



Museum Profile  
**PRINCE GEORGE'S  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM  
AND CULTURAL CENTER**

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

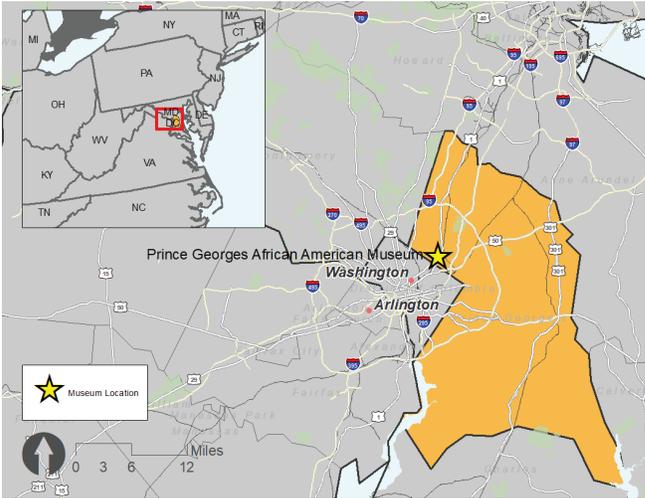
# Museum Profile: Prince George’s African American Museum and Cultural Center



## PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY, MARYLAND

Founded in 1991, the Prince George’s African American Museum and Cultural Center (PGAAMCC) is located in a small building on a busy street in North Brentwood in Prince George’s County, Maryland. The museum evolved from the North Brentwood Historical Society, which documented the history of the first municipality to be incorporated by African Americans. In 2019, the museum hosted roughly 8,500 visitors, 75 visiting artists, and 38 events in the community.

The museum’s mission is to “raise awareness of the cultural and historical significance of African Americans in Prince George’s County by celebrating and inspiring the community through the cultivation, preservation, and presentation of the cultural and artistic contributions of African Americans in Prince George’s County, Maryland.” PGAAMCC also “recognizes past accomplishments across the African diaspora and seeks to empower Black futures, innovators, and community influencers.” PGAAMCC fosters social wellbeing by creating an active, welcoming space for visitors and artists,



highlighting the unique history and culture of the county through educational offerings for all ages, and coordinating activities and events that celebrate African American and African diaspora heritage.

## PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Prince George's County is a suburban community outside Washington, DC. The county is easily accessible by public transit and grew by 12 percent between 2000 and 2016. Prince George's County is majority Black at 62.6

percent, and 13.6 percent are White. The median household income is \$75,925, well above the national median income, while the share of families in poverty in the county is at 6.9 percent, well below the national level.

	Population	% Change in Population (2000–2016)	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Other	Median Household Income	% Families in Poverty
United States	318,558,162	13.2	62.0	12.3	17.3	5.2	3.3	\$55,322	11.0
Prince George's County	897,693	12.0	13.6	62.6	16.7	4.2	2.8	\$75,925	6.9

Compared to other suburban counties across the country, Prince George's County residents suffer from relatively low levels of community health, and the K–12 educational sector experiences extremely high needs, reflected in students' performance across a range of publicly available

measures of success. Prince George's County fell in the bottom quartile on the Community Health and School Effectiveness Indexes.<sup>1</sup> Education Services and Retail Trade are the two largest employment sectors in the county, employing 16 and 13 percent of workers, respectively.

	Total Labor Force	% Education Services	% Retail Trade	% Accommodation & Food Service	% Health Care & Social Assistance
United States*	131,362,978	9.2	10.9	8.9	14.5
Prince George's County	281,415	16.0	13.0	10.0	10.0

Data Sources: 2012–16 American Community Survey five-year estimates; U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), 2017.

\*Continental figures for total labor force include the 48 lower states and Washington, DC.

<sup>1</sup> Data elements included in the Community Health and School Effectiveness Indexes, along with measures for Prince George's County, can be found at the beginning of Appendix II.

## SITE VISIT PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

In December 2019, the study team conducted interviews with seven current museum staff and representatives from two different partner organizations. Site visit interviews conducted with PGAAMCC staff and partners focused on understanding the programming and partnerships that support formal and informal learning, community health, and social wellbeing in Prince George's County as well as institutional approaches to assessment and sustainability.

In addition, the following data were used to create the network map included in this profile:

- PGAAMCC Form 990 for 2015–2018
- Online resources advertising PGAAMCC programs

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select PGAAMCC programming and partnerships that support visitors' access to formal and informal education, community health, and social wellbeing
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections PGAAMCC maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond

## PGAAMCC PROGRAMMING PRESERVES AND CELEBRATES LOCAL AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Referred to as a "hidden gem," PGAAMCC's small size and local focus invite a more personalized visitor experience: "People talk to us as families . . . there isn't the red tape like other areas. We make sure that [neighborhood access] is a priority," remarked one staff member. Engaging the local community is a key feature to its programming. Staff look for relevant ideas and stories to share and open PGAAMCC's doors to community artists to show their work. One partner noted the museum "embodied the local movement, growth, and feel" and has the power to galvanize the local community.

PGAAMCC is purposeful in developing programming that represents and uplifts the history of Black residents within Prince George's County. PGAAMCC programming focuses on Prince George's County, specifically on North Brentwood. PGAAMCC leadership believes in cultivating empowerment through celebrating the integral role of African Americans in

the history of Prince George's County. One permanent exhibit tells the history of the founding families of the city of North Brentwood, documenting their family trees. One partner explained how the collections and exhibits connected her to the rich history of the area: "I love to come here and relax—it connects me to my community more. Some people don't know their roots, and here there is history about where I grew up. I feel a sense of grounding."

Acknowledging the unique history of the county, the Community Treasure Chest program invites community members to bring family heirlooms and everyday objects that have been passed down through generations into the museum to learn about cultural preservation. There is an emphasis on letting residents know that their items are museum-worthy, and PGAAMCC gives them the option of temporary or permanent donation to the museum for display. Stories that PGAAMCC chooses for temporary or permanent

donation to the museum then become part of the exhibit. The museum also preserves the stories that donors share about their objects.

PGAAMCC also organizes educational programming for the larger community. PGAAMCC organizes Scholar Talks to host experts from around the world to talk about their work; these often take a discussion-based format, encouraging questions and interaction. Topics

relate to PGAAMCC's mission of promoting local African American history. The museum shares information on genealogy where people can look up their family: "We don't want people to just feel welcome, but also that they have a place here." Staff also personally commit to teaching school-age students about Prince George's County's African American history. One staff member described this as "near and dear to her heart."

## **PGAAMCC PROVIDES ENRICHMENT PROGRAMMING TO PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY STUDENTS WITH AN EMPHASIS ON BLACK CULTURE**

The museum convenes workshops and learning opportunities for children both on-site and in the community. It has brought programming to the local mall and to school assemblies. The goal of the assemblies is to empower children to become cultural ambassadors in their community: Themes included Powerful Men and Women in Prince George's County, Black Inventors, Jazz and Poetry, Maryland Emancipation, and Community and the First Court Townships. PGAAMCC also offers a Museum in a Box program where museum educators go into schools and guide students through an interactive classroom tour of historical photos, objects, and art. As a staff member explained, "It enhances our mission to get more Black history [into schools]. The teacher's curriculum doesn't always have that. We can teach local Black history and instill pride in their county to the teachers, students, and us . . . we want to take it a step forward and allow them to connect to history." This promotes a hands-on, interactive approach to education and strengthens community ties.

In the past, the museum has also offered an early childhood education program, Early Keepers, for students in pre-K through third grade to explore African American history through storytelling, music, dance, and art; activities incorporate problem-solving, math, and reading skills. Culture Keepers is an after-school program

for older students that runs for 10 weeks. Teaching artists, scholars, students, and teachers collaborate and agree on programming themes, which have included exploring different Black cities around the region, Black Marvel characters, and Black masculinity and femininity. Teaching artists and scholars lead workshop activities once per week, and PGAAMCC exhibits participants' work in the gallery at the end of the year and hosts a reception. The goal is for participating students to become researchers and teachers of African American history, art, and culture.

PGAAMCC creates programs with the intention of celebrating both the history and culture of African Americans and the African American diaspora in Prince George's County. There are ongoing educational programs, annual celebrations and ad hoc museum programs and events. Partnerships at PGAAMCC are largely provisional and mostly center around programming. Types of partnerships range from ongoing field trips and assemblies for the schools of the Prince George's County Public School District; ongoing partnerships with the Bahamian Embassy, which participates in the annual Winter Motherland festival; and other partnerships that tend to be episodic and transactional, in which the museum provides fee-based programming for a partner.

## PGAAMCC FOSTERS SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND CULTURAL PRIDE AMONG NORTH BRENTWOOD'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

In addition to highlighting local Black history with its programming, PGAAMCC also prioritizes “making a home for Black excellence,” in the words of the executive director, and focusing on stories of joy and resilience in the museum. Its priorities ensure that visitors feel seen and heard and have a platform for their voices. This role as an amplifier of local Black voices goes beyond the traditional museum role of showcasing collections. Creating a home for Black excellence is also an important way to foster social wellbeing through making connections within and across the community. One staff member noted:

*“We want to emphasize people benefiting in a mutual relationship. We want to be people that serve our visitors while understanding what their emotional and social needs are. This atmosphere—it’s about having a smaller staff. We rely on and talk to the community to support us. We take the community seriously.”*

Another staff member emphasized the importance of openness and transparency among museum staff. For instance, PGAAMCC intentionally allows visitors to see the restructuring of the exhibits to keep the museum transparent and accessible. At PGAAMCC, it is important to break down perceived barriers between museum buildings and collections and visitors. As one staff member observed:

*“We intentionally want people to have interactions for the sake of ‘face time’ with people who walk through the door. You can walk up to a perfect stranger and have a conversation about what they are doing, and that’s different.”*

PGAAMCC hosts festivals and events that move it into the community and foster social connections. One event, the Winter Motherland, ran from November to December 2019 with a focus on connecting people in the Afro-Caribbean and African American experience.

One staff member recollected that at the time, many people in the Bahamian community—especially after Hurricane Dorian—were looking to connect. PGAAMCC hosted a celebration for Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Junkanoo (a Caribbean street parade traditionally held on Boxing Day). PGAAMCC featured a vibrant Afro-Caribbean art exhibit and invited the Bahamian ambassador to attend and share their insight on Junkanoo’s history. There were also dancers and an event on the significance of steel drums. The event was about celebrating culture but also acknowledging trauma and resistance. One staff member explained:

*“We speak about things other than just Christmas and allow them to be felt and seen. We want to talk about protest movements and other types of politics of joy movements. We want to talk about resisted people and celebrate that.”*

PGAAMCC hosts and participates in a wide array of events in the community that center African American culture. One staff member wrote a play that was performed to celebrate both the museum’s anniversary and Maryland Emancipation Day, which commemorates when slavery was abolished in the state. For Juneteenth, PGAAMCC collaborated with local partners to host a four-day festival, with discussions around African American music and Afrofuturistic films and a fashion show that celebrated Black fashion and creativity. The festival culminated in a block party that featured local and Black-owned businesses, activities on the museum’s outdoor patio, and food trucks. Finally, the museum organized a Team Natural weekend to celebrate natural hair, with workshops centered around women’s health, wellness, and mindfulness practices. These events promote social connection and a sense of cultural pride and identity within Prince George’s African American community.

Partners recognize the important role PGAAMCC plays in bolstering this sense of community through both the collections and the interactions fostered by events and performances. One staff member reflected on how PGAAMCC connected her to the broader Black Prince George's County community:

*"You see people that you see at the grocery store, mall, or library. This helps sustain and retain community. We welcome anyone here, but they know it's for Prince George's County. It's a visible beacon in community gatherings and expectations, particularly for Black people. I learned the history of north Brentwood. It's where Black people came and built up that space and people. It has given me greater pride."*

Another partner connected the way PGAAMCC cultivates social wellbeing to a broad sense of individual and community health.

*"My desire in this space, with so many groups bringing us down, I have the idea of healing and understanding within yourself, whether that's the broader Prince George's or Black people community. I want to provide programming that can speak to a lot of people in a lot of ways. My work here has impacted me and made me excited to be a part of this community. It has charged me to want to be the best individual person that I can. That's important for the community on the broader sense."*

## **PGAAMCC FOSTERS RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE LOCAL ARTS COMMUNITY**

Many of the museum's partners are independent contracting artists who perform or exhibit at the site. PGAAMCC has also helped build and support informal networks of local artists through staff and artists in residence. For example, a member of the museum's educational staff also booked poetry readings at a nearby café and bookstore. Through this connection, she was able to introduce local poets to PGAAMCC, both as a museum and as another venue to showcase their work.

The museum also offers space for local Black artists to not only display but sell their art in the gift shop. By providing a place for local artists and performers to share their work, PGAAMCC helps support and foster relationships in the art

community. These relationships are mutually beneficial. The museum offers programming to bring people into the building, while the artists receive monetary support and exposure. But many independent contractor partners expressed another beneficial aspect of partnerships. They saw PGAAMCC as supportive of their artistic growth and as a safe place that fulfilled a special role in the community by promoting local Black culture. One artist who performed at a local café and the museum reflected on her experience:

*"We are all connected. A lot of poets in the area came to the poetry night and didn't even know the museum was here . . . here you can be more vulnerable; this isn't a space just for entertainment."*

## PGAAMCC APPROACHES ORGANIZATIONAL AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT AS CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY

PGAAMCC's grounds its approach to professional development for staff, artists, and contractors in a commitment to enhancing the capacity of Black professionals in the community. Staff described a strong internship program, through which many of the current staff had progressed to their full-time roles. Former interns, staff, and volunteers have also gone on to hold leadership positions in other museums— as one staff member said, "This is a place where you can come and grow, that has a lot of merit."

PGAAMCC embraces its role in mentoring Black museum staff to become leaders and professionals in a predominantly white field and sees this as an explicit goal in its work. The emphasis on nurturing talent, both among staff and local artists, is a unique characteristic of PGAAMCC and is another crucial way the museum promotes wellbeing in the community. Staff emphasized the importance of creating an environment where staff, performing artists, and visitors could grow and learn. PGAAMCC sews development into all aspects of its work, and staff continually look for ways to bring more people in and provide opportunities for growth.

One longtime staff member reflected on how her role had evolved during her 10 years at the museum. She shared that she was able to learn about museum programming on the job, through hands-on experience, and that she'd, "... rather be in this space while learning from a master and having opportunities to try and learn to grow. It's better than sitting in class and getting a master's degree while reading about it." The ability to train staff on the job broadened the range of people employed at the museum. One staff member

observed that most staff and contractors did not have formal a background in the arts but that this diversity of experience was viewed as an asset and a positive example to young people thinking about careers:

*"When people see folks coming from a museum but having different backgrounds, they can see the different ways to end up here. Even if they don't want to work at a museum, I encourage them to see their career path, past what they're interested in. As long as your background aligns with the mission, it can fall together."*

PGAAMCC also sees its advocacy for public funding as part of its commitment to creating equity within the largely white museum world. In 2014, PGAAMCC's county funding was reduced amid statewide budget cuts. PGAAMCC's work to create a larger individual donor base in response to budget cuts were a challenge due to long-standing racial wealth and income inequalities. Recently, PGAAMCC was awarded a \$500,000 grant from the Maryland Commission on African American History and Maryland Historical Trust to develop a plan for expanding its facilities.

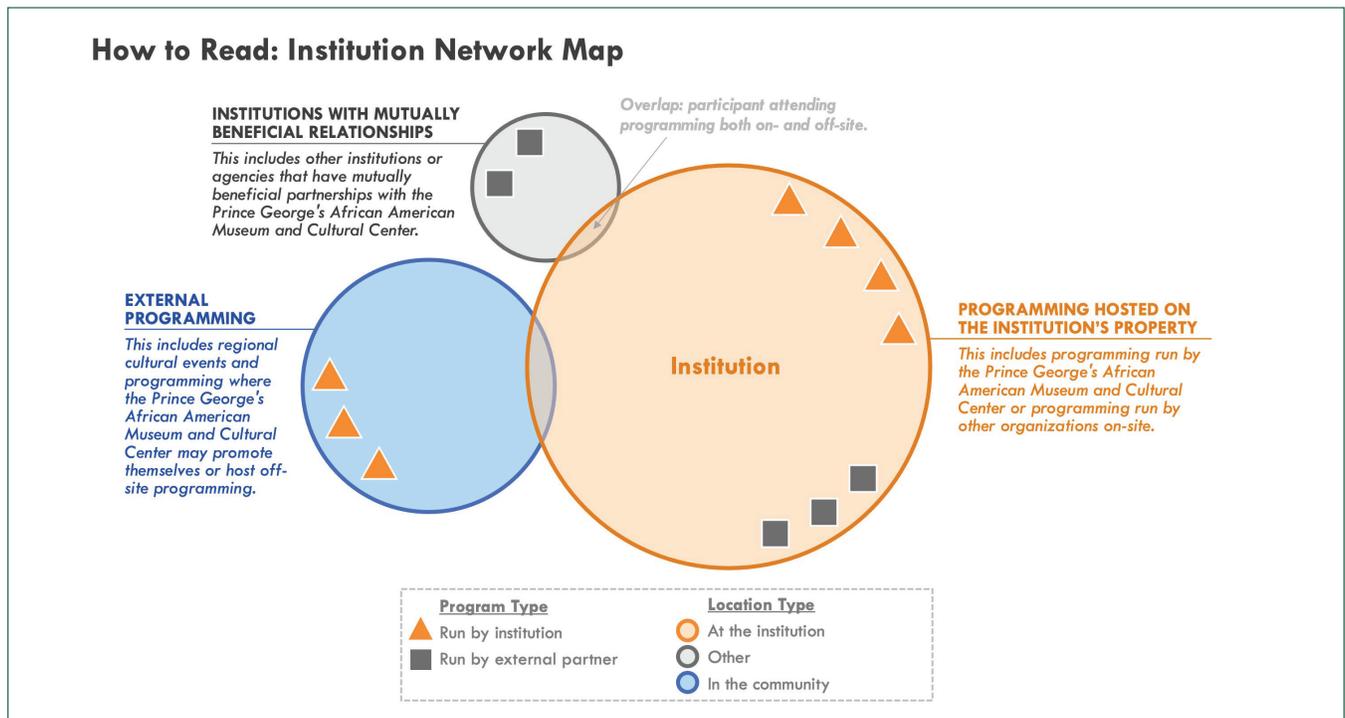
PGAAMCC has deep roots and involvement in its local community. PGAAMCC's role as an African American museum contributes to local understanding of African American history and culture. The museum also supports wellbeing for local Black residents through its community events and celebrations; its commitment to making Black artists and voices visible; and by creating a welcoming, open home to nurture and support the work of local artists.

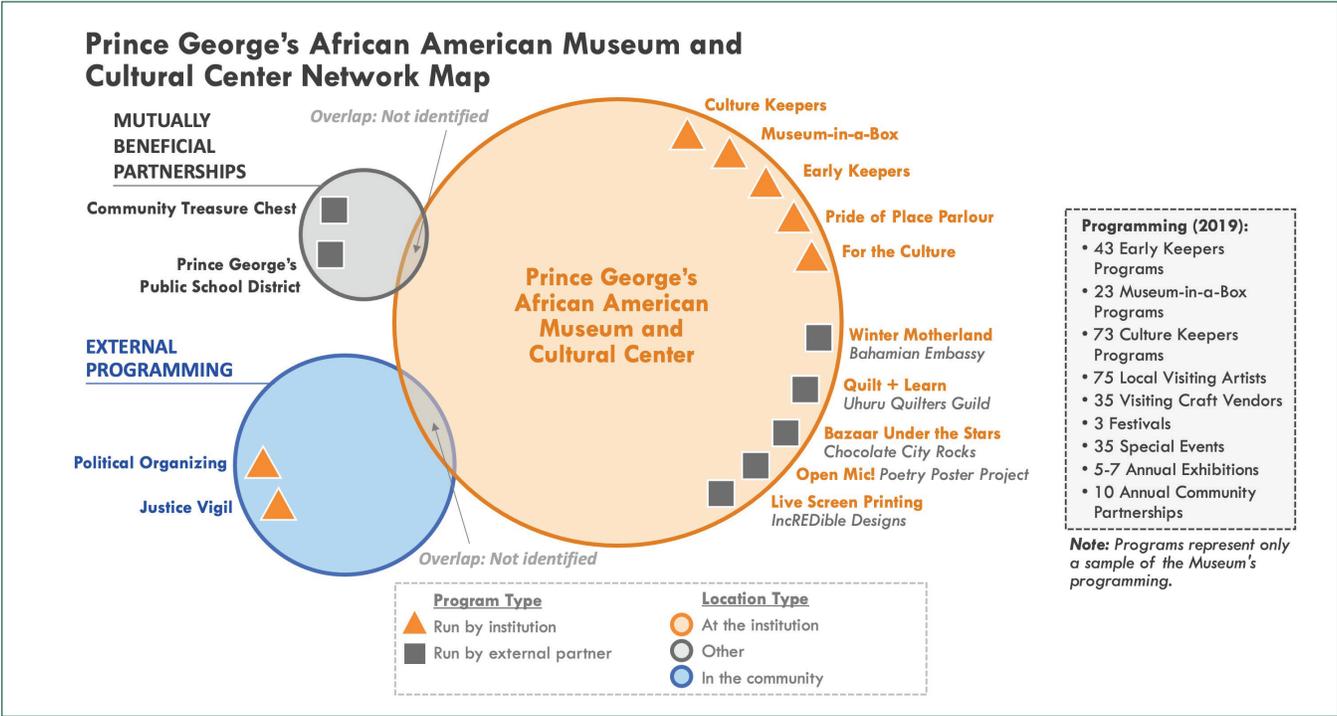
# PRINCE GEORGE'S AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER NETWORK MAP

Using data provided by PGAAMCC, the study team developed a descriptive network map to highlight the different types of connections PGAAMCC maintains with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between PGAAMCC and those entities that offer programming at the museum

itself and those that support cross-marketing efforts or have reciprocal relationships with the museum, and it includes examples of off-site, PGAAMCC-led programming. The map does not provide an exhaustive list of the museum's programs but attempts to illustrate a subset of the relationships that the museum maintains.

*NOTE: The network map is purely descriptive. The connections represented on the map do not necessarily, and are not intended to, provide estimates of the duration, durability, intensity, or broader economic impact of the relationships between PGAAMCC and any single entity, or the broader network itself. The goal of the network map is to represent the range and diversity of different types of institutions that connect to the museum in different ways.*





The figure above illustrates a *sample* of the connections across the programs offered by PGAAMCC. Within the orange circle is a small sample of programs conducted on the physical property of the museum—both programs produced by PGAAMCC and those produced by others. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by PGAAMCC and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of connections with other organizations that have reciprocal relationships with PGAAMCC.