



In Search of the Magic Bullet:
Results from the Building
Audiences for Sustainability
Initiative

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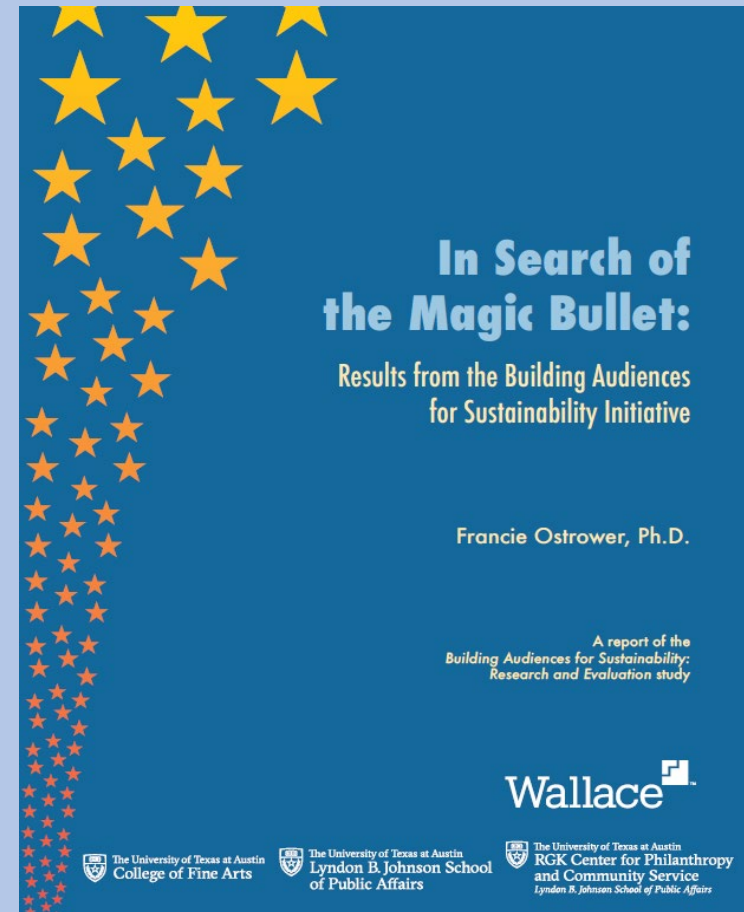


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*In Search of the Magic Bullet: Selected Findings**

*Francie Ostrower, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin
April 11, 2024*



*This talk is based on [*In Search of the Magic Bullet: Results from the Building Audiences for Sustainability Initiative*](#). Francie Ostrower. Copyright 2023 The Board of Regents of the University of Texas System and Francie Ostrower. All rights reserved.



Introduction

- The Wallace Foundation's *Building Audiences for Sustainability* (BAS) initiative awarded grants to 25 performing arts organizations to explore ways to engage new audiences while retaining existing ones, and to see whether these efforts contributed to organizations' financial health.
- The Foundation then awarded a grant to The University of Texas at Austin to independently study project implementation and outcomes.
- Neither the initiative nor study offer surefire solutions. But they offer many insights about effective audience-building approaches – and equally important, about approaches that were not effective.



Focus of Today's Talk

- Multiple findings, analyses, and case examples in report
- Focus of comments today is some major crosscutting findings



Overarching Message of Findings

Organizations may expand audiences, but not necessarily on the organization's original terms. If organizations want to change how audiences engage with them, then organizations need to be open to changing themselves.



Findings and Implications

- Unexamined and unfounded assumptions often hindered organizations' ability to connect with intended audiences.
- The implication: These assumptions exist and need to be examined and addressed. Otherwise, organizations risk talking past, instead of with, those they want to reach.
- Engaging with data and external feedback can help.



Findings and Implications

- Productive audience-building strategies met audiences where they were
- Thus, organizations may need to assess whether their communications are reaching and resonating with intended audiences
- Engaging with data and external feedback can help



Findings and Implications

- Organizations consistently found crossover strategies unsuccessful. Some organizations kept the programming and changed their criteria for success.
- An implication: Organizations should assess beforehand whether their goal is to expand audiences, even if it involves changing or expanding programming, or building audiences strictly for what they already do. They can do either or both but shouldn't conflate the two.



Findings and Implications

- Most outcomes study organizations expanded their target audiences, but usually audience gains were more modest than initially hoped.
- Even dramatic gains generally did not enlarge total audience because organizations mostly focused on audience that were a small percent of their audience to begin with. Therefore, organizations should consider beforehand if their goal is increasing engagement by a particular audience or expanding audience overall.



Findings and Implications

- Target audience change was not associated with change in total ticket revenue, total revenue, or assets.
- Some target audiences were financially disadvantageous because they attended less and/or spent less on tickets. Thus, organizations should recognize some audience-building efforts serve other goals and may require subsidy. For those efforts, it's important to have resources in place to protect the organization's financial health.




Changes in Total Audience: 2015-2019

- Many outcomes study organizations expanded total audience, but audience gains were coupled with declining frequency of attendance.
- If this pattern holds more widely, implications would be profound: Organizations would need to either attract many more audience members just to fill the same number of seats previously filled with a smaller number of repeat ticket-buyers; find ways to attract deeper engagement; or some combination of the two.




Infrequent Attendees: Implications and Assumptions

- Audience-building strategies often assumed that once attracted, target audience members would progress along what one interviewee called the “long slow escalator” to frequent attendees and donors.
- Qualitative and quantitative study findings suggest many audience members may not be headed in that direction. If not, incorporating this group for who they are, is an important consideration for audience-building strategies today.



Concluding Questions

- If organizations want to change how audiences engage with them, organizations need to be open to changing themselves. If that is true, a key question is how much are organizations ready to change?
- Organizations saw philanthropy as equally, if not more, important to future sustainability. If that is true, then a key question is whether that philanthropy will be there to sustain them?



Q: How do we grow the audience for new, unfamiliar
dance works...
not driven by a traditional narrative or “plot?”

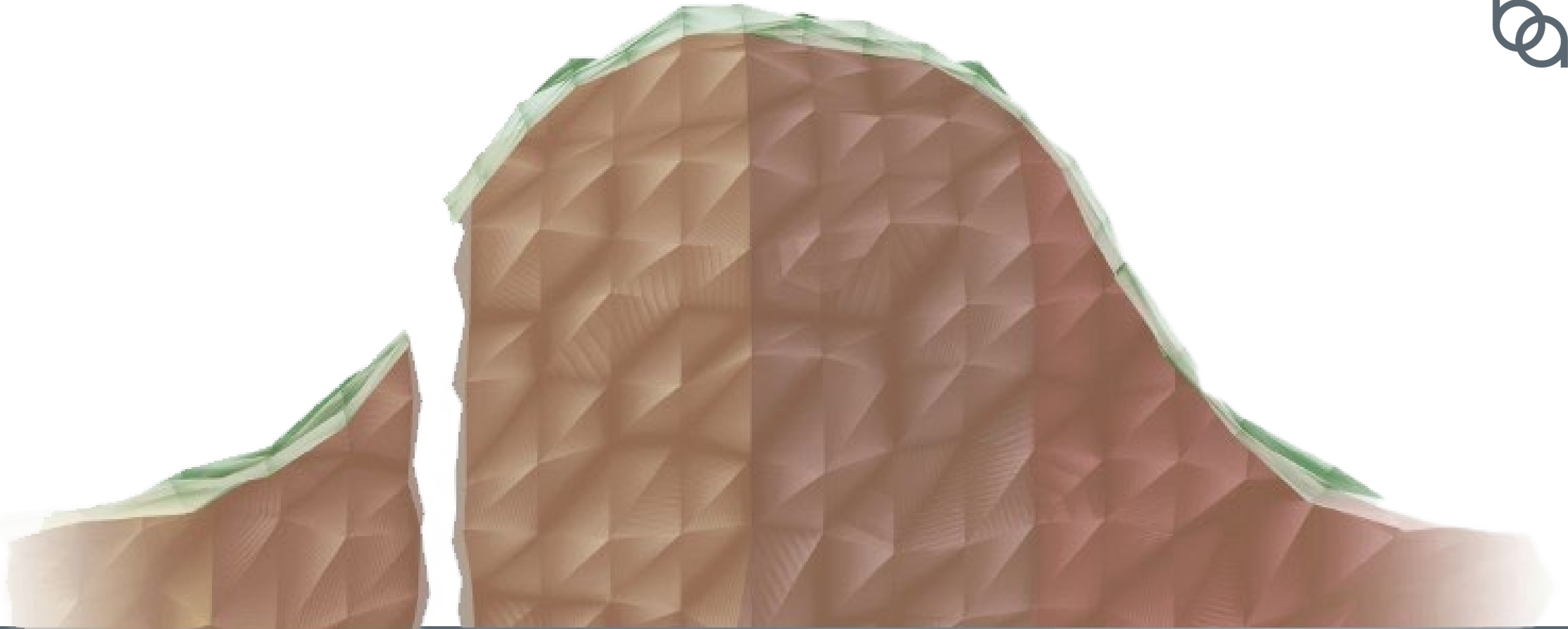
Cookie G. Ruiz, CFRE
Executive Director



Q: How do we grow the audience for new, unfamiliar dance works... not driven by a traditional narrative or “plot?”

THE HYPOTHESIS: IT'S A FAMILIARITY CONTINUUM





THE UNCERTAINTY GAP

FOUR CONNECTIONS

Emotional



Social



Intellectual



Kinesthetic

THE FRAMEWORK: Pre-Show Experiences



19 likes
The world premiere of Stephen Mills ballet "Poe: A Tale of Madness" was a smash! 🎉 Graham Reynold's amazing score was performed beautifully by Peter Bay and The Austin Symphony Orchestra; the exquisite costumes and staging were a delight for the eyes; and of course with the immensely talented and mesmerizing Ballet Austin dancers, they all blended into an Austin masterpiece. 📸



INTERACTIVE DISCOVERY LOUNGE





GOODMAN THEATRE

- **Founded in 1925**
- **Innovator in regional theater**
- **Values based arts and community organization: Quality, Equity, Community**

Wallace BAS Goal

- Goodman Theatre's premise focused on building audiences for "new work"
- Every season Goodman Theatre commits to presenting new work on our stages



THEATRE
GOODMAN

Key Learnings

- It's not “new” –it's familiar vs. unfamiliar
- Importance of providing context for audiences
- Impact of price and discounts
- Comprehensive digital strategy
- Events and their role in attracting audiences



GOODMAN THEATRE

Impact Today

- Maintaining staff—
and learnings
- Current state of audiences
- Challenge of relying
on single tickets
- Increased confidence in
selling new/unfamiliar work



THEATRE
GOODMAN



oakland
symphony

Dr. Mieko Hatano
Executive Director

Kedrick Armstrong
Music Director

Pre-Pandemic

Target Demographic: born between 1965-1984; Gen X; older Millennials; and a more diverse population

Tactics: New series of concerts - Playlist and other socially relevant concert programs/themes.

- ❖ **>25%** of total Playlist audience in the target demographic
- ❖ **45%** of new ticket buyers to Playlist in the target demographic
- ❖ Playlist attendance of **2,200+**
- ❖ **Increase subscribers by 10%** in the target demographic
- ❖ **Average of 20%** of ticket buying households in the target demographic for additional two concerts

Ethnicity data

Variable not used in modeling

Key
 Orange = 30% or more above market
 White = +/- 30% of market
 Green = 30% or more below market

- Asian and Latinx households are underrepresented among Oakland Symphony buyers as compared to the market.

Purchasing Type (Households)		Ethnicity of Primary Decision Maker					Grand Total
		European	African American	Asian	Latinx	Other	
Subscribers	Total (938)	82.0%	7.2%	4.2%	5.8%	0.8%	100%
Single Ticket Buyers	Total (5,624)	72.5%	10.9%	9.2%	7.0%	0.4%	100%
	Ticketed Events* (4,100)	70.6%	11.7%	9.8%	7.5%	0.4%	100%
	Break Bread Together (1,878)	78.0%	10.6%	5.9%	5.0%	0.5%	100%
	Summer Sing-In (286)	75.0%	11.0%	11.0%	2.9%	0.1%	100%
Total Buyers (5,931)		73.1%	10.7%	9.0%	6.8%	0.4%	100%
San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward (1,627,360)		52.7%	6.4%	21.8%	17.5%	1.6%	100%

PARAMOUNT THEATRE • FRIDAY • JANUARY 19 • 2018 • 8PM

OAKLAND SYMPHONY



W. KAMAU BELL'S PLAYLIST

2018
W. Kamau Bell



oakland
symphony
michael morgan | music director

★ SEE DOLORES HUERTA IN CONCERT WITH THE OAKLAND SYMPHONY!

Sí Se Puede: DOLORES HUERTA'S

▶ Playlist

Friday, February 22, 2019 • 8pm
Paramount Theatre

Michael Morgan, conductor
Taylor Eigsti, piano
Briseyda Zárate, flamenco dancer
Oakland Symphony Youth Orchestra,
(Omid Zoufenoun, conductor)
Jazz Mafia

Community activist, feminist, and co-founder of the United Farm Workers — Dolores Huerta has been on a lifelong journey to correct economic and social injustice. Ms. Huerta picks the playlist of her life, as told through the voice of your symphony. Music of Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Carlos Santana, John Lennon, and George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue."

ORDER TICKETS TODAY!
OAKLANDSYMPHONY.ORG • 510-444-0802

TICKETS START AT \$25

Dolores Huerta is Founder & President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation. She co-founded the United Farm Workers of America with Cesar Chavez.

2019
Dolores Huerta



oakland
symphony
michael morgan
music director
it's all in the music

TICKETS START AT \$25!
DETAILS INSIDE...

DEBBIE ALLEN'S Playlist

Saturday, February 12 • 8pm • Paramount Theatre

Debbie Allen, guest artist • Rickey Minor, conductor

Stage and screen star of *Fame*, *Sweet Charity* and *Grey's Anatomy*. Five-time Emmy winner. And a 2021 Kennedy Center honoree. Debbie Allen has also transformed the lives of California's most talented disenfranchised youth through the Debbie Allen Dance Academy. Now, she shares the playlist of the music that has transformed her remarkable life - live in concert.

ORDER NOW FOR THE BEST SEATS! 510-444-0802 • OaklandSymphony.org

2022
Debbie Allen



oakland
symphony
It's all in the music

PLAYLIST: Angela Y. Davis WITH HOST W. KAMAU BELL

Saturday, Oct. 21 • 7:30pm
Paramount Theatre
Rickey Minor, conductor



2023
Angela Y. Davis



Post-Pandemic

Audience Building is Community Building
 11% of annual audience are Hall Pass ticket holders

oakland symphony
It's all in the music

ROOTED IN AMERICA

THE GREATEST SYMPHONY YOU'VE NEVER HEARD.

Friday, Jan. 27 • 8:00pm • Paramount Theatre
 Andrew Grams, conductor
 Sara Davis Buechner, piano

FLORENCE PRICE: *Five Folk Songs in Counterpoint*
 GEORGE GERSHWIN: *Second Rhapsody*
 WILLIAM DAWSON: *Negro Folk Symphony*

Rooted in America. In 1934, William Dawson imagined a symphony that would fuse African rhythms and American laments into the symphonic form. What Dvořák's "New World" Symphony promised, Dawson delivered in his defiant, triumphant *Negro Folk Symphony*.

Also, Sara Davis Buchner returns for Gershwin's lyrical and too little-known *Second Rhapsody*.

Jan 2023

oakland symphony
It's all in the music

THE STAND THEY TOOK... WAS TO SIT.
SONGS OF PROTEST

Friday, May 19 • 8pm • Paramount Theatre

The stand they took... was to sit. By occupying their Flint plant for 44 days, workers forced GM to recognize the UAW and changed the course of labor relations. Martin Rokeach's new work, commissioned by the Oakland Symphony, commemorates their collective action, draws us into the stand off, and celebrates the heroic victory of laborers.

Tito Muñoz, conductor
 Melody Wilson, mezzo-soprano
 Marc Molomot, tenor
 Morgan Smith, baritone
 Oakland Symphony Chorus
 Pacific Edge Voices

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN:
Leonore Overture No. 3
 SAMUEL BARBER:
Second Essay for Orchestra
 MARTIN ROKEACH: *Bodies on the Line: The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike*
(world premiere, Oakland Symphony commission)

May 2023

oakland symphony
It's all in the music

TRUTH & POWER

● Friday, Nov. 10 • 8:00pm
 Paramount Theatre

Jeri Lynne Johnson, conductor
 Anthony McGill, clarinet
 Oakland Symphony Chorus

ON SALE NOW!

Nov 2023

oakland symphony
It's all in the music

HERE I STAND

Friday, February 16 • 8:00pm
 Paramount Theatre, Oakland

Kedrick Armstrong, conductor
 Morris Robinson, bass
 Oakland Symphony Chorus
 Pacific Edge Voices

JOAN TOWER: *Fantare for the Uncommon Woman No. 6*
 CARLOS SIMON WITH LIBRETTO BY DAN HARDER:
Here I Stand: Paul Robeson
(World Premiere, Oakland Symphony Commission, generously funded by the Robeson Centennial Committee)
 DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH: *Symphony No. 5*

Feb 2024

OPERA THEATRE



of SAINT LOUIS



OTSL's goal for the *Building Audiences for Sustainability* initiative:

- ▶ To **build an audience that reflects the true diversity of the St. Louis community** -- representing an array of ages, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, and viewpoints.
- ▶ Specifically, **OTSL was focused on Millennial and Gen X audiences with a special emphasis on culturally diverse segments.** This target was selected as a logical progression from the company's recent growth among audiences from those demographic segments.

OTSL's learning cycles included:

- ▶ **Expanding capacity** for existing programs that attract the target audience
- ▶ Creating activities in venues across the community to engage the target audience, with a goal of **converting off-season attendees** to festival season ticket buyers
- ▶ Launching a brand campaign to **raise awareness** within the target audience
- ▶ Experimenting with in-season activities to **increase retention** of new-to-file audiences from year one to year two





What did OTSL learn?

- ▶ A **commitment to diversity** on stage, in our storytelling, and in creative teams is the most effective way to attract the target audience.
- ▶ Connecting with the target audience through **experience-based activities** is more effective than disseminating information through marketing campaigns.
- ▶ **Community partnerships** are integral in reaching this target audience.
- ▶ While we saw some success with many of these tactics, we have **yet to achieve growth that balances the decline** of the subscriber base.

How are BAS learnings guiding OTSL's work today?

- ▶ Centering diversity and inclusion in decision-making through initiatives like:
 - ▶ **New Works Collective**, which invites new decision-makers and new creators into opera.
 - ▶ **Artist-led programming** for concerts and events
 - ▶ **Intentionality** in assembling creative teams and casting
- ▶ Creating engagement opportunities **throughout the year** that reflect OTSL's festival season experience
- ▶ **Investing in data** collection to drive decision-making, and adding capacity to ensure learnings are actionable



Thank you!

Andrew Jorgensen
General Director
ajorgensen@opera-stl.org
ExperienceOpera.org

OPERA THEATRE **OTSL** *of* SAINT LOUIS

Thank you for joining us!



For more information

www.wallacefoundation.org