

Muslim Artists Live Here: Who Gets Funded, Seen and Paid

Prepared by MCRO from *Muslim Artists Live Here: The opportunities and challenges for Muslims working in Canada's cultural industries*, by Radiyah Chowdhury for the Inspirit Foundation's Narrative Change Lab, with 2021 Census data compiled by Kelly Hill of Hill Strategies Research.

Key message.

Muslim artists are younger, more often racialized and more often immigrants than other Canadian artists, yet they are underrepresented, underpaid and largely invisible to the funders who could support them.

Muslim Artists Live Here, pp. 11–17, 22

Muslims are about 4% of Canada's workers but just 2% of its 202,900 artists, and only 1.6% of arts leaders (pp. 11, 14). Public funders can't say how well they serve Muslim artists, because they don't ask (p. 22).

Who Muslim artists are

89%

are racialized, compared with 19% of all Canadian artists (p. 11)

71%

are immigrants, compared with 21% of all artists (p. 12)

51%

are under age 35 (p. 12)

58%

live in Ontario; 18% in Quebec and 14% in B.C. (pp. 15–16)

Paid less at every level

Median income, 2020 (pp. 17–18)	Muslim workers	All workers
Artists	\$24,600	\$30,200
Arts leaders	\$36,000	\$57,200
Cultural workers	\$36,000	\$46,400
All workers	\$38,400	\$49,600

Muslim artists earn 19% less than other artists, and Muslim arts leaders 37% less (p. 17). Muslim and Sikh artists have the lowest incomes of any religious group (p. 18). One in 23 Canadian workers is in the cultural sector, but only one in 31 Muslim workers (p. 14).

What artists told the researchers

“It’s hard as a visible hijabi to be taken seriously in this industry.”

Sara Rangooni, writer and director, p. 27

“Islamophobia is quite embedded and very normalized in many ways.”

Rua Wani, film and television producer, p. 24

“We pay artists poorly, and then say people shouldn’t be artists because they’re paid poorly.”

Aquil Virani, visual artist, p. 17

“Grant money should be seed money.”

Raz Hyder, singer-songwriter, p. 27

“Canada still needs some sort of creative platform for Muslims.”

Mustaali Raj, visual artist, p. 21

“We already have a Muslim story. We don’t need another one.”

What Sara Rangooni says she has been told, p. 24

The funding gap

2

national funds exist expressly for Muslim artists: Inspirit’s New Narratives Fund and the Silk Road Creative Arts Grants (p. 22)

0 of 3

NCCM’s 2021 recommendations on Muslim artists had been adopted four years later (p. 23)

900

Muslim arts leaders among 56,200 in Canada (p. 13)

General “BIPOC” and diversity funds leave Muslim identities between the cracks, and some artists feel pushed to tell a narrow, self-deprecating kind of Muslim story to be funded (p. 23).

What the report recommends

Data and visibility

Develop self-identification methods with Muslim communities, and build a database of Muslim artists (p. 30).

Funding

Create dedicated, multi-tiered funding streams, plus help with grant writing and administration (p. 30).

Decision-making

Increase Muslim representation on funding juries and boards, with mentorship from mid-level to established (p. 31).

Community

Support Muslim-led arts organizations and pay artists fairly at community events (p. 31).

Recognition

Add categories for devotional music and other Muslim art forms to awards like the Junos (p. 32).

Combating Islamophobia

Back affirming content and a wide range of Muslim voices, beyond Islamic Heritage Month (p. 32).

ABOUT MCRO

The Muslim Communities Research Observatory is an independent research observatory. We collect and synthesize rigorous research on Muslim communities, turn it into policy briefs, dashboards and toolkits, and help leaders and organizations put that evidence to work. Contact: Amira Elghawaby · amira.elghawaby@mcro.ca

Source: Chowdhury, R. *Muslim Artists Live Here: The opportunities and challenges for Muslims working in Canada’s cultural industries*. Inspirit Foundation. Census data: 2021 Census, custom request by Hill Strategies Research. Income figures are for 2020, a pandemic year. Page numbers refer to that report.

Who does what

The report's recommendations speak to funders, policymakers, institutions and Muslim communities (pp. 29–32). It calls the CRTC's 2025 Canadian content review a "generational moment" (p. 29).

1 · WHO MUST ACT

The bodies with the duty or power to fix it

Public arts funders FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL ■ Ask artists to self-identify religion, with communities, so funders can measure who they serve (pp. 22, 30) ■ Create dedicated, multi-tiered Muslim artist funding streams (p. 30) ■ Put Muslims on juries and in decision-making roles (p. 31)	Canadian Heritage and the CRTC FEDERAL ■ Fund grassroots Muslim storytelling, as NCCM urged in 2021 (p. 23) ■ Run festivals and competitions that include Muslim artists (p. 32) ■ Reflect Canada's diversity in the updated Canadian content rules (p. 29)
Galleries, museums and awards INSTITUTIONS ■ Partner with Muslim artists and arts organizations (p. 30) ■ Add award categories for devotional music and Muslim art forms (p. 32)	Muslim community institutions COMMUNITY ■ Pay artists a competitive rate to perform at events (p. 31) ■ Tackle anti-Black racism and misogyny in Muslim spaces (p. 31)

2 · WHO CAN PUSH FOR IT

Find your group: what to ask for, and who to ask

Artists ■ Join or start collectives and group shows, which draw bigger audiences (p. 31) ■ Send portfolios to curators, as ROM curator Fahmida Suleman advises (p. 14) Take it to → arts councils, curators, Muslim arts organizations	Muslim arts organizations ■ Keep building platforms like the Mosquers, MIFF and Silk Road Institute (pp. 6, 15) ■ Push to be counted in diversity funding (p. 22) Take it to → Canada Council, Canada Media Fund, Telefilm*
Audiences and community members ■ Buy tickets early, as comedian Hassan Phillips asks (p. 20) ■ Show up for Muslim artists beyond Islamic Heritage Month (p. 32) Take it to → venues, festivals and your own networks	Philanthropy and advocates ■ Grow funds like Inspirit's New Narratives Fund (p. 22) ■ Press governments to act on NCCM's 2021 arts recommendations (p. 23) Take it to → Canadian Heritage, MPs*

* MCRO suggestion, not named in the report. Census figures count people by their main occupation in May 2021 and exclude part-time artists with other main jobs (p. 2).