Association for Theatre in Higher Education

Focus Group Executive Summary

Prepared by: Sheri Jacobs, FASAE, CAE
President & CEO
Maria Berg-Stark, CMP
Director Strategic Marketing

August 20, 2014
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Overview</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbatim Responses</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) retained Avenue M Group, LLC (Avenue M) to conduct two membership research groups. The purpose of the research groups was to obtain feedback from members and non-members about ATHE’s organizational benefit offerings. The insight gained from this feedback will ultimately help ATHE continue to provide members with the information and resources they need to successfully support and advance the study and practice of theatre and performance in higher education.

*A total of 10 professionals participated in two focus groups during the ATHE Annual Conference held in Phoenix, Arizona July 24, 2014.

Membership Research Group Format

Avenue M asked participants a series of questions on the following topics:

- Decision to join
- Value of membership programs and services
- Future services
- Issues/challenges
- Level of involvement
- Organizational membership
- Other resources
- Recommendations and final thoughts

This report summarizes the primary themes that emerged during the group discussions. The verbatim conversations during the focus groups are included in this report following the Executive Summary.
1. What is your academic rank?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Theater</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. How many years have you been a member?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 2 years</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4 years</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following key findings emerged during the July 24, 2014 Phoenix, Arizona membership research group discussions:

New 2014 Key Findings:

Key Finding #1: Target key decision makers to promote the value of ATHE.
Customize communications to the senior academic management of educational institutions who make business and budget decisions on a daily basis. Some of these decisions are in response to arising opportunities, business challenges, academic issues or budget requirements. Address their concerns and promote ATHE as a resource for staff and organizational issues such as tenure (the ATHE Guidelines for Tenure Promotion).

“One of the things I think ATHE could do is to do target mailings and marketing to the deans of arts and sciences and humanities.”

“I have two older faculty members and they don’t need professional development. They don’t see value in why even I’m going, so that is challenging for me to try to get funding through our college/university when our other colleagues are saying it’s not beneficial.”

Key Finding #2: Engage new participants so they do not feel overwhelmed with their first annual meeting experience.
ATHE would benefit from implementing and promoting a new Ambassador Program to match new members and first-time attendees with experienced members in order to maximize new attendees’ experience. ATHE can make new members/attendees feel welcome by reaching out to them ahead of the convention, introducing them to other members, answering any convention-related questions they may have, and generally helping them navigate through the convention programs, highlighting the social activities and where to go and with whom.

“They should do mixers in the beginning where people aren’t able to sit with their friends. Because what I always do, those people know those people and are deep in conversation I don’t want to break in, so I have made it part of my goal as a representative to force people to at least meet other people.”

Key Finding #3: Promote discounted registrations earlier in the year to increase membership renewals. Faced with both shrinking budgets and limited time, it is essential to reach out as early as possible with save the date correspondence so not only time but funds can be allocated to attend the event. Promote what is new and different from the previous year in addition to the further enhance the value of early registration.

“I think that a discounted rate for members makes a lot of sense and it is an incentive every year for me to join. But I also agree that when I’m thinking about conferences, and I tend to do that earlier rather than later, there’s no information on there.”
“The conference information comes fairly late. For those of us who are applying for grants and things like that, my grant application is due a semester before I actually do it. If there’s no information it’s really hard to apply for a grant when I don’t know what the fees are.”

**Key Finding #4: Enhance the overall perception of ATHE by promoting cost versus value.**

ATHE must show accountability to members and institutions by demonstrating the value of its work, the impact of its advocacy, and cultivating alliances on behalf of the profession. Incorporate facts and statistics about advocacy efforts, best practices including member testimonials in both external and member communications.

“It’s the deans that decide on the funding, who decide on tenure and promotion. So if they know that “hey, ATHE is the tenure of theater,” that makes much more sense and makes our task of getting here and getting funding and contributing a lot easier. If (deans) have a piece of literature that says, “this is what ATHE is and you should support it because...” that’s gonna be great.”

“I think when faculty is involved then grads go. Grads tend to follow instructors to the organization quite frequently.”

**Key Finding #5: There is opportunity to better illustrate the value and benefits of an organizational membership.** ATHE should develop a strategy that builds member loyalty through a consistent price-value proposition. Promote and emphasize the access to peers, the professional community, resources and programs only available through ATHE.

“I was confused, my colleague did the paperwork for us. I thought once we paid the organizational membership that it benefitted one of us coming, and I paid the second fee, and the only benefit we got was the second fee, so what does that do for us? Maybe I just read it wrong but it just seemed odd.”

“I think the value in an organizational membership comes from the other things that ATHE is trying to develop in support of institutions year round like papers and tenure and research opportunities.”

**Key Finding #6: Educate members about the Leadership Institute some members are confused about when to begin participating.** Because the conference is so large and there is so much going on with focus groups, etc. members don’t have enough time to go to the institute or don’t have the time or finances to extend their stay in order to attend. ATHE would benefit from the development a short, concise overview of who should participate in the LI and why the time is an investment in their career.

“Not that I know what LI is, I know that I have other colleagues who come that you might really have something to offer those of us who are in theater for youth programs.”

**Key Finding #7: Advocacy continues to be important members.**

Members mentioned having to defend themselves to administration and the need to explain their value to justify their existence and “prove they are worthy.” Members suggest bringing in experts and people who have been able to successfully sell their value to upper administration.
“What this organization has done in terms of, there’s a program that’s threatened working with capitol hill with NEA funding, even the tenure and promotion, that’s all layers of advocacy and I think that’s a really important aspect association.”

“One could understand a particular part of ATHE’s mission as advocating for the continuation of theater in higher education.”

Comments Consistent from 2012 and 2013 Focus Groups:

Key Finding #1: Graduate school faculty and advisors are strongly influential in promoting ATHE and encouraging membership in the organization. The majority of focus group participants first learned about ATHE from faculty or advisors while they were in graduate school or getting their PhD. Faculty and advisors strongly encouraged membership in ATHE as well as presenting papers at the conference.

Key Finding #2: Importance of the conference. Members continue to value the information exchange with like-minded individuals at the annual conference and pre-conference; learning things that they can take back and apply in the classroom. Formal program presentation opportunities are beneficial to showcase professional skills and expertise. Other valued aspects of the conference of returning members include the focus groups, professional networking opportunities, ability to engage in conversation about curriculum, hearing about other disciplines, and the conference’s consistent focus on education.

Key Finding #3: Strong sense of community – a key benefit that members don’t get with other membership organizations. Members highly regard that sense of community felt within ATHE. Members indicated it is so important in a professional organization to feel those connections when collaborating with colleagues from all around the world. Members cited the relationships and friendships through the organization as the thing they would miss most if no longer a member.

“The fellowship, the relationships, it’s actually really wonderful but strange that there are people that I only see here. And those over the years have become vital friendships here, and I know those are people I can reach out to if I need to. And the other would be those inspirational panels and workshops.”

Key Finding #4: Value of social interaction/networking. Members highly value the informal social aspects of ATHE and share this fact with colleagues when describing the benefits of the organization. Members find the casual conversation at ATHE irreplaceable as it aids in professional development and is an avenue for idea generation and feedback that you can’t get “on the phone or email.”

Key Finding #5: Other strengths of ATHE: The Journal, listserv, job bank. Members also value ATHE’s job bank, listservs, and journals. Members feel the central bank of job announcements is an important service. They use the job board to help their graduate students going into the market, as well as for themselves when undertaking a job search. Members like being able to post questions on the listserv and the resulting help they receive from a wide variety of people.
Key Finding #6: Top issues in the profession – lack of funding. Although there are a number of factors that contribute to the ATHE member’s personal and professional challenges, the greatest factor discussed was the lack of funding and decreasing budgets. Members feel that they are expending lots of energy doing more with much fewer resources; finding it hard to deal with bigger workloads. In many cases, faculty is not being replaced when they retire or leave the institution resulting in much larger classrooms for members. Lack of funding has also contributed to the member’s ability to attend conferences since they may not have the resources to attend on their own.

Key Finding #7: ATHE website. Members consistently commented that the ATHE website should be more intuitive and easier to navigate. Although members find the website is better than it used to be, they feel improvements are still needed. Members enjoy going to the website to learn but find it hard to navigate and locate information.

“I check it periodically to see what’s out there I do the same thing with Art Search and the Chronicle. It’s important too for students, I can help my students out, or I can see if someone’s on the move. It would be good if it were easier to get to, if there weren’t quite so many steps to get to it. But yes, it’s useful.”

Key Finding #8: Reasons for volunteering: Members of ATHE volunteer to “give back,” contribute to and shape the direction of the conversation. Members enjoy volunteering and being active in the ATHE community. They feel personally and professionally rewarded by the experience.

[Being a mentor], it’s a way for me to give back. That’s why I do the Leadership Institute (LI). It puts me in communication with people across the country who are just the kind of support that young faculty, transitional faculty, people who feel they are in a lifeboat by themselves, really need.

Key Finding #9: New and established members are unaware of many existing ATHE programs and benefits. ATHE should develop short, concise informational communications and a special website section to educate and promote the organization’s existing membership benefits to increase value and awareness of programs and benefits.

“Embarrassingly I would probably say I don’t know what’s available sometimes… sometimes I forget what’s there.”

Key Finding #10: Different member types want ATHE communications and updates in different formats. Customize member communications based on member preference. Though members value ATHE news and updates, the method by which they chose to receive the information varied regarding emails, newsletters and Twitter feed. It should also be noted many would rather “go green” regarding receipt of the journals, while others still enjoy receiving hard copies via mail of the publications.
Moderator: What additional service or benefits would enhance your experience?

Respondent: Just growing the electronic communication that has really started the last couple years. I remember when we first started talking about websites, we were like “who knows how to do that?”

Respondent: I like the idea of the project, it’s almost like casting from the different focus groups, and putting them together and making them focus on a project.

Respondent: For me, the conference is basically it. And I was wondering, other organizations that I belong to have very vibrant newsletters. And I like the ATHE newsletter, but I think it could be more substantial. I think interviews, with people who are follow-ups from especially exciting panels from the conference. And maybe dialogues from the focus groups on common topics, or just interviews with very experienced people in the field. These are all things that I would find interesting and I think that would promote maybe a deeper comfort level for people who don’t have a long history with ATHE and haven’t been highly integrated in their conferences.

Moderator: Is anyone here using a discount registration for this conference?

Respondent: I suppose I did, the registration that gives you $100 toward your registration.

Moderator: Did this prompt you to join or renew your membership?

Respondent: It helped. I had to get several types of funding in order to be here, so it helped.

Respondent: I also did the discount, so I guess it helped. I’m new to this so I didn’t know I had to do the membership fee as well. I remember looking a lot to find out what the fees were so I could apply for funding, but it was a lot of work and wasn’t clear.

Respondent: I think that a discounted rate for members makes a lot of sense and it is an incentive every year for me to join. But I also agree that when I’m thinking about conferences, and I tend to do that earlier rather than later, there’s no information on there. The conference information comes fairly late. For those of us who are applying for grants and things like that, my grant application is due a semester before I actually do it. If there’s no information it’s really hard to apply for a grant when I don’t know what the fees are.

Moderator: What do you think are the benefits of an organizational membership?

Respondent: The discount that we’re taking advantage of is that our organization we can have one member go to a conference, so I’m not technically an ATHE member but I can go to the conference so that helps me out tremendously. If I had a colleague that wanted to join we’d have to figure that out. So that was a huge perk for our organization.

Respondent: I’m an outlier in that I’m the only full-time person and I maintain a membership in ATHE, and I think that’s because I believe in the organization and I think that’s a little bit that I can do because I do have a little more control over some budget issues. But it’s also a way to
make my institution a little more aware of ATHE in our department. For whatever reason, I am the only person within our department to be doing professional development.

**Moderator:** What benefits would you like added to the organizational membership?

**Respondent:** I want a golf cart! LOL

**Respondent:** A little bit more discounted conference rate. For some deans it’s worth it to see a list of members in their programs.

**Respondent:** I agree with that I think it’s a benefit to attract new faculty (as well for our institution) so they can see that we are members of this organization. The expectations are that you’re participating in professional development throughout your career even though that’s not the culture.

**Moderator:** What makes you want to renew membership?

**Respondent:** If I can afford it, it comes down to money.

**Respondent:** If we’re not going to the conference, there really is no benefit unfortunately.

**Respondent:** I’m in a unique position, my school has always supported my attendance it’s part of the budget. I have not missed a year since 1993.

**Respondent:** I would say the conference discount, but I like the fact that I get *Theater Journal* and a couple of other publications as part of my membership because I think that’s more than I get in my other professional memberships. And especially TJ was an important part of me getting my doctorate. That’s a perk I’m still surprised we get.

**Moderator:** Over the next year, if ATHE could focus on providing it’s members one thing to enhance experience, what would it be?

**Respondent:** I’d like to see a website where you could access every focus group with meaningful content without having to have signed up and been a member, so that the website becomes a real clearinghouse of information and introductions.

**Respondent:** Everything. One place.

**Respondent:** And what’s going to happen is every group is going to say, “wait we’ve got that”. Why do we need to offer ATHE all our content for their umbrella site? I don’t disagree, but that has been the argument in ATHE for years. I don’t disagree that it’d be very simple conceptually for now, the fact that we’re still maintaining membership for now in ATHE through focus groups, trying to maintain both the focus groups and ATHE is getting to a point where it’s just a little bit much to manage.

**Respondent:** I think it just comes down to making it easier to use. The website feels like it’s just been handed over and over to new people and it’s become amorphous. It’s constructed poorly, it’s not user friendly and it needs to be changed.
Respondent: I just came off a board where we went through this kind of transition, so we got new software and trained how to do that. It’s challenging, but it is working. Everyone recognizes that having that presence helps. I agree I think the focus groups are essential, but I think the one stop shop, grand central type, is so vital.

Respondent: Should it be a website that people want to visit frequently rather than that they have to visit frequently?

Respondent: The only reason I go is to try to get conference information.

Respondent: How would we professionalize the website? As ATHE continues to grow, is that the thing we need to do to take the organization to the next step? Now we have a professional development program, and they’re searching for a new director. What would happen if ATHE spent some money to build an office, what if we really professionalized it? What if the board allows the organization to professionalize?

Moderator: What would you miss if you were no longer a member?

Respondent: Regular contact with colleagues.

Respondent: Maintaining the network.

Respondent: I would miss fellowship.

Respondent: The fellowship, the relationships, it’s actually really wonderful but strange that there are people that I only see here. And those over the years have become vital friendships here, and I know those are people I can reach out to if I need to. And the other would be those inspirational panels and workshops.

Respondent: [Being a mentor], it’s a way for me to give back. That’s why I do the Leadership Institute (LI). It puts me in communication with people across the country who are just the kind of support that young faculty, transitional faculty, people who feel they are in a lifeboat by themselves, really need.

Moderator: Anyone else regarding the Leadership Institute?

Respondent: I’ve never done LI just because of the kind of organization where I’m employed it didn’t feel like it was the right, it wasn’t going to meet my needs even when I was chair.

Respondent: Not that I know what LI is, I know that I have other colleagues who come that you might really have something to offer those of us who are in theater for youth programs.

Respondent: Primarily it is for those of us who are going to transition into administration and you never know when you’re going to get the call to be a chair.

Respondent: I’ve always wanted to go but it’s always been on like a Monday and I’m trying to cut down the days at the hotel.
Moderator: Have any of you ever utilized the job bank?

Respondent: I probably will be soon.

Respondent: We’ve used the job bank. We were looking for a resident designer director. I convinced our administration they needed to use ATHE and USITT.

Respondent: I check it periodically to see what’s out there I do the same thing with Art Search and the Chronicle. It’s important too for students, I can help my students out, or I can see if someone’s on the move. It would be good if it were easier to get to, if there weren’t quite so many steps to get to it. But yes, it’s useful.

Moderator: What form of communication do you prefer for news and updates?

Respondent: Email.

Respondent: Email.

Respondent: Pony Express.

Respondent: I like letters! I like mail on paper. Because I have a file cabinet and I can keep it in a file and it says ATHE. I get so many emails and most of its crap and I delete stuff, and sometimes organizations emails go into my junk mail...send a letter, it’s nice.

Respondent: I think it is very helpful to have letters because I read them. But I also want more interactive content such as an email that comes with a video or something to participate in.

Respondent: Even if the website was a more user-friendly, like a video was added and every time we get an email there’s been an update to the website.

Respondent: I love paper, but ecologically the cost...that’s a high cost. I really appreciated getting the booklet as a hard copy, so I think they could target very specific things that could be good to get hard copy.

Moderator: What other sources of information related to your profession or advancing theater in higher education do you utilize?

Respondent: I read the Chronicle, I read Backstage, I read Art Search, TCG, I get the STC Journal, and when my colleague remembers to pass it along to me I read the USITT Bulletin.

Respondent: AATE.

Moderator: Any additional thoughts or comments?

Respondent: Although I love the Southwest, I really do enjoy it out here, I think that being a theater organization we should have conferences in places that have theater. We should have places that we can walk to places and take public transportation to places. It’s nice here and
everything and it’s great to have a pool but Chicago, New York, Washington, Portland, Toronto, out here you’re kind of trapped.

**Respondent:** It would be wonderful to have the conference be either on the front-set or on the back-set of a fringe festival, something that was related so we’d be encouraged to be here for more than just a week.

**Respondent:** Or integrate it. We are an organization that professes to be very community outreach oriented. It seems to me that integrating the theaters within the community would be a good thing to do because it would enliven the conference in a different way.

**Respondent:** I think that the conference organizers really need to be aware that we are theater educators and not millionaires, and the conference is pretty pricey and it takes funds to travel there, and be really conscious that we need to have other meal options not just the hotel. It’s really expensive and we should be able to walk out to a sandwich shop is just smart if they want people to continue to come.

**Respondent:** I also think there’s something dissonant about so many panels on community engagement and activism and working with disadvantaged groups and then we’re staying in a place like this.

**Respondent:** Over the years we’ve had many conversations about why we aren’t doing a university and wouldn’t that be cheaper, and the explanation is that it really would not be cheaper but I totally agree we need to be somewhere where we can walk to places and that we’re trapped here unless you have a car. So I think they need to consider this. I understand they’re booking things two three or four years in advance and we have to work with that, but I think being able to go outside and walk to restaurants and where the is theater should be part of the consideration when we choose locations.

**Respondent:** I wish there could be a larger presence of publishers. I would take advantage of that.

**Respondent:** I’ve said from the very beginning that I would love to see the conference evaluations raw data when they get them. It would be interesting to see what the numbers are. Everything we’ve already said is right on the money. I think what the organization has to do, because they do recognize the issues with the cost and isolation that they need to do a better job of facilitating how you bring theater to the conference. If that’s what we’re trying to do, whatever that is, whether it’s trying to figure out a way to interact with local organizations, it doesn’t always have to look the same. The conference doesn’t always have to be panels and presentations and three people reading.

**Respondent:** I’ve been to significantly more workshops and performance, but is there any way to have something that is a little bit more of a reading or less than a full performance, even if they get here early on so I feel like I’ve seen a week of theater.

**Respondent:** I think what the conference planners need to do, whether the conference committee or board or whatever, how could we have brought more to this island?
**Respondent:** They need to be thinking about that as they plan the next one.

**Respondent:** We do production on a regular basis even if you are a theater historian at some part you did theater. How can we build a conference that values the doing of the thing that it is that we love that got us into this profession, how can a conference reflect those ideals?

**Respondent:** At ASTER, and as I understand it was the first time they tried anything like this, but they were trying to incorporate more performance, and they had performances in the hallways in-between when you’re walking to different things, I was a part of some of them. It’s silly but at the same time it was very engaging and it made everywhere we went buzz, and you just stop for a moment and remember on why you’re there.

**Respondent:** We have to be inventive every time we plan a conference. In Washington, on the mall, there was buzz, not only from the conference and even from tourists. That’s value.

**Focus Group – PM Session**

**Moderator:** What is the primary reason you or your organization joined ATHE?

**Respondent:** I’ve only been with my organization a couple of years. I’m somewhat at a loss to know exactly why it was originally, but I’m assuming that my predecessor is currently fairly active in the ATHE, so I’m assuming it was because of that. She was active in it, so our school was active in that to a degree so we’ve just continued to maintain it. Last year we didn’t actually join as a member, primarily because I didn’t know. It was inherited.

**Moderator:** What were you told about it?

**Respondent:** I’ve been individually a member on and off for the last twenty years, so I’m totally familiar with the organization, but this is the first time I’ve ever been a part of an organizational membership.

**Respondent:** I had just left my institution we were not an organizational member so I’ve been an individual member for the last twenty years. I joined originally for two reasons: networking and jobs, and for pedagogy…the learning and developing techniques for teaching.

**Respondent:** To have the opportunity to present paper or be on a panel, to better my resume for tenure and promotion.

**Moderator:** How have your needs changed since your first joined?

**Respondent:** I no longer need tenure and promotion. So my needs are totally different, and I don’t necessarily, as I said, it’s been sporadic because I didn’t always need it. I haven’t been to an ATHE conference in a decade. I have visited when it’s near a city that I’ve been living near, and I’ll slip in and see friends…this is anonymous right? How many times is that actually done? You just slip in and see people and slip back out.

**Respondent:** My needs changed because I’m technically retired, I had to leave the institution I was at I couldn’t be in that area anymore. So, and I was tenured and I have done a lot of
networking and know a lot of people here, but it’s well established at this point if I need something I know someone who knows somebody. Practically any city I visit now I can go to a theater department and see a colleague I met at a conference. I’ve been very busy in one focus group for the last seven years, and so my opportunities to get out and go to other sessions I’m looking forward to being able to do that again. I would like to get back to going to the pedagogy sessions and maybe actually presenting a paper, I’ve never actually presented my own paper I’ve presented research and directed panels.

**Moderator:** How would you describe your ATHE membership to someone who is unfamiliar with the organization?

**Respondent:** I believe in the organization, I believe in higher education, and I have talked it up to a lot of people that I know haven’t come or are in the early stages of their profession because I have had a good time here, I’ve enjoyed the papers I’ve heard and people I’ve met. It can be a very valuable professional organization and it’s international. I think it can be really invigorating and challenging going into the next school year.

**Respondent:** I’ve always found ATHE beneficial and it’s prestigious enough that it still looks good, especially for young academics getting started, it’s an ideal place to come and be fed and encouraged. There’s programs for new faculty which is valuable I think, and if I had the opportunity to do that when I was that age I think it would have considerably helped me move through academics smoother than I have. That’s absolutely what I would tell someone when I have the opportunity.

**Moderator:** How is ATHE perceived by colleagues in your department, what could ATHE do to enhance that perception?

**Respondent:** Thinking of the people that I would consider my colleagues, respectfully, something like that would be nice to go to. I don’t know really what could be done necessarily for those particular people, maybe just proximity. People in the summertime do other things or do nothing.

**Respondent:** Timing is an issue sometimes. When I’m acting, several seasons I can’t get here because I’m acting. I spent most of my career teaching in the southeast, and the Southeast Theater Conference is a big deal, and it’s in March and I can get there a lot easier than in the summer. That was typically for me the one I would go to instead of this one unless the proximity was too good. And I would imagine most of my colleagues there felt the same way.

**Respondent:** I don’t remember how I first learned of ATHE back in the early 90s, and I was at Alabama, and I don’t remember anyone from Alabama going to this conference, I don’t remember how I heard about it.

**Respondent:** My past chair when I was in graduate school was president, so we knew about it early on.

**Respondent:** I think when faculty is involved then grads go. Grads tend to follow instructors to the organization quite frequently.
Moderator: What do you find unique about ATHE and what needs improvement?

Respondent: I do think that the quality of what is presented typically, I’ve always been impressed. It does tend to be more theoretical in its approach to topics than a practical approach.

Respondent: I’ve been to the VASTA conference and I stopped going because I wanted to learn how to teach and I found more of that here, because a focus group officer is actually practical... I think it draws people from every part of the country and Canada and international. I’ve gone to USITT a few times and it’s all tech; ATHE has always worked to get people included and get everyone to know each other and find interests and have receptions, that may be unique. I don’t go to the ASTR conferences and all those really academic conferences that are just about papers, so that’s what’s unique to me it is that I know people.

Moderator: What additional services or benefits would enhance your membership experience?

Respondent: Group health insurance!

Respondent: Embarrassingly I would probably say I don’t know what’s available sometimes... sometimes I forget what’s there. For me, I’m in such a transition mode that I could even say, other than a group discount on health insurance, but I just came out of a meeting this morning about how can we communicate better and what can we do, and it’s just about always remembering to communicate with the membership proactively. Sometimes the officers forget how recently things go out. Staying in touch with people becomes sporadic I’ve never been sought out as to why I’m not a member. I was on the membership and marketing committee, and we’ve had that discussion of why do people stop coming, what are we not doing?

Moderator: Did you use a discounted membership registration fee? Did it prompt you to renew your membership?

Respondent: I was going to do it anyway, but I have actually retired so I took the retirement cost this year to save money. Living in Phoenix, it helped that the conference was here if it was New York I might not have gone. My university has been paying for it for the past 15 years.

Moderator: What do you think are the benefits of an organizational membership?

Respondent: I was confused my colleague did the paperwork for us. I thought once we paid the organizational membership that it benefitted one of us coming, and I paid the second fee, and the only benefit we got was the second fee, so what does that do for us? Maybe I just read it wrong but it just seemed odd.

Respondent: I think the value in an organizational membership comes from the other things that ATHE is trying to develop in support of institutions year round like papers and tenure and research opportunities. It at least implies that there’s a little more selection in the work that’s done. Institutional memberships help validate the organization. There’s a lot more we could do for organization members to help. Help them advocate for the arts and art education.
**Respondent:** I have used the statements about what ATHE believes in and what is necessary and the expectation, and I’ve used that even this last year to show presidents and deans what we expect, because I wouldn’t expect them to know they just need to be reminded sometimes. So I do come to the website time because it’s laid out with nice verbage.

**Moderator:** What benefits if any would you like seen added to the organizational membership?

**Respondent:** That would be nice if it would include more people from the department other than just one or two in getting here. Primarily because of the proximity of this location to where our school is, we could have brought more people perhaps. That’s just one little small aspect. As far as benefits on a larger scale I just can’t say.

**Respondent:** We talk about a lot of these things in various meetings, and I think some of the ideas that came up this morning: training and sessions for deans and chairs. I think ATHE has the opportunity for some during the year activity for people to go present at panels or workshops at ACTF for faculty, for faculty development and pedagogical development and establish that link. And the faculty will choose to go to the conference because they will get some of that, I think ATHE could reach out and provide more to faculty.

**Moderator:** What specifically makes you want to renew or not?

**Respondent:** Things I have done during the year have been responsibilities to come to the conference, but other than that I tend to not think about ATHE during the year. So to me the membership is part of the cost of going to the conference. You either pay the membership and the member’s price, or the non-members price that is more than the membership plus the member’s price.

**Respondent:** I don’t know that I would have come this time had someone not asked me to do a panel and when it got accepted, and I was like “ah... I gotta go.” Over the years I have not found it beneficial personally, I’ve only used it to pad the resume.

**Moderator:** When was the last time you were a member?

**Respondent:** Where was the conference?

**Respondent:** I think the last time was in Chicago.

**Respondent:** My first one was in Atlanta and the next time was in Philadelphia. It’s one of those when it works into my summer, yes. Planning has to start early, and if I’m going to get a gig that pays me to perform I’m going to do that instead of paying someone else.

**Respondent:** I think if I had as a younger faculty, if I had had an opportunity to go more often, then I would, like you had said you establish a network of colleagues, but I didn’t go that often so I don’t have that network of colleagues. And it’s only when my colleagues suggest to do a paper, but I went through the list today and I don’t know anybody anymore.
Respondent: I floundered for a lot of years coming to conference before I got involved in a particular focus group. Theater dance is what I enjoy, so I voiced my personality on them, but to just come here by yourself and wander around, people are friendly but it takes a long time to get that sense of acceptance into the community.

Respondent: When there are so many focus groups, I feel like I don’t know which one I belong to.

Respondent: They should do mixers in the beginning where people aren’t able to sit with their friends. Because what I always do, those people know those people and are deep in conversation I don’t want to break in, so I have made it part of my goal as a rep to force people to at least meet other people.

Moderator: If you could choose one thing that ATHE could provide it’s members over the next year what would it be?

Respondent: Group health insurance!

Respondent: I think a broadening of our communication as an organization so we’re not just preaching to ourselves all the time. I’d like to see us reaching out to the profession. My friends in the profession think academia is a joke. Not that learning is a joke, but as far as preparing for the real world that it’s a joke. So making our voice heard and publishing articles in the Chronicle or New York Times that have the byline of ATHE, they put together a nice response to an article in the times that was degrading MFAs in acting, but we can’t be reactive we have to be proactive. Send people out to other conferences and make it known that we are a gathering of people that teach all levels of theater in higher education and there’s value in that.

Respondent: I don’t know if there is an arm of ATHE that really is advocacy at a higher level, I’ve never heard of it.

Respondent: It’s kind of there but it’s more in support of and trying to be in support of diversity. I think we could be a bigger voice in just the arts and theater specifically to non-theater people. When CNN’s doing a story on theater in higher education they come to ATHE to ask questions- we should be that resource for the outside world.

Respondent: Being a lobby group is just not there.

Respondent: Lobby or whatever, but being a proactive lobby rather than reactive. I’d just like to see us be that body that outside places turn to when they want to know something about theater in higher education.

Respondent: I think being more vocal. What I was thinking of before was I don’t even know what other schools in my state would be organizational members. I don’t know the people. But it wouldn’t be a wish to make this do something that it’s not meant to be. There are already so many conferences at state or regional levels.
**Respondent:** There was a discussion to try to get a conference for undergrads but they've got their conference called KCACTF. There's things for undergrads this needs to stay in the realm of faculty and graduate students. That's my preference.

**Moderator:** What would you miss if you were no longer a member?

**Respondent:** The people and the stimulation. I'm wowed every time I come here. I've developed some friendships and if I don't continue to come here those will naturally diminish.

**Moderator:** Have you participated in the Leadership Institute?

**Respondent:** I have not, the reason was that at the time, let's see, I don't know when it became something, and when I needed it wasn't there, this was like twenty years ago. And when it came to be I wasn't interested because I was leaving higher education, and now I'm back. Could I use it now? I don't know, maybe.

**Respondent:** I did it one year I was not a chair and was seeing that as a career path for me. I thought not only would it be information but a certificate on my vita, and it was, but honestly I got very little out of it. My mentor didn't recognize me the next year, and because I didn't really have specific concerns because I wasn't a chair yet, I really had nothing to bring up to ask my mentor so to speak. And most of the stuff they went over I had had in one form or another in another kind of venue. It didn't really do much for me. I know people have benefitted greatly from it, so I don't necessarily want to see it go away, but it was not money well spent.

**Moderator:** Have you used the job bank?

**Respondent:** I've looked at it. Usually the jobs I see there I've already seen somewhere else. Or I already have that institution on my radar. I can't remember that I've actually applied to any that I've seen there. I might have seen a notice then gone to that schools website.

**Respondent:** I may have looked at it but never used it.

**Moderator:** If you were looking or posting?

**Respondent:** I think I would go through the Chronicle or Higher Ed Jobs, or send a notice out to schools. I keep forgetting that it's there.

**Respondent:** Same for me.

**Respondent:** *Art Search* is one that I would go to.

**Respondent:** I got *Art Search* for years, but was not finding anything unique so stopped spending the money.

**Moderator:** What type of communication do you prefer to learn about things from ATHE?

**Respondent:** Email. And what I've been getting over the last two weeks regarding this conference is probably more information than I've ever gotten.
Respondent: Absolutely electronically. I rarely crack a journal when it comes anymore.

Respondent: I can’t handle what I can’t read in paper, it just makes me anxious, but I can get things quickly- and I have not been a member in a while so I don’t know what has been happening- but from the international theater research I attended last year, I get monthly updates, just notices of things. If I choose to read them out of curiosity I will open it up, but if things are backlogged I’ll delete. But I get monthly updates from that organization now, and if I have a colleague that needs to see it I can forward it immediately.

Moderator: What other sources do you use to get information related to your profession or advancing theater in higher education?

Respondent: American Theater Magazine. I try to read it as much as possible. Chronicle, every morning. Try to stay abreast of some of the things going on in higher education.

Respondent: Whatever comes through my email. I’ll go to my colleague’s office to get her copy of American Theater… If I get a hard copy of something I thumb through it.

Moderator: Any other thoughts or comments?

Respondent: The last three times they’ve done this, I’ve done this. So I find it odd, I’d think they’d be sick of my opinion, I’m not sure why I keep getting asked to do this.

Respondent: I think I’m probably not a good person to ask, but I would like to see more practical things rather than reading of papers that I find useless.