

FEBRUARY 4TH, 2025



GREATER MADISON MUSIC CITY

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP

**DATA SUMMARY AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

INTRODUCTION

Greater Madison Music City (GMMC) is a collective impact initiative composed of artists, promoters, venues, educators, music production companies, city and county staff, nonprofit organizations, and music supporters. Collective impact is an intentional, comprehensive approach that brings together diverse aspects of the music ecosystem in the Greater Madison Area so that they can work together toward equitable change. Through these relationships, GMMC delivers solutions to protect, support, and preserve the music community, using the power of music to create a more inclusive and diverse landscape.

As part of its work to meet this vision, GMMC hired the global consultancy company, Sound Diplomacy to research and recommend ways that the Greater Madison area could grow into a more culturally diverse and financially robust music ecosystem that supports local artists, businesses, non profit organizations, and fan base. The Sound Diplomacy Report identified five priority areas to help the Greater Madison area move toward its vision. These five areas are:



After the release of the Sound Diplomacy report and the identification of the five priority areas, GMMC moved forward to vet these priority areas with the local community. GMMC hired **EQT By Design (EQT)** in spring 2024 to facilitate a community feedback process from a diverse group of stakeholders in Madison and Dane County.

MUSIC IN MADISON

GMMC and EQT By Design are committed to creating an equitable music ecosystem, and to that effect, engaging diverse voices from the community as part of this process. The recognition and work to create an equitable music ecosystem in Madison has existed for decades. For example 2018, a report by the City of Madison Task Force on Equity in Music in Entertainment was published. The report highlights the discriminatory practices and bias against Hip-Hop. “For a myriad of reasons, musicians and entertainers of color, especially within the community of Hip-Hop, do not have equal access to performance opportunities venues in Madison at licensed, commercial venues such as bars and nightclubs, and publicly accessible venues such as parks, block parties and festivals. This lack of equity leads to both artists and businesses missing financial opportunities, businesses losing patrons of color, and the City of Madison losing citizens of color.”

The Sound Diplomacy report from 2022 reflects similar findings related to representation in the Greater Madison’s music ecosystem with “the ‘artistic activities’ segment [at] 15.8% self-declared Asians and 10% Black/African American...and 92.2% of managers being White, 1.9% Black/African American, 3.9% Asian and 1.7% from other races.”

WORDS FROM THE COMMUNITY

EQT, during its other community engagement projects, has heard from citizens about their needs and interest about music in the Greater Madison Community.



I imagine a much more dynamic space, filled with **vibrant art and interesting music, hip-hop, funk, and other music** that is part of our conversation as older people too.

-OLDER ADULTS SERVICES ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

More social places not necessarily with alcohol, cool coffee/ tea shops with **jazz/ music (live) club, music and dance clubs**

-VANDEWALLE AND ASSOCIATES-OSCAR MAYER STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT PROJECT

PROCESS

GMMC and EQT designed a community engagement and input process that involved focus group sessions and a survey. Community stakeholders identified included artists, music related businesses and non profits, and local supporters of music. The intention from the outset was to engage as many stakeholders as possible from the BIPOC community.

Outreach to stakeholders involved providing flyers and focus group sign up opportunities at Madison area music events, through social media, and email.

A total of four focus groups were conducted between September and October 2024. One focus group was in person and the others virtual. Each focus group consisted of a diverse group of individuals representing different roles in the music ecosystem -artists, venue owners, producers, music non profits, and music supporters. The total number of focus group participants was 15.

The four focus groups were followed by a survey emailed to individuals who had expressed interest in the focus groups but could not attend, and also sent to additional contacts through GMMC and EQT networks. The total number of completed surveys was 16.

The questions asked in the focus groups and in the survey were the same:

- 1. Self Introductions - share your name, role in the music ecosystem and what has been your experience with the music scene in Madison?**
- 2. What hopes do you have for the music scene in the Madison/Dane County area?**
- 3. How do the 5 priorities of the Sound Diplomacy report align with your perspective?**
- 4. How and in what ways do you want GMMC to help support this work?**
- 5. In what ways do you want to engage in creating and maintaining an equitable and robust ecosystem?**

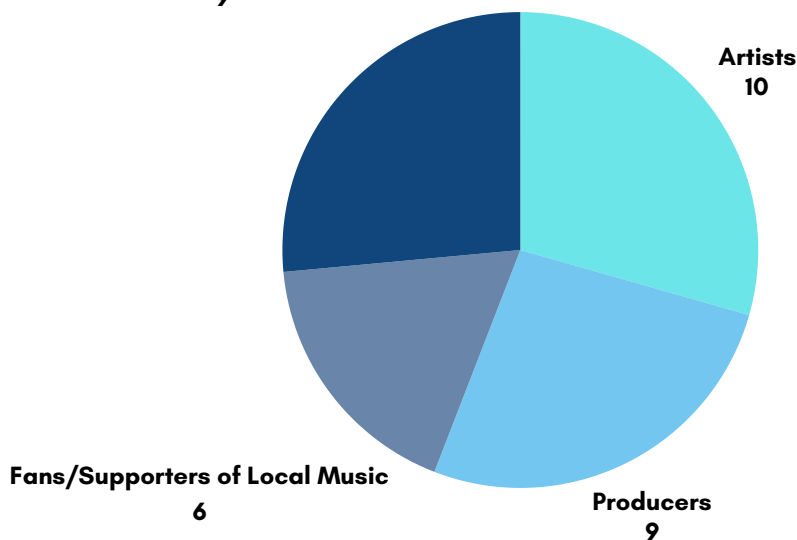
DATA HIGHLIGHTS AND SUMMARY

The demographic breakdown of focus group and survey participants are found below. It is important to note that some participants play more than one role in the music ecosystem. Additionally, participants could choose more than one racial category.

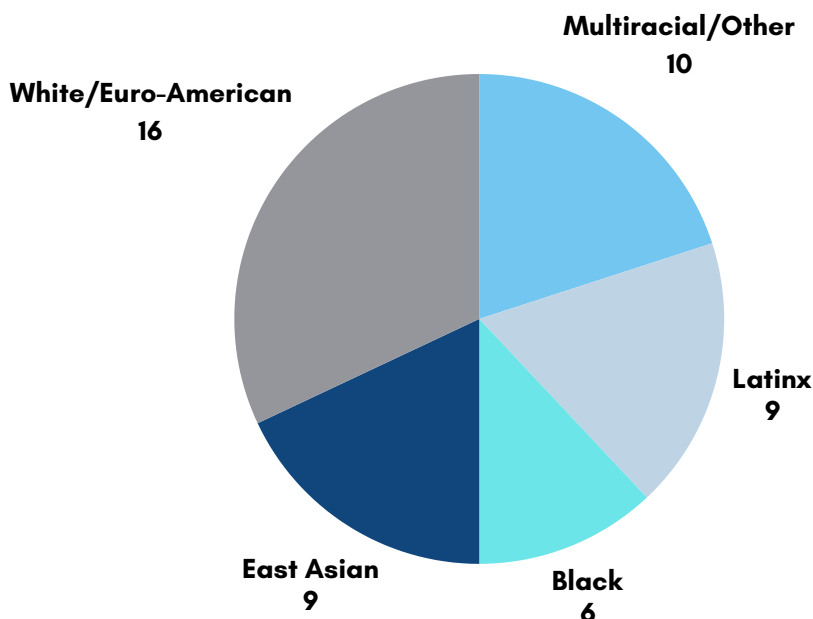
31 TOTAL RESPONDENTS

ROLE IN MUSIC ECOSYSTEM

Music Related Activities, Organizations,
9



RACIAL REPRESENTATION



KEY FINDINGS

#1: FULL SUPPORT OF THE 5 PRIORITIES

There was unanimous agreement from **ALL** participants that **ALL 5 priorities** identified in the Sound Diplomacy report are important in developing a more equitable and robust ecosystem in the Greater Madison area. The only change suggested was to add an additional priority of funding.

“Those priorities sound very well thought out and equitable.” -(Business)

“These priorities are in line with my own. The priorities listed are solid steps to nourish a music culture.” -(Artist, Supporter)

“The priorities outlined in the Sound Diplomacy report align closely with my vision for the music scene in Madison.” -(Artist, Nonprofit, Supporter)

“These priorities reflect a shared vision for building a thriving, inclusive music scene in Madison that values diversity, supports its artists, and creates lasting cultural impact.” -(Artist)

#2: ADDING FUNDING AS AN ADDITIONAL PRIORITY

Participants highlighted the need for funding from both the public, philanthropic, and private sector to achieve a shift in the music ecosystem. It is challenging for new and established small business owners, emerging artists, and small and well established music non profits to receive or generate adequate funding.

Specific suggestions include:

- Use of City of Madison room tax as annual support in the development of an equitable and robust music ecosystem
- Partnering with local businesses to support music events

*“**Funding and fundraising.** A key tool and strategy for success. This will also mean arts advocacy at the state level.”- (Supporter)*

“[I don’t see changing a priority] but none of this can happen without funding!” -(Nonprofit)

*“**...Economic Stimulus Package for the Arts in Madison**” -(Nonprofit)*

#3: VALUING AND SUPPORTING LOCAL ARTISTS

Based on data from the focus groups, it is critical that the Greater Madison community shifts its values to more strongly support local talent, along with national artists. A significant shift in the mindset, values, and narratives that recognizes the quality of local artists is vital.

Specific suggestions from participants to support this key finding:

- Build understanding within the community of the high quality of talent that exists in the Greater Madison area through joint marketing
- Find ways to tap into university and college students in the area
- Help local artists build the skills needed to develop and expand local, fan support
- Collaborate with local businesses in sponsoring music events

*“Recognizing Madison as a **music city with strong support networks, education, and outreach programs** would be a transformative step. It would encourage both artists and supporters to see our local music scene as a sustainable industry with real potential.”*

-(Artist, Business)

“Young [artists] who want to make a living shouldn’t have to leave Madison in order to make a living” - (Artist)

#4: VALUING AND SUPPORTING BIPOC AND WOMEN ARTISTS, VENUE OWNERS, MUSIC RELATED BUSINESSES AND NONPROFITS

Participants shared their experiences of the challenging climate in the Greater Madison area for BIPOC and women artists and business owners. This includes perceptions that BIPOC businesses and artists are treated differently. Examples include the inability to secure liquor licenses and additional police presence at hip hop shows.

Specific suggestions from participants include:

- Have more than one venue that hosts hip-hop and rap
- Support shows that showcase diverse music styles
- Have venues and event spaces that support diverse number of audience sizes
- Provide networking opportunities within and across roles within the music ecosystem
- Ensure equitable application of city policies

“Racial barriers exist for artists from the number of venues available for hip hop/rap shows to discriminatory treatment by the city and law enforcement” -(Artist, Business)

*“It’s difficult to make a living here as an artist or small venue owner”
-(Business)*

“[P]roviding support for grant writing and funding innovative programs that address our underserved community members, including Music for Wellness, Woman-focused programs, and the Hip Hop culture, are all important” -(Artist, Nonprofit, Business)

#5: GMMC FILLING CRITICAL ROLES

Participants overwhelmingly saw the need for GMMC to continue its work as a collective impact initiative in creating a more equitable and robust music ecosystem. Stakeholders emphasized the enhanced roles for GMMC as a hub/connector, artist and business incubator, and a place for information and knowledge sharing. Participants felt that there was no organization currently filling these roles and that the music ecosystem does not feel connected or share a similar vision. Being a hub and connector provides opportunities for people to learn from each other, learn about different opportunities, and gain additional skills and mutual support.

Specific ways in which GMMC might fulfill these roles include:

- Work with youth in partnership with community organizations and schools
- Support women artists through affinity groups/events, education, funding, etc.
- Support BIPOC artists through affinity groups/events, education, funding, etc.
- Support BIPOC venue owners and other music related businesses through affinity groups/events, education, funding, etc.
- Provide networking opportunities within and across roles
- Bring individuals and groups together to collaborate on priority areas
- Funding opportunities
- Education for emerging and established artists and businesses: marketing, business plans, legal issues, permits and policies, career sustainability
- Pulse of the music ecosystem
- Co-working space for musicians

#5: GMMC FILLING CRITICAL ROLES

“My experience with the music scene in Madison has been a mix of highs and challenges. While there is incredible talent and potential within the hip-hop community, I've noticed that **unity can sometimes be lacking**. Instead of collaborating to push the local scene forward, there's often competition or division that can hold artists back from fully thriving. This lack of unity impacts our ability to create a more powerful and cohesive movement within Madison's hip-hop & music scene”
-(Artist, Business)

“If I were to suggest a different priority to add or substitute, I'd propose **Enhanced Artist Development and Mentorship Programs**. While recognition, venues, and fair pay policies are crucial, we also need to ensure that artists—especially emerging talent—have access to structured mentorship, skill-building resources, and career guidance. Programs that focus on artist development would give local musicians the tools to sustain their careers, improve their craft, and even break into broader markets without having to leave Madison...”
-(Artist, Business, Nonprofit)

“There aren't enough **local venues and events** that support hip hop/rap artists and that are owned by BIPOC individuals”
-(Artist, Business)

“As a small venue owner, we get many inquiries from emerging artists. We see that they don't have the marketing and business skills needed. **A resource that can help these artists with marketing and other business skills would be valuable**”
-(Business)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. GMMC serve as **Hub** that actively connects and shares information across different parts of ecosystem (*For example, local music news, social media, podcast, etc.*)
2. GMMC focus areas on areas of programming, networking, and advocacy. The initiatives can include:
 - a. **Education** (professional development) and incubator for artists, businesses, and community.
 - b. Mentorship for **artists, businesses, and venue owners**
 - c. **Resource** for events, funding (grant writing, donor identification)
 - d. **Networking events and groups** within and across roles within music ecosystem, and serve as bridge between various stakeholders in the Greater Madison music community
 - e. **Advocacy and facilitation** of the 5 priority areas and additional 6th area of funding through collaboration with people representing different aspects of the ecosystem
3. GMMC serve as a **private-public partnership** with current city and county departments, and with the Cultural Affairs Office once the office is established within the City of Madison.
4. Develop a 3 year strategic roadmap that helps prioritize goals and actions, creates a timeline, identifies strategies and funding needs, and creates a shared vision and way forward.