REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS
Cultural Plan for Montgomery County, MD
Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County

Meet Me at the Triangles, sculpture by Norie Sato with collaborating artists Adrienne Moumin, Eric B. Ricks, Maritza Rivera, and Achamyeleh Debela in Wheaton Town Square, Wheaton, MD. Image courtesy of The Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County.

arts&humanities
council of montgomery county

1. SUMMARY

The Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHCMC) seeks qualified consultants to create a new Cultural Plan for Montgomery County, MD. AHCMC is developing this plan on behalf of, and in collaboration with, Montgomery County Government (County), including its planning agency, the Maryland–National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC).

Montgomery County is a county of approximately 1.1 million people immediately north and west of Washington, D.C.. Over the last century, it has evolved from a rural region to a bedroom community to a dynamic, diverse, exurban community anchored by health, biotech and hospitality industries as well as federal government agencies.

AHCMC is an independent, 501(c) 3 non-profit organization contracted by the County to administer all taxpayer funded grantmaking for the arts and humanities and manage the County's Public Arts Trust. As the designated local arts agency and contracted non departmental agency of County Government, AHCMC also leads civic engagement in the arts and humanities, arts advocacy initiatives, and capacity building and technical assistance for the entire cultural community.

The County adopted its most recent Cultural Plan in 2002; however, the art and design chapter of *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, the County's recent general plan update (prepared by MNCPPC in collaboration with AHCMC), recommends the creation of a fresh plan. AHCMC envisions a bold new plan that addresses the significant demographic changes and priority shifts witnessed in Montgomery County over the last twenty years and reflects the evolving thinking from the broader cultural planning field (specifically, the intersection of arts and cultural policy within broader community goals and government services) situated within the equity frameworks established by both the County and AHCMC. AHCMC expects the planning process will begin in the second half of 2024 and complete within 18 to 24 months supported by AHCMC's staff, a core internal advisory committee, and a broader external community stakeholder advisory group.

The selection process will take place in two phases. The first phase will evaluate consultant qualifications and identify a short list of finalists. In the second phase, the finalists will be asked to prepare technical proposals and participate in an interview. Qualifications are due by March 13, 2024. Finalists for the second phase will receive an invitation by March 19, 2024. Second phase proposals will be due April 29, 2024. Interviews will be held shortly thereafter, with a decision expected in May, 2024.

The fee for the project will be $250,000.

RFQ Issue Date:	**January 2024**
Question Period:	**January 31–February 18, 2024**
Responses Posted:	**February 21, 2024**
RFQ Response Due Date:	**March 13, 2024**
Finalists Notified:	**March 29, 2024**
RFP Due Date:	**April 29, 2024**
Interviews and Selection:	**May 2024**
Project Dates:	**July 1, 2024–December 31, 2025**
Project Fee:	**$250,000**

2. BACKGROUND

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

Situated north and west of Washington, D.C., Montgomery County, Maryland is bounded by the District of Columbia on the south, the Potomac River on the west, the U.S. 29 corridor roughly on the east, and roughly by the Patuxent River on the north.

Montgomery County's population is approximately 1.1 million people. The county includes several major municipalities, including Rockville, Germantown and Takoma Park, as well as major unincorporated urban areas, such as Bethesda, Silver Spring and Wheaton, and an agricultural reserve in its northern areas

Here is how *Thrive Montgomery 2050* describes the county:

> *We have evolved from a bedroom community to a complex jurisdiction with major employment centers and mature residential neighborhoods. As a group, our residents are older, more diverse, and less likely to live in traditional family arrangements. We have a highly educated workforce, proximity to the nation's capital, and a culture of openness to newcomers, but we also are struggling to attract businesses and house our residents, grappling with a legacy of racial and economic inequality, and facing the effects of climate change.*

Demographically, the county's population is remarkably diverse; it is now a "majority-minority"[1] jurisdiction. County residents are among the most highly educated in the country with similarly high per capita income nationally. Yet, disparities exist: a surprisingly large percentage of school-age children in the county are eligible for free and reduced meals assistance.

Montgomery County contains hundreds of arts, humanities and cultural organizations of all sizes from the community-focused Sandy Spring Museum to billionaire Mitchell Rales' private Glenstone Museum, and from Amazing Theater, a growing local professional theater company producing stories of BIPOC history on stage, to Round House Theatre, a nationally renowned LORT A+ regional powerhouse. Montgomery County is home to more than 58 performing arts venues; 60 galleries; 22 theatres; 50 historical venues;

150 small, midsized, and emerging arts and humanities groups; 27 bookstores; 33 dance studios; 28 music stores; 14 recording studios; 9 art supply stores; 32 music schools; and 2,000 independent artists and scholars, according to AFTA's 2015 Local Arts Index.

AHCMC

AHCMC evolved from the Arts Council of Montgomery County (Arts Council), a non-profit founded in 1976 with three objectives: to establish an art center; to provide grants to artists and to provide space for artists to work, exhibit, and perform. In 1995, the Arts Council assumed leadership of the county's public art program, and in 2000, the Council merged with the Montgomery County Commission on the Humanities to consolidate their efforts to sustain the county's cultural community. The newly created entity was named the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHCMC).

In 2001, as one of its first activities, AHCMC completed *Cultural Montgomery*, the County's first cultural plan. That was followed in 2007 by a strategic plan, which called for the restructuring of operating support provided to large organizations with several large organizations "grandfathered" into the grants award process. In 2017 AHCMC developed and implemented a five-year strategic plan that called for the agency to optimize grantmaking, deepen its organizational capacity, strengthen the capacity of the sector in Montgomery County and augment social, economic and cultural development in the region. Recognizing that AMCHC had for the most part met the goals of the strategic plan, AHCMC adopted a "strategic bridge" to carry the agency forward through the adoption of a new countywide cultural plan.

AHCMC has developed remarkable depth and breadth of programs since its founding; evolving alongside the county's changing demographic and community needs. AHCMC maintains these programs with a dedicated, albeit small, staff.

AHCMC's vision and values are summarized in its *Racial Equity Principles* (2018), including this excerpt:

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[1] Majority-Minority is the term used by the United States Census. AHCMC prefers the term Global Majority.

The arts have a unique power to inspire, to bring people together, to help us all imagine different possible worlds, to illuminate and amplify diverse experiences, to catalyze transformation, and to allow us all to build empathy and connection. As stakeholders of cultural organizations, we are all leaders; this means we have a powerful responsibility to engage in the urgent, essential, and nuanced work to build a more equitable world for us all through building racial equity. We recognize that we have a special responsibility to do this work in ways that welcome others to join us, because fighting oppression and making change requires both leadership and broad participation

WHY PLAN NOW?

There are several reasons why a new cultural plan is a priority for AHCMC and Montgomery County.

— The County's *Thrive Montgomery 2050* general plan update, approved in October, 2022, recommends the creation of a new cultural plan for the County.

— Montgomery County's **demographics** have changed since the last cultural plan was completed twenty years ago. Though the county's population has grown about one percent per year, its non-white population has grown by approximately 80 percent, to the point where 60 percent of the county's population is non-white.[2]

— The **philosophy of cultural planning** has also changed significantly in the last twenty years. Cultural planning has evolved from its traditional emphasis on arts and culture organizations and the economic impact of the arts and culture sector, to a focus on a community's overall creative and cultural life and the intersection of arts and culture with other government services and programs.

— **AHCMC's vision, values and priorities** have evolved as it completed two strategic planning processes, adopted racial equity principles and navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. AHCMC has shifted its grantmaking emphasis towards empowering smaller and non-traditional organizations, emphasizing general operating support and reorienting its evaluative criteria more heavily towards community impact.

— The **COVID-19 pandemic** has had lingering impacts on how arts and culture organizations operate in terms of staffing, programming, planning, and serving their stakeholders.

— The County is preparing to invest tens of millions of dollars in a new **cultural facility in Wheaton**[3], one of Montgomery County's most diverse communities. This project has precipitated a robust conversation about the cultural life of communities that have not traditionally been a focus of the County's support of arts and culture, and how to build an infrastructure to support them.

Thrive provides the following context:

While the County makes significant investments in arts and culture, these investments are not always equitably distributed. Emerging organizations that support underserved communities often lack the funding and base of support enjoyed by some of their more established counterparts. Artists and arts organizations cite the lack of affordable living, working, and sales spaces as a major challenge.

The field of public art has been expanding to embrace a wider range of approaches including civic and placemaking practices, but the County's art programs lag in its ability to apply these approaches. Making countywide investments in public art and placemaking will educate, connect, and build communities that thrive into the future.

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[2] This information is compiled from the *Thrive Demographic Summary* and population data published by the St. Louis Federal Reserve (https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MDMONT0POP)
[3] More information on the Wheaton Arts and Culture Center development project can be found at: https://montgomerycountymd.gov/DGS/OPD/WheatonArtsandCulturalCenter.html

3. WHAT WE HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH

The new Cultural Plan intends to provide direction and guidance for Montgomery County Government (County) and its departments to ensure every resident has meaningful access to arts and culture.

The plan should consider how the County's investment in cultural infrastructure and equitable access to arts and culture can promote cultural equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging in every sector of community and civic life. The plan is intended to serve as not only a roadmap to increasing cultural equity in the arts, but also as a vehicle for addressing the County's economic, sustainability, and placemaking goals, and for advancing anti-racism and equity across all policy areas, and encouraging intersectionality between the arts, humanities, and culture/heritage within all aspects of civic life and government agencies.

OUTCOMES

We are seeking a cultural plan that provides direction for the following:

Broadening Our Understanding of Arts and Culture:

— Understanding the historical, conventional and appreciative ways that people engage in creative activity as a means of sustaining their cultures, living their lives, and expressing themselves personally

— Ensuring that resources are available for all communities, particularly those that are historically under-resourced, to pursue their cultural lives

— Bridging gaps between diverse communities, cultures and goals through understanding and problem solving

— Leveraging resources for broader purposes, such as equity, sustainability and social justice though the arts and humanities

Expanding the Intersectionality of Arts and Culture with County Government:

— Establishing an overarching cultural policy for Montgomery County government

— Aligning the County's resources across all of its agencies—its funding, facilities and land; its programming and educational activities; its management of community planning, land development and economic development— with this cultural policy

— Building on the arts, culture and community planning recommendations in *Thrive 2050*

— Increasing people's recognition of themselves, their communities and their cultures in County initiatives

— Creating an ethos of stewardship of the County's creativity and diversity

Finding a New Normal, and Building on It

— Continuing to stabilize the arts, culture, and humanities sector in the face of pandemic-related, economic and political instability; identifying new parameters of stability and the resources necessary to support capacity, facilitate mission achievement and pursue new opportunities

— Continuing to address inequities in access to and funding for arts, humanities and cultural activities

— Defining a shared vision of inclusion in arts and culture, among arts organizations and the broader community

— Ensuring the County's resources for arts and culture keep pace with the size of the County's population and the needs of its increasingly diverse communities

Charting Clear Paths

— Providing specific, actionable steps for AHCMC, County agencies, and arts, culture and humanities organizations to accomplish our shared goals and the recommendations within the cultural plan

— Recommending new policy, operational, organizational or structural frameworks to address capacity or structural gaps in the arts, culture and humanities ecosystem

— Identifying opportunities and partnerships for catalytic projects that reflect equitable development practices and community-centered arts and culture

Expected Scope of Work and Deliverables

The consultant will be responsible for defining and undertaking a scope of work that includes the following tasks:

— Research and assessment

— Community and stakeholder engagement

— Analysis

— Recommendations

— Plan development and approval

The cultural planning process is expected to result in the following key deliverables:

— An assessment of Montgomery County's cultural life, including the context for arts, humanities and cultural policy and funding in Montgomery County

— A proposed Cultural Policy for Montgomery County

— Actionable recommendations for AHCMC, County agencies and the independent arts and culture sector

— A strategic roadmap for implementing recommendations

— An evaluation process for monitoring progress, measuring success and reassessing strategy

4. APPLICATION INFORMATION

This is a two-phase selection process. In the first phase, AHCMC will evaluate consultant qualifications. In the second phase, a short list of consultants will be asked to prepare proposals and participate in interviews.

ELIGIBILITY

This RFQ is open to firms, or collaborations among firms, based in the United States.

AHCMC strongly encourages applications from teams with ALANA and/or BIPOC leadership.

PHASE ONE: QUALIFICATIONS

Applicants should submit a package that demonstrates their qualifications regarding the evaluation criteria set forth below.

Application Requirements

Applicants must provide the following information:

— Letter of interest, explaining how your firm or team fulfills the criteria listed below

— Project statement, responding to the following questions:

  – What is your philosophy of cultural planning?

  – How are AHCMC's racial equity principles reflected in your work?

  – We've listed the important contextual drivers for this plan in the section "Why Plan Now?" above. Have you experienced these drivers in other projects? How have they impacted those projects? Have you experienced other important contextual drivers in your work in other communities that might be important for us to consider?

  – What stakeholders would you engage in a project of this nature, why would you engage them, and how would you engage them? What are common barriers or resistance to participation that you have encountered? How have you addressed them in your past work?

  – We've listed the outcomes we are seeking from this plan in the section "Outcomes" above. What is your experience in working towards these outcomes? Are there other outcomes that you think we should be seeking from our planning process?

— Team composition and roles (lead consultant, subconsultants)

— Firm Description (lead consultant, subconsultants)

— Resumes of Key Staff (lead consultant, subconsultants)

— Examples of up to three projects that shed light on your philosophy of cultural planning

— References from clients for at least three past projects who can speak to your cultural planning philosophy and experience (lead consultant, subconsultants)

Review Process and Criteria

Applications will be reviewed by a panel including AHCMC, County staff, arts and culture stakeholders, and arts and culture field leaders outside of Montgomery County.

Applications will be reviewed according to the following criteria:

— Experience working in jurisdictions of similar size and complexity as Montgomery County

— Experience in diverse aspects of arts planning and administration

— An understanding of Montgomery County's context, including its communities, arts and culture ecology, and system of government

— Ability to provide local presence required for interacting with stakeholders

— Demonstrated competency working in diverse cultural settings

— Affinity with the County's and AHCMC's equity principles and strategies

— Diversity of the consulting team, reflecting the demographics of the community AHCMC serves

Phase Two: Interview

The most highly ranked applicants will be invited to submit a technical proposal that addresses the scope of work and deliverables outlined in this RFQ. We will be looking to the applicants to propose the methodologies, interim deliverables, and project management approaches that they think are most relevant to this project. Applicants should also propose key milestones and timelines in the process, with an anticipated completion of December, 2025.

All applicants at this stage will be asked to participate in an interview with our selection panel. The interviews will be conducted via video-conference.

Review Schedule

RFQ Issue Date: January 2024

Question Period: January 31–February 18, 2024

Responses Posted: February 21, 2024

RFQ Response Due Date: March 13, 2024

Finalists Notified: March 29, 2024

RFP Due Date: April 29, 2024

Interviews and Selection: May 2024

Notice to proceed: July 1, 2024

How to Apply

Applicants should send responses to AHCMC in a digital format. Materials may be sent by email or by file-sharing links (such as Drop Box) to Cultural.Plan@creativemoco.com. Responses must be received by 5 pm, EST, March 13.

We will acknowledge all submissions that we receive, so please contact us at Cultural.Plan@creativemoco.com to inquire about the status of your submission.

Questions?

Please email questions to Cultural.Plan@creativemoco.com. No phone calls, please.

We will post questions and answers on or about February 7, to the project web page: https://www.creativemoco.com/cultural-plan/.

5. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Background on Arts and Culture in Montgomery County

The following documents provide context for cultural planning in Montgomery County. These include the 2002 Arts and Culture Plan, important past plans, and original research that AHCMC conducted in preparation for this planning effort.

— Creative Montgomery – A Vision for Arts and Humanities in Montgomery County, MD (Montgomery County, 2002)

— Five Year Strategic Plan, 2017-2022 (AHCMC, 2016)

— *Racial Equity Principles: A Framework and Shared Commitment* (AHCMC, 2018)

— Strategic Bridge Document (AHCMC, 2023)

— *Thrive 2050 Montgomery County* (M-NCPPC, 2022)

— Public Art Roadmap + Guidelines (AHCMC, 2023)

— *Setting The Stage, Planning for a Cultural Plan in Montgomery County, MD* (AHCMC and Todd W. Bressi, 2024)

— Cultural Asset Mapping Study, Montgomery County, MD (AHCMC and Civic Arts, 2023)

— Defining Arts, Culture and Humanities in Montgomery County, MD (AHCMC and MJR Partners, 2023)

— *Race Equity Resolution* (Montgomery County Government, 2018)

— Montgomery County Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

— New Wheaton Arts and Culture Center Development Plan (2023)

What Inspires Us

In preparing to undertake a cultural planning effort, AHCMC has conducted extensive research on the field of cultural planning and has been inspired by work that has occurred across the country. We encourage consultants interested in applying to consider the following plans, policies and research papers as important resources in understanding the context for our project.

— Tom Borrup, "40 Years Young: The Evolving Practice of Cultural Planning" ArtsBlog, November 8, 2018

— Maria Rosario Jackson, Joaquin Herranz Jr., Florence Kawbasa Green, *Art and Culture in Communities: A Framework for Measurement* (The Urban Land Institute, 2003)

— Kalima Rose, Milly Hawk, Daniel Jeremy Liu, *Creating Change through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Development: A Policy and Practice Primer* (PolicyLink, 2017)

— City of Oakland Cultural Affairs Division, *Belonging in Oakland, A Cultural Development Plan* (2018)

— Soluna Group, *Advancing Cultural Equity and Inclusion: Our Approach for Developing a Cultural Policy for the County of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, 2020)

— *Countywide Cultural Policy* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, 2020)

— *Countywide Cultural Policy Strategic Plan* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, 2022)

— Los Angeles County Creative Strategist Program (2018)

— *Nashville Next: A General Plan for Nashville and Davidson County, Arts Culture and Creativity* (Nashville: Metropolitan Planning Commission, 2015)

— *Executive Order on Promoting the Arts, the Humanities and Museum and Library Services* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2022)

— Evan Bissell, *Notes on a Cultural Strategy for Belonging* (Berkeley: Hass Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, 2019)