

Audience (R) Evolution

GUIDING PRINCIPLES & FOLLOW UP REPORTING

Grant Program Overview

Developed by **Theatre Communications Group (TCG)**, with funding provided by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the **Audience (R)Evolution** program is designed to study, promote, and support successful audience engagement and community development strategies in the not-for-profit professional theatre community.

To reflect and support art-making and community-building, Round 3 grantmaking will have the specific focus of audience engagement and community development as they relate to theatre for youth and multigenerational audiences.

While the definition of “youth” and “multigenerational” can be subjective, in the context of the **Audience (R)Evolution** program, “youth” is defined as audiences/communities averaging 18 years of age and under; and “multigenerational” audiences/communities consist of, relate to, and/or involve two or more generations. Proposed projects aimed at engaging multigenerational audiences/communities must include those defined as youth by this program.

This round seeks to inspire and challenge theatres to develop meaningful partnerships and artistic work in an effort to better understand and fuel the apparent growth trend in attendance at events for young and multigenerational audiences. This round also encourages applicants to consider the benefits of cross-cultural, cross-sector and/or cross-discipline ways of making theatre.

Cohort Grants of \$75,000 or \$150,000 will allow teams of three or more organizations, one of which must be a TCG Member Theatre (that must serve as the Project Leader) to implement and refine ways to increase audience engagement and community development in theatre for youth and multigenerational audiences. Cohorts should share similar needs and interests to implement audience engagement and community development strategies. Cohorts can be based on budget size, region, aesthetic, or other common interests and collaborating partners may be cross-cultural, cross-sector and/ or cross-discipline. These grants are intended to have a seismic impact on the participating theatres, as well as the field at large, by building audiences for theatre through projects that lead to new, more frequent, and increased audience and community participation.

Exploration Grants of up to \$5,000 will allow teams of TCG Member Theatre staff and/or community stakeholders to observe effective audience engagement and/or community development programs or consult with professionals who can advise on strategies to deepen relationships with communities served by the theatre. Grant activities will focus on peer-to-peer and field-wide learning as they relate to theatre for youth and multigenerational audiences. The program also encourages applicants to consider the benefits of cross-cultural, cross-sector and/or cross-discipline ways of theatre-making. These grants are intended to serve as a catalyst for deeper field-wide relationships between Applicant Theatres and those being observed.

At the core, **Audience (R)Evolution** supports risk-taking, reflection, experimentation, and collective action toward implementing new strategies that will help theatres sustain and grow attendance and demand.

The following information is intended to assist applicants as they assemble their **Audience (R)Evolution Cohort Grant** proposals.

For more information about these grant programs, and information on how to apply, please visit:

[https://www.tcg.org/Grants/GrantsAtAGlance/Audience\(R\)Evolution/Description.aspx](https://www.tcg.org/Grants/GrantsAtAGlance/Audience(R)Evolution/Description.aspx)

If you have any questions about the composition of your cohort, or the eligibility requirements, please contact TCG at AudienceRev@tcg.org prior to submitting an application.



AMS Audience-Engagement and Community-Development Case Studies

Round One of the program took place from 2012 to 2015. TCG engaged AMS Planning & Research, a national arts management consulting firm, to create a report based on field surveys and a series of case studies spotlighting audience development strategies identified by AMS at eight theatre companies. The goal of the report was to:

- Develop a shared vocabulary around audience engagement.
- Explore audience engagement models and understand how/why the best work.
- Share these successful models with the field.

As part of the research effort, AMS compiled data and prepared case studies on eight theatre companies that have incorporated audience engagement as a fundamental component of their service delivery and institutional mission. The eight participating theatres were:

Arkansas Repertory Theatre, Little Rock, AR

HERE Arts Center, New York, NY

Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, CT

Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, OR

Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, IL

The Theater Offensive, Boston, MA

Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Washington, DC

Youth Speaks, San Francisco, CA

AMS's research focused on understanding "success" for the theatres' audience-engagement efforts and comprehending the journey and outcome of their efforts. The case studies tell the organizations' stories by way of institutional insight, qualitative and quantitative data, and personal perspective during the period of the study.

In October 2018, building on the original Round One case studies, TCG and writer Ben Pesner developed the **Case Study Follow-Up Report**. This report re-visited seven of the eight original theatres studied by AMS and included a mini-report on two additional organizations selected by TCG: **Hattiloo Theatre** in Memphis, TN, and **Trinity Repertory Company** with Spectrum Theatre Ensemble in Providence, RI.

This new report describes how the strategies discussed in the original case studies have evolved over the past five years. While much has changed, the strategies persist as the tactics through which the companies implement them have grown, transformed, or even been completely reinvented. The focus in the report is on the work the theatres are doing now; on what audience engagement strategies are working for them, and what still needs to be worked on; how they sustain this work; and how they are currently striving to improve it.

Major Findings/Lessons Learned

AMS identified a number of key findings that grew out of the findings detailed in the case studies. These include:

- Audience engagement and community development look very different at different theatres. There is a broad spectrum of strategies, approaches, and practices.
- Different strategies and activities are best suited for different audiences. Embrace and celebrate the diversity of your community, and adjust accordingly.
- Audience engagement takes time—especially when it comes to trust-building.
- Spend time outside your theatre’s building, and outside of your comfort zone. Says Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s Freda Casillas, “You must go out and meet ethnic-specific leaders in your community. Not just one meeting; it takes many encounters. Start in your own backyard. Say hello.”
- “Acts of engagement and creation are the same,” says The Theater Offensive’s Harold Steward. Engagement often involves co-creation, or at least participation in creation—not just the consumption of art. As Long Wharf Theatre’s Josh Borenstein says, community engagement might also be called “co-creation programming” or “professional/amateur collaboration.”
- Think about how you speak with audiences—and who is doing the speaking. Ask yourself these questions from Youth Speaks’ Joan Osato: “Whose story are you telling? Who is telling the story? Who is speaking with the audience and artists?”
- Measuring success can be tricky—so be creative! Take a systematic approach. Use all tools at your disposal, including surveys; and strategize when/how to invest dollars into research.
- Successful strategies often are grounded in—or generate—participation and buy-in from many departments at the theatre, not just Audience Development (or Marketing or Education).
- Digital media can supplement—but does not replace—conventional media, including “analog” in-person experiences of many different kinds.
- Partnerships should be equitable, mutually beneficial, and should be sustained over time to develop trust. This may involve working with arts organizations as well as non-arts organizations. Remember that, as Woolly Mammoth’s Kristen Jackson puts it, “Every relationship has its own unique timetable.”
- Make EDI work central to your organization’s practice. Consider hiring an experienced consultant, but be prepared to do the work this commitment requires. Be open to learning.

In the Case Study Follow-Up Report, Steppenwolf Executive Director David Schmitz summarized his learnings about how theatres can mount successful audience engagement initiatives in the following guidelines:

- Identify a need.
- Do research.
- Identify a possible solution.
- Start an experiment.
- Make changes and do it again, learning from your successes and failures.
- Do small experiments, then bigger ones.

TCG highly encourages **Audience (R)Evolution Cohort Grant** applicants to review the Round One case studies and the Case Study Follow-Up Report for additional context and learnings, both of which can be downloaded at: [https://www.tcg.org/AudRev/Audience\(R\)Evolution/ResearchResources/CaseStudies.aspx](https://www.tcg.org/AudRev/Audience(R)Evolution/ResearchResources/CaseStudies.aspx)

Why Cohorts?

During the pilot round of Audience (R)Evolution, TCG learned that while effective models are increasing around the country, many theatres are interested in collaborating with other organizations who are navigating similar challenges and strategies.

Working in partnership with peer organizations can maximize impact and provide a renewed understanding of purpose benefit. Furthermore, adopting a cohort approach to audience engagement and community development efforts can:

- Build on the value of diverse ideas, styles, and identities.
- Increase the likelihood of implementation.
- Enhance the power of peer exchange and peer support.
- Replenish emotional reserves.
- Create collective voice and collective impact.
- Reinforce skills-building.
- Lead to more cost-effective implementation strategies.

Effective Cohort Building

Create clear goals and objectives, including:

- A shared vision for change
- A common understanding of the problem or issue
- A joint approach to addressing the issue through agreed-upon actions (specific and achievable)

Build a shared understanding and commitment for accountability by:

- Defining clear expectations
- Establishing group agreements/norms
- Creating mechanisms that ensure accountability
- Planning clear roles, responsibilities, and time frames

Establish clear and effective systems of communication by:

- Maintaining open and frequent communication
- Valuing process as much as product
- Establishing protocol for identifying and managing conflict when it arises
- Monitoring and addressing group dynamics

Share leadership by:

- Rotating key responsibilities among members
- Allowing for differences in organizational capacity and individual capacities and strengths

Share decision-making by:

- Exploring and valuing multiple perspectives
- Making all members responsible for key decisions
- Highly regarding consensus decision-making

Establishing trust and relationship-building by:

- Building in time to get to know group members
- Respecting individual feelings
- Maintaining confidences

Model optimism and positive reinforcement by:

- Enhancing productivity and group work
- Fostering group resiliency from set-backs
- Allowing for creative problem-solving

Checklist for Success: Audience-Engagement and Community-Development Strategies

While developing strategies for an **Audience (R)Evolution Cohort Grant**, addressing the following questions can contribute to the effective planning, execution, and assessment of successful audience-engagement and community-development strategies.

1. Identify the desired outcome.

- Have you identified what questions or concerns you are working to address?
- Have you identified the goals, strategies, and tactics that will be used to achieve your outcome?
- Do you have clarity regarding the difference between a goal, strategy, and a tactic?

2. Build a shared understanding and commitment for accountability.

- Have you determined what parties will need to work on this project?
- Have you determined who you intend to impact by this effort and in what manner?
- Have you developed a baseline from which you can measure the success of the project?
- Have you allocated the appropriate resources needed for the project?
- Have you made a commitment to allot the time needed to complete the project?

3. Identify metrics to measure success.

- Have you determined the metrics you will use and identified why they are the most appropriate?
- Have you included both quantitative and qualitative metrics?
- Are your metrics “understandable”?
- Your metric should be able to measure change. Have you designed a series of metrics capable of doing so?

4. Measure the success of the project.

- Did you adhere to your designed timeline for measuring the success of this project?
- Was the desired outcome achieved? Why or why not?
- Did you analyze your results and determine what worked, and what did not work?
- Did you note what needs to be done to ensure future success?
- Does the project warrant reproduction? If so, are there more efficient ways to execute? If not, are there things to change that may lead to increased success in the future?