

**Putting Research into Practice:  
Ten Arts Organizations Pilot Ways to Engage Audiences**

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## Introduction

Philadelphia is among the most vibrant arts cities in the country. Art is everywhere and in every form imaginable. Brightly colored murals on the sides of buildings and homes greet visitors and tourists alike, as do public sculptures throughout the city. Theaters of every size, music of all kinds, an array of museums, dance companies, and other art forms testify to the rich and continuing vitality of Philadelphia's art scene.

But after years of growth arts organizations in the Philadelphia region, like many others in the country, have struggled with attracting and maintaining audiences. In looking for solutions, two key needs emerged for these organizations to forge deeper connections with existing audiences as well as create bonds with new ones—data and effective practices.

As part of a broader campaign to double regional cultural engagement by 2020, the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance authored a report, [\*Research Into Action: Pathways to New Opportunities\*](#). That report identified 10 key findings of why Philadelphia was not fulfilling its cultural potential. Those findings provided practical steps that arts organizations could take—the data—to engage their audiences at a deeper level as well as grow new audiences.

Among the findings were:

- Personal practice is a gateway to attendance. There is a strong correlation between personal creative practice and higher levels of attendance.
- Marketing is multi-channel. Cultural marketers have to rely on a mix of marketing media to reach consumers.
- People become more engaged with arts with the presence of children in the household.

With the research in hand, the next step was to help selected arts organizations put it into action—that is try to learn effective practice that could be valuable not only to them but to arts groups across the country.

The Wallace Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Philadelphia Foundation and the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance partnered to create the Engage 2020 Innovation Grants Program, an initiative to stimulate marketing innovation in the Greater Philadelphia Region. The program offered 10 arts organizations 18-month grants of up to \$75,000 that took place between 2010 and 2011. The goal was to design and implement projects that addressed one or more of the findings of *Research Into Action* and aimed to help reach the long-term goal of doubling Greater Philadelphia's cultural participation by the Year 2020.

All of the arts organizations that received grants had projects that the Cultural Alliance and the Philadelphia Foundation deemed “case study worthy,” that is, the work they did and the lessons they learned could be valuable to arts organizations across the country that grappled with similar dilemmas. To capture these lessons for a case study, the Cultural Alliance and The Philadelphia Foundation contracted with Clear Thinking Communications to follow the 10 organizations through the course of their project. To do so, we reviewed each organization's proposal and project reports

as well as other materials relevant to the project, interviewed key participants four times during the project period about progress and challenges and conducted a site visit for each project.

Most of the organizations built on efforts that they had already begun to more deeply engage their audiences. These grants gave the organizations the opportunity to explore in more depth what it means to connect in new ways with the people they most want to reach.

All of the organizations went outside their comfort zone. Sometimes they tried new technologies, such as YouTube videos or smart phone applications, other times they gave up some control of their performances to allow greater audience participation and still other times they sought to bring in completely new audiences with which they had little familiarity.

Good data is a good start, but it is just a start, to finding new ways to effectively deepen relationships with current audiences and bring in new audiences. In the course of the projects, each organization could point to successes and missteps along the way. Throughout the course of the project, participants candidly shared what had worked and what hadn't.

The following is a summary of how each Engage 2020 Innovation grantee organization sought to increase audience engagement, what they accomplished and what they learned that might be valuable to others seeking to do similar work.

## Art Sanctuary: Bringing Hip H’Opera To Teens

[Art Sanctuary](#) is a literary and performing arts organization that uses the power of art to deepen literacy in communities, particularly in African-American communities.

### Project

The project sought to use high school students’ creativity to inspire an original work that fuses hip-hop with opera—Hip H’Opera--and other musical genres.

A central goal was to build a new audience for opera--urban teenagers--who are not traditionally represented in opera attendance. Art Sanctuary also hoped the project would increase literacy among participants and that students would write stories about themselves that could serve as inspiration for the creation of an original Hip H’Opera by professional artists in a later phase.

#### *Research Into Action Finding Used by Art Sanctuary*

- Personal practice is a gateway to attendance. There is a strong correlation between personal creative practice and higher levels of attendance.

### Activities

Art Sanctuary, in collaboration with the Opera Company of Philadelphia, worked with students from three underserved Philadelphia high schools who learned about opera and “conscious”<sup>1</sup> hip hop from teaching artists in their classrooms.

Art Sanctuary developed a curriculum and hired two teaching artists to come to classrooms once a week over a semester to teach students about the aesthetics of hip hop and opera—two genres that use the voice to tell stories. With that background, students used spirituals, poetry, fiction and non-fiction as tools to write stories they felt were important to tell. Staff also trained participating teachers. As part of their coursework, students attended an opera—a modern re-telling of the opera Romeo and Juliet—told as the story of two warring fashion families.

*Anyone walking past teaching artist’s Ali Richardson’s class on Hip H’Opera might be surprised to hear the sounds of a traditional call and response being sung by students. Richardson is working with students to write a spiritual as part of teaching about the roots of hip hop and opera. Richardson has the students sing a chorus that they had begun to write the previous week. “What do you think?” he asks the class. One student says that it sounds depressing. Another student suggests that the chorus should be more empowering. Then Richardson asks the students to write down challenges they face that they can incorporate in the spiritual. One student says, “For me the topic of violence is devastating. I lost several family members to street violence.” Other students mention racism, sexism and homophobia. Teacher Joan Asprakis, an opera lover, chimes in at times to explain a concept or get the*

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<sup>1</sup> Conscious hip hop or socially conscious hip-hop is a sub-genre of hip hop that focuses on social issues.

*students to settle down. As the class ends, Richardson collects the students' writing, which he and Art Sanctuary hope will eventually serve as material for a Hip H'Opera production.*

## Results

- **Through the Hip H'Opera project some 85-90 students were introduced to opera for the first time through a lens with which they are familiar—hip hop and pop culture.** Through the classes, students helped define a new genre of music and engaged in writing that allowed them to find their own connections to opera and hip hop.

The project did not result in a next planned phase of students participating in a production of a Hip H'Opera because of time constraints.

"We opened a new world to urban teenagers about opera and planted a seed that we hope will bear fruit over the next several years," said Biany Perez, arts & education program administrator, Art Sanctuary, in her final report on the project. "What we learned from the students is young audiences are open to things that are new and innovative as long as it's explained and connected to them in some way."

## Challenges

"Our assumption was that we take a brilliant curriculum into the schools and produce a stunning body of work that would inform an even more stunning new and innovative opera—all in one school year," Perez wrote. "The first error in that plan was overestimating the ease of navigating a school district that has constant changes in personnel and process, which can effectively bring an entire project to a dead halt. Our start date had to be moved twice because of these challenges. A second correction to our project came after we realized, through evaluation with the teaching artists, that the students not only did not have any real familiarity with opera but they also did not have a full understanding of hip-hop as a cultural practice with a history and defining elements. As a result, our curriculum had to be revised to put more emphasis on that aspect of this work."

## Lessons Learned

- **Find schools and teachers that embrace an approach to learn about a new art form such as Hip H'Opera and create a memorandum of understanding outlining clear expectations for all parties involved.** Much of the success of a project like this hinges on the enthusiasm and commitment of schools.
- **Work closely with teaching artists, teachers and students who can provide feedback on how to adjust a curriculum so that it meets the needs of students and provides educational value.** By listening closely to teaching artists and other participants, project staff can make adjustments to the curriculum along the way to make it as effective as possible.

"We asked the teaching artist to have a culminating project where the students defined Hip H'Opera," Perez said. "We weren't really happy with the writings we received. The biggest lesson learned was that we should have checked in with the teaching artists to see if the students really understood Hip H'Opera."

- **Provide participating teachers with training on the curriculum so that they understand it and can implement it on their own in later classes.** “If you get teacher buy in, you’ll get student buy in,” Perez said.
- **Break down ambitious projects like these into small, achievable steps because each step will likely become more complex and time-consuming than originally envisioned.** Working with schools, for example, often requires multiple visits to administrators and teachers to start such a project, build trust with participants and make sure that it stays on track.

### **Next Steps**

A production team has been formed to begin the work of creating and later producing an original Hip H’Opera, planned for 2012 or 2013. The team will use the students’ writing from the project to inform the libretto. Art Sanctuary staff hope to include students in several phases of the project including in the development and production.

Art Sanctuary plans to publish the Hip H’Opera curriculum on its website in early 2012.

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## Curtis Institute of Music: Creating a Tailored Experience for Patrons

The [Curtis Institute of Music](#) trains gifted young musicians free of charge and offers 130 free and ticketed public performances by students and guest artists each year.

### Project

Curtis sought to create a tailored experience for patrons of Curtis' performances, hoping to increase paid attendance by 20 percent or 1,400. It hoped to do so by segmenting its paid audience into three segments as defined by the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance's [Paid Patronage Study](#): (1) "one-timers"; (2) "return-after-lapsed"; and (3) "loyalist", surveying them to determine what they felt would enhance their overall experience at Curtis and then creating and marketing promotional packages tailored to each segment.

"The Paid Patronage Study was very helpful in identify the different audience segments but it didn't talk about what incentives or promotions each of those audience categories would find appealing," said Walter Beck, director of marketing at Curtis Institute of Music. "That's what we want to learn."

#### *Research Into Action Finding Used by Curtis Institute of Music*

- Fixing the leaky bucket. There is a major opportunity to increase engagement simply by increasing our retention rate.

### Activities

Curtis' project was delayed because of staff changes and competing priorities in the organization. As a result, the surveys were completed but Curtis is still analyzing them and making plans to carry out promotions to targeted audience members in 2012.

Curtis contracted with marketing consulting firm Moskowitz Jacobs, Inc. to do an "Idea Map Survey" of patrons in the three audience segments to determine what would enhance their overall experience as patrons of Curtis performances. An IdeaMap survey presents a series of vignettes to learn which elements resonate most with the survey takers. It is designed to prevent respondents from answering questions based on what they think is "right" and to elicit information about what customers truly want.

As part of their research, Curtis staff completed competitor research of 13 arts organizations to examine what they were doing to engage patrons. Staff included any unique events or concepts into its Idea Map Survey.

In October 2011 Curtis sent an email to all 5000 of its ticket buyers from the past five years offering them the opportunity to participate in one or more of three surveys, which covered: (1) concert experience; (2) reasons to attend; and (3) ticket promotions. For each survey audience members took they were entered into a drawing for a \$250 gift card.

In the survey, patrons were asked to rate activities or perks as "more likely" or "less likely" to inspire them to purchase tickets to Curtis performances. Those activities or perks could include receiving



free drinks at intermission, meeting with artists after the performance, or attending a gala with other patrons.

## Results

- **More than 450 audience members from Curtis completed surveys.** Among the key preliminary findings are that Curtis patrons are keenly interested in feeling close to the artists and the music that they create. They want to feel like they know the musicians, composers and pieces performed onstage. They also said that they are proud of the fact that by being part of these performances, they are supporting the education of Curtis' student musicians. Curtis will analyze the results further to determine what would inspire the three distinct audience segments to attend Curtis performances more frequently.
- **The process of creating the surveys had an immediate effect on Curtis's efforts to engage audiences.** One idea that was generated was the creation of events as part of Curtis' free student recital series specifically programmed to appeal to those who are new to classical music. One such performance in early October 2011, marketed to young professionals in their 20s and 30s, resulted in more than 80 new concert attendees (two-thirds of the total audience).

## Challenges

The key challenges in this project were staff changes and competing priorities at Curtis, which made it difficult to attend to the Engage 2020 project, according to Beck.

## Lessons Learned

- **Devote time to market research, which can become an audience engagement tool.** If arts organizations want to maintain and engage their audiences someone in the organization must spend time surveying and checking in with patrons. And market research itself can be a way of engaging audiences as well.

"When people were taking these surveys comments came back saying 'I never really thought about my patron experience,'" Beck said. "By taking the survey it made the person think about what was important to them in a performance. If we are going to maintain and engage and increase the audience in the arts world we want them to actually think about why they are there and what it is about this experience that excites them and inspires them to come back."

- **Consider dedicating a part-time staff person or full-time one year staff position to a complex audience engagement project.** There was a considerable amount of staff time spent on informing, training and explaining the methodologies of the project to the various departments at Curtis. Having one dedicated staff could help others in the organization implement the changes and absorb the lessons and needed to engage patrons touched by an organization's development, communications, ticketing and performance departments.

## Next Steps

Curtis received a no-cost extension on its project to complete analysis of the survey data. Staff plan to carry out activities and promotions aimed at first-timers, lapsed and loyalist patrons in 2011 and 2012. The targeted marketing campaigns will tie into Curtis' celebratory performance season, Appassionato, which expands the number and types of offerings to mark the opening of a new building and other initiatives. Curtis plans to do periodic reviews of ticket sales to benchmark against ticket sales in earlier years.

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## Fairmount Park Art Association: Seeing Public Art Through New Eyes

The [Fairmount Park Art Association](#) is the nation's oldest nonprofit association devoted to commissioning and caring for public art.

### Project

The project is a marketing campaign to promote the approachability and accessibility of Philadelphia's public art to residents and visitors. Philadelphia has the largest collection of outdoor sculptures in the country but many residents and visitors walk by every day without noticing them.

In 2010, Fairmount Park Art Association (FPAA) launched an audio program "Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO" in which people can call a number next to a sculpture and listen to a 3-4 minute audio about it. Unlike most audio tours that feature one authority, these audios feature "authentic voices" – people who are connected to the sculpture by knowledge or experience. The Fairmount Park Art Association sought to build on that project to raise the visibility of Philadelphia's collection of art sculpture and increase audience engagement.

"We are trying to increase people's comfort with public art," said Jennifer Richards, development & communications manager at Fairmount Park Art Association. "And use that as a gateway for them to experience other kinds of art."

#### *Research Into Action Findings Used by the Fairmount Park Art Association*

- Marketing is multi-channel. Cultural marketers have to rely on a mix of marketing media to reach consumers.

### Activities

Fairmount Park Art Association hired an advertising firm to develop experiential or "guerilla" marketing ideas to grab the attention of people who happen to be walking or jogging past some of Philadelphia's public sculptures.

The project had multiple delays as the firm did not meet the timelines set by FPAA, which wanted to carry out its activities in the summer of 2011 when many residents and visitors are outdoors.

In July 2011, the advertising firm proposed several options to engage the public with outdoor sculptures. Among them were wrapping sculptures with large green shrouds along a busy parkway in order to unveil and "reintroduce" them to the public. The firm also proposed that FPAA advertise a "date night" on sites such as Match.com and provide picnic dinners and iPods to borrow at select locations to encourage couples to come see the sculptures. In addition, they suggested placing "squirrel art critics" near sculptures to create a dialogue around public art.

The Fairmount Park Art Association staff liked the firm's concepts, but executing the ideas proved difficult. According to staff, it was hard to get status updates from the firm. In addition, the City of Philadelphia, which owns many of the public sculptures, denied permission to shroud the artworks.

The Fairmount Park Art Association planned a date night in late September but was informed by the advertising firm a few days beforehand that it would be too expensive to advertise on dating sites. Fairmount Park Art Association staff instead sent an email blast and posted it on their social media sites and received about 40 RSVPs.

*It was gusty, rainy Friday evening in Philadelphia as staff from the Fairmount Park Arts Association set out signs in front of a cafe in a small park that is close to several of Philadelphia's most notable outdoor sculptures including ones by Henry Moore and Alexander Calder. Picnic dinners awaited those who had signed up for date night as well as passersby. Staff lined up iPods, which people could borrow to listen to descriptions of the nearby sculptures. As the rain continued to pound down, few of the 40 people who had made reservations showed up.*

*But one older couple who lived in a nearby high-rise complex and had heard about the event through their neighborhood association did brave the storm. As they sat inside the café they borrowed an iPod from staff and listened intently to descriptions of the sculptures.*

*"We walk by these sculptures every day and you kind of take them for granted," said Jim Reddick. "I'd like to take these [self-guided] tours for myself and for visitors. This is something we'd like to do because we can do while walking around. I didn't realize the story behind the "Jesus Breaking Bread" sculpture. It's at the cathedral where my wife works and she never knew its background."*

*The next week, Reddick and his wife attended Sculpture Saturdays, another Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO event, presented by FPAA staff, where they walked around Kelly Drive listening to the audio programs about other sculptures.*

Shortly after the date night, the FPAA ended its relationship with the advertising firm. The firm returned much of its fee and FPAA plans to launch their own marketing campaign in 2012.

## Results

- **After taking over the direction and management of the project, the Fairmount Park Art Association developed its own experiential marketing plan for a number of events to raise visibility of public art and its organization.** It will launch those events beginning in April 2012.

## Challenges

The main challenge in this project was the need to continually adjust the timeline because of delays from the advertising firm that the Fairmount Park Art Association had contracted with, according to Richards.

## Lessons Learned

- **Look for a consulting firm that values collaboration when working in collaborative fields such as public art.** Conceptualizing, creating and maintaining public art is challenging and

requires the collaboration of many groups including artists, engineers, contractors and city officials. It is important to look for a similar spirit of collaboration and understanding of the challenges involved with consulting firms, some of which may be used to “presenting” creative ads and concepts rather than deeply engaging with an arts organization.

- **Put firm dates in contracts when collaborating with consultants or outside firms.** Fairmount Park Art Association initially told the advertising firm that they could be flexible in terms of deliverables though they made it clear they wanted the campaign to be done in the summer. However, the staff said the firm continually delayed sending them its proposal for the marketing campaign, which resulted in no activities taking place in the summer as planned.
- **Check with public officials well in advance to see if permission is needed for a marketing campaign for public art.** While Fairmount Park Art Association works closely with city officials on many of its projects, staff did not initially realize that they would need additional permission for some of their proposed ideas. Permits and other approvals are sometimes required for campaigns involving public art and can take several days to weeks to obtain. It is important to factor in that time.
- **Trust your staff’s instincts and knowledge about creative approaches to marketing.** After ending its relationship with the advertising firm, the Fairmount Park Art Association staff had to quickly come up with creative, on-target marketing ideas for the campaign in order to make use of their grant funding. They developed original ideas that they knew they could implement working with the city and other partners.

“We’ve put a little more value and trust in our staff in being able to do this,” Richards said. “We’ve discovered strengths we didn’t know we had.”

### **Next Steps**

Fairmount Park Art Association received permission from its funder, The Philadelphia Foundation, to use its unspent funds to carry out a marketing campaign in the spring of 2012. Among the activities planned are a: (1) tango dance party; (2) public art pathway marked by large balloons; (3) sculpture flashlight mob; and (4) public art bike tour and scavenger hunt.

Staff will measure the success of its work by comparing the number of calls to Museum Without Walls™: AUDIO both before and after the campaign.

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## First Person Arts: Sharing Stories of Objects Held Dear

[First Person Arts](#) is an organization that focuses on memoir and documentary art. Its best known program is its First Person Arts Festival, an annual event that features movie screenings, book readings, discussions and other events on memoir and documentary art.

“Our mission is all about the power of the personal story. Every person has a story. By sharing our stories with each other we connect with other people and learn things about ourselves,” said Dana Dorman, former museum coordinator.

### Project

First Person Arts developed a project in which they asked people to write stories based on an ordinary object that they hold dear. The goal was to attract new communities and audiences to First Person Arts programs, particularly by increasing racial and age diversity.

#### *Research Into Action Findings Used By First Person Arts*

- People of color are more engaged & growing in population. Arts and culture organizations need to adapt programming and marketing to accommodate changing demographics.
- Personal practice is a gateway to attendance. There is a strong correlation between personal creative practice and higher levels of attendance.

### Activities

First Person Arts undertook a variety of ways to engage with new audiences. Among them was working with six community organizations to hold “StoryCircles” in which participants brought objects and told stories about them. First Person Arts hoped that people who came and told stories would contribute to a special exhibit during its annual festival, and then attend the festival, bringing their friends and family with them.

Nearly 100 people came to one of the story telling events. Of those, 44 contributed stories to the museum exhibit that was featured throughout the First Person Arts Festival that ran in November and December 2010. Of those stories 16 were full-length stories of 200 words and the rest were one-sentence summaries of stories. The exhibit at the First Person Arts Festival had the feel of a living room with tables and dressers to display the objects, and chairs and couches located throughout to encourage visitors to sit and enjoy the stories.

Among the participants and objects were: (1) a mother and her son’s boxers shorts that he had been wearing when he was arrested for drug possession; (2) a woman and an unfinished sock that her friend had been knitting when she died at age 33; and (3) a young man and the lifetime fishing license of his grandfather who had taught him to fish.

*In the story circle she attended, Carla Jones had not brought an object to tell a story about. But as she listened to others talk she found that, out of nervous habit, she reached to spin her wedding ring. Only she was no longer wearing it. Jones then knew what her story would be about. Once she wrote her story, the facilitator at the story circle strongly encouraged her*

*to submit it for the museum exhibit. Without the facilitator's persistence, Jones said she probably would not have done so.*

*"I couldn't say no one asked for my story," she said. "I saw that this was bigger than my little story. I went from 'Oh my God, my marriage is over, now I'm going to be divorced,' to seeing that this was a story that people could connect to and feel empowered by. Maybe someone comes in here [to the exhibit] who signed divorce papers yesterday and this story helps. It made me feel valuable and that my story was worth telling."*

*Jones said she went to the First Person Arts Festival for the first time as a result of contributing a story to the museum exhibit. She has since returned several times for events sponsored by First Person Arts.*

To read Jones' story, go [here](#)

## Results

- Some 75 percent of participants who sustained their involvement in the story telling project visited the First Person Museum.
- About 40 percent of those participants brought friends and family to the Festival.
- First Person Arts increased minority attendance by 36 percent based on audience survey responses.
- More than 2910 people attended the First Person Festival -- surpassing the organization's goal by more than 400 visitors.

"The goal of increasing audience engagement worked to some extent," said Vicky Solot, former executive director of First Person Arts. "It brought in a lot of people who would not have been introduced to our events otherwise."

## Challenges

Engaging a new audience from communities that had not typically participated in First Person Arts events was daunting, staff members said. Staff often had to follow up with participants several times to get them to submit stories and come to the festival, in the midst of planning for the larger festival itself. In their debriefing after the festival, staff said they were not sure whether those participants would become continuing audience members.

While First Person Arts added a new website devoted to this project, it was not well connected to the physical exhibit. The disconnection meant that the website and other activities did not provide an integrated "voice" to the project.

## Lessons Learned

- **Seek participants that are prospects for long-term involvement.** First Person Arts hoped that the Engage 2020 project would expand and diversify their audience. Yet they did not "prequalify" the participating groups in terms of whether they had a long term potential to stay involved, Solot said.

When seeking to build new audiences, it is important to make sure that the audiences that arts organizations target *want* to become involved in its organization and then provide them with a clear understanding of a project.

“If people know that they will be involved in something that has an extended life and that their stories may be exhibited and we give them a direction and theme, the stories will be deeper and more nuanced,” Solot said. “We will also attract people who are interested in doing this and we will spend less time drawing them back in, as we did with the Engage 2020 project. We had to do a lot of outreach and maintaining of participants’ interest, mostly because we didn’t set up expectations.”

- **Consider going into greater depth with similar story projects.** Feedback from participants and audiences was that they wanted longer, more in-depth stories that could more fully describe the experience and historical background or connections of the stories.
- **Devote significant resources to website development if an online strategy is part of a project’s goals.** Much of the project work focused on gathering stories and creating the exhibit for the First Person Arts festival. But the organization’s website, which could be another powerful vehicle to engage audiences, did not fully connect visitors to the stories, which was a lost opportunity. If a website is part of an audience engagement strategy, it needs its own dedicated effort.

### **Next Steps**

First Person Arts plans to write a grant proposal to fund a version of this project for its festival in 2012. Among the changes might be recording stories on video or telling them through story slams, including one at the First Person Arts annual festival, rather than mounting another museum exhibit. First Person Arts also plans to update the new website and make it more interactive and easier to share stories in multiple forms.

In addition, the organization’s new executive director, Jamie J. Brunson, first came to learn about First Person Arts through her participation in a StoryCircle in the Engage 2020 project.

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## Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia: Giving Audiences a Voice

[Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia](#) is a 138-year-old symphonic chorus that regularly performs choral music of varied cultures, traditions, periods and style.

### Project

The project was to engage audiences in new ways before, during and after performances in part by encouraging them to actively participate in concerts through singing and other ways of joining in.

In its proposal, Mendelssohn Club pointed out that audiences at classical music performances are passive and silent, constrained to applause at the conclusion as their only “polite” responses to the experience. Artistic Director Alan Harler said, “I would be so happy if our audiences could feel encouraged and empowered to respond emotionally and physically to our performances.”

#### *Research Into Action Findings Used by the Mendelssohn Club*

- Personal practice is a gateway to attendance. There is a strong correlation between personal creative practice and higher levels of attendance.
- Social connection is a benefit. Arts organizations have an enormous opportunity to increase cultural engagement simply by facilitating social connection.

### Activities

Mendelssohn Club included ways to involve audiences as participants in all of its concerts during the project. As an example, in one concert Artistic Director Harler chose a range of choral works to give audience members a variety ways to participate. The works were the Duruflé *Requiem*, Leonard Bernstein’s *The Lark* and a new work by composer Rollo Dilworth.

To prepare the audience and build excitement for the concert, Mendelssohn Club staff sent out e-mail blasts, made posts on Facebook and Twitter, had choral members blog about the performance, did a radio interview and put up fliers around the city about the opportunity for audience participation. The choral group also held an open rehearsal in which audience members could practice; some 18 people attended.

In addition, in a [You Tube](#) video posted in the weeks before the concert, Artistic Director Harler taught audience members how to sing Gregorian chants during the Duruflé requiem.

*At a Baptist church on a Sunday afternoon, well-dressed audience members file in and find a place to sit in one of the church pews. Artistic Director Alan Harler takes his place in front of the 150-member chorus and does something a little different. Today, he tells the audience, you will have a chance to play an active role in each of the three pieces the chorus is*

*performing. To start off, Harler tells the group about the first composer, Maurice Duruflé, who grew up steeped in Gregorian chants.*

*“We thought it would be good to sing the chants so you can hear them more clearly as the soul of Duruflé’s Requiem,” he says. “By singing it, maybe you can hear this piece better. It doesn’t matter if you can’t read music, you can pick it up. You can relax. I’ll turn and let you know when to sing.”*

*After a brief mini-rehearsal with the audience, Harler signals the chorus to begin, motioning the audience when it is their turn to sing the chant. About two-thirds of the audience members appear to be singing, aided by 30 members of the College of New Jersey College Chorale who are scattered throughout the church and have practiced the chants in advance.*

*“Beautiful!” Harler says at the end of the piece. “Congratulations. You were wonderful.”*

*Later in the concert the audience acts as a crowd by shouting in a Joan of Arc piece and then makes the sound of rain during an original composition based on a traditional African American spiritual.*

*When the concert ends, several audience members are enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate. One said it helped to create a “partnership” with the chorus. Others said that they liked the different ways to participate (i.e., one did not have to be a good singer to be part of the chorus). A chorus member described it as the best experience he had had in ten years of being part of the chorus.*

## **Results**

- **Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia is approaching the way it presents its work from a new perspective.** “This project forced our organization to ask very hard questions about what we are going to present to our audiences,” said Janelle McCoy, Mendelssohn Club’s executive director. “We are no longer in an environment where we can push content and people will passively consume it. This season made us think about all the ways to engage audiences. It was a tipping point. For every program the overlaying question we always ask is how do we engage the audience? How do we invite them in? I don’t think we ever had those conversations.”
- **Mendelssohn Club saw evidence of increased audience engagement through survey feedback and a large increase in auditions.** In the past year, for example, the organization has seen a dramatic increase in audition requests, mostly coming from younger people, McCoy said. Some 75 people asked to audition for the chorus with little to no advertising, compared to about 10-12 who typically audition each year. McCoy suspects that some of the interest is coming from the organization’s increased outreach on Facebook, YouTube and other social media. The number of attendees at concerts has remained about the same.

*“I’m dealing with too many variables to say bluntly that audiences are going up,” McCoy said. “But there are elements that point to an upward trend. I think it’s a longer trajectory that we are looking for.”*

## Challenges

Finding the balance between artistic excellence and audience involvement can be difficult. Some audience members at the Duruflé concert said it was important that audience participation was not an add-on but rather integral to the piece. One member said she felt that the Gregorian chants were an example of superfluous audience participation. Artistic Director Harler, meanwhile, said that he knew of two regular attendees who likely did not come to the performance because they were afraid they would be forced to participate. Some people, Harler said, want to passively experience music.

One long-time choral member was skeptical about audience participation. He said that in another concert that featured the Brahms *Requiem* he had worked hard to learn the piece and then, to his annoyance, audience members often came in at the wrong places. At this concert, he sat in the audience and was more positive about the experience. He believed this approach should be used as an occasional, rather than regular, part of the performances.

## Lessons Learned

When Mendelssohn Club sought peers nationally from whom they might compare community involvement, they were able to validate their findings with the Weill Institute of Music at Carnegie Hall, who also has a participatory community series. Both organizations shared these best practices:

- **Create an environment in which audiences get to know the essence of your organization.** Mendelssohn Club undertook a variety of ways, both low and high-tech, to create a more intimate connection with their audiences. The club began holding receptions after each concert in which audience members could mingle with one another and chorus members to chat about the performances. The organization also posted YouTube videos and blogs that gave an insider look at the chorus to generate interest in the organization.
- **Build in flexibility by creating different entry points for engagement—i.e., online, at a concert or open rehearsals.** Different audiences have different ways that they want to connect with an organization. For some, Facebook, blogs and YouTube videos are a good way to engage. Others prefer to receive direct mail, meet choral members after a concert or attend an open rehearsal. It's important to have multiple avenues for audiences to connect with an organization in order to meet them where they are.
- **Challenge your audiences.** Mendelssohn Club often chooses difficult pieces to perform such as the Brahms's *Requiem*. The organization chooses such pieces not necessarily because they are challenging but because they were so beautiful. Audiences, however, showed that they were eager to try more difficult pieces.

## Next Steps

Mendelssohn Club developed this project in conjunction with a new strategic plan and will continue to incorporate audience participation in its concerts in the coming three years.

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## **New Paradise Laboratories: Using the Web to Create Online Performance**

[New Paradise Laboratories](#) is an experimental theater that puts on original performances by a core ensemble group.

### **Project**

The project sought to create a highly-interactive online tool that would engage young audiences aged 18-28 in the act of creation and provide material for an upcoming theater piece “Extremely Public Displays of Privacy.”

#### *Research into Action Findings Used by New Paradise Laboratories*

- Marketing is multi-channel. Cultural marketers have to rely on a mix of marketing media to reach consumers and close the sale.
- Personal practice is a gateway to attendance. There is a strong correlation between personal creative practice and higher levels of attendance.

### **Activities**

New Paradise Laboratories (NPL) staff and consultants created an online tool called the “Frame” on NPL’s website in which curators shared compelling content they found or created with a deliberately chosen audience of like-minded people. At the same time, NPL staff and artists used some of the material gathered by curators and others to inform the creation of their play “Extremely Public Displays of Privacy.”

Specifically, New Paradise Laboratories hired seven “specialists” who acted as curators and trolled the Internet or created their own content to post on a private wiki. These specialists also created fictional characters who interacted with one another. The work took place under the direction of Whit McLaughlin, founder of New Paradise Laboratories.

After several months of gathering content and creating the site, New Paradise Laboratories moved the site to its webpage and opened it up to the public. Rather than make a public announcement, however, New Paradise staff and the curators “leaked” it out slowly by inviting friends as well as people who had gone to a previous NPL production to check out the website. NPL also posted a blurb about it on their Facebook page.

Visitors could come to the site, look around, respond to posts and even create their own characters.

The idea was to create a “provocation” or start a conversation with like-minded people, said Inger Hatlen, managing director of New Paradise Laboratories.

“It’s a site where they can go to engage ideas with New Paradise,” Hatlen said. “If there is any sense that we are trying to pitch them something other than ideas, concepts and aesthetics, people are going to run away. They can smell a marketing technique from a mile away.”

*While New Paradise Laboratories was creating the interactive Frame on its website, it was developing its most challenging piece yet. Extremely Public Displays of Privacy told the story of the relationship between Fess Elliot, a mother, teacher and undiscovered singer/song writer and Beatrix Luff, a mysterious young performance artist who promises to help Fess gain the fame she’s never achieved.*

*The play unfolds in three different venues. Act I is viewed [online](#) and tells the story of how Fess and Beatrix meet on a chat site. ACT II is a video podcast that takes the audience on a walking tour of Central Philadelphia to places where Fess carries out escalating public dares at Beatrix’s direction (audiences could download a free app or reserve an iPod) and ACT III was staged at a secret underground venue and featured a live concert by Fess.*

*NPL artists drew some of the material for the play from the content found on the Internet by the “specialists” and posted on the Frame including a video montage of Beatrix displaying her conquests with men. In addition, in the midst of content that curators and visitors posted on the NPL’s interactive site, the theater included mentions of the upcoming show. The play was performed in September 2011 during Philadelphia’s Live Arts Festival.*

## Results

- **The Frame was visited in its “soft” launch by more than 9,000 viewers with 3,000 returning individuals.** More than 2,000 posts have been made with more than 4,000 responses. The site has averaged about 100 users a day with an average time on site of about five minutes. In comparison, NPL’s site typically had about 800 visitors a year.
- **More than 5,000 people downloaded Act I of “Extremely Public Displays of Privacy” in the first ten days of its availability.** Approximately 485 people downloaded Act II. Some 256 people attended the live performance (ACT III). Typically, NPL has about 1,200 to 1,500 attendees at its productions.

## Challenges

New Paradise Laboratories staff learned they were seeking to engage two audiences: its regular theater audience that attends its plays but does not necessarily spend a lot of time using their computer to delve into online content like the Frame and a non-theater audience who were engaged in the online content but did not necessarily think about attending the live performance of Extremely Public Displays of Privacy.

“Our usual audience is a theater audience. They like off the wall, radical stuff but it’s a theater audience,” Hatlen said. “We were doing things [with FRAME and Acts I and II of the play] that innately didn’t appeal to a theater audience. They didn’t get it.”

At the same time, the people who spent time on the Frame didn't relish the idea of sitting in a dark theater for an hour and a half looking at something they could not click away from, McLaughlin said.

"How do you make the leap to live performance?" McLaughlin asked. "We are talking to people who go to their computers for entertainment."

The theater group also saw a sharp decline in audience members attending "Extremely Public Acts" from ACT I to ACT III, a decline Hatlen attributed to the length of the combined acts (more than five hours) and the logistics involved in seeing all three acts.

In addition, NPL hired a marketing firm to help them promote "Extremely Public Acts," and felt that the marketing was not as successful as it could have been.

### **Lessons Learned**

- **Try a new way of connecting with your audiences through truly interactive online experiences.** Most arts organizations use web presence purely as a marketing tool—as a place to deliver information *about* the art and drum up audience members—it is not usually seen as an art in itself. New Paradise Laboratories proposed an alternative with Frame. NPL staff believe that there is a place online for audiences to engage directly with artistic practice. Providing a space where people, particularly younger people, can go to see and create art without overt marketing may be way to cultivate a new audience that seeks to participate in art and is jaded by anything that obviously looks to simply sell tickets.
- **Make it easy to connect with an interactive experience.** The Frame has many cutting edge features but it is also difficult to easily find the characters of the specialists or find responses to content that curators or viewers have posted. NPL is re-vamping the site to make the navigation more clear cut while maintaining its edgy style. Among the changes: NPL is also going to a user introduction video and Facebook Connect to help people learn quickly how to participate and share content.
- **Help audience members see the relationship between online and live content.** People who troll the web for entertainment may not be looking for live theater experiences and those who go to the theater may not see their computer as anything other than a tool to be used for work. If arts organizations are going to bring together online and offline experiences for audiences they need to think about how to help people see the relationship between the two. NPL is continuing to experiment with ways to do that, including encouraging more creation of content for its live plays on its online platform.

### **Next Steps**

In 2011, New Paradise Laboratories received two-year funding from the Philadelphia Cultural Management Initiative to hire a staff member dedicated to working on the Frame. As part of this work, NPL will train a corps of new ensemble members who will be both specialists and artist/creators. These members will not only provide and create content but work to devise NPL's live theater work and serve as NPL's online ambassadors.

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## **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts: Bringing Families Together Through Art**

The [Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts](#) (PAFA) is the country's first art museum and school of fine arts.

### **Project**

PAFA offered a Family Arts Academy, which consisted of free weekly arts workshops for families at the museum and in underserved communities as well as multi-week classes. The project was aimed at promoting family engagement and attracting more ethnically diverse and low-income families to the museum. The project was done in partnership with the Philadelphia School District.

While PAFA was well-positioned to reach out to families the museum and school was also a well-kept secret and perhaps even slightly intimidating to many Philadelphia families, staff believed. PAFA staff hoped that by attending weekend workshops, families would become introduced to the museum, look around at the exhibits and become visitors.

#### *Research Into Action Finding Used by Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts*

- People become more engaged in arts with the presence of children in the household.
- Personal practice is a gateway to attendance. There is a strong correlation between personal creative practice and higher levels of attendance.

### **Activities**

PAFA advertised the Sunday workshops at the museum through announcements in the Philadelphia elementary school newsletter, ads in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Philadelphia Tribune*, as well as on local radio stations and outreach through teacher and community workshops.

The two-hour museum Sunday workshops were often led by PAFA faculty and students. Staff designed activities to appeal to both children and adults. Workshops include drawing a live horse, creating mummies, making instruments with a member of the group "The Roots" and creating soft sculpture food pillows. PAFA also held more intensive four-week family art courses and family art workshops in communities where PAFA traditionally had not drawn many visitors. Based on initial success of the offsite workshops, PAFA increased the number from a planned 15 to a total of 84 during the project. The museum held a final exhibition of artwork created by the families at the end of the year.

*On a bitterly cold Sunday afternoon, families might be expected to stay inside, perhaps cheering on their hometown football team the Philadelphia Eagles. But on this Sunday, about 100 young children and their parents came to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts to learn how to make "wearable" art by using painting, stencils, stamps, photo transfers and other means to decorate their clothes.*

*The families first gathered in an auditorium where an artist and two assistants gave a brief demonstration of the different ways to make wearable art. Then, participants filed into two large workrooms to make their art. PAFA staff showed people where to find supplies and provided help where needed. But soon, most children and their parents were absorbed in their project, painting tee shirts, dresses, hats and other items of clothing.*

*A father who had been coming regularly with his wife and two children was busy helping his kids decorate hats that they had brought with them. "My wife and I both grew up in Philadelphia and we had never been [to this museum] before this program," he said. "The first time we came here we spent time looking around the art galleries after the class. The kids love it here. They have interesting activities, like the band Roots coming, which is what caught our attention. And if you come to 24 of 30 workshops you get a free week of camp in the summer. That keeps people interested and coming."*

*Several parents said that having the workshop on a Sunday—rather than a Saturday—was also helpful because they much more likely to feel they had free time to participate in an activity like this after getting errands and sports done on a Saturday.*

## Results

- **Staff held 30 Sunday afternoon workshops at PAFA (attendance 2,828) and 84 off-site workshops in community locations (attendance 2,893).** Those workshops, along with family art class mini-courses, an Art Career Fair, a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event targeted to homeless families, participation in five community events and a year-end Family Art Exhibit, drew attendance of nearly 8,000 (exceeding the original goal of 5,000).
- **Family Arts Academy allowed PAFA to reach out to new audiences, many of whom were first-time attendees.** Diversity data indicated the audience for workshops at PAFA was 60 percent minority and the mean participant satisfaction ratings were 4.7 on a 5.0 scale. Over 90 percent of participants rated the workshops as being of good quality, having a quality instructor and having quality helpers.

## Challenges

PAFA said that while the Philadelphia School District was a partner in the project it was a challenge to engage officials there in promoting the project, perhaps because of competing priorities and internal upheaval that took place in the year of the project.

Staff also had to put much more time than they expected into holding community workshops to drum up interest so that people felt comfortable coming to the museum. In addition, staff said that they didn't feel as if they reached as many underserved neighborhoods as they had hoped.

## Lessons Learned

- **Do sustained outreach to communities if they are not familiar with your organization.** Before arts organizations can expect new communities unfamiliar with them to begin attending their events they may have to do repeated outreach to those communities. PAFA

staff found that they sometimes needed to go to communities five to ten times before community members would start attending museum events. Staff said it is also better to concentrate on a few, targeted communities with repeated workshops rather than try to reach many communities with just one or two workshops a piece.

“In underserved communities, parents often have two or three jobs,” said Monica Zimmerman, director of museum education at PAFA. “It’s not like they’re sitting around all day trying to figure out what to do. They are busy. It takes a long time to convince people that this would be valuable for their kids.”

- **Remember that word of mouth can be the best form for advertising when seeking to grow new audiences.** While PAFA engaged in extensive media and school advertising, they found that word of mouth was most powerful.

“If you satisfy people who come that is the best form of advertising,” Zimmerman said. “We have people who come to our Sunday workshops every week and they have become huge advocates for us.”

- **Consider holding family events on Sundays for better turnout.** While in the past PAFA had done its family programming on Saturdays, it found that providing workshops on Sunday was very popular with families. Sundays appeared to be a day that families saw as offering more free time to participate in activities than Saturdays, which can be crowded with errands and sports obligations.

### **Next Steps**

PAFA is continuing Family Arts Academy in 2011-2012. For the 30 Sunday onsite workshops, staff plan to connect the gallery exhibits more closely with the art projects. The success and popularity of the off-site workshop initiative will be honed to engage each target community more deeply and draw them to PAFA on-site workshops. Fewer offsite locations will be targeted, but with more workshops at each location, and bus transportation will be offered to enable community members to come to PAFA for on-site workshops.

PAFA also planned on relaunching a Free Family Sunday program for an upcoming exhibit. Admission to PAFA galleries will be free on Sundays during the exhibit and PAFA will present related programs including film, hands-on art making dance performances, storytelling and musical collaborations. The Free Family Sundays are designed to reach first-time visitors, those who do not typically participate in the arts and broaden access among underserved and low income communities.

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## People's Light & Theatre: Nurturing Generations of Theatregoers

The [People's Light & Theatre Company](#) is a 37-year-old professional theater in Chester County, Pennsylvania that includes an active arts education program that works with young people.

### Project

The project had two components: (1) A Subscription Teen Engagement Program (STEP) in which teens purchased discounted 2010-2011 season tickets and participated in monthly activities to connect them to the plays that they were seeing as well as create their own plays; and (2) Project Discovery Alumni Circle, which sought to reconnect to adults who had seen plays at People's Light through the theater's program that brings high school students to attend plays.

Through this project, People's Light hoped to nurture the next generation of arts goers as well as re-engage adults who had attended the theater as teens, said Jane Moss, director of development at People's Light & Theatre Company.

*Key Research Into Action Findings Used by People's Light & Theatre Company*

- Fixing the leaky bucket. There is a major opportunity to increase engagement simply by increasing our retention rate.
- Social connection is a benefit. Arts organizations have an enormous opportunity to increase cultural engagement simply by facilitating social connection.

### Activities

For the teen STEP program in the summer of 2010, 31 students participated in a four-week Summerstage program in which they created a piece, "Down Swoops a Blackbird" in response to the theater's upcoming production, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

Some 30 students then enrolled in the STEP 2010-2011 teen subscription program in which they subscribe as a group to People's Light season of eight productions (of this group, 16 had participated in earlier Summerstage programs). Teens paid \$105 for an 8-play subscription, workshops and scripts (subscriptions are normally \$232). Six students were on full or partial scholarships.

Students read the script in advance and then, on a Sunday afternoon, participated as a group in a two-hour workshop in which they explored the play through speaking with actors, discussing its plot and themes and engaging in improvisation exercises, among other activities. The teens attended the plays as a group on a Thursday evening and stayed afterward for a talkback with the actors. Some teens followed up by blogging about their experiences.

In the Summerstage program of 2011, 20 students read and explored John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men," and then created their own piece of theater in response.

*On a Sunday evening, about 30 teens sit in a circle in a large room of the People's Light & Theatre complex, discussing the play Kidnapped!, an adaption of the Robert Louis Stevenson novel. The play's director, Samantha Bellomo, leads the group in a discussion about the play's themes, such as friendship. The teenagers appear engaged but they really perk up when one of the lead actors in the play, Luigi Sottile, comes in to speak with them. The young adults pepper him with questions. How did he prepare for his role? How did he learn his Scottish accent? What advice does he have for people who hope to be actors or directors?*

*Then, Bellomo tells them they are going to do improvisation exercises to better connect with the play. For the next several minutes, several teens rotate in and out of improvisation exercises based on the play with Sottile as their partner. Some students are so star struck that they are hard pressed to participate. But others leap at the chance to create a scene with a professional actor. In every case, Sottile gently and artfully builds off the teens' ideas for scenes and helps bring them to life. As the workshop comes to a close, the teens linger behind, chatting with one another, laughing and saying they will text each other soon.*

People's Light also sought to re-connect to people who had attended plays in high school from 1987 to 2009 through its longtime Arts Discovery program. To do so, theater staff contacted local high schools and ran advertisements solely on social media websites: classmates.com and Facebook. The ad asked viewers to fill out a survey for which they would receive two free tickets to a production at People's Light. In addition to the information gleaned from the surveys, staff conducted two focus groups of survey participants to delve further into alumni impressions of the program and its impact.

## Results

- **Some 55 teens participated in one or more of the STEP programs, which provided them with multiple-week programs to deeply engage in the theater's plays with their peers.** Theater staff said they see this project as a long-term effort to build audiences for the future.

"We do feel like there is this ripple effect of their involvement in the theater and a deeper role they will be taking," Moss said. "Another piece of the *Research Into Action* study noted that teens are at a critical point in their lives. By engaging with them you are developing an audience that will be there with you forever."

- **Some 564 alumni of the Arts Discovery High School program completed a survey about their experience (the project's goal was 750 surveys).** Among the findings were 50 percent of respondents remembered the names of plays they saw at People's Light and 74 percent believed that attending plays at People's Light in high school influenced their overall cultural attendance. One survey participant commented:

"As much as I did not want to enjoy the plays in high school I couldn't help but like them. If it wasn't for People's Light I would have no interest in theater."

Some 105 households redeemed vouchers for 235 tickets (about 10-15 households purchased additional tickets.)

### Challenges

The main challenge of the project was to reach alumni, especially through the avenue of high schools and classmates.com. As a result, staff decided to focus their efforts on locating alums through Facebook ads exclusively. The STEP program initially sought to attract 60-80 teens but staff said that the smaller number of 35 was probably better for group cohesion. The blog was not as active as staff had hoped, especially during the teen subscription program.

### Lessons Learned

- **Give teens the chance to create art, not just see it.** People's Light staff learned that the students who signed up for their STEP programs saw themselves as artists as well as audience members. They wanted to create work as well as being immersed in it as observers. People's Light communicated to the teens as artists and gave them multiple opportunities to create their art through short plays, improvisation exercises and blogging.
- **Help teens relate to plays through their own experiences, rather than ask them to dissect the character, plot and structure of a script.** In its pilot year of the STEP program (before the Engage 2020 funding), workshops focused on teens analyzing scripts but that approach did not engage them nearly as much as when they were asked to look for themes and relate those to their own experiences.

"The more connections you make with someone's life as a teenager, the more engaged they're going to be," Moss said.

- **Hold programs for teens on one night of the week, rather than two, to make it easy for them to participate.** It was sometimes difficult for teens to coordinate their schedules, and their rides, to get to People's Light twice in one week. In the current STEP program, People's Light holds the workshop and play attendance on the same night, with dinner included, to make it easy for teens to participate and add a social element.
- **Give parents a chance to participate.** Parents are eager to engage with their teens. People's Light created a parent liaison for the summer program who checked in with the director at the end of each day and synthesized material into a parent's blog that all parents could access. That way parents could participate without intruding on the student blog. It also gave parents a way to understand the project and discuss it with their teens.

### Next Steps

People's Light is continuing the teen STEP program for the 2011-2012 season with support from an area benefactor and others. Some 36 students are enrolled. The theater is also creating a Teen Ambassador program in which teens will be advocates for People's Light at their high schools. In addition, the theater is creating more structured internships for teens than they have in the past in order to help them gain experience in the arts by working in several departments at People's Light.

The theater plans to continue to interact with the alumni who responded to its survey with the goal of encouraging them to become season ticket subscribers.

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## Philadelphia Mural Arts Advocates

The [Philadelphia Mural Arts Advocates](#) is a 27-year-old organization whose mission it is to create murals that connect artists to communities. Some 1,500 murals exist in the city and more than 20 percent portray an aspect of African American history or culture.

### Project

The project was to curate a collection of Philadelphia's most iconic African American themed murals and create cell phone/podcast audio tours, new guided tours, a website, educational programs and participatory mural events. Mural Arts Advocates worked in partnership with the African American Museum in Philadelphia.

"We hope that this project makes the stories and message behind the murals accessible to new audiences," said Kathryn Ott Lovell, former chief advancement officer at the Mural Arts Program.

#### *Research Into Action Findings Used by Philadelphia Mural Arts Advocates*

- People of color are more engaged & growing in population. Arts and culture organizations need to adapt programming and marketing to accommodate changing demographics.
- Marketing is multi-channel. Cultural marketers have to rely on a mix of marketing media to reach consumers and close the sale.

### Activities

An advisory committee from the African American Museum in Philadelphia chose the 47 murals for the Albert M. Greenfield African American Iconic Images Collection. The criteria for inclusion were artistic merit, context in the community and educational or historical significance.

Among the murals chosen were ones of "Dr. J." Julius Erving, former Philadelphia 76ers basketball player and successful businessman; North Philadelphia heroes including Dr. Ethel Allen, the first African American city councilwoman; several neighborhood leaders as well as those that tell a common story, such as about urban horsemen, women of jazz, and a transformation from homelessness to a better life.

Project staff prepared an audio tour that includes artists, community members, academics and others discussing the significance of the murals. Ahmire "Questlove" Thompson of the hip hop group "The Roots" narrates the audio tour.

The tour was launched during African American History month in February 2011 with a kickoff event and free, abbreviated trolley tours of select murals. Guided tours were held the last Saturday of each month from the African American Museum. People who bought tickets to the tour also received admission to the African American Museum.



The tour is also available on the Mural Arts [website](#). In addition, the tour can be accessed through podcasts and cell phones and downloadable maps so that visitors and residents can take the tour throughout the city on their own. Mural Arts also launched a new smartphone app for the tour.

Mural Arts staff engaged in significant publicity efforts. For example, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News* featured the project in pull out sections the weekend the project was launched and a local television station ran 30 second public service announcements.

The staff and an educational consultant also developed lesson guides for teachers that are adaptable for K-12 classrooms and held a teacher education seminar on the tour.

## Results

- **For the Albert M. Greenfield African American Iconic Images Collection nearly 8,000 people visited the website, 754 downloaded the podcast, 224 downloaded an education guide, 1,424 people accessed the cell phone tour and 680 people participated in a guided trolley tour.**
- **The project represented the Mural Arts Advocates first curatorial collaboration with a museum and first effort to provide schools and parents with a free and in-depth interpretation guide and learning aid.** Those steps helped the organization expand its reach to new partners and audiences and gave it a model for how it might continue to foster community engagement with its collection of murals.
- **The project brought new audiences to the African American Museum in Philadelphia who might not have otherwise come without going on the mural tour.** To capitalize on the new visitors, the museum has begun offering workshops that ties into some of the tour's murals such as one on quilting and another on African dance and drumming.

## Challenges

The project was much more time consuming than staff anticipated. A marketing manager devoted almost full time to the project for several months. Staff at Mural Arts and the African American Museum said that the partnership was challenging at times because each organization had different perspectives and needs. For example, Mural Arts staff wanted to include a mural with Abraham Lincoln while museum staff raised concerns about the truth of Lincoln's legacy.

"The desire from Mural Arts was to have a celebratory tone about Abraham Lincoln but that's not necessarily how African Americans feel about him," said Adrienne Whaley, museum educator at the African American Museum who did much of the research for the audio tour.

The mural with Lincoln was eventually included in the tour with a narrative that made clear Lincoln's complex relationships with African Americans.

Project staff also faced challenges in engaging school groups on guided tours as planned because schools typically do not have budgets for these kinds of activities.

*When visitors or residents see the mural “Legacy” that depicts the legacy of slavery and abolition, they can use their cellphone or iPod to learn more about its creation and creation.*

*“...artist Josh Sarantitis chose powerful imagery to remind us of the enduring legacy of slavery and abolition,” says narrator Questlove. “On the left is the deck of a slave ship... where a skull-like African mask hovers, symbolizing the suffering caused by slavery. As you move to the right, the ship morphs into the bright red, white and blue of the American flag, signifying the transition from Africa to America, the grueling road from slavery to freedom. Below the girl are two medallions, featuring abolitionist, scholar and activist Frederick Douglass, and President Abraham Lincoln. Research has shown that Abraham Lincoln had a complex relationship with the moral and political meanings of African American slavery and freedom, and his letters, speeches and behavior over time reveal conflicting beliefs - or personas. Yet, Lincoln fought against the expansion of slavery in the growing United States and worked behind the scenes to ensure the passage of the 13th Amendment, which mandated an end to the slave system.”*

*“Sarantitis got help from elementary school students who were studying about Lincoln as part of their curriculum,” Questlove continues. “They came up with drawings for the mural.”*

Click [here](#) to see the mural and listen to the full audio.

### **Lessons Learned**

- **Create numerous avenues and levels of access so that people can engage with art according to their availability and preferences.** It is critical to develop multiple ways for people to engage from shallow to in-depth, short to long, expert mediated to self-mediated, out in the community to home on the couch. Mural Arts Advocates staff created several types of ways that people could interact with the African American mural collection.
- **Find media and marketing partners to get high visibility for similar efforts.** Well-respected partners can bring greater attention, larger audiences and needed revenue to arts organizations. The Philadelphia Mural Arts Programs partnerships with media organizations such as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News* and a local television station provided no-cost, far reaching coverage that brought audiences to the African American Mural Arts project who otherwise would likely have been unaware of it.
- **Seek partners in developing rich, multi-dimensional content and opening avenues to new audiences.** Partners can bring in needed new perspectives and content expertise to a project that can make it a deeper, more engaging experience for audiences. Staff at the African American Museum in Philadelphia provided the content for the audio tour and made sure that it was informed by a nuanced understanding of the neighborhoods in which the mural were located as well as the historical underpinnings. African Americans and African American-led organizations held prominent positions in this project, which provided credibility to new audiences that Mural Arts Advocates was trying to reach.

### **Next Steps**

The Albert M. Greenfield African American Iconic Images Collection will continue to grow as new murals are created. The Philadelphia Mural Arts Program anticipates adding a new mural created in collaboration with poet Sonia Sanchez and a new mural honoring The Roots.

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## Walnut Street Theatre: Inspiring Teens and Adults to Connect with Theater

[Walnut Street Theatre](#) is the oldest continuously operating theater in the country and is in its 203<sup>rd</sup> season.

### Project

The theatre's project was to engage 100 local high school students and one of their parents, mentors or guardians in a new, comprehensive subscription program for its 2010-2011 Mainstage Season. Theater staff hoped that the program would inspire parents to purchase tickets to the theater after the project ended and plant the seeds in high school students to become regular patrons of the arts as they entered adulthood.

#### *Key Research Into Action Findings Used by Walnut Street Theatre Corporation*

- People become more engaged in arts with the presence of children in the household.
- Adults who report having had mentors both inside and outside their family who introduced them to culture when they were children are more than twice as culturally engaged as those who had no role model (note: Walnut Street Theatre staff also saw teenagers as mentoring their parents).

### Activities

Walnut Street Theatre created a project in which high school students could apply to attend all five of the theater's Mainstage productions in 2010-2011 free of charge along with one parent or guardian. In an effort to go beyond simply providing free tickets, the subscription series included several elements to more deeply engage participating students. Chief among these elements was the expectation that each student would write a review or feature article about each play within a few days after attending. The theater partnered with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, whose editors agreed to run one or two student-written reviews or articles on each play. The theater posted selected reviews on its website as well.

Advertising through the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, high school announcements and Facebook, the program selected 100 high school students from 11 counties in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. Selected students and one of their parents received all the benefits of subscription tickets including the ability to change the dates they attended the play and receive discounted parking and restaurant meals as well as reduced cost theater classes.

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* provided a kickoff training for students on writing theater reviews. An educational consultant and Walnut staff developed a "junior press kit" for students for each play to provide them with facts about the show, interviews with cast members and the creative team and suggested topics for discussion and writing. The theater also created a blog where students could

post their thoughts on the plays as well as a public page that included select student reviews. The theater provided a mid-year and culminating event at the theater for students as well.

*On an early Saturday morning, high school students from around Philadelphia gathered at the Walnut Street Theatre to get an inside glimpse at the theater's current production of "Amadeus." As students and their parents partook of bagels and orange juice in the lobby, they spoke about their impressions of the program so far.*

*One young woman gave a comment typical of her peers: "This program opens up our generation to classical theatre, not just movies like 'Twilight.' We have been doing a lot of writing [in this program], not just going to the theater, which is pushing us to understand how the actors develop and what's going on behind the scenes. That's exciting!"*

*One mother said that the free tickets gave her and her daughter an excuse to go the theater, which they normally would not do in their busy lives. Another mother said that they had season tickets to Walnut but had not been attending much until this program.*

*The conversations were interrupted by a signal that the formal program was about to begin. For the next hour, attendees listened to and asked questions of the theater's Artistic Director and the lead actor who played "Amadeus." They also went on a backstage tour in which staff demonstrated, among other things, how they quickly changed sets during performances.*

## Results

- **Both students and parents indicated that participating in the program gave them a greater awareness of the art form of theatre.** It also brought many people who hadn't previously been to the Walnut to see productions, according to theater staff. Students said that the program helped improve their critical writing skills and that they used the suggested talking points in the study guides to converse with their parents or adult companion on the ride home. About half of the parents said that prior to the program were not engaged in the theatre. Some 80 percent indicated that they would have still participated in the program even if they had to purchase the subscription tickets.
- **Some 10 percent of the families who participated in the program purchased their subscriptions for their family in the 2011-2012 season for a total of 20 individual subscriptions.**

## Challenges

Students and parents spoke about a few areas that they thought could improve the program. The first was having more edgy plays that appealed to teenagers. One mother described the plays at Walnut Street as "old-fashioned and corny." Students also said that they wished they had more opportunity to interact with other students and see the development of plays at every stage.

Rob Weinstein, who oversaw the project, said that a few participants criticized the staff for only posting positive reviews of plays. Weinstein also said that the student blog was not nearly as active as staff had hoped, with only a few students regularly making posts to it.

### Lessons Learned

- **Create a partnership with a local media resource, such as a newspaper.** The opportunity to have their writing published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* appeared to be a strong incentive for continuing student engagement in the project. During the project, between 98 and 90 percent of students submitted articles or reviews for each play. Project director Rob Weinstein believes that the project would not have had such high student participation if the only outlet for their writing was the theater's website.
- **Provide a subscription program, rather than just free tickets, so that participants can experience the benefits of buying subscriptions.** "I think it's less likely that parents would buy subscriptions if they don't know the benefit of subscriptions," Weinstein said. "You don't really know the benefits until you experience them."
- **Create many opportunities for students to learn about the creation of art and interact with one another.** Students crave the chance to be with their peers and to learn more about the creation of art. In their feedback, students wanted more behind-the-scenes programs to learn about the creation and production of plays and more opportunities to meet with and interact with other students.
- **Provide a chance for parents to interact with their teenagers as a way to engage the parents in an arts organization.** The project challenged the idea that teens will not go anywhere with their parents. While the program was targeted to the students, parents relished the opportunity to play even a marginal role in the activities.
- **Maintain strong communication with the parents of each participant throughout a project.** While students are the main focus of such an effort, it is important to make sure that the dialogue with parents remains strong throughout the program as it is the parents who will be the ticket buyers once the program ends.

### Next Steps

With the support of its Artistic Director, the Walnut Street Theatre is using its own funds to continue the program on a smaller scale during the 2011-2012 season. The theater is providing tickets to 35 students and one parent to the dress rehearsal of each play. It is continuing to partner with *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and provide students with junior press kits and the opportunity to get feature articles published in the newspaper. Theater staff are applying for larger funding to enable them to provide the full program, with subscription benefits, in the 2012-2013 season.

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## Conclusion

The 10 Engage 2020 arts organizations in Philadelphia took on a challenge that is almost universal for arts organizations around the country: engage new and potential audiences in ways that are authentic and lasting.

Unlike other efforts that might be based on gut feelings or anecdotes, the work of the Engage 2020 organizations was based on extensive research conducted by the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. That research pinpointed ten key, actionable findings that arts organizations could take to deepen their relationships with their audiences.

Through this process, the arts organizations learned lessons that not only they can build on but other arts organizations can as well. Specifically:

- **Personal practice is a key way to involve current and potential audience members in the arts.** Seven of the ten Engage 2020 organizations involved people in some type of creation of art. Of all the Cultural Alliance's findings, this was the most common thread among the projects. Participating organizations tapped into a hunger among audience members to create art. Arts organizations can provide a space to fulfill that hunger, especially if they let go of some control.

New Paradise Laboratories (NPL) took this notion the farthest by creating an online space where visitors could create and post their own art without a direct relationship to NPL's productions. The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts similarly provided a space for children and adults to make art—an effort that exceeded the museum's own projections for attendance. The next steps for both organizations is to pilot ways that the audience-generated art can tie in more closely with the works produced or shown by them.

- **Parents want to find ways to be involved with their children, including teens, and creating and participating in art can provide an ideal opening for that interaction.** Three of the projects focused on bringing parents and children together; two of them involving parents and teens. While it might not be surprising that parents with young children leapt at the opportunity to participate in a fun weekend activity, it may be a bit more noteworthy how eager parents of teens were to find a way to engage with them. Parents in the Walnut Street Theatre project, for example, participated in all phases of the project, including attending special events and discussing the play with their teens afterward. The teens also seemed happy to have an organized event in which they could spend time with their parents.
- **Teens want to be involved in the creation and expression of art.** Three of the projects focused on engaging teens. A common thread was that teens wanted more opportunities to create, not just learn about art, and that they wanted to have more control over what that creation would look like. For example, all three projects tried to get teens to blog about their experiences; it mostly fell flat in each case perhaps because blogging is not a forum that teens normally use to communicate. Both the Walnut Street and People's Light project found, however, that teens did want more even more opportunities to participate in the



creation of art. People's Light is responding to that desire in part by creating structured internships for teens at the organization.

**It is important to focus on audiences already interested in the art that the organization is creating and offering, rather than simply cultivate “diverse” audiences for the sake of diversity.** Walnut Street Theater and People's Light Theatre focused on teens with some predisposition to the theater and created a project to help nurture that interest at a time in their lives when few such programs were available.

A few of the projects that sought to diversify their audiences in terms of racial, ethnic and age mix had disappointing results. First Person Arts staff learned, for example, that the goal of “diversity” was too broad. Instead, they needed to cultivate specific audiences that were already interested in storytelling and wanted to an opportunity to do more. Art Sanctuary staff learned, meanwhile, that while its largely African-American and Latino audience of teens might seem an ideal audience to engage in a project involving hip hop, not everyone knew much about or even liked hip hop.

- **People need a variety of ways to access and interact with an arts organization.** The more entrance points an organization can offer potential audience members, the more likely it may be that they will participate. For example, Mural Arts Advocates of Philadelphia created a number of ways that people could access its African American Mural Arts including self-tours, guided tours, watching the tour online and getting an educational guide.

Similarly, the Mendelssohn Club provided audience members who were interested in participating with a number of ways to do so including attending an open rehearsal, watching a YouTube demonstration and being part of a mini-rehearsal at the concert itself. Audience members could also opt out of all of these opportunities and decide not to participate or even attend.

- **Art organizations may need to go to the communities that they seek to cultivate first, rather than expect those communities to come to them.** If a community has never been involved with an art organization in the past, it may be too much of a leap to expect that people from that community will come to an unfamiliar and perhaps intimidating place. The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts staff found that they had to hold workshops in targeted communities five to ten times before they began seeing people from those communities come to the museum to visit or take classes. Similarly, First Person Arts staff went into the communities they sought to cultivate by holding story telling workshops and then following up with attendees to ask them to participate in its museum exhibit.
- **Working with any partner, while valuable, is extremely time-consuming and almost constitutes a project in and of itself.** While it is a truism that partnerships are difficult arts organizations may not fully understand how time-consuming it is to cultivate good partnerships. Five of the projects worked with a key partner—either an institution such as a school district or museum—or a consultant—to do their work. All found that while the partners brought valuable knowledge and connections, it took much more effort than they envisioned to develop good working partnerships. Many said that they underestimated the

time and repeated efforts it took to develop relationships that worked for them and their partners. Fairmount Park Art Association staff, for example, found themselves unable to move forward on their project because of delays by a consulting firm.

A common suggestion was to be clear on the goals of the project and to create memorandums of understanding with benchmarks to help keep a project on track. Another suggestion was to look for partners, such as schools or teachers, which are already inclined to support arts or to work collaboratively, rather than try to force a working relationship just because on paper it “should” work.

- **Social media and online forums can be an important a part of audience engagement efforts but they must be tied to “live” events.** New Paradise Laboratories (NPL) took full advantage of social media by building an interactive website for visitors. But staff found that its online audience did not necessarily attend its live events and that its audience at live events did not necessarily want to go online to see other, related content. Similarly, First Person Arts found that its live event drew a good response but that its website did not tie closely enough into the event, which limited the reach of its storytelling project. To make full use of social media, arts organizations found that they needed more closely link it with their events. Both NPL and First Person Arts are working on ways to create closer ties in the next iteration of this work.
- **The *process* of audience engagement can have a positive effect on an arts organization.** Simply by looking at one’s audiences in new ways—not just as passive recipients of arts—but as people who are interested and have a voice—arts organizations in Engage 2020 said they changed. The Curtis Institute of Music, which has not finished its project, has already piloted a successful audience engagement project aimed at young concert goers as a result. The Mendelssohn Club staff said that they are looking at all of their upcoming productions through the lens of audience engagement now. New Paradise Laboratories staff say that through their new online interactive presence, they have a new way to involve their audiences in creating content for their upcoming productions.
- **Audience development efforts take a long time and will unlikely show results in the first year.** While some organizations could point to increases in attendance as a result of their projects, most were relatively small. It remains to be seen if those increases are sustained. For virtually all of the organizations, audience engagement is something that will require an ongoing, concerted effort that staff members continually test and refine. One year or so of funding is a good start, but just a start, in for what some organizations may be a whole new orientation to their audiences.

All of the Engage 2020 organizations took risks and stepped out of their comfort zone to try new ways to connect with their audiences. Each one could point to successes and challenges along the way. For many, the most lasting effect of this project may be a re-orientation toward seeing their audiences in a new way--as active participants, as people with a variety of preferences in interacting, and as those who are eager to forge a new kind of relationship with art and those who create or curate it.