

DOORS OPEN

King County Resident Culture & Communities Study

WINTER 2026



DOORS
OPEN

4 CULTURE


Wilkening Consulting
audience research | knowledge curation

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PURPOSE

TO FIELD RESEARCH WITH A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF KING COUNTY RESIDENTS, DOCUMENTING CURRENT CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG KING COUNTY RESIDENTS.

This research establishes a benchmark and is designed to be replicated over time to assess the impact of newly implemented Doors Open programs on cultural access.

METHODOLOGY

This survey was designed to reflect the people and communities of King County, so that findings are representative of residents across the county.

Representative Resident Sample

A countywide sample (**963 respondents**) was collected and weighted to align with **King County demographics and geography**, to ensure findings reflect residents across:

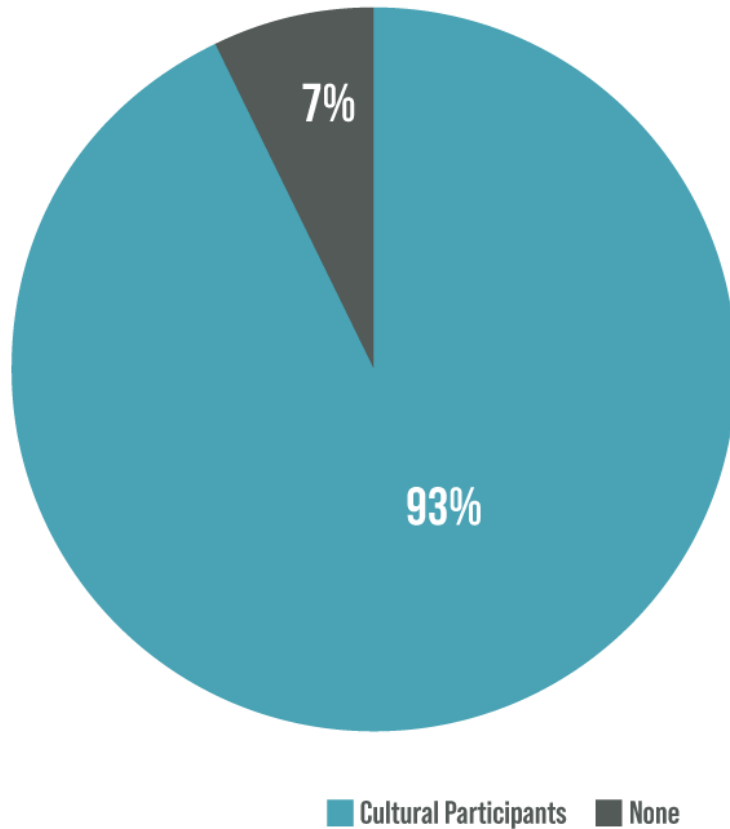
- Age groups
- Race and ethnicity
- Income levels
- Household characteristics
- Geographic areas of King County

How data was collected

Residents completed a survey about cultural participation, attitudes, barriers, motivations, and community experiences. Data collection included:

- General population sample (963 respondents)
- Community-based organization sample (1,787 respondents) to broaden participation & perspectives

93% OF KING COUNTY RESIDENTS ARE CULTURAL PARTICIPANTS



If all cultural activities are measured, 93% of King County residents participated in at least one cultural activity in the past year.

King County exceeds national participation rates. Residents are 1.3x more likely to visit museums, and also 1.3 more likely to attend live performances, than U.S. adults.

In contrast, 41% of King County residents attended a sporting event.

Source for U.S. data: 2026 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling (AAM + Wilkening Consulting)

CULTURAL PARTICIPATION IS THE NORM IN KING COUNTY

The cultural activities provided in all three of these questions are expansive.

For the purposes of this study, a narrower definition of cultural participation is used, namely participation in at least one of the following:

-
- **Museums**
 - **Live performances**
 - **History/heritage activities**
 - **Cultural festivals**
 - **STEM events**
 - **Literary arts events**
 - **Customs/practices of a specific cultural community**
 - **Indigenous, Native, and traditional cultural activities**

When all of these cultural activities are taken together, 93% of King County residents participated in at least one cultural activity in the past year.

Comparisons to U.S. adults are limited. A 2023 study from Americans for the Arts found that 79% of U.S. adults had visited a cultural organization or attended a cultural event in the previous year. This measure, however, does not appear to include participation in cultural traditions or some of the other forms of engagement tracked in this study.

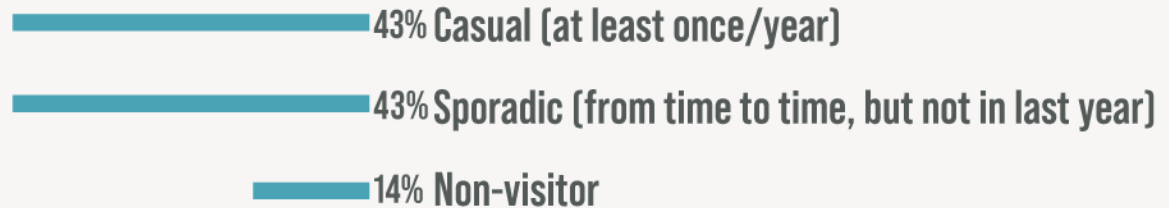
Most U.S. adults actively participate in cultural activities, while *nearly all* King County residents engaged to some degree.

MUSEUM VISITATION IS WIDESPREAD



MUSEUM PARTICIPATION

■ King County Sample



Just over 40% of King County residents reported visiting a museum in King County in the past year, and a similar number reported doing so in the past few years (though not in the past 12 months).

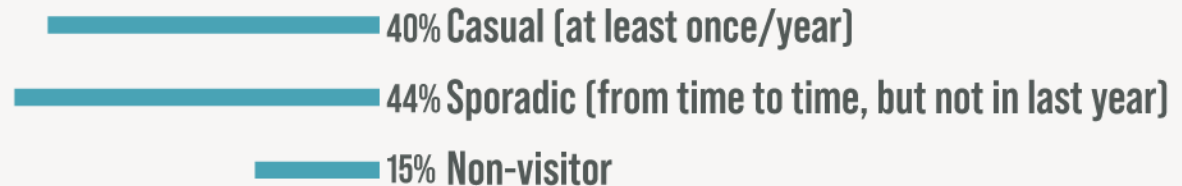
This is 1.3x higher than museum participation rates among U.S. adults (32%). Additionally, fewer King County residents identified as non-visitors to museums, only 14% compared to 20% nationwide.

LIVE PERFORMANCE ATTENDANCE IS WIDESPREAD



LIVE PERFORMANCE ATTENDANCE

King County Sample



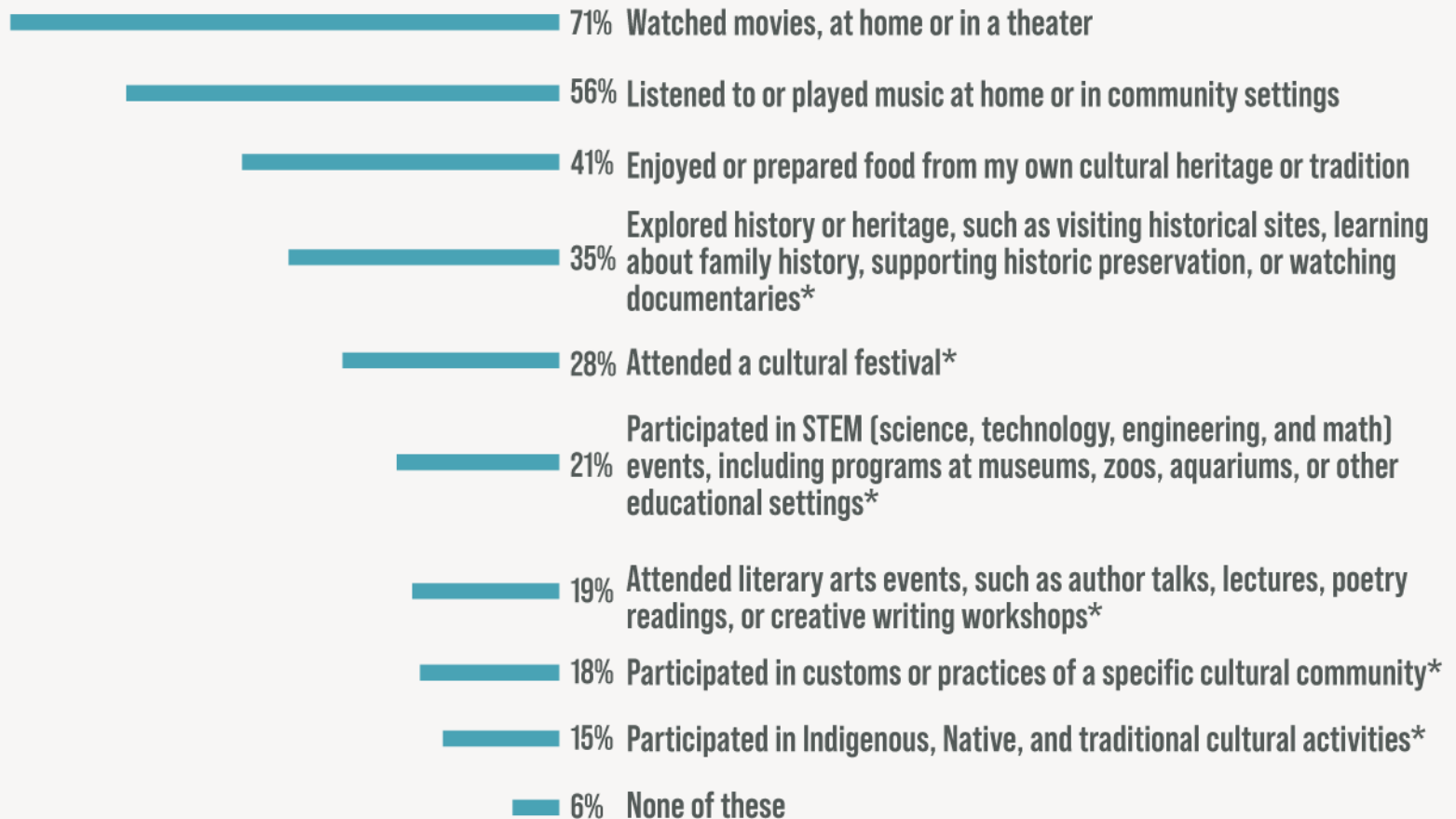
Just over 40% of King County residents reported attending a live performance in King County in the past year, and a similar number reported doing so in the past few years (though not in the past 12 months).

This is 1.3x higher than live performance attendance rates among U.S. adults (32%).

VIRTUALLY EVERYONE ENGAGES WITH CULTURE

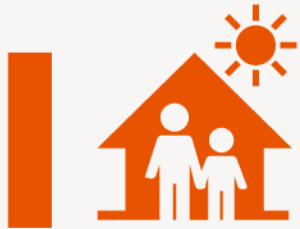
 What other types of cultural or creative activities did you engage in during the past year? (Choose all that apply.)

■ King County Sample



*The cultural activities provided in this question is expansive. For the purpose of this study, a narrower definition of “cultural participation” is used that includes attendance at museums, live performances, or one of the six activities indicated above with an asterisk.

CULTURE IMPROVES LIVES



People engage with culture to connect with family and friends, feel a sense of belonging, expand their minds, relax, and enjoy themselves.



95% of King County residents have experienced health and wellbeing outcomes from participating in cultural activities.



93% have experienced other outcomes, such as gaining knowledge, empathy, curiosity, critical thinking, and more.

FUN IS A KEY MOTIVATION FOR LEISURE ACTIVITIES

 Thinking about the activities you just indicated you participate in, why do you do them? (Choose those that are most important to you.)

■ King County Sample



MOTIVATIONS AND OUTCOMES ARE DIFFERENT

People's motivations for participating in leisure time activities, including cultural activities, tend to focus on their interests, fun, and spending time with people they care about.

Mission-related motivations, such as learning, culture, and civic engagement, are strongest among high-frequency participants, and still motivations are not universal.

Most people come *out* of cultural activities feeling like they did something good for themselves, their families, and/or their community, above and beyond connecting with organizational missions.



WORD-OF-MOUTH AND FACEBOOK KEY FOR GETTING THE WORD OUT

➤? How do you typically learn about events in your community? (Choose all that apply.)

■ King County Sample



ACCESS IS WIDESPREAD ... BUT BARRIERS STILL EXIST

78% of King County residents agree there are plenty of cultural activities in their neighborhood or community.



While participation, at 93%, is close to universal, participation *frequency* varies widely. Primary barriers to higher participation rates include:



Cost



Time



Other interests/priorities

Cost concerns are greatest for:

- **Young adults under 40 without children**
- **Families with young children**
- **Lower income households**

Three out of five King County households have access and support needs. The most common ones include:



Mental health considerations



Physical disabilities (including associated with aging)

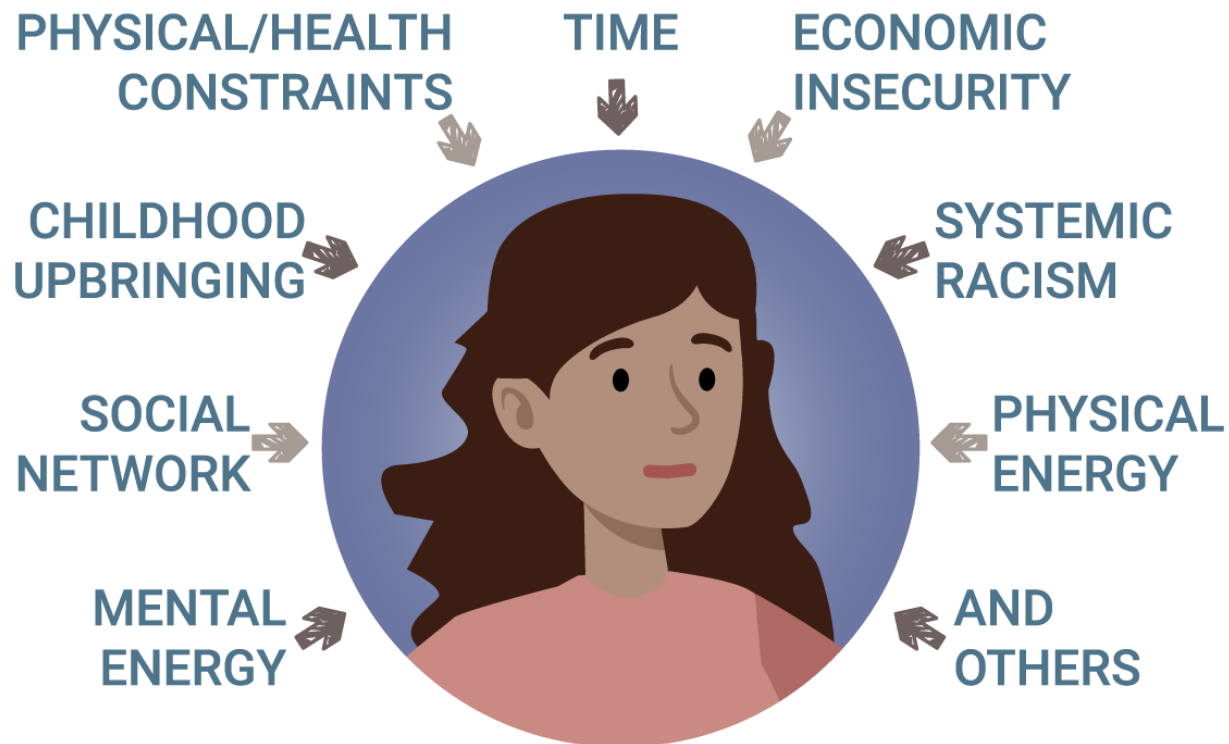


Learning disabilities



Sensory sensitivities

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?



COST IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

 What kinds of things prevent you from participating in cultural activities more frequently? (Choose all that apply.)

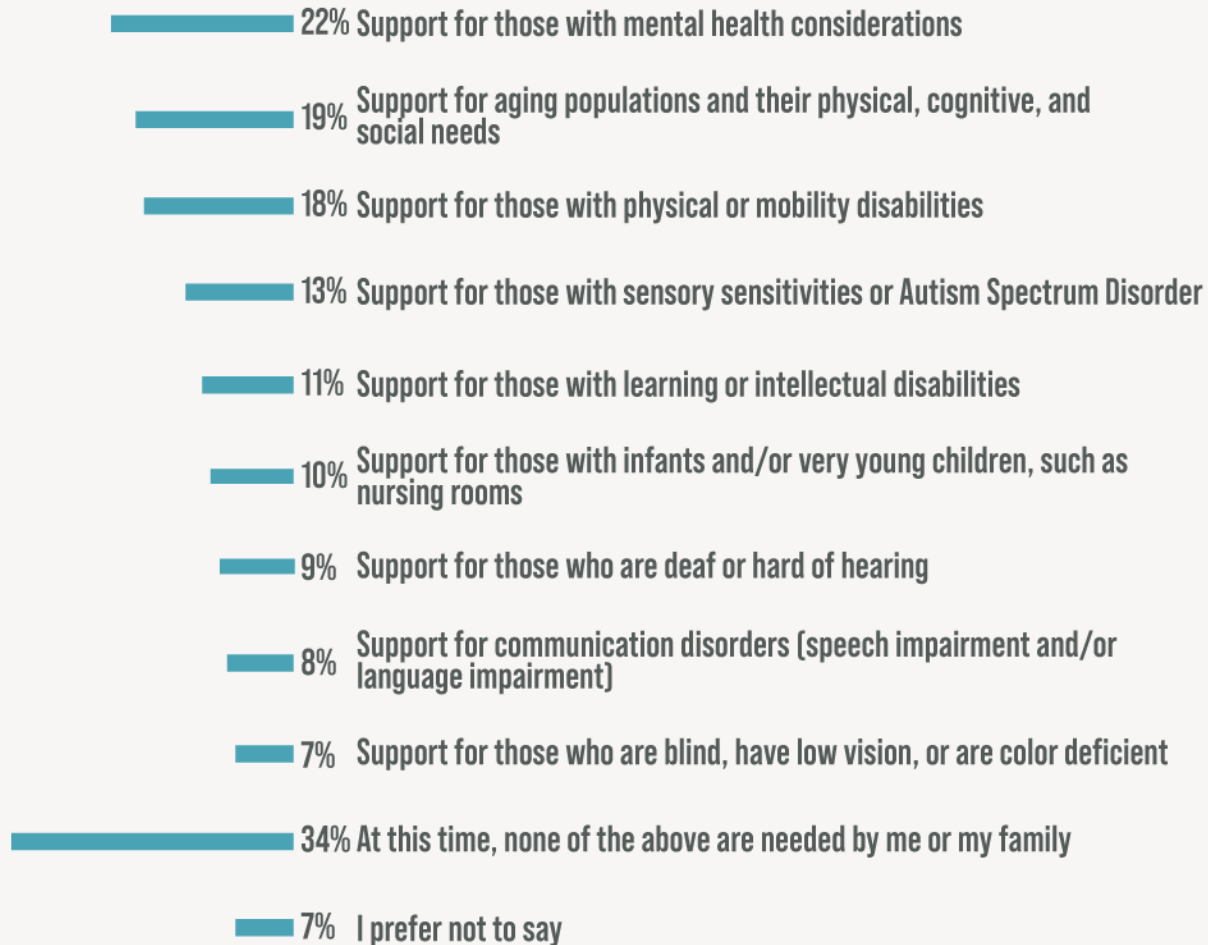
■ King County Sample



ADDITIONAL AID AND SUPPORT ARE NEEDED

? In your daily life, what types of aid and support are used or needed by you and your immediate family members? (Choose all that apply to you and your family specifically.)

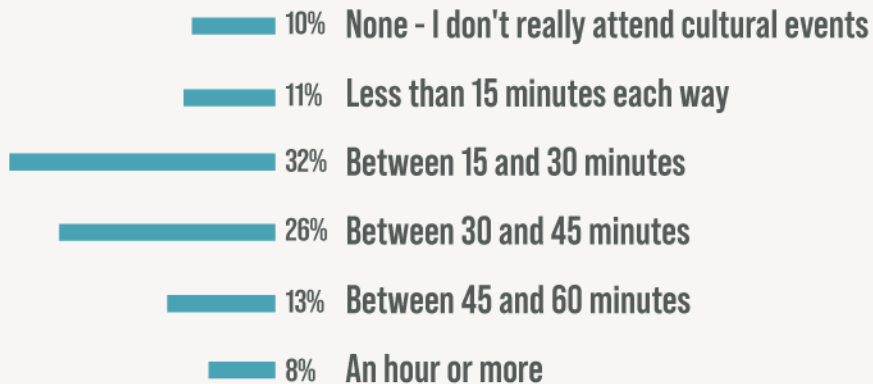
■ King County Sample



A 30-MINUTE RADIUS

? On average, how much time are you willing to spend traveling to cultural events? (Choose one.)

■ King County Sample



Most King County residents recognize it takes time to travel to cultural events. How much time they are willing to invest, however, varies.

About half the sample (47%) are willing to travel 30 minutes (or more), and another 39% are willing to travel up to an hour.

Only 8% of respondents are willing to travel an hour or more, but they are committed cultural participants, more likely to visit museums frequently, attend live performances, and engage in a wider range of activities overall.

CULTURE IS COMMUNITY

97% of King County residents believe cultural organizations have a positive impact in their community, with the top impacts being:

1

Providing
educational
opportunities

2

Improving
quality of life

3

Honoring
cultural
diversity

4

Promoting
engagement in
community
life/bringing their
community
together



85% of King County residents think cultural organizations contribute to the economic vitality of their community.

CULTURE IMPROVES QUALITY OF LIFE AND BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

 What are the most important ways cultural organizations contribute to your community? (Choose all that apply.)

Virtually all King County residents (97%) feel that cultural organizations are community assets.



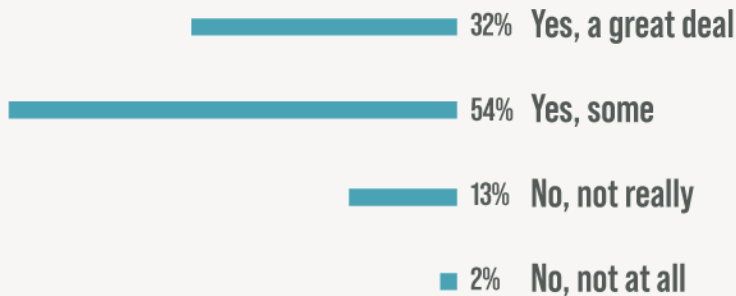
More specifically, nearly three out of five King County residents feel that cultural organizations improve the quality of life in their community. A majority also feel that cultural organizations honor cultural diversity in their community, help bring their community together, and are educational assets.

Cultural respondents are even more enthusiastic about these answer choices, with majority responses across every answer choice.

CULTURE: GOOD FOR THE BOTTOM-LINE

? Do you think cultural organizations contribute to your community's economic vitality through jobs, ticket sales, tax revenue, etc.? (Choose one.)

■ King County Sample



Five out of six King County residents agree that cultural organizations contribute to their community's economic vitality.

This result is several percentage points higher than a national study that finds 70% of U.S. adults believe “arts and culture are important to my community’s businesses, economy, and local jobs.”

KING COUNTY RESIDENTS WANT CULTURE TO BE INCLUSIVE AND HONEST

King County residents expect cultural organizations to:



- Be welcoming, and provide a sense of belonging
- Be respectful of different values of community members
- Share universal human experiences



70% of King County residents want cultural organizations to resist pressures to remove content for political reasons.



73% of King County residents are supportive of inclusive content in cultural organizations.

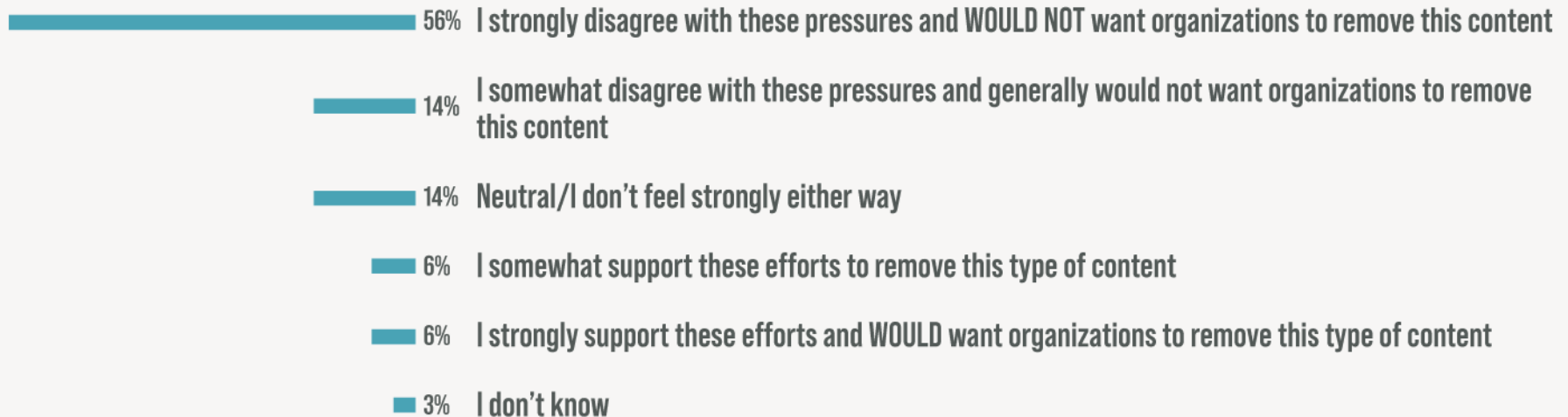
Note: Inclusive content refers to cultural programming and interpretation that includes diverse perspectives and lived experiences. In this survey, it includes representation of women, people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, religious minorities, and historically underrepresented communities.

CONTENT INDEPENDENCE DESIRED FOR CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS



Some public libraries, museums, and arts organizations have been pressured to remove content that addresses things like: Gender, race, and ethnicity; Scientific topics like climate change; Historical topics like slavery; and similar topics. How do you think these organizations should respond if pressured to remove this type of content? (Choose one.)

■ King County Sample



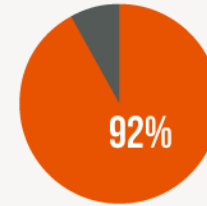
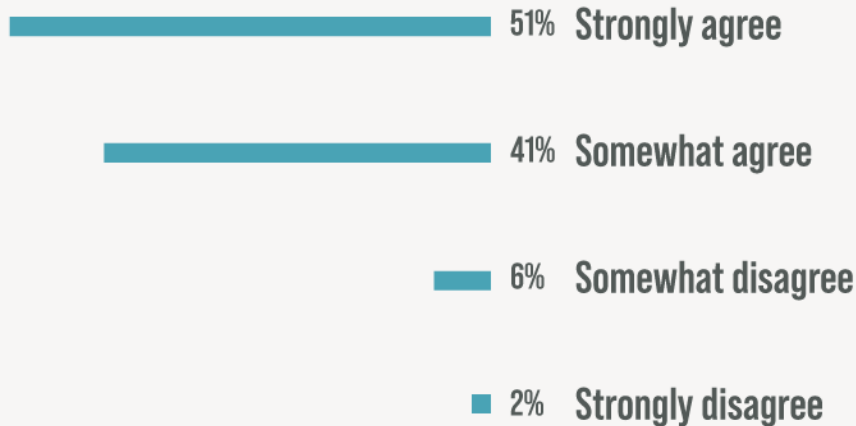
70% of King County residents disagree with pressures put on cultural organizations to remove content that has become politicized, including a majority (56%) who *strongly* disagree.

This is nearly identical to the 69% of U.S. adults when answering a virtually identical question.

KING COUNTY SHOULD SUPPORT CULTURE

? Do you agree or disagree with the following: "The King County Council should work to support our county's cultural organizations." (Choose one.)

■ King County Sample



92% of King County residents agree that cultural organizations are worth the support of King County.

This is significantly higher than the 70% of U.S. adults who support local government funding nonprofit arts and culture organizations.

RESULTS BY LIFE STAGE

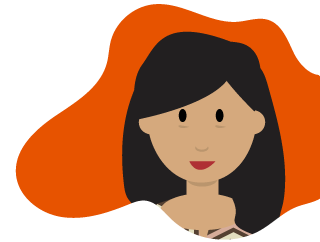
The following four pages examine the life stages delineated in this report:



Young adults
(under 40) with
no minor
children



Parents and
guardians of
minor children



Adults 40 – 59
with no minor
children



Adults 60 or
older with no
minor children

A word of caution: it is easy to take the characteristics and behaviors described here and extend them to all individuals who fit within that age and parental status. But what is shared here are *overall patterns* and individuals within each life stage can vary widely in their values, attitudes, and behaviors. Understanding overall patterns is extremely useful, but always make room for individual difference.

YOUNG ADULTS (UNDER 40) WITH NO MINOR CHILDREN



“ King County would be drastically different and serve the people less. The cultural organizations I engage with are central to my life and have allowed me to develop a community in Seattle. ”

Cultural Engagement Patterns

- More likely to participate ... but sporadically (not at high frequency)

Motivations for Leisure Time

- Fun, pursuing interests, relaxing

How They Hear About Community Events

- Instagram, word-of-mouth

Barriers to Cultural Participation

- Cost, time, hours of operation

Cultural Activities Most Likely to Visit/Participate in

- Live music, movies, zoos/aquariums, art museums, botanical gardens/arboretums
- Most likely to be engaged with “maker” and craft activities

Expectations of Cultural Organizations

- A sense of welcome and belonging
- Inclusive

PARENTS AND GUARDIANS OF MINOR CHILDREN



“As a mom, these spaces matter to my family. Music classes, festivals, libraries, performances and community events give my daughter chances to explore creativity and see herself as something bigger. Without them, our lives would feel smaller.”

Cultural Engagement Patterns

- Most avid cultural participants, across the cultural sector
- But participation decreases as children get older

Motivations for Leisure Time

- Family time, pursuing interests, child enjoyment/enrichment

How They Hear About Community Events

- Facebook, Instagram, word-of-mouth

Barriers to Cultural Participation

- Cost, time, perceptions of family-friendliness

Cultural Activities Most Likely to Visit/Participate in

- Live music, zoos/aquariums, movies, festivals, theater

Expectations of Cultural Organizations

- A sense of welcome and belonging
- Educational for children

ADULTS 40 – 59 WITH NO MINOR CHILDREN



“ Art and Culture are important, and without them, life would be boring, dull, and we'd have less connection and understanding. I think it would make King County less accepting and sad. Even if I can't attend as many events as I'd like, it is nice to know they are there and others are able to attend. ”

Cultural Engagement Patterns

- Least likely to participate in cultural activities

Motivations for Leisure Time

- Fun, pursuing interests, respite/relaxation

How They Hear About Community Events

- Facebook, word-of-mouth

Barriers to Cultural Participation

- Cost, crowds

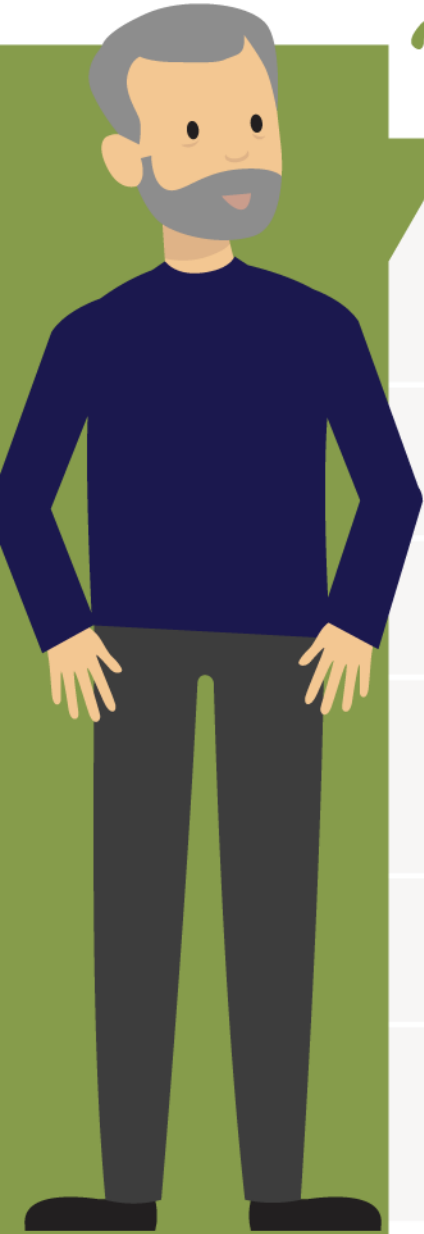
Cultural Activities Most Likely to Visit/Participate in

- Live music, movies, zoos/aquariums, art museums, festivals

Expectations of Cultural Organizations

- A sense of welcome and belonging
- Promotes respite/relaxing

ADULTS 60 OR OLDER WITH NO MINOR CHILDREN



“ I love that there are so many cultural activities and events in King County. It's part of what makes this area so great. ”

Cultural Engagement Patterns

- Cultural extremes:
 - Overall, less likely to participate in cultural activities
 - But those that engage are high frequency

Motivations for Leisure Time

- Pursuing interests, fun, respite/relaxation ... supporting cognitive health a bonus

How They Hear About Community Events

- Word-of-mouth, email

Barriers to Cultural Participation

- Cost, crowds
- Disinterest

Cultural Activities Most Likely to Visit/Participate in

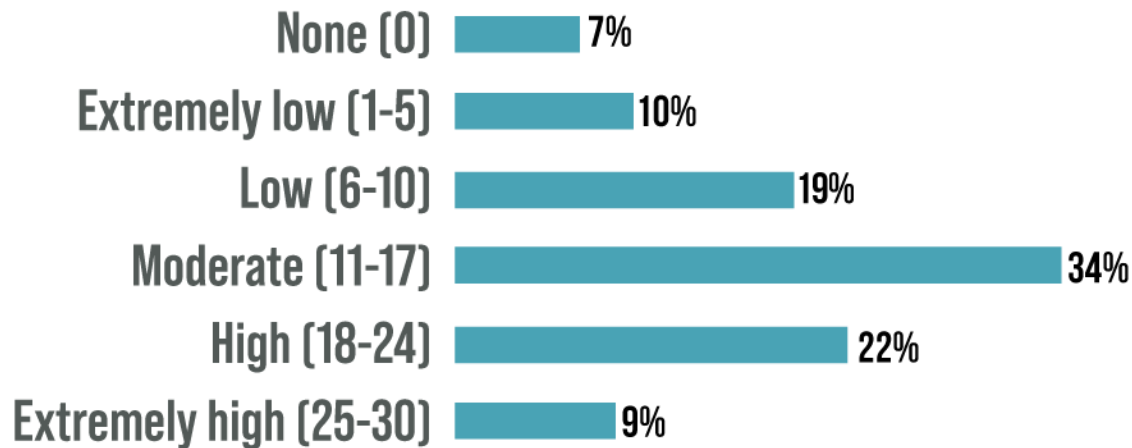
- Movies, live music, art museums, theater, botanical gardens/arboretums

Expectations of Cultural Organizations

- A sense of welcome and belonging
- Larger minority segment with “traditional” values

CULTURAL PARTICIPATION RATES

PARTICIPATION RATE PERCENT OF KING COUNTY RESIDENTS



Just under 10% of King County residents have extremely high participation rates, and just over 30% fall in the high/extremely high categories.

The largest segment, those with moderate participation rates, comprise about a third of King County residents.

About a third of King County residents have lower-than-average rates of cultural participation.

A note about non-participants:

INDIVIDUALS WHO DON'T PARTICIPATE IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES SHARE A FEW TRAITS:

- Demographically, they are more likely to be over the age of 50 and less likely to have a college degree; they also have lower incomes on average
- They are the least likely to participate in any leisure time activities we tracked and the most crowd-adverse, indicating a lower level of interest in activities outside the home overall

PARTICIPATION PATTERNS: KING COUNTY VS. U.S.

Because this survey was developed specifically for King County, no direct comparisons to U.S. samples are available.

Overall, however, the findings align with or exceed those reported in other national studies:

**“79% of Americans visited, attended, or watched an arts or culture event in person in the past year”
– Americans Speak Out About the Arts (2023)**

Note: this study used a slightly narrower definition of arts participation than the King County study

The Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling, only examines museum-going behaviors, reporting estimates of:

**Frequent
museum-goers –
LESS THAN 10%**

**Casual visitors –
ABOUT 20%**

**Sporadic
visitors –
ABOUT 50%**

**Non-visitors –
ABOUT 20%**

LOWER THAN AVERAGE CULTURAL PARTICIPANTS

Percent of King
County Residents: **36%**

Participation Score: **0 to 10**
[out of 30]



Leisure Time Patterns

- Least engaged in general leisure activities
- Priorities for leisure time: fun, relaxing, time with family/friends

How They Hear About Community Events

- Word-of mouth, Facebook
- But not as tuned in as other segments

Barriers to Cultural Participation

- Cost
- Crowds (most likely to cite this barrier)
- Interest (lower levels generally)

Cultural Activities Most Likely to Visit/Participate in

- Concerts, zoos and aquaria, cultural festivals

Expectations of Cultural Organizations

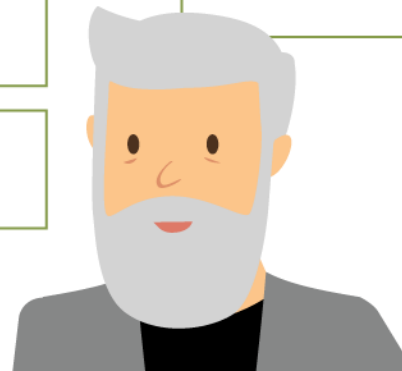
- A sense of welcome and belonging
- Educating children and young people
- A small, but significant, percentage of them hold anti-inclusive values

Demographic Characteristics

- More likely to be 50 or older
- Lower levels of educational attainment and income
- Less engaged politically
- No significant differences by accessibility needs, race or ethnicity

Summary Statement

They are glad cultural activities are in their community for others ... and they will also try them out from time to time if they are close by, inexpensive, and convenient.



HIGHER THAN AVERAGE CULTURAL PARTICIPANTS

Percent of King
County Residents: **30%**

Participation Score: **18 to 30**
(out of 30)



Leisure Time Patterns

- Most engaged in general leisure activities
- Priorities for leisure time: fun, relaxing, time with family/friends
- But the majority also prioritize learning and curiosity *as well*

How They Hear About Community Events

- Word-of-mouth, Facebook, email, and Instagram
- Much more tuned in

Barriers to Cultural Participation

- Time
- Distance

Cultural Activities Most Likely to Visit/Participate in

- Everything! They are participating at relatively high frequency across all activities.

Expectations of Cultural Organizations

- A sense of welcome and belonging
- Promotes engagement in community life
- Provides educational opportunities
- Highest rate of inclusive values

Demographic Characteristics

- More likely to be parents or guardians of minor children
- More likely to have a college degree, generally higher incomes
- No significant differences by accessibility needs, race or ethnicity



Summary Statement

Omnivorous! They have much broader and frequent engagement with culture. 99% believe cultural organizations positively impact communities.

CULTURE IS MAINSTREAM IN KING COUNTY



Celebrate the impact!
Culture matters to King County residents, and they understand its value to communities and to individuals.



Build on the shared value of culture. It is a major strength.



King County is a community of cultural participants.

A COMMUNITY WITHOUT CULTURE IS NOT WORTH LIVING IN

And without culture, the appeal of a place disappears.



"I wouldn't want to live here without our institutions. A community has no culture without a space to share and create. Museums, theaters, art, science, libraries – these are humanity's oldest institutions because they are reflections of what it is to be human in community. I moved here for culture 14 years ago. If the culture left, so would I."

"Living in a major city/county with no cultural organizations would defeat the purpose of living in a city. A city (or county, or country if we are being frank) is pointless when it gives up its community and cultural celebrations."



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