

CLOSING THE GAP

Impact & Representation of Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour Live Music Workers in Canada

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Key Findings

Everyone deserves access to safe and equitable working conditions; the inclusion and safety of artists and workers in creative careers identifying as Indigenous, Black, and as people of colour (IBPOC) is a basic human right and therefore morally imperative. It is also imperative for fostering the innovation on which creative industries thrive. While important research exists on the state of inequality in music industries writ large, very little research has been conducted on the live music industry. The critical and urgent need for this sector-specific research is demonstrated throughout our report, as the nature of working conditions in live music – festival curation guided by genre, invisible labour that is unevenly distributed, gatekeeping practices by individuals in decision-making roles – have specific repercussions for the wellbeing and safety of IBPOC workers.

Closing the Gap: Impact & Representation of Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour Live Music Workers in Canada is a significant step forward in helping to close the gap in knowledge on inequality in the live music sector. More importantly, our goal is to provide evidence on the nature of inequalities experienced by IBPOC live music workers, and actionable policy recommendations that can in turn help to close the gap in representation and inequitable experiences in the live music community that vary along lines of race and ethnicity. This report examines the challenges confronted by IBPOC workers, while also exploring the opportunities and industry strengths that can be harnessed to promote their full participation. The study consists of 40 in-depth interviews with IBPOC live music workers across Canada, spanning various roles, genres, levels of experience, and identities. This study also includes country-wide demographic survey data on the economic, as well as mental and physical health effects of working in the live music sector.



Live music demographics and representation

The survey focused on three occupational roles in the live music industry: artists, entrepreneur/owners, and workers. White respondents were evenly distributed across the roles of artist (40%), entrepreneur/owner (44%), and worker (35%). In contrast, survey respondents who identified as Black were overrepresented as artists (73%), and underrepresented as entrepreneurs/owners (28%), and workers (17%). This pattern was similar across respondents who identified as Indigenous and other people of colour suggesting **IBPOC live music workers are disproportionately represented as artists, rather than entrepreneurs/owners and workers.**

Survey results revealed that gender diversity, sexual orientation diversity, and having a disability is more common among IBPOC live music workers. Because these facets of identity are underrepresented in the population at large and may be experienced as marginalized, it is likely that discriminatory and tokenistic experiences in live music are intersectional in nature. This further suggests that solutions to overcoming discrimination must likewise be intersectional in design.

In terms of representation, Statistics Canada indicates that **Indigenous people and people of colour¹, including Black people, constitute 27% of Canada's population, but they constitute 16% of the total number of live music industry workers.**

Economic impact

Rates of entrepreneurship and ownership were lower among IBPOC respondents when compared to white respondents; there was a 16% gap in ownership among Black respondents compared to white respondents. Other people of colour

Skip ahead:

Live music demographics and representation	ii
Economic impact	ii
Sources of inequality	iii
Sources of promise	iv
Recommendations	iv
Calls-to-action for presenters	ix

had a 12% gap in their rates of ownership, while Indigenous respondents had a 9% gap in comparison to white respondents.

IBPOC workers are not earning as much labour income as white individuals working in the live music industry. Survey data demonstrated that **IBPOC individuals working in live music make, on average, \$11,700 less per year than white industry workers.** If IBPOC workers and artists currently in the community earned the same as their white counterparts, they would add \$202.2 million to the industry's annual contribution to GDP. **In total, the "missing" GDP contribution of missing IBPOC people and missing wages is an estimated \$273.5 million.**

Additionally, if IBPOC representation in the live music community matched Canada's population, there would be an additional 1,765 full-time equivalents (FTEs) in the industry. These FTEs would earn a total labour income of \$71.3 million if they earned as much as white individuals in the community.

Sources of inequality

IBPOC live music workers' **employment patterns differ**; they are eight times more likely to be working a part-time job not related to the music industry, and twice as likely to be working on a casual or freelance basis in a job not related to the music industry, in addition to their hours of work as a music worker. By contrast, 71% of white respondents report being able to work full-time in the music industry. Related, Indigenous (30%) and Black (29%) workers most frequently report being paid less than someone else with the same qualifications; none (0%) of the white survey respondents reported being paid less than equally qualified counterparts.

IBPOC study participants also reported experiences of **exclusion** and **tokenization** with greater frequency than white study participants. Indigenous, Black, and people of colour survey respondents reported that tokenization is a major [barrier to their sense of belonging](#) in the live music community (at rates of 14, 28, and 19% respectively), compared to only 2% of white respondents. Similarly, 31% of Indigenous respondents, 42% of Black respondents, and 37% of people of colour respondents reported feeling as though lack of representation is a barrier to their sense of belonging.

Related to this, study participants report that **while genres such as Indigenous music and world music provide a source of community and belonging, they can also create feelings of marginalization and tokenization**. The impact of genre is wide-ranging: it is present in funding application categories, where artists and their managers have to select a category that may help or hurt their chances, or otherwise misrepresent them. In addition, genre plays a major role in the way that festivals are curated and venues are programmed, creating a ripple effect that influences marketing and promotion, and the extent to which

IBPOC artists, workers, and audiences are made to feel included in live events.

The top four reported employment positions among white live music industry workers are gatekeeping positions: music venue owners, music promoters, live event producers, and music festival programmers. On the other hand, excluding artists, racialized respondents primarily occupy artist management, professional services, and booking agent roles, which seek audience access from gatekeepers. The **unequal allocation of gatekeeping roles** poses significant barriers for IBPOC workers, in terms of gaining access to audiences, and thus, revenue streams.

Access to funding was the most frequently identified barrier for Indigenous (45%), Black (53%), and people of colour (49%) respondents. Eligibility requirements (including restrictions based on for-profit vs. not-for-profit models, by-invitation-only policies, eligible expenses, e.g. Pow Wow competitions), language barriers, lack of awareness of available funding programs, and insufficient reflection of cultural diversity within public funding frameworks and policies were cited as the most significant barriers to funding access for IBPOC respondents.

While eligibility criteria are necessary, the processes and practices on which they are founded do not always take into account how systemic racism may prevent IBPOC workers from meeting eligibility requirements. As funding organizations continue to pursue more equitable practices and level funding opportunities across creative communities, it is important to continue to identify and disentangle systemic racism and colonial histories from their procedures.

Sources of promise

For all the difficulties found, this study also discovered many joys and opportunities shared by participants that counter their negative and harmful experiences. In fact, one of the most consistent themes across interviews was the **importance of community**. Participants shared how their community provided a soothing balm in painful situations, promoted them during their earlier career stages, and offered guidance over necessary learning curves. For example, some IBPOC live music workers promote ethnic and gender diversity in their staff as a way of **cultivating a safer space for otherwise excluded community members**.

Other sources of promise include new partnerships between live music businesses and advocacy groups, such as ADVANCE, Canada's Black Music Business Collective, with the goal of **identifying knowledge gaps**. And, there are programs such as the Toronto Arts Council's (TAC) newcomer and refugee Artist Mentorship and Artist Engagement programs that help **address language barriers** in the funding application process by providing program guidelines in the seven most widely spoken languages in Toronto, outside of Canada's official languages.



Based on these findings, we provide the following recommendations.

For Live Music Industry (Venue Owners, Promoters, Agents, Managers, and Festival Organizers)

One of the strongest findings emerging from this study is the prominence of white workers in gatekeeping positions in the live music industry, while one of the most significant barriers for IBPOC workers is a lack of access to gatekeepers and/or a lack of representation in the industry. This situation perpetuates itself, and will continue to do so unless actively disrupted.

- Publicly funded festivals and concerts can disclose final budgets, including data on artist payments that are aggregated along lines of race/ethnicity and gender (to protect the confidentiality of individual artists), as a check and balance against payouts that skew higher for white artists.
- Additionally, publicly funded organizations should introduce pay transparency in hiring practices to provide a check and balance against discriminatory payment practices that vary by race/ethnicity and gender.
- Those in positions of power can insist on [inclusion/equity riders](#) for festivals and concerts.
- When festivals and concerts are promoting events on radio, they can request that booked artists from underrepresented groups receive either airplay, or at least name recognition on radio stations as part of their promotion efforts.
- Privately owned venues can make rental fees publicly available, which may curtail discrimination against booking genres where IBPOC artists, workers, and audiences are more highly represented.

- Organizations can open access to IBPOC workers by offering a ‘behind the board’ program where emerging sound tech staff, especially women and non-binary technicians, are invited to shadow established sound techs on the job.
- Expand hiring searches to include a more diverse pool of applicants.
- Consider enlisting the help of fractional HR services.
- Engage in more dialogue about the role of substance abuse in live music, provide a wider selection of non-alcoholic beverages, and offer performing artists financial compensation in lieu of complimentary alcohol.

- Amplify music industry-specific addiction and mental health support services.

For Government and Funding Bodies

One response to addressing the inadequate representation of IBPOC live music workers has been for government, funding agencies, and white-led organizations to pursue further research, lead workshops, etc. Although useful, these activities can often consume large amounts of resources that could be used to fund immediate change for IBPOC live music industry workers. Deeper examination and prioritization based on need, where all public funds are concerned, may be required to drive effective and meaningful change.

Promoting Industry Shifts

- Include eligibility guidelines and assessment criteria that stipulate white-led organizations must include significant IBPOC representation in decision-making positions.
- Examine existing, and work to remove, prohibitive funding eligibility criteria. This would include support for competition Pow Wows, examining the limitations of “by invitation only” policies for operating or core grant programs, and expanding eligibility requirements to be more inclusive of for-profit models in addition to not-for-profit organizations.
- Insist on inclusion/equity riders for festivals and concerts that receive public funding.
- Establish additional dedicated support for initiatives led by and serving emerging artists and enterprises, DIY/grassroots initiatives, and newcomers.
- Organize a system-wide grant funding symposium where agencies at different levels of government can do a collective strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)



Aysanabee, photographed by J. Atlas

analysis, engage more directly with each other's programs, and collaborate on ways to address shared systemic barriers.

- Municipalities can engage with the industry through the Music Cities work, which includes reviewing existing bylaws and policies such as noise regulations and use of public space, and adapting them to better accommodate Canada's sonically and culturally diverse musical expressions and traditions.

Increasing Access and Inspiring Trust

- Consult with IBPOC artists, organizations, and community members regarding the limitations and complex issues related to genre categorizations, and explore strategies to add more flexibility within self-identification processes for program applications, eligibility criteria, and awards programs.
- To account for different regional needs and varying access to information, establish partnerships with regional representatives or community advocates. For example, partnering with the National Indigenous Music Office or ADVANCE, Canada's Black Music Business Collective, could help to ensure the development of relationships needed in order to grow the industry.
- Revise language requirements to include Indigenous languages and non-official languages.
- Provide interpretation/translation services so applicants can apply in the language in which they feel they can most clearly and accurately communicate their project ideas and goals.
- Expand application methods to include audio and video application submissions.

- Remove revenue benchmarks and organizational model requirements for emerging racialized artists and organizations.
- Include a rationale for demographic data requested of applicants to promote transparency between applicants and the funding organization.
- Ensure aggregated peer assessor feedback is provided to unsuccessful applicants, both to promote transparency in the review process and to further improve applicants' future competitiveness.



Nikki Komaksiutiksak, photographed by sākihiwē festival

- Publicly fund music industry-specific addiction and mental health support services, including sector-specific charitable organizations.

For All of the Above (Government and Funding Bodies, Live Music Industry — Venue Owners, Promoters, Agents, Managers, and Festival Organizers)

- Dedicate funding for paid mentorship programs for newcomers and racialized workers, including personal professional skills development and training.
- Both for-profit and nonprofit companies can focus on ensuring that entry-level IBPOC workers receive training and mentoring at every stage of their development.
- Adopt a 'more than one' rule. When employing IBPOC workers to increase representation on staff, boards, and in leadership positions, hiring one worker impedes the psychological safety needed to express oneself, which in turn limits thought diversity.
- Technical and business administration training for IBPOC workers can be developed, including programs specifically for femme and gender non-conforming workers.
- Healing practices around internalized racism and internalized oppression can be implemented to ensure that, as representation at a leadership level increases, IBPOC workers are less at-risk of recreating dynamics and work conditions that emerge from the systems of oppression they're working within, alongside, or past.
- Organizations can fill in knowledge gaps (in skills, infrastructure, resources) by partnering with complementary organizations.

- Organizations can engage in learning surrounding diverse cultural protocols and ensure their inclusion in contracts.

For IBPOC Workers

It is important to acknowledge that reshaping workplace cultures to be safer and more inclusive for IBPOC workers is not the responsibility of IBPOC folks themselves. At the same time, any positive change that occurs will likely be slow. Developing tools for self-empowerment and a repertoire of practices that enable workers to advocate for themselves may be necessary, albeit unfair. The following are some community-centred ideas inspired by the study's findings that may help IBPOC workers self-advocate, support each other, and create a sense of agency as they continue to grow their careers:

- Request a copy of grants that include you as a partner, consultant, or other substantial participation to retain/review.
- Add a clause in work agreements that stipulates that artist fees should reflect the budgets of successful grants, if above initial negotiation.
- Exercise your right to request a grant report extension in the event of traumatic experiences.
- Create group grant writing sessions. This can simply involve writing silently, in the same space or via zoom, as a comforting accountability partnership.
- Ask if a granting office would be willing to review the application together with you, to assess eligibility, and answer questions.
- Cross-promote as a way of expanding your audience and deepening your community.
- Adopt the shared spaces approach, whereby established venues and office spaces open

The past decade has thrown into stark relief the toxic and lasting effects of systemic racism, at the same time that we have seen ongoing efforts across communities to protest racism and inequality.

More work remains to be done.

access to emerging, DIY, or small-scale organizations. Workers and venues could consider co-leasing space with another organization, and alternating access or rotating programming to lessen the financial burden of a long-term lease.

- If it feels safe to do so, cross-reference performance rates with each other, and white peers and colleagues to promote transparency.
- Ask collaborators, contractors and/or promoters if your fee/pay is equal to others doing the same work.
- Request a dry green room, or financial compensation in lieu of complimentary alcohol.
- Request that space and time be provided for traditional, spiritual, and/or cultural practices.



Calls-to-Action for Presenters

Alan Greyeyes (sākihiwē festival/Ogichidaa Arts) contributed a parallel set of recommendations that recognize and address some of the distinct barriers experienced by Indigenous artists and industry workers in Canada.

1. We call on music award shows, music presenters, music promoters, and music conferences to use every stage they have to show Canadians that Indigenous people are just as special and talented as their loved ones.
2. We call on music presenters to submit offers to Indigenous artists that give them the ability to put their best foot forward. In Marek Tyler's words, "you know that you have given enough when it starts to hurt a little." (A teaching given to him by his mom, Linda Young).
3. We call on summer music festivals in Canada to contract Indigenous artists well before the December tour grant deadline at the Canada Council for the Arts so they can submit competitive applications, strengthen their cash flow positions, and provide better customer service to their presenters.
4. We call on government departments and funding partners to recognize the unique position that Indigenous people have in Canada and not to lump them in with diversity, inclusion, and equity programs or projects.
5. We call on the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal art councils to remove the "by invitation only" policies on their core or operating grant programs so Indigenous organizations can build the capacity to compete for private sponsors and contract artists well in advance of tour grant deadlines.
6. We call on the Department of Canadian Heritage to make competition prize money for pow wows an eligible expense in all music presentation programs.

As we continue to reflect on how to improve the live music experience throughout and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, it is especially important to consider ways to improve the experiences and wellbeing of IBPOC live music workers. The past decade has thrown into stark relief the toxic and lasting effects of systemic racism, at the same time that we have seen ongoing efforts across communities and organizations to protest racism and inequality. More work remains to be done. We invite you to read the full report in order to develop a more comprehensive picture of the nature of inequalities experienced by IBPOC live music workers, as well as possibilities for change.

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