

Montgomery County Cultural Plan Task 2.3 Community Survey Summary Memo

Prepared by Metris Arts Consulting
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INTRODUCTION

Metris Arts Consulting (Metris) developed a community survey to capture perspectives across as wide a sample as possible of diverse Montgomery County residents. The survey asked about residents' priorities for arts, culture, and heritage¹ in Montgomery County. It focused on the three central cultural plan pillars derived from priorities identified through previous community research:

- **Belonging:** Creating a community where everyone belongs and can lead culturally rich lives
- **Intersectionality:** Using arts, culture, heritage, and creative expression to help solve community challenges
- **Cultural sector resilience:** Helping our artists and our cultural communities thrive

The survey is a particularly important data source for cultural sector resilience, given the large number of cultural sector/creative economy respondents and tailored questions for these stakeholders.

Outreach methods and response

The community survey received a sizable response—1,305 residents took the survey. It was delivered online via SurveyMonkey for 15 weeks (May 8 - August 4, 2025).

We made several efforts to increase inclusivity and response rates. In partnership with the Office of Community Partnership, we translated the survey into six languages (Amharic, Chinese, French, Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese). We mailed a multi-lingual QR-code postcard to 82,000 households residing in disadvantaged Community Equity Index² areas. We offered a lottery for 10 \$100 gift cards. We placed transit ads (bus interior and digital). We advertised in culturally-specific media—The Korean Times, *El Tiempo*, Chinese Culture and Community Center (CCACC) websites—and ran targeted ads on Facebook and Instagram that reached more than 77,000 people.

¹ In the survey questionnaire, we used the most accessible and inclusive term, “arts, culture, and creative expression” for questions intended for all respondents. For questions asked about attendance/participation in events/activities, we added “heritage” to signal that things like visiting historic sites and attending heritage-based celebrations “counted.” We selectively used the term “humanities,” only for questions targeted to leaders of arts, culture, and humanities organizations, out of a concern that it may not be widely understood. When discussing the findings in this memo, we aimed for consistency with the terms as they appeared in the survey protocol.

² The [Community Equity Index \(CEI\)](#) helps analyze existing conditions in neighborhoods and explore factors that may contribute to social inequities in Montgomery County. It is a composite measure of equity-related indicators.

The Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHCMC) promoted the survey via its social media channels and e-newsletters. In addition, we created a social media toolkit and sample e-newsletter blurb that we shared with elected officials, as well as the County boards, commissions, and advisory groups we presented to. For example, County Executive Marc Elrich promoted the survey in his countywide newsletter, which goes out to more than 550,000 residents. To increase response rates by subgroups that were underrepresented in the survey (men and people in the Francophone Black diaspora), we added targeted, in-person intercept (iPad) surveys at SoccerPlex and the Ivorian Festival.

Both the high number and diversity of responses suggest that the survey results are robust. Although conducting a statistically random sample was cost-prohibitive, our “sample of convenience”³ yielded more than three times the sample size required for a 95% confidence interval.⁴ Our results captured:

- All race/ethnicity categories tracked by the Census (Q51)
- Residents in all regional service center areas (Q58)
- People with disabilities (Q54)
- LGBTQI++ folks (Q53, 55)
- 76 responses in non-English languages

The survey also captured responses from 488 unique cultural sector/creative economy stakeholders, including 453 artists, cultural/creative practitioners, or scholars; 354 leaders of art, culture, or humanities organizations; and 124 respondents who lead creative for-profit businesses (Q9, 11, 12).⁵

Our promotional efforts did attract some “bad actors” (bots responding to the survey to try to receive the gift card lottery). We meticulously reviewed all responses and purged suspicious submissions, leaving 1,305 valid responses. Below, we present key findings, a description of Montgomery County’s cultural life, in-depth findings organized by cultural plan “pillar,” and an appendix with the full survey results.

KEY FINDINGS

Montgomery County: Cultural Life

- Respondents most strongly value arts, culture, and creative expression for their contributions to quality of life, benefits to mental and physical health, and fostering cultural understanding and connections

³ As a sample of convenience subject to selection bias, survey findings may not be representative of the entire population. Respondents may be those with more passionate views (pro or con).

⁴ For Montgomery County’s population size, a random sample of 385 people would yield results representative of the true population 95% of the time. See <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>

⁵ Cultural sector/creative economy stakeholders are not mutually exclusive—artists may also lead arts, culture or humanities organizations or creative businesses, etc.

- 95% of respondents rated arts, culture, and creative expression as important to the quality of life
- Respondents' daily experiences of arts, culture, and creative expression are notably diverse and broad
- Montgomery County's core cultural sector/creative economy is home to a wide array of stakeholders, especially those whose work is associated with culturally-specific traditions and very small organizations and creative businesses

Findings: Belonging

- Respondents believe in the power of arts and culture to cultivate belonging, and they want to see more of it:
 - 89% percent of respondents agree that they'd like to see closer links between Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy and community building
 - 82% percent of respondents agree that arts, culture, or creative activities help them feel like a part of a specific group, neighborhood, or community
 - Free response data reflects strong support for culture's ability to connect people and build understanding
- Respondents view Montgomery County as having an inclusive and welcoming culture, but many voiced fears around the erosion of those values and named specific groups facing discrimination
- Respondents cited feeling welcome/unwelcome, as well as cost, as particularly important barriers/motivators affecting residents' cultural participation
- Respondents value all aspects of cultural life
- Respondents expressed a strong interest in expanded programming/opportunities to support:
 - Cultural access for youth
 - Culturally-specific heritage offerings
 - Cultural access for older adults and under-55
 - Offerings at recreation centers, libraries, schools, and parks
 - Upcounty and East County

Findings: Cultural Sector Resilience

- Cultural sector respondents see funding and space needs as the most critical levers to strengthen capacity and address gaps
- Interest in funding changes includes:
 - Funding increases
 - Multi-year and general operating support
 - More grantee-friendly applications and requirements
 - New niche funding categories
- Interest in space-related supports include:
 - Space affordability

- Space for cultural production, consumption, and sharing
- Niche space needs
- Vacant space activation and safe/suitable space
- Cultural sector respondents experience continued pandemic impacts unevenly, with some still struggling to recover
- Cultural sector respondents named a range of economic challenges, with reduced demand and rising costs affecting all cultural sector segments
- Cultural sector respondents voiced deep concerns about federal-level policy changes—both direct impacts and ripple effects
- To a lesser extent, cultural sector respondents named County-level concerns, such as incentives/regulations that can impede or foster public art and cultural spaces, the need for increased validation/visibility, and interest in new positions/tools to help them navigate County bureaucracy

Findings: Intersectionality

- Respondents support cultural links to all domains of community need/infrastructure, with particularly strong support for education, community building, and well-being/health
- Residents also see arts, culture, and creative expression as innovative means to illuminate issues, inspire action, and help the work of government be more fun/effective

MONTGOMERY COUNTY: CULTURAL LIFE

What is it about arts, culture, and creative expression that Montgomery County residents value? How do residents experience culture in their daily lives? What “baseline” insights about Montgomery County’s core cultural sector (artists, organizations, creative businesses) can we glean from survey findings? In this section, we mine survey data to help paint the picture of Montgomery County residents’ current cultural life.

Why arts, culture, and creative expression matter

Survey findings indicate that Montgomery County residents value arts, culture, and creative expression for a variety of reasons, from contributing to quality of life to benefiting mental and physical health to fostering cultural understanding and connections.

Quality of life: Ninety-five percent of respondents rated arts, culture, and creative expression as extremely (77%) or moderately (18%) important to quality of life (Q5). When we excluded respondents who identify as core members of the cultural sector/creative economy (presumably the most enthusiastic about culture), 91% of non-creative sector respondents *still* rated arts, culture, and creative expression as extremely/moderately important to quality of life (Q5).

95% of respondents rated arts, culture, and creative expression as extremely or moderately important to the quality of life.

Health, fostering cultural understanding & connections: Probing more specifically, we asked why respondents value arts, culture, and creative expression, offering a variety of options. Respondents rated the top three reasons as essentially of equal importance: “Maintain my mental and/or physical health” (72%), “Develop a greater understanding of history and other people’s cultures” (72%), and “Feel connected to a larger community” (71%). Majorities of respondents also valued the arts, culture, and creative expression’s ability to develop their creativity (64%), find insights into other cultures and circumstances (60%), and discover new artists and art forms (58%) (Q7, see Table 1).

Table 1: Why residents value arts, culture, and creative expression

	%	#
Maintain my mental and/or physical health	72	852
Develop a greater understanding of history and other people’s cultures	72	844
Feel connected to a larger community	71	839
Develop my creativity	64	752
Find insights into other cultures or circumstances	60	705
Discover new artists and arts forms	58	687
Connect with emotions	54	632
Make new friends and expand social networks	51	606
Celebrate and honor my own heritage/culture	44	523
Live a spiritual life	34	399

Source Q7: “I value arts, culture, and creative expression because they help me: (Check all that apply.)”
N=1,177 respondents

We invited respondents to share more about why arts, culture, and creative expression are important to them personally, and their comments showed similar patterns to the quantitative findings (Q8). For instance, the largest share of respondents cited art, culture, and creative expression’s ability to foster cross-cultural connections and understanding (52). In one respondent’s own words:

*Porqué ayuda a conectar y a unir a las comunidades.
Because it helps to connect and unite communities.*

Forty-two respondents spoke to the related theme of fostering social connections. The second highest share of respondents wrote that arts/culture/creative expression is fundamental to the human experience/humanity (49), e.g., “Another word for these activities is ‘humanities’. The arts make us human and help us understand other humans.” Many respondents also voiced that arts, culture, and creative expression are important to them because of the impact that they have on their personal health and well-being, as well as the community’s (40).

How people participate in arts, culture, and creative expression

We asked respondents about what activities they participate in, what events and venues they attend, and what their favorite events are. Survey findings suggest that Montgomery County residents' daily experiences of arts, culture, and creative expression are notably diverse and broad.⁶

Wide range of active participation: Residents actively participate in a wide range of cultural activities, from Japanese Ikebana to preserving the history of trolley cars to *Día de los Muertos* celebrations to attending the county agricultural fair. Fifty percent of respondents actively practice/participate in visual arts and crafts, and more than a third of respondents participate in cultural/ethnic/heritage (45%), music (38%), literature/writing (36%), and media/film (33%)(Q4).

Avid events attendance: Montgomery County residents also avidly attend arts, culture, and heritage events and venues. Respondents most frequently attend live music (71%)(Q2), with the genres of rock, jazz, folk, and classical frequently mentioned (Q3). Majorities of respondents also attend crafts fairs or a visual arts festivals (64%), art museums or galleries (64%), theatre/plays (58%), community, culture, or heritage-based festivals or celebrations (58%), and historical/cultural sites (54%)(Q2).

In a free response question, we asked respondents to specifically name their favorite arts, culture, or heritage event in Montgomery County (Q1). Survey findings reveal Strathmore's prominence as a cultural anchor (90 responses), how central and beloved the Montgomery County Agriculture Fair is (57), and the importance of Glen Echo Park (32) and BlackRock (22) as cultural hubs. Residents mentioned collective holiday celebrations, especially Juneteenth (30) and the Fourth of July (23). Festivals spanning different parts of the county are popular, from Heritage Days (26) to the Gaithersburg Book Festival (25) to the Takoma Park Folk Festival (25) to the Wheaton Arts Parade/Festival (24). Many respondents (22) also voiced the importance of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) as a sponsor of cultural events, such as the *Baila4Life* MCPS Latin Dance Competition (14).

Core Cultural Sector/Creative Economy

Survey findings also revealed that Montgomery County is home to a wide array of core cultural sector/creative economy stakeholders. Significant numbers of organizations and independent artists, cultural/creative practitioners, and scholars' work is associated with specific ethnic or cultural traditions or communities. The survey captured responses from many unincorporated groups, and the highest percentages of both organizational and creative business respondents had annual revenues of under \$50,000. These small and unincorporated entities are often overlooked/undercounted in efforts to characterize a region's cultural ecosystem.

Distribution of cultural sector respondents: Thirty-nine percent of all survey respondents are artists, cultural/creative practitioners, or scholars who work independently, and 32% of all survey respondents earn

⁶ These findings are consistent with prior community research: Civic Arts. 2022. "Montgomery County, MD: Cultural Asset Mapping Project." Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County; MJR Partners. 2022. "Reflective Conversations on Arts and Culture: Observations and Understanding." Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County.

income, or aspire to, from their creative practice. Thirty percent of respondents identified as leaders of arts, culture, or humanities organizations. The survey also captured the perspectives of 124 (11% of respondents) leaders of for-profit creative businesses.

Disciplines and traditions practiced by “independents:” Montgomery County independent artists, creative/cultural practitioners, and scholars work in a wide range of disciplines, from storytelling to a “multidisciplinary multimodal applied anthropology and perspective weaver.” The greatest shares of these respondents work in visual arts (34%), music (16%), and writing (8%) (Q13). Thirty-two percent of artist/practitioner/scholar respondents also indicated that their work is associated with a specific ethnic or cultural tradition or community (Q14), ranging from Puerto Rican folklore to Kolam to punk music to a photography project on the history of African American cemeteries in Montgomery County (Q14).

Disciplines and traditions for organizations: The 354 respondents representing arts, culture, and humanities organizations also specialized in a range of disciplines, with the greatest shares in visual arts (17%), theatre (14%), other (14%), and music (13%) (Q21). Many of the organizations’ work in the “other” category cuts across multiple disciplines listed. Thirty percent of organizational respondents indicated that their work is associated with a specific cultural tradition or community (Q22). The highest numbers of respondents cited the following cultural traditions: Jewish (10), Asian (9) (including Chinese, Cambodian, Indian, and Indonesian); and Latin (8) (including dance forms such as Salsa, Bachata, Cha Cha, and Merengue) (Q22).

Organizations’ structures, budgets, and County support: The survey captured both nonprofit organizations (69%) and unincorporated groups (31%) (Q23) with the highest share of respondents having annual operating revenue of under \$50,000 (48%), followed by organizations with annual revenue of \$1M to \$4.9M (14%) and \$250,000 to \$999,999 (12%) (Q24). A majority (52%) of organization respondents indicated that they receive no support from Montgomery County government (including AHCMC), followed by 41% receiving AHCMC grants and 13% receiving non-AHCMC grants from Montgomery County government. Among organizational respondents, 6% indicated that they received in-kind rent, and 5% that they received in-kind utilities from Montgomery County government (Q25).

Creative businesses’ budgets and type: For the 124 creative/cultural business respondents, very small businesses made up the largest share of respondents—77% had annual operating revenues of under \$50,000 (Q33). The greatest share of business respondents also did not see themselves represented in the business category selections the survey offered—39% selected “other,” ranging from “a living history re-enactor” to a Kung Fu/Chinese cultural center. The next highest categories were for-profit arts education (13%), design services (13%), and publishing or creative production (12%) (Q32).

FINDINGS: BELONGING

We asked the opinions of a wide swath of residents across the county about how art and culture foster belonging and community building. Respondents overwhelmingly told us that they understand the connection, value belonging, and believe in the power of art, culture, and creative expression to bring people together. Access is a key component of the belonging pillar—how can arts, culture, and humanities investments and policies expand access to arts and cultural resources for all residents? Survey findings offer a wealth of information on that topic, in terms of groups and geographies that are currently underserved, priorities for types of investments/programming, and existing strengths from which to build.

Strong support for culture advancing belonging: Respondents believe in the power of arts, culture, and creative expression to foster belonging and want to see more of it:

- 89% percent of respondents agree that they'd like to see closer links between Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy and community building (Q48)
- 82% percent of respondents agree that arts, culture, or creative activities help them feel like a part of a specific group, neighborhood, or community (Q43)

When asked, "Can arts, culture, and creative expression help bring residents together? If yes, how? If no, why?" respondents overwhelmingly agreed (672 responses, 90%) to the extent that some took issue with the survey asking such an obvious question (Q45):

Bro you know the answer to this question. Shared experiences are incredibly important to human beings, storytelling is in our blood. And it's easier to empathize with people when you actually see them IRL.

Duh. Of course. It's a chance to gather—the agora.

A minority of respondents (44 responses, 6%) offered caveats that these benefits are modest/fleeting and/or are not automatic, but that programs must be intentionally crafted to reach such ends (Q45).

In a separate free response question, we asked how art, culture, and creative expression can help solve challenges facing Montgomery County (Q49); the largest number of responses addressed the theme of art, culture, and creative expression's ability to help people connect cross-culturally and build understanding. Some respondents advocated for smaller-scale/neighborhood-focused events that included opportunities for discussion and continued engagement as opposed to one-off large festivals. As one respondent wrote:

We need events and public rituals that bring people together. Parades and festivals are good, but you reach more people at neighborhood block parties.

Montgomery County's vulnerability as an inclusive/welcoming place: Survey data also suggests that residents view Montgomery County as having an inclusive and welcoming culture; 81% agreed that "all cultures are welcome in Montgomery County" (Q43). Many respondents, however, voiced fears around the erosion of those values and named specific groups facing discrimination.

When asked what *the most important issues* facing Montgomery County residents today are, 70 people named anti-immigrant sentiment/ICE raids. Others spoke to a desire to combat isolation/build a sense of community (21), anti-Semitism (13), racism (9), and language barriers (7) (Q46).

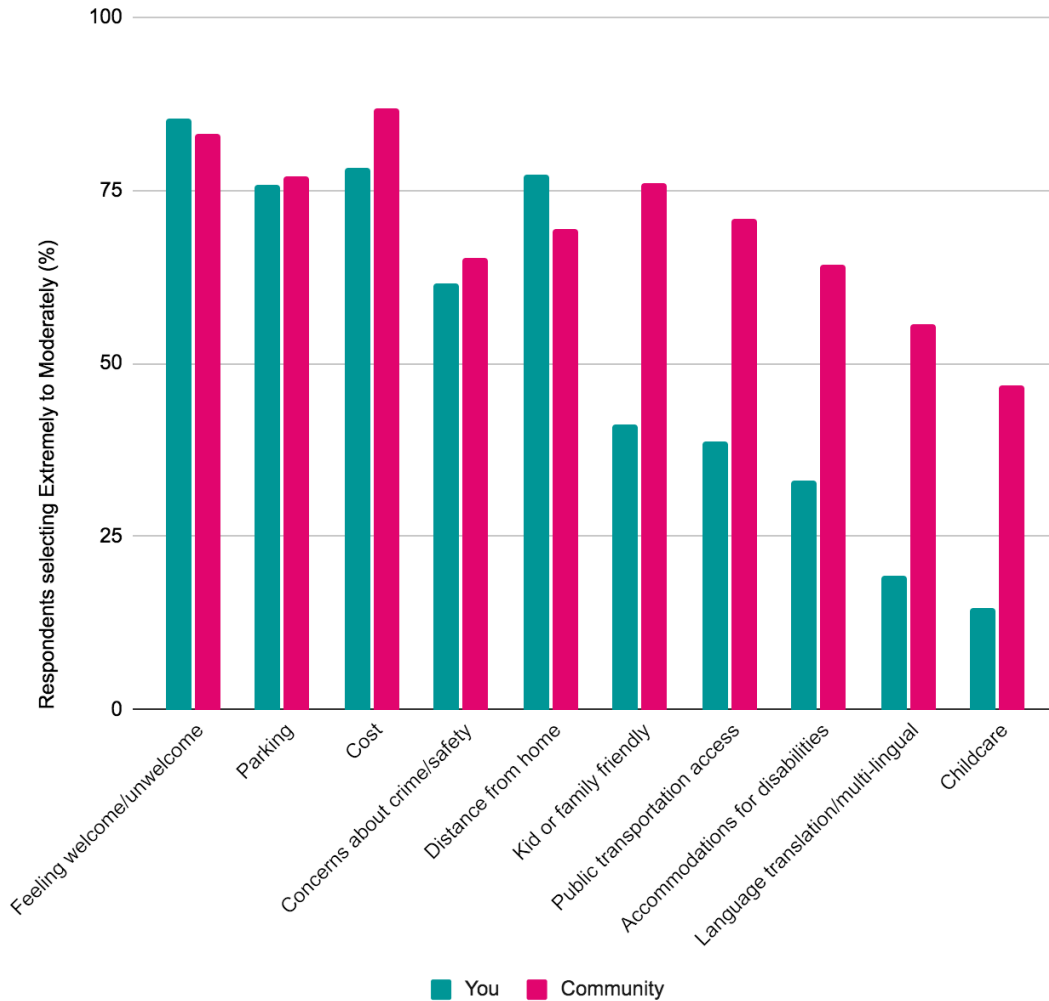
When asked, "if you don't feel all cultures are welcome, who is being left out..." respondents most frequently (22) named Jewish residents/rising anti-Semitism, followed by communities of color, broadly (12) (Q44). Other groups mentioned included specific East and South Asian nationalities, Latinos, immigrants, white/European Americans (including specifically Polish, Irish, and Sicilian), Muslims, disabled/neurodivergent people, and older adults.

In a separate free response question on where/what kinds of increased programming to prioritize, respondents named programming for youth more frequently (58) than any other demographic group, followed by programming for older adults (38).

Access Gaps and Opportunities

Participation—Critical importance of feeling welcome and cost: We also tried to understand potential barriers/motivators as Montgomery County residents consider participation in cultural activities. Interestingly, when respondents considered barriers/motivators to their *own* participation, 85% of respondents rated feeling welcome/unwelcome as extremely or moderately influential, above all other considerations, such as cost (78%) or distance (77%). We also probed barriers/motivators for their *community as a whole*, to try to gain insights into the importance of factors such as childcare or accommodations for disabilities that are not equally personally relevant for all respondents. Feeling welcome/unwelcome was still rated the second-highest factor (83%), following cost (87%) (Q42, see Figure 1). These trends underscore just how important feeling welcome/unwelcome is with regards to cultural participation, as well as cost. In free response data, 32 respondents prioritized free/low-cost offerings and, to a lesser extent, issues of transportation access (5) (Q41).

Figure 1: Factors that influence personal and community participation in cultural activities/events



Notes: Source Q42: "What influences you, personally, and your community when considering participating in cultural activities/events?" N=874 respondents. Percentage of respondents selecting Extremely to Moderately. Based on a four-point scale.

Importance of all aspects of cultural life: If Montgomery County were to expand access, what would be most prioritized by residents? We asked respondents to tell us how important different aspects of cultural life were to them, from "extremely important" to "not at all important." We then used aggregate scores to infer what aspects are most important to the community at large. One takeaway is that respondents view *all* aspects of cultural life as important, with 73-91% of respondents rating all categories as extremely or very important. Places to attend arts and cultural activities/events (such as galleries and theaters) received the highest share of respondents (91%), when extremely and very important were considered in combination. Survey respondents prioritized "opportunities to experience the work of national/international artists" the least, with 73% rating as extremely or very important (Q6, see Table 2).

Table 2: Relative importance of different aspects of cultural life in Montgomery County

	Extremely important (%)	Very important (%)	Moderately important (%)	Slightly important (%)	Not at all important (%)
Arts/cultural education and enrichment in K-12 schools	74.6	15.6	6.9	1.6	1.4
Places to attend arts and cultural activities/events (such as galleries and theaters)	67.3	24.1	6.5	1.8	0.3
Support for local creative/cultural practitioners, organizations, projects, or programs	63.6	23.7	8.5	3.0	1.2
Neighborhood/community centers (such as recreation centers, senior centers)	62.5	26.4	8.3	2.0	0.8
Art/cultural classes for all ages offered in the community	61.8	24.2	9.9	2.9	1.3
Public art, gardens, and/or architecture	58.6	27.5	10.6	2.7	0.6
Community celebrations (such as street fairs, festivals)	54.5	28.5	12.7	3.2	1.1
Opportunities to experience the work of national/international artists	44.8	28.4	18.4	5.8	2.5

Source Q6: "How important are the following things to cultural life in Montgomery County?" N=1,194 respondents

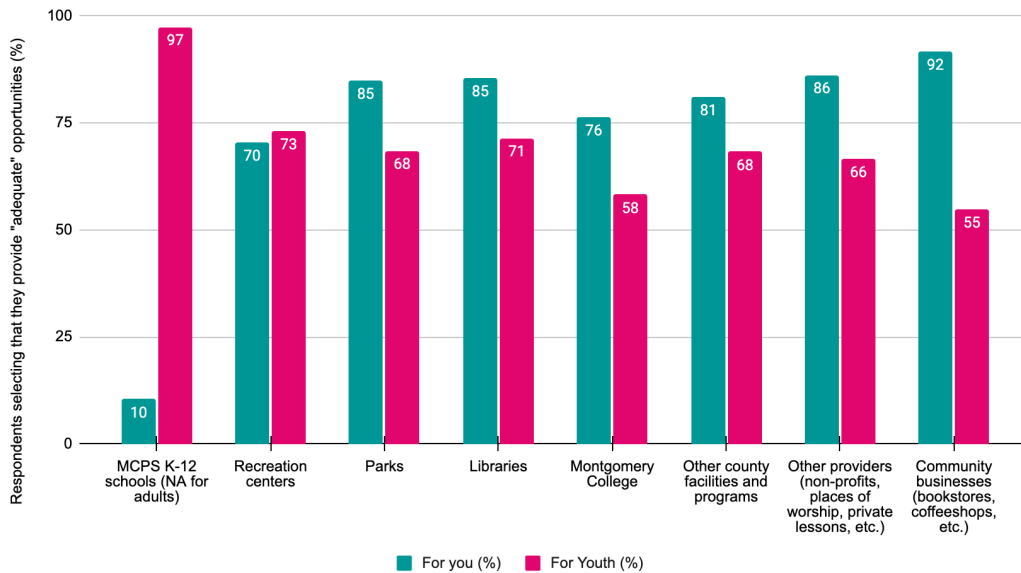
Youth: Survey data across a range of questions suggests a broad and strong consensus of support for youth cultural access and education. First, 75% of respondents rated "arts/cultural education and enrichment in K-12" schools as extremely important, higher than for any other option, and 90% rated it as extremely to very important (Q6, see Table 2). Secondly, when asked in a free response question where/what kinds of cultural programs they would like to see increased, respondents named programs for youth (58) more frequently than for any other demographic group (Q41). Third, when queried on interest in stronger linkages between the cultural sector/creative economy and other domains of community need, 93% of respondents agree that they'd like to see closer links to education, the highest response for all domains queried (Q48). One respondent wrote:

"I think Montgomery County, through partnerships, should ensure that the schools have robust art programs that also support the academic subjects that can help the students succeed. It is important to help students with their emotional, mental, and physical well-being to be successful and become lifelong learners" (Q49).

Lastly, when asked about access to cultural offerings overall, lower percentages of respondents indicated that various cultural providers provide youth with adequate opportunities, compared to adequate opportunities for themselves (Q40, see Figure 2). Notable exceptions are that 97% of respondents rated MCPS K-12 schools as providing adequate opportunities for youth to participate in culture, and slightly higher shares of respondents (73 vs. 70%) viewed recreation centers as providing adequate opportunities for youth vs. themselves. The fact that

97% of survey respondents rated MCPS K-12 schools as providing adequate opportunities for youth to participate in arts, culture/heritage, and creative activities in Montgomery County indicates that, while a priority area, residents recognize MCPS's existing strengths in this area.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with Montgomery County providers of arts, culture/heritage & creative activities



Notes: Source Q40: "Please select which of the following provide adequate opportunities for you/youth to participate in arts, culture/heritage, and creative activities in Montgomery County. (Check all that apply)." N=868 respondents.

Culturally-specific heritage offerings: In terms of people's satisfaction with their own access to cultural offerings, survey data paints a mixed picture. For instance, when asked about access to cultural offerings overall, high majorities (70-92%) of respondents indicated that all categories of cultural providers provide adequate opportunities for them to participate in arts, culture/heritage, and creative activities in Montgomery County (Q40, see Figure 2). However, when asked if they have adequate opportunities in Montgomery County to engage in activities specific to *their* cultural heritage, only 42% of respondents agree (Q43). This trend holds for youth—only 37% of respondents agree that young people in their community have adequate opportunities to experience and learn about the respondent's *own* cultural traditions/heritage (Q43). This indicates unmet demand for more culturally-specific heritage offerings.

Older adults and under 55: Although the strong support for youth cultural access clearly stands out, a large number of respondents (38) also voiced that older adults/seniors were a demographic they would like to see served through increased programming. Interestingly, many respondents (26) also voiced that they felt adults under 55 were underserved vis-à-vis older adults, particularly with recreation programming. They called for more programming compatible with working adults' schedules, i.e., evenings and weekends (Q41).

Recreation centers, libraries, schools, parks: When asked where they would like to see increased programs and opportunities, numerous respondents cited County-government cultural providers, such as recreation/community centers (71), libraries (67), MCPS/schools (62), and parks (55) (Q41). This indicates strong demand for broadly accessible cultural offerings and underscores the importance of County-government cultural provision alongside nonprofit organizations.

Upcounty and East County: Where in the county should increased cultural programs be prioritized? Free response data indicated the strongest demand for opportunities in Upcounty communities (28), followed by the Silver Spring region (18) and Mid-County communities (16). Fewer respondents (10) named East County; however, that region also had the fewest survey responses. East County-related submissions indicate that they are aware of disparities:

East County. We live in Burtonsville and feel forgotten.

...public art funds only ever seem to land in DTSS on this side of the county while historically marginalized communities continue to be forgotten in Four Corners, White Oak, Colesville, Briggs Chaney, etc. We pay taxes, too, and have received little public support for the arts...

Silver Spring was named by five respondents as receiving a disproportionate amount of cultural resources/opportunities. Fewer respondents named communities in the other down county regions, such as Bethesda communities (9), and Rockville (5), which actually spans Bethesda and Mid-County regions, complicating efforts to categorize.

FINDINGS: CULTURAL SECTOR RESILIENCE

We asked the different segments of Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy (independent artists/practitioners/scholars, leaders of organizations, and leaders of businesses) to reflect on their support systems, networks, and facilities in a series of free response questions (Q18-20, 29-31, and 37-39). They shared their thoughts on what parts of their support systems are working best, the most important opportunities for improvement, and other ideas for how Montgomery County leaders can help the county be a place where the cultural sector can thrive. We also queried them specifically on the continued impacts of the pandemic and challenges with government policies and economic instability. Their responses surfaced both vulnerabilities and resilience, with impacts often being felt unevenly.

Top priorities to strengthen capacity & address gaps: Funding

The theme of funding surfaced repeatedly, but opinions diverged in interesting ways and presented potential contradictions. Both organizations and artist/practitioner/scholar respondents frequently mentioned funding as one of the parts of their support systems that was working well; however, both also mentioned funding, more than any other theme, as the most important opportunity for improvement. When asked for other ideas for Montgomery

County leaders working to make the county a place where the cultural sector can thrive, funding was also the second most frequently mentioned theme for both artists/practitioners/scholars and organizations. Respondents offered rich, nuanced suggestions for how to improve funding...

Funding increases: Artist/practitioner/scholar respondents emphasized the importance of funding and advocated for more:

Mo Money! Mo Money! Mo Money!

Organization respondents voiced a desire for more funding, both for organizations lacking nonprofit status and formal nonprofits. They voiced particular support for organizations that are small or community-centered:

Another opportunity lies in creating incentives and support structures for work that is intersectional, community-centered, and socially relevant. Artists and organizations doing this kind of work often face structural and funding challenges that more traditional or institutionally aligned projects do not. It would be powerful to see more funding priorities, partnerships, and recognition aimed specifically at efforts that address justice, equity, health, climate, and care through creative practice.

Multi-year & general operating support: Both artist/practitioner/scholar and organization respondents advocated for multi-year funding and general operating support. Organization respondents also requested funding for space needs. One respondent pitched a dream scenario:

In a wildest dream scenario, it would be wonderful to create something like a MacArthur Fellowship where creative MoCo residents are offered a substantial, no-strings-attached income. MacArthur offers \$800,000 over five years, which averages to about \$160,000 a year, which is about what a person needs to have a home in MoCo. (The one condition could be that they reside and continue to reside in MoCo for the duration of the grant.)

More grantee-friendly applications and requirements: Some artists/practitioners/scholars emphasized the accessibility of grant applications or requirements, from simplifying applications to removing requirements that expenses be incurred and submitted for reimbursement as a condition of funds release. Organization respondents suggested providing translations for those not fluent in English, and or reducing documentation requirements to be more inclusive of smaller nonprofits with limited capacity.

New niche funding categories: Cultural sector respondents suggested novel and very specific new funding categories. Some artists/practitioners/scholars requested funding for arts educators, arts journalists, or small for-profit creative businesses. Organization respondents offered specific suggestions ranging from County funding for arts programs organized by local governments to microgrants to cover the cost of Zoom meetings for small nonprofits. Organization respondents suggested grants or tax incentives for small creative start-ups, internship grants for young creative workers, and grants to local businesses that exhibit the work of local artists.

Top priorities to strengthen capacity & address gaps: Space

Cultural sector respondents also frequently prioritized space needs, and, similarly to the funding theme, opinions diverged and presented seeming contradictions. Creative/cultural businesses cited space most often when asked what was working well, for example, the ability to work from County library branches or secure venues through recreation centers. In contrast, when we asked what the most important opportunities for improvement were, both organizations and artists/practitioners/scholars mentioned space the second most frequently, after funding (Q19, 30).

Space affordability: All kinds of cultural sector respondents spoke to the need for affordable space. As one respondent summed up:

Space space space. Subsidizing arts spaces and providing the space is the best thing that county leaders can do for the arts.

Organization respondents spoke of their high rent burdens and proposed rent control for cultural nonprofits. They suggested offering incentives/requirements for developers/property managers to increase affordable cultural space. They proposed developing government-run subsidized spaces, such as administrative space for cultural non-profits and/or a studio building with spaces for event/workshop rentals.

Even though housing affordability surfaced as the most frequently cited “important issue facing Montgomery County residents today” (Q46), only a few respondents addressed artist housing and live/work space.

Space for cultural production, consumption, and sharing: Cultural sector respondents expressed interest in space for both creative production (studio, rehearsal), consumption (exhibition, performance), and teaching/connecting. Artist/practitioner/scholar respondents, for instance, called for more studio and rehearsal spaces, as well as spaces for exhibition/performance. They also emphasized spaces with the potential to foster artist networking and collaboration. Organization respondents’ comments on space themes emphasized the need for performance venues, rehearsal spaces for the performing arts, and studio space. Business respondents expressed needs for spaces to exhibit visual arts/craft, spaces for creating, and performance spaces.

Niche space needs: Suggestions for specific space needs run the gamut. Some artist/practitioner/scholar respondents described very niche space needs (such as all-ages music venues or access to venues in Upcounty and Mid-County for local filmmakers). One request from a business respondent included a podcast studio rentable by the hour. Organization respondents emphasized the need for spaces with transportation accessibility.

For performance spaces, specifically, business respondents called for more outdoor amphitheaters, whereas organization respondents advocated for venues with up-to-date technical capabilities; a range of sizes, and

especially mid-sized (500 seats); and spaces that are not dependent on good weather (i.e., outdoor, uncovered stages). Respondents mentioned the demolition of the County-owned Randolph Road Theatre and called for its replacement.

Vacant space activation and safe/suitable space: Some artist/practitioner/scholar respondents emphasized the potential to animate vacant/underutilized commercial spaces with arts uses, whereas others emphasized that space should be safe and suitable for the artists' needs:

Artists need to be treated like plants. You cannot put plants in the bottom of an old dirty ill maintained basement with no light and think they're going to thrive. They need tons of light and fresh air and space to thrive with great equipment and others to work with so that they can put down their roots and fully grow.

Uneven continued impacts of the pandemic

Free response data indicate that the continued impacts of the pandemic are felt unevenly, with some entities still struggling to recover (Q15, Q26, Q34). Some members of Montgomery County's cultural sector felt (and continue to feel) deep negative impacts from the pandemic. Conversely, others experienced upsides, such as increased time for their creative practice, development of lasting innovative practices, and even connections to expanded geographic markets/audiences. Artists/practitioners/scholars, particularly in the live performing arts, commented that they continue to experience reduced performance/exhibition opportunities. Arts, cultural, and humanities organizations also described continued impacts, including decreased attendance, enrollment, and membership numbers, related financial hardships, and even closures. For instance, many respondents acutely feel the loss of the Sugarloaf Craft Festival, which ceased during the pandemic and never returned. As with artists, performing arts organizations experienced particularly severe effects from the pandemic. In one respondent's own words:

...we went from a robust thriving organization to a barely surviving entity. We are still not back to pre-pandemic levels.

Vulnerabilities to numerous economic challenges

Submissions for free response questions yield insights into the economic challenges facing different segments of Montgomery County's cultural sector (Q16, Q27, Q35). Across categories, cultural sector respondents voiced concerns about reduced demand and rising costs. Many respondents connected these dynamics to federal policy changes.

Independents: Artists, creative/cultural practitioners, and scholars cited low rates of compensation, funding scarcity, and reduced demand and earned income opportunities from larger economic challenges. Numerous respondents commented on the difficulty of covering the costs of inputs for their creative process, including supplies/materials and space.

Organizations: Arts, culture, and humanities organizations faced similar issues. They frequently cited funding challenges, including reduced grants and individual donations. Some respondents specifically tied funding challenges to federal policy shifts under the Trump administration. For example:

The current national environment does not support the kind of work that we do, which is rooted in cultural diversity and broad human understanding. We recently had federal funding revoked, and we know that the pressure on state and local funding in many areas may lead to decreased support for the arts. Many people in the region also face personal challenges, which impact individual giving.

Organizations also wrote of reduced demand/earned income opportunities and lower audience attendance and membership, which they connected to federal job cuts and high costs of living/inflation:

With all the economic challenges facing our society and county, people are less willing to buy tickets to see plays. On top of that, the cost of materials has increased significantly.

As the above quote demonstrates, high costs both reduce demand and increase the costs associated with creating artistic/cultural work. Numerous respondents called out issues of space affordability/skyrocketing rents, in particular. These compounding pressures, unfortunately, leave many organizations with insufficient revenue to cover costs, forcing them to scale back mission-related programming.

Businesses: Responses from creative/cultural business representatives suggest that overall business has slowed and income has decreased. Economic factors, such as inflation/rising costs, tax burden, and federal policy changes (layoffs, attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)), have resulted in contractions in the budgets of both creative businesses themselves and their clients:

Costs for EVERYTHING have risen since the pandemic, but venues fail to adequately compensate to meet the rise in costs, so I make significantly less than before the pandemic, making it harder to stay in business.

Our bulk of clients are in public media, and so the economic challenges mean that they have smaller budgets, which means they have less of an ability to hire us.

Navigating government policy impacts

We asked cultural sector respondents how government policies impact them (Q17, 28, 36). Cultural sector respondents focused primarily on Trump administration federal policy changes and spoke to both direct impacts and ripple effects, such as increased competition for funding from lower levels of government and reduced demand for cultural experiences due to cuts to the region's federal employment base. To a lesser extent, they articulated challenges and opportunities related to County-level policies, such as incentives/regulations that can

impede or foster public art and cultural spaces, the need for increased validation/visibility, and interest in new positions/tools to help them navigate County bureaucracy.

Trump administration federal policy changes: For all cultural sector groups (artists, organizations, businesses), concerns about federal policy changes from the Trump administration predominate. These include anti-DEI policies and rhetoric, cuts to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), reductions in the regional federal employment base, decreased freedom of expression, and immigration enforcement. One illustration of how such federal policies impact the cultural sector can be seen in numerous survey responses citing Hispanic Heritage Month/events as a favorite event. This year, however, the Wheaton Hispanic Heritage Festival was canceled due to concerns about federal immigration enforcement raids.

Ripple effects: Montgomery County's cultural sector is already experiencing or anticipates several impacts from current government policies, including: greater demand/increased competition for state and local funding, rising costs, and reduced demand/audience sizes and earned income opportunities.

I am deeply worried by the current administration's lack of support for the arts and what that will mean on the local level. I know of more than one art non-profit that is contemplating closing its doors. Merging is an option, but that is laborious and takes considerable time. Most organizations simply don't have the wherewithal. I'm very concerned that our community will be much poorer, in all ways, without a strong initiative to combat the federal policies.

The federal government cuts have greatly impacted our local economies, and with so many out of work or in fear of losing their jobs, many don't buy at craft shows. Thus, our federal "leadership" has greatly minimized my business sales.

The anti-DEI policies have really hurt me as a business owner, as my business is owned by a multiply marginalized person.

Suggestions for County-level improvements: Some cultural sector respondents also commented on how County government can impede or foster public art or cultural spaces through incentives and regulation. One organizational respondent wrote:

Montgomery County and M-NCPPC have done a disgraceful job in failing to encourage or support the building of arts spaces and capital projects for arts renovations... their errors (and bad policies) have cost us (and thus, MoCo taxpayers) more than the \$1.4M... over the past ten years... the County and M-NCPPC have blocked, confused, obfuscated and made otherwise awful the process of attempting to build facilities to serve this community.

Respondents also expressed a desire for more validation/visibility for the cultural sector and new positions/tools to help navigate County bureaucracy.

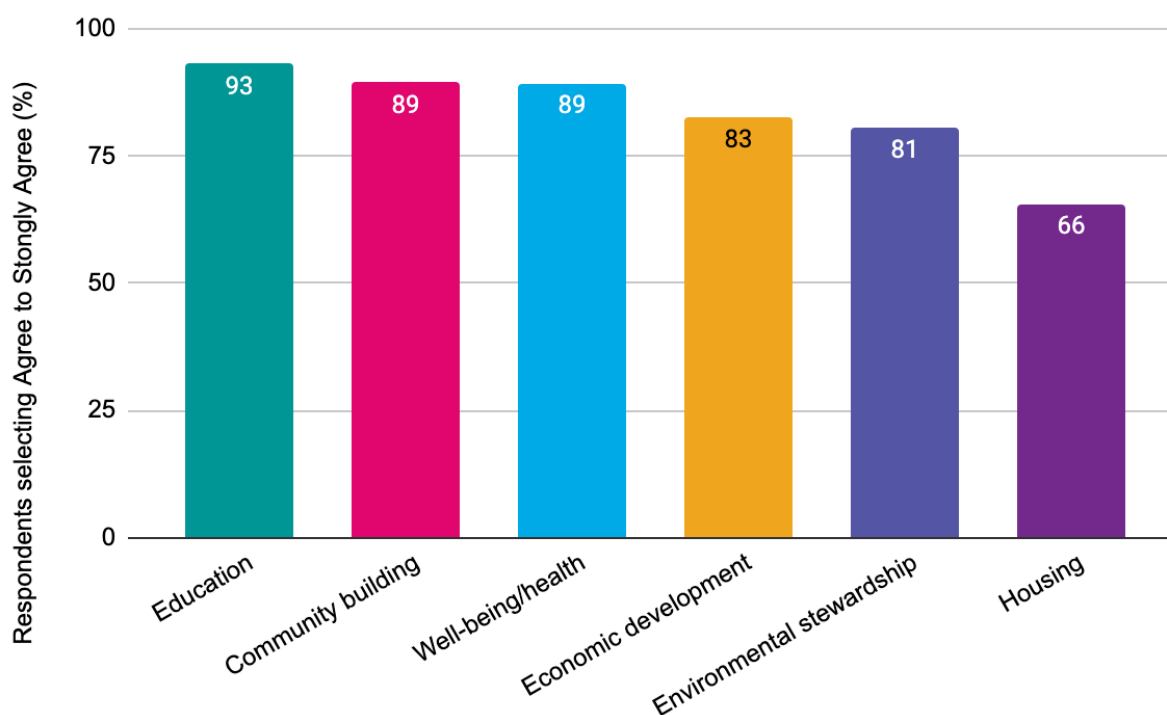
FINDINGS: INTERSECTIONALITY

We asked respondents to consider challenges in their community and the potential for the cultural sector/creative economy to have closer links to areas of community need and the physical environment/infrastructure. Survey findings indicate that the majority of respondents support links to *all* domains of community need/infrastructure queried about, with particularly strong support for education, community building (both discussed in the belonging pillar), and well-being/health. Respondents also described arts, culture, and creative expression as innovative means to generally illuminate issues and/or inspire action and saw opportunities for artists/creative practitioners to help the work of government be more fun, innovative, or effective.

The majority support links to *all* domains of community need

We asked respondents which areas of community need in the county (from housing to economic development to health) they would like to see have closer links to the cultural sector/creative economy. Majorities of respondents (93-66%) expressed support for closer links between the cultural sector/creative economy and *all* domains of community need in the county asked about (Q48, see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Support for closer links between cultural sector/creative economy and other domains



Notes: Source Q48. N=908 respondents. Percentage of respondents selecting Strongly Agree to Agree. Based on a five-point scale.

Respondents expressed the strongest support for linkages between the cultural sector/creative economy and education (93%), community building (89%), and health/well-being (89%). Not surprisingly, the priorities placed on

education and community building align with the core plan pillar of belonging surfaced through prior research. We include a discussion of these findings in that section.

Strong support for culture's connection to well-being/health: Survey findings suggest residents desire increased connections between culture and well-being/health. In a free response question, respondents stated that participating in arts/culture/creative expression offers a joyful respite from stressful times (including those related to federal layoffs/cuts and immigration enforcement), reduces isolation, and can provide physical activity (such as through dance). Twenty-three respondents cited their belief that arts, culture, and creative expression can strengthen health or well-being. These perceived benefits often overlapped with the culture's potential to help meet the needs of older adults (12) (Q49). These sentiments are also found in the quantitative survey data. Eighty-nine percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they'd like to see closer links between Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy and well-being/health (Q48, see Figure 3), and 72% of respondents value arts, culture, and creative expression because they help them personally maintain their mental and/or physical health (Q7).

Support for culture's connection to economic development: High majorities of respondents (83%) also expressed support for closer links between Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy and economic development (Q48, see Figure 3.) In the free response question that asked how art, culture, and creative expression can help solve challenges facing Montgomery County, a small number of respondents (6) drew connections between art, culture, and creative expression's ability to support economic development, including by promoting tourism and attracting customers to spend at non-arts local businesses (Q49).

Support for culture's connection to environmental stewardship: The trends for support for links between Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy and environmental stewardship were similar to those for economic development, albeit with slightly less robust rates of agreement (81%) for the quantitative question (Q48, see Figure 3), and higher numbers of respondents (11) providing free response comments that art and culture can help promote environmental resilience/stewardship (Q49).

Less robust support for culture's connection to housing: Interestingly, respondents placed relatively less emphasis on linkages between housing and the cultural sector/creative economy, even though housing affordability surfaced as the top "most important issue facing Montgomery County today" (Q46). Sixty-six percent of respondents would like to see closer links between Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy and housing, compared to 93-81% for the other domains of community need queried (Q48, Figure 3).

Support for culture's connection to physical environment improvements: Quantitative and qualitative survey findings indicate that respondents support using arts, culture, and heritage to improve the physical environment/infrastructure, though not as robustly as for the domains of education, community building, or well-being/health. When asked about infrastructure improvements, the majority of respondents agreed that they would like to see Montgomery County use art, culture, and heritage to improve parks (85%), County buildings

(68%), buses/bus stops (67%), and streets and bridges (65%) (Q47). Related, in a free response question about how art, culture, and creative expression can help solve challenges facing Montgomery County (Q49), many respondents (44) emphasized art, culture, and creative expression's potential to beautify or enhance the physical environment. Their ideas included murals, painting utility boxes/trash receptacles, and greater utilization of landscape architecture. Five respondents suggested that pavement murals or quality landscape design could calm traffic and increase pedestrian/bike safety.

Culture to innovate, illuminate & inspire

Via free response submissions, respondents also described the potential for art, culture, and creative expression not to solve a particular topical issue, but as an innovative means to generally illuminate issues and/or inspire action. For instance, respondents stated art and culture can help increase awareness of societal issues/community problems (15), foster civic engagement (13), and help solve problems with creativity, innovation, and imagination (8) (Q49). Some respondents suggested artists/creative practitioners could help the work of government be more fun, innovative, or effective:

For community conversations, planning, issues, rallies, meetings, county council meetings, etc., start with some culture.

Artists integrated in county government, like public works, planning, integrating public art in public and private development projects. But better coordination with AHCMC oversight, which means \$ for staff.

I think the urban planners for our county need to have a background in art!

APPENDIX A: FULL RESULTS

Below, we include full results for the quantitative survey findings, as well as select summaries of free response submissions. Numbers in parentheses indicate how many respondents addressed a specific theme via free response comments.

Q1. What is your favorite art, cultural, or heritage event in Montgomery County?

Many respondents supplied general responses (e.g., “live music”) that spoke to their preferred artistic disciplines rather than specific events or venues. This data is more comprehensively assessed in Q2 and Q4; therefore, we excluded it from this analysis. For respondents who supplied specifics, the highest number of respondents (90) mentioned Strathmore, revealing its prominence as a critical cultural anchor. Large numbers of residents also voiced their love for the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair (57). Glen Echo Park (32) and BlackRock (22) also stood out as important cultural hubs. Residents prize collective holiday celebrations, especially Juneteenth (30) and the Fourth of July (23). Festivals spanning different parts of the county are beloved, from Heritage Days (26) to the Gaithersburg Book Festival (25) to the Takoma Park Folk Festival (25) to the Wheaton Arts Parade/Festival (24). Many respondents (22) also voiced the importance of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) as a sponsor of cultural events, such as the *Baila4Life* MCPS Latin Dance Competition (14).

Other responses with more than 3 mentions: Olney theatre (21), Rockville Arts Festival (20), Bethesda Art Festival (19), Brookside Gardens (19), Silver Spring Jazz Festival (18), Pride (17), AFI (15), Hispanic Heritage Month/events (14), Jewish heritage events (14), Glenstone Museum (12), VisArts (12), Oktoberfest (11), Roundhouse Theatre (11), Farm Tour (10), Montgomery College (10), Taste of Bethesda (10), Sligo Creek concerts/festivals (9), Hometown Holidays (8), Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (7), Takoma Park Street Festival (7), Bethesda Row Art Fair (6), Sandy Spring Slave Museum (6), Silver Spring Blues Festival (6), History Month/events (5), Ethiopian Day Festival (5), Jazz at the Kramer (5), Kensington Day of the Book Festival (5), Lunar New Year (5), Sugarloaf Craft Festival (5)—note no longer active, Bethesda Art Walk (4), Caribbean-American Heritage Festival (4), Countryside Artisan Tours (4), Kensington Paint the Town Labor Day Art Show (4), Silver Spring Civic Center (4), National Capital Trolley Museum (3).

Q2. What kinds of arts, cultural, and heritage events and venues do you attend? (Check all that apply.)

	%	#
Live music	71	926
Crafts fairs or a visual arts festivals	64	828
Art museums or galleries	64	825
Theatre/plays	58	759
Community, culture, or heritage-based festivals or celebrations	58	749
Historic/cultural sites	54	705
Other museums (history, culture)	42	550
Dance performances	37	483
Documentary/art film screenings/festivals (in-person)	36	461
Other types of live performance	22	288

Other (please specify)

11

142

N=1,298 respondents

Free responses (142): Many respondents who selected “Other (please specify)” used that field to elaborate on a category they also selected (e.g., “ballet performances” or “dances from Central America” to provide detail on the “Dance performances” selection. Looking beyond the use of elaboration, the greatest number of respondents specified poetry/literary readings (16), followed by food fairs (14), and classes/instruction (9). Other themes that appear for three or more respondents include: school events (9), parks or gardens (8), farms/farmers markets (5), history events/activities (4), Jewish events/observances (4), nature (4), religious worship (4), social dancing (4), spots/sporting events (4), book festivals (3), comedy (3), libraries (3), Montgomery County Agricultural Fair (3), Pride (3), virtual/online (3).

Q3. Please specify genre(s) of live music you attend

Free responses (884): Top responses include rock (194), jazz (185), folk (171), classical (171), and pop (75).

Q4. I actively practice/participate in the following (including activities you do at home). (Check all that apply.)

	%	#
Visual arts/craft (from oil painting to quilting to henna painting)	50	560
Cultural/ethnic/heritage (celebrating, preserving, or teaching culturally-specific practices and traditions)	45	497
Music (from singing in a choir to African drumming to composing on Garage Band)	38	421
Literature/writing (from poetry slams to book clubs to writing a novel)	36	396
Media/film (from photography to making creative TikTok's or an Indie film)	33	363
Dance (from Zumba classes to Bharatanatyam to salsa to ballet)	31	345
Research/scholarship in arts, humanities, and cultural topics	29	323
Design (from fashion to graphic to landscape architecture)	25	275
Theater/performance (from Shakespeare to sketch comedy to drag)	21	234
Other artistic or cultural activities, please specify (please specify)	14	152

N=1,111 respondents

Free responses (152): Many respondents used the “Other artistic or cultural activities, (please specify)” option to provide more specificity on an activity that also fell into one of the provided categories: visual arts/craft (31), music (19), cultural/ethnic/heritage (14), dance (9), theater/performance (6), literature/writing (5), research/scholarship (4), and media/film (3). If a respondent had not selected the related provided category, we modified their submission to ensure that data was accurately captured. For instance, “I teach dances Mohiniattam, folk, & other styles of India,” was also counted in both the Dance and Cultural/ethnic/heritage categories. One hundred thirteen responses did not overlap clearly with the provided categories. Of these, the largest numbers of respondents spoke to teaching/education, such as serving as a museum docent (10); history/historic preservation, such as preserving trolley cars and historical reenactments (8); cooking (6); gardening (4); and yoga/Qigong/Tai Chi (3).

Q5: How important are arts, culture, and creative expression to your quality of life in Montgomery County?

	%	#
Extremely important	77	916
Moderately important	18	209
Slightly important	4	53
Not at all important	1	12

N=1,190 respondents

Q6. How important are the following things to cultural life in Montgomery County?

	Extremely important (%)	Very important (%)	Moderately important (%)	Slightly important (%)	Not at all important (%)
Arts/cultural education and enrichment in K-12 schools	74.6	15.6	6.9	1.6	1.4
Places to attend arts and cultural activities/events (such as galleries and theaters)	67.3	24.1	6.5	1.8	0.3
Support for local creative/cultural practitioners, organizations, projects, or programs	63.6	23.7	8.5	3.0	1.2
Neighborhood/community centers (such as recreation centers, senior centers)	62.5	26.4	8.3	2.0	0.8
Art/cultural classes for all ages offered in the community	61.8	24.2	9.9	2.9	1.3
Public art, gardens, and/or architecture	58.6	27.5	10.6	2.7	0.6
Community celebrations (such as street fairs, festivals)	54.5	28.5	12.7	3.2	1.1
Opportunities to experience the work of national/international artists	44.8	28.4	18.4	5.8	2.5

Percentages based on N=1,194 respondents

Q7. I value arts, culture, and creative expression because they help me: (Check all that apply.)

	%	#
Maintain my mental and/or physical health	72	852
Develop a greater understanding of history and other people's cultures	72	844
Feel connected to a larger community	71	839
Develop my creativity	64	752
Find insights into other cultures or circumstances	60	705
Discover new artists and arts forms	58	687
Connect with emotions	54	632

Make new friends and expand social networks	51	606
Celebrate and honor my own heritage/culture	44	523
Live a spiritual life	34	399

N=1,177 respondents

Q8. Feel free to share more about why arts, culture, and creative expression are important to you.

Free responses (456): The largest share of respondents commented that arts, culture, and creative expression are important to them due to their ability to foster cross-cultural connections and understanding (52). Smaller shares spoke to related themes of affirmations of their own cultures (33), preserving/sharing history (15), and celebrations of diversity (7).

The second highest share of respondents wrote that arts/culture/creative expression is fundamental to the human experience/humanity (49):

缺了它生活无味又无趣，感受不了人类的温柔，细腻与澎湃的情愫。

Without it, life becomes dull and boring, and we cannot feel those feelings of humankind that are gentle, delicate, or passionate.

The human race has been telling stories since we developed speech. Creative expression, performance, and shared experience are ingrained in our DNA. We need art to live.

Another word for these activities is “humanities”. The arts make us human and help us understand other humans.

High numbers of respondents commented on other social utility of the arts, including fostering social connections (42), building community/social cohesion (38), and fostering belonging (16) and empathy (15).

Many respondents also voiced that arts, culture, and creative expression are important to them due to their personal and community health and well-being impacts (40). These included mental/emotional health, such as countering stress, isolation, depression, and anxiety, as well as physical health through art forms that get the body moving (e.g., dance). These benefits overlapped with meeting the needs of older adults, specifically (4).

Others commented that creativity is personally enriching to them (33), fun/entertaining (17), that they value experiencing beauty (13), or that it deepens their spiritual life (10).

Others spoke to the value of arts and culture for youth enrichment/development (20), and specifically the desire to share their own cultural traditions/heritage with youth (11), or connect youth to other cultures (9).

Q9. Are you an artist, creative/cultural practitioner or scholar who works independently (i.e. sole proprietor vs. formal employment)? (We’re interested in a broad range of disciplines, from folk and traditional arts to design to philosophy and comparative religion.)

	%	#
Yes	39	453
No	61	718

N=1,171 respondents

Q10. Do you earn income, or aspire to, from your creative/cultural practice?

	%	#
Yes	32	378
No	68	793

N=1,171 respondents

Q11. Do you hold a leadership role (volunteer or paid) at an arts, culture, or humanities organization? (We're interested in both non-profits and community/unincorporated groups from a broad range of disciplines.)

	%	#
Yes	30	354
No	70	817

N=1,171 respondents

Q12. Do you hold a leadership role at a creative for-profit business (e.g., graphic design, architecture, fashion/interior design, for-profit music venue/bands, for-profit gallery, bookstore, publishing, video game development, creative support services and technicians, etc.)? (We're interested in sole proprietors, low-profit LLCs/artist collectives, and larger creative/cultural enterprises.)

	%	#
Yes	11	124
No	89	1,047

N=1,171 respondents

Q13. Select your primary discipline as an artist, creative/cultural practitioner or scholar.

	%	#
Visual Arts	34.3	103
Music	15.7	47
Writing	8.0	24
Other (please specify)	6.0	18
Theatre	5.7	17
Dance	5.0	15
Media	4.7	14
Design	4.3	13
History and/or Social Sciences	4.0	12

Multidisciplinary	4.0	12
Languages, Linguistics, and/or Literary Arts	3.3	10
Folk & Traditional Arts	3.0	9
Storytelling	1.7	5
Philosophy, Ethics, and/or Comparative Religion	0.3	1

N=300 respondents (only asked of those who selected "yes" to Q9: Are you an artist, creative/cultural practitioner or scholar who works independently and Q10: Do you earn income, or aspire to, from your creative/cultural practice?)

Free responses (18): Some respondents (8) used the "Other (please specify)" option to describe their work in more than one discipline, for example, "theatre, storytelling and visual arts" or "architecture and choreography." Others, such as photography (3), indicate that it is not intuitive whether photography falls into the Visual Arts or Media category, even though a link to a glossary was provided. Other responses (5) included highly specific niches, for example, "Multidisciplinary multimodal applied anthropology and perspective weaver" and "Mental health practitioner that weaves movement with trauma healing and stress management."

Q14. Is your artistic/cultural/scholarly work associated with a specific ethnic or cultural tradition or community?

	%	#
Yes	32	97
No	68	202
If yes, please specify:		87

N=299 respondents (only asked of those who selected "yes" to Q9: Are you an artist, creative/cultural practitioner or scholar who works independently and Q10: Do you earn income, or aspire to, from your creative/cultural practice?)

Free responses (87): Respondents shared a range of specific ethnic or cultural traditions or communities with which their work is associated. These cultural influences include Latin (16), such as Puerto Rican folklore and Venezuelan culture; African and/or African diasporic (13), ranging from from "Región Caribe" to "Ghanaian matriarchy;" African American (10); Jewish (10), European (7), e.g. Irish, Hungarian; and South Asian (6), such as a Kolam master artist. Themes in other responses included: American history (5), Jazz (4), East Asian culture (3), LGBTQIA+ (3), and Native American (2).

How have the following continued to impact your artistic/cultural/scholarly work? Please share a story or statistic:

Q15. the pandemic?

Free responses (189): Artist, creative/cultural practitioner, and scholar respondents shared both positive and negative impacts from the pandemic.

Some described upsides such as increased time for artistic and creative practices (22) or for ideation and exploration (8). Others spoke to their ability to pivot and develop innovative/creative programming or opportunities (16) or find new virtual/digital-based revenue sources (7). For instance:

At the start, about 75 % of my income was from working as a therapeutic musician in two hospitals. I was basically kept out of the hospitals for two years. However, teaching and performing online became a major source (and continues to be) of my revenue.

Others invested in professional development activities, whether skill building (6) or education (3). Others made new (often virtual) connections to other creative practitioners, communities that they value and endure to this day (7). Conversely, other creative practitioner respondents described significant hardships, such as job loss (16), financial stress (14), isolation (8), mental health stress (4), and creative practitioners being forced to change career paths (4) or put their creative practice on hiatus (3). Respondents working in the live performing arts (16) seem to have felt the effects most acutely. Respondents stated that many venues/arts businesses closed (11) that featured music, dance, and theater, as well as galleries. Others spoke to cancelled performances/opportunities (8), and that reduced performance/gallery opportunities continue to this day (3). One respondent wrote, "The pandemic was devastating to the dance company I'm a member of. Our performance opportunities are so few compared to pre-pandemic." Some respondents described a lasting cultural shift in people's preferences to stay at home/engage virtually (6), affecting audiences/patronage and, therefore, opportunities.

Q16. economic challenges?

Free responses (170): Overall, comments from artists, creative/cultural practitioners, and scholars spoke to their vulnerability to withstand economic challenges. The largest numbers of respondents wrote of low rates of compensation, period, for creative practitioners (21); funding scarcity (20), including increased competition for grants and cuts to school budgets for arts enrichment; and reduced demand and earned income opportunities (20) from larger economic challenges. Numerous respondents commented on the difficulty of covering the costs of inputs for their creative process, including supplies/materials (17) and space. Overall, 16 respondents wrote of the theme of space availability/affordability (studio, rehearsal, exhibition, and performance). Twelve respondents commented about their experiences of loss of income, revenue, or sales. Others commented on larger economic trends impacting their creative pursuits, such as the high cost of living in Montgomery County (12), the federal policy changes of the Trump administration (11), especially its effects on regional employment; inflation/rising costs (8); and job loss in general (7). Others commented on the stress they experience (5), managing economic challenges and reduced time available for creative pursuits.

Q17. government policies?

Free responses (162): The largest number of artist, creative/cultural practitioner, and scholar respondents (53) shared concerns about the federal administration and their policies. Specific themes included anti-DEI policies and rhetoric (13); cuts, changes in permitted content, and other attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and public media (10); the Trump administration's sweeping changes at the Kennedy Center (6); federal job/contract cuts (5); immigration enforcement (4); and tariffs (4).

Many respondents voiced concerns about current/anticipated cuts to public funding for arts and culture at the federal, state, and local levels (34). They also commented on reduced demand/earned income opportunities (12) and general economic uncertainty (11). Others shared deep appreciation for or cited an increased need for local and state funding, including as a counterweight to federal cuts (9):

...I am deeply worried by the current administration's lack of support for the arts and what that will mean on the local level. I know of more than one art non-profit that is contemplating closing its doors. Merging is an option but that is laborious and takes

considerable time. Most organizations simply don't have the wherewithal. I'm very concerned that our community will be much poorer, in all ways, without a strong initiative to combat the federal policies.

Some spoke to the psychological impacts of federal policy changes, including negative impacts on mental health/well-being (11), inspiring shifts towards activism within their creative practices (7), and heightened fear (5).

Ten respondents indicated that they had been unaffected by government policies.

Very few respondents addressed County/local policies beyond funding. Two respondents expressed a desire for greater priority and support to be given to local artists for public art awards vs. artists from outside the region. Another respondent commented on hurdles surrounding art in public ways:

...The bonding requirements are designed for developers not for local community art initiatives. The Right of Entry Agreement created by County lawyers, risk management and others was formidable... Sophisticated negotiation and political effort has moved the needle on two projects in Bethesda (the signal box art and the intersection art at a scramble intersection); however, similar projects in Wheaton stalled due to impediments and obstacles. Wheaton did not have the ability to get approvals/surmount initial denials, for similarly timed proposals...

Consider your support systems, networks, and facilities as an artist, creative/cultural practitioner or scholar in Montgomery County.

Q18. What parts are working best?

Free responses (185): Artist, creative/cultural practitioner, and scholar respondents most frequently cited artist networks/groups (27) when asked what parts of their support systems, networks, and facilities are working best. These included more formal associations (Art League of Germantown, Rockville Art League, Montgomery Art Association) and informal networks/collaboratives.

Large numbers of respondents also wrote favorably about funding support available to them (19). AHCMC was cited ten times, both as a funder and provider of other important services/supports.

Respondents also highlighted Montgomery County's strength in community events and festivals (18).

Respondents also spoke favorably about the availability of space (studio, exhibition, performance, event, and meeting space) (15), though some critiqued its affordability. In one of the respondents' words, "The reasonable fees for the use of public buildings for quilt guild meetings, shows, teaching, and events has enabled many to thrive."

Other themes: supportive community (11), libraries (10), Montgomery College (7), Strathmore (7), arts education classes/programs (7), availability of creative opportunities (7), nonprofit arts/community organizations (6), community art centers (4), live music (4), marketing/promotion (4), and BlackRock (3).

Q19. What are the most important opportunities for improvement?

Free responses (187): When queried on the most important opportunities for improvement to their support systems, networks,

and facilities, the artist, creative/cultural practitioner, and scholar respondents most frequently spoke to both the themes of funding (35) and space (34).

With regard to funding, respondents emphasized its importance and advocated for more. Some requested more simplified grant processes (6), multi-year funding, and general operating support. Some respondents requested funding for niche grantees, such as arts educators, arts journalists, small for-profit creative businesses, and organizations that serve Montgomery County but are headquartered elsewhere.

With regard to space, 10 respondents emphasized the need for *affordable* space. Respondents called for spaces for both artistic creation (studio, rehearsal) and exhibition/performance. The latter overlapped with calls for more opportunities to exhibit visual art/craft (e.g., galleries, shows)(15) and more performance/live music event opportunities (11). Respondents described very specific space needs (such as all ages music venues or access to venues in Upcounty and Mid-County for local filmmakers). Others emphasized spaces with the potential to foster artist networking and collaboration:

I would love an Arts Center where visual artists, writers, media makers, composers, filmmakers and animators work on their projects in one place and connect and help one another with projects.

Numerous respondents also spoke to themes of improved promotion of cultural offerings, including journalism (18) and increased visibility and validation for artists (12). One respondent wrote:

The robust visual arts scene in Montgomery County is practically invisible. It's a missed opportunity. There are many accomplished artists—and a lot going on—in the visual arts community, but very little is done to promote the art scene as a whole...

Thirteen respondents addressed various aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some emphasized countering federal policies and “protecting communities most under attack (minorities, women, LGBTQ+, immigrants).” Some called for more exposure of BIPOC artists and musicians to wider audiences and inclusion of world music in music festivals. Others spoke to expanding arts access in lower-income regions of the county:

It would be nice to see more county support for neighborhoods with less income - Takoma Park and Bethesda are great, but there is already a lot of money in those communities.

Other themes included: classes and workshops, including free or low-cost (9), business training/professional development (5), networking (4), create County art collection/“bank” (3), poet laureate proposal (3), disappointing arts districts (3), and transportation issues (3).

Q20. Do you have other ideas about what Montgomery County leaders could do to make the County a place where creative/cultural practitioners can thrive? Please be as specific as possible.

Free responses (192): When queried for other ideas about what County leadership could do to help make Montgomery County a place where creative/cultural practitioners can thrive, the largest share of artist, creative/cultural practitioner, and scholar respondents addressed issues of space (45). Comments including the need for more spaces/venues (30), and including multidisciplinary arts centers/working space. Twenty-one respondents emphasized issues of space affordability, including

specifically for studio space. Smaller numbers of respondents addressed artist housing and live/work space (6) and the potential to animate vacant/underutilized commercial spaces with arts uses (6), whereas they emphasized that space should be safe and suitable for the artists' needs:

Artists need to be treated like plants. You cannot put plants in the bottom of an old dirty ill maintained basement with no light and think they're going to thrive. They need tons of light and fresh air and space to thrive with great equipment and others to work with so that they can put down their roots and fully grow.

After "space," the next greatest share of respondents addressed the theme of funding (38). Many called for sustained/more funding, for example:

Mo Money! Mo Money! Mo Money!

Whereas others offered specific dream scenarios:

In a wildest dream scenario, it would be wonderful to create something like a MacArthur Fellowship where creative MoCo residents are offered a substantial, no-strings-attached income. MacArthur offers \$800,000 over five years, which averages to about \$160,000 a year, which is about what a person needs to have a home in MoCo. (The one condition could be that they reside and continue to reside in MoCo for the duration of the grant.)

Other funding-related comments dealt more with the accessibility of grant applications or prohibitive grant requirements (6), from simplifying applications to removing requirements that expenses be incurred and submitted for reimbursement as a condition of funds release (as it precludes projects that lack "bridge" funding).

Respondents sought more opportunities to share artistic work with the public. These included more visual arts/craft exhibitions (17), such as galleries and craft fairs with affordable "booth" fees; and new/more festivals and fairs (7).

Respondents also address themes of the need for more extensive/effective promotion (14) and, relatedly, the need for increased artist visibility and validation (9). Suggestions included cash prizes, proclamations by elected officials, a County art award, an arts/artist directory (4), and establishing a Montgomery County poet laureate (3).

Some respondents addressed youth arts education (14), including issues of funding equity for low-income schools and across geographies:

The county should reach out to schools and showcase more arts education opportunities and projects within schools not just in Rockville and large cities but in all of the county, including Damascus.

Some respondents suggested exploring business/corporate partnerships and support (8), from helping connect small businesses with a consultant that could help match them with live music or local artwork to showcase in their establishment, to community-wide public/private funding campaigns.

Others wanted opportunities for creative practitioners to connect and learn from one another, as indicated by the following

themes: networking (7) and mentorship/apprenticeship/internship opportunities (4).

Other themes included sentiments of satisfaction with the County/AHCMC's support for arts and culture (5), and critiques of the designated arts districts (3).

Respondents also submitted novel ideas that did not neatly fit into the above themes:

- A "library of things" where people can lend out creative supplies
- More opportunities for buskers to perform
- Small form studio/jam space and/or rentable podcast studios at libraries
- Replicate the Baila4Life Latin Dance Competition for African American street dance styles (hip hop, whacking, krump, and popping)

Q21. Select your organization's primary discipline.

	%	#
Visual Arts	16.9	53
Theatre	14.4	45
Other (please specify)	14.1	44
Music	12.8	40
Dance	8.3	26
Presenting and/or Multidisciplinary	7.4	23
Folk & Traditional Arts	6.1	19
Media Arts	4.8	15
History and/or Social Sciences	4.5	14
Languages, Linguistics, and/or Literary Arts	3.2	10
Design	2.6	8
Philosophy, Ethics, and/or Comparative Religion	2.2	7
Writing	1.9	6
Historical, Critical, and/or Theoretical Approaches to the Arts	0.6	2
Storytelling	0.3	1

N=313 respondents (only asked of those who selected yes for Q11: Do you hold a leadership role at an arts, culture, or humanities organization?)

Q22. Is your organization's work associated with a specific ethnic or cultural tradition or community? If yes, please specify:

	%	#
Yes	30	93
No	70	218

If yes, please specify: 85

N=311 respondents (only asked of those who selected yes for Q11: Do you hold a leadership role at an arts, culture, or humanities organization?)

Free response (85): The highest number of respondents cited the following cultural traditions/communities: Jewish (10); Asian (9), including Chinese, Cambodian, Indian, Indonesian, and Thai; and Latin (8), such as "Venezuelan nationalist dance" and Salsa, Bachata, Cha Cha, and Merengue. The following themes also appeared in three or more respondents' entries: African American (4), African/African diaspora (4), Hungarian (4), Hip Hop (3), and Youth (3).

Q23: How is your group or organization structured?

	%	#
Unincorporated	31	89
501c(3) nonprofit	69	198

N=287 respondents (only asked of those who selected yes for Q11: Do you hold a leadership role at an arts, culture, or humanities organization?)

Q24: What is your organizations' annual operating revenue?

	%	#
Under \$50,000	48	127
\$50,000 to \$149,999	11	29
\$150,000 to \$249,999	7	19
\$250,000 to \$999,999	12	33
\$1M to \$4.9M	14	38
\$5M and above	8	20

N=266 respondents (only asked of those who selected yes for Q11: Do you hold a leadership role at an arts, culture, or humanities organization?)

Q25. What kind of support, if any , does your organization receive from the Montgomery County government? (Check all that apply)

	%	#
AHCMC grants	41	111
In-kind rent	6	16
In-kind utilities	5	15
Non-AHCMC grants from Montgomery County government	13	35
Non-AHCMC contracts from Montgomery County government	6	17
Other (please specify)	4	12

None of the above

52

142

N=274 respondents (only asked of those who selected yes for Q11: Do you hold a leadership role at an arts, culture, or humanities organization?)

Free response (12)

How have the following continued to impact your organization's mission or programming? Please share a story or statistic:

Q26. the pandemic?

Free responses (155): The greatest share of respondents (42) commented on shifting from in-person to virtual modes, whether for program delivery, rehearsal/creation, meetings, or informal connections. Many organizations experienced this pivot as a painful and temporary stopgap measure, whereas some developed lasting innovative practices—hybrid classes, livestreamed events, and even connections to expanded geographic markets/audiences (5):

Moved from in person to zoom - ended up expanding to other states and France!

We had to pivot away from assembly shows, initially our main offering, until we found a way to offer them online. We did after-school workshops online and created educational music videos. The latter helped our program and our group.

Shifting to online programming, which was already underway, was an absolute game changer in terms of reaching new audiences at virtually no cost.

Large numbers of respondents also commented on how the pandemic resulted in decreased attendance, enrollment, and membership numbers (29). Others spoke to financial hardships it generated (22), the need to suspend activities/close (8), and the impact of cancelled events (3). Organizations working in the live performing arts particularly felt its effects (10). Some respondents wrote that they had bounced back/recovered (10), whereas others still feel these effects:

...we went from a robust thriving organization to a barely surviving entity. We are still not back to pre-pandemic levels

Q27. economic challenges?

Free responses (146): Respondents representing arts, culture, and humanities organizations commented on a range of economic challenges they navigate.

The largest share of respondents (37) wrote about funding challenges (both grants and individual donations). Specific concerns included the difficulty of planning given variability/fluctuations in grant funding, perceived priority shifts in philanthropy away from arts and culture, and decreased individual donations. Some respondents specifically tied funding challenges to federal policy shifts under the Trump administration (11), including cuts to the NEA, attacks on DEI, and federal job cuts (7) affecting both donor giving and demand. For example:

The current national environment does not support the kind of work that we do, which is rooted in cultural diversity and broad human understanding. We recently had federal funding revoked, and we know that the pressure on state and local funding in many areas may lead to decreased support for the arts. Many people in the region also face personal challenges, which impact individual giving.

Respondents also commented on reduced demand/earned income opportunities (18) and lower audience attendance and membership (10), which they connected to federal job cuts (7) and high costs of living/inflation (17).

With all the economic challenges facing our society and county, people are less willing to buy tickets to see plays. On top of that, the cost of materials has increased significantly.

As the above quote demonstrates, high costs both reduce demand and increase the costs associated with creating artistic/cultural work. Numerous respondents called out issues of space affordability/skyrocketing rents (16), in particular.

Respondents commented on how these compounding pressures result in insufficient revenue to cover costs (14), force them to scale back mission-related programming or cease operations (10), and drive them to run at a deficit/take on debt (3). Ten respondents commented on staffing challenges related to financial pressures, with several respondents (6) writing that project organizers or program teachers often work with no pay/greatly reduced compensation and cover costs out of pocket, effectively subsidizing organizations' creative work/programming.

Q28. government policies?

Free responses (130): When queried on how government policies have continued to impact their organization's mission or programming, the largest share of respondents shared concerns about federal policy changes of the Trump administration (48). These included funding cuts (both experienced and anticipated) (31), with NEA cuts and programmatic shifts specifically mentioned (5); anti-DEI policies and rhetoric (13); immigration enforcement/visa policies (6); concerns about decreased freedom of expression/censorship (6), and reductions in regional federal employment (5).

Respondents cited impacts of these federal policy changes ranging from a sense of uncertainty (especially economic uncertainty) (8), negative impacts on mental health and well-being (e.g. stress) (4), reduced demand/earned income opportunities (4), and, relatedly, reductions in audience attendance/membership levels (3).

A relatively smaller share of respondents spoke to state, county, and local government policies, with the greatest number commenting on the increased importance of and competition for state and local funding (10), in the context of federal cuts. In one respondent's words:

Cuts in federal funding may put added pressure on state and local arts councils forcing increased competition for ever decreasing sources of funding for the foreseeable future.

Others wrote about opportunities for improvement with how local and/or County government impede/foster cultural spaces (6), from incentives for developers/property managers to frustrations with underutilized spaces, even in cultural districts, to costly regulation:

Montgomery County and M-NCPCC have done a disgraceful job in failing to encourage or support the building of arts spaces and capital projects for arts renovations... their errors (and bad policies) have cost us (and thus, MoCo taxpayers) more than the \$1.4M... over the past ten years... the County and M-NCPCC have blocked, confused, obfuscated and made otherwise awful the process of attempting to build facilities to serve this community.

Other critiques offered of County government included a desire for more validation/visibility (6) for arts/culture generally and specifically for Jewish cultural heritage, filmmakers, and historical preservation. Respondents also commented on difficulty with permitting (2), for instance, permitting public art in County parks. They also offered suggestions for County cultural grantmaking, such as a desire for streamlined grant applications/multi-year funding, and no “match” requirements.

Twelve respondents wrote that they were unaffected by government policies.

Consider the support systems, networks, and facilities that your organization relies on in Montgomery County.

Q29. What parts are working best?

Free responses (132): When queried on what parts of their organizations' support systems, networks, and facilities are working best, organizational respondents most frequently mentioned funding and grants (22), with AHCMC receiving ten specific mentions. Respondents recognized AHCMC not only for grantmaking, but also for the support received by AHCMC staff and training it provides. For example:

One of the most impactful forms of support in recent years has been the community of learning and training opportunities facilitated by AHCMC, particularly those focused on advancing racial equity within organizations and creative work. The equity-centered training and convenings created ripples that are still being felt in our organization.

High numbers of respondents also cited “community” and “partnerships” (15, each). For community, respondents commented on their organization’s ability to work with and receive support from the community, with regard to both participation and financial support. Relatedly, six organizations cited “volunteers” as what was working best for their organization. With regards to partnerships, respondents mentioned the following organizations and venues: ArtsBarn (1), BlackRock (3), Casey Community Center (1), Dance Exchange (2), Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts & Culture (2), Heritage Montgomery (1), Nonprofit Montgomery, and Sandy Spring Museum (1).

Fewer numbers of respondents commented on County agencies/departments (7), including schools—for use of space, partnerships, and the backpack flyer distribution program, libraries (5)—for free space and programming collaborations, as well as Recreation (3), Health and Human Services (2), and Parks (1) for their commitment to working with and supporting arts and culture.

Other themes included affordable/free space (6), networks (3)—reliance on informal and artist network connections, individual contributions (3), and general support for nonprofit organizations (2).

Q30. What are the most important opportunities for improvement?

Free responses (120): The highest share of organizational respondents cited funding (31) as the most important opportunity for improvement. Some advocated for multi-year funding, grants for operations, funding for space needs, and County funding

for arts programs organized by local governments. Respondents voiced a desire for more funding for both organizations lacking nonprofit status and cultural nonprofits, particularly those that are small or community-centered:

Another opportunity lies in creating incentives and support structures for work that is intersectional, community-centered, and socially relevant. Artists and organizations doing this kind of work often face structural and funding challenges that more traditional or institutionally-aligned projects do not. It would be powerful to see more funding priorities, partnerships, and recognition aimed specifically at efforts that address justice, equity, health, climate, and care through creative practice.

Nearly as many organizational respondents cited issues related to space (26) as the most important opportunity to improve the support systems, networks, and facilities that their organization relies on in Montgomery County. Space-related comments emphasized the need for affordable space (10), performance venues (9), rehearsal spaces for the performing arts (5), spaces with transportation accessibility (4), and studio space (3). For performance spaces, respondents advocated for venues with up-to-date technical capabilities, a range of sizes, and especially mid-sized (500 seats), that are not dependent on good weather (i.e., outdoor, uncovered stages).

A smaller number of respondents emphasized collaboration/partnerships (12) as the most important opportunities for improvement. Some respondents advocated for improved connections between cultural nonprofits and local businesses. Others emphasized partnerships between arts and cultural groups to aid resource mobilization. Specific mechanisms to foster collaboration included the creation of a centralized information hub:

One of the most important opportunities for improvement is the need for a centralized platform or hub to learn about existing and emerging communities of practice across Montgomery County's arts and cultural sector. Right now, it can be difficult to track who is doing what, where collaboration is possible, or how to join efforts already in motion. A centralized resource—whether a digital platform, regular convening, or shared calendar—could foster greater connectivity, visibility, and collaboration across disciplines, generations, and communities.

Respondents also commented on opportunities to promote and market cultural offerings more broadly/effectively (7), increase the visibility and validation of the cultural/creative sector (4), and the need for professional development and organizational mentorship (5) on topics such as grant writing, nonprofit accounting, and board governance.

Some respondents commented on County policy/functioning (11), outside of its grantmaking. For instance, respondents offered critiques of delays and expense of permitting/regulatory processes and the red tape involved in renting school auditoriums, called for improved maintenance of facilities/property, and suggested tax credits for working artists. Several respondents called for changes to help arts and cultural stakeholders better navigate County processes and resources, as well as more effective departmental arts integration. Respondents requested help navigating County offices/paperwork, including a liaison between AHCMC and the Montgomery County Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF) rental system, to help optimize AHCMC grantees' rental of public facilities. Another drew comparison with Prince George's County, which maintains an office within parks and recreation to coordinate and support programming:

They pay visual artists to do solo exhibitions and group exhibitions at curated spaces throughout the county that are both parks and rec centers and I don't understand why Montgomery County has so many spaces yet and there's no office or funding to make sure that those spaces are curated or doing anything that is cultural or artistic. Many of the rec centers and communal spaces

have no plan for any art and hallways or lobbies or any such things...

Q31. Do you have other ideas about what Montgomery County leaders could do to make the County a place where art, culture, and humanities organizations can thrive? Please be as specific as possible.

Free responses (126): When queried for other ideas about what Montgomery County leaders could do to make the County a place where art, culture, and humanities organizations can thrive, the largest share of organization respondents commented about space needs (26). As one respondent sums it up:

Space space space. Subsidizing arts spaces and providing the space is the best thing that county leaders can do for the arts.

Within the broader theme of space, respondents emphasized the need for affordable or free space (10) and spoke of their high rent burdens (4). They proposed rent control for cultural nonprofits, offering incentives/requirements for developers/property managers and developing government-run subsidized spaces (administrative space for cultural non-profits, a studio building with spaces for event/workshop rentals, etc.). Others just asked for more... arts spaces (7), performance venues (4), and rehearsal space (3). One respondent offered the novel suggestion of a county-wide storage space for lendable sets/costumes. Two respondents bemoaned the demolition of the County-owned Randolph Road Theatre and called for its replacement.

After space, funding (18) was the most frequently mentioned theme, with respondents advocating for continued/increased funding and operating support, specifically. Some respondents requested funding increases for heritage/humanities organizations relative to arts organizations. Others sought to increase accessibility of grant applications/requirements (2), such as providing translations for those not fluent in English, and or reducing documentation requirements to be more inclusive of smaller nonprofits with limited capacity. Microgrants to cover the cost of Zoom meetings for small nonprofits were even proposed.

Twelve respondents commented on themes related to more effectively supporting the promotion/marketing of cultural offerings, such as via social media, and subsidized bus hub advertising spaces. Relatedly, other respondents advocated for greater visibility and validation for the cultural/creative sector (5), such as through the creation of a poet laureate position (2) or awards for individual artists with cash prizes and certificates.

Respondents also suggested that the County could develop structures to encourage collaboration/partnerships (6) between cultural organizations, such as “incubating” smaller organizations in larger/more established ones or sponsoring an annual meeting for peer-to-peer problem solving.

A smaller number of respondents (7) offered suggestions on how arts, culture, and creative expression is integrated and structured in County government. These included promoting intersections with other domains of county work, including urban and regional planning and community outreach; new positions/tools to help navigate County bureaucracy (2), including a point person between the County and the film community; and the development and implementation of a holistic cultural plan (2), led by an “art czar” reporting to the County executive.

Four respondents advocated for more public art.

Q32. What kind of creative/cultural business do you work as part of?

	%	#
Other (please specify)	39	32
For profit arts education (dance studios, ceramics classes, etc.)	13	11
Design services (graphic, fashion, interior, architecture, etc.)	13	11
Publishing or creative production (books, music albums, etc.)	12	10
For profit performance venues (music, theater, dance, comedy, etc.)	7	6
Creative technology and design services (web design, video game development, etc.)	5	4
For profit art gallery or museum	5	4
Creative technicians or service providers (piano tuner, art framer, art restorer, AV technician, etc.)	5	4
For profit creative retailers (bookstore, instrument shop, art/craft supply store, etc.)	0	0
For profit history museum or heritage site	0	0

N=82 respondents (only asked of those who selected "yes" for Q12: Do you hold a leadership role at a creative for-profit business)

Free responses (32): Responses ranged from "a living history re-enactor" to a Kung Fu/Chinese cultural center. Some descriptions cut across the categories provided, such as "design services and publishing." Entries from a number of respondents indicate that independent artists, such as visual/craft artists (8), teaching artists/dance instructors (3), and photographers (2), identified as both independent artists (Q9) and creative businesses (Q32).

Q33: What is your business' annual operating revenue?

	%	#
Under \$50,000	77	59
\$50,000 to \$149,999	9	7
\$150,000 to \$249,999	8	6
\$250,000 to \$999,999	5	4
\$1M to \$4.9M	0	0
\$5M and above	1	1

N=77 respondents (only asked of those who selected "yes" for Q12: Do you hold a leadership role at a creative for-profit business)

How have the following continued to impact your business? Please share a story or statistic:**Q34. the pandemic?**

Free responses (29): Responses from those representing creative/cultural businesses presented a mixed picture of the pandemic's impacts. Some were unaffected (4) or saw an increase in business/revenues, especially due to virtual/digital opportunities (5). Others cited loss of income/sales (5), forced business closures (3), and lower enrollment (2).

Q35. economic challenges?

Free responses (32): Responses from those representing creative/cultural businesses suggest that overall business has slowed and income has decreased (9). Economic factors, such as inflation/rising costs (4), tax burden (2), and federal policy changes (layoffs, attacks on DEI) (2), have resulted in contractions in the budgets of both creative businesses themselves and their clients:

Costs for EVERYTHING have risen since the pandemic, but venues fail to adequately compensate to meet the rise in costs, so I make significantly less than before the pandemic making it harder to stay in business.

Our bulk of clients are in public media and so the economic challenges mean that they have smaller budgets which means they have less of an ability to hire us.

Respondents spoke to negative impacts on their ability to deliver services, such as their compensation/rates staying flat (2) and fewer opportunities (2). Other respondents spoke to the difficulty of competing (2), for instance, customers switching to AI for design instead of relying on professional graphic designers.

Q36. Government policies?

Free responses (29): Numerous respondents representing creative/cultural businesses cited concerns about federal policies driven by the Trump administration's policies (12). They spoke to impacts on revenue/funding opportunities (5), fear/uncertainty (2) from attacks on DEI and anti-LGBT rhetoric (4), cuts to public media, and tariffs:

Funding uncertainty is enhanced while fear grows for people who express opinions that differ from those of the President of the United States. These are scary times for artists and independent thinkers.

The federal government cuts have greatly impacted our local economies and with so many out of work or in fear of losing their jobs, many don't buy at craft shows. Thus our federal "leadership" has greatly minimized my business sales.

The number of gigs have been cut in half since the attack on cultural heritage by the current administration. It's very very difficult now.

The anti-DEI policies have really hurt me as a business owner, as my business is owned by a multiply marginalized person.

Other cultural/creative business respondents wrote that they were unaffected (6) or commented on tax burden (2).

Consider the support systems, networks, and facilities your business relies on in Montgomery County.

Q37. What parts are working best?

Free responses (26): For the support systems, networks, and facilities that are working best, a number of creative/cultural business respondents cited access to space/venues (6), including the ability to work from the library (2) or secure venues through recreation centers. Libraries were also mentioned positively (4) beyond work space. Other respondents wrote about the ability to reach customers (3), with the region hosting wealthy people with disposable income, the numerous cultural events/festivals, and the MoCo spotlight for artists/creatives cited as assets. Disappointingly, a number of respondents were

unable to characterize *any* aspects that were working best (5). For instance, “None. Moco is more concerned about building developments than communities. Property taxes and income taxes keep small businesses, especially creative businesses, in a disadvantaged state.”

Q38. What are the most important opportunities for improvement?

Free responses (26): When offering ideas for the most important opportunities for improvement, a number of creative/cultural business respondents wrote about a desire to increase opportunities for artists to show their work (5), including exhibitions in galleries/art shows and small performance venues for recitals. Others offered specific suggestions for funding programs (grants or tax incentives for small creative businesses, internship grants for young creative workers) or other resources (universal WiFi) (3). Others emphasized support for marketing and promotion (3) and the need to effectively promote and deliver existing resources and services (3):

Provide resources without preconditions that are easy to access without a lot of hoops to jump through.

No one I know is even aware of the MoCo spotlight. How does it get circulated?

Q39. Do you have other ideas about what Montgomery County leaders could do to make the County a place where creative/cultural businesses can thrive? Please be as specific as possible.

Free responses (26): When queried on other ideas for how to make the County a place where creative/cultural businesses can thrive, the highest number of respondents’ suggestions were related to financial resources and professional development tailored for creative businesses (10). Their comments emphasized the need to effectively promote offerings and design programs to minimize administrative burden/reduce barriers to entry. Ideas ranged from grants and mentorship programs for creative start-ups, professional development surrounding starting and growing a creative business (such as effectively navigating RFPs and bidding opportunities for larger projects), and offering local businesses grants to exhibit the work of local artists. Other respondents (6) wrote about space needs (spaces to exhibit visual arts/craft, spaces for creating such affordable studio space or a podcast studio rentable by the hour, and outdoor amphitheaters). A smaller number of respondents addressed the need to more effectively promote existing cultural offerings (2) and tax burdens (2).

Q40: Please select which of the following provide adequate opportunities for you/youth to participate in arts, culture/heritage, and creative activities in Montgomery County. (Check all that apply).

	For you (%)	For Youth (%)
MCPS K-12 schools (NA for adults)	10	97
Recreation centers	70	73
Parks	85	68
Libraries	85	71
Montgomery College	76	58
Other county facilities and programs	81	68
Other providers (non-profits, places of worship, private lessons, etc.)	86	66
Community businesses (bookstores, coffeeshops, etc.)	92	55

Percentages based on N=868 respondents

Q41. Where would you like to see increased programs and opportunities and what kind?

Free responses (527): Respondents interpreted “where would you like...” as both types of providers of cultural offerings and geographic regions/places. They also expressed their preferences for kinds of offerings, issues of accessibility/awareness, and the cultural sector’s space and business training needs.

In terms of types of providers of cultural offerings, the largest number of respondents (71) listed recreation/community centers, followed by libraries (67), MCPS/schools (62), and parks (55). Other kinds of providers/sites included: community businesses (37), such as coffee shops/cafes (12), bookstores (11), and galleries (9); Montgomery College (13); museums (5); public spaces (4); and churches (4).

For what regions should be prioritized, respondents most frequently named the region/communities of Upcounty (28): Ag Reserve, Clarksburg, Damascus, Gaithersburg, Germantown, Montgomery Village; followed by Silver Spring (18), including Takoma Park; Mid-county (16): Aspen Hill, Glenmont, Kensington, Layhill, Olney, Sandy Spring, Wheaton; East County (10): Briggs Chaney, Burtonsville, Colesville, Hillandale, White Oak; Bethesda (9): including Chevy Chase, Glen Echo, North Bethesda; as well as Rockville (5), which spans the Bethesda and Mid-County regions. Interestingly, some respondents (5) perceived Silver Spring as receiving a disproportionate amount of resources for public art/cultural offerings and called for a more equitable regional distribution. Others called for the prioritization more generally of “underserved” areas with low-income residents (9).

For kinds of offerings, large numbers of respondents (45) expressed a preference for concerts/music, some specifically for outdoor music (8); followed by classes/active participation in visual arts/craft (31); public art/murals/street art (20); theater (20); classes/active participation in performing arts (18); health/well-being related cultural offerings (18); outdoor venues/events/classes (13); history programs/historical (13) sites; visual arts/craft exhibitions or festivals (12); and events that were multi-cultural in nature or offered opportunities to learn about different cultures (12). Other responses for types of offerings included: bilingual programming and/or language instruction (10); food festivals/events (7); cooking classes (7), poetry (7); writing (7); virtual/online; and events celebrating Jewish culture (5).

Other respondents named particular demographic groups they would like to see prioritized: youth was the most frequently named demographic group (58) for programming through schools (62), including under-schools/low-income students (5); summer programs/camps (9); family-friendly events (8); and after-school programs (5). A large number of respondents (38) also stated that they were older adults/seniors. Interestingly, many respondents (26) also voiced that they felt adults under 55 were underserved vis-à-vis older adults, particularly with recreation programming. They called for more offerings on evenings and weekends (8) compatible with working adults’ schedules. Five respondents called out young adults, specifically.

Still other respondents spoke to aspects of accessibility and awareness. Respondents brought up the importance of free/low-cost offerings (32) and transportation access (5). Others wrote about the importance of more effective promotion of the cultural offerings already occurring (10). Others still blended the two—suggesting more extensive promotion of cultural offerings on buses, as well as publishing poetry by Montgomery County youth/residents on transit signage.

Lastly, some respondents focused on the space and business training needs of the cultural sector. Issues included the need for affordable and accessible “stage” access (7), affordable studio space (7), business training/incubator spaces for artists and creative businesses (4), rehearsal space (3), a need for more mid-sized performance venues (2), and maker spaces (2). Some specifically called for recreation facilities and/or schools to grant more convenient access to their facilities for these

purposes.

Q42: What influences you, personally, and your community when considering participating in cultural activities/events?

	Extremely influential (%)		Moderately influential (%)		Slightly influential (%)		Not at all influential (%)		Don't Know (%)
	You	Community	You	Community	You	Community	You	Community	Community
Feeling welcome/unwelcome	62	62	24	21	10	4	4	1	12
Parking	43	40	33	37	17	10	7	1	12
Cost	43	55	35	31	19	6	3	0	7
Concerns about crime/safety	39	41	22	25	19	14	19	5	16
Distance from home	33	27	45	43	18	11	4	1	18
Kid or family friendly	20	36	21	40	18	8	40	2	14
Public transportation access	19	34	20	37	26	15	36	4	11
Accommodations for disabilities (sight/hearing impaired, wheelchairs, etc.)	18	33	16	31	22	18	45	3	15
Language translation/multi-lingual programming	9	23	11	33	22	20	58	5	19
Childcare	8	17	7	30	7	18	78	7	28

Percentages based on N=874 respondents

Q43: Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree (%)		Neither agree nor disagree (%)		Strongly disagree (%)	
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Arts, culture, or creative activities help me feel like I am part of a specific group, neighborhood, or community.	51	31	14	3	1	
I have adequate opportunities in Montgomery County to engage in activities specific to my cultural heritage.	13	29	37	15	5	
Young people in my community have adequate opportunities to experience and learn about my cultural traditions/heritage. (Such as music, dance, literature, painting, language, celebrations, holidays etc.)	10	27	39	18	5	
All cultures are welcome in Montgomery County.	39	42	12	6	1	

Percentages based on N=956 respondents

Q44. If you don't feel all cultures are welcome, who is being left out and how?

Free responses (62): Respondents most frequently named Jewish residents/rising antisemitism in Montgomery County (22). This was followed by communities of color, broadly (12), and specifically Asian (East, 3; South 2), Latino/Hispanic (2), and immigrants (3). A number of respondents (6) also felt white/European Americans were not welcomed, including specifically Polish, Irish, and Sicilian. Three respondents voiced concerns over Islamophobia. Respondents also named disabled/neurodivergent people (2) and older adults (2). For example:

There has been a huge increase in the level of hatred toward the Jewish population in Montgomery County. MCPS is not including enough Holocaust education in its curriculum. There are hardly any cultural events in Montgomery County where people can learn about Jewish heritage and culture even though the Jewish population in the county is about 10%.

It appears that Montgomery County is a Majority Minority Community, but the organizations with the greatest assets are white. Policies that would help to balance the scales are needed.

Q45. Can arts, culture, and creative expression help bring residents together? If yes, how? If no, why?

Free response (747): A striking 90% of respondents (672) stated that, yes, arts, culture, and creative expression help bring residents together. As one respondent stated, "Through art, culture, and food, many become one." Large numbers of them spoke to themes of community engagement and participation (114); social connection and interaction (96); artistic expression and creativity (46); cultural understanding, appreciation, and exposure (53); perspective sharing, building mutual/community understanding and empathy (42); knowledge and learning (41); and cultural heritage, traditions, and celebration (27). Comments suggested that events involving music (39), food (21), opportunities for dialogue (20), and opportunities for active participation/co-creation of art (19) are particularly effective. Respondents stressed that events should be inclusive/welcoming of all (23). To increase accessibility, some suggested events held outdoors/in public spaces (6) or that are free/low cost (6). Some advocated for cross/multi-cultural events (9) rather than celebrations of a single sub-culture, as well as small/local events. In one respondent's words, "Being American is what unites us. I am from a specific country in South America so I don't even identify as Hispanic. Sometimes I feel like MoCo overemphasizes specific subcultures in the county and instead you should bring us all together with art and food!"

A minority of respondents (45) expressed support with caveats that the impacts would be modest/fleeting or would only be realized with certain factors in place. Even fewer (14) felt arts, culture, and creative expression couldn't/shouldn't be used to help bring people together, for reasons including moral opposition to government funding for arts/cultural programming.

Q46. What are the most important issues facing Montgomery County residents today?

Free responses (748): The highest share of residents listed economic concerns as the most important issue facing Montgomery County residents, with housing affordability (205) rising to the top, followed by cost of living (123), and general economic concerns (63). Specific economic concerns also included: taxes (55), food disparity and insecurity (39), job security (24), regional unemployment (31), driven by the Trump administration's cuts to the federal workforce, homelessness/poverty (18), inflation (10), and affordable childcare (4).

After housing affordability and cost of living, crime and safety (122) was the third most frequently cited concern.

Large numbers of respondents also listed anti-immigrant sentiment/ICE raids (70), as well as broader concerns with the Trump administration's federal policies (69), and the political climate/divisiveness (29).

Respondents also frequently named managing growth and infrastructure needs as a concern, specifically traffic congestion and parking access/affordability (63); other transportation concerns, such as road conditions and mass transit (37); balancing development pressures on open space and providing necessary infrastructure (25); climate change resilience (18), population growth/overcrowding (17), especially in schools; and parks/green spaces (9).

Respondents cited concerns about access to resources and services (33), such as quality schools (35), affordable health care (23). Respondents particularly called out older adults (14) and youth (11) as groups that needed equitable and affordable access to resources and services.

Others spoke to a desire to combat isolation and increase social connections/build a sense of community (21), antisemitism (13), racism (9), and language barriers (7).

Q47: I would like to see Montgomery County use art, culture, and heritage to improve:

	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Parks	44	41	11	2	2
County buildings	33	35	24	5	3
Streets and bridges	32	33	25	6	4
Buses/bus stops	30	38	25	5	3

Percentages based on N=907 respondents

Q48: I'd like to see closer links between Montgomery County's cultural sector/creative economy and...

	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Education	63.3	29.8	5.5	0.3	1.0
Community building	56.4	33.0	8.4	1.0	1.1
Well-being/health	54.1	35.2	8.7	0.8	1.1
Economic development	45.2	37.5	13.4	2.7	1.2
Environmental stewardship	46.5	34.2	15.7	2.0	1.6
Housing	33.8	31.9	27.2	5.3	1.9

Percentages based on N=908 respondents

Q49. How else do you think arts, culture, and creative expression can help solve challenges facing Montgomery

County? Please share any examples you have seen or ideas for the future.

Free response (396): We focused our analysis on responses that addressed the question of how arts, culture, and creative expression can help solve challenges, rather than those that only reiterated support for a particular cultural program/offering, as those preferences were well captured elsewhere in the survey.

The largest number of responses (50) addressed the theme of art, culture, and creative expression's ability to help people connect cross-culturally and build understanding. As one respondent said, "By using creative expression, people from different backgrounds can find common ground. Hopefully, this will lead to greater understanding of each other and less prejudice and isolation." These robust findings are consistent with other quantitative and free response survey findings that showed strong support for belonging-related priorities. Some respondents advocated for smaller-scale/neighborhood-focused events that included opportunities for discussion and continued engagement vs. one-off mega festivals.

Respondents also frequently emphasized art, culture, and creative expression's potential to beautify or enhance the physical environment (44). Their ideas included murals, painting utility boxes/trash receptacles, and greater utilization of landscape architecture. They suggested specific places/visions for these interventions:

More artwork at bus transit, please!

I would love to see the cultural plan giving particular attention and budget allocations for artistic displays, gardens, plazas, gateways at and around the county-city interjurisdictional areas near the Purple Line stations such as at Long Branch station, where it would be fantastic to have a huge tree filled, Mexican style sitting plaza with artistic embankments, a football field, artistic signs and displays, fountains or long term gateways or exhibits that celebrate the convergence of our multiple cultures-Ethiopian, Salvadoran, Dominican, etc. (such as at Piney Branch & Flower Avenue)..

The Upcounty lacks a visual personality. We need colorful murals and sculptures in public that celebrate our diversity. Even artwork on utility boxes and trash receptacles would be a plus, but building-sized murals would be great. Baltimore is an example of an area that has wonderful murals. Frederick has many colorful public artworks as well. Germantown and Gaithersburg need this too...

Responses that address art, culture, and creative expression's ability to support youth development (40) were the third most frequent, with a number of respondents positing that these positive/safe activities could also prevent youth crime. Some respondents also emphasized that arts education can advance youth learning in non-arts subjects (5). One respondent advocated for Montgomery County to name a poet laureate to help bring poetry to our community, especially to its young writers.

A number of other responses spoke to themes of social connectivity and its benefits: connect with others (29), build social cohesion (15), foster collective efficacy (the ability of a group to identify and act on a common goal) (8), connect across ages/generations (7), celebrate cultural diversity (5), foster empathy (4), and increase community attachment (4).

Other respondents cited their belief that arts, culture, and creative expression can strengthen health or well-being (23), from offering a joyful respite from stressful times (including related to federal layoffs/cuts and immigration enforcement) to

reducing isolation to art activities, such as dance, that involve physical activity. These perceived benefits often overlapped with the culture's potential to help meet the needs of older adults (12).

Fewer, but a sizable number, of respondents spoke to art, culture, and creative expression to illuminate issues and/or inspire action. For instance, respondents stated art and culture can help increase awareness of societal issues/community problems (15), foster civic engagement (13), promote environmental resilience/stewardship (11), and help solve problems with creativity, innovation, and imagination (8). For instance, five respondents suggested that pavement murals or quality landscape design could calm traffic and increase pedestrian/bike safety. Some respondents suggested artists/creative practitioners could help the work of government be more fun, innovative, or effective:

For community conversations, planning, issues, rallies, meetings; county council meetings, etc. ... start with some culture.

Artists integrated in county government, like public works, planning, integrating public art in public and private development projects. But better coordination with AHCMC oversight, which means \$ for staff.

I think the urban planners for our county need to have a background in art!

A small number of respondents (6) drew connections between art, culture, and creative expression's ability to support economic development, including by promoting tourism and attracting customers to spend at non-arts local businesses.

A minority of respondents took issue with the premise of using art, culture, or creative expression to address community challenges, either because they are morally opposed to spending tax dollars on culture (6) or because their ability to effect change would be modest/non-existent (3):

I think art and culture are only minimally related to "solving challenges" such as economic development, racism, or environmental degradation. There might be a very short-term (like 30 minutes) of good feeling if you see something like painted storm drains or enjoy a blues festival, but it doesn't "solve" anything. Art and culture are wonderful for their own sake, and I totally disagree with the concept that they need to show value by solving problems, creating economic growth, or giving people pride.

Q50: Age

	%	#
Under 18	0.1	1
18-24	2.9	26
25-34	7.3	66
35-44	15.4	139
45-54	14.2	128
55-64	24.3	219
65-74	24.6	222

Over 74 11.1 100

N=901 respondents

Q51. Race/ethnicity. (Check all that apply)

	%	#
Asian (East or Southeast)/Asian American/Pacific Islander	10	88
Arab/Middle Eastern	2	18
Black/African American/African/Caribbean	12	106
Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx/Chicanx	16	141
Native American/American Indian/Indigenous	2	15
White/European	65	575
Different identity (please specify)	6	56

N=883 respondents

Free response (56): A large number of respondents (35) specified Jewish, or more specifically Ashkenazi (5). This indicates an important omission in the ethnicity categories provided in the survey. Other common responses included: multi-racial/bi-racial/mixed (5), American (3), Italian (3), and providing specific ethnicities within the Latino category, such as Puerto Rican or Argentinian.

Q52: Gender Identity

	%	#
Male	25	221
Female	73	651
Non-conforming	2	17

N=889 respondents

Q53: Do you identify as part of the LGBTQI++ community?

	%	#
Yes	10	89
No	90	795

N=884 respondents

Q54: Disability: How do you publicly self-identify?

	%	#
A person with a disability	14	121
A person without a disability	86	759

N=880 respondents

Q55. How do you publicly self-identify? (Check all that apply)

	%	#
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual, Queer	81	68
Cis Gender	30	25
Trans Gender	6	5
Intersex	0	0
Nonbinary or Gender Non-conforming	12	10
Asexual	11	9
Different identity (please specify)	8	7

N=84 respondents (only asked of those who selected "yes" for Q53: Do you identify as part of the LGBTQI++ community?)

Free responses (7)

Q56: What is your annual household income?

	%	#
Less than \$25,000	7	53
\$25,000 - \$49,999	12	89
\$50,000 - \$99,999	21	161
\$100,000 - \$149,999	23	173
\$150,000 - \$199,999	17	126
More than \$200,000	21	158

N=760 respondents

Q57: How many school age children live in your home?

	%	#
None	75	659
1	11	100
2	9	82
3+	4	35

N=876 respondents

Q58: Regional Service Center Area (RSA) distribution, based on zip code

	%	#
Mid-county	23.9	202
Upcounty	22.3	188
Spans multiple	18.2	154
Bethesda	15.9	134
Silver Spring	12.8	108
East County	6.9	58

Sources: RSA & zip code "crosswalk" provided by M-NCPPC, 1/10/2026. Talled from N=844 respondents who answered Q58: What is your five-digit zip code?