



# Case Study Follow-Up Report

## Executive Summary



HERE

LONG WHARF THEATRE



steppenwolf

THE THEATER OFFENSIVE

trinity rep

WOOLLY  
MAMMOTH



Audience (R) Evolution



## INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, **Theatre Communications Group (TCG)** has studied, promoted, and supported successful audience engagement and community development strategies in the U.S. not-for-profit theatre through its **Audience (R)Evolution** program, a multi-year project funded by the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**.

A key element of this program was a series of case studies published in 2013, based on an analysis by the national arts management consulting firm **AMS Planning & Research**. The [case studies](#) highlighted audience development and community development strategies at eight theatre companies identified by AMS. The goal of the report was to develop a shared vocabulary around audience engagement and community development; explore audience engagement models and understand how/why the best ones work; and share these successful models with the field.

## CASE STUDIES

Now, five years later, TCG takes a look back at those case studies. This [new report](#) revisits seven of the theatres and describes how the strategies discussed in the original case studies have evolved over the past five years. While much has changed, the report shows that the underlying strategic imperatives are still in force. Audience engagement and community development are still fundamental components of the theatres' practices and institutional missions. The strategies persist as the tactics through which the companies implement them have grown, transformed, or even been completely reinvented. While the report references theatres' practices that were in place in 2013, the focus is on the work they 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.

The seven revisited theatres are:

- **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

In addition, the report's author, Ben Pesner, created new case studies spotlighting a pair of additional theatres. The first of the two is Hattiloo Theatre in Memphis, TN, which is creating opportunities to give community members direct access to artists, curating civic conversations that speaks to and elevates voices from the Black community, creating a place for vital public discourse, engaging with local youth around technical theatre, and more. The second new case study describes how Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, RI, is collaborating with the Providence-based Spectrum Theatre Ensemble (STE) to deepen its engagement with neurodiverse audiences by expanding its sensory-friendly performance program to include all mainstage shows. It also describes how STE, working under Trinity Rep's umbrella, is developing a nationally-standardized rating system that Trinity Rep and other theatre companies will be able to use to guide and inform neurodiverse audiences. Finally, this case study explores how STE empowers and supports adults who are on the Autism Spectrum and other neuroatypical individuals to create theatre.

The report explores key learning developed through the participating theatres' practical experience, with an eye toward highlighting not just replicable best practices, but also useful strategies and areas of interrogation that might become catalysts or sources of inspiration for other companies across the nation. The final section includes a series of gleanings intended to further elucidate and inspire. We hope that theatres find the report useful in developing audience engagement and community development strategies customized to their own, unique aesthetics and contexts.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ben Pesner** has been writing about theatre for more than three decades. He is currently the program director of Venturous Theater Fund, which makes grants to support new-play production in the not-for-profit theatre; the digital content producer of the Tony Awards; and the manager of creative services at the Broadway League. He is the co-author, with Todd London, of *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the New American Play* (TDF, 2009).

For more information on TCG's **Audience (R)Evolution** program please contact [AudienceRev@tcg.org](mailto:AudienceRev@tcg.org) or visit [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org).

The mission of the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** is to improve the quality of people's lives through grants supporting the performing arts, environmental conservation, medical research and the prevention of child abuse, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke's properties. [www.ddcf.org](http://www.ddcf.org)

For over 50 years, **Theatre Communications Group (TCG)**, the national organization for theatre, has existed to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional not-for-profit theatre. In all of its endeavors, TCG seeks to increase the organizational efficiency of its member theatres, cultivate and celebrate the artistic talent and achievements of the field and promote a larger public understanding of, and appreciation for, the theatre. TCG is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org)

Audience  Evolution

