



ARTS CANDIDATE SURVEY

Toolkit

Presented by Arts North Carolina



About Candidate Surveys

Arts North Carolina has researched best practices and learned from success stories here in NC to create this easy to use step-by-step guide that will walk you through the process of creating, distributing, and sharing an arts focused candidate survey for local elections. This is a fantastic way to elevate the arts as an issue in your community and build relationships with elected (or about to be elected) officials.

Creating the Survey

- **Decide which race or races** for which you are going to survey candidates. You will want the questions in the survey to be appropriate for each race and related to the office for which the candidates are running. You can survey one race, or several, such as State Legislator, County Commission, City Council/ Mayor, or School Board.
- **Get input from your arts partners** by contacting the arts constituency you want to represent and find out what issues are most important to them. You may also ask for input from the same partners on the completed survey before distributing it to candidates.
- **Create the survey** using an online format, such as Google Forms or Survey Monkey, as that is how most candidates prefer to complete surveys. However, you should also create a printable version that candidates can print and fill out, or that can be mailed or delivered to them. Your survey should be no more than 10 questions, preferably 5 to 7, and should be no more than one page printed. Candidates fill out many of these surveys, and may avoid longer ones.



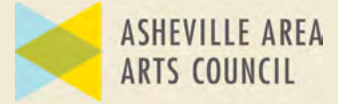
- **The first question should be the candidate's name** and/or email address so you can easily identify who is responding.
- **Warm them up** by asking one or two personal questions about the arts, such as what background they may have in the arts, or what arts activities they have participated in recently. You may provide multiple choice answers if you like, but you should leave a space for "other" and always include an option for "additional comments" to be added. This will help the candidate to make a personal connection to the arts before answering questions more related to the specific race. This information is also extremely helpful for arts advocacy when/if you engage them later as an elected official.
- **Educate the candidate** prior to each question by providing background information such as economic impact, employment, or community engagement demographics. The background statement must be factual information, not opinion, though it should support your position. The survey is as much an opportunity for the candidate to become informed about your issue, as it is to find out their position.
- **Provide an easy way to answer each question first** such as with multiple choice (Yes/No/Maybe/Need More Information OR Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Undecided).
- **Provide an opportunity to say more for each question** by providing an optional space for a written answer labeled "additional comments" or "please explain your answer."
- **You can ask a "cross-sector" question** that may be related to the arts, arts education, or creative workers, but not exclusively such as affordable housing, child care, or transportation. In the background provided, briefly describe how the issue affects the arts community before posing the question on that topic. Adding a question like this can make the survey feel less politically specific and allows candidates to speak on a broader range of issues.
- **If surveying candidate for multiple races**, either create a survey using more general questions that apply to all races, or create multiple surveys that are specific to each race. For example, you should not be asking school board candidates about their position on city funding for operating support of nonprofit arts organizations



ARTS CANDIDATE SURVEY

Sample Questionnaire

Written by



2022 ARTS QUESTIONNAIRE

Asheville City Council & Buncombe County Commissioner Candidates

Below you will find a list of important issues currently impacting our local creative sector. The Asheville Area Arts Council respectfully requests that you complete this survey by April 21, 2022, so that our constituents can better understand your stance on these policy topics.

Candidate Name:

Date:

Q1: What is your personal background and experience in the arts? (select all that apply)

Instrumental Vocal Visual Dance Theatre Photography Literary Other

Additional Comments:

Arts NC Note: This is a good "warm-up" question. Multiple choices are provided so that the candidate can answer quickly and easily. On the online survey, the multiple-choice response should be required, with the ability to select multiple answers, and the option to provide additional comments. In this case the candidate can give more detail about their arts experience and may also help them feel more connected to the arts before answering the other questions

Q2: What arts activities have you attended, participated in, or supported in the last year? (select all that apply)

Music Theatre Visual Arts Dance Literary Arts Other None

Additional Comments:

Arts NC Note: This is another good "warm-up" question. Multiple choices are provided so that the candidate can answer quickly and easily. On the online survey, the multiple-choice response should be required, with the ability to select multiple answers, and the option to provide additional comments. In this case the candidate can give more detail about their arts experience recently and give them an opportunity to share experience with the local creative community. By having the candidate speak about their recent local connections, it allows them to recognize the arts as a current presence in their life and a hopefully a relevant issue in their campaign.

Background: Americans for the Arts reports Buncombe County nonprofit arts organizations generate \$3.5 M in local government support annually. However, the NC Arts Council's 2019-20 report shows Buncombe County ranks last among tier 3 counties for local government funding for local arts councils at just \$.02 per capita. Average for tier 3 counties is \$.73 per capita.

Q3: Would you support a plan to increase local government funding to the Asheville Area Arts Council to at least match the state arts funding awarded to Buncombe County (\$61,447 or \$.23 per capita) to support community arts programs for all Buncombe County residents? This would bring the combined state and local arts investment up to \$.46 per capita.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Undecided

Additional Comments:

Arts NC Note: The background provides the context of the economic value of the nonprofit arts which is an effective point in support of public funding for the arts. The background can also provide relative context, in this case comparing public funding for the arts in other counties with a similar economic rating. The question directly asks for support of a specific funding proposal and provides multiple choices so candidates can quickly express their level of support. They also have the option of providing additional comments to explain their response, though that should not be required.

Background: Buncombe County's 74 creative industries were responsible for over 14,000 jobs and \$1.6 B in industry sales in 2019. By 2020, over 1,300 jobs were lost in the Arts & Entertainment industry alone-- the greatest % of job loss from any industry in Buncombe County as reported by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce. Many arts businesses experienced up to 14 months of closure, and artists/arts organizations are still facing significant pandemic related expenses and revenue losses.

Q4: Would you support additional relief aid for arts businesses to support recovery and revitalization of the creative sector?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Undecided

Additional Comments:

Arts NC Note: The background provides the context of jobs and economic activity the creative industries provide in order to put the job losses and economic impact of the pandemic into perspective. This question is direct, but without offering a specific funding proposal, and provides multiple choices so candidates can quickly express their level of support for this funding. They also have the option of providing additional comments to explain their response, though that should not be required.

Background: Legislation changing the county's occupancy tax is likely to be introduced in the NC Senate this session. It would potentially reduce the funding dedicated to marketing from 75% to 67%, increasing funding available for community projects to 33%. Expanded funding flexibility included non-capital projects, option for bonding funding, administration and maintenance of TPDF approved projects, and funding for local arts projects.

Q5: Do you support using this funding to support the maintenance and creation of local arts projects?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Undecided

Additional Comments:

Arts NC Note: Like the background for all the questions, this serves to educate the candidates, however this relates to funding issue that is very specific. By mentioning this possible funding development, awareness is raised not only by the candidate, but also by those reading the survey. The backgrounds for the prior questions have already provide the economic context for local arts, so it is not necessary to repeat it for this question. This question is direct, but without offering specific examples, and provides multiple choices so candidates can quickly express their level of support. They also have the option of providing additional comments to explain their response, though that should not be required.

Background: Affordable Housing is the primary reason for Buncombe County's rising cost of living index (now 106). This is having a large impact on the local creative community, forcing more artists to move their residence and business outside of the county. The 2018 Keep AVL Creative survey, taken by 1,265 individuals and 170 organizations, found that a majority of artists (86%) and arts organizations (78%) need affordable artist housing and/or studio space. 424 responded that they have considered leaving Asheville due to cost of living.

Q6: Would you support an initiative to create affordable housing/workspace within Buncombe County?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Undecided

Additional Comments:

Arts NC Note: This is a good example of a cross-sector question. The background provides the context of how affordable housing is specifically affecting artists and creatives, though the question is phrased to include the entire county, which acknowledges that others face similar challenges. Cross-sector questions can help your event seem more nonpartisan by addressing issues that affect the entire community and not just your creative community. This question is direct, but without offering a specific proposal, and provides multiple choices so candidates can quickly express their level of support for this issue. They also have the option of providing additional comments to explain their response, though that should not be required.

Background: According to a 2019 report by NeighborWorks America, 80% of individuals' health is determined by the social and environmental conditions in which they live, work and play. We need a shared vision for Asheville- Buncombe County's cultural future that improves the lives of all residents with arts education, neighborhood revitalization, art in public spaces, economic development, and more.

Q7: Would you support the creation of Asheville- Buncombe County's first Cultural Plan to support the preservation of our cultural assets, and the equitable recovery and sustainable growth of the creative sector?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Undecided

Additional Comments:

Arts NC Note: The background provides a sourced statistic that support the creation of a cultural plan. Suggesting a new or updated arts and/or cultural plan such as this, if your community does not already have one, can be a good way to be sure the work continues after the election. It may also be easier for government officials to support the creation of a plan as it does not necessarily commit them to additional spending in the moment. This question is direct and provides multiple choices so candidates can quickly express their level of support for this issue. They also have the option of providing additional comments to explain their response, though that should not be required.



Surveying the Candidates

- **Get the official list of candidates** from your [County Board of Elections](#) or the NC State Board of Elections. You should reach out to candidates using only the email address, phone number, and/or mailing address provided.
- Send the survey the SAME WAY TO ALL candidates with ample time (2-3 weeks) to complete prior to your due date (which should allow you time to publish the result shortly before the first day of early voting). It is best to start by emailing the survey, then following up regularly to every candidate that has yet to respond, in the same manner and with the same frequency (more details below).
- Include a clear, brief, yet detailed message that includes the name of your organization and its mission, the exact due date when the survey needs to be completed, clear instruction on how to complete and submit the survey online or by mail (including how they can obtain a printed version if they are unable to print their own), and how the results will be made available to the public (website, press release, scheduled media story, etc.). Make sure you use a tone that is both professional and polite and be grateful for their time and consideration.
- Remind those candidates that have not completed the survey one week before it is due, then the day before it is due, and also the day it is due. Continue to provide the same clear message in a polite and professional tone. You may mention how many other candidates have completed the survey (do not use names, i.e. "12 out of 14 candidates have responded, make sure you are not left out") or that the names of those candidates that do not complete the survey may also be published. Follow up with emails, phone calls or mailings to every candidate that has yet to respond, but in the exact same manner and with the same frequency for all candidates. It is crucial, especially if you are representing a nonprofit, that you do not treat any one candidate differently than another or try harder to get certain candidates to respond.
- Survey either before the primary or the general election. Surveying before the primary election is preferred because candidates are more likely to submit a response so as not to be overlooked in a crowded field, however there are more candidates to engage which can be more difficult. If you want to survey a wide variety of races, it may be easier to do so after the primary winners have been decided and there are fewer candidates to contact. You may choose to focus on one race before the primary and then survey candidates for multiple races after the primaries, prior to the general election.
- Thank the candidates for completing the survey and let them know how the information will be shared. Also, notify them when the results are posted on your website, and when/if it will be covered by media outlets online, in print, or on TV or radio.



Spreading the Word

- Post the responses on your website shortly before early voting begins, which in North Carolina is 18 days prior to each election day. Be sure to organize the candidates by what office they are running for, then alphabetically, so as not to show any preference. Try to have the responses posted a day or two before early voting begins for each election.
- Tell everyone through email and social media that the survey responses have been posted. Make sure to do this multiple times during the early voting period and before election day, or if possible, before both the primary and general elections. This is also a great opportunity to remind people to vote and provide voting resources and information.
- Ask for help to spread the word from your creative community. Artists, arts leaders and arts lovers should be encouraged to spread the word. The partners who you asked for input to create the survey should now be invested in helping share the candidate responses.
- Create a press release that includes links to the survey questions and results, as well as a description of your organization and why you are surveying these candidates specifically. You should send the press release out well in advance of the survey responses be made public and include specific information about how and when the candidate responses will be available. This will increase the likelihood the media outlet will cover the release of the responses.
- Contact the media directly and ask them to publish the results. Press releases can be easily missed in a busy election cycle. You can work with a local newspaper or other media outlet to be the one to exclusively share the results. Approaching the arts columnist with this idea can be very effective as the media is often eager for new angles leading up to the election.
- NONPROFITS CAN NOT AT ANY TIME OR IN ANY WAY SHOW ANY PREFERENCE OR IMPLY ANY ENDORSEMENT FOR A CANDIDATE OR THEIR RESPONSE.

Prepared by:
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