

2022

# Mid-County Regional Services Center Community Engagement Report



Gwendolyn Peyton

Montgomery County Council Summer Fellow

8/8/2022

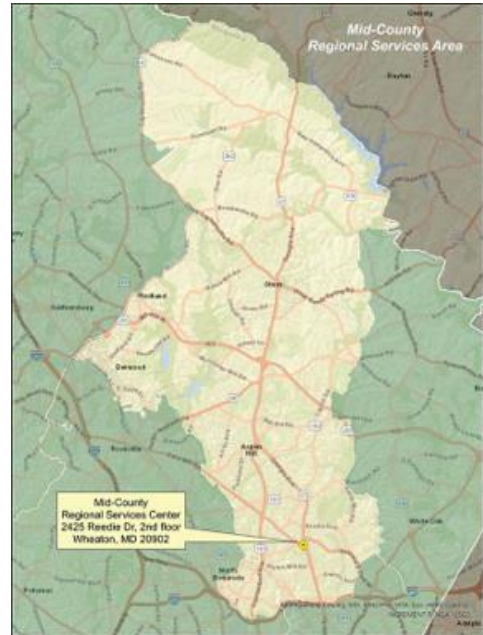
## Contents

<b>About Montgomery County and the Mid County Region</b> .....	2
Age in Mid County.....	2
Race and Ethnicity in Mid-County.....	3
Languages in Mid County.....	4
<b>Community Engagement Study</b> .....	6
Methodology.....	6
Limitations .....	6
Survey Results .....	7
Respondent Characteristics .....	7
Respondent Preferences.....	11
Discussion.....	13
Underrepresented Survey Groups .....	13
Preferred Means of Communication .....	14
In-Person, Mail or Door-to-Door Outreach.....	14
Recommendations .....	15
Identify Gaps in Existing Programming.....	15
Ongoing Evaluation of Engagement.....	15
Social Media Strategy.....	15
Offline Outreach .....	15
Communications and Outreach Personnel .....	16
Concluding Remarks.....	16



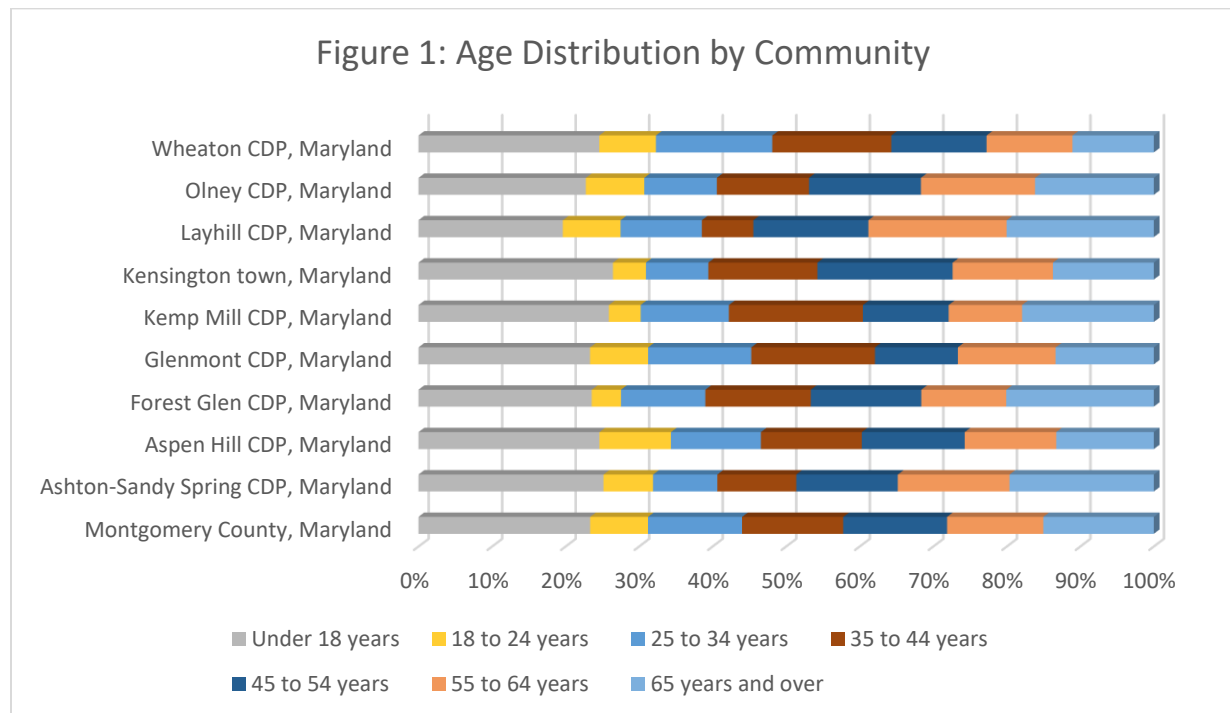
## About Montgomery County and the Mid County Region

Montgomery County is the most populous county in Maryland, situated to the North of Washington, D.C. and to the west of Prince George’s County. The Montgomery County government has 5 regional offices, located in Bethesda, Silver Spring, Up-County, East-County and Mid-County. The Mid-County Regional Services Center is located in Wheaton and serves the communities of Ashton, Aspen Hill, Brookeville, Capital View, Derwood, Forest Glen, Glenmont, Kemp Mill, Kensington, Layhill, Norbeck, Olney, Sandy Spring, Upper Rock Creek, and Wheaton.



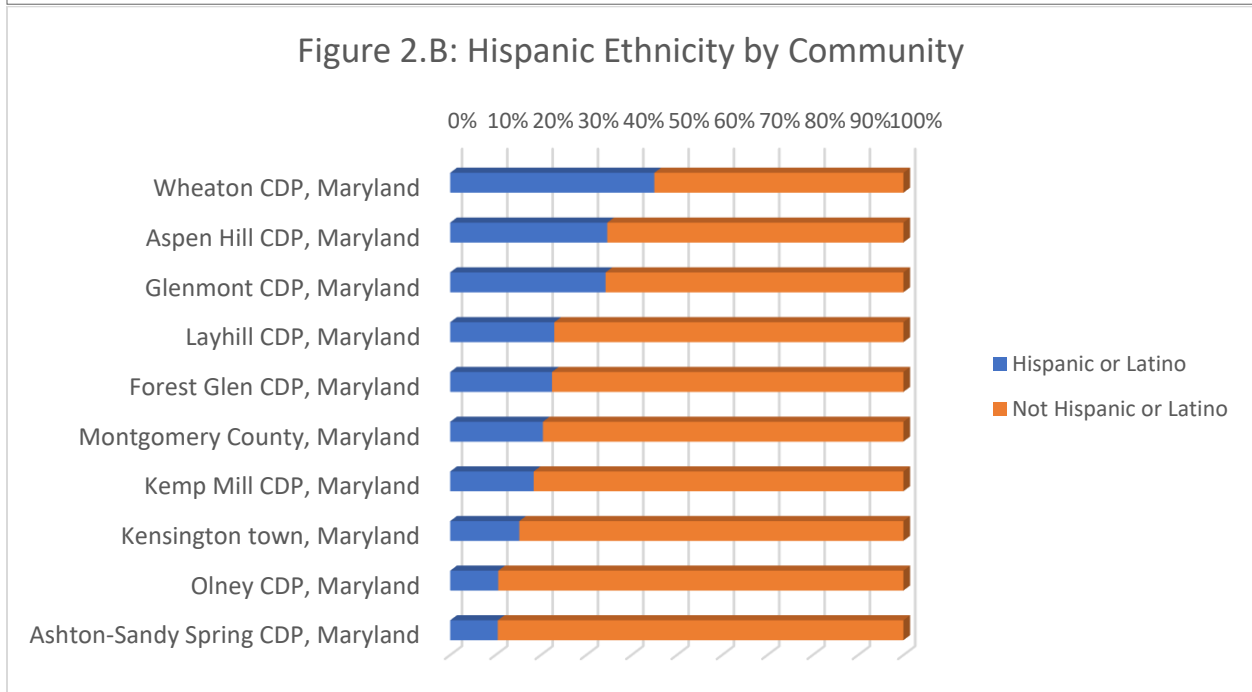
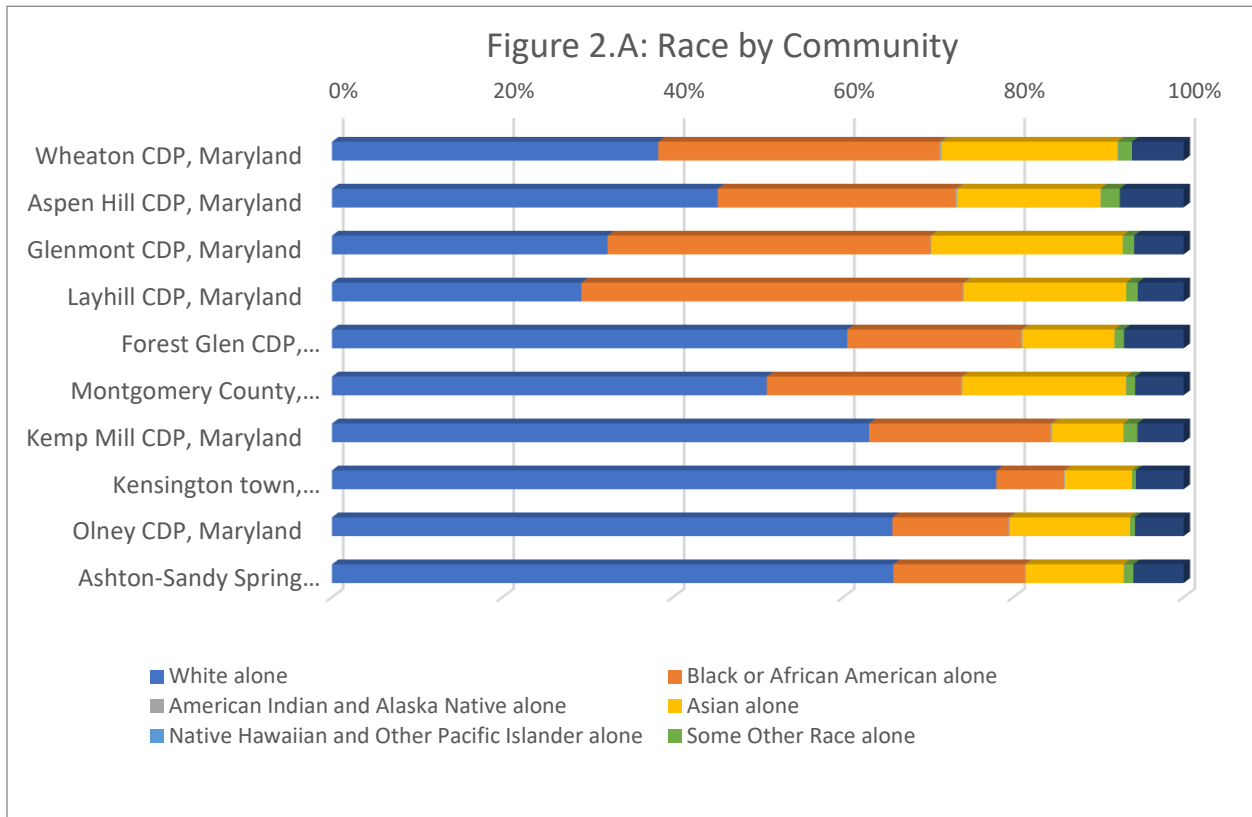
### Age in Mid County

Figure 1 shows the age composition of the mid-county region and Montgomery County. In most of the communities above, under-18-year-olds constitute 20-25% of the population, 18- to 24-year-olds and 25- to 34-year-olds all constitute 5-10% of the population. Thirty-five to 44-year-olds, 45-55 year-olds and 55- to 65-year-olds each represent 10% to 15%. People 65 and older represent between 15 and 25% of the population of Mid-County depending on the community. Aspen Hill, Wheaton and Glenmont are the youngest communities in the Mid-County Region. Wheaton and Glenmont both have about 30% of their population under the age of 25, and Aspen Hill has nearly 35% of its population under the age of 35. Layhill is the oldest community in the region, with about 40% of the population over the age of 55.<sup>1</sup>



## Race and Ethnicity in Mid-County

The Mid-County Region is racially and ethnically diverse. The racial and ethnic makeup of this region and in Montgomery County appears in figure 2 below.<sup>i</sup>



## Languages in Mid County

Just over half of the population of the Mid-County region speaks English at home. Of individuals that speak a language other than English at home, about half speak Spanish. About 10% speak “Other Indo-European Languages”, which is a large language family reported by the ACS that includes non-Spanish European languages such as French and Italian as well as many Central and South Asian languages such as Hindi. An equal proportion speaks Asian- and Pacific Island languages. Spanish is the most common language other than English spoken in every CDP except for Olney. Olney has slightly more speakers of Asian and Pacific Island languages than it does speakers of Spanish (2,434 compared to 2,154), and nearly as many speakers of other Indo-European languages (2,096). Figures 3 and 4 show the languages spoken in mid-county and which languages are most frequently spoken in which communities<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 3: Languages Spoken in Mid-County**

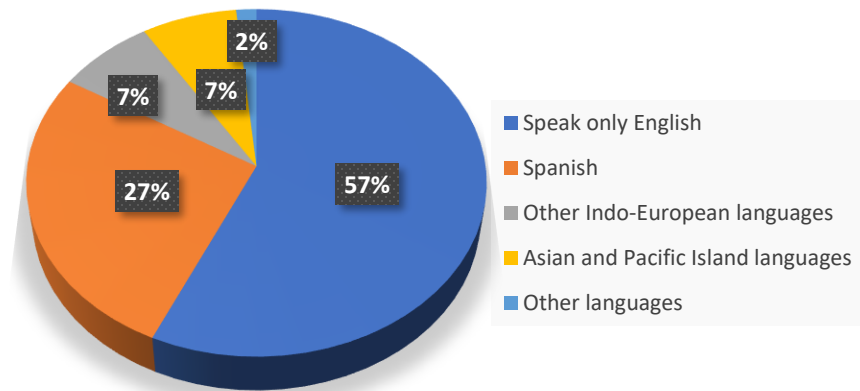


Figure 4 shows language groups spoken at home and English proficiency by language group. About 80% of the population over the age of 5 in the Mid-County region reports speaking English exclusively or speaking English “very well”. Among those who speak a language other than English at home, around 60% report speaking English very well. Those speaking “other Indo-European languages”, 73% report speaking English very well. Those reporting speaking Asian and Pacific Island languages were the least likely to report speaking English “very well”, at only 54%. About 60% of individuals who spoke Spanish at

home reported speaking English “very well”.

Figure 5 shows English proficiency in the Mid-County region by community. Considerable variation appears in English proficiency by community in the mid-county region. Wheaton has the largest proportion of residents who report speaking English “less than very well”, at nearly 23% of its total population. Glenmont and Aspen Hill also have large populations of people who report limited English proficiency.

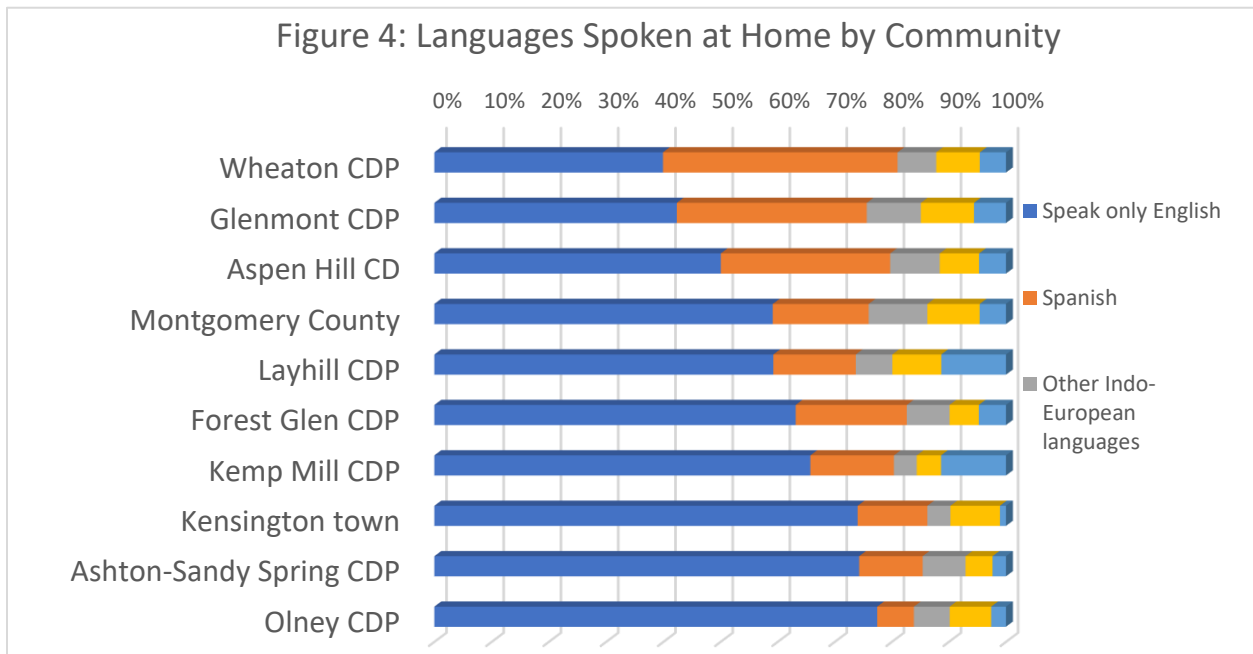
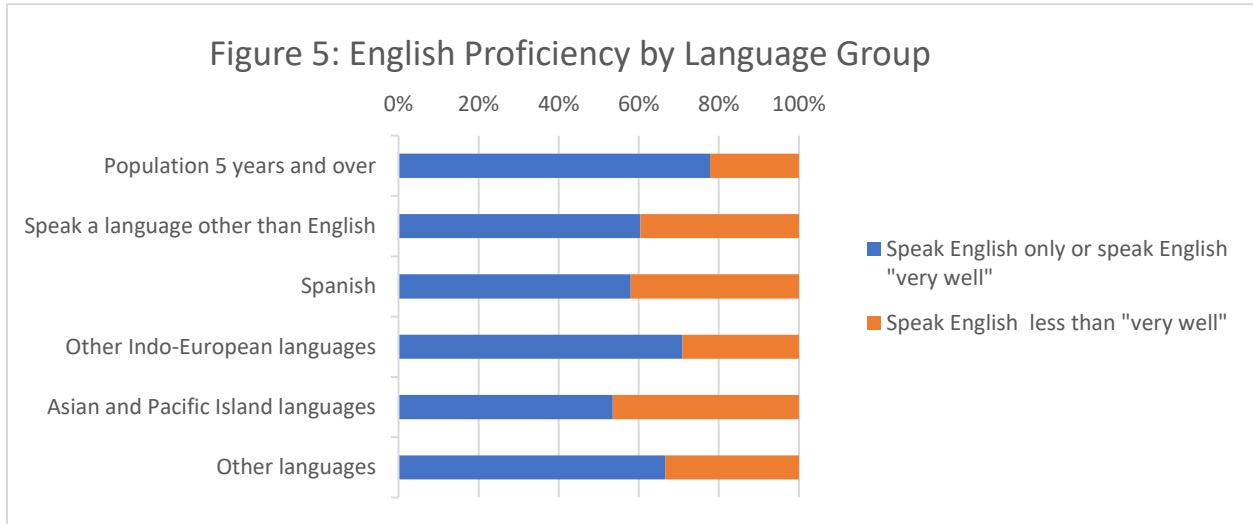
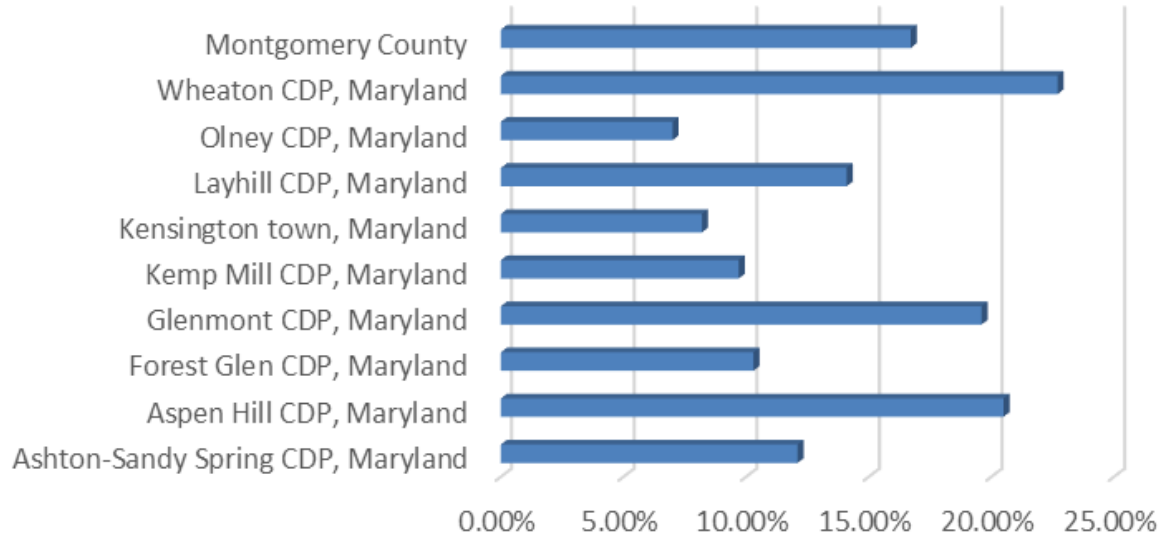


Figure 6: Proportion of Population with Limited English Proficiency



## Community Engagement Study

### Methodology

English language surveys were collected at the June 2022 Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board Meeting, at the Wheaton Summer Concert Series, at the Glenmont Block Party, the Mid-County newsletter, and through tabling at the Marian Fryer Plaza on 7/7/2022. Spanish language surveys were collected through tabling at the Marian Fryer Plaza on 7/7/2022, at the Wheaton Summer Concert Series, and at the Glenmont Block Party. This survey was also shared through the Montgomery County Spanish Facebook page however no surveys were collected through this means. At the Wheaton Summer Concert Series, the Glenmont Block Party and the Marian Fryer Plaza, respondents were offered “swag” in exchange for their participation.

### Limitations

Some measurement error exists in survey responses especially for those individuals who filled in the survey on their own (the survey administrator did not change any responses once they were submitted). One person responded that they answered the survey at a Wheaton Urban District Action Committee meeting, when the survey was never administered at a WUDAC meeting. Five individuals who responded to the English survey indicated that they responded to the survey through social media which is not possible as this version of the survey was never distributed through social media. Considering the time that these responses were collected, they were most likely collected from the newsletter. Additionally, 6 people who responded to the Spanish language survey indicated that their preferred

method of communication was email/newsletter, however several of these respondents made remarks that implied that they understood a “newsletter” to be physical mail that would be delivered to their address.

One major limitation of this survey was that most responses came from community events. Individuals who attend community events already have a certain level of involvement, and these individuals are over-represented in the survey. Individuals who are already involved in community events may have different preferences regarding communication methods than those who are less involved. Additionally, about 25% of the Mid-County population speaks a language other than English or Spanish, and of those people, about 40% speak English “less than very well” (about 10% of the total Mid-County population). Some people did approach the table at community events who were unable to participate in the survey because they spoke a language other than English or Spanish. Only one person who spoke a language other than English or Spanish submitted the survey with the assistance of her daughter.

## Survey Results

### Respondent Characteristics

Figures 7-10 show the basic demographic information of those who responded to the survey. A plurality of English surveys were collected at community events, however several were also collected through the newsletter. Eighty-two surveys were collected, 8 from the June 2022 Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board meeting, 12 from the newsletter, 5 who reported social media (however, these responses are most likely from the newsletter based on the date of these responses), 37 from community events and 29 from the Marian Fryer Town Plaza.

The largest number of participants were in between 35-44 years of age, with substantial numbers of responses in the 45-54, 55-64 and 65 and over age groups. Only 13 responses were collected in total from people under 35, which is only 15% of total surveys. Eighteen to 35-year-olds constitute about 25% of the total Montgomery County population and a similar proportion of the populations of Wheaton and Glenmont, where most survey responses came from. All 4 surveys from 18-24-year-olds were collected at the Marian Fryer Town Plaza (none were collected at community events or meetings).

Twenty-eight survey respondents were male, while 39 were female. Two people indicated that they preferred not to answer, and one person selected “Other” and indicated that they identified as non-binary. Women were overrepresented in the English language survey, and to a much lesser extent in the Spanish survey. This may be due to variations in the locations where surveys were collected. Spanish language surveys were more likely to have been collected in the Marian Fryer Plaza. Women were most overrepresented in surveys collected at community events.

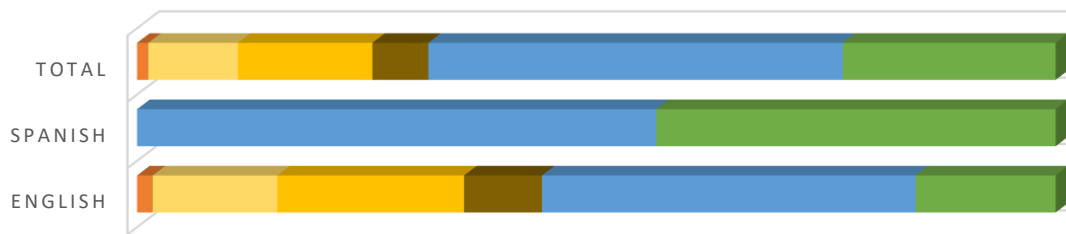
Respondents were about 40% Hispanic/Latino, 29% non-Hispanic white, 20% Black and 7% Asian/Pacific Islander. Two people selected “prefer not to answer” and one person selected “other: Trinidadian”. Compared to the Mid-County population as a whole, Hispanic/Latino respondents were overrepresented (40% of respondents compared to 28% of the region), Black respondents were proportionately represented (20% of respondents compared to 23% of the region) and White and Asian respondents were underrepresented (29% of respondents vs. 51% of the region and 7% of respondents vs. 19% of the region, respectively).



These proportions can be partially explained by the fact that most surveys were collected in Wheaton-Glenmont. Compared to the population of Wheaton-Glenmont, Hispanic/Latinos were proportionately represented (40% compared to 45%). Non-Hispanic White respondents were somewhat overrepresented. According to census data from 2020, the non-Hispanic white population of Wheaton constitutes only 21% of the population (compared to 29% of survey responses). Black and Asian residents were both underrepresented. The Black population of Wheaton constitutes about 33% of the population (compared to 20% of survey responses) and the Asian population of Wheaton constitutes about 21% of the population (compared to 7% of survey responses).

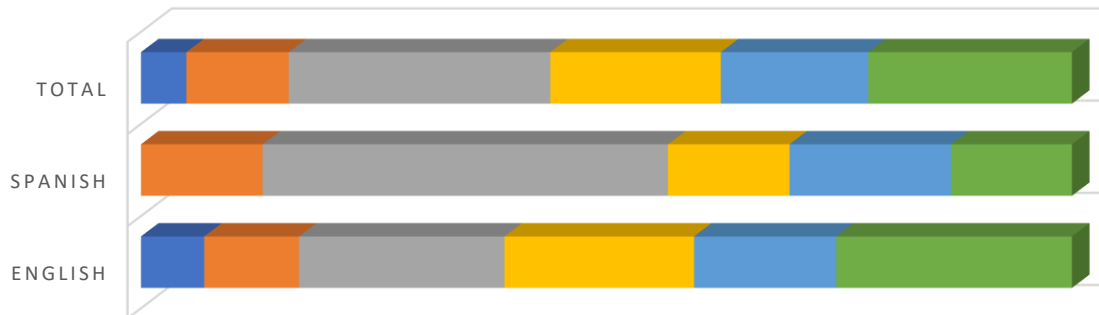
To some extent, these disproportionate rates may be explained by small sample size, however this is unlikely to explain the entirety of the disproportionality. To be proportionately represented relative to the Mid-County region, Asian residents would have needed 15 survey responses, and 17 survey responses to be proportionately represented compared to the population of Wheaton.

**FIGURE 7: SURVEY LOCATIONS**



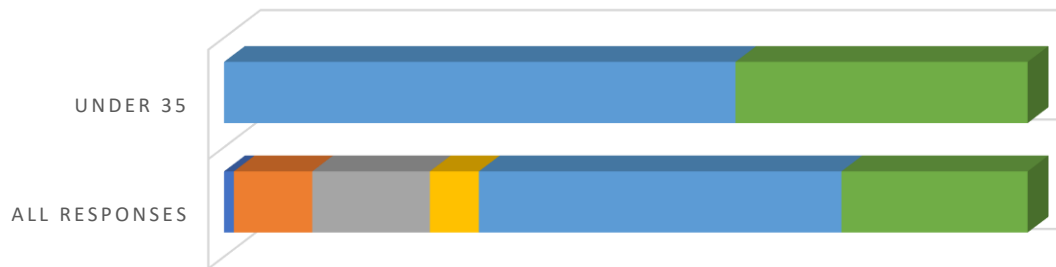
	English	Spanish	Total
Wheaton Urban District Action Committee Meeting	1	0	1
Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board Meeting	8	0	8
Newsletter	12	0	12
Social Media	5	0	5
Community Event	24	13	37
Other	9	10	19

**FIGURE 8: AGE BY LANGUAGE OF SURVEY**



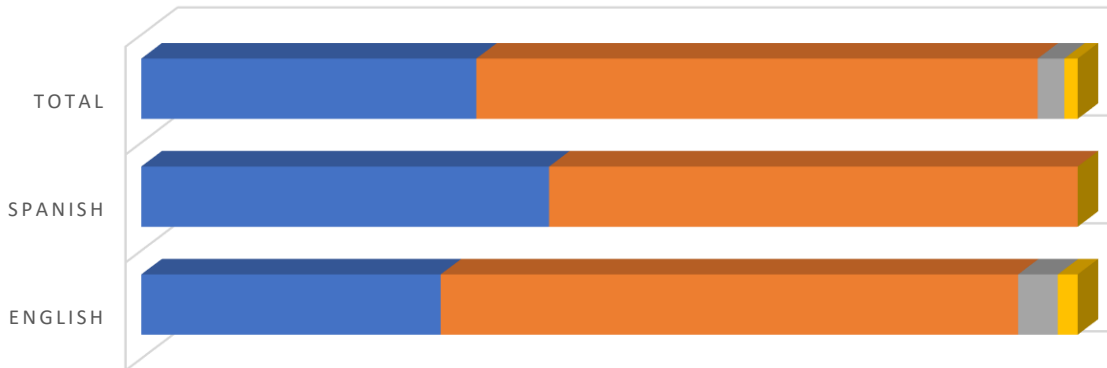
	English	Spanish	Total
■ 18-24	4	0	4
■ 25-34	6	3	9
■ 35-44	13	10	23
■ 45-54	12	3	15
■ 55-64	9	4	13
■ 65+	15	3	18

**FIGURE 9: AGE OF RESPONDENT BY LOCATION OF SURVEY**



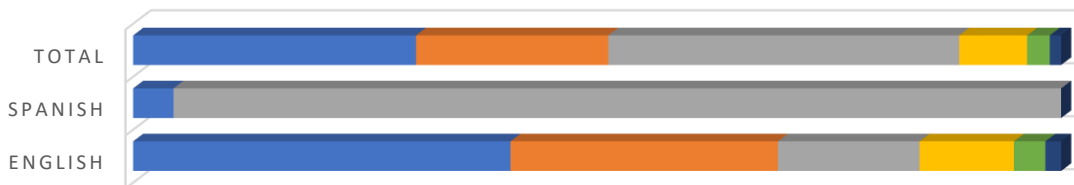
	All Responses	Under 35
■ Wheaton Urban District Action Committee Meeting	1	0
■ Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board Meeting	8	0
■ Newsletter	12	0
■ Social Media	5	0
■ Community Event	37	7
■ Other	19	4

**FIGURE 10: GENDER BY LANGUAGE OF SURVEY**



	English	Spanish	Total
Male	15	10	25
Female	29	13	42
I prefer not to answer	2	0	2
Other	1	0	1

**FIGURE 11: RACE/ETHNICITY BY LANGUAGE OF SURVEY**



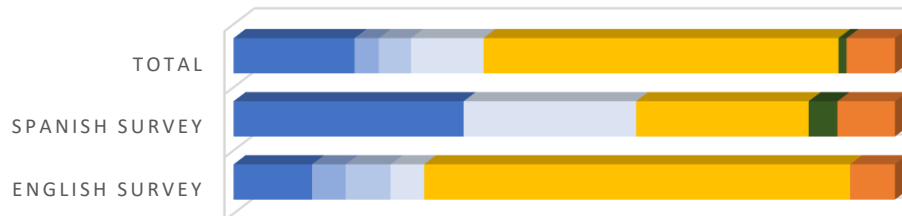
	English	Spanish	Total
Non-Hispanic White	24	1	25
Non-Hispanic Black	17	0	17
Hispanic/Latino	9	22	31
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	0	6
Native American/Indigenous	0	0	0
Prefer not to answer	2	0	2
Other	1	0	1

## Respondent Preferences

Figure 12 shows the respondent’s preferred means of communication about events and programs in the community by the language of the survey response. Overall, the respondents most preferred email newsletters, however many people who reported that they preferred to receive information in a newsletter indicated in comments that they were already subscribed to the newsletter. Other people who preferred newsletters did not know where to sign up for the Mid-County newsletter. This suggests that while newsletters are a popular way to receive updates, they are unlikely to be effective in reaching new individuals. Major differences in preferred means of communication emerged between respondents who answered the English survey and those who answered the Spanish survey. Among Spanish speaking respondents, most people preferred Facebook or WhatsApp as a means of communication. While an equal number of Spanish-speakers selected “newsletter” (*boletín*) as selected “Facebook”, several of those who selected newsletter made remarks that suggested they interpreted a newsletter to be something that was physically mailed to their house.

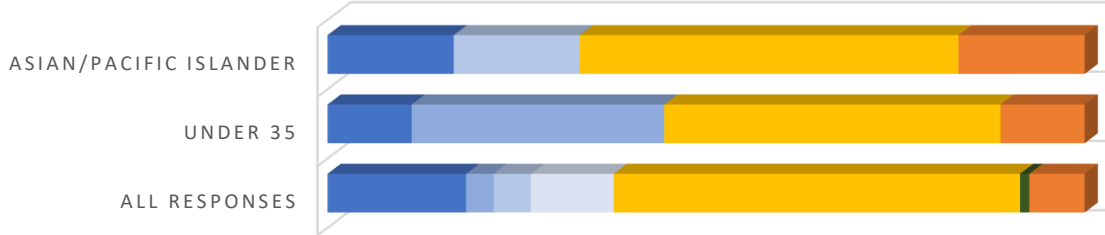
Figure 13 shows respondent’s preferred means of communication among least represented groups (Under-35’s and Asian/Pacific Islanders). While only 13 responses were from people under 35, some patterns emerged. Half of all under 35 respondents prefer social media as a means of communication. Three quarters of under 35 respondents who preferred social media indicated that they preferred Instagram, and one person preferred Facebook. The other half of respondents preferred an email newsletter. Among Asian/Pacific Islander respondents, communication preferences were varied. Two people preferred social media (Facebook and Twitter) and 3 people prefer email newsletter. Two people indicated in the “comments” section of the survey that they felt physical mail was the best way to communicate with the public.

**FIGURE 12: PREFERRED MEANS OF COMMUNICATION BY LANGUAGE OF SURVEY**



	English Survey	Spanish Survey	Total
Facebook	7	8	15
Instagram	3	0	3
Twitter	4	0	4
WhatsApp	3	6	9
Newsletter/Email	38	6	44
Virtual Meetings	0	0	0
Live Meetings	0	1	1
Word of mouth/from other people in my community	4	2	6

**FIGURE 13: PREFERRED METHOD OF COMMUNICATION FOR LEAST REPRESENTED GROUPS**



	All Responses	Under 35	Asian/Pacific Islander
Facebook	15	1	1
Instagram	3	3	0
Twitter	4	0	1
WhatsApp	9	0	0
Newsletter/Email	44	4	3
Virtual Meetings	0	0	0
Live Meetings	1	0	0
Word of mouth/from other people in my community	6	1	1

Table 1 shows select responses to the final survey question “How can the County improve its communication with the public”. This was an open ended question that allowed people to write in their response. Some responses were omitted due to lack of relevance. Common themes that emerged were more centralized sources of information, more direct outreach (i.e., mail, signage, flyers), and more use of social media. Some respondents to the Spanish language survey indicated a preference for more in-person outreach such as community meetings and outreach at community events.

Table 1: Select Responses to Question: “How can the County improve its communications with the Public?”	
English	Spanish
Direct Outreach: Flyers, public advertisements, signage and mail or door-to-door communications	Increase Outreach at Community Events
Text/Email updates	More Community Meetings
“It’s gotten harder with no local paper and now it seems scattershot so it becomes necessary to communicate over multiple platforms. Trust in gov’t is key and educating people on what the county is doing/ what are the benefits/ services of gov’t is key”	Direct Outreach: Mail, brochures, flyers, signage and other physical forms of promotion
“An official Wheaton Instagram would help”	Increase use of WhatsApp and Facebook
Mobile app for 311	Centralize sources of information about programs and services, especially immigration services, healthcare and benefits
“Use social media more, I get a lot of county information on Next Door”	
One centralized community outreach website	
“Assign MCCAB members to attend/participate in all community events, frequently survey community to understand gaps/opportunities, target change makers to encourage them to attend monthly meetings”	
“A lot of people may not have so much access to internet or social media and limited English skills. So maybe more specific outreach in different languages?”	

Discussion

Underrepresented Survey Groups

This survey poorly reached two groups of people: under-35’s and Asian/Pacific Islanders. Both groups had less than 10 responses (about 10% of total responses) despite representing 18% and 25-30% of the Mid-County population respectively. Considering that responses were collected in Wheaton-Glenmont (which has larger populations of both 18-35-year-olds and Asian/Pacific Islanders than Mid-County as a whole does), it is possible that these groups are poorly engaged in regional programs and services.

In the case of Asian/Pacific Islander communities, underrepresentation may be partially due to the lack of capacity to administer this survey in AAPI languages. AAPI languages were the second largest language group spoken in Mid-County after Spanish, and this language group had the highest prevalence of people who reported speaking English “less than very well” in the Mid-County region (about 50%). As a point of comparison, Hispanic/Latino respondents comprised just 15% of English language survey responses but 40% of overall survey responses. Twenty-three out of the 32 total Hispanic/Latino respondents opted to take the Spanish language survey. While these communities are distinct, this data does highlight the impact of providing outreach in relevant languages, especially in a region as linguistically diverse as Mid-County.

One potential reason for the lack of youth responses is that the community events at which this survey was administered were not youth-oriented. The two community events at which surveys were collected were the Wheaton Summer Concert held on 7/8/2022 featuring the Tribe Band and the Glenmont Block Party held on 7/10. The Tribe Band performed predominantly older music at this concert, and the

Glenmont Block Party consisted of many activities for children and parents. Events with a stronger youth orientation may produce more youth responses.

### Preferred Means of Communication

The most preferred means of communication across age groups was email/newsletter. However, many people who preferred receiving information via newsletter also indicated in their comments that they were already subscribed to the newsletter (or were responding to the survey through the link in the newsletter itself). Twenty-five out of 82 responses preferred some form of social media to receive communication from the County. This preference was strongest among Spanish-speaking respondents and 18 to 35-year-olds. Spanish-speaking respondents most preferred Facebook and WhatsApp as a means of communication, while 18-35-year-olds most preferred Instagram.

Presently, Mid-County events are promoted through the Mid-County newsletter, the Wheaton Urban District website, as well as through signage and flyers. The Mid-County Regional Services Center does not currently have active social media accounts. Wheaton Urban District does have an Instagram that was last updated in November of 2021. Montgomery County has a WhatsApp Business account for Spanish language outreach.

Social media and newsletters have complementary functionalities. Newsletters have the advantage of being able to convey lots of detailed information in a single place. While newsletters are a useful way to disseminate information, to obtain information from a newsletter, individuals must be already subscribed to the newsletter. Currently, the newsletter is only promoted through a “subscribe to newsletter” button posted on the Mid-County Regional Service Center website. This limits the ability of the newsletter to reach people beyond those who are already actively seeking out information from the website. Social media has greater capacity to reach people who are not previously engaged—social media accounts are easily searchable, posts are shareable, most social media sites show “recommended content” to users. Newsletters and social media accounts can also be used to cross-promote one another. According to data from Google, 18 to 24 year-olds are more likely to search for information on social media sites such as Instagram than to use search engines like Google<sup>ii</sup>.

### In-Person, Mail or Door-to-Door Outreach

This survey identified a preference for offline outreach in the form of mail, door-to-door promotion, signage in public locations, community meetings and having representatives at community events. A surprising outcome of this analysis was that 29 responses were collected in just two hours of tabling at the Marian Fryer Town Plaza. Additionally, individuals in this context provided more detailed responses to the open ended survey question than did respondents at events. This suggests that tabling in high-pedestrian traffic areas is itself a useful form of outreach.

## Recommendations

### Identify Gaps in Existing Programming

Certain groups, including Asian/Pacific Islanders and youth aged 18-34 were very poorly represented in this analysis. This may be due in part to the fact that the events at which this survey was administered were not oriented or marketed to these groups (especially in the case of youth). The Mid-County Regional Services Center and the Wheaton Urban District should review existing programming and identify the likely audience for these programs to determine if these results are indicative of broader gaps in programming or are simply a product of the specific events in which this survey was administered.

### Ongoing Evaluation of Engagement

This evaluation was limited in scope due to time constraints. The Mid-County Regional Services Center should implement periodic engagement reports to provide a better picture of regional engagement over time. These reports should include the systematic evaluation of programs and services for gaps in engagement. This may include surveys administered both at community events and through outreach outside of community events (i.e., tabling in areas with high pedestrian traffic).

Newsletter and social media were popular means of communication by survey respondents. Both communication platforms provide insights about follower and subscriber engagement which can serve as another important source of data for periodic reports.

### Social Media Strategy

Social media was the preferred method of communication of over ¼ of responses. Among youth and Spanish speakers, 50% of respondents preferred some form of social media. Mid-County and Wheaton Urban District's lack of social media utilization represents a significant gap in communications strategy that disproportionately excludes young people and Spanish speakers from opportunities for community engagement. To increase engagement among these groups, Mid-County and Wheaton Urban District should increase usage of Facebook and Instagram to promote events and direct people to the newsletter, as well as promote events through the County WhatsApp. The Mid-County office should work with the Office of Community Partnerships to develop social media collateral to effectively reach different cultural and linguistic communities.

### Offline Outreach

Many respondents to this survey elaborated on a preference for mail, door-to-door, or in-person outreach events. Montgomery County should take steps to increase these "offline" engagement in the Mid-County region using the following strategies:

- Distributing information through USPS mail or door-to-door
- Tabling in areas with high-pedestrian traffic to distribute flyers, administer surveys and answer resident questions
- Hosting community meetings in different community languages



- Have representatives from Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) present at community events to provide information about MCCAB's work and to liaise with the community.

Providing opportunities for MCCAB to engage directly with all segments of the community is especially important as MCCAB's purpose is to "serve as Montgomery County's bridge to the residents and businesses of the Mid-County area". Increasing opportunities for MCCAB members to participate directly in community outreach initiative directly supports MCCAB's goal.

### Communications and Outreach Personnel

The above recommendations are highly labor intensive and will require additional staff to implement. To ensure the sustainability of new engagement and communications initiatives, the Mid-County Regional Services Center should seek funding to create a position to oversee communications and outreach.

Examples of responsibilities this position may entail include:

- Creating content for social media accounts
- Managing newsletter content
- Developing flyers, signage etc. to spread information and promote events
- Administer surveys and compile survey data, newsletter and social media insights into periodic reports
- Working with the MRSC to facilitate community meetings
- Coordinate MCCAB's community outreach at events

### Concluding Remarks

The results of this survey provide insights as for how Montgomery County can improve its engagement and outreach in the Mid-County region. Preliminary results suggest that Montgomery County can strengthen its relationship with residents in this region by creating a social media strategy for the Mid-County Regional Service Center and its affiliated programs and services, increasing off-line communications, and implementing periodic evaluations of its outreach strategies. To support these initiatives, Mid-County Regional Services Center should work to obtain resources to hire additional personnel.

## References

---

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

<sup>ii</sup> *Most young people choose social media over Google for internet searching.* (n.d.). NBC News.