

TORONTO
BIENNIAL
OF ART

EVALUATION REPORT 2019

April 24, 2020
Prepared by:

Bespoke
CULTURAL COLLECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE



Image caption:
Artist Opening Party.
Toronto Biennial of Art
(2019). Also pictured:
Adrian Blackwell, *Isonomia
in Toronto? (harbour)*,
2019; and Dana Claxton,
LED Fireboxes, 2018-2019.
Photo: Sue Holland.

Executive Summary

The inaugural Toronto Biennial of Art, held from September 21 to December 1, 2019, is a new international contemporary visual arts event that brought 72 days of free visual arts programming to the city. For 10 weeks every two years, Toronto will be transformed by exhibitions, talks, and performances that reflect the local context while engaging with some of today's most pressing issues. In 2019, the Biennial set its sights on programming across Toronto's waterfront, which is currently undergoing major urban renewal. This stretch of Lake Ontario has also been active long before Toronto became a city, as an important site for Indigenous peoples dating back at least 12,000 years. The Biennial explored these underrepresented histories while temporarily inhabiting repurposed sites along the lake shore.

The first Biennial welcomed 296,691 unique visitors with 79% from the GTA, 7% visiting from Ontario, 5% from the rest of Canada, 5% from the US and 4% from overseas. For 48% of visitors this was their very first Biennial. They came out to expand their perspective and learn something new, to actively participate in the arts, and to immerse themselves in an experience.

The purpose of this 2019 evaluation report is to: (1) collect and document foundational data; (2) understand the impact the Biennial made in its inaugural year; (3) provide a holistic view of the Biennial experience across programs, sites, and partners; and (4) identify recommendations for how to strengthen the next iteration. A synthesis of research findings across stakeholder interviews, focus groups, public and artist surveys, person-on-the-street intercepts, comment cards, and comparable desk research led the consultants, Bespoke, to determine that the Biennial made the following five key impacts:

- 1. The Toronto Biennial of Art leaves a legacy of more inclusive artistic representation and supports the local arts community.** The 2019 edition was celebrated by the public and arts community for its quality and integrity. It provided expanded views of contemporary art and contemporary art practice, reflected a significant presence of Indigenous artists and artworks, and also left a legacy of sustained free and accessible contemporary arts programming.



Image caption:
Donor Opening Party,
Toronto Biennial of
Art (2019). Performance
by Bangerz Brass, Quincy
Morales. Photo: Sue
Holland.

1. Job creation number reflects full-time equivalents—direct, indirect, and induced for the province of Ontario, including the GTA. Job creation is based on Biennial visitor spending and operational expenses over three calendar years, 2018, 2019, and 2020. Calculation based on Ontario's Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model (TREIM) reporting. See Appendix C for more details.

2. **The Toronto Biennial of Art builds international visibility for Toronto as a contemporary art destination.** Through the Biennial, Toronto was positioned as a premier cultural destination based on impactful international media coverage, as well as showcasing diverse artistic voices, which aligns with Toronto's identity as an international urban centre.
3. **The Toronto Biennial of Art catalyzes a vibrant ecosystem of partnerships.** With 82 cross-disciplinary partners spanning creative, education, marketing, hospitality, and corporate sectors, the Biennial created a connected network of deep partnerships at an unprecedented scale that can expand and strengthen in subsequent years. This ecosystem also brought in new community partnerships and enabled new creative partnerships within the artistic community.
4. **The Toronto Biennial of Art contributes to individuals, families, and communities.** On an individual level, visitors appreciated the event's learning opportunities, immersing themselves in culture and meaningful connections to art. The programming attracted intergenerational audiences: families, students, and retirees. It presented an opportunity for local communities to situate Toronto within a contemporary art context.
5. **The Toronto Biennial of Art makes an economic impact to the creative workforce and city.** Overall, 586 full-time equivalent jobs¹ were created across the province of Ontario and when it comes to tourism there was \$29 million generated in visitor spending. In addition to the creative economy, industries such as transportation, education, and tourism all benefited from the Biennial.

This evaluation report concludes with six recommendations for how to strengthen the Biennial in its next cycle. These touch upon facilitating transportation, ticketing and visitor tracking, Toronto's cultural calendar, the programming pace and frequency, streamlining communications, and continuing to build a more diverse audience.

THE BIENNIAL BY THE NUMBERS

296,691

Unique Visitors

72

Days

215

Public Programs,
Performances
and Events

161

Artists, Participants
and Performers

100s

of Artworks

15

Venues

528

Jobs created

82

Creative, promotional
& venue partners

93%

Agree we should continue
to showcase the arts
through the Biennial

\$17M

Direct impact on
Toronto economy

21%

of visitors
were tourists

\$29M

Total Visitor
Spending

48%

of visitors attended
their first Biennial

91%

of visitors discovered
new artists

26,500+

International Tourists

24

Countries publish 313
Biennial editorial items

370M+

Publicity Impressions

531M+

Gross impressions

CONTEXT

SECTION TWO



2 Context

Image caption:
New Mineral Collective,
Pleasure Prospects, 2019.
Installation view at Small
Arms Inspection Building.
Toronto Biennial of Art
(2019). Photo: Triple Threat.

Background

This evaluation of the Toronto Biennial of Art 2019 aims to document a broad sweep of baseline data and to serve as a starting point for future iterations of the Biennial. The creative consultancy Bespoke (Bespoke Cultural Collective) worked in close collaboration with the Biennial team to set standards for the inaugural year, in terms of how the event should be tracked, measured, captured, and shared back in a transparent and accountable way with the public, partners, artists, funders, and supporters.

Purpose of This Work

Our objectives for this report include:

- **Collecting and documenting foundational data for the inaugural year and future iterations.** This includes quantitative and qualitative information, such as the number of Biennial visits, unique visitors and audience demographics, as well as determining where and why visitors attended.
- **Understanding the impact the Biennial made in its inaugural year.** Our model of impact includes how the Biennial contributes to the local arts ecology, builds partnerships and international visibility, as well as how it contributes to individuals, communities, and society. We also analyzed the impact the Biennial had on the creative workforce and its overall contribution to the local economy.
- **Providing a holistic view of the Biennial experience across programs, sites, and partners.** We aggregated data across multiple sites around how visitors engaged with the Biennial, who attended, their initial impressions, and opinions on the quality of the overall experience.
- **Identifying recommendations for how to strengthen the next iteration.** We consulted with partners, supporters, artists, and staff to identify ways the Biennial can continue to grow and strengthen its offerings. We also reflected on some of the key feedback that emerged from the visitor surveys and public intercepts.

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Context

Research Approach and Scope

This evaluation report draws from a number of research touchpoints. Over the course of a six month period, we worked with the Biennial team to plan for the evaluation, support data collection, and synthesize findings across the following seven research touchpoints.



Our scope encompassed the following process:

PHASE ONE: DEVELOP RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

In advance of the launch, Bespoke met with the Biennial team to define the research objectives, identify appropriate research touchpoints, and to confirm key stakeholders. Our research was conducted over four months and included pre-launch development of research tactics, data collection during the Biennial, as well as post-event group reflection sessions. We collected feedback from the public, partners, visitors, staff, participating artists, as well as funders. For more detailed information on our methodology, see Appendix A.

2

Context

PHASE TWO: RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Throughout the duration of the Biennial we implemented our evaluation framework by organizing person-on-the street intercepts, tracking visitor counts where possible, conducting interviews, and circulating surveys. During this phase we also looked at comparable biennials as we pulled together data and metrics to calculate Biennial visits, visitor numbers, as well as aggregating the data needed to analyze the Biennial's economic, cultural, and social impact. For more detailed information on the calculation of visitor numbers and economic impact, see appendices A and C.

PHASE THREE: SYNTHESIS AND FINAL REPORT

Once the Biennial closed, we synthesized the data across our research touchpoints and conducted an analysis to arrive at key impacts and to provide recommendations to strengthen the next iteration.

Evaluation Parameters

While every effort has been made to report back with accuracy, outlined below are the limitations we encountered with the data collection reflected in this report:

- 1. Absence of a ticketing system to track visitors and visits.** Admission to the Biennial is free and not ticketed. While accurate estimates were calculated, it was a challenge to determine exact attendance numbers, multiple visits, etc. In addition, a number of outdoor sites, such as the Toronto Sculpture Garden, are unstaffed and do not track attendance or data related to annual visits, making it difficult to project exact visitation during the Biennial.
- 2. Conducting public intercepts were a challenge due to the Biennial's dispersed sites and programming at multiple venues.** As a result this report was more influenced by the public feedback gathered through online surveys.
- 3. Reliance on the reporting of partners and the online visitor survey for visitor data.** Our visitor numbers rely on partner venues reporting visits, as well as information gathered from a digital visitor survey. In some instances partner venues had concurrent, non-Biennial-related exhibitions, and an additional step was required to extract the number of Biennial visitors from partner site visitors. The result is less control and consistency over the specific methods of counting visitors at each site. The online survey provided a means of cross-referencing numbers and projecting attendance. However, it has a built-in margin of error of 5%.

THE INAUGURAL YEAR

SECTION THREE

3

The Inaugural Year



Image caption: Jumblies Theatre & Arts with Ange Loft, *Talking Treaties*. Installation and workshop view at Small Arts Inspection Building, Toronto Biennial of Art (2019). Photo: Yuula Benivolski.

This section of the evaluation report provides a baseline understanding of four basic questions that include:

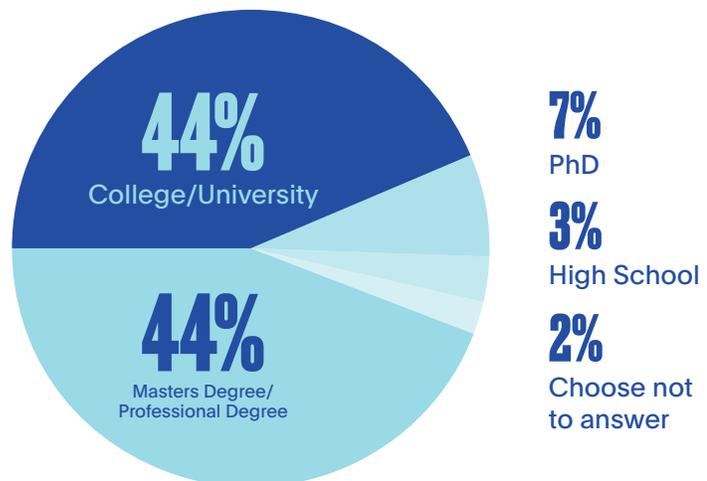
1. Who was the visitor?
2. Where did visitors come from and what did they see?
3. Why did visitors attend?
4. How did visitors find the overall experience?

The data for this section largely draws from the digital visitor survey we conducted, as well as on-site intercepts with visitors at multiple sites. This section serves as a useful baseline starting point for tracking the performance of subsequent iterations.

Who Was The Visitor?

Overall, visitors were highly educated but not necessarily global Biennial-goers. They reflected a range of different life stages and ages with varying economic backgrounds.

EDUCATION LEVELS

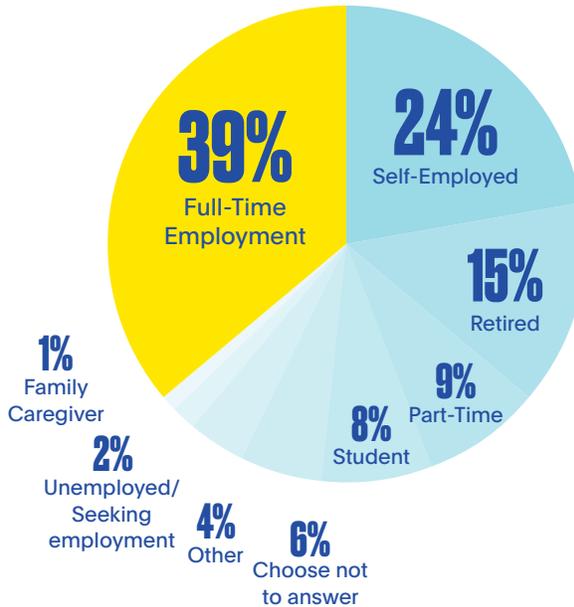


3

The Inaugural Year

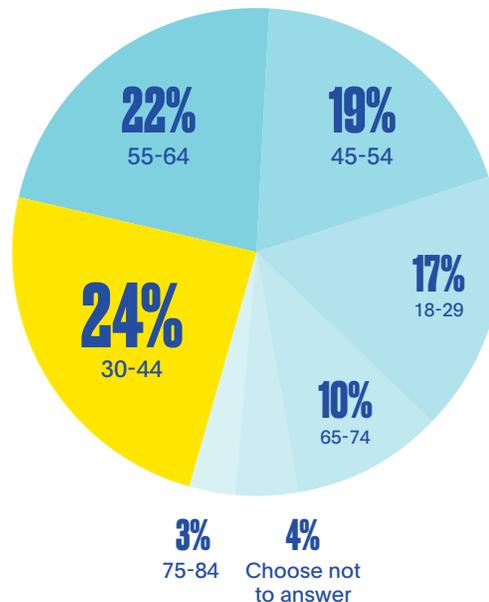
The Biennial attracted a highly educated audience, with over 50% of respondents having attained a masters, professional, or PhD level education. Yet for 47.7% of respondents this was their very first Biennial experience. With the Toronto 2017 median household income at \$71,631, 38% of respondents earned less than the city household median, 44% earned above, and 18% chose not to respond.

OCCUPATION AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS



While 63% were full-time employed or self-employed, 8% of visitors were students, and nearly 15% were retirees, suggesting that the Biennial reached audiences at a wide range of life stages. Partners commented that the programming “attracted older audiences and I was also pleased to see that people included their kids. There was learning as a family and a willingness to bring in a younger generation.” The survey responses on age further suggest an intergenerational mix of attendees.

VISITORS AGES (OVER 18)



3

The Inaugural Year

Visitors Under 18

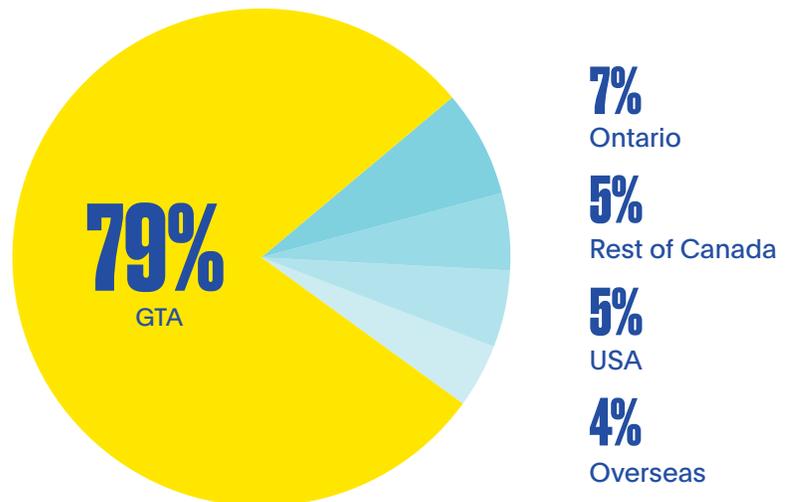
Biennial attendees under the age of 18 were not captured in visitor surveys. However, the onsite Biennial team recorded head counts of children and youth at several venues, and based on this data, estimate that 15% of overall visitors to the Biennial were under the age of 18.



Where Did Visitors Come From and What Did They See?

Given the visitor counts and survey data, the visitor numbers for the inaugural Toronto Biennial are estimated at 296,691 with 79% from the GTA, 7% visiting from Ontario, 5% from the rest of Canada, 5% from the US, and 4% from overseas. Based on this data, 62,335 visitors came to see the Biennial from outside the GTA.

ORIGINS



The Biennial was a dispersed visual arts event along the waterfront with two mainspace locations: 259 Lake Shore Blvd E in Toronto and the Small Arms Inspection Building in Mississauga. In addition, there was a mix of twelve indoor and outdoor cultural partners throughout the city that hosted exhibitions and programming. 85% of respondents to a public survey stated they visited the main Lake Shore Blvd E site and 52% of respondents stated they visited the Small Arms Inspection Building. On average, respondents visited two sites throughout the duration of the Biennial.

3

The Inaugural Year



Image caption:
Althea Thauberger and
Kite, *Call to Arms*, 2019,
performance at the
Toronto Biennial of Art
(2019). Photo: Triple Threat.

Why Did Visitors Attend?

The visitor surveys suggest that many Biennial visitors are looking for deeper levels of engagement with the arts, whether this is described as learning, immersive experiences or seeking engaged opportunities to participate. The top three motivators for Biennial visitor attendance were:

70%

To expand their perspective and learn something new

63%

To actively participate in the arts

53%

To immerse themselves in an experience

Based on the comment cards submitted by visitors, amongst the most frequent responses included:

“

“To expand my knowledge of contemporary art and to see how Toronto approaches the subject.”

“

“Curious, it seemed like there would be interesting and unique art.”

“

“Looking for something interesting to do while visiting Toronto.”

Generally, the comment cards reflected that many visitors are passionate about contemporary visual art, that this was a new and different way to experience Toronto, and that curiosity was a primary driver for visiting the Biennial—whether they heard about it from a friend, in an article or were just passing by.

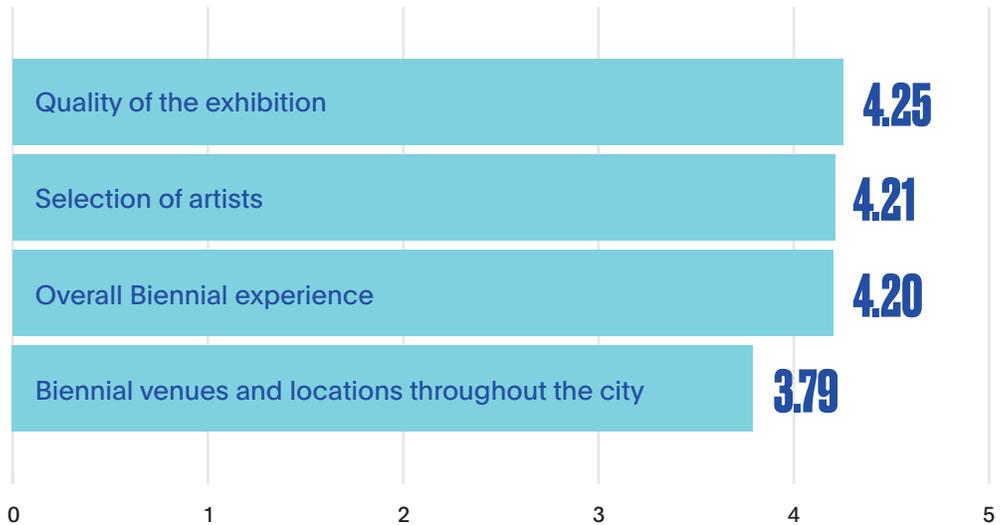
3

The Inaugural Year

How Did Visitors Find The Overall Experience?

Based on data collected from visitors, the Biennial was a very well received cultural attraction that activated the city in new ways and introduced 76% of visitors to cultural venues that they had not previously visited before.

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, SURVEY RESPONDENTS RATED THE BIENNIAL:



OVERALL:

93%

support continuing to showcase the arts through the Biennial

91%

discovered a new artist through the Biennial

81%

felt the Biennial brought more access and visibility to the arts

The survey responses indicate an appreciation for the overall quality of programming and selection of artists, acknowledging that the Biennial increased access to the visual arts throughout the city of Toronto.

KEY IMPACTS & FINDINGS

SECTION FOUR

4

Key Impacts & Findings



Image caption:
Diane Borsato and
Amish Morrell with Alan
Gan, Outdoor School,
Mushroom Foray. Toronto
Biennial of Art (2019).
October 13, 2019. Photo:
Amish Morrell.

a. Leaves a Legacy of More Inclusive Artistic Representation and Supports the Local Arts Community

In the words of one participating artist, “It was a strong first iteration of the Biennial. It was about art, discourse, public programming, and relevant politics. It was not about stardom and flash-in-the-pan spectacle.” The quality and integrity of programming for this Biennial was celebrated by visitors and artists alike. Many appreciated how it engaged with the critical issues of our time in an authentic way that was inspired by a distinctly local ethos.

94% of artists surveyed, agreed that this Biennial addressed relevant issues through contemporary art.

“

“The Biennial was grown here. It was not an imported brand.”

- Partner interview

“

“[The performance] was amazing, historic, [and] well-researched ... People cried.”

- Public intercept

“

“I was really blown away by much of the work in this Biennial.”

- Artist survey

4

Key Impacts & Findings



Image caption: Adrian Blackwell, *Isonomia in Toronto? (harbour)*, 2019. Installation view at 259 Lake Shore Blvd E. Toronto Biennial of Art (2019). Photo: Sue Holland.

A number of visitors and participating artists commented that this Biennial showed the public a more expanded view of contemporary art practices and a more diverse representation of artists. 94% of artists agreed that the Biennial exposed more people to different artists and art practices. One of the strongest differentiators for the inaugural year was the significant presence and emphasis given to Indigenous artists and artworks.

70%

Places of origin represented, including 29 Canadian and international First Nations and Indigenous communities

68%

of artists and collectives are Canadian, and 45% are locally-based

23%

of artists self-identify as Indigenous

42%

of artists self-identify as people of colour

58%

of artists self-identify as women or non-binary

From the outset, the team commissioned a resource titled *The Toronto Indigenous Context Brief*, authored by artist and Biennial advisor Ange Loft, who is from Kahnawake Mohawk territory. This curatorial brief set a new precedent for Indigenous land curation and for a large-scale and contemporary art event grounded in place. Loft noted, "The presence of Indigenous

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Key Impacts & Findings

artists throughout the process was unique and valuable. Drawing attention to water and interconnection was present throughout, in the curatorial vision and location choices.”

Participating artists, visitors, and partners expressed how important the Indigenous focus was, along with the hope that it would continue to influence the Biennial legacy moving forward.



“This Biennial was about radical inclusion, with a focus on Indigenous participants and community experience.”

- Artist survey



“The strong presence of First Nations participants and the overall political framing gave the Biennial important gravitas ... I was honoured to be included.”

- Artist survey



“They did a remarkable job on the Indigenous cultural brief and now lead in that legacy.”

- Partner interview

2. LaPlaca Cohen’s study, *Culture Track: Canada, 2018* confirms that “the cost is too high” is one of the top barriers to cultural participation for Canadians.

Over the course of 72 days, the Biennial provided the public with 215 free programs, performances, and events, and free access to 29 commissions and over 100 artworks across 15 sites. This Biennial delivered a visual arts festival that was entirely free for all ages and 84% of visitors who were surveyed felt that this was important. As one staff member commented, “It’s not just about art in the public realm, but also about art that is free and accessible.” Given that cost remains one of the major barriers to attracting a wider range of audiences to culture², this commitment lays the groundwork for a Biennial model that is inclusive, accessible, and based on the value that art is for everyone.

“A free Biennial meant there were no barriers. People came who would not go otherwise and it was important that it was world-class.”

- Partner interview

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Key Impacts & Findings



Image caption:
AA Bronson, *A Public Apology to Siksika Nation*, 2019; and Adrian Stimson, *Iini Sookumapii: Guess who's coming to dinner?*, 2019. Installation view at 259 Lake Shore Blvd E. Toronto Biennial of Art (2019). Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

3. According to TREIM, a Biennial out-of-town visitor or tourist is someone who has taken an overnight, out-of-town trip or an out-of-town same day trip of 40km or more from their place of residence to see the art event.

b. Builds International Visibility for Toronto as a Contemporary Art Destination

The art world is increasingly global, with a larger population and greater number of cities vying for their place as a world-leading destination for contemporary art experiences. The Toronto Biennial of Art plays a leading role in building the local, national, and international perception of Toronto as a premier destination for contemporary art within this landscape. In its inaugural year, the Biennial attracted over 62,000 out-of-town visitors³, including over 26,500 international visitors.

“The Biennial really pushed home the idea that Toronto is important for contemporary art. It has helped to put us on the map.”

- Partner interview

Overall the media coverage for the Biennial earned an impressive 370,287,880 media impressions. Within Canada, major news outlets such as *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star*, *CBC Radio*, and *Canadian Art* featured editorials on the Biennial. Internationally, outlets from over 24 countries covered the Biennial; these included China, England, Japan, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. International press highlights included: *Artforum*, *Forbes*, *Monocle*, the *Berlin Arts Insider*, *The New York Observer*, *National Geographic Traveller*, *The World News*, and the *On-Line Post* (Middle East). One exhibition partner noted, “The strong international press was fantastic and better than the local coverage.” Amongst the local public, especially including partners, there was a perception that Toronto needs this level of international exposure

4

Key Impacts & Findings

and it has taken too long to showcase itself as a centre for art, worthy of global attention. An artist remarked how, “Our work has been written about in the international arts media, allowing us to see value in taking on complex narratives in a public fashion.”



“The Biennial has an immense outreach and impact for Toronto as a cultural destination.”

- Artist survey



“It showcases Toronto as a centre for art, a city that wants to make art accessible”

- Public intercept



“Something like this opens up people’s eyes to the diversity Toronto has.”

- Public intercept

One of the reasons for the Biennial’s success in attracting the international art world was its focus on diverse artistic voices, an aspect that is closely aligned with the rising international identity of Toronto. As one participating artist noted, “I believe its strength was its political framing with a significant emphasis upon work and activities by non-western artists, especially First Nations artists.” By curating a diverse range of artists, and attracting significant numbers of locals and tourists alike, the inaugural Biennial declared Toronto’s position as an art city of the future.

Further engaging with the specificity of place, the Biennial confronted Toronto’s shoreline, an impermanent natural boundary imbued with the social, cultural, economic, and political histories of the city. The two main venues for the Biennial responded to these histories, creating exhibition and program spaces within adapted industry sites, both on a former shoreline of Lake Ontario. This positioning was well received by a public who appreciated how the curatorial vision was aligned with the exhibition locations. As one partner commented: “I loved the curatorial vision. I loved bringing guests to the lake shore sites.” The programming of exhibitions and art events at numerous partner venues and public spaces also highlighted the cultural literacy and resources of Toronto. According to one participating artist, “I feel the Biennial increased public awareness and strengthened public perception of contemporary art in Toronto ... because it was free, in multiple locations and encompassed a wide range of programs that were very accessible.”

92%

of artists agree that the Biennial exposed Toronto communities to new international artists

62k+

tourists attended the inaugural Biennial

4

Key Impacts & Findings



Image caption:
Front: Fernando
Palma Rodríguez,
Cihuapapalutzin, 2019;
Back: Embassy of
Imagination + PA System,
*Sinaaqpagiaqtuut/
The Long-Cut*, 2019.
Installation view at 259
Lake Shore Blvd E. Toronto
Biennial of Art (2019).
Photo: Triple Threat.

c. Catalyzes a Vibrant Ecosystem of Partnerships

This Biennial created a vibrant network of 82 partnerships, comprised of creative, educational, promotional, and venue partnerships. One staff member noted in the group session that the partnerships were proactive and engaging, “We had co-commissions, collaborative and deep partnerships. It wasn’t just a listing.” Furthermore, the cyclical nature of this Biennial enables the 2021 Toronto Biennial to continue to leverage, refine, and strengthen partnerships moving forward. As a staff member remarked, “With the exception of *Nuit Blanche*, no one has done the visual arts at this scale through partnerships.” For larger cultural institutions who partnered with the Biennial, it was an opportunity to boost visibility. There were also smaller grassroots and community organizations who participated, who do not typically partner with arts-based initiatives. For partners such as the Toronto Green Community’s *Lost River Walks* and LAMP Community Health Centre’s *Among Friends Community Mental Health Program*, this visual arts event cross-pollinated audiences and strengthened community connections:



“We reached a new community through participating in the Biennial. Everyone who came out to see the show, they wouldn’t have engaged with us otherwise.”

- Partner focus group



“About one third was a Biennial crowd that would not have intersected with our community program otherwise.”

- Partner interview



“The Biennial’s greatest strength was its committed engagement with local communities and ecologies.”

- Artist survey

The local arts community was also given the opportunity to gain broader exposure from the Biennial, which acted as both a networking opportunity

4

Key Impacts & Findings

as well as a galvanizing force to draw attention to the artists who exhibited. "Toronto suffers from a lack of platforms for contemporary art and the Biennial did a lot to open that up," an artist commented. The 29 newly-commissioned artworks also presented an opportunity to establish new creative partnerships. One artist explained, "The Biennial gave me the opportunity to produce outstanding artwork with local talents, dancers, composers, and filmmakers as well as one scientist on research regarding outer space."

ACCORDING TO THE ARTIST SURVEY:

90%

of artists believe that the Biennial was a good opportunity to meet and work with peers

70%

of artists agreed that the Biennial built stronger partnerships across the city

94%

agreed that the Biennial exposed more people to different artists and art practices

From a marketing and communications partnership standpoint, the campaign leveraged \$1,555,960 of in-kind marketing through media partnerships with businesses such as Cineplex, Pattison, St. Joseph Communications, and Bell Media.

The formal education partnerships with multiple school boards and universities, such as OCAD University, enabled free learning opportunities and professional development. Leading up to and throughout the Biennial, over 215 public programs were held, providing educational enrichment to thousands of students throughout the city. Working with educator groups such as Canadian Art's School Hop (who have extensive in-school and after school networks throughout the city) enabled the Biennial to broaden student reach throughout the GTA. Through bus subsidies and free online learning resources for the classroom and at home, the Biennial also facilitated visits and engaged student groups from outside the downtown core of Toronto. The furthest school group visited from Rama Reserve in Orillia, and these students had not visited a biennial of contemporary art before.

"There was cohesive support from the arts community. Everyone seemed to get behind it and wanted it to succeed."

- Partner interview

4

Key Impacts & Findings

d. Contributes to Individuals, Families, and Communities

Based on the visitor survey findings, attendees were a highly engaged group who were looking to expand their perspectives, learn something new, actively participate in the arts, and to make connections with local, national, and international artists. On an individual level, the Biennial provided visitors with moments of learning and enjoyment and, at the same time, it served as a major platform for connecting people with contemporary art practices. The free exhibition and public programming events meant the city was activated by contemporary art in sustained and unexpected ways.

84% of artists agreed that the Biennial offers something to people of all ages.

Over the course of the Biennial, staff, artists, and members of the public also commented on the extent to which the Biennial was an intergenerational experience for the city that strengthened community connections. From the public intercepts we heard:



“This Biennial was empowering ... It’s a healthy reflection of the city and a mix of ages.”



“The Biennial ... generates dialogues that are multi-ethnic, multi-generational, Indigenous, and with different art being offered.”



“These events make me pause, it changes the vibe, and makes us better human beings.”

Over 1,500 elementary and high school groups visited the Biennial and for a number of young people, this was their very first introduction to contemporary art. By delivering a series of programmed events in collaboration with Blank Canvases (local artist educators), the Biennial delivered informal learning opportunities for young families to engage in artmaking using studio-based methods of artistic creation. Other layers to the public program included the walking tours and storytellers, which attracted non-art goers, and seniors and retirees. More broadly, the Biennial became a catalyst for sharing creativity, information, different perspectives, and stories. It provided local communities with the opportunity to situate Toronto within larger contemporary conversations. It made art more accessible to everyday citizens as well as out-of-town visitors.

4

Key Impacts & Findings



Image caption:
Borelson, Storytelling
Session. Toronto Biennial
of Art (2019). Photo: Yuula
Benivolski.

e. Makes an Economic Impact to the Creative Workforce and City

4. Job creation numbers reflect full-time equivalents—direct, indirect and induced for the province of Ontario, including the GTA. Job creation is based on Biennial visitor spending and operational expenses over three calendar years; 2018, 2019, and 2020. Calculation based on TREIM reporting. See Appendix C for more details.

5. According to TREIM, a Biennial out-of-town visitor or tourist is someone who has taken an overnight, out-of-town trip or an out-of-town same day trip of 40km or more from their place of residence to see the art event.

6. Source: *Toronto's Visitor Economy Report*, Tourism Toronto, 2019.

7. Total visitor spending \$29M. Source: TREIM Report.

8. \$17M in direct impact to the Toronto GDP from Visitor Spending and Operations Spending, Source: TREIM Report.

An event at the scale of the Biennial requires a significant undertaking in arts administration, fundraising, development, communications, marketing, project management, venue preparation, and many more skills and employment sectors. Since its creation in 2014, the Toronto Biennial has supported the equivalent of 586 full time jobs⁴ in a range of employment sectors, adding expertise and experience to the Toronto workforce. According to one staff member, “To build a Biennial in Toronto for the first time has elevated everyone and their careers.” Noted contributions to the creative workforce include generating employment and development opportunities for arts professionals, developing artist commissions and sales, enabling educational programming in the city, and promoting cultural tourism.

The Biennial’s more than 62,000 out-of-town⁵ and international tourists made a direct and lasting impact on the Toronto economy. In fact, tourist spending in Toronto supports approximately 70,000 jobs.⁶ In 2019, the inaugural Toronto Biennial of Art generated \$29M in visitor spending⁷ and contributed \$17M⁸ directly into the Toronto economy.

“The visitor economy is an important pillar in Toronto’s diverse economy, and an incubator for the broader economy that fuels industries and creates jobs for residents.”

- Scott Beck, President of Tourism Toronto⁹

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Key Impacts & Findings



Image caption:
Embassy of Imagination
+ PA System, *Sinaaq-
pagiaqtuut/The Long-Cut*,
2019. Installation view at
259 Lake Shore Blvd E.
Toronto Biennial of Art
(2019). Photo: Triple Threat.

(continued)
9. Source: Scott Beck,
President of Tourism
Toronto, as quoted in
a *Toronto Star* article
by Michael Lewis, 'A
massive surge in tourism
is changing the Toronto
economy'. Monday,
November 25, 2019.

In addition to promoting arts and culture, and fostering greater tourism in the city, the Biennial also contributed to a number of compatible economic sectors such as transportation and education. Transportation, ranging from the movement of art works to travel for Biennial participants, was a substantial portion of the Biennial's operating budget and the organization also partnered with Lyft Canada, a ridesharing platform, and Bike Share Toronto, a bike-sharing system, to provide discounted transportation to venues around the city. The Biennial also committed a significant number of resources to education for local students, as well as school and community groups, including, tours, an Inuit learning curriculum, youth activity books, and *Tools for Learning*, a free digital educational companion promoting independent and group learning skills. According to one education partner, "This was a chance to give students the opportunity to think about different types of professional jobs beyond the roles of artists and curators."

As the Biennial plans further iterations and becomes even more embedded into the fabric of Toronto's economy and creative workforce, these tangible benefits will become more visible, as evidenced by a stronger more productive arts and culture sector, as well as the positive effects to complementary sectors and economies.

72%

of artists agree that
the Biennial provided
new opportunities for
the arts workforce

191

Volunteers
participated in
the Biennial

\$17M

injected into the
Toronto economy
by the Biennial

RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION FIVE

5

Recommendations



Image caption:
The New Red Order
(NRO), *Never Settle*, 2019.
Installation view at 259
Lake Shore Blvd E. Toronto
Biennial of Art (2019).
Photo: Sue Holland.

Given the cyclical nature of the biennial model, it is important that this first wave of evaluation informs how the next iteration can be strengthened in 2021. Based on the feedback we heard from audiences, artists, partners, and staff, we have identified six recommendations for how to grow and evolve the Toronto Biennial of Art moving forward.

a. Facilitate Transportation

The Toronto Biennial of Art programmed two main sites, as well as a number of dispersed sites in and around the city. However, with 13 satellite venues and two main sites more than 20km apart, the Toronto Biennial had a large geographic footprint. While dispersed sites allowed audiences greater engagement with the various neighborhoods and institutions Toronto has to offer, it also posed a number of difficulties for access, mobility, and the ease of experience for visitors. A number of visitors highlighted the difficulty of traversing multiple sites given the lack of adequate public transportation and the volume of traffic in the city of Toronto. One participating artist commented, "It was too spread out. Some of the sites were very hard to access without a vehicle."



"This city is not ready for this level of commitment with travel."

- Partner interview



"The locations are the one issue they need to address."

- Partner interview



"I felt that it was too spread out. It was hard and expensive to get to some venues."

- Artist survey

While the Biennial partnered with Lyft and Bike Share Toronto to offer discounted transportation, we recommend that in future iterations the Biennial make further efforts to facilitate transportation between main Biennial sites and satellite venues. Tactics used by other organizations with dispersed sites include: free

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Recommendations

shuttle services to main sites from public transportation stations, the distribution of maps that highlight public transportation, cycling and walking routes to venues, and the organization of a 'day pass' for Biennial visitors that enables them to use multiple forms of public transportation at a discounted rate.

b. Ticketing and Visitor Tracking

The Biennial team made a strategic decision to keep the inaugural year unticketed. This ensured there were as few barriers as possible to attending all 15 free sites, and reduced waste associated with printed tickets. Also, in an effort to provide comfortable working conditions for staff and volunteers, some of the public outdoor sites were not staffed. These factors, along with differing methods for tracking attendance at partner sites, meant that while the public faced few barriers to attend the Biennial, tracking visitor attendance was complex and, in many cases, inconsistent.

For the next iteration, the Biennial could provide free ticketing through a platform such as Eventbrite and also provide greeters with hardcopy tickets for attendees who might not have access to handheld mobile devices. One of the challenges of this year's evaluation report was to accurately reflect the total number of visits and visitors who experienced the Biennial. A ticketing system would enable a more holistic, consistent, and accurate view of visitor attendance, the frequency of Biennial visits, and also allow for sustained information gathering and communications with attendees.

c. Toronto Cultural Calendar

A number of stakeholders expressed there may be ways to strategically leverage Toronto's cultural calendar to further strengthen and support the Toronto Biennial of Art in future years. The Biennial team has thoughtfully considered the timing of the event in relation to the international Biennial calendar, as well as Toronto's many cultural activities. The team has identified ways to collaborate and cross-program events; for instance, they are looking to establish a partnership with the Year of Public Art in 2021. Over the course of the next year, the Biennial team should continue to be responsive and identify new opportunities to expand their impact with other festivals and events, when it is mutually beneficial and aligned with the overall vision.

Toronto's annual Nuit Blanche program is another compatible event, and partners suggested that a deepened, more integrated partnership would be mutually beneficial. Nuit Blanche could help bring in additional funding and potentially help to launch the commissioning of new Biennial artworks that could then be exhibited for a longer duration. One partner noted, "Nuit Blanche early on was the germination of a Biennial. When looking at resources that go to Nuit, why not strategize something that is more than one night and supports the Biennial?" In addition to supporting commissions, a greater overlap with Nuit Blanche could expand the Biennial's ability to reach new audiences.

d. Programming Pace and Frequency

Throughout the Biennial's 72 days, a total of 215 public programs, performances, and events were held at various partner venues throughout the city. While the frequency and variety of programming gave the public ample opportunity to actively participate in the Biennial, for others there was a concern that they were

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Recommendations

not able to attend enough. One partner advised, “Less is better. More depth is better and strength of commitment. I only saw one event ... and that is just the reality as there was something almost every day.” Another partner suggested, “Go for higher impact rather than a quantity of programming.”

While the capacity to deliver such a fast-paced program speaks to the strengths of the programming team, one staff member commented, “We need more staff and maybe less programming. We could do less but be more focused.” For the next iteration, there may be an opportunity to streamline the public programs, consolidate efforts in key impact areas, and stagger the pace further over the duration of the event.

e. Streamline Communications

In its inaugural year, the Biennial effectively brought together 82 partners across creative, promotional, and venue partnerships. For a first iteration, building up this partnership network was a significant accomplishment that will serve as a great foundation for subsequent years.

For the next cycle, the Biennial should continue to sustain strong internal communications amongst participating collaborators. The team should also maintain ongoing cross-promotion and networking amongst partners. For the 2021 Biennial, preliminary meetings with partners and an internal mailing list that keeps everyone up to date could streamline communications during the event. Post event, a debrief session with each major partner, which the Biennial has undertaken, ensures strong connectivity and networking for future iterations.

f. Continue to Build Diverse Audiences

While the curatorial framework for the Biennial emphasized Indigenous artists and knowledge, and the list of exhibiting artists was inclusive, a number of partners and artists felt that the audiences for the event nonetheless lacked diversity. According to one staff member, who had firsthand experience with visitors, the audience “still skewed primarily white and middle aged.” This sentiment was supported by the visitor survey, in which the majority of respondents identified as of North American or European Descent, between the ages of 45-65. A lack of audience diversity is particularly visible in a city like Toronto, which prides itself as being one of the world’s most diverse cultural communities.

Continuing to diversify its audiences is a foundational goal for the Biennial and its leadership has already implemented strategies that will ideally remove barriers to inclusion and increase representation. These include a new staff position dedicated to expanding diverse audiences, and continuing to partner with arts organizations that represent Indigenous and BIPOC communities. As one partner stated, “They are looking to expand beyond the obvious gallery goer and that work needs to continue.” Expanding audiences is, however, an ongoing challenge for a number of museums and cultural organizations, and the Biennial would be well advised to consult with contemporary art organizations that have been successful in engaging diverse communities and expanding their audiences.

APPENDIX

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Appendix

a. Methodology

VISITOR NUMBERS

The Biennial established data on both the total number of visits and the total number of unique visitors to the event across all sites. To arrive at these numbers Bespoke collected actual counts of visits from each of the Biennial main and partner site locations, as well as projected counts to outdoor and public locations based on visitor reporting and suggested footfall data. In addition to the Biennial visit counts from 259 Lake Shore Blvd E and the Small Arms Inspection Building, the organizations that reported their visit numbers included:

- Art Gallery of York University
- Harbourfront Centre/Artport Gallery
- Ontario Place
- Ryerson Image Centre
- Art Gallery of Ontario
- Art Museum at the University of Toronto
- The Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto
- The Power Plant

Based on the visitor survey conducted, we were able to project the number of visits to the following public/outdoor sites:

- 55 Unwin
- Riverdale Park West
- Toronto Sculpture Garden

Attempts were also made to further differentiate direct Biennial visits from indirect visits. Partner locations with multiple exhibitions were consulted to better understand how many of the visitors reported engaging with the Biennial exhibition. Those figures were used as multipliers to arrive at a total number of visits for partner locations. For example, the Art Gallery of Ontario reported 20% of its overall visit numbers engaged with the Biennial exhibition and that portion of their total visit numbers was used to establish Biennial visits.

We followed a similar process to determine the number of visits and visitors to Toronto's Union Station. The events and programming team at Union Station were able to provide a daily footfall number for the Oak Room, the area of the Station in which the Biennial installation was presented. This information was then cross referenced and validated against the number of people on the public survey who indicated they visited the exhibition at Union Station.

Our research indicated that the Biennial generated 593,382 direct visits and an additional 1,011,000 indirect visits from public sites such as Union Station. It also indicated that the typical visitor attended two different sites. Using the average number of visits, we were able to translate 593,382 direct visits to 296,691 unique visitors.

VISITOR SURVEY

Bespoke designed an online visitor survey to gather information on audience behaviours, motivators, demographics, visitor origin, and tourism details during the Biennial. This information directly contributed to the analysis of the social, cultural, and economic impact of the event. The survey was distributed to the Biennial mailing list, as well as across social media platforms and promoted at Biennial venues throughout the event. This resulted in a total of 340 usable

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responses with a margin of error of 5% at a 95% confidence level. This is a sufficient number of responses to be confident that the survey is representative of the Biennial core audience.

ARTIST SURVEY

In addition to surveying visitors, Bespoke circulated an online survey to the Biennial’s participating artists. The survey polled artist experiences, impressions and the potential impact of the Biennial on their practices. Out of a possible 122 artists we obtained 51 responses, resulting in a margin of error of 11% with a 95% confidence level. While we would have ideally liked to have a larger sample size, this information was used exclusively for qualitative pulls of artist experiences represented by quotes from the survey.

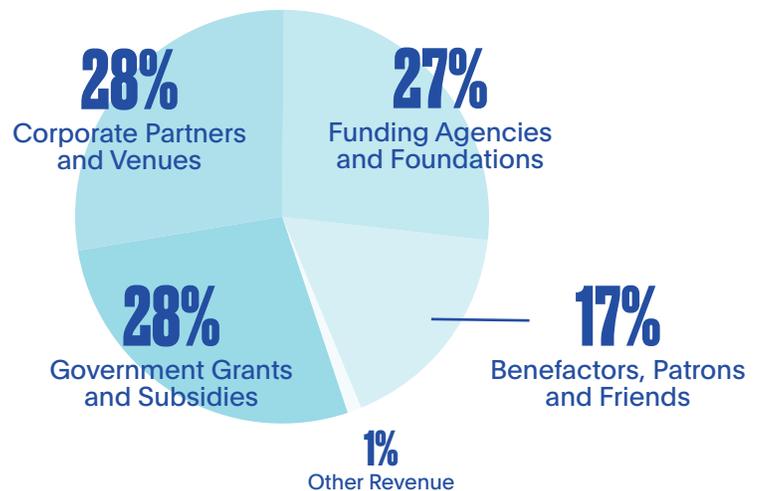
b. Revenue and Expenditure

The following outlines the percentage revenue and expenditure of the 2019 Biennial by categories.

REVENUE 2019 BIENNIAL

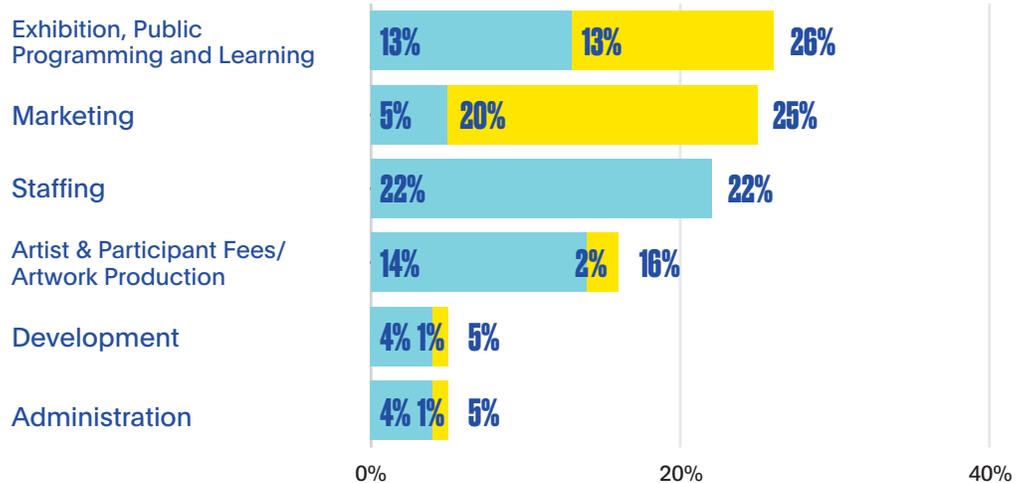
Revenue includes both in-kind and cash support.

Note:
The following chart totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.



EXPENDITURE 2019 BIENNIAL: CASH AND IN-KIND (COMBINED BUDGET OF \$8.2M)

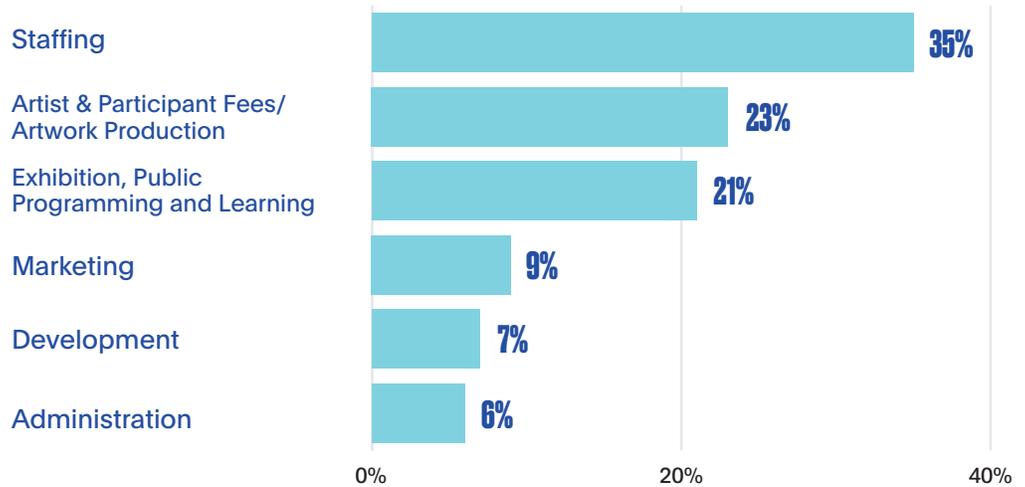
Legend
■ Cash
■ In-Kind



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EXPENDITURE 2019 BIENNIAL: CASH ONLY (BUDGET OF \$5.1M)



c. TREIM Economic Impact

Bespoke estimated the economic impact of the 2019 Toronto Art Biennial using the Tourism Regional Impact Model (TREIM). TREIM is the most widely used input/output system for measuring tourism related economic impacts in Toronto and provides a measure of interdependency between these sectors and the rest of the economy. The provincial economic multipliers provide the direct, indirect, and induced effects on economic metrics and can be used to measure the impact of Biennial tourists and Biennial operations spending on the gross domestic product (GDP), employment, and government tax revenues.

For the purposes of the TREIM calculation, a Biennial tourist is someone who has taken an overnight, out-of-town trip or an out-of-town same day trip of 40km or more from their place of residence to see the art event.

Employment figures include direct, indirect, and induced full-time equivalent jobs for the region of Ontario, including the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

The economic impact of the Biennial's operational expenses cover two fiscal years, mid-year to mid-year, which includes the calendar years 2018, 2019, and 2020.

OUT OF TOWN VISITOR SPENDING

Average Visitor Spending	\$1,985
Total Visitor Spending	\$29.3M
Direct Impact on the Toronto Economy	\$15M

DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT IN TORONTO

Operations Impact	\$2.4M
Visitor Spending Impact	\$14.9M
Total Direct Economic Impact in Toronto	\$17.3M

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NUMBER OF FTE JOBS CREATED (DIRECT, INDIRECT & INDUCED)

Operations FTE Jobs Created	260
Visitor Spending Jobs Created	326
Total FTE Jobs Created	586

TAXES GENERATED (FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL & MUNICIPAL)

Operations Taxes Generated	\$1.6M
Visitor Spending Impact	\$8.9M
Total Direct Economic Impact in Toronto	\$10.5M