

Montgomery County Cultural Plan

Task 2.4 Cultural Preserves Summary Memo

Prepared by Metris Arts Consulting

September 4, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of five months, Metris held nine pop-up creative engagement events at festivals, markets, and gatherings across the county, eliciting more than 250 responses. Metris staffed the events with support from Everyday Canvassing, which expanded the cultural representation of our team and added language capabilities in Spanish, Amharic, Portuguese, and French. Our team conducted outreach to passersby using a format called “Cultural Preserves.” This engagement focused on the cultural plan theme of *belonging*, creating a community where everyone belongs and can lead culturally rich lives. Participants also submitted responses that spoke to the themes of *intersectionality*—using arts, culture, and the humanities to help solve community challenges—and *resilience*—helping Montgomery County artists and cultural communities thrive.



“Cultural Preserves” by Holly Bass. Photo by Sed Gary, Dream Story Productions.

About Cultural Preserves

Cultural Preserves is an activity devised by interdisciplinary artist and Metris team member Holly Bass. She uses this method in her practice to capture and “preserve” people’s thoughts, feelings, and stories. Bass presents a prompt for participants to respond to, supplies colorful paper for them to write their answers, and captures the responses in a series of large antique canning jars.

Metris is using a variety of formal engagement methods to reach different groups of county residents, but this creative pop-up presents a less formal way to interact, especially at a time when people might be hesitant to engage with “official” government events. By holding these opportunities at festivals and public events, we are able to meet people where they are. Using a creative medium for information gathering breaks down barriers and offers a more inviting engagement



“Cultural Preserves” by Holly Bass (pictured right). Photo by Sed Gary, Dream Story Productions.

opportunity than more formal or traditional activities like surveys or focus groups. It allows people to share their authentic selves and experiences and gives us another way to see what is important to them, what they value, and what makes where they live “work” for them.

For the Montgomery County Cultural Plan, we offered two prompts for people to think about and respond to. They could choose to answer one, both, or neither. Our prompts were:

- What kinds of arts and culture would exist in your ideal community?
- Can you share a memory of a cultural experience or arts experience in Montgomery County that made you feel a sense of connection?

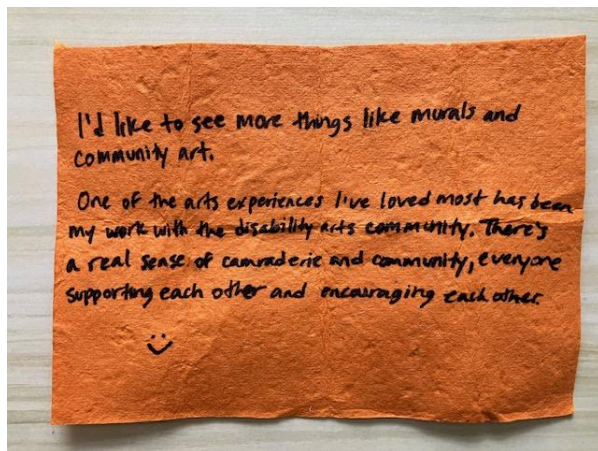


"Cultural Preserves" by Holly Bass. Photo by Sed Gary, Dream Story Productions.

Our Cultural Preserves team members wore kitchen aprons, signaling their role in helping people preserve their thoughts. We supplied markers and colorful sheets of paper for their responses. When participants finished writing or sketching, they were invited to wrap their folded responses and tie them with twine, label them with their names, and “preserve” them by putting them in large canning jars. We collaborated with the youth documentarians of Action Youth Media and a photographer from Dream Story Productions, both local organizations, to capture the

stories of Cultural Preserves through video and still photography. Our partnership with Action Youth Media empowered youth documentarians to tell the story from their perspective. After their participation, Action Youth Media asked to hold an additional Cultural Preserves event as part of their participation in the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Following the events, we read and transcribed all of the responses and scanned them for key ideas and common themes.



"Cultural Preserves" by Holly Bass. Photos by Meris Arts Consulting.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

People highly value public events.

Nearly a quarter of total respondents referenced festivals, fairs, outdoor concerts, and other public events, highlighting the strong appreciation for opportunities that bring people together and encourage them to get out of their homes. This sentiment emerged across both prompts. Several people envisioned their ideal communities as places that offer free concerts and art classes. Others shared meaningful memories of feeling a sense of connection at events like the county fair, Strathmore on the Lawn, and the Gaithersburg Book Festival. Many note that they have attended the same events year after year, underscoring the lasting importance of these gatherings in their lives. Overall, there is a tremendous appetite for publicly accessible, communal creative, and cultural experiences.

Montgomery County residents define “art and culture” quite broadly.

Participants shared that they value a wide range of activities and experiences that they consider artistic and/or cultural. Their responses included: visual art, music, festivals, literature, fashion, cosplay, food, dance, theater, video games, museums, holidays, parks, history, and more. Many referenced highly specific things that hold personal significance, from their racial and cultural histories to niche art practices to *Doctor Who*. This reinforces the idea that art and culture are often in the eye of the beholder, and the importance of building a large “umbrella” for the various communities that call Montgomery County home.

There is a strong interest in learning about art, culture, and the humanities.

Many participants said they valued learning about other cultures, either through festivals or in school. Several people specified that learning and broadening horizons are key elements in their ideal communities. Others reminisced about taking art classes, including free classes offered during Wheaton Arts Parade. More than one participant lamented that art classes fill quickly and can be difficult to access.

Belonging is important, and takes on many forms.

Themes of community, connectedness, and belonging surfaced frequently and in different ways. People spoke of sharing experiences, feeling acceptance, breaking down barriers, and appreciating diversity. Pride festivals, culturally specific holiday celebrations, time spent with friends, and art classes were all mentioned as experiences that foster a sense of belonging. Belonging was a key theme in respondents’ visions for an ideal community as well. One contributor wrote, “We’re all accepted, valued and respected.”

Looking ahead

The Cultural Preserves responses provide rich insights for shaping a cultural plan focused on belonging. They highlight many opportunities to continue and enhance the aspects of Montgomery County’s cultural life that lead to belonging.

- Support for public and community events

- Affordable and accessible classes
- Support for smaller artistic businesses and communities

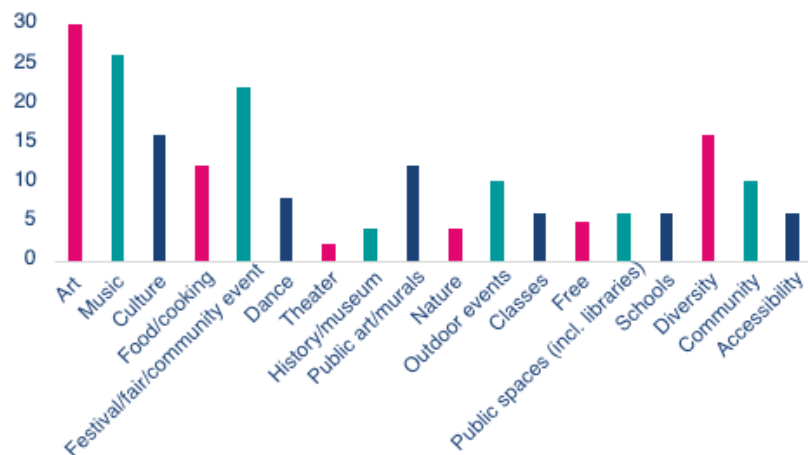
“The ideal community I would like to see for art and culture is art from all skill levels and genres coexisting together to show that art is for everyone regardless of talent. This is a passion that shouldn't have any walls blocking people.”

RESPONSE DETAILS

Although we provided specific prompts for Cultural Preserves participants, people were free to—and did—write whatever they wanted. Many people responded to the prompts directly, while others shared related thoughts and memories, or used the opportunity to write or draw what was on their minds in the moment. Several participants included sketches alongside their words, and some just drew pictures. Children especially enjoyed Cultural Preserves, contributing their observations and artwork alongside adults.

Prompt 1: What kinds of arts and culture would exist in your ideal community?

We received seventy-four responses specifically to this prompt. Respondents told us their ideal communities would include...

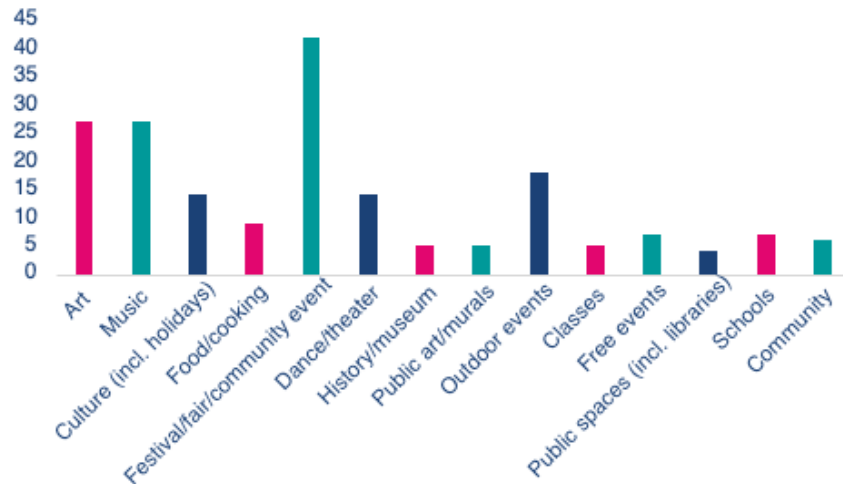


Highlights from the responses:

- My ideal community would have art and culture from everywhere. I feel connected when I see the creative pictures around town while I take walks.
- In our ideal community, there would be many different forms of art from all different cultures. It would be a safe space for everyone to come together to enjoy, celebrate, and collaborate.
- My ideal community involves a lot of food, music and dance
- More mirrors to see one another for who we are and the way we can express

Prompt 2: Can you share a memory of a cultural experience or arts experience in Montgomery County that made you feel a sense of connection?

Participants shared 142 responses to this specific prompt. People's memories centered around...



Highlights from the responses:

- Becoming part of [a] new community: Strathmore Live on the Lawn is our first event since moving from New Zealand.
- When I was at Montgomery College they hosted a multicultural arts fair. It allowed me to experience many different forms of art and music that I still remember fondly.
- At Rockville Town Square during Pride there was a mural that everyone was contributing to and it was so nice to see everyone coming together to show their support for the LGBTQIA+ community and creating art
- Every Saturday we go to the library. The library is important to us.
- Viewing *Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round* film about the history of Glen Echo Park made me feel connected to both the negative history of Moco (segregation) as well as inspired by community organizing to make changes.
- Brookside Gardens during Covid. They hung a crystal for every resident that passed away.



"Cultural Presence" by Holly Cross. Photos by Sed Rony, Dream Story Productions.

APPENDIX 1: CULTURAL PRESERVES EVENTS

Event	Location	Date	County Council District
MoComCon	BlackRock Arts Center	3/22/25	6
Rockville Arts Festival	Rockville Town Square	5/3/25	3
Taste of Wheaton	Marian Fryer Town Plaza	6/1/25	5
Strawberry Festival	Sandy Spring Museum	6/7/25	7
Silver Spring Blues Festival	Silver Spring Square	6/8/25	4
Scotland Juneteenth Heritage Festival	Scotland	6/19/25	1
Summerfest	Gaithersburg	6/28/25	2
Smithsonian Folklife Festival	Washington, DC	7/7/25	N/A
Strathmore on the Lawn	Strathmore	7/9/25	1

APPENDIX 2: CULTURAL PRESERVES PHOTOS

Please click [here](https://www.creativemoco.com/cultural-plan/) or visit <https://www.creativemoco.com/cultural-plan/> to view a gallery of Cultural Preserves Photos