

DEMOGRAPHICS

Describe your community. Describe the representation of diverse communities defined by, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, age and disabilities, including artistic environment.

Our Community: LowellArts is located on the eastern boundary of Kent County in the city of Lowell, which is 20 miles east of Grand Rapids and 15 miles west of Ionia. The primary service area for LowellArts includes the surrounding, rural, suburban, and urban communities adjacent to Lowell in Kent and Ionia counties. These communities include: Belding to the north, Saranac & Ionia to the east, Alto and Caledonia to the south, and Ada and Grand Rapids to the west. LowellArts programs also attract artists and audiences from west Michigan and state-wide.

Although Lowell is located within Kent County, there is a dedicated effort on the part of LowellArts to provide arts programming to the more underserved communities to the north and east of Lowell in the counties of Montcalm and Ionia. The population of Montcalm County is 62,922 and Ionia County is 64,126 versus the more densely populated Kent County with a population of 642,173.

The immediate community that LowellArts serves is rural. The Lowell Area School District is the 7th largest school district in Michigan geographically. The Lowell Area School District ethnic demographics are 95.84% Caucasian, 2.42% Hispanic, .73% African American, .57% Asian, and .43% Native American.

Census data shows 14% of the city of Lowell's residents living in poverty. The city of Lowell median household income is \$44,643 and per capita income is \$21,658. 25.83% of the students in the Lowell Area School District qualify for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program. 40.75% of the students attending the two elementary schools within the city of Lowell qualify for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program.

LowellArts serves the artists in the Lowell community as well as artists in surrounding communities who have limited opportunities to showcase their artistic talents. The programs and events offered by LowellArts have different focuses to serve both the new/amateur artists as well as professional artists.

Describe your audience. Describe the demographics of your audience such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and people with disabilities?

Our Audience: Travel and economic status can be major hurdles for individuals that do not have easy access to the arts in other communities. LowellArts serves as a resource for people in this region – especially for **youth, families, seniors, and emerging artists** who do not have the financial means or transportation to participate in programs offered in Grand Rapids or the more affluent suburbs. There is no connection to the Grand Rapids bus line to residents of the Lowell area.

LowellArts offers several programs that are no cost to meet the needs of our service area. Additionally, there is also free parking next to and behind the LowellArts building. **Free programs include:**

- **Lowell Showboat Sizzlin' Summer Concerts** are free and draw upwards of 1,000 visitors each week for the 10-week series
- **Fallasburg Arts Festival** is free and draws over 35,000 attendees for the 2-day arts event
- **Gallery exhibitions** are free and open 5 days a week
- **Laughfest Events** (Gilda's Club sponsored ten-day festival) hosted by LowellArts are free.

LowellArts makes accommodations whenever possible to make participating in programs easier, particularly to minimize travel obstacles in our rural area.

- **Theater productions** include a weekend matinee to accommodate individuals who cannot drive in the dark.
- **LowellArts Youth Theater Performances** are presented for Lowell Area Schools and Saranac School's 3rd-5th graders. Students are bused to the Performing Arts Center at the High School during the school day to see these productions
- Every spring, LowellArts is one of the main stops for the **Lowell 1st Grade Walking Tour** that provides over 450 students an opportunity to explore the current exhibition that is on display
- Specifically for artists, the **West Michigan Art Competition** jurying is conducted through an on-line application process. This allowed artists from farther away, within the 25 eligible county regions, to enter the competition without having to drive to Lowell multiple times to deliver and pick-up art pieces.

How are you using your demographic information to inform your organization's decision-making?

Demographics and Decision Making: Through evaluation and strategic planning, LowellArts provides quality arts programming to artists and audiences within the context of its unique location and specific community needs, taking into account travel, age, and abilities of participants and visitors. For example, when arts classes were launched in the new space – offered primarily for non-professional artists and youth – careful consideration was put into keeping the cost for these classes affordable. On-line research is done on a regular basis to ensure that LowellArts classes were less expensive than classes offered in neighboring, affluent communities.

LowellArts is a satellite location for **Arts in Motion Studio West Michigan**, a Grand Rapids-based organization that provides art experiences for individuals with special needs. artsinmotionstudio.org This relationship is important to LowellArts because our location enables individuals in the Lowell area to have access to the services provided by Arts in Motion. LowellArts has partnered with local artist and art educator, Sharon Brandner, who offers private art classes for local individuals with special needs. (Sharon is an elementary art teacher at Zeeland Public Schools and lives in Lowell.)

LowellArts supports a neighboring business, **Ability Weavers**, with exhibition and sales opportunities by providing them an art booth at the annual Fallasburg Arts Festival. Ability Weavers is a non-profit organization with a mission to provide a purpose-filled weaving work environment that includes adults with or without disabilities working side by side as employees. abilityweavers.com

Through community partnerships, LowellArts will continue to respond to needs within the Lowell community and the other communities it serves. LowellArts Strategic Plan – Objective #7’s first strategy is to engage youth with the arts. A new LowellArts program collaboration is with a local young musician, Ryne Clarke, and the Lowell High School Cable Channel WRWW lowellradio.org. The **Ryne Shyne Club** has moved some of its broadcast to LowellArts providing local performing opportunities to emerging musicians. ryneshyne.club

Opportunities for additional collaborative programs are being explored with the **Lowell Senior Neighbors** and **Gilda’s Club of Lowell** since these organizations are located 2 blocks away from LowellArts. seniorneighbors.org/centers/lowellgildasclubgr.org/lowell-programs

While our immediate community is not racially diverse, it is made up of array of abilities, orientations, and economic circumstances. We have, however, found that LowellArts is uniquely positioned to positively impact organizations and groups with diverse races, ethnicities, abilities, orientations, socioeconomic statuses, and cultures, through our role as a re-granting agency for the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs for eight counties in West Michigan. We have directly helped different organizations meet their missions and reach their audiences through grant funding.

We recognize that race is a determining factor in outcomes and are committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community and to partnering with organizations who are already doing the work. This year, we are committed to prioritizing communities on the MCACA’s underserved county list to increase access to arts funding.