

Rug Hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador: Report on the Planning Survey Fall 2018

Maureen Ashfield

The Respondents

The link to the survey was sent to 240 members of the RHGNL. 99 people completed the survey, a response rate of 41% (considered a good rate of response by Survey Monkey given the length and the type of questions asked). Some people do not have emails and were thus not surveyed, and we recognize that some people did not receive the survey (in spite of attempts to resend it to their email). Since the survey is based on those receiving it taking the initiative to respond, the results cannot be interpreted as representative of the entire membership. However, the results do provide a useful snapshot of our guild membership, with many thoughtful suggestions in response to the questions. Not everyone responded to every question (the survey allowed the option to skip questions), and some of the questions allowed more than one response. Thus, the number of responses for each question does not necessarily add up to 99 responses.

Six people under 50 responded. Twenty-three respondents were in their 50's, 46 respondents were in their 60's, and 21 were over 70. Twenty-eight respondents had been hooking for 5 or less years, 20 for 6-10 years, 31 for 11 to 20 years, and 12 for more than 20 years. Respondents came from across the province (Central 29, Western 22, Avalon 20, Eastern 10, Southern 5, Labrador 1, none from the south). Ten respondents came from other provinces (Ontario and New Brunswick primarily) and two were from the United States. The age range of respondents, the range of years of hooking, and the geographical locations of people, suggest a breadth of experience with rug hooking and with the guild among the respondents.

Members were asked to indicate where they had learned rug hooking, and many (53 respondents) indicated that they learned to hook at an introductory course not associated with rug school, while 20 indicated they had learned at an introductory course at rug school. Since they were asked to identify all of the influences in learning to hook, 14 identified their mother, father or another family member, 22 learned from friends, 17 indicated they learned from books and videos, 8 indicated in the comments section that they had learned at courses in other places (e.g., Molly Made, rug hooking schools in Ontario, and courses offered by Deanne Fitzpatrick). A few people indicated they were self-taught.

The two main reasons people gave for taking up and continuing rug hooking were that it is a creative and artistic outlet (82 respondents) and they enjoy the social interaction (68 respondents). Twenty-five people indicated the importance of family heritage and continuing the tradition, and hooking is a source of income for 5 people.

Participation in Rug Hooking Activities: Local Groups and Hook-ins

Almost 90% of the respondents attend a local rug hooking group. Twelve people indicated they did not attend a group and 7 of them indicated there was no group in their area. The others indicated time factors (scheduling and other commitments) as their reasons for not attending a local group. For those who did attend a group, the majority (44) went weekly, while the rest were fairly evenly distributed

among every other week, monthly and occasionally. Things that affected attendance were time limitations, followed by time conflicts. Eleven people noted that their local group was held in another community which made it difficult to attend. The weather and a non-desirable location were also noted.

Respondents were asked to comment on whether they have friends who have expressed an interest in rug hooking, but do not attend local meetings. The primary reasons given for non-attendance were conflicts or time limitations due to work or family obligations. It is interesting to note that while regular members did not indicate that meetings held either in the day or the night were a major barrier to attending, for friends the fact that meetings are held in the day was the reason given by 14 people for why their friend did not attend. The local group meeting being held in another community was also a barrier noted by 12 respondents. Two people noted that friends did not feel they were skilled enough to attend a group, and one person suggested the need to look at alternating meetings between weekdays and weekends (which could also apply to day and evening meetings, although no one suggested it).

Seventy-one of the respondents attend day long hook-ins sponsored by local groups. Respondents were not forced to choose one reason only for attending, and the responses were fairly evenly distributed among the options offered in the question: to focus on rug hooking for a day with no interruptions (49), to learn new techniques (54), to see what other people are doing and get new ideas (64), to purchase from vendors (50), and to socialize with other rug hookers (67). Of the people who don't attend hook-ins, 12 indicated there were none in their area, 6 indicated not wanting to drive the distance, 4 were not interested or found the events too tiring, and 4 indicated conflicts with other obligations.

Participation in Rug Hooking Activities: Education courses (not at Rug School)

Sixty-five of the respondents indicated they had attended an education course (not including rug school courses), and 27 had not. Those who had not attended any courses indicated that the main reason was no courses offered in their area (12) or they had not been interested in the courses that were offered (7). Four people were unable to commit to the time, while cost, lack of transportation, and lack of interest in education courses had one response each. For those who had attended education courses, 34 had attended 3 or more courses, and 30 had attended one or two courses. Seventy-three respondents indicated that learning new techniques was the reason they attended courses. Fifty-six people were looking for new ideas and 51 indicated socializing with other hookers was an important reason for attending education courses.

We asked a question specifically about beginner courses in rug hooking (not including those held at rug school). Thirty-nine people said they had attended a beginner course. Thirty-six of those people indicated they wanted to learn the basic techniques of rug hooking, 15 indicated a desire to improve their skills and learn new techniques, 7 were looking for new ideas for projects, and 9 indicated that socializing with others was one of their reasons for attending the beginner course. The reason most often given for not attending a beginner course was not needing a course because they learned from other people or resources (26). Nine people noted that there had not been a beginner course offered in their area, while inability to commit to a full day (2), cost (1), and transportation (1) were the other reasons given.

Respondents were asked to suggest education courses....and they did! The responses have been printed directly from the survey and are available for the planning session discussion if needed. Some of the suggestions appeared multiple times, such as proddy, geometrics, learning new or special stitches or techniques, design elements, use of mixed media, shading and use of colour, portraiture, animals, and finishing techniques. The list of suggestions is quite extensive and varied overall.

In terms of how and when courses are offered, the majority of respondents indicated they preferred courses that are 6 hours long offered on one day, and courses that are 12 hours long offered on two consecutive days. Fourteen people preferred weekend courses and 8 preferred weekday courses. Some respondents noted that they were unable to choose more than one option in spite of being invited to check all that applied, and as a result a number of people commented that they were flexible and open to a number of the options offered. One person suggested the nature of the course would impact the best way to present it and another noted that variety in the way courses are offered might mean that more people have the opportunity to attend courses. One person suggested setting up courses using the internet (e.g., webinar courses) as a way to make them more available.

Familiarity with the Rug Hooking Guild of Newfoundland and Labrador

With respect to the organizational structure of the RHGNL (e.g., Board of Directors, Committees, Area Directors, etc.), 50% of respondents were very familiar with the structure and 45% were somewhat familiar. With respect to the project to register older hooked rugs, almost 53% of respondents were very familiar with the project and 43% were somewhat familiar. Ninety-eight per cent were aware of the web-based newsletter and 98% were aware of the RHGNL website.

We asked a series of questions regarding the Newsletter, in light of the recent change to a web-based production rather than a hard copy mail-out. Sixty-eight people (70%) indicated the new approach was working for them. While only 5 people said it wasn't working for them, a greater number provided comments about the problems they had encountered. Some people commented that they had problems accessing the web-site, others appeared to have not been receiving the email notification that the newsletter had been posted on the web-site. A couple of people indicated they preferred having the newsletter emailed to them as an attachment. A number indicated that they preferred receiving a paper copy in the mail, and in a question directly asking whether people wanted a paper copy mailed to them, 13 said yes while 80 said no. Eight people were willing to pay \$15 to have it mailed, while 4 people were willing to pay \$20. One person asked why the annual membership fee does not cover the mailing cost, and another noted that the poor internet service experienced by many people in Newfoundland and Labrador was a challenge and that people shouldn't be made to pay extra for a mailout of the newsletter through no fault of their own.

An email is sent to members indicating that the newsletter has been posted on the web-site. At a number of points in the survey, people indicated that they were not receiving the notification email – something for the newsletter committee to follow-up on. Seventy-eight respondents indicated that they read the newsletter at some point, in response to receiving the email. Ten people occasionally read the newsletter and 5 indicated they never read it. The main reasons for reading the newsletter are for information about upcoming events and reports on events that have happened, to be aware of what is happening around the province, and to see pictures of the hooked rugs other members have been

working on. About a third of the members look to the newsletter for information on the RHGNL organization (e.g., president's and area directors' reports, committee reports, and the business, vision and direction of the guild).

Respondents were asked to provide other comments on the newsletter. The comments are varied in perspective and opinion (e.g., from "it's excellent as it is" to "the layout is confusing"), and most of the comments reiterated the comments made in previous questions on the newsletter (e.g., problems accessing, wanting to receive a hard copy). Questions on the newsletter were included to provide feedback to those who put together the newsletter; copies of the responses will be forwarded to them.

With respect to the RHGNL website, 98% of the respondents were aware of its existence. Regarding the different resources on the website, 86% were aware of the contact form to communicate with executive members or area directors (although only one third of respondents had used the form). Only 67% were aware of the event calendar on the website (with 42% actually having referred to it). Seventy percent were aware of accessing free patterns on the website (and almost 60% had used it for that purpose). Sixty-seven percent were aware that they could access back copies of the newsletter on the website, but only 22% had done so. Comments and suggestions with respect to the website included references to the difficulty of accessing the website and the information on it (e.g., password doesn't work, needs to be more user friendly in its design), and the need for more specific types of information (e.g., more details about rug school). There were a number of accolades (e.g., a good resource for communicating with the executive, useful information about upcoming events). Copies of the responses will be passed on to those administering the website, and will be available at the planning session.

The RHGNL is on Facebook with its own page/group, however one third of respondents were not aware of it, and 11 respondents were not Facebook users. Of those who were aware of the Facebook page, almost 43 % of the respondents liked and followed the RHGNL. The comments were generally positive from those who used Facebook with some suggestions for additional content. Copies of the responses will be passed on to the Facebook administrators, and will be available at the planning session.

The majority of the respondents (97%) were agreeable to receiving more emails related to information that was time sensitive (i.e., could not wait for the next newsletter).

In order to get a sense of where people look for information about the RHGNL, respondents were asked about which resources they used. People use multiple avenues for getting information, with 72% of the respondents looking at the guild website, 44 % asking a friend, 25% looking to Facebook, 25% contacting their area director, and 25% contacting a member of the executive. Back copies of the newsletter are used by less than 15% of the respondents. One respondent asked how we would be able to determine what people were most likely to do since respondents checked multiple responses. The results gathered here show that people are using the various web-based and social media platforms to get information, however further exploration needs to be done to determine whether some resources are better than others and should be developed further to ensure people have access to information and resources.

Promotion of rug hooking and the RHGNL

Respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions seeking suggestions for promoting and advertising RHGNL events, and raising the profile of the guild and of rug hooking. They provided many

and varied suggestions. In terms of promotional events, many of the suggestions fit into the category of being visible at community events where people expect to see arts and crafts displays (e.g., farmers markets, craft shows, educational events, music festivals). Suggestions for how to be visible included doing demonstrations, doing a hook-in in a mall setting, and holding rug hooking sessions at community recreation centres. A number of respondents suggested connecting with schools (elementary and high schools) in order to run events for students. It was also suggested that groups host events, such as open houses or learn to hook seminars (with adequate advertising in the community). A frequent response in this question was the need for advertising and the use of local media (newspapers, cable TV and radio) to get the word out. The full set of suggestions for promotional events is available as a resource for those thinking about what might work in their specific community and the direction the guild might take in supporting certain kinds of events. (It should be noted that many of the responses to this question also apply to the next question with respect to advertising the guild.)

Advertising suggestions included local media (radio, print, TV stations as well as cable community news channels and an article in Downhome magazine) and the use of social media (buy and sell sites on Facebook for example, and encouraging members to post information on social media about local events that they are involved with). Other suggestions included brochures and photocards left at known distribution sites in the community, featuring hooked rugs on display at local galleries or other sites along with information for follow-up, tying into community brochures and publications, tying into tourism publications and advertising, posters in places where community events are usually advertised. The full set of suggestions will be available for the planning session.

In terms of raising the profile of the guild, many of the suggestions were similar to the previous two questions. However, a few more detailed examples of events and advertising were suggested, such as developing a relationship with The Rooms, developing relationships with other guilds for our mutual benefit, being seen hooking (at fabric stores for example), using the 25th anniversary of the guild as a focal point for advertising and promotion, and finding ways to encourage and support members to talk about the guild. The full set of suggestions will be available for the planning session.

Raising the profile of rug hooking resulted in similar responses as the previous questions, but also elicited some comments more focused on making known the craft itself. Some examples were: engaging younger people (e.g., art classes), finding ways to display hooked mats in the community (e.g., libraries, local galleries), offering to be guest speakers at community groups (e.g., seniors' groups, youth groups, library information nights). The full set of suggestions will be available for the planning session.

Rug Hooking School

The next series of questions focused on rug hooking school. This series of questions was included in order to give the planners some feedback on what seems to be working and what needs further investigation. Seventy-nine of the respondents indicated that they had been to rug school at least once, with 41 of those respondents having been 4 or more times. Of the 17 respondents who said they had not been, 9 indicated they could not commit to four days due to other obligations, and 4 indicated the event was too expensive. We asked people who had previously attended rug school but no longer attended, their reasons for stopping. Fifteen indicated they were unable to commit to the four days, and

11 indicated they had not been interested in the courses offered at recent rug schools. Four indicated that the cost was now too expensive. In the comments section, some noted they no longer lived in NL.

We asked people why they keep coming back. Sixty-three people responded and all of the reasons we suggested got strong responses (e.g., interest in the courses offered, learning new techniques, new ideas for projects, purchasing from vendors, socializing, and being involved with the activities and events of the provincial organization). No one reason stood out as more significant than the others.

People indicated that they initially heard about rug hooking school at a local hooking group meeting (40%), from a friend (26%), or at a hooking event (e.g., class or hook-in; 15%). The rest found it through social media and four people commented that they had heard about it in either the newspaper or on the radio.

Ninety-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they would recommend rug school to others. When asked why or why not, the comments reiterated the reasons why the respondents themselves attend rug school (e.g., learning new techniques, receiving good instruction from teachers, spending time with other rug hookers), and in addition there were comments that it was fun, a great get-away time (some referred to it as a mini-vacation), and it was an opportunity to develop new friendships and be part of a community.

The next series of questions on rug school were open-ended questions about people's experience with different facets of rug school – the accommodations, the food, the physical space of the various settings, and the educational experience. Needless to say, the comments were varied and indicated a wide range of preferences. We did not force people to make specific choices (i.e., this setting was better than another setting) rather, we were looking for the general things that make rug school a good experience. Interestingly (or perhaps unfortunately), the result of the open-ended approach was that it is impossible to come to any strong conclusions about what the majority of people definitely need or want (i.e., the bottom line) in order to enjoy their rug school experience. Emmanuel Camp and Killdevil were most often referred to in the comments. A number of people indicated that Emmanuel Camp was by far the best accommodations (hotel like rooms) and others indicated that the accommodations at Killdevil were a poor experience (too crowded, bunk beds, and unclean). But then some appeared to indicate that the atmosphere (beautiful setting in nature) and physical space at Killdevil (the fact that people were generally in one area), was most memorable for them, and some said they liked the cabin/bunkbed experience shared with friends. The facilities at Emmanuel Camp were described as being too spread out and resulted in limited social interaction, and other sites were praised because the various rooms were in close proximity. Killdevil got many mentions with respect to the food (good and plentiful), while the food at Emmanuel was commented on because the kitchen ran out of food at some meals. There were some comments indicating the need for more nutritious options. The comments relating to physical space indicated the need for rooms and resources that supported the activity of rug hooking (so reference was made to classrooms that were too small, the need for comfortable conditions such as seating and room temperature, good lighting, etc.). Throughout the comments on accommodations, food, and physical space, many respondents noted that no one setting has everything that would please everyone. And some people indicated that they had been satisfied with everything at the camps they attended.

The comments on people's experiences with accommodations, food, and the physical space, will be given to those planning future camps.

In response to the proposal to hold the rug school in a permanent location, The people who said no indicated that there were benefits to holding the rug school in different parts of the province (e.g., to reflect the membership from different parts of the province, to ensure that some people attend some of the time because they will only go to a site that is geographically close to them).

The final question with respect to rug school sought people's support for, and thoughts on, the idea of finding a single permanent location for rug school, rather than holding it in different venues each year. Almost 60% of respondents (51) indicated that they agreed with the proposal, 11% (10) said no, and 31% (27) had no opinion either way. However, the comments provided in response to the question indicate that respondents who said yes had some qualifications with their yes answer. For example, yes if it was in a central location for equal travel distance for everyone, or yes if it was in the east since the greatest number of people live there, or yes as long as it is or is not held at Camp "fill in the blank", and yes if it made planning easier and was more cost effective. A number of yes respondents did in fact believe that having the camp in one place would make planning easier for the planning committee (familiarity with the space) and that for those attending, a permanent location might help with their own planning and fitting the event into their vacation time. Those who said no commented that moving the school to different regions meant the spirit of the local groups in that area were captured, it was easier for local groups to be involved in planning if the event was in their area, members liked to travel to different parts of the province, and they noted that moving it to different areas means people from that area might attend in the years when it is closer to them.

People were asked an open-ended question about their educational experiences at rug school - what made it a good experience and what detracted from the experience. The overwhelming response was the importance of the instructor, with comments pointing to the teacher's skill level and experience, their course preparation and organization, and their ability to clearly communicate as an instructor. The second most noted issue was the class setting – size, comfort, outside noise and distractions, and whether the required resources for the course were present (such as enough electrical outlets for the dying course, classroom size too small for the number of participants, lighting). Comradery and learning from other students, and seeing their work were also valued. Specific suggestions for planning included: shorter courses over the weekend rather than one long one, more information in advance about the courses including better course descriptions, course handouts, clearer communication when specific materials are needed to be brought by the students, and more details in advance about the expectations around additional costs for courses (some respondents raised questions about needing to pay additional costs at all).

In terms of how rug school could be improved, people had a variety of suggestions, some related to course selection, some related to the logistics of how the camp is run, some related to where the event is held. There was no single theme that emerged in these comments, although some reiterated the comments in the previous questions.

Respondents were asked to respond to whether they would be interested in specific course offerings. The results are as follows:

Design courses using photography, technology and other means of design

45% yes, 5% no, 50% need more information

Hiring professional artists/craft people to teach classes on methods to incorporate other art into hooking projects

42% yes, 10% no, 48% need more information

A class based on topics characterized as “beyond hooking” i.e., the business side of being a rug hooker, how to be adjudicated by the Craft Council and Department of tourism, using Facebook and other social media with a view to selling your products

30% yes, 48% no, 21% need more information

It is likely the above classes would require hiring professional teachers, so respondents were asked if they would be willing to pay the additional fees. Twenty-three percent said yes, 30% said no, and 47% said it would depend on the course offering or they would need more information.

Forty-eight people responded to the request for course suggestions for future rug schools. The list will be passed on to those planning future rug schools.

2020 Celebrations and Rug School at Fogo Island

A proposal has been made to hold rug school on Fogo Island in 2020, the 25th anniversary of the guild (in recognition that the guild had its beginnings on the Change Islands). The proposal suggests holding the event in the non-tourist season (May or June) in order to ensure availability of accommodations. Since there is no one centre on Fogo Island that could accommodate everyone, people would need to stay in different locations and possibly different communities (such as Bed and Breakfasts, AirBNBs, or available motels). When asked if they would support the proposal to hold the 2020 rug school on Fogo Island, 63% of respondents said yes, 7% said no, and 30% weren't sure. Almost 40 people weighed in with reasons why Fogo Island was not a good location. Some indicated concerns with the time of year (conflicts with other obligations), too much uncertainty with ice and the weather and with the ferries at that time of year, too complicated and inconvenient to get there, difficulty finding places to stay, and that they did not like the idea of being in accommodations spread out over the island. In terms of support for holding rug school in May or June, 68% said yes, 14% said no, and 18% said not sure. When asked if they would support the approach of booking their own accommodations on Fogo Island, 66% said yes, 8% said no, and 26% weren't sure. Comments about the accommodations indicated similar concerns as above, e.g., people being spread out and losing the ambience that comes with a central location, the added costs that might be related to staying in those kinds of accommodations, added costs of transportation and the added factor of needing to have transportation from where people are staying to the classrooms.

Thoughts on the future priorities of the RHGNL

Respondents were asked to choose two of the suggested priorities to help guide decisions about the future direction of the guild. An emphasis on teaching received the greatest number of responses (59%), followed by participation in the cultural plan being developed by the provincial government (49%), and then an emphasis on expanding the membership (40%), creation of a rug hooking museum in NL (24%)

and building a central RHGNL facility (23%). In the comments, two suggested the need to engage youth, and one suggested the need to continue with the distribution of bolivar cutters.

Final thoughts, comments and suggestions

People were asked for any additional final comments and most reiterated the thoughts provided by respondents throughout the survey. Some comments were general reflections on ways to continue to make the guild and rug hooking known in NL and the challenges the guild faces (reaching young people, dealing with distances in the province). There were cautions to the guild to keep costs under control. Some were concerned about the increasing use of technology and how that can result in some of our members being excluded and in particular, there was a concern that we not forget those original members who worked to revive the tradition. Some comments emphasized the need to keep a focus on the historical connection of rug hooking to NL culture, in order to preserve our heritage. Three people offered what might be considered sage advice as we embark on this planning process: develop a strategic plan with continuing evaluation, remember that change for the sake of change is not useful, and know that you can't please everyone all the time!