A few ineligible responses were not included (e.g. respondents who were not independent).

Why

We initiated the first survey in 2017 to contribute to the health of the sector by collating and publishing data that reflects the realities of making work and living as an independent artist or creative in Australia.

In this report, we de-mystify the lives and work of independent artists in Australia

today. We hope it leads to greater understanding, appreciation and valuing of their dedication and practice — without which so many major festivals, companies, and venues would cease to exist.

To continue the work of the 2017 survey, we asked about independent artists' 2019 activities as is shown in chapters 1-4. However, due to the timing of the survey we also gathered information about the impact of the pandemic — covered in chapter 5 of this report. As the impact is ongoing, this report provides indicative insights into the

immediate impact but we acknowledge the continual pressures independents are facing due to COVID-19.

In the conclusion we have provided some observations, which have also been informed by our ongoing work with thousands of artists around the country, in an attempt to paint an overall picture of what is happening in the independent performing arts sector in 2020.

Greater
understanding,
appreciation
& valuing



TNA is the leading industry development organisation for the performing arts, with a particular focus and priority for supporting independent creative practitioners and small to medium companies.

As a national organisation, TNA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the different lands on which we meet, gather, and work, especially the people of the Kulin nation where our office is based. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

ABOUT TNA

Founded by the sector in 2009, TNA strengthens artists and arts organisations, influences cultural policy, facilitates critical debate and networking, and advocates for a safe, healthy and relevant sector.

TNA believes in the central role that creativity plays in a society.

- ▶ We work towards a more diverse and fairer performing arts sector, that puts First Nations people first.
- ▶ We value independent artists, small to medium companies and large organisations and we want greater interconnections between them.
- ▶ We believe in life-long learning. We support different models of working, and we value flexibility.
- ▶ We advocate for fair pay and conditions for our sector. We know that risk and experimentation are important. And we foster ongoing, respectful and challenging conversations that connect us, open new ideas, and lead to a stronger sector.

In practical terms this means TNA:

- ▶ Runs industry forums;
- ▶ Delivers workshops on current issues for the sector;
- ▶ Drives advocacy campaigns in partnership with other service organisations and the sector;
- ▶ Undertakes and promotes research and benchmarking;
- ▶ Provides advice to industry, the education sector and government;
- ▶ Provides information and resources through our popular e-news and the online resource library.

We design our work to address the gaps, and our approach is underpinned by a spirit of care, deep listening, and trust in the sector's capacity to make progress.

Advocate,
influence,
facilitate
& connect

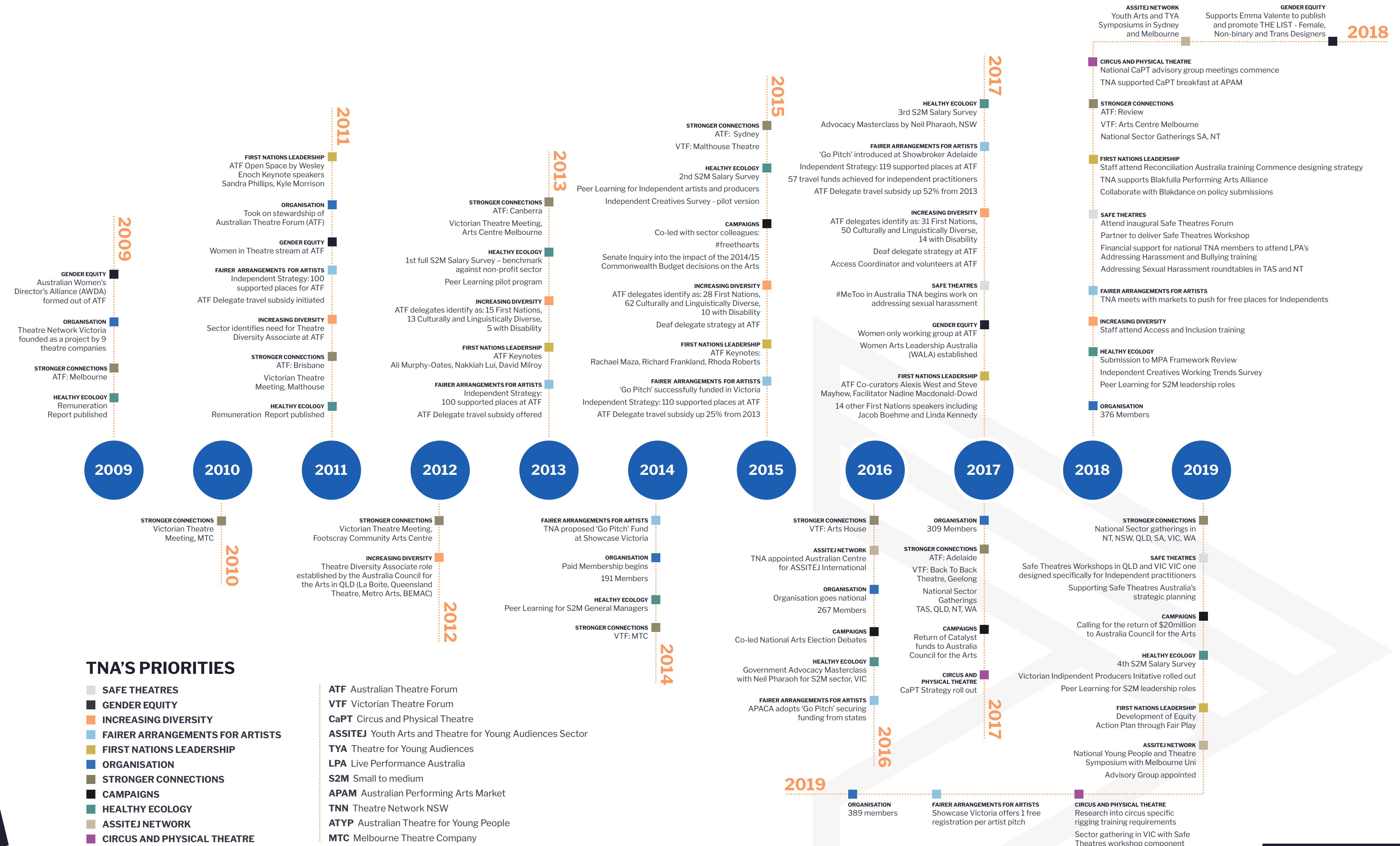
Diverse
&
fair

First
Nations
people first

Fair pay
&
conditions

We value
independent
artists & small
to medium
companies

OUR WORK AND IMPACT 2009–2019



NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

TNA acknowledges the complexity of terminology that relates to a person's identity, ancestry, ability, sexual orientation and gender, and appreciates respondents who engaged with this question in the survey.

Language and identity terminology are ever-changing and by their very nature a 'term' or 'label' cannot ever represent the diversity of lived experiences that they attempt to define.

We continue to use the terms Aboriginal &/ Torres Strait Islander artists, Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse (CALD) artists and LGBTQI+ artists, allowing us to compare data to 2017 responses.

We use these terms as they are commonly used by governments and their associated arts agencies, as well as being identifiable for respondents. However, we also acknowledge it brings together a wide variety of experiences, backgrounds and beliefs that are not aligned or homogenous.

We use the term Deaf and Disabled artists following new guidance provided by Arts Access Victoria who now preference this term. As such, we updated Person with a Disability from this and the 2017 survey.

Trans, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse or In Another Way is the category we use in our survey after reading the guidelines 'Clear Expectations'¹. This is updated from our 2017 survey where we used 'female' 'male' and 'in another way' as gender identifications.

To achieve fair access and representation, we believe it is important to document this data, knowing that these terms will shift and change, hopefully to address inequality with more nuance and dignity for all.

¹ Clear Expectations: Guidelines for Institutions, Galleries, and Curators Working With Trans, Non-Binary and Gender Diverse Artists, Spence Messih & Archie Barry, 2019. Petetskaya, 2017.

THE ARTISTS

Chapter 1

THE ARTISTS

For the 2020 survey, the 283 respondents provided their age, number of years as a practising artist, self-nominated their career stage, shared the country where they were born and provided information on their identity.

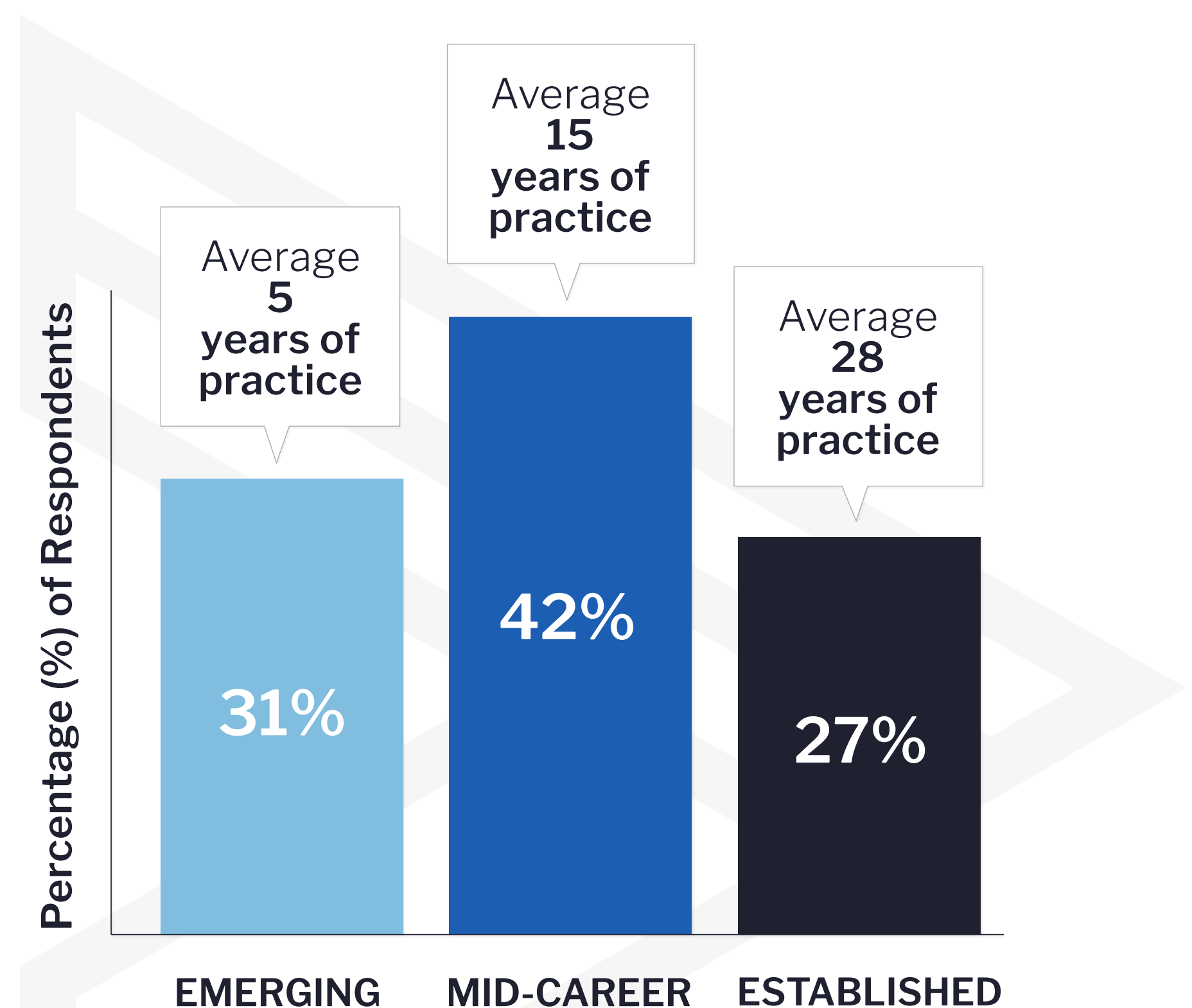
Age

The wide range of ages in each career category suggests that artists begin their practice at varying stages of life and that different interpretations exist for the terms emerging, mid-career and established.

	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	AGE RANGE	AVERAGE AGE
ALL	283	19-76	39
EMERGING	89	19-58	30
MID-CAREER	118	23-60	40
ESTABLISHED	76	30-76	51

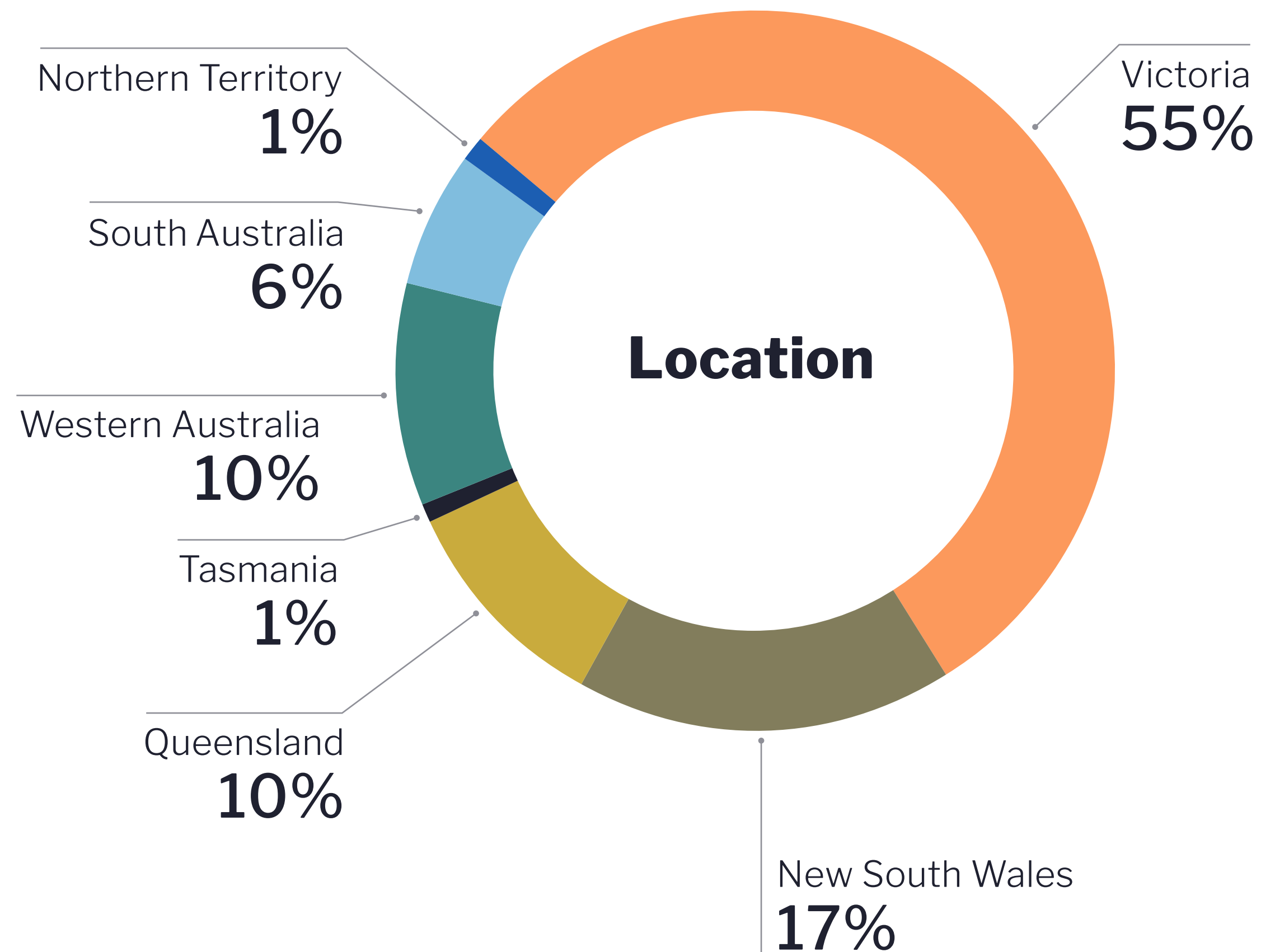
Career Stage

There was fairly even representation across the three pre-defined stages of career from the respondents, with the years of practice varying from 1 year (4 respondents) to 50 years (1 respondent).

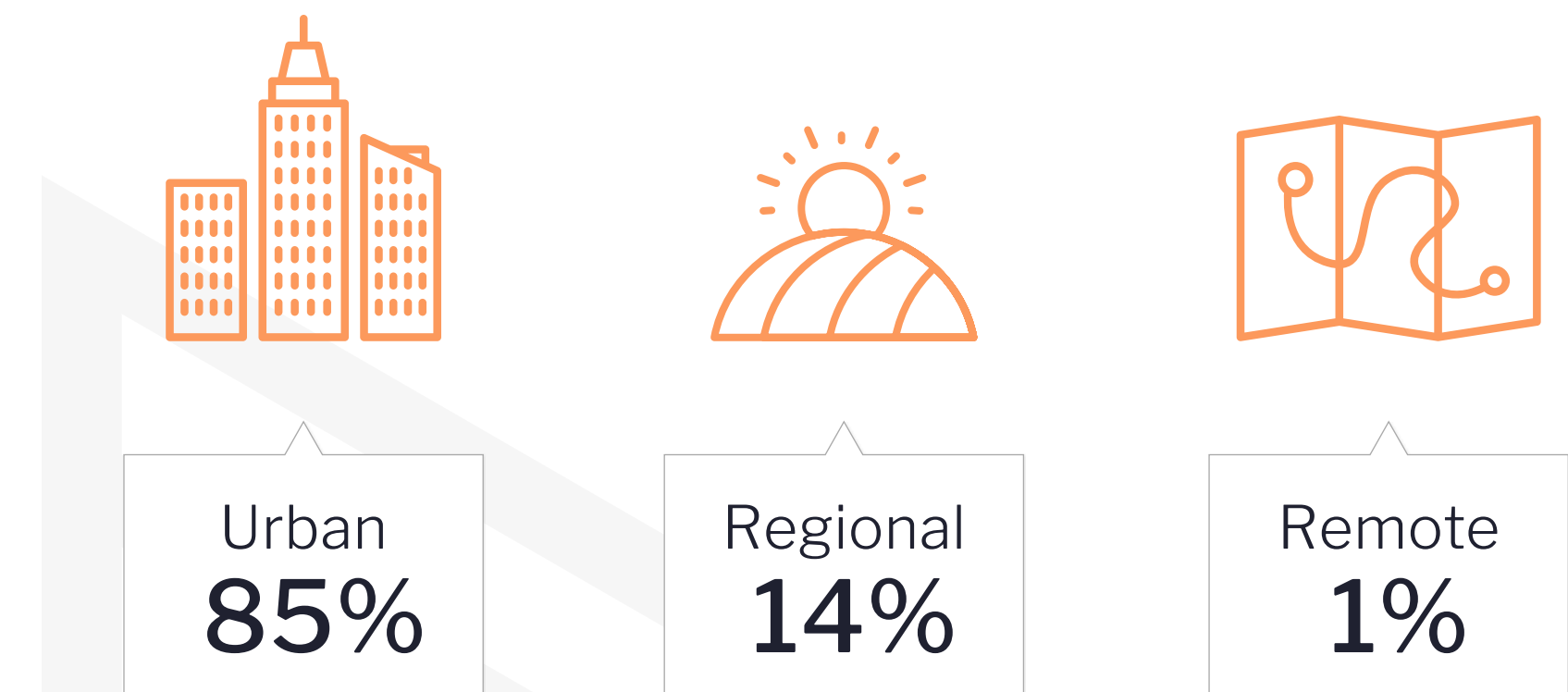


THE ARTISTS

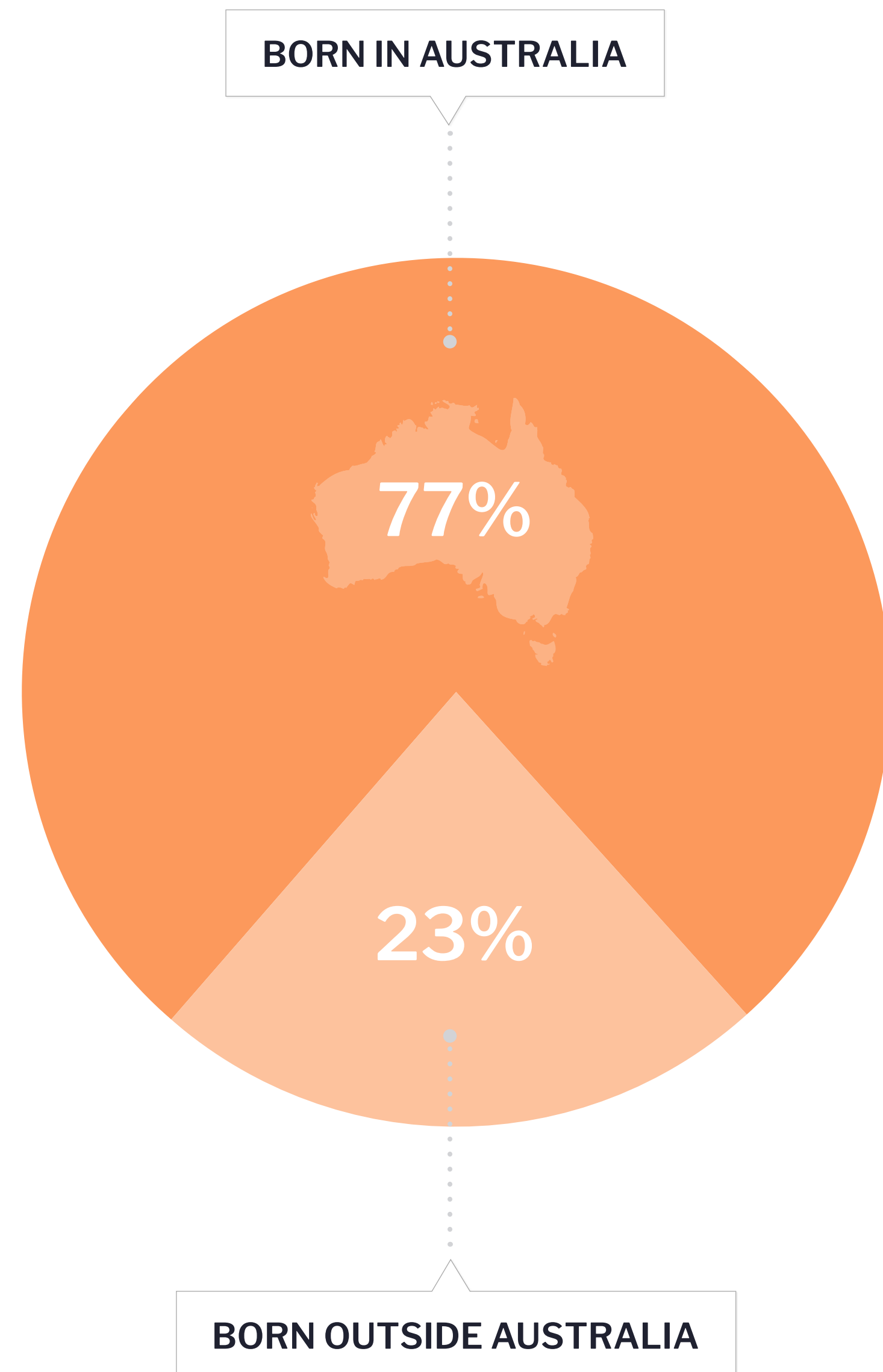
The location of respondents is consistent with our 2017 survey. It is reflective of our membership structure and the TNA 'T' model delivering high level national advocacy, research and communications across each of the states/territories, and a deep program of activity in Victoria.



Geographical Area



THE ARTISTS



Country of Birth

Of those born outside of Australia:

- ▶ **5%** were from the United Kingdom;
- ▶ **2.5%** from United States of America;
- ▶ **2%** from New Zealand.

Respondents were also born in Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Colombia, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates and Vietnam.

THE ARTISTS

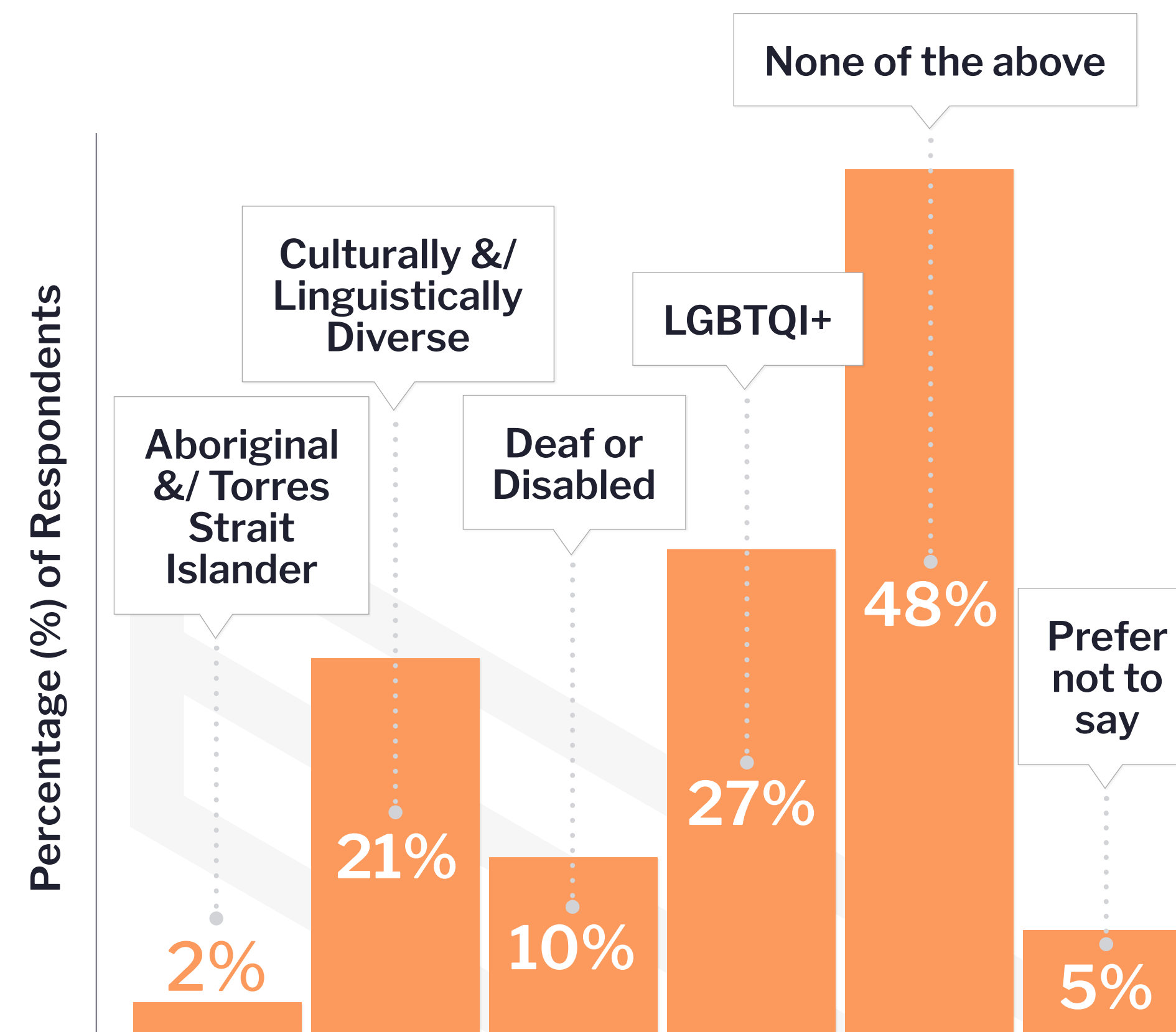
Representation

Despite extensive efforts at shoulder tapping, personal invitations to participate and distribution through targeted networks, our 2020 survey respondents are not representative of the general population.

Of the respondents: 2% are Aboriginal &/ Torres Strait Islander artists — less than the 3.3% estimate for the general Australian population¹; 21% identify as Culturally & / Linguistically Diverse artists which is below the 39% of Australians who identify as coming from a cultural backgrounds other than a solely Anglo-Celtic background² and 10% identify as Deaf and Disabled artists consistent with the 10% of working age people who are Deaf and Disabled in the general population.³

By contrast, 27% of respondents identify as LGBTQI+ artists compared with the 5.6% estimation for the general Australian population.⁴

In summary, our survey reflects the under-representation of various groups in the arts sector.



1 Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018.

2 Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership Within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors, Diversity Arts Australia, BYP Group and Western Sydney University, 2019.

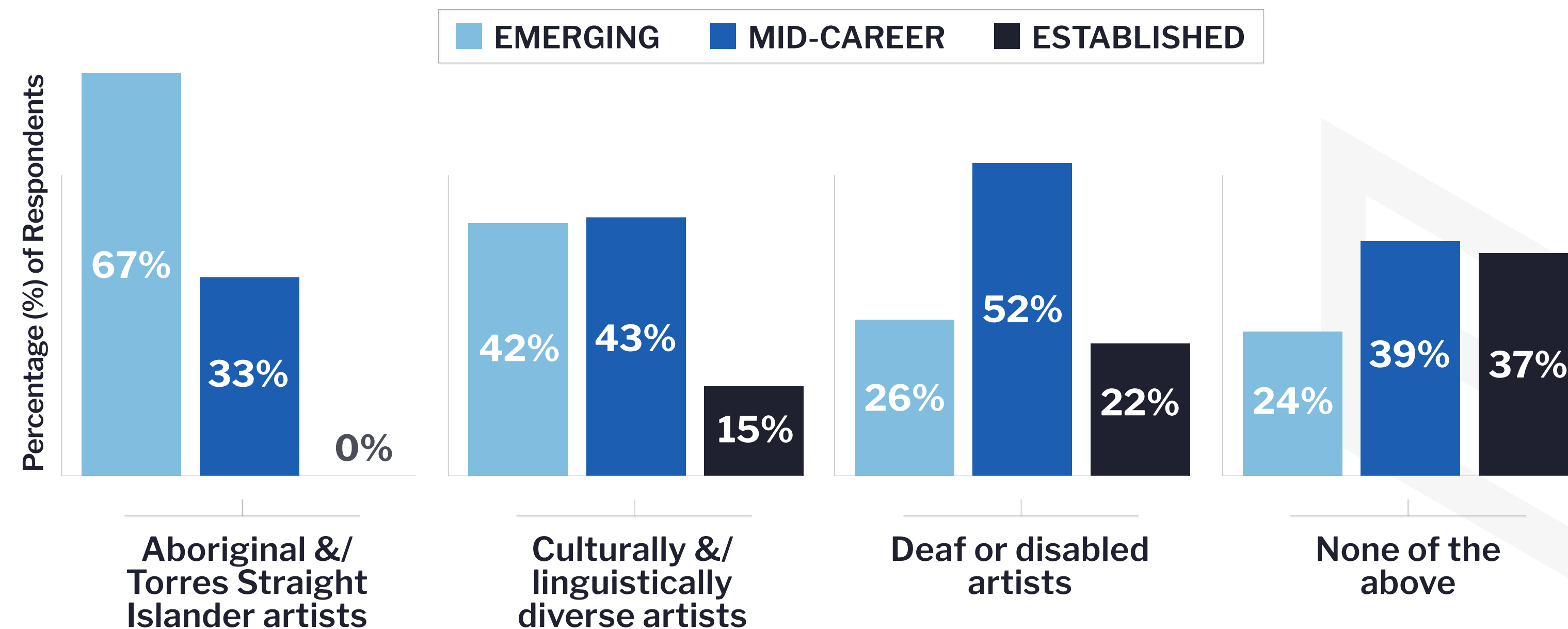
3 People with Disability in Australia, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019.

4 Australia's Health 2018, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018.

THE ARTISTS

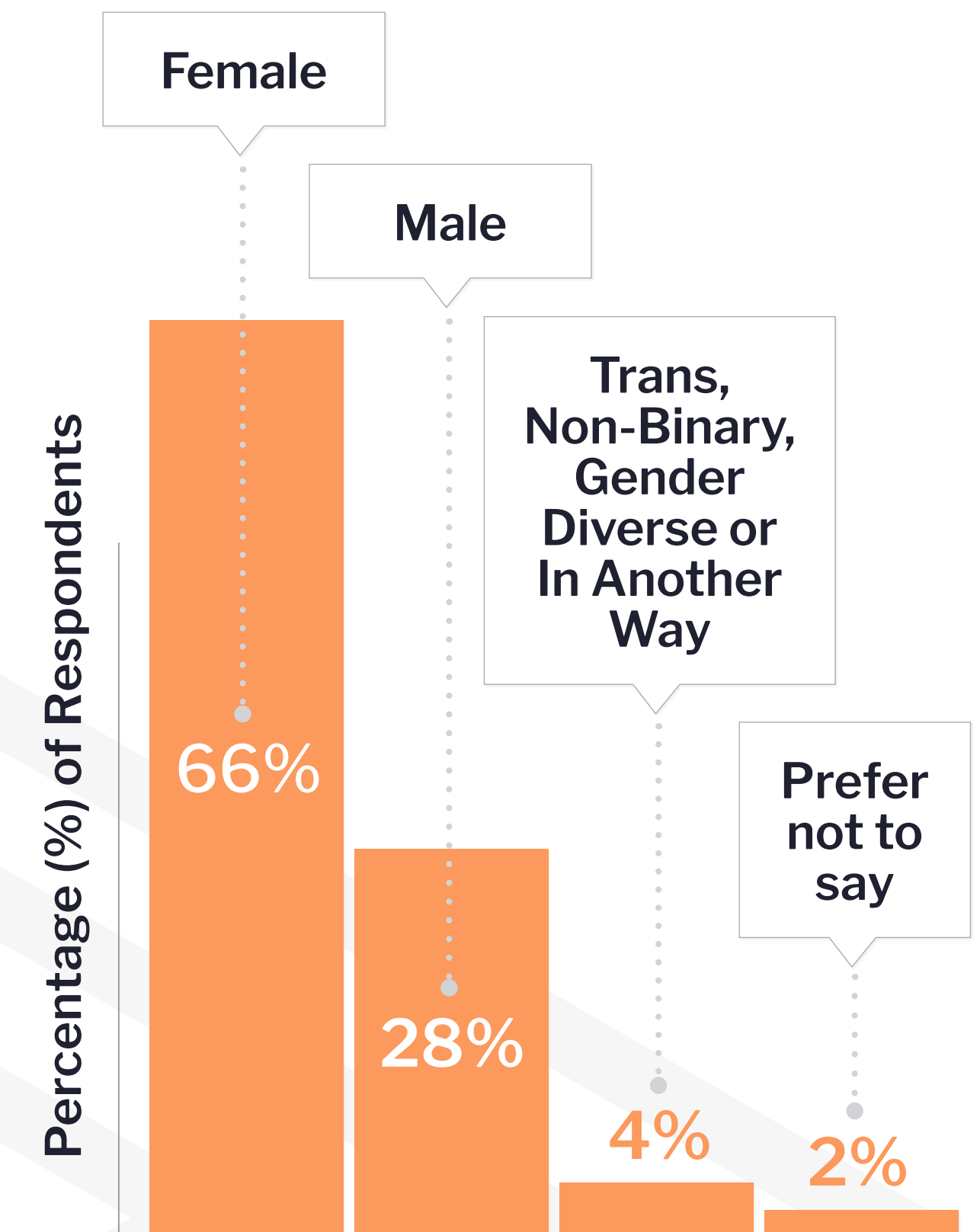
Representation at Career Stage

Similar to our 2017 survey, there is greater representation of Culturally &/ Linguistically Diverse artists, Aboriginal &/ Torres Strait Islander artists and Deaf or Disabled artists in emerging and mid-career stages. For comparison, in the None of the Above category, we see a fairly even spread across career stages.



75% of the respondents who identify as Trans, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse or In Another Way also identify as a Deaf or Disabled artist. No established practitioners identify as Trans, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse or In Another Way.

Gender Identity



THE **ART**

Chapter 2

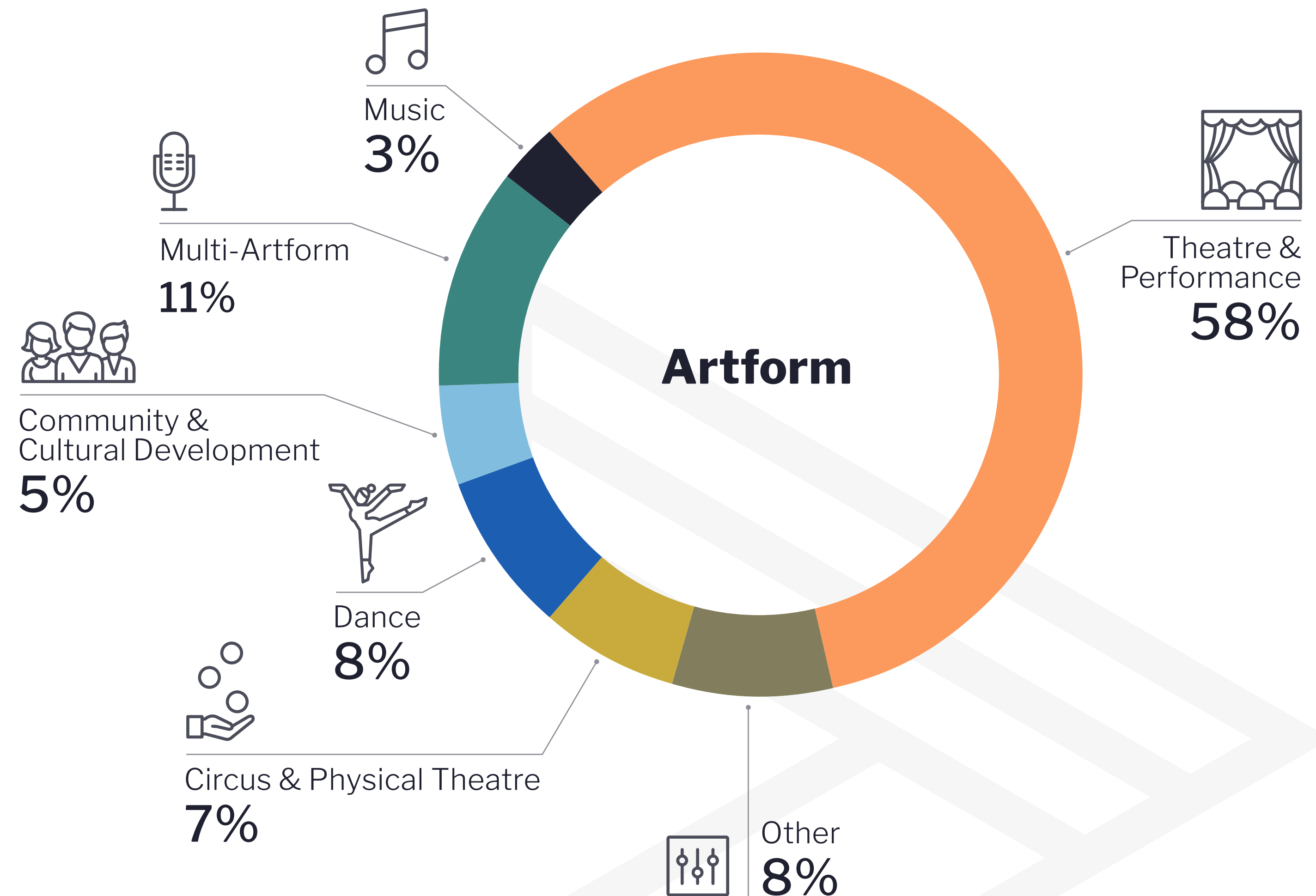
THE ART

Artists are increasingly working across different artforms, in multiple roles across projects and with varied working arrangements.

Artform

The majority of respondents identify their artform as Theatre & Performance, reflecting TNA's membership and reach.

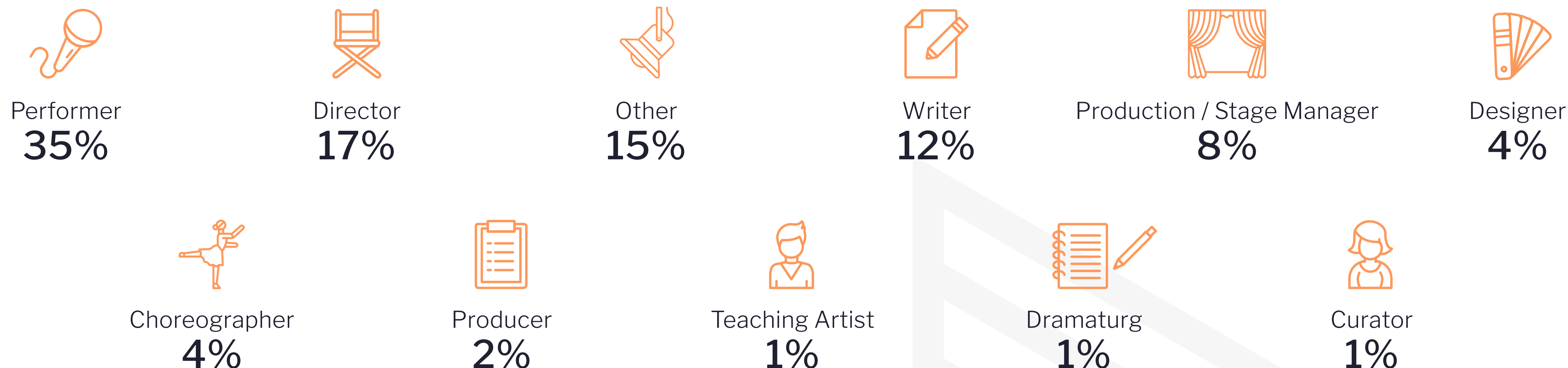
- ▶ A **'Multi-Artform'** segment was created after results were analysed to represent those who responded with multiple artforms or with the terms Cross Artform, Interdisciplinary and Multi-Artform.
- ▶ **'Other'** respondents work in the areas of Live Art, Participatory & Social Practice, Puppetry, Screen, Cabaret, Burlesque, Comedy and Experimental Practice.



THE ART

To examine how independent artists define themselves, we asked for respondents' primary and secondary roles in their art practice.

Primary Role



Roles not listed but added by respondents are — Costume Tech, Video and Sound Creator, Editor, Broadcaster, Lighting Designer, Circus Rigger, Workshop Leader/Facilitator, Mentor and Movement Director.

Comments show that artists do not necessarily see one specific role as their main focus. Independent artists fulfill multiple roles sometimes within the same project or across varying projects within the year. Response to the secondary roles are dispersed across all provided titles.

Only 6% say that they do not have a secondary practice.

THE ART

“
...quite deliberately, I don't have a primary focus for my work and try to maintain a balance between different focuses.”

“
I do a mixture of performing, directing, writing, [dramaturgy] and creative producing. They all equally contribute to my income.”

“
Impossible to just tick one: Director/Producer/Performer in own company.”

Working Arrangements

We asked respondents about their working arrangements on creative projects — whether they are the Lead Creative or work more on projects initiated by others. Able to tick only one of the following options as their primary engagement, the majority of artists are creating their own work and projects which is consistent with our findings from the 2017 survey.



Many who answered 'Other' were unable to choose one and split their time between the above arrangements. 'Other' was included for the first time in 2020 because of similar feedback in 2017.

With over half of the 283 respondents being the Lead Creative on projects, the amount of artistic practice driven by individuals within the sector is significant.

Creative Employment

Independent artists worked on more creative projects in 2019 compared to 2017 to make ends meet: working an average of about 1 project a month. On average, established artists work on twice as many projects than emerging artists.

The primary role that artists fulfill also influences the yearly project count.

Number of Creative Projects Worked Per Year

OVERALL AVERAGE:

11

Up from 8 in 2017

EMERGING 8

MID-CAREER 10

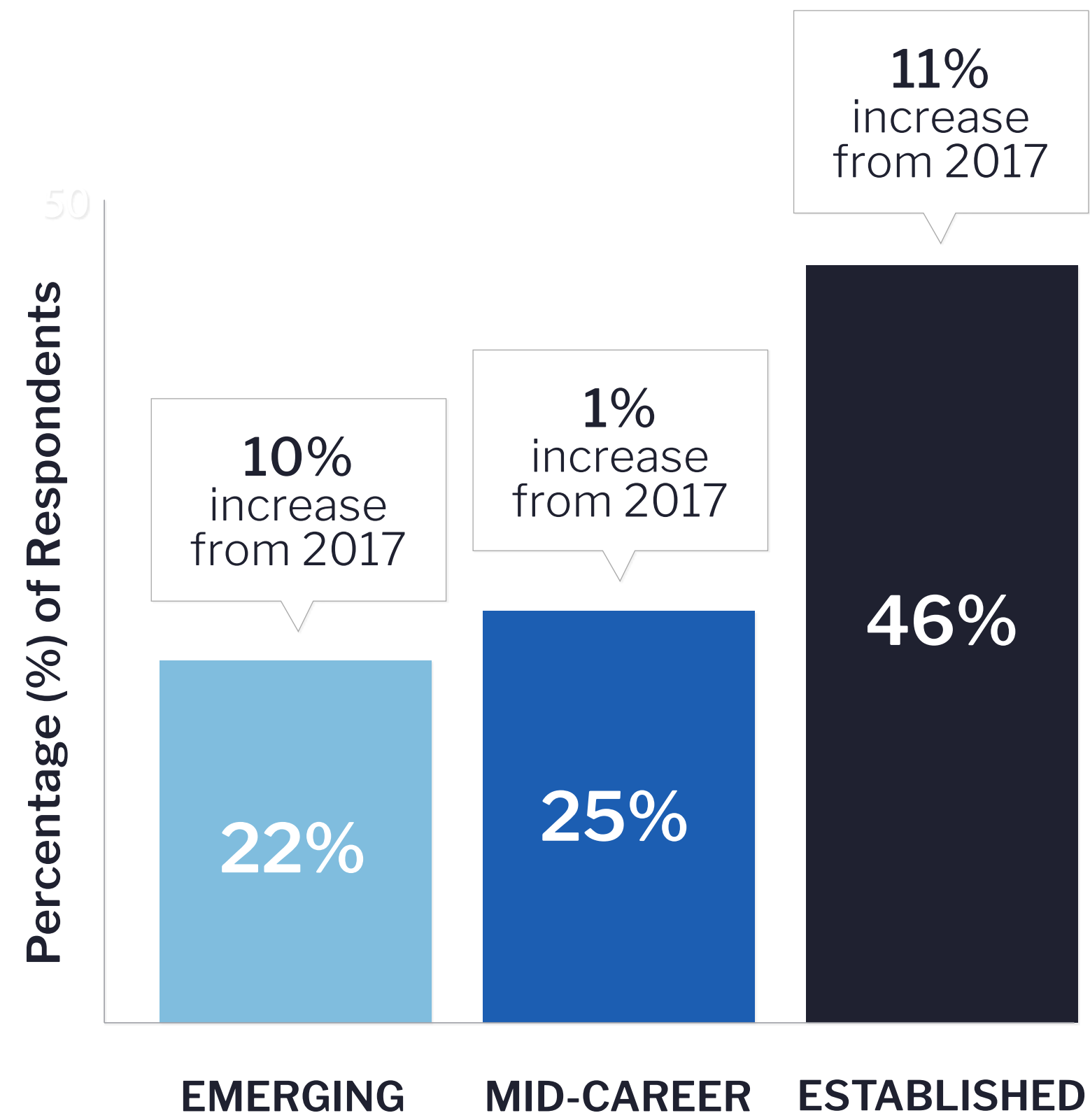
ESTABLISHED 16

Average Number of Creative Projects By Primary Role

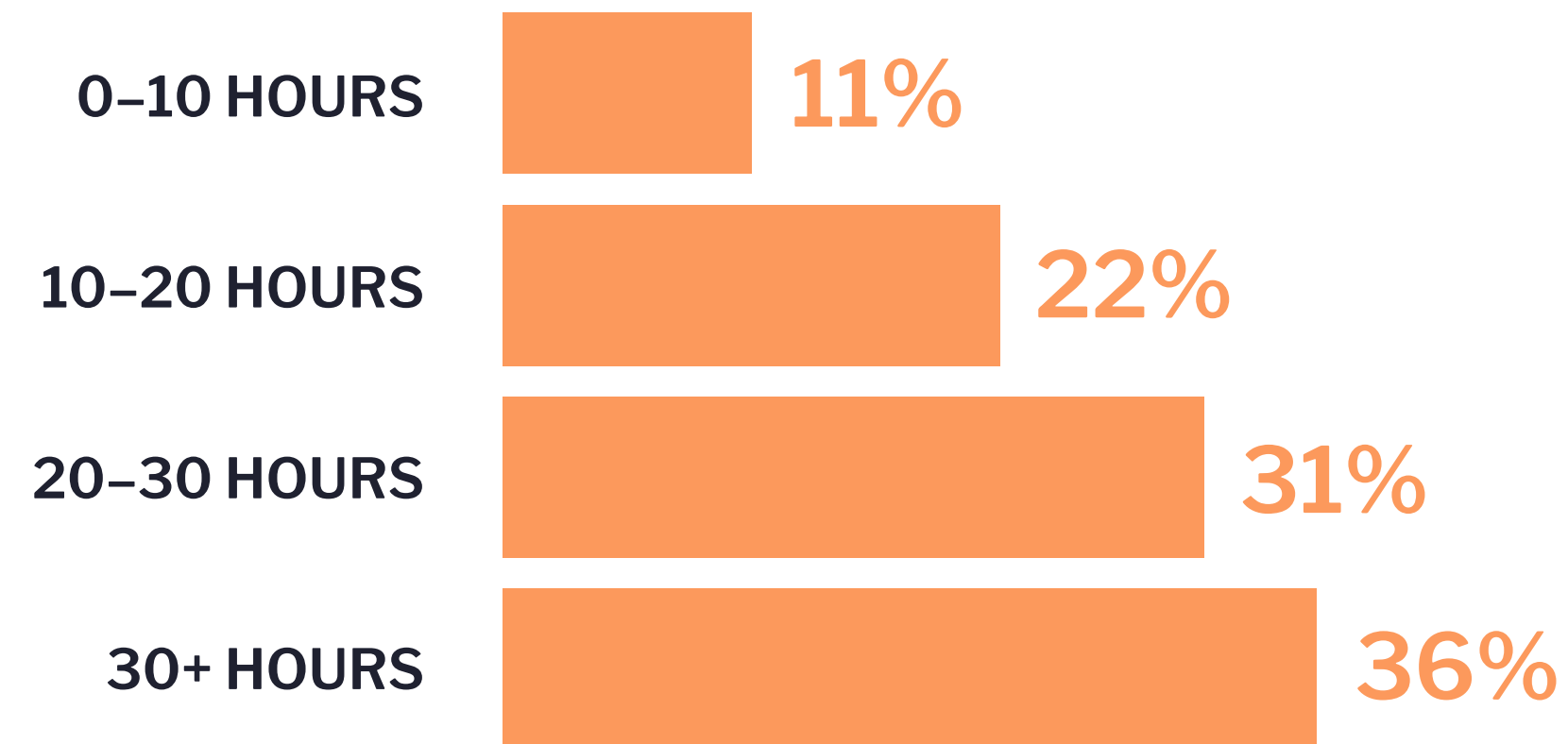


The percentage of respondents working exclusively in their creative practice without other employment has grown across all career stages since the 2017 survey. With twice as many established artists working exclusively in their creative practice than emerging artists, this aligns closely with their number of projects (above), also being double that of emerging artists.

Artists Working Exclusively in their Creative Practice by Career Stage



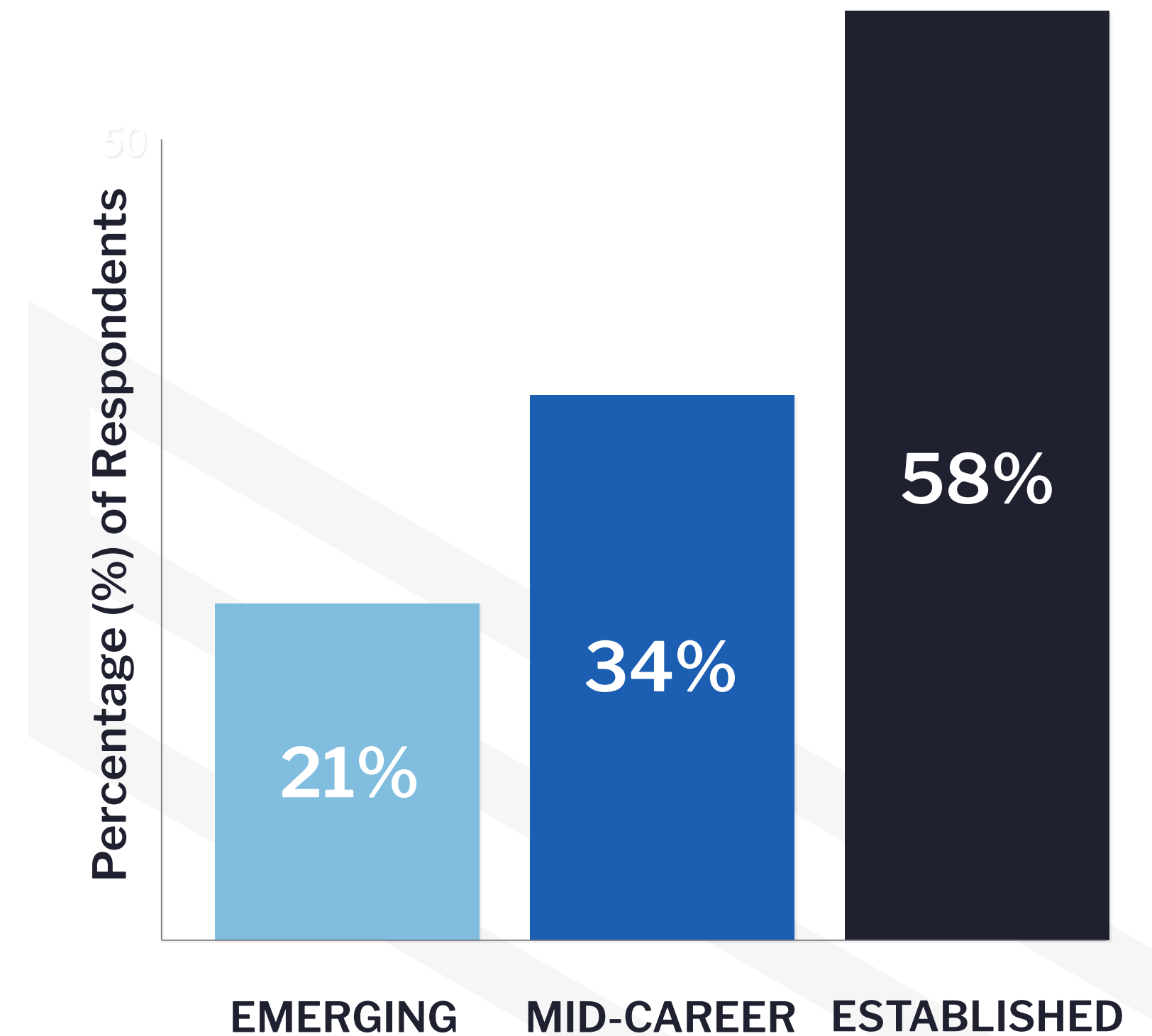
Hours Spent Per Week on Creative Practice



Over 65% of respondents work more than 20 hours a week on their creative practice. As respondents progress through career stages, so too do their hours of work per week. When considering hours committed to creative practice, we must also recognise that artists spend 57% of their time on creative work, to generate only 39% of their income and that an artists' total average income is 21% below the national average.¹

¹ Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, 2017.

Working 30+ Hours on Creative Practice by Career stage



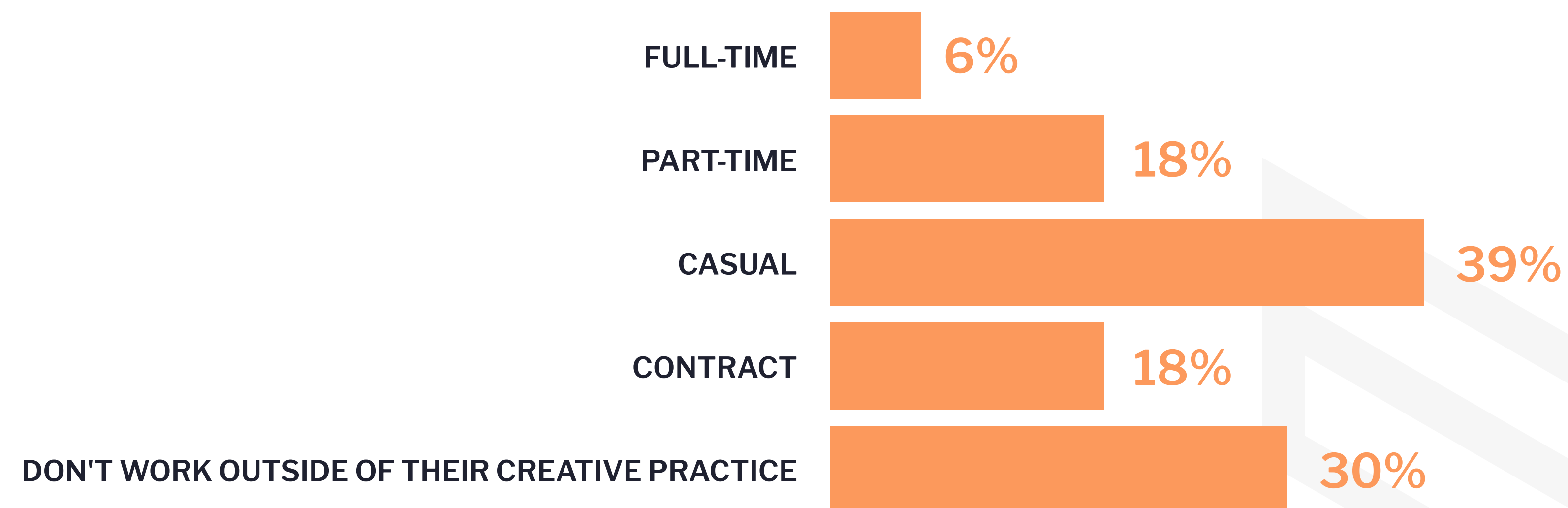
THE **OTHER** WORK

Chapter 3

THE OTHER WORK

The majority of independent artists surveyed split their time between creative projects and other employment to earn money. Almost 70% of respondents maintain some form of employment outside of their creative practice, with some engaged in more than one job.

Other Employment



Casual employment is the most common type of employment held by independent artists, making them particularly vulnerable financially, but perhaps providing the flexibility they need to deliver

their creative projects. Over half of emerging artists maintain casual employment, which drops to around 30% for mid-career and established artists.

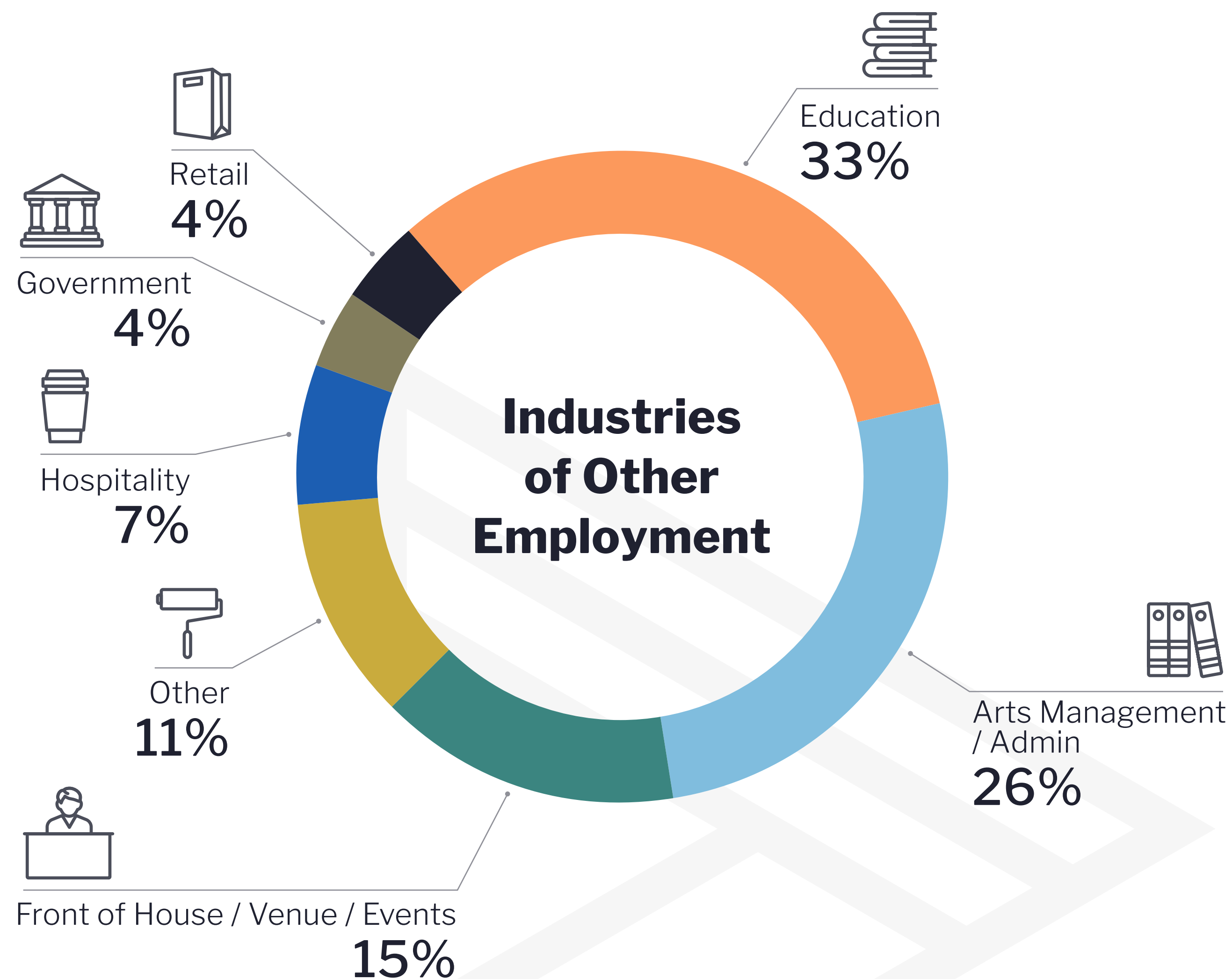
THE OTHER WORK

Industries of Other Employment

Money earned by many artists outside of their creative practice is still very reliant on the performing arts sector with employment in areas such as Arts Management / Admin and Front of House / Venue / Events.

Those working part-time or casual jobs outside their practice are engaged on an average of 9 creative projects per year. Artists who are working full-time jobs outside their creative practice work on an average of 3 creative projects per year. Considering the number of hours worked on creative practice plus the time on outside employment, the number of hours worked per week by many of these artists will far exceed the 38 Maximum Weekly Hours in accordance with the Fair Work Act.¹

¹ Maximum Weekly Hours, Fair Work Ombudsman, 2017.



THE **MONEY**

Chapter 4

THE MONEY

We regularly field requests from independent artists for fee benchmarking in a range of employment circumstances. Here we **average the figures provided by respondents** for common activities to get a sense of the **current ‘going rates.’** We also sought insights into the factors they take into consideration when setting rates.

Hourly and Weekly Rates with Different Employers

	ESTABLISHED ORGANISATIONS	FUNDED ARTISTS OR COLLECTIVES	UNFUNDED ARTISTS OR COLLECTIVES*
OVERALL	\$61.55 hr / \$1345.55 wk	\$47.15 hr / \$1075.69 wk	\$30.74 hr / \$660.70 wk
EMERGING	\$52.37 hr / \$1148.23 wk	\$42.91 hr / \$873.53 wk	\$27.69 hr / \$479.48 wk
MID-CAREER	\$61.10 hr / \$1391.48 wk	\$47.40 hr / \$1127.43 wk	\$30.72 hr / \$712.34 wk
ESTABLISHED	\$74.51 hr / \$1517.31 wk	\$52.49 hr / \$1247.37 wk	\$34.94 hr / \$778.75 wk

*These numbers were calculated from respondents who do charge for their time — many respondents working for Unfunded Artists or Collectives do not charge any fees.

Average Fees Charged for One-off Engagements



1 HOUR OF PRIVATE TUTORING: \$77.18

Down from \$80.72 in 2017

EMERGING \$65.95

MID-CAREER \$79.23

ESTABLISHED \$88.62



PLANNING AND FACILITATING A 2 HOUR MASTERCLASS: \$312.55

Up from \$263.98 in 2017

EMERGING \$253.40

MID-CAREER \$343.63

ESTABLISHED \$334.92



1 HOUR INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSION: \$222.23

Up from \$195.78 in 2017

EMERGING \$170.40

MID-CAREER \$236.68

ESTABLISHED \$267.33



WRITING AND DELIVERING A FORMAL KEYNOTE: \$459.01

Equal with \$459.57 in 2017

EMERGING \$362.57

MID-CAREER \$488.97

ESTABLISHED \$593.33

THE MONEY

“
I usually accept whatever
I am offered (if anything).
”

“
These are not award
nor ideal, underpaid
in practice!
”

“
I often have to explain how my "hourly"
rate for a 2-hour gig (eg. a workshop)
has to cover several hours [of]
planning, travel, set up and evaluation.
”

“
I'm happy to work for free -
but not for an org that has
plenty of money to pay me.
”

Notes on Rates

Many respondents included comments with their rates. Common themes include getting paid a one-off fee instead of charging hourly or weekly wages, working on profit-share projects or working for free — especially when working on unfunded projects.

A range of reference points that assist them include:

- ▶ Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance guidelines;
- ▶ Live Performance Australia rates;
- ▶ Advice from agents;
- ▶ Australian Writers' Guild rates;
- ▶ Auspicious Arts Guide;
- ▶ National Association for Visual Arts' Schedule of Fees;
- ▶ TNA's 2017 Indie Survey;
- ▶ Peer consultation.

Factors influencing rates charged include:

- ▶ Who is running the project and their funding status;
- ▶ Whether the project has funding;
- ▶ Creative outcomes, benefits and potential for professional growth;
- ▶ Previous rates offered / received;
- ▶ Career stage;
- ▶ Number of total hours required ;
- ▶ Impact of the project.

The majority of independent artists set rates on a case by case basis and many do not have a standard amount they charge.

THE MONEY

“
... flexible, but I try to avoid being exploited.”

“
Flexible scale
according to context,
need and who's asking.”

“
I have been finding that orgs are still on the
\$1250 for 6 days & as many hours as they
ask for, I have shifted to aim for \$1500 for
40 hrs over 5 days.”

“
... rates depend
on if there's other
income for me to
supplement...”

“
...content and integrity are more
important to me than dollars.
My fee depends on the overall
reward from the engagement...”

“
Larger organisations tend to offer
lower fees / rates than smaller orgs.”

Expenses

There are a number of direct expenses incurred to keep an artistic practice afloat, including professional development, health and wellbeing, as well as financial advice and services. Below are the averages of responses provided.



AVERAGE 2019 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SPEND: \$4202.16

Up from \$3084 in 2017: +36%

EMERGING \$4807.04

MID-CAREER \$4076.54

ESTABLISHED \$3698.64

- Professional development could include education, courses, workshops, attending conferences, forums or events, or anything required to keep up with the latest in the industry. The maximum spend on professional development was \$30,000 and the minimum \$18.



AVERAGE 2019 HEALTH AND WELLBEING SPEND: \$1967.24

Up from \$1421 in 2017: +38%

EMERGING \$1642.57

MID-CAREER \$2185.89

ESTABLISHED \$2000.00

- The maximum spend on health and wellbeing was \$25,000 and the minimum \$9.

77% of respondents sought advice or services from a registered accountant for their income tax. This is a decrease of 4% from the 2017 survey.

Superannuation

Superannuation is another expense — money that is put aside now to be used in retirement. However, worryingly, 8% of respondents either did not know or had no superannuation, which has grown from the 3% reported in 2017.

Artists in the performing arts are automatically entitled to super if they are an employee and also if they are a sole trader.

Legislation requires super to be paid for sole traders who are:

- ▶ paid to participate in the performance or presentation of any music, play, dance, entertainment;
- ▶ paid to provide services in connection with the above activities;¹

When an artist is working as an employee or as sole trader, the employer or contracting party **is obligated to pay 9.5% super on top of the fee for anything above \$450** (before tax) **in a calendar month** into their nominated superannuation account. Artists with an agent or their own company can make personal contributions.

¹ Superannuation Guarantee Ruling, Australian Tax Office, 2005.

In this survey, 30% of respondents report making personal contributions to their own superannuation, a 3% increase from the 2017 survey.



Industry
Superannuation Fund
78%



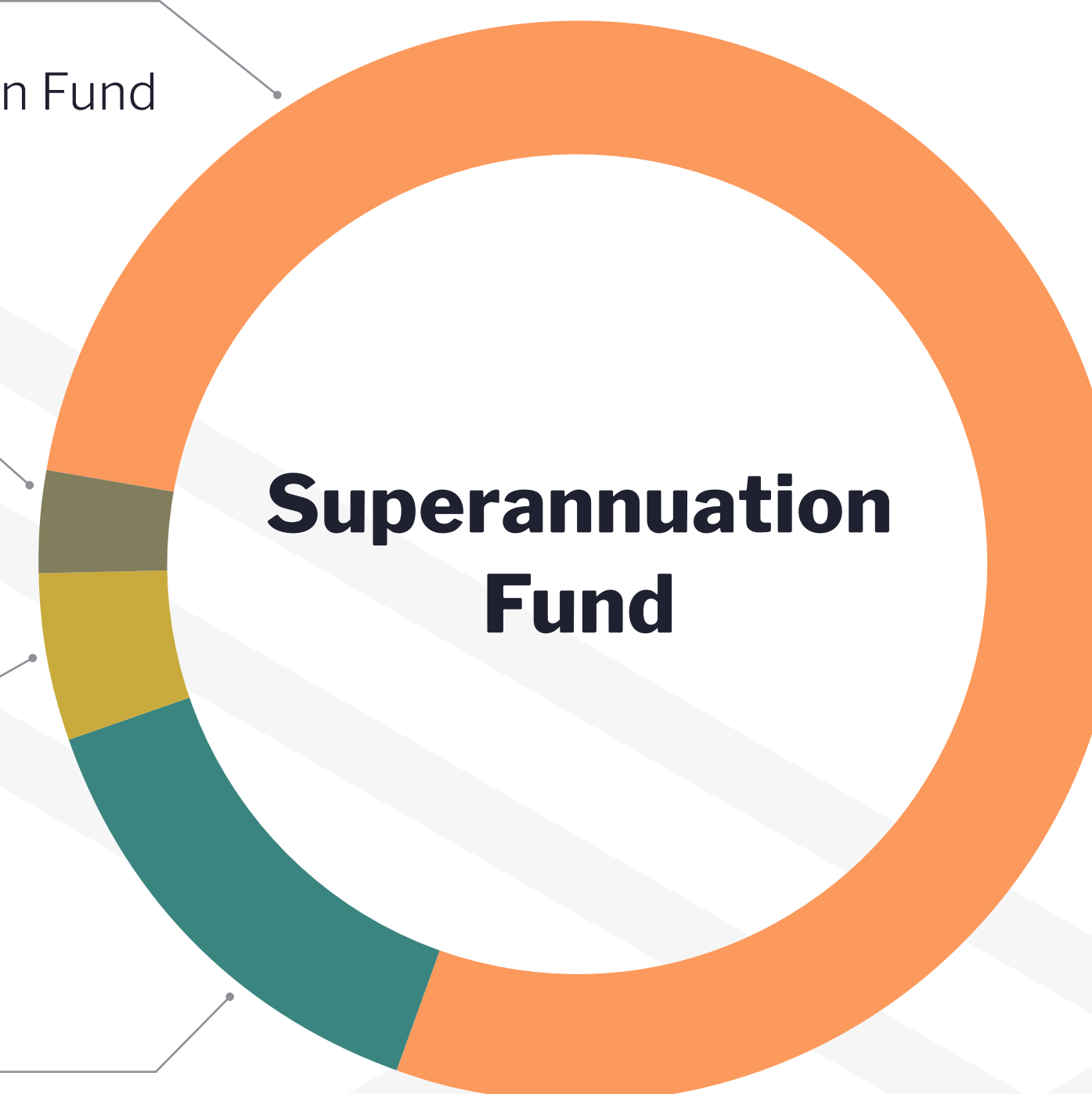
Don't Know
3%



No Super
5%



Retail
Superannuation Fund
14%



Alternative Economies

With the average artist salary from arts work at \$18,000/year¹, it is not surprising that many independent artists trade, swap and exchange services and items to minimise hard costs. 75% of respondents enter into alternative arrangements, outside of a financial contract.

These are some responses from independent artists about what they exchange in the course of their creative practice:

- ▶ Free classes;
- ▶ Space;
- ▶ Technical support;
- ▶ Equipment;
- ▶ Administrative work;
- ▶ Marketing work;
- ▶ Grant writing ;
- ▶ Producing assistance;
- ▶ Mentoring;
- ▶ Advice;
- ▶ Teaching;
- ▶ Building maintenance — cleaning and painting;
- ▶ Strategic planning sessions;
- ▶ Free tickets to shows;
- ▶ Massage;
- ▶ Copywriting;
- ▶ Editing and grant feedback;
- ▶ Dramaturgical support;
- ▶ Set and design elements.

¹ Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, 2017.

THE **IMPACT** OF COVID-19

Chapter 5

THE **IMPACT OF COVID**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been monumental in the performing arts sector and continues to severely impact independent artists across the country.

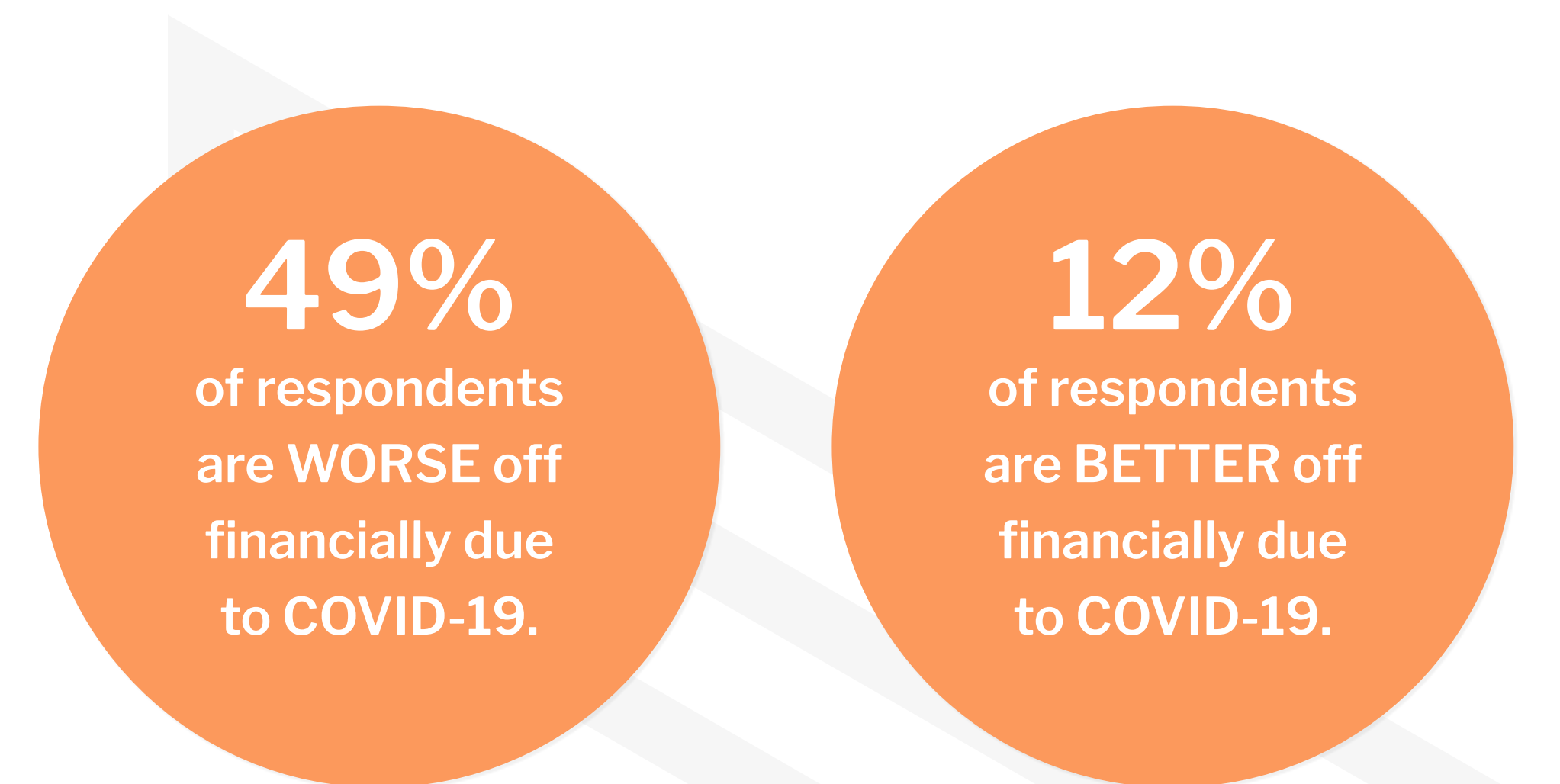
Number of Creative Projects

There was an average of 5 creative projects planned for respondents in 2020 before the impact of COVID-19. This decreased to an average of 1.5 for these same respondents because of the impact of the pandemic.

21% of respondents had no creative projects at all after the impact of the pandemic.

Financial Impact

Fewer emerging artists reported being impacted than mid-career artists, with the highest financial impact felt by established artists as more are relying solely on their practice for income.



THE IMPACT OF COVID

“
I think that the organisations that I work with really tried their best to look after [my] welfare...as the artist...
”

“
It had both a positive and negative impact. It did give me more time to work on my creative practice specifically writing my own work but negatively affected my mental health.
”

“
All domestic & international tours postponed or cancelled.
”

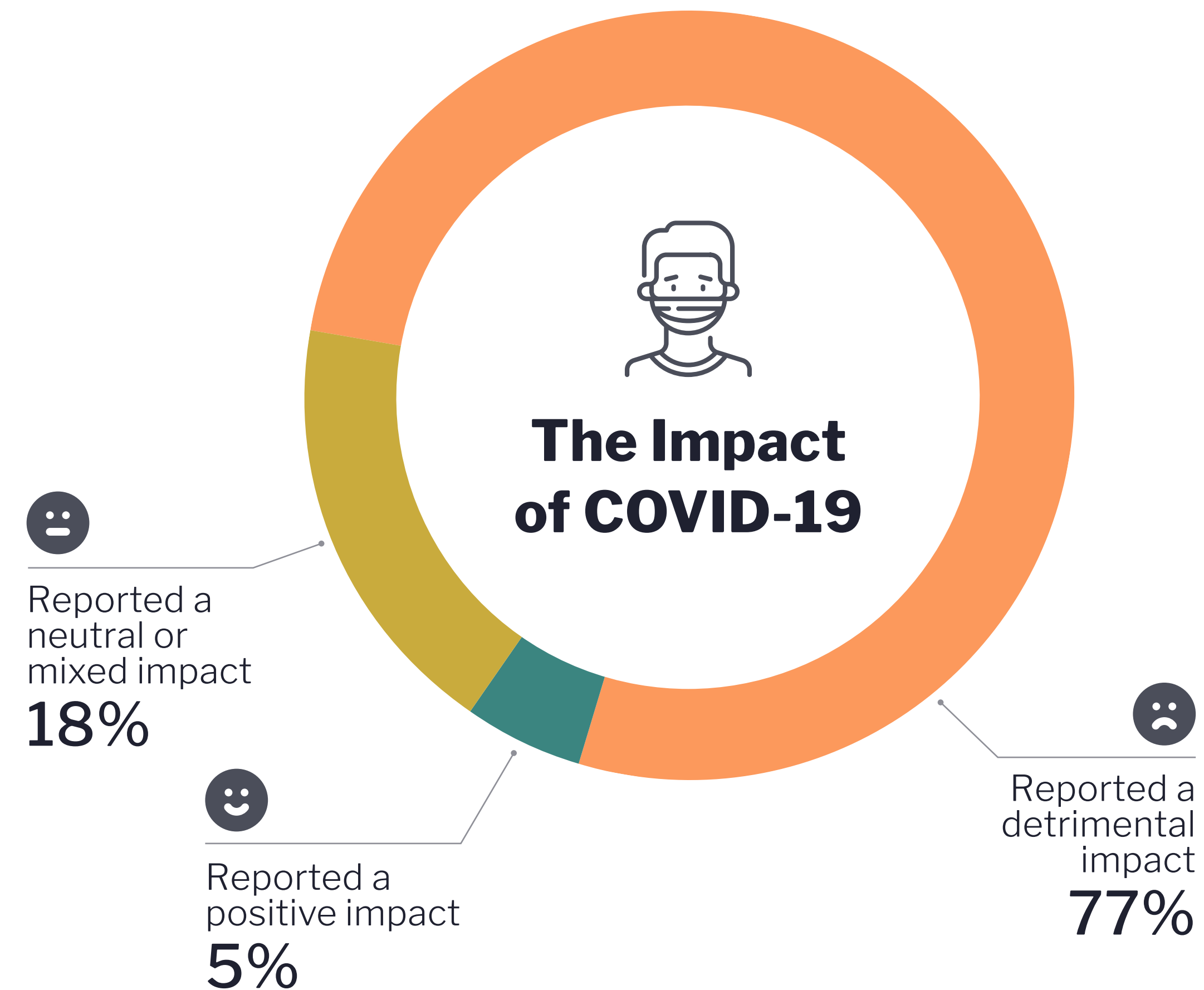
“
[There was a] mad rush to come up with ideas for new or re-purposed projects because of COVID grants.
”

“
It pushed me to be more creative, to figure out alternate solutions for art-making, performing, and income.
”

“
Two productions cancelled, the rest have been moved online but with less financial income due to an inability to monetise.
”

THE **IMPACT OF COVID**

Along with quantitative data, we also asked respondents to report in their own words the impact of COVID-19 on their practice. Our text analysis produced the following findings.



“I have never lived [in] a more stressful time (mentally, emotionally, physically and financially).”

THE IMPACT OF COVID

“ I lost 8 months of touring full-time work as well as the ability to work independently on my own projects / creative developments due to ...restrictions. ”

“ All my shows have been cancelled this year except in December, including a number of interstate and international tours. Having said this, I have also had more time to focus on my own creative practice and develop skills. ”

“ The play I was rehearsing was cancelled and I lost all my teaching work at 5 different institutions. ”

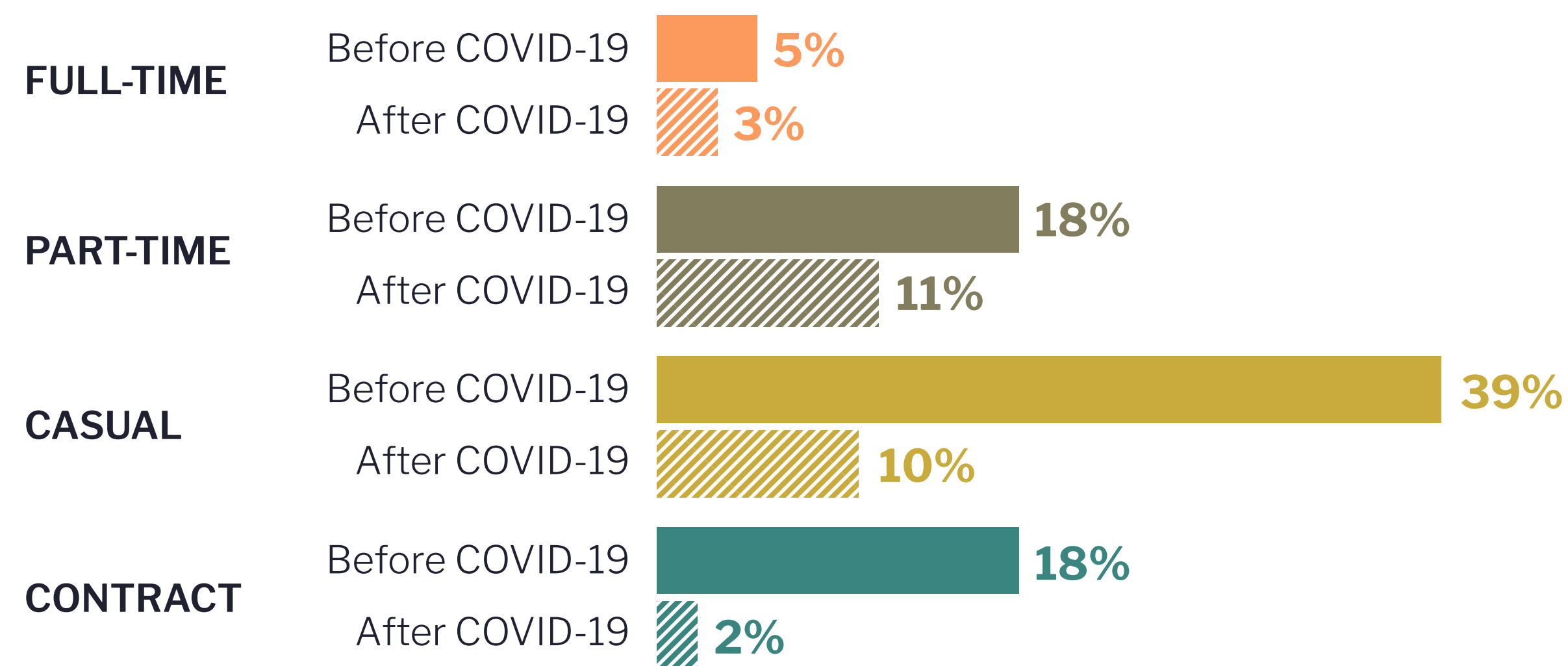
“ Receiving JobKeeper payments through my ABN has ...enabled me to be more selective about applying for grant opportunities, and relaxed some timelines. I have been able to spend more time on other aspects of independent practice. ”

THE IMPACT OF COVID

Pre-existing precarity within the arts sector and reliance on work within the arts, hospitality and education sectors compounded the financial strain many experienced in 2020.

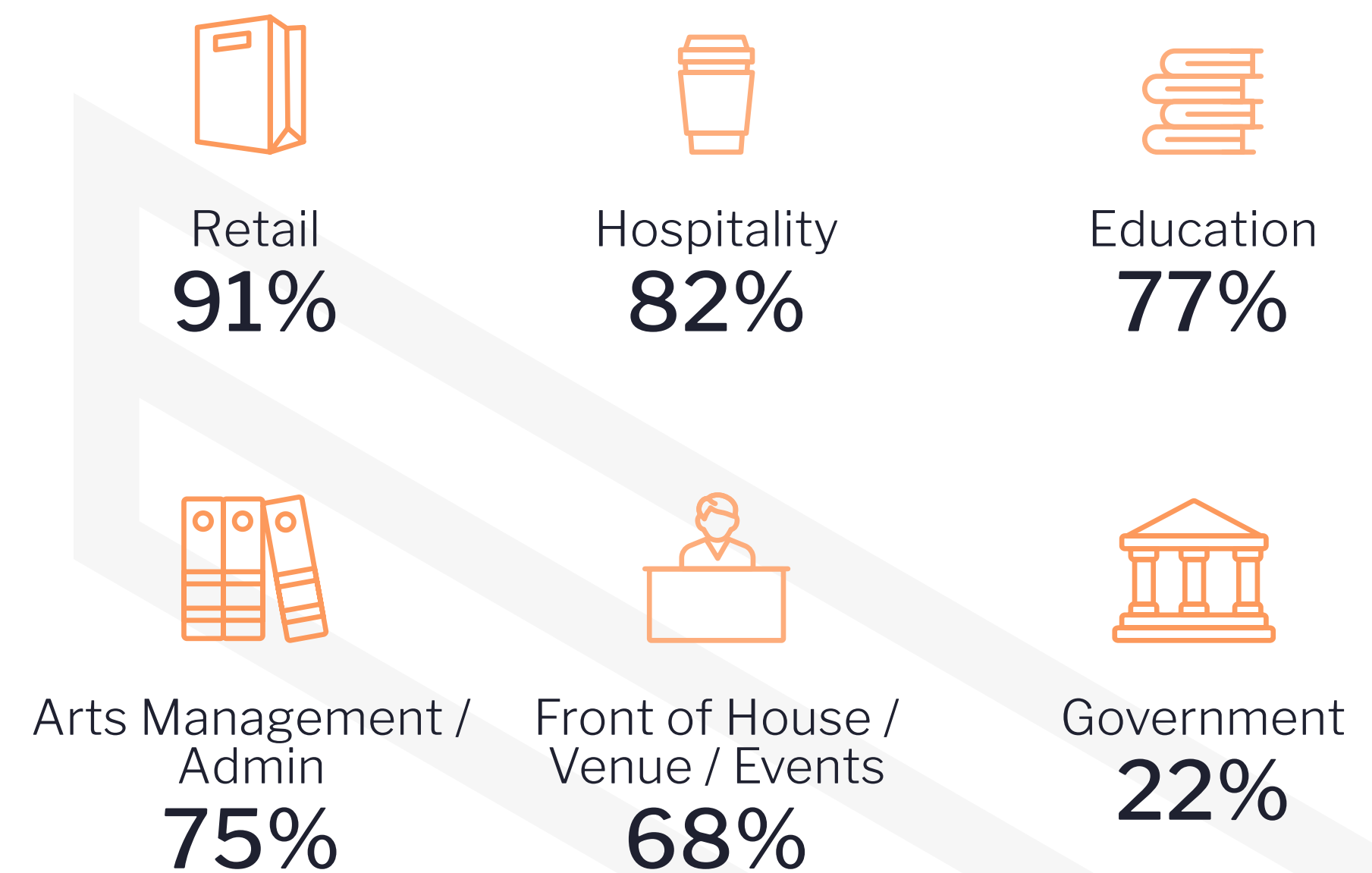
83% of independent artists who have other employment lost work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on Other Employment



87% of Contract employment was lost, followed by 74% of Casual employment, 50% of Full-time employment and 41% of Part-time employment.

Jobs Lost by Industry



THE IMPACT OF COVID

Support and Survival

Changes to the way we live, work, communicate and socialise to keep ourselves and others safe from COVID-19 have led to many actions taken by respondents.

- ▶ 12% of respondents relocated due to COVID-19. Of those that relocated, 45% said it was to be with family or friends.
- ▶ 11% of respondents accessed their superannuation due to COVID-19. This aligns with the 1.35 million approved applications to access superannuation across Australia — the majority for the full amount of \$10,000¹. More people from the mid-career or established bracket accessed superannuation.
- ▶ 56% of respondents applied for survival or crisis response money from one or more sources. Sources mentioned included The National Assistance Program for the Arts (Myer Foundation and others), Australia Council for the Arts, Support Act and TNA's Crisis Cash among others.

¹ How to avoid pain accessing super during coronavirus pandemic, ABC News, Emma Elsworthy, 2020.

Actions Taken by Respondents



“Losing my stable non-arts job has been the most worrying part.”

THE IMPACT OF COVID

“
Working at home in isolation is not good for collaborative / physical artists.
”

“
I'm optimistic about the future at this point.
”

“
COVID has dramatically increased my workload whilst decreasing my income.
”

“
Now my creative practice has me looking after me more. I have been fortunate to gain a few opportunities out of Covid, mostly writing (understandable), and now I am rested, and no longer overworked.
”

“
It's very uplifting seeing the resilience come through from fellow creatives.
”

“
My parents are using their retirement funds to help me.
”

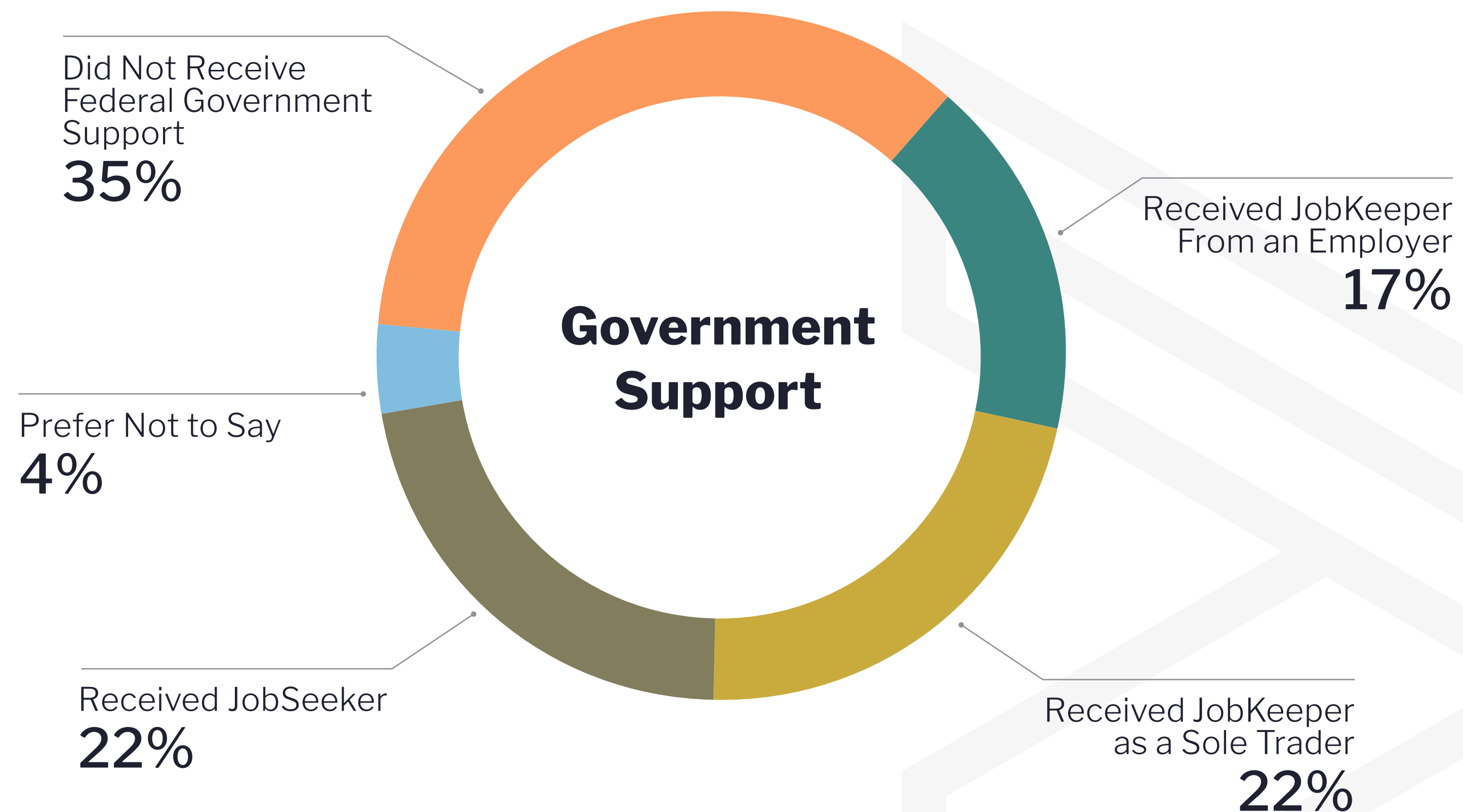
“
There was the sense of futility.
”

THE **IMPACT OF COVID**

Government Support

Of those who believed themselves eligible and completed the full process of requesting JobKeeper / JobSeeker support, 16% were knocked back. From comments provided, it appears there were many more that had determined their own ineligibility based on the guidelines, despite being in need of help.

Some independent artists who did receive support through JobKeeper or the increased Coronavirus Supplement on top of JobSeeker (formerly the Newstart Allowance), had the mixed blessing of being more financially secure than they are in their independent practice.



THE IMPACT OF COVID

“
JobKeeper has
allowed me the
first stable income
I’ve ever had.”

“
We (artists) seem to be forgotten
and our industry ignored as a major
contributor to society and economy.”

“
Needing to apply for a ‘real job’ was
extremely demoralising, as was being
more secure on JobSeeker / JobKeeper
than with a professional arts practice.”

“
Dealing with job service providers
has been traumatic leading to mental
health issues and panic attacks.”

“
...my practice actually thrived once
the life factors were stabilised.”

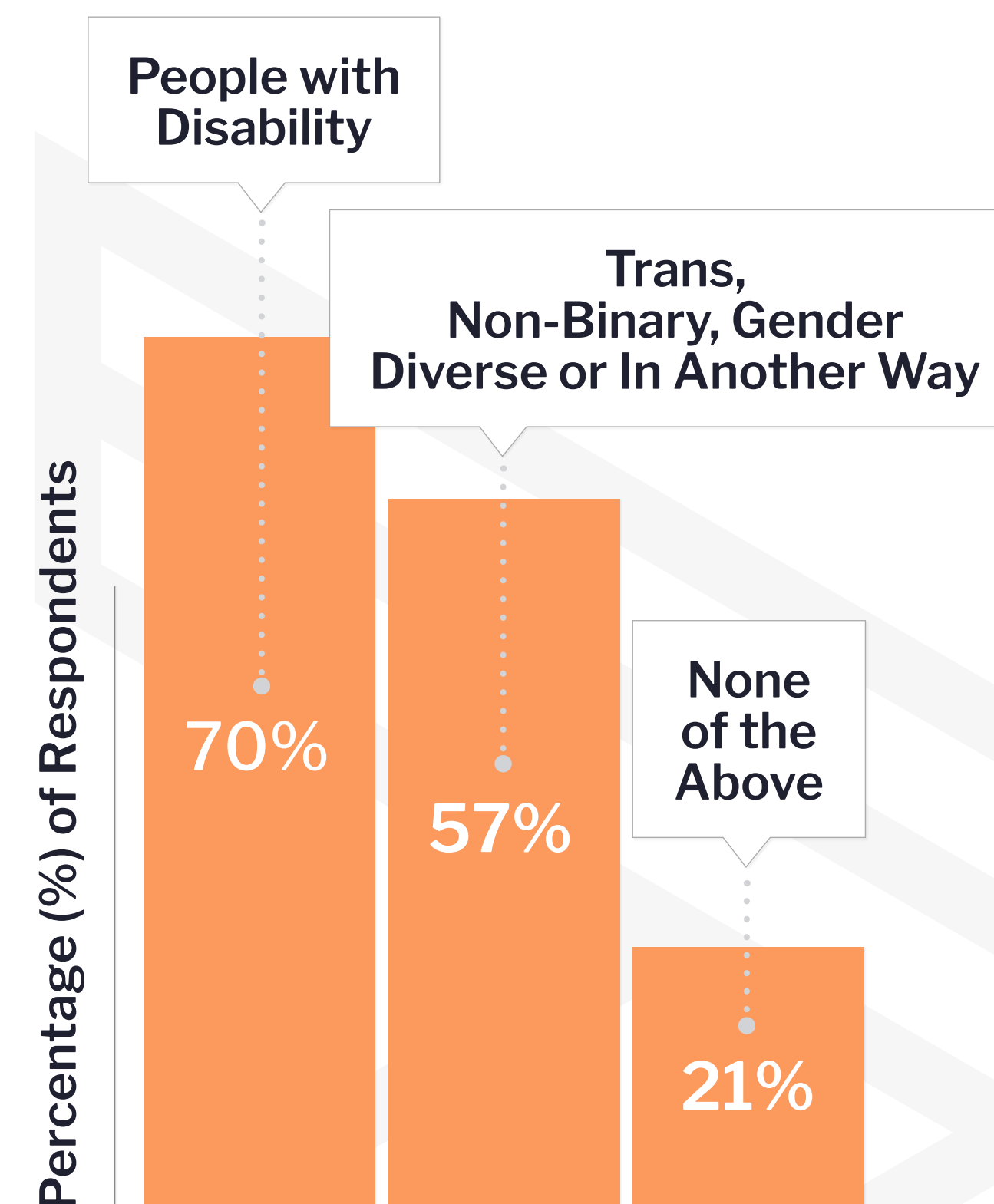
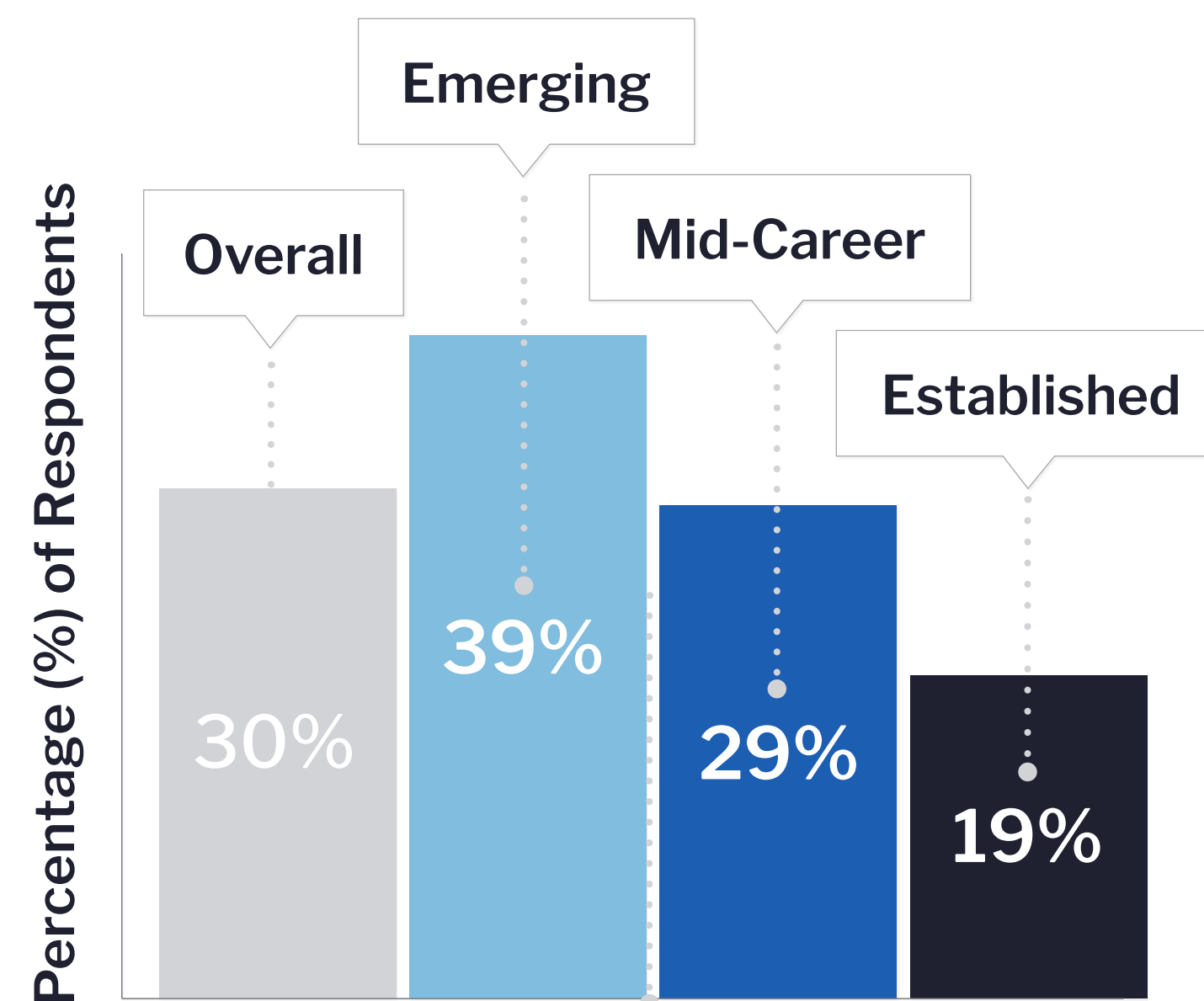
THE IMPACT OF COVID

Mental Health

Before COVID-19 the Australian entertainment industry had already recorded significant mental health challenges. 15.2% of our workers were already experiencing moderate to severe depression (compared to 3% in the general population) and 44% experiencing moderate to severe anxiety (compared to 3.7% in the general population)¹. The impact of COVID-19 saw 1 in 3 respondents access mental health services.

An artist's stage of career and their identifiers had a large influence on the percentage of those who accessed mental health services.

Accessed Mental Health Services



¹ Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry: Final Report, Victoria University and Entertainment Assist, 2016.

THE IMPACT OF COVID

““

I found it very difficult to focus on creative practice when so much of the rest of my life was affected – working from home, being unable to see family / friends, relationship pressures.

””

““

I, along with many others, find it appalling that performing artists have been so specifically excluded from almost all federal government financial rescue packages, including the much vaunted \$250m injection into the arts.

””

““

Covid has been terrible for my arts career but amazing for my life.

””

““

I went from leaving the house at 7am and coming back at 11pm nearly 7 days a week working multiple creative projects to cold turkey at home. It took me a while to adjust, but what it has done has allowed me to take a step back, reassess my priorities and focus myself more.

””

TNA OBSERVATIONS

➤ REPRESENTATION

Consistent with our 2017 report, there is a significant drop in artists from traditionally under-represented groups as careers progress. This could indicate that there have been more opportunities for these targeted groups in recent years, or that these opportunities are targeted at emerging artists, and not focussed on these groups of artists sustaining careers into mid-career or established. It could also highlight ongoing barriers for these groups across their career development.

This report also shows that independent artists use varied identifiers about who they are, often identifying with more than one group.

Without a more complex and nuanced approach to representation and inclusion, the sector is at risk of further alienating artists, promoting segregation and creating barriers to making and experiencing art.

➤ EMPLOYMENT

In 2019, more respondents were employed solely in their creative practice than in 2017. This could reflect that an artistic career is becoming more sustainable, or it could mean there are more people living precariously without a stable income.

Employment outside creative practice was heavily weighted to Arts Management / Admin; Front of House / Venue / Events; and Education. While it is great that the arts and cultural networks of independent artists have provided other employment opportunities, seeking engagement beyond this bubble could be advantageous — for higher earning potential and less precarity.

The number of hours worked per week by independent artists who have jobs outside their creative practice is also significant. With the average number of projects per year increasing from 2017, juggling this with other employment could be contributing to poor mental health and the large amount of spending on health and wellbeing.

➤ MONEY

283
respondents
undertook
3097
projects

Many independent artists do not have set fees or consistent rates for their practice. They also seem to lack confidence in negotiating and setting their own fees for a job. Independent artists are often given the impression, 'If you don't take this offer someone else will!'

High levels of expenditure by Deaf or Disabled artists on health and wellbeing is evident — and also does not lead to higher fees for these artists.

The average rates provided by the respondents to this survey shows the ongoing underpayment of artists working independently. The independents in our survey alone in 2019 undertook 3097 total projects, which are often unfunded or under-funded. On these projects they often receive a fee per person – and yet fulfill multiple roles.

Our industry is currently relying on a huge amount of unpaid labour from independent artists.

When artists are employed by Funded Collectives or Established Organisations, their wages are considerably higher. However, emerging artists' rates when working with Funded Collectives do not fulfill the Live

Performance Award rate of \$941.10 per week (Performer – Category 1 Grade 1)¹. It is only when engaged by an Established Organisation that artists in all career stages receive the current MEAA Performers Collective Agreement (Theatre) rate of \$1,145.70² per week. For comparison, the Australian full-time adult average weekly earnings increased to \$1,713.90³ in May 2020. We must also keep in mind that the expenditure required to continue practising between projects is not covered.

In publishing these rates, TNA advocates for fairer and more equitable remuneration for arts work. Understanding the constant push and pull of lean arts budgets, we would encourage those setting rates to think not only of short-term outcomes but how they can enable independent artists to have more sustainable careers.

1 Live Performance Award 2010, Fair Work Commission, 2020.

2 Equity Minimums 2020, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), 2020.

3 Average Weekly Earnings Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020.

➤ SUPERANNUATION

With such low rates of pay, is it not surprising that only 30% of artists make their own contributions to their superannuation, though 52% are “Lead Creatives” and we assume are thus self-employed. Self-employed artists working on their own projects are not required to make contributions to their own superannuation, but it is an important consideration for a financially secure future.

We recommend artists who do not know or do not have superannuation seek financial advice to understand contributions and obligations and how this can improve their future financial outlook. As a standard on all invoices we also recommend artists include all superannuation details regardless of the amount being charged.

TNA currently pays superannuation on top of all artist contracts regardless of amount as part of our commitment to building a more sustainable future for independents.

In terms of surviving the financial impacts of the pandemic, we note that emerging artists did not access their super at the same rate as mid-career and established artists. Many factors may have influenced these decisions, but one is that they may simply not have much super to access.

➤ LEAD CREATIVES

Lead Creatives, 52% of respondents to this survey, take on the financial and creative risk for projects while filling multiple roles within a project. This takes considerable dedication and work hours, however this position is rarely well-remunerated.

Without their drive to deliver projects, which are commonly under-funded or unfunded, much arts activity across the country would not exist. Lead Creatives also report being the ones writing funding applications and often self-producing which requires another level of unpaid administration work with no guarantee of payment or success. The success rate for the Australia Council for the Arts’ February 2020 grant round was 16%.⁴

⁴ Application Feedback, Australia Council for the Arts, 2020.

➤ COVID-19

While the pandemic has presented the sector with many challenges, individual responses about the impact were wide ranging and showed the impossibility of separating art practice, other work, finances and life.

The increasing hours of work done for lower or no pay was clear from many respondents' comments. There was great enthusiasm and also much stress caused by the many COVID-19 response grants available, which often had short turnaround times.

The comments that some artists were 'relieved' when the shut-down began is also evidence of the financially precarious, unhealthy and unsustainable work and life commitments of many independent artists.

With many artists employed in sectors also greatly affected by COVID-19, this meant a double blow to work and life for artists in 2020.

We also asked respondents about their experiences with cancellations, re-negotiating contracts and the 'un-producing' of shows. There were varied responses with many experiencing increased anxiety about the situation due to poor communication or a lack of transparency about process. Yet, many also had positive experiences by being included in decision-making or being paid for cancelled projects.

➤ GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Sentiments of being under-appreciated, under-valued and under-represented came through in many comments. For those receiving JobKeeper, the regular income meant financial relief along with existential concern — to be valued in the midst of a pandemic only, and some at a better rate than their usual pay, was confronting.

Lack of recognition of arts work as 'real work' continues to be perpetuated through a government system which does not treat it the same as work in other sectors and industries. The differences between the nature of working arrangements in the arts sector and others also remain unaddressed.

Access to services assumes a certain level of bureaucratic, financial and social literacy along with a lot of time and patience. The stigma associated with applying for services and previous negative or traumatic experiences in dealing with government are barriers to achieving equality.

THE FUTURE

Independent creatives will continue to bear the brunt of the impact of the pandemic in their lives and on their creative practice. The coming years will chart a new time for the arts sector in Australia as we continue to navigate restrictions on activity, audience capacity, interstate and international travel. The way in which we come together, share and support each other as an industry will need to be completely re-built.

TNA invites arts organisations, companies and festivals, as well as local, state and federal funding bodies and governments to work with us to address the imbalances and inequities highlighted by this report. Independent artists are an essential part of a healthier, safer and more relevant Australian performing arts sector.

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