



Case Studies

LONG WHARF THEATRE

Developed by **Theatre Communications Group**, with funding provided by the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**, the **Audience (R)Evolution Program** is designed to study, promote and support successful audience-engagement models. Through specific case studies, the project's goal is to tell organizations' stories based on institutional insight, qualitative and quantitative data, and personal perspective.

Audience **(R)**Evolution



Audience ^(R) Evolution

Case Studies



Long Wharf Theatre

NEW HAVEN, CT

INTRODUCTION

This case study describes **Long Wharf Theatre's** efforts to advance its focus on establishing pathways of accessibility (as audience members and active program participants) for those of all backgrounds and socioeconomic status, and to create means for community members to connect directly with artists.

TCG engaged AMS Planning & Research, a national arts management consulting firm, to provide research expertise for this project. AMS gathered data by way of institutional and audience surveys, and conducted interviews with staff, board members and artistic leadership. Interviews were conducted in April and March 2013.

CASE STUDY

Now in its 49th season, Long Wharf Theatre (LWT) produces six plays a year on two stages, in addition to offering programming for children, new-play workshops and special events. This LORT theatre, located in Connecticut's second-largest city, serves more than 100,000 audience members each year.

In the words of LWT Associate Artistic Director Eric Ting, the theatre's audience-development efforts are like a "concentric circle." The organization works to engage staff, board and the current audience, while reaching out to the larger New Haven community. One of the theatre's main goals is collaboration in and outside of the theatre's walls. According to Managing Director Joshua Borenstein, this requires an engaged working relationship with members of its communities.

This case study focuses on three strategies intended to help the theatre create and expand pathways of accessibility:

- 1. Create affordable price points to LWT productions so that productions are open to all socioeconomic backgrounds.**
- 2. Increase participants' direct access to artists.**
- 3. Partner with a nearby assisted living center.**

Of the five Audience-Engagement Strategy Clusters developed as part of this overall research effort (see Research Approach, page 9), those in alignment with LWT's efforts were the Income (#1, above), Relationship (#2 and #3, above), and Segment (#1 and #3, above) strategies.

LWT implemented these strategies primarily within three ongoing projects at the theatre:

- 1. SPARK welcomes a small group of interested theatregoers to participate in all of the stages of the new-play development process, from workshop to opening night.**
- 2. Stage. Page. Engage. offers a theatre and literacy program in collaboration with the New Haven Free Public Library (an expanded program is in planning stages).**
- 3. Elder Play Project engages senior citizens to write their own plays, using Long Wharf's productions as a touchstone and inspiration.**

As part of the research effort, LWT completed an institutional survey sharing the goals and strategies associated with three of its audience-engagement programs. Tables detailing this information appear in the appendix to this case study.

Audience **(R)**Evolution

Case Studies



Long Wharf Theatre

NEW HAVEN, CT

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The case study included interviews with the following individuals:

- Gordon Edelstein**, Artistic Director
- Joshua Borenstein**, Managing Director
- Eric Ting**, Associate Artistic Director
- Annie DiMartino**, Director of Education
- Sandy Stoddard**, board member
- Xia Feng**, partner, New Haven Free Public Library
- Sharon Lovett-Graff**, partner, New Haven Free Public Library
- Silvia Rifkin**, program participant, Elder Play Project
- Eileen Wiseman**, CEIO planning team

STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1

Create affordable price points to Long Wharf productions so that productions are open to all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Artistic Director Gordon Edelstein and Managing Director Borenstein talked about the importance of offering an entryway to the theatre by way of affordable ticket prices. “Approximately one-fifth of the New Haven population is below the poverty line,” Borenstein shared. “And we’d like to see a more economically diverse audience engaged with our work.” To that end, the interviewees stated that the organization is in the planning stages with the New Haven Free Public Library to develop a theatre and literacy program to foster understanding and empathy throughout New Haven’s diverse communities, with hopes that the result of the effort will increase participation by the populations in those communities.

A current collaborative effort with the library provides the opportunity for community members to visit the library and receive free tickets to the theatre. According to staff, New Haven residents feel very connected to their local library, so it seemed like an ideal community space for LWT to partner with. The free pass program provides an accessible way to see LWT’s shows and offers those who may have financial challenges a way to see shows without bearing any financial hardship. Another part of this effort allows patrons to check out library books onsite at LWT and return them to the local library. The titles on offer complement themes of the current production at LWT. The initiative is designed to increase involvement/interaction for both organizations, while engaging residents of New Haven who might have limited access to Long Wharf’s programs for economic and geographic reasons.

The partnership, which is entitled “Stage. Page. Engage,” is supported by the Co-Creating Effective and Inclusive Organizations (CEIO) project. This two-year pilot program is meant to increase inclusivity, justice and conscious co-creation in New Haven. The effort encourages discussion between the various parties engaged in the project: artists, partnering organizations, community members and staff. “The ultimate goal of this partnership would be to make theatre audiences and library audiences indistinguishable from each other and become truly reflective of the New Haven community,” said Wiseman, who is part of the CEIO planning team.

Audience **(R)**Evolution

Case Studies



Long Wharf Theatre NEW HAVEN, CT

Board member Sandy Stoddard described this library partnership program as an ambassador's program which serves to engage constituents and provide an avenue for conversation. An additional aspect of this program has library personnel identifying select library patrons to attend dress rehearsals, see the show and have dinner afterwards. Each "ambassador" can bring five friends to see the production. They are asked to spread the word about this component of the program, which has been in effect for two years. According to the library's Sharon Lovett-Graff, participants are grateful and excited to be invited to have this level of participation with LWT.

Lovett-Graff called LWT a "cornerstone of the arts" and described the efforts put forth as "inventive." The partnership has been a good one for the library. It generates increased library membership (required to receive free LWT theatre tickets), while providing an avenue to see theatre for some who would otherwise not have the opportunity.

STRATEGY 2

Increase participants' direct access to artists.

LWT's SPARK program engages a group of interested theatregoers through all of the stages of the new-play development process, from workshop to production. Under Ting's leadership, members of this group participate in four 90-minute dialogues per production, and receive a copy of the script to review. The group is limited to 50 members. Membership is diverse and includes board members, subscribers, a high school student, two critics from smaller papers and teachers (who get special credit for participation), among others. Members pay a fee of \$25. The implementation effort for the program is reported to be small.

Now in its fourth year, SPARK involves one new production per season at Long Wharf. In 2013, the show involved in the SPARK program was the show directed by Ting. Ting has found that the most effective way to maintain the program is to build it around a production that he was directing, because of his level of access, comfort, knowledge and investment as a staff member. The interaction with the participants is "very real," according to Ting. He and other LWT staff don't try and hide anything from the group; when things are going well participants see it firsthand. Conversely, if challenges occur during production, they experience this aspect of theatre as well.

Every season the group learns about and discusses a different facet of the process—one year the program focused on ensembles; another year the program was designer-focused; yet another year was writer-focused. The dialogue in each of the season's four gatherings covers topics relevant to both the production at hand and to the art of making theatre. As an example, one discussion covered how to read a play from a director's perspective versus an English teacher's perspective, examining how writers use punctuation, form and structure.

At SPARK meetings, the group spends 60 percent of the time on presentations and conversation. The remaining 40 percent involves artists and LWT staff answering questions about the piece and the artistic process. Ting said that designers otherwise rarely have this level of connection with audience members and actors are excited to see the depth of interest expressed by the SPARK participants.

STRATEGY 3

Partner with a nearby assisted living center.

As explained by Annie DiMartino, Director of Education, the Elder Play Project engages senior citizens to write their own stories, using LWT's productions as a touchstone and inspiration. The goal is to encourage lifelong learning and to connect the work LWT is doing with participants' life experiences. The program began in 2008, inspired by LWT staff reading an

Audience **(R)**Evolution

Case Studies



Long Wharf Theatre NEW HAVEN, CT

NEA Aging and Creativity document. LWT forged a relationship with Tower One/Tower East residence, an assisted living facility near the theatre that houses 300 residents.

The structure of the program involves LWT staff visiting the participating residents 12 times each season. Staff talks to the residents about the upcoming show and its themes, and the residents attend Sunday matinees. The following day staff returns to Tower One/Tower East for a conversation with participants. Staff asks them to write about their experiences involving the theme of the current play. Staff then creates a memoir book based on the participants' material. The book becomes the basis of a theatre piece performed by the participants, reader's theatre-style, on the LWT stage. The most labor-intensive parts of the process are compiling, writing and rehearsing with the participants to prepare them for the performance.

Silvia Rifkin, a 92-year-old program participant, said that she appreciates how the play topics tie into her real-life experiences. She added that taking part in the program helps her feel connected to LWT, an honor she has had for three years as a program participant and several years as an audience member.

SUCCESSSES

LWT reported success for each of the three programs attached to the strategies discussed.

Edelstein stated that the LWT/Library partnership program is proving successful because it has met its goal of providing access to the theatre for community members, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Ting described the SPARK program as successful, given that the group continues to enroll 50 members, the maximum number currently permitted.

DiMartino reported the partnership with an assisted living center as successful based on the enthusiasm and commitment of program participants.

CHALLENGES

Ting stated that one challenge regarding the SPARK program is that while he is the logical person to lead this program, this requires him to handle all of the details of the program himself. Other directors may not be willing to have the same level of transparency that he offers. His goal is to determine how to build the program and have SPARK members work with guest directors. Ting would also like the SPARK group composition to be even more diverse. The group is currently 65 percent female, and includes people with a wide range of experiences. Ting wondered how to target specific groups for participation. However, he was leery about trying to "curate" the group.

One of the challenges in the Elder Play Project was that staff expectations did not match the specific abilities of individual participants. According to DiMartino, some residents were unable to write due to health conditions, which required dictating to LWT staff. Others had poor penmanship, and the staff had to devote more time than expected to deciphering their work. To address these issues, the teaching artists had to put more time into providing stenography support during sessions.

Audience **(R)**Evolution

Case Studies

Long Wharf Theatre NEW HAVEN, CT



MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Edelstein stated that LWT measures success to a great degree by attendance figures for all programs and activities. Surveys are also administered for all programs and activities. The staff analyzes the anecdotal feedback from these surveys to check patron satisfaction. For the library program, Long Wharf also tracked how many books were checked out from the micro-branches to measure its effectiveness.

Borenstein added a corollary to Ting's measure of success for SPARK, that all available participation slots are filled. He cited SPARK's high retention rate and consistent level of participation. The level of participant commitment for this program is high.

DiMartino measured success of the strategy to partner with an assisted living center by level of participation. The program can accommodate up to approximately 20 participants and consistently enrolls 15, a number the organization is pleased with.

Board member Stoddard measured success by way of watching audience members reacting positively to their theatre experience.

The New Haven Free Public Library's Xia Feng reported that the library had exceeded all of its measures of success for the partnership program. Ten percent of available Long Wharf passes were successfully distributed by way of this program. The staff reports that, as this is a new program, the distribution rate of passes may increase over time. During the 2011-12 season, based on survey findings, 50 percent of the people who saw the show through the project reported having a positive experience, and 50 percent of those who participated in a community conversation reported having a positive experience.

REPLICATION OPPORTUNITIES

LWT expressed interest in replicating some version of the program with other local arts and public organizations. Borenstein shared that staff is in discussion about how to engage other neighboring libraries, such as the Woodbridge Public Library, which is located in a nearby affluent suburb.

LESSONS LEARNED: BENEFITS TO THE FIELD

Edelstein mentioned a lesson learned: Programs must be given time to "root." Results are typically not immediate, and theatres must allow sufficient time to determine how well a program is (or is not) doing. Openness to making changes if needed is essential. Borenstein added the importance of allowing sufficient time for planning and developing programs.

Ting noted the importance of the social aspect of gathering people together. Food and refreshments can be a wonderful tool to encourage engagement. Speaking specifically about the SPARK program, Ting commented that being respectful of participants' time is important. Starting and ending gatherings on time shows that the theatre honors others' time.

DiMartino said that in working on the Elder Play Project it was an honor to learn from members of previous generations. This program can illustrate how positive the experience can be for different generations to learn from each other.

Stoddard added that an important "learning" is that the board cannot push the staff. Staff members have a lot on their plate and can only do so much. It is not always feasible to accomplish everything the board would like to see done. Expectations need to be reasonable.

Audience (R)Evolution Case Studies

Long Wharf Theatre NEW HAVEN, CT



ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

At LWT, audience engagement is an effort undertaken by the organization as a whole, though according to Borenstein, the education department is keenly on board and understands the importance of engagement efforts. He shared that it can be more challenging for staff that do not work with activities outside of the theatre's walls to be as wholeheartedly on board. According to Edelstein, there is not sufficient organizational capacity to develop and offer audience-engagement programs to the degree they would like, yet the efforts they are undertaking are proving successful. LWT does not have staff dedicated specifically to audience-engagement efforts. Instead, this is a shared responsibility between the artistic, management, education and marketing departments. The board also shares input, with the opportunity to respond to what the theatre is offering.

DiMartino noted that the organizational structure serves to provide an avenue for open discussions among staff to discuss the season and talk about who each show is intended to reach, and brainstorm about activities that can be designed to do so.

BACKGROUND

This case study is part of TCG's **Audience (R)Evolution Program**, which is designed to study, promote and support successful audience-engagement models. The program will take place over three years and include four phases: Assessment, Learning Convening, Grants and Dissemination.

As part of the research phase, AMS prepared eight case studies on theatre companies that have incorporated audience engagement as a fundamental component of their service delivery and institutional mission. The focus was to understand "success" for these theatres' audience-engagement efforts and to comprehend the journey and outcome of their efforts. The eight companies are:

- **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

More information about the study is available by emailing AudienceRev@tcg.org.

Audience ^(R)Evolution

Case Studies



Long Wharf Theatre

NEW HAVEN, CT

ABOUT LONG WHARF THEATRE

MISSION: To create theatre of the highest quality that inspires discourse and reflection about each of us and the world in which we live.

Founded in 1965 by Jon Jory and Harlan Kleiman, with the assistance of community leaders and arts supporters, Long Wharf Theatre (LWT) opened with Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which ran for two weeks. Originally built in a warehouse that was vacant, the organization was named for the Long Wharf port along New Haven Harbor.

Led by Arvin Brown and Edgar Rosenblum for more than 30 years, and following Doug Hughes's four years as artistic director, LWT is now led by Artistic Director Gordon Edelstein, in his 12th season, and Managing Director Joshua Borenstein, in his third season.

The theatre "revitalizes classic and modern plays for a contemporary audience, discovers new resonance in neglected works and premieres new plays by new voices that both investigate and celebrate the unique circumstances of our time."

The organization has had a number of productions perform on and off Broadway, including *Wit* (Pulitzer Prize), *The Shadow Box* (Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award/Best Play), *Hughie*, *American Buffalo*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, *Quartermaine's Terms* (Obie Award/Best Play), *The Gin Game* (Pulitzer Prize), *The Changing Room*, *The Contractor* and *Streamers*.

Long Wharf has received New York Drama Critics Awards, Obie Awards, the Margo Jefferson Award for Production of New Works, a Special Citation from the Outer Critics Circle and the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1978. www.longwharf.net

ABOUT AMS

AMS Planning & Research, a national arts management consulting firm, has been engaged by TCG to provide research expertise for this project. For more than 25 years, AMS has been supporting the success of the arts and cultural sector through applied research and strategy development. AMS prepared eight case studies on theatre companies that have incorporated audience engagement as a fundamental component of their service delivery and institutional mission and have adequate results to support their assertions of success. The companies were selected based on a review of research data and recommendations by TCG leadership. AMS compiled research data on each theatre, studied grant reporting and conducted site visits to interview a broad array of staff, lay leadership and audience-engagement program participants. www.ams-online.com

ABOUT TCG

Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre, was founded in 1961 with a grant from the Ford Foundation to foster communication among professional, community and university theatres. Today, TCG's constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to nearly 700 Member Theatres and Affiliate organizations and more than 12,000 individuals nationwide. TCG's mission is to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional not-for-profit American theatre. www.tcg.org

Audience **(R)**Evolution

Case Studies



Long Wharf Theatre

NEW HAVEN, CT

APPENDIX

I. RESEARCH APPROACH

Earlier in the research process, based on an extensive literature review, AMS defined five Audience-Engagement Strategy Clusters, designed to organize a theatre's tactics, support more productive collaboration and suggest underexplored approaches. While a theatre's strategies may be represented by more than one group (two is most common), the majority of strategies deployed are dominant in a single one. The five Audience-Engagement Strategy Clusters are:

1. SEGMENT Strategies

Defining and refining the intended **people** to be served by the institution's work.

2. VENUE/PATH Strategies

Rethinking the **place** where people engage with the organization's work and the **road** they follow to find it.

3. RELATIONSHIP Strategies

Building or enhancing the **personal relationships** the organization has with its community.

4. INCOME Strategies

Redesigning the **financial** exchange: who pays, how much, for what, for whom.

5. CONTENT Strategies

Doing **different work**, rather than doing current work differently.

II. INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAM SURVEY TABLE

These tables, which were provided by the theatre, indicate which specific strategies from among the five Audience-Engagement Strategy Clusters apply to each of the programs covered in this case study.

	PROJECT 1 SPARK engages a small group of interested theatregoers through all of the stages of the new-play development process, from workshop to opening night.
GOALS	
1. Educate our audiences about the new-play development process.	STRATEGIES
	1. Program is open to everyone. 2. Program has a low price point (\$25 for all sessions). 3. Participants have direct access to the artists.

Audience **(R)**Evolution

Case Studies



Long Wharf Theatre

NEW HAVEN, CT

PROJECT 2

We are in the planning stages with the New Haven Free Public Library to develop a theatre and literacy program to foster understanding and empathy throughout New Haven's diverse communities.

GOALS

1. Engage New Haven's diverse communities in theatre.

STRATEGIES

1. Partner with a community institution that already has relationships.
2. Engage an external group of advisors to guide us on specific tactics.
3. Create affordable price points to Long Wharf productions so that productions are open to all socioeconomic backgrounds.

PROJECT 3

The Elder Play Project engages senior citizens to write their own plays, using Long Wharf's productions as a touchstone and inspiration.

GOALS

1. Enrich the lives of seniors through deeper engagement in theatre.

STRATEGIES

1. Partner with an assisted living center.
2. Provide accessible tickets so that participants can attend the theatre.
3. Provide handicapped-accessible transportation to allow more senior residents to attend.

For more information on TCG's **Audience (R)Evolution Program** please contact AudienceRev@tcg.org or visit www.tcg.org.

RESEARCH

AMS Planning & Research Corp

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Ben Pesner

COPY EDITOR

Sarah Hart

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Kevin E. Moore, Managing Director, TCG; Emilyya Cachapero, Director of Artistic & International Programs, TCG; Kevin Bitterman, Associate Director of Artistic & International Programs, TCG; and Soriya Chum, Project Assistant

DESIGN

Monet Cogbill, Associate Art Director, TCG

Audience **(R)**Evolution

