Marin Shakespeare Company

Member Survey

Summary
Over the course of August and September, 2021 the Marin Shakespeare Company conducted a survey of its audience, actors, production staff, staff, and board, conducted by Authentic Arts. The goal of the survey was to provide feedback on new opportunities and help ensure a more equitable organization. The survey was sent to 417 people, and 59 people responded for a 14% response rate.

The survey revealed that respondents feel the organization is doing well overall. Many people feel like MSC is a home. The range for ages of people who are affiliated with the organization is fairly well distributed between 25 and 80. And nearly 29% of respondents fall on the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

Overall, in terms of MSC's mission, “With Shakespeare as our endless inspiration, our mission is to serve as a vibrant catalyst for cultural engagement, education, and social justice to benefit the people of Marin County, the San Francisco Bay Area, and beyond,” the organization is doing fairly well. However there are some specific challenges revealed by the survey. While many suggestions for improvement will be fairly easy to implement, there are a few areas that will offer some challenges. In particular, there are some trust issues that seem to go back to issues of sexual harassment and discrimination. Many of those issues seem to be among the artists and actors who are a part of the community. MSC should focus on regaining trust among this group in order to fulfill its mission. Doing so will not just be the work of a different message but will require true accountability by the leadership and perhaps some further changes in the structure of the organization.
Demographics

The majority of respondents were actors at 47.5%. The second largest respondent category was audience at 37.3%. Directors, designers, and technicians made up 16.9% of respondents.
79.9% of respondents were white. There were also significant pockets of racial/ethnic minorities.

How do you identify in terms of sexual orientation?
59 responses

- Lesbian
- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Straight
- Prefer not to Answer

What is your racial or ethnic identity? (Check all that apply)
59 responses

- AAPI / Asian American Pacific Islander: 6 (10.2%)
- Black / African-American / African: 7 (11.9%)
- Latine / Latinx / Chicano / Chicana: 2 (3.4%)
- MENA / Middle Eastern and North African: 1 (1.7%)
- Native American / Alaskan Native: 1 (1.7%)
- Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander: 1 (1.7%)
- White / Caucasian / European: 47 (79.7%)
- Filipino: 1 (1.7%)
A super majority of respondents did not claim a disability.

No one who has a disability asked for further accommodations.

There was fairly even distribution between the various age groups between 25 and 80.

The vast majority of respondents speak English as a first language (94.9%) with one (1.7%) for Spanish, Tagalog, and Finnish. A smattering of respondents speak additional languages including Spanish, German, and Dutch.

The majority of respondents live in the various Marin County zip codes. However, there were people who live in neighboring areas as well. There were a small few from other parts of the country, including New Jersey, New York, Florida, Kentucky, Arizona, and other parts of California. There was one respondent from Mexico,

While 11.9% of respondents have only been a part of the MSC community for a year or less, a plurality of respondents have been a part of the organization for 3 to 10 years, 37.3%. And
18.6% of respondents have been a part of it for over 20 years. 5.1% of respondents don't feel part of the MSC community.

How long have you been a part of the MSC community?
59 responses

While 74.6% of respondents are not caregivers, 25.4% of respondents are, and their needs and concerns are talked about in later sections.

Are you a primary caretaker/caregiver?
59 responses
A positive note about access to MSC is that a clear majority of respondents self-report that they are either middle income or lower income.

Would you consider yourself currently living in a:

- Lower income household: 52.5%
- Middle income household: 18.6%
- High income household: 1.7%
- Somewhere in between lower and middle: 3.4%
- Not really sure what this means to you: 10.2%
- Group Home: 0.2%
- Middle-high: 0.2%
Envisioning the Future

Equity, diversity, and inclusion was the highest priority for the future at 27.1%. However, Shakespeare productions at 25.4%, expansion of type programs at 11.9%, education programs for youth at 10.2%, community engagement at 6.8%, and expansion of prison programming, also at 6.8%, followed closely behind. The other options, all at 1.7% and entered manually, are as follows: ensuring a robust, vital future for MSC that serves our communities; I don’t think splitting these up is useful or tells the whole story of what is and has been successful for a Shakespeare Co, specifically MSC; productions AND equity, diversity, and inclusion; quality theater; plays; all the selections above - maintaining the quality standards of excellence already in place; and social justice including at risk youth, prisons, returned citizen and general audience theatre.

What should be the highest priority of the future artistic leader(s)?
59 responses

A clear majority of respondents would like the company to continue its Shakespeare productions, 67.8%. This was followed by clear desires to have productions by other classical authors, theater classes for youth, theater classes for adults, community gatherings, classic works from other authors, and lectures and conversations. Please note that respondents were allowed to give several responses. Total responses add up to over 100%.
When the new venue at 514 Fourth Street is completed, what type of programming would you like to see there? (Check all that apply)

59 responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programming Type</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare productions</td>
<td>40 (67.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productions by other class</td>
<td>-35 (59.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographical story-telling</td>
<td>-24 (40.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Dramatics classes</td>
<td>-22 (37.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy Nights</td>
<td>-25 (42.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Gatherings</td>
<td>-35 (59.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film Screenings</td>
<td>-19 (32.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing Circles</td>
<td>-20 (33.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures and Conversations</td>
<td>-33 (55.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical offerings</td>
<td>-29 (49.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Mic Nights</td>
<td>-26 (44.1%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oscar Night</td>
<td>-6 (10.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Productions by diverse companies</td>
<td>40 (67.8%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Productions that focus on</td>
<td>38 (64.4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Productions by other theatres</td>
<td>-22 (37.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentals to other organizations</td>
<td>-23 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned Citizens Theatre</td>
<td>38 (64.4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student productions</td>
<td>36 (61%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theatre classes for Youth</td>
<td>43 (72.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatre classes for Adults</td>
<td>41 (69.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for low income</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund Raisers</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New work, musicals, classes</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What? no karaoke? ;o)</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of these types of programming</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Learning from the Past

Nearly 85% feel that diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are an important part of MSC’s efforts. However, the 15% who do not believe so might be the most important percentage in the below graph. That significant number seems to correlate with the people who have had complaints about discrimination and sexual harassment and have often felt those issues have not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner.

Based on your experience, how high of a priority have equity, diversity, and inclusion been to MSC?

- Highest priority to the organization: 40.7%
- A top priority, but not the most important: 23.7%
- One of many important topics: 11.9%
- Not very important to this organization: 20.3%
- Not important at all: 11.9%

59 responses
A plurality of respondents don’t experience any barriers to participation at MSC productions. Of those who experience barriers, the top results were lack of time and lack of work/life balance. Other significant barriers were location, lack of diversity, and not feeling safe.

The biggest support for participation was having a positive experience at 72.9%. Other significant supports were safety, accommodations, affordability, sense of community, and ease of getting involved.
69.5% of respondents feel like they belong at MSC. However 8.5% strongly disagree. An additional 3.4% disagree.

76.3% of respondents feel safe at MSC. But a significant minority of respondents don’t feel safe with 10.2% either disagreeing (6.8%) or strongly disagreeing (3.4%) with the statement. That smaller but significant response serves as a flag that the organization has some work to do to help all feel like they belong.
The numbers from the last question fairly closely mirror whether people feel like they feel seen and heard at MSC. The same percentage of respondents don't feel seen or heard.

A similar breakdown is seen with whether respondents feel their voice is valued.
Regarding the question of whether one has to change they are to fit in at MSC, there was a significant drop in the number of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed with only 5.1% answering this question negatively. And there was a significant rise in the number of respondents who strongly agreed with this statement at 44.1%.

A similar trend appeared with the question of whether people feel included and/or at home at MSC. 79.7% agreed with this statement. However, there was a bit more of a significant negative response with 5.1% disagreeing and 1.7% strongly disagreeing.
I feel included/at home at MSC
59 responses

- Strongly disagree: 37.3%
- Disagree: 13.6%
- Neutral: 4.4%
- Agree: 23.7%
- Strongly agree: 15.2%
Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

20.4% of respondents feel they’ve either been discriminated against, been sexually harassed, or may have been. Please note that this question allowed multiple responses, so totals do not add up to 100%. The main problems seem to be in how reports about these issues have been handled. Respondents don’t feel there’s a clear line for reporting issues, particularly when the person(s) who harmed them are in positions of authority, whether on staff or on the board. There is some small overlap between those who have experienced and/or witnessed discrimination and sexual harassment, the vast majority of individuals experienced one or the other.

Have you experienced discrimination and/or sexual harassment at MSC?

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes to discrimination</td>
<td>5 (8.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes to sexual harassment</td>
<td>4 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50 (84.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>3 (5.1%)</td>
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</table>

Two respondents have left MSC due to discrimination. Four have limited their time at MSC. Five spoke out as allies. And 11 respondents witnessed discrimination.

Please tell us about your experience of discrimination at MSC: (Check all that apply)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have left MSC because of discrimination</td>
<td>-2 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have limited my time at MSC</td>
<td>-4 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been the target of discrimination</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not experienced discrimination</td>
<td>-5 (8.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have spoken out as an ally who experienced discrimination</td>
<td>-11 (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have witnessed discriminatory behavior</td>
<td>-9 (15.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reported discriminatory behavior</td>
<td>-2 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadvertent Ageism, Reactive P...</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In working with an all BIPOC c...</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel that they always speak up</td>
<td>-1 (1.7%)</td>
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As regards sexual harassment, there also are some significant challenges, many similar to issues around discrimination.

If you have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, where did it happen? (Check all that apply)
15 responses

- As a board member: 2 (13.3%)
- As a volunteer: 0 (0%)
- As an audience member: 0 (0%)
- As part of a production at Foo...: 5 (33.3%)
- Backstage: 4 (26.7%)
- During a Class: 1 (6.7%)
- During Casting: 6 (40%)
- During rehearsals: 7 (46.7%)
- From another cast or company...: 0 (0%)
- From an audience member: 0 (0%)
- In a school: 1 (6.7%)
- In a prison: 2 (13.3%)
- NA: 1 (6.7%)
- Random Inappropriate Com... as staff: 1 (6.7%)

Some of the more significant responses included the below:

“I have witnessed behaviors that allowed/encouraged an environment of sexual harassment.”

“Some boundaries were crossed by cast/company members during rehearsal process”

The most serious issue coming out of the question of reporting discrimination or harassment is that 57.9% of those who saw these issues did not report them to anyone. This would seem to indicate that either the path for reporting is unclear or people did not feel safe doing so.
The survey saw nine responses to the following question: “If you have experienced discrimination or sexual harassment and feel comfortable telling us about it, please use the following field to tell us what you’d like us to know. Please be sure to tell us what the impact was and how it affects your relationship with MSC. Also let us know what was or wasn’t done to address, repair and/or protect you.” Responses included:

“I felt talked out of it. I expressed feeling uncomfortable and they explained to me why I shouldn’t feel uncomfortable.”

“I wish it had been taken more seriously and that the person had been fired”

“Reporting company members who cross physical boundaries of touch and language is very tricky when you want to be cast in another production with the organization.”

In response to the question of what MSC can do to better ensure people feel safe, seen, and included in all areas of the organization, moving forward, there were 21 responses. Responses included:

“Offer pay to BIPOC in the MSC community and people with disability to be on a commission to work on solving these issues. Don’t ask us to volunteer to clean up your mess.”

“I believe these topics were covered and explained at the first cast meeting/reading and it was all very clear”
“Nothing everything is amazing.”

“too many things to list.”

“Establish and publicize clear guidelines and protocols for reporting and investigating any misconduct.”

“Ensure safe working conditions”

“Continue to diversify the board, the staff and the artists.”

“Allowing more space for my ideas and creative process to be included in the development of what's being worked on.”

“Be more educated and informed on what diversity and inclusion is truly about. It's not enough bringing in diverse people but also recognizing their fears and anger.”

“I feel like when I've spoken up about something in the past, it's easy for it to get swept under the rug by the people in charge by saying "this is just the way it's always been" etc

“Listen to employees and actors, be open and receptive to feedback, unpack Whiteness, treat employees with respect, dignity, and worth, and take responsibility when you make mistakes”

“This form is a great start. Thank you for taking DEI, Discrimination, & Harassment seriously. Company members need to be reminded of appropriate behavior, appropriate touching (outside of on-stage work), and sexual-related or discriminatory joke-telling at the beginning and throughout the rehearsal process”

“I feel safe but it is important that MSC do deep work from the board level down to educate and sensitize privileged people who have blind spots when it comes to the experience of less privileged people”

“More training of individual across the board of how we engage in our privilege.”

“It costs me $60-$120 in babysitting charges just to come to watch one of your shows. Maybe have a family night where you distract the kiddos somewhere and grownups can see the show?”

In regards to the following question, “If you'd like to talk confidentially with someone at MSC about the discrimination or harassment, please share your name and email with us. (OPTIONAL),” there was no response. This may be due to feelings of not being safe to do so as protocols seem to have been unclear for many.
Conclusions
MSC has a wonderful base of support and is doing many of the things it needs to do. However, there are some significant challenges that need to be addressed in order to fully grow into the organization it wants to be. The main issues that are challenges fall into the belonging category. This is most seen around the issues of discrimination and sexual harassment and the lack of clarity and safety that people feel. With accountability and seeking the right assistance, whether that be through consultation and/or a deep dive by leadership, there’s a strong case to be made for MSC being the organization that it wants to be.