IMPACT REPORT

NOVEMBER 10–12  NEW YORK CITY

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We hear the phrase “sea change” being invoked time and time again to describe the current state of the theatre field, and the profound phase of transition we find ourselves in with respect to our leadership as well as our audiences. With a charge to seize the opportunities presented by this period of transformation, and a penchant for nautical metaphors, TCG convened the national theatre community in November for the 2017 Fall Forum on Governance: Turning the Tide.

Turning the Tide programming followed three interconnected tracks, each of which approached questions of organizational and field-wide sustainability through a different lens: succession and leadership transitions; audience and community engagement; and reimagining the nonprofit theatre business model. After a poignant opening reception in which the Civilians paid musical tribute to the late composer Michael Friedman, we kicked off the weekend on Saturday morning with a riveting presentation from one of our own. Roche Schulfer, executive director of Goodman Theatre, laid the groundwork for the entire Forum with his engaging and informative talk, “Why Not-for-Profit Theatre?”, which meticulously illustrated the longstanding challenges of the traditional business model of our field.

For the remainder of the weekend, 240 attendees heard from: field experts in engagement and community development; colleagues doing radical work in shifting their institution’s approach to engaging marginalized audiences; a panel of field leaders on their recent experiences of transition into leadership roles; and each other in peer-led affinity spaces with focused conversations on challenges specific to their professional roles. Trustees participated in a lunch session centered on equity, diversity, and inclusion in leadership searches and succession planning, and attendees were invited to gather for breakfast conversations on the complexity of transition in founder-led organizations, as well as the need for gender equity in theatre leadership.

Breakout sessions fell under two umbrellas: STEER THE SHIP, which highlighted innovative new case studies and practical approaches to overcoming some of the hurdles most confronted on our three tracks; and ROCK THE BOAT, which provided generative space for collective problem-solving and ambitious group thinking. From instructive lectures on the emergence of adaptive leadership, to model-sharing of nontraditional search processes, to a panel of millennial leaders discussing their generation’s unique contribution to the field, the conversations that unfurled were rich and impactful for attendees in all roles. As one trustee put it: “The word ‘thoughtful’ applies. It was full of thought.”

As the many new thoughts and ways of thinking that arose from the Fall Forum find their way into upcoming TCG programming, we are grateful to those who embarked with us in November, filling our sails with hope and energy for the adventures ahead.

Teresa Eyring
Executive Director

Adrian Budhu
Deputy Director
& Chief Operating Officer

Devon Berkshire
Director of Conferences
& Fieldwide Learning

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FALL FORUM IN NUMBERS

INCLUDING:

85 TCG MEMBER THEATRES represented

48 SPEAKERS

20 SESSIONS and DISCUSSION GROUPS over 1.5 days

16 TCG AFFILIATES

15 SCHOLARSHIPS and SUBSIDIES awarded to attendees

240 ATTENDEES
The Civilians’ Tribute to Michael Friedman
Designed and introduced by Steve Cosson, Artistic Director, The Civilians.
With opening remarks from Teresa Eyring, Executive Director, TCG;
Shanta Thake, Director, Joe’s Pub at The Public Theater; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director, The Public Theater.
“I propose that if you are going to appropriately compensate theatre practitioners, wages must increase by at least the cost of living. If you are going to make tickets accessible to the broadest possible audience, tickets must increase by less than the cost of living. Because if the audience at larger theatres consist of only those who can pay 90 dollars plus, we are not serving our entire community.”

—ROCHE SCHULFER

“When it comes to contributions [over the last ten years] we have seen 59.7% growth in individual contributions. If you stripped out the amounts earmarked for capital campaigns it would still be 19% growth. I mean, these are substantial amounts of growth for people giving money to theatres.”

—ZANNE VOSS

SATURDAY PLENARY SESSIONS

BLESSING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE LAND
Joan Henry, Tsalagi (Cherokee) Elisi

HIGHLIGHTS FROM TCG’s THEATRE FACTS 2016
Zannie Voss, Director, National Center for Arts Research

WHY NOT-FOR-PROFIT THEATRE?
Roche Schulfer, Executive Director, Goodman Theatre, in conversation with Vickie Reiss, Executive Director, Shubert Foundation, and Zannie Voss

“This was such a clear and accessible explanation at a top level of the challenge we all face. I had one board member whispering in my ear and another texting me throughout the meeting. We collectively geeked out on it and it will save me time explaining so much to so many on my board. Really one of the best presentations I’ve been to.”

—Mike Schleifer, Managing Director, Alliance Theatre

“I want EVERY board member to hear this speech.”
—Erica Daniels, Managing Director, Victory Gardens Theater
“Now more than ever cultural diversity must become a cornerstone of all facets of the arts industry, and that’s why it’s so important that those of us in this business take responsibility for cultivating a generation of leaders who not only love the arts but who are committed to multiculturalism and community collaboration.”

—DONNA WALKER-KUHNE

“I found Donna’s specific examples of what can be done to further advance audience engagement insightful...and I appreciated the examples of innovative approaches she shared.”

—Lynette Turner, Senior Associate, AMS Planning and Research

“This was a very enlightening conversation about how to really consider the challenges in working with new communities and how we need to practice what we preach. It actually provided concrete examples of where we can go wrong due to the nature of the theater business and what we need to do to improve.”

—Kate Liberman, Managing Director, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival

SPONSORED BY Audience(R)Evolution
A multi-year program designed by TCG and funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

ARTFUL ENGAGEMENT: STRATEGIES TO EXPAND DIVERSE PARTICIPATION
Donna Walker-Kuhne, Founder, Walker International Communications Group

A DEEPER DIVE: ARTIST-LED ENGAGEMENT IN SERVICE OF COMMUNITY
Larissa FastHorse, Playwright and Co-Founder, Indigenous Direction; David Stewart, Director of Production, Guthrie Theater; Donna Walker-Kuhne; Facilitator: Raymond Bobgan, Executive Artistic Director, Cleveland Public Theatre

“What we’re trying to do is be proactively reactive. And that is a chance for us to kind of stop, listen to what is going on, and react to the needs of the community who are coming to our doors.”

—DAVID “DSTEW” STEWART

SATURDAY PLENARY SESSIONS
“How are you a visionary? How can you inspire people to follow your lead? How can you be sympathetic and empathetic in your leadership style while you’re also doing all of this running of a complex organization?”

—MEGHAN PRESSMAN

“I don’t think we can really make a cultural shift until we have leadership behind that [Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion] lens to really guide the conversation.”

—NIJEUL X. PORTER

“We shouldn’t be thinking about the thing that we had, we should be thinking for ‘where are we going?’”

—DAVID SCHMITZ

SUNDAY PLENARY SESSIONS

SEA CHANGE: RETHINKING LEADERSHIP AND TRANSITIONS IN A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR THE FIELD

Snehal Desai, Producing Artistic Director, East West Players; Nijeul X. Porter, artEquity Strategist/ SOZE Producer; Meghan Pressman, Managing Director, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company; David Schmitz, Executive Director, Steppenwolf Theatre Company; Moderator: Emilya Cachapero, Director of Artistic Programs and ITI-US, TCG

“LOVED this session. Very open, honest, insightful. Important to hear about the ‘system’ and how it doesn’t welcome processes outside of that system. How important it is for us to recognize we live within that system and must keep questioning ourselves.”

—Kristen van Ginhoven, Artistic Director, WAM Theatre

“I believe that every theatre is also a social justice organization. So the question is: to what degree do you embrace that and then turn that up as part of your values and mission?”

—SNEHAL DESAI
The 2017 Fall Forum featured eight breakout sessions, between 75 and 90 minutes in length. Saturday’s sessions, under the theme *Steer the Ship*, highlighted innovative new models, case studies, and practical approaches to tackling some of the challenges most confronted on our three programming tracks: managing successful leadership transitions; sharing new strategies in audience engagement and community development; and rethinking the traditional business models of our field. Sunday’s sessions, *Rock the Boat*, took leaders and trustees to the 30,000 foot view and explored our three programming tracks on a macro level. Session leaders asked big questions, exploded traditional frameworks, encouraged grandiose thinking, and inspired generative discussion around the possibility of major field-wide change.

**SATURDAY: STEER THE SHIP**
Leading in a Complex World: The Case for Adaptive Leadership

“I thought this session was INCREDIBLY useful. It gave me info I needed and inspired thought for how I lead.”

—David Schmitz, Executive Director, Steppenwolf Theatre Company

**SUNDAY: ROCK THE BOAT**
The Transition Process: Empowering New Leaders as Agents of Change

“Very engaging! Great perspectives, and interesting space to talk about being ‘new’ in a position...and a catalyst for change.”

—Marissa Hutton, General Manager, Dorset Theatre Festival
PROFESSIONAL AFFINITY GROUPS AND OTHER SESSIONS

For the first time at the Fall Forum on Governance, we offered an opportunity for attendees to gather by their professional identity (a mainstay of our annual National Conference). In addition, we introduced a working session around Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion specifically for trustees as many of their theatres address the sweeping leadership change happening in the non-profit theatre field. In addition, we offered special topics meetings on Gender Equity in the Field, Disaster Management at Your Organization, Leadership Transitions at Founder-Led Organizations, and more.


“It really was a great first time experience. I will never never miss another Fall Forum again. The networking was incredible.”

—Teresa Coleman Wash, Executive Artistic Director, Bishop Arts Theatre Center

Save the Dates for the 2018 Fall Forum on Governance
November 9–11, 2018 in New York City!