SALINA MUSIC CENSUS



Photo Courtesy of Tanner Colvin

Summary REPORT

September 2026

SOUND MUSIC CITIES

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This report is the story and interpretation of the 2026 Salina Music Census. The interactive dashboard at salinaarts.com/salina-music-census is the full data record: every question, filtered by sector, age, gender, race and ethnicity, and years of experience. Each section of this report says what else the dashboard holds for that indicator.

A note on base sizes, which applies throughout. The census drew 211 responses. Views filtered to venue and presenter respondents (10% of the pool, about 21 people, and fewer on venue-specific questions) and to industry respondents (13%, about 27 people) rest on small counts, where a single answer can move a percentage by several points. Those figures are best read as directional rather than precise.

A Community Effort

Salina asked its music community to speak for itself. Before a single chart, that is the first thing the census tells us about this city: enough people cared about music here to ask the question, and 211 people making, presenting and supporting music here answered it.

KANSAS MUSIC CITIES TOGETHER

The Salina Music Census is part of Kansas Music Cities Together, a year-long, cohort-based program designed to help Kansas communities better understand, connect, and support their local music ecosystems. Led by Sound Music Cities in partnership with the Kansas Arts Commission, and supported by Movement Musick, Kansas Music Cities Together brings Kansas communities together for shared learning and technical assistance. Each participating community conducts the same Music Ecosystem Health Assessment, built on ten indicators, so that a musician in Salina, a venue owner in Wichita, and a presenter in Topeka are answering the same questions and their communities can learn from one another's answers.

The program is designed to meet communities where they are. Salina is a regional hub in north central Kansas with a professional hall that brings in national acts, a symphony with youth ensembles, a river festival, and a working circuit of bars, community stages and churches, and this report is written for a city of that shape. Its questions are about connection, audience, and the rooms between the bar stage and the concert hall rather than about whether music exists here at all. What Salina learns about itself also travels. Its musicians already work a corridor that runs to Wichita, Manhattan, Kansas City and Topeka, and the cohort exists so that no Kansas city has to answer these questions alone.

SALINA'S RESPONSE

The Salina Music Census was carried by Salina Arts & Humanities, the census's Lead Organizer, and fifteen Community Partners, who shared the survey through their own networks, rooms and audiences. The census page was hosted at salinaarts.com/salina-music-census, the same address this report points readers to for the results. The census was open to anyone 18 or older who contributes to the music community in Salina and the surrounding area, including neighboring Ottawa County, in any capacity, paid or unpaid, including people who live here but work in music elsewhere.

The survey was open from August 20 to September 4, 2026, and drew 211 responses: 78% from music creatives, 13% from industry and organization workers, and 10% from venues and presenters. Eighty-seven respondents also wrote about what they value in the scene and ninety-two about what frustrates them, and their words run through every section of this report.

That response is itself a finding. In a community where, as the pages that follow show, the most-wanted resource is a place to connect and collaborate and the preferred way to organize is a coalition, the partners and people who carried this census are the first draft of the network respondents say they want.

LEAD ORGANIZER

Salina Arts & Humanities organized the Salina Music Census, with Community Partners Salina Symphony, Stiefel Theatre, S.M. Hanson Music, Friends of the River, Rolling Hills Zoo, Smoky Hill Museum, Kansas Wesleyan University, Salina Art Center, The Land Institute, Salina Public Library, Salina Downtown, Inc., The Temple, Theatre Salina, The Garage and Visit Salina. The census was conducted by Sound Music Cities. Results and the interactive dashboard: salinaarts.com/salina-music-census.

Executive Summary

In the late summer of 2026, the people who make, present and work in music in Salina answered the same set of questions about their lives and their city. Organized by Salina Arts & Humanities with fifteen Community Partners, the census drew 211 responses between August 20 and September 4. What follows is what they said, organized around ten indicators of music ecosystem health, and what Salina might do about it. The interactive dashboard at salinaarts.com/salina-music-census holds the full record.

The clearest thing Salina said is that its music community is warm and not yet organized. Respondents describe a scene that is safe (91%) and cooperative (75%), and camaraderie is the largest subject in their written answers. Asked what would help, they give the same answer three ways: a place to connect and collaborate is the top resource request (49%), community and collaboration the support with the greatest impact (50%), and one central place to find events, venues, opportunities and musicians the most repeated single ask in the comments. Asked how the scene should organize, 63% chose a coalition or alliance, well ahead of a dedicated organization (27%) or a city office (18%).

The people asking are mostly the ones who make the music, and nearly all of them have been at it a long time: 78% of respondents are creatives and 84% have more than a decade in music. The scene has two anchors, the concert hall and the bar stage, with classical and rock musicians in about equal measure, and its players already work a circuit to Wichita, Manhattan and Kansas City. Music moves real money here, $4.3 million a year in income across respondents and $1.2 million a year in creative spending, though only 37% of that spending stays in town.

Few live on music. Two thirds of respondents hold a job outside music, most because music alone does not pay enough. The typical local show pays $100, four in ten creatives play no paid local show in a given month, a third of respondents are unpaid for their music work, and rising cost of living is the leading career concern. In their comments, respondents describe pay that has not moved since the 1990s and ask for something plain: published pay ranges and a guarantee they can count on.

The audience is the problem every sector shares. Finding clients, customers or audiences is named by 72% of respondents, and people describe a city that turns out when promotion is done well and has no dependable way to do it. The rooms are the second constraint: most reporting venues hold 100 people or fewer, and none reports a capacity between 101 and 200, the next step up respondents name in their own words. Behind both sits a pipeline question. Keyboardists and accompanists are aging out, two teachers cover strings across the district, and 22% of respondents are 65 or older against 8% under 25.

This report closes with six community action opportunities drawn from what respondents asked for, beginning with a time-limited City music task force that brings the community and the city to one table, with working groups on regulation, venue capacity and financial support. They are starting points for discussion, not a finished plan.



Photo courtesy of Salina Arts & Humanities and the Salina Symphony

Salina Music Ecosystem at a Glance

WHO ANSWERED

211

responses

Collected August 20 to September 4, 2026, from creatives, industry workers, and venues and presenters.

78 / 13 / 10

creatives / industry / venues

A creative-heavy ecosystem. Venue and presenter figures rest on about 21 people and read as directional.

84%

have more than ten years in music

A deeply rooted workforce; 4% are in their first three years.

179

written comments

87 on what respondents value in the scene and 92 on what frustrates them.

WHO THEY ARE

57%

men

Against 41% women. Among industry respondents the share of men rises to 68%.

22%

aged 65 or older

Against 8% aged 18 to 24. The scene's depth and its succession question in one figure.

9 / 12

Hispanic share, census vs city

The one place the census clearly under-reaches the city it describes.

69%

own their home

And 61% report no housing change in three years. Housing is a stable base here.

WHAT MUSIC IS WORTH HERE

$4.3M

in music income each year

Real money, spread thin: music is about a quarter of respondents' income.

$1.2M

spent by creatives on their careers

A customer base for Salina businesses; 37% of it stays in town.

567

live events a year

An average of 28 per room, with 78% of reporting rooms holding 100 people or fewer.

$100

median pay for a local gig

The average is $240.11, lifted by a smaller number of well-paid dates.

HOW IT FEELS TO WORK HERE

67%

work outside music

For 80% of them, because music alone does not pay enough.

60%

rank cost of living a top-two concern

Creatives. The squeeze is on the cost side, ahead of pay rates and lack of work at 44%.

72%

name finding an audience

The top challenge to music work, far ahead of space and operating costs at 34%.

91 / 49

safe / elitist

The share who describe the scene each way. Welcoming to be inside, harder to enter.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WANTS

49%

want a place to connect and collaborate

The top resource request, ahead of services, space and training.

63%

recommend a coalition or alliance

Against 27% for a dedicated organization and 18% for a city music office.

94 / 87

plan to stay in music / in Salina

Creatives, definitely or probably. Committed to the work and, nearly as much, to the city.

01 Ecosystem Composition

Who makes up a music ecosystem, and who the census reached, shapes how every other finding in this report should be read.

Salina's music community is built mostly by the people who make the music, and nearly all of them have been at it for more than a decade. Classical and rock musicians anchor the scene side by side, and its players already work a regional circuit to Wichita, Manhattan and Kansas City. The census reached a pool that looks much like the city, though Hispanic residents are somewhat under-reached and the comments describe that community as working largely on its own.

211
census respondents: 78% creatives, 13% industry, 10% venues and presenters

84%
have more than ten years in music; 4% are in their first three

22%
are aged 65 or older, against 8% aged 18 to 24

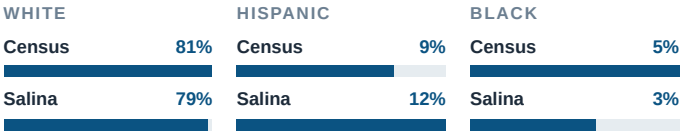
21%
of travel mentions name Wichita, the most-named destination for music work

ECOSYSTEM SECTORS



This is a creative-heavy ecosystem, so the presenting and service layers are each described in this report by a small group whose figures read as directional rather than precise.

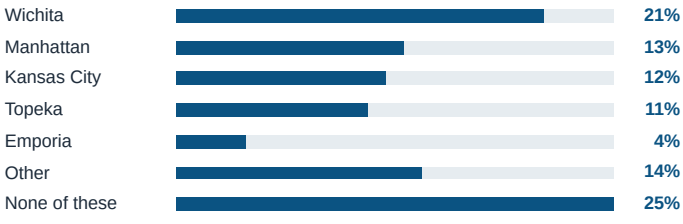
RACE AND ETHNICITY, CENSUS VS SALINA



Two or more races 3% vs 4%; Asian 1% vs 2%; Native American 2% vs 0%.

The census tracks the city's makeup closely, with Hispanic residents the one group reached at a noticeably lower rate than they live here, which frames the belonging findings later in this report.

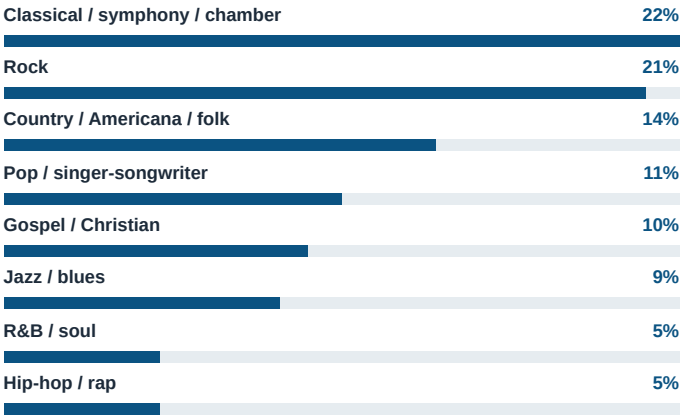
CITIES TRAVELED TO FOR MUSIC WORK IN THE LAST YEAR



Share of all destinations named; check all that apply.

Salina sits on a working regional circuit rather than at the end of one, and three of the four Kansas cities its musicians name most are running censuses of their own.

GENRES RESPONDENTS IDENTIFY WITH



Share of all genre selections; respondents could select up to three. Electronic 3%, Latin and world 1%.

Classical and rock share the lead almost evenly, a two-anchor scene where the concert hall and the bar stage matter about equally, while hip-hop, R&B, electronic and Latin music together make up a small share of what respondents identify with.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Salina has extremely good talent in abundance. This helps every musician by offering differing styles and keeping things fresh."

"Diversity of music styles performed."

"I have been impressed with the number and variety of music opportunities in central KS. I am most involved in classical music and educational opportunities."

"There is a growing lack of younger musicians in the area willing to fill the shoes of older folks who are retiring. We need better support of music programs in schools and encouragement of young people to stay in the area."

"The only thing that can be frustrating in Salina's music scene is a lack of diversity in genre. From what I've observed, most performances around town fall into rock, folk, and country. I would love to see more hip hop, electronic, indie, experimental, and jazz at events like First Friday's and the River Festival."

"KS is very spread out so much traveling is required. Pay is low but some organizations (i.e. Salina Symphony) are working to increase musician pay."

What respondents value about the scene — What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

Gender and sexual orientation; age, experience and gender filtered by sector; the full ten-genre list; and every destination named for music work, including write-ins. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

02 Creative Profile

The people who make the music are the ecosystem's largest sector and the one most exposed to what a living costs.

Salina's creatives are seasoned multi-hyphenates: the same people play originals, work cover gigs, sit in the orchestra and teach. Nearly all intend to keep making music, and most intend to do it here. What worries them most is a cost of living rising around pay that stays flat, and local live performance is the stream that carries the most weight in their income. Most of what they spend on their craft leaves town.

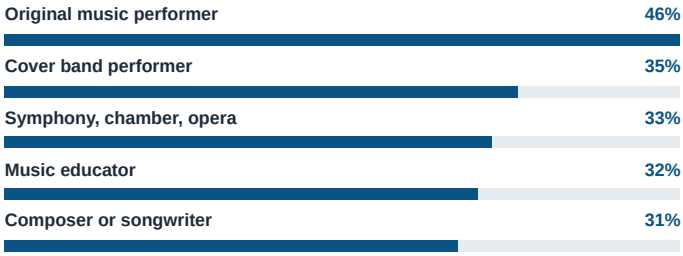
$7,456
average annual creative spend

37%
of creative spending stays local

87%
of creatives have more than ten years in music

94 / 87
plan to keep working in music / to keep living in Salina

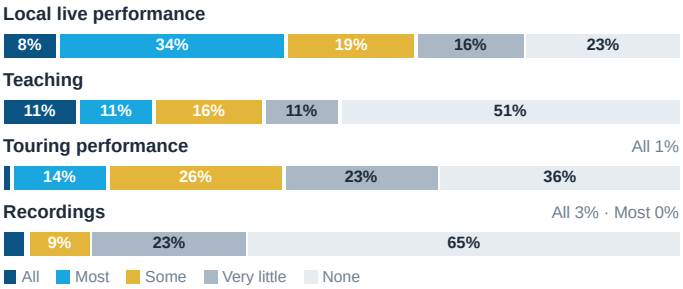
CREATIVE TYPES AND ROLES



Select all that apply.

Salina's creatives wear several hats at once, and the overlap of original work, cover gigs, ensemble playing and teaching is how most of them piece a music life together.

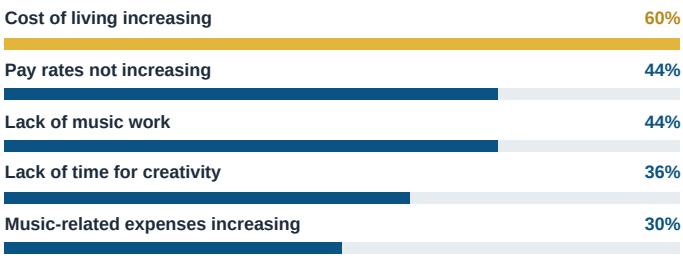
HOW MUCH OF THEIR INCOME COMES FROM EACH SOURCE



Creatives. Merchandise, songwriting and studio work: 6%, 3% and 2% earn all or most of their income from them.

Local live performance is the income stream that matters most, paying about twice as many creatives all or most of their income as teaching, the next source, while recordings, songwriting, studio work and merchandise pay almost no one a living.

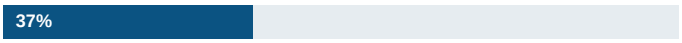
CAREER CONCERNS, TOP TWO TIERS COMBINED



The pressure creatives feel most is a cost of living rising around pay rates that are not, with a shortage of music work close behind.

CREATIVE SPENDING AND WHERE IT LANDS

$1.2M put back into music each year by creative respondents



37% of that spending goes to local providers; the average creative spends $7,456 a year

Creatives put real money into their craft each year and most of it leaves Salina, so their spending is a customer base the city's music businesses are only partly serving.

PLANS TO STAY OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

94%
will definitely or probably keep working in music

87%
will definitely or probably keep living in Salina

10% are not sure about Salina and 4% expect to leave. 60% define success locally, 30% regionally, 10% nationally or internationally.

Commitment to music runs slightly ahead of commitment to Salina, and the one in ten who are not sure about the city is the retention question worth watching.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Lots of Local musicians that are highly skilled"

"good things: a chance to grow into a new instrument, freedom inside performance, working with great vocalists and a good pianist and leader"

"Creating and letting people hear what I've created"

"Access and expenses. Wages are down, cost of living is up, and there's no return on investment"

"We don't have the funding to support teachers, equally creative and highly proficient, to teach in the different instrument families and voice genres. [...] But I can't afford it. I'd have to finance myself. So I focus on my main, non-music work."

"…but I do want to get my musical work out there, more, and I think our band could be a lot bigger if we had certain kinds of support. Then again, in either the band stuff or my solo experimental work, we may need to build something bigger elsewhere before we will have more of an audience in Salina or its environs."

What respondents value about the scene · What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

Every stream on the Sources of Income chart, all eight expense categories and how much creatives spend locally, what success looks like (60% local, 30% regional, 10% national or international), creative age, gender, race and experience, and home use for music work. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

03 Venue/Presenter Profile

Venues and presenters are the rooms where the rest of the ecosystem meets its audience.

Salina's presenting layer is small and mixed, and locally owned businesses and nonprofits run equal shares of it. Most reporting rooms are small, and none sits in the size a growing act would move into next. The people running them are certain about staying in Salina and a little less certain about staying in music. These figures rest on the smallest respondent group in the census and read as directional.

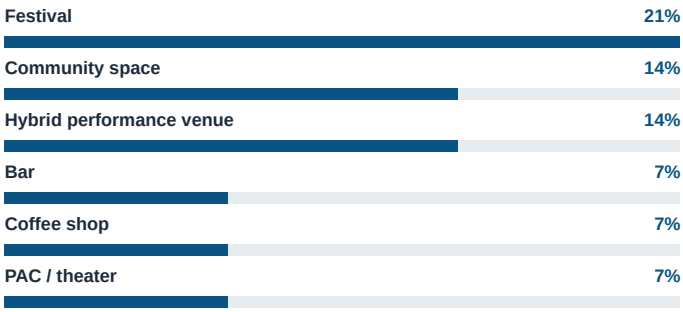
567
live events presented annually

28
live events per venue, on average

78%
of reporting venues hold 100 people or fewer

100 / 80
plan to keep living in Salina / to keep working in music

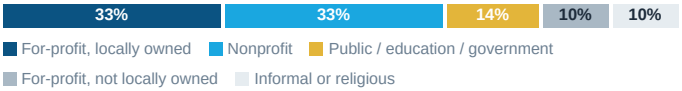
VENUE AND PRESENTER TYPES



Mostly private events, independent promoter: 7% each; other 14%.

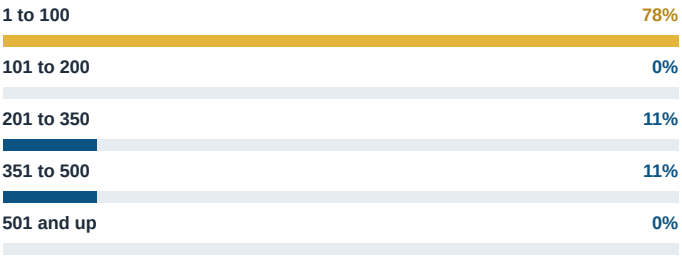
Festivals and community spaces lead Salina's presenting mix, so live music here depends on occasions as much as on rooms that program every week.

VENUE OWNERSHIP AND TAX STRUCTURE



Locally owned businesses and nonprofits run equal shares of the presenting layer, so Salina's rooms answer to ticket margins and to missions in about equal measure.

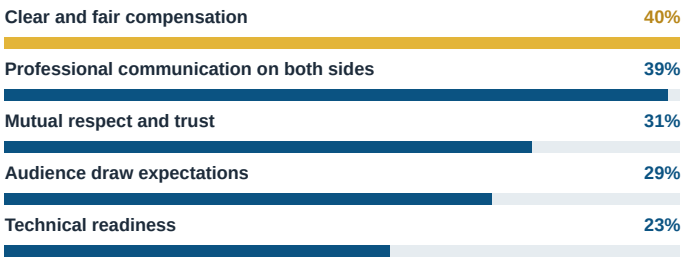
VENUE CAPACITY



Venue owners only; 75% can present outdoors (see Music-Friendly Policies).

Most reporting rooms hold 100 people or fewer and none falls between 101 and 200, the next step up respondents name for a growing act, while nothing reported sits above 500.

WHAT MOST SHAPES THE ARTIST-VENUE RELATIONSHIP



All respondents; select up to three.

Across all respondents, fair pay and professional communication are named almost equally, so the fixes are about expectations on both sides as much as about money.

PLANS TO STAY OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

100%
will definitely or probably keep living in Salina

80%
will definitely or probably keep working in music

On music, 7% are not sure and 14% expect to stop. 56% of these respondents operate the venue and 22% own it.

Every presenter who answered expects to stay in Salina, while one in five is not sure or expects to step away from music, so the risk on this side is rooms going quiet rather than people leaving.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

What respondents value about the scene

"Wonderful professional venue bringing in national acts and several bars bringing in regional musicians"

"There are some good, intimate venue spaces."

"Small events and venues making a great effort to provide opportunities for local artists"

What frustrates them

"We need a small 50-100-cap room venue that can serve as a springboard for emerging acts or niche artists. A 200-cap space for touring acts, local acts that aren't rock or country but draw large audiences, and a 500-cap space for mid-tier regional and national acts, with local support as openers."

"Small venues who want to support musicians don't know how to find them, how to ensure technology that supports musicians, or struggle to receive clear communication and professionalism from emerging musicians"

"If you're going to hire a band: make sure you have ample room for the band and for people to dance. Make sure you pay them promptly. Respect goes a long way."

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

Age, experience, gender and race and ethnicity for venue and presenter respondents; role in the entity (56% operate the venue, 22% own it); home use for music work; the full venue type list; and the full artist-venue relationship ranking. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

04 Industry Profile

The industry and organization sector is the service layer that turns individual talent into a working economy.

Salina's industry layer is small, young and home-based: production support and marketing lead its occupations, and more than half its members work from a home office. Creatives mostly handle their own publicity, booking and management, and the service they most often buy outside the region is publishing and licensing. The sector serves a mostly local clientele and nearly all of it plans to stay. These figures rest on a small group and read as directional.

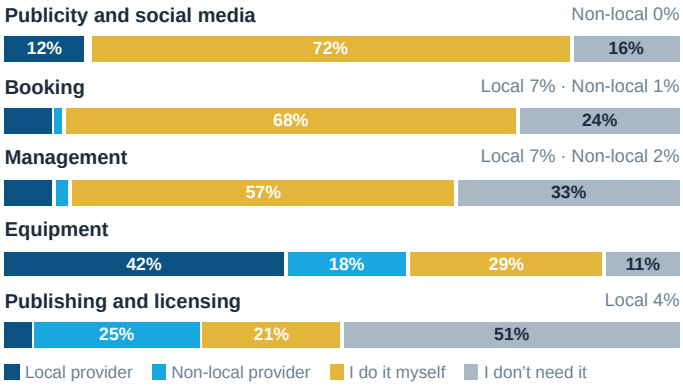
72%
of creatives handle their own publicity and social media

54%
of industry respondents draw at least three quarters of their clients locally

95 / 87
plan to keep living in Salina / to keep working in music

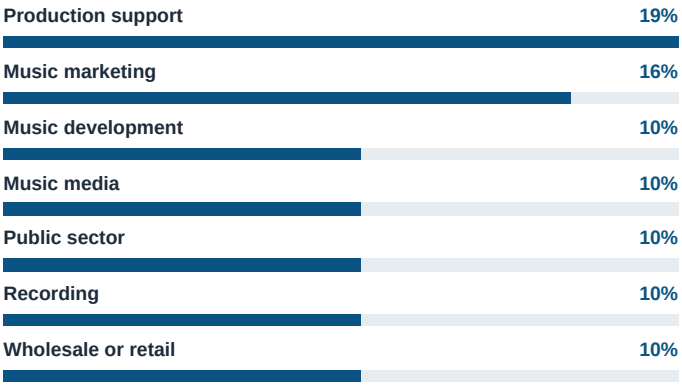
57%
of industry respondents use their home as an office

HOW CREATIVES GET INDUSTRY SERVICES



Creatives handle their own publicity, booking and management almost by default, and publishing and licensing is the one service they buy outside the region more often than at home, which sends rights work out of town.

INDUSTRY OCCUPATION



Event or venue work and manufacturing 6% each; label and distribution 3%; no one currently in publishing. 17% are aged 18 to 24.

Salina's industry sector is concentrated in production support and marketing, with almost no one currently working in the label, distribution and publishing roles that move music beyond the region.

LOCATION OF CLIENTS SERVED

54%
serve a client base at least three-quarters local

63%
serve no international clients

Industry respondents serve a mostly local clientele and very few serve anyone abroad, so the sector's growth is tied to the local scene's growth rather than to export.

PLANS TO STAY OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

95%
will definitely or probably keep living in Salina

87%
will definitely or probably keep working in music

Definitely yes: 52% on Salina, 35% on music.

Industry respondents are among the most committed to Salina of any group, though only about a third say definitely yes to staying in music.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Having a venue like the Stiefel and the opportunity for photograph some big names for a number of years. Other events such as the Smoky Hill River Festival, Salina Symphony and KWU offer a chance to photograph local and regional talent."

"Word of mouth is huge for networking, especially in a world where EVERYONE is competing on social media. Some of our best show opportunities have come from people who verbally suggest us to others."

"I like that there is some effort to address the needs of the music community."

"Unless you hire a promoter or agent there really isn't any good way to get your name out there besides word of mouth. I dont want to hire a promoter not coyld I afford one if I did."

"I dont believe we need more venues, we just need to equip and make our local options easier to work with and have more things a production company would need including more then 1 20 amp circuit near the performance space."

"More studios with engineers."

What respondents value about the scene · What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

Industry age, gender, race and experience (42% are aged 25 to 39); the full occupation list; all nine service categories; client location bands for local, national and international work; and home use for music work. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

05 Economic Activity

Whether music work pays, and who it pays, decides who can afford to keep doing it.

Music moves real money through Salina, but it rarely provides a living on its own. Two thirds of respondents work outside music, mostly because music alone does not pay enough, and a typical local show pays about a hundred dollars. A third of respondents are unpaid for their music work, and much of local performance is volunteer or community service. The rights side of the business is thin, with most respondents holding no intellectual property of their own.

$4.3M
music income across respondents each year

26%
of respondents' income comes from music

$77.1K
average household income

$20.4K
average annual income from music

WORK OUTSIDE MUSIC



67% work outside music; for 88% of them it is the primary income

Why: not enough earnings from music alone 80%; benefits 50%; career development 39%.

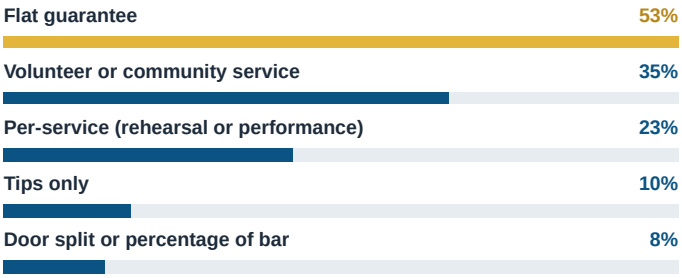
Outside employment is the mechanism sustaining participation in Salina's music economy, and its main driver is that music alone does not pay enough.

HOW MUSIC WORK IS PAID



Direct payment is the most common arrangement, but a third of respondents are unpaid for their music work, so a large part of the scene runs on volunteered time.

HOW LOCAL PERFORMANCES ARE PAID



Select up to two.

$240.11
average pay per local performance

$100
median pay per local performance

43% of creatives play no paid local show in a typical month.

Flat guarantees are the norm when a show pays, but volunteer and community-service performance comes second, and an average fee well above the hundred-dollar median means a few well-paid dates are lifting the average for everyone else.

RIGHTS AND ROYALTIES

71%
do not consider themselves intellectual property rightsholders

38%
collect no performance royalties through any organization



Most respondents hold no intellectual property and many collect no performance royalties while aggregators are the most-used licensing route, so what original music Salina produces goes out more easily than royalties come back.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Pretty regular places to play with steady, reasonable pay."

"I think the city and other organized venues do pay performers, and that is a positive. More of that would be great. I think musicians are willing to purchase equipment with their own money if they know they will be paid to perform."

"I have not dealt with any bad situations and have always been paid the agreed upon amount."

"The Downtown committee does not pay musicians. There needs to be more incentive. $100- 200/gig was standard in the 90s and should be much more today."

"There are lots of opportunities to play for free or tips - it would be great if more of those had at least some kind of guarantee, that was easily knowable. It is also can be challenging to know how much to ask for."

"Venues that promote themselves using live music but do not pay performers. I realize open- mic nights have been around and give someone a chance to try out but it has turned into regular performers playing at no cost."

What respondents value about the scene — What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

Household income and the share of income from music by bracket, touring frequency and pay ($279.06 average, $100 median; 65% of creatives play no paid touring show in a typical month), all five outside-work motivations, every royalty and licensing channel, and compensation type filtered by years of experience. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

06 Ecosystem Development

An ecosystem develops when the people in it can find each other, their audiences and the resources already within reach.

What Salina's music community asks for first is each other. A place to connect and collaborate is the top resource request, and community is the support people say would help their careers most. The most common barrier is finding an audience, far ahead of cost or space. Financial support sits largely untouched, and the community has a clear view of the form an organized effort should take: a coalition of many partners rather than a single office.

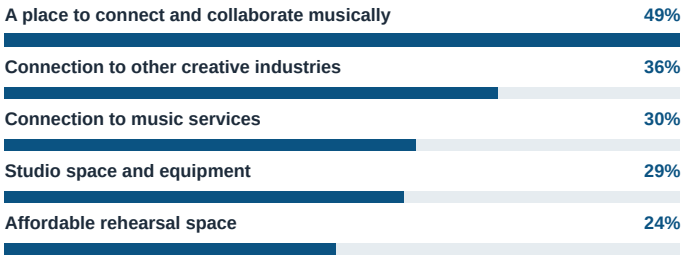
63% would organize the scene as a coalition or alliance

72% name finding clients, customers or audiences as a top challenge

50% name community and collaboration as the support with the greatest impact

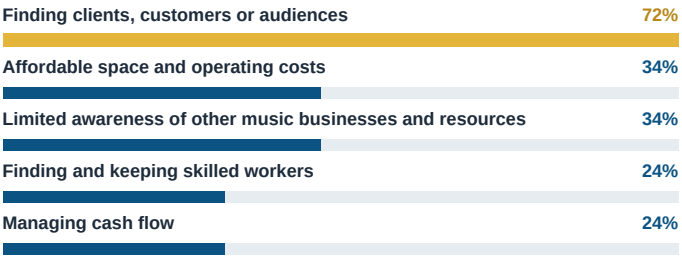
17% have received financial assistance for music work

LOCAL RESOURCES THAT WOULD HELP MOST



The resource respondents want most is a place to connect and collaborate musically, ahead of any service, space or training.

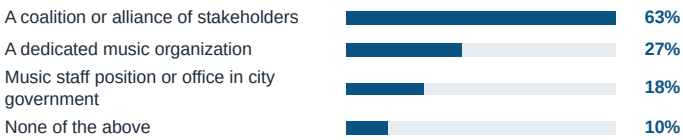
CHALLENGES THAT MOST AFFECT MUSIC WORK



Select up to three.

Finding clients, customers or audiences is named by nearly three in four respondents, far ahead of cost or space, which makes audience the shared problem of every sector.

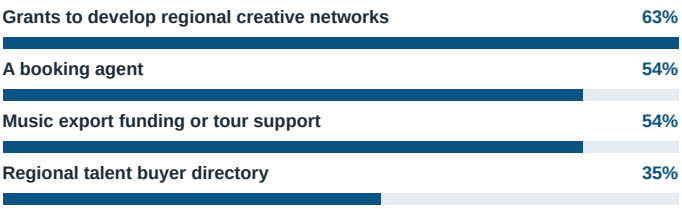
PREFERRED FORM OF AN ORGANIZING EFFORT



Select up to two.

The community's clear preference is a coalition where musicians, venues, businesses, nonprofits and schools work together, well ahead of a single organization or a city office.

RESOURCES THAT WOULD GROW REGIONAL TOURING



Select all that apply.

Asked what would grow regional touring, respondents point first to grants that build regional creative networks, then to a booking agent and tour support.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR MUSIC WORK

17% have received financial assistance for their music work

28% were not aware any opportunities existed

61% have not actively sought assistance; 12% cite a lack of grant-writing skills.

Few respondents have received financial assistance and far more have never looked or did not know it existed, so available support is going unused as much as it is falling short.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Salina has a very supportive scene of musicians. There is a sense of comraderie in the music ecosystem here; it's collaborative rather than competitive"

"I think the Horizons grants and other opportunities that Salina Arts & Humanities provides are amazing and I think more people could use them if they weren't afraid to try to obtain them."

"The city of Salina appreciates live music, specifically original music. It is not hard to get a big crowd if promotion is done correctly."

"A central hub for sharing information pertaining to musical events and musicians"

"There is Salina Chorale, Salina Symphony, KWU music, local bands, etc. What I don't see is a place for musicians and artists in general to know each other."

"It doesn't feel like a collective - there's a handful of venues but no coordination across the city for music itself. There needs to be some better promotion for all shows and artists across the board."

What respondents value about the scene — What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

Business resources presenters want (audience development tools 71%, a best practices guide 64%, a production directory and a venue and presenter coalition 57% each); workspace needed but lacking (25% lack live performance space); the full support and financial assistance lists; and challenges by sector. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

07 Workforce Development

A workforce grows through training, credentials and the networks that carry them, and Salina's sits mostly outside the last two.

Salina's music workforce is deeply experienced, mostly self-taught and largely unaffiliated. More than half learned by doing rather than through a degree, and two thirds belong to no professional organization. The one thing every sector wants to learn is how to record and produce its work; past that, the sectors part ways. Industry respondents have held far more roles than they hold today, a reserve of experience the scene is not drawing on.

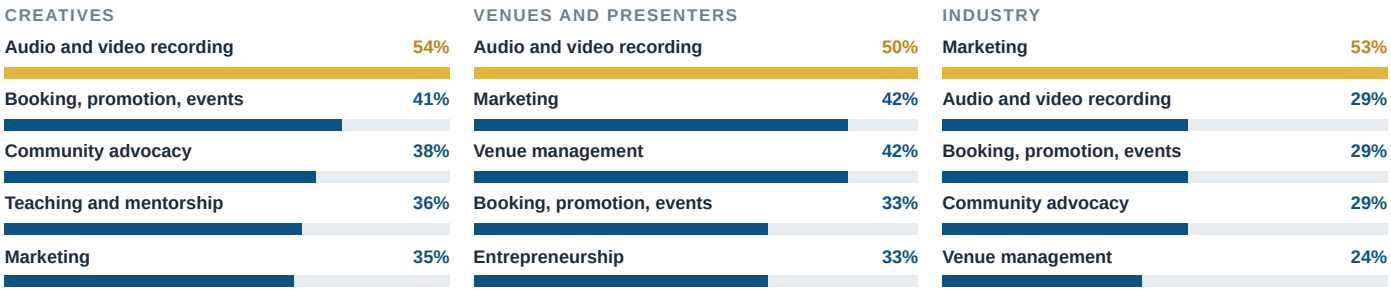
66%
hold no professional membership or registration

56%
mostly learned music by experience

51%
want training in audio and video recording and engineering

92%
of all respondents plan to keep working in music

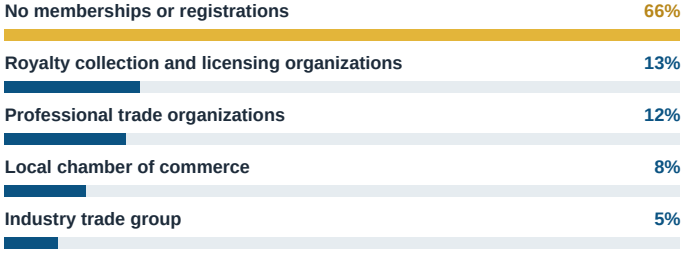
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WANTED, BY SECTOR



Top five per sector; multi-select. All respondents: audio and video recording 51%, booking, promotion and event production 39%, marketing 38%, community advocacy 35%, teaching techniques 31%. Venue, presenter and industry views rest on small bases and are directional.

Audio and video recording sits in every sector's top three and leads for creatives and presenters, so the one shared training ask is the ability to capture and produce the work; past that, creatives want booking and advocacy, presenters marketing and venue management, and industry respondents marketing above all.

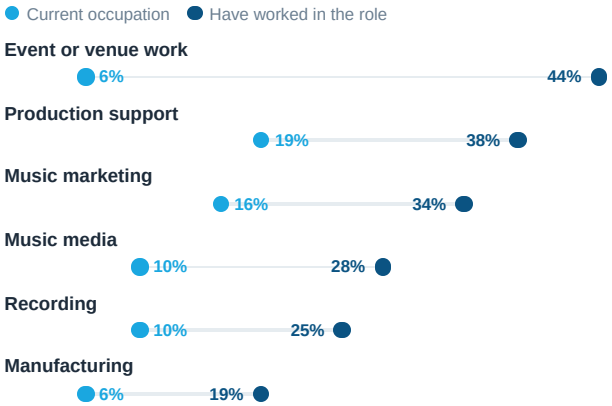
MEMBERSHIPS AND REGISTRATIONS



Union 4%. How the workforce learned: 56% mostly by experience, 29% through a post-secondary music degree, 17% through other education useful for music work.

Two thirds of respondents belong to nothing, which means the trade groups, unions and rights organizations that carry professional standards elsewhere have a small footprint in Salina.

INDUSTRY ROLES: EVER HELD VS HELD NOW



Industry respondents have held far more roles than they hold now, most sharply in event and venue work, a reserve of experience the sector is not currently using.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"There are some good strong music teachers in this community that show an interest in their students. More opportunities for musicians of all ages to gather to learn and create."

"My favorite thing is the Salina Symphony. The youth symphonies can definitely provide a path for growth for those interested in the intense skill development necessary to perform classical music."

"We have impeccable talent for the size of our community. We also have some nice schools/organizations teaching music for all levels."

"It's frustrating how few keyboardists are active in the community. The few of us that play the gigs are exhausted. [...] Several great ones we have relied on for years are aging out and we don't have the manpower to keep up."

"We need one additional music educator for strings. Two high schools and so many grade schools split between only 2 people is not enough."

"More collaboration and professional development opportunities."

What respondents value about the scene — What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

The full training skills list for each sector, the full membership list, experience for all respondents, and industry work experience against current occupation for every role. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

08 Livability

Whether music people can afford to stay is the condition every other indicator depends on.

Most of Salina's music people are insured and housed, and six in ten report no affordability struggle at all. The strain shows at the edges: insurance premiums, rent, food and health care for a meaningful minority, and housing costs that have risen for one in five. For venues and presenters, livability is an operating question rather than a personal one, and the cost of talent is the pressure they feel most.

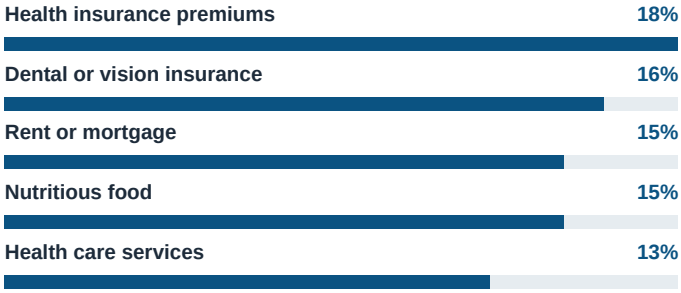
61%
report no affordability struggles

69%
own their home; 61% report no housing change in three years

88%
carry health insurance, most often through an employer

60%
of presenters rank talent costs a top-two business challenge

AFFORDABILITY STRUGGLES



61% report no struggles; select all that apply.

Most respondents report no affordability struggle, and for those who do, health insurance, rent and food lead, the costs an outside job is often there to cover.

HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

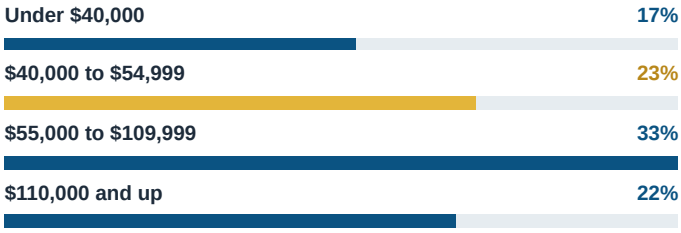


88% of respondents have health insurance; 13% do not

Coverage comes from an employer (46%), a government program (21%), a family member (18%) or an own policy (12%).

Coverage is high, but it comes mainly through an employer or a government program, which ties health security to work outside music or to age rather than to music work.

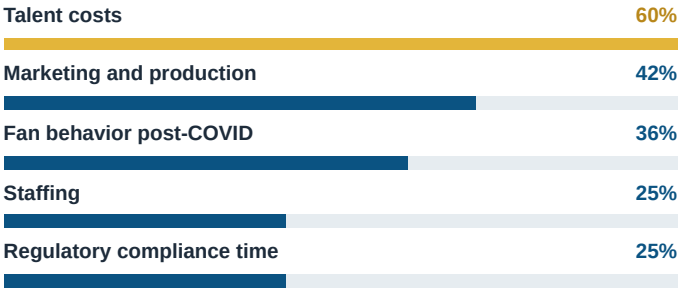
HOUSEHOLD INCOME



5% preferred not to say. Housing: 69% own, 23% rent; 20% have seen housing costs rise in three years.

Respondent households cluster in the lower-middle brackets, with nearly a quarter between $40,000 and $54,999, while more than one in five earns $110,000 or more.

PRESENTERS' BUSINESS CHALLENGES, TOP TWO TIERS



Venue and presenter respondents; a small base. Talent costs are ranked the single greatest challenge by 47%.

For venues and presenters the strain is operational, with talent costs ranked the greatest challenge far more often than anything else.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I am fortunate that I am retired from another creative field that I still pursue avidly, and I don't depend on music for my income."

"Air Conditioning Opportunities for musical growth Community Connections Seeing Friends"

"Where else can you go on a Saturday afternoon & chances are there is a solo act playing somewhere?"

"People can't join a group because they have to work so much to make ends meet and they don't have social skills to be in a group"

"A space where you can create and collaborate with with other musicians without worrying about extra fees with today's inflation so rough."

"Lessons for younger students are hard to access due to socioeconomic barriers."

What respondents value about the scene — What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

Every affordability and housing change category; health and wellness concerns; health coverage type; home use for music work; and the complete presenter challenge ranking. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

09 Music-Friendly Policies

Regulation decides how easily a room can open its doors to live music, and what it costs to do so.

Salina's venues and presenters do not describe one dominant regulatory problem; they describe a spread of friction led by confusion, permit cost and administrative time. Sound rules draw the most least-significant rankings, and three in four reporting venues can present outdoors, which makes clear event rules an everyday matter. What presenters ask for first is an advocate inside government and an online permitting portal. These figures rest on about a dozen presenters and read as directional.

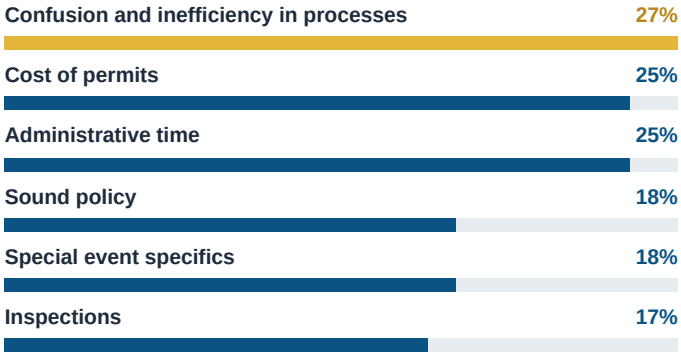
78%
want an advocate inside government

67%
want an online portal for permitting and communication

75%
of reporting venues can present outdoors

45%
place sound policy in the least significant tier

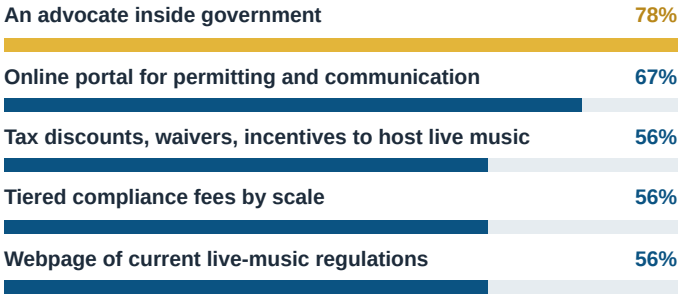
REGULATORY CHALLENGES RANKED GREATEST OR SECOND GREATEST



Venue and presenter respondents; about a dozen answered. 45% place sound policy in the least significant tier.

No single challenge dominates: confusion and inefficiency leads the top two tiers by a narrow margin over permit cost and administrative time, and sound policy is the one presenters most often rank least significant.

TOOLS PRESENTERS SAY WOULD HELP



One point of contact for permitting 44%; annual training 33%.

Presenters ask first for a person and a process, an advocate inside government and an online portal, ahead of fee relief, which points to clarity as the main need.

OUTDOOR CAPABILITIES



75% of reporting venues can present music outdoors

Three in four reporting venues can present outdoors, which turns special-event and sound rules from a niche concern into a routine part of operating.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Lots of outdoor stages available"

"a variety of outdoor/community stages and local venues who support live performances"

"For a bunch of years the city hosted a weekly summer show in the park. It showcased some of the best bands and music from all over the country. It was a free event and always a packed house. For some reason they shut those events down several years ago and started promoting small street side events, they even built several very small stages at various places."

"I think there are a lot of ways music can be added to many events but it's hard to know who to contact or find information about these events while they are in planning."

What respondents value about the scene — What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

The full five-tier ranking for every regulatory challenge, including inspections, which draws the largest single greatest-challenge share (17%), and every regulatory tool asked about. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

10 Culture & Belonging

How a scene feels to the people in it decides who stays, who joins, and who never tries.

People inside Salina's music scene describe it as safe, cooperative and inclusive, and their written answers are full of camaraderie. Nearly half of the same respondents call the scene elitist and more than four in ten call it homogeneous, and a small, serious set of comments names favoritism and a community left to work on its own. No measure crosses into a negative majority, but the distance between those two readings is the finding.

91%
describe the scene as safe

75%
describe it as cooperative

49%
describe it as elitist

43%
describe it as homogenous rather than diverse

DO YOU FIND YOUR LOCAL MUSIC SCENE…

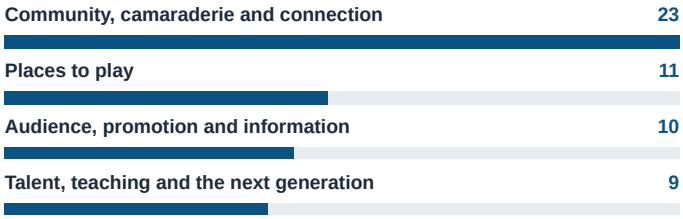


Respondents placed the scene between each pair of descriptors; totals shown, intensity bands on the dashboard. Rows carry different bases because respondents can skip individual measures.

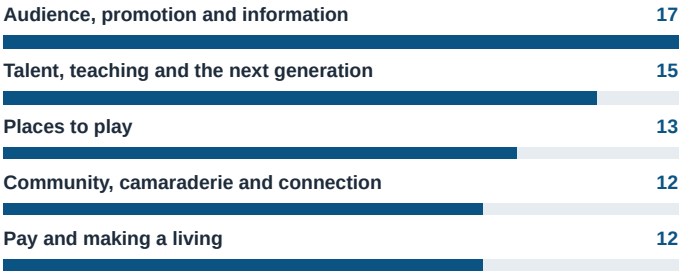
On safety, cooperation and inclusion, the scene earns strong marks from the people already inside it.

Elitism comes within two points of a majority and homogeneity follows, and the written responses tie both to who gets booked and who gets included.

WHAT RESPONDENTS SAID IN THEIR OWN WORDS: CODED THEMES



Strengths, 87 responses



Frustrations, 92 responses

Community is the largest theme overall and the largest source of praise, and the same subject draws requests to become better organized, which makes it the scene's biggest asset and its most fragile one.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"The community. Everyone supports everyone."

"People are generally open-minded and supportive."

"Some of the younger acts are good and inclusive. Getting younger people to encourage high school and middle school students to pursue music would be great."

"The Hispanic/Latino community tries so hard and brings bands and performers to town all the time, but doesn't have a lot of community support or ever gain any real traction. They are their own island. We claim to be inclusive but don't reach out to see how we can elevate other voices that might be different from what we are used to hearing."

"The favoritism...see the last half of the Festival Jam EVERY year for example"

"There is very little working together and supporting each other around here. It is seeing each other as competition and/or as less than. Would be great if we could come together better."

What respondents value about the scene — What frustrates them

EXPLORE MORE ON THE DASHBOARD

The full set of eight paired measures with their intensity bands, and subgroup views by sector, age, gender and race and ethnicity where the dashboard offers them. **salinaarts.com/salina-music-census**

What We Heard Across the Ecosystem

Ten indicators, three sectors, and 179 written answers point to eight things Salina learned about itself. None belongs to a single section. The first five are carried by both the survey and the comments, in order of how often respondents wrote about them; the last three rest more on the survey. Together they are the findings this report stands on and the ground the community action opportunities that follow are built on.

A warm community that is not yet organized. Community is the largest subject in the written answers, 35 of 179 comments, and the one where the two questions answer each other most directly. Asked what they love, respondents name each other: camaraderie, encouragement, a scene that is collaborative rather than competitive. The survey agrees, with 91% describing the scene as safe and 75% as cooperative. Asked what needs to change, the same people ask for the structures that would turn that goodwill into work: a way to find other musicians, regular jams worth attending, a place to gather. A place to connect and collaborate is the top resource request (49%), community and collaboration the support with the greatest impact (50%), and 63% would organize the scene as a coalition. One respondent names the gap inside the praise, saying musicians get along but do not collaborate much; another says the support is real but most bands play anywhere but Salina. The warmth is real, and it is not yet organized.

The audience is there; the pipes are not. Audience and promotion is the second largest theme (27 comments) and the largest source of frustration (17). Respondents describe engaged, varied and paying crowds, and one says it is not hard to draw a big crowd in Salina if promotion is done well. The problem is getting the word out: everything runs through social media, radio and promoters cost money, and there is no single place to find events, venues, opportunities or musicians. A central hub is the most repeated single ask across both questions. In the survey, finding clients, customers or audiences is the top challenge to music work (72%), 71% of venue and presenter respondents want audience development tools, and 43% of creatives play no paid local show in a typical month.

Rooms without a ladder. Places to play is the third theme (24 comments), and the two questions describe the same shelf. Respondents love the outdoor and community stages, the intimate rooms, a professional hall that brings in national acts, and a sense that there is more live music in Salina than in years. Then they name what is missing: a 50 to 100 seat room for emerging acts, a 200 seat room for touring acts, a 500 seat room between the bars and the Stiefel, all-ages and non-bar options, and affordable rehearsal and lesson space. The survey shows the same gap. Most reporting venues hold 100 people or fewer (78%), none reports a capacity between 101 and 200 or above 500, and a quarter of respondents lack the live performance space they need. One respondent argues against building anything new: equip the rooms that exist with the power, sound and upkeep a production needs.

Deep talent, thin pipeline. No one disputes that Salina has talent; respondents call it abundant and impeccable for the size of the community, and 84% have more than a decade in music. The 24 comments on talent and teaching are about whether that stays true. Two teachers cover strings across two high schools and many grade schools. Keyboardists and accompanists are exhausted and aging out. Lessons are out of reach for some families, and private instructors are too few. The age profile makes the same point, with 22% of respondents aged 65 or older against 8% aged 18 to 24. Most of the workforce learned by doing (56%), two thirds belong to no professional organization (66%), and the one training need every sector shares is audio and video recording (51% overall).

Pay that has not moved. Pay is the widest gap in the comments: three positive against twelve frustrations. Music moves $4.3 million a year through respondents, but 67% work outside music, 80% of them because music alone does not pay enough. The median local show pays $100 and the average $240.11, a third of respondents are unpaid for their music work, and volunteer or community-service performance is the second most common way a local show is paid (35%). Among creatives, rising cost of living is the leading career concern (60% in the top two tiers). Respondents describe rates flat since the 1990s, open mics that became unpaid residencies, and public events that do not pay. Their most practical ask is published pay ranges and some form of guarantee musicians can count on, and the three positive comments describe what that looks like when it works.

Anchors to build around. Salina is not starting from nothing. Ten comments, nearly all positive, name the institutions respondents rely on: the Stiefel Theatre, the Salina Symphony and its youth ensembles, the Smoky Hill River Festival, Theatre Salina, Kansas Wesleyan, Salina Arts & Humanities, and a songwriters group that has met at the public library for years. The presenting layer is split evenly between locally owned businesses and nonprofits (33% each), festivals lead the venue types (21%), and 75% of reporting venues can present outdoors. Support exists but is underused: 17% have received financial assistance, 61% have never sought it and 28% did not know it existed, and one respondent says more people would use the local grants if they were not afraid to try. The single frustration in this theme is about programming that ended, a free weekly summer show in the park that one respondent remembers drawing full crowds.

Welcoming inside, harder to enter. Nearly half of respondents describe the scene as elitist (49%) and 43% as homogenous, even as large majorities call it safe and inclusive. Fourteen comments help explain the difference. Some describe real range, music in unexpected places and options for every kind of performer; others describe rock, folk and country crowding out hip-hop, electronic, jazz and original music. A few name favoritism directly. One respondent describes the Hispanic and Latino community bringing bands and performers to town and remaining its own island, the clearest equity signal in either question, and the census itself reached Hispanic residents at a lower rate (9%) than they live in Salina (12%). Anything built next will be judged on whether it widens the door.

A regional circuit, and money leaving town. Salina's musicians already work a corridor. Wichita is the most-named destination for music work (21% of travel mentions), followed by Manhattan, Kansas City and Topeka, and 30% of creatives define success regionally. To grow that circuit, respondents want grants that build regional creative networks (63%), a booking agent (54%) and tour support (54%). Money moves out as easily as musicians do. Creatives spend $1.2 million a year on their craft and 37% of it stays local. Publishing and licensing is the one service creatives buy outside the region more often than at home, 71% of respondents hold no intellectual property, and 38% collect no performance royalties. Almost no one wrote about rights; the survey is where this theme lives.

Community Action Opportunities

The eight findings in the previous section are the community's own account of where Salina's music ecosystem is strong and where it is stuck. What follows are six starting points for acting on them. They are not a finished plan; they are opportunities the community identified in its own answers, ordered so that the first one makes the rest easier.



Photo courtesy of Salina Arts & Humanities

1 Create a Salina Music Task Force

Establish a time-limited City task force to act as the central leadership body for music ecosystem actions, with working groups on specific issues.

Connection is the clearest theme of the Salina Music Census. A place to connect and collaborate is the top resource request (49%), and 63% would organize the scene as a coalition of many partners rather than a single organization (27%) or a city office (18%). A time-limited City task force answers both. The City brings the community to one table, and musicians, venues, educators, industry, Salina Arts & Humanities and the institutions respondents rely on share ownership of what comes next.

Working groups can take on the specific issues the census names. **Regulatory clarity:** presenters' top frustrations are confusion (27%), permit cost (25%) and administrative time (25%), not any one rule, and they want an advocate inside government (78%) and a way to handle permits online (67%). **Venue capacity gaps:** 78% of reporting venues hold 100 people or fewer, and none reports a capacity between 101 and 200 or above 500. **Financial support:** only 17% have received financial assistance for music work, 61% have never sought it, and 28% did not know it existed.

Responds to: A warm community that is not yet organized; rooms without a ladder; anchors to build around. 63% coalition; 49% place to connect; 78% advocate inside government; 67% online permitting; 78% of venues at 100 or fewer; 17% received assistance.

2 Build Audiences for Salina Music

Give Salina one place to find its music, and tell its story beyond social media.

The audience is the problem every sector shares. Finding clients, customers or audiences is the top challenge to music work (72%), 71% of venues and presenters want audience development tools, and 43% of creatives play no paid local show in a typical month. Respondents describe crowds that turn out when promotion is done well, and no dependable way to do it. A central hub for events and musicians is the most repeated single ask across both open-ended questions.

Built through the Salina Music Task Force, a shared calendar and directory can meet that need: shows and open calls, venues with their capacity and equipment, musicians by instrument and genre, and the production providers 57% of presenters want to find, so a venue can find a band and a newcomer can find a jam.

Alongside it, partner with local media and schools to cover local artists, events and music news. Respondents want coordinated promotion of live music outside of social media, and storytelling can raise the visibility of the genres and voices that get less attention; hip-hop, R&B, electronic and Latin music together make up 14% of the genres respondents identify with.

Responds to: The audience is there, the pipes are not; welcoming inside, harder to enter. 72% finding audiences; 71% audience development tools; 57% production directory; 43% no paid local show in a typical month; a central hub as the most repeated written ask.



Photo courtesy of Tanner Colvin

3 Activate Public Spaces with Regular, Paid Programming

Make live music a regular part of Salina's public life, and let public events set the standard for paying musicians.

Salina's music community already treats its public spaces as stages. Festivals are the most common venue or presenter type (21%), 75% of reporting venues can present outdoors, and respondents praise the city's outdoor and community stages. They also remember what regular programming did: a free weekly summer show in the park was always a packed house, and respondents noticed when it ended. The small stages built around town since then are there to use.

Build a regular, year-round calendar of music in public spaces, downtown, in the parks, along the river and at the smaller stages around town. Mix local acts with regional and touring ones, and plan for all ages and a range of genres, so these events widen the door as well as fill the square. The Smoky Hill River Festival and downtown events already show the audience is there.

Public programming can also lead on pay. The typical local show pays $100, 32% of respondents are unpaid for their music work, and volunteer or community-service performance is the second most common way a local show is paid (35%). Respondents credit the city and organized venues that pay performers and ask for more of it. Paying musicians at every publicly supported event, and publishing the pay ranges respondents asked for, gives the rest of the scene a standard to match.

Responds to: Pay that has not moved; anchors to build around; welcoming inside, harder to enter. 75% of venues present outdoors; festivals 21% of venue types; $100 typical local show; 32% unpaid; 35% volunteer or community-service pay.

4 Create Shared Spaces to Rehearse, Record and Collaborate

Equip the rooms Salina already has, and open affordable shared space where musicians can work together.

What Salina's musicians want most is each other, and somewhere to meet. A place to connect and collaborate is the top resource request (49%), followed by studio space and equipment (29%) and affordable rehearsal space (24%). A quarter of respondents lack the live performance space they need, 16% rehearsal space, 13% a recording studio and 11% a place to teach, and affordable space and operating costs are the second most common challenge to music work (34%).

Start with what exists. Salina has libraries, schools, churches, Kansas Wesleyan, community stages and small venues, and a songwriters group has met at the public library for years. Take stock of the rooms already in use or sitting idle, and help them add the power, sound, equipment and upkeep that rehearsal, recording and small shows need. Most reporting venues hold 100 people or fewer (78%), and equipping them well is the first rung of the venue ladder.

Where gaps remain, look at shared, affordable space: rehearsal rooms by the hour, a community recording setup and lesson rooms. Recording is the one training need in every sector's top three (51% overall), and 43% of creatives already record themselves. Shared space lowers the cost of the work and puts musicians in the same building, which is where collaboration starts.

Responds to: A warm community that is not yet organized; rooms without a ladder; deep talent, thin pipeline. 49% place to connect; 29% studio space and equipment; 24% affordable rehearsal; 25% lack performance space; 34% space and operating costs; 51% want recording training.



Photo courtesy of Salina Arts & Humanities

5 Build the Next Generation and Broaden Participation

Rebuild the pipeline of teachers, accompanists and young players, and open the door wider while doing it.

Salina's talent is deep and aging: 84% of respondents have more than a decade in music, only 4% are in their first three years, and 22% are 65 or older against 8% aged 18 to 24. The comments show where the pipeline is thinning: two strings teachers split across two high schools and many grade schools, keyboardists and accompanists serving the churches, schools and ensembles who are aging out, too few private instructors, and lessons out of reach for some families.

Connect students and emerging players with experienced musicians through mentorship, lesson access, first-time bookings and showcases, building on what the Salina Symphony's youth ensembles, the schools and Kansas Wesleyan already do. One respondent proposed a grant-funded mentoring exchange between experienced and newer musicians, and the same approach can bring along the accompanists and teachers Salina depends on, not only performers.

Open that route on purpose. Most respondents describe the scene as safe (91%) and inclusive (71%), yet 49% call it elitist and 43% homogenous. The census reached Hispanic residents at a lower rate (9%) than they live in Salina (12%), and one respondent describes the Hispanic and Latino community as bringing bands and performers to town and remaining its own island. Booking is the lever presenters control most directly, and they can choose to open it to newer artists and to communities that have not felt part of the established scene.

Responds to: Deep talent, thin pipeline; welcoming inside, harder to enter. 84% over ten years; 22% aged 65 or older, 8% aged 18 to 24; 49% elitist, 43% homogenous; Hispanic 9% of respondents against 12% of the city; 15 written frustrations on talent and teaching.

6 Build Economic Sustainability and Music Business Skills

Make financial help easier to reach, help musicians earn from more than one source and more than one city, and keep more of the money spent here.

Music moves $4.3 million a year through respondents, but it rarely pays a living on its own: 67% work outside music, and music is about a quarter of respondents' income (26%). Financial help exists and is barely used. Only 17% have received assistance for music work, 61% have never sought it and 28% did not know it existed, and respondents say more people would use the local grants Salina Arts & Humanities offers if they were not afraid to try. Through the task force's financial support working group, make help easier to find and apply for: small grants with plain applications, grant-writing help, and the tax breaks or waivers 56% of presenters want.

Help artists earn from more than live shows. After recording (51%), respondents want training in booking and promotion (39%), marketing (38%) and new revenue streams (27%). The rights side is where the most is left on the table: 71% hold no rights to music they created and 38% collect no performance royalties. Creatives spend $1.2 million a year on their craft and 37% stays local, and publishing and licensing is bought outside the region far more often than at home (25% against 4%). Workshops on rights and royalties, and support for local providers, keep more of that money in Salina.

Grow the regional market as well. Wichita is the most-named destination for music work (21% of travel mentions), followed by Manhattan (13%), Kansas City (12%) and Topeka (11%), and 30% of creatives define success regionally. Respondents want grants that build regional creative networks (63%), a booking agent (54%) and tour support (54%). Several of those cities are running censuses of their own through Kansas Music Cities Together, which makes shared routing, artist exchanges and co-promotion a natural next step.

Responds to: Pay that has not moved; a regional circuit, and money leaving town; anchors to build around. $4.3M music income; 67% work outside music; 17% received assistance, 28% did not know it existed; 71% hold no rights; $1.2M creative spend, 37% local; 21% Wichita; 63% regional network grants.

A Community Effort

The Salina Music Census was carried by Salina Arts & Humanities and its Community Partners, who shared the survey through their own networks, rooms and audiences from August 20 to September 4, 2026.

Thank you to every partner and community member who shared the census, showed up, and answered. The 211 responses in this report exist because of you, and the network that carried the census is the same network that will carry whatever Salina decides to do with what it learned.

Thank you to everyone who shared, showed up and answered.

LEAD ORGANIZER

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The Salina Music Census is part of Kansas Music Cities Together, led by Sound Music Cities in partnership with the Kansas Arts Commission and supported by Movement Musick. The census was conducted by Sound Music Cities.

RESULTS AND THE INTERACTIVE DASHBOARD

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