

Star Store Redevelopment: Community Needs & Engagement Survey - Summary of Findings New Bedford, MA | September–December 2025

The Star Store Community Needs & Engagement Survey collected responses from 178 participants during Fall 2025. Respondents included artists, creatives, educators, cultural workers, and community residents, with a strong concentration of individuals who live and/or work in New Bedford.

The survey explored:

- How respondents identify within the creative ecosystem
- Current barriers to participation and space access
- Desired uses for the Star Store
- Priorities related to affordability, access, programming, and governance

Respondent Profile

- A majority of respondents identify as artists or creatives, working across multiple disciplines.
- Many respondents occupy hybrid roles (e.g., artist + educator, maker + small business owner, artist + community organizer).
- A portion of respondents identified as community members, underscoring that interest in the Star Store extends beyond potential tenants.
- Respondents skew strongly toward local and regional engagement, with New Bedford residents and workers forming the core audience.

Survey data aligns with the findings from the community engagement sessions, reinforcing the consistency and reliability of the overall engagement process, where the Star Store is widely viewed as a shared civic resource, not a niche facility for a single professional group.

Desired Uses of the Star Store

Across questions about programming, space types, and activities, respondents consistently prioritized public-facing and shared uses over private or exclusive ones.

Top desired uses include:

- Exhibitions and galleries open to the public

- Performances, screenings, lectures, and talks
- Shared making spaces and workshops
- Teaching and learning environments (non-degree, artist-led, youth-focused)
- Informal gathering spaces to socialize, collaborate, or spend time

Respondents frequently selected multiple uses, indicating strong interest in a building that supports layered, flexible experiences rather than single-purpose visits.

Affordability & Access

Affordability emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent themes across the survey.

Respondents expressed:

- Concern that high rents or long-term leases would exclude local artists
- Support for sliding-scale pricing and low-cost access models
- Preference for short-term, rotating, or shared-use opportunities
- Interest in free or pay-what-you-can public programming

Affordability was framed broadly, not only in terms of cost, but also fairness, transparency, and access for artists at different career stages.

Space Preferences

The survey revealed a strong preference for shared and flexible spaces rather than permanent, individualized studios.

Respondents supported:

- Shared workshops with secure personal storage
- Multipurpose rooms adaptable for teaching, rehearsals, meetings, or exhibitions
- Short-term residencies and rotating access
- Spaces that can evolve over time as needs change

Long-term, exclusive studio tenancy was often viewed as less aligned with community benefit unless balanced by robust public access.

Inclusion, Education & Community Engagement

Respondents placed high value on intentional inclusion and broad community participation.

Key priorities included:

- Educational programming and partnerships
- Intergenerational learning and mentorship
- Accessibility for people with disabilities
- Multicultural and multilingual engagement
- Outreach beyond existing arts networks

Education was consistently framed as informal, community-based, and empowering, rather than credential-driven.

Open-Ended Feedback Themes

While less visible early in the survey, governance emerged as an important concern in open-ended responses.

Respondents emphasized:

- Transparent decision-making
- Local representation and accountability
- Clear safeguards to prevent mission drift
- Ongoing opportunities for community feedback

There was broad recognition that long-term trust depends on how the building is stewarded, not just what it contains.

Written responses also reinforced quantitative findings and highlighted:

- Anxiety about affordability and displacement
- Strong desire for writers, interdisciplinary artists, and underrepresented disciplines to be included
- Appreciation for being asked for input
- Calls for continued listening as plans develop

Overall Summary and Alignment with Community Engagement Sessions

Survey responses demonstrate strong, citywide support for reactivating the Star Store as a public-facing, affordable, flexible civic arts hub that serves artists *and* the broader community. Respondents envision a building grounded in shared resources, inclusive programming, and transparent stewardship; one that strengthens New Bedford's creative ecosystem while remaining accessible, welcoming, and adaptable over time.

Quantitatively, the survey validates the dominant themes that emerged across listening sessions and town halls: a clear preference for the Star Store to function as a public-facing civic arts hub, strong emphasis on affordability and equitable access, and broad support for shared, flexible, and multi-use spaces over permanent, exclusive tenancy. High levels of interest in exhibitions, performances, learning opportunities, and informal gathering spaces mirror the qualitative feedback that positioned public engagement as the building's primary function.

Similarly, survey responses affirm the community's call for intentional inclusion, particularly educational access, intergenerational programming, and outreach beyond established arts networks. These responses echo the priorities articulated consistently during in-person sessions.

Where the survey introduces nuance is in how priorities are weighted and articulated. While engagement sessions generated more detailed discussion around governance,

stewardship, and long-term trust, these concerns appear less prominently in closed-ended survey questions and emerge primarily through open-ended responses.

The survey captures a broader cross-section of participants, especially community members, who may not have attended listening sessions but nonetheless expressed strong interest in public-facing programming and affordability. This difference suggests not a contradiction, but a complementary dynamic: in-person sessions allowed for deeper exploration of structural and governance issues, while the survey validated core priorities at scale and highlighted the breadth of public interest.

Together, the two engagement methods provide a coherent and well-rounded understanding of community expectations for the Star Store's future.

Appendix A

This appendix summarizes some of the quantitative findings from the Star Store Community Needs & Engagement Survey conducted in Fall 2025. The survey received 178 responses and was designed to complement qualitative listening sessions and public town halls by validating priorities at scale. Survey results strongly reinforce the core findings outlined in the Community Engagement Summary, particularly around public engagement, affordability, shared and flexible space, inclusion, community engagement, and governance.

A.1 Respondent Profile

Table A1. Respondent Identification

Survey respondents represented a broad cross-section of New Bedford's creative ecosystem. A majority identified as artists or creatives, often with overlapping roles as educators, cultural workers, small business owners, or community organizers. A significant share of respondents identified primarily as community members or audience participants, underscoring that the Star Store is widely viewed as a civic resource rather than a tenant-only facility.

This validates the synthesis finding that most people envision engaging with the Star Store as participants, audiences, learners, and collaborators, not solely as studio tenants.

Figure A1. Respondent Roles - General

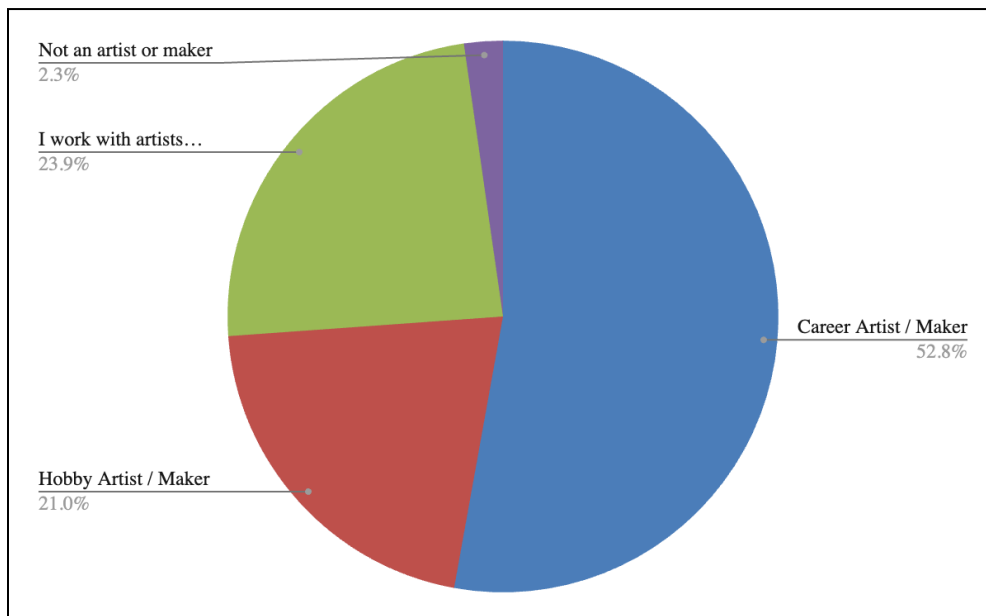
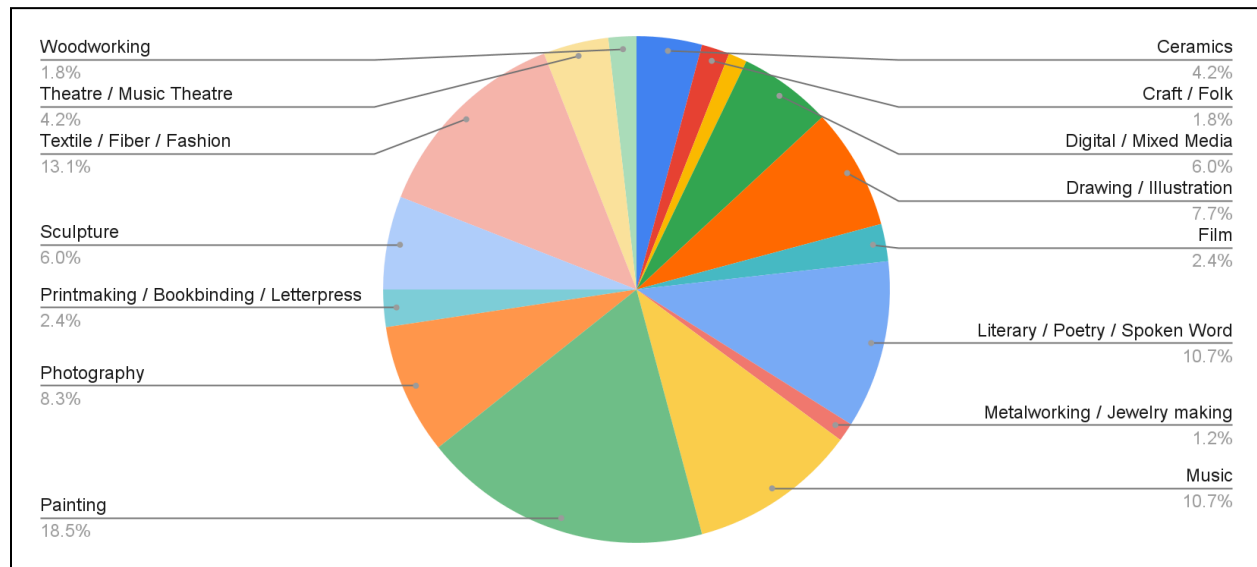


Figure A1. Respondent Roles - By Discipline



A.2 Desired Uses of the Star Store

Across multiple survey questions, respondents selected public-facing and shared uses at significantly higher rates than private or exclusive uses.

Commonly selected priorities included:

- Exhibitions and galleries
- Performances, screenings, and talks
- Shared workshops and making spaces
- Teaching and learning environments
- Informal gathering and social spaces

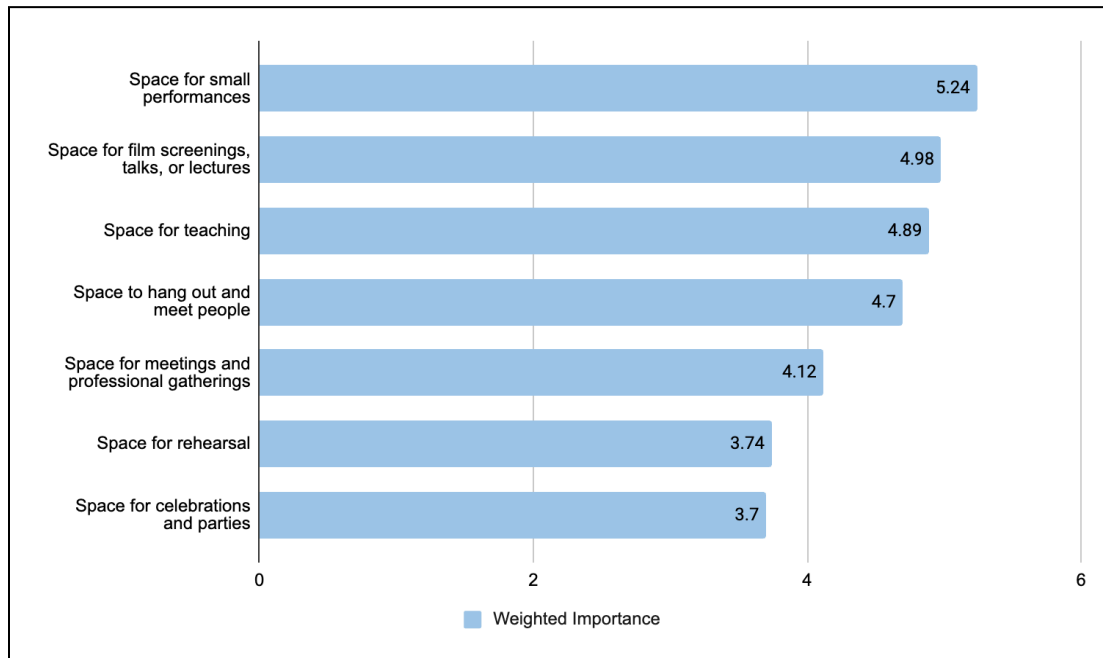
Most respondents selected multiple use types, indicating strong interest in a building that supports layered, multi-purpose visits. Survey data confirms that public engagement should be the organizing principle of the Star Store, not an add-on.

Respondent open-ended feedback:

“Our community needs a gallery and spaces to teach art classes. There is a great need for adult education and for emerging artists.”

“Kids who have a positive arts-based experience at a young age in the Star Store will remember it their entire lives. Don't just serve the arts community as it is now. Serve the future arts community as well!”

Table A2. Top Desired Uses of the Star Store (weighted importance)



A.3 Affordability & Equity

Affordability emerged as one of the strongest quantitative signals in the survey.

Respondents consistently indicated that:

- Affordability is essential to participation
- High rents or long-term leases would exclude local artists
- Sliding-scale pricing and low-cost access models are preferred
- Free or pay-what-you-can public programming is critical

Affordability was framed broadly—not only as cost, but as fairness, access, and opportunity across career stages.

These findings directly support the synthesis conclusion that affordability must be built into both financial models and access structures.

Respondent open-ended feedback:

“Make it affordable. Don’t hyper focus on profit. I know the realities, but what made the Star Store special when I was a student and then later, a patron, was that it was art for art’s sake, not for profit.”

“Some of the questions about affordability leave out the possibility of a free membership at the lowest end of the scale. If you truly want to be inclusive, there needs to be an option to access the space without a financial barrier. Art and creativity is most powerful when it can be shared across costly divides.”

Table A3. Importance of Affordability

| Private Studio Space | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Affordability Requested | Responses |
| Less than \$100 per month | 32% |
| \$100-\$200 per month | 28% |
| \$201-\$350 per month | 19% |
| \$351-\$500 per month | 13% |
| \$501-\$1000 per month | 6% |
| More than \$1000 per month | 2% |

| Shared Space and Equipment | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Affordability Requested | Responses |
| Less than \$25 per month | 20% |
| \$26-\$50 per month | 25% |
| \$51-\$75 per month | 24% |
| \$76-\$125 per month | 19% |
| \$126-\$250 per month | 7% |
| More than \$250 per month | 5% |

| Public Engagement Space | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Affordability Requested | Responses |
| Less than \$100 per half day use | 61% |
| \$100-\$200 per half day use | 24% |
| \$201-\$350 per half day use | 9% |
| \$351-\$500 per half day use | 6% |
| \$501-\$1000 per half day use | 0% |
| More than \$1000 per half day use | 0% |

A.4 Space Model Preferences

Survey responses show a clear preference for shared, flexible, and rotating space models rather than permanent, exclusive tenancy.

Respondents expressed strong support for:

- Shared workshops with personal storage
- Short-term rentals and residencies
- Multipurpose rooms adaptable over time
- Policies that allow for rotation and broad access

Long-term, fixed studio tenancy received notably less support unless balanced by strong public access and shared infrastructure. This data reinforces the synthesis finding that adaptability and shared use are cultural values, not merely operational strategies.

Respondent open-ended feedback:

“Be careful not to duplicate what already exists. Audiences are already spread thin with the theatre and gathering space we have. Fill the gaps.”

Table A4. Space Model Preferences

| <i>Type of Space</i> | Need but Cannot Currently Access | Currently Pay to Access | Currently Access for Free |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Space with shared tools/equipment | 21% | 7% | 8% |
| Event/gathering space | 21% | 20% | 17% |
| Private studio space | 14% | 22% | 18% |
| Computer/media lab/research space | 13% | 8% | 17% |
| Storage space for my creative work or equipment | 13% | 17% | 15% |
| Studio space I share with others | 11% | 14% | 7% |
| Office/administrative space | 8% | 12% | 18% |

A.5 Inclusion, Learning & Community Access

Quantitative responses and open-ended survey feedback emphasized:

- Educational programming and partnerships
- Intergenerational participation
- Accessibility for people with disabilities
- Multicultural and multilingual engagement
- Outreach beyond established arts networks

Education was consistently described as informal, community-based, and empowering, rather than credential-focused. Survey data confirms that inclusion must be operationalized through programming, outreach, and policy, not assumed through design alone.

Table A5. Inclusion, Learning & Community Access - First Choice Only

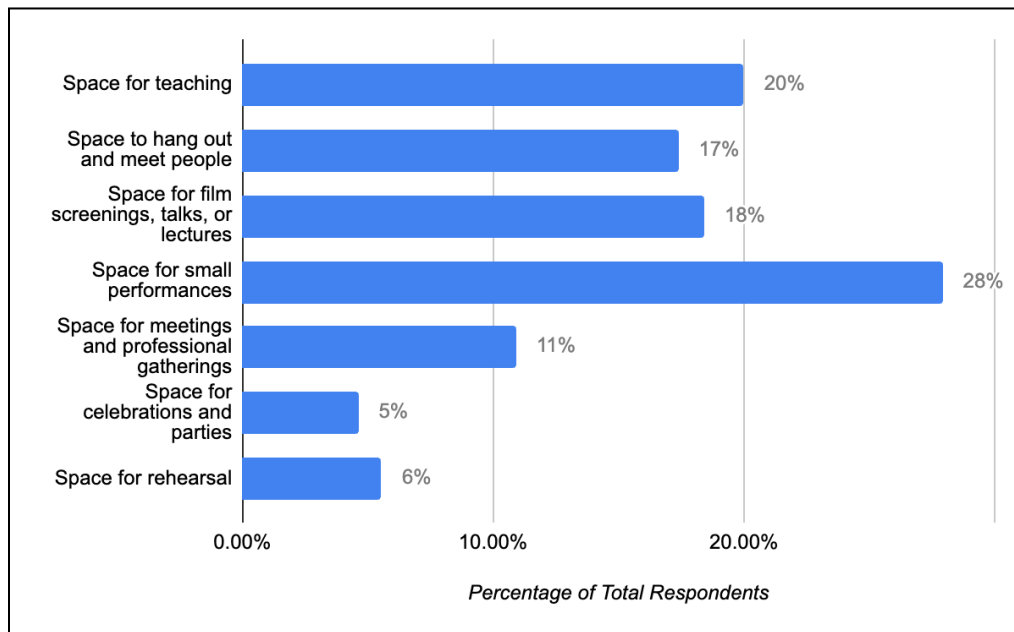
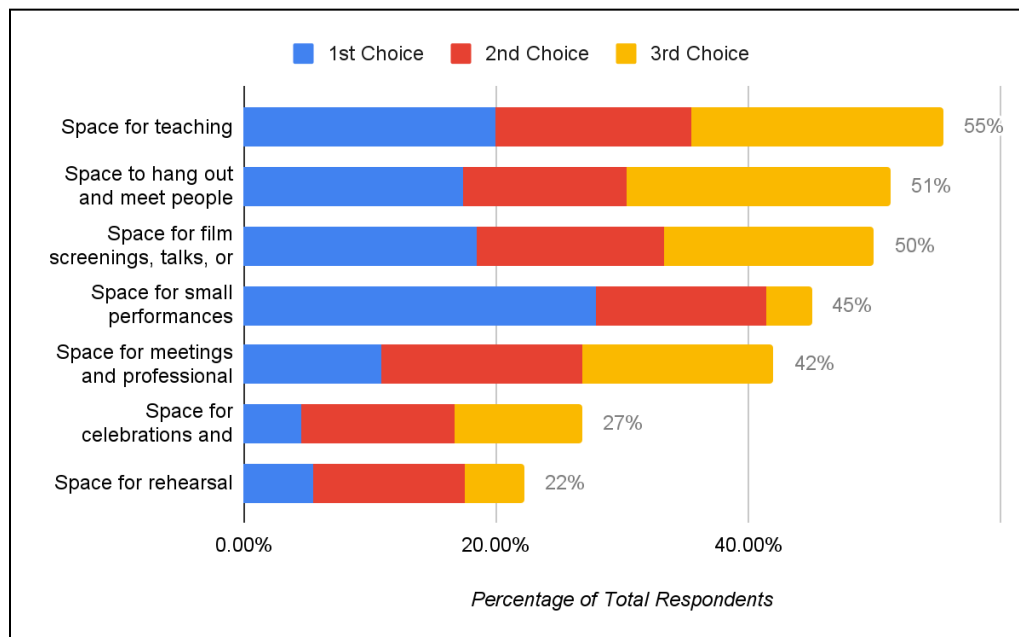


Table A5. Inclusion, Learning & Community Access - Top Three Choices



A.6 Summary Alignment to Community Engagement Summary

Overall, survey data strongly validates the qualitative findings captured through listening sessions and town halls. Quantitative responses consistently support the vision of the Star Store as:

- Public-facing first
- Affordable and equitable by design
- Shared, flexible, and adaptable
- Welcoming through action
- Transparently governed
- Learning-centered and intergenerational
- Open to evolution over time

Together, the survey and engagement summary establish a robust, community-informed foundation to guide the Star Store's redevelopment.

Respondent open-ended feedback:

"As is always said, NB has a great deal of cultural and artistic potential that could drive tourism and local interaction. The Star Store presents a huge opportunity for the cultural scene in NB."

"This project is so exciting. The potential is nearly limitless. The community has so many capable people. Lean on the community."

"I hope this is helpful in taking the Star Store to a positive direction for artists and residents of New Bedford. They deserve a place where artists can have access to the tools, places, and opportunities that will take them to the highest level. When I lived in New Bedford, I was surrounded by amazingly talented community-minded artists that still inspire me today. The Star Store was my introduction to that New Bedford community and should continue in its mission of being a hub for artists and community to meet, learn, and collaborate."