

Examining the Evaluation of Montgomery County's Arts and Entertainment Districts

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About the Fellow

William Brooks is an MPA candidate at the University of Georgia, looking to pursue a career in arts and cultural policy. At UGA, he focuses on local government, with experiences as a graduate research assistant on education finance policy, President of the UGA student chapter of the International City/County Management Association, and as a Popular Annual Financial Report Fellow.



William's focal point for his career has always been the arts. Prior to attending the University of Georgia, he attended California State University, Northridge where he received his bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance, studying opera. After graduating, he worked in nonprofit arts organizations, focusing on marketing and communication. In addition, he consulted for the Los Angeles Department of Arts and Culture on their Youth Advisory Council, writing arts education policy.

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Executive Summary

Introduced in Montgomery County in 2001, the Arts and Entertainment (A&E) Districts were a unique policy tool to revitalize communities and build unique artistic identities. However, after 20 years, the districts' impact, effectiveness, and oversight has been left unexamined. This research uses the Silver Spring A&E District as a case study to examine the impact and administration of the districts over the last 20 years by reviewing their evaluation methods.

Originally, the research was designed to examine the impact of the A&E Districts in Montgomery County. However, it was soon apparent that little information was known or collected on the tax incentives in the districts. The information that was collected showed low usage of the incentives. This uncovered the fact that no formal evaluation mechanisms exist, other than an outside economic impact analysis, despite the districts' 20-year history in the state.

As a result, the research focused on the existing evaluation of the A&E Districts. Montgomery County has provided at least \$2.4 million¹ in operating support to the districts over the course of their existence and does not know the districts' impact on the County.

Without a thorough evaluation of the program, Montgomery County cannot properly invest money into the arts, fix programs, or design better arts and cultural policy. Ultimately, the A&E Districts should be beneficial for both the arts sector and economic development. However, with the state of evaluations, neither can be shown to benefit from the current program.

¹ This number does not include the County expenditures to Bethesda Urban Partnership, which manages the Bethesda A&E District.

Key Findings for A&E District Evaluation

Finding #1-Lack of Clear Responsibility for Evaluating the Programs. No entity assumes responsibility for formal evaluation of the A&E Districts.

Finding #2-Lack of Full Time Staff Requirements. Requirements for A&E District designation do not require full-time staff devoted to the district, leading some districts to be designated and operate while chronically understaffed.

Finding #3-Mismatch on Goals. The goals of the State policy focus on economic revitalization and development while current actions focus on collaboration, branding, and promotion.

Finding #4-No Tie Proven Between A&E District and Economic Impact. While the State does provide an economic analysis of the districts, it fails to connect indicators of arts and culture with economic growth.

Finding #5-Decentralized/Lack of Data Collection. Key tax incentive information is difficult to find, divided between County Finance Department and State Comptroller's office, and not shared with the districts, County, or State.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Request the Maryland State Arts Council to Develop Metrics for Evaluation

Recommendation #2- Designate the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County as the Administrators of the A&E Districts

Recommendation #3- Task the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County with Designing an Evaluation Method

Recommendation #4-Improve Data Collection

Methodology

To determine the evaluation methods, the Maryland State Arts Council primary goals of the Arts and Entertainment Districts were divided into eight unique program goals for assessment. To assess these goals, the research used primary sources from Maryland State Comptroller’s Office, Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC), the Silver Spring Regional Service Center, and the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District to determine what metrics are being collected and being evaluated.

Interviews were held to determine whether the organizations responsible for managing, designating, or overseeing the districts were conducting any other evaluations. The key organizations interviewed involved with A&E districts were: Silver Spring A&E District director Elizabeth Gallauresi; Deputy Director of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County Joseph Frandoni; Silver Spring Regional Service Director Jacob Newman; and MSAC Executive Director Steven Skerritt-Davis. A site visit was also conducted for the case study on the Silver Spring A&E District.

The limitations of the research include the inability to interview any artists or organizations for their feedback on the district; unavailability of tax incentive data and; focusing only on Silver Spring. In addition, the FY 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports were not available from the Maryland State Arts Council. Future research should incorporate more specific analysis into the Bethesda and Wheaton A&E Districts.

Relevance of Research

Arts and culture are an essential part of building stable, health, and thriving communities. This research examines a key policy for building an arts and cultural landscape in Montgomery County and in Maryland. Creating a more equitable environment for arts and culture is also part of the Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan:

“Placemaking and public art are essential in building great and inclusive communities. However, while the county makes significant investments in arts and culture, these investments are not always equitably distributed” (Montgomery Planning).

In keeping with the County's goals, it is imperative that efforts to build arts and culture into the fabric of the community must achieve impact and distribute benefits equitably to the diverse communities in Montgomery County. In addition, tax funded programs require evaluation to be accountable for public resources.

The arts and culture workers and organizations are rebuilding after a difficult period during the pandemic. Artists and arts organizations sustained huge losses. In June 2020, 62% of artists became fully unemployed and the average financial loss per artist/creative worker was \$21,000 (Chen 2020). In addition, the financial losses to U.S. nonprofit arts and cultural organizations were an estimated \$5.9 billion in June 2020 (Chen 2020). Following COVID-19, the County Council has an incredible opportunity to support artists and the arts in the County.

However, before Montgomery County is able to improve arts and culture, the County must understand and evaluate the current programs. The A&E Districts are a unique policy with possibilities to better the lives of artists and revitalize communities. Through careful assessment, the County can make an informed decision to either continue support, recommend improvements, or develop new policies that better help artists and organizations.

Overview of Arts & Entertainment Districts

Introduction

Started in 2001, Maryland was one of the first states to design a state-wide arts and cultural district designation program (Eger 2014). The A&E Districts were designed to spur economic development and boost tourism in Maryland municipalities through cultivation of the arts. The goals of the A&E districts' furthers the State's goal of reinvesting in existing communities and creating places that help people, businesses, the economy, and the environment thrive, coinciding with the [Reinvest Maryland strategy](#) through the Maryland State Department of Planning (Arts and Entertainment Districts).

The A&E Districts utilizes **three core economic incentives** to accomplish its goals. Through designation by the Maryland State Arts Council, A&E Districts leverage tax incentives for individuals and organizations.

Table 1: Core Tax Incentives Available to All A&E Districts

Incentive	Description	Responsible Entity
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." The amount and duration of the tax credit, as well as the application process, is determined by the local government.	Local Government is responsible for the amount, duration, and application process.
Artist Income Tax Subtraction Modification	A "qualified residing artist" who lives in Maryland and sells "artistic work" in any of the 25 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.)	Maryland State Comptroller's Office
Admissions and Amusement Tax Exemptions	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.	Local Government

[Arts & Entertainment Districts / MSAC](#)

Today, the Maryland State Arts Council has designated 29 Districts in 18 Counties. The Maryland State Arts Council cites significant fiscal and economic impact for the districts. In FY 2020, the A&E Districts Survey Analysis reported a total economic footprint of:



- Approximately 1,454 jobs, comprised of 978 jobs supported by attendee spending and 477 supported by net business growth
- Over \$148.6 million in state GDP, with \$84.2 million from attendee spending and \$64.4 million supported by net business growth
- \$46.9 million in employee compensation, comprised of \$28.2 million from attendee spending and \$18.7 million from net business growth.

Despite Economic “Success Story”, The Tax Incentives Are Not Highly Used

- 67% of A&E Districts in the State do not have any businesses claiming the Admissions and Amusement Tax Exemption in FY20
- Only one business in all the A&E Districts used the property tax exemption in FY20²
- In FY20, only 2.62% of estimated artists in the A&E Districts used the Artist Income Deduction (Appendix 1)

Tax Incentive Usage in Montgomery County

Property Tax Credit

The property tax credit aims to encourage organizations to revitalize buildings by giving a 10-year tax credit based on the difference between the pre- and post-renovation assessments of the property. Over the 20 years of the A&E Districts in Montgomery County, only 9 total business have used the tax credit with a total value of \$72,194.

² This is a discrepancy against the Montgomery County Finance Department, which states that two businesses in the Bethesda A&E District used the tax exemption. The MSAC Annual Report Survey states that only one business in the Silver Spring-Takoma Park District used the exemption

Figure 1: Property Tax Credits for Montgomery County A&E Districts Over Time (\$)



Data from Montgomery County Finance Department

No business owners in Wheaton have used the property tax credit. The last time a business in the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District used the tax credit was 2015. Currently, Bethesda is the only A&E District in Montgomery County with businesses using the property tax credit (Appendix 2).

Income Tax Deduction

In FY 2021, only 12 artists in Montgomery County used the Artist Income Tax Modification Deduction for a total tax deduction of \$266,940.00 (Appendix 3). The data did not provide individual deduction details, obscuring the range of individual tax deductions. In addition, the data is only provided at the County level, preventing a full analysis between the three Montgomery County A&E Districts.

With an estimated 1,240 artists in the Montgomery County A&E Districts, only 12 individuals used the deduction, roughly 1% of the eligible artists in the districts.

The Amusement and Admissions Tax Exemption

In FY20, two organizations in Bethesda, two in Silver Spring, and one in Wheaton used the Admissions and Amusement tax though the exact amount is unknown because of setup the tax exemption structure. Overall, most A&E Districts in the state do not have any businesses using the Admissions and Amusement tax exemption (Appendix 4).

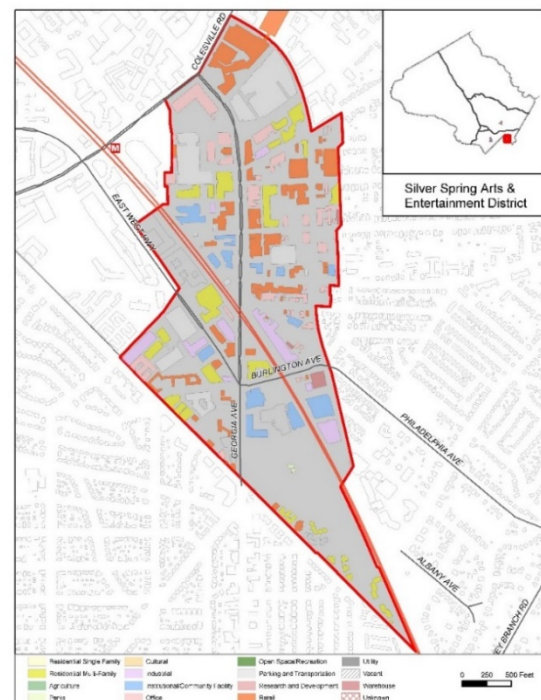
Overview of the A&E Districts in Montgomery County

Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District

Silver Spring was designated as a district on December 31, 2002 and was one of the first four A&E districts in the State. The district is managed by the Silver Spring Urban District, which is within the Silver Spring Regional Services Center. There is a total of 126 arts enterprises³ (Appendix 5). Some of the key organizations include the Fillmore Silver Spring and AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center (FY20 Maryland Arts and Entertainment District Survey Analysis). Approximately, 64% of the district is BIPOC (Appendix 6).

Table 2: Silver Spring District Overview⁴

Category	Silver Spring (2020)
Total Population	7,939
High school graduate or higher	93.86%
Bachelor's degree or higher	75.09%
Median household income (dollars)	\$83,066.92 ⁵
Median housing costs (dollars) ⁶	\$1,764.24
Owner occupied housing units	12.67%
Renter occupied housing units	87.33%



Map from Montgomery Planning

³ Number of galleries, venues, museums, arts organizations, public art, and other. However, prior to 2017, the MSAC did not include public art in the definition of Arts Enterprise

⁴ All demographic, housing, and income data are estimated from the census tract information. Because the A&E Districts do not line up perfectly with the census tracts, all numbers are estimates.

⁵ Median income of each census tract of the district weighted by population size. Same as Bethesda and Wheaton

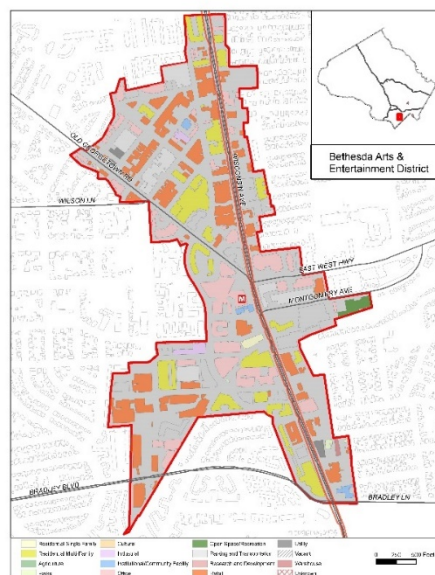
⁶ Median housing costs for each census tract of the district weighted by population size. Same as Bethesda and Wheaton

Bethesda A&E District

Bethesda was designated as a district in 2002. The district is managed by the Bethesda Urban Partnership, a nonprofit organization. There are 30 creative enterprises in the district (FY20 Maryland Arts and Entertainment District Survey Analysis).

Table 3: Bethesda District Overview

Category	Bethesda (2020)
Total Population	11,977
Estimated Artists	1,000
High school graduate or higher	97.58%
Bachelor's degree or higher	85.01%
Median household income (dollars)	\$104,339.71
Median housing costs (dollars)	\$2,055.21
Owner occupied housing units	21.72%
Renter occupied housing units	78.28%



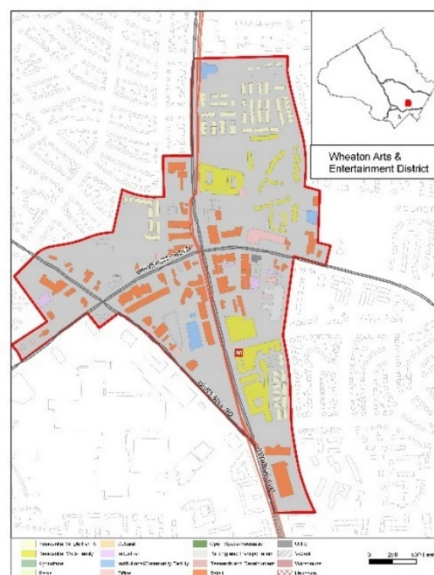
Map from Montgomery Planning

Wheaton A&E District

The Wheaton A&E District was designated in 2005. It is managed by the Wheaton Urban District, which is within the Mid-County Regional Services Center. There are 51 arts enterprises (FY2020 Maryland Arts and Entertainment District Survey Analysis).

Table 4: Wheaton District Overview

Category	Wheaton (2020)
Total Population	10,347
Estimated Artists	90
High school graduate or higher	93.40%
Bachelor's degree or higher	56.69%
Median household income (dollars)	\$81,651.49
Median housing costs (dollars)	\$1,718.80
Owner occupied housing units	37.48%
Renter occupied housing units	62.52%



Map from Montgomery Planning

Silver Spring A&E District Case Study

To gain a better understanding of the evaluation methods used for the A&E Districts, the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District was used as a case study. The case study examined four key elements: County funding, changes in the population and income, growth of the arts and culture landscape, and other revitalization or economic initiatives in the district.

1. County Funding for the Silver Spring A&E District

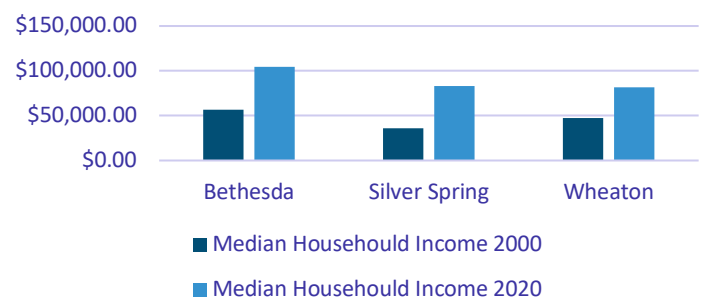
The Annual Reports from the MSAC state that the County Council has given the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District over **\$1.2 million** in operating funds to the district between 2012-2020⁷. However, it is possible that more resources were allocated to the district during this period because of the following reasons:

- No line-item expenditures for the A&E District under the Silver Spring Urban District funding. The closest funding approximation is the Promotions and A&E District budget which was \$454,800 in 2021 (Silver Spring Urban District Marketing and Promotions Budget). The information does not indicate which area the funding was used for.
- There is staff overlap between the Silver Spring Urban District and the A&E District. While there are staff in the Silver Spring Regional Service Center that help with promotions and marketing, the SSRSC only employs the director of the A&E District on a part-time contract (Interview with Jacob Newman).

2. Changes in Population and Income

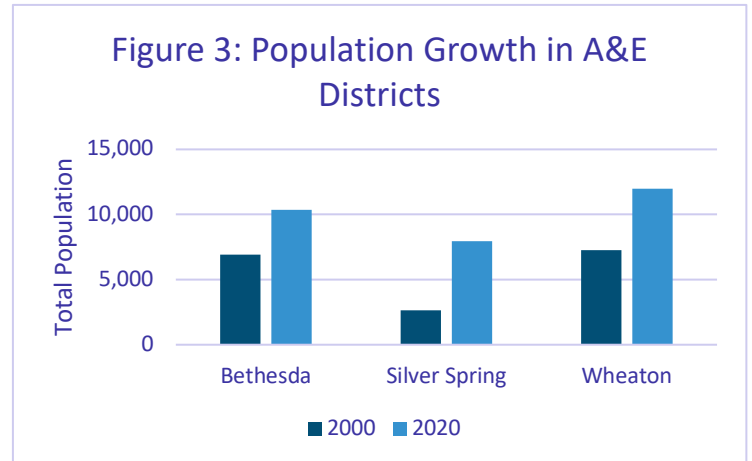
Median incomes have increased. In 2000, the median income in the Silver Spring A&E District was the lowest of the three Montgomery County A&E Districts. In 2020, the median income of the Silver Spring A&E District was higher than Wheaton (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Median Household Income in the Montgomery County A&E Districts



⁷ However, this does not include years 2014 and 2016. Survey analyses were not available through the MPIA request

Along with the other A&E Districts in Montgomery County, the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District has experienced rapid population growth--population has tripled in the district since the district's beginning (Figure 3).



3. Growth of the Arts and Culture Landscape in Silver Spring

- +** Contains the most public art out of all the Maryland A&E districts
- +** Strong attendance for arts enterprises in the district. Attendance measured at 429,750 in 2012. Attendance swelled to 1,479,750 in 2019⁸. In 2001, the Silver Spring district only had two events, Montgomery County Thanksgiving Parade and Silver Spring Swings. The Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District has built its presence in the area through consistent grassroots marketing.
- The number of galleries, venues, museums, arts organizations, and public art only increased by 1.6% from 2012 to 2020
- Since 2012, the district has not increased the amount of affordable housing in the district, with 4 affordable housing complexes with 232 units (2020 A&E District Survey). One is devoted to visual arts.
- No data on the number of artists since 2000. In addition, while Silver Spring does keep track of some artists, there is not a formal registry and way to track how many artists work or reside in the district.

⁸ For FY 2020, Silver Spring did not list any arts enterprise attendance data

4. Other Revitalization and Economic Efforts in the District

During the 1980s and 1990s, the area experienced the loss of retailers and other businesses, a high office vacancy rate, and elevated crime (Department of Legislative Services 2014). In addition, the event areas lacked maintenance and aesthetic beauty: “The summer concerts in 2001 were held in a neglected park, surrounded by open lots, which sometimes would have drug paraphernalia littering the field” (2011 Silver Spring A&E District Redesignation Application).

During the late 1990’s, Silver Spring underwent a comprehensive effort by Montgomery County to revitalize the downtown area. An Enterprise Zone⁹ was established in 1997. Additional efforts included 1) the creation of several redevelopment committees and boards; 2) the purchase and restoration of the Silver Theatre; 3) successful attraction of the Discovery Communications headquarters and; 4) a concerted effort to develop

Investment into Silver Spring Revitalization Efforts in the 1990s

- \$450 million in Public Investment
- \$2 billion in Private Investment¹

a “town center” (Department of Legislative Services 2014). While these efforts were significant, analyses by the Montgomery County Planning department showed that no singular approach was the reason for success, rather it was the coordinated efforts together with transportation access and strong demand for housing in the Washington DC area (Department of Legislative Services 2014). Today, the storefront and commercial occupancy rate is 93% in the A&E District (Silver Spring A&E District Annual Report 2020).

The district also benefited from redrawn boundaries. The district redrew the boundaries to include more existing arts organizations and to mirror the boundaries of the Central Business District (CBD), a geographic boundary of Silver Spring’s core downtown area used for planning and economic development purposes (Montgomery Planning 2022). Businesses within its boundaries are taxed and the Silver Spring A&E

⁹ An Enterprise Zone provides real property and state income tax credits for businesses located in a Maryland enterprise zone in return for job creation and investments

District benefits from the funded Clean and Safe Team that monitors the CBD/A&E District. This team assists with beautification maintenance and pedestrian safety within the CBD/Silver Spring A&E District (2011 Silver Spring A&E District Redesignation Application).

Summary of the Case Study

The case study of the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District presents significant challenges in evaluating the district.

- The managing organization for the district does not know how much or where funding is being spent for the district. This prevents a cost-benefit analysis of the district.
- The growth (or lack thereof) of the arts and culture landscape is juxtaposed with the overwhelming economic success the MSAC states of the districts. A successful arts and cultural policy will show growth of arts and culture resulting in economic impact. The case study of the Silver Spring A&E District shows the problem with looking at the topline economic figures first without examining the growth of arts and culture.
- The nearly \$2.5 billion spent on revitalization efforts in the 1990s make it difficult to parse out the exact effects of the A&E District.
- While population and incomes have grown in the district, there is no data specifically for artists. To understand if and how artists benefit from the existence of the A&E Districts, data on artist income and population is necessary.

Evaluation Methods for the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District

The beginning stages of the research were focused on evaluating the impact of the A&E Districts. However, when investigating the districts, evidence indicated that the State, County, and Districts did not formally evaluate the districts' impact. While there are concrete reporting requirements, most of the information from the Annual Reports were not used for evaluation. Further conversations with representatives from the State, County, and districts all confirmed the lack of systematic evaluation of the districts. Instead of judging the success or failure of the districts, this research examines 1) how the districts are evaluated; 2) what data is collected and; 3) the oversight systems in place.

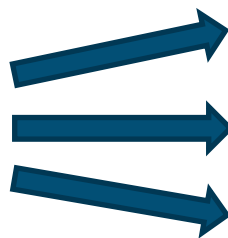
Evaluation at the State Level: Minimal

All A&E Districts are required to submit a required annual report to the Maryland State Arts Council. The MSAC coalesces the information from the reports into a survey of the districts.

Steps to Determining Evaluation at the State Level

1. Divided MSAC A&E District Program Goals into distinct areas

"The goal of the A&E Districts program is to develop, promote, and support diverse artistic and cultural centers in communities across Maryland that preserve a sense of place, provide unique local experiences, attract tourism, and spur economic revitalization and neighborhood pride."



Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers

Support diverse artistic and cultural centers

Promote diverse artistic and cultural centers

Preserving a Sense of Place

Attract Tourism

Provide Unique Local Experiences

Spur Economic Revitalization

Spur Neighborhood Pride

2. Identified Individual Reporting Elements in the Annual Reports

The Annual Report requires each A&E district to submit **41 separate elements** to the MSAC with the program goals separated out into distinct categories (Appendix 7). This research assigns the collection of elements into the distinct categories.

3. Categorized Reporting Elements According to District Program Goals

While many of the elements could be attributed to multiple categories, elements were assigned to the most relevant program goal. While 7 out of 8 program goal elements are supported by reporting elements, 83% of the reporting elements supported only three program goals (Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers; Support diverse artistic and cultural centers; Spur economic revitalization). Four program goal elements had only one relevant reporting element. Spurring Neighborhood Pride is not supported by any reporting requirement.

4. Determine Whether Evaluation Methods Address Program Goals

Table 5: Program Goals and Corresponding Evaluation Method

GOALS FROM MISSION STATEMENT	EVALUATION METHOD
DEVELOP DIVERSE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL CENTERS	No formal evaluation method in place
SUPPORT DIVERSE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL CENTERS	No formal evaluation method in place
PROMOTE DIVERSE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL CENTERS	No formal evaluation method in place
PRESERVING A SENSE OF PLACE	No formal evaluation method in place
PROVIDE UNIQUE LOCAL EXPERIENCES	No formal evaluation method in place
ATTRACT TOURISM	No formal evaluation method in place
SPUR ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION	Fiscal and Economic Impact Survey Completed by Towson University.

Only economic impact aspects are examined, leaving all other aspects of the program goals unexamined. Only “Spur Economic Revitalization” was being evaluated in some way. The MSAC only publishes a fiscal and economic impact analysis by Regional Economic Studies Institute at Towson University for [Economic Analysis](#).

The Program Director confirmed that this is the only formal evaluation method (David Mitchell, Arts and Entertainment Program Director): “Traditionally, we do not use any additional methods.” While the reporting is extensive, the MSAC only evaluates the economic and fiscal impact of the districts.

In addition, only 9 out of 41 reporting elements are used for evaluation. While reporting elements are collected for most of the program goals, the information collected is not being used for evaluation. Towson University only uses the net openings of retailers, businesses, and restaurants, and event attendees to analyze the economic impact. **Most of the extensive reporting requirements are not used for any evaluation of the districts.**

The State Comptroller’s Office collects information on income tax and admission and amusement tax incentives but does not report them to MSAC or evaluate their effectiveness or utilization.

Evaluation at the County Level: *No formal evaluation process*

The Silver Spring Regional Center (SSRC) is the County level authority for the Silver Spring-Takoma Park A&E District. The A&E District sends the annual report to the Silver Spring Regional Center. After conversations with the SSRSC Director, they confirmed that they were unaware of an internal evaluation mechanism. In addition, Montgomery County Finance or the State Comptroller’s office do not provide any analysis of the economic incentives. The Montgomery County Executive or County Council have not provided any evaluation methods or guidelines to districts in the County.

Evaluation at the District Level: *No formal evaluation process*

At the district level, the A&E Districts submit their Annual Reports to the managing organizations. For the Silver Spring district, they submit the report to the Silver Spring Regional Services Center. However, not all district models are under the County. For example, the Bethesda A&E District is under the Bethesda Urban Partnership, a nonprofit organization. While the BUP collaborates on an oversight report by OLO

annually, the A&E District is not evaluated in this report. The individual district's report submits goals in the Annual Report, but the state does not require evaluative methods be a necessary part of the goal submissions.

In an interview with the Silver Spring A&E Director, she confirmed that no evaluation process is used at the district level. However, this is mostly because of staffing and capacity issues. Silver Spring A&E Director and A&E Consultant Elizabeth Gallauresi noted that during the 2008 recession, funding was cut from the Silver Spring Regional Service Center cutting staff from around 10 full-time staff to just the director. The staffing for the district has never really recovered. The A&E District Director cited the challenges in funding for full time staff for the district, complicating the issues of data collection and meaningful evaluations.

With the current evaluation process, the County cannot know whether A&E Districts help artists or economic development. While arts can be difficult to measure and quantify, providing objective analysis and evaluation of the districts' impact will allow the State and County to support artists and design more effective policies.

Key Findings for A&E District Evaluation

Finding #1- Lack of Clear Responsibility for Evaluating the Programs

In many of the conversations with office directors and program leaders, several noted that district evaluations were another entity's responsibility.

- The Maryland State Arts Council Director confirmed that the working relationship between the MSAC and the individual districts is “not evaluative.” This underscores the fact that there is a disconnect with the state and evaluation.

- The Silver Spring A&E Director asserted that evaluation was not the State's responsibility, but the County's responsibility.

However, the original legislation and regulations specify clear responsibility to “the Secretary of Commerce” who “shall administer the Arts and Entertainment Districts Program” (Md Code Ann., Department of Commerce §26-2 (2013)). With no other language in the statute or the regulations regarding evaluation, this prior language suggests the responsibility of evaluation with the Secretary of Commerce. In practice, administrative responsibility lies with the Maryland State Arts Council.

Finding #2-Lack of Full Time Staff Requirements

The variation in management structures create an uneven landscape to the A&E Districts. The regulations for the A&E Districts simply state that applications for designation must have a “plan covering the responsibility for management of the district” (Md Code Ann., Department of Commerce §26-5 (2013)). This is a new requirement. In fact, the first years of the program did not require a management plan. Now, the MSAC requires at least one staff member devoting 15 hours a week to the A&E district (Interview with MSAC Director).

However, the legislation does not state what kind of management plan districts should have. In practice, a nonprofit or government office typically serves as the managing organization due to the existing designation process of an A&E District. The lack of requirements allows some districts to operate without sufficient staffing.

Currently, there is only one staff member contracted to work for the Silver Spring A&E District. While there is crossover with the Silver Spring Urban District, the staffing level noted in the Silver Spring-Takoma management plan is insufficient for managing the A&E District.

Finding #3-Mismatch on Goals

The A&E District legislation focuses on economic development while program participants focus on other benefits. The State of Maryland sponsored the statewide A&E District program “for economic development purposes” (*Smart Growth: Arts and Entertainment Districts Application*). However, in conversations with the Silver Spring A&E District, Silver Spring Regional Service Center, and Maryland State Arts Council, staff confirm that the A&E District program main benefits come from the ability of the district to serve as an information resource to artists and organizations, coordinate interagency action, and advocate for the arts. Many stakeholders also noted the benefit of promoting, marketing, and branding of an arts district.

“[The A&E Districts] are about art and placemaking, but art and the culture is what the county is supposed to be using as a tool for marketing and tourism and economic development.”-Silver Spring A&E Director and A&E Consultant Elizabeth Gallauresi

Individuals from MSAC, AHCMC, and Department of Commerce noted the relative unimportance of the incentives to the mission of the districts. Instead, they noted the ability of the districts to advocate for the arts, create a sense of place, promote a geographic area, and market the districts’ unique artistic elements.

Other A&E Districts in Maryland have confirmed the benefits of marketing and branding. Director of Promotional Organization for Baltimore City stated this in a 2013 interview:

“It turns out that the tax designation wasn’t all that interesting to people. It might be to some, like the Charles [Movie] Theatre can take advantage of the amusement tax credit. But some of these other income tax and housing credits weren’t as valuable as getting the marketing value out of calling yourself an arts district. Which anybody could

anyway but still they would have the city and state approval on it” (Ashlin and Tsitsos 2016).

Finding #4- No Tie Proven Between A&E District and Economic Impact

While the arts are important economic drivers, there has been no evaluation of whether economic incentives produce results for the districts. The Silver Spring impacts could be a result of other economic development activities rather than the A&E district.

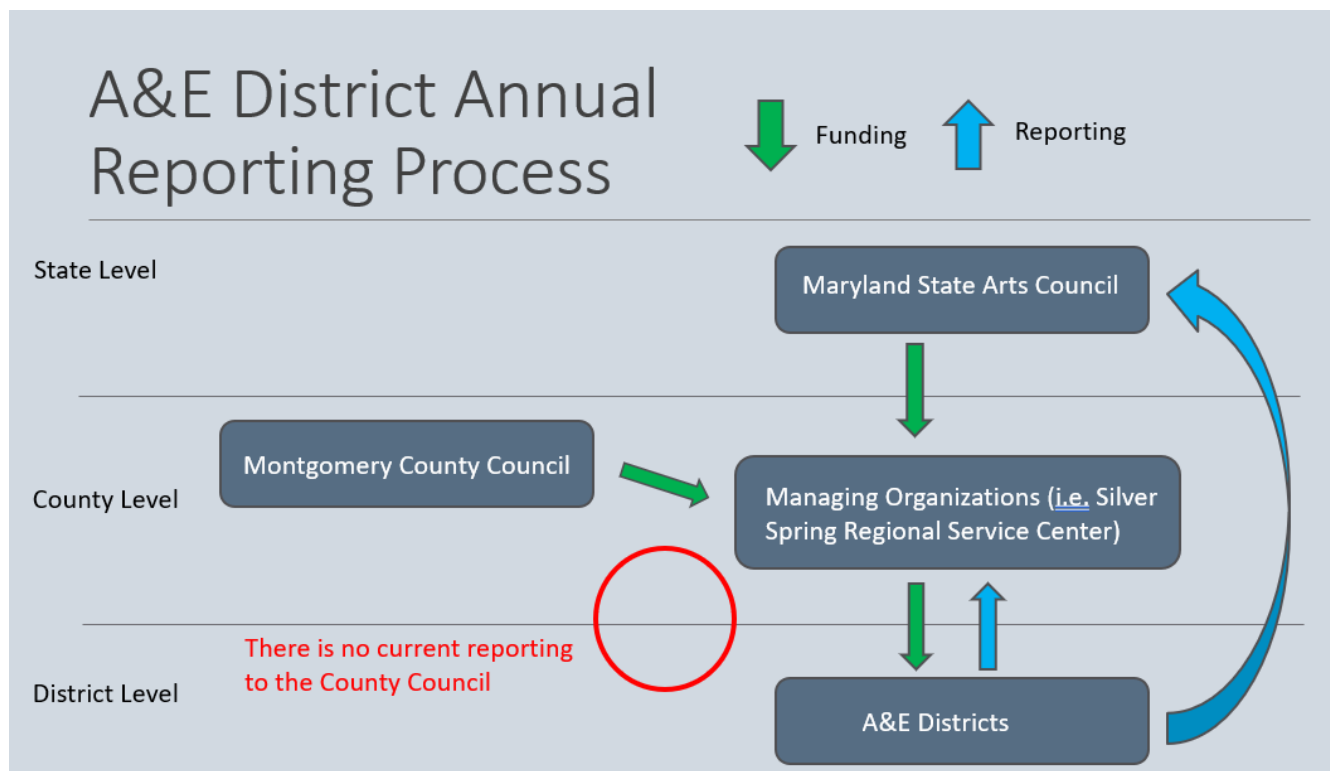
- The main aspect of the policy, the economic incentives, are not being highly utilized. The State has not evaluated whether there is a correlation between usage of the economic incentives and economic impact.
- The State does not examine whether tax incentives or presence of an A&E District are causing artists and arts organizations to relocate or start their work in an A&E district.
- The Maryland State Arts Council does not have year over year data showing the key indicators. There is no data showing the growth of artists or arts organizations over time. While some data can be requested, the MSAC does not keep any Annual Reports or Surveys past 2012, as they are not on their retention schedule.

Finding #5-Decentralized and Lack of Data Collection

At this time, there is no comprehensive A&E budgetary data for funding from Montgomery County due to overlapping budgets. While the property tax information is collected at the County level, the Income and Admissions and Amusement Tax information is collected through the Comptroller’s Office. This information is never shared with the MSAC.

The Annual Report process leaves the County Council out of the oversight process since individual districts submit their information through the annual report to the MSAC (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Annual Reporting Process for Districts



Because of this reporting structure, County government is not reviewing full impact and results of the work of the A&E districts. In addition, the required reporting elements do not include any information pertaining to **racial equity or social justice goals**. This prevents the County from realizing impacts on arts and culture, racial equity, and economic development. Information/data on districts is difficult to find.

Also, there is no publicly available data sets with the information. If this information were made available, researchers, arts organizations, and policy makers would have the ability to begin evaluating the effectiveness of the districts.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: In the 2023 Future Priorities Letter to the General Assembly, the County Council should request the MSAC to develop metrics for evaluation

The language of the A&E District legislation clearly states the Secretary of Commerce is responsible for administering the program. As the Maryland State Arts Council is the administrative agency in the Commerce Department, the County Council should request the State to provide a robust evaluation of the A&E Districts.

The evaluation methods should include the following:

- Measurable program goals. This also allows the County to include missing Racial Equity and Social Justice Goals.
- Funding levels and management guidelines necessary to run a successful A&E district.
- Fundamental metrics to measure successful achievement of program goals.
- Demographic information (District, artists, communities served, types of arts enterprises, etc.)
- Removal of any metric or information request that is not used for analysis. From the annual report surveys, only 9 out of 41 elements are used in evaluation. The Maryland State Arts Council must be mindful of the administrative burden of requesting such detailed reports, especially when the information is not used for any known purpose.

Recommendation #2-Designate the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County as the Administrators of the A&E Districts

Because of the Annual Reporting process in the legislation, the County has very little oversight over the districts. To remedy this, the County Council should designate the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHC MC) as the administrator of the A&E Districts in the County. This would fall within the regulations as a managing entity. Benefits of this designation includes:

- AHCMC is the main advocate and knowledge expert in arts and culture in Montgomery County. Placing them with oversight power would allow the AHCMC to utilize their knowledge and insight to create more effective A&E Districts for the County.
- The AHCMC is already advising the districts in an unofficial capacity (Interview with Deputy Director of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery Council). Artists and organizations seek them out when designation and redesignations are due. Making them the managing organization of the districts would change their informal status to a formal one.

In order to fulfill this recommendation, the County Council should accompany the designation with increased funding and staffing levels for the AHCMC. In addition, the County Council should schedule a yearly oversight meeting with the AHCMC.

Recommendation #3-Task the AHCMC with Designing an Evaluation Method

While the Maryland State Arts Council is central to evaluating the overall program, Montgomery County must be accountable for the arts and cultural policy in the County. To provide responsible management of the A&E Districts, the County Council should task the Arts and Humanities Council with evaluating the effectiveness of the districts and provide a recommendation on whether to change policies for current districts or to designate new districts, based on the effectiveness of the current districts.

Elements Necessary for Designing the Evaluation Method

1. Develop a framework for evaluation that separates the impact of tax incentives and the impact of the managing organization. Many arts districts can work effectively without the tax incentives (Stubbs 2014). A metric for effectiveness should be the utilization of the tax incentives.
2. Incorporation of all eight of the A&E district program goal areas.
3. Include Racial Equity and Social Justice as an element of evaluation in order to align with the County goals.

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4. Ensure appropriate funding and staffing level of a functioning A&E District.
 5. Identify arts and cultural centers to compare to Montgomery County's A&E districts.
 - a. Benchmark against other MD districts
 - b. Within the state without a formal district
 - c. Other arts and cultural districts without tax incentives
 6. Identify indicators based on the age of the district. While growth and revitalization may be adequate benchmarks when designating a new district in need of economic development, other indicators are needed to evaluate A&E Districts that are older.

When A&E Districts are successful in revitalization, property values and rents rise, often pushing out artists. The new evaluation method should examine whether artists are staying in the district long-term, the availability of housing for artists, and pathways to property ownership for artists. The Baltimore Station North A&E District has encountered this exact problem. They are economically successful but have also pushed artists out of the district.

The Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County can build off the work of other organizations. The University of Pennsylvania's research group [Social Impact of the Arts](#) measures the effects of arts and culture in urban areas. The National Endowment of the Arts has developed [placemaking indicators](#) to measure success of the [Our Town grants](#). These [areas](#) include:

- Attachment to community: Seven measures such as length of residence and election turnout.
- Quality of life: Six measures such as median commute time and violent crime rates.
- Arts and cultural activity: Five measures such as arts and cultural nonprofits per capita and the earnings from arts and entertainment.
- Economic conditions: Five measures such as income diversity and median household income.

ArtPlace America has developed a set of [Vibrancy Indicators](#):

- Employment rate
- Number of creative industry jobs: Information, media, arts and creative endeavors
- Walkability: Many destinations within walking distance
- Cell phone activity: High levels of activity on nights and weekends and in places people congregate away from home and outside of regular 9 to 5 business hours
- Number of mixed-use blocks
- Number of jobs in the community
- Population density
- Percentage of independent businesses: Locally owned, independent businesses (more is better)
- Number of indicator businesses: Businesses that represent destinations of choice for cultural, recreational, consumption or social activity
- Percentage of workers in creative occupations: Higher than average concentrations of residents who are employed in the arts, writing, performing and other similar occupations

Recommendation #4-Improve Data Collection

In order to evaluate the current districts, the data collection process must be organized and improved. The County must be able to collect data in order to understand the amount of County expenditures on the districts, usage of the tax incentives, and number of key indicators crucial to measuring the vitality of the arts.

The specific recommendations are as follows:

- Require any funding for A&E Districts to be clear line-item budget items to A&E Districts. This will allow the managing organizations and the County Council to evaluate the cost of districts.
- Instruct A&E Districts to keep public records of each year's Annual Reports.

-
- Request the Comptroller to deliver annual tax incentive information to the districts.
 - Develop a more concrete way to measure number of artists working and living in the district. Currently, the number of artists relies on estimates from the districts' managing organization. While some districts maintain an artist registry, it is not required for the A&E Districts. A combination of artist survey results, estimation based on amount/size of arts organizations, and adjustment for size based on population would provide a clearer estimate of artists.
 - Require all districts to develop and collect a more robust set of indicators developed by the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County.

Conclusion

The A&E Districts are essentially an unknown entity in terms of impact. No formal evaluation process at the State, County, or District level is in place to measure the success of these districts. The policy has roots in economic revitalization and rightly assumes the economic impact of the arts. However, no real effort has been made to evaluate the link between these specific arts and cultural policy and their intended economic impact.

While the evaluation is missing to objectively declare the policy a success, this policy has strong supporters. From the Silver Spring A&E Director to the Director of the Maryland State Arts Council, staff connected to the A&E districts anecdotally speak to the importance of creating a knowledge source for artists and organizations, promoting unique artistic areas, and the tourism boost from marketing an arts and cultural district. These feelings should not be disregarded but should be buttressed by objective data.

The County Council has an opportunity to reinvest in the arts. By creating oversight for the A&E districts, new evaluation methods, and better data collection processes, the County Council can assess the impact of the A&E Districts. With that assessment, the Council will be able to either sustain the districts, improve the policy, or pivot to another policy that would benefit artists and organizations better.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Number of Artists and Income Tax Deductions from 2017-2020

Year	Number of Artists (Estimate +Registry)	Number of Artists using the Income Tax Deduction	Amount of Tax Deduction	Average Benefit per Artist	Percentage of Estimated Artists Using the Tax Incentive
2017	4813	149	\$1,932,900.00	\$12,972.48	3.10%
2018	5280	145	\$2,443,606.00	\$16,852.46	2.75%
2019	5918	181	\$2,416,737.00	\$13,352.14	3.06%
2020	5339	140	\$2,300,422.00	\$16,431.59	2.62%

Source: Maryland State Comptroller's Office

Appendix 2: Number of Property Tax Credits for Montgomery County A&E Districts



Source: Montgomery County Finance

Appendix 3: Artist Income Tax Subtraction Modification for FY 2021

JURISDICTION_NAME	TTL_COUNT	TTL_SUBTRACTIONS_502SU_AMT
ALLEGANY COUNTY	2	36,546.00
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY	2	157,221.00
BALTIMORE COUNTY	7	174,549.00
BALTIMORE CITY	30	615,547.00
CALVERT COUNTY	1	28,000.00
CARROLL COUNTY	1	3,553.00
CECIL COUNTY	1	2,685.00
CHARLES COUNTY	1	21,292.00
DORCHESTER COUNTY	3	46,519.00
FREDERICK COUNTY	10	149,664.00
GARRETT COUNTY	1	59,447.00
HARFORD COUNTY	2	9,120.00
HOWARD COUNTY	3	6,982.00
KENT COUNTY	5	54,888.00
MONTGOMERY COUNTY	12	266,940.00
PRINCE GEORGES COUNTY	12	113,270.00
QUEEN ANNES COUNTY	1	1,720.00
WASHINGTON COUNTY	3	15,692.00
WICOMICO COUNTY	3	36,875.00
WORCESTER COUNTY	4	20,936.00
TOTAL	104	1,821,446.00

Source: Maryland State Comptroller's Office

Appendix 4: Businesses' Tax Incentive Utilization by District, FY 2020

Admissions and Amusement Tax Abatement			Property Tax Credit	
District	n	%	n	%
Annapolis	2	10.5%	0	0.0%
Bel Air	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Berlin	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Bethesda	2	10.5%	0	0.0%
Bromo	3	15.8%	0	0.0%
Cambridge	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Chestertown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Crisfield	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Cumberland	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Denton	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Easton	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Elkton	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Frederick	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Frostburg	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Gateway	3	15.8%	1	100.0%
Grantsville	1	5.3%	0	0.0%

Hagerstown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Havre de Grace	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Highlandtown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Leonardtown	2	10.5%	0	0.0%
Oakland	1	5.3%	0	0.0%
Pennsylvania Ave.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Salisbury	2	10.5%	0	0.0%
Silver Spring	2	10.5%	0	0.0%
Snow Hill	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Station North	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Stevensville	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Wheaton	1	5.3%	0	0.0%
Total	19	100.0%	1	100.0%

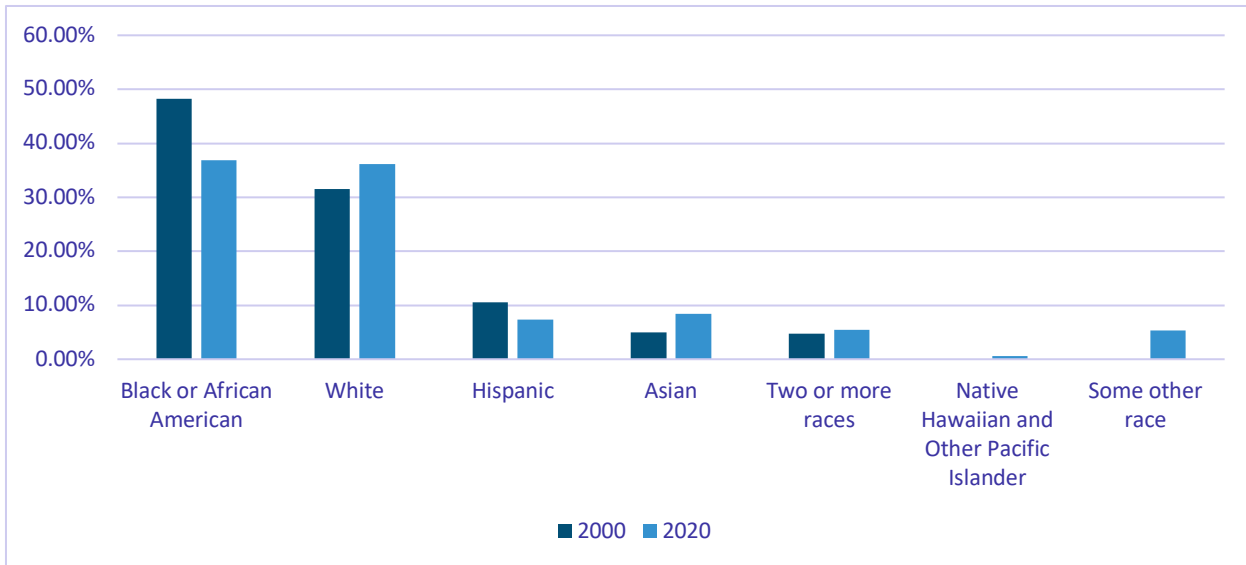
Sources: Maryland A&E Districts, MSAC, RESI

Appendix 5: Silver Spring A&E District Assets

Asset Category	Number
Public Art	81
Creative Enterprise	30
Restaurants with Live Entertainment	17
Arts Organization	15
Visual Artist, Studios and Art Galleries	11
Historic Sites	10
Entertainment	7
Arts Education	6
Venue	6
Theater	4
Books	2
Cinema	2
Museums	2
Traditional Arts	1

Source: Maryland State Arts Council

Appendix 6: Race of Householder in the Silver Spring-Takoma Park District



Source: Montgomery County Planning

Appendix 7: Reporting Elements in A&E District Annual Reports

Program Goals	Reporting Element
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	List of all capital projects initiated, in process, or completed within the district
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	List of all organizations that opened a physical office or space in the district during the reporting period
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	List of all organizations that closed a physical office or space in the district during the reporting period
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	List of all arts-related enterprises by type
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	Estimate the total number of artists working in the district
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	Does the district have an artist relocation program?
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	How many artists relocated to the district during the reporting period as a result of the program?
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	Other than the A&E tax incentives, list all additional incentives available in the district
Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	Narrative of Accomplishments-activities of significant arts organizations or arts-related businesses

Develop diverse artistic and cultural centers	Narrative of Accomplishments-new initiatives (e.g. strategic planning, marketing campaigns, funding secured, management changes, partnerships/collaborations, signage, etc.)
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	Narrative of Accomplishments-changes in district management and staffing
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	List of housing that is built for or marketed to artists, including affordable housing
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	Does the district maintain an artist registry?
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	What is the total number of registered artists working in the district
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	How many artists registered during the reporting period
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	Indicate any federal or national funding applications submitted and provide grant/award amounts received for district projects or operations during the reporting period
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	Indicate all Maryland State Arts Council applications submitted and provide grant amounts received for projects undertaken by the district during the reporting period.
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	Indicate any other state funding applied for or awarded for district projects or operations during the reporting period.
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	Indicate any local awards/grants applied for or awarded for district projects or operations during the reporting period.
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	If your district receives direct operating support, indicate who provides the operating support and how much was provided during the reporting period
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	If your district receives in-kind support, (e.g. office space, administrative support) indicate who provides the in-kind support, the type of support, and the estimated value.
Support diverse artistic and cultural centers	Let us know what type of technical assistance MSAC could provide beyond funding that would serve to strengthen your district and help you achieve the goals listed above.
Promote diverse artistic and cultural centers	List all communication tools
Preserving a Sense of Place	Narrative of Accomplishments-new public art projects within the district, new capital projects within the district

Provide Unique Local Experiences	Narrative of Accomplishments-significant events and festivals occurring within the district
Attract Tourism	No data collection from Annual Report
Spur Economic Revitalization	Narrative of Accomplishments-new or significant retailers, businesses, and restaurants within the district
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all retailers that opened in the district during the reporting period.
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all businesses (other than retailers and restaurants) that opened in the district during the reporting period
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all restaurants that opened in the district during the reporting period
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all retailers that closed in the district during the reporting period
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all businesses (other than retail or restaurants that closed during the reporting period
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all restaurants that closed in the district during the reporting period
Spur Economic Revitalization	Occupancy rate of real estate
Spur Economic Revitalization	How many businesses in the district take advantage of the Admission and Amusement Tax abatement?
Spur Economic Revitalization	How many property tax credits were applied for during the reporting period?
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all public events and attendance
Spur Economic Revitalization	List of all festivals and attendance
Spur Neighborhood Pride	No data collection from Annual Report

Source: Maryland State Arts Council