



APS: Summaries – Savings & CERB

2020



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land we gather on, Moh'kinsstis, is the ancestral territory of the Siksikaitapī—the Blackfoot peoples—comprising the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani Nations, as well as Treaty 7 signatories, the Tsuut'ina Nation, and the Įyâxe Nakoda Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Wesley First Nations. Today this land is home to the Métis Nation of region 3 as well as many First Nations and Inuit peoples from across Turtle Island. We acknowledge that there has been art, music, dance, storytelling, and ceremony on this land since time immemorial, and it is in the spirit of this land and its people that we do our work.



Barriers to savings

When asked about barriers to savings, there were 339 qualitative text responses which included varying factors from unexpected expenses, low income, and debt to the financial costs of being an artist, such as reinvesting in artistic practice or forgoing paid employment for exposure work. The following subsections present some of the overarching barriers to savings as enumerated in text results from the 2020 Arts Professional Survey.

Cost of Living

Ninety-nine comments mentioned the high cost of living as being one of the biggest issues impacting the savings of arts professionals. Calgary's cost of living is known to be one of the highest in Canada. Pre-recession Calgary's cost of living catered to those in higher income brackets. Unfortunately, that has meant for the lower income Calgarian, or those who have lost their jobs during the recession, the cost of living is high, and the rate of inflation keeps increasing. This reality is especially hard for arts professionals, and more specifically, professional artists as they represent the highest portion of the low-income category (i.e. those earning less than \$35,000 per year). The Canada's Consumer Price Index (CPI) looks at the rate of inflation by comparing the cost of a \$100 basket of household expenses in 2002 dollars and comparing that same basket of goods at today's prices (Calgary Economic Development, 2020). In 2019, Canada's overall CPI was \$136.00 whilst Calgary's CPI was \$143.10 (StatsCan, 2019). Additionally, it is recommended that only 35-50 percent of one's monthly income should go toward household expenses (Canada.ca, 2020). However, survey results demonstrated that arts professionals are spending more than this percentage on housing given their incomes.

Canadian Consumer Price Index

CITY	ALL ITEMS CPI (2019)	SHELTER CPI (2019)
Calgary	143.1	172.0
Edmonton	143.2	173.7
Toronto	139.9	149.9
Vancouver	134.1	131.6
Montreal	132.4	135.8
Canadian National Average	136.0	144.5

(All information obtained from Table 18-10-0005-01 Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted Calgary is being compared to Edmonton as well as more predominate Canadian arts hubs)



Debt

Overall, there were 39 references to debt or credit card debt in survey comments. Nationally, Albertans carry the highest provincial debt load. In Q4 of 2019, the Albertan average non-mortgage debt load was \$29,076; compare this to the Canadian average non-mortgage debt load at the same period of \$23,760. Furthermore, Calgaryans averaged out at \$29,789 during this time, and were only outpaced by the citizens of Fort McMurray at \$39,674.

Equifax notes that the average total debt per consumer at the end of 2019 was \$72,950 (Findlater, 2020). One of the biggest contributors to debt is the cost of post-secondary. The latest Statistics Canada (2020) data shows that in the year 2019/2020 the average Canadian's undergraduate tuition was \$6,468, and in Alberta, tuition was \$5,692. During the same period, the average cost of tuition for graduate degrees was \$7,186 in Canada and \$6,749 in Alberta. Although the cost of education in Alberta is slightly below the national average, Albertans still carry some of the highest provincial debt load, which points to the other factors accounting for the total debt, including the rate of inflation in Alberta compared to other provinces as previously mentioned.

Sandals (2018) reporting on the *2017 National Compensation Study – For Managerial and Administrative Positions in Not-for-Profits Arts Organizations* articulates that low pay, high turnover, and poor benefits have ensured that, even before COVID-19 wages, the Arts and Culture sector has stagnated behind other sectors. Given this information and the chart below, it follows that the cost of tuition and possible debt load would not be easily overcome by the wages produced by the arts sector. In fact, based on our survey, this financial precarity contributes to some arts professionals' desire to leave the arts completely.

PROGRAM	COST OF AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE AFTER 4 YEARS BASED ON 2019/20 TUITION FEES. (These totals do not account for textbooks or other supplies for courses.)	ENTRY LEVEL HOURLY WAGE IN ALBERTA	EXPECTED ANNUAL SALARY (MID-CAREER LEVEL) EXPRESSED AS AN AVERAGE IN ALBERTA
Engineering	\$32,000	Geological \$39.13	\$122,937
		Mechanical \$35.43	\$97,209
		Petroleum \$45.52	\$140,758
Business, management and public administration	\$27,308	Financial Sales Representative \$23.53	\$49,723
		Financial and Investment analyst \$34.87	\$85,565
		Advertising, marketing, and public relations \$28.73	\$69,165
Visual and performing arts, and communications technologies	\$23,080	In doing a quick scan of the ALIS Alberta site. It demonstrates that there is a limited grasp on "jobs type in the arts." The occupations vary from Make-Artist to Editor, and many of the profiles do not have an average wage available. This makes it hard to describe the actual ability for an artist to pay back their school debt, especially if they decide to do further studies.	Anecdotally, comments from respondents routinely mention low wages in the arts.
Education	\$18,496	Elementary teacher \$35.77	\$77,661
		Secondary teacher \$36.27	\$78,700

(All tuition amounts are based on Statistics Canada (2020) Table 37-10-00030-1 data. Salary expectations are based on *alis.alberta* searches)

CERB

By Oct 4, 2020 there have been 27.56M applications processed out of 27.57M applications received for CERB - 8.90M of these are unique applicants (*"Unique applicants are people who have applied for the CERB benefit with either CRA and/or ESDC [Employment and Social Development Canada]. A unique applicant is only counted once for the lifetime of the CERB program regardless of the number of times they have applied (Canada.ca, 2020)"*). A total of \$81.64B of CERB Benefits have been received by Canadians. Canada, at the time of writing this, has a population of 38,175,883 (Stats Can, 2020).

"[W]ITHOUT A SIMILAR BENEFIT MY LIVING SITUATION WOULD BE VERY UNCERTAIN."

Satisfying the requirements for 'proof of employment' was a barrier to collecting CERB. In particular, it was difficult for the self-employed to prove that they had not made anything for 14 consecutive days. The self-employed also needed to prove that they would not be making anything while on CERB (Moorhouse, 2020), which further hindered their ability

to continue work even though they continued to have expenses. Artists, who are considered self-employed, are often low income and the fluctuations in their income have, subsequently, ensured their ineligibility for CERB (Lim, 2020):

"...many artists are self-employed and earning low wages and don't qualify for federal benefits. That includes for the Canada Recovery Benefit, which provides workers who aren't eligible for EI \$1,000 every two weeks for up to 26 weeks if they've lost work, or their weekly income has dropped by 50 per cent or more from 2019, or in the last 12 months. Workers may not have recorded the minimum \$5,000 income in that period to be eligible for the benefit, since self-employed income can fluctuate from year to year or be spread out over several years (ibid.)."

When asked about CERB, there were 268 responses. For those who *actually* collected CERB, the end of this benefit has had a profound impact. Some have even stated that this is the most stable their income has been, giving them the ability to save and pay expenses without worry. For this reason, some even had the ability to create more art. CERB has helped artists invest in professional development through several avenues; common examples provided by respondents include (i) allowing project progression with some continuity (i.e., not stopping the creative flow), (ii) financial reinvestment into materials, and (iii) generally fostering time/space for artistic and career growth.

CERB has been effective in supporting eligible arts professionals into the Fall 2020. With the end of CERB and the initiation of the new CRB EI program, new uncertainties emerged because, at the time of this survey, artists were uncertain

"IT [CERB] MAY AFFECT THE CARE I AM ABLE TO PROVIDE FOR MY DISABLED MOTHER..."


whether they would qualify for the new program. Artists expressed and continue to express the need for financial support during the pandemic, and without such support, many cite that their living situations are uncertain – especially during the winter season. Winter provides further complications as

it is typically a slow time for the arts, and therefore, many at the time of this survey were concerned about changes to a program that was working (to a certain extent) during their leanest times.

CERB's end exposed arts professionals to various levels of precariousness. Respondents expressed concern about how to pay their bills or debt, pay their rent or mortgage, and many considered leaving the art sector completely. Artists have done all they can to conserve and reduce their expenses, but this reality further entrenched stress and anxiety. People actively sought work, but in COVID-times this was and remains even more complicated. For teachers, the school restrictions have limited their teaching ability across public and private education settings. For gig workers, their gigs have been canceled due to restrictions on gatherings or pushed to future dates. Furthermore, back up jobs in other industries have also been impacted. For arts professionals also working in tourism or hospitality, those industries were also severely impacted throughout much of the pandemic, either completely shut down or offering limited work hours.

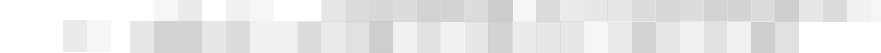
Still, some have found work and canceled their CERB early. This work, however, may pay less than CERB. Further, in the case an individual loses their job or their contract ends before there is more certainty, they will need to reapply to the new CRB program or EI. This new program will be housed under EI not the CRA, which poses a new set of issues for qualification into new programs. At the time of the survey, those who are self-employed either do not know if they will be eligible under new guidelines or are hoping for a new program for gig workers. Others do not know if they worked enough hours to qualify for a variety of reasons. Some respondents felt secure through the fall, expressing that they will only need EI if their jobs fall through, but security into 2021 remained uncertain for many.

A further complication needs to be highlighted: finding jobs in other sectors is even more complicated because people outside the arts are competing for these same jobs – which are limited both in quantity and in hours.



**“I HAVE TO FIND A JOB
OUTSIDE MY INDUSTRY -
VERY DIFFICULT WITH THE
CURRENT UNEMPLOYMENT
RATE. NOT SURE HOW WE
WILL PAY RENT.”**

**“I’M EXTREMELY UNCERTAIN AS TO WHAT
THE FUTURE LOOKS LIKE. WITH A LACK OF
INFORMATION ON HOW TO TRANSFER TO
CRB, IT’S POSSIBLE THAT, AT THE END OF
THIS MONTH, I WILL HAVE ZERO INCOME,
AND ZERO WAY TO EARN IT IN THE ARTS.
I WILL HAVE TO LEAVE THE PROFESSION.”**



“I THINK I’M FINALLY GOING TO HAVE TO GET A NON-ARTS JOB. IT’S DAUNTING, BECAUSE I HAVE NEVER WORKED CUSTOMER SERVICE AND HAVE NO EXPERIENCE IN THE JOBS I WILL BE APPLYING FOR. I WAS LUCKY AND WAS ABLE TO DIVE INTO THE ARTS IMMEDIATELY AFTER COLLEGE, BUT NOW I’M WOEFULLY UNPREPARED TO APPLY FOR A DAY JOB.”

Given the precariousness of the times and the industry, arts professionals have started to look elsewhere for work; with some even considering leaving the arts entirely. There is a definite need to make ends meet by respondents, as mentioned previously, to pay bills, rent, and other expenses. People do not want to leave the arts yet feel pressure to look elsewhere. While this may be a last option for some, the reality of the global pandemic coupled with an already depressed economy – not to mention its trickle down effects of high unemployment and high competition for limited jobs with limited hours – makes it that much harder for arts professionals looking for work.



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