

Building Arts Audiences? **Take the Journey**

How can arts organizations engage new audiences while retaining existing ones? And can their efforts to build new audiences contribute to their work, mission, and financial health? Twenty-five large performing arts organizations explored these questions. A team at the University of Texas at Austin studied their efforts. Here's some of what they found:

Four Key Ideas

1. ACCEPT THERE IS NO MAGIC BULLET

Cultivating audiences takes time and resources. It should be seen as a mission-driven investment that may require funding, similar to starting a new program.



2. USE DATA AND TEST ASSUMPTIONS

Engaging audiences requires learning everything you can about them—and about how they perceive your organization. Knowing what a particular audience or community wants can help with programming, marketing, and communications.

3. QUESTION BELIEFS AND OUTDATED PRACTICES

Industry-wide beliefs or traditional practices may not hold true for every organization. Audience-building must therefore be unique to each organization's circumstances.



4. BE THE CHANGE—AND GIVE IT TIME

While building audiences is possible, it might not happen on an organization's desired terms and may not yield immediate results. Organizations who want to change how audiences engage with them must first be open to changing themselves.



Organizations found promising strategies...

- making communications more welcoming with less jargon
- expanding digital and multimedia communications to meet audiences where they are
- using video trailers to preview work, especially when it's challenging or experimental

and a couple less promising

- creating "crossover" programming with new genres
- staging performances off site (i.e., at a bar) to attract mainstage audiences

