



Montpelier Senior Activity Center FINAL REPORT ON 2021 ANNUAL SURVEY

October 30, 2021

Table of Contents:

- I. Survey Objectives and Process Before and During Pandemic (*page 1*)
- II. Profile of Survey Respondents as Reported on Their Surveys (*page 3*)
- III. Marketing and Communications (*page 5*)
- IV. Pandemic-Specific Findings (*page 7*)
- V. MSAC Programming (*page 8*)
- VI. Impressions and Outcomes (*page 10*)
- VII. Survey Wrap-up and Next Steps (*page 11*)

I. SURVEY OBJECTIVES AND PROCESS BEFORE AND DURING PANDEMIC

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 anyone 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, MSAC initiated an annual survey process in the spring of 2019. Its purpose was to clarify needs and interests of Montpelier area residents aged 50 or older, and to assess how well

"MSAC is a wonderful, vibrant, and important asset to our community. There are so many options available to engage physically, mentally and socially. MSAC rocks!"

MSAC is responding to them. Do MSAC programs have a positive impact on their lives? How do they learn about the programs? How might MSAC improve its operations?

The survey was designed to collect quantifiable and anecdotal information. In 2019, MSAC enclosed a paper copy of the survey form in its May membership renewal mailing to current and recent MSAC members. An electronic Survey Monkey version of the form was available online and posted to the MSAC website. People were urged to choose the electronic instead of paper version of the survey to reduce the hours of data entry needed to incorporate information from paper forms into the survey data set.

"I am grateful that MSAC followed strict guidelines during the pandemic. Thank you for looking out for the wellness of staff and your members."

Onset of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) in March of 2020 forced MSAC to close its doors and radically alter its programming to protect the health of its members, visitors and staff. The annual survey was among dozens of activities forfeited that year. That spring, the Center's newsletters advised that MSAC was alive and well but would not collect the annual member dues for the time being.

MSAC cancelled or suspended dozens of services. With the building shuttered, MSAC stopped serving its popular FEAST meals in a congregate setting in the spring of 2020. However, it expanded home-delivered frozen meal services and pivoted to serving prepared hot meals "curbside" outside the facility twice a week. Many MSAC instructors independently began to offer private classes online. A remote learning model allowed participants with access to appropriate electronic devices to use Zoom or other video platforms to take part in classes from home. That fall, MSAC began offering its own classes again, including some in-person classes that ran five weeks before being cancelled due to a surge in COVID cases.

"I'm SO grateful MSAC was able to offer classes virtually. It has been a lifesaver during the pandemic. Although I've missed the in-person contact, I've really appreciated the ease of taking yoga and bone builders without leaving my house, especially during the winter."

As the pandemic dragged on from quarter to quarter, MSAC followed City and State guidance in judging if, when, and how it could offer programs. The chronic shifting of Vermont's COVID status required MSAC to be nimble, making difficult decisions that could or had to change with little notice. Should the building remain closed? Should MSAC require facemasks? Should it restrict access to vaccinated people? How

"welcoming" would MSAC feel with such policies?

"May we all survive the challenges of this past year and learn positive lessons from the experience."

Older Vermonters tended to stop in-person interactions with others, putting distance between themselves and potential sources of viral contagion.

The loss of revenues from member dues, rental income, fundraising events and class fees pinched

MSAC's budget. In May of 2021, a mailing to about 1600 current and former MSAC participants urged them to complete the electronic version of the survey but, unlike 2019, did not enclose a paper copy of the survey form. MSAC promoted early submissions and Annual Meeting attendance by inviting those who returned the survey by June 15 to take part in a raffle prize drawing at the June 22, 2021 annual membership meeting. With only 105 submissions by mid-June, MSAC extended the survey deadline to July 30 and enclosed the survey in its early July mailing to about 250 members who receive the MSAC newsletter on paper. This step expanded survey participation to 174 respondents, a number still less than half the size of the 2019 survey response. It also may have skewed statistics a bit toward those less inclined to use electronic devices.

The pandemic –the impact COVID had on MSAC and its participants' lives – influenced the design of the 2021 survey and how MSAC participants did or did not respond to it.

This report highlights a few of the 160 written comments and summarizes others. It presents statistical and other responses to survey questions, considers those findings and describes how MSAC will put them to use. For some survey questions, the report distinguishes the results for respondents age 75 or older from those for the overall survey population. Some sets of percentages may not total 100% due to decimal rounding.

II. PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS AS REPORTED ON THEIR SURVEYS

MSAC Participation Levels:

The survey was completed by 174 people, of whom 95.4% said they were current MSAC members. Two were not sure, likely due to COVID-triggered changes in membership renewal procedures. Only three said they were not members.

How long have they been taking part in MSAC activities?

	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
Never	4.1%	0%
Less than a year	3.5%	1.5%
1-5 years	32.0%	14.9%
6-10 years	36.6%	38.8%
More than 10 years	23.9%	44.8%

The survey invited the seven who chose "never" to clarify their answer. Only three responded, one citing a lack of interest and the other two describing a lack of time.

When the survey measured the impact of the pandemic on participation frequency, the response rates for people aged 75 or older were similar to those for the overall survey.

About how often did you take part in MSAC activities?		
	<u>Before</u> COVID closed MSAC in March of 2020	<u>Since</u> March of 2020
every day	1.8%	.6%
2-4 times/week	61.0%	43.2%
once a week	14.7%	11.7%
1-3 times a month	5.5%	4.9%
less than once a month	7.9%	39.5%
was not taking part back then	9.2%	n/a

Survey Respondent Demographic Characteristics:

	Years	Years
<u>Age</u>	1.2% 50-54	33.7% 70-74
	3.5% 55-59	20.4% 75-79
	3.5% 60-64	10.5% 80-84
	18.0% 65-69	9.3% 85 or older

Nearly 74% of the 2021 survey respondents said they were age 70 or older, compared to less than 60% for the 2019 survey. This finding may have been affected by the 2021 survey process – the only members sent paper survey forms were those who receive paper MSAC newsletters in the mail and may be less inclined to rely on electronic media.

"Even though I have not taken an active role in the Center, I feel it is important for you to know our written newsletter is what keeps me informed. Being a family caregiver can be very isolating. Your newsletter is how I get most of my information."

Gender 88.4% female 9.9% male .6% non-binary/other
 1.2% prefer to self-identify 0% prefer not to say

Race/Ethnicity 95.4% White .6% Black or African-American 0% Hispanic or Latino
 2.3% Native American .6% Asian 2.3% Other 1.2% Prefer not to say

For the race/ethnicity question, the survey asked respondents to check all that apply, and nobody checked more than one. While the resulting statistics suggest a lack of diversity, they do not differ radically from available U.S. Census Bureau estimates for Montpelier's population (2020 Census data are not yet available). Montpelier City leaders have placed increased priority on equity and inclusion.

"Be more welcoming to low income and BIPOC seniors."

Housing

Financing: 82.5% own their homes 15.2% rent 0% homeless 2.3% other

Occupancy:	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
Live alone	44.8%	53.6%
Live with spouse/partner	47.1%	39.1%
Live with other family members	5.2%	2.9%
Live with people not related to them	4.7%	4.4%

The housing profile generated by the 2021 survey may be influenced by a quarter of the surveys being completed by residents of communities outside Montpelier City.

Income

Annual Household Income	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
\$0 - \$9,999	1.2%	1.5%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	7.8%	7.6%
\$15,000 - \$19,999	3.0%	1.5%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	10.2%	16.7%
\$30,000 - \$49,999	13.2%	12.1%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	18.0%	18.2%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	12.6%	13.6%
\$100,000 or more	6.6%	1.5%
Prefer not to say	27.5%	27.3%

<u>Financial Security</u>	<u>Overall Survey</u>	<u>Respondents Age 75+</u>
I can easily meet my expenses	56.5%	59.4%
I meet my expenses by following a budget	34.1%	33.3%
I struggle to meet my expenses	5.3%	2.9%
I can only meet my expenses with help from programs or others	2.9%	4.4%
I do not meet my expenses	1.2%	0%

"Did the pandemic change your housing or financial situation?"

7.6% yes 10.5% somewhat 82.0% no 0% not sure

Those results may reflect the less volatile living circumstances experienced by older Vermonters. The income profile based on survey responses 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 an MSAC-supporting town)

75.3%	Montpelier	1.8%	Worcester*	.6%	Barre Town
9.0%	East Montpelier*	1.8%	Plainfield	.6%	Moretown*
5.4%	Berlin*	1.2%	Calais*	.6%	Northfield
3.6%	Middlesex*				

When the 2021 survey was conducted, about 70% of the MSAC members were Montpelier City residents.

"I have been taking Bone Builders class via Zoom and it turns out that I really prefer it to coming to town. It is enjoyable to see people and be in the group, but I have realized it saves a lot of time not having to drive to town and search for parking. Plus not having to clean the snow off the car in winter and drive on the back roads. I can even do the morning class on zoom in my PJ's!"

III. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

MSAC uses different methods to spread the word about its services, activities and events. To evaluate whether those marketing strategies are working – and to identify which

"Add 'BIPOC friendly, welcoming space' and see what happens!"

"Some stories in the Bridge about the great activities to let people know the Senior Center is more than a group of old ladies sitting around crocheting and eating chicken soup."

ones may be more effective at reaching the target audience (area residents age 50 or older) – the survey asked where people learn about MSAC or its programs. The table on the next page shows responses to a "check all that apply" question probing that topic.

"I love MSAC and appreciate how well you communicate with the membership. I also appreciate how difficult this past year has been for the staff."

The survey invited suggestions regarding MSAC publicity. One respondent said they did not know that MSAC had a Facebook page. Another who noted surprise that many older people are unfamiliar with what MSAC offers suggested more MSAC news in the local press.

"Post more events, classes, etc. on Front Porch Forum. I believe it's the dominant way in which Montpelier residents (and perhaps residents of other towns) find out about what's happening in town."

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

Marketing Technique	Overall Survey	Respondents Age 75+
newspaper – Times Argus	19.1%	23.5%
newspaper – The Bridge	21.4%	22.1%
newspaper – The World	15.0%	11.8%
word of mouth, friends, etc.	37.0%	32.4%
MSAC newsletter (paper edition)	40.5%	50.0%
MSAC newsletter (email edition)	54.3%	48.5%
MSAC page on Montpelier City website	12.1%	7.4%
MSAC office or instructor	20.2%	20.6%
Montpelier Programs & Events Guide	26.6%	16.2%
MSAC Facebook page	4.1%	1.5%
other social media (e.g., Front Porch Forum, Facebook, Twitter)	9.8%	7.4%

"Helpful staff. I appreciate a person, not a recording, answering the phone."

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?	95.4%	94.1%
Do you use the Internet?	95.0%	93.8%
Do you use social media? (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)	50.3%	44.6%
Do you use Front Porch Forum?	83.8%	77.6%
Do you use email?	95.2%	92.5%

When the eight respondents saying they do not have a computer or smart device were asked if they want one, four said no and the other four were not sure.

Fourteen surveys skipped the question asking if they use the Internet. Only one of the eight who answered no said they were not interested. No respondent checked that Internet service was unavailable where they live. Three said they do not know how to use the Internet. Two cited lack of access to a computer or smart device, and the remaining two checked the nonspecific "other" option as their reason.

The respondents who reported not using tools such as email or the Internet were generally the same set of people who shared a lack of computer or smart device. Most (96.2%) of the survey respondents reported that Front Porch Forum is available in their community.

IV. PANDEMIC-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

MSAC carefully adhered to City and State policies for reopening Vermont senior centers, though it was painful to stifle MSAC's normally lively operations. It is not easy to shield members from potential contagion when uncertainty about the risk persuades many people to hesitate to wear facemasks or to get the COVID vaccine. Given that MSAC hoped to offer its Annual Meeting or other activities inside, the survey posed the following question:

"Thank you for being responsible and keeping us safe and as connected as possible in the past 15 months."

"We know guidelines have been changing. In the near future, if MSAC offers an indoor, in-person activity on a subject or with people that interest you AND where participants are safely distanced AND must wear a mask, would you want to attend?"

41.5% yes 36.8% no 18.3% doubtful 3.5% no

Asked if they had gotten at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, 98.2% answered yes. The three (1.2%) who answered no said they did not plan to get the vaccine in the future. Ten skipped the question.

"Feeling lucky to be alive, and appreciating all that life offers: nature, people, and the pleasures of learning all kinds of things."

A reminder about the role of contact tracing in identifying people who may have been exposed to COVID, the survey also asked the following: "The Vermont Health Department recommends that we keep a daily list of people with whom we are in "close contact" (less than six feet apart for 15 minutes or longer). Do you already do this?" 26.6% of the survey participants reported they had adopted that practice.

Facility closure due to COVID required MSAC to identify creative ways to continue offering programs without compromising participant safety. Some were conducted at outdoor venues such as the recreation area pavilion and the Statehouse lawn. Finding gathering spaces large enough allow protective "social distancing" between participants was difficult, but instructors learned to offer many classes remotely. The survey included the following three questions seeking feedback on this technique. Responses to the last two questions from people age 75+ were similar to those for the overall survey:

Over the past year, have you used Zoom or other video platforms to take part in MSAC activities remotely? 73.5% yes 26.5% no

Fewer respondents age 75+ (64%) answered yes to that question, not surprising since older elders appear less likely to have the needed resources or expertise. Nearly 87% of the survey respondents said they would like MSAC to continue offering the option to meet remotely, even after the Center can return to in-person programming. The survey also probed interest in the related training or equipment:

Would you like to learn how to use Zoom or other video platforms, or how to use them better? 33.5% yes 44.3% no 22.2% not sure

Do you need the equipment to use Zoom or other video platforms? 5.0% yes 86.3% no 8.7% not sure

V. MSAC PROGRAMMING

MSAC wants to know what types of programming interest its members. Before COVID struck, the Center typically averaged 140 hours weekly of classes and other activities. The table below shows responses to the question: "Before and during the pandemic, what was the focus of your MSAC activities or classes? Check all that apply."

Activity Focus	Overall Survey	Respondents Age 75+
arts, crafts	26.5%	26.9%
music or film	30.1%	40.3%
group presentation, discussion	38.0%	43.3%
book discussion group	6.0%	9.0%
health clinics, wellness events	20.5%	17.9%
physical fitness, movement	77.7%	74.6%
discount to area fitness/dance facility	9.6%	1.5%
Village services/MSAC At Home	3.6%	4.5%
MSAC committee work	9.0%	6.0%
other volunteering for MSAC	19.9%	19.4%
tax assistance	10.2%	14.9%
social games (Scrabble, Mahjong, etc.)	8.4%	10.5%
outdoor drop-in groups	12.1%	10.5%
FEAST meals curbside or in facility	30.1%	37.3%
FEAST meals home-delivered	6.6%	10.5%
group trips	30.7%	35.8%
writing, poetry	17.5%	16.4%
foreign language	11.5%	16.4%
technology skills	14.5%	20.9%
library (books or DVDs)	21.1%	25.4%
other	1.8%	0%

Survey participants accepted the invitation to make programming comments or suggestions. This topic generated 70 of the 159 comments added to surveys – remarks and suggestions that are copied to members of the MSAC Advisory Council and Program Committee. They ranged from suggesting an organic gardening seminar, to salsa dance lessons, to missing the MSAC rummage sale and in-person guitar classes.

"I am interested in MSAC At Home as I anticipate making Montpelier my home over the long term. Thanks for the help with technology and for all you have done to continue needed services over the pandemic."

"Going forward, we need to offer hybrid classes, some folks at the center and some taking them from home. We will be able to accommodate more people in each class or activity."

VI. MSAC IMPRESSIONS AND OUTCOMES

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

One way the survey explored this issue was to ask respondents how their involvement in MSAC may have influenced their lives, inviting them to check all that applied.

Because I began taking part in MSAC activities, I ...	Overall Survey	Respondents Age 75+
Volunteered to help with MSAC projects (committees, events, FEAST, mailings, etc.)	28.9%	23.5%
Saw friends more often, made new friends	70.5%	75.0%
Take better care of my health	45.8%	39.7%
Have more chances to eat nutritious meals	11.5%	11.8%
Have more energy	19.9%	13.2%
Feel more contented or satisfied with life	43.4%	42.6%
Have more options for how to spend my time	59.0%	57.4%
Know where I can ask for advice or help	21.1%	23.5%
Feel more able to stay independent	16.9%	16.2%
Am learning new things	56.7%	51.5%
Get more physical exercise	71.1%	70.6%
Feel less isolated, more socially connected	45.8%	42.6%
Can learn more about services and benefits	21.7%	20.6%
Feel more confident about trying new things	19.3%	11.8%
Am more likely to take part in community events/activities	28.9%	23.5%

The pandemic seems to have influenced the results reflected above. For example, more than 36% of the 2019 survey respondents reported that MSAC participation gave them more energy, compared to less than 20% in 2021, and among respondents age 75+, this statistic plummeted

from 41% to 13%. Another significant change likely influenced by COVID was that only 19.3% said MSAC made them feel more confident about trying new things in 2021, compared to over 39% in 2019. This same statistic dropped from 36% to less than 12%

"I look forward to trips being resumed."

among survey respondents who were age 75 or older.

"It really has helped to have structure to each week and keep physically active and see people socially."

Then the survey sought opinions on various aspects of the Center and its operations. It asked respondents to rate how well four statements match their impressions of MSAC, on a scale from 0 (never) to 1 (sometimes) to 2 (often) to 3 (usually) to 4 (always). The small volume of surveys responding to this section (168 total) did not warrant breaking out the results by each of the five ratings, but did allow these averages to be calculated:

Aspects of MSAC, scored on scale from 0 to 4	Average Score
MSAC makes me feel welcome and comfortable	3.5
Staff members are responsive to my needs or questions	3.7
I understand the MSAC membership benefits	3.4
I would recommend MSAC to a friend	3.8

The median score for all four questions was four because "always" was the rating in well over half of the surveys for each of the four aspects. The "always" scores ranged upward from 57.5% saying they understand the MSAC benefits to 87.5% saying they would recommend MSAC to a friend.

The survey also probed interest in MSAC's annual membership meeting. This June event that mixed business with socializing did not occur in 2020 due to the pandemic. MSAC decided to hold a June 2021 hybrid meeting where members could attend remotely or, in limited numbers, in person at the facility. The survey provided the following feedback:

Have you attended an MSAC annual meeting before?

28.6% yes 62.9% no 3.6% not sure

Would you attend if you were available?

28.7% probably 35.9% maybe 35.3% not likely

In general, what time of day would a 60-90 minute Annual Meeting work best for you next year?

21.6% before lunch 53.0% early afternoon
 11.9% late afternoon 13.4% early evening (before 8 pm)

A strong majority (58%) of those who said they "probably" would attend an annual meeting if available chose early afternoon as the time best suited to their schedule.

"I have missed the social connections that MSAC provides through classes, lunches and events. I have much to be grateful for! Being fully vaccinated is one of them."

"I stopped going because parking is too hard to get there."

"I can't wait to get back. I am all Zoomed out!"

VII. SURVEY WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS

The survey invited people to express their wishes, hopes or lessons learned during the pandemic. Their responses were plentiful, thoughtful, interesting and moving.

"Thanks for being there and offering services and classes even during the pandemic. It makes a huge positive difference in our lives."

"I think we've all brought who and what's really important close to our hearts and realized some things we may have been carrying became too heavy a load and let them go. I hope we all experience and lead in kindness and respect."

The anecdotal and statistical survey data generated are provided to the MSAC Advisory Council members, as well as to the Program Committee, which meets quarterly with the Director

to evaluate proposed presentations, classes or workshops, and to scope out programming options for the upcoming season. Their 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, equipment and instructors.

"Years ago, long before the invention of personal computers, I read a futuristic science fiction story about the exclusive and universal usage for human contact and communication through what today is called the Internet. Like today, people were taking courses, attending seminars and socializing that way. The reason was that what we now call global warming had made our atmosphere so toxic, contagious and impossible to breathe that everyone had to be isolated as individuals in cleansing air-filtered underground residences. So it is with some trepidation that I checked that I'd be interested in continuing Zoom meetings after the pandemic ends."

The older population in the Montpelier area is growing, with a diverse array of wants and needs. The 2021 survey generated information to help guide MSAC as it tries to satisfy those wants and needs.

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:

"I would like to see plenty of varied options and many activities. Is it possible to project future needs and propose plans to meet those needs in the future?"

- Marketing and communications data help MSAC and its Community Services Department partners to evaluate and strengthen their promotional methods and materials.

- Input regarding the building, staffing and administrative procedures helps MSAC strengthen its operations and management (e.g., comments that parallel parking spaces are a challenge or that remote video sessions can be difficult to hear).

"We can do this, i.e., get through it with dedication, innovation, diligence and good spirits, as MSAC has."

"Lessons learned is that even the not-huge amount of involvement I have in my various activities (the majority goes to my garden) is crucial to my health, physical, mental and spiritual. And movement is the key. MSAC is very valuable to me, and I know to many other seniors."

- Hearing from older residents about the services they use or desire guides MSAC in planning future events and activities. One survey suggested that the Center maintain a list of people who provide services for pay, such as housekeepers. Another asked MSAC to research a source to help seniors prepare a simple will at little or no cost. The array of

suggestions was diverse – more services for people with disabilities, classes focused on slower-paced physical activity, more programs aimed at younger seniors, services targeting disease prevention, a bicycle maintenance skills workshop, a class in jazz or bluegrass music appreciation, adding opportunities to learn about or discuss current events, and many more.

- Experience gained in conducting the 2021 survey will better prepare MSAC to update its survey form and process in the future, hopefully without still being in the midst of a pandemic. This report is timely as a new director came onboard recently to help guide MSAC into the future.

The data and comments generated by the survey provide valuable information to members of the MSAC staff, Advisory Council and other committees as they weigh the seemingly endless list of considerations entailed by effective senior center operations. The survey helps the Montpelier Senior Activity Center learn more about its strengths and weaknesses, and whether it is fulfilling its stated mission.

"We are all starting from a new beginning. That is exciting!"