

# NYC Performing Arts Spaces

## Space Solutions for Music • Dance • Theatre

In May 2009, NYC Performing Arts Spaces conducted two surveys specifically to assess the impact of the downturn in the economy on performing artists based in New York and on cultural facilities that list their available spaces on our website resource, comparing this year with last and looking forward. We are grateful to the Office of New York City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn for their continuing support.

We were impressed by respondents' resilience. Organizations and individual artists continue to create and present at levels that have not dropped drastically. The challenges appear to have more to do with the economy in general than with workspace issues in particular. Major findings follow.

**For Performing Artists:** 44% of respondents live in Manhattan, 27% in Brooklyn, 12% in Queens, and 4% each in the Bronx and Staten Island.

- Respondents have fewer performing opportunities than last year, both in New York and elsewhere, and musicians appear to be significantly more impacted than those in dance and theatre.
- The overall forecast for work next year in and out of New York City is slightly more optimistic; however, groups whose performing opportunities have declined expect this trend to continue.

**For Facilities:** 68% of respondents were located in Manhattan and 18% in Brooklyn. Note that most facilities provide both rehearsal and performance space.

- 49% of those in rented or donated space rated their real estate situation as "probably secure, but not certain", while an equal 24% were "probably endangered, but not certain" and "very secure". 3% considered their facility as "endangered".

**Note:** Of the facilities that responded this year, 13 had responded to our 2008 survey. Four identified their status as "endangered" in 2008; this year, three of those four changed their status to "probably secure", and one space remains in danger of closing. Two facilities that responded to our 2008 survey have since closed. Both were primarily dance facilities in Manhattan that housed a total of over 20 workspaces.

- As for booking capacity over the past year, none were booked at full capacity, 30% were 50-75%, and 35% at 75-99%. Compared to the previous year, 45% had increased bookings, 35% had fewer, and 20% of facilities were the same.
- Even though more than half report greater expenses, only 18% have raised their rates, and 67% have kept them the same.

**Creative Survival Strategies:** In their comments, performing artists and facilities describe their approaches. They include:

**Performing artists:** renters barter for space; smaller groups take advantage of gaps in programming due to decreased funding of larger groups;

**Facilities** are increasingly competitive: promoting more actively; offering to share box office revenues instead of charging up front; providing more "subsidies" at certain hours; raising weekly rentals while lowering daily and hourly rentals.

Both online surveys were open from May 12 – June 12, 2009 and posted on the NYC Performing Arts Spaces website as well as the NYC PASpaces and Fractured Atlas blogs. The survey for performing artists was sent to NYC Performing Arts Spaces' email list of over 2,700 individuals and groups working in music, dance, and theatre. The survey for cultural facilities was sent to 1,200 facilities in the NYCPAS database. Other service organizations and arts councils, including Dance/NYC, The Field, Make Music New York, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, A.R.T./New York, NYFA, nytheatre.com, Chamber Music America, the Dramatists Guild, the Council on the Arts & Humanities for Staten Island, Make Music New York, were asked to pass information to their constituents.

**Survey team:**

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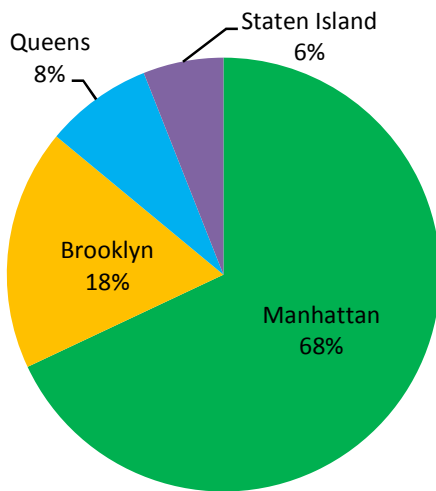
NYC Performing Arts Spaces is a program of Fractured Atlas. For more information please contact Kirsten Nordine at [kirsten.nordine@fracturedatlas.org](mailto:kirsten.nordine@fracturedatlas.org) or 212-277-8020 x 209.

## 2009 Cultural Facilities Survey

Notes:

- **50 valid responses.** (Out of 58 total responses. 3 respondents did not have space and 5 facilities took the survey multiple times and their responses are only counted once.)
- Although our database includes organizations that manage facilities in all five boroughs, none of the 23 Bronx organizations we sent the survey to responded.

**Where is your facility located?** (50 responses)

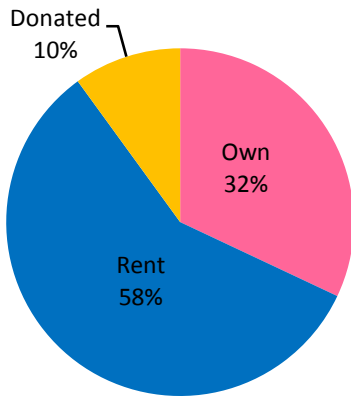


**Do you operate your facility as a for-profit or non-profit organization?** (49 responses)

**80% (39) – Non-profit**  
20% (10) – For-profit

## Real Estate Situation

Do you own, rent, or have donated space? (50 responses)

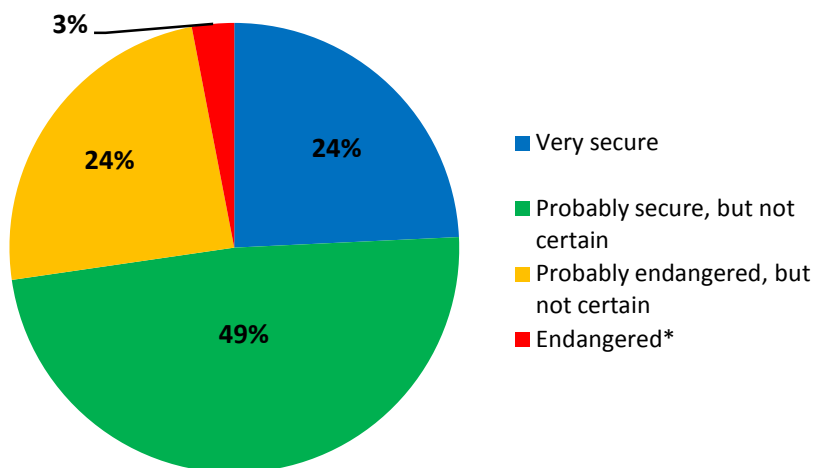


*"We have just won a battle against our putative landlord, who was trying to raise our rent by 500%!"*  
— theatre space, Manhattan: West Village

Of the organizations that **own** their space, 100% said they plan to stay there for the next 1-5 years.

*"If we can work out a restructuring plan with our bondholders."*  
— dance space, Manhattan: Chelsea

Of the 33 organizations that are in **rented or donated** space:



**\*Endangered facility:**

**Multi-disciplinary use/community center, Manhattan: East Village, 2 spaces.**

**Of the 9 facilities that answered “endangered” or “probably endangered”:**

- All were in rented space
- 67% are run by non-profit organizations.
- 8 were in Manhattan (5 below 14<sup>th</sup> Street, 2 in Midtown – Theatre/Garment Districts), and 1 is in Brooklyn (Williamsburg)

**Security of rented or donated space by borough:**

**Manhattan:**

67% (16) said they were “very” or “probably” secure  
33% (8) said they were “endangered” or “probably secure”

**Brooklyn:**

83% (5) said they were “very” or “probably” secure  
17% (1) said they were “probably endangered”

**Queens:**

100% (2) said they were “very” or “probably” secure

**Staten Island:**

100% (1) said they were “very secure”

*“We face numerous challenges like many institutions but we have a good strategy and a healthy endowment.”*

— multi-disciplinary space, Staten Island

*“We have a lifetime lease but have been going several months without paying rent and might be in danger of eviction / We had to raise our rates because we have been falling behind in covering our general operating expenses and administrative staff salaries.”*

— dance space, Manhattan: Lower

*“The overwhelming overhead we need to pay necessitates that we find a way into larger grant cycles, and it is unclear as of yet if this recent attempt has been successful.”*

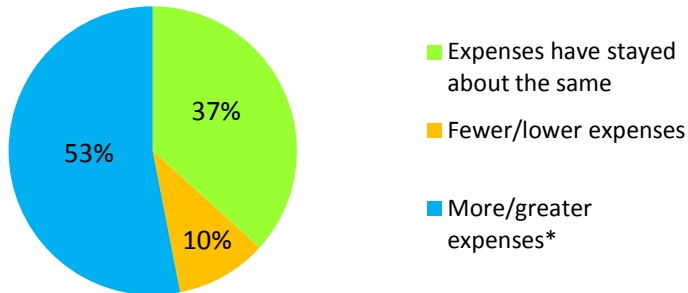
— theatre space, Manhattan: Lower East Side

*“Rents are falling this year, but build-out costs are very high for arts spaces. This city needs a mechanism to provide long-term leases at fixed rather than escalating rents to arts groups because arts revenues for space-based ventures (classes and performances) cannot grow much at all over time. And it is almost impossible to get financing for build-outs now, so we need an arts/small-business build-out financing fund.”*

— multi-disciplinary space, Manhattan: East Village

## Rental Information

How have your expenses changed in the last 12 months? (49 responses)



**\*Respondents named the following expenses (listed here in order of frequency):** rent, utilities, insurance, staffing, property taxes, advertising, maintenance, renovations, and updating equipment.

*“Rent has gone up slightly as called for in our lease. What has really gone up shockingly is our share of the property tax increase.”*

— multi-disciplinary space/community center, Manhattan: East Village

*“Advertising costs have risen. We are spending more to get more publicity, to get more people into our theater. Also, things we used to get for free (in-kind items and services) we have to pay for. People don't have the money to buy things for us.”*

— music space, Brooklyn: Borough Park

*“Operating costs are up and studio rentals are down.”*

— multi-disciplinary space, Manhattan: Chelsea

*“Although our rentals have increased, we have seen less revenue from programming and much less from our donors. Our expenses are lower because we have had to cut staff and marketing.”*

— music space, Manhattan: Chelsea

Do you rent your facility's space to outside users? (49 responses)

**84% (41) – Yes**

16% (8) – No

Of the facilities that rent space to outsider users:

What is the *primary* field your renters come from?\*

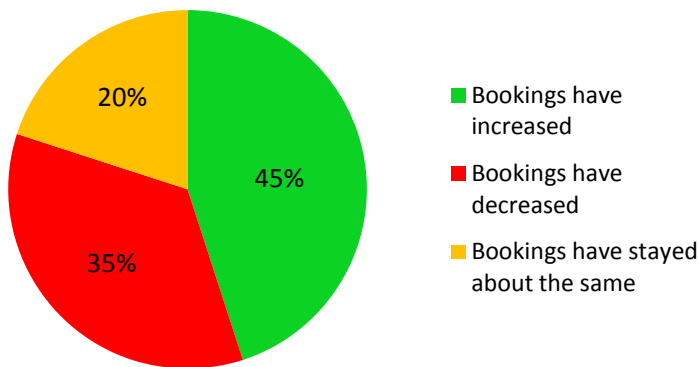
- 24 – Theatre
- 17 – Dance
- 15 – Music
- 3 – Meetings, workshops, forums, etc.
- 2 – Multi-disciplinary
- 1 – Weddings
- 1 – Television production

\*Respondents were able to select any combination of music, dance, theatre or write in an “other” use. Many respondents selected more than one field.

In the past 12 months, about what percentage of the time was your facility booked? (40 responses)

- 35% (14) – 75-99%
- 30% (12) – 50-75%
- 25% (10) – 25-50%
- 7.5% (3) – 0-25%
- 2.5% (1) – Not sure
- 0% (0) – 100% (completely booked)
- 0% (0) – 100% + (booked with waitlist/turning people away)

How has this percentage changed from the previous year (12-24 months ago)? (40 responses)



**Bookings have increased:**

*“Several major facilities have closed, resulting in rising demand for certain peak hours (6-10 on weekdays, etc)”*

— dance space, Manhattan: Lower

*“The listing on NYC Performing Spaces has had a positive impact on bookings.”*

— multi-disciplinary space, Manhattan: East Village

*“Since we have started promoting our rehearsal rental program, we are booked solid in the day time between in-house rehearsals and rentals. We are also averaging 15 performances a week. However, more rehearsal renters means more administrative time spent dealing with scheduling and renter needs.”*

— multi-disciplinary space, Manhattan: Midtown/Theatre District

**Bookings have decreased:**

*“Things look better this coming year, but we have been more flexible with rates”*

— theatre space, Manhattan: Midtown/Theatre District

*“Economic downturn has severely reduced bookings.”*

— theatre space, Manhattan: Midtown/Theatre District

*“Inquiries have decreased; people are asking for breaks.”*

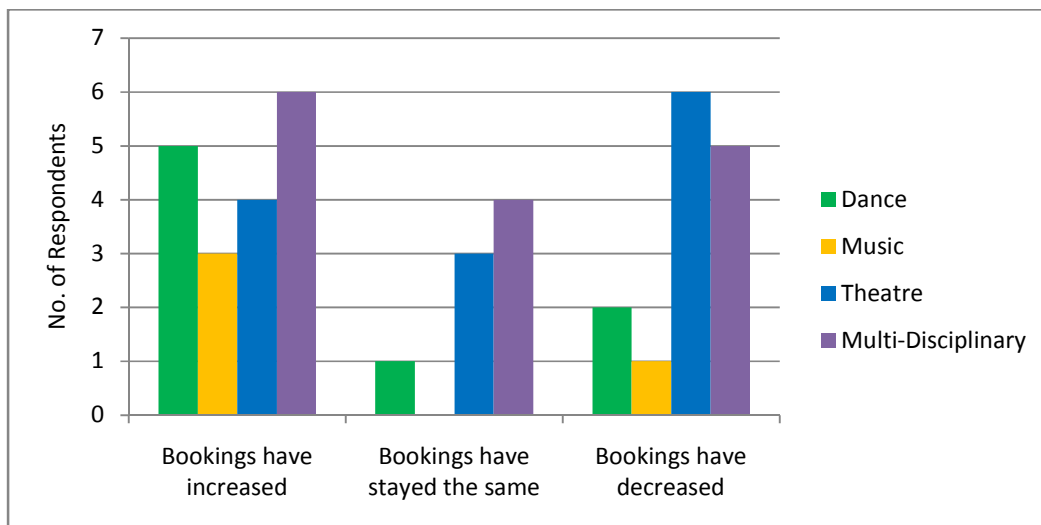
— theatre space, Manhattan: West Village

**Bookings have stayed the same:**

*“We’ve rented a similar percentage of the time, maybe slightly less, but the number of inquiries has definitely decreased.”*

— theatre space, Manhattan: Lower

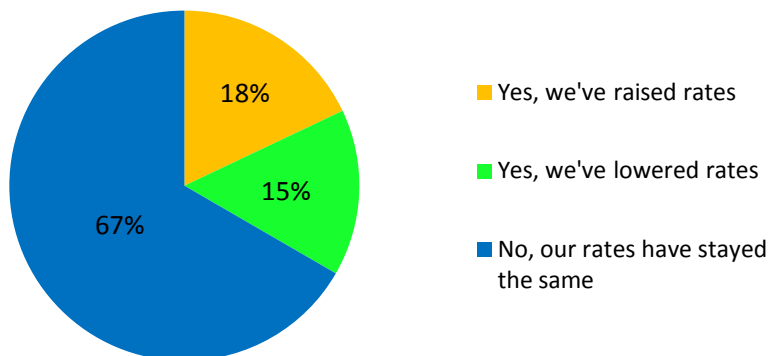
**Changes in amount of time booked by discipline:\***



\*Spaces that indicated their renters came from multiple fields are considered “multi-disciplinary” for the purposes of this chart.



**Have you changed your rental rates in the last 12 months? (39 responses)**



67% (26) – No, our rates have stayed the same (85% were nonprofits)  
46% said that their **expenses were greater**  
39% said their **expenses were about the same**  
15% said their **expenses were fewer**

*“However, rate increases are in the immediate future.”*  
— dance space, Brooklyn: Fort Greene

18% (7) – Yes, we’ve raised rates (71% were nonprofits)  
71% said that their **expenses were greater**  
29% said their **expenses were about the same**  
0% said their **expenses were fewer**

*“Pressured by rising overhead, we've had no choice but to raise our base rates for weekly rentals while lowering rates on daily and hourly rentals to remain competitive in a depressed market.”*  
— theatre space, Manhattan: Midtown/Theatre District

15% (6) – Yes, we’ve lowered rates (67% were nonprofits)  
83% said that their **expenses were greater**  
0% said their **expenses were about the same**  
17% said their **expenses were fewer**

*“We have had to reduce rates because of the economic climate and have started offering more splits and co-benefits. Lots of times we will do even splits of the box-office without charging a nightly rental rate. Almost no one has much money up front that approaches us, as most experimental and alternative/radical groups do not have many funders. With groups that are also nonprofit groups we bill them as co-benefits.”*  
— theatre space, Manhattan: Lower East Side

*“We created a "Subsidized Rehearsal Space" program, offering \$10/hr space during special hours. It was listed as \$20/hr before. Due to a strain on the facility, rates have recently been raised to \$20 for anything requiring more than a boom box for rehearsal. The new rate will include a tech person who can set up sound and lights.”*  
— multi-disciplinary space, Manhattan: Midtown/Theatre District

**Are your rates negotiable?** (38 responses)

**63% (24) – Yes**

37% (14) – No

*“They are negotiable to the extent we have to cover our costs and make a small profit. Rentals help with our presenting costs.”*

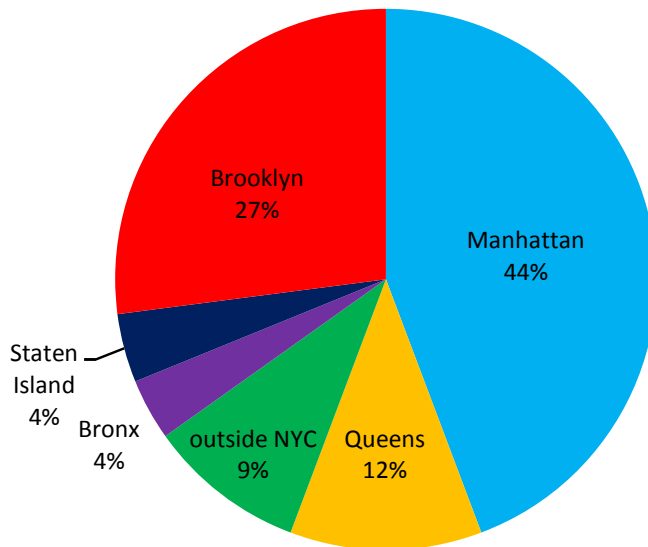
— multi-disciplinary space, Queens: Long Island City

## 2009 Survey of Performing Artists

### Total responses: 246

(total respondents were 253, but 9 respondents did not identify as performing artists and their answers are not counted in the survey results)

#### 1. Where do you live? (244 *valid* zip code responses)



#### Zip codes with five or more respondents:

##### Manhattan: West Side

- 10025 (16) – Upper West Side (2 dance, 7 music, 7 theatre)
- 10024 (8) – Upper West Side (1 dance, 1 music, 6 theatre)
- 10023 (7) – Upper West Side/Lincoln Center (1 dance, 6 music)
- 10012 (7) – West Village/SoHo (3 music, 4 theatre)
- 10011 (6) – Chelsea (2 dance, 1 music, 2 theatre, 1 “other”)
- 10019 (6) – Midtown/Theatre District (1 dance, 1 music, 4 theatre)
- 10036 (5) – Midtown/Theatre District (1 dance, 1 music, 2 theatre, 1 “other”)
- 10040 (5) – Washington Heights (2 music, 3 theatre)

##### Manhattan: East Side

- 10003 (7) – East Village (5 music, 1 dance, 1 theatre)
- 10128 (6) – Upper East Side (4 dance, 2 theatre)

##### Brooklyn: Downtown

- 11215 (11) – Park Slope (1 dance, 4 music, 5 theatre, 1 multi-disciplinary)
- 11217 (7) – Fort Greene (3 dance, 3 music, 1 theatre)
- 11238 (5) – Prospect Heights (2 music, 1 dance, 2 theatre)

**Brooklyn: Williamsburg**

11211 (6) – Williamsburg (4 theatre, 2 multi-disciplinary)

11222 (5) – Greenpoint (1 dance, 1 music, 3 theatre)

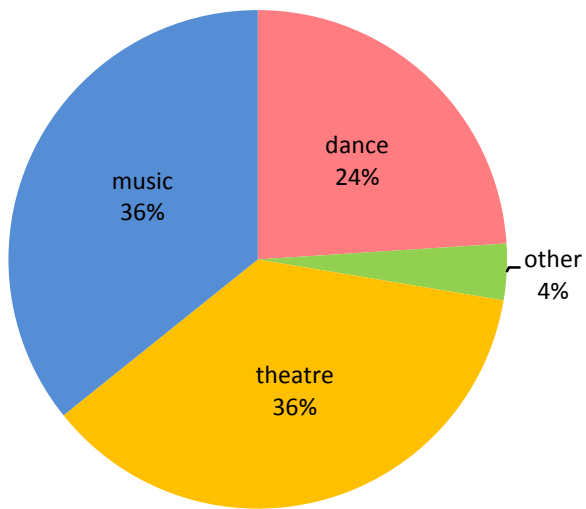
**Queens**

11106 (5) – Astoria (2 dance, 2 music, 1 theatre)

**Staten Island**

10301 (5) – Staten Island (1 dance, 3 music, 1 “other”)

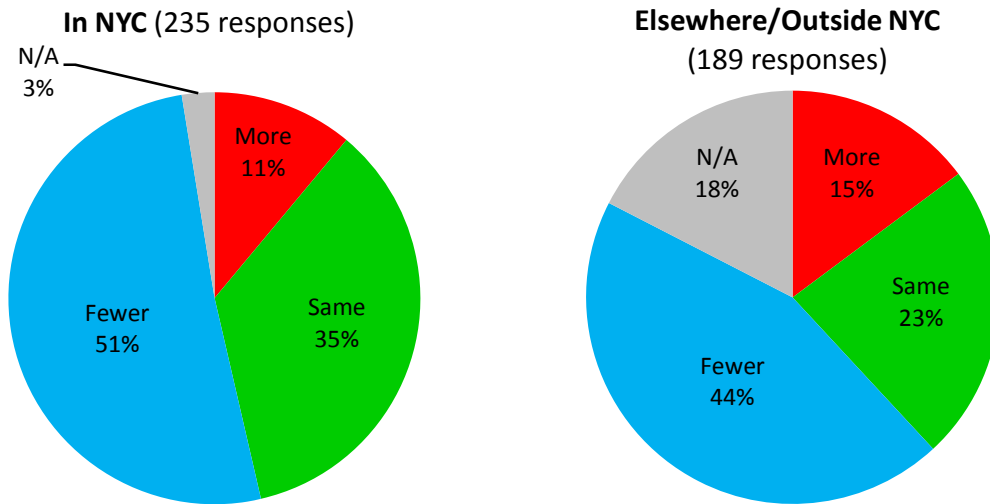
**2. What is your primary discipline? (246 responses)**



Of the 9 respondents who identified as “other” disciplines:

- 4 – multi-disciplinary
- 2 – music and theater
- 1 – environmental art/fashion/dance
- 1 – music, dance & exercise programs for seniors/children
- 1 – television/film

### 3. Do you have more, the same, or fewer performing opportunities than you did last year?



#### Comments:

##### Respondents with *more* NYC opportunities:

*"In 2008 we were able to produce one show in our first season. In 2009 it appears we will be presenting two different productions."*

-theatre respondent

*"Our dance company created local performing opportunities for ourselves."*

-dance respondent, Queens

##### Respondents with the *same* amount of NYC opportunities:

*"There are more opportunities for workshops, but fewer paying jobs."*

-theatre respondent, Bronx

*"The opportunities are there, the money is not."*

-music respondent, New Jersey

*"Most of my performing income comes from gigs in Europe, and that's been significantly hit. NYC gigs never make any money, but there's just as many door gigs as there were last year!"*

-music respondent, Connecticut

##### Respondents with *fewer* NYC opportunities:

*"I got to perform at the Montreal Jazz Festival but nothing in NYC."*

-music respondent, Manhattan

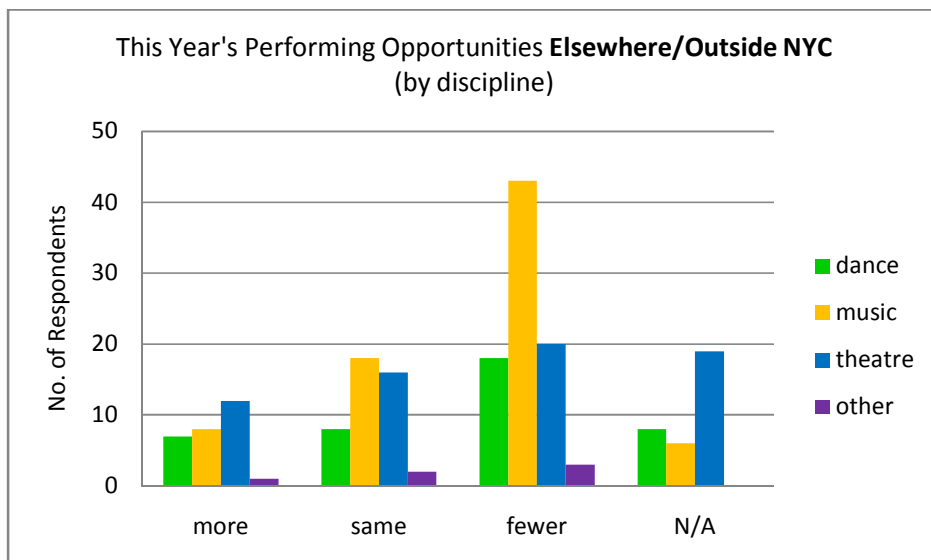
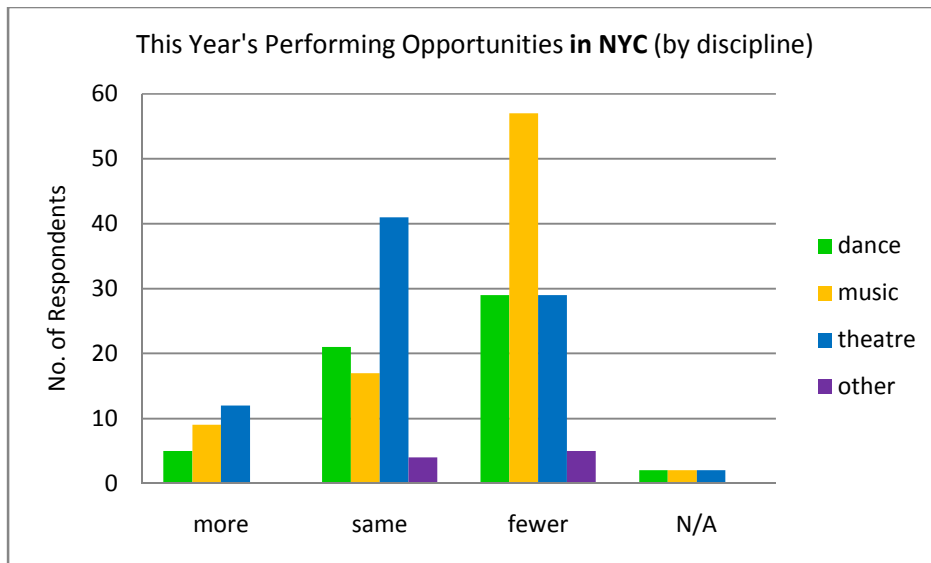
*"Grants are impossible to get to produce anything."*

-theatre respondent, Manhattan

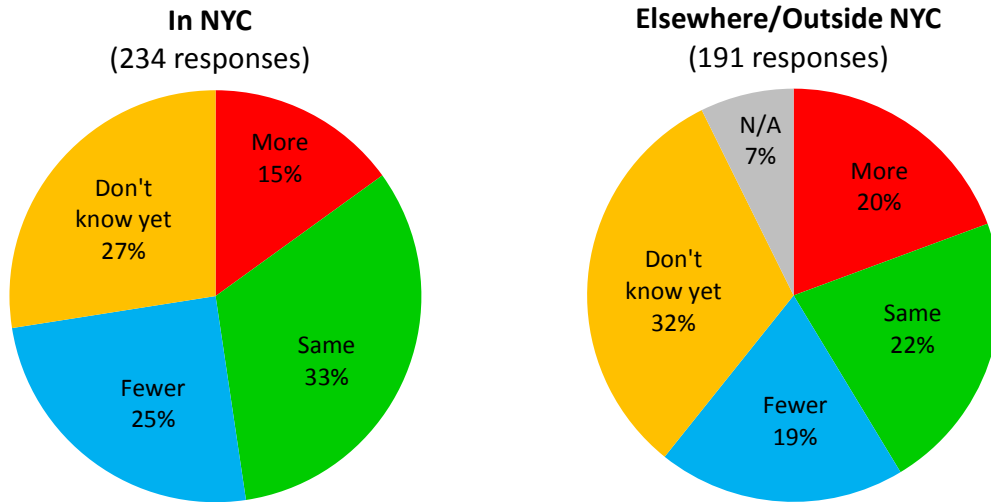
*"Have been reduced to solo presentations as putting together group items cannot be afforded!"*  
 -dance respondent, Long Island

*"We received no NYSCA funding, individual donors cancelled."*  
 -music respondent, Manhattan

**This year's performing opportunities by discipline compared to last year:**



#### 4. Next year, what do you predict, compared with this year?



#### Comments:

##### Respondents anticipating *more* opportunities:

*"Things are picking up."*  
-theatre respondent, Brooklyn

##### Respondents anticipating *fewer* opportunities:

*"For these reasons, I've bailed freelance performing to take a full-time academic position in Wisconsin."*  
-music respondent, Bronx

*"Funding cuts will affect our fall program and possibly also our 2010 spring program as well."*  
-dance respondent, Manhattan

##### Respondents that *didn't know yet* what their opportunities would be:

*"Next year we have no NYC commissions or presentations secured."*  
-dance respondent, Brooklyn

*"It has come to creating opportunities for myself and praying that costs will be covered - just forget about getting funds left over for the ride home!"*  
-dance respondent, Long Island

## **Additional comments:**

### ***From theatre respondents:***

*"Attendance to our performances has been notably lower since the economic downturn."*

*"I volunteer for...a nonprofit performing arts presenter/space; I've taken on the position in the past 6 months so there have been more opportunities for me because of that. However, we have been able to increase our capacity to present shows since we have a new space, and with the closing of other theatres in the midtown area we are in higher demand."*

*"No grants, few donations so after our summer show, we will have no money to mount another."*

*"Smaller, independent theater companies are closing up shop, and more established groups are now competing for audience. I believe creativity thrives in troubled economic times, but I am very worried that arts patrons, myself included, must now aggressively budget time and money, and cannot afford to attend performances and support nonprofits as they have in the past."*

*"There is no reason why the financial crisis should hinder any creator of worthwhile art. Artists who are capable of truly entertaining an audience have always thrived during economically lean times."*

### ***From music respondents:***

*"I released a new CD this year. Despite the economy it is selling well. What has been very challenging this year has been the gigging situation. I booked my first gig in 1997, and I have never seen it this bad."*

*"Series everywhere have been forced to cut back due to decreased or lost funding. Ironically, we have one new opportunity next year created by the crisis: a location that used to have an orchestra but was forced to fold and now has a chamber music series in its place."*

*"I'm having great trouble paying my rent."*

### ***From dance respondents:***

*"I think it's a time in which dance companies should collaborate more program and funding wise. We would welcome meetings to explore this issue."*

*"Aerial Dance has much fewer opportunities to perform than floor dance - many showcases tell us we can't apply. I produce my own showcase because of this and it costs over \$5,000"*