



**BUILDING ARTS PARTICIPATION**

**NEW FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD**

# Participation in Arts and Culture

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY VENUES

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with Kay Sherwood

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# Participation in Arts and Culture

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY VENUES

Many arts organizations are discovering that *where* people choose to attend arts and cultural events can be crucial to developing effective strategies for reaching broader and more diverse audiences. New research on the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation (CPCP) initiative finds that more people attend arts and cultural events in *community venues*—such as open air spaces, schools, and places of worship—than in conventional arts venues, such as concert halls, theaters, museums, and art galleries. Although audiences for events

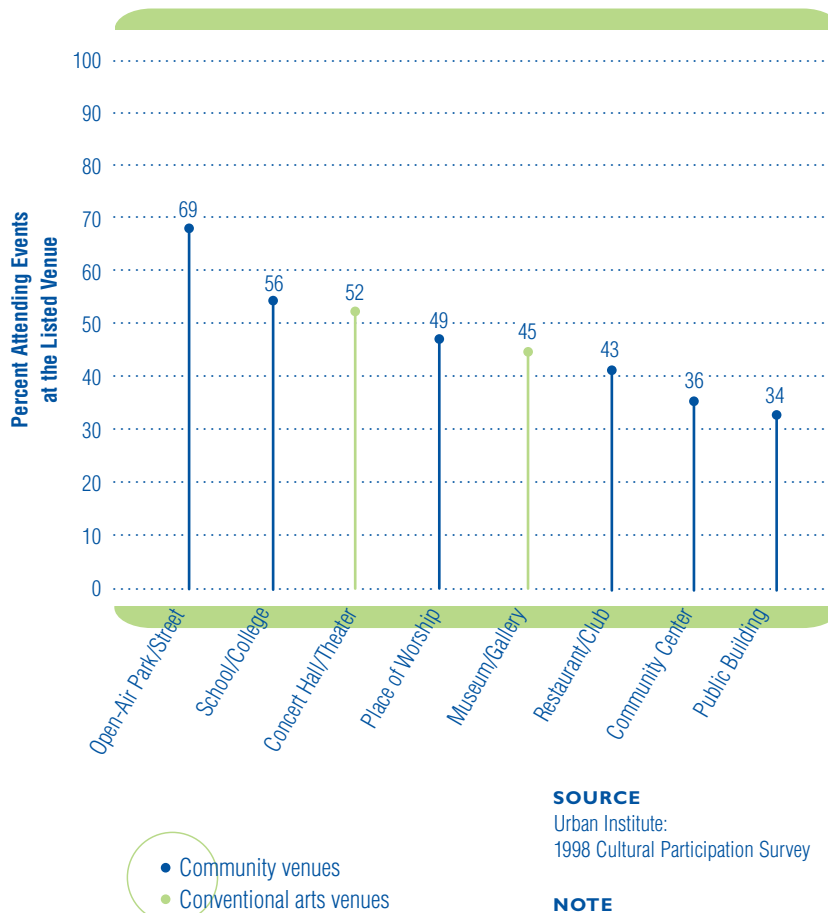
held in both types of venues overlap, about one-fourth of the people who participate in arts and culture do so only in community venues.

These findings confirm the wisdom of one strategy employed by many arts organizations: presenting arts and cultural activities in places normally used for other purposes. The findings also have deep relevance for policymakers and funders, as well as those who are interested in cultural planning or facilities development, or are otherwise engaged in creating opportunities for participation in the arts.

## Where People Attend Arts and Cultural Events

Previous Urban Institute research has pointed out the many connections between arts and culture, and community. The places, or venues, where arts and culture can be experienced are one key connection.

**Three of the top four places where people attend arts and cultural events are community venues rather than conventional arts venues.**

**EXHIBIT 1****THREE OF THE TOP FOUR VENUES WHERE PEOPLE ATTEND CULTURAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS ARE COMMUNITY VENUES****SOURCE**

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

**NOTE**

Figures based on weighted N of 4,038 from five survey communities.

In the Cultural Participation Survey conducted as part of this research (see description on page 4), 69 percent of respondents said they had attended at least one arts and cultural event in an open air space during the past year; 56 percent mentioned schools or colleges; and 49 percent said they attended arts and cultural events in places of worship—all community venues. (Community venues also

include restaurants, community centers, and public buildings.) Fifty-two percent of respondents said they attended such events at a concert hall or theater, the only conventional arts sites to rank among the top four venues. Rankings of the full range of arts and cultural venues identified by survey respondents are shown in exhibit 1.

## CULTURAL PARTICIPATION SURVEY

The CPCP initiative, sponsored by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds and carried out by community foundations in 10 localities across the country, is designed to "broaden, deepen, and diversify" participation in arts and culture. An evaluation of the initiative by the Urban Institute is producing an important new picture of how the choices that arts organizations make about venues and where they present their work may influence people's participation in arts and culture.

The Urban Institute conducted a telephone survey of adults in five of the CPCP communities in the fall of 1998. The purpose was to collect information about individual participation in a range of arts and cultural activities. A random sample of adults in the five communities was contacted, producing 2,406 responses. The main topics of the 20-minute survey were:

- **Methods of Participation**—defined as attendance at live arts and cultural programs and events, donations of time and money to arts and cultural organizations, and pursuit of personal artistic expression.

- **Motivations** for participation.
- **Venues** for participation—where people had attended live music, theater, and dance performances and where they had viewed painting, sculpture, architecture, and other visual arts.
- **Participants' Background**—questions about respondents' income, education, religion, immigrant status, organizational memberships, and other personal and household characteristics.

The five communities surveyed are diverse in terms of their populations' background characteristics. They are:

- **The Kansas City Metropolitan Area** (N=604 respondents)
- **Humboldt County, California** (N=602)
- **Mayfair, San Jose, California** (N=400)
- **Milpitas, California** (N=400)
- **Gilroy, California** (N=400)

## SURVEY OF ARTS AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

In 2000, the Urban Institute conducted a mail survey of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations in the same communities surveyed for the Cultural Participation Survey plus two others—Southeastern Michigan and Boston, Massachusetts—with a total of 553 responses. The main topics of the survey were:

- **Descriptions of the organizations**—characteristics such as number of employees, number of volunteers, annual expenses, types of activities, composition and size of audience, and resources provided by volunteers.
- **Venues**—types of venues used to present or distribute arts and cultural products.
- **Interest in and strategies used to broaden, deepen, and diversify participation**—involvement of staff, volunteers, board members, and audience in efforts, future priorities for the organization, and satisfaction with support/resources.
- **Partnerships**—types of partnerships with other organizations, activities undertaken in partnership with other organizations, and partnerships initiated or significantly changed in the recent past.

**Almost all people who attend arts and cultural events do so in community venues at least some of the time, but a substantial group of arts and cultural participants attend only in community venues. For arts and cultural organizations, this represents a substantial group of potential new participants if the organizations go beyond conventional arts venues to present their work.**

Almost everyone (99 percent) who attended any live performance of music, dance, or theater or who saw any visual arts in the year before the survey said they went at least once to a place classified as a community venue; nearly three-quarters (74 percent) reported attending a conventional arts venue. A substantial group attended events in both community and conventional arts venues (73 percent).

Those who attended only in community venues (26 percent) were far more numerous than the respondents who said they attended arts and cultural events only in conventional arts venues (1 percent). Taken together, these findings suggest that arts and cultural organizations might reach more participants if they also present their work outside conventional arts venues (see exhibit 2). ●

## CPCP SURVEY COMMUNITIES

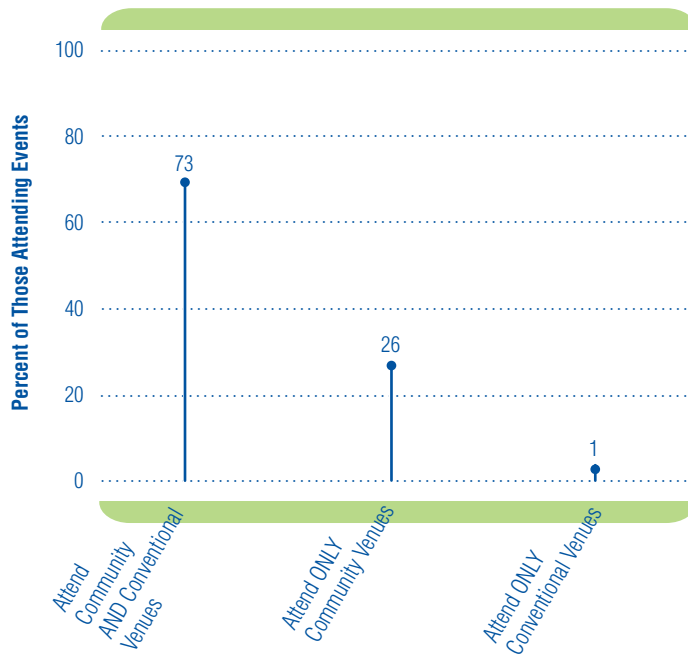
**The Kansas City Metropolitan Area,** including 1.4 million residents of five counties in Missouri and Kansas. This area resembles the rest of the country in its mixture of urban and suburban, rich and poor, and crowded and sparsely populated sections. More than four out of five residents are white; most of the rest are African American and, increasingly, Hispanic.

**Humboldt County, California,** a largely rural county of about 120,000 people, with the largest population centers in the cities of Eureka and Arcata. Humboldt County's economy was built around the timber industry, although the southern part of the county is dotted with farms. About 88 percent of the county's population is white, although there is a substantial Native American population, which was oversampled in the Urban Institute's Cultural Participation survey.

**Mayfair, Milpitas, and Gilroy, California.** Within Silicon Valley, a popular name for Santa Clara County, Mayfair is a one-square mile, low-income neighborhood in San Jose, with about 6,000 Hispanic and, increasingly, Asian residents. Milpitas, an affluent suburb of San Jose with about 50,000 residents, is about one-half white, one-third Asian, and one-fifth Hispanic. Gilroy is an agricultural town containing 39,000 residents, about half of whom are Hispanic.

**EXHIBIT 2**

**MOST PEOPLE WHO ATTEND CULTURAL PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS DO SO AT BOTH CONVENTIONAL ARTS AND COMMUNITY VENUES**



**SOURCE**

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

**NOTE**

Figures based on weighted N of 4,038 from five survey communities.

Community venues tend to attract people who are more strongly motivated by social and family interests than cultural ones, and certain community venues—churches, for example—appeal more strongly to African Americans and Hispanics than they do to whites as places to experience art and culture.

## How Venues Influence Participation

**The people who attend arts and cultural events only in community venues tend to be motivated primarily by different factors than those who also attend events in conventional arts venues.**

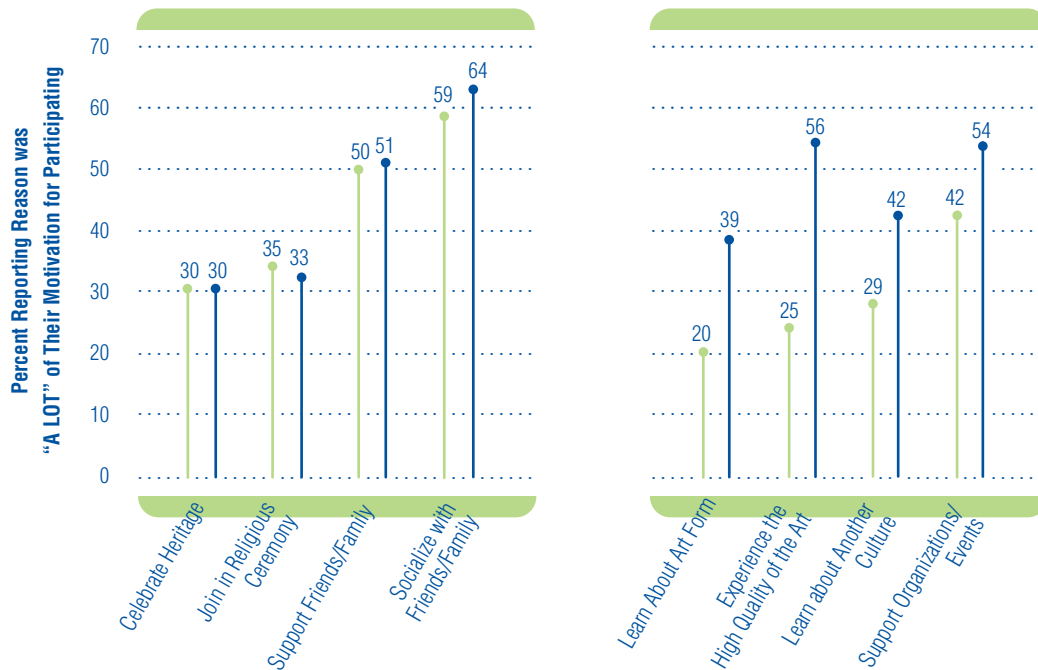
The choices people make about where they participate in arts and culture are influenced by their interests and personal characteristics as well as their motivations for participation. Community venues tend to attract people who are more strongly motivated by social and family interests than cultural ones, and certain

community venues—churches, for example—appeal more strongly to African Americans and Hispanics than they do to whites as places to experience art and culture.

On average, people who attend arts and cultural events only in community venues are less likely than others to be motivated by interest in the arts and culture being presented. Like other groups, they are motivated to attend by social and religious interests. These include getting together with friends and family, celebrating their heritage, participating in a religious ceremony, or supporting friends and family (see exhibit 3).

**EXHIBIT 3**

**PEOPLE WHO ATTEND PROGRAMS ONLY AT COMMUNITY VENUES ARE LESS MOTIVATED BY ISSUES OF ARTISTIC QUALITY AND CULTURAL LEARNING**



**Motivations that are Similar for the Two Groups of Participants**

**Motivations that are Different for the Two Groups of Participants**

**Groups of Participants:**

- Community venues ONLY
- Conventional arts AND community venues

**SOURCE**  
Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

**NOTE**  
Figures based on weighted N of 4,038 from five survey communities. Attendance at conventional arts venues only is 1 percent and not included.



People who are more strongly motivated to participate in arts and cultural activities by social and religious interests than by interests in arts and culture appear to be drawn to events held in venues for social and religious activity, for example schools or places of worship. Arts organizations seeking to broaden and diversify participation with a “community venues” strategy should examine their offerings and marketing in light of what motivates arts and cultural event participants who are exclusively attracted to these venues. A symphony might bill an outdoor pops concert at a local park as an opportunity for a picnic with family and friends. Or a traveling museum exhibit displayed at a neighborhood school could be marketed as an opportunity for community residents to learn more about their heritage.

**People who frequently attend arts and cultural events in community venues tend to be active participants in community life and therefore make up a potential pool of active supporters for arts organizations to cultivate.**

The people who attend the largest number of arts and cultural events...also are members of volunteer associations, they donate money to charitable causes, and they vote.

The people who attend the largest number of arts and cultural events held in community venues also participate in a range of civic activities. They are members of volunteer associations, they donate money to charitable causes, and they vote. These people are more likely than those who attend infrequently or those who attend only in community venues to be motivated to participate in arts and culture by a desire to support organizations and events that are important to the community. These activists also report that “cultural interest” reasons—such as wanting to experience the high quality of the art, learn about arts and culture or celebrate their heritage—are an important explanation for their participation in arts and culture. Their inclination to participate—whether in arts and culture, or in civic activities—suggests that this group is a potential pool of active supporters of arts and cultural organizations. These are people whose involvement can go beyond attending events to, for example, volunteering for the organization or donating funds.

**Arts and cultural organizations could reach broader, more diverse audiences by connecting with non-arts organizations.**

Many non-arts organizations, such as veterans organizations, church auxiliaries, or civic associations, offer potential community venues for arts and cultural programs.<sup>1</sup> When these organizations sponsor such programs,

their members are almost guaranteed to participate in the events.<sup>2</sup> For example, a charity concert for a community organization is likely to be attended by the group's staff, board members, donors, beneficiaries, and well-wishers from the neighborhood. Therefore, arts and cultural organizations can reach broader, more diverse audiences by connecting with such non-arts organizations. ●

## Using Community Venues to Increase Arts and Cultural Participation

Arts organizations striving to broaden and diversify their audiences can take advantage of the relationships among personal motivation, organizational membership and citizen activism, and race and ethnicity to tailor programs and select venues that appeal to particular audience interests.

**Most arts and cultural organizations already present events in community venues. Many organizations seeking to increase audience participation have employed strategies focused on new venues, with reported success, and on collaborating with non-arts organizations.**

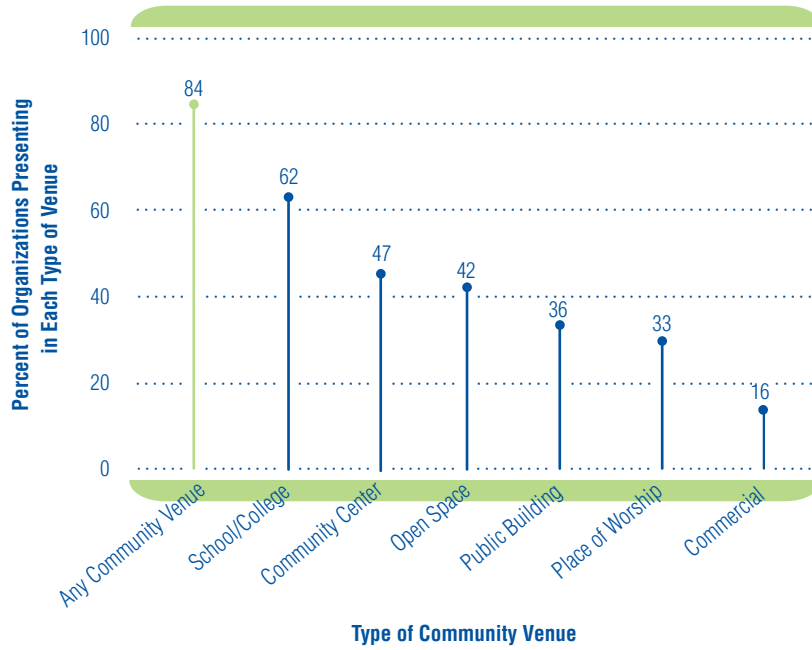
The CPCP Survey of Arts Organizations (see description on page 4) showed that more than 80 percent of the visual and performing arts organizations responding—including some that directly participated in activities of the initiative and some that did not—had presented events in community venues during the past year. Schools were the most frequently used venue (62 percent of organizations), followed by community centers (47 percent) and open air spaces (42 percent) (see exhibit 4). Sixty-five percent of the arts organizations reported presenting work in new venues to encourage more active participation. Of those that tried new venues, 85 percent reported success in increasing participation. Thirty-five percent reported that they collaborated with non-arts organizations during the past year.

<sup>1</sup> Hodgkinson, Virginia A. and Murray S. Weitzman. 1993. *From Belief to Commitment: The Community Service Activities and Finances of Religious Congregations in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, Chris, and Stephanie Scott-Melnyk, with Kay Sherwood. 2002. *Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

**EXHIBIT 4**

**MOST VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS ORGANIZATIONS PRESENT IN COMMUNITY VENUES**



**SOURCE**

Urban Institute:  
2000 Survey of Arts and Cultural Organizations

**NOTE**

Figures based on N of 254 in five survey communities, and includes only organizations identified as performing or visual arts groups—e.g., excludes arts councils, advocacy, and other groups active in arts and culture.

**Places of worship are particularly important venues for events presented by small arts and cultural organizations. Also, events held at such venues are attended more often by people of color.**

The Survey of Arts Organizations showed that 34 percent of the small organizations—those with five or fewer employees—had presented their work in a place of worship in the past year, compared with 26 percent of the organizations with more than five employees. The Cultural Participation Survey showed that 65 percent of African Americans and 54 percent of Hispanics who attended events heard or saw music, dance, theater, or visual arts in a place of worship in the past year, compared with 46 percent of whites.<sup>3</sup>

Communities that participated in the CPCP initiative provide several examples of how community venues can be used to increase arts and cultural participation. The first illustration below demonstrates how a local health clinic took a leading role in bringing cultural experiences to the people it serves. The second shows how a mainstream cultural organization that usually performs in a conventional arts venue moved out into community venues. The third illustrates an entirely new combination of arts participation and community space.

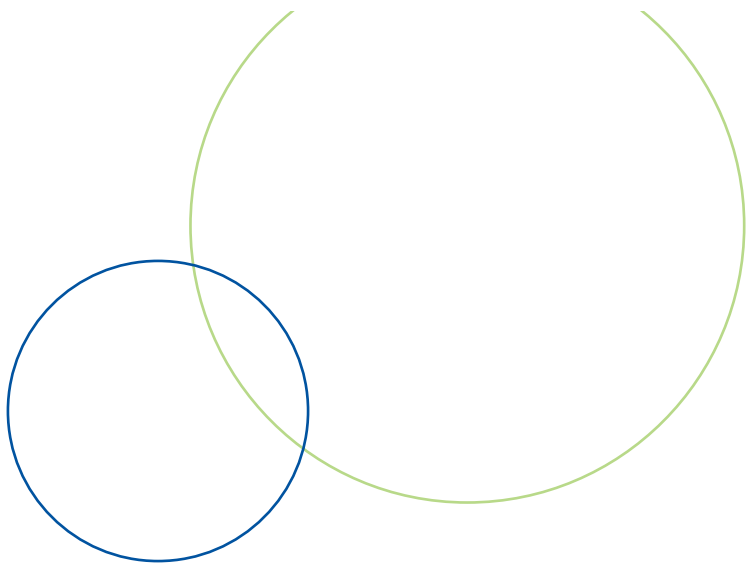
- In the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami, Florida, the Dr. Rafael A. Peñalver Clinic is a busy community-based medical center that also acts as a social and cultural center for the low-income population it serves. The building has won design awards for its welcoming Spanish-style architecture, which features a central courtyard and multiple patios. The clinic used these areas and a next-door park to develop and host a monthly Latino cultural festival, “The Arts, Your Health, and You,” featuring neighborhood artists, musicians, and dancers, and highlighting the clinic’s health care resources. With support from Dade Community Foundation, the clinic worked with about a dozen community-based organizations and local artists to develop cultural events on a main commercial street running through Little Havana, which quickly became the major recurring Latino cultural festival in the city of Miami, “Viernes Culturales.” This project has been credited with helping to reenergize the cultural life of Little Havana, drawing attention to the rich cultural assets in the neighborhood.

<sup>3</sup> The differences between African Americans and whites, and between Hispanics and whites, were statistically significant, but the difference between African Americans and Hispanics was not.

- With support from the Boston Foundation Arts Fund, the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra and Gospel Choir presented “Pops in Franklin Park” in the summer of 2000, attracting 8,000 people to a free concert and family program in Franklin Park, which is located in a low-income neighborhood. The concert grew out of an orchestra program to present music in community venues, implemented in cooperation with more than 80 community, cultural, social, and religious organizations in the low-income neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, and Jamaica Plain. The concerts are held in settings such as churches and community centers to introduce the concert experience to people who do not ordinarily hear chamber music and to provide an opportunity for families to spend time together.
- In the Riverwalk “Tile Project,” VSA New Hampshire—a statewide nonprofit organization that supports the creative power of people with disabilities—worked with at-risk teens, other teens, and adults with disabilities to create a series of tiles inspired by personal stories about “their Manchester” and the mighty Merrimack River. Each person worked with artists to design and create a ceramic tile depicting a personally meaningful aspect of

past and current Manchester. The tiles were mounted as a mosaic face on the fountain base of the newly established Riverwalk, the first phase in a multiyear revitalization project along a two-mile stretch of mill buildings in the heart of the Amoskeag Millyard along the Merrimack River. Visitors, residents, and businesses will see historic and contemporary Manchester reflected in the tiles. This project inspired the engineers and designers of the Riverwalk Plan to incorporate other spaces for public art along the two-mile stretch, giving a uniquely Manchester look and feel to this key revitalization initiative. ●

**Most African Americans and Hispanics who attended events heard or saw music, dance, theater, or visual arts in a place of worship in the past year, compared with less than half of whites.**



## Conclusion: New Support for Strategies to Use Community Venues

The strategy of increasing participation in arts and culture by taking arts and culture to the places where people go for other reasons has become well established in much of the arts world. The findings from the CPCP initiative provide solid validation for such a strategy. Beyond that, however, the CPCP survey data demonstrate the potential for reaching out to participants who do not attend arts and cultural events in conventional arts venues. The survey findings also suggest that by reaching out, arts organizations may attract and engage active citizens in the community, who are the people most likely to support the organizations' work.

Community venues for the arts have demonstrated that they can connect diverse segments of society to cultural experiences. They provide opportunities for people who are active in social and civic life to experience arts and culture—and they allow those interested in arts and cultural experiences to encounter the diverse institutions that make up the fabric of society. Investments by public agencies and private foundations in arts and cultural activities at community venues can strengthen both the community institutions that host the events and the arts and cultural organizations that produce them. ●

## EVALUATION OF THE CPCP INITIATIVE

In January 1998, the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a five-year evaluation of the CPCP initiative. The initiative is part of the Funds' long-term commitment to support a range of cultural organizations and private and public arts funders to enhance broad participation and to make the arts and culture part of people's everyday lives. This policy paper is one of a number of publications from the study, including: *Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture*; *Cultural Collaborations: Building Partnerships for Arts Participation*; and *Arts and Culture: Community Connections*. Further publications are planned exploring the policy and practice implications for building arts participation based on the CPCP evaluation.

## COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS PARTICIPATING IN CPCP

The Boston Foundation  
Community Foundation Silicon Valley  
Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan  
Dade Community Foundation  
East Tennessee Foundation  
Greater Kansas City Community Foundation  
Humboldt Area Foundation  
Maine Community Foundation  
New Hampshire Charitable Foundation  
San Francisco Foundation

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The Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds seek to create opportunities for people to enrich themselves through better schools, enhanced community activities, and participation in the arts. Using a range of strategies over the past decade, the Funds have worked to propel the development of cultural organizations that are effectively increasing participation in their communities; to foster partnerships with states and other public and private funders to increase arts participation; and to develop new knowledge and tools that help make the arts part of people's everyday lives.

**Arts4AllPeople**

A web community for those committed to building participation in the arts.

Visit: [www.arts4allpeople.org](http://www.arts4allpeople.org)



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