



BALLET AUSTIN: EXPANDING AUDIENCES FOR UNFAMILIAR WORKS

A DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide explores preliminary insights from Ballet Austin's audience-building efforts as part of The Wallace Foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability Initiative



ABOUT THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

In February 2017, The Wallace Foundation released *Ballet Austin: Expanding Audiences for Unfamiliar Work* as part of a series documenting early stage efforts of performing arts organizations participating in the foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) initiative.

The purpose of this Discussion Guide is to help arts administrators, board members and arts practitioners working in organizations of varying budget sizes and disciplines to better understand and apply lessons from Ballet Austin's experience to their own organizations. The guide can serve as a teaching aid for group discussions as well as for individual study. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the article and/or video.

Please note that the foundation's BAS initiative is only one-half completed, with more years of learning to come (including several reports from a team of independent researchers). As a result, the Ballet Austin article and video offer preliminary insights only.

This Discussion Guide was created in collaboration with Dance/USA, the national service organization for professional dance.

DOWNLOAD THE BALLET AUSTIN ARTICLE AND VIDEO

Prior to completing this Discussion Guide, read the article and watch the video that describe the first two years of Ballet Austin's efforts to develop larger audiences for new or less familiar work.

The Ballet Austin article and video are available on the following webpage:
www.wallacefoundation.org/BalletAustin

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

A THE AUDIENCE GOAL

- a.1. What kinds of market research activities does your organization conduct to affirm or challenge the assumptions you have about your audiences?
- a.2. What audience group did Ballet Austin target to address its mission-critical problem—and why did it make sense to pursue this group?

B INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS

- b.1. How did Ballet Austin staff frame their understanding of the target audience behavior?
- b.2. Ballet Austin developed what it called a Familiarity Continuum. What were the different components of this framework? And, what were Ballet Austin's assumptions for how audience members moved through the framework?

Based on the target audience you identified, write out any assumptions you have about that group's behavior—why do you think audiences do and do not attend certain performances?

C MARKET RESEARCH

- c.1. What kinds of market research activities did Ballet Austin conduct to test its assumptions on audience behavior?
- c.2. Why was it helpful to Ballet Austin to have articulated an initial framework on audience behavior before beginning the market research?

D THE FINDINGS

- d.1. How did Ballet Austin’s original assumptions and framework on audience behavior change based on the market research findings?
- d.2. Upon receiving the market research findings, Ballet Austin staff reviewed and digested the findings. Does your organization bring teams of your staff together to process new audience research? If so, how does this affect your work? If not, consider how it might help to reflect on audience research together.
- d.3. Ballet Austin’s market research identified several factors that motivate audiences to purchase a ticket to and attend a performance. What were those factors?
- d.4. Ballet Austin’s market research found that potential ticket buyers want to have “reasonable certainty” that they will enjoy the evening. What do you think would give them “reasonable certainty”?

E DESIGNING NEW STRATEGIES

- e.1. Ballet Austin’s market research also found that arts organizations can create unintentional barriers that prevent audiences from purchasing a ticket. What are some of the unintentional barriers that the research identified?
- e.2. Reflect on how your organization communicates and engages with your audiences.
 - a. Ballet Austin’s market research identified several factors that motivate audiences to purchase a ticket to and attend a performance. What were those factors?
 - b. Ballet Austin’s market research found that potential ticket buyers want to have “reasonable certainty” that they will enjoy the evening. What do you think would give them “reasonable certainty”?

F IMPLEMENTATION

- f.1. What new engagement activities did Ballet Austin design based on the market research findings? What did they stop implementing?
- f.2. When you think about your own organization, what sorts of engagement activities might be harder or easier to create or change?

G ASSESSMENT

- g.1. Many of the lessons learned by Ballet Austin about audience engagement and the opportunity gap are applicable to performing arts organizations of all budget sizes and genres.

Take a moment to reflect on your organization's activities to engage prospective and current audiences. What are you doing to provide social and intellectual opportunities for your audiences? What could you be doing differently based on Ballet Austin's learning thus far?

ABOUT BALLET AUSTIN

Ballet Austin has brought dance to the Austin area for more than five decades. Its core purpose is to create, nurture, and share the joy of dance through classically innovative arts and arts education programs. Within this purpose, Ballet Austin maintains a strong commitment to the creation of new work, incubation of emerging talent, and integration into the community. Ballet Austin believes that the arts are most valuable to a community when supported by a network of quality education and outreach initiatives.

ABOUT DANCE/USA

Dance/USA believes that dance is essential to a healthy society, demonstrating the infinite pos-

sibilities for human expression and potential, and facilitating communication within and across cultures. Founded in 1982, Dance/USA sustains and advances professional dance through national convenings, research, advocacy, and leading national programs that have a positive impact on the field. Dance/USA's core values of equity and inclusion inform all aspects of the organization's operations, programs, and services to the field.

ABOUT BUILDING AUDIENCES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Ballet Austin is one of 25 performing arts organizations participating in The Wallace Foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) effort, a six-year, \$55-million initiative aimed at develop-

ing practical insights into how arts organizations can successfully expand their audiences.

The BAS initiative represents a spectrum of dance and opera companies, orchestras, theaters, and multidisciplinary arts institutions. Their projects are designed to reach a variety of diverse audiences, including racial and ethnic groups, age cohorts (primarily young people), and people working in specific sectors. Strategies include commissioning new art that resonates with particular groups, involving target audience members in the creation and selection of works to be performed, creating events that allow audience members to gather and learn more about the art, and staging works in non-traditional venues that are more easily accessible to the target audience.

The evidence gathered from these organizations will be documented and analyzed by an independent team of researchers at the University of Texas, Austin, providing valuable insights, ideas and information for the entire field.

The current initiative draws from lessons learned in the Wallace Excellence Awards. In that 2006-2014 venture, 54 arts organizations in six cities sought to use reliable data and analysis to design and carry out projects to increase the size of their

audiences, diversify them, or encourage current audience members to attend more often. The results were promising among the 46 arts groups for which Wallace obtained reliable data; for example, across the 11 organizations that sought to increase the overall size of their audience, the median gain over about three years was 27 percent.

ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is an independent national philanthropy dedicated to fostering improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. It seeks to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing, and sharing of new solutions and effective practices. At www.wallacefoundation.org, the foundation maintains an online library about what it has learned, including knowledge from its current efforts aimed at strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement, helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to more children, expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens, providing high-quality summer learning programs to disadvantaged children and enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students, and helping arts organizations build their audiences.

If you are interested in learning more about using market research to better understand your audiences, ***Taking Out the Guesswork: Using Research to Build Arts Audiences*** is a practical guide to conducting market research with low-cost solutions applicable to organizations of all sizes and disciplines. Download the free guide along with other Wallace resources here.

