

SECTION 1. INTENT

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Project Background

Montgomery County (the County) is managing the planning, design and construction of a new arts and cultural facility, the Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center (the Center), to address the longstanding need for accessible, community-centered arts infrastructure in the Wheaton area and beyond. The County-owned facility is to be co-located with an affordable housing project to be developed by Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP) at 11507 Georgia Avenue, Wheaton, Maryland. The Center will be included on the ground floor of the multifamily building fronting on Georgia Avenue. The County-owned facility of approximately 45,000 square feet will include key spaces for arts activities including a flexible theatre for performing arts and community events, a studio space for event rehearsals and instruction, a visual art gallery, two classrooms, and administrative space for future users and the Operator, further described below.

The vision for the Center emerged from a comprehensive feasibility study initiated in 2018, which included community engagement activities such as interviews, focus groups, and town hall meetings. These efforts highlighted the community's desire for a dedicated arts facility that supports professional development for artists, offers diverse programming, and fosters cultural exchange. A preliminary programming and business plan was also included in the feasibility study, completed in 2019.

In 2024, the County engaged Theatre Projects to update the 2019 business plan, incorporating feedback from two community forums and adjusting for post-pandemic considerations. The updated plan outlines an operational model where a selected Operator will manage the facility, develop programming, and ensure the center serves as an inclusive hub for the arts.

Additionally, the Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County is managing the development of a new Montgomery County Cultural Plan. The Cultural Plan is anticipated to be formally adopted in fall 2026. More information about the Cultural Plan and drafts are available at this website:

<https://www.creativemoco.com/cultural-plan/>.

The Center aims to enhance cultural and educational opportunities in Wheaton, reflecting the area's rich diversity and artistic vitality. The County is now seeking proposals from qualified organizations to operate the center, with the goal of creating a vibrant, sustainable, and community-focused arts and cultural venue.

1.1.2. Facility Construction Schedule

The Center core and shell will be constructed as part of the construction of the affordable housing project by MHP. This also includes construction of the adjacent garage that will contain parking spaces for the Center and the multifamily housing project. One hundred (100) parking spaces within this shared garage will be dedicated for the exclusive use of the Center. Construction of the core and shell is anticipated to begin in winter 2026/2027 and take approximately two years.

The tenant fit out of the Center has only been designed to the point necessary to fit within the overall building framework (schematic design). See **Attachments I (Floor Plan), J (Building Sections), K (Renderings) and L (Site Plan)**. Detailed design for the Center fit out, including finishes, lighting, specialty equipment, and other building components will be designed while the core and shell is under construction. It is anticipated that this design work will begin late spring/early summer 2027, after an

Operator is selected and under contract. While the County will manage design of the tenant improvements, it is expected that the selected Operator will have input to ensure the design supports the proposed programming. It is expected that the Operator will attend design meetings with the County and architecture/engineering team. Design of the tenant fit out is anticipated to take approximately one year, with construction to begin no earlier than July 2028. The County will manage construction of the tenant fit out. It is anticipated that construction of the tenant improvements will occur simultaneously with construction of the core and shell, with both projects finishing around the same time. Construction is projected to be complete spring 2029. To account for the fact that the Center will be under construction, the Contract will be divided into two parts. There will be an initial predevelopment/development term of three (3) years, to allow for the chosen Operator to attend design meetings and begin planning for Center operations while the project is under construction. After this time, the initial Contract term will be ten (10) years for Center operations. See Section 5.1. for more details.

1.1.3. Facility Description

The Center includes the following key elements:

- **Flexible Theatre** (approximately 3,500 SF; 150 to 300-capacity): The flexible theatre is intended primarily for performing arts and community event usage. It will be well- equipped for performance, dance, movement, and music, (with a surface appropriate for dance and acoustical sound treatment). It is designed with maximum flexibility in mind and is not intended to serve as a traditional proscenium theatre. As such, it does not have permanent fixed seating (but includes flexible seating options) or wing space, a set proscenium, fly space, or other elements traditionally associated with a proscenium-style theatre. It will have a professional grid with theatrical lighting, drapery, and rigging capacity so that the theatre can be styled with an end-stage or used as an open flat floor – and any combination in between.
- **Studio Space** (approximately 1,500 SF): The studio is intended primarily for use by the community at large for smaller gatherings and cultural events. It could also be used as a teaching or rehearsal space for performing arts disciplines including theatre and dance (a surface appropriate for dance will be included), small music ensembles, and select visual arts disciplines including drawing and illustration. Readings and other events may also be held in this space.
- **Gallery** (approximately 500 SF): This space is intended primarily for visual arts exhibits. It can be closed and secured for gallery use only or opened up to combine with the larger lobby space for bigger exhibits or events. It is not intended to be utilized by performance disciplines.
- **Flexible Classroom** (approximately 1,200 SF): This space is intended as a flexible gathering and teaching space. It will not be equipped for dance, movement, or music (no specialized flooring or acoustical sound treatment). It will be designed with maximum flexibility in mind including wi-fi and projection capabilities, ample electrical power, and moveable tables and seating. This room could be used for digital arts classes, smaller community or cultural gatherings, meetings, or table-top visual arts (i.e.: knitting, crafting, etc.).

- **Visual Art Classroom** (approximately 1,450 SF): This space is intended as a flexible visual arts studio classroom designed to serve the broadest possible number of mediums and uses. The space will have sufficient ventilation for use by painting and other mediums requiring similar air circulation. There will be a sink and ample electrical power. Examples of mediums that this room can serve include painting, drawing, jewelry, or other table-top arts. As many visual arts mediums require specialized spaces and equipment, it is important to note that not all of them will be able to be accommodated in this room. It will not be well-suited for pottery, large sculpture, metal working, or wood working.
- **Administrative space** (approximately 3,750 SF) to be used by the users of the facility including the future Operator and associated programs.
- **Performer support space** to be shared between the Flexible Theatre and Studio Space includes dressing rooms, restrooms, lounge, laundry, and a kitchenette.

Attachments I, J and K were presented to the community in June 2024. These aspects of the Center were refined with community feedback, see **Attachment M** for a detailed Questions and Answers guide that was disseminated with the preliminary floor plan. Offerors are highly encouraged to review additional information on the project website: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/departments-general-services/dgs-divisions-offices/office-planning-development/projects/wheaton-arts-cultural-center>.

1.2. RFP Goals

1.2.1. General Goals

The County is seeking proposals from qualified, for-profit and non-profit organizations to manage and operate the future Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, a multi-venue facility that will be located in the Wheaton Arts and Entertainment District in Wheaton, Maryland.

Wheaton is ethnically rich and diverse with multiple cultures represented. Wheaton can boast of a robust commercial sector and is a central transportation hub servicing the Washington DC metro area, making it an attractive location for commuters. The local arts community is representative of its diverse residents and is artistically varied and active. However, Wheaton is without a well-defined arts infrastructure. The State of Maryland has designated Wheaton's central core as an Arts and Entertainment District, joining other Montgomery County communities Silver Spring and Bethesda. The Arts and Entertainment District designation provides income tax incentives to artists working in the designated area. Developers who create spaces for artists to live and work can be exempt from paying certain property taxes on the value of the renovations for a period of up to 10 years. Designated districts are also exempt from admissions and amusement taxes. Wheaton has achieved this status multiple times; and the fact that Wheaton owns this designation without an arts facility in the designated area is important to note.

The Center will fill this gap and address the lack of adequate performance and visual arts space in Wheaton, which has constrained an influx of artists and organizations to the area that could take advantage of the incentives of the designation. The Center intends to create available space for arts activities that will ultimately attract artists, arts organizations, cultural groups and patrons to the Arts and Entertainment District. The diversity and breadth of the creative community require a flexible space with the ability to accommodate a mix of artistic styles and varied programming.

1.2.2. Anticipated offerings and services

It is anticipated that the Center will provide the following for local artists and cultural organizations:

- Professional development opportunities for artists to grow their business through the incubator program;
- Teaching opportunities;
- Performance space for a variety of activities such as theater productions, dance performances, concerts, recitals, amplified music, lectures, readings, film screenings and special events;
- Gallery space for visual artists;
- Potential retail opportunities for art sales; and
- Opportunities for collaboration and shared learning experiences with other artists, cultural groups, and community members.

The Operator will provide a full range of services including building operations and programming, including the following:

- Increased arts and cultural events and classes for community members;
- New opportunities for the area's diverse community to share their cultural offerings with the public;
- New opportunities for community members of all ages to participate in arts learning;
- Affordable performance and rehearsal space in Wheaton to arts groups from the region;
- Strategic partnerships with local arts and cultural organizations; and
- A robust facility rental program designed to provide access to community users, including local residents, nonprofit organizations, non-resident individuals, and/or commercial entities with an equitable and inclusive policy and process that will allow access for a diversity of users.

Additionally, an arts and culture incubator program is envisioned to support a diverse group of artists and culture workers in refining their business strategy, administrative and operational capacity, and strategic growth. The program may include professional development, central services, and administrative support for the local arts and culture community. Specific programming may include:

- Workshops, seminars, and business development resources.
- Classes in business skills, website development, and marketing.
- Opportunities for artists to produce and teach in the facility.
- A networking platform for collaboration and shared learning experiences.

The incubator program is intended to support artists' and arts organizations' capacity, which then enables artistic growth and enhanced output, all of which benefits the community. The program will be further refined and directed by the County in collaboration with the selected Operator. It is expected that the Operator will manage the arts incubator program but may do so in partnership with other organizations or firms.

1.2.3. **Staffing**

To achieve the goals and programs outlined for the WACC, the County studied potential staffing models, see **Attachment N 2019 Programming and Business Plan** and **Attachment O 2024 Summary Report of Facility Operational Model**, which reviewed and updated the 2019 plan. The model below is one example of a staffing structure to support the intent of the Center. Offerors are expected to submit their intended staffing structure, elaborating on any variations by year (i.e., adding positions in later years). Proposed staffing structures do not need to comport exactly with the model

below; however, Offerors should outline in their submissions how their organizational structure supports program delivery and other Operator responsibilities outlined in this solicitation:

- Eight full-time positions:
 - Executive Director
 - Finance & Human Resource Manager
 - Program & Education Manager
 - Marketing & Communications Manager
 - Rentals & Facilities Manager
 - Development Manager
 - Community Arts Specialist
 - Administrative Assistant
- Six part-time positions:
 - Ticket Services Associate
 - Volunteer Coordinator
 - Visual Arts & Carpentry Technician
 - Theatre Technician
 - Stage/Event Manager
 - House Manager
- Potential third-party vendor engagements for necessary marketing, security, custodial, accounting, and other professional services.

The final staffing structure will be determined by the selected Operator, with proposals evaluated on the strength of the proposed staffing model and the organization's commitment to program delivery and other Operator requirements, including facility operations and financial responsibilities.

SECTION 2. SCOPE OF WORK

2.1. Requirements

The County is seeking proposals for a proven and excellent facility Operator to assume responsibility for the following key areas:

Venue Management: Oversee and deliver day-to-day high-quality operations, including staffing, ticketing, booking, technical direction, custodial services, food and beverage management, arts and culture incubator program management, safety, security, and customer service.

Partnership and Tenant Management: Negotiate terms and manage long-term agreements with designated collaborative partners and/or presenters, as well as other long-term tenants.

Arts and Cultural Programming: Curate and attract a diverse range of performances, community events, and arts programming that will serve local community members and ensure the financial stability of the facility. Beyond artistic programming, the Operator will be required to provide opportunities for Wheaton's diverse ethnic community to share their cultural offerings with the public. The Operator will create an equitable and inclusive use-policy that will allow access for a diversity of users.

Production Management: Manage all technical aspects necessary for the professional operation of the facility, including any union negotiations.

Marketing and Audience Development: Develop and maintain a comprehensive marketing strategy to promote the venue and its events to diverse audiences throughout the market region, as well as develop and maintain website, social media, digital, and other marketing efforts for the facility, its users and programs.

Arts and Culture Incubator Management: Develop, grow, and sustain an arts and culture incubator program that serves the professional development of local individuals and organizations.

Financial Management: Oversee all financial management for the facility, including budget development, financial reporting, and fundraising efforts to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the facility operations. This includes but is not limited to managing income sources from programming, facility rentals, fees and commissions, and food and beverage, as well as other earned income streams not limited to corporate giving, sponsorships, grants, and individual donations. All financial activities and outcomes should be reportable to the County as the facility owner when requested. Contributing to the overall financial health of the facility operations will be a core responsibility of the selected Operator.

Additionally, the Operator will provide input into the design of the tenant improvements, which will require attending design meetings with the County and its architecture/engineering team. See Section 1.1.2.

2.2. Performance Metrics and Contract Management

2.2.1. Performance Metrics

2.2.1.1. The County expects to develop an operational reporting framework in collaboration with the selected Operator during the interior design phase before the venue is open. Refer to **Attachment P, Sample 10-Year Operational Metrics Reporting Framework**. The reporting framework is expected to include the following categories:

- 2.2.1.1.1. Facility Utilization and Access – Metrics for space utilization and number of users.
- 2.2.1.1.2. Community Engagement and Equity – Metrics that include number and diversity of programs, partnerships, and events, and community satisfaction.
- 2.2.1.1.3. Arts and Culture Incubator Program – Metrics that track artists served by this program and what offerings they are provided.
- 2.2.1.1.4. Financial Health and Fundraising – Metrics that specify income, expenditures, earned revenue ratio, and clarify goals vs. actual progress.
- 2.2.1.1.5. Marketing and Audience Development – Metrics that track attendance, online/media engagement, conversion rates and audience demographics.
- 2.2.1.1.6. Facility and Operational Management – Metrics that track maintenance requests, safety issues, staff and user satisfaction rates.

2.2.2. Contract Management

- 2.2.2.1. The County will require regular reporting from the Operator. The frequency and specific deliverables of this reporting will be developed with the selected Operator as part of the operational reporting framework. While the details of the deliverables are to be developed, the Operator should anticipate that certain reports will be required as frequently as quarterly. The selected Operator should be prepared to provide regular financial reports to the County; it is expected that the Operator's finances will be "open book" with the County.
- 2.2.2.2. The Operator will be evaluated on the metrics identified in the operational reporting framework. It is anticipated that there will be a midterm evaluation that will include recommendations for course correction or scaling, and a final evaluation with a recommendation for either contract renewal or transition planning.

2.3. Operator Qualifications

2.3.1. Operator Mandatory Qualifications

- 2.3.1.1. The Operator must have at least five (5) years of recent experience in managing facility operations for an arts and/or cultural facility.
- 2.3.1.2. The Operator must have five (5) years of recent experience providing services of similar nature to the one included in this solicitation including arts and cultural programming and community engagement.
- 2.3.1.3. The Operator must have a proven track record of successfully and consistently delivering exceptionally high-quality work within proposed operational budgets.
- 2.3.1.4. The Operator must have at least three (3) professional references ready to validate the Operator's experience in providing services of related nature to the ones included in this solicitation.

2.3.2. Operator Preferred Qualifications

- 2.3.2.1. The Operator has recent experience providing or procuring professional development services intended for emerging artists and/or arts/cultural organizations.
- 2.3.2.2. The Operator has recent experience managing a space rental program, ideally to a wide range of entities including private individuals, civic organizations, and private businesses.
- 2.3.2.3. The Operator has experience securing grant funding and/or fundraising.
- 2.3.2.4. The Operator has experience reporting required metrics as part of a monitoring and evaluation plan. Metrics are like those in Section 2.2.1. and **Attachment P** are ideal.
- 2.3.2.5. The Operator has experience with government agencies and government contracts.

2.4. Operator's Responsibilities

- 2.4.1. The Operator will oversee venue operations, programming, gallery spaces, and an arts incubator program on behalf of the County.
- 2.4.2. The Operator must provide all management, supervision, labor, and transportation necessary to perform all services as described in this Solicitation.
- 2.4.3. The Operator must assign a representative that will coordinate the work and reporting needs with the County's Contract Administrator or its designee.
- 2.4.4. The Operator must require its workers to comply with the instructions pertaining to conduct and other regulations called to the Operator's attention by the County.
- 2.4.5. The Operator must furnish all equipment, tools, parts, supplies and materials required to perform all work described in this Solicitation.
- 2.4.6. The Operator will be responsible for all operational expenses including but not limited to janitorial, utilities, security and insurance.
- 2.4.7. The Operator will provide input for design of the tenant improvements to ensure the design supports the proposed programming, including attending design meetings when necessary.
- 2.4.8. The Operator will support any reporting and/or renewal efforts required by the state of the Wheaton Arts & Entertainment District. The Wheaton Arts & Entertainment District is managed by a separate entity.

2.5. County's Responsibilities

- 2.5.1. The County will be responsible for construction of the Center core and shell.
- 2.5.2. The County will be responsible for design and construction of the Center tenant improvements.
- 2.5.3. The County will be responsible for management of the Operator, including:
 - 2.5.3.1. The County will be responsible for administrative/contract management.
 - 2.5.3.2. The County will develop an operational reporting framework in conjunction with the selected Operator.
 - 2.5.3.3. The County will review Operator reports and operational metrics, see Section 2.2.2. and **Attachment P**.
- 2.5.4. The County or its landlord will maintain the physical plant (core and shell), generally responsible for expenses related to:
 - 2.5.4.1. Maintenance of the fire alarm.
 - 2.5.4.2. Repair, replacement and preventive maintenance of mechanical (including the elevators), HVAC, electrical and plumbing systems.
 - 2.5.4.3. Major structural repairs.
 - 2.5.4.4. Maintenance and repair to the exterior of the building envelope components including painting, waterproofing, and gutters, including gutter cleaning.
 - 2.5.4.5. Fire extinguisher service, inspections, and replacements as necessary.

- 2.5.4.6. Repair and/or replacement of exterior lighting.
- 2.5.4.7. Grounds maintenance, including snow removal.

2.6. Reports and Deliverables

- 2.6.1. Delivery of arts and cultural programming to local community within the guidelines outlined in this Solicitation.
- 2.6.2. Regular reporting to the County per the Reporting Calendar in the Operational Metrics Reporting Framework (See **Attachment P**)

SECTION 3. SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

3.1. Proposal Submissions

- 3.1.1. Failure of an offeror to submit all required proposal submissions may render its proposal unacceptable as determined by the Director, Office of Procurement.
- 3.1.2. Offerors must electronically submit their proposal through [BidNet Direct](#) in the format detailed below. Proposals will be evaluated only on material that is submitted. The offeror must submit sufficient information to enable the Qualification Selection Committee (QSC) to evaluate the offeror's capabilities and experience.

The Offeror is responsible for ensuring that the materials uploaded to BidNet Direct are properly formatted and not corrupted. Offerors should carefully check their submissions on BidNet Direct following upload to confirm that all documents were properly uploaded and legible. Offerors will not be allowed to submit or supplement any missing, corrupted, or illegible documents after the solicitation has closed.

Proposals must include the following information (including labeled sections numbered as shown):

- 3.1.2.1. A **cover letter** with a brief description of the organization including the offeror's full name, address, telephone number, and email address. If the offeror is a consortium, please briefly describe the roles of each entity and provide each entity's full name, address, telephone number, and email address, and identify a single point of contact to be the liaison with the County. The cover letter should summarize the organization's background, relevant facility management experience, and a high-level summary of why the organization is best suited to perform these services.
- 3.1.2.2. The completed **Acknowledgment Page** of this solicitation, signed by a person authorized to bind the offeror to the proposal (see **Attachment B**).
- 3.1.2.3. At least three **References** that may be contacted to attest to the quality and timeliness of the offeror's work of similar nature and scope as that required by the County in this solicitation (see **Attachment C**).
 - 3.1.2.3.1. References must be able speak to the Offeror's qualifications and past performance managing or operating arts, cultural, or community-serving facilities or programs. References may include—but are not limited to—facility owners, public sector clients, partner organizations, presenters, resident companies, or other collaborators. Include the name, title, organization, email address, and phone number for each reference. This section is not included in the page count.