



# Maintaining Financial Security as a Young Artist in Québec



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**Date published**

**May 2025**

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## INTRODUCTION

Québec has long established itself as a unique and vibrant cultural centre (Canadian Heritage, 2012, 245). The provincial government in particular has sought to position itself as a supporter of Québec’s diverse cultural makeup, while promoting Québec as a player on the global artistic stage (Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, 2024). For this reputation to be upheld, however, there must be space and resources within the province for artists to remain so that their work can develop and be shared.

In the midst of a national housing and cost-of-living crisis, young artists are being pushed into a very precarious position, even while the demand for artistic and cultural projects remains. It is this position that will be the focus of this policy brief, examining the experiences of young artists in Québec who are trying to financially support themselves and their work. This brief aims to identify gaps in policies that support the cultural sector by hearing from young artists directly.

## CONTEXT

Supporting Québec’s artistic community is an ongoing financial commitment and policy decision for both provincial and municipal governments, albeit with varying levels of investment from year to year.

At the provincial level, Québec’s post-COVID recovery budgets indicated a prioritization of funding for the arts, with record stimulus provided in 2020–2021 (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2023). However, the 2024–2025 budget saw a decrease in funding for key cultural institutions such as the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ). Many artists rely heavily on government support to sustain their work. Reductions in this funding base can therefore have serious implications for a sector in which—according to a 2019 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—the average income of artists is 44% lower than that of the average Canadian worker (Milton & Sewell, 2024).

Municipal governments have also assumed responsibility for fostering the arts, culture, and nightlife in their cities. At the turn of the century, researchers were already noting that “cultural policies” were increasingly falling under the purview of municipal governments (de la Durantaye, 305). In 2024, Montréal released its Nightlife Policy, with a focus on “cultural vitality,” which it identifies as part of the city’s lifeblood. Informed by a wide-ranging stakeholder engagement process, this initiative illustrates how governments are attempting to balance the need to maintain cultural vibrancy with the human needs of those who define and sustain it (A Framework Policy for Nighttime Activities in Montréal, 2025).

Funding streams and policies that support artists and entertainment venues are vital to protecting Québec’s cultural landscape. Yet while these policies often measure success through business retention, attendance figures, and tax revenue, what is the lived experience of those who preserve and nurture this culture? This is the question our survey seeks to explore.

## SURVEY AND INTERVIEW METHODS AND RESULTS

The goal of our survey (N=16), along with four subsequent interviews, was to connect the lived experiences of young artists in Québec directly to their economic aspirations and needs. Participants were reached through a brief social media campaign and word of mouth. While the small sample size means these findings should not be generalized across the province, they do offer a snapshot of key themes that can serve as starting points for future research.

### ***What is Your Art...?***

Each respondent was first asked to provide some context on their artistic discipline and financial situation. Disciplines mentioned included painting, writing, film and media, music, sculpting/ceramics, and the performing arts.

### ***And What Do You 'Do'...?***

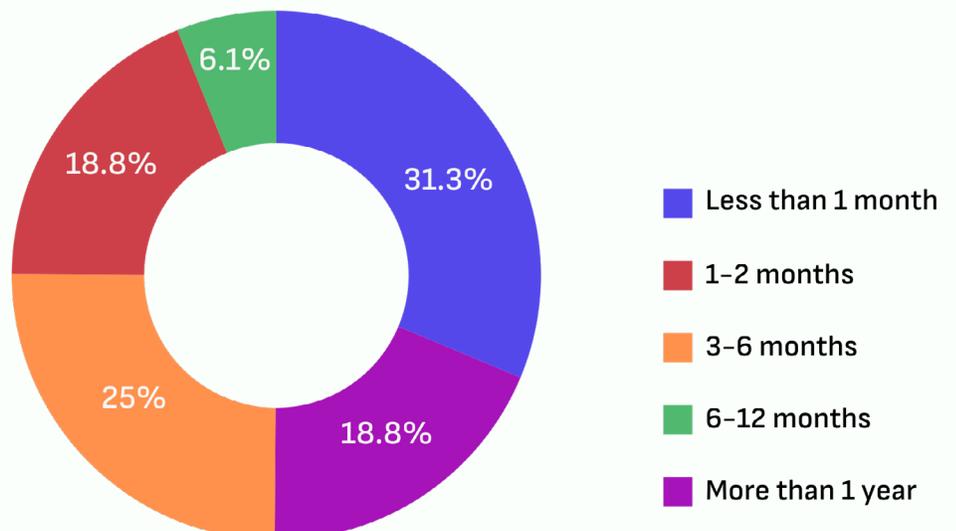
When asked to identify their income streams, each respondent indicated having multiple sources. The vast majority also shared that their income came entirely from their art or from industries related to their artistic discipline. For example, musicians who were not performing at their own shows often worked in nightlife doing audio engineering and mixing, or offered private music lessons. Visual artists, beyond selling their original works, often contributed artwork to organizations with commercial contracts or worked for event management companies. Notably, only two respondents reported that grant funding was currently a source of income. In follow-up interviews, one respondent remarked that grant funding had become less accessible and more competitive in recent years.

### ***How Stable Do You Feel...?***

Respondents were asked: "If you were to lose all of your non-art-based income streams tomorrow, for how long could you support yourself financially?" This question aimed to assess the extent to which artists are financially reliant on sustaining their creative work. The graph below presents the responses to this question, with multiple-choice options shown on the right-hand side:

**If you were to lose all of your non-art based streams of income tomorrow, for how long could you support yourself financially?**

16 responses



Of note, almost exactly half of all respondents noted that, if they were to lose their non-arts-based income, they would no longer be able to financially support themselves after two months. Just under one third noted they would not be able to sustain themselves for a single month. Respondents were then asked to elaborate further and describe how they felt about their financial situation.

Almost all expressed concern and a lack of financial security. For those respondents who noted being able to support themselves for 2 months or less, they felt their situation was unpredictable, precarious, and that they had little room for big financial hits (such as certain medical expenditures). For those respondents who noted having more financial security, similar themes were present. However, they typically expressed concern that they may never be able to take the 'next step' of starting a family or owning a home. Institutional and grant backing was noted as an avenue for relieving financial anxiety. In the case where the respondent noted they were receiving grant money or where the respondent was a student, there were greater feelings of financial security.

### ***What barriers have you Faced...?***

When asked to describe the financial barriers they had experienced as artists, two central themes emerged: accessing grant money and affording resources/space.

- **Access to grant money:** grant money was often described as feeling inaccessible if you were not knowledgeable in how to write them, if you were already enrolled in an educational institution, or if you did not directly fit the social/artistic criteria of the grants. Given the further perception that grants are becoming more competitive, more artists are starting to question whether it is worth taking the time to find, write, and submit a grant.
- **Resourcing and space:** in almost every case, artistic practices require resources (such as art supplies, instruments, mixing/editing software, etc) and space (studios, stages, sets, etc). Except for a few rare instances, these resources and spaces are recurring costs for artists that will very seldomly generate them a financial reward.

Expanding on the barriers they face, respondents emphasized that much of their time spent developing their art is unpaid, yet crucial.

### ***What Advice would they Give...?***

Respondents were asked to share advice on what has helped them be financially supported as an artist in Québec:

- **Networking and Community:** The most recurring theme was that artists need to find community and connection in one another. Very often, community was described as the single most important system of support, particularly given how precarious other avenues of support can be, such as institutional backing. Community can offer support in terms of resource sharing, space sharing, and by having artists attending one another's events and purchasing their work or merchandise.
- **Grassroots Support Networks:** Respondents also noted that they found more success speaking

directly with smaller, local, and grassroots organizations that support the arts. These organizations often have smaller demographics they are serving so are relatively more likely to give artists tailored responses and help. They are also often knowledgeable of Québec's cultural and artistic support networks and can help artists access these more effectively.

- **Skill Sharing:** Some respondents noted that artists often do possess technical and marketable skills, but may be less willing or understanding of how they can apply these across different fields. Whether they are programming, woodworking, ceramics, or event organizing, communications, and marketing skills, thinking more broadly about the artistic skillset and seeing where it can be applied and developed was noted as a way of helping achieve financial stability while not stepping entirely away from artistic development.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Artists are often determined to maximize time spent on their art, even if this commitment offers minimal financial stability. Given this, we recommend the provincial and municipal governments acknowledge that the artistic and cultural works they celebrate are in part founded on this unpaid work, and by extension the financial risks assumed by young artists.

Based on this survey and follow-up interviews, this brief recommends exploring opportunities for support that align with the aforementioned themes:

- **Financial Backing:** Grant funding was seen as a vital yet relatively inaccessible avenue for supporting artists. Although these funding sources can be drawn from tax revenue, resources shared by the Ontario Arts Council help explain how funding for the Arts often results in the generation of revenue for local economies: e.g., through the purchasing of goods and services to support artists' work or the creation of artistic and cultural events driving tourism (Ontario Arts Council, n.d.). Importantly, there were concerns shared from respondents that funding pools were not accessible for all groups, and that there was not enough funding to make a successful application likely. As such, the brief also recommends increasing and diversifying available arts grants: both in terms of application requirements and scale of funding. This funding in turn can be seen as a direct investment in the local economies and cultural sector across Québec.
- **Networking, Community, and Grassroots Support Networks:** From the perspective of both groups supporting the arts, as well as the artists accessing their resources, this brief would strongly recommend an increase in spaces and communities that allow artists to meet freely and mutually support one another. Respondents made it clear that these communities were often the backbone of their work: the original collaborators, sources of skill development, and purchasers of each other's art. These groups can be arts-specific – such as the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ) or the English Language Arts Network (ELAN) – or institutional centers such as your local library, many of which allow for free arts supply and instrument rentals. For those organizations that wish to support the development of these networks, non-cost prohibitive access to community spaces that are accommodating to artistic work would be invaluable. This can be as straight forward as office or studio space offered intentionally for

artists to work at. Additionally, for artists who wish to create these spaces themselves, reaching out to friends and local artists to find ways of supporting one another was noted as being a crucial step for respondents.

- **Skill Sharing:** Bridging the gap between skillsets used in the arts and skillsets that are used in non-arts related jobs can help make the long journey for young artists more financially secure. Speaking with a career advisor or accessing career related resources can help connect these dots. Organizations such as the English Language Arts Network (ELAN) and Yes Employment + Entrepreneurship are examples of organizations that provide a range of artist specific career resources and opportunities. From the perspective of a young artist, reaching out to these organizations directly can be a great first step in better orienting your job search. From the perspective of organizations who wish to support artists in this area, providing free or non-cost prohibitive career counseling services would be invaluable for those who are looking to apply their skillset in a professional setting.

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