



# CultureCheck

GREATER PHILADELPHIA  
FINDINGS



# CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	1
WHO PARTICIPATED?	3
ATTENDANCE	4
OPERATIONS	6
COMMUNITY IMPACT	8
CALL TO ACTION	11
PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS	13
2023/2024 PA CULTURECHECK MAP	15
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	16



# CultureCheck

## GREATER PHILADELPHIA FINDINGS

### It's our story, let's tell it!

PA CultureCheck is a study by the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance and PA Humanities to gather the voices of Pennsylvania's cultural, arts, and humanities organizations, along with other nonprofits and community groups. The two primary goals were to **continue tracking the post-pandemic recovery and regrowth** and to **look deeper at the many ways organizations are engaging with their communities**. The results inform local and statewide advocacy efforts, educate grantmakers and practitioners about the latest trends, inspire future research, and help build a stronger and more responsive cultural community.

The Cultural Alliance has covered the effects of the pandemic as well as recovery from the pandemic by arts and culture organizations since 2020. This is the second year the Cultural Alliance and PA Humanities have conducted CultureCheck surveys, and it has now expanded to include virtual listening sessions. The results of PA CultureCheck reveal that the cultural sector is still feeling the effects of the pandemic but continues to be a powerful asset to economic development with many opportunities for growth.

The future of this sector lies not in its past, but how we move forward from here.

### Data highlights

- **112 survey responses from across Southeastern PA.** 271 survey responses from all of PA
- **Attendance approximately 22% down** from 2019, with varying degrees of impact across organization type; performing arts organizations especially affected
- **Operations returning to normal but hiring and volunteer participation especially challenging**, with 58% of organizations across Southeastern PA reporting hiring difficulties
- **Cultural organizations are embedded in communities** - 95% partner with community organizations, addressing issues like education (66%), access and inclusion (60%), youth development (38%) and mental health and wellness (29%)
- During listening sessions, **organizations reported seeking innovative ways to work and interact with audiences**. New challenges like inflation and audience members commuting to work/downtown less frequently have arisen.

## What We Learned

- **The arts and humanities community is expansive and diverse**, including many different kinds of organizations with unique assets and interests.
- **Collectively, they drive innovation and growth** in our communities and economies.
- **Increased funding and support from businesses, philanthropy, governments, and the media is essential** to reflect our art and humanities community's significant economic contribution and national prominence.
- **Our sector amplifies our community's unique cultural identity and functions as powerful connectors** by building bridges, lifting missing voices, and maintaining crucial partnerships in an often divided state.
- **Now is the time for cultural workers to redefine our moment** and to discover new ways to grow audiences, engage on a deeper level, and develop new partnerships.

*"Southeastern PA's cultural organizations are centers of innovation, creativity, learning, and progress. If we work collectively we can leverage our talents and experience to grow ourselves, our communities, and our economies with heart and soul."*

- Laurie Zierer, executive director, PA Humanities

*"A healthy creative sector has a profound ripple effect in communities and economies across the state. This data illustrates that fact, but it also highlights the far-reaching potential that could be gained by working in collaboration with the allied industries and individuals who benefit from the positive impact of arts and culture."*

- Patricia Wilson Aden, President and CEO, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance



## WHO PARTICIPATED?

Various organizations from communities of all sizes across the state participated in PA CultureCheck. In addition to the survey, in fall 2023 we held two listening sessions of arts and cultural community members (many of whom had completed the survey) to hear additional feedback and input on this study: one held with arts and culture leaders and workers from across the state, and one held specifically focusing on Southeastern PA.

- **112** participating organizations from across Southeastern Pennsylvania (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties)
- **73%** having an annual budget under \$1.5 million. 51% had budgets under \$500,000
- **20%** BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) organizations (35% of the population Southeastern PA are BIPOC residents)

### Takeaway

PA CultureCheck illustrates the expansiveness and diversity of Southeastern PA's cultural sector. Its vital work touches and inspires our communities and grows our economies in many ways, such as through historical sites, zoos, arts centers, and libraries. During our listening sessions, cultural workers were eager to connect with each other and share their experiences and learnings. This shows the need for increasing opportunities for regional and statewide collaboration. Data on the sector from PA CultureCheck and other sources is vital for making informed, strategic decisions.

### Participating Organizations by Type:



#### Organization Type

Libraries & Archives	24
Historical Museums & Societies	17
Art, Science, & Other Museums	11
Performing Arts	30
Community & Education	12
Service, Support, & Other	11
Media	7

46% (52) of all participating organizations are Museums, Historical Organizations, and Libraries.

Please see the end of the report for a map and listing of participating organizations.

## ATTENDANCE

Many organizations continue to regain audiences but uncertainty remains about the “new normal” and what the future holds. Some areas of the sector have seen unique shifts and patterns of growth, with performing arts and museums adapting and building in different ways and rates.

- 32% of organizations report that their attendance is “back to or above 2019 levels,” compared with 10% in the 2022 survey
- These effects are not evenly distributed -- performing arts organizations are more affected, with only 15% report having fully regained attendance, compared to 41% for museums, historical organizations, and libraries
- 29% of respondents replied that they are unsure when attendance might fully recover
- Sector-wide the median organization still reports a 22% decline in attendance compared to 2019
- During listening sessions, organizations, especially in the performing arts, noted that much of the recovery of attendees comes from single ticket buyers, with subscriber levels not recovering, possibly accelerating a trend away from subscribers occurring over the last few decades
- During listening sessions, organizations adapted programming and identified new audiences during the pandemic as work habits and locations changed; they are seeking ways to keep those gains while bringing back past audiences and events

### Takeaway

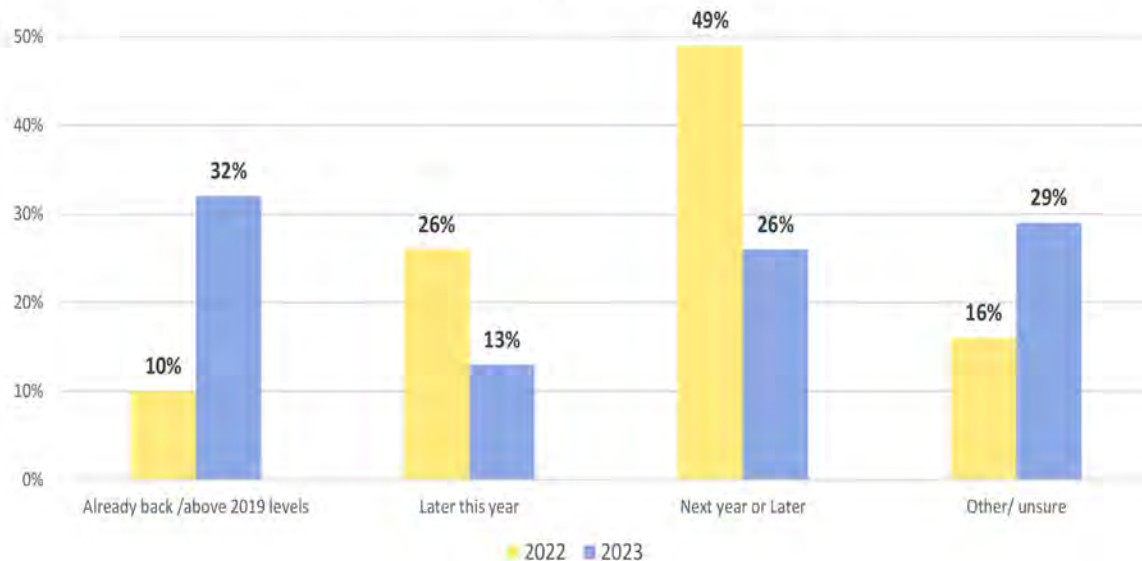
Southeastern PA's resilient cultural sector is working to innovatively navigate the aftermath of the pandemic and new inflationary pressures. Some organizations have reached or surpassed their pre-pandemic attendance levels, but the path to a full recovery is complex and multifaceted. This period of transformation is characterized by adaptive strategies and necessary adjustments. For example, the performing arts are now attracting more single ticket buyers instead of subscribers, indicating a shift from traditional models. Across the cultural sector, organizations are responding to changing audience behaviors and preferences against the backdrop of a challenging financial landscape. The sector's ability to continue thriving hinges on greater overall support from the public, philanthropy, business, government, and media while recognizing the unique challenges and recovery paths of different cultural organizations.

*“I know we always try to compare our attendance data from 2019, but I think at this point it's like a whole new world when it comes to attendance data...”*

- Museum Professional



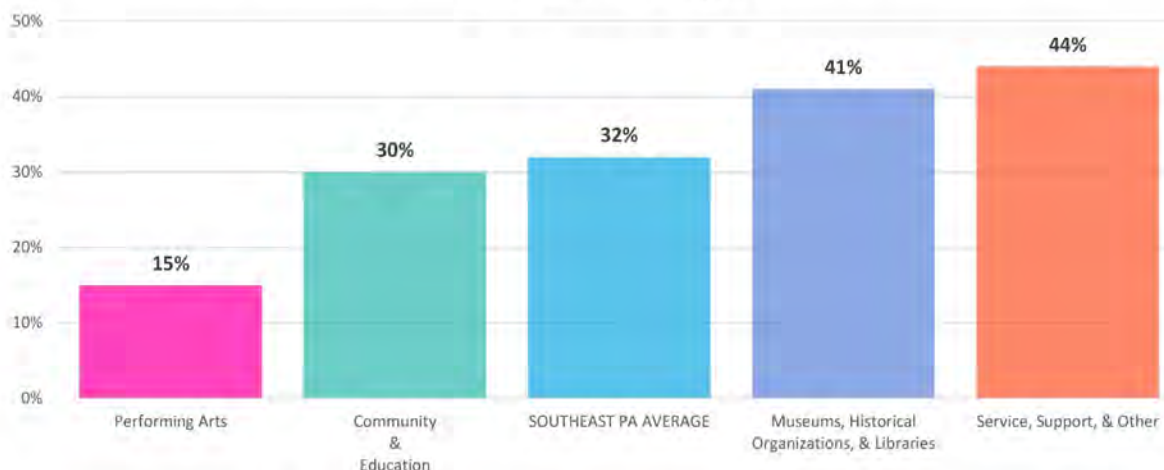
**“When do you expect attendance to return to 2019 levels?”  
Results compared: 2022 to 2023**



*“About 70% of our audience, pre-pandemic, were subscribers. So being down 20% there, which is probably our new normal, is significant. [Also,] overall expenses are so much higher.”*

- Theater Professional

**Percentage of Organizations with Attendance Back to/Above 2019 Levels  
By organization type**



Historical Museums & Societies and Art, Science, & Other Museums are combined here as Museums & Historical.  
Media organizations not shown; no significant in-person attendance reported.

## OPERATIONS

Top concerns are the ability to gain or retain attendance, encourage community participation, and hiring new staff. While we heard in the listening sessions that organizations are working to innovate and develop new business models and ways of working, they are now grappling with inflation and new costs of doing business with fewer volunteers and staff.

- Only **21%** of organizations report that their programs are operating at reduced capacity, compared with 33% of organizations in 2022
- **46%** of organizations report a reduced number of volunteers. This effect is not evenly distributed — a larger percentage of libraries (55%) report a reduction compared to a lower percentage of performing art organizations (30%)
- **58%** of organizations report difficulty in hiring
- During the listening sessions, a frequent comment was that, over the last year, organizations have faced increased inflationary pressures
- Gaining/retaining attendance and community participation is a top concern according to polls in the listening session and the sector is looking for ways to collaborate on promotion and develop relations with the media, business, and local government to rebrand their community's assets

### Takeaway

Cultural workers need space, time, and capital to innovate. In light of the evolving landscape, operations within the sector must be agile and forward-thinking. Organizations are called upon to balance innovation with sustainable practices to ensure resilience in the face of economic and societal shifts. Hiring and volunteer recruitment are persistent issues and are taking a toll on an already stretched sector and cultural workers' well being. Embracing collaboration, diversification of staffing and audiences, and finding new ways to engage volunteers to build capacity will be key in maintaining relevance and impact. There is a need for stronger media collaboration and partnerships with business and local government to aid in community and economic development, as well as promotional efforts. Organizations find themselves needing to be more flexible and innovative in their operational strategies, such as building new marketing for single-ticket buyers or scaling back on the number of productions.

*“We were seeing a nice return to more of a normal pattern before inflation really took off. And when that hit, that also kind of was that second whammy that came around.”*

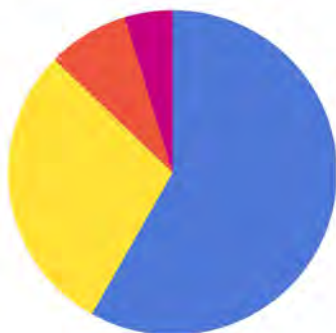
- Listening Session Participant

*“Unless you have a lot of money, you don't make it in the newspaper... I think everybody has a crisis in promotion.”*

- Listening Session Participant



## How Has Hiring Been?



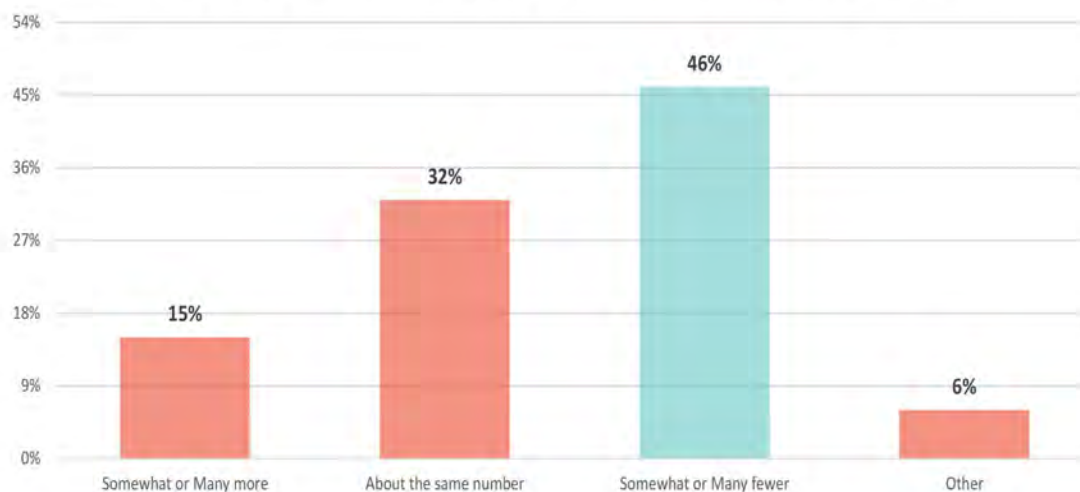
### How has hiring been?

Somewhat or very difficult	58%
Neutral/ about the same as always	29%
Somewhat or very easy	8%
Other	5%

*"We don't even have a newspaper out in our little rural community."*

- Theater Professional

## "How many volunteers at your organization compared to 2019?"



*"I think inflation has had a huge impact on us, just paying our people, keeping the doors open, paying the electric bill, paying the natural gas bill. It's great that we have volunteers, it's great that we have these programs, but if we can't keep the doors open, what are we going to do?"*

- Theater Professional

## Listening Session: What Are Your Biggest Challenges Right Now?\*



Gaining/Retaining Attendance and Community Participation



Securing Funding and Donations



Building Organizational Capacity and Hiring Staff

\* Results of combined instant polls conducted during the live listening sessions over Zoom

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Cultural organizations are engaged with and addressing the needs of their communities in many ways, such as supporting job training, youth education, and health and wellness. Their audiences are diverse and often include immigrants, veterans, unhoused, incarcerated, and victims of gun violence. Arts and culture workers bridge gaps, forge connections, and form meaningful partnerships, particularly in challenging times.

- 79% of organizations partner with schools; of the organizations that work with schools, almost a third (32%) work with ten or more schools.
- Many work with students in multiple locations: 72% of organizations work with students on school premises and 77% of organizations work with students in the organizations' facilities.
- Over one quarter of cultural organizations (26%) directly engage in economic development activities.
- During the listening sessions, it was reported that building community identity and pride are integral to the role of cultural institutions. The contributions to a sense of place and community cohesion was highlighted, especially in terms of engaging new residents and reflecting the diversity of the community
- Discussions also highlighted the importance of uplifting diverse voices and stories and focused on the role of cultural institutions in promoting diversity and inclusion within their communities

### Takeaway

The cultural sector actively addresses social and educational issues while helping to grow thriving, economically vibrant communities. Cultural work plays a key role in areas such as neighborhood revitalization, youth engagement, public safety, and health and wellness. In challenging times, the sector is instrumental in amplifying underrepresented voices, leading with equity, and creating inclusive spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging. Organizations note the need to re-engage with local communities and attract new, more diverse audiences, with a greater emphasis on inclusivity and broadening the reach of cultural activities. By providing opportunities to connect and learn while helping to fuel our economy, the cultural sector contributes to the health, well-being, and support of our recovering communities. This is also critical for shaping social cohesion, cultural identity, and civic vitality. However, the economic and creative assets and potential that the sector brings to revitalizing our communities are underutilized and under-recognized.

*"One of our values is community... every show we produce has at least three to five [social and community] nonprofits... with which we connect... So for every show and what its themes are, there is a way of lifting up their missions to our audience."*

- Listening Session Participant



*"In the pandemic, we saw a pretty big community change...[We worked to] best engage with and capture our new audience members that might not know who we are, what we do, and just tried to welcome them into our organization."*

- Museum Professional

### Local Impact

**95%**

of organizations partner with community organizations,  
an increase of 8% from previous year

**79%**

of organizations partner with schools

**58%**

of organizations partner with Parks/Rec Centers

*"I'm hearing even from elected officials about how the arts and culture are our opportunity to re-engage our downtown. I'm seeing arts organizations do a really excellent job using arts as an opportunity to uplift diverse groups of voices. I just feel like that is exploding here..."*

- Listening Session Participant

### Listening Session: Community impact of your work?\*

**75%**

Educational & Cultural  
Opportunities for Residents

**54%**

Uplifting Diverse  
Voices & Stories

**42%**

Spurring Economic  
Development

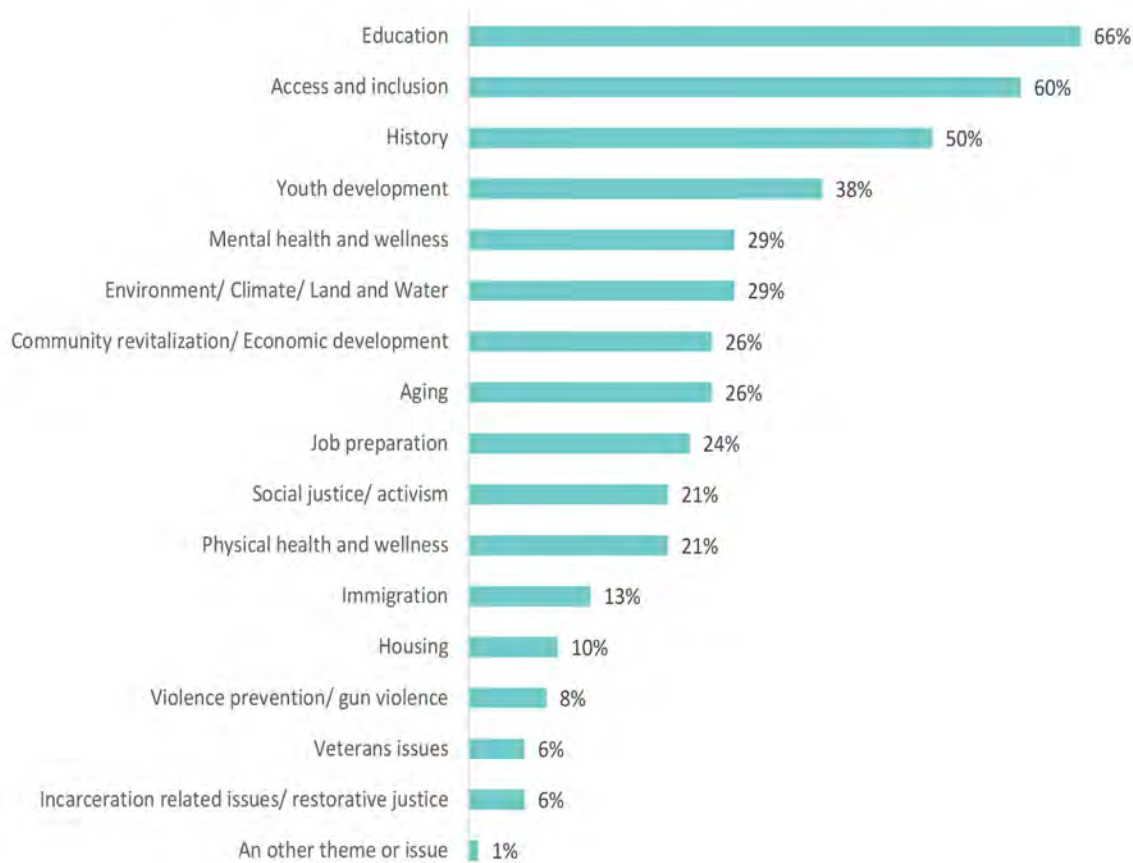
**29%**

Building Identity  
& Local Pride

\* Results of combined instant polls conducted during the live listening sessions over Zoom



### Which social issues does your organization address in its work?



*"We ARE the second responders in our town. Our participants are everyone. ...Our resources are free, or very low cost. And we are the only digital connection that many people have...."*

- Library Professional

## CALL TO ACTION

PA CultureCheck emphasizes the resilience, adaptability, and innovation of Southeastern PA's cultural sector -- but also the need for continued support. Here are two ways you can help:

- **Advocate:** Show your support for the cultural sector by contacting your elected officials to encourage additional funding, policies, and support for cultural initiatives. Sign up for advocacy alerts to be updated on important advocacy issues affecting arts and culture in Southeastern Pennsylvania: [philaculture.org/advocacy-alerts](https://philaculture.org/advocacy-alerts)
- **Engage:** The work of nonprofit arts and culture organizations is made possible by financial contributions. When possible, consider donating to your local organizations, artists, and projects. Offer your time and skills to assist in activities and events, including board membership roles. Additionally, consider the gift of your time and attention! Volunteer your skills in activities and events, including board membership roles. And remember, in our digital world, the best way to stay engaged is by connecting on social media and receiving email newsletters.

*"I think I don't believe in normal. I think the world is different. I don't think the world is ever going to go back to 2019. So I think that's a big challenge. It's just setting new benchmarks."*

- Listening Session Participant

*"We need to redefine and study the actual economic contribution that we make in making a much more livable place. We are not getting the credit we deserve for creating a really decent place to live."*

- Listening Session Participant

PA CultureCheck in the news: [WHYY/PBS](#), [Philadelphia Inquirer](#), [Philadelphia Citizen](#), [Axios Philadelphia](#), [Arblog](#)

## Research Timeline

- **May & June 2023**
  - Survey of organizations
- **July - August 2023**
  - Data analysis
- **August - September 2023**
  - Preliminary data presentations to cultural and civic leaders
- **October 17 & 18 2023**
  - Cultural community Listening Sessions on final data findings
- **November 1, 2023**
  - Preliminary presentation at PA Arts & Humanities statewide convening (Lehigh University)
- **December 2023**
  - Incorporating community feedback from presentations and Listening Sessions
- **February 2024**
  - Final report release



## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

### Art, Science, & Other Museums

Barnes Foundation  
 Da Vinci Art Alliance  
 The Franklin Institute  
 The Galleries at Moore College of Art & Design  
 James E. Brewton Foundation  
 Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens  
 Longwood Gardens  
 Penn Museum and GPADC  
 Philadelphia Sketch Club  
 Philadelphia's Magic Gardens  
 The Temple Judea Museum

### Historical Museums & Societies

American Philosophical Society  
 Bucks County Historical Society (Mercer Museum and Fonthill Castle)  
 Chester County History Center  
 Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation  
 Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site  
 Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion Inc  
 Historic Fallsington Inc  
 Historic Germantown  
 Historic RittenhouseTown Inc  
 Independence Seaport Museum  
 Museum of the American Revolution  
 National Constitution Center  
 Newlin Grist Mill  
 Pennypacker Mills  
 Philadelphia Archaeological Forum  
 Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center  
 Wyck Association

### Libraries & Archives

Atglen Public Library  
 The Athenaeum of Philadelphia  
 Avon Grove Library  
 Cheltenham Township Library System  
 Coatesville Area Public Library  
 Delaware County Libraries  
 Folcroft Public Library

Free Library of Springfield Township  
 Helen Kate Furness Free Library  
 Indian Valley Public Library  
 Jenkintown Library  
 Lansdowne Public Library  
 Lower Merion Library System  
 Middletown Free Library  
 Montgomery County Library District  
 Newtown Public Library  
 North Wales Area Library  
 Sharon Hill Public Library  
 Springfield Township Library  
 Swarthmore Public Library  
 Union Library of Hatboro  
 Upper Darby Township & Sellers Memorial Free Public Library  
 Upper Moreland Free Public Library  
 William Jeanes Memorial Library

### Performing Arts

Anna Crusis Feminist Choir  
 Arden Theatre Company  
 Aurora Classical of Culture Trust Greater Philadelphia  
 Enchantment Theatre Company  
 FringeArts  
 Grounded Theatre Company  
 Harmony Theater Inc  
 Inis Nua Theatre Company  
 InterAct Theatre Company  
 Kun-Yang Lin Dancers  
 La Fiocco  
 Lantern Theater Company  
 Lenape Chamber Ensemble  
 LiveConnections.org DBA World Cafe Live  
 Mendelssohn Chorus of Philadelphia  
 Mt. Airy Barn Dance  
 Network for New Music  
 Patricia Masarachia  
 The Pennsylvania Ballet Association DBA Philadelphia Ballet

Performing Arts Traditions  
 Philadelphia Dance Company  
 Philadelphia Freedom Band  
 The Philadelphia Thing  
 PlayPenn  
 Singing City  
 Theatre Exile  
 Theatre Horizon  
 VoxAmaDeus  
 Walnut St Theatre  
 Wilma Theater

### Community & Education

Abington Art Center  
 Caribbean Community in Philadelphia  
 The Clay Studio  
 Community Arts Center  
 Curtis Institute of Music  
 First Person Arts  
 Georgia E. Gregory Interdenominational  
 School of Music  
 Ollin Yoliztli Calmecac  
 Oxford Arts Alliance  
 Pickleberry Pie  
 Play On Philly  
 Project Capoeira

### Service, Support, & Other

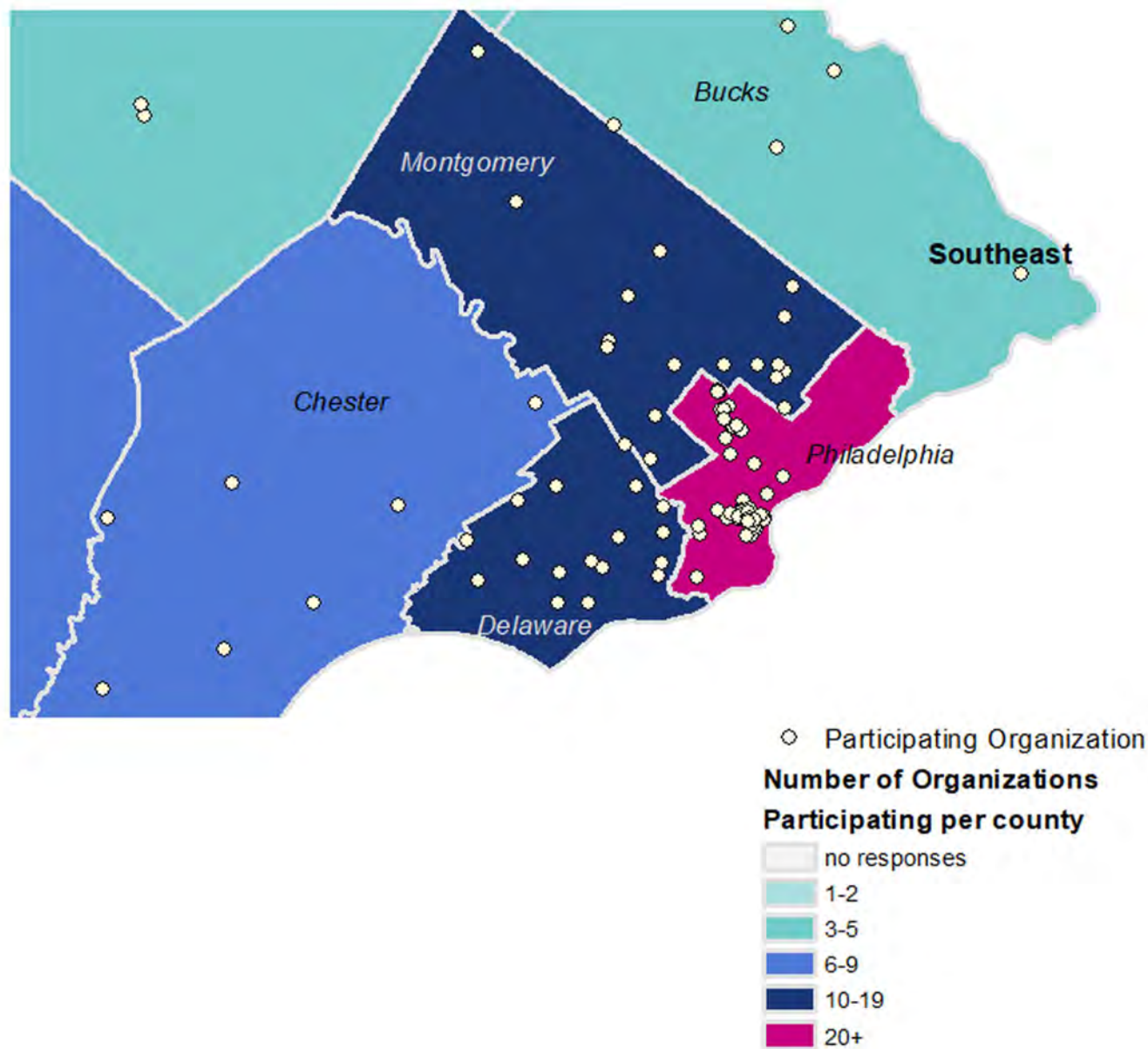
BuildaBridge International  
 Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts  
 Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance  
 Greater Philadelphia Film Office  
 H-CAN (Havertown Community Action  
 Network) Arts Advocacy ArtSquad  
 Keep Music Alive  
 PA Humanities  
 Philadelphia Scenic Works  
 Philadelphia Sculptors  
 Theatre Philadelphia  
 Travelers Aid International PHL Airport

### Media

Broad Street Review  
 Bryn Mawr Film Institute  
 CMPRadioNet  
 G-Town Radio  
 Historical Dream  
 History Making Productions LLC  
 Second State Press

## 2023/2024 PA CULTURECHECK MAP

## 2023 PA CultureCheck Participating Organizations





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all our PA CultureCheck participants!

Additional thanks to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the Office of Commonwealth Libraries (Pennsylvania Department of Education), the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, PA Museums, Citizens for the Arts in Pennsylvania, and advisors Kristi Poling and Genna Styles-Lyas.

PA CultureCheck and the work of the Cultural Alliance is made possible through the generous support of committed individuals and institutions — [Donate Today!](#)

For questions about PA CultureCheck, please contact Kristen Vinh:  
[kristenv@philaculture.org](mailto:kristenv@philaculture.org)



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE  
HUMANITIES

Funding for PA CultureCheck has been provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities

Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance  
1315 Walnut Street, Suite 732  
Philadelphia PA 19107  
[info@philaculture.org](mailto:info@philaculture.org)

