

COVID-19: Impact on Auckland's Creative Sector

Executive Summary

Introduction

Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi commissioned Dovetail, an Auckland-based research and evaluation company, to undertake a survey of Auckland's creative sector on the impact of COVID-19. The survey was distributed via email and social media networks over the first two weeks of April 2020. A snowball sampling approach was undertaken, in which recipients were encouraged to distribute the survey to others in the sector. In total, 332 responses were received from people based in or working in the Auckland region.

The sampling approach means that the results may not be representative of the creative sector in the region; the results do however point to a range of issues for consideration.

Respondent profile

Almost half of those participating in the survey were creative freelancers, contractors or entrepreneurs (48%). Some 16% were leaders of a creative not-for-profit organisation, and 12% were leaders of commercial creative enterprises. A further 12% were creatives working for an organisation. The remainder were unpaid creatives or indicated other roles. Over two-thirds (72%) were working full-time in their roles, and the remainder (28%) were part-time.

One-third of respondents (34%) were male and two-thirds (64%) were female. Some 75% were European/Pākehā, 10% were Māori, with the remainder spread across a range of ethnic groups.

Loss of events, projects or services

COVID-19 has had widespread impacts on respondents' creative sector activity. 83% of respondents indicated they had to cancel an event, hui or gathering, or project or service because of COVID-19, and a further 6% were considering this.

Many of these cancelled events were scheduled for some months from when the lockdown was initiated; 35% were scheduled in 2 to 3 months from when the lockdown began in late March, and a further 19% 4-6 months from lockdown.

Financial impacts

Participants widely reported financial uncertainty as a result of cancelled activity. Only 45% said that they personally would be able to financially get by without the cancelled activity, compared 14% who could not get by, and 42% who were unsure. Respondents were even less confident about their organisations (where this was applicable), with only 35% able to get by, compared to 16% who they thought would not get by and 48% who were unsure.

Answers to open-ended questions about financial costs indicated a range of impacts for individual respondents, from some saying no impact, to as high as \$200,000. People from creative organisations also reported significant losses, ranging from less than \$1000 to \$900,000.

Of those who had staff, only 27% would be able to sustain staff payments, 38% would not be able to, and 35% were unsure. Respondents were less confident about sustaining payments to contractors, with only 21% able to sustain payments, 50% unable to sustain payments, and 30% unsure.

Key priorities and concerns

The need for financial support to the creative sector was a widespread concern, with participants indicating the following issues:

- Professional and business viability
- Immediate financial survival
- Impact on my creative work/industry
- Wellbeing of self/others
- Using this time constructively
- Impact on the creative sector generally

A range of non-financial priorities were also raised, including strengthened communication and information flows to the creative sector; effective governance from government and sector leaders; support with marketing and tech/digital skills; work and support in finding work; forums with other creatives; and mentoring and advice.

Accessing support

Three-quarters (76%) of relevant respondents had been able to access the government's wage subsidy package, and a further 7% intended to. 10% had not been able to and 8% were unsure at this point.

At the time the survey was distributed, the Creative New Zealand Emergency Response Package was planned but not yet available. At that point, 30% of respondents were intending to access Creative New Zealand's emergency response package, 18% were not intending to, and 52% were unsure. This is likely to be due to lack of knowledge of the criteria for the response package at that stage.

Looking ahead

When asked, on a scale of 1 to 6, if they expected to be working in the creative industry in six months' time, 39% were confident, and 19% were not confident. The uncertainty of the current environment was notable, with some 43% who were borderline pessimistic (20%) or optimistic (23%).

Some 42% of respondents had a business continuity plan in place, 37% did not and 20% were unsure.

Most respondents, where relevant, were maintaining contact with clients/customers, with 68% emailing, 50% using social media and 39% making direct contact.

In the face of the COVID crisis, suggested priorities for the creative sector going forward were financial support; collaboration and mutual support; recognition of the value of the arts; leadership; new spaces and platforms to showcase, share and monetize; disruption to current systems and structures; capacity building and nourishing local sector and content.

A more detailed final report will be completed by the end of April, which will include further analysis of responses to open-ended questions regarding impacts, priorities and concerns suggested by survey participants.