

# **Boston Performing Arts Facility Assessment**

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**DRAFT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

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## **I. About TDC**

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Founded in 1968, TDC is one of the nation's oldest nonprofit management consulting and research firms. TDC believes that the nonprofit sector plays a vital role in society, giving tangible support to some of our country's most cherished ideals and enhancing the quality of our lives. TDC works exclusively with nonprofit, governmental, educational, and philanthropic organizations, providing them with the tools critical to achieving mission success.

We bring to this report experience working with performing arts organizations, many here in Boston, as they navigate the artistic, operational, and financial challenges of working in different venues. We have also worked with organizations to explore the feasibility and potential impacts of building their own venues or entering into new, collaborative arrangements. Last, we have worked with venues as they navigate the changing organizational landscape and the ways that landscape impacts their mission and business realities.

Over the past fifteen years TDC has complemented its organization-specific work with studies of the arts landscape in particular cities. These studies examine the impact of systemic forces on the ability of organizations to achieve their missions. Most recently we have conducted public and private studies in Boston, Detroit, Houston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco.

## **II. Acknowledgments**

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We thank all those who spoke with us for an interview, filled out a survey, or provided guidance as we shaped this report. Without your time and thoughtfulness we could not have achieved an understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing Boston's performing arts sector.

### III. Introduction

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The second strategy of the City of Boston’s cultural plan, *Boston Creates*, states: “Support the availability, affordability, and sustainability of cultural spaces and facilities for arts and culture organizations of all sizes in Boston.” This report responds to Tactic 1, in which the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) commissioned a study “to understand the current and anticipated venue challenges of local performing arts and culture organizations.”

TDC was engaged to conduct the study in partnership with the BPDA and the Mayor’s office. Three seemingly straightforward questions guided the study:

1. What is the supply of spaces that serve the performing arts in Greater Boston?<sup>1</sup>
2. What is the demand for spaces that serve the performing arts in Greater Boston?
3. How well do supply and demand align?

In the course of answering these questions, we spoke to individuals from across the arts and related fields: leaders of large producing organizations and artists creating one-person shows; those who have been working in Boston arts for decades and those who are new to the city; managers of venues for global corporations and volunteers at community centers situated in small communities; and those who support the sector through advocacy, providing services, philanthropy, and setting policy. Through these conversations, we heard the following:

**There is excess supply.** Certain types and sizes of performing arts spaces have availability for rehearsals and/or performances.

**There is unmet demand.** Many artists and organizations are searching for additional or different rehearsal and/or performance spaces. The need for rehearsal space is particularly high.

**However, excess supply and unmet demand do not align due to issues of appropriateness, price, and location of available spaces.**

**Because users cannot pay the full operating or capital costs of facilities, the market requires subsidy to adequately support facilities.** Economic realities for both space users and space providers prevent them from finding a pricing “sweet spot” absent significant and ongoing additional support to run, maintain, and update facilities.

Study participants stated that these realities have strained the performing arts system in Boston. In the face of this strain, all players are communicating and negotiating in the best interest of the

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<sup>1</sup> This study focuses on Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville, and the town of Brookline.

sector and their businesses. However, the different constraints participants face prevent them from achieving meaningful solutions.

We heard clearly from participants that this discussion and attempts to find solutions have occurred many times before, yet transformative action has not been taken to remedy the situation. In fact, many observed that due to outside forces, the strain on artists and organizations has worsened in recent years. At the most basic, meaningful positive change will require a community-wide effort to develop a shared set of priorities and significant support from a variety of partners. It will also require suitable leadership to implement and steward the solutions that arise. The intention of this report is to assist in anchoring the ongoing dialogue and to provide data that can help inform change.

## IV. Methodology

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We examined trends in rehearsal and performance space supply and demand through two lenses: organizations and individual artists. To capture as many voices as possible, we publicly released a survey that was available to all organizations and individuals who wished to discuss the provision of or need for performing art space. While certainly not exhaustive, the data collected through the survey provided a rich sample and showed a set of clear trends that we confirmed and clarified through in-depth interviews. The data was collected in early 2016, and the table below provides further detail on the survey and interviews.

After developing an initial set of findings, we presented our core arguments to a set of advisory groups—assembled from within the performing arts sector, philanthropic community, and local and state governments—to test the resonance of those arguments. Feedback from the groups helped shaped the narrative of this report and the potential solutions that close the report.

	<b>Survey of Space Users and Providers</b>	<b>Interviews with Field Leaders</b>
<b>Design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public release, promoted through Boston Creates and other professional networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selected through survey responses and discussions with informed stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand current practice of space users and providers</li> <li>• Collect details on challenges and aspirations for future practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verify themes from the survey</li> <li>• Gain qualitative nuance on the current state and possible solutions</li> </ul>
<b>Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 190 space users               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 105 organizations, both nonprofit and commercial</li> <li>○ 85 independent artists</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 45 space providers               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Nonprofit organizations and commercial entities</li> <li>○ Traditional performing arts venues and others</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 interviewees               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Leaders of nonprofit performing arts organizations</li> <li>○ Space providers</li> <li>○ Commercial promoters</li> <li>○ Other field leaders and stakeholders</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## V. Definitions

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This section summarizes the key terms used in the report. We have generated and defined these terms based on the usage of those who participated in the study. In those cases when we heard multiple terms describing a similar concept or a single term describing multiple concepts, we have chosen the most frequently used term and noted examples within that definition.

Four technical terms repeat throughout the report:

**Purpose-built:** Spaces that were constructed expressly for the purpose of performing or rehearsing art. This encompasses a wide range of spaces, ranging from 3,000+ seat traditional theaters; to simple rooms with flexible seating areas, stages, and lighting systems (e.g. black box theaters) built for 75 to 100 audience members; to sound-proof rehearsal rooms.

**Non-purpose-built:** Spaces that are used for performing art but were not expressly built for that purpose. In the context of this report, the defining characteristic of these spaces is their limited technical amenities (see the next definition).

**Technical amenities:** Production elements built into a space that are used by artists and organizations during performance or rehearsal. Frequently mentioned technical amenities are lighting systems, sound systems, fly systems, and flexible stages.

**Audience amenities:** Aspects of a space that enhance an audience member's experience. Frequently mentioned audience amenities are social/gathering space, bars and/or cafés, large bathrooms, and design elements that make a space accessible according to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Another set of terms apply specifically to **space users**, individuals and organizations using rehearsal and/or performance spaces:

**Independent performing artists:** Individuals producing and/or performing art outside of an organizational context.

**Nonprofit performing arts organizations:** Nonprofits dedicated to presenting and/or producing performing art.

**Commercial performing arts producers/presenters:** Promoters and for-profit companies dedicated to presenting and/or producing performing art.

The last set of terms apply specifically to **space providers**, entities with one or more rehearsal and/or performance spaces available for use by external individuals or organizations:

**Broadway/touring viable venues:** Performance spaces able to serve large commercial acts and Broadway tours. These are managed by commercial entities, nonprofit organizations, and universities.

**Nonprofit performing arts venues:** Purpose-built spaces owned and managed by nonprofit organizations that have a primary mission and business model focus on the performing arts. Frequently the organizations that control these spaces are producing organizations themselves.

**University-managed venues:** Often purpose-built, these spaces are owned by universities and have a primary charge to serve the university community. These spaces also frequently serve the space user groups previously described.

**Cultural centers:** Spaces managed by organizations that have a mission focused on encouraging participation in arts and culture within a specific community. We have treated these spaces as distinct from “Nonprofit performing arts” spaces for a few reasons:

- **Space:** they most often have non-purpose-built space and/or space with low levels of technical amenities.
- **Mission:** these organizations tend to have a broader focus than staging the performing arts. These could include presenting visual arts, encouraging community participation in visual and performing arts, and serving working artists. They seldom produce art themselves.
- **Business model:** space rental income acts as a major revenue driver for these organizations. Also, because they are neither producers nor arts-discipline-specific, their philanthropic appeal is different from other performing arts organizations.

**Religious venues:** Spaces managed by organizations that have a primary mission of religious worship. These spaces are considered non-purpose-built.

**Commercially operated venues:** Spaces operated by a commercial entity. In this analysis we often disaggregate by size, for example from large concert halls to small clubs.

**Rehearsal venues:** Spaces purpose-built for rehearsal. For the purpose of this report we have used this term exclusively for standalone complexes of rehearsal studios.

**Other venues:** All other types of space that are currently serving as rehearsal or performance space, including fitness studios, elementary and high school auditoriums, co-working spaces, and visual art galleries.



Museums are also grouped in the Other category, and they presented a particular challenge in the analysis. Four museums responded to the study, and each has space used by the local performing arts community. At the same time, each responded that they do not treat their spaces as “open rentals.” Instead, they curate performance series that align with their institution’s artistic vision. From a supply perspective, therefore, we have held these spaces apart in the analysis since they require an invitation for use. We do acknowledge, however, that these are important spaces, often with high levels of amenities, to which a limited number of space users have access.

## **VI. What is the demand for spaces serving performing arts?**

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Sections VI through VIII review the findings of the study's three guiding questions. We first examine the question of demand for spaces with the view that the needs of those creating and staging the art should act as the primary determinant of the landscape. We then examine the current supply of venues and the extent to which demand and supply align.

In both the demand and supply sections, we discuss the data through three lenses:

1. What does the landscape look like?
2. How do organizations and artists operate within the landscape?
3. What concerns or barriers were expressed?

The survey of space users and space providers generated the quantitative data referenced. Qualitative data came from the open-ended response questions in the survey and interviews.

As a final introductory note, a traditional supply and demand analysis considers demand based on what buyers are willing to pay. We found many instances of organizations and artists renting spaces free of cash expense or seeking to do so in the future. Therefore, we have widened the definition of demand to include any interest in accessing rehearsal and performance space.

### **A. What does the landscape look like?**

The survey sample consisted of 190 space users. Two groups comprised 45% each of those users: nonprofit performing arts organizations and independent artists. Other respondents included commercial entities, other arts-focused nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions.

The size and discipline distribution of organizations in the survey responses is similar to that of the Greater Boston arts sector as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Over half have annual budgets under \$100K, and another 20% have annual budgets between \$100K and \$500K. Just over 6% could be considered large organizations with budgets of \$5M or more (Figure X-1).

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<sup>2</sup> TDC used Guidestar data to check the weighting of budget size and disciplines for all nonprofit arts organizations that are filing tax returns. The clear trend in this data is that the majority of organizations are small, with budgets under \$200K. While we cannot compare the study and Guidestar datasets exactly, the distribution of our survey sample gave us confidence that we were reflecting the range of sizes and disciplines in the system. Independent artists were not included in this part of the analysis, as there is no comprehensive dataset against which to compare our study sample.

Reflecting on discipline representation for both organizations and individual artists, respondents with a theater-focus and music-focus each comprised around 30% of the sample. Opera-focused respondents made up the minority of the sample at around 4% (Figure X-2).

## **B. How do organizations and artists operate within the landscape?**

When weighing their space options, space users (both individual artists and organizations alike) employ an evaluative framework for decisions in which some space attributes are valued above others. Study participants identified the following key criteria:

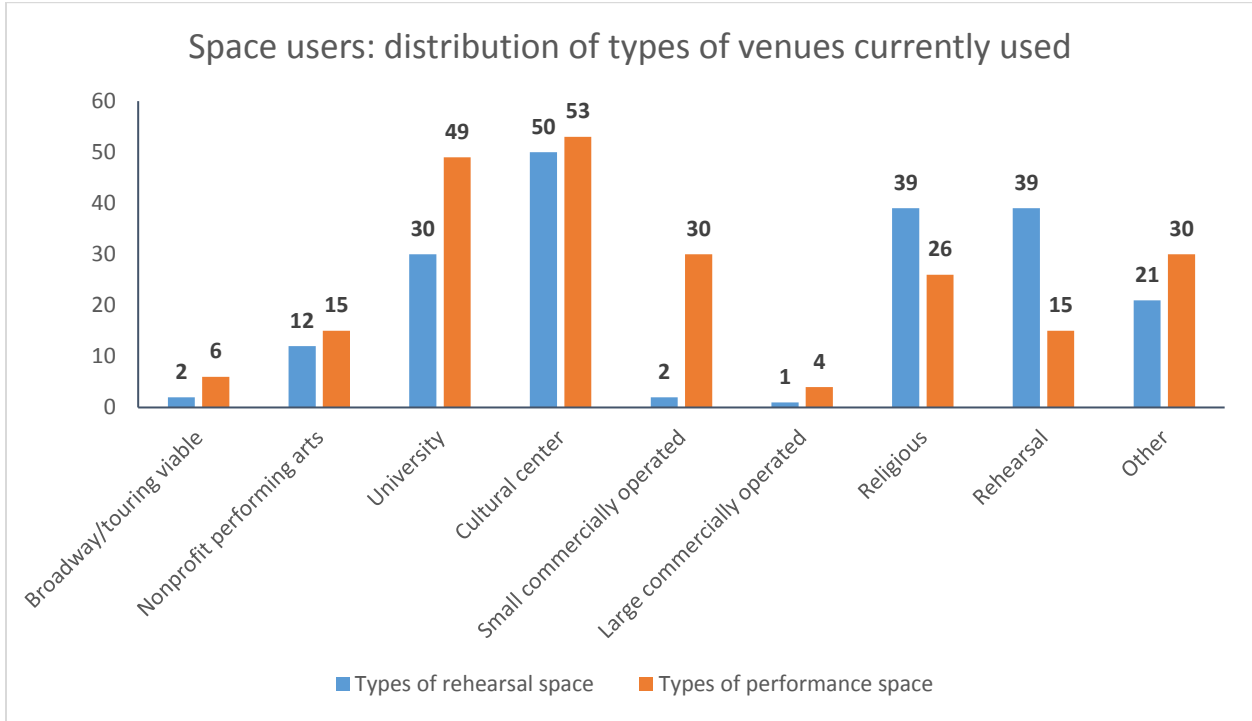
- **Appropriateness of space:** Characteristics such as technical and audience amenities, audience capacity, and layout of the space (usually the size and type of stage) surfaced as the primary decision points for organizations. Users reported significantly more willingness to compromise on their rehearsal spaces and less willingness to compromise on their performance spaces.
- **Price:** The second consideration point is price. Users reported low levels of willingness to stretch their budget for an appropriate rehearsal space. As we detail later, they will overextend their resources for an appropriate performance space, despite the harmful effect it can have on their finances.
- **Location:** Last, we heard that while the location of the space matters, it is the area in which organizations are most willing compromise. For rehearsal space, public transportation accessibility is the central concern. The focus for performance space is about the audience: is the user's audience willing to travel there?

The application of this framework results in the following usage patterns:

- **Users depend on a wide range of rehearsal and performance space.**  
Of all the spaces that respondents use during a season, around 25% of both rehearsal and performance spaces are housed within Cultural centers. Concentrations of rehearsal spaces used can also be found in Religious venues, Rehearsal venues, and University-managed venues (20%, 20%, and 15% respectively). University-managed venues comprise over 20% of performance spaces used, with small Commercially operated, Religious, and Other spaces each housing between 10% and 13% of spaces (Figure VI-1 on the following page).
- **Most users are accessing one to two spaces for their rehearsals and performances.**  
On the surface, the fact that nearly 70% of users access one or two rehearsal spaces and 65% access one or two performance spaces suggests relative stability in the system (Figure X-3). Similarly, that one-third of space users are accessing three or more

rehearsal and performance spaces suggests that a meaningful number of users need to cobble together spaces to stage a season.

Figure VI-1



Qualitative data reveals a more nuanced story. Many users are seeking an appropriate “permanent home,” at the right price, that provides stability and predictability. Few report having found this and instead feel they are sacrificing at least one of their key criteria. This finding raises a question of whether the market is stagnant rather than stable.

- **The range of rental prices that users are paying is broad.**

For rehearsal, the spaces used by organizations are concentrated in the under \$100 per hour and \$100-\$199 per hour ranges (both 30% of spaces used). Outside of this, the data shows a significant spread in rates paid up to \$800+ per hour and down to no cash cost. Individual artist spaces are concentrated at rates under \$100 per hour (50%), with 26% of independent artists using a no-cash or exchange agreement (Figure X-4 and Figure X-5).

Performance venue pricing appears less organized. The ranges between \$100 and \$300 per night (28%) and between \$500 and \$1,000 per night (14%) stand out. A scattered distribution surrounds these peaks. Independent artists rent spaces concentrated across a spectrum from \$50-\$500 per night, though the most reported rental arrangements (23%) come from those outside a traditional fee-for-service model (Figure X-6 and Figure X-7).

Given the variety of performance and rehearsal spaces used in the Boston system, it follows that there is a breadth in price. At the same time, a balanced market often results in clear groupings around certain price points representing the meeting points of what users are willing to pay and providers are willing to charge. In the case of the Boston space users, this is modestly reflected in rehearsal space but not reflected in performance space.

Despite usage patterns, independent artists, nonprofit performing arts organizations, and smaller commercial entities report unmet demand. The three most common reasons users say their demand is unmet are:

- Appropriate spaces do not exist.
- Appropriate spaces exist, but are unaffordable.
- Appropriate spaces exist, but are unavailable.

The inaccessibility of spaces that satisfy users' criteria leads to compromise. In Boston's performing arts system, users report that the extent to which they compromise leads to larger concerns and potentially damaging situations, as described in the following section.

### **C. What concerns or barriers were expressed?**

Before describing concerns and barriers, we acknowledge that they will always exist in a mutually dependent system. We have elevated those that users expressed with a frequency that made the concerns or barriers seem like pervasive characteristics of the system; we also elevated those that could act as inhibitors of achieving a more suitable current state for space users.

The fundamental concern we heard, which has been referenced but deserves attention, is that spaces that offer users the mix of production amenities, audience amenities, and audience capacity they feel is right for their art either do not exist or are inaccessible. This concern was echoed across study participants. There is a pervasive feeling that Boston venues, as a whole, are not adequately appointed and sized to serve the community of users.

More specifically, a set of concerns relates to operations:

- **The cost of renting space is seen as constraining across user types and budget sizes.** Nearly every study participant commented on the challenges that current rents present to their annual operations. When asked if they would pay additional rent for a more suitable space, the majority of respondents said no.
- **Current space arrangement can be potentially damaging to users.** Around one-third of study participants said that some aspect of their current space arrangement is damaging

to their operations. The most frequently mentioned aspects were cost and restrictive contracts that lock users into agreements with terms that are too expensive or require a minimum level of use that is beyond their needs.

- **Additional staff needs are further stressing budgets.** We heard from users across the budget sizes that their staff needs have increased because of the demands of finding and securing adequate spaces. Smaller organizations reported that beyond the cost of renting space, they often need to contract additional staff to provide assistance in creating or adapting production elements (such as lighting, sound, and set) in spaces that have low levels of technical amenities. Staffing concerns will be mirrored by space providers later in the report.

We also heard concerns related to the negative impact the venue landscape is having on the art:

- **Space booking cycles can hinder artistic planning.** Users frequently spoke about their interest in booking artists two to five years in advance (ranges are discipline dependent, with opera and classical music tending to book artists furthest in advance). We heard that advanced booking is standard practice and becomes necessary with in-demand artists who users feel will help attract audiences. However, users also report that Boston space providers are generally unwilling to commit to booking dates more than 12 to 18 months in the future.<sup>3</sup>
- **For some art forms, Boston has few adequate venues.** Dance was frequently mentioned as the art form most hindered by Boston's performing arts spaces. Study participants shared that, in the simplest terms, dance requires a comparatively large stage. In Boston, the few stages that meet this requirement are in spaces with the biggest seating capacity, which require large audiences and budgets to fill.

Participants also named opera and ballet as two forms that are being hindered by inadequate spaces. Boston's major companies in these disciplines, Boston Lyric Opera (BLO) and Boston Ballet, have particular challenges related to technical amenities, audience amenities, and booking cycles. BLO announced in 2015 that it would leave its home, the Shubert Theatre, and stated that the decision was motivated by economic and space appropriateness concerns. At the time of this report, the Opera has entered discussions with various venues in the city but has not identified a long-term solution it finds satisfactory. The Ballet has entered a stable multi-year agreement with the Boston Opera House, and they both report a mutually supportive relationship.

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<sup>3</sup> This is a result of the operating priorities of space providers, which we discuss in detail in Section VII.

A potential remedy for users is to develop their own space, which many said would “be ideal.” Some organizations have benefited from unique, low-cost opportunities to develop and operate space. However, most would need to complete a capital campaign equal to the full cost of building and maintaining their new space. Nearly all study participants said this is infeasible for them at this time. A few organizations – primarily midsize to large organizations – report current capital campaigns and projects focused on renovating and/or building spaces, such as the Huntington Theatre Company.

In summary, the overarching concern of study participants is that they believe the current space restrictions have negatively impacted their art. One interviewee stated, “In Boston, our venues have taken the art hostage.” Space users perceive that the persistent and meaningful compromises they must make to stage their work do not allow for artistic progress, and may instead cause artistic stagnation or regression.

## VII. What is the supply of spaces that serve performing arts?

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The data that comprises the space provider sample came through the survey in two ways. A group of space providers provided detailed information on the individual spaces they make available to the performing arts. Also, users accounted for the spaces that they use for rehearsal and performance. The data reported from users contained more spaces than those generated by participating providers. Therefore, we have two data sets: one, which results from the combined provider and user responses that gives a broad view of the landscape<sup>4</sup>; a second, which results from the providers that gives a detailed view of a smaller set of spaces.<sup>5</sup>

### A. What does the landscape look like?

The broadest view of the landscape resulted in 184 distinct providers of rehearsal and performance space. Approximately one-third of these providers are making available spaces that are solely used for rehearsal, one-third spaces used solely for performance, and another third spaces used for both.

Five percent of the sample (Nonprofit performing arts providers and two Broadway/touring viable providers) are purpose-built spaces with a mission to serve the local performing arts. Cultural centers, with their focus on serving arts within communities, comprise another 20% of the sample; a few of these spaces are purpose-built with high levels of amenities, though many have moderate to low levels of amenities. Religious venues and Other providers also each make up 20% of the space providers reported in the survey (Figure VII-1 on the next page).

It became clear as we conducted our analysis that a particular type of provider, those defined as Broadway/touring viable,<sup>6</sup> requires closer attention. We came to this conclusion for several reasons:

- These spaces are unique in the system as they can serve major touring companies, Broadway tours, and large commercial productions or performers.
- Because of their size, historical significance, and central locations in the city, they tend to attract the most public attention. This prominence can warp a more objective view of Boston's performing arts sector as a few spaces become stand-ins for a broad system.

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<sup>4</sup> For this sample, we have included spaces that users identified outside of the previously noted geographic area.

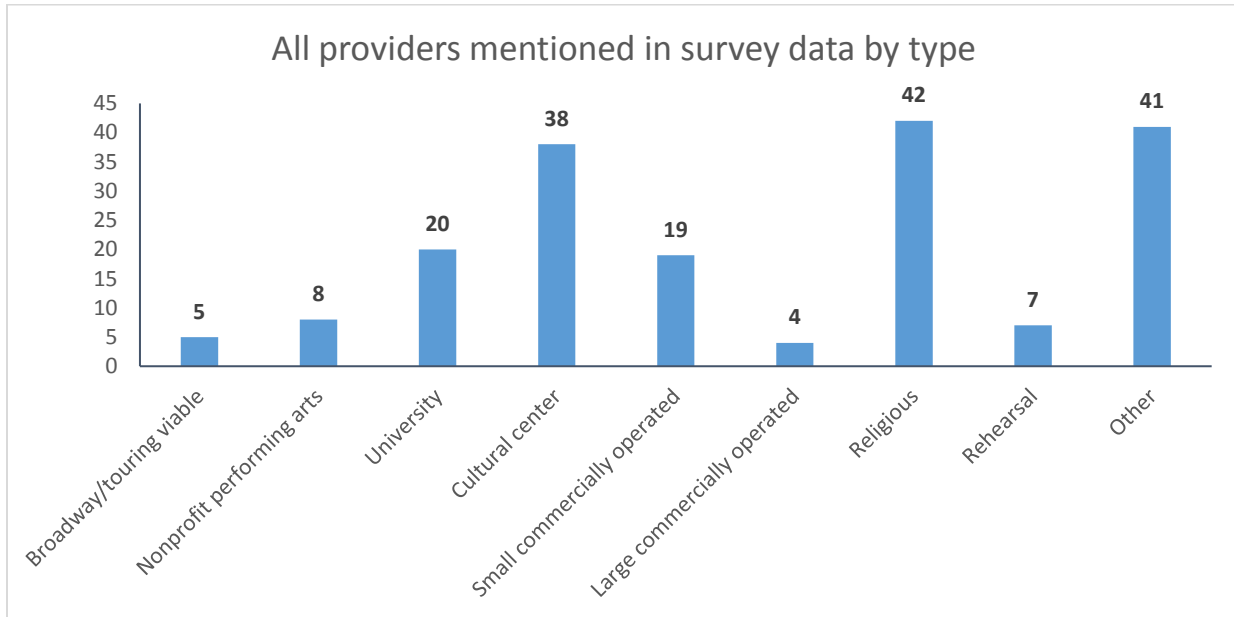
<sup>5</sup> The divide between the space providers that responded and the spaces being used raises a survey bias question worth briefly discussing. When launched, the survey invited those from "the performing arts community" who either "provide rehearsal and performance space" or "use rehearsal and performance space" to respond. We learned through interviews that the positioning may have unintentionally excluded venues that serve this community but do not consider themselves a part of it. Through our interviews and the inclusion of the broader group of spaces mentioned above, we have tried to address this bias.

<sup>6</sup> These include the Boch Center (Shubert and Wang Theatres), Boston Opera House, Boston Symphony Orchestra (Symphony Hall), Colonial Theatre, and Orpheum Theatre.



- Conversations both within the system and in the public often position increasing their usage as a “fix-all” solution.

Figure VII-1



The five Broadway/touring viable providers and the spaces they manage contain just under half of the available seats in our sample on a given night. Six percent of participating space users report that they use these spaces on a regular basis. These users report that they often struggle to afford the rents and fill the seats. Through the survey and interviews we heard that for users other than the largest organizations, the pricing, size, and labor costs put these spaces out of reach except for occasional large shows or events. We have removed them from the sample set for the remaining analysis, unless otherwise noted, since in their current state they are a narrowly usable asset.

The sample of 42 space providers that responded to the survey has a different distribution than the broad sample (Figure XI-1). University-managed venues are more heavily represented than in the broad sample, while Cultural centers and Religious venues are less heavily represented than in the broad sample. From a budget standpoint, two-thirds of providers have annual operating expenses of under \$1M per year, which we found surprising given the usual budgetary needs of owning and operating space (Figure XI-2).

The 42 space providers make available a total of 102 unique spaces. Forty of those spaces are listed as rehearsal space, 30 are listed as performance space, and 32 are listed as both rehearsal and performance space. Across both types of space, Universities manage the largest segment of the portfolio at 37%, with a particular concentration in the number of performance venues.

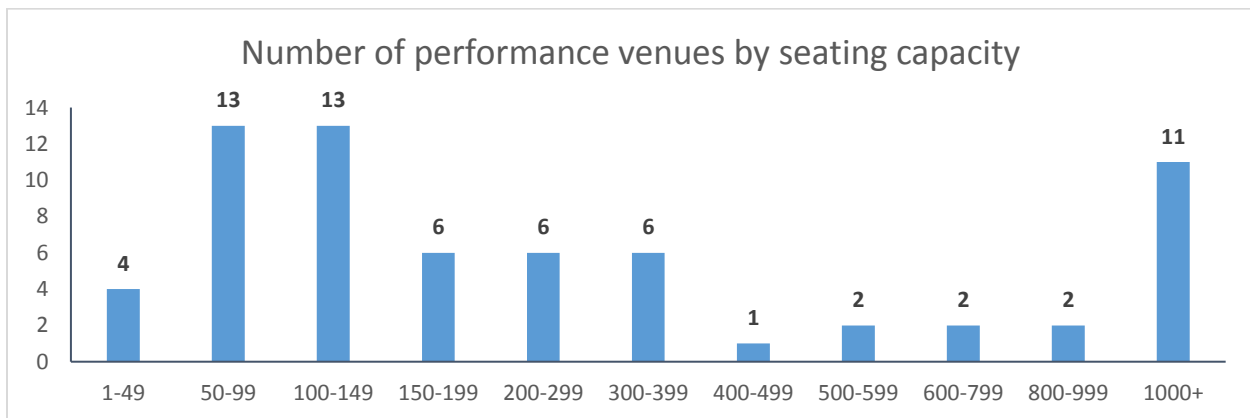
Cultural centers and Nonprofit performing arts manage the next most numerous band, at 19% and 17% respectively (Figure XI-3).

Detailed data on the spaces supplemented by interviews showed a high correlation between the type of provider and level of amenities in the space. For instance:

- University-managed venues tend to have rehearsal and performance spaces with high levels of amenities. These are some of the most sought after spaces in the city.
- Nonprofit performing arts venues have similar levels of rehearsal and performance space amenities to University-managed; however, they are also more likely to have unaddressed maintenance needs.
- Cultural centers house a wide range of spaces. A few have high levels of rehearsal and performance space amenities. Most have spaces with basic levels of technical and audience amenities.
- Commercially operated venues tend to have modest amenities designed for music performance.
- Religious and Other venues have limited amenities and highly variable acoustics. For rehearsal space, they tend to have rooms that satisfy basic user needs.
- Rehearsal venues tend to have significant amenities for rehearsal needs and have passable amenities when used for performance.

The last lens through which we can view the landscape is the number of seats in performance spaces.<sup>7</sup> At first glance, there are relatively few spaces in the 400 to 1,000 seat range and relatively many in the 50 to 150 seat range. The system also has a significant number of spaces with 1,000 or more seats that are appropriate for a small proportion of space users. We return to this subject later in the section as it benefits from additional layers of operational data.

Figure VII-2



<sup>7</sup> We set the groupings of venue capacity, as can be seen in Figure VII-2, based on the bands that space users discussed in the survey on during interviews.

## B. How do organizations operate within the market?

As noted in the previous section, space users consider the appropriateness of the space as their primary determinant. Given the correlation between type of provider and level of amenities, we also see a strong relationship between type of provider and type of user. The following table provides a summary:

Type of space provider	Primary users
Broadway/touring viable	Mid-large orgs (\$5M-10M & >\$30M), multidisciplinary, commercial
Nonprofit performing arts	Mid orgs (\$1M-5M)
University-managed	Small-mid orgs (<\$100K & \$1M-5M)
Cultural center	Small orgs (<\$100K), theater, individual artists
Small commercial	Small orgs (<\$100K), commercial, multidisciplinary, individual artists
Large commercial	Mid orgs (\$1-5M), multidisciplinary, commercial
Religious	Small orgs (<\$100K), music, individual artists
Rehearsal	Small orgs (<\$100K), dance, individual artists
Other	Small orgs (<\$100K), individual artists

Two other key variables, availability and rental cost, showed less of a correlation to provider type than one might expect given the similarities of the spaces. A note on availability: As we heard from many providers and users, the dynamics of availability is more complicated than trying to book each venue every day and night for the whole year. The primary performing arts season runs from approximately September through May, which results in summer availability that is usually undesirable to space users. Additionally, many productions run for more than a week at a time, which means a few days of availability scattered throughout the season may not align with the needs of most users. Therefore, in the following discussion we consider venues booked at rates of 70% of the year or higher as “fully booked.”

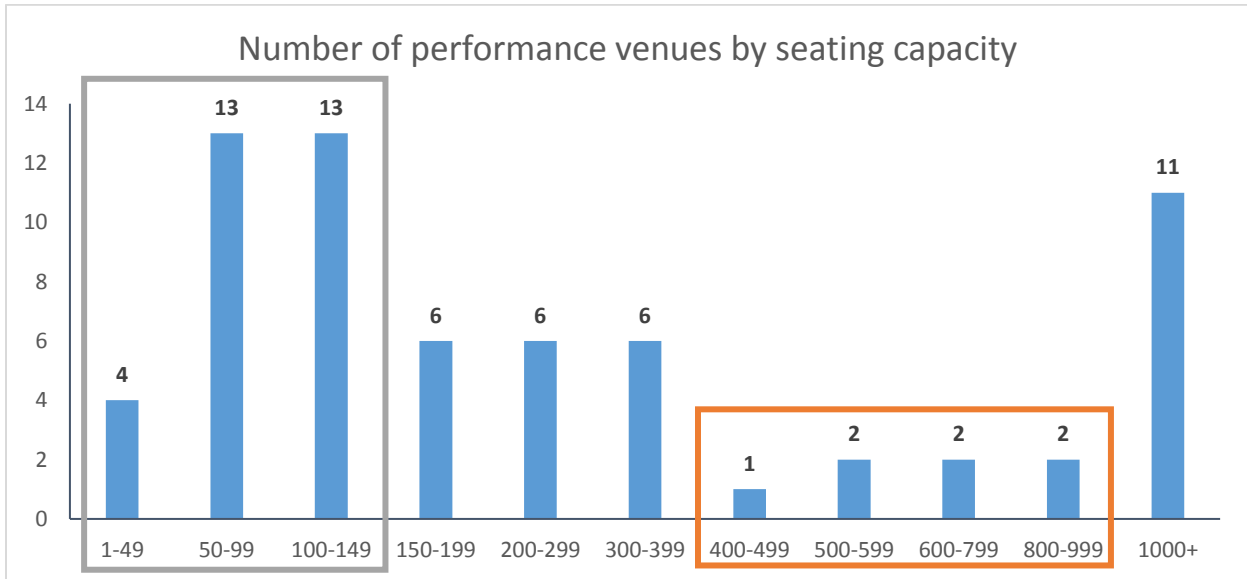
- **Availability:** Nonprofit performing arts venues have the least availability, with 80% of those spaces reporting that they are fully booked or nearly fully booked. University-managed venues and Cultural centers show a relatively clear split between spaces that are highly booked and highly available. Religious and Other venues have the lowest booking rates (Figure XI-4 and Figure XI-5).

Given the frequency with which study participants discussed the need for access to rehearsal space, we looked more closely at availability across the sample. Nearly half of the rehearsal spaces are fully booked or nearly fully booked. Of those 29 that are booked below 40% of available days, the majority are open rooms with limited amenities.

Examining performance space availability through the lens of seating capacity also provides a clearer view of underlying challenges. The two capacities most in demand by space users were in the 100 to 150 seats and 400 to 600 seats ranges. While there appear

to be a significant amount of spaces with under 150 seats (Figure VII-3, grey box), over half are fully booked or nearly fully booked; these tend to be purpose-built spaces in more traditional performing arts complexes. Another third have low levels of amenities and are set within churches and art galleries. Regarding the few spaces that exist between 400 and 1,000 seats (Figure VII-3, orange box), three are purpose-built and fully booked. The remaining four have limited amenities, set within churches, a historic space, and a cultural center.

Figure VII-3



- Pricing:** Pricing varied notably within and among provider groups. Cultural centers tend to have the lowest rates for both rehearsal and performance space. Nonprofit performing arts venues are also weighted towards the lower end of the spectrum, which could be a demonstration of their mission-emphasis on serving local performing artists and organizations. Conversely, Religious venues are often more expensive than spaces with higher levels of amenities. This could result from a focus on rentals as a revenue generator, from unfamiliarity with market rates, or from competing non-arts renters.

Variation in pricing to this extent, especially among similar spaces, suggests that supply and demand are out of balance. We heard from providers that while they set their rates with a consideration of what the market can bear, their unique circumstances—such as revenue from a governing body, labor agreements, or costly facility maintenance budgets—force them to hold to the higher rates they need to support their organization.

### **C. What concerns or barriers were expressed?**

All of the participating providers expressed genuine concern for the health of the performing arts in Boston. At the same time, they noted that operating and stewarding buildings restricts their flexibility in addressing the particular needs of each space user.

The primary concern we heard from providers is that they require additional revenue and capital to adequately support their operations. This support would go to:

- Rising operating costs, in part related to the growing staff demands of booking, managing, and assisting the many users in their space.
- Deferred maintenance, especially in older spaces.
- Space upgrades that would align their amenities with those that users and audiences seek.

However, providers of all types and sizes, including the Broadway/touring viable venues, reported a struggle to attract sufficient funds. Their understanding of the strained financial capacities of users prevents them from pricing appropriate to their needs. Additionally, raising funds for those providers that are nonprofits requires them to compete directly with their users for philanthropic support. They are left in a double-bind.

## VIII. How well do supply and demand align?

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The findings described suggest misaligned supply and demand. Space users seek appropriately sized, specialized spaces with high levels of amenities. However, such spaces often do not exist; if they do, users can rarely afford rent equal to the operating, capital, and financing costs of those spaces. Space providers are struggling to support even the operating costs of their current spaces given the rental rates that users seem able to bear, and significant amenity upgrades are out of reach. All of this results in a system with excess supply that does not meet demand for reasons of space appropriateness, price, and location.

### A. Misalignments and types of space

When examining alignment by types of space, the following themes emerged from the data:

- **Broadway/touring viable:** Both in terms of the size of the spaces and the price, Broadway/touring viable spaces are appropriate for a small number of users. Lowering prices could make them more accessible to that small group. However, their age, design specifications when they were originally built, and limited renovations have resulted in technical and audience amenities that users report don't fully align with their needs.

Providers of these spaces must serve two different markets: a local nonprofit market that cannot pay sufficient rent to meet the operating costs of the space, and a commercial market that can contribute to providers' profits (we discuss this in more detail later in the section). These two markets often have conflicting practices, such as length of advanced booking periods, which providers cannot align.

- **Nonprofit performing arts:** These spaces are the most attractive to users, and as such have little availability. Some users have access to these venues based on a historical relationship with the venue. Those who are seeking access report feeling like they are structurally "boxed out" and have no way into a more appropriate space.

Providers seek to find ways to lower prices and unlock more availability, but they face constraints. Often these spaces are owned and/or operated by organizations primarily for their own use. Staffing needs have grown to manage an increased volume of usage, sometimes by users who are not adequately trained to use the space. Frequently strained business models can create a pricing floor beneath which it is unprofitable for organizations to offer and staff the spaces.

- **University-managed:** Also highly attractive, University-managed spaces have low availability. Users report an interest in deepening university relationships by securing more dates in current and future seasons; however, they have had limited success.

Providers are primarily committed to serving the university community. We heard they are interested in increasing support to local users (many currently are or have been working as a local artist/producer) but do not have the inventory to do so. Some noted that opening more dates would require engaging university administrations.

- **Cultural centers:** The broadest range of spaces sit within the Cultural center classification. Users had a few common reflections. First, users appreciate the proximity of these spaces to their audiences. On the other hand, the spaces tend to have the low levels of amenities and have not been well maintained. Many users also find these spaces difficult to access. Reasons for this can range from artistic visions instituted by the Cultural centers that limits the type of artists they will stage, to staffing and support shortages, to pricing and contracting structures that are perceived as burdensome.

Cultural center providers face a particular tension. They frequently have deep mission commitments to serving the needs of their community, and their primary asset is their building. Yet, we heard that the philanthropic potential of providing space for the arts without a tie to a particular art form or artistic vision can be limited. Many cultural centers respond by narrowing their mission or imposing a particular vision to create a more compelling philanthropic case. This can create a point of conflict with local users.

- **Commercially operated:** Commercially operated spaces of all sizes are primarily designed for live music, though they can adequately serve other forms depending on the layout of the venue and the demands of the art. Scheduling is the primary challenge for users in these spaces. The commercial booking cycle tends to run six to 18 months in advance, which can hinder the ability of organizations to attract in-demand artists who are often confirming dates two years or more in advance.

Providers stated that they have an interest in working with local users; at the same time, they feel generally removed from the sector, and they report that their own market dynamics must remain the priority to support their businesses.

- **Religious:** While frequently used because of their prevalence across the city, Religious spaces often force the biggest tradeoffs for space users. Some of the spaces can be ideal for music groups, though we heard repeatedly that the arrangement of Religious spaces rarely fits the needs of other disciplines. Users also expressed concerns about the conflicting or negative impact of religious symbolism on the art and the audience. Last, since Religious spaces often act as community centers, users expressed frustration at the fact that residual noise from other activities can interrupt a performance.

Along with “Other” space, we had few Religious providers who responded to our study. Those that did respond expressed an interest in increasing usage by local performing arts organizations or artists and stated that they feel they struggle to raise awareness that their spaces are available.

- **Rehearsal:** Purpose-built Rehearsal space satisfies the needs of those users that have access to it. The clear challenge that came through the study is that there is far too little available, and often the space that is available is too expensive for the regular rehearsals of small organizations and individual artists. Study participants highlighted a related and challenging dynamic that has resulted from the lack of appropriate, small, affordable performance spaces. Users have taken to performing in Rehearsal spaces, which further limits the availability of high-quality space for actual rehearsal.
- **Other:** Like many of the non-purpose-built spaces, users struggle with these spaces because of their limited amenities. However, they frequently feel they must turn to them because they are the only available or price-appropriate option.

## **B. Misalignment and ownership**

The overarching issue that arises from the study is the way that Boston has financed, owned, and managed spaces for the performing arts. We observe four core arrangements, all of which depend on indirect subsidies:

- **Commercial stake:** A set of providers manages spaces owned or heavily subsidized by commercial entities. Their ability to offer rents within the price ranges of local nonprofit organizations depends on offsets from high-netting commercial acts. If nonprofit use gets too high, commercial providers can't earn enough to support their operations. We heard that if too much of this type of space becomes available in the system, which some participants suspect has happened, the supply of commercial acts can become spread too thin across venues, limiting the profits of all providers. This concern was often mentioned by survey participants in relation to the recent Colonial Theatre deal between Emerson College and Ambassador Theatre Group.
- **University stake:** University owned and managed spaces are subsidized primarily as a benefit to their schools' community. These spaces neither comprise a core business line nor are they expected to generate a profit. As was the case recently with the Colonial Theatre, they can end up costing a university too much within its portfolio of facilities. Serving the local arts community is a secondary consideration that can help fund operating costs, expose the university community to diverse art, and strengthen community partnerships.



- **Organization-specific use:** Organizations with their own facilities use their spaces as the platform for mission delivery. We heard from all such providers that when they are not in the space, they see community and financial benefits to providing space to other users. Some of the organizations we spoke with see this as part of their organizational vision. However, widespread usage is a secondary consideration.
- **Patchwork approach:** All other spaces fall under this arrangement, in which providers cobble together support where they can find it. This study revealed that these providers often can't attract sufficient donations from individual donors, which leads them to rely on a shifting mix of funding from institutional donors and earned revenue. As we have noted, this arrangement results in a struggle to support operations and an inability to support capital maintenance and facility improvements.

Boston has very little governmental ownership of or funding for facilities. The statewide Cultural Facilities Fund, focused on major capital projects, stands as the major funding mechanism. While these funds have been essential for many organizations, they are episodic by design and cannot provide the high level of annual support that is critical for organizations to support a facility.

The misalignment of management arrangements, subsidy, and incentives has strained the operations of many performing arts organizations and artists, compromised the financial health of space users and space providers, and resulted in performing arts spaces that cannot be properly maintained and updated.

### C. Misalignment and specific spaces

At a more granular level, this study revealed particular holes in supply that are widely sought by space users and could address the needs of many in the system.<sup>8</sup> Research suggests that increasing the availability of assets that currently exist in Boston could supply a modest amount of the space mentioned below; however, fully satisfying the shared needs would likely require new venues and financial support, which we discuss in the next section.

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<sup>8</sup> The space characteristics described in this list are meant as guidelines generated from the data. As such, they should be considered directional. Determining the exact size of houses, types of technical amenities, etc. would require significant community discussion.

Shared needs include:

***Rehearsal***

- **Rehearsal space for independent artists and small to mid-sized organizations**  
Needed: Extremely low cost, modest technical amenities, located near public transportation
- **Rehearsal space for larger organizations**  
Needed: Sophisticated technical amenities, located near public transportation

***Performance<sup>9</sup>***

- **150 seat performance space for independent artists and small organizations**  
Needed: Sophisticated technical amenities, low rental cost, flexible space
- **400 to 600 seat performance space for small to mid-size organizations**  
Needed: Sophisticated technical amenities, low rental cost, flexible space
- **300 to 600 seat performance space for local commercial acts**  
Needed: Modest amenities, low rental cost
- **Performance space with a stage appropriate for dance**
- **1,300 to 1,800 seat performance space that can appropriately serve opera and ballet**  
Needed: Sophisticated technical and audience amenities, low rental cost

The last performance space listed is unique in the list as its inclusion is driven primarily by two organizations, BLO and Boston Ballet. Both could benefit from a long-term space solution tailored to their technical amenity, audience amenity, and artistic booking needs. As stated earlier, the BLO seeks to immediately define a solution as the organization reports it is currently at risk.

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<sup>9</sup> Not all these spaces are mutually exclusive. For example, a 500 seat performance space with a stage appropriate for dance could satisfy two needs. Additionally, some study participants noted that spaces have been built with highly flexible seating that can expand their capacity from around 300 to 1,000 seats, for example.

## IX. Achieving solutions

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It would be impossible to build specific spaces for each user in need from real estate and financial perspectives. Therefore, throughout this study we have discussed solutions through a system lens. A promising early outcome of the process is that a number of potential solutions have arisen. In particular, we heard discussions about:

- The significant opportunity presented by the Seaport Square development, led by WS Development. Their agreement with the City calls for creating a large arts and culture complex that is earmarked for the performing arts. The development may present a once in a generation opportunity to widely address a set of complex needs.
- Thoughtfully repurposing Boston's grand yet less-used spaces, such as the privately-owned Wang Theatre, the city-owned Strand Theatre, and two smaller privately-owned theaters in Hyde Park. These are difficult conversations that would likely ask these organizations to reflect on their missions, while also presenting preservation and funding challenges. However, early exchanges have been encouraging and focused on best serving the current needs of artists and organizations in Boston.
- Rethinking how some of Boston's legacy assets are deployed. Stakeholder discussions suggested that if appropriately funded, Boston's facility-based cultural centers, such as Boston Center for the Arts, could be better equipped and more open to serving the needs of their current users and wider local arts communities.
- Organizations undertaking capital projects that could create new supply of rehearsal and performance space. For example, Huntington Theater Company's renovation of its venue on Huntington Avenue is intended to provide new spaces for the Huntington and for the broader performing arts community. Through the study process we heard about two to three similar potential projects.

Many of these solutions are complex but possible. All would require early investment and long-term operating support. Fully realizing them would also require a new approach to how facilities are financially supported, operated, and managed in Boston. To achieve any meaningful change we will need to take inspiration from other communities and develop new tools for:

- Enhancing partnerships among developers, the City, and the local arts community.
- Stimulating new sources of funding from a philanthropic community—including individuals, foundations, and government—that has provided limited support to systemic space solutions.
- Developing funding mechanisms that aggregate and focus existing and potential new sources of support. To effectively support the system, these funds could provide ongoing support, increasing access to spaces and helping to maintain them.

- Ensuring that any new spaces are operated effectively with incentive structures that elevate the needs of the local performing arts community.

In thinking about developing and deploying the appropriate tools, it is helpful to remember key themes that emerged over the course of the study:

- All are working tirelessly to create a vibrant performing arts system in Boston.
- Addressing the current performing arts facilities challenges is seen as a critical step to increase vibrancy.
- There is widespread weariness and doubt that solutions can happen.
- There are significant rifts in how those in the sector view success. Larger organizations, smaller organizations, and independent artists all expressed that in the past the needs of others have been placed before their own. Many expressed hostility towards the idea that, in the words of one participant, “a solution might be reached for them and not me.”

Stepping back, taking a system view to solutions requires setting priorities and making tradeoffs. Some of the spaces in the previous section and solutions above could serve many organizations. Others could serve a few. Some solutions could take a decade or more to materialize. Others could take effect in the coming year. What is the appropriate portfolio of solutions to lift the system?

Our hope is that this study has described the current state of performing arts facilities in Boston, outlined shared needs in the system, and highlighted possible solutions. Continuing to pursue the second strategy of *Boston Creates* will involve organizing around the solutions and tools that resonate most deeply with those in the sector and reaching shared definitions of success over time. Ultimately, the system needs leadership and partnership to break the current stasis and unlock the vision, passion, and resources that exist among artists, organizations, funders, and government entities.

## X. Appendix: Chart for Section VI

Figure X-1

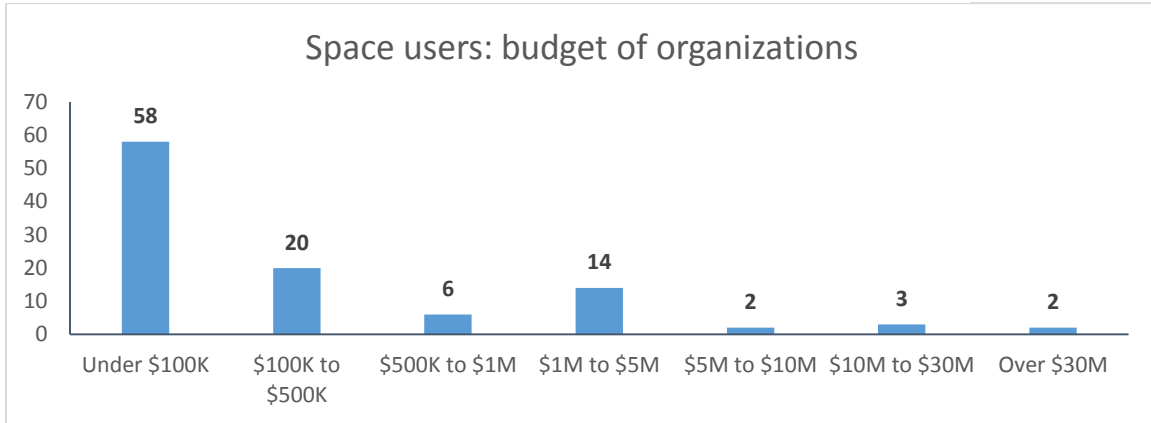


Figure X-2

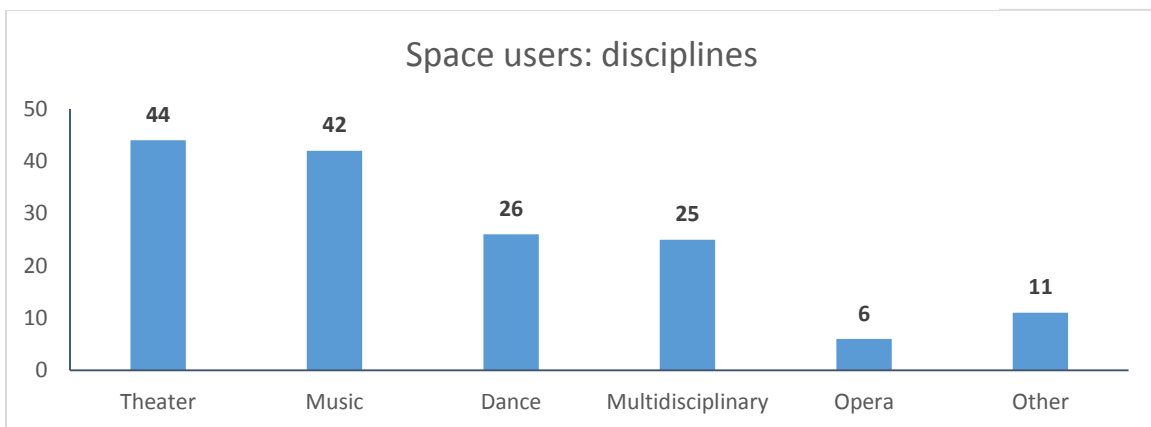


Figure X-3

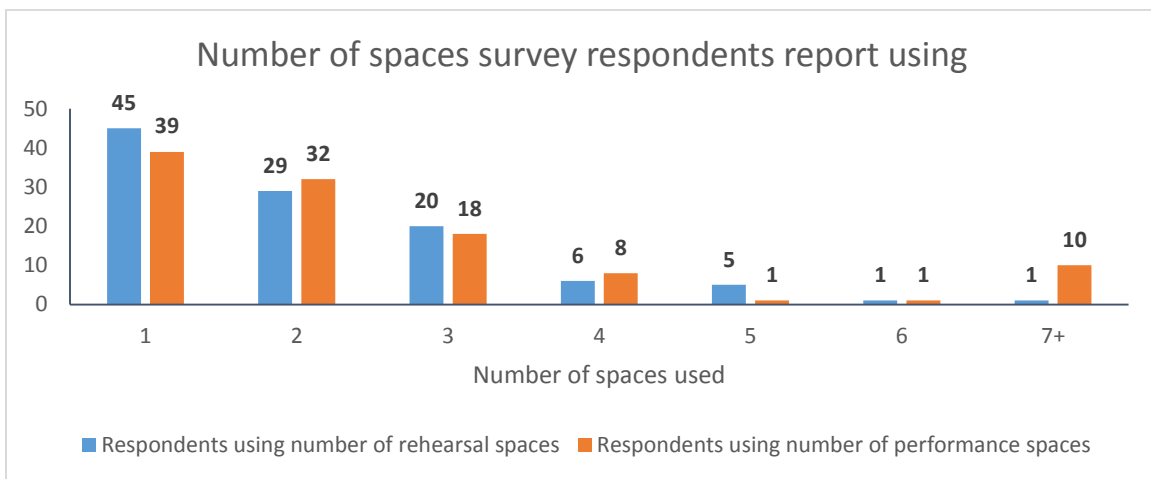


Figure X-4\*

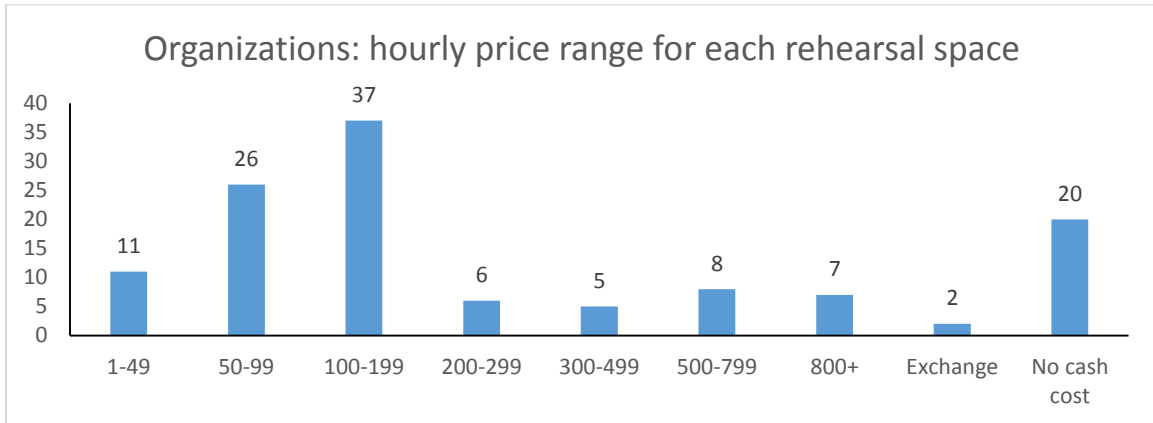


Figure X-5\*

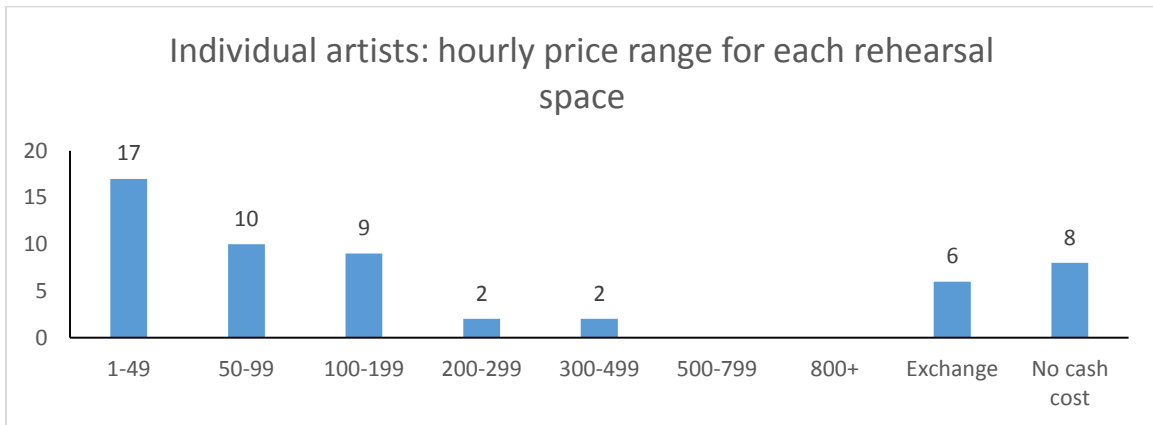


Figure X-6\*

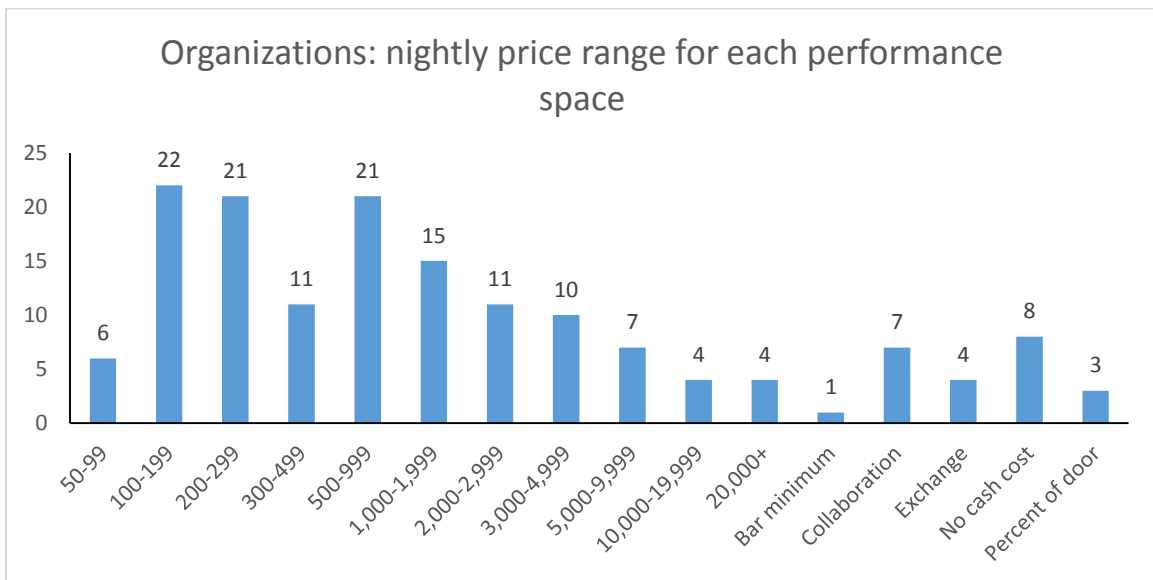
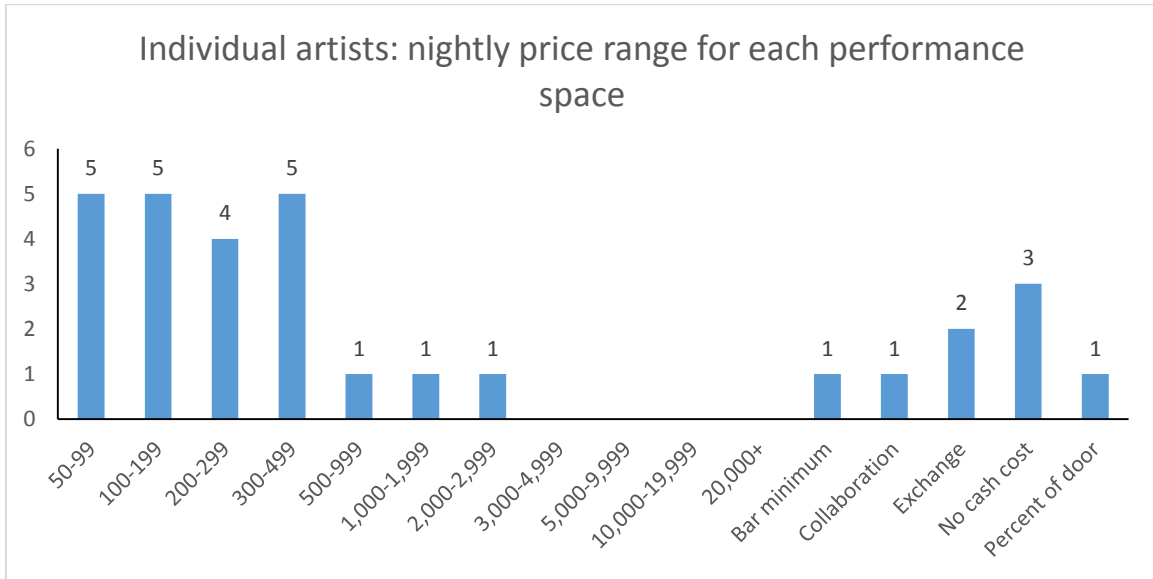


Figure X-7\*



\*For all rental price charts, we set ranges based on the bands that study participants discussed in the survey or during interviews.

# XI. Appendix: Charts for Section VII

Figure XI-1

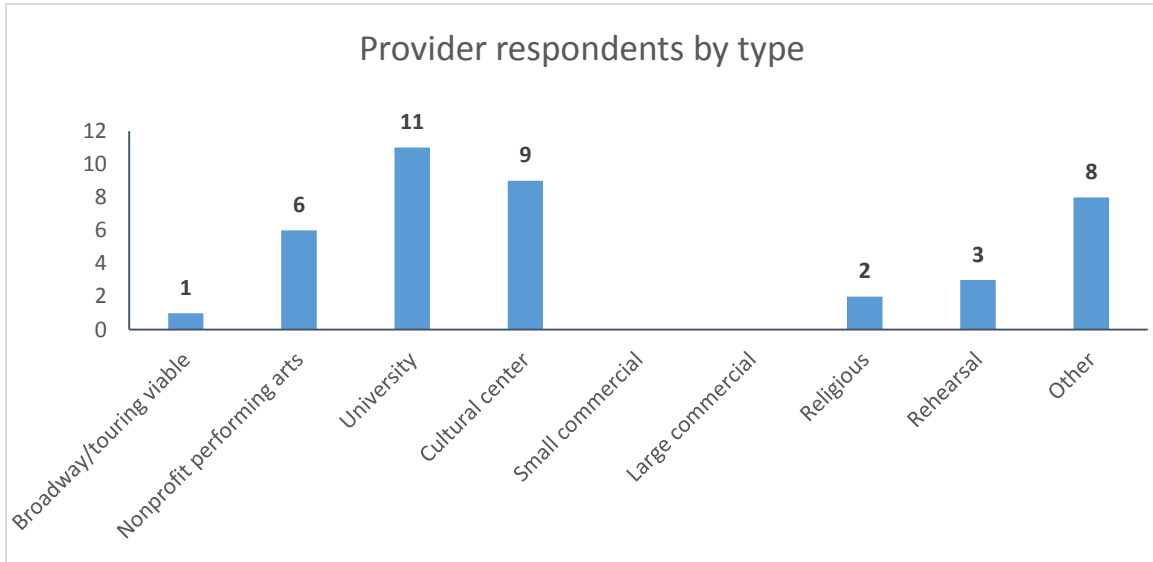


Figure XI-2

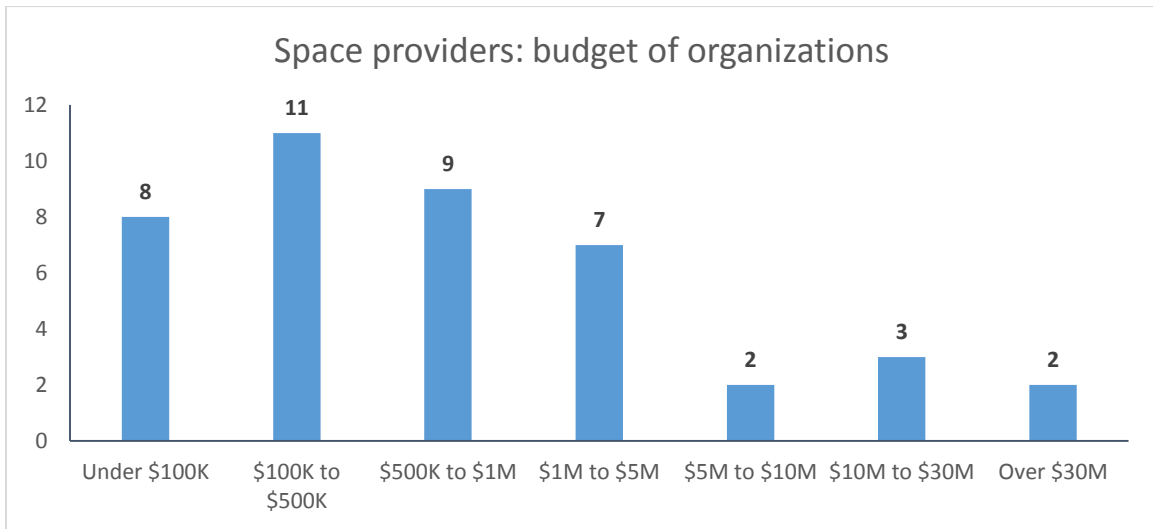




Figure XI-3

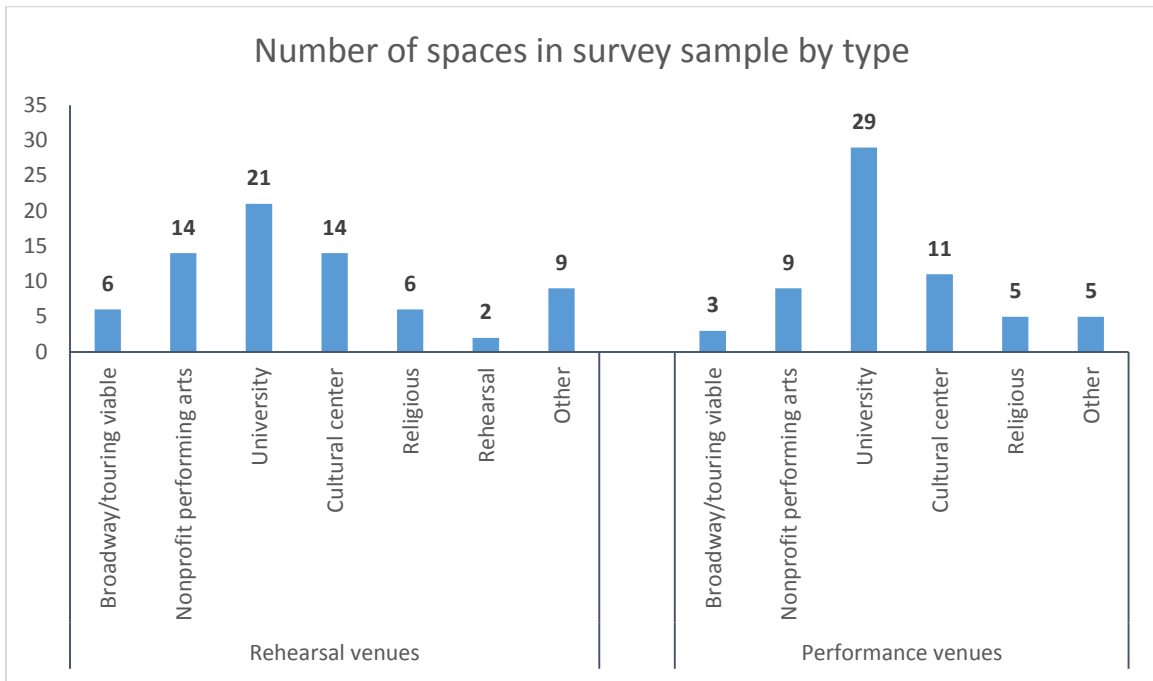


Figure XI-4\*

Booking rates of rehearsal spaces by type						
	Nonprofit performing arts	University	Cultural center	Religious	Rehearsal	Other
20% or less	21%	33%	30%	50%	0%	56%
30% to 40%	0%	0%	10%	17%	0%	33%
50% to 60%	0%	10%	10%	33%	0%	11%
70% to 80%	29%	5%	20%	0%	0%	0%
90% to 100%	50%	52%	30%	0%	100%	0%

\*Percentages in the first column refer number of rented days in a space divided by the total number of available days for rent.

Figure XI-5\*

Booking rates of performance spaces by type					
	Nonprofit performing arts	University	Cultural center	Religious	Other
20% or less	0%	26%	45%	40%	50%
30% to 40%	11%	7%	9%	60%	25%
50% to 60%	11%	11%	9%	0%	25%
70% to 80%	11%	22%	27%	0%	0%
90% to 100%	67%	33%	9%	0%	0%

\*Percentages in the first column refer number of rented days in a space divided by the total number of available days for rent.

Figure XI-6

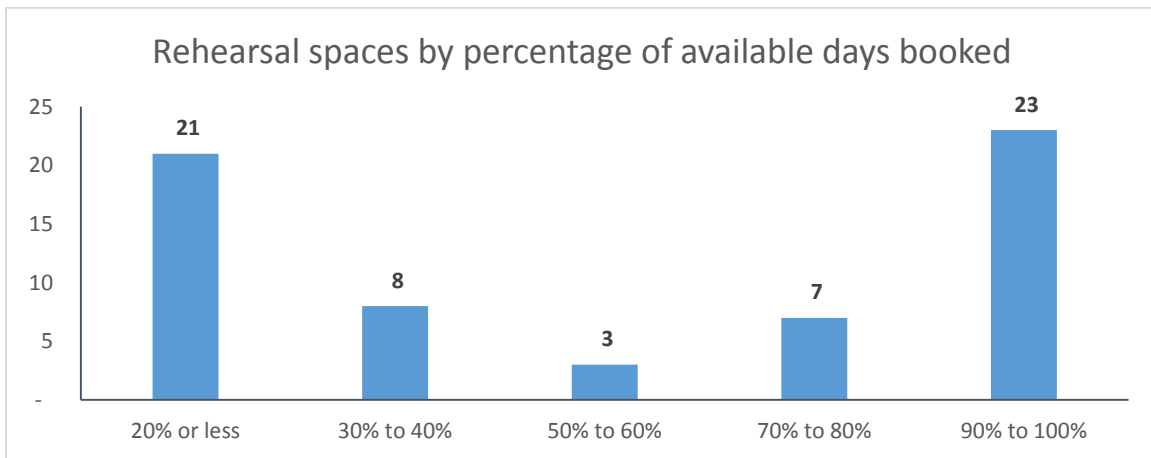


Figure XI-7

Hourly rental rates of rehearsal spaces by type						
	Nonprofit performing arts	University	Cultural center	Religious	Rehearsal	Other
\$1-\$49	36%	0%	86%	0%	100%	33%
\$50-\$99	7%	19%	7%	0%	0%	56%
\$100-\$199	43%	38%	7%	17%	0%	11%
\$200-\$299	0%	29%	0%	17%	0%	0%
\$300-\$399	0%	10%	0%	17%	0%	0%
\$400 and up	14%	5%	0%	50%	0%	0%

Figure XI-8

Nightly rental rates of performance spaces by type					
	Nonprofit performing arts	University	Cultural center	Religious	Other
Under \$400	25%	20%	40%	40%	50%
\$400 to \$1,000	50%	30%	30%	0%	0%
\$1,000 to \$2,000	0%	30%	10%	40%	50%
\$2,000 to \$3,000	25%	0%	10%	20%	0%
\$4,000 to \$5,000	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
\$5,000 and over	0%	15%	10%	0%	0%

## **XII. Appendix: Providers in survey sample by type**

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Space providers marked with an asterisk directly participated in the study. The remaining venues were supplied by survey respondents who reported using their space. Some respondents did not provide a specific organization or venue name in the survey; we have included their data in the study but have not included them in this list. Several universities operate multiple venues that are analyzed separately in the analysis but are represented once below.

### ***Broadway/touring viable venues***

Boston Opera House\*  
Boch Center \*  
Colonial Theatre  
Symphony Hall  
Orpheum Theatre

### ***Nonprofit performing arts venues***

American Repertory Theater\*  
Charlestown Working Theater\*  
Huntington Theatre Company\*  
Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre\*  
Lyric Stage Company of Boston\*  
Passim\*  
The Footlight Club\*  
The Strand Theatre\*

### ***University-managed venues***

Babson College  
Berklee College of Music\*  
Boston Playwrights Theater  
Boston University\*  
Emerson College\*  
Harvard University\*  
Lasell College  
Longy School of Music\*  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
MassArt  
New England Conservatory\*  
Northeastern University  
Roxbury Community College\*  
Suffolk University

The Boston Conservatory\*  
Tufts University  
University of Massachusetts

### ***Cultural centers***

Arts at the Armory  
Boston Center for the Arts\*  
Boston Community Circle for the Arts\*  
Central Square Theater  
CityPOP Egleston  
Community Art Center  
Dance Dimensions  
Deborah Mason School of Dance  
Hovey Players  
Indian Hill Music School  
Jamaica Plain Tuesday Club\*  
Jeane Paige School of Dance  
Jeannette Neill Dance Studio  
Lexington Community Music School  
Madison Park Development Corporation\*  
Mass Motion Dance Studio  
Melrose Memorial Hall  
Mosesian Center for the Arts\*  
Multicultural Arts Center\*  
MusiConnects  
New School of Music\*  
Outpost 186  
Puppet Showplace Theater\*  
Somerville Theatre  
Sound Museum  
Spontaneous Celebrations  
Studio at 550

The Brookline Ballet School  
The Green Room  
The Space  
Third Life Studio  
Urbanity Dance  
Veronica Robles Cultural Center\*  
Villa Victoria Center for the Arts\*  
Washington Street Art Center

***Religious venues***

All Saints' Church  
Allin Congregational Church  
Arlington Street Church  
Beth El Temple Center  
Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Boston Harbor Community Church  
Christian Science Center  
Church of Nazarene  
Clarendon Hill Church  
Emmanuel Church\*  
First Baptist Church  
First Church Boston  
First Church Cambridge  
First Church Waltham  
First Korean Church  
First Parish Church  
Holy Name Church  
International Community Church  
Masonic Temple  
Mission Church  
North Shore Community Baptist Church  
Old South Church  
Reservoir Church  
Saint John's Episcopal Church  
St. Cecilia Parish  
St. John's Episcopal Church  
St. Mary's Church  
St. Paul Episcopal Church  
Temple Ohabei Shalom  
Tremont Temple

United Parish Church  
Unity Church of God  
Unity Somerville  
UU Urban Ministry\*  
Wollaston Congregational Church

***Rehearsal venues***

Arlington Music Studios  
Charles River Studios  
Green Street Studios\*  
Jamspot\*  
My Lady on Fire  
The Allston Space  
The Dance Complex\*

***Commercially operated venues***

Back Bay Events Center  
Bella Luna and the Milky Way  
Bill's Bar  
Brighton Music Hall  
Club Café  
Fazenda Coffee Roasters  
Great Scott  
House of Blues  
ImprovBoston  
Johnny D's  
Lansdowne Pub  
Limelight  
Middle East  
Midway Café  
Nightshift Brewing  
Paradise Rock Club  
The Burren  
The Lilypad  
The Regent Theatre  
The Riot Theater  
The Sinclair  
Trident Cafe and Booksellers  
Wonder Bar

***Other venues***

Barnstable Performing Arts Center  
Boston Children's Museum  
Boston Latin School  
Brattle Theatre  
Cambridge Community Center  
Cambridge Rindge and Latin  
Coolidge Corner Theatre  
Davis Square Theater  
Edward Devotion School  
Elks Lodge  
Esh Circus Arts  
Faneuil Hall  
Franklin Park Zoo  
Goethe-Institut  
Hyde Square Task Force  
Industry Lab  
Inner Space Yoga  
Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston  
JM Studio Productions  
Karma Yoga  
Museum of Fine Arts  
Museum of National Heritage  
Naimo Photography Gallery  
New England Aikikai  
Nobles and Greenough School  
North Bennet Street School  
Okan\*  
Old North Foundation of Boston\*  
Old South Meeting House\*  
Out of the Blue Art Gallery  
Somerville Veterans Memorial Cemetery  
Studio 52  
The Democracy Center  
The Hatch Shell  
The Record Company  
The Z Spot  
Todos Dance and Fitness  
Uforge Gallery\*  
United South End Settlements

Watertown High School  
WGBH  
YMCA of Greater Boston  
ZUMIX\*

### **XIII. Appendix: Interviewees and Select Advisory Group Members**

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Jesse Irons	A Far Cry
Diane Quinn and Anna Fitzloff	American Repertory Theater
Jim Grace	Arts & Business Council of Boston
Catherine Peterson	ArtsBoston
David Dower	ArtsEmerson
Joe Spaulding	Boch Center
Max Hodges and Ming Hui	Boston Ballet
Debra Cash	Boston Dance Alliance
Craig Coogan	Boston Gay Men's Chorus
Dan Shea	Boston Hassle
Esther Nelson and Eileen Williston	Boston Lyric Opera
Dan Yonah Marshall	Brookline Community Center for the Arts
Gary Dunning and Karen Brown	Celebrity Series
Sarah Champnois	Company One
Emily O'Neill	Fort Point Arts Community
Lyndsay Allyn Cox	Fresh Ink Theatre Company
Michael Maso and Joey Riddle	Huntington Theatre Company
John Tobin	Laugh Boston
Don Law, James Jensen, and Ryan Vangel	Live Nation New England
Matt Chapuran	Lyric Stage Company of Boston
Jay Paget	Massachusetts Cultural Council
Anna Burnham	Mosesian Center for the Arts
Bree Edwards	Northeastern University
Ryan Agate	RTT Presents
Adara Meyers	Sleeping Weazel
Ian Judge	Somerville Theater
Julie Hennrikus	StageSource
Josh Bhatti	The Bowery Presents: Boston
Peter DiMuro	The Dance Complex
Damon Leibert	The Rockwell
Abe Rybeck	The Theatre Offensive
Maure Aronson and Susan Weiler	World Music/CRASHArts