American Circus Alliance (ACA)

Circus Survey 2022

Final Report

Circus Survey Team

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Background, Methodology, and Respondents

The American Circus Alliance (ACA) has partnered with the American Youth Circus Organization/American Circus Educators (AYCO/ACE) to collaborate on a survey of the circus sector in the United States.

AYCO/ACE conducts a survey of educational organizations every two years, and in 2022, ACA collaborated to expand the survey to include individual circus workers and production companies. The purpose of the survey is to gather information on the sector and its scale to advocate on behalf of circus workers and organizations.

The full AYCO/ACE report can be accessed at https://www.americancircuseducators.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ACE-AYCO-Survey-Final-Report.pdf.

The 2022 survey launched in April 2022 as an online survey using Survey Monkey (see Appendix A for a copy of the survey instrument). After survey links were generated, ACA utilized social media to target the circus community at large, and e-blasts to target ACA members and mailing list subscribers. Most ACA members are individual circus practitioners, who were encouraged in our distribution methods to share the survey directly with colleagues and co-workers.

The initial total respondent count was 714, which included 197 educational organizations, 448 individual workers, and 69 production companies. The raw data was cleaned by removing any entries that did not contain data past the initial question(s) and then any duplicate entries were removed. Duplicate entries were checked to ensure that all submitted data about a specific organization or individual was included. After data cleaning, there were 428 individual circus workers, 49 production companies, and 148 circus education organizations.

ACA's eventual goal is a full count of circus workers and production companies in the United States.

Individual Circus Workers

Of the 428 individual circus workers who completed the survey, the vast majority (61%) are performers. Coaches comprise 27%, and rigger/crew members comprise 3%. The remaining circus participants listed their primary roles as administrators, composers, directors, marketing, musicians, or involved in circus equipment or tech.

The total cost of monthly circus training ranged between $27-$1,600. On average, individual workers were paying $308/month for circus-related training.

The most common educational background of circus workers was a recreational circus program (56%), followed by being self-taught (42%). More than 26% of circus workers trained at a professional circus school and 28% received training in a pre-professional circus program. Other avenues included social circus (16%) and circus family (7%). In open-ended responses, many workers indicated they were former dancers or gymnasts, and others have additional training in physical therapy, teaching, theater, and/or fitness.

Independent Circus Instructors

This survey asked the 428 respondents who identified as individual circus workers if they worked as a circus coach or instructor, and 68% reported they did. More than 75% taught recreational classes at local organizations and 21% taught professional level classes at a local training program. Workshops were also a common source of income, with 36% teaching locally and 24% traveling to teach workshops. Instructors also taught at summer camps (22%) and virtual/online classes (25%). Instructors also taught private lessons, other physical practices like Pilates, teacher trainings, and choreography for performance companies.

When teaching, 42% of instructors work as independent contractors, 26% are employees, and 28% are both. While this section did not clarify if instructors who were both independent contractors and employees worked at multiple organizations, this may be the reason for the overlapping classifications. This would be an area for future investigation in future surveys.

Income

COVID was the most common reason for zero or significantly reduced income, especially during 2020. Changing careers, going to school/circus school, or working as a volunteer instead of a paid employee were other reasons for reduced or no income.

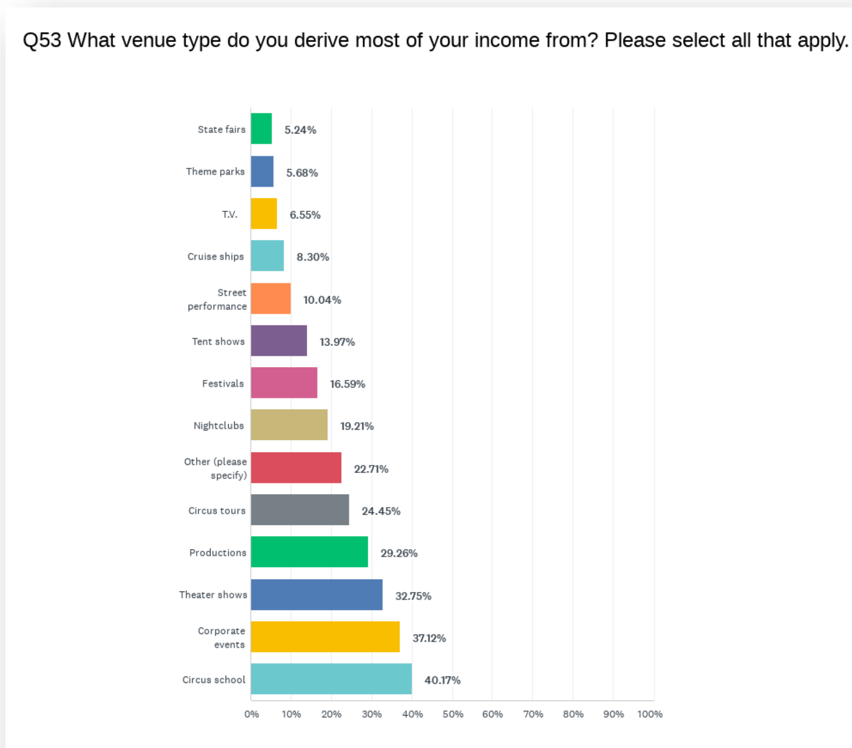
In 2019, the average annual income was $22,000. Not surprisingly, that average dropped to $6,500 in 2020, mostly due to COVID-related issues. In 2021, the average jumped back up to a healthy $30,000/year, with fewer individual workers reporting that COVID was impacting their ability to work.

Paid Days

Respondents reported an average of 147 paid days in 2019, which dropped to an average of 65 paid days in 2020. The reason for the lack of paid work was most often attributed to COVID. In 2021, paid days rebounded somewhat, up to 116 on average.

Between 2019-2021, workers reported that on average, 85% of their circus-related income was made in the U.S.

Respondents reported that 40% of their overall income came from circus school, while 37% came from corporate events and 33% from theater shows. Productions (29%), circus tours (24%), and nightclubs (19%) were also primary sources of income.



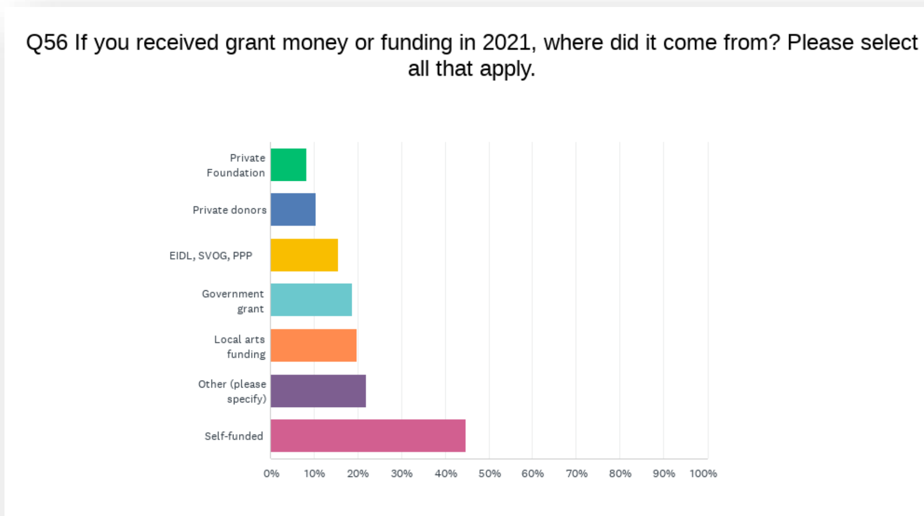
Regions Worked In

Workers were spread evenly throughout the United States and internationally, with the highest percentage (47%) working in the Western U.S.

Region	Percentage of Participants
Mid-America (AR, KS, MO, NE, OK, TX)	15.15%
New England (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)	15.58%
South (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN)	16.45%
International	19.48%
Mid Atlantic (DC, DE, MD, NJ, NY, PA, VA, VI, WV)	23.81%
Midwest (IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, ND, OH, SD, WI)	26.41%
Western (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY)	47.19%

Funding

The majority of circus workers (45%) were self-funded between 2019-2021. Of those receiving outside funds, local arts funding provided 20% of workers with assistance, 19% received government grants, and 16% received some sort of COVID-19 related funding, including the EIDL, SVOG, or PPP. Private donors or foundations provided 19% of funding for workers. Additional funding sources noted in an open-ended question included unemployment, national arts grants, unions, and family funding.



When respondents were asked how much they received total in funding between 2019-2021, their answers ranged from $500-$25,000. The average amount received was $5,765.

Aspects Limiting Growth

Respondents were asked to choose any and all aspects of the circus industry they felt were currently limiting their growth as a circus worker. The biggest limitation chosen by 49% of respondents was lack of performance opportunities, followed closely by inadequate pay options (47% of respondents). Unemployment (44%), funding (42%), and access to training space (30%) were the next three most common limitations.

Limitation	Percentage of Respondents
Lack of performance opportunities	49.09%
Inadequate pay options	47.73%
Underemployment	44.09%
Funding	42.73%
Access to training space	30.45%
Liability insurance	22.27%
Physical health	20.45%
Other (please specify)	19.55%
Oversaturation	18.64%
Mental health	17.73%
Performance insurance	16.82%
Representation/equity	15.91%
Racism	6.36%
Discrimination because of cultural identity (including ethnic, LGBTQAI2S+, Deaf and Disabled, etc.)	5.91%
Physical or mental discrimination	4.09%

In an open-ended question that asked respondents to expand on the limitations they felt as a circus worker, many reported they felt overwhelmed with trying to make enough income as an artist while still having enough energy to create work. Workers also reported frustration with the discrimination and lack of opportunities for BICOP and LGBTQ+ folks in the circus industry. Respondents also reported much lower performance pay rates as compared to pre-COVID times, and an increased cost of training that is much higher than the income potential. Workers who have had contracts overseas report much better wages than in the United States.

When asked about insurance, 85% indicated they have health insurance, 42% have circus performance liability insurance, 13% have accident insurance, and 12% have organization general liability insurance. Only 5% have no insurance at all. Other respondents indicated that they had insurance coverage through the studio where they teach, have teaching insurance, or only purchase insurance when required for gigs or contracts.

Demographic Information

Nearly 90% of respondents indicated they are U.S. citizens, and another 7.2% are dual citizens. U.S. residents make up 2% of respondents, and less than 1% are green card holders or on a work visa. Nearly 67% of respondents identify as LGBTQIA2S+, 4% indicated they have a disability, and 34% indicated they identify as other. In future surveys, allowing respondents to expand on how they identify will help gather additional data.

The majority of respondents (38%) indicated that they are single and have never been married, while 31% are married. Those who are single but cohabiting with a significant other comprise 16% and another 7% are in a domestic partnership or civil union. Only 15% of respondents have children under 18. More than 65% of respondents identify as a woman, while 28% identify as a man. Non-binary respondents comprised 5%.

A vast majority of respondents (74%) indicated they are white/Caucasian, 10% indicated they are multiple/mixed races, 5% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3% are Black or African American.

Respondents between the ages of 30-30 comprised the largest group 45%, with 18-29 being the next largest group (24%), and ages 40-49 and 50-59 were the next largest breakdowns at 18% and 7%, respectively.

The most common avenue for respondents to hear about the survey was from ACA (30% of respondents), followed closely by Instagram (22% of respondents).

More than 47% of respondents are not members of any trade organization, while 25% are members of ACE/AYCO and 27% are members of ACA. In an open-ended question, respondents indicated that they are members of unions, local circus alliances, American Council on Exercise (ACE), and various other industry organizations.

Production Companies

There are 49 production and performance companies that responded to the survey, and among the respondents, 67% were production company owners or managers, 12% were directors and/or choreographers, and 6% were other, which included creative directors and performers.

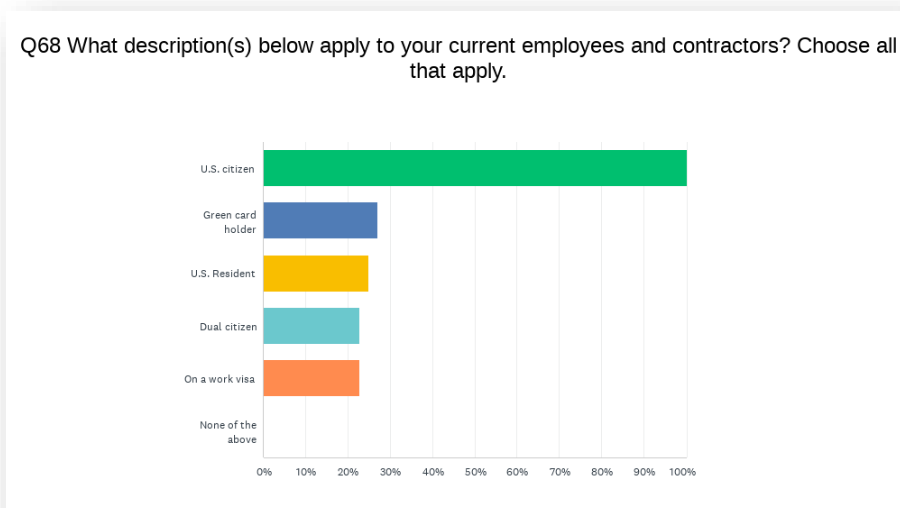
The most common insurance companies carried is organization general liability insurance (69%). Companies also carry circus performance liability insurance (59%), accident insurance (39%), organization workers' compensation insurance (37%), health insurance (14%), and organizational disability insurance (8%). Five of the 49 respondents (10%) do not carry any insurance at all.

In 2019, respondents reported an average of $295,587 in annual revenue. That number decreased in 2020 to $143,101. In 2021, annual revenue was rebounding, with the average reported to be $318,824.

Respondents dedicate 29% of their annual budget to equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts.

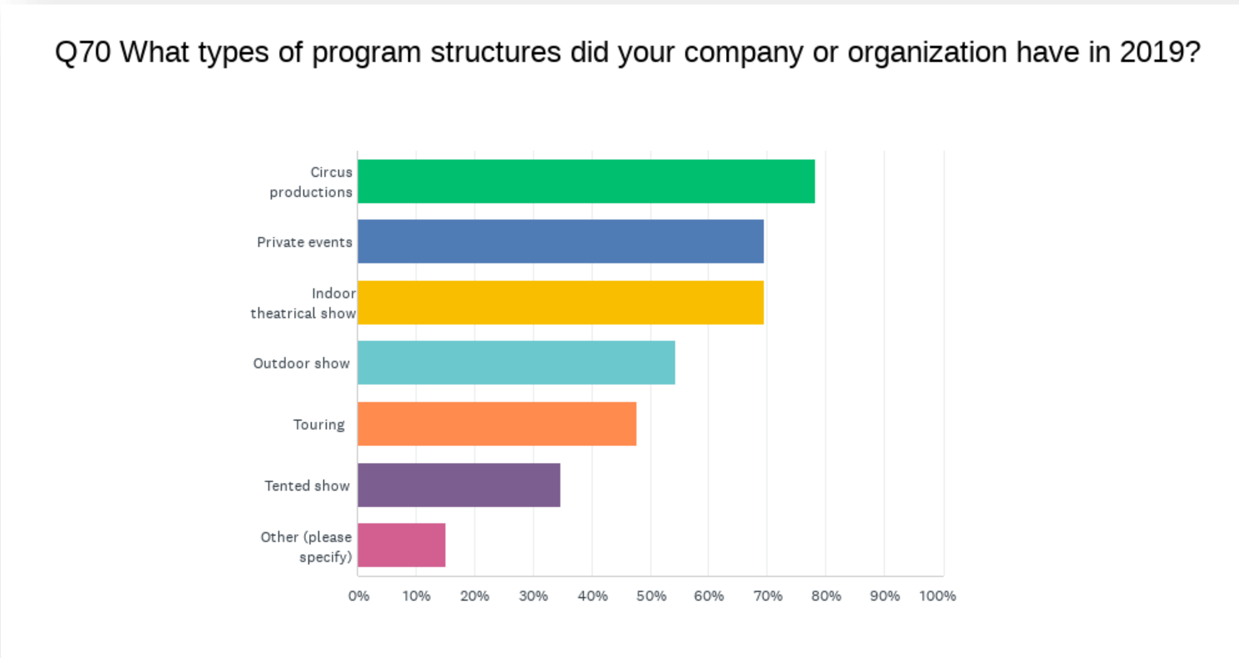
Respondents reported between 1-9,000 employees and contractors. Because 9,000 was a very high outlier, it was not included in the calculation of the average number of employees and contractors. On average, respondents employ 30 employees or contractors.

All responding organizations employ U.S. citizens, while 27% also employ green card holders, 25% employ U.S. residents, and 23% employ dual citizens and work visa holders. *Note: Respondents could select multiple responses, resulting in percentages that exceed 100.*



Respondents were asked how their employees and contractors self-identify. On average, respondents had 6 employees who identify as BIPOC, 8.5 who identify as LGBTQIA2S+, and .4 who identify as disabled. No respondents indicated they had d/Deaf employees or contractors.

When asked about program structures in place in 2019, 78% of respondents had original circus productions, 70% had indoor theatrical shows, 70% had corporate or private events, and 54% had outdoor shows. Touring shows comprised 48%, while tented shows were 35%. Of the 15% of respondents who chose "other," their answers included summer camp, variety performances, and free community shows.



Respondents were asked how COVID-19 had impacted their organizations, and 0% reported zero impact. More than 80% of respondents had to cancel productions and 69% canceled or postponed corporate or private events. Respondents also moved performances online (52%) and refunded tickets for canceled performances (31%).

More than 54% had to use financial reserves, 50% reduced salaries, 38% increased expenses, 46% laid off or furloughed employees, and 50% reduced salaries or payroll. Seven respondents (15%) permanently closed or suspended operation and one respondent filed for bankruptcy.

Demographic Information

More than 62% of respondents indicated they are married, while 16% are single and never married. Another 13% are single but cohabiting, 7% are in a domestic partnership, and 2% are divorced. Just over 68% of respondents do not have children under 18 and 32% do.

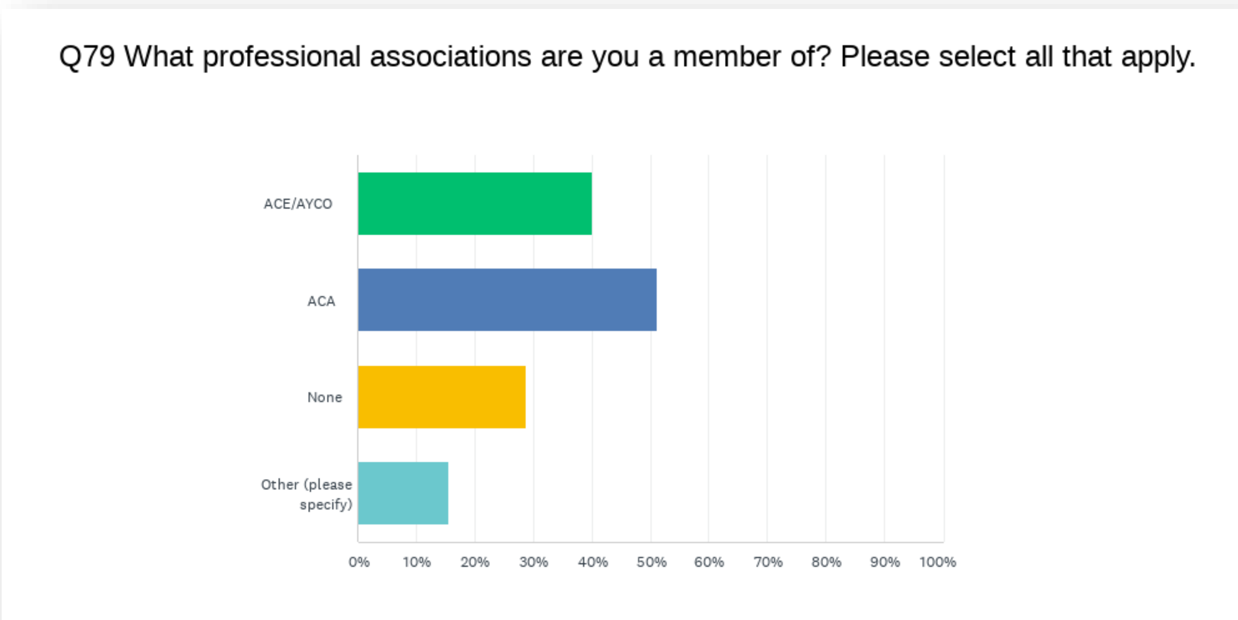
The percentage split between men and women was even, with 47% of respondents identifying as a woman and 47% identifying as a man. A small percentage (6%) of respondents indicated they would self-describe in the open-ended comments, but none did so.

A vast majority of respondents (81%) indicated they are white/Caucasian, 9% indicated they are Hispanic, 2% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% are Black or African American, and 7% are multiple ethnicities.

Respondents between the ages of 40-49 comprise the largest group (42%), with 50-59 being the next largest group (19%), and ages 30-39 and 60-99 the next largest breakdowns at 17% and 10%, respectively. The age group 18-29 comprises 10% of respondents.

The most common avenue for respondents to hear about the survey was from ACA (45% of respondents), followed closely by the American Circus Educators Association/American Youth Circus Organization. Respondents heard about the survey from colleagues or peers (14%), as well as on social media, including Facebook (7%) and Instagram (5%).

Only 29% of respondents are not members of any trade organization, while 40% are members of ACE/AYCO and 51% are members of ACA. In an open-ended question, respondents indicated that they are members of other industry organizations, including Circus Fans Association of America, Circus Producers Association, and Yoga Alliance.



Summary

This survey was the first of its kind conducted among individual circus workers and production companies in the United States. Because there is a lack of data available to compare the 2022 data, it is challenging to make sweeping claims about the industry as a whole. Based on the skewing of the demographic data toward white folks, it is also possible that the survey could be more widely distributed to encompass a more diverse base of respondents.

The results indicate both potential throughout the industry as well as areas for improvement and growth, especially in support for individual circus performers.

Overall, the data gathered from this survey provides a solid overview of the circus industry in the United States and provides a launching pad for future and more in-depth research and analysis.