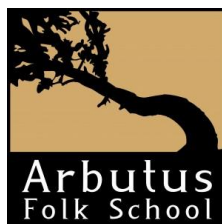


# The Arbutus Folk School's Craft Practitioner Survey



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Stacey Waterman-Hoey

Prepared for the  
Arbutus Folk School



## Introduction

Craft, arts, culture and heritage activities are the beating heart of communities, providing rich and vibrant texture to our lives and generating deep human connection. They are critical economic drivers, a cornerstone of livable communities, and a source of resiliency and pride. For some people, the income generated through their practice is important to their livelihood. For others, the value goes beyond economic to the very essence of life, providing a vital lifeline to connect with our communities, a way to carry precious cultural knowledge forward, or perhaps a means to sustain ourselves and our families. The opportunity to exercise creativity and connect with others is deeply rewarding and even a vital necessity for many people.

Craft, art and heritage practices have served community needs for millennia. These time-tested activities can support and enhance human connection, resiliency and economic prosperity. When rooted in the sustainable use of local materials, they can offer a powerful opportunity for economic and community renewal.

The Arbutus Folk School, founded in 2013 in Olympia, Washington, was built on a vision of identifying, learning, preserving and sharing craft and heritage arts as a way of learning about and connecting to the place we call home in the Southern Salish Sea. The current facility offers classes in fiber arts, woodworking, metal arts, ceramic arts, stonecarving and music. To the extent possible, materials for classes are sourced through local businesses such as family farms that provide sustainably harvested lumber, wool and fibers for basketry. The school develops these relationships and fosters resilient networks for building a thriving culture of craft.

Folk schools differ from other forms of American education by responding to the community's pursuit of knowledge to enrich their own lives and empower self-determination. The U.S. Dept of Education's motto is to *"promote student achievement and **preparation for global competitiveness** by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access"* (U.S. Dept of Education - About, 2021). In other words, the focus of federally-funded education in America today is to prepare citizens to meet global, corporate workforce needs. By contrast, folk schools are avenues for building personal and community-level resiliency through learning skills that support and enhance our own lives.

FIGURE 1 - SCREENSHOT OF US DEPT OF EDUCATION WEBSITE



The focus on global competitiveness has resulted in increasing dependency on a consumer-driven, global economy with enormous benefits for a very small group while pushing environmental and social impacts out of sight. Individuals on a local community scale have very little influence on how things we use are made – be it the lives of the workers who make our consumer goods or how the resources these

goods were derived from impact the environment. There are many benefits of an interconnected economy, but there are harmful impacts as well.

The Arbutus Folk School was founded to support creativity and resiliency, to encourage community connections, preserve cultural heritage and traditions, and to allow local communities to manage their own social and environmental impacts. Within this framework of personal enrichment and local empowerment, programming is informed by the needs and interests of the community. This survey supports identifying both the community it serves and what their needs are.

The first challenge of the survey was to define activities that build community resiliency. We began by calling these “arts, culture, craft and heritage arts practices”, shortened simply to “craft practices”. This list is a starting point, not a definitive list. We expect this to evolve over time.

This definition includes all art practices, but also includes heritage practices, traditional arts, rural or urban homestead lifestyles, and other practices that enhance connection to our communities and places we live. It deeply honors indigenous knowledge and seeks to elevate, empower and be led by indigenous voices and practices. Those participating in craft and heritage activities may or may not view this work as art – frequently, it is just the essence of living life. They may practice these activities for the potential of generating income but very often, these activities serve a deeper purpose of helping us feel some measure of resiliency, human connection or creative impulse.

This new definition of craft practices was created to broadly encompass human activity that supports environmental, social and economic sustainability. It merges terms such as “creative economy”, “maker’s movement”, “green economy”, and “local economy” with values of indigenous knowledge, community building, cultural preservation and heritage practices. It attempts to bridge rural and urban livelihoods and lifestyles, historic preservation and modern innovation, those seeking creative opportunities and those seeking personal resilience. Our research has not found an existing definition that encompassed all of this. We have used the terms “arts, culture and heritage”, “craft”, “folkways”, “folklife”, and “creative economy”. While none of these terms is exactly right, for the purposes of this report we will refer to this new categorization as “craft practices” and those who do this work “craft practitioners”.

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## COVID-19 Impacts on this Survey

The original research plan included broadcasting this survey through local and regional economic development agencies, municipalities, libraries, tribal centers, arts and culture organization, heritage groups, clubs, guilds and additional avenues to reach deeply into the community.

However, the pandemic changed budgets and staffing which waylaid these plans. In the end, the survey and this final report were completed on a shoestring and the number of survey responses were limited. Some of the respondents noted that they would like to respond again when COVID was behind them, as fear of the uncertain future colored their responses.

However, the information resulting from the survey may still be useful and perhaps can lay the foundation for further research in the future.

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### The Craft Practitioner Survey

The survey was published in the spring of 2020. It was shared via the Arbutus Folk School newsletter and social media, the City of Olympia Arts, Culture and Heritage Digest newsletter and through various individuals in the community. This is far from an ideal sample, but the results may still be valuable and hopefully further research in the future can expand the findings.

The following is the list of craft practices created for this survey. The survey targeted anyone practicing any of these activities. Many respondents practice multiple activities from this list.

- **Woodworking**
  - Wood turning
  - Furniture craft
  - Tool making and care
  - Traditional home/shelter building
  - Wood carving
  - Wooden boat building
  - Other
- **Ceramic Arts**
  - Sculpting/hand building
  - Wheel throwing
  - Tile, mosaic
  - Ceramic painting, surface design
  - Other
- **Fiber Arts**
  - Fiber processing/gathering
  - Weaving
  - Basketry
  - Sewing
  - Quilting
  - Knitting
  - Felting
  - Dyeing
  - Spinning
  - Embroidery and handsewing
  - Crotchet
  - Other



- **Music and Dance**
  - 
  - Acoustic, folks or traditional music or music festivals
  - Independent music, dance, or related festivals
  - Making and repairing musical instruments
  - Folk and traditional dance and/or dance festivals
  - Other
- **Jewelry Making**
  - Beadwork
  - Metal work
  - Stonework
  - Other
- **Metal Arts**
  - Welding
  - Blacksmithing
  - Silver and Goldsmithing
  - Forging
  - Other
- **Leather Craft**
  - Dyeing/Painting
  - Molding/forming
  - Carving/stamping
  - Other
- **Stone Craft**
  - Carving
  - Masonry
  - Lapidary
  - Other
- **Animal Husbandry**
  - Food Production
  - Fiber Production
  - Other
- **Agriculture and Food**
  - Home vegetable gardening
  - Home food preservation and storage
  - Cooking
  - Hunting, fishing or seafood gathering
  - Foraging, wild food preparation and preservation
  - Beekeeping
  - Wine/beer/spirits making
  - Cheese and dairy
  - Meat
  - Farming, agriculture or professional food-related business
  - Plant nursery, landscaping
  - Other
- **Glass**
  - Glass beadwork
  - Blown glass/art glass
  - Stained glass/mosaic
  - Other
- **Storytelling (digital, performative, or written)**
  - Writing
  - Cultural festivals
  - Film making/visual storytelling
  - History
  - Theater arts
  - Other

- **Language arts, heritage communication practices**
  - Language practice or preservation
  - Storytelling
  - Oral history
  - Other
- **Book arts, paper craft or printing**
  - Letterpress and printing
  - Book arts
  - Paper making
  - Other
- **Painting, drawing, calligraphy**
  - Painting
  - Drawing
  - Calligraphy
  - Other
- **Outdoor/Ecology**
  - Orienteering
  - Birding/ornithology
  - Native plants
  - Outdoor skills/safety
  - Ethnobotany
  - Other
- **Natural or traditional health and medicinal arts**
- **Photography/Digital Arts**
  - Photography
  - Digital art
  - Other
- **Beadwork**
- **Additional Categories**
  - Other- Specify





## Survey Results

The survey was open from April 2020 through Dec 2020 and was accessible on the Arbutus Folk School's website. There were fifty-nine individual responses to the survey.

The first question on the survey asks respondents to select all of the activities they engage in from the craft practitioner list. Table 1 below shows their responses. Note that most respondents selected multiple activities.

**TABLE 1 RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION “DO YOU PRACTICE ONE OR MORE OF THESE ACTIVITIES? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)”**

Fiber Arts	32	17%
Music and Dance	17	9%
Agriculture or Food	16	9%
Painting, Drawing, Calligraphy	14	8%
Woodworking	13	7%
Photography / Digital Arts	12	7%
Jewelry Making	12	7%
Outdoor Skills / Ecology	11	6%
Book Arts, Paper Craft, or Printing	10	5%
Storytelling (digital, performative, or written)	9	5%
Metal Arts	8	4%
Leather Craft	8	4%
Language Arts, Heritage Communication Practices	6	3%
Ceramic Arts	6	3%
Animal Husbandry	5	3%
Natural or Traditional Health and Medicinal Arts	4	2%
Glass	1	1%

The respondents were asked to characterize their participation in these activities in the following areas. They were allowed to select all that apply.

**TABLE 2 – CHARACTERIZING HOW RESPONDENTS PARTICIPATE IN CRAFT**

Hobby / Recreation	51	43%
Lifestyle	26	22%
Business	17	14%
Cultural / Heritage	12	10%
Family	11	9%
Religious	1	1%

The following responses identified the primary community avenues for engaging in these activities. They were allowed to select all that apply.

**TABLE 3 GROUP AFFILIATIONS**

Association	14	20%
Club	12	17%
Guild	11	16%
School	11	16%
Cultural Group	9	13%
Business	7	10%
Historical Association	4	6%
Tribes/Native Communities	1	1%
Religious Group	1	1%

The following four questions asked respondents about the relative importance of these activities for social connection, personal wellbeing, and as a source of personal or family income. The responses reveal the deep personal importance of these activities. For this group of respondents, generating income for themselves or their families ranked low in importance.

**CHART 1**

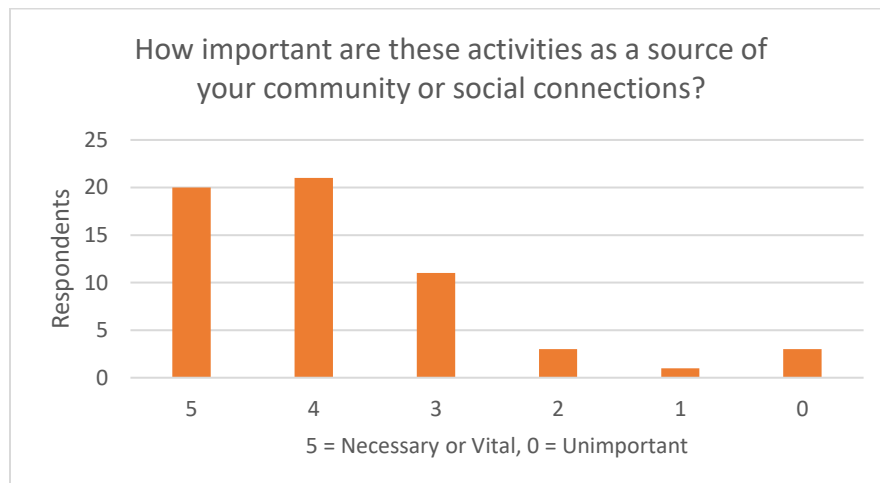




CHART 2



CHART 3

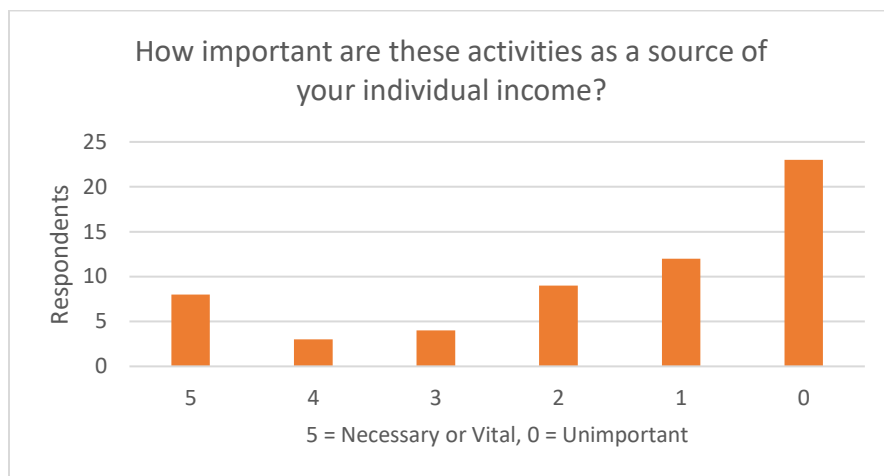


CHART 4

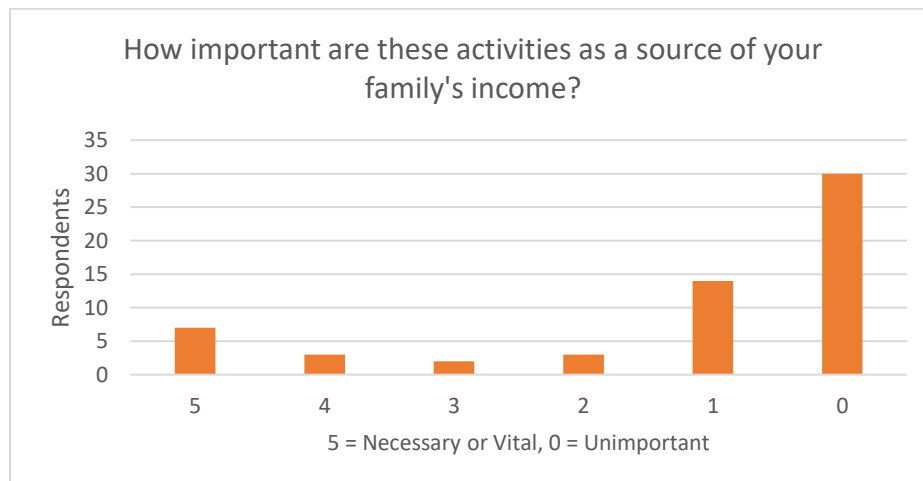
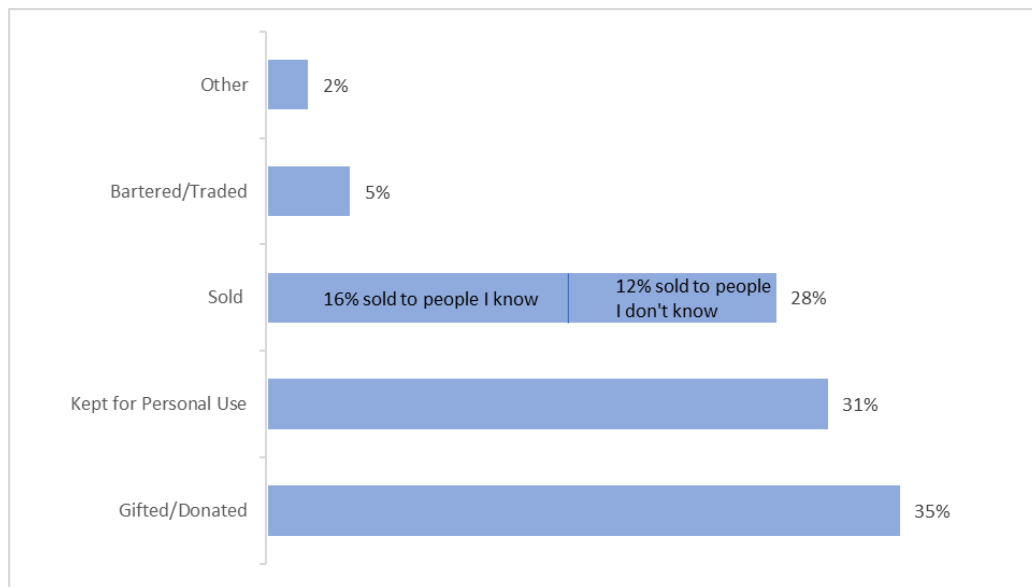


Chart 5 below asks respondents to identify how goods they may produce are distributed in the community. Many of these goods are offsetting expenses in their lives, or are donated and thus offsetting expense of others in their community. These questions highlight the role craft plays in supporting community needs, adding non-economic value and building resiliency that isn't traced through an economic lens.

Of the 28% of good sold, 16% was sold to people known to the maker, 12% to people unknown.

**CHART 5 ESTIMATES OF THE PERCENTAGE SHARED**



The next set of questions ask the respondents to report obstacles to their own participation and obstacles they perceive others may face in the community. Responses to this question could highlight opportunities for programmatic interventions designed to increase participation.

Interestingly, respondents ranked “time constraints” as their own top obstacle, but perceived that the “cost of materials, resources or equipment” was the top obstacle for others to participate in their activities.

CHART 6

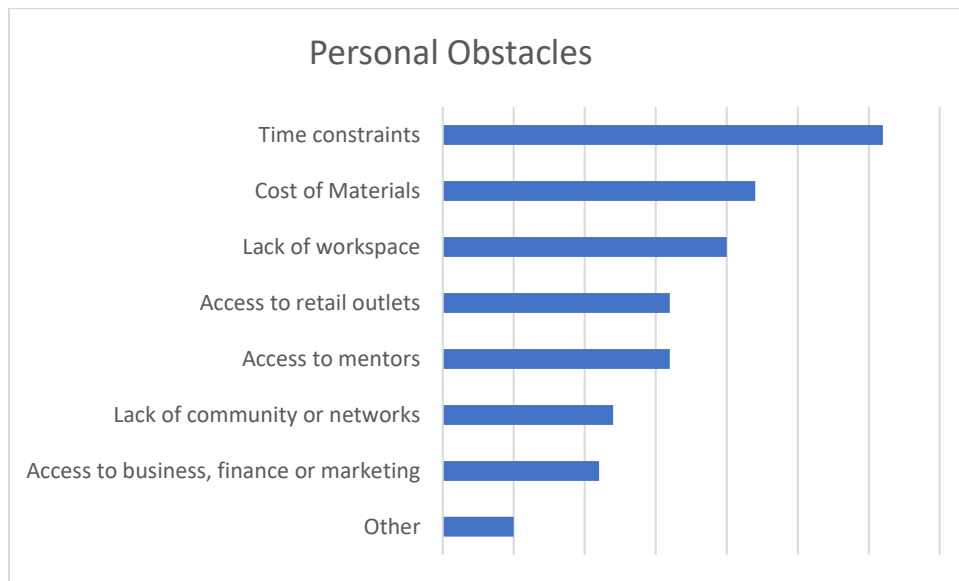


CHART 7

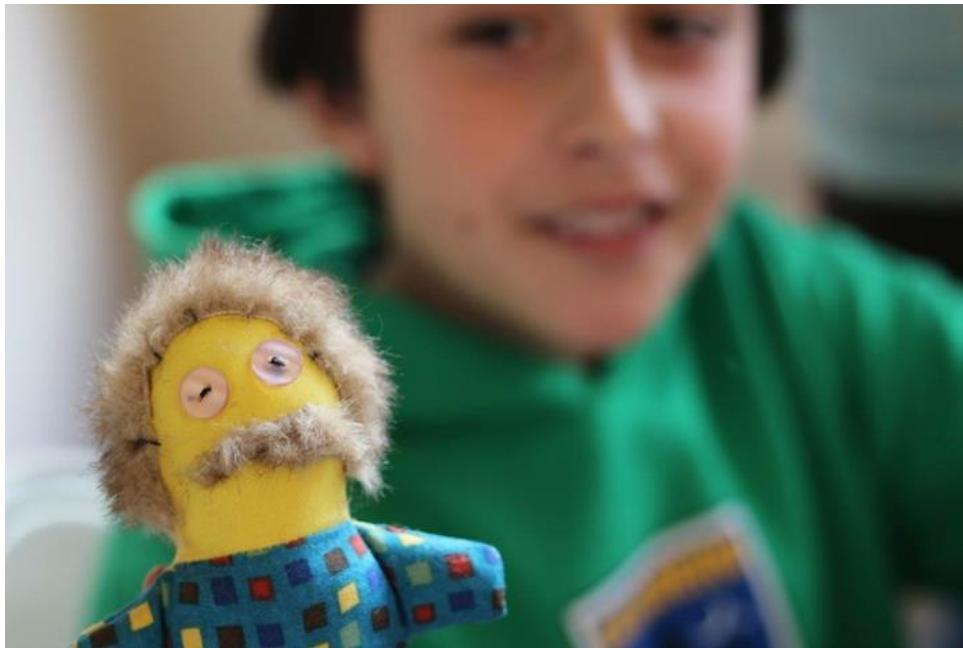


Following the above rankings, space was provided in the survey for respondents to describe in their own words benefits to increasing community participation to these activities. The two most important benefits mentioned by the respondents related to “community health and connection”, mentioned by 27% of respondents, and “personal connection with others”, mentioned by 21% of respondents. 13% described “concern about loss of knowledge, culture and tradition” and another 13% expressed an interest in more support for arts programs. Other topics mentioned in the open-ended responses included the importance of building skills, the positive impacts on personal mental health, the value of quality workmanship and the importance of community resilience.

Respondents were asked what kind of regional support would increase their participation in these activities. Table 4 below is a summary ranking their responses. Table 5 shows more detailed responses to the top responses.

**TABLE 4 – TYPES OF REGIONAL SUPPORT, RANKED RESPONSES**

Type of Support	Number of Favorable Responses
Dedicated facilities	25
Specific partnerships	20
Marketing opportunities	16
Specific grant funding programs	15
Retail opportunities	15
Governmental policies (local, state or federal)	9
Other	5



**TABLE 5 – DETAILED RESPONSES TO WHAT KIND OF REGIONAL SUPPORT WOULD INCREASE PARTICIPATION**

<b>Area of Regional Support</b>	<b>Summary of Responses</b>
Dedicated facilities:	Blacksmith shop
	Glass studio
	Woodshop
	Ceramic studio
	Weaving studio (accessible, no stairs)
	Space for community groups to gather
	Large workshop space
	Metal casting foundry
	Welding
	Business incubation space
	Music and dance performance, rehearsal and practice space
	More facilities like Arbutus in other areas
	Theater space
	Drop in, public studio space
	Access to shared resources like computers, printers, tools, project storage
	Community kitchen
	Workshops on tool safety and use
	Retail space
	Painting, drawing studio
	Museum to explore, preserve and share arts, culture and heritage
Specific partnerships:	Collaborations with area schools and colleges.
	Collaborations with community and senior centers
	Links with local business or facilities who need things made
	Businesses with surplus facility space.
	Assistance with purchasing or loaning tools
	Advertising partnerships
	Creating community networks, hubs for connecting across artists
	Apprenticeships, mentoring
	Retail outlets
	Banks, funding sources to assist with improving access to programs
	Collaboration with underserved communities
	Connected businesses, such as suppliers, materials providers, growers, etc.
	Build relationships with existing guilds
Grant funding:	Targeted to enable beginners to access tools and education.
	Help purchase supplies
	Support apprentice programs
	Meet basic needs of artists
Supportive local, state or federal policies:	Support for public art, sculpture parks
	Support for building light-industrial workshop spaces/studios

	Career development for artists, professional development and leadership training
	Increase educational requirements for art and history

Below is a summary of final thoughts or ideas offered by respondents.

- “Learning communities are important for access to mentors, hands-on help and sharing resources”
- “Increase access to arts by those effected by houselessness, incarceration, mental health and mental and physical disabilities”
- “Much more space is needed”
- “Sponsor juried competitions and exhibits”



## Survey Respondent Demographics

Twenty-four percent (14) of respondents identified as male, sixty-six percent (39) identifies as female, five percent (3) identified as non-conforming and five percent (3) did not reply to this question. Fifty-eight percent (34) of respondents identified as white. Three percent (2) identified as native American. Thirty-nine percent (23) did not identify a race or ethnicity.

CHART 8

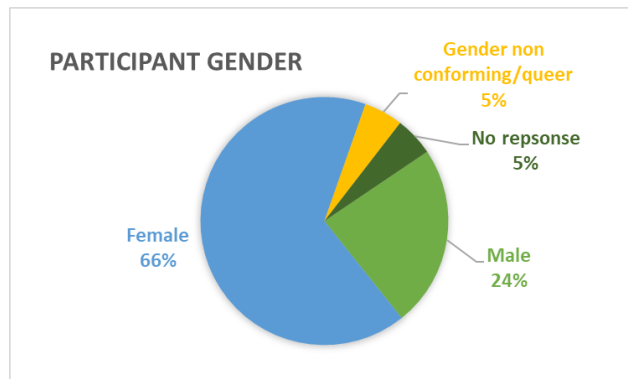


CHART 9

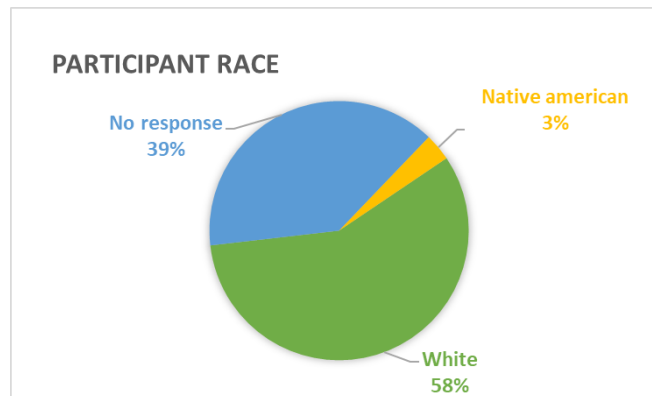


CHART 10

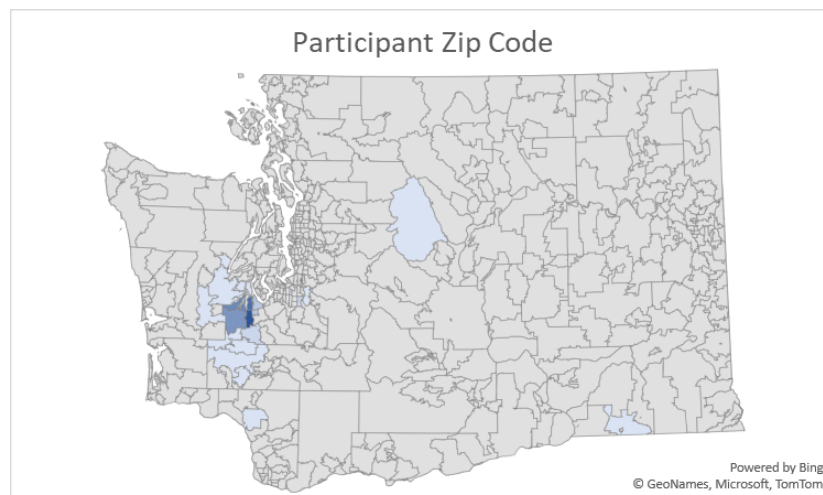
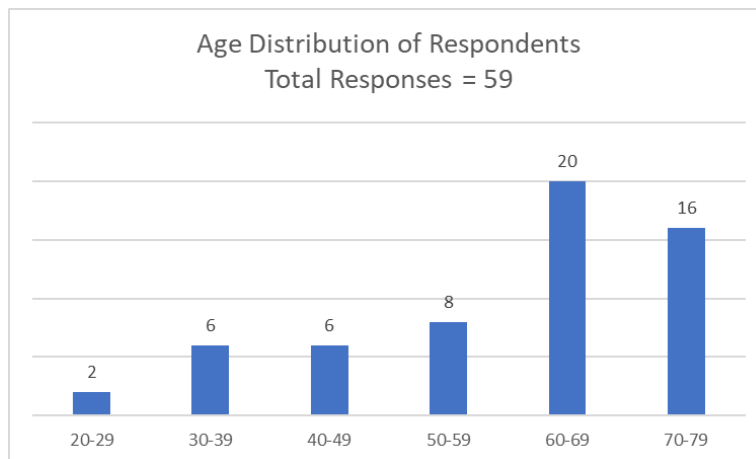




CHART 11



## Summary and Recommendations

This research offers a new way of looking at activities currently taking place in communities all around us which could enhance economic and social resiliency, while preserving and enhancing cultural heritage. The sample size of the survey was unfortunately too small to make definitive characterizations of these activities, however, there were strong, nearly unanimous responses revealing the deep personal significance of craft and heritage activities to the practitioners of these activities. The need for more access to workspace and more community partnerships to improve access and participation in these activities was also an important finding.

It is recommended to repeat this survey in the future, post COVID, with more focus on reaching a broad demographic.

