



# Community Performances and Partnerships

*at New England Conservatory*

**20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Alumni Study**

**2003–2023**

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# FENWAY COMMUNITY CENTER



# Introduction

In 2003, New England Conservatory (NEC) introduced a community engagement program offering students a chance to connect the skills they were developing as musicians to a broad array of civic aims and aspirations in Boston and beyond. In just a few years, what started as a relatively modest initiative led by a single staff member blossomed into a full-blown department at NEC. Nearly a quarter of all NEC students were participating in community-based programming on an annual basis, NEC developed a robust network of collaborators in disparate fields such as public education, health, and the visual arts, and demand for related coursework and fellowship opportunities steadily grew.

After a decade of continuous growth, NEC's Community Performances and Partnerships (CPP) department reached a critical inflection point. Hundreds of CPP alumni were working in communities across the globe, and many alumni stayed in close contact after graduation. Stories of deep community embeddedness, continued learning and the possibilities afforded through interdisciplinary collaboration poured in—providing the impetus for an initial alumni study. The first NEC Community Performances and Partnerships Alumni Study was launched in 2013 with an eye toward understanding alumni career trajectories as well as how those trajectories were shaped by key dimensions of the CPP experience. The study yielded remarkable findings: 100% of CPP alumni remained involved in the field of music in some capacity, and most indicated that they were using the skills they developed through CPP programming to develop vibrant and deeply satisfying careers.

Published in 2023, the current alumni study broadens the lens to address a critical topic in the field of community music: sociocultural impact. In other words, while the first study explored the impact of CPP programming on the trajectories of NEC alumni, this study examines how CPP alumni are leveraging their musical skills to **strengthen the social and cultural lives of their communities.**

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# CPP STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

## *Alumni and Community Impact*

- **51%** of alumni are using their craft to enhance educational opportunities in a variety of settings.
- **42%** of alumni are creating opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and ability levels to participate in musical activity.
- **41%** of alumni are cultivating mutually beneficial relationships and/or community partnerships.
- **38%** of alumni are using their craft to support a sense of communal well-being and/or healing.
- Alumni involved in CPP programming for a year or longer tend to have a greater impact on their communities along several dimensions of practice than alumni with less intensive CPP involvement. Overall, alumni with less CPP involvement tend to experience greater challenges in enacting their goals for community music making.

## *Participation and Professional Development*

- **98%** of alumni report that CPP was a significant aspect of their educational experience at NEC.
- **89%** of alumni report that the skills they gained through CPP programming have played a vital role in their professional development.
- **98%** of alumni report that they would recommend CPP training and community engagement work to other music students in preparation for a career in music.

## *Career Satisfaction*

- **92%** of alumni report that they are satisfied with their professional lives.

## **This report is divided into six sections.**

**Part I** “Community Music: A Brief Introduction” provides an overview of the distinct subfield of community music.

**Part II** “A Mixed-Method Approach” describes the alumni study’s key questions, research design and sample.

**Part III** “Unpacking Impact” forms the bulk of this report and complements a presentation of broad impact trends with several qualitative portraits of practice to provide a closer look at alumni impact.

**Part IV** “Professional Development and CPP Programming” takes a step back to consider the role educational experiences specific to the CPP program played in shaping alumni’s professional trajectories.

**Part V** “Gaps Between Aspiration and Impact” discusses key challenges alumni have confronted in their professional development.

**Part VI** “Conclusion” presents a brief synthesis of key findings and considerations for NEC.

# I. Community Music: A Brief Introduction

For centuries an “art for art’s sake” ideology has governed professional art-making activities, creating strict divisions between artists and audiences. From this perspective, the idea of an audience frames individuals as passive in relation to culture—as witnesses rather than full contributors to the cultural process (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2008). By contrast, community artmaking experiences are guided by a more participatory vision of art. Community arts practitioners endeavor to make work that is as compelling socially as it is aesthetically, and practitioners tend to view members of the broader public as key allies in this regard (Bartleet and Higgins, 2018; Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Goldbard, 2006). In line with this vision, community art-making practices are designed to support meaning-making and dialogue to address local concerns, and project activities commonly involve a wide array of community members in an effort to democratize the creative power of the arts (Elliott, Silverman and Bowman, 2015; Lena, 2019).

In the realm of music, community-based initiatives play a central but often underappreciated role in strengthening social networks in a range of settings across the globe. As noted by the International Society for Music Education, “Community music activities... provide opportunities to construct personal and communal expressions of artistic, social, political, and cultural concerns” (as cited in Schippers and Bartleet, 2013, p. 457). However, while community music-making practices are often framed as a “more marginal manifestation of mainstream arts activities”

(Goldbard, 2006, p. 20), the community music subfield operates with a distinct set of values and goals. In contrast with experiences that frame music as something rooted in European traditions, community-based practices are fundamentally concerned with emphasizing local traditions and thematic concerns (Higgins, 2012; Lerman, 2002). Moreover, rather than resourcing and classifying only certain forms of creative expression as music, community-based approaches aim to support the broadest possible array of musical production—often involving diverse community members as a result (Chapple and Jackson, 2010; Graves, 2010). And finally, rather than reserving educational experiences for a small number of privileged youth, community-based traditions aim to make the expressive power of music as widely available as possible (Veblen and Olsson, 2002).

However, the highly interdisciplinary nature of community music means that practitioners must also contend with multiple competing priorities and a unique set of tensions. As trained musicians, community music practitioners strive to create high-quality music. Yet what constitutes quality is often defined by traditions and norms associated with classical and jazz genres, and within this context, the values of a community-specific approach to music are often suppressed. As cultural workers, community music practitioners often must justify their projects according to various assumptions about “needy communities”—even when the work they produce challenges these assumptions altogether. As music

educators, community music practitioners exist in a landscape dominated by standards and accountability pressures, practices that are fundamentally at odds with the goal of supporting place-based music and local creativity. Complicating matters further, because communities evolve under distinct historic, sociopolitical and cultural circumstances, these field-level tensions manifest differently within each community context.

As a result, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to community music—and efforts to address questions of community impact must take several ecological factors into account. First, the impact community-based musicians have through their practice is shaped by the needs and aspirations that emerge in particular geographic settings. Ultimately, the projects with the greatest impact are those that are most culturally relevant, as determined in collaboration with key partners. Second, impact is always shaped by resources and challenges. Musicians constantly negotiate various affordances (e.g. time, local social networks, funding, etc.) and constraints (e.g. lack of space, partners, access to professional learning opportunities, etc.) as they pursue their visions, and over time these negotiations set the stage for varying levels of impact. For these reasons, this study adopts an ecological view of community impact in an effort to honor the richness and complexities of alumni’s lived experiences.

## II. A Mixed-Method Approach

The findings in this report are based on a mixed-method study of NEC alumni who were involved in CPP programming during their time at NEC. Study methods combined survey and semi-structured qualitative interviewing techniques to reveal broad trends as well as more in-depth understandings based on several key ecological factors. In this study we ask: What kind of impact do CPP alumni have on communities through their musical practice? In what ways do they draw on their educational backgrounds to forge meaningful ties to their communities?

The survey was designed to capture a snapshot of alumni’s professional pathways and community music-making practices, and it was informed by an extensive review of scholarly literature on community art. The survey gathered basic demographic information as well as information on the following topics:

- Current employment trends.
- Professional goals and perceptions of community impact.
- Key material resources and challenges.
- Reflections on CPP experience.

The survey was distributed to 918 alumni who graduated from NEC who were involved in CPP between 2004–2022. Of the 120 alumni who responded to the survey, 61% indicated that they attended NEC as master’s candidates and earned master’s degrees. 27% of all respondents attended NEC as undergraduates and earned

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bachelor's degrees. 2–5% of respondents indicated they were involved in NEC through artist diploma, graduate diploma, and doctor of musical arts degree programs. In terms of majors, 30% of all respondents indicated that they were strings majors and 28% majored in woodwind, brass or percussion. Jazz majors comprised 15% of the survey sample and 12% of respondents majored in vocal performance. The remaining 15% of survey respondents were evenly distributed across all other NEC majors.

Although the sample represents the full spectrum of CPP programming, it is important to note that students participate in CPP programming in different ways depending on their particular needs and interests. As a result, the alumni responses gathered over the course of the study reflect various modes of participation and engagement in the CPP program. Respondents' length of participation in CPP programming varied considerably. While 38% of respondents were involved for one to two years, 28% were involved for two to four years. 16% of respondents were involved for

six months to a year, 12% were involved in CPP programming for six months or less, and 3% were one-time participants. 4% of survey respondents indicated that their involvement spanned multiple degree programs at NEC and lasted four years or longer.

Survey data were analyzed in December 2022 with a particular emphasis on identifying trends in CPP alumni's professional goals and perceptions of community impact. Interviews with a selected group of 10 alumni were designed to explore key trends revealed in the survey data. Topics explored during interviews included recent projects, community contexts, key partnerships, stories of community impact and challenge, and reflections on the NEC experience. All interviews were recorded, lasted approximately one hour, and were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Interview transcripts were reviewed by the lead researcher and systematically coded to develop a more nuanced understandings of the nature of alumni community impact.

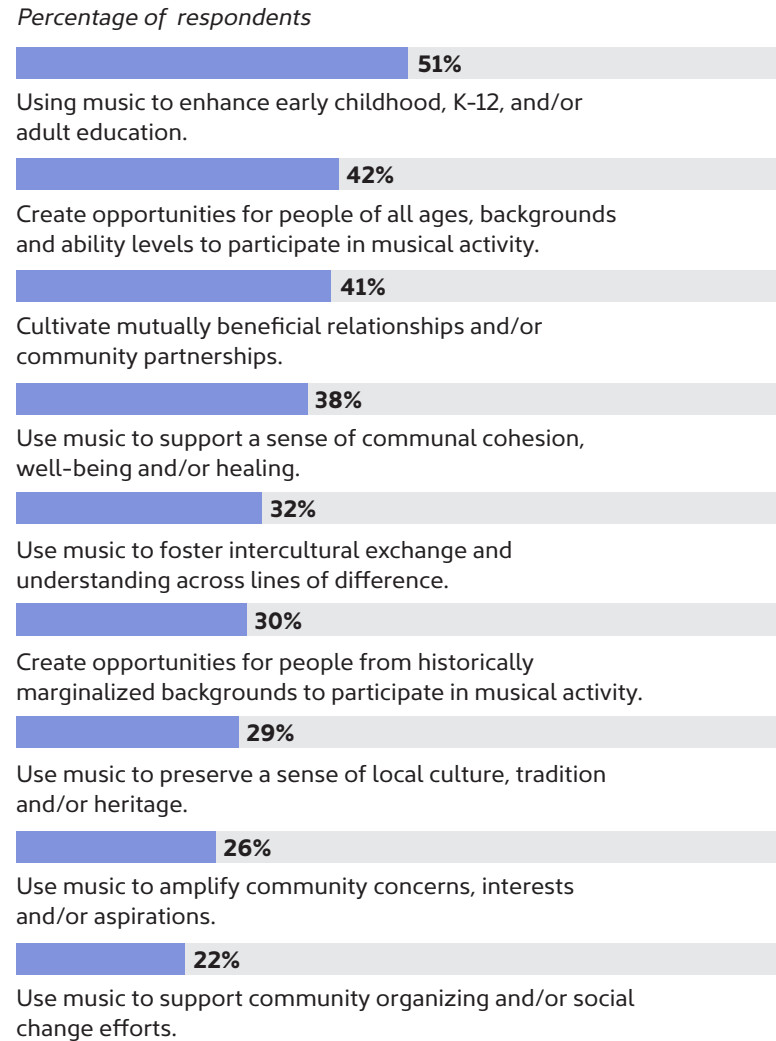
### III. Unpacking Impact

Whether embedded in city governments as artists-in-residence, curating performances to amplify local mutual aid projects, or leading nonprofit arts organizations, CPP alumni are using their musical skills to support broader social aims. Alumni report that connecting their craft with the deeper parts of who they are—their identities, values and lives as citizens—allows them to make a meaningful impact in their communities. As Figure 1 (at right) demonstrates, alumni have a particular impact in terms of using their musical practice to enhance educational activities in a variety of settings (51%); are successful in creating opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and ability levels to participate in musical activity (42%); are cultivating mutually beneficial relationships and/or community partnerships (41%); and are using music to support a sense of communal well-being and healing (38%).

Each of the four sections below draws on CPP alumni interviews to offer more in-depth portraits of practice in these realms of impact.

***\*Survey respondents were able to select the impacts/skills/challenges that were most relevant to their musical practice, and in many cases respondents selected more than one.***

**FIGURE 1**  
**Perceived Areas of High Community Impact**





### **Building Meaningful Partnerships: Ethan and Shaw Pong**

Collaboration is essential to community-based music. Relationships between musicians and allied cultural workers, community groups and organizations provide a necessary foundation for pursuing mutual aims and aspirations. However, while collaboration is often positioned as a means to achieving others' ends, many alumni also regard relationship-building and strengthening cultural networks as a distinct form of impact.

**Ethan Philbrick '03 Prep** is a cellist, scholar and educator based in New York City. He notes that working within one of the art world's epicenters comes with its challenges. Over the years, New York's economic inequalities have created gaps in cultural infrastructure and a "winner-take-all environment" in arts funding. As a result, a small number of already-established projects backed by institutions prosper while independent cultural causes may struggle to find audiences and gain traction. Under these circumstances, Ethan is especially intentional about working across as many different kinds of settings as possible—from well-resourced cultural centers and institutes of higher education to grassroots community organizations and temporary DIY spaces—in an effort to bridge divides in New York's ecology of cultural production. Creative allies and partners are essential to this work. Building relationships with other creatives across disciplines allows Ethan to cultivate the forms of social capital that can help broaden the field of cultural production. Partners provide access to space, collaborate to co-present work across multiple modes of production, and, as Ethan notes, open up additional possibilities for reaching multiple audiences. For these reasons, Ethan says, "collaboration is the medium of my practice," and he expands on this maxim in his recently published book, *Group Works: Art, Politics, and Collective Ambivalence* (Fordham University Press, 2023).

**Shaw Pong Lui '08 MM** is a violinist and teaching artist based in Boston. As part of the Boston Artists-in-Residence program Shaw Pong developed Code Listen, a project that facilitated participatory songwriting workshops to create community dialogues around violence, racism, and policing. "I had this lofty idea that I could use music to unpack racism" Shaw Pong says before realizing that she needed to rethink her goals. Local organizers were reluctant to get involved with a project sponsored by the city, and longstanding tensions between police and communities of color threatened to derail the project before it ever got started. In response, Shaw Pong turned her attention to rebuilding trust across lines of difference. Shaw Pong acknowledged that while she couldn't erase history, she could create space for homicide survivors and police officers to listen to and learn from one another. In particular, Code Listen created possibilities for new modes of relationship—helping to heal the divisions responsible for fomenting legacies of distrust. As a result, Code Listen offered a valuable social intervention, helping to establish the conditions needed for pursuing shared goals through ongoing collaboration.

### **Enhancing Education: Nana and Kevin**

Most CPP alumni teach in some capacity, and just over half of survey respondents report that their most impactful work happens in the realm of education. They can be found teaching in adult learning programs, community music schools, K-12 schools and after-school programs, museums, and within higher education settings. As teaching artists, alumni work in these settings to enhance education—and they are particularly focused on addressing the needs and interests of diverse learners.

**Nana Aomori '06 BM** is a music educator at a public school in Long Island, New York. Nana's impact is in the realm of culturally sustaining education. As a student in the same public school system years prior, Nana often felt othered due to her immigrant background, and she's mindful of the imprint decades of discriminatory policy has left on the community. Given this broader context, Nana sees the music room as a place where she can build the foundations for intercultural exchange, learning and respect. As an educator, Nana knows that curriculum is never neutral. What institutions choose to teach sends a powerful message to students about the kinds of knowledge and skills that are valued in society. To this end, Nana aims to expand what "counts" in the educational space, and she takes pride in centering students' heritage practices within her classroom. "I'm just trying to normalize diversity," Nana says. "It's not that only certain kinds of people have culture. We all have culture, and that deserves to be seen and respected by our peers." Over time, diversifying the curriculum has a profound effect. Teaching and learning practices in Nana's classroom encourage cultural curiosity and provide children with a set of practices for engaging with and learning about difference. Moreover, for minoritized youth, seeing themselves represented in the curriculum can instill a deeper sense of connection and belonging at school.

**Kevin Bock '12 GD** is a tubist and educator based in Phoenix where he teaches within the city's robust network of community colleges in addition to performing with the Phoenix Symphony. Kevin notes that in contrast with the area's symphony audience, teaching opens up possibilities for engaging with a demographic that more closely reflects the diversity of the surrounding area. He teaches many first-generation college students from lower-income backgrounds.

To do so effectively, questions such as "What is the zeitgeist of younger people?," "How can I engage with the zeitgeist of younger people?" and "What kind of music works?" are at the forefront of Kevin's pedagogical practice. He says reflecting on them helps him meet people where they are, because he's observed that too often, institutions expect students and members of the broader public to "meet us *where we are*." To make the fundamentals of music more accessible and engaging, Kevin builds bridges between his students' interests and tastes in popular music and music education, allowing him to impart valuable lessons in discipline and self-directed learning. He says by working toward these goals he can cultivate "the core tendencies in music that can support success in any field."

### **Expanding Opportunities for Musical Participation: Katie and Michal**

Careers in the arts are often facilitated by "structured pathways," a constellation of creative learning opportunities that are not widely available to members of the general public (Gaztambide-Fernández and Parekh, 2017). In music, private lessons, rigorous preparatory programs and specialized music camps form the basis of the training that is often the prerequisite for professional development. While these enrichment experiences create opportunities for some, sociologists of art observe that structured pathways are also responsible for limiting socioeconomic diversity in the arts. In many cases, CPP alumni said they have seen how these pathways put youth who are not economically privileged at a disadvantage in music, and they are conscientious in their efforts to broaden them.

**Kathryn (Katie) Sansone '07 MM** is the executive director of the Musical Mentors Collaborative, a nonprofit organization that works

in multiple cities across the United States to provide private lessons and tailored support to a broad array of youth and families. Katie acknowledges that many families don't have access to preparatory programs, so she sees her work as an effort in "leveling the playing field" with respect to music education. To pursue this vision, Katie begins by developing a nuanced understanding of the communities in which her organization works. "When we look at the structure of our programming, we have to look at it through a lens of flexibility to make sure we are meeting the needs of the communities we serve, as opposed to saying, 'We think someone needs this, let's create it,'" she says. Ultimately, her work is about creating multiple points of entry for musical enjoyment and participation: providing free tickets for youth and families to attend performances, planning lessons centered around young peoples' existing musical tastes and interests, filling gaps in public music education, and connecting youth to professional musicians in their communities who can mentor them.

**Michal Shein '07 MM** is a cellist and teaching artist based in Boston. Over the years, she has learned to think differently about the question of impact. While she was a student, Michal says, her ideas about impact were bound up in notions of personal prestige and success. But as she has continued to live and build a career in Boston, she finds that her work is driven by two fundamental questions: "Where can I make the biggest contribution? Who can I really serve and make a connection with?" To address these questions, Michal uses her position as a well-connected musician to widen the doors of opportunity—in Boston and beyond. In the city, Michal is a teaching artist with several music programs that span neighborhoods and economic circumstances. As a result, she has seen how Boston's history of racial and economic segregation

has affected the geographies of opportunity. Through working across contexts, Michal has learned where the city's resources and supports are concentrated, and she leverages her connections to broker opportunities for her students. In addition, Michal is the founder of Cellisimo, an international music festival for Latinx cellists, who are underrepresented in the field of classical music. Unlike festivals solely focused on performance, Cellisimo emphasizes wellness and community to provide the holistic support required for high-level musical development. For Michal, professional fulfillment comes from "connecting people and worlds," and redefining success along these lines has afforded multiple possibilities for impact.

### **Supporting Communal Well-being and Healing: Ehud and Shaw Pong**

Many CPP alumni are involved in devising projects that can be viewed through the lens of cultural organizing, where local artists collaborate with neighbors, civic groups, and municipalities to advance shared goals for community development (Kuttner, 2015). The concept of cultural organizing can help us understand musical projects devised as a mechanism for supporting communal well-being and healing. As cultural organizers, CPP alumni are working across disparate fields—such as social services, urban planning and medicine—to strengthen civic ties and cultural landscapes.

**Shaw Pong**, introduced earlier, says that the social foundations she built through the Code Listen project provided a basis for healing. Amid the nation's earliest stages of reckoning around police reform, Code Listen brought together community organizers, families impacted by violence, and members of the Boston Police

Department to create original compositions based on shared experiences of loss and aspirations for peace. Project participants worked together to create songs based on personal testimonies and poetry, and this humanizing process provided a context for members of the group to begin repairing longstanding divisions. “It was comforting for all of us in the ensemble to be able to be actively connecting with one another and working towards connection,” Shaw Pong says. “We were showing up for each other, caring for each other, and building a sense of safety for each other. We weren’t necessarily intimate the way a family is, but we came to feel closeness and trust with people in the group in a way that was healing.” While popular imagination is often besieged by images of political division and hopelessness, Code Listen illuminated that an alternate reality is possible. The communicative power of music, Shaw Pong says, provides “a vehicle for having a collective experience and building a collective voice.”

**Ehud Ettun ’12 MM** is a bassist and educator based in Mitzpe Ramon, Israel. While many alumni live in urban areas with well-developed arts and cultural infrastructures, Ehud has chosen a different path. Since 2016 he has built a career for himself in Israel’s rural south, where he founded the Internal Compass Music Institute, which teaches collegiate and pre-collegiate musicians. Ehud explains that the school is both an educational institute and a cultural hub that is reshaping the cultural and economic contours of the region. Given Mitzpe Ramon’s geographic isolation,

the town has contended with a history of civic disinvestment, fomenting a deficit narrative that has in turn disincentivized development. In this context, Ehud’s work is in the realm of creative placemaking. The institute has brought a range of ancillary arts and cultural activities to the region, such as music festivals, an artist-in-residence series and a jazz club. Over time, these offerings have helped reshape the region’s civic identity so that it is no longer defined by deficits. Rather, arts and cultural activities are helping tell a new story about Mitzpe Ramon and its future. Although Ehud still travels across the globe for various performance engagements, returning to Mitzpe Ramon has given him the opportunity to “align my personal goals with the bigger goals of the country and do something bigger than me.”

## IV. Professional Development and CPP programming

Success in community music making is not solely a matter of individual achievement, and impact does not happen in a vacuum. Local social networks, time, project funding, access to space and opportunities for continued professional development are all important factors that shaped CPP alumni's accomplishments. Alumni also indicated that CPP played an outsize role in their professional development—providing the knowledge and skills they draw upon as they seek resources and navigate setbacks. In particular, **89% of alumni report that the skills they gained through the CPP program have played a key role in their professional development, and 92% report that they are satisfied with their professional lives.**

In interviews, alumni characterized the CPP program as an important “incubator,” “gateway” and “eye-opener” that helped them refine their creative visions, develop the skills they needed to share their visions with particular audiences and communities, and implement cultural projects across a wide variety of contexts. As a result, alumni often view CPP as a foundational learning experience that allowed them to connect their talents to the broader world. They also suggest that having the opportunity to learn in a less competitive environment gave them latitude to explore their interests, space to reflect on the purpose of music in society, and an amplified sense of personal possibility. As one graduate said,

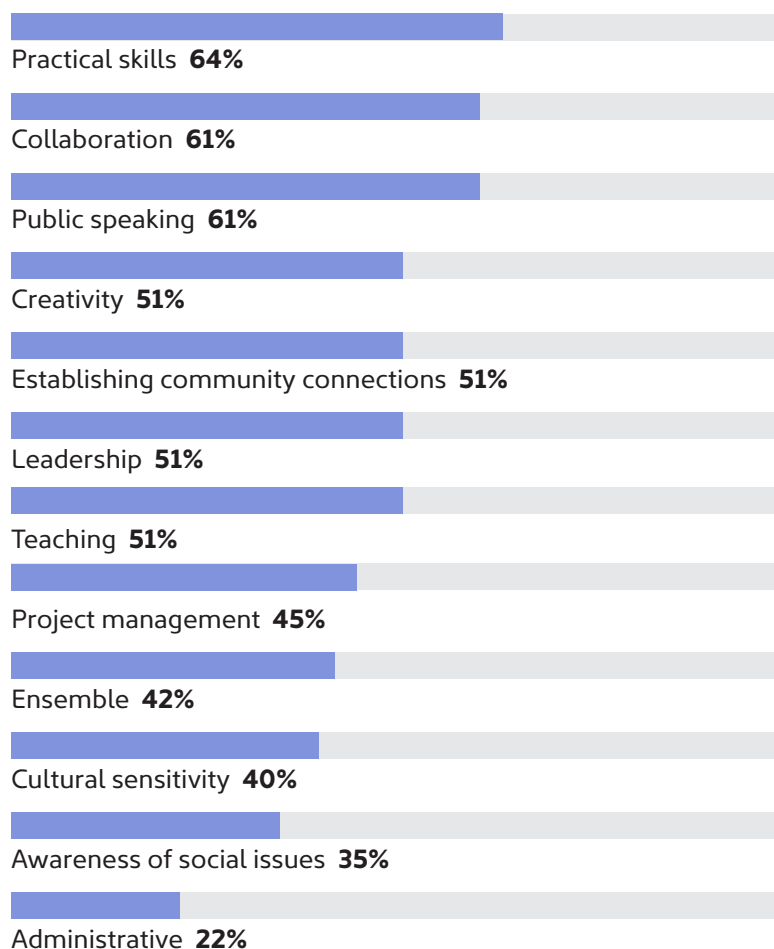
“As someone who was often marginalized, I think one of the best things that happened to me at NEC was the CPP program. CPP opened up an avenue for developing the tools I needed in order to share who I was with the world and what I had to say in a way that felt safe. CPP was where I developed more of who I was, which led me to be able to make choices about my career after that. It just reframed who I was and could be.”

A closer look at survey findings is useful in unpacking the tools and skills alumni develop through CPP programming. *In particular, alumni report that through their involvement in CPP, they were able to begin cultivating the skill sets they draw upon most frequently in their professional lives.* As depicted in Figure 2 (next page), alumni identified real-world/practical (64%), collaboration (61%), public speaking (61%), establishing community connections (51%), creativity (51%), leadership (51%), and teaching (51%) as highly important professional skills they developed through CPP programming.

Given the increasing importance of “portfolio careers,” an “evolving patchwork of projects, jobs, educational experiences and skills” that are now required for career development and sustainability, many alumni credit CPP with helping them navigate a career landscape

**FIGURE 2**  
**Critical Professional Skills** Developed  
 Through CPP Programming

*Professional skill and percentage of respondents*



that requires multiple competencies (Lingo and Tepper, 2013, p. 345). As one graduate notes,

“CPP was absolutely instrumental in giving me the tools to be able to make a career. I’ve been playing full time with the symphony for the last two years. But before that, I had to cobble together a freelance career. I would not have been able to stay in music if it were not for those skills developed by the CPP program. It was a very nurturing environment where it was OK to make mistakes and learn from that.”

Survey findings also reveal that sustained CPP participation is especially beneficial. For instance, alumni who were involved in CPP programming for a year or longer report several areas of community impact that are stronger than those of alumni who were involved for less than a year. As shown in Figure 3 (facing page), alumni with longer term participation in CPP programming tend to be more successful in cultivating mutually beneficial relationships and/or community partnerships (+21%); are more able to use music to enhance early childhood, K-12 and/or adult education (+14%); and are more able to use their musical skills to support community organizing and/or social change efforts (+10%).

Survey data also suggest that alumni who were involved in CPP programming for less than one year face greater challenges in several areas of their professional practice. As observed in Figure 4 (facing page), they tend to report greater difficulties in connecting with local social networks (-17%), making their work visible to potential audiences (-20%), and securing funding for their projects (-15%).

FIGURE 3

### Breakdown of Observed Musical Impacts by Length of CPP Involvement

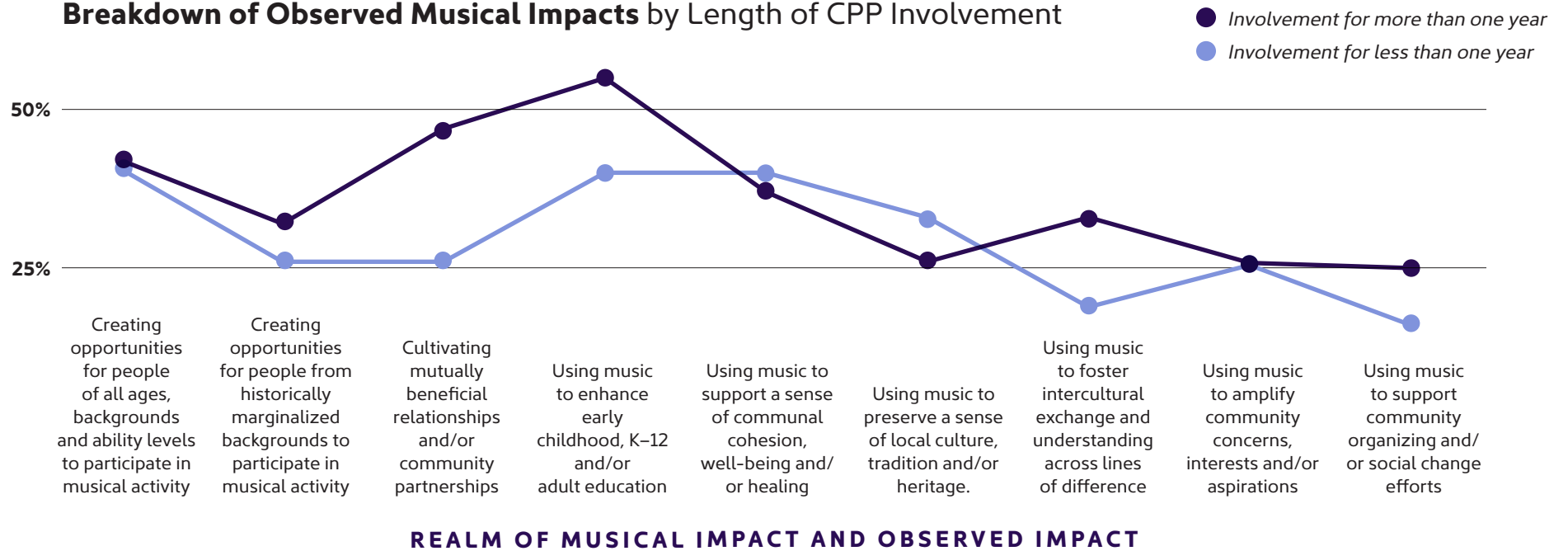
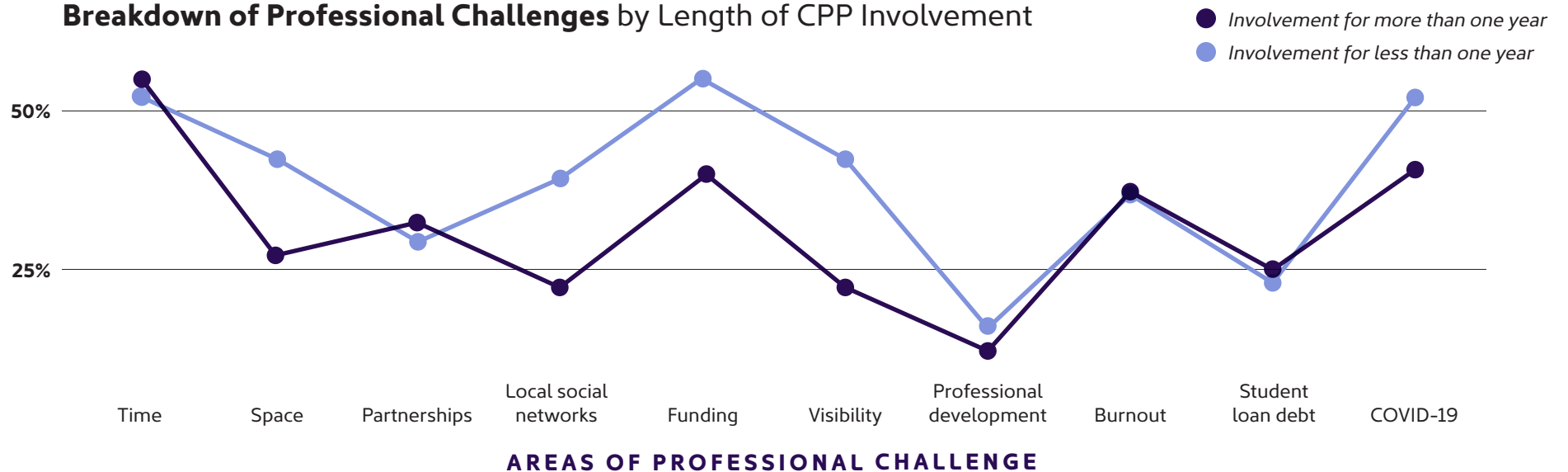


FIGURE 4

### Breakdown of Professional Challenges by Length of CPP Involvement



## V. Gaps Between Aspiration and Impact

Alumni report having an impact on their communities through their work, albeit one that tends to fall short of their aspirations. As depicted in Figure 5 (facing page), the gap between alumni aspirations and observed impact is particularly large in the following three areas: cultivating mutually beneficial relationships and/or community partnerships (-27%); creating opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and ability levels to participate in musical activity (-25%), and using music to support a sense of communal well-being and/or healing (-22%).

These gaps can be explained by several headwinds alumni encounter as working professionals. Alumni indicated that time, funding and their professional socialization as conservatory students were especially common challenges. Out of necessity, many alumni juggle multiple professional responsibilities to make ends meet. Under these circumstances, it can be difficult to carve out time for community-based projects, which require considerable investments in research, planning and project management. As a result, alumni also note that it can be challenging to build and sustain community relationships, work that is crucial when they are not part of the communities within which they are developing projects. Alumni also note that community-based work is often funded on a project-by-project basis. This means community partners may interpret projects as short, one-off experiences, and that perceived lack of sustainability can be a significant barrier. As one graduate noted, the structural conditions that surround

community-based music can position alumni as perpetual “outsiders” who are less likely to form the long-term relationships needed to sustain deep and ongoing collaboration.

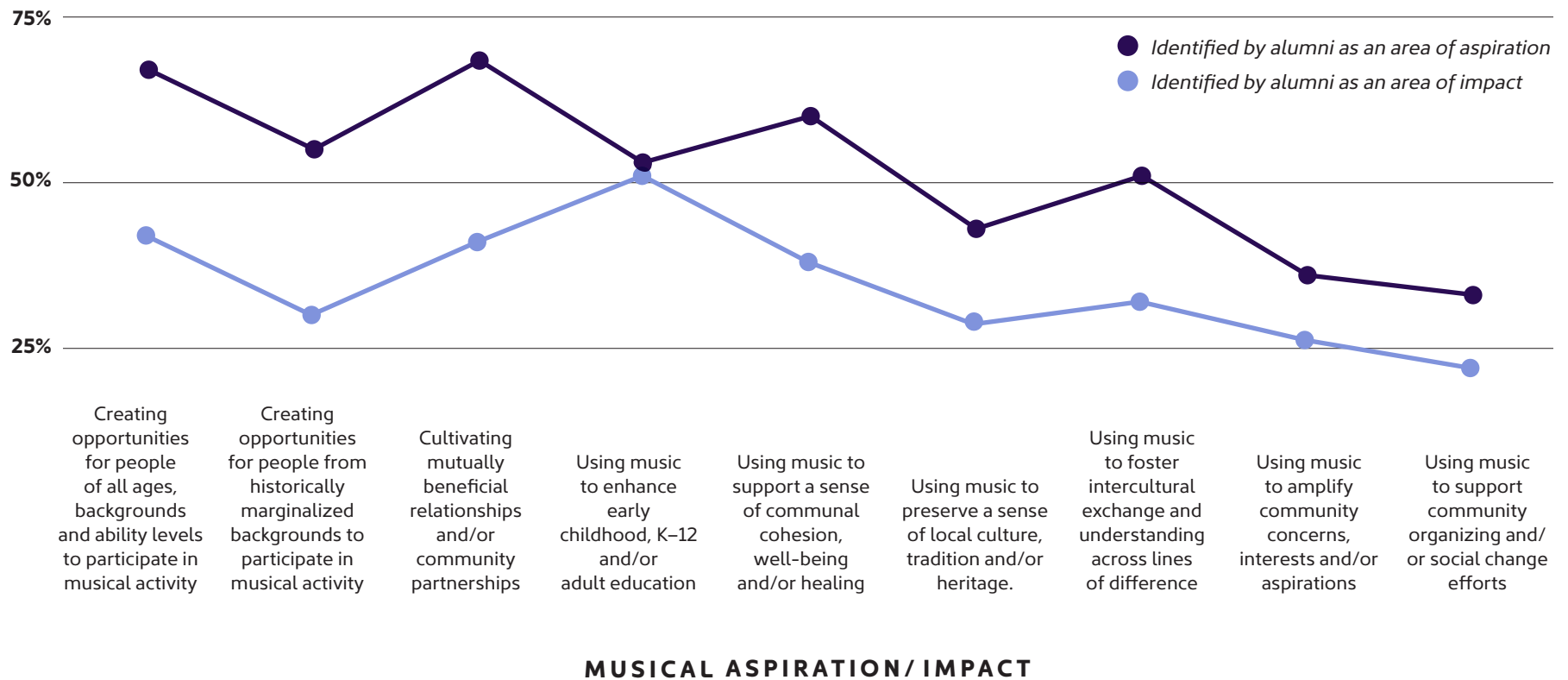
While the overwhelming majority of alumni felt that their involvement in CPP programming benefitted their professional development, many also expressed frustration with other elements of their NEC experience. These alumni tended to regret not having deepened their CPP participation, and in hindsight, they believe their decision to forgo further CPP involvement was a result of NEC’s broader institutional culture. As one graduate said, “It felt pretty palpable, the ways that community music offerings were like this little enclosure within the conservatory and were sort of an afterthought for the institution and for the majority of students.”

Connected to this idea, several alumni felt the institutional priorities and assumptions that informed campus life at NEC perpetuated narrow ideas about the purpose of music in society and what it means to be a “successful” musician. In particular, these alumni suggested that the success ideology they learned at NEC was harmful because it discouraged them from seeking a broader course of study. They underscored the centrality of community-based music and teaching artistry in their careers, and they characterized their CPP experience as an essential aspect of their professional development.



FIGURE 5

**A Side-by-Side Comparison of Aspirations to Areas of Perceived Impact**



## VI. Conclusion

As NEC's Community Performances and Partnerships department reaches its 20th anniversary, it's worth pausing to reflect on its accomplishments and areas for continued growth. CPP alumni are now navigating work across multiple career stages, from the earliest moments of development after NEC to maturation as accomplished midcareer professionals. A comprehensive study of CPP alumni affords numerous opportunities for examining the contours of their professional practice: What kinds of community impact do CPP alumni aspire to and realize through their work? How has their involvement in CPP programming served them in their current professional endeavors, and what challenges arise most frequently.

The current study reveals several key findings in response to these questions. CPP alumni commonly aspire to build meaningful relationships and partnerships within the communities which they are a part, and this relational work sets the stage for enhancing education, expanding opportunities for musical participation, and supporting communal well-being and healing. These findings also suggest that CPP alumni play a crucial role in their communities by leveraging their skills as musicians to build, strengthen and repair the cultural fabric needed to sustain a democratic society. Moreover, it's clear that CPP alumni are drawing on the skills they developed through their involvement in CPP programming to make this ambitious work possible.

Although alumni cite CPP programming as a positive career influence, their comments on NEC's broader culture warrant careful consideration. In particular, they highlight the need for leaders to examine and reflect upon the Conservatory's hidden curriculum—a set of implicit beliefs, values and norms that are taught indirectly. Alumni suggest that a powerful aspect of this hidden curriculum concerns unstated ideas about musical success that tacitly frame other pathways as “less than.” However, for many alumni, the CPP program was a valuable part of their NEC education precisely because it illuminated alternate models of value and possibility.

The findings from this study make a persuasive case for continuing to integrate CPP programming and related coursework into the Conservatory's core curriculum. NEC, like other institutions, is ultimately a community of practice organized around a shared set of values—and thriving institutions evolve as the needs of fields and societies change. Over the course of 20 years CPP has steadily grown from a program to a department at NEC, and this shift represents a significant step toward ensuring the future of music is aligned with society's needs for a more participatory culture (Jenkins, et al., 2009). An in-depth look at a broad range of alumni career trajectories reaffirms the fundamental importance of community-based music in society and highlights the need for NEC's continued evolution. Continuing to elevate the role of CPP at NEC would send a powerful message about the Conservatory's most closely held values, while also ensuring that alumni are prepared to launch careers in music that will have an impact.

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## About the Author

Raquel Jimenez, PhD is a Boston-based scholar whose work explores how artists and arts organizations work together to meet the needs of a changing society. Her writing has appeared in outlets such as the *Boston Art Review*; *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*; and the *Harvard Educational Review*. As part of her scholarly practice Dr. Jimenez develops projects and public programs with arts organizations, and her approach to community-engaged scholarship was recently profiled in the *Boston Globe*. She is the co-chair of the Arts and Learning Concentration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she also teaches courses at the intersections of art, culture and educational practice.

