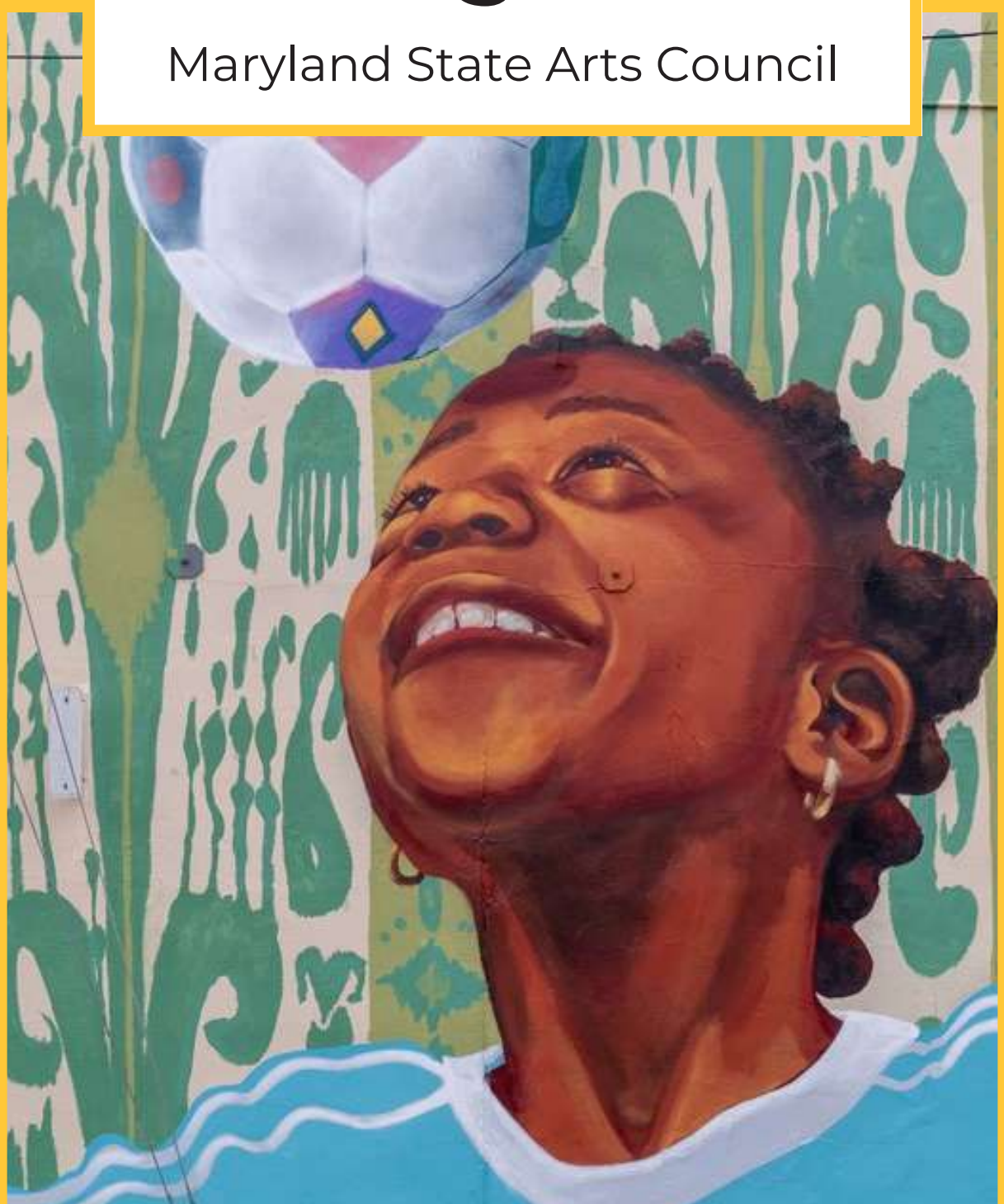




2025

Strategic Plan

Maryland State Arts Council



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Crowded streets in the Downtown Frederick Arts & Entertainment District

INTRODUCTION



Representatives of the Pocomoke Homelands, a Heritage Award winner in Somerset County

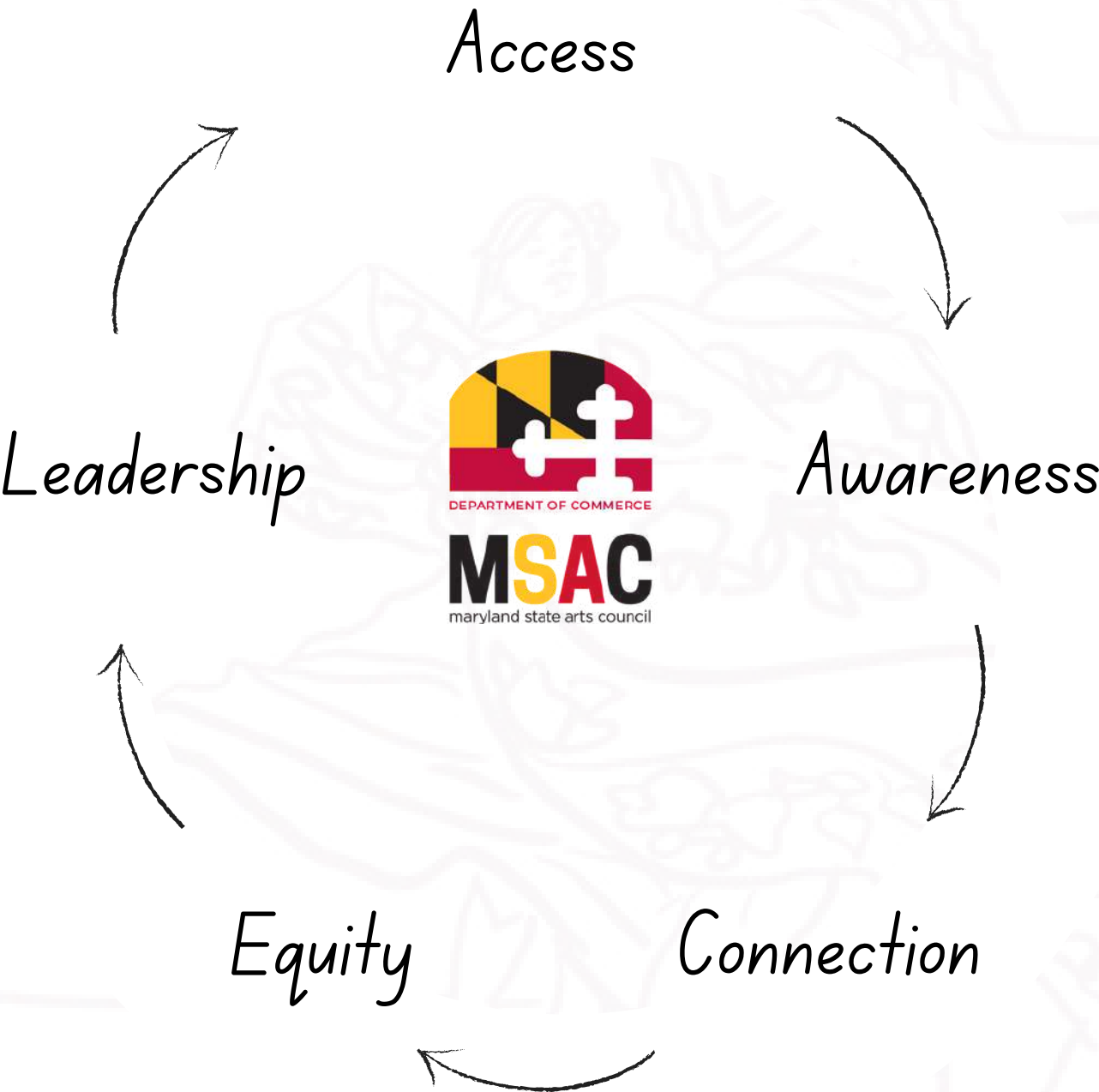
The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) advances the arts in our state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland. By supporting and promoting arts organizations and artists, MSAC strengthens communities across Maryland, ensuring access to the transformative power of the arts for all .

The agency now adopts a strategic plan setting a future direction in service to its many stakeholders: arts organizations, artists and creatives, teaching artists, local governments, peer state agencies, and all Maryland residents. This plan is grounded in goals that pursue equity and justice, arts sector health, an emphasis on the arts' ability to spur community connection and economic vitality, and alignment with Governor Wes Moore's priorities to make Maryland a state that serves while leaving no one behind. Through general operating and project support for organizations and artists, as well as programs supporting Maryland's cultural traditions, public art, Arts and Entertainment Districts, county arts agencies, arts learning, Poetry Out Loud competition, arts capital, and more, the council demonstrates the value of public funding in cultivating a strong arts sector that uplifts artistic expression in all its forms. Through its efforts to ensure that Maryland arts organizations and artists can continue to present, produce, create, and ultimately thrive, the work of MSAC ensures that the arts are an essential part of the fabric of life of all Marylanders and contribute to the state's economic vitality.

We invite you to review this plan in detail and learn more about how MSAC will keep Maryland one of the most arts-vibrant states for years to come!

FIVE PILLARS

The Strategic Plan is built on five complementary pillars.



The goals, objectives, and example strategies that follow support each pillar.



A Montgomery County Folklife Apprenticeship team practicing Tamil kolam

Access

Goal: *Bolster access to arts experiences and resources*

Objectives and Strategies

- Increase arts engagement by all Marylanders
 - Prioritize funding and staff resources to benefit populations with no or limited access to the arts
- Eliminate real and perceived barriers to participation
 - Simplify program guidelines and application processes
 - Develop inclusive marketing practices that encourage participation
- Activate networks in the development and implementation of strategies to reach new people
 - Explore innovations in expanding access to the arts through stakeholders, other government agencies, and the private sector

Awareness

Goal: *Amplify the stories of Maryland's arts sector and the value of public support*

Objectives and Strategies

- Promote an appreciation for the role of the arts in advancing a healthy and vibrant Maryland
 - Leverage media and state partnerships to enhance the overall reach of arts sector news
 - Showcase stories of the diverse range of funded projects to celebrate their impact
- Ensure all arts constituents know the breadth and depth of MSAC resources
 - Create opportunities to learn about funding and other offerings
 - Collaborate with community hubs and organizations to engage new constituents
- Maximize support for MSAC efforts and the arts sector as a whole
 - Communicate the impact of the arts with strategic collaborators and other state agencies to build cross-sector relationships
 - Invest in cross sector collaborations that support the work of artists and arts organizations

Connection

Goal: *Foster networks within and beyond the arts sector*

- Nurture mutually beneficial connections among artists, cultural institutions, and Maryland's diverse communities
 - Create spaces for learning and authentic interaction within MSAC's networks
 - Enhance professional development offerings to cultivate a culture of learning
- Harness statewide partners and resources to increase the visibility of and interaction with artists and arts organizations
 - Involve county arts agencies, regional folklife centers, and Arts & Entertainment Districts as sites of connection and convening



Dancer at the Charles Street Promenade in Baltimore
City's Station North Arts and Entertainment District



Artists installing a public artwork commission in Baltimore County's Catonsville Courthouse

Equity

Goal: *Cultivate a thriving arts ecosystem centered in equity*

Objectives and Strategies

- Support equitable and just practices in Maryland's arts sector
 - Implement policies and procedures that continue to realize a more equitable distribution of funding and resources
 - Serve as a model encouraging arts organizations to adopt equitable funding practices
- Foster an environment supporting stability and security in Maryland's arts sector
 - Lead in the development and utilization of resources that support the achievement of artists and arts organizations
 - Aggregate and share data to support constituent success

Leadership

Goal: *Commit to a culture of care and innovation*

Objectives and Strategies

- Embrace innovative public funding models
 - Investigate the successes of grant initiatives at fellow funding organizations
 - Center data in decision making and share learning publicly
- Develop a team culture of care and wellness
 - Align resources and capacity to meet operational objectives
 - Nurture a workplace centering appreciation and support
 - Launch council development initiatives to support overall agency work



Speaker at OysterFest at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, a regional folklife center in Talbot County

Context

Work on this plan began at the end of several years of upheaval in the arts sector and the world, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and national calls for racial reckoning. These challenges inspired MSAC to push forward with its service to Maryland's public, including new grant programs supporting operations at smaller organizations; project, working, and living expenses for artists; funding for eight folk and traditional arts resource centers across the state; and an arts capital program. In addition, MSAC instituted an equitable funding formula setting operating funding caps for larger organizations and greater funding opportunities for smaller organizations; and completed a Land Acknowledgement Project foregrounding the histories and current experiences of tribal groups.

As the time came to develop a new strategic plan, MSAC was fortunate to move forward in an environment with energetic support from the legislature and newly-elected governor Wes Moore. This document reflects the agency's characteristic ambition while prioritizing staff resources and engaging newly appointed council members.

Process

This strategic plan is the result of a collaboration between MSAC and AMS Planning & Research. MSAC engaged AMS in 2023 to guide the development of a strategic plan setting the agency's operational direction for the next three to five years. Work consisted of a series of interviews with MSAC staff, councilors, and state government stakeholders; listening sessions with constituents from partner organizations, artists, arts learning professionals, and arts organizations; and a stakeholder input survey. The following pages discuss the data resulting from this process in more detail.

A series of interviews and listening sessions began the data collection process, with staff, councilors, state government stakeholders, and arts sector representatives sharing perspectives on MSAC's successes and challenges in recent years. Listening sessions included individualized conversation opportunities for more than 60 of Maryland's artists, arts organizations, and arts learning constituents.

Staff success

- Council members, state government stakeholders, and the public find the MSAC team to be talented, knowledgeable, and capable.

Funding access

- The public recognizes and appreciates MSAC's efforts to simplify grant application processes.

Pandemic recovery

- Many arts organizations have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels of audience engagement.

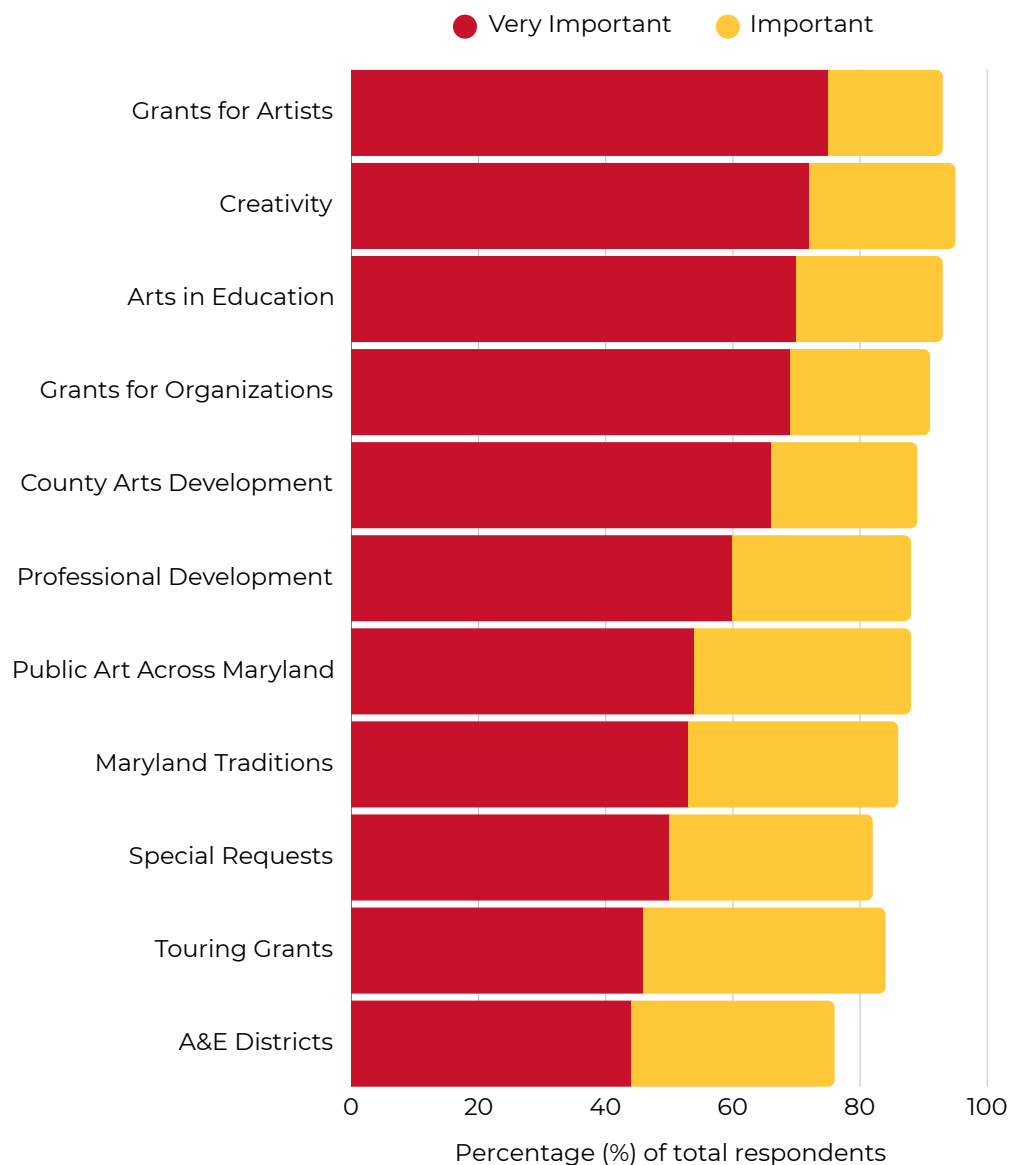
Storytelling

- Now is the time to leverage data, in order to demonstrate the value of public funding for the arts and its success in Maryland.

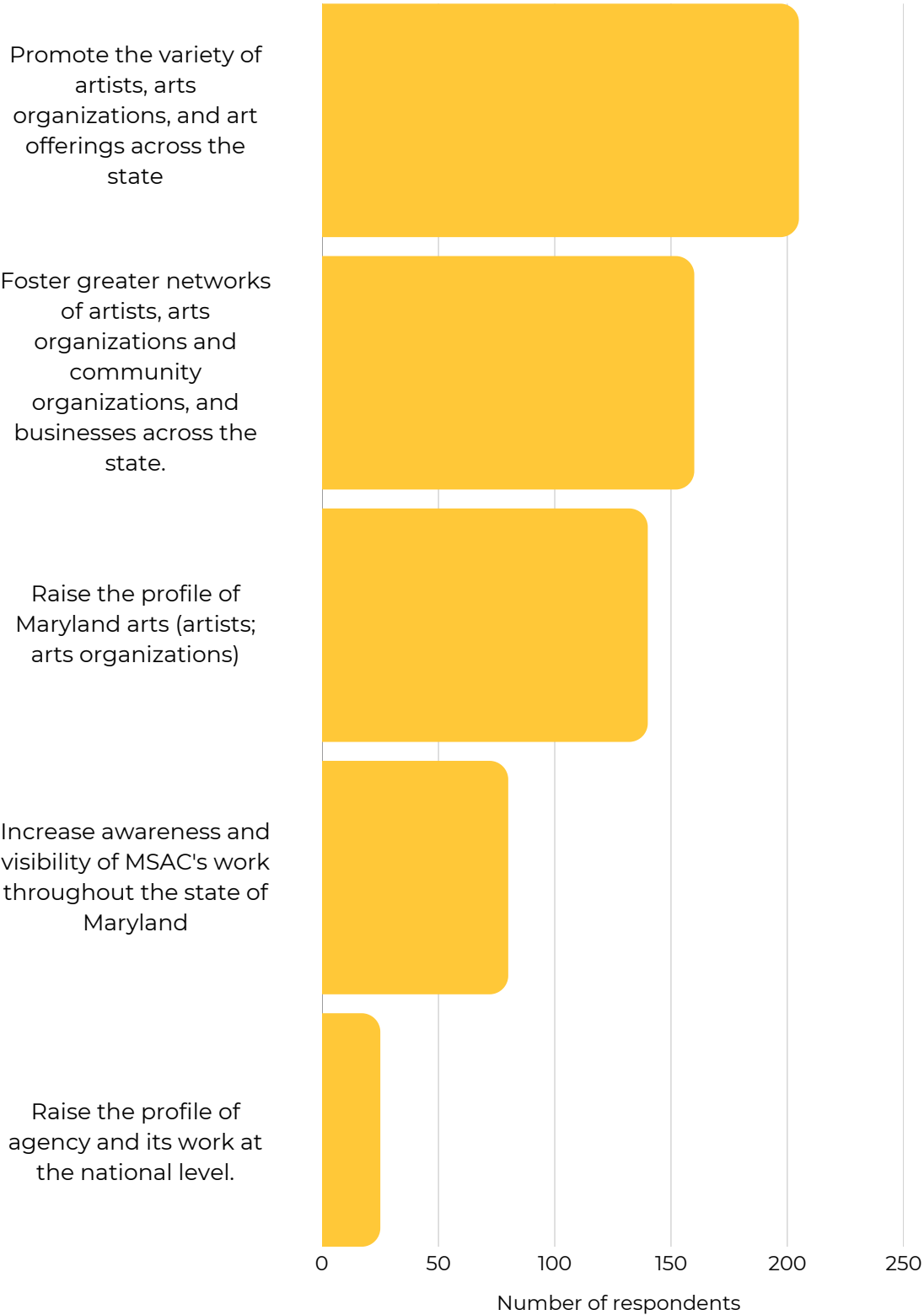
A digital survey continued the data collection process, with the public being invited to contribute feedback on MSAC’s funding and other resources, as well as note future needs and expectations. More than 600 respondents representing all 24 Maryland jurisdictions contributed their thoughts. Almost half the respondents had never received MSAC support, with the remainder being current or former grantees.

Funding

Survey results underscored the value of MSAC’s funding programs, with all being rated as “Very Important” or “Important.”



Survey results also pointed to the need for building public awareness of the arts in Maryland, with about a quarter of respondents suggesting MSAC’s statewide perspective could be valuable in building networks among artists, organizations, and Marylanders engaging in arts activities as audiences or participants.



MSAC's Role

Indicators of the success of this strategic plan will center on continuing to deliver high-quality funding and other resources that are relevant to the needs of those maintaining and engaging with Maryland's arts ecosystem. This work will foster a thriving arts sector characterized by economic, racial, and geographical diversity, the sustainability of funding to artists and organizations, and efforts to expand the reach of MSAC to a broader pool of grantees.

"MSAC's staff really cares about meeting the needs of the people." - Survey respondent

Implementation

To track the progress of this strategic plan, MSAC will regularly report on activities and their connection to the five strategic plan pillars, ensuring all are addressed in the coming years. This implementation reporting will benchmark progress across all grant programs, agency communications, and professional development efforts. Staff and council are responsible for working toward the plan's goals to ensure fulfillment of the aspirations identified in this strategic planning process.

"There is opportunity to further champion the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland—in a very public-facing way." - Listening session participant



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