

Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2023



***Creative Encounters:
Living Religions in the U.S.***

***The Ozarks:
Faces and Facets of a Region***

**2023 Visitor Survey Report
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Overview

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival is an international exposition of living cultural heritage annually produced outdoors on the National Mall of the United States in Washington, D.C., by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Established in 1967, the Festival honors contemporary, living cultural traditions and celebrates those who practice and sustain them. It is an educational, research-based presentation that features master artisans and other tradition bearers. The Festival takes place annually over 2 weeks and overlaps with the Fourth of July holiday.

About this Report

Over the 10-day Festival, a visitor experience evaluation is often conducted. This year, the evaluation consisted of 2 parts: 406 quantitative surveys supplemented by 22 qualitative interviews. This report summarizes the significant findings from the data collected to present a visitor-centered perspective of the 2023 Festival.

Survey Limitations

With only 4 surveyors, vast land to cover, and the data collection method, there were limitations to the sample and the ability to create unbiased conclusions. The sample may be biased as people with younger kids, larger groups, or people who do not speak English were less likely to be surveyed and represented in this report.

Additionally, multiple days of the Festival had evacuations due to electrical storms. June 30 and July 6, 7, and 9 had rain closures, resulting in fewer visitors and, therefore, more occasional surveys. On July 6 and 7, the shutdowns happened in the middle of the day; when the Festival reopened, few visitors were willing to take the survey due to the low visitor population. Further, many visitors had not seen enough of the Festival to provide helpful and reliable data. On the last day of the Festival, July 9, programming was moved indoors due to electrical storms; surveyors shifted their resources to the reallocation efforts and closed the site, resulting in 0 surveys this day. While the weather created less than ideal surveying conditions, the minimum 400 surveys required for accurate Festival analytics were collected.

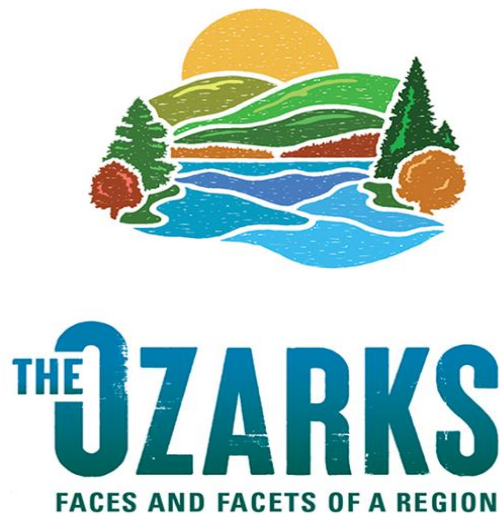
Program Description

The Folklife Festival was back in full swing after a brief hiatus from the COVID-19 Pandemic. The 2023 Festival was held in person on the National Mall on June 29–July 4 and July 6–July 9. This year’s Festival featured two programs, *Creative Encounters: Living Religions in the U.S.* and *The Ozarks: Faces and Facets of a Region*.

Creative Encounters: Living Religions in the U.S. explored the abundant creativity that emerges from spiritual and religious experiences. The program centered on stories and lived experiences of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Native Americans and Pacific Islanders, Sikhs, practitioners of African-descended religions, Humanists, and other ethical and spiritual traditions.

The Ozarks: Faces and Facets of a Region explored the region of the Ozarks—a geographic region stretching across portions of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Illinois. It possesses a distinct blend of karst and caves, springs and streams, hills and hollers, and forests and fields. The cultural Ozarks is a human region built from the ever-changing cultural practices and traditions of the peoples who have and continue to inhabit this beautiful yet demanding and fragile terrain.

The descriptions above were adapted from the official Folklife Festival program website pages and the Festival’s mission statement.



Introduction

What Methods Were Used to Collect Data?

Surveys

Over 9 days, 4 surveyors conducted 406 surveys. Surveyors randomly selected survey participants. Once consent was obtained, surveyors administered and recorded a 40-question survey on an iPad. A typical survey lasted about 8 minutes, while some could go over 40 minutes, depending on the visitors' willingness to share. This report also acknowledges and analyzes any additional comments shared with surveyors.

Interviews

Besides the survey, 22 interviews with 43 younger adults (< 40 years old) were conducted. The interviews aimed to better understand what draws younger people to the Festival and what could be improved at future Festivals to attract younger audiences. The interview questions consisted of demographic and open-ended questions tailored to probe younger peoples' perspectives. Interviews were audio-recorded for analysis and verbal consent was obtained from all interlocutors before the interview. Personal details were removed from transcriptions for confidentiality.

Visitor Profile

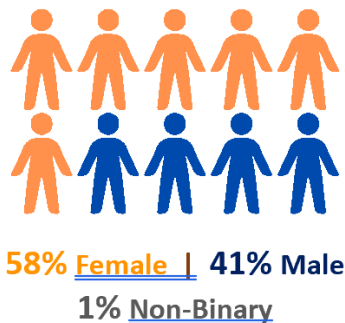
Who is Coming to the Folklife Festival?

Age and Gender

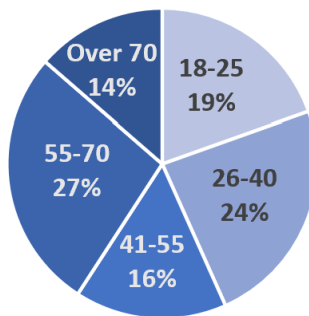
There is a relatively even divide of age groups among respondents. The largest age group was 55–70 (27%), followed by 26–40 (24%), 18–25 (19%), and 41–55 (16%). The age 70 and over had the fewest people, consisting of 14% of the data.

Almost 6 out of 10 respondents are female. Out of 406 surveys, 236 respondents identified as female, 165 as male, and 3 as non-binary. Two respondents left the gender blank. The gender demographics sampled may have been impacted by the limitations and biases of the sampling. Because all four surveyors identify as female, the 6:4 gender ratio observed in this data may not accurately reflect the overall makeup of the Festival’s visitors.

Gender Distribution



Age Distribution



Race	Count	Percentage
White	306	75.4%
Asian	31	7.6%
Black or African American	28	6.9%
My identity is not listed above	19	4.7%
Blank	11	2.7%
Mixed Race	6	1.5%
Prefer not to answer	5	1.2%

Ethnicity

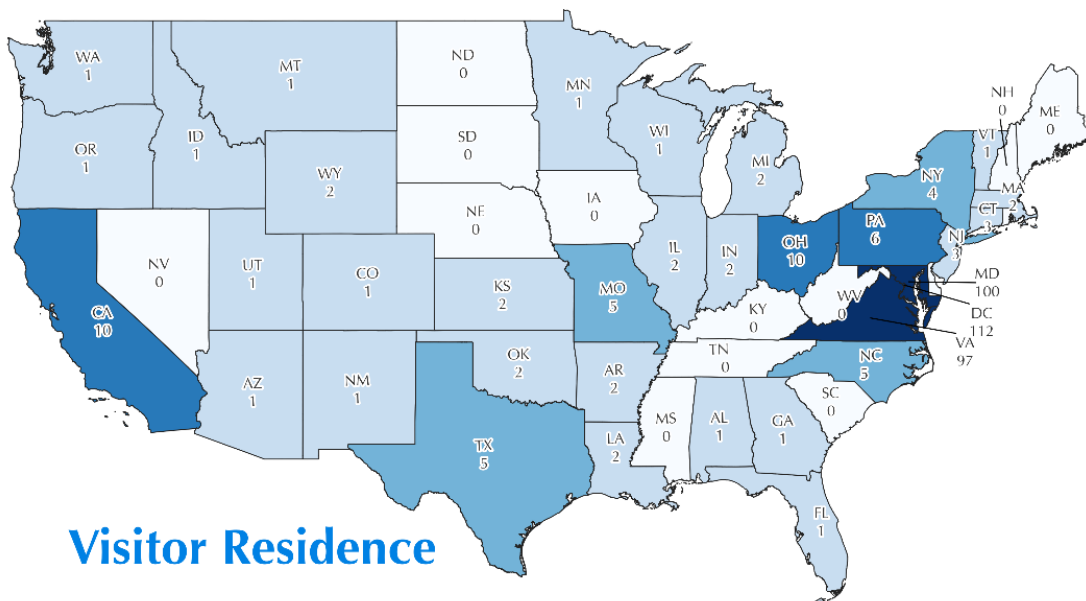
To understand the racial makeup of Festival goers, visitors were asked about their racial identity. Most surveyed visitors were white, comprising 75% of the sample. Asian and Black or African American visitors comprised 8% and 7%, respectively. Eight percent of the visitors chose to self-describe their race, did not answer, or left the question blank. An additional 2% considered themselves as mixed race.

Current Residence

Almost all the visitors surveyed were U.S. residents. Most respondents were from Washington, D.C., Maryland, or Virginia. Collectively, DMV residents represented 76% of all the visitors surveyed. Among non-local visitors, California and Ohio led the number of respondents by 10 each.

State	Counts	Percentage
Washington, D.C.	112	27.5%
Maryland	100	24.5%
Virginia	97	24.0%

Of 406 responses, only 12 respondents stated they live outside of the U.S., and over half of them were from Europe. However, international visitors may have been disproportionately underrepresented due to surveyors' limited capabilities to conduct surveys in languages other than English.



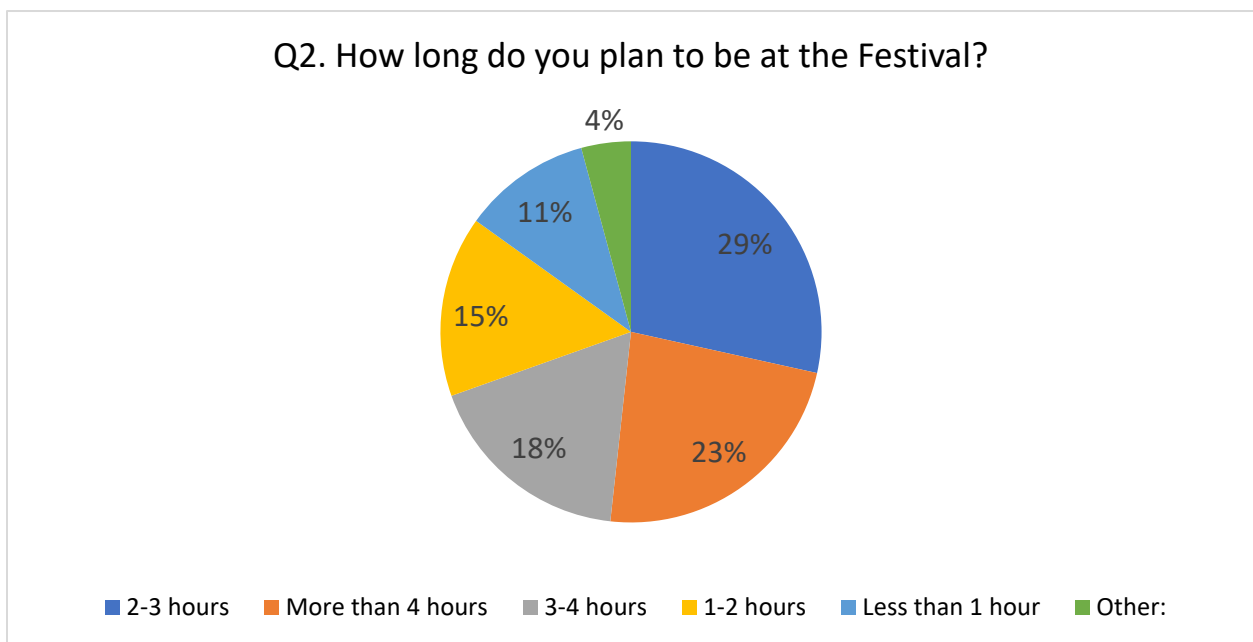
How Did Visitors Engage with the Folklife Festival?

Festival engagement can be measured in a variety of different ways. By asking about the amount of time visitors spent at the Festival, visitors' previous experience with the event, and visitors' motivations for attending the Festival, the Center gains a better understanding of the Festival's educational and cultural success.

Previous Festival Experience

The 2023 Folklife Festival had an almost 50/50 split between first-time and returning visitors, with 201 first-time and 205 returning. When asked, "What was the first Smithsonian Folklife Festival you visited?" Those who could remember a year most frequently mentioned a year between 2000-2009. Of those who could remember the program of their first Folklife Festival, many mentioned the 2002 program, *The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust*.

Time Spent at the Festival



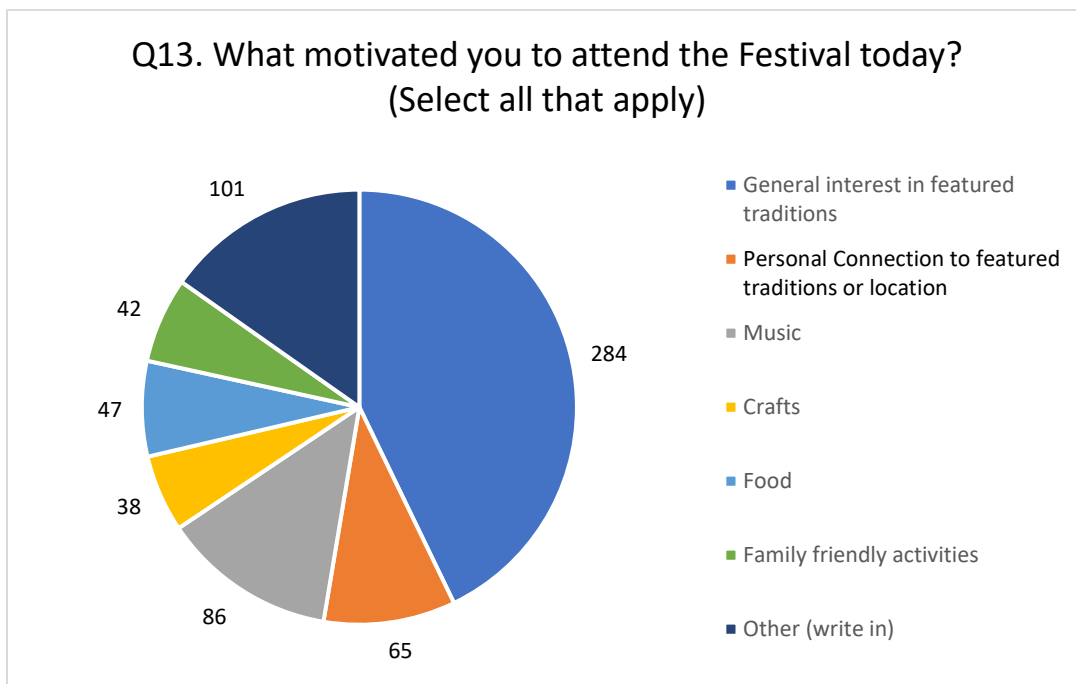
The most prevalent proportion (29%) of survey respondents reported they intended to stay a total of 2 to 3 hours at the Festival, and the next most significant population of visitors (23%) were those who planned to spend "more than 4 hours."

Many visitors reported that the weather forecast played a prominent role in the amount of time spent at the Festival. Though there was not a question on the survey to measure how many days total a visitor attended or planned to attend this event, surveyors anecdotally reported that many visitors mentioned they attended further days.

On average, 70% of survey respondents had spent 2 hours or less at the Festival when they took the Visitors' survey. Festival closures due to inclement weather may have played a role in how much of the Festival visitors experienced before they took the survey.

Motivations to Attend the Festival

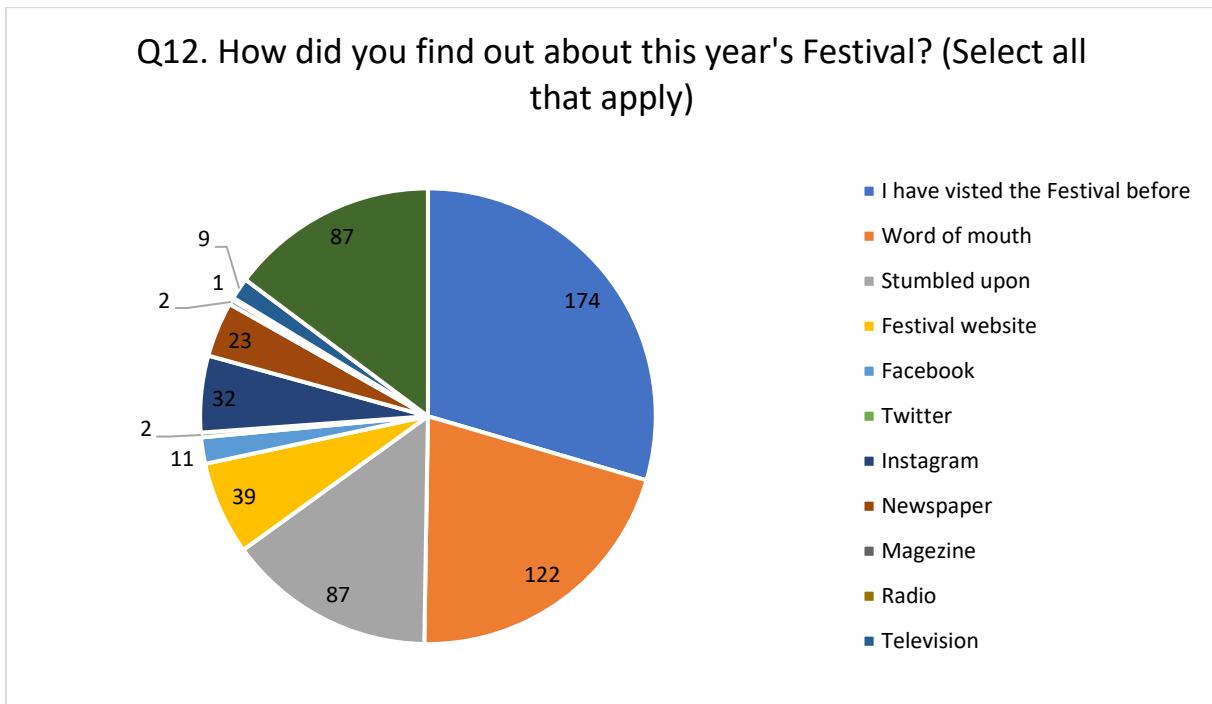
Visitors most frequently chose “A general interest in featured traditions” and “Music” as their reasons for attending this year’s Folklife Festival. However, there was also a large number of write-in responses in which visitors named other motivators to attend the Festival. Of these responses, the most frequent were scholars who attended the Folklife Festival as a supplement to their work and groups of visitors who have made the Folklife Festival a “yearly tradition” or “must-go” event for families and friends.



Note: This question allowed visitors to select all options that apply. For this reason, the graph above depicts the number of times a visitor mentioned each category.

Advertising Using Social Media

Word of mouth and previous Festival experience account for more than half of the ways in which visitors learned about this year's Festival. In addition, “stumbling upon” the Festival grounds accounted for the next highest advertising category—gesturing towards the influential nature of location and layout to the Festival visitors.



Note: This question allowed visitors to select all options that apply. For this reason, the graph above depicts the number of times a visitor mentioned each category.

The write-in option also revealed that some visitors learned about the Festival from Smithsonian newsletters, and many came to support friends or loved ones (serving as participants, interns, staff members, or volunteers) who were working at the Festival.

Most notable is the growing role of “new media” in Festival advertisements. This is exemplified by the emergence of social media as the primary way in which some visitors learned about this year's events. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram account for 45 instances in which advertisements on this platform led visitors to attend the Folklife Festival. In the “write in” option for this question, 18 visitors mentioned posts on TikTok as a form of advertisement. **Combined, these 63 instances of social media/influencer marketing that led to in-person visitation**

demonstrate the growing space for “new media” advertisement in Festival advertisement.

For this reason, it could be advantageous for Festival organizers to consider alternate forms of Festival promotion. Specifically, pairing with local social media accounts dedicated specifically to advertising the weekly events held in the DMV area. This move could prove to be vital in reaching visitors who are young adults and other groups that may be missed by legacy forms of advertising and marketing.

Social Media Examples
<p>Instagram:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ct9a6y1Jcsh/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==• https://www.instagram.com/reel/CuXYZORrao-/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==• https://www.instagram.com/reel/CuU_KlEu95l/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==• https://www.instagram.com/reel/CuMYv_ARPO/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==• https://www.instagram.com/reel/CuZXprONsL8/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA== <p>TikTok:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT88GLqk9/• https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT88GLqk9/• https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZT88GkWYS/ <p>Note: Many social media influencers cross-promote across multiple platforms. Although CFCH may be prohibited from using TikTok, these kinds of videos still may be useful on other social media platforms.</p>

Survey Findings

How Do Visitors Evaluate Their Festival Experience?

Overall satisfaction

The survey results displayed a high level of interest and enjoyment from visitors. Visitors were asked to rate their overall Festival experience from “Superior,” “Excellent,” “Good,” “Fair,” and “Poor.” Of the 406 survey respondents, 34% of visitors rated their experience as “Superior,” and another 43% of visitors rated their experience as “Excellent.” Additionally, visitors were asked to rate how likely they were to return to the Festival next year on a scale of one to five, with five being the most likely to return. Of the visitors surveyed, 69% of visitors responded with a top rating of five. The overall satisfaction of visitors is also reflected in previous years' number of returning visitors. There was an almost perfectly even split of new and returning visitors this year. Of 406 surveys, 205 were from returning visitors and 201 were from new visitors, showing a strong contingent of returning visitors with sustaining interest and enthusiasm for the Festival.

Participation

Visitors also showed a high level of engagement with the Festival, with 89% of visitors surveyed planning to stay for at least one hour and 23% of visitors planning to stay for more than four hours. Additionally, visitors were asked to state if they felt like they could actively participate in the Festival on a scale of one to five. The results for this question showed that 52% of respondents responded with five, the highest rating. The amount of time spent at the Festival and the positive responses to the question of visitor participation emphasize the ability of visitors to engage with the Festival's programs. The high number of returning visitors also shows continued engagement from past visits, providing an encouraging outlook for future Festival initiatives.

The Use of Technology

While most visitors noticed QR codes around sites, only a small percentage of people used them. 22% of visitors did not see the posted QR codes, and of the visitors who did see them, only 18% used them. While QR codes did

not necessarily generate a lot of traffic, most visitors used the website, with 75% of visitors using the website in some capacity. Visitors rated their experiences with the website quite highly, with 52% of visitors giving it a five out of five. Visitors were also asked what they looked at on the website, able to select multiple answers. The most common reason for using the website was to look at the schedule, with 35% of visitors selecting this option, followed by 28% of visitors who looked at general information and 15% who looked at program information. 6% of visitors used the website to look at information about concessions. Overall, the website was utilized far more than the QR codes.

Shopping

The Marketplace was held online rather than in-person this year, and the survey results display a low level of awareness of the Marketplace from Festival visitors. 77% of visitors were unaware of the online Marketplace prior to the survey. However, 52% of visitors stated that they were interested in visiting it online. 74% of the visitors who indicated that they were interested in visiting the online Marketplace said they would be window shopping. However, 35% of visitors were also interested in Arts and Crafts purchases, the category with the next highest level of responses. During the survey, a considerable number of visitors verbally stated an interest in an in-person rather than online Marketplace in future years.

Sustainability

This year's Festival featured recycling, compostable packaging, water stations, and biodiesel generators as part of a continued attempt to prioritize sustainability. The survey asked visitors about their knowledge of these efforts, and the survey revealed a high level of awareness of sustainability initiatives. 89% of visitors stated they had seen at least one of the Folklife Festival's sustainability initiatives. 84% of visitors stated that they had seen recycling, followed by 61% who had seen compostable packaging. While only 20% of visitors had seen the Festival's water stations, this number was likely affected by a problem with the main visitor water stations that necessitated their removal. Only 4% of visitors were aware of the Festival's biodiesel generators. Overall, visitors were highly aware of the Festival's sustainability efforts, especially the more visible efforts such as recycling and compostable packaging.

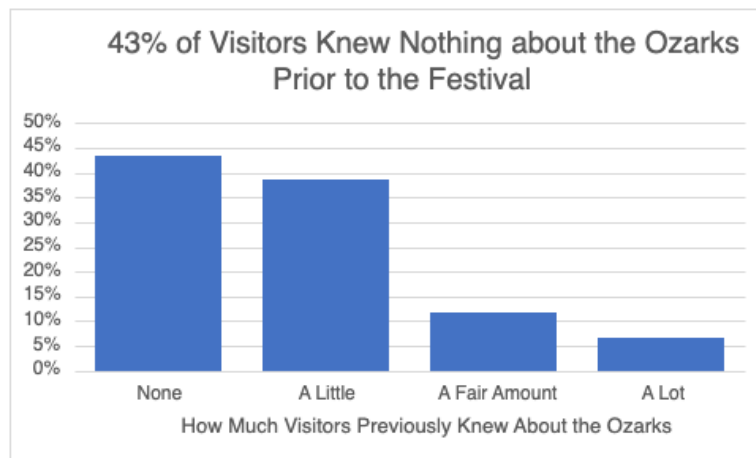
How Much Have Visitors Learned During the Festival?

Programming

To analyze the educational success of the 2023 Folklife Festival, surveyors asked visitors what sections they visited, prompting three follow-up questions per program seen. For both the *Ozarks* and *Creative Encounters*, visitors were asked how much they knew about the program's topics prior to the Festival, how much they had learned during the Festival, and how much they were inspired to keep learning about the programs after leaving the Festival. The multiple-choice options for each question were “none,” “a little,” “a fair amount,” and “a lot.”

The Ozarks

Prior to their trip to the Festival, 43% of those surveyed claimed to know nothing about the region. Many visitors had no previous experience with the region, including understanding its regional boundaries, cultural depth, and racial background. Many visitors commented that their only previous knowledge of the region was through the show *Ozark*, quipping they knew the shows' themes were drugs and illegal activities.

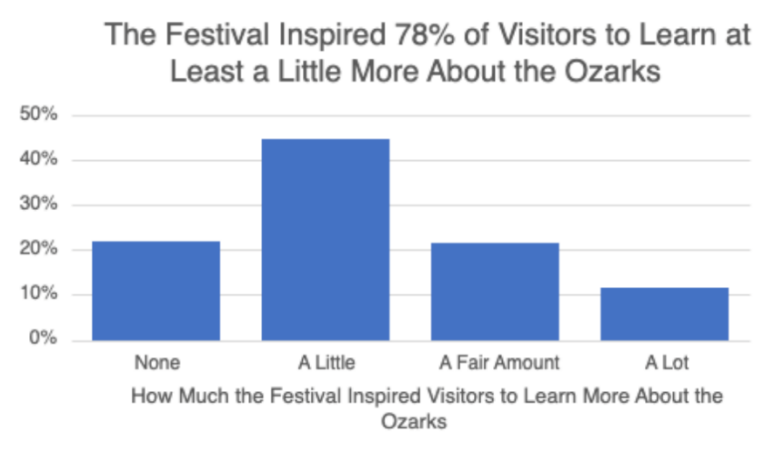


Only 6% of visitors claimed to have learned nothing during their time at the Festival. A significant 55% of visitors claimed they learned a lot or a fair amount about the Ozarks due to Festival programming. Many visitors commented that they learned about how diverse the region is, claiming they previously thought it was mostly white and homogenous in culture; they

were surprised about and interested in the stories of immigration and racial diversity.



Lastly, the data showed the Festival inspired 33% of those surveyed a lot or a fair amount to learn more about the Ozarks. Only 22% of those surveyed said they were not inspired to learn anything more about the region.



Creative Encounters

Compared to the 324 survey responses from the *Ozarks: Faces and Facets of a Region*, only 265 surveyed visitors attended *Creative Encounters: Living Religions* in the U.S. This does not necessarily mean the *Ozarks* program was more popular; many visitors noted that if they had only been to one section, they were planning to visit the other when they were done.

Factors such as the location of the two programs, with the *Ozarks* located next to the Metro, meant people visited the programs in a different order depending on factors such as their commute and the Festival’s schedule. Due to the manner of the survey, with two surveyors in each section, it is possible the facilitators caught more visitors at the beginning of their Festival time in the *Ozarks* section, leading to swayed results.

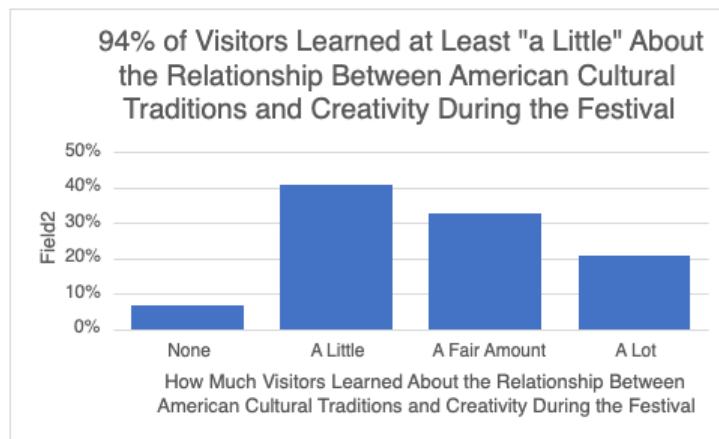
Of those surveyed, only 21% of visitors knew nothing about the ways in which religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions inspire creative practices prior to the Festival. Compared to the *Ozarks*, in which 43% of visitors claimed to know nothing about the topic prior to visiting, *Creative Encounters*’ audience showed a deeper prior understanding of the program.



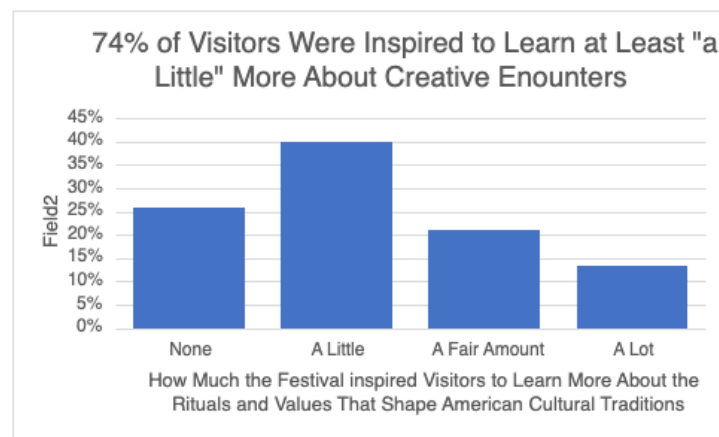
When asked about how much they learned from the *Creative Encounters* program, the largest percentage of visitors, 40%, claimed they learned “a little” about the relationship between American cultural traditions and creativity during this Festival. Only 6% of visitors claimed they learned nothing in their time in *Creative Encounters*, on par with the *Ozarks*’ 6%.

Many visitors described the details they learned in this program, specific participants who they learned from, or cultures they were particularly interested in. Compared to the *Ozarks* program, in which visitors cited their new knowledge of the region’s geography, racial diversities, and

cultural practices, visitors' outcomes in *Creative Encounters* focused on nuance, details, and perspective.



Finally, 40% of visitors claimed they were inspired to learn a little about the rituals and values that shape American cultural traditions. Only 26% claimed they were not inspired at all. While this is slightly above the *Ozarks*, 22%, both programs deeply engaged their audiences.



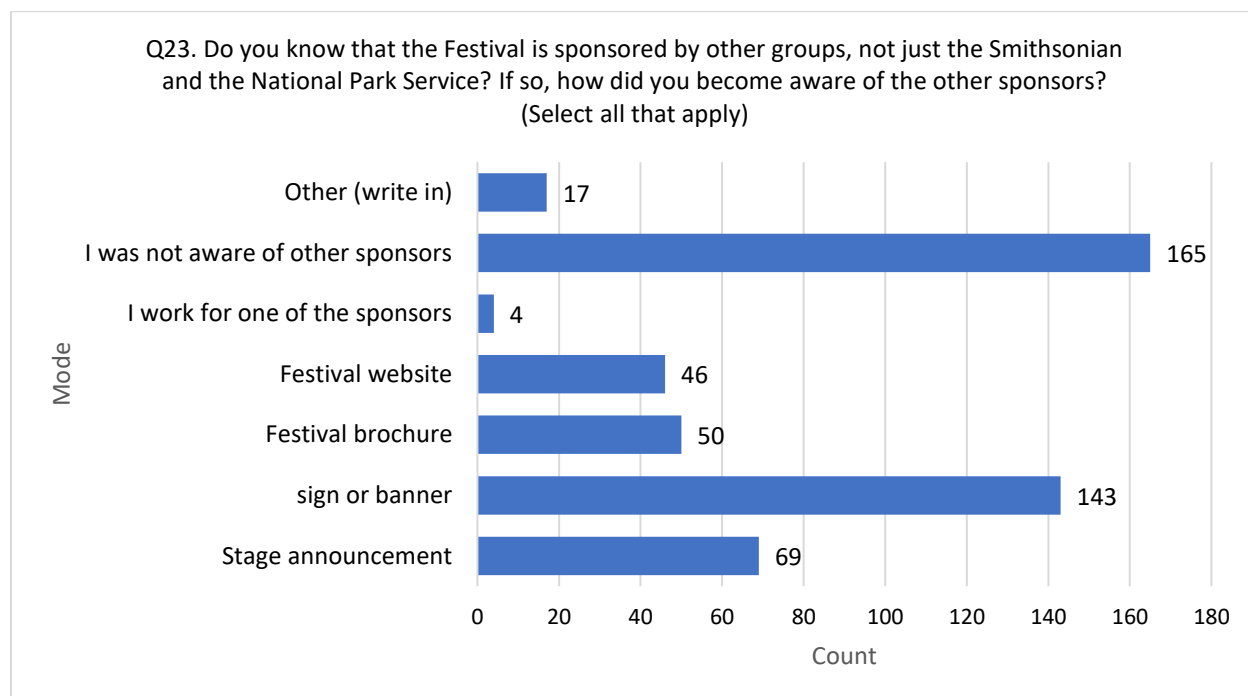
The data from the program-centered questions proved that the 2023 Festival was academically engaging, encouraged thought, and inspired further education.

Sponsorships

To comprehend the reach and promotion of the Festival's sponsors beyond the Smithsonian and the National Park Service, visitors were asked if they were aware of such sponsors and, if so, how.

The data showed that 41% of survey respondents were not aware of the Festival’s sponsors. Many guests seemed genuinely surprised and were curious to learn more.

The most efficient methods of promoting sponsors were signs or banners, which were seen by 35% of surveyed visitors, and stage announcements, which were seen by 17% of surveyed visitors. The Festival brochure informed 12%, and the Festival website informed 11% of survey takers.



Note: This question allowed visitors to select all options that apply. For this reason, the graph above depicts the number of times a visitor mentioned each category.

Visitors’ Opinions on Future Programming

The last questions of the survey addressed the overall success of the Festival and visitors' input for improvements for future programming. With the increase of online and hybrid programming during COVID-19, the 2023 Festival was entirely in person and for multiple weeks for the first time since 2018. When surveyors asked visitors if they would attend virtual classes or workshops from cultural experts affiliated with the Festival, 53% of visitors said they were not likely to participate. Only 11% of visitors claimed they would be very likely to participate in virtual classes or workshops.

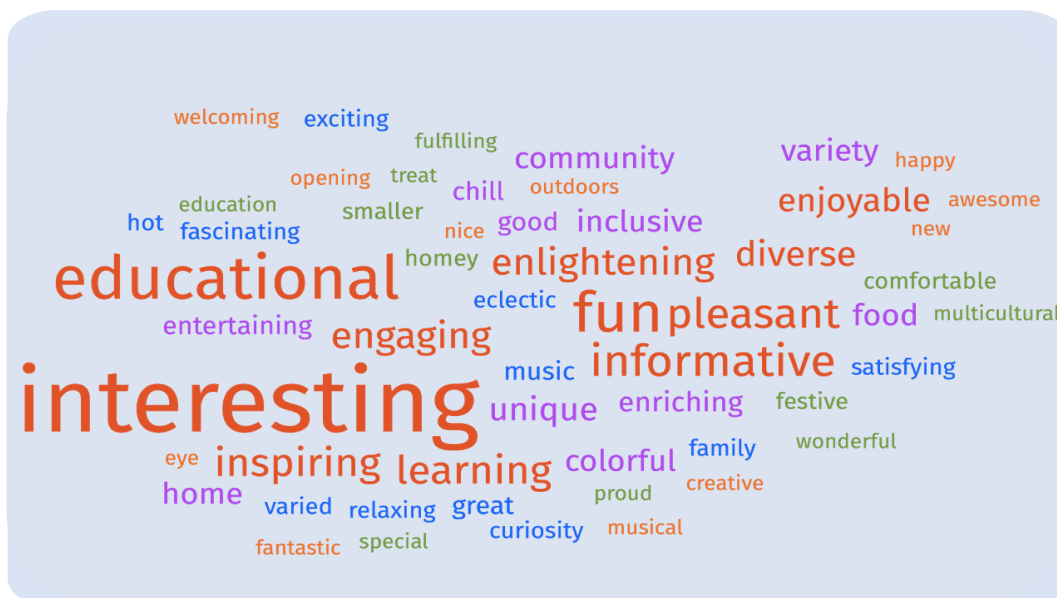
When visitors were asked if they would attend other programming for the Festival throughout the year, only 19% said they would be interested in online programming. However, there was a demand by visitors for Festival programming in other outdoor locations and at Smithsonian museums, with 52% claiming they would be interested in outdoor venues and 64% of visitors interested in programming at Smithsonian museums.

Surveyors also asked what two programs people would like to see throughout the year. They were given the options of performances, craft demonstrations, foodways demonstrations, cultural discussions, skill workshops, cultural tours, Festival Marketplace products to buy, and others.

Most visitors, 63%, responded “performances.” Many visitors commented on the draw-in of live music, hoping to see more large concerts in the future. “Craft demonstrations” was the second most popular answer, with 40% of visitors requesting to see them throughout the year. Interestingly, many visitors commented on foraging and the community gardens, citing it as one of their favorite events this year and requesting to see more like it in the future.

What Did Visitors Say About the 2023 Folklife Festival?

Surveyors asked visitors to provide one word to describe their experience at the Festival. In the word cloud below, visitors' responses are compiled and sized relative to their rate of response, with larger words representing higher response frequency.



The top ten most mentioned words were: interesting (31 times), educational (19 times), fun (17 times), informative (12 times), pleasant (11 times), learning (10 times), inspiring (10 times), engaging (9 times), enlightening (9 times), and diverse (8 times).

Almost a third of all visitors mentioned words related to education and learning in their responses. Most visitors commented on the myriad opportunities created by the Festival, which enabled learning.

Educational: *You can tell that people are here to learn and I love the opportunity to be introduced to so many things.*

Informative: *A lot of info to learn, each station gives a lot of information about what they are about. This is amazing to learn about what you are doing.*

Enlightening: *[It was] more than entertaining. [There were] opportunities to learn so much more about so [many] things, ask questions [and listen to] first [hand] accounts. You walk away knowing and appreciating so much more than you did before.*

Connection and community were the second largest theme that emerged from visitors' responses. Over 70 visitors felt that the Festival created a welcoming atmosphere that allowed them to engage, establish connections, and feel they belonged.

Community: *Best Folklife Festival yet, this Festival is a part of the community and encourages us to learn and stay connected to those around us.*

Belonging: *We all are welcome, belong, and exist together as a community.*

Inclusive: *I felt welcomed and able to jump in and learn wherever I entered.*

Harmony: *It brings different people and different cultures to you in one place, it opens your mind.*

Additional Commentary

Before concluding the survey, surveyors asked visitors for any additional comments they would like the Festival organizers to know. This open-ended question provided the opportunity for unfiltered and unprompted perspectives of the Festival. Some visitors reiterated their love and appreciation of the Festival. Other visitors took the chance to voice their constructive criticisms to improve future Festivals. Most of the comments converge on a few themes: shopping experience, accessibility, and logistics.

For a full list of additional comments, please refer to the *Results of the 2023 Smithsonian Folklife Festival* attached at the bottom of this report.

Shopping Experience

The Marketplace was most frequently brought up by visitors. Over 20 people expressed a strong wish to bring back the in-person Marketplace, and many others asked about the Marketplace or were disappointed they would not be able to buy things. For many long-term Festival goers, the Marketplace was a focal point where they could connect with the culture and materialize their experience into something tangible.

One visitor who had been coming back to the Festival for over forty years emphasized how much he enjoyed the in-person shopping experience:

The Marketplace is a signature feature of the Festival and adds to the experience. Having a physical Marketplace increases my enjoyment of the Festival and makes me more likely to buy things.

After asking why the in-person Marketplace was cut, one visitor even suggested a hybrid alternative to a full marketplace:

[I] wish there were a booth that has everything you can buy on display, and you can see what you can get and order it online. Perhaps also having a menu of items available to purchase would be helpful. In this case, [it] could cut down security and delivery costs but still get people interested in buying stuff.

Apart from the Marketplace, food made up an important aspect of visitors' experience at the Festival. Many visitors commented on how much they enjoyed the culinary offerings at the Festival. However, a handful of visitors

also suggested more affordable prices and more varieties of food would improve the visitor experience in the future.

One suggested attention to dietary restrictions:

Make sure food is dietary restriction accessible.

Another visitor was particularly upset by the price of drinks:

Everyone should be able to buy something, at least a drink, in the hot steamy summer.

Another visitor advised the Festival to include educational content in the concessions that inform visitors of the culinary traditions that they were about to experience:

[It would be nice to] add information on food in the dining area, if there are already so many foodways demonstrations, it is a missed opportunity to not include that and educate visitors in the concessions.

Accessibility

Some visitors voiced accessibility concerns during the survey. The two most mentioned topics were the fences that enclosed tree plots and water stations.

A number of visitors, particularly older adults, expressed concerns regarding the fences, which could be hard to see and would sometimes blend into the lawn. Many more, regardless of age, had approached surveyors asking for directions to the exits.

[It was] hard to figure out where the fence openings are. If evacuation happens, people can't figure out how to get out.

The summer heat was also a primary concern shared by visitors. While many visitors appreciated the tree shades that brought breeze and benches on which people could rest, over a dozen visitors strongly advised the Festival to provide more “support for visitors to survive the heat” for safety and accessibility considerations. Visitors suggested more water stations, misting stations, and fans that should be made available for public use:

[The Festival] should provide water for visitors, especially in this heat and humidity, it is not healthy for people without water, especially for elderly people. If someone is going to pass out, they won't be able to walk to neighboring museums to get water.

Need cool-down stations. It gets dangerously hot out there and the weather is an obstacle to attending.

Logistics

In terms of logistics, many visitors indicated that more information about the Festival prior to attending would significantly enhance their experience.

Several visitors suggested schedules and maps to be made more readily available:

[I would like a] full schedule in the program brochure, or even an app to inform schedules.

More organized time schedule on-site.

[I] wish the map was more prominent and ma[de] it easier to navigate to the Festival's main page.

The website was hard to maneuver, the schedule should be made very visible. It took a while to find maps.

Multiple others suggested that the schedule could be improved to better communicate the programming:

I wish the website was clearer about ... how the programs were organized in terms of time and theme.

The website schedule was confusing. It felt too linear and unclear where things physically were on the Mall.

One non-local visitor also indicated better directions and public transportation information are needed for visitors unfamiliar with the area:

There needs to be more information on where the Festival is taking place. It was unclear where on the Mall it was taking place and which metro stop to get off at.

Below listed some other information visitors would like to see before coming to the Festival:

I would like to know more about what the themes are [in] the advertisements.

[I] wish there were more description[s] on the themes and more photos [on the website] to attract people to come.

The mission of the Festival could have been clearer. For example, when [you] first go to the main page, state what the Festival is, what it has, [that] themes change every year, etc.

More info on food vendors.

Regarding sustainability efforts, most visitors lauded the effort to sort trash and recycle as much as possible. However, some visitors pointed out that resource recovery needed to be more explicit. They noted that Resource Recovery was not commonly perceived as a trash station and may be confused with lost and found.

More recycling [stations], resource recovery [is] not obvious.

Resource Recovery is obscure, say it is recycle/trash disposal here.

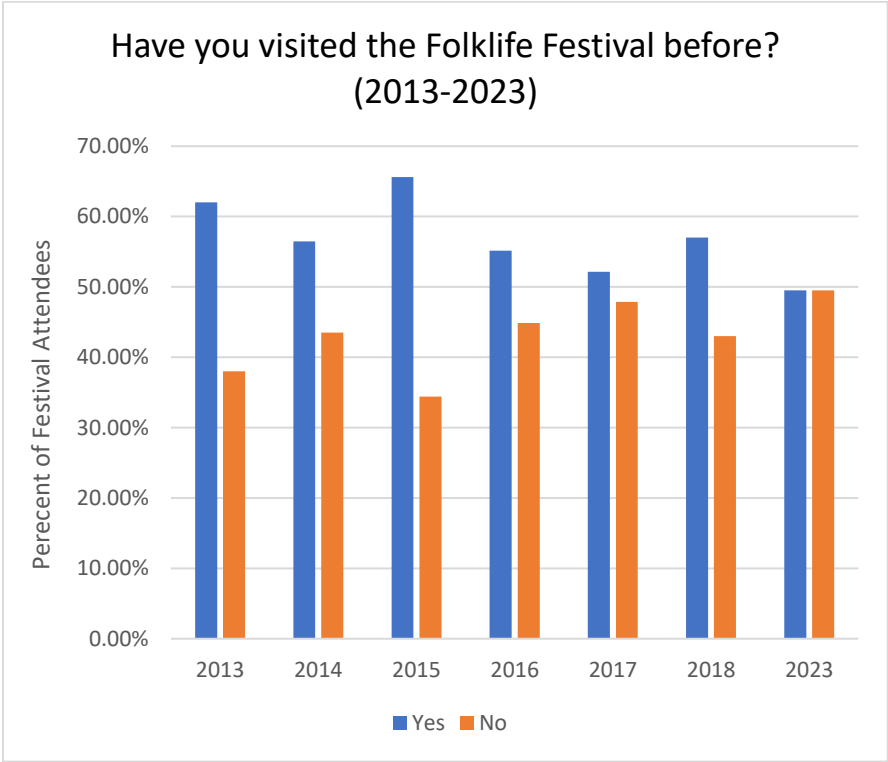
Trends in Festival Experience

How Does the 2023 Folklife Festival Compare to Previous Years?

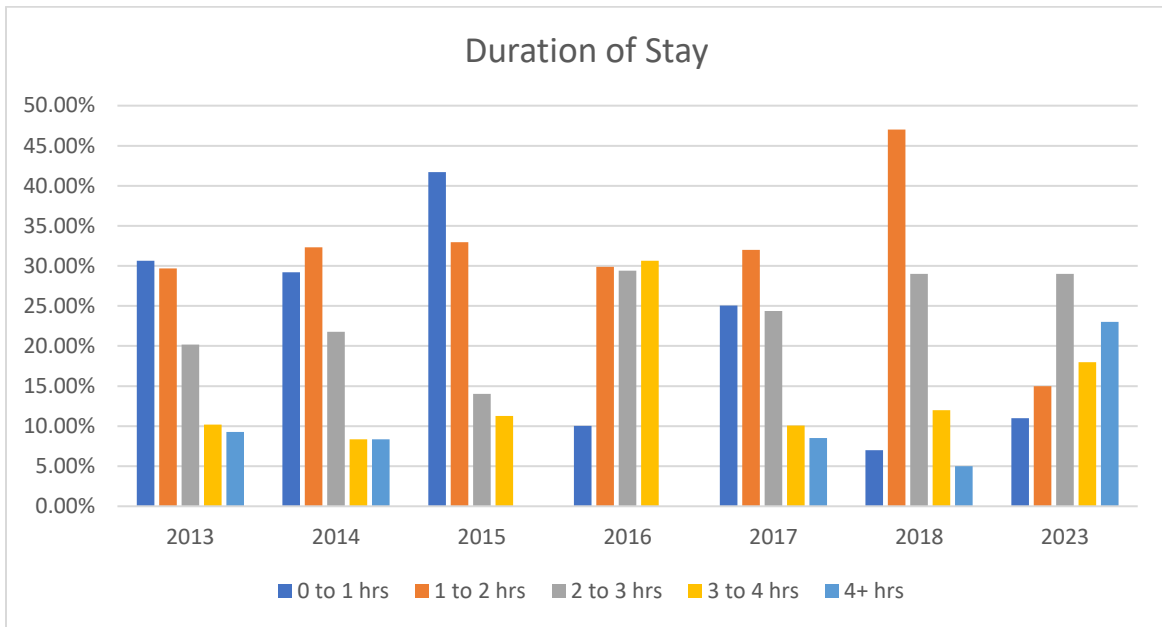
Due to the 2019 Government Shutdown and the COVID-19 Pandemic, this survey marks the first full-length Visitors' Survey since 2018. When comparing the results of the 2023 survey to previous years, there is a clear uptick in the number of satisfied Festival visitors.

How Have Visitors Changed Over Time?

The number of first-time visitors has steadily risen in the past ten years.



In 2023, visitors spent more time at the Festival.

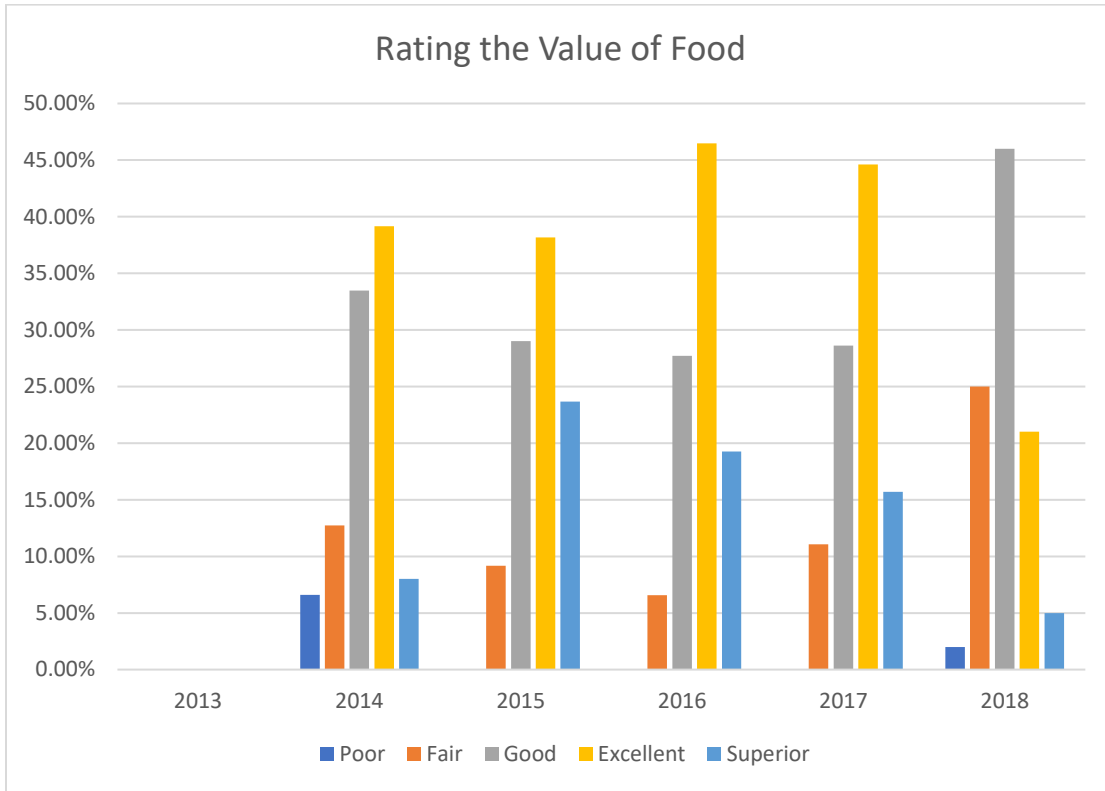


How Have Visitors' Experiences Shifted?

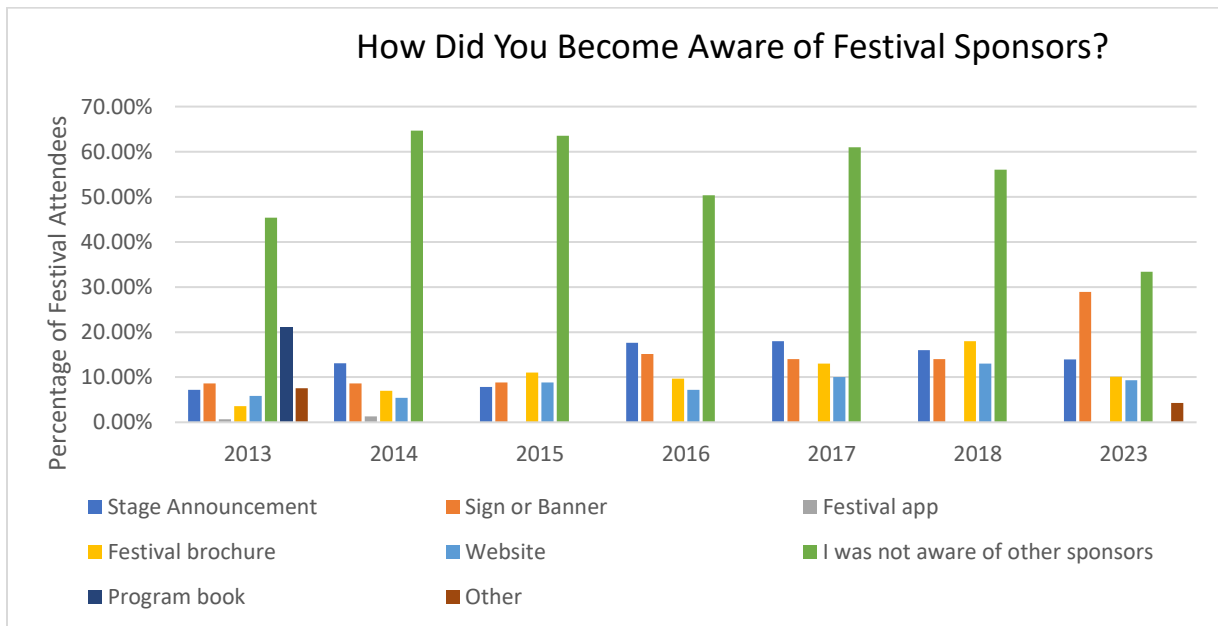
The number of visitors who have bought Festival Concessions has decreased since 2018.



Despite high satisfaction with the taste of Festival concessions, visitors' ratings of the value of concessions have noticeably fallen.

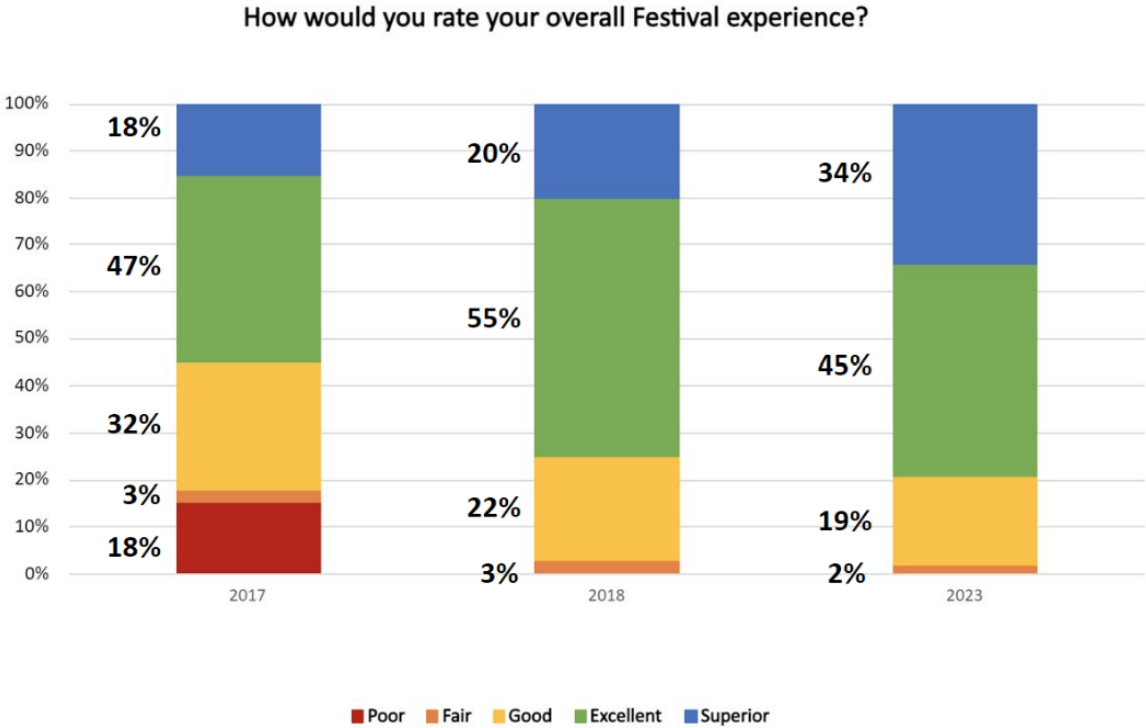


Awareness of Festival Sponsors has risen.



How Would Visitors Rate Their Overall Festival Experience?

On each iteration of the Visitors’ Survey, surveyors have asked visitors to rate their overall experience from Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent, to Superior. When comparing visitors’ experience to previous years, it is undeniable that this year’s Festival met and exceeded visitors’ expectations.



The percentage of visitors who rated the Festival as “Superior” has increased significantly from 18% in 2017 to 34% in 2023. Similarly, the percentage of visitors who were dissatisfied has decreased from 18% of visitors rating the Festival “Poor” in 2017 to only 2% in 2023.

Overall, there have been many positive trends when comparing the results of the Visitors’ Survey in the last 10 years. This should be a sign of encouragement and optimism for many different Festival stakeholders.

Qualitative Interviews

Introduction

Besides questionnaires, surveyors conducted interviews with younger visitors to better understand what drew younger folks to the Festival and what could be changed to attract younger demographics to visit the Festival. Twenty-two interviews were conducted with 43 individuals. After obtaining verbal consent for an interview and collecting demographic information, surveyors asked five open-ended questions, with follow-up questions when appropriate.

The questions asked were:

1. What motivated you to attend the Festival today?
2. What aspect of the Festival did you enjoy the most?
3. In the future, would you be interested in a Folklife Festival that offers both in-person and virtual options? Like live-streamed concerts, digital timelines, or virtual demonstrations?
4. We are working to engage more youth visitors at the Festival. What factors would encourage you and your peers to return to the Festival in the future?
5. Is there any comment that you would like to add?

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the four surveyors. A coding scheme was then developed to thematically code and analyze the interviews. See below for a summary of demographics and the key themes that emerged from the interviews.

Demographics

The interviewees ranged from 19 to 39 years old, with an average of 23.7 years old.

In terms of gender, 70% of the interviewees were female. The largest race category is white, consisting of 51% of interviewees, followed by mixed race (14%), black (12%), and Asian (5%). 19% of respondents identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino.

Most of the interviewees currently live in the DMV area, representing 79% of the sample. The rest of the interviewees visited the Festival from all over the United States, including Alabama, California, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, and Tennessee. There was also one international interviewee from Nicaragua.

The majority of interviewees were first-time visitors at the Festival, which contrasts with the even split of the general visitor survey.

Findings

In the interviews with youth participants at the Festival, 5 major recurring themes emerged: interactive activities, food, music, virtual Festival, and marketing. The following section is organized by discussing each of the 5 themes.

Interactive activities

Several visitors highlighted the hands-on activities as inviting for youth:

If you are more socially oriented, or if you want to come out here and learn how to do something, I feel like [interactive workshops] would be more encouraging for younger people.

When asked to suggest specific interactive elements that would engage youth visitors, a few interviewees suggested workshops where they could participate in making handicrafts. For these visitors, meaningful participation goes beyond asking questions or watching presentations. Instead, it focuses on creating tangible memories that they could take home:

[I] started out at the Ofrenda tent, and we were making flowers ... for the altar that they were still setting up. So having those kinds of experiences where you can make something that represents what you've learned.

If there's something like making bags, that would be really popular. You get a free souvenir. We'd love to see that.

However, it is important to note that despite the general enthusiasm for interactive activities, one visitor explicitly stated that joining conversations

required a higher threshold than just watching and listening. Her comment was a reminder that not everyone would be willing or able to participate in interactive elements of the Festival:

It can be a little bit more intimidating to join in on conversations than coming in and watching or listening.

Food

As a critical site of cultural exchange and experience, food was at the center of visitors' experience at the Festival. Many visitors were drawn to the Festival by food, and most visitors said they enjoyed the variety of food offered. However, some interviewees expressed the desire for more diverse food options at affordable prices.

Some visitors came to the Festival because of the food offered:

Saw there would be music/food/drinks and thought it was a good way to spend the day.

I saw that menu online, and it looked really good. So, I was excited to check it out.

Many visitors who purchased food rated very highly of the taste, variety, and value:

The food was good actually... I got the pastrami sandwich. I liked it. I mean for festival food... It was good.

Everything you could probably want, they have. But it's not overwhelming or like, I have a thousand things to pick from. You have like six things. I'm like, oh, works for me.

Festivals are normally pretty expensive, so I was happy with the prices.

However, a handful of interviewees hoped to find more food options at more affordable prices. Other visitors suggested that food was overly expensive and was not labeled with clear serving sizes:

[I want] more veg options.

I wanted to try the fried chicken, but I didn't know how big it was because it cost \$20, and I was like, is that for just one person? So, I was like, eh, I don't know if I want to spend \$20 on fried chicken.

No, no [I have not tried the concessions]. Because there's only one restaurant that seemed a little pricey... just a little bit more food option.

We each spent over \$40 for a meal and drinks... we don't think we would do [it] again.

Despite mixed opinions on the diversity and value of food, most interviewees agreed on the importance of affordable food and drinks in drawing visitors. One visitor even described the food as an anchor that led people in.

I had a drink, [and] I'm like, I'm going to go hang out and see gig making, you know. So ... that is the anchor here.

Music

Alongside food, music ranked high among youth visitors' favorite aspect of visitors' Festival experience. For visitors who stumbled upon the Festival, music that spilled over the tree plots was a significant factor that invited them to walk into the Festival:

We just walked by and my husband's a string band musician, he's really into music. So yeah, that [music] is what brought us in.

I biked through the Mall last year and ... I stumbled upon a little bit of music, and then wanted to follow it and see what's happening this year, so I started following it on Instagram. I watched the video yesterday and I was eager to come.

Similarly, when surveyors asked interviewees for advice on increasing youth participation at the Festival, live music was frequently mentioned as a way to draw in passersby:

Live music is always a good drawing factor for me.

Something loud draws you in.

Later at night, you should obviously change to live music.

Virtual Festival

Would youth prefer a virtual Festival? When surveyors asked interviewees this question, most said no. Over 74% of the youth interviewees preferred an in-person Festival. For many, the Festival experience was not just about watching panels or listening to music; it was a cohesive experience about being outside, trying out new food, stumbling upon activities, and engaging in unexpected cultural interactions. One visitor described the Festival experience as “all about the going.” Thus, for these Festival-goers, the intimacy of in-person Festivals could not be replicated online:

I like being outside, and I like the novelty of new things... doing that through a screen diminishes that experience, and it becomes a little more superficial.

That's a really special thing about the Folklife Festival is that these people come from all over [and] have [lived] experiences. Because of that, I wouldn't want to [have the Festival online].

With virtual, you lose the personal connection with people. Because instead of being able to engage back and forth, it's more like a lecture style.

Meanwhile, many also stressed the importance of virtual Festivals for accessibility and documentation considerations.

[Virtual] makes it more accessible to everybody.

I think it's great for people that can't go out or don't want to go out.

It would be nice to have online recordings of events after they happened.

One visitor, who lives in D.C. for work, said she would love to have both options to be able to share her Festival moments with her family living in Hawaii:

It's great to see things in person. But I also have family members back in Hawaii, when I show them all these pictures, they're like, oh my gosh, I wish we could be there with you. And I'm like, it'd be

great if there was something I could share with them too online because I know that they would.

Marketing

Among first-time visitors, over half of the interviewees learned about the Festival via word of mouth (friends, professors, and work) or stumbled upon it. Almost a fifth learned about the Festival via social media (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook). Other methods were through Google searches, newspapers (*Washington Post*), and physical advertisements on the Metro and apartments. The small percentage of first-time visitors who found out about the Festival through official advertisements highlighted the need to increase marketing efforts, especially in ways that could better reach the youth, such as increasing presence on social media platforms.

Many first-time visitors mentioned that they had not seen an advertisement for the Festival.

I live in the area, and I didn't even know this was an annual Festival.

I don't think I saw any advertisement [on social media] before.

If you told me it was more like this, I would definitely have told my friends about it.

Two visitors compared advertisements for the Folklife Festival to *Solstice Saturday*, which the Smithsonian hosted two weeks prior.

There was a lot of advertising on social media in terms of TikTok people on the Solstice Saturday event and not so much this [Folklife Festival].

Thus, the interviewees generally agreed that low youth participation at the Festival was primarily due to the need for more knowledge of the Festival. Over half of those interviewed mentioned that increasing marketing efforts would bring them and their peers/friends to the Festival. They claimed that had they had known about it, younger audiences would be very interested in attending. In other words, the biggest challenge to increase youth participation at the Festival was to spread the word in ways that can reach them.

The interviewees gave several specific suggestions on how the Festival could achieve a wider social media presence on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

- 1) Highlight food options and interactive activities in social media posts.

Highlighting some of the cool foods.

Do one of the demonstrations, do one of the engagement parts, like write your name in Arabic or start weaving. That would pique youth's interest of, "oh, that looks cool. I want to do that."

- 2) Partner with local influencers to be featured in "What to do in DC" videos.

Make a connection with influencers, whether that's behind-the-scenes tours or private meetings with any artists.

I know a lot of DC TikTokers who post for people to look at their stuff to be like, oh, what do I want to do with DC this weekend.

- 3) Incorporate more photo opportunities that encourage social media posts, such as in front of murals or art installations.

I want like a little area where you can take photos specifically for social media. I think that would help.

*So more ... photo ops
—I saw the beautiful,
wooden Ozark sign
and some of the
murals that will be
made—those are
beautiful photo ops.*



In Summation

Recommendations

Based on the data of the 2023 Folklife Festival Visitors' Survey and a collection of qualitative interviews, the following are recommendations from the Survey Team.

Logistics

Some guests commented that they needed clarification about the layout of the Festival. A better map, one which showed their current location, perspective, and guided guests, would allow for a better Festival experience and create a better flow for visitors. Fencing was also a point of contention for some visitors as the black fencing which lined the programming tree plots made some visitors anxious, and they felt contained. They requested more signage to show exits and entrances due to anxieties over emergencies and weather evacuations. There were also some concerns about inclement weather and how visitors would be notified.

While the heat is an unavoidable aspect of presenting a Festival in DC in the summer, many visitors cited this as a struggle and an obstacle to their enjoyment of the Festival. There were also issues with the water coolers this year, and the lack of available water was a frequent comment. Many visitors claimed they wanted to stay longer, but the heat -and lack of relief the Festival provided- made this goal difficult. Some visitors proposed cooling stations, where visitors could go to cool down and rest from the heat in a dedicated tent or area.

Some visitors commented that the toilets' sanitization made their Festival experience worse. One guest commented that there was no hand sanitizer, wipes, or toilet paper in any of the toilets they went to.

Technology

While some visitors found the website easy to navigate, some struggled with the formatting of the schedule. Visitors expressed a desire to see when a program was repeating over multiple days, as the schedule did not clearly show this. Some visitors also expressed an interest in an app to organize information and allow for easy viewing of program descriptions and the Festival map.

Programming

Many visitors enjoyed the programming at the 2023 Festival, citing learning and entertainment. To increase their enjoyment, many visitors cited a desire for more live music. Some visitors claimed that large musical performances would drive in locals and increase the joyful atmosphere of the Festival.

While visitors liked the idea of online programming for when they could not attend events, visitors did not like or recommend the idea of having mainly online, rather than in-person, programming. Most visitors liked connecting with other visitors and program participants.

Shopping experience

Many visitors expressed their disappointment with the lack of a physical Marketplace, although many also said they would visit the online store regardless. There was significant enthusiasm for an in-person Marketplace, with many visitors citing their desire to window shop, make impulse purchases, or to shop in person for gifts. While the logistics for an in-person Marketplace may or may not be feasible, there was a lot of visitor interest in being able to shop in person. The online store was not well-known to visitors before the survey, although many visitors expressed interest in visiting it after they found out. Visitors also proposed allowing artisans to sell their own work, as many people were interested in buying directly from the artist. This was somewhat visible this year with books; some participants brought their own books to sell, which several visitors commented on positively. If an in-person Marketplace is not feasible, this could be an option to allow visitors to purchase from participants on a smaller scale.

Recruiting youth

The qualitative data showed strong interest in the Festival from the youth visitors who were interviewed. Many young people cited social media as both a recruiting tool and a motivation for attending the Festival. Visitors also proposed other activities that could be motivating for their demographic, such as emphasizing different foods and activities on social media, partnering with influencers, and offering more photo opportunities. Much of the youth feedback was centered on ways to promote and engage with visitors on social media, but these visitors also emphasized that they

enjoyed the actual in-person elements of the Festival, such as the beer gardens.

Accessible surveys

To promote a more accessible survey in the future, it may be advantageous to create the visitors' survey in multiple languages to allow guests that do not speak English to be able to leave their thoughts about the Festival.

Conclusion

This report explored the impact and success of the 2023 Folklife Festival, highlighting *The Ozarks: Faces and Facets of a Region* and *Creative Encounters: Living Religions in the U.S.* Through the 40-question survey conducted over 9 Festival days, the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage gained valuable information about the Festival's achievements and areas for improvement. To create a long-term understanding of the Festival's impact and public outreach, it is important to continue administering this annual Visitors' Survey.

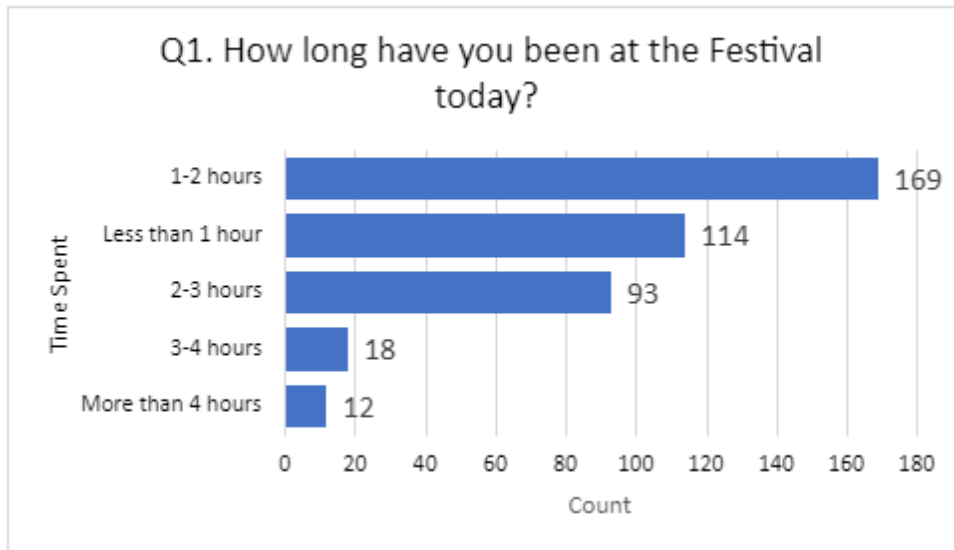
This year's Festival survey provides valuable information that may inform future programming and how to structure future Festivals. Visitors responded positively to concessions, performances, interactive activities, and the overall Festival community. However, visitors suggested more social media advertising prior to the Festival, a revised user-friendly website and online schedule, and a focus on creating a more open Festival layout. Due to the intentional and educational program initiatives and the continued hard work of Smithsonian staff, the survey demonstrates that visitors are supportive of and eager for the next Folklife Festival.

Appendices

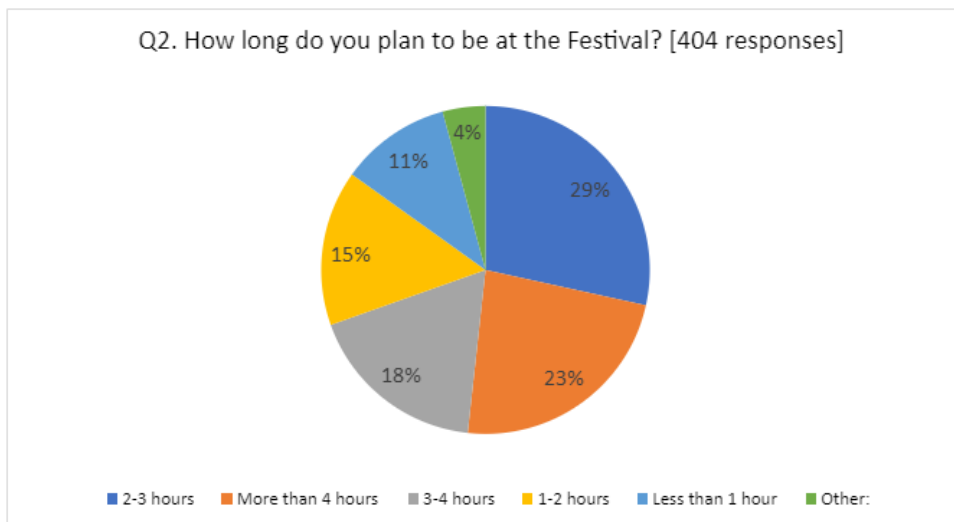
Results of the 2023 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

See the accompanying Excel Sheet of the 2023 Official Folklife Survey Results for view the unprocessed data and/or a compilation of the “write in” responses.

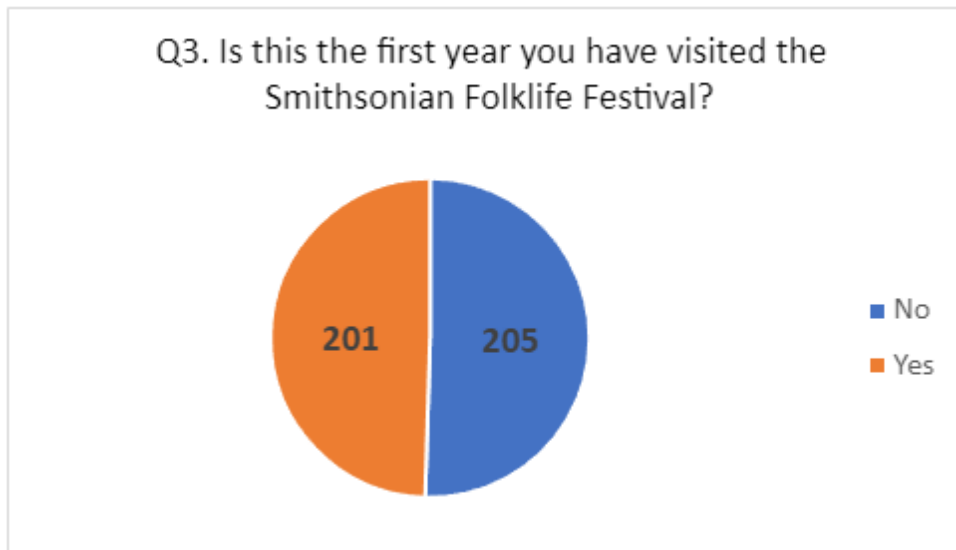
Question 1. How long have you been at the Festival today?



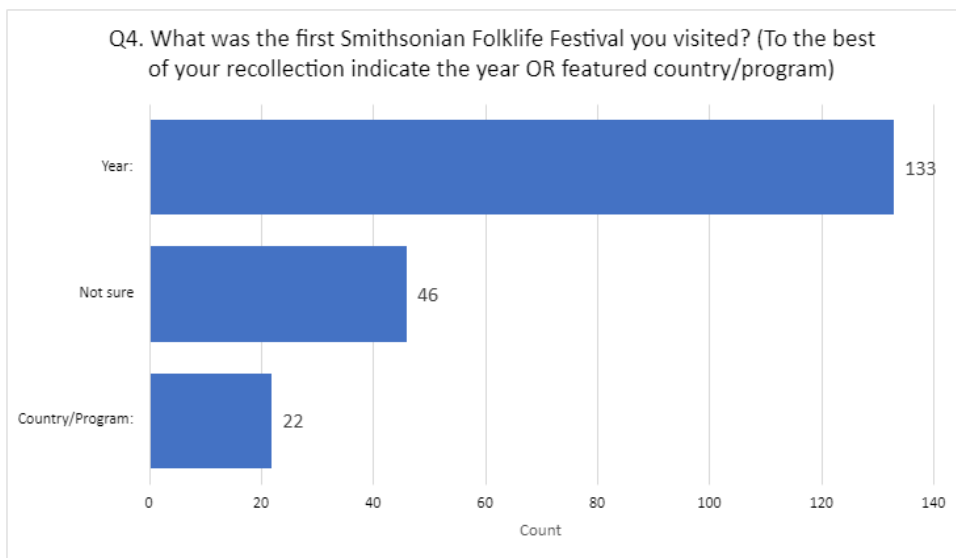
Question 2. How long do you plan to be at the Festival?



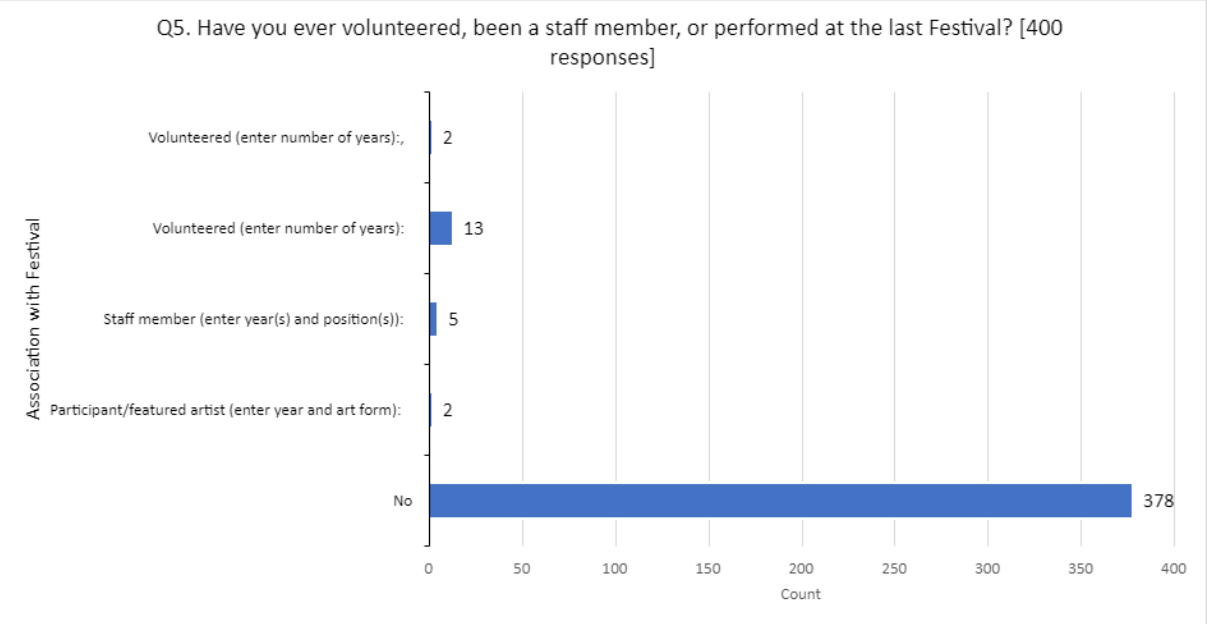
Question 3. Is this the first year you have visited the Smithsonian Folklife Festival?



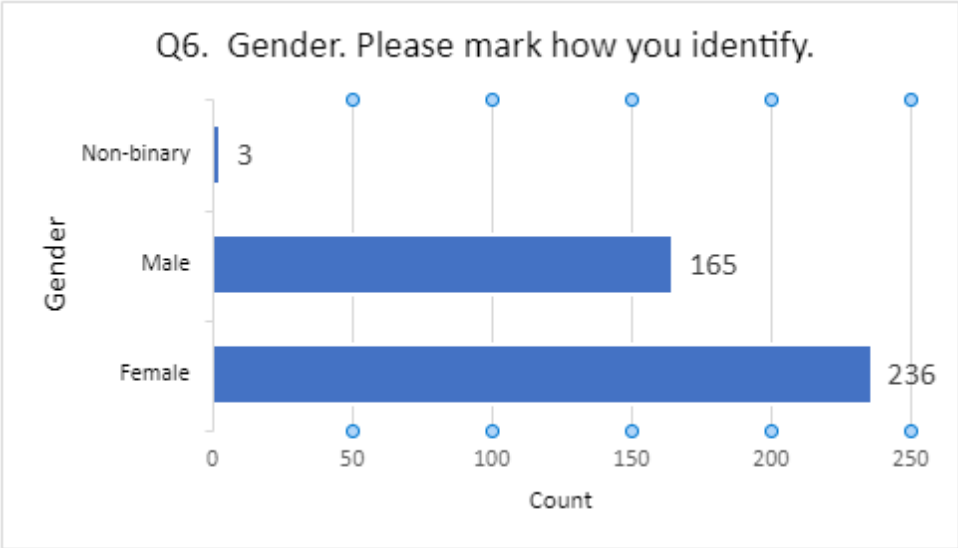
Question 4. What was the first Smithsonian Folklife Festival you visited? (To the best of your recollection indicate the year OR featured country/program)



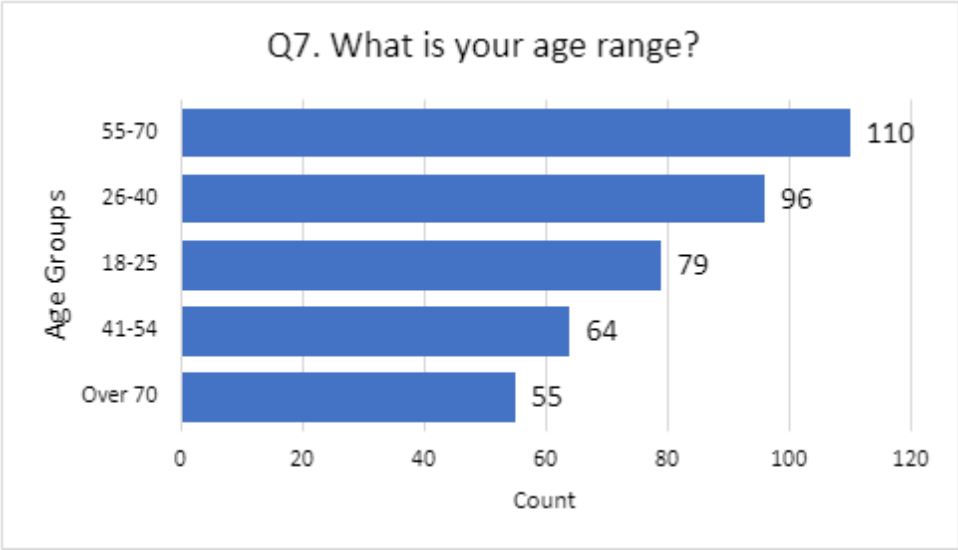
Question 5. Have you ever volunteered, been a staff member, or performed at the Festival?



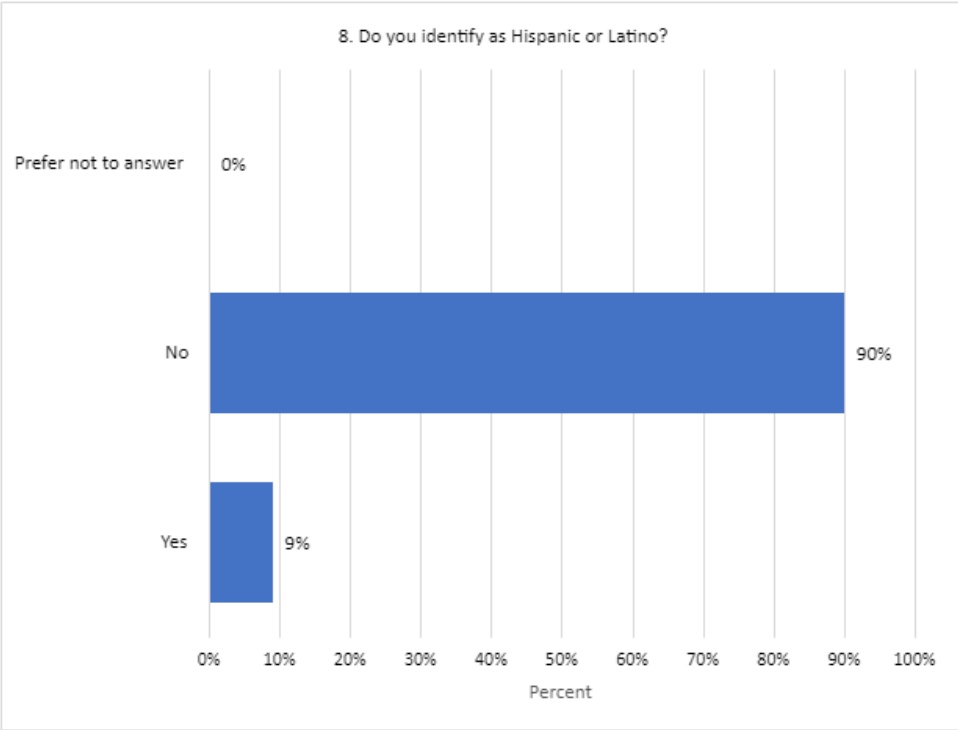
Question 6. Gender. Please mark how you identify.



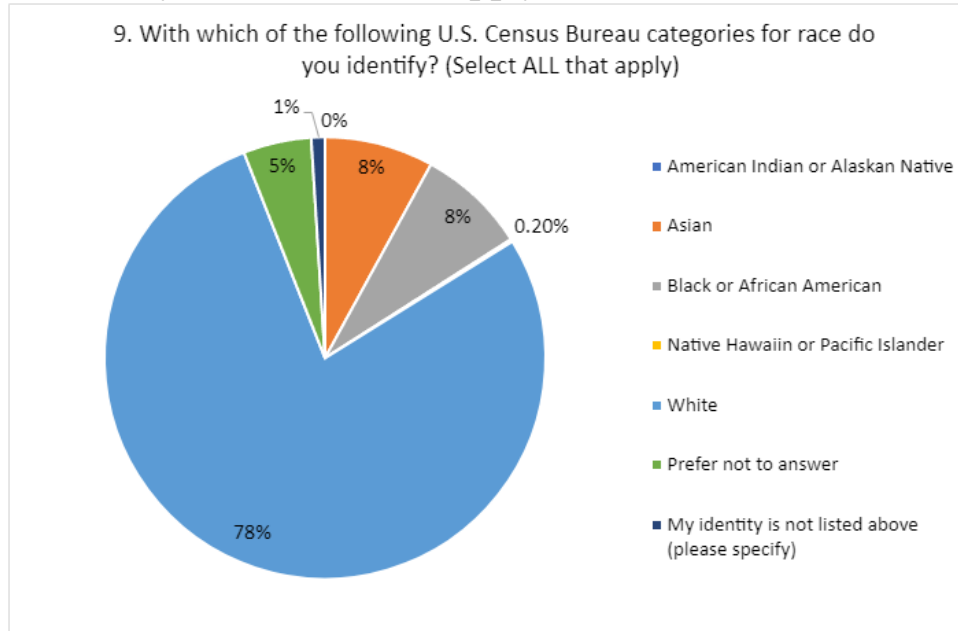
Question 7. What is your age range?



Question 8. Ethnicity. Do you identify as Hispanic or Latino?

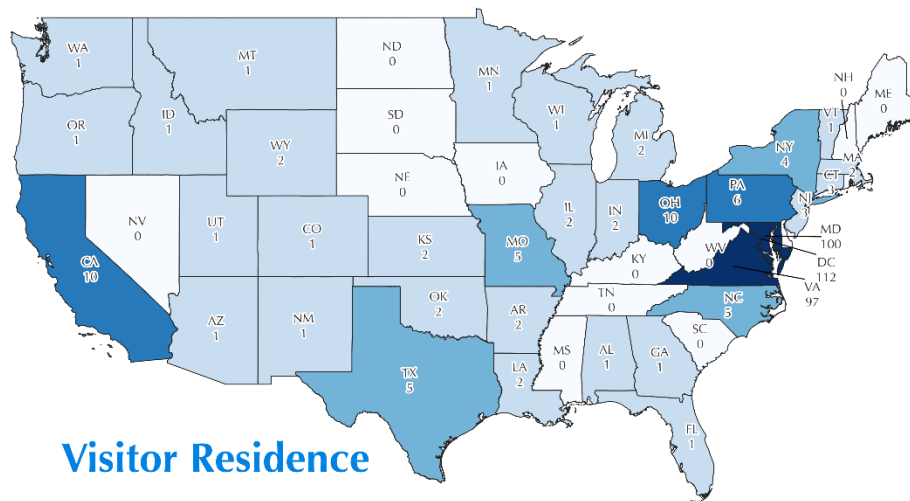


Question 9. With which of the following U.S. Census Bureau categories for race do you identify? (Select all that apply)



Question 10. If you live in the U.S., what is your ZIP code?

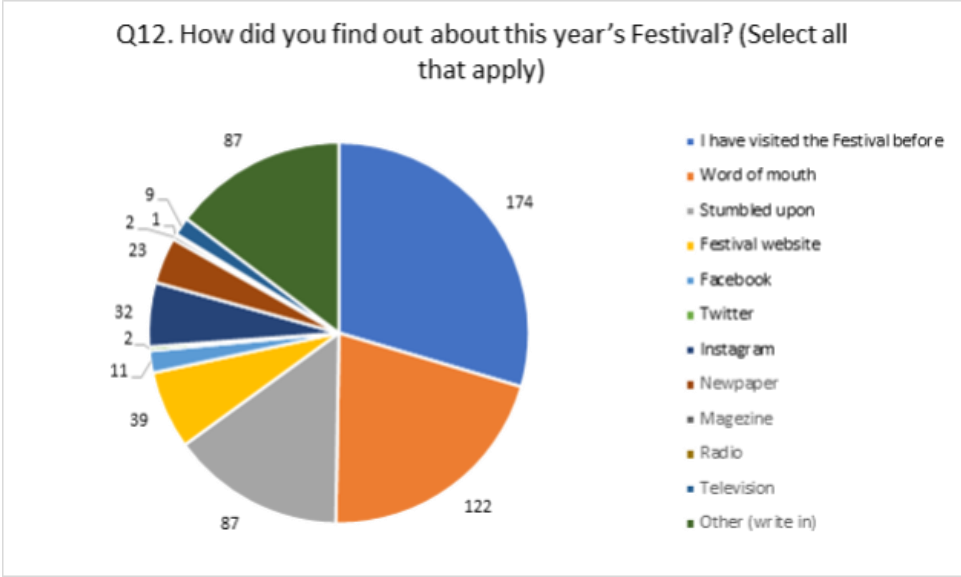
See Excel Sheet of the 2023 Official Folklife Survey results to unprocessed data and/or a compilation of the “write in” responses.



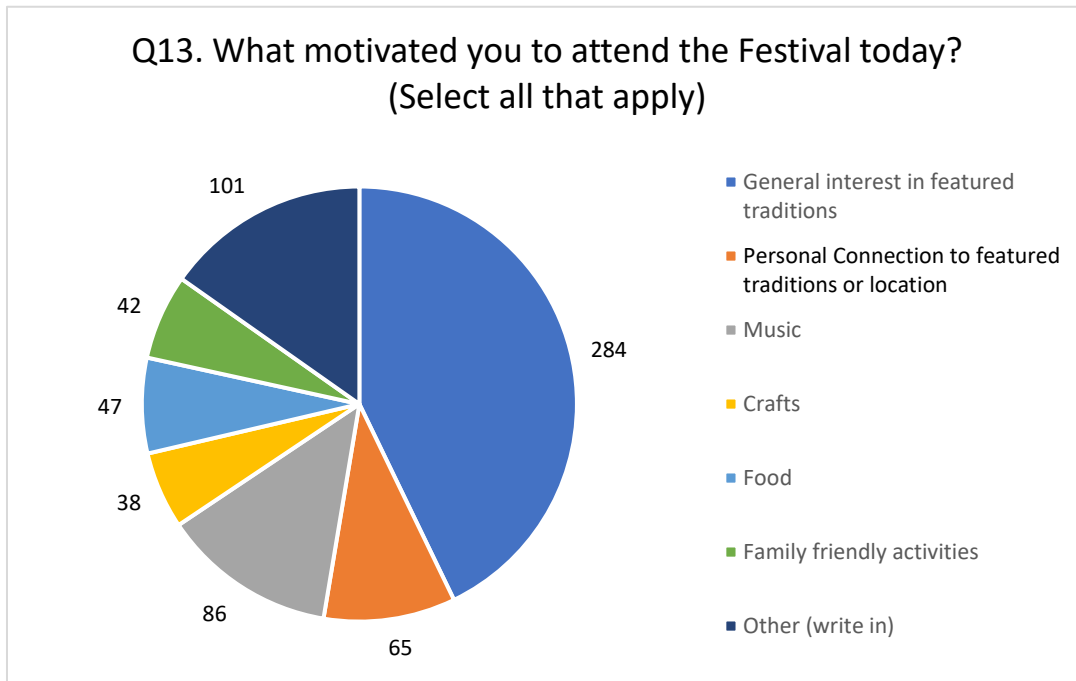
Question 11. If you do not live in the US, which country are you from?

Country	Count
China	2
England	2
Russia	2
Canada	1
Bermuda	1
Germany	1
Colombia	1
France	1
Türkiye	1

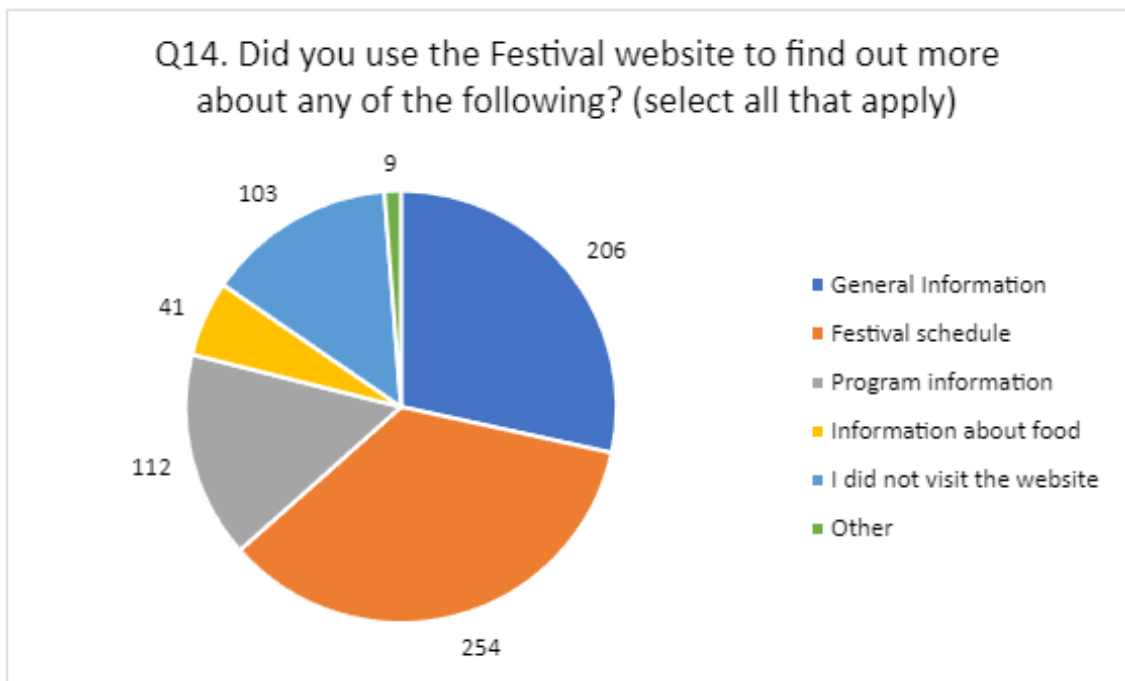
Question 12. How did you find out about this year’s Festival? (Select all that apply)



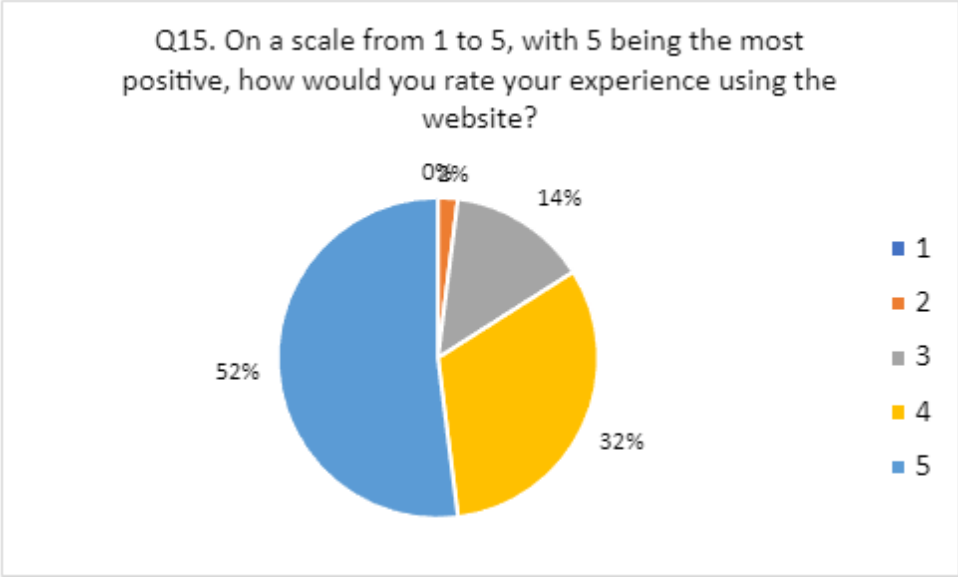
Question 13. What motivated you to attend the Festival?



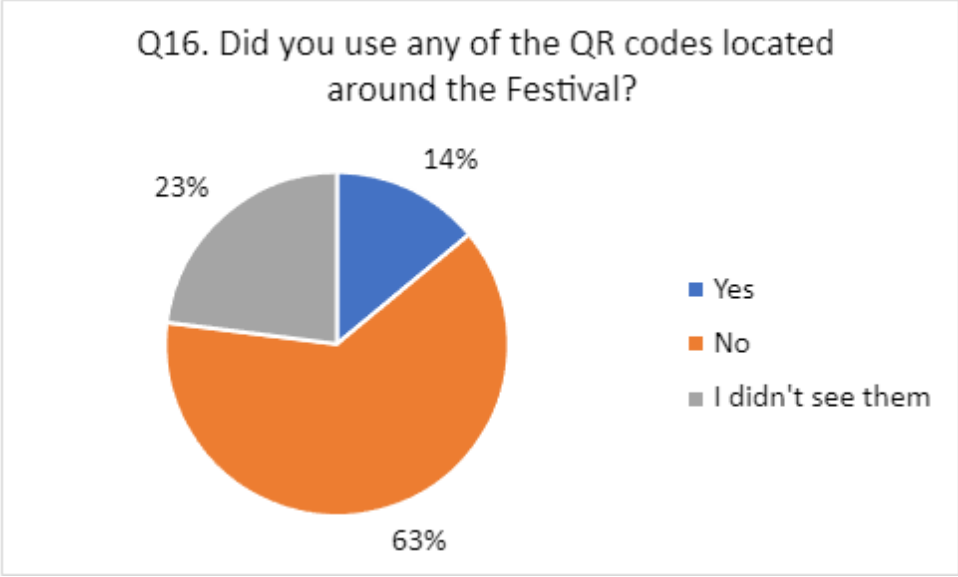
Question 14. Did you use the Festival website to find out more about any of the following? (Select all that apply)



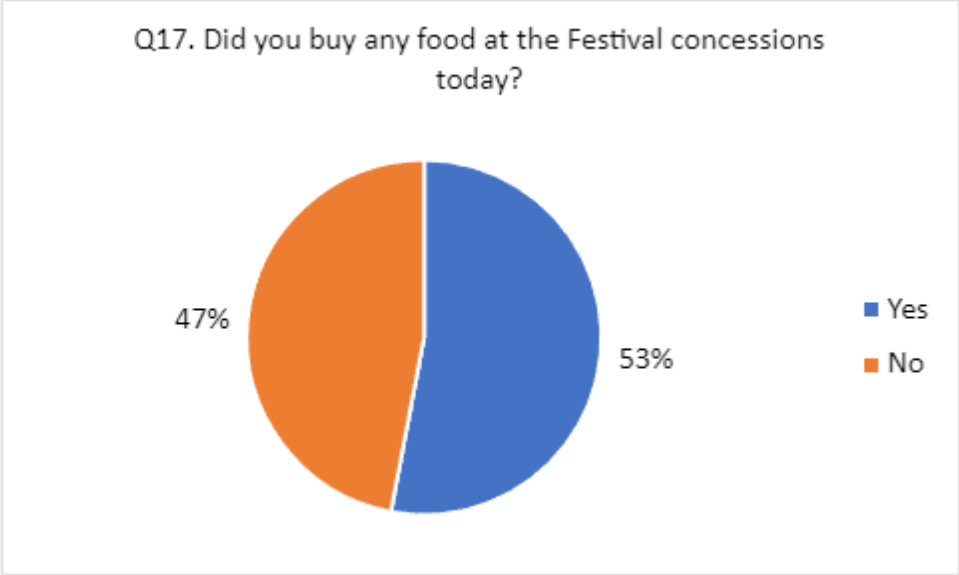
Question 15. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive, how would you rate your experience using the website?



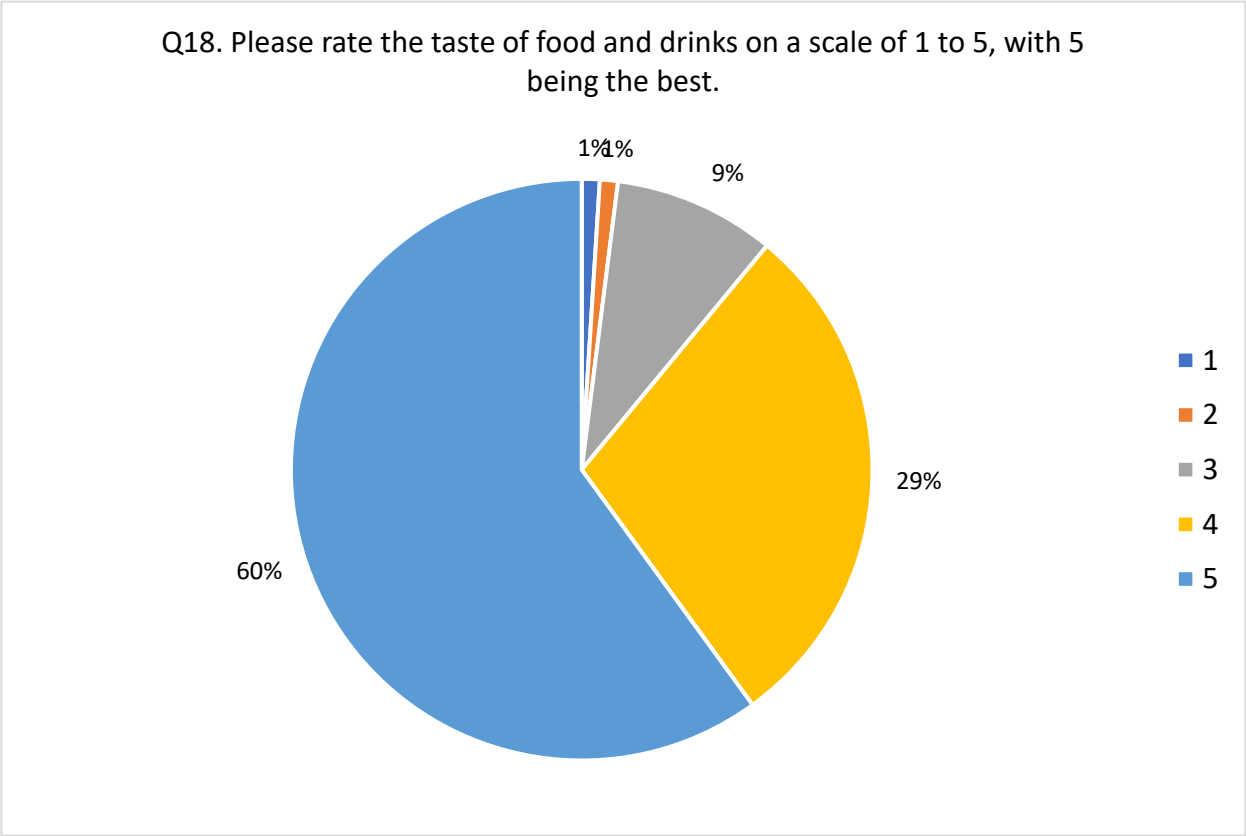
Question 16. Did you use any of the QR codes located around the Festival?



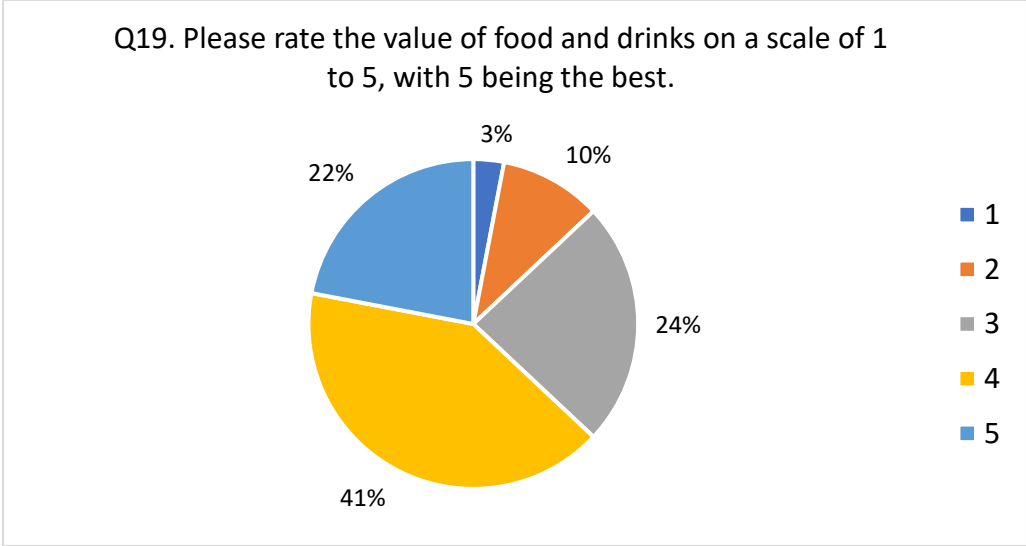
Question 17. Did you buy any food at the Festival concessions today?



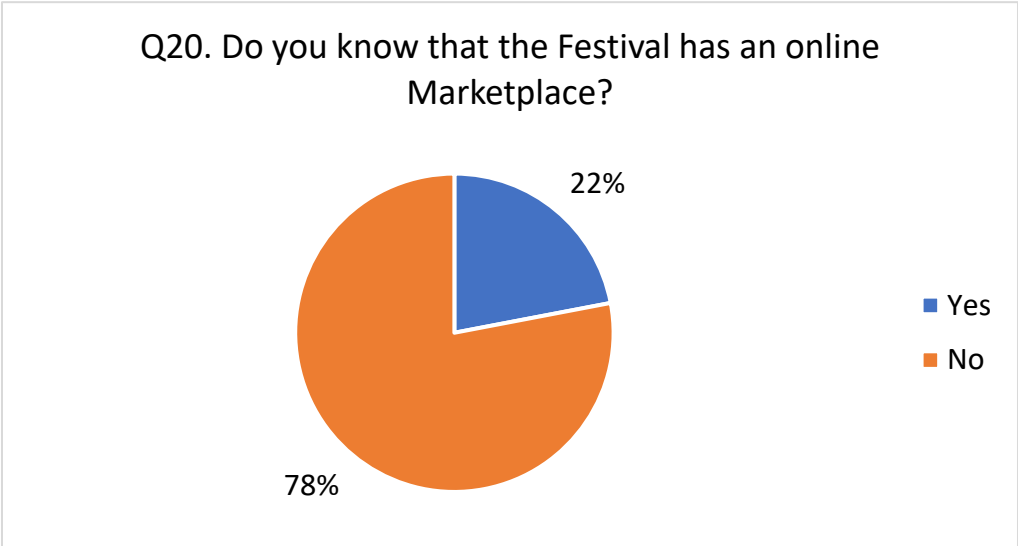
Question 18. Please rate the taste of food and drinks on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best.



Question 19. Please rate the value of food and drinks on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best.



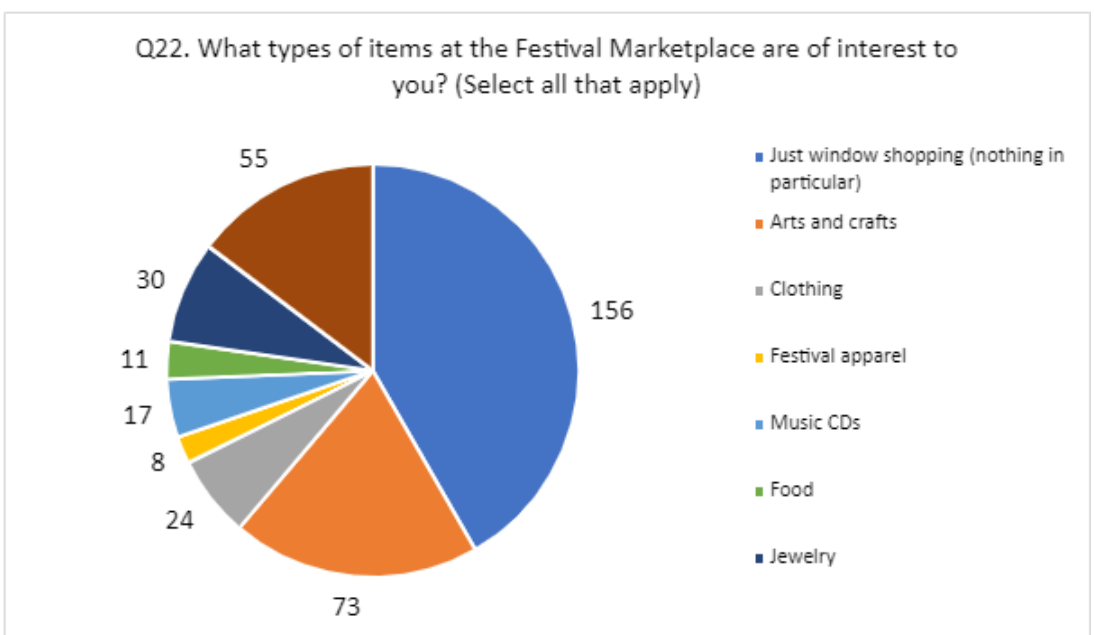
Question 20. Do you know that the Festival has an online Marketplace?



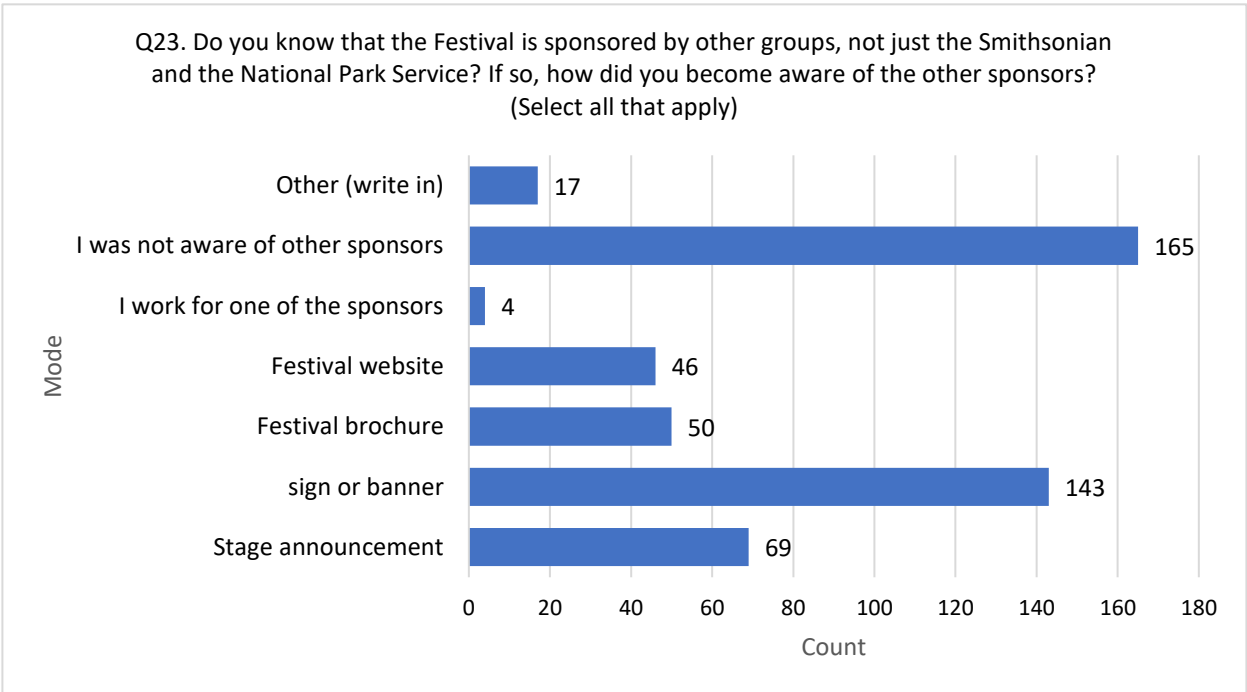
Question 21. Will you visit or have you already visited the Festival's online Marketplace?



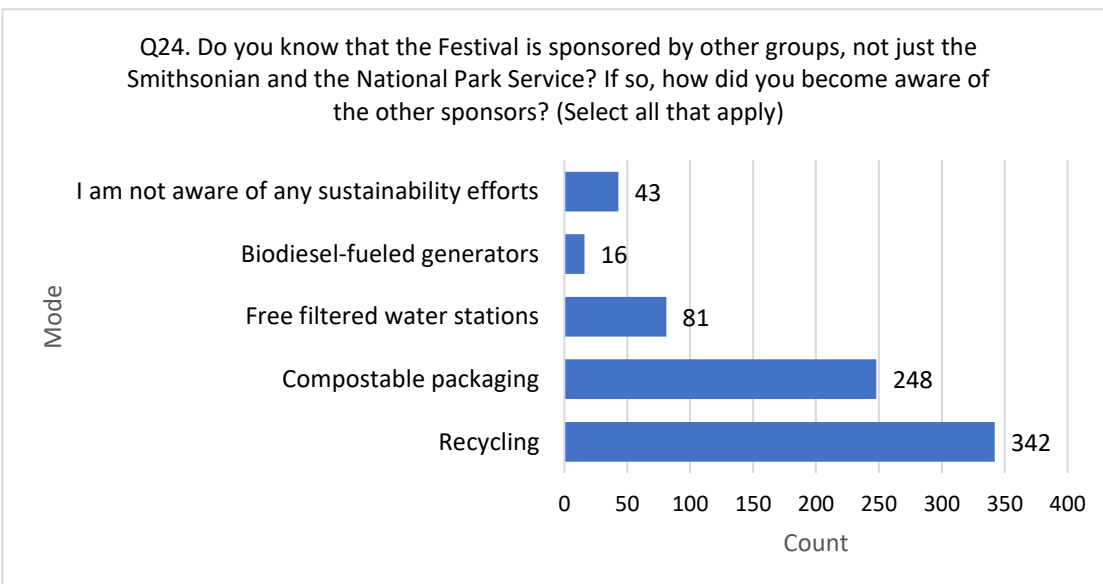
Question 22. What types of items at the Festival Marketplace are of interest to you? (Select all that apply)



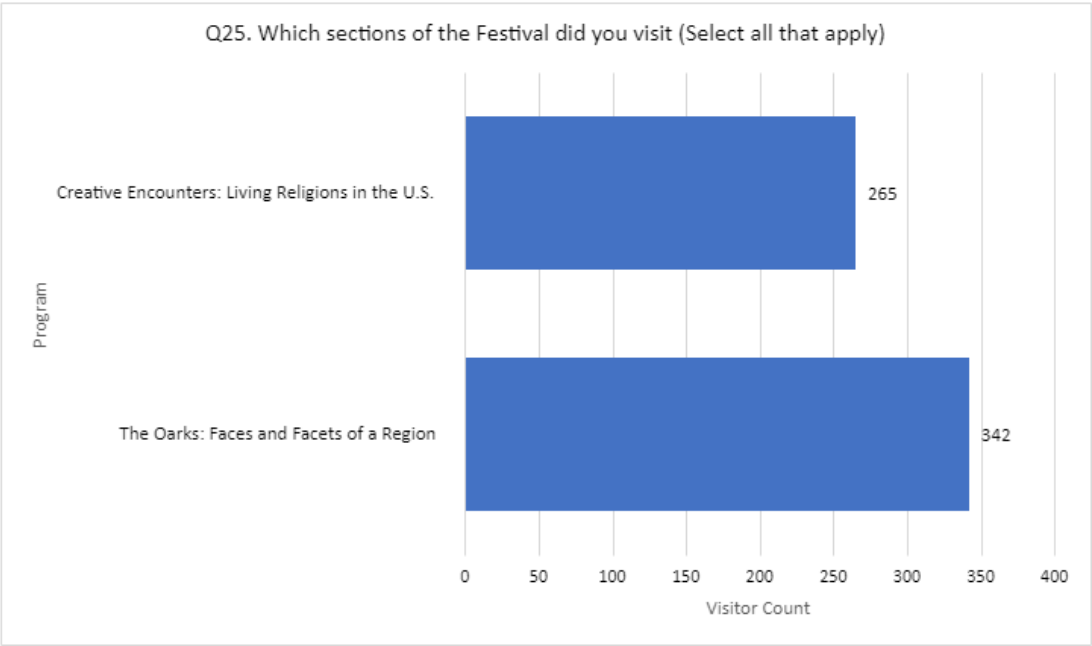
Question 23. Do you know that the Festival is sponsored by other groups, not just the Smithsonian and the National Park Service? If so, how did you become aware of the other sponsors? (Select all that apply)



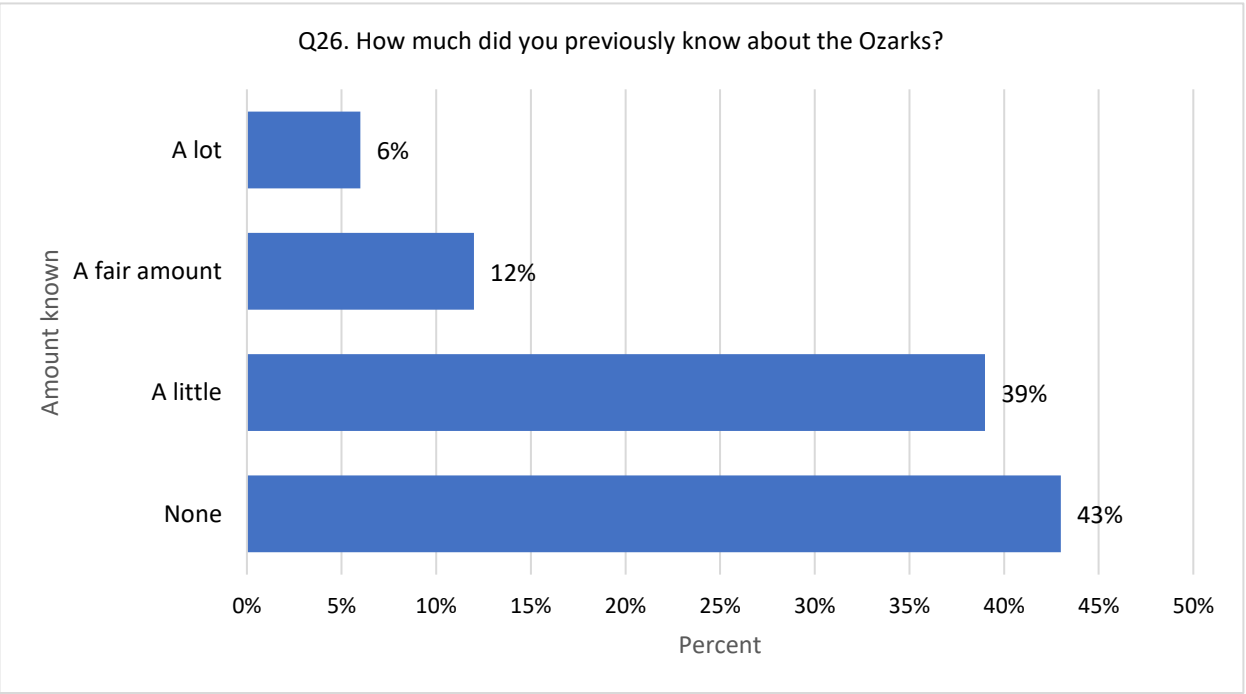
Question 24. The Festival is trying to go green. Which, if any, of the following sustainability efforts are you aware of? (Select all that apply)



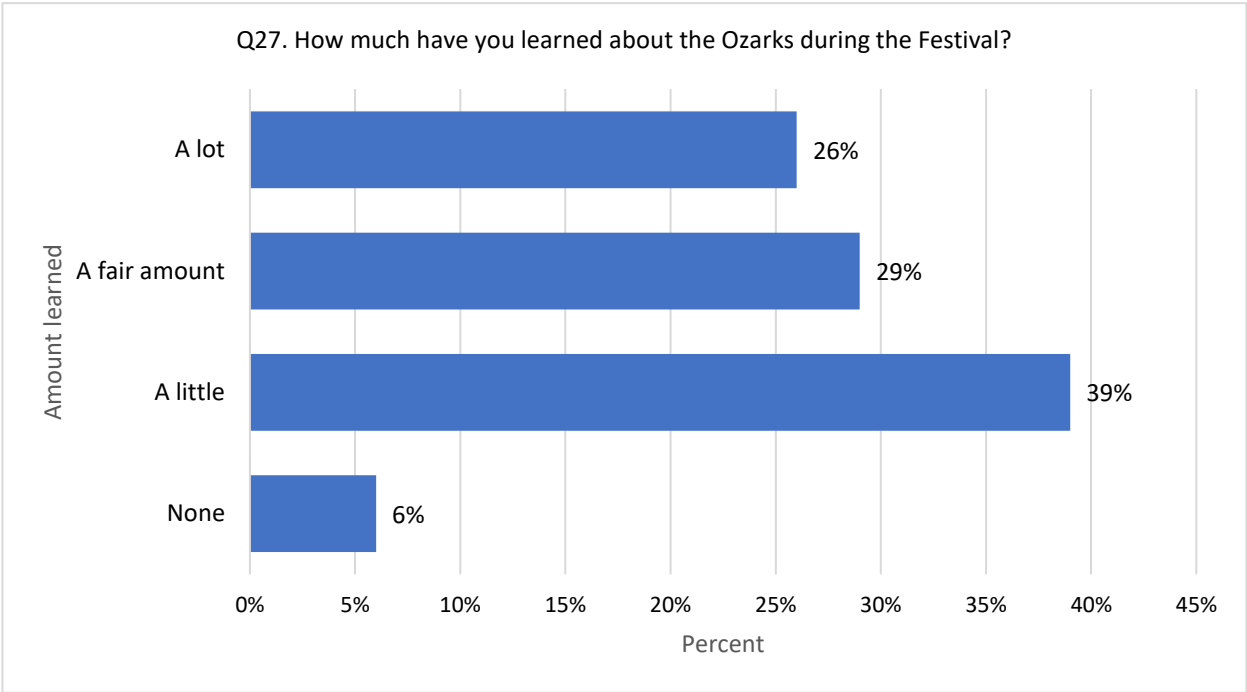
Question 25. Which sections of the Festival did you visit (Select all that apply)



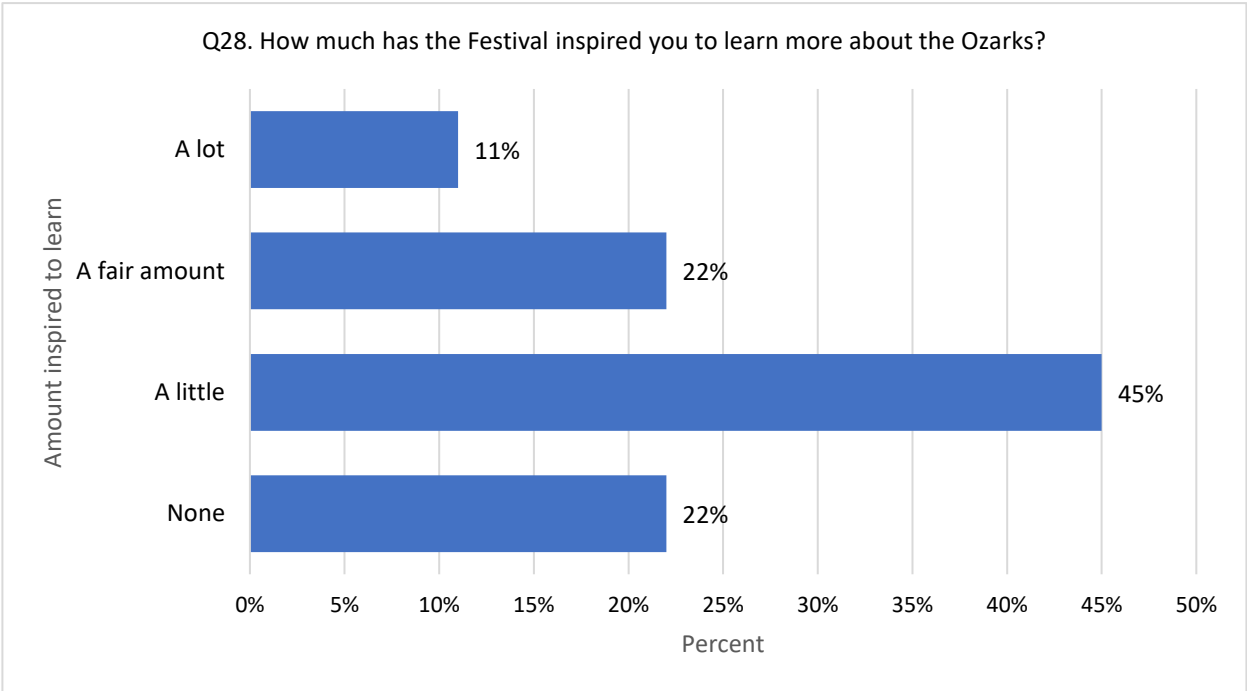
Question 26. How much did you previously know about the Ozarks?



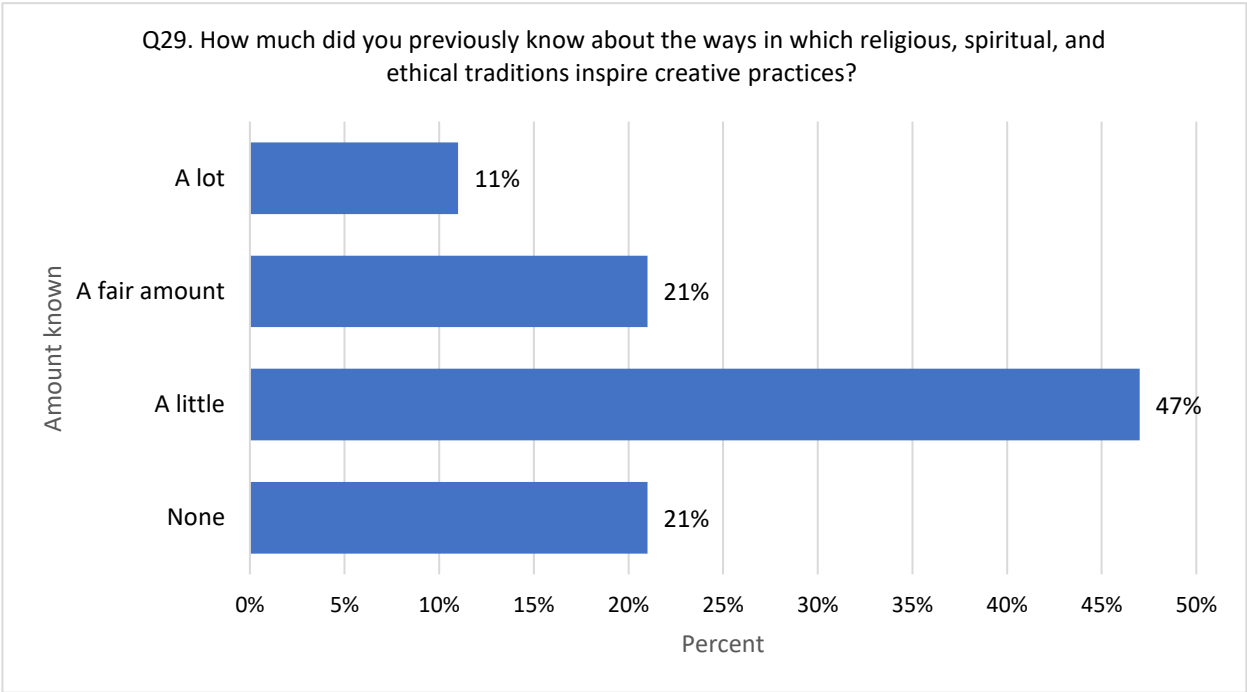
Question 27. How much have you learned about the Ozarks during the Festival?



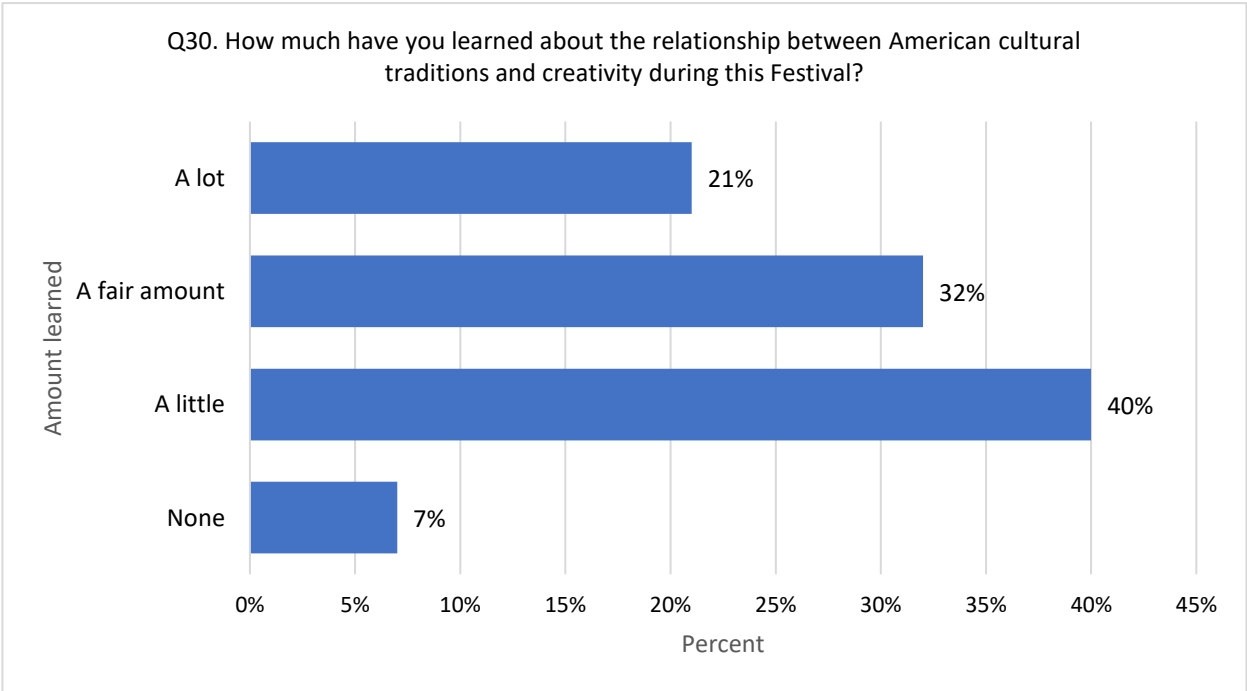
Question 28. How much has the Festival inspired you to learn more about the Ozarks?



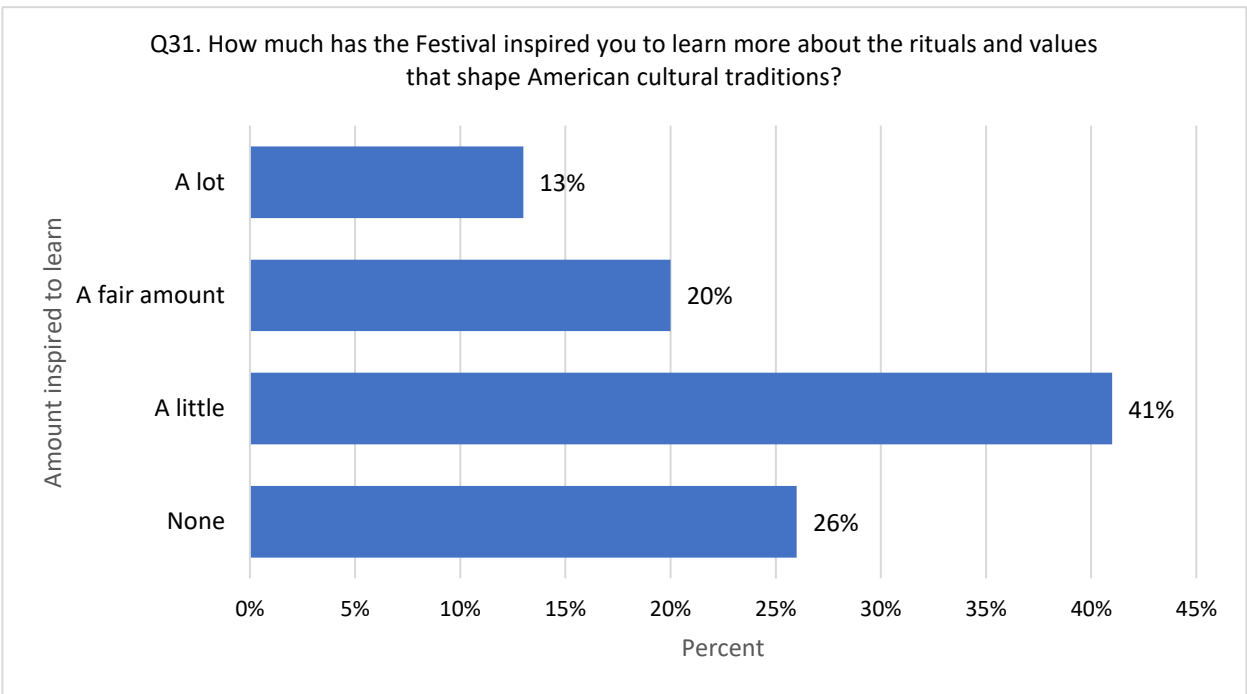
Question 29. How much did you previously know about the ways in which religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions inspire creative practices?



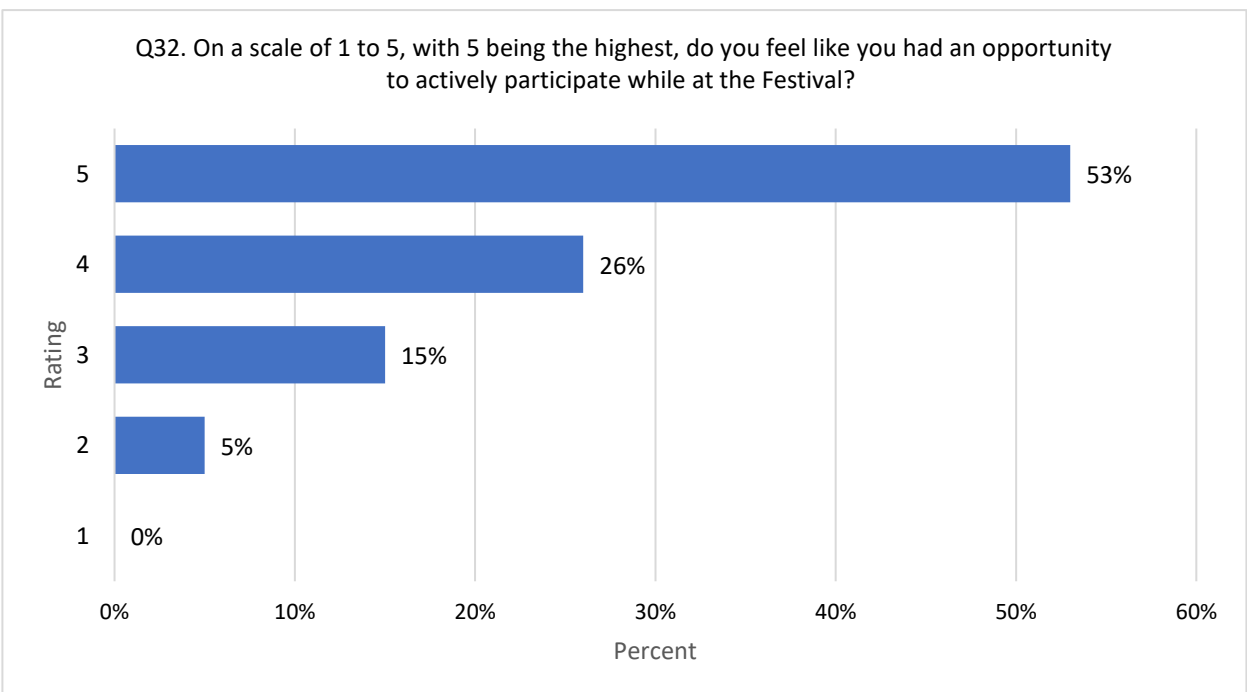
Question 30. How much have you learned about the relationship between American cultural traditions and creativity during this Festival?



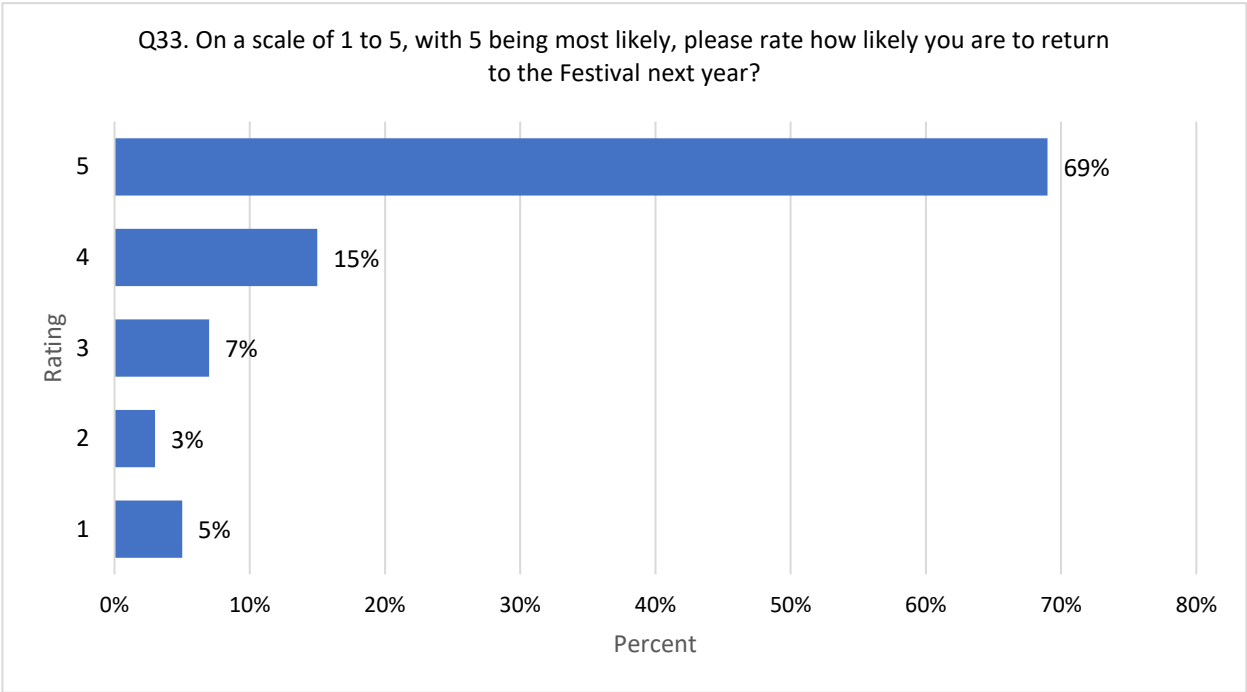
Question 31. How much has the Festival inspired you to learn more about the rituals and values that shape American cultural traditions?



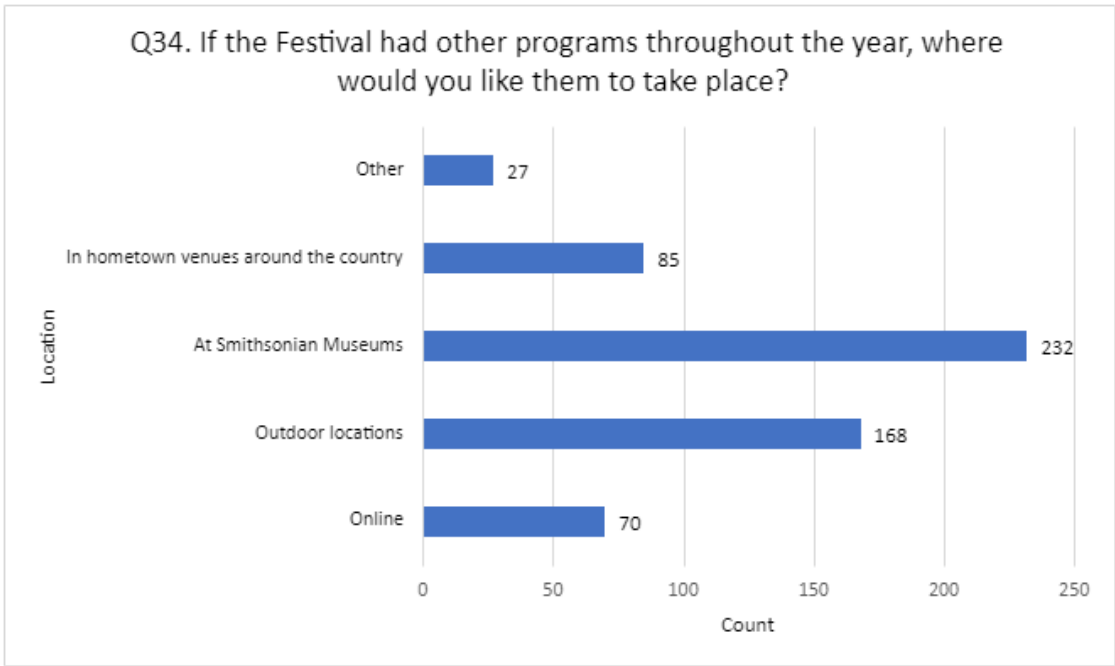
Question 32. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, do you feel like you had an opportunity to actively participate while at the Festival?



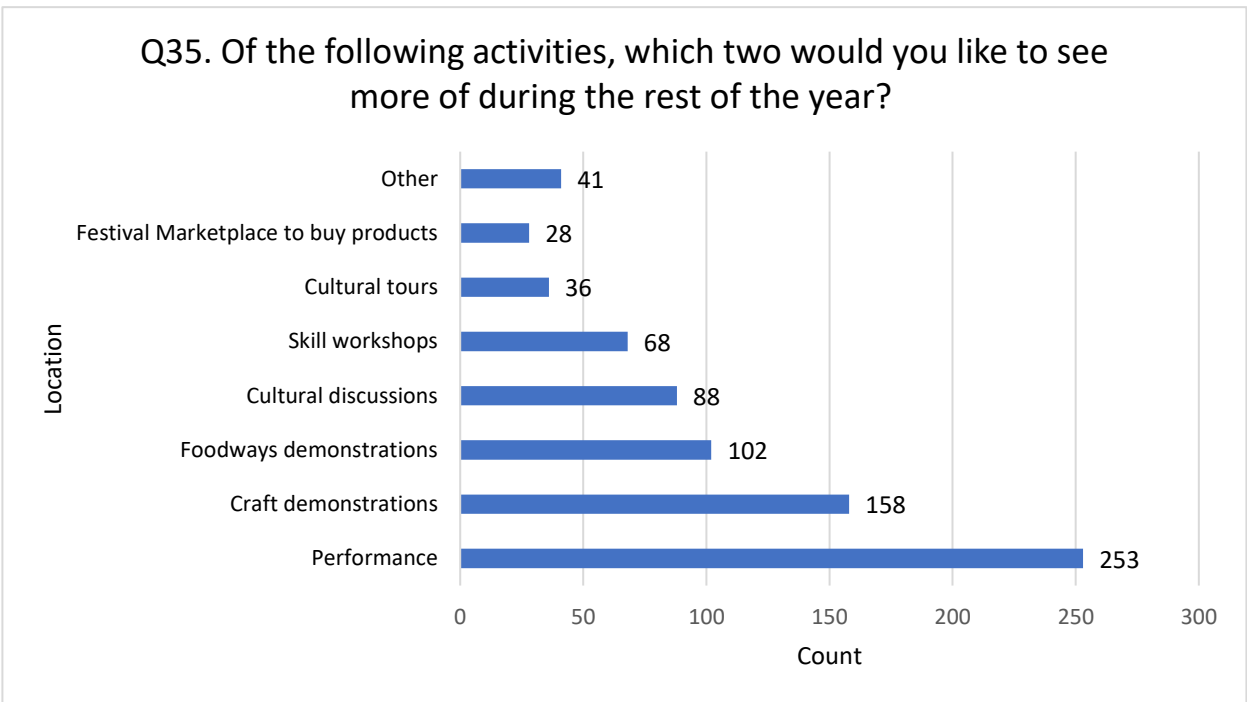
Question 33. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most likely, please rate how likely you are to return to the Festival next year?



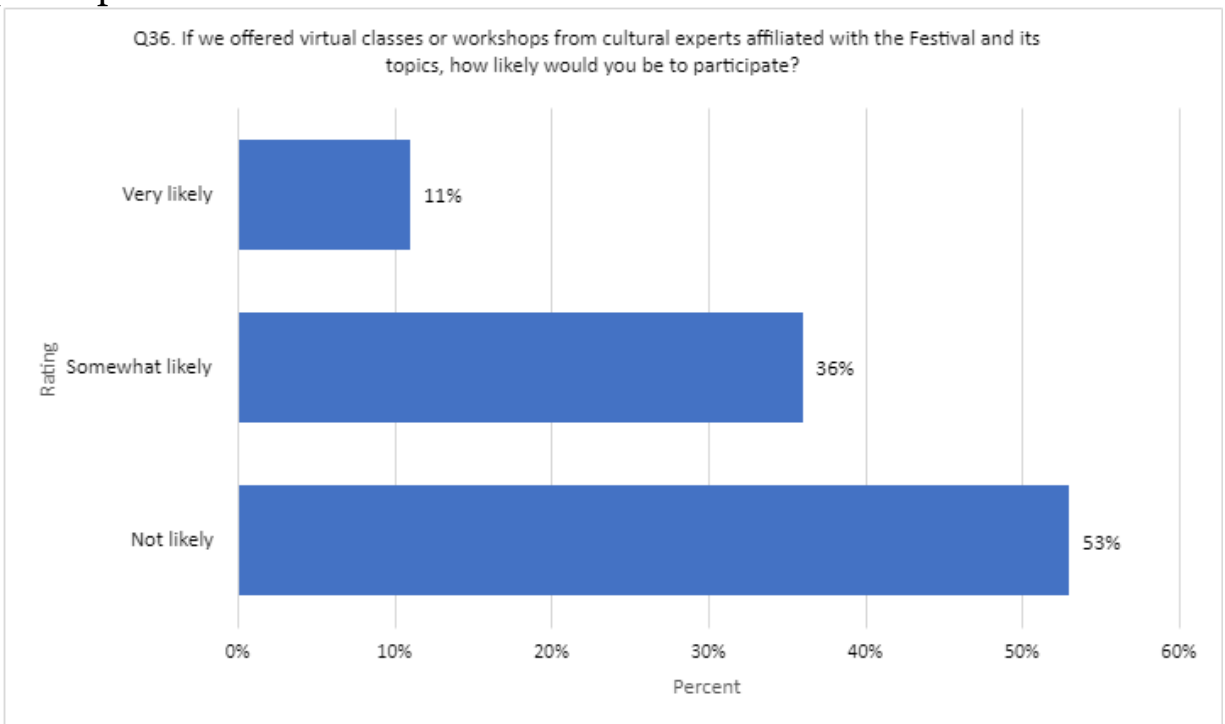
Question 34. If the Festival had other programs throughout the year, where would you like them to take place?



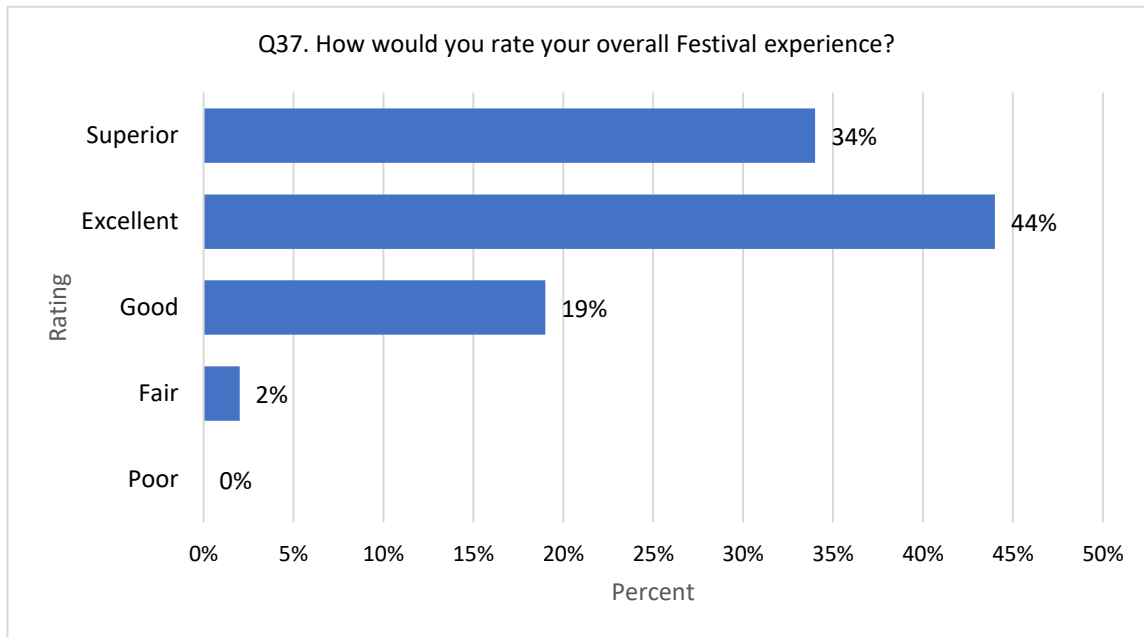
Question 35. Of the following activities, which two would you like to see more of during the rest of the year?



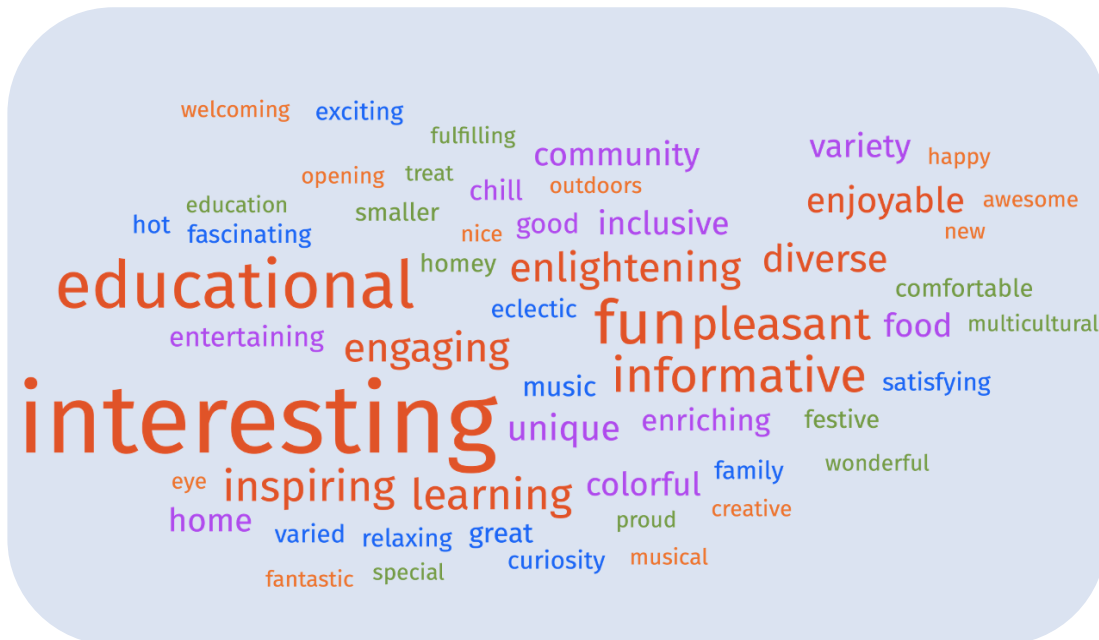
Question 36. If we offered virtual classes or workshops from cultural experts affiliated with the Festival and its topics, how likely would you be to participate?



Question 37. How would you rate your overall Festival experience?



Question 38. What is the one word that best describes your Festival experience? (Type)



Question 39. And, why?