



Survey on the Challenges of Itinerant Performing Arts Organizations in Miami-Dade: Results, Conclusions, and Recommended Actions

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted among a representative sample of Miami-Dade County itinerant performing arts organizations. The sample includes opera, ballet, zarzuela, theater, orchestra, dance, and multidisciplinary performing arts organizations. These organizations, each with a rich history and significant contributions to the arts, have been grants recipients of the Miami-Dade Department of Cultural Affairs (MDDCA), the Florida Division of Arts and Culture, and other local, regional and federal programs.

Miami-Dade Itinerant performing arts organizations do not have a permanent performance space; instead, they rent venues to present live performances. This approach enables them to reach diverse audiences across various locations within the community. However, this model also presents certain challenges. The necessity of renting venues for each performance can lead to increased operational costs and logistical complexities. Additionally, the transient nature of their performances may limit opportunities to build a consistent local audience base. These factors underscore the importance of understanding the unique dynamics of itinerant organizations, as highlighted in the findings of this survey and study.

Initiated by The Opera Atelier, which has actively engaged with these organizations, the survey aims to provide relevant authorities with a collective perspective on the current challenges and opportunities within the sector. The report includes detailed results, thoughtful conclusions, and actionable recommendations intended to inform and inspire collaborative efforts toward enhancing the itinerant performing arts sector in Miami-Dade.

Survey Question 1:

"What do you think about the cost of venues and associated expenses for performing arts groups and organizations in Miami-Dade?"

Results:

Outrageous: 16.7%

Excessively expensive: 75.0%

Fair: 8.3%

Excellent: 0.0%

Analysis:

The results indicate that a significant majority (75.0%) of respondents find the cost of venues and associated expenses to be excessively expensive. An additional 16.7% consider these costs to be outrageous, while only 8.3% rate them as fair. No respondents found the expenses to be excellent. This suggests that affordability is a major concern for performing arts organizations operating in Miami-Dade. The survey findings highlight the need for a critical examination of venue-related costs, as they represent a substantial barrier for itinerant performing arts groups. Further analysis and potential strategies for cost mitigation will be essential for sustaining these organizations.

Survey Question 2:

"How would you describe the technical support provided by the venues you usually rent?"

Results:

Professional and skilled: 0.0%

Cooperative: 66.7%

Amateur or insufficient: 16.7%

Mediocre: 16.7%

Analysis:

While no respondents rated the technical support as "Professional and skilled," a significant majority (66.7%) found it to be cooperative. This indicates that although venue staff are generally willing to help, there might be a gap in expertise or overall service quality. The equal distribution (16.7% each) for "Amateur or insufficient" and "Mediocre" further emphasizes the need for improved technical support to ensure that technical aspects of performances are handled at a higher professional standard.

Survey Question 3:

"How easy is it to achieve the desired artistic level of your productions considering the difficulties in covering the cost of rehearsals in venues and developing the artistic concept given the technical conditions of the venues?"

Results:

Easy: 8.3%

Somewhat difficult: 58.3%

Impossible: 33.3%

Analysis:

The results reveal that only a small fraction of respondents (8.3%) find it easy to achieve their desired artistic level under the current conditions. The majority (58.3%) experience moderate difficulty, while a significant 33.3% indicate that it is impossible. These figures underscore the substantial challenges that itinerant performing arts organizations face in balancing cost, technical limitations, and artistic vision. Addressing these challenges could be critical for improving the overall quality and feasibility of performing arts production in Miami-Dade.

Survey Question 4:

"As a director/board member, have you used your own money to finance productions or cover season expenses due to delays in grant disbursements?"

Results:

Yes: 75.0%

No: 25.0%

Analysis:

A substantial majority (75.0%) of respondents who are directors or board members have resorted to using personal funds to finance productions or cover season expenses due to delays in grant disbursements. This indicates a significant reliance on personal financial contributions, reflecting potential cash flow issues or delays in institutional funding. Addressing these funding delays could be critical to reducing the personal financial burden on leadership and ensuring more sustainable production financing.

Survey Question 5:

"Do you believe your organization spends too much on marketing compared to the results achieved?"

Results:

Yes: 83.3%

No: 16.7%

Analysis:

A large majority (83.3%) of respondents feel that their organization overspends on marketing relative to the results achieved. This suggests a significant perception of inefficiency in current marketing expenditures, highlighting the need to reexamine marketing strategies and evaluate the return on investment more critically. Optimizing the marketing budget could allow for better allocation of resources toward initiatives that directly enhance organizational performance and audience engagement.

Survey Question 6:

"What is the most challenging aspect of managing your organization during the season?"

Results:

1. Budget
2. Marketing and Venues
3. Audience
4. Other

Analysis:

The survey indicates that the most significant challenge for managing the organization during the season is related to budget constraints. Challenges concerning venues and marketing are also notable, came in second place, while engaging the audience is somewhat less challenging. A small group of respondents mentioned other factors, suggesting that additional, less common issues may also be at play. These results imply that while financial management is the primary concern, addressing logistical and promotional challenges is also important for organizational success.

Survey Question 7:

"How difficult is it to find artists for your productions?"

Results:

Easy: 41.7%

Somewhat difficult: 33.3%

Difficult: 25.0%

Nearly impossible: 0.0%

Analysis:

The survey reveals that finding artists for productions is moderately challenging. While 41.7% of respondents find it easy, 33.3% consider it somewhat difficult, and 25.0% rate it as

difficult. Notably, none of the respondents felt that it is nearly impossible. This suggests that although there are challenges in recruiting artists, the situation is manageable, and there is room to improve outreach and recruitment strategies to further ease the process.

Survey Question 8:

"How difficult is it to maintain a stable rehearsal schedule with your artists?"

Results:

Easy: 0.0%

Somewhat difficult: 50.0%

Difficult: 33.3%

Nearly impossible: 16.7%

Analysis:

The survey results indicate that maintaining a stable rehearsal schedule is a considerable challenge. No respondents found it easy, while half of the respondents (50.0%) experience it as somewhat difficult. A further 33.3% rate it as difficult, and 16.7% believe it is nearly impossible. This suggests that scheduling and coordinating rehearsals with artists remains a critical issue, potentially affecting production quality and overall operational efficiency.

Survey Question 9:

"How easy is it to balance the artists' expectations regarding fees with the reality of current budgets?"

Results:

Easy: 0.0%

Somewhat difficult: 75.0%

Impossible: 25.0%

Analysis:

The results indicate that balancing artists' fee expectations with available budgets is a significant challenge. No respondents found this balance easy to achieve, with the majority (75.0%) considering it somewhat difficult, and a notable 25.0% deeming it impossible. This highlights a critical tension between artistic compensation demands and financial constraints, suggesting the need for revised budgeting strategies or alternative funding mechanisms to better align these expectations.

Survey Question 10:

"How difficult is it for you to attract an audience to your performances?"

Results:

Easy: 16.7%

Difficult: 83.3%

Analysis:

A vast majority of respondents (83.3%) find it difficult to attract an audience to their performances, with only 16.7% indicating that it is easy. This significant challenge may be linked to broader issues such as marketing inefficiencies and budget constraints, as indicated in previous questions. Enhancing promotional strategies and exploring alternative audience engagement initiatives may help mitigate this challenge.

Survey Question 11: Has the grant disbursement schedule negatively affected your organization's financial stability?"

Yes (100.0%)

No (0.0%)

The survey results indicate that 100% of respondents affirm that delays in grant disbursements have negatively affected their organization's financial stability. This unanimous response underscores a critical challenge within the nonprofit sector, particularly among itinerant performing arts organizations. Unpredictable grant funding timeline can create major operational challenges for nonprofits. This instability frequently causes cash flow issues, making it difficult to sustain programs, compensate staff, and

provide services efficiently. Furthermore, delayed payments may push organizations to explore alternative financial solutions, which are often unsustainable, to cover funding shortfalls.

Survey Question 12:

"How do you perceive the immediate future of performing arts groups and organizations in Miami-Dade?"

Promising (0.0%)

Uncertain (83.3%)

Unfavorable (16.7%)

No idea (0.0%)

The survey results indicate that a significant majority (83.3%) of respondents perceive the immediate future of performing arts groups and organizations in Miami-Dade County as uncertain, while 16.7% view it as unfavorable. This collective apprehension reflects the current challenges of the arts community.

Recent events have added to this uncertainty. In the summer of 2024, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis vetoed a bill that would have allocated more than \$30 million in arts grants, causing Miami-Dade County to lose around \$6.4 million designated for 132 nonprofit arts organizations. This substantial cut in state funding has compelled many cultural organizations to adapt and modify their operations.

Moreover, in September 2024, the Miami-Dade County cultural budget was reduced in over \$1 million, further intensifying the financial pressures on local arts programs. These budget reductions have sparked concerns among arts organizations about their ability to remain sustainable with reduced public funding.

Despite these challenges, there are efforts in place to support the arts community. One example is the Arts Resilient 305 program, a partnership between the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and other key stakeholders, which provides resources and funding opportunities to strengthen the resilience of local arts organizations.

Survey Question 13:

Have you ever considered discontinuing your performing arts organization due to sector challenges?"

Yes (33.3%)

No (66.7%)

The survey results indicate that 33.3% of respondents have contemplated discontinuing their performing arts organizations due to sector challenges, while 66.7% have not. This reflects the significant pressures faced by arts organizations in Miami-Dade County.

Survey Question 14:

Have you made any efforts (emails, calls, letters, public statements) to bring political attention to the challenges faced by performing arts organizations in Miami-Dade?"

Yes (66.7%)

No (33.3%)

I don't care (0.0%)

The survey results indicate that 66.7% of respondents have actively engaged in advocacy efforts—such as emails, calls, letters, or public statements—to draw political attention to the challenges faced by performing arts organizations in Miami-Dade County. This proactive stance underscores the community's commitment to addressing sector-specific issues through direct political engagement.

Survey Question 15:

"Could you describe your experience regarding the treatment of artists and staff by the venue personnel? (Check just those that apply.)"

1. Only doing the bare minimum
2. Poor backstage conditions
3. Professionalism & Respect
4. Support & Assistance
5. Logistical & Administrative Issues
6. Mistreatment, or rudeness
7. Good Working Conditions & Environment

The survey results reveal mixed experience regarding the treatment of artists and staff by venue personnel: Some respondents reported encountering professionalism and respect, with an equal percentage, noting support and assistance from venue staff. Negative experiences: most respondents indicated that venue personnel did only the bare minimum, and highlighted poor backstage conditions. Additionally, some respondents reported logistical and administrative issues, while some reported mistreatment or rudeness.

These findings underscore the need for standardized policies to ensure a respectful and supportive environment in performing arts venues. Implementing a comprehensive code of conduct can be instrumental in addressing these concerns. Such a policy should emphasize respect and dignity, prohibit harassment and discrimination, and establish clear reporting mechanisms for any incidents. Regular training on topics like harassment prevention and accessibility can further promote a positive atmosphere.

Additionally, fostering open communication channels between venue management and artists can help identify and resolve logistical and administrative challenges, contributing to improved working conditions and overall satisfaction.

Survey Question 16:

"What is your opinion on the possibility of creating an independent strategic alliance among local performing arts organizations in Miami-Dade to improve conditions and strengthen their role in cultural policymaking?"

I like the idea (58.3%)

I would like to participate in this alliance (41.7%)

I don't intend to participate in this alliance (0.0%)

The survey results indicate strong support for the creation of an independent, grassroots strategic alliance among local itinerant performing arts organizations in Miami-Dade County:

- **58.3%** expressed a positive view of the idea.
- **41.7%** indicated a willingness to actively participate in such an alliance
- **0.0%** stated they do not intend to participate.

This enthusiasm highlights a collective interest in fostering collaboration to enhance conditions and strengthen the role of itinerant performing arts organizations in cultural policymaking, in addition to the initiatives of local, state and federal government units.

OPEN QUESTIONS

Note: The following responses have not been edited but are transcribed verbatim. The organization providing each particular response is not identified to preserve confidentiality.

Survey Open Question Responses to: "Please list two major challenges your performing arts organization is currently facing."

- Our challenges are BUDGET related, due to lack of State funding in tandem with County grant disbursement delays.
- We have been challenged to pay artist fees / salaries in a timely manner.
- We have been challenged to meet the increase in space rental and production costs.
- Funding does not increase while cost of living does. Finding professional staff willing to work within our budget.
- Delayed funding dollars not available to pay back fees. Attracting new audiences.
- Lack of funding, Lack of funding.
- Audience attendance. Corporate support.
- Public Awareness Marketing.
- We are having difficulties with the funds not arriving on time resulting in having to postpone or cancel different projects.
- Another significant challenge will be securing a venue that meets all the requirements outlined in the grants.
- Funding on time and venues rent.
- Budget Venues.
- Lack of Fair and Equitable Funding Distribution: Public institutions often prioritize large, well-established arts organizations, leaving smaller organizations with minimal support.

- Delays, Bureaucratic Hurdles, and Subjective Grant Evaluations: Grant disbursements are often significantly delayed, yet organizations face strict deadlines and penalties if they do not utilize funds on time. Furthermore, the evaluation panels frequently lack proper training and depth of understanding of performing arts. In conclusion, this reflects a lack of recognition of the value and importance of local artistic groups.
- The time to receive an answer to a question or concern.
- Budget constraints. Finding good performance venues.

Survey Open Question Response to: "Do you have any ideas or solutions that could benefit performing arts organizations in the city?"

- We believe the immediate solution will be alliance - artistic and operational collaboration, cross marketing/promotion, co-production, and co-advocation for recognition and financial support. Longterm, with the current political climate, it would be helpful to form a strategic alliance and use it to encourage city officials to take a louder, stronger and more vocal/visible stance on the importance of the smaller PA groups on our economy, tourism, and general quality of life in Miami. Collectively we may have more power to advocate for annual operational support from local foundations and our major local philanthropists. Right now, Miami is an arts ecosystem with 3-4 giants at the table, and the rest of us are stuck underneath it, in a daily fight just to stay alive. There is no hope for any growth like this - and ultimately, that will not prove sustainable for anyone.
- The experience is different in each venue, however almost all venues have policies of not including rental clients in their promotional platforms.
- Lowering the costs of venue rentals and their staff.
- Have a subsidy fund for the county venues to make the major venues affordable perform in (i.e., not just a rent abatement, but a subsidy for labor and equipment rental).
- Create a County-wide, pooled marketing effort whereby MDC could create an awareness campaign for mid and smaller size arts organizations to help boost ticket sales.
- Create one or two mid-sized venues (600-800 seats) which are in different neighborhoods. MDC has several large venues and now LOTS of small venues, but very few mid-size.
- Our organization performs in several different venues, and our experience differs from venue-to-venue. The county run venues (MDCA) are well-run with excellent tech and professional staff. The Bandshell is extremely well-run with professional staff and excellent tech. Pinecrest Gardens is managed well and the staff is extremely supportive. The other small venues (churches, synagogues, etc.) where we perform generally have no support or tech staff, so we have to bring it all in.
- Sharing of email lists.

- Have commissioners, and residents more aware of the arts. Educate citizens.
- For the city/ state grant administrators to at least send out the funds on time.
- Establish clear funding criteria that prioritize artistic merit, community impact, and financial need rather than institutional size.
- Accessible and Affordable Venues: Create a citywide initiative to provide subsidized or free access to performance venues for small and mid-sized arts organizations.
- Timely Grant Disbursement and Flexible Deadlines: Establish clear deadlines for grant payments to ensure organizations receive funding when needed.
- Inclusion of Local Artists in Policy-Making: Form an advisory council of local artists to help shape Miami's cultural policies.
- Strengthening Digital and Marketing Support: Offer city-sponsored promotion for local performances, including dedicated spaces in public transit and county websites.
- Not really. Because we do not belong to an Union and All is in the hands of the government bureaucracy.
- To demand that venues, reduce costs or to boycott expensive venues.

Conclusions:

Itinerant performing arts organizations in Miami-Dade County face significant challenges that affect their operations and long-term viability, such as funding, venues, and audience engagement. Gaining a thorough understanding of these issues is crucial for crafting effective solutions.

1. Budget Constraints and Funding Delays

A significant concern among these organizations is the lack of timely and equitable funding.

2. Venue Availability and Rental Costs

Securing suitable venues that meet the specific requirements of grants poses another significant challenge.

3. Bureaucratic Challenges in Grant Processes

Organizations frequently encounter bureaucratic hurdles and subjective evaluations in the grant application process. Delays in grant disbursements can lead to financial instability, as funds may not be available when needed to meet project timelines. Moreover, the evaluation panels sometimes lack proper training and a deep understanding of the performing arts, which can affect the fairness and effectiveness of the grant distribution process.

4. Audience Engagement and Attendance

Attracting and retaining audiences is an ongoing challenge. Despite efforts to diversify programming and marketing strategies, many organizations struggle with audience attendance, impacting ticket sales and community engagement. Building a loyal and diverse audience base requires innovative approaches and sustained outreach efforts. This is especially challenging for itinerant organizations.

5. Perception of Funding Distribution and Support

There is a growing sentiment that funding distribution favors larger, well-established organizations over smaller, emerging ones. This disparity can hinder the growth and sustainability of smaller arts groups, limiting their ability to contribute to the cultural diversity of the community.

6. Operational Challenges

Beyond funding and venues, organizations face operational challenges such as finding professional staff willing to work within budget constraints and managing the time-sensitive nature of grant-related activities. Efficient communication and timely responses to inquiries are also areas needing improvement to enhance organizational effectiveness.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including advocating for more equitable funding, streamlining grant processes, ensuring fair distribution of resources, and developing innovative strategies for audience engagement. Collaboration among arts organizations, government bodies, and the community is essential to ensure a sustainable and vibrant performing arts ecosystem in Miami-Dade County.

This study was conducted by The Opera Atelier, Inc.

At the time of the data processing (March 26, 2025), the responding organizations included:

- Afro Borinken Roots Performing Group
- Arts Ballet Theatre of Florida
- Ballet Flamenco La Rosa
- Dimensions Dance Theatre of Miami
- Florida Opera Prima
- Hispanic Performing Arts Group
- Karen Peterson and Dancers
- La Zarzuela
- Martí Productions
- Orchestra Miami
- South Beach Chamber Ensemble
- The Opera Atelier
- Voices of Miami

We extend our gratitude to all the organizations that have contributed to this study, as well as those continuing to share their insights and perspectives.

The study continues to gather data for future research and publication. To participate in this survey please contact The Opera Atelier, Inc. at contact@theoperaatelier.com with the subject 'survey'.

Many Thanks!