County Council of Howard County, Maryland

2026 Legislative Session Legislative Day No. 11

Resolution No. 159 2026

Introduced by: Chairperson at the request of the County Executive

Short title: Supporting – Arts & Culture Plan

Title: A RESOLUTION supporting the Howard County Arts & Culture Plan; providing for the publication of the Plan; providing that the County Executive's signature indicates support for the Plan.

Introduced and read first time Sep 8, 2026.

By order Michelle Harrod
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Read for a second time at a public hearing on Sep 22+23, 2026.

By order Michelle Harrod
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

This Resolution was read the third time and was Adopted ✓, Adopted with amendments___, Failed___, Withdrawn___, by the County Council on Oct 5, 2026.

Certified By Michelle Harrod
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Approved by the County Executive October 15, 2026

Calvin Ball, County Executive

NOTE: [[text in brackets]] indicates deletions from existing law; TEXT IN SMALL CAPITALS indicates additions to existing law; ~~Strike-out~~ indicates material deleted by amendment; Underlining indicates material added by amendment

WHEREAS, pursuant to Title 12, Subtitle 8 of the Howard County Code, the Howard County Arts Council is the agency authorized to be the County's designated arts council in order to develop, promote and coordinate a County-wide effort for the support, encouragement and performance of the arts in the County; and

WHEREAS, the Arts Council secured funding from the County, the Maryland State Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts to develop an Arts & Culture Plan (the "Plan"); and

WHEREAS, the County's General Plan, HoCo By Design, references arts and culture within its economic prosperity framework and the Plan expands on that foundation, establishing arts and culture as a priority that transcends many areas to include, without limitation, economic development, community belonging, equity, education, and the environment; and

WHEREAS, guidance and oversight in the Plan's development was provided by a 31-member steering committee, made up of local artists, creative practitioners, civic and educational leaders, and county officials; and

WHEREAS, a 20-month planning process included gathering community insights which were integrated into the Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Plan guides the next decade of work by setting forth a series of goals, strategies, and actions that align with the aspirations and insights of Howard County's diverse communities and direct efforts towards a more sustainable and inclusive arts and culture ecosystem.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland, this 5 day of October, 2026, that it hereby supports the Howard County Arts & Culture Plan, substantially in the form as the attached Exhibit.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the County Executive has signed this Resolution, thus indicating support for the Howard County Arts & Culture Plan, substantially in the form as the attached Exhibit.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Arts Council may correct obvious errors, capitalization, spelling, grammar, headings and similar matters and may publish the Howard County Arts & Culture Plan by adding or amending title pages, a table of contents, photos and graphics to improve readability.

Date: August 27, 2026

To: Brandee Ganz
Chief Administrative Officer
Howard County Government

From: Coleen West
Executive Director
Howard County Arts Council

Testimony and Fiscal Impact Statement for:

Resolution No. __ - 2026

Adopting – Howard County Arts and Culture Plan

Resolution No. __-2026 is a request for the governing body to support the Howard County Arts and Culture Plan.

BACKGROUND

Howard County's General Plan, HoCo By Design (2023), established arts and culture as part of the county's economic prosperity framework. The Howard County Arts Council, the agency authorized by the governing body as the county's designated arts council, secured funding from Howard County, the Maryland State Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts in 2025 to undertake a 20-month community planning process to compliment HoCo By Design with blueprint for artistic development and growth.

The arts and culture plan was guided by rigorous research, deep community engagement, a review of cultural assets, and listening to artists, business owners, and community stakeholders and reflects the aspirations of county residents. The plan was developed through a highly collaborative process led by the Arts Council and Designing Local, a national arts and culture planning firm. A 31-member steering committee of local artists, creative practitioners, civic and educational leaders, and county officials provided guidance and oversight at every stage and shaped the plan's positioning as an expansion of

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HoCo By Design's economic prosperity framework. The plan establishes arts and culture as a cross-cutting priority touching economic development, community belonging, equity, education, and the built environment.

The plan also provides a framework for how arts and cultural communities can work with the governing body and other partners to address community priorities, support artists, creators, and creativity, advance arts and culture for all, and strengthen Howard County's position as a hub for innovation and creativity in the region.

The Howard County Arts and Culture Plan is designed to work alongside HoCo By Design and is meant to be a living document to use, iterate on, and adjust as elements of the plan go forward. The plan's goals and strategies will help guide arts and culture decision-making and provides actionable steps to increase awareness of cultural opportunities, diversify cultural offerings, and strengthen the county's identity as a vibrant cultural destination. Achieving these goals will be a collaborative effort with the Arts Council, local arts and cultural organizations, and other community partners.

FISCAL IMPACT

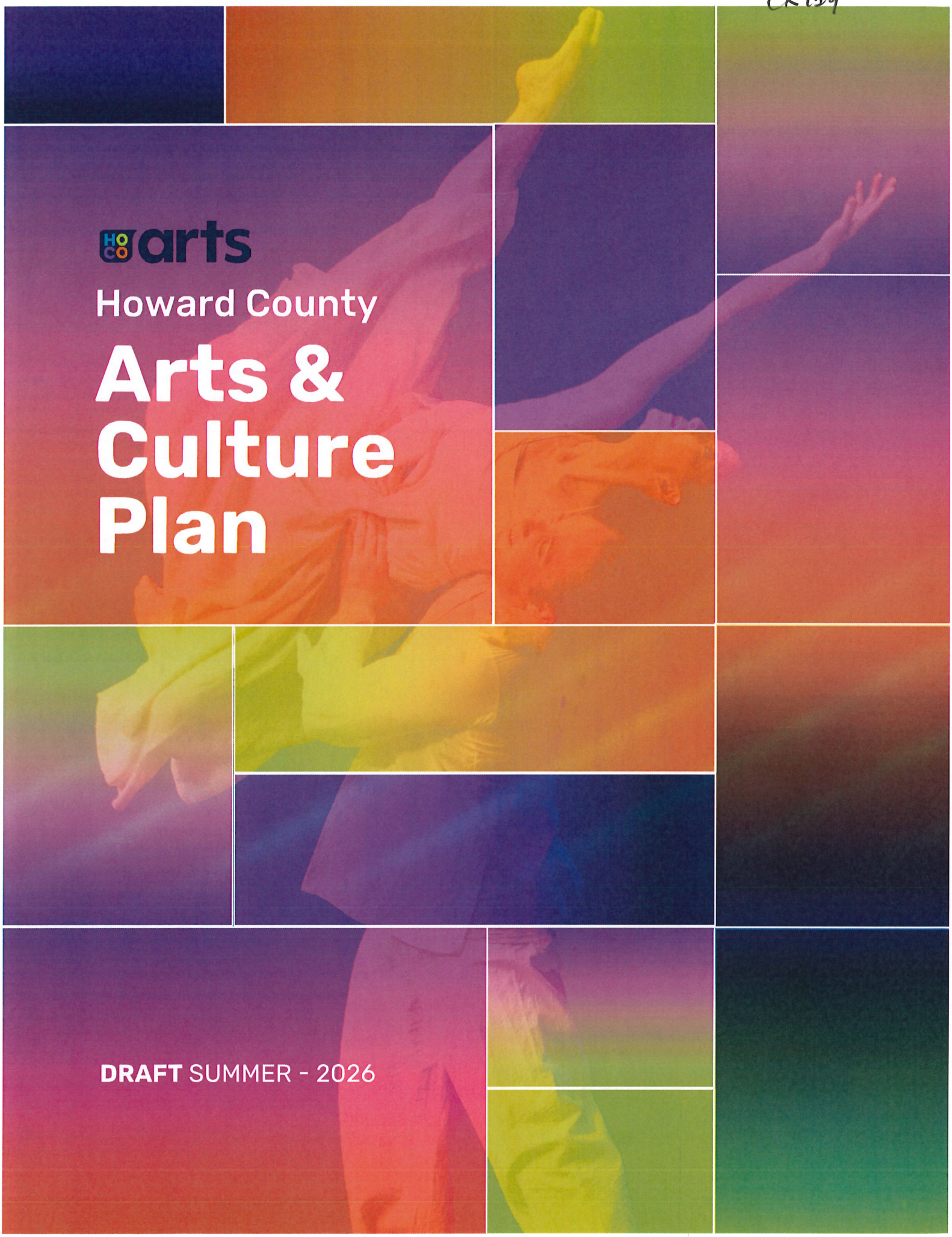
There is no anticipated fiscal impact to adopting this legislation that supports the plan. However, there may be a fiscal impact associated with implementation of the plan's recommendations overtime. Any future fiscal impact would need to be approved by the governing body.

Thank you for your consideration,

Coleen West

Coleen West
Executive Director

CR 159



HOCO arts

Howard County

Arts & Culture Plan

DRAFT SUMMER - 2026

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photo courtesy of HoCo Arts
cover photo Misako Ballet

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HoCo Arts Council

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Nicole Scarborough

Casey Simpson

Theresa Colvin

Michelle Dunn

Debra Stepp

Steering Committee

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jonathan Alexander
St. John's Baptist Church

Tonya Aikens
Howard County Public Library System

Misako Aoki
Misako Ballet

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Inner Arbor Trust, Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods

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Luzmila Robinson
La Alianza Latina Commission

Brandey Rodgers
Howard County African American Roundtable

Berta Sabrio
Columbia Orchestra

Beck Seckler
LGBTQ+ Commission

Tim Singleton
HoCoPoLitSo

Fahimeh Vahdat
Howard Community College

Yolanda Vazquez
La Alianza Latina Commission

George Wilson
Former HoCo Arts Board

Artist Cohort

ARTIST COHORT MEMBERS

Misako Aoki
Misako Ballet

Kwame Kena
Visual Artist

Berta Sabrio
Columbia Orchestra

Pavani Reddy
Bend It Like Bollywood

Liz Quinones
Kinetics

Robert Neal Marshall
Columbia Film Festival

Kelli Williams
Artist, Arts Educator

Jared Smith
HoCoPoLitSo

Quasheba Allen
Artist, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

Evan Nicole Bell
Musician

Tyrone Parker
Musician

Mark Minnick
Toby's Dinner Theatre

Luzmerlin
Artist

Warren Chambers
Artist

Asma Shikoh
Artist

Consultant Group

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Meredith Reed,
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Gabrielle Smith
Project Coordinator, Urban Planner

KIMISTRY

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JON STOVER & ASSOCIATES

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Principal

Aaron King
Director

Jane Scinta
Economic Development Associate

CUSICK CONSULTING

Jessica Cusick, President

Why this Plan?

HOWARD COUNTY TODAY

Howard County sits between two of the nation's great cultural spheres, Baltimore and Washington, DC, and its more than 340,000 residents share in the cultural access and diversity driven by the region. The county's geography carries its own kind of diversity: rural land and small historic towns surround denser village centers, giving residents a wide range of ways to live and build community. At the heart of the county is Columbia, one of the nation's most significant planned communities, where generations of families have chosen to put down roots in a place designed around shared services, community amenities, and cultural life. Across this geographic and cultural range, residents are unified by a shared belief that arts and culture is central to community life and personal well being.

A LONG-STANDING FOUNDATION OF CULTURAL INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTY

Howard County's previous comprehensive arts and cultural plan was adopted in 1991 and last updated by the Howard County Arts Council in 2003. Over the past 20 years, the county has grown substantially and experienced significant shifts in population and demographics, changing the demands for arts and cultural experiences along with the needs of artists and arts organizations. This 10-year plan responds to new and emerging trends within the Howard County arts scene to guide future arts and culture investments.

It is intended to complement and advance Howard County's broader planning priorities. HoCoByDesign, the county's General Plan, references arts and culture within its economic prosperity framework. The Howard County Arts and Culture Master Plan expands on that foundation, establishing arts and culture as a cross-cutting priority that touches economic development, community belonging, equity, education, and the built environment.

In a thriving community, art and culture infuse all aspects of community life and are employed with intention to advance goals ranging from mental health to civic participation, crime reduction, economic development, youth empowerment, and more.

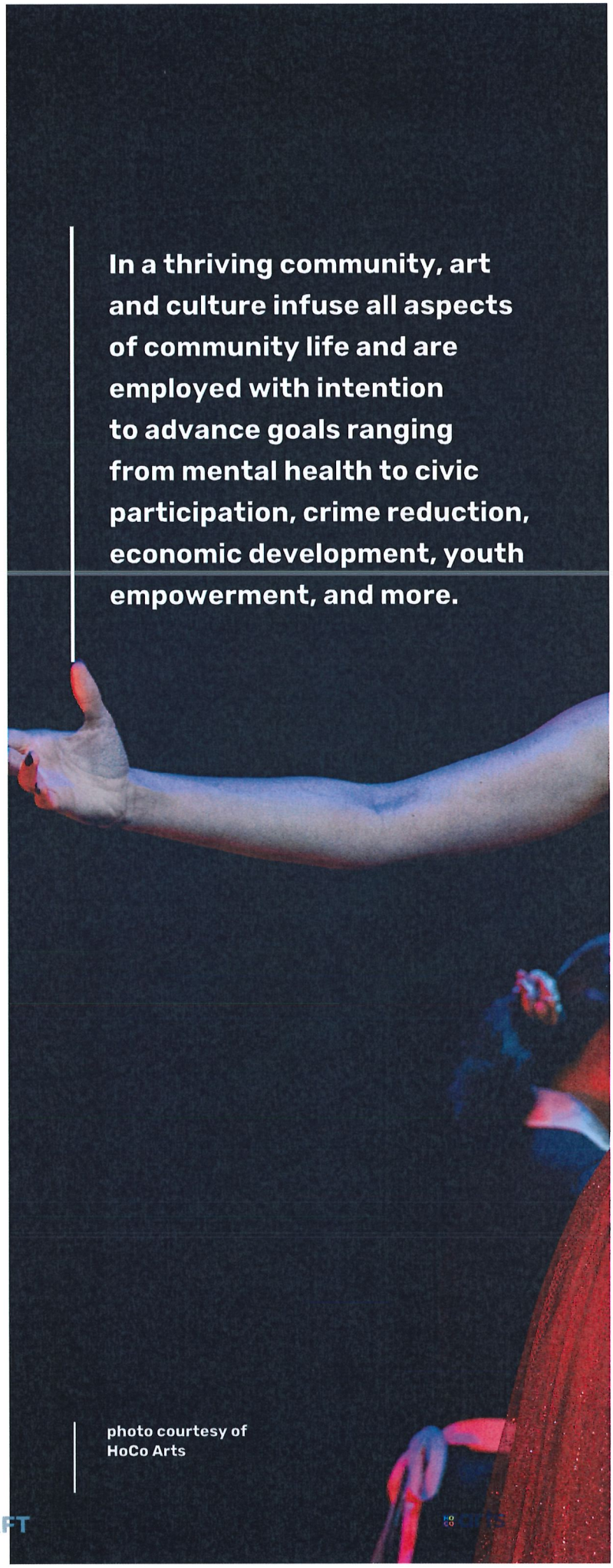


photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

DRAFT



Howard County has experienced substantial benefits from its arts and culture investments to date and is now poised, through plan implementation, to deepen its commitment to the community's creative expression and appreciation.

Effectively doing so will require a full community effort that extends beyond the typical partners into new relationships and collaborative structures that enable a shared burden of work. Those at The County and HoCo Arts who spearheaded this plan will continue to drive implementation efforts and facilitate collaboration among partners, but are not equipped to undertake all the actions recommended herein. Leveraging the networks and resources of a variety of organizations — and understanding how arts and culture can be used to advance missions far beyond arts and culture for its own sake — will ultimately prove a strength of this approach.



PLAN PURPOSE

COUNTY EXECUTIVE CALVIN BALL

> "THE ARTS MOTIVATE, EXCITE, AND CONNECT US TO THE WORLD THROUGH HOPES, DREAMS, AND ALL THAT CAN BE. I'VE BEEN THRILLED TO PARTNER WITH THE HOWARD COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL TO MAKE OUR COMMUNITY A NATIONAL LEADER IN ARTS AND CULTURE."
>
> **- COUNTY EXECUTIVE CALVIN BALL**

photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

On behalf of Howard County Government and the Howard County Arts Council, we are thrilled to introduce the Howard County Arts and Culture Plan. This Plan outlines our ten-year roadmap to strengthen creative life and advance Howard County's position as a regional hub for arts, culture, and innovation.

This Plan represents our first comprehensive master planning effort for arts and culture in more than two decades, and it is the culmination of extensive research, convening, and listening. The Plan reflects the voices, aspirations, and perspectives of our community, and it affirms what we heard resoundingly through the process: that a vibrant, creative environment is a deeply held community value here in Howard County.

Howard County has built a strong foundation for arts and culture, sustained by public support, homegrown talent, deep civic engagement, and widespread participation in community arts events. It is part of what makes Howard County one of the best places in the nation to live, work, play, grow, and thrive for all. This Plan orients the next ten years of our shared work through a series of goals, strategies, and actions that align with the insights of our diverse communities and chart a course toward a more sustainable and inclusive arts and culture ecosystem.

The Plan was developed through a highly collaborative process led by the Howard County Arts Council and Designing Local, a national arts and culture planning firm. A 31-member steering committee of local artists, creative practitioners, civic and educational leaders, and county officials provided guidance and oversight at every stage. Over 20 months, hundreds of residents and stakeholders shared their perspectives through surveys, listening sessions, and community conversations, and their input is reflected throughout the pages of this Plan.

As this Plan moves from concept to practice, implementation becomes the work of our entire community. No single individual, organization, or agency can do it alone.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped shape this vision, and we look forward to partnering with artists, nonprofits, businesses, institutions, and residents across Howard County to bring it to life.

The arts are the heartbeat of Howard County – providing meaning, inspiration, and purpose to our shared community. Through this Plan, we will continue to cultivate a strong and vibrant arts and cultural environment for generations to come.

Calvin Ball,
Howard County Executive

Coleen West,
Executive Director,
Howard County Arts Council





HOCO ARTS

Since 1981, HoCo Arts has served as Howard County's arts cornerstone, supporting local arts organizations, artists, and audiences. In 2026, it relocated to the Capitoline Center in Ellicott City, providing exhibitions, affordable studio and meeting space, and visual and performing arts programming for all ages. HoCo Arts reaches 280,000 people annually through direct programming and six grant programs that award 50 to 60 grants totaling more than $900,000 each year. Its extensive partnership network connects 26 arts organizations with schools, colleges, libraries, parks, tourism, government, and regional and state arts agencies.

Plan Process

THE CREATION OF THE HOWARD COUNTY ARTS AND CULTURE PLAN

HoCo Arts with the support of Howard County engaged Designing Local, a national leader in cultural planning alongside JS&A, KiMISTRY, and Cusick Consulting, to lead the development of this Arts and Culture Master Plan. The plan process spanned three phases: an initial period of preliminary research and analysis, an extensive countywide community engagement process, and the development of the plan itself, including its strategic recommendations and implementation framework.

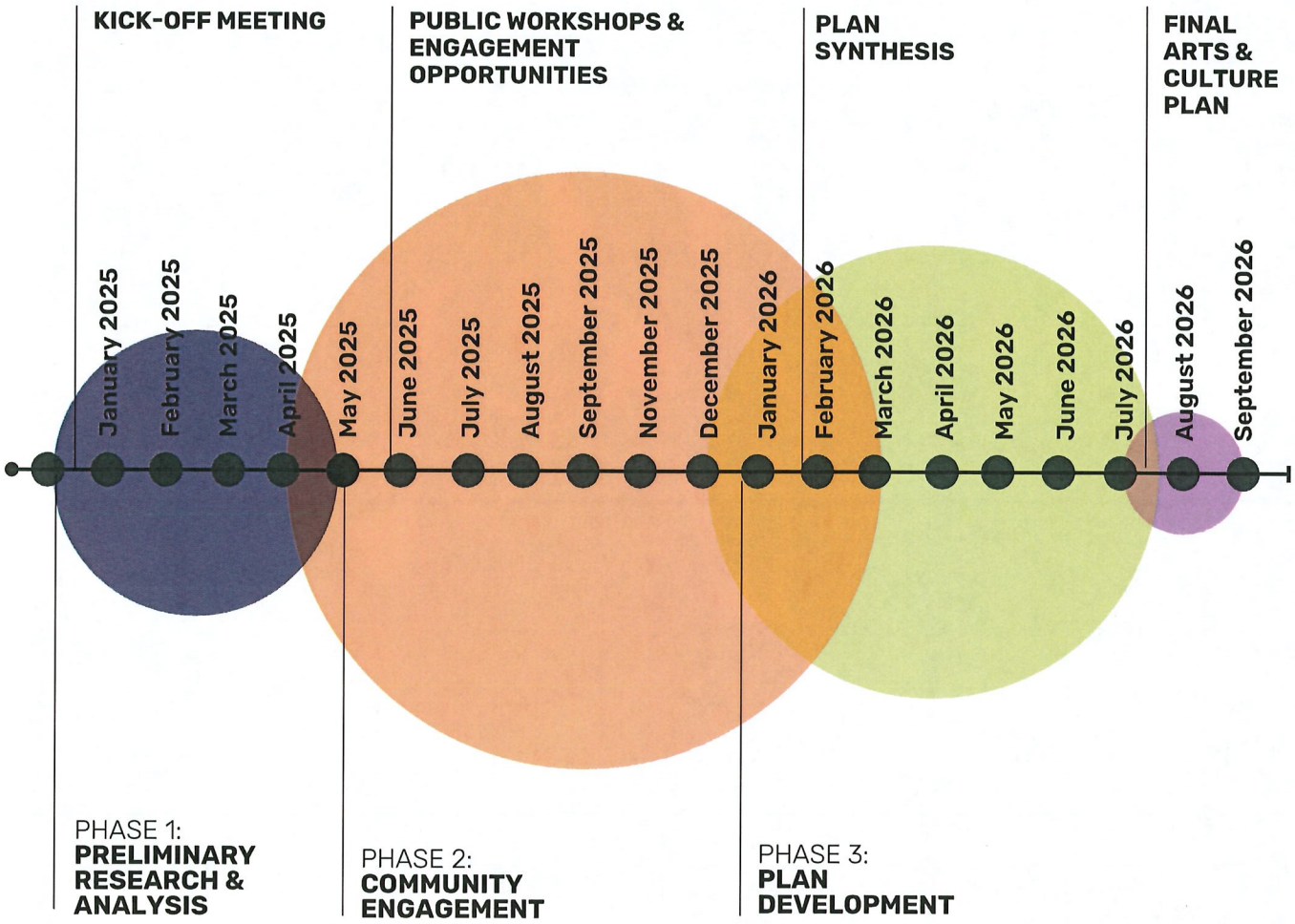
The preliminary research phase established the plan's foundation. This included a comprehensive review of Howard County's prior arts and cultural planning efforts, an inventory of existing cultural assets and policies, a comparative benchmarking analysis against peer communities, and an assessment of the county's arts and culture needs from the perspective of economic development leadership. Together, these inputs ground the plan in Howard County's specific context and help reveal how existing conditions have shaped the cultural landscape of the community.

HOW THE COMMUNITY SHAPED THIS PLAN

Community engagement followed, designed to reach a broad and representative cross-section of Howard County residents, artists, and arts and cultural organizations. This process, detailed further in the Community Engagement section of this plan, combined a countywide survey, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and discipline-and affinity-based conversations conducted over the course of the planning timeline. The full scope of engagement formats, individual events, and their sequencing is documented there.

- **Steering Committee & Artist Cohort** A Steering Committee of 30 local organizational leaders and County staff and an Artist Cohort of 12 local creatives met several times over the course of the process to guide the plan's content.
- **Community Survey** A countywide survey, available in English, Chinese, Spanish, and Korean, received 720 responses between spring and the end of 2025. An additional survey on plan outcomes was released following the final public workshop, 49 community members responded.
- **Stakeholder Interviews** One-on-one virtual interviews were held with more than 30 stakeholders spanning artists, arts and culture organizations staff and leaders, HoCo Arts Board members, public sector leaders, educators, and leaders in the spaces of economic and community development.
- **Focus Groups & Community Conversations** Small-group conversations were held with members of various affinity groups and with practitioners and administrators representing several sectors in Howard County's creative community. These included a series of discipline-specific focus groups, held separately for creatives working in theater, visual arts, music, dance, and literary arts, which together engaged 30 participants. Affinity group conversations were also held separately, at different times, with Black, Latino/Hispanic, AAPI, and LGBTQIA+ groups.
- **Open Houses & Community Convenings** A State of the Creative Community convening drew 30 attendees, and a final workshop held across two in-person sessions drew 40. A virtual option was also provided, with small group discussions drawing 15 participants and a follow-up survey released regarding the plans outcomes receiving 49 responses.

The findings from this research and engagement process directly shaped the plan's three Big Ideas and twelve strategies. The Road Map section of this plan translates these strategies into a phased set of implementation actions, timelines, and measures of progress, and readers seeking the plan's specific outcomes and sequencing should refer to that section.



Community Engagement by the Numbers

survey responses
769

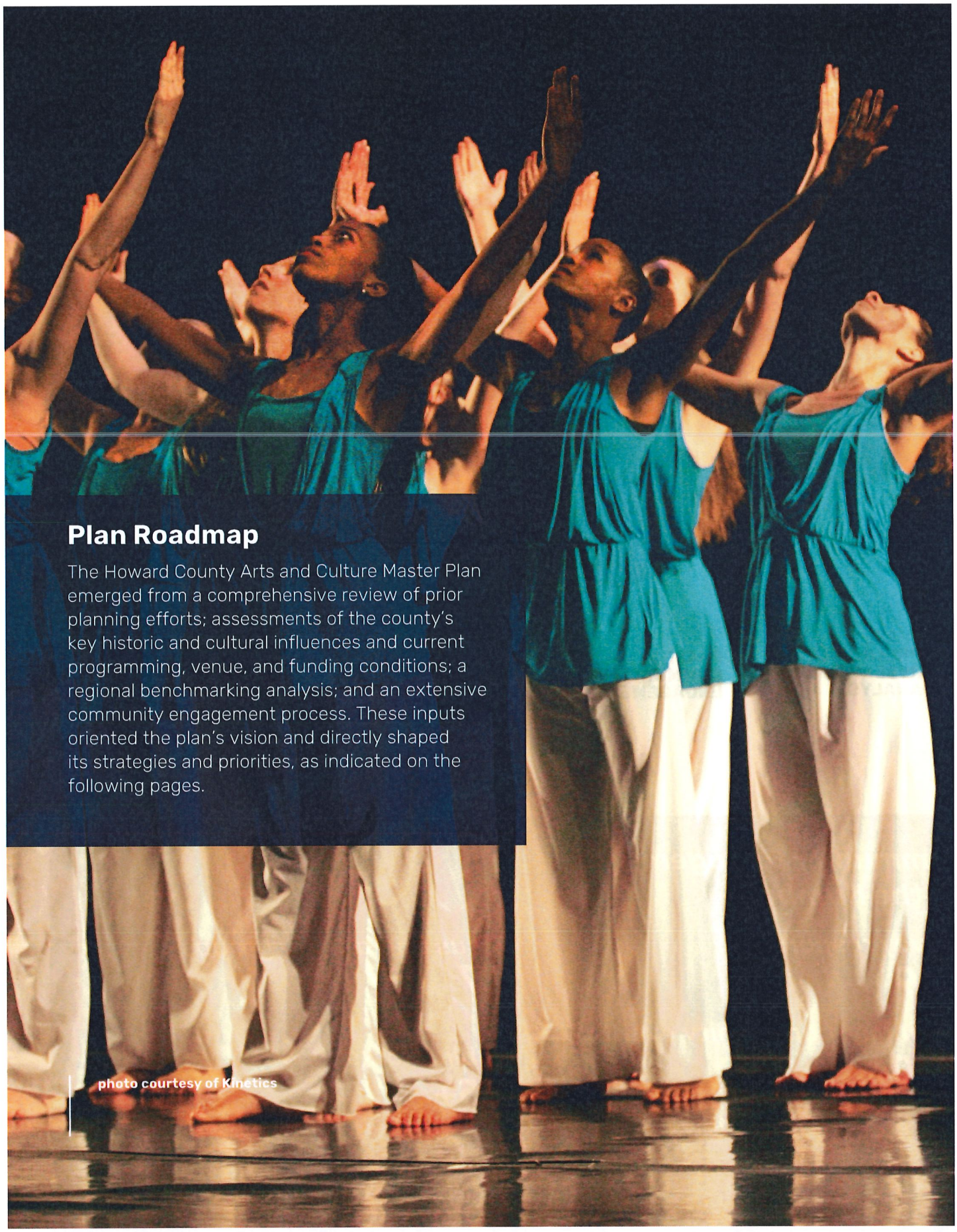
tabling at community events
250+

Stakeholder interviews
45

focus and affinity groups
97

public workshops
85+

1,346+ touchpoints



Plan Roadmap

The Howard County Arts and Culture Master Plan emerged from a comprehensive review of prior planning efforts; assessments of the county's key historic and cultural influences and current programming, venue, and funding conditions; a regional benchmarking analysis; and an extensive community engagement process. These inputs oriented the plan's vision and directly shaped its strategies and priorities, as indicated on the following pages.

photo courtesy of Kinetics

Prior Planning Assessment

This plan builds from several prior planning efforts, including:

HoCo Arts FY24–FY29 Strategic Roadmap

To ensure they understood and could meet the needs of Howard County's arts community and continue to strengthen and grow their organization, Hoco Arts engaged in strategic planning process through which they defined their commitment to equity; clarified their purpose, mission, and values; and presented four priorities that focused on expanding resources, building capacity, increasing community engagement, and strategically evaluating their efforts through a DEIA lens.

2015 Needs Assessment for Arts Facilities

Webb Management Services, Inc. was tasked with establishing whether there was a need and opportunity to develop new arts facilities in Howard County. Upon assessing the supply of facilities, potential demand for facilities, and how the development of new facilities might serve the county's broader goals, the firm recommended new spaces in downtown Columbia and Long Reach Village Center.

HoCoByDesign

Howard County's General Plan references arts and culture within its economic prosperity framework as a way to promote economic vibrancy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The HoCo Arts FY24–FY29 Strategic Plan's 4 organizational priorities provides this plan with a vetted internal framework of HoCo Arts's own priorities to build from.
- The 2015 Needs Assessment for Arts Facilities established a baseline understanding of the county's facility gaps and needs.
- HoCoByDesign (2023), Howard County's General Plan, established arts and culture as part of the county's economic prosperity framework.
- Howard County's last comprehensive arts and culture plan is more than two decades old, meaning this plan had no recent, countywide cultural planning baseline to build from.

How the Key Takeaways Informed the Plan:

- Shaped this plan's positioning as an expansion of HoCoByDesign's economic prosperity framework, establishing arts and culture as a cross-cutting priority touching economic development, community belonging, equity, education, and the built environment
- Shaped the decision to update, as opposed to recreate, the 2015 facilities assessment as part of this plan's Venue Supply Assessment
- Reinforced Hoco Arts' role as a central convener and facilitator across nearly every strategy, given its established partnerships spanning schools, government, and community institutions

Historic & Cultural Influences

The county's history was researched across its Indigenous, agrarian, emancipation-era, and modern periods, drawing on county and state archives, historical scholarship, and Steering Committee input, to establish the cultural foundation this plan's recommendations build from.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Indigenous peoples, most notably the Piscataway and Susquehannock, used the land that is now Howard County as farming and hunting grounds long before European settlement. Until suburban development began taking hold in the 1950s, the county was an agrarian community featuring mills, farms, market villages, and iron foundries, and a transportation center with the B&O Railroad and the National Road both passing through.
- The county's Underground Railroad legacy is complicated by its history of enslavement. Maryland abolished slavery through its own constitution in 1864, nearly a year before the Thirteenth Amendment, and the Ellicott City Colored School was the first school for Black children in Howard County built with county funds.
- Freed and free Black residents established the freedom villages of Freetown, Guilford, and Elkridge and built the churches, schoolhouses, and fraternal lodges that constitute the county's earliest sustained record of community-built cultural life.
- Jim Rouse's founding vision for Columbia, which embedded institutions like the Merriweather Post Pavilion and the Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts into the community from the start, has influenced Howard County's longstanding commitment to its arts and culture sector.
- Howard County's cultural institutions have consistently been founded by residents acting on their own initiative, from the Chinese Language School of Columbia in 1975 to the African American Museum of Maryland, the county's first museum in 1980, to festivals that now draw tens of thousands of attendees.
- Howard County's diversity index rose from 59 in 2010 to 72 in 2020. The county's Asian and Asian American communities, now representing one in five residents, illustrate why cultural representation and decision-making structures need to keep pace with demographic change, rather than reflect assumptions about the county's cultural makeup that may already be out of date.

How the Key Takeaways Informed the Plan

- Reinforced the plan's emphasis on cultural expression rooted in Howard County's own distinct history, as opposed to a generic destination-branding approach
- Supported the plan's attention to historic Ellicott City's vulnerability, informing recommendations tied to Arts and Entertainment District designation and heritage preservation
- Shaped the plan's equity framework and its emphasis on cultural representation that keeps pace with the county's demographic change
- Informed the plan's recognition that Howard County's cultural communities are already organized and leading their own institutions, positioning the county's role as one of continued partnership and investment

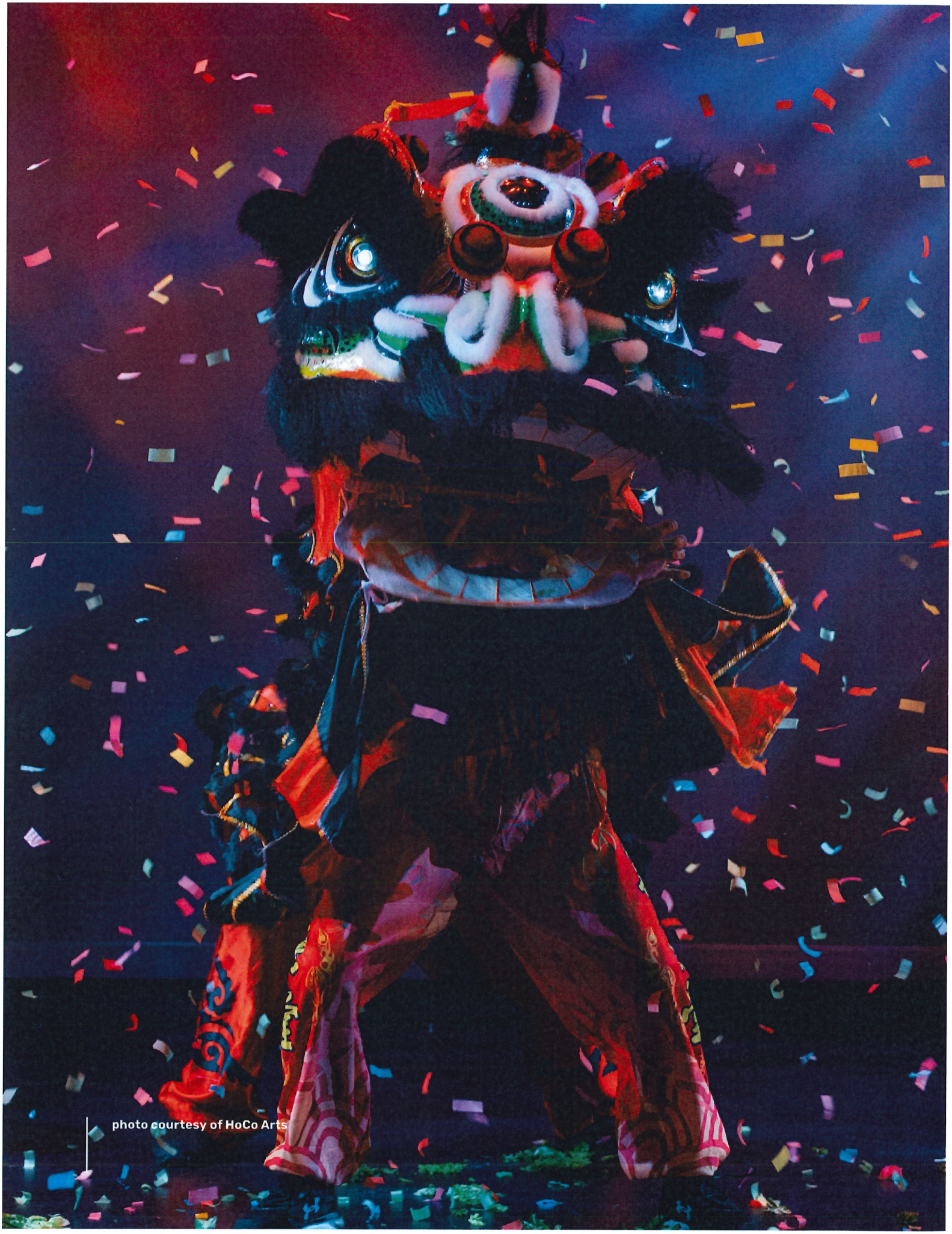


photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

County and Regional Arts Analyses

To assess the county's current cultural infrastructure, its cultural assets were mapped, drawing from HoCo Arts's 2024 Arts Directory, the appendices of the 2015 Needs Assessment, and direct input from the Steering Committee to identify assets missing from existing sources. A parallel review of the county's heritage site inventory, with 1,080 documented sites, assessed how many offer publicly accessible programming today. To understand Howard County's position within the broader mid-Atlantic creative economy, its creative sector was benchmarked against Washington, DC, Baltimore City, and Montgomery County using employment and wage data and public investment and policy documentation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Howard County's creative market is best understood as a market in active formation: a disproportionately strong performing arts anchor paired with a thin independent artist base and emerging, but not yet mature, physical infrastructure.
- Howard County currently lacks several policy tools that peer jurisdictions use to direct investment toward the arts, including a percent-for-art program, systematic cultural data infrastructure, and, until now, a countywide cultural plan.
- The potential for a designation of Ellicott City as Howard County's first Maryland Arts and Entertainment District to create a policy framework and tax incentives for artist live-work development, but its value depends on active implementation through a district management structure and development strategy.
- Regionally, Washington, DC produces more creative talent than it can absorb, Baltimore's creative ecosystem is dense but financially strained, and Montgomery County has built the most sophisticated arts investment infrastructure in Maryland but faces cost conditions that constrain its independent creative workforce. Howard County occupies a distinct position between both major
- Directly shaped the plan's framing of Howard County as a connector and artist home base within the region, offering relative affordability and proximity to both Washington, DC and Baltimore, rather than a destination competing with those cities on their own terms
- Supported recommendations to pursue Arts and Entertainment District designation, adopt a public plan and policy, and invest in affordable studio and rehearsal space before development pressure closes the current window of opportunity
- Informed the plan's emphasis on connective infrastructure, including a shared calendar, venue directory, and coordinated marketing, as a high-leverage investment given the county's currently fragmented cultural identity
- Reinforced the need for stronger cultural data infrastructure to support future advocacy for public investment, following the model of neighboring jurisdictions that have used economic impact data to justify funding increases



photo credit Dot Slash Digital

Community Engagement

A robust countywide public engagement process was undertaken to ensure this plan reflects community priorities. The planning process and the development of all plan content was guided by two groups — a Steering Committee, composed of local organizational leaders and County staff, and an Artist Cohort, composed of local creatives. Community feedback was generated through an online survey, one-on-one stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and public events.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Residents and stakeholders want Howard County to become a recognized regional arts destination and questioned why a county with a well-funded arts ecosystem doesn't yet have a stronger regional presence.
- Audience development emerged as a dominant theme: stakeholders want routine, recurring arts experiences that build habits and belonging, and value cross-disciplinary programming that expands audiences collectively rather than having disciplines compete for the same limited space and scheduling windows.
- Artists want direct investment, business training, and clearer pathways from arts education into sustainable local careers, and see the current disconnect between local arts training and local arts employment as talent leaving the county.
- A persistent lack of accessible, affordable performance and rehearsal space forces competition among groups and organizations, and stakeholders want a shared directory of bookable cultural spaces.
- Younger and emerging artists feel underrepresented in leadership and planning structures, and cultural groups expressed a preference for cultural exchange that centers their own identity on their own terms rather than a generalized multicultural framing.
- Respondents consistently described information about arts and culture opportunities as fragmented across websites, social media, and word of mouth, with strong interest in a centralized source.

How the Key Takeaways Informed the Plan

- Shaped the plan's emphasis on opening institutional and non-traditional spaces to arts use
- Anchored the plan's emphasis on connective infrastructure and countywide promotion as a response to residents' consistent difficulty finding out what's happening
- Informed the plan's leadership development and succession planning strategies, addressing the generational tension raised directly by both emerging and long-standing cultural practitioners
- Supported the plan's individual artist grant, business training, and career pathway strategies as a direct response to the talent-retention concern raised across artist-focused engagement
- Reinforced the plan's equity framework, particularly its emphasis on cultural expression on each community's own terms rather than a blended, generalized approach

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENVISION A PLACE

WHERE...

ARTS AND CULTURE IS CULTIVATED WITH INTENTION AND FAMILIES COME TO RAISE CHILDREN IN A CULTURAL COMMUNITY,

EMERGING CREATIVES FIND THEIR FOOTING AND BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS OF A PRACTICE,

GENERATIONS HAVE CHOSEN TO INVEST IN SOMETHING LARGER THAN THEMSELVES,

WE ALL SHARE IN THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, MENTAL, AND EMOTIAL BENEFITS OF A CREATIVE EXPRESSION.



photo courtesy of Designing Local

Challenges & Opportunities

Distilling data from all the inputs across the community engagement portion of this process resulted in the following high-level understanding of Howard County's unique challenges and opportunities in the arts and culture space.

KEY CHALLENGES

Fragmented Information and Coordination

Arts and culture information is scattered across multiple forms of media, making it difficult for people to learn about offerings outside of their immediate social circles.

Space Scarcity and Competition

Affordable, accessible performance and rehearsal space is limited, forcing arts and culture organizations to compete for access with one another and with the groups that own or manage the spaces, with those who receive priority in scheduling.

Talent Retention

Arts-oriented careers within the county are scarce, creating a talent pipeline that trains people locally only to see them build careers elsewhere.

Generational and Cultural Tensions

Younger and emerging artists feel underrepresented in leadership and planning structures, creating friction with long-standing cultural leaders over legacy and direction. Some cultural groups feel that generalized multicultural framing dilutes their distinct community identity.

Funding Concentration

County government is the sector's dominant funding source, but federal funding has contracted and other traditional revenue streams, including individual giving and foundation support, have declined or plateaued, suggesting that new

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Building a Recognized Arts Identity

Residents and stakeholders want Howard County to be known regionally for its arts and culture, suggesting support for a coordinated, countywide identity and promotional infrastructure.

Cross-Disciplinary and Recurrent Programming

Strong stakeholder appetite exists for consistent programming that builds audience engagement habits and for cross-disciplinary collaboration that expands audiences by exposing people to new types of cultural experiences.

Activating Existing Assets

With cultural assets concentrated in Columbia and Ellicott City, there is a clear opportunity to activate underutilized institutional and non-traditional spaces in the western part of the county, and to extend heritage interpretation to underinterpreted sites.

Investing in Artist Careers

There is demand for direct investment in individual artists, business and entrepreneurial training, and pathways connecting arts education to sustainable local careers, including in sectors like healthcare and technology.

Diversifying the Funding Base

New local and state policy tools, including a percent-for-art program and Arts and Entertainment District designation, can support efforts to grow earned revenue among local arts and culture organizations.



photo courtesy of
Columbia Festival of the Arts

ENGAGEMENT THEMES



1 AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The core ask was for routine, habitual arts experiences that build belonging rather than one-off events. Stakeholders explicitly said attendance and presence matter as much as financial support. There was also a strong call for cross-disciplinary programming that expands audience reach collectively rather than having disciplines compete for the same limited space and peak scheduling windows.Tactics should address the core needs of:

- Awareness
- Limited communications networks
- Attention span strain
- Audience cannibalization
- Limited volunteers/audience participation and engagement
- Stretched donor bases
- Calls for audience diversification



2 ARTIST DEVELOPMENT+ CREATIVE CAREERS

Stakeholders want direct investment in artists as small business operators such as marketing, nonprofit management, creative entrepreneurship. The existing grant structure rotating by discipline was flagged as a gap; artists want consistent, annual discipline-specific support. There was also a clear desire to embed the arts into healthcare, tech, and innovation sectors as career pathways.Tactics should address the core needs of:

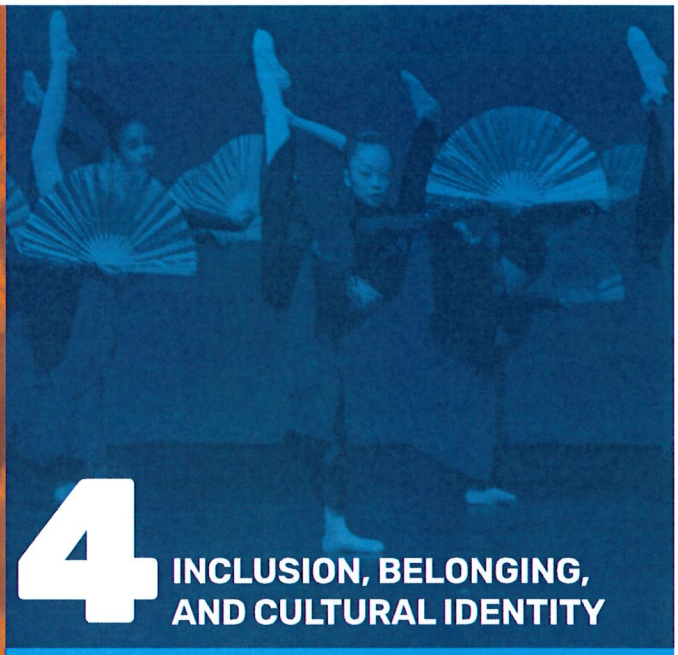
- Lack of direct and predictable investment in artists as professionals
- Disconnect between arts education (available locally) and sustainable local employment (in the arts)
- Limited sequential learning opportunities outside of formal higher ed programs
- Limited technical assistance for artists and arts organizations, including financial & business training
- Missed opportunities to integrate artists into other sectors, such as science and healthcare



3 SPACES + PLACES

The requests were specific: a cultural spaces directory showing which venues accept outside booking, geographically dispersed programming across the whole county, and visible evidence of creativity in the built environment including artist workforce housing, small-scale supportive spaces for organizations and independent artists, and a highly visible public art program. Tactics should address the core needs of:

- Scheduling and space scarcity concerns
- Gaps in the cultural infrastructure: flexible, low/no-cost spaces (including non-traditional spaces)
- Activation and visibility of the arts in public, including creative placemaking
- Cultivation of arts districts to leverage their economic potential
- Reducing barriers to creation and presentation associated with issues of space size, scale, cost, and location



4 INCLUSION, BELONGING, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Two tensions sit in this theme.

The first is generational: younger and emerging artists in their 20s and 30s feel locked out of leadership and planning structures, and there is friction between the long-standing cultural bearers and the next generation around legacy and vision.

The second is cultural: multicultural rebranding of heritage events was named as a frustration — groups want their own cultural identity centered and visible on their own terms, not blended into a generic multicultural umbrella, but still are enthusiastic in their desire to provide welcoming cultural experiences to the entire community. Tactics should address the core needs of:

- Underrepresentation and misrepresentation of communities in programming and decision-making
- Safeguarding the cultural expression of individual communities while welcoming the broader community into heritage celebrations and
- Leveraging shared cultural spaces, places of worship, and cultural centers as gateways to community connection
- Empowering the next generation of creatives to lead

Big Ideas & Strategies

In response to the community's identified needs and aspirations, and with an understanding of how Howard County's existing conditions and cultural landscape shape the opportunities ahead, three Big Ideas were developed to guide plan implementation:

Big Idea One: Build Avenues to Connect, Resource, and Represent a Diverse Creative Community closes the fragmentation and equity gaps this plan's engagement and equity framework identified.

Big Idea Two: Create a Responsive Approach to Creative Spaces addresses the concentration of cultural assets in Columbia and Ellicott City that this plan's asset mapping and regional benchmarking documented.

Big Idea Three: Make Howard County a Place Where Artists Can Develop Their Careers responds to the talent-retention concern residents and artists raised throughout engagement, a concern the county's thin independent artist base, relative to its regional peers, confirms.

These Big Ideas, and the strategies and actions beneath them, give county government and community partners a coordinated framework for investment and dedication of resources to support cultural access and the expansion of the arts.



photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

DRAF

Big Idea 1: Build Avenues to Connect, Resource & Represent a Diverse Creative Community.

Howard County is one of the most demographically diverse counties in the United States, and its arts and culture community reflects that richness in the work being created, the stories being told, and the communities gathering around shared cultural expression. The opportunity is to build the infrastructure that connects that community across organizations, disciplines, and cultural identities, so that its full range of voices has the resources, visibility, and decision-making power to shape Howard County's cultural life.

WHAT WE AIM TO ADDRESS:

- **Representation of diverse communities in programming, funding decisions, and organizational leadership**
- **Coordination among arts organizations to build collective visibility and shared audience reach**
- **A recognizable, county-wide identity for the arts that positions Howard County as a cultural destination**
- **Technical assistance and promotion support for culturally specific and emerging organizations**
- **Pathways for the next generation of leaders to step into roles that shape Howard County's arts and cultural future**
- **Access to arts participation across barriers of cost, language, transportation, and cultural familiarity**

» Strategy 1.1 Build Capacity for Culturally Specific Organizations to Produce and Present Community Programs and Events

- Directs targeted support toward emerging and developing culturally specific organizations
- Provides technical assistance to strengthen promotion, financial planning, programming development, and audience development

» Strategy 1.2 Develop Pathways for Diverse Leaders

- Builds a leadership curriculum to prepare a broader, more representative pool of candidates for board and staff roles
- Establishes a formal succession planning process to support long-term leadership continuity

» Strategy 1.3 Establish Formal Coordination and Promotion Infrastructure Among Arts Organizations

- Builds a coordinated marketing campaign alongside a central arts resource to raise the visibility of Howard County's arts and culture identity
- Brokers cross-organizational agreements to reduce administrative and financial barriers to collaboration
- Establishes a Culture Pass program to expand access and promote cultural experiences

» Strategy 1.4 Activate Businesses and Employers as Arts Access Partners

- Builds new partnerships connecting the business community to local arts organizations

» Strategy 1.5 Safeguard and Expand Arts Education and Lifelong Learning throughout Howard County

- Protects consistent, sequential arts education throughout Howard County Public Schools
- Directs resources toward community partnerships to fill gaps in arts and cultural learning beyond the K-12 system

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Big Idea 2: Create a Responsive Approach to Creative Spaces.

Howard County's creative community is growing, and the spaces that support that growth are an essential part of what makes a county truly arts-forward. Artists, performers, and cultural organizations are finding each other, building audiences, and producing work of genuine quality, and the county has a meaningful opportunity to ensure that the physical infrastructure keeps pace with that energy. A responsive, county-wide approach to creative spaces should meet artists where they are, activate underutilized assets, and make Howard County's investment in the arts visible in its built environment.

WHAT WE AIM TO ADDRESS

- **Access to quality spaces for independent artists and smaller organizations across peak and non-peak scheduling windows**
- **Flexible, low-cost space options distributed across the full geography of the county**
- **Activation of public spaces, vacant properties, and existing community facilities for arts programming**
- **Live-work and affordable studio infrastructure that supports working artists building sustainable practices**
- **Visible evidence of creativity in the built environment that signals to creatives that Howard County is a place where they belong and can grow**

» Strategy 2.1. Create Incentives for Permanent Creative Spaces in Development

- Directs creative businesses toward existing Enterprise Zone incentive areas to share in resources
- Utilizes inclusionary development incentives to encourage creative space in development

» Strategy 2.2. Nurture Cultural Hubs

- Enhances access to arts and culture through transit initiatives
- Strives to open institutional doors and non-traditional arts spaces, including schools, businesses, places of worship, and libraries, to community arts and culture use
- Reinforces creativity across the county through placemaking and urban design strategies
- Identifies staff support or contracted services to build capacity for Creative Placemaking and Public Art
- Seeks to pursue state-designated Arts & Entertainment District status for eligible communities

» Strategy 2.3 Expand Public Art Across the County

- Develops a formal, permanent Public Art Program where none currently exists
- Directs funding toward establishing a sustainable public art budget
- Builds staff capacity to manage and grow the program over time
- Convenes a task force to guide development of a Public Art Plan

» Strategy 2.4 Make a Signature Investment in Creativity and Family Enrichment

- Develops a highly participatory creative destination that encourages arts exploration for youth and families

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Big Idea 3: Make Howard County a place where artists can develop their careers.

Artists are choosing Howard County for its location, quality of life, and creative community. The opportunity now is to build the career infrastructure that turns a place people are drawn to into a place they put down roots — and to capture the economic and cultural return that comes with it.

WHAT WE AIM TO ADDRESS:

- **Lack of direct and predictable investment in artists as professionals**
- **Gaps in business and entrepreneurial training; disconnect between arts education and local professional employment**
- **Limited technical assistance; no progressive learning pathway beyond foundational arts classes**
- **Missed opportunities to integrate artists into other sectors**
- **Absence of healthcare and benefits for professional artists**

» Strategy 3.1 Start with Grants, Progress towards Careers

- Establishes a dedicated grant directing support to community-based artists and creators
- Builds capacity through an Individual Artist and Creator Grant Program Coordinator at HoCo Arts

» Strategy 3.2. Bring Creativity Into the County's Small Business Ecosystem

- Formally recognizes artists and cultural creators as Small Business Enterprises
- Explores launching a Creative Economy Accelerator through the Maryland Innovation Center

» Strategy 3.3 Build a Pathway from Practice to Profession

- Advocates alongside state and national agencies for a Healthcare and Benefits Support Feasibility Study
- Creates a paid creative practitioner and internship program with placement support

Plan Implementation

Howard County has already experienced the benefits that come from investing in arts and culture, from strengthened civic participation to economic development and youth empowerment, and this plan positions the county to deepen that investment over the next decade.

Partners

The Implementation chapter identifies the partners and structures Howard County would rely on to carry this plan forward. It outlines the shared responsibility between HoCo Arts, Howard County government, and a broader network of County departments, boards and commissions, local arts organizations, the business community, and community service and advocacy groups, recognizing that no single organization is equipped to implement every strategy in this plan alone.

Funding Considerations

For each goal, the Implementation Matrix identifies funding opportunities or considerations to guide Howard County and its partners toward appropriate sources of support as implementation moves forward.

Evaluating Progress

Howard County, in partnership with HoCo Arts, may wish to develop an ongoing structure for tracking progress, revisiting priorities, and adjusting course as conditions change. Toward that end, the County is encouraged to conduct a formal review of progress against this plan in partnership with participating organizations on an annual basis, with outcomes reported to the public. Tracking measures may include the number and status of strategies advanced by Big Idea, the distribution of grant funding by organization type, discipline, and geography, program participation tracked by zip code and demographic group consistent with the metrics identified in this plan's Equity Framework, and progress toward diversified funding, including the share of sector revenue drawn from earned income, individual giving, and sources beyond County government.

For each strategy, the Implementation Matrix identifies a recommended timing, level of priority, potential partners, and funding avenues for consideration. Priority levels reflect what residents and stakeholders identified as most pressing by the community and the countywide digital survey.

URGENCY

- ● ○ ○ ○ ○ **LOW**
- ● ● ○ ○ ○ **MEDIUM-LOW**
- ● ● ● ○ ○ **MEDIUM**
- ● ● ● ● ○ **MEDIUM-HIGH**
- ● ● ● ● ● **HIGH**

TIMING

- ● ○ ○ ○ ○ **IMMEDIATE**
- ● ● ○ ○ ○ **NEAR-TERM**
- ● ● ● ○ ○ **MID-TERM**
- ● ● ● ● ○ **LONG-TERM**
- ● ○ ● ○ ● **ONGOING**

FUNDING

Funding opportunities or considerations are indicated for each goal.

LEAD

A lead partner is identified each action.

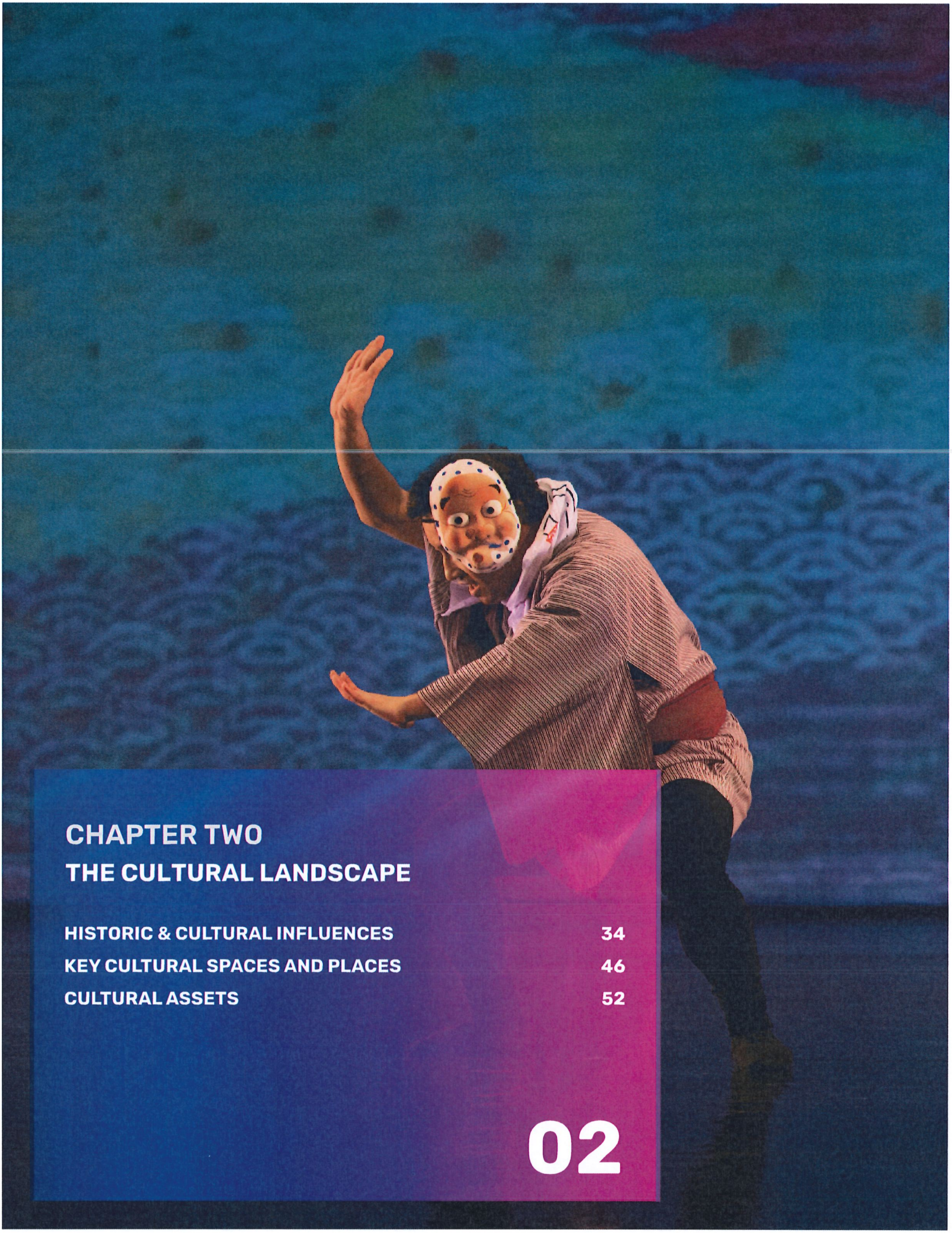
PARTNERS

Potential partners and collaborators are identified for each action.

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photo courtesy of
Silhouette Stages



CHAPTER TWO
THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

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02



photo courtesy of
Misako Ballet

Historic & Cultural Influences

Howard County's cultural identity has been shaped over centuries and by many hands, from the Piscataway and Susquehannock peoples of the Patapsco and Patuxent watersheds, to the milling families whose agrarian economy depended on enslaved labor, to the Black residents who built the county's first churches and schools after emancipation, to the Chinese, Korean, Indian, and Latino families who have founded institutions of their own in the decades since Columbia opened in 1967. Today, Howard County is one of the most diverse counties in the nation.



PRE-1600S

Piscataway and Susquehannock peoples inhabited the Patapsco and Patuxent watersheds.



1860s

Free Black residents build the churches, schoolhouses, and fraternal lodges that constitute the county's earliest record of community-built cultural life in Freedom Villages.

1888

Ellicott City Colored School,the county's first dedicated school for Black students, is built.



1878-1899

The County builds its first jailhouse in 1878, first firehouse in 1889, and opens the Ellicott City trolley in 1899.

INDIGENOUS HOMELAND & AGRARIAN BEGINNINGS

1838-1899

COUNTY FORMATION, EMANCIPATION, AND THE FREEDOM VILLAGES

1837

Patapsco Female Institute opens in Ellicott City on land donated by the Ellicott family. Among the earliest academic schools for women in the country.



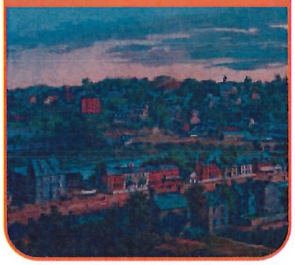
1864

Maryland abolishes slavery through its own new state constitution, nearly a year before the Thirteenth Amendment.



1867

Ellicott Mills becomes Ellicott City, now a flourishing town of 1,600 with a large mercantile trade.



1700s

Colonial land grants, tobacco and wheat cultivation underpins the local economy & Ellicott brothers establish mills on the Patapsco.

1830s

National Road and B&O Railroad make the county a major convergence point.

1838

Howard County established.

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1900-1970
RURAL COUNTY TO NEW TOWN

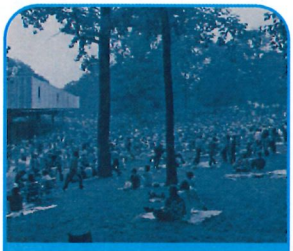
1900

Roughly 29 Russian Jewish families are present in the county, having grown since the late 1890s representing some of the earliest recorded immigrants in the County.



1946

The first Howard County Fair is held, growing out the Farm Bureau Picnic at Brendel's Manor Park.



1967

Columbia is founded by Jim Rouse, that same year the Merriweather opens, hosting opera, ballet, and later pop and rock outfits like the Who and Jimi Hendrix.

1937

Black students gain access to education past seventh grade at the newly formed Rosenwald School in Cooksville.



1949

The Harriett Tubman School opens for Black High School students, and would be the last operating segregated school.



1971-PRESENT
CULTURAL GROWTH FOR THE COUNTY

1970-1979

Delta Sigma Theta, the first Divine Nine organization to establish a chapter in Howard County is chartered.

Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts, Chinese Language School, Chamber Music Maryland (formerly Candlelight Concert Society), the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society (HoCoPoLitSo),Columbia Pro Cantare, The Columbia Orchestra, and the Howard County Arts Council (HoCo Arts) are all founded during these years.

1980

African Art Museum of Maryland founded, one of only three in the United States devoted exclusively to African art.

1998

Howard County Chinese School founded, a volunteer Chinese education center.

2000-2010

The County's Korean and Indian populations grow steadily, with the Asian American community reaching 14.4% of the county's total population by 2010.

2016, 2018

Deadly flooding impacts Ellicott City, destroying businesses and historic properties.

2018, 2020, 2022

The Indian Cultural Association is founded in 2018.
In 2020 the La Alianza Latina working group formed, then formalized as a commission in 2022.

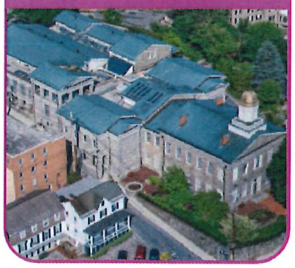


2025

The County breaks ground on the new Howard County Performing Arts Center (PAC) and Artist Flats development.

2026

The Capitoline Center for Arts opens in Ellicott city, the new home of the Arts Council.



Historic & Cultural Influences

PRE-HISTORY TO EUROPEAN COLONIZATION

Long before European settlement, the land that is now Howard County, Maryland was used as farming and hunting grounds by Indigenous peoples, most notably the Piscataway and the Susquehannock. The Piscataway were an Algonquian-speaking people who relied heavily on agriculture and lived in permanent villages, while the Susquehannocks, an Iroquoian people primarily rooted along the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania and New York, claimed hunting grounds stretching south through Maryland to the Patuxent River and often clashed with the Piscataway. The two nations' contest over this territory came to a formal end on July 5, 1652, when Susquehannock leaders signed the Articles of Peace and Friendship along the banks of the Severn River. Under the treaty, six Susquehannock chiefs ceded to the Maryland colony all territory from the Patuxent River to Palmer's Island on the western shore and from the Choptank River to the Northeast River on the eastern shore, effectively ending the Susquehannock presence in the region. The Susquehannocks, for their part, were seeking European alliances as protection against Haudenosaunee attacks from the north.

Archaeological evidence of this deep Indigenous history survives in Howard County to this day. The Beehive Site (18HO206), a stratified Late Archaic quarry-related extraction site discovered along the floodplain of a tributary of Shallow Run, yielded over 22,000 artifacts — almost exclusively lithics — dominated by quartz and quartzite, revealing that Indigenous peoples used the location as both a short-term stone-tool processing site and temporary encampment.



Figure 1.1 Depiction of a Susquehannock on a map of Virginia created by John Smith in 1624. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 1.2 A painting by William Woodward illustrates a historic meeting between European settlers and the Piscataway Indians in 1699. Source: Our History, Our Heritage: The Maryland Historical Trust Blog.



Figure 1.3 Depiction of a Susquehannock village, with inaccuracies. Source: *De nieuwe en onbekende weereld, of, Beschryving van America en 't zuid-land*, Arnoldus Montanus (1671).



Figure 1.4 Field crew excavating the Beehive (18HO206) archaeological site in eastern Howard County. Source: Archaeological Sites in Maryland.

AGRARIAN BEGINNINGS

Agriculture formed the backbone of Howard County's economy and identity for nearly two centuries. Farming was the way of life for the county's earliest European settlers, with tobacco serving as the basis of the economy, while local iron ore and tobacco were shipped from Elk Ridge Landing along the Patapsco River to the Chesapeake Bay. That foundation shifted dramatically when the Ellicott brothers arrived in 1772. Although earlier settlers had planted tobacco, it had exhausted the soil and left the land unproductive; the Ellicotts introduced ground plaster of Paris as a fertilizer and championed the transition to grain, convincing prominent landowners like Charles Carroll to convert their estates to wheat cultivation, which quickly spread regionally. The Ellicotts built roads, bridges, iron works, and a wharf in Baltimore to support this agricultural economy, helping create Ellicott's Mills as one of the greatest milling and manufacturing towns on the East Coast.

Smaller villages across the county developed in support of this agrarian life: Lisbon in western Howard County grew as a farming community and supply depot before the Civil War, Clarksville prospered as a market town, and Savage Mill operated as a textile mill along the Little Patuxent River from 1822 until 1947. This agricultural and industrial economy depended substantially on enslaved labor. Cultural life was carried in these decades through craft, foodways, and religious practice, within enslaved and free Black communities and Quaker and European settler communities alike.

Formal cultural and educational institutions began to appear as the milling economy matured. The Patapsco Female Institute opened in Ellicott City on January 1, 1837, on land donated by the Ellicott family, and was the second academic school of its kind in the country. It operated until 1891, teaching botany, chemistry, mathematics, history, and foreign languages.



Figure 1.5 View of Ellicotts Mills, MD. Color lithograph by E. Sachse & Co. (1854). Source: Library of Congress.

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THE PATAPSCO FEMALE INSTITUTE

The Patapsco Female Institute closed in 1891, and by the mid-twentieth century the Institute's granite building on the hill above Ellicott City stood in ruins. A preservation group formed in 1965 to save the Institute and persuaded the County to acquire it, purchasing the eight-acre property the following year for $17,500. The Institute has operated as Patapsco Female Institute Historic Park since 1995 and now hosts outdoor theatrical performances, making it one of the county's oldest heritage sites in active cultural use.

RAIL CREATES A CONVERGENCE OF PEOPLE AND INDUSTRY

Howard County has sat at the crossroads of American transportation history since the nation's earliest decades. The Ellicott brothers built roads and bridges to support their milling empire, and the road they constructed to Charles Carroll's estate later became part of the National Road — America's first interstate highway. Ellicott City's Main Street formed an essential segment of that National Road corridor, with Thomas Isaac's Log Cabin serving as a way station for travelers heading west. The railroad era brought even more dramatic change. The initial thirteen-mile stretch of the B&O Railroad from Baltimore to Ellicott's Mills opened for public use on January 7, 1830, featuring horse-drawn cars before transitioning to steam locomotives by the mid-1830s, making it the first common carrier railroad in the United States. The Ellicott City Station, built in 1831, remains the oldest surviving railroad depot in the United States. The railroad's expansion southward produced another landmark: the Thomas Viaduct, completed in 1835 at Elkridge, was the first multi-span railroad bridge built in the United States and the first constructed on a curved alignment, and it remains virtually unchanged and still in active use today. Passenger service at Ellicott City's station eventually ceased on December 31, 1949, as Americans turned increasingly to automobiles. Interstate 70, which runs through Howard County connecting Baltimore with Frederick and western Maryland, was constructed in the late 1960s — tracing roughly the same east-west corridor that the National Road and the B&O had pioneered more than a century before.



Figure 1.7 Blah. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Viaduct#/media/File:Thomas_Viaduct_wide_angle_shot.jpg.



Figure 1.8 Blah. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lisbon,_Maryland.



Figure 1.9 Blah. Source: https://www.facebook.com/ecborail/photos/1274387268020902/

COUNTY FORMATION, EMANCIPATION, AND THE FREEDOM VILLAGES

Howard County was established as a separate county in 1838. The National Road and the B&O Railroad made it a convergence point for the movement of people and goods westward, and the Thomas Viaduct stands as a marker of the county's role in that industry. For the first half of the twentieth century, the county changed slowly. Howard County remained a place of villages and crossroads, with Ellicott City drawing summering Baltimoreans in this period and supporting an opera house, an early instance of the county serving as a cultural destination for the surrounding region.

The county's foundations changed fundamentally in the middle of the century. Slavery in Maryland ended on November 1, 1864, under the state's own new constitution, ahead of the Thirteenth Amendment and by state action independent of federal proclamation. Maryland's status as a Union slave state meant the Emancipation Proclamation had not applied here, so the county's Black residents were freed on a different date and through a different mechanism than most of the country.

What followed produced Howard County's oldest sustained record of community-built cultural institutions. Freed and free Black residents established and sustained communities including Freetown, Guilford, and Elkridge, and built the churches, schoolhouses, cemeteries, and fraternal lodges that anchored them. Religious activity is documented at the Asbury Methodist Episcopal site in Annapolis Junction as early as 1860, in the final years of slavery in Maryland, and its wood-frame building included an adjoining structure that served as a schoolhouse. In 1900, the Reverend Willis Carter, a quarry worker and preacher, secured land for First Baptist Church of Guilford and worked to ensure the Black community there had housing, food, education, and worship. These congregations remain standing, and several still gather.

The institutions built after emancipation continued to carry cultural life within the Black community.

The Harriet Tubman School opened in 1949 as the county's only high school for Black students, the culmination of a slower expansion of Black secondary education that began in Cooksville in the late 1930s, and it remained the county's sole option until desegregation closed it in 1965, making it the last operating segregated school in Howard County.



Figure 1.10 Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. Source: Wikimedia



Figure 1.11 Former Harriet Tubman School, now Cultural Center.
Source: Howard County Government.



Figure 1.12 Colored School. Source: Wikimedia

THE HARRIET TUBMAN SCHOOL

The Harriet Tubman School closed with desegregation in 1965, and the Tubman building sat largely unused for decades afterward. The County took ownership of the Harriet Tubman School building in 2015 through an agreement with the school system, and after more than $9.3 million in restoration, it reopened in September 2022 as the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center, led substantially by the school's own alumni through the Harriet Tubman Foundation. The Cultural Center operates today as an active venue with a recording studio and rentable performance space, returning to public cultural use a building that had been closed for fifty-seven years.

RURAL COUNTY TO NEW TOWN

For the first half of the twentieth century, the county changed slowly. Howard County remained a place of villages and crossroads, holding roughly 23,000 residents in 1950 and no incorporated municipality anywhere within its borders. Its population would grow more than fourteenfold over the next seven decades. Residents looked to Baltimore and Washington D.C. for arts and entertainment, and civic life operated along segregated lines.

Enter James Rouse, a Maryland-born developer and visionary, who dreamed of building something far more ambitious than another postwar suburb when he set his sights on Howard County in the early 1960s. Rouse envisioned Columbia as "a garden for the growing of people" — a self-sustaining city, not merely an improved suburb — where his goals were to create a place where residents could live and work, to respect the land, to foster personal growth, and to turn a profit. Working through shell corporations, he quietly assembled more than 15,000 acres of rural farmland between Baltimore and Washington D.C., keeping the acquisitions secret. Once his plans were revealed in October 1963, Rouse assembled a "Work Group" of nationally recognized experts across multiple disciplines to determine the optimal social and institutional components of the new city and how those ideals could be reflected in the physical environment. When Columbia opened in 1967 — the same year Maryland finally legalized interracial marriage — Rouse dubbed it "The Next America," intending it to be the country's most racially and economically integrated suburb. The plan called for neighborhoods organized around village centers containing community spaces, grocery stores, and multi-denominational interfaith centers, all nestled within protected open spaces and connected by trails. Rouse believed the design of a space should never alienate anyone from its use, and he sought to create a city where anyone who worked in Columbia could afford to live there as well.

Diversity was a founding principle of the Columbia development, and a growing social life around the county continued to grow and evolve to reflect this belief.

In 1971, the Columbia Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority chartered, becoming the first Divine Nine organization to establish a chapter in Howard County and the beginning of a network of sororities, fraternities, congregations, and lodges that continues to anchor Black civic leadership across the county.

Families arriving in the same years built with equal speed. Chinese families in Columbia founded the Chinese Language School of Columbia in 1975, only eight years after Columbia itself, making it among the county's earliest sustained cultural institutions of any kind. Korean families moved to Ellicott City and Columbia in growing numbers through the 1970s and 1980s, many of them having first settled in Baltimore a generation earlier and choosing Howard County for its schools and its stated commitment to an integrated community.

The clearest expression of what the period made possible came in 1980, when Doris and Claude Ligon founded what became the African Art Museum of Maryland, the first museum in the planned community of Columbia and one of only three museums in the United States devoted exclusively to African art. It is the only one of the three founded by an African American. Doris Ligon has said they began in Columbia because they admired Rouse's vision of a community welcoming to people of any race, and that Rouse told them he was proud Columbia's first museum was about Africa.

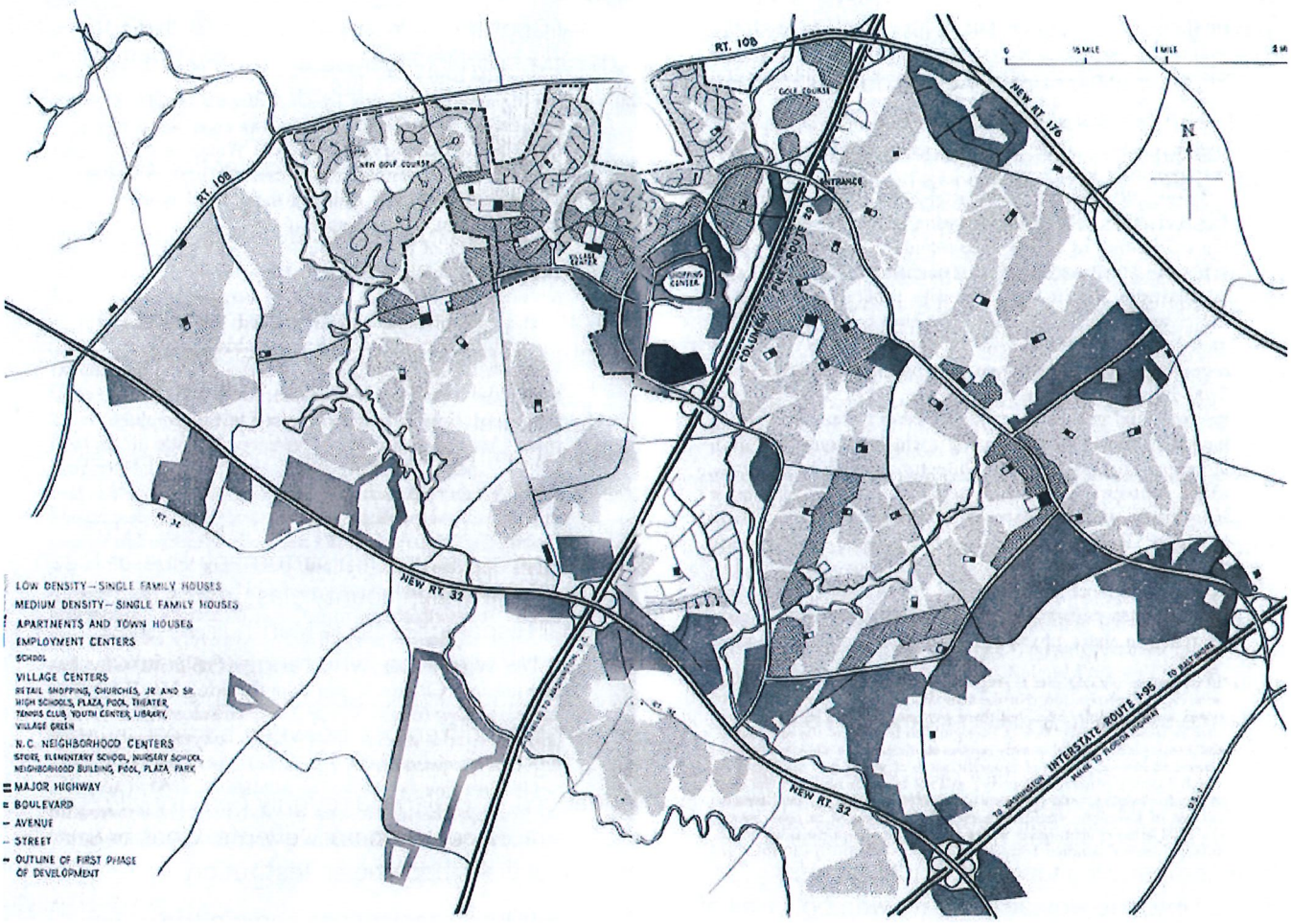


Figure 1.13 Blah. Source: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/james-w-rouses-legacy-better-living-through-design-180951187/.



Figure 1.14 Blah. Source: https://www.pbs.org/show/mpt-specials/.

INSTITUTION BUILDING AND A GLOBAL COUNTY

The African Art Museum of Maryland was the first of many cultural anchors in the county. The two decades after 1980 produced much of the county's still-active cultural backbone, built by residents working in parallel across communities.

Eva Anderson moved to Columbia in 1973 and become artistic director of the Baltimore Dance Theatre in 1977. She brought the company to Howard County and incorporated it as Eva Anderson Dancers, Ltd., taking up residence at the Howard County Arts Council and Center for the Arts. Her repertoire centered classical modern, classical ballet, and classical African American dance forms, and the company performed at the Jim Rouse Theatre and the Baltimore Museum of Art and toured Germany, Austria, and Italy. She received Maryland State Choreographers Fellowships in 1982 and 1986 and choreographed the dance sequences in Barry Levinson's film "Avalon."

By the time the company closed in 2004 after roughly 35 years, it was the longest-running dance company in Maryland. Anderson was inducted into the Howard County Women's Hall of Fame in 2007.

In 1981, Pat Hatch opened the Foreign-born Information and Referral Network with seed funding from the Columbia Foundation. It grew out of an informal support service at Howard Community College, where ESL teachers found their students asking questions that had less to do with English than with navigating a new country. In its first year FIRN served 90 people from 10 countries. Operating today as Luminus, it serves immigrants from more than 75 countries.

Documentation of the county's older history was taking shape at the same moment. In 1986, the Howard County NAACP published "History of Blacks in Howard County, Maryland," compiled by Alice Cornelison, Silas E. Craft Sr., and Lillie Price, which remains the foundational documented reference for this history and underpins the historic designation of the county's Black churches. The following year, Wylene Sims Burch, a local educator and activist, founded the Howard County Center of African American Culture with her husband Olger Burch, motivated by a conviction that this history deserved more than the annual brevity of Black History Month. The center began with grassroots collection of oral histories, photographs, and everyday objects, and its research library at Howard Community College now holds more than 10,000 items.

The cultural landscape of the county continued to unfold in classrooms. Chinese families founded the Howard County Chinese School in 1998, staffed entirely by volunteers and based at Howard Community College, where it operates today as the county's largest volunteer-run Chinese education platform. Around the same time, Angel Rivera began performing Puerto Rican bomba and plena in county classrooms during National Hispanic Heritage Month, invited in through his wife Alba, who taught Spanish in the Howard County Public School System. He taught students the difference between bomba, a genre more than 300 years old carrying strong African influences, and plena, a roughly century-old form that narrates contemporary events. What began as school visits became an institution.

Other cultural organizations serving the community through access to arts education and expression formed around traditional and contemporary arts practices, expanding arts across the county. The Mid Atlantic Foundation for Asian Artists, based in Clarksville, took up Filipino musical heritage and performance. Niti and Sanjay Srivastava founded the Indian Cultural Association in 2018, guided by the principle of seva, or selfless service, and it has grown into the largest organization of its kind in the region, distributing more than three million pounds of food through FEED HOCO since the pandemic. Its Festival of India, first held in 2019, now draws more than 20,000 attendees to the Howard County Fairgrounds and has been voted best festival in

DANCE & HOCO'S CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Today, dance is where Howard County's composition becomes visible as culture. The community supports a dense concentration of classical and contemporary forms. Indian classical dance instruction spans Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kuchipudi, alongside folk and popular forms including Bhangra, Garba, and Bollywood choreography. Korean dance traditions, including fan dance and samulnori percussion performance, anchor the annual AAPI Festival at Merriweather Park. Puerto Rican bomba and plena are taught and performed by Cultura Plenera's ensemble Los Hijo 'e Plena in county schools, at the Chrysalis, and at the Hispanic Heritage Festival. Forms in the western tradition, from classical to contemporary, are taught by studios including Misako Ballet, Kinetics Dance Theatre, Columbia Youth Ballet, and Howard County Ballet. West African dance continues to play a role in cultural life and expression in Howard County.

Across all of these traditions, dance is programmed alongside a multitude of forms at festivals that draw tens of thousands of people, taught to children in village centers and school gymnasiums, and performed as a visible reminder of cultural traditions still held in communities across the county.



photo courtesy of Howard County Chinese School

Key Arts and Cultural Assets

HOWARD COUNTY TODAY

Howard County's arts and culture landscape today reflects decades of investment, from cornerstone institutions like the Howard Community College's Horowitz Center to community touchstones like the Howard County Fairgrounds, alongside a new wave of development including the Chrysalis at Merriweather Park and the upcoming Howard County Performing Arts Center. Together, these spaces and places form the physical backbone of the county's cultural life, offering residents access to performance, exhibition, education, and gathering across every corner of the county. This section highlights the venues, institutions, and organizations that make up that foundation, and the ongoing investment shaping what comes next.

Alongside these physical spaces, Howard County's arts and culture sector is equally anchored by a group of long-standing organizations that have sustained programming for the community across multiple decades. The African American Museum of Maryland, Chamber Music Maryland (formerly Candlelight Concert Society), the Howard County Poetry and Literature Society (HoCoPoLitSo), Columbia Pro Cantare, The Columbia Orchestra, and the Howard County Arts Council (HoCo Arts) -represent a sustained foundation of community-built cultural infrastructure, several tracing their roots to the 1970s and celebrating their 50th anniversaries in recent years having served generations of residents.


CHAMBER MUSIC MARYLAND


HOCOPOLITSO


COLUMBIA PRO CANTARE


THE COLUMBIA ORCHESTRA


HOCO ARTS COUNCIL



photo source Horowitz Visual and Performings Art Center

HOROWITZ VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

The Peter and Elizabeth Horowitz Visual and Performing Arts Center at Howard Community College (HCC) is a major cultural and educational anchor for Howard County, hosting over 35,000 patrons annually. This comprehensive facility includes three performance venues—the main stage Smith Theatre, a Black Box Studio, and the intimate Monteabaro Recital Hall—alongside two professional art galleries. Crucially, the Horowitz Center serves both the college's Arts & Humanities Division and the wider community with state-of-the-art instructional studios (including ceramics, dance, photography, and music), offering a rich season of student and professional performances, exhibitions, and engaging cultural programs.



photo source HoCo Arts

ARTSITES

The ARTsites program, managed by HoCo Arts, is a unique annual juried public art competition designed to liberate sculpture from gallery walls and place it directly into the community. Each year, the program selects a temporary collection of approximately twelve large-scale sculptures and strategically installs them at highly visible public and commercial locations across the county, such as library branches, village centers, and nature centers. By rotating these temporary visual anchor points annually, ARTsites dramatically increases public access to high-quality, contemporary artwork, enhancing the vibrancy of public spaces and serving as a free, self-guided public art tour for all residents.



photo source jim Rouse Theatre

JIM ROUSE THEATRE

The Jim Rouse Theatre for the Performing Arts, housed within Wilde Lake High School, is a 740-seat venue built to serve both the Howard County Public School System and the wider arts community. Operating under a formal Memorandum of Understanding for shared use between HCPSS and community organizations, the theatre extends its stage to groups such as The Columbia Orchestra and Howard County Poetry and Literature Society (HoCoPoLitSo) alongside student productions. The partnership model reflects a long-standing approach in Howard County of pairing public school facilities with community arts programming,



photo source Wikimedia Commons

MERRIWEATHER POST PAVILION

The Merriweather Post Pavilion is an outdoor amphitheater nestled within the 40 acres of Symphony Woods Park in Columbia, MD. Opened in 1967, and originally designed by architect Frank Gehry, it has evolved from a planned summer home for the National Symphony Orchestra into a nationally ranked venue hosting a diverse array of major contemporary musical acts, from rock legends to modern pop stars. Operated by a nonprofit, Merriweather boasts a massive capacity (over 19,000) and anchors the area's cultural life, often utilizing the surrounding Symphony Woods—including the adjacent Chrysalis stage—for community events, festivals, and the annual holiday Symphony of Lights display.

In 2016, ownership of the pavilion transferred from its original developer to the Merriweather Arts and Culture Center (MACC), a nonprofit founded in 2013 to grow arts and culture in and around Downtown Columbia, following a multiyear renovation effort.



photo source Designing Local

THE CHRYSALIS AT MERRIWEATHER PARK

The Chrysalis is a pavilion, sculpture, and performance venue located in Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods, adjacent to Merriweather Post Pavilion. Opened in 2017 as part of the Inner Arbor initiative, the structure was designed by Marc Fornes of THEVERYMANY and serves as both a stage and an open-air civic gathering space. Owned by the Columbia Association and operated by the Inner Arbor Trust, the Chrysalis hosts a wide range of programming, from orchestral performances by the Columbia Orchestra to community festivals, seasonal celebrations, and free public events, extending Howard County's outdoor performance capacity beyond Merriweather's larger stage.

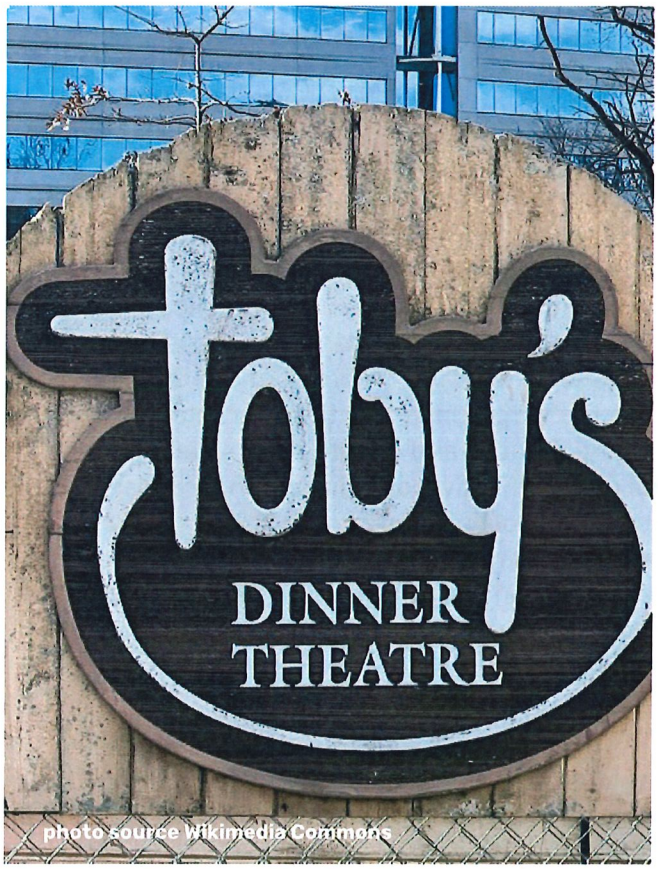


photo source Wikimedia Commons

TOBY'S DINNER THEATRE

Toby's Dinner Theatre, located in the heart of Columbia, MD, is an award-winning performing arts institution known for its unique "in-the-round" staging and exceptional buffet dining experience. Founded in 1979 by Artistic Director Toby Orenstein, the theatre provides a vibrant, interactive setting where no audience member in any of its 300 seats is more than 30 feet from the action, and the performers often double as the serving staff. Celebrating over 45 years and accumulating over 100 Helen Hayes Award nominations, Toby's is one of the few venues in Howard County that features a live orchestra. It showcases a blend of popular Broadway hits and original musicals, cementing its status as a beloved destination for regional theatre and entertainment.


photo source Howard County Library System

HOWARD COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM

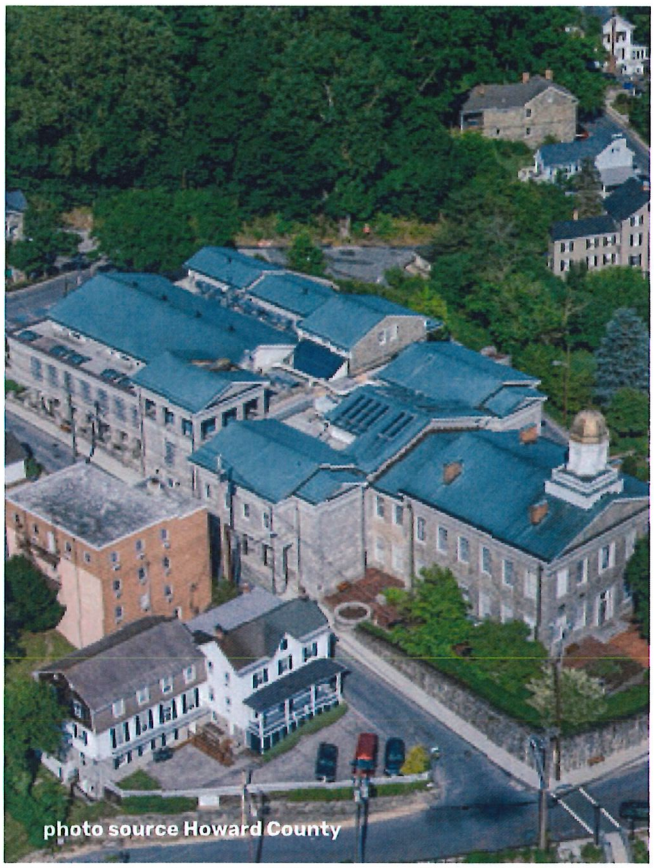
The Howard County Library System (HCLS) is nationally recognized as an award-winning leader in public education, distinguished for its innovative services and deep community engagement. HCLS actively pursues a mission to be an educational partner, fostering lifelong learning for all ages by offering a vast array of resources, high-quality programs, and specialized initiatives like HiTech, its cutting-edge STEM education for teens. HCLS is highly lauded for its civic leadership, notably pioneering the "Choose Civility" initiative across Maryland, demonstrating its commitment to building community cohesion, equity, and civil discourse, making it a beloved and essential institution within Howard County.



photo source Howard County Fairgrounds

HOWARD COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

Located just outside Ellicott City, the Howard County Fairgrounds serves as a vital community cornerstone that celebrates the region's strong agricultural heritage. Established in 1946, it is primarily known as the home of the annual eight-day Howard County Fair in early August, attracting over 100,000 visitors with its livestock exhibits, 4-H programs, carnival rides, and educational displays. Throughout the rest of the year, the fairgrounds facilities are rented out for a variety of public and private events, ranging from the colorful Festival of India and the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival to trade shows and large meetings, cementing its role as a key year-round venue for community gathering and cultural celebration outside of the county's more densely populated areas.


photo source Howard County

THE CAPITOLINE CENTER

The Capitoline Center, which opened in Ellicott City in March 2026, is an adaptive reuse of the historic Howard County Circuit Courthouse, an 1843 Classical Revival building that sits on the hill known locally as Capitoline Hill. Following the Circuit Court's relocation in 2021, a public survey found strong community interest in repurposing the building for community, cultural, civic, and food-related uses, leading the county to pursue an adaptive reuse project. The Capitoline Center now serves as the new home of HoCo Arts, which occupies the space with a Black Box Theatre, three multipurpose classrooms, a large historic courtroom and multi-purpose room, and a dance studio available for rent to arts groups. The building also houses the county's first Asian American and Pacific Islander Cultural Center, the Roving Radish program, and a Shared Commercial Kitchen, making it a hub for arts, culture, and community life beyond HoCo Arts alone.


photo source Howard County
Rendering Design Collective

HOWARD COUNTY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER (UPCOMING)

The Howard County Performing Arts Center (PAC), currently under construction in Downtown Columbia, will bring a new 340-seat dinner theater, two 200-seat black box theaters, dance studios, classrooms, and a public art gallery to the site of the former Toby's Dinner Theatre. The project will house both the Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts, Toby's Dinner Theatre, with HoCo Arts managing a community gallery and black box theater within the complex. Groundbreaking took place in April 2025, with the new dinner theater expected to open in 2026 and the full center anticipated for completion in 2027. The PAC will join the Merriweather Arts and Culture Center, Inner Arbor Trust, and the Chrysalis as part of a growing cluster of arts venues anchoring Downtown Columbia's cultural district.

Cultural Assets Inventory

Cultural amenities encompass the institutions and spaces that enhance a community's cultural life, contributing to its overall quality of life by providing opportunities for recreation, education, social interaction, and artistic expression. These include a broad spectrum of facilities, such as museums, theaters, libraries, parks, and historical sites, which collectively shape places and foster community engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Gathering Cultural Assets.

Cultural Assets in Howard County were gathered through internal research and from a list of existing and developed sources. In recent years, several organizations have curated lists of amenities and cultural resources in the community.

2024 Arts Directory.

This document was assembled by HoCo Arts as a list of literary, media, performing, and visual arts organizations and resources. The directory includes 150+ local organizations, their programs, and their missions.

2015 Needs Assessment Appendices.

As a part of the 2015 needs assessment, lists were compiled of organizational study participants, user demand to understand space requirements, and facility inventories with a full list of spaces available for community use in 2015.

Steering Committee Engagement.

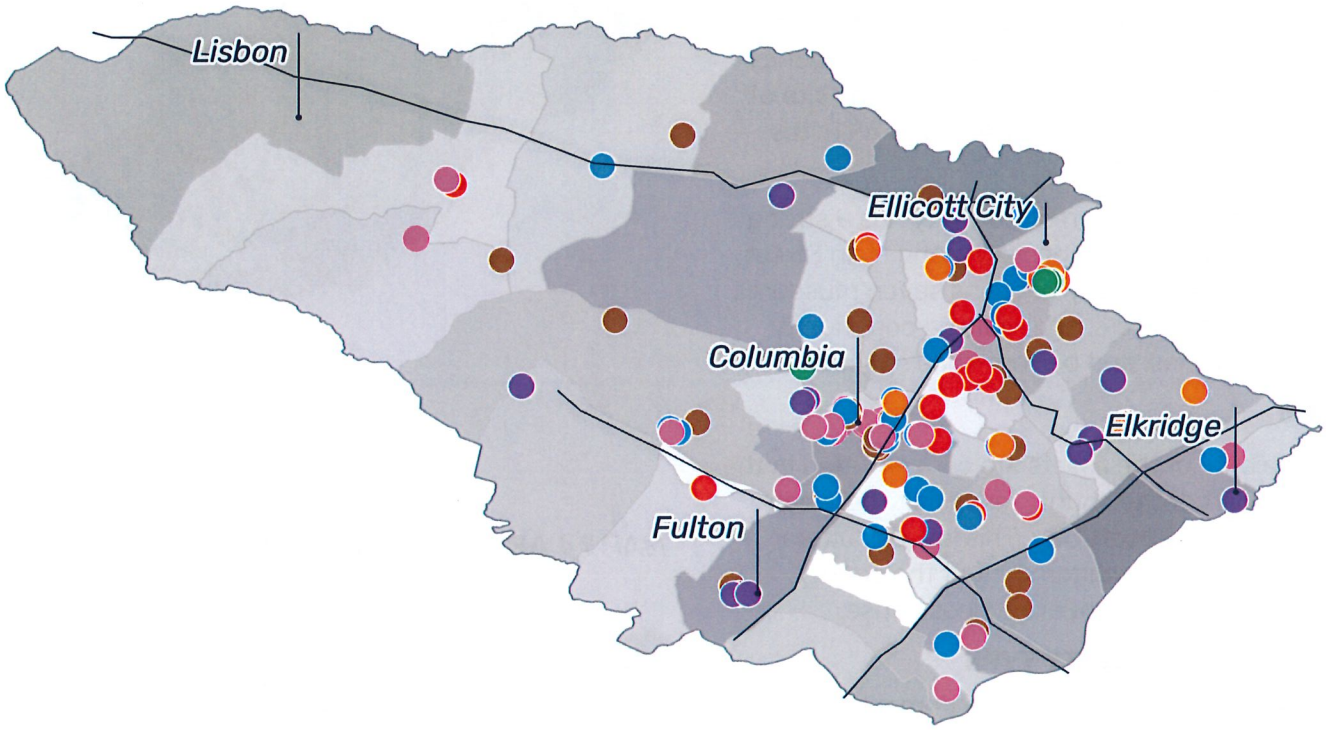
At the start of the process, the steering committee highlighted assets and resources that were omitted from the above sources. A digital platform for adding assets to the map of the county was provided and participants could comment on missing resources and their locations.

Organizing Cultural Assets.

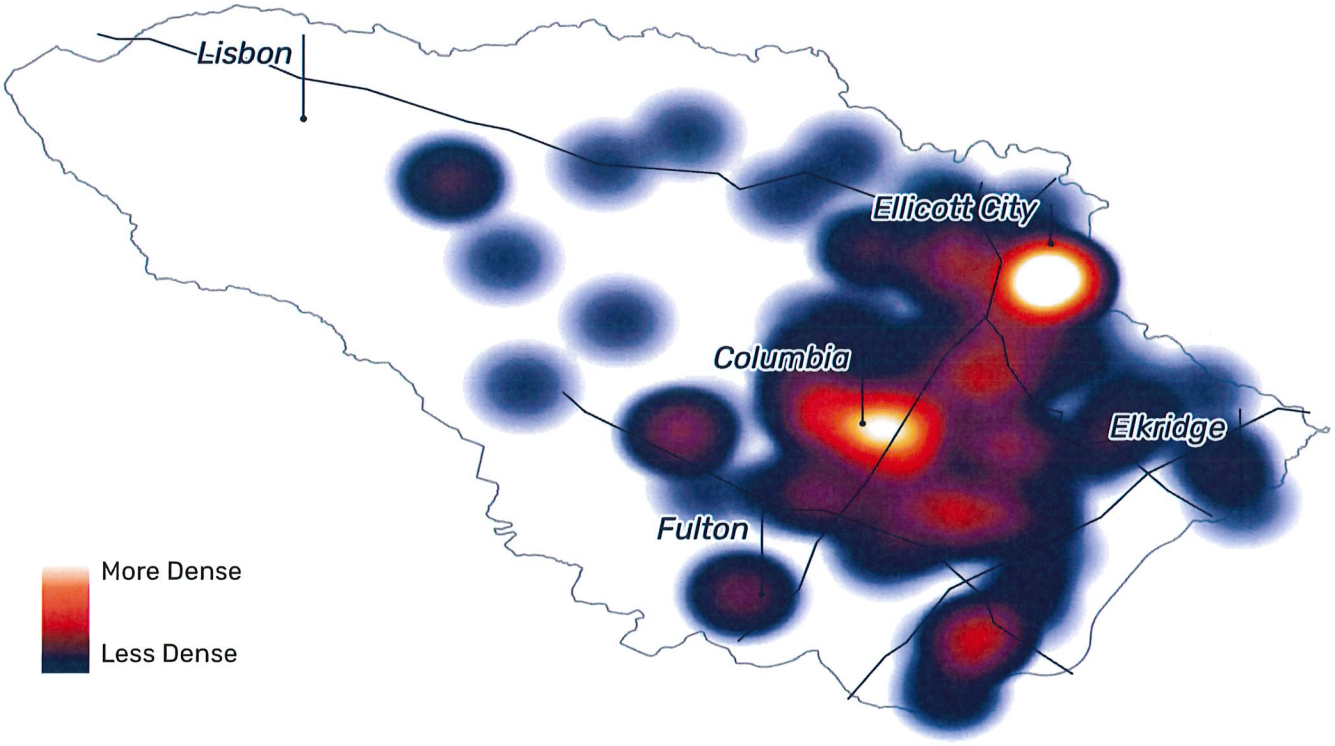
When resources were gathered, they were sorted into one or more of the following categories:

- **Arts Education.** Facilities dedicated to structured learning and skill development in the arts, including dance studios, music schools, and K-12 school art programs that provide extracurricular or community-focused artistic education.
- **Community Space.** Multi-use venues designed for social gathering and civic engagement, such as community centers, public libraries, cultural hubs, and town meeting halls that serve as anchors for local interaction.
- **Galleries.** Dedicated visual arts spaces designed for the exhibition, curation, and sale of artwork, ranging from professional art galleries to local, community-focused exhibition spaces.
- **Makerspaces & Studios.** Collaborative environments for creative production and community innovation, including shared art studios, craft workshops, and fabrication spaces that provide tools and equipment for artistic creation.
- **Museums & Heritage Centers.** Institutions focused on the preservation, study, interpretation, and public display of art, local history, and cultural heritage, serving as repositories for the community's collective memory.
- **Performance Space.** Venues equipped for live artistic presentations, including theaters, amphitheaters, concert halls, and school auditoriums, designed to accommodate both free and ticketed community performances.
- **Public Art.** ARTsites creates accessible artworks installed in public, semi-public, or outdoor spaces, such as sculptures, murals, and site-specific installations, intended for community enrichment and public engagement.
- **Other.** Private-sector artistic ventures and for-profit entities, such as specialized music stores, commercial creative agencies, or businesses that incorporate significant artistic programming into their operations.

MAP 1.1 **CULTURAL ASSETS**



MAP 1.2 **CULTURAL ASSET DENSITY**



FINDINGS

HOTSPOTS

Columbia. There is a heavy concentration of assets in Columbia, including many performance spaces (stages, amphitheaters, etc), community spaces (libraries, community centers, the site of the new performing arts center), and ARTsites locations/installations.

Ellicott City. Downtown Ellicott City has a strong collection of assets, especially along Main Street. This 1500ft of roadway contains seven museums and heritage centers, and multiple community spaces, galleries, and performance spaces.

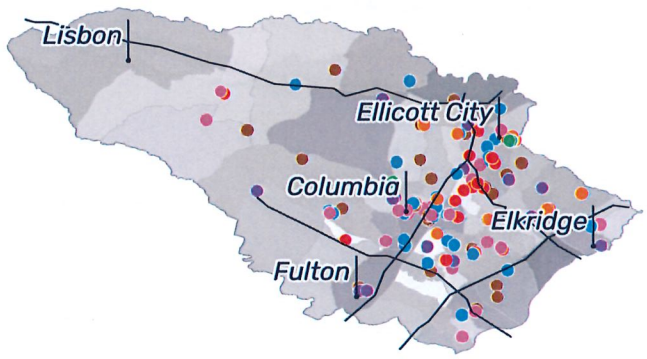
GAPS

The majority of the assets are concentrated in the eastern part of the county, especially between Columbia and Ellicott City. This leaves cultural asset gaps in the western half of the county, which is more residential and less dense.

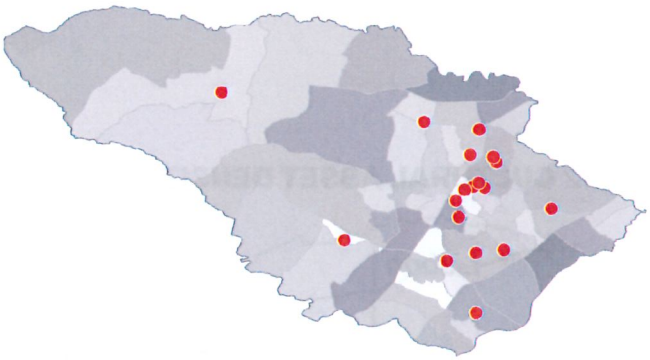
INSIGHTS BY AMENITY TYPE

- Arts Education assets are primarily concentrated along/adjacent to major thoroughfares between Columbia and Ellicott City, notably Columbia Pike, Patuxent Parkway, and Baltimore National Pike.
- Community Spaces primarily exist only in Columbia and Ellicott City.
- Makerspaces & Studios are the most evenly distributed asset, without large concentrations in any one spot.
- Over 50% of the museums and heritage centers in the county exist in Ellicott City.
- Public Art/ARTsites are primarily concentrated in the Southeastern part of the county

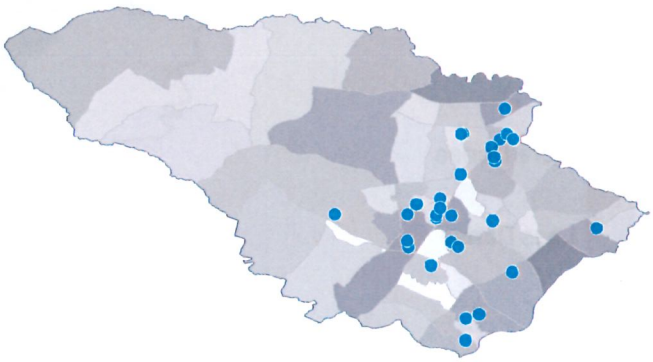
MAP 1.3 **CULTURAL ASSETS**



MAP 1.4 **ARTS EDUCATION ASSETS**

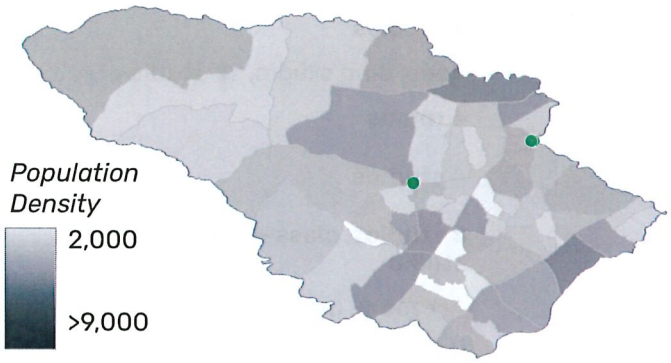


MAP 1.5 **COMMUNITY SPACE ASSETS**

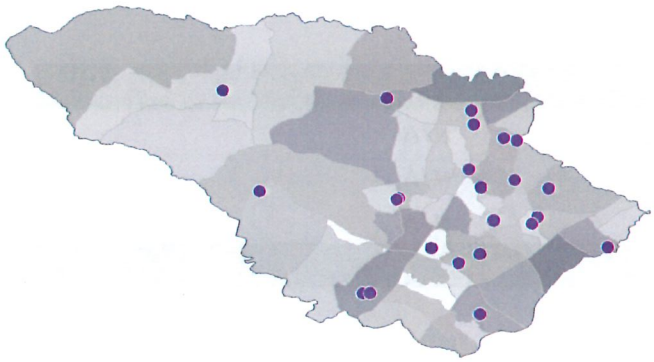


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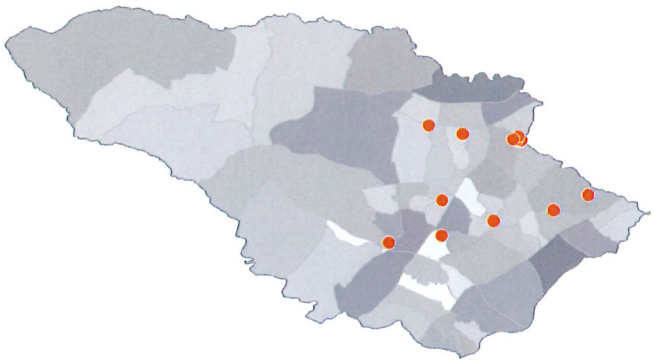
MAP 1.6 **GALLERY ASSETS**



MAP 1.7 **MAKERSPACE & STUDIO ASSETS**



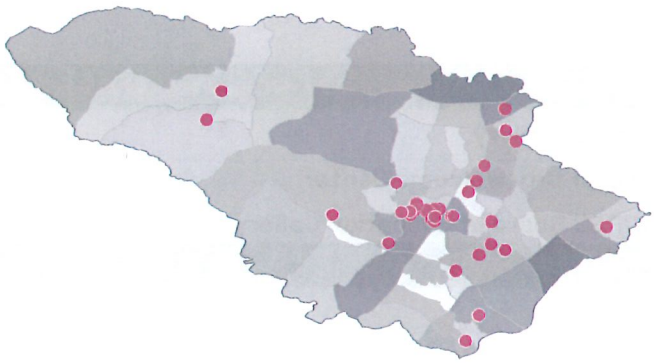
MAP 1.8 **MUSEUM & HERITAGE ASSETS**



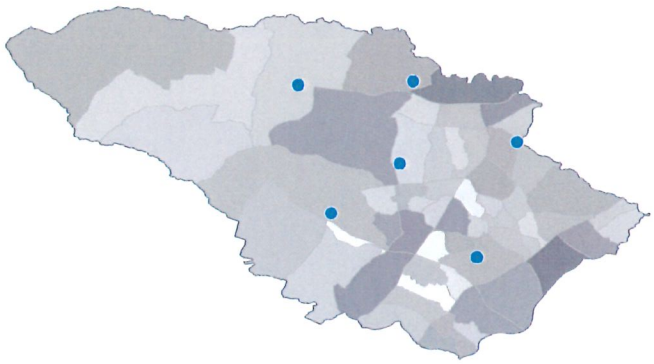
MAP 1.9 **PERFORMANCE SPACE ASSETS**



MAP 1.10 **PUBLIC ART ASSETS**



MAP 1.11 **OTHER ASSETS**



ARTS EDUCATION ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
Artipre	21042	N/A
Backstage Dance Studio	21046	N/A
Columbia School of Music	21045	4 studios
Damon Forman Music Academy	21738	Recording studio, 12 studios
Joyful Motion	20763	4 rooms
Kinetics Dance Theater School of Contemporary Dance	21042	4 studios
Maryland Music Academy	21045	8 studios, class + performance studio
Oakland Mills High School	21045	Art room, music room
One for All Dance Academy	21046	N/A
Roberson School of Music	21045	6 rooms
Rockburn Elementary School	21075	N/A
School of Rock	21045	N/A
Teelin Irish Dance	21045	N/A

GALLERY ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
Artists' Gallery	21043	N/A
Ellicott City Welcome Center	21043	N/A
HCPSS Board of Education Gallery	21042	N/A

COMMUNITY SPACE ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
Howard County Performing Arts Center	21044	200-seat children's theatre, 1,600 sqft art gallery, 200 seat black box theatre, 800 sqft
Central Branch - HCLS	21044	N/A
Dorsey's Search Village Center	21042	Activity Rooms
East Columbia 50+ Senior Center	21045	N/A
East Columbia Branch - HCLS	21045	N/A
Elkridge 50+ Center	21075	N/A
Elkridge Branch - HCLS	21075	N/A
Ellicott City Colored School	21043	N/A
Ellicott City Senior Center	21042	Arts and crafts room, exercise room, great room
Glenwood Branch - HCLS	21723	N/A
Harriet Tubman Cultural Center	21044	N/A
HCC Hickory Building	21044	Kitchen, rooms
Heritage Orientation Center	21043	N/A
Hickory Ridge Village Center	21044	Activity rooms
Howard County Center for the Arts	21043*	100 Seat theater, 2,000 sq. ft ofgallery space, 17 art studios, dance studio, 3 classrooms
Kings Contrivance Village Center	21046	Activity rooms
Long Reach Village Center	21045	Dance studio, activity rooms
Miller Branch - HCLS	21042	N/A
North Laurel Community Center	20723	Kitchen, Patuxent Arts + Crafts Studio, Stone Lake Dance Studio
Oakland Mills Village Center	21045	Gallery, activity rooms
Owen Brown Village Center	21045	Activity rooms
Pue-Fulton Farm House Museum	21043	N/A
Residences at Vantage Point in Columbia	21044	N/A
Ridgely's Run Community Center	20794	N/A
River Hill Villlage Center	21029	Activity rooms
Roger Carter Recreation Center	21043	N/A
Savage Branch - HCLS	20723	N/A
Savage Mill	20763	N/A
The 3rd	21044	N/A
Town Center Villlage Center: Oakland	21043	Activity rooms
Wilde Lake Village Center	21044	Activity rooms
Y of Central Maryland	21043	N/A
Yingling-Ridgely VFW & Auxiliary Post 7472	21043	N/A

MAKERSPACE ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
AR Workshop Columbia MD	21075	4 dance Studios
Arabesque Dance Studio	21045	2 ballrooms
Arthur Murray Dance Center	21045	N/A
Atholton Elementary School: Art Room	21046	Activity room, community room, craft room, meeting room, woodshop
Bain Center	21044	N/A
Bead Soup	20763	N/A
Bellows Spring Elementary School: Art Room	21043	N/A
Bill Knapp Sculpture and Fine Furnishings	21043	N/A
Clayground	21043	Glass and jewelry studio (2 classrooms), clay studio with wheels and glazing room,
Columbia Art Center: Glass and Jewelry Studio	21045	N/A
Doodle Hatch	21045	Art room, recreation activity room, stage
Fulton Elementary	20759	Arts + crafts room, kitchen, multi-purpose room
Gary J Arthur Community Center	21723	N/A
Greenbridge Pottery	21036	Art room
Ilchester Elementary School	21043	25 studios
Mike's Music Inc	21043	2 studios
Misako Ballet Studio	21044	3 studios
Music + Arts Studio	21042	2 studios
Olenka School or Music	21046	2 studios
Patuxent Youth Ballet	21042	N/A
Pinot's Palette	21042	N/A
Red Bridge Studios	20763	Art room, music room
St. John's Lane Elementary School	21042	4 studios
Studio Dans	20759	2 studios
Turning Pointe Dance Academy	21076	N/A

OTHER ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
Backwater Books & Bibliopub	21043	N/A
Howard County Fairgrounds	21794	N/A
Howard County Nature Conservancy	21163	N/A
Manor Hill Brewing	21042	N/A
Nest	21029	N/A
Queen Takes Book	21045	N/A

MUSEUM & HERITAGE ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
African Art Museum of Maryland	21045	N/A
B&O Ellicott City Station Museum	21043	N/A
Belmont Manor - HC Conservancy at Belmont	21075	N/A
Columbia Archives	21046	N/A
Ellicott Mills Children's Museum	21043	N/A
Firehouse Museum	21043	N/A
Howard Co. Historical Society Museum	21042	N/A
Howard County Center of African American Culture	21044	N/A
Museum of Howard County History	21043	N/A
National Road Mile Marker	21043	N/A
National Road Mile Marker 14	21042	N/A
Old Ellicott City Courthouse	21043	N/A
PFI Historic Park	21043	N/A
Robinson Nature Center	21044	2 classrooms
Rockburn Branch Park Heritage Site	21075	N/A
Thomas Isaac Log Cabin	21043	N/A

PERFORMANCE SPACE ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
Atholton High School	21044	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
B Funk Dance Company	21042	4 studios
Bus Boys and Poets	21044	Stage
Carroll Baldwin Hall	20763	Stage, activity rooms
Centennial High School	21042	Art rooms, theater, activity space
Centennial Park Amphitheater	21042	N/A
Christ Episcopole Church	21045	Performance space
Chrysallis Stage	21044	N/A
Clarksville Commons Shopping Center	21029	N/A
Color Burst Park and Stage	21044	Stage
Columbia Lakefront Stage	21044	N/A
Dance Connections, Inc	21043	3 studios
Drama Learning Center	21045	Rehearsal room, theater

PERFORMANCE SPACE ASSETS CONT.

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
First Evangelical Lutheran Church	21042	Performance space
Glen Mar United Methodist Church	21043	N/A
Glenelg County School: Muliz Theater	21042	N/A
Glenelg High School	21737	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Guilford Park High School	20794	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Hammond High School	21046	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Harpers Choice Village Center	21044	Dance studios, activity rooms
Howard High School	21043	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Let There Be Rock	21045	2 rooms
Lime Kiln Middle School	20759	N/A
Little Market Café Courtyard	21043	N/A
Long Reach High School	21045	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Marriets Ridge High School	21104	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Merriweather Post Pavilion	21044	19,319 seat amphitheater
Mount Hebron High School	21042	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Reservoir Hill High School	20759	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
River Hill High School	21029	Theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space
Slayton House	21044	Dance Studio, rehearsal room, gallery, theater (240 seats), Wilde Lake room,
St. John's Church	21044	Performance Space
That's Dancing Ballroom	20794	N/A
The Collective Encore	21044	N/A
The Wine Bin	21043	N/A
Toby's Dinner Theatre	21044	340-capacity indoor theatre
Wild Lake High School: Jim Rouse Theater	21044	Rouse theatre, black box theatre, art rooms, music rooms, rehearsal space

PUBLIC ART ASSETS

Location	Locale	Arts Spaces
ARTsites - Board of Education	21042	N/A
ARTsites - Clarksville Commons Shopping Center	21029	N/A
ARTsites - Gary J. Arthur Community Center	21723	N/A
ARTsites - George Howard Building	21043	N/A
ARTsites - Howard County Community College	21044	N/A
ARTsites - Johns Hopkins U Howard County Medical Center	21044	N/A
ARTsites - Merriweather Park at Symphony Woods	21044	N/A
ARTsites - N. Laurel Community Center	20723	N/A
ARTsites - Robinson Nature Center	21044	N/A
ARTsites - Savage Mill	20763	N/A
ARTsites - Slayton House, Wilde Lake Village Center	21045	N/A
ARTsites- COPT	21046	N/A
Lake Kittamaqundi	21044	N/A
Metropolitan Promenade	21044	N/A
Columbia Mall Plaza	21044	N/A
Merriweather District Parking Garage	21044	N/A
Merriweather Row Plaza	21044	N/A
10475 Little Patuxent Parkway	21044	N/A
Azlon (Anthony Howe sculpture), 6100 Merriweather Dr	21044	N/A
10101 Twin Rivers Road	21044	N/A
Gateway Corporate Park	21045	N/A
Oakland Mills Village Center	21045	N/A
Wilde Lake Village Center	21044	N/A
Snowden Center	21045	N/A
Long Reach Village Center	21045	N/A
Thunder Hill Elementary School	21045	N/A
9125 Guilford Road	21046	N/A
10901 Little Patuxent Pkwy	21044	N/A
10400 Cross Fox Ln	21044	N/A
Howard County Circuit Courthouse, Entrance	21043	N/A
3430 Courthouse Drive	21043	N/A
8225 Main St	21043	N/A
8510 High Ridge Road	21043	N/A
5001 Meadowbrook Lane	21043	N/A
8600 Foundry Street	20763	N/A

CURRENT APPLICABILITY OF 2015 STUDY FINDINGS

A 2015 Analysis by Webb Management identified a series of Venue Supply gaps in Howard County's cultural inventory, since then Howard County has seen the opening of several arts and cultural venues that have helped fill gaps identified in the 2015 analysis. The new Performing Arts Center in Downtown Columbia will act as a broader cultural hub to meet a range of visual and performing arts needs. Key community arts groups, Toby's Dinner Theatre, the Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts, and HoCo Arts has moved into the improved spaces, which can help expand their audiences and improve the visitor experience. HoCo Arts' relocation to the Historic Courthouse, now the Capitoline Center, will allow for more visual arts studio and exhibition capacity and serve as a central destination for arts and culture in Ellicott City. HoCo Arts' Long Reach Artist Studio Program, launched in 2020, and provided space for individual artist studios at the Village Center until 2026.

Many of the findings from the 2015 report hold true in 2026. Several of the dynamics that have persisted include the ongoing supply gap of small-scale venues, the limited (though improving) competitiveness of some Howard County venues compared to others in the region, the clustering of arts and culture venues in Columbia, the importance of public spaces and village centers in the arts landscape, and the ongoing lack of visual arts gallery spaces and small and mid-sized performing arts space in the county.

Statement	Applicability in 2026	Summary of Change Since 2015
Locally, there are gaps in the facility inventory for a high quality, small to mid-size performance space.	Still Applicable	Although new small to mid -size venues have been developed since 2015, the supply gap for these venues persists.
Regionally, there is an abundance of performance facilities covering a variety of capacities. Most of them have higher quality ratings than Howard County spaces.	Partially Applicable	While higher-rated regional competition still exists, investments in the Capitoline Center, Columbia's new Performing Arts Center, the Chyrsalis, and Merriweather Post Pavilion (for example) have leveled up the quality of some key venues.
The type, size, features and availability of existing facilities limit the level and quality of touring activity visiting Columbia and Howard County. While there is a good level of music and family programming, there is opportunity to present more theatre, dance and culturally specific performances.	Partially Applicable	National touring performances are still limited by the availability of venues in Howard County and there is still a good level of music and family programming. With the changes that have taken place, there is more potential to expand theatre, dance and cultural programming.
Columbia's performance facilities tend to be better outfitted than those in the rest of the County. Compared to regional facilities, however, they lag behind.	Partially Applicable	High-quality venues remain concentrated in Columbia. The new Performing Arts Center is well-positioned to help capture demand from regional competitors.
The majority of spaces used for performance were not built, nor are well-equipped, for live performance. They include galleries, churches, village centers, and parks.	Partially Applicable	Public spaces, village centers, and parks remain key sites for arts and culture in Howard County. These spaces provide unique and helpful elements for a thriving arts and culture landscape, but do not replace the need for purpose-built performance spaces. The new spaces at the Capitoline Center and the Performing Arts Center and the renovations at the popular Lakefront Stage will help support live performances.
There is limited gallery and exhibition space in the County.	Still Applicable	At least 2-3 new gallery spaces have been opened/relocated since 2015, but arts stakeholders expressed that the county still lacks sufficient high-quality spaces for the visual arts. Additionally, the redevelopment of Long Reach Village will displace the artist studio spaces and potentially DoodleHatch.
There is limited maker/studio space for artists and creative entrepreneurs to work and create. Existing facilities are limited in size, availability and function.	Partially Applicable	Two new library makerspace facilities have been created since 2015. Although there is still room to increase the supply of makerspaces, notable progress has been made.

Note: Chart above excludes core findings from 2015 analysis that are not directly related to supply growth, such as findings pertaining to arts education programming, historic resources, and space availability.



CHAPTER THREE
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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A COMMUNITY DEFINED VISION FOR ARTS & CULTURE 66
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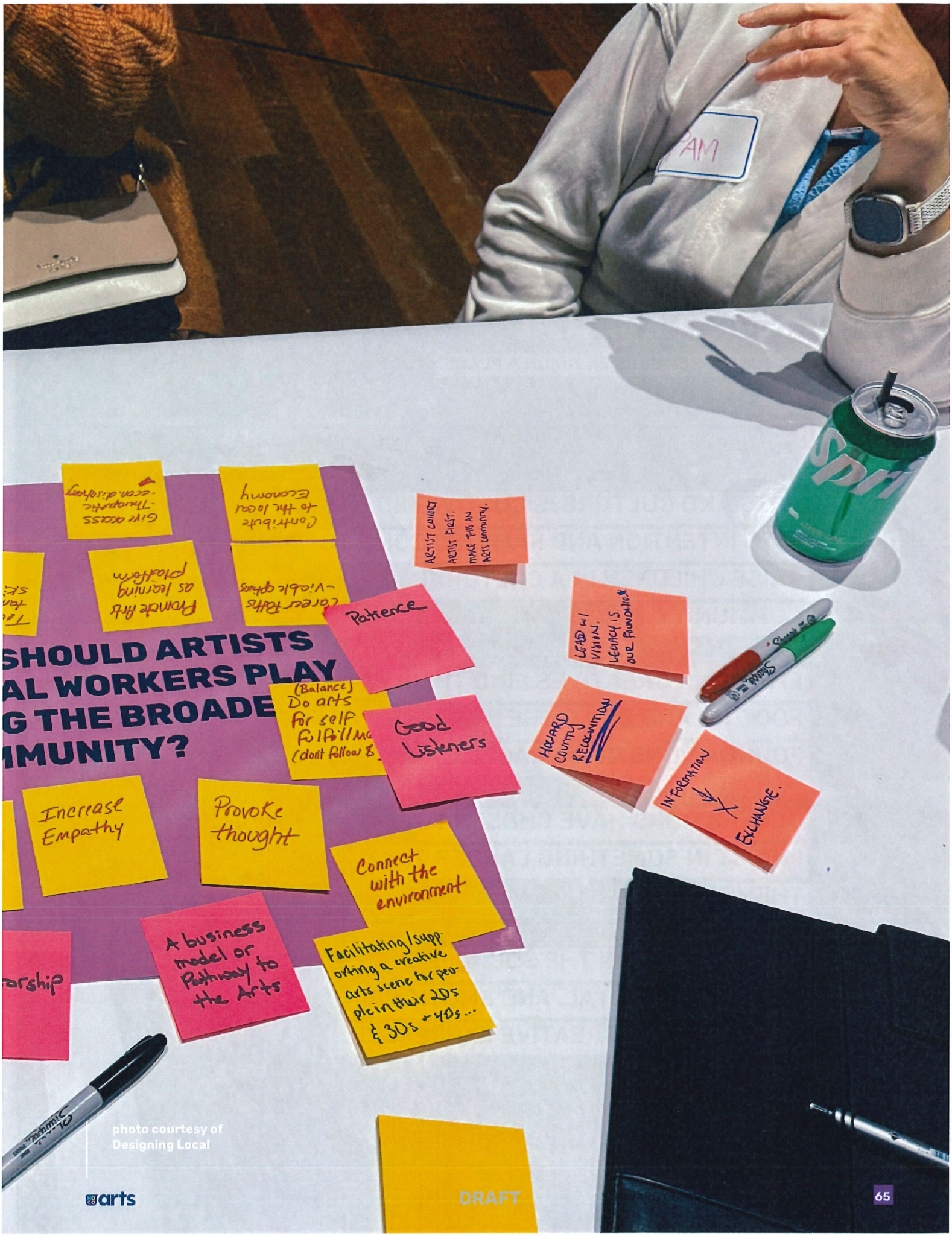
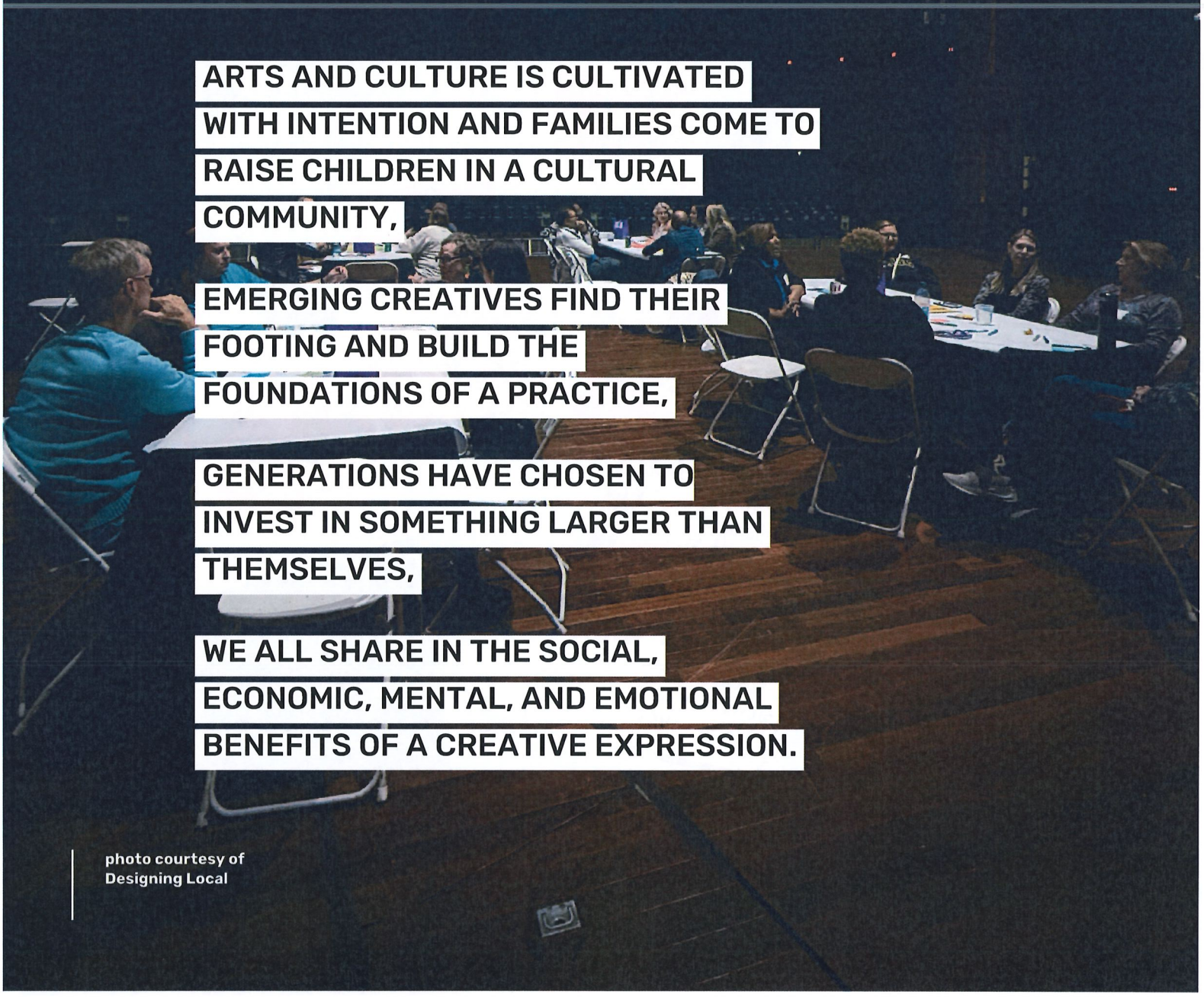


photo courtesy of
Designing Local

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

HOCO COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENVISION A PLACE

WHERE...



ARTS AND CULTURE IS CULTIVATED WITH INTENTION AND FAMILIES COME TO RAISE CHILDREN IN A CULTURAL COMMUNITY,

EMERGING CREATIVES FIND THEIR FOOTING AND BUILD THE FOUNDATIONS OF A PRACTICE,

GENERATIONS HAVE CHOSEN TO INVEST IN SOMETHING LARGER THAN THEMSELVES,

WE ALL SHARE IN THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF A CREATIVE EXPRESSION.

photo courtesy of Designing Local

Community Engagement

A COMMUNITY DEFINED VISION FOR ARTS & CULTURE

Howard County's Arts and Culture Master Plan takes its direction from the people who make up the county's creative life, including artists, cultural organizations, business and institutional partners, county staff, and residents across every part of Howard County. Rather than treating community input as a single early step, the planning team built a sustained, multi-format engagement process that ran across the full length of the planning effort, giving residents and stakeholders many different ways to shape the plan's direction as it developed.

What emerged from that process was a clear and consistent picture.

Residents and stakeholders described wanting arts and culture woven into everyday life, not limited to flagship events or concentrated in a single part of the county, and they value routine, recurring experiences that build habits and belonging over one-off events. Community members spoke of choosing Howard County for its location, its quality of life, and its creative community, while asking for the direct investment, spaces, and resources to allow them to develop to grow their creative spirits in community.

Stakeholders envisioned a Howard County recognized regionally for its arts, a place where artists choose to live and visitors choose to experience the county's culture directly, built on the strong local foundation already in place. Cultural groups asked that this vision include their communities on each group's own terms, with shared visibility rather than blended, generalized programming.

This plan is Howard County's answer to that community-defined vision.

Community Engagement Report

ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

Howard County's engagement process combined individual conversations, small-group dialogue, and large-format public events, each designed to reach a different segment of the county's creative community. Formats included stakeholder interviews, affinity-based conversations, creative community convenings, an artist cohort series, workshops with county and cultural leaders and change-makers, and a countywide communications and mini-grant effort that put engagement tools directly into the hands of local artists and creatives.

The following methods were used to engage with Howard County community members around the content of this plan.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The planning process and the development of all plan content was guided by the Steering Committee, composed of 31 local leaders and County staff across a variety of perspectives and backgrounds. The Steering Committee met 8 times over the course of 18-months to provide their input.

Alongside receiving updates regarding the plan's process and outcomes, the Steering Committee members were engaged through deep dive discussions and live-polling sessions during their meetings. The types of prompts utilized during these meetings explored topics of:

- **County cultural identity.** Members discussed how they would characterize Howard County's culture and what they valued most about being part of the county, reflecting on both its strengths and its untapped potential.
- **Aspirations for the sector.** Members considered how arts and culture should feel and where the county should focus growth effort across festivals and markets, performing arts, visual arts, public art, literary arts, and cultural and heritage experiences, weighing both effort and impact.
- **Directional priorities for the plan.** Members weighed targeted investment in emerging artists, marketing and communications and engagement as an opportunity area, a formal arts group that meets regularly, routine programming that builds community and audience, and progressive arts education that helps artists advance.
- **Barriers to implementation**. Members ranked the obstacles organizations face, placing funding and financial limitations first, followed by capacity and staffing, then competing priorities.
- **Audience development.** Members envisioned what the county would look like if the plan addressed audience development and proposed specific tactics, including centralized marketing, multigenerational classes, ticket-sharing across organizations, tiered pricing, transportation partnerships, greater use of county-owned spaces, and the development of more spaces.
- **Goals for the planning process.** Members shared what they hoped to learn and what they hoped the process would teach the wider community.

ARTIST COHORT

A separate Artist Cohort, composed of 12 local creatives, provided ongoing input into the plan from the perspective of working artists. The Artist Cohort's engagement ran across three sessions, some virtual and some in person, that gave the cohort ongoing opportunities to review plan materials and provide input as they were developed. Topics explored during these conversations included:

- **Envisioning a fully realized creative community.** Members discussed what their lived experience would look like if the county's artist community reached its full potential, including the opportunities and resources that would be available to them and to the wider community.
- **Howard County as a destination for their art form.** Members explored what the county would look like if it became the

- describing what that would mean in practice.
- **Questions this plan should explore.** Members considered what questions the planning process needed to pursue and who it needed to reach to find the answers.
- **Aspirations for the creative community.** Members reflected on what they would change about or bring to the creative community if they could. Members supported the planning team in developing talking points to open the broader community convenings, drawing on their perspective as working artists.

OPEN HOUSES & COMMUNITY CONVENINGS

State of the HoCo Creative Community, held October 8, 2025 on the stage of Merriweather Post Pavilion, invited residents to share their vision for the next ten years of arts and culture in Howard County. The evening gathering ran from 6 to 8pm and was organized around stations placed throughout the space, with small-group conversations occurring in each zone and a drop box available for ideas and thoughts. The convening drew 30 attendees and opened with talking points developed by the Artist Cohort the day before. The types of prompts utilized during this convening included:

- What cultural traditions and practices do we need to uplift and protect?
- What challenges do we need to overcome together to make creativity more accessible to all?
- If you had one bold wish for the creative future of Howard County, what would it be?
- What role should artists and cultural workers play in shaping the broader community?

Public engagement culminated in a final community open house, held July 23, 2026 at the Capitoline Center across two sessions, giving residents a chance to react to the plan's Big Ideas and help identify priorities for implementation before the plan moved into final production and submission to the County Council. The two sessions together drew 40 attendees.



photo courtesy of Designing Local

Stakeholder Interviews

One-on-one interviews were held virtually with 35 local stakeholders, including artists and other creatives, arts and culture organization staff and volunteers, County staff, school district leaders, tourism and marketing professionals, small business owners, and others. The types of prompts utilized during these interviews included:

- **Relationship with arts and culture.** Interviewees discussed their own connection to arts and culture in Howard County and how they perceive the sector as it stands today.
- **Community engagement.** Interviewees reflected on how residents of Howard County are best reached and drawn into arts and culture.
- **Opportunities and challenges.** Interviewees explored the biggest opportunities and obstacles facing arts and culture locally, and what arts and culture leaders, funders, and local government could do to meet them.
- **Lessons from other communities.** Interviewees considered what they had seen work in other communities that Howard County might learn from or adapt.
- **Vision for the sector.** Interviewees shared their vision for the future of arts and culture in the county and what they would want it to become.

FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

- **Government and institutional support.** Strong, comparatively rare county and state commitment to the arts, with a well-regarded, independent Arts Council and a supportive County Executive; funding does remain fragile and exposed to state and federal cuts.
- **Leadership and governance.** Arts Council staff widely praised as well-run; elsewhere, organizations tend to protect their own turf, with entrenched leaders resistant to merging, aging boards, and little succession planning.
- **Facilities and space.** Genuine excitement about the Capitoline Center and upcoming Performing Arts Center as a long-awaited anchors and beacons for the county; existing space is more mixed, with one oversaturated large venue and few mid-size options.
- **Artistic quality and ambition.** Professional-caliber work already exists locally, including Merriweather's touring acts, a professional dance company unique in the state, and record-setting community theater; interviewees still see room to push toward more ambitious, less risk-averse programming.
- **Communication and visibility.** Robust, well-attended offerings across the county; awareness remains the bottleneck, with repeated attempts at a working central calendar and small organizations that can't yet reach beyond their existing audiences
- **Diversity and representation.** The county's diversity is real and genuinely valued as a strength; leadership and programming have room to grow to reflect it fully, with some communities still feeling underrepresented in decision-making.
- **Education and youth pipeline.** Nationally strong school arts programs, including early instrument selection and competitive marching bands; the opportunity gap widens after graduation, when affordability and options drop off.
- **Funding and philanthropy.** Government funding is a genuine strength relative to peer counties; corporate and philanthropic giving has room to grow to match the county's wealth, and smaller organizations could use more fundraising capacity. Interviewees described small organizations lacking staff or expertise to cultivate corporate sponsors or major donors, with wealthy residents' capacity not translating into giving, and government funding filling a gap that private philanthropy has not.
- **Reliance on volunteer and part-time leadership.** Several organizations are run by unpaid or part-time staff and volunteer boards, limiting capacity for outreach, fundraising, and strategic planning even where the artistic program itself is strong.
- **Tension between arts as subsidized community infrastructure and arts as commercial entertainment.** Interviewees distinguished between community-rooted, often nonprofit "arts and culture" and larger, revenue-driven "entertainment" venues, with some describing friction over which model the plan and county funding should prioritize.
- **Underrepresentation of specific cultural and religious communities in leadership and programming**. Interviewees described artists of color rarely able to sustain full-time careers locally, arts leadership as still predominantly white, and specific communities, including Muslim and immigrant communities, feeling absent from both programming and decision-making.

Discipline-Based Focus Groups

A series of virtual focus groups, held in September 2025 gave practitioners across artistic disciplines a chance to speak directly to their art form's specific needs. Each topic was offered in both a daytime and an evening session to accommodate different schedules. Sessions covered Theater, Visual Arts, Music & Dance, Events & Community Gathering, and Literary Arts, representing the full scope of discipline-based conversations offered as part of this engagement effort. Prompts that guided each session included the following questions, all groups ended on one question:

"If you had one bold wish for Howard County's cultural future, what would it be?"

Theater

- What stories are uniquely "ours" that should be told on local stages?
- What are the biggest barriers to producing, directing, or performing theater here?
- How can theater spaces (traditional or nontraditional) be better utilized?
- What opportunities exist for collaboration between theater groups, schools, and community organizations?
- What kind of support (funding, facilities, audience development) would make the biggest impact?

Visual Arts

- What role does visual art play in shaping the identity of our community?
- What challenges do visual artists face in accessing studios, galleries, or funding?
- How can we expand visibility and opportunities for local artists?
- What role could the county (or partners) play in providing space or resources?
- What would a sustainable visual arts ecosystem look like here in 5–10 years?

Music & Dance

- How do music and dance currently connect people in our community?
- What's missing — venues, rehearsal spaces, teaching opportunities, audiences?
- How do artists balance performance, teaching, and creation, and where are the gaps in support?
- What cultural traditions in music and dance should be preserved and celebrated?
- If you could imagine a "next level" for music and dance locally, what would it look like?

Literary Arts

- What role does writing (poetry, fiction, nonfiction, spoken word) play in shaping the identity of our community?
- What are the biggest barriers writers face in creating, publishing, or sharing their work here?
- How can access to spaces (libraries, bookstores, schools, community venues) be expanded to support writing and storytelling?
- What opportunities exist for collaboration among writers, publishers, educators, and cultural groups?
- What would a sustainable literary arts ecosystem look like here in 5–10 years?

Events & Community Gathering

- What makes a community gathering or event feel truly successful here?
- What barriers prevent events from being inclusive or widely attended?
- How can existing spaces (parks, plazas, downtown streets, etc.) be better used for gatherings?
- What's missing from the current festival and event landscape?
- What role should arts and culture play in fostering stronger community connections through events?

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

- **Audience development.** Nearly every session named building and sustaining audiences as the single highest-impact priority. Participants pointed to aging audiences limiting programming, the challenge of getting people to show up even when opportunities exist, and the idea that a recurrent audience builds community cohesion. Several tied audience development directly to the sector's long-term health, with contributors noting that audience development ultimately drives creative workforce development.
- **Spaces and facilities.** Practitioners across disciplines described a shortage of appropriate, accessible venues for rehearsing, creating, and performing. Theater participants raised limited traditional space and the potential of school auditoriums, amphitheaters, and new black box theaters, while flagging western Howard County as an arts desert. Dance participants were specific about the gap of a well-suited mid-size venue with adequate wing space for dance performances.
- **Funding and direct investment in artists.** Groups consistently cited inconsistent funding as a core barrier, including grant funding, covering payroll and production costs while keeping tickets affordable, and staffing capacity for programs. Visual and literary artists in particular asked for more direct support to individual artists and a dedicated resource to help them navigate the business side of their practice.
- **Visibility, coordinated promotion, and arts-destination identity.** Participants repeatedly described a disconnect between what organizations offer and what the community knows about, and asked for coordinated promotion, a consolidated events calendar, and stronger social media. This connected to a shared aspiration to position Howard County, Ellicott City, or Columbia as a recognized arts destination.
- **Collaboration and cross-sector networks.** Across disciplines, participants described their communities as siloed and wanted structured ways to connect, including county-wide meet-ups, an artist and organization directory, and shared convening space. Theater was framed as inherently collaborative and well positioned to bring other art forms together, and dance participants saw untapped potential in linking dancers with local musicians and composers.

Affinity Group Conversations

Affinity group conversations were offered in person for groups to better understand opportunities and desires for this plan to meet the needs of the multitude of communities in Howard County. Conversations were held with Black, Latino/Hispanic, AAPI, and LGBTQIA+ affinity groups, during the week of October 6, 2025. Ambassador hosts from within each community helped extend invitations and offered welcoming, familiar spaces for these conversations.

Each session opened with a group-specific theme question exploring what is unknown or misunderstood about that community in Howard County, and what separates it from the county's other cultural communities and why. The types of prompts utilized during these conversations included:

- What role does arts and culture play in your daily life and community connections?
- What cultural traditions or practices do you want to see preserved and celebrated here?
- What barriers exist for your community in accessing or participating in creative activities?
- How can the County (or partners) better support your cultural expression and visibility?
- What kinds of spaces, events, or programs would make you feel more at home and represented?
- What does a thriving creative future look like for your community in Howard County?

In-person affinity group conversations reached 72 participants across the AAPI, Black, Latino, and LGBTQIA+ communities. Findings that emerged are showcased on the following page.

FINDINGS FROM AFFINITY GROUP SESSIONS

- **Power, representation, and decision-making access.** Across the affinity groups, there's a consistent ask to be included in real governance and cultural decision-making, not just program participation. This shows up as wanting a seat at the table, "not about us without us," and leadership with real influence to champion each community.
- **Trust gaps between institutions and communities.** Each group described a pattern of institutions offering initial support that later fades, cancels, or goes uncommunicated, with several groups linking this to shifting political and funding climates around DEI.
- **Structural barriers to participation.** All three groups pointed to barriers that are economic and institutional rather than cultural: funding inequity, language access, cost, time, transportation, and gatekeeping by institutions.
- **Cultural expression as wellness and belonging.** Each group framed arts and culture as essential to community wellbeing, from safe healing spaces and mental health integration to cultural celebration as affirmation, to art as emotional regulation.
- **Demand for cultural space and communication infrastructure.** Every group asked for accessible, culturally safe physical space (third spaces, multi-use cultural hubs) alongside better, more coordinated ways to learn about what's happening, including centralized and multilingual outreach.
- **Balance between intracultural identity and intercultural collaboration.** A desire for room to celebrate distinct cultural identity on its own terms while also participating in broader cross-cultural collaboration, rather than being folded into generalized "multicultural" programming.
- **Youth engagement and intergenerational knowledge transfer.** Arts participation tied to cultural continuity across generations, including mentorship, identity-building, and passing down knowledge and tradition.
- **Communication infrastructure gaps.** Difficulty simply learning what's happening, ranging from inconvenience to a felt sense of being overlooked, pointing to a need for centralized, trusted outreach.
- **Cultural labor sustainability and burnout.** Community cultural leaders and artists stretched thin, with concern that cultural work is becoming underfunded, understaffed, or performative under pressure.

Community Survey

A nonscientific survey to discern the community's arts and culture-related preferences — available in English, Chinese, Spanish, and Korean — was available from spring 2025 through the end of the year. It was promoted on social media and through the county's email network, as well as on handouts with a QR code linking to the plan website. Ultimately, the survey received 720 responses.

A follow-up survey detailing the plan's outcomes was released in July 2026 and remained open through mid-August, this survey received 49 responses.

I FEEL THE QUALITY OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE THROUGHOUT HOWARD COUNTY IS THRIVING.



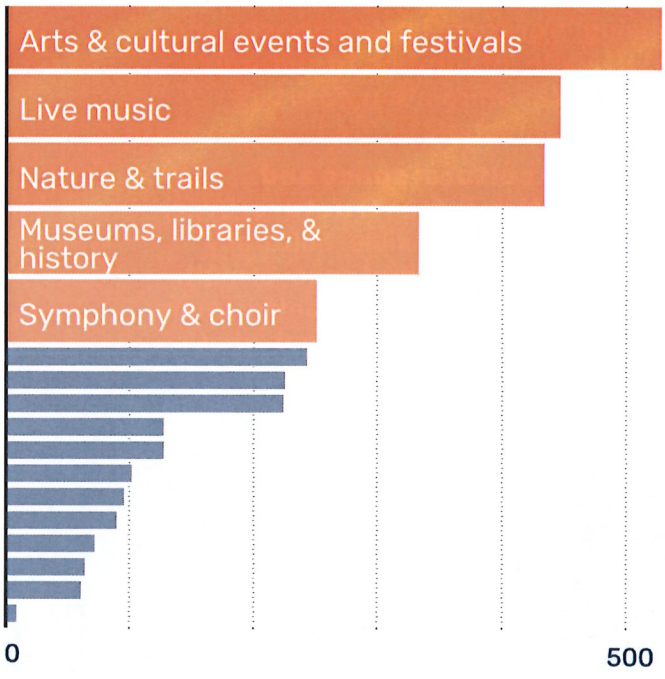
I FEEL THAT ARTS AND CULTURE THROUGHOUT HOWARD COUNTY REFLECTS THE COMMUNITY THAT LIVES HERE.



IF THERE WAS MORE SUPPORT FOR ARTS AND CULTURE, HOWARD COUNTY WOULD BE A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE.



WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE HALLMARKS (STRENGTHS) OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN HOWARD COUNTY?



DRAFT

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN HOWARD COUNTY?

LIVE MUSIC EVENTS

Merriweather Post Pavilion
Columbia Orchestra
Summer Lake concerts

170 mentions

#1

CULTURAL FESTIVALS & CELEBRATIONS

Columbia Festival of the Arts
Books in Bloom
Pride Festivals
Heritage Festivals
Wine In The Woods

145 mentions

#2

PERFORMING ARTS

Toby's Dinner Theater
Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts
Drama Learning Center

134 mentions

#3

ART EXHIBITIONS & GALLERIES

82 mentions

#4

COMMUNITY SURVEY SENTIMENTS

"We have a vibrant arts community, but could do more to reach beyond that community to position Howard as an arts destination."

"Being a member of a large musical organization, our largest problems are facilities for rehearsals and concerts. There are multiple musical organizations in the county that could work together if they had access to a location that was appropriate."

"I know that MUCH is going on free or nominal cost. What I find difficult is to know what and when something is taking place. There is no centralized listing of events. One has to go to too many websites or receive too much e-mail to be on various websites."

"As a newer artist I bumped into the arts program by accident. Other institutions advertise more. I'm still not entirely clear about what Howard County offers me. I've sought to be in shows in Montgomery, Baltimore and Annapolis because finding the resources is centralized with the organizations there."

"Artists have a need for affordable studios and places [to] come together to work collaboratively."

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE HOWARD COUNTY'S KEY ARTS AND CULTURAL ASSETS?

MERRIWEATHER POST PAVILION
75 mentions
#1

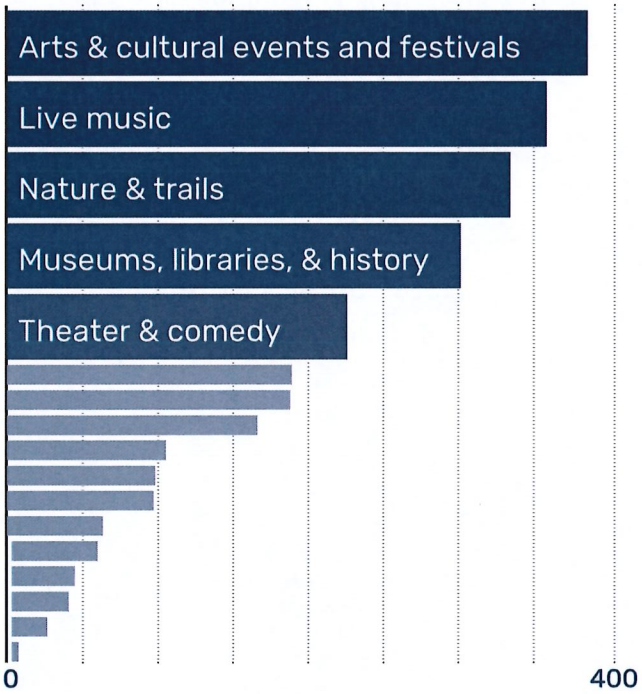
HOCO LIBRARY SYSTEM
50 mentions
#2

TOBY'S DINNER THEATRE
45 mentions
#3

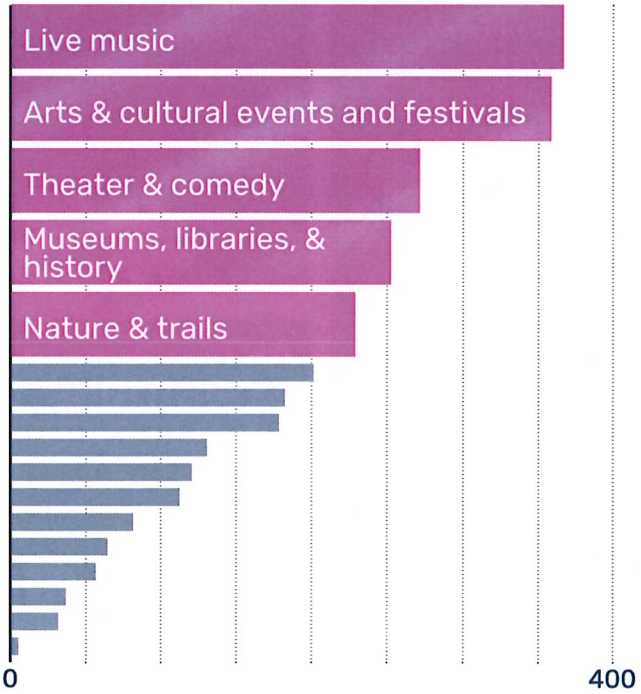
HOCO ARTS CENTER FOR THE ARTS
34 mentions
#4

HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
27 mentions
#5

WITHIN A TYPICAL YEAR, WHICH OF THESE ARTS AND CULTURE EXPERIENCES DO YOU PRIORITIZE WHEN IT COMES TO FINANCIAL SPENDING?



WITHIN A TYPICAL YEAR, WHICH ARTS AND CULTURE EXPERIENCES DO YOU AND/OR YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY MOST FREQUENTLY INVEST TIME IN?

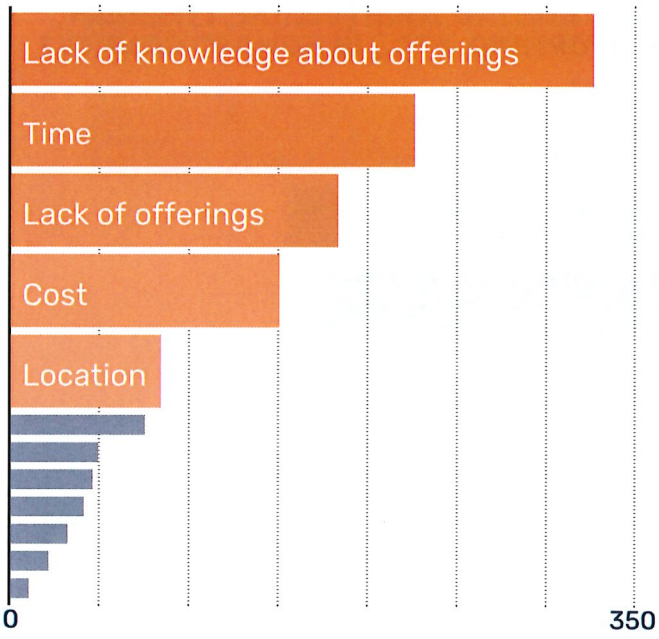


DRAFT

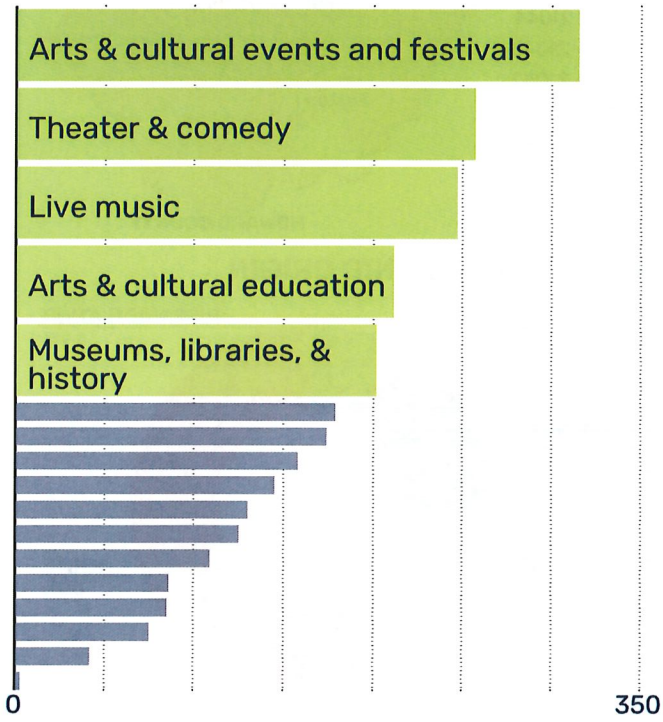
WHICH OF THESE **MOTIVATIONS** FOR EXPERIENCING THE ARTS DO YOU MOST STRONGLY ALIGN WITH?



WHAT **BARRIERS PREVENT YOU** FROM PARTICIPATING IN ARTS AND CULTURE ACTIVITIES WITHIN HOWARD COUNTY?



WHAT ARTS AND CULTURE ACTIVITIES DO YOU **WANT MORE OF** IN HOWARD COUNTY?

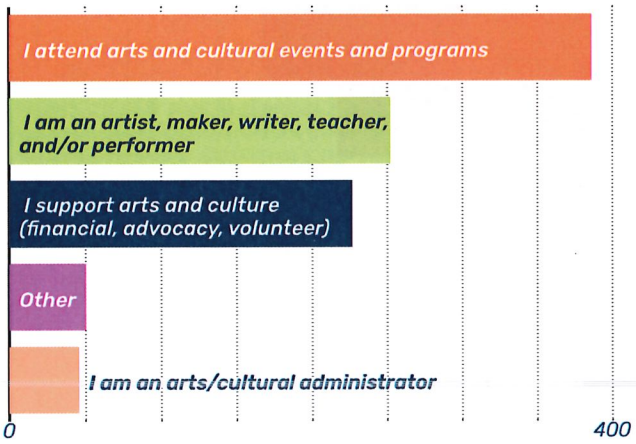


WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE **THE GREATEST NEEDS** FOR ARTS AND CULTURE IN HOWARD COUNTY?

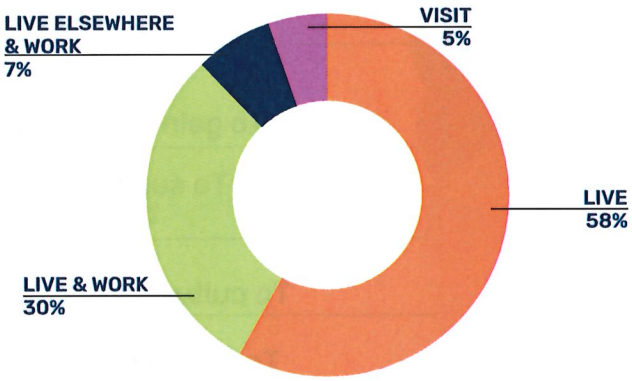


WHO WE HEARD FROM

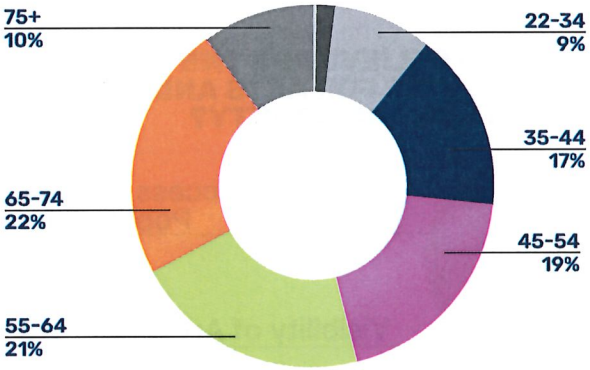
WHAT IS YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ARTS AND CULTURE (VISUAL, LITERARY, PERFORMING, ETC.) IN HOWARD COUNTY?



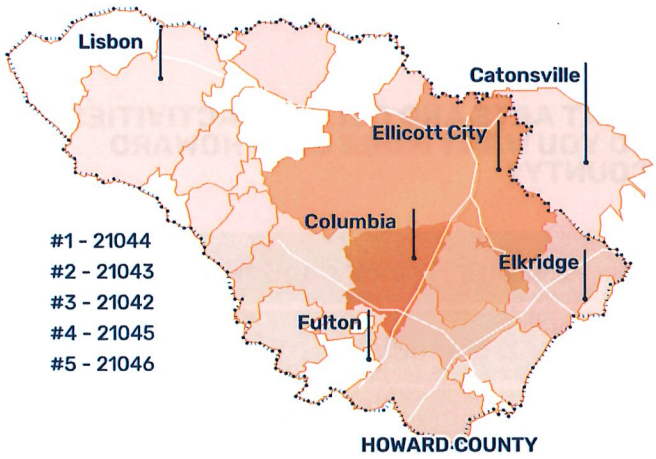
WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO HOWARD COUNTY?



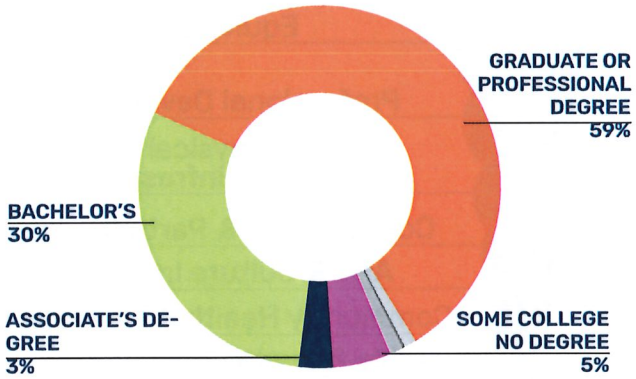
AGE



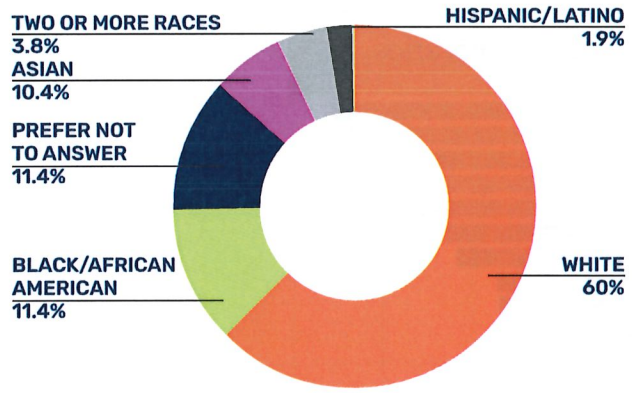
WHAT IS YOUR ZIP CODE?



LEVEL OF EDUCATION



RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN





"ANY COMMUNITY THAT RESPECTS THE ARTS IS A THRIVING COMMUNITY."

- SURVEY RESPONDENT

ENGAGEMENT THEMES



1 AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The core ask was for routine, habitual arts experiences that build belonging rather than one-off events. Stakeholders explicitly said attendance and presence matter as much as financial support. There was also a strong call for cross-disciplinary programming that expands audience reach collectively rather than having disciplines compete for the same limited space and peak scheduling windows. Tactics should address the core needs of:

- Awareness
- Limited communications networks
- Attention span strain
- Audience cannibalization
- Limited volunteers/audience participation and engagement
- Stretched donor bases
- Calls for audience diversification



2 ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS

Stakeholders want direct investment in artists as small business operators such as marketing, nonprofit management, creative entrepreneurship. The pilot individual artist grant structure rotating by discipline was flagged as a gap; artists want consistent, annual discipline-specific support. There was also a clear desire to embed the arts into healthcare, tech, and innovation sectors as career pathways. Tactics should address the core needs of:

- Lack of direct and predictable investment in artists as professionals
- Disconnect between arts education (available locally) and sustainable local employment (in the arts)
- Limited sequential learning opportunities outside of formal higher ed programs
- Limited technical assistance for artists and arts organizations, including financial & business training
- Missed opportunities to integrate artists into other sectors, such as science and healthcare



3 SPACES + PLACES

The requests were specific: a cultural spaces directory showing which venues accept outside booking, geographically dispersed programming across the whole county, and visible evidence of creativity in the built environment including artist workforce housing, small-scale supportive spaces for organizations and independent artists, and a highly visible public art program. Tactics should address the core needs of:

- Scheduling and space scarcity concerns
- Gaps in the cultural infrastructure: flexible, low/no-cost spaces (including non-traditional spaces)
- Activation and visibility of the arts in public, including creative placemaking
- Cultivation of arts districts to leverage their economic potential
- Reducing barriers to creation and presentation associated with issues of space size, scale, cost, and location



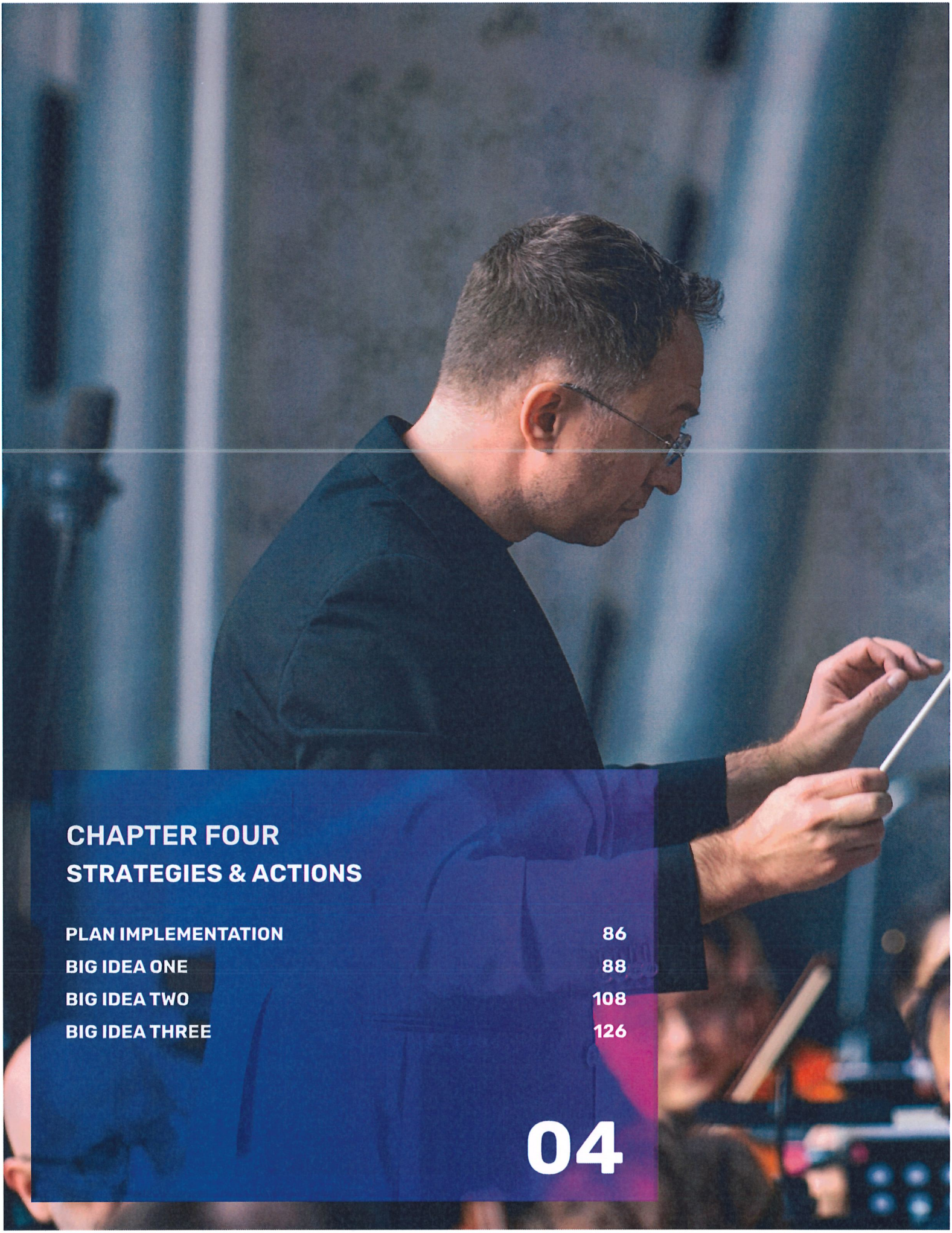
4 INCLUSION, BELONGING, + CULTURAL IDENTITY

Two tensions sit in this theme.

The first is generational: younger and emerging artists in their 20s and 30s feel locked out of leadership and planning structures, and there is friction between the long-standing cultural bearers and the next generation around legacy and vision.

The second is cultural: multicultural re-branding of heritage events was named as a frustration — groups want their own cultural identity centered and visible on their own terms, not blended into a generic multicultural umbrella, but still are enthusiastic in their desire to provide welcoming cultural experiences to the entire community. Tactics should address the core needs of:

- Underrepresentation and misrepresentation of communities in programming and decision-making
- Safeguarding the cultural expression of individual communities while welcoming the broader community into heritage celebrations and
- Leveraging shared cultural spaces, places of worship, and cultural centers as gateways to community connection
- Empowering the next generation of creatives to lead



CHAPTER FOUR
STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION	86
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04

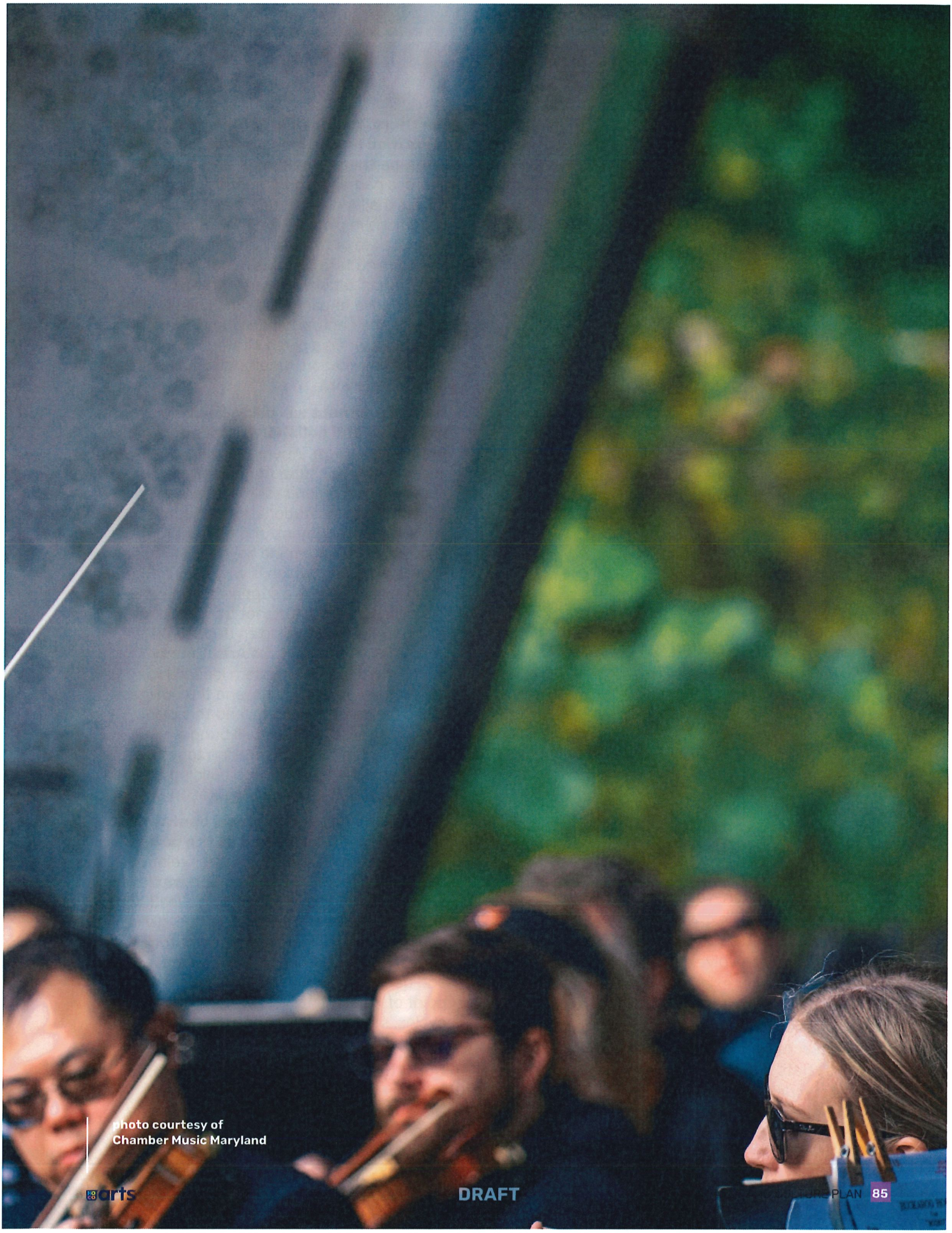


photo courtesy of
Chamber Music Maryland

Plan Implementation

On its face, this plan is narrowly concerned with Howard County's arts and culture infrastructure. But in a thriving community, arts and culture infuse all aspects of community life and are employed with intention to advance goals ranging from mental health to civic participation, crime reduction, economic development, youth empowerment, and more. Howard County has experienced such benefits from its arts and culture investments to date and is now poised, through plan implementation, to deepen its commitment to the community's creative expression and appreciation.

Effectively doing so will require a full community effort that extends beyond the typical partners into new relationships and collaborative structures that enable a shared burden of work. Those at the County and HoCo Arts who spearheaded this plan will continue to drive implementation efforts and facilitate collaboration among partners, but no single partner is positioned to implement the entirety of this plan's vision on their own, which is why a truly collaborative effort will be required to ensure success for the future of arts and culture.

ASSUMPTIONS

This plan cannot fully predict the entirety of future scopes, economic conditions, availability of resources, or the status of new or existing organizations. Recommendations in this plan reflect conditions and information available at the time of adoption. Actual implementation will depend on economic and funding conditions that shift over the plan's ten-year horizon, resources and capacity that may expand or contract, and organizations named as partners throughout this plan that may grow, evolve, consolidate, or in some cases no longer exist by the time a given strategy is ready to move forward. Implementation should proceed with this uncertainty in mind, adapting to actual conditions rather than treating this plan's strategies as fixed. This plan is built on a set of working assumptions about how implementation will unfold, including:

- **Partners, timing, and funding avenues identified in this plan are not fixed.** The leads, partners, timeframes, and funding sources named throughout this plan reflect the landscape, relationships, and conditions in place at the time of adoption. Over the life of this plan, new partners may emerge and take on roles not anticipated here, organizations named in this plan may choose to participate at a level that reflects their actual capacity and available resources when a given strategy is ready for implementation, timeframes may shift as conditions evolve.
- **Named partners will bring their own expertise and collaborate throughout implementation.** Where this plan identifies a lead partner or supporting partner, it assumes that organization or agency will apply its own institutional knowledge, professional judgment, and operational experience to determine how a given action is best executed, which is why they have been invited to play a supporting role; this is a collaborative effort, not transactional. Many strategies in this plan depend on coordination across HoCo Arts, County departments, school system leadership, community organizations, and the business and development sectors, and this plan assumes those partners will bring a shared commitment to working together, communicating openly, and building on each other's strengths as implementation unfolds.
- **Specific costs, staffing, and operational schedules will be refined at the point of execution.** This plan identifies relative priority, a general implementation window, applicable funding avenues, and a lead and supporting partners for each action, giving implementers a clear starting point for planning. Exact dollar figures, staffing levels, and detailed schedules should be set at the point of implementation, when actual budget cycles, staff availability, and additional conditions are known.
- **Conditions will change over the plan's ten-year horizon.** This plan assumes that funding landscapes, staffing capacity, community needs, and County priorities will shift over time, and that the strategies and

HOW TO READ THIS SECTION

Strategies (as in Strategy 1.#), respond to each goal with accompanying Actions (as in Action 1.1.#). To easily convey the urgency, timing, staff involved, and potential partners for each action, we have included a chart outlining this information using the format and scales below.

Each action includes accompanying indicators for priority level, recommended timing across five implementation timelines including Immediate (Year 1), Near-Term (Years 1-2), Mid-Term (Years 3-5), Long-Term (Years 6-10), and Ongoing (throughout the plan period) and potential partners to support in program development.

ADDITIONAL CASE STUDIES, PROOF POINTS, AND SOURCES

This document includes case studies, proof of concept examples, and impact estimates pertaining to the action steps included in the plan. These are intended to be used for reference by future taskforces, staff, and partners carrying out plan implementation and some situations such as community scale or investment level may not be entirely applicable to Howard County and are not intended to act as a one-for-one program or project example but rather as a resource to learn more about potential models, key progress indicators, published resources and data sources, and inspiration for future programs and projects.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS

SPACES + PLACES

INCLUSION, BELONGING & CULTURAL IDENTITY

PRIORITY



LOW



MEDIUM-LOW



MEDIUM



MEDIUM-HIGH



HIGH

TIMING



IMMEDIATE



NEAR-TERM



MID-TERM



LONG-TERM



ONGOING

FUNDING

Funding opportunities or considerations are indicated for each goal

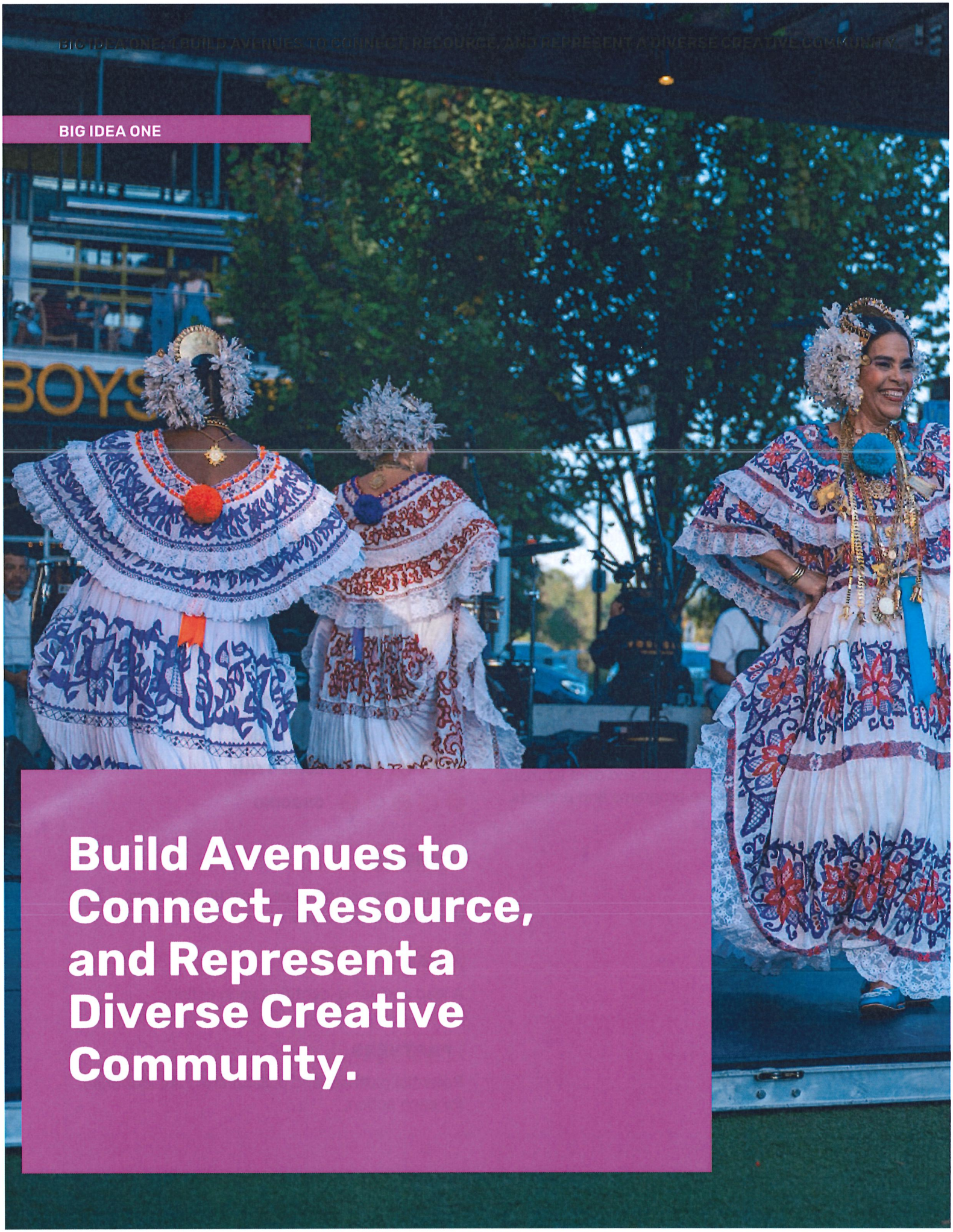
LEAD

A lead partner is identified each action.

PARTNERS

Potential partners and collaborators are identified for each action.

BIG IDEA ONE



Build Avenues to Connect, Resource, and Represent a Diverse Creative Community.

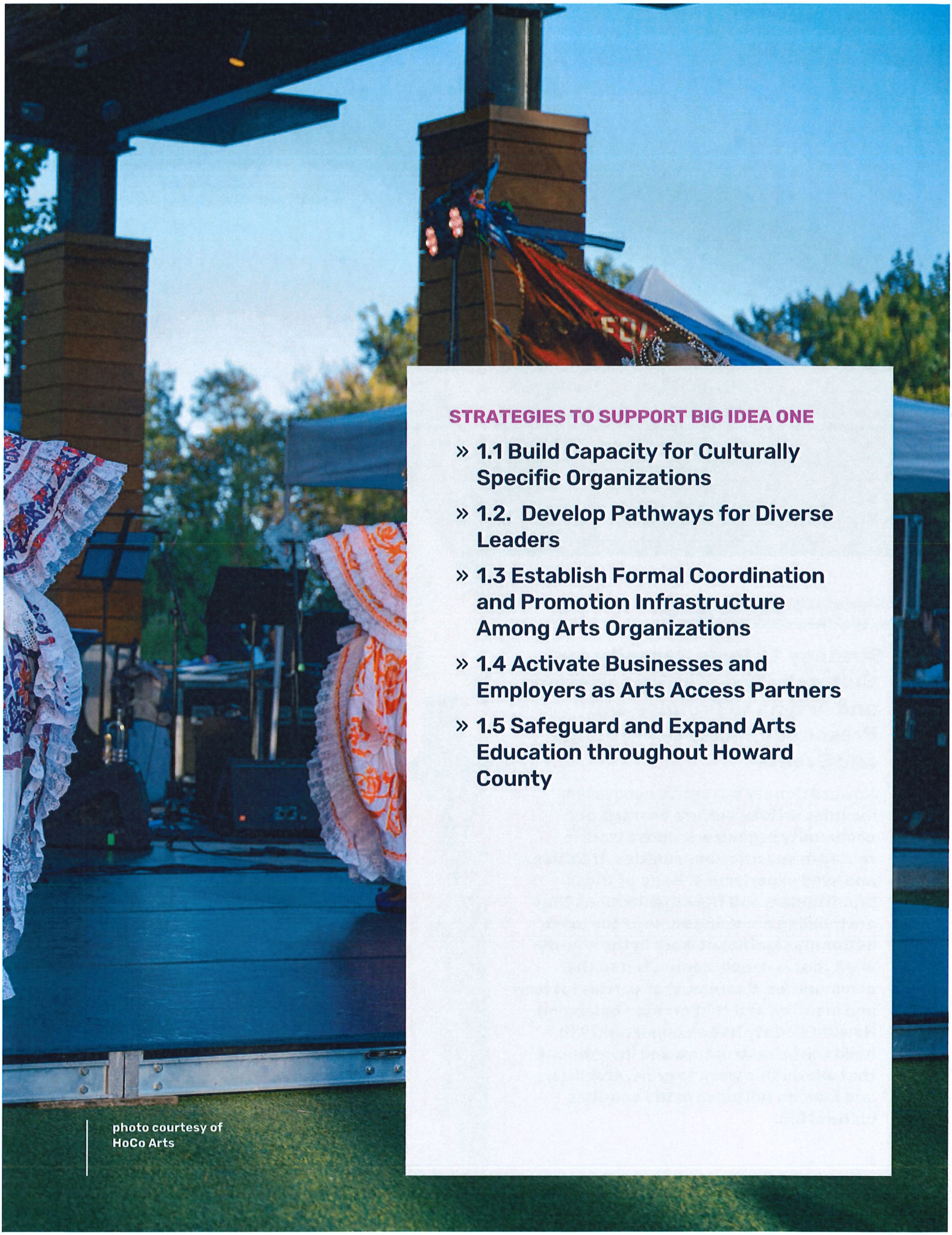


photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT BIG IDEA ONE

- 1.1 Build Capacity for Culturally Specific Organizations
- 1.2. Develop Pathways for Diverse Leaders
- 1.3 Establish Formal Coordination and Promotion Infrastructure Among Arts Organizations
- 1.4 Activate Businesses and Employers as Arts Access Partners
- 1.5 Safeguard and Expand Arts Education throughout Howard County



BIG IDEA ONE

> Strategy 1.1 Build Capacity for Culturally Specific Organizations and Artists to Produce and Present Community Programs and Events

Howard County's creative ecosystem includes artists, culture bearers, and community organizers whose work is rooted in specific communities, traditions, and lived experiences. Many of these practitioners and the organizations they are building are doing some of the most culturally significant work in the county: work that is deeply connected to the communities it serves, that carries history and identity, and that creates belonging. Howard County has an opportunity to build the infrastructure and investment that allows this work to grow, stabilize, and take its full place in the county's cultural life.

photo courtesy of
Howard County Chinese School

Action 1.1.1 Provide targeted support for emerging and developing culturally-specific organizations.

a. Author a joint advocacy statement that is signed by HoCo Arts, Howard County Government, and local community organizations and decision-makers, establishing shared language and public accountability for cultural equity across programming and funding decisions.

b. Identify an Advisory Taskforce reflective of the wider community, composed of artists, culture bearers, community organizers, and leaders that are reflective of the wider Howard County community. The Taskforce would plan and oversee the design and implementation of the pilot program and participate in the selection of organizations and artists to participate, members may be compensated for their time. At its conclusion, the Task Force may author a document outlining key findings and recommendations from the program's outcomes.

c. The Taskforce should be formed with input from various local commissions that understand the multiplicity of diversity present across Howard County, including but not limited to:
    - Asian American & Pacific Islander Commission
    - Commission on Aging
    - Commission on Disabilities
    - Commission for Women
    - Human Rights Commission
    - Interfaith Advisory Commission
    - La Alianza Latina Commission
    - LGBTQIA+ Commission

d. Appoint a program coordinator to administer the work and support documentation of the Task Force's outcomes.

e. The Taskforce, alongside the appointed program coordinator, may then develop a set of queries to inform their work which would be aimed at investing in more diverse, inclusive, equitable practices for arts and culture.

f. The Taskforce may also commission a set of cultural creators, paid at professional rates, to develop experiences as part of the pilot that create genuine opportunities for authentic cultural exchange with the wider Howard County community, where process and participation is tracked and measured to help support the understanding of cultural creators and audiences' most pressing needs.
    - The Taskforce would oversee the selection process, ensuring commissioned experiences reflect the priorities of the communities involved; and
    - The Taskforce should consider deploying the cultural creators to program events dispersed across the county at various scales and program lengths to make the experiences as widely accessible as possible.

g. The Taskforce and program coordinator would document the process and outcomes, potentially publishing findings as a replicable framework for future programming and, through that process, identify where current grant programs and funding decisions can be improved and make recommendations to inform the expansion of technical assistance programs, grant programs, and metrics used to track cultural participation locally.

Action 1.1.2 Provide technical assistance for capacity building, promotion, and presentation.

a. Based on the documentation and findings from the pilot program, resource and support culturally specific organizations in ways that address the greatest needs and barriers in producing and presenting cultural programming identified, these resources may be published online with occasional virtual or in-person workshops, cross-training for program and relevant county staff should be considered to increase awareness and efficacy. These technical assistance resources and workshops should include special considerations for multilingual audiences and may cover topics that include:

   i. Good business practices, including governance, Board development, finance and accounting, organizational development, partnerships, and succession and strategic planning tools and training

   ii. Marketing and promotional tools and training, including support for social media, press outreach, and event promotion

   iii. Grant writing and funding literacy, including navigation of local arts and culture grant programs and other local, state, and federal funding opportunities

   iv. Documentation and storytelling support, helping organizations capture and communicate the impact of their work for funders, partners, and the public

   v. Fiscal sponsorship or nonprofit formation support, providing emerging organizations with a pathway to access institutional funding before achieving independent 501(c)(3) status

   vi. Connection to Visit Howard County promotional opportunities, ensuring culturally specific programming is represented in the county's public-facing identity

   vii. Any additional areas of need identified through the pilot program and Advisory Taskforce findings referenced in Strategy 1.1 Action 1

Refer to Strategy 1.3 Action 1 for the proposed multilingual toolkit to support individuals and organizations in this endeavor.

Action 1.1.3 Define metrics for tracking progress against emerging standards and national best practices.

a. The metrics framework for this strategy would be informed by the pilot findings and the recommendations in the Cultural Equity Framework, found in Appendix E. Example metrics identified in the Cultural Equity Framework include:

   i. Demographic composition of staff and boards at supported organizations across the five dimensions outlined in the Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII) authored by Los Angeles County, a national model in equity and inclusion

   ii. Share of funding going to culturally specific and grassroots organizations

   iii. Geographic distribution of cultural investment by zip code

   iv. Attendance tracked by zip code, age, and affinity communities

   v. Grantee-reported DEI commitments and documented progress over time

IMPACT AREAS



ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS



INCLUSION, BELONGING & CULTURAL IDENTITY

PRIORITY



MEDIUM

TIMING



NEAR-TERM

FUNDING

Public Operating Grants, Public Project Grants, Individual Giving, Corporate Sponsorship, State Arts Council Operating Grants

LEAD

HoCo Arts

PARTNERS

Culturally-Specific Boards and Commissions, Arts and Culture Organizations, Association of Community Services of Howard County

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Resources:** Existing frameworks and resources include Creative Equity Toolkit and Race Forward's Creating Cultures & Practices for Racial Equity guide. Los Angeles County also took a close look in 2022 at the demographic makeup of people who participated in available professional development programs over a six year period in Measuring Participation. The County studied different aspects of equity in partnership with the Claremont Graduate University arts management program. Accessibility and the Arts asked, "Who is responsible for ensuring disabled people have access to art, the artist or the institution that presents and exhibits their art?" That was followed by Make or Break, an analysis of entry-level compensation for LA County arts administrators that found significant disparities in earnings, education, and debt for BIPOC administrators compared to their White counterparts. Agents of Change looked at the role that young adult advisory councils can play in helping arts and culture nonprofits in addressing emerging issues, including equity issues.



BIG IDEA ONE

> Strategy 1.2 Develop Pathways for Diverse Leaders

Howard County's arts and cultural organizations are stronger when their leadership reflects the full diversity of the communities they serve. Audience diversity matters, but governance is where the real decisions are made. Boards determine organizational direction, control budgets, hire executive staff, and shape which communities an organization is ultimately accountable to. When board composition reflects only a narrow segment of the community, the organization may be serving its neighbors without being genuinely accountable to them. Expanding the diversity of arts and cultural leadership is therefore not simply a matter of representation. It is a matter of institutional effectiveness, community trust, and long-term sustainability.

photo courtesy of Misako Ballet

Action 1.2.1 Develop a leadership curriculum for board and staff roles.

a. Local arts and cultural organizations should be convened in order to develop and administer a structured leadership curriculum available to board members and staff across Howard County arts organizations, with particular attention to leaders who are newer to institutional board service or arts administration and those who are young, BIPOC, or queer. A partnership should be formed to develop the course and provide subsidies or grants to participants to support their access the program.

b. Drawing from models including ArtsFund's Board Leadership Training, NYFA's Emerging Leaders Program, CultureSource's Arts Leaders as Cultural Innovators program, and locally the Horizon Foundation, the curriculum could include:

   i. Foundational modules on nonprofit governance, fiduciary responsibility, financial management, and legal obligations for board members

   ii. Modules on arts administration, fundraising, community engagement, and organizational strategy for staff

   iii. Cohort-based learning that builds peer relationships across Howard County arts and cultural organizations

   iv. Mentorship connections linking emerging leaders to organizations seeking expanded board member representation

Action 1.2.2 Design a formal succession planning program.

a. Convene organizations to develop a formal succession planning program that supports Howard County arts and cultural organizations in building leadership continuity infrastructure before a transition is imminent. Drawing from Grantmakers in the Arts' succession planning toolkit and Americans for the Arts' research on arts leadership succession, the program would support organizations in:

b. Developing formal succession plans as part of their regular strategic planning cycle

c. Identifying and cultivating internal leadership pipelines that reflect the demographic diversity of the communities the organization serves

d. Documenting institutional knowledge and key relationships so that leadership transitions do not require starting from scratch

e. Building emergency succession plans for unplanned departures alongside longer-term planned transition frameworks

f. Consider including Succession Planning and related expenses as eligible expenditures for the Capacity Building Grant program

IMPACT AREAS



ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS



INCLUSION, BELONGING & CULTURAL IDENTITY

PRIORITY

●●●○○ **MEDIUM**

TIMING

●●●○○ **MID-TERM**

FUNDING

Public Project Grants, Professional Development Grants (State), National Foundation Giving, Corporate Sponsorship

LEAD

HoCo Arts

PARTNERS

Howard County Government, Association of Community Services of Howard County, Asian American & Pacific Islander Commission, La Alianza Latina Commission, LGBTQIA+ Commission, Equal Business Opportunity Commission, African American Roundtable, Korean Culture & Art of MD, Maryland State Arts Council, Howard Community College

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Resource:** Americans for the Arts's Cultural Equity Resource Center offers a leadership pipeline (Diversity in Arts Leadership program, Arts and Culture Leaders of Color Fellowship and Network) plus an equity consultants directory and field resources.
- **Case Study:** Live United Central Ohio's Project Diversity Pride Leadership, United Way of Central Ohio's nonprofit board-development program, launched in 1989, trains people of color and LGBTQ+ community members for nonprofit board and leadership roles.

DRAF



BIG IDEA ONE

> Strategy 1.3 Establish Formal Coordination and Promotion Infrastructure Among Arts and Culture Organizations

Howard County is home to a wide network of arts and cultural organizations, venues, and creative practitioners, yet residents and visitors often find it difficult to discover what is happening across the county at any given time. Without a shared calendar, coordinated marketing, or a central resource hub, individual organizations promote their own programming independently, limiting visibility and audience reach countywide. Building formal coordination and promotion infrastructure connects the county's creative community under a shared identity, making it easier for residents to engage with arts and culture wherever it happens.

photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

Action 1.3.1 Expand HoCo Arts' website's role as a resource center for Howard County creatives.

a. HoCo Arts should recieve funding to expand its website to serve as a comprehensive, searchable resource hub connecting arts and culture practitioners and organizations to the tools, services, and opportunities they need to operate and grow. Including:

   i. A comprehensive venue directory and contact list covering performance spaces, gallery spaces, rehearsal facilities, and community venues available to Howard County creatives, with capacity, technical specifications, rental information, and direct contact details for each location

   ii. A coordinated calendar of events in partnership with local arts organizations and Visit Howard County, which might include a monthly newsletter promoting local opportunities to engage in the arts to a broad audience of community members

   iii. A searchable online directory of resources for arts and culture practitioners covering business formation, legal and financial services, healthcare access, affordable space, grant opportunities, and professional development programming, building on the existing resources section

   iv. A multilingual outreach toolkit that any partner organization may access to expand audience reach, including translated promotional templates and guidance on culturally responsive communications, with an additional consideration of deploying grants to support material translation for organizations

Action 1.3.2 Launch a coordinated, county-wide marketing campaign and build media partnerships that create a recognizable identity for arts and culture.

a. Howard County should develop a county-wide arts and culture marketing campaign that gives the county's creative community a shared public identity, building recognition among residents, visitors, and potential corporate partners. Key considerations include:

   i. Make promotion a component of granting decisions, require grantees to utilize Visit Howard County's promotional opportunities available to arts and cultural organizations and to actively participate in county-wide promotional efforts as a condition of public funding, such as posting to both the HoCo Arts Calendar and Visit Howard County calendars and showcasing evidence that they are utilizing the tools and resources available through the proposed resource center

   ii. An Arts and Culture Marketing Roundtable may be convened to inform this approach

   iii. Strengthen the formal relationship between Visit Howard County and HoCo Arts, establishing a shared calendar, coordinated promotional campaigns, and joint outreach that positions Howard County arts and cultural programming as a tourism asset

   iv. Develop a multilingual outreach toolkit that any partner organization may access, including translated promotional materials, multilingual social media content, and guidance on culturally responsive audience development

   v. Consider expanding grant funding available to directly support increased access and awareness, such as supporting access to translation services for organizations as a technical assistance or Capacity Building Grant eligible expense

Action 1.3.3 Introduce and welcome new residents to the arts and cultural community.

a. Develop a formal arts welcome initiative, in partnership with major employers, real estate professionals, Visit Howard County, and the Howard County Chamber of Commerce, that introduces new residents to the county's arts and cultural community from the moment they arrive. The initiative should include:

   i. A curated arts welcome guide, available in print and digital formats, showcasing local arts and cultural programming, organizations, upcoming events, venues, and how to access arts and culture across the county

   ii. Distribution through employer onboarding packages, real estate agents, and county welcome programs

   iii. A periodic welcome event hosted at an arts venue that gives new residents a low-barrier entry point into the local arts community

   iv. Complementary tickets to make one of their first experiences in the county arts and culture-oriented

Action 1.3.4 Broker formal cross-organizational agreements with presenters for ticket sharing, co-production, and shared box office.

a. Convene Howard County arts and cultural organizations to explore formal agreements that create operational efficiencies, expand audience reach, and reduce administrative burden. Howard County organizations might consider agreements that include:

   i. Shared box office services allowing audiences to access tickets to multiple organizations through a single platform

   ii. Shared back-office services including technology, communications, and financial administration for organizations that choose deeper operational integration

   iii. Co-production arrangements enabling organizations to pool resources for productions to create programs that may not be possible independently and/or with the goal of broadening audiences

Action 1.3.5 Develop a Culture Pass program in collaboration with the Howard County Library System.

a. Develop a Culture Pass program in partnership with Howard County Public Library, leveraging the library system's reach to remove financial barriers to arts participation for all county residents. Howard County Public Library serves more than 70 percent of county residents as active cardholders, a reach no single arts or cultural organization can match independently. Howard County's Culture Pass program could:

   i. Invite arts and cultural organizations across disciplines to participate by donating passes to the library system

   ii. Library cardholders borrow passes just as they borrow a book, checking out a one-time pass in person at a participating branch using their library card, with no cost to the patron

   iii. Passes are first-come, first-served and cannot be reserved, ensuring equitable access across the cardholder base

   iv. Pass structures are flexible by organization: some admit families of up to six, others admit individuals or pairs, and some are valid for specific performances or seasons rather than general admission, allowing each organization to participate in a way that works for their programming model

   v. Grow over time through active recruitment of new participating organizations, with the library facilitating the partnership agreements that bring new institutions into the program

IMPACT AREAS

- **AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT**
- **ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS**

PRIORITY

MEDIUM-HIGH

TIMING

NEAR-TERM

FUNDING

Public Operating Grants, Corporate Sponsorship, Earned Revenue

LEAD

HoCo Arts

PARTNERS

Arts and Culture Organizations, Local Businesses, Visit Howard County, Howard County Public Library System

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** The Park City & Summit County Arts Council maintains a shared county-wide events calendar, a monthly newsletter, a website hosting resources and event listings, and a coordinated social media and marketing program with a dedicated staff role.
- **Case Study:** The California Arts Council runs Collective, a central hub where arts and culture organizations, artists, and the public can browse, publish, and get notifications for opportunities such as jobs, internships, artist calls, grants, conferences, and workshops.
- **Case Study:** The City of Temple produces a print and digital guide, Welcome Home Guide, that introduces new residents to local arts, culture, and community resources.
- **Case Study:** CBUSArts served as a shared regional ticketing platform across multiple Columbus arts venues and organizations.
- **Case Study:** The Columbus Metropolitan Library's Culture Pass program lets cardholders check out free passes to local cultural institutions the same way they'd borrow a book.
- **Case Study:** North Carolina communities have developed arts trails with themes like Blue Ridge music, Cherokee heritage, and literature to attract visitors to its unique cultural amenities, strengthening visitor attraction and spending at arts and culture destinations.



BIG IDEA ONE

> Strategy 1.4 Activate Businesses and Employers as Arts Access Partners

Howard County's business community and major employers represent a largely untapped partner for the arts, offering both financial support and new audiences for local organizations. Structured partnerships between businesses and arts organizations create meaningful benefits on both sides, from employee engagement and talent retention to expanded revenue streams and visibility for creative programming. Activating businesses and employers as arts access partners opens new channels of support for the creative community while strengthening the role of arts and culture in Howard County's broader economic landscape.

photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

Action 1.4.1 Develop local partnerships to connect businesses to the arts and culture community.

a. Arts and culture organization leaders should position themselves as strategic partners to work with the business-facing community to develop a structured business partnership program. This program will give Howard County companies a pathway to support and engage with the local arts and culture community through direct outreach and curated connections. The program could offer businesses multiple levels of engagement, including:

   i. Active outreach to Howard County businesses to position local arts venues as preferred destinations for corporate events, client receptions, and employee celebrations

   ii. Sponsored tables and tickets at performing arts events, positioned as employee perks or client entertainment

   iii. Artist-led team experiences, including workshops, creative sessions, and behind-the-scenes tours

   iv. Connections to local visual artists to secure permanent or temporary art displays in corporate headquarters and offices

   v. Corporate memberships with tiered employee benefits, including discounted or complimentary tickets, priority access to programming, and recognition across HoCo Arts and partner organization communications channels

Action 1.4.2 Approach the county's largest employers to pilot an employee arts and culture access program.

a. An expansion of the arts access program described in the previous recommendation includes approaching the county's largest employers to pilot an employer-sponsored arts access program that provides employees with a meaningful benefit while expanding audiences and revenue for local arts organizations. A Lifestyle Spending Account model, in which employers allocate a fixed dollar amount per employee redeemable for pre-approved categories including arts, culture, and wellness, represents one such mechanism. Working with the same partners as Strategy 1.4 Action 1, these program aspects should be:

   i. A dedicated arts access stipend or benefit, administered through a designated entity, allowing employees to access tickets, memberships, and programming across participating Howard County arts and cultural organizations

   ii. Recognition of participating employers as arts and culture business partners on the HoCo Arts website and partner organizations, with visibility across other county arts and culture marketing channels and acknowledgment at major arts events

   iii. Consider developing a method and point of contact to generate an annual report on program utilization through a simple employer-submitted form, documenting employee participation and redemption activity for arts and culture activities

IMPACT AREAS

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS

PRIORITY

MEDIUM-HIGH

TIMING

MID -TERM

FUNDING

Corporate Sponsorship, Earned Revenue, National Corporate Sponsorship

LEAD

Howard County Government

PARTNERS

Economic Development Boards and Commissions, Howard County Economic Development Authority, Local Businesses, Business and Chamber Networks, Corporate Community

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** This program, Art at Work, places local artists' work and artist-led programming directly into member companies' offices as a corporate arts partnership model.
- **Case Study:** OSU's Lifestyle Spending Account reimburses employees up to $500 per year for wellness-related expenses.
- **Case Study:** The Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives highlights programs for professionals to volunteer their skills to arts organizations, early career leaders to observe board governance in action, and help local professionals engage their creative side through arts experiences.
- **Proof Points:** The Americans for the Arts "pARTnerships" movement highlights ways businesses have formed meaningful partnerships with arts businesses and institutions, including a hotel in Portland that supports local arts institutions and artists (Heathman Hotel), a bank in Dubuque that gives employees discounts to local arts experiences and festivals (Premier Bank), and Duke Energy employees' tours of local art museums and tickets to events (Duke Energy).

DRAF



BIG IDEA ONE

> Strategy 1.5 Safeguard and Expand Arts Education and Lifelong Learning throughout Howard County

Howard County's reputation for educational excellence is inseparable from its commitment to the arts, and that commitment is under pressure. As arts programming faces cuts in public schools nationally and locally, and as the county's formal arts education infrastructure strains to meet growing demand, Howard County has an opportunity to act on two fronts: protecting the quality and consistency of arts education within the public school system, and expanding access to arts learning through outside partners and community institutions.

photo courtesy of Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts

Action 1.4.1 Safeguard sequential arts education in the Howard County Public School System.

a. Howard County should treat the continuity of high-quality, sequential arts education in its public schools as a core policy commitment. Howard County in partnership with the Howard County Public School System, should develop a County-wide Arts Education Taskforce in order to:

   i. Advocate for systematic progression of arts instruction within the HCPSS pre-K-12 curriculum, where foundational skills and concepts are taught and mastered before moving on to more complex ones

   ii. Advocate for sustained funding for arts education programs within the HCPSS budget, with particular attention to programs currently at risk of reduction or elimination

   iii. Support efforts to align the county's budget approval timeline with the school system's teacher recruitment calendar, addressing the structural gap that makes it difficult to recruit and retain qualified arts educators before hiring windows close

   iv. Specifically evaluate where there are gaps in sequential arts education curricula that progress from foundational arts education through deeper skill-building and arts education

   v. Track the status of arts education staffing and programming across HCPSS schools annually, using that data to inform advocacy and investment decisions

   vi. Advocate for Maryland's Department of Education to update its STEM focus to include the arts (i.e., formally transition to a STEAM model), alongside designated funding for this expansion in programming and protections for curriculum access and staffing

Action 1.4.2 Fill gaps in arts and cultural education through community partnerships.

a. Beyond the public school system, arts learning opportunities should extend to residents of all ages through community-based partnerships. These partnerships would include:

   i. Expand the HoCo Arts Artist-in-Education grant program to include after-school programs and community-based learning settings, such as Head Start centers.

   ii. Support lifelong learning pathways in the arts through noncredit and continuing education programming at Howard Community College, including modular coursework accessible to working adults and practitioners seeking to deepen their skills

   iii. Ensure that free and low-cost arts learning opportunities, including library programming, remain funded and promoted as part of the county's commitment to arts access across all ages and income levels

IMPACT AREAS

- **ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS**
- **INCLUSION, BELONGING & CULTURAL IDENTITY**

PRIORITY

MEDIUM

TIMING

ONGOING

FUNDING

Artists-in-Education Grants, Corporate Sponsorship, Traditional Arts Grants (MSAC Maryland Traditions), State Humanities Funding, Federal Programming Grants

LEAD

Howard County

PARTNERS

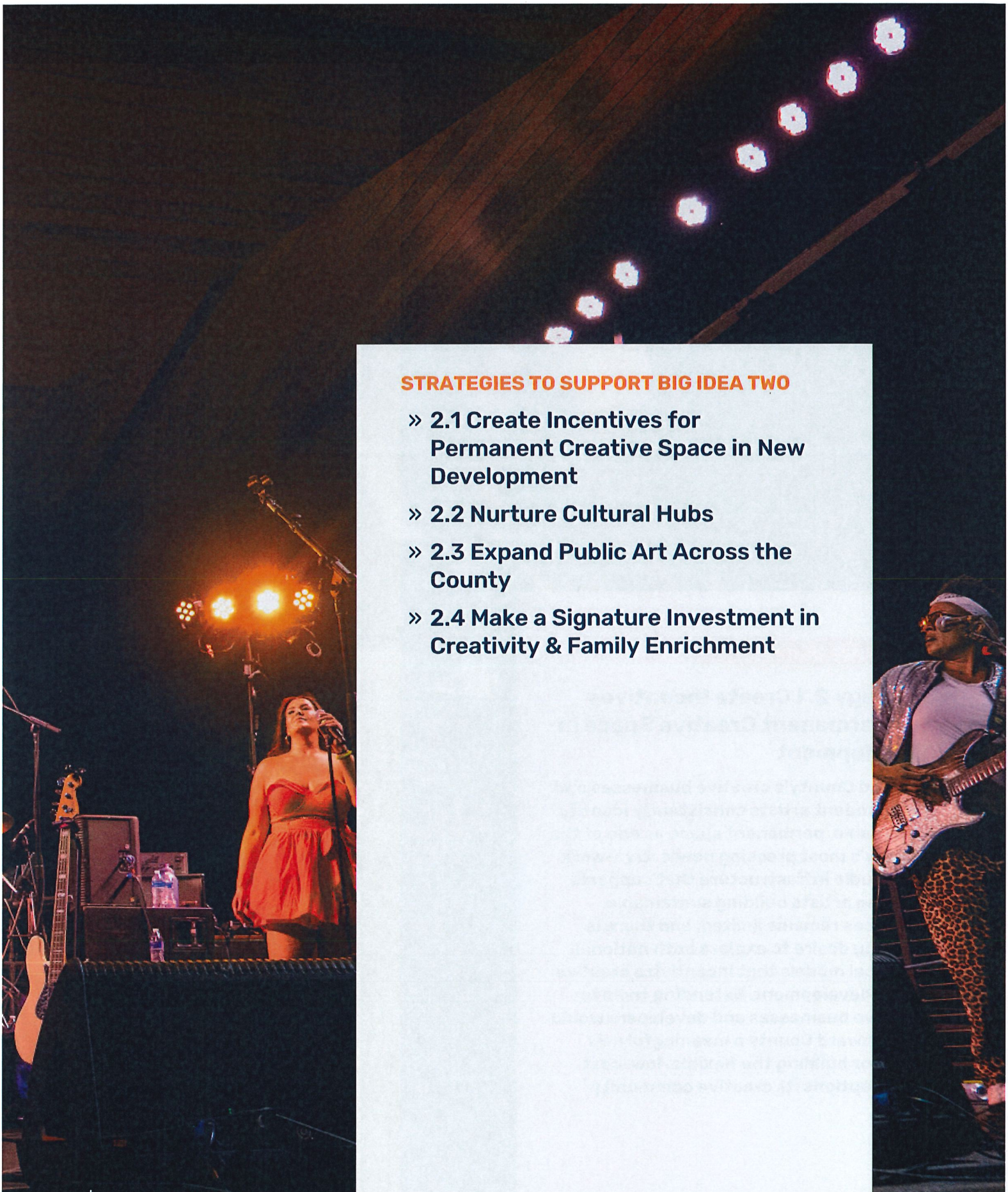
Howard County Public School System, Howard Community College, Howard County Public Library System, Youth and Education Boards and Commissions, Youth-Serving Organizations, Local Arts and Culture Organizations

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** California Prop 28 guarantees roughly $900 million to $1.1 billion annually for K-12 arts and music education statewide.



Create a Responsive Approach to Creative Spaces.



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT BIG IDEA TWO

- » 2.1 Create Incentives for Permanent Creative Space in New Development
- » 2.2 Nurture Cultural Hubs
- » 2.3 Expand Public Art Across the County
- » 2.4 Make a Signature Investment in Creativity & Family Enrichment

photo courtesy of
Nik West Mariana Orellana



BIG IDEA TWO

> Strategy 2.1 Create Incentives for Permanent Creative Space in Development

Howard County's creative businesses and independent artists consistently identify affordable, permanent space as one of the county's most pressing needs. Live-work and studio infrastructure that supports working artists building sustainable practices remains limited, and there is a strong desire to explore both national and local models that incentivize creative space development. Extending tools to creative businesses and developers would give Howard County a meaningful new lever for building the flexible, low-cost space options its creative community needs.

photo courtesy of Columbia Jazz Band

Action 2.1.1 Explicitly target creative businesses in Enterprise Zones.

a. The recently established Eastern Howard County Enterprise Zone offers a ten-year tax credit at 80% of the eligible assessment for the first five years on real property expansion, renovation, or capital improvement. Creative businesses and arts enterprises seeking to locate in the Enterprise Zone are currently eligible for these credits, but there is no active strategy to recruit them.

   i. Proactively recruit creative businesses and arts enterprises for the Eastern Howard County Enterprise Zone

   ii. Developing targeted informational materials that offer guidance and clearly defined pathways for them to locate there

   iii. Presenting the opportunity to local creatives and creative entrepreneurs to make them aware of it

Action 2.1.2 Evaluate inclusionary development incentives to promote creative spaces.

a. Establish clear definitions for the types of creative spaces targeted for development and preservation, with categories which may include:
    - Rehearsal, instructional, and practice studios for performing arts
    - Shared maker spaces, industrial arts facilities, and visual arts studios
    - Small to mid-sized performance venues, such as black box theaters
    - Public exhibition and gallery spaces
    - Creative business incubators and administrative offices for nonprofit arts organizations

    i. Artists and creative workers should be explicitly recognized as income-qualifying households within existing affordable and workforce housing eligibility frameworks, consistent with national models that include creatives alongside teachers, nurses, and first responders as the workforce population these programs are designed to serve

    ii. Identify ways to incentivize developers to include creative spaces within their developments, with options to include:
        - Fee waivers
        - Density bonuses
        - Relaxed site area, parking, and/or other requirements
        - Expedited processing times for permits

    iii. Identify opportunities to adapt existing commercial real estate for arts and cultural use, through zoning amendments that allow the conversion of vacant storefronts, offices, and warehouses into artist live/work housing and creative spaces, alongside a study of codes and zoning ordinances from other jurisdictions that successfully govern these conversions

    iv. Connecting developers and property owners to existing resources for creative space and arts amenity development, such as the Route 1 Tax Credit Program, which covers 125% of verified expenses for eligible improvements and may be applicable for certain creative spaces or murals

    v. Create a recognition program that celebrates developers who incorporate creative uses into their projects

IMPACT AREAS

ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS

SPACES + PLACES

PRIORITY

●●●●○ **MEDIUM - HIGH**

TIMING

●○○○○ **IMMEDIATE**

FUNDING

Enterprise Zone Tax Credits, Facade Improvement Funds, Community Development Finance, Historic Revitalization Tax Credits (State), Federal Historic Tax Credit, National CDFI and Program-Related Investment

LEAD

Howard County Department of Planning & Zoning

PARTNERS

Planning and Zoning Boards and Commissions, Howard County Economic Development Authority, Private Developers, Local Businesses

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** Within Montgomery County, developers may choose to install public art on their site as part of their public space requirement or may pay into a public art fund, satisfying a public space amenity requirement in exchange for increased density.
- **Case Study:** This Austin, Texas city grant program provides direct financial support for rent, improvements, and insurance to creative spaces facing displacement or rising costs.
- **Case Study:** Artspace has developed 28 permanent artist live/work developments nationwide using Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Artist inclusion in LIHTC-funded housing is federally protected under Section 42(g)(9) of the Internal Revenue Code, added by the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008, which clarified that a project does not fail the general public use requirement solely because it includes occupancy preferences for tenants involved in artistic or literary activities.
- **Case Study:** In Paducah, KY, within the city's Lower Town Enterprise Zone, materials for construction are tax-exempt and the area is zoned for both commercial and residential use, creating an opportunity for artist live-and-work spaces. When the Paducah Planning Department and Paducah Bank provided relocating artists with 100% financing through a basic loan package, they attracted forty artists to the district.



BIG IDEA TWO

> Strategy 2.2 Nurture Cultural Hubs

Howard County's cultural assets cluster tightly around Columbia and Ellicott City, while access to quality performance and rehearsal space, especially outside peak scheduling windows, remains limited for independent artists and smaller organizations elsewhere in the county. Activating public spaces, vacant properties, and existing community facilities, alongside stronger transit connections and community-centered placemaking, would extend cultural access and visibility across the full geography of the county.

photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

Action 2.2.1 Enhance arts and culture access through transit initiatives.

a. In 2025, Howard County launched the free Old Ellicott City (OEC) Trolley service, which runs along historic Main Street every 10–15 minutes during the weekends from 11 am to 7 pm. It would be beneficial to the creative community if trolley hours could be extended into evening performance windows, and if routes could be extended to connections beyond OEC.
    i. Evaluate whether an MTA Innovation Grant would support expanded hours and routes for the OEC Trolley service to better support arts and culture events
    ii. Explore ways to replicate this pilot program in other areas of the county
    iii. Howard County's Bus Stop Beautification Program uses public art to make RTA bus shelters more attractive, engaging, and welcoming while providing local artists with highly visible opportunities to showcase their work. Building on a successful 2019 pilot along the US 1 corridor, the County expanded the effort through a competitive artist selection process involving the Office of Transportation, County Executive's Office, RTA, HoCo Arts, Columbia Association Art Center, and Howard County Public Schools
    iv. Explore grant opportunities to expand programs like the Bus Stop Beautification Program

Action 2.2.2 Open both institutional and non-traditional doors to community arts and culture use.

a. The local creative community frequently noted that affordable performance and rehearsal spaces are difficult to access within Howard County. At the same time, excess capacity within spaces such as high schools, senior living facilities, and places of worship suggests that some gaps in access could be filled if barriers to using these spaces were removed and new models of operation were explored.
    i. Recruit and convene a Venue Managers Cohort of both arts-focused venues and venues seeking to support more arts and culture programming to meet regularly and coordinate programming calendars, operational models, the need for maintenance and equipment/space upgrades, and funding requests
    ii. Promote the opportunity to incorporate arts and cultural programs within various types of communal gathering spaces, including those not traditionally seen as arts spaces such as small businesses, community centers, libraries, and places of worship, so that program managers are aware of opportunities to support and help their audience(s) participate in creative programming of these spaces

Action 2.2.3 Reinforce creativity and cultural identity across the county through placemaking, urban design, and historic preservation strategies.

a. The County's many neighborhoods and communities each have unique elements to call attention to through targeted placemaking efforts. Many communities in the county may benefit from tactical placemaking and cultural infrastructure building, as well as creative placemaking and interpretive elements appropriate for historical contexts.

   i. Explore developing community-centered design processes for creative placemaking in small areas to strengthen local identity. Placemaking processes are often led by Planning and Zoning departments or by nonprofit organizations with a placemaking mission and would include input from residents, neighborhood business owners, and the local creative and heritage communities. The County would determine which agency or nonprofit partner is best suited to explore and implement this concept. (Explore resources like Better Block for ideas)

   ii. Evaluate how the Sustainable Communities program and the Route 1 Tax Credit Program can support small businesses in creating dynamic places through their façade improvements funding

   iii. Evaluate building code and local ordinances, in coordination with the Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits, for barriers to creating creative amenities and spaces and where policy and code can reinforce creativity in the built environment

   iv. Seek to expand preservation and interpretation around underrepresented communities and stories, particularly historic spaces and assets that intersect with Black, Asian American, and LGBTQIA+ history, working with local multicultural communities and heritage organizations

Action 2.2.4 Identify staff support or formal contracted services for Creative Placemaking and Public Art

a. These roles may function as two complementary areas of work: Creative Placemaking and Public Art, housed either within the County under Planning and Zoning, HoCo Arts, in a new department for Creative Placemaking, or through a combination of designated County staff support and contracted services with an outside organization, a nonprofit dedicated to placemaking, or a consultant. The scope and duration of this role, whether a full-time position, a contracted engagement, or a short-term task, would be determined through further discussion among County departments and community partners.

b. Creative Placemaking Planning & Coordination

   i. Plan and manage public space activations and events, from small temporary installations to larger multi-day builds, coordinating creative, technical, and logistical elements

   ii. Develop concepts and site-specific frameworks for placemaking projects in consultation with County agencies and community organizations

   iii. Build and maintain partnerships with property owners, community members, and County departments to implement activations and programs

   iv. Research and manage permitting for installations and events

   v. Facilitate consultant selection processes, including RFPs and RFQs, for placemaking projects

   vi. Serve as liaison between artists, architects, developers, County agencies, and community groups

   vii. Pursue and manage grant funding to support placemaking initiatives

viii. Collaborate with HoCo Arts, Recreation & Parks, Visit Howard County, and the Howard County Economic Development Authority on programming and corridor or downtown revitalization

c. Public Art Management

i. Coordinate the implementation of any future Public Art work plan supported by the County

ii. Manage artist calls, selection process, contracts, and invoices for both temporary and permanent public art

iii. Coordinate installation, maintenance, and repair of the County's public art collection

iv. Maintain public art records and files

v. Assist in oversight of public art funding, including any future percent-for-art mechanism

vi. Assist with marketing materials to promote public art opportunities and events

vii. Guide private developers seeking to incorporate public art into their projects

viii. Serve as liaison between the County, artists, and business organizations

Action 2.2.5 Pursue state-designated Arts & Entertainment Districts.

a. The Arts & Entertainment (A&E) District designation offers Maryland counties and municipalities tax incentives, access to funding, and other tools to encourage activity and investment in specific geographic areas where the arts are part of an economic development strategy. Benefits of the A&E District Designation include:

   i. Property Tax Incentives: The owner of a manufacturing, commercial, or industrial property is eligible for a local property tax credit based on the difference between the pre- and post-renovation assessments of the property when it has been wholly or partially renovated for use by "qualified residing artists" or "arts and entertainment enterprises." Maryland's property tax credit for renovations serving qualified residing artists is a comparatively rare incentive nationally, offering property owners a direct incentive tied to artist housing

   ii. Admissions & Amusement Tax Exemption: Local governments may exempt from the admissions and amusement tax gross receipts from any admissions or amusement charge imposed by an "arts and entertainment enterprise" or a "qualifying residing artist" in an A&E District

   iii. Artist Income Tax Subtraction Modification: A "qualified residing artist" who lives in Maryland and sells "artistic work" in any of the A&E Districts throughout the State is eligible for the income tax subtraction modification on income derived from their in-district sales (for performing artists, this includes income derived from performances in a district; for all "qualified residing artists," this includes internet sales originating in a District)

b. Steps to pursue the district designation include:

   i. Meet with Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) program staff to discuss the potential for Ellicott City to become a designated A&E District and preemptively identify any deficiencies that might impact its application

   ii. Identify the partners who would be involved in authorizing and sustaining an A&E District and bring them into the conversation

   iii. Work with MSAC and community partners to address any deficiencies over time, and submit an Intent to Apply application when ready

   iv. Within 90 days of the Intent to Apply, submit a full application as per the official application timeline

IMPACT AREAS

- AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT
- SPACES + PLACES

PRIORITY

MEDIUM - HIGH

TIMING

ONGOING

FUNDING

Public Capital Improvement, Private Capital Investment, Community Development Finance, Historic Revitalization Tax Credits (State), Federal Historic Tax Credit, National CDFI and Program-Related Investment, State A&E District Tax Credits and Incentives, Enterprise Zone Tax Credits, Facade Improvement Funds, Public Art Grants and Funds (Local & State), Creative Placemaking Grants (Federal)

LEAD

Howard County Department of Planning & Zoning

PARTNERS

Planning and Zoning Boards and Commissions, Howard County Economic Development Authority, Private Developers, Local Businesses, HoCo Arts, Local Artists and Creative Professionals

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** Montgomery County Creative Placemaking is led by a dedicated Design, Placemaking and Policy Division combining housing, infrastructure, zoning, and urban design staff.
- **Proof Point:** The average Arts & Entertainment District earned approximately $540,000 in out-of-state tourism spending and $1.6 million in in-state visitor spending; this contributed to an average of over $4 million in GDP impact from net business growth and an average of more than $336,000 in state and county tax revenue per district. (Source: MCAC's 2022 Impact Report)
- **Proof Point:** The state designation helped the Crisfield Arts & Entertainment District launch new regular events, including the Annual Waterfront Jazz Festival, Tangere Sound Music Festival, and the Tawes Museum Annual Heritage Festival.
- **Proof Point:** The Grantsville Arts & Culture District made its central project the Spruce Forest Artisan Village, where historic cottages house studios of accomplished potters, weavers, painters, sculptors, and woodworkers who inhabit the village throughout the summer each year, offering demonstrations, workshops, and work for sale.
- **Proof Point:** The Cumberland Arts & Entertainment District used the designation to launch a new logo and promotional video, creating new paintings and signage at the City Center Parking Garage that identifies local theatre, dining, and attractions within the district.
- **Resources:** The Better Block Foundation offers tools and support for tactical urbanism and community-built placemaking, while Howard County's Route 1 Tax Credit Program covers 125% of verified expenses for eligible exterior improvements visible from Route 1.



BIG IDEA TWO

> Strategy 2.3 Expand Public Art Across the County

Visible evidence of creativity in the built environment signals to artists and residents alike that Howard County is a place where creative work belongs and can grow. The County's Arts For All initiative has built early momentum for public art, but Howard County does not yet have a permanent program to guide, fund, and maintain it over time. A formal Public Art Program would carry that momentum forward as a lasting feature of the county's identity.

photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

Action 2.3.1 Develop a formal, permanent Public Art Program.

a. Howard County's Arts for All initiative, a $1.5 million commitment from Howard County, was announced in 2024 to fund up to 4 public art pieces throughout the county. Arts For All is a partnership between the County and HoCo Arts, with support from outside consultants, at County-owned sites. The County, however, does not have a permanent public art program to consistently and professionally manage public art installations and ensure artworks are properly maintained. Instituting such a program would dramatically increase the amount of art in Howard County and would be considered an essential component of expanding arts access to county residents and the development of a creative community.

   i. Develop a task force and work with a consultant with expertise in Public Art Policy to create policies and structures to support a Public Art Program. These would include definitions, roles and responsibilities, policies, and procedures to guide public art acquisitions, maintenance, and donations, as well as allowable uses of funds. Specific steps:

      - Draft a comprehensive Public Art Policy defining public art, establishing selection and procurement procedures, identifying maintenance policies, and clearly outlining donation procedures
      - Establish clear roles and responsibilities for County staff, advisory bodies, artists, donors, and development partners
      - Integrate public art review into capital project planning and development processes under the purview of a designated County department and/or commission
      - Adopt the policy via ordinance or resolution and implement it across all County departments involved in capital investment and creative placemaking
      - Contract with HoCo Arts or an outside consultant to manage public art project implementation and ongoing maintenance of the collection in a consistent, professional manner
      - Consider ways to sustain the Public Art Program fund
      - Invite the community to weigh in on their priorities for the county's public art program. Develop a Public Art Plan that reflects their responses in a detailed plan outlining how partners would collaborate to implement their vision for public art throughout the County
      - Explore a commission structure to support Public Art—or more expansively—Public Art, Arts & Culture, and Heritage

IMPACT AREAS



ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS



SPACES + PLACES

PRIORITY

●●●●● **HIGH**

TIMING

●●○○○ **NEAR-TERM**

FUNDING

Percent for Art: Public Capital (Proposed), Percent for Art: Private Development (Proposed)

LEAD

Howard County

PARTNERS

HoCo Arts, Howard County Department of Planning & Zoning, Planning and Design Boards and Commissions, Local Visual Artists and Creative Professionals

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** Arlington County's Public Art Program formalized in 2000, and its Public Art Master Plan, adopted in 2004, established a sustained dual funding model: the county allocates a percentage of its own capital improvement budget to public art, while private developers pursuing site plan approval can satisfy a community benefits requirement either by commissioning public art directly on their site or by contributing to the county's Public Art Fund. This structure has funded the program continuously for more than two decades.
- **Case Study:** Montgomery County's public art program combines two sustained funding mechanisms: a dedicated capital budget allocation, dating to a 1983 mandate that has funded art continuously since, and a zoning-based density bonus that lets private developers in downtown and transit-area zones satisfy a public amenities requirement by commissioning public art on their site. A dedicated Art Review Panel, coordinating with county planners and the Public Arts Trust Steering Committee, meets monthly to evaluate developer proposals as part of site plan review, and the county maintains a combined public map of its full public and privately funded art collection.

DRAF



BIG IDEA TWO

> Strategy 2.4 Make a Signature Investment in Creativity & Family Enrichment

Howard County's families and visitors often travel to Washington, D.C. or Baltimore for the region's most engaging creative experiences for children and youth. A highly participatory creative destination located within the county would keep that engagement local, adding a signature amenity that strengthens Howard County's appeal to residents and visitors alike.

photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

Action 2.4.1 Develop a highly participatory creative destination stay and play space that encourages arts exploration for youth and families.

a. Artists, families, residents, and visitors alike will find much to appreciate in Howard County given its high-quality schools, libraries, parks, residential neighborhoods, and business districts. Efforts to further augment family life here can be an additional draw and keep people engaged with the community as opposed to driving to DC or Baltimore for their cultural experiences. Multimedia arts enrichment programs and spaces for youth, done right, can prove a regional draw in their own right.

   i. Pursue a feasibility study to determine the regional market for a children's art museum or creative stay and play destination and local support for it

   ii. Assess whether this destination could be incorporated into plans for the new Central Library to be built on the Columbia Lakefront.

   iii. If the library development is not the right fit, consider placement within another area of the County

IMPACT AREAS

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

SPACES + PLACES

PRIORITY

●●●○○ **MEDIUM**

TIMING

●●●●○ **LONG-TERM***

FUNDING

Public Capital Improvement, Corporate Sponsorship

LEAD

Howard County

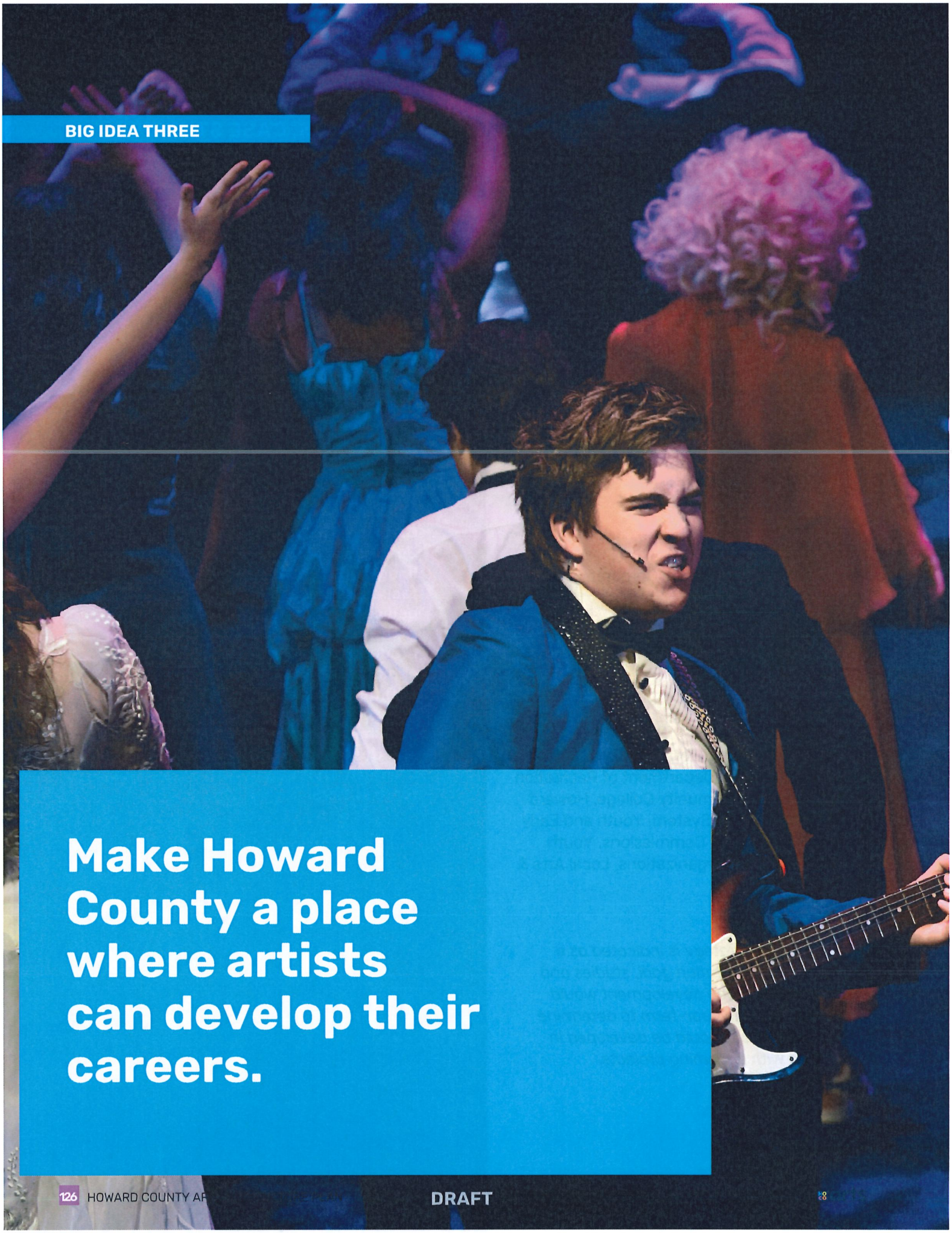
PARTNERS

Howard County Public Library System, HoCo Arts, Howard County Department of Recreation & Parks, Howard Community College, Howard County Public School System, Youth and Early Childhood Boards and Commissions, Youth and Family-Serving Organizations, Local Arts & Culture Organizations

**Note: While this strategy is indicated as a long-term implementation goal, studies and assessments of space development would be conducted in the near-term to determine whether this space should be developed in conjunction with upcoming projects.*

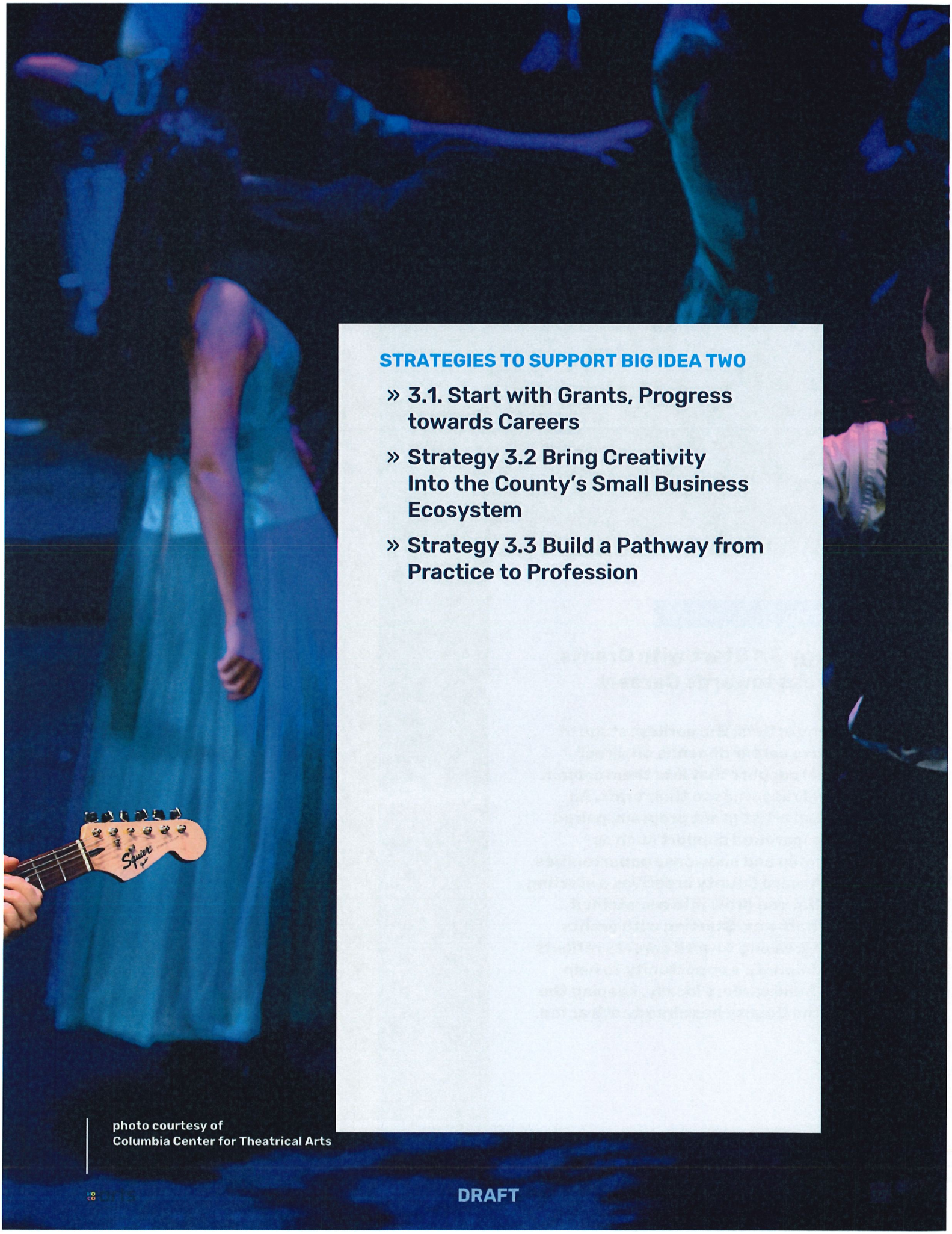
RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** Young at Art Museum is a 55,000-square-foot interactive children's art museum offering hands-on, participatory arts exploration for youth and families across a series of immersive exhibit environments, an art institute for classes, and a teen center. Founded in 1987 as a "museum without walls" that traveled South Florida delivering arts education, it grew from a small storefront into its current facility, which opened in 2012 through a public-private partnership with Broward County drawing on federal, state, county, and community support.
- **CASE STUDY:** ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center (Charlotte, NC) ImaginOn is a 102,000-square-foot facility in Charlotte that combines a dedicated children's and teen library with two theaters, a multimedia production studio, and interactive exhibit space, drawing more than 300,000 visitors a year. The facility grew out of a partnership between the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and the Children's Theatre of Charlotte that began with a joint task force in 1995.



Make Howard County a place where artists can develop their careers.

DRAFT



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT BIG IDEA TWO

- 3.1. Start with Grants, Progress towards Careers
- Strategy 3.2 Bring Creativity Into the County's Small Business Ecosystem
- Strategy 3.3 Build a Pathway from Practice to Profession

photo courtesy of
Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts



BIG IDEA TWO

> Strategy 3.1 Start with Grants, Progress towards Careers

For many artists, the earliest stage of a creative career depends on direct financial support that lets them commit time and resources to their craft. An individual artist grant program, paired with wraparound support such as mentorship and showcase opportunities, gives Howard County creatives a starting point that can grow into a sustained career pathway. Starting with grants and progressing toward careers reflects Howard County's opportunity to help artists build careers locally, keeping the talent the County has already attracted.

photo courtesy of HoCo Arts

Action 3.1.1 Establish a dedicated grant for direct support for community-based artists and creators.

a. Establish an individual artist grant program that provides consistent annual support for artists, modeled after the granting component of the piloted I AM Creativity grant program. As a permanent program, it would begin with annual grants for each artistic discipline, specifically targeting independent artists and creators. This foundational grant would remain accessible and merit-based, and would require a sustained investment in the program's development, both in available grant dollars and in operational support to staff the program. The program could evolve to include additional components that develop local artistic and creative talent, including:

   i. Establish wraparound support to connect award recipients with local and regional opportunities and resources as a primary component of the grant structure, with dedicated staff to develop and manage the program

   ii. A mentorship component, with showcasing and networking opportunities during the program period, with the potential for past program participants to serve as mentors for new grant recipients

   iii. Curated exhibition and showcase opportunities that position program participants before new audiences, donors, and potential collaborators

   iv. An additional expansion of this proposed program that could be explored in the future is the development of a multi-year cohort or partnership with outside organizations, such as nationwide residency and fellowship programs or regional colleges and universities

Action 3.1.2 Staff an Individual Artist and Creator Grant Program Coordinator at HoCo Arts.

a. An additional staff role should be funded at HoCo Arts. This role would be built around relational capacity first, administrative capacity second. A dedicated Coordinator would oversee:
    i. Day-to-day administration of the direct artist and creator grant program, including application support, outreach to prospective applicants, selection processes, and funder reporting for the grant program
b. Additional staff would be needed to administer the an expansion of the program including managing cohort relationships across program cycles, designing and iterating on programming offerings, and ensuring the career development track remains responsive to participants' actual needs
    i. Individualized, one-on-one engagement with program participants to identify each artist's specific development needs and connect them proactively and personally to relevant local and regional resources spanning business training, creative entrepreneurship, healthcare navigation, and affordable housing pathways
    ii. A structured mentorship component, recruiting and matching experienced practitioners with program participants, and organizing instructors to provide workshops and educational training to participants and interested Howard County community members
    iii. Planning and coordination of showcase events, public exhibitions, and networking opportunities that build relationships between program participants, the broader arts community, county partners, and potential donors and sponsors
    iv. Ongoing relationship management with partner organizations, ensuring referral pathways remain active and that artists are connected to the right resources across a changing landscape
    v. Tracking participant outcomes over time and reporting findings to funders and county stakeholders
c. This coordinator role could also support capacity building for artists and cultural creators through:
    i. Grant readiness and application support, helping artists and organizations pursue local, state, and national funding
    ii. Managing access and connecting artists and cultural creators with organizations and community partners with shared resources, technical assistance, and peer networks

IMPACT AREAS



ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS

PRIORITY

MEDIUM-HIGH

TIMING

NEAR-TERM

FUNDING

State Arts Funding, Public Operating Grants, Corporate Sponsorship, Earned Revenue

LEAD

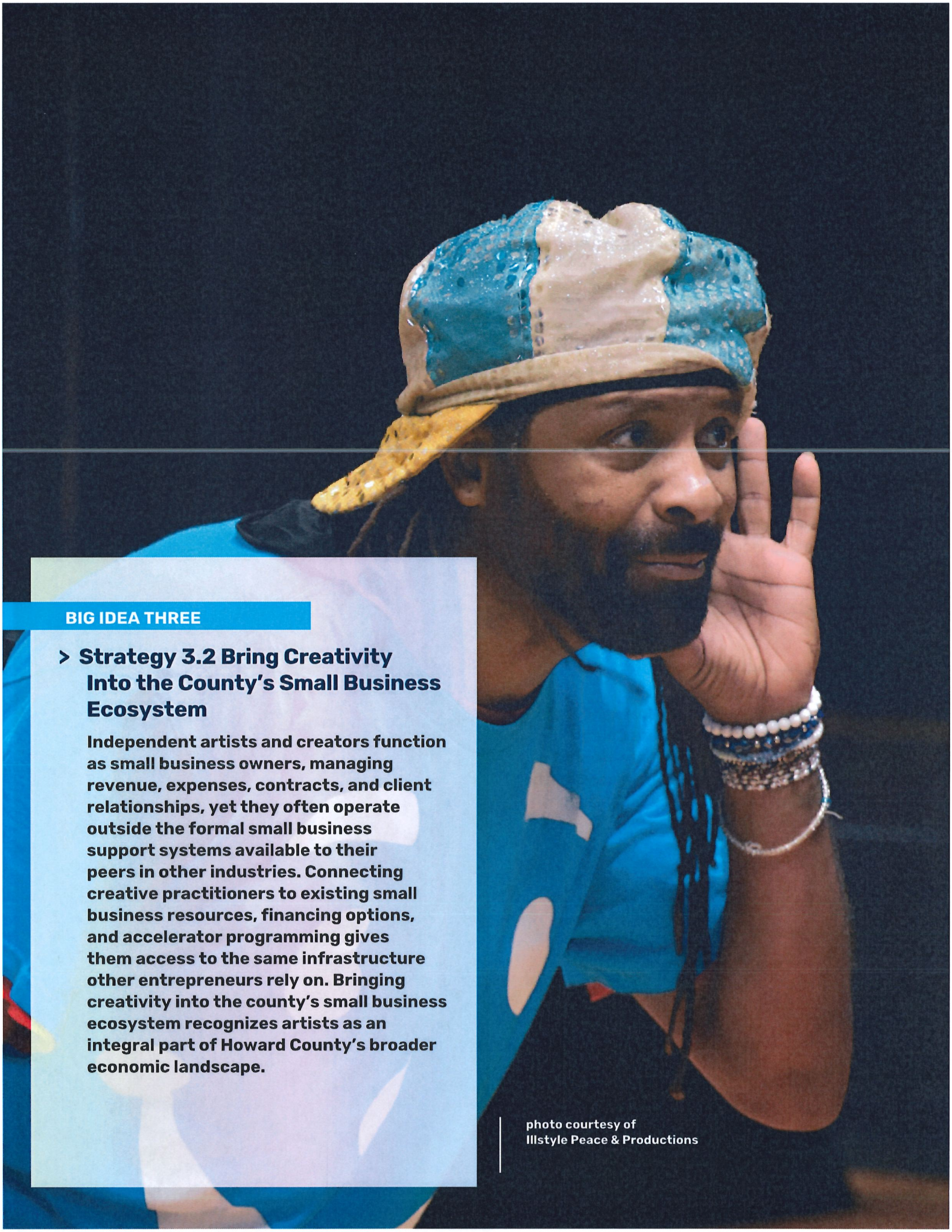
HoCo Arts

PARTNERS

Howard County Government, Maryland State Arts Council (Resource), Howard County Economic Development Authority, Howard County Community College, Americans for the Arts (Resource), Local Service Organizations

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** Mural Arts Philadelphia is a long-running public art organization running community mural, mentorship, and artist fellowship programs. The artist fellowship program provides mentorship and professional development to emerging artists through paid, structured fellowship placements and community-based project funding.



BIG IDEA THREE

> Strategy 3.2 Bring Creativity Into the County's Small Business Ecosystem

Independent artists and creators function as small business owners, managing revenue, expenses, contracts, and client relationships, yet they often operate outside the formal small business support systems available to their peers in other industries. Connecting creative practitioners to existing small business resources, financing options, and accelerator programming gives them access to the same infrastructure other entrepreneurs rely on. Bringing creativity into the county's small business ecosystem recognizes artists as an integral part of Howard County's broader economic landscape.

photo courtesy of
Illstyle Peace & Productions

Action 3.2.1 Formally recognize artists and cultural creators as Small Business Enterprises.

a. Independent artists and creators are, in practice, small business owners. They manage revenue, expenses, contracts, intellectual property, marketing, and client relationships, often without the business infrastructure, legal protection, or access to capital that is routinely accessed by their peers in other sectors. A first step toward closing this gap is ensuring that artists are formally recognized within the county's small business ecosystem and that they understand the resources available to them as a result.

   i. Develop clear guidance, in plain language accessible to artists, on how independent creative practitioners can qualify for and benefit from Small Business Enterprise designation in Howard County and the state of Maryland, including access to procurement opportunities, certifications, and business development resources

   ii. Establish a dedicated outreach effort, coordinated between HoCo Arts, HCEDA, and the Chamber of Commerce to reach artists and creative businesses currently operating outside the small business support ecosystem and connect them to relevant resources

   iii. Create a referral pathway from the Individual Artist Program, directly into HCEDA, Chamber of Commerce, and Maryland Small Business Development Center services

   iv. Examine available financing options such as low-interest loans, bridge funding, and lines of credit, examples of existing programs include HCEDA's LIFT Fund microloans, the Catalyst Fund revolving loan program, and Maryland Innovation Center support for borrowers

Action 3.1.2 Consider Launching a Creative Economy Accelerator through the Maryland Innovation Center.

a. MIC (The Maryland Innovation Center)'s BRITE platform accelerates the journey from innovation to commercialization, offering mentorship, marketing, and resources for startups and established businesses in Howard County. Through programs like HoCo Higher and the Cyber Howard Accelerator, MIC has demonstrated that sector-specific cohort programming can produce meaningful outcomes for Howard County entrepreneurs. Creative enterprises represent a natural and largely untapped extension of this mission. Resources offered through a Creative Economy specific program may include:

   i. Structured curriculum covering business formation, intellectual property basics, pricing and revenue strategies, grant writing and funding literacy, marketing and audience development, and financial management for variable-income practitioners

   ii. Mentorship from established creative business owners and MIC's existing network of business advisors

   iii. A pitch or showcase component at program completion, giving creative enterprises the opportunity to present before investors, funders, and community stakeholders

   iv. Seed funding or grant access for cohort graduates to support business launch or growth following program completion

   v. A pathway into MIC membership and ongoing incubation resources for creative enterprises ready to scale

   vi. Networking opportunities designed to connect creative enterprises with potential sponsors, collaborators, and employers

   vii. Explore a partnership to host a Creative Enterprises Summit (with HoCo Arts, the Maryland State Arts Council, Maryland Citizens for the Arts, MIC)

IMPACT AREAS



ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS



AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

PRIORITY



MEDIUM

TIMING



MID-TERM

FUNDING

Corporate Sponsorship, Earned Revenue

LEAD

Howard County

PARTNERS

Howard County Economic Development Authority, Small Business Support Organizations, Entrepreneurship Networks, Artists and Creative Business Owners, Local Businesses

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **CASE STUDY:** Creative Capital provides individual artists with unrestricted project grants up to $50,000, plus professional development services, for artists creating new work across all disciplines, funded through a national open-call process.

- **CASE STUDY:** NYSCA/NYFA Artist as Entrepreneur Program This is an intensive, multi-day professional development program for artists of all disciplines that covers strategic planning, finance, law, marketing, and fundraising through a blend of workshops, panels, and breakout groups.

- **CASE STUDY:** Doris Duke Foundation's Performing Arts Technologies Lab This accelerator supports pioneering artists, technologists, and arts organizations exploring innovative uses of digital technology in the performing arts, providing funding for prototyping and feasibility testing alongside production advice and network-building opportunities.

- **CASE STUDY:** Center for Craft Teaching Artist Cohort This program awards mid-career craft artists who teach a $10,000 grant and a multi-month cohort experience supporting their artistic and teaching career development through mentorship and peer-to-peer learning.

DRAF



BIG IDEA THREE

> Strategy 3.3 Build a Pathway from Practice to Profession

Sustaining a career in the arts depends on more than talent and opportunity. Without access to affordable healthcare, retirement planning, and other professional benefits, many artists and creative practitioners face structural barriers that make a long-term career in the sector difficult to sustain. Building a pathway from practice to profession addresses these barriers directly, connecting artists to existing resources while advancing the case for broader structural investment at the state and county level.

photo courtesy of Columbia Bands

Action 3.3.1 Collaborate with State and National Agencies to advocate for a Healthcare and Benefits Support Feasibility Study for those working in arts and culture across the state.

a. Access to affordable healthcare, retirement planning, and professional benefits remains one of the most significant structural barriers to sustaining a career in the arts. Without employer-sponsored coverage or collective bargaining protections, many arts and culture practitioners face inadequate coverage, unaffordable premiums, and no path to retirement security, which is a prevalent reality that pushes talented practitioners out of the cultural sector. A feasibility study conducted at the state-level that would assess the landscape of healthcare and benefits support options for arts and culture practitioners in Maryland would:

   i. Survey artists, arts administrators, producers, and performers in the State of Maryland to document the scope and nature of healthcare and benefits access challenges, identifying where gaps are most acute across disciplines and career stages

   ii. Map existing group rate, pooled insurance, retirement, and benefits access models available to independent creative workers at the regional and national level, including models administered by arts service organizations, unions, professional associations, and emerging benefits platforms for freelance workers

   iii. Assess the feasibility of a new or existing entity administering or brokering a benefits access program directly, including potential partnership models with existing regional providers, credit unions, and benefits platforms

   iv. Produce a set of concrete recommendations for State and County investment, ranging from low-cost referral and navigation support to more substantial program development, with estimated costs and implementation timelines for each option

   v. Direct artists and creatives toward existing national and regional resources, including the Entertainment Community Fund's free health insurance counseling, the Freelancers Union, and Americans for the Arts' benefits navigation tools, while longer-term structural solutions are pursued at the state and national level

Action 3.3.2 Create a paid creative practitioner or internship program with placement support.

a. Arts and culture careers are built through experience, and Howard County has an opportunity to be the place where the next generation of creative professionals gets theirs. A paid creative internship program connects college students pursuing arts, design, communications, arts administration, and related fields with local arts organizations, county agencies, and corporate partners in order to build operational capacity for host organizations while demonstrating to emerging practitioners that arts and culture careers are valued and viable in Howard County.

    i. Explore partnerships with regional education systems to connect young artists and emerging creative professionals with local organizations to help them build operational capacity and show the interns that arts careers are valued. Regional colleges and universities should lead recruitment and student support, with HoCo Arts advocating for the funding that makes compensation possible and convening the network of host organizations

    ii. Additional placement opportunities for early-career professionals should also be explored in partnership, particularly those identified through the Individual Artist Grant Program (Strategy 3.1)

    iii. Career navigation support for program graduates, connecting interns who wish to remain in Howard County after graduation to employment opportunities

    iv. Leverage this program to expand opportunities for arts careers in sectors with significant corporate and institutional presence in the county, including healthcare and technology, recognizing that the arts contribute to individual and community wellbeing, economic vitality, and innovation across all sectors

IMPACT AREAS



ARTIST DEVELOPMENT + CREATIVE CAREERS

PRIORITY

●●●○○ **MEDIUM**

TIMING

●●●●○ **MID-TERM**

FUNDING

Discipline-Specific National Funders, Federal Programming Grants, Corporate Sponsorship

LEAD

HoCo Arts

PARTNERS

Maryland State Arts Council, Educational and Workforce Development Institutions, Regional Arts Organizations, Artists and Creative Practitioners, Local Creative Businesses

RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & PROOF POINTS

- **Case Study:** The Entertainment Community Fund is a national nonprofit offering free health insurance counseling and social services for entertainment and performing arts workers.
- **Case Study:** The LA County Creative Strategist Program places paid artists directly inside County departments to develop artist-driven solutions to civic challenges.

DRAF

Howard County

Arts & Culture Plan

APPENDIX A - COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

County Demographics

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

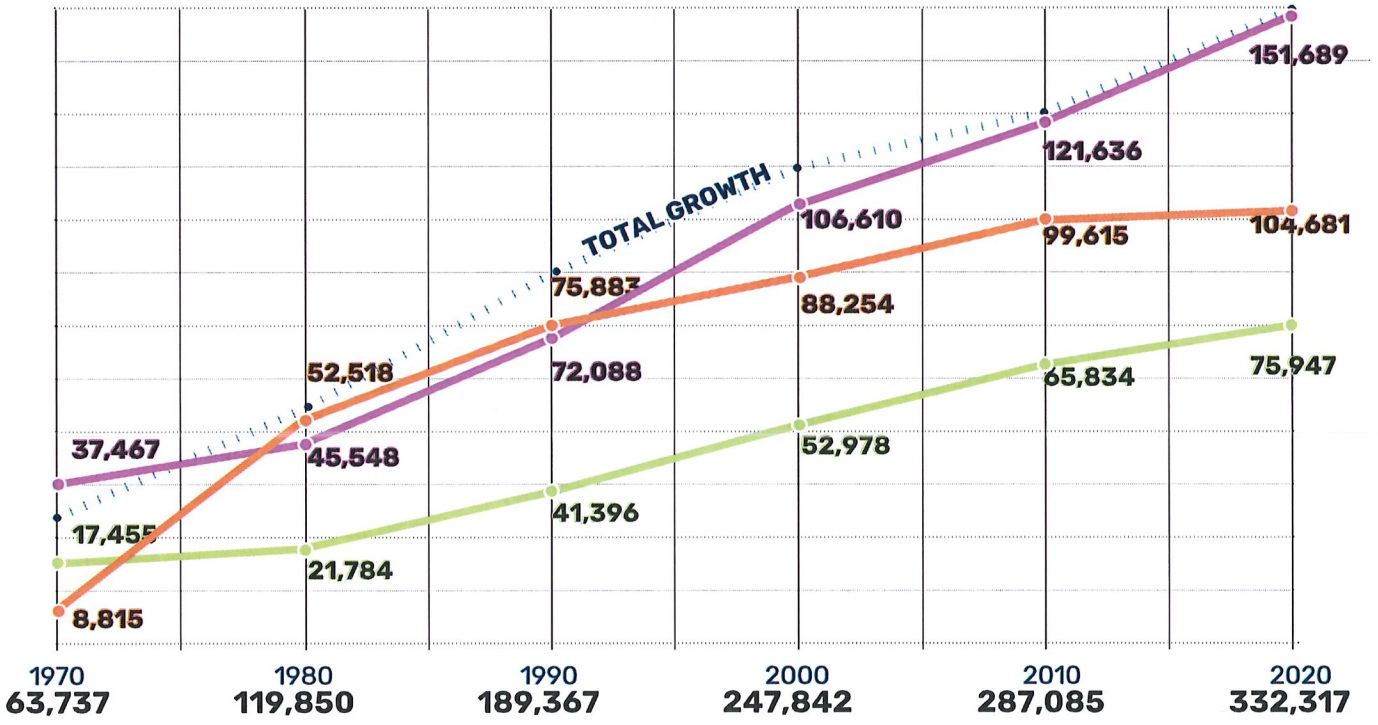
Howard County, Maryland, is consistently recognized as one of the most affluent and highly educated regions in the United States. As of 2026, the county maintains a population of approximately 340,000 residents, characterized by significant diversity and a strong socioeconomic profile. Roughly 23% of the population is foreign-born, contributing to a vibrant multicultural fabric where nearly 30% of households speak a language other than English at home. The workforce is highly skilled; over 64% of adults hold a bachelor's degree or higher, which is nearly double the national average, and the median household income hovers around $150,000. This reflects a concentration of professionals in the technology, defense, and healthcare sectors. This economic vitality is further bolstered by the presence of major institutions like Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory and proximity to federal agencies, fostering a landscape where innovation and community growth go hand-in-hand.

The county's communities range from planned urban centers to historic districts and rural farmsteads. Columbia, the largest community, remains a national model for planned development, known for its extensive park systems, the Merriweather Post Pavilion, and its emphasis on social integration. To the north, Ellicott City offers a blend of 18th-century historic charm along its Main Street and modern residential growth in the surrounding "Greater Ellicott City" area. Emerging hubs like Maple Lawn provide high-density, "live-work-play" luxury environments, while the western portion of the county preserves a more pastoral atmosphere with equestrian estates and agricultural preserves. These varied neighborhoods are unified by a top-tier public school system and a strategic location nestled between the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. metropolitan corridors, offering residents a unique quality of life that balances career opportunities with rich recreational and cultural amenities.

EARLY POPULATION GROWTH

Howard County has experienced dramatic population growth, increasing more than fivefold from 63,737 residents in 1970 to 332,317 by 2020 (data.census.gov). This expansion profoundly reshaped the county's population distribution. While the unincorporated areas began as the largest segment, holding 59% of the population in 1980, Columbia absorbed the largest share of new residents, peaking at 44% of the county's total population in 2000. By 2020, Columbia accounted for 40% of residents. Meanwhile, Ellicott City also saw substantial numeric growth (from 17,455 in 1970 to 41,396 in 2010) but its proportional share of the county's ever-growing population gradually decreased, dropping to 22% by 2020, illustrating the shifting settlement patterns concentrated around the planned growth centers.

HOWARD COUNTY POPULATION OVER TIME



UNINCORPORATED HOWARD COUNTY

ELLICOT CITY

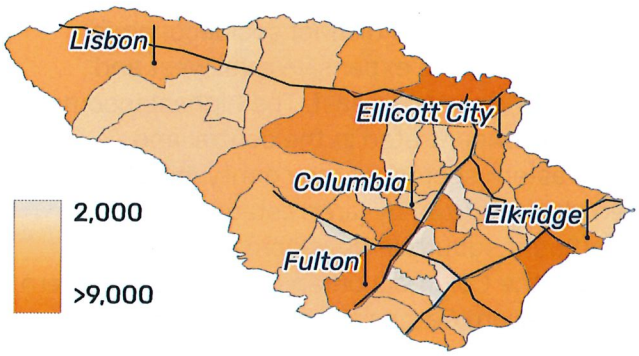
COLUMBIA

TOTAL POPULATION

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION TODAY

The highest concentrations of population are clustered in the eastern and southeastern regions, particularly within the planned community of Columbia and surrounding areas like Ellicott City and North Laurel, which benefit from their proximity to the Baltimore-Washington D.C. corridor. In contrast, the western portion of the county reflects a lower density characterized by agricultural preservation and large-lot residential zoning. Centrally, the map shows Columbia the county's suburban core, where density begins to transition from the intensive development of the I-95/US-29 corridor to the more open landscapes of the Piedmont plateau.

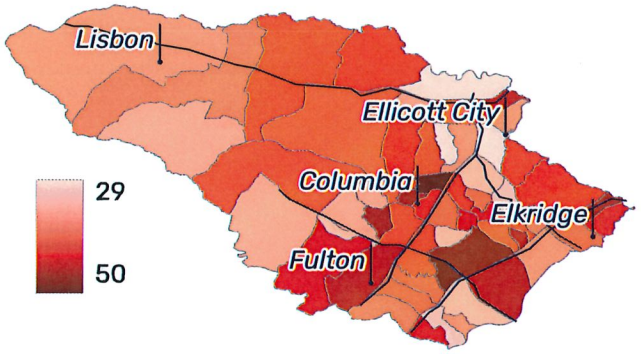
MAP B.1 **POPULATION**



Median Age Distribution

The county's demographic profile has evolved significantly over the decades, with the median age steadily increasing from 28.1 in 1970 to 38.7 in 2020. The oldest median age cohorts are concentrated in pockets of the southern and eastern regions, particularly along the corridor between Columbia and Laurel, as well as in the suburban neighborhoods bordering Patapsco Valley State Park. Interestingly, Columbia presents a striking mosaic of age diversity, containing both younger and older concentrations, likely reflecting the presence of both senior living communities and high-density apartments favored by younger professionals. The western panhandle near Mount Airy and the central-northern rural areas maintain a moderate, more uniform median age, suggesting established family-oriented residential zones that lack the extreme demographic swings seen in the county's more urbanized eastern core.

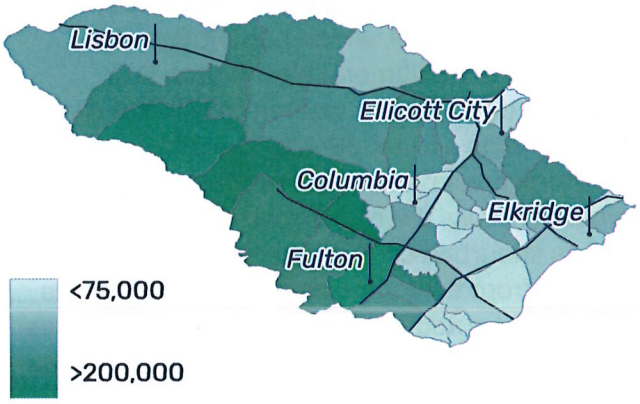
MAP B.2 **MEDIAN AGE**



Median Income Distribution

This map highlights a distinct socioeconomic divide between the expansive rural west and the densely developed east. The highest income levels are concentrated in the central and southwestern sectors of the county, which are often characterized by large estate housing and affluent suburban developments. In sharp contrast, the Columbia urban core and the eastern corridor toward Catonsville show lower median incomes relative to the rest of the county. This pattern suggests that while the county is overall quite wealthy, its economic "peaks" are found in the less densely populated residential belts, while the more diverse, high-density areas of Columbia and the eastern border serve as the county's more affordable housing hubs.

MAP B.3 **MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

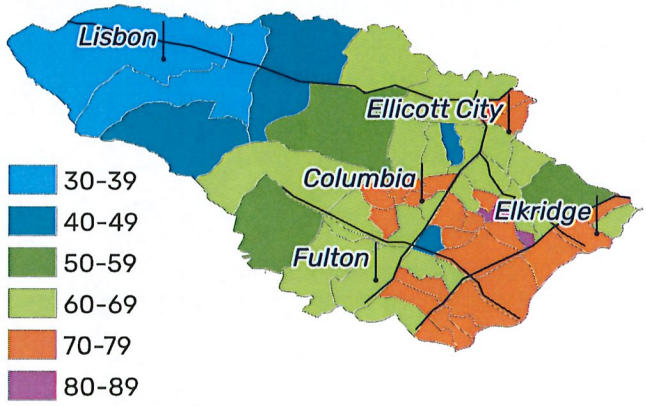


Racial Make-up

According to census designations, the White population is the most widespread in the county, representing both the highest number of people and the strongest concentration across the most census tracts. There is a concentration of Hispanic peoples in Columbia, especially to the east and south. Similarly, the Black or African American population lives primarily in the most eastern part of the county. Notably, these two categories mirror the areas on the lower end of the county's median income. There is also a significant Asian population in the northcentral part of the county, though the decennial census does not pull out specific races within the Asian populations.

A diversity index shows on a scale of 0 to 100 how likely it is two people from an area would have a different race or ethnicity. A score of 0 would mean everyone had the same race and ethnicity; a score of 100 would mean everyone in an area had a distinctly different combination of race and ethnicity. Nearly every area in the County is some place in the middle. The index was invented in 1991 by Phil Meyer of the University of North Carolina and Shawn McIntosh, who was then with USA TODAY. (USA Today). In 2010, Howard County's diversity index was 59. It has since raised 13 points up to 72 in 2020, showing a move towards a greatly diverse population. According to the index map, the most diverse areas of the county are in the southeast, while the least diverse are in the northwest.

MAP B.4 **DIVERSITY INDEX**



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Howard County

Arts & Culture Plan

APPENDIX B - PROGRAMMING ASSESSMENT

Programming Assessment

Howard County's arts and culture sector is shaped by a network of public investment, institutional infrastructure, and organizational capacity that has grown considerably over the past decade. This section examines that landscape across three interconnected areas: the programming that arts organizations deliver and the conditions that enable or constrain it, the physical venues and spaces that make arts activity possible, and the funding structures that sustain the sector over time.

Together these areas tell a consistent story. Demand is strong. Howard County audiences are engaged, growing, and hungry for more. Organizations are building programming, earning revenue, and developing community relationships that position the sector well for the future. At the same time, structural gaps persist: the supply of flexible, affordable, and purpose-built spaces; in the depth and diversity of the sector's funding base; and in the staff capacity organizations need to act on the opportunities in front of them.

HoCo Arts sits at the center of this ecosystem as both a direct program provider and the primary administrator of public grant funds for the sector. Through more than $900,000 in annual grants and over $6.7 million distributed in the past ten years, HoCo Arts supports organizations, individual artists, schools, and Baltimore City institutions that serve Howard County residents. The recommendations in this section build on that foundation, identifying what the county and its partners may do to strengthen the conditions for a thriving, equitable, and resilient creative sector.

THE MARYLAND STATE ARTS COUNCIL

Founded in 1967, The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) is an agency of the State of Maryland's Department of Commerce that plays an essential role, ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts.

MSAC advances the arts in the state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland.

To carry out its mission, MSAC awards grants to nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations for ongoing arts programming and projects. MSAC also awards grants to independent artists and provide technical assistance and professional development to individuals and groups.

MSAC is comprised of an appointed body of 17 citizens from across the state, 13 of whom are named by the governor to 3-year terms that may be renewed once. Two private citizens and two legislators are appointed by the president of the Senate and by the speaker of the House. All councilors serve without salary.

https://msac.org/about

THE HOWARD COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL (HOCO ARTS)

The Howard County Arts Council was designated in 1984 as the agency authorized to serve as the county arts council in accordance with provisions of the Howard County Charter and Howard County Code. As the designated local arts agency it is authorized by Howard County Government and the Maryland State Arts Council to administer public funds designated for the arts. One of HoCo Arts' most important responsibilities is the administration of public and private funds designated for grants. The desired impact of the HoCo Arts' grant programs is to foster excellence, diversity, and vitality in arts offerings for Howard County residents; broaden opportunities for Howard County audiences, artists, and arts organizations; increase the availability of arts activities in Howard County; and promote county-wide awareness of arts resources and opportunities.

Publicly-Supported Arts and Culture Programming

This section summarizes findings from interviews with four major Howard County cultural organizations regarding each organization's existing programming capacity, related needs and challenges, and opportunities for the County to strategically support and strengthen programming moving forward. Staff members from the following organizations were interviewed: HoCo Arts, Howard County Library System, Columbia Arts Center, and the Merriweather Arts & Culture Center. Interviews took place in Spring 2026. This memo summarizes findings and takeaways from these interviews to support the insights and recommendations within the Howard County Arts & Culture Master Plan.

SUMMARY OF KEY CULTURAL PROGRAMMING CONSTRAINTS

Organizations reported that overall demand for programming classes, event series, and flagship events has been strong in recent years. Classes and other educational offerings have seen especially strong demand.

The two most common constraints when it comes to launching expanded programming are limited staff capacity and limited rental venue availability (including both high caliber community-oriented performing arts space and visual arts gallery space).

Limited Space
Venue rental availability is low, with many facilities being outdated, either too large or too small, or being overbooked
Limited access to larger venues and/or venues with greater availability was cited as a major barrier to expanded programming
Arts organizations expressed the importance of creating a dedicated space for community use

Limited Staffing Capacity
Organization staff capacity is a major constraint in the expansion of existing programming or development of new programming
While increased connectivity and collaboration with other arts partners would boost the scale and quality of programming, such partnerships require greater staff capacity

ARTS ORGANIZATION PROGRAMMING NEEDS & CHALLENGES

Arts organizations frequently cited a lack of consistently available, high-quality spaces and limited staffing capacity as the top operational barriers constraining expansion of existing programming or development of new programming.

- Arts organizations often have a small team and limited capacity with which to develop, plan, execute, and market programming. Staff capacity is a major need of these organizations to expand their offerings and elevate existing offerings in terms of profile, quality, and attendance. Programming can create particular staffing challenges, as many events fall outside typical weekday working hours.
- The current landscape remains lacking in visual arts and gallery space, particularly high-quality, multi-use space. This is a major constraint on visual arts programming and the ability of arts organizations to showcase the work of community, curated, and visiting artists.
- Organizations expressed a desire for a dedicated rental space for community groups and multidisciplinary programs. Many rental facilities are either too large (e.g. Merriweather Post Pavilion) or too small (e.g. Slayton House Theatre). Other facilities are predominantly used by an educational institution or a resident company, drastically cutting into rental availability.
- Organizations cited a need for a high-quality, high-capacity venue to host top-tier speaker events. Organizations characterized Howard County audiences as sophisticated, intellectually curious, and interested in seeing lectures and authors that are current and high-profile. Existing facilities for hosting speakers (e.g. in high schools or at Howard County Community College) often run into scheduling constraints and/or are not equipped to host high-profile speakers who draw large audiences.
- Arts organizations are increasingly cognizant of the opportunity presented by makerspaces and interested in breaking into this space more comprehensively with dedicated staff and facilities.
- Organizations sometimes struggle with coordination and marketing of programs, as well as ensuring that audiences are aware of their offerings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW OR EXPANDED PROGRAMMING

Arts organizations are interested in expanding programs across disciplines, particularly new visual arts exhibitions and experiences that can broaden existing audience bases and launch new artistic collaborations.

- Expanded visual arts exhibitions and experiences were cited as a major opportunity to attract new audiences to Howard County and generate excitement.
- Artistic collaborations and joint programming across arts organizations and artistic disciplines are also a goal for many arts stakeholders. Expanded joint programs have the potential to increase audience size, raise awareness of new groups, artists, or disciplines, and provide a richer and more vibrant arts experience for the public.
- Expanding access to audiences across age groups, languages, and artistic interests is a priority for arts organizations. Stakeholders expressed a desire to reach all age groups with their programming, and to include participants from all backgrounds and across multiple languages.
- Many arts stakeholders are interested in expanding makerspace offerings and supporting small, independent creators and entrepreneurs.
- Arts organizations are looking to expand the marketing of their events, often taking steps to cross-promote events from different organizations or sending out email blasts and mailers to participants of previous programs. Expanded communications around arts offerings continues to be an area for future growth.

- Continuing to connect organizations to available facilities for their programs and convene listings of available spaces is essential. Creating a centralized online booking system for facility rentals across the county was one recommended approach for addressing the uncertainty and lack of awareness that sometimes surround facility rental opportunities.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF GREATER FUNDING AND EXPANDED PROGRAMMING

Anticipated benefits of investing in staff capacity and facility availability range from improved programming and expanded access to the arts, to community building.

- The development of new physical spaces for the visual arts and for large-scale audiences (e.g. for speaker series events) would enable organizations to launch more ambitious programs and bring more visual arts experiences to their audiences.
- Enhanced staff capacity could empower greater coordination between arts organizations, facilitating greater connectivity and joint programming that can both grow audiences and drive artistic innovation.
- Facility upgrades at venues across the landscape can be impactful in elevating the audience experience and causing greater visitation or participation in programs.
- Expanding programming and facility access to better reach all age ranges can help facilitate connection and build community among participants

HOCO arts

Howard County

Arts & Culture Plan

APPENDIX C - VENUE SUPPLY ASSESSMENT

Venue Supply Assessment

Summary of Key Arts & Culture Venue Supply Changes Since 2015

Since 2015, several key new venues have been built or renovated, particularly the new Performing Arts Center in Columbia. Other especially notable additions include the Capitoline Center in Ellicott City and the Chrysalis, a 5,000 SF concert stage in Merriweather Park.

The supply gap identified in the 2015 analysis, which states that there is a supply gap for smaller performance spaces and galleries, still exists, according to several local stakeholders. The biggest needs across the Howard County arts landscape remain gallery spaces and small-to-mid-sized theater spaces that can host more events with a smaller or more moderately sized audience.

The new Performing Arts Center, currently under construction, directly meets several of the key supply gaps identified in the 2015 analysis, particularly the addition of high quality, small-to-mid-size performance space (300-seat dinner theater), new gallery and exhibition space (1,600 SF of gallery space), available rental spaces (with two 150-seat theaters), and nearly 7,000 SF of supporting rooms for education and rehearsals.

The Capitoline Center in Ellicott City has also directly helped fill several critical supply gaps. The center, which recently opened in March 2026 as the new home of the Arts Council, has added 80,000 square feet of space for cultural production and promotion, including four new artist studios (bringing the total up to 18), an upgraded black box theater, and improved studios, classrooms, and supporting spaces.

The Long Reach Village Center Artist Studio Program, which launched in 2020, has also directly met one of the key supply gaps identified in the 2015 analysis by adding affordable, flexible studio spaces for a wide range of disciplines and uses (although this program will likely end in 2027).

Since the 2015 report, the Merriweather Post Pavilion has undergone two major renovations: in 2015-2016, for guest services including box office, restrooms, and concession areas, and in 2017-2018, structural changes to raise the height of the pavilion roof.

Additionally, The Market at Caplan's is a new local goods marketplace and incubator space located in the historic Caplan's Building in Old Ellicott City. This facility is administered by the Howard County Economic Development Authority, with the goal of serving the practical needs of those who live and work in the community, while also providing a strong offering to visitors and reconnecting Main Street to its working roots. The second floor of the space is used as a gallery, with rotating exhibits that feature local artists.

With new venues like the Chrysalis, there are specific programming limitations to the spaces, where not all rental user groups will find the spaces tailored to their specific needs.

CURRENT APPLICABILITY OF 2015 STUDY FINDINGS

Howard County has seen the opening of several arts and cultural venues that have helped fill gaps identified in the 2015 analysis. The new Performing Arts Center in Downtown Columbia will act as a broader cultural hub to meet a range of visual and performing arts needs. Key community arts groups, Toby's Dinner Theatre, the Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts, and the Howard County Arts Council, will be moving into improved spaces, which can help expand their audiences and improve the visitor experience. HoCo Arts' relocation to the Historic Courthouse, now the Capitoline Center, will allow for more visual arts studio and exhibition capacity and serve as a central destination for arts and culture in Ellicott City. HoCo Arts Long Reach Artist Studio Program, launched in 2020, and provided space for individual artist studios at the Village Center until 2026.

Many of the findings from the 2015 report hold true in 2026. Several of the dynamics that have persisted include the ongoing supply gap of small-scale venues, the limited (though improving) competitiveness of some Howard County venues compared to others in the region, the clustering of arts and culture venues in Columbia, the importance of public spaces and village centers in the arts landscape, and the ongoing lack of visual arts gallery spaces and small and mid-sized performing arts space in the county.

IMPACT OF DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA'S PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

The PAC in Downtown Columbia is positioned to serve as an arts hub for the County. The venue is set to include an upgraded dinner theatre, two black box theaters, a gallery/exhibition space, and arts education classrooms. The space aligns with the following supply gaps identified in the 2015 analysis:

Identified Gap (2015 Study)	Applicability with Identified Need	Detail
High quality, small-to-mid-size performance space	Directly Met	The new PAC will include a 300-seat dinner theater (adding 25 seats to the previous theater of 275 seats) and two 150-seat black box theaters, featuring improved stage, lighting, and sound enhancements.
Lack of availability of rental spaces	Directly Met	The two 150-seat theaters can alleviate some need for rental space. One will serve as homebase for the Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts, largely eliminating its need for outside space, and may have limited ability as rental space, depending on future policies and availability.
Limited gallery and exhibition space	Directly Met	The new art gallery will bring 1,600 square feet of gallery space to Howard County.
Limited maker/studio space for artists	Partially Met / TBD	The 7,000 square feet of new arts classroom space does not directly meet this need but can serve a related purpose.

APPROXIMATE NET CHANGE IN ARTS AND CULTURAL VENUES SINCE 2015

Geography	Openings	Closings	Net Change (Count)	Net Change (SF)
Columbia	10	1	+9	+128,500
Ellicott City	5	2	+3	+13,000
Howard County	15	3	+12	+141,500
Total Square Footage*	161,500	(20,000)	+141,500	

Note: Venue change figures based on available online directories, articles, and other publicly available information. Figures are approximate and may not capture all cultural venue openings and closing since 2015.
**Square footage figures were estimates by JS&A for several venues without available information. Estimates are based on the typical size for each venue given its features, uses, and location.*

CURRENT APPLICABILITY OF 2015 REPORT FINDINGS

Geography	Openings	Closings
Develop a center for arts education that makes high quality facilities accessible to local organizations	In-Progress	New Performing Arts Center opening in Columbia will be the new home for the Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts, a gallery, a community black box theatre, and supporting rooms for arts education and rehearsals.
Support the development of new digital arts facilities and makerspaces	In-Progress	Two new library makerspaces opened (Elkridge DIY Center and the Glenwood Makerspace) and a feasibility study conducted and early plans made for an anchor makerspace in Columbia.
Promote the development of additional small and informal performance spaces	Limited Achievement	A few privately owned galleries have opened new locations, and new facilities have been built or expanded, including Chrysalis (2017), Color Burst Park (2023), the Carroll Baldwin Hall renovation, and the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center (2022). However, there remains a need for additional performance spaces with greater rental availability.
Promote the development of new community arts facilities within other village centers and other areas of Howard County.	Not Yet Achieved	Outside of the Carroll Baldwin Hall in Savage, no community arts facilities have opened outside of the existing arts and culture centers of Columbia and Ellicott City since 2015.
Redevelop and position Long Reach Village Center to support the development and creation of performing and visual arts activity	Achieved	Sixteen new artist studio spaces opened in 2020, as well as the African Art Museum of Maryland, DoodleHatch, and Roll Up and Dye. The Columbia Art Center, a long-time anchor of the Long Reach Village Center, was renovated in 2025. Note that these artist studio spaces closed in 2026, creating a need for an alternative space.

PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2015

Statement	Applicability in 2026	Summary of Change Since 2015
Locally, there are gaps in the facility inventory for a high quality, small to mid-size performance space.	Still Applicable	Although new small to mid -size venues have been developed since 2015, the supply gap for these venues persists.
Regionally, there is an abundance of performance facilities covering a variety of capacities. Most of them have higher quality ratings than Howard County spaces.	Partially Applicable	While higher-rated regional competition still exists, investments in the Capitoline Center, Columbia's new Performing Arts Center, the Chyrsalis, and Merriweather Post Pavilion (for example) have leveled up the quality of some key venues.
The type, size, features and availability of existing facilities limit the level and quality of touring activity visiting Columbia and Howard County. While there is a good level of music and family programming, there is opportunity to present more theatre, dance and culturally specific performances.	Partially Applicable	National touring performances are still limited by the availability of venues in Howard County and there is still a good level of music and family programming. With the changes that have taken place, there is more potential to expand theatre, dance and cultural programming.
Columbia's performance facilities tend to be better outfitted than those in the rest of the County. Compared to regional facilities, however, they lag behind.	Partially Applicable	High-quality venues remain concentrated in Columbia. The new Performing Arts Center is well-positioned to help capture demand from regional competitors.
The majority of spaces used for performance were not built, nor are well-equipped, for live performance. They include galleries, churches, village centers, and parks.	Partially Applicable	Public spaces, village centers, and parks remain key sites for arts and culture in Howard County. These spaces provide unique and helpful elements for a thriving arts and culture landscape, but do not replace the need for purpose-built performance spaces. The new spaces at the Capitoline Center and the Performing Arts Center and the renovations at the popular Lakefront Stage will help support live performances.
There is limited gallery and exhibition space in the County.	Still Applicable	At least 2-3 new gallery spaces have been opened/relocated since 2015, but arts stakeholders expressed that the county still lacks sufficient high-quality spaces for the visual arts. Additionally, the redevelopment of Long Reach Village has displaced the artist studio spaces and DoodleHatch.
There is limited maker/studio space for artists and creative entrepreneurs to work and create. Existing facilities are limited in size, availability and function.	Partially Applicable	Two new library makerspace facilities have been created since 2015. Although there is still room to increase the supply of makerspaces, notable progress has been made.

Note: Chart above excludes core findings from 2015 analysis that are not directly related to supply growth, such as findings pertaining to arts education programming, historic resources, and space availability.

HOWARD COUNTY'S ARTS & CULTURE VENUE NEEDS LOOKING AHEAD

Over the past ten years, Howard County has made notable investments in the arts and culture supply landscape. The new spaces at the Capitoline Center in Ellicott City, the New Performing Arts Center in Columbia, Chrysalis, and Color Burst Park, as well as the renovations of the Merriweather Post Pavilion, CAC, and Lakefront Stage, represent key successes in expanding access to arts and culture spaces.

In addition, the County should consider incentivizing the growth of small and mid-scale performance and rehearsal spaces, visual arts exhibition spaces, and multidisciplinary or flexible spaces, through tools such as:

Identify opportunities to loosen commercial, residential, and mixed-use zoning restrictions to allow for live-work units.

- Consider supporting the development of arts and culture spaces by providing capital to community-based organizations working on maintaining and expanding spaces for cultural performance, production, and retail distribution.
- Consider providing matching County incentives for applicable projects eligible for State incentives provided through Arts & Entertainment Districts (in Columbia and Ellicott City). Consider providing matching funds to nonprofit arts organizations that receive State arts capital grants.
- Provide bonus density to mixed-use developments that incorporate arts and cultural uses.
- Consider utilizing the marketplace concept in additional development projects and historic revitalization projects across the county.

Howard County

Arts & Culture Plan

APPENDIX C - REGIONAL POSITIONING

Regional Positioning

Introduction

Howard County's cultural sector does not exist in isolation. It sits between two of the mid-Atlantic region's most significant cultural markets: Washington, DC to the south and Baltimore City to the north. Adjacent to the west is Montgomery County, home to one of the most well-resourced local arts agencies in the country. The proximity of these markets shapes where Howard County artists work, where residents seek cultural experiences, and what role the county is positioned to play in the regional creative ecosystem.

This analysis examines four geographies: Washington, DC; Baltimore City; Montgomery County, Maryland; and Howard County, Maryland. Each profile draws on creative sector employment data from the U.S. Census Bureau's County Business Patterns (2023), public arts investment, and policy documentation available from each community. Population figures are drawn from U.S. Census Bureau estimates. Employment totals are drawn from Esri Business Analyst. All per-capita figures are calculated against population to enable meaningful cross-geography comparison.

Each profile addresses four dimensions: cultural market character, creative economy and workforce, public investment and policy infrastructure, and gaps and opportunities. Each closes with a direct bridge to Howard County's role in the regional landscape.

Washington, D.C.

CULTURAL MARKET CHARACTER AND CREATIVE ECONOMY

Washington, DC operates at a scale that places it in a category apart from any other regional jurisdiction. The District's cultural economy supports an estimated $30 billion in annual spending, generates over $1 billion in tax revenue, and employs approximately 150,000 workers across arts, entertainment, media, and communications. The performing arts and cultural sector alone counts 269 establishments employing 7,123 workers at an average annual wage of $123,509, and 1,060 creative workers per 100,000 residents, nearly four times Baltimore's rate, ten times Montgomery County's, and four times Howard County's. Theater companies employ 1,030 workers at a per-capita rate of 153 per 100,000 residents, second only to Howard County's 173. Museum employment reaches 133 workers per 100,000 residents, nearly 14 times Howard County's rate. Most distinctive is the public relations sector: 493 establishments employing 6,904 workers at a combined payroll of $1.2 billion, reflecting the concentration of advocacy organizations, federal agencies, and political infrastructure unique to the national capital.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE

The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities distributes funding across all eight wards through annual ward reports, producing a level of public accountability that few jurisdictions can match. The DC Cultural Plan establishes 28 policy recommendations and eight investment priorities backed by an initial commitment of more than $8 million. A dedicated municipal office for the film and music industries, separate from the arts agency, reflects a scale of political investment in creative sector development that no Maryland jurisdiction in the study has replicated.

GAPS AND THE BRIDGE TO HOWARD COUNTY

DC's gap is structural. Rising housing and studio costs in arts-adjacent neighborhoods like Shaw, U Street, and Columbia Heights are displacing the communities that gave those neighborhoods their creative character. DC generates enormous demand for creative talent. It cannot fully sustain the artists who supply it. For Howard County, DC establishes the southern anchor of the regional ecosystem: a market many artists work within but cannot afford to live in. The question is not whether Howard County can compete with DC; it cannot and should not try. The question is whether it can offer what DC cannot: a home base accessible to DC's opportunities without requiring DC's cost of living.

Sector / Subcategory	Estab.	Emp.	Avg. Annual Wage	Emp. per 100k Residents
Performing Arts & Cultural (NAICS 711–712)				
Theater companies & dinner theaters	28	1030	$36,280	153.3
Dance companies	8	155	$49,329	23.1
Musical groups & artists	17	107	$43,542	15.9
Other performing arts companies	4	27	$32,555	4.0
Promoters of perf. arts w/ facilities	23	1302	$52,751	193.8
Promoters of perf. arts w/o facilities	25	188	$104,031	28.0
Agents & managers for artists	20	437	$288,713	65.0
Independent artists, writers & performers	98	251	$110,079	37.4
Museums	26	892	$55,581	132.8
Historical sites	10	117	$65,564	17.4
Commercial Creative & Media (NAICS 512, 515, 541)				
Advertising agencies	80	1241	$110,045	184.7
Public relations agencies	493	6904	$178,509	1,027.7
Graphic design services	49	331	$95,247	49.3
Commercial photography	8	8	$60,000	1.2
Motion picture & video production	79	580	$123,586	86.3
Television broadcasting	46	2936	$96,667	437.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns (CBP), 2023 (CB2300CBP). Employment, establishments, and annual payroll data reported for employer establishments only. Average annual wage calculated as reported annual payroll (×1,000) divided by paid employees. Employment per 100,000 residents calculated using U.S. Census Bureau 2023 population estimates: District of Columbia 671,803; Baltimore city 569,931; Montgomery County 1,062,061; Howard County 345,596. N/R = not reported; data suppressed by the Census Bureau to avoid disclosure of information for individual businesses

Baltimore City, MD

CULTURAL MARKET CHARACTER AND CREATIVE ECONOMY

Baltimore City presents a cultural market profile that is in several respects the inverse of Washington, DC. Where DC is defined by institutional scale and deep public investment, Baltimore is defined by density of independent creative activity, a historically rooted performing arts and music culture, and a nonprofit sector that punches well above its weight relative to its funding base. The performing arts and cultural sector counts 120 establishments employing 2,406 workers at an average annual wage of $39,882, the lowest of the four study geographies, at 422 workers per 100,000 residents, second only to DC. Musical groups and artists employ 482 workers across 14 establishments at 85 per 100,000 residents, the highest count of any study geography, compared to DC's 16, Montgomery County's 4, and Howard County's 8. Museum employment reaches 112 workers per 100,000 residents, more than 11 times Howard County's 9.5. Payroll per establishment in Baltimore's performing arts sector is $799,633, comparable to Howard County's $733,500, suggesting similar average organizational scale despite significant differences in total employment.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE

The Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts administers the Creative Baltimore Fund, produces Artscape (billed as America's largest free arts festival), and manages cultural facilities including the Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower and School 33 Art Center. BOPA reports $111.1 million in annual economic impact from special events and leverages city investment to raise an additional $6 to $7 million annually from external sources. The Baltimore Arts Realty Corporation has leveraged more than $19 million to develop approximately 60,000 square feet of creative space in the Station North Arts and Entertainment District, including the Motor House and Open Works, a 34,000-square-foot nonprofit makerspace. The BARCO model demonstrates that developing artist-serving real estate in an affordable market requires a dedicated nonprofit vehicle with real estate expertise, patient capital, and a long-term commitment to below-market rents.

GAPS AND THE BRIDGE TO HOWARD COUNTY

Baltimore's primary gap is the growing mismatch between the richness of its creative ecosystem and the fragility of the financial infrastructure that supports it. Displacement pressures in Station North, Remington, and Highlandtown are real and accelerating. The 13-mile distance from Ellicott City to downtown Baltimore is not simply a commute; it is a measure of the degree to which Howard County and Baltimore artists already share a professional network and creative community. Howard County's role is not to replicate what Baltimore has built, but to provide the conditions that allow artists moving between the two markets to sustain themselves.

Sector / Subcategory	Estab.	Emp.	Avg. Annual Wage	Emp. per 100k Residents
Performing Arts & Cultural (NAICS 711–712)				
Theater companies & dinner theaters	12	480	$25,181	84.2
Dance companies	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Musical groups & artists	14	482	$41,894	84.6
Other performing arts companies	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Promoters of perf. arts w/ facilities	9	566	$24,390	99.3
Promoters of perf. arts w/o facilities	14	122	$100,327	21.4
Agents & managers for artists	4	17	$22,882	3.0
Independent artists, writers & performers	43	45	$146,200	7.9
Museums	16	636	$43,657	111.6
Historical sites	4	29	$37,586	5.1
Commercial Creative & Media (NAICS 512, 515, 541)				
Advertising agencies	33	1117	$161,211	196.0
Public relations agencies	25	109	$96,834	19.1
Graphic design services	38	135	$57,429	23.7
Commercial photography	11	6	$45,666	1.1
Motion picture & video production	30	73	$75,273	12.8
Television broadcasting	11	604	$96,905	106.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns (CBP), 2023 (CB2300CBP). Employment, establishments, and annual payroll data reported for employer establishments only. Average annual wage calculated as reported annual payroll (×1,000) divided by paid employees. Employment per 100,000 residents calculated using U.S. Census Bureau 2023 population estimates: District of Columbia 671,803; Baltimore city 569,931; Montgomery County 1,062,061; Howard County 345,596. N/R = not reported; data suppressed by the Census Bureau to avoid disclosure of information for individual businesses.

Montgomery County, MD

CULTURAL MARKET CHARACTERAND CREATIVE ECONOMY

Montgomery County is the largest jurisdiction in the study at 1,062,061 residents, and its cultural market is distributed across a large and internally diverse geography rather than anchored by a single dominant creative district. The performing arts and cultural sector counts 159 establishments employing 1,138 workers, at a creative employment share of 0.26 percent and 107 workers per 100,000 residents, the lowest of the four study geographies. Theater employment is the most revealing data point: Montgomery County's 11 theater companies employ 220 workers at an average wage of $25,059 and 21 workers per 100,000 residents. Howard County's 13 theater companies employ 597 workers at an average wage of $62,232 and 173 workers per 100,000 residents. Howard County, with roughly one-third of Montgomery County's population, has nearly three times the theater employment, more than six times the theater payroll, and average theater wages nearly two and a half times Montgomery County's.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE

The Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, operating as Creative MoCo, functions as a non-departmental agency of county government with the operational flexibility of an independent nonprofit. AHCMC supports more than 500 cultural organizations and 2,000 artists, with a county council appropriation of $7 million in fiscal year 2024, up from $5.7 million in fiscal year 2022. Montgomery County's arts and culture industries generated $183.3 million in economic activity in 2022, according to a custom Americans for the Arts Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 study. Creative MoCo's platform, a comprehensive online cultural calendar, artist directory, and resource hub, functions as connective infrastructure that makes the sector legible to audiences, artists, and policymakers regardless of whether activity is publicly funded.

GAPS AND THE BRIDGE TO HOWARD COUNTY

Montgomery County's gap is creative workforce depth rather than audience infrastructure or organizational capacity. The same affluence that generates strong consumer demand for cultural programming makes it expensive for independent artists to establish studios and live near their work. This is a challenge Howard County does not yet face to the same degree, which makes the window for investing in affordable artist-serving infrastructure a time-sensitive opportunity. For Howard County, Montgomery County provides both a benchmark and a warning: invest in audience-facing programming and organizational capacity, but not at the expense of the independent creative workforce infrastructure that neither jurisdiction yet has in sufficient depth.

Sector / Subcategory	Estab.	Emp.	Avg. Annual Wage	Emp. per 100k Residents
Performing Arts & Cultural (NAICS 711–712)				
Theater companies & dinner theaters	11	220	$25,059	20.7
Dance companies	5	13	$20,461	1.2
Musical groups & artists	10	38	$60,026	3.6
Other performing arts companies	3	12	$24,666	1.1
Promoters of perf. arts w/ facilities	11	163	$50,411	15.3
Promoters of perf. arts w/o facilities	20	77	$52,168	7.3
Agents & managers for artists	12	26	$50,653	2.4
Independent artists, writers & performers	66	253	$46,833	23.8
Museums	9	295	$53,074	27.8
Historical sites	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Commercial Creative & Media (NAICS 512, 515, 541)				
Advertising agencies	44	144	$99,208	13.6
Public relations agencies	53	375	$114,874	35.3
Graphic design services	76	167	$64,197	15.7
Commercial photography	18	55	$33,436	5.2
Motion picture & video production	68	231	$79,904	21.8
Television broadcasting	10	229	$141,301	21.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns (CBP), 2023 (CB2300CBP). Employment, establishments, and annual payroll data reported for employer establishments only. Average annual wage calculated as reported annual payroll (×1,000) divided by paid employees. Employment per 100,000 residents calculated using U.S. Census Bureau 2023 population estimates: District of Columbia 671,803; Baltimore city 569,931; Montgomery County 1,062,061; Howard County 345,596. N/R = not reported; data suppressed by the Census Bureau to avoid disclosure of information for individual businesses.

Howard County, MD

CULTURAL MARKET CHARACTER

Howard County's creative market is best understood as a market in active formation: a disproportionately strong performing arts anchor, a growing population of regionally active artists choosing the county as a home base, emerging physical infrastructure in Ellicott City, and structural gaps in artist-serving resources and public investment that represent the clearest near-term investment opportunity in the regional landscape. Artists in the county's cohort are teaching at MICA, performing across both cities, and building professional networks that span the regional ecosystem. They are using Howard County as a base of operations, drawn by relative affordability and proximity to two major markets. The studio spaces at the new Ellicott City arts center filled immediately upon opening. The demand signal is clear.

CREATIVE ECONOMY AND WORKFORCE

Howard County's performing arts and cultural sector counts 84 establishments employing 921 workers, with a creative employment share of 0.50 percent and 267 workers per 100,000 residents, between Baltimore's 422 and Montgomery County's 107. The headline finding: 13 theater company and dinner theater establishments employ 597 workers at a combined payroll of $37.2 million and an average annual wage of $62,232, the highest theater sector average of any study geography, exceeding DC's $36,280, Baltimore's $25,181, and Montgomery County's $25,059 by margins ranging from 72 to 148 percent. Howard County's theater payroll is nearly identical to DC's $37.4 million, despite DC having twice as many theater companies. Beyond theater, the gaps are significant: museum employment is 9.5 workers per 100,000 residents, 14 times below DC's rate; independent artists count just 14 per 100,000 residents, the lowest of any study geography; dance companies, artist agents, and historical sites are entirely absent from reportable data. One counter-intuitive finding: the promoter-without-facilities subcategory employs 95 workers at 27.5 per 100,000 residents, essentially identical to DC's 28.0 and well above Montgomery County's 7.3, suggesting grassroots programming activity that is not yet visible in the county's cultural identity narrative.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT AND POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE

Public investment is anchored by HoCoArts, which administers grant programs and operates the Howard County Center for the Arts. Maryland State Arts Council support flows through multiple grant programs. The structural gaps are significant and worth naming directly: no percent-for-art program, no county-level cultural plan, and no systematic data infrastructure, including an economic impact study or artist survey, to support evidence-based advocacy for increased investment. The designation of Ellicott City as Howard County's first arts and entertainment district under the MSAC A&E District program creates a policy framework and tax incentives for artist live-work development and arts business location.

GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Howard County's creative sector gaps fall into three interrelated categories. Infrastructure: the absence of affordable studio and rehearsal space at a scale meeting demonstrated demand, the absence of flexible experimental performance space, and the absence of maker and fabrication space. Ecosystem depth: the thin independent artist base, the absence of dance and heritage infrastructure, and the concentration of creative employment in a small number of anchor organizations. Policy and investment: the absence of a percent-for-art program, a cultural plan, and the connective infrastructure that makes a creative ecosystem legible and navigable.

Sector / Subcategory	Estab.	Emp.	Avg. Annual Wage	Emp. per 100k Residents
Performing Arts & Cultural (NAICS 711–712)				
Theater companies & dinner theaters	13	597	$62,232	172.7
Dance companies	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Musical groups & artists	7	29	$18,896	8.4
Other performing arts companies	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Promoters of perf. arts w/ facilities	4	44	$144,704	12.7
Promoters of perf. arts w/o facilities	10	95	$108,947	27.5
Agents & managers for artists	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Independent artists, writers & performers	28	49	$102,673	14.2
Museums	7	33	$16,636	9.5
Historical sites	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Commercial Creative & Media (NAICS 512, 515, 541)				
Advertising agencies	14	464	$149,898	134.3
Public relations agencies	7	32	$60,218	9.3
Graphic design services	25	75	$48,466	21.7
Commercial photography	7	101	$27,960	29.2
Motion picture & video production	5	25	$85,480	7.2
Television broadcasting	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns (CBP), 2023 (CB2300CBP). Employment, establishments, and annual payroll data reported for employer establishments only. Average annual wage calculated as reported annual payroll (×1,000) divided by paid employees. Employment per 100,000 residents calculated using U.S. Census Bureau 2023 population estimates: District of Columbia 671,803; Baltimore city 569,931; Montgomery County 1,062,061; Howard County 345,596. N/R = not reported; data suppressed by the Census Bureau to avoid disclosure of information for individual businesses

Synthesis

WHAT THE REGIONAL LANDSCAPE REVEALS

The four-geography analysis reveals a regional creative ecosystem with distinct, complementary, and in some cases competing roles. DC generates demand for creative talent it cannot fully absorb, producing an outflow of artists that adjacent jurisdictions are positioned to receive. Baltimore's creative ecosystem is dense and deeply rooted but operating against structural financial pressures that make organizational sustainability and individual artist livelihoods difficult to maintain. Montgomery County has built the most sophisticated arts investment infrastructure of any Maryland jurisdiction, but cost conditions have constrained the independent creative workforce density its investment might otherwise have produced. Howard County occupies a position that is neither peripheral nor dominant but genuinely strategic: anchor performing arts strength operating at professional scale, geography enabling simultaneous participation in both adjacent markets, a growing population of regionally active artists, and identified infrastructure gaps that represent clear investment priorities.

HOWARD COUNTY'S POSITIONING AS CONNECTOR AND ARTIST HOME BASE

Howard County's role in the regional ecosystem is that of a connector and home base rather than a destination competing with DC and Baltimore on their own terms. This is not a concession to Howard County's smaller scale; it is a strategic positioning that reflects genuine comparative advantages. As a connector, Howard County sits at the geographic midpoint of a regional creative corridor stretching from DC through Ellicott City and Columbia to Baltimore. Artists who base themselves here can access the professional networks and economic opportunities of both major markets within 15 to 30 minutes. The plan's role is to make Howard County a legible, intentional choice for artists seeking a sustainable creative life rather than a default option for those priced out of adjacent cities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Artist-serving infrastructure is the most time-sensitive investment priority.** The demand exists now, and the window for developing affordable studio and rehearsal space is closing as spaces continue to be developed.
- **Connective infrastructure is the highest-leverage organizational investment.** A platform, calendar, directory, and advocacy function, modeled on Creative MoCo, generates value disproportionate to its cost.
- **The Ellicott City A&E District designation is an important near-term policy lever.** but only if activated through a deliberate development strategy oriented toward regionally active and emerging artists, not solely audience-facing programming.
- **Anchor performing arts organizations require active stewardship.** The concentration of theater employment and payroll in a small number of organizations is simultaneously a strength and a vulnerability.
- **Cultural data infrastructure is a prerequisite for advocacy.** Montgomery County's ability to make the case for a $7 million appropriation rests on demonstrating a $183 million economic return.

HOCO arts

Howard County

Arts & Culture Plan

APPENDIX D - EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Equity Framework

WHY AN EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Howard County's arts and culture ecosystem is growing. Its organizations are producing high-quality work, its grantees are serving residents across the county, and its creative community is attracting artists who value what the region offers. But access to that ecosystem — who participates, who leads, who benefits, and who shapes its direction — is not yet equally distributed. An Arts and Culture Master Plan that does not reckon honestly with that reality will not serve the full community it is meant to represent.

This section establishes a framework for equity, one that directly contributed to this plan's recommendations and can serve as a reference point for future work, investment, partnership, and governance that makes Howard County a more equitable place to live, create, and access the arts

HoCo Arts holds this conviction as an organizational commitment: ***we believe everyone should have access to the creative, intellectual, spiritual, and healing benefits the arts provide.***

This framework is an opportunity to move that belief into durable structures, measurable outcomes, and sustained investment.

HOW WE APPROACHED THIS ANALYSIS

The equity analysis underlying this plan draws on three complementary streams of inquiry. No single source was sufficient on its own. Together, they offer a picture of Howard County's cultural ecosystem that is grounded in data, shaped by community voice, and informed by the standards and practices leading the field. This includes:

1. Quantitative Data: Demographics and Asset Distribution

2. Qualitative Data: Community Voice and Theory of Change

3. National Best Practices and State-Level Standards

4. A Shared North Star

A note on scale and context: While the planning team recognizes that LA County differs substantially from Howard County in scale, governance structure, funding capacity, and the composition of its cultural landscape, it is referenced here because it offers the most rigorous, publicly documented, and sustained example of county-level cultural equity practice in the United States. Its published research, reporting frameworks, and policy commitments provide a standard against which any jurisdiction committed to equity can measure its own progress, regardless of size. While the scale of LA County's investments may not be applicable, its principles and methodology are instructive for Howard County.

SHARED DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used with specific, intentional meaning throughout this plan. Establishing a common vocabulary is itself an equity practice and creates the conditions for accountability, shared expectation, and honest assessment of progress.

Arts and Culture

"Arts and culture" is often used as an umbrella phrase in policy, funding, and academic contexts to capture both formal artistic institutions and everyday creative or cultural life. "The arts" is typically defined to include a wide range of creative human activities, for example painting, sculpting, literature, music, dance, jewelry making, textiles, ceramics, photography and film, architecture, crafts, and digital media. "Culture," meanwhile, is a broader concept that refers to the shared beliefs, customs, values, social behaviors, and ways of life of a particular group or society. The arts can be understood as creative practices that express culture, alongside other forms of expression including language, food, and religion.

Shared Power

A balanced, intentional, and fair effort to distribute or share resources, voice, and decision-making access and influence.

Equitable

Fairness based on circumstances rather than strict, identical equality. Considers historical context in relation to a group or individual's access, opportunity, and relationship to disenfranchisement.

Safer, Braver Spaces

Human systems where an environment and its members feel a sense of comfort, authentic belonging, and low or no risk of being harmed, endangered, threatened, or injured in any way. (KiMISTRY Definition)

Decision-Makers

Those in a position to decide and direct outcomes and resources.

Diversity

Multidimensional categorical human differences and characteristics within groups, organizations, and society that shape visible and invisible identity lenses through which people see the world and experience culture and circumstances. Diversity is quantifiably countable and measurable. Related to but not necessarily assuming inclusion, power, privilege, equity, and sustained belongingness for all.

Leaders

Those who hold influence within their communities. What we are looking to expand and diversify within the county, seeking to increase pathways for leaders to become decision-makers, and for decision-makers to consult and be in partnership and relationship with community leaders in their decision-making.

Youth and Young Adults

Persons ages 15 to 25, focusing on adolescence and emerging adulthood.

(Artistic) Agency

Possessing power, capacity, independence, and influence to create decisions and outcomes, particularly through cultural and artistic expression. Creative control or autonomy over choice, voice, and action in relationship to one's environment and outcomes.

Access

Removal of barriers, allowing people of all backgrounds, including those with disenfranchised histories, to seek, obtain, and utilize systemic, structural, financial, cultural, social, and political resources and knowledge-building in a way that honors and dignifies personhood.

Transparency

The practice of open, honest, and non-agenda-driven communication between individual, organizational, collective, and community partners, providing context and access to pertinent information, and creating greater capacity for clarity, accountability, and trust.

1. Quantitative Data: Demographics and Asset Distribution

Howard County is one of the most affluent and highly educated counties in the United States, with a population of approximately 340,000 residents as of 2026. The median household income is approximately $150,000 which speaks to the county's economic strength but may also influence who has historically been centered in its cultural institutions. The population of the county has grown more than fivefold since 1970, and it is increasingly diverse: with the county's diversity index rising from 59 in 2010 to 72 in 2020 with the most diverse areas in the southeast and the least diverse in the northwest, reflecting a significant shift toward grevater racial and ethnic variety. Roughly 23% of residents are foreign-born, and nearly 30% of households speak a language other than English at home.

That diversity is not evenly distributed across the county's geography.

The White population is the most widespread, with representation across the greatest number of census tracts. Hispanic and Latino residents are concentrated in Columbia. Black and African American residents are concentrated primarily in the eastern part of the county. Both communities correspond to areas on the lower end of the county's median income distribution.

A significant Asian population is present in the north-central part of the county, though it should be noted that the decennial census does not disaggregate specific national-origin communities within that designation. The county's cultural asset inventory tells a more textured story: organizations, festivals, and cultural institutions serving South Asian, East Asian, and Southeast Asian communities are well represented across Howard County, reflecting a diversity of heritage, language, and tradition that aggregate census categories do not capture.

The county's cultural asset inventory reflects and reinforces these geographic patterns.

The county's cultural asset inventory reflects and reinforces these geographic patterns. Analysis of mapped cultural amenities, organizations, events, and facilities reveals two dominant hotspots: Columbia and Ellicott City. Columbia holds the heaviest concentration of performance spaces, community spaces, library branches, and ARTsites installations. Ellicott City's Main Street alone contains seven museums and heritage centers within roughly 1,500 feet, alongside galleries, community spaces, and performance venues. Together, these two communities account for the substantial majority of publicly accessible cultural infrastructure in the county.

The gaps are significant.

The western half of the county, more rural and less dense, has limited cultural infrastructure by comparison. Community spaces exist almost exclusively in Columbia and Ellicott City. Galleries are the sparsest asset type in the county, with only three identified countywide. Arts education assets are concentrated along the Columbia-to-Ellicott City corridor. Makerspaces and studios are the most evenly distributed asset type, but even they reflect the broader pattern of eastern concentration.

What this means for equity is not simply a question of geography. Despite the concentration of cultural assets in central and eastern Howard County, the specific census tracts with the highest concentrations of Black, Latino, and lower-income residents have relatively few cultural assets of their own. Asset concentration in Columbia and Ellicott City does not translate to equitable access for the communities living nearby. The county's historic sites inventory further illustrates this gap: of more than 1,080 documented sites, fewer than a dozen have active, publicly accessible heritage programs, and sites with African American and other culturally significant histories remain largely underdeveloped as resources for interpretation, programming, and community connection. Missed opportunities exist for cultural access in the Eastern and Western portions of the county and representation of both the real and intangible histories of the Black, Latino, and Asian American communities is pervasive across documented historic sites in the county.

2. Qualitative Data: Community Voice and Theory of Change

Numbers alone cannot capture what it feels like to be welcomed or overlooked by a cultural ecosystem. In the fall of 2025 through early winter 2026 a series of affinity group sessions with four communities whose experiences and perspectives have too often been absent from institutional planning: African American, LatinX, AAPI, and LGBTQIA residents and cultural practitioners.

These sessions were not input-gathering exercises in the conventional sense, participants were invited to serve as co-designers to articulate not only what is missing, but what a genuinely equitable cultural ecosystem should look and feel like for their communities. The result was a Cross-Group Collective Theory of Change: a community-authored document that names a shared North Star, diagnoses the core problem, identifies concrete needs, and proposes a logic for change.

Its findings are woven throughout the themes and recommendations that follow. Themes identified include:

- Inconsistent institutional support and a lack of transparency in decision-making has eroded trust between communities and institutions, including government and arts funders.
- Funding structures favor established organizations and rarely reach the grassroots and culturally specific organizations that anchor community life for many residents.
- Leadership pipelines in the arts remain narrow, limiting who shapes programming, sets priorities, and holds decision-making authority.
- Space access in terms of cost, hours, capacity, and cultural safety is a persistent barrier to participation and to the viability of culturally specific programming.
- Arts and culture function as community wellness and healing infrastructure, not merely entertainment, and should be resourced and designed accordingly.
- Youth engagement and intergenerational connection are central to the long-term health of the ecosystem, not supplementary.
- Accessible arts education that meets community members where they are in life, with more institutional connections and on-ramps paired with opportunities to explore arts education through non-traditional pathways, is a shared and significant need.
- Multicultural events and arts expression should be both open to anyone in the community to experience and participate in, with audiences of all backgrounds genuinely welcomed, and authentic to the communities that produce them. Communities should not be pressured to flatten or overly generalize their expression for the sake of representing more cultures. Each community can and should have its own moment, on its own terms.

3. National Best Practices and State-Level Standards

Understanding Howard County's equity landscape requires situating it within the broader field. Two levels of context are relevant: what leading jurisdictions nationally have demonstrated is possible, and what Maryland's own arts infrastructure has committed to as a standard for the state.

NATIONAL STANDARDS: LOS ANGELES COUNTY AS BENCHMARK

The ongoing leadership and commitment of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors combined with 10 years of tracking outcomes are what make Los Angeles' Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative (CEII) a national model. First adopted on November 10, 2015, supervisorial motion directed the Department of Arts and Culture to lead a countywide conversation on improving diversity in cultural organizations for all residents. The 18-month public process, which began in 2016, produced thirteen recommendations to the Board of Supervisors aimed at expanding access to arts and culture and advancing inclusion across the County's arts ecosystem.

In April 2017, the CEII report was released, and in June 2017, the Board unanimously adopted a motion funding 5 of the 13 recommendations included in the report. These initiatives included:

- Expanding the Arts Internship Program to provide additional positions for students, including those from community colleges
- Creating the Creative Strategist Program, which embeds artists in County departments to develop artist-driven solutions to complex civic challenges
- Establishing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Requirement, which requires County grantees to submit board-adopted statements, policies, or plans demonstrating their commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access as part of their applications
- Providing increased funding for the Organizational Grant Program
- Creating a new work-based learning program for high school students that prepares them for careers in the arts and creative industries

The effort was further codified with the adoption of the Countywide Cultural Policy, in June, 2020. The policy provides a guiding framework for the Department of Arts and Culture, fostering a culture that values arts, culture, and creativity, strengthens equity and inclusion, and integrates arts and culture across County programs. Its three core goals are to:

- Invest in cultural infrastructure and access
- Advance arts and culture in every sector of civic life
- Promote cultural equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging

Data on compensation for LA County arts administrators that found significant disparities in earnings, education, and debt for BIPOC administrators compared to their White counterparts. Agents of Change looked at the role that young adult advisory councils can play in helping arts and culture nonprofits in addressing emerging issues, including equity issues.

What makes the CEII a meaningful benchmark is not its scale, as Howard County is not Los Angeles, but its methodology. The County has committed to a decade of ongoing data collection, reporting, and public accountability. Its equity dashboards investigate 12 dimensions of equity across the geographic reach of arts investment. Its studies have examined entry-level compensation disparities for BIPOC arts administrators, the role of young adult advisory councils, the demographics of professional development program participants, and what DEI commitments from grantees look like in practice. The lesson for Howard County is not to replicate these specific programs, but to adopt the orientation: equity work requires measurement, transparency, and institutional commitment that persists across election cycles and political climates.

NATIONAL PARTICIPATION DATA STANDARD: THE NEA/NASERC FRAMEWORK

The National Endowment for the Arts established the National Arts Statistics and Evidence-based Reporting Center (NASERC) in 2022 to provide regularly updated national data on arts participation. The underlying Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), conducted in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, is the nation's largest and most representative survey of adult arts participation patterns. Its published indicators address who attends arts events in person, how often people attend and consume arts, who is personally creating or performing, how much time Americans spend on arts activities, and what consumer spending in the arts looks like.

NASERC's state-level companion report, "50 States of Arts Participation," allows Maryland-specific comparisons and could serve as a baseline against which Howard County tracks its own progress. HoCo Arts may wish to advocate for Howard County's participation in future SPPA survey cycles and to establish grantee reporting requirements that generate locally comparable data over time.

Examples of metrics Howard County may adopt:

- Demographic composition of staff and boards at supported organizations across all five CEII dimensions
- Share of funding going to culturally specific and grassroots organizations
- Geographic distribution of arts investment by zip code
- Attendance tracked by zip code, age, and affinity communities
- Grantee-reported DEI commitments and documented progress over time

STATE-LEVEL CONTEXT: MSAC'S EQUITY COMMITMENTS

Howard County's primary state arts funder, the Maryland State Arts Council, has made equity a stated and structural priority. MSAC's mission explicitly names equitable access as a core goal, and its grantmaking guidelines reflect a commitment to eliminating bias in applications, panelist procedures, and adjudication systems expanding the definition of artistic rigor beyond Western traditions and acknowledging positions of privilege that have historically shaped funding decisions.

In September 2021, MSAC adopted a reformed funding formula for its Grants for Organizations program designed to distribute state funds more equitably by tiering organizations into five budget groups and providing smaller organizations with a higher percentage of allowable expenses than their maximum grant award. This reform places MSAC among the national leaders in state arts agencies adopting structural equity in grantmaking.

MSAC's "Future of Maryland's Arts Sector" recovery strategy, developed through a statewide listening process following the COVID-19 pandemic, further articulated equity commitments at the state level: compensating community participants for planning labor, prioritizing funding to and for marginalized communities with limited access, setting specific and quantifiable goals around racial equity, and addressing digital equity as a condition of access.

These commitments establish a state-level standard that Howard County's own equity goals may align with and build upon. Howard County's high median household income creates structural challenges in competing for need-based grant programs, but MSAC's direction toward equitable distribution represents an opportunity for HoCo Arts to position the county's culturally specific and grassroots organizations as well-aligned with where state funding priorities are heading.

4. A Shared North Star

A Howard County cultural ecosystem where all communities can create, gather, heal, and celebrate, with shared power, equitable resources, and culturally safe spaces, even in a volatile national environment.

This is not a distant aspiration. It is a set of design criteria, and the recommendations in this plan should be evaluated against them: do they move power toward community? Do they allocate resources in ways that reach those who have historically been underserved? Do they create conditions in which all residents can participate authentically and safely?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE EQUITABLE HOWARD COUNTY

The recommendations below are organized around the three pillars of the community's North Star: shared power, equitable resources, and culturally safe spaces. These recommendations directly informed how this plan's strategies and action items were developed to move the needle for cultural equity within the Arts and Culture Master Plan's purview, they may also serve as a foundational reference point for future work in building an equitable Howard County.

Shared Power

Building shared power means creating structures through which community members move from being consulted to being decision-makers. It requires intentional on-ramps, sustained relationships, and institutional willingness to distribute authority.

- HoCo Arts may consider requiring all grant applicants to submit a board-adopted equity statement as a condition of funding, consistent with the approach adopted by LA County and now reflected in MSAC's own grantmaking guidelines. This approach may be considered by other sectors and nonprofit organizations outside of the arts and culture community.
- A cross-cultural event planning framework, developed by a community taskforce that includes representatives from the county's affinity communities, should be established to guide how multicultural programming is conceived, produced, and supported — honoring each community's right to its own expression while creating shared infrastructure for coordination.
- HoCo Arts and county partners should establish mentorship and training pathways that connect emerging artists and cultural practitioners with experienced peers, supporting career development and broadening who participates in the county's professional arts networks.

Equitable Resources

Equitable resources mean that funding, space, and organizational support reach the communities and practitioners who have historically been underserved by existing structures. HoCo Arts should explore:

- Targeted grant programs designed specifically to support culturally specific organizations and grassroots groups that have limited capacity to compete for general operating grants, drawing on models such as MSAC's reformed funding formula.
- Expanded support for mid-career artists, including through stipends, professional development funding, and related programs described in this plan, should be designed with equity in mind, ensuring that artists from underrepresented communities have genuine access to career advancement resources.
- Organizational infrastructure seed grants that support planning, board development, and operational capacity for smaller and emerging organizations should be available on accessible terms, with application processes that do not create disproportionate burdens for organizations with limited staff.
- Encouraging cultural event producers and grantees to track program participants and vendors by zip code and demographics, generating the locally comparable participation data, drawing from NASERC as a standard.
- Assessing the ARTsites public art program for geographic and demographic equity, with future site selection giving deliberate

attention to communities currently underserved by public art installations and communities of artists that are historically underrepresented in the county.

Culturally Safe Spaces

Culturally safe spaces mean that the county's cultural infrastructure — its facilities, programs, and institutions — are designed and operated in ways that welcome all residents authentically, not merely formally.

- County-owned and publicly accessible cultural facilities, including libraries, community centers, and recreation centers, should explore expanded hours, including evening and weekend access, to remove scheduling barriers that disproportionately affect working families and communities with limited transportation options.
- HoCo Arts and county partners should assess the feasibility of a large, subsidized shared studio complex that provides affordable creative workspace for artists across disciplines, with access structured to reach artists who cannot compete for market-rate studio space.
- Cultural programming supported by both the County and HoCo Arts should be evaluated against cultural safety principles, including whether spaces and programs are designed in ways that make all communities feel genuinely welcome, and whether cultural expression is supported on its own terms rather than flattened for broader audiences.
- County partners should work to develop a cultural trust and transparency framework, including published decision pathways, clear processes for community input before major program changes, and accessible channels for feedback and escalation when communities feel unheard.

RESOURCES

- The standalone website https://lacountyartsdata.org/#equity shows the geographic reach of the County's investment in the arts at a single point in time, followed by a series of 21 equity dashboards investigating 12 dimensions of equity.
- Policy and Practice is a study published in 2025 that analyzes how the recipients of funding from the agency's largest grant program (OGP) define diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their own words, and how they take action on those ideas. The report is a follow-up to the 2019 study From Words to Action that analyzed the DEI statements, policies, and plans submitted by all OGP grant applicants in the first year the requirement was implemented.
- Los Angeles County also took a close look in 2022 at the demographic makeup of people who participated in available professional development programs over a six year period in Measuring Participation. The County studied different aspects of equity in partnership with the Claremont Graduate University arts management program. Accessibility and the Arts asked, "Who is responsible for ensuring disabled people have access to art, the artist or the institution that presents and exhibits their art?" That was followed by Make or Break, an analysis of entry-level compensation for LA County arts administrators that found significant disparities in earnings, education, and debt for BIPOC administrators compared to their White counterparts. Agents of Change looked at the role that young adult advisory councils can play in helping arts and culture nonprofits in addressing emerging issues, including equity issues.

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Endnotes

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