



**EXECUTIVE BRIEFING:
GREATER RICHMOND CULTURAL
CENSUS**

Research Commissioned by The Cultural Action Task
Force as part of the Greater Richmond Regional Cultural
Action Plan

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ABSTRACT

Over 2,500 Richmond area adults completed a comprehensive survey about their cultural attitudes and involvement in 55 different cultural activities. The Cultural Census is a survey of community residents undertaken to better understand patterns of cultural participation in the Richmond area (including the City of Richmond and Henrico, Chesterfield, and Hanover counties). Together with other research, results from the Cultural Census provide a foundation of information upon which to build a regional Cultural Action Plan – an assessment of the state of arts and culture in the Greater Richmond region and a roadmap to better support, promote, and encourage arts and culture activities in the future.

METHODOLOGY

The Greater Richmond Cultural Census was conducted in September and October of 2008 as part of a cultural planning process commissioned by the Cultural Action Task Force, a coalition of leaders in the arts, business, and government sectors. The overall purpose of the research was to gain a clearer sense of how Greater Richmond residents participate in and feel about the arts. A lengthy survey protocol was designed and developed in close consultation with the Cultural Action Task Force advisory committee.

All adult residents (age 18+) of the City of Richmond or Henrico, Chesterfield, or Hanover Counties were eligible to participate in the survey.

The primary method of data collection was through an online survey. Respondents were recruited mainly through broadcast email invitations and other promotional efforts. The online sampling was supplemented by on-the-ground intercept surveying at a range of locations where it was likely to find individuals who would not respond online, including lower income neighborhoods in the Richmond area.

Promoting participation in the survey was the responsibility of the Task Force. This work was aided by the services of paid staff who assisted in gaining cooperation with the online survey and who traveled to locations around the Richmond area such churches, senior centers, and libraries to survey adults.

Technically speaking, this was not a random sample. Area residents “self-selected” into the online survey, which introduces two elements of bias: 1) over-representation of those with Internet access, and 2) over-representation of those with an interest in arts and culture. Significant efforts were made to offset the first bias by conducting on-the-ground intercept work to reach those without access to the Internet. To offset the second bias, statistical weights were applied to the final results so that survey results would better reflect the community’s demographics in terms of age, race, and education.

Respondents who indicated they are under 18 years of age, live outside the area, or had taken the survey more than once were excluded from the data set. After these adjustments, the final data set includes a total of 2,805 valid responses, of which 704 are from on-the-ground intercept work. The final data set includes 1,535 residents of the City of Richmond (57%) and 1,180 residents of the surrounding area (43%).

For the purposes of analysis, respondents were grouped into three categories, based on the combined frequency of attendance at performing arts events, art museums and galleries, and history museums and historic sites: 1) lower frequency attenders, 2) moderate frequency attenders, and 3) higher frequency attenders.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, point to **increased demand for more active forms of participation** – making art, taking art classes, and collecting and organizing art. This is consistent with national trends. The survey also indicates demand for arts activities that fulfill social and educational needs.

- **A close correlation was observed between personal participation and attendance.** For example, 30% of higher frequency attenders say that they earn at least a portion of their income making art, compared to 2% of lower frequency attendees. In other words, people who *do* arts activities also *support* community arts programs.
- **Informal venues – including the home and places of worship – play an important role as settings for arts and cultural activities,** especially among lower frequency attenders. These attenders are proportionately more likely than higher frequency attenders to use places of worship and other community venues for cultural activities.
- In general, **lower frequency attenders** tend to be older, non-White, less likely to have children, and have much lower levels of educational attainment.
- The most frequently cited **barriers to increased attendance** were “too busy” (which is not really a barrier, but rather an indication that arts activities are less of a priority than other activities), “too expensive,” and “not aware of what’s going on.” Younger respondents were much more likely than older respondents to cite lack of awareness. Respondents in the oldest age cohort were most likely to cite social constraints as a barrier to more frequent attendance (e.g., “no one to go with”).

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of involvement in 58 different arts and cultural activities. For each activity, five response items were available: 1) it’s a vital activity for me, 2) I enjoy it occasionally, 3) I used to, but don’t any longer, 4) I haven’t, but would like to try, or 5) I’m not interested.

- Among the **literary arts** activities, “reading books, magazines, or newspapers for fun” is by far the most pervasive activity, while three in ten respondents indicated an unfulfilled interest in “meeting with a book club” and “attending book or poetry readings.” **Together with other results, this points to a significant amount of unfulfilled interest in doing participatory arts activities in social settings.**
- **Attending live stage plays or musical theatre productions was cited as “a vital activity” by less than 10% of all respondents** and another 44% said that they “enjoy it occasionally.” While large percentages of respondents attend theatre, fewer seem to regard it as “a vital activity,” as compared to other cities we have studied. This may reflect recent developments in the theatre, such as the closure of

Theatre Virginia and the discontinuation of the Broadway series. A high level of unfulfilled interest was reported for “attend readings of new plays, workshops, etc.,” especially among younger adults. Overall, however, results point to relatively low levels theatrical attendance in Richmond.

- Among the **dance** activities tested, **“watching dance programs on TV or video” was the most vital activity**. This reflects the national trend of increased engagement with dance as a result of the reality-based dance programs on TV such as “So You Think You Can Dance” and “Dancing with the Stars.”
- Social dancing is highly correlated with age. **About a third of respondents 18 to 24 years old enjoy social dancing at least occasionally, and another 25% consider it a vital activity**. Additionally, large percentages of older adults indicated past involvement in social dancing.
- Among the music activities tested, respondents were most likely to cite “listening to music on a local radio station” as “a vital activity” (54%), followed by “buy music” (41%), followed by “hear music as part of a worship service” (32%). African-Americans are two times as likely as Whites to cite “hearing music as part of a worship service” as a vital activity, **indicating the central role that faith-based cultural activities play in the cultural ecosystem, especially for African-Americans**.
- The level of involvement of curatorial participation in visual art and crafts (i.e., “collect art or decorations for your home,” which 19% cited as “vital”) exceeds that of observational participation (i.e., “visiting art museums and galleries,” which 14% cited as “vital”), again illustrating the high value that some residents place on home-based activities that provide avenues of personal creative expression. **Over a third of all respondents enjoy “attending arts and crafts festivals” at least occasionally**, indicating the key role that free outdoor cultural events play in the life of the community.
- Discovering **history** through media use – e.g., “watching history programs on TV” (22% “vital”) and “reading books or magazines about history” (17% “vital”) – measures high for all respondents, and about a third of respondents enjoy “visiting Richmond area historic sites and history museums” and “going on historic tours of Richmond” occasionally. **It is not surprising that history activities are more central to residents than other categories of activities such as theatre, given the area’s deep connections to American history**.
- **Unfulfilled interest in “researching or exploring your family history” (32%) exceeds that of all other arts and cultural activities**. This underscores the importance of personal relevancy and interactivity for engaging interest, and also suggests a need in the community for new ways of allowing people to chronicle their lives.
- Level of involvement was also measured for **online and digital arts** activities. “Taking digital photographs” was the most central activity by a wide margin (38% “vital”), followed by “downloading music” (21% “vital”). Use of online and digital arts are highly correlated with age. Younger adults (ages 18 to 34 years old) are far more likely to download music, listen to Internet radio, and “record or compose

music using a computer,” however **a significant proportion of respondents ages 35 to 64 are interested in these activities, suggesting a shift to online and computer activities regardless of age.**

Half as many African Americans as Whites strongly agree that “the arts were a part of my upbringing.” Moreover, African Americans were more likely than Whites to say that cultural resources are not distributed equitably. While 82% of Whites “agree a lot” that arts education should be a part of every child’s education, the figures falls to 49% for African Americans. Overall, results indicate different sets of beliefs and values around culture.

Arts and cultural programs pay civic dividends, with strongly positive correlations found between voting behavior and various forms of attendance at cultural events and facilities. Strongly favorable opinions were also expressed regarding the role of arts education in child development and public funding of the arts.

In sum, results of the cultural census paint a detailed picture of how Greater Richmond area residents express themselves creatively, and the many ways that they participate in the arts. While many of Richmond’s existing arts offerings are observational in nature, consumers are demanding more inventive, interpretive, and curatorial experiences that involve some level of personal creative expression or aesthetic judgment. Results offer cultural providers and their supporters with a nuanced picture of the cultural ecosystem and their place in it. This raises the possibility of identifying more points of relevance with the diverse populations of Greater Richmond in order to achieve higher levels of public support.

IMPLICATIONS

For cultural providers, there are many implications and challenges. These include offering more intense, customized, and participatory experiences, but also finding ways to be relevant to constituents in a range of settings, including the home and other non-traditional settings where a great deal of meaningful arts activities happen, according to the findings.

The Cultural Census is just one of several major research tasks of the cultural planning process. Understanding cultural participation, both frequency and interest in different arts and culture activities, provides important context to our discussion of the challenges and opportunities facing our community. In order to generate solutions, we need to start asking difficult and important questions. Research, such as the Cultural Census, offers insight into what questions we should be addressing. For example, results of the Cultural Census lead us to consider:

- How can cultural providers make connections to residents in a wider range of settings, including the home?
- What support structures exist for participatory arts practice, given that so many residents engage with culture in this way?
- What programs and activities would help community members to explore their family history, chronicle their lives, and tell their stories?

- How can the cultural community tap into the surge of interest in dance?
- How can we value and support faith-based cultural activity, given the critical role that places of worship play in the cultural system?
- What programs would help residents derive more satisfaction and meaning from curatorial participation (i.e., downloading music, collecting art, and decorations for the home)?
- What collaborative efforts might be undertaken to overcome barriers to increased engagement, such as “too busy” or “too expensive”?

To maximize its return on investment in the Cultural Census, the Richmond cultural community must discuss these and other important and sensitive questions in conversations with colleagues, friends, board members, staff, artists, and public officials.