

SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](mailto:gage.harter@vacountyva.gov).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Montgomery County

Program Title: Sensory Museum

Program Category: Community & Economic Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Angela M. Hill

Title: County Administrator

Signature: *Angela M Hill*

VACo Achievement Award Nomination: Sensory Museum

Award Category: Community & Economic Development

Executive Summary (1 page):

The Sensory Museum began as a program to meet the needs of the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library's (MFRL) population of teen and adult patrons with disabilities. Since then, it has grown to include an expanded age range. Sensory programs have been wildly popular with those aged five and under. Not only are they helpful to our young children, sensory play is also tremendously helpful for the neurodivergent population and people struggling with mental health. Studies show everyone can benefit from sensory play to regulate their nervous systems. The MFRL created the Sensory Museum program to widen the scope of services, programs, and community engagement opportunities for patrons with disabilities offered at the library through their Developmental, Cognitive, and Intellectual Disability Committee.

The program is often held after hours in the library's community room, but it has also been successful during regular operating hours. Typically, two staff members are required to set up and run the program. The lights are dimmed to reduce overstimulation from fluorescent lights and calming music is played while utilizing the overhead projector with visually stimulating images. Around the room, patrons can visit stations containing different tactile or visual sensory experiences such as water beads, rice bins, Zen gardens, kinetic sand, glow painting with black lights, fiber optic and plasma ball lamps, water painting, and a sensory light projector in a tent that shines calming patterns and colors of light onto the canopy of the tent. Occasionally, local therapy dogs participate in the program as well.

Patrons of all ages have enjoyed this program, remarking that it has been very helpful for their neurodivergent teens and selves. Parents and caregivers are excited about the MFRL program, often asking about the materials used so they may replicate some of the tools in their homes to help with regulation after learning the benefits of sensory play. The program has drawn attention from local organizations and universities.

Brief Overview (2-3 paragraphs):

In an effort to meet the needs of patrons with disabilities, the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library launched a Sensory Museum in 2023. The Sensory Museum program is typically held after hours in the library's community room, but it has also been successful during regular operating hours. In order to best accommodate the needs of the participants, the lights are dimmed to reduce overstimulation from fluorescent lights and calming music is played while utilizing the overhead projector with visually stimulating images. Around the room, patrons can visit stations containing different tactile or visual sensory experiences such as water beads, rice bins, Zen gardens, kinetic sand, glow painting with black lights, fiber optic and plasma ball lamps, water painting, and a sensory light projector in a tent that shines calming patterns and colors of light onto the canopy of the tent. Occasionally, local therapy dogs participate in the program as well. As they leave, the Sensory Museum program participants may choose a fidget toy as a tool to use in stressful or overwhelming situations.

Patrons of all ages have enjoyed this program, remarking that it has been very helpful for their neurodivergent teens and selves. Parents and caregivers are excited about the MFRL Sensory Museum program, often asking about the materials used so they may replicate some of the tools in their homes to help with regulation after learning the benefits of sensory play. No matter the age, sensory play can bring out a playful side in someone and help them unwind. Due to the positive response to the Sensory Museum, it has been implemented on a semi-regular basis throughout all branches of the MFRL system.

The Challenge:

The MFRL staff wanted to widen the scope of services, programs, and community engagement opportunities for patrons with disabilities offered at the library through their Developmental, Cognitive, and Intellectual Disability Committee. The challenge included finding something that could appeal to a broad audience within the disabilities community; creating something with limited budget and means; and focusing energy and time on a program that would have a direct and positive impact on patrons who may feel isolated at times.

The Solution:

Given existing research surrounding the positive benefits of sensory play, the MFRL Developmental, Cognitive, and Intellectual Disability Committee created the Sensory Museum. Sensory play is helpful for the neurodivergent population and people struggling with mental health. In preparation for the Sensory Museum, MFRL staff coordinated with local organizations and community groups that work with people who have disabilities with the goal of directly reaching the targeted population. The Sensory Museum program description and marketing included language and images expressing that assistive devices and technology are welcome to ensure that patrons felt comfortable existing in the space. The MFRL staff shared posters online, in local stores, and in the library spaces prior to the program date.

The initial Sensory Museum was held on July 7, 2023, at the Blacksburg branch of the MFRL. Given the success of the initial program, it returned to the Blacksburg branch on September 8, 2023 and December 18, 2023. In addition, a Sensory Museum was held at Christiansburg branch on November 9, 2023. Patrons with disabilities and those who struggle with mental health eagerly participated in the Sensory Museum each time it was held. Due to popular demand, additional Sensory Museums have taken place in 2024 as well.

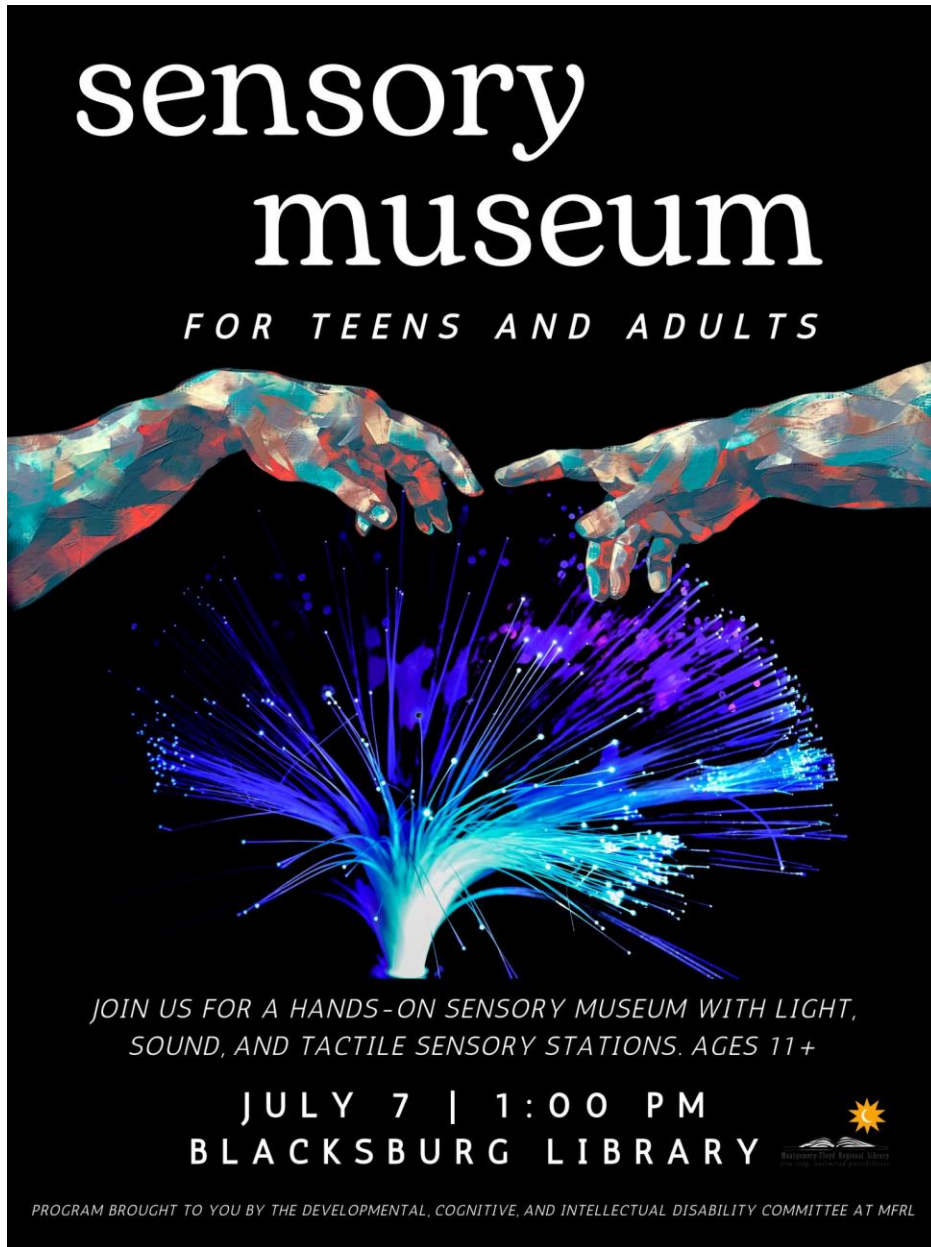
Program Cost:

To host the initial Sensory Museum, the MFRL purchased a set of items that offer sensory input and can be re-used for multiple programs. The one-time, upfront cost of approximately \$500 was an investment that has proven a great return throughout the library branches in Montgomery County. Even though it is a recurring cost, the fidget toys made available to program participants is a nominal cost.

The Results:

The goal to create an engaging program with the Sensory Museum for MFRL patrons who may otherwise feel isolated was a success. Patrons of all ages have enjoyed this program, remarking that it has been very helpful for their neurodivergent teens and selves. In short, program participants and their caregivers crave this program. One of the biggest testaments to the positive result of this program has been the demand to continue offering it at all of the MFRL branches on a regular basis. Another fact that speaks to the positive results of this program has been the desire of caregivers to find ways to recreate elements of the Sensory Museum. Parents and caregivers are often inquire about the materials used so they may replicate some of the tools in their homes to help with regulation after learning the benefits of sensory play.

Following are a few of the posters created and shared about the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library Sensory Museum.



sensory museum

FOR TEENS AND ADULTS



JOIN US FOR A HANDS-ON SENSORY MUSEUM WITH LIGHT,
SOUND, AND TACTILE SENSORY STATIONS. AGES 11+

SEPTEMBER 8 | 5 - 7 PM
BLACKSBURG LIBRARY

PROGRAM BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE DEVELOPMENTAL, COGNITIVE, AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY COMMITTEE AT MFRL

Following are images of some of the stations at the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library Sensory Museum. Pictures with patrons are not available out of respect for the program participants.

