



The Wallace Foundation

Wallace Studies in  
Building Arts Audiences

# OPENING NEW DOORS



**HANDS-ON PARTICIPATION BRINGS A  
NEW AUDIENCE TO THE CLAY STUDIO**

**Bob Harlow and Tricia Heywood**

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## PREFACE

This case study describes how The Clay Studio brought in a new audience of hundreds of young professionals to its workshops and classes. It is part of a larger set of 10 case studies commissioned by The Wallace Foundation to explore arts organizations' efforts to reach new audiences and deepen relationships with their existing audiences. These in-depth reports lay out how the efforts were created and run, describe the results in detail, identify what helped them become successful, and show what got in the way of success. They add to a growing body of field-based research, providing specific examples of individual organizations' responses to unique circumstances. At the same time, each aspires to capture more-broadly applicable lessons about what works and what does not—and why—in building arts audiences.

The individual case studies are the products of multiple interviews with key staff and analysis of program elements, budgets, and planning documents. Unlike similar efforts, however, each draws from a multifaceted base of data and evidence collected over a period of several years, including ticket purchases, online activity, and participation in a broad array of programming, as well as qualitative and quantitative research undertaken by independent consultants and the organizations themselves to inform program development and to evaluate results. That research was integral to each program, and of such importance that in 2015 The Wallace Foundation published a

companion guide on using research to support audience building that draws from practices and examples employed across the 10 organizations, *Taking Out the Guesswork: A Guide to Using Research to Build Arts Audiences*.

Each case study in this series begins with a brief executive summary and a “scene setter” describing an actual component of the program. That is followed by an overview of the environment within which the organization was operating, its audience-building challenges, and the program it built to address those challenges. Detail follows about strategy and tactics, and key decisions and adjustments made as the organization developed its approach and refined it in response to new information. Additional specifics are provided on how progress was measured and what results occurred, and an analysis highlighting elements that led to success follows.

The Clay Studio is part of a second round of case studies. The first round included four organizations, and this second round contains six. The 10 arts groups encompass variety in size, geography, and art form. Perhaps more importantly, each organization’s strategy and set of tactics are different, providing planning details and considerations across diverse programs and circumstances.

The experiences of the organizations as a whole reveal several recurring themes. When the first four case studies were published in 2011, we highlighted five general principles:

1. Market research can sharpen engagement-strategy development and execution.
2. Audiences are open to engaging in the arts in new and different ways.
3. Audience building is an ongoing endeavor, not a one-time initiative.

4. Audience-building efforts should be fully integrated into every element of an organization’s operations, not approached as a separate initiative or program.
5. Programs that emerge from a clear and well-supported organizational mission develop in environments in which they can thrive.

These themes are reinforced in the experiences of the six organizations in the second group of case studies and were more fully developed (alongside additional effective practices) in a recent Wallace Foundation publication, *The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences* (that report and other audience-building resources are available at <http://www.wallacefoundation.org>).

While the individual reports provide details of particular strategies, the collective experience across the organizations also suggests that there is no one winning tactic, no killer promotion, no social media strategy that alone will help organizations build audiences in a sustainable way. Instead, successful audience building is an integrated and coordinated effort with several parts of an organization working together over several years’ time, more often than not in the face of very slow progress or setbacks. The Clay Studio had great success, but not right away. The organization’s perseverance, combined with strategic visitor research and observation, opened the door to building relationships with an audience a generation or two younger than the audience that staff members had been used to seeing. Getting there also required a shift in organizational thinking, not to mention experimenting with class formats and developing new marketing that would speak to an audience that was not (yet) familiar with ceramic arts. That said, while organizations

may have to operate differently to connect with new audiences, that does not mean they need to change who they are or what they produce. In fact, such a strategy may backfire, because an audience engagement initiative that departs from an organization's mission or core values likely will not receive the broad and ongoing support needed to maintain it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**A**great many individuals and organizations assisted us in our research, and we want to express our heartfelt appreciation. First, this work would not have been possible without the generous support of The Wallace Foundation. We would also like to express our appreciation for their guidance and support to The Wallace Foundation staff members Lucas Held, Ed Pauly, Jessica Schwartz, Daniel Windham, Will Miller, and Christine Yoon. Ann Stone of The Wallace Foundation was an important strategic advisor from the project's beginnings to its conclusions. Our sincere thanks are also due to editor Anne Field, who wove the moving parts of a multiyear initiative into a clean and engaging narrative. Sarosh Syed and Pamela Mendels of The Wallace Foundation helped us shape and refine the draft for greater clarity.

We are grateful to Chris Taylor, Jennifer Martin, and The Clay Studio staff for their responsiveness and openness in helping us understand the many components of their organization's work. We were also fortunate to have received feedback on direction and an earlier draft of this work from Julie Farr, Jo LaBrecque of Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, and Julie Crites of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Of course, the final responsibility for the questions posed and conclusions drawn rests with us.

*Bob Harlow*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2007, the staff at The Clay Studio (TCS) realized that some big changes needed to be made. Located in the heart of Old City Philadelphia's Arts District, it offered area residents classes and workshops on how to work with clay, as well as providing studio space to artists and operating a gallery and a shop. But the organization also had just celebrated its 30-year anniversary, and, as senior staff members surveyed their visitor base, they realized TCS needed to better prepare itself for the next 30 years. Its core audience of college-educated professionals and retirees was getting older, and fewer and fewer newcomers were signing up for classes or making purchases in the shop. Something had to be done to bring new visitors to the organization.

The demographic with the most potential, TCS reasoned, was professionals in the area who were culturally active but relatively younger (ages 25 to 45) than the current base. With that in mind, staff threw themselves into the effort, experimenting with a series of events and workshops aimed at persuading the target audience to try out the organization. Many of these trial runs failed, but TCS finally found success with Date Night, a Friday evening event where ceramics novices could get hands-on experience working with clay in an informal environment.

That success convinced TCS staff to conduct more research to pinpoint what program elements appealed to younger clay novices and how to capitalize on them, leading to a few conclusions: This target audience valued new and different activities

they could share with friends, and Date Night fit that bill. They also avoided making commitments far in advance and disliked the prospect of tying themselves down to a long-term class. As a result, the organization found ways to package the regular curriculum into shorter and less expensive chunks. In addition, the target audience got most of its information online and found the organization's regular brochure to be overwhelming and unappealing. So the staff overhauled how they promoted events and activities targeted to this demographic, relying more on TCS's website and social media, of course, but also streamlining printed materials to emphasize the experience visitors could expect, rather than the skills they might learn.

It worked. The number of students taking classes and workshops tripled, and revenue from the school more than doubled. Monthly social art-making workshops regularly sell out. Enrollment in 5- and 10-week classes and in weekend workshops also continues to increase. And many newbies have gone on to take TCS's longer classes. At the same time, this success has created new challenges. The organization is negotiating the sometimes-difficult balancing act of serving its core visitor base, who seek a professional atmosphere in which to advance their skills and be inspired by others, and its new audience, a group drawn to TCS at least initially for a more social experience around clay.

*On a warm July evening in Philadelphia's quaint Old City neighborhood lined with restored brick and stone buildings, a group of approximately thirty 20- and 30-somethings drank wine and beer and nibbled on munchies. They had congregated at The Clay Studio, a 40-year-old organization providing classes and workshops in ceramics along with artist studio space, a gallery, and a shop. But this gathering clearly wasn't an ordinary get-together. Indeed, it was hard to miss the air of anticipation, tinged with nervousness, filling the space.*

*After 15 minutes or so, it was time to get down to business. Chris Taylor, TCS president, talked briefly about the organization, inviting the guests to explore the ceramic works all around them on shelves, much of it made by their "local friends and neighbors" who were taking classes there. Then, guided by Debbie, a warm and friendly instructor, each person sat down on a short stool in front of a pottery wheel, ready for action—a virgin experience of the messy, highly tactile, and surprisingly tricky act of throwing clay. After a brief introduction to the essentials, armed with a supply of earthen materials, the group got started.*

*One young man, who had learned about the event online and was there with three other friends, discovered a previously untapped knack for it and, after a few false starts, found he was able to produce something resembling a symmetrical bowl fairly easily. One of his pals, though considerably less successful, was still smiling when, after two hours, she hadn't managed to create anything but a lopsided*

*mass. "This takes too much patience," she said with a grin. "It's not my forte." But, she and her friends all agreed they'd come back again—and recommend the evening to some of their friends.*

*The monthly event, called Out of Hand, was one of a number of efforts launched by TCS in recent years to attract a new generation of young professionals to fill out the dwindling ranks populated by an aging group of regulars. An enthusiastic staff embraced the challenge, but had limited success at first with a series of one-off events. That changed, however, especially after in-depth research validated some prior assumptions about the target demographic's preferences for exploring new, interesting experiential programs and opportunities to socialize; signing up for events at the last minute; and opting for classes that didn't require the usual 10-week commitment. With those findings in mind, TCS introduced everything from Out of Hand, to workshops lasting a few hours, to 5-week classes, alongside the 10-week programs that had been the primary attraction up to that point. The staff also revamped TCS's marketing communications with more-targeted brochures, a dash of tongue-in-cheek in its messaging, and an emphasis on social media and the web.*

*The result has been a rejuvenated community, and substantial increases in enrollment and revenue. In fact, in just a few years, TCS has managed to do what had seemed impossible: turned an outlet for older pottery devotees into a hip destination frequented also by young clay novices.*

## **THE CHALLENGE: REVIVING AUDIENCE GROWTH**

**S**everal years into the new millennium, staff members at The Clay Studio (TCS), like those at many other arts institutions around the country, became concerned about the future of their organization. Located in the heart of Old City Philadelphia's Arts District, TCS provided studio space to artists and offered area residents with basic and advanced skills an opportunity to work with clay in classes and workshops, or simply to appreciate the ceramics in its gallery and shop. For many years TCS had enjoyed an enthusiastic and dedicated visitor base that regularly attended gallery functions, enrolled each year in the organization's 10-week pottery classes and weekend workshops, and purchased resident artists' works. But, that base was aging and, perhaps more alarmingly, no longer expanding. As Jeff Guido, TCS's former artistic director and gallery and shop manager, explains:

*We were serving the same people over and over and over again. There was no one new ... even at the exhibition programs. Those individuals were getting older as we all were getting older, and there weren't younger individuals stepping in to replace them. That panicked us a little.*

The core TCS audience was made up of current or retired professionals ages 40 to 75, mostly (65 percent) women, of a

high-middle- to upper-income bracket who lived in or close to Center City, the central business and residential area surrounding the Old City district. Many had free time during the day and ample disposable income, allowing them to both take classes and support the resident artists by purchasing their work. But gradually over the years, they signed up for fewer classes and, their homes already filled with their collections of ceramic art, made fewer purchases. It was clear to TCS's staff and board that the future of the organization depended on the ability to attract new, younger patrons. Who would be their next generation of supporters?

## INTRODUCING THE CLAY STUDIO TO NEW AUDIENCES

The most likely population to tap, TCS believed, was younger professionals in the area. For starters, like its current audience, they were educated and culturally active. Moreover, there were a lot of them either living or working within the Center City district. In fact, TCS had access to a large portion of that target market on First Fridays, a free monthly open house event at art galleries and studios in the Old City Arts District that brought nearly 2,000 mostly young-adult visitors through TCS's doors on the first Friday of each month. In addition, TCS staff members believed there was potential to engage parents of young children, who were less likely to attend First Fridays but might be inclined to bring their kids to workshops where they could create ceramic art together.

The problem was that although large numbers of young professionals came to TCS on First Fridays, the staff had no idea how to get them to return after that brief sojourn. TCS staff members knew little about this audience's interests and needs and were unaccustomed to serving them on any deep level. The upshot: They hadn't a clue about what would entice that group to become more involved.

Amy Sarner Williams, president and CEO at the time, Artistic Director Guido, and Vice President Jennifer Martin knew that building a connection with this audience required

experimenting with new, untried approaches. Specifically, they decided to create social events targeted to young professionals that would be held in the shop and gallery, where visitors could learn about ceramic arts in a relaxed setting with their peers. These gateway experiences might build a connection to TCS and its artists that could lead to deeper levels of engagement.

TCS applied for and received a four-year (January 2008 to December 2011), \$375,000 Wallace Excellence Award to support its efforts. The staff would use that award to (1) experiment with different event and workshop formats designed to introduce professionals ages 20 to 45 to clay, (2) develop marketing tactics and materials to promote their undertaking, and (3) conduct audience research to strengthen and evaluate their efforts. Some programs fell flat; others found considerable success. But by honing what they knew about audience preferences and the visitor experience through a combination of trial and error, evaluation, and research, the staff developed programs that more than doubled the number of students they were serving. In addition, they completely revamped communications to be not only less expensive to produce, but also more effective.

## **BACKGROUND ON THE CLAY STUDIO**

TCS exhibits and artist residencies have an international reputation for excellence in ceramic arts, and its classes and workshops have a strong local following. Five potters in need of workspace founded the organization in 1974 as an artists' collective. But the mission evolved quickly to include educational and community objectives aimed at promoting ceramic art and artists through classes, exhibitions, and a shop selling original work. An institutional member of the International Academy of Ceramics, TCS has mounted seven major international exhibitions and, since 1992, hosted artists from more than 45 countries in its artist-in-residence program. Over the years, the organization has played a key role in the development of Old City Philadelphia into a cultural arts district. In particular, it worked with the Old City Arts Association to create the First Friday gallery events, which have drawn thousands of people to the area on the first Friday of each month since 1991.

An increased demand for studio space by resident artists and students led TCS to expand in 2007, taking over two floors of the building next door, where it already had been using some space. After the expansion, TCS had nearly doubled in size to 21,000 square feet spread over four floors (in addition to basement space) and doubled its street presence (see Figure 1). The gallery was relocated to the ground floor and the shop was

## THE CLAY STUDIO AT A GLANCE

- Founded in 1974 by five artists as a workspace for themselves and other recent art school graduates
- Mission: The Clay Studio's mission is to provide a unique educational environment in which to experience the ceramic arts.
- Public audience includes:
  - 1,500 students, 2,000 Claymobile outreach students, 30,000 visitors annually
  - 12 artists in five-year residencies and 150 artists under consignment in the shop or exhibitions in the gallery
- Varied programming, including:
  - Ceramic art classes for adults and children
  - Evening "social workshops" with clay aimed at young professionals
  - Permanent collection of works in clay and approximately 30 exhibitions per year
  - Functional pottery and online store with over 120 artists' works
  - Two Claymobile vans providing hands-on activities to 2,000 inner-city K-12 students
  - Studio rental for 40 artists
  - Work exchange co-op program for 13 young artists
- Current staff
  - President: Christopher Taylor
  - Vice President: Jennifer Martin
  - Curator of Artistic Programs: Jennifer Zwilling
- Previous staff
  - Artistic Director: Jeff Guido
  - President Emerita: Amy Sarner Williams
- 2014 operating budget: \$1.5 million



**Figure 1. The Clay Studio, with Street-Facing Gallery and Shop**

expanded, allowing both to accommodate more pieces. The new space also enabled TCS to add studios, doubling the number of local artists it could serve from 20 to 40. Staff also created a third classroom, which expanded programming possibilities.

## SOME FALSE STARTS WITH GALLERY TALKS AND RECEPTIONS

Initially, staff believed they could use gallery talks, networking events, studio tours, and artist receptions to create an inclusive, social, and fun atmosphere, one where newcomers could develop an appreciation for clay and, hopefully, a connection to TCS, along with a desire to return to participate in workshops and classes or make purchases. While TCS had always held gallery events and receptions, it hadn't specifically targeted younger audiences or people new to ceramics.

The staff hit the ground running with a variety of these events, but attendance was disappointing. Pinpointing the cause was next to impossible, because staff members generated ideas that were quickly developed into events, one after the other, and they found they had little time to analyze and reflect on what was and wasn't working. Creating programming and getting the word out took all of their energy and then some. Worse, since events often were one-shot deals, TCS had to start fresh virtually each time, so there was little incremental learning.

That situation changed by the end of their first year of funding, when staff made a strategic adjustment. Instead of creating one new format after another, they first took a closer look at their goals for each event—such as raising money, raising awareness, and/or building relationships—and began more formally to evaluate progress against those objectives. They

also improved their ability to measure results and gather visitor feedback.

As part of that evaluation process, in 2008 they began having staff use clickers to count gallery visits. They also developed a questionnaire for each visitor to complete (on a volunteer basis), so they could measure who was coming to programs and determine the kind of experiences those attendees were having. And they conducted formal profit-and-loss analyses for individual events—in terms of not only financial objectives, but also such goals as exposing new people to TCS.

Those efforts revealed the gallery events and receptions were not working out as the organization had hoped. Some were even losing money. Although TCS charged a fee (around \$20 to \$30 per person), actual attendance failed to justify the expense or staff time involved. Events, including receptions for artists in their studio spaces, which staff had hoped would draw upwards of 50 visitors, for example, brought in around 15. According to Williams, the president and CEO at the time, “[Younger audiences] just didn’t care that much about [the events]; there’s just so much of that—the cocktail party here and there. It didn’t move them.”

Even when events attracted a substantial number of visitors, they didn't lay the groundwork for deeper engagement with TCS. One such occasion was a Mug Shots networking evening at a local brewery in the fall of 2008. Featuring beer tastings and complimentary appetizers, guests also could take home a handmade mug chosen from among a number donated by TCS artists, who were on hand to mingle. Although there were over 65 attendees, the majority of them new to the organization, they failed to take the next step and visit the studio. While they enjoyed the beer and socializing, attendees did not make a connection to TCS itself.

## HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES BUILD A FOLLOWING WITH A YOUNGER CROWD

As TCS staff members continued to think through what introductory experiences could bring the target audience closer to the institution, they realized the new classroom space they had access to, thanks to the expansion, presented possibilities for introducing different kinds of events. Also around that time, interest was growing among arts practitioners in engaging audiences (particularly younger ones) by providing opportunities for them to participate in more active ways.<sup>1</sup> As staff thought about how to tap into the trend, they came up with an idea for Date Night, first offered in February 2008, as a single-session evening workshop for young professionals. The idea was that resident artists would lead groups of young-adult couples through their first experiences working with clay, showing them how to mold the material into simple, but functional shapes that could later be glazed. Attendees would have multiple opportunities during the evening to see what they could produce. The evening would also be social, with beer, wine, and snacks provided. Date Night was unlike any single event they had offered before; less a reception and much more hands-on, it provided a way for novices to work with clay in the company

1. See, for example, Henry Jenkins and Vanessa Bertozi, "Artistic Expression in the Age of Participatory Culture: How and Why Young People Create," in *Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life*, Eds. Steven J. Tepper and Bill Ivey (New York: Routledge, 2008), 171–195.

of peers without asking them to commit to a longer curriculum. It was promoted not as a class with a learning agenda, but as an introductory experience providing an opportunity to have fun and "get dirty" (see sidebar, *Date Night*).

Twelve attendees participated at that first event (capacity was about 36), and 14 when it was held again one month later, in March. While there certainly was room for improvement, staff thought the numbers were promising for a first go at a new format, and so they experimented with some publicity. That included producing a Date Night postcard handed out on First Fridays and placed at local coffee shops and other businesses, as well as listing the event in free print and online postings of local goings-on, before the next event in June. They were pleasantly surprised to see 32 attendees (89 percent capacity), many of whom, as is typical for young adults, signed up at the last minute or arrived without registering at all.

TCS continued to schedule Date Night every other month, and it soon became a regular offering that usually sold out weeks in advance to an audience of both first-timers and repeat participants. Having found a winner, the staff stuck with it, and their experimentation slowed down. Other unexpected benefits: The event itself required less planning than a gallery reception because it could be repeated, and it was cheaper to produce.

In the fall of 2008, TCS increased the frequency from bimonthly to monthly, and served 77 visitors over four evenings. In 2009 Date Night continued fairly regularly each month, and was supplemented with events catering to specific groups, such as the LGBT community, and a Valentine's Day Date Night, for which staff decorated the studio; provided candlelight, chocolates, champagne, and romantic music; and asked each couple to share a wheel (which played on the image of Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore in the movie *Ghost*, and also allowed them to host

## **DATE NIGHT**

On each Date Night, up to 36 people (18 couples) arrive at TCS by 7:00 p.m. for a reception in the gallery and shop. A resident artist offers a brief introduction to TCS, the gallery, and the shop while the evening's participants enjoy wine, beer, and snacks; peruse the artwork; and, in some cases, make purchases. Marketing materials promoting other events and classes are displayed around the gallery and throughout the building.

Participants are then led upstairs to a large studio set up with a ceramic wheel and a short stool for each guest. Mounds of clay balls sit on a large woodwork table at the back of the studio. The resident artist then provides a quick demonstration that includes helpful beginner-focused tips for operating the wheel, including how to center and mold the clay into the desired shape. Participants are invited to select a ball of clay and get started, but to do so at their own pace, producing as many or as few pieces as they choose. Two resident artists continue to offer tips and answer questions throughout the evening. After a quick glazing demonstration, participants select and apply colors to their molded pieces. The cost for the evening is \$35 per person or \$70 per couple. Those who want to can have their pieces fired and shipped to their homes for an additional \$10.

The event is promoted on postcards placed locally, as well as in free listings online and in print newspapers and weeklies, using the following description (from the June 20, 2008, Date Night):

*Get a little dirty on Friday night at The Clay Studio (139 N. 2nd St.)! Bring a date, come with friends, or meet someone there. Either way, you are sure to have a great time! The Clay Studio's instructors will walk you through a simple project, or you are free to make your own creations. You may also try your hand at the wheel. If you're feeling adventurous, grab a partner and explore fourhanded throwing! Your work will*

*be glazed, fired, and ready for you to take home by July 5th. Best of all, beer, wine, and snacks are included. It all starts at 7 pm and for more information visit <http://www.theclaystudio.org>.*

The spirit and language differed significantly from those in announcements for other events, such as holiday-themed DIY Workshops, where the emphasis was less on the social aspect and more on the process:

*As part of the Clay Studio's new series of DIY Workshops, participants are invited to create votive holders or candelabras for the holiday season. Expert teachers from The Clay Studio will demonstrate simple ways to sculpt and decorate objects of your own design. This workshop is designed for all skill levels. Materials and firings included. Items will be available for pick up by December 20th. 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.*

The instructors, skilled in clay as well as experienced at teaching, signed up voluntarily to lead the class. As a result, they were people who enjoyed teaching in a social atmosphere and were able to work with a less-structured learning agenda. They focused the instruction on elementary techniques, beginning with how to sit at the wheel and position the hands and fingers while working the clay, allowing even those completely new to the medium to experience the feeling of creation. But it was far from a free-for-all, with all students working their wheels and making several basic shapes, and even glazing their objects to get a deeper understanding of the process.

Date Night was designed to allow newcomers to sample TCS in a friendly, low-cost, and low-commitment atmosphere. Former Artistic Director Guido reflected, "People are intimidated by art in general and in trying to make art. We made a welcoming, friendly, warm environment for people to come and try."

more guests). The Valentine's Day Date Night in 2009 received such overwhelming interest that TCS offered an additional pre-Valentine's Day Date Night the evening before, attracting 98 participants over the two events. TCS has continued to hold two Date Nights for Valentine's Day ever since. It also began offering variations, such as brunches and happy hours, in 2013, and in the years since has held a total of four events for couples celebrating Valentine's Day.

## RECONSIDERING HOW TO INTRODUCE NEWCOMERS TO TCS

Date Night's success prompted a shift in thinking about how to introduce TCS to young professionals. As President Emerita Williams explains, "We really thought that our way to reach this population was through gallery talks and receptions, and interactions with artists. And that was not it at all." Staff members quickly realized they needed to better understand what made Date Night so popular, how they could build deeper engagement with those who attended the event, and what methods they could use to connect with others in the target audience who did not. TCS's funding allowed it to move past speculation about how to connect with this new demographic by conducting research, something it had never done before. Getting the audience's perspective led to more informed choices about programming options and ways to promote TCS. The staff also used some of those funds to hire a full-time director of marketing and public relations to both manage the research process and modify the communication strategy based on what they were seeing in studio spaces and hearing from the research.

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**"WE THOUGHT THAT OUR WAY TO REACH THIS POPULATION WAS THROUGH GALLERY TALKS AND RECEPTIONS, AND INTERACTIONS WITH ARTISTS. AND THAT WAS NOT IT AT ALL."**

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## RESEARCH REVEALS HOW THIS NEW AUDIENCE SEES TCS

TCS planned two research phases: one round in late 2008 and another in the fall of 2010 (discussed later). The 2008 research examined how Philadelphia professionals ages 25 to 45 choose cultural and leisure activities, their sources of information about preferred pastimes, the appeal of TCS programming, and their reactions to its current brochures. It relied on focus groups, an exploratory research technique aimed at unearthing new insights about a target market, such as the range of opinions about an organization and reasons for those feelings. The six two-hour focus groups included individuals with varying degrees of experience with TCS, from those who had never visited to members and students (see sidebar, *Focus Group Participants*).

Key findings from the research included:

**The target audience wants unique, social experiences.** As TCS staff members suspected, this culturally active target group tends to gravitate toward novel experiences, particularly ones in social settings. Williams, the president and CEO at the time, recalls that the attendees sought something different from not only their own everyday experience, but also from the offerings TCS (and most galleries) typically provide. “People wanted a unique experience that they would remember and could share with others. Just looking

### FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Each focus group had as many as nine participants. Because researchers believed younger and older people might not use the same media channels and choose cultural activities for different reasons, they conducted separate discussions with individuals ages 31 to 45 and ages 25 to 30. That allowed the team to explore these preferences in depth. Researchers further segmented the groups by their level of experience with The Clay Studio, ranging from those who had never visited to members and students. The six groups included:

- Adults ages 25 to 30 who had visited TCS in the past two years
- Adults ages 25 to 30 who had not heard of TCS
- Adults ages 31 to 45 who had visited TCS in the past two years
- Adults ages 31 to 45 who had not heard of TCS
- Parents ages 25 to 45 with children ages 5 to 12, some of whom had visited TCS and others who had not
- Female members and students of TCS ages 25 to 45

The participants were seen as good prospects because, even if they had not visited TCS before or even heard of it, they were screened by recruiters for being “culturally active,” defined as having participated in cultural or artistic activities at least six times in the past year in the Center City area of Philadelphia, where The Clay Studio is located. In addition, they had to have participated in two different visual arts activities (e.g., visiting an art museum or going to the movies) at least three times in the past year.

at art doesn’t touch people quite as deeply. At least the people who do not yet have that appreciation.”

**The brochures and other marketing messages appeared to shut out people unfamiliar with ceramics and TCS.** TCS’s main communication vehicle was a brochure that came out four

times per year to correspond with the class terms (winter, spring, summer, and fall). Until 2008, it included not only course descriptions, the class schedule, and instructor biographies, but also information about all of TCS's activities, from exhibition descriptions and schedules and workshop information to general news about the organization, its board, and its donors, and a letter from the president. Focus group participants reading the brochure for the first time were overwhelmed by all the information and could not readily zero in on activities of interest to them. In addition, the experiential side of TCS was buried.

A tag line and summary statement printed at the bottom of the brochure was meant to encapsulate all that TCS was, but in reality, it distanced it: "Ceramic arts are our passion at The Clay Studio, a non-profit learning center in the heart of Old City, Philadelphia. Our exhibitions, retail shop, classes, artist residencies, and community outreach programs educate and inspire locally, nationally, and internationally." While focus group participants were impressed by the terms "non-profit," "internationally," and "community outreach," they could not see how they would fit in. Williams explains, "People would say to us in these focus groups, 'Why would that make me want to come? I've got to right away see there's something there for me.'"

Most important, the brochures, designed for a more-experienced audience, addressed a group of insiders who had intimate familiarity with ceramics and TCS. While such messages were probably important for those in the know, they left out others who weren't and risked alienating them. Many of the terms used (e.g., "wheel throwing") even confused newer audiences. The message was clear: TCS could continue to design communications for its experienced audience, but it would need a separate

communication strategy to generate interest outside that circle.

**First Friday generates visits, but not impact.** First Friday was a great vehicle for bringing newcomers to the Old City Arts District, but the brief experiences did not make a strong enough impression to encourage visitors to explore an organization in greater depth. Even remembering the names of the places they stopped at was a challenge, said many focus group respondents. (That was not specific to TCS, but across organizations taking part in First Friday.) In addition, visitors saw just a small part of TCS on those visits, because only the first-floor shop and gallery were open to the public. Thus, the classroom space and artist studios—the places where most of TCS's activity occurred and were of more interest to this audience—remained hidden up the stairs. In addition, focus group participants said they were especially drawn to places with a dynamic feel created by artists and other activities both inside and outside the gallery space. As will be discussed later, the organization would find a way to bring classroom space and artist studios into First Friday, and also to respond to participants' preference for a more active experience.

**Artistic activities appeal to parents, but cost is a barrier.** Culturally active parents indicated that they continually looked for things to do with their children and ways to expose them to diverse experiences. Typical comments included, "Kids are more open-minded about what they want to do when they get older, so I want to ensure mine get all kinds of experiences," and, "Generally, I want art to be part of who they are. I try to expose them to it as best I can." But while their desire for such experiences was strong, parents were challenged by budget constraints, and therefore especially attracted to low-cost or free events.

Based on insights learned in focus groups, as well as in conversations with visitors and ongoing scrutiny of its experiments with programming, TCS began a process of transforming (1) program formats targeting this audience, (2) communications designed to publicize its offerings, and (3) First Friday as an entry point. These changes were gradual and continual as staff learned more about their target audience through observation, additional research, and the monitoring of program results.

## **NEW CLASS FORMATS MAKE IT EASIER FOR NEWCOMERS TO TRY OUT TCS**

The staff knew from focus group results and the response to Date Night that hands-on experiences could hold the key to building their audience. Such engagement wasn't new to TCS—it had been offering classes for decades. But that curriculum was focused on helping students develop specific skills, such as working clay using a potter's wheel (called wheel throwing), shaping clay without the use of a wheel (handbuilding), figure sculpture, molds, and glaze testing. Classes also were long, generally meeting for three hours once per week over an 8- to 10-week period, and often offered on weekdays, sometimes during business hours. Further, many of the classes were geared toward those with an intermediate or advanced skill level, and offered at an average cost of \$275 for nonmembers. All those elements worked well for many devotees of clay who had been coming to TCS for years. But they left little opening for new and younger audiences, for whom the timing and cost were prohibitive.

Staff members kept hearing a refrain of "shorter, lower cost," both in focus groups and informally from workshop visitors, a concern that appeared to be exacerbated by the economic downturn at that time. They were also keenly aware of a general trend in the performing arts suggesting that people were less inclined than they had been in the past to make the long-term commitments required by subscription packages. Knitting these

insights together, they determined that they needed to find a way to deliver their classes in smaller doses, allowing newcomers to sample them first. With that in mind, TCS experimented with several scheduling and pricing formats.

## 1. SUCCESS WITH SHORTER, LOWER-COST CLASSES

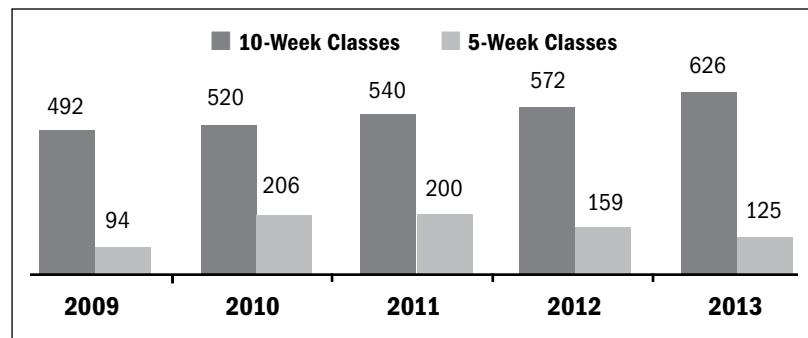
Earlier in 2008, TCS staff had reasoned that, although young professionals and newcomers to ceramics were unlikely to make time for a 10-week class, they might squeeze in a shorter 5-week program. Thus, in another experiment, they began offering five-week sampler classes at work-friendly times: weekday evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays. They had begun experimenting with the format early on, offering a five-week sampler class in the spring of 2008, for which 14 students signed up (the 10-week classes typically had an average of 10 students each, and approximately 10 to 15 of those courses were offered each quarterly term). They followed that in the summer with three four-week courses (the summer term is always shorter, hence the shorter length), including basic handbuilding and wheel throwing; those only got a total of 16 students—vacations may have been a factor—and two classes in the fall brought in 18 students. For the winter 2009 period, they created a greater variety of five-week classes, including general pottery, and enrollment took off.

To build momentum, TCS staff announced the new classes in an e-mail to all of the people in their database, which included a mix of students, Date Night participants, people who had made shop purchases, and gallery visitors; they would refine their e-mail approach later, as they began to target audience segments based on where they lived and the workshops, classes, or events they had participated in. They also created offers through the

website DailyCandy, which targeted young urban professional females with reduced-price offers, in 2009 and just before the winter 2011 term, causing an enrollment spike in that period. Although TCS failed to make much in terms of revenue from those enrollees, the discount offer seemed to jump-start interest and the five-week classes quickly built a following (see Figure 2), with approximately five classes each term bringing in 8 to 10 students each. (Enrollment in the five-week classes has leveled off following the initial launch and the spike that resulted from the reduced-price offers.) At the same time, there was no decrease in attendance in the longer 10-week classes. In fact, enrollment in general increased, despite the slow economy at the time.

After experimenting over several terms with how to structure the five-week classes, TCS quickly moved to two formats. One was a sampler giving students the opportunity in the first four weeks to try out different wheel-throwing and handbuilding projects, which would be fired and then glazed in the final week. Several of those classes were offered in various time slots each semester. The second was a five-week wheel-throwing course, which had proven to be a relatively easy one to sell

**Figure 2. Enrollment in Clay Studio Classes**



Note: Data are by fiscal year, which runs from June 1 to May 31.

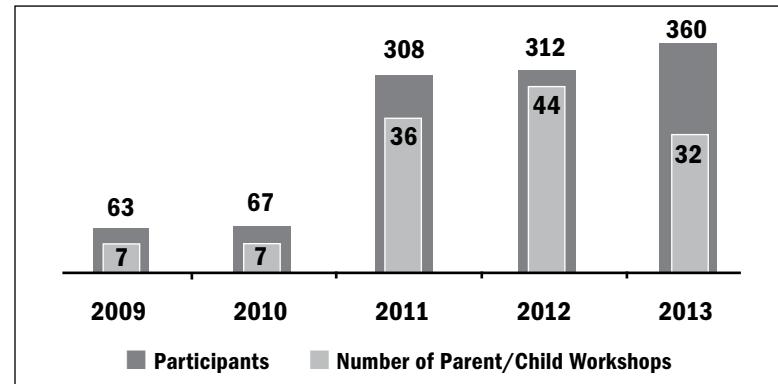
among the many formats they had tested. The shorter classes gave newcomers who were unsure about making a 10-week commitment a feel for working with clay and, in some cases, led to their enrollment in a second five-week program that continued from where the previous session had left off. And, just as TCS staff had experimented with the curriculum, they also tinkered with the number of courses offered and discovered they could fill about four or five each term.

At \$195, the samplers were priced higher than half the cost of a \$295 10-week program, but students who wished to sign on for an additional five-week class at the end of their first one could do so at a discount that made the price of the two 5-week classes equivalent to the 10-week cost. Essentially, students who attended two of the shorter sessions received the same amount of instruction that initially had been offered in a 10-week introductory program. But when recast as two five-week classes, the pressure of time and cost commitments was diffused. A few students each term have gone on to a second five-week program immediately following the first.

## **2. FLEXIBILITY APPEALS TO PARENTS**

**A** year prior, in summer 2008, TCS staff had launched Clay Camps, which attracted, on average, 74 children for eight weeks of daylong and half-day sessions, but their fall, winter, and spring offerings struggled to find an audience. There were two main class formats during those times. One was classes for children meeting on five consecutive Saturdays for two hours. These attracted an average of fewer than 10 children per term and were dropped. The other format was family workshops for parents and children designed around different themes (e.g., holiday wares or animals) that were special offerings scheduled

**Figure 3. Enrollment in Parent/Child Workshops**



irregularly, so their scheduling was difficult for families to anticipate.

Parents in the focus groups had revealed they were always looking for activities for their children, but they faced two key obstacles. First, money was tight, making them particularly drawn to inexpensive or free events. Second, their schedules could be unpredictable and it was difficult to commit to anything in advance. Given those barriers, TCS staff members reasoned that they could generate greater interest by offering the workshops more regularly but with a drop-in format not requiring advance registration, and at a lower price point. They began to do just that, holding a series of workshops nearly every Saturday with a cost of \$15 per adult or child for members or \$17.50 for nonmembers (as opposed to the original workshops' fees of \$20 for members and \$25 for nonmembers). The plan worked. The parent/child workshops went from an annual cumulative attendance of approximately 65 parents and children to over 300, and staff offered about five times the number of workshops to meet the demand.

### **3. FREE INTRODUCTORY EXPERIENCES ENCOURAGE NEWCOMERS**

“**F**ree” emerged in the focus groups as a large draw that could encourage those new to clay to make that initial jump from bystander to participant. TCS was not about to offer classes at no charge, but it could create gateway experiences it would offer gratis, and included the word “free” when marketing appropriate events.

For starters, staff began using First Friday to deliver introductory experiences in *working* with clay. They started opening the classroom space for a free hands-on activity four times each year, with no advance registration needed. Visitors could sign up on the spot to go up to a classroom and make something small—they’ve tried items such as shot glasses and ornaments—with the guidance of a TCS artist. Staff members have also used the time to talk to visitors about classes and workshops. In addition, TCS has held small free weekend workshops for parents and their children, knowing they are less likely to visit on First Fridays.

### **4. DATE NIGHT GETS “OUT OF HAND”**

**T**CS staff realized that even though Date Night was bringing in large numbers of newcomers, there was another group of young adult professionals who might be interested in the social workshop concept but reluctant to take on the pressure of finding a date to attend with. They responded by creating Out of Hand in October 2011. The workshop had the same format and price as Date Night, but its name and the promotions for the event emphasized that visitors didn’t have to come with a date. The workshop was announced in local online bulletin boards and via postcards handed out on First Friday and distributed locally (see sidebar, *Out of Hand*).

### **OUT OF HAND**

Announcements for Out of Hand pitched the event’s friendly and low-key atmosphere.

*Bad week at the office? You are invited to come have an after-work drink, try your hand at a new skill and release some of the stress. The Clay Studio’s skilled instructors will walk you through a few simple ceramic projects on the wheel, or you are free to make your own creations. Bring friends or meet new ones at The Clay Studio—either way you are sure to have fun at this new monthly event. The Clay Studio can even glaze, fire, and ship your work to your home for an additional \$5 (any firing/shipping fees are collected at the event). Beer, wine, snacks, and materials are included. Wear or bring clothes to change into that you don’t mind getting dirty.*

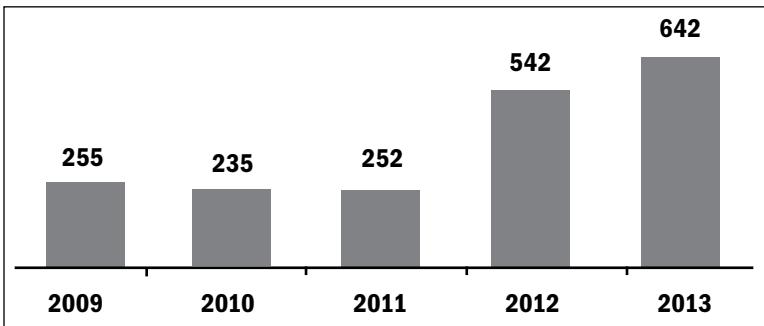
The format had initial success, building off both word of mouth as well as the same kind of e-mail and online listings used to promote Date Night. Figure 5 shows the growth of the two social workshops together. Out of Hand was introduced at the begin-



**Figure 4. An Evening at Out of Hand**

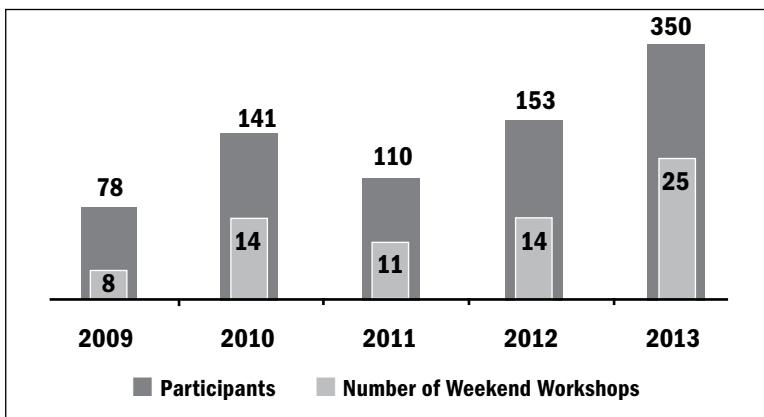
ning of the 2012 fiscal year and ran monthly alongside Date Night, for a total of two social workshops per month. Attendance at the social workshops more than doubled. What’s more, Out of Hand’s success did not eat into Date Night attendance. The former continued to be held once a

**Figure 5. Social Workshop (Date Night and Out of Hand) Attendance**



month (on the fourth Friday) during the fall, winter, and spring terms and in occasional summer months through fiscal year 2013, but demand began to taper off and attendance was at less than full capacity, even as Date Night continued to sell out. While many who'd been hoping to attend Date Night but had been turned away were offered Out of Hand as an alternative, most preferred to wait for their first choice because they wanted to bring a date; the name meant a lot, particularly as the event grew in popularity. As Date Night waiting lists became longer, TCS discontinued Out of Hand in December 2013 and began running Date Night twice each month. Both sessions often sell out.

**Figure 6. Weekend Workshop Attendance**



### SHORTER WORKSHOPS HELP A STRUGGLING FORMAT

TCS found some of the tactics that were effective with its new audience could help boost offerings for advanced students, as well. One vehicle it struggled to find success with was weekend workshops. Up through 2010, TCS had been holding two-day intensive weekend programs with guest artist instructors that allowed the organization to refresh its programming. These 12-hour events took place on a Saturday and Sunday (six hours on each day) and cost \$195 for members and \$210 for non-members. Typically, two were offered during each three-month term, but once the economic downturn hit in 2008 and 2009, their rosters became harder to fill. They also were expensive to run, because the guest artist instructors were flown in from out of town and housed for the weekend. At times, enrollment was not high enough to cover those expenses and TCS would need to cancel the event; in some cases, however, they could not be put off and the workshops lost money.

The two-day format clearly was untenable, but rather than cancel the program outright, in the winter 2010 term TCS decided to apply the "shorter, lower-cost" adjustment by piloting a three-hour weekend workshop run by a TCS instructor and offered at a quarter of the cost. The approach worked, and in spring 2010 (the end of fiscal year 2010), it replaced the two-day format with the new three-hour workshops, offering four of them to 47 students who signed up (compared to the prior spring's single workshop, where 12 had enlisted for one weekend program). Offering four times the number of workshops allowed TCS to serve a variety of skill levels and interests with a mix of introductory and more-specialized topics (e.g., glazing or kiln maintenance). As shown in Figure 6, attendance rose following the switch to the new format.

In 2012, TCS found a way to bring back guest artist instructors more cost effectively. On the third Sunday of each month, artists from the area would provide instruction and opportunities for hands-on participation. The approach allowed TCS not only to support the local ceramics community and bring those artists into the organization, but also to provide guest instruction without having to shoulder the expense of housing and transporting the guest artist.

## **CREATING EFFECTIVE MARKETING FOR A NEW AUDIENCE**

TCS staff understood it wasn't enough to offer appealing programs; without the right promotion, they would not attract an audience. For that reason a radically revised marketing strategy undergirded all programming introductions and modifications. While the existing brochures and other communications materials seemed effective with the organization's regular audience, this new group had a different relationship to clay and TCS, and as a result, staff suspected they needed a different approach. Says Vice President Martin, "We had to figure out the messaging and branding, and that

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Thanks to insights gained from focus groups, staff knew it would be important to convey the hands-on, in-the-moment experience of working with clay. Up to that point, communications had focused on class content—emphasizing the instruction, but not the experience—as well as on the events and objects in the shop and in the galleries. Staff would also need to figure out what words and imagery would appeal to this new audience, and they used the focus group research as a starting point.

### **1. RESHAPING COMMUNICATIONS**

**1. Simplifying the Class Brochure.** Based on focus group findings and ongoing feedback from students, the class brochure was redesigned in a few iterations over several terms starting in 2009. It has moved from detailing all TCS activities to covering classes and workshops only, giving descriptions, schedules, costs, and registration information. In addition, the format was changed to attract attention and to be more user-friendly, with the following modifications:

- It was moved from uncoated one-color paper to a glossy four-color brochure, because when respondents in focus groups had been presented with a variety of materials from TCS and other Philadelphia organizations, they had gravitated toward brighter, uncluttered, more streamlined "off-size" publications printed on high-quality glossy paper. That made it very different from the old TCS class brochure, which at the time was gray-scale against a colored background.
- A one-page pullout calendar was added.
- Information about exhibits was reduced, making the brochures cleaner to read.
- Instructor bios were removed and placed online, where most students register, reducing clutter.

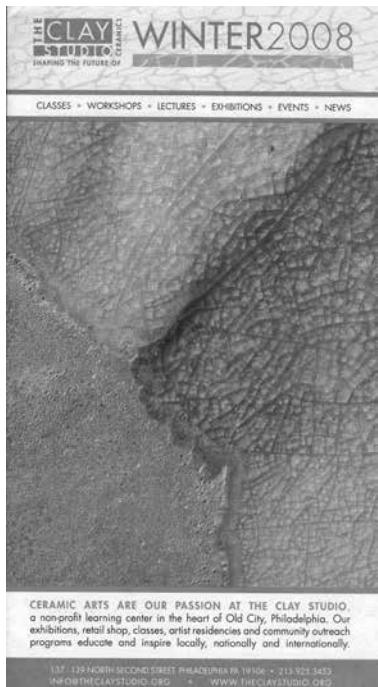
Not only is the new brochure more eye-catching and easier to navigate, its smaller format and the migration of much of the content to online have also produced cost savings, especially in printing and postage.

**2. Using Images That Convey the TCS Experience.** Focus group respondents found the brochures and other materials to be interesting *once they read them*. The challenge was to get potential newcomers outside of focus groups to pick up and

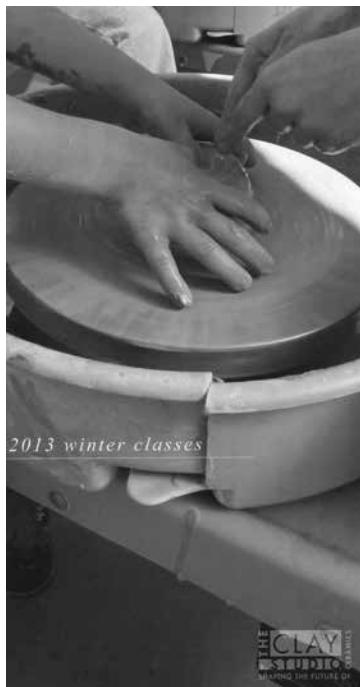
look at the material spontaneously when they spotted the publications in neighborhood shops and cafés. The photos were said to be the most inviting element, but there weren't enough of them. Martin summarizes the irony: "We are a visual organization and we didn't have enough visuals. So we really tried to do that better: more images, less text." And the lesson would be applied to not just the class brochure, but all print and online communications, including e-mails.

Staff also reexamined which visuals they were using, because many images failed to convey the hands-on experiences to be had at TCS, and to some individuals in the focus

**Figure 7. Before and After Class Brochures**



Winter 2008



Winter 2013

groups, the pictures did not even evoke "clay." Participants found cover images used in the fall and winter 2008 pieces to be confusing, as they did not look like clay works, but instead resembled woodwork or glass. With those insights in mind, TCS changed promotional materials for all activities—social workshops, Clay Camps, and even workshops and classes—to include more images of people working with clay and fewer of ceramic objects (see Figure 7 and Colorplates 1 and 2 for an example).

Staff, who had become enamored of displaying images of exquisite ceramics, found the new direction hard to accept at first. But they remained focused on ensuring that brochures grabbed potential students' attention, understanding that showing beautiful objects was not enough. "[Focus group respondents] were saying, 'Why would I pick that up?'" says Williams, "and we were thinking, *We love that and it looks so beautiful!* So we started thinking more in terms of what's going to really get somebody to pick up this piece that's sitting around, or open it when it comes through their mail slot or when they get an e-mail."

**3. Speaking Their Language.** While the images were critical for attracting attention to promotional materials targeting new audiences, the wording was important, as well. Staff learned to avoid insider jargon that could alienate potential participants and instead use language everyone could relate to when reading about introductory classes and workshops. That meant dropping terms such as "wheel throwing" that might signal an event was for more advanced participants. (For another example of removing the jargon, see the *Family Workshop Announcements* sidebar on page 46.) Former Artistic Director Guido explains further, "We learned that you need to remove as many obstacles as possible for people to come. You need

to be simple, clear, and concise. You need to use language that is relatable to them.” Guido believed unequivocally that such an approach was not about “dumbing down” the message or presenting a light version of what TCS had to offer. Instead, it was a matter of framing the ideas using language that would be clear to someone who was not yet intimately familiar with clay. “How is your work meaningful if no one gets it?” he asks.

**4. Rethinking Other Promotional Materials.** Staff did not confine the application of lessons learned in focus groups to the brochures presented to those participants, but rather looked at every piece of marketing collateral with a new perspective and redesigned it accordingly. Take the brochures for summer Clay Camps. For the first run in summer 2008, TCS produced a budget-conscious black-on-yellow brochure, thinking that the bright color would stand out when placed in coffeehouses and local businesses. It also used inexpensive paper and a lot of text. After hearing focus group participants’ insights, however, in the next year the staff opted for higher-quality paper presented as a foldout with an at-a-glance calendar. They made the front cover much less text heavy to attract attention, and replaced visuals of clay pots with images of a child working at a potter’s wheel (see Figure 8 and Colorplate 3).

## 2. TAILORING TO DIFFERENT AUDIENCES (SEGMENTATION)

The one-size-fits-all brochure brought to the fore a larger communications issue—that TCS had different audiences who came to the organization for a variety of reasons. It was inefficient and ineffective, therefore, to hit everyone with messages about all of the organization’s activities. Guido explains:

**Figure 8. Clay Camp Announcements for Summer 2008 and Summer 2009**



Summer 2008



Summer 2009

*There were individuals only interested in classes who don't care about anything else that is happening, they only need to get those kinds of communications. Same thing with our shoppers. ... We have clients who love coming in and come in regularly, buy a ton of handmade ware, and they don't even care how it's made. What's important to them, though, is that it is a handmade object. And that it's beautiful and it brings them joy.*

The evaluation surveys that guests completed at each event provided quantifiable evidence that there were different visitor segments (see the appendix, "Who Visits The Clay Studio?"). Communicating to a variety of groups involved two components. First was simplifying the message for each audience, characterized by Guido as, "Get that message across, repeatedly and as clearly and succinctly and memorably as you possibly can." That also required, of course, not clouding it with additional information. Instead, the staff created separate communications and announcements for audiences likely to be interested in specific classes, exhibitions, family workshops, and social workshops. The key insight from the focus groups: Don't overwhelm potential students with the whole brochure, as TCS had done before. Even when talking about one particular program, staff realized it wasn't necessary to include every last detail; much of that information could be found online, allowing communications to use less text and more images to attract attention and get the basic message across.

In addition, TCS needed to reach audiences using the right media and placement. In their focus group and survey research, staff learned that local young professionals turn to a variety of sources about cultural events and activities, including newspapers such as *Philadelphia Weekly*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and

*City Paper*; radio stations with a listenership that skews younger, like WXPN and WHYY; websites with local event listings, for example, goPhila.com, and MetroKids, as well as Facebook and Twitter. These information sources were used in addition to direct mail and e-mail. TCS would attempt to capture all of these outlets, matching particular events to those sources it believed appealed to the appropriate following.

### **3. REACHING DIFFERENT GROUPS**

**T**he outcome was that TCS segmented the messaging by both program and media outlet:

- To appeal to potential students seeking instruction in clay, advertisements in alternative weeklies, such as *City Paper* and *Philly Weekly*, emphasized the opportunity to be creative and to advance skills. Each term, those who had taken courses also received the class brochure, which contained information about exhibitions.
- Social workshop participants, who were looking for a unique experience, saw different messages about "getting dirty" and having fun on online bulletin boards and on postcards left at local businesses.
- For parents of young children, who wanted activities they could engage in with their kids, TCS took advantage of free local listings in online guides such as *PhillyFunGuide*.
- As for the collectors and others who might purchase ceramics, paid advertisements featuring the objects themselves were posted on online design blogs.

TCS created its own printed media in the form of postcards and flyers to promote events targeting new audiences, such

as the social workshops and Clay Camps. In addition to keeping postcards in the gallery, staff developed a strategy for local distribution, tapping the ZIP code data obtained from the evaluation surveys collected at each event. They were able to identify the neighborhoods drawing the most visitors for different activities (e.g., Date Night), and then, to promote similar events in the future by targeting those same locations with printed media. The thinking was that, because neighborhoods tend to have like-minded and demographically similar people, other residents were likely to find those events appealing. Postcards, flyers, and brochures were placed at institutions that culturally active young professionals tend to frequent, such as progressive coffee shops and cafés, art galleries, yoga studios, arts organizations, and Whole Foods stores.

#### 4. E-MAIL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

**B**efore 2008, TCS had not used e-mail much for marketing and largely depended on printed media, particularly its brochure. Staff, of course, had known that young professionals were online, and they heard in their focus groups that 25- to 30-year-olds were almost exclusively getting their information via e-mail and social network platforms, including not only Facebook and Twitter, but also several local blogs and online events listings. But those ages 30 to 45, who also were making increasingly more decisions about cultural activities for themselves and their families based on information they found online, were still receptive to print, radio, and direct-mail marketing.

Regardless, all audiences agreed on the primacy of e-mail, and that prompted TCS to migrate much of the information previously included in the printed class brochure to two e-mail newsletters. One had broad appeal, with announcements about

exhibits, events such as First Friday, and artist lectures directing recipients back to the website, where more information was available. Sent monthly, it went to the full TCS e-mail database, nearly 7,000 people, including TCS artists, students, and others who had provided their e-mail addresses in the gallery or at festivals. The organization continues to refine its approach, with the goal of sending fewer, but more relevant e-mails to individuals depending on what they are looking for. Right now that approach is limited to a simple segmentation based on distance—those living within a 30-mile radius of TCS receive a slightly more detailed newsletter than individuals who live farther away.

Members, who presumably have a deeper level of interest in and involvement with TCS, receive a quarterly e-newsletter, *The Insider*, which includes information and updates about staff, board members, donors, volunteers, students, and artists—material that in the past had been placed in the printed brochure. Such in-depth information seems to be of great interest to this more-limited audience: *The Insider* has an open rate of 50 percent,<sup>2</sup> and anecdotally, staff report members saying that they enjoy receiving it.

TCS also used a social media strategy to stay top of mind with younger audiences. In late 2008, staff began using Facebook and Twitter to build an online fan base. Early posts were photo albums from Date Night and other events, but they gradually evolved to include a steady stream (one or two posts per day) of messages covering a broad range of activities, such as

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2. While there is no accepted standard benchmark for open rates, digital marketing companies typically find they are below 35 percent for arts organizations. For example, Constant Contact reports its art gallery and museum clients' e-mails have an open rate of 32 percent, and MailChimp reports a 28 percent open rate for its arts and artist clients. Constant Contact, "Comparison by Industry Chart," <http://support2.constantcontact.com/articles/FAQ/2499>; MailChimp, "Email Marketing Benchmarks" <http://mailchimp.com/resources/research/email-marketing-benchmarks>.

announcements of events to be held in the galleries and on First Friday, new works available in the ceramics shop, updates on artists and staff, course registration, content from resident artists, goings-on in the ceramics world at large, and more. Staff members have also occasionally used interactive tactics, such as a Guess the Artist game, to build dialogue. Although TCS has not attached strategic objectives to its social media activity, the continued posting is generating a fan base; as of early 2015 TCS had more than 12,000 Facebook fans and 3,000 followers on Twitter.

## 5. NEW RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE HOW VISITORS EXPERIENCE TCS

To get a better handle on the kinds of relationships newer visitors were developing with TCS and how best to communicate about the organization as a whole—beyond particular events or programs—staff completed a second round of research in 2010. In November and December 2010, an outside consultant conducted 30-minute telephone interviews with 26 TCS visitors ages 45 and under who had been to Date Night, classes, or workshops. These discussions focused on what had motivated visitors to come for the first time, how enjoyable their experience was, their thoughts about current offerings, and an exploration of what programming would fit best into their lives. The researchers also explored the language visitors used to describe their time at TCS and the unique benefits the organization offered.

Visitors, particularly newcomers, said they found TCS to be welcoming and approachable. Staff also heard again that classes held over multiple weeks posed a difficult commitment, and “one-time deals” and shorter stints had greater appeal. And they noted that their visitors made the usual comments typical of

this generation as a whole: They were looking for opportunities to socialize, and word of mouth was an important communication channel.

The staff was pleasantly surprised to hear how TCS was described, with visitors using action words and emotional benefits. The most-often-used descriptors were “fun” and “creative.” First-timers also used words like “community,” “active,” “hip,” “exciting,” and “edgy.” More-frequent visitors described it as “inspiring,” “well run,” “inviting,” and “open.” These two audiences seemed to be after different ends—first-timers were often looking for fun and new social activities; frequent participants wanted a professional atmosphere where they could practice their craft, learn new methods, and be inspired by the work of others.

When research interviewees discussed TCS, they talked mostly in terms of activities *they could do* while there, not what the organization *was* or what it offered. TCS saw an opportunity to start communicating those elements both in its marketing materials and on the website. A new communications strategy, staff realized, would employ words and images that spoke about the experiences visitors could have at TCS and the emotional benefits they would provide. Action words slowly started to appear in marketing materials, including the brochures, direct-mail pieces, e-mail campaigns, and the website (see the *Family Workshop Announcements* sidebar for an example). E-mails and promotional pieces were given active headers like “Experience The Clay Studio” and “Get Out of Hand.”

To better convey this dimension of TCS, the website has been reorganized around an experiential/action framework. The changes proceeded in iterative steps, as staff gradually gained insight into how visitors experienced activities at the organization. Prior to the redesign, the website had 12 sections

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## FAMILY WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENTS

Online descriptions of family workshops assumed a more experience-oriented tone following TCS's second round of research. As an example, the description below of the March 13, 2010, Easter basket workshop focuses on what families will make (eggs, bunnies, grass, candy, and a basket) and how they'll do it, and references "slips" (liquid colored clay), a term that may be unfamiliar to those with no prior clay experience. In contrast, the 2012 workshop announcement emphasizes the fun experience that parent and child will share and uses language accessible to novices and experts alike.

### March 13, 2010: Easter Baskets Family Workshop

*A tisket a tasket make an awesome Easter basket! Using colorful slips, you can make the brightest eggs, bunnies, grass, and candy to go in your hand made Easter basket. Work will be fired and ready to be picked up by March 29th.*

### April 7, 2012: Spring Planters on the Pottery Wheel Family Drop-In Class

*Learn how to make fun and functional planters using the pottery wheel! Be sure to wear clothes you're not afraid to get dirty, because you're going to have lots of fun playing in the mud!*

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for individual TCS categories, such as "events," "classes & workshops," "exhibitions," "shop," and "news." Those were reduced to eight sections with titles describing what people can do, such as "see," "learn," "participate," "shop." Each section has images reflecting the experiential orientation, with fewer depictions of objects alone (although there are still plenty) than before and a greater number of images communicating, according to Vice

**Figure 9. Images from theclaystudio.org in 2015**



President Martin, that TCS is “more of a social, friendly place to be.” Adults and children are shown with clay-covered hands as they’re creating objects; artists are hard at work carving or glazing; groups of people are engaged in a lecture, exhibit, or class, or browse in the shop together. The marketing materials are designed to convey a feeling of movement—of a happening. Hands are moving wheels and shaping clay, people are laughing, learning, creating, and socializing. The design layout of the printed materials and the website’s pages is crisp, clean, and warm, with large images presented against a lot of white space, and less text than before (Figure 9 and Colorplate 4 include images used following the redesign).

## RESULTS

### 1. ENROLLMENT AND SCHOOL REVENUE UP

**B**etween 2008 and 2013, TCS increased enrollment and school revenue. As shown in Table 1, the number of visitors taking part in classes and workshops of any kind—not only 10- and 5-week classes, but also social workshops, parent/child workshops, Clay Camps, and weekend and other workshops—has tripled. Revenue from the school—which includes tuition for classes, workshops, and camps, as well as supplies purchased in the school store—more than doubled.

At the same time, visits to the gallery have gone down, a trend staff members believe is the consequence of increasing competition from other neighborhood districts holding events similar to Old City’s First Friday.

**Table 1. Enrollment, School Revenue, and Gallery Visits**

	Baseline 2007	Year 1: 2008	Year 2: 2009	Year 3: 2010	Year 4: 2011	Year 5: 2012	Year 6: 2013
Total students	734	955	1,296	1,414	1,560	2,309	2,278
School revenue	\$149,790	\$182,143	\$210,525	\$266,395	\$276,951	\$308,226	\$322,341
Gallery visits	N/A	26,208	27,900	29,852	22,452	20,527	N/A

Data are by fiscal year, which runs from June 1–May 31

Note: In 2010, co-produced annual conference with NCECA, the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, and experienced a temporary increase in traffic.

N/A = Data not available

**Table 2. Memberships**

	<b>Baseline 2007</b>	<b>Year 1: 2008</b>	<b>Year 2: 2009*</b>	<b>Year 3: 2010</b>	<b>Year 4: 2011</b>	<b>Year 5: 2012</b>	<b>Year 6: 2013</b>
New members	113	153	90	129	126	173	198
Renewed memberships	N/A	383	358	336	330	352	255
Total members	N/A	536	448	465	456	525	453
Membership renewal rate	N/A	N/A	67%	75%	71%	77%	49%

Data are by fiscal year, which runs from June 1–May 31

\* During February through August 2008, TCS was without a development director, the position that had been tasked with building the membership base.

## 2. SOME MOMENTUM AROUND NEW MEMBERS, BUT RENEWAL RATES DECREASE

While TCS values its members and membership has been a gateway to deeper engagement with the organization, efforts to pursue members actively have been less of a focus. Instead, the organization has preferred to apply its limited resources to creating compelling classes and workshops. Membership has fluctuated over the years, with some growth offset by a reduction in renewals (particularly in 2013, for reasons that are not clear).

Early on, staff had hoped to build a community of younger members, but they believed they would need an approach that was different from the one in use at the time. Their existing membership program provided benefits that were more likely to appeal to their traditional audience—specifically, discounts on classes, workshops, and shop purchases. Staff reasoned that these benefits would likely hold less sway with younger audiences, but those individuals might be drawn to a membership program offering social benefits.

Accordingly, TCS created two separate membership categories for younger patrons. Those in the new Young Supporters group were included in invitation-only events designed by fellow group members to be different from something they might find at other galleries, such as studio visits with artists and gallery walks. There were financial benefits tailored to this group as well, like free admission to certain events, including one Date Night per year. An additional Family Membership had discounts for hands-on activities, such as family workshops, Saturday drop-in classes, and Clay Camps.

The Young Supporters group was especially slow to take off. Part of the problem was managing the program effectively, so it could build momentum. In the early years of the initiative, development staff came and went, and the organization did not have personnel to oversee it. Moreover, finding a dedicated group of people in the target demographic to run a committee and build appropriate events and programs proved difficult. But while some art observers may argue that membership isn't necessarily something young audiences aspire to, TCS staff members instead believed there was potential for interest. In 2012 they reactivated the Young Supporters committee with two key board members falling within the 25- to 45-year-old age group as its co-chairs and hired a development coordinator to focus on programming to build a core base. A Young Supporters membership level was reintroduced in 2012 as a \$10 add-on to the \$60 annual membership cost (for a total of \$70). Again, it promised educational and social opportunities, as well as free and discounted art experiences, such as the chance to socialize and connect with the artists at First Friday after-parties and other Young Supporters members-only events.

This renewed effort has reaped promising results. TCS had 20 new Young Supporters members by the end of 2012,

## CLAY STUDIO MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP

Individual memberships begin at \$60, while dual/family memberships start at \$125. Traditionally, the incentive to be a member has been cost savings on classes, workshops, events, and shop purchases. But particularly for the casual visitor looking for something outside of ceramics mastery (e.g., unique experiences or getting acquainted with the art form), membership has little compelling value.

Data from the second data-analysis wave of the visitor survey (fiscal years 2009 and 2010, shown in Table 3) suggest that, not surprisingly, members tend to be class devotees who have a long history with TCS, rather than people who are looking for a more social experience. First, members are older; nearly two-thirds (65 percent) are age 45 or above, compared to 17 percent of nonmembers.

Over two-thirds (68 percent) have visited four or more times in the past, compared to 17 percent of nonmembers, and they are nearly four times as likely to come alone. They primarily come for classes—nearly 9 in 10 members visiting TCS were there for one—while none attend Date Night and very few go to First Friday or TCS's free workshops. Both members and nonmembers rate their visits highly, so TCS appears to be satisfying both groups.

**Table 3. Characteristics of Members and Nonmembers**

	Member (n=157)	Nonmember (n=688)
Female	75%	70%
Age		
Under 25	2%	<b>23%</b>
25–44	32%	<b>60%</b>
45–64	<b>48%</b>	15%
65+	<b>17%</b>	2%
Prior visits		
None	6%	<b>48%</b>
1–3	26%	35%
4 or more	<b>68%</b>	17%
Who came with		
Alone	<b>78%</b>	21%
Friends	12%	<b>42%</b>
Spouse/children	9%	<b>29%</b>
Others	2%	<b>15%</b>
Program visited		
Class	<b>89%</b>	26%
Date Night	0%	<b>30%</b>
Free workshop	2%	<b>12%</b>
Private workshop	0%	<b>6%</b>
Special-topic workshop	2%	2%
First Friday	5%	<b>13%</b>
Special event	3%	<b>11%</b>
Ratings of visit		
Excellent	62%	<b>71%</b>
Very good	28%	24%
Good, fair, or poor	10%	5%

When comparing members to nonmembers, bold statistics are significantly higher than the others at 95% confidence.

increasing to 59 by early 2015. Young Supporters events—such as tastings and dinners served in handmade ware—regularly bring in an audience of over 100. Five Young Supporters have gone on to serve on the board.

Staff members believe the recent growth is less the result of the benefits provided (which seem similar to offerings in prior years) and more to the dedicated attention the program receives, which in turn has allowed more events to be produced. Younger members, TCS has learned, need to be actively engaged. In discussing the roots of this recent success, TCS President Chris Taylor says, “It’s more of a focus, so we’re on the top of the priority list. Perhaps the biggest difference is now they have special events, and they are more organized, with a Young Supporters committee, bylaws, and programs.” As Martin sees it, “Whereas before I felt like it was just a badge, now it’s actually a community, which is what we’re trying to build.”

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

Just a few years ago TCS was concerned about not seeing new faces, and in a short time it has experienced marked growth. Staff members have found a way to tap into the desire for more participatory arts experiences and reduced the barriers to trying TCS. Course offerings have expanded well beyond the 10-week classes forming the core of its educational programming. Those offerings remain and continue to grow, but TCS now also has five-week classes, weekend morning workshops, family drop-in classes, and evening social workshops designed to fit not only a variety of skill levels, but also varying degrees of interest, schedules, and levels of willingness to invest time and money. The development of these new formats was informed by audience research and program evaluation, so it is perhaps not surprising that they have succeeded.

At the same time, TCS communicates differently than it did in the past, in part to accommodate its expanded audience. Communications are written taking into account the perspectives of various visitor groups, and targeted so that different audience segments receive clear messages that are likely to interest them.

The gains that TCS has experienced have largely been confined to its school; gallery traffic has gone down (which staff attribute to increased competition for the First Friday audience) and, as previously noted, membership has remained flat (sales

from the shop, not discussed here, also rose briefly, but are for the most part stable). It may simply be a matter of time before the organization's newer audience members build an affinity for TCS that leads these indicators to rise. In any event, for now the evidence is clear that TCS serves a wider audience through an emphasis on a dynamic mix of experiences, instruction, and exploration. The organization's success in bringing new audiences to its classes and workshops appears to be fueled by several factors, outlined below.

## 1. FACILITATING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

**B**y creating introductory experiences where newcomers can work with clay, TCS provides them with an opportunity for more active participation than it had in the past. While some arts groups see such activity as incompatible with the relationship they want to have with the public, TCS has been able to turn it into a gateway to the organization.

Although hands-on activities always existed at TCS, they were not pitched at such an accessible level, or in a format that a newcomer was willing to try. With the exception of Date Night and Out of Hand, which were new experiences, much of the organization's success came from simply making formatting changes to existing classes, even as the content remained the same. This was important, because staff members were determined not to change the organization's identity. At the same time, they recognized that the level of commitment their existing classes required was too high for newcomers and that they needed a way to ease barriers to exploring TCS.

Certainly, TCS may seem uniquely qualified to provide opportunities for more active participation, because, since its

beginnings, it has invited students to create objects by hand. But arts researchers Alan Brown, Jennifer Novak-Leonard, and Shelly Gilbride suggest that organizations representing diverse art forms—and not just those offering classes—can do the same.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. GETTING TO KNOW THE AUDIENCE

**T**CS staff members not only drew in a new young-professionals audience, but also expanded what they knew about the target demographic. These two factors are connected: The more they learned, the more staff improved their ability to attract new audiences, and their observations about what drew those people added to their expertise. Their understanding of that target audience came from two sources:

**1. Experimentation.** TCS constantly toyed with formats and events, believing successful innovation would result from trying different approaches and seeing which worked and which did not. Having a creative staff meant there was never a shortage of ideas; the challenge was determining which ones to pursue, because resources were limited. As Martin explains, on the road to innovation, "It takes time to figure it out. You're going to make a lot of mistakes." But they were not just throwing things at the wall to see what stuck. Broader arts participation trends, such as a move toward more active forms of participation and a tendency for younger audiences, seeking greater flexibility, to be less likely than older adults to make large time commitments, helped to focus their experimentation. And

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3. Alan S. Brown, Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard, and Shelly Gilbride. 2011. *Getting In on the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities for Active Participation*. San Francisco: The James Irvine Foundation. <https://www.irvine.org/arts/what-were-learning/getting-in-on-the-act>.

once they placed as much emphasis on evaluating new formats as they did on developing them, their trial-and-error approach became more effective.

**2. Visitor Research.** The research boosted TCS's success in three ways. First, it helped the program-format experiments by pinpointing such barriers as a hesitancy to make major commitments of time and money. Second, the findings spotlighted what newcomers found intriguing about TCS, insights staff incorporated into new and ongoing programs. Finally, the research helped staff identify how to talk about those elements in marketing materials in ways that would attract attention.

The research gave the organization much-needed perspective in an area that was a potentially debilitating blind spot. Says Martin, "It was really fascinating to be able to just sit behind this glass. You think you know, and now you have a complete group of strangers telling you what they think of your printed materials and your studio and your interactions with them." Most significantly, the organization was willing to listen to, respect, and embrace these insights, rather than dismissing them as unimportant.

Former Artistic Director Guido emphasizes that the staff's intellectual curiosity and commitment to understanding their new target audience maximized their ability to learn from the research. Straightaway, staff members took a stance of keeping an open mind without preconceived notions. It was imperative, staff realized, to determine what mattered to the target audience and what elements of the TCS experience best delivered on those preferences, as well as how to convey the message in a compelling way.

### 3. WELCOMING NEW AUDIENCES

**W**hen new audiences come to TCS, staff members are ready to receive them, making an effort to neutralize any potential for intimidation. The organization focuses on making all visitors feel that they belong, attempting to give people the confidence to explore and even try creating their own works. Williams sees the staff's role as understanding visitors' mindsets and welcoming them. The trick for instructors, when it comes to workshops, is figuring out how they can play the role of an expert, but not appear elitist. Staff and instructors achieve this balancing act via their own belief that, while they have expertise to share, they are there to serve those who come in the door. Williams explains:

*It's a nonjudgmental atmosphere. It doesn't mean that we're not also teaching. We have professionals and people who are very serious. ... In some of the materials, we were seen as elitist. Now, elitist is good in some ways but it turns out not to be for an organization such as ours. We need to be inclusive, welcoming.*

Martin, who manages the shop and has a lot of contact with visitors, strives to make their time at TCS seem "easy," so that guests feel comfortable and free to look around. "My role is, how pleasant can I make that experience? And the ease of it—I want to ensure that they were educated but it wasn't shoved down their throat," she says. It's an attitude that assumes everyone is entitled to experience the best of TCS. Guido notes that staff members, even before the initiative began, had encouraged visitors to explore not only what's shown in the shop, gallery, and studio space, but also the objects in the cabinets that are not on display.

## MOVING FORWARD

### 1. CONTINUED REFINEMENTS

TCS's Wallace Excellence Award ended in 2011, but activity has not slowed down. Although they no longer conduct extensive market research, staff members continue to apply the insights from it and experiment with workshop formats and communication, continually looking for ways to engage the community as well as to integrate TCS's different activities.

One recent development is weekend clinics designed to offer an intermediate experience that's somewhere between the social workshops and the formal classes. The sessions are promoted as "a relaxing, creative afternoon playing on the potter's wheel" for those "who are curious about clay or want to further their skills without the commitment of a class." The two-and-a-half-hour clinics are designed to provide a low-pressure learning atmosphere for a beginner, and, unlike the social workshops, they are held on weekend afternoons as opposed to evenings—and they have already proven popular. The hope is that TCS can create different steps that gradually bring at least some of its social workshop participants into deeper levels of engagement.

TCS staff also continue to refine communications, migrating as much online as possible both for users' convenience and to save costs. They also have made other modifications to the class brochure, and, as the website has become more sophisticated and

a place for posting additional content, the organization continues to reduce the information included in the printed material. Ideally, staff would prefer to move communications entirely online, but there are limitations to what they can do: TCS's audience includes a diverse age group, and many still prefer printed materials. While some are able to register for classes from their smartphones in a matter of seconds, others are loath just to log on to their computers.

### 2. SERVING MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

The success TCS has had in bringing in a new, younger audience through a separate stream of workshops and classes has created additional demands. The offerings need instructors, and the existing staff must handle registration and other administrative details. In addition to developing marketing strategies, messages, and images that will appeal to this new audience, the organization also has added a database to track participation and coordinate e-mail communications.

Beyond those additional responsibilities, staff members are still trying to determine the best way to balance serving a variety of audiences who are looking for different things from TCS. Take the messaging. Staff believe the tongue-in-cheek approach, using phrases such as "I ♥ Dirt" and "Get Dirty," is effective for bringing in a younger, hipper crowd. At the same time, they understand that collectors and longtime students want to see the more serious side of TCS. As Martin states, "We don't want the integrity of the organization or mission to go."

TCS's newfound success has also prompted questions about what activities best serve the institution's mission. Not surprisingly, some long-term supporters have wondered whether some of the social workshops and children's classes are consistent

with programs providing artist residencies and internationally recognized exhibits. The organization's leaders acknowledge that these questions need to be addressed, but the answers are not clear-cut. What's more, because TCS's unusual success has brought these issues to the forefront more prominently than they have been at other institutions, there are few models to follow.

The organization's research confirmed that the new audience is different from the traditional core—younger, on the one hand, and also looking for a social experience as opposed to a learning one. But those objectives are not necessarily incompatible. TCS President Taylor sees the broader range of activities as consistent with supporting ceramic arts—not only generating revenue to support the studio's traditional programming of exhibitions and residencies, but also providing diverse opportunities to explore ceramics in a more inclusive way than in the past, as well as a much-needed pipeline for the next generation of TCS supporters—something that was lacking just a few years ago.

The crucial issue, in fact, may be creating less of a pipeline and more of a funnel, where large numbers of people enter the institution in various ways and a smaller subset goes on to build long-term relationships. Staff members realize that not everyone who signs up for a Date Night will go on to take classes, but some portion of newcomers is likely to engage on a deeper level. For example, between 2010 (when TCS began tracking student enrollment patterns) and 2014, 61 people who first came to TCS through a Date Night or Out of Hand social workshop reengaged in other ways, accounting for 76 registrations: 32 took a 10-week class, 23 a 5-week class, and 21 a one-day weekend workshop. Moreover, 37 became members. Similarly, the drop-in and themed family workshops have served as entry points

for deeper involvement, with parents often going on to enroll their children in summer Clay Camps and themselves in weekend workshops, and several even enrolling in 5- and 10-week classes. And, as mentioned earlier, 5 of the Young Supporters have gone on to serve on the board—as of 2015, 4 of 18 board members have come through that group. In a world where many arts organizations are questioning how to find new supporters, Taylor sees these results as indicators of future TCS relevance and viability. At the same time, the staff recognizes that it is essential to be vigilant about maintaining the integrity of the organization, and to be clear with artists, students, and other supporters that TCS is not abandoning its principles.

These organizational growing pains command considerable senior-level attention. Rather than running the risk of watching TCS's activities and messages become fragmented, leadership has made capturing a unified voice and purpose a strategic imperative. While still a work in progress, TCS has begun clarifying how all of the organization's activities (not just classes and workshops, but also the shop, gallery, artists-in-residence, and outreach programs) fit into one broader institutional mission. By clarifying intent, TCS hopes to provide a more in-depth learning experience and connections across all of its programs, better allocate resources, and communicate the organization's purpose more effectively to the community at large—including those currently involved with TCS, as well as potential students and the donors the organization serves.

To that end, in 2012 the organization revised its mission to reflect a broader range of activities and its pride in serving a diverse audience: "The Clay Studio's mission is to provide a unique educational environment in which to experience the ceramic arts." While its previous mission statement also emphasized the idea of providing broad access, the updated version

appears to prioritize all groups the organizations serves more equally. (That earlier statement was: “The Clay Studio is a non-profit educational arts organization dedicated to the promotion and development of the ceramic arts and the work of new clay artists. It supports the ceramic arts through its artist residencies, gallery, studio space, school, educational and outreach programs, and permanent collection. TCS believes in promoting broad access to the ceramic arts. Accordingly, it gears its programs to all levels of interest and proficiency.”)

### 3. PROVIDING MORE ENTRY POINTS

Staff members continue to look for new ways to display the experiential element behind creating with clay. During some First Fridays, for instance, resident artists conduct outdoor wheel-throwing contests, which draw crowds of attendees to observe artists actually working with clay—and hopefully providing a feel for the active, hands-on process and sparking interest in attending a future workshop.

TCS has found other ways to put the spotlight on the creative process—pulling back the curtain to show visitors the act of creating the objects on display in the galleries. As one early example, in August 2010 TCS held its Maker, Make, Made exhibition, which recreated the studio of a local potter, Ryan Greenheck, in a TCS gallery that faces the street and has large windows running from the floor almost to the ceiling (see Figure 1 on page 11; the gallery is on the left side, enclosed in the tan brick). At different times throughout the three-week exhibition, Greenheck made his work in the gallery space, giving viewers the opportunity to see his process as well as the development of a single pot at various stages of creation. As another example, TCS placed the visiting artist’s studio within the educational

space, where classes are held, so students would have several opportunities to witness firsthand how working potters develop their ideas and make choices—experiences usually limited to the privacy of an artist’s studio.

Taylor believes the experience of creating with clay will differentiate the organization from other local arts groups:

*A lot of arts organizations will invite you in, have you sit down, ask you to turn off your cell phones, turn off the lights, and then tell you to appreciate the art, whereas we are the complete opposite of that. We may ask you to turn your cell phones off, but we’ll invite you in, we’ll tell you to roll up your sleeves and plunk a piece of clay down in front of you.*

TCS staff have also begun exploring other accessible points of entry into ceramic art for younger audiences who may not wish to get started by taking a class, or who have tried a workshop and want to come back and experience ceramic arts in a different way. The Young Supporters group recently has had success hosting events targeting young professionals that bring finished ceramics into familiar settings, such as dining at a table set entirely in handcrafted ceramics, or events that connect such works to artisanal food and drink, seizing on the recent interest in farm-to-table foods and craft beverages. Like TCS’s successful workshops, these events have been designed to be low-cost and low-commitment social platforms that give meaning and context to the ceramic arts. Following these successes, the organization received funding in early 2015 from The Barra Foundation to develop additional opportunities over a three-year period, potentially providing another gateway to The Clay Studio’s workshops, classes, and other activities.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Could your organization create low-commitment and unintimidating introductory or gateway experiences that would be a minimal risk, easy sell for newcomers?
2. Are there elements of the creative process that you can share with audiences or involve them in? Are there experiences that can be built around creating art?
3. You know what you think of your print and online marketing. Do you know what your audience thinks? On a similar note, are your communications designed around what you believe is important, or around information that will grab the interest and attention of audiences you are looking to attract?
4. What about potential audiences—culturally savvy people who may not be familiar with your art form? Do you have communications for them that are free of insider language and speak to emotional or other benefits they can relate to?
5. If you are thinking about tactics for expanding your audience, is it clear how they will support your mission? What measures or indicators will you use to ensure that new programs stay on mission?

## APPENDIX: WHO VISITS THE CLAY STUDIO?

To improve program evaluation, TCS began collecting data on its visitors in February 2008 by distributing a one-page staff-designed questionnaire to class and workshop participants, event attendees, and gallery walk-ins. The surveys were completed on a voluntary basis, and included basic demographic information (e.g., age, sex, and place of residence), reason for visiting, source of information about TCS, and history of prior visits, along with a few questions about the experience they had while they were visiting. In October 2008, an independent research firm conducted a detailed analysis of the 531 surveys TCS had collected to date. A second wave of analysis was completed on the 845 surveys collected between October 2008 and June 2010.

The analysis of the visitor surveys completed in the first phase confirmed much of what TCS already knew about the makeup of its existing visitor base. Frequent patrons—people who had visited several times within the past year—tended to be women between the ages of 45 and 64 living in Center City, not far from TCS, who had no children under 18 residing at home. They came often, attending 10-week classes and gallery events, and most (69 percent) came alone. The surveys also confirmed the existence of a separate segment of relatively new or first-time visitors, who were primarily young professionals or parents of young children. Their first encounters with TCS tended to be

at a First Friday or another one-off event, which they generally attended with a spouse, a date, or friends.

Some of the findings from the second data-analysis wave are reproduced below and show how certain events tend to be of interest to specific visitor segments. Date Night is more likely to attract first-timers than any other event, suggesting its effectiveness as a draw for newcomers. First Fridays appear to have a more devoted following, with more than half of First Friday visitors saying they had been to TCS at least twice before. Classes are the least likely to attract first-time visitors. As TCS had intended, workshops seem like both a good entry point and a vehicle for repeat engagement for those who are relatively new, attracting a mix of first-time and repeat visitors.

Date Nights and workshops also tend to attract a younger audience (an average age of 33) than First Fridays (average age, 38) or classes (average age, 42). Although the Date Night and class audiences appear to be different segments, TCS is starting to see some crossover, with dozens of social workshop (Date Night and Out of Hand) participants going on to take 5- or 10-week classes.

**Appendix Table 1. Prior Visits of Attendees at Different Activities**

	Class	Date Night	First Friday	Workshop
n=	314	203	96	104
Never before	13%	<b>62%</b>	39%*	44%*
Once before	<b>20%</b>	<b>24%</b>	6%	<b>18%</b>
2-3 times	19%**	9%	18%**	13%
4+ times	<b>49%</b>	5%	37%**	25%**

Bolded percentages are significantly higher than non-bolded percentages at 95% confidence.

\* Significantly higher than Class at 95% confidence.

\*\* Significantly higher than Date Night at 95% confidence.

The surveys also provided practical information for TCS's communications strategy. Staff learned in 2008 that word of mouth was a key source of information about TCS, and during the second wave of their data analysis, they saw a jump in the importance of the Internet as a source of information, particularly among visitors ages 25 to 45; at 36 percent for that group, it was second only to word of mouth (48 percent), and significantly higher than for other age groups (about one in four respondents under age 25 and ages 46 to 64 said "Internet search" was a source, and just 17 percent of respondents over age 65 did). The growth of the web as a source and its high use among their young-professional target gave them the confidence to move more of their communications online and to e-mails. Because word of mouth remains important for this and all groups, staff members also keep their eyes on other metrics in the survey about the likelihood of recommending TCS to others; this rating consistently has been high, with about 9 in 10 respondents in both waves of data collection saying they would be "extremely likely" or "very likely" to recommend TCS to their friends, relatives, and co-workers.

**Appendix Table 2. Sources of Information about TCS  
(Multiple-Choice Survey Question)**

	Feb 2008-Oct 2008	Oct 2008-Jun 2010
n=	511	810
Word of mouth	56%	54%
Passed by the gallery and shop	<b>39%</b>	27%
Internet search	13%	<b>31%</b>
Advertising	13%	12%
Direct mailings	9%	8%
Print reviews or feature stories	<b>6%</b>	3%

Bolded percentages are significantly higher than the opposite column at 95% confidence.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Bob Harlow, PhD**, is a social psychologist and statistician who develops research programs that help organizations more deeply understand their target audiences. He has partnered with marketing managers and senior executives at some of the world's largest companies and leading nonprofit organizations to develop brand, communications, and operations strategies. He has held senior and management positions at IBM and at market research consulting groups such as Yankelovich Partners, RONIN, and KRC, and currently leads Bob Harlow Research and Consulting, LLC, a market research consulting organization.

Bob has written hundreds of surveys and conducted hundreds of focus groups and interviews with broad audiences in 30 countries. He has more than a dozen scholarly publications in social psychology and research methods, and is the lead author of The Wallace Foundation publication series Wallace Studies in Building Arts Audiences. He has a PhD from Princeton University in social psychology and completed the postdoctoral program in quantitative analysis at New York University's Stern School of Business and Graduate School of Arts and Science.

**Tricia Heywood** conducts research that informs brand and communications strategies. She began her career in Bangkok and has worked with leading consumer goods companies and

communications firms on three continents, and has conducted research around the globe in 16 countries.

In addition to positions at market research firms, Tricia spent five years as marketing director for an alternative energy consumer product company in London, ran the Vancouver office for Weber Shandwick Worldwide, consulted with a sponsorship strategy agency for the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, and served as executive director for Alexandra's Play-ground, a nonprofit dedicated to creating play spaces for children around the world. She is currently a partner at Onesixtyfourth, a strategic brand consultancy.

Tricia holds a Masters of International Management from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.

## Colorplate 1. Class Brochure for The Clay Studio, Winter 2008

THE CLAY STUDIO CERAMICS  
SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CERAMICS

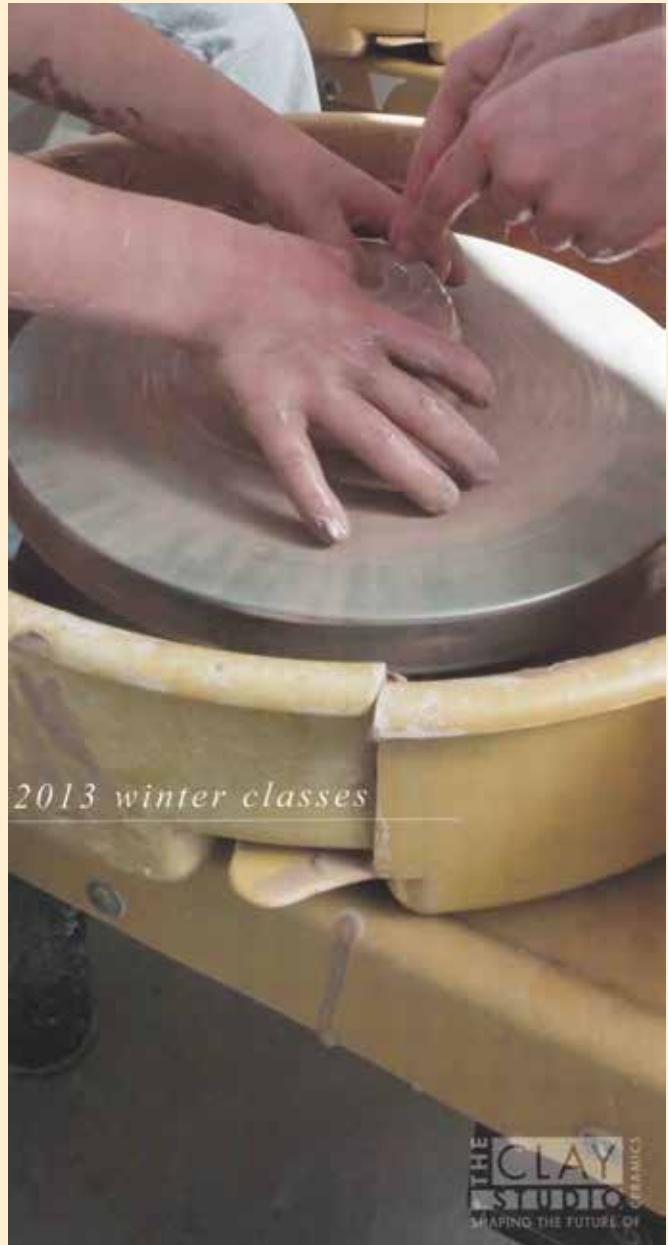
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CERAMIC ARTS ARE OUR PASSION AT THE CLAY STUDIO.  
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exhibitions, retail shop, classes, artist residencies and community outreach  
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Colorplate 2. Class Brochure for The Clay Studio, Winter 2013



Colorplate 3. The Clay Studio's Summer Camp Announcements before and after the Research

#### Summer 2008

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SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CERAMICS

CERAMIC ARTS ARE OUR PASSION AT THE CLAY STUDIO, a non-profit learning center in the heart of Old City, Philadelphia. Our exhibitions, retail shop, classes, artist residencies and community outreach programs educate and inspire locally, nationally, and internationally.

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## 2008 SUMMER CLAY CAMPS at The Clay Studio

- ★ CREATIVE
- ★ FUN
- ★ MEMORABLE
- ★ EXCITING
- ★

YOUNG ARTISTS WILL EXPLORE THEIR IMAGINATIONS, DEVELOP THEIR CREATIVITY, GAIN CONFIDENCE, AND HAVE A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE CREATING WITH CLAY.

We welcome all skill levels and abilities. Class sizes are limited to ensure plenty of individual attention. Each camp meets for one week (Mon. - Fri.), three hours a day, with a short break for snacks (provided by parents or guardians).

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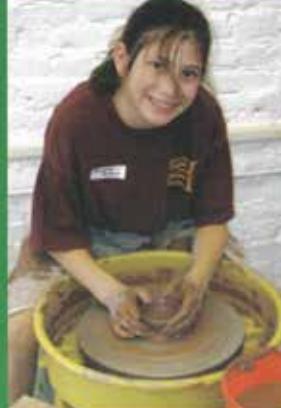
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#### Summer 2009

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## 2009 SUMMER CLAY CAMPS



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WEEK-LONG (M - F) DAY CAMPS  
MORNINGS AND AFTERNOONS  
Ages 6 - 12

- ★ WHEEL THROWING ★ HANDBUILDING ★ FUN ★
- ★ CREATIVE ★ MEMORABLE ★ EXCITING ★

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**Colorplate 4. Images from The Clay Studio's Web Site**





# The Wallace Foundation

Supporting ideas.

Sharing solutions.

Expanding opportunities.

This review of The Clay Studio's initiative that brought a new audience of hundreds of young professionals to its workshops and classes is the ninth case study in a series of 10 offering insights into how arts organizations can attract new audiences to the arts and deepen the involvement of current audiences. Written for arts organization leaders, arts funders, policymakers, and arts management students, each study is the product of independent research exploring the success and challenges faced by different arts organizations as they undertook multi-year efforts to build their audiences. Strategic and tactical elements of each program are described in depth, along with factors that helped and hindered progress. Putting together findings from the 10 case studies, a separate report, *The Road to Results*, describes nine practices that arts organizations can use to make their audience-building programs more effective.

## Current titles in the series include:

Cultivating the Next Generation of Art Lovers:  
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*How Fleisher Art Memorial Is Adapting to Shifting Community Demographics*

Opening New Doors:  
*Hands-On Participation Brings a New Audience to The Clay Studio*

Forthcoming in 2015 will be a case study of  
The Contemporary Jewish Museum's audience-building program

A companion guide, *Taking Out the Guesswork*, includes detailed examples of how the 10 organizations used research to more effectively attract and retain audiences.

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