



Montpelier Senior Activity Center
FINAL REPORT ON
2019 ANNUAL SURVEY
September 15, 2019

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I. SURVEY OBJECTIVES AND PROCESS

The Montpelier Senior Activity Center (MSAC) is a division of the Community Services Department for the City of Montpelier, Vermont. MSAC membership is open to any person age fifty or older. Its mission is to "enhance the quality of life for older adults in the Montpelier area through opportunities that develop physical, mental, cultural, social and economic well-being in a welcoming, flexible environment."

With that mission in mind, the MSAC leadership initiated an annual survey process in the spring of 2019. Its purpose was to clarify needs and

"I moved to Montpelier as a stranger to the area. MSAC was recommended to me before I moved, so my first week here I registered and began taking classes immediately. I have made all my close friends through these classes, and look forward to them to see these friends. I have made so many other acquaintances that have enriched my life here."

interests of Montpelier area residents aged 50 or older, and to assess how well MSAC and its activities are responding to them. Are MSAC programs having a positive impact on their lives? How do they learn about the programs? How might MSAC improve its services? The survey was designed to collect both quantifiable and anecdotal information from older area residents.

"The growing senior population and the popularity of MSAC present challenges of how to expand and accommodate seniors."

This report highlights a few of the 406 written comments and summarizes the others. It presents statistical and other responses to survey questions, considers those findings and describes how MSAC will put them to use. For many survey questions, the report distinguishes the results for respondents age 75 or older from those for the overall survey population.

In May of 2019, MSAC enclosed a paper survey form in a membership renewal mailing to over 1,710 current and recent MSAC members. An electronic Survey Monkey version of

"I am in early stage of retirement and have not participated fully in MSAC. I hope to participate more as I transition more fully into retirement."

the form was available online and posted to the MSAC website. People were urged to use the electronic version instead of the paper form to reduce the hours of data entry needed to incorporate information from the paper forms into the survey data set.

MSAC accepted completed surveys through June 30.

It promoted early submissions by inviting members who responded by June 7 to take part in a raffle prize drawing held at the June 18, 2019 annual membership meeting.

II. PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS AS REPORTED ON THEIR SURVEYS

MSAC Participation Levels:

The survey was completed by 399 people, of whom 98.7% said they were current MSAC members. Only five said they were not members.

"I used to be more involved and expect I will be again, if ever my responsibilities and other interests slow down. I like the freedom to drop in when I'm in that area of town. The Center gives a comfortable feeling of 'coming home' when I do that."

How long have they been coming to MSAC or taking part in its activities?

	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
Never	2.5%	2.4%
Less than a year	7.6%	1.6%
1-5 years	51.4%	40.5%
6-10 years	22.2%	30.2%
More than 10 years	16.4%	25.4%

The survey invited the ten who chose "never" to clarify that answer. The largest number indicated a lack of time, but other replies indicated a lack of transportation or interest.

Then the survey asked "in general, how often do you come to MSAC?" Responses were:

.5% every day 25.6% once a week 16.7% less than once a month
48.0% 2-4 times a week 9.1% 1-3 times a month

The results among people age 75 or older did not vary dramatically from the above percentages for the overall survey, except that more than a third (34.1%) said they went to MSAC fewer than four times a month, compared to 25.8% for the overall survey.

Survey Respondent Demographic Characteristics:

<u>Age</u>	Years	Years
1.3%	50-54	26.5%
2.9%	55-59	17.1%
10.2%	60-64	6.6%
26.0%	65-69	9.4%
		70-74
		75-79
		80-84
		85 or older

"It's a really awesome community resource with a lot of participation by interesting and active members. I like that it accommodates a range of ages."

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (continued from page 2)

Gender 79.6% female 19.8% male .3% prefer to self-identify .3% prefer not to say
75.4% of respondents age 75 and older identified themselves as female, and 24.6% male.

Race/Ethnicity 97.4% White 0% Black or African-American .5% Native American
.3% Asian .5% Hispanic or Latino 1.8% Other

For the race/ethnicity question, people were asked to check all that apply. Percentages are based on the total number who did respond, disregarding the fourteen surveys leaving this question blank. While the above statistics appear to indicate a lack of diversity, they do not differ radically from available U.S. Census Bureau estimates for the Montpelier population.

"More evening classes would be helpful for those who work."

Housing

Financing: 84.1% own their homes 14.0% rent 0% homeless 1.9% other

<u>Occupancy:</u>	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
Live alone	39.2%	53.7%
Live with spouse/partner	51.8%	37.2%
Live with other family members	5.5%	3.3%
Live with people not related to them	3.4%	5.8%

Recent Vermont State Data Center demographics indicate that over a third of Montpelier residents age 65 or older were renters and 66% were homeowners, a much lower percentage than reported by survey respondents. The difference may be due to a third of the surveys being completed by people living in towns outside Montpelier City, rather than MSAC or its survey attracting more homeowners than renters.

<u>Annual Household Income</u>	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
\$0 - \$9,999	1.2%	.9%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	2.3%	2.8%
\$15,000 - \$19,999	2.9%	2.8%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	6.7%	9.3%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	7.3%	9.3%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	11.9%	15.7%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	18.3%	14.8%
\$75,000 or more	21.2%	17.6%
Prefer not to say	28.2%	26.9%

"Thanks, especially for the scholarships, without which I could not afford to take a single class, much less three!"

<u>Financial Security</u>	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
I can easily meet my expenses	40.4%	44.0%
I meet my expenses by following a budget	53.6%	53.4%
I struggle to meet my expenses	3.6%	1.7%
I can only meet my expenses with help from programs or others	2.2%	.9%
I do not meet my expenses	.3%	0%

In general, these income-related statistics from survey participants appear consistent with the available Vermont State Data Center information on Montpelier elders (*U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2012-2016 estimates*). They may not reflect the actual distribution of financial resources from lowest- to highest-income elders.

Town of Residence

Listed in order from most- to least-often checked (*indicates a MSAC-supporting town)

67.5%	Montpelier	2.2%	Worcester*	1.1%	Barre Town
10.0%	East Montpelier*	1.9%	Berlin*	1.1%	Moretown*
5.9%	Middlesex*	1.9%	Northfield	.8%	Plainfield
4.8%	Calais*	1.1%	Barre City	.3%	Marshfield
1.6%	Other (one each Brookfield, Hardwick, Hyde Park, Waitsfield; two Woodbury)				

These results are consistent with the ratio of MSAC members who live in Montpelier to those who live in its supporting towns.

"I take yoga in Worcester. As of yet I haven't availed myself of other classes/opportunities because I work full time. I'm sure when I retire I will use more services."

"MSAC has helped me create a new life for myself following the loss of my partner. It has helped me meet new friends and stay busy with fun and healthy activities and meals. It is an enormous asset to Montpelier and the surrounding towns."

III. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

MSAC uses several different methods to spread the word about its services, activities and events. To evaluate whether those marketing strategies are working – and to identify which ones may be more effective at reaching the target audience (Montpelier area residents age 50 or older) – the survey asked where people learn about MSAC or its programs.

"Publicity is good. Good to have a variety of ways that people can learn what's going on."

The table on the next page shows responses to a "check all that apply" question probing this topic. Percentages are based on the number who responded, disregarding those who left the question blank.

How do you learn about MSAC or its events, services or activities?

Marketing Technique	Overall Survey	Respondents Age 75+
newspaper – Times Argus	18.4%	27.3%
newspaper – The Bridge	16.4%	21.5%
newspaper – The World	11.8%	18.2%
Vermont Digger	2.3%	3.3%
word of mouth, friends, etc.	46.6%	42.2%
MSAC newsletter (paper edition)	35.6%	48.8%
MSAC newsletter (email edition)	54.0%	42.2%
Montpelier City website	10.2%	5.0%
MSAC office or instructor	20.7%	11.6%
Montpelier Programs & Events Guide	25.8%	20.7%
MSAC Facebook page	4.9%	1.7%
other social media (e.g., Facebook, Front Porch Forum)	15.6%	14.9%

The survey invited comments and suggestions regarding MSAC publicity. One person mentioned learning about activities from announcements written on the blackboard. Others made suggestions or commented on challenges associated with using some social media and other online resources.

"It has been helpful for you to put resources and services available in the community as part of the newsletter. I really feel it is a lifeline for me."

MSAC also wanted to learn more about member access to other communication tools, resulting in the following "yes" responses from survey participants:

Communication Tool	Overall Survey	Respondents Age 75+
Do you have a computer or other smart device?	96.0%	90.8%
Do you use the Internet?	95.7%	89.8%
Do you use social media?	55.6%	41.0%
Do you use Front Porch Forum?	79.1%	71.8%
Do you use email?	94.4%	86.6%

This kind of information from older area residents helps MSAC evaluate its promotional methods and adjust them accordingly. The comments/suggestions and data were shared with the Montpelier Community Service Department Communications & Development Coordinator.

IV. MSAC PROGRAMMING

MSAC typically offers more than a hundred hours weekly of classes and other activities. The table below shows responses to the survey question: "What was the focus of your MSAC activities/classes over the past year? Check all that apply."

Activity Focus	Overall Survey	Respondents Age 75+
arts, crafts	22.9%	11.0%
music, film studies	26.1%	27.1%
group presentation, discussion	20.5%	18.6%
health clinics, wellness events	6.9%	11.9%
physical fitness, movement*	63.5%	56.8%
swimming, water aerobics	8.5%	6.8%
discount to area fitness center	2.1%	.9%
committee work	3.5%	4.2%
other volunteering	14.7%	13.6%
social games (Scrabble, Mahjong, etc.)	5.9%	7.6%
tax assistance	9.1%	10.2%
FEAST meal	18.1%	18.6%
group trip	17.9%	19.5%
writing, poetry	11.5%	14.4%
foreign language	7.7%	6.8%
computer, technology skills	3.2%	5.1%
DVD library	8.5%	7.6%
book library	16.3%	17.0%
other	9.9%	11.0%

*41.0% of respondents age 80 or older checked physical fitness/movement.

"Other" activities cited included one-time events (e.g., annual rummage sale or specific workshops), meditation, pickleball (a Recreation Department program), computer access at the MSAC facility, and drop-in groups such as the Tuesday band and an evening writers group.

"Vibrant place for seniors, with such amazing volunteers. When I was young, I didn't imagine a senior center being this lively. So wonderful!"

"I would like to suggest that you think about planning a few trips that can accommodate people who have mobility issues. Perhaps outdoor trips where people can ride on a tram or something so that those of us who can't get around well could spend some time in nature."

Survey participants were not shy about accepting the invitation to make programming comments or suggestions. In fact, this topic generated 148 of the 406 remarks written on surveys.

Recommendations ran the gamut from physical activity (e.g., various dance types), to American Sign and foreign languages, to the arts, to health and nutrition, to teaching beginner chess and bridge, to programs on Vermont history. One participant suggested adding a sauna room to help members endure Vermont winters.

"MSAC programs are top-notch! I love and depend on the Gentle Yoga classes. So many others of interest. I have tried several."

"There should be more classes directed toward the younger senior center members or potential members. For instance, more strenuous fitness classes."

The anecdotal and statistical data generated by the survey were shared with the MSAC Program Committee which meets with the Director at least quarterly to evaluate proposed presentations, classes or workshops and

to scope out programming options for the upcoming season. Their persistent challenge is to build a schedule of programs that are affordable for both seniors and MSAC and for which the Center can find the space and instructors.

V. MSAC IMPRESSIONS AND OUTCOMES

So does MSAC live up to its mission to "enhance the quality of life for older adults"?

"I love the Center! I am writing poems, something I would never have done, and now, for four years has been a force in my life, with the consequence also of making new friends."

"I enjoy the intellectual stimulation of the classes. Also, it is good to socialize and talk with people with whom I have a lot of issues in common."

The annual survey probed this issue in two ways. First, it asked participants whether MSAC activities affected them in various ways. Those results are shown in a table on the next page. Then the survey sought opinions on various aspects of the Center and its operations.

Respondents could skip questions they chose not to answer or felt did not pertain to them. As with previous statistics in this report, the percentages shown in the following table are calculated based on the number of people who did answer the question, disregarding those who left the question blank.

"My only suggestion is maybe to offer some more workshops on caregiving, stress, support groups."

"Sometimes drop in just to enjoy the atmosphere. Used tables for a volunteer project I was doing. (It required space for sorting a lot of papers.) Sometimes bring items I think other members can use."

"I am astonished at the quality of the instructors for exercise and art classes I attend. I can't get away much because I work and care for elderly parents, but the short MSAC trips are perfect mini-vacations."

Because I began taking part in MSAC activities, I . . .	Overall Survey			Respondents Age 75+		
	Yes	No	No Change	Yes	No	No Change
Do more volunteer work	23.0%	19.6%	57.4%	26.3%	21.3%	52.5%
See friends more often, make new friends	75.4%	5.0%	19.6%	76.7%	5.8%	17.5%
Take better care of my health	55.8%	5.0%	39.2%	49.5%	5.5%	45.1%
Eat nutritious meals more often	15.9%	10.9%	73.2%	15.6%	9.1%	75.3%
Have more energy	36.2%	8.1%	55.7%	41.1%	7.8%	51.1%
Feel more contented or satisfied with life	61.6%	3.8%	34.7%	60.4%	3.3%	36.3%
Have more options for how to spend my time	77.9%	3.4%	18.7%	77.2%	3.3%	19.6%
Know where I can ask for advice or help	38.8%	8.4%	52.8%	44.7%	12.9%	42.4%
Feel more able to stay independent	23.0%	7.2%	69.8%	22.4%	7.9%	69.7%
Am learning new things	80.6%	3.8%	15.7%	73.6%	6.9%	19.5%
Get more physical exercise	65.1%	5.9%	29.0%	62.9%	8.2%	28.9%
Feel less isolated, more socially connected	61.8%	3.8%	34.4%	62.0%	1.1%	37.0%
Am learning more about services and benefits	38.7%	9.6%	51.7%	45.7%	12.3%	42.0%
Feel more confident about trying new things	39.2%	6.4%	54.4%	36.0%	9.3%	54.7%
Am more apt to take part in community events/activities	41.9%	7.1%	51.0%	36.3%	12.5%	51.3%

"Space for all class offerings and some chronically full classes seem to be a challenge, but you do a great job. Thank you!"

"I appreciate the open houses, especially when groups entertain, e.g., yoga demo or the ukulele group playing. Also could have Bone Builders demo for the benefit of others who don't know much about it."

"It would be hard to imagine my life without the senior center. It is the hub and community for the town's elders to be less isolated."

The survey probed satisfaction with some aspects of MSAC by asking participants if they agreed (yes or no) with certain statements, inviting them to leave blank a statement they considered not applicable (N/A) to them. However, the electronic version of the survey added a N/A checkbox. Therefore, the following table shows the results for each basic yes/no question, as well as the number of people who either skipped that question or said it was not applicable. For example, 98.9% of the people *who expressed an opinion* agreed that yes, overall the Center is clean and attractive, and 43 of the 399 surveys either left that question blank or said it was not applicable to them.

Do you agree with this statement about MSAC?	Overall Survey 399 total surveys			Respondents Age 75+ 126 total surveys		
	Yes	No	Number who said N/A or skipped question	Yes	No	Number who said N/A or skipped question
Overall, the Center is clean and attractive.	98.9%	1.1%	43	100%	0%	10
I feel welcome and comfortable at MSAC.	98.9%	1.1%	43	99.2%	.8%	7
Staff members respond to my needs or questions.	98.8%	1.2%	53	99.1%	.9%	13
Staff members are friendly and courteous.	98.9%	1.1%	45	100%	0%	10
Staff members are knowledgeable.	99.4%	.6%	64	100%	0%	17
I understand the benefits of MSAC membership.	97.9%	2.1%	69	97.2%	2.8%	17
I feel appreciated as a volunteer.	92.0%	8.0%	286	88.6%	11.4%	82
I like exercise and fitness programs offered.	96.7%	3.3%	126	92.7%	7.3%	44
I like health clinics and wellness events offered.	91.5%	8.5%	270	89.6%	10.4%	78
I like arts/writing/humanities classes offered.	94.3%	5.7%	205	89.1%	10.9%	71
I like other educational presentations/classes/events, offered	95.6%	4.4%	174	90.8%	9.2%	61
I like social activities offered.	90.1%	9.9%	268	83.3%	16.7%	84
I like the meals offered.	85.9%	14.1%	264	84.1%	15.9%	82
I like group trip opportunities offered.	96.0%	4.0%	199	93.0%	7.0%	55
I would recommend MSAC to a friend.	100%	0%	51	100%	0%	12

This section generated dozens of comments, with several saying the survey should have offered response options more flexible than yes and no. Remarks and recommendations spanned a range of topics. About half expressed compliments for MSAC and its staff. Several wanted the Center to serve more vegetarian meals. Some said activities are too expensive, or that they were not inclined to spend time at MSAC because the membership had outgrown the available space. Nine surveys mentioned the shortage of parking near the building.

"It's great! I like that you experiment with new classes. Parking obviously is much too limited."

VI. SURVEY WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS

The older population in the Montpelier area is growing, with a diverse array of wants and needs. The 2019 survey generated a wealth of information to help guide MSAC as it tries to satisfy those wants and needs.

"Sometimes people are a little too 'clubby' and exclusive. They forget to welcome and include new people."

"As we age, we develop a lot of physical and emotional issues. It would be great to have experts on these issues do presentations on how to recognize the issues and where to find help."

MSAC staff and volunteers compiled the survey data – statistics and written remarks – in order to report the study findings and direct information to appropriate parties. These results are applied in many ways:

- Marketing and communications data help MSAC and its Community Services Department partners to evaluate and strengthen their public information methods.
- Input regarding the building, staffing and administrative procedures helps MSAC strengthen its operations and management.
- Hearing from older residents about the programs/services they desire or use guides the MSAC staff and Program Committee in planning future events and activities.
- Experience gained by testing the 2019 survey questionnaire will help MSAC improve the annual survey form and process for future years.
- Survey data and comments provide valuable information to MSAC staff and Advisory Council members as they weigh the seemingly endless list of considerations entailed by effective senior center operations.
- The survey helps MSAC learn more about its strengths and weaknesses, and whether it is fulfilling its stated mission.

"I appreciate that MSAC management is open to suggestions and willing to try new programs, classes, trip destinations, etc. This openness is key to the Center remaining relevant and dynamic."

"I like that it is evolving and growing."