



**THE ART OF  
ENGAGEMENT:**  
TRENDS IN U.S.  
CULTURAL  
EXCHANGE AND  
INTERNATIONAL  
PROGRAMMING

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**ROBERT STERLING CLARK FOUNDATION**  
SERIES ON INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

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# I. CONTEXT

Historically, the U.S. Department of State has been the major player in the fields of cultural diplomacy and international cultural exchange, spending countless millions during the cold war to project a positive image of the United States abroad. In the fifteen years following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union, U.S. government expenditures for cultural exchange and diplomacy contracted, leaving few public diplomacy programs in place to serve as a support system. After the terrorist attacks of 9-11, an outpouring of international sympathy was quickly eroded following the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq. And in the wake of the war, world opinion toward the U.S. began a rapid downward spiral.

In late summer of 2007, with America's image abroad continuing to decline, the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation began to commission research on U.S.-based cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange aimed at making the case for public and private reinvestment in the field. We believed that such work would be of value to a new administration in helping to reverse negative attitudes toward the U.S. and that it would spur private philanthropic support. Our research brings together data on public and private funding for arts exchange, as well as research on the challenges, successes, smart practices and trends of engagement. The research will result in a series of reports on cultural engagement that will be published over the next several months. The first of these, *The Art of Cultural Engagement: Trends in U.S. Cultural Exchange and International Programming*, was produced by Aimee R. Fullman who designed the online survey, analyzed the data, and produced the charts and graphs of findings presented herein.

Margaret C. Ayers, President  
Robert Sterling Clark Foundation  
October, 2009

## II. OVERVIEW OF SURVEY FINDINGS

- American artists and cultural organizations believe there is an important role for them to play in U.S. cultural diplomacy efforts.
- Reservations about public support for cultural programming linger in the cultural community and are based on a perception of censorship.
- Significant challenges to exchanges and international programming exist, creating a high threshold of entry for participation in international exchanges.
- Despite the challenges, many arts and cultural organizations are very interested in participating in international exchanges but need better access to supportive resources including information on exchange opportunities, visa assistance, technical expertise, funding and smart practices.
- The U.S. is perceived by U.S. artists and cultural organizations to be the most difficult country to engage with due to lack of funding and difficulties in bringing in foreign performers.
- Geographic engagement trends reflect long established partnerships in Europe and the many festivals in that region as well as Cold War priorities in E. Europe and Asia.
- Audience information is inconclusive and most organizations do not have specific visitor or participant metrics readily available.
- Digital divides exist in the use of technology to facilitate creation and enhance participation in the arts, indicating a need for more technological capacity and training.
- While organizations and artists attempt to evaluate the impact of their international work, substantial information gaps continue to exist on the practices and long term results of international programming.

# III. METHODOLOGY

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# SURVEY GOALS

- Since 9-11 there have been numerous policy reports calling for increased cultural exchange to bolster U.S. public diplomacy efforts. However, few of these reports have focused on the experience of practitioners in the field.
- This survey, as the first of its kind, sought to address some of the information gaps by soliciting information about on-the-ground execution of cultural exchange-related programming as well as impediments to engagement by artists and arts and cultural organizations.
- Questions were designed to solicit information on:
  - Organizational Characteristics;
  - Program Information;
  - Audience Engagement;
  - Use of Technology; and
  - Cultural Diplomacy and the Role of Government.

# SURVEY DESIGN

- The e-survey included 41 questions and was administered online through Survey Monkey.
- To address differences in perception, the terms international programming and international cultural exchange were used synonymously.
- An attempt to begin to benchmark activity lent itself to using both [multiple-choice and open-ended](#) questions.
- Responses to all questions were not required. Those required are indicated by an asterisk. (See [Cultural Exchange and International Programming Survey](#).)
- Discriminating levels for budgets and organizational capacity inputs were established after data collection.
- Some lines of inquiry (e.g. audiences and organizational capacity) did not yield enough specific information to establish clear findings and are therefore not included in final survey conclusions.
- Some artists felt that the questions were not very applicable to them as individuals.
- Final survey results were restricted to one response per U.S.-based organization or artist.
  - 2 non-U.S. based organizations (GULP, and Détournement) participated but their responses are not included in findings.
  - The Ohio Arts Council and the New England Foundation for the Arts provided multiple responses. Data from each was consolidated and any discrepancies were clarified through direct follow-up with the organization.

# GATHERING RESPONSES

- The survey was conducted between September 2007 and June 2008.
- 134 [individuals and organizations](#) voluntarily participated with an estimated targeted response rate of 28.6%.
- Information was solicited about cultural exchange and international programming from arts and cultural practitioners. Potential participants identified and invited included:
  - 31 programs/organizations listed in the 2005 Exchange Locator, published by the Alliance for Educational and Cultural Exchange, that had a classification of “arts and culture.”
  - 40 U.S. recipients of foundation grants over \$10,000 between 2003-2006 with the primary classification of *international exchange, arts*.
  - 31 State Department Cultural Programs Division Grantees 2004-2006 as listed on the ECA Exchange website as of December 2007.
  - 117 Regional and state arts and humanities organizations for the 50 U.S. states and 4 U.S. territories (Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands.)
- An open call for participation was advertised on the Cultural Policy Listserv.
- Outreach assistance was requested from major U.S. Arts Service Organizations in all disciplines. An electronic invitation was sent to select members and program participations by the following organizations: ART in Embassies at the U.S. Department of State (40), the American Association of Museums (133), Dance/USA and Opera America (15).
- 37 participants answered 4 survey questions that were included on the [2007 Urban Arts Federation Survey](#) administered by Americans for the Arts to the 60 largest U.S. cities.



# URBAN ARTS FEDERATION SURVEY

- Americans for the Arts included four of our survey questions on the 2006 - 2007 electronic U.S. Urban Arts Federation Survey, conducted in early 2008, which yielded 37 participants.
- The four questions were multiple choice and required an answer.
- The questions included were:
  - Q 24: How many international cultural exchange initiatives or cultural diplomacy programs does [org] sponsor or participate in annually? (Corresponds to RSCF Survey Q11)
  - Q 24a: What kinds of international exchange has [org] sponsored or participated in ? (Corresponds to RSCF Survey Q14)
  - Q24b:What is your average budget for cultural exchanges or international programs/tours/projects? (Corresponds to RSCF Survey Q16)
  - Q24c: What challenges have you encountered in organizing cultural exchanges or international programs? (Corresponds to RSCF Survey Q19)

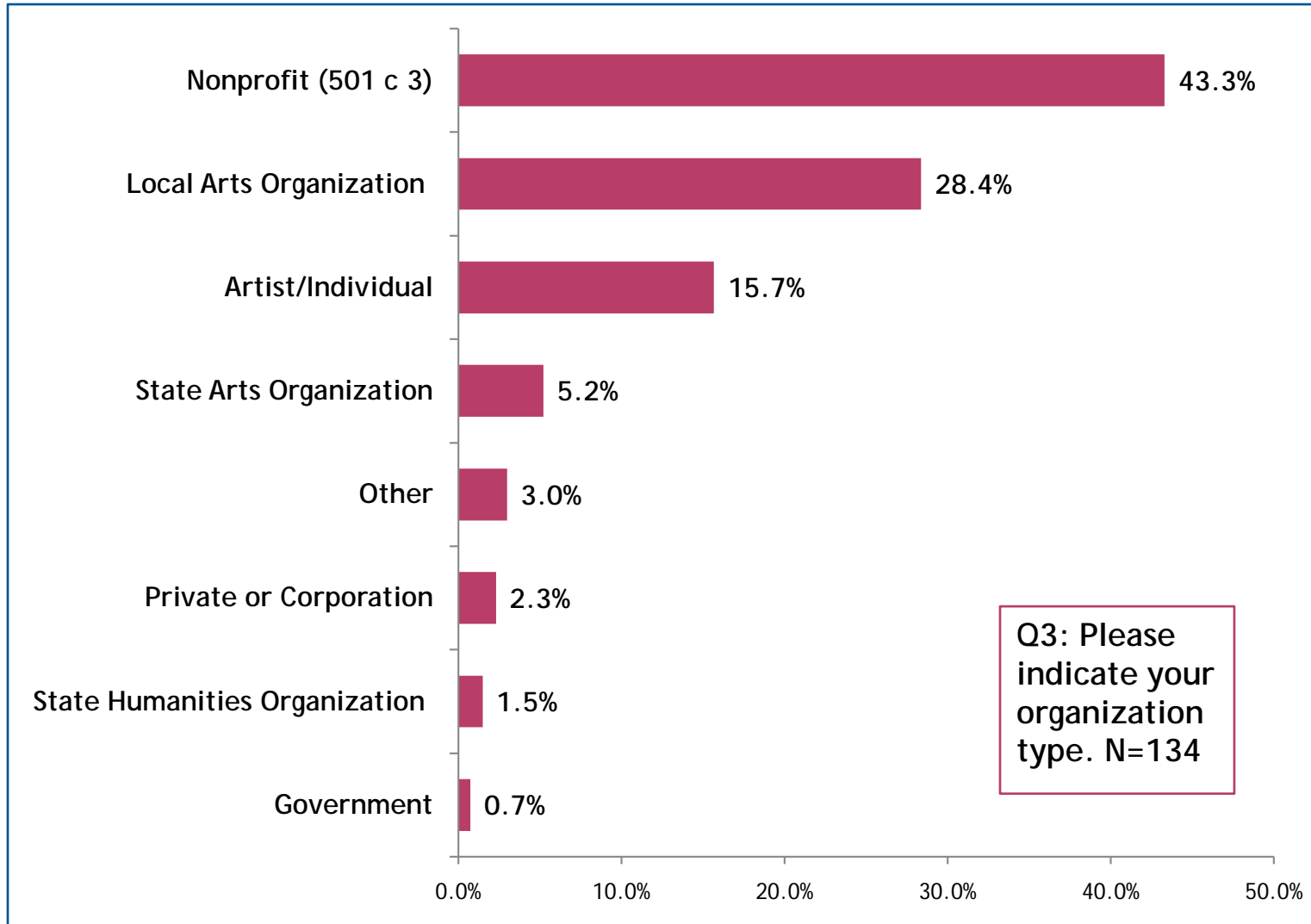
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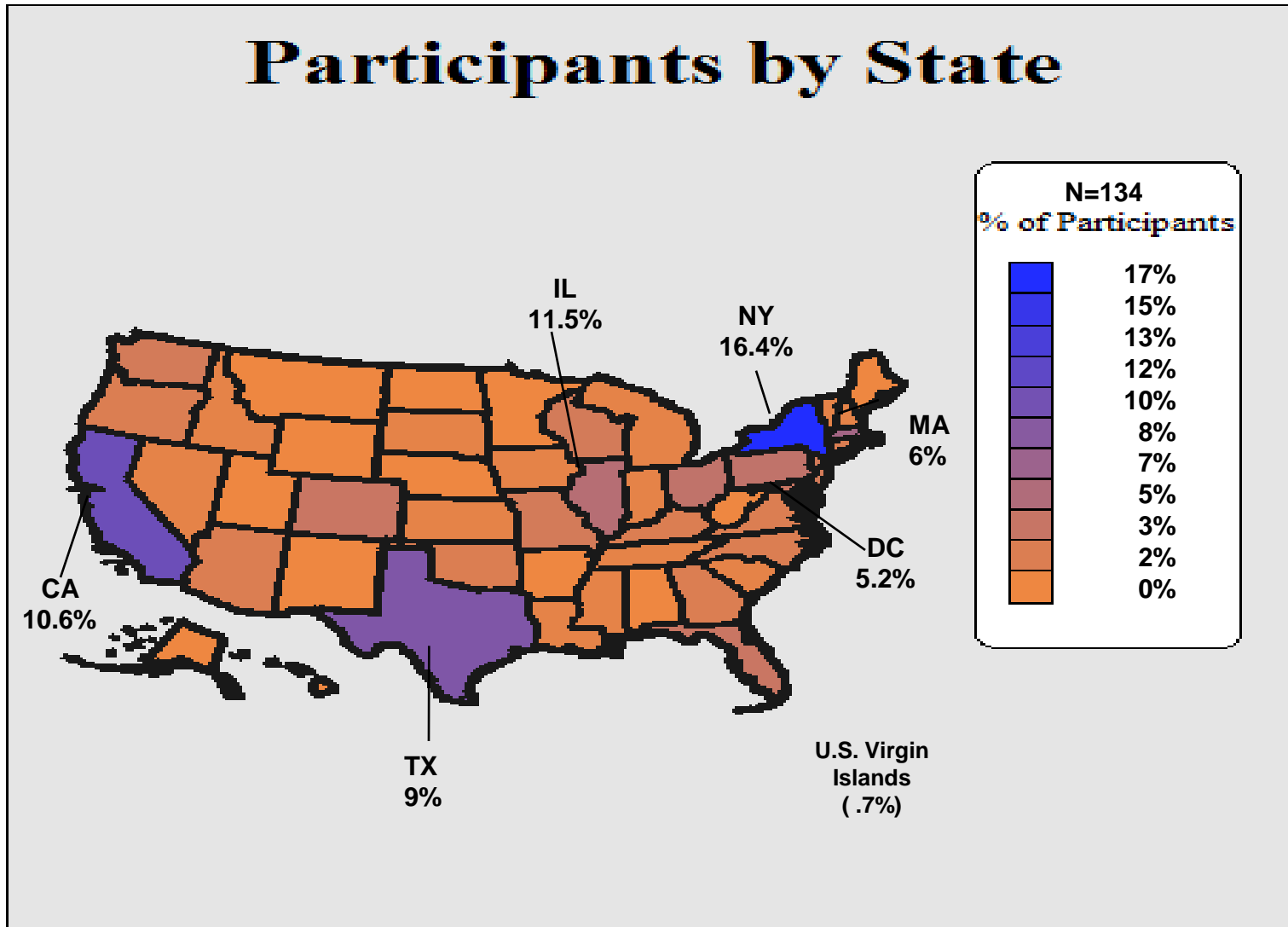
# AN OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

- The majority of survey participants are nonprofit organizations.
- 36 States and the U.S. Virgin Islands are represented. Geographically, participants are most likely to hail from California, New York or Texas.
- Almost one-third of respondents (30.2% when n=96) had an annual budget of between \$1-5 million.
- 13 disciplines are represented; Visual arts are the most prevalent followed by dance and museums.

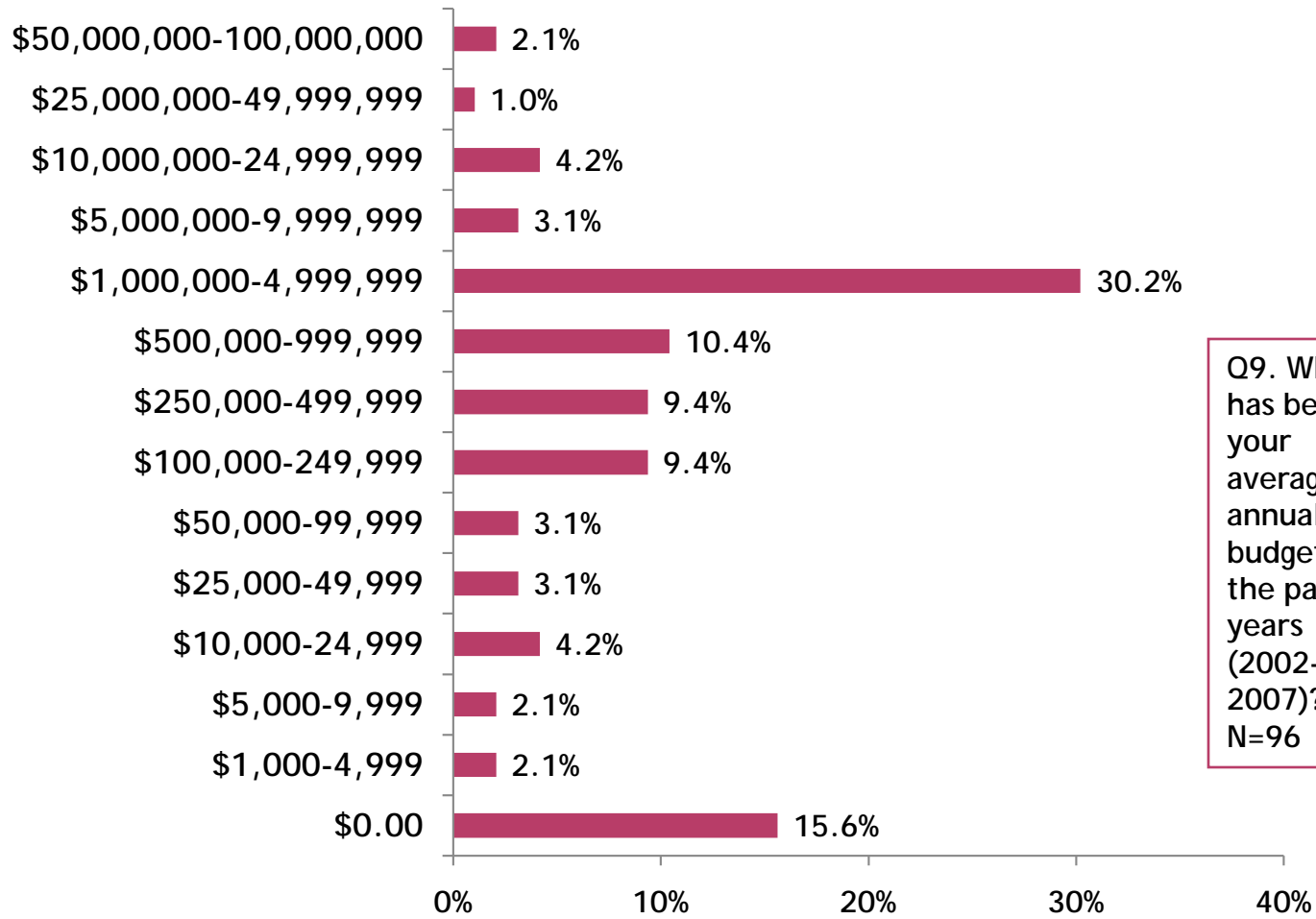
# PARTICIPANTS BY ORGANIZATION TYPE



# PARTICIPANTS BY U.S. REGION

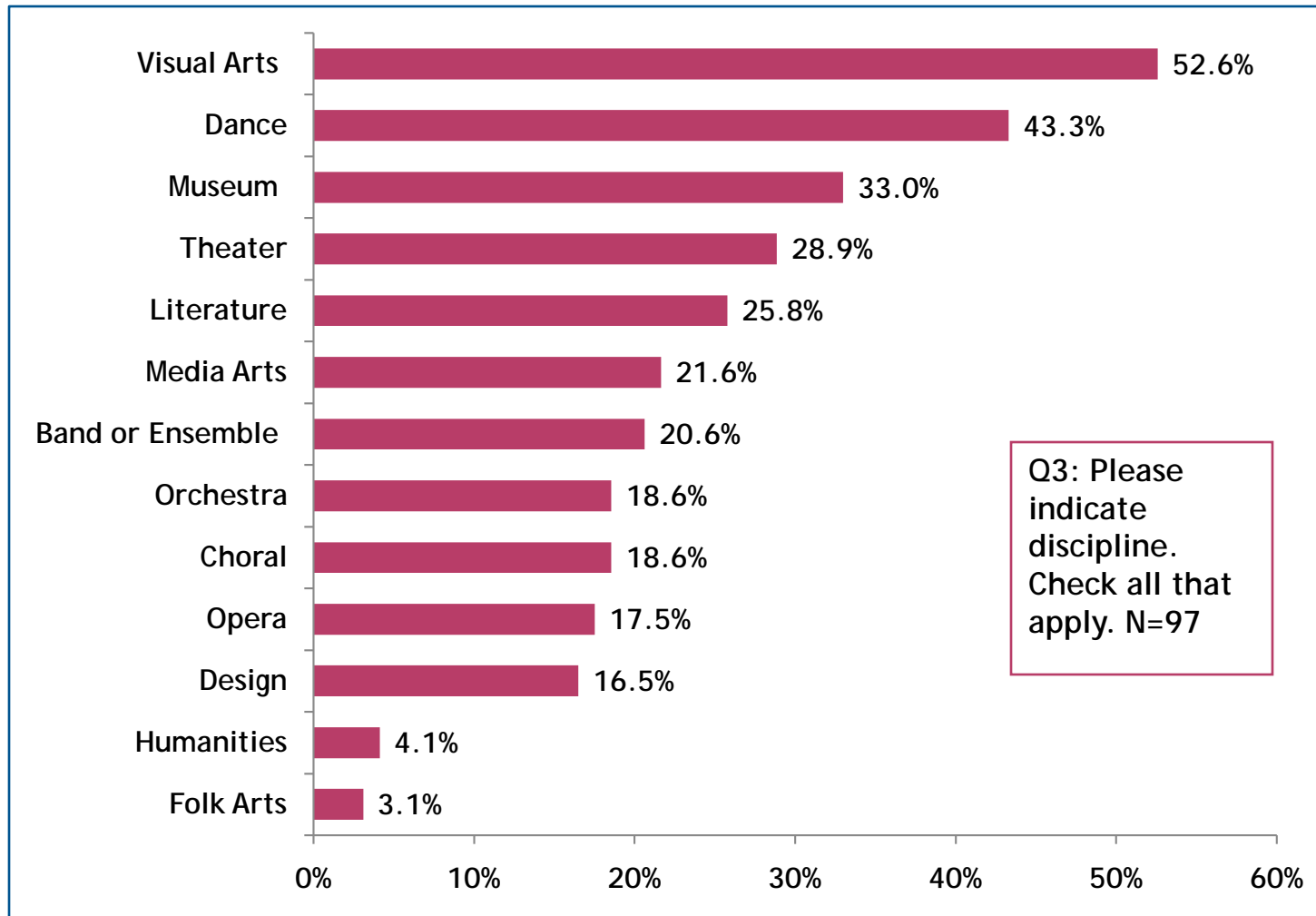


# PARTICIPANTS BY ANNUAL BUDGET



Q9. What has been your average annual budget over the past 5 years (2002-2007)?  
N=96

# 13 OVERARCHING DISCIPLINES REPRESENTED



# V. MAKING THE COMMITMENT

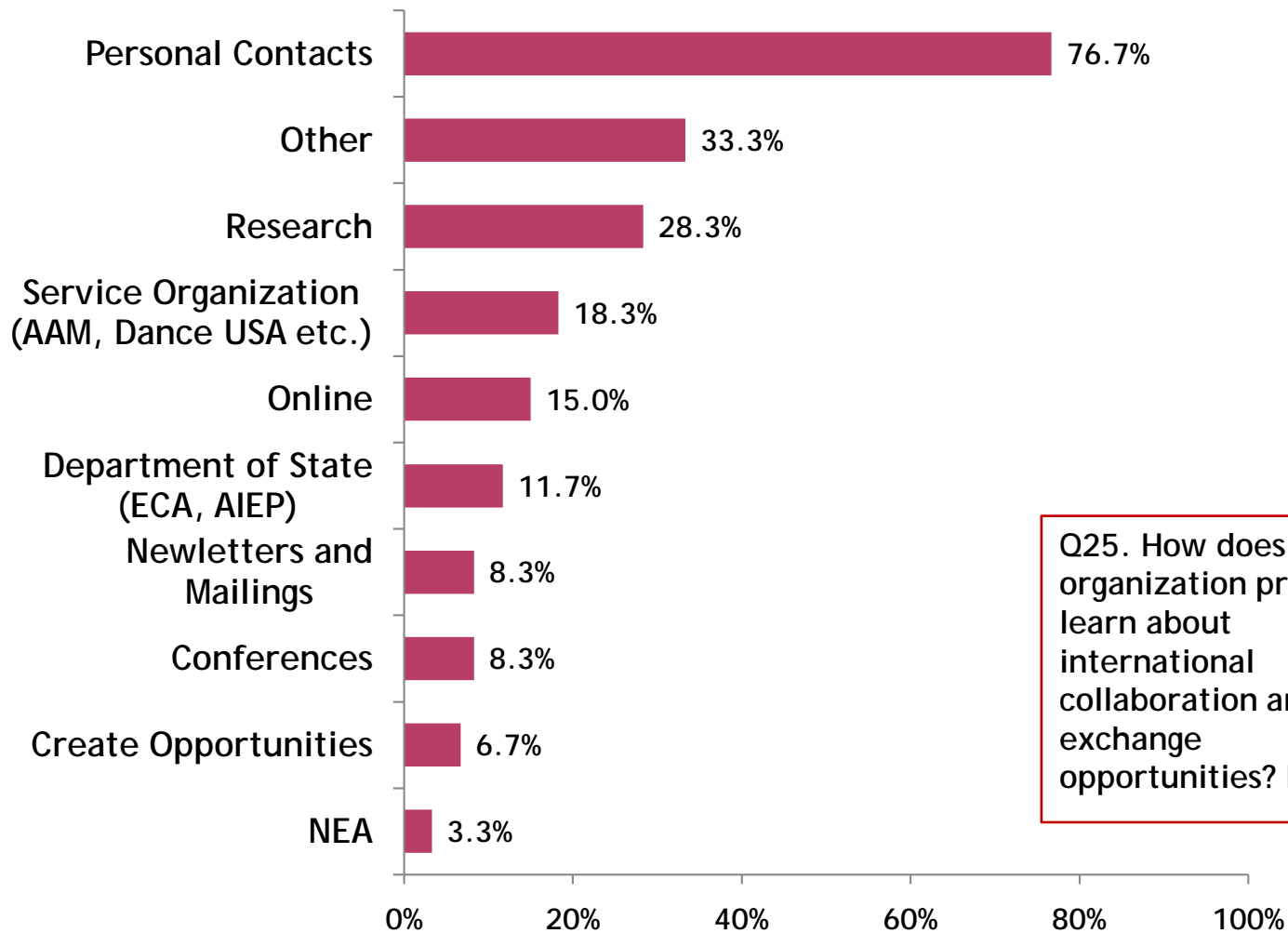
1. A Role for Arts and Culture [Slide 17](#)
2. Discovering Opportunities [Slide 18](#)
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5. Barriers and Challenges to Engagement [Slide 21](#)



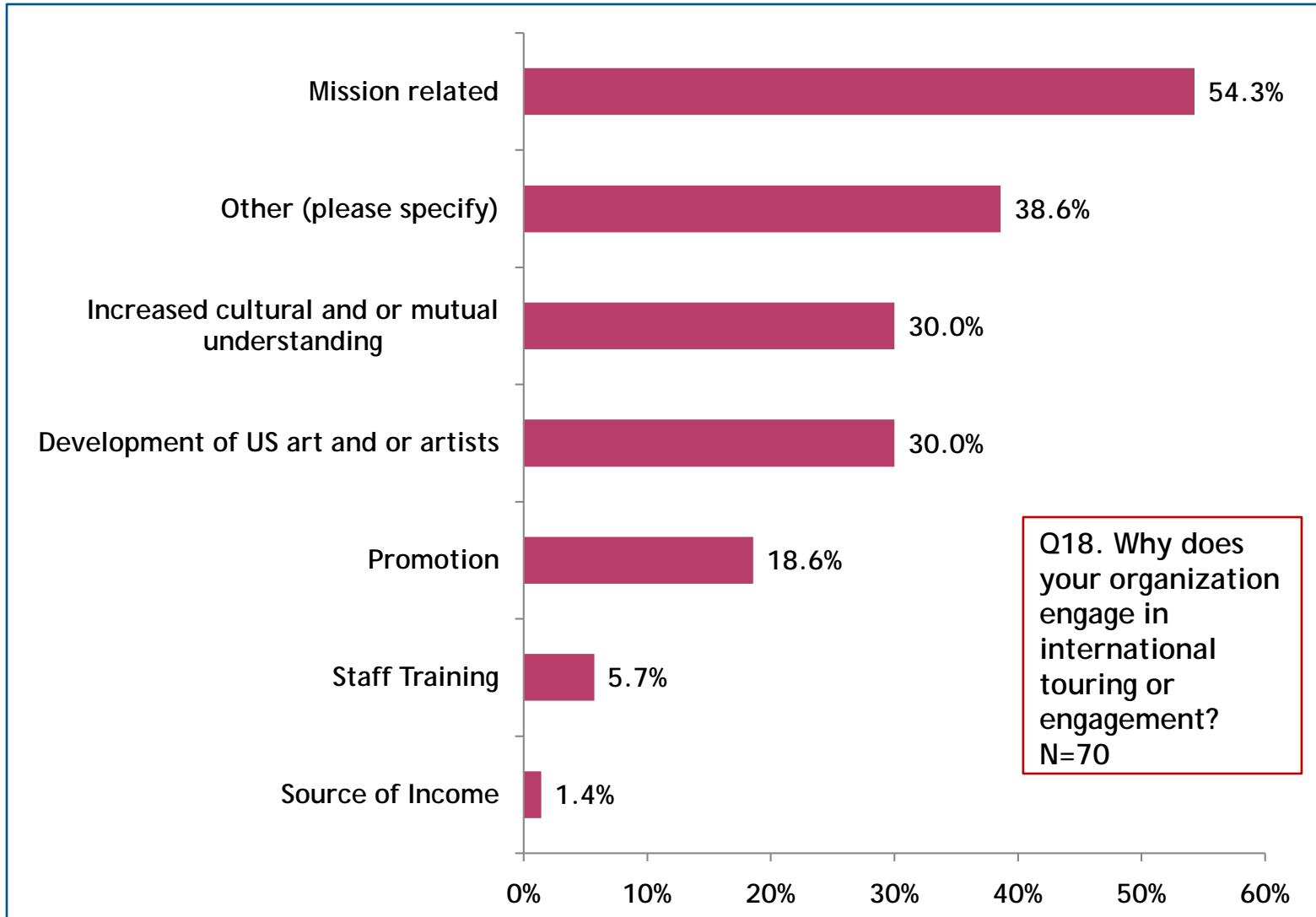
# A ROLE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

- The majority of participants believe that arts and cultural organizations have an important role to play in U.S. public and cultural diplomacy efforts. (96.3% selected yes and 3.7% selected maybe when n=82)
- 54 out of 80 (67.5%) participant responses indicated that they had been directly supported by the U.S. federal government or a U.S. Embassy abroad as part of a cultural diplomacy initiative or exchange.
- No participating artist or organization indicated that they had ever been censored by the government or given instructions on what to say in the field.
- However, some artists and cultural organizations have lingering concerns about government interference with regard to freedom of speech and/or creative content.

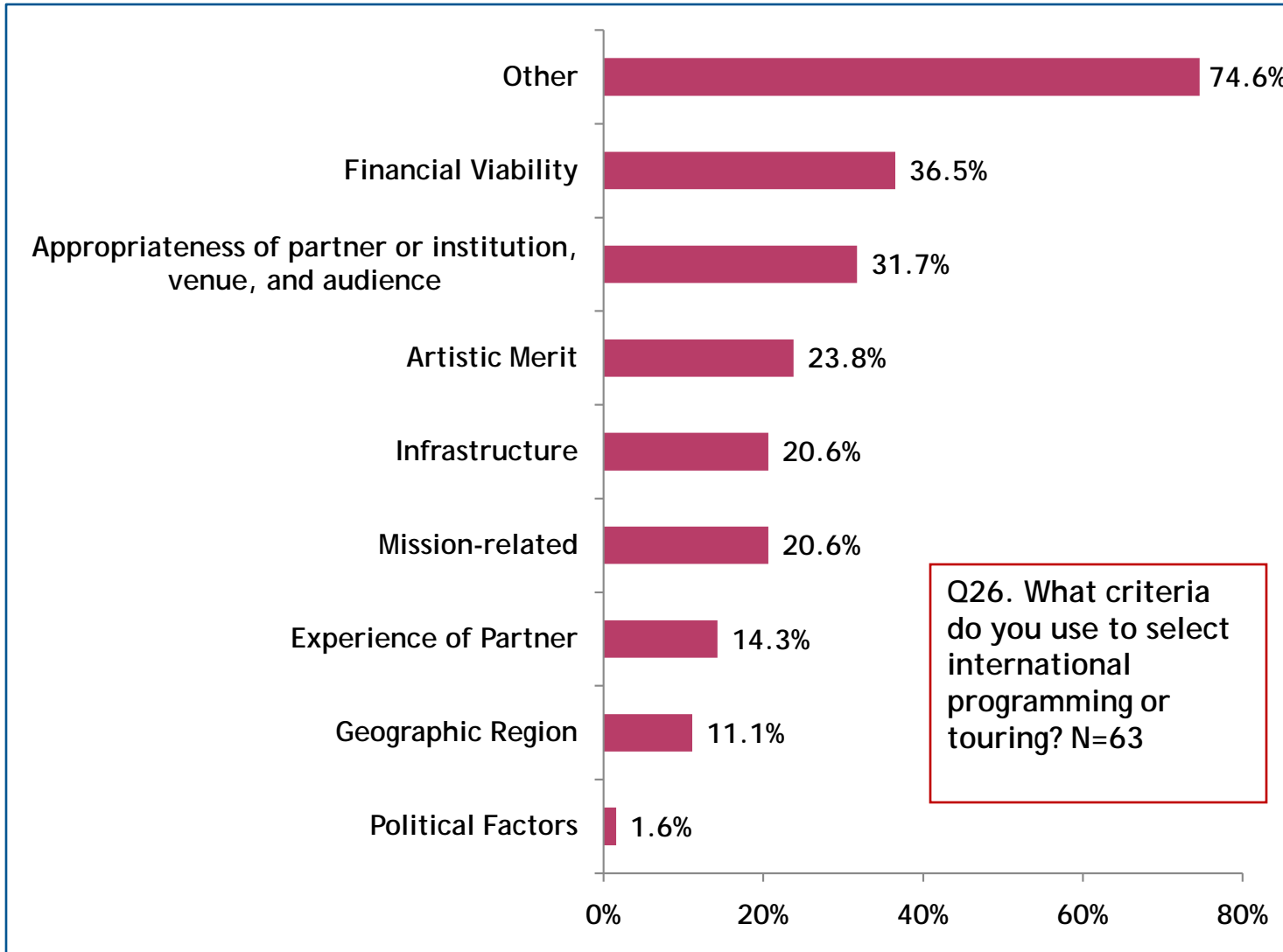
# DISCOVERING OPPORTUNITIES



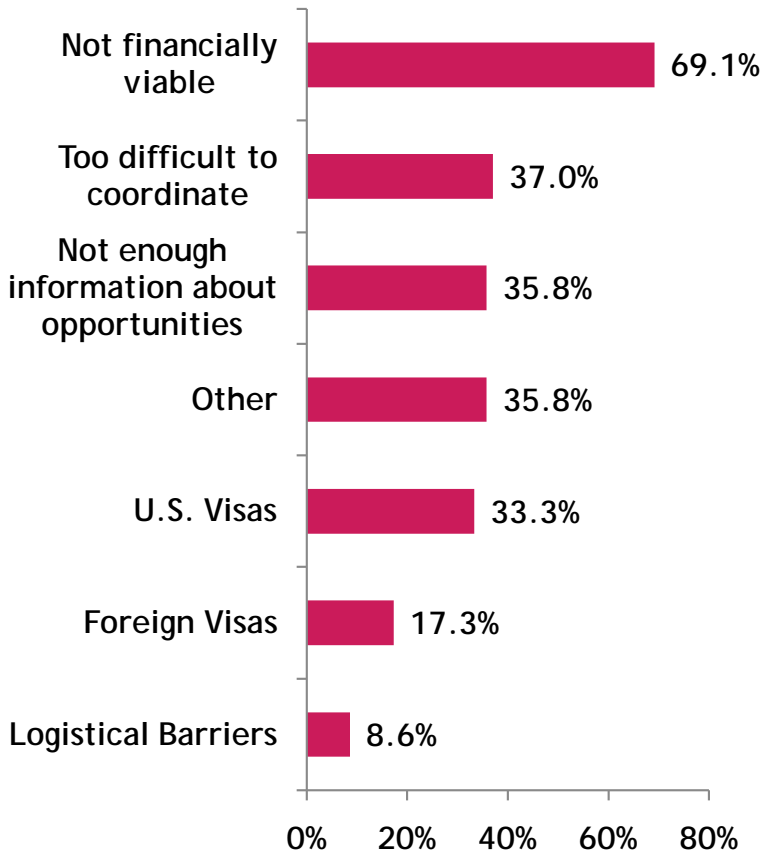
# MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT



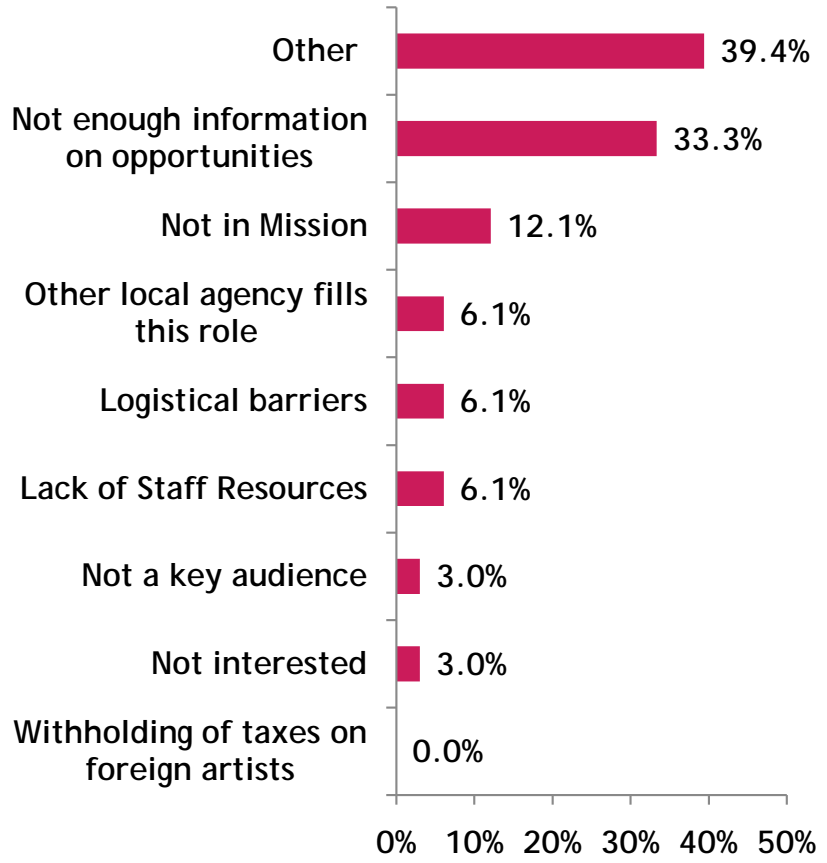
# CRITERIA FOR ENGAGEMENT



# BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO ENGAGEMENT



Q19. What challenges have you encountered in organizing cultural exchange or international programs? Please check all that apply. N=81



Q18. If you or your organization has not participated in international programming or exchanges please indicate why not below. Check all that apply. N=33

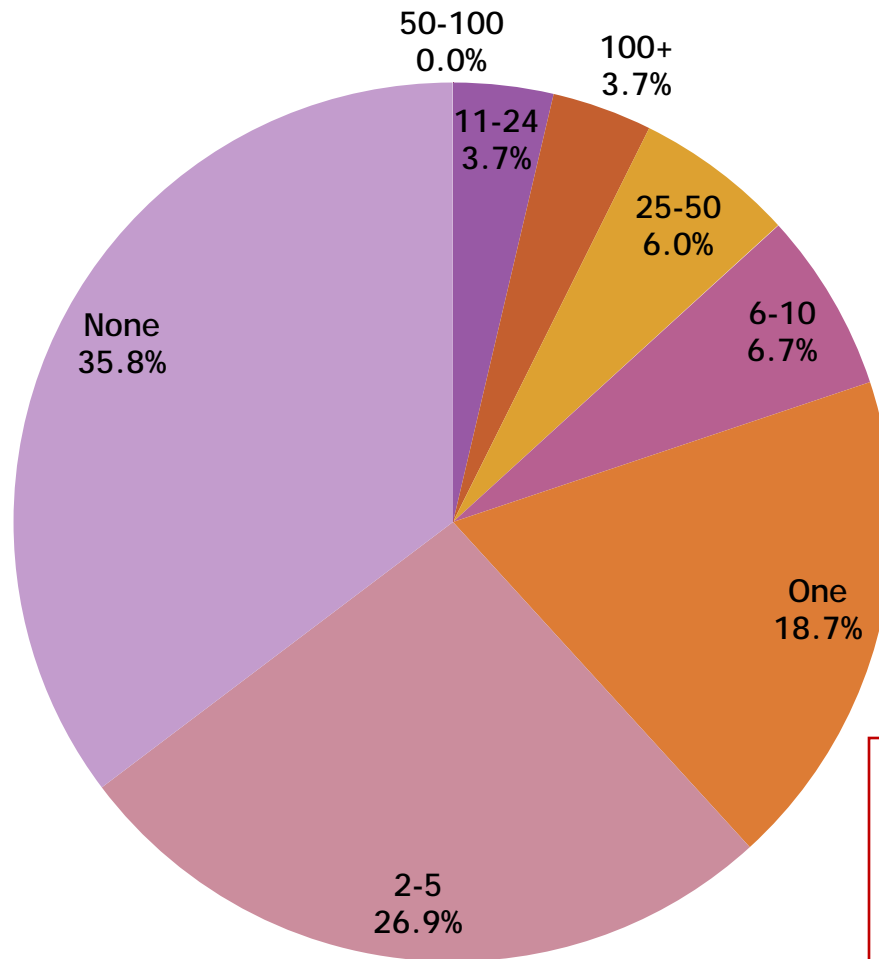
# VI. PRACTICES OF ENGAGEMENT

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# AN OVERVIEW OF ENGAGEMENT TRENDS

- 47% (where n=134) of respondents indicated that they participated in international programming or exchanges more than twice annually.
- International collaboration was the most frequently mentioned exchange type followed by hosting a foreign guest artist (which contradicts the severity of the barriers to bringing in foreign artists), and performing abroad.
- The majority of exchanges (50.7% where n=71) are conducted on a budget of less than \$25,000.
- Over 130 countries of engagement were individually mentioned. Geographic trends indicate that Europe and Asia are the most likely regions of engagement.
- Exchanges are facilitated by good partnerships, U.S. government financial and logistic support, and proper funding.
- Exchanges are impeded by lack of funding, visas, difficulties with customs and political factors.
- The United States is considered to be the most difficult country with which to engage with due to challenges in bringing in foreign performers.

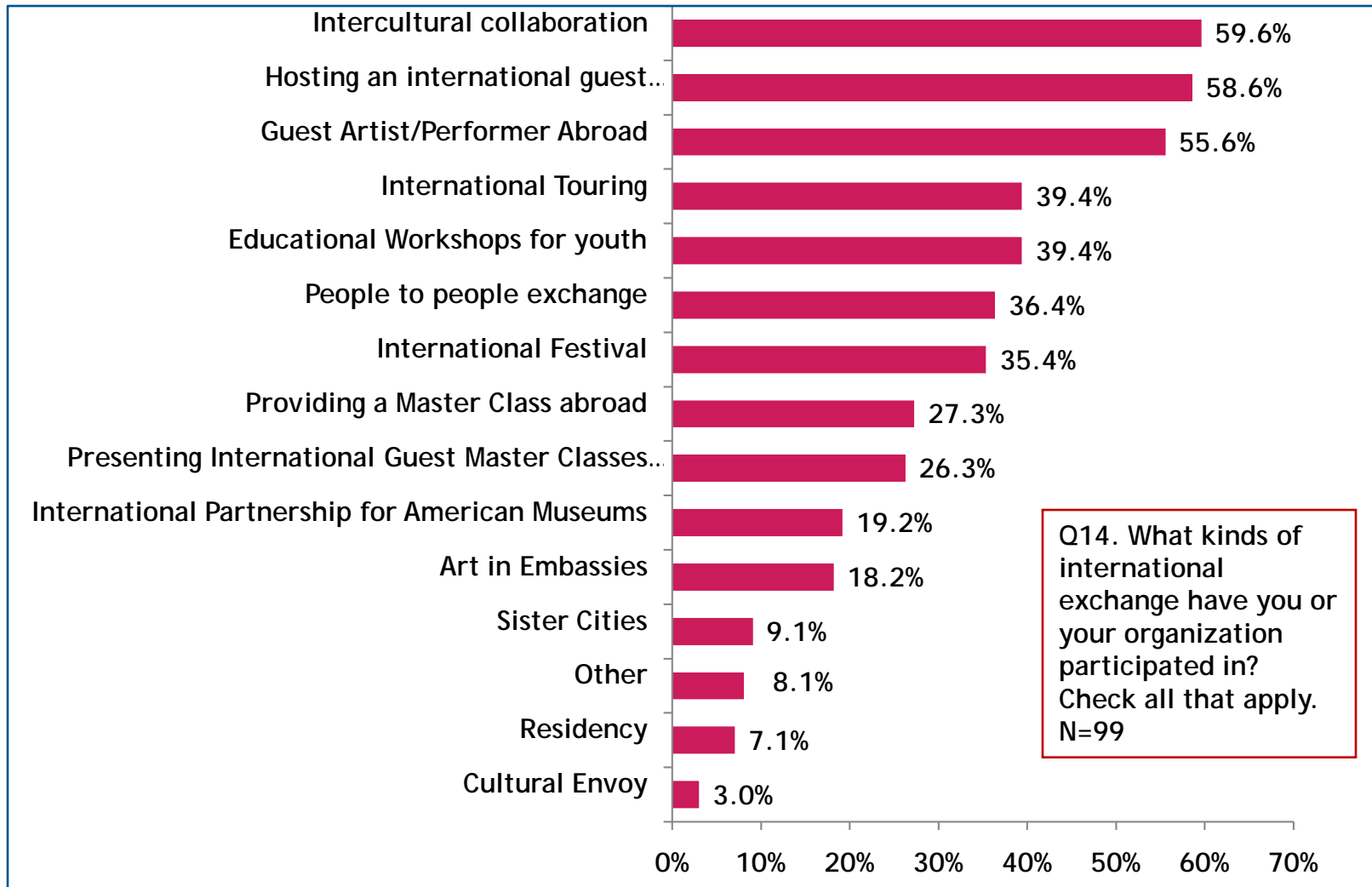
# FREQUENCY OF ENGAGEMENT



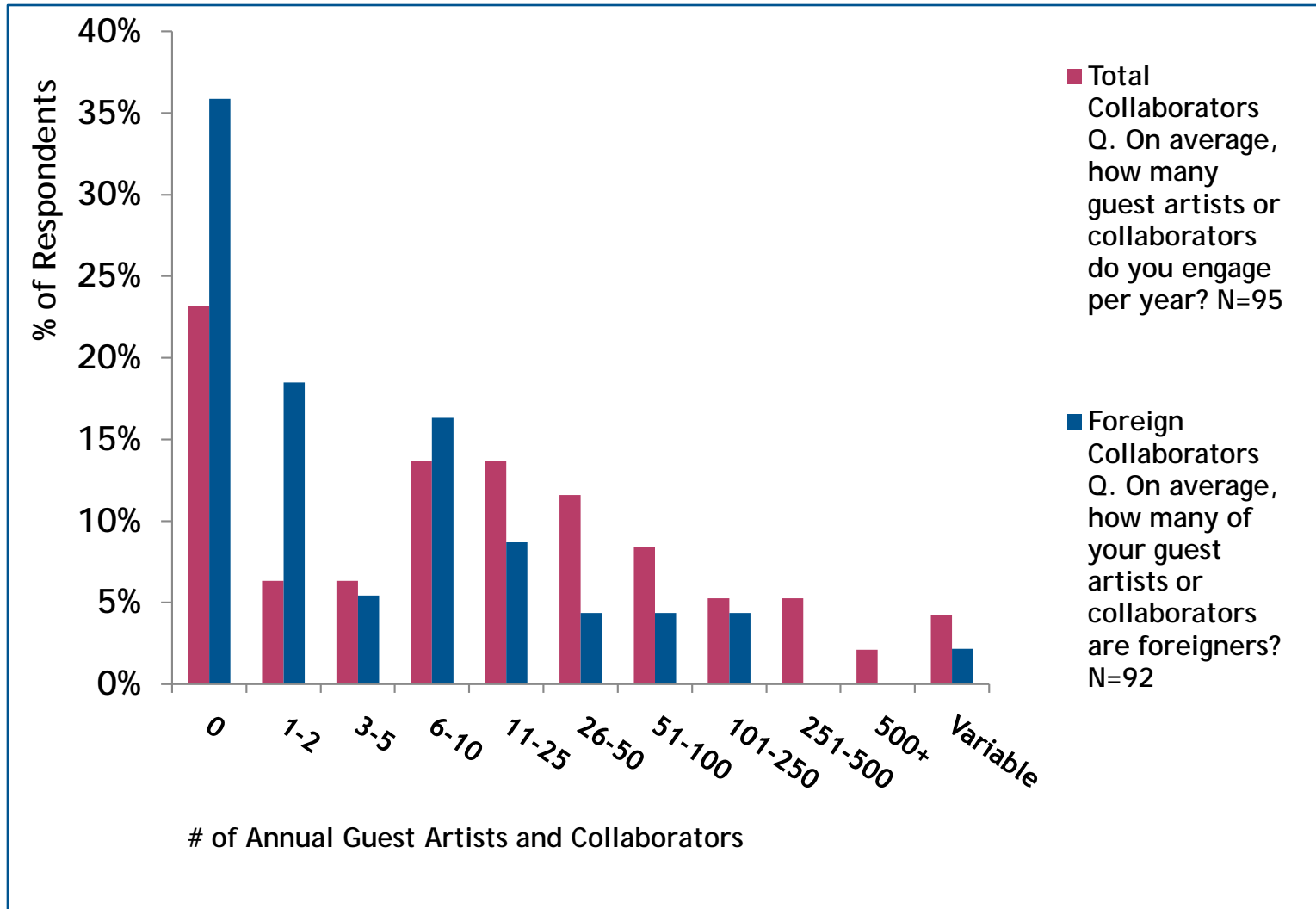
Q19. How many cultural exchange initiatives or cultural diplomacy programs does your organization sponsor or participate in annually? N=134



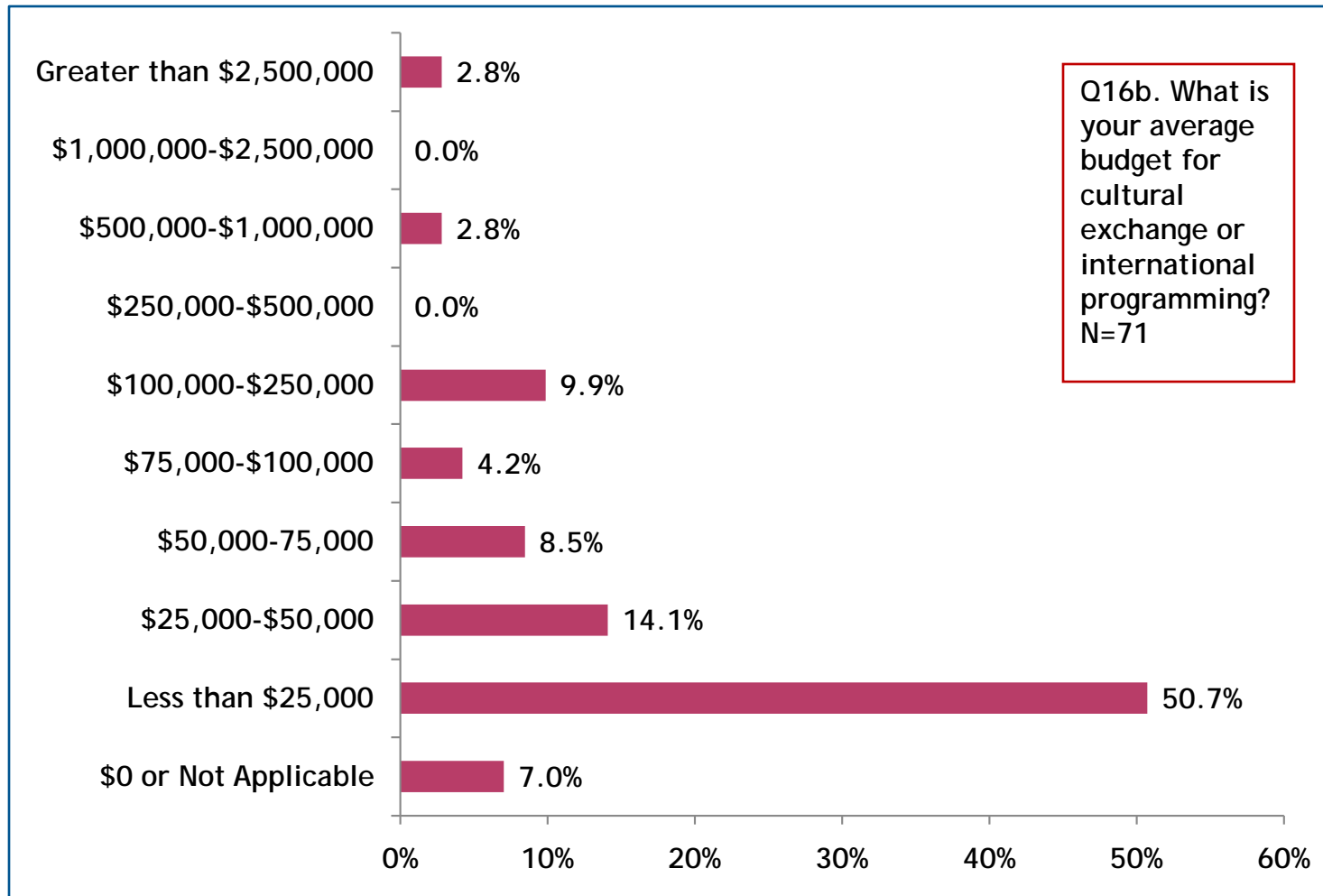
# TYPES OF CULTURAL EXCHANGES BY FREQUENCY



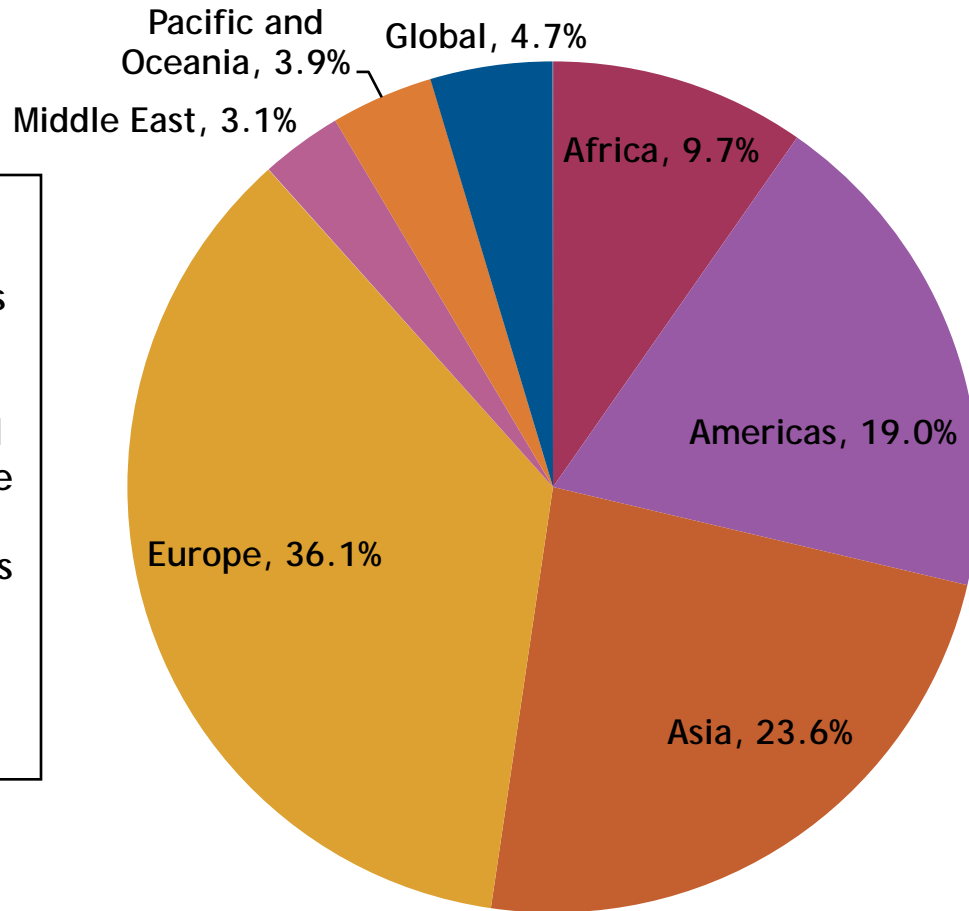
# GUEST ARTISTS AND COLLABORATIONS



# AVERAGE BUDGET FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGES BY PROJECT



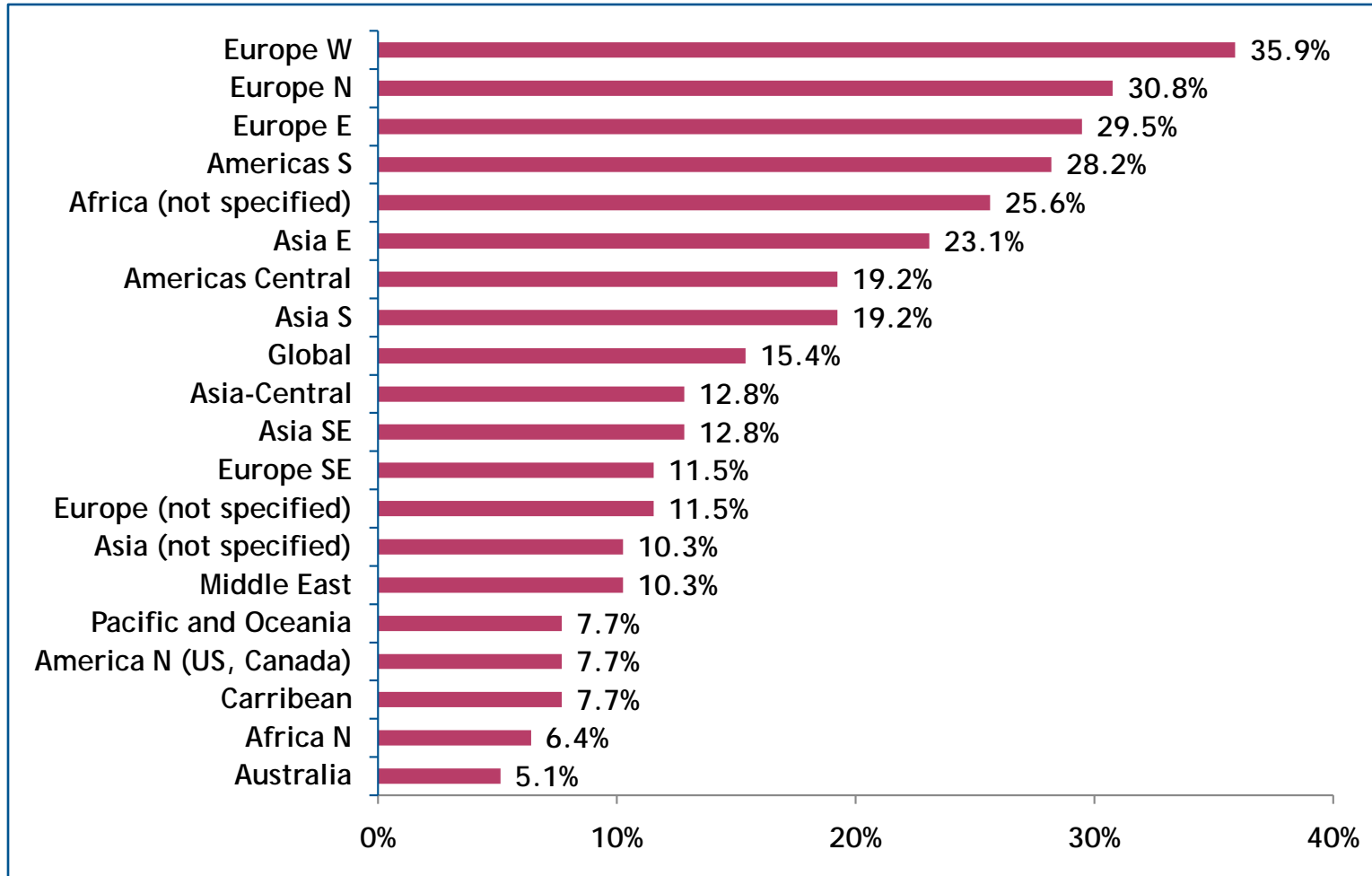
# WORLD GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS OF ENGAGEMENT



Artists and cultural organizations are on the ground globally in all regions of the world. Over 130 countries were mentioned specifically.

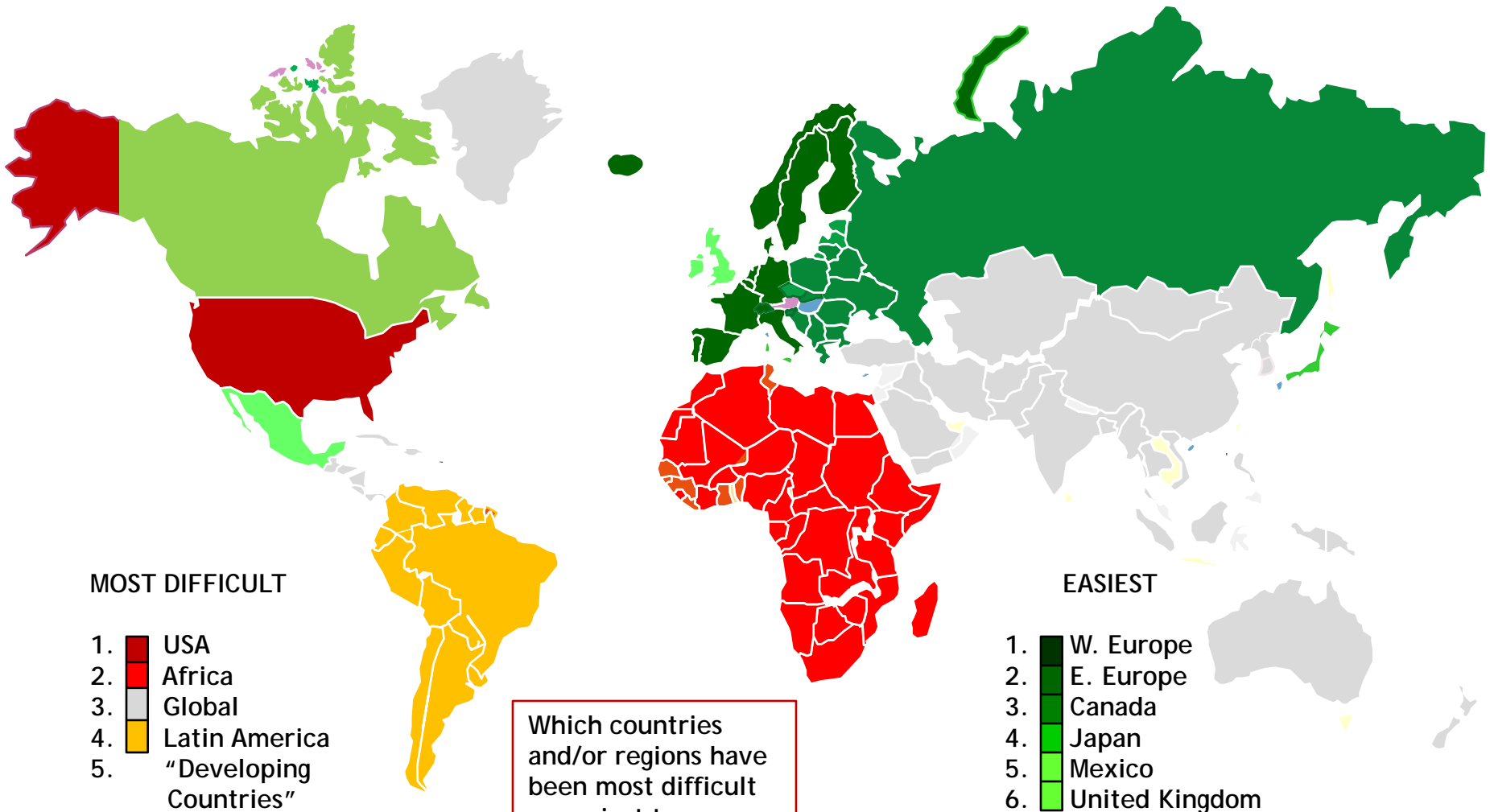
Q20. If you have participated in international programming or exchanges, please list which regions and countries you have engaged with as well as frequency. N=78

# ENGAGEMENT BY SUB-REGION



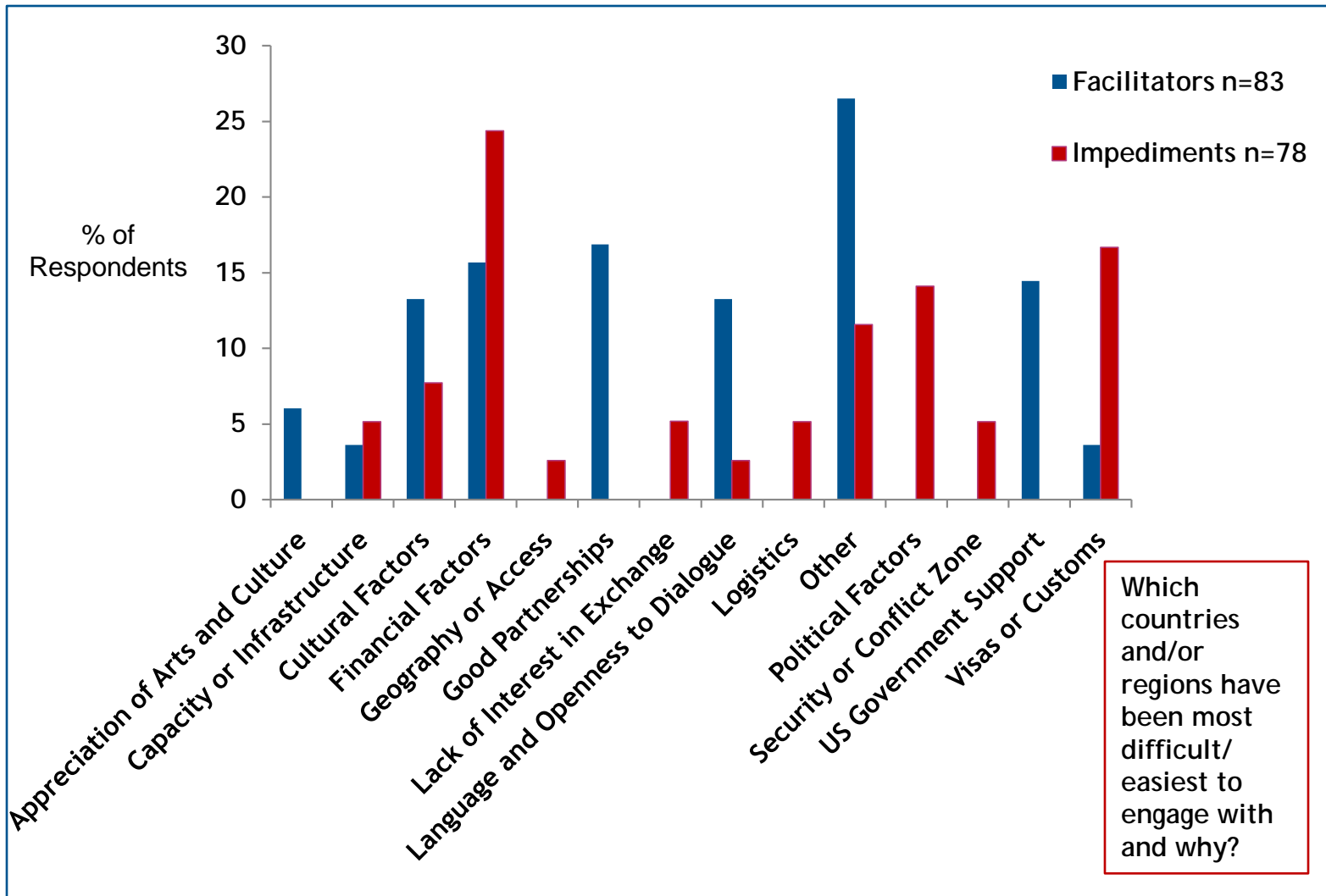
Q20. If you have participated in international programming or exchanges, please list which regions and countries you have engaged with as well as frequency. N=78

# REGIONS BY EASE OF ENGAGEMENT



Which countries and/or regions have been most difficult or easiest to engage with and why?

# FACTORS AFFECTING GEOGRAPHIC ENGAGEMENT

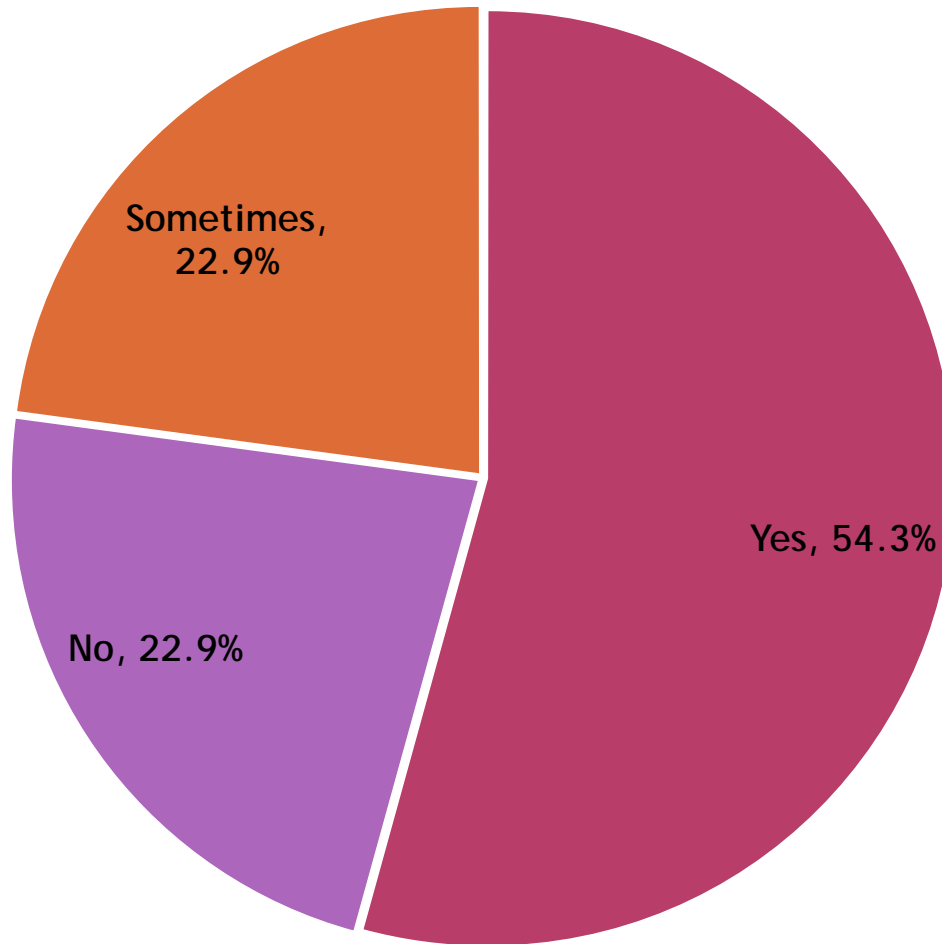


# VII. MAKING AN IMPACT

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4. Use of Technology Overview [Slide 36](#)
5. Use of Technology for Content Dissemination and Promotion [Slide 37](#)
6. Use of Technology in the Creative Process [Slide 38](#)
7. Facilitating Exchange: A Cultural Portal [Slide 39](#)
8. Leveraging Resources [Slide 40](#)

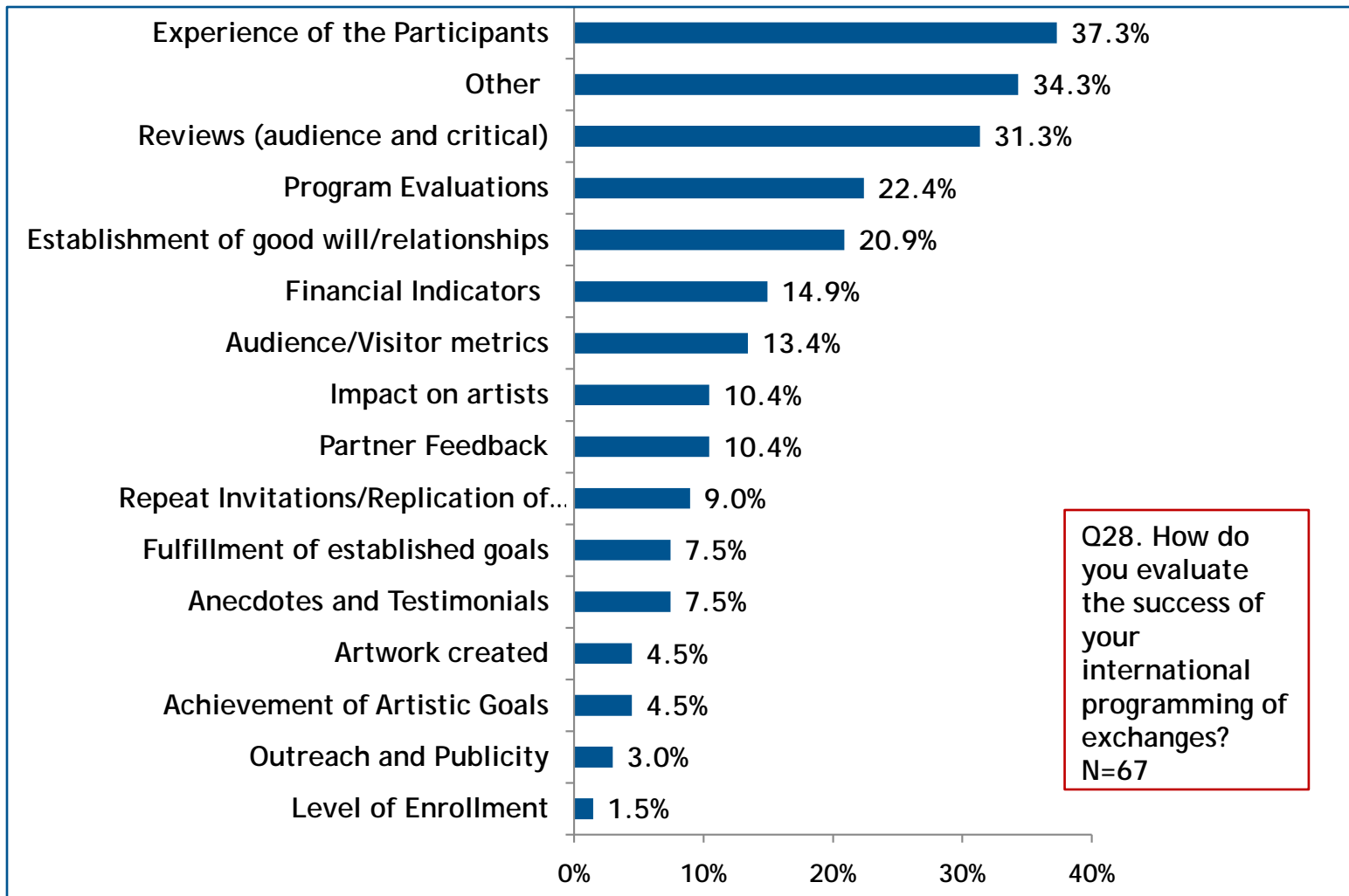


# MEASURING SUCCESS



Q27. Are you required by your funders and or governance structure to evaluate your cultural exchange and international programming initiatives?  
N=70

# COMMON INDICATORS OF EVALUATION BY FREQUENCY



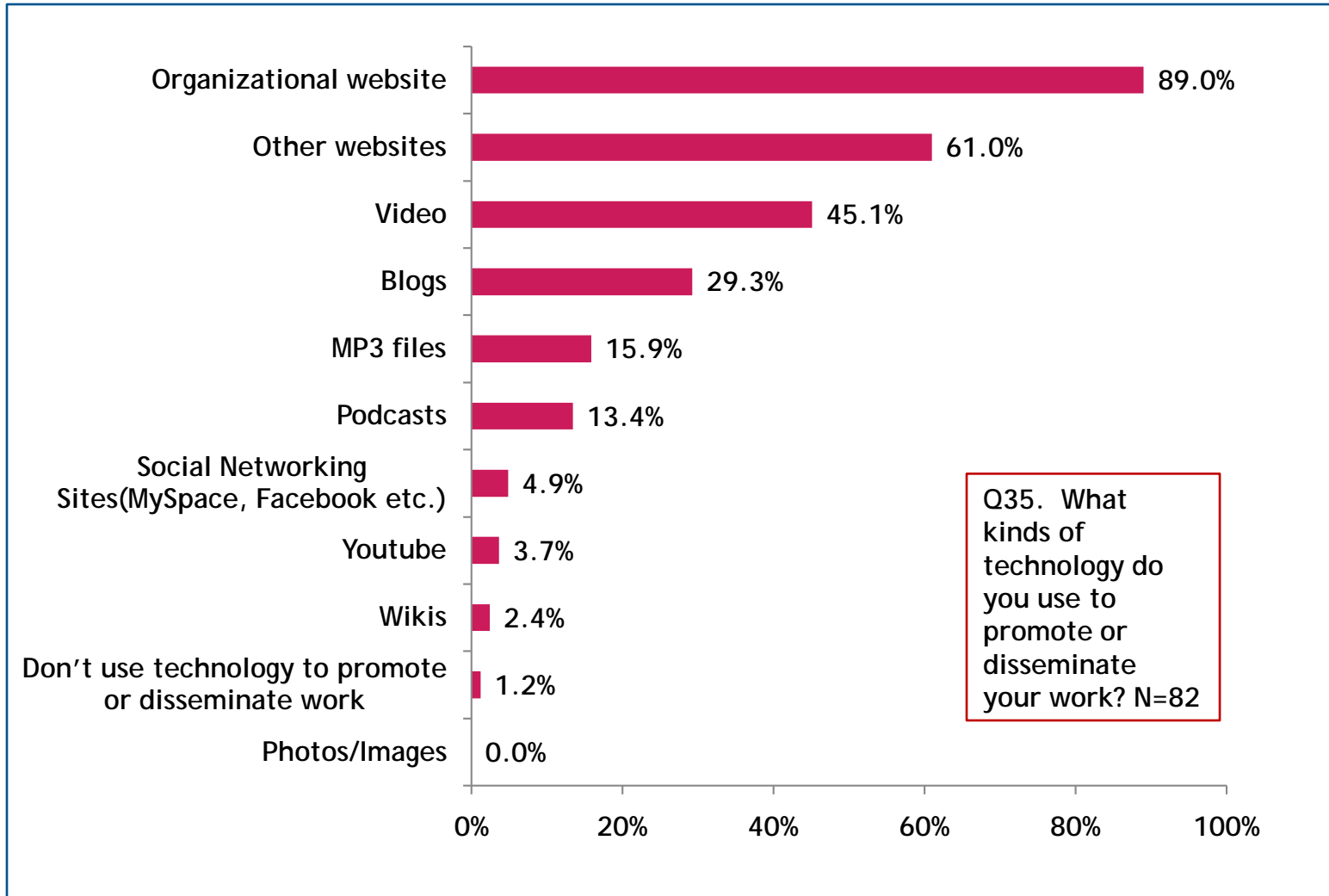
# AUDIENCES

- Audience questions were open-ended and not mandatory.
- Inconclusive information demonstrates the inherent challenges in gathering information from the field.
- Organizations and individuals have difficulty in providing domestic or international audience statistics for ethnicity and age ranges even though audience or visitor metrics were indicated as a factor of measuring success.
- Further studies should make this topic a priority and provide audience categories by key demographics including age and ethnicity.

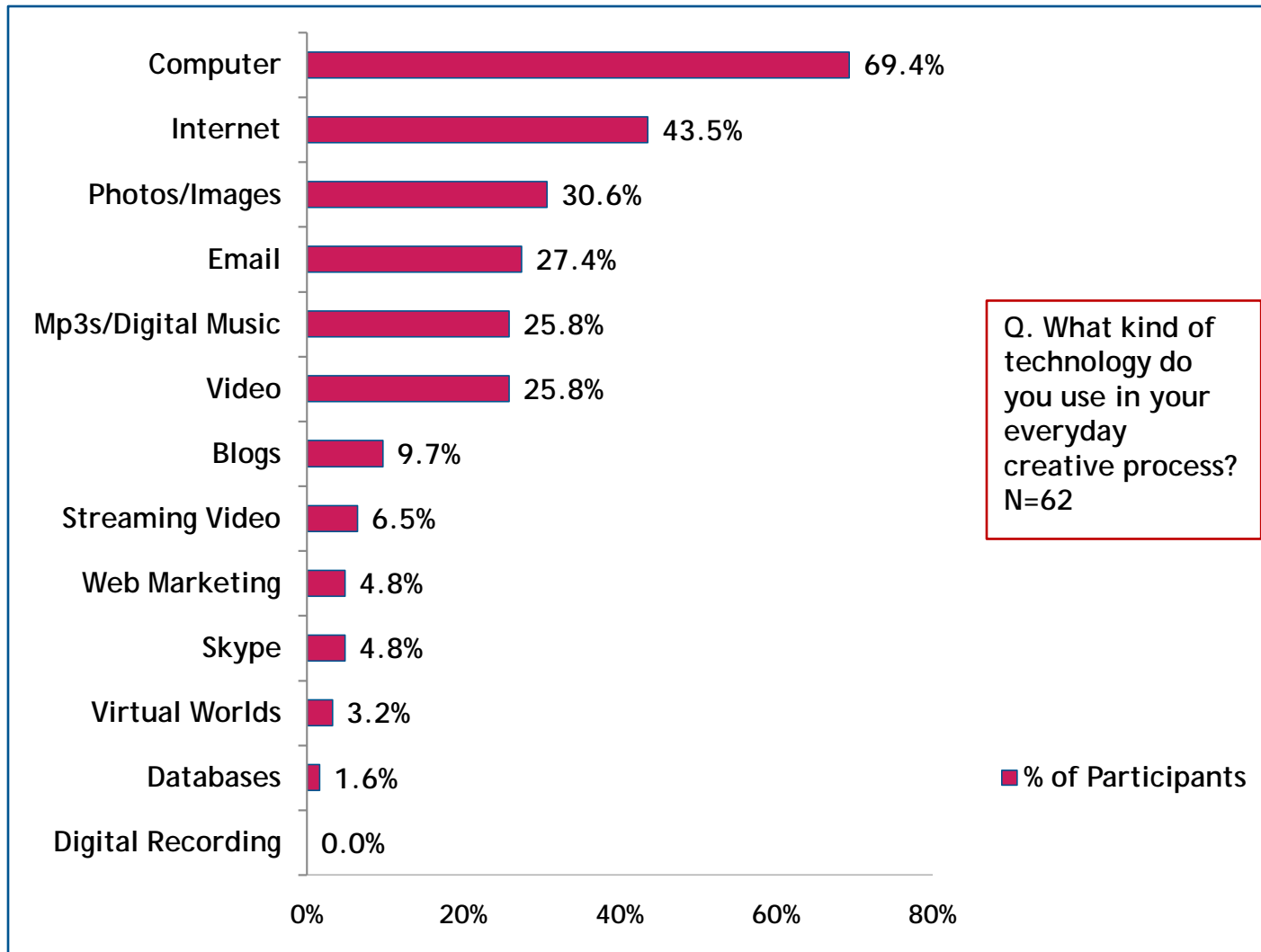
# USE OF TECHNOLOGY

- Artists and cultural organizations trend towards both ends of the spectrum in terms of their facility to use technology for creation and dissemination.
- The majority of participants do use technology—if only by use of a promotional website.
- 15% of survey respondents (n=59) use the Internet to find new opportunities for international engagement.
- 92% of respondents (n=79) indicated a possible interest in an online, interactive Web 2.0 portal to facilitate cultural exchange.
- Most popular features requested of such a portal include directories of opportunities, organizational profiles and funding sources.

# USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR CONTENT DISSEMINATION AND PROMOTION

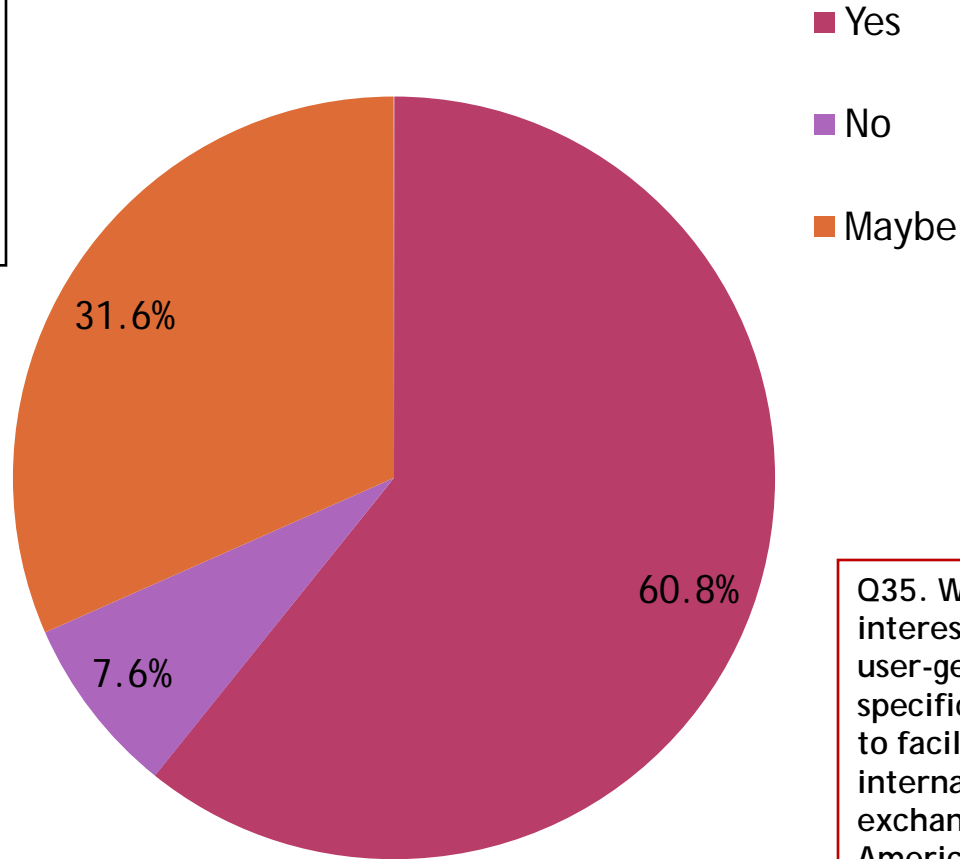


# USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS



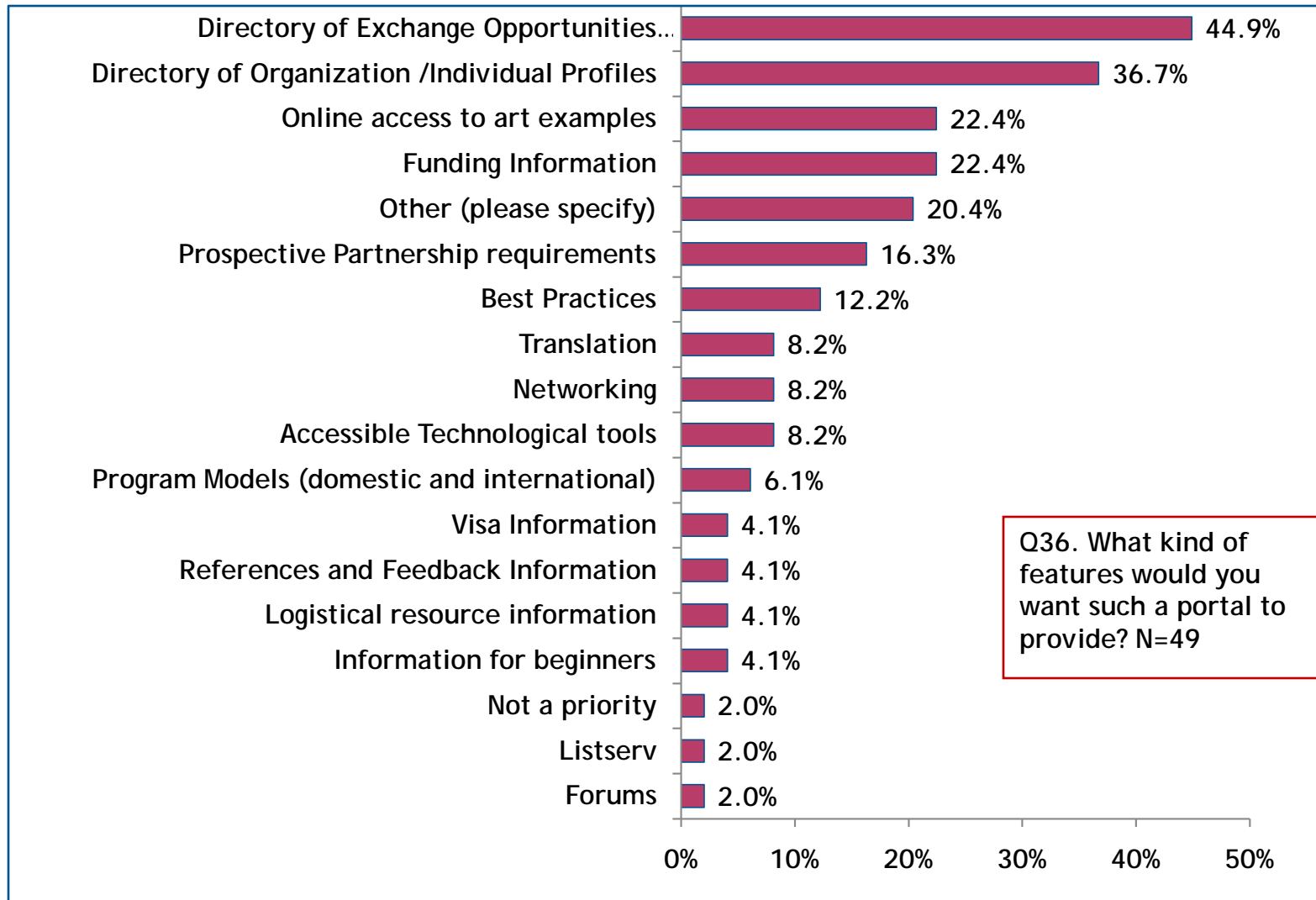
# FACILITATING EXCHANGE— A CULTURAL PORTAL?

92% of responses indicated a possible interest in an online cultural portal to facilitate cultural exchange.



Q35. Would you be interested in an online user-generated portal specifically designed to facilitate international exchange with American cultural organizations? N=79

# LEVERAGING RESOURCES: A CULTURAL PORTAL

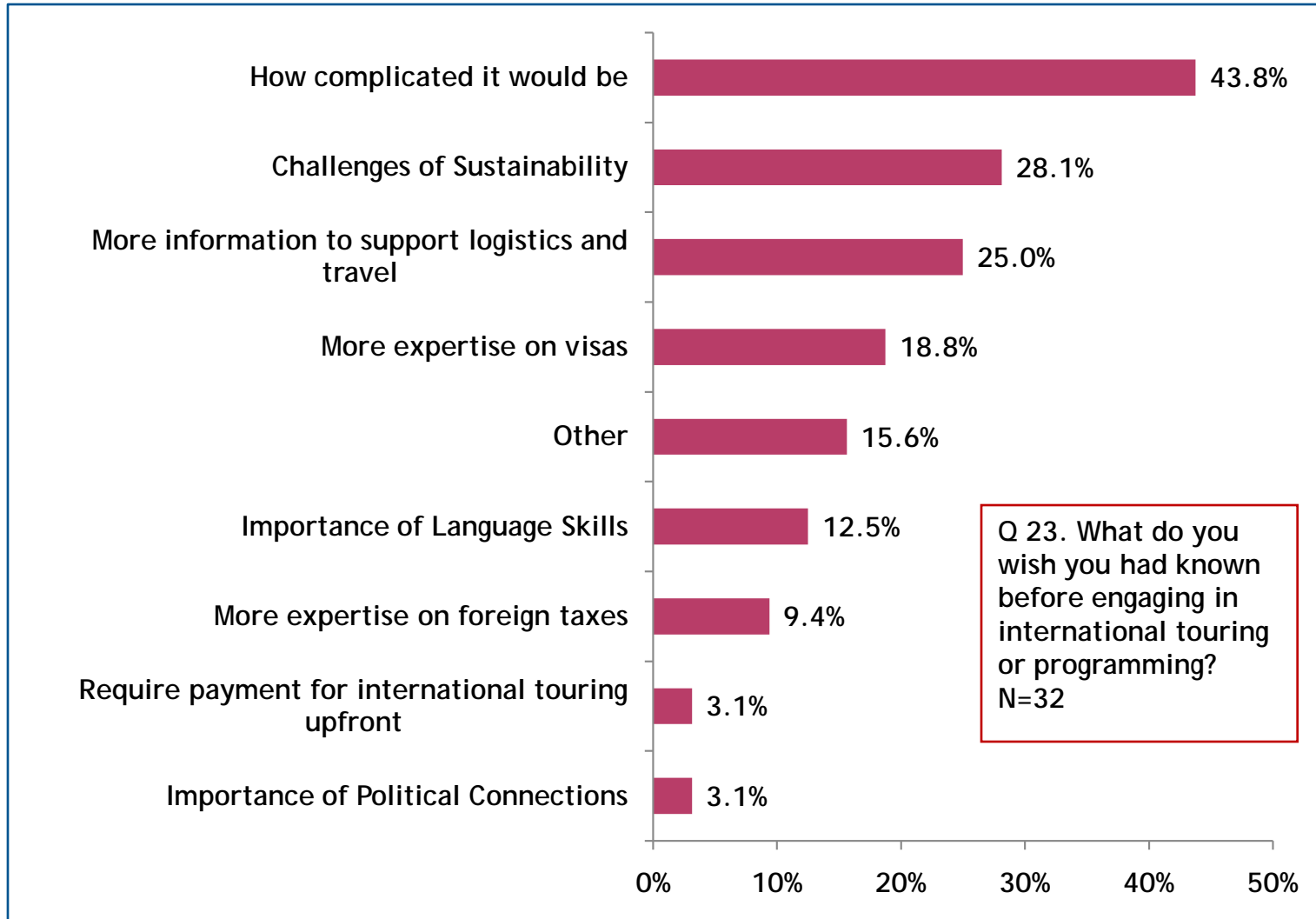




# VIII. LESSONS LEARNED

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What Organizations Wished  
They Had Known in Advance [Slide 42](#)
2. Practice Makes Perfect:  
Smart Practices [Slide 43](#)
3. Final Thoughts by Participants [Slide 45](#)
4. For Further Investigation [Slide 46](#)

# HINDSIGHT IS 20/20



# PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

*"No matter what the challenges, it (cultural exchange) is always worth it. It promotes growth in all parties, as well as a deeper understanding and appreciation for the similarities and differences of peoples and cultures."*

1. Successful engagement can happen through any discipline.
2. Context is important and every engagement is different; Do the homework and consider logistical, political, cultural and artistic factors before deciding to engage.
3. Be aware that you are representing a larger artistic community.
4. Approach exchange as the act of building relationships and not just as a source of revenue.
5. Consider an individual exchange or appearance with an established international festival or organization abroad before involving an entire company.
6. Try to collaborate with peers in a specific country or region.

# PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT CONT.

7. Translation capacity is essential at all stages of organization and execution and shows respect. Students that speak both English and the in-country language(s) are good on-the-ground resources.
8. Be aware that packages shipped internationally may be opened in transit or handled roughly. For fragile works, individual artists have sometimes labeled work with the components rather than identifying them as art.
9. Be aware that festival and performance schedules in other regions (particularly Europe) do not match U.S. timeframes.
10. If at all possible, have a representative make a trip in advance of any performance-based exchange.
11. Foreign tax and visa guidance is available through Artists from Abroad (<http://www.artistsfromabroad.org/>). Arts service organizations track worldwide interview timelines and can provide letters or assistance as a last resort.
12. The Ohio Arts Council, in partnership with the State Department, has created a nuts and bolts handbook (*The Appreciative Journey*) on organizing, conducting and evaluating international cultural exchange projects.

# FINAL THOUGHTS BY PARTICIPANTS

- “I personally can attest that cultural exchanges are very good avenues for U.S. diplomacy - creating goodwill and directly letting people around the world know that Americans' are interested in understanding and working with others. Art also has a definite advantage over other fields: It can also remain apolitical while imparting this message of caring, respect and a willingness to work cooperatively.”
- “We would appreciate any advice, support, help to enter this very important field of endeavor in the arts.”
- “I think this is a great project and hope more US institutions get involved in cultural diplomacy as the US government cannot do this (well) alone!”

# FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- Large data gaps on the practice of cultural exchange in the field remain and greater cooperative efforts are necessary to further address them.
  - Additional research about trends in international exchange and programming for each discipline are worth further investigation.
  - Long-term information gathering is needed to further establish benchmarks.
  - Representative cultural membership organizations, with some exceptions, are reluctant to recommend independent surveys to their membership or to poll their constituents. This is based on the belief that their memberships are not engaged in international cultural exchange or international programming combined with a concern of “over-surveying.”
  - Information on foreign artists and organizations and their direct experiences in engaging with the U.S. culturally is minimal and could compliment further research on the practices of U.S. based organizations’ trends of engagement.

# IX. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- *This survey is the first attempt to systematically and quantitatively benchmark the international engagement practices of U.S. based cultural organizations. Many thanks to each of the 136 individuals (representing 134 organizations or individual artists) who took the time to participate in this survey. Without their individual investments of the significant time required to gather the appropriate information, this survey could not have been undertaken.*
- *A special thank you to Americans for the Arts which published two calls for responses on the Cultural Policy Listserv (now Arts Watch) in addition to including 4 questions on its own Urban Arts Federation Survey.*
- *We are grateful to the American Association of Museums, ART in Embassies, Dance/USA, and Opera America each of which generously reached out to select members of their constituencies and program participants to solicit responses.*